



Northern Ireland
Assembly



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**



**STRANMILLIS
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**
A College of Queen's University Belfast



**St Mary's
University College**
A College of Queen's University Belfast

Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

Time for redress for those bereaved during the Troubles

Luke Moffett

Professor of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law
l.moffett@qub.ac.uk

29 April 2026

KESS Policy Briefing

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-informed policy and law-making within Northern Ireland

Key points:

- Bereaved victims of the Troubles have historically been inadequately compensated for their loss resulting in continuing harm and a lack of official recognition of their suffering.
- In 2024 the Commission for Victims and Survivors provided legal advice to the Executive Office for a bereaved payment scheme to be created.
- Other post-conflict societies (e.g. Colombia, Spain, Taiwan, Iraq) have implemented meaningful compensation schemes, often far more substantial than anything available in Northern Ireland. These programmes aim not only to alleviate suffering, but also to counter impunity and prevent recurrence.
- Current schemes, such as the Troubles Disablement Payment Scheme for those injured during the Troubles provide a workable scheme to remedy those injured, but excludes the vast majority of bereaved victims.
- Most victims will not benefit from current legacy proposals for prosecutions and truth recovery, with reparations remaining the only pathway to provide measures to remedy and acknowledge the harm suffered by those bereaved.
- A proposed scheme would:
 - Provide lump-sum payments (£20,000–£75,000) or a pension
 - Base eligibility on family relationship, not presence at the incident
 - Prioritise spouses/partners, children, then other relatives
 - Align with international human rights standards
 - Address longstanding inequalities
 - Offer recognition and dignity to victims
 - Support reconciliation and societal trust

KESS does not support or promote perspectives or messages stated in this Briefing.

The opportunity to apply to present at KESS is open to all academics in the five university partners; and is promoted through their internal communication channels and social media: contributions from all perspectives are encouraged, as they make for a richer annual KESS Programme.

Introduction

Nearly 30 years on from the Good Friday Agreement Northern Ireland still does not have a transitional justice process to comprehensively deal with the consequences of the Troubles/conflict in and around the province. Despite multiple attempts to provide a comprehensive solution, and ongoing debates over the future of the Legacy Act, the issue of reparations for victims has been often neglected. This briefing paper highlights the place of reparations in supporting families who had a loved one killed (bereaved). A payment scheme for the bereaved has long been advocated for, but often been disregarded as efforts for truth and justice have been pursued. With the passage of time the opportunities for truth recovery and convictions are increasingly remote, reparations through a bereaved payment offer the potential of individual acknowledgment and redress of the continuing effects of those killed.

Why Reparations?

Reparations are a range of measures used to acknowledge and remedy harm. They have been used for [millennia](#) to promote reconciliation and to alleviate the suffering and loss of those who have suffered death, injury or property loss. Since [2005](#) reparations have been recognised by the United Nations as a key obligation on states to remedy the harm caused by gross violations of human rights. Reparations are intended to provide financial and symbolic measures to those most affected by conflict, to counter impunity and silence around such violence, as well as to ensure that by doing so it prevents the repetition of such violations in the future.

Numerous other [countries](#) have established reparations programmes after mass violence to lessen the burden on victims and to promote reconciliation. In [Colombia](#) over 1.2 million victims have been paid compensation for the killing or enforced disappearance of a loved one. Victims can claim compensation for several family members who have been killed. Each victim is entitled to 40 of effectively the monthly minimum wage (in January 2026 worth 1.75 million pesos (~\$473 USD) – in total this would be \$18,920 USD (£14,000). The United Kingdom has a higher monthly minimum wage (£2,034) so calculating and 40 times rate for compensation would equate to £81,344. In [Spain](#) the amount is €250,000 – half for a spouse and half to any children of the person killed. In [Taiwan](#) the amount for those killed in the civil protest equated to £141,000. In [Iraq](#) the killing of a loved one by ISIS under the Yazidi Survivor Law 2021 is \$600 per month (double the average monthly minimum wage), plus funding for rehabilitation and housing. All these countries have larger victim populations than Northern Ireland (including per capita) and mobilised state resources to ensure that reparations are meaningful in remedying their harm.

KESS does not support or promote perspectives or messages stated in this Briefing.

The opportunity to apply to present at KESS is open to all academics in the five university partners; and is promoted through their internal communication channels and social media: contributions from all perspectives are encouraged, as they make for a richer annual KESS Programme.

Background Research on Bereaved Victims and Reparations

Compensation has a long [history](#) on the island of Ireland, going back well over a thousand years as a means to resolve grievances. Changes in the late 1960s sought to bring Northern Ireland more into line with emerging good practices of compensation for criminal injuries in New Zealand and England and Wales through state-funded statutory compensation schemes. However, with the onset of the Troubles, these rules soon became inadequate and were not fit for purpose for dealing with sustained and widespread political violence. Within the first few years of the Troubles, the courts were inundated with claims, peaking at over [500](#) per week, leading to delays and overburdening the judicial system. As a result, new laws were introduced in 1977 and 1988, with amendments in 1982, to improve the scheme and deal with the volume of cases. A minimum bereaved payment was guaranteed to widows only in [1977](#), and to parents of minors in [1988](#). However it was not until [2002](#), following [Kenneth Bloomfield's](#) critical review of compensation provision in Northern Ireland, that a bereavement support payment was introduced for relatives of all killed victims.

Despite these changes, it meant that the majority of bereaved families fell under the 1968 compensation scheme, which meant they did not receive compensation for bereavement, only for loss of income as a dependent of the deceased. Claims for killed family members were primarily made by the victim's spouse on behalf of both themselves and any children as dependants, or where there was no spouse by the personal representatives of the deceased person's estate. The court could only award pecuniary (economically assessable damages i.e. income) losses and direct costs (such as funeral expenses) for spouses or dependant relatives of the deceased victim claiming compensation. Pecuniary damages were only available to spouses and dependants, which meant for those single, children or elderly killed, their compensation was often just funeral costs. This created very unequal situations, such as in the case of one bombing that had multiple casualties, one victim's family was awarded £90 and another over £15,000. In another bombing, one bereaved family was awarded £44.62, another £9,000 and an injured victim £35,000.

Past Efforts on a Troubles Bereaved Payment Scheme

There have been some efforts to provide reparations to victims of the Troubles/conflict in and around Northern Ireland. The cross-community [Consultative Group on the Past](#) in 2009 recommended that the 'nearest relative of someone who died as a result of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, from January 1966, should receive a one-off ex-gratia recognition payment of £12,000.' This was based on what was provided by the Irish Remembrance Commission through an acknowledgment payment of €15,000. However, given the controversy of who would be eligible for the recognition payment, it was not adopted.

KESS does not support or promote perspectives or messages stated in this Briefing.

The opportunity to apply to present at KESS is open to all academics in the five university partners; and is promoted through their internal communication channels and social media: contributions from all perspectives are encouraged, as they make for a richer annual KESS Programme.

Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series 2026

Over the past twenty-five years there have been a range of efforts to provide assistance and services to victims through the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund and then the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS). This includes the [Bereavement Scheme](#) which provides £500 to parent, spouse/partner, and/or a child of those killed in a Troubles-related incident, and an additional £500 needs-based amount for those who lost a spouse/partner or both parents. While such assistance has benefited bereaved families, it is a paltry amount and does not reflect an effective remedy or official acknowledgment of their loss and suffering.

In 2016 the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Truth, Justice, Reparations and Non-Recurrence, Pablo de Greiff, in his report on [Northern Ireland](#) underscored that reparations are an 'area of least achievement in the context of Northern Ireland' this is despite assistance to victims and support for former members of the security forces seeing 'significant resources' being mobilised. The report found that 'significant inequalities exist' and 'inequity' persists in compensation and assistance to victims, instead he recommended that reparations for 'victims should be tackled seriously and systematically'.

In 2020 after nearly decades of campaigning by victims, in particular the Wave Injured group, the British government passed the [Victims' Payments Regulations 2020](#) for those injured and permanently disabled in Troubles-related incidents. The [Victims' Payment Board](#), established the adjudicate on injured victims' claims, has of April 2026 received over 13,000 applications and made awards of nearly £135 million. However there is an acute inequality for bereaved families, few of whom can be eligible under the scheme - only where they were present in the immediate aftermath of seeing a loved one injured. This has obviously created stark disparities and tensions within families where one child witnessed the death of a loved one and their siblings did not, meaning only one of them would be eligible for a payment.

Research on Past Troubles Bereavement Payments

Over the past decade I with my team been interviewing bereaved family members as well as carrying out archival research on part compensation payments. In September 2023 we published our [findings](#). We analysed 1,000 compensation claims for individuals killed during the onset and height of the Troubles (1966-1976), which represented over half of those killed during this period (55% of around 1,800 in total).

In our [sample](#) of compensation awards (N=1000), the lowest award was £43 to cover the funeral costs of a female victim caught up in a bombing. The highest involved two separate incidents in which the families of two businessmen were awarded £100,000 and £103,000, respectively, for their deaths. Of the 1000 victims killed in our sample, the average amount awarded was £6,917 and the median £2,712. In total, £6,896,699.94 was made to 983 victims; 14 had their claim rejected and 3 abandoned their claims. Well over half of our sample (60%), equating to six hundred and three (603) victims, saw their families awarded less than £5,000 for their death. Of that number, 363 (36%) received less than £1,500, with

KESS does not support or promote perspectives or messages stated in this Briefing.

The opportunity to apply to present at KESS is open to all academics in the five university partners; and is promoted through their internal communication channels and social media: contributions from all perspectives are encouraged, as they make for a richer annual KESS Programme.

Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series 2026

272 receiving between £3,000-£10,000 (27%), 166 receiving £10,000-£25,000 (16%), and only 44 (4.4%) receiving more than £25,000. In all, 130 families (13%) received awards of less than £300, effectively to cover funeral expenses. What this means is that the value placed on a life lost was unequal, and a large proportion of victims were awarded a pittance.

In general our examination of bereaved payments found that compensation was grossly inadequate and unequal, with some families paid £90 and others £15,000 for death in the same bombing. Women, children, single people and cohabittees saw their families paid an insulting pittance, some as [low as £43](#). Women who were killed during the Troubles saw their families received disproportionality smaller amounts than men who died. In light of this and relying on international human rights law, we [recommended](#) a single or monthly payment to bereaved families of the Troubles ranging between £20,000-£75,000.

These findings were later used by the Commission for Victims and Survivors (CVSNI) in its [legal advice](#) to the NI Executive to recommend the implementation of a bereavement payment scheme. This scheme would complement the payment scheme currently available to injured victims of the Troubles. This is not about paying off victims to silence or placate them. Compensation is an important part of officially acknowledging the suffering of victims and providing them some means to move on from the past.

Before the Legacy Act came into effect, there was a [spate](#) of compensation settlements made to families from the UK government over collusion or failures to investigate effectively their murder. These awards ranged from £75,000 to £625,000, standing in stark contrast to the couple of hundred to a few thousand pounds most bereaved families received. In addition in October 2023 the UK government opened up the [War Widow\(ers\) Recognition Payment](#) scheme, which entitles widow(ers) of military personnel killed and later gave up their pension benefits due to being remarried, to a single payment of £87,500. For civilians they are again being left behind in redressing the harm they suffered. The continuation of litigation is taking too long and costing too much money. The Chief Constable of the PSNI, Jon Boutcher, in [2025](#) highlighted that ongoing civil litigation around the Troubles has seen £25 million paid out, with £18 million going to legal representatives, with other former chief constables warning that such claims are “[financially crippling](#)” current police resourcing. A bereavement payment scheme would provide an easier pathway to resolve the lack of acknowledgment around those who died during the Troubles.

Any long-term resolution of the Troubles/conflict in and around Northern Ireland needs to provide recognition and measures to remedy the harm caused. Most families of those killed will not be able to benefit from an inquest, there is unlikely to be sufficient evidence to reasonably prosecute those responsible if prosecutions are restarted, and there is little faith in those responsible for Troubles related murders to come forward and provide the truth.

KESS does not support or promote perspectives or messages stated in this Briefing.

The opportunity to apply to present at KESS is open to all academics in the five university partners; and is promoted through their internal communication channels and social media: contributions from all perspectives are encouraged, as they make for a richer annual KESS Programme.

A bereavement payment scheme would provide a direct benefit to bereaved payments that not only symbolically acknowledges their loss, but enables them to seek new opportunities, such as moving house. This has been the experience of our work in a number of countries emerging from [conflict](#). For some of the victims we spoke to, many of them were children/adolescents at the time of their family member's death, so they dropped out of school, were unable to work or leave their home, or suffered a range of other consequences that have never been recognised or acknowledged.

What would a bereaved scheme look like?

A bereavement payment could like the injured scheme take the form of a monthly pension or a lump-sum. However, there is no need for injury or disability to be proven for those to be eligible. Those who would benefit from such a scheme would be within a generally identifiable group of victims, many of whom have availed already of the VSS bereavement scheme. There would be no need for a claimant of a bereavement payment to demonstrate that they were in the 'immediate aftermath' of an incident to benefit, as applicants for the Troubles-related disablement payment are required to do. Eligibility would be based on family relationship to the person killed in a Troubles-related incident (between 1966-2010). Those eligible could then be categorised to prioritise spouses/partners, children then parents, siblings and other dependants of the deceased person. This is similar to the practice in other countries.

The issue of eligibility often faces political barriers with who is considered the most deserving of reparations. The potential exclusion of those engaged in rioting, political violence or otherwise injured 'by their own hand' continues to influence discussions around the issue of compensation in Northern Ireland. While it has shaped the debate around a standard payment to all victims of the conflict as proposed by the Consultative Group on the Past and the discussion around a 'Troubles pension' for the severely injured too, it is clear from that the difficulty posed by the issue has long pre-dated these discussions. Through its review on the conviction and circumstances of their injury, the Victims Payment Board offers a more balanced approach to tackling these issues for injured claimants. The human rights law position suggests that those not directly participating in hostilities at the time of their death or who were subjected to unlawful use of force should have some form of [remedy](#) to acknowledge the violation of their right to life, no matter their character or background. For the bereavement payment scheme, like the disablement one, the fundamental purpose of the payments would be to 'acknowledge the harm suffered by those who were killed during the troubles and by their family and associates, and thereby to promote reconciliation between people in connection with Northern Ireland's troubled past'. Such a provision in the scheme would guide the payment board to determine difficult cases.

KESS does not support or promote perspectives or messages stated in this Briefing.

The opportunity to apply to present at KESS is open to all academics in the five university partners; and is promoted through their internal communication channels and social media: contributions from all perspectives are encouraged, as they make for a richer annual KESS Programme.

Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series 2026

For a bereavement payment to be appropriate would need to more than a symbolic amount currently provided by the VSS. In our [report](#) we suggested a single payment of £20,000 or £75,000 or a fixed term pension amounting to £50,000. The [CVSNI](#) in their advice, outlined indicative costs for a range of options including an one-off payment between £10,000-£100,000, a recent payment of £2,000 or £5,000 per annum for 10-30 years. Either of these approaches would be consistent with comparative practices in Northern Ireland and other jurisdictions. The payment amount would be determined by the authorising authority for the scheme. The CVSNI advice outlined the potential cost of such a scheme based on the amount of payment choose and the scope of beneficiaries spouse/partner and children, and then siblings). These costings ranged from £129 million at the lowest amount of a £10,000 one off payment to £1.9 billion for a 30 year £5,000 annual pension. In between there in a feasible and appropriate payment amount that could be found. In terms of funding, a bereaved scheme should be resourced by the British government, but there is also a place for the Irish government to provide a meaningful contribution. Ultimately reparations are about the state(s) taking responsibility to make good on the past, even if other actors carried out the violence.

Conclusion

Compensation alone cannot repair the harm of loss, but when it is grounded in fairness, transparency, and respect for victims' dignity, it can contribute to trust, acknowledgment, and longer-term reconciliation. Currently we are in a situation where most direct victims of the Troubles are dying before receiving acknowledgement and information about what happened to their loved ones. A bereavement payment scheme would help to redress the inadequacy of past compensation efforts for those killed in the Troubles, and provide a level playing field to compensate all those bereaved.

Bibliography

Kenneth Bloomfield, *We Will Remember Them*, (NIO 1998).

Kenneth Bloomfield et al., *Report of the Review of Criminal Injuries Compensation in Northern Ireland*, HMSO (1999).

Commission for Victims and Survivors, *Advice to Government on provision of a bereavement payment scheme and services for people bereaved as a result of the Troubles / conflict*, December 2023.

Luke Moffett, *Reparations for 'Guilty Victims': Navigating Complex Identities of Victim-Perpetrators in Reparation Mechanisms*, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 10(1)(2016), 146-167.

Luke Moffett, *Time for a reparations programme for those bereaved during the Troubles?*, *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly* 75(4)(2024) 659-689.

Luke Moffett and Kevin Hearty, *More than a Number: Reparations for those Bereaved during the Troubles*, (RRV 2023).

KESS does not support or promote perspectives or messages stated in this Briefing.

The opportunity to apply to present at KESS is open to all academics in the five university partners; and is promoted through their internal communication channels and social media: contributions from all perspectives are encouraged, as they make for a richer annual KESS Programme.