

we support  end **child poverty**

**CHILD
POVERTY
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BUtTLEuk
FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

CHILD POVERTY: EIGHT COMMON MISTAKES CORRECTED

1. The poverty line we use in the UK is an 'arbitrary' measure. Wrong.

The official poverty line we use in the UK is not arbitrary. It is an accepted international measure employed by the OECD and the EU. We use it because social scientists have shown again and again that when incomes fall below this level, material deprivation and many other indicators of well-being deteriorate too.ⁱ

2. It is impossible to eliminate relative poverty. Wrong.

This belief stems from a failure to understand the difference between the median income (the mid-point in the income distribution) and the mean income (what is commonly viewed as the average).

Using a relative measure does create a moving target when incomes rise (and sometimes fall). But it is statistically possible for every household currently below the poverty line to move above it without the poverty line itself shifting as a consequence.ⁱⁱ Other countries have child poverty levels to which we aspire: if they can achieve this, so can we.ⁱⁱⁱ

3. We should not measure relative poverty because it is not 'real' poverty. Wrong.

Those who comprehend poverty as a simple lack of existential basics such as food, shelter and warmth will never see the value of a relative poverty measure.

But the vast majority understand that the experience of poverty goes far beyond simple survival, and instead is a question of being able to participate fully in the society in which we live.^{iv} If we understand poverty as exclusion from the mainstream, as being unable to enjoy products, services and experiences which are regarded as the norm, a relative measure is essential.

4. We only measure relative income poverty in the UK. Wrong.

There are three additional ways of measuring poverty that the government has committed to through the Child Poverty Act of 2010: a material deprivation measure, persistent poverty and absolute poverty.^v There is also a standard way of measuring the depth of poverty.^{vi}

But we also track numerous other aspects of well-being beyond the material in the UK.^{vii} We have a multitude of indicators that tell us about educational and health outcomes, about family and peer relationships, about behaviours and risks as well as subjective assessments of well-being. Putting these together with income measures allows us to understand more fully what it means to live in poverty.

5. We have achieved nothing with respect to child poverty over the last decade. Wrong.

While we await the exact figures for 2010/11, the Institute for Fiscal Studies projects that between 1998/99 and 2010/11, the number of children living in poverty will have reduced by 900,000 (the equivalent of a quarter of all children living in poverty in 98/99)^{viii}, along with an additional 900,000 who have been prevented from falling into poverty during the same period.^{ix} Reducing child poverty on this scale and at this pace has few if any precedents, either over time or across comparable wealthy countries.

6. What we saw over the last decade was simply 'poverty plus a pound'. Wrong.

Many persist in arguing that the gains observed over the last decade are illusory, with interventions designed to move families from just below to just above the poverty line.

In fact, the 'poverty plus a pound' thesis has been decisively disproved. Analysis from the IFS shows that the poverty line could have been set at any point between 43% and 100% of median income in the last decade, and we would still have witnessed significant reductions in child poverty.^x

7. We have failed to tackle the real causes of poverty over the past decade. Wrong.

Some assert that resources have been unduly focused in recent years on raising incomes through benefits, rather than directed at other interventions that enable people to live better lives.

This depiction of past strategy is a misrepresentation: large investments have been made over the last decade in children's centres, a national childcare strategy and community regeneration, alongside interventions to improve work incentives for key at-risk groups such as lone parents, support disadvantaged children in schools and promote greater health equality.^{xi}

8. The Child Poverty Act targets are responsible for a narrow strategy which focuses on income support at the expense of other areas. Wrong.

The Child Poverty Act includes statutory drivers as well as statutory targets. The statutory drivers are areas that the government must consider when developing their child poverty strategy. These are employment and skills of parents, financial support for children and parents, information, advice and assistance on parenting skills, physical and mental health, education, childcare, social services, housing and social inclusion.^{xii}

NOTES:

ⁱ See P Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom*, Allen Lane 1979

ⁱⁱ See <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2010/06/relative-poverty-income-wrong>

ⁱⁱⁱ Luxembourg income Study data available from <http://www.lisdatacenter.org/our-data/>

^{iv} See, for example, P Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom*, Allen Lane 1979

^v <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/9/part/1/crossheading/targets-relating-to-child-poverty>

^{vi} See, for example, <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/factbook2011>

^{vii} See Table 13.2 in J Bradshaw (ed), *The well-being of children in the UK* (3rd ed), Policy Press 2011

^{viii} M Brewer, J Browne and R Joyce, *Child poverty and working age poverty from 2010 to 2020*, IFS Commentary C121, Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2011

^{ix} M Brewer et al, *Child Poverty in the UK Since 1998/99: lessons from the past decade*, Working Paper 10/23, Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2010

^x M Brewer et al, *Child Poverty in the UK Since 1998/99: lessons from the past decade*, Working Paper 10/23, Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2010

^{xi} See. For example, J Hills, T Sefton and K Stewart, *Towards a more equal society: poverty, inequality and policy since 1997*, Policy Press 2009

^{xii} <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/9/part/1/crossheading/strategies-duties-of-secretary-of-state>