

Scottish Women's Convention
response to the Scottish
Parliament's consultation on:

Post Legislative Scrutiny of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017



September 2024

Premise

In 2017, the Scottish Parliament established the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act, which set the Scottish Government targets to reduce the number of children experiencing the effects of poverty by 2030. The Act also tasked Scottish Ministers and public bodies with creating delivery plans and reports to reach these pre-arranged targets. These targets are that by 2030 less than:

- 10% of children are in relative poverty
- 5% of children are in absolute poverty
- 5% of children are in combined low income and material deprivation
- 5% of children are in persistent poverty

In order to assess the impact of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, the Social Justice and Social Security Committee within the Scottish Parliament have released the following consultation. The consultation asks respondents to consider how policies may have been different without the Act, whether there would have been less focus on child poverty without the Act and whether the Act has serviced to 'focus minds and resources'.

After the Scottish Parliament has received consultation responses, they shall consider alterations that are required and rectify their plan accordingly – incorporating suggestions made.



The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

Our Response

What difference has having the targets, delivery plans and reporting requirements built into the Act made at a national level?

Across Scotland, child poverty rates have experienced little change since the introduction of the Child Poverty (Scotland) (Act) in 2017. As stated by the Scottish Government, relative, absolute and persistent poverty amongst children has remained “broadly stable”, despite rapid reduction in the late 1990s and early 00s¹. Therefore, the impact of the Child Poverty (Scotland) (Act) 2017, must be brought into question.

The Scottish Government have introduced the Scottish Child Payment, which it estimates will reduce the number of children living below the poverty line by 100,000 in 2024. Additionally, the Child Poverty Action Group has estimated that this payment will assist low-income families to retain £28,000 per child. These evaluations show a clear emphasis on reducing child poverty, with targets assisting in maintaining a focus on child poverty rates at a national level. Furthermore, in consideration of reporting requirements, it has been said that in Spring 2025, a review of whether interim targets have been met will be released, providing insight into progress. The Poverty and Inequality Commission have stated that it is highly unlikely that interim targets will be reached however, highlighting that a reduction of eight percentage points would be required in a single year, an act they have regarded as “improbable”².

With the recently announced £500 million of cuts across Scottish spending, the upcoming winter is likely to be a difficult one for women and families. Women have expressed considerable concern surrounding rising living costs, with benefit payments and wages struggling to keep up with inflation. This has placed many women and their children into difficulty, with some straining to access the basic right to food. It has been estimated that foodbank usage has surged in recent years³, and women have stated that the normalisation of foodbanks across the country is unacceptable. Therefore, with rates experiencing little change, resulting in the continued suffering of children across the country, the statistical evidence presented by the Scottish Government, as well as SWC qualitative data, show obvious failures in addressing child poverty.

- “Essential spend has gone up, I’ve had to reduce spend in other areas. Also, I’m having to consider whether to get out and about for leisure, as focus needs to be on paying to get to work.”
- “So, the cost of living? Yes, definitely. I think what we’ve found is that people are finding that they have to pick between food or heating.”
- “That’s the thing, if you’re working and say you’re on about £70 a week, you’re trying to pay your electricity, that’s doubled, insurances have doubled, pensions have doubled, even the food in the supermarkets...So, like, how can people survive? Everything has gone up, but benefits haven’t.”

¹ Scottish Government. (2024). Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Progress Report 2023-24. Available at: [Best Start, Bright Futures Tackling Child Poverty Progress Report 2023-24 \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/best-start-bright-futures-tackling-child-poverty-progress-report-2023-24)

² Scottish Government. (2024). Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2020-23. Available at: <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/#children>

³ Trussell Trust. (2024). <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/05/EYS-Scotland-Factsheet-2023-24.pdf>

- “Well, I was a carer for my dad for quite a number of years and you didn’t get much money to be a carer. I mean if I had to go anywhere for appointments and things, I found it too expensive”

It can also be said that since the 1990s, there has been a significant increase in the number of children living in households where at least one adult is in paid employment². This brings into question larger issues around pay rates and working conditions, with the continual worsening of employment options available to women significantly impacting their access to good quality work. The gender pay gap remains a major issue for women in work, with this being largely fuelled through women’s continued over-representation in part-time employment. Improving work opportunities has been outlined within delivery plans since the release of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act in 2017, however, have rarely followed through with action which has a specific focus on women’s unequal access to employment. One could therefore argue that despite general Scottish Government rhetoric surrounding child poverty, without tangible actions across workplace policy, child poverty is unlikely to be reduced.

- “...that’s the thing about the cost of living, is that it’s impacting people who would normally never have felt those kinds of things.”
- “I have had to change working industries due to my previous employer not having enough hours to give me. It is tough to manage personal every day finances...We have had to cut down on experiences outside of home and find free or cheaper alternatives”
- “We’ve [foodbank] got so much busier overall though, you know, you’re getting people saying that they never thought they would find themselves in this position, that they would need to use a foodbank. It could be any of us.”

The Act set up several scrutiny measures. How effective have these been?

Through the creation of the Poverty and Inequality Commission, a level of scrutiny has been developed. Within the annual review of progress towards to the reduction of child poverty, key points from the Poverty and Inequality Commission’s assessment have been presented. Alongside these, the Scottish Government have provided a response, highlighting why child poverty targets are likely not to be met. Within the document there is a lack of accountability from the Scottish Government, with full reflection being limited. Ultimately, scrutiny plays a significant role in assessing the quality of work carried out, however must be followed with tangible, evidence-led actions. With little change in child poverty rates, it can be argued that although scrutiny enables effective monitoring of the issue, it has not resulted in an observable difference to children’s lives.

What does the implementation of the Act tell us about the effectiveness or otherwise of statutory targets as a way of driving policy?

The implementation of the Act has clearly laid out a narrative which focuses on reducing child poverty. Multiple Scottish Government Programme for Government publications have outlined child poverty as a key concern, with the 2024/25 report concentrating much attention on the issue. It could therefore be argued that the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 has been a driver in the shift in focus within Scottish Government policy. Additionally, the Act has pushed local

authorities to consider child poverty reduction measures in a more robust way. However, recent revelations surrounding equality impact assessments within Glasgow City Council, highlight a lack of accountability despite narrative change. Glasgow City Council have made decisions to cut teacher numbers across the city by 450, with an equality impact assessment finding that this would disproportionately impact children with additional needs and children experiencing poverty⁴. Despite this assessment, the decision was made to continue with teacher number cuts, disregarding the needs of children. This is one such example, where a local authority decision has gone against the statutory targets set out by the Scottish Government in relation to child poverty, as well as local authority led initiatives. If the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 is to be properly implemented, narrative change is one element, however, ensuring that local authorities and public services are held accountable, enables further action in eliminating child poverty.

A further example has recently been provided by the Scottish Government: free school meals for all children in Scotland. The Scottish Government made promises to expand free school meals to all children across the country, however, have recently announced that budgetary limitations prevent them from doing so. At the SWC we believe that universal free school meals should be made available, with school meal costs adding to women's weekly expenditure. The decision to revert the implementation of free school meals for all children in Scotland, flagrantly goes against wider policy commitments made as a result of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, evidencing a lack of effectiveness.

Do you have any comments?

We believe that there is a lack of focus throughout child poverty tackling methods on the issue of women's poverty. Women's poverty and children's poverty are inextricably linked, with specific interventions being required if any significant movement is to occur across child poverty. When one considers the obvious drops in child poverty in the late 90s and early 00s, this occurred alongside a quick increase in women's representation across workplaces: in 1990, women's employment rate across the UK was approximately 67%, compared to approximately 75% in 2005⁵. Women remain a significant contributor to Scotland's economy, through paid employment and unpaid domestic labour, yet receive poor financial compensation for their efforts. With regards to women's caring responsibilities, it has been estimated that unpaid carers, the majority of which are women, save the Scottish Government £13.1 billion every year⁶.

Currently, women's sacrifice is consistently disregarded, however with the development of the wellbeing economy strategy within Scotland, whereby wellbeing for people and places is embedded across decision-making, some progress could be made to reduce children and women's poverty. In order to effectively implement a wellbeing economy, we believe that the Scottish Government must prioritise improving women's experiences of paid and unpaid work. This can be achieved through better working environments and pay levels, as well as full consideration of the continued invaluable unpaid workload within the home carried out by women. Therefore, the SWC believe that the continued economic disadvantage experienced by women must be cited as a key driver of child poverty.

⁴ Glasgow City Council. (2024). Equality Impact Assessments Completed During 2024/25: Service Reform (Staffing) June 2024 (Word Doc). Available at: <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/article/1328/Equality-Impact-Assessment-EqIA>

⁵ Roantree, B. and Vira, K. (2018). The Rise and Rise of Women's Employment in the UK. Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available at: https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/output_url_files/BN234.pdf

⁶ Carers Scotland. (2023). Women and Unpaid Care in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.carersuk.org/media/wqbpnce4/women-and-unpaid-caring-in-scotland-briefing-final.pdf>

Conclusion

Having listened to women, our three key recommendations on this topic are:

- Include the economic disadvantage experience by women as a key driver of child poverty.
- Tangible action which aims to reduce child poverty, such as universal free school meals, should be implemented.
- Improve the workplace disadvantage faced by women through workplace policies.

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Parliament's consultation on '**Post Legislative Scrutiny of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017**'. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to this topic and its effects on women's equality.

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