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Third of children under 16 in poverty in West Midlands

Child poverty continues to rise in the West Midlands, with 34% of under-16s in the region living in poverty after housing costs, according to research published today by the End Child Poverty Coalition. The new data shows the scale of the challenge faced by government if it is to realise its ambition to build back better and level up opportunities for children across the UK.

The research by Loughborough University shows that, before the pandemic, in some parts of the region – such as **Birmingham Ladywood, Birmingham Hodge Hill** and **Birmingham Hall Green** – the majority of children were growing up in poverty, once housing costs are taken into account. Additionally, in the last four years, child poverty has risen fastest in the Midlands.

The increase in child poverty after housing costs is partially explainable by rising rents over the last five years. Many families find that once their housing costs are paid, they do not have enough money to meet their children’s needs and are left no option but to turn to crisis help, like food banks, and are increasingly reliant on free school meals.

The impact of poverty on children is well documented with children from low income families more likely to experience worse physical and mental health; do less well in school; and have fewer opportunities in the future.

The End Child Poverty coalition is calling on the Government to recognise the scale of the problem and its impact on children’s lives. They are urging the Government to set out an ambitious plan to tackle child poverty encompassing not only social security spending but the high cost of housing and childcare and investment in children’s services.

Thomas Lawson, Chief Executive at Turn2us, said:

*“In 2001, our government set a target to end child poverty by 2020, yet here we are reporting once again that it is rising.*

*“Low wages, soaring rents and the stubbornly high cost of living is pulling families into poverty and drying up the opportunities of so many young people across the country - particularly in the West Midlands.*

*“If the government truly believes in compassion and justice, ministers must first admit the problem then fully commit to solving it. We are urging the Prime Minister to listen to our recommendations and include them in a comprehensive strategy to end child poverty once and for all.”*

Anna Feuchtwang, Chair of End Child Poverty which commissioned the research, said:

*“The Government can be in no doubt about the challenge it faces if it is serious about ‘levelling up’ disadvantaged parts of the country. This new data reveals the true extent of the hardship experienced by families on low incomes – the overwhelming majority of which were working households before the pandemic. The children affected are on a cliff edge, and the pandemic will only sweep them further into danger.*

*“The Prime Minister must urgently admit to the true extent of child poverty in our country rather than resorting to his own inaccurate statistics. An ambitious plan to put this shameful situation right would be transformational for millions of children. As a matter of urgency we are calling on the Chancellor not to go ahead with planned cuts to Universal Credit which would see families lose out on £1000 a year. Given today’s data, this cut is unconscionable.”*

**End Child Poverty is calling for an urgent Government plan to end child poverty including:**

* *Uprating of housing assistance in line with inflation;*
* *Retain the £20 uplift in Universal Credit introduced at the start of the pandemic, which the Government has indicated will end in April 2021;*
* *End the benefit cap and the two-child limit on benefits;*
* *Invest in all children with an increase to child benefit*
* *Extend Free School Meals to all families in receipt of Universal Credit and those with No Recourse to Public Funds*

The statistics are based on data published by the Department for Work and Pensions in March 2020, and on estimates of the effect of housing costs on poverty rates produced by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University, based on survey evidence.

Earlier this year, Boris Johnson was rebuked by the statistics watchdog for his repeated misuse of child poverty statistics. The Statistics Authority upheld a complaint from the End Child Poverty coalition judging that on three separate occasions his statements on child poverty were ‘incorrect’.

**The ten constituencies in the West Midlands with the highest child poverty:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Constituency | **% of children below 60% median income AHC** |
| 2014/15 | 2018/19 | %age point increase |
| **UK** | **28%** | **30%** | **2%** |
| **West Midlands** | **30%** | **34%** | **4%** |
| Birmingham Ladywood  | 41.8% | 54.5% | 12.7% |
| Birmingham Hodge Hill  | 40.5% | 53.8% | 13.4% |
| Birmingham Hall Green  | 43.7% | 52.5% | 8.8% |
| Birmingham Perry Barr  | 40.4% | 48.4% | 8.1% |
| Warley | 39.7% | 48% | 8.3% |
| Walsall South | 40.6% | 47.2% | 6.6% |
| Stoke-on-Trent Central | 37.9% | 45.5% | 7.7% |
| Birmingham Yardley  | 32.4% | 44.7% | 12.4% |
| Stoke-on-Trent North | 38.3% | 44.3% | 6% |
| West Bromwich West | 38% | 44.2% | 6.1% |

**-ENDS-**

For further information and interviews with Turn2us spokespeople or case studies, please contact the Turn2us Communications team on: media@turn2us.org.uk

**Notes to editors**

1. The research was carried out by Dr Juliet Stone and Professor Donald Hirsch at the Centre for Research in Social Policy, at Loughborough University using Before Housing Cost data produced by the Department for Work and Pensions in March 2020, together with housing cost data from the Valuation Office Agency and income data from the Understanding Society survey. The report and data is available at [www.endchildpoverty.org.uk](http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk)
2. Note that the total number of children in poverty shown in the data tables only includes those aged under 16 and is therefore lower than in the main poverty statistics, which also includes 16-19 year olds in full-time secondary education.
3. For more information about End Child Poverty’s complaint to the Office for Statistical Regulation and their judgement visit [www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/pms-use-of-child-poverty-statistics-misleading/](http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/pms-use-of-child-poverty-statistics-misleading/)

**About End Child Poverty**

End Child Poverty is a coalition of organisations from civic society including children’s charities, child welfare organisations, social justice groups, faith groups, trade unions and others, united in our vision of a UK free of child poverty.

**About Turn2us**

Turn2us is a national charity that provides practical information and support to people facing financial shocks. We work alongside those who have experienced not having enough money to live on to develop practical information and support that helps people cope with life-changing events such as job loss, illness or bereavement.