



MIND THE GAPS

REPORTING ON FAMILIES' INCOMES DURING THE PANDEMIC

16 April 2020

This is the first in a series of weekly briefings, *Mind the Gaps*, which highlight some of the gaps in support that exist for children and families affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Evidence of these gaps is drawn from our Early Warning System (EWS) which collects case studies from frontline practitioners working directly with families on the problems they are seeing with the social security system.

The issues outlined in this briefing are a selection of some of the 'top issues' emerging through the EWS. It is important to note that these briefings are not designed to capture everything we are seeing; instead the *Mind the Gaps* briefing series will feature different issues each week and return to issues that need urgent attention where necessary.

Groups that are excluded from claiming universal credit (UC)

Some groups are excluded from claiming UC despite experiencing a sudden loss of income as a result of the crisis. This includes:

- a) students who have lost their jobs, but who are not eligible to claim UC because they do not have disabilities or children;
- b) couples where one person has lost their job and their partner has their own income or savings;
- c) those with no recourse to public funds;
- d) EU nationals that do not have a right to reside and therefore cannot claim means tested benefits;
- e) those who are stuck in the UK or abroad.

A single full time student with no health problems had just changed jobs when the bar he started working in closed due to coronavirus. He has lost his job and doesn't think he can be re-employed to be furloughed. He is not entitled to UC or job seekers allowance (JSA) as a student and would have to apply to the college or university hardship fund.

A self-employed taxi driver whose income has dried up will not be entitled to UC due to his wife's income. It's unlikely that he would have made the national insurance contributions that would entitle him to contributory JSA and he would only be entitled to contributory employment and support allowance if he is self-isolating. Otherwise he will have to wait for government support for self-employed people.

An EU national with 3 children moved to Scotland in January and is not working. Her partner remained in Europe and isn't working either. She has been relying on foodbanks and the Scottish Welfare Fund as she is not entitled to claim any benefits. Normally she would have been advised to find work so that she could establish a right to reside as a worker, but that is not possible at the moment.

A client and his wife are full time students with visas that state that they have no recourse to public funds (NRPF). Their course has been suspended. It is unlikely they can claim any means tested benefits.

An American couple with a young child have asked if they can claim any benefits. She works and he has just finished studying but is currently unable to look for work due to coronavirus. It is likely that they will have a NRPF restriction on their visa, in which case they will not be eligible for benefits and will have to rely solely on her income from work.

A Scottish national was working in Spain but is not receiving any wages due to coronavirus. She is not entitled to Spanish benefits and neither can she claim UC as she is not present and habitually resident in the UK.

Support for making or managing a benefit claim

Many people will require support to make a new claim for UC in the coming weeks and months, and many existing claimants require ongoing support (e.g. non-English speakers, those with limited or no digital skills, people with additional support needs). Libraries are closed and many other services are either closed or have very limited telephone-based support.

A single client was self-employed for a short time until 4 weeks ago. He was told to claim UC by HMRC but is having problems making the claim online due to his limited IT skills.

A client's support worker usually helps him with his UC claim as he is unable to do it himself due to disabilities and mental health problems. He needs to reclaim UC due to a drop in his income but he is too anxious to call himself.

A client is self-isolating and needs to claim UC. He has no way to claim online at home and can't get through to the DWP on the phone. The adviser is concerned about the ethics of starting the online claim for him due to data protection rules and potential failure to disclose/misrepresentation of his facts.

Claimants are also experiencing ongoing issues in relation to the UC claims process which can create further delays in receiving initial payments.

A couple tried to claim UC a couple of weeks ago but didn't have the required evidence, so their claim was refused. They have it now, but jobcentres are closed so they will have to make a new claim online and wait for DWP to call them back to verify their information.

A homeless man with numerous health conditions cannot isolate until social services have assisted his move into a care home, which requires confirmation of income i.e. his UC claim. Verification was held up until the adviser was accepted as having implied consent via an existing Personal Independence Payment claim and answered basic questions over the phone.

Families struggling with additional costs of children

Families are struggling with the additional costs of raising children, made worse by children being at home due to school closures and some parents experiencing a sudden loss of income due to job losses or not being able to work as a result of childcare responsibilities.

A UC claimant with a moderate income explains how her family is affected, she was previously just about making ends meet (but no treats) and now there are increased costs everywhere: additional commuting costs for childcare arrangements now the children are off school, increased food budget for kids who empty fridge every day, increased energy and water bills, higher prices in supermarket across the board, visiting numerous shops to do a standard (non-stock-piling) shop.

A part time support worker with two children is unable to work because the schools are closed. She was receiving housing benefit, working tax credit, child tax credit and child benefit. Her working tax credit is likely stop after 8 weeks.

A disabled student and her carer husband with three kids are managing on a student loan income only. Not "disabled enough" for disability benefits and reluctant to claim UC as they wouldn't be able to manage if her husband was required to seek work. Can't access free school meals whilst self-isolating. Mental health has deteriorated since virus outbreak, having all kids at home, increased bills (energy and food). Shopping is problematic as kids have suspected autistic spectrum disorder and very particular food preferences. Three members of the family have a health issue affecting their joints.

About CPAG

Child Poverty Action Group works on behalf of the more than one in four children in the UK growing up in poverty. It doesn't have to be like this. We use our understanding of what causes poverty and the impact it has on children's lives to campaign for policies that will prevent and solve poverty – for good. We provide training, advice and information to make sure hard-up families get the financial support they need. We also carry out high profile legal work to establish and protect families' rights.

About the Early Warning System

Our Early Warning System helps us get a better understanding of how changes to the social security system are affecting the lives of children and families. We gather information from advisers about the experience of children and families. This intelligence informs much of our policy, research and campaigning work, and also feeds into the advice we give frontline advisers.

The Early Warning System in Scotland is supported by the Children, Young People and Families Early Intervention Fund, managed on behalf of the Scottish Government by CORRA foundation. The Early Warning System in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is made possible by the support of Oak Foundation and Barrow Cadbury Trust. The Mind the Gaps briefing series is also being supported by the Nuffield Foundation, increasing the capacity of the Early Warning System to effectively monitor the impact of Covid-19 on children and families, and identify issues with the social security response as they emerge.

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