

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSORTIUM SCOTLAND: ROLE, GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR 2026-2031

**Briefing for Members of the
Scottish Parliament**

Human Rights Consortium Scotland: Role, Goals, and Priorities for 2026–2031

Congratulations on your election to the Scottish Parliament. We welcome you to your new role and are pleased to provide this short briefing on the role, goals and priorities of the Human Rights Consortium Scotland (HRCS).

HRCS believes that human rights can make real and lasting change to quality of life for everyone in Scotland. We are committed to making this belief a reality and are keen to develop a strong partnership with the new Scottish Parliament over the next five years.

HRCS is often confused with the Scottish Human Rights Commission, although our purpose and role are different.

HRCS is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, independent of government. We facilitate a network of civil society organisations and individual human rights defenders.

We currently have 180 organisational members and 320 individual members.

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Our purpose and role

Our charitable purpose is the advancement of human rights, understood as the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[1] and subsequent UN conventions and declarations[2],[3]. We do this by:

- raising awareness of, and support for, human rights;
- facilitating civil society organisations to promote human rights within their activities;
- enabling others to hear and learn from the lived experience of individual human rights defenders;
- working for the promotion and protection of human rights in local, national and international law, policy making and practice; and
- securing the enforcement of human rights law and holding duty bearers to account.

Our values

HRCS' core values are aligned with those that 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. HRCS works in line with the PANEL principles – participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and legality[4].

Theory of change and strategy

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 can defend and promote human rights.
- Civil society can use human rights as a tool to strengthen democracy and deliver social justice in Scotland.

There are a number of barriers to human rights development and implementation in Scotland. Individuals, communities and the public sector can feel disconnected from the human rights framework, and many may believe it does not relate to them or that it will not deliver positive change. Human rights are also increasingly misunderstood. This is compounded by legal barriers to incorporation, reduced access to justice and redress, increasing poverty and inequality, and a lack of information and advice.

However, where politicians, policy makers, individuals and communities engage with human rights proactively, they can support clear and positive progress[5],[6].

HRCS exists to bridge these gaps, address misunderstandings and promote the use of human rights as a tool to overcome discrimination and prejudice, improve quality of life and wellbeing for everyone, and strengthen democracy.

The organisation is independent of government and operates at international, UK, Scottish and organisational/community levels to pursue our goals.

We build the human rights capacity of individuals, groups and organisations, and support them to work together by facilitating events, webinars, resources and campaigns. By doing so, we aim to increase the impact and influence of civil society and hold government to account for progressing human rights.

Human rights in Scotland in 2026

Human rights must deliver tangible changes in people's day-to-day lives if they are to be made 'real' for and valued by people in Scotland. However, without a robust, mainstreamed human rights framework to anchor policies at all levels, progressive ambitions and commitments often fall short. This can lead to criticism of human rights themselves, rather than the lack of effective implementation and accountability mechanisms.

HRCS and our members believe that the realisation of human rights is central to delivering the bold and progressive change we want to see for everyone in Scotland. People in Scotland must be able to live well and to do so must have their human rights respected, protected and fulfilled.

We believe that the status quo has failed to deliver the transformational change required to enable people in Scotland to live free from discrimination and inequality as the core of a just and progressive democracy. Change is urgently needed. We stand ready to work with the new Scottish Parliament and Government to build a Scotland that delivers on its reputation as a rights-respecting nation and a leader in embedding human rights into policy and practice.

Our Priorities for 2026-2031

- The incorporation of human rights into the Scottish legislative and policy framework through the creation of a Human Rights (Scotland) Bill
- Engaging and advocating with the Scottish Government and other public bodies, the UK Government, the United Nations and the Council of Europe to secure the enforcement of human rights and hold duty bearers to account
- Seeking increased provision of access to justice in Scotland
- Contributing to public sector reform through the promotion of human rights-based approaches and budgeting mechanisms
- Continuing to amplify the voices and experiences of our members and individual human rights defenders
- Increasing capacity building for our members, the voluntary sector and the public sector
- Strengthening our network through increased membership and enhanced membership services.

Human Rights (Scotland) Bill

HRCS and its members urge all political parties to commit to introducing a Human Rights (Scotland) Bill that places human rights at the centre of a more equal, just and thriving Scotland. The incorporation of our everyday human rights, specifically our economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, in the Bill would demonstrate strong leadership and significantly enhance enforceable measures to tackle the root causes of poverty, inequality and discrimination.

Building on Scotland's incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child through the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024[7], the Bill would also enhance Scotland's commitment to social justice and equality, with a particular focus on those people whose rights are most at risk.

HRCS believes the Bill should incorporate four existing international human rights treaties:

- the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)[8]
- the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)[9]
- the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)[10]
- the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) [11]
- enshrine the right to a healthy environment in Scots law.

Embedding these conventions and rights in law would help make fairness, justice and equality guiding principles across Scottish governance, protecting Scotland's values for the future and ensuring real and tangible change for the people of Scotland.

What does HRCS do?

HRCS supports civil society organisations, governments, the wider voluntary sector, local authorities and other public bodies to develop a deeper understanding and awareness of human rights, and to embed human rights in planning, budgeting, service delivery, monitoring and complaints processes.

We also create stronger routes for rights holders and human rights defenders to influence decisions, share evidence and challenge barriers before harm occurs. To advance our work we are committed to:

- Capacity building work with civil society, the wider voluntary sector and the public sector
- The development and delivery of the Scottish National Action Plan for Human Rights[12] (SNAP 2)
- The introduction of the Human Rights City[13] model to Scotland
- Co-chairing the Civil Society Working Group on Incorporation

- Network and steering group membership of the UK Human Rights Act Coalition
- Network and steering group membership of the UK Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Network
- Working closely with our sister consortium organisations in Northern Ireland and Wales/Cymru.

We are also a founding member and partner in the development of Scotland's first Human Rights Festival[14].

A place-based approach to human rights realisation?

"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world ... Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere."

Eleanor Roosevelt, 1948[15]

Scotland's Second National Human Rights Action Plan (SNAP 2) sets out a vision of a Scotland where everyone can live with dignity, with practical action delivered by public bodies, civil society and rights holders working together.

HRCS believes these commitments must reach people where they live, work, learn and access services, so we are developing a place-based human rights model focused on everyday experiences in communities.

This means asking how rights can be realised through local decision-making, public service design, housing, health and social care, education, transport, environmental decisions and access to justice.

The model will be grounded in the PANEL principles. It will also recognise that communities experience rights issues differently, particularly where poverty, inequality, geography, disability, race, age, gender or immigration status affect access to services, voice and redress.

Please get in touch

We look forward to working constructively in partnership with Members of the Scottish Parliament throughout the parliamentary term to strengthen human rights protections, support effective implementation and ensure that people and communities across Scotland can experience the practical benefits of human rights in their everyday lives.

If you would like to hear more about our work, our current priorities for human rights realisation in Scotland, or to explore other areas of common interest, please get in touch:

You can contact us at:

admin@hrcscotland.org | Website: [Human Rights Consortium Scotland](https://www.hrcscotland.org)



References

- [1] United Nations General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted 10 December 1948, UNGA Res 217A (III).
- [2] The international human rights framework includes the core UN human rights treaties and related declarations developed after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- [3] The United Kingdom is a signatory to eight United Nations Human Rights treaties: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/united-nations-treaties-ratified-by-the-uk/> The UK is also a founding member of the Council of Europe and has ratified the European Convention on Human Rights: [UK and the Council of Europe - GOV.UK.](#)
- [4] PANEL is a commonly used human rights-based approach: Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination and equality, Empowerment, and Legality.
- [5] Scottish Government high level action plan in response to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - gov.scot
- [6] www.togetherscotland.org.uk/rightsontrack/incorporation-of-the-un-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child/
- [7] United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, asp 1.
- [8] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 3 January 1976.
- [9] Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted 13 December 2006, entered into force 3 May 2008.
- [10] Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted 18 December 1979, entered into force 3 September 1981.
- [11] International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted 21 December 1965, entered into force 4 January 1969.
- [12] www.snaprights.info/
- [13] www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/guidance-framework-creating-human-rights-city
- [14] [Scotland's Human Rights Festival 2026 | Human Rights Consortium Scotland](#)
- [15] Eleanor Roosevelt, remarks on the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.