

BEMIS Key Priorities in the lead up to the Scottish 2026 Elections


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Empowering Scotland's Ethnic and
Cultural Minority Communities

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Who We Are

BEMIS is the national umbrella body supporting the development of the Ethnic Minorities Voluntary Sector in Scotland and the communities that this sector represents. BEMIS was established in 2001 to promote the interest of minority ethnic voluntary organisations, develop capacity and support inclusion and integration of ethnic minorities communities.

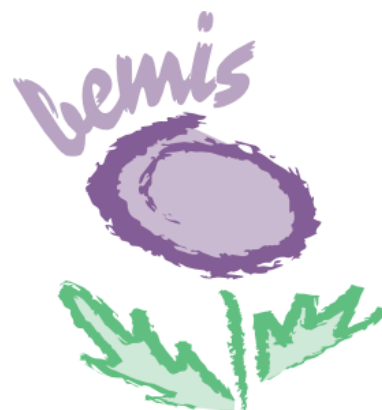
BEMIS aims to:

- Support ethnic minority communities to develop democratic, representative organisations as formal organisations and charities who can speak on their down behalf.
- Be a proactive stakeholder in influencing policy development in relation to race equality as a part of the Scottish governments human rights agenda.
- Aid in developing and progressing democratic active citizenship for all in a multicultural Scotland.

BEMIS takes a human rights-based approach to all aspects of our work. Our work is firmly rooted in both international and domestic human rights and equalities obligations and standards. We recognise that ethnic minority communities are protected under the grounds of colour, nationality, national and ethnic origin (including citizenship), as outlined in Article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD).

We believe the 2026 Scottish Parliament election presents a crucial opportunity to strengthen rights protections for minority ethnic communities and advance race equality across Scotland. Now more than ever, this work is urgent. We are seeing a rise in support for the far right, a widening gap between policy and practice, and a troubling pattern of communities being excluded from consultations and decision-making. These trends threaten to undermine progress on racial justice and deepen existing inequalities.

This document sets out key policy recommendations that we hope will guide political parties in shaping inclusive, accountable, and human-rights-based commitments. Each priority area includes clear calls to action that we believe parties must adopt to address systemic racial inequality. Our recommendations are grounded in the lived experiences and priorities of ethnic minority communities, gathered through ongoing engagement with the Ethnic Minority Race Equality and Human Rights Network.





1. Fair Funding for the Ethnic Minority Third Sector

Ensure long-term, ring-fenced funding for ethnic minority third-sector organisations, meeting Scotland's legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 and CERD recommendations.

BEMIS Scotland demands a fair and sustainable funding model for the ethnic minority third sector—recognizing its critical role in combating racial discrimination and advancing equality in Scotland. This funding policy must be anchored in both international and domestic legal obligations.

Policy Links:

- CERD (2024) urges the UK and devolved administrations to ensure effective implementation of equality laws with participation from those affected and adequate resources.
- Equality Act 2010, Section 149 (Public Sector Equality Duty), requires public bodies to eliminate discrimination, advance equality, and foster good relations, including engagement with ethnic minority organisations.
- Fairer Scotland Duty (under the Equality Act) obliges authorities to reduce socio-economic inequalities, including funding fairness.

We are calling for the Scottish Government to:

- Provide ring-fenced, core funding for ethnic minority organisations.
- Require consultation with ethnic minority organisations in funding decisions.
- Publish Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) for all funding allocations.
- Ensure funding aligns with the Fairer Scotland Duty by tackling socio-economic disparities.



2. Anti-Racism Observatory for All Scotland's Communities

Establish an inclusive Anti-Racism Observatory grounded in ICERD, CERD 2024 recommendations, and the Equality Act 2010 to monitor, measure, and eradicate systemic racism across all communities.

BEMIS Scotland proposes an Anti-Racism Observatory dedicated to all communities facing racism in Scotland rooted in the legacy of colonialism and racialisation. Its establishment must embody Scotland's international and domestic legal obligations, particularly under ICERD and the Equality Act.

Policy Links:

- CERD (2024) emphasises the need for disaggregated data collection, monitoring of intersecting discrimination, and coordinated race equality policies with measurable outcomes.
- Equality Act 2010, Section 149 (PSED), mandates data analysis and consideration of impacts on protected characteristics.
- Scottish-specific duties require authorities to publish equality outcomes, EIAs, and monitoring reports.

We are calling for the Scottish Government to:

- Establish a Scotland-wide Anti-Racism Observatory with a mandate to:
 - Collect, analyse, and publish disaggregated data on racial inequalities.
 - Monitor race equality strategies with measurable goals.
 - Ensure representation of all racialised communities in governance
 - Operate in compliance with PSED and Scottish specific duties.
- Ground the Observatory's work in ICERD principles.
- Embed the Observatory in the forthcoming Human Rights Bill to incorporate CERD into Scots law.



3. Promote Community Cohesion

Scotland stands at a critical juncture. The rise in far-right activity and racial discrimination presents an unprecedented challenge to community cohesion and democratic values. With the 2026 Scottish elections approaching, there is a vital opportunity for political parties to lead meaningful change in countering hate to promote inclusion, solidarity and community resilience.

Race-related hate crime continues to be disproportionately high, accounting for approximately [55% of all recorded hate crime charges in Scotland](#). Recent far-right protests targeting asylum seekers highlight the urgent need for proactive responses. Despite the introduction of the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act, enforcement remains inconsistent.

BEMIS, alongside our partners, have demonstrated the power of community-led cohesion initiatives through the delivery of Scottish Winter Festivals, supported by the Scottish Government from 2014 - 2021. Such initiatives foster intercultural dialogue, strengthen shared identity and differences, and promote mutual respect and democratic values. In times of heightened division, these community-led efforts have proven effective in building resilience and countering far-right narratives.

We're calling for:

- Commitments to sustained funding for community-led cultural and cohesion initiatives.
- Prioritisation of proactive, community-based approaches over reactive enforcement.
- Support for initiatives rooted in long-standing, trusted relationships within communities.
- Placing inclusion, democratic participation, and diversity at the heart of Scotland's political agenda.



4. Translate CERD Recommendations into Tangible Actions

In August 2024, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) published its [concluding observations](#) on the UK's compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). Twelve of its key recommendations were directed at Scotland, including:

- Incorporating CERD into Scots Law
- Adopting a new Race Equality Action Plan
- Addressing poverty disproportionately affecting ethnic minority communities, particularly children

While the Scottish Government has accepted these recommendations, many have yet to be translated into tangible outcomes. There remains a significant gap between commitment and delivery.

Importantly, several CERD recommendations directly align with our key focus areas in this paper, including child poverty, structural accountability, and the need for a renewed Race Equality Framework. These recommendations must not remain aspirational, they must be embedded into policy and practice.

We call on all political parties to:

- Fully incorporate all CERD recommendations into national policy and legislation.
- Ensure implementation leads to measurable improvements in the lives of ethnic minority communities.
- Align race equality efforts with international human rights obligations and PANEL principles.



5. Addressing the Disproportionate Impact of Child Poverty on Ethnic Minority Children

Scotland must take urgent action to address the disproportionate impact of poverty on ethnic minority children. A 2024 report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that [53% of children in minority ethnic families are living in poverty](#) - a stark indicator of systemic inequality. Yet current government strategies remain largely generic, failing to reflect the lived experiences, intersectional challenges, and structural barriers faced by these communities.

One major contributor to this inequality is the UK Government's **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)** policy, which restricts access to vital social security benefits. Many ethnic minority families in Scotland are affected by NRPF, which pushes them into extreme poverty and social exclusion, including denying access to devolved benefits such as the Scottish Child Payment.

The CERD Committee has called on the UK and Scottish Governments to abolish policies that disproportionately impact ethnic minority households, including the **two-child limit, benefit cap, and NRPF**. While the Scottish Government has pledged to scrap the two-child limit and has taken steps to mitigate NRPF's effects, significant gaps remain.

We call on all political parties to:

- Develop targeted child poverty strategies that address the specific causes affecting ethnic minority children.
- Ensure sustained funding for community-led initiatives that support ethnic minority families.
- Advocate for reform of the NRPF system at the UK level to align with human rights obligations.
- Explore ways to make devolved benefits accessible to families affected by NRPF.
- Embed lived experience, intersectionality, and race equality principles into all child poverty and social inclusion policies.

6. Improving Employment Outcomes for Ethnic Minority Communities

Ethnic minority communities in Scotland continue to face entrenched inequalities in employment and pay. These disparities are not only unjust, they represent a missed opportunity to harness the full potential of Scotland's diverse population. These barriers manifest in persistent clustering within low-paid sectors such as health and social care, and public administration with [33.9%](#) of minority ethnic employment concentrated in these areas. Whereas ethnic minority workers are chronically underrepresented in public services such as education, and policing. For example, only [1.83%](#) of the Scottish Police Authority workforce identified as Black or Minority Ethnic in 2024. Additionally, The Scottish Government's most recent [analysis of labour market outcomes](#) for ethnic minorities found that minority ethnic workers are more likely to be underemployed, work part-time, and lack contractually secure employment compared to Scottish white workers.

In skilled trades, such as joinery, plumbing, and electrical work, there is a near-total absence of data on ethnic minority participation. This is due to the fragmented nature of the private sector and lack of reporting requirements. Yet, these trades are central to Scotland's economy, especially as governments continue to invest heavily in infrastructure projects.

A critical opportunity is being missed. These infrastructure projects, which are publicly funded and long-term in nature, should be leveraged to drive inclusive employment. Currently, there are no embedded equalities targets within the procurement processes that govern these contracts. This absence perpetuates exclusion and fails to use public investment as a tool for promoting equality and improvements in employment outcomes for ethnic minority communities.

We advocate for the following actions:

- Utilise the [Equality Act's \(2010\) positive action provisions](#) to embed equalities targets in all major infrastructure contracts.
- [Direct pathways into skilled trades through targeted training and positive action](#)- When the government invests in building new homes or infrastructure, a proportion of apprenticeships within these contracts should be reserved for ethnic minority candidates.
- [Data Collection and Transparency](#): Require contractors receiving public funds to report disaggregated workforce data by race, enabling transparency, identifying gaps, and tracking progress on equality.
- [Diversify Pathways Beyond University](#): Vocational routes and skilled trades must be promoted as respected alternatives to university.
- [Public Sector Leadership](#): The public sector, particularly in health, education, and policing, must lead by example. Recruitment, retention, and progression strategies should reflect Scotland's demographic diversity.



RACE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR SCOTLAND

7. A Renewed Commitment to a Race Equality Framework and Action Plan

Scotland's national approach to race equality has been inadequate and inconsistent. [The Race Equality Framework for Scotland 2016–2030](#) and subsequent Action Plans, developed through meaningful engagement with minority ethnic communities, set out a strong vision, but progress has been limited.

The Scottish Government's engagement with rights holders has lacked transparency, leadership, and measurable outcomes. This has been highlighted in the [2024 UN CERD recommendations](#) which called for the expedited implementation of the [Race Equality Framework and Action Plan](#), underscoring the need for urgent and coordinated action.

The next parliamentary session must commit to a renewed strategy that is community-led, transparent, and accountable. This means moving beyond consultation to co-design and ensuring ethnic minority communities are central to shaping, delivering, and evaluating race equality policy.

While the introduction of a The Anti-Racism Observatory for Scotland has been framed as a step toward increased accountability, we must ensure that accountability mechanisms must be built from the ground up - not imposed from the top down. This requires early and ongoing community consultation, independent oversight, and enforceable mechanisms to ensure progress.

We call on all political parties to:

- Commit to the expedition of a Race Equality Framework 2025-30 and Action Plan.
- Publicly outline how UN CERD recommendations will be implemented in Scotland.
- Establish independent, community-led oversight bodies to monitor and challenge institutional performance.
- Provide enforcement mechanisms and legal redress for rights violations.

8. Incorporate Human Rights Obligations into Scottish Law

Although The Scottish Government has stated their committed to introducing a Human Rights Bill for Scotland that will incorporate a range of international treaties into Scots law, progress has been extremely slow. The 2026 elections present a critical opportunity to embed enforceable rights protections for minority ethnic communities and strengthen Scotland's approach to race equality.

One of the most significant treaties in this context is the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Incorporating CERD into Scots law would help close the compliance gap between Scotland's race equality frameworks and the lived realities of ethnic minority communities.

CERD incorporation would address these gaps by:

- Creating a **legal duty** for public bodies to proactively tackle racial discrimination and inequality.
- **Strengthening cohesion** across existing frameworks by aligning them with international standards and encouraging coordinated action.
- **Raising public awareness** of racial inequalities and fostering a deeper understanding of their structural causes.
- Enhancing the **effectiveness of existing equality duties** and supporting their integration into everyday decision making.
- Providing **legal redress** for rights violations, ensuring that commitments to race equality are enforceable.

To be effective, the Human Rights Bill must be carefully drafted and shaped through genuine cooperation between political parties, civil society, and the communities whose rights are affected. Incorporation must not be a top-down process, it must reflect the lived experiences of those facing inequality and discrimination, ensuring accountability mechanisms are built from the ground up.

We call on political parties to:

- Commit to introducing a Scottish Human Rights Bill in the next Parliamentary session that incorporates CERD into Scots law.
- Ensure that the Human Rights Bill reflects peoples lived experience by engaging meaningfully throughout with communities whose rights it will affect.
- Build on lessons learnt from the UNCRC incorporation in relation to legal constraints under the Scotland Act 1998.