

February 2026

Human Rights Consortium Scotland **Strategic Plan** 2026 - 2031

HRCS' vision is that Scottish civil society has a strong, collective voice and is empowered and enabled to defend and promote human rights for everyone.

Our mission is to provide a high quality, accessible civil society network and to defend and promote human rights. We work towards two strategic outcomes:

- **Scotland has a strong, collective civil society voice which is able to defend and promote human rights.**
- **Civil society is able to use human rights as a tool to strengthen democracy and deliver social justice in Scotland.**

HRCS has developed a Theory of Change to highlight our strategic approach to our work over the next five years.

In the current external environment, HRCS must contend with and overcome a number of barriers if we are to succeed in delivering this strategy. These include the fact that individuals, communities and the public sector often feel disconnected from the human rights framework, and many believe it does not relate to them and/or that it will not deliver positive change.

Furthermore, human rights are increasingly misunderstood by many, and this is compounded by legal barriers to incorporation, the increasing lack of access to justice and redress, increasing poverty and inequality, and a lack of information and advice.

These barriers make our vision and mission all the more urgent. HRCS exists to bridge these gaps and misunderstandings and promote the use of human rights as a tool to overcome discrimination and prejudice, promote quality of life and wellbeing and strengthen democracy.

In order to deliver on our vision, mission and values over the next five years we will:

- **continue to prioritise the incorporation of human rights in the Scottish legislative and policy framework**
- **strengthen our network through increased membership**
- **increase the capacity building for our members**
- **continue to amplify both our members and individual human rights defenders' voices and experiences in our engagement and advocacy with the United Nations, Council of Europe, UK and Scottish Governments and other duty bearers.**

Within this context and approach, we will focus on our strategic priorities over the next 5 years:

- **Policy and Influencing within the International, UK and Scottish arenas**
- **Membership and network development**

In order to deliver this ambitious strategy, HRCS will maintain its financial independence and seek to increase and diversify our income generation in order to sustain the organisation in the medium to long-term.

Introduction

The Human Rights Consortium Scotland (HRCS) is a young and ambitious organisation which believes that human rights are vital to underpin the quality of life and wellbeing of people in Scotland.

We are Scotland's civil society human rights network, a registered charity in Scotland, and as of 2026 we have **121 civil society/NGO members** and **306 individual members**.

HRCS is independent of Government and is dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights for everyone in Scotland.

We aim to ensure that Scotland respects, protects and fulfils everyone's human rights through the incorporation of international treaties and conventions into Scottish law and through the mainstreaming of human rights at all levels of policy decision making.

Vision: HRCS' vision is that Scottish civil society has a strong, collective voice and is empowered and enabled to defend and promote human rights for everyone.

Mission: Our mission is to provide a high quality, accessible civil society network able to defend and promote human rights.

We exist to bring together organisations and campaigners to work for the incorporation of human rights into Scottish law, to ensure the mainstreaming of human rights across policy, and to enhance accountability of duty bearers.

HRCS aims to amplify marginalised voices in all that it does and to ensure that consideration of human rights is at the core of decision-making.

The Consortium works towards two strategic outcomes:

- **Scotland has a strong, collective civil society voice which is able to defend and promote human rights.**
- **Civil society is able to use human rights as a tool to strengthen democracy and deliver social justice in Scotland.**

Values

HRCS' core values are aligned to those which underpin the international human rights framework; everyone is entitled to **freedom, respect, equality, dignity and autonomy**. We believe that human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to everyone simply because we exist as human beings. Operationally HRCS will work in line with the PANEL principles – **participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and legality**.

Current Situation

Despite positive political rhetoric and some progress in terms of the application of human rights in Scotland's legal and policy framework over the last thirty years, more recently there has been a significant negative change in political attitudes towards the importance of human rights. Some sections of both UK and Scottish governments are proposing to substantially weaken the human rights legislative framework.

This has been a result of a number of factors increasingly fuelled in response to poverty and inequality, including:

- the growth of the populist political agenda both in the United Kingdom and internationally
- the increasing negativity of the right-wing media towards human rights
- increased 'othering' and targeting of minority groups
- public disillusionment with the political process and its failure to demonstrate the positive impact of human rights on peoples' lives.

At an international level, the rule of law and the role of the United Nations and the Council of Europe are increasingly challenged.

These pressures are significant and have resulted in an ongoing regression of human rights for many who are already marginalised and excluded.

Strategic Priorities

In order to deliver on our vision, mission and values HRCS will continue to prioritise the incorporation of human rights in the Scottish legislative and policy framework. We will strengthen our network through increased membership and increased capacity building for our members. In our engagement with government and other duty bearers we will provide a platform for the voice of our members' and individual human rights defenders.

Within this context and approach, we will focus on the following strategic priorities, working at different levels and in different fora:

- **Policy and Influencing within the International, UK and Scottish arenas**
- **Membership and Network Development**

POLICY AND INFLUENCING

We will continue to grow and develop HRCS' profile and influence others to amplify the voice and experience of our members in human rights-based policy. Our work in this area will involve engagement with the United Nations, Council of Europe, the Scottish and Westminster parliaments, and, increasingly, the Scottish public sector. It should be noted that the devolution settlement currently adds a level of complexity within our policy and influencing work and this is itself an area for priority action.

During the lifetime of this strategy, our ambition is to maintain our work with the United Nations through a number of mechanisms and engage more with the Council of Europe and at the UK (Westminster) level. We will also continue in developing our relationship and advocacy impact by working more closely with our sister organisations in Wales and Northern Ireland. (Additional resource will be required to progress this further.)

Strategic Priorities

Our policy and influencing priorities are:

- Wider political engagement with existing and new MSPs and MPs
- Establish and maintain our relationship with the new Scottish Government as a key 'critical friend' and stakeholder
- Take a leading role in lobbying/advocating for the next Scottish Government to deliver on the Scottish Human Rights Act
- Continue our involvement with Scottish National Action Plan for Human Rights (SNAP 2) and seek to increase its delivery and impact
- Influence Westminster and Holyrood to promote reframing the devolution settlement (Section 28/7)
- Further develop our joint policy and influencing work with the Human Rights Consortium Northern Ireland and the Human Rights Consortium Cymru in order to increase influence within the UK Parliament
- Continue our Migrants Project for a further 3-year period and Identify new projects to highlight and promote human rights of specific groups and communities that experience discrimination
- Ensure that the Scottish Mental Health Law Reform incorporates the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRPD)
- Work collaboratively to ensure further progress is made in the reform of access to justice in Scotland

MEMBERSHIP AND NETWORK DEVELOPMENT – ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

Following approval of our new SCIO 2 Tier Constitution, HRCS conducted a refresh of its network members in 2025. We currently have 2 categories of membership (organisational and individual) and membership is free of charge. Membership benefits include monthly e-newsletters with information about headlines, updates and events around human rights in Scotland, invitations to members' meetings and other events on key human rights issues, opportunities to access training, resources and projects and the opportunity (for organisational members) to vote at our AGM.

Strategic Priorities

During the lifetime of this strategy, we plan to survey our membership so that we can be clear on their priorities and expectations, to build our membership by a further 50%, and enhance membership benefits with new events, publications and webinars. We are committed to increasing members' engagement and their opportunities to influence our priorities and direction.

Our membership and networking priorities are:

- Conduct a membership survey during 26/27
- Building on the work done in 2025 to further develop the membership of the Consortium using an ongoing recruitment strategy
- Consider widening membership to include public and private sectors by developing new membership categories e.g. corporate, trade/sector and associate membership
- Develop sectoral expertise and knowledge transfer between members by providing new and innovative ways for members to engage including groups focussed on specific policy priorities e.g. access to justice, migrants' rights and children's rights
- Delivery of a wide range of relevant, high-quality member only webinar and in-person events
- Increase opportunities for members to engage with the Consortium (blogs/podcasts/newsletter features) and to present at events on behalf of the Consortium
- Increase opportunities for network members to engage with each other and share experience and learning including a biannual conference
- Contribute to the wider human rights culture change agenda by hosting an inaugural human rights festival for Scotland

The Consortium's financial independence is fundamentally important to our ability to deliver our ambitious strategy. To date, we have developed valuable partnerships with a small group of funding organisations which actively support human rights-based work. This is critically important to our sustainability and our ability to tell truth to power. However, HRCS must continue its work to increase and diversify its income if we are to sustain the organisation in the medium to long-term.

During the lifetime of this strategy, we intend to increase our income by 50% in order to enable us to deliver in different and original ways. We will also seek to diversify our funding sources in order to increase the organisation's resilience while remaining independent of government.

Our Business Development and Income Generation priorities are:

- Sustaining our existing funding base through delivery, reporting and relationship management for our current funders
- Diversify our funding base both for core funding and project costs to enable us to sustain the organisation and develop new areas of delivery
- Develop an Income Generation Strategy for the organisation which builds on successes to date and targets opportunities for new funding sources and innovation alongside multi-year funding
- Further develop our relationships with the private sector including opportunities for sponsorship of key projects and/or events in line with our Policy on Acceptance of Sponsorship, Donations and Grants
- Keep up to date in best practice in both income generation and in increasing our engagement and impact, working with key knowledge partners (academic, third sector, think tanks)
- Diversify our supporter/membership base to engage those organisations and individuals who currently may not be politically active or interested in human rights
- Explore and implement opportunities to generate trading income that are both viable and align line with our vision, mission, values
- Enhance our external communications profile, using social media to maximum effect and additional formats such as podcasts and video (additional resources will be required)
- Develop new strategic partnerships which enable us to enhance our reach and impact.

This strategic plan will be used to develop an annual delivery plan for the organisation and both will be monitored and reviewed:

- by HRCS's members through the membership survey, the Annual General Meeting and through informal feedback, and
- by HRCS's Board of Trustees at their regular meetings.



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