

Child poverty reduction

"You need to get in early, as soon as you see people struggling."

Mokopuna, age 15-18 years¹²

Ending child poverty needs to be an urgent and enduring project of national significance, enabled by cross-Parliamentary support and the commitment of successive governments.

Data over the past 20-30 years demonstrates that government policy choices have a direct impact on child poverty. Child poverty can be reduced and is ultimately preventable.

In 2018, with cross-Parliamentary support, the Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018 (the Act) was passed. The Act included accountability for successive governments to set child poverty reduction targets and report publicly on progress. This remains a world-leading framework and should enable real progress on reducing child poverty. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has acknowledged this achievement and urged Aotearoa New Zealand to strengthen it.³

In Aotearoa New Zealand, too many mokopuna (children and young people) are growing up in poverty. Official child poverty statistics show that Māori, Pacific and whaikaha (disabled) mokopuna, and those in sole-parent households, are known to be disproportionately affected by poverty.^{4 5} Mokopuna from refugee backgrounds and those in State care are also more likely to be disadvantaged by poverty.^{6 7}

Living in poverty creates negative impacts for whānau (families) and mokopuna. These can include high levels of stress, an increased likelihood of experiencing harm, poor quality housing, food insecurity, and poor health outcomes in childhood and beyond.

Preventable child poverty is inconsistent with Aotearoa New Zealand's duties and obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It is inconsistent with children's right to an adequate standard of living under Article 27 of the Convention, and it can have a negative impact on many of their other rights, including to be protected as taonga (treasures) under Article Two of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Poverty is a multifaceted barrier to children developing to their full potential.

Our calls to action

We call on all of government to:

- **Make ending child poverty an ongoing project of national significance.** Implement specific child poverty reduction-focused policies and investments recognising mokopuna in the context of their whānau, hapū, iwi and hāpori (community). Commitment is needed on a cross-Parliamentary basis over successive governments.
- **Set ambitious poverty reduction targets** that match the scale of the child poverty challenge, in line with Aotearoa New Zealand's commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals, which include ending poverty by 2030.

- **Gather robust data about poverty** to inform decisions and shape policies, with data covering all the dimensions of child wellbeing and poverty as contained in the Child Poverty Reduction Act. Report data separately for Māori, Pacific, and whaikaha mokopuna to show whether inequities are being reduced among disadvantaged groups.
- **Create a child poverty reduction plan and implement it** to achieve bold, focused action that increases incomes, helps alleviate the practical stressors on low-income whānau, and ensures all mokopuna can grow up safe and thriving. Based on the commitment to reduce material hardship in the Government's Child and Youth Strategy 2025-27, begin with a focus on ending child material hardship.

What mokopuna say

Mana Mokopuna engaged with mokopuna across the motu (country) to inform the Child and Youth Strategy refresh in 2024.⁸ We asked them what they think is needed at different stages throughout childhood and into early adulthood, so that all mokopuna can experience a good life. Mokopuna raised their concerns about poverty with us many times, and mentioned the importance of welfare, safe housing, education, health, and community support.

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Mokopuna, age 15-18 years⁹

"I believe that parents that struggle with stress, relationship and money problems should get more support financially and more guidance. Reason being parents struggle with financial emotional and relationship problems eventually generate an unhealthy environment for any child within the environment."

Mokopuna, age 15-18 years¹⁰

"[I believe a solution is:] Financial support for parents that are really struggling with money, more support to lower income families."

Mokopuna, age 15-18 years¹¹

"Always moving, not being able to settle."

Mokopuna, age 15-18 years¹²

"I want to get every qualification that I can that will better our future and get us in a better space."

Young parent¹³

"If only education and other fun and cool activities didn't need to be paid for... having to go to places without worrying about money."

Mokopuna, age 15-18 years¹⁴

"Babies need medical attention, 0-4 get sick a lot, I watched my brother grow up and he needed attention."

Mokopuna, age 15-18 years¹⁵

"My family is good and helps some poor people."

Mokopuna, age 11 years¹⁶

"Help families and people in needs across Auckland. Because many families struggle with survival items and bills."

Mokopuna, Cook Island, age 9 years¹⁷

When we have asked mokopuna around the country, "in your world, what matters most?", mokopuna often share their ideas and solutions about poverty, including the following:

"[he aha te mea nui?] Whangai tonu ki te kura"

([what matters most?] Keep feeding in schools)

Mokopuna, Māori, age 9 years¹⁸

"Lower the uniform prices plz. Improve the school lunches :)"

Mokopuna, Fijian Indian, age 9 years¹⁹

"I want to say that every kid should get tidy clothes and books from school, and everyone should live [some] place and be with each other."

Mokopuna, Samoan and Tongan, age 9 years²⁰

Endnotes

¹ Mana Mokopuna (2024). [“You need to get in early as soon as you see people struggling”: Understanding the life course journey.](#)

² ibid

³ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. 2023. [Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of New Zealand.](#)

⁴ MSD 2024 Bryan Perry [Child Poverty Report 2024](#) reports on data from 2022-23 and previous data with detail relating to household make up e.g. sole-parent as well as ethnicity data. Also compares internationally.

⁵ Stats NZ February 2025 [Child poverty statistics: Year ended June 2024 reported by ethnicity and disability status](#) and [Child poverty statistics: Year ended June 2024 primary measures report](#)

⁶ Huibert Peter de Vries, Nirosha Wellalage, Dr Nadeera Ranabahu, Dr Ruth Helen Samujh, and Sandya Rajapakshe, Refugee Orientation Centre Trust (2023). “We want to contribute”: Former refugees’ perspectives and aspirations on economic integration; Rachel Rafferty, Anna Burgink, Vivienne Anderson (2020). “Do we really offer refuge? Using Galtung’s Concept of Structural Violence to Interrogate Refugee Resettlement Support in Aotearoa New Zealand”. In *Sites: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.11157/sites-id455>

⁷ Royal Commission of Inquiry into abuse in Care (2024). [Chapter 2: Circumstances that led children and young people to enter social welfare care settings](#); Jennifer Montgomery and Clive Aspin (2024). How state care fails NZ’s most vulnerable young people. In <https://theconversation.com/care-and-protection-or-containment-and-punishment-how-state-care-fails-nzs-most-vulnerable-young-people-224629>

⁸ Mana Mokopuna (2024). [“You need to get in early as soon as you see people struggling”: Understanding the life course journey.](#)

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ ibid

¹² ibid

¹³ ibid

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ ibid

¹⁷ ASB Polyfest, 2025 engagement by Mana Mokopuna Mai World - Child and Youth Participation (unpublished)

¹⁸ Newtown Festival engagement (unpublished) Children’s Day, March 2025.

¹⁹ ibid

²⁰ ibid