

General Election 2024: Our voices matter



POLITICS AND THE COMMON GOOD

Catholic social teaching guides us to begin our reflection on voting in the General Election on 4th July by considering how we can use our votes to serve human dignity and the common good.

Every general election offers us the opportunity to fulfil our responsibilities as Christian citizens in a democracy.

Politics is about making choices, choosing how we will use our resources, what our priorities will be, and who we will trust to make decisions on our behalf. These choices have both moral and practical aspects.

So we will want to consider the personal qualities of those who seek to represent us.

Are they trustworthy? Are they people of integrity? What skills and experience do they have that will inform their practice as MPs? Do they understand the locality they intend to represent? Do they understand the issues that matter in this constituency? Do they share our concern for the poor and for the earth?

We have a right and a duty to vote freely in the interests of advancing the common good. We do not vote as consumers, seeking the 'best deal', but as

citizens concerned with the good of our fellow citizens, and the conditions for mutual flourishing.

The [Social Responsibility Committee](#) has identified some key areas where political decisions have an important impact on the lives of women, and we suggest some questions we can ask prospective parliamentary candidates.



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POVERTY

The cost of energy, housing, food, and basic household goods has risen sharply in the last few years.

It is reported that close to 200,000 children in the UK are living in poverty. This means that their families do not have enough money to provide the necessities – food, clothing, a roof over their heads, a bed.

One reason for this is the decision made by previous governments to cap benefits to families with more than two children. The third and subsequent children receive no benefits, and this means that all the children, the whole family, suffer. Most families in this situation have at least one adult in work. This matters to women. Nine out of ten lone parents are women, women are more likely to be in low paid jobs, to have caring responsibilities, to suffer as a result of cuts to public services, and to be in insecure employment.

- *Will your party, if elected, scrap the two-child cap on benefit payments? On what sort of timescale?*
- *What steps will your party take to ensure that women with children are not disadvantaged at work because of their caring responsibilities?*
- *What will your party do to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to prepare for a dignified retirement, including people who have not been able to build a 'pension pot', who are more likely to be women?*
- *Will your party maintain the 'triple lock' to ensure that women depending on the state pension are not impoverished?*

The Living Income sets an 'income floor' that no one can fall below whether they are in or out of work. The level is based on the independently assessed Minimum Income Standard, which is also used to determine the Real Living Wage.

- *Would your party support the introduction of a Minimum Income standard or a Living Income to ensure that no-one is unable to afford the basic necessities of life?*

For more information go to:

- <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk>

- <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty>
- <https://svp.org.uk/social-justice>
- <https://www.csan.org.uk/guidance/csan-statement>



HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Housing costs in the UK are making it harder and harder for families to find a safe, secure and affordable home that meets their needs.

Families may find themselves in unsuitable temporary accommodation. People are forced to live in overcrowded conditions, in degraded properties, or to 'sofa-surf' with friends or family. Single people may have nowhere to stay but hostels or shelters. They may have no choice but to camp out in tents or live on the streets.

'No fault' evictions are an important factor in homelessness. The most common reasons for 'no-fault' evictions are the landlord intending to sell the property, or to re-let it at a higher rent.

Social housing is in short supply. Local authorities have to place families who become homeless in temporary accommodation or hostels far from their familiar surroundings, and move them frequently, making normal life impossible.

- *Will your party support local authorities to build new social housing ?*
- *Will your party reform the law to provide protection for tenants and controls on the rental market?*
- *Will your party commit to implementing Awaab's Law*, and to extend it to all landlords, not only social landlords?*

*Awaab's Law would require social landlords to ensure that properties to let are free of mould and damp.

For more information go to:

- https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/general_election
- <https://housingjustice.org.uk>

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PRISONS

Women should not be in prison unless they represent a clear danger to themselves or others.

Most women in prison have suffered domestic violence, have mental health problems, and have not committed violent crimes.

Most women who are in prison are mothers, and imprisoning mothers has long-term, devastating impact on the wellbeing of their children. Children may be taken into care without warning if their mother is unexpectedly sent to prison.

- *What is the policy of your party on custodial sentences for women? On the protection of children when a parent receives a custodial sentence?*
- *What steps would your party take to improve access to mental health services for women in prison?*
- *What is the policy of your party on criminal legal aid? How will you ensure that vulnerable people, and women in particular, are properly represented in court?*
- *What proposals do you have for supporting people leaving prison, especially young people and women, to prevent re-offending and enable a fresh start?*

For more information go to:

- <https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/latest/news>
- <https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk>

PRT has a very informative series of publications called Invisible Women:

[Invisible Women: Hope, health, and staff-prisoner relationships](#)

EDUCATION

Catholic schools educate about 850,000 children and young people in England and Wales. Almost half of these come from ethnic minority communities, and about 20% are from deprived communities. 10% or more of non-Catholic pupils are from the Muslim community.

There is significant opposition in principle to faith schools from organisations such as the National Secular Society and Humanists UK. It is argued that faith schools are divisive and give rise to discrimination and conflict.

The Bloom review of faith engagement with government [2023] identified religious literacy as a problem in many areas of public service.

The Church teaches that parents are responsible for the education of their children, and as such have a right to send their children to schools that will educate them in the faith and help them become mature Christian adults able to contribute to society.

- *What is your view of the place of faith in education? Do you agree that faith schools play a valuable role in offering parents a choice of schools for their children?*
- *Will your party commit to removing the 50% cap on faith admissions to new free schools?*
- *Will your party protect the rights of Catholic schools to determine their own religious education syllabus and to devote adequate teaching time to religious education?*
- *Do you agree that better religious literacy is important in our multi-cultural society? Will your party take steps to improve religious literacy in the public sector?*

For more information go to:

- <https://catholiceducation.org.uk>
- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64478b4f529eda00123b0397/The_Bloom_Review.pdf
- <https://catholicunion.org.uk/2024/05/final-push-to-scrap-the-cap>

REFUGEES AND MIGRATION

The 'hostile environment' that has been created to discourage migrants and asylum seekers from coming to the UK and settling here to build a new life is contrary to Catholic and biblical teaching on migration. It may be in breach of international law on sanctuary and human rights.

While it is necessary for the UK to protect its borders and manage immigration, this must be done in a way consistent with justice and human rights, and that fulfils our obligations under the various UN Conventions to which we are signatories.

Migrants and asylum seekers – legal or 'illegal' – are human beings whose dignity is to be respected. Under our current laws, refugees arriving in the UK by 'illegal' means such as small boats are deemed to be illegal immigrants. They are permanently excluded from claiming asylum or seeking protection or the right to remain in the UK. This policy applies whatever the situation from which the person is seeking refuge.

- *Will your party repeal the Illegal Migration Act 2023 and restore the rights of people seeking sanctuary to claim asylum in the UK?*
- *Will your party if elected end the policy of deporting unwanted asylum seekers to Rwanda?*
- *What steps will your party take to regularise the situation of the many people who are already trapped in 'no man's land' by current legislation?*
- *The present asylum and immigration system is expensive and unfair. What steps will your party take to change this?*
- *Will you end detention and give refugees the right to work after six months? Will you end detention and use community-based options to house refugees? Will you increase the number of case workers and improve training so that the system is quicker and fairer?*
- *Would you party establish more legal and safe routes to the UK for people who are unable to seek consular help or obtain visas in their country of origin?*

Many immigrants come to the UK to work. They play a crucial role in, for example, agriculture, social care, the NHS, and the hospitality sector. They may

be vulnerable to unscrupulous employers, agents or traffickers. They deserve the same pay and employment rights as all other workers.

- *Will your party undertake to protect the employment and personal rights of migrants who come to the UK to work or study?*

For more information go to:

- <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/love-the-stranger>
- <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/safe-routes-save-lives-refugees-tell-parliament>
- <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/immigration>
- <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-trafficking-and-modern-slavery>
- <https://www.medaille-trust.org.uk/modern-slavery-today>



LIFE ISSUES

Catholic teaching is clear that human life is a gift of God to be valued and protected from conception to natural death.

Changes to the law on assisted suicide [or assisted dying] have been proposed and may be brought before the next parliament. There may also be moves to change the law to decriminalise abortion and remove the requirement for medical supervision of abortions. Changes to the law to make surrogacy easier for commissioning parents have also been proposed by the Law Society.

Hospice care for people with terminal illnesses depends heavily on charity and intensive fund raising, and even so is only available to a limited number of people.

- *How will your party ensure good quality care for the terminally ill, and good quality palliative care, is available to all who need it?*
- *Are you in favour of changing the law to permit assisted suicide?*
- *Will you support changes in the law to reduce the time limit for abortions so that no viable child is aborted?*

For more information go to:

- <https://righttolife.org.uk>
- <https://www.carenotkilling.org.uk>
- <https://surrogacyconcern.uk>

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Each party is committed to the NHS and to improving the experience of patients. One key problem for the NHS is patients who no longer need to be in hospital but cannot be sent home because there is no social care in place to support them. Underlying this is the issue of funding and resources.

- *How will your party address the needs of the increasing numbers of elderly and chronically sick people who need care and support in their own homes?*
- *Should the next government commit to developing an integrated health and social care service? Could you work towards a cross-party approach to secure this?*
- *How should the costs of social care be met? Would you consider adopting the recommendations of the Dilnot Report of 2011? Do you have an alternative proposal?*

For more information go to:

- <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/resource/delayed-discharges-from-hospital>
- <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/care/arranging-care/homecare/support-after-hospital-discharge>
- <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/care/dilnot-commission>

CLIMATE CHANGE AND GLOBAL WARMING

Climate change, brought about by human actions, is one of the biggest challenges humanity has ever faced. The future of life on earth may depend on our taking action to keep the increase in global temperatures to 1.5 C.

We know what we must do to limit global warming. Our government must phase out the use of all fossil fuels as quickly as possible and move to renewable energy sources; and do this as part of an international commitment.

We would like to see an end to all investment in fossil fuels; more investment in green technologies at home; and the direction of UK overseas aid to limit the impact on those countries hardest hit by climate change abroad.

Climate change is not 'gender neutral.' While both women and men are theoretically susceptible to its effects, the impact of climate change is not evenly distributed. Women and girls are especially vulnerable due to economic, social, political, and cultural factors.

- *What plans does your party have to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels?*
- *Will you continue to grant new North Sea exploration and drilling licences?*
- *What steps will your party take, in government, to make the UK housing stock ready for more extreme weather conditions?*
- *Do you have plans for ensuring food security in the UK as the climate changes and the weather becomes less predictable?*
- *Would you be in favour of working with other countries to raise new taxes from the most polluting industries to support international efforts to mitigate the impact of climate change?*

For more information go to:

- <https://cafod.org.uk/campaign/uk-general-election-2024-a-guide-for-catholics-voters>
- <https://greenchristian.org.uk/general-election-pack-for-churches>
- <https://laudatosimovement.org>

DEVELOPMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY

We are concerned about the use of social media by children and young people, and the impact this may have on their mental wellbeing.

Recent research by the University of Edinburgh has shown that many young people are victims of online sexual exploitation and are exposed to online pornography and violence.

- *What steps would your party take to keep children and young people safe online?*

Artificial Intelligence systems have the potential to make a significant improvement to our lives, but also may present hazards. As with all technology, the purpose, design and oversight of the systems and their management in practice, will be critical.

AI systems may lead to redundancies in many industries.

AI systems also use substantial amounts of energy, and as their use increases this may exacerbate global warming.

- *How would your party ensure that the benefits of AI are shared by the whole community, and used to further equality and inclusion?*
- *Would your party be open to the creation of a sovereign wealth fund based on fair taxation of technology companies?*

For more information go to:

- <https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/2024/scale-of-online-harm-to-children-revealed-in-global-report>
- <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/pope-francis-urges-ethical-use-of-artificial-intelligence>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/mar/07/ai-climate-change-energy-disinformation-report>

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

In the last ten years, local authorities have been stripped of much of their funding from central government. This has meant that many community facilities have closed, impacting women's lives, especially women who are on low incomes or in caring roles. The closure of youth centres, children's centres, arts organisations, swimming pools and sports facilities all make life more difficult for women and families, as do cuts to public transport.

Much of the support that local government used to be able to offer to families, people with disabilities, and the elderly, and to community initiatives, is no longer 'affordable'.

We need to ask prospective parliamentary candidates how their party sees local government being supported to fulfil its many obligations and responsibilities in the future.

- *Will your party commit to fully fund local government to deliver services imposed by statute?*
- *How will you structure local government funding so that resources go where the need is greatest?*