Response to a call for written submissions regarding a visit by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights to the United Kingdom - (scheduled for November 2018).

Responses to be sent to: srextremepoverty@ohchr.org by September 14th 2018

**A. GENERAL**

**(1) What is the definition of poverty and extreme poverty that your organization employs in the context of the United Kingdom and to what extent do official definitions used by the state adequately encompass poverty in all its dimensions?**

**(2) What is your view on the current official measurement of poverty by the government, what are the shortcomings of the current measurement and what alternatives would be feasible?**

**(3) What are the most significant human rights violations that people living in poverty and extreme poverty in the United Kingdom experience? Please exemplify by referring to specific cases and relevant norms of international human rights law.**

 **(4) Could you specify how poverty and extreme poverty in the United Kingdom intersect with civil and political rights issues (such as for example the right to political participation or the right to equality before the law)? Please exemplify by referring to specific cases and relevant norms of international human rights law.**

 **(5) Could you specify how poverty and extreme poverty in the United Kingdom intersect with economic and social rights issues (such as the right to education or the right to health care)? Please exemplify by referring to specific cases and relevant norms of international human rights law.**

Layers of Inequality, A Human Rights and Equality Impact Assessment of the Public Spending Cuts on Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Women in Coventry. (<http://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/download/3067/layers_of_inequality>)

The report highlighted the ways in which different groups of BAME women will experienced the cuts, and showed where possible how women from different ethnic backgrounds, or women facing multiple disadvantages were affected. The report looked at the cumulative impact of the cuts on BAME women in the following areas

* The labour market
* Housing
* Welfare reform
* Education
* Violence against women
* Health,
* social care
* Legal Advice services
* voluntary organisations

The research found that the combined impact of the university fees, together with job losses, cuts to benefits and the rising cost of living impacted on girls’ right to education. One focus group attendee stated

*My husband has lost his job and we don’t have much money and so we are only thinking about now sending our son to university and not our daughter.*

Other women in the same focus group nodded in agreement. This alerts us to the position of women in families and to the potential huge societal impact. Sending a young woman to university is a family decision, the courses they study, and where they study. And with no money in the family the women are the first to go – the first to lose out. This is a huge societal impact for the future, where young women are not given the opportunity to fulfil their potential but also a generational impact on their children. This is an indication of what could happen to BAME women as a result of their gender and ethnicity in relation to the cuts.

Other research has been undertaken which shows how BAME women are disproportionately affected by austerity.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**(6) Which areas of the United Kingdom should the Special Rapporteur visit in light of the poverty and human rights situation in those locations?**

I am a researcher in the impact of austerity, particularly on women and minority groups. I also a councillor in Coventry City Council. I would like to suggest that the Special Rapporteur visits Coventry due to the impact of austerity on the citizens of Coventry.

**(7) Which individuals and organizations should the Special Rapporteur meet with during his country visit to the United Kingdom?**

Local councillors in Coventry City Council.

Local MPs in Coventry

Local voluntary organisations: Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre, Haven

Coventry Foodbank

Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau

Coventry Law Centre

Professor Akwugo Emejulu, Professor of Sociology, University of Warwick

Dr Mary-Ann Stephenson, Director, Womens Budget Group

**B. AUSTERITY**

**Since 2010, successive governments have engaged in fiscal consolidation, the process of reducing the amount of fiscal deficit of the United Kingdom. This process is popularly referred to as 'austerity' or 'budget cutting'.**

**(8) To what extent has austerity been necessary given the fiscal outlook of the United Kingdom in the last decade?**

**(9) Have austerity measures implemented by the government taken adequate account of the impact on vulnerable groups and reflected efforts to minimize negative effects for those groups and individuals?**

BAME families are disproportionately affected. In some cases it is because of particular circumstances of BAME women’s lives. So for example the initial Benefit Cap for benefits for families particularly affected BAME families because they are more likely to be larger or multi generational.

The DWP own impact assessment estimates that out of every 10 households affected by the cap, 4 of those 10 households will contain somebody who is from an ethnic minority[[2]](#footnote-2)

**(10) What have the effects of austerity been on poverty (and inequality) levels in the United Kingdom in the last decade?**

**(11) Have the human rights of individuals experiencing poverty been affected by austerity measures?**

The right to work has been affected by austerity and agencies working to provide employment. For example the Work Programme in Coventry has not proved successful in finding work for women of any ethnic background, but BAME women have fared worse than white women. Of the 1290 white women referred to the Work Programme in Coventry up to July 2012, 60 found jobs. 10 out of 210 Asian women referred found work. Out of 280 referrals of women from other ethnic groups none found work.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**(12) How have local governments been affected by austerity measures in the last decades? If possible, please specify the impact on public services such as police and fire departments, public libraries, and the administration of the welfare system by local authorities.**

In Coventry the level of Government funding per household figure has fallen by more than £850 between 2010/11 and 2018/19. Calculations suggests that the loss of funding per person is more like £390, reflecting the fact that population has grown so quickly over this period.

**(13) What alternatives to austerity might have been considered by governments in the last decade?  Could any such alternatives have had a more positive impact on poverty (and inequality) levels in the United Kingdom?**

**(14) What** **are the potential implications of Brexit on austerity measures in the coming years?**

**C. UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

**Universal Credit, which was first announced in 2010, is a key element of welfare reform in the United Kingdom.  Its stated aims are to simplify and streamline the benefits system for claimants and administrators, to improve work incentives, to tackle poverty and to reduce fraud and error. The Special Rapporteur is interested in learning more about Universal Credit, including its impact on poverty in the United Kingdom and on the human rights of those living in poverty. Below are some of the questions the Special Rapporteur has in that regard:**

**(15) To what extent has the Universal Credit been able to achieve the goals identified above?**

**(16) What has the impact of Universal Credit been on poverty and the lives of the poor in the United Kingdom until now? It would be helpful to also distinguish the specific impact of Universal Credit on specific groups, including for example children, persons with disabilities, women and other groups which may be more vulnerable on the basis of their identity and circumstances.**

**(17) Claimants apply for Universal Credit online. What has been the impact of Universal Credit being a ‘digital-only benefit’ on the ability of potential claimants to apply for this benefit? How does this relate to broadband internet access in the UK and the so-called ‘digital divide’? What is the role of public libraries and Jobcentres in enabling access to broadband internet for those applying for Universal Credit and have these public services been adequate for the purpose?**

**(18) What has the impact been of various forms of ‘welfare conditionality’ in the context of Universal Credit in terms of incentivizing work?**

**(19) To what extent has the introduction of Universal Credit reduced the incidence of fraud and error in the welfare system?**

**D. NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WELFARE SYSTEM**

**The Special Rapporteur is interested in learning more about the impact of new technologies including the use of ‘big data’, artificial intelligence, algorithms and automated decision-making processes on the human rights of those living in poverty in the United Kingdom, especially in terms of the functioning of the welfare system. Below are some of the questions the Special Rapporteur has in that regard:**

**(20) What use does the national government, as well devolved governments and local governments, make of such new technologies in the context of decision-making in the welfare system? A recent report by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee on ‘Algorithms in decision-making’ (May 2018) concluded that the central government does not currently produce, publish or maintain a list of algorithms it uses for public purposes, despite the fact that some of the new technologies that are employed, for example in welfare fraud and error investigations, can may have major negative human rights implications, especially for the poor. The Special Rapporteur is especially interested in learning more about concrete examples of the use of such new technologies by governments in the welfare system.**

**(21) What is the relevant regulatory framework for the use by government of such new technologies, especially in the context of the welfare system, and are there any shortcomings in the current legal framework?**

**(22) Which government agencies and departments are responsible for and have oversight over the use of new technologies by governments in the UK, especially in the context of the welfare system? Are their respective responsibilities clearly defined and delineated and are they able to effectively perform their responsibilities?**

**(23) What are the relevant policies of the central government vis-à-vis the use of these new technologies by the government, including especially in the context of the welfare system, and do these policies take into account the potential impact of the use of these technologies on the human rights of those living in poverty?**

**(24) What are the potential human rights issues faced by individuals living in poverty as a result of the use of new technologies in the UK welfare system?**

**E. CHILD POVERTY**

**(25) What is the extent of child poverty in the United Kingdom, and how has it evolved over the last decade?**

**(26) What are the implications of child poverty for the rights enumerated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child?**

 **(27) What are the main causes of child poverty in the United Kingdom, what have been the main government responses, and how effective have they been?**

**F. ‘BREXIT’**

**(28) What are the potential implications of Brexit for the situation of those living in poverty in the United Kingdom?**

**(29) What are the potential implications of Brexit in terms of protecting the human rights of low-income groups and of persons living in poverty?**

**(30) To what extent does government planning for Brexit explicitly address the issues arising under questions 28 and 29 above?**

1. WBG and Runnymede (2017) *Intersecting Inequalities: The impact of austerity on Black and Minority Ethnic women in the UK* (<http://bit.ly/2jLave5>) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. DWP (2012) Households below average income 2010/11. p.62. Available online at http:// statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/hbai/hbai2011/pdf\_files/full\_hbai12.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. DWP (2012) Work Programme: Local Authority cumulative figures. Referrals (Thousands): Local Authority by Ethnicity summary by Gender. Available online at http://research. dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=wp using a search Coventry. search page: http://83.244.183.180/WorkProg/wp\_la\_jo/ethnic\_sum/ccsex/cclanum/a\_cnjo\_r\_ ethnic\_sum\_c\_ccsex\_p\_cclanum\_coventry\_jul12.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)