

# **ADDRESSING POVERTY UPDATE:**

## **UK CHILDREN DYING THROUGH POVERTY**

# Addressing poverty with and through schools - UK children dying through poverty

## This update highlights:

- Changes since the Child of the North poverty Report in 2024 warned that the **increase in infant mortality** between 2014 and 2017 was attributable to rising child poverty. [1]. One year on, the latest statistics show **the crisis is not only unresolved but worsening**.
- In 2023/24, **4.5 million children** – 31% of all children – were living in relative poverty after housing costs. The figure is projected to rise to 4.8 million by 2029/30 if urgent action is not taken.
- Children from disadvantaged areas face a **13% higher risk of death** in paediatric intensive care than those from the least disadvantaged areas [2].
- The two-child limit continues to drive hardship, pulling **109 more children into poverty every day**. Families lose £3,514 per year for every child beyond the second born after April 2017.

## The scale of the problem

In 2021/22, 4.2 million children were living in poverty in UK. In 2023/24, the figure surged to 4.5 million children (**31% of all children**) reported to be living in relative poverty after housing costs according to DWP statistics.

It is estimated that an **increase to 4.8 million by 2029-30** (before benefit cuts are factored in) is inevitable if no substantive action to change course takes place [3].

At constituency levels, **42% of constituencies report a higher-than-average poverty rate** [4].

The Prime Minister's Holborn & St Pancras constituency in London has a staggering **child poverty rate of 47%** but this is still lower than some constituencies that report over half of all children living in poverty (e.g., **Birmingham Ladywood where 62% children live in poverty**).

The Child of the North poverty report warned that structural inequities would worsen without urgent reform. The 2025 data confirm that prediction.

## Poverty is killing children

New findings show that children living in the most disadvantaged areas of the UK face significantly worse outcomes in paediatric intensive care units (PICUs) with **13% higher risk of PICU mortality** than those from the least disadvantaged areas [2].

Children from disadvantaged areas experienced **longer PICU stays** and higher rates of unplanned readmission [2].

Children from disadvantaged areas appeared to be **more severely ill on arrival**, suggesting potentially delayed access to care or unmet health needs [2].

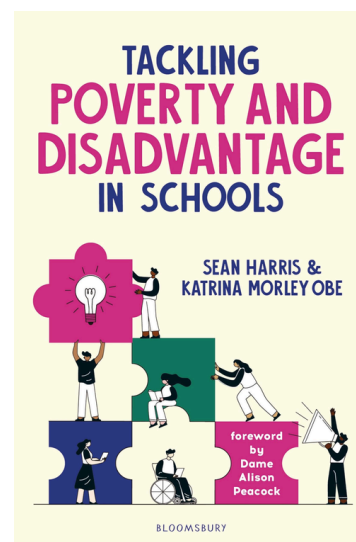
These problems are compounded for children from ethnic minority backgrounds with **children of Asian heritage ethnicity having a 52% higher risk of death** in PICUs compared to children of White heritage [2].

## Schools must be part of the solution

Schools support children who live in poverty and address the inequalities that impact on children's lives alongside poverty. New research emphasises the vital importance of relationships involving schools when bringing about change for children and families living in poverty [5,6,7].

The evidence shows change is possible with examples including the **Children North East's school day poverty proofing** and the Child Poverty Action Group's work on the Cost of the School Day.

New work by Harris and Morley gives schools practical, tried and tested ways to understand and address poverty and play their role in breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty that is killing children in the UK [8].



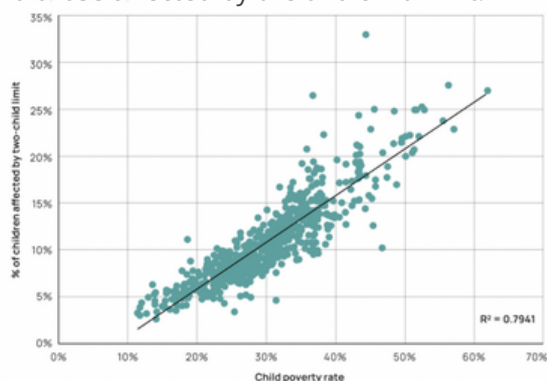
## Breaking intergenerational poverty

A lethal combination of the high costs associated with raising children, restrictions on access to social security, limited scope to increase income, and high housing costs (that quickly reach the benefits cap due to cost of rent alone) have trapped many families into the permanent cycle of intergenerational poverty.

Living in families with below average income means going without at least 1 of 3 basic essentials of food, heating and keeping up with household bills [9].

1.3 million children in large families in receipt of Universal Credit are going without at least 1 basic essential. This number is expected to grow further if the 2-child limit remains in place. Yet, the removal of 2 child limit needs to be paired with a protected minimum floor to ensure that families gaining from the removal of the limit would not be hit by the benefit cap instead.

Children living in large families, lone parents and families receiving universal credit or disability benefits are at a high risk of experiencing hardship if the limits remain in place. The figure below shows the strong relationship between child poverty rates and those affected by the two child limit.



Government action is necessary but not sufficient. The UK needs a concerted effort to create partnerships that can deliver meaningful change at pace on the ground.

New research by Newcastle University has shown that partnerships between schools and the voluntary sector can influence change[5,6,7]. Qualities of successful partnership involve: trust building, listening, transparency in decision-making and creating a space together, that are also applicable to partnerships in reducing the cost of the school day. However, the financial constraints faced by schools must be addressed.

## Recommendations

1. The removal of the two child limit would cost the government £2.0 billion in 2025/26 with a projected rise to £2.8 billion by 2029/30 but paired with the introduction of a protected minimum floor in Universal Credit could lift 500,000 children out of poverty and reduce the depth of poverty for a further million. Tax reformation and preventing £7 billion cuts to disability and health benefits would reduce child poverty and the observed hardship in families with a disabled family member [10].

2. Support and encourage schools to take no-cost and low-cost actions to reduce the cost of the school day, support children who live in poverty, and address the many inequalities that impact children's lives through poverty (see the 2024 report for practical suggestions).

3. Co-produce solutions with children, young people, families, and the wider community. Children's voices need to be at the centre of interventions. Education alliances can act as critical friends across services; putting student voices at the centre in identifying what needed to change and – more generally - dismantling hierarchies so there is an equalisation of power relationships within our most disadvantaged communities.

## Conclusion

The 2024 CoTN Report described a poverty crisis that has increased over the last year.

The forthcoming UK Government child poverty strategy must give hope that the experiences of every child living in poverty was heard and deeply contemplated.

Government must exercise compassionate political will and take bold measures to change the life course of children born into poverty. The UK needs a strategy that ensures children's lives are safe and no child needs to experience shame, exclusion, anxiety and worry.

This crisis is not inevitable. It is the result of political choices. If we act on the evidence, we can turn the tide and transform the life chances of all children. This will strengthen the UK and grow the economy.

**The message is even more urgent today than in 2024: we cannot afford to wait.**

**“I reflect on my hard-working Mam who would go days on end without eating. I reflect on younger me always pretending I was full and leaving food on my plate so my Mam would eat something without any guilt.”**

- Sophie Balmer

# References

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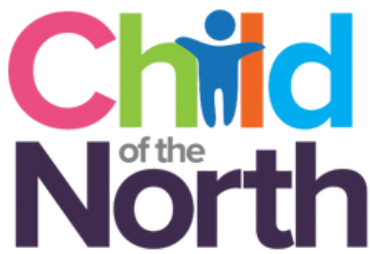
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This report is a collaborative programme of work between Child of the North and the Centre for Young Lives.

### **A note about language**

Please note that this report often uses “schools” as shorthand for “schools, nurseries, and other educational settings such as pupil referral units and special schools.” One central message of this report is the need for a “whole system” approach that includes all relevant stakeholders, and this includes all parts of the education system.

### **About Child of the North**

Child of the North is a partnership between the N8 Research Partnership and Health Equity North which aims to build a fairer future for children across the North of England by building a platform for collaboration, high quality research, and policy engagement. [@ChildoftheNort1](#) [@childofthenorth.bsky.social](#)

### **About the N8 Research Partnership**

The N8 Research Partnership is a collaboration of the eight most research-intensive Universities in the North of England: Durham, Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, and York. Working with partner universities, industry, and society (N8+), the N8 aims to maximise the impact of this research base by promoting collaboration, establishing innovative research capabilities and programmes of national and international prominence, and driving economic growth. [www.n8research.org.uk](http://www.n8research.org.uk) [@N8research](#) [@n8research.bsky.social](#)

### **About the Centre for Young Lives**

The Centre for Young Lives is a dynamic and highly experienced innovation organisation dedicated to improving the lives of children, young people, and families in the UK – particularly the most vulnerable. Led by former Children’s Commissioner, Baroness Anne Longfield CBE, who has been at the forefront of children’s issues for decades, the Centre’s agile team is highly skilled, experienced, and regarded. It is widely known and well respected across government departments, Parliament, local and regional government, academia, the voluntary sector, and national and local media. The Centre wants to see children and young people’s futures placed at the heart of policy making, a high priority for government and at the core of the drive for a future for our country which can be much stronger and more prosperous. [www.centreforyounglives.org.uk](http://www.centreforyounglives.org.uk) [@CfYounglives](#)

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