



**Save the  
Children**

# Save the Children 2024-25 Budget Briefing

**‘As soon as you find out you’re pregnant, you just want to love and protect this bairn’ (Mother, Dundee, 2023)**

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## Children’s futures start with the choices we make today

Throughout 2023, Save the Children in Scotland has spoken with more than 120 parents and 40 young people experiencing poverty. Their stories and experiences shape our policies and campaigns. Ahead of this critically important Scottish Budget, we believe that MSPs should hear directly from those who will be most affected by budgetary decisions. So, this budget briefing centres the voices of lived experience.

We know that the cost of living crisis is ongoing and is still crippling for families living on low incomes, despite it falling off the front pages. Rising costs continue to make life extremely challenging for those families who were already struggling to make ends meet. The stories we have heard are heart-breaking and underline how vitally important it is that spending commitments in the Scottish Budget 2024-25 prioritise children in poverty; not just today, but in the longer term.

The 2030 Child Poverty targets are legally binding and must be met. But this is about much more than numbers and targets. **We need to make choices now that will deliver on both the numerical commitment and the aspiration of the legislation: a Scotland free from child poverty.** Political choices must be made that sustainably drive down child poverty levels to give every child in Scotland an equal opportunity to thrive.

Save the Children contributed to and fully supports the [End Child Poverty Coalition \(ECP\) Budget Briefing](#) published a few weeks ago. The ECP briefing contains a range of well evidenced calls but most critically, it urges the Scottish Government to:

- Build on existing investment in the Scottish Child Payment by increasing this to at least £30 in this budget, as committed to by the First Minister during the SNP leadership election, with a view to reaching £40 by the end of this parliament.
- Apply a robust test across the entire Scottish Budget: will this meaningfully support Scotland’s child poverty ambitions?

[Evidence](#) shows that it is better for individuals, communities, society and the economy for governments to *prevent* poverty rather than respond to it. We know that the impacts for children who experience poverty can last a lifetime and cut across education, mental and physical health, employment and wellbeing. **Children cannot and must not be the collateral damage of a tough fiscal environment. This parliament made a cross-party commitment to drive down child poverty – this budget must honour that commitment.**

## Our conversations with parents

Our conversations with parents illustrated how difficult life can be for families on low incomes. We know that parents will always prioritise their children, making sacrifices to ensure they can provide for them. But for many families there is nothing left to cut back on. Families universally welcomed the Scottish Child Payment (SCP) and believe it is making a difference. But they told us that the cost of living crisis and inflation means this money simply does not go far enough.

**“When I go shopping, just a standard food shop, when I leave, I feel guilty because I have spent so much money only on food.”** (Parent, Renfrewshire, 2023)

**“When it was just me and my other half, we were on £30 a week for the full food shop, now with kids, it’s £70 a week.”** (Parent, Dundee, 2023)

**“I sat and made a list of everything I need. I was thinking am I going to be able to afford this? There are so many unknown costs that I didn’t budget for.”** (Parent, Dundee, 2023)

**“[The SCP] ‘you can use it towards taking the kids out for the day’ [but] you are not getting its intended use because you are cutting back on so many things”** (Parent, Renfrewshire, 2023)

**“Everything has gone up...extra money is managing us through [however] because everything went up, they [social security benefits] are not actually getting you any further than what you were previously”.** (Parent, Renfrewshire, 2023)

**“They’ll [the government] throw some money in, they will hope it [the household financial situation] gets better – but it doesn’t get any better, just throwing money in doesn’t make it better. You need to reduce other things as well”.** (Parent, Renfrewshire, 2023)

Families need a secure, stable and adequate income in order to plan and make the best choices for their children. It is heart-breaking to hear parents talk about the guilt, worry and

anxiety caused by poverty, and the impact that this can have on their children and on their own mental health.

**“When I go shopping, just a standard food shop, when I leave, I feel guilty because I have spent so much money only on food”. (Parent, Renfrewshire, 2023)**

**“I don’t buy healthier snacks; they are too expensive.” (Parent, Dundee, 2023)**

**“Mum guilt is so hard anyway, but not being able to afford to do things with them makes me feel horrible. I never want to have to say, ‘I can’t afford it.’” (Parent, Dundee, 2023)**

**“If we’re going through a bit of financial pressure... It’s more like, ‘Look, I just don’t have the time right now’, or you get a little bit snappy. When we have these environmental pressures... that affect our emotions... that’s when we find it hard - we can’t be the parents we know we are.” (Parent, Highland, 2023)**

It is important to emphasise that ending child poverty is not solely about enhanced social security payments. The parents we speak with want access to a range of other services. Many want access to fair work but also need a flexible, responsive childcare system that supports them to make the most of work or training opportunities. Too often, we heard that the system is working against parents on low incomes and that navigating services continues to be complex and inaccessible.

**“I was working for £5 per week, the rest paid for childcare. I’ve to work hard, someone else looks after child, all for the sake of £5 per week? Employers always want someone who can come in at a drop of a hat but when you’re a parent you can’t, you need to plan your day, plan your childcare.” (Parent, Scotland 2023)**

**“Took couple of years to find a job because employers kept saying naw you’re not flexible.” (Parent, Scotland, 2023)**

**“Now looking at a whole new career because been out the work force for 10 years and cannot go back to teaching, all knowledge out of date.” (Parent, Scotland, 2023)**

Poverty is preventing children and families from participating fully in society and being able to thrive. Families spoke to us about key public services – particularly mental health - that are simply out of reach. This was compounded by an awareness of the importance of early learning environment and access to play, particularly for the youngest children.

**“Transport is another issue... if you really want to go out maybe apart from to our local park... you need to take the bus... which costs like £5.40... I only do it once in a while.” (Mother, Glasgow, 2023)**

**“Why do you have to be minted to take your baby swimming?”** (Mother, Dundee, 2023)

**“The first year is the most important, that’s when they build a secure attachment with their family. That shouldn’t be restricted because of income.”** (Mother, Dundee, 2023)

Finally, we heard that accessible and compassionate service provision *can* be a lifeline for families, helping them access information and entitlements. But experiences of interacting with public services is mixed and we also heard from parents who found accessing services to be daunting, complicated and added to their stress and anxiety.

**“I’m quite an anxious person - I’d rather not go through the stress of following up with the government, I’d honestly rather not do it.”** (Parent, Dundee, 2023)

**“Just being more aware of what entitlements you’re entitled to... That took a lot of stress off me... One of the Health Visitors telling us about the benefits system, helping me sort that all out, took [away] that huge stress of ‘oh my gosh, we’re going to live on the streets’.”** (Mother, Highland, 2023).

The priorities for parents living on low incomes should not come as a surprise. We know that despite many positive policies and initiatives, families need further support to meet the demands of ever rising costs. Many parents tell us that they want access to fair work, flexible childcare and public services that allow them to participate fully in society. These priorities are not new. **But we hope that hearing the voices of parents will focus the minds of decision-makers in using this Scottish Budget to truly shift the dial on child poverty.**

## Young people

The final word of this briefing comes from a group of young people. In June 2023, Save the Children Scotland and [Aberlour Children’s Charity](#) held an event in Glasgow for young people called “Imagining a Future Without Poverty”. The 47 young people who attended all had experience of low incomes and were aged between 12-17.

We asked them, **‘If you were First minister for the day, what would you do?’** Their answers show a clear set of priorities and offer a useful blueprint for how the Scottish Government should use this Scottish Budget to drive down child poverty.

- **“More money for families that need it the most.”**

- “Children and young people more involved in decisions that affect them, how can we ensure we are incorporating the UNCRC when participating with children and young people.”
- “Valuing family time and protecting this time from financial pressure- 4 day working week and flexibility from employers.”
- “Accountability - we want to hold Scottish Government to account for the ambition they have in place for children and young people.”

## Contact

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## Find out more

- [Tipping the Scales: The social and economic harm of poverty in Scotland](#) (IPPR, JRF, Save the Children, 2023)
- [Better for Babies: Ending poverty among families with babies](#) (Save the Children, 2023)
- [Parents' experiences and views on supporting early learning and development at home](#) (Save the Children, 2023)

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