

# Visit by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extre...

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I think it appropriate to [draw attention to this call for evidence](#) that many in civil society, as well as concerned individuals, might want to respond to:

### **Call for written submissions — Visit by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from 5 to 16 November 2018**

As the call notes:

*The United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Philip Alston, will undertake an official visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from 6 to 16 November 2018 at the invitation of the UK Government. His visit will focus, in accordance with his mandate, on the interlinkages between poverty and the realization of human rights in the United Kingdom.*

It adds:

*The Special Rapporteur is part of a system of so-called [UN Special Procedures](#), made up of independent experts who regularly undertake country visits around the world to report on human rights issues. The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights has since 2014 (when he was appointed by the Human Rights Council) undertaken country visits to Chile, Romania, Mauritania, China, Saudi Arabia, the United States and Ghana. Every country is different, and each faces its own human rights challenges. The Special Rapporteur thus adapts his approach in accordance with the specific circumstances of the country involved.*

**The Government's invitation to the Special Rapporteur to visit the United Kingdom reflects its standing invitation to all UN Special Procedures, and its commitment to the principle of accountability, which it encourages other UN Member States to respect also in their countries. An overview of visits by all UN Special Procedures to the United Kingdom and other countries since 1998**

can be found [here](#).

**Country visits are based on extensive preparations by the Special Rapporteur and his team and are supported by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. They involve extensive study of topics relevant to the issue of poverty and human rights as well as interviews with civil society organizations, experts and affected individuals before a visit. The actual country visits usually last for about two weeks and include meetings between the Special Rapporteur and government officials, members of the legislature and judiciary, state institutions, civil society organizations, academics, and individuals who have experienced poverty. During his visit the Special Rapporteur will travel to various parts of the UK, but a final decision on his itinerary will not be made until close to the start of the visit.**

As a result:

*The Special Rapporteur would like to invite all interested individuals and organizations in the United Kingdom working on issues related to poverty and human rights, including representatives of civil society organizations, experts and academics, to provide input for the preparation of his visit to the United Kingdom in November 2018. Submissions can be sent to [srextremepoverty@ohchr.org](mailto:srextremepoverty@ohchr.org) until Friday 14 September at 18:00 GMT.* Please note that the Special Rapporteur is also open to receiving input via browser-based encrypted email. Please contact the Special Rapporteur and his team via the email address mentioned above about how to further communicate via encrypted email.

There are more details in the call notice, but what is of special interest are the questions that follow, which indicate areas of concern. I unashamedly share them::

## **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.

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

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

## **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?

(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?

(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.

(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 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-Ã -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?

Might I encourage people to submit? There is ample expertise amongst commentators on this site to do so. Pick a theme and get going, I suggest.