



The aim of the alliance ‘*Is it a crime to be poor?*’ (ICP) is to put an end to the ‘criminalisation of poverty’ & ‘crimes of poverty’. We will mobilise power-holders, decision-makers and the general public to achieve this aim.

The ICP alliance considers poverty to not only refer to low levels of financial resources and basic assets, but also the absence of experience and connections that are essential for accessing quality education, housing and employment. Poverty amplifies the stressors of daily life and unfairly impacts the most vulnerable people in society, leading to the widening of social and health inequality. These marginalised and minoritised people are more exposed to the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and greatly harmed by it. This includes the unfair treatment of individuals and communities by the CJS because of conditions of poverty, as well as ‘deviant’ behaviours arising out of conditions of poverty and structural inequalities. Examples of this include:

- **Poverty leading to the school-to-prison pipeline** – School exclusion is correlated with contact with the criminal justice system, and therefore a narrowing of opportunities in adult life, and, in some cases, incarceration. 48% of adult prisoners in England and Wales had been permanently excluded from school; 63% temporarily excluded. A lack of resources for children and young people experiencing difficulties at school leads to higher levels of them being excluded from school, therefore feeding a pipeline that widens inequality .
- **The criminalisation of begging and rough sleeping** – begging and rough sleeping are criminalised by anti-social behaviour laws, which punish people for being poor and mentally ill.
- **Prosecution for crimes of desperation/survival** – low level, volume crimes such as stealing food, sanitary products and baby products are punished by the criminal law with relatively harsher sanctions than those imposed on the rich for offences such as tax evasion.
- **Imprisonment for non-payment of council tax** – owing council tax is not a crime, but is punishable by incarceration for up to three months in England. In 2018, Wales repealed the provision for imprisonment; England should follow its lead.
- **Criminalisation of non-payment of the TV licence** – the non-payment of the TV licence is a criminal offence, unlike other forms of debt which are a civil matter. This offence disproportionately affects women, and can result in incarceration, which in turn impacts their children and families.
- **A problematic criminal justice approach, rather than public health response, to drug use** – the motivation to use drugs is complicated; this is made worse by conditions of poverty and a CJ response.

How will the ICP alliance achieve its mission?

To achieve our aim of ending the ‘criminalisation of poverty’ and ‘crimes of poverty’, the ICP alliance will:

- Campaign to raise awareness of the over-policing of impoverished communities, and the criminalisation of poverty that takes place within the CJS and other systems and structures
- Work to change the way people in poverty are presented and portrayed by the media and within political debates, including challenging the conflation of poverty and criminality
- Conduct research on areas where the criminalisation of poverty is evident, in order to tailor evidence-based solutions
- Focus attention on structural inequalities that generate conditions of poverty that can foster criminal activity
- Centre the voices of people with lived experience of poverty and the CJS.

ICP Alliance Partners:

The ICP Alliance is a coalition of academics and charities, made up of representatives from APPEAL, University of Birmingham, Coventry University, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, Liberty, Prisoners’ Advice Service, Durham University, Carolan57 Ltd, Canterbury Christ Church University, Revolving Doors, and University College London.

We want to see a world in which no one is criminalised simply for being poor and where structural inequalities are tackled in policy and practice.