



# End Child Poverty Coalition Changing Children's Lives:

Ending the Injustice of Child Poverty in the UK



# Foreword from Joseph Howes, Chair of End Child Poverty Coalition and CEO of Buttle UK



We believe that we can build a future where every child in the UK has a safe and happy childhood, one where they can thrive and achieve their potential. In order to do this, we all must work together and push for change for children and young people and reduce the millions across the UK that are living in poverty – an entirely unacceptable statistic.

Our Coalition aims to make child poverty a thing of the past. I am extremely proud to chair the End Child Poverty Coalition – a group that is made up of over 850 organisations including charities, child welfare organisations, social justice groups, faith groups, trade unions and others, united in our vision of a UK free of child poverty. This amazing alliance of organisations are together helping to release the grip that poverty holds over so many lives, and that damages countless futures.

Child poverty is not inevitable, and doesn't have to be accepted. During the Covid 19 pandemic, the government increased social welfare payments for those on Universal Credit by £20 per week. This strengthened the safety net that should be there to catch us all, when it was most needed. As a result, it lifted around 400,000 families out of poverty. Sadly, the government has not maintained this benefits uplift – and as the everyday cost of living increases, we have a new threat that will affect everyone in the UK.

We now know however, that we are not all in the same boat when facing a crisis. All families need enough money, from either work which pays a living wage, or via benefit payments that recognise the real cost of living, in order to meet their needs.

We also know that some people, and some combinations of circumstances, are more vulnerable to child poverty than others. A black, disabled child is more likely to live in poverty than their peers. Single mothers are more likely to struggle to meet everyday costs for their children than families with two parents. More must be done to recognise these particular vulnerabilities. Through our collective work with children and young people across our organisations, and the data we collect, we will shine a light on these communities, pushing the government to provide additional support when it has been neglected in the past. All of the organisations in this Coalition stand up for children in poverty every day, we ask no less of the government.

Here we set out some very practical recommendations that can be taken forwards by governments across the UK to reduce levels of child poverty. This includes a recommendation for a roadmap which would see cross-departmental working across government to put in place targets and measures for ending child poverty. We need a cross-party plan to tackle this issue and keep its focus in the longer term. We urge representatives in governments across Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England to work with us to implement these measures to ensure that the scandal of children living in poverty the UK is one that is brought to an end

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'J' and 'H' intertwined.

Joseph Howes,  
Chair of the End Child Poverty Coalition  
and CEO of Buttle UK

# End Child Poverty members see the real impacts that poverty has on the daily lives of children.

- Government data shows **4.2 million** children living in poverty (after housing costs) between April 2020 and April 2021, that is **29% of all children**
- **Nearly half** of children in lone-parent families live in poverty, compared with **1 in 4** of those in families with two parents<sup>1</sup>
- **42%** of children in families with 3 or more children are in poverty, **up from 36%** a decade ago<sup>2</sup>
- **36%** of children living in families where someone has a disability are in poverty<sup>3</sup>
- Poverty puts pressure on struggling families, and undermines their ability to cope - in England, children in the most deprived decile were around **13 times more likely** to be on a Child Protection Plan and over **10 times more likely** to be looked after than a child in the least deprived decile<sup>4</sup>
- Deaths during infancy are strongly associated with preterm birth, fetal growth restriction and congenital abnormalities, which disproportionately affect the most disadvantaged families in society. **The risk of infant death increases with greater levels of maternal deprivation**<sup>5</sup>
- Children in Bangladeshi and Pakistani households were the **most likely to live in low income and material deprivation** out of all ethnic groups<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Household's Below Average Income Statistics (HBAI), Department for Work and Pensions, March 2023

<sup>2</sup> Household's Below Average Income Statistics (HBAI), Department for Work and Pensions, March 2023

<sup>3</sup> Household's Below Average Income Statistics (HBAI), Department for Work and Pensions, March 2023

<sup>4</sup> Bywaters, P. and Skinner, G. 2022. The Relationship Between Poverty and Child Abuse and Neglect: New Evidence

<sup>5</sup> <https://stateofchildhealth.rpch.ac.uk/evidence/mortality/infant-mortality/>

<sup>6</sup> ONS, 2020. Child Poverty and Educational Outcomes by Ethnicity

## 1. Every child should grow up with access to enough money to achieve a decent standard of living.

1.1 The government must address benefit levels, so families receive the support they need.

Every family should be able to afford the essentials. Our social security system needs proper investment by government so that the safety net catches us all should we need it. When cost of living increases occur, benefit payments and earnings must always rise at the same rate. Families should receive their full entitlement and not have amounts deducted due to the two child limit, benefit cap or other deductions such as advance repayments or tax credit overpayments. All families who need support should be offered this irrespective of their immigration status.

1.2 The government must develop a family-focused strategy to support parents who are able to work.

Parents are constrained in their employment choices due to the cost and availability of childcare. In 2022 the average cost of a part time nursery place for a child under 2 was £138.70 per week, or over £7,210 per year. Families on low incomes are able to receive some support with childcare costs through Universal Credit. But these childcare costs need to be paid upfront and in 99 per cent of local areas, the average price of a full time nursery place for a child under two is higher than the maximum costs supported through universal credit and the benefits system. Lone Parent families can even risk getting into more debt if working more hours, because of the high cost of childcare.

A family-focused employment strategy would ensure working parents can access at least 30 hours of fully available and funded free childcare from the time at which maternity or paternity pay ends, alongside extended schools which should provide comprehensive out-of-school and holiday childcare.

Work does not provide a guaranteed route out of poverty. 75% of children growing up in poverty live in a household where at least one person works. A family-focused employment strategy would recognise that full-time work is not always suitable or appropriate for all parents (for example, for parents with a health condition, disability or young children). It should tackle low wage and insecure work, particularly in part-time and flexible roles which are often the best suited to parents with young children. The strategy should also ensure that paying parents the living wage is a mandatory obligation of all employers, alongside driving up pay and conditions, in order to ensure parents can escape in-work poverty.

1.3 Further financial support should be provided to families who are caring for a disabled child.

Families who care for disabled children can face significant financial hardship. The costs associated with care needs amount to around £580 a month on average, with 1 in 4 families facing costs of over £1,000 per month. Yet the Carers Allowance benefit payment, for those giving regular care, pays the equivalent of just under £2 per hour.

“

The concept of money has been ingrained into my head to always be my first thought. Growing up, I didn't have the luxury of buying something first and worrying about the money after. Ever since I could remember, I looked at the price on everything before I asked my parents to buy something for me. I knew at the age of 7 where to look for the price labels and I felt that £4.99 for a magazine was too much to ask for. I knew that if I asked for new school shoes today, I'd have to wait about a year for them to properly wear out before I could get a new pair. I've kept most of these money cautious habits even to this day.

My parents had moved to this country in search for a better life and while they were getting used to this transition and adjusting to new jobs, we weren't as financially secure as we are now. This meant that money was particularly tight growing up. We had enough money to get by, but it wasn't a lot. I never really noticed much because it was my 'normal' but there were small things such as putting water in shampoo bottles to make them last longer, or storing any leftover food to eat later rather than throwing it away, that made me realise that we had to be careful with the way we spent my family's income. I am extremely privileged and grateful to have gradually come out of living under such financial stress, however not everyone has been as lucky as I have. This is why listening to everyone's story, understanding everyone's story and accepting everyone's story is so vital. Every family and child should be offered extra financial support, if they need it.

”

An End Child Poverty Youth  
Ambassador

<sup>7</sup> Coram Family and Childcare, 2022, Childcare Survey 2022

<sup>8</sup> Coram Family and Childcare, 2021, Childcare Survey 2021

<sup>9</sup> Gingerbread and Stepchange, 2021, The Single Parent Debt Trap

<sup>10</sup> Households Below Average Income, Statistics on the number and percentage of people living in low income households for financial years 1994/95 to 2019/20, Table 4.3db. Department for Work and Pensions, 2021

■ **1.4** The government must ensure locally managed funds are available to help to families in crisis.

In England Local Welfare Assistance schemes provide crucial support for families in an emergency, yet in reality these are one-off discretionary payments which are hard to access and provide limited temporary relief. These schemes are also not available in every local authority, and where they are they can be under threat. 1 in 5 local authorities in England no longer operates a scheme. Where schemes do operate, in 2020/21 the per capita spend in England on these schemes was just £1.30, in comparison to £6.89 in Scotland and £8.07 in Wales. The government must provide sustainable, dedicated funding so that every local authority in England has a local welfare assistance scheme to provide financial support for families facing a crisis. These schemes must be there for all families in crisis and should not be seen as a prop for easing problems with longer-term social security support.

Across Wales, the Discretionary Assistance Fund provides grants to households in an emergency and in extreme financial hardship. There should be a long term continuation of this scheme, and for the scheme to be flexible and responsive to the needs of families in crisis.

The Scottish Welfare Fund provides a much-needed for families. The current level of investment in the fund and the administration of the scheme still appears inadequate to maximise its potential as a dignified statutory alternative to food banks and other forms of charity aid. Additional resourcing should be allocated along with refreshed guidance to ensure all those eligible to apply for support are aware of and can access the fund.

In Northern Ireland families in an extreme, exceptional or crisis situation can apply for assistance from Discretionary Support in the form of an interest free loan or non-repayable grant. The government must be able to continue with its comprehensive review on the fund irrespective of the political situation.



“

Poverty is hard, but it is an extra kind of hard when you have a child with a disability. In my family we have three, my mother works multiple jobs to be able to work around the many hospital appointments and stays and I am a carer. Getting the equipment we need so my two year old sister can have a good quality of life is difficult. Everything made for disabilities is very expensive. The NHS does not provide much. I believe that only my sister's Atom chair was paid for by the NHS which I am grateful for, but my mother fought for months in order to get it. We have to fight the NHS to get my sister a wheelchair, but they won't supply one that works for her and the wait time is a long time. 10 months is a long time when you are only 2 and it is really hard to see her look at everyone else her age running around and she can't play too.

We live in a house that is not accessible for my little sister, but because my family is so large (8 children) the council won't provide any accessible housing for us to rent. The private market is almost impossible and we won't be able to adapt anything we rent to her needs. So we are on our own with that, hopefully we can figure it out.

”

**An End Child Poverty Youth  
Ambassador**

11 [Scope, 2019, Disability Price Tag](#)  
12 Gov.UK from <https://www.gov.uk/carers-allowance>,  
accessed 07/03/2023  
13 [End Furniture Poverty, 2022, The State of Crisis Support](#)  
14 [End Furniture Poverty, 2022, The State of Crisis Support](#)

## 2. Every child should live in a decent, secure, affordable and warm home.

2.1 The government must ensure families have a long term decent home by investing in social housing, ending no-fault evictions and by ensuring struggling families can afford their rent.

A decent home is one which is weatherproof, can be kept warm and is in a good state of repair. Yet In 2018 there were 1 million families with children living in non-decent housing in England, equivalent to 1.8 million children.

In 2021 there were 104,000 families in England who were at risk of eviction and just over 134,000 children were homeless and living in temporary accommodation in the UK.

Temporary accommodation, where families are housed by local authorities when they face homelessness, can be particularly bad. In London families housed in this way faced toxic mould, cold temperatures, and a lack of adequate space. Often these placements are often far from temporary, with some families being housed in this way for several years.

2.2 The government must ensure families are able to afford to heat their homes

Families with children more likely to be in fuel poverty than other groups and often the poorest families are also those living in the worst housing, which is poorly insulated. It was estimated that 2.2 million UK households with dependent children were in fuel poverty from 1st April 2022. This is a 74% increase since 2019 and more than half a million more households with children since October 2021. As there are 6.6 million households with dependent children in England, this equates to a third of those households facing fuel poverty.

The government must ensure that low-income families are protected from the ever increasing cost of energy. These families need ongoing financial support to ensure they can heat their homes.

2.3 The government must work alongside local authorities to ensure families have access to the basics needed for a home.

Only 2% of social rented properties are let as furnished or partly furnished (i.e. floor coverings/curtains) in comparison to 29% of private rented properties. Families need access to the basic essentials including a bed, carpets, curtains and a fridge. Families should have access to funds to buy these goods themselves, or help could be provided via a properly functioning local authority scheme. Social landlords could also be encouraged to provide furnished accommodation.

<sup>15</sup> [Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006, A Decent Home](#)

<sup>16</sup> Number based on the Decent Homes Standard 26 hazard model.

Source: EHS 2018-19 SPSS data, 2018 physical survey.

<sup>17</sup> From research carried out by YouGov for Shelter.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 11th November – 6th December 2021 and was carried out online.

<sup>18</sup> From the latest figures produced separately for each of the four nations. The number in England is 121,680, Northern Ireland is 3,596, Scotland is 7,130, Wales is 1,791.

<sup>19</sup> [Human Rights Watch and The Childhood Trust, 2022, I Want us to Live Like Humans Again](#)

<sup>20</sup> [End Fuel Poverty Coalition, 2022, Massive increase in children experiencing fuel poverty revealed](#)

“

I'm someone who gave everything into education. I see education as a fundamental instrument in my life. In fact it's one of three factors for why I can say that my life does make sense, it's why I'm still fighting. I had to move around a lot as certain areas it was unacceptable to keep up with the housing price that forced me to constantly move. I have moved from the South East to North East as it was much cheaper. As a default it has negatively impacted my education, I did not have full support in education therefore I failed my GCSEs. I was aware of the North and South divide, but I never thought that something like this would impact my life negatively, unfortunately I didn't really have a choice based on the circumstances of life. There are more opportunities in the South than in the North in terms of education and jobs/career opportunities.

”

An End Child Poverty Youth Ambassador



### 3. Every child should be able to thrive, learn and develop, regardless of their family income.

3.1 The government must ensure families can afford to buy the food needed for their children, to keep them healthy and help them grow.

In 2021 2.5 million children live in households that have experienced food insecurity. These levels are approximately 27% higher than before the pandemic began. By January 2023 21.6% or 3.7 million children had directly experienced food insecurity in the past month. This was up from 11.6% of children in January 2022.

But increasing food bank provision or food waste redistribution is not the answer. Families should have the money in their pockets to be able to afford the food their children need. This should come from a functioning social security system, or from work which pays enough to meet their needs.

3.2 Westminster government must provide funding to ensure local authorities and schools are able to address attainment gap between poorer students and their peers in every school.

Too often children's educational outcomes are hampered by living in poverty. Evidence shows that high quality early education is effective at improving children's outcomes especially for the most disadvantaged children. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are already 11 months behind their peers when they start at primary school and evidence suggest that the gap has started to widen. Gifted children from the most deprived families begin school on a par with gifted children facing least deprivation, but their performance falls away by the age of 16. In 2015, 33 per cent of children receiving free school meals obtained five or more good GCSEs, compared with 61 per cent of other children.

Yet failing children in the early years costs them and society. Inadequate support for early years care and education costs England more than £16 billion every year.



21 [End Furniture Poverty, 2021, No Place like Home: Poverty and Furniture Provision in Social Housing](#)

22 [End Furniture Poverty, The Essential Items: What does a household need to escape furniture poverty](#)

23 [Food Foundation, 2023, Food Insecurity Tracking](#)

■ **3.3** All governments must ensure Free School Meals are extended, at a minimum to all children in families receiving Universal Credit. But ideally all children should receive a free school meal. The government should consider extending this offer to children who are home-schooled.

Free school meals should be available so children can eat during their school day without worry. They can focus on learning, playing and fully participating in their education. Yet at least two in five school-age children in England, who are living below the poverty line, were not eligible for free school meals.

The earnings threshold for a child to qualify for free school meals is too low. For families who claim Universal Credit, only households who earn less than £7400 a year qualify for a free school meal. Children in poverty who don't qualify for free school meals typically come from working families who earn too much money to claim free school meals, but not enough to escape from the grip of poverty.

■ **3.4** The government must ensure that schools are supported to remove all costs of participation. No child should ever be prevented from taking part in school activities by an inability to pay.

All children should have access to an education which helps them develop the skills, knowledge and attributes needed for learning, life and work - however, living in a low-income household can affect how children and young people are able to access that education.

Trips, uniforms, resources for learning in class and at home, clubs and activities, food, fun events, transport etc. are all school costs which are difficult or impossible to meet for families living in poverty. This can place barriers in the way of children's participation and learning, it can risk income related exclusion and stigma and put pressure on already stretched family budgets.

## 4. Every child in the UK should grow up free from the threat of poverty

■ **4.1** Westminster government must create a comprehensive roadmap for ending child poverty by focusing on the systemic causes of child poverty, via cross-departmental action and at all levels of government. This must include the monitoring of child poverty levels and setting targets for reduction.

Where devolved nations have set their own targets, or are assigned targets under the national plan, Westminster government needs to provide resources to help meet these.

■ **4.2** The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 has sets out ambitious child poverty targets for Scotland. The Scottish government must now work to ensure that the targets within are maintained, and that child poverty is below 18 per cent by 2023/24 and under 10 per cent by 2030.

■ **4.3** The Northern Ireland government has a child poverty strategy and action plan, but these must be updated and the Executive must meet its legal obligations to create an anti-poverty strategy.



24 Department for Education, 2015, *Effective pre-school, primary and secondary education project (EPPSE 3-16+)*

25 Nathan Archer and Beatrice Merrick, 2020, *Getting the Balance Right*

26 From <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/effects-poverty>

27 LSE, 2021, *Big Change Starts Small*, <https://centreforearlychildhood.org/report/>

28 CPAG, 2020, <https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/CPAG-FSM-briefing-2020.pdf>

29 Entitled to: <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/help/free-school-meals/downloaded07/03/2023>

30 CPAG, 2022, *Cost of the School Day in England: Pupils Perspective*

31 CPAG, 2021, *Cost of the School Day Toolkit*





end  child poverty