

Programme for Government 2025/26

April 2025



**One Parent
Families Scotland**
changing lives, challenging poverty

Programme for Government priorities

Social security

- Mitigate the two-child limit at the earliest possible opportunity through Social Security Scotland.
- Increase the Scottish Child Payment to £40 before the end of the current Parliament.
- Target additional support through the Scottish Child Payment to families affected by the Young Parent Penalty.
- Increase funding for income-maximisation services, with targeted investment in services which are best able to reach priority families.

Education and training

- Increase the School Clothing Grant, and the income threshold for accessing this, in line with inflation, and ensure that eligible families are auto enrolled.
- Extend free school meals to all primary school pupils and commit to introducing universal free school meals for all pupils in secondary schools.
- Support single parents into training, education and sustainable, family friendly employment, which pays the Real Living Wage, through specialist employability support and actions to reduce inequalities in the labour market.

Care

- Accelerate progress towards expanding universal childcare to one and two-year-olds and actions to create a system of funded school age childcare, whilst committing to a more radical childcare ambition including the choice of up to 50 hours of ELC.
- Introduce a new National Outcome on valuing and investing in care, and all those who provide it.

Tax powers

- Use the Scottish Parliament's devolved tax powers to generate more revenue in Scotland to fund action on poverty and inequality, while investing in care, and tackling the climate crisis.

Background

Single parents are one of six priority groups included in the Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan (Best Start, Bright Futures), in recognition of the fact that [36% of all children in poverty in Scotland](#) are living in single parent households - significantly higher than the national average of 22% of all children in 2023-24.

In recent years, measures such as the Scottish Child Payment and Benefit Cap Mitigation, have moved the dial on child poverty in the right direction. However, if the Scottish Government is to meet its statutory child poverty target of 10% of all children living in poverty by 2030 further and faster action is urgently needed.

As we look towards Scottish Parliament elections in 2026, we would therefore welcome policy commitments which place single parent families at the heart of decision-making in areas which impact their lives. Specifically, this should include targeted interventions in the areas of social security, education and training, employment, and childcare.

Barriers for single parent families

Higher rates of child poverty among single parent families can be seen a result of several factors, including:

- Gender inequality: [92% of single parents are female](#).
- Labour market inequality: Single parents in work are consistently the family type most likely to face in-work poverty and are more likely to be working in a low-wage sector and on lower hours.
- Lack of affordable childcare: For single parents, access to affordable, flexible, quality childcare is vital as means of enabling them to enter paid work and potentially lift their families out of poverty.
- Multiple inequalities: Single parents are more likely than couple parents to be from black (9%) or mixed ethnic groups (3%), are more than twice as likely to be disabled (33%), and are more likely to have a disabled child (35%).

These factors will impact different families in different ways, but overall single parent families are likely to face several unique challenges when compared to couple parents.

Priorities for the next Programme for Government

Social security

Every child should be able to grow up in a Scotland where their rights to development, health, social security, and education (UNCRC Articles 6, 24, 26, 28 and 29) are respected, protected and fulfilled. However, at present, too many children in Scotland are growing up without the resources that they need to realise these rights - as a direct result of their experiences of poverty.

To better support single parent families, and therefore lift children out of poverty, the Scottish Government should:

- Mitigate the two-child limit at the earliest possible opportunity through Social Security Scotland.
- Increase the Scottish Child Payment to £40 before the end of the current Parliament.
- Ensure all devolved social security payments are increased in line with inflation, so that they do not lose value.
- Increase funding for income-maximisation services, with targeted investment in services which are best able to reach priority families.

Young Parent Penalty

In addition to measures directly within the remit of the Scottish Government, the Young Parent Penalty within Universal Credit, where under 25s receive a lower rate of entitlement, has ensured that young single parents under the age of 25 are £83.16 (20%) worse off every month than their older counterparts in 2025, with that amount rising to £130.55 for couples. Yet, despite this lower income, we know young parents do not actually have lower costs than other families.

As a result, we are calling on the Scottish Government to:

- Target additional support through the Scottish Child Payment to families affected by the Young Parent Penalty.

Education

While education is theoretically free for school-aged children in Scotland, we know all too well that there are many hidden costs to the school day which are required to ensure that children have what they need to learn effectively. These include but are not limited to: Costs related to nutrition, uniform, school trips, and school supplies.

To ensure that every child has what they need to learn, we are calling on the Scottish Government to:

- Increase the School Clothing Grant, and the income threshold for accessing this, in line with inflation, and ensure that eligible families are auto enrolled.
- Extend free school meals to all primary school pupils and commit to introducing universal free school meals for all pupils in secondary schools.

Training

[‘No One Left Behind’](#), the Scottish Governments’ employability strategy, aims to be person centred and responsive to individual needs.

However, we are concerned that a very individualised model risks losing sight of the structural and systemic barriers that priority families, including single parents, encounter in the labour market.

The [latest NOLB statistics](#) show that the percentage of single parents who can sustain employment is very low. The findings from [research](#) by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and OPFS highlights the importance of understanding all the structural and individual barriers affecting single parent families and taking the time to address them.

We are therefore calling on the Scottish Government to:

- Introduce bespoke employment support within NOLB for single parents – particularly in relation to improving access to higher level training courses, further education and adult apprenticeships/ILMs.
- More broadly support single parents into training, education and sustainable, family friendly employment, which pays the Real Living Wage, through specialist employability support and actions to reduce inequalities in the labour market.

Childcare

Accessible, affordable, and flexible childcare is critical for supporting single parents, the majority (92%) of whom are women, in achieving economic stability and escaping poverty. Childcare is a vital social infrastructure that plays a key role in the Scottish Government's efforts to reduce child poverty.

While reforms, such as the introduction of 1140 funded hours, are positive steps forward, significant gaps remain in ensuring childcare meets the unique needs of single parent families. Childcare is a lifeline for single parents, enabling them to access the labour market, secure stable employment, and support their families. However, the lack of affordable and flexible childcare options often forces single parents into low-paid, part-time, or insecure work. These limitations perpetuate poverty and reduce opportunities for career progression and financial security.

Going forward, we would like to see an expanded childcare offering made available – allowing parents greater flexibility around working patterns and therefore facilitating enhanced access to the labour market. This should involve:

- A universal funded entitlement of 50 hours per week for children aged 6 months and above that is free at the point of use for all families.
- A high-quality service which delivers positive outcomes for children and realises children's rights.
- A diverse and skilled childcare workforce that is valued, fairly paid, and gender balanced.
- Flexible delivery that enables families to access childcare when they need and want it.
- Work towards a childcare system that is not based on profit making.

Paid and unpaid care

Many single parents work in the care sector. The under-valuation of social care workers reflects the under-valuation of all care in Scotland, whether paid or unpaid, with too many single parents in low paid caring roles living in poverty. A high proportion of single parents care for a disabled child - for too long, people who care for others, whether paid or unpaid, have been undervalued and under-rewarded.

As a result, caring can result in significant personal and economic costs for individuals and their families, with carers more likely to live in poverty. Therefore, we are calling on the Scottish Government to:

- Introduce a new National Outcome on valuing and investing in care and all those who provide it. A focus on care, care workers and unpaid carers is urgently required to ensure that Scotland is a caring country.

Tax

As members of Tax Justice Scotland, we are calling on the Scottish Government to:

- Use income tax powers to ensure the highest earners make a fairer contribution in the next Scottish budget.

Pursue more radical tax reform, including overhauling Council Tax and exploring new ways to tax wealth. This could raise substantial additional money, ensuring those with the highest incomes pay more while protecting those on the lowest.

About One Parent Families Scotland

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) is the leading charity working with single parent families in Scotland. Building on over seventy years of advocacy and service-delivery expertise, OPFS provides expert information, advice, and family support for one parent families, along with training activities, employability programmes and flexible childcare. OPFS campaigns with parents to make their voices heard to change the systems, policies and attitudes that disadvantage single parent families.

Our vision is of a Scotland in which single parents and their children are valued and treated equally and fairly. Our mission is to work with and for single parent families, providing support services that enable them to achieve their potential and help create lasting solutions to the poverty and barriers they face.

For more information, please contact:

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