

UK child poverty soars as workers' living standards suffer sharp decline and household poverty grows

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Child poverty in Britain is growing rapidly as working-class families suffer a severe reduction in living standards and are tipped into poverty.

Over recent months rapidly rising bills and prices, wages failing to keep pace with inflation, and cuts of £20 a week to the Universal Credit welfare payment on which millions rely, including millions of low paid workers, have decimated incomes.

Cumulatively, UK household incomes could drop on average by approximately £1,000 next year, according to analysis by the Resolution Foundation (RF) thinktank. The Institute for Public Policy Research says a typical family will lose a further £500 a year because of the planned increase in national insurance taxes next April and an expected 5 percent rise in council tax.

Recent figures from the Department for Works and Pensions record astonishingly high levels of child poverty even before housing costs. It found that 11.7 million children (18 percent) are in relative poverty and 9.2 million (14 percent) are in absolute poverty. Once housing costs are taken into account, 14.5 million children (22 percent) are in relative poverty and 11.7 million children (18 percent) suffer absolute levels of deprivation.

RF expects child poverty to rise further by 2.7 percent, approximately 400,000 extra children, in the coming year. Over the course of this Parliament (2019-2024), the RF expects child poverty to rise from 30.9 percent to 33.7 percent, or one in three children. Even if the Universal Credit uplift payment of £20 a week (introduced at the start of the pandemic) had remained—it was removed by the Conservative government in October—the RF would still have expected child poverty to grow to 31.4 percent by

2024-25.

According to a report released November 29 by child poverty charity The Childhood Trust (CT), 250,000 children in the UK will go hungry this Christmas. The report, “Cold, Hungry and Stressed”, estimates that nearly a fifth of families are worried about not being able to afford Christmas dinner.

While childhood poverty was prevalent before the coronavirus pandemic, the CT stress how the scale and complexity of child poverty has intensified over the past 18 months because of economic and political developments that have jointly reduced UK incomes.

Laurence Guinness, CEO of The Children’s Trust, said, “The social and economic situation across fuel, food and support services will force families into making impossible decisions between feeding their child or keeping them warm, decisions no families should be forced to make”.

The CT found families are being forced into desperate measures in order to make sure their children are fed and 28 percent of women admitted they have gone without food so their child can eat. Of the 55,318 children represented by 30 charities in the CT report, it is estimated that approximately 14,152 (26 percent) will not receive any Christmas presents this year. Contacted by the CT, London charities reported that 67 percent of the children they support were affected by food poverty in October 2021 and over half of the charities surveyed reported an increase in the number of people accessing their services due to food poverty. Of these charities, the average increase in the number of beneficiaries was up by an incredible 50 percent.

These results echo findings from CT’s UK-wide survey, which reported 22 percent of London and 20

percent of UK respondents were financially concerned about not being able to buy Christmas presents this winter.

Authoring a comment piece about their research at Politics.co.uk, Guinness wrote “Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, household food insecurity has increased, food bank use has reached its highest levels, and the number of children eligible for free school meals has risen. This winter, the rising cost of food is hitting low income families hard.” Guinness said children face devastating life-long consequences from food insecurity and the nutritional deficiencies it causes.

Charities involved with CT predict fuel poverty will get even worse in winter 2021/2022 causing many families to choose between heating their homes or feeding their children. The lives of 24,591 of the 25,726 children (96 percent) affected by fuel poverty across 23 of the charities surveyed are predicted to significantly worsen. Out of the total 106,523 children represented by 31 charities in this report, approximately 38 percent are expected to experience fuel poverty at some point during the Christmas holidays.

Millions of people are rationing the use of their gas central heating system. Kevin Peachey, personal finance correspondent for BBC News, reported December 2 on the case of Sandy Birtles and her child. Sandy must pile coats and blankets on top of him to keep him warm in bed. “When she goes in to check on him at night, Sandy Birtles says she can hardly see her teenage son for all the layers on his bed. The single mother of two says that the family do all they can to keep warm as the bills continue to rise.”

The article noted National Energy Action’s calculation that when domestic energy prices rise in April, it will mean that the typical domestic gas bill will have doubled in just 18 months. The charity, which campaigns for warm, dry homes, used industry data and forecasts to predict that the typical gas bill, for those on standard tariffs, is likely to have gone up from £466 a year in October 2020, to £944 in April 2022.

Widespread poverty has resulting in cases of malnutrition almost doubling in the decade since the Conservatives came to power in 2010. National Health Service research found that people were treated in hospital 4,657 times for the condition in the 2010/2011 financial year. By 2020/2021, this had risen to 10,109.

Poverty affecting millions of people has resulted in a staggering increase in the use of food banks over the last decade. In 2009/2010, The Trussell Trust provided 40,898 emergency three-day food parcels. By 2020/21, approximately 2.5 million parcels were given out across Britain. As an indicator of how poverty has worsened in the course of the pandemic, the amount of food parcels given out in 2020/21 was over 600 thousand more than the previous year. Nearly a million (980,000) food parcels were given out to children. The Trussell Trust operates nearly 1,300 food banks and a further 1,000 are operated by other organisations.

As working-class living standards collapse and poverty rockets, the ruling Conservatives occupy a parallel universe of Thatcherite triumphalism. When the United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Philip Alston, visited the UK in 2018 reporting on the impact of “extreme poverty” on people’s lives, the government belittled him and rubbished his damning findings. In 2013, a report on UK housing by UN Rapporteur Raquel Rolnik was dismissed as “a Marxist diatribe” by Kris Hopkins, the then Tory housing minister.

On the same day the Childhood Trust released their figures on child poverty, John Penrose MP, chairman of Conservative Policy Forum, wrote in a *Daily Telegraph* column, “In the past forty years... Britain has pretty much defeated mass unemployment, and improved living standards beyond our parents’ and grandparents’ wildest dreams.” Today, said the Tory minister receiving £81,932 plus expenses a year, the problem is that “We’re stuck down a blind alley, built by the political Left, where poverty is defined as a question of how equal or unequal people’s pay might be.”

Penrose has been this astoundingly corrupt government’s “anti-corruption champion” since it took office. He is married to the multi-millionaire incompetent Baroness Dido Harding, who has been paid £63,000 a year since 2017 for working two days a week as head of NHS Improvement, a role which saw her lead the privatised test-and-trace fiasco.



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