

**Our social security
system is badly in
need of reform.**

**It is time for a system
which prevents poverty,
treats people with
dignity and respect
and supports everyone
to flourish.**

A MANIFESTO FOR CHANGE

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Our social security system is undergoing fundamental change. The value of basic benefits already falls well below internationally agreed definitions of poverty. Despite this, huge cuts to the welfare budget are plunging many into even deeper poverty and reinforcing inequality.¹ Radical restructuring is creating a system which is leaving more people without access to any support at all, whilst those who may qualify must engage with a system which lacks compassion and fails to treat them with dignity and respect.

The UK government's approach to simplifying welfare is undermined by increasing conditionality, means testing, and the erosion of a rights based approach to entitlement. The increasing characterisation of benefit claimants as undeserving – 'skivers' enjoying an overly generous system or worse, actively defrauding the system at the expense of hard working taxpayers; ignores the evidence about the reality of people's lives. This rhetoric is used to justify cuts and harsher conditionality. Many lone parents (the majority of whom are women), for example, are required to

engage in stressful work seeking activities despite inadequate childcare provision. Disabled people are forced to seek work in a competitive labour market where little is done to combat discrimination or aid accessibility. When, despite their best efforts, many fail to jump through these impossible hoops, they are sanctioned and have their benefits cut off entirely.

While individuals are blamed for not being in paid work, the real barriers to employment such as the lack of jobs, lack of affordable and suitable childcare, employer discrimination and our low wage economy are not tackled effectively. At the same time an immense amount of unpaid work in caring for children, for ill and disabled friends and relatives (most often done by women) or socially worthwhile volunteering goes unrecognised and unrewarded.

The need for a new approach to social security has never been more pressing and we are campaigning for the following key reforms:

1 Increase benefit rates to a level where no one is left in poverty and all have sufficient income to lead a dignified life

2 Make respect for human rights and dignity the cornerstone of a new approach to welfare

3 Radically simplify the welfare system

4 Invest in the support needed to enable everyone to participate fully in society

5 Make welfare benefits work for Scotland

WHAT WOULD THESE KEY REFORMS MEAN IN PRACTICE?

Increase benefit rates to a level where no one is left in poverty and all have sufficient income to lead a dignified life

- Levels of basic benefits should be increased with the aim of lifting all out of poverty in the short term and in the longer term matching Minimum Income Standards (MIS), calculated by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. MIS are based on what members of the public think is the minimum that is currently required to enable people to meet their needs and live with dignity
- Those who are ill or disabled should get additional help to cover the extra costs incurred through ill health or disability
- Help with housing costs must reflect the real costs of housing to the claimant.
- Provide better financial and other support for unpaid carers.

Make respect for human rights and dignity the cornerstone of a new approach to welfare

- Redesign the delivery of benefit and job seeking services and make them accountable at a local level to service users
- Put services users' needs - rather than profits - first, with the aim of ensuring that all claimants are treated with dignity and receive an excellent service
- Ensure that the design and delivery of social security takes into account the need to incorporate measures which tackle the discrimination, social exclusion and higher risk of being in poverty experienced by many sections of society.
- Redesign ill-health and disability benefits putting the claimant's needs at the heart of the process, with "fit for work" and disability assessments the responsibility of those best placed to have a full understanding of the person's health and disability

Radically simplify the welfare system

- Ensure that entitlement to benefit is based on equality of access and entitlement regardless of where someone lives. Non-means-tested support is simpler, easier to administer and does not suffer the stigma often attached to means-tested support. Increase the proportion of non means tested financial support by

- Reinstating universal child benefit
- Ensuring that a state pension is sufficient to enable all pensioners to live in dignity
- End age discrimination by extending entitlement to adequate disability benefit to older people.
- Ensure that entitlement to benefits has straightforward conditions which are based on people's circumstances and needs. Roll back punitive conditionality and sanctions which are ineffective, complex, costly and stigmatising.

Invest in the support needed to enable everyone to participate fully in society

- Make employment in benefit and job seeking support services more fulfilling and better rewarded.
- Give guaranteed access to a well-resourced wide range of not for profit employment services which prioritise sustainable outcomes for people.
- Ensure that those who are unable to work or have caring responsibilities get the support they need to engage in society fully (including, if appropriate, taking steps towards moving into paid employment) and are not required to engage in inappropriate work seeking activities.
- Invest in free or affordable, accessible, high quality childcare focused on the wellbeing of the child, as a right for all parents and carers enabling them to engage fully in society.
- Make childcare available to those in paid work, further education and training as well as carers and volunteers in recognition of the importance of education and unpaid caring work in society.

Make welfare benefits work for Scotland

- In Scotland, ensure that those areas of welfare which are devolved to Scotland are developed in line with the principles above.
- At a UK level, ensure that all welfare reform takes account of the different legislative framework in Scotland so that it is integrated with Scottish housing, childcare, education, social care, training and other key devolved areas of responsibility.
- In the longer term, and whatever the constitutional settlement, ensure that principles set out here underpin a new approach to social security wherever powers lie.

The fact that in a rich country like ours there are people who cannot afford to feed and clothe themselves properly or pay their bills is simply not acceptable, nor is it necessary, even during an economic crisis. In fact, when more and more people find themselves out of work or struggling on below poverty wages, adequate social security benefits are more important than ever. Of course, the proposals outlined above would require a sizable investment. However, this would lead to significant savings in the longer term, slashing the costs of poverty to society and removing barriers to paid employment.² Costs would also be substantially offset by the administrative savings generated by a radical simplification of the current system. In addition, insuring against the risks of ill health, disability or unemployment is something which everyone benefits from. We should all, as a society, take collective responsibility for this, ensuring that

costs are met in an equitable way through a fairer taxation system. Other European countries support a much more generous welfare system and there is no reason why we cannot afford to do likewise. This will benefit everyone - not just those on low income - a more equal society is one where everyone is happier and healthier and communities flourish.

The Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform was set up in 2006 and is a coalition of key third sector organisations, faith groups, trade unions and individuals from across Scotland, working together to campaign for a fairer social security system.

- 1 See for example Cribbs, Hood, Joyce and Phillips, 2013 *Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2013*, London, The Institute for Fiscal Studies
- 2 See for example Hirsch, 2008, *Estimating the Cost of Child Poverty*, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

MEMBERS INCLUDE:

Bipolar Scotland
Blackwood Housing Association
Capability Scotland
Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland
Children 1st
Children in Scotland
Church Action on Poverty
Energy Action Scotland
Engender
Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector
Glasgow Disability Alliance
Glasgow Homelessness Network
Hillcrest Housing Association
HIV Scotland
Homeless Action Scotland
Inclusion Scotland
National Autistic Society Scotland
One Parent Families Scotland
Oxfam
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
Public and Commercial Services Union Scotland

Quarriers
Save the Children
Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People
Scottish Association for Mental Health
Scottish Drugs Forum
Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
Scottish Homelessness and Employability Network
Scottish Poverty Information Unit
Scottish Trade Union Congress
Scottish Women's Aid
Scottish Women's Convention
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
Sense Scotland
Shelter Scotland
Terence Higgins Trust Scotland
The Action Group
The Stroke Association
The Iona Community
The Poverty Alliance
Turning Point Scotland
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To find out more about our campaigning and our Manifesto for Change visit: <http://www.cpag.org.uk/scotland/SCoWR>