



## Why should we bother with poverty profiling?

Poverty profiling is necessary as poverty affects different communities of interest in different ways. Without such variation, there would only be the need for a national poverty profile and a national strategy to tackle poverty. Although it is certainly true that the primary tools to tackle poverty in Scotland rest with the UK Government – taxation, tax credits and welfare – the many guises of local poverty mean that there is a need for community interventions. Poverty profiling can be an integral part of the strategy to tackle the problem.

## Who should bother with poverty profiling?

All practitioners who are interested in tackling poverty should be concerned with poverty profiling. It's everybody's business to understand exactly what the problem is and to think through how it can be tackled most effectively.

## What do we know already?

### What is profiling?

All profiling activity involves identifying, assembling and presenting relevant information about an issue to inform understanding. Profiling has become commonplace in our information society, where data are readily available and technologies are widely available to exploit these data.

Well-known forms of profiling include:

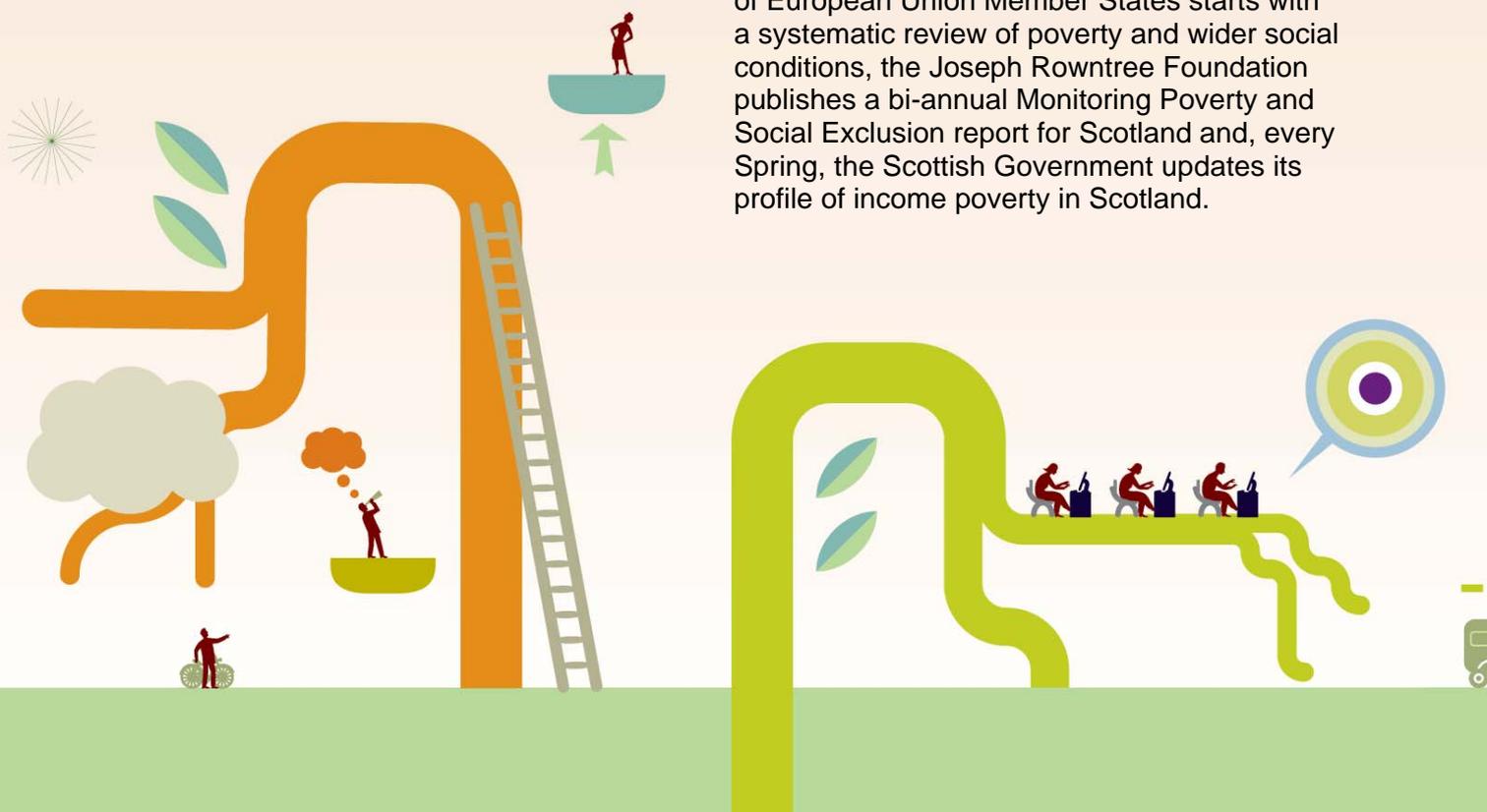
- *Geodemographic profiling.* Identification of the most typical characteristics of people/households based on the overall characteristics of people living in their local area.
- *Community needs assessment.* Identification of strengths and weaknesses in a community.
- *Offender (criminal) profiling.* Analysis of behavioural traits that help investigators identify the probable characteristics of unknown offenders.
- *Credit rating.* An estimate of creditworthiness, based on personal credit history *and* group profiling of customer types.

These examples also highlight two other key features of profiling:

- Profiling aims to organise and analyse existing information to generate new understanding.
- Profiling often aims to generate new understanding to assist decision-making.

## Who produces 'poverty profiles'?

The concept of a 'poverty profile' is not commonplace. Yet, there are many examples of a wide range of organisations describing the character of poverty for their community of interest. For example, each National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and Social Protection of European Union Member States starts with a systematic review of poverty and wider social conditions, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation publishes a bi-annual Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion report for Scotland and, every Spring, the Scottish Government updates its profile of income poverty in Scotland.



## What is included in 'poverty profiles'?

Poverty profiles are more readily recognised in the Republic of Ireland, Canada and in many other economically developed nations. Although no consistent approach is adopted, all of these poverty profiles include:

- Contextual information on the community of interest.
- Poverty data.
- Data on wider population and socio-economic conditions.
- The inclusion of other information is variable and can include:
  - Causes of poverty.
  - Information on policy initiatives.
  - Governance profiling.
  - Policy recommendations.
  - Action plan to address poverty.

## What have we learned?

### ***'Poverty profiles' differ to other types of community profile***

Many so-called 'local poverty profiles' are very similar to what others may describe as 'community needs assessments' or 'community area profiles'. It is inconceivable that such community profiles would not include information on poverty (or wealth). Similarly, it is to be expected that a 'poverty profile' will include wider contextual information on the community of which it is part. However, there should be five key differences in approach:

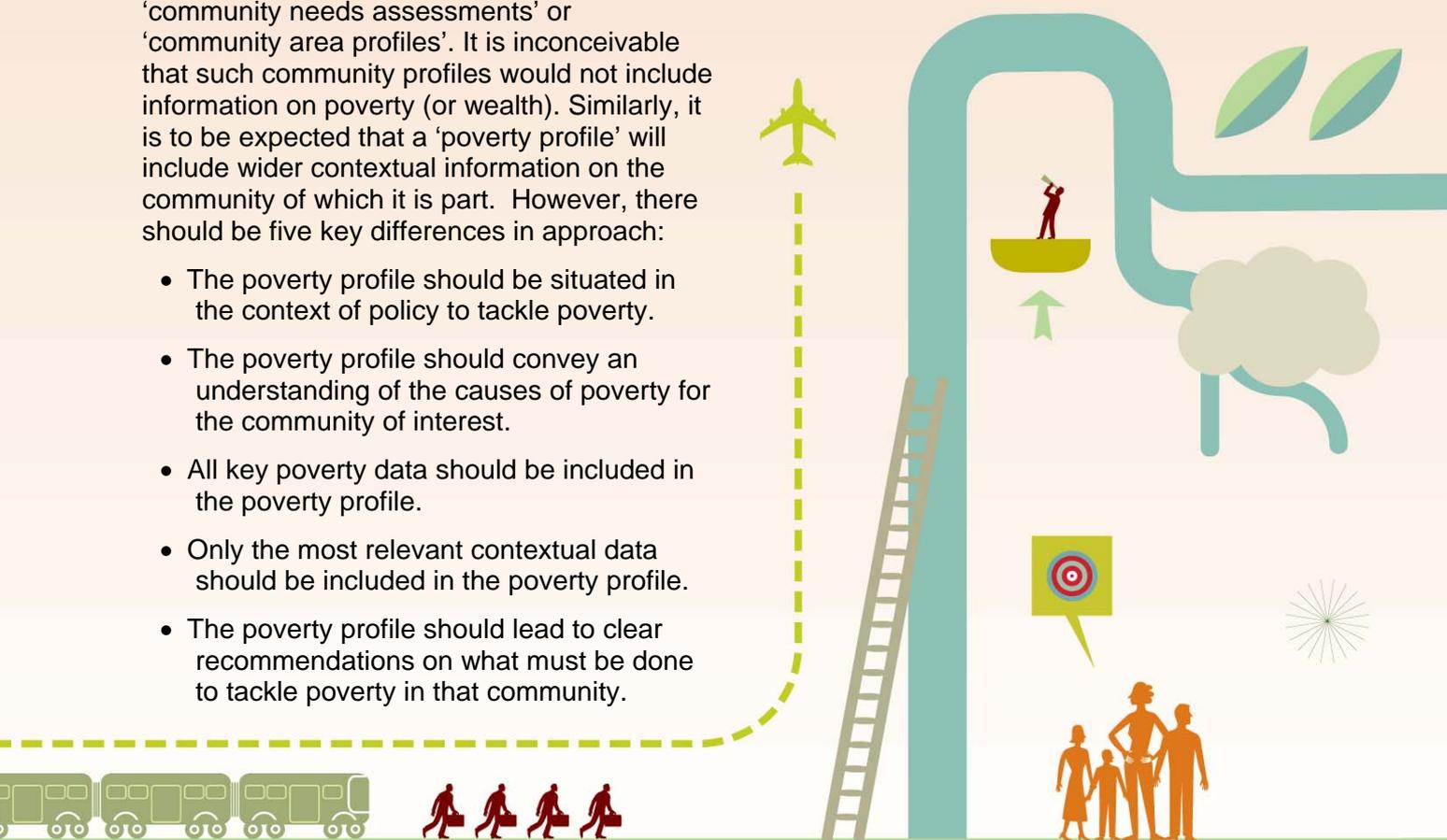
- The poverty profile should be situated in the context of policy to tackle poverty.
- The poverty profile should convey an understanding of the causes of poverty for the community of interest.
- All key poverty data should be included in the poverty profile.
- Only the most relevant contextual data should be included in the poverty profile.
- The poverty profile should lead to clear recommendations on what must be done to tackle poverty in that community.

Poverty profiles are most effective when the indicators are robust (issue 1), the whole community of interest is involved in producing them (issue 2) and when it is more than a collection of figures describing poverty (issue 3).

### **Issue 1: What makes a good indicator?**

The ready availability of data means that there is no shortage of information that could be included in a poverty profile. Each indicator must be scrutinised before inclusion in the poverty profile. The gold standard against which indicators should be appraised and (which may determine whether they are to be included in the profile) is that they should:

- Be available.
- Be relevant.
- Have a clear and accepted interpretation.
- Be generated in a robust manner.
- Be responsive to policy interventions.
- Be comparable across populations and places.
- Be updated regularly.
- Be current (notwithstanding some inevitable time lag for data processing).



## Issue 2: Participatory profiling

There is growing recognition that regeneration must take account of the 'voices of the poor'. This is often contrasted with the 'top down' approaches whereby the priorities for tackling poverty are determined by 'experts'. *Participatory Poverty Assessment* is somewhere between these positions, in that it seeks to include all stakeholders in the research process. The advantage of a participatory approach to poverty profiling is that it accounts for the whole range of interests and perspectives, and heightens local capacity and commitment to undertake follow-up action.

## Issue 3: Numbers or words, data or intervention framework?

The poverty profile should not merely be a report of quantitative data in which poverty is described through numbers to generate a better understanding of poverty. A poverty profile should be this ... and more. To capture the essence, impact and nature of poverty, consideration should be given to the inclusion of qualitative evidence to complement the overview that numbers can provide. Similarly, the true value of a poverty profile is when it is an integral part of a process to inform decision-making.

## What next?

### Towards a blueprint for 'poverty profiling' in Scotland

Drawing upon best practice from outwith Scotland, a blueprint for poverty profiles in Scotland is now proposed.

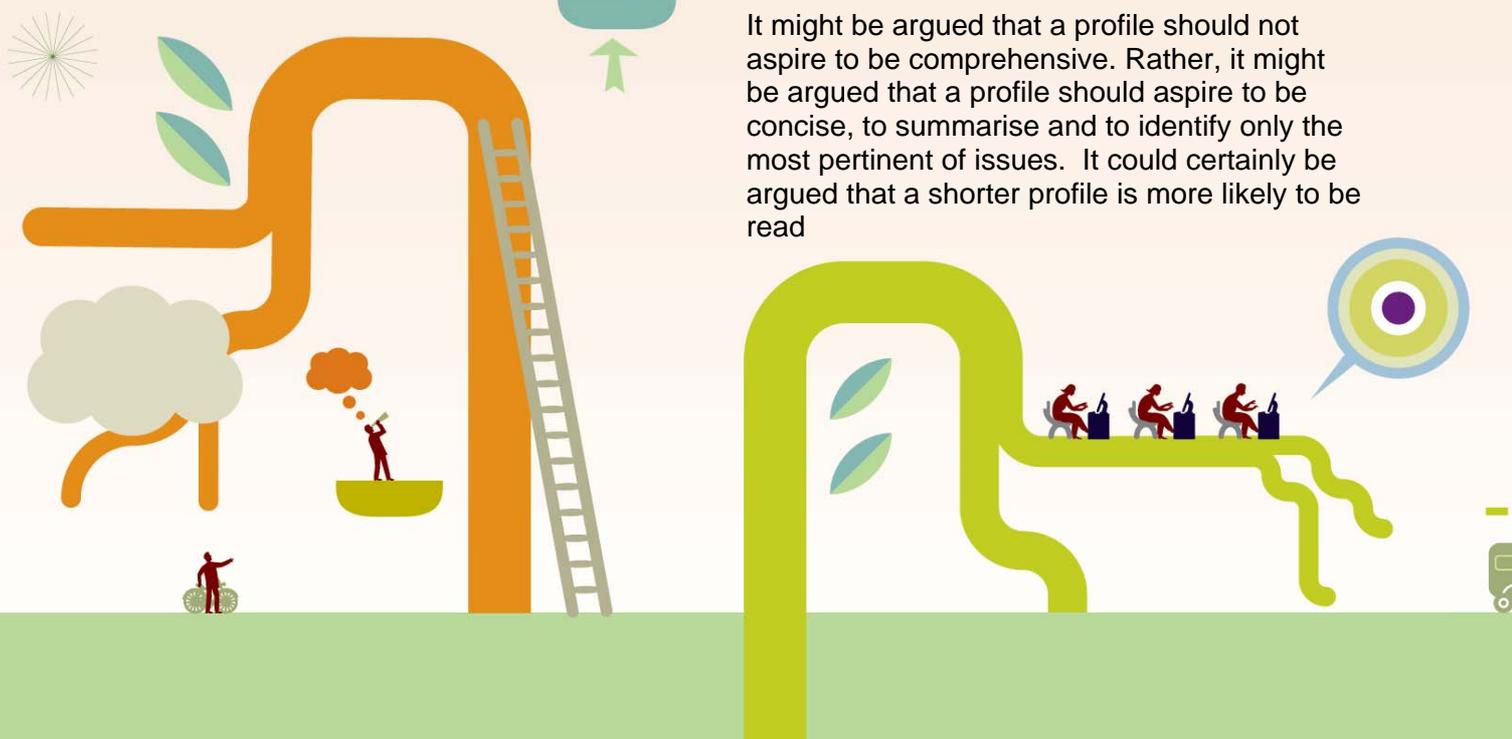
By way of preparation and introduction, poverty profiles should:

- Clearly identify the community of interest.
- Clearly identify and involve all stakeholders.
- Specify any sub-themes that are of particular interest, e.g. education, housing.
- Systematically identify and gather information.

Poverty profiles should aspire to:

- Present a comprehensive account of the nature of poverty.
- Accurately and comprehensively report the extent of poverty.
- Identify the most intensive poverty within the community of interest.
- Use indicators that are fit-for-purpose.
- Describe the UK and Scottish policy context and specifically discuss the relevance of this to the community of interest.
- Appraise the Community Planning Partnership policy context (or community of interest).
- Present an action plan or recommendations for future action.
- Identify trends, as well as profiling the here-and-now.
- Compare the extent of poverty beyond the community of interest.
- Be of value – an implementation, communication and dissemination strategy should be an integral part of the process.

It might be argued that a profile should not aspire to be comprehensive. Rather, it might be argued that a profile should aspire to be concise, to summarise and to identify only the most pertinent of issues. It could certainly be argued that a shorter profile is more likely to be read



more widely among the community of interest. However, all poverty profiles should aspire to include the same information, ensuring that a poverty profile is more than merely a descriptive report of poverty. In conclusion, a potential template for a community poverty profile is presented below, with page lengths suggested in parenthesis for a concise 12 page report.

### Suggested Template for a Community Poverty Profile in Scotland

#### Cover page. (p.1)

#### 1. Introduction to our Profile (p.2)

- 1.1. What this profile is about
- 1.2. How we completed the profile

#### 2. *AnyScotPlace*: Our Community (p.3)

- 2.1. Geography: where we are
- 2.2. History: how we got here
- 2.3. Population: who we are
- 2.4. Assets: our strengths
- 2.5. Weaknesses: challenges that we face

#### 3. Poverty in *AnyScotPlace*: An overview (pp.4-5)

- 3.1. How much poverty?
- 3.2. What poverty means to us

#### 4. What causes poverty in *AnyScotPlace*? (p.6)

(By theme)

#### 5. What is being done to tackle poverty in *AnyScotPlace*? (p.7)

- 5.1 UK Government
- 5.2 Scottish Government
- 5.3 Community Planning Partnership and Local Government
- 5.4 In our community

#### 6. Poverty Issues in *AnyScotPlace* (pp.8-10)

(By theme)

#### 7. New solutions, our solutions: tackling poverty in *AnyScotPlace* (p.11)

#### 8. Conclusion and contacts (p.12)

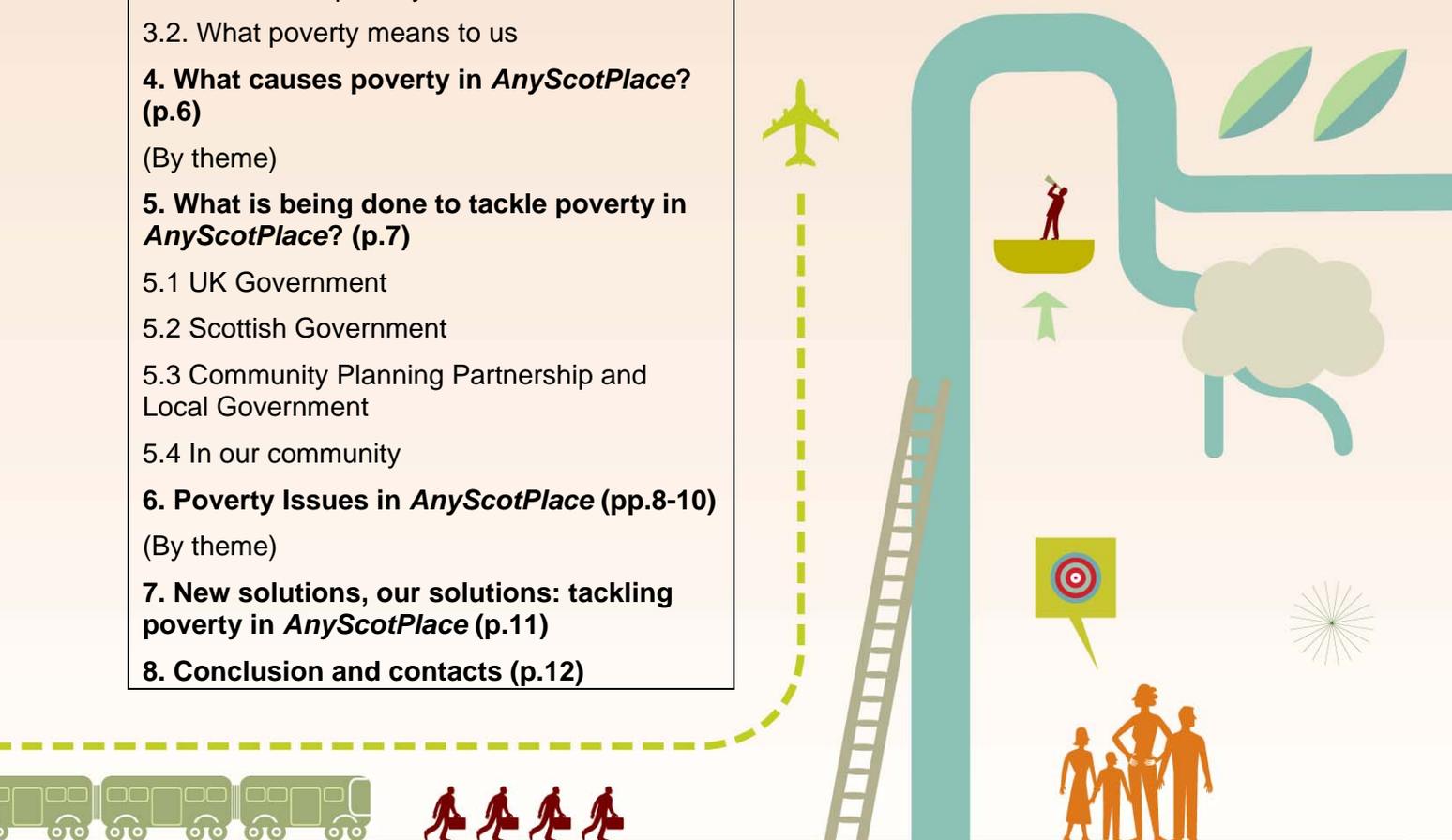
## Further Information

### Guidance on Poverty Profiling

- Combat Poverty Agency (2002) *Local Poverty Profiling: A Guidebook for Local Authorities*. CPA: Dublin.  
[http://www.combatpoverty.ie/publications/LocalPovertyProfilingAGuidebookForLocalAuthorities\\_2002.pdf](http://www.combatpoverty.ie/publications/LocalPovertyProfilingAGuidebookForLocalAuthorities_2002.pdf)
- Andy Norton (2001) *A Rough Guide to Participatory Poverty Assessment. An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. London: Overseas Development Institute.  
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPCE/NG/1143333-1116505707719/20509327/ppa.pdf>

### Examples of Poverty Profiles

- London Poverty Profile  
<http://www.londonpovertyprofile.org.uk/>
- Sarah Campbell (2008) *The Vibrant Abbotsford Poverty Profile*. Abbotsford.  
<http://www.uwfv.bc.ca/Vibrant%20Resources/Poverty%20Profile%20December%2008.pdf>



## Overview of sources of poverty data in Scotland

- Leo Williamson and Anthony Rafferty (2008) *Guide to Data Sources for Scotland*. Version 2.2. Manchester: ESDS Government  
<http://www.esds.ac.uk/government/docs/ScotlandGuide.pdf>
- Nicola Smith, Natalie Branosky, John H. McKendrick and Gill Scott (2006) *Closing the Opportunity Gap (CtOG): Scoping Work for the Design of Impact Assessment*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/05/22120926/0>

## Compilations of data on poverty in Scotland

- John H. McKendrick, Gerry Mooney, Peter Kelly and John Dickie, editors. (2007) *Poverty in Scotland 2007*. London: CPAG.  
<http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=327372&direct=1>
- The Poverty Site  
<http://www.poverty.org.uk/summary/scotland.htm>

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## Scottish Centre for Regeneration

This document is published by the Scottish Centre for Regeneration, which is part of the Scottish Government. We support our public, private and voluntary sector delivery partners to become more effective at:

- regenerating communities and tackling poverty
- developing more successful town centres and local high streets
- creating and managing mixed and sustainable communities
- making housing more energy efficient
- managing housing more efficiently and effectively

We do this through:

- coordinating learning networks which bring people together to identify the challenges they face and to support them to tackle these through events, networking and capacity building programmes
- identifying and sharing innovation and practice through publishing documents detailing examples of projects and programmes and highlighting lessons learned
- developing partnerships with key players in the housing and regeneration sector to ensure that our activities meet their needs and support their work

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The views expressed in case studies are not necessarily shared by the Scottish Centre for Regeneration or the Scottish Government. **March 2010**