

# SHRC

Scottish  
Human Rights  
Commission



## Participation Strategy 2024-28

**“Any meaningful commitment to human rights must start from the ground up, with recognising the humanity of the people standing beside you.”**

**SHRC Community Stakeholder, 2023**

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Vision For Change</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Participation Principles</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Embedding the Participation Principles</b>	<b>9</b>
Engagement with Members of the Commission	11
Co-design and delivery of Spotlights	11
Engagement opportunities to inform local area monitoring and international treaty monitoring	13
Empowerment Programme for Scotland’s Human Rights Defenders	13
Safeguarding Scotland’s Human Rights Defenders	13
<b>Supporting Delivery of the Strategy</b>	<b>14</b>
1. Training	14
2. Wellbeing	14
3. Resources	14
4. Measuring impact	14
<b>Action Plan</b>	<b>16</b>
Year One – 2024/25	16
Year Two – 2025/26	16
Year Three – 2026/27	17
Year Four – 2027/28	17
<b>Accountability</b>	<b>18</b>
Complaints	18
Contact us	18
Get in touch	18
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>19</b>

# Foreword

The Scottish Human Rights Commission (the SHRC) is changing. As outlined in our 2024-28 Strategic Plan, the SHRC has a refreshed vision of a Scotland where everyone's rights are respected, and where there is justice when things go wrong. As part of this renewed approach to delivering its mandate, the SHRC has reviewed how best to support people to engage in, and inform its work.

Participation is critical to the work of the SHRC, not only because it is a pillar of a Human Rights-Based Approach, but because it is vital to respecting each person's inherent humanity. Human rights are about how people experience the world. The SHRC's role is to bear witness to how rights are experienced in Scotland, and so we need to be open to and welcoming of everyone.

As the SHRC continues to develop, we will uphold our commitment to ensuring that all people – human rights defenders and, most critically, victims of rights violations – can meaningfully engage in its work. Through our research and guidance, we seek to support public authorities as duty bearers so that they meet their obligations in ensuring rights for all are met.

Given the ever-changing policy landscape, this process will take time and is not without complexity and challenge. However, it is a process the SHRC is committed to and will underpin our work throughout the 2024-28 strategic plan timeframe.

The following strategy outlines how we will do this, and the members of the Commission and staff team look forward to working with human rights defenders across Scotland to ensure their views and experiences are heard.



**Professor Angela O'Hagan**  
Chair, Scottish Human  
Rights Commission

# Introduction

“Any meaningful commitment to human rights must start from the ground up, with recognising the humanity of the people standing beside you.”

SHRC Community Stakeholder, 2023

The Scottish Human Rights Commission (the SHRC) is Scotland’s Human Rights Watchdog. We are an independent, expert body that works with and for the people of Scotland. We monitor, listen, advocate for all our rights, and respond when things go wrong.

The SHRC is also part of the international human rights system. The United Nations has accredited the SHRC as a trusted organisation that provides impartial evidence on the enjoyment of human rights in Scotland.

The SHRC is independent of the Government and accountable to the people of Scotland through the Scottish Parliament.

As part of its 2024-2028 strategy, the SHRC has committed to undertaking work under three strategic themes:



The SHRC will ensure that its work under each critical theme is based on real-life experience and evidence of how human rights are being experienced in Scotland. We will hear from the people of Scotland about when things go wrong so that we can speak up for them when necessary. For the SHRC to do this, human rights defenders from all backgrounds and across Scotland must be able to inform and work alongside the SHRC, and our approach to participation is central to this.

Human rights defenders have started this process by helping us to identify our key strategic priorities for 2024-2028:

- 1 **Impact of poverty on human rights**
- 2 **Human rights in places of detention**
- 3 **Access to justice**
- 4 **Rights to remedy for specially protected groups**

Building on this, the SHRC has learned from its past approach to participation and has listened to human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations about their experience of involvement with the SHRC to date. We would like to thank those individuals for their insight and contribution to the SHRC.

As a result of these discussions, the SHRC has developed an enhanced model for the participation of human rights defenders from across Scotland. Central to this is embedding the following values within our work:



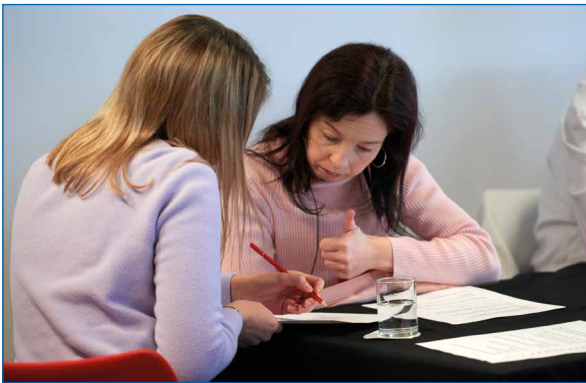
## Equality

Everyone is equal and has experiences to bring to the process.



## Diversity

Our approach to project design and general engagement is proactively pluralist and diverse to ensure diversity in participation.



## Accessibility

Everyone has the same opportunity to participate in an activity fully, in the way that suits them best.



## Reciprocity

People receive something back for putting something in, and building on people's desire to be needed and valued.

Given the complex and changing landscape in which the SHRC works, we will seek to keep this strategy under review between 2024 and 2028 and provide regular updates, through the Commission, regular updates to the Commission and through our Annual Reporting cycle.



# Vision For Change

**“Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to develop and discuss new human rights ideas and principles and to advocate their acceptance.”**

Article 7 of Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1998.<sup>1</sup>

The SHRC recognises the critical role of human rights defenders in realising human rights in Scotland. Throughout 2024-28, the SHRC is committed to developing its approach to working alongside people and communities, reflecting their concerns, and supporting Scotland’s human rights defenders in their work nationally and internationally.

“Human rights defender” is a term used to describe people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights peacefully. Human rights defenders are identified above all by their actions.

Human rights defenders often work locally or nationally, supporting respect for human rights within their communities and countries. They usually seek to influence and challenge the practices of local government authorities responsible for realising the country’s rights. Human rights defenders can be people who have experienced human rights violations, or they can be advocating on behalf of those people.

The role of human rights defenders is outlined in the “Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms” (1998), known as the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Recognising the critical role of human rights defenders, we want to make sure they are heard, seen, and respected by Scotland’s National Human Rights Institution. Their experience must be valued, and they should be empowered to work alongside the SHRC to highlight human rights issues in Scotland.

To ensure this is the case the SHRC is working through this strategy and will seek to embed the recommendations of the Marrakesh Declaration<sup>2</sup> which called on National Human Rights Institutions to promote human rights, protect human rights defenders and co-operate and work in partnership with human rights defenders.

To help us achieve this, the SHRC has developed participation principles to guide its work.








**IN SOLIDARITY & HOPE**



# Participation Principles

The SHRC's Participation Principles are underpinned by co-operation. Co-operation can occur when the SHRC supports human rights defenders to collaborate with us on issues that impact them.

To help the SHRC achieve co-operation with communities of human rights defenders, we will embed and live the following principles through our actions.

Principle	Action
 <p><b>Personal Leadership</b></p>	<p>We will support the empowerment of rights holders to function as human rights defenders.</p>
 <p><b>Inclusive Planning</b></p>	<p>We will work alongside groups of people who have faced rights violations to inform, design and deliver SHRC projects.</p>
 <p><b>Payment and Responsibility</b></p>	<p>We will pay for participation in accordance with best practices in Scotland and ensure a clear understanding of participants' contributions and impacts.</p>
 <p><b>Trauma-Informed Practice</b></p>	<p>We will recognise the impact trauma has had on the individuals we work with. In doing this we will seek to develop and utilise human rights defenders' skills and confidence while supporting and protecting defenders and SHRC staff who undertake direct work with them.</p>
 <p><b>Accessibility</b></p>	<p>We will communicate clearly and tailor our communication to our audience. This will involve accommodations for anyone who wants to participate in a SHRC project. This may include, but is not limited to, the provision of our work in Easy Reads, BSL, and Braille. We will also provide information in a range of languages for those who require it, on request.</p>















# Embedding the Participation Principles

There are five key ways that human rights defenders can participate in or be supported by the SHRC's work:

- 1 Engagement with Members of the Commission and staff to help inform priorities for human rights monitoring projects (Spotlights),
- 2 Co-design and delivery of relevant Spotlights,
- 3 Engagement opportunities to inform international and local monitoring,
- 4 Empowerment programme for Scotland's Human Rights Defenders,
- 5 Safeguarding via monitoring the experiences of Scotland's Human Rights Defenders.

These activities are aligned with the SHRC's Participation Principles, and existing mandate as outlined:

Principles	Mandate
<b>Activity: Engagement with Members of the Commission to help inform Spotlight priorities.</b>	
 <b>Inclusive Planning</b>	<p><b>Mandate: Co-operation</b></p> <p>The SHRC can cooperate with others, including human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations, to exercise its functions.</p> <p>Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 5<sup>3</sup>.</p> <p><b>Mandate: Promote human rights</b></p> <p>The SHRC can promote human rights, particularly the rights of groups of people whom it does not feel rights have been sufficiently protected.</p> <p>Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 2<sup>4</sup>.</p>
<b>Activity: Co-design and delivery of relevant spotlights.</b>	
 <b>Personal Leadership</b>	<p><b>Mandate: Co-operation</b></p> <p>To exercise its functions, the SHRC can cooperate with others, including human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations.</p> <p>Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 5<sup>5</sup>.</p> <p><b>Mandate: Promote human rights</b></p> <p>The SHRC can promote human rights, particularly the rights of groups of people whom it does not feel rights have been sufficiently protected.</p> <p>Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 2<sup>6</sup>.</p>
 <b>Inclusive Planning</b>	
 <b>Payment and Responsibility</b>	
 <b>Trauma-informed Practice</b>	
 <b>Accessibility</b>	

Principles	Mandate
<b>Activity: Engagement opportunities to inform international and local monitoring.</b>	
 <b>Personal Leadership</b>  <b>Accessibility</b>	<p><b>Mandate: Co-operation</b></p> <p>The SHRC can cooperate with others, including human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations, to exercise its functions.</p> <p>Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 5<sup>7</sup>.</p> <p><b>Mandate: Monitoring of law, policies, and practices</b></p> <p>The SHRC can review and recommend changes to any area of Scottish law and to Scottish public authorities’ policies and practices.</p> <p>As a National Human Rights Institution, the commission engages with the international human rights system, such as the Universal Periodic Review, special procedures, and treaty monitoring bodies.</p> <p>Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 4<sup>8</sup>.</p>
<b>Activity: Empowerment Programme for Scotland Human Rights Defenders.</b>	
 <b>Personal Leadership</b>  <b>Trauma-informed Practice</b>  <b>Accessibility</b>	<p><b>Mandate: Information, guidance, and education</b></p> <p>The SHRC can provide education and training about the promotion of human rights.</p> <p>Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 3<sup>9</sup>.</p>
<b>Activity: Safeguarding via monitoring the experiences of Scotland’s Human Rights Defenders.</b>	
 <b>Trauma-informed Practice</b>	<p><b>Mandate: Monitoring of law, policies, and practices</b></p> <p>The SHRC can review and recommend changes to any area of Scottish law and to Scottish public authorities’ policies and practices.</p> <p>As a National Human Rights Institution, the Commission engages with the international human rights system, including the Universal Periodic Review, special procedures, and treaty monitoring bodies.</p> <p>Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 4<sup>10</sup>.</p>

## How will we do this?

### Engagement with Members of the Commission

On key issues in the SHRC's work programme, we will engage with communities and groups from across Scotland to help inform our work. The focus of Commission members' engagement aligned to the delivery of the 2024-28 Strategic Plan will be exploring issues which uncover the impact of poverty on human rights in Scotland.

Commission members and SHRC staff will hear directly from groups across Scotland and will feed this into their decision making and ongoing communications about the work we develop against our strategic focus on poverty.

Over the course of these engagements, Commission members may be informed about rights issues of significant concern. In these instances, the SHRC may undertake a small-scale rights review: summarising concerns, human rights impacted and sharing this with relevant duty bearers to ensure promotion of human rights of those groups in society whose human rights are not, in the SHRC's opinion, otherwise being sufficiently promoted.

External requests for meetings with the Commission members will be considered through our internal decision-making criteria.





### Co-design and delivery of Spotlights

Participation of both human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations are critical in all areas of the SHRC's work. There is an important role for the SHRC to co-operate with human rights defenders and victims of abuses in developing and delivering its work, particularly spotlight projects and human rights monitoring, to gain the best understanding of the human rights at stake and the effects it can have.

The following principles and practices will be demonstrated across all the SHRC's spotlight project work.



Principles	Spotlight Project Practice
 <b>Inclusive Planning</b>	<p>Human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations can provide insight to help inform the SHRC’s projects via project advisory groups or engagement with Commission members.</p> <p>Project planning should include mechanisms for human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations to inform projects and future delivery.</p>
 <b>Personal Leadership</b>	<p>Spotlight project plans should demonstrate how human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations can continue to develop their skills and if they choose to be involved in the SHRC’s work beyond the project.</p> <p>Human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations involved in a SHRC project can take part in the SHRC Human Rights Defender Empowerment Programme in 2027/28.</p>
 <b>Payment and Responsibility</b>	<p>Payment for participation is being piloted across the SHRC in 2024/25 via the spotlight projects on Moving Away from Institutions to Independent Living and the Cultural Recognition of Scotland’s Gypsy Travellers. This will be evaluated in 2025/26 with a view to informing future policy.</p> <p>Following this project, plans will clearly state the expected payments for human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations and the payment schedules.</p>
 <b>Trauma-informed Practice</b>	<p>Project plans should include measures the SHRC will take to safeguard human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations, and SHRC staff.</p>
 <b>Accessibility</b>	<p>SHRC projects will tailor their communication with participants, ensuring it is suitable for those taking part and providing accommodations as needed.</p> <p>The output of major SHRC projects will be provided in accessible formats such as Easy Reads and BSL, and in other languages on request.</p>

## Engagement opportunities to inform local area monitoring and international treaty monitoring

Human rights defenders from across Scotland will have the opportunity to share their experiences to inform the SHRC's monitoring of the realisation of human rights in Scotland. This will happen in two ways:

- Local area monitoring where the SHRC team will visit local areas in Scotland to meet with residents and human rights defenders to hear their experience of rights locally.
- Engagement events to help to inform our international treaty monitoring work.

Both local area monitoring and engagement events will help to inform our international treaty monitoring work, and State of the Nation annual reporting. We will also include information directly collected by members of the Commission via their engagement in this reporting.

## Empowerment Programme for Scotland's Human Rights Defenders

The SHRC will develop and deliver a trial training programme for human rights defenders between 2026 and 2028. The programme will explore how human rights defenders can best organise themselves to

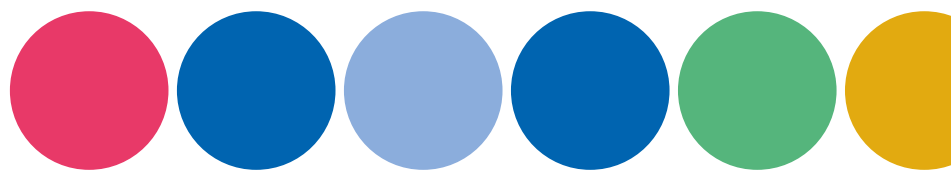
achieve the most significant impact, national and international advocacy and influence, access to justice, and various other relevant topics. Priority for this course will be given to individuals with human rights concerns on issues, aligned with the SHRC's strategic priorities of poverty, places of detention, access to justice, and rights to remedy for specially protected groups.

Defenders participating in this course will have the opportunity to engage with the SHRC on its submission to the Universal Periodic Review in 2028.

In addition to the Empowerment Programme the SHRC will establish an online newsletter for human rights defenders which will circulate upcoming engagement opportunities and other relevant information.

## Safeguarding Scotland's Human Rights Defenders

Through the SHRC's human rights monitoring work locally and internationally, we will collect and log data relating to acts against human rights defenders in Scotland. We will ensure this data is provided to relevant International Committees and the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders. This will support enhancing accountability for public bodies in Scotland and highlight the importance of support for human rights defenders.



# Supporting Delivery of the Strategy

To ensure the SHRC and its staff team can deliver the best possible experience for human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations who engage with and work alongside the SHRC, our team will be supported in four ways to develop their skills and expertise. These are:

## 1 Training

- ASSIST Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training for all SHRC staff.
- Easy Read Communication training for all SHRC staff.
- Trauma-informed training is provided to all members of staff.
- Training for management on how to support staff with vicarious trauma.

## 2 Wellbeing

- Debriefs and check-in process with line managers for staff who attend participation work.
- Structured guidelines for the delivery of long-term community monitoring.

## 3 Resources

- Development of participation stream budget, which includes ring-fenced resources to pay for the participation time of human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations, as well as accessible communications, including, as required, Easy Reads, BSL, and Braille and other languages where requested.

## 4 Measuring impact

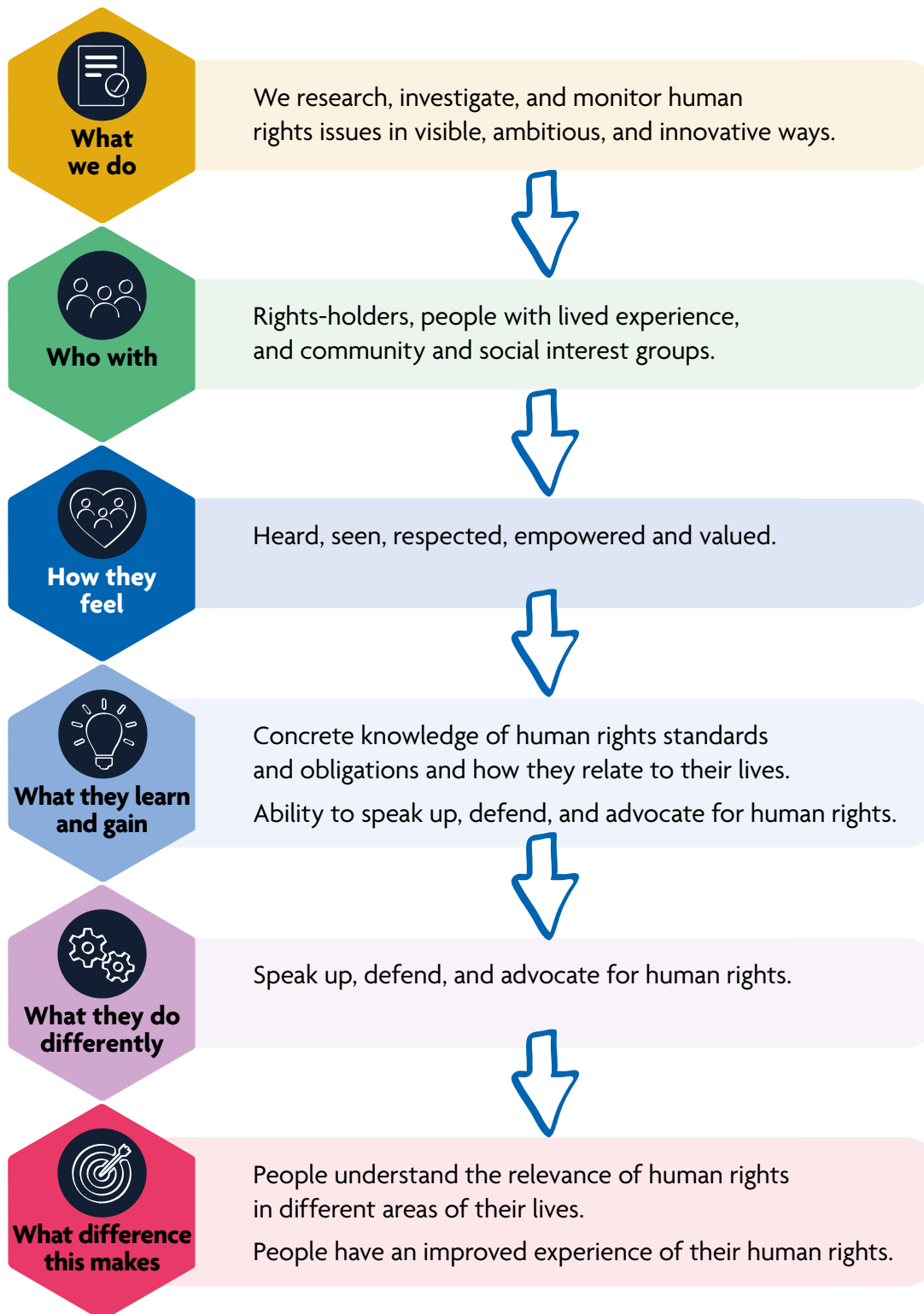
The SHRC has developed a Theory of Change<sup>11</sup> and an outcome map to measure the SHRC's contribution to the following areas over the course of its 2024-28 Strategic Plan:

- People understand the relevance of human rights in different areas of their lives.
- Human rights concerns in law, policy, and practice are identified and tackled.
- People have improved experience of their human rights.
- Scotland has influential bodies that respect, protect, and fulfil human rights.

We will use the SHRC's outcome map to measure the impact of this participation strategy in changing how the SHRC works with human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations while demonstrating the impact of this on the realisation of rights for people and communities.



## Outcome Map



We will collect evidence of impact internally through a process of reflective logging. This will help us capture the contribution of the SHRC, via its work with human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations, to ensure people understand

the relevance of human rights in different areas of their lives and have an improved experience of their human rights. This will be included in the SHRC's overall monitoring and evaluation of its impact in its annual report to the Scottish Parliament.



# Action Plan

The following Action plan outlines how the SHRC will realise the ambition of the Participation Strategy.

## Year One – 2024/25

- Work with human rights defenders and publish co-created Human Rights Defenders resources on Work with human rights defenders and publish co-created Human Rights Defenders resources on Moving away from institutions to independent living as part of Spotlight Project. (Completed January 2025)
- Co-design and begin delivery of a Spotlight project on the Cultural Recognition of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers in partnership with members of Scottish Gypsy Travellers community. (Ongoing)
- Easy Reads, Trauma-informed and ASSIST training for staff team. (Completed by March 2025)
- Commission members and staff to take part in engagements to begin scoping phase 1 of the SHRCs work on poverty. (Completed by January 2025)
- Engagement opportunities to inform local area monitoring and international treaty monitoring. (Ongoing)

## Year Two – 2025/26

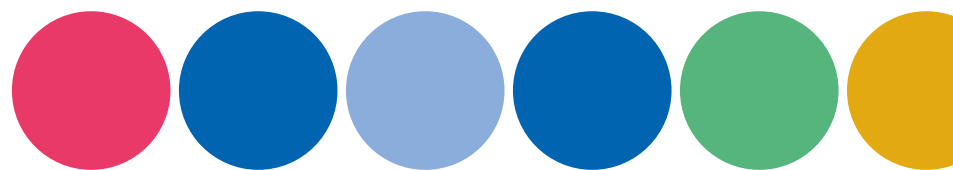
- Deliver co-designed Spotlight project on the Cultural Recognition of Scotland's Gypsy Travellers.
- Training for line managers on how to support staff with vicarious trauma.
- Begin development of Human Rights Defenders Empowerment Programme.
- Engagement opportunities to inform local area monitoring and international treaty monitoring.
- Development of Human Rights Defenders online newsletter.
- Evaluate the Payment for Participation pilot.

### **Year Three – 2026/27**

- Ongoing development of Human Rights Defenders Empowerment Programme.
- Co-design, agree and begin delivery of a Spotlight project on the human rights impact of poverty.
- Scoping of Access to Justice for historic abuses Spotlight project.
- Engagement opportunities to inform local area monitoring and international treaty monitoring.

### **Year Four – 2027/28**

- Deliver co-designed spotlight project on poverty.
- Delivery of Human Rights Defenders Empowerment Programme.
- Support human rights defenders to participate in the Universal Periodic Review and special procedures.
- Co-design, agree and begin Access to Justice for historic abuses Spotlight project.
- Engagement opportunities to inform local area monitoring and international treaty monitoring.



# Accountability

As an independent public body, the SHRC is held accountable for upholding the standards outlined within this strategy. If you have concerns about how the SHRC conducts its participation work, please contact us at [hello@scottishhumanrights.com](mailto:hello@scottishhumanrights.com) and our Policy and Participation Officer will get in touch with you to discuss.

If you feel that the matter is of significant concern, you can raise a complaint.

## Complaints

You can complain by phone, in writing, or by email.

When complaining, tell us:

- Your full name and contact details.
- As much as you can about the complaint.
- What has gone wrong?
- How do you want us to resolve the matter?

Usually, you must make your complaint within six months of:

- The event you want to complain about, or
- Finding out that you have a reason to complain, but no longer than 12 months after the event.
- In exceptional circumstances, we can accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

## Contact us

You can contact us in the following ways:

**By email:** [hello@scottishhumanrights.com](mailto:hello@scottishhumanrights.com)

**By phone:** 0131 297 5750

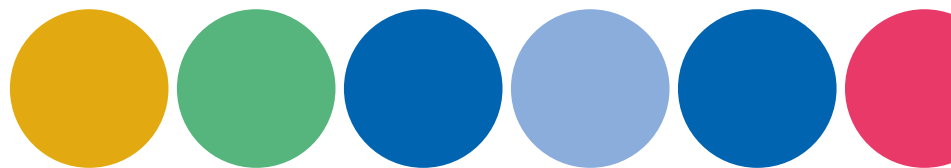
**By post:** SHRC, Bridgeside House,  
99 McDonald Road,  
Edinburgh, EH7 4NS.

## Get in touch

**If you are a human rights defender who wants to know more about how the SHRC works alongside people in Scotland, please email us at [hello@scottishhumanrights.com](mailto:hello@scottishhumanrights.com)**

# Endnotes

- 1 Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998)
- 2 Marrakesh Declaration (2018)
- 3 Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 5
- 4 Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 2
- 5 Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 5
- 6 Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 2
- 7 Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 5
- 8 Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 4
- 9 Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 3
- 10 Scottish Human Rights Commission Act (2006) Section 4
- 11 A Theory of Change is a method that explains how an action, or set of actions, is expected to lead to change.





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

[scottishhumanrights.com](http://scottishhumanrights.com)