

Universal Periodic Review: UK 4th Cycle

Child poverty, cost of living crisis, homelessness

Suggested questions for the UK:

- Please indicate the plans to reduce poverty and inequality within the current public spending programme and methods in place to measure progress or regression.
- Please outline the steps being taken and planned to safeguard children's rights from the social and economic impacts of the current cost-of-living crisis and COVID-19 pandemic.
- What analysis has the UK Government undertaken to assess the impact of the two-child limit and the benefit cap on child poverty, including the impact on different groups of children?
- What steps have the UK and devolved governments taken to reduce homelessness and use of temporary accommodation, and ensure that all children have access to safe, stable and appropriate housing?

Suggested recommendations for the UK:

The UK and devolved governments should

- develop, fund and implement national plans for the eradication of child poverty, including re-establishing statutory targets and ambitious measures to tackle the cost-of-living crisis on families.
- make a significant investment to build new social housing to reduce the numbers of homeless households, including care leavers in temporary accommodation and the length of time they stay there.
- end the use of inappropriate temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast, for homeless families and children and young people, with action taken against those that continue to house families with children in B&Bs beyond the 6-week legal limit.

The UK Government should

- abolish the two-child limit and benefit cap, and increase welfare benefit levels to help prevent serious hardship to children and families

Increase in child poverty

There has been regression in relation to recommendation 134.192. Child poverty continues to increase across the UK, with minimal measures to address it. Child poverty is predicted to rise further as families bear the brunt of an unprecedented cost-of-living crisis.

Child poverty rates have remained persistently and unacceptably high, with pre-COVID-19 data indicating that 27% of children in the UK are living in poverty, amounting to 3.9 million in 2020-21.¹ Relative child poverty rates are considerably higher in many local areas² as the incomes of the poorest families with

¹ Department for Work and Pensions (2022) [Households below average income: for financial years ending 1995 to 2021](#)

² End Child Poverty Coalition & Loughborough University (2022) [child poverty across the UK](#).

children and those most exposed to the cost of living crisis, have fallen further behind.³ Child poverty rose at a significantly faster rate for larger families with three or more children,⁴ BAME and lone-parent families. Half of all children in lone-parent families are now living in relative poverty.⁵ Families in poverty are now living in deeper poverty than five years ago⁶ with over 3.9m children in households receiving Universal Credit.⁷ This is predicted to rise to unprecedented levels as the cost-of-living crisis and energy bills hit unless there is government intervention.

No impact assessment has been undertaken of the impact of welfare reform on children from disadvantaged families despite the UK social security system continuing to fail to provide families with an adequate safety net. The two-child limit and benefit cap, both limiting the amount of income households can receive, regardless of need, continue to exacerbate child poverty.⁸ It is noticeable that no reference is made to the impact of Welfare Reform changes in the State Party UPR submission. Whilst the devolved governments take steps to mitigate the impact of poverty on children, through cash transfers payments and targeted schemes, these alone are not sufficient to address the financial pressures a growing number of families are facing and the reforms introduced by the UK Government.

Food poverty and hunger will be the single biggest challenge schools will face as children return to classrooms, with calls for universal free school meals for all pupils across the UK growing.⁹ The Scottish Government has committed to expand universal entitlement to free school meals during term time, with alternative provision for eligible children during school holidays.¹⁰ The Welsh Government is also taking steps to expand entitlement to Free School Meals¹¹ but many children in poverty remain excluded due to restrictive eligibility criteria.¹² Migrants – including children of migrant parents – often have a ‘no recourse to public funds’ (NRPF) condition on their visas, which leads to deep, long-term child poverty.¹³ However, some progress has been made to allow some migrant children to receive free school meals.¹⁴

Lack of effective strategies to eradicate poverty

There has been limited progress in relation to recommendation 134.168. There has been no strategy in England to address child poverty since the repeal of the Child Poverty Act in 2016, along with associated targets, monitoring, and reporting. The UK Government has been criticised for failing to address the cost-of-living crisis, which is increasing child poverty.¹⁵

In Wales, the current statutory Child Poverty Strategy is dated and there is no action plan despite calls from campaigners¹⁶ and that rates are higher in Wales than the rest of the UK.¹⁷

³ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2022) [Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK 2022](#)

⁴ Ibid - a rise from 34% to 47% over the same time period

⁵ Institute of Fiscal Studies (2022) in Guardian 04.07.22 ‘Half of all children in lone parent families are in relative poverty.’

⁶ Lee, T. (2020) [Dragged Deeper: how families are falling further and further below the poverty line](#), Child Poverty Action Group

⁷ UK Government (2022) [Universal Credit statistics: background information and methodology: Methodology](#).

⁸ To be affected by the two-child limit, any third or subsequent children must have been born on or after 6 April 2017, when the policy came into force.

⁹ Guardian (2022). [Fears of widespread child hunger spark calls for universal free school meals in UK](#)

¹⁰ Scottish Government (2022). [Programme for Government 2022-23](#). p7, p9.

¹¹ Welsh Government (2022) [Free School Meals provision](#)

¹² Since 2018, households in Wales receiving Universal Credit are only eligible for free school meals if their family income is below £7,400 (before benefits are taken into account)

¹³ The Children’s Society (2020) [A Lifeline for All: Children and Families with No Recourse to Public Funds](#)

¹⁴ Department for Education (2022). [Providing free school meals to families with NRPF](#).

¹⁵ Child Poverty Action Group (17th March 2022) Open letter ‘Second Benefits cut is unthinkable – organisations call for minimum 7% benefits rise’ [Second benefits cut is unthinkable - organisations call for minimum 7% benefits rise | CPAG](#)

¹⁶ [ECPN \(2020\) Manifesto](#).

¹⁷ ITV News (2021). [Wales now has the worst child poverty rate of all the UK nations, new study shows](#).

In Scotland, the devolved government is not on track to meet its statutory poverty reduction targets,¹⁸ despite actions such as its Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plans,¹⁹ introduction of Scottish Child Payment and increased school clothing grant.

In Northern Ireland, despite *Child Poverty Act 2010* targets to eradicate child poverty by 2020, and a now outdated *Child Poverty Strategy 2016-2019* (extended to 2022), numbers of children living in poverty in the jurisdiction remain unacceptably high²⁰. An Anti-Poverty Strategy is in development, but has been severely delayed due to the lack of a functioning government in Northern Ireland.

Homelessness and temporary accommodation

There has been regression in relation to recommendation 134.164. In England and Wales the number of homeless households with dependent children has increased since 2017, as has the number of homeless families staying in poor quality temporary accommodation.^{21 22} Children continue to be placed in B&Bs for longer than the six-week legal limit.²³ In 2021, there were 96,060 households living in temporary accommodation in England, including 121,680 dependent children.²⁴ One third of care leavers become homeless in the first two years immediately after they leave care and a quarter of all homeless people have care experience.^{25 26} A similar picture exists in Scotland, where 11,804 children were assessed as being in homeless households in 2020-21.²⁷

In Northern Ireland, legislation prohibiting prolonged placement of children in temporary accommodation by public authorities has not been enacted. Under the 'Looked After Child' system, social services have a duty to accommodate and support 16 and 17 year olds who are assessed as homeless. Concerns include failure to assess young people in a timely manner and use of unregulated placements such as Bed and Breakfast or hostel accommodation. Data indicates the number of households facing homelessness and housing stress is increasing, as is the number of children in these households.²⁸ Although housing shortage and need exist across communities, NI Housing Executive statistics evidence that households on the waiting list, in housing stress, or with homeless status are disproportionately prevalent in areas where households are predominantly Catholic.²⁹

¹⁸ IPPR, Trussell Trust, Save the Children (2022). [Tackling child poverty and destitution](#).

¹⁹ Covering 2018-22 and 2022-26. See: Scottish Government (2018). [Tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-22](#); Scottish Government (2022). [Tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022-26](#).

²⁰ BBC News (2022). [1 in 4 children in Northern Ireland live in poverty](#)

²¹ In September 2021, there were 96,060 households in temporary accommodation, which included 121,680 dependent children. House of Commons (2022) [Households in temporary accommodation \(England\)](#). In March 2017 there were 77,240 households in temporary accommodation, which included 120,540 children. National Audit Office (2017) [Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; Homelessness](#)

²² Shelter Cymru have seen a huge increase in the number of children experiencing homelessness, living in temporary accommodation, such as hostels and hotels, with little room to eat, sleep and play. Shelter Cymru (2021) ['Over 1,500 children in Wales will wake up this Christmas without a place to call home'](#)

²³ The number of households with children in B&B-style accommodation was 8% higher in September 2021 than a year previously. A total of 590 households had been in B&B accommodation for over six weeks, up from 470 households a year previously. Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (2022) [Statutory homelessness live tables](#)

²⁴ More than a quarter (27%) of these households are accommodated outside the local authority area they previously lived in because councils can't find suitable accommodation locally. This can lead to long, tiring journeys to school and work and families becoming isolated from support networks. Rich, H. (2022) ['Temporary accommodation: the new social housing?'](#) Shelter

²⁵ All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness (2017) [Homelessness prevention for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence](#)

²⁶ End Youth Homelessness Cymru (2020). [Don't let me fall through the cracks report](#).

²⁷ Shelter Scotland (no date). [Housing and homelessness statistics](#).

²⁸ [Northern Ireland Homelessness Bulletin](#)

²⁹ Children's Law Centre (2020). [Northern Ireland NGO Stakeholder Report](#)

Recommendations referenced from the UK's UPR 2017 (3rd cycle)

134.168	Develop clear national strategies for the eradication of the poverty of about four million children, as indicated in the United Kingdom universal periodic review summary report of the stakeholders' submissions	Syrian Arab Republic A/HRC/36/9/Add.1 - Para. 3	Supported
134.192	Increase government efforts to eradicate child poverty, and in this regard undertake an assessment of the impact of the welfare reform on children from disadvantaged families	Kazakhstan A/HRC/36/9/Add.1 - Para. 3	Noted
134.164	Provide more targeted social policies to help disadvantaged families, and in particular their children, so as to boost social mobility	Singapore A/HRC/36/9/Add.1 - Para. 3	Supported

About us

Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE)

CRAE works with around 100 members to promote children's rights and monitor government implementation of the CRC in England. See: www.crae.org.uk Contact: lking@crae.org.uk

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

Together is an alliance of almost 500 NGO and individual members that works to improve the awareness, understanding and implementation of the CRC in Scotland. See: www.togetherscotland.org.uk Contact: juliet@togetherscotland.org.uk

Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group

The Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group is a national alliance of non-governmental and academic agencies tasked with monitoring and promoting the CRC in Wales. It is currently facilitated by Children in Wales, the national umbrella organisation. See: www.childreninwales.org.uk Contact: sean.oneill@childreninwales.org.uk

Children's Law Centre

The Children's Law Centre is a registered charity and specialist children's human rights centre in Northern Ireland, founded on the principles enshrined in the CRC. See: www.childrenslawcentre.org.uk Contact: fergalmcferran@childrenslawcentre.org