



Strictly embargoed until 22.45 on Tuesday 9th February 2021

Over one million under 5s living in poverty in the UK, new research reveals.

1.3 million of the 4.2 million children in poverty in the UK are babies and children under the age of 5. That's according to new researchⁱ from Little Village, one of the largest 'baby banks' in the UK, supported by analysis from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

The report explores the rates, persistence and depth of poverty in families with young children. It also highlights the impact of the Covid pandemic on low-income families with young children.

Key findings about children living in families with at least one child under 5:

- A third (34%) of children in these families live in poverty.
- Households where there is a child under the age of 3 face the highest risk of poverty.
- Poverty has risen faster in the last decade for children in these families than for families with older children.
- Children in these families are at greater risk of persistent poverty than families with older children.
- Two in five of these families (38%) have seen a reduction in their earnings as a result of the Covid crisis (July 2020).
- In addition, a quarter of all babies and toddlers currently experiencing poverty are deep in poverty (in other words living below 50% of the poverty line). In real terms this means families are facing impossible choices between heating, food and rent.

London-based Little Village is like a foodbank but for clothes, toys and equipment for babies and children up to the age of 5. The exclusive research has been commissioned to mark the 5th anniversary of the charity, which has supported over 11,000 children since 2016.

Sophia Parker, Founder of Little Village said:

"Our new research lays bare the unacceptable scale and depth of poverty in the UK for babies, toddlers and young children. The figures speak for themselves, and we see the real impact poverty has on families every week at Little Village - too many children are growing up hungry, cold and with clothes that don't fit, lacking the essential items they need to thrive.

"Every child has the right to a good childhood. The early years have a huge bearing on future health, education and employment outcomes. Even before the pandemic struck, millions of children were being left behind, and the last year has made matters so much worse. Child poverty is not inevitable: we have successfully tackled it in the past. This generation of children should remember us for how we got behind them, not for how they were let down. We believe the Government needs to take real action to address this national crisis now."

The report also exposes differences in regional poverty rates in families with at least one child under 5:

- London has the highest rates of poverty for children in these households (43%), followed by the North East (42%) and the West Midlands (39%). The lowest poverty rates in the UK for children in these households are in Scotland (28%), the South West (28%) and Northern Ireland (27%).
- London has the deepest poverty rates of anywhere in the UK for these families. On average, children in poverty in the capital live further below the poverty line than children elsewhere in the UK. In real terms, that's the equivalent to a family with two young children living on £248 a weekⁱⁱ.

Helen Barnard, Director at JRF said:

"It's just not right that any child in our society is growing up in poverty. The fact that so many children are growing up with the constant pressure of poverty shows just how far we are from realising our society's shared belief that every child should have the best start in life.

"Organisations like Little Village do extraordinary work to support children and families, not just with the essentials they need but with the solidarity and kindness that we know means so much to people who've been pulled under.

"But as a society we have a responsibility to make sure that people don't end up in this situation in the first place, and the Government has a critical opportunity to do this now, by keeping the £20 increase in Universal Credit. Introducing this support was the right course of action, and a recognition that our social security system was not strong enough to keep people afloat prior to the pandemic. Unemployment is projected to peak later this year and stay high for some time. Cutting the lifeline would be the worst possible decision for families on low incomes who face another extremely challenging year ahead."

In order to address the immediate impact of the Covid pandemic on young families living in poverty, Little Village fully supports the calls from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and others to:

- Keep the lifeline. Treasury plans to remove the temporary uplift in Universal Credit in April will reduce the incomes of 6.2 million families by £1040 (£20 a week) and plunge half a million people, including 200,000 children, into poverty overnight.
- Adapt Universal Credit to reflect the challenging economic circumstances families are facing as a result of the pandemic.
- Ensure renters can remain in their homes and extend the ban on evictions for the duration of the lockdown.
- Help low paid and insecure workers through this crisis by widening access to statutory sick pay to make it easier for low-income families to self-isolate when necessary.

To promote good childhoods for all in the long term, the report recommends:

- Ensuring families enjoy decent wages and security of income.
- Greater investment in the early years, to ensure parents and young children receive proper support at this crucial stage in a child's life.

Ends

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Little Village has launched an online charity appeal, #VirtualVillage, to help support families most at risk of hardship during the pandemic:

<https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/2021VirtualVillage?success=true>

About Little Village

Little Village is like a foodbank, but for clothes, toys and equipment for babies and children up to the age of 5. We've grown to be one of the largest 'baby banks' in the UK, supporting over 11,000 children since we launched in 2016. Families are referred to us via a network of over 1,800 professionals such as midwives and social workers. As a volunteer-led movement of parents committed to alleviating child poverty, Little Village's vision is that every child in the capital has the essential items they need to thrive.

About the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is an independent social change organisation working to solve UK poverty. For more information visit www.jrf.org.uk

ⁱ **"It takes a village: how to make all childhoods matter"** Little Village report, supported by JRF February 2020. The analysis was undertaken by the research team at JRF. They drew on three main sources:

- Households Below Average Income dataset (Department for Work and Pensions).
- Understanding Society (University of Essex, ISER) to make sense of persistent poverty.
- The Understanding Society, Covid-19 study (University of Essex, ISER)

ⁱⁱ Figures after housing costs.