

Give me Five Campaign Briefing



Give Me Five is a coalition of faith groups, children's charities, anti-poverty groups and trade union groups, supported by the Children and Young People's Commissioner, campaigning since 2016 for a top up to child benefit of at least £5 per week.

We believe this budget represents an opportunity to lift thousands of children out poverty. The Scottish Government should commit to topping up child benefit by £5 a week.

Summary

- We strongly welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to introducing a new income supplement, however families struggling now cannot wait until 2022 for this.
- A universal approach such as child benefit top-up is less complex and less expensive to administer than targeted or means-tested approaches, and ensures that the payment reaches the families who need support. As well as the simplest and most efficient way of boosting family incomes, it represents a stable source of income that helps protect children's wellbeing.
- We urge all MSPs to prioritise tackling child poverty when considering the budget and commit to a child benefit top up of £5 a week. There is no greater priority than ensuring all families have the resources needed to give children the best possible start in life.

The need for an income supplement

- We strongly welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to introducing a new income supplement for families on low incomes.¹ However, while recognising that the Scottish Government is undertaking a process of evaluating options for this, we are concerned that the stated timescale for delivering this – by 2022 - is not reflective of the urgency required.
- More and more children and their families will be pushed into poverty in the coming years, particularly as the benefit freeze and universal credit rollout continue to have an impact. Almost one in four (230,000) of Scotland's children are officially recognised as living in poverty,² which is higher than in many other European countries.³ This is also projected to rise significantly.⁴
- Investment in child benefit and child tax credit between the mid 1990's and 2010 was a central factor behind historically and internationally unprecedented reductions in child poverty.⁵ Cuts in the value of child benefit and tax credits since 2010 are a key driver in the forecast rise in child poverty. Child benefit will have lost 23% of its real value by 2020, compared with 2010, due to sub-inflationary uprating and the freeze.
- Analysis suggests a £5 a week top up for every child would lift thousands of children out of poverty in Scotland.⁶ It would also boost the incomes of families still below the poverty line, and provide

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/child-chance-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2018-22/>

² [Latest 2016/17 Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland figures, CH 15, table showing: relative poverty in Scottish households with children \(AHC\) 1994/5 to 2016/17, www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/03/3017/downloads \(See Associated tables\)](#)

³ The latest Eurostat figures (2016) show that rates of child poverty are higher in the UK than in Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Hungary, Finland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland and Norway. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=...>

⁴ Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2017-18 to 2021-22, (Institute for Fiscal Studies) page 15, www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/comms/R136.pdf

⁵ CPAG (2016) Poverty in Scotland 2016: Tools for Transformation.

⁶ <http://jonathanbradshaw.blogspot.co.uk/2017/10/analysis-of-impact-of-increases-to.html> ; <https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/child-poverty-in-scotland>

protection against poverty for all families. An additional £5 per week could cover seven nutritious breakfasts of cereal, milk, fruit juice and a banana; or over two months, a good quality winter coat or enable children to take part in a school trip or activity each week.

- Children born into poverty today should not have to wait for three years to be freed from that poverty. If we want to realise our shared vision of a Scotland where every child has every chance, then we must use the budget to bring forward the income supplement; families simply cannot wait.



The benefits of a universal approach

Whilst there is always a balance to be struck between universal and targeted approaches to supporting family incomes a universal approach has a number of clear benefits:

- **Universal benefits are far simpler to administer.** The more a payment is targeted or has conditions placed on it, the more complicated it is to deliver. With administrative complexity, error and delay in the delivery of means tested benefits now a key reason that people are ending up in acute income crisis,⁷ child benefit provides families with secure, reliable protection.
- **Less expensive to deliver.** As well as the simplest and most efficient way of boosting family incomes, it also represents a good option financially as means-tested benefits tend to be significantly more expensive to deliver.
- **Increased take-up rate.** The near universality of child benefit and the simplicity of making a claim ensures that take-up rates are consistently high (94% in 2015/16).⁸ The increased complexity and barriers that surround targeted or means-tested approaches lead to lower take-up for families who should be receiving payments.
- **Stable and reliable source of income.** Child benefit supports families in and out of work – creating no problems when parents take up work or increase their hours. As circumstances change it remains a stable and reliable source of income to help with the costs of bringing up children. This is particularly significant given that over 60% of those children in poverty live in working households.⁹
- **Money is spent on children.** Research suggests that child benefit is spent on children¹⁰ – helping to protect their wellbeing when household budgets are under increasing pressure.
- **Not affected by two-child limit:** Child benefit continues to be paid to all children, whereas families who make a new claim for universal credit only receive the child element for two children per family.

What it means to parents and carers

The Poverty Alliance surveyed parents with lived-experience of poverty to ask what topping up child benefit would mean for them.

- *“I have two kids, so £10 a week extra could allow us to buy fresh fruit and hopefully not rely on foodbanks so much”.*
- *“£5 per week extra for each of my three children could go towards replacing shoes as they grow so fast. It’s embarrassing for the kids to go to school with their shoes falling apart but at the moment I just can’t afford to replace them. Replacing them in the past has meant sacrificing on heating, or me not eating much that week. That £15 a week extra would really help me”.*

⁷ Emergency Use Only: Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK, CPAG, Oxfam, Trussell Trust, Churches Against Poverty, 2015

⁸https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666846/Child_Benefit_Child_Tax_Credit_and_Working_Tax_Credit_Take-up_rates_2015-16.pdf

⁹ <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/poverty-income-inequality-scotland-2014-17/>

¹⁰ A poll of 642 child benefit recipients found that spending priorities for child benefit included clothes and shoes (51%), food (26%) and education and related items (16%), see [Save Child Benefit](#) CPAG 2012

- “The extra £5 would be great for giving kids an out of school activity, and keep kids active”.
- “I’m getting excited thinking I could maybe even manage to try and save £5 per week as that’s £260 per year and that could help give us a wee family weekend in a caravan somewhere. My children have never had a holiday, or even been out of this town and that makes me really sad”.
- “£5 a week extra for my family would mean some weeks saying yes instead of no to my child”.



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