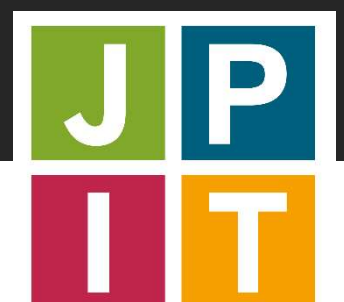




# General Election issues briefing 2024

Produced by the Joint Public Issues Team of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church





The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) helps the Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches to work together for peace and justice through listening, learning, praying, speaking and acting on public policy issues. Its work is guided by [Six Hopes for society](#), focused around the areas of poverty, refugees, the environment, the economy, peace, and politics.

**This briefing sets out some of the key issues at stake in the coming General Election in each of these policy areas, and suggests questions which might be raised with candidates about them.**

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Note that not everything in this briefing will be applicable in every country in the UK, due to devolved responsibilities. Figures and references are correct at the time of publication, May 2024.



# Called to love, pray and vote

We believe that Christians have an important role to play in elections: to love, to pray, and to vote. As we follow Jesus's commandment to love our neighbours, we must take part, debate with kindness, ask questions, demand honest answers and be offended when truth is not offered. We are called too to listen to those on the margins, seek good news for the poor, and stand up for those who are vulnerable – whether that is families who are struggling today, or future generations who do not have a vote but will be affected by our choices.

In this election, parties and candidates will have their own carefully selected messages to give to the electorate, which may not include the issues that we most care about. How can the scandal of foodbanks be ended? How can we avert climate catastrophe? How can we ensure refugees are treated fairly and humanely? You will have others. In playing our part in this General Election, we have the opportunity to raise these questions above the fog, and hold candidates accountable to providing solutions which work for the good of all. We pray that this briefing is helpful as you reflect, discern and participate.

**The Joint Public Issues Team**

## A prayer for voters

Loving God, we face a choice.

Be with us as we consider the options  
weigh the arguments  
and assess the claims and the candidates.

But also prompt us to listen:  
to the voices on the margins  
to the cry of the earth  
and to those who reach a different conclusion to us.

God, we pray that you would  
stimulate our minds  
stir our hearts  
and sanctify our choosing.

Help us also to remember  
your command to love our neighbours  
both during and after this election.

Amen



# Poverty



If everyone is made in God's image (Genesis 1:26), all should have the opportunity to flourish and realise the potential that God has put within them. Poverty denies many people these opportunities. In the Bible, God consistently shows a bias to people experiencing poverty and those who are excluded, and often speaks to and through those on the margins. Jesus proclaims a mission to be good news for the poor. Christians are called to tackle all that traps people in poverty and oppression.

The numbers of people experiencing poverty in the UK has steadily risen over the past decade – from 13.1 million in 2010 to 14.3 million by 2023, including 8.1 million working age adults, 4.3 million children and 1.9 million pensioners. However, the biggest change has been the increasing depth and duration of poverty. Destitution, the deepest form of poverty, which had been virtually eliminated in the UK, has re-emerged – rising past 1.5 million people in 2015, to 2.5 million prior to the pandemic, and onto 3.8 million, including one million children, [in the latest figures from 2022](#). To be classed as destitute these children experienced significant periods without food, were unable to maintain basic hygiene standards, or lacked shelter because of their family's low income.

Some groups of people are more likely to experience poverty than others. Around half of people in Pakistani and Bangladeshi households struggle against poverty. In 2024, for the first time data revealed that if you are a child of black, African or Caribbean heritage you were more likely to live in poverty than not (51%). Nearly a third of disabled people are in poverty, and informal carers are more likely to be in poverty than people without caring responsibilities. Poverty in rural areas can often be hidden, but can be intensified by a lack of public transport, seasonal working patterns and fuel costs.



A major reason for these increases in poverty is the reductions in the support offered by the benefits system. When the minimum wage was introduced in 1998, a low paid worker losing their job could expect to receive over 35% of their former wage in sickness or unemployment benefits. Today that figure is 13%. It is hardly a surprise that around half of all adults receiving the main income top-up benefit, Universal Credit, need to skip meals every month, and that [foodbanks are providing support to record numbers of people](#).

Poverty now causes hardship and suffering for more than 1 in 5 people across the UK, yet it is an avoidable, solvable problem. The systems and structures that trap people in poverty are designed – and can be re-designed. Proposals for new policies and practices already exist and form the stepping stones needed to rebuild a system that means poverty cannot hold anyone down.

As a bare minimum, the benefits system should enable people to avoid destitution by meeting their most basic physical needs – to be warm, dry, clean and fed. Churches have endorsed a proposal from anti-poverty organisations for an [‘Essentials Guarantee’](#) that would embed in our social security system the widely supported principle that Universal Credit should protect people from going without essentials of life.

As part of the [Let’s End Poverty movement](#), Churches are calling for political leaders to commit both to urgent action to stop rising poverty, and to developing a coordinated, long-term plan to end poverty in the UK in collaboration with people with direct experience of poverty.

How can we build a society where the poorest and most marginalised are at the centre?

#### **Questions for candidates:**

- Do you agree with the principle of the ‘Essentials Guarantee’ – that benefits should be set at a level high enough that families avoid destitution?
- Foodbank use has increased massively over the past decade – why do you think that is?
- What is your plan to tackle poverty in the UK over the long term?

#### **Resources to explore this further:**

[Changing Realities](#): a project documenting the experiences of people battling with poverty in their own words.

[Trussell Trust General Election Manifesto](#): sets out steps to build a future where no one needs a food bank to survive, including a social security system that is fit for purpose and cross-government action to ensure everyone has enough for the essentials.

JPIT blogs and briefings on poverty in the UK: <https://jpit.uk/category/poverty-and-inequality>

# Asylum and refugees



The story of the people of God is full of experiences of journeying and of exile. Perhaps because of this, a deep ethic develops through the Bible about how travellers and foreigners are to be treated. Repeated instructions to 'love the stranger', respect the rights of foreigners, ensure the fair treatment of those at risk of oppression, and the reminder that 'you were once strangers in Egypt', mean that commandments to protect migrants are the most-repeated injunctions in the Bible. For Christians, added to this imperative is the Gospel understanding that by welcoming the stranger, we welcome Christ himself (Matthew 25:35).

Since the last general election in December 2019, [116 migrants have lost their lives or went missing trying to reach the UK across the English Channel, including 13 children](#). The political arena is united in mourning this tragic loss of life, but that is where common ground ends. Many point the finger of blame at the criminal gangs who are endangering vulnerable people by putting them on inadequate vessels for huge profits. Others decry the lack of safe routes for genuine asylum seekers to reach the UK, forcing them to resort to the risky channel crossing. Still others blame the migrants themselves, who are perceived, by some, to be unworthy of entry into the UK; even if they have a genuine claim for asylum, there are those who assert that, having moved through safe countries already, there is no need for them to travel any further.

Given that the vast majority of those making the crossing would be legally entitled to asylum under UK law ([at least 67% in 2023](#)), and in recognition of our moral and legal responsibility to offer sanctuary to a fair number of those fleeing war, persecution, famine and climate catastrophe, [senior church leaders have been consistent in their appeal for parliament to pursue policies that are compassionate and fair](#).



However, recent legislation, aimed at deterring the small boat crossings over the English Channel, has resulted in parliament [all but banning the right to claim asylum in the UK](#), and pursuing ways to send those who come via irregular routes back to the countries they came from or another "safe" third country (most notably Rwanda), without even considering their case for asylum.

Meanwhile, those who have arrived have been offered shelter that has been frequently criticised as inappropriate, or even inhumane, while waiting for decisions about their claims. [At the end of 2023, 95,252 people were waiting](#) for an outcome on their initial claim for asylum, [nearly twice the number at the end of 2019](#). Of this number, 64% ([60,525 people](#)) had been waiting for more than six months. None have the right to work, and most are provided with just £7 per day to live on.

How can we become a society that welcomes the stranger?

#### **Questions for candidates:**

- How do you feel about the forcible sending of asylum seekers to another country without their claim being assessed in the UK?
- What would your approach be to the expansion of current resettlement programmes, and introduction of new safe routes for groups such as unaccompanied children, to prevent asylum seekers risking their lives to seek protection in the UK?
- Do you agree that asylum seekers should be given the right to work if their asylum claim takes over 6 months to be processed?

#### **Resources to explore this further:**

Refugee Council Briefing – Safe routes: the need for an ambitious approach (January 2024): <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Safe-routes-the-need-for-an-ambitious-approach-Refugee-Council-January-2024.pdf>

Together with Refugees – Fair Begins Here Campaign (December 2023): <https://togetherwithrefugees.org.uk/fair-begins-here-a-new-campaign-calling-for-a-fair-new-plan-for-refugees-that-works-for-everyone/>

Refugee Council Briefing – The Truth about Channel crossings and the impact of the Illegal Migration Act (October 2023): <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-truth-about-channel-crossings-and-the-impact-of-the-illegal-migration-act-Oct-2023.pdf>

Briefing from JPIT on UK asylum and migration policy (January 2023): <https://jpit.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Asylum-and-Migration-briefing-2023.pdf>

# Environment and climate change



In the book of Genesis, humans are shown to be part of God's Creation, shaped out of the same fabric as the earth itself. Humanity's interdependence with the rest of Creation means that the flourishing of humankind cannot be separated from the flourishing of all life. God commands us to act justly and in righteousness not only towards our fellow human beings, but to all Creation, pursuing a just and sustainable use of the world's resources. This includes acting such that future generations, whom God also loves, can enjoy and benefit from Creation too.

Humanity is living beyond the fragile limits of our planet. Political leaders have a critical role to play in responding to the climate crisis in the UK and globally, protecting nature and biodiversity, and steering the UK's journey towards net zero carbon emissions. [Recent research](#) found that the vast majority of people in Britain would like to see action from leaders to tackle climate change and protect nature, and that leadership from the government would offer hope as people want to feel part of a bigger move towards climate action, rather than individuals facing the brunt of costs or impacts.

According to the government's advisory Climate Change Committee, decarbonising the UK electricity system is ["the central requirement for achieving net-zero"](#) by 2050. The UK has made good progress in reducing carbon emissions from the generation of electricity, but is not currently on track with its target to reduce emissions by 90% by 2035. By then, 70% to 90% of electricity should come from renewable sources (which allows a part of this ambition to be achieved through new nuclear power plants). We now need specific plans and public investment at levels that will meet this ambition.



[Energy experts assessed in 2021](#) that no new fossil fuel supply projects should be started if the world is to limit temperature rises to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, so licensing of new oil and gas fields in the North Sea needs to end.

Taking action to make the UK's homes more energy efficient could have a significant impact on the nation's carbon footprint. [Housing represents 16% of the UK's carbon emissions](#), and Britain's residential properties are [the worst insulated in Europe](#). This means larger energy bills for

householders, as well as higher carbon emissions. Yet nowhere in the UK are developers of new housing currently required to build to full net zero standards, such as by including solar panels, and in England, plans to phase out fossil fuel heating systems have been delayed. Huge investment is also needed to retrofit public sector housing to increase its energy efficiency and reduce heating costs for tenants.

Globally, the climate crisis is impacting hardest on the poorest countries. International financing is needed both to enable the transition to clean energy, and to compensate for loss and damage as a result of climate-related disasters. During the Glasgow COP26 summit, the UK Government committed to a contribution of £11.6bn for International Climate Finance over five years, but has not met this commitment to date. The reality is that the future levels of funding required to support developing countries is beyond government budgets, and innovative new international financing mechanisms are urgently needed. These could include a global air fuel tax, private jet tax, a tax on the fuel for maritime shipping, a global financial transaction tax on currency exchange, or sovereign debt relief for countries impacted by severe climate events.

### How can we nurture a planet where our environment is renewed?

#### Questions for candidates:

- In order to get us on track for achieving net-zero emissions in the UK, what policies must the government introduce in the next parliament?
- How would you improve the energy efficiency of Britain's homes?
- How should the UK contribute to ensuring that the poorest countries have the financing needed to deal with the unjust impacts of climate change?

#### Resources to explore this further:

COP28 – the conclusion of the 2023 climate summit: [COP28 – A call to “accelerate action” \(jpit.uk\)](#)

Zero Carbon Electricity: [CCC: Here's how the UK can get reliable zero-carbon electricity by 2035 - Carbon Brief](#)

Net zero construction plans: [Delayed consultation on net zero construction ‘a blow to UK homeowners’ | Housing | The Guardian](#)

Loss and Damage: [Christian Aid ‘Counting the Cost’ report 2023 \(christianaid.org.uk\)](#)

# Economy



God created human beings to live together with one another in communities and as part of God's Creation. Without this interdependence we cannot experience 'life in all its fullness' which Jesus offers (John 10:10). Economic activities are a vital aspect of this healthy common life, and an expression of relationships and moral choices, as we see in the many parables that Jesus told about the uses of money. We are called to find ways of living, working and managing our resources together that prevent injustice, embody fairness, and lead to the flourishing of both people and planet.

The UK has had several years of economic difficulties and for most of the population, this has been experienced as a cost of living crisis. But it should also be recognised that UK is still a wealthy nation, that that wealth has steadily increased even over the past decade, and that it is predicted to continue to increase.

The major parties at this general election are all making increasing economic growth a key objective, which means that they wish for the total value of all the goods and services consumed in the UK to continue to increase year on year. Growth is seen as the primary aim of economic policy because it has been linked with improved quality of life for most people across society, including things such as better health and life expectancy. This link, which is the key justification for targeting growth, has become more tenuous in the UK over the last 15 years – with the poorest families and regions becoming disconnected from the benefits of growth first.



Growth has always had a cost. Ever-increasing consumption has environmental consequences. Best known of these is growth's link to the increased production of greenhouse gasses, but it is also tightly linked to other environmental problems such as deforestation, air pollution, and biodiversity loss.

Economic growth in the UK can also be at the expense of exploiting the people and resources of other less developed nations. In the past this may have been via conquest and military means, but today's exploitation is enabled by unequal trading, financial and taxation relationships.

To be just, economic policy needs to say much more than "we want more wealth", but identify how economic activity will enable the wellbeing of people and nature, by sustaining the environment, promoting justice toward less developed nations, and distributing its benefits within the UK.

**How can we create a just economy that enables the flourishing of all life?**

**Questions for candidates:**

- How would you ensure that future economic growth is environmentally sustainable?
- Do you feel that economic impacts and benefits are currently fairly distributed across society?
- Do you think the current tax system is effective in ensuring that those people and companies with the greatest resources contribute appropriately to the funding of public services?

**Resources to explore this further:**

JPIT's [Just Economics course](#) for small groups

# Peace and conflict



The call to be peacemakers is a central Christian vocation. The Biblical understanding of peace is a very rich concept which encompasses that deep and lasting wholeness, integrity, well-being and flourishing we experience when injustice is overcome and lives are transformed, both at the individual and communal level. It is to seek this kind of peace that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, calls his followers, through preventing bloodshed and seeking reconciliation and right relationships.

The military and humanitarian challenges prompted by current conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, and the threat they pose to global peace and security, will be major concerns for the next UK government. The defence budget has risen significantly over the last five years, but the work of building a more peaceful and secure world is much broader than this.

For the majority of the world's population, 'security' is about reliable access to food, water, education and healthcare, on which the armed forces have little impact. The downturn in the UK economy during the Covid-19 pandemic caused a drop in the level of UK government spending on international development, yet the government cut aid still further by reneging on its commitment to meet the UN target of spending 0.7% of national income on fighting global poverty. UK development aid [still stands at 0.5% of GNI today](#). This has caused major cutbacks in the support the UK provides for education, poverty reduction, humanitarian relief and conflict prevention around the world.



The aftermath of bombing in Gaza City on October 9 2023.

[Photo](#) by Naaman Omar / APA Images, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

As our world suffers the pain of major military conflicts, the funding of the UK Government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund has been substantially reduced. Much of this fund has also been focused on the training of security forces and police, rather than addressing the underlying causes of conflict. The UK has

highly skilled aid professionals and well-respected expertise in government in this area. The UK's conflict prevention work needs long-term funding to provide reliable support to civil groups and local NGOs with track records in conflict mediation and peacebuilding. Increasing spending on arms and defence while reducing funding for conflict prevention is short-sighted.

One of the positive initiatives in arms control in recent years has been the introduction of the UN Treaty on the Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Even though the UK government and other nuclear weapons states oppose the Treaty, it has enabled governments around the world to come together to work out how to reduce and then eliminate nuclear weapons. Arms control initiatives (either treaties or protocols) are also needed to secure agreements in nuclear or conventional arms, including in the new technologies of killer robots and weapons in space. The UN Secretary General has called for a Special Session on Disarmament to be held at a future UN General Assembly, as a way of building commitments to reduce the harm done by conflict, whilst also reducing the likelihood of conflict occurring.

### How can we cultivate a world that actively works for peace?

#### **Questions for candidates:**

- What do you feel the UK's responsibilities are for tackling global poverty, and what would your timetable be for restoring UK international development spending to 0.7% of GDP?
- In a dangerous and violent world, what contribution can the UK make to conflict prevention?
- How can the UK help to create the conditions for effective and meaningful peace negotiations in Israel and Palestine?

### Resources to explore this further:

The case for protecting Britain's International Development commitment: [A briefing from UK Churches](#)

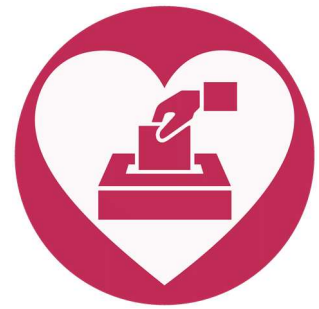
UN Special Session on Disarmament: [Briefing from JPIT](#)

Sustainable Development Goal 16 - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development - [Goal 16 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(un.org\)](#)

[Conflict Prevention and 'A New Agenda for Peace' \(jpit.uk\)](#)

The UK's 'Conflict Framework': [Ensuring the UK's new conflict framework successfully promotes peace - The Foreign Policy Centre \(fpc.org.uk\)](#)

# Politics



The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu once famously observed, “When people say that religion and politics don't mix, I wonder which Bible it is they are reading.” The Bible tells the story of God’s intimate concern with how human societies are ordered and governed, and stresses the particular responsibilities of those with power to judge wisely, act mercifully, protect the vulnerable, speak truth, and uphold justice. Through the incarnation, Jesus immersed himself in the injustices and sufferings of the world and the political issues of his day. Engagement with politics is one vital way that Christians live out his commandment to love our neighbours.

Trust in politics in the UK is at an all-time low. Polling shows that [there is little faith in politicians and government ministers to tell the truth](#), and that [two-thirds of people have little confidence that they have a meaningful say on the decisions made by the government](#). Some of this is the direct result of the behaviour and actions of politicians, but a gloomy economic backdrop of stagnating living standards and high levels of inequality also has a significant impact on how people feel.

Politics should be a way of having a national conversation about priorities, and about the best ways of seeking the common good. People feeling they don’t have a stake in that conversation, or that their needs are not heard or understood, is a recipe for disengagement, disenchantment and anger. We see symptoms of this across many western democracies at present. Those offering simplistic solutions can hold greater



appeal, amplified by the algorithms and echo-chambers of social media, resulting in an increasingly polarised and fragmented political discourse – and consequently, a more divided society.

A toxic political climate comes at an increased personal cost for those who seek elected office, and their staff and volunteers. Many politicians experience high levels of abuse online, and threats to their safety, which put off some from standing.

Yet this is a time when we need politics – and good people willing to serve in public life – to rise to the many complex long-term challenges facing our country and our world. These include how to ensure new technology and globalisation bring public benefits, tackle conflict and climate change, improve public services and meet the needs of an aging population while managing the public finances responsibly. The risk is that without effective politics, decisions will be made that serve the interests of those with the most money, power and influence, rather than the common good. That's why it's vital that ways are found to rebuild trust in our political system, and embed integrity and accountability within it.

How can we build a politics characterised by listening, kindness and truthfulness?

**Questions for candidates:**

- How would you listen to your constituents, and enable them to hold you accountable?
- How would you seek to increase people's faith in politics and politicians?
- What would you do to ensure government decisions on policies that affect people living in poverty are informed by lived experience?

**Resources to explore this further:**

Faith leaders call for truth and integrity in politics (November 2022): [Fulfil your pledge to govern with integrity, faith leaders urge prime minister | Quakers in Britain](#)

JPIT resource for small groups on faith and politics: [The Art of the Possible – Joint Public Issues Team \(jpit.uk\)](#)

## Further resources

### **Voter Registration Champions**

This new initiative aims to equip local churches to increase democratic participation through registering people to vote, providing information about the need to have appropriate photo ID, and encouraging people to vote on polling day.

### **Hosting a hustings**

Holding an election meeting gives members of the public the chance to listen to and ask questions of the candidates. Churches and community organisations can host these events as a public service, to support the democratic process, to facilitate public debate and as a contribution to the common good. Our guidance will help you to organise safe and successful events which comply with the law.

### **Hopes for manifestos**

Explore the policy changes that could make a difference across JPIT's Six Hopes for Society. In our podcast series from 2023, experts from the team talk through some of the key issues.

### **Engage with your candidates about poverty**

As part of the Let's End Poverty campaign, we want every candidate standing at the next General Election to be asked what they plan to do to tackle poverty. Get involved by reaching out to the candidates standing in your area. Find toolkits and training to help you at: [letsendpoverty.co.uk/candidates/](https://letsendpoverty.co.uk/candidates/)



### **Politics in the Pulpit?**

Each week on our lectionary-based preaching podcast, we welcome a different guest to discuss the political dimensions present in the set Bible readings, and reflect on how they connect with the week's current news and our calling to be justice seekers.

### **Small group resources**

Use our free courses to dig deeper into issues including poverty, the economy, politics, and how change happens.

Find all these and more at [jpit.uk/election](https://jpit.uk/election)

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