

Tackling the greatest barrier to opportunity:

What young people need from the Government's Child Poverty Strategy

This briefing sets out the six essential components for an effective Child Poverty Strategy, informed by new research with 51,000 young people | 22nd May 2025

Summary

- On current trajectories, more than one in three children in the UK will be living in poverty in 2029/30. Reversing this trend and reducing child poverty within this Parliament must be the focus of the government's forthcoming Child Poverty Strategy.
- New data from Barnardo's and VotesforSchools gathered views from 51,000 young people on child poverty between 28th April and 2nd May 2025. A clear majority - **64% - of the 39,000 secondary and college students who took part want the UK Government to make ending child poverty a top priority**. 90% of the primary school students who took part want UK leaders to make sure all children's needs are met.
- Our polling with Public First from 11th – 14th March 2025 found that 89% agree no child should be living in poverty in the UK. 3 in 4 adults (74%) think that the UK government has a role to play in addressing child poverty, followed by local government (64%) and parents (55%).
- Barnardo's has set out six essential elements for the Child Poverty Strategy to deliver transformational change for children:

- 1) **Measurement & Accountability:** A target to **reduce child poverty** to no more than 28% in this Parliament, alongside milestones to halve child poverty in 10 years and eradicate it in 20 years. The Strategy also needs a clear **accountability framework** with regular updates to Parliament
- 2) **Safety Net:** Ending the **two-child limit and benefit cap** or equivalent measures, to create a safety net for all children
- 3) **Tackling Structural Inequalities:** sub-targets and measures to **support children disproportionately likely to be living in poverty**, including Black and Asian children and migrant children and families with no recourse to public funds
- 4) **Hunger & Poor Nutrition:** **extending eligibility for free school meals** to all households in receipt of Universal Credit and implementing auto-enrolment
- 5) **Support in Every Community:** investing in early intervention and establishing a **family centre in every community**
- 6) **Leadership & Focus:** A cross-ministerial group chaired by the Prime Minister to deliver the Strategy and clarity about how it connects with other key government initiatives

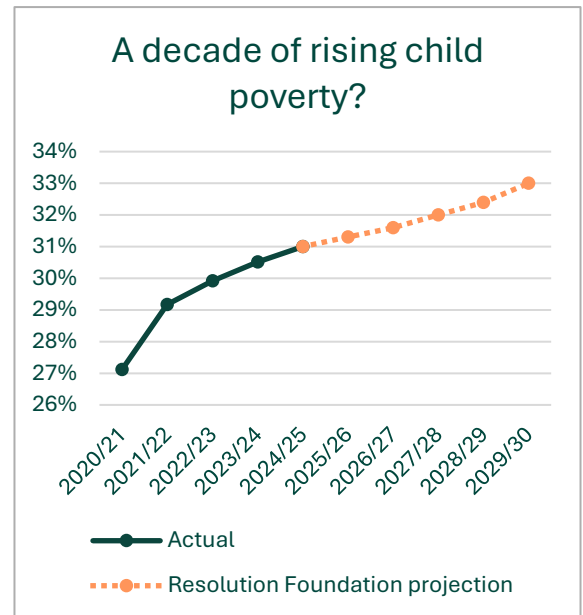
Reducing child poverty in this Parliament

Child poverty: status and trends

Poverty affects every part of a child's life and leaves many struggling with their education, health and happiness. Barnardo's supports children who are sleeping on a mouldy mattress or not in a bed at all; who are not getting enough food to focus at school; and who are growing up in a cold home that causes or exacerbates poor health.¹

We do not think this is right or fair – every child deserves to grow up safe, happy, healthy and hopeful.

New research finds that the public agree. **Our polling with Public First found that 89% of the public agree that no child should be living in poverty in the UK.** 3 in 4 adults (74%) think that the **UK government has a role to play** in addressing child poverty, followed by local government (64%) and parents (55%). **This was true across all voter groups.**



“

We think it is very important for the UK government to make [ending child poverty] a priority otherwise it will affect many children in the future.”

**Primary school children,
VotesforSchools**

A child is defined as living in poverty in the UK if their household income is below 60% of the median income after housing costs. The government recognises this as “the leading, and internationally recognised, measure of poverty”.² The most recent official statistics for 2023/24 show that almost a third (31%) of all children in the UK live in poverty, a rise of 4% since 2020/21.³ That’s 4.5 million children, or three times the entire population of Birmingham.⁴ The characteristics of families in poverty has also changed markedly over time: between 2000 and 2023 the proportion of families in poverty where the adults are doing some paid work has risen from 49 per cent to 70 per cent.⁵ As of December 2024, 37% of people on Universal Credit are in employment.⁶

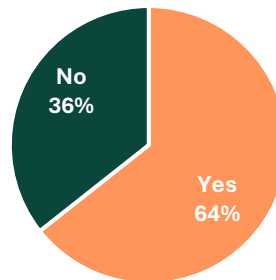
In February 2025, the Resolution Foundation forecast that child poverty would reach 33% by 2029-30 based on existing policies (see graph).⁷ Resolution Foundation updated their forecast to 34% in May 2025.⁸ Analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (‘JRF’) shows that no English regions are likely to see a fall in poverty between 2024 and 2029.⁹ However, Scotland is bucking the trend, with child poverty falling from 25% in 2021 to 23% in 2024.¹⁰ JRF analysis forecasts a 7% to 10% lower child poverty rate in Scotland compared with the rest of the UK by 2029. This is driven by investment in social security and demonstrates that progress can be made on child poverty with sufficient prioritisation and focused resource.¹¹

New data: young people's views on child poverty

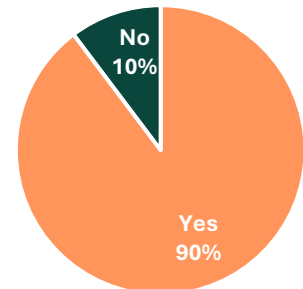
Barnardo's partnered with VotesforSchools to ask young people about their views on child poverty. 51,664 children and young people took part in lessons about child poverty and voted on the following questions between 28th April and 2nd May 2025. This included 39,365 secondary and college students and 12,299 primary school students (see pie charts).

The children and young people who took part also shared their views on how to tackle child poverty. Their views are shared throughout this briefing in **purple boxes**.

Should ending child poverty be a top priority for UK Government?
(secondary & college)



Should UK leaders make sure all children's needs are met?
(primary school)



The chance for all children to thrive: 6 key components of an effective Child Poverty Strategy

Barnardo's view on the child poverty strategy

The government has committed to publishing a Child Poverty Strategy in Spring 2025 and has established a ministerial taskforce to lead its development. We were proud to host the launch at a Barnardo's family hub in North London in October 2024.¹² The government has set out its intention for the Strategy to both reduce child poverty and to mitigate its effects.

For the strategy to be meaningful, Barnardo's believes that the government must, as a minimum, achieve a **fall in child poverty within this Parliament from existing levels of 31% to 28%**.

We believe this target strikes the right balance between achieving genuine change for families, as well as being both achievable and affordable. Longer-term targets are also critically important (see below).

We are supportive of different policy solutions to achieve this objective, however we believe the six key elements below reflect the most realistic, cost-effective and practical means of reducing child poverty, as well as mitigating its effects for the children remaining in poverty.

“To help rebuild Britain, tackling child poverty should be at the forefront of any mission. By investing in children's future you are, in turn, improving their quality of life and the economy in the future too. If we don't break the cycle of poverty, it could continue or get worse.”

Secondary school students, who shared their views on child poverty with Barnardo's and VotesforSchools

1. Measurement & Accountability

The government has confirmed the Strategy will cover a 10-year period.¹³ We welcome this longer-term approach and believe the Strategy must collectively form **a credible plan for halving child poverty over the next decade**. For the Strategy to be ‘ambitious’, clear targets are necessary so that all departments and organisations involved in delivery know what they are aiming for and by when. The government has recognised the importance of this approach in setting targets within each of their five Missions.¹⁴

Targets for reducing child poverty existed previously under the Child Poverty Act 2010. Whilst the Act did not deliver progress as intended and was repealed in 2016 there are elements of the legislation that could inform the forthcoming Strategy. For example, the Act required the government to publish annual progress reports and lay reports before Parliament. It also established the independent Child Poverty Commission to advise on how to achieve child poverty targets (now the Social Mobility Commission).¹⁵ The Act set requirements for child poverty strategies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and required the UK government to consult with devolved nations.

“

It is embarrassing that so many people are left to struggle in a country as rich as the UK.”

**Secondary school students,
VotesforSchools**

In addition to reducing child poverty within this Parliament from 31% to 28% (or lower), we believe the Strategy must also implement legally binding, independently evaluated, **targets with clear milestones, aimed at eradicating child poverty in 20 years**.

Robust parliamentary scrutiny of the Strategy, on a regular basis, will be key to ensuring the Strategy is implemented effectively and remains a priority. The Strategy must include a clear accountability framework with a commitment to lay **annual progress reports before Parliament and plans for appropriate scrutiny from a parliamentary committee** such as the Public Accounts Committee.

2. Safety Net

Families in receipt of Universal Credit receive an additional amount for each child in the household. This is designed to support families with extra costs and to reduce child poverty.¹⁶ Since April 2017, with few exceptions, families that have a third or subsequent child do not receive an additional amount for these children (a ‘two-child limit’).

Families affected by the two-child limit will miss out on up to £3,455 per child in 2024/25.¹⁷ 59% of families impacted by the policy are working.¹⁸ In our frontline services, Barnardo’s sees first-hand how the policy penalises many of the poorest children. It means some families cannot put food on the table or put the heating on when it gets cold.¹⁹ Unless the policy is ended, the majority (51%) of larger families – those with three or more children - will be in poverty by the end of this Parliament.²⁰

The two-child limit interacts closely with the benefit cap and the two must be removed together. The cap restricts the amount of support a working-age household can receive from the social security system. 122,000 households are affected by the cap - 71% of these are single parent households and half have a child under five.²¹ The average loss of income is £61 per week.

Ending the two-child limit and the benefit cap would cost £4.5bn by 2029-30.²³ The Resolution Foundation estimates it would lift 500,000 children out of poverty by 2029-30, reducing the poverty rate to 28% at a cost of £10,000 per child lifted out of poverty. While this would represent a significant investment of public funds, it is important to account for the economic cost of failing to reduce child poverty, in addition to the hardship it places on children in low-income families. In 2008, child poverty cost the economy an estimated £25bn per year, comprised of costs due to greater risk of unemployment and lower earnings potential of adults who grew up in poverty, and of the additional amount spent on public services.²⁴ This has since risen to £39bn per year and is forecast to reach £40bn per year in 2027.²⁵ The New Economics Foundation estimate that if two-child limit and benefit cap were removed from April 2025 the cost of child poverty would reduce by £3.0bn (7.1%) a year.²⁶

We do not believe it is possible for the Child Poverty Strategy to remain credible if it does not urgently remove the two-child limit and benefit cap or take another action that will deliver a similar impact on the incomes of families in poverty. Our polling with Public First shows that the two-child limit is not widely popular with the public: only 40% want to keep the policy and 28% oppose it. 1 in 4 (25%) people neither support or oppose the limit and 8% do not know.

“ We are a country that can afford to keep children safe and healthy. The country's future depends on healthy and happy children.”

**Primary school children,
VotesforSchools**

3. Tackling Structural Inequalities

The Child Poverty Strategy should aim to reduce child poverty for all children, while **focusing support towards children at greatest risk of poverty.**

The following groups are at acute risk:

- 49% of **children from Black and Asian families** are in poverty compared to 24% of children in white families.²⁷
- 44% of children living in **larger families** with 3 or more children live in poverty.²⁸
- 43% of children living in **lone-parent families** are in poverty.²⁹

Data on the proportion of children in some groups is not as robust or comparable, however the evidence available does highlight major inequalities:

- 82% of **care experienced young people** report struggling to afford food all or some of the time and 25% of homeless people are estimated to have been in care at some point in their lives.³⁰
- 44% of children in poverty live in families where someone is **disabled**.³¹ The government's proposed changes to sickness and disability benefits will increase the number of children in poverty by 100,000 by 2029-30.³²
- 33% of children living in destitution are **migrant children**.³³ Destitution is the most severe form of hardship where basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing cannot be met.³⁴

The Strategy should include **specific targets and actions to reduce poverty in these groups.**

The UK saw the largest increase in child poverty in Europe between 2012 and 2021

Country	Change in Child Poverty Rate (%)
Poland	-37.6
Czechia	-28.4
Ireland	-18.5
Belgium	-17.0
Spain	-4.0
Sweden	-2.4
Italy	-0.8
Netherlands	+0.7
Denmark	+3.5
Germany	+5.0
Austria	+5.3
Norway	+10.1
Switzerland	+10.3
France	+10.4
UK	+19.6

*Only the 15 wealthiest European countries are included for size.
Source: UNICEF²²*

Barnardo's is particularly concerned about the depth of poverty amongst asylum-seeking and migrant families, including amongst British children with parents who are foreign nationals. It is unacceptable for children in the UK to be growing up in poverty – regardless of their immigration status.

In 2023, an estimated half a million children in the UK had leave to remain in the UK but were subject to the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) condition.³⁵ The Child Poverty Strategy **must encompass all children living in the UK, regardless of immigration or asylum status**. Blanket policies such as NRPF restrictions, constraints on the right to work for asylum seekers and below-poverty levels of asylum support severely limit household incomes and push many children into extreme levels of hardship.

While we would welcome government proposals to extend the Healthy Start Scheme on a statutory level to families subject to the NRPF condition, extending this scheme alone will not be nearly enough to address levels of need within this group.³⁶ The Strategy must **exempt families with children under 18 from the NRPF condition**, as this is a key driver of poverty for asylum-seeking and migrant children.

4. Hunger & Poor Nutrition

Far too many children and young people are missing out on the nutritious food they need to thrive.³⁷ Barnardo's polling of parents with YouGov in January 2025 found that:

- More than a quarter (26%) had to buy unhealthy food for their child(ren) because they couldn't afford healthy ingredients or meals at least once every fortnight
- 60% of these parents worried about what they feed their children
- 8% of parents made use of their local food bank(s), up 2% from February 2023

“ I think government needs to help to meet children's needs so that everybody is healthy and equal to others.”

**Primary school participant,
VotesforSchools**

School food is essential for nutrition and provides some children with their only hot and healthy meal of the day. Research into the impact of free school meals for primary school children in London also identified wider benefits: 84% of parents and carers surveyed said the availability of universal primary free school meals helped or significantly helped household finances and 33% felt that access to a filling, healthy lunch meant their children concentrated better in lessons.³⁸

All children in England up to Year 3 receive a Free School Meal ('FSM'). Beyond Year 3, children in England are only eligible for FSMs if their families have net earnings below £7,400 per year.³⁹ This low earnings threshold means **there are 900,000 children living in poverty who are not eligible for FSMs**.⁴⁰ Approximately 11% or 250,000 children who are entitled to free school meals miss out.⁴¹ Under-registration is believed to be due to factors such as complexity of the application process, administrative burden, lack of awareness and stigma.⁴²

Children in England who are eligible for free school meals can also access the Holiday Activities and Food Programme. This provides activity sessions and food during some parts of the Summer, Christmas and Easter holidays and offers a lifeline to the estimated 3 million children at risk of holiday hunger when school meals are not available.⁴³ The nature of provision is largely determined at a local level with some local authorities able to offer more support than others.⁴⁴ The scheme is now due to end in March 2026 after another short-term extension.

The Child Poverty Strategy should introduce **auto-enrolment for Free School Meals** to ensure that all eligible children receive the support they are entitled to. The Strategy should also **increase the extremely low (and frozen) earnings threshold and extend FSMs to all households in receipt of Universal Credit**.

This would benefit around 3 million children and would reduce child poverty to 27% (near to 2011/12 levels) by the end of this Parliament when implemented in conjunction with ending the benefit cap and two-child limit.⁴⁵⁴⁶ The Strategy should embed this as a universal minimum standard for FSMs across the UK, enabling regions and devolved nations to go further wherever possible. The Strategy should also commit to a longer-term ambition of extending FSMs to all primary school children. Finally, it should address holiday hunger by committing to **long-term funding of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme** and extending the scheme beyond March 2026. This would provide greater certainty to local authorities, schools and providers and reduce inefficiency caused by short-term rounds of funding.

5. Support in every community

All families need help from time to time when raising their children. For those on a low income it can be harder to access this support, particularly where help is only available on a paid for basis, such as play groups or baby sensory sessions, which can help with attachment. This can put children from lower income backgrounds at a disadvantage compared to their peers.

During the last 20 years, the development of children's centres and then family hubs has provided vital support for families in communities across England. These centres provide a 'local nerve centre' for families in a community, bringing together everything from stay and play groups, to breastfeeding support, to help with issues such as finding a job or applying for benefits. Family hubs operate through a universal front door, providing support to families from pre-birth to 18 (or 25 in the case of SEND). This means that all families can access basic support available at no cost. They also offer a range of specialist and bespoke support for families facing more complex challenges including with issues such as substance misuse, mental health and domestic abuse.

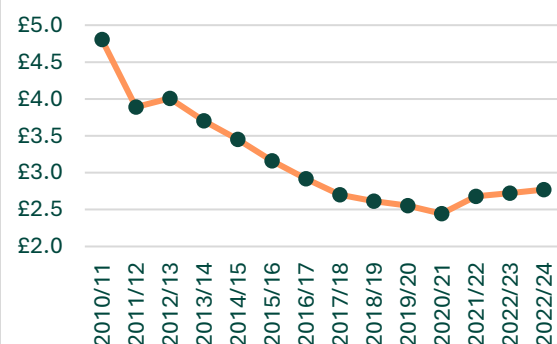
“Children do not get a choice in the family they are born into. The government should be helping everyone. If they do not fix child poverty there is more chance that more children in the future will face the same problems as poverty reduces access to basic things like education. The cycle needs to be changed and the government should be helping”

**Secondary school students,
VotesforSchools**

There is growing evidence of the positive impact of access to centres has had on children. For example, three in-depth studies of Sure Start by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that:

- Access to a Sure Start centre between the ages of 0 and 5 **significantly improved the educational achievement** of children⁴⁷
- “Sure Start **decisively reduces hospitalisations** ... we find that the financial benefits from reducing hospitalisations offset approximately 31% of the cost of Sure Start provision⁴⁸
- “Living near a Sure Start centre between the ages of 0 and 4 **reduced young people's likelihood of receiving a criminal conviction** by 13% and a custodial sentence by 20%⁴⁹

Spending (£ bn) on early intervention services by local authorities in England (adjusted)
Footnote 55



Despite the emerging evidence, council spending on early intervention services has fallen by over £2bn since 2010/11 with spending on Sure Start alone being reduced by £1.4bn.^{50 51} A reduction in this type of support means that families on low incomes cannot always access support either to help them increase their incomes (such as support to find employment or access training) or to alleviate the impacts of living on a low income (such as advice on eating healthy on a low budget).

To ensure all families and particularly those on low incomes can access this vital support, the Child Poverty Strategy **should commit the government to an investment of £2.8 billion, to expand the current Family Hubs network enabling the development of 3,500 family centres across England.** These would provide support from pre-birth up to 19 (or 25 in the case of SEND). By establishing a hub in every community we can ensure that all families can access joined up health, social and other support for one trusted and independent setting.

6. Leadership & Focus

As the Public Accounts Committee and National Audit Office highlight in recent reports, cross-government strategies require strong and concerted political leadership to be effective.⁵² The Child Poverty Taskforce has been led by the Secretary of State for Education and Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.⁵³ As the Taskforce transitions to delivery, the **Prime Minister and Chancellor should lead a new phase of the Child Poverty Taskforce** to drive implementation across government.

The Strategy must also integrate with other strategic activity such as the Opportunities Mission, Socio-Economic Duty, NHS 10 year strategy, Child Health Action Plan and the Food Strategy. The Strategy should **explicitly articulate how it will integrate with these elements of the government's agenda** and how it will support and interact with work undertaken by the devolved legislatures (including child poverty strategies) to address child poverty in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Action you can take

Ask the following Parliamentary Questions:

1. Will the Government include specific targets to reduce child poverty in its forthcoming Child Poverty Strategy and how does the Government intend to give Parliament adequate scrutiny over delivery of the Strategy? For peers only: support Lord Bird's amendment on child poverty targets in the Children's Wellbeing Bill.
2. Has the Government considered the evidence, highlighted in Barnardo's recent briefing, that shows that to reduce child poverty within this Parliament removing the benefit cap and two-child limit will be essential?
3. Will the Government's forthcoming Child Poverty Strategy include specific measures to support children in deepest poverty, such as migrant children who make up almost 1 in 3 of all destitute children in this country?
4. Will the Government lift the extremely low £7,400 annual earning threshold for eligibility for free school meals in the upcoming Child Poverty Strategy and extend eligibility to all children in households that receive Universal Credit?
5. Has the Government fully considered the compelling evidence on the impact of family support services in tackling child poverty for its forthcoming Strategy?
6. Will the Prime Minister and Chancellor join the Child Poverty Taskforce as it transitions to delivery after the Child Poverty Strategy is published?
7. Will the Government commit to lifting children out of the deepest poverty by removing the no recourse to public funds 'NRPF' condition for families with children under the age of 18?

Share the following on social media:

“64% of the 39k young people who shared their views with @Barnardos want the Government to make ending child poverty a top priority. The Child Poverty Strategy is how we deliver for them. We need bold action on social security and school meals to reduce child poverty by 2029/30.”

“Reducing child poverty in this Parliament is essential if the UKG wants to deliver a credible Child Poverty Strategy. We need bold action to lift children out of poverty, fast. Clear majority (64%) of young people want UKG to make this a top priority @barnardos @votesforschools.”

Finally, please ask to meet with Ali Cooper, Senior Policy Advisor on Child Poverty, to discuss Barnardo’s key expectations for the forthcoming Child Poverty Strategy at public.affairs@barnardos.org.uk



Barnardo’s support for children in poverty

Helping children and young people in poverty has been a core part Barnardo’s work for over 150 years. In response to the cost-of-living crisis we have been providing urgent crisis support to families in our services, including through accessing our 75 children’s centres and family hubs.

In the first phase of our crisis response, between October 2022 and August 2024, we supported over 18,560 children, in over 9,875 families. We provided immediate support to help prevent hunger, and ensure access to safe and warm spaces. Examples include helping families to afford warm hats and jumpers in the winter, and to replace fridges and washing machines when they break down.

About Barnardo’s

At Barnardo’s, our purpose is clear - changing childhoods and changing lives, so that children, young people, and families are safe, happy, healthy, and hopeful. Last year, we provided essential support to 356,200 children, young people, parents and carers through 760 services and partnerships across the UK. For over 150 years, we’ve been here for the children and young people who need us most – bringing love, care and hope into their lives and giving them a place where they feel they belong. www.barnardos.org.uk

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- ² UK government (2024), '[Policy paper – Tackling Child Poverty: Developing Our Strategy](#)'
- ³ Department for Work and Pensions (2025), '[Households Below Average Income: for financial years ending 1995 to 2024, HBAI summary results, Table 1.4b](#)'
- ⁴ Population of Birmingham in 2021 census was 1144900: Office for National Statistics (2022), '[How the population changed in Birmingham: Census 2021](#)'
- ⁵ Resolution Foundation (2025), '[Turning the Tide: What will it take to reduce child poverty in the UK](#)'
- ⁶ Department for Work & Pensions (2025), '[Universal Credit Statistics January 2025](#)'
- ⁷ Resolution Foundation (2025), '[Turning the Tide: What will it take to reduce child poverty in the UK](#)'
- ⁸ Resolution Foundation (2025), '[Limited Ambition: An assessment of the rumoured options for easing the two-child limit](#)'
- ⁹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025), '[Growth alone won't cut child poverty, as gap between UK countries set to widen](#)'.
- ¹⁰ This measure uses three year averages of child poverty. Department for Work and Pensions (2025), '[Households Below Average Income: for financial years ending 1995 to 2024, Children Time Series, Table 4.16ts](#)'
- ¹¹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025), '[Growth alone won't cut child poverty, as gap between UK countries set to widen](#)'.
- ¹² Department for Work & Pensions (2024), '[Press release: Child Poverty Taskforce aims to 'give all children the best start in life'](#)'
- ¹³ UK government (2024), '[Policy paper – Tackling Child Poverty: Developing Our Strategy](#)'
- ¹⁴ UK government (2024), '[Plan for change](#)'
- ¹⁵ [Section 14 and Section 10 of the Child Poverty Act 2010](#)
- ¹⁶ UK Government (2025), '[Universal Credit](#)'
- ¹⁷ End Child Poverty Coalition: '[Immediate release: two-child limit](#)'
- ¹⁸ End Child Poverty Coalition analysis
- ¹⁹ Barnardo's (2024), '[Empty Plates & Cold Homes](#)'
- ²⁰ Resolution Foundation (2025), '[Turning the Tide: What it will take to reduce child poverty in the UK](#)'
- ²¹ Child Poverty Action Group (2025), '[Capped and trapped: why the benefit cap must go](#)'
- ²² UNICEF (2023), '[Child Poverty in the Midst of Wealth](#)', see league table on page 17. The table displayed in this briefing only includes the wealthiest 15 countries in Europe for size. See International Monetary Fund (2020), '[World Economic Outlook \(October 2020\)](#)'.
- ²³ Resolution Foundation (2025), '[Turning the Tide: What it will take to reduce child poverty in the UK](#)', page 29.
- ²⁴ Child Poverty Action Group (2023), '[The cost of child poverty in 2023](#)'
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- ²⁶ New Economics Foundation (2024), '[Capping ambitions: recognising the economic benefits of reducing child poverty by scrapping the two-child limit and benefit cap](#)'
- ²⁷ Department for Work & Pensions (2025), '[Households Below Average Income 2023/24, Children \(detailed breakdowns, table 4.5db\)](#)'
- ²⁸ Child Poverty Action Group (2025), '[Poverty: facts and figures](#)'
- ²⁹ Child Poverty Action Group (2025), '[Poverty: facts and figures](#)'
- ³⁰ See Barnardo's (2024), '[No Bank of Mum and Dad](#)' referring to National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (2022), '[Survival is not easy](#)'. See also National Audit Office (2015), '[Care leavers transition to adulthood](#)'.
- ³¹ Child Poverty Action Group (2025), '[Poverty: facts and figures](#)'

- ³² Child Poverty Action Group (2025), '[CPAG's response to proposed changes to sickness and disability benefits](#)'
- ³³ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023), '[Destitution in the UK 2023](#)', see Table 1.
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- ³⁵ Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (2025), '[Poverty among children affected by UK government asylum and immigration policy](#)'
- ³⁶ Department for Health and Social Care (2024), '[Closed consultation: Eligibility for Healthy Start for groups who have no recourse to public funds or are subject to immigration controls](#)'
- ³⁷ Dimbleby, H. (2020) '[The National Food Strategy: The Plan. National Food Strategy Independent Review](#)'
- ³⁸ Impact on Urban Health (2024), '[More than a meal](#)'
- ³⁹ UK government (2025), '[Apply for free school meals](#)'
- ⁴⁰ School Food Matters (2024), '[New government data shows 900,000 living in poverty do not qualify for free school meals](#)'
- ⁴¹ Food Foundation, Fix Our Food, Bremner & Co (2025), '[Briefing: Auto-enrol children onto Free School Meals](#)'
- ⁴² Food Foundation, Fix Our Food, Bremner & Co (2025), '[Briefing: Auto-enrol children onto Free School Meals](#)'
- ⁴³ Department for Education (2025), '[Holiday activities and food programme 2024](#)'
- ⁴⁴ ITV (2024), '[Families struggling with food costs over school holidays face 'postcode lottery' for support](#)'
- ⁴⁵ Resolution Foundation (2025), '[Turning the Tide: What it will take to reduce child poverty in the UK](#)', page 33.
- ⁴⁶ For this briefing we have suggested a headline target to reduce child poverty to 28% to account for the fact there will be interdependencies with other areas of government policy. We note that ending the two-child limit, benefit cap and extending the provision of free school meals could go further and reduce child poverty to 27% as outlined above.
- ⁴⁷ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2024), '[The short and medium term impacts of Sure Start on educational outcomes](#)'
- ⁴⁸ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2021), '[The health impacts of Sure Start](#)'
- ⁴⁹ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2024), '[The effect of Sure Start on youth misbehaviour, crime and contacts with children's social care](#)'
- ⁵⁰ Barnardo's (Children at the Table campaign) (2024), '[Children's services spending 2010-2023 Final report](#)'
- ⁵¹ Barnardo's (Children at the Table campaign) (2024), '[Children's services spending 2010-2023 Final report](#)', Figure 2: Total net expenditure on early and late intervention services by local authorities, 2010-11 to 2022-23, England, 2022-23 prices. Early intervention spending has been isolated in the graph presented.
- ⁵² House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2024), '[Cross-government working](#)'. See also: National Audit Office (2023), '[Cross-government working good practice guide for leaders and practitioners](#)'
- ⁵³ Cabinet Office (2024), '[Child poverty taskforce: terms of reference](#)'