

Nearly 4 million children living in poverty in the UK

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The latest End Child Poverty coalition report shows that 3.7 million children (29 percent) in the UK are living in poverty. The coalition was established in 2001 and comprises over 100 local and national groups, including children's charities, social justice groups, trade unions and faith organisations.

A graphic in the report shows 30 desks in a classroom, nine of which are in black to represent each child living in poverty. It explains that while child poverty exists throughout the country, in the areas with the highest levels, child poverty is running at 47 percent. It is at 10 percent in areas considered more affluent.

The data was compiled using the most recent tax credit data of two years ago but also used national trends in joblessness to give an up-to-date picture of child poverty.

The report gave a detailed picture of levels of poverty across the UK using parliamentary constituencies and local authority areas. The local authority area data was broken down into ward boundaries to give a detailed localised picture of levels of poverty.

The data based on parliamentary constituencies showed high levels of child poverty in the UK's major cities. Birmingham Ladywood tops the list with a child poverty rate of 47.3 percent. The other top 20 areas include Manchester Gorton, Leeds Central, Glasgow Central, Liverpool Riverside and Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough. Within Greater London, the Poplar and Limehouse constituency along with Bethnal Green and Bow have poverty rates greater than 43 percent.

Whole areas of the UK are blighted by child poverty, with nearly a quarter of children in Northern Ireland affected and 27 percent of children in the Yorkshire and Humberside region.

Scotland has nearly a quarter of a million children

living in poverty, with a third of children in Glasgow and 30 percent of children in the former coalfield area of North Ayrshire blighted by poverty.

Commenting on the figures, John Dickie, director of the Scottish Child Poverty Action Group, said, "There's no doubt that many of the key drivers of child poverty are UK-wide and if the prime minister is serious about supporting families then decisive action must be taken to end the freeze on children's benefits and reverse sharp cuts to in-work support under Universal Credit."

Some areas traditionally considered more affluent suffer elevated levels of child poverty. Kent has a 25 percent rate and in Slough the figure is nearly 27 percent. In the Cotswolds, the figure is one in six and nearly one in six in Aylesbury.

The measure used by the government defines relative poverty as households whose income is below 60 percent of the median income. The median income figure is one in which half of households earn more and half earn less.

In its Key Facts, End Child Poverty noted:

- "Since 2010, child poverty figures have flat-lined. The number of children in absolute poverty has increased by 0.5 million since 2010. As a direct result of tax and benefit decisions made since 2010 the Institute of Fiscal Studies (an independent body) project that the number of children in relative poverty will have risen from 3.6m to 4.3m by 2020."

- "Work does not provide a guaranteed route out of poverty in the UK. Two-thirds (64 percent) of children growing up in poverty live in a family where at least one member works."

- “Child poverty blights childhoods. Growing up in poverty means being cold, going hungry, not being able to join in activities with friends. For example, 60 percent of families in the bottom income quintile would like, but cannot afford to take their children on holiday for one week a year.”

- “Childcare and housing are two of the costs that take the biggest toll on families’ budgets. When you account for childcare costs, extra 130,000 children are pushed into poverty.”

The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) states its mission is to “hold the government and all main political parties to account for their commitment to eradicate poverty by 2020.”

In a commentary on the report, Sam Royston, the chair of End Child Poverty, stated, “Many families who are just about managing today, won’t be managing tomorrow if Universal Credit leaves them with fewer pounds in their pocket, and if rising costs of living mean their money doesn’t stretch as far as it used to.”

Last month’s Autumn Statement given in Parliament by Chancellor Philip Hammond demonstrated that there would be no let-up in austerity from a government that, as revealed by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), has carried out an additional £12 billion in welfare cuts in the 18 months since the last general election. No cuts in place will be reversed, with Hammond saying the budget “re-states our commitment to living within our means.”

The statement included a reduction in the Universal Credit taper—meaning the rate at which the low pay supplement is withdrawn as earning rise was reduced. However, as Royston noted, the measures laid out in the Autumn Statement “are but a drop in the ocean compared to recent cuts to family income. The 3.9 million children living in poverty across the UK are still waiting for measures that make Britain ‘a country that works for everyone,’ as promised by Theresa May in her first speech as Prime Minister.” He added, “Instead, whilst experts are giving stark warnings of price rises on the horizon, the Government is continuing with a four year freeze on children’s benefits and tax credits until 2020. As a result, low income families are likely to find it ever harder to make

ends meet in coming years.”

A Joseph Rowntree Foundation report published in June this year, based on a Department of Work and Pensions analysis of Households Below Average Income, showed 19 percent of children living in poverty before housing costs are taken into account—rising to 29 percent when they are factored in. It noted, “The gap between the two poverty measures has grown which reflects the rising housing costs over the past decade pushing more people into poverty.”

Another indicator of growing poverty is the ongoing increase in the use of food banks by families. Trussell Trust food banks, which operates 400 food banks across the UK, distributed—in Scotland alone—63,794 three-day supplies of emergency food to people in crisis between April and September 2016. This compared to 60,458 during the same period in 2015—an increase of 6 percent. Nearly a third 20,332 of these (32 percent) were for children.

Working people are being made to pay for the crisis of the capitalist system and poor families with children are at the sharp end of this. This is the result of a systematic offensive against the working class waged by successive Labour and Tory governments over the last decade.

More than £100 billion has been slashed from public spending as a result of the £1 trillion bailout of the banks initiated by the 2007-2010 Labour government of Gordon Brown and continued by the Tories. The ruling elite aims to destroy what remains of the post-1945 welfare state, while implementing its pro-business agenda to step up the exploitation of the working class to compete with their international rivals.



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