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CARE, CLIMATE AND COVID-19

BUILDING A WELLBEING ECONOMY FOR SCOTLAND



OXFAM SCOTLAND'S PRIORITIES FOR THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

This briefing explores Oxfam Scotland's priorities and recommendations for the Scottish Parliament both immediately and beyond the Scottish election in May 2021. It focuses on the measures needed to tackle poverty in Scotland, while contributing to sustainable international development and responding to humanitarian crises. It outlines the need to improve care for people and the planet as part of a fairer, more sustainable wellbeing economy. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the briefing outlines the link between the under-valuing of all forms of care work in Scotland and poverty. It particularly highlights the impact on women, who provide most care. The briefing also explores progress in other key areas, including climate action, tackling economic inequality and ending food insecurity.

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CARE IMAGE: CREDIT JPC PROD/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM.JPG
FLOODING IMAGE: FABEHA MONIR/OXFAM, BANGLADESH

“Oxfam Scotland has been at the heart of debates about the purpose of the Scottish economy for over a decade. The ideas in this paper draw on that track record and its global perspective. They stem from a sense that Scotland can be a leader in the economic system change that is so very necessary: Oxfam’s calls are bold, but entirely possible. It is now up to Scotland’s elected representatives to step forward and put them into action.”

Dr Katherine Trebeck
Advocacy and Influencing Lead
WE-ALL Scotland

“Oxfam Scotland provides the Scottish Parliament with precisely the priorities and policies it should adopt if it is to make progress on tackling inequalities, both local and global, and the inter-related health, climate and biodiversity crises. Especially welcome is the recognition that valuing and investing in care is one of the most effective ways of both addressing inequalities, including in particular gender inequality, and transitioning from a polluting, extractivist economy to a sustainable wellbeing economy.”

Dr Claire Duncanson
Senior Lecturer in International Relations
University of Edinburgh

“Climate change and care work go hand in hand: in Malawi, climate change isn’t a distant, future threat – we are feeling the impacts of the global climate emergency right now. Because of climate change – women and girls are having to walk further and further to collect water under the hot sun and they also take on most of the household caring responsibilities in the wake of extreme weather. This has only increased with COVID-19 which has put pressure on developing countries’ strained healthcare systems. Scotland can set an example for other countries to follow by prioritising care, living up to its domestic climate promises, and increasing its support to developing countries who are on the frontline of the climate crisis.”

Lingalireni Mihowa
Oxfam in Malawi Country Director

“Oxfam’s voice is a critical one on poverty, both at home and abroad and it is clear that climate change is already making this worse. The coming few years are vital and, if we want to properly tackle the climate crisis and the inherent inequality in its impacts, it is essential that our political leaders respond positively. They need to quickly find the funding and support for domestic action and international aid and quickly take steps to deliver the vision outlined by Oxfam in this paper.”

Mike Robinson
Chief Executive, Royal Scottish Geographical Society

“It is critical that Scotland remains committed to supporting Scottish schools to improve their practice in Global Citizenship Education, within the broader umbrella of Learning for Sustainability. Understanding the root causes of local and global poverty, inequality and the climate crises, are essential in creating a wellbeing economy that cares for people and the planet, as called for in this paper.”

Diana Ellis
Executive Member
International Development Education Association Scotland

SCOTLAND'S CHOICE

Oxfam Scotland's vision is of a world without poverty. One served by a 'wellbeing economy' in which everyone's basic needs are met within safe environmental limits. The COVID-19 pandemic is making this harder to achieve but it remains possible, if we act together. While the crisis is exacerbating existing inequalities and exposing our lack of resilience, it offers a chance to reject paradigms and mind-sets that have left so many behind for too long. We have reached an historic moment for change: an opportunity to use ideas, old and new, to build a fairer, more resilient and sustainable society. The choice we make – to break with the past or to reinforce the old ways – will be with us for generations.

COVID-19 creates major new challenges for the Scottish Parliament, both now, and after the election in May 2021, with rapid economic and societal changes globally. This follows a decade during which liberal democracy has been in decline with populist sentiment, often characterised by intolerance, on the rise, and a loss of faith in democratic institutions and leaders. We've faced extreme economic inequality, complex conflicts, discrimination based on race and gender, and climate and nature crises. The world is being challenged to find answers – Scotland must play its part.

Yet, even before COVID-19, many people in Scotland were already walking a financial tight-rope due to the failure to match positive statements of intent with action to tackle persistent and high levels of poverty and economic inequality. They now find the rope burning below their feet: financial pressures have deepened, food insecurity has surged, and unpaid caring responsibilities have escalated. While this paper primarily looks towards the next Scottish Parliament, if ever there was a time to build a fairer and more resilient society, it is now in the teeth of an historic global crisis.

This paper is a call to action. Reflecting devolved powers, it identifies four linked priorities for the Scottish Parliament:

- **delivering a wellbeing economy built on care, while leaving no-one behind;**
- **the better valuing of – and investing in – all forms of care work and those who provide it;**
- **caring for our planet by delivering climate justice; and**
- **caring for people in poverty and humanitarian crisis globally.**

Progress in each area is integral to the creation, for current and future generations, of a wellbeing economy. We must simultaneously care for people – in Scotland and around the world – while also caring for our shared planet.

In Scotland, caring for those with support needs – and the women who overwhelmingly provide care – is systemically under-valued. It is unconscionable for people to be trapped in poverty because they look after someone. The Scottish Parliament has the powers to change this and a key step is setting a new National Outcome that places all aspects of care at the core of a new wellbeing economy, with time-bound measures – and new investment – to realise it.

In 2015, we called for Holyrood to 'Even It Up' in Scotland. Yet economic inequality remains very high. It cannot be right for the wealthiest 10% of households to hold 43%¹ of wealth when one in five people is in poverty², including 230,000 children, and when food banks are an entrenched feature of our communities. Not all powers to tackle this rest in Edinburgh, but the Scottish Parliament has failed to act at the speed and depth needed. It needs to do more.

As a globally responsible nation, Scotland must also care for people in poverty and crisis globally. We need to support sustainable international development, alleviate suffering, and offer a place of dignified sanctuary. Where the Scottish Parliament has the power, it should act boldly; where it does not, it should be a powerful advocate for change.

To care for people, we must also care for the planet. Right now, people's homes and lives are being destroyed by a climate crisis created by the 'haves' which hits the 'have nots' hardest. In 2021, Scotland has a one-off chance to influence global climate action when UN talks are held in Glasgow. The Scottish Parliament – and all parts of our society – must do more to help limit global heating below 1.5°C while ramping up support to those suffering the most.

The Scottish Parliament faces an era-defining moment of choice: it must choose to care for people and our planet.

Jamie Livingstone
Head of Oxfam Scotland

OXFAM'S PRIORITIES FOR THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

DELIVER A WELLBEING ECONOMY BUILT ON CARE AND LEAVE NO-ONE BEHIND

Build a fairer, more sustainable economy which is resilient to shocks like COVID-19, through richer measures of prosperity, better valuing care, protecting the planet and narrowing extreme economic inequality to help end poverty.

Embed Scotland's New Compass for Wellbeing and Shared Prosperity

- Commit to using the National Outcomes as Scotland's measures of success, ensuring they transparently drive all policy and spending decisions, while developing a new composite measure based upon them to help displace narrow economic growth-based measures, such as GDP, as the dominant benchmark for progress in Scotland.

Legislate to Explicitly Connect Domestic and Global Sustainable Development

- Commit to a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill early within the next Parliament to underpin commitments to Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development and to ensure that delivery of Scotland's National Outcomes positively impacts people and the environment within Scotland and low-income countries.

Leave No-one Behind with Bold Action to Tackle Extreme Economic Inequality

- Implement bolder policy and spending decisions to help realise a wellbeing economy, with time-bound measures to significantly narrow income and wealth inequality, including using devolved Income Tax powers to redistribute income and raise more revenue, while reforming or replacing the Council Tax and exploring other wealth taxes.

Ensure Policy Better Reflects the Views of Those Living in Poverty

- Sustain and deepen actions to ensure people with experience of poverty meaningfully shape Scottish Parliament policymaking and accelerate action in line with their priorities to tackle the structural causes of poverty.

Protect People from the Income Crises Leading to Food Insecurity

- Deliver a 'cash-first' response to food insecurity during COVID-19 and then commit to enshrining the right to food in Scots Law. Produce a time-bound plan by the end of 2021 to end the need for food banks by enhancing devolved social security and income-based crisis support, while improving work quality and reducing living costs.

Require Businesses Accessing Scottish Government Support to Contribute to a Wellbeing Economy

- Require businesses accessing public money and support to improve the quality of work they offer – including to those juggling paid and unpaid care work while seeking to provide quality care and avoid poverty – and to cut their climate emissions, while bolstering voluntary accreditation initiatives to help deliver a wellbeing economy.

VALUE AND INVEST IN CARE AND THOSE WHO PROVIDE IT

Learn from COVID-19 by ending the systemic injustice of people, mostly women, living in poverty due to their caring roles by investing in high-quality care for all those who need it, while valuing and rewarding those who provide it.

Embed the Scottish Parliament's Commitment to Valuing and Investing in Care

- Commit to the co-creation of a National Outcome on valuing and investing in all forms of care – including ensuring paid and unpaid carers are protected from poverty – to act on the lessons from COVID-19, and measure progress.

Protect Paid Care Workers from Poverty

- Commit to significantly, quickly, and consistently boosting investment in social care in Scotland, while protecting other vital services, including consulting on a dedicated Scottish Social Care Tax on high incomes or wealth.
- Commit to reforming the approach used to commission and procure social care to ensure these consistently deliver fair work for those working in the sector, alongside high-quality care and self-directed support for all those who need it, with input from paid care workers, those who receive care, and unpaid carers.

Protect Unpaid Carers from Poverty

- Relieve financial pressures on unpaid carers created by COVID-19 with extra cash support and commit to an improved Scottish Carer's Assistance by at least the end of 2021. Ensure this new entitlement, as a minimum, protects unpaid carers from poverty, with the eligibility criteria significantly widened to support more carers.

- Increase support for those caring for older and disabled people to access and sustain decent work, including expanding high-quality, accessible and flexible publicly-funded social care, providing carer-centred employability support for current and former unpaid carers, and incentivising businesses to boost their support.

Protect People Caring for Children from Poverty

- Commit to increased support for those caring for children, particularly women, to access and sustain decent work by further expanding high-quality, accessible and flexible publicly-funded childcare, while supporting people into work in ways that recognise their individual circumstances, and incentivising businesses to enhance their support.
- Re-commit to delivering, as a minimum, the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act, ensuring that the 2023 interim targets are achieved and that statutory delivery plans are fully consistent with at least delivering the 2030 targets.
- Relieve current financial pressures on low-income families and commit to permanently protecting them from poverty through adequate and accessible devolved social security entitlements, including at least doubling the Scottish Child Payment, accelerating its roll-out, and uprating it – and other payments – as required.

CARE FOR OUR PLANET BY DELIVERING CLIMATE JUSTICE

Urgently implement fast and deep cuts in emissions in response to the climate and nature crises, while quickly boosting support to the Least Developed Countries and most vulnerable communities, who did least to cause it.

Deliver Faster and Deeper Emissions Reductions

- Commit to the actions needed to cut emissions by at least 75% by 2030, in line with the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2019. Fund this through taxes on high emitters, high incomes and wealth, while ensuring a just transition for impacted communities and requiring businesses accessing public money to commit to transformative climate action.

Increase and Promote Our Commitment to Climate Justice

- Show global leadership before the UN talks in Glasgow in 2021 by immediately increasing the Climate Justice Fund to at least £10 million per year to reflect Scotland's role in creating the climate crisis, and the growing impacts on the Least Developed Countries and most vulnerable communities, while championing a new global funding mechanism for loss and damage.

Invest in a Climate-Conscious and Globally-Engaged Society in Scotland

- Harness the power of individuals, businesses and other actors across Scotland for climate action and sustainable development. This should include maintaining core funding of the Development Education Centres in real terms and investing in education and other initiatives to substantially deepen understanding of climate change across all parts of society, including making climate action compulsory for businesses accessing public funds.

CARE FOR PEOPLE IN POVERTY AND CRISIS GLOBALLY

Meaningfully respond to global poverty and suffering, made much more urgent by COVID-19, by sustaining Scotland's commitment to international development and humanitarian aid, while supporting people seeking sanctuary.

Protect Scotland's International Development Fund

- Recommit to a climate-proofed International Development Fund focused on tackling poverty and inequality, ensure it meets international effectiveness standards and, as a minimum, restore and then maintain its real-terms value.

Counter High Levels of Humanitarian Need and Champion an Equitable Response to COVID-19

- Respond to surging global humanitarian need by, as a minimum, maintaining the real-terms value of the Humanitarian Emergency Fund in the next Parliament and by calling for equitable global access to COVID-19 vaccines as well as a moratorium on debt payments so that low-income country governments can fund COVID-19 responses.

Provide a Place of Sanctuary, Safety and Dignity

- Enhance Scotland's commitment to refugees and asylum-seekers by bolstering investment in support and integration projects to ensure dignified, human-rights-based support, including maximising the use of devolved powers to protect people, regardless of their asylum status, from the injustice of poverty and destitution.

DELIVER A WELLBEING ECONOMY AND LEAVE NO-ONE BEHIND

This coronavirus crisis has laid bare the deep vulnerability of even the earth's richest nations. It is showing that our failure to tackle extreme and growing inequalities has left the world woefully unprepared. The discrepancies in the economic impacts are no accident. They are the result of an economic model that delivers profits for the wealthy, while extracting value from the many. The pandemic did not create economic, racial and gender injustices; but it has exposed and amplified them. No-one would have chosen the circumstances of this moment: the human and emotional price of the pandemic is simply too great. Yet they have made the case for change more urgent and compelling. We cannot simply reboot our grossly unequal, carbon-intensive economies. To do so would be to jump from the frying pan of the pandemic into the fire of an irreversible climate crisis and ever more extreme economic inequality.

We must learn from the past. Between 1990 and 2015, global Gross Domestic product (GDP) doubled. Yet, while the proportion of humanity in extreme poverty, living on less than \$1.90 per day, fell sharply, income inequality grew.³ By 2015, nearly half the world's population still earned less than the more realistic \$5.50 per day poverty line⁴ and our planet was facing a worsening climate crisis. As we respond to the economic shock from COVID-19 – with global forecasts that more people will be pushed into extreme poverty⁵ – we must instead build a fairer, more sustainable and resilient world, served by a new wellbeing economy. This is an economy that recognises that it exists within society and, crucially, that it depends on a healthy society.⁶ One that adopts feminist approaches⁷, with care at the centre of our ethics and our politics. One that radically reduces the gap between the richest people and those in poverty, with the better off paying their fair share. One which protects children and future generations by caring for the planet.

The shape of this new wellbeing economy is still in development but it must ensure that everyone's basic needs are met within safe environmental limits.⁸ Many ingredients are already known: re-shaping our economy to share the rewards more fairly through decent work and valuing unpaid care work; redistributing wealth and income through progressive taxation; the provision of high-quality public services which ensure people are healthy and well educated; embedding renewable energy and circular resource use; requiring businesses to create wellbeing, as well as financial wealth, and promoting alternative business models; and ensuring open and responsive democratic processes. By reflecting these ingredients within our policy and spending decisions in Scotland – while realising the potential of the Scottish National Investment Bank⁹ and ensuring a just transition for people negatively affected by the move to a green economy¹⁰ – we can be an early-adopter of this new model. But we must learn from others too. The current Scottish Government's leadership of the Wellbeing Economy Governments¹¹, a platform with New Zealand and Iceland to encourage shared learning, should be continued in the next Parliament, with cross-party engagement encouraged.

Embed Scotland's New Compass for Wellbeing and Shared Prosperity

For too long measures of national progress have been dominated by the pursuit of economic growth, usually measured by GDP. This has come to be viewed by many as a goal in and of itself, rather than a means of delivering societal outcomes.¹² Economic growth, when used to support health and education, and when those living in poverty are participants, has helped to reduce extreme poverty globally. Yet the gains are often captured by those with the most. Worse still, traditional measures of GDP accord no value to anything outside of the market, whether positive, like unpaid caring¹³, or negative, like climate change.¹⁴ As Nobel-Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz argues: "If we measure the wrong thing, we will do the wrong thing".¹⁵ GDP fails to measure the ingredients of a wellbeing economy.

The current Scottish Government has endorsed a different approach: the First Minister has shown support for a wellbeing economy¹⁶ and the current Scottish Government committed¹⁷ to delivering the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the world's 2030 blueprint, including leaving no-one behind.¹⁸ It says the National Performance Framework (NPF) is Scotland's way to localise the Goals.¹⁹ Positively, the Government's Purpose within the NPF includes "increased wellbeing" alongside "sustainable and inclusive growth".²⁰ If growth is to contribute to ending poverty, while protecting the planet, it is essential to look beyond the rate of growth and focus instead on the composition of it and how any gains are distributed.²¹ Encouragingly, the NPF includes 11 National Outcomes to "describe the kind of Scotland it aims to create", with Ministers legally required²² to consult the public on these and to pay "regard" to reducing inequalities. A consultation informed the refreshed Outcomes in 2018.^{23,24} However, the depth of future consultations should be increased to ensure the Outcomes reflect the public's priorities over time.

No country has yet made the full transition to measuring success differently. While Scotland has begun to shift the compass, with some policy-making consistent with this, the next Scottish Government must ensure policy and spending decisions are consistently driven by Scotland's National Outcomes, with the whole of government working together to deliver them. Transparently monitoring progress is vital in driving action while also increasing awareness of this richer approach, creating a virtuous circle of increasing accountability and delivery. However, in 2018, time-limited targets were removed with a focus on "continuous improvement".²⁵ This has led to concerns around accountability, in addition to a lack of clear linkages between the Outcomes and the Scottish Government's budget.²⁶ At a time of significant pressure on the public finances, this gap must be closed through approaches such as wellbeing budgets²⁷ and Human Rights Budgeting²⁸ to ensure strong alignment between the National Outcomes and spending.

The inaugural "Scotland's Wellbeing Report"²⁹ in 2019 was a welcome attempt to set a baseline and showed progress in some areas, though often slow. It also highlighted deep inequalities with people in more deprived areas living shorter lives and spending fewer years in good health. Women's rights organisations say it had insufficient analysis on the wellbeing of women and girls.³⁰ The linked Equality Evidence Finder is a positive tool but is incomplete.³¹ Scottish Ministers are only required to report on the National Outcomes at such times as they "consider appropriate"³²; yet GDP figures are published quarterly.³³ While the Wellbeing Report and the review of progress on the SDGs³⁴ are welcome, the frequency and depth of Parliamentary reporting against the National Outcomes should increase with regular debates and committee scrutiny. Positively, amid COVID-19, the Scottish Government has stressed the need to "redesign how we think about our economy"³⁵ and has pledged to develop a "Wellbeing Economy monitoring framework", based on the NPF, with a "clear focus" on data for the hardest-hit groups.³⁶ To encourage action flowing from this, a new headline metric³⁷ capturing progress across the National Outcomes should be considered. This could, over time, help to fully displace inadequate measures, like GDP, and embed a new compass for national progress.

Commit to using the National Outcomes as Scotland's measures of success, ensuring they transparently drive all policy and spending decisions, while developing a new composite measure based upon them to help displace narrow economic growth-based measures, such as GDP, as the dominant benchmark for progress in Scotland.

Legislate to Enshrine a Policy Coherent Approach to Sustainable Development

The NPF's focus is on Scotland. However, we must not increase wellbeing here at the expense of people globally. Positively, there is a National Outcome for Scotland to "make a positive contribution internationally"³⁸ with a new composite indicator to measure progress.^{39,40} However, we must seek to deliver every National Outcome in ways that reflect sustainable development principles and enhance our global contribution. Everything we do in – and from – Scotland can impact on those in poverty and the planet, including how our companies operate, government policies, the things we buy, the waste we produce and the tax we pay. While there is cross-party support for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development⁴¹, an approach that seeks to ensure all parts of government work together on shared goals, this must be fully operationalised. Every minister, directorate, public body and Parliamentary committee should share responsibility to deliver the National Outcomes in ways that support faster sustainable global development.

We endorse the recommendation of Scotland's International Development Alliance⁴² for a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill. This could require the Scottish Government, local authorities and public bodies to deliver the National Outcomes in ways that deliver progress in Scotland while also supporting low-income countries to increase their wellbeing, now and in the future, and preventing negative impacts. As the first Bill of its kind in the UK, it would build on the inter-generational focus in Wales.⁴³ Civil society should help shape the Bill, but it could require: the formalisation of the Scottish Government's Inter-Ministerial Working Group⁴⁴; enhanced reporting on Scotland's global footprint; and systematic scrutiny of legislation and the work of public bodies via mandatory impact assessments.^{45,46} The Bill should link to the SDGs and the NPF, with Parliamentary committees aligning their remits to track progress. Further, the current Scottish Government's Contribution to International Development Report⁴⁷ is welcome but should encourage continuous improvement by investigating areas of incoherence and the activities of all public bodies, rather than focusing narrowly on Scottish Government-funded international activities.

Commit to a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill early within the next Parliament to underpin commitments to Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development and to ensure that delivery of Scotland's National Outcomes positively impacts people and the environment within Scotland and low-income countries.

Leave No-one Behind with Bolder Action to Tackle Extreme Economic Inequality

Even before COVID-19, one in five people in Scotland lived in poverty, with rates around twice as high for non-white minority ethnic groups, Muslims and single women with children, and elevated for households in which somebody has a disability.⁴⁸ One in four people said he or she would be able to cope for less than a month without their main income source.⁴⁹ Many more people are now being dragged deeper into hardship or are suffering this for the first time. The number of people applying for Crisis Grants⁵⁰ has risen sharply⁵¹ to record levels.^{52,53} and the number of people seeking food aid has surged.^{54,55} At more than 470,000, the number of people claiming Universal Credit in August 2020 – both in and out of work – was nearly double the figure in January⁵⁶, and unemployment is predicted to rise.^{57,58}

Against this context, delivering Scotland's National Outcomes and the SDGs will require the Scottish Parliament to act much more boldly. Using the 81 indicators identified by the current Scottish Government to measure progress, only 19 are "improving" – less than a quarter. Some 33 indicators are "maintaining" and 13 are "worsening"; performance is either to be confirmed or there is no indicator for 16 indicators.⁵⁹ Significantly, there is a lack of progress in tackling poverty and wealth inequality, with persistent poverty worsening. The UN's Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights highlighted⁶⁰ that while Scotland has the UK's lowest poverty rates, it also has the lowest life expectancy and "pockets of profound poverty". He noted "ambitious schemes" for addressing poverty but concluded that it is "too soon to say" if these steps, or Scotland's tax powers, will "make a difference for people in poverty".⁶¹

The University of the West of Scotland-Oxfam Partnership and the SDG Network Scotland worked with organisations across Scotland to perform a 'snapshot review' of Scotland's progress in delivering the SDGs.⁶² While there are some signs of policy and political commitment – including to tackle child poverty, reduce economic and gender inequalities, and deliver faster cuts in climate emissions – more needs to be done to meet the 2030 targets. The response to the economic shock created by the pandemic must be a catalyst for faster action, and there is welcome evidence of a desire to "bank" policy and practice shifts implemented during COVID-19.⁶³ However, delivering upon Scotland's commitment to the SDGs will require a rapid transformation of our economy and our society. The people of Scotland are clear that they want to live in a Scotland in which hunger and poverty are reduced, the environment is protected, and human rights are put at the heart of what we do.⁶⁴ We've been falling short of these standards for too long.

Globally, extreme economic inequality is a key barrier to a wellbeing economy. In 2019, the world's 2,153 billionaires had more wealth than 4.6 billion people.⁶⁵ The richest 22 men own more wealth than all the women in Africa.⁶⁶ In fact, the world's richest 1% have more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people put together.⁶⁷ Such extremes are a sign of a failing economic system⁶⁸, and they come as the global rate of poverty reduction has halved since 2013.⁶⁹ Around 100 million fewer people could live in poverty by 2030, if all countries cut income inequality by just 1% per year.⁷⁰ However, if a huge share of global income growth continues to accrue to those at the top, we will fail to end poverty⁷¹ or live within safe environmental limits⁷², and we will remain more vulnerable to this, and future, pandemics.

Scotland is very far from immune to economic inequality. While the current Scottish Government has sought to cushion the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis, including increasing crisis support^{73,74}, the pandemic reinforces the need for the Scottish Parliament to maximise the use of devolved powers to even up Scotland and build resilience to shocks like COVID-19, while fulfilling commitments to leave no-one behind.⁷⁵ Whilst there is welcome political attention on tackling poverty, particularly child poverty^{76,77}, there is too little focus on addressing inequality across the whole income spectrum. Yet, since the 1960s, poverty rates in the UK tend to be higher when income inequality is higher, showing that we cannot tackle poverty in isolation.⁷⁸ Scotland must do more to realise the current Scottish Government's aim to "reduce inequalities".⁷⁹ Its preferred measure for income inequality is the Palma ratio, and this has remained largely stable at a high level: the 10% richest households have nearly 24% more income compared with the bottom 40%.⁸⁰ Wealth – including financial, property, pensions and physical assets – is even more unequally distributed: the wealthiest 10% of households held nearly 43% of Scotland's just over one trillion pounds of personal wealth in 2016-2018.⁸¹ The bottom 20% held 1%⁸², placing them at risk of financial shocks like the coronavirus crisis.

There is some policy intent to tackle inequality in Scotland with, for example: a marginally more progressive Income Tax schedule, with an extra tax band and slightly higher rates for those on higher incomes compared with the rest of the UK⁸³; a commitment to tackling inequality within Scotland's Economic Strategy⁸⁴; The Fairer Scotland Duty on particular public bodies to consider how they can reduce inequalities of outcome⁸⁵; The Community Empowerment

(Scotland) Act 2015⁸⁶; and The Fairer Scotland Action Plan.⁸⁷ The Scottish Parliament also placed the Poverty and Inequality Commission into statute.^{88,89} However, insufficient concrete action is being taken. Important levers are reserved, but devolved powers can make a difference, including: income-tax and social security; education and skills; economic development; public procurement; planning; housing and childcare.⁹⁰ The current and next Scottish Governments must significantly deepen action, with measures across portfolios, to narrow inequality. This should include much bolder spending decisions, with greater transparency – as recommended by the Poverty and Inequality Commission⁹¹ – on how much is spent on cutting poverty and inequality. Critically, with levels of poverty at risk of rising sharply and food insecurity already surging, more money must reach the pockets of lower-income households.

A wellbeing economy would ensure markets better share the proceeds of the economy from the outset, but tax and spending decisions matter too. Amid a steep economic downturn⁹², Scotland faces a challenging period for the public finances. The Scottish Parliament can secure extra funding as a result of the UK Government spending more on areas that are devolved, such as health, or by utilising devolved borrowing and tax powers. Too many governments shy away from levels of tax on high incomes and wealth that would ensure a fairer contribution by those who can most afford it towards public services and entitlements. As states seek to balance the books while implementing economic-stimulus packages, progressive tax must play a central part. Tax can also be used to redistribute, in order to help tackle inequality, and to shape behaviours. It is an essential element of a wellbeing economy which prevents poverty, invests in care⁹³ and tackles the climate crisis. Holyrood should use its tax powers to help realise a wellbeing economy, for all.

While small in scale, polling⁹⁴ suggests that 61% of people in Scotland would, if they had to, rather pay more tax to the Scottish Government, compared with 24% to the UK Government. The current Scottish Government has shown itself willing to use Income Tax powers⁹⁵; though changes, to date, are limited.⁹⁶ A majority of people in Scotland support raising Income Tax, with stronger backing for doing so for everyone except the least well off and substantial support for larger increases for the better-off. Some 70% also support or strongly support a one-off 10% tax on wealth over £2m.⁹⁷ For years, Oxfam has called for better use of wealth taxes across countries, alongside tackling tax dodging.⁹⁸ There is now growing support for taxing wealth to help tackle inequality, including inter-generational inequality.⁹⁹ This includes at UK level¹⁰⁰ where this is an expanding wealth gap¹⁰¹ and rising support for reform.^{102,103} In Scotland, the Fraser of Allander Institute says that if the Scottish Government wants to reduce inequality, wealth tax “could – in principle – be an important policy lever”.¹⁰⁴ Scotland also has devolved powers over local tax, but there has been little progress in the five years since the Commission on Local Tax Reform concluded the present Council Tax “must end”.¹⁰⁵ The current system is regressive and, despite some reforms, change is overdue. The Institute for Public Policy Research also suggests that, provided revenue funds local expenditure, Scotland could introduce new local taxes to raise revenue and drive changes in behaviour, including on priorities such as climate change, fair work, and reducing poverty and inequality.¹⁰⁶ To help deliver the National Outcomes, Scotland should be prepared to act boldly on tax.

Implement bolder policy and spending decisions to help realise a wellbeing economy, with time-bound measures to significantly narrow income and wealth inequality, including using devolved Income Tax powers to redistribute income and raise more revenue, while reforming or replacing the Council Tax and exploring other wealth taxes.

Ensure Policy Better Reflects the Views of Those Living in Poverty

Poverty and inequality are about more than money: they are about power too. Around the world, wealth is too often used to skew legal frameworks and government policies, increasing the gap between the richest and the rest.¹⁰⁷ A powerful example is the spider’s web of tax havens. However, inequality skews our politics in other ways too; for example, there is evidence that lower-income individuals are less likely to vote. This can become a vicious circle with lower-income individuals withdrawing from the voting booths because political parties are doing little to represent their interests, with these parties instead focusing on policies that benefit the profile of the voting electorate.¹⁰⁸ To end poverty, we therefore need a multi-pronged strategy to rebalance power within global and national economies.¹⁰⁹

In Scotland, there is a growing commitment to participative engagement within policy and spending decision-making.¹¹⁰ This includes Scottish Government funding for Poverty Truth Commissions which bring together those with lived experience of poverty and local decision-makers¹¹¹, and the Get Heard Scotland programme.¹¹² The Poverty and Inequality Commission has sought to amplify the voices of those living in poverty¹¹³ and Social Security Experience Panels¹¹⁴ have been formed to help shape devolved entitlements. Scotland’s Citizen’s Assembly¹¹⁵ has a remit to

discuss the kind of Scotland “we are seeking to build”. However, four out of five people say they feel they cannot influence decisions in their local area, with adults in the most deprived areas more likely to feel this way.¹¹⁶ Research on political participation found that women, people from ethnic minority groups, and disabled people continue to be under-represented in all areas of public life, including at Holyrood.¹¹⁷ Early steps to introduce Participatory Budgeting have been taken, but remain small-scale with challenges related to culture, capacity, politics, legitimacy and sustainability.¹¹⁸ Rebalancing skewed power requires sustained commitment and investment. However, to be credible, engagement must also lead to demonstrable change in policies to reduce poverty and inequality in Scotland.

At the 2021 Scottish election, all parties must show they are listening to those seldom heard in policymaking. In early 2020, Oxfam Scotland conducted workshops – ‘Your Voice, Your Say: Let’s Talk Inequality’ – with seven local organisations.¹¹⁹ The workshops particularly sought to engage with low-income groups, marginalised communities, and those with experience of poverty.¹²⁰ The conversations touched on reserved and devolved policy areas. However, participants urged action in three key areas – education and employment opportunities; housing; and health. These sit within the Scottish Parliament’s powers. Within education and employment, priorities included: a focus on vocational education; widening participation within higher education; better-paid secure jobs; and help for families with young children to get into work through cutting childcare costs. Within housing: more good-quality, social-rented housing; better regulation of landlords; action to reduce rents; and Council Tax reform. And within health: more NHS funding to cut waiting times; better pay and conditions for the “on-the-ground workforce”; a mental-health services review; and increased investment in children and adolescents’ mental-health services. These priorities are not necessarily new, suggesting insufficient progress on them to date. Participants had a clear desire for the Parliament to move beyond mitigating poverty and towards preventative, structural change – funded by fairer taxation – to narrow inequality. The Scottish Parliament must listen to those living in poverty and demonstrate a clear willingness to act.

Sustain and deepen actions to ensure people with experience of poverty meaningfully shape Scottish Parliament policymaking and accelerate action in line with their priorities to tackle the structural causes of poverty.

Protect People from the Income Crises Leading to Food Insecurity

A key sign of a failing economic model is surging levels of hunger. There is no shortage of food in Scotland, yet food banks are an entrenched feature of our communities. Even pre-pandemic, more than 1,000 food parcels were issued on average every day across Scotland¹²¹ and nearly one in 10 adults reported being worried he or she would run out of food due to a lack of money, rising to nearly one in six in the poorest areas.¹²² At 25%, rates are even higher for single parents. Recent figures show a doubling of food parcels year-on-year.¹²³ Despite this worrying context, Scotland has committed to ending hunger by 2030.¹²⁴ While there is positive policy intent, and our understanding of the drivers of food insecurity has substantially increased¹²⁵, progress is off-track and the Scottish Parliament has a duty to act.

No-one should be left hungry, but food aid should be the last resort. People need an adequate and secure income that allows them to buy food. The current Scottish Government’s commitment to a ‘cash-first’ approach¹²⁶ must be consistently realised. The learning of projects like A Menu for Change¹²⁷ must be invested in. Alongside improving local referral systems, action is needed by both Holyrood and Westminster to tackle the structural causes of income crisis, including inadequate social security and poor-quality work. Despite delays during the pandemic – including in relation to disability payments¹²⁸ – Social Security Scotland is increasingly delivering a number of devolved social security entitlements, with the transfer of existing cases from the Department for Work and Pensions due to be completed by 2025. During this transition, the Scottish Parliament must bolster devolved entitlements and build on efforts to boost uptake¹²⁹, including via improved access to welfare-rights advice. It must simultaneously use available levers to tackle poor-quality work and to reduce living costs, including enhancing access to debt support, boosting affordable housing and acting to reduce transport costs. For many people, a lack of money for food is one challenge amongst many and they stress the importance of being treated with dignity.¹³⁰ To fully embed the stated commitment to end hunger, the Parliament should make a time-bound commitment to ending the need for food banks, including enshrining the right to food into Scots Law¹³¹ and supporting people to realise this right through access to an adequate income.

In the meantime, emergency financial support which tackles individuals’ immediate income crises and acts as a gateway to wider support is essential. The Scottish Welfare Fund¹³² throws an extra financial lifeline to those in crisis but research, pre-pandemic, showed 55% of people were not confident they would know where to access emergency

cash¹³³ and that local delivery of the Fund does not always reflect best practice.¹³⁴ During pandemic, there have been ongoing concerns about a lack of awareness of the Fund, variations in how it is promoted, and barriers to application.¹³⁵ This is fuelling concerns about a “postcode lottery” with reports of people turning to third sector support having been rejected for the Fund.¹³⁶ People should always have access to crisis cash, and guidance¹³⁷ which suggests limiting support to three awards in a rolling 12-month period, unless exceptional circumstances apply, should end. While the recent increase in the Fund¹³⁸ is welcome – alongside the extension of free-school-meals over the holidays¹³⁹ – awareness of the Fund must rise, with adequate grants provided quickly and investment matching need.

Deliver a ‘cash-first’ response to food insecurity during COVID-19 and then commit to enshrining the right to food in Scots Law. Produce a time-bound plan by the end of 2021 to end the need for food banks by enhancing devolved social security and income-based crisis support, while improving work quality and reducing living costs.

Require Businesses Accessing Scottish Government Support to Contribute to a Wellbeing Economy

A wellbeing economy cannot be built by governments alone: business must play a bigger role. Oxfam has shone a light on how the actions of the world’s biggest and richest companies before and during the pandemic have exacerbated the economic impacts.¹⁴⁰ While workers, families, and many businesses – particularly small- and medium-sized firms – are struggling, some large corporations have shielded themselves, or have even cashed in. Our expectations of business – including to provide decent work – must grow if society is to become more resilient to shocks like COVID-19. Poor-quality work¹⁴¹ drives poverty, including for those with caring responsibilities. While employment law is reserved, the Scottish Parliament can do more to push employers to improve practice. The current Scottish Government has committed to creating “a new compact with and for business”¹⁴², giving them an enlarged role in the design and delivery of policies during the coronavirus recovery. However, it must expect more from business too.

The current Scottish Government funds voluntary schemes¹⁴³, including: Living Wage Scotland¹⁴⁴; Carer Positive, which recognises employers providing a supportive environment for carers¹⁴⁵; and the Scottish Business Pledge, a “values-led partnership” between Government and business to boost productivity and competitiveness through “fairness, equality and sustainable employment”.¹⁴⁶ The elements within the Pledge have improved, including the addition of action to address the gender pay gap, but the current Scottish Government has failed to implement a more robust accreditation process or clearer incentives.¹⁴⁷ For example, while the Pledge recognises that businesses have a “central role” in growing a greener, fairer and more resilient Scotland, the “environmental impact” element is not compulsory. In addition, while participation is growing, it remains very low at just 0.4% of Scotland’s registered business base.¹⁴⁸ The Pledge should be further enhanced, and invested in, to ensure it drives change and to boost engagement levels.

However, those accessing public money should be *required* to help create a wellbeing economy. The current and next Scottish Government must use the £11bn per year of public procurement to drive improved business practice¹⁴⁹ through greater conditionality.¹⁵⁰ As called for by the Scottish Parliament’s lead committee on climate change, all applications from private enterprises for public funds should include a transparent action plan to deliver social and environmental objectives.¹⁵¹ The emergent Fair Work First approach¹⁵² includes a commitment to apply work-quality criteria – such as the Real Living Wage¹⁵³ and no exploitative zero-hours contracts – to Scottish Government funding streams and support grants.¹⁵⁴ While this approach is encouraging, it remains in its infancy. The current and next Scottish Governments should review and expand the criteria – including tax transparency, pay ratios and the support firms are required to provide to those with caring responsibilities. Given the need for Scotland’s emissions to fall quickly, all businesses accessing public money or support should also be required to commit to climate action. Similarly, while public bodies are required to report annually on how their procurement policies and activity contribute to Scotland’s climate ambitions,¹⁵⁵ there are calls for a review of their founding legislation to ensure they are required to respond to the climate and nature crises.¹⁵⁶ In addition, consideration should be given to how local taxes, such as payroll taxes, could incentivise improved practice. Ideas include a levy on low pay employers and a Fair Work Bonus for those offering fair work, thereby creating disincentives to low pay models and incentives to improve practice.¹⁵⁷

Require businesses accessing public money and support to improve the quality of work they offer – including to those juggling paid and unpaid care work while seeking to provide quality care and avoid poverty – and to cut their climate emissions, while bolstering voluntary accreditation initiatives to help deliver a wellbeing economy.

VALUE AND INVEST IN CARE AND THOSE WHO PROVIDE IT

Oxfam is deeply worried about the impact that COVID-19 crisis is having on all those in poverty, or at risk of being dragged into it. However, our analysis before the pandemic, which has been reinforced by it, has sharply highlighted the deep links between care and poverty, and the gendered nature of these. Each of us needs care at some point: as a child, in older age, or due to ill health or additional needs. While the quality of the care provided to those who need it and their financial and personal wellbeing are essential, the coronavirus crisis has shown that carers – paid and unpaid – are the glue holding our society and economy together. Care is a vital social good. Yet too many people with caring responsibilities live in poverty and policy fails to sufficiently value their contribution.¹⁵⁸ The surge in caring responsibilities caused by COVID-19 makes action to end the systemic under-valuing of care work a national priority. We must make care the visible and valued engine of a new wellbeing economy – one that that cares for and nurtures people, as well as the environment. As the activist Naomi Klein states, we need to shift from an economy centred on “gig and dig” to one built on “care and repair”.¹⁵⁹ In Scotland, whether the response to the pandemic, and the promises made before the Scottish election, better value and invest in care, is a key test of our commitment to change.

Care and Gender

Globally, the under-valuing of care, and the impacts of this, are highly gendered.^{160,161} Our sexist economic system accrues wealth and power into the hands of a rich few; in part, by exploiting women and girls, especially those in poverty and from marginalised groups, who put in 12.5 billion hours every day of care work for free¹⁶², and countless more for poverty wages. Their work is essential to our communities. A core part of a new wellbeing economy is addressing the under-valuing of work largely undertaken by women, including unpaid and under-paid care work. As the Women’s Budget Group argue, a caring economy can help deliver wellbeing, sustainability and gender equality.¹⁶³

In Scotland, 61% of unpaid carers are women.¹⁶⁴ Women also make up 96% of the childcare¹⁶⁵ and 86% of the care-home workforces¹⁶⁶ – both characterised by low pay and poor working conditions. This unequal distribution of care work can limit women’s economic prosperity and undermine their health and wellbeing.¹⁶⁷ Not only are women often required to take time out of the labour market, but those who do paid work are more likely to be in part-time and precarious jobs, often earning lower pay amid a gender pay gap.¹⁶⁸ Overall, while the gap between women and men’s overall average hourly earnings in Scotland has narrowed, it remains at 13%¹⁶⁹ with four main drivers: bonus earnings, the size of company a woman works for, occupational segregation, and gender discrimination.¹⁷⁰ The care sector’s pay gap is lower at 3.5%, but this sector tends to be female-dominated and low-paid. There is also a lack of intersectional data for different groups of women, such as disabled women and Black and Minority Ethnic women.¹⁷¹ Additionally, there is evidence that women are more impacted by COVID-19-related labour-market disruption¹⁷² with, for example, disproportionate numbers of older women leaving paid work due to caring responsibilities, ageism and sexism.¹⁷³

The unequal distribution of care and domestic work is fuelled by entrenched gender norms, with this imbalance deepening during the pandemic.¹⁷⁴ Yet norms are not cast in stone: change can and must be nurtured in every-day practice, such as men doing more unpaid care work.¹⁷⁵ Alongside this, action is needed to tackle violence against women, discrimination, and women’s under-representation in positions of power;¹⁷⁶ for example, only 35% of MSPs and 29% of elected councillors are women.¹⁷⁷ As explored elsewhere in this paper, efforts to challenge entrenched gender norms and gendered inequalities must accompany efforts to properly value and invest in care work in Scotland.

Embed the Scottish Parliament’s Commitment to Valuing and Investing in Care

The Scottish Government has edged towards a better valuing of care, including providing some extra support to those with different types of caring responsibilities. However, amid strong public recognition of the importance of care before¹⁷⁸, and particularly during the pandemic, there is significant public support for action to better value it.^{179,180} The Scottish Parliament must now commit to action at a speed and depth that reflects the public’s priorities and the current Scottish Government’s welcome recognition of the care sector as “key economic infrastructure”.¹⁸¹ Investing in care can create valuable, low-carbon jobs¹⁸² as part of a just, caring and green recovery¹⁸³, but it is also the right thing to do. The Scottish Parliament must do more to recognise and invest in these multiple benefits to make care count – and the creation of a cross-cutting new national commitment to value and invest in all care is a key step.

Despite the surge in public and political solidarity with carers, alongside NHS and other key workers¹⁸⁴, and enhanced recognition of the importance of childcare, there is no National Outcome within the National Performance Framework¹⁸⁵ which is focused on better valuing and investing in all forms of care.¹⁸⁶ While ensuring that care is reflected in the delivery of all existing Outcomes is essential, a new National Outcome should be developed in deep consultation with those providing and receiving care, as well as wider society. This should link to existing commitments, including the National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes¹⁸⁷, which focus more narrowly on improving people's experience of health and care services and the outcomes that services achieve. However, critically, the new National Outcome must embed the financial and personal wellbeing of those providing care, whether paid or unpaid, and encompass those caring for people of all ages, including children. Creating this new National Outcome is a chance to fully embed the learning from COVID-19 – and the solidarity shown for carers during the pandemic – within a clear commitment to better valuing and investing in **all forms of care** and to measuring progress through transparent indicators. It would be a clear statement of the Scottish Parliament's commitment to making care count in Scotland.

Commit to the co-creation of a National Outcome on valuing and investing in all forms of care – including ensuring paid and unpaid carers are protected from poverty – to act on the lessons from COVID-19, and measure progress.

Protect Paid Care Workers from Poverty

While employment is often described as the best defence against poverty, if you are a paid carer, this is not always the case. To learn the lessons from COVID-19, the Scottish Parliament must invest in, and reform, social care to ensure that, alongside providing high-quality care for all those who need it, paid care workers are valued and protected from poverty. Right now, paid care work is associated with low incomes, poor working conditions and a lack of agency.¹⁸⁸ While the value we place on this overwhelmingly female workforce is low, our expectations of them are high – a contradiction reinforced by the coronavirus crisis. While workers are foregoing social distancing, putting themselves and their family in danger,¹⁸⁹ too many paid care workers live in poverty due to existing low pay and poor conditions.¹⁹⁰

Coupled with COVID-19, Scotland's ageing population^{191,192} makes investment in social care an urgent priority. Employing more than 200,000 people¹⁹³, the sector makes up Scotland's largest workforce.¹⁹⁴ While publicly-funded adult social care workers should receive at least the Real Living Wage¹⁹⁵, the Fair Work Convention has highlighted the poor quality of work, with long hours, insecure contracts and low pay.¹⁹⁶ It found that working in the sector is "fulfilling, but not always fair" and that the current funding and commissioning systems make it "almost impossible for providers to offer fair work" to staff. Alongside integrating health and social care^{197,198}, the Scottish Government says it is "taking forward" the Convention's recommendations for reform¹⁹⁹, but calls for faster progress have intensified.²⁰⁰ Interviews conducted during COVID-19 with people who care for adults in care homes²⁰¹ highlight their deep levels of dedication to their work, but also that pre-existing work quality issues have been compounded, including: a reported lack of management support; safety concerns, including access to trauma support; and inadequate pay, terms and conditions. This research points to a lack of sectoral bargaining and worker voice, staff feeling under-valued compared with NHS workers, and a sense that a cultural shift is needed to better value those who need care and those who provide it.

The current Scottish Government's announcement of an independent review of adult social care in Scotland²⁰², reporting by January 2021, is welcome – particularly the focus on the experiences of care workers. It has also committed to ensuring "fair work is embedded"²⁰³, with full proposals due by the end of 2020.²⁰⁴ However, the scale of change needed requires substantially more investment. For years, funding across the UK has been insufficient to cover growing demand, with analysis suggesting this has led to unmet and under-met need, a crisis among providers, and greater pressure – including on staff and families.^{205,206} Overall funding from the Scottish Government to Scotland's 32 local authorities, who play a key role in procuring social care services, has fallen by 7.6% in real terms since 2013-14 and the Accounts Commission has warned that councils face "changing and growing demands on their services" with their income "straining to keep pace".²⁰⁷ While the current Scottish Government says councils received a "fair" funding settlement, even before COVID-19 many councils reported using their reserves²⁰⁸, with knock-on funding pressures on care homes.²⁰⁹ To better join up care, local authorities and health boards are legally required to work together to plan and deliver adult community health and social care services.²¹⁰ Some 31 Health and Social Care Partnerships now commission services, mainly by delegating funds to Integration Joint Boards. The budgets of these Boards rose in 2018/19, but a majority required extra funding to avoid deficits.²¹¹

Demography and care needs vary, but analysis suggests²¹² that spending on adult social care per person in Scotland exceeded that in England and Wales between 2010 and 2016, but that levels fell in each nation. Year-on-year budget rises for social care in Scotland have reduced, despite rising costs, with resources managed through the “use of eligibility criteria” for those accessing it.²¹³ However, the British Medical Association²¹⁴ says that to look after patients well, social care must be “well-funded and adequately staffed” and points to “inadequate resourcing”. The UK Women’s Budget Group has warned of a squeeze in revenues and increased safety costs²¹⁵ and Scottish Care says COVID-19 demands a ‘new care normal’ with higher staffing levels.²¹⁶ The current Scottish Government has provided an extra £262 million this year to help meet additional costs,^{217,218} while ensuring care workers who are ill or who need to self-isolate do not face financial hardship.²¹⁹ There is also a new one-off payment to a named survivor of social care workers whose death is linked to contracting COVID-19 at work.²²⁰ While welcome, more investment is clearly needed to ensure social care supports all those who require it, while protecting workers from poverty and relieving pressure on unpaid carers. To boost investment amid pressured public finances, while protecting other services, the current and next Scottish Governments should use Holyrood’s tax-raising powers, focusing on high incomes or wealth. The Welsh Government is exploring the viability of a new “social care levy”²²¹, potentially using devolved Income Tax powers to ring-fence new social care funding.²²² This should be considered in Scotland: polling suggests that 70% of people support higher Income Tax to fund pay rises for care workers.²²³ While acting quickly, Holyrood should also call for more investment in social care at Westminster, increasing the funds available in Scotland.

Some also believe that ownership models within social care need to change, with calls for a new National Care Service.^{224,225} Whatever model exists, it must ensure everyone who needs care can access high-quality provision while protecting from poverty those working in the sector, people who rely on it, and unpaid carers. Importantly, a new approach is needed for commissioning²²⁶ and procuring²²⁷ services to prevent competition from driving down work quality, including wages.²²⁸ This will require sustained investment and support. Those commissioning services must place greater importance on criteria related to ‘fair work’ and ‘sustainability and community benefits’, with their terms facilitating these by, for example, setting an hourly rate which makes it possible for providers to pay the Real Living Wage.²²⁹ This approach must be shaped by low-paid care workers²³⁰, those who use social care, and unpaid carers.

Commit to significantly, quickly, and consistently boosting investment in social care in Scotland, while protecting other vital services, including consulting on a dedicated Scottish Social Care Tax on high incomes or wealth.

Commit to reforming the approach used to commission and procure social care to ensure these consistently deliver fair work for those working in the sector, alongside high-quality care and self-directed support for all those who need it, with input from paid care workers, those who receive care, and unpaid carers.

Protect Unpaid Carers from Poverty

Around 3 in 5 people will be an unpaid carer for someone with ill health or additional support needs at some point.²³¹ Surveys during lockdown suggest around 1.1 million people in Scotland were providing unpaid care.²³² Some 87% of unpaid carers report providing more care for relatives, with some support services not available.²³³ Worryingly, nearly 30% report struggling to make ends meet, 10% say they are or have been in debt as a result of caring, and one in 14 says he or she has reduced their working hours or given up work to care due to the pandemic.²³⁴ While some unpaid carers in Scotland receive the Carer’s Allowance Supplement²³⁵, many do not qualify²³⁶ and therefore also missed out on the Coronavirus Carer’s Allowance Supplement paid in Scotland in June 2020.²³⁷ Nevertheless, the Scottish Government should replicate the Coronavirus Supplement in December 2020 while providing more financial support to those who do not qualify for it and ensuring effective access to crisis funds. These are important steps towards long-lasting change to better support unpaid carers through action to boost their incomes and to reduce their living costs.

Powers over Carer’s Allowance were devolved in 2016²³⁸ and the Scottish Government has promised the new entitlement, Scottish Carer’s Assistance, by the end of 2021.²³⁹ This is a major chance to enhance the adequacy and flexibility of support and delays must be avoided.²⁴⁰ Consulting with carers is vital but the need to deepen and widen financial support is urgent.²⁴¹ Reforms should include: calculating the earnings threshold for the entitlement on the basis of the Real Living Wage²⁴² and – as a minimum – ensuring it keeps pace with this; introducing a taper to prevent carers earning just above the threshold from losing all of their entitlement; lowering the volume of hours people are required to care for per week in order to qualify; and making it easier for carers to both care and study. These should

be implemented quickly. Before the pandemic, 69% of unpaid carers reported receiving “no help or support” – financial or otherwise²⁴³ – with surveys²⁴⁴ suggesting that awareness and uptake of entitlements, as well as the provisions in the Carers (Scotland) Act (2016)²⁴⁵ – including the right to an adult-carer support plan or young-carer statement – remain low. People must be supported to access their rights at a time when surveys also suggest there is a worryingly steep decline in the mental health and wellbeing of young unpaid carers.²⁴⁶

Unpaid carers who wish to take paid work must also be better supported. Pre-pandemic, around 270,000 people in Scotland combined work and care²⁴⁷ – around one in eight – with this forecast set to rise as the population ages and people work longer.²⁴⁸ Tailored support to access and sustain paid work is needed with, pre-coronavirus, 38% of carers reporting they had given up work to care and 21% having to reduce their hours.²⁴⁹ This support is particularly key for those at the end of their caring role. While action is also needed to improve the quality of work for everyone, employers must do more to support those with caring responsibilities. Voluntary initiatives, like Carer Positive – which recognises employers providing a supportive environment²⁵⁰ – are welcome, but employers accessing Scottish Government funding and support must be required to do more. Importantly, increasing social care capacity will also help unpaid carers to enter paid work. While some people will still choose to care for their loved ones directly, the less that care needs can be effectively fulfilled by the state, the more unpaid carers need to plug gaps through necessity, not choice, and the more that those who want to deliver care will feel pressure to do more than is reasonable.

Relieve financial pressures on unpaid carers created by COVID-19 with extra cash support and commit to an improved Scottish Carer’s Assistance by at least the end of 2021. Ensure this new entitlement, as a minimum, protects unpaid carers from poverty, with the eligibility criteria significantly widened to support more carers.

Increase support for those caring for older and disabled people to access and sustain decent work, including expanding high-quality, accessible and flexible publicly-funded social care, providing carer-centred employability support for current and former unpaid carers, and incentivising businesses to boost their support.

Protect People Caring for Children from Poverty

People with childcare responsibilities are more likely to live in poverty. At 21%, the poverty rate for people of working age with children is 3% higher than those without children.²⁵¹ Women provide most unpaid childcare and the poverty rate for single women is 39%.²⁵² Parent poverty is linked to: inadequate social security; labour-market barriers; low-paid and insecure work; insufficient working hours; the gender pay gap; inaccessible and unaffordable childcare; and high living costs. The pandemic has exacerbated financial pressures²⁵³ with parent poverty inseparable from child poverty: this impacts 24% of children, some 230,000²⁵⁴, with rates even higher in some areas, and levels rising in almost all parts of Scotland.^{255,256} Sustained action is needed to tackle the systemic drivers of poverty for low-income families.

UK social security promotes work as the best route out of poverty.²⁵⁷ Poverty is much lower for children in working households²⁵⁸, but 65% of children in poverty in Scotland live in working households, up sharply in the last decade.²⁵⁹ Women on Oxfam’s Future Skills project²⁶⁰, including those with children, identified barriers to paid work, including: caring responsibilities; qualifications and experience; difficulties in applying for jobs; language and literacy issues; and health and wellbeing concerns. Improving support for people with children to access decent work was also prioritised during Oxfam’s ‘Your Voice, Your Say: Let’s Talk Inequality’ events.²⁶¹ A key step is boosting provision of high-quality, affordable, accessible and flexible childcare.²⁶² Publicly-funded Early Learning and Childcare hours for three- and four-year-olds, and eligible two-year-olds, is due to rise from 600 hours per year to 1,140 hours – equivalent to 30 hours per week term-time.²⁶³ However, the expansion is delayed.²⁶⁴ This must re-start quickly while ensuring concerns about insecure contracts²⁶⁵ and low pay²⁶⁶ in the largely female childcare sector are tackled.²⁶⁷ This expansion should be a stepping-stone, with calls for it to rise to 50 hours per week for children between six months and five years old.²⁶⁸

The devolution of powers over employability is a key opportunity for change, particularly amid major labour market uncertainty. Positively, participation in Fair Start Scotland²⁶⁹, which offers up to 12 months support to find a job, including because of caring responsibilities, is voluntary, with an ambition for it to provide a “flexible, tailored, ‘whole-person’ approach”.^{270,271} This must be realised.²⁷² Employability support cannot push people, particularly unpaid carers, towards paid work while taking too little account of the structural barriers, such as affordable and accessible childcare, which trap people in poverty. Holistic support can help people towards the labour market²⁷³ and to realise a sustainable livelihood.²⁷⁴ Services must recognise that individuals experience poverty in different ways due to

gender, ethnicity and other factors. Greater investment is needed in training – delivered with organisations offering specialist support – which meets the needs and career ambitions of those with caring responsibilities, and in working with local employers to shape jobs and to match applicants to them. Support must be shaped by those accessing support. Sustained investment is also needed in existing, or equivalent initiatives, such as the Parental Employability Support Fund²⁷⁵, which offers “intensive employability support” for parents, and the Gender Pay Gap Action Plan²⁷⁶, including: the Workplace Equality Fund²⁷⁷ to promote inclusive workplaces; the Women Returners Programme; the promotion of flexible working; and the tackling of wider gender inequalities, discrimination and sexual harassment.

For paid employment to be a meaningful and sustainable choice, work must also be decent.²⁷⁸ As the Carnegie UK Trust concludes, alongside protecting jobs during COVID-19, “we can’t stop caring about the quality of work”.²⁷⁹ Oxfam research captured the elements that low-paid workers believe are needed for work to be decent, and the negative impacts when these are missing.²⁸⁰ An adequate hourly wage is only one ingredient – others include enough hours and job security – but it is critical.²⁸¹ Yet one in six workers in Scotland – rising to nearly one in five women in work – earns less than the Scottish Living Wage (SLW) of £9.30 per hour.²⁸² Holyrood must increase expectations on employers to deliver decent work, including flexible work, by enhancing voluntary initiatives and by increasing conditionality for those accessing public funds.²⁸³ Similarly, schemes like the Scottish Youth Guarantee²⁸⁴ should prioritise work quality and decent work must also be provided across the public sector, with low-paid workers prioritised within pay policy.²⁸⁵

However, social security must also provide a reliable safety net for everyone. The Chair of Scotland’s Poverty and Inequality Commission says the existing UK system “perpetuates, rather than reduces, poverty”.²⁸⁶ The UK Government must bolster reserved benefits by: locking in temporary rises in Universal Credit; ending the five-week wait by making advance payments non-repayable; and removing the benefit cap and the two-child limit. However, Holyrood also has major powers and the current Scottish Government has shown a welcome willingness to act.^{287,288} Forecasts prior to the pandemic showed devolved social security spend rising from £3.4bn in 2020-21 to almost £4bn by 2024-25.²⁸⁹ However, more investment is needed to fully reflect the principles of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018²⁹⁰, namely that social security is: an investment in the people of Scotland; a human right; and a means of reducing poverty. This could include exploring, along with the UK Government, a Scottish Minimum Income Guarantee.^{291,292}

Cross-party support for the Scottish Child Payment (SCP) is a major building block for progress. On current plans, it will provide £10 per child per week for eligible²⁹³ low-income households and is forecast to cut child poverty by 3 percentage points by 2023/24.²⁹⁴ However, the roll-out for children under six won’t start until February 2021 and won’t be completed for all eligible children under 16 until the end of 2022. Yet the number of families applying for qualifying benefits has doubled during the pandemic²⁹⁵, with the number of eligible children under six up by 14% since June.²⁹⁶ The current and next Scottish Government should use existing mechanisms to ensure low-income families receive at least the equivalent of the SCP now and until they receive the new Payment^{297,298,299}, while accelerating the roll-out. However, more investment in the SCP³⁰⁰ will be needed to help meet Scotland’s legal targets of reducing child poverty to 18% by 2023/24 and less than 10% by 2030. Even with an SCP set at £10, child poverty will remain unacceptably high³⁰¹ and COVID-19 places the interim targets at risk.³⁰² The Children and Young People’s Commissioner for Scotland has called for a £20 per week direct payment for children in low-income families³⁰³ and modelling suggests an SCP at this level would lift a further 20,000 children out of poverty.³⁰⁴ Along with the End Child Poverty coalition in Scotland, we urge all parties to commit to at least doubling the SCP’s value with the Payment, alongside Best Start Grants and School Clothing Grants, further increased, if required, to meet Scotland’s legal child poverty targets.

Commit to increased support for those caring for children, particularly women, to access and sustain decent work by further expanding high-quality, accessible and flexible publicly-funded childcare, while supporting people into work in ways that recognise their individual circumstances, and incentivising businesses to enhance their support.

Re-commit to delivering, as a minimum, the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act, ensuring that the 2023 interim targets are achieved and that statutory delivery plans are fully consistent with at least delivering the 2030 targets.

Relieve current financial pressures on low-income families and commit to permanently protecting them from poverty through adequate and accessible devolved social security entitlements, including at least doubling the Scottish Child Payment, accelerating its roll-out, and uprating it – and other payments – as required.

CARE FOR OUR PLANET BY DELIVERING CLIMATE JUSTICE

While COVID-19 has taken up global leaders' attention, climate-induced tragedies have continued: the UN warns that political and business leaders are failing to stop the planet turning into an "uninhabitable hell" for millions of people amid a sharp increase in extreme weather events over the last two decades.³⁰⁵ We have reached an historic juncture in which we risk jumping from the frying pan of the pandemic into the fire of an irreversible climate crisis. In the Paris Agreement, countries promised to limit temperature rises to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, while pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C. Yet the world has already warmed by 1.1°C degrees³⁰⁶ and current emission pledges place us on track for a devastating 3°C or more of warming by 2100.³⁰⁷ Despite sharp falls in carbon emissions in 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis – which is driven by the accumulation of emissions in the atmosphere over time – continued to grow. Tackling the climate crisis therefore cannot wait.

We must confront the deep carbon inequality which has brought the world to the climate brink.³⁰⁸ Globally, between 1990 and 2015, the richest 1% accounted for 15% of emissions – more than twice that of the poorest half of humanity (7%). The richest 10%, approximately 630 million people, accounted for over half (52%) of the carbon emissions. Governments cannot seek to reboot unfair and polluting pre-COVID economies. If emissions rebound and carbon inequality is left unchecked, the world will smash through the critical 1.5C barrier by 2030.³⁰⁹

As a founding hub of the first industrial revolution, Scotland bears a significant responsibility to lead the way towards a climate-just future. In 2021 we have a unique opportunity for our voice to be heard on a global scale³¹⁰, when representatives from 195 countries arrive in Scotland for landmark UN climate talks. Scotland can point to an encouraging record of climate action that includes declaring a "climate emergency".³¹¹ Our legal targets commit us to 'net-zero' by 2045, with an interim 75% cut from the 1990 baseline by 2030.³¹² While our targets do not fully reflect our historic emissions³¹³, nor emissions generated by goods and services produced outside Scotland but consumed here, these targets, and linked governance frameworks, are amongst the strongest in the global North. However, while Scotland's emissions have halved since 1990, and the UK Committee on Climate Change (UKCCC) says they fell faster than any G20 nation in the decade to 2018³¹⁴, that year's annual target was missed.³¹⁵ This cannot continue. The UKCCC says Scotland must "earn its stripes as an international climate leader" through "decisive action".³¹⁶ This must include transformative steps quickly. At 68%, a majority of people in all age groups across Scotland say climate change is an "immediate and urgent problem" – with concern rising.³¹⁷ The Scottish Parliament must act upon this significant public concern and demonstrate that its commitment to climate action runs deeper than ambitious promises.

Deliver Faster and Deeper Emission Reductions

The Scottish Parliament's policy and spending commitments must be consistent with our climate-emission targets, in line with recommendations from Oxfam Scotland's partner, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland.³¹⁸ Amid research showing emissions in the UK are higher amongst the richest households³¹⁹, we must simultaneously tackle the linked climate and inequality crises. To achieve this, policies must be shaped by those in poverty and those impacted by the climate crisis while recognising the deep connections between climate justice and gender justice.³²⁰ We must reduce emissions amongst the richest, for example, by curbing excessive emissions from car journeys and flights.³²¹ And we must raise the money needed to cut emissions and support the resilience of those with the least, through progressive taxes on wealth and high incomes, and high-carbon activities like frequent flights. Hard choices cannot be avoided.

The promised "recovery and renewal"³²² from coronavirus must include sustained investment in green infrastructure and new, valuable, low-carbon jobs, such as within care.^{323,324} As recommended by the Scottish Parliament's lead committee on climate change, we must "front-load investment in the low-carbon solutions we already know about" and tackle the "implementation gap"; it rightly says "there is a need for strong leadership".³²⁵ We must fully decarbonise electricity generation in Scotland³²⁶ and drive down emissions in high-emitting sectors – including agriculture³²⁷ and transport³²⁸ – where progress is slow. Commitments to ramp up investment are welcome, but faster delivery is essential.³²⁹ Heating our buildings accounts for a quarter of Scotland's climate emissions. If delivered, the promise³³⁰ to spend £1.6 billion on improving heat and energy efficiency in our homes and buildings over five years will help cut emissions while benefiting the 279,000 households facing "extreme fuel poverty".³³¹ However, sustained investment, combined with support to householders to adopt low-carbon heating options, will be needed with such

investment creating new low-carbon jobs. We must also boost investment in affordable public transport, walking and cycling – measures that will disproportionately benefit those in poverty³³² – with consideration given to extending concessionary travel schemes, including to those with caring responsibilities. We must also support people to work from home, including by delivering 100% broadband coverage and ensuring everyone can benefit from this. With large quantities of waste being exported from Scotland to be dealt with internationally³³³, legislation to encourage a circular economy built on sharing, repairing and re-using to cut Scotland’s consumption must also be rekindled.³³⁴

As Scotland acts to urgently reduce emissions, it must rise to the Just Transition Commission’s challenge to “move beyond the rhetoric”³³⁵, by supporting workers in impacted industries, like oil and gas, into high-quality new jobs. The commitment to spend £100 million over five years through a Green Jobs Fund can only be the start.³³⁶ Our expectations of business should also grow. The next Scottish Government must realise calls for greater conditionality³³⁷ with those firms accessing public money required to commit to transformative climate action³³⁸, fulfilling pledges to link publicly-funded business support with Scotland’s climate objectives.³³⁹ Action in Scotland to address the climate crisis, should reflect the deep overlaps with the nature-crisis, with one in nine species in Scotland at risk of extinction.³⁴⁰ Restoring nature, including habitats which help capture carbon, should be at the heart of our response to the climate crisis.

Overall, the speed of emissions cuts must accelerate, and the current and next Scottish Government must remain fully responsive to the ideas for new, transformative action flowing from an increasingly engaged civil society in Scotland.³⁴¹ These include measures to cut high-carbon demand, through changes to taxes and new legislation, if necessary, and measures to build low-carbon demand and capacity, with positive investment to make ‘doing the right thing’ cheaper.

Commit to the actions needed to cut emissions by at least 75% by 2030, in line with the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2019. Fund this through taxes on high emitters, high incomes and wealth, while ensuring a just transition for impacted communities and requiring businesses accessing public money to commit to transformative climate action.

Increase and Promote Our Commitment to Climate Justice

We must also ramp up support to those impacted by a crisis they did not cause. Rising global temperatures increase the frequency and severity of extreme weather like droughts and floods, and – combined with slower-onset impacts such as sea-level rise – food crops, sources of drinking water and livelihoods are being destroyed. New data suggests climate change could push 132 million people in poverty by 2030.³⁴² The UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, has warned of a “climate apartheid” in which the “wealthy pay to escape overheating, hunger, and conflict while the rest of the world is left to suffer”.³⁴³

A decade ago, developed countries committed to mobilise \$100 billion per year by 2020³⁴⁴ to help developing countries adapt to climate change and cut their emissions. Newly released figures for 2018, the most recent data available, suggest total climate finance mobilised reached \$78.9 billion, including \$62.2 billion in public finance and \$14.6 billion in private finance.³⁴⁵ This is up by 11% from \$71.2 billion in 2017. However, Oxfam’s analysis³⁴⁶ suggests the true value of support to developing countries may only be a third of that (\$19-22.5bn) once loan repayments, interest and finance which is not focused on climate change are accounted for.³⁴⁷ Oxfam’s analysis suggests that only around 20% of finance is in the form of grants with the other 80% mostly in loans that have to be repaid, and that much of the money is not new or additional to existing aid promises. Too little is supporting communities to adapt and, according to the OECD, only 14% is going to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and just 2% to Small Island Developing States (SIDS).³⁴⁸

Gender inequalities mean women are often most vulnerable to climate impacts: from having to walk further to collect water to being last to eat during climate-related food shortages.³⁴⁹ Communities are also being left uncompensated for irreversible loss and damage³⁵⁰, like homes becoming uninhabitable due to rising sea levels. Those least responsible suffer most: those living with poverty, and the future generations who will inherit an even more dangerous climate.³⁵¹

The current Scottish Government’s innovative Climate Justice Fund³⁵² aims to “share the benefits of equitable global development and the burdens of climate change fairly” and is a welcome contribution. However, it has remained frozen at £3m a year since 2016, losing value at the time it is needed most.³⁵³ Scotland’s Climate Change Act commits to supporting the people “most affected by climate change but who have done the least to cause it and are the least

equipped to adapt to its effects".³⁵⁴ Scotland must set an example for other countries ahead of COP26 by acting upon previous calls³⁵⁵ for the Fund to match the International Development Fund, currently £10 million per year. The new and additional revenue required should be raised through high-emitter taxes or taxes on high-incomes or wealth. The majority of the increased Fund should be focused on supporting impacted communities to adapt to the climate crisis. The next Scottish Government should fully capitalise on the unique opportunity created by the UN climate talks being hosted in Glasgow in 2021. It should promote Scotland's climate-action plans, by publishing an indicative Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)³⁵⁶, well ahead of COP26. This should be used to encourage all countries to increase their emission pledges and to bolster their climate finance. The Scottish Government should also proactively champion the creation of a new funding mechanism for loss and damage for communities facing irreversible climate impacts. It must use all diplomatic channels to their maximum to shape global climate action ahead of the talks, and provide funding and venue support for civil society, in Scotland and internationally, to be influential during COP26.

Show global leadership before the UN talks in Glasgow in 2021 by immediately increasing the Climate Justice Fund to at least £10 million per year to reflect Scotland's role in creating the climate crisis, and the growing impacts on the Least Developed Countries and most vulnerable communities, while championing a new global funding mechanism for loss and damage.

Invest in a Climate-Conscious and Globally-Engaged Society in Scotland

Global crises like the climate crisis and COVID-19, highlight the need for coordinated action at national and global levels from all actors: national and local governments; the public, private, and third sectors; academia; and individuals. The next Scottish Government must do more to harness the collective power of all actors in Scotland to create change in support of a sustainable, safe and fair world. Education is the bedrock on which transformative action can be built.

Young people are demanding^{357,358} faster emission cuts and for learning about the climate crisis to be core within the education system in Scotland.³⁵⁹ Currently, 'enabling young people to become responsible citizens' is one of the four key capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence. Global Citizenship Education³⁶⁰ can help deliver this: it does not tell young people what to think but shows them that they have a voice and gives them the skills, knowledge and values to use it. It is enshrined in UN SDG 4.7³⁶¹ and, in Scotland, within pupils' entitlement to Learning for Sustainability (LFS).³⁶² International surveys suggest pupils in Scotland have a higher-than-average awareness of global issues³⁶³ such as poverty and equality but lower awareness in areas such as international conflicts and health issues. The strong focus on boosting literacy and numeracy, coupled with COVID-19, risk a squeeze on the scope for teachers and pupils to think widely. Yet the climate crisis, the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement reinforce the need to equip young people with the skills of responsible global citizens. Teachers must have the support they need and Scotland's five Development Education Centres³⁶⁴, with core funding of around £300,000 per year from the current Scottish Government, have worked with thousands of them. Amid UK Government funding cuts, and with access to European Commission money at risk, this support must continue. Sustained investment is also required in the Learning for Sustainability Action Plan to realise the commitment for every school to have a 'whole-school' approach.³⁶⁵ Delivery of LFS should be independently reviewed in 2022, with any recommendations implemented quickly.

The next Scottish Government should also support initiatives to broaden and deepen knowledge of climate change across society in Scotland, including the private, public and third sectors.³⁶⁶ In addition, while the introduction of an Environmental Impact element to the voluntary Scottish Business Pledge was positive³⁶⁷, it remains optional and the Scottish Government should also use the £11bn per year of public procurement to drive improved business practice³⁶⁸ through greater conditionality.³⁶⁹ The Scottish Parliament's lead committee on climate change says businesses in receipt of public money should "demonstrate credible action" in delivering social and environmental objectives.³⁷⁰ This should be embedded within initiatives like the emergent Fair Work First³⁷¹, or any equivalent procurement-focused scheme, making it compulsory for decision-making managers to undertake climate training and then to identify specific actions to support transformative climate action in support of Scotland's national climate change aims.

Harness the power of individuals, businesses and other actors across Scotland for climate action and sustainable development. This should include maintaining core funding of the Development Education Centres in real-terms and investing in education and other initiatives to substantially deepen understanding of climate change across all parts of society, including making climate action compulsory for businesses accessing public funds.

CARE FOR PEOPLE IN POVERTY AND CRISIS GLOBALLY

The climate crisis and COVID-19 are exacerbating economic inequalities and poverty.³⁷² Nearly half of humanity still scrape by on less than \$5.50 a day.³⁷³ Despite progress in recent decades, 736 million people live in extreme poverty³⁷⁴ and more than two billion people face the pandemic without access to clean water.³⁷⁵ Too many people are one failed harvest or global pandemic away from destitution. Oxfam analysis shows that before COVID-19, just 26 of 158 countries surveyed spent the recommended 15% of their budgets on health and only 53 countries had social-protection systems against unemployment and sickness.³⁷⁶ COVID-19 is expected to push 100 million people into extreme poverty during 2020 alone.³⁷⁷ Without major intervention, the UN warns a “tidal wave of COVID will become a tidal wave of new poverty”.³⁷⁸ It has issued its largest-ever financial appeal³⁷⁹ but this is hugely under-funded.³⁸⁰

Funding the health response is crucial but, without action to shore up low-income country economies, it is estimated COVID-19 could push up to half a billion more people into poverty, the first rise since 1990.³⁸¹ No-one is safe until we all are, and we need a global response³⁸² based on human rights.³⁸³ COVID-19 is the final straw for those facing conflict, inequality and the climate crisis. It makes the need for action even more urgent with, for example, investors removing money from emerging markets and estimates that nearly half the jobs in Africa could be lost.³⁸⁴ All governments must boost social protection and make financial support to big corporations conditional on their upholding the interests of workers.³⁸⁵ The global response must recognise that while the virus does not discriminate between people based on their income, the wider impact is highly unequal. Better off people are more likely to be in secure work, have savings and be able to quarantine in well-connected home while continuing to work and educate their children. Living day-to-day, people in poverty often cannot take time off work or afford to stockpile provisions. The virus is also increasing gender inequalities; 92% of women workers in the poorest countries are employed informally³⁸⁶ and women provide most unpaid care work.³⁸⁷ Economic inequality is also linked to racial inequality; for example, Black people generally do more precarious jobs, have less access to healthcare and social protection, and suffer other health problems.³⁸⁸

Protect Scotland’s Support for Equitable and Sustainable International Development

Good-quality, predictable aid, spent according to the recipient country’s needs, remains an essential tool to save millions of lives while unlocking people’s ability to work their own way out of poverty. It is particularly critical during a pandemic. It is 50 years since rich countries committed to spend 0.7% of their gross national income (GNI) on aid to the global South.³⁸⁹ Since then, it has been crucial in the fight against killer diseases in low- and middle-income countries; for example, the near eradication of polio.³⁹⁰ Yet, many rich countries continue to break their aid promises.³⁹¹ Against this backdrop, the Scottish Government’s publicly-funded international development programme³⁹² is a key contribution which has matured with welcome cross-party support. At £10 million per year, the International Development Fund equates to just 0.02% of the Scottish Government’s £50 billion annual budget. However, it has been frozen for five years. At a time of increasing global poverty due to COVID-19, the Scottish Parliament must, at a minimum³⁹³, restore the Fund’s value in real-terms, and then sustain it.

The current and next Scottish Government should also adequately resource the International Development Team, report its development activities with the International Aid Transparency Initiative³⁹⁴ and mainstream the climate- and gender-proofing of projects. It should adhere to internationally recognised aid definitions³⁹⁵ and adhere to development effectiveness and humanitarian principles, including: transparency and accountability, especially to developing country stakeholders; gender equality; and local ownership of development priorities and practice. We note, and welcome, the current Scottish Government’s limited review of the programme to reflect COVID-19.³⁹⁶ Recognising the importance of sustained partnership, we endorse the commitment to maintain the current partner-country relationships, as well as assurances that the programme will remain focused on poverty reduction. At a time when there are concerns that the merger of the UK Government’s Department for International Development with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office could skew UK aid towards the national interest³⁹⁷, this continued core commitment to tackling poverty is an important statement of intent, and should be sustained in the next Parliament.

Recommit to a climate-proofed International Development Fund focused on tackling poverty and inequality, ensure it meets international effectiveness standards and, as a minimum, restore and then maintain its real-terms value.

Counter High Levels of Humanitarian Need and Champion an Equitable Response to COVID-19

The need for swift and effective humanitarian support remains essential. Even before COVID-19, the UN said nearly 690 million people were hungry, up nearly 60 million in five years and exacerbated by the climate crisis.³⁹⁸ The pandemic is deepening hunger³⁹⁹ with the World Food Programme estimating crisis-level hunger will rise to 270 million before the end of the year, an 82% increase since 2019.⁴⁰⁰ It has warned of famines of 'biblical proportions' without swift action⁴⁰¹, with fears that 12,000 people could die per day from hunger linked to COVID by the end of 2020.⁴⁰² Yet, despite this surge in need, and alarm bells being rung⁴⁰³, the necessary response is nowhere to be seen. We cannot wait until it is too late; we cannot wait until children are crippled by hunger before we respond. We must act now.

Oxfam is supporting communities to respond to COVID-19, including through our work on water, sanitation and hygiene, and public-health promotion.⁴⁰⁴ However, the world cannot respond effectively when two billion people live in fragile and conflict-affected areas.⁴⁰⁵ For example, in Yemen, five years of conflict⁴⁰⁶ have left people on the brink of famine. By 2030, it is estimated that nearly half of all people in extreme poverty will live in conflict-affected places.⁴⁰⁷ Peace is critical. In March 2020, the UN Secretary-General called for a global ceasefire⁴⁰⁸, leading to a landmark UN Security Resolution.⁴⁰⁹ If implemented locally, this would be a first step to stopping violence and a more effective COVID-19 response. The Scottish Parliament must champion peace, building on initiatives to help women contribute towards it.⁴¹⁰ It should also advocate for the UK Government to end its immoral and incoherent approach to Yemen, with the licensing of arms sales to Saudi Arabia despite concerns that the weapons might be used in serious violation of International Humanitarian Law.⁴¹¹ Approval of these licences undermines the UK's aid to those impacted by the conflict⁴¹² and they come as the people of Yemen also face COVID-19, with cases estimated at more than one million.

The people of Scotland have a well-deserved reputation for responding to emergency appeals, with this generosity matched by successive Scottish Governments. The £1m per year Humanitarian Emergency Fund (HEF)⁴¹³ is relatively new and small, but it is a responsive tool which has brought predictability and transparency to allocations. An independent review outlined significant achievements in responding to nine crises across three continents while also identifying opportunities to strengthen the Fund.⁴¹⁴ The HEF must continue to mature, while remaining focused on reducing the threat to life and wellbeing caused by disasters, disease or conflict. The Fund's value should, as a very minimum, be protected in real terms but this should be a floor, not a ceiling, with the Fund responding to humanitarian need. It should involve and support local and national organisations, including women's rights organisations, in the design and delivery of humanitarian response work, with the importance of this reinforced by the COVID-19 crisis.

By bolstering Scotland's financial support as sub-state actor, the Scottish Parliament can credibly call for all countries to provide at least 0.7% of their Gross National Income in aid. However, COVID-19 urgently requires an unprecedented global economic rescue package.⁴¹⁵ The Scottish Parliament should support calls for a moratorium on debt-interest payments for low-income country governments. While some debts have been temporarily suspended, vulnerable countries are being forced to spend more than \$92 million a day on repayments instead of using these resources to protect people in need.⁴¹⁶ Debt cancellation is the fastest way to free up money for governments, like Malawi, to spend on health and other services. The Scottish Parliament should also call for COVID-19 vaccines⁴¹⁷ – and treatments – to be available to all, free of charge, with evidence that wealthy nations have cornered more than half the promised doses.⁴¹⁸ We need a People's Vaccine⁴¹⁹ and the Scottish Parliament should be a strong advocate for this.

Respond to surging global humanitarian need by, as a minimum, maintaining the real-terms value of the Humanitarian Emergency Fund in the next Parliament and by calling for equitable global access to COVID-19 vaccines as well as a moratorium on debt payments so that low-income country governments can fund COVID-19 responses.

Provide a Place of Sanctuary, Safety and Dignity

The number of people forcibly displaced globally is at its highest level since the Second World War at 79.5 million; 85% are hosted in low-income countries.⁴²⁰ Last year, there were 33.4 million new internal displacements, the highest since 2012.⁴²¹ Many people live in camps with basic sanitation. Overcrowded camps for one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh contain 40,000 people per square kilometre; social distancing is virtually impossible.⁴²² Even within the European Union, the camp on the Greek island of Lesbos – home to almost 8,000 people – has no running water, no

sewage management and woefully inadequate shelter.⁴²³ In conflict-affected countries, the pandemic is adding extra threat for women and girls. The UN Secretary-General says there is a “horrifying” global surge in domestic violence.⁴²⁴

Refugees are entitled to protection under international law.⁴²⁵ Asylum policy is reserved, and the UK Government must ensure that when migrants arrive in the UK and claim asylum, their case is assessed fairly. However, services to support refugees integrate in Scotland – including education, health, and housing – sit within devolved powers.⁴²⁶ Scotland has a proud history of providing sanctuary, including to Jewish refugees during World War II.⁴²⁷ Amid cross-party and public support^{428,429}, Scotland has welcomed refugees from Syria and the New Scots Strategy⁴³⁰ is in its second phase. Analysis of the Strategy⁴³¹ suggests Scotland can bolster support in areas such as: the quality of housing; access to education and work; language barriers; access to health services; support to integrate into local communities; and addressing racism and discrimination. Many of these issues were raised by refugees on Oxfam’s Future Skills project.⁴³² This project showed how person-centred support can help refugees towards work while also integrating in the community and influencing policy.⁴³³ However, too many refugees and asylum seekers face destitution, particularly those whose asylum application is refused, an issue highlighted by the death of Mercy Baguma in Glasgow in August 2020.⁴³⁴

The Scottish Parliament must ensure Scotland is a safe and welcoming place which fulfils the human rights of everyone. It should review and, where necessary, enhance the New Scots Strategy, or introduce an equivalent project, when the current phase ends in 2022. Reflecting the areas where further support is needed⁴³⁵, investment should be reviewed and increased, as required. The Scottish Parliament should also build on the current Scottish Government’s commitment to develop a dignified anti-destitution strategy for those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) under UK immigration rules,⁴³⁶ reflecting the disproportionate impact on migrant women.⁴³⁷ While funding for projects which support those with NRPF is welcome⁴³⁸, no-one in Scotland should face extreme financial hardship or destitution, and all devolved powers, including local-authority discretionary powers, should be used to their fullest to prevent this.

The current and next Scottish Government should also be a strong champion for all countries to fulfil and protect refugee rights and condemn failures to do so.⁴³⁹ It should call for the UK to do its fair share by re-starting its suspended resettlement programme⁴⁴⁰, and by providing adequate safe and legal routes to the UK. This must include allowing more refugee families to be reunited, with UK rules failing to guarantee children’s rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).⁴⁴¹ This runs counter to positive moves to incorporate the UNCRC into Scots Law.⁴⁴²

Enhance Scotland’s commitment to refugees and asylum seekers by bolstering investment in support and integration projects to ensure dignified, human-rights-based support, including maximising the use of devolved powers to protect people, regardless of their asylum status, from the injustice of poverty and destitution.

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