

Major report finds poverty absent from political debate

August 19 2013

With the economy once again dominating media coverage and public anxiety in the lead-up to the federal election, a new campaign by leading academics is urging Australians to consider how decisions on expenditure will affect poverty.

A comprehensive audit outlining the implications for [poverty](#) of the policies of Australia's three major political parties has been released by [Academics Stand Against Poverty \(ASAP\) Oceania](#), established under the auspices of the Social Justice Network at the University of Sydney.

The [Australian Political Party Poverty Audit](#) (PDF, 560kb) consists of short, readable analyses by leading experts exploring the impact on poverty in areas such as migration, industrial relations, children and family policy, Indigenous policy, and disability policy.

"Whether a party's policy will condemn entire groups to sustained poverty is at best a minor note in the overall songbook of campaigning," says Associate Professor Danielle Celermajer, Director of the Human Rights program area at the University of Sydney and co-founder of the Australian arm of ASAP.

"This is in part because questions of poverty and distribution are apparently not that 'sexy'. They don't seem to have the same photo or byline opportunities as sinking boats or mud-slinging politicians. But it is also because the public just does not know enough about the policies of the various parties and their implications for poverty and distribution."

The report seeks to address the gap by outlining the policies of the Coalition, the ALP and the Greens in various areas, and explaining in real terms how this will influence poverty and who is likely to be affected.

In an analysis of [migration policy](#), Dr Anna Boucher, of the University of Sydney's Department of Government and International Relations, outlines the grave risks for Australia's growing temporary [immigrant population](#).

According to Dr Boucher, while both the Coalition and the ALP have supported large-scale increases in temporary economic immigration, neither party has sought to remove the welfare waiting periods introduced in the early 1990s. The Greens have advocated that immigration policy should include services for immigrants, but does not specify whether these provisions would extend to temporary immigrants, who now outnumber permanent immigrants.

"There is the possibility of the emergence of an underclass of residents in Australia denied access to basic social and health entitlements over the short to medium term," Dr Boucher says.

"In the case of New Zealanders who do not naturalise to Australian citizenship, these people are denied lifetime access to social welfare payments, a reality of which many New Zealand residents in Australia are unaware."

The academics behind the audit hope their insights will promote discussion and action on poverty, which currently affects more than a million Australians.

"Our aim in releasing this audit to the public is to stimulate discussion about the poverty implications of the policies of the parties who are

seeking our votes," says Associate Professor Celermajer.

"Most importantly, we hope that Australians will insist that the question of poverty in Australia and the world be moved from the remote periphery to the centre of our debates about the future direction of this country."

Provided by University of Sydney

Citation: Major report finds poverty absent from political debate (2013, August 19) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-08-major-poverty-absent-political-debate.html>

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