



MAKING CARE COUNT IN SCOTLAND

INVESTING FOR A JUST, CARING AND GREEN RECOVERY

JULY 2020

“Some may get back to whatever normal looks like – for others though, the shadow of Covid-19 will be hanging over our heads for a long time. That may be through continued isolation or it may be through deeper poverty or poorer physical and mental health.”

Lynn Williams, unpaid carer¹

This briefing explores the link between the under-valuing of care work in Scotland and a growing gendered poverty crisis. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate in Scotland, Britain and Globally. It outlines how women provide most paid and unpaid care in Scotland and examines the context for those with different types of caring responsibilities. The paper amplifies the voices of people providing care, while reviewing the evidence and priorities of those working to support them. It details emerging evidence on the impact of the coronavirus crisis and makes a series of recommendations for the Scottish Parliament to better value and invest in care. Protecting people providing care from poverty, and valuing their contribution, must be at the heart of a Just, Caring and Green Recovery in Scotland.

KEY MESSAGES

- **We have one simple ask of governments across Britain: act now to end poverty for carers, paid and unpaid, by investing in care, and creating the care jobs that will power a Just, Caring and Green Recovery.**
- **Care, Covid and women:** The coronavirus crisis has placed yet more pressure onto households and women who were already at breaking point after years in which the costs and responsibility for care have shifted from government and business to households – especially those in poverty. Even pre-crisis, carers were more likely to be in poverty. Women deliver most care and therefore suffer most from the systemic under-valuing of care.
- **Care matters to all of us:** We all need care at some point in our life: whether as a child, in older age, or due to ill health or additional needs. Around 3 in 5 people will become an unpaid carer at some point.² Research suggests that an estimated 1.1 million people in Scotland are now unpaid carers.³
- **The Scottish Parliament must act:** It has significant powers to protect those who provide care from poverty and there is strong public support for it to use them.⁴ Investing in care will create new, green jobs.⁵ We must build a wellbeing economy for people and planet, with carers at the heart of a Just, Caring and Green Recovery.

THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT MUST ACT NOW TO END POVERTY FOR CARERS

To help make care count, and protect every carer from poverty, the Scottish Government should:

- Prioritise investment in the care sector as a low-carbon, gender-just solution to job creation and green economic recovery, placing people with caring responsibilities at the heart of a Just, Caring and Green Recovery in Scotland;
- Implement a step-change in how we value care by fully recognising that care work, paid and unpaid, is skilled work and valuable to our collective social and economic wellbeing by embedding this perspective, and the voices and experiences of people with caring responsibilities and those supported by them, across all areas of policy.

To protect unpaid carers looking after people with ill health or additional needs the Scottish Government should:

- Relieve immediate income pressures by enhancing emergency financial support, including replicating the one-off Coronavirus Carer's Allowance Supplement in December 2020 while considering additional financial support for those who do not qualify for this payment, and ensuring effective access to wider crisis funds;
- Embed a step-change in the valuing of unpaid carers through speedy introduction of Scottish Carer's Assistance while ensuring effective implementation of non-financial support to carers under the Carers Scotland Act 2016;
- Make it easier for unpaid carers to leave poverty through entering and sustaining paid employment by increasing expectations on employers to provide a supportive environment as part of decent work, bolstering voluntary accreditation schemes and making access to public money conditional on progress to achieve this.

To protect low-income families, alongside all those in or at risk of poverty, the Scottish Government should:

- Support those caring for children to secure and sustain decent work by boosting access to high-quality, accessible and flexible publicly-funded childcare, including recommencing the delayed expansion as soon as possible and seeing this as stepping-stone to wider entitlement;
- Ensure those juggling paid and unpaid work can provide quality care for their children and families while avoiding poverty by improving the quality of work, strengthening voluntary accreditation schemes and Fair Work First to ensure receipt of public funding is conditional upon enhanced support to those with childcare responsibilities;
- Immediately use devolved powers to give low-income families the equivalent of at least £10 per week per child while ensuring access to timely and adequate emergency financial support for those facing an income crisis.

To protect paid carers from poverty, while increasing support for unpaid carers, the Scottish Government should:

- Use devolved powers to raise new revenue to significantly boost investment in social care, while protecting other vital services, with consideration of a dedicated Scottish Social Care Tax;
- Review and strengthen Fair Work First criteria and swiftly apply these to all publicly-funded social care and childcare and move faster to fulfil and strengthen commitments to increase collective bargaining in social care while reconsidering the private provision of public services within both sectors.

INTRODUCTION

This briefing explores the link between the systemic undervaluing of care work and poverty in Scotland, particularly amid the coronavirus crisis. Poverty isn't inevitable, it can be overcome – and a crucial step is to challenge the structural causes driving care-related poverty, while adequately valuing and investing in care, and all those who provide it.

Our focus here is on Scotland, but we are deeply worried about the serious implications of both under-valued care work and Covid-19 on all those living in or at risk of poverty. We are particularly concerned for women, who generally have the least financial resilience to income shocks because of deep pre-existing inequalities and are therefore likely to be impacted the most.⁶ Globally, 736 million people live in extreme poverty⁷ and more than 2 billion people face this pandemic without access to clean water.⁸ Without action, a “tidal wave of COVID will become a tidal wave of new poverty”⁹, with up to half a billion more people pushed into poverty, the first rise since 1990.¹⁰ Within months, 12,000 people per day could die from hunger linked to COVID-19.¹¹ No-one is safe until we all are, and we need a global response.¹²

In Scotland, this briefing comes at a critical time. As we tentatively emerge from the pandemic's dark shadow, politicians are considering how to support the recovery. The Scottish Government is reviewing a report by the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery¹³ which urges Scotland to “seize the opportunity for a process of national renewal”. Before this pandemic, one in five people in Scotland were in poverty.¹⁴ Many more now rely on a social safety net that too often fails to protect them from poverty.¹⁵ The full impact of this crisis is not yet known. However, the UK Chancellor has warned that a “significant recession” is “very likely”¹⁶ – with Britain's economy shrinking by 20.4% in April 2020.¹⁷ In Scotland, the economy may have shrunk by a third during lockdown and unemployment could reach 10% by late 2020.¹⁸

Amid this context, the coronavirus crisis has sharply highlighted the importance of care and it is impossible to ignore the deep links between care and poverty – nor the gendered nature of this. While action has long been championed by carers', anti-poverty and women's rights organisations, too many people with caring responsibilities face poverty. This wasn't right before the pandemic. It certainly isn't now and it's getting worse. Failing to tackle this injustice would be unforgivable. Investing in care is not just the right thing to do, it would create significant numbers of new, valuable, low-carbon jobs, and help deliver a Just, Caring and Green Recovery in Scotland.¹⁹

Whether paid or unpaid, looking after children, older people, or those with ill health or additional needs, carers are the glue holding our society together. Care – the majority of which is provided by women – plays a critical role in maintaining a healthy and productive society and a functioning economy. Paid care workers, whether in care homes or looking after people in their homes, as well as unpaid carers supporting family or friends, are putting themselves at heightened risk of COVID-19. However, even before the coronavirus crisis, people with caring responsibilities were more likely to be in poverty, with the pandemic increasing financial pressures. Directly, and through restrictions put in place to reduce its spread, the virus has greatly increased care needs. While lockdown is easing, significant pressures remain, and the very last thing anyone with caring responsibilities needs is the added worry of struggling to pay the bills.

Governments across Britain have tried to cushion the impact on incomes, with initiatives at UK level like the Job Retention Scheme²⁰, Self-Employment Support Scheme and increasing the Universal Credit standard allowance, as well as measures to create an economic recovery.²¹ As this briefing explores, action has also been taken at devolved level to help mitigate the impact, including for some of those with caring responsibilities. However, Oxfam and more than 100 care, anti-poverty and women's rights organisations, unions and think tanks – including over 30 in Scotland – recently urged all politicians²² across Britain to do more to protect carers from poverty by investing in social care and enhancing social security; with this message echoed in Scotland.²³ Along with saving lives, this is a key test of our response.

People should never have to live in poverty due to the care work they do. To achieve this, we must ensure: the importance of unpaid and paid care work are better **recognised**; unpaid and paid carers are **represented** in the design and delivery of policies and services that affect their lives; unpaid care work is **reduced** and the responsibility **redistributed** more equally between women and men, and between households, governments and businesses; and paid carers are properly **rewarded**, with unpaid carers protected from poverty. If we do these things, we can together make care count in Scotland.

OXFAM'S DEFINITION OF CARE AND OUR WIDER RESEARCH

We believe care work is a critical social good – without it our society and economy wouldn't function. Yet we believe all care work is under-valued and under-invested in. Social care workers, unpaid carers of disabled and elderly people, childcare workers and parents all deserve better. When we're discussing care, we are referring to all of these groups.

- **Unpaid care work** is the direct caring for people – such as bathing a child or taking care of adults who are sick; as well as indirect care of the household – such as cooking and cleaning domestic work – without any explicit financial compensation. 'Unpaid carers' in this briefing includes parents and guardians caring for children, and those caring for children and adults with additional needs due to illness, disability or age.
- **Paid care work** is caring for people or doing domestic work for pay, e.g. social care and childcare workers. It takes place in public and private care sectors, such as education, health and social work, but also in private households. Domestic workers might care directly for other people and do tasks such as cleaning, cooking and washing clothes.

This briefing focuses on the levers for change held by the Scottish Parliament, however these issues are also explored in two Britain-wide reports published by Oxfam, and within wider work focusing on the under-valuing of care globally:

- **Make Care Count:** demonstrating the link between care and poverty in Britain;²⁴
- **Care, Poverty and COVID-19 Across Britain:** demonstrating how the coronavirus crisis is intensifying this injustice;²⁵
- **Time to Care:** examining the scale of global economic inequality amid the undervaluing of care work;²⁶
- **Care in the Time of Coronavirus:** evidencing a surge in unpaid care, and the impact on women.²⁷

UNDER-VALUED CARE AND POVERTY

"I suppose it's making us older before our time... it is stressful, and I don't know what sort of toll [it] takes ultimately on you, you know, the worry and things of it."

Unpaid Care Research, Woman²⁸

Care is about much more than any financial reward: both paid and unpaid care work is a vital social good and an essential human right. It contributes to developing human capabilities, supports children to thrive and learn, adults to rest and be ready for paid work, and people with illness or disability to be healthy and contribute to society and the economy.²⁹ It is crucial to all of us and yet is largely invisible within economic measures and systemically undervalued. Our broken global economy accumulates vast wealth into the hands of a rich few, in part by exploiting the unpaid labour of millions. Women and girls carry out 12.5 billion hours of unpaid care every day, worth at least \$10.8 trillion a year to the global economy.³⁰ With little or no time to get an education, earn a decent living or have a say in how our societies are run, carers are too often trapped at the bottom of the economy and often rendered invisible in measures of economic progress.³¹

This is too often also the case in Scotland. In January 2020, even before coronavirus struck, new data showed the staggering economic value of unpaid care in Scotland. While complex to calculate in total, if the hours of unpaid household and caring work undertaken – mainly by women – were paid at the average wage rate of equivalent paid jobs, their value was estimated at around £36 billion per year.³² The UK figure was estimated at £451bn. Care is the hidden engine driving our economy and we can't afford to go on under-valuing it while leaving too many carers – paid or unpaid – in poverty.

While lower than in the rest of the UK, largely due to lower housing costs, the poverty rate in Scotland has gradually risen over the last decade. Pre-pandemic, 19% of people lived in poverty³³ with – at one in four – children more likely to be in poverty.³⁴ However, those with caring responsibilities are more likely to face manifestations of this injustice – for example:

- The poverty rate for single women with children is 39%, some 20% higher than for all working-age adults;³⁵
- Paid care work is associated with low incomes, poor working conditions and a lack of agency; as the Fair Work Convention has noted: working in social care can be fulfilling but is not always fair.³⁶
- Even before the pandemic, the Scottish Government estimated that 47% of carers in the most deprived areas were caring for 35 hours a week or more – almost double the level in the least deprived areas.³⁷

During the coronavirus crisis, polling carried out by YouGov for Oxfam showed strong public support across the UK for better valuing carers.³⁸ Some 78% of adults said care work is not valued highly enough by the UK Government. A parallel poll in Scotland shows 62% of adults believe care work is not valued enough by the Scottish Government.³⁹

There has been some progress towards richer measures of national progress in Scotland. The Scottish Government's purpose within the National Performance Framework includes "increased wellbeing" alongside "sustainable and inclusive economic growth."⁴⁰ Scotland's First Minister has shown personal support⁴¹ for a transition from a narrow focus on Gross Domestic Product to a wider focus on the wellbeing of people and the planet and is leading the Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership.⁴² She has highlighted the inadequacies of GDP in capturing the contribution made by unpaid carers but much faster progress is needed to properly value them. We all have a role to play – government, businesses, charities, local authorities, and individuals. We must, together, secure a positive legacy from the coronavirus crisis by righting the wrong of carer poverty and by creating a future that values the wellbeing of people and the planet.

"[GDP] puts a value, for example, on illegal drug consumption, but not on unpaid care. It values activity in the short term that boosts the economy, even if that activity is hugely damaging to the sustainability of our planet in the longer term."

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon⁴³

MAKING BETTER POLICY: LISTENING TO CARERS

Better policies are made when experts are meaningfully included. Carers are experts in their day-to-day experiences and Governments must ensure they are part of policy-making processes. Unpaid carers have told us about⁴⁴:

- The challenges of juggling unpaid care and paid employment, with many describing how they were forced to leave or reduce the time spent in paid employment due to the demands of their caring duties and a lack of flexible jobs;
- The importance of affordable, accessible and flexible childcare in accessing and maintaining employment;
- Having to rely on a complicated and inefficient social security system that often does not provide adequate financial support, including sufficient support from benefits like Carer's Allowance;
- The problematic links between benefits and paid work, with carers and parents having to carefully manage income from paid work and benefits to avoid being penalised for extra employment income that is still not sufficient;
- The impact on the emotional, mental, physical and social well-being of carers of providing round-the-clock care;
- Feeling lonely and isolated, with carers having less time to meet or share their experiences and issues with others;
- Feeling that society does not value those providing care, or those receiving it, with them made to feel like a burden.

WOMEN, CARE AND COVID-19

There are deep overlaps between the under-valuing of care and gender inequalities. Across the world, paid and underpaid care work is disproportionately provided by women and girls, especially those from groups who, as well as gender discrimination, experience discrimination based on ethnicity, nationality, and age.⁴⁵ This unequal distribution of care, as well as the under-valuing of it, impacts women throughout their lives. It perpetuates gender and economic inequalities, undermines their health and wellbeing, limits their economic prosperity, fuels gender gaps in employment and wages and amplifies existing vulnerabilities.⁴⁶ Women have less time to pursue paid work and career progression; making them more likely to have part-time or precarious work, earn less, and be more likely to live in poverty as they get older.

Globally, the coronavirus crisis is making the unequal distribution of care even worse. A five-country survey⁴⁷ commissioned by Oxfam, shows that while men have been spending more time looking after their children and doing chores, like cooking and cleaning, women have too and are still doing more overall. Over half of women surveyed reported spending more time on cooking, washing, cleaning, and caring for children and family. Single mothers, women in poverty,

and ethnic and racial minorities reported the largest increase. Some 43% of the 3,558 women surveyed reported suffering more anxiety, depression, lack of rest and sleep and physical illnesses due to increased unpaid care work.

*“You’ll often find that women are the anchors holding things together
and that comes at a cost: personal and financial.”*

Unpaid carer, Scotland, Woman⁴⁸

Across the UK, including in Scotland, women are also more likely to be carers, on average, carrying out 60% more unpaid care work than men.⁴⁹ Again, one consequence is that women have less opportunity to enter the labour market and, when they do, are more likely to be in flexible or part-time roles than men due to inadequate shared parental leave policies and unaffordable childcare. Many of these roles are often low-paid – such as within retail and cleaning. Paid care itself is also deeply gendered. In Scotland, women make up 96% of the paid childcare workforce⁵⁰ and 86% of the care home workforce⁵¹; both sectors which are characterised by low-pay and poor working conditions. And more widely, working age women are, overall, more likely than men to experience poverty even while in paid work.⁵²

Worryingly, Close the Gap, Scotland’s policy and advocacy organisation working on women’s labour market participation, warn that women will experience disproportionate job disruption from the coronavirus crisis due to labour market inequalities, including the 13% gender pay gap and occupational segregation, with most key workers in “undervalued female-dominated occupations”, including nurses, carers, and supermarket workers.⁵³ They say the opportunity for women in low-paid jobs to do paid work will be hampered by increased unpaid care, with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women, young women and women on zero-hour contracts more likely to work in a shutdown sector. Further, they warn of a “significant risk that the crisis will force women to leave their jobs, affecting their income, career prospects and making them more vulnerable to poverty”.⁵⁴ These findings are reinforced by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which says mothers are more likely to have quit or lost their job, or to have been furloughed and that more women may lose their jobs than men.⁵⁵ In addition, more than half of working mothers in the UK report that increased childcare responsibilities during the coronavirus crisis have negatively affected their career prospects or will harm them in future.⁵⁶

Who provides care, and whose livelihood is prioritised in the home, are factors driven by social norms relating to gendered roles, as well as the fact that women are more likely to earn less due to structural discrimination in the workplace. This means women are disproportionately affected by the sudden spike in care needs created by the coronavirus crisis.⁵⁷ The Equality and Human Rights Commission has warned pre-existing gender imbalances mean pandemic-related “reduction in social care provision by local authorities, changes in care requirements as a consequence of home working, and changes in childcare through the closure of schools and nurseries are likely to have a significant impact on women”.⁵⁸ Feminist organisations have warned we could see a “substantial rollback” in gender equality, with women under pressure to cut hours or give-up paid work. Engender say women have told them: “they are unable to carry on squashing a full working day and a full day of childcare into the same 24 hours”.⁵⁹

Across Britain, new survey data⁶⁰ suggests the unequal distribution of care work has deepened: 17% of men report spending more time on unpaid care tasks, such as home-schooling and caring for children, or caring for elderly or sick family or community members, with this rising to 23% for women. Similarly, while 28% of men report spending more time shopping for food, preparing meals, cooking, cleaning, or washing, the figure for women is 39%. While one in five men report feeling more stressed or anxious because of spending more time on care, this rises to 33% for women. Encouragingly, 58% of men agree they should carry out more unpaid care and domestic roles in the household, though – tellingly – more than three-quarters of women polled (76%) felt this was the case.

*“... we need bold action on what Covid-19 has exposed, that women’s
work is under-valued, under-protected, and under-paid.”*

Anna Ritchie Allan, Executive Director, Close the Gap⁶¹

It is also vitally important to recognise linkages to wider gender inequalities, including violence against women and girls; ending discrimination, and ensuring women are equally represented within positions of power and influence, across all sectors – including politics. It is essential that action is taken across these issues, including acting upon the recommendations of Scotland’s National Advisory Council on Women and Girls⁶² and the work of Women 50:50, the campaign for at least 50% representation of women in the Scottish Parliament, local authorities and on public boards.⁶³

TURNING PROGRESS IN SCOTLAND INTO A JUST, CARING AND GREEN RECOVERY

To unlock significant progress in protecting unpaid and paid carers in Scotland from poverty, a step-change is required in how care is valued. We must place this at the heart of the recovery from the coronavirus crisis. The Scottish Government acknowledge that while caring can be a positive experience for the carer and the cared-for person, it is associated with carers being at higher risk of poverty and can impact their own wellbeing.⁶⁴ They have made welcome policy and funding commitments, before and during the pandemic, with those with caring responsibilities in Scotland benefiting from some additional financial protections compared to those in other parts of the UK, but this cannot be the limit of our ambition.

Positive measures include supplementing the UK Government-set Carer’s Allowance for eligible unpaid carers in Scotland, while also providing a one-off top-up in June 2020.⁶⁵ Similarly, the commitment to fast-track a pay-rise for social care workers so they receive at least the Real Living Wage (£9.30) was welcome⁶⁶, though it needs to reach all workers quickly. Others, like the Scottish Child Payment⁶⁷ and the expansion of early learning and childcare entitlement⁶⁸, will also help those with childcare responsibilities, particularly low-income families; though the implementation of both measures have been delayed. In addition, emergency measures like the recent increase in the Scottish Welfare Fund⁶⁹ and the extension of free-school-meal entitlement over the school holidays⁷⁰, will help protect people facing income crises, including those with caring responsibilities, at a time of increased financial pressures due to the coronavirus crisis.

However, there is still an overwhelming need for a step-change in how we value those with caring responsibilities and for greater investment in the care sector. Without these, we will fail to realise the First Minister’s commitment to deliver the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Scotland by 2030, including the commitment to leave no-one behind.⁷¹ The SDGs include Goal 5, achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, including recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work; as well as Goal 8, decent work for all. The Government says the National Performance Framework is Scotland’s way to localise and implement the SDGs.⁷² Better valuing care is a prerequisite for progress across the National Outcomes, including ‘fair work for everyone’⁷³, but this will require deep and sustained policy commitment.

Encouragingly, as lockdown eases and thoughts turn to a recovery from the pandemic, there is an opportunity to build on substantial public, political and media focus on care, and a desire for change in the status-quo.⁷⁴ Scotland should seize this opportunity to show international leadership. We must, for example, harness strong public awareness and recognition of the role played by unpaid carers, with 43% of the public in Scotland who have never been an unpaid carer saying they are more aware of their contribution and with 72% saying they are not well valued or not valued at all.⁷⁵

“If the monumental scale and nature of this economic shock is not a catalyst to accelerate change and to find new bold, radical interventions that will transform Scotland’s economy, then nothing ever will be.”

Advisory Group on Economic Recovery⁷⁶

In establishing the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery⁷⁷, the First Minister asked it to “contribute to our aim of building a fairer, greener and more equal society”.⁷⁸ In its report, the Group acknowledges “the fragility of our society and our economy, like that of others, has been laid bare these past few months” and says the crisis has helped us “rediscover what we value”. Positively, it says the recovery “must not repeat the mistakes of the past, whether the early years of the 1980s recession or the post 2008 austerity” and says “we must seize the opportunity for a process of national renewal”

towards a wellbeing economy. Recognising the need to place Scotland on a climate-safe path, the Group says the recovery must place equal importance on four pillars: People, the Environment, Community and Business.

Positively, the Advisory Group recognises the need for an investment-led and resilient recovery and calls for “a proactive, muscular intervention from all layers of government”. Specifically, it calls for faster reform of adult social care, including improving the quality of work and reviewing funding. However, while the importance of unpaid care work is acknowledged, there is a worrying lack of focus on how this can be better valued. This is described as a “serious blind spot” by the Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland⁷⁹ who also say the Group’s report retains a focus on ‘growth’ without clarity over what type and for whom. While describing the report as a “good starting point”, it says it falls short in recognising the type of transformation needed for a wellbeing economy in which business and economic activity is “designed to serve people and planet, not thrive alongside them”.

“... a desire for ‘growth’ still features prominently ... What kind of growth? And for whom? Simply adding ‘inclusive’ and ‘sustainable’ modifiers to growth does not answer either of these vital questions.”

Wellbeing Alliance Scotland⁸⁰

While significant, the recovery cannot be shaped by the Advisory Group alone; a Just, Caring and Green recovery requires broad engagement. Encouragingly, several Scottish Parliamentary Committees^{81,82} are also examining the impact of COVID and the Poverty and Inequality Commission has volunteered itself to “test out potential policies and solutions”.⁸³

However, a wide spectrum of civil society actors in Scotland have also called for a broader Recovery Commission to be established.⁸⁴ Further, women’s and parenting organisations have published nine principles for putting “care and solidarity at the heart of a new economy”.⁸⁵ They say that investment in childcare and care for disabled people and older people is “as essential to our economy as bricks, steel, and fibre-optic cable”, and is “necessary infrastructure for a sustainable wellbeing economy and a good society”.⁸⁶ Amid a focus at UK level on investment in construction projects to stimulate a UK-wide economic recovery, characterised by the Prime Minister’s commitment to “build, build, build”⁸⁷, the UK-level Women’s Budget Group has instead called for investment in care to be at the heart of the recovery.⁸⁸ They say this would be both more effective in generating jobs than a programme of construction projects delivered over many years. The Group estimates that if the UK matched some Scandinavian countries and had 10% of its employment in care, this would generate nearly 2 million jobs overall, while helping to narrow the gender employment gap.

The Scottish Government has committed to responding to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery’s report by the end of July 2020. It must go significantly further and place care at the core of this national renewal. We must value and invest in care not only because it is the right thing to do, but because care, in all its forms, underpins our society, and our economy. This briefing seeks to explore the measures needed to help realise a step-change in the valuing of care.

“This is an important moment for transformative change: for an economic stimulus that focuses on care”.

Women’s Budget Group⁸⁹

To help make care count, and protect every carer from poverty, the Scottish Government should:

- **Prioritise investment in the care sector as a low-carbon, gender-just solution to job creation and green economic recovery, placing people with caring responsibilities at the heart of a Just, Caring and Green Recovery in Scotland;**
- **Implement a step-change in how we value care by fully recognising that care work, paid and unpaid, is skilled work and valuable to our collective social and economic wellbeing by embedding this perspective, and the voices and experiences of people with caring responsibilities and those supported by them, across all areas of policy.**

THE ROLE OF PROGRESSIVE TAXATION IN PROTECTING CARERS FROM POVERTY

Quality public services, paid for by progressive taxes which recognise a taxpayer's ability to pay, are the essential bedrock of efforts to reduce and redistribute care. Progressive tax and adequate public spending on free public services and social protection systems are also the key to tackling gender and economic inequalities. When governments choose not to invest in much-needed equalising policies and public services, like social care, they leave women to fill the gap, pushing them further into time and income poverty. Globally, too many governments shy away from levels of taxation on high incomes and wealth that would ensure a fairer contribution by those who can most afford it. Oxfam believes governments should go further to use fiscal policy – tax and spending powers – to actively support carers.⁹⁰

As detailed above, care work is currently undervalued in Scotland, as it is across Britain. Making care work the visible and valued engine of a new wellbeing economy in Scotland can only be done through increased levels of investment. Yet, amid a steep economic downturn⁹¹, we face a challenging period for the public finances. While the Scottish Government could commit more money from existing budgets, we must also protect other vital services. There are two main ways it could secure additional funding: through more money committed at a UK government level feeding in to Scottish budgets, or by using the Scottish Parliament's significant tax-raising powers. The Scottish Government has shown itself willing to use devolved income tax powers – freezing thresholds for paying the higher rate of income tax in Scotland⁹² – to increase revenues for spending on devolved priorities. It could do so again to raise the funds needed to boost investment in care.

IPPR Scotland has also explored the potential of local taxation as a means of raising additional revenue for local expenditure. It notes that since 1999, Scotland has had full devolution of powers over local taxation and, provided funding from new local taxes goes to fund local government expenditure, Scotland has wide legislative powers to introduce new local taxes alongside the existing ones such as council tax and business rates.⁹³ The IPPR analysis cites various options to raise considerable new revenues, including a local inheritance tax and a local payroll tax for low-pay employers.

We also note that the Welsh Government is exploring the viability of a new “social care levy”⁹⁴, potentially making use of devolved powers over income tax to generate ring-fence additional funding for social care.⁹⁵ The proposal put forward by Professor Holtham suggests the levy could involve tax rates set variably, with younger people and those with lower incomes paying less. These contributions would either be used immediately for social care or be split between immediate use and creating a new fund, based on the sovereign wealth fund model, which would then pay for the projected increased social care needs in future. He notes the public is more likely to accept taxes that are ‘hypothecated’ – assigned to a specific purpose – in this case, social care.⁹⁶ In fact, a poll conducted across the UK in May found that two in three people support an increase in income tax to fund pay rises for care workers.⁹⁷ Questions around who would pay and how much have led to a lack of political consensus at UK level in recent years⁹⁸, but the UK Government is once again examining reform and exploring how to provide additional funding.⁹⁹

This briefing makes clear that more investment is needed to protect those delivering all types of care – including those employed within the care sector – from poverty. While a dedicated care, or social care, tax or levy in Scotland – focused on taxing high incomes or wealth – should be considered, it is only one option to fund a transformation in the way we value and fund the social care system in Scotland while protecting unpaid carers from poverty. Who would pay, and at what level, is beyond the scope of this paper, however any increase in tax should be progressive. Regardless of the revenue source selected – whether it is new or existing, such as increasing general income tax rates, or a combination of both – there is an urgent need to be boost investment to ensure those delivering care are not trapped in poverty. The Scottish Government should not wait, it should use the powers it has to increase investment in social care in Scotland.

MAKING POLICY CARE

In January 2020, the University of the West of Scotland-Oxfam Partnership explored paid and unpaid care work, poverty, and inequality with around 50 anti-poverty campaigners, carers and policy professionals.¹⁰⁰ Six themes were identified:

- **Pay, income, and work conditions:** lack of effective voice for paid carers; split shifts increasing transport costs and impacting carers' family responsibilities; zero-hours contracts; recruitment and retention issues; the undervaluing of skills; the disproportionate impact on women; and the overall impact of the under-valuing of care by society.
- **Impact on carers:** the physical and mental impact on carers of their work; the challenges for young carers of balancing work, schoolwork and care; the difficulties of managing income falls resulting from leaving paid employment to care unpaid; challenges in securing respite care; and a lack of funding for unpaid carers for training.
- **Quality of care:** concerns around the quality of care due to low pay, lack of training, and high staff turnover amongst paid carers and insufficient levels of support for unpaid carers; the impact of time pressures; differentials in care quality between public and private care; and concerns about access to culturally- and faith-sensitive care services.
- **Care provision:** delays in accessing and the adequacy of social security; pressure on local authority budgets, with this varying between areas; and concerns about a lack of smaller, more family-like care settings for young people.
- **Funding care:** concerns about growing and unmet social care costs and the need for putting people before profit.
- **Policy and practice:** concerns that good policy does not always lead to good practice 'on the ground'.

A MESSAGE TO THE POWERFUL

Participants were also asked to work in small groups to develop messages to those in power. These included:

- The huge social and economic costs of not valuing care work – under-paid, stressed, overworked, under-valued, and untrained carers are more likely to deliver poor quality care with knock-on effects on the health-care system;
- Who cares for the carers? Paid and unpaid carers are often neglected in attempts to improve the quality of the care system – their needs must be met to avoid losing these workers to poor mental and physical health;
- A society that does not appreciate its carers and those they care for is, by necessity, an uncaring one;
- We were all cared for and will all be cared for, at many points in our life – we need a good care system for all.

UNPAID CARERS – UNDER-VALUED AND UNDER-SUPPORTED

This section examines the interaction between unpaid care and poverty, and the policy context in Scotland. Firstly, it will examine those looking after people with ill health or additional needs, and secondly, those with childcare responsibilities.

Caring for a person with ill health or additional needs and poverty

Caring for a loved one with ill health or additional needs can be one of the most fulfilling things a person can do.

“Learning from them and them learning from you and watching them understand something that they didn’t understand before.”

Unpaid Care Research, Woman¹⁰¹

Prior to coronavirus, around 729,000 adults in Scotland reported providing care to someone due to their having a mental or physical illness, growing older, or having a physical or learning disability. Of those, 61% are women and 39% are men.¹⁰² Overall, around one in six adults (16%) in Scotland provide this type of care; however, rates are highest amongst women (18%) compared to men (12%).¹⁰³ It is estimated three in five people are likely to become a carer at some point¹⁰⁴ with provision of unpaid care higher among adults in the most deprived areas (18%) compared to the least deprived (13%).¹⁰⁵

A person's likelihood of being a carer increases with age up until the 55-64 group, when nearly 17% of people provide care.¹⁰⁶ The time varies from a few minutes per week to round-the-clock, 365-days-a-year support. Two-thirds of carers provide up to 19 hours per week – 32% up to four hours and 34% between five and 19 hours per week – but more than one in six provide 50 or more hours. The number of hours also increases with age: nearly twice as many of those aged 65 and over (22%) reported providing 50 hours or more, compared with 12% of those aged 16-44. A higher proportion of female than male carers aged 65 and over reported providing 50 hours or more of care (26% compared to 16% respectively).¹⁰⁷ MECOPP, the Minority Ethnic Carers of Older People Project, suggests 5.7% of the Black and Minority Ethnic population in Scotland identify as carers, though data is limited¹⁰⁸, and it is thought there is under-reporting with individuals preferring to self-identify as spouses, sons or daughters, parents, relatives or good neighbours where the caring role is subsumed within this identity. Similarly, while research suggests 11.7% of the Gypsy/Traveller community in Scotland have a caring responsibility, there is little research and limited data.¹⁰⁹

Worryingly, despite the critical role they perform, many unpaid carers report that they receive little, if any, support – financial or otherwise. Around seven in 10 unpaid carers report receiving no help or support (69%). Even amongst those providing more than 35 hours of unpaid care per week, some 40% report doing so without help or support.¹¹⁰

“About three weeks ago I just broke. My doctor prescribed me medication because I was having panic attacks... This crisis has really brought home the fact that my partner and I are on our own; there's no safety net.”

Unpaid carer, Scotland, woman¹¹¹

Time-limited emergency legislation introduced during the pandemic contained provisions relaxing requirements on local authorities to conduct full community-care assessments for those who need social care.¹¹² While limited in scope and duration¹¹³, the Scottish Human Rights Commission says human rights must be protected during this period.¹¹⁴ Positively, the Scottish Government has reinforced that local authorities should “not be constrained by funding issues” in delivering care packages, a key support for unpaid carers, and has agreed to meet additional costs.^{115 116} However, the Glasgow Disability Alliance has reported care packages have been reduced, leaving disabled people to rely on unpaid carers or go without support.¹¹⁷ The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland say eligibility criteria for the more than 230,000 individuals and families in Scotland who access social care have been tightened with care packages “reduced and/or stopped, sometimes with little or no notice, leaving people in distressing situations”.¹¹⁸ It is concerned about a lack of sufficient transparency about the use of the emergency powers, with the Government's First Progress showing six local authorities have used them.¹¹⁹

“Unpaid carers are vital in the national effort to keep vulnerable people safe during the coronavirus outbreak yet many fear that continuing to care around the clock will lead to them burning out.”

Simon Hodgson, Director of Carers Scotland¹²⁰

Unpaid caring has surged during the pandemic. Polling in May 2020¹²¹ suggested 392,000 adults in Scotland – approximately 239,000 women and 153,000 men – had started providing unpaid care for the first time; typically, helping with food shopping and collecting medicine.¹²² Carers Scotland say this suggests a total of 1.1 million adults are providing unpaid care in Scotland. When unpaid carers were asked about the biggest challenges, they identified: managing the stress and responsibility (74%); negative impacts on their physical and mental health (70%); not being able to take time away from caring (66%); financial impacts of additional care costs (63%); the impact on other personal relationships (62%); the negative impact on their ability to do paid work (55%); and not having anyone to talk to about the challenges (53%). This data reinforces an earlier survey of 890 existing unpaid carers in Scotland in which 78% reported providing increased care, with 39% saying this was because their local care and support services had reduced or closed.¹²³ Nearly a quarter (23%) were providing more care because they were worried about paid care staff having contact with the person they care for. On average, carers reported picking up an extra 10 hours per week. The pandemic is also significantly increasing

living costs, with 79% saying they are having to spend more money – 70% spending more on food and 53% more on other household bills. More than half (53%) said they feel overwhelmed managing their caring responsibilities.

YouGov polling for Oxfam Scotland shows that 63% of people in Scotland believe that those on low incomes who look after sick or disabled people should receive more financial support through increased social security payments.¹²⁴

A SOCIAL SAFETY NET FOR UNPAID CARERS

The Women's Budget Group describe social security as a "fundamental element of a caring economy".¹²⁵ It is critical for women who receive a greater level of their income from it due to their disproportionate role as carers and secondary earners. Yet UK analysis suggests 59% of the cuts to social security by 2021-22 will have "come from women's purses".¹²⁶

The main entitlement for unpaid carers across Britain is the £67.25 per week Carer's Allowance.¹²⁷ Applicants must be over 16, spend at least 35 hours a week caring for someone who qualifies for specified disability benefits, and earn less than £128 per week after tax, National Insurance and expenses.¹²⁸ Worryingly, less than a third (31%) of carers aged over 16 who look after someone for 35 hours of more per week report receiving Carer's Allowance – suggesting issues around uptake, and the wider eligibility criteria.¹²⁹ Power over Carer's Allowance was devolved to Scotland in 2016.¹³⁰ However, rather than changing it, the Scottish Government says its priority is to ensure a smooth transition to prevent disruption for carers. However, it has committed to creating a new Scottish Carer's Assistance, with this entitlement due to open for applications by the end of 2021 and the transition from the DWP to Social Security Scotland fully completed by 2024.¹³¹

This new entitlement creates a major opportunity to enhance support for unpaid carers in Scotland. The Scottish Government has acknowledged scope for policy change but says it will only do so when it is sure "there will not be an adverse impact on carers".¹³² Consulting fully with carers is vital, but the need to increase support is also urgent. Carers Scotland has highlighted the need to extend support, including increasing the earnings threshold to help unpaid carers improve their incomes through employment. They have also suggested the removal of the full-time study rule, which limits the opportunities of carers, particularly young people, to enter further education to gain new skills or retrain without being penalised.¹³³ Other options include reducing the qualifying criteria of 35 hours or more of care.

"You don't live for yourself anymore, you're like literally a robot, do you know? Everything, every thought process is about when you're cooking, it's what they would like, what she would eat, what she wouldn't eat, you know? ... Everything is to do with the child."

Unpaid Care Research, Woman¹³⁴

Pending Scottish Carer's Assistance, positive measures have been implemented, including increasing Carer's Allowance in Scotland to match Jobseeker's Allowance. The Carer's Allowance Supplement, which is paid in two instalments per year of £230.10, benefits over 83,000 Scottish carers; it means eligible carers in Scotland receive 13% more per year than those in the rest of the UK. Further, amid the coronavirus crisis, the Scottish Government paid a one-off Coronavirus Carer's Allowance Supplement of £230.10 in June 2020, providing much-needed respite.¹³⁵ It has also relaxed some eligibility rules on Carer's Allowance and provided £500,000 to support carer services to continue to operate. However, amid pre-existing financial pressures and increased pressures during the pandemic, further support is needed; not least as many unpaid carers in Scotland do not qualify for Carer's Allowance, the standard Supplement or one-off Coronavirus Supplement. While those in income crisis can access the Scottish Welfare Fund, Carers Scotland has called for a new, ring-fenced Carer Wellbeing Fund, initially worth £5 million, to increase support for carers facing financial hardship.¹³⁶

In June 2020, the Scottish Government also announced £300,000 extra to support young carers.¹³⁷ There are 29,000 young people caring for someone in Scotland. Financial support includes the Young Carer's Grant, which is worth £305 a year to those aged 16, 17 and 18 who care for an average of 16 hours each week.¹³⁸ The Scottish Government has further committed to boosting financial support to carers of more than one disabled child in spring 2021.¹³⁹

Some organisations believe a Universal Basic Income (UBI), could help protect unpaid carers and others from poverty¹⁴⁰; though others, including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, question its affordability and impact on reducing poverty.¹⁴¹ The concept would see either everyone, or the vast majority of people,¹⁴² receive an unconditional, regular payment – regardless of other sources of income. The First Minister says the coronavirus crisis has made her “much, much more strongly of the view that it is an idea that’s time has come”.¹⁴³ A 2-year study into the feasibility of a UBI pilot by four local authorities in Scotland has also concluded a pilot is “desirable” to test its impact, including on poverty.¹⁴⁴ However, the group says a pilot is not viable without support from local, Scottish and UK governments levels and the UK Government says a basic income is not the best response to the pandemic as it would not target those most in need.¹⁴⁵ Meanwhile, others are exploring the potential of a model known as “Universal Basic Services”, with access to services, such as care, available to everyone on the basis they have an entitlement to have their needs met.¹⁴⁶

The level of non-financial support for carers is also critical and the new online Wellbeing Hub is therefore welcome¹⁴⁷, along with the Scottish Government’s £3 million Short Breaks Fund, and support for young carers through Young Scot’s Young Carers package. Additional measures flowing from the Carers (Scotland) Act (2016)¹⁴⁸, which took effect in 2018, are intended to improve the health and wellbeing of carers, with a duty on local authorities to provide support to carers through an adult-carer support plan or a young-carer statement. It’s critical the welcome intent of these measures increases support for carers. A survey by the Coalition of Carers in Scotland¹⁴⁹ found, of more than 1,000 carers surveyed, only 16% knew what the Act was and the rights it offered. Around one third (33%) had heard of the Act but were not sure what it was about, and around half (51%) had never heard of it. While a new Carers’ Charter¹⁵⁰ now exists alongside the Act to outline carers’ rights, it is clear greater awareness of its provisions is required if the benefits are to be fully realised.

FROM THE ASHES, NEW DREAMS START

Lynn Williams cares unpaid for her husband, who has had a high-level, complete spinal injury for over 20 years.

“Even before the pandemic, many carers faced poverty. For years, we’ve been plugging holes in the social care system. Carers face additional costs as a result of Covid-19. Our heating costs will be higher than normal; we’ve had to buy in more continence equipment. We’re doing more online shopping which brings its own costs, and stresses when you can’t get a delivery slot. We’re paying for deliveries and hygiene equipment, often at vastly inflated prices.



“But we’re not just faced with financial pressures, there’s the emotional and physical toll too. We’ve had pain treatment postponed, yearly health check-ups at the Spinal Unit may not happen and important diagnostic tests to look at kidney function have been cancelled. Others have faced similar challenges – leaving greater worry about the health and wellbeing of our loved ones. And of course, we worry about getting sick ourselves. That deep fear haunts my nights. What would happen to my husband should I contract the virus? Worse still, what if I died?

“So many carers feel that they may burn out. And I understand how that feels – I have been anxious, scared and have felt utterly alone. My own fear is magnified when my husband looks on with terror in his eyes as he sees himself in every older or disabled person who dies as a result of this pandemic. At times, the pressure has felt like a heavy weight on my shoulders.

“Honesty about the post Covid-19 reality must take into account the policy failures which preceded the crisis – the inequalities that that have been magnified by the pandemic. And honesty about all of this must be accompanied by hope. Hope is needed – we carers must be given a reason to keep fighting and to keep caring. A new normal requires a new politics and proper, total and open inclusion of those hardest hit in shaping the way forward, in shaping their own future. We cannot continue as we were before Covid-19. When we say lessons will be learned, we must mean it.”

ACCESS TO DECENT WORK FOR UNPAID CARERS

Alongside accessible and adequate social security, unpaid carers who wish to take paid employment must be better supported. Prior to the pandemic, three million people across the UK combined work and care, with an estimated 270,000 in Scotland.¹⁵¹ This means around one in eight people of the workforce in Scotland are carers, with this forecast to rise as the population ages and people work longer.¹⁵² We must ensure carers can access the labour market, with those already in it not being forced to leave paid work or reduce their hours due to caring responsibilities.

“I did work before, and I had to leave work, so your income just went [makes ‘declining’ sound] ... The social worker gave me no option, just “you need to give up [work] to put in the 24-hour support” ... I had no choice.”
Unpaid Care Research, Woman¹⁵³

The Work and Families Act 2006 gives carers the right to request flexible working and all employees also have the right to take unpaid time off for emergencies involving someone they look after. They are also protected against direct discrimination or harassment due to their caring responsibilities.¹⁵⁴ However, there is often very limited awareness, amongst both employers and employees, of the minimum legal rights. Carers UK say that making caring a protected characteristic in the law would increase levels of support.¹⁵⁵ Yet supporting carers to enter and sustain work benefits carers and their employers and employers should develop and implement, with carers, flexible practices such as part-time working, compressed hours and job-sharing, alongside other forms of practical support. The UK Government is consulting on the introduction of one week per annum statutory carer’s leave¹⁵⁶; some 80% of carers across the UK say that additional paid care leave of between five and 10 days would help them to juggle work and unpaid care.¹⁵⁷ However, the UK Government’s proposal is that this leave is unpaid, limiting the ability of carers on lowest wages to benefit from it.

While employment rights are reserved to Westminster, the Scottish Government has a significant role to play to ensure work provides a reliable route out of poverty for carers. Encouragingly, it recognises that, “many carers give up work because the job of juggling their work and caring responsibilities simply becomes too much”.¹⁵⁸ As part of the Fair Work Action Plan, it funds the Carer Positive scheme to recognise employers providing a supportive environment, including flexibility, for carers.¹⁵⁹ While there are currently 437,000 employees working within 192 accredited employers, uptake could be significantly higher, with there being more than 356,000 private-sector businesses in Scotland.¹⁶⁰

Carer Positive is also referenced within the Scottish Business Pledge¹⁶¹ – a “values-led partnership between Government and business”. While the Pledge is a welcome attempt to improve business practice, expectations on employers to support carers should be increased. Participation with the Pledge is growing, but still at a very low level; as of 31 January 2020, some 722 businesses had signed up, 0.4% of Scotland’s registered business base. The Government re-vamped the scheme in 2019 and the continuing focus on the Scottish Living Wage and the introduction of an additional core commitment to reducing the gender pay gap was welcome. However, the refresh failed to sufficiently enhance the platform as a tool to improve business practice. Oxfam Scotland called for a more robust accreditation process, with clear incentives for businesses to engage in continuous improvement.¹⁶² The Advisory Group on Economic Recovery has now also encouraged the Scottish Government to make greater use of conditionality as it supports businesses during the coronavirus recovery.¹⁶³ The Group says conditionality should be “pursued actively” to promote good practice. This should include enhancing support for carers to ensure the Government’s £11bn per year of public procurement drives faster change.¹⁶⁴

“Where do you go once you stop caring? Where’s the help to get you back into work?... If you’ve looked after a set of parents and then they die, you’re just left... No support, no, you’ve saved the government thousands and then you’re just left... I know several carers, they just find it so difficult to find a job after caring.”
Unpaid Care Research, Woman¹⁶⁵

To protect unpaid carers looking after people with ill health or additional needs the Scottish Government should:

- **Relieve immediate income pressures by enhancing emergency financial support, including replicating the one-off Coronavirus Carer's Allowance Supplement in December 2020 while considering additional financial support for those who do not qualify for this payment, and ensuring effective access to wider crisis funds;**
 - Boost awareness of the entitlements and non-cash support for carers and support them to access it.
- **Embed a step-change in the valuing of unpaid carers through speedy introduction of Scottish Carer's Assistance while ensuring effective implementation of non-financial support to carers under the Carers Scotland Act 2016;**
- **Make it easier for unpaid carers to leave poverty through entering and sustaining paid employment by increasing expectations on employers to provide a supportive environment as part of decent work, bolstering voluntary accreditation schemes and making access to public money conditional on progress to achieve this.**

Caring for Children and Poverty

An important group of unpaid carers are those with childcare responsibilities. Once again, this caring contribution is under-recognised within measures of economic performance and therefore under-valued, leaving too many parents and their children in poverty. At 21%, the poverty rate in Scotland for people of working age with children is 3% higher than those without children.¹⁶⁶ For single women with children, the rate is significantly higher at 39%.¹⁶⁷ Parent poverty is linked to a combination of inadequate social security rates; labour-market barriers; low-paid and insecure work; insufficient working hours; the gender pay gap; inaccessible and unaffordable childcare and high expenditure.

Growing evidence suggests financial pressures for low-income families have been exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis. UK-level surveys during lockdown show that while a quarter of people report their household finances were impacted, this rose to 39% amongst parents.¹⁶⁸ Almost half of families (46%) surveyed in Scotland by Save the Children and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported a reduction in income since March, with almost nine in ten (86%) also reporting rising household costs.¹⁶⁹ Low-income families are more likely to report having to buy educational resources for their children compared to those in better off homes.¹⁷⁰ Services, including those run by One Parent Families Scotland, report a surge in the number of families seeking support.¹⁷¹ Figures from the Trussell Trust show a 47% increase in the overall need for emergency food parcels in Scotland, including a 62% rise in parcels given to families with children.¹⁷²

Further measures are urgently needed short-term to boost income levels for those with childcare responsibilities. However, wider sustained action is needed to improve work and social security, including how they interact, alongside enhanced childcare options. We need to lift low-income families out of poverty for good. Below we explore: sharing childcare more evenly; the affordability and accessibility of childcare; the quality of work; and the role of social security.

JUGGLING CHILDCARE AND WORK

Access to paid decent work can help lift those with caring responsibilities for children out of poverty. Across the UK, a household's risk of poverty falls as working hours increase.¹⁷³ In Scotland, the risk of poverty is much lower for children in working households compared to those in non-working households.¹⁷⁴ However, Scottish Government figures also show that while 28% of all working-age family units in Scotland have children, this rises to 30% of all families in poverty and 40% of all families facing in-work poverty.¹⁷⁵ The risk of poverty and in-work poverty is highest for those with children aged four and under.¹⁷⁶ Scottish Government data also shows that in 2016-19, 65% of children in poverty in Scotland (150,000) were living within working households; up sharply over the last decade.¹⁷⁷

A key issue for people with childcare responsibilities is the level of expectation on them to work, while also being able to access flexible and affordable childcare. As Child Poverty Action Group research explores, attitudes to parental employment and decisions taken by individuals are complex and reflect: deep-seated cultural values; individual

preferences; assumptions about the gendered division of labour; the shape of the tax and benefits systems; workplace parental leave policies; and the economic realities facing individual households.¹⁷⁸ Whilst opinions vary, polling suggests the public tend to agree that parents should be able to work fewer hours. There was also a clear recognition that child development cannot be overlooked and that parents should be allowed to choose what works best for them.¹⁷⁹ However, the analysis suggests there is increasing pressure on parents to enter the labour market, not least through the design of the social security system.¹⁸⁰¹⁸¹ It should also be noted many studies have shown that children benefit significantly from receiving high-quality formal childcare, and that this effect is stronger for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially where there is a mixture of children from different social backgrounds.¹⁸² ¹⁸³ ¹⁸⁴ ¹⁸⁵ ¹⁸⁶

Currently, women provide the majority of unpaid childcare and this hugely impacts their ability to enter and remain in the labour market and gain financial stability and independence. Not only are women often required to take time out of the labour market, those who do paid work are also more likely to be in part-time and precarious jobs, often earning lower pay. While the gender pay gap has narrowed, it remains at 13%. Close the Gap identifies the key drivers as: occupational segregation; a lack of quality part-time and flexible working; the economic undervaluation of stereotypical female work; women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work; biased and un-transparent recruitment, development and progression practices; male-oriented workplace cultures; and discrimination in pay and grading systems.¹⁸⁷ They also highlight the multiple barriers to the labour-market experienced by disabled women, black and minority ethnic women, Muslim women, lesbian and bisexual women, trans women, refugee women, young women, and older women.¹⁸⁸

The impact of childcare responsibilities is particularly acute for single parents and their children; 36% of all children in poverty in Scotland live in a single-parent family, compared to 23% of all children.¹⁸⁹ While the coronavirus crisis impacts many working parents, One Parent Families Scotland says it poses a "unique challenge" for single parents, most of whom are women, as they depend on one income and don't have the support of another adult in the home.¹⁹⁰ They say school and nursery closures have disrupted the "delicate balancing act of being able to earn and raise their children".¹⁹¹

Parental poverty is inseparable from child poverty – with 24% of children (230,000 children) living in relative poverty in 2016-19.¹⁹² This issue has attracted significant policy focus in Scotland with the introduction of statutory targets to cut child poverty below 10% by 2030/21, and an interim target of 18% by 2023/24.¹⁹³ The Scottish Government's Child Poverty Delivery Plan¹⁹⁴, includes a range of commitments to support delivery of the targets. However, there are concerns that annual child poverty targets in Scotland will be missed¹⁹⁵ amid forecasts by The Resolution Foundation that, without action, child poverty across the UK will rise between now and 2023/24 due to UK Government benefit reforms.¹⁹⁶

For parents with a disabled child, who are more likely to be women, the situation is even more stark. At UK level, one in five parent carers looking after someone under the age of 16 leave paid employment because they are unable to stay in work and maintain their caring responsibilities; disabled children are twice as likely to be in a home with no parent in paid work compared to children without additional support needs.¹⁹⁷ A third of families (33%) in Scotland have extra costs of more than £300 per month for their disabled child, with 10% facing costs of between £500 and £1,000 per month. Disability benefits fail to fully cover these additional costs for more than half of parents (58%).¹⁹⁸

REDISTRIBUTING CHILDCARE RESPONSIBILITIES

Tackling parental poverty, and therefore child poverty, requires a range of actions, including: greater access to good-quality, affordable childcare; driving up the quality of work; addressing inequalities within the labour market, including the gender pay gap; boosting parental-leave entitlements; and providing an effective social safety net for all those who need it. However, it also requires action to challenge deep-rooted social norms, with a redistribution of childcare responsibilities from women to men so that women have meaningful choices about seeking employment.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission highlights that despite increasing female participation in the labour market, "men's contribution to childcare has not increased at the same rate".¹⁹⁹ This is reinforced by data showing that in the UK, the uptake of shared parental leave by men is around as little as 2%.²⁰⁰ The Commission highlights that many women who become mothers still experience a 'motherhood penalty', working beneath their capabilities and qualifications and often in low-paid work. The Commission highlights the importance of men taking on more caring responsibilities and concludes

that two factors seem to encourage men’s involvement in childcare and reduce the impact on women’s careers of being the sole carer: the first being more generous paid paternity leave, and the second being more affordable childcare.

While noting that women are eight times more likely than men to play the primary role in childcare, research with more than 10,000 UK employees by Business in the Community found that while traditional views of gender roles have shifted, “this has not yet significantly impacted on behaviours”. However, the majority of men surveyed (85%) agreed they should be as involved in all aspects of childcare as women and over nine in ten believe it is equally acceptable for both women and men to take time out from employment to care for their family.²⁰¹ The research found that one of the main barriers to men doing so is “concern that it may affect their career progression”.²⁰² They found men would be encouraged by “more visible examples from senior leaders in their organisation”.²⁰³ BIC says businesses should publish parental leave and pay policies; enhance Shared Parental Leave (SPL) to match maternity pay, while offering leave for carers and flexible working wherever possible; and provide training so line managers can support parents, including new fathers, and carers. It says the UK Government should make flexible working a ‘day one’ statutory right for employees; introduce ‘use-it-or-lose-it’ incentives for men to use SPL; and introduce tax incentives for employers to boost support for SPL.²⁰⁴

In Scotland, the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls has recommended²⁰⁵ the creation of “two ‘Daddy months’ of use-it-or-lose-it paid paternity leave in Scotland, using existing and additional powers transferred by UK Government”. The Scottish Government says it accepts the proposal’s ambition, but that powers relating to paternity leave and paternity pay are reserved to Westminster. While commissioning a review of international evidence on paternity leave, it says it has written to the UK Government asking it to consider making it a legal requirement to publish their parental-leave rights, alongside measures to increase flexible working.²⁰⁶ It also says it would “strongly encourage” employers in Scotland to consider “voluntarily offering enhanced paternity leave” but has stopped short of specifying this as a criterion private companies must meet to access to Scottish Government contracts – an area that warrants further consideration.

AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE CHILDCARE

Paid work remains a critical source of income for many people with childcare responsibilities but too often fails to protect them from poverty. One way to help tackle this is boosting the affordability, accessibility and flexibility of childcare to ensure parents are supported to enter paid work and are left with enough income after paying for childcare.

“My kid’s in school all day, I’ve got between nine in the morning until maybe two and I’ve got an after-school care, so if needs be, you know, I could work. I just can’t find anything.”

Unpaid Care Research, Woman²⁰⁷

Analysis suggests that parents in the UK not only pay the highest childcare costs in Europe, but the second highest in the world.²⁰⁸ A UNICEF study of 31 countries ranked the UK amongst the worst for family-friendly policies.²⁰⁹ Some aspects of the social security system seek to reimburse some childcare costs to low-income families, with this embedded within the ‘child element’ of Universal Credit. This power is reserved to Westminster and several groups have urged the UK Government to increase the child element and pay childcare costs upfront rather than in arrears.²¹⁰ Separately, The Fawcett Society has described the lack of investment in childcare in the UK Government’s recovery plans as “breath-taking”, amid concerns many working parents, particularly mothers, cannot return to work due to inadequate provision.²¹¹

A method of making childcare affordable within devolved powers is increasing publicly-funded childcare hours. In Scotland, the number of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) hours for all three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds is 600 hours per year. In November 2014, the Scottish Government announced this will rise to 1,140 a year – equivalent to 30 hours per week term time – by 2020,²¹² at a total annual investment of nearly £1 billion.²¹³ While welcome, this falls significantly short of the 50 hours per week for children between six months and five years called for by The National Advisory Council on Women and Girls²¹⁴; an ambition the Scottish Government says it accepts while saying it is focused on the current expansion.²¹⁵ While welcoming cross-party support on the issue, the independent Commission for Childcare Reform also recommended an all year, entitlement for every child up to the age of 12 to 50 hours per week

of – high-quality, affordable, flexible and accessible – childcare and education. Critically, it said priority should be given to families who live in or near poverty, having found that for those with childcare responsibilities the “current mix of state provision of early learning, market-led provision of paid for childcare, and a variety of tax and benefit supports does not work together in a way that enables them to work or study confident that their children’s needs are being met”.²¹⁶ The UK Women’s Budget Group’s analysis shows that free universal provision for children between six months and primary school has long-term benefits for children and their parents, as well as for the economy.²¹⁷

While publicly funded entitlement boosts affordability, accessibility of provision is essential too. A 2018 study²¹⁸ of parents and carers with children under six in Scotland, showed that on average, parents use 29 hours a week of ELC for three- and four-year-olds but a “substantial number” felt there is not enough flexibility in existing provision. Others reported being unable to access provision due to “a lack of flexibility in hours and days available” or limited choice of provider. Some 54% of parents surveyed paid for at least some of the ELC they use, with an average spend for all children under six of £494 per month and with 69% of those who pay for provision reporting issues with affordability.

“I [am] waiting once they [the children] go to school, but I think it won’t be easy... because of the childcare. If I decide to work two days in the week still I need to pay for childcare.”

Decent Work Research, Woman²¹⁹

Importantly, studies have shown that alongside the quantity of hours, the quality of early childhood education and care provided is also critical and can bring particular benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In contrast, high numbers of hours in poor-quality group care can create negative effects, particularly in a child’s first year of life.²²⁰

These findings reinforce the importance of realising the Scottish Government’s principles for the ELC expansion: quality, flexibility, affordability, and accessibility.²²¹ The Government forecasts families will save £4,500 per year under the expansion²²² with local authorities required to consider the flexibility of the provision.²²³ In addition, the National Standard for Early Learning and Childcare Providers sets minimum quality thresholds all ELC funded providers, including recommended adult to child ratios and minimum Care Inspectorate quality evaluations relating to quality of care and support. However, while delivery of the expansion was making “steady progress”²²⁴, the Scottish Government has now revoked the legal requirement for local authorities to deliver it from August 2020 because of the pandemic and has confirmed the expansion will not be introduced during the 2020-21 school year.²²⁵ The First Minister has expressed “deep regret” at the delay and committed to getting “back on track and deliver it as quickly as possible”. However, Maree Todd MSP, the Minister for Childcare and Early Years, says an “initial assessment of readiness” will not be carried out until December 2020. Given the significant consequences, particularly for low-income families, it is essential the roll out commences across Scotland as quickly as possible, while ensuring the accessibility and quality of provision is protected.

BOOSTING QUANTITY OF DECENT WORK AND ACCESS

Measures to make paid work a meaningful and sustainable choice for people with childcare responsibilities are critical. However, this will only be achieved if the available work is decent.²²⁶ The UK-wide social security system is premised on work as being the best route out of poverty. For example, the conditionality regime expects: people looking after children aged two to “take active steps to prepare for work”; those whose children are aged three and four to work a maximum of 16 hours a week; those with children aged between five and 12 to work a maximum of 25 hours a week; and those whose children are 13 and over to work a maximum of 35 hours a week.²²⁷ These age thresholds have reduced in recent years.²²⁸ Further, those in-work, but not earning enough, are expected to increase their hours up to 35 hours per week or secure a better paid role; this requirement does not take account of the unpaid care and domestic work disproportionately delivered by women or the lack of progression pathways into better paid roles for many low-paid workers.

Despite this focus on paid work, too often, it does not provide enough income. While an adequate hourly wage is only one ingredient required for decent work, it remains critical²²⁹ and even on this narrow measure major progress is needed. While the proportion of employees in Scotland earning less than the living wage has fallen from 18.8% in 2012 to 16.9%

in 2019, one in six workers still earn below this basic threshold. Importantly, 19.5% of women – nearly one in five – earn less than the real living wage in Scotland, compared to 14% for men.²³⁰ At 61%, women make up the majority of employees earning below the living wage, with this largely unchanged since 2012.²³¹ In addition, people may have access to decent work, including the real living wage, but still live in poverty. This is particularly the case for single-earner households; at 39%, the poverty rate for single women with children in Scotland is 20% higher than for all working-age adults.²³²

The regulation of work is reserved to Westminster, but the Scottish Government can still push employers to improve the quality of work. Existing initiatives²³³ include promotion of the Scottish Living Wage, the Scottish Business Pledge; and increased funding to help employers remove barriers faced by their staff. The Gender Pay Gap Action Plan²³⁴ includes a “Women Returners Programme” to support women after a career break – particularly older women, disabled women, minority ethnic women – and a feasibility study for a ‘Centre for Flexible Work’ to increase quality, flexible work in Scotland, with a focus on low-income parents. The Scottish Government also has a role to play in supporting low-income parents seeking work through the devolved employability programme Fair Start Scotland.²³⁵ Encouragingly, participation in the scheme, which offers up to 12 months support to people to find a job including because of caring responsibilities, is voluntary and it adopts a ‘whole person’ approach. The Parental Employability Support Fund also helps parents, particularly those on low-incomes, to access and progress while aligning to the expansion of childcare entitlement.²³⁶

This trajectory is encouraging, but progress remains slow and insufficient. Ironically, the Scottish Government’s Advisory Group on Economic Recovery highlights that those termed ‘key workers’ during the coronavirus crisis are amongst the lowest paid and face economic disadvantage on “multiple levels”.²³⁷ Damningly, it says they have been “neither respect[ed] nor rewarded as such”. Amid warnings of significant unemployment because of the crisis, the Group calls for the creation of a new Scottish Jobs Guarantee scheme focused on young people while calling for a new Centre for Workplace Transformation to improve business performance and productivity, but through a Fair Work approach.²³⁸

Expectations on employers must grow, with stronger incentives to improve practice and penalties where necessary. At £11bn per year, the Scottish Government estimates that the number of jobs supported by public procurement is on a par with employment in the whole of the City of Dundee.²³⁹ The Government must use this spending power to fast-track the step-change needed for parents with childcare responsibilities, as well as other carers; it should also encourage local authorities and other public bodies to do the same. While the revamp of the Scottish Business Pledge failed to sufficiently strengthen the initiative²⁴⁰, through “Fair Work First” the Government has committed to “use its financial power to make Fair Work the norm”, including “no inappropriate use of zero hours contracts, action on gender pay, genuine workforce engagement, including with trade unions, and payment of the real Living Wage”.²⁴¹ These criteria will cover “as many funding streams and business support grants as we can” by the end of this Parliament in 2021.²⁴² The criteria used should at least include those within existing voluntary schemes, like the Scottish Business Pledge and Carer Positive, such as flexible working practices and greater support for carers within HR policies and procedures.

“We may not yet have the constitutional power to make fair work a legal requirement, but we do have the financial power of government to make it a practical reality and we will make that count.”

Nicola Sturgeon MSP, First Minister²⁴³

In the coming weeks and months, Governments around the world will be investing huge volumes of public money into economies to boost recovery from the coronavirus crisis. This creates an opportunity to change incentives and business models permanently. Governments must bail out businesses responsibly. Any support to big corporations should be conditional on measures to increase the quality of work they provide, alongside transformative action to reduce climate emissions and tackle gender inequalities.²⁴⁴ Here in Scotland, we must realise the First Minister’s commitment to use the Scottish Government’s “financial power” to drive this change.

USING DEVOLVED SOCIAL SECURITY POWERS TO PROTECT LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

The UK Government has a continuing and key role in ensuring the social security system better protects people from poverty, including low-income families. While recognising measures put in place to protect businesses and the wider economy, the Institute for Public Policy and Research says “there has been little to no support specifically for families with children”. It has called for a £10-per-week increase to the child supplements paid through Universal Credit and a £5 uplift in Child Benefit for the duration of the crisis.²⁴⁵ A unique coalition of organisations²⁴⁶, including Oxfam, has also united to call for increases to key benefits, including Child Benefit, as well as immediate changes to Universal Credit, including removing the five-week wait for an initial payment, the limit on the number of children families receive payment for, and the benefit cap. Similar calls have been made by the Scottish Campaigns on Rights to Social Security.²⁴⁷

However, the Scottish Parliament has significant devolved social security powers. While the Scottish Government cannot mitigate the impact of all UK decisions, it has shown – both before the pandemic and since – a willingness to act, with a focus on realising Scotland’s child-poverty targets.²⁴⁸ However, amid the coronavirus crisis, the Children and Young People’s Commissioner for Scotland (CYPCS), Bruce Adamson, has called for it to increase cash support for children in low-income families and says “the safest and most dignified way” is to give them a direct payment of £20 a week”.²⁴⁹ This call comes ahead of the introduction of the new Scottish Child Payment (SCP). Worth £10 per week extra for every child in a low-income household, it is predicted to cut relative poverty after housing costs by 3 percentage points in Scotland.²⁵⁰ Payments were due to begin in late 2020, starting with low-income families with children under six, before rolling out to all children under 16 by 2022. However, amid the coronavirus crisis, delivery is delayed, with the Scottish Government citing lack of capacity; it hopes the payment will open to applications by the end of 2020, but this is not guaranteed. As the Fraser of Allander Institute notes, delivering a new payment takes time, but “it is frustrating that the Scottish Government cannot operationalise powers on social security at a time when undoubtedly most needed”.²⁵¹ The Scottish Government must avoid further delay.

Positively, the Communities Secretary Aileen Campbell has acknowledged “this pandemic will disrupt lives like never before and cause financial hardship”. In March 2020, the Scottish Government announced an additional £350 million of funding for “those most affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic”.²⁵² It has also announced an additional £27.6 million to ensure children eligible for free school meals, which has grown by 53,000 to 175,000 children during the pandemic, will continue to receive cash payments or vouchers over the summer holidays.²⁵³ While very positive, not all low-income families will benefit from it, including those sitting above the eligibility threshold but facing financial pressure – with calls for the threshold to be urgently reviewed to ensure all children in need of this vital support receive it.²⁵⁴

Measures to date are welcome, but they are not enough. While 30% of all households report being ‘in serious financial difficulty’ or ‘struggling to make ends meet’, this rises to nearly half (49%) of households with dependent children in Scotland – some 300,000 households in total. Of these, 100,000 – were in the most serious category.²⁵⁵ While figures for low-income families are not available, the total number of applications for emergency cash grants from the Scottish Welfare Fund²⁵⁶, and the value of grants, has also reached record levels.²⁵⁷ As noted by A Menu for Change, a group which includes Oxfam Scotland, the Fund throws a much-needed financial lifeline to those in crisis in Scotland. However, the surge in applications exposes the gaps in the social safety net and inadequacy of incomes from paid work.²⁵⁸ In addition, prior to the pandemic, the majority of people (55%) were not confident they would know where to access emergency financial help if they ran out of money to buy food²⁵⁹ and the Fund’s delivery did not always reflect best practice.²⁶⁰ While the recent increase in the Fund’s value is welcome, awareness must be boosted, and access to grants provided quickly.

YouGov polling for Oxfam Scotland shows that more than half (53%) of people in Scotland believe governments should spend more on parents who work on very low incomes, with only 3% saying they should receive less.²⁶¹

We must protect low-income families before they reach crisis. Amid the delayed roll-out of the Scottish Child Payment, the Scottish Government must ensure low-income families receive at least the equivalent of this payment – £10 per week, per child – with this continuing until the new entitlement is in place. Writing to the First Minister in May 2020²⁶², a broad range of organisations, including Oxfam, urged her “to use every tool at your government’s disposal”. A range of options

exist²⁶³, such as: using Best Start payment mechanisms – including the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods²⁶⁴; using the Scottish Welfare Fund to provide a new coronavirus crisis grant to low-income families; and increasing the School Clothing Grant. So far, the Government has not embraced any of these, nor outlined alternatives. Amid spiralling need, particularly of low-income families, they should act quickly. Beyond the immediate emergency, poverty rates will remain high – unacceptably high – despite the Scottish Child Payment. While recognising the importance of wider interventions, such as affordable housing²⁶⁵ and improving the quality of work – further measures to bolster social security will be needed to ensure all those with childcare responsibilities are protected from poverty on an ongoing basis.

To protect low income families, alongside all those in or at risk of poverty, the Scottish Government should:

- **Support those caring for children to secure and sustain decent work by boosting access to high-quality, accessible and flexible publicly-funded childcare, including recommencing the delayed expansion as soon as possible and seeing this as stepping-stone to wider entitlement;**
- **Ensure those juggling paid and unpaid work can provide quality care for their children and families while avoiding poverty by improving the quality of work, strengthening voluntary accreditation schemes and Fair Work First to ensure receipt of public funding is conditional upon enhanced support to those with childcare responsibilities;**
- **Immediately use devolved powers to give low-income families the equivalent of at least £10 per week per child while ensuring access to timely and adequate emergency financial support for those facing an income crisis.**
 - Introduce the Scottish Child Payment as quickly as possible but, in the interim, use existing mechanisms to provide at least the equivalent level of support to help prevent families reaching income crisis.
 - Boost awareness and uptake of the Scottish Welfare Fund and ensure people can access adequate Crisis Grants quickly by ensuring consistent use of best practice in the delivery of the Fund. Increase investment to match demand while ensuring the Fund as a gateway to income maximisation and debt minimisation support.

PAID CARERS – UNDER-VALUED AND UNDER-PAID

Just as unpaid care is under-valued, so too is paid care. While employment is often described as the best defence against poverty, if you are a paid carer, this is not always the case. Across Britain, paid care is associated with low incomes, poor working conditions and a lack of agency.²⁶⁶ While the value we place on carers is low, our expectations of them are high – a contradiction reinforced by the coronavirus crisis, with COVID-19 spreading to the majority of care homes and high numbers of extra deaths.²⁶⁷ Social care workers have highlighted a lack of personal protective equipment²⁶⁸ at a time when they are endangering themselves by foregoing social distancing, putting themselves and their family in danger.²⁶⁹ At the same time, too many paid care workers live in poverty due to existing low pay and poor conditions.²⁷⁰ Some have been furloughed on 80% of their pay, or have lost their incomes entirely partly due to illness or living with somebody who is ill.

“It’s just not enough, how can I pay all my bills and rents and... buy a bus pass... it’s just not evening out.”
Social care worker, female²⁷¹

Below we examine the interaction between paid care and poverty, and the policy context for this in Scotland. Firstly, we consider the situation for those working in the social care sector and, secondly, the context for paid childcare workers.

SCOTLAND’S SOCIAL CARE SECTOR

In 2018, the social care sector²⁷² in Scotland employed 204,610 people²⁷² and the economic value of the adult social care sector alone was estimated at £3.92 billion.²⁷³ The sector features a complex web of more than 1,000 providers – 41%

private, 28% third sector and 31% public sector²⁷⁴ – and with services including residential care, nursing care, domiciliary care and day care. There is no single co-ordinating body for social care.²⁷⁵ There are more than 800 care homes in Scotland²⁷⁶ but this has declined in recent years, with a growing focus on delivering care within individuals’ own homes.²⁷⁷

Overall, the workforce has grown by nearly 7% over the last decade²⁷⁸ and estimates before the coronavirus crisis suggested that, amid an ageing population, an extra 80,000 workers could be required in Scotland by 2035.²⁷⁹ Some 85% of employees are women²⁸⁰, compared to the public sector generally at 65% female.²⁸¹ This makes it a prime example of horizontal segregation – with women concentrated in typically low-paid sectors. Across the UK, social care is a designated low-pay sector.²⁸² In Scotland, average earnings in the adult social-care sector in 2018 were just £18,400.²⁸³

Amid growing concerns around social care during the coronavirus crisis there are increasing cross-party calls for reform in Scotland.²⁸⁴ Scotland’s Health Secretary Jeane Freeman has said there should be a review of how it is funded, regulated and provided, noting the pandemic has “shone a light” on improvements required.²⁸⁶ This comes after an earlier programme of reform was launched in June 2019²⁸⁷ and alongside the ongoing process to integrate health and social care.²⁸⁸ The Advisory Group on Economic Recovery²⁸⁹ has now called on the Scottish Government to accelerate reform of adult social care, including urgently reviewing “the structure, funding and regulation of the sector to ensure its sustainability and quality.” It says that while care homes have been at the “front line in the crisis” we must make sure, as we emerge from the crisis, that “Scotland takes action to strengthen the capacity and sustainability of the care sector as a whole.” Critically, the Group also acknowledges job quality issues, whilst making clear that challenges – from recruitment and retention of staff, to funding levels – pre-date the coronavirus.

FULFILLING WORK, BUT NOT FAIR WORK

While working conditions in Scottish care homes are similar to those in the rest of the UK²⁹⁰, Scotland’s Fair Work Convention²⁹¹ has highlighted significant concerns about the quality of work in social care. It reported data showing: 13% of the workforce work over 50 hours a week; 20% are not on permanent contracts; 15% of workers work unpaid overtime; 11% are on zero hours contracts; and the average hourly pay is just £9.79. The Convention found that while the work is fulfilling, “fair work is not being consistently delivered”. Amid this context, despite only 19% of social care workers having their pay and conditions affected by agreements between their employer and trade unions²⁹², the STUC warns that, “we are seeing and are likely to see more industrial unrest among the care workforce”.²⁹³

The Convention found that despite some good practice, the current funding and commissioning system makes it almost impossible for providers to offer fair work. They say the existing model of employment transfers “the burden of risk of unpredictable social care demand and cost almost entirely onto the workforce”. Despite the complexity of the roles and the skills and qualifications required, the Convention found a “chronic under-valuing” of social care with this “not unconnected to perceptions of care as ‘women’s work’”. While front-line workers feel respected by their colleagues, those they care for, and their employers, the Convention said they “do not feel particularly valued by Scottish Government or the wider public”. It is critical this is tackled, with poor pay conditions potentially exposing workers and their families to financial instability, and affecting their physical, emotional and social well-being.²⁹⁴

“Scotland’s care workers deserve better pay, improved conditions and recognised trade union representation. But they also deserve a re-evaluation of their status.”

Richard Leonard MSP, Leader, Scottish Labour²⁹⁵

The Scottish Government has taken steps to try to boost pay in the sector. In February 2016, it jointly agreed with COSLA to ensure front-line staff in publicly-funded adult social care would receive at least the Scottish Living Wage (SLW), with money committed via local authorities to ensure providers could fund this. Extra funding was provided in subsequent years to reflect increases in the SLW. In April 2020, at the peak of the coronavirus crisis, the Government announced it was fast-tracking²⁹⁶ a 3.3% wage rise to at least £9.30 per hour for all hours worked; a move welcomed by the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland²⁹⁷ and Unison Scotland²⁹⁸, though the latter has noted previous commitments

have taken months to reach workers' pay packets. Swift implementation of the pay rise is now essential, with research suggesting that some providers have struggled to pay rates that match the SLW in the past.²⁹⁹ In addition, while measures to improve hourly wages are important, Oxfam research with low-paid workers shows this is only one element of decent work, with factors such as job security, paid leave and a safe working environment also significant.³⁰⁰ Unison Scotland has also highlighted that alongside payment of the SLW, employers need to ensure that adequate travel time, travel costs and other expenses, such as mobile phones to ensure workers' safety are properly provided to their staff.³⁰¹

"This deal begins to recognise the real value in society of this workforce.

When this crisis is over, there must be no slipping back."

*Mike Kirby, UNISON Scotland secretary*³⁰²

Payment of the Scottish Living Wage is the least that social care workers should receive with the volume of their hours and the equity of their pay important too. Research in 2018, showed almost half (46%) of care employees viewed their pay as unfair compared with other local jobs.³⁰³ Less than half agreed that they always had enough hours or income to meet their basic household requirements. To tackle poverty, the STUC has called for a new minimum wage of £10-per-hour for all key workers in Scotland, including carers, with an immediate uplift of at least £2 per hour.³⁰⁴

YouGov polling for Oxfam Scotland shows that two-thirds (66%) of adults in Scotland believe care workers are paid too little; only 1% said they are paid too much.³⁰⁵

The Scottish Government has placed a significant focus on the Fair Work agenda.³⁰⁶ However, further effort is needed to realise this policy intent within social care. While Government guidance requires public bodies to have "regard to fair work practices" in their contracts, progress to deliver decent work requires, as the Fair Work Convention found, "significant robust intervention" by national and local government, by commissioners and by employers to fix the "broken commissioning and procurement system". The Government says it will "consider and respond to" the Convention's recommendations³⁰⁷, but without significant action, care workers are likely to continue to face in-work poverty.³⁰⁸

"Everything is such an issue just to get time off. It really is difficult 'cause you give a lot of stuff up 'cause it's not worth the hassle... And then five years down the line you realise... that's all you do, is go to work."

*Social care worker, female*³⁰⁹

TOWARDS A NEW AND FAIRER CARE MODEL

Alongside the long-term, and long-known, pressures created by Scotland's ageing population^{310 311}, Scottish Care has warned a 'new care normal' is needed due to the coronavirus crisis. It warns that staffing levels in care homes are likely to need to rise within a sector already facing "acute staffing pressures and significant economic instability".³¹² Furthermore, the UK Government's proposed new immigration system excludes care workers from receiving fast-tracked visas, in contrast to workers in the NHS³¹³ – attracting significant criticism in Scotland³¹⁴. This is likely to increase pressures on care workers, as staffing shortages are likely to become even more acute, without further investment. We cannot heap more pressure upon the existing low-paid social care workforce.

Unison Scotland says we need an "entirely different, more ambitious approach to care".³¹⁵ It says the coronavirus crisis has "shone a light on the poor employment practices which are depressingly widespread" in the sector and that a coordinated response has been hampered by the fragmented model of social care which includes large numbers of private providers and by the complicated commissioning and procurement processes.³¹⁶ They say workers in high-risk groups have felt pressured into going to work with some companies refusing to give sick pay to self-isolating members of staff.³¹⁷

³¹⁸ Gaps in death in-service coverage have also emerged at a time when front-line workers have been killed by the virus.³¹⁹ While acknowledging the need to address such gaps within the commissioning process, the Scottish Government has announced funding to make sure social care workers in Scotland receive normal pay if they have the coronavirus or are

self-isolating because of it³²⁰, a move welcomed by unions³²¹, and a named survivor of any social care worker who dies without death in-service cover in their contracted pension will also receive a one-off payment of £60,000.³²²

“What this crisis continues to expose is the underlying diseases plaguing our care sector: low pay, precarious employment, and excessive working hours – the exploitation of a predominantly female workforce.”

Kirsty Nimmo, GMB Scotland organiser³²³

Jeane Freeman MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Health, says the “mixed economy” model of private, public and third sector delivery of social, and how the service is funded, should be reviewed in the wake of the coronavirus crisis.^{324 325} This presents an opportunity for change and the review must result in those working in the sector being properly valued, with measures taken to fully protect them from poverty. The Government must realise the priorities identified when it launched a previous programme of reform in June 2019, specifically: changing attitudes so that social care support is seen as an investment in Scotland’s people, society and economy; investment in social care support, and how it is paid for in the future; and a valued and skilled workforce.³²⁶ Issues related to job quality featured strongly in a consultation to inform the programme of reform.³²⁷ The Government must therefore deliver much faster progress on its stated commitment to ensuring “fair work is embedded in the delivery of social care services”.³²⁸

The voices of low-paid social care workers, those who use social care, whether adults or disabled children and their parents, as well as unpaid carers, must be central to any reform. Too often this is not the case, with frontline workers missing when policies are formed.³²⁹ While effort has been made to include those with lived experience of social care in the early development and testing of policies³³⁰, meaningful reform must fulfill the Scottish Government’s commitment to promote increased collective bargaining in social care, including the procurement process.³³¹ This should include urgently building upon the creation of the Fair Work in Social Care Implementation Group to implement the Fair Work Convention’s recommendations.³³² While this approach appears positive, it is not clear if progress is being made.³³³

Further, in May 2020, the STUC voiced “extreme disappointment” after an amendment to establish a system of national collective bargaining in the private care home sector within emergency coronavirus legislation was rejected by the Scottish Parliament, with the Scottish Government opposing the move. More positively, Jamie Hepburn MSP, the Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills, has since reiterated the Government’s “sincere and genuine commitment” to the promotion of collective bargaining within social care, as well as within early learning and child care. He says a “mapping exercise” of current collective bargaining and national and sectoral agreements is underway and says this will “inform further work to increase Scotland’s collective bargaining coverage”.³³⁴ Faster progress is required to increase the level of collective bargaining within social care and to realise the Scottish Government’s stated commitment to this.

BOOSTING INVESTMENT IN SOCIAL CARE

Increased funding will be key to protecting paid carers from poverty. Social care is delivered by providers via local authorities, funded by the Scottish Government and some charges paid by those using the services. Social care in Scotland is distinguished by the entitlement to free personal care³³⁵ – such as help with dressing and washing – for those assessed by local authorities as requiring it; some note that access risks being squeezed amid stretched finances.³³⁶ Nursing care is also free with charges for other costs means-tested; people pay towards the cost of their accommodation in a care home if they have capital of more than £18,000 and pay in full if they have above £28,500.³³⁷ However, with around 70% of people not having sufficient assets, their fees are mainly paid by local government.³³⁸

Overall funding to Scotland’s 32 local authorities from the Scottish Government has fallen by 7.6% in real-terms since 2013-14. While the Scottish Government says councils have received a “fair funding settlement”, many councils are using their reserves³³⁹ and face increasing funding pressure on care services.³⁴⁰ In 2019, the Health Foundation examined spending on adult social care in England, Scotland and Wales.³⁴¹ While noting differences in demography and care needs in each country, it found spending per person between 2010 and 2016 in Scotland exceeded England and Wales, but that levels had fallen in each nation over this period. Importantly, these funding pressures within social care not only impact

the ability of paid carers to live free from poverty, the British Medical Association³⁴² says social care in Scotland is an “increasing area of concern”, adding that to look after patients well, “doctors need social care to be well-funded and adequately staffed”. While noting “huge challenges with recruiting and retaining social care professionals” it says the pressures on social care are a “direct result of inadequate resourcing”.

Amid the coronavirus crisis, the UK-level Women’s Budget Group has warned the future of the social care sector is uncertain amid a likely squeeze in revenues and a predicted increase in costs due to enhanced safety requirements.³⁴³ It says the “disastrous impact” of COVID-19 on the largely privately-run care sector is a symptom of long-term under-funding and that investment is needed to increase the proportion of the UK economy working in the sector. Significantly, it warns for this shift to be realised, “wages and working conditions will have to improve”. This will require more investment.

The Scottish Government’s budget for 2020-21 includes £9.4 billion for Health and Social Care Partnerships to deliver primary and community health and care services; with this spend directed by Integrated Authorities in each area.^{344 345} This includes spending on adult social care, primary care, mental health services and some support for unpaid carers. While this is around a fifth of the Scottish Government’s £50 billion total budget, as discussed earlier, the Scottish Government must increase investment in social care to ensure workers are protected from poverty and to relieve pressure on unpaid carers. It can do from existing budgets, though it must protect other vital services, while also utilising devolved tax powers to increase revenue, and advocating for more investment in social care at Westminster, thereby growing the funds available to commit to social care in Scotland.

Crucially, investment levels, and therefore capacity, within social care also impacts on the level of unpaid care required to fill the gaps. While some people, now and in the future, will wish to deliver care for their loved ones themselves, regardless of the availability of publicly-funded support, the less that care needs can be effectively fulfilled by the state, the more unpaid carers will be required to plug the gaps through necessity, not choice.

Alongside boosting funding, some also believe ownership models need to change with calls for a new National Care Service to be created with the vast majority of social care publicly delivered.³⁴⁶ First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has said she has “huge sympathy” for this and has voiced a willingness to “rethink old ways of doing things and contemplate potentially new and potentially better ways of doing things”.³⁴⁷ Whatever model exists for social care, a fundamental principle must be that those working in the sector, people who rely on it, and unpaid carers must be protected from poverty.

DECENT WORK FOR CHILDCARE WORKERS

There are also concerns about the quality of work in the childcare sector in Scotland. Amid growing employment levels pre-coronavirus, 34,910 staff work in day care of children services with a further 5,260 childminders.³⁴⁸ At 97%, the workforce is again overwhelmingly female and one in five of the day-care-of-children workforce do not have a permanent contract.³⁴⁹ Amongst private and voluntary providers, it is estimated that around 80% of practitioners and 50% of supervisors are paid less than the Living Wage.³⁵⁰ Skills Development Scotland reports recruitment and retention challenges with the sector “often perceived by potential recruits as an unattractive employment destination offering low status, gendered assumptions about the nature of the work and employment terms and conditions”.³⁵¹ Further, the Women’s Budget Group has voiced fears that some childcare providers may not survive the economic shock of the coronavirus crisis³⁵², a concern shared by the Fawcett Society who cite a collapse in demand at UK-level.³⁵³

As outlined previously, while the planned expansion in Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland is delayed by a year³⁵⁴, it will increase the affordability of childcare for many parents, particularly women in low-paid work. However, given the sector is itself dominated by low-paid women, it is also critical that childcare workers are themselves offered decent work. The Scottish Government estimates that, relative to 2015/16 levels, between 8,000 and 11,000 staff will be needed with a commitment to “high-quality and well-paid jobs”.³⁵⁵ The Government provides funding to local authorities to implement ELC; it is then delivered primarily by public providers, with others operating across the private and third sectors. The commissioning process, including the hourly rate the partner provider is paid, is determined by each individual authority.

Currently, public-sector ELC staff are paid the real Living Wage, and the Government says it wants all childcare workers to receive this. Encouragingly, the National Standard for Early Learning and Childcare Providers, which set minimum quality

thresholds all funded providers must meet, include criteria on fair work, including payment of the Living Wage for funded ELC hours and “avoiding exploitative employment practices such as unfair zero hours contracts”.³⁵⁶ Funding to deliver the Living Wage commitment will be critical amid concerns that, at present, the rates paid by local authorities do not meet the operating costs of partner providers, creating a shortfall. Additionally, providers will only need to pay the Scottish Living Wage for funded ELC hours, creating a risk that staff working for the same provider could be on different rates.

Further, Unison Scotland says the Living Wage benchmark is “far too low” and fails to reflect the workforce’s value.³⁵⁷ The STUC warns that investment beyond the living wage will be needed, highlighting that moves to pay the living wage have squeezed pay differentials between care workers and team leaders or supervisors, limiting progression opportunities; it calls for collective and sectoral bargaining agreements to ensure fairness for all workers.³⁵⁸ Given these concerns, the Scottish Government needs to realise the commitment within the Fair Work Action Plan to create a forum in Early Learning and Childcare to “explore sectoral bargaining as a long-term aim”.³⁵⁹ Given the significant consequences that poor quality work has on workers and their families, greater urgency is needed to realise this commitment.

To protect paid carers from poverty, while increasing support for unpaid carers, the Scottish Government should:

- **Use devolved powers to raise new revenue to significantly boost investment in social care, while protecting other vital services, with consideration of a dedicated Scottish Social Care Tax;**
- **Review and strengthen Fair Work First criteria and swiftly apply these to all publicly-funded social care and childcare and move faster to fulfil and strengthen commitments to increase collective bargaining in social care while reconsidering the private provision of public services within both sectors.**
 - Swiftly implement the Fair Work Convention’s recommendations for social care, including reforming the commissioning and procurement models to drive up the quality of work for those working within the sector.

CONCLUSION

Those providing care in Scotland, whether on an employed basis or not, do so for more than any financial reward they receive. However, it cannot be acceptable for those caring to live in poverty. This briefing has made clear that poverty is too often closely linked to caring. While the context and solutions vary for people providing different types of care, there are two core truths: all care is under-valued, and women are impacted most. We can do better.

To unlock significant progress, we require a step-change in how we value and invest in care. No longer can carers be invisible while being the glue holding our society together. The solidarity people have shown with carers and other key workers during the coronavirus crisis cannot become a footnote of history, it must be a catalyst for change. We must create a positive legacy from the appalling human suffering this pandemic has created. To achieve this, we must listen to carers, and then we must act. But we should do so quickly.

The window for meaningful and long-lasting change is unlikely to stay open for long. The Scottish Government is currently considering the recommendations of its Advisory Group on Economic Recovery. The Group calls for action to deliver a “Robust, Resilient Wellbeing Economy for Scotland”. To achieve this, we cannot overlook care. The Scottish Government must therefore use this moment for national reflection to better value and invest in care in the short-term leading to a sustained and deep transformation both before and after the Scottish Parliament election in May 2021.

We have an opportunity to create lasting change. We must, together, make care count in Scotland.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper was written by Jamie Livingstone. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Rhiannon Sims, Ieuan Ferrer, Rebecca Lozza, Kenneth Watt, Kirsty Davies-Warner, Silvia Galandini, Amber Parkes, and Anam Parvez Butt.

We are very grateful for the input and support of Lynn Williams who is featured within this report. We would also like to thank all participants in Oxfam's research projects and case studies for sharing their experiences and views. Without them it would not have been possible to put carers' voices at the centre of this report to ensure their lived experiences guides our work to improve the value and support given to care work in Scotland.

Further thanks to: Dr Hartwig Pautz, University of the West of Scotland; Fiona Collie, Carers Scotland; Satwat Rehman, One Parent Families Scotland; John Dickie, Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland; Deborah Clarke, UNISON Scotland; and Francis Stuart, the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

This paper is part of a series written to inform public debate on the interaction between care and poverty.

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