

RIGHTING THE WRONGS

A manifesto to tackle poverty

General Election 2019

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Over 1 million people in Scotland are living in the grip of poverty

240k

240,000 children in Scotland are growing up in poverty

INTRODUCTION

“Living in poverty is like being stuck in the middle of a spider’s web with no escape route. You can climb further up the web to try and get out but something keeps dragging you back. Low pay, insecure work, zero hours contracts and a punitive social security system make it very difficult to escape. That’s the trap of poverty.” **Jamie, Community activist**

We are a society that believes in compassion, justice and protecting each other from harm. Yet over 1 million people in Scotland – including almost 1 in 4 children – are now living in the grip of poverty. For too many people in communities across the country – and particularly for women, disabled people and black and minority ethnic groups – our economy is not working and is trapping them in poverty.

But it doesn’t have to be this way. Poverty can be solved, and the next UK Government can take decisions that will loosen the grip of poverty on people’s lives. This manifesto sets out a range of actions that can be taken to help create the kind of society we all want to see.

These actions focus on:

TAKING AN ALL-GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO SOLVING POVERTY

BUILDING A MORE COMPASSIONATE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM

DESIGNING A LABOUR MARKET THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE

PROTECTING PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES FROM THE IMPACT OF BREXIT

TAKING AN ALL-GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO SOLVING POVERTY

“In a country like ours, nobody should be forced into making decisions between heating their home and paying their rent. The shocking levels of poverty in our communities demand that the next UK Government puts solving poverty at the very heart of everything that it does.” **Sue, Community activist**

In the midst of a rising tide of poverty across the UK, there is an urgent need to prioritise the actions that will stem that tide. This means ensuring that poverty reduction and prevention is at the front and centre of the UK Parliament’s political and legislative programme, and that solving poverty is at the heart of all policy-making. The next UK Government can do this by:

INTRODUCING POVERTY REDUCTION TARGETS

While the setting of targets on their own will not unlock people from poverty, we know that they can help to catalyse action. The introduction of UK-wide poverty reduction targets – which should be at least as ambitious as those set by the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act – would provide a much-needed focus for anti-poverty actions and activity across the UK.

DEVELOPING A UK ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

In the absence of a strategic vision for how poverty can be tackled in the UK, we risk inaction. To drive the changes we need to see, the next UK Government should work in partnership with the devolved administrations and people with experience of poverty to develop a UK-wide anti-poverty strategy that acts in tandem with existing devolved strategies, such as the Scottish Government’s Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

APPOINTING A MINISTER FOR POVERTY PREVENTION & REDUCTION

Solving poverty should be the business of all government departments and must be a focus of all government policy-making processes, but too often this is not the case. To address this, the appointment of a Minister for Poverty Prevention and Reduction – tasked with working cross-departmentally to co-ordinate the actions required to embed social justice at the heart of all decision-making – is needed.

BUILDING A MORE COMPASSIONATE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM

“Too many people are being pulled into poverty by our social security system. It doesn't have to be this way though. Social security benefits should be enough so that everyone can live a dignified life.” **Derek, Community activist**

We all rely on public services, but they are particularly important for people living on low incomes. Our social security system is a public service that should secure the wellbeing of everyone in society. But rather than preventing and reducing poverty, it is too often making it more difficult for people to get by.

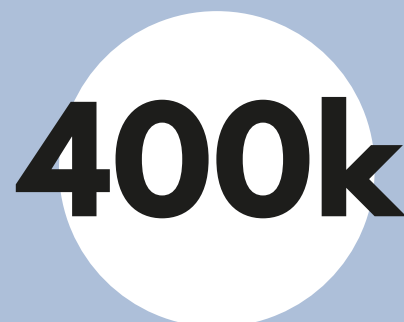
We need a social security system that helps to release people from poverty and supports everyone in having a decent standard of living. The next UK Government can begin to build this system by:

ENSURING SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS ARE ADEQUATE

Social security should help to unlock people from poverty, but policies like the benefits freeze have meant that people are too often finding themselves in a daily struggle to make ends meet. The freeze will end in April 2020, but to improve people's living standards we need to ensure that social security is adequate for people's needs. This means increasing social security benefits - over and above inflation, given the reduction in value that has taken place in recent years - so that everyone has an adequate income and can lead a dignified life. Increasing child benefit by at least £5 a week, for example, would make a significant difference to families who are struggling to stay afloat.

ENDING THE FIVE-WEEK WAIT FOR UNIVERSAL CREDIT

In communities across the country, individuals and families are being pulled into poverty by the five-week wait for Universal Credit. For people without savings and with no other income, five weeks is far too long to wait and we know it is this wait that is making it impossible for many people to put food on the table, and is often driving them to foodbanks. This simply cannot be right; the five-week wait must end.



400k

By 2020, 400,000 people across the UK will have been pulled into poverty by the benefits freeze

REMOVING THE TWO-CHILD LIMIT

The decision to implement the two-child limit has removed support from many of the families across the country who need it most – especially lone parent families - and has locked many into poverty. It is a policy that has had a particular impact on women’s poverty and – with its associated ‘rape clause’ – has violated women’s dignity and privacy. This cannot be the kind of society we wish to be, so if we are serious about protecting the 9,000 families in Scotland affected by the policy, and the many more across the rest of the UK, then the two-child limit must be removed.

ENDING THE SANCTIONS REGIME

Our social security system should be there to protect all of us, but the punitive application of sanctions is too often pulling people into poverty and inflicting the very harm it is intended to prevent. For many people, sanctions can result in destitution. That’s not right and goes against everything our social security system is intended to do. The unjust sanctions regime must end.



9000

**9,000 FAMILIES IN
SCOTLAND HAVE BEEN
AFFECTED BY THE TWO-
CHILD LIMIT**

DESIGNING A LABOUR MARKET THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE

“More and more people in our communities are being locked into poverty by jobs that are low paid and insecure. When people in work can barely afford to put food on the table and when parents working full-time are struggling to cope, there is clearly something very wrong that we have to put right.”

Jackie, Community activist

Work should help to support people out of poverty, but with two-thirds of children in poverty in Scotland living in working households it is clear that the labour market is just not working. With levels of in-work poverty and precarious work rising in recent years and with 17% of workers in Scotland – the majority of whom are women - being paid less than the real Living Wage , we need to end in-work poverty and build a labour market that works for everyone. The next UK Government can do this by:

ENSURING THAT WAGES MEET WORKERS’ NEEDS

It cannot be right to pay workers a wage that keeps them locked into poverty and that does not allow them to have a decent standard of

living. The real Living Wage, which is based on the real cost of living, is good for workers, for employers and for the economy. The next UK Government must take this into account and commit to boosting workers’ wages – including young workers - by increasing the National Living Wage in line with a set adequacy standard that keeps pace with the cost of living and average incomes.

TAKING ACTION ON PRECARIOUS WORK

Tackling in-work poverty is not about wages alone, and workers also need security and access to their full range of rights. Right now, too many workers face ongoing precarity and insecurity, and 70,000 people in Scotland are now employed on zero hours contracts. We need



70k

70,000 people in Scotland are employed on zero-hour contracts



17%

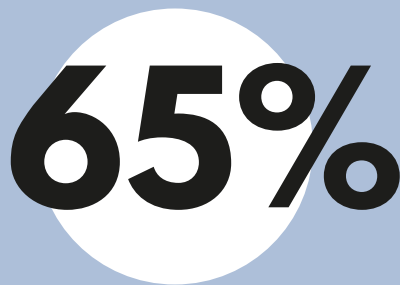
17% of workers in Scotland earn less than the real Living Wage

Increased action to eradicate precarious and insecure work, including:

- A requirement for all employers to give workers four weeks' notice of shifts, with guaranteed full payment if shifts are cancelled.
- A guaranteed right to a 16 hour per week minimum contract for all workers – except in cases where employers can evidence genuine need for contracts of less than 16 hours - which can only be reduced at the request of the worker.
- A guaranteed right for all workers to a contract that accurately reflects their average hours worked.

ENHANCING THE RIGHT TO FLEXIBLE WORKING

Flexible working is essential for many people experiencing in-work poverty, particularly for lone parents – the majority of whom are women – and for disabled people. Yet very few jobs are advertised as being available for flexible working and workers must wait 6 months before making a formal flexible working request. Flexible working rights need to be strengthened, including through giving every worker the right to request flexible working from day one of their employment and by giving every worker the right to request a return to a full-time working pattern after a previous change in working hours.



65%

**65% OF CHILDREN IN
POVERTY IN SCOTLAND
ARE LIVING IN WORKING
HOUSEHOLDS**

PROTECTING PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES FROM THE IMPACT OF BREXIT

“None of the debates about Brexit have properly considered its impact on people who have been caught up in a rising tide of poverty in recent years. I don’t think that’s right. We need to think carefully about the impact of Brexit on people living on low incomes, and take steps to protect them.” **Amanda, Community activist**

In the result of the UK leaving the European Union, there is a clear risk that the resultant economic impact could tighten the grip of poverty on people’s lives. We cannot allow that to happen, and we must ensure that people living on low incomes are not pulled even deeper into poverty. The next UK Government can protect people on low incomes by:

UNDERTAKING A LEGALLY BINDING COMMITMENT TO NON-REGRESSION OF RIGHTS

With many employment rights underscored by existing EU legislation, workers – particularly low-paid workers – need guarantees that in the result of Brexit, their rights will not only be maintained but strengthened.

MAKING A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT TO MAINTAINING THE LEVEL OF SUPPORT PROVIDED BY EU FUNDING

Funding from the European Union, particularly the European Social Fund, provides vital financial support to organisations across Scotland who work with people living in the grip of poverty. In the absence of this funding, there is a risk that the vital services the funding supports will end. These organisations – and the people they support – require security and need a long-term commitment that the levels of support they currently receive will be maintained in the result of Brexit.

MAKING PUBLIC ANY ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF BREXIT ON POVERTY

There is a need for us all to be clear about the possible impact of Brexit on levels of poverty in the UK. Extensive impact assessments on the consequences of different Brexit scenarios on levels of poverty must be undertaken, with these impact assessments being made publicly available.

MORE INFORMATION

Visit our website www.povertyalliance.org or contact:

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THE POVERTY ALLIANCE

Poverty Alliance is Scotland's anti-poverty network. We bring together campaigners and communities to rebalance the distribution of power and resources. We work to:

- Influence policy and practice
- Support communities to challenge poverty
- Build the anti poverty movement
- Change attitudes
- Provide evidence through research

