

Mitigation of the two-child cap: Consultation

April, 2025



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

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.

Question 1:

Do you agree or disagree with the Scottish Government's assessment that Social Security Scotland should deliver payments to mitigate the two-child cap in Scotland?

Agree

OPFS provides 'support for families' services both locally and nationally and advocates for policy changes to tackle child poverty and inequality. We provide direct support to over 5,000 families annually through one-to-one support, peer groups, and information and advice services. Our policy and campaigning work aims to challenge systemic and structural barriers through research, awareness raising, involving single parents and engaging with policymakers.

Established in 1944, OPFS is the leading charity for single parent families who make up 25% of families with dependent children in Scotland, with women as the primary caregivers in most cases. Single parents face unique challenges, including being sole carers & breadwinners, which contribute to a higher child poverty rate than average - 36% compared to 23% of all children in Scotland.¹

One Parent Families Scotland along with other agencies has campaigned to scrap this policy since it was introduced on 6th April 2017.² It's introduction resulted in parents with a third or subsequent child born after that date not receiving full financial support for those children. Unlike the 'Benefit Cap' this policy has very limited exemptions therefore the majority of larger families are affected by the loss of income.

¹ [Additional child poverty analysis 2025 - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/additional-child-poverty-analysis-2025/pages/1-introduction.aspx)

² [Single parents in crisis: a pre-budget briefing on the two child benefit cap - One Parent Families Scotland](https://www.opfs.org.uk/news/single-parents-in-crisis-a-pre-budget-briefing-on-the-two-child-benefit-cap)

Recent research shows that larger families have become poorer since the introduction of the two-child limit – and the poorest families are losing out the most. The policy breaks the link between need and social security: rather than assisting those in greatest need, it penalises them³.

“It’s as if I’ve done something wrong. It’s like a punishment, even though I am the responsible one. I’ve looked after my three children after their father left. This was such a shock, but I’ve tried my best to give the kids the life they deserve and not to have all the support we should have is devastating. Why is my youngest not given the same worth as his brother and sister? It seems so unkind”

(Fiona is a single mother from Stirling with three children.)

Families with children, and in particular single parent families, are more at risk of falling into poverty than other households. Household costs for example rent, food and energy costs area no cheaper for single parents than for other households while at the same time the loss of financial support due to the two child rule has a greater impact on their overall income. Most low income families rely either on state benefits or a mixture of low earnings and benefit top-ups. The loss of income of £292.81 per month per child (2025/26 rate) has a devastating effect on the single parents this policy effects and results in many single parent families being unable to cover even essential living costs never mind provide an adequate living standard for their families.

Amy – struggling to cover the essentials of life

Amy is a single parent with three children aged six, four and two years old. She lives in a flat rented from her local Housing Association. She is struggling week to week to cover her essential costs and is often having to cut back on her own food to make sure her kids are eating.

She is unable to work due to childcare issues and has no family support. Amy gets £287.92 per month less to keep herself and her three children because of the Two Child Limit. Because of the limit she does not receive the Child Premium in Universal Credit for her third child.

Due to the state of repair of the house, she rents from her local housing association, her bills are high, and she has to pay on average £70 to £80.00 per week for gas and electricity. Amy is having to make tough decisions daily as to how she covers her costs. She will only heat the children’s rooms and not the rest of the house.

Although she budgets her money, she is still short on a weekly basis as she has to spend more on her outgoings than she has coming in. She ended up building up arrears for her gas and electricity as she just couldn’t cover her charges during the winter. For Amy, the reduced income means that she cannot heat her room during the winter, the family cannot go on family outings that cost money, she has to buy basic foods and will either miss meals or eat small amounts to make sure that her three children have the same standard of living as others.

Amy has expressed feelings of hopelessness and is constantly anxious. She stresses over how she will cope with a sudden emergency or provide for things like birthdays or Christmas. She feels that she is letting her children down and would love to go out to work but has no family support to help .Her mental health and the family wellbeing is suffering.

³ [The two-child limit and child poverty in the United Kingdom - Chzhen - 2025 - International Journal of Social Welfare - Wiley Online Library](#)

In order to reduce child poverty increasing parental employment is a key factor, however social security benefits that support parent by topping up low paid earnings is essential. Without this support parents moving into low-paid jobs do not see a significant increase to their income and this in turn has no impact on reducing child poverty.

Abolishing the two-child limit at the UK level would lift 540,000 children out of absolute poverty at a cost of £4,510 per child. Research shows this would be the most efficient child poverty reduction policy of those modelled.⁴ Analysis by CPAG shows mitigating the two-child limit in Scotland could lift around 15,000 children out of poverty.⁵

One Parent Families therefore wholeheartedly commends the Scottish Government's commitment to mitigating the two child rule as an essential tool to reduce child poverty. However OPFS is still committed to calling for this unfair policy to be scrapped by the U.K. government.

Question 2:

Do you agree or disagree that to mitigate the two-child cap, the Scottish Government should use the powers at s79 to top-up Universal Credit?

Agree

One Parent Families Scotland agrees that the Scottish Government should use the powers at s79 to top up UC as this offers the quickest route to providing much needed income to single parents and their families.

"The cost of living's risen too much to have quality of life, and I can't see a way out. I have a 14- year girl, 9-year boy, twin girls 4 years old and a 19-month baby. I receive benefits for three children only. It's the domino effect of spending more on food, gas and utilities which then limits money left over for leisure or fun things for the kids. It is very impactful on mental health especially when it's not only yourself but your dependents who need security and safety. I must go without so that my children don't. It's not a choice I make it's the life that has been forced upon me by standing up to and leaving a domestic abuser. It's becoming very depressing for me that there's nothing to enjoy in life now."

(Janie is a single mother from Paisley who has five children)

While we would prefer to see the UK. government delivering the mitigation at source , we recognise that given the complexity of this delivery would cause a long delay in the payments using s79 is the safest way to move forward. Although the use of s79 will have problems in itself for example those families who do not qualify for Universal Credit as a result of the two-child rule.

Whatever method is used to deliver the mitigation payment it must be as streamlined as possible and avoid unnecessary bureaucracy. To avoid delays in payment and the possibility of parents missing out the delivery of payment should be decided and processed without the need to apply. If that is not possible, the application should be added into the Social Security

⁴ [Child poverty: trends and policy options | Institute for Fiscal Studies](#)

⁵ <https://cpag.org.uk/news/new-costings-scrapping-two-child-limit-far-most-cost-effective-way-cut-child-poverty>

Scotland application form for the Scottish Child Payment.(SCP)

Using section 79 is the easiest and fastest way to achieve mitigation. The SCP is a good example of this, with high take-up because it's simple to claim. We suggest changing SCP to provide mitigation instead of creating a new payment with new rules.

There should also be regulations to ensure an appeal system and backdating are part of the payment system.

Question 3:

Do you agree or disagree that payments to mitigate the two-child cap should be disregarded as income by the UK Government?

Agree

Payments made to mitigate the two-child limit should be disregarded as income by the UK government as is the case with scottish child payment, the bedroom tax and benefit cap mitigation through discretionary housing payments.

The payment to mitigate should be treated in the same way as the SCP and not included as unearned income. Unearned income is deducted in full from Universal Credit entitlement, meaning that recipients of two-child limit mitigation payments would be no better off.

The payments could also end up being subjected to the benefit cap which would negate any intended mitigation.

Question 4:

Do you have any information you wish to share about any additional potential impacts of the proposed approach outlined in this consultation?

Analysis by the Scottish Government highlights that families with three or more children and single parent families are disproportionately living in relative and absolute poverty. A fifth of children in single parent households are also in households with three or more children⁶ Therefore mitigating the two-child limit imposed by the UK government will have a significant impact on improving the living standards of some of our poorest families

Single parents have described to OPFS the intolerable living situations they experience. Child poverty policies need to be tailored to support single parent families out of poverty but the experience of the many families affected is that the two child policy does the opposite. Currently, the policy goes against everything that we as a society are trying to achieve which

⁶ [Additional child poverty analysis 2024 - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/additional-child-poverty-analysis-2024/pages/10/)

is promoting a more cohesive and inclusive society. If we are to invest in single parent families, society needs to generate more effective strategies to reduce child poverty and ensure that all children, regardless of their family structure, have the best possible start in life.

While One Parent Families Scotland supports the use of s79 as the best way to ensure the mitigation is delivered as quickly as possible, there are some families who could lose out and there will therefore need to be provision made to ensure they receive the mitigation they are entitled to. The use of s79 allows for Universal Credit to be topped up, however this section cannot be used for those who do not qualify for Universal Credit but would have but for the two child rule.

There is also the question of parents who are awarded zero Universal Credit awards due to receiving two wages in one assessment period. Depending on how the mitigation payments are made, as they will probably not run in conjunction with the Universal Credit assessment and payment periods, it would add a further level of complexity.

We ask that the Scottish Government investigate the impact of missing out on the two-child limit mitigation and ensure policies are put in place to support these families. It is vital that any payment and application process is promoted properly to avoid parents missing out. We would suggest that parents are consulted at every stage of the development of the payment and this should include all notifications and if necessary all application forms to ensure they are fit for purpose.

OPFS has as a key strategic aim to contribute to ending child poverty in Scotland by providing support to families to navigate the complex social security system, increasing benefit take up and supporting families to maximise their income. We support family wellbeing, empower single parents with the right advice and information and enable parents to access training, employment and education. Our national advice and information service and family hubs in six local areas reach thousands of single parent families each year.

Adequate resources for advice services, such as those provided by OPFS are essential to improve social security uptake and effectiveness. Long-term funding ensures job security for our specialist advisers, retaining trusted expertise in single parent issues, while enabling us to feedback to government on policy impacts. Tailored specialist advice and information services are crucial for single parents for several reasons:

Single parents often face unique challenges, such as dealing with separation, child contact, child maintenance and managing childcare, finances, and work-life balance on their own. Tailored advice can address these specific needs, providing practical solutions and support. Specialist single parent services offer personalised emotional support, helping parents cope with stress, loneliness, and the demands of raising children alone.

Tailored services connect single parents with essential resources, such as support to access devolved social security payments, childcare options, training programmes, and community support networks. This boosts their confidence and sense of control over their circumstances. OPFS facilitates connections with other single parents, fostering a sense of community and mutual support. This helps reduce feelings of isolation and creates a supportive network. By providing targeted information and advice, our services empower single parents to make informed decisions about their lives and their children's futures.



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