

Government and policy on poverty

When it took office in 1997, the New Labour government made tackling poverty a prime objective. Specifically, it pledged to eliminate child poverty by 2020, with an interim target to halve it by 2010.

Since 1998 it has made billions of pounds available to families on low incomes, yet most observers, while welcoming the commitment, are skeptical that the interim target will be achieved. And it now appears that the Government accepts that it will not be reached by the date set.

Policy on poverty (from [Reporting poverty in the UK](#) pp78-9)

Decisions that affect poverty are made by many areas of government. With devolution, this is even more complex as responsibilities are now split between central, devolved and local government. The private and voluntary also have a role in finding and implementing solutions.

Among the ways in which poverty is being tackled are:

Getting more people into work

This is a key part of the strategy to tackle poverty. The Government wants in particular to ensure that more lone parents and more disabled people are able to work, in order to raise their incomes above the poverty line. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for “New Deal” schemes around the country, aimed at getting people into work, and there are other initiatives run by the devolved administrations and local authorities.

Providing better support services to help people get out of poverty

Better childcare and improved public transport can make it more feasible for parents to take up jobs. Many of these services are provided by local authorities.

Improving incomes within work

This is principally done through the minimum wage and tax credits, but employers’ practices are crucial in ensuring staff are properly trained, able to progress in their jobs, and paid enough to help them avoid poverty.

Improving long-term prospects through education and training

Many people argue that the only sustainable solution to poverty is to upgrade the educational qualifications and the skills of the UK population, to support greater productivity and a better-paid workforce. Central and local government, schools and employers would all need to play a part in this, improving educational achievement for children from disadvantaged backgrounds depends on much more than the standard of education they receive. But people in poverty also need support such as transport costs – just one obstacle that can hinder them taking up opportunities.

Improving the level of benefits for people not working

There will always be people who cannot or do not work – for very good reasons – and they may be reliant on out-of-work benefits for many years to come.