

ECPN Cymru Manifesto



Child poverty levels in Wales remain unacceptably high and predicted to increase across the course of the next Senedd term unless urgent action is taken. Behind every statistic is a baby, a child or a young person. Children of all ages have consistently faced higher poverty rates, yet the growth in those living in deep poverty is especially worrying. The damaging impact of being born into and growing up in poverty can be profound with lifelong consequences. The longer a child stays in poverty, the harder it becomes to break out.

The next Welsh Government should make the eradication of child poverty a central priority.

Action should be taken to tackle the root cause of poverty alongside steps to mitigate the impact of low income on babies, children, young people and their families across Wales.

All babies, children and young people have a right to an adequate standard of living under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and all should have a say in decisions which affect them. Child poverty remains a significant violation of children's human rights.

We believe that the next Welsh Government could and should do more within the power they have at their disposal. Working together, with the UK Government, Welsh Public Bodies and third sector partners, tackling child poverty should be the key priority for the next Senedd term.

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10 Steps to tackling child poverty in Wales

Action 1 – A Clear ambition and Delivery Plan

The next Welsh Government should

- Build on the statutory Child Poverty Strategy by publishing and fully implementing a Child Poverty Delivery Plan with measurable and ambitious targets and milestones, supported by transparent monitoring and reporting arrangements.
- Undertake an analysis into the depth and severity of child poverty in Wales, to inform pathways out of poverty and the development of an ambitious set of metrics by which to measure progress against.
- Take steps to strengthen data collection mechanisms, prioritising the collection of more comprehensive, detailed and disaggregated data that captures the experiences of children living in diverse situations and circumstances.

Action 2 – No Child should go hungry

The next Welsh Government should

- Extend Universal Free School Meals (FSM) to all secondary school children, or at the very least in the first instance, to all children living in households in receipt of Universal Credit.
- Ensure rapid progress is made to enable automatic enrolment of Free School Meals whilst the Universal offer is being rolled out.
- Ensure that all school meals are nutritious and of sufficient quality and quantity to meet need.
- Take steps towards tackling food insecurity, including the provision of food during the school holidays, as part of a wider strategy to address rising levels of health inequalities.

Action 3 – A Childcare system which works for babies, children and young people

The next Welsh Government should

- Ensure that all children have access to high quality, flexible child-centred childcare, as part of a coherent, inclusive and integrated system, with the eligibility criteria for the Childcare Offer and Flying Start childcare expanded to ensure that all children in poverty can access free childcare.
- Ensure that childcare services are delivered by a well-paid and highly valued workforce, with action taken to help address the recruitment and retention crisis in the sector.

Action 4 – An effective and fair Welsh Benefit System

The next Welsh Government should

- Invest in a coherent and unified Welsh Benefits System which helps raise living standards and provides sufficient financial support to all families when they need it.
- Introduce a weekly Wales Child Payment, similar to the Scottish Child Payment, informed by a feasibility study which should be completed during the first year of government and working with the UK government as necessary.
- Ensure that no family misses out on the support they are entitled to by providing improved access to welfare advice and support services to help maximise take up and address levels of debt.
- Ensure that all Welsh benefits, entitlements and income thresholds are annually uprated and increased in line with inflation so that real value is maintained.
- Protect future funding of the Discretionary Assistance Fund to at least the allocated budget for 2025-26, ensuring that the fund is well promoted to families.
- Proactively engage with the UK Government to ensure that the UK Social Security System is reformed and provides the necessary safety net for all children and families to live in dignity.



Action 5 – Address the cost of Education

The next Welsh Government should

- Ensure that schools and governing bodies are fully complying with the guidance for school uniforms, by introducing robust monitoring and accountability arrangements to scrutinise the effectiveness of the existing guidance.
- Ensure that no child is disadvantaged by not having the necessary resources needed for learning and participating fully in school life.
- Fund free bus travel for all children of statutory school age so that no family faces additional charges for their child to travel to and from school.
- Review the eligibility criteria and adequacy of the School Essentials Grant so that all children in poverty are able to access support with school costs.
- Ensure that all school staff, including governors, undertake mandatory training to inform their approaches to addressing child poverty in the school environment and to reduce stigma.
- Measure attainment gaps between children living in poverty and their peers and set clear targets to reduce these.

Action 6 – A Children’s Rights approach to tackling poverty

The next Welsh Government should

- Ensure that all decisions taken are fully compliant with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- Publish Child Rights Impact Assessments on all policy decisions, including the Welsh Government’s annual budget.
- Embed a genuine model of coproduction with babies, children, young people and families with lived experience of poverty, and ensure that all delivery partners also build meaningful and enduring relationships grounded in rights, respect and partnership.
- Ensure that all delivery partners take a children’s rights approach to addressing the impact of poverty, and that funded training is provided to support professionals working with children and families.

Action 7 - Affordable Homes and tackling Fuel Poverty

The next Welsh Government should

- Significantly increase the supply of social homes across Wales which are affordable by design and provide security and stability.
- Accelerate the retrofit of poorly insulated homes to shield households from energy price shocks and reduce fuel poverty.
- Expand investment in energy efficiency for families most in need, including through the Nest scheme.
- Ensure the full Welsh consequential from the UK Government’s £13.2bn Warm Homes Plan is used to cut bills, reduce fuel poverty, and make homes greener.



Action 8 – Child and family support services

The next Welsh Government should

- Adequately resource and scale up existing national programmes such as Flying Start and Families First services, which deliver positive outcomes for our poorest children.
- Invest in early intervention and preventative services for all ages to ensure that babies, children, young people and families receive support earlier in their journey to prevent escalation of need and crisis. This should include those at greater risk of poverty due to the extra barriers they face owing to their identity, background, circumstances or characteristics.
- Ensure that Baby Bundles are rolled out and accessible for all new families, to elevate some of the costs of buying essential items and to help give all babies in Wales the best start in life. A full evaluation of the roll out should be undertaken.
- Support and enhance the development of poverty aware child protection practice.

Action 9 – Role of Welsh Public Bodies – tackling regional disparities

The next Welsh Government should

- Ensure that all Welsh public bodies publish a sufficiently robust and adequately funded local or regional strategy to tackle child poverty in line with existing statutory duties, supported by transparent monitoring and reporting arrangements.

Action 10 – Good quality jobs which fit with family life

The next Welsh Government should

- Make sure that families have an adequate income to lead a full and decent life with dignity, by providing access to secure and well-paid quality jobs with good prospects for progression and which are responsive to the needs and circumstances of certain family types.
- Ensure that government funded employers follow the 'Fair Work' standards which promotes a working environment which is attentive to the well-being of workers.



Further Reading

Action for Children – [Securing a Better Childhood](#) (Wales mini- report) - Highlights the need for a revised child poverty strategy with measurable targets, early intervention funding and better support for parents.

Audit Wales – [Time for Change: Poverty in Wales](#). Highlights growing poverty in Wales and calls for coordinated government action and better-targeted policies.

Barnardo's Cymru – [Briefing: The Deepening Impact of Poverty and the Cost-of-Living Crisis on Children, Young People and Families in Wales](#) – Examines how the rising cost of living exacerbates child poverty and affects family wellbeing in Wales.

Bevan Foundation – [The Impact of Policy Interventions Designed to Reduce Poverty in Wales](#) – Provides modelling of how specific policy interventions could reduce poverty levels across Wales.

Bevan Foundation & Barnardo's Cymru – [Ending Poverty in Early Years](#). Co-produced report highlighting effective strategies to prevent and reduce poverty during early childhood.

Child Poverty Action Group – [The Child Poverty Strategy for Wales: A Missed Opportunity?](#) Critiques the Welsh Government's strategy for lacking clear targets and strong actions to reduce child poverty.

Children in Wales – [8th Annual Child & Family Poverty Survey 2024-25](#). Presents findings from the latest survey on child and family poverty across Wales, including trends and lived experiences.

Children's Commissioner for Wales – [A Child Rights Approach to Tackling Poverty](#). Calls for embedding children's rights into all anti-poverty policies to protect their wellbeing and participation.

Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) – [The Homes that Children Deserve](#). Explores how housing costs and shortages contribute to child poverty, with recommendations for policy interventions.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation – [Poverty in Wales 2025](#). An evidence-based forecast of poverty in Wales, analysing drivers and trends for children and families.

National Energy Action Cymru – [Response to Welsh Government Fuel Poverty Plan \(2020-2035\)](#). Critically evaluates Welsh fuel poverty policy, highlighting impacts on households with children.

Oxfam Cymru – [Invest in Care, Invest in Wales](#). Calls for increased investment in affordable and accessible childcare in Wales.

Public Health Wales – [Working together for a healthier Wales: Five policy priorities](#). Outlines five key public health priorities to improve the health of people in Wales and the policy solutions to deliver them.

Public Health Wales & World Health Organization Collaborating Centre on Investment for Health and Well-being – [Children and the cost-of-living crisis in Wales](#). Report on how children's health and well-being are impacted and areas for action.

Save the Children Cymru – [Power of Voice](#). Focuses on children's perspectives and their experiences of poverty, highlighting how policy can better support their needs.

Trussell – [Hunger in Wales](#). Presents trends in food insecurity and hunger across Wales, including the impact on children and families.

Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) – [Lifting the Lid on Poverty Stigma in Wales](#). Survey report showing how poverty-related stigma affects individuals and families, including children, and recommendations for tackling it.

Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) – [Review of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Wales](#). Provides an overview of the scale, causes and consequences of poverty and social exclusion across Wales

Welsh Government – [A Guide to Fair Work](#). Sets out Welsh Government's definition of fair work and the key principles and expectations for employers to promote fair, secure, and decently paid employment in Wales.

About

The End Child Poverty Network Cymru (ECPN Cymru) is a national coalition of organisations focused on the eradication of child poverty in Wales. Operational since 2001, and facilitated by Children in Wales, the ECPN Steering Group works collaboratively to identify and support solutions for the purpose of reducing levels of child poverty in Wales and to mitigate its impact on children, young people and their families.

The work of the group is driven by a firm commitment to furthering the rights of children and young people as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and to improve the lives of all children, particularly those who are most at risk and disadvantaged by poverty.

The ECPN Steering Group is made up of members from national organisations operating in Wales who are actively involved in policy, public affairs and/or campaigning activities which contribute to the eradication of child poverty. Members of the ECPN Steering Group are representatives of, and nominated by, and are accountable to the following organisations.

Action for Children Wales

Barnardo's Cymru,

Child Poverty Action Group,

Children in Wales

Children's Commissioner for Wales (observers),

Citizens Advice Wales/Cymru,

Home-Start Cymru,

NEA Cymru,

NSPCC Cymru,

NYAS Cymru,

Oxfam Cymru,

Public Health Wales (observers),

Save the Children Wales,

Shelter Cymru,

The Children's Society Wales,

The King's Trust Cymru,

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (Observers),

Trussell Wales/Cymru,

University of Wales Trinity Saint David,

Welsh Local Government Association (observers)

