

BRIEFING: POVERTY IN THE UK

Christians believe that every person is made in God's image (Genesis 1:26) and should have the opportunity to flourish and realise the potential that God has put within them. Poverty denies people these opportunities. In the Bible, God often speaks to and through those on the margins, and comes to the world in Jesus, proclaiming a mission to be good news for the poor. We are called to tackle all that traps people in poverty and to listen to the voices of those who are experts through lived experience.



Between April 2018 and March 2019, the Trussell Trust distributed a record 1.6 million three-day emergency food parcels to individuals in crisis, 73% more than five years ago.

CONTEXT Poverty, hunger and deprivation are rising in the UK. There are now **14.3 million people held back by poverty**, and an estimated **1.5 million people experience destitution** – meaning they lack the most basic resources to eat and stay warm, dry and clean. In his **April 2019 report**, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty found that the experience of being held back by poverty and needing support was both increasingly common and increasingly undignified – even humiliating. Children and young adults are the groups most likely to experience poverty.

IN WORK POVERTY

Employment rates are currently high, but work, even full-time work, no longer protects families from poverty. **70% of children in poverty are in working families. The economy has grown very slowly over the past decade, and despite a rise in the minimum wage, average earnings remain below their 2008 peak.** Much low-paid work is insecure.

Low income working families, especially those with children, have also experienced large cuts to their benefits. While rises in the income tax threshold have helped most working families, they have been **of more value to high earners, with 75% of the benefit going to the wealthiest half of families.**

WELFARE SYSTEM

Universal Credit is gradually replacing previous benefits for people of working age and is intended to simplify systems and incentivise work. It has been unreliable and poorly administered, and there are problems inherent in

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

What are your plans to improve Universal Credit?

Which groups of people have you spoken to when looking at how to tackle UK poverty?

its design, including the 5-week wait for an initial payment, which has been linked to rising levels of debt and hunger. **There are also growing concerns that even when it is administered and paid correctly it simply does not provide enough money for families to live on.**

Around £47bn has been cut from the benefits system since 2010, and benefit rates have been frozen since 2016, meaning a 6% drop in their value in real terms.

Most people who rely solely on the benefits system are those unable to work due to disability, illness or caring responsibilities. They do not benefit from policies to encourage work or to reduce income taxes.

LIVING IN POVERTY

Lower income households end up spending more on basic goods and services – such as transport, food and energy – than higher income households. This 'poverty premium' is exacerbated in rural communities.

Increasingly families in poverty are housed in the private rental sector, leading to higher costs not covered by welfare payments, and less security.

Building effective policies to address poverty will require a combination of more resources, better work, and the insights of those who experience poverty every day.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How do you actively value the voices of people who experience poverty?

What do you think the purpose of the welfare system should be?