

The real cost-of-living-crisis: Five million British children 'sentenced to life of poverty thanks to welfare reforms'

Charity's report blames benefit cuts, increased cost of living and stagnant wages for looming crisis

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Five million children in Britain could be “sentenced to a lifetime of poverty” by 2020 because of welfare reforms, according to research from Save the Children. Cuts to benefits, the rising cost of living and years of flat wages have created a “triple whammy” for children, the charity said. It argues that children have borne the brunt of the recession in Britain, and now represent the “face of poverty” in the UK.

Soaring food prices and childcare costs have also hit families, with the cost of food rising by 19 per cent when compared with other goods between 2007 and 2011. A nursery place for a child under two cost 77 per cent more last year than it did a decade ago.

A significant proportion of families across England – as high as 28 per cent in London – are skipping meals in a bid to make ends meet. And in many areas, more than one in 10 families cannot afford to buy children new shoes when they need them.

Ending child poverty by 2020 is a target to which all political parties have committed. But the Save the Children report found that the number of children living in poverty could actually rise by 1.4 million by 2020 – an increase of 41 per cent on the 3.5 million children currently living in poverty. Political promises to eradicate child poverty by 2020 are “no longer credible”, says the report.

Responding to the findings, shadow Work and Pensions Minister Rachel Reeves said:

“Under David Cameron child poverty is set to rise, not fall, and the cost-of-living crisis has left millions of families struggling to make ends meet.”

But the report's authors said: “We do not believe any party is showing a sufficient strategic response to the scale and seriousness of the problem.”

Work “has ceased to become a sufficient solution to poverty for families with children”, the report warns. Two-thirds of children in poverty now live in working households, a rise of 20 per cent since 2003.

“The UK remains one of the most unfair countries in the developed world – the lottery of birth still determines millions of children's chances in life,” the report warns.

A Government spokesperson said: “With the economy growing, we have just seen the largest rise in employment for over 40 years, and unemployment is falling, with 100,000 fewer children living in workless poor families. Universal credit will make around three million households better off and lift up to 300,000 children out of poverty.”

How do you measure child poverty?

Defining poverty is not easy, not least because it is all relative to where people happen to live (...). Relative poverty looks at how much people have to live off compared to others, at any given time. It is the official Government measure used to define poverty, with those on 60 per cent or more less than the median income deemed to be in that category. While they may not be starving to death, they are poor in terms of not being able to live in the manner of the majority of the country. The poverty line for a family of four is £357 a week after housing costs.

(582 words)