



# Election Insights



## Forgotten populations March 2026

### In a flourishing Scotland, no one should be left behind

The impact of poverty is not always visible, with many people falling between the gaps of policy interventions. Found in 300 locations across Scotland, the Citizens Advice network delivers free, confidential and impartial advice to anyone who needs help. While systems and structures can forget certain groups, local CABs don't forget anyone.



Single working age people make up **34% of all advice provision – up 10% since 2021**

Single working age people more likely **male (58%) and more likely to live in deprived areas (40%)** in Scotland



Digital exclusion advice up **110%** since 2021



Living in **rural and island communities** costs: average **debt is over £11,300**, compared to almost **£9,000 in urban areas**

### In a just and compassionate Scotland, the next Scottish Government must invest in whole person support, end digital exclusion, and unlock the power of prevention.



#### Invest in whole person support

Whole family support should be delivered in partnership with whole person support to ensure all of us have access to the right help when we need it.



#### End digital exclusion

A digital Scotland is one where everyone has the capacity, connectivity and equipment needed to navigate our online world and access essential services.



#### Unlock the power of prevention

Prevention is vital. Communities that are equipped and empowered are best placed to identify and design long-term solutions for systems to change.

### Whole person support is needed when growing numbers of single working age people are falling through the gaps

Rising steadily through the pandemic, and with the twin cost-of-living and energy crises, single working age people are increasingly falling through the gaps in the safety net of support. Governments have understandably prioritised support for households with children, or older adults, meaning people already getting qualifying support are receiving extra help. It also means huge numbers of people are missing out entirely.

In 2025, single working age adults were more likely to receive advice on:



**Food insecurity:** 56% vs all other households (46%)



**Social housing rent arrears:** 27% vs all other households (19%)



**Homelessness:** 36% vs all other households (28%).



### **CAS election ask:**

Whole Family Support is pivotal to eradicating poverty. This must sit alongside whole person support – especially for those without a family safety net, or who fall through gaping holes in our social security system.

## **Ending digital exclusion is essential to securing a Scotland where people and communities can thrive**

Many people don't just need a device in their hand; they need that wrap-around whole person support to be able to fully navigate the digital realm. Frontline community organisations are the social infrastructure that underpins digital inclusion – as essential as the physical infrastructure of broadband cables and data centres.



### **Mairi's experience:**

Mairi lives in the Western Isles. She's disabled, in her 70s and anxious her mobile phone wasn't working properly. Without a working phone, Mairi wouldn't be able to arrange her care visits: causing her real worry. Through home visits from a trusted CAB adviser, Mairi received a free new mobile phone, via a partnership with CAS and Virgin Media O2. This brought huge relief as the 3G network switch-off in her area would have meant that she would not be able to contact her carers.



### **CAS election ask:**

The next Scottish Government should commit to delivering face-to-face digital skills programmes within communities to empower confidence and tackle exclusion.

## **Beyond mitigation, we must unlock the preventative potential within Scotland's communities**

Solutions lie in communities – yet they are often not equipped and empowered to find these. While third sector organisations can support communities to realise this potential, the sector is often locked into mitigation of state failure via service delivery. For our network, this is advice that changes lives. Enormous potential exists to reimagine this work to prevent harm and deliver systems change.



### **Local action for change:**

Colleagues from Glasgow Citizens Advice Bureau took to the streets of Dalmarnock Village after residents sought advice on housing repair issues. The team became familiar faces in the neighbourhood, speaking to 400+ of the development's 650 households. They supported residents access essential advice, while empowering the local community to engage with housing providers. That support has started to secure the systemic change needed for not just this development but future sites, preventing further harm.



### **CAS election ask:**

The next Scottish Government must provide frontline community services with the resources and space for innovation and imagination to tackle issues in partnership with the communities experiencing the most harm.

### **For more information please contact**

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