

Programme for Government: Support for single parent families

Briefing

August 2023



**One Parent
Families Scotland**
changing lives, challenging poverty

About One Parent Families Scotland

Established in 1944, One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) is the leading charity working with single parent families in Scotland. We provide expert advice, practical support and campaign with parents to make their voices heard to change the systems, policies and attitudes that disadvantage single parent families.

Programme for Government Priorities: Summary

1. Increase the Scottish Child Payment to a minimum of £30 by April 2024, increasing to £40 as soon as possible.
2. Target additional support through the Scottish Child Payment to families affected by the young parent penalty and two-child limit.
3. Ensure all devolved social security payments are increased in line with inflation, so they do not lose value.
4. Increase school clothing grants and the income threshold for accessing them in line with inflation and commit to rolling this out to all children whose parents receive Universal Credit.
5. Urgently continue the roll out free school meals to all primary school pupils and commit to introducing universal free school meals in secondary schools.
6. Support single parents into training, education & sustainable, family friendly employment which pays the real living wage through specialist employability support and actions to reduce inequalities in the labour market.
7. Accelerate progress towards expanding universal childcare to one and two-year-olds and actions to create a system of funded school age childcare, whilst committing to a more radical childcare ambition including the choice of up to 50 hours of ELC.
8. Commit to provide funding for local authorities to write off existing public debt for low-income households.

9. Use the Scottish Parliament’s devolved tax powers to generate more revenue in Scotland to fund action on poverty and inequality, while investing in care and tackling the climate crisis.
10. Introduce a new National Outcome on valuing and investing in care and all those who provide it. A focus on care, care workers and unpaid carers is urgently required to ensure Scotland is a caring country.
11. Ensure that single parents are part of the focus of policies to achieve a just transition to net zero so they are not left behind or disadvantaged by the shift to a low-carbon economy.

Background

Single parents are one of six priority groups included in the Scottish Government’s Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan (*Best Start, Bright Futures*), in recognition of the fact that 2 in 5 of all children in poverty in Scotland are in single parent households.¹

The Scottish Government has taken a number of important actions to reduce child poverty which are already having a positive impact for families. As a result of recent tax and benefit policies introduced by the Scottish Government, the Institute for Fiscal Studies concludes that “amongst the poorest 30% of households, those with children will see their incomes boosted by around a sizeable £2,000 a year” compared to families in England and Wales.²

Policies such as the Scottish Child Payment are projected to lead to a fall in the child poverty rate by 2023/24.³ We also welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to mitigate the UK Government’s benefit cap, which disproportionately impacts on single parents.

The Poverty and Inequality Commission finds that the Scottish Child Payment is driving most of the progress towards meeting the interim child poverty targets and recommend

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-second-year-progress-report-2019-20-annex-c-child-poverty-lone-parent-families/pages/4/>

² [Scottish Budget changes to tax and benefit system widen gap with rest of the UK, with higher taxes and more redistribution to poorer families | Institute for Fiscal Studies \(ifs.org.uk\)](#)

³ [Analysis of Scottish Government child poverty targets | FAI \(fraserofallander.org\)](#)

greater urgency of action on other commitments in Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, for example on childcare and employability support⁴. IPPR also finds that the Scottish Child Payment will need to increase to £40 in order to meet the interim targets.⁵

With one in four children in poverty, it is vital that the Scottish Government build on the success of these policies to inject more resources and urgency, including additional targeted interventions for families at greatest risk of poverty. Only by doing so will the government achieve its statutory targets and reduce deep inequalities which remain between different population groups⁶, including the specific disadvantages faced by single parent families.

Barriers facing single parent families

Children in single parent families are more likely to be living in poverty across the UK, at 49% compared to 30% of all children⁷, and at 38% in Scotland compared to 24% of all children⁸.

This higher rate of poverty is the result of a combination of factors, including:

- **Gender inequality.** 90% of single parents are women⁹, and the barriers and inequalities faced by single parent families are inextricably linked to gender equality.
- **Labour market inequality.** Single parents in work are consistently the family type most likely to face in-work poverty and are more likely to be working in a low-wage sector and on lower hours¹⁰. 48.2% of single mothers in paid work are in part-time work¹¹. Part-

⁴ [Child Poverty Delivery Plan progress 2022-2023 Scrutiny by the Poverty and Inequality Commission.pdf \(povertyinequality.scot\)](#)

⁵ <https://www.ippr.org/blog/poverty-doesn-t-have-to-be-inevitable-it-needs-political-will-and-investment-to-eradicate>

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/tackling-child-poverty-priority-families-overview/>

⁷ Department for Work and Pensions. 2021. [Households Below Average Income. Statistics on the number and percentage of people living in low-income households for financial years 1994/95 to 2019/20.](#)

⁸ Scottish Government. 2020. [Tackling child poverty: second year progress report – annex C.](#)

⁹ Labour Force Survey, 2022.

¹⁰ [UK Poverty 2020/21 – JRF](#)

¹¹ [Families and the labour market, UK – ONS, 2021](#)

time opportunities tend to be within lower-paid jobs and sectors which are female-dominated and often undervalued,¹² which contributes to the lower hourly average rate of pay received by women.¹³ There is limited availability of job opportunities that would allow single parents to meet their caring responsibilities and exit poverty, especially in regions where single parents are more likely to live¹⁴. Just 65.5% of single parents are in paid work, compared to 78.3% of mothers in a couple and 93.8% of fathers in a couple.¹⁵

- **Lack of affordable childcare.** For single parents, access to affordable, flexible, quality childcare is vital as means of enabling them to enter paid work and potentially lift their families out of poverty. Coram's Childcare Survey 2023 found that across the UK the cost of childcare is rising and there is a major gap in provision, which, in Scotland, was particularly stark for under 2s, disabled children, and school-age childcare.¹⁶ In 2022, research by OPFS found that 21.2% of participants were not able to afford childcare at all,¹⁷ and a Scottish Government survey found single parents were twice as likely as dual earner households to report significant difficulties paying for childcare.¹⁸
- **Social security.** Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that cuts to social security from 2010-20 left single parents among the most exposed to rising inflation.¹⁹ Women are twice as dependent on social security due to structural inequalities, and analysis from the House of Commons library shows that from 2010 to 2020, 86% of net 'savings' raised through cuts to social security and tax credits would come from women's incomes.²⁰ As of February 2020, 72% of households affected by the benefit cap were single parent families²¹.

¹² [Women, Work and Wealth in Scotland's Changing Economy – Scottish Women's Budget Group, 2022.](#)

¹³ [The Gender Pay Gap in the UK – ONS, 2021.](#)

¹⁴ [Freeing low-income single parents from in work poverty's grip – One Parent Families Scotland and JRF, 2021.](#)

¹⁵ Census 2021. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork>

¹⁶ [Childcare Survey 2023 – Coram.](#)

¹⁷ [Living Without a Lifeline – One Parent Families Scotland, 2022.](#)

¹⁸ [Parents views of early learning and childcare in Scotland, 2022.](#)

¹⁹ [Pre-pandemic relative poverty rate for children of lone parents - IFS, 2022.](#)

²⁰ [Gender Matters in Social Security \(engender.org.uk\)](#)

²¹ Department for Work and Pensions, 2020. [Benefit Cap Data to February 2020.](#)

- **Multiple inequalities.** Many single parent families are also impacted by multiple inequalities which increase their risk of poverty. Single parents are more likely than couple parents to be from black (9%) and mixed ethnic groups (3%), and are more than twice as likely to be disabled (33%)²² and are more likely to have a disabled child (35%)²³.
- **Being the sole earner and carer.** All of these are areas which impact disproportionately on single parent families because they start from a position of living in a one-income household and balancing sole childcare responsibilities with paid work. They have many of the same costs as a two-parent family to be paid for from one income. When children do not receive financial support from their other parent, or can't rely on receiving it regularly, this creates a huge strain for low-income single parents.

Priorities for Programme for Government

Every child should: grow up in a family with access to enough money to achieve a decent standard of living; live in a decent, secure, affordable and warm home; be able to thrive, learn and develop, regardless of their family income: grow up free from the threat of poverty.

In order to better support single parent families and lift children out of poverty, the Scottish Government should prioritise the following areas:

Increase income from social security

- Increase the Scottish Child Payment to a minimum of £30, as committed to by First Minister Humza Yousaf in his leadership campaign. In order to meet child poverty targets, an increase to £40 will be needed as soon as possible.

²² Labour Force Survey 2022. Analysis by Gingerbread.

²³ Census 2011. [Analysis by Contact](#).

- Target additional support through the Scottish Child Payment to families affected by the young parent penalty and two-child limit. Families with mothers under 25 and larger families are both priority groups in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, both face higher rates of poverty, and both are impacted by unfair UK social security policies.
- Ensure Best Start Grants are increased in line with inflation so they do not lose value. This provides vital support to families during their children's earliest years and we know these grants have already made a positive impact for many single parent families.
- Raise the qualifying earnings limit for the new Scottish Carers Assistance payment to ensure that carers can work at least 16 hours at National Living Wage.

Reduce costs for low-income families

- Urgently roll out free school meals to all primary school pupils and commit to introducing universal free school meals in secondary schools.
- Increase school clothing grants in line with inflation.
- Increase the school clothing grants income threshold in line with inflation and commit to rolling this out to all children whose parents receive Universal Credit.
- Put in place a moratorium on debt and arrears to public bodies in Scotland.
- Commit to provide funding for local authorities to write off existing debt for low-income households, and those with pre-school and primary school aged children not yet receiving free school meals.

Childcare

- In the first instance, accelerate progress towards commitments to expand universal childcare to one and two-year-olds and create a system of funded school age childcare.
- Urgent work should be carried out on how childcare can be provided more flexibly.
- Commit to a more radical childcare ambition including providing a universal funded entitlement of 50 hours per week for children aged 6 months and above that is free at the point of use for all families.
- Commit to a more ambitious target on pay for childcare workers, as part of a focus on ensuring a diverse and skilled workforce that is valued, fairly paid and gender balanced.

Labour market

- Support the public sector to create more quality, flexible vacancies (flexible in terms of offering hours that suit single parents and options such as job sharing; quality in terms of protecting them from poverty through fair wages which keep pace with inflation), directly and through procurement and economic development.
- Support employers in the private sector to create more quality, flexible vacancies.

Employability support

- Offer bespoke, holistic initiatives for single parents to move into, stay and advance in employment such as a Scotland-wide employability pathway specifically for single parents, taking account of intersectional inequalities and barriers.
- Provide fully funded opportunities for single parents to attain their first level 3 qualification, prior to their return to paid work and for those already in work.
- Employability Programme providers should guarantee to fully fund childcare costs for single parents undertaking their first level 3 qualifications.

Just transition to net zero

- Just Transition should be linked into employability initiatives, so that work to achieve net zero and work to reduce poverty supports each other. Without this interconnectedness there is a risk of reproducing and deepening inequalities.
- The Just Transition must include a recognition that investing in job creation in more carbon neutral sectors such as the care and childcare sectors – which are female dominated – is an important part of the transition to net zero.

Paid and unpaid care

Many single parents work in the care sector. The under-valuation of social care workers reflects the under-valuation of all care in Scotland²⁴, whether paid or unpaid, with too many single parents in low paid caring roles living in poverty.

A high proportion of single parents care for a disabled child - for too long, people who care for others, whether paid or unpaid, have been undervalued and under-rewarded. As a result, caring can result in significant personal and economic costs for individuals and their families, with carers more likely to live in poverty²⁵.

- Introduce a new National Outcome on valuing and investing in care and all those who provide it. A focus on care, care workers and unpaid carers is urgently required to ensure Scotland is a caring country.

Tax

- Use income tax powers to ensure the highest earners make a fairer contribution in the next Scottish budget. IPPR Scotland has estimated a new income tax band for higher earners could generate £257 million and lift 20,000 children out of poverty.²⁶
- Pursue more radical tax reform, including overhauling Council Tax and exploring new ways to tax wealth. This could raise substantial additional money, ensuring those with the highest incomes pay more while protecting those on the lowest.

²⁴ https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2022/briefing_220127_social_care.pdf

²⁵ <https://www.learningdisabilitytoday.co.uk/half-of-all-people-in-poverty-in-the-uk-are-disabled-or-carers>

²⁶ [Humza Yousaf's tax pledge could help to lift 20,000 children out of poverty, leading think-tank finds | IPPR](#)



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