

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee
Tuesday 6 May 2025
11th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

Scrutiny of International Recommendations: UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) Concluding Observations (2025)

Purpose of the Session

This paper provides background and analysis on the recent [Concluding Observations](#) issued by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) following the seventh periodic review of the United Kingdom's compliance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

It aims to:

- Inform the Committee's scrutiny of Scotland's role in the UK's implementation of international human rights obligations;
- Provide a platform for civil society and government to give evidence on the Concluding Observations issued in March 2025;
- Support the Committee's consideration of follow-up action, including the role of international recommendations in domestic law and policy.

Background on ICESCR and the Review Process

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is one of the core UN human rights treaties. Ratified by the UK in 1976, it guarantees a wide range of rights including the right to work, to an adequate standard of living (including food, housing and clothing), to health, to education, and to social security. These rights apply to everyone without discrimination, and States parties have a legal obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil them.

The CESCR is the expert UN body responsible for monitoring implementation of the ICESCR. As part of its review cycle, States submit periodic reports. Civil society organisations, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), and devolved governments can submit shadow or supplementary reports. The Committee's Concluding Observations are authoritative, setting out recommendations and concerns based on all the evidence received.

While not legally binding in the way domestic law is, the Observations carry significant normative weight and are part of the UK's obligations under international law.

Scotland's Role and Relevance

While foreign affairs and treaty obligations are reserved, many of the rights protected by the ICESCR fall within devolved competence — such as housing, education, social security, health, and equality. The Scottish Government has expressed a commitment to incorporating

international human rights into Scots law through a forthcoming Human Rights Bill.

The CESCR's March 2025 Concluding Observations highlighted both positive developments in Scotland and areas where further action is required. These include:

- Full incorporation of ICESCR into Scots law;
- A stronger intersectional approach to gender equality;
- Tackling child poverty and food insecurity;
- Better access to healthcare for marginalised groups;
- Improved conditions for migrants, disabled people, Gypsy/Traveller communities, and others.

29 April 2025 – Civil Society Evidence Session

On 29 April, the Committee heard from the following witnesses:

- Lucy Mulvagh, Director of Policy, Research and Impact, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)
- Charlie McMillan, Interim Director, Human Rights Consortium Scotland
- Clare MacGillivray, Director, Making Rights Real
- Lorne Berkley, Strategic Lead: Policy and Rights, Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities (virtual attendance)
- Professor Angela O'Hagan, Chair, Scottish Human Rights Commission

Each organisation submitted a shadow report to the CESCR review in January 2025. Their contributions focused on how international human rights obligations can better shape law, policy, and lived experience in Scotland.

6 May 2025 – Scottish Government Evidence Session

The Committee will now take evidence from:

- Kaukab Stewart MSP, Minister for Equalities
- Ian Davidson, Deputy Director for Social Security Policy
- Alexandra Devoy, Human Rights Policy Lead (Treaties and International), Scottish Government
- Andrew Fraser, Child Poverty Briefing and Strategy Team Leader
- Cat McMeeken, Deputy Director, Equality

This session offers the Committee an opportunity to hear directly from the Minister and relevant officials about the Scottish Government's response to the CESCR's recommendations and its approach to the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights in devolved areas.

It aims to inform the Committee's scrutiny of Scotland's role in the UK's implementation of international human rights obligations, and to support the Committee's consideration of follow-up action in relation to the CESCR's recommendations.

Since the session last week the Committee has received submissions from the [Minister for Equalities](#) and the [Equality Network](#).

Next Steps

The Committee will reflect on the evidence it has taken at its meetings on 29 April and 6 May and consider its next steps.

Clerks to the Committee
May 2025