# CHILDHOOD MATTERS SERIES
# YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON CHILD POVERTY

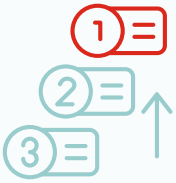
Save the Children.

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## KEY INSIGHTS



85% of young people are worried about child poverty




Tackling child poverty is the top priority for young people



Only 1 in 4 young people are confident the government will do enough to tackle child poverty

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Save the Children Scotland makes sure that children's and young people's voices are heard and that their views are acted upon. In the recent Scottish Parliament elections, many children and young people did not get a say in the outcome because they are not eligible to vote, while decisions over the next 5 years will have a lasting impact on them personally as well as the Scotland they grow up in.

That is why we teamed up with Young Scot to find out what matters most to young people so that we can share this with decision-makers and strengthen the voices of young people in policymaking.

## WHAT DID WE DO?

We used Young Scot's Truth About Youth survey to ask over 2,600 people aged 11 to 25 about their priorities. The full results from this survey were published in Young Scot's **Truth About Youth: Our 2026 Insights Survey**.

We asked young people what they think the new Scottish Government should focus on most urgently, what their thoughts are on the issue of child poverty in Scotland, if they think that the Scottish Government is doing enough to tackle child poverty, what they think politicians could do so children in Scotland don't live in poverty, and what their top priority would be.

The survey captured perspectives from every local authority with equal participation from young people across different income levels. Care experienced young people (12%), young carers (21%) and young people from different ethnicities were also well represented.

# WHAT DID YOUNG PEOPLE SAY?

**Young people are really worried about child poverty**: 85% believed that child poverty was a big problem in Scotland. They also deemed it to be the most important issue for the new Scottish Government to tackle.

**Many young people also have first-hand experience of poverty** with 62% knowing families in their area experiencing child poverty. This is not an abstract topic for them, they see the impact it has on their friends, neighbours and schoolmates.

When we asked young people what they thought the government should be doing in its first 100 days, **'tackling child poverty and inequality' was the top priority;** and 50% selected this as one of their top two priorities. A further 39% would prioritise making everyday items like food cheaper. Child poverty emerged as an issue that is more important to children and young people than issues including the NHS (at 41%), Mental Health (29%), education (19%), taking action on climate change (18%), and growing the economy (9%).

While child poverty is the most important issue for young people, they also overwhelmingly felt that not enough is being done to tackle it. Almost half (43%) categorically felt that **not enough was being done** to eradicate it, while another third (34%) believed that some action was being taken, but more needed to be done. At the same time, only 3% deemed that actions currently taken to tackle child poverty were working.

Young people also shared a range of views on what politicians should do to make sure that children and young people don't live in poverty. They favoured measures that would impact them directly such as free food at schools and colleges and help for young people finding jobs. They also included measures that young people may have less direct experience of, such as increasing social security, family support and childcare which all ranked relatively highly.

**What should politicians do so children and young people don't live in poverty?**



**81%**
free food at school and college



**66%**
help young people find jobs



**62%**
make childcare more affordable and flexible



**59%**
improve mental health services



**57%**
targeted help for families at risk of poverty



**55%**
ensure everyone has a good quality home



**50%**
increase benefits such as the Scottish Child Payment

Young people also shared further thoughts on what needs to happen such as the importance of safe and good homes, jobs for young people, decent wages and reducing the cost of living.

Worryingly, only 1 in 4 were confident that the next Scottish Government will make sure that children and young people don't experience poverty (26%).

> "Minimum wage should be the same as the living wage." (Young person)

> "Reduce the cost of living so that we can actually afford food again." (Young person)

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

**Tackling child poverty is the top priority for young people in Scotland,** ahead of the NHS and education. They are acutely and personally aware of the everyday impact it has for the lives of far too many children and their families.

Young people recognise that child poverty is a systemic challenge for Scotland which needs complex and sustained action across a range of measures. They are acutely aware of the connection between poverty and not having access to good affordable housing and jobs, as well as the increased cost of living.

> "The Scottish government should make sure all young people have a safe home to go to no matter what."
> (Young person)

> "Listen more to people that are actually in poverty than people who are comfortable."
> (Young person)

Young people recognise that it's crucial to listen to those affected by poverty for identifying solutions and making sure they work, but also so that people feel represented and listened to.

Some of the measures that young people identified as helping to tackle child poverty were access to good quality homes, free food in schools, colleges and universities, better mental health services and increased support through benefits such as the Scottish Child Payment.

> "Definitely help younger people find more jobs it's so hard to get a job as a 16-year-old who needs the money."
> (Young person)

Young people are not confident that the Scottish Government will make sure that children and young people don't experience poverty, and many say that decision-makers simply are not doing enough to tackle child poverty. There is a clear need for politicians to rebuild trust with this next generation of voters, by setting out how they will improve the lives of children and build a better Scotland for everyone.

> "The issue [of child poverty] is incredibly complex and inter-layered with other societal issues, which suggests a more structural issue within policy."
> (Young person)

## CONCLUSIONS

**It is vital that we see election commitments translated into urgent action on child poverty that young people can see and feel.** Far too many young people feel left behind, well aware that families are struggling to afford the basic essentials that make up a good childhood. Tackling child poverty is not just a moral mission: it is an opportunity to rebuild trust with young people and the public in general by taking action that will make a real difference to their lives, and recognise this as an investment in building a better and fairer Scotland for everyone.

**Young people want to see action not just promises and words**, and actions need to have an impact which is felt by children and young people. Scotland's children cannot wait. We need to get today's decisions right to build a better future for everyone.

**Children and young people must be at the heart of the debate on identifying the decisive action we need to tackle child poverty.** Their voices and the voices of those affected by poverty need to be heard, acted upon, and be part of delivering the change for children and childhood that we need.

## ABOUT TRUTH ABOUT YOUTH

Young Scot's Truth About Youth report draws on its annual youth insight survey, which gives young people across Scotland the opportunity to share their views and experiences on a wide range of topics, helping to inform Young Scot's work and that of valued partners.

The survey combines a core set of questions, providing a consistent basis for tracking young people's views over time, with 'pulse' questions exploring topical issues and emerging priorities. This enables young people to share their perspectives on issues that matter to them, from child poverty and inequality to their experiences of everyday life.

## ABOUT SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children works to make sure that families have the money, services and power to end child poverty, so that every child grows up loved, safe, happy, respected, full of hope and with an equal chance to fulfil their potential. We want to make sure that no child experiences poverty, that they grow up in communities that support them to thrive and that children's views are valued and acted on. We do this by helping to build communities of people who care about children, listen to what's important to them and work together to make things better for them.

To find out more about this research, and our work across Scotland, please contact Ben Thurman, Public Attitudes Campaign Manager, b.thurman@savethechildren.org.uk or Stefanie Keir, Senior Policy and Research Manager, s.keir@savethechildren.org.uk.