



Poverty can have a severe effect on a child’s development, and a negative impact on their health, education, family relationships and aspirations – both in childhood and in adult life. Growing up in poverty is one of the biggest barriers to children living in the UK being able to realise their rights.

“States Parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.”  
Article 27, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

## THE STATISTICS

The statistics alone paint a bleak picture. Today, an estimated 3.5 million children live below the poverty line in the UK.<sup>1</sup> The proportion of children living in poverty has grown from 1 in 10 in 1979 to 1 in 3. Living in poverty in the UK can mean a shorter life expectancy, the absence of a warm coat or a second pair of shoes, the inability to take part in extra-curricular activities, fewer qualifications, poorer health, and no celebrations of special occasions.

Children from lone parent families, children from ethnic minority families and children with disabilities are most likely to live in low income households.

Child poverty not only has a huge impact on individual children and families, but on an economic level costs the UK an estimated £25 billion each year in additional strain on public services, welfare support, and lost earnings.<sup>2</sup>

Situation in which children are living <sup>3</sup>	Number in poverty
In poverty, after housing costs	3.9 million
In poverty, before housing costs	2.8 million
In families in poverty where at least one parent works	2.1 million
In families in poverty where no one is in paid work	1.6 million

## THE RIGHTS

Living in poverty is something about which children themselves can do little, having no economic power, minimal political influence, and limited opportunities to get their voices heard.

In 1991, the UK Government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In doing so, it took on duties to promote and protect the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children, and to ensure that every child living in the UK has the opportunity to fulfil those rights. The Government also took on specific duties relating to children living in poverty.

However, since its first examination of the UK’s child rights record in 1995, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has remained seriously concerned about the unacceptably high levels of child poverty and inequality across the UK.

▲ Girls play on a street in Beeston, Leeds. Large parts of the area are economically deprived.

In 1998, the Labour Government made a historic commitment to eradicate child poverty in the UK by 2020, a pledge that gained the support of all political parties. In 2010, through the Child Poverty Act, it turned this ambitious goal into UK law.

In 2010, the coalition Government restated its commitment to ending child poverty in the UK by 2020.

### THE LEGAL BACKGROUND

The Child Poverty Act was passed in 2010. This, for the first time, placed child poverty targets in UK law.

By 2020, the Government – under this law – must reduce child poverty levels to less than 10 per cent of children living in relative poverty and less than 5 per cent of children living in absolute poverty. In real terms, this means that child poverty will need to fall below 0.6 million children.<sup>4</sup> Among other things, the Act also requires the Government to publish a UK child poverty strategy every three years, and for Northern Ireland and Scotland to produce their own national strategies. Wales has separate legislation that places the Welsh Assembly under similar duties.

### WHAT THE GOVERNMENT IS DOING

Tackling the inequalities in our society is a priority for any government committed to better lives for children. UNICEF UK welcomes Government policies to introduce a pupil premium for disadvantaged children in schools and to extend free early years provision to the poorest two-year-olds.

Government efforts to date have been essential in limiting the number of children living in poverty in the UK. However, they have not yet delivered a substantial and sustained decrease in child poverty. Huge cuts in public spending, changes to welfare support, and changing employment patterns resulting from the recession all risk increasing child poverty still further.

### WHAT FURTHER ACTION IS REQUIRED

UNICEF's research on child inequality shows that income matters. When comparing inequality between children, UNICEF found that the UK was in the bottom two-fifths of 24 developed countries, with income remaining the single biggest cause of child poverty and inequality.<sup>5</sup>

In the UK, it is the poorest children that are falling further and further behind their peers. The difficult economic climate is not a reason for failing to invest in children. The time to tackle child poverty decisively is now.

UNICEF UK calls on the Government to address both benefits and pay levels to maximise household income in the fight against child poverty, and to design the Universal Credit to ensure no family with children has to live on less than a living wage.

## CHILD POVERTY IN THE UK – QUICK REFERENCE

Approximately 3.5 million children in the UK live in poverty.

The UK has one of the highest child poverty rates in the industrialised world.

Successive UK Governments have committed to ending child poverty in the UK by 2020.

Progress to reduce the number of children living in poverty in the UK has slowed and stalled in recent years.

Current economic forecasts suggest that child poverty in the UK is likely to increase in the coming months and years.

UNICEF UK also asks the Government to pay at least the living wage to all its employees and sub-contractors, and promote the living wage to public and private sector employers. In making changes to the welfare, tax, health and education systems, the Government must apply a fairness test to make sure that new laws and policies do not increase inequality and poverty among children.

“ We should focus on closing the gap between the bottom and the middle not because that is the easy thing to do, but because focusing on those who do not have the chance of a good life is the most important thing to do. ”

The Rt. Hon. David Cameron MP, 2009

Denying child rights is wrong. Put it right.

### FIND OUT MORE

📞 [www.unicef.org.uk/endchildpoverty](http://www.unicef.org.uk/endchildpoverty)  
✉ [parliamentaryteam@unicef.org.uk](mailto:parliamentaryteam@unicef.org.uk)



#### References:

1. UNICEF UK supports the measure of relative poverty set out in the Child Poverty Act 2010 – households below 60 per cent of national median household income.
2. D. Hirsch (2008), *Estimating the costs of child poverty*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation
3. Department for Work and Pensions (2010), *Households Below Average Income 2008/09*
4. D. Hirsch (2008), *What is need to end child poverty in 2020?* Joseph Rowntree Foundation
5. Innocenti Research Centre (2010), *Report Card 9: The children left behind*. UNICEF