

PROGRESS ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN WALES

Inquiry Report 2025



Cross Party Group on Human Rights



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament

Foreword

As Chair of the Cross-Party Group on Human Rights (CPGHR), I am pleased to present this report from our short inquiry, and to thank Amnesty International UK, and the Observatory on Human Rights and Social Justice for their support in gathering evidence and preparing this report.

The CPGHR has gathered evidence from across Wales, hearing directly from academics, campaigners and organisations of how human rights are upheld – or denied - in our everyday lives.

We launched this inquiry with a simple question in mind – **is the Welsh Government delivering on its commitment to strengthen human rights?**

The answer we heard from stakeholders was clear. Despite repeated commitments, the Welsh Government has not met its ambitious goals to strengthen human rights. People face poverty and inadequate social security, alongside barriers to accessing healthcare, housing, education and justice. Whilst direct and indirect discrimination, in society and systems, compound to further deny the rights of women, disabled and racialised people.

Though some progress has been made - including the *Rights of Children and Young People Measure (2011)* - the Welsh Government's commitment to incorporate UN treaties into Welsh law to give effect to a recommendation in the Strengthening and Advancing Equality and Human Rights research report remains aspirational and is yet to put into practice.

What struck me most in the evidence we received during this inquiry is the consistency of the call for change. Across disabled people's rights, women's rights, economic and social rights, racial equality and children's rights, the message is the same: we need to do more to protect people from discrimination and disadvantage through action to enshrine human rights in Welsh law.

The evidence points to failings in the protection of human rights: and these are not isolated failings. They are symptoms of a deeper and long-standing problem of failures to recognise and protect human rights at UK level as well as here in Wales.

What is apparent is that without binding, enforceable human rights – without incorporation of human rights into Welsh law – people in Wales are left to rely on political goodwill and policy commitments.

This all too often falls well short of meeting the expectations of human rights or are ineffective because politicians are unwilling to give human rights a high priority or allocate the resources needed to ensure they are fully realised for all.

This report is not just a record of concerns, it is a mandate for action. It demonstrates the consequences of delay, and the harms caused when rights are not protected, underscoring the urgency of delivering on promises to strengthen human rights.

The timing is crucial. A powerful, coordinated anti-human-rights movement is growing in Wales and across the world, threatening to roll back our hard-won freedoms and rewrite the rules on whose rights, bodies and lives deserve protection. If we want a Wales that values dignity, equality and justice, we have to fight for it.

When we defend one group's human rights, we defend everyone's human rights

S.A. Williams

Sioned Williams MS

Chair, Cross Party
Group on Human
Rights



Executive Summary

Throughout this inquiry, the CPGHR heard consistent messages: the Welsh Government has a strong commitment to human rights in policy, but these are not realised in practice. Many rights remain aspirational and without enforceable routes to redress.

This report is drawn from the evidence submitted from stakeholders and assesses how the Welsh Government is delivering on its human rights obligations, focusing on five key international treaties: the **UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People** (UNCPRD), the **UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** (CEDAW), the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (ICESCR), the **UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination** (CERD), and the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** (CRC).

The evidence we received is clear. Poverty, disability, race and gender all intersect to deepen inequalities and further restrict, erode and violate people's rights. While examples of good practice exist, like the due regard duty on children's rights, they have not ensured that people's rights are respected, nor have they delivered on the Welsh Government's stated ambitions.

If we want a Wales where human rights are protected, respected and fulfilled – where everyone may live their lives with dignity, freedom, security and without discrimination – we must protect these principles in law.

Headline findings:

- Rights remain aspirational not enforceable – people in Wales cannot directly claim their rights when breached, leaving protections dependent on political will and discretionary policy.
- Poverty undermines rights for all – poverty is a barrier to human rights which cuts across education, health, housing and family life.

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- Discrimination is systemic – structural racism, gender inequality and ableism shape access to services, opportunities and justice.
 - Public services lack consistency and accountability – from healthcare and housing to education and advocacy, provision is patchy, under-resourced, and subject to postcode lotteries.
 - Participation and lived experience are sidelined – the voices of disabled people, women, children, and racialised people are often excluded from shaping decisions that affect them.

Introduction



The Cross-Party Group launched this inquiry to examine the state of human rights in Wales. During the summer of 2025, stakeholders were invited to submit evidence focused on the following topics

- Areas where there is a gap between the goals of human rights and the experience of individuals or communities in Wales
- The most significant barriers that prevent individuals and/or social groups from experiencing the benefits of human rights in Wales
- Best-practice examples of programmes, projects or activities that promote human rights in Wales (undertaken by government or other organisations)
- Actions that the Welsh Government should take to progress human rights in Wales.
- The extent to which the Welsh Government has delivered on its commitment to make human rights part of Welsh law

The inquiry received more than 20 written submissions. The evidence has been presented under the headings of relevant UN treaties. However, many of the issues raised by respondents cut across more than one treaty. This reflects the way rights intersect in practice and the indivisible nature of human rights. Grouping the evidence in this way provides a useful framework, but much of it is relevant to multiple human rights obligations and should be read with that in mind.

Context



Human rights are central to devolved government in Wales. The Government of Wales Act 2006 – the overarching statutory framework that governs devolution – prohibits Welsh Ministers from exercising their functions in a way which is incompatible with the **European Convention on Human Rights** (ECHR) or the UK's international obligations, which include human rights obligations.

Wales was the first country in the UK to partially incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law, placing a due regard duty on Welsh Ministers. Since then, further due regard duties to the UNCRC and UN Principles on Older Persons have been introduced via the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and the to the UNCRC and UNCRPD via the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. Following the 2021 Senedd election, the Welsh Government promised to go further, committing to incorporating the UNCRDP and CEDAW. The Welsh Government's Programme for Government commitment followed a series of recommendations to strengthen human rights protections in Wales, including:

- In 2017, the UNCRPD periodic review concluding observations recommended the Welsh Government incorporate CRDP.
- In 2018, two Senedd Committees jointly recommended that the Welsh Government further incorporate international human rights treaties, noting specifically the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UNCRDP.
- In 2019, the UNCEDAW periodic review concluding observations 2019 recommended the Welsh Government incorporate CEDAW.
- In 2021, the Welsh Government commissioned research that recommended the introduction of a Human Rights (Wales) Act to incorporate select UN treaties.

The Strengthening and Advancing Equalities and Human Rights research made a series of recommendations. Importantly, these included a recommendation that the Welsh Government introduce legislation to incorporate key human rights treaties into Welsh law within the 2021-2026 Senedd term, in-line with the Programme for Government commitments.



As we approach the Senedd 2026 election, it is clear that legislation will not be brought forward during this parliamentary term. It will be for whomever forms the next Welsh Government to deliver on the recommendations of the Strengthening and Advancing Equality and Human Rights in Wales report.

Unsurprisingly, our inquiry made many of the same findings as the research. Echoing the concerns which show that rights are still too often held up as aspirations rather than guarantees people can rely on. This report should be considered as further evidence in support of the research recommendations.

Human rights are rights which belong to everyone. We will respect, protect and fulfill our human rights and equality duties so everyone in Wales may live their lives with dignity, freedom, security and without discrimination. We commit to a human rights approach which puts people at the centre of everything we do, improving the well-being of current and future generations.

- Welsh Government Human Rights Statement, 2025

Convention on the Rights of Disabled People

The CPGHR heard extensive evidence about the gap between Wales's commitments to disabled people and the lived reality of their rights. Submissions described the UNCRPD as aspirational rather than enforceable. Disability Wales stressed that, without direct incorporation into law, disabled people are left dependent on policy commitments that can be inconsistently applied and easily overlooked.

"Despite repeated commitments, incorporation has not been delivered. This leaves disabled people without a legally enforceable framework to uphold their rights."

Disability Wales

Education and Inclusion

Education emerged as one of the most pressing areas of concern. The CPGHR heard that disabled children are routinely excluded from education settings, sometimes formally, sometimes through subtle practices of isolation. Learning Disability Wales reported widespread use of restraint and restrictive practices:

"Children with a learning disability and/or autism are not only being excluded from school, but they are also subject to restraint and restrictive practices in schools."

Learning Disability Wales

Campaigners for inclusive education added that these practices reflect deeper systemic discrimination and have lifelong impacts

"Segregation based on ability or difference undermines equality and harms mental health, social belonging, and future opportunities."

Inclusive Education campaigner

Health and Independent Living

Disabled people also face systemic barriers to their right to health and independent living. Learning Disability Wales warned:

“Despite commitments to equitable health and social care in Wales, people with a learning disability are still facing significant barriers resulting in earlier mortality rates, poor mental and physical health, and preventable illnesses becoming severe.”

Learning Disability Wales

The CPGHR received powerful evidence on the ‘Stolen Lives’ Group, which is made up of families who have loved ones with a learning disability, or who are autistic, who are detained in long-stay institutions and hospitals.

“Too many people with a learning disability and/or autism are trapped in long stay hospitals because of lack of understanding in health services and available community support.”

Learning Disability Wales

Parent Carers

Parent carers told the CPGHR that lifelong, unpaid care with little or no respite, left them feeling exhausted, impoverished and socially isolated. The CPGHR heard that this burden often falls on women, compounding inequality under both the UNCRPD and CEDAW:

“Parent caring requires the parent to be available 24/7 and may continue into the disabled child’s adulthood and into the parent carers old age until the caring role is no longer possible. This cumulative, unrelenting role leaves little chance for rest or recovery and drives long-term poverty, social exclusion, and severe physical and mental health inequalities.”

Parent Carers submission



The CPGHR concluded that disabled people in Wales continue to face systemic barriers in education, health and independent living. The UNCRPD establishes a human rights framework that recognises that disabled people have the same human rights as everyone else but often face social barriers. The treaty sets out what governments and societies must do to remove these barriers, and covers rights such as inclusive education, independent living, non-discrimination and protection from violence and abuse. Incorporation of the UNCRPD would mean that these rights would be enforceable in our courts and enable people to hold governments and public bodies to account. Until disabled people have enforceable protections, their rights will remain dependent on discretionary policies that too often fail to meet their needs.

Angharad's story

In 2022 I broke my leg in 5 places crashing my chair. I have broken my bones many times so know the drill. On attending A&E in my electric wheelchair, which I was only in because I took a taxi despite the horrendous pain I was in, I was treated badly from the beginning.

The Dr wouldn't offer me any pain relief; due to the medication I already take and insinuated throughout I was a drug addict looking for my next fix. He thought I was a piece of work with an attitude problem, which he told my PA because it took me ages to transfer from my chair to the bed, which I was attempting to do with no pain relief. There was a lot of other instances in this hospital visit that made it horrendous. My dignity was not upheld because it was easier for them if I wet myself rather than give me a bed pan.

After the A&E visit the level of care continued to be appalling, I requested treatment from a Dr that was familiar with my impairment, however, because my impairment is rare the Dr treating me refused as they wanted the teaching opportunity. I just wanted my bones to heal! This left me with several fractures that took a long time to heal because the Dr didn't know what they were doing.

Disability Wales

Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women

Evidence submitted to the CPGHR made clear that women's outcomes remain worse than men's across multiple indices. Evidence from the Women's Equality Network Wales (WEN Wales) highlighted persistent gender-based violence, economic inequality and underrepresentation in leadership roles. Respondents stressed that commitments to women's equality have not translated into strengthened rights or outcomes.

Women's experiences in almost every area of life are worse than those of men, undermining the principles of equality (and equity) and universality which underpin all human rights conventions.

WEN Wales

Gender based violence

The CPGHR heard evidence on the impact of gender-based violence, with around three quarters of domestic abuse related offences and over 80% of sexual assault cases being committed against women.

"Due to their unequal social and economic position, women are at an increased risk of poverty and financial hardship, as well as gender-based abuse, harassment and violence."

WEN Wales

Evidence from the Equality and Human Rights Commission showed a lack of urgency in taking forward recommendations on tackling gender-based violence.

The Welsh Government has published guidance for commissioning violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) services; however, no national review of provision has taken place. The Wales Audit Office found, in 2019, there are gaps in provision of services across Wales.

EHRC

Health

Fair Treatment for Women of Wales (FTWW) provided extensive evidence of barriers in healthcare. They described structural underinvestment in women's health services, compounded by dismissive attitudes:

"We are concerned that historic under-investment in research or services for conditions uniquely or disproportionately impacting women and people assigned female at birth means that they are more likely to be negatively impacted by a lack of specialist care in their locale, whilst attitudinal barriers and biases potentially increased need to seek a second opinion on symptoms and treatment."

FTWW

The CPGHR heard that these barriers to adequate healthcare have lasting impacts and can cause a domino-effect which impact other rights:

"The impacts of this include increasingly long waiting lists across Wales and limited support available whilst on them, resulting in deteriorating health and mental wellbeing, job losses, financial hardship, and consequential impact on families / future generations."

FTWW

Poverty

The CPGHR heard evidence on the disproportionate impact of poverty on women and the impact this has across multiple areas of life.

"Single parents, the vast majority of whom are women, continued to face the highest risk of all household types, with almost one in three experiencing relative income poverty."

WEN Wales

Safety First Wales provided powerful evidence on the experiences of sex workers who are routinely denied their rights to adequate housing, healthcare, family life and freedom from discrimination.

“Any policy that seeks to reduce prostitution, increase safety and wellbeing, or enable sex workers to leave must work directly to address rising hardship, homelessness and debt, as well as the lack of pay equity, low wages and poor conditions in many other jobs – especially those traditionally done by women.”

Safety First Wales

CPGHR concluded that structural gender inequality persists across women’s health, work and safety. Commitments to uphold women’s rights protections under CEDAW are undermined by gaps in policy and implementation and, as a result, women’s rights remain aspirational.

Sara’s Story

“All the different agencies think sex workers can’t be good parents and because I’ve been a sex worker I can’t be trusted. It’s a get out clause for anything.”

“Most of the women that work on the street have got the stage where they’ve lost their children. Their children have been either adopted at birth or subsequently taken from them by social services. They don’t get any help, there’s no help once your kids are taken, you don’t get any counselling, it’s like a bereavement.”

“I thought that, they’re meant to do all you can to keep mother and child together, but they don’t do that at all, in fact on the parent’s side they do nothing, absolutely nothing”

Safety First Wales

International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

The CPGHR heard compelling evidence about failures to realise the rights guaranteed under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Housing and poverty were the most pressing areas identified. The CPGHR heard consistent evidence on the need to deliver a right to adequate housing.

Housing and Homelessness

Shelter Cymru and Tai Pawb provided pointed to the Back the Bill campaign for a legally enforceable right to adequate housing:

“Shelter Cymru are a partner in the campaign for the creation of a Right to Adequate Housing in Wales which would incorporate existing UN rights into Welsh law and reform our approach to homes and homelessness – driving progress through a rights-based approach.”

Shelter Cymru

“The Back the Bill coalition has been campaigning for the full incorporation of the UN right to housing in Wales. We have developed the evidence base to show this legal right is feasible in Wales, has popular support amongst the public (77%) and senior housing leaders (over 70%), and has a cost-benefit model for savings of £2.30, for every £1 invested in delivering it.”

Tai Pawb

The CPGHR heard evidence on how the Welsh Government’s commitment to adequate housing were not delivering the transformative change required:

“In terms of the housing and homelessness, the WG [Welsh Government] has produced a White Paper that fails to recognise the importance of rights and shows a lack of understanding of how a human rights lens could reframe WG’s short and longer term strategy to end the housing emergency in Wales.”

Shelter Cymru



Most importantly, the CPGHR received evidence of the harmful impact that barriers to adequate housing created for people in Wales. A survivor of domestic abuse shared her experience:

"My first worry when I became homeless (after fleeing domestic abuse) was that I would be on the streets and I knew I wouldn't last 2 minutes... Knowing that I had a legal right to a home would have massively reduced my anxiety. I was so ashamed when I had to ask for help... If I thought I had a right to a home, it wouldn't be so shameful."

Shelter Cymru, Take Notice Project

Gypsies and Travellers Wales highlighted ongoing discrimination in housing provision:

"A significant gap remains in the availability of adequate housing provision for Gypsy and Traveller communities in Wales. There is a stark mismatch between the number of safe, legal sites and the number of families needing somewhere to live. Where sites do exist, they are often located in poor environments, sometimes near environmental hazards. Overcrowding is common, with families forced to live in cramped conditions, increasing fire risks as trailers must be parked too close together due to lack of space."

Gypsies & Travellers Wales

Poverty and Essentials

The Bevan Foundation and Children in Wales provided stark testimony on the impact of poverty and a lack of essentials:

"Many children live in families below an accepted level for their healthy survival and development. Barriers will include a lack of family income to provide all the basic necessities. This may be due to a lack of adequate income to sustain a family above the breadline, due to low wages and/or benefits, with finances under greater pressure due to the cost of living pressures post austerity and covid, as well as increases in energy prices"

Children in Wales



"Child poverty and lack of essentials (food, including restricted access to foodbanks, basic essentials at home) – more than 3 in 10 children live in poverty and this is set to rise."

Bevan Foundation

The CPGHR heard further evidence about the intersection of poverty, refugee and asylum seeker and children's rights:

"Some asylum-seeking parents cannot afford transport to get children to school (in a recent consultation for Welsh Government one participant reported using online schooling)."

Bevan Foundation

Health and Patient Choice

FTWW explained how decisions and structures regarding financing public services can undermine the right to health:

"The way health boards are block-funded in Wales can mean that there is little incentive to work collaboratively / across regional footprints... Where specialist services are located in just one health board, only patients in that locale can access them, resulting in postcode lotteries to healthcare."

FTWW

Whilst Mind Cymru highlighted how poverty and discrimination intersect with poor mental health:

"People facing poverty, discrimination, or marginalisation often experience poorer mental health outcomes, and face greater obstacles in accessing timely, appropriate, and culturally competent care. These disparities undermine core human rights principles like dignity, autonomy, and equality."

Mind Cymru

The CPGHR concluded that rights under ICESCR remain aspirational. ICESCR protects some of our fundamental rights such as the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, adequate housing, social security, education, and the highest attainable level of physical and mental health. Access to adequate housing and healthcare are uneven and dependent on geography, while poverty further restricts the right to adequate housing and standard of living.

Sara's Story

Sara has been homeless for two years. She currently lives in a hotel and before that, lived in a bed and breakfast for nine months following a period of sofa surfing. She is 57 years old.

Sara has Type 1 diabetes, is prescribed insulin and follows a food management plan. She was recently hospitalised for four days due to a diabetic episode where her blood sugar was dangerously low. There are no cooking facilities in the B&B where Sara is living so she's been provided with a fridge for her room so she can safely store her insulin. She regularly spends a night or two at her sister's when she's unwell so that she can eat and rest well.

"I usually go to my sisters for food. She cooks for me and gives me sandwiches in case I need to eat in the night. She worries that I won't be able to find food when I need it and I'll have a diabetic attack."

Bevan Foundation

Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The CPGHR received evidence that racial inequality remains entrenched in Wales. Witnesses described persistent racial inequalities across education, health, employment and housing. The inquiry also heard that while the Welsh Government has adopted an Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (ArWAP), delivery has been inconsistent.

Structural Racism and Inequality

Race Equality First told the inquiry that racial inequality is systemic:

“Structural racism continues to shape access to services, housing, healthcare and employment and remains one of the most entrenched barriers to the realisation of human rights in Wales, resulting in eroding trust in public bodies among minority ethnic people.”

Race Equality First

They also expressed concern that ending racial discrimination has not been given equal priority, with the Welsh Government committing to incorporating CEDAW and UNCRDP but not CERD:

“No such commitment has been made regarding the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD). This is deeply concerning, especially considering Welsh Government’s ArWAP [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan] and the consistent feedback from respondents to the draft plan highlighting the need to integrate and embed existing strategies, policies, and legislation into the ArWAP, including UNCERD.”

Race Equality First

Refugee and asylum seeker rights

The CPGHR heard stark evidence about the collapse of immigration and asylum legal aid in Wales, which has created an advice desert impacting the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees within Welsh communities. Whilst the Welsh Government is not directly responsible for these policy levers, they can impact on the rights of refugees and asylum seekers to access their rights in areas which are devolved, including housing.

"One of the most pressing human rights crises for asylum-seekers and refugees in Wales is the collapse of immigration and asylum legal aid, significantly impacting access to justice."

Dr Emma Nishio

Evidence from the Bevan Foundation raised similar concerns.

"People cannot retain or exercise their legal rights. There is almost no representation for immigration appeals in Wales. In a recent study, 40% of people with a current legal case could not find representation."

Bevan Foundation

The CPGHR heard that whilst organisations have stepped-in to provide increased support they do not have capacity to meet the scale of the challenge.

"Asylum Justice has operated to fill the asylum legal aid gap in Wales, undertaking a significant proportion of asylum appeals work in Wales with a high success rate and client satisfaction. However, its capacity to do this work has been impacted by the collapse of the immigration and asylum legal aid sector in Wales."

Dr Emma Nishio

Evidence from Race Equality First highlighted the right to adequate housing as a key concern.

The right to adequate housing is not fully realised, especially for asylum seekers, refugees, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities – many of whom are housed in unsafe or substandard accommodation.

Race Equality First

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

The Bevan Foundation called for a specific NRPF strategy, noting that these policies restrict the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

"NRPF restrictions drive poverty and trap families in it for long periods"

Bevan Foundation

The CPGHR concluded that racial inequalities remain entrenched in Wales, affecting housing, healthcare, employment and access to justice. While the ArWAP is welcome, full incorporation of CERD is necessary to tackle structural and entrenched discrimination.

Taliesin's story

Taliesin was 17 when he arrived in the UK. He was introduced to an unregulated immigration advisor pretending to be a solicitor. This man took him to the Home Office to claim asylum and pretended to be his guardian, a term which Taliesin did not understand.

"I went to the Home Office for the first interview... and they asked me to choose between staying with your lawyer [and initial accommodation]... my lawyer went with me. He said that he was my guardian. He was tricking me. He wanted the money that the government will give to the guardian, who [is] going to take care of me and give me this money. But he did not. He took this money and he left me by myself in London. He said: 'If anything happens, they will call me, and I will let you know.'

"So, the money keeps coming and I have never received anything... Even though I did [claim] asylum, I did not receive it... And people in London I met, [who] used to claim [asylum] before, they told me that this is not normal. ...After six months, I discovered that this is not normal, and I have called [the Home Office] again and I have told them, 'I have nothing. I have only five pounds in my pocket and I have no place to stay.'

"Then he [the person at the Home Office] said: 'Well, so where have you been? ...What has happened?'

"I could not say anything. I said, 'What is happening? I do not know. I am only 17...' "

Taliesin's story shows how vulnerable children can be within the asylum system. It appears that nobody checked on Taliesin's welfare throughout the six months that he was street homeless while supposedly in the care of a "guardian" he was not related to.

Bevan Foundation

Convention on the Rights of the Child

While the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 requires ministers to have 'due regard' to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the CPGHR consistently heard that this falls short of adequately protecting children's rights. Children in Wales remain unable to enforce their rights directly when these are breached.

"Almost 1/3 of children live in poverty – breach of right to an adequate standard of living. Children are having to wait long periods of time for health treatment – breach of right to highest attainable standard of health. Children are being strip searched by the police – degrading treatment. Children are deprived of their liberty in unregulated or unregistered placements – possible breaches of right to liberty and inhuman and degrading treatment. Children from certain groups are disproportionately excluded from school – breach of right to non-discrimination."

Children's Legal Centre Wales

Incorporation and Accountability

The Children's Commissioner explained that gaps in the current model mean children's rights do not have adequate protections. This was exposed during a judicial review to challenge a Welsh Government decision on free school meals during school holidays.

"In that case, [the Welsh Government] failed to comply with its duty under the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 to have due regard to the requirements of Part I of the UNCRC due to the lack of a CRIA [Children's Rights Impact Assessment] when taking the decision to discontinue funding for holiday free school meal provision. Ultimately though, this did not result in a different outcome for children and families, due to the limitations of the due regard model we currently have in Wales under the 2011 Measure."

Children's Commissioner for Wales



Mind Cymru also highlighted the limits of the current law:

“While the Measure was a landmark step in 2011, it has limited enforcement mechanisms and does not provide children with a direct way to claim their rights.”

Mind Cymru

Poverty and Inequality

The CPHR consistently heard concerns that child poverty – which remains among the highest in the UK – was one of the biggest barriers to realising children’s rights in Wales.

“Wales has one of the highest child poverty rates of all the UK nations, with 34% of children living in poverty.”

Bevan Foundation

“The right for people to be free from poverty is not being met. Child poverty levels are rising again in Wales and remain the highest of all UK nations.”

Children in Wales

Education and Participation

Learning Disability Wales described how disabled children’s rights are denied in schools:

“Children with a learning disability and/or autism are not only being excluded from school, but they are also subject to restraint and restrictive practices in schools. Both of these are in violation of Article 23 of the UNCRC which says that ‘disabled children should receive special care and support to be able to live a full and independent life’.”

Learning Disability Wales



UNICEF UK raised concerns about low levels of awareness among children, and the need to strengthen human rights education at all levels:

“From UNICEF UK’s experience of working with over 350 schools in Wales, we know that a significant number of children and young people lack knowledge of their human rights as set out in the UNCRC. School leaders report that introducing knowledge and understanding of child rights often leads to an increase in safeguarding referrals, and increased sense of ‘belonging’ to the school community and a greater sense of engagement and agency across all aspects of school life.”

UNICEF UK

Wales Humanists highlighted the impact of collective worship on non-religious children:

“Non-religious children and families are often excluded from fully participating in school life, with few routes to assert their rights.”

Wales Humanists

ProMo Cymru stressed barriers children and young people face in accessing advocacy:

“Rhetoric of advocacy enshrined in legislation and policy eg: SSWB Act not matched by investment in adequate resources, service design and pathways, commissioning, scrutiny and accountability.”

ProMo Cymru

Mental Health

The inquiry also heard testimony from young people about the damaging transition from child to adult mental health services:

"When I moved from CAMHS to adult services, it felt like falling off a cliff. I was left without support at a time when I needed it most."

Mind Cymru

The CPGHR concluded that while Wales has pioneered recognition of children's rights, the lack of full incorporation means the UNCRC cannot deliver its full promise. Poverty, exclusion, barriers to equitable education and a lack of enforceable remedies mean that many children's rights remain theoretical rather than real.

Steve's story

"We're in a dump at the moment, we've been here three years already."

Steve lives with his eleven children, his partner and their dog. The children's ages range from a toddler to twenty-one years old. They currently live in two local authority owned flats that are joined together.

Despite being far too small, there are several other problems with the property. A ceiling has collapsed, all rooms have black mould which the council tried to clean but the mould returned in a few weeks. In winter, they had to bin clothes due to damp. They had reported a crack on the back of the house and a leak in the roof that was letting water into the fourth bedroom where the kids were sleeping. The split is now through the wall, water has been coming through and part of the ceiling has collapsed so that the bedroom is no longer usable.

Bevan Foundation

Recommendations

The inquiry has shown that while progress has been made in recognising the importance of human rights, too many people continue to experience their human rights as promises rather than protections. They are rights without remedies. They remain aspirational because they are not directly enforceable. Commitments have not been translated into the legal frameworks, resources, and accountability mechanisms necessary to guarantee them in practice.

Disabled people face systemic barriers in education, health, and independent living. Women remain disproportionately affected by gender-based violence, poverty, and health inequalities. Poverty undermines people's rights to an adequate standard of living, housing and to participate fully in society. Structural racism shapes access to housing, healthcare, justice and employment. Refugees and asylum seekers are unable to exercise their rights due to the collapse of legal aid and restrictive policies.

Despite repeated recommendations, from the UN, Senedd committees, independent research, and civil society, the Welsh Government has not delivered its Programme for Government commitments to incorporate key UN treaties into Welsh law. With the Senedd 2026 election approaching, the responsibility now falls to the next Welsh Government to ensure rights are made real.

The Cross-Party Group therefore recommends the Welsh Government:

1. Introduce a Human Rights (Wales) Act

- Incorporate key international treaties into Welsh law, including the UNCRPD, CEDAW, CERD, ICESCR and CRC.
- Ensure rights are enforceable in practice, with remedies available when rights are breached.

2. Strengthen accountability and implementation

- Ensure meaningful and regular scrutiny of progress to strengthen human rights by the Senedd and independent commissioners.
- Resource public bodies to deliver on rights obligations, with clear lines of accountability.

3. Prioritise cross-cutting action on housing, poverty and inequality

- Deliver a rights-based approach to tackling child poverty.
- Ensure a legally enforceable right to adequate housing.

4. Embed participation of affected groups

- Ensure disabled people, women, racialised people, children and young people, and people with lived experience of poverty or asylum have a central role in designing, implementing, and monitoring policies.

5. Deliver on existing commitments without further delay

- The Welsh Government should immediately set out a clear, time-bound plan to fulfil its Programme for Government commitments on incorporation.
- Interim measures should strengthen Children's Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs), Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs), and Human Rights Impact Assessments (HRIAs), and ensure these directly shape decision-making.

Wales has an opportunity to lead the way on human rights within the UK. The evidence received through this inquiry shows both the urgency and the opportunity for transformative change. A Human Rights (Wales) Act, alongside dedicated implementation and accountability would ensure that rights are not only recognised but realised in the everyday lives of people across Wales.

Annex 1: Organisations and individuals who submitted evidence

The CPGHR would like to thank the following organisations for submitting evidence to our inquiry.

- Amnesty International UK
- Bevan Foundation
- Children in Wales
- Children's Commissioner for Wales
- Children's Legal Centre Wales
- Disability Wales
- Dr Emma Nishio
- Equality & Human Rights Commission
- FTWW (Fair Treatment for Women of Wales)
- Gypsies and Travellers Wales
- Inclusive Education campaigners
- Learning Disability Wales
- Mind Cymru
- Parent Carer Network
- ProMo Cymru
- Race Equality First
- Safety First Wales
- Shelter Cymru
- Tai Pawb
- UNICEF UK
- Wales Humanists
- WEN Wales

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