

Factsheet: Human Rights Related Advice and Advocacy Services in Scotland

The Scottish Human Rights Commission (“the Commission”) and the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS) have jointly commissioned research to map human rights-related advice and advocacy services in Scotland.

What we set out to do

To better understand the availability, distribution and focus of services offering human rights-related advice and advocacy in Scotland, we set out to map the current landscape.

Why we did this research

We know that people facing potential human rights violations often encounter significant barriers when trying to access justice, including lack of information about where to get advice, geographic disparities, and unmet need.

Human rights law says that everyone has the right to an effective remedy when things go wrong. That includes being able to access information, advice and advocacy on human rights. However, the available evidence tells us that too often in Scotland, people can’t find the information they need and don’t know where to turn for help. This puts access to justice for human rights beyond the reach of many in Scotland.

Together, we wanted to understand where people in Scotland can turn to if they have problems in accessing their human rights.

This is particularly important as the Scottish Government is progressing with action to incorporate more human rights treaties into Scots Law.

Who this research is for

First and foremost, it is hoped this research is a useful tool for those experiencing a human rights issue, making it easier to understand and navigate the advice and advocacy landscape to access assistance.

We hope that civil society can use this research to help evidence gaps in provision and inform service development plans.

Finally, the map should be relevant for duty bearers and service providers, allowing them recognise gaps in provision to inform strategic funding decisions.

How we did the research

We identified 262 advice and advocacy services across Scotland that offer human rights-related advice and advocacy, categorised based on the type of support provided - advice (83 per cent), casework (71 per cent), advocacy (72 per cent), and legal representation (15 per cent).

The human rights issues we looked at include, amongst others, education, housing, poverty, social security, health, mental health, disability, social care, equality and discrimination and detention.

What we found

- **Human rights issues:** We found that the most common human rights issues covered include mental health (178 services), housing (169), disability (167), health (165), and social security/benefits (160). There are notably less services covering issues such as biometrics, AI, and privacy (61 services), freedom of expression (73), and workers' rights (79), and in-depth or specialist support in these areas will be less than the numbers suggest.
- **Type of support:** We found that only 13 per cent of services offer support across all four categories. Significant gaps exist in legal

representation in general, with only 38 services across Scotland providing this, and specifically for human rights issues other than social security and housing.

- **Geographic disparities:** We found significant geographic disparities in service accessibility, with rural areas facing particular access challenges due to distance and transportation issues. Only 25 per cent of services operated Scotland-wide, with legal representation services having the highest proportion of nationwide coverage (39 per cent). The remaining 75 per cent serve specific geographic areas. A high concentration of services can be found in the central belt.
- **Children and young people:** 20 per cent of services are age restricted in some way, meaning that some children and young people will not be able to access them. Only 13 (5 per cent) are specific to children and young people. Of the services focused on children and young people, less than half provide advocacy, while only one offers legal advice and representation.
- **Funding:** Nearly three-quarters of services receive funding from charitable trusts (73 per cent), with 52 per cent receiving local authority funding and 50 per cent receiving Scottish Government funding.

Next steps

Civil society and duty bearers may use these research findings to advocate and plan for more comprehensive coverage of advice services which support people to access their human rights when they are facing problems and ensuring equitable geographic distribution of services. The Commission will reference this data in its human rights monitoring work.

To help individuals with finding advice on human rights issues we are [launching two interactive online maps which show the support provided](#), human rights issues covered and support for vulnerable groups in services across Scotland.