

Save the Children Fund (SCUK)

Who we are

The Save the Children Fund ("SCUK") supports children to transform their lives and seek a world where every child has the right to survive, learn and be protected.

In April 2020, in response to the Covid-19 outbreak, we launched the [Emergency Response for Parents and Children at Home](#), supporting families on low incomes in communities across the UK. We worked in 21 areas of the UK, through 94 partner organisations to identify the most vulnerable families impacted by Covid-19. Between April 2020 and April 2021, we provided support to 7,149 families, reaching 15,430 children aged 0-6 years old across the UK.

We also adapted our [Families Connect](#) parental engagement programme, so it could be delivered online during the pandemic and early recovery. Families Connect was delivered by a small group of schools and family learning teams in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and Tower Hamlets (London). Facilitators were supported to engage parents of young children either at home, school or nursery, or in a community setting in areas of disadvantage. The adapted programme had an emphasis on social and emotional development and well-being, alongside early literacy, and numeracy in the context of Covid-19. It gave facilitators opportunities to respond to parents' concerns about their child having missed learning opportunities or about settling their children back into nursery or school. Parents were introduced to examples of fun and engaging activities they could adapt for use at home with their child and were enabled to learn together, share ideas, and reflect on their experiences of supporting their children's learning and development.

Background

Our core hypothesis is that children's rights and wellbeing are not considered as a priority by decision-makers in the UK government, and that this has been the case for many years. This can be evidenced both through the lack of specific approaches such as Children's Rights Assessments for policy development, and the absence of analysis of impacts on children in the key documents which officials prepare for ministerial decision-making.

This is problematic at any time but is particularly harmful during a crisis where major decisions are being taken at speed and based on imperfect information, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. We know that Covid-19 and the lockdowns were a deeply traumatic time for many children and families which increased pre-existing inequalities, so we want to identify safe and respectful ways in which children, families and researchers can share their experiences – acting as a "connector."

Overview of our case

Many of the non-pharmaceutical government interventions which affected everyone, disproportionately impacted children. Children's lives were turned upside at crucial stages of their development. Six months in the life of a 12-year-old is vastly different to 6 months in the life of a 28-year-old. And there were many other specific impacts, such as children awaiting trials in the criminal justice system turned 18 and lost protections that were afforded to them when they were children.

Despite this, children were not systematically identified as a vulnerable group requiring additional support to cope with the restrictions. In our view, the impact on children, and the rights of children were not considered adequately or even at all, in many key decisions by the UK Government, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government or the Northern

Ireland Executive. SCUK spent the pandemic both directly supporting and working with children affected by such matters, as well as advocating for their voices and their rights to be heard by government.

From the beginning of the pandemic, we consistently made the case to the UK government individually and alongside other children's rights organisations, that children needed to be given full consideration when making decisions about how to deal with the pandemic, and for the impact of the pandemic more broadly to be considered when the government was making decisions around coming out of the pandemic and recovery. We made this case consistently through individual and coalition correspondence, meeting requests, meetings, inquiry submissions, research we produced, and media statements & stories.

COVID Inquiry Questionnaire

1. A brief overview of the history, legal status and aims of the organisation or body. Please explain whether the work of the organisation or body is UK wide, or is instead confined to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland only.

The Save the Children Fund" ("SCUK") is a charitable company limited by guarantee. We are registered with the Charity Commission of England and Wales, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator and the Isle of Man Charity Regulator.

Founded in the UK in 1919, SCUK is the UK member of the Save the Children movement, a global network of national member organisations helping children to survive and thrive in 118 countries, including here in the UK where we operate UK wide. We are committed to making a positive, lasting difference for and with children. We put children's rights at the core of everything we do.

As noted above, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, we launched an Emergency Response Programme (the "ER Programme") and learning and development support for children in poverty in the UK, as well as responding at a global scale. In the first year of the pandemic, we delivered 5480 grants to UK families impacted by the pandemic, working with 94 organisations across 21 areas of the UK, ensuring that 12,000 children have the material items and resources they need to help play, learn, and develop at home. We carried out a full assessment of this in April 2021, details of which are outlined in our answer to question 3.

2. A brief description of the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents.

The SCUK ER Programme was launched at the beginning of the pandemic. Families were referred to this by trusted professionals working in the communities who identified families who were experiencing:

- Recent financial hardships as a direct impact of the coronavirus, and/or:
 - One or more of the child's parents/carers meet the low-income threshold and are receiving at least one specified benefit.
 - Child at risk of falling further behind in their early learning due to the impact of the coronavirus.

These families were in our partnership areas where there are high levels of disadvantage/low-income families. The ER Programme supported families already living in poverty, minimising further financial pressures, and who were already vulnerable. The ER Programme provided support to families who were impacted by Covid pandemic lockdown restrictions, which we know led to more families moving into poverty or facing financial difficulties

The focus of our advocacy work in the UK is the reduction of child poverty, giving every child the best start in life, and the reform of childcare. The families we advocate on behalf of are low-income families in work and out of work, most of whom are in receipt of social security.

Our Parent Campaigners are an important part of the work we do. This group of passionate parents volunteer their time and expertise to help shape our campaigns and inform our policy approaches. Providing space to hear about the challenges they're facing means we can work with them to turn their insights into policy solutions that have a real impact. We support this group to build skills in campaigning and connect with other like-minded parents as part of a supportive network.

3. A brief overview of the work of the organisation or body in supporting or representing the relevant group(s) between January 2020 and Spring 2022 as it relates to the response to Covid-19 of (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive.

In April 2020 we launched the ER Programme to:

- Support families with immediate needs and provide essential items that minimise further financial pressure on families who are already vulnerable.
- Ensure the continuity of children's early learning and minimise inequalities in the home learning environment.
- Use the interaction with children and families to hear their voices, understand how they have been impacted and what they want to see happen and build that into our advocacy calls.

We worked in 21 areas of the UK, through 94 partner organisations to identify the most vulnerable families impacted by Covid-19. Between April 2020 and April 2021, we provided support to 7,149 families, reaching 15,430 children aged 0-6 years old across the UK. The programme has delivered:

- 7,600 early-learning packs that provide age-appropriate educational activities, books and interactive games for children and parents to use together.
- 13,600 e-vouchers for families to purchase essential food and basic products
- 4,300 toys and games from corporate partners Hasbro and Lego
- 2,000 household essentials such as children's beds, high-chairs and dining tables
- 35,700 Covid-19 packs filled with guidance for parents and activities for children to enjoy at home, put together by early years experts and distributed by partners across the UK.

4. A list of any articles or reports the organisation or body has published or contributed to, and/or evidence it has given (for example to Parliamentary Select Committees) regarding the impact on the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents of the response to Covid-19 by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please include links to those documents where possible.

Articles and Reports

UK Government

- [Supporting Children and Families Through Covid: What we've learned from our UK Emergency Response Grants](#) (as outlined above in question 3), July 2021
- [COVID'S KIDS: Repaying our debt the Covid Generation](#), October 2020

We argue that critical to the success of the post-pandemic settlement will be the extent to which it serves the interests of the Covid Generation, defending the historic progress in children's rights made over the past century while seizing new opportunities to protect and advance the rights of future generations.

We outline the five big agendas that we propose should be a focus for everyone who cares about children: 1. Creating economies in which all children can thrive 2. Rescuing childhood for the Covid Generation 3. Saving children's natural inheritance 4. Governing for children's rights – by sharing and building power 5. Governing for children's rights – through international cooperation.

The Covid Generation cannot afford a return to 'normal'. The scale and severity of poverty, inequality, malnutrition, poor health, precariousness, and exclusion that persisted before the pandemic mean that for many millions of children, normal simply was not good enough. And poverty for children in the present more often than not means poverty for children in the future.

Recovering from the pandemic offers a chance to break this cycle, to catalyse the emergence of economies that value the things that really matter. This will take concerted engagement by governments and a clear view on how to distribute wealth in ways that strengthen resilience, that allow families to thrive and that promote a fairer settlement between generations. Among other things, this means putting family finances at the heart of economic decision-making everywhere, prioritising universal public services, protecting parents from precarious employment and re-focusing on international economic cooperation that puts the rights and interests of children first.

Scottish Government

- [Dropped into a cave: how families with young children experienced lockdown](#) June 2021

The purpose of this report is to understand the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on families with young children living on low incomes in Scotland. By sharing their experiences, we hope to help inform how families can best be supported as we emerge from life in lockdown and begin our recovery.

The experiences shared by the parents we spoke to point to a number of priority areas for action:

- 1. Prioritise the needs of families with young children living on low incomes during the recovery.*
- 2. Protect family incomes to weather the current storm and work towards a minimum income guarantee.*
- 3. Guarantee holistic family support for all families needing help that offers tailored practical, emotional and financial support.*

4. Provide opportunities for children to play and build secure relationships in early childhood.
5. Ensure families are part of decision making about how we 'recover' and 'renew' from the pandemic.

Evidence to Committees

UK Government

- [Written submission to Education Select Committee Inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services](#) May 2020

Submission highlighted the following:

*Concern about the impact of this crisis on the youngest children, particularly those growing up in poverty.
The long-standing, consistent evidence that shows a significant relationship between poverty and young children's early learning outcomes.
Highlighted the point that the discussion and debate around education during this crisis has largely focused on schools, with little discussion around the importance of parents and the home learning environment and the impact on children of pre-school age.*

Welsh Government

- [Our submission to the Senedd Children and Young Peoples Inquiry into the impact of Covid 19 on Children](#) May 2020

Submission highlighted the following:

- *Families already struggling on low incomes before the crisis are hardest hit, and many do not have the tools, resources and skills to adequately support their child's learning and development at home. This is particularly important in the early years, when children's experiences form the foundation for their later learning.*
- *Parents play a crucial role in supporting their children's learning, and this crisis highlights the importance of supporting parents to enable them to help their children whilst at home. Parents in poverty face additional stresses and pressures that make it harder for them to provide the resources and activities that children need, and as a result, children in poverty are less likely to access high quality learning at home.*
- *The early years are a crucial time in a child's life. Before this crisis, there was a significant gap in attainment between children in poverty and their peers in the early years. Without clear interventions, we anticipate this gap to widen as a result of the pandemic, threatening the life chances of a generation. It is vital that children do not miss out on the opportunities they need to learn and develop during this crisis – we must ensure that children, parents and early years services have the support they need throughout this time and during the months of recovery to follow.*

- [Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group](#) (contributor) May 2020

Submission highlighted the following:

- *Was concerned about the restrictions placed on children's right to assembly (Art.15) and to engage in play and recreational activities (Art.31). These rights are directly*

linked to the right to development (Art.6(2)) as a fundamental principle of the UNCRC.

Regarding Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA) we called on Welsh Government to:

- 1. Introduce an ongoing and iterative CRIA to all measures taken in response to the Covid-19 situation, and future proposals for emerging from the pandemic*
- 2. Undertake and publish a consolidated CRIA to cover all of the measures impacting on children.*
- 3. In carrying out CRIA, to adopt the recent guidance issued by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, including providing opportunities for children's views to be heard and considered in decision-making processes*

- [Children in Wales on behalf of the National Children's Charities Policy Group](#) (contributor) May 2020

Submission highlighted the following:

The paper attempts to capture the immediate impact of restrictions placed on children, young people and families during this unprecedented period. It highlighted issues such as Child Rights, Access to Education and Support for Learners, Emotional and Mental Health, Child Poverty, Food Insecurity and Play.

There is a legal requirement for Welsh Ministers to pay close attention to the interests of children in the management of Covid-19 because of the duty to have due regard to the UNCRC under the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. While we fully appreciate that the speed with which initial guidance, regulations and announcements were made may have limited the scope to undertake Child Rights Impact Assessment we believe that subsequent guidance and functions of Ministers should be subject to the Impact Assessment process

There are additional barriers for children attending Welsh medium education with non-Welsh speaking parents in their household.

Recommended that all decisions made when lockdown restrictions were lifted are 'poverty proofed'. The impact of decision making on children in low-income families should be a priority consideration for the future

- [We were a research participant in the Delphi Study on the impact of COVID-19 on children under the age of 5.](#) (contributor) December 2021

Based on the opinions of more than 400 experts and practitioners in Wales, this study points to ways that will help to identify, address, or mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on children under the age of 5.

Research participants believe there is value in:

- *supporting early education and childcare settings to create supportive play environments*

- *creating calm environments which provide children with a sense of belonging and supporting their well-being to ensure that they can progress in their learning and development*
- *In terms of more strategic methods, the key message is that early education and childcare provision should be of a high quality, with universal access, which sits alongside support and resources for parents and carers.*

5. The view of the organisation or body as to whether the group(s) it supports or represents was adequately considered when decisions about the response to Covid-19 were made by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please also explain the reasons for the view expressed by the organisation or body in this respect

Many of the non-pharmaceutical government interventions which affected everyone, disproportionately impacted children. Children's lives were turned upside at crucial stages of their development. Six months in the life of a 12-year-old is vastly different to 6 months in the life of a 28-year-old. And there were many other specific impacts, such as children awaiting trials in the criminal justice system turned 18 and lost protections that were afforded to them when they were children.

Despite this, children were not systematically identified as a vulnerable group requiring additional support to cope with the restrictions. In our view, the impact on children, and the rights of children were not considered adequately or even at all, in many key decisions by the UK Government, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government or the Northern Ireland Executive. SCUK spent the pandemic both directly supporting and working with children affected by such matters, as well as advocating for their voices and their rights to be heard by government.

Key findings from SCUK work

- Many families who we supported had **lost their primary source of income** due to job loss or had seen a reduction in their earnings due to furlough or losing the income they received from self-employed work.
- The need to **self-isolate, shield or look after sick children** also meant that parents had lost jobs or earnings.
- **Additional costs caused by lockdown** and closures of schools and early years settings was a common theme, with parents having to pay for more food, heating and electricity, provide resources for home learning, and needing to rely on more expensive local shops and online shopping.
- Financial difficulties were exacerbated by **delays and closures to services** – for example, backlogs with registrations of births caused delays in payment of child-related benefits. This meant that families were left waiting even longer for support, which pushed them further into hardship and left them lacking the very basics.

The impact on family incomes along with other challenges of the pandemic have had a clear effect on children's early learning and parents' ability to support their children, meaning that children's learning and development has suffered.

- Lack of money, isolating in limited space, mental health difficulties, and taking on additional home-schooling and childcare responsibilities meant that families **struggled to provide the resources and time to support their children's early learning**.
 - Spending time at home with limited space **exacerbated family conflict and parents' mental health difficulties**, meaning that children may have been more likely to have been exposed to traumatic experiences and stress.
 - **Disruption in access to services**, such as health visitors and GPs, and children being unable to attend early years settings or school left families without crucial support and meant they struggled to provide their children with a high-quality home learning environment.
6. **Whether the organisation or body raised any concerns about the consideration being given to the group(s) which it supports or represents with (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive, when the Government(s) and/or Executive were making decisions about their response to Covid-19. Please provide a list of any such correspondence or meetings with the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or the Northern Ireland Executive, including the dates on which the body or organisation wrote or such meetings were held, to whom the correspondence was addressed or with whom the meeting was held, and any response received from the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or Northern Ireland Executive addressing such concerns.**

Meetings

Our Head of Early Years contributes to the following Department for Education groups and meetings:

- Early Years Education Recovery Expert Advisory Group which has been running during 2022: Attended the final meeting of this year on 2nd of November. Earlier monthly meetings were attended by our previous Head of Early Years.
- Family Hubs: parenting support, early language and home learning environment meeting scheduled for the 13 October 2022 and postponed to 2023.
- Stronger Practice Hubs Advisory Group to inform plans to support the early years sector in their endeavour to address the impact of the pandemic on the youngest and most disadvantaged children. The first meeting will take place on the 5th of January 2023 and is planned to meet four times in total over the course of the year.

SCUK Letters

- **SCUK CEO Letter to Secretary of State for Education, October 2020**



SCUK Letter to the
Secretary of State fo

- **SCUK CEO Letter to Secretary of State for DWP, October 2020**



SCUK Letter to the
Secretary of State fo

- **DWP Minister for Welfare Delivery Letter to SCUK CEO, December 2020**



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- **SCUK CEO Letter to the Chancellor, October 2020**



SCUK Letter to the
Chancellor of the Ex

- **SCUK Representation to the Comprehensive Spending Review, January 2021**



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- **SCUK Executive Director Letter to Chief Secretary to the Treasury, February 2021**



SCUK letter to the
Chief Secretary to th

- **Chief Secretary to the Treasury Letter to SCUK Executive Director, March 2021**



Steve Barclay letter
to SCUK - 2 March 21

- **SCUK CEO Letter to Secretary of State for DCMS, July 2021**



Letter to SoS DCMS
- Summer of Play 120

- **SCUK Executive Director Letter to Children's Minister, October 2021**



SCUK Letter to
Minister for Childrei

- **Children's Minister Response to SCUK Executive Director, November 2021**



2021-0045698 -
Kirsty McNeill - signe

- **SCUK CEO letter to Secretary of State for the DWP, October 2021**



Save the Children
CEO letter to the Se

- **SCUK CEO letter to Secretary of State for Education, October 2021**



Letter to Education
SoS.pdf

- **Secretary of State for Education Response to SCUK CEO, January 2022**



2021-0045205 -
Gwen Hines - signer

SCUK Briefings

- [SCUK Winter Plan for Children Briefing sent to the Secretary of State for Education, Secretary of State for DWP, and Chancellor, October 2020](#)

In this briefing, we highlighted:

The coronavirus pandemic has affected UK parents' and children's lives in countless ways, and those on low incomes have been particularly hard hit. Job losses, cuts to pay and working hours, and the extra costs associated with the pandemic have created new difficulties for many families and pulled those already in poverty even further into hardship.

Six months into the pandemic, the situation is not improving for families. While some lockdown measures have eased and schools and childcare settings have reopened, rising numbers of coronavirus cases mean that large areas of the UK still face restrictions, and further national lockdowns may be on the horizon. As we move into the winter, the combined impact of rising unemployment along with increased lockdown measures mean that many families will struggle to cope.

New research shows the reality of the situation for families

To explore the experiences of families at this time, Save the Children has conducted research with parents on low incomes across the UK, looking at the impact of the pandemic on incomes and jobs and exploring how families are coping financially during this time.

The findings are stark. Families are finding themselves worse off, struggling to afford the basics and turning to charities for help. Key points include:

- *Almost two in five (38%) of families say they are worse off since the pandemic hit*
- *Over a quarter (27%) say they find it harder to afford the food they need now compared with April 2020*
- *Almost two in five (38%) have turned to food banks or other charities for support*
- *70% of parents said their children had had to cut back on or go without things due to financial issues caused by the pandemic.*

Coalition Statements, Briefings & Letters

- [Children at the Heart of Recovery Statement \(led by National Children's Bureau\), June 2020](#)
- [Children at the Heart of Recovery Statement \(led by National Children's Bureau\), June 2021](#)
- [Build Back Childhoods Briefing \(led by National Children's Bureau\), October 2021](#)



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- 7. A brief summary of the views of the organisation or body as to any lessons, if any, that can be learned from any consideration which was given to the group(s) that the organisation or body supports or represents by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive when they were making decisions about their response to Covid-19.**

Through our work with families, and our advocacy work with the UK Government, local authorities and with devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it became very apparent that the UK government's response to key elements of the pandemic was undermined because of a lack of consideration about children's rights and wellbeing. This, we believe, was a cause of key policy failings such as the approach to free school meals which was highlighted by Marcus Rashford's campaigning, the problems with GCSE and A-Level exam results, and the fact that many children were unable to access any kinds of support and services at key moments in their lives.