

About the Commission

The Scottish Human Rights Commission is Scotland's National Human Rights Institution (NHRI). The Commission was established by the Scottish Commission for Human Rights Act 2006, began operating in 2008 and currently employs 17 staff. Governance of the Commission is led by the full-time Chair and there are three part-time Commission Members.

The Commission has a general duty to promote awareness, understanding and respect for all human rights to everyone, everywhere in Scotland, and to encourage best practice in relation to human rights.

To fulfil this duty, the Commission carries out a range of activities including recommending changes to Scottish law, policy and practice as necessary, raising awareness of human rights, carrying out research and monitoring the implementation of human rights standards.

The Commission shares office space with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS). The key environmental impacts of our operations are staff travel, whether commuting or travel for work, and waste and energy use in our office.

Protecting biodiversity and connecting people with nature

The Commission does not own or manage land or property, and therefore has limited opportunities to carry out biodiversity activities. The key ways in which we protect biodiversity are activities carried out in order to reduce waste and carbon emissions. These include:

- minimising waste, and reducing waste to landfill through recycling;

- using a food waste collection service to make better use of leftover food from meetings and events;
- switching to fully biodegradable and fragrance-free cleaning products in our office;
- using local and environmentally-minded suppliers wherever possible;
- encouraging staff to use public transport or active travel for their commute;
- providing shower facilities to support active travel;
- carefully considering necessary business travel, including air travel, in the context of our inherent requirement to take part in the international human rights system as Scotland's NHRI;
- supplying recycling facilities throughout the office; and
- implementing a "wash it and squash it" campaign to reduce waste volume.

Mainstreaming biodiversity

The Commission has been carrying out a systematic review of policies and procedures and consideration of sustainability and our impact on the environment has been part of that review. Our finance and procurement policy explicitly encourages use of local and environmentally-minded suppliers where possible. We are developing an ethical food policy for use in sourcing catering for internal and external meetings and events. We use a food sharing service to collect any uneaten food from meetings and events to reduce food waste. We are also developing an environment policy to reinforce our aim to reduce our environmental impact.

Nature-based solutions, climate change and biodiversity

The Commission has a mandate to promote and protect all human rights. This includes the right to a healthy environment. The Commission gave evidence to the 45th Human Right Council session in September 2020, supporting the call for a global recognition of this right and the need for a global approach to a global environment crisis.

In November 2021 COP26 is being held in Glasgow and the Commission is working with NHRIs from around the world to further develop human rights based approaches to tackling climate change. We are also part of Scotland National Taskforce on Human Rights Leadership to develop a new framework law to strengthen protection of peoples' social, economic and cultural rights and incorporate the right to a healthy environment.

Workforce development

In order to raise awareness of biodiversity and sustainability issues, staff are encouraged to take part in Scotland's annual Climate Week. This has included activities such as using a Personal Carbon Footprint Calculator, making individual pledges to improve personal impact on the environment, talks from recycling providers and a visit to a recycling plant, and webinars on a range of topics related to sustainability and environment.

Research and monitoring

The development of our work in relation to climate change and human rights is a strategic priority for the Commission. In the next years we will be further developing our monitoring and research in this area.

Biodiversity highlights and challenges

The Commission has introduced plants into the office in order to improve the working environment and provide a connection with nature.

During the pandemic, staff have been encouraged to walk regularly, and flexible working arrangements are in place to allow this during daylight hours through the winter period.

The pandemic has also halted all international travel for the purpose of taking part in the international human rights system. Once restrictions lift, balancing the importance of that participation with an aim to reduce international travel as far as possible will remain a challenge for the Commission.