

Prioritising child poverty in Fife

Child poverty

Fife is ranked 7 out of 32 local authorities for child poverty but the figures mask considerable variation within and across Fife. The latest children in low income families data (FYE 2025) highlights that - after Glasgow - Fife has some of the highest levels of child poverty in Scotland in two of its parliamentary constituencies: Glenrothes and Mid Fife, and Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy.

From a review of the publicly available administrative data this paper draws out some of the key evidence across the three main drivers of child poverty to inform priorities.

Income from social security

Scottish Child Payment

The estimated take up rate is 93% (just below Scotland). 24,280 children were actively benefiting from Scottish Child Payment in Fife (Sep 25). Lower take up for pre-school children suggests that more could be done to promote Scottish benefits (including best start) to new mothers and in early years. Some neighbourhoods within Kirkcaldy Area may be underclaiming Scottish Child Payment.

Two child limit and benefit cap

Constituency-level child poverty rates are directly / strongly correlated with % children affected by two-child limit (parents can only claim universal credit or tax credits for their first two children). Abolition of two-child limit (from April 2026) will directly lift children out of poverty. 134 households (including 458 children) will only likely see a partial benefit before reaching benefit cap. Additional discretionary housing payment will be made available from Scottish Government to mitigate this.

Staying on

Fife has a lower percentage of young people in the most deprived areas and higher percentages of young people in SIMD quintiles 2, 3 and 5 receiving Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) compared to Scotland. The attainment of pupils from the most deprived areas in Fife is significantly below that of Scotland (levels 5/6).

Out of work benefits

In December 2025, Fife's claimant rate was 3.0% with an estimated 6,940 people claiming out-of-work benefits in the region. Fife's male claimant rate (3.6%) was significantly higher than the female rate (2.4%). In all parts of Fife (except North East Fife), 16-24 year olds have the highest rate of people claiming out-of-work benefits. In Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy Areas, 16-24 age group's claimant rate was highest of all age groups in Fife (6.1%). The Kirkcaldy Area had the highest claimant rates for all three age groups (16-24, 25-49 and 50-66).

Income from employment

Annual participation (16 to 19 year olds)

Fife's participation rate (91.4%) is below Scotland (93.3%). 67.5% are participating in education and 21.1% in employment (compared to 70.5% and 20.7% for Scotland).

Employment

While Fife's employment rate 16-64 (73.9%) is just below Scotland (74.4%), the employment rate for 16-24 year olds (45.8%) is significantly below Scotland (53.9%). Fife has a lower percentage of people employed part-time (19%) and a higher percentage of people who are self-employed (14%). 64.4% of children are in poverty where at least one adult works (66.3% Scotland).

Jobs and earnings

The job density rate in Fife (0.66) is lower than Scotland (0.83). There are around 6 jobs for every 10 working-age people in the area. While median earnings have risen over time, weekly wages (work-place based) continue to track below Scotland. 13.1% of employees earn less than the living wage (11.4% Scotland).

Skills and qualifications

Only 28.6% of Fife adults have qualifications at degree level or above, compared to 32.5% for Scotland. In Fife, the proportion of residents employed in lower paid occupations (caring and leisure, elementary occupations, sales and customer service work) are higher than Scotland.

Cost of living

Early learning and childcare

Fife has a higher proportion using the two-year-old entitlement to early learning and childcare, and a lower proportion of children registered with childcare services. Fife has fewer childcare places, an average of 27.6 places per service (30.3 Scotland).

Housing

While the median residential property price in Fife is lower than Scotland, the average house price in Fife was £178,000 (November 2025), up 6.3% from November 2024. This was higher than the rise in Scotland (4.5%) over the same period. Private rent prices stayed similar in the year to December 2025, at £807. Across Scotland, the average rental price rose by 2.8% over the year.

Talking points

- Should there be a strong place focus on action on child poverty? ie Mid Fife
- Does there need to be a focus on the attainment and positive and sustained destinations for school leavers to address issues re youth participation and employment?
- Could action on childcare support parents to improve their skills and progress into better paid work?