SHRC

Scottish
Human Rights
Commission



Annual Report

2025-26

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Foreword from our Chair



Professor Angela O'Hagan

"This year, we have seen the power of connecting local voices to international human rights systems, ensuring that the experiences of people in Scotland are heard, recognised and acted upon at every level.

We present our Annual Report to the Scottish Parliament and the people of Scotland in a challenging context.

Across Scotland, and around the world, human rights are under threat. We have evidence that people in Scotland are experiencing human rights violations. People are going hungry, cannot afford housing and cannot access basic services like healthcare where and when they need it. In this context, human rights are more important than ever.

This has been a strong focus for our work this year, including our monitoring of economic, social and cultural rights in the South of Scotland. In 2026-27, we will spotlight poverty as a human rights issue. People are struggling. Sometimes, that pressure turns to anger or even political unrest. In Scotland, and globally, we see those frustrations expressed as tensions within and between our communities. There are some voices that would suggest human rights themselves, or even the rights of others, are the cause of these challenges.

But protecting human rights is even more important because of these challenges. More than ever, we need to protect and uphold the framework that requires public authorities to realise the rights of people in Scotland.

I am honoured to report that the SHRC has been re-accredited as an 'A status' human rights body. This means we meet the highest international standards and that we are fulfilling our role as a 'bridge' between domestic realities and international scrutiny. The UN accreditation committee recommended that we continue to advocate for a stronger National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) and human rights framework for people in Scotland. At a time when rights are under threat, this matters more than ever. Scotland needs a strong human rights watchdog. This annual report reflects the breadth and depth of work which SHRC has engaged in across a range of rights. It also demonstrates where Scotland's NHRI would be able to do even more with full powers, as directed by the international accreditation process, and which we have highlighted to the Scottish Parliament in its review processes.

We are committed to 'recognise the humanity of the person standing beside you', as set out in our current Strategic Plan. We are here to listen and take the knowledge of what is going on in people's everyday lives directly back to parliament. This year, we have worked with people across the country including Scottish Gypsy Travellers, families whose loved ones have died in prison, and people who are struggling to afford essentials.

In 2025-26, we have made more use of our legal powers. We developed a new legal strategy and have increasingly engaged in legal action, including in the Court of Session. This legal intervention is part of our wider work on increasing access to justice for rights holders. It is another indicator of how the SHRC is growing in reach and impact for rights holders in Scotland.

This Annual Report highlights the broad range of work to promote and protect rights for everyone across Scotland. We are presenting it to a newly elected Scottish Parliament, who are the guarantors of human rights in Scotland. The growing evidence base from the SHRC will inform and guide MSPs in their deliberations and in ensuring human rights are integrated into parliamentary scrutiny and law making.

Professor Angela O'Hagan
Chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission



About the SHRC

Our Purpose

We are Scotland's human rights watchdog. We are the National Human Rights Institution for Scotland, with 'A status' accreditation from the UN.

Our job is to work with people and communities to understand their experiences, hold public bodies to account where human rights are not upheld, and help them to do better.

Our Vision

A fairer Scotland where human rights are respected, understood, and where there is justice when things go wrong

Our Mission

To be a strong independent authority that works collaboratively to uphold everyone's human rights in Scotland

Our Values

The Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) delivers our work through the lens of a human rights based approach, known as the PANEL principles.

- Participation
- Accountability
- Non-discrimination, Equality
- Empowerment
- Legality

Our values bring this to life.



We are accessible

We involve people in our work on issues that affect their rights and ensure that our work is understood by all.

We are independent

We hold duty bearers to account by monitoring human rights standards in Scotland, the system of accountability, and using our mandate to take action where required. We are accountable to the people of Scotland.

We uphold everyone's human rights

Human rights belong to everyone. We recognise where bias, discrimination and power dynamics have an impact on human rights violations, and we take action on rights and groups most at risk.

We educate and engage

We help everyone to understand their human rights and make sure that decision makers are fully supported to develop policy and practice which affect people's rights

We are authoritative, expert and trusted

We keep watch over national and international human rights law to help duty bearers understand the impact of their plans and actions on their human rights obligations, ensuring that this is rooted in rule of law, and easily understood.

Our Strategic Objectives for 2024-28

Purpose

We will deliver and extend our mandate to improve accountability for human rights in Scotland; and inform the Scottish Parliament on the human rights implications of proposed legislation.

People

We will ensure that the SHRC is informed by, and works alongside, people and communities throughout Scotland who have direct knowledge of how human rights are being experienced; and use our mandate to focus on poverty, places of detention; access to justice; and the rights of at risk specially protected groups.

Performance

We will monitor and report on how human rights are being experienced in Scotland, and play our part in embedding a stronger human rights culture



Scottish Human Rights Commission

Our impact in 2025-26

In year two of our 2024-28 Strategic Plan, we can evidence that the SHRC is delivering a change in our approach to our mandate to promote human rights in Scotland:

- **We are influencing the work of the Scottish Parliament more**
- **Our spotlight reports are influencing policy change**
- **The direct experiences of people are informing our human rights monitoring work**
- **We are starting to have more influence and engagement with the legal community to promote human rights through the courts**



In 2025-26, the SHRC has made good progress in promoting the human rights of the people of Scotland:

- Spotlighting the human rights of the Gypsy Traveller community and calling for redress for historic practice
- Informed Scottish Parliament business, including dedicated Committee time on the findings of our discussion paper on Orders of Lifelong Restriction
- Informed the development of a Human Rights Tracker Tool, launched by the Scottish Government in March 2026 – a first for Scotland
- Worked with the Auditor General on exploring a human rights based approach to budgeting and budget scrutiny
- Used our powers of intervention under section14 of the Scottish Commission for Human Rights Act 2006 for the first time to intervene in a judicial review. We made a written and oral submission to the Court of Session to clarify the human rights legal framework underpinning the policy on the management of transgender people in custody.
- Informed Parliament about the role of the National Human Rights Institution and how the SHRC could evolve to provide greater monitoring, accountability and education on human rights in Scotland
- Provided clarity about the status of human rights in law following the Supreme Court ruling on the definition of woman in the Equality Act 2010
- Offered evidence to Parliamentary Committees on the role of office holders of the Scottish Parliament in upholding human rights in Scotland
- Completed a robust and thorough United Nations review process of our performance as Scotland's National Human Rights Institution, achieving 'A status'
- Held a Family Listening Day with families of people who have died in state custody to inform the evidence and recommendations of the Fatal Accident Inquiry Review
- For the first time ever, published a joint statement with our sister UK NHRIs – the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Northern Irish Human Rights Commission – to call on the UK Government to protect the integrity of the European Convention on Human Rights

Of course, our work has a long term impact beyond any individual year and we cannot do it alone. We work alongside human rights defenders and civil society to protect and promote human rights. In 2025-26, our work from previous years has contributed to:

What we did	The impact in 2025-26
Our 2024-25 Spotlight report on people with learning disabilities and/ or autistic people who are denied their right to choose where they live and are stuck in institutions (Tick Tock)	Publication of a new Scottish Government action plan to end institutionalisation, with £20m of funding to support this, announced in March 2026
Our 2024-25 report on the absolute rights of people in detention (Review, Recommend, Repeat) and our 2025-26 Family Listening Day	Scottish Government established a Pilot National Oversight Mechanism to monitor implementation of recommendations following deaths in custody. Clear evidence of SHRC recommendations in Sheriff Principal Abercrombie's recommendations. The Scottish Government will set up a multi-agency working group.
Our ongoing work calling for access to justice for people who experience rights violations (Access to Justice for Everyone (2024); recommendations from all Spotlights)	The Scottish Government has launched a consultation on Legal Aid Reform
Our report on Access to Justice in the prison system (2025) highlighting the experiences of prisoner complaints	The Scottish Prison Service has taken ownership of an accessible version of the Prison Rules, which has been disseminated to people in prison custody for the first time. The publication was adapted by SHRC in partnership with Parkhead Citizens Advice Bureau.
Our work with families of people who have died in state custody (Family Listening Day, 2025)	Scottish Government announced free, non means tested legal aid for close family members involved in Fatal Accident Inquiries following a death in custody. A new national advocacy service for bereaved families has been established
Our 2024-25 local monitoring on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Highlands and Islands	Informed a Scottish Parliament debate in 2024-25, a dedicated Equality, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee session in 2025-26 and a review into maternity services in Caithness as part of the 2026 Programme for Government

What we did	The impact in 2025-26
Our 2023-24 report (At a Crossroads) and ongoing work on the human rights system in Scotland	Scottish Parliament approved Committee recommendations and agreed a positive case had been made to review the mandate and resource of SHRC in Session seven
Our written and oral intervention in the Judicial Review on the management of transgender prisoners (2025-26)	Scottish Government and Scottish Prison Service have adopted a new policy approach that better promotes the human rights of female prisoners
Our 2025 discussion paper on the human rights implications of Orders of Lifelong Restriction	Criminal Justice Committee roundtable to consider the status of these indeterminate sentences in Scotland
Joint statement with EHRC and NIHRC on protections in the European Convention on Human Rights (2026)	The 'Chisinau Declaration' did not interfere with the functional independence of the Strasbourg Courts, in line with our collective recommendation

The Members of the Scottish Human Rights Commission monitor this progress through a suite of Key Performance Indicators and a Theory of Change. The recommendations from our domestic human rights monitoring work are now part of our performance assessment framework. In 2026-27, we will establish a programme for tracking the implementation of NHRI recommendations.

We have worked to strengthen the organisation. In 2025-26, we inducted two new Members of the Commission, recruited a full capacity Senior Leadership Team, and a new solicitor to deliver our extended mandate under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. We also reviewed our employee policies and improved our ways of working, to build a high performing team culture.

It is making a difference. Since 2024, the SHRC has increased the number of domestic human rights monitoring reports by 200% and increased the volume of correspondence issued by the Commission to duty bearers resulting from these reports by 384% in the same timeframe. We have done this while maintaining our international reporting schedule and briefings to Parliament, as well as meeting our target of increasing the use of SHRC enabling powers through our first intervention in a significant judicial review. The current volume of output is the maximum that can be delivered within the current resource. Any increase in outcomes would require further resourcing, as recommended by the UN Committee that approve our reaccreditation.

The Commission

The Commission comprises four members and a Chair, appointed by the Scottish Parliament. They are required to meet up to 9 times per year to fulfil their function of strategic leadership of the SHRC's mandate.

Members have undertaken a full schedule of Commission and Audit and Risk Committee meetings in 2025-26 (23 meetings including special meetings, an increase of 35% from 2024-25), as well as a joint meeting with the EHRC Scotland Committee, and an induction programme (5 sessions) for the incoming Members of the Commission, which was designed by the Chair, and offered to all Members.





Purpose

Strategic Objective 2024-28:

We will deliver and extend our mandate to improve accountability for human rights in Scotland; and inform the Scottish Parliament on the human rights implications of proposed legislation.

"Human rights matter to our everyday lives. At the Scottish Human Rights Commission, we shine a spotlight where rights are not being upheld, whether that's about health, housing, transport, food or social care. We work for fairness so we can all enjoy freedom and dignity."
Shelley Gray, Member of the Scottish Human Rights Commission

Our strategic objective focused on purpose is all about our role as an independent National Human Rights Institution, and demonstrating our value to the Scottish Parliament and the courts on protecting human rights in law.

Our work is making a difference. Over the course of our Strategic Plan, the presence and use of SHRC evidence in the Scottish Parliament is increasing. There were 182 parliamentary mentions of the Scottish Human Rights Commission and 999 mentions of human rights in 2025-26, which is an increase of 48% from 2023-24. This averaged at roughly one SHRC mention for every 5.5 human rights mentions.

This year again saw significant human rights activity across the parliamentary and governmental monitoring landscape. The Scottish Government's planned Human Rights Bill continued to be a prominent reference point, alongside the SPCB Supported Body Landscape Review, the UK Supreme Court judgment in For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers, social care, justice and public administration issues. Awareness of human rights in parliament and government is vital in making real change to realise human rights in Scotland. The impact and influence of our work spans across multiple years. For example, directly referencing the recommendations of our Tick Tock report of 2024-25, in 2025-26 the Scottish Government announced an action plan and a £20m fund to support people on the right to independent living.

Parliamentary committees, including the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice and Finance and Public Administration Committees, are using human rights concepts as lenses in their scrutiny work, following our evidence and briefings. Committee business continued to be a major route for SHRC mentions, including agenda papers, correspondence, evidence sessions and Official Reports. There were 154 mentions of human rights in Committee agendas, correspondence and summaries across 12 separate Committees. Building on our discussion paper on the human rights implications of the Order of Lifelong Restriction sentence, our Commission Member Rosemary Agnew chaired a roundtable hosted by the Equality, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee in the Scottish Parliament to consider the topic.

We submitted a briefing to inform the Scottish Parliament debate on the SPCB Supported Bodies Landscape Review. The Parliament voted to approve the Committee's recommendations to endorse the value of and strengthen existing supported bodies such as the SHRC, rather than creating new Commissions. It is vital that any change to the public body landscape is designed and resourced to protect human rights, especially for people who we know are consistently left behind, many of whom had campaigned for policy commitments to develop new Commissions. We welcome proposals to review our mandate and resourcing within that context and note that this is a recommendation for the UK and Scottish Governments from the Sub Committee on accreditation of NHRIs at the UN.

What we did

We work throughout the year to ensure that human rights are at the heart of policy and practice in Scotland. You can find all of our briefings, consultation responses and letters **on our website** and our 2025-26 outputs listed in **Appendix A**.

Using our legal powers

This year, for the first time, we used our legal powers to make a written and oral submission to assist the court in a judicial review. This met our target of increasing SHRC interventions in the courts by 100%.

We intervened in the judicial review brought by For Women Scotland against the Scottish Ministers, which determined the legality of the Scottish Prison Service policy for the management of transgender people in custody.

Our job is to promote and protect human rights for everyone in Scotland, and to support public authorities to meet their human rights obligations. Our purpose in intervening was to support the court by providing independent, expert analysis of all the human rights relevant to the case. This included the rights of female and transgender prisoners, and prison staff.

Impact

When Lady Ross made her ruling on the case in June 2026, we welcomed the references in her written opinion to the SHRC intervention and the prominence of human rights in the consideration of the issues before the court.

Separately, in advance of the ruling, we contacted the Scottish Government and Scottish Prison Service, to remind them that they are required to take a human rights based approach in the future approach to the design, implementation and monitoring of all policies, but particularly where the rights of multiple at-risk groups are engaged. The Scottish Government and Scottish Prison Service have since adopted a new policy approach that better reflects the rights of female prisoners.

This case was instrumental in establishing the role of the SHRC as Scotland's National Human Rights Institution in supporting the courts to uphold the rule of law. Since we made this intervention, we have identified several other cases where we plan to use our legal powers in 2026-27. We will continue to advocate for a strengthening of our legal powers, including for the power to bring own-name litigation.

How it meets our mandate

- Section 14: Power to intervene
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Incorporation

What happened

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) protects the human rights of children. In July 2024, Scotland was the first UK nation to incorporate the UNCRC into law. It means that public bodies have a duty to embed children's rights and that breaches of those rights can be challenged in court.

As part of the incorporation, the SHRC gained new powers, alongside the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. For the first time, we have the power to intervene in legal proceedings or to bring proceedings in our own name. In 2025, we recruited a Legal and Policy Coordinator for UNCRC.

Impact

We have developed a litigation strategy and are actively monitoring the courts to identify opportunities to intervene. We have since made our first written intervention using these powers in the Scottish Ministers [2026] CSOH 82, in August 2026.

We responded to consultation on tribunal rules for UNCRC compatibility questions. We submitted written and oral evidence on the Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty) (Scotland). The Scottish Parliament voted to pass the bill, even though it included reforms to religious observance in schools that were drafted to fall outside the scope of a key part of the UNCRC Act. The SHRC outlined its concern to the Scottish Parliament about the approach the Scottish Government took with this legislation, so soon after the passage of the UNCRC Act. This experience underscores the imperative for the Scottish Parliament to ensure effective scrutiny of legislation and compliance with domestic and international human rights obligations. We have urged the Scottish Government to ensure that future Bills affecting children's rights do not take this approach. We are willing to support with drafting guidance to guard against this.

"Incorporation of children's rights is essential for children and young people to secure accountability when the rights that they already have under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are not adequately considered by public bodies in Scotland. That is also the view of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child."
Jan Savage, Executive Director, SHRC

How it meets our mandate

The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 granted new powers for the Commission to take legal action in relation to children's rights. Section 4A of the Scottish Commission for Human Rights Act 2006 was inserted as follows:

"For the purposes of its general duty, the Commission may: (a) bring proceedings under section 7(1)(a) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 (b) intervene in proceedings in which a person claims that a public authority has acted (or proposes to act) in a way which is made unlawful by section 6(1) of that Act.

SHRC in the media and social media

We use our communications and media work to educate and inform people about their rights and to hold duty bearers to account for their human rights obligations.

This year, the volume of our media coverage increased by 67%, with a combined potential reach of over 1.5 billion. SHRC spokespeople and publications were featured across almost every media outlet in Scotland, including STV, BBC and Channel 5 TV news, radio, and national and regional newspapers. This matters. It meant it was impossible for duty bearers to ignore human rights.

The biggest news stories of the year were on the rights of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers, the policing of protests, the rights of prisoners, Fatal Accident Inquiries, and our State of the Nation report on economic, social and cultural rights.

Our social media presence has also grown across the year. There has been a global decline in Twitter/X users, but despite this, our social media followers across all platforms increased by 9.5%. Our posts were seen300,000 times in 2025-26. Our engagement rate across all platforms sits at 6.3%, compared with an average of 2.8% for nonprofits and 2.25% for government.

We are learning that social media content that focuses on people – on the human side of human rights – is most interesting to our audiences. We are increasingly using real stories from rights holders in our work, in line with our Participation Strategy.

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)(b)(c)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices

Reaccreditation as an 'A status' National Human Rights Institution

Our core purpose is as an independent National Human Rights Institution. The global criteria for NHRIs are very strict and are kept under regular review. We applied for reaccreditation through the UN system in October 2025. We were delighted to learn in June 2026 that the SHRC achieved the top grade of international accreditation at the United Nations as a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) for the fourth time.

This award of 'A Status' from the Global Alliance of NHRIs and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recognises the SHRC's independence, authority, and broad statutory mandate to promote and protect human rights.

The decision was made by a Committee of National Human Rights Institutions from around the world, following an extensive review of the SHRC submission and our work in Scotland over the last five years. This review took place against a set of detailed standards endorsed by the United Nations in 1993, known as the Paris Principles.

The Committee's final report recommended reaccreditation of the SHRC. The Committee commended the SHRC's work to promote human rights in Scotland, and our efforts to advocate for changes to our mandate to better protect human rights. It recommended that we should continue to make the case for stronger powers, including:

- Stronger powers in the SHRC's legislation to include a more explicit and stronger protection mandate, including the power to raise human rights cases through the courts in the public interest, remove the current restrictions on providing advice to individuals, compel information from public bodies, and conduct unannounced visits to places of detention
- The law should require that the SHRC's reports are debated and considered by the Scottish Parliament
- Dedicated resources for the SHRC's roles in both the UK National Preventive Mechanism (UK NPM) to monitor ill treatment in places of detention, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) monitoring mechanism, reflecting the breadth of the SHRC's responsibilities
- Full-time decision-making members and formal appointment processes with the selection and appointment process for Commission members to be enshrined in law to ensure transparency, diversity and broad public participation.

"Reaccreditation strengthens the case for the Scottish Parliament to build the stronger human rights legal framework that people in Scotland need, and to ensure the SHRC has all the powers it needs to protect human rights in Scotland."
Professor Angela O'Hagan, Chair of the SHRC



People

Strategic Objective 2024-28:

We will ensure that the SHRC is informed by, and works alongside, people and communities throughout Scotland who have direct knowledge of how human rights are being experienced; and use our mandate to focus on poverty, places of detention; access to justice; and the rights of at risk specially-protected groups.

Our work to hold the State to account on human rights is informed by working directly with the people who know best: rights holders. We have met our target of ensuring that 100% of SHRC spotlight outputs are informed directly by the experiences of people.

This has included a Family Listening Day with people whose loved ones have died in custody, a co-produced spotlight with members of Scotland's Gypsy Traveller community and the inclusion of personal stories in our State of the Nation report.

We have listened to people's experience of human rights, including through our monitoring work on economic, social and cultural rights in the South of Scotland.

And we have worked with people to build their capacity to advocate for their own human rights. We delivered training for disabled human rights defenders about international human rights. We also ran a series of workshops on using UN recommendations in campaigning, which have led to a toolkit that will be published in 2026-27.

We updated our **Help with Human Rights** leaflet, giving details of organisations that may be able to help people who are having a human rights problem.

Family experiences of Fatal Accident Inquiries

We worked with families whose loved ones have died in custody in Scotland to understand their experiences of the Fatal Accident Inquiry System.

We heard from 33 bereaved relatives at a 'Family Listening Day', where they described the system as confusing, slow, defensive and dehumanising. We commissioned INQUEST, a charity with expertise in State related deaths, to facilitate the day.

When a person is in custody, their life lies in the hands of the State. The right to life, under Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), requires the State to proactively protect life. If someone dies, human rights law requires the State to conduct effective, transparent, independent and impartial investigations, with the involvement of family or next of kin. This is to ensure accountability and, crucially, to prevent future loss of life in similar circumstances.

Families described being ignored when raising concerns about their loved ones' safety, being treated without dignity after the death occurred, and navigating long, complex investigation processes alone.

Impact

We submitted to the Fatal Accident Inquiry Review, chaired by Sheriff Principal Ian Abercrombie. This review was announced by the Scottish Government in January 2025, following a report from the SHRC.

The messages from the Family Listening Day and the SHRC recommendations came through strongly in Sheriff Principal Abercrombie's recommendations. The Justice Secretary announced that Scottish Government will set up a multi-agency working group to drive collaboration and legislative change. We will continue to advocate for a human rights based approach to this work.

Significantly, following our recommendation, the Scottish Government has now funded the establishment of a National Oversight Mechanism to investigate Article 2 deaths in state custody. Our recommendation is that this NOM must be independent of the State. We note that the initial pilot is being hosted within HM Inspectorate of Prisons and will keep watch on how this progresses.

"They didn't call him by his name, just 'the body'."

"You're frozen in time with no answers."

"You have to piece everything together yourself."

"It feels like you are the one on trial."

Family reflections on the Fatal Accident Inquiry system

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)(b)(c)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices (1)(b)
- Section 5: Power to co-operate4 with others (1)(a)
- Section 16: Publications of reports (2)



Spotlight: access to justice for people in detention

We all have the right to access justice when our rights are not realised. Our report on the way complaints are handled in Scottish prisons exposed serious failings, leaving people in prison unable to challenge mistreatment, poor conditions or human rights violations.

We found that the prison complaints process is complex and inaccessible especially for disabled people, people with lower literacy and people whose first language is not English.

- Many people in prison fear reprisal or punishment for complaining.
- Complaints data is incomplete, inaccessible and not disaggregated making accountability near-impossible.
- Independent support or advocacy and legal advice is hard to access.

Impact

For the first time, there is a Scottish version of the Prison Rules for people in custody to support them to name and claim their rights. We co-produced the guide with Parkhead Citizens Advice Bureau. The Scottish Prison Service agreed to ensure that the guide is available to people in prisons across Scotland, and their families, including in accessible formats such as British Sign Language and easy read.

We are working with the Scottish Prison Service to remind them that they must take a human rights based approach to the design, implementation and monitoring of all policies.

In 2026-27 we will scope our next access to justice spotlight, which will focus on social care.

"People entering prison should not lose their human rights at the prison gate. Scotland must do better to ensure access to justice in prisons is not just a promise, but a reality — for everyone."
Professor Angela O'Hagan, Chair of the Commission

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)(c)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices (1)(b)
- Section 5: Power to co-operate with others (1) (a)(b)
- Section 16: Publications of reports (2)



Spotlight: 'No Man's Land': a human rights assessment of the Tinker Experiment and redress for its victims

We all have the right to private and family life, to an adequate home and to our culture. We have the right to be free from discrimination and to access justice when our rights are not respected.

Our work with Scotland's Gypsy Travellers sets out evidence that many were forced to abandon their culture, experienced child removal, and were housed in substandard accommodation. This was part of legislative and policy efforts by the government and local authorities known as 'the Tinker Experiment'.

The harms caused by the 'Tinker Experiment' are not solely historic. Victims are still living with the consequences, including unsafe housing, cultural loss, discrimination, stigma, poor health outcomes and barriers in education and employment. These ongoing impacts amount to a continuing human rights issue under international law.

In partnership with Rajpot – a voluntary organisation working to give indigenous and cultural communities a voice – and an archival researcher, victims collated evidence to develop an archive documenting the experiment. We worked closely with the community to produce a human rights assessment of the experiment and redress for its victims.

Impact

We published 'No Man's Land' in January 2026. There was widespread media coverage, including TV and radio interviews with victims.

Community members led an event to share the ongoing impacts on their lives with duty bearers. We received a detailed response from the Scottish Government.

The report had an impact locally and internationally. We submitted evidence to the UN Human Rights Council on Minority Rights. Bernard Durheim, UN Special Rapporteur for the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, shared a video message in support of the victims.

We received powerful letters from victims who had seen their experiences reflected for the first time.

The First Minister of Scotland, Perth and Kinross Council and the Church of Scotland have issued apologies, which we welcome, but victims are still living with the consequences and continuing human rights issues.

Victims have the right to redress, which means public bodies should offer 'transformative reparations' in line with international human rights standards.

"The years of alienation and mental, emotional and physical torture; the emotional plague of having been the victim of savage gaslighting and defamation, linked to seeking an apology, that continues to haunt my mind."
Project participant

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)(c)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices (1)(b)
- Section 5: Power to co-operate with others (1) (a)(b)
- Section 16: Publications of reports (2)



Orders for lifelong restriction

We published a discussion paper raising serious concerns about the use of Orders for Lifelong Restriction (OLRs) in Scotland. OLRs are indeterminate prison sentences, with no fixed release date and include lifelong supervision in the community after the person is released.

We warned that people in prisons on OLRs are likely to experience breaches of their rights to liberty and respect for private and family life under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Prolonged uncertainty over release could cause severe psychological distress, risking treatment that may be considered inhuman or degrading.

We did not call for OLRs to be abolished, but asked the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament to urgently review whether OLRs meets Scotland's human rights obligations.

The human rights framework recognises both the need to punish crimes and to manage risk. There must be a sensitive balance – ensuring the State does not act disproportionately and that people are given real opportunities for rehabilitation.

Impact

The paper received significant public attention and was featured in news coverage across a range of outlets, including press, online and broadcast. The Scottish Parliament took notice of the report; the Equality, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee hosted a special roundtable on Orders of Lifelong Restriction, which was chaired by our Commission Member Rosemary Agnew.

> **"Right now, too many people serving Orders for Lifelong Restrictions face indefinite detention without a clear path to release – and that puts Scotland at risk of human rights breaches."**
>
> **Professor Angela O'Hagan, Chair of the SHRC**



Performance

Strategic Objective 2024-28:

We will monitor and report on how human rights are being experienced in Scotland, and play our part in embedding a stronger human rights culture

Our strategic objective focused on performance includes monitoring and reporting on how people in Scotland are experiencing their human rights. We use this evidence to hold the State to account for their human rights obligations and to embed a stronger human rights culture.

Impact

Our monitoring work has an impact in Scotland and beyond.

After years of advice from the SHRC and others, the Scottish Government has now produced a human rights tracker tool, which allows users to explore recommendations made by six UN human rights treaty bodies and to filter them by theme, human rights issue and affected group.

Following a recommendation from the SHRC, the Scottish Parliament's Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee undertook proactive follow-up engagement with the Scottish Government on its international human rights commitments. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has called this 'transformational'.

We hope to see this practice continue with the successor committee, as urged by the committee's legacy report.

Beyond Scotland, our work has been held up as an international example of good practice. For example, we were invited to present at the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) Academy in Zagreb on the innovative storytelling approach in our State of the Nation report.

We received a video message of support for our work alongside Scotland's Gypsy Travellers from the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence. Similarly, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and the Northern Irish Human Rights Commissioner shared video messages in support of the recommendations in our State of the Nation report.

Our work with people with learning disabilities and autistic people who are left with no choice but to live in hospital was highlighted as good practice in the Scottish Government's Coming Home Action Plan.



Monitoring economic, social and cultural rights in the South of Scotland

We visited the South of Scotland to ask people about their experiences of economic, social and cultural rights (ESC rights).

This research assessed how human rights such as housing, health, education, food, social security and culture are being realised across the South of Scotland. We heard first-hand from human rights defenders on the ground about the issues facing their communities. This included interviews, town hall events, focus groups, an online survey and story gathering.

We will publish a report for the Scottish Parliament in autumn 2026. Through local monitoring work, we find out what specific challenges there are for people in rural areas in accessing services and experiencing poverty.

We gather new evidence directly from communities to assess how local authorities are meeting their human rights obligations and make practical recommendations to improve outcomes for people in the area.

Impact

The SHRC's work on this topic is being recognised in Scotland and internationally.

Last year, our report on the Highlands and Islands led to the first ever Scottish Parliament debate on ESC rights, as well as dedicated sessions at the Equality, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee. We were pleased to receive a detailed response from the Scottish Government to the recommendations in our Highlands and Islands report. Local campaign groups have made use of our evidence in their advocacy work and the 2026 Scottish Government Programme for Government has committed to review maternity services in Caithness, in line with our recommendation.

The Council of Europe chose to come to Scotland to mark ten years of collaboration on ESC rights. We have used the evidence from our ESC monitoring as part of our wider influencing work. We travelled to Brussels to attend the 'Rights and rurality: from recognition to action' workshop. We submitted evidence to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as to the UK Government Rural Affairs Committee consultation on rural connectivity.

"Economic, social and cultural rights are about the things we all need to live life with dignity. It has been a privilege to meet with people in the South of Scotland to learn about how they are experiencing these rights in their everyday lives. Through our regional monitoring work, the SHRC is promoting awareness and accountability so that everyone across Scotland can enjoy these rights in practice."

Dr Claire Methven O'Brien, Member of the SHRC

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)(b)(c)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices (1) (b)
- Section 5: Power to co-operate with others (1) (a)



Our international work

The Scottish Human Rights Commission is accredited as the United Nation's trusted organisation to provide impartial evidence on the enjoyment of human rights in Scotland. This year, we submitted for reaccreditation through the UN system and were delighted to learn in June that we were granted 'A status'.

We promote human rights within Scotland and monitor how people are experiencing their rights. We report on these findings to contribute to international human rights treaty monitoring. This year, we have:

- Submitted statements to the Human Rights Council on disability rights and on the rights of minorities
- Published a statement alongside our UK sister NHRIs in support of the European Convention on Human Rights
- Delivered a speech as part of our Chair's role as Head of Delegation for ENNHRI at the Council of Europe High Level Conference on Social Rights in the European Social Charter
- Hosted a series of webinars with rights holders and duty bearers on international treaty reporting
- Trained disabled human rights defenders on the UN human rights system
- Delivered a full day workshop for Scottish civil society organisations on using the international human rights system for change
- Submitted evidence on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights review to the Scottish Parliament's Equality, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee
- Submitted on behalf of Scotland to ENNHRI report on the Rule of Law in Europe
- Highlighted human rights issues to the Timm's review on Personal Independence Payments alongside our sister UK NHRIs as part of the UK Independent Mechanism on alignment with UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Inquiry findings
- Gave evidence to the Framework Convention on National Minorities Advisory Group at Council of Europe on the launch of 'No Man's Land'
- Presented at the ENNHRI Academy about our participation work and our use of storytelling

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights (1) (b) (3) (4)(b)
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1) (a)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices
- Section 16: Publications of reports (2)

The State of the Nation

This year, our **State of the Nation report** focused on economic, social and cultural rights (ESC rights).

These are the rights of everyday life: health, housing, food, access to cultural life. We found that for many people these rights remain out of reach. Across the country, people are struggling to afford food, fuel and housing or to access essential services.

We based the report on recommendations from the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and outlined ten areas of concern:

- People cannot always access healthcare where and when they need it
- People with learning disabilities and autism do not have adequate support to live in their own homes
- Disabled people do not have a decent standard of living because disability-related social security entitlements are inadequate
- People across Scotland do not have access to safe, affordable and adequate housing.
- Marginalised people are worst affected by changes to the UK welfare system
- People in Scotland are hungry and not fully nourished
- Caregiving responsibilities for children, disabled people and older people are not fairly distributed or recognised
- People cannot afford basic daily essentials that keep us safe and warm
- People cannot access effective justice or remedies when their ESC rights are not realised
- The budget allocated to food programmes, social security, housing, health, education, employment services and other areas related to ESC rights is inadequate

We were very grateful that rights holders Anne, Derek, Nada and Shamus shared their powerful stories to illustrate what economic, social and cultural rights look like in their daily lives. This is part of our commitment to embed lived experience in our work.

Impact

When we published the report, people took notice. We secured widespread media and social media attention, including TV news and a long form interview in a Sunday newspaper.

We held an event at the Scottish Parliament for Human Rights Day on December 10, to discuss the report findings. The First Minister, John Swinney MSP, spoke at the event and confirmed his commitment to embedding human rights. We welcome the publication of the Scottish Government's high level action plan to respond to the concluding observations of the UN Committee.

We were disappointed that the Scottish Parliament did not hold a Human Rights Day debate in 2025. The UN committee that approved our 'A status' reaccreditation recommended that the law should require the Scottish Parliament to consider and debate our reports.

"There is no doubt that people are struggling. In many cases, that struggle turns to anger. In some, it leads to political unrest. At times like these, human rights matter more than ever. They provide the framework that requires public bodies to act fairly, protect people's dignity, and direct resources to those who need them most. The most effective way to rebuild trust and reduce anger is to make these rights a lived reality for everyone."

Professor Angela O'Hagan, Chair of the SHRC

How it meets our mandate

- Section 2: General duty to promote human rights (1)(b) (4)(a)(b)
- Section 3: Information, guidance, education (1)(a)
- Section 4: Monitoring of law, policies and practices
- Section 16: Publications of reports (2)



Strengthening our organisation

To meet our mandate to realise human rights in Scotland, we need to be a strong, high performing organisation. We are working hard to continuously improve our governance, staffing and processes.

This year, we were pleased to have our work recognised domestically and internationally. Our 'A status' reaccreditation in the UN system is evidence that our organisation is strong and is performing well. The Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA) made recommendations to strengthen the case for the Scottish Parliament to ensure the SHRC has all the powers it needs to protect human rights in Scotland. This further reinforced the conclusions of the SPCB Supported Bodies Landscape Review Committee there is a case for reviewing the powers and remit of the Scottish Human Rights Commission.

In 2025-26, we have worked hard to implement the recommendations of our 2024-25 independent governance review. This has included clarifying governance roles and responsibilities through new standing orders, a revised code of conduct for Commission Members, and structured delegation protocols.

We have also worked to review all our internal policies. We expect this work to be complete in autumn 2026.

Participation strategy

We are committed to ensuring that all people – human rights defenders and, most critically, victims of rights violations – can meaningfully engage in our work. In 2024, we published a four-year **Participation Strategy**.

We are working to listen to and amplify the voices of rights holders and communities. In this second year, this has included a Family Listening Day with people whose loved ones have died in custody, a co-produced spotlight with members of Scotland's Gypsy Traveller community and the inclusion of personal stories in our State of the Nation report.

We have increased the opportunities for participation in our monitoring work. Our research on economic, social and cultural rights in the South of Scotland included open town hall events, focus groups with marginalised people, and a survey for rights holders. We believe that we are stronger when we listen to and work alongside people, communities and organisations.

Accessible and inclusive

We have been making our work more accessible and inclusive. We are in the second year of our second six-year British Sign Language (BSL) plan to empower BSL users to name and claim their rights. We have produced an annual progress report on our 2025-26 work against this plan.

We commissioned Deaf awareness training for all of our staff in March 2026. We have created pages on our website for BSL and Easy Read versions of our work. All of our new publications are available in a format that is accessible to people who use screen readers.

We have also convened a BSL Joint Working Group to encourage collaboration and efficiency across SPCB Supported Bodies.

Strengthening our team

We have worked to strengthen our team: both the membership of the Commission and the staff who support them.

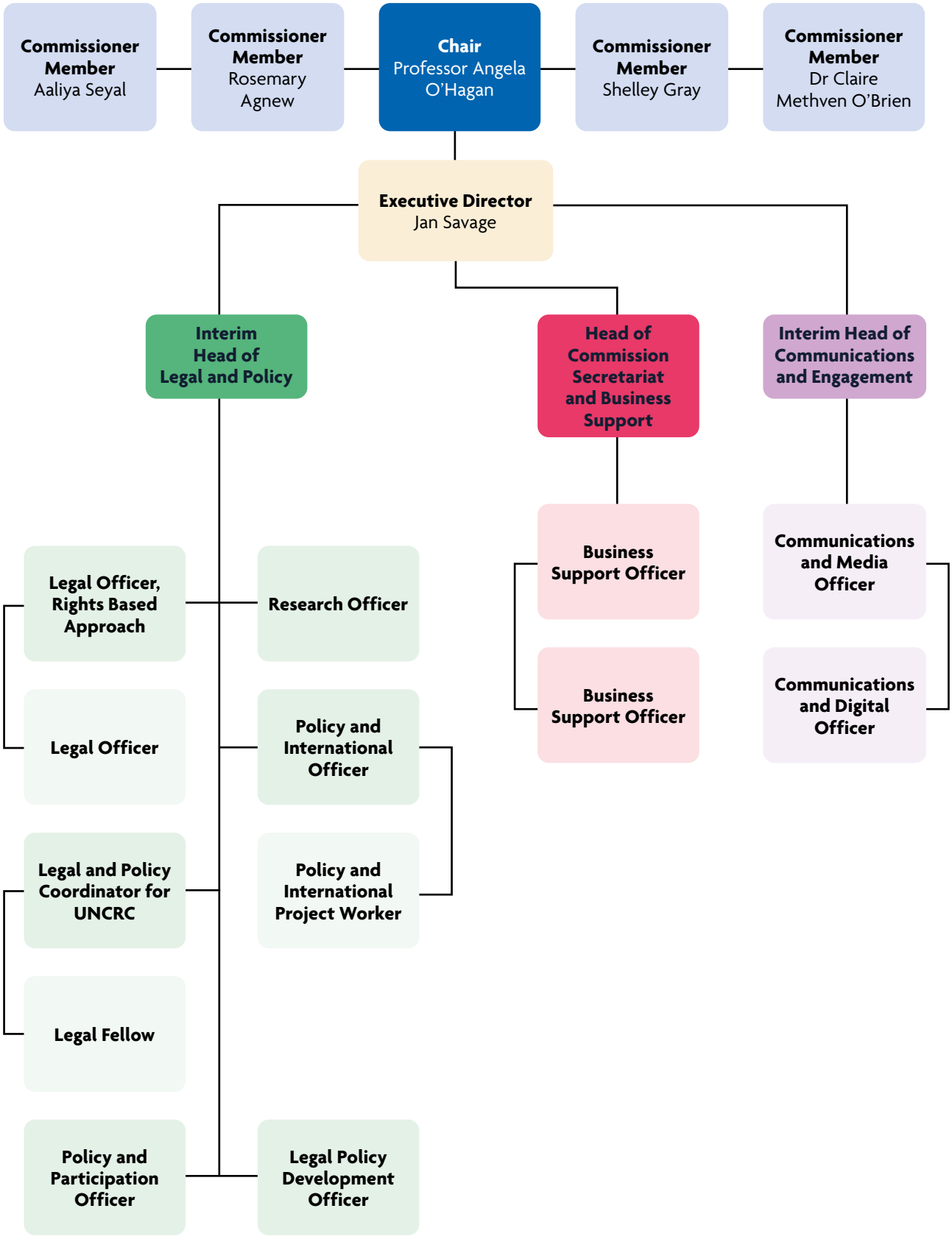
Commission
We were delighted to welcome two new Commission members, Rosemary Agnew and Aaliya Seyal, who began work in September 2025. They serve alongside Shelley Gray and Dr Claire Methven O'Brien, who were appointed in September 2022, meaning the Commission now has a full team of five Members including the Chair leading our strategic direction.

Staff
In 2025-26 we had 100% staff retention. We recruited a third Legal Fellow, who joined our Legal and Policy team for 12 months from September 2025.

We also welcomed three new team members. Our Interim Head of Communications and Engagement and our Interim Head of Legal and Policy started work in May 2025. Our Legal and Policy Coordinator for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child joined us in June 2025.


SWAN
Cup O' Kindness
I ♥ Stranraer
TRAGICOHARA
SHRC
Scottish
Human Rights
Commission

Organisational Structure



Financial summary

Performance against budget

The SHRC is funded through the SPCB. For financial year 2025-26, the SHRC was allocated a budget of £1,725k (2024-25; £1,495k). This included an allocation of approved Contingency Funding of £168k (2024-25: £39k) to support implementation of the final recommendations of the independent governance review (£106k), continued support for the legal Fellow (£44k) and the cost of full Commission membership following recruitment in 2025 (£18k). There were no surrenders in 2025-26 but in 2024-25 the SHRC surrendered £35k following agreement of the pay award in June 2025, which reduced the amount available for drawdown to £1,460k.

	2025-26 Budget £'000	2025-26 Expenditure £'000
Comprehensive Net Expenditure	1,725	1,712
Capital Expenditure	-	7
Total Expenditure	**1,725**	**1,719**
Accruals adjustments:		
Non-cash items		(2)
Working capital (including cash)		8
Cash Funding from SPCB		**1,725**

The above total for auditor's remuneration includes £21,350 for external auditor's remuneration for 2025-26 (2024-25: £20,460). There were no non-audit fees for 2025-26 (2024-25: none) paid to the external auditors.

Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2026

	Notes	2025-26 £'000	2024-25 £'000
Staff costs	3	1,372	1,156
Depreciation	6,7	2	2
Other Expenditures	5	338	277
Total expenditure for the year		**1,712**	**1,435**
Net expenditure		**1,712**	**1,435**

Other expenditures

	2025-26 £'000	2024-25 £'000
Operational costs	81	76
External Engagement Costs (Non-Consultancy)	41	35
Operational legal costs	12	–
IT costs	28	24
Website	6	13
Training, conferences and subscriptions	45	29
Auditor's remuneration	26	25
Printing, stationery & library costs	20	21
General office costs	13	10
Travel, subsistence and hospitality	24	26
Legal and consultancy fees	41	6
Recruitment Costs	1	12
	338	**277**

The above total for auditor's remuneration includes £21,350 for external auditor's remuneration for 2025-26 (2024-25: £20,460). There were no non-audit fees for 2025-26 (2024-25: none) paid to the external auditors

Appendix A: Briefings, consultation responses and letters

April 2025

- **Submission to Finance and Public Administration Committee Inquiry** at the Scottish Parliament into the Scottish Budget Process in practice

May 2025

- Response to the **Call for Evidence on the Rule of Law from the House of Lords Constitution Committee**
- **Stakeholder survey response** to Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Inquiry into Committee Effectiveness
- Evidence to the **Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee Call for Views on Civil Legal Advice and Assistance**
- Response to the **Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee on British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 Inquiry**
- **Feedback on the Scottish Budget 2025-26 Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment**
- **Evidence to the Scottish Government Consultation on Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation**
- **Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill**
- **Briefing for MSPs on the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1 Debate**

June 2025

- Evidence at the Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry
- **Letter to the Chair of the Independent Review of Fatal Accident Inquiries relating to Deaths in Custody** in Scotland welcoming the offer to engage on the review
- Joint letter with the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland and **the Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland to Police Scotland on live facial recognition technology (LFRT)**
- **Response to the first statutory review of the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner's Code of Practice**
- **Briefing to the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee on the UEFA Championship (Scotland) Bill 2025**
- **Letter to the Mental Wellbeing Minister on potential inhuman and degrading treatment in mental health in-patient units**
- **Letter to Cabinet Secretary about SHRC Powers and Human Rights Bill**

July 2025

- **Letter to the Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing on the closure of Ward 7A, Woodland View, Ayrshire**
- **Joint letter from UKIM to the Minister for Social Security and Disability**
- **Joint letter to the UK Minister for Social Security and Disability on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Report**
- **Letter to Minister for Victims and Community Safety on the Istanbul Convention**
- Letter to the **Minister for Victims and Community Safety on combatting violence against women and domestic violence**

August 2025

- **Statement in response to the Supreme Court judgment in For Women Scotland vs The Scottish Ministers**
- Letter to the Chief Constable and Lord Advocate on proportionality in the **policing of peaceful protestors**

September 2025

- Evidence in response to the **Stage 1 call for evidence for the Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty) Bill 2025**
- **Briefing to the Scottish Parliament on SPCB Supported Bodies Landscape Review Committee Debate**
- **Evidence to the Fatal Accident Inquiry Review**
- **Submission on the human rights implications of the Prostitution (Offences and Support) (Scotland) Bill**
- **Response to the consultation on the Prevention of Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill**

October 2025

- **Letter to the Convenor of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee on the Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty) (Scotland) Bill 2025**

November 2025

- **Briefing to the Scottish Government Consultation to add 'sex' as a protected characteristic to the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021**
- Letter to **Police Scotland on policing of protests at hotels housing asylum seekers**
- **Briefing to the Scottish Parliament on Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty) Bill 2025**

December 2025

- **Submission to the Independent Review of the FAI system for Article 2 Deaths in State Custody**
- **Our 2025 State of the Nation report focusing on economic, social and cultural rights in Scotland** to the Scottish Parliament
- **Inquiry response | Connectivity in Scotland: Fixed links**
- Response to the **Scottish Affairs Committee on its inquiry into 'Connectivity in Scotland: Fixed links.'**

January 2026

- **Letter to EHRCJ Committee | One year on from "Tick Tock..."**
- Letter to **the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, a year on from the publication of our spotlight report "Tick Tock..." A human rights assessment of progress** from institutionalisation to independent living in Scotland

February 2026

- **Written and oral intervention** in the Judicial Review brought by For Women Scotland (FWS) against the Scottish Ministers and HM Lord Advocate challenging the legality of the Scottish Prison Service policy for the management of transgender people in custody
- Briefing for MSPs on Stage 3 Proceedings: **Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty) (Scotland) Bill**
- Response to the **Scottish Government's Consultation on Tribunal Rules for UNCRC Compatibility Questions – Stage 2**

March 2026

- Letter to the **Equality, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee about their legacy report**
- Letter to the **Cabinet Secretary for Justice on Scottish Prison Service policy for the Management of Transgender People in Custody**
- **Joint statement with our UK sister NHRIs on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**
- **Briefing for MSPs on the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill, Stage 3 Debate**

This report is laid before the Scottish Parliament under Section 15 of the Scottish Commission for Human Rights Act 2006

SHRC

Scottish
Human Rights
Commission

Scottish Human Rights Commission
Bridgeside House
99 McDonald Road
Edinburgh
EH7 4NS

scottishhumanrights.com