

Drawing a Line Under Poverty: The Minimum Income Guarantee



Briefings from The Poverty Alliance Conference 2023



WORKING TOGETHER TO COMBAT POVERTY

About us

The Poverty Alliance is Scotland's anti-poverty network. Together with our members, we influence policy and practice, support communities to challenge poverty, provide evidence through research and build public support for the solutions to tackle poverty. Our members include grassroots community groups, academics, large national NGOs, voluntary organisations, statutory organisations, trade unions, and faith groups.

1. Introduction

In our wealthy nation, it's unjust that so many people do not have adequate incomes for a dignified life. One of the policy solutions that has emerged in response to poverty and inequality has been the Minimum Income Guarantee - an idea centred on setting an income floor below which nobody would be allowed to fall. It is a simple, but potentially transformative idea, that would help give everyone a secure foundation for people to thrive and develop their potential.

In November 2023, 150 people attended the Poverty Alliance's annual conference focused on the Minimum Income Guarantee. The *Drawing a Line* conference was an opportunity to explore why a Minimum Income Guarantee is needed, looking at key aspects of the current poverty problem in Scotland. We also identified shared priority actions that would take us closer to a Minimum Income Guarantee across social security, fair work, equalities, and public services. The Poverty Alliance have collated the findings from these conference sessions into individual briefings, combining the key discussion points and recommendations relating to these policy areas. This series of briefings can be found at povertyalliance.org/drawingaline.

This briefing summarises discussion points from the final session of the conference. This was an interactive workshop where attendees were encouraged to identify challenges, opportunities and begin thinking about campaign actions they could take within their own communities, organisations and networks.

To open the final plenary, Russell Gunson, Head of Programmes and Practice at the Robertson Trust and Co-Chair of the Minimum Income Guarantee Expert Group, provided a keynote address. This address outlined some of the opportunities and challenges facing the MIG Expert Group; the priorities for the next phase of this work; as well as the importance of uniting between shared priorities in the design and implementation of the policy. You can listen to a [recording of the afternoon](#)

[plenary here](#). This briefing also provides an overview of the key recommendations and discussion points from the Drawing a Line conference.¹

2. Conference sessions: why is the Minimum Income Guarantee needed? And how do we get there?

The Drawing a Line conference offered an opportunity to discuss aspects of the current poverty problem that the MIG must respond to, as well as identifying key priorities for the development of the policy. There were a number of recommendations that emerged across the sessions, including the need to consider how we pay for the MIG; how we communicate the policy; the need to mainstream considerations such as equalities; poverty-related stigma; and rurality throughout the development of the policy. This section provides a brief overview of the key recommendations that were raised within each session:

Ensuring the Minimum Income Guarantee is not undermined by public sector debt recovery

Too often, people are pulled into impossible financial circumstances due to debt. The subsequent repayments force people into being unable to afford the essentials such as heating, food and transport with consequences for people's health and wellbeing. We must ensure that the MIG is not undermined by public sector debt recovery with action to:

- Make changes to our Council Tax Reduction Scheme to take more households out of paying these charges.
- Consider the role of social care charges and social care debt and how this prevents people, particularly disabled people, from accessing an adequate income.
- Deductions should never pull anyone below the level of the MIG and there is need to introduce measures to only enact one deduction at a time; and longer term recovery periods to minimise monthly deductions or repayments.

Achieving a Minimum Income Guarantee for people in the asylum system

At present, proposals for the MIG have not explicitly encompassed the needs of people seeking asylum, but it is important that the policy does not leave anyone behind. Embedding the needs of asylum seekers into the MIG should include action to:

- Work with the UK Government on human rights issues for asylum seekers, including the right to work.
- Better support the needs of asylum seekers including: expanding free travel; access to free services including childcare; increasing investment in ESOL courses; extending rights to further and higher education to all asylum seekers; accommodation and technology provision for college/university students; provision of access to cooking facilities and culturally appropriate ingredients; free leisure access; and right to free advocacy support.

¹ This briefing series summarises the discussions held at the Drawing a Line Conference, and may not reflect the organisational views of the Poverty Alliance, or the positions of our individual members.

- Provide employers with up-to-date information on the regulations as well as a need to promote equal opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees around employment and training.

Achieving an adequate income in rural Scotland

We know that one of the key drivers of poverty in rural Scotland is the higher cost of living. The 'rural premium' means that the cost of essentials like fuel, energy, transport and food are significantly higher, increasing hardship for those struggling on low incomes. Key recommendations emerging from this session included:

- Support for the idea of 'rural mainstreaming' i.e., building the MIG and piloting it in rural communities, rather than 'rural proofing' which was interpreted as retrofitting policies to adapt to rural contexts.
- 'Distance from services' was a potentially powerful measure to help quantify elements of rural experience which would need to be taken into account in designing a place based MIG.
- Whilst the MIG could help with some of the drivers of Rural Poverty it would need to be combined with efforts to 'unlock' additional costs: e.g., public transport and childcare.

Health Impacts of Major Income Supplementation Policies

People who are worse off experience poorer physical and mental health than those who are better off. But could improving peoples' financial situations through a Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) lead to improved health? For the MIG to have positive impacts in terms of health, priority actions included:

- Policies such as these should focus on breaking down as many barriers as possible, we cannot make decisions for people without consulting them. In the development of any new policies such as MIG people with lived experience need to be involved from the beginning.
- This is about basic human rights and the rights we should all have to public services that work and support us, the fear created in the media in recent times about people taking advantage of the social security system needs to be broken down.
- Payment of the new policy should be either cash or bank account payment to give people freedom and dignity.
- Additional payments to be made to groups who experience additional costs as part of daily life, e.g. people with disabilities, care experienced, carers and those living in rural areas. This is to ensure they are not left behind due to the 'premiums' they experience as part of daily life.

Ensuring the Minimum Income Guarantee tackles poverty and inequality

There continues to be a higher risk of poverty for particular groups in Scotland, including unpaid carers; disabled people; women; single parents; and Black and minority ethnic people. The transformational potential of the MIG will only be realised if the design of the policy takes into account the needs of equalities groups.

An overarching recommendation was the need to mainstream equalities

considerations from the outset of the design of the MIG. Additional key recommendations for the design and implementation of the MIG included:

- Other services need to be improved alongside the delivery of a MIG, with a focus on a social guarantee in areas such as transport; social care; childcare; and health.
- There is a need to empower communities to be heard, and be involved, in the development of the MIG to ensure that policymaking and service design takes account of everyone's needs.
- The MIG Expert Group recommended that non-means tested disability benefits, such as Adult Disability Payment, Child Disability Payment and Carers Allowance should not be included as income for the purposes of calculating a MIG in Scotland. While this is a welcome start, there is a need to build on this proposal to fully account for the premium disabled people incur in their daily lives.
- The MIG must recognise, and build upon, existing differences in UK and Scotland social security policy including having a commitment to the Scottish definition of 'terminal illness'.

The Scottish Social Guarantee and the role of services in the MIG

The implementation of the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) would require reform to our public services to reduce essential costs for low-income households across Scotland. Collective services, such as free school meals or public transport, can help reduce the income needed to live a decent life. Identified priorities included:

- Improvements to social care, in terms of ensuring that people have access to adequate social care for as long as they need it.
- Increased provision of childcare to achieve improved access to the labour market, and reduced reliance on wider family and older generations who increasingly are required to work later in life.
- Increased investment in affordable social housing.
- Better linking up of public services across Scotland and making public services more accessible to everyone.

Next Steps for Fair Work in Scotland

There is a clear role for fair work in the delivery of a MIG, but it is clear that work does not yet represent a guaranteed route out of poverty. Some of the identified next steps for fair work to ensure that more people have access to a secure and adequate income included:

- Increase the minimum wage to the level of the real Living Wage.
- A greater focus on providing flexible and hybrid working, and continued focus on the business case for flexibility.
- Better consider procurement and how this is linked to real Living Wage, boosting accountability for this across industries especially low paid sectors. Public grants that are given to organisations, particularly in the third sector, must be enough to pay the real Living Wage.
- Clear guidelines must be given to employers on how to implement Fair Work and embed better accountability into policies and action plans.

- Ensure the childcare system works for everyone, including shift workers and those working atypical hours. This should include the implementation of a funded system of wraparound childcare of 50 hours per week.

What do we mean by an adequate income? Identifying the Minimum Income Guarantee level

Recent campaigns like the Essentials Guarantee have highlighted that the level of social security is too low to allow people to afford the essentials for a dignified life. It is vital that we improve our social security system so that it provides everyone with an adequate income for a decent and dignified life. Priority actions should include:

- Scrapping the five-week wait for Universal Credit, removing the two-child limit and ending benefits overpayment recovery.
- Invest in a programme of benefit uptake to maximise income.
- Measuring the wider economic, social and health benefits of the MIG with a focus on the preventative spending argument.
- Simplifying applications for social security, ensuring quicker processing times.
- Conduct more research into the cost of living for disabled people, as well as expanding the criteria for disability benefits to reflect a range of needs and circumstances.

3. Summary of reflections and opportunities for the Minimum Income Guarantee

Attendees' contributions to the final session reflected the optimism of discussions during the day, and comments relating to 'opportunities' focused on enthusiasm for a transformational policy:

- ***“Sounds optimistic and we need something to be optimistic about”***
 - The MIG is viewed as an achievable policy, and discussions centred around a staged approach to implementation makes it seem more workable.
 - Attendees were pleased to hear about the practical steps that underpin a MIG and the realities of what the policy could look like.
- ***“MIG seems to be good for meeting everyone’s needs”***
 - There was a sense of excitement about the very real difference the MIG could make to people’s lives.
 - However, this optimism was tapered by some with regards to questions about how some particular groups (e.g. disabled people) would benefit from the policy.
- ***“Easy to get stuck in a rut speaking about poverty”***
 - MIG was viewed as providing a new vehicle or context to discuss poverty, and how we can work together to address this.

- o Attendees reflected positively on the momentum that is building for a MIG, and the opportunity to talk about associated or underpinning actions was also viewed as positive.
- o Attendees noted that progress on MIG had been made from the previous annual conference, where an individual session on MIG was characterised by some scepticism and lack of understanding.
- ***“Discussions around rural poverty were helpful to have”***
 - o Attendees welcomed the focus at the conference on the need for mainstream considerations such as equalities and rural perspectives.
 - o Policies are not usually designed with rural perspective in mind, and this early focus was welcomed.

The positivity relating to the MIG outlined above may also reflect the increased understanding that people established over the conference. While 34% of attendees said they were only somewhat informed about MIG prior to the conference, 39% and 55% of attendees said they were fairly or well informed respectively following the conference. This highlights the importance of establishing spaces for individuals and organisations to learn more about the policy.

4. Challenges to consider when implementing a Minimum Income Guarantee

Attendees considered the challenges associated with the MIG, highlighting a number of questions which should be considered in the development of the policy.

- **How do we increase media and public awareness of MIG?**
 - o Knowledge of MIG must increase, including seeking to improve understanding beyond the third sector. There is a need to remove ourselves from the ‘echo chamber’ and hear what people really think and focus on building our campaigns on that.
 - o Fears that the austerity narrative will come up in the lead up to the UK election would undermine the need to invest in the MIG, and to undertake the social security reform that is needed to progress this.
 - o Language and how we talk about the MIG remains still tricky – we need accessible language to help us talk about this and to get people interested in the policy.
- **How do we build public support?**
 - o The build-up to the 2024 general election presents an opportunity to raise awareness and build support. The third sector must reflect MIG in our organisational manifestos, but is there also an opportunity to get MIG in party manifestos?

- o We require greater understanding of where the public actually sits with regards to MIG and how we can measure existing public support.
 - o There may be some negativity regarding the level of the MIG and how people feel this relates to their own income and experience of paid work.
 - o How much does the public understand about the realities of Universal Credit and social security? There is a need to continue to reframe social security not as a cost, but a huge economic benefit and a human right.
 - o Messaging must highlight MIG as a route out of poverty and use this as a means to build public support.
- **Will focus on the MIG detract from other areas?**
 - o Consider wider systems sitting beside MIG (employment, childcare, transport etc) and how we can maintain focus on these critical areas simultaneously.
 - o Attached to this, there was a fear that the resourcing of the MIG would necessitate other services being stripped of resources.
 - o Concerns about housing costs and supply as potentially undermining efforts on the MIG. Housing is a critical means of addressing poverty and should be an important starting point for reducing costs and establishing the means for a decent and dignified life.
 - o There is very slow progress in other policy areas which have relevance to the MIG such as NHS or education, with the risk that there may also be backsliding on this precarious progress.
 - o Within the design and implementation of the policy, there is a need to ensure that the role of debt, particularly public debt, is taken seriously and prioritised.
- **How would the MIG be paid for?**
 - o This policy is likely to be expensive and there is a lack of clarity as to how it will be resourced, particularly in the current economic climate. There is also a lack of clarity as to the costs of the policy.
 - o Those advocating for the MIG need to be clear as to where the money comes from, particularly in the context of concerns about competing priorities and potential media/public backlash outlined above.
 - o How will this relate to the need for more progressive taxation, including addressing the under-taxation of wealth through a wealth tax.
 - o The money needed to resource this policy will likely increase over time as the MIG level would need to rise in line with inflation and the real cost of living.
- **How would MIG work with a human rights approach?**

- o Human rights cannot just be a buzzword or afterthought within discussion of the MIG.
- o Human rights need to be adequately embedded in our campaigning and approach to the MIG, including making clear connections to our human right to an adequate income (e.g. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).
- **How will the voices of people with lived experience of poverty and low incomes be included?**
 - o The views and perspectives of people who have lived experience of poverty need to be embedded in the earliest stages of designing the policy.
 - o This cannot just be about telling people what will happen with regards to the policy, but actively designing it around people's needs and perspectives.
 - o This should extend to the needs and views of children and young people across Scotland.
- **How can politicians be influenced?**
 - o Ensuring political buy-in across our political parties is critical to ensure longevity for the policy and continued action to develop the MIG. We cannot stall on initial steps.
 - o Attendees were concerned about the challenges of establishing and maintaining political support within election years, especially if there may be issues with public support as outlined above. Is MIG a 'vote-winner?'
 - o There is a significant degree of political and economic uncertainty for 2024 including the role of inflation and the outlook for the economy; electoral outcomes; and how the UK and Scottish Governments will work together in the aftermath of the UK election.
 - o Does the political will for implementation exist in Scotland, and the wider UK?
- **How will the MIG impact and support different groups and what pilots will be carried out?**
 - o We need to ensure that we design a MIG that works for everyone as attendees were concerned that particular groups, for example asylum seekers, will be left out of the policy.
 - o There were suggestions for pilot groups including women; single parents; disabled people; care experienced people; and rural communities. However, there were also concerns about the unintended consequences of selecting a pilot group and the potential downsides of narrowing a universal income floor to a particular group.

- o There was some cynicism about the impacts for disabled people, and how the needs of this group will be actively addressed within the MIG.
- **There remain unanswered questions on the role of the labour market and work incentives.**
 - o Attendees highlighted questions about the impact on the labour market, including how this will impact the actions of employers; whether people will be willing to take on less attractive jobs; and whether the policy would disincentive paid work.
 - o There were also concerns about how this may impact those who are self-employed, including small business owners across Scotland.
 - o How do we build upon the pre-existing fair work business case? Given the evidence that low income families spend additional money in their local communities, would there be potential to carry out polling on 'how would you spend x money' and use findings to make a case to the local business community.

5. Campaign Actions

Attendees were asked to consider actions that they could take following the conference to advance work on the MIG. [We provided a list of 10 suggested actions](#), and a variety of additional actions were considered during discussions. Attendees were asked to complete a pledge card which will be returned to them six months after the conference to assess how these actions have progressed. Key actions which were identified or committed to include:

- **Sharing Information about the MIG to a wider audience**
 - o Target audiences included co-workers; external groups and organisations; and informing clients what the MIG can do and how it will help people to achieve a decent life.
 - o Social media was identified as a key platform for sharing information, including utilising the conference hashtag to join the conversation.
 - o Join anti-poverty networks that help shape policy and campaigns on MIG.
 - o Write a blog post on MIG to highlight individual/organisational support and how it can help us to meet wider campaigning priorities.
- **Grow the network of supporters for the MIG**
 - o Organise a webinar to promote discussion.
 - o Build public understanding and awareness about MIG as part of pre-existing public attitudes projects.
 - o Contacting the board of their organisation to build active support for the policy.
 - o Contact elected representatives to ask for their support.
 - o Exploring ways in which people who support/advise on the current benefits system can contribute to discussions on MIG.
- **Engaging with the trade union movement**

- o Joining the local government union and encouraging colleagues to do the same - based on session at conference, there is a need to engage with the union movement to mobilise workers and secure fair work.
- o Taking ideas from conference to next trade union branch committee meeting.
- **Framing pre-existing policy engagement as interim steps towards the implementation of the MIG**
 - o Many attendees highlighted that they would be able to utilise the banner of MIG to push for policy change in a range of areas, which are pre-existing organisational priorities.
 - o Campaigning to build an efficient, cost-effective and quality childcare system with choice by co-designing policy and listening to what children, parents and providers want.
 - o Taking information on the MIG to NHS population health teams to highlight how this could be progressed within place-based approaches; and supporting research into health and income by widening contact networks.
 - o Embedding MIG into advocacy on disabled people and unpaid carers poverty with elected members and government representatives.
 - o Thinking about how the design of MIG interacts with a shared understanding of housing affordability, including how housing costs are factored into the MIG level; and considering how the homelessness sector can become more involved.

6. Conclusion

The Poverty Alliance and our membership have expressed support for the potentially transformational potential of the MIG in Scotland. The status quo and policy tweaks are insufficient to address the prevalence of poverty. Now is the time to build bold policy solutions that can help us to build a Scotland free from the injustice of poverty.

Diversifying the coalition of MIG supporters, including building public and political support, is an overarching priority and something that should be a core focus for the anti-poverty movement. This is particularly pertinent as we approach the period of implementation. The Drawing a Line conference underscored the importance of carving out space to engage new audiences on the MIG and the development of this policy priority. While previous engagement had highlighted that many found the MIG to be complicated and inaccessible, conference feedback highlights the effectiveness of adopting an approach focused on interim steps and key themes as a means of facilitating support and engagement.

Conference discussions also established a number of key areas for future development and the continued existence of unanswered questions with regards to the detail of the MIG. Key areas for future discussion include:

- Ensuring that the MIG actively considers, and embeds, the needs of disabled people across Scotland so that the policy addresses the higher risk of poverty for this group.

- Better understanding the role of fair work within the delivery of the MIG, including addressing concerns regarding incentives for employers in delivering decent work and work incentives for individuals.
- Establishing greater clarity with regards to the cost of the MIG, and how we could pay for it.
- There is a need to build wider public support for the MIG, including through the development of clear and accessible framing of the policy.
- Building support within the anti-poverty movement for priority interim steps that will get us closer to the MIG, and highlighting the value of framing our policy calls under the banner of the MIG.

The MIG will be the core policy priority for the Poverty Alliance over the coming year and we will be continuing to develop opportunities for organisations to come together to discuss key aspects of the policy. This is particularly important as we approach the general election and the cost of living crisis continues to bite, with disproportionate impacts for people on the lowest incomes.

Drawing A Line Under Poverty: Ensuring the Minimum Income Guarantee is not undermined by public sector debt recovery

January 2024



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Poverty Alliance Annual Conference: Drawing a Line

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1. Introduction

Too often, people are pulled into impossible financial circumstances due to debt. The subsequent repayments force people into being unable to afford the essentials such as heating, food and transport with consequences for people's health and wellbeing. Currently, our inadequate social security net is being further undermined by deductions making it even more challenging for households to make ends meet. It is important that the income floor established by the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) is solid, and that people are not allowed to fall below that level as a result of debt collection.

This session of the Drawing a Line conference explored debt, with a particular focus on public sector debt, as an aspect of the current poverty problem in Scotland. We were joined by Emma Jackson, a trustee with the Poverty Alliance, and Martin Canavan, Head of Policy and Participation at Aberlour, to set out what is needed to do things differently in the context of the MIG. The workshop identified key priorities to ensure that the policy is not undermined by public sector debt collection. This

briefing provides a summary of the input from our guest speakers, as well as collating the key recommendations identified within the session by attendees².

2. A Scotland where everyone has ‘enough’: Exploring the intersection of debt and the Minimum Income Guarantee

Speaking about debt can be technical and complex, so it is important that conversations about the intersection between the MIG and debt are accessible and as free from jargon as possible. This is imperative to secure public buy-in for the MIG.

Problem debt can happen to any of us. Circumstances such as being made redundant, a relationship breaking down or bereavement can all plunge households into debt quickly and with little warning. Personal finances can become unmanageable quickly, often out of an individual’s ability to control.

Low-income households have been experiencing a long-term cost of living crisis that predates both the current crisis and the impact of the pandemic. A decade of austerity policies has meant that the fastest growing reason for people and households going into debt is now insufficient income. We are now in the midst of a debt crisis. Low-income families in receipt of social security payments are often subject to deductions and [research by Aberlour and Professor Morag Treanor details how public debt pulls people deeper into poverty and holds them there.](#)

Falling into debt due to insufficient income may be unexpected at an individual level but it is completely predictable in the context of the UK social safety net. The Financial Conduct Authority highlighted in their [Financial Lives Report](#): the cost of living crisis; increasing inflation; the after effects of the Covid-19 pandemic; and the consequences of war in Ukraine as catalysts, putting pressure on household budgets and making essential goods and services unaffordable. The report also outlined that over a quarter of people living in Scotland are burdened by ‘domestic bills’ or ‘credit commitments’. This figure is higher than that for the rest of the UK.

The [Step Change: Scotland in the Red Report](#) highlighted that energy arrears in 2023 are over two-thirds (68%) higher than they were in 2022. Latest polling from [Understanding Scotland \(November 2023\)](#) reported that a lack of confidence in being able to pay a £100 emergency expenditure has increased from 25% to 28%, rising again to 34% for households with children. If this unexpected expense was to rise to £500, uncertainty in being able to pay it rises to almost half (49%). This indicates that many households in Scotland are in a situation of severe financial fragility. Debt help charities in Scotland have reported that council tax remains the greatest source of

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debt for households with over 60% of clients reporting that council tax is their main debt.

Private debt requires a negotiation between, for instance, a credit card company who cannot physically take money from bank accounts. Public debt, on the other hand, such as council tax or overpayments in Universal Credit can exacerbate and put pressure on budgets which are already on a knife edge. Debt such as council tax arrears can result in deductions to social security, making it even more challenging for households to afford the essentials of a dignified life. Around 84% of Christians Against Poverty Scotland's client base receive income via social security, with around half of those clients experiencing deductions in Universal Credit. These findings are in line with research by Aberlour who found more than half (55%) of low-income families in Scotland in receipt of Universal Credit experienced at least one deduction and over a quarter (27%) of households have multiple deductions. Aberlour found that low-income families in receipt of UC with debts to public bodies are seeing their monthly income reduced on average by £80 to cover those debts.

Many Scottish households are not reaching out for debt help because of the stigma and shame of not being able to manage debt. Where individuals do reach out for help, they may not know who offers free and professional advice and many will fall victim to those who charge for their support and perhaps do not give the most appropriate solutions. This can unfortunately further perpetuate the crisis. There remains a lot of work to be done to ensure people get the right debt advice, with overcoming the impact of poverty-related stigma being a key priority in this space.

3. Pursuing public debt

As well as there being an issue with public debt and the way it is accumulated by households, concerns were also raised about the manner in which public debt is pursued by stakeholders such as local authorities and the DWP. [Diligence](#), the action a creditor can take to recover a debt after a court action, can involve arrestment of wages or bank arrestment. In addition to the impact on people's financial security these methods can have a detrimental personal impact, particularly on mental health. The vast majority of diligence, over 91% of all methods used, were in respect of council tax debt.

Diligence methods have been described by individuals as humiliating, with experiences including arrestment of wages allowing your employer to know that you are experiencing issues with public debt. Bank arrestment, where your bank account is essentially frozen, does come with a protected minimum balance but this does not take into account individual or household circumstances which presents challenges for households with a higher cost of living, including households with children or disabled people.

Public debt – its accumulation and enforcement – must be considered a key factor within the design and implementation of the MIG to ensure that households are receiving enough for essentials and to live a dignified life. On the journey to a ‘full’ MIG there are steps which can be taken quickly to make progress in the immediate term, such as engaging policy makers to ensure public debt recovery becomes more fair and proportionate. For example, by influencing the [Bankruptcy and Diligence \(Scotland\) Bill](#) which is currently making its way through the Scottish Parliament. Amongst other changes to bankruptcy and diligence law in Scotland, this bill would give Scottish Ministers the power to pause debt enforcement actions against people with serious mental health problems.

4. Recommendations

During this session attendees were asked to identify priority areas of action to ensure the MIG is not undermined by debt collection.

Considerations for development of the MIG:

- How do we frame benefits of MIG to local authorities who have budget challenges in order to ensure we get sufficient buy-in for the policy?
- What changes could be made to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme to take more households out of paying these charges?
- Raise the Scottish Child Payment to increase household budgets, minimising the risk of problem debt
- Consider the role of social care charges and social care debt and how this prevents people, particularly disabled people, from accessing an adequate income. Social care debt should be identified as a key form of debt for households with a disabled or older person and social care investment considered within the context of the services sphere of MIG
- Explore how the MIG responds to non-payment of Child Maintenance and how this prevents resident parents from reaching an adequate income
- Universal free school meals should be introduced to reduce household costs and negate the impact of poverty-related stigma

Considerations with regards to enforcement of public debt:

- Deductions should never pull anyone below the level of the MIG
- There is a need to introduce measures to only enact one deduction at a time and longer term recovery periods to minimise monthly deductions or repayments
- Stop sub-contracting debt collection to third parties and remove any additional administration charges
- Official error overpayment recovery needs legislative change and Social Security Scotland are leading the way in an alternative approach
- More automation of council tax recovery for Universal Credit claimants (including better data sharing with local authorities) and arrange Council Tax Reduction using MIG eligibility

Adopting an intersectional approach to the design of the policy is critical, including:

- Adopting a gendered lens to analysis of debt, including awareness of economic abuse in the context of men's violence against women and the subsequent impact on women's financial security
- Adopting gender budgeting approaches, gender mainstreaming and responsive decision making to ensure the MIG and the allocation of resources takes account of women's needs with regards to debt and financial security
- Embedding practical actions which are measurable to tackle disabled people's poverty and inequality within the design and delivery of the MIG

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1. Introduction

This workshop was delivered by community researchers who have lived experience of the asylum system involved in the Poverty Alliance's [Rights in Action](#)³ programme. The workshop aimed to explore how a Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) could be developed to include and address the needs of asylum seekers in Scotland. At present, proposals for the MIG have not explicitly encompassed the needs of people seeking asylum.

In partnership with the Maryhill Integration Network and Saheliya, the community researchers provided evidence on how economic, social and cultural rights recognised in international human rights treaties, and which will be incorporated in

³ Funded by Scottish Government's Equality and Human Rights Fund, Rights in Action is working with communities in Scotland to raise awareness how human rights can be used as a tool in the fight against poverty, to increase their capacity to address human rights issues and create a supportive community of practice and to support participatory research projects on human rights in Scotland.

the new Human Rights Bill in Scotland, are far removed from asylum seekers.⁴ This briefing reflects the discussions held at this session of the Drawing a Line Conference, collating key recommendations to ensure nobody is left behind by the policy.⁵

2. What are the barriers faced by people seeking asylum in Scotland?

To explore how a MIG could be developed in Scotland to meet the needs of asylum seekers, the workshop first focused on participants' understanding of the barriers that asylum seekers face. Discussions focused on how asylum seekers "start with nothing". The UK asylum system provides just £47.39 a week to asylum seekers, with those in hotel accommodation given just £9 a week.

Asylum seekers' are blocked from participating in society by not having a right to social security, limited rights to work in the UK, and being denied equal access to further and higher education.⁶ The conversations highlighted the lack of knowledge in wider society of asylum seekers' experiences and of the asylum system.

Discussions on the barriers faced by asylum seekers in Scotland centred on a range of human rights issues including:

- **Issues with the asylum system** including asylum system process backlog, complexity and insecurity, unsuitable accommodation and a lack of dignity.
- **Lack of support and access to services** including help to navigate the system and to understand rights, lack of interpreter services, and lack of mental health support and recognition of trauma and high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder among asylum seekers. The cost of public transport and leisure facilities and a lack of recognition of previous qualifications in the education system were also raised.
- **Inadequate financial support** resulting in asylum seekers left without enough to live on, affecting their mental and physical health and children's wellbeing and development.
- **Discrimination, racism and exploitation** as well as a lack of empathy and compassion towards asylum seekers. Political and public discourses as well as media representation were raised as significant issues contributing to negative sentiments towards asylum seekers. It was therefore considered common for people seeking asylum in the UK to experience fear, uncertainty, stigma and isolation.

The community researchers then delivered an interactive presentation that discussed the barriers that the presenters and their peers have faced since arriving

⁴ Poverty Alliance (2023) "The Life of Glasgow pigeons is more certain": mental health and wellbeing amongst people navigating the asylum process. Available at: [Research: 'The life of Glasgow pigeons is more certain' - The Poverty Alliance](#)

⁵ This briefing series summarises the discussions held at the Drawing a Line Conference, and may not reflect the organisational views of the Poverty Alliance, or the positions of our individual members.

⁶ Poverty Alliance (2023) "Education is supposed to be free for all": Asylum seekers' experiences of accessing further and higher education in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.povertyalliance.org/education-is-supposed-to-be-free-for-all-research-briefing/>

in the UK and subsequently when navigating society under restrictions imposed by the Home Office. One community researcher stated:

“People have experienced violence, torture, seen their loved ones killed, and when they get here they faced the depressing thing of the asylum system.”

Through their experiences, they shared that they have found that employers are not always aware of the rules that surround employment of asylum seekers. There is also a lack of involvement of asylum seekers in the development of policies that affect their lives.

3. How can the Scottish Government ensure that they carry out their duty of care to asylum seekers and increase the standard of living in the development of the Minimum Income Guarantee?

The workshop presentation focused on what the Scottish Government has done to provide support for asylum seekers exploring the recent successful campaigns for access to tuition fees *Our Grades, Not Visas* (led by Ahmed Alhindi, the Maryhill Integration Network and JustRight Scotland) and the extension of the concessionary bus travel scheme to include people claiming asylum (led by Maryhill Integration Network and the Voices Network).

Recommendations for what the Scottish Government can do included the important role in continuing to push the UK Government on human rights issues for asylum seekers, including the right to work. There was recognition of the legal complexities around providing support for asylum seekers in Scotland, as this is not a devolved issue. Regarding the development of the MIG, a recommendation included developing an expert working group to explore how asylum seekers can be better supported within the realms of devolution. This would require legal experts and other experts to support this group and to help to enable meaningful change.

The discussion moved on to focus on the role of both local and Scottish Governments to better support the needs of asylum seekers. Recommendations included: expanding free travel; access to free services including childcare; increasing investment in ESOL courses; extending rights to further and higher education to all asylum seekers; accommodation and technology provision for college/university students; provision of access to cooking facilities and culturally appropriate ingredients; free leisure access; right to free advocacy support; more long-term funding for organisations providing support to asylum seekers; embedding trauma-informed care within services; and making mental health services more accessible. It was also noted that services should be centred around dignity.

A lack of understanding among employers of the rules around employment is a current challenge affecting asylum seekers. There was a call for action to provide employers with up-to-date information on the regulations as well as a need to promote equal opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees around employment and training.

4. Concluding comments

The work around the development of the MIG so far in Scotland has not included a specific focus on asylum seekers. The principles that underpin the MIG include universality and equality and this must ensure the inclusion of asylum seekers. This workshop provides initial ideas for further exploration that must be included in the development of the MIG to ensure that these principles are embedded, and that asylum seekers' needs are recognised and that ultimately, asylum seekers are protected from the grip of poverty.

Drawing A Line Under Poverty: Achieving an adequate income in rural Scotland

January 2024



About us

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Poverty Alliance Annual Conference: Drawing a Line

In our wealthy nation, it's unjust that so many people do not have adequate incomes for a dignified life. One of the policy solutions that has emerged in response to poverty and inequality has been the Minimum Income Guarantee - an idea centred on setting an income floor below which nobody would be allowed to fall. It is a simple, but potentially transformative idea, that would help give everyone a secure foundation to thrive and develop their potential.

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1. Introduction

We know that one of the key drivers of poverty in rural Scotland is the higher cost of living. The 'rural premium' means that the cost of essentials like fuel, energy, transport and food are significantly higher, increasing hardship for those struggling on low incomes. This session of the Drawing a Line conference explored how an understanding of the rural premium should influence the design of a Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG), ensuring the policy delivers for all of Scotland's communities. We were joined by Artemis Pana, National Co-Ordinator at [Scottish Rural Action](#) and Professor Mark Shucksmith, co-author of the [Rural Lives](#) report. This briefing provides a summary of the input from our guest speakers, as well as collating the reflections of attendees.⁷

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2. Rural experiences are not uniform

Key to understanding rural experiences and considering the design and implementation of any policy in rural Scotland, is recognising that rural experiences are not uniform or homogenous. This applies both to differences between island and mainland locations and crucially, the differences within individual communities. This can be seen in the sharp inequality in some rural areas between those who are able to commute or work from home who benefit from higher paid, secure jobs, and those with 'local work' which is often insecure and low paid. For the latter group, incomes are often volatile and unpredictable, with limited opportunity for career progression. It is therefore vital that the design and implementation of the MIG takes account of the needs of rural communities, but that this does not amount to a one-size-fits all approach to embedding rural needs.

5. Cost of living

Whilst not everyone in rural areas has challenges with their income, the financial pressures created by the higher cost of living are a universal rural experience. The weather, additional time spent at home, and the poor energy efficiency of rural properties means people use more energy to heat their homes. When combined with significant reliance on more expensive alternative fuels, as a result of many houses not being on the main gas grid, the upshot is higher levels of fuel poverty. Poor, expensive or simply non-existent public transport means a greater reliance on private cars and an average £50 per week in additional spend for rural households on transport. Finally, we heard about the lack of appropriate affordable housing in rural areas and the suggestion that recent rises in rates of poverty rurally have coincided with an increase in reliance on the private rented sector.

6. Access to Services

Our speakers both spoke compellingly about the challenges accessing services in rural areas. It was argued that, to work for rural communities, the development of a MIG must be bolstered by the maintenance and improvement of strong public services and a healthy voluntary sector. We heard about the 200-mile round trip by car that is required to access the dentist for communities in Raasay; the nonexistence of childcare services in many rural communities; and the inability of the welfare and social security system to adapt to rural lives. This latter point was noted as particularly relevant for the implementation of the MIG.

Rural communities have experienced the same frustrations and challenges in their interactions with the social security system as their urban counterparts, but these issues are often compounded by rurality. Specifically, the general inflexibility of social security does not marry well with the irregular and seasonal incomes and multiple jobs that are the norm for many in rural Scotland. In addition, the centralisation of welfare advice services combined with a lack of guaranteed connectivity in rural communities means these core services are far less accessible. One attendee noted that the centralisation of services was presented as a cost saving measure by the governments. In reality, the cost of accessing the service is being shifted on to citizens and does not fall equally. One result of this is a systematic under-claiming of social security in rural areas.

Connected to this, it was noted that a MIG would need to address the role that stigma plays in entrenching poverty and its impacts. In some rural communities, stigma can be enhanced as a result of 'increased visibility'. Equally, the role of the voluntary sector in filling in gaps in state provision in rural communities also needs to be taken into account in the design of the MIG. In many rural communities, the local voluntary sector is the first 'port of call' for those in financial hardship, but funding cuts and a competitive funding environment have put the sector under significant pressure.

3. A place-based approach to the Minimum Income Guarantee

Importantly, we also heard about the enormous strengths and assets of rural communities. It was suggested that the stabilising effects of a MIG could be particularly beneficial for the ecosystem of microbusinesses which exists in many rural and island communities, supporting this vibrant part of rural life. Rather than one-size-fits-all approaches (which would inevitably be designed around urban experiences), the MIG must be implemented in such a way that it can respond to the specificities of place – both strengths and challenges. Place-based approaches were seen as critical, with any piloting of the MIG including pilot schemes in different rural communities, to reflect the diversity of experience.

4. Discussions

In groups we discussed the question: *How can we address the barriers to an adequate income that exist in rural areas in the design and implementation of the MIG?* Discussion tended to focus on the broader enabling factors for a MIG than the detail of implementation, though elements of this were touched on. Points raised included:

- Support for the idea of 'rural mainstreaming' i.e., building the MIG and piloting it in rural communities, rather than 'rural proofing' which was interpreted as retrofitting policies to adapt to rural contexts.
- Support for the idea of a place-based approach, recognizing the diversity of experiences in rural Scotland.
- Recognition that for the MIG to be successful it would need strong public services, but interest in exploring these relationships from the reverse angle; would the introduction of a MIG improve or help strengthen public services?
- In designing the MIG, a need to draw on: lived experience; learning from local innovation; and the expertise of the voluntary sector.
- 'Distance from services' was felt as a potentially powerful measure to help quantify elements of rural experience which would need to be taken into account in designing a place-based MIG.
- A clear sense that whilst the MIG could help with some of the drivers of Rural Poverty it would need to be combined with efforts to 'unlock' additional costs: e.g., public transport.

Drawing A Line Under Poverty: Health Impacts of Major Income Supplementation Policies

January 2024



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Poverty Alliance Annual Conference: Drawing a Line

In our wealthy nation, it's unjust that so many people do not have adequate incomes for a dignified life. One of the policy solutions that has emerged in response to poverty and inequality has been the Minimum Income Guarantee - an idea centred on setting an income floor below which nobody would be allowed to fall. It is a simple, but potentially transformative idea, that would help give everyone a secure foundation to thrive and develop their potential.

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1. Introduction

People who are worse off experience poorer physical and mental health than those who are better off. Could improving peoples' financial situations through a Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) lead to improved health? This session was facilitated by members of the [MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit](#) at the University of Glasgow. The workshop was designed to contribute to a wider 12-month development project Funded by the National Institutes of Health and Care Research (NIHR) entitled "Evaluating a Minimum Income Guarantee and modelling major income supplementation policies: A development award". The project explores the potential for what has been termed major income supplementation policies (MISP) to reduce health inequalities.

This workshop was part of a project work package that asks which policy scenarios and impacts are of greatest interest to policy makers, the public and other

stakeholders. The feedback given by session participants will help the team to decide on a set of MISP policy scenarios to model, to explore what their potential health impacts might be.⁸

2. Can radical income policies make an impact?

A “radical income policy” is any kind of policy or scheme put into place by a government to improve peoples’ financial situations. This is normally achieved by boosting incomes, which in turn it is hoped will improve people’s wellbeing. A MIG would also be classed as a radical income policy. In addition, two pre-existing examples of radical income policies are:

- The Alaska Permanent Fund (APF), this is funded by money generated from Alaska’s oil and gas production which is then divided between residents in the state who receive an equal annual payment from the fund to spend as they wish. The amount varies per year, but it is permanent as it is written into the constitution of the State of Alaska.
- Universal Basic Income (UBI), the idea behind a UBI is that every adult citizen regularly receives a set amount of money, regardless of their financial situation with no conditions attached. In 2016, the Scottish Government announced they would support local authorities in exploring a UBI pilot. However, it was decided that due to complexities this pilot was not able to run at the time.

3. Evidence on the relationship between income and health

[Research](#) published in November 2023 showed a link between social security spending and health, the research was focused on a period when spending was reducing on public services as well as cuts and freezes being applied to some benefit payments. The research showed that in general spending money on social security seems to be good for health, while cuts in social security spending are not. It was estimated that a £100 decrease in social security per head of the working age population was associated with an approximately one-month reduction in life expectancy.

In a [review](#) carried out in March 2020, there was mixed evidence on the results of UBI, or schemes similar to UBI. Nine different UBI-style schemes were assessed including the Alaska Permanent Fund. The review revealed:

- Some large positive health impacts like increases in birthweight and reduced childhood obesity as well as some evidence of improved adult mental health. Impacts on health were more focused in groups of people who were financially worse off to begin with.
- UBI-style policies encouraged people to stay in education longer with better educational outcomes such as improved school attendance and more children completing high school.

⁸ This briefing series summarises the discussions held at the Drawing a Line Conference, and may not reflect the organisational views of the Poverty Alliance, or the positions of our individual members.

- Impact on employment was inconsistent. While men's results were more mixed, there was some evidence of women leaving the workforce or choosing to reduce working hours, particularly those with young children.

On mental health specifically, a [study](#) which reviewed findings from studies which looked at the effects of income changes on mental health and wellbeing showed that increasing income likely does lead to improved mental health and wellbeing. These improvements in mental health could be quite small but were up to 13 times larger when the increase in income moved people out of poverty.

4. What needs to be considered when building a new policy?

Radical income policies come in lots of shapes and sizes, and the impacts on health might depend on certain aspects of the policy. Key questions which we may want to consider in the context of the development of the MIG include:

- Who would be eligible?
- How much would people receive?
- What form would people receive it in?
- Would the amount always be the same?
- How often would people receive it?
- If people came off the scheme, how would that work?
- How would it be paid for?
- How long would it last for?
- Would there be any conditions?

This last question of conditionality is one that needs very careful consideration. Conditionality refers to the idea that there could be conditions attached to the receipt of an income support payment. This would mean that a person must agree to some kind of behaviour in order to receive their payment, a familiar example being the need for people to show they are looking for work or preparing for work as part of receiving universal credit. In other countries conditions attached to income support payments have included good attendance at school and getting your child vaccinated.

[Research](#) from four UK-based studies has suggested that the conditionality of requiring people to work was related to negative impacts. This research revealed that there were negative impacts on mental health in parents and children, increases in health related claims on social security and while employment increased it was in mostly low paid part time work. Evidence related to sanctions on social security payments also showed negative health impacts, such as increased child maltreatment, poorer child wellbeing and while employment increased it was again in low paid, poor quality and unstable roles.

In contrast the review referenced in section two of this briefing showed that unconditional payments paid in high income countries showed some large positive health impacts, and positive impacts on education.

5. Key recommendations

Session attendees were asked to work as a group at their tables to build an income policy to improve health. Attendees were given a segmented wheel to work round which asked them to discuss a different aspect of their policy in each segment, assisting them to build their policy. In general, they agreed that the level of support needed to be considered carefully, it is not enough for the payment to meet essential costs, it should be sufficient to live a healthy and dignified life and that increases in the financial level of support should reflect inflation and increases in the cost of living. It was also suggested that payments could increase in the winter months to contribute to additional energy costs.

Other key recommendations emerging from this activity were:

- Income supplementation policies should focus on breaking down as many barriers as possible, we cannot make decisions for people without consulting them. In the development of policies such as MIG people with lived experience need to be involved from the beginning.
- This is about basic human rights, including the rights we should all have to public services that work and support us. The fear created in media narratives about people taking advantage of the social security system needs to be broken down.
- Universality being considered is an interesting aspect, guaranteed safety nets could help people take on roles they would not have considered before, but it could be tricky to find the right balance with this.
- If universality is built into any policy then there should be an option for people to opt out if they earn what they view to be enough. A new system needs to be created with trust embedded within it, trust in people, government and employers.
- MIG payment should be either cash or bank account payment to give people freedom and dignity.
- MIG payment should be made weekly or fortnightly, not as long as monthly.
- Additional payments to be made to groups who experience additional costs as part of daily life, e.g. people with disabilities, care experienced, carers and those living in rural areas. This is to ensure they are not left behind due to the 'premiums' they experience as part of daily life.

Drawing A Line Under Poverty: Ensuring the Minimum Income Guarantee tackles poverty and inequality

January 2023



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1. Introduction

There continues to be a higher risk of poverty for particular groups in Scotland, including: unpaid carers; disabled people; women; single parents; and Black and minority ethnic people. These groups face multiple barriers to accessing an adequate income that makes for a decent and dignified life, including being more likely to be in low-paid and insecure work and more reliant on our inadequate social security system. As a result, these groups should disproportionately benefit from the introduction of a Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG). However, the transformational potential of the MIG will only be realised if the design of the policy takes into account the needs of equalities groups.

To ensure we tackle both poverty and inequality through the implementation of a MIG we need to embed equalities analysis into our policymaking and service design at the earliest possible point. The MIG is also intended to be tailored to specific household needs (for example, whether someone in the house is disabled or whether the household is headed by a single parent) which makes it critical that we have a clear understanding of the income needs of specific groups.

This session of the Drawing a Line conference explored what is needed to incorporate the needs of equalities groups and the priority families, as outlined in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, into the design of the MIG. We were joined by Fiona Collie, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at Carers Scotland and Bill Scott, Senior Policy Advisor at Inclusion Scotland to set out key issues relating to achieving a MIG for carers and disabled people in Scotland. This briefing provides a summary of the input from our guest speakers as well as collating the key recommendations identified within the session by attendees.⁹

2, The Minimum Income Guarantee and unpaid carers

There are approximately 800,000 people in Scotland providing unpaid care and this care is worth an estimated £13.1 billion every year. Despite the importance of unpaid care to our society and economy, carers in Scotland are more likely to be experiencing poverty than non-carers, with research from Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlighting that 29% of carers are living in poverty compared to 20% of non-carers. Similarly, those in receipt of Carer's Allowance are nearly three times more likely than the general population to be living with food insecurity. Carers are more likely to be in poverty because of inadequate social security, with over one-third (34%) of carers in receipt of Carer's Allowance experiencing poverty and persistent barriers to entering and progressing paid work.

Carer's Allowance and the new Carer Support Payment are worth just £76.75 per week. This is the lowest level of any working age benefit. This support equals £2 an hour for most carers, but the value is depleted to around 50 pence per hour for those providing continuous care. Only one in 10 qualify for this support, with eligibility criteria requiring claimants to earn no more than £139 per week. Carer's Allowance Supplement in Scotland adds around £541 per year but this still does not amount to an adequate income for a decent and dignified life.

Caring responsibilities have a huge impact on the ability of individuals to enter and progress within paid work. Research from Carers Scotland found that more than one-third of working carers had turned down a promotion or job offer because of their caring responsibilities. Similarly, over one-third (36%) of women and around one-quarter (24%) of men providing care had reduced their working hours in order to balance work and care. 29% of carers in paid employment said that they were considering reducing their working hours, while 24% of carers were considering giving up their job because of caring responsibilities. It is therefore challenging for carers to reach an adequate income level through paid work alone with 23% of working carers reporting they are struggling to make ends meet.

Barriers to increasing working hours and earnings have implications for the financial security of carers in the immediate term as well as longer-term implications. Careers are thus less likely to have paid into any pension, or to have paid in a sufficient amount, to avoid poverty in later life. Caring thus creates a lifelong vulnerability to

⁹ This briefing series summarises the discussions held at the Drawing a Line Conference, and may not reflect the organisational views of the Poverty Alliance, or the positions of our individual members.

poverty.

3, State of caring

Every year, Carers Scotland publish [The State of Caring](#) report which provides insight into the experiences of providing unpaid care in Scotland. Headline findings include:

- 28% of carers are struggling to make ends meet, rising to 33% of carers who are providing care for 25 hours per week or more
- 41% of those in receipt of Carers Allowance are struggling to make ends meet
- 39% of parent carers are struggling to make ends meet
- 40% of disabled carers are struggling to make ends meet

Carers incur a higher daily cost of living and have to manage these increased costs on a very limited income. As a result, many carers cannot afford the basics of a decent and dignified life, underscoring the importance of a MIG that meets the needs of unpaid carers. While this situation pre-dates the cost of living crisis, the crisis is having a devastating impact on the financial wellbeing of unpaid carers in Scotland. One carer stated that *“I am good at managing money, but I have been forced to use food banks and to cut back on essentials like toiletries and cleaning products in order to survive.”*

The research shows that 60% of carers who are struggling to make ends meet cannot afford food. One-third of carers are cutting back on food and heating, with one carer stating *“We can only afford to heat one room. This means our already very restricted life has shrunk even more. It's cold and damp in Scotland for nine months of the year so this is dismal.”* Sixteen percent of carers are falling into arrears with their rent or mortgage, creating longer-term problems of financial security as carers will be forced to manage debt on a very low income. This is not merely an issue of financial insecurity, but also has implications for carers health and wellbeing. Two-thirds of carers said that their financial situation was having a negative impact on their health and wellbeing.

The MIG can provide welcome tailored financial support that provides greater financial security for unpaid carers in Scotland. However, this support must be accompanied by the adequate funding of services that underpin the wellbeing of carers in Scotland, including social care services. Instead of falling into poverty, there is a need to build a strong income floor and good quality public services so that carers can see a positive way forward. In a wealthy country like Scotland, it is not too much to ask that carers would have the security of a warm home, adequate income and time to look after their own health and have friends and hobbies.

4, The Minimum Income Guarantee and disabled people

In 2015 to 2016, 22% of people in Scotland (1.1 million people) said that they were disabled. The prevalence of disability rises with age: approximately 9% of children are disabled compared to 21% of working age adults and 42% of adults over State

Pension age. These figures underscore the importance of getting the MIG right for disabled people.

In Scotland, 41% of children living in poverty come from a household containing a disabled adult or child. This represents almost double the overall figure for child poverty in Scotland (24%). This means that it is very difficult to meet our child poverty targets without addressing disabled people's poverty. In addition, once the extra costs of disability are taken into account, nearly half of all those living in poverty in the UK are disabled people or live in a family with someone who is disabled. In seeking to tackle poverty in Scotland, you cannot afford to leave disabled people out of policymaking and service design. In fact, there is a strong argument for starting with this group.

Evidence highlights that the poverty experienced by disabled people is deepening. Research from Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that 63% of those experiencing destitution in the UK reported having a disability or long-term health condition. Similarly, three out of four Trussell Trust foodbank users in Scotland come from households containing a disabled person.

5. Extra costs of disability

Research by the disability charity Scope in 2019/2020 found that, on average, disabled households (with at least one disabled adult or child) needed an additional £975 a month to have the same standard of living as non-disabled households. If this figure is updated to account for inflation over the current period of 2022/2023, these extra costs rise to £1,122 per month. The average additional costs in Scotland were the highest in any part of the UK, in part due to the extra cost of living in rural areas of Scotland.

Analysis by Scope in 2018 found that, even before the recent rise in energy costs, 4.1 million households containing disabled people spent over £1,500 a year on energy. In comparison, at that time, the average UK household spent £1,200. 790,000 households with a disabled member spent over £2,500 a year, representing double the average household spend. The recent dramatic increases in energy prices have therefore had a disproportionate impact on disabled people. The financial support offered by the UK Government during the crisis has been a drop in the ocean compared to the real increases in costs. There are concerns for disabled people's financial security over this winter, particularly as much of the limited financial support that was in place last year has now been removed.

The Research Institute for Disabled Consumers surveyed 3,800 disabled people and found that two-fifths of disabled people said that their financial situation was making their physical health worse and 45% said that their financial situation was making their mental health worse. This is a situation that has been worsened by the impact of austerity and policy announcements in the Autumn Statement around disabled people's access to social security is likely to further exacerbate this situation.

Disabled people face structural barriers in the labour market which makes it difficult to access an adequate income through paid work alone. Less than 50% of disabled people in Scotland are in paid work. Disabled people in paid work are often concentrated in low-paid, insecure and entry-level work. As a result, disabled people

are more reliant on social security for some, if not all, of their income. Therefore, any additional income provided via a MIG is likely to benefit a higher proportion of disabled people.

There are a range of options for responding to the disability premium within the design of the MIG. Firstly, the MIG payment could be topped up for disabled households in response to the additional cost of living and the likelihood that disabled people may spend longer periods out of work. Alternatively, the disability premium could be addressed by improving the adequacy of disability-related benefits.

As per previous benefits such as Invalidity/Incapacity benefit, there is an argument that the longer you are in receipt of social security, your payments should increase as your financial resilience will have been eroded over time. While affluent households can stand bouts of unemployment or cost increases for essentials, this is not the case for lower income households. In recognition of the fact many disabled people will be unable to move into paid employment, should the MIG level increase over time for these households? The Scottish Government should seriously consider these policy proposals within the design of the MIG.

6. Key recommendations

During their table discussions attendees were asked to identify campaigning priorities to ensure the MIG tackles both poverty and inequality. There was broad ranging support for the MIG, with attendees seeing this as an opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and give people an opportunity to participate in society beyond merely surviving. An overarching recommendation was to mainstream equalities considerations from the outset of the design of the MIG.

Additional key recommendations for the design and implementation of the MIG included:

- Other services need to be improved alongside the delivery of a MIG, with a focus on a social guarantee in areas such as: transport; social care; childcare; and health. This is particularly needed for carers and disabled people as social care and NHS investment could reduce costs in the longer-term.
- There is a need to empower communities to be involved in the development of the MIG to ensure that policymaking and service design takes account of everyone's needs.
- There can be no one-size-fits all approach to the MIG and intersectional approaches should be adopted to ensure that the needs of all groups are embedded. This should, for example, consider the needs of disabled women, or Black and minority ethnic carers within consideration of household needs. Assessing need at the household level requires consideration of a range of factors including geography, disability and family size.
- As part of an intersectional approach to policy making, the MIG should take into account the higher cost of living in rural Scotland. Including, for example, the higher cost of fuel or transport and how this particularly impacts disabled people in these geographies.
- Efforts should be made to address the impact of stigma in preventing people from accessing the support to which they are entitled. Income maximisation

should be part of the delivery of the MIG, increasing awareness of entitlements and how people can access this support. Entitlement to the MIG should be automatic, utilising pre-existing data and entitlement to simplify the process and maximise uptake.

- The MIG Expert Group recommended that non-means tested disability benefits, such as Adult Disability Payment, Child Disability Payment and Carers Allowance should not be included as income for the purposes of calculating a MIG in Scotland. While this is a welcome start, there is a need to build on this proposal to fully account for the premium disabled people incur in their daily lives.
- A key consideration for the equalities dimension of the MIG is how this can improve financial security for people in the asylum system, including those who have No Recourse to Public Funds. Within these discussions, support does not have to be solely focused on financial support, but also wider support to access services and education.
- Social security levels (including Universal Credit) must be rooted in the real cost of living, aligned with the real cost of essentials to ensure people have access to a dignified life. The level should be reviewed annually, via an independent process, to reflect the real cost of living in a timely manner.
- There is a need to build wide-ranging public support for the MIG. This is not merely about getting the public to support the implementation of the policy in the first instance but also thinking about how we can maintain that support in the longer-term. This should include emphasising the societal-wide benefits and the importance of renewing the social contract. This is particularly important in the context of debates about cost and potential negative media narratives, often focused on the demonisation of those who are unable to work.
- The design of the MIG level should consider whether there is a need to vary the payment at different stages of life e.g., taking into account childhood transitions when costs may be higher.
- The MIG must recognise, and build upon, existing differences in UK and Scotland social security policy including having a commitment to the Scottish definition of 'terminal illness'.
- There must be consideration given to women's caring responsibilities and how this impacts their ability to enter paid work, increase their working hours or progress in paid work. There is also a need to consider the high cost of childcare (including the especially high costs for disabled children) and how this impacts women's ability to reach the MIG level.
- The design and implementation of the MIG must be rooted in human rights-based approaches. The universal entitlement to this income floor must be framed as a basic human right.
- Within the context of housing costs, it would be necessary to consider not just the geographical area, but also the sector in terms of private or public which may increase or decrease costs.
- To be a solid income floor the delivery of the MIG must be free from deductions and sanctions.

Drawing A Line Under Poverty: Scottish Social Guarantee and the role of services in the Minimum Income Guarantee

January 2024



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Poverty Alliance Annual Conference: Drawing a Line

In our wealthy nation, it's unjust that so many people do not have adequate incomes for a dignified life. One of the policy solutions that has emerged in response to poverty and inequality has been the Minimum Income Guarantee - an idea centred on setting an income floor below which nobody would be allowed to fall. It is a simple, but potentially transformative idea, that would help give everyone a secure foundation to thrive and develop their potential.

In November 2023, 150 people attended the Poverty Alliance's annual conference focused on the Minimum Income Guarantee. This conference was an opportunity to explore why a Minimum Income Guarantee is needed, looking at key aspects of the current poverty problem in Scotland. We also identified shared priority actions that would take us closer to a Minimum Income Guarantee across social security; fair work; equalities; and public services.

1. Introduction

The implementation of the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) would require reform to our public services to reduce essential costs for low-income households across Scotland. Collective services, such as free school meals or public transport, can help reduce the income needed to live a decent life. This session explored what changes are needed in the delivery of our public services, including childcare, transport, and housing, to ensure everyone reaches a minimum income. We were joined by Carmen Martinez, Coordinator at the Scottish Women's Budget Group and Jen Gracie, Public Affairs Manager at the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations.¹⁰

¹⁰ This briefing series summarises the discussions held at the Drawing a Line Conference, and may not reflect the organisational views of the Poverty Alliance, or the positions of our individual members.

2. The role of childcare in achieving a Minimum Income Guarantee for all

The availability and cost of childcare was the first key issue highlighted as an area of public service that has a significant impact on gender inequality, with single mothers and disabled women being a particularly high-risk group. With monthly costs of childcare as high as £1106 p/m, this has led to a situation where women who had previously considered themselves to be on 'good incomes' are being pushed into poverty due to the costs and pressures of childcare. In response to a survey by the Scottish Women's Budget Group, 30% of women said that they do not find childcare costs manageable; and two-thirds said childcare costs were impacting their financial wellbeing. As a result, some parents, particularly mothers, have been forced to leave paid work because of the prohibitive cost of childcare.

The system and provision of childcare in Scotland has become a public issue that is affecting increasing numbers of people. It is critical that action on child care forms a central part of the introduction of the MIG, both in terms of reducing the costs for households in Scotland and in enabling people to enter or progress in paid work. Greater investment in affordable and flexible childcare is key to addressing inequality in Scotland. More broadly, investment in the care economy should be key to the development of a MIG, including greater investment in childcare provision for one and two-year olds. Increases in pay rates for the predominantly female care workforce was highlighted, with a target of £15 per hour stated.

3. The role of housing in achieving a MIG for all

Similar to childcare, housing is an essential and significant cost facing people in Scotland today. Housing costs for those on the lowest incomes have grown at a faster rate than for those on the highest. A major issue highlighted was the lack of social housing, which provides stable and affordable rent in contrast to the private rental market which is generally much less affordable. Scotland currently has around 250,000 people on the waiting list for social housing, with over 9,000 children growing up in emergency housing. This is a deepening crisis, due in part to the reduction of funding and the failure to meet new social housing targets. The reduction of funding makes building new social housing more challenging for housing associations. The wider holistic support offered by housing associations to tenants was also discussed. Tenants can receive support to access social security and in areas such as employment. This suggests that beyond the provision of stable and affordable housing, housing associations can play a role more widely in areas that are relevant to achieving a MIG for all.

In the context of the cost of living crisis, there has been an increased role for housing associations in supporting tenants to meet basic needs and essential costs. Food

and fuel poverty were raised as being major issues that are becoming more acute. This has led to funding in the region of £8m from the Scottish Government for cash first responses to tackle food insecurity and winter hardship amongst tenants. Despite this, the need for people to rely on support from housing associations to meet basic and essential needs illustrates a social security system that was failing and in need of change.

First steps for housing in the context of the delivery of a MIG included increases in social security, which many people living in social housing are in receipt of; and ensuring there is an increase in momentum with regards to the building of new social housing to address housing availability.

4. Key recommendations

The workshop produced several key recommendations required to achieve a Minimum Income Guarantee for all through the strengthening of our critical public services. Primarily these are related to the provision of care, and the need to improve access to affordable and adequate housing and social security. Workshop attendees supported this need from their own experience and practice, whilst highlighting further key areas such as healthcare, transport, and suggestions for means with which to generate increased public finances. Furthermore, the potential of MIG to tackle areas of existing and persisting structural inequality was highlighted. Identified priorities included:

- Improvements to social care, in terms of ensuring that people have access to adequate social care for as long as they need it.
- Increased pay for staff working in the care sector.
- Investment in healthcare that provides diagnosis, care, and support earlier, alongside improving capacity of mental health services.
- Increased provision of childcare to achieve improved access to the labour market, and reduced reliance on wider family and older generations who increasingly are required to work later in life.
- Increased investment in affordable social housing.
- Better linking up of public services across Scotland and making public services more accessible to everyone.
- Measures to tackle the 'poverty premium.'
- Taking public services back into public control and reducing privatisation.

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1. Introduction

Almost 70% of children living in poverty in Scotland live in a household where someone is in paid work. It is clear that work does not guarantee a route out of poverty, and this is particularly true for women; Black and minority ethnic people; and disabled people. As the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) is developed, we need to ensure that the transformational potential of this policy is not undermined by the absence of robust and enforced employment practice. We cannot allow the guaranteed income floor provided by MIG to disincentive employers from providing well paid, secure, and fulfilling jobs.

This workshop explored the role of employers in the delivery of a MIG. What are the next steps for fair work to ensure that more people have access to a secure and adequate income? To explore this, we were joined by Lindsey Millen, Head of Policy and Development at Close the Gap and Jack Evans, Senior Policy Advisor at Joseph Rowntree Foundation. This briefing provides a summary of the input from our guest

speakers, as well as collating the key recommendations identified within the session by attendees.¹¹

2. Ensuring the Minimum Income Guarantee tackles, rather than entrenches, gender inequality

It is of critical importance that the implementation of the MIG tackles rather than entrenches gender inequality. As women are more likely to be in poverty, find it harder to escape poverty, account for the majority of unpaid carers, and are more reliant on social security, they would benefit from the introduction of a MIG. However, in order for these benefits to be realised, a MIG needs to take into account the gendered nature of unfair work including hours, wages and precarity. To this end, employers have a huge role to play.

Women's higher risk of poverty is in part a reflection of the fact that they are concentrated in low paid, insecure work like caring, clerical and cleaning roles. Women also dominate the part time work force, accounting for 75% part time workers, who are more likely to earn less than the real Living Wage. Finally, it was noted that women are not a homogenous group; disabled women and Black and minority ethnic women face compounded barriers to good quality, well paid work.

The causes of the gender pay gap span a huge range of policy areas, all of which are relevant to the delivery of a MIG. In 2019 the Scottish Government launched the [gender pay gap action plan](#) which reflected the broad causes of the pay gap. In 2022, this was subsumed into the [Fair Work Action Plan](#) accompanied by the [anti-racist work plan](#). While this meant that the narrative of the Fair Work Action Plan was better gendered, by nature, it was much more narrowly focused on work than A Fairer Scotland for Women. The Plan therefore neglected to consider the wider structures that support women into employment or tackling existing inequality within the labour market, including childcare and public transport. The lack of focus on these issues was considered to be a barrier to tackling all forms of inequality in the labour market. In addition, the current underpinning Fair Work Framework does not afford sufficient attention to all women's experiences of employment.

The Fair Work First Guidance was also a promising step with the guidance highlighting work to close the gender pay gap and create a more diverse workplace. However, the guidance lacks specificity and clear, tangible action for employers to tackle gender inequality in their workplace and hinges on procurement eligibility. Specific regulatory duties on public bodies to mainstream equality into procurement, such as the Public Sector Equality Duty, are not mentioned. Throughout the fair work policy landscape, there is also a lack of accountability, with a lack of clarity as to how the implementation of these actions will be assessed.

The introduction of the MIG requires accompanying changes to childcare provision and increased flexible working across all levels of the labour market, otherwise women will be unable to escape low paid and insecure work – a root cause of their experiences of poverty. There are also structural issues regarding the undervaluation of 'women's work' which the MIG alone is unable to address.

¹¹ This briefing series summarises the discussions held at the Drawing a Line Conference, and may not reflect the organisational views of the Poverty Alliance, or the positions of our individual members.

3. Ensuring the Minimum Income Guarantee and Fair Work are complementary

A key focus of the session was how to ensure that fair work and the MIG work together. Paid work is central in tackling poverty, however, the impact of the labour market on poverty rates is lessened due to prevalence of low paid, insecure and insufficient hours.

Demonstrating this, in 1999 around 40% of children in poverty lived in a household where someone is in paid work. By contrast, that figure now sits at around 70%. The story about paid work and poverty is broader than just the links with child poverty, but it is important to highlight in this context because:

1. Fair work alone cannot tackle in-work poverty – we need to change this to ensure that the MIG responds to and tackles this issue.
2. Several reports have been written about the MIG, including the [Institute for Public Policy Research's 2021 report](#) and the [MIG Expert Group's interim report](#). Both reports are insightful and set out visions for the MIG as being more than just a payment or social security proposal. However, both reports have gaps when it comes to paid work, including how work and a MIG can interact.
3. How does a MIG and paid work interact with work incentives, both for employers' practice and individuals entering paid work? If the MIG includes a payment to citizens to 'top-up' to the level of the income floor, then this may distinguish employers paying well.
4. There are also questions about communication, including how we talk to employers about poverty. There has been work around the framing of messages relating to the real Living Wage for employers, but employers do not yet know about MIG; how to talk about it and the positives of this policy approach.

In the delivery of a MIG, there is a need for accompanying action to make the labour market more just and equal. We also need to broaden our focus to include addressing in-work poverty and improving employment practice as well as getting people into paid work through employability. Within the implementation of the MIG, there is a need to consider decent pay; hours that support the income needed; contract security; and progression opportunities.

To ensure the fair work principles are available to all, we need to use five key drivers:

1. National legislative changes: We need large scale change from the UK Government (or Scottish Government depending on future changes in employment powers) which increases the minimum wage to the real Living Wage and we need maternity, paternity and sick leave rolled out to all. There is the potential to make headways with this at UK level depending on the next Government.
2. Social and Consumer Movement: this covers both what and how employers can drive change but also how we incentivise consumers to utilise their power to drive changes towards fair work. We need to explore why we do not have a balance between goods at a reasonable price delivered by staff with decent wages and a good work life.
3. Trade Unions: we have to be clear that there is a significant policy angle in empowering the trade union movement and boosting membership, with a

particular focus on ensuring increased unionisation in gender segregated sectors like retail and hospitality.

4. Sector specific action: we need to have tailored plans and movements within specific sectors where more workers are in poverty.
5. Innovation/Social Research and Development: there is a need to consider where good things are happening – this is not just a question of scale, but what is currently useful. Do we have examples of changing business models so that benefits are shared for the whole workforce for example, providing flexible childcare for the entire workforce?

In conclusion, there is a clear connection between fair work and poverty. While there are currently a number of unanswered questions with regards to the linkages between fair work and MIG, if MIG can act as a focal point and rallying point for this action, then we can build a better and more just labour market.

4. Key recommendations

Attendees were asked to discuss what the next steps for fair work should be in order to ensure that everyone has access to an adequate income. Key recommendations included:

- Increase the minimum wage to the level of the real Living Wage.
- Some employers will increase prices in order to pay the real Living Wage to staff and we therefore need to ensure people in receipt of social security retain spending power by uprating social security in line with inflation and the real cost of living.
- A greater focus on providing flexible and hybrid working, and continued focus on the business case for flexibility.
- Ensuring employers increase availability of hours to ensure people have access to the hours that would enable them to earn enough to live a decent life.
- Enhance the involvement of people with lived experience of poverty and labour market disadvantage in the design of policies and practice relating to paid work.
- Better consider procurement and how this is linked to real Living Wage, boosting accountability for this across industries especially low paid sectors. Public grants that are given to organisations, particularly in the third sector, must be enough to pay the real Living Wage.
- Expanding the rights of Refugees and Asylum Seekers so they can access good quality, well paid work.
- Clear guidelines must be given to employers on how to implement Fair Work and embed better accountability into policies and action plans.
- Build a movement from the foundation level, including building union membership and empowering our trade unions to enforce change at a sectoral and national level.
- Address the underpinning structures that make paid work unaffordable for people experiencing poverty, including keeping the cost of clothes, internet, and transport affordable.

- Ensure the childcare system works for everyone, including shift workers and those working atypical hours. This should include the implementation of a funded system of wraparound childcare of 50 hours per week.
- The Scottish Government needs to invest in the care economy, including childcare and social care, in order to address women's disadvantage in the labour market.

Drawing A Line Under Poverty: What do we mean by an adequate income? Identifying the Minimum Income Guarantee level

January 2024



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1. Introduction

After over ten years of cuts and restrictions, our social security system is failing those it is intended to support. Recent campaigns such as the Essentials Guarantee have highlighted that the level of social security is too low to allow people to afford the essentials for a dignified life. This session assessed how we will set the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) level; and how we can improve our social security system so that it provides everyone with an adequate income for a decent and dignified life. We were joined by Juliet Stone, Research Fellow at the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University and Philip Whyte, Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research Scotland (IPPR).¹²

¹² This briefing series summarises the discussions held at the Drawing a Line Conference, and may not reflect the organisational views of the Poverty Alliance, or the positions of our individual members.

2. The Minimum Income Standard as a Minimum Income Guarantee

Work to establish the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) began in 2006. Through extensive consultation with different groups of people with lived experience of poverty, a list of goods and services was drawn up and cost to arrive at a socially acceptable standard of living. While the Essentials Guarantee¹³ only covers the essentials, the MIS goes further in aiming to allow people to thrive and have the opportunities and choices necessary to participate in society.

The 2023 MIS requirement for a single adult was £309 per week, and £519 per week for a lone parent with two children. In tracking peoples' incomes to see how well state benefits and wages are supporting people to reach this income standard, the results revealed that a single adult working full-time earning the National Living Wage (NLW) will reach a disposable weekly income that is only 67% of the MIS. This falls to 47% if working part-time and just 24% if receiving out-of-work benefits (figure 1).

Single adult.

Disposable weekly income relative to MIS requirement, on out of work benefits or National Living Wage



Source: Padley, M. and Stone, J. (2023) *A Minimum Income Standard for the United Kingdom in 2023*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation:

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/minimum-income-standard-uk-2023>

Equally, a lone parent with two children would only achieve a weekly disposable income that is three-quarters (76%) of the MIS if working full time on the NLW. This falls to 69% for those working part-time, and less than half (49%) for those not in paid work (figure 2). Attendees discussed one of the proposals to initially set the MIG level at around 50% of the MIS. Attendees questioned whether this was sufficient,

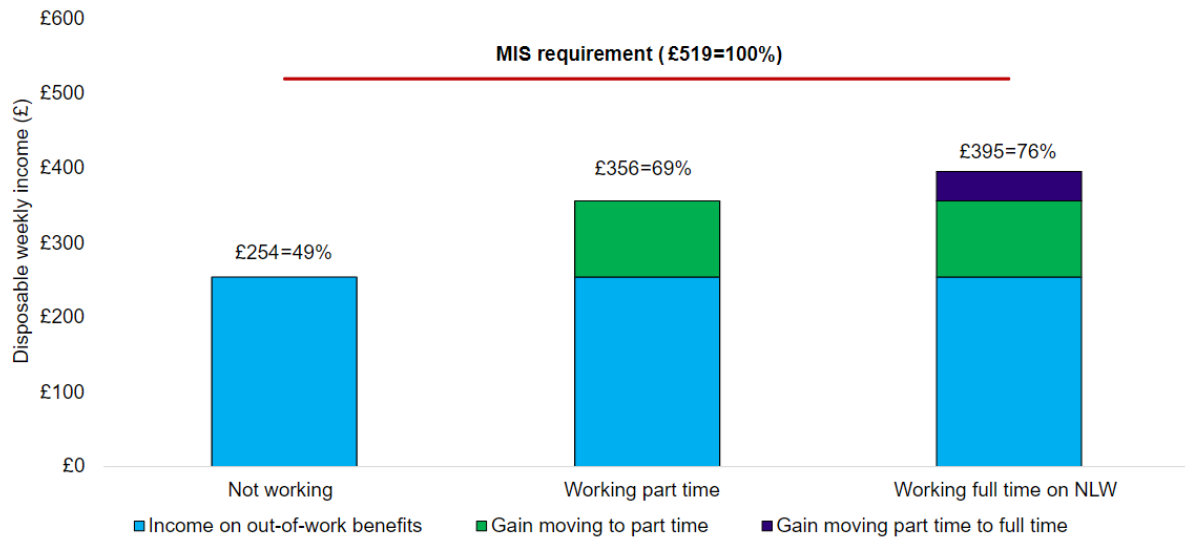
¹³ See Trussell Trust – Guarantee our Essentials

<https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/campaigns/guarantee-our-essentials/>

given the evidence outlined above, to secure a decent standard of living.

Lone parent with two children aged 4 and 7.

Disposable weekly income relative to MIS requirement, on out of work benefits or National Living Wage



Source: Padley, M. and Stone, J. (2023) *A Minimum Income Standard for the United Kingdom in 2023*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation:

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/minimum-income-standard-uk-2023>

3. The route to a Minimum Income Guarantee

IPPR Scotland have been assessing how we could develop a route map to the MIG. This has included considering what it means to have an adequate income; how to address the link between income and living costs; and what proportion of the MIS would be adequate for different types of households if 100% is not financially attainable for the Scottish Government. Analysis by IPPR revealed that the current distribution of income in Scotland falls short of ensuring that all households have sufficient income by billions of pounds.

Echoing the findings above, adults would currently need to go beyond working full-time hours in order to reach the MIS, while inaccessible and unaffordable services are continuing to drive up living costs. Consideration needs to be afforded to ensure that everyone is receiving the financial support to which they are entitled, as well as how we can deliver public services that not only reduce outgoings, but actually contribute to peoples' incomes.

4. Questions

Some of the key questions from attendees, raised during the question and answer session, included:

Are there any studies looking at savings in government spending from encouraging people to claim the social security to which they are entitled?

Work has started on this, including the [Tipping the Scales: The Social and Economic Harm of Poverty in Scotland](#) report from IPPR Scotland. However, more needs to be done to demonstrate how upfront cost delivers long term savings. This was viewed as particularly important in the current fiscal environment.

Has the MIG expert group considered if there would be a benefit in carrying out MIS methodology in Scotland?

How can we build the higher cost of living in rural, remote and island places into the MIG?

MIS is designed to cover all of the UK. The expert group decided a separate group to determine MIS for Scotland was not required for various reasons. However, there has been work undertaken to explore the MIS required for remote and rural Scotland.¹⁴ In addition, there is further action to establish an island premium, as well as putting measures in place e.g., social security or service recommendations, to balance these higher living costs. Services cost more in rural areas and if we can address this by developing universal basic services in tandem with boosting incomes this should address these higher living costs.

How do we avoid falling into the trap of MIG being a sticking plaster over providing adequate public services and social security? For example, the UK Government is moving towards collapsing costs for disability and health issues.

While work has been done with people with different types of disabilities, it is hard to measure the cost of disability as this is such a heterogeneous group. We need to keep trying to cover these costs. MIS should address attempts to hide failings in the benefits system and governments also need to be working to address this. Services can only be an effective aspect of the MIG if sufficient work is in progress to ensure our public services are of a sufficient standard, and that services are accessible to everyone.

¹⁴ HIE (2013) A Minimum Income Standard for Remote Rural Scotland available at <https://www.hie.co.uk/media/3191/a-plus-minimum-plus-in-come-plus-standard-plus-for-plus-remote-plus-rural-plus-scotland-plus-plu-summary-plus-and-plus-key-plus-findings.pdf>

5. Group Discussions to Identify Key Priorities

The session was rounded off with group discussions about campaigning priorities relating to social security over the coming months and years at both UK and Scottish Government level. A common priority identified across groups was to fight against incoming benefits cuts and work requirements at the UK level, as well as scrapping the five-week wait for Universal Credit; removing the two-child limit; and ending benefits overpayment recovery. The need to develop a route map and set targets for 2030 was highlighted. Identified goals included campaigning for a commitment to the Essentials Guarantee, with a further commitment to the MIS/MIG within the lifetime of this parliament; and linking benefits to inflation, including making this a duty of the Scottish Government for devolved benefits.

Another common priority identified was to invest in a programme of benefit uptake to maximise income. This was emphasised for rural areas where stigma within small communities can result in an imbalance of uptake. Simplifying applications, ensuring quicker processing times, and making the case for dignity and autonomy to be the basics of the system were suggestions put forward to assist with this. Social Security Scotland was deemed to be working well and a question regarding how the Department for Work and Pensions could become aligned with those values arose.

To help achieve a MIG that is 100% of the MIS, measuring the wider economic, social and health benefits of the MIG, with a focus on the preventative spending argument was suggested. This should include making the case around the economic benefits to the business sector to bring them on board as allies and consider what role they should play e.g., developing a Green Book cost-benefit analysis. Using the Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales pilot to learn, design policy, and provide a payment at a set value that allows people to thrive was also proposed.

There was consensus to exercise caution to prevent narrowing the focus of the MIG too much to ensure that no groups lose out or get left behind. Recognising and addressing disparities in social care spending and charges at local authority level and developing person-centred policies designed by people with lived experience on the ground were viewed as critical. Boosting incomes for groups with particular risk of poverty, including parents under 25 and those with no recourse to public funds, while also bringing services up to a national standard was suggested. Recommendations around the need for more research into the cost of living for disabled people, as well as expanding the criteria for disability benefits to reflect a range of needs and circumstances, emerged as priorities from this discussion.

Finally, the need to celebrate successes and measure what is working was acknowledged, with the recent expansion of free bus travel and increase to Scottish Child Payment given as examples of positive progress.

