**Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group**



**Grŵp Monitro CCUHP Cymru**

**Submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights ahead of his visit to the United Kingdom (5-16 November 2018)**

**About**

The **Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group** is a national alliance of non-governmental and academic agencies, tasked with monitoring and promoting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in Wales. Since 2002, the alliance has worked with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and submitted civil society reports to inform successive UK State Party Examinations. The alliance is facilitated by Children in Wales

This briefing provides a short summary of the key issues impacting on children and young people in poverty in Wales through a human rights lens. It draws upon our civil society report and related documents submitted to the UN Committee in 2016 which sets out our concerns in relation to children and young people due to their socio-economic circumstance, and our series of briefings developed with other UK wide alliances in advance of the 2017 UK Universal Periodic Review.

This briefing also draws upon the work of the **End Child Poverty Network Cymru** which is the national child poverty alliance for Wales, facilitated by Children in Wales. Latest statistics and notable publications from Wales within the context of Child Poverty have also been referenced

**Children’s Rights - Context in Wales**

In March 2011 the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure[[1]](#footnote-1) received Royal Approval. The Measure places a clear duty on all Welsh Ministers, in exercising their functions, to have ‘due regard’ to the UNCRC. Similar duties on persons exercising functions in relation to children under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014[[2]](#footnote-2) have also been put in place. While these legislative measures do not create legal remedies for individual rights violations, they are significant advances towards incorporation of the UNCRC in Wales and the promotion and protection of children’s human rights in legislation, policy development, practice and culture.

**Child Poverty – Context in Wales**

The Welsh Government does not have all the powers by which to address present levels of child poverty in Wales, especially in relation to taxation and welfare benefits. Education, health, housing, transport and the public sector are all areas where power is devolved to Wales and where significant impact to prevent and tackle child poverty can be made

**Our Report to Geneva and the UN Concluding Observations**

The Wales UNCRC Monitoring Groups report[[3]](#footnote-3) to the UN Committee alongside our contribution to the GB-wide List of Issues briefing submitted to inform the 2016 UK State Party Hearing, identified a number of overarching concerns, as well as specific issues concerning child poverty[[4]](#footnote-4).

The UN Committee published their Concluding Observations in June 2016 following the examination of the UK and devolved governments compliance with its obligations under the UNCRC. The Committee was seriously concerned that the rate of child poverty remained high, and disproportionately affecting children with particular characteristics and in certain household types. The UK Governments repeal of child poverty reduction targets within the UK Child Poverty Act 2010, and the direction taken since has had profound implication on children and families living in Wales, and the ability of the Welsh Government to respond.

Amongst the UN Committee’s recommendations with direct relevance to Wales was for

* Clear accountability mechanisms for the eradication of child poverty, including by re-establishing concrete targets with a set timeframe and measurable indicators, and continue regular monitoring and reporting on child poverty reduction in all parts of the State party;
* Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the cumulative impact of the full range of social security and tax credit reforms introduced between 2010 and 2016 on children, including children with disabilities and children belonging to ethnic minority groups;

The UK Government has neither developed a UK-wide plan for child poverty reduction and no comprehensive assessment of reforms has been undertaken

**Child Poverty in Wales in 2018– the data and the reality for children**

We remain deeply concerned that the levels of child poverty in Wales remain stubbornly high and predicted to sharply increase in the near future, with many more children, young people and their families struggling to meet basic everyday costs and needs.

Headline statistics[[5]](#footnote-5) for Wales show that

* 28% of children are living in relative income poverty households in Wales (after housing costs) – over 200,000 children
* This percentage figure has remained fairly consistent over time, although 2% lower than data released in 2017
* Children are more likely to be in relative income poverty compared to any other group e.g. working age adults, pensioners
* Children of all ages are in relative income poverty households
* This rate is, and has been consistently higher than Scotland, Northern Ireland but is now lower than the England and UK average
* Children living in lone parent families were more likely to be in relative income poverty than those living in households with a couple
* Children in workless households are more likely to be living in relative income poverty compared to those in working families
* Living in a household where there was someone with a disability increased the chances of living in relative income poverty for children
* 10 per cent of children living in Wales between 2014-15 and 2016-17 were in material deprivation and low income households (i.e. households that had a total household income below 70 per cent of the UK average household income – before housing costs were paid). This is down from the 14 per cent reported last year

However, care should be taken in interpreting these figures, and latest estimates should be considered alongside long term patterns. For instance, independent reports estimate that there could be 50,000 more Welsh children in poverty by 2021 (best estimate) – up to 250,000 children in total[[6]](#footnote-6) The Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Equality and Human Rights Commission have both produced recent reports to this effect, and the last Welsh Government also commissioned a number of report around the impact of welfare reform which also reported a predicted increase in child poverty levels over the coming years

The UK End Child Poverty coalition published figures providing a new Child Poverty map of the UK[[7]](#footnote-7). The local child poverty estimates are broken down by parliamentary constituency, local authority and ward. Child poverty is prevalent across all local authorities in Wales (highest being almost 33%), but especially so in the cities, the South Wales valleys and West Wales. Of the 40 parliamentary constituencies in Wales, the 10 constituencies with the highest levels of child poverty are located in South Wales (highest being almost 37%).

Additional data through the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation[[8]](#footnote-8) at Lower Level Super Output Areas is also publically available.

**Child Poverty in Wales – behind the data: the reality for children**

Current and future impact of welfare reform is a major concern. We have plenty of evidence in Wales of the negative impact changes are having on some families including the freeze or cuts to benefits, delayed payments, sanctions, bedroom tax and the new two child limit on means tested benefits. The Institute for Fiscal Studies found some low income families will receive £2,500 less in benefits due to the two child limit.

Universal Credit (UC) is expected to be fully rolled out in Wales to all families by 2022. The Welsh Government have described UC as being flawed and called for the roll out to be halted to allow issues to be addressed, and have issued a number of ministerial letters to the UK Government setting out concerns in respect of welfare reform[[9]](#footnote-9). Many reports describe significant challenges with the system with almost daily media articles recounting the plight of UC recipients[[10]](#footnote-10)

But there are other notable issues

Children in Wales publishes an annual report of their Child and Family Poverty Survey in Wales which identifies the main issues families are presenting with when accessing services across Wales

The 2018 Report[[11]](#footnote-11) highlighted that Welfare Reform, Food Poverty, Debt, employment issues and Housing were the main concerns highlighted by services working with and for families.

**What does this mean for children and families?**

* Making impossible choices on a daily basis which they shouldn’t have to make
* Whether to put food on the table, clothe their children or heat their home
* Holiday hunger is a growing concern. Services report of huge demand for free lunches during the school holiday, with one local authority giving out 2,000 lunches in the recent summer holiday[[12]](#footnote-12) and the Church in Wales reporting of children walking the streets hungry[[13]](#footnote-13)
* Many families are getting into problem debt
* Teachers and schools trying their best to deal with hunger and physical impacts of poverty**[[14]](#footnote-14)**
* Housing costs are increasing pressures on families living in social housing with the increasing risk of homelessness [[15]](#footnote-15)
* Foodbank use - The number of emergency food bank supplies given to families in crisis in Wales has increased by 3% in the past year, recent figures show. The Trussell Trust food bank network distributed 98,350 three-day food bags between April 2017 to March 2018, of which 35,403 were to children[[16]](#footnote-16). Some 29% of referrals were because people on low incomes or benefits were unable to make ends meet, up from 27%.

**Legislation and policy in Wales**

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 continues to provide the legislative framework for tackling child poverty in Wales. This places a duty on Welsh Ministers and named public bodies, including local authorities, to set objectives for tackling child poverty.

**Strategy & Action Plan**

The Welsh Government last published their revised child poverty strategy[[17]](#footnote-17) in December 2015, which was informed by an independent evaluation of the previous strategy[[18]](#footnote-18). More recently, the WG has published an Assessment of Progress report[[19]](#footnote-19) which highlighted where good progress had been made and where more needed to be done

However, it is not clear how the current Strategy is being utilised and shaping thinking, as the current Programme for Government Taking Wales Forward 2016-21[[20]](#footnote-20) makes no explicit reference to tackling Poverty.

There is also no **Child Poverty** **Action Plan** to support the delivery of the Strategy, and no appetite within WG to publish a Plan to deliver this agenda. The ECPN Cymru have been calling for a plan to be published with measurable milestones, targets and key performance indicators which should be reported against through an annual report. A single coherent plan could be a compendium of existing and planned actions, with complimentary targets and milestones, and a strong narrative to reinvigorate the debate. The Plan should place both an emphasis on Preventing Poverty as well as Mitigating the impact of poverty, differentiating actions which the WG can do to help stop children from falling into poverty in the first place, as well as how to support them whilst in poverty (and to lift them out of poverty)

The National Assembly for Wales Economy, Local Government & Communities Committee in their report following the closure of the area-based anti-poverty programme Communities First recommended that‘*a clear tackling poverty strategy is published, which brings together the many strands of poverty reduction work to help provide clear direction and to help the Assembly scrutinise the Governments approach. The strategy should include clear performance indicators to ensure effective performance management. As well as setting out a broader evidence base to help underpin effective evaluation of different approaches to tackling poverty.*

Disappointingly, this key Recommendation was rejected by WG[[21]](#footnote-21)

**Wales therefore does not have an Action Plan to eliminate poverty for children, young people and their families, and there is no appetite by the WG to introduce such a plan with measurable milestones and key performance indicators subject to annual monitoring and reporting**

**Targets**

In December 2016, the then Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children announced that the WG ambition to eradicate child poverty by 2020 would not be achieved[[22]](#footnote-22). This was in response to the UK Government changes to the Child Poverty Act with the decision to abandon the target to eradicate child poverty by 2020. The changes to welfare reform and the challenging economic climate had also worked against WG ability to meet their ambition.

However, the

* UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in July 2016 during their assessment of the UK (as the state party) called for concrete targets within a timeframe should be re-established
* The Joseph Rowntree foundation[[23]](#footnote-23) called for an aim that fewer than 1 in 10 people are in poverty at any one time by 2030
* A 2030 target would be in line with the Sustainable Development Goals on ending poverty and inequality, and provide a solid relationship with the intentions of the Wellbeing of Future generations Act
* The Scottish Government[[24]](#footnote-24) have responded to the changes to the UK Child Poverty Act by setting new targets for 2030 against the 4 previous indicators of that Act, with the Child Poverty Act for Scotland receiving Royal Assent last December 2017 and a Delivery Plan[[25]](#footnote-25) published in March.

**Wales is now without a headline target or a similar pledge to eradicate child poverty by an identified future date, and there is no appetite currently to introduce a new headline target despite lobbying by the ECPN Cymru**

**External Advisory Group**

It is also worth noting that the Scottish Governmenthave, through their new Act, placed their Poverty and Inequality Commission[[26]](#footnote-26) on a statutory footing from 1 July 2019. The commission was set up in 2017 and provides expert advice to Ministers. Under the previous WG, a Tackling Poverty External Advisory Group was set up and had representation (through Public Appointments) from all the sectors and key groups – Children, Disability, Education, Health, Housing, Advice and Energy meeting at least quarterly, and providing advice to WG on delivery, direction and priorities. The Group was dispended by the current Government and no equivalent advisory mechanisms across all strands of poverty related thematic areas is in place.

**Brexit: Future of funding to tackle child poverty in disadvantaged communities**

There is increasing concern and growing uncertainty as to the future of programmes and services presently match funded through the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESF) many of which are in place to help tackle poverty, inequality and social-economic disadvantaged in areas of high deprivation across Wales. The ESF provides financial support for projects that work with disadvantaged communities to improve employability, to support education and training, and to tackle social exclusion. The ESF has also been directly targeted at helping young people develop skills, to find jobs, and to provide childcare so parents can access employment training opportunities. As examples, there is the LIFT, PACE and Communities 4 Work programmes led by WG

In Wales,

* Presently 20% of existing ESF **must** be allocated to tackling poverty
* There are no guarantees that existing levels of funding will be protected or whether the present priorities informed by the EU will be retained.
* Wales is a net beneficiary from EU Structural Funds, having received £4bn since 2000. Between 2014–2020, Wales is set to benefit from over £2bn further investment9.
* By January 2017 the Welsh Government had identified £192 million of EU funds to support projects that tackle poverty and improve youth employment

Some members of the UNCRC Monitoring Group have echoed the Welsh Governments demand of the UK Government to make good the promises made during the Referendum campaign that Wales would not be financially worse off when we leave the EU[[27]](#footnote-27). The Report of the Children’s Rights and Brexit Conference[[28]](#footnote-28) in 2017 found that many services located in areas of Wales with disproportionate levels of child poverty compared to other parts of the UK had profound concerns. There was some anxiety that further cuts to income and services for vulnerable families will have an adverse consequence for poverty andinequality levels in Wales, escalating pressure on existing sources of support already struggling to meet demand.

The UK Government have indicated that some financial support will be provided through a Shared Prosperity Fund but there is growing frustration over the lack of information in the public domain about the Fund and a lack of communication by the UK Government around future intentions. There is no guarantee that the UK Governments priorities will reflect those of the WG on child poverty and uncertainty around level of resources will be available.

The National Assembly for Wales ELGC and EAAL Committees have given some consideration to this as part of their short inquiry into the Equality and Human Rights Implications of Brexit and we support the Committee’s the view that fund should be targeted at tackling inequality, socio-economic disadvantage (including tacking child poverty)[[29]](#footnote-29)

**There will be profound negative implications for levels of child poverty in Wales should funding cease and no replacement funds be secured.**

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1. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/2/contents> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/4/pdfs/anaw_20140004_en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. UNCRC Monitoring Report to the UN CRC Committee <http://www.swansea.ac.uk/media/WalesUNCRCReport_v3.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Combined Report of the Recommendations for Wales <http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/resource/wales-uncrc-monitoring-group-combined-report-recommendations-wales/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. UK Government HBAI data - <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-199495-to-201617> (March 2018)

   Welsh Government headline statistics <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/households-below-average-income/?lang=en> (June 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/cumulative-impact-assessment-report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/poverty-in-your-area-2018/> (January 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/welsh-index-multiple-deprivation/?lang=en> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For example <https://gov.wales/newsroom/people-and-communities/2018/180711-universal-credit/?lang=en> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For example <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-43432715>, <https://chcymru.org.uk/en/view-news/welsh-social-housing-tenants-on-universal-credit-in-over-1-million-worth-of>, https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/families-welsh-city-73000-debt-13806810 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/resource/child-family-poverty-wales-results-child-family-survey-2018/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-45046994> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-45270644> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-43611527> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-44615136> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-43870934> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. <https://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/150327-child-poverty-strategy-walesv2-en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/20483/1/140709-child-poverty-strategy-wales-final-en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <https://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/cyp/161212-child-poverty-strategy-progress-report-2016-en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. <https://gov.wales/docs/strategies/160920-taking-wales-forward-en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/gen-ld11240/gen-ld11240-e.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. <https://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/cyp/161212-child-poverty-strategy-progress-report-2016-en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/prosperity-without-poverty> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/poverty-and-social-justice/child-poverty/> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. [Every Child, Every Chance: the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018-22](https://beta.gov.scot/publications/child-chance-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2018-22/) [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. <https://beta.gov.scot/groups/poverty-and-inequality-commission/> [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. <http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/resource/brexit-childrens-rights-wales-briefing-paper/> [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. [Brexit & Children’s Rights: Implications for Wales – Summary Report of the Round Table Exchange Event](http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CR-Brexit-Roundtable-Exchange-Event-Summary-Report-final.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. [Inquiry on the equality and human rights implications of Brexit – June 2018](http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/policy-document/inquiry-equality-human-rights-implications-brexit-june-2018/) [↑](#footnote-ref-29)