



Reduce inequality within and among countries

Fife Centre for Equalities

Fife Centre for Equalities (FCE), funded by Fife Council, started in 2014 with the vision to inspire and enable everyone we work with to take action that makes Fife a more equal, fairer place to live, work and study. FCE's mission is to develop a harmonised approach to build a collective voice to champion equality, diversity, inclusion and social justice. Our values are to work with honesty, integrity, respect and transparency, and we strive to demonstrate a fully inclusive approach in everything we do. We want everyone we work with to share these values in the belief that they will help make Fife a fairer and more equal place.



How is Scotland doing against this Goal?

While income inequality impacts on all age groups in society, its long-term effects are worse on children as it impacts their development and future prospects. In 2017, the risk of poverty in the UK for people under 18 was at 21.3%,¹ the highest since 2008. The situation in Scotland appears not to be worsening at present and is relatively better than across Great Britain,² but there is still a high incidence of child poverty, and a high poverty gap. Between 2015 and 2018, it is estimated that 24% of children in Scotland (240,000 children each year) were living in relative poverty after housing costs.³

In 2016/2017, the 10% most deprived areas in Scotland had levels of child poverty at 34.9%, compared to 3.7% in the 10% least deprived,⁴ a gap of 30.5%. In our local authority area, the gap in Fife was of 30.7% for the same period. However, our position is that 'reducing inequality' should involve understanding and addressing the magnitude of the gaps between populations as well as 'proportions of population' in poverty. Not including equality and protected characteristics in 'reducing inequality'/'anti-poverty' measures is, in our perspective, counter-productive as this further contributes to siloed policy making or communities of practice. For instance, relative poverty rates after housing costs are double (38%) for Mixed, Black or Black British and Other ethnicities compared to the whole population (19%), and over twice higher (41%) for Muslim adults compared to adults overall (18%).⁵ Universal Credit has had a disproportionate impact on disabled people.⁶ Economic inequality and barriers to equality of opportunity are closely related agendas. Social mobility is limited in Scotland, as a person's job and life chances are still determined by their socio-economic status at birth. In 2018, 55% of people in professional / managerial occupations had parents with similar occupations, compared to 32.4% with parents from working class backgrounds. On a positive note, this gap has narrowed 28% to 23% over the past four years, while it has remained stagnant at 26% across Britain.



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Is Scotland committed to achieving this Goal?

There is not enough commitment behind this Goal, as the laws to ensure equal opportunity and tackle inequality through anti-discriminatory laws, policies and practices are difficult to enforce by individuals who have few resources to afford legal fees and have had reduced access to legal aid in recent years. In force since 2018, the Fairer Scotland Duty asks for 'active consideration' and 'due regard' to socio-economic considerations of the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no legal requirement to involve communities in meeting the Fairer Scotland Duty, and this allows for great variation in practice across policy areas and local authorities. Gender pay gap reporting is worth considering in this instance. The reporting is mandatory for companies in Great Britain (not Northern Ireland) with more than 250 employees. There are issues with how accurate this reporting is and also with how well it is enforced across different employers, setting precedents for some sectors (e.g. tech, agriculture, same large private employers) to be less committed to SDG 10 and also SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Nevertheless, it creates a baseline that can be acted upon to tackle inequality as it is mandatory and not dependent on 'active considerations'. Disability and race pay gaps do not currently have the same level of political or policy commitment.

What should Scotland do better to achieve this Goal?

We could do better by adopting a unified approach to pay gap reporting across protected characteristics and thus minimise the time or cost of assessing and implementing various evidence gaps⁷ and diminish disparity between groups attempting to validate their experience, or tackle inequality in isolation and competition. We would like to see employers becoming more transparent and actively become more diverse (e.g. by adopting the '50:50 by 2020' voluntary scheme) when it comes to the workings and memberships of their pay and remuneration committees.⁸ There should be more regulation and mandatory training and guidance for equality and diversity policies for both SMEs and large employers, including support for adopting positive employment policies (e.g. Disability Confident or the Living Wage). This is in order to tackle the longstanding barriers to employment for people with protected characteristics at the recruitment stage. To do better in this Goal, we would need to give tangible support to employers who are adopting inclusive recruitment practices.

Case study — the impact of benefit changes

When we responded to the UK Public Accounts Committee in July 2018,⁹ we raised concerns about increasing economic inequality of disabled people who transitioned from the full Employment and Support Allowance legacy system to Universal Credit. For the same set of conditions,¹⁰ disabled people were worse off by £67 per week, an amount which is directly comparable to the cost of weekly food spend per household.

Author detail: Elric Honoré, Development Officer at Fife Centre for Equalities