

CHILD
POVERTY
ACTION
GROUP

Impact report

2024/2025



Positive changes for children and families this year

- A new child poverty taskforce will publish a UK-wide child poverty strategy in 2025.
- The Scottish government announced it will effectively abolish the two-child limit in Scotland from 2026.
- Free school meals will be extended to all families getting universal credit in England from September 2026.
- Maintained sector nurseries are being expanded in England.
- A fairer level of deductions will allow households claiming universal credit to pay back debts at a lower rate.
- The UK government has made further investment in the household support fund and discretionary housing payments.
- More people will benefit from carer's allowance after a change to the earnings threshold.
- The UK government is investing in employment support.

CPAG in numbers

4 percentage point reduction in child poverty in Scotland

10 percentage point reduction in the rate of deductions people can have taken from universal credit

15,000 children will be lifted out of poverty in Scotland when the two-child limit is mitigated

30,000 people supported through our helpline for advisers

Spotlight on our work engaging with politicians and policymakers

This year saw the election of a new government at Westminster. In the pre-election period, we focused on keeping child poverty high on the agenda through generating media coverage. We also met with key MPs and advisers of different political parties. Significantly, the Labour party committed to deliver an ambitious child poverty strategy in its manifesto. In the run up to the election, the two-child limit in particular was high profile, getting coverage in debates. In one debate, there was pressure on the two main parties after all the other candidates came out against the two-child limit.

The new UK government announced a new Child Poverty Unit and Child Poverty Taskforce within 10 days of the election, inviting CPAG to meet ministers and then to engage in evidence gathering for the Taskforce. We ran two roundtables on income for ministers and officials. And we published a report alongside Save the Children informed by these roundtables and interviews with 40 experts about how the child poverty strategy should be implemented and the policies it should contain.

We have also played a significant role in ensuring the sector is as aligned as possible, holding the line on the importance of abolishing the two-child limit and benefit cap, the need for investment in social security more generally, the need to expand free school meals eligibility, and highlighting the importance of specifying targets in the strategy.

We have supported Changing Realities – a collaboration between parents and carers on a low income, the University of York and CPAG – with structured engagement with the Taskforce. This has included supporting parents to meet ministers and secretaries of state. In November 2024, 12 participants shared their powerful testimony about what needs to change and why at a meeting at 10 Downing Street with ministers and senior civil servants, a symbolically powerful moment.

Changing Realities outside No 10, November 2024. Participants also address the media, take part in campaign opportunities and speak at parliamentary events. Photo: Alex Holland



We have worked to promote what is working in the devolved contexts, publishing a State of the Nations report on what can be learned, and running an event in the House of Lords on the benefit of cash responses to poverty as exemplified by the Scottish child payment. We have also engaged at a local level within England, such as with individual councils, the Mayor of the North East and the Mayor of London. In London, we contributed to the evaluation of the first year of the universal primary free school meals programme, highlighting the many benefits of this approach, leading to a decision by the Mayor of London to further commit funding to this programme.



Normally the people who get through these doors have whole teams of public affairs and paid officials lobbying for them; but you have done it yourselves, with grit, determination and all the while facing the daily harm that poverty causes.

A special adviser commenting on the meeting at 10 Downing Street

We continue to focus our work on influencing the UK-wide child poverty strategy ahead of its publication in autumn 2025.

In Scotland, we have focused on the restoration of the overall value of children's benefits (with specific focus on the role of the Scottish child payment). We have engaged directly with the first minister and cabinet secretary on several occasions, as well as with the leader of Scottish Labour and senior spokespeople in other opposition parties, and with special advisers in order to ensure child poverty remains a top priority. The first minister has said child poverty is his 'first priority'. The recent child poverty figures show child poverty is falling in Scotland. The Scottish government has pledged to mitigate the two-child limit by 2026. We have worked to ensure a Scotland perspective informs the new UK government's child poverty thinking.

In Wales, we presented at the Welsh government's Child Poverty Conference, met with its Child Poverty Strategy external advisory group, and regularly attend the Child Poverty Strategy External Reference Group with officials. The future generations commissioner has called on the Welsh government to expand universal free school meals to children in secondary schools. Plaid Cymru has pledged a child payment similar to the Scottish child payment if elected. Our senior education policy officer has been appointed chair of the children's commissioner for Wales' advisory group.



Delivering our objectives

We maintained focus throughout the year on our priority ask for the child poverty strategy – the abolition of the two-child limit. The policy is the biggest driver of rising child poverty, so removing it is vital to start to reduce child poverty. We have used moments like the anniversary of the policy, party conferences and the autumn budget to draw public attention to the impact of the policy on children, and have worked closely with others including the End Child Poverty Coalition and Save the Children for maximum effect.

We have generated new insight on the impact of the policy on child poverty, with our analysis showing that 109 children a day are being pulled into poverty by this policy alone. We undertook interviews with families affected, publishing these in a report (Things will only get worse) to highlight the harms of the policy and why the new government needs to scrap it or be left with a legacy of worsening child poverty.

In addition to our public campaigning, we have been advocating strongly behind the scenes, meeting MPs, mayoral teams, and other political figures to advocate for our position and why it's a priority issue.

After sustained pressure from CPAG in Scotland and others, the Scottish government committed to mitigate the effects of the two-child limit as far as possible by 2026.

We have also continued to highlight the impact of the benefit cap, and the need to scrap it. This includes our work with academics on the Benefit Changes and Larger Families project, and with Shelter and Women's Aid showing how the survivors of domestic abuse are particularly affected.

A billboard calling for an end to the two-child limit, Labour party conference, 2024
Photo: Mark Gowlett @ MMG



The Labour manifesto promised a review of universal credit. Drawing on our welfare rights and policy expertise we published our priorities that would make the most difference for families. Some require investment, but some are cost neutral. The recommendations are on adequacy, the design and function of universal credit, and universal credit's relationship to work. In its first Budget, the UK government reformed deductions in line with what we have long called for – reducing the rate to 15 per cent of the standard allowance in universal credit.

We informed the debate on the proposed changes to sickness and disability benefits. The changes initially included large cuts to sickness and disability benefit rates and tightened eligibility criteria which would have resulted in a net reduction in social security expenditure of £5 billion a year by 2029/30. We pointed out that this would have been the biggest cut to sickness and disability benefits in a generation, pushing 50,000 children into poverty, and reducing living standards for many more. Our analysis, which generated significant concern among MPs, showed that the £5 billion cut by 2029/30 masked the long-term impact of the changes. We briefed MPs throughout the debates. Many of the changes in the Bill were removed due to MPs applying pressure on the government. But the cut to the health element of universal credit for future claimants remains, which will have a sizable impact on those who need this support in the future.

Our Strengthening Social Security in Scotland project, funded by The Robertson Trust is identifying why families are missing out on the Scottish child payment and other Scottish national and local family payments, highlighting where the payments are creating financial uncertainty for families. This includes conducting research with frontline advisers, parents and carers. We are working with the University of York and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) as policy partners in the Family Finances project to better understand the impact of the Scottish child payment and ensure policy lessons are heard at Holyrood and Westminster.

Our Early Warning System gives us a better understanding of how changes to the social security system are affecting the lives of children and families. Its evidence and expertise informed the development and amendment of the Social Security (Scotland) Amendment Bill, securing significant redrafting, amendment and changes to guidance that improve the effectiveness of the Scottish social security system. It also secured changes to the Scottish welfare fund.

We have worked extensively on the Children's Wellbeing and School's Bill, providing oral evidence to the Public Bill Committee and the Education Select Committee. The Bill makes positive changes to tackle school uniform costs and to introduce free breakfast clubs in primary schools in England, which began to be rolled out in April 2025. While highlighting that much more is needed to reduce child poverty, we welcomed these changes as recognition that school costs remain prohibitive for many families.



The Cost of the School Day in Scotland continues to support schools and local authorities to remove or reduce financial barriers to education, including through the Cost of the School Day Voice network. The network now has members in more than 320 schools. In March we organised an event for members of the network to meet the cabinet secretary for education and skills to share findings from their 'Big Question' on how lack of money affects their education, with particular focus on food, school trips, and what helps them feel ready to learn.

In Wales, our Cost of the School Day – Every voice heard project (funded by the National Lottery Community Fund) helps schools and local authorities to identify and overcome cost barriers to education, so that all pupils can have the same school experience. We have introduced Youth Voice Champion groups in three schools. Young people are advocating for the changes they want to see.

Beyond the school gates, our London Youth Panel members have met with the Low Pay Commission, helping secure a higher minimum wage for younger workers. Members also made a submission to the Department for Education's Curriculum and Assessment Review. A panellist also spoke at Labour party conference, and one contributed to the 'reverse select committee' parliamentary event, questioning members of the work and pensions and education committees on tackling child poverty.

We continue to share our evidence on poverty and education, tackling poverty in the classroom, free school meals and stigma with teachers, including through an ongoing partnership with the NEU and events with the Confederation of School Trusts. We have reached teachers from those early in their career to heads.

Our authoritative analysis and relentless campaigning on free school meals continued this year, contributing to the announcement in June 2025 that free school meals would be expanded to all children in families in England receiving universal credit in September 2026. We added to our evidence base further through the lived experience evaluation we undertook on the roll out of universal primary free school meals in

London. Among our findings was that the policy is easing the pressure on family budgets, with families living on low incomes benefiting the most.



My mum tells me she can spend money on trips and more things at school as she noticed the [dinner] money stopped coming from her account.

Year 5 pupil who receives universal primary free school meals in London

We continue to deliver our highly-valued second-tier service for advisers who support the public with issues around their benefits, and the demand has been significant. Available by phone and email, our free expert social security advice lines are open five days a week for frontline workers which sometimes includes MPs' caseworkers, helping people get the social security support they need. We run a bespoke service for Trussell, supporting advisers working in food banks. CPAG Welfare Rights is the online home of all our welfare rights information, advice and tools. These services help people get the social security support they need, maximise family incomes and reduce child poverty. We continue to undertake legal test cases to make improvements to the social security system as well as help make the case for wider reform.

The positive changes we have achieved this year were made possible thanks to supporters like you. We are grateful to nearly 2,000 individuals and organisations who donated or raised funds, 892 members and nearly 30,000 supporters who contributed to our efforts in other ways to prevent and end child poverty, and to our many funders and corporate partners. For every £1 of our expenditure in 2024/25, 92p was spent on our charitable activities.

Thank you. We hope you will continue to support us in whatever way you can.

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty. It doesn't have to be like this. We use our understanding of what causes poverty and the impact it has on children's lives to campaign for policies that will prevent and solve poverty – for good. We provide training, advice and information to make sure hard-up families get the financial support they need. We also carry out high-profile legal work to establish and protect families' rights. CPAG is a charity registered in England and Wales (registration number 294841) and in Scotland (registration number SC039339), 30 Micawber Street, London N1 7TB.

