

Call for Evidence on Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2026–2031

Consultation response from The Young Women's Movement

At The Young Women's Movement, we strive to support young women and girls across Scotland, ensuring they are connected to the policy decisions that impact their lives. As Scotland's national organisation for young women and girls' leadership and rights, The Young Women's Movement welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence and provide expertise on the urgent change needed to meet child poverty targets and reduce young women's poverty in Scotland. Like other national women's sector organisations, The Young Women's Movement believes that poverty is gendered - children's poverty is women's poverty. It is not possible to deliver the First Minister's mission on eradicating child poverty without taking targeted action to addressing the intersecting gendered inequalities which overwhelmingly cause harm to women and constrain their participation and outcomes in life.¹

Answers to questions

2. Are there other key strategic themes we should consider?

At The Young Women's Movement, we believe it is important that child poverty is not viewed as separate to women's poverty. A gendered analysis of poverty and inequality must be understood and addressed by targeted actions under each of the themes outlined. The ongoing cost-of-living crisis continues to cause profound harm to young women and girls across Scotland. In 2024, we published research with Scottish Women's Budget Group looking at the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on young women and girls. Our research shows that young women, and particularly young mothers, are at significant risk of deepening poverty and destitution without targeted interventions and support.²

¹ Joint Response from Close the Gap, Engender and Scottish Women's Aid to the Call for Evidence on Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2026-2031, <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Final-CtG-Engender-SWA-joint-response---call-for-evidence-on-the-Tackling-Child-Poverty-Delivery-Plan-2026-31.pdf>

² The Young Women's Movement and Scottish Women's Budget Group (2024), "'I'm just keeping my head above water': Young women's experiences of the cost-of-living crisis in Scotland", <https://youngwomenscot.org/research-reports/cost-of-living-crisis/> (Accessed 21 April 2025).

Through our research, which engaged with over 300 young women and girls from across Scotland, we found that more than 1 in 4 young mothers surveyed (26.7%) are unable to afford replacement clothes or shoes for their children, which increased to two-thirds (66.7%) when asked if they are unable to afford replacement clothes and shoes for themselves. Some young mothers told us they are skipping meals to ensure their children are fed.

One young mother under 25 told us: *“I’m a single parent and stay at home parent. I can’t get a job because I can’t get my son into nursery. He’s 2, I have no help to watch him while I try [to] work. There has been many of times my son has been the only one getting food, as I just simply can’t afford to buy the “cheap stuff” to feed myself too.”*

Young women are feeling trapped and financially strained due to the cost-of-living crisis, which significantly limits their opportunities and future aspirations. They are frustrated over not being able to live independently or own a home, even with steady employment or higher education. The rising cost of essential items such as housing, utilities, and food leaves them with little to no disposable income, resulting in a compromised quality of life. This situation forces difficult trade-offs, such as skipping basic needs like heating or eating, or even delaying motherhood, leading to feelings of anxiety, isolation, and an overall lack of autonomy.

One young woman told us: *“I will never be able to afford to have kids in this current climate at my current unfair rate of pay. I feel chained to unhealthy, unsafe jobs and putting my health and needs and happiness as second to work.”*

The continuing cost-of-living crisis has only exacerbated deep-rooted inequalities following years of austerity and hostile cuts that violate young women’s rights. To challenge and eradicate child poverty and women’s poverty, we must view both issues as inextricably interlinked. Poverty must be explored through an intersectional lens as women, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, are typically impacted more due to existing inequalities across all areas of life.³

To the first theme area, we would add that improving statutory maternity pay (SMP) and support for expectant, new and working mothers should be included as a specific aim. At the moment, SMP remains low and places significant stress on low-paid workers (typically young women) planning to start a family, with evidence showing that many young women are delaying or putting off motherhood because they simply can’t afford to have children within the current system.⁴ Whilst the UK Government sets the statutory rate, we ask that the

³ The Poverty Alliance and Scottish Women’s Budget Group (2022), ‘“It’s hard work being poor”: Women’s experiences of the cost-of-living crisis in Scotland’, <https://www.povertyalliance.org/its-hard-work-being-poor-womens-experiences-of-the-cost-of-living-crisis-in-scotland/>

The Young Women’s Movement and Scottish Women’s Budget Group (2024), ‘“I’m just keeping my head above water”: Young women’s experiences of the cost-of-living crisis in Scotland’, <https://youngwomenscot.org/research-reports/cost-of-living-crisis/> (Accessed 21 April 2025).

Scottish Government considers offering additional support through enhanced maternity pay or by increasing top-up payments for those who qualify for SMP.

As part of our research with Scottish Women's Budget Group, increasing SMP was specifically mentioned as important to young women, with some highlighting how low the current rate of pay is in relation to their working income, and expressing the impact this was having on their lives and their decision to start a family. From being unable to save to returning to work earlier than they would like, the impacts of a low SMP has far-reaching impacts on young women's ability to be financially secure and on their career prospects. Low SMP also places the onus on employers to provide company enhanced offers to subsidise pay. As a third-sector women's organisation, dependent on grant funding, it is very difficult to offer a competitive package for expectant and new mothers.

A statutory recognition of fertility treatments/periods of time off work to manage stress and last-minute hospital appointments for those undergoing these treatments would also be a welcome addition to this theme. Support for women from the earliest stages of a child's life, including pre-natal, is a vital step in ending the child poverty cycle.

The Young Women's Movement also suggests the inclusion of housing as another key strategic, standalone theme. In addition to the provision of affordable homes as stated in the second theme area, we would suggest that rent and mortgage caps and lowered caps on energy bills are explored as possibilities to tackling child poverty within the Plan.

To the fourth theme area, we would include more emphasis on improved youth work services, however we feel this could also be a standalone theme due to its importance in tackling child poverty. Over the last five years, funding for youth work has reduced significantly across the sector, which has led to the closure of youth work organisations, community hubs and reduced staffing across the sector. In real terms, this means there are fewer safe places for young people to meet, socialise and eat; there are less adults fulfilling safeguarding responsibilities in the lives of young people; and there are less positive role models to support and inspire children and young people as they develop into adulthood. This contrasts directly with the Scottish Government's aims to support every young person through *Getting It Right For Every Child* (GIRFEC) and *Every Child, Every Chance*. Increased and long-term funding for youth work, as well as an improved recognition of the importance of youth work in tackling child poverty, is vital and necessary.

It has been widely reported in both research and media, that instances in both online and in-person misogyny and violence against women and girls, and more generalised youth

violence, have increased significantly in recent years in Scotland.⁵ Trauma-informed practice and Adverse Childhood Experiences studies tell us that this rise indicates that many of our young people will face a higher likelihood of experiencing poverty throughout their lives as a result. Youth work is a proven and evidence-based way to break this cycle and should therefore be included as an explicit aim within the already noted themes or added as a standalone theme.

There is also scope for youth work to be considered as a statutory service for young people. Just as all children under the age of five are entitled to early years services, youth services could be considered as an entitlement as mainstream education isn't a suitable alternative for many young people, particularly those experiencing poverty. We are open to any discussions around what this might look like. For example, a youth worker could be made available in every secondary school and further education setting - a model which has proven successful in many Glasgow schools.⁶

As you think about each theme, noting the plan must set out measures for the purpose of meeting the 2030 child poverty targets, we would also be keen to hear your views on any or all of the following questions:

1. What is working well and what actions should Scottish Government and partners either continue to do or to do more of?

At The Young Women's Movement, we believe that the Scottish Government's focus on early years and holistic family support should be continued. The Scottish Child Payment has provided thousands of children and families, especially young mothers and single parents, with vital support, and we ask that the Scottish Government commits to offering this support in the long term.

Affordable childcare must become a key priority for the Scottish Government in their mission to tackle child poverty. The Young Women's Movement welcomes the provision of 1,140 hours of childcare for all 3 to 5-year-olds. As part of the new delivery plan, the Scottish Government could consider introducing 30-hour funding Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

⁵ No Knives Better Lives (2024), "'The Lassies Are No Feart': Understanding Violence Between Girls", <https://www.noknivesbetterlives.com/resources/the-lassies-are-no-feart/>; Zero Tolerance and Civic Digits (2024), 'Many Good Men: Young Scots' experiences of online misogynistic extremism and radicalisation', <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/Many-Good-Men.pdf>

⁶ Glasgow Life, 'Working with young people', <https://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/glasgows-learning/working-with-young-people>; The Young Women's Movement, 'Girls with Goals' youth programme, <https://youngwomenscot.org/our-programmes/girls-with-goals/>

with immediate effect after paid maternity leave and ensure free childcare provision for those groups experiencing poverty. We also believe that the new delivery plan should prioritise childcare for all children between six months and five years and develop affordable wraparound care for over 5-year-olds.

At The Young Women's Movement, we believe that the Scottish Government could do more to acknowledge the strong links between women's poverty and children's poverty in the next delivery plan. As noted by other women's organisations in their joint written submission, we urge the Scottish Government to revisit and build on the gender analysis in the first child poverty delivery action plan (2018-2022), which explicitly acknowledged the importance of tackling gender inequality in order to eradicate child poverty. The new delivery plan must include an explicit acknowledgement of poverty and gender as intertwined and addressed by targeted actions under each of the themes outlined.

We also ask that the Scottish Government continues to promote the 'real living wage' and 'living hours' approaches, ensuring procurement processes and other levers are used to encourage employers to be Fair Work employers.

2. Are there policies, actions or approaches that the Scottish Government and/or partners should either stop or do differently?

The Young Women's Movement welcomes any approach that improves funding support for young mothers and for organisations that support expectant and new mothers in work. This includes longer-term funding (3 years or more) and funds which provide core support for organisations to ensure staffing, rents, and other costs like insurance, can be covered to ensure organisations can redirect their energy and expertise to supporting families who engage with our work. As already mentioned, we believe it is important that child poverty is not viewed as separate to women's poverty and ask that the Scottish Government carefully considers this when drafting the new delivery plan.

3. Are there new policies, actions or approaches that Scottish Government should consider implementing?

The Young Women's Movement emphasise the importance of using an intersectional lens throughout its work in tackling child poverty. Gender inequalities are created and exacerbated by poverty. Only by recognising this explicitly and by tackling it directly through bold and gendered approaches, will poverty rates be significantly reduced across Scotland. A gendered analysis of poverty and inequality must be understood and addressed by targeted actions under each of the themes outlined. We defer to the work of national women's

organisations on how this can best be achieved as part of the tackling child poverty delivery plan.⁷

In response to Q6, we have included some calls for targeted measures to support young women and children experiencing poverty.

4. How can Scottish Government and partners work differently to ensure seamless, integrated supported for families? What prevents this?

At the Young Women's Movement, we welcome any change to funding priorities which welcome collaborative applications to reduce competition between third-sector organisations and improve joint-partnership working. The emphasis on shorter-term funding (e.g. 1 year) and calls for new ideas in applications in order to secure future funding, rather than using delivery models that we as the sector know work for our young women and families, means that organisations often end up competing for funding and can end up with reduced staff, hours and capacity to support families. Any opportunity to mobilise the collective voice and action of the third sector together would ensure integrated support is available.

We also support a holistic approach to tackling child poverty. No Wrong Door is an initiative in Glasgow which listens to individuals and families experiencing poverty, understands their needs, and provides holistic support that helps them achieve their aspirations for a brighter future.⁸ This network represents an important step in ensuring that children and families experiencing poverty receive the wraparound support they need. This approach reduces the likelihood of individuals being forced to retell their stories to many different organisations and service providers. The Young Women's Movement would support a nationwide implementation of this approach.

5. What more can we do to understand the challenges being faced by the family at greatest risk of poverty, including the six priority families identified to ensure their specific and interconnected needs are met?

The child poverty delivery plan's focus on family groups at greatest risk of poverty, including young mothers, is clearly designed to enable the targeting of resources to those disproportionately experiencing poverty. For this approach to be successful, the plan must employ an intersectional gendered analysis. Women's experiences of poverty are not universal, but rather shaped by the intersecting inequalities they face. As noted by national

⁷ Joint Response from Close the Gap, Engender and Scottish Women's Aid to the Call for Evidence on Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2026-2031, <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Final-CtG-Engender-SWA-joint-response---call-for-evidence-on-the-Tackling-Child-Poverty-Delivery-Plan-2026-31.pdf>

⁸ No Wrong Door, Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector, <https://gcvs.org.uk/policy/no-wrong-door/>

women's organisations in their response to this call for evidence, the next child poverty delivery plan must be cognisant of the relevance of gender to all priority groups.⁹

Furthermore, many individuals and families experiencing poverty face survey fatigue and feel they have to share their stories time and time again to be heard. The Scottish Government could speak directly to third sector organisations who are working with families experiencing and living with poverty every day to understand the challenges being faced by those at greatest risk of poverty through case studies, observations and reports. We all, collectively, must ensure that our practice is trauma-informed and sensitive to the needs of individuals and families and reduce the onus on them to tell us what poverty is and what it looks like.

We would also suggest that participation policies and feedback loops be improved so that if and when families experiencing poverty share their experiences, they are paid for their time and kept informed of final outputs and next steps to ensure their voices and experiences are respected and valued.

6. What targeted action could be taken to tackle inequalities faced by marginalised groups, to help raise their incomes and improve their outcomes? This could include specialist support for one or more groups.

We call on the Scottish Government to:

- Tackle the gendered experiences of low pay, poverty, occupational segregation and the gender pay gap as part of the plan to tackle child poverty. The undervaluation of women's work is a driver of women's in-work poverty, and therefore child poverty, and it is imperative that this is addressed throughout the next action plan.
- Introduce 30-hour funding Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) with immediate effect after paid maternity leave and ensure free childcare provision for those groups experiencing poverty. Work towards an entitlement of 50 hours per week of funded, good quality, flexible education and childcare for all children between six months and five years and develop affordable wraparound care for over 5-year-olds.
- Clearly set out the long-term vision and funding arrangement to facilitate the development of appropriate affordable housing and put in place measures to protect renters through the new Housing (Scotland) Bill.
- Review thresholds for access to means tested benefits at local and national level.
- Work with the UK Government to provide an adequate safety net for people experiencing poverty. The UK Government should increase Universal Credit basic rate to cover the cost of essentials (food, household bills and travel) in line with calls made

⁹ Joint Response from Close the Gap, Engender and Scottish Women's Aid to the Call for Evidence on Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2026-2031, <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Final-CtG-Engender-SWA-joint-response---call-for-evidence-on-the-Tackling-Child-Poverty-Delivery-Plan-2026-31.pdf>

by the Trussell Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation and end the 5-week period from the day you make the claim until you receive the support.

- Work with the UK Government to enhance statutory maternity pay and consider offering additional support through enhanced maternity pay or by increasing top-up payments for those who qualify for SMP.
- Work with the UK Government to implement the New Economic Foundation's proposal on a National Energy Guarantee which lowers and fixes the price paid by households on their essential energy needs.

We call on the Scottish Government and Local Authorities to:

- Invest in financial education and support services including promotion of support funds that are available such as the Scottish Welfare Fund.
- Ensure that quality gender analysis is used to inform budget decision making, enhancing transparency and that takes into account the needs and experiences of diverse young women.

For further information

Contact: Dr Rebecca Mason, Research and Policy Lead, The Young Women's Movement

Email: rebecca@youngwomenscot.org

About us

The Young Women's Movement is Scotland's national organisation for young women's feminist leadership and collective action against gender inequality. We value the power, and recognise the necessity, of working both intersectionally and intergenerationally to achieve change. Young women, girls and non-binary people who recognise themselves within this movement are at the heart of everything we do by participating, co-designing and leading our research, campaigns and programmes.