

ECONOMIC (IN)JUSTICE

FACTSHEET - EXPLAINER

Name	Helen Barnard
Details, area of experience	“Helen has worked across policy and analysis at JRF, most recently leading the policy and partnerships team to develop new solutions to solve poverty and prior to that, building the first iteration of JRF’s monitoring and analysis team, examining the key social, economic and public policy trends and changes affecting people and places in poverty.” (www.jrf.org.uk)
Interview date	November 2020
Issues addressed	Causes of poverty interlinked with employment, housing and social security; the need for a redesigned economy and housing market; the effect of the pandemic on low income families; what the recovery should look like; what form activism should take.
Injustice category (linked to economic injustice)	ability <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> age <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> class <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> faith <input type="checkbox"/> gender <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> neuro-diversity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> race <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sexuality <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Key words	Economic justice Being held back In-work poverty Service sector Housing market

Brief summary (key points)

Helen Barnard explains how the causes of poverty interlink with employment, housing and social security, and the need for a redesigned economy.

What would an economically just society look like?

One in which everyone can thrive and no one is locked in poverty, held back in education or employment due to racism, sexism, homophobia or discrimination against the disabled.

What society do we live in now?

An economy designed to hold people back – people from disadvantaged groups trapped in low paid jobs which dominate in some parts of the country, struggling to stay afloat. A housing market not designed to give easy access to secure homes, with most on low incomes housed in the private rented sector. Rents rising with wages, a surge in homelessness. Social security weakened by cuts and freezes. Growth in the service and care sectors where employers operate a low pay/ high turnover business model and workers have no career paths to better paid jobs. Most people in work poverty are employed in shops, cafes, warehouses etc. High stress, low dignity, low pay.

What needs to be done?

Redesign the economy with different groups working together to do this. Focus on quality of jobs, not quantity. Regulate to provide more job security. Use consumer power to demand living wage, regular shifts etc. Use the soft power of government procurement to influence employers to improve pay, training and career paths. Provide business support and advice to nudge people up the value chain. Redesign the housing market, investing in low cost, rented social housing and better standards in the private rented sector. Have a good social security system.

Is a minimum wage the answer?

The living wage is an important initiative but poverty is now mainly in working families. As the minimum wage rose, social security was cut so many families lost out. Rising minimum wages alone don't get rid of poverty if people cannot work enough hours. There also needs to be a minimum number of hours.

What about food banks?

They are an expression of compassion but food is neither the problem nor the solution: we need to move beyond them to demand economic justice. Everyone should have the dignity of enough money to do a food shop. People need money but council schemes for crisis loans or grants have been cut.

What has been the effect of COVID?

	<p>It has made life harder for those struggling and undone progress in narrowing children’s attainment gap and therefore employment prospects. However, it has shone a light on injustices always there – the importance of low paid workers and how insecure they are. And it has shown what is possible when we have the will – furlough, boost to Universal Credit, halt to evictions, employers allowing flexible working. Can we harness this to create a new kind of normal life? It’s an opportunity to redesign, not just build what was there before.</p> <p>So what next? The last ‘recovery’ after the recession saw repeated financial blows to people on low incomes. More people from disadvantaged groups got into work but were stuck in low income jobs. The housing supply recovered but not in social housing. The government tried to reduce spending before recovery had got going. The freeze in working age benefits meant that prices rose and incomes stood still. Then COVID hit the poorest hardest. We need a different kind of recovery – good quality work, low cost homes.</p> <p>Advice to activists Think big, campaign smart. Seek common ground, not high ground: too many campaigners use the language of their bases, alienating others. Use language the public can engage with, emphasise common values. Reach out to others and connect with those who don’t already agree. Let people in poverty lead. Learn from organisations and individuals already working in these ways. Use popular culture and personal experience.</p>
Stand-out quotations	<p>“An economically just society is one where everyone can thrive, ... nobody is locked in poverty.”</p> <p>“What we’ve seen ... was more and more people pulled into the situation of constant insecurity, having to go without essentials because they can’t get a decent job and an affordable home, and the support that all of us should be able to rely on within our economy.”</p>
Main themes for learners	<p>How and why people are locked in poverty?</p> <p>The need for a redesigned economy with a different approach to employment and housing.</p> <p>The impact and opportunities of COVID.</p> <p>What does smart activism look like?</p>