

23 January 2026

Convenor

Scottish Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

The Scottish Parliament

Edinburgh

EH99 1SP

Dear Convener,

We write on behalf of 27 signatory organisations funded through the Equality and Human Rights Fund (EHRF) to seek the Committee's support, through its scrutiny of the 2026/27 Scottish Budget and engagement with the Minister for Equalities, for an inflation-linked uplift to the Fund.

The Equality and Human Rights Fund is a cornerstone of Scotland's equality and human rights infrastructure. Through 47 funded organisations, it enables specialist, trusted, and community embedded services that cannot be replicated elsewhere in the public or private sector. These organisations provide independent advocacy, culturally competent support, community engagement, policy scrutiny, and rights-based oversight for people with protected characteristics and for communities experiencing socio-economic inequality across Scotland.

The Fund has remained cash flat at £8 million since 2021. Over that period, cumulative inflation of around 25% has reduced its real-terms value to approximately £6.2 million. This erosion has occurred while demand for equality and human rights services has increased sharply, and while these organisations continue to be relied upon by Government, Parliament, local authorities and regulators as delivery partners, policy contributors and sources of independent oversight.

There is also a critical workforce dimension. The equality and human rights sector must be enabled to function as a fair, sustainable and rights-respecting employer. Continued real terms cuts undermine organisations' ability to retain skilled staff, uphold fair work principles and sustain the very expertise that Scotland routinely presents as best practice nationally and internationally.

We are therefore seeking an uplift of the Equality and Human Rights Fund from £8 million to £10.3 million per annum from 2026/27, restoring its original real terms

value, alongside a commitment to future index-linking to inflation. This represents an inflationary adjustment rather than an expansion and would be distributed proportionately across all 47 funded organisations.

The attached evidence briefing sets out the detailed, independent and quantitative case for this request. Drawing on evaluation and impact data from Inspiring Scotland, alongside examples of delivery and system level impact, it demonstrates that protecting the real terms value of the Fund represents a modest investment with disproportionately high returns for Government, Parliament and civic society.

We would welcome the Committee's consideration of this evidence during budget scrutiny and would be pleased to engage further at a time convenient to the Committee and officials.

Yours sincerely,

Danny Boyle  
Executive Director, BEMIS Scotland

On behalf of 27 signatory organisations funded through the Equality and Human Rights Fund included at bottom of briefing document.

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### Protecting Scotland's Equality and Human Rights Infrastructure in the 2026/27 Budget

#### Executive Summary

The Equality and Human Rights Fund (EHRF) is a core part of Scotland's democratic and human rights infrastructure. Managed by Inspiring Scotland, it provides £8 million per year to 47 organisations working across race, disability, gender, age, sex, LGBTQI+ equality and human rights. Between October 2021 and March 2025 alone, these organisations supported over 200,000 individuals, worked with more than 12,000 organisations, and played a central role in shaping legislation, policy and public sector practice.

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Despite this, the Fund has been cash-flat since 2021. Cumulative inflation of approximately 25% has reduced its real-terms value to around £6.2 million. This constitutes a hidden cut to equality and human rights provision at a time of increased demand, heightened social tension and growing reliance on the sector as a preventative buffer for statutory services.

An uplift to £10.3 million in 2026/27 would restore the Fund's original purchasing power. This is not expansion, but a stabilisation. For a relatively modest investment within the overall Scottish Budget, the Committee has the opportunity to highlight the benefits of and protect a proven, high-impact system that delivers clear benefits to Government, Parliament and communities across Scotland.

### 1. Why the Equality and Human Rights Fund Is Unique

Evidence from Inspiring Scotland's independent evaluation shows that EHRF-funded organisations occupy a role that cannot be substituted by mainstream public services or short-term project funding. They combine:

- Trust and legitimacy within marginalised communities
- Specialist legal, policy and advocacy expertise
- Independence from statutory bodies
- The ability to work preventatively and systemically

From October 2021 to March 2025:

- Over 202,000 individuals were supported to access rights, remedy discrimination and improve wellbeing
- Over 12,200 organisations, including public bodies, received training, advice or tailored support
- Funded organisations contributed directly to the development and implementation of legislation including hate crime law, the Human Rights Bill, the Disability Equality Plan and the Minimum Income Guarantee

These organisations act as bridges between lived experience and decision-making. They enable Parliament and Government to hear from communities that are otherwise under-represented, and they provide independent scrutiny and evidence that strengthens policy design and implementation.

## 2. Preventative Value and Value for Money

The EHRF operates as a preventative investment. By resolving issues early, supporting self-advocacy and improving public sector practice, it reduces pressure on:

- Courts and tribunals
- Complaints and regulatory systems
- Crisis mental health and safeguarding services
- Emergency housing and welfare provision

Inspiring Scotland's evaluation demonstrates that multi-year, core funding enables organisations to plan, collaborate and deliver consistently, producing better outcomes and stronger public value than fragmented or short-term funding models. Protecting the real-terms value of the Fund safeguards this efficiency.

## 3. Inflation in Practice: What Real-Terms Cuts Mean

While the Fund remains nominally at £8 million, funded organisations face:

- Rising staffing, premises, utilities and digital costs
- Increased employers' National Insurance contributions
- Growing demand and complexity of cases

The result is not abstract. Evidence shows:

- Reduced organisational resilience
- Pressure to freeze posts or delay recruitment
- Increased staff turnover and loss of specialist expertise
- Weaker continuity for service users and communities

Without intervention, this erosion risks undermining delivery against National Outcomes and increasing long-term public costs.

## 4. Workforce, Fair Work and Sustainability

Equality and human rights organisations are not only service providers; they are employers responsible for upholding the rights and wellbeing of their staff. Inspiring Scotland's findings show that funding uncertainty and real-terms cuts lead to:

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- Skilled staff leaving for more secure employment
- Loss of institutional knowledge
- Reduced morale and productivity

This directly conflicts with Scotland's Fair Work ambitions and weakens the very sector that Government and Parliament routinely commend as best practice. An inflation-linked uplift is a practical way to align funding with stated values.

## 5. Human Rights Compliance and Non-Retrogression

Maintaining a robust equality and human rights sector is integral to Scotland's compliance with:

- The Public Sector Equality Duty
- International treaties including ICERD, CEDAW, CRC and ECHR
- Commitments to human rights incorporation

Human rights standards require progressive realisation and prohibit unjustified regression. Allowing inflation to erode the EHRC risks a de facto reduction in rights protection capacity, exposing Government and Parliament to legal, reputational and policy risk.

## 6. A Modest Investment with Shared Returns

Restoring the Fund to £10.3 million represents:

- A modest increase within the overall Scottish Budget
- Protection of a system already delivering demonstrable impact
- A visible commitment to human rights-based budgeting

It is a clear win:

- For Government: safeguarding delivery, compliance and credibility
- For Parliament: effective scrutiny and stewardship of public value
- For civic society: stability, fair work and continued partnership

## 7. Questions the Committee May Wish to Explore with the Minister

- Can Government commit to an inflation linked uplift of 2.3 million in the 26/27 Scottish Budget given the overwhelming evidence outlining the importance of the sector and its work?



Empowering Scotland's Ethnic and Cultural Minority Communities

- How does cash flat funding align with the principle of non regression in human rights?
- What assessment has been made of workforce sustainability in the equality and human rights sector?
- How does the Government ensure value for money if inflation erodes proven preventative funding?
- What risks arise for statutory services if equality and human rights capacity are reduced?

### Conclusion

The Equality and Human Rights Fund is a functioning, high-impact part of Scotland's public and civic infrastructure. Protecting its real-terms value through an uplift to £10.3 million in 2026/27 is not an expansion of ambition, but a sensible act of stewardship. For a modest investment, the Committee can help secure significant and lasting returns for communities, public services and Scotland's human rights reputation.



Danny Boyle

Executive Director, BEMIS Scotland

### **EHRC-funded organisation endorsements:**

AMINA – The Muslim Women's Resource Centre

BEMIS

Boots and Beards

CEMVO

Central Scotland Regional Equality Council

CRER

Disability Equality Scotland

Disability Information Scotland

Ethnic Minority Law Centre

Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland

Equate Scotland

FENIKS

Friend of Romano Lav

Generations Working Together

Glasgow Disability Alliance

Inclusion Scotland

Intercultural Youth Scotland

JustRight Scotland

Kairos Women's Group

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Empowering Scotland's Ethnic and Cultural Minority Communities

Legal Services Agency  
LGBT Health and Wellbeing  
LGBT Youth Scotland  
Multi-Cultural Family Base  
Scottish Women's Budget Group

The Equality Network  
The Poverty Alliance  
West of Scotland Regional Equality Council



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