

Poverty in Scotland

2011

Towards a more equal Scotland?

**Edited by:
John H McKendrick, Gerry Mooney,
John Dickie and Peter Kelly**

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CPAG promotes action for the prevention and relief of poverty among children and families with children. To achieve this, CPAG aims to raise awareness of the causes, extent, nature and impact of poverty, and strategies for its eradication and prevention; bring about positive policy changes for families with children in poverty; and enable those eligible for income maintenance to have access to their full entitlement. If you are not already supporting us, please consider making a donation, or ask for details of our membership schemes, training courses and publications.

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About the organisations

CPAG in Scotland is part of CPAG. It promotes action for the prevention and relief of poverty among children and families with children. To achieve this, CPAG aims to raise awareness of the causes, extent, nature and impact of poverty, and strategies for its eradication and prevention; bring about positive policy changes for families with children in poverty; and enable those eligible for income maintenance to have access to their full entitlement. If you are not already supporting us, please consider making a donation, or ask for details of our membership schemes, training courses and publications. For further information, please visit www.cpag.org.uk/scotland.

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The Poverty Alliance is the national anti-poverty network in Scotland and was set up in 1992. It works with a range of community, voluntary and statutory organisations to find better solutions to the problems of poverty in Scotland. The Alliance attempts to influence anti-poverty policy by lobbying and campaigning, organising seminars and conferences, producing briefing papers and other information. A key goal for the Alliance is to have the voices of people experiencing poverty heard in policy processes. To do this we work with a number of partners across the UK and Europe and represent the UK Coalition Against Poverty and the European Anti-Poverty Network in Scotland. For further information on our work, please visit www.povertyalliance.org.

Emeritus Professor Gill Scott, then of the Scottish Poverty Information Unit (**Glasgow Caledonian University**) was the driving force behind the first

four editions of *Poverty in Scotland*. Dr John McKendrick has ensured the continuity of this Glasgow Caledonian University connection, with his editorial and writing contributions to this and the previous edition. The study of poverty in Scotland remains a focus within Glasgow Caledonian University – including the work of the Scottish Poverty Information Unit, academic research on issues such as child poverty in Scotland and the role of the media in shaping public opinion, and expert academic support to practitioners through its association with the Community Regeneration and Tackling Poverty Learning Network. For further information contact: j.mckendrick@gcal.ac.uk.

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Section One

Introduction

One

Poverty and anti-poverty policy in Scotland: themes and issues

Gerry Mooney

This is the latest in a series of books that have been concerned to provide a detailed overview of poverty and anti-poverty policies in Scotland. Starting in the mid-1990s, the *Poverty in Scotland* series has aimed to provide an accessible account of the main themes and issues relating to poverty during the period in question. In addition, the books have also had an important role in providing a comprehensive, yet accessible, account of the evidence base of the state of poverty in Scotland, highlighting the main patterns and its impact on diverse groups and places across Scotland. Further, there has also been a concern to review existing anti-poverty policies, identifying strategies that have had a positive impact – as well as critiquing those that have either failed to ameliorate poverty or, more commonly, have worked to deepen the effects of poverty itself, or which have in different ways furthered the stigmatisation of people experiencing poverty.

One of the hallmarks of the *Poverty in Scotland* series, at least in its more recent forms, has been the inclusion of a series of thematic essays that focus on particular aspects of poverty, disadvantage and inequality in contemporary Scotland. This reflects a concern to provide a range of narratives and viewpoints, but in a way that also mirrors that this is the outcome of a genuine collaboration on the part of a number of practitioners, activists and academics who are working in this area.

This new edition, *Poverty in Scotland 2011: towards a more equal Scotland?*, follows a similar path, offering the most up-to-date data and evidence relating to poverty, examining different policies and strategies, and also providing an opportunity for a more detailed examination of particular topics or themes. In our previous issue, *Poverty in Scotland 2007*, we were able to locate our discussions within the context of Scottish devolution. Written largely in late 2006, *Poverty in Scotland 2007* looked forward to the May 2007 Scottish parliament elections, contributing to the

debates that emerged, not only around the question of poverty in Scotland, but also around wider matters of social and economic inequality, public service provision, taxation and a range of other social issues relating to health, education and employability among others.

Similarly, such themes and issues feature prominently in this edition. Likewise, we are also looking forward to the next Scottish parliament elections scheduled for May 2011. It is our hope that, once again, we can both stimulate and contribute to a much needed debate on poverty in contemporary Scotland, and promote the development and implementation of new and more effective policies in addressing poverty. It is also an aim of this book to challenge many of the misconceptions that surround the discussion of poverty and of people who experience poverty, an issue to which we return below and elsewhere in this edition.

Poverty in Scotland 2007–2011: continuity and change

There are, of course, strong continuities with the period in which we produced *Poverty in Scotland 2007*. As we highlight in Section Two, poverty remains a significant feature of Scottish society, affecting as it does a sizeable proportion of the Scottish population. As we explored in *Poverty in Scotland 2002* and again in *Poverty in Scotland 2007*, the policy approach to poverty is one that is strongly influenced and shaped by strategies that promote work activation, labour market participation and retraining, and which together share a view that paid employment is the best route out of poverty. While some of the language used and the way in which this is presented has changed to an extent, this remains the dominant discourse in political and policy-making arenas.

There are further continuities too in the view that poverty should not be reduced to a question of income alone, or material wellbeing, but is also a matter of wellbeing in other senses. In this respect, the idea of 'social exclusion' has generally been used in an attempt to capture these, the so-called 'wider' dimensions of poverty. Poverty is also, in this sense, 'about' poor health, poor education, housing, environment, social opportunities and so on. However, while the editors of this collection also share the perspective that poverty is 'about more than income', we are also conscious that income and material conditions remain the most fundamental determining dimensions of poverty, and that all too often an emphasis on non-income-related dimensions has been used to draw

attention away from a concern with material wellbeing and issues of income.

Alongside the continuities, there have been major changes since 2006/07 and we highlight two developments as being of particular importance for our understanding of poverty in Scotland in 2011.

The political and policy-making landscape

The political map of Scotland is very different in important respects from that of 2006/07. The 2007 Scottish elections saw the Scottish National Party (SNP) emerge as the new Scottish government, albeit a minority government with a one-seat advantage over its closest challenger, the Labour Party. This had not only Scottish, but wider UK (and indeed global), implications. For the first time since the devolution settlement in 1998, different political parties formed the governments in Edinburgh and in London. That the SNP was a minority government meant that its room for manoeuvre was somewhat limited, but this did not prevent it from introducing a series of policy measures which gained widespread support across Scotland.¹ Notable here were the abolition of prescription charges by 2011, a renewed emphasis on the construction of social housing and the promise of smaller class sizes, all of which are now threatened by the impact of large-scale budget cuts, announced by both the Scottish and UK governments in late 2010.

As we will see below, such policy making was couched in a language which spoke of 'fairness' and 'equality'. However, that the SNP has not been as radical as some would have expected, or hoped, in part reflects its minority government status, relying as it does on its rivals to secure support in the Holyrood parliament, as well as perhaps an unresolved tension over the relative priority it gives to its 'solidarity' and economic growth ambitions.

There is a second dimension to the changed UK political landscape. This book is being produced in late 2010, with the May 2010 UK elections still fresh in the memory. This has had significant implications for politics across the UK – not least in Scotland. In brief, following 13 years of New Labour rule at Westminster, the May 2010 elections saw the Conservatives emerge as the single largest political party in terms of seats and votes – but with no clear overall majority. For the first time in a generation, a coalition has been created in the shape of the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats who now form the UK government. Not for the first

time, however, the political landscape of Scotland following the 2010 UK elections was markedly different from the rest of the UK, with Labour and the SNP emerging as the two largest parties in terms of votes (and Labour the overwhelmingly largest in terms of votes and seats), with the Conservatives managing only to hold onto the one single seat that they held prior to May 2010.

For us, the significance of the 2010 UK general election is that we now have in power (albeit thanks to a coalition) a party that has promised a different approach to poverty from that of New Labour (following the 2010 Labour Party conference at which Ed Miliband was elected leader, New Labour is now rebranded as Labour). We return to consider the approach of the Conservatives shortly.

However, there has been another major development which has also impacted on government policy, both in Edinburgh and in London.

The economic crisis

The UK, as much of the rest of the Western world, is currently experiencing the deepest financial crisis since the Wall Street crash and great depression of the inter-war period. The crisis of 2008 is of considerable importance, given its far-reaching impact on the world economy, bringing with it repeated pronouncements of a prolonged economic slump. The financial crisis, and the reactions to it by different governments and transnational organisations, has major implications for our understanding of social welfare today, and the future shape and direction of social welfare and anti-poverty policy in Scotland and across the UK.

With a Conservative/Liberal Democrat UK government committed to major cuts in public services and jobs, and with the promise of a renewed attack on 'welfarism' in an attempt to reduce the vast national debt, the immediate future for social welfare in the UK looks bleak, with much talk of the deepest cuts amid the most significant recession since the Second World War.

In what is now being widely referred to as the 'new age of austerity',² long-cherished forms of state-provided social welfare are already under sustained attack from the new government. In his emergency Budget on 22 June 2010, Chancellor George Osborne promised a Budget that would be 'tough but fair' as he announced an increase in VAT from 17.5 per cent to 20 per cent, a two-year pay freeze for public sector workers, a three-year freeze on child benefit, a tightening of housing ben-

efit entitlements and on eligibility for child tax credit among other austerity measures. In the Comprehensive Spending Review announced on 20 October 2010, an additional £7 billion was cut from welfare spending (in addition to the £11 billion cut announced in June). Elsewhere, some £46 billion was cut from other government department spending.³ We return to the impact of this in the concluding chapter, but the immediate future is one of cuts, the running down of welfare and public services, rising unemployment as almost 500,000 public sector jobs are slashed, and a harsher regime for benefit claimants.

As many critics have highlighted,⁴ the June 2010 Budget (and October Spending Review) has been one of the most regressive in living memory and, despite UK government claims that ‘we are all in it together’ and that government cuts are ‘fair’ with all sections of UK society affected, it is all too evident that the impact will fall disproportionately on the poorest and most vulnerable groups, and on those who deliver the services on which those groups so depend. There has been widespread condemnation from campaigning and third-sector organisations that the Budget and austerity measures will further increase poverty and inequality.

In the decade of devolution, the level of poverty in Scotland, especially child poverty, has for the most part fallen, although poverty remains widespread and deep.⁵ The interaction of devolved powers and reserved powers (that is, legislative powers controlled by the Westminster government), in a context of relative economic growth, played a major part in this – but this is now threatened by the onset of economic crisis.

Once again, poverty, and social welfare more generally, are at the heart of ‘contentious politics’ across the UK – at the centre of debates about the future direction of government policy and of the kind of society to which we aspire.

The SNP government 2007–2011: a new approach to poverty?

‘Making poverty history in Scotland will be central to everything we do.’ Thus commented Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, launching the government’s consultation process on a new approach to addressing poverty.⁶ As part of this new approach, a new language was introduced with terms such as ‘social justice’ and ‘closing the opportunity gap’ being replaced by an emphasis on ‘solidarity’ and ‘social cohesion’ – changed

terminology but continuing ambiguity over meanings and outcomes. There was some expectation that the arrival of an SNP government would lead to a very different kind of approach to social policy making in Scotland, in particular in relation to the issue of poverty. However, the fact that the SNP was a minority government and a party with no history in government (and arguably little history in terms of a clear and committed ideology around social welfare) resulted in an approach to poverty that shared many of the underlying assumptions of the previous two Labour/ Liberal Democrat coalition administrations.

In particular, as with its predecessors, the SNP administration attached considerable importance to 'sustainable' economic growth and employment as part of a social inclusion agenda. Published in November 2007, *The Government Economic Strategy*,⁷ followed in 2008 by *Taking Forward the Government Economic Strategy*⁸ and *Achieving Our Potential*,⁹ outlined the key aspects of the SNP's approach by emphasising the importance of work as a way out of poverty.

The government's approach was couched in a relatively new narrative, around which a set of 'golden rules' would govern its economic and social policy making. The 'solidarity' rule aims to increase the proportion of income and overall income of the bottom 30 per cent of the population by 2017. The 'cohesion' rule aims to narrow the gap in participation between the best and worst performing regions in Scotland, again by 2017. In turn, these are supported by a range of 'purpose targets' and 'national outcomes'.

The approach recognises the importance of tackling the underlying income inequality that drives poverty by setting a specific income inequality 'solidarity' target, something the government at UK level has failed to do. There are also indications of a new approach, in terms of the emphasis on consultation and partnership working, not least with Scotland's councils. In the context of deepening fiscal constraints and cuts, such partnerships are already experiencing considerable tension, however, and there is a question about how much is significantly new in the overall approach.

Inequalities and equalities

While it has long been acknowledged and understood that poverty and inequality are distinct, at the same time it is important to grasp that they are interconnected and entangled in many different ways. We live in a period of deep-seated poverty and inequality on a global scale. Across the

planet, as is well and increasingly documented, there is widespread poverty, hunger, malnutrition, discrimination and oppression.¹⁰ It is also, however, a world in which the inequalities between rich and poor have reached an unparalleled level. One illustration of this from the UK serves to underline the fact that our world is an unequal world: on 25 April 2010 the *Sunday Times* published the latest in its annual series of 'rich lists'. The *Rich List* for 2010 makes for jaw-dropping reading: the top 1,000 multi-millionaires in the UK saw their collective wealth increase by 29.9 per cent on 2009 levels – a whopping £77.25 billion. With a wealth stash of some £335.5 billion, this is almost twice the UK's well-publicised and historically largest national debt.¹¹ In the 22 years of the *Rich List*, this is the largest percentage increase on a year-by-year basis. And let us remind ourselves that this increase has happened as the UK (and much of the rest of the global economy) goes through its deepest economic crisis since the great depression of the 1920s and 1930s.

Such wealth inequality is, of course, repeated on a global scale. Not only does it indicate the huge gulf in incomes and economic security between (super) rich and poor, as has been forcefully argued, but such inequalities also have devastating consequences for all aspects of human (and planet and animal) life. As Wilkinson and Pickett have demonstrated, the more unequal a society, the greater the range and depth of 'social problems', from deteriorating community and social life, through mental health issues, high obesity, morbidity and mortality levels through to higher rates of incarceration and punishment, violence, teenage pregnancy and lower rates of social mobility.¹² Further, as Dorling has also shown, the five social evils (want, idleness, ignorance, squalor and disease), identified by Beveridge at the dawn of the British welfare state in the early 1940s, have been replaced by what he terms the five new tenets of injustice: elitism is efficient; exclusion is necessary; greed is good; prejudice is natural and despair is inevitable.¹³

Such injustices raise important questions about the winners and losers in society – and immediately draw attention to the unequal and socially divided nature of contemporary Scotland. Poverty and wider issues of social welfare are entangled with social inequality and social differentiation: class, gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, age and disability. The subtitle of this book, *towards a more equal Scotland?*, places the question of in/equality at centre stage. Throughout the volume we have worked to embed the issue of 'equalities' as a core aspect of the understanding of poverty in Scotland today. Arguably, an equalities approach was reflected in the anti-poverty approach of the first devolved Scottish administra-

tion in 1999. In *Social Justice: a Scotland where everyone matters*,¹⁴ for instance, there was some recognition of the need to extend equality to a range of different social groups across Scotland, going beyond the issue of income inequality alone.¹⁵ However, in the period since then, this has been diluted to some extent. The establishment in November 2007 of a new 'concordat' between the Scottish government and councils, whereby both would work together, along with the private and voluntary sectors, towards improvements in the quality of opportunities and life chances for people across Scotland, was accompanied by the development of single-outcome agreements for all of Scotland's 32 local authorities. With community planning partnerships a key part of this, the view adopted here was that single outcome agreements would be developed more in tune with local circumstances and priorities, thereby more effectively addressing local needs.¹⁶ However, the concordat and single-outcome agreements also mean the effective ending of any consistent national approach to poverty and equality, arguably making progress more difficult to achieve. This is an issue we pick up again in the concluding chapter.

Promoting equality: challenging the disrespect and misrecognition of poverty and poor people

A central theme running through this book is that we must challenge the view that people experiencing poverty are in some way 'deviant'. The distinction between a 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor has a long history. Echoing nineteenth-century poor laws and policies towards people in poverty, these continue to permeate and influence the representations of poor populations today, and are also evident at times in policy outcomes.

Disadvantaged populations have long been seen as distinctive from 'the rest of society'. In this way, we can talk of 'the poor' being 'other'. 'Othering' refers to the construction and categorisation of 'the poor' and other populations (eg, some migrant groups and single parents) as 'undeserving', as 'a problem' and as lacking or deficient in some way or another.¹⁷ Othering works to stigmatise and to stereotype such groups as distinct, as distant from normal society/'us' and underpins how some among the non-poor and, in particular, politicians, policy makers and the media think, talk and act towards 'the poor'. As Ruth Lister has argued, such processes help to make it easier for poor people to be blamed for both their own and society's problems, while also acting as a 'warning' to others.¹⁸

That such humiliations are sharpest when inequality is rising betrays the unequal social relations that underpin and permeate processes of 'othering'. Poor people may be demonised, constructed as a problem, but they are also feared, feared for who they are (or are thought to be) and resented for representing a state of existence into which others fear to fall. There is a double stigmatisation of people experiencing poverty and other disadvantaged populations at work here: the stigma of poverty and a lack of respect.

The misrecognition and disrespect experienced by people experiencing poverty works to reproduce inequality. It means infringing human and citizenship rights, a lack of freedom to act and an erosion of personal respect as it denies voice and agency to those who are treated as such. We return to consider this in more detail in Chapter 9.

The structure of *Poverty in Scotland 2011*

Following the previous editions in the series, *Poverty in Scotland 2011* seeks to provide a comprehensive summary of the state of poverty as it affects Scottish society today. **Section Two: The nature of poverty in Scotland** begins by exploring the issue of how poverty is to be best defined and measured. As is well known, this is a long-standing and controversial issue, reflecting as it does the many different viewpoints and approaches to poverty. Of similar importance, and again also of controversy, is the question of the causes of poverty. In Chapter 4, the main causes of poverty in Scotland are considered.

In **Section Three: Poverty in Scotland: the evidence**, the contributors highlight some of the key quantitative and qualitative aspects of living in poverty. The extent of poverty and inequality is considered here, with particular emphasis on the degree to which these are increasing or falling (Chapters 5 and 6). In Chapter 7 there is a particular focus on the groups affected by poverty in Scotland today, followed in Chapter 8 by a discussion of the real, daily lived experiences of a considerable proportion of the population of Scotland.

In **Section Four: Scotland in focus, 2007–2011**, Chapter 9 considers some of the ways in which poverty is being presented and represented in Scotland today. Continuing with the structure and format of *Poverty in Scotland 2007*, **Section Five: Issues and future challenges** provides a range of thematic essays which focus on particular dimensions

of poverty. Chapter 10 introduces the essays, drawing out the main themes and issues, particularly in relation to the policy, practice and provision of services. As in previous issues, it has not been possible to provide a coverage and review of each and every aspect of poverty and disadvantage. Instead, we have chosen to focus on particular areas which are both central to the discussion of poverty, and offer a place for consideration of other aspects which are sometimes overlooked, such as the connections between environmental issues and poverty as well as the question of cultural representation. In a departure from the previous issues, here we have not included thematic essays which highlight the complex entanglements and inter-relationships between different aspects of social differentiation and division, such as class, gender and ethnicity and poverty. Instead, we see these as key threads that run through and across the entire collection.

Section Six: Conclusion draws together the discussions across the collection and, in particular, considers the subtitle of the book – *towards a more equal Scotland?* What has to be done to make Scotland a more equal society, and how can we more effectively tackle poverty in Scotland as we look beyond the next Scottish parliamentary elections?

Finally, and again in keeping with the format of the previous edition, the **Appendix** provides a policy diary, which highlights many of the most important anti-poverty policies and legislation since 2007, with a particular focus on the policies of the Scottish government.

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