



Call for Evidence on the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill for the Scottish Parliament's Social Security Committee

Submission from the Scottish Youth Parliament
March 2017

Introduction

SYP represents all of Scotland's young people. Our Vision for Scotland is of a nation that listens to and values the participation of children and young people. Our goal is to do our utmost to make this vision a reality. We see this as vital to ensuring Scotland is the best place in the world to grow up.

Our democratically elected members listen to and recognise the issues that are most important to young people, ensuring that their voices are heard by decision-makers. We provide a platform for young people to discuss issues that matter to them, and support them to campaign for the changes they wish to see at community, local and national levels.

SYP's Values are:

Democracy - We are youth-led and accountable to young people aged 14-25.

Rights - We are passionate about ensuring that young people are aware of their rights and ensuring that local and national government deliver policies that ensure those rights are fulfilled.

Inclusion - We are committed to being truly inclusive and work tirelessly to ensure that we represent young people from every community and background.

Political impartiality - We constructively engage with, and challenge, decision-makers from all political parties to ensure the voices of young people are at the heart of policymaking in Scotland.

Our approach

SYP welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee on the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill. Our 2015 National Campaign, *POVERTY: See It Change It*, aimed to raise awareness of child and youth poverty, and children and young people's right to an adequate standard of living. As part of the campaign, SYP surveyed nearly 1000 young people aged 12-25 to learn more about young people's perceptions of poverty.¹ In addition, in September 2016, with the support of the Scottish Government, SYP consulted with young people on the proposals set out in the Scottish Government's consultation on a

¹ The full report from this consultation, *It's Not a Choice*, can be accessed here: <http://tinyurl.com/hgjb7kl>



Child Poverty Bill for Scotland.² The SYP staff team facilitated two discussion groups made up of 15 young people between the ages of 14 and 25, with mixed experiences of poverty.³

Our response is based on the views of young people in Scotland gathered through these consultations.

Do you agree that statutory child poverty targets should be re-introduced for Scotland?

We support the re-introduction of statutory child poverty targets for Scotland. From our research into young people's perceptions of poverty, it is clear from many of the qualitative responses that young people see a strong relationship between poverty and rights. Many of the contributions from the young people who participated appear to equate living in poverty and its causes/impacts as a failure to defend their rights. As one young person noted, "[Children] are our future - the government have a duty to protect our future. Poor children do worse at school than their peers. All our young people deserve the right of equal opportunity."

Developing statutory targets demonstrates a welcome commitment from the Scottish Government to meeting its children's rights obligations; we agree with the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland that establishing these targets is consistent with the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations and in line with their duty in Part I of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.⁴

Appropriateness and scope of the 4 proposed targets

We welcome the introduction of income-based targets, and believe that for the most part, they are appropriate. Young people's views on the specific aspects of the targets are as follows:

Targets being income-based: Young people who took part in the Child Poverty Bill consultation focus groups unanimously agreed that income should be included when measuring poverty. The most important priority highlighted by young people when determining degrees of poverty was overwhelmingly considered to be income; "Money - it controls so much of what you do - it all comes down to that".

However, many young people agreed that using income alone would not provide a full assessment of poverty, and that the Scottish Government should be "looking at people as individual cases [...] who need different support". Some of the factors that young people felt were also important to consider alongside income were the costs of healthcare, childcare, and education, which some young people felt "should be included in income costs". As well as this, several young people also highlighted that debt should be acknowledged when assessing poverty, as "one big expense can push you into crisis".

² Scottish Government, *Consultation on a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland* (2016): <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00504079.pdf>

³ The full report from these focus groups can be accessed here: <http://tinyurl.com/jfcvuu6>

⁴ Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, *Response: a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland* (2016): <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/ufiles/Child-Poverty-response.pdf>



Targets based on after housing costs basis: With regards to the targets being measured after housing costs, all young people across both focus groups agreed with this proposal, commenting that this method is “more inclusive and accurate”.

Target percentages: With regards to the target percentages, a slim majority of the young people agreed with the proposed government targets: “I agree with all targets - all should be below the 10% mark”.

Targets timeframe: Young people largely agreed on 2030 as an appropriate timeframe, commenting, “By 2030 government targets should be met and new ones should be set”. Young people emphasised the importance of targets being achievable; as one young person said, “[Ending] Poverty by 2020 put people’s hopes up and it was never going to happen - it just creates a barrier between [elected officials] and the public”.

We note that the 2030 targets should not be seen as an end result in themselves; as the Children and Young People’s Commissioner points out, the ultimate aim should be for no child to grow up in poverty. It should be made explicit in the Bill that new targets will be set following the proposed targets being met.

Whether interim targets are needed

While young people broadly agreed with the 2030 targets, several thought that an emphasis should be placed on “interim goals/targets” and “small targets - little by little”. We believe that setting interim targets will help ensure that the 2030 targets remain on track; as several young people highlighted, creating targets far into the future made them more difficult to set and to achieve: “I think smaller targets are better - looking first at 2020, then 2030”.

The Scottish Government should consider including statutory interim targets in the delivery plans for the periods outlined in section 7 of the Bill.

The proposed arrangements for reporting progress towards meeting the targets and how best to hold the Scottish Government to account

Young people varied in how often they thought there should be a report on progress towards meeting the targets, however were in closest agreement on some form of report every one to two years.

Young people additionally highlighted that for the sake of transparency and checks, reports must be “accessible to all”, and made widely known to the public. Our research into young people’s perception of poverty displays a lack of awareness about the anti-poverty measures taken by governments, and how effective these have been. The Scottish Government should ensure that reports are young person-friendly and promoted to children and young people, so that children and young people are involved in holding the Government to account.

Although not in this Bill, the Scottish Government has committed to establishing a national poverty and inequality commission. What should this commission’s status and powers be in relation to this Bill?



We agree with the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland that there is a need for an independent body to provide expert scrutiny and oversight, including a duty to publish an annual report setting out its views on the progress made towards the income targets.⁵ The national poverty and inequality commission should fulfil this function. We endorse CPAG in Scotland's assertion that there should be legislative underpinning to ensure that this body is able to be critical of the government when needed.

In addition to considering the progress made towards meeting the income targets, the commission should consider how effectively the Scottish Government meaningfully involves children and young people with lived experience of poverty in its efforts to tackle child poverty. Young people who took part in the consultation focus groups asserted that when tackling poverty, it is essential to regularly consult young people on their views, particularly those affected by poverty. They asserted that this consultation should be included in reviews of poverty delivery plans at a local and national level. As experts of their own lives, young people need to be meaningfully involved in policies that affect them, and the Scottish Government has an obligation to fulfil this in line with the UNCRC Concluding Observation to "Establish structures for the active and meaningful participation of children and give due weight to their views in designing laws, policies, programmes and services at the local and national levels".⁶ The commission could play a valuable role in providing independent oversight of children and young people's participation; this function, along with the status and role of the commission, should be outlined in the Bill.

Several young people at the focus groups also felt that there should be increased representation of young people in "positions of power" as a means of tackling poverty. We believe that the commission should include a place at the table for young people with lived experience of poverty, to ensure that they are involved at a strategic level. SYP's membership is very diverse, with some of our members representing young people from Scotland's most deprived areas, and we would be delighted to work with the commission to support them in achieving this objective.

Contacts

Roseanna Macdonald
Public Affairs Officer, Scottish Youth Parliament
Roseanna.m@syp.org.uk
0131 557 0452
Visit us: www.syp.org.uk
Follow us on Twitter: @OfficialSYP

⁵ Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland, *CPAG in Scotland response to the Scottish Government's consultation on a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland* (2016):

<http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/CPAG%20child%20poverty%20bill%20responseUPDATED.pdf>

⁶ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland* (2016): <http://www.crae.org.uk/media/93148/UK-concluding-observations-2016.pdf>