



# **BUILDING A SECURE FOUNDATION FOR ALL OF US**

## **THE POVERTY ALLIANCE'S 2026 SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTION MANIFESTO**





# WE ARE THE POVERTY ALLIANCE, SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK

For more than 30 years, we have campaigned for the changes needed to bring about an end to poverty.

We are a membership organisation made up of groups from across Scotland, including grassroots community and voluntary organisations, national organisations, campaign groups, trades unions, faith groups, university and colleges, and research organisations.

## OUR VISION

**A SCOTLAND FREE OF POVERTY,  
WITH SOCIAL, ECONOMIC,  
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOR  
ALL, WHERE EVERYONE CAN  
FLOURISH AND IS TREATED  
WITH DIGNITY.**

The experience of our network has reinforced three key lessons:

1. Change in our society is urgently required to address the poverty and inequality that scar so many lives;
2. We have the resources, know-how and capability to make the required changes when it is necessary; and
3. The political will to make and sustain real change is too often lacking.

Our approach to change is collaborative, through working with our members to influence policy and practice, supporting communities to challenge poverty, providing evidence through research and building public support for the solutions to tackle poverty.

## OUR PURPOSE

**TO SUPPORT THE PREVENTION  
AND REDUCTION OF POVERTY  
BY BUILDING A STRONG  
NETWORK OF ORGANISATIONS  
AND PEOPLE TO INFLUENCE  
POLICY AND CHANGE PRACTICE.**

At the centre of this, we work with and alongside people with direct and diverse experiences of poverty to ensure that their voices and experiences are not only heard, but meaningfully incorporated into national policy making.

We know that our vision of a Scotland free from poverty is achievable, but only if we work together. That is why we have been building the Scotland Demands Better campaign, supported by a diverse coalition of over 280 civil society organisations. A key moment in this campaign was a national march and rally in October 2025. Thousands of people took to the streets of Edinburgh in the biggest anti-poverty demonstration Scotland has seen in decades. Trade unions, faith groups, community organisations and charities stood shoulder to shoulder with people from across the country to demand fair work, strong public services and dignified social security. This solidarity represents the foundation of our work, and the starting point for this manifesto.

# THE CHALLENGES WE FACE

In Scotland, we believe in justice and compassion. We want to see everyone with enough to live a decent life – and the opportunities to flourish – through an economic system that prioritises people and the planet. We know that this is possible.

That is why we are tired of waiting for change on stubbornly high levels of poverty. One in five people in Scotland are held back by poverty. That is over a million people whose ability to meet basic needs like food, housing and health is being actively restricted. A direct breach of their human rights, this creates powerful barriers to opportunities and ultimately sustains inequality. The risk of poverty continues to be disproportionately high for particular groups including disabled people, women, Black and minority ethnic people, unpaid carers and single parents.

## **In 2023/24, 22% of children in Scotland were experiencing relative poverty.<sup>1</sup>**

Scotland's legislation on child poverty contains four ambitious but achievable income-based targets to reduce child poverty by 2030, a deadline which falls within the lifetime of the next Parliament. Whilst welcome progress has been made, modelling shows that we are currently on a path to missing all of these targets.<sup>2</sup> Much more needs to be done to ensure that our next Government delivers for Scotland's children, providing opportunities to learn, grow and develop fully through happy and thriving childhoods.

**Poverty is a longstanding, structural injustice in Scotland, but it is not inevitable. That is why people across Scotland are demanding better. We want our political leaders to have the bravery and political will necessary to build a just economy and society through bold action.**

**Tackling poverty must be given the priority it deserves in this election campaign, and in the work of the next Scottish Government and Parliament. We call on all political parties to outline their plans to turn the tide on poverty.**

When we all have access to good healthcare, education, childcare, housing and jobs – when we are able to live in security – we thrive, and so does our economic wellbeing. However, at present, broken systems are costing us all every day. The time, stress and money spent on navigating inaccessible transport and housing systems, insecure food infrastructures, and rising child and social care costs are making life impossible for people across Scotland, and particularly those living on low incomes.

This is coupled with the reality that, for many, household income is not keeping up with the cost of living. Too many remain in low-paid, inflexible and insecure employment. And rather than providing a strong foundation to build a better life, our social security system often provides minimal levels of respect and financial support.

This not only has far-reaching negative impacts for individuals and households. When people are unable to support their local communities or access good employment, it holds back Scotland's collective prosperity.

## **£2.3 billion of Scottish health boards budget is directed to responding to the impacts of poverty.<sup>3</sup>**

**It is within this context that the 2026 Scottish Parliament election takes place. The cost of inaction on poverty is high. It is why this election is so important. We know that a better future for all of us is possible, so the time for action is now.**

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2025) *Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2021-24*. Available at: <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/#Children>

<sup>2</sup> IPPR Scotland (2025) *Achieving the 2030 child poverty target: The distance left to travel*. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/articles/achieving-the-2030-child-poverty-target>

<sup>3</sup> IPPR (2023) *Tipping the scales: The social and economic harm of poverty in Scotland*. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/articles/tipping-the-scales>

# THE MINIMUM INCOME GUARANTEE, AND HOW WE GET THERE

The policy solution that has emerged in response to the scale of the challenge we face – and opportunities we have – is the **Minimum Income Guarantee**. The Guarantee would set a level of income below which nobody in Scotland would be allowed to fall. This will be the amount of money that is needed to live a good life. It is a simple but powerful idea to give all of us a solid foundation to build a better future.

There are three parts of the Guarantee:

1. **Good jobs that pay the bills:** Most people of working age will reach the income level through fair paid work, but change is needed to make sure more people have access to good quality work that is accessible through increased flexibility and support;
2. **Strong services:** With stronger investment in the public services that we all rely on, people will not only have more choice in their lives – increasing their opportunities for work, training, education and access to essential services – the daily living costs for those on low-incomes will also be reduced; and
3. **Better social security:** For people who cannot get suitable work – or who are unable to work due to caring responsibilities, ill health or disability – our social security system will be strengthened so that it once again functions as a protection against poverty.

The Minimum Income Guarantee is a big change but it can make our country better and fairer. Delivering this will need time, investment, and action. It will take a genuine national commitment. Political parties must play a key role in getting this policy on the agenda ahead of the next election and advocating for its implementation in the next Parliament.

It is positive that the current Scottish Government have committed to exploring the Guarantee, with the establishment of a Steering Group and

Expert Group to take forward the proposal. The final report of the Expert Group sets out a clear policy roadmap for the next Scottish Government to make real progress on delivery in the next Parliament. Political parties adopting this roadmap in their own manifestos will help us to hold the government to account.

All of the interim steps on the Expert Group's roadmap to the Guarantee will make a tangible difference to the lives of those living on low incomes. Taken together, the actions that make up a Minimum Income Guarantee have the potential to transform our society.

**Therefore, progressing a Minimum Income Guarantee for Scotland is our overarching policy ask in this manifesto, and the policy calls in this manifesto should be viewed as interim steps on the roadmap to delivering the Guarantee.**

This will take an all-government approach to tackling poverty. This means that poverty must be a cross-cabinet priority, with the mainstreaming of anti-poverty and equalities policy-making across all government portfolios. Reforming Scotland's Public Sector Equality Duty will be a key part of this, to create a stronger, more effective equalities framework for the public sector that goes beyond reporting and actively drives equalities mainstreaming. Integrating intersectional, equalities approaches is vital to shift the Duty from a largely procedural exercise to a meaningful tool for change, especially for groups most at risk of poverty.

An all-government approach must also involve a clear commitment to scaled-up, sustainable investment in holistic Whole Family Wellbeing support. This is essential to ensure that early and preventative help is available to all families who need it, at the right time, and in ways that truly work for them.

**We call on the next Scottish Government to take an all-government approach to progressing a Minimum Income Guarantee for Scotland, taking bold, timely and equalities driven action across policy portfolios to make meaningful progress on the roadmap to delivery. This includes introducing multi-year pilots of the Guarantee to test the policy in practice, with a focus on unpaid carers and rural and island communities.**

**The first steps on that journey must be prioritised in the next Parliament. As such, our key recommendations for action are to:**

- 1.** Use all devolved powers to incentivise and encourage employers to adopt the real Living Wage, Living Hours and Living Pensions;
- 2.** Introduce sectoral bargaining in low-paid sectors, like social care;
- 3.** Strengthen investment in, and the accessibility of, employability support and training;
- 4.** Provide long term funding for new social homes;
- 5.** Expand and fairly fund energy efficiency and clean home heating schemes;
- 6.** Expand concessionary bus travel to under 25s, unpaid carers and people on low-income and disability benefits;
- 7.** Expand the funded childcare entitlement to 50 hours per week for low-income households;
- 8.** End charging by council for non-residential social care;
- 9.** Deliver universal free school breakfast and lunch provision to all pupils in Scotland;
- 10.** Reform Scotland's public debt recovery processes;
- 11.** Increase Scottish Child Payment to £55 per week;
- 12.** Widen eligibility for and increase the value of the Carer Support Payment;
- 13.** Strengthen the administrative approach of the Scottish Welfare Fund;
- 14.** Maximise incomes through full coverage access to advice services;
- 15.** Take steps to unlock our country's wealth through reform to our devolved and local tax systems;
- 16.** Introduce fair and sustainable funding of three years or more for the third sector; and
- 17.** Place social and economic justice at the heart of climate action.

# FAIR, WELL-PAID JOBS FOR EVERYONE WHO NEEDS ONE

Work should offer dignity, security, and a route out of poverty. Yet, wages are failing to keep pace with the real cost of living, and rising insecurity in the Scottish labour market is undermining the impact of paid work on financial security. This means it is not always the case that employment is the route out of poverty it should be.

**60% of working-age adults living in poverty reside in a household where someone is in paid work.<sup>4</sup>**



**Of every four children in poverty, three live in a household where someone is in paid work.<sup>5</sup>**

Although we have made strong progress in Scotland towards tackling this by increasing earnings for the lowest paid, there are still over 270,000 workers in Scotland who do not earn the real Living Wage, the only rate of pay calculated according to the cost of living. That's more than one in ten workers.<sup>6</sup>

We can and must do better. To ensure that most people of working age will reach the Minimum Income Guarantee level through paid work, more people need access to secure and well-paid employment opportunities, which are appropriate for their circumstances, to making meaningful progress on poverty.

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2024) *Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2020-23*. Available at: [https://data.gov.scot/poverty/#Working-age\\_adults](https://data.gov.scot/poverty/#Working-age_adults)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Living Wage Foundation (2024) *Employee Jobs Paid Below the Real Living Wage 2024*. Available at: <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/employee-jobs-paid-below-real-living-wage-2024>

<sup>7</sup> Scottish Government (2025) *Non-domestic rates relief statistics 2024*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/non-domestic-rates-relief-statistics-2024/pages/small-business-bonus-scheme-relief/>

<sup>8</sup> OECD (2015) *Who are the top 1% earners in Europe*. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jr1g39gkzw-en>

That is why we are calling on the next Scottish Government to:

## 1 Use all devolved powers to incentivise and encourage employers to adopt the real Living Wage, Living Hours and Living Pensions

Employers are central to changing the narrative on low-pay and insecure work, but they need support and encouragement from the Government to make this a reality. This means that the next Scottish Government must renew and refocus its effort to design Fair Work into our economy. They can build on the Community Wealth Building Bill by resourcing it properly and providing power and resources to public bodies to deliver on its promise. They should undertake a comprehensive review to ensure that all available powers are being used to promote Fair Work. Although some progress has been made applying Fair Work First criteria to public spending, gaps and limitations remain, such as incorporating Living Hours into Fair Work guidance on procurement, and attaching Fair Work conditionality to the Small Business Bonus scheme with a subsidy to business of £239 million in 2024.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 Introduce sectoral bargaining in low-paid sectors, like social care

Collective bargaining is one of the most effective tools for tackling low pay, income inequality, and precarious work. Countries with high levels of collective bargaining coverage – such as Sweden, Denmark and Belgium – have lower levels of low pay and income inequality.<sup>8</sup> This sits in contrast to economies like the UK which have low levels of collective bargaining and high levels of low-pay.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Keune, M (2021) *Inequality between capital and labour and among wage-earners: the role of collective bargaining and trade unions*. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/10242589211000588>

We believe the Scottish Government should begin driving sectoral collective bargaining by focusing on social care. Social care employs over 200,000 workers in Scotland in complex, skilled and socially and economically vital work, but it is chronically undervalued. Tackling low pay in social care is particularly important for addressing women's poverty, with women accounting for the vast majority of staff in the sector. Whilst the UK Government's Employment Rights Bill will soon introduce sectoral bargaining for social care in England and Wales and devolve the same powers to Scotland, the Scottish Government already has powers to drive this process which they have failed to use.

Workers in Scotland's lowest paid sectors need an immediate pay rise, their jobs need formally revaluing to reflect their true contribution to our collective wellbeing, and this should form the basis for an ongoing sectoral collective bargaining framework.

### **3. Strengthen investment in, and the accessibility of, employability support and training**

There are currently too many barriers for people on low incomes accessing education and good quality employability services. Participants in a Citizen's Panel facilitated by the Poverty Alliance identified the cost associated with undertaking retraining – including that of broadband and rising training course prices – as barriers to access.<sup>10</sup> Adequately covering the costs associated with undertaking training, including that of enabler services like transport and childcare, is a vital step to strengthening Scotland's lifetime skills offer.

Further to this, mainstream employability programmes routinely do not take account of caring responsibilities, and in particular fail to acknowledge that women's readiness to work will be impacted by these caring roles. Analysis from Close the Gap has shown that women are less likely to have access to training that will enable them to progress or secure a pay rise.<sup>11</sup> Other groups, including disabled people and Black and minority ethnic people, have similar experiences of employability programmes with the lack of consideration afforded to specific barriers resulting in poorer outcomes and lower participation rates. Therefore, mainstreaming equalities considerations in the design of employability and retraining programmes, and ensuring that they are focused on individual needs, is vital.

A redesigned and enhanced employment support offer will be critical to achieving Scotland's child poverty targets. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has been clear that the actions outlined in Best Start Bright Futures are inadequate to the scale of change needed<sup>12</sup>, and those actions have been subject to substantial budget cuts, further undermining their impact. There is a need for greater investment in employment support in the next parliament, alongside efforts to shift focus from supporting people to merely enter paid work to greater prioritisation of progression to ensure that work is a sustainable route out of poverty.

<sup>10</sup> The Poverty Alliance (2023) *The Lifetime Skills Offer: Participation of people with experience of poverty and equalities organisations in the development of the Scottish Government's Lifetime Skills Offer*. Available at: <https://www.povertyalliance.org/get-heard-scotland-lifetime-skills-and-equalities/>

<sup>11</sup> Close the Gap (2021) *Response to Scottish Government's Consultation on the Child Poverty Delivery Plan*. Available at: <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Close-the-Gap-Response-to-Scottish-Governments-Consultation-on-Child-Poverty-Delivery-Plan---September-2021-.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025) *Meeting the Moment: Scottish Election 2026*. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/child-poverty/meeting-the-moment-scottish-election-2026>

# INVESTING IN OUR PUBLIC SERVICES

Our collective public services help us live our lives, fulfilling our most basic needs. They are part of our wider social safety net. Yet for people living on low incomes, accessing the services they need can be challenging, if not impossible, which can tighten the grip of poverty.

That is why strengthening services is a core part of achieving a Minimum Income Guarantee. Stronger investment in the services that we all rely on – transport, childcare, social care, health care, warm homes, and education – will give people more choice in their lives, allowing them to participate fully in society and reach their full potential. Affordable, accessible services can also reduce daily living costs, shifting how the cost of basic needs are met and, as a result, making it easier to access a decent standard of living.

**That is why we are calling on the next Scottish Government to:**

## **4 Provide long term funding for new social homes**

Having a safe home is one of our most basic needs, but with the Scottish Government having declared a housing emergency and with 10,000 children living in temporary accommodation, it is clear that our current housing system is not working. The shortage of housing stock in Scotland is driving people into unaffordable and unsuitable housing. Despite this, the affordable housing budget has seen significant cuts in successive Scottish Government budgets, delaying the provision of urgently needed affordable homes with far reaching consequences.

Simply put, we need to see the adequate funding of new social homes, whether through building new, or acquiring and adapting existing, housing stock. Greater access to social homes would have a transformative effect on poverty, as well as save the Government expenditure in other key areas like social security and health.

**Had low-income private renting households instead been in social tenancies throughout the 2010's they would have spent £2,200 less in housing costs a year, which in turn would have meant that would have had to receive £800 less in housing support payments, resulting in households being left £1,400 better off.<sup>13</sup>**



The provision of long term funding will provide the stability and commitment needed to transform housing in Scotland. Until now, funding commitments have been haphazard, subject to in-year changes and vulnerable to budget cuts. This means that, despite the Scottish Government commitment to build 110,000 affordable homes by 2032 with at least 70% for social rent,<sup>14</sup> current trajectories indicate these goals will be missed with a net increase of just 10,000 homes in the decade to 2020.<sup>15</sup> We also need to ensure new housing includes enough accessible homes and adequately fund adaptation of existing housing stock to ensure accessibility for disabled tenants.

<sup>13</sup> IPPR Scotland (2024) *Social housing need of the hour amid homelessness crisis*. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/articles/social-housing-need-of-the-hour-amid-homelessness-crisis>

<sup>14</sup> Scottish Government (2021) *Housing to 2040*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-2/documents>

<sup>15</sup> IPPR Scotland, Save the Children and Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023) *Tipping the Scales: the social and economic harm of poverty in Scotland*. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/articles/tipping-the-scales>

## 5. Expand and fairly fund energy efficiency and clean home heating schemes

Households experiencing fuel poverty do not have enough money left over from their energy bills and other essential costs to maintain an acceptable standard of living. A key driver of this poverty is the poor energy efficiency of homes.



**More than one third of households in Scotland are currently living in fuel poverty, and almost a fifth live in extreme fuel poverty.<sup>16</sup>**

Improvement of Scotland's housing stock is therefore a necessary action that will not only help us meet our climate targets, but also reduce rates of fuel poverty. Despite this, there remains a significant lack of support for actions that people on low incomes can take to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. For those that own their home, that means that affordability remains a key barrier to low-income households being able to invest in energy efficiency measures. Existing financial support often requires up-front household investment or taking on loans. This is impossible for many low-income households in Scotland.

That means that the provision of financial support for people on the lowest incomes through grants is vital. This should include support for those where the installation of green technology like heat pumps has resulted in short-term increases to their energy bills. For people living in poverty or on a low income, increases to bills – however small or temporary –

risks further entrenching financial insecurity and discourages buy in for the green transition.

Alongside this, we need multi-year resource funding to energy advice and advocacy services for low income groups, social tenants and rural communities. These services help people navigate a complex landscape, stay warm, save people money and help avoid energy debt.

## 6. Expand concessionary bus travel to under 25s, unpaid carers and people on low-income and disability benefits

Public transport is a collective good that should be available to all, connecting people to services, social opportunities and jobs, education and training. But successive governments have allowed our public transport system to become so expensive and fragmented that it has simply stopped being an option for people to use.

Our research highlights that the cost remains one of the key barriers to accessing public transport for those in poverty. The cost of bus travel has risen 60% over the past decade, significantly faster than average wages and the broader cost of living.<sup>17</sup> The impact of these increased fares fall disproportionately on people living on low incomes, women and minority ethnic communities, who are more likely to use the bus and rely on public transport systems.<sup>18,19</sup> Further to this, for people living in rural Scotland, just getting around puts even more of a squeeze on finances; transport is the most significant additional cost compared to people living in urban areas, amounting to an additional £50 per week.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Scottish Government (2025) *Scottish House Condition Survey: 2023 Key Findings*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-house-condition-survey-2023-key-findings/>

<sup>17</sup> Transform Scotland (2024) *Briefing on Scottish Government Fair Fares Review debate*. Available at: <https://transform.scot/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024-03-28-Fair-Fares-Review-debate-Transform-Scotland-briefing-paper.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Transport Scotland (2022) *National Transport Strategy (NTS2): Monitoring and Evaluation 2019 Baseline Report*. Available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/monitoring-and-evaluation-2019-baseline-report-may-2022-national-transport-strategy-nts2/reduces-inequalities/>

<sup>19</sup> Transform Scotland (2024) *Does transport worsen gender inequality?* Available at: <https://transform.scot/2024/03/08/putting-people-first-why-gender-matters-in-sustainable-transport/>

<sup>20</sup> Scottish Government (2021) *Poverty in rural Scotland: evidence review*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/poverty-rural-scotland-review-evidence/pages/4/>

The introduction of the under 22s concessionary travel scheme, alongside the continued funding of the vital older persons and disabled concessionary travel scheme, was the right thing to do. However, there are many people in poverty and on low incomes who do not yet qualify for concessionary travel. That is why concessionary bus travel must be expanded, and its use funded for community bus transport, to further support rural communities ability to get around.

This must be the first step in a wider and more ambitious programme of reform and investment that would see us develop a public transport system fit for the 21st century, which includes ticket integration and prioritising municipal ownership.

## **7 Expand the funded childcare entitlement to 50 hours per week for low-income households**

Childcare costs present a significant barrier to reaching a living income for families across Scotland.<sup>21</sup> The introduction of 1140 hours of funded provision has not negated the need for expensive top-up childcare for single parent households, or households where both parents want to work full-time. As a result of the need for top-up through paid-for provision, childcare costs continue to prevent low-income parents from increasing their working hours and earnings. With women accounting for the majority of primary caregivers and single parents, this has a disproportionate impact on women's labour market participation and equality.

It is vital that any extension is done in a way which increases the flexibility, affordability and quality of provision for low income families. The delivery of the funded entitlement at the local level is often insufficiently flexible to meet the needs of families. Scottish Government analysis has shown that the lack of flexibility in delivery has been a key barrier

to parents utilising the 1140 funded hours in a way that allows them to access the labour market. To meet the needs of low-income families, the funding allocated to childcare providers must enable sufficient flexibility in the delivery of funded hours.

Provision and infrastructure must also meet the needs of disabled children, with efforts to reduce the cost of accessible childcare for families. Three quarters of parents and carers of disabled children have reduced their hours or left their job because of difficulties accessing appropriate childcare. Our system of childcare in Scotland does not yet meet the needs of disabled children, thus contributing to the higher rates of poverty in households with a disabled person.

## **8 End charging by councils for non-residential social care**

A sustainable and affordable social care system for all is vital if we want a society based on fairness, dignity and respect. However, our current system entrenches exclusion and disadvantage by increasing pressure on people already experiencing or at risk of poverty.

Despite this, the current Scottish Government has failed to deliver on its promise to end charging by councils for non-residential social care and its plan to establish a National Care Service has collapsed. Charging for social care is not just about the financial cost to people but about the brutality of a system which demands payment and negotiation from people who need support. It is exhausting and demoralising for service users, contributing to inequalities and the higher risk of poverty experienced by disabled people in Scotland.

Reforming Scotland's social care system is fundamental to tackling poverty and inequality, and a key part of this is the ending unfair social care charging which denies people access to an adequate income and their basic human rights.

<sup>21</sup> IPPR Scotland (2022) *Universal Basic Services: Building Financial Security in Scotland*. Available at [https://www.ippr.org/files/2022-03/1646753753\\_universal-basic-services-scotland-march-22.pdf](https://www.ippr.org/files/2022-03/1646753753_universal-basic-services-scotland-march-22.pdf)

## 9 Deliver universal free school breakfast and lunch provision to all pupils in Scotland

Hunger is a significant barrier to learning. Addressing poverty through education requires all children and young people, regardless of their socio-economic background, to have access to learning opportunities. That means that expanding breakfast and lunch provision is a key tool for closing the attainment gap.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that providing a free, nutritious breakfast to children boosted reading, writing and maths by an average of two months progress over the course of the academic year compared to pupils in schools with no provision.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, a 2021 study looking into the economic impact of the work of Magic Breakfast found that school breakfast provision can offer a 50 times return on investment, showing the vital role of tackling hunger has significant wider benefits for the Scottish economy.<sup>23</sup>

**55%** of low-income families in Scotland in receipt of Universal Credit have at least one deduction by the Department for Work and Pensions from their monthly income to cover debts to public bodies.<sup>24</sup>

## 10 Reform Scotland's public debt recovery processes

Low-income families in Scotland and across the UK are in the midst of an ever-worsening debt crisis.

Deductions by public bodies are currently actively undermining individuals and families' households ability to meet the income level necessary to live in decency and dignity. They pull families into debt and keep them there. The Scottish Government must respond to the public debt crisis by reforming public debt recovery processes, through both policy and legislative change, to prevent public debt trapping children and families in poverty.

This must include targeted action to help and support low-income households most at risk of experiencing problem public debt, including families with a disabled child and single parent families.



<sup>22</sup> Institute of Fiscal Studies (2016) *Breakfast clubs work their magic in disadvantaged English schools*. Available at: [Breakfast clubs work their magic in disadvantaged English schools | Institute for Fiscal Studies \(ifs.org.uk\)](https://www.ifs.org.uk)

<sup>23</sup> Magic Breakfast, Heinz and Pro Bono Economics (2021) *The economic cost-effectiveness of the Magic Breakfast model of school breakfast provision*. Available at: [The-economic-cost-effectiveness-of-the-Magic-Breakfast-model-of-school-breakfast-provision.pdf \(magicbreakfast.com\)](https://www.magicbreakfast.com)

<sup>24</sup> Aberlour (2022) *Universal Credit deductions for households with children by Scottish local authority*. Available at: <https://www.aberlour.org.uk/news-item/new-report-debt-to-public-bodies>

# STRENGTHENING OUR SOCIAL SAFETY NET

Our social security system is a public service and a basic human right that should secure the wellbeing of everyone in society. It is not only a safety net that should be there for all of us when we need it, but also a springboard which provides vital support for accessing suitable educational and employment opportunities, as well as other forms of participation in society. It is an investment in people.

However, we must be clear that, for many, the value of devolved social security still falls short of what is needed to meet the cost of living.

Life is unpredictable. We can all encounter unexpected events like job loss, reduced working hours and illness. That is why our social security system must be strengthened to ensure that all people can meet the Minimum Income Guarantee income level.

It is welcome that Scotland's social security system was founded on the principles of dignity and respect, and that is having a tangible impact in the way that processes are experienced by households. But we know that further change is needed to ensure that our social security system truly functions as a protection against poverty, and promotes decency and security.

**We therefore call on the next Scottish Government to:**

## 11. Increase Scottish Child Payment to £55 per week

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's 'UK Poverty 2025' report highlights that child poverty rates in Scotland remain much lower than those in England and Wales.<sup>25</sup> They are clear that this is largely down to the significant investment in Scottish Child Payment. Our members highlight that the Scottish

Child Payment is also having a demonstrably positive impact at household level, and its importance for families should not be understated.

It is a bold policy, and it can – and must – go further. As recommended in the Minimum Income Guarantee Expert Group's final report, we see an initial increase of the Payment to £55 as a tool that the next Government should use to make an immediate difference to the lives of children and families across Scotland, with further uplift likely required over the course of the next Parliament to meet legally binding 2030 child poverty targets.

**Increasing the Scottish Child Payment to £55 would lift 20,000 children out of poverty and deep poverty, and 30,000 children out of very deep poverty.<sup>26</sup>**



## 12. Widen eligibility for and increase the value of the Carer Support Payment

Some groups of carers experience greater poverty including disabled carers; unpaid carers who either care for a disabled child, or have another caring responsibility and children; and BME carers, 67% of whom suffer financial difficulties due to caring.

**More than a quarter (28%) of unpaid carers are living in poverty. That is 56% higher than for those without caring responsibilities.<sup>27</sup>**



<sup>25</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025) *UK Poverty 2025*. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2025-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025) *Meeting the Moment: Scottish Election 2026*. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/child-poverty/meeting-the-moment-scottish-election-2026>

<sup>27</sup> Carers Scotland (2024) *Poverty and Financial Hardship of Unpaid Carers in Scotland*. Available at: <https://www.carersuk.org/reports/poverty-and-financial-hardship-of-unpaid-carers-in-scotland/>

Reform of the Carer Support Payment is therefore vital to securing the financial security of unpaid carers across Scotland. As well as significantly increasing its value, this should include:

- Extending eligibility to student carers aged 16-19 in non-advanced full-time study;
- Reforming the earnings threshold to enable more unpaid carers to juggle paid work with unpaid care; and
- Increasing the time the benefit is paid after the cared-for person dies to six months.

Work to reform financial support for unpaid carers must include delivering an 'Older Carers Payment' for older unpaid carers, many of whom are not eligible for Carer Support Payment when they reach State Pension Age.

### **13. Strengthen the approach of the Scottish Welfare Fund**

For many, the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) acts as a lifeline when facing crisis. However, there is growing evidence that the Fund is difficult to access and under-promoted.

Feedback from a Citizen's Panel supported by the Poverty Alliance uncovered that those who had accessed or tried to access the SWF had largely negative experiences of the process. Some panellists made clear that it was the most stressful of all the financial support that they had sought, involving significant levels of fear and stigma, including a fear that disclosing financial crisis could trigger child protection interventions. Stigma and fear were exacerbated by 'upsetting' and 'degrading' questions, and a lack of clear, consistent and transparent information about eligibility and how decisions are made.

To improve the Fund, the Panel recommends that putting dignity, fairness and respect at its heart. This will require successful delivery of improvements including through:

- Staff training, including on poverty related stigma;
- Clearer information on eligibility and support available through the Fund;
- Accessible and effective promotion of the Fund; and
- Improved accountability processes around how decisions have been made, promoting the right to review and appeal.

### **14. Maximise incomes through full coverage access to advice services**

The ever-increasing complexity of social security, along with rising costs and insufficient wages, means more people than ever are seeking advice from welfare rights services. Evidence consistently highlights that many people cannot access their maximum social security entitlement without expert help and advice. Sufficient investment must be made to ensure comprehensive advice services are available across all communities. These services should be free, independent, and stigma-free, enabling people to access the financial support they are entitled to.

# FINANCING OUR FUTURE

Delivering the steps necessary to achieving a Minimum Income Guarantee will take greater financial investment. That means that our political decision makers must choose to meet challenging fiscal contexts with decisive action on revenue raising. Taxation is a critical tool in tackling inequalities; it can enable higher public spending on services, redistribute income and wealth more equitably and incentivise social and environmental change, particularly by businesses and the wealthiest in our society. A renewed approach to tax in Scotland is therefore urgently needed to create a robust tax system that is fit for the 21st century.

**15. We call on the next Scottish Government to take steps to unlock our country's wealth through reform to our devolved and local tax systems to meet our collective aim of a fairer, greener society.**

**Reformed systems of taxation could unlock an annual £1.1bn of extra revenue for social investment in the short-term, and an additional £2.6bn a year through a package of longer-term reforms.<sup>28</sup>**



As supporters of the Tax Justice Scotland campaign,<sup>29</sup> we agree that – as key first steps to creating a fairer devolved and local tax system – there must be commitment to:

### **A reformed property tax**

For many years, Council Tax reform has been on the political agenda in Scotland without any significant action being taken, despite consensus across parties, academia and civil society that Council Tax is unfit for purpose. Failure to progress reform is having severe consequences for the public services and amenities we all rely on and contributes to a constantly worsening financial situation for our local authorities.

Given the regressive and disproportionate impact of Council Tax on low-income households, the next Scottish Government must finally take the steps necessary to reform or replace it with a fairer system of property tax that is truly local, proportionate to property value, based on periodically reviewed valuations and flexible to individual household circumstances. The starting point must be an immediate revaluation of properties, with our current system still utilising values from 1991.

### **A progressive approach to existing taxes like Income Tax**

Recent progressive reforms to Income Tax are raising more money – over £600 million in additional tax receipts in 2025/26.<sup>30</sup> But there is still much more that could be done to ensure that those with the most contribute the most to our economic recovery and social renewal. With rising costs and demand, further action is needed to raise more revenue for public services – like the NHS and social care – which are critical to everyone in Scotland, but particularly those living on low-incomes.

<sup>28</sup> STUC (2023) *Raising taxes to deliver for Scotland*. Available at: <https://www.stuc.org.uk/resources/scottish-tax-options.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> More information available here: <https://taxjustice.scot/>

<sup>30</sup> Scottish Fiscal Commission (2025) *Forecast Evaluation Report*. Available at: <https://fiscalcommission.scot/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Forecast-Evaluation-Report-August-2025.pdf>



Reforming how services are provided will not be enough. Increased investment is vital to meet unmet need, while simultaneously hitting Scotland’s legal commitments on child poverty and emissions reduction, fulfilling human rights and delivering upon wider policy goals. The next Scottish Government should take steps to create an even more just taxation system, by adopting a more progressive approach to income tax levels and thresholds in order to generate additional resources to invest in tackling poverty.

**Exploring ways to tax wealth more effectively**

Scotland’s wealth is held grossly unequally across our society; this is a deep injustice that must be addressed. According to the latest data which covers the period during the pandemic, a typical household in the wealthiest 10% of households had £1.3 million in total wealth, whereas a typical household in the least wealthy 10% of households had £7,600.

**The wealthiest 2% of households in Scotland had 15% of all wealth.<sup>31</sup>**



The next Scottish Government should publish a time-bound and ambitious plan to tax wealth more effectively in Scotland leading to concrete proposals for new wealth taxes at national and/or local levels, while simultaneously taking immediate interim steps to ensure all land and property in Scotland is registered and accurately valued.

**Setting out concrete options to raise more revenue to invest in climate action, by making polluters pay for their damage while incentivising emissions cuts.**

Global and Scotland-level data shows that, on average, the wealthier you are, the more you pollute. This reality must inform how we use taxation to raise more revenue to invest in climate action, but also help to incentivise big polluters to reduce their carbon emissions in the fairest possible way. Alongside progressive use of general taxation, measures could include targeted measures to incentivise emission reduction, such as:

- A well-designed Carbon Emissions Land Tax on large landholdings;
- Reforms to existing mechanisms, like Non-Domestic Rates that make tax reliefs are conditional on climate action; and
- The operationalisation of Air Departure Tax, with a new higher rate for private use. This could also lead to a fair new levy that makes those who fly more, pay more.

<sup>31</sup> Scottish Government (2025) *Wealth in Scotland 2006-2022*. Available at: <https://data.gov.scot/wealth/>

# VALUING OUR COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

## 16. Introduce fair and sustainable funding of three years or more for the third sector

Many of Scotland's 46,000 community and voluntary organisations provide vital support to those experiencing poverty. The cost of living crisis has seen demand soar for their services. Yet – as a result of a precarious funding landscape – too many have themselves been left without the financial security they need to survive and thrive. Across the country, organisations face significant challenges in staff retention; recruitment and morale; continuity of service provision; and planning for the future. Some face a constant threat of closure.

Despite this, they continue to be at the frontline of efforts to challenge poverty, enduring in their efforts to make positive change.

A sustainable, financially healthy third sector is central to making meaningful progress on inequality. Community and voluntary organisations can mobilise community resources through their local knowledge, delivering trusted support that has legitimacy in the communities they serve. That means that they can work closely with the most marginalised communities and individuals who are too often unreached by statutory services. They are agile and innovative so are able to respond quickly to emerging needs, and tailor solutions to specific cultural and local contexts. And through this experience they advocate for systems change, highlighting the root causes of poverty to shape public and political debate and holding our decisions makers to account.

This invaluable work requires resources. That means it cannot simply be noted with rhetoric and praise. Rather, we must match this value with fair, secure, and adequate funding to allow our community and voluntary organisations to continue to deliver for people across the country.

Taking a Fair Funding approach is therefore an increasingly urgent building block that the Scottish Government can place to build a Scotland free from poverty. To move forward on this, we must mobilise the definition of Fair Funding as set out by the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO).<sup>32</sup> They have defined Fair Funding as a long-term, flexible, sustainable, and accessible approach to funding. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Longer-term funding of three years or more;
- Flexible unrestricted core funding;
- Timely decision-making and payments;
- Accessible and proportionate application and reporting processes;
- Sustainable funding with inflation-based uplifts; and
- Proportionate, transparent approaches to monitoring and reporting.

This approach is essential for a sustainable sector which can offer fair work, support volunteers, and deliver high-quality outcomes for people and communities.

**We call on the next Scottish Government to introduce a Fair Funding approach to supporting our voluntary and community organisations.**

<sup>32</sup> See further information here: <https://scvo.scot/policy/fair-funding-procurement/fair-funding/what-is-fair-funding>

# TAKING AN ANTI-POVERTY APPROACH TO CLIMATE ACTION

## 17 Place social and economic justice at the heart of climate action

The climate crisis and poverty are deeply connected through a triple injustice. Those on the lowest incomes contribute the least to the climate crisis. They experience this crisis first and worst because of the scale of resource and financial security necessary to respond to the impacts of environmental breakdown. And, without proactive action, the measures designed to tackle the climate crisis will further entrench financial inequality.

We know that without a properly planned and resourced green transition, jobs will be lost, bills will rise, housing quality will decline, health systems will suffer, and transport will remain both a major emitter and a cost burden on low-income households. That is why we are calling on the next Scottish Government to take fair, bold and fast action on climate that benefits local communities, protects those on low-incomes and ensures that the biggest polluters pay for their damage.

There is no doubt that action being taken on the green transition is happening in a complex social context. However, this action is also a once in a generation chance to rebalance our economy and society toward fairness and sustainability. We must therefore ensure that the transition to net zero and a climate resilient economy is truly just, through joined-up government action that recognises tackling poverty and the climate crisis as mutually reinforcing goals.

We see many of the interim steps to delivering a Minimum Income Guarantee that we have included in this manifesto as dual climate and poverty asks.

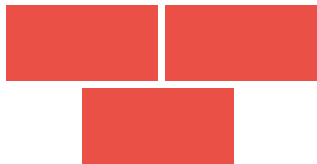
That is why the next Scottish Government must implement policy that:

- Creates a strong labour market that provides decent, unionised and future-proof employment and training opportunities so that workers and their communities are taken along on the green transition;
- Expands and fairly funds energy efficiency and clean home heating schemes so that low-income households will be able to support the energy transition without this being a significant financial burden;
- Provides significant investment in public transport routes so that they meet the needs of communities will increase connectivity for low income communities and make sustainable travel a viable alternative to car use; and
- Ensures the biggest polluters pay their fair share through a reformed tax system so that the cost of this transition is fairly distributed.

But this change cannot happen unless those most affected are involved from the beginning. That means embedding the voices of people with lived experience of poverty in climate policymaking to ensure that they are the centre of shaping the green transition. Whether in transport, housing, energy or jobs, decisions must be co-produced and properly resourced to ensure participation is meaningful.

**Communities across Scotland are already leading the way with local innovation and resilience. It's time our national approach matched the scale of need in our communities. The next Scottish Government must design climate policy that has tackling poverty and inequality at its heart.**





**The Poverty Alliance**  
**94 Hope Street**  
**Glasgow**  
**G2 6PH**  
**[www.povertyalliance.org](http://www.povertyalliance.org)**  
**0141 353 0440**