



For immediate release

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United Nations: Austerity policies breach the UK's international human rights obligations

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has expressed “serious concern” about the impact of regressive policies on the enjoyment of economic and social rights in a [damning report](#) on the UK.

Based on [evidence](#) it received from Just Fair and other civil society groups, the Committee concludes that austerity measures and social security reform breach the UK's international human rights obligations.

This was the Committee's first review of the UK since 2009 and thus its first verdict on the austerity policies pursued by successive governments since the financial crash. Over eight months the Committee conducted a dialogue with government officials, the UK human rights commissions and civil society groups.

In a wide ranging assessment, expressed in unusually strong terms, the Committee sets out the following findings:

- Tax policies, including VAT increases and reductions in inheritance and corporation tax, have diminished the UK's ability “to address persistent social inequality and to collect sufficient resources to achieve the full realization of economic, social and cultural rights”. The Committee recommends the UK adopt a “socially equitable” tax policy and the adoption of strict measures to tackle tax abuse, in particular by corporations and high-net-worth individuals.
- Austerity measures introduced since 2010 are having a disproportionate adverse impact on the most marginalised and disadvantaged citizens including women, children, persons with disabilities, low-income families and those with two or more children. The Committee recommends that the UK reverse the cuts in social security benefits and reviews the use of sanctions.

- The new ‘National Living Wage’ is not sufficient to ensure a decent standard of living and should be extended to under-25s. The UK should also take steps to reduce use of “zero hour contracts”, which disproportionately affect women.
- Despite rising employment levels the Committee is concerned about the high number of low-paid jobs, especially in sectors such as cleaning and homecare.
- The Committee urges the UK to take immediate measures to reduce the exceptionally high levels of homelessness, particularly in England and Northern Ireland, and highlights the high cost and poor quality of homes in the private rented sector and the lack of sufficient social housing.
- The UK is not doing enough to reduce reliance on food banks.

Jamie Burton, Chair of Just Fair, says:

“The UN’s verdict is clear and indisputable. It considered extensive evidence and gave the Government every opportunity to show why its tax and policy reforms were necessary and fair. In many important respects the Government proved unable to do this. It is clear that since 2010, ministers were fully aware that their policies would hit lower income groups hardest and deepen the suffering of many already facing disadvantage without offering any long term gain for the pain they inflicted. We urge the Government to take heed of the Committee’s recommendations and commit to ensuring that it does not diminish human rights further in the UK.”

Note to editors

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, a body of independent experts, monitors states’ compliance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). The UK has been bound by the Covenant since 1976.

Under the Covenant, the UK is committed to protecting the rights to food, housing, social security, health and equality, among others.

Just Fair has published a [series of reports](#) that have highlighted the impact of austerity measures and social security reform on economic and social rights in the UK.

The Just Fair Consortium includes 76 national and local organisations, including Amnesty International UK, the Child Poverty Action Group, Crisis, the Refugee Council, Save the Children, the Trade Union Congress and the Trussell Trust.

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