

# Broken Britain:

Voices from the  
frontline of the fight  
for everyday rights

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Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilises the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights.

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We believe that acting in solidarity and compassion with people everywhere can change our societies for the better.

Broken Britain: Voices from the frontline of the fight for everyday rights

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# Executive summary

This report examines UK community perspectives on the human rights set out in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). These are the rights that affect daily life, such as the rights to healthcare, housing and work. They are often referred to as ‘everyday rights’. The ICESCR makes governments responsible for ensuring that they are fulfilled.

Although the UK ratified the ICESCR in 1976, social and economic rights are not yet protected in law. This makes it difficult for people to seek justice through the courts if their rights are violated. Moreover, access to everyday rights is more challenging for some communities than others, because of systemic discrimination: policies and practices embedded in society and institutions that treat certain groups of people unfairly.

To help develop Amnesty’s strategy to tackle this systematic denial of human rights, our staff travelled the length and breadth of Britain, speaking to communities about their experiences of having their everyday rights violated. What they told us generally aligns with official data and research by credible institutions and organisations. The views presented in this report are by no means conclusive, and they are not necessarily those of Amnesty International. But they show how people in Britain feel about everyday rights, and highlight areas that would benefit from more in-depth debate and research.

In his first press conference as Prime Minister, Keir Starmer said: ‘The principle I operate to is those with skin in the game know what’s best for their communities.’ We hope his government will understand the wisdom of listening to communities, and acting on what it hears.

We took a two-pronged approach to discovering public perceptions of economic and social rights. We commissioned an opinion poll of a representative sample of the UK population. To better understand the challenges people face in claiming economic and social rights, we consulted communities who face poverty and inequality in their everyday lives, and the grassroots organisations who support them. For this, our partner organisations helped arrange 24 workshops across Scotland, Wales and England (our deadlines for this report meant we were unable to consult communities in Northern Ireland).

In this report, all information from the focus groups is anonymised, with quotes used to illustrate group discussions rather than attributed to specific individuals.

## **What rights do people want?**

Our public polling showed that an overwhelming 80-90 per cent of people in the UK think economic, social and cultural rights are important, above all the rights to health, food and education. Seventy-three per cent of the public support the principle of rights – including economic, social and cultural rights – being protected in law.

In the community discussions, we first asked people to focus on the things in their lives

that they value most. The words they mentioned most frequently were family and freedom, closely followed by economic and social rights. Those rated most highly included food, housing and health.

### **What people think about access to economic and social rights**

Many in the general public are concerned that their access to their human rights has deteriorated over the past 10 years. In our poll 43 per cent believed that access to the rights to health services, and to food, had declined. For housing the proportion was 46 per cent.

Access to justice is also a concern. More than a third of people (37 per cent) do not think that a complaint would be listened to. A majority (55 per cent) do not feel confident they would qualify for legal aid, and 54 per cent say they would not be able to afford legal help otherwise.

We asked focus group participants to rank their access to economic, social rights on a simple scale. Sixty per cent felt their right to social security and access to income protection was limited, while more than half said they had limited access to the rights to an adequate standard of living (56 per cent) and the right to health (55 per cent). Fewer people perceived access to the rights to work and to support for the family as restricted. The proportion was 46 per cent for each: more than four out of 10 people.

The effect of limited access to everyday rights was summed up by a focus group participant:

‘Poverty means you feel disadvantaged from the start. Living in poverty equals a lack of fairness, feeling treated differently, being judged, being picked on, being looked down upon. Feeling labelled.’

### **Community perspectives**

**The right to education.** Many people in communities had positive experiences about the quality of primary and secondary education and pastoral care. However, they also spoke of instances of limited access to rights. The common themes in their experiences are:

- Variations in education quality, curriculum and monitoring
- Inflexibility and inequity in access, especially for marginalised groups
- Financial burdens affecting children from a lower income background
- Challenges in getting support for special educational needs
- Financial barriers to access to higher education.

Some observations from our focus groups:

‘The cost of participation in schools like uniform and school trips is difficult. Schools penalise parents: if the uniforms are from a different brand children get excluded. It’s discrimination against not well-off families.’

‘We had a two-year wait for speech therapy and diagnosis for my child.’

‘Low-income students should have equal rights to university without having students loans and massive debt.’

**The right to work.** People discussed not only access to jobs, but also pay levels and discrimination. Common themes in people’s experiences included:

- Challenges in accessing work especially for people in coastal and rural areas
- Mixed experience of training and support
- Financial barriers and caring responsibilities affecting women
- Inequality and insecurity in employment.

Some observations from our focus groups:

‘In coastal and rural communities, because of poor transport links, most of the work available is seasonal.’

‘When you get a job there might be discrimination because of your faith. My dad does construction, but he doesn’t get picked for work because of racism.’

‘Young families find it difficult to work especially if they haven’t got school age children. They have to front the bill for childcare ... it’s cheaper not to work.’

‘Wages have not kept up with the cost of living. Work doesn’t meet all the needs of the family.’

‘It takes a lot to leave an awful workplace because people are desperate for the money. I worked in the care sector. I got no sick pay, lost holiday pay and was working way over the hours.’

**The right to an adequate standard of living.** People were very concerned about limited access to adequate food, clothing and housing. The common themes in their experiences are:

- Limited or unreliable access to nutritious food and reliance on food banks
- A crisis in housing availability, affordability and standards of accommodation
- Struggles to meet basic needs for clothing and heating.

Some observations from our focus groups:

‘A good standard of living depends on social status: if you have money, you have better opportunities.’

‘Poverty is a lack of choices, and you turn to rubbish food because good food is expensive. No food means no strength, no energy, feeling weak.’

‘Someone called up our service for help. There were two people working full time and they were crying because they couldn’t afford tights for their child for school.’

‘Rent increases are making rent unaffordable.’

‘I was facing eviction and the council told me to wait until the bailiffs come and then get homelessness assistance, otherwise I would be making myself intentionally homeless.’

‘Quality of housing is bad – there is mould and the kids are living with it which is not good for their health.’

**The right to social security and social insurance.** To many people, the rules, processes and penalties in the benefits system are a source of confusion, insecurity and humiliation. Common themes in people’s experiences are:

- Administrative hurdles that make it difficult to access benefits
- Extra costs to claiming benefits in rural areas (for example, transport costs)
- Limitations on eligibility for social security, and challenges in benefits assessments
- Inadequate benefit rates and punitive measures (sanctions)
- Demeaning treatment at the hands of the authorities.

Some observations from our focus groups:

‘Benefit criteria, the process of applying and forms should be clearer. People are put off applying because of the confusing forms.’

‘I had a meeting every week and I had a two-hour round trip for a five-minute conversation. The bus journey into the [social security] office is £7 a week if the buses are running.’

‘Over the last few months, since losing my Personal Independence Payment, I’ve lost a large part of my daily living costs. There was no warning, there was no time to prepare financial budgeting, the phone call just came, totally unexpected. Suddenly my life was changed.’

‘It is not income support; it’s punishment and it feels intentional.’

**The right to health.** Generally, our focus groups said the quality of care and treatment in the NHS was good once you were on a care pathway. However, they also experienced limitations on their rights to care and treatment. The common themes were:

- Challenges in getting healthcare, particularly for vulnerable groups.
- Geographic challenges
- Disparity between public and private healthcare
- Limited capacity in mental health services, and long waiting lists.

Some observations from our focus groups:

‘Accessing my GP is hard and takes two to three hours of ringing.’

‘There are no dentists in coastal and rural areas and there’s a waiting list for 18 months to three-and-a-half years.’

‘Maternity services are bad but it’s even worse for women of colour.’

‘Immigrants are denied healthcare if they have no recourse to public funds. Many are low-waged carers working in the healthcare industry but denied medical care or forced to pay thousands.’

‘There’s an 18-month wait for community mental health services. You get offered a telephone appointment but there’s no support while you’re waiting.’

**The right to protection and assistance for the family.** People shared experiences of their needs and getting support for their families. Common themes were:

- Fear of social services
- Experience of discrimination
- Challenges in transitioning from child to adult services
- Decline in youth and community support services
- Concerns about adult social care.

Some observations from our focus groups:

‘People are scared to talk to social services because they always think, “The children will get taken off me because I don’t have enough to live on.”’

‘There is a hostile, punitive approach to mothers – especially mothers of colour, disabled mothers or single mothers.’

‘The transition from child services to adult services is like jumping off a cliff – away from all the accessible support, people coming to the house, being in contact. The reduction in resources and staff is shocking.’

‘Adult social care is shit. There’s a resource issue. When someone has dementia you get information about support, and they talk about what they will do, but not much happens after your diagnosis.’

### **Rights are interdependent**

Listening to people whose everyday rights are denied shows that human rights defy the neat categories of international conventions. The everyday struggles faced by individuals, families and communities cannot be approached as isolated problems, but are multi-layered and complex, with connections between issues. A single social or economic rights violation can set off a chain reaction and undermine the entire support structure for a decent standard of living.

### **Solutions: Communities call for change**

We asked communities what a future government should prioritise to address the challenges they face in getting their social and economic rights. This is what they said:

1: Ensure people’s basic needs for housing and food. In particular, people wanted the government to tackle homelessness and to ensure access to affordable, decent homes. People wanted basic economic and social rights to be protected in law.

2: A social security system that genuinely protects people. People wanted a system based on compassion and dignity. They wanted benefit rates that enable people to meet essential needs, without punitive and degrading treatment.

3: More equality and an end to discrimination. People called for an end to divisive rhetoric that demonises groups. They wanted politics and politicians to better reflect people and communities who face discrimination. And they wanted more accountability from the authorities for failures to tackle inequality and discrimination.

4: Fund and reform the NHS. People wanted free health care, available across the country. In particular, people wanted mental health services to be more accessible.

5: Financial decisions that prioritise people struggling to make ends meet. The communities we spoke to are concerned about cuts to public services. They felt cuts affected some people more than others. They also wanted more transparency, so that the government can be held to account.

6: People want a bigger say in decisions that affect them. People said they were crying out to be heard: tokenistic listening is not enough. People wanted meaningful participation in policy making.

7: Protect children and young people from the effects of inequality. People want the government to prioritise assistance for families with children and young people, and specialist services for children and families fleeing armed conflict and state or domestic violence.

8: Transport us to our rights. Public transport was a key theme across all the other priorities. It is seen as a gateway to rights: it enables vulnerable and isolated people to get the public services they are entitled to.



## Conclusions

Amnesty International UK wanted to create a report that sheds light on where access to economic and social rights is lacking, with a focus on perspectives from communities who are seldom heard.

Our goal was to highlight the issues that communities prioritise in order to guide future government policies and practice. The community priorities are not formal recommendations from Amnesty International. They belong to the people. However, we continue to work in solidarity with the communities. We aim to carry out more research to better understand the challenges they face, and we will campaign for change.

These community perspectives reveal:

- A significant breakdown in how the government upholds economic and social rights in the UK
- Where new policy measures are needed
- Where existing policies fall short.

Amnesty International calls on the government to act in response to this – and to do it urgently:

- Transition from isolated policy approaches to integrate the obligations contained in the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This would enable a shift to policy frameworks that recognise how rights are connected and help prevent people being forced into poverty. Our polling shows that there is public support for this.
- Ensure a universal minimum standard of rights and develop an action plan to address inequality.
- Strengthen the Equality Act 2010. Growing inequality perpetuates discrimination, with certain groups facing greater challenges: disabled people, single parents, people experiencing homelessness, and people seeking asylum.
- Build inclusive institutional frameworks that actively engage marginalised communities, to ensure their voices are heard. Better community engagement will foster more government accountability.

This report ends with words from the communities:

‘Put the humanity back into politics and get better at understanding what it is like to live in our situation.’

# Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) outlines fundamental rights that every person should enjoy. These include civil and political rights, such as the right to life and freedom of expression, and economic, social and cultural rights that affect daily life, such as healthcare, housing and employment. These are often referred to as ‘everyday rights’.

These principles are further detailed in international agreements which governments have ratified (meaning that they commit to be bound by them). Monitoring of governments’ performance on these rights is carried out by the UN and other intergovernmental organisations.

This report examines community perspectives related to one of these agreements overseen by the UN: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which the UK ratified in 1976.

These rights affect our quality of life, and governments are responsible for ensuring they are fulfilled – which might include providing financial assistance. Unlike civil and political rights, which are legally protected in the UK in the Human Rights Act (1998), social and economic rights are not protected in law, making it difficult for individuals to seek justice through the courts if their rights are violated. It should be noted that through devolution agreements, governments and administrations in the four nations of the UK have taken different approaches to the respect, protection and fulfilment of social and economic rights.

Access to these everyday rights is also more challenging for some communities than others, because of systemic discrimination: policies and practices embedded in society and institutions that treat certain groups of people unfairly.

To help develop Amnesty’s strategy to tackle this systematic denial of human rights, our staff travelled the length and breadth of Britain, speaking to communities about their experiences of having their everyday rights violated. We focused in particular on economic and social rights. We will build on this work with a research review and consultation with staff, partners and independent political and academic figures.

Although the experiences outlined in this report generally align with official data and research by credible institutions and organisations, they are by no means conclusive. But they highlight areas that would benefit from more in-depth debate and research.

The views cited in this report are not necessarily those of Amnesty International. As an impartial organisation, we do not support or oppose these views, or those of any government or opposition group. But the views of communities who have experienced rights violations are important in themselves. They show how people in Britain feel about their everyday rights.

In his first press conference as Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer said: ‘The principle I operate to is those with skin in the game know what’s best for their communities.’ We hope his government will understand the wisdom of listening to communities, and acting on what it hears.

# Methodology:

## How we gathered people's opinions

We took a two-pronged approach to this consultation:

### **1: General public polling**

Public polling was carried out by Opinium on behalf of Amnesty International UK between 13 and 17 October 2023 with a representative sample of 2,005 adults across the UK.

### **2: Targeted community engagement**

A network of 'host' organisations helped Amnesty International UK by convening focus groups where we could listen to people who face poverty and inequality in their everyday lives, and the grassroots organisations who support them. We wanted to better understand:

- What challenges people faced ensuring their economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR)
- What they think a UK government should prioritise to address these challenges
- What support they would need to claim their rights (for example, support from Amnesty International UK).

In total 301 people participated in 24 face-to-face or online workshops across Scotland, Wales and England (our deadlines for this report meant we were unable to consult communities in Northern Ireland).

The intention was to engage with groups who are more likely to face inequality because of discrimination or because of their economic background.

Participants were asked to complete a demographic form, but the majority chose not to complete it. However, it is useful to analyse the trends in the smaller sample of 79 to demonstrate that there was good representation of the views of those who identify as facing social exclusion for a range of causes.

- 27 per cent of participants consider themselves to have a disability, as opposed to 18 per cent of population of England and Wales.<sup>1</sup>
- 73 per cent of participants identified as women, 26 per cent as men and 1 per cent as non-binary.
- 81 per cent of participants identified as heterosexual/straight as opposed to 89 per cent of people in the most recent census.
- 32 per cent described their religion and belief as No Religion or Belief, 38 per cent as Christian, and 9 per cent as Muslim. According to the World Factbook, 60 per cent of the UK describe themselves as Christian, 4 per cent Muslim, and 26 per cent as none.<sup>2</sup>
- 23 per cent of people were over 55, 22 per cent were aged 45-54, 20 per cent 35-44, 15 per cent 25-34, 8 per cent 18-25, 11 per cent 17 and under. (Census data is not available in these categories.)
- 13 per cent of participants told us they were Black, African, Caribbean or Black British, 6 per cent mixed or multiple, 5 per cent Asian or Asian British. These figures are higher than those in the recent census which reports 86 per cent of the population being white, 7.5 per cent Asian, 3 per cent Black.

- 60 per cent of people went to a state-run or state-funded school, 9 per cent went to a fee-paying school and 14 per cent attended school outside the UK.
- 22 per cent of participants were caring for someone under 18 and 28 per cent were caring for someone over 18. In comparison, the reported number of unpaid carers in England and Wales averages at between 9 and 11 per cent of the population.<sup>3</sup>
- 36 per cent of the people we spoke to had full- or part-time work or were self-employed, 24 per cent were unemployed, 9 per cent were retired and 17 per cent were unable to work. In comparison, census figures indicate 22 per cent of the population are retired, 57 per cent are employed, 3 per cent are unemployed and looking for work, and 12 per cent are unable to work.<sup>4</sup>

Analysis of trends in community perspectives is provided below. All information is anonymised, with quotes used to illustrate group discussions rather than necessarily attributed to specific individuals. The points made often align with official data and reputable independent research: some of this additional information is presented in the 'Facts and Figures' boxes at the end of each section.

# What rights do people want?

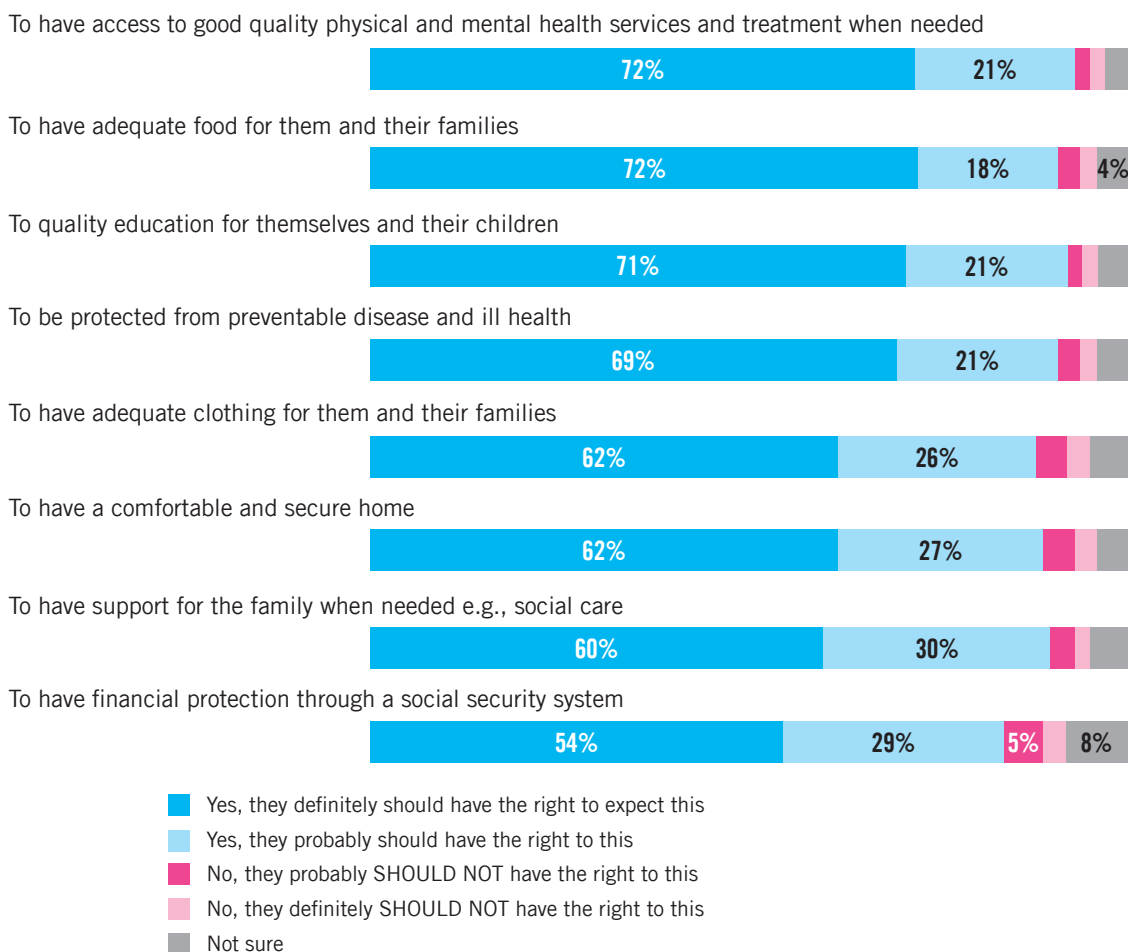
## General public polling

An overwhelming 80-90 per cent of the people in the UK think economic, social and cultural rights are important. Most support all rights, although the greatest certainty ('yes definitely') was expressed over the rights to health, food and education.

Seventy-three per cent of the public support the principle of rights being protected in law and do not distinguish between the need to protect civil and political rights and the need to protect economic, social and cultural rights. (For example 83 per cent think the right to health and 82 per cent think the right to social security should be protected as human rights in UK law.)

**Table 1. What rights do people want?**

### Do you think people in the UK should or shouldn't have each right?





# What people think about access to social and economic rights

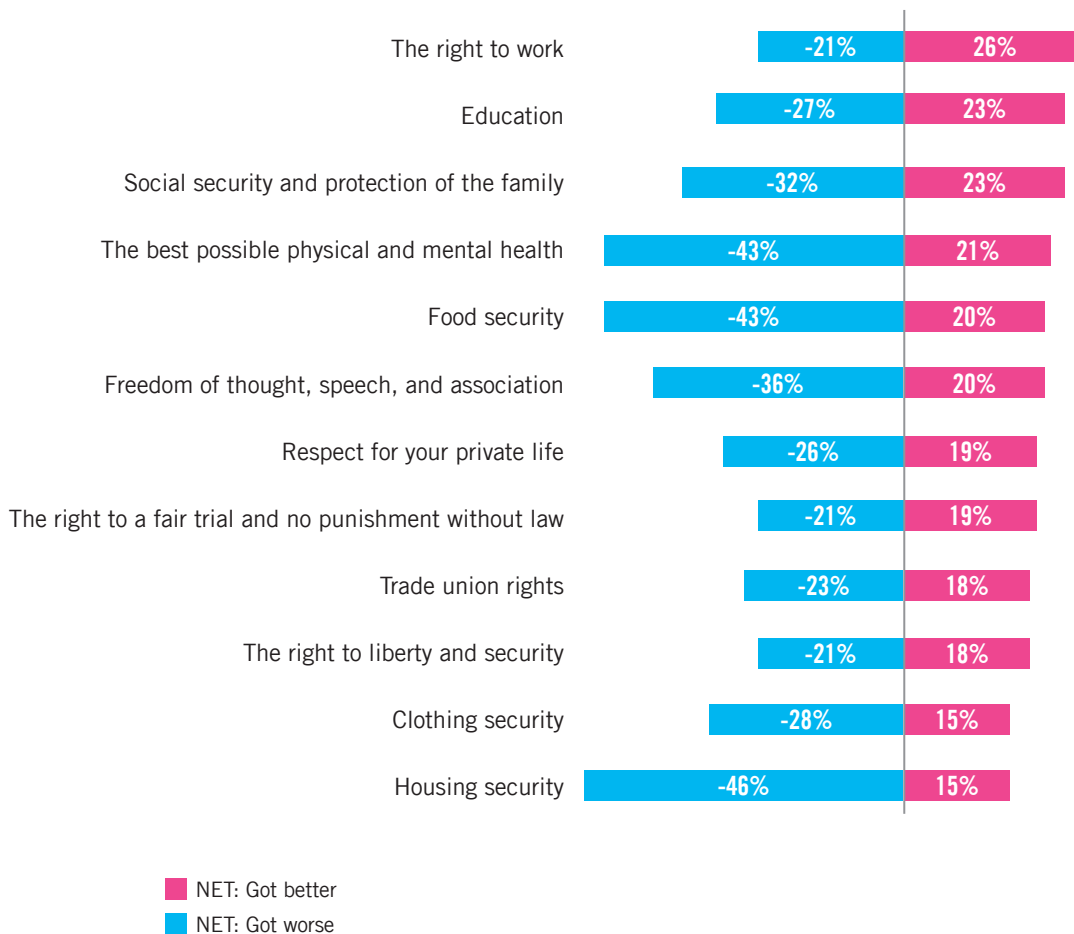
## General public polling

The general public polling tells us that many people are concerned that their access to their human rights has deteriorated over the past 10 years, including the rights to health services (43 per cent), food (43 per cent) and housing (46 per cent).

Proportionately much fewer people believe there have been improvements in rights protections across the board.

**Table 2. Protection of rights**

Have protections got better or worse in the past 10 years?



The ability to get justice is something the public feel concerned about. More than a third of people (37 per cent) do not think that a complaint would be listened to. A majority (55 per cent) don't feel confident they would qualify for legal aid, and 54 per cent say they would not be able to afford legal help otherwise.

**Targeted community engagement**

Participants were asked to rank their access to economic, social rights on a simple scale, using marks to indicate whether they felt each right was fulfilled or not. The chart below shows the percentage of people who placed marks closer to the end of the scale, indicating they did not believe their rights were fulfilled. A total of 227 people participated.

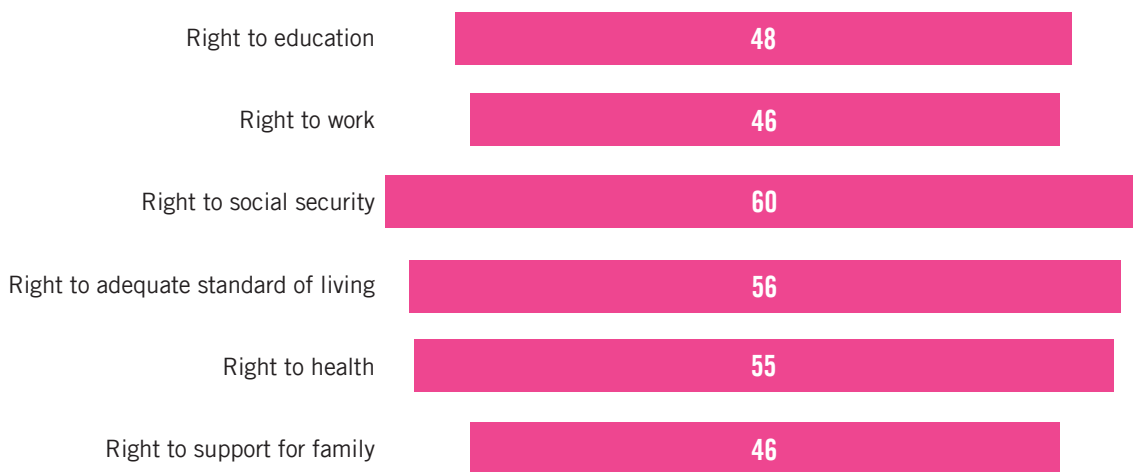
In three out of the six categories of rights, most people felt their rights were limited. The right to social security and access to income protection was the one perceived as limited by the most people, with 60 per cent of participants expressing this view. Fifty-six per cent of people reported experiencing limitations to the rights to an adequate standard of living (including housing, food, and clothing), while 55 per cent felt they had limited access to the right to health.

The rights perceived as least restricted were the right to work and the right to support for the family, with 46 per cent of participants expressing limitations in each category. However, this still represents more than four out of 10 people.

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**Table 3. Access to rights**

**Percentage of participants in the communities we spoke to who said they experienced limitations on their economic and social rights**





# Economic and social rights: the challenges communities face

*'Poverty means you feel disadvantaged from the start. Living in poverty equals a lack of fairness, feeling treated differently, being judged, being picked on, being looked down upon. Feeling labelled.'*

**From a focus group discussion**

After providing community members with a basic understanding of what each of the rights contained in the ICESCR mean, we asked communities to discuss how well this aligned with their own experiences.

Public attitudes reported to us about getting human rights are shared below. This is not a comprehensive list of all the issues raised or an analysis of policy compliance, but it provides insight into the most common concerns raised by the people we spoke to.

## The right to education

### **What is the right to education?**

Everyone should have access to free and compulsory primary education with access to secondary education. States should aim for free higher education. Education should meet minimum standards of quality and affordability, and must be based on the principle of non-discrimination. Alternative forms of educations should be available for people who did not finish primary school.

### **Public attitudes to the right to education – our findings**

While many in communities had positive experiences about the quality of primary and secondary education and pastoral care, they also shared instances where they encountered limitations in access to rights. The common themes in their experiences are:

- Variations in education quality, curriculum and monitoring
- Inflexibility and inequity in access, especially for marginalised groups
- Financial burden or schools affecting children from a lower income background
- Challenges in getting support for special educational needs
- Financial barriers to access to higher education.

Communities shared concerns about the inflexibility of the system: its inability to meet needs in a personalised way. They also highlighted inequity in access to education for children whose specific needs are unmet, or who face stigma and discrimination (for example, asylum seekers, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, and children from minoritised ethnic groups).

People were concerned about the financial burden of schooling on parents with low incomes, including cost of uniforms, public transport, accompanying children to school (especially in rural areas), school meals and trips.

People described the emotional impact of stigma which leads children with experience of poverty to poorer educational outcomes and even exclusion because their parents can't afford the uniform or for being late for school.

'The cost of participation in schools like uniform and school trips is difficult. Schools penalise parents: if the uniforms are from a different brand children get excluded. It's discrimination against not well-off families.'

The challenges which were most shared across all communities was the likelihood of poorer educational outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Education, health and care (EHC) plans should be available for children and young people up to 25 who need more support than is available through special educational needs. EHC plans identify needs and set out additional support to meet them. Local Authorities have 20 weeks to deliver a final plan from the date of request for an assessment. Eligibility for assessment is based on request by parents, or anyone else who thinks one is needed.<sup>5</sup>

People said they had to fight for access to an assessment for an education, health and care plan and they reported long waiting times and fears that thresholds for support are higher than in the past.

Overwhelmingly, the people we spoke to with experience of this issue reported concerns about lack of funded support (personal budgets) to deliver on EHC plans, leading to limited support in classrooms. They felt this led to poorer educational outcomes for children.

'Special educational needs specialists are being cut. There is discrimination against disabled children.'

'I could put him in a mainstream school, but he wouldn't get the support he needs to succeed and thrive in education. I don't know what to do. This is so stressful and disempowering.'

'Schools just don't have the resources to give the recommended support.'

This problem is felt particularly acutely in secondary and higher education where mainstream schools were felt to be less equipped to support children.

'My sister was refused college because she was disabled. It wasn't fully accessible; they didn't think she could cope.'

'I have seen kids that do well in primary school but then don't do well in high school due to lack of support: they are less worried about their emotional needs.'

'People with special educational needs are likely to struggle in secondary school and that lowers their outcomes.'

Long waiting lists for young people's support services were also felt to affect children's education. Children and young people with mental health needs wait long periods for assessments and support. Some people said their children fell out of education for lack of classroom support.

A number of communities reported that poor support for mental health needs was leading schools to encourage home schooling for larger numbers of children, without adequate support for parents in place, even where the parents were not literate.

‘We had a two-year wait for speech therapy and diagnosis for my child.’

‘There is poorer attendance at school since Covid. Mental health services are inadequate, and children are anxious and don’t want to come in. More children need 1:1 support. Yet schools have started issuing fines. More children are also being encouraged to home school but don’t get help to do that.’

Communities shared concerns about the inequity in access to higher education, experienced by some people because of their background or identity. People were primarily concerned that university fees were too high for people from lower income backgrounds and that this leads to inequality in access to better pay through employment throughout life.

For those who finance studies through student loans it was felt that the financial burden of repayment was also felt more keenly by those from lower-income backgrounds who are less likely to have family support to reduce their debt.

Community members reflected that rather than a ‘progressive introduction’ of the right to free university education, free higher education has been rolled back across the UK except for Scottish residents.

‘Low-income students should have equal rights to university without having students loans and massive debt.’

## Facts and figures: The right to education

### Support for special educational needs

- In 2022/23, 8 per cent of children in England were referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for support. The average waiting time was 35 days but 40,000 children had been waiting for two years. There were significant geographic variations in waiting times.<sup>6</sup>
- Of the 74,000 children and young people in England on the waiting list for speech and language therapy in March 2024, just under 5,000 had been waiting more than a year; 21,000 had been waiting longer than 18 weeks (NHS England’s target waiting time).<sup>7</sup> The problem of long waits is more acute in north east and north west England.<sup>8</sup>
- In February 2024 the Children’s Commissioner reported a 23 per cent increase in children missing from education in 2022-2023 compared to the previous year. The number of children recorded as home educated increased by 8.4 per cent. People living in deprived areas are more likely to be missing from education and people who are home educated are likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds or have special educational needs or a disability.<sup>9</sup>

### Access to higher education

- Pupils who are eligible for free school meals are less likely to go to university and much more likely to drop out before the second year.<sup>10</sup> According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, large unexplained earnings gaps between socio-economic and ethnic groups remain between university graduates’ salaries.<sup>11</sup>

# The right to work

## What is the right to work?

Everyone should have access to the right to work. This includes the right to choose their work and to defend their rights at work. When people can't find work, governments should help with education and training.

Everyone should have fair pay and there should be equal pay for work of equal value. People should be able to earn enough for a decent standard of living. Workers are entitled to health and safety at work, and to paid time off. They have the right to form and join a trade union and to strike.

## Public attitudes to the right to work – our findings

Common themes in people's experiences included:

- Challenges in accessing work especially for people in coastal and rural areas
- Mixed experience of training and support
- Financial barriers and caring responsibilities affecting women
- Inequality and insecurity in employment.

Some of the greatest barriers to employment, our focus groups said, were lack of suitable jobs in their area and poor public transport, making it difficult to travel to where there are good opportunities (such as skilled full-time roles with good pay and conditions). Many people we spoke to had to rely on seasonal work and insecure contract terms.

'In coastal and rural communities, because of poor transport links, most of the work available is seasonal.'

'The jobs are gone and no one told the people who were in them. They were told by the media. There is no help to look for new work.'

People were concerned about the barriers to work for young people leaving school, especially if they are from lower-income backgrounds, and the disparity in minimum wage for younger people, questioning why they should be paid less than someone over 21. Minimum wage in April 2024 was £11.44 for over 21s, £8.60 for 18-21-year-olds or £6.40 for under-18s and apprentices.

'I'm concerned about young people aged 16-18 coming from the experience of poverty getting into work. There are fewer opportunities for work experience than in previous generations and fewer organisations that they can turn to for support.'

'Age differences with the minimum wage is an issue – you don't get a discount on rent or food based on age so why do you get paid less?'

Some communities reported facing discrimination in their search for work and being

denied opportunities because of their needs, background or social situation (for example, people with a disability, people who identified as Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, people who identify as transgender, and people seeking asylum).

‘The Traveller community faces stigma and discrimination in relation to the right to work. Often, they don’t disclose where they are from to get work and use a “care of” address. Often they get low paid jobs like cleaning.’

‘Asylum seekers don’t have the right to work. Feeling stressed and sitting at home is no good for my mental health and I can’t pay for the necessary things of life.’

‘When you get a job there might be discrimination because of your faith. My dad does construction, but he doesn’t get picked for work because of racism.’

‘There’s a hidden bias in the workplace that stops people getting promoted – like gender inequality. It’s all about who you know.’

People (primarily women) with caring responsibilities for children or family members felt they had little choice over whether to work. Many felt that their caring responsibilities were not recognised as work, nor remunerated as work of equal value.

‘The cost of living and childcare put women in an impossible situation to choose between work or benefits.’

‘Young families find it difficult to work especially if they haven’t got school age children. They have to front the bill for childcare. It’s getting better with support but it’s still expensive .... it’s cheaper not to work.’

‘It is work to look after a child with disabilities and extra work and it is not recognised and you get no break. This causes mental health stress and depression.’

‘Recognise caring work as work. The work of mothers or other family care givers is ignored. It needs financial recognition.’

‘I have thrown myself into vocational training all this year and got qualifications and got offered work, but I couldn’t take it because there were no services in place for my daughter. I really want to work. It’s so frustrating to have skills and knowledge and not be able to use them because there is no support.’

‘On the one hand the government wants everyone to work, but they aren’t putting things in place to make that work. There are too many barriers.’

People experiencing homelessness and in temporary accommodation said this limited their ability to get work: they would have to leave supported accommodation but could not earn enough to pay market rents.

‘I could get a job tomorrow but then I would get kicked out of my house of multiple occupation.’

The high costs of supported accommodation for working people are also prohibitive for

women who need to escape domestic violence. Some told us they face the choice of staying in a dangerous situation or leaving the work which is important for their independence and mental health.

‘If someone is working, they can’t flee domestic violence unless they pay for the refuge themselves. Sometimes they even have to pay their mortgage as well.’

Some communities reported being forced through the government job search system into jobs which they did not freely choose, which undermined their health, or disregarded disability. In some cases, people in manual labour jobs which because of their age they could no longer physically do, were forced out of employment, rather than redeployed to more appropriate roles or retrained.

‘I was forced to do unsuitable, unhealthy work for too long hours. It was not well paid enough to sustain you if you have poor health. You don’t have the power to complain due to your status.’

‘Pregnant women are forced to search for work even when no employer will take them.’

‘The job search system questions people with a disability by saying it’s social anxiety. People are forced into work that will exacerbate their issues.’

Communities’ main concern about the right to work was low pay, meaning they could not enjoy an adequate standard of living. For some, a barrier to finding work was the fear of having less money than when they were completely dependent on benefits. People described experiencing in-work poverty.

‘Wages have not kept up with the cost of living. Work doesn’t meet all the needs of the family.’

‘With the high cost of living, prices are increasing every week, but I am still receiving the same pay and you are left with nothing. It is mentally straining for me. The kids, the bills, the work, not much childcare. I have to use my credit card.’

‘I don’t want to start work part-time because I fear I will lose benefits and not get them back.’

Some described how zero hours contracts, which often involve fluctuating hours of work, limit the ability to budget appropriately, get consistent childcare and plan for rest and leisure.

‘It takes a lot to leave an awful workplace because people are desperate for the money. I worked in the care sector. I got no sick pay, lost holiday pay and was working way over the hours and they still required extra work. It felt like exploitation.’

‘Work for many rural people is seasonal and means zero hours contracts. Employers get away with anything; people are frightened of challenging, as that’s their only option for work.’

‘Some employers are not paying National Insurance on zero hours contracts, and this has implications for your pension.’

‘It’s difficult when you don’t know your shifts in advance – you can’t plan for the future, for childcare and it socially excludes you.’

‘I was doing zero hours contracts with irregular hours far away, which meant I was out of pocket. But if you turn the work down you are blacklisted, then punished by DWP [Department of Work and Pensions] sanctions. It’s a real source of stress. They are in complete control, and I’m not allowed to take another job.’

## Facts and figures: The right to work

### Access to work

- Economic inactivity (people not in work or looking for work) is highest in coastal and rural areas. According to the Coastal Communities Alliance, digital connectivity is lower in coastal areas and the government needs to prioritise investment in local transport. Coastal areas have lower than average median weekly pay and a higher than average number of people working part-time or self-employed<sup>12</sup>.
- Homeless Link has reported the flaws in the system that keep people out of work or deprive them of support they need: ‘Hostel residents claim Housing Benefit for help with their rent, unlike people living in other accommodation who claim Universal Credit for this. This means that, once they earn a certain amount of money, those living in hostels end up financially worse off compared to those living in other types of accommodation. This is clearly unfair.’<sup>13</sup>
- Women’s Aid reported in 2019 that ‘Covering the cost of refuge can also be difficult for women in employment if they are not eligible for housing benefit or other economic support.’<sup>14</sup>
- In September 2023 only 16 per cent of Carer’s Allowance claimants were in paid work. Those in paid work tend to work part time in lower paid jobs that fit around their caring responsibilities.<sup>15</sup>
- In 2021 37 per cent of people who are Gypsies, Roma and Travellers were employed (compared to 56 per cent of white British people).<sup>16</sup>
- Disabled workers’ median hourly pay is 15.6 per cent lower than that of non-disabled workers. Overall, there is a lower rate of employment (39 per cent) for disabled than non-disabled adults.
- The Census 2021 shows that adults in England and Wales whose gender identity does not match their sex registered at birth had lower rates of employment (49.2 per cent) and higher rates of unemployment and economic inactivity.<sup>17</sup>
- People who are seeking asylum are not ordinarily allowed to work while their claim is being considered.<sup>18</sup>





### **Women at work**

- In 2023, 86 per cent of male employees were in full-time work, compared to only 61 per cent of female employees. The gender pay gap is 7.7 per cent in favour of men but gets higher the older a woman is.<sup>19</sup>
- Carers UK state that 600 people a day quit their jobs because of caring responsibilities and lack of support.<sup>20</sup>
- The mean hourly fee for childcare for children aged two rose by 6 per cent, to £6.07 in 2023 from £5.72 in 2022. This would leave someone who is over 21 and paying for childcare on a minimum wage, a net income of £5.37 per hour before tax.<sup>21</sup> From April 2024 a parent of a two-year-old is entitled to 15 hours' free childcare: additional hours have to be privately funded.<sup>22</sup>
- Pregnant women claiming Universal Credit are expected to search for work until 11 weeks before their due date.<sup>23</sup>

### **Inequality and insecurity**

- Office of National Statistics (ONS) data from May 2024 suggests that more than 1million people are on zero hours contracts: 72 per cent of these are on part-time hours, on average working 18 hours per week; one-third of people on zero hours contracts have been with their employer for less than a year.<sup>24</sup>
- Employers of staff on zero hours contracts are required to pay national insurance contributions.<sup>25</sup>
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests single people need £29,500 a year for an adequate standard of living.<sup>26</sup>



# The right to an adequate standard of living

## What is the right to an adequate standard of living?

This includes several different rights, such as the right to housing, to food, and to water and sanitation. The government should ensure that people have access to decent housing from which they cannot be forcibly evicted or pushed into homelessness, sufficient and nutritious food, and can live a life of dignity.

## Public attitudes to the right to an adequate standard of living – our findings

‘A good standard of living depends on social status: if you have money, you have better opportunities.’

From a focus group discussion

People had much to say about limited access to adequate food, clothing and housing. The common themes in their experiences are:

- Limited or unreliable access to nutritious food and reliance on food banks
- A crisis in housing availability, affordability and standards of accommodation
- Struggles to meet basic needs for clothing and heating.

People in our focus groups shared experiences of having to use food banks and manage their hunger when they and their families do not have enough to eat. They reported that the cost of food in supermarkets has increased so much that it leaves little choice about what they can buy and cook.

‘Poverty is a lack of choices, and you turn to rubbish food because good food is expensive. No food means no strength, no energy, feeling weak.’

‘We need free breakfast clubs, free after-school clubs and free school meals for children. And access to food banks must be eased, removing the fear of social services becoming involved.’

‘The supermarkets are taking the piss with the basics that have gone up. The way they market their basics range creates stigma.’

‘More people are using foodbanks. The government say eat five fruit and vegetables a day but it’s more expensive – I can’t afford fresh fruit. Takeaways are cheaper than fresh food and the cost of transport to get it.’

People valued free school meals as a way to support children, but many talked about the need for free school meals for everyone to both tackle hunger and avoid stigma. Some people said that accessing free school meals in higher or further education settings is a struggle.

‘There is a stigma of being on school meals. They should be for every child so there is no disparity.’

‘For free school meals we had to speak to multiple people for three weeks to eventually get them. I have to go every week to get the money and jump through hoops to get this done so that I can eat every day.’

People shared similar challenges in affording clothing for their families. This was a particular issue with school uniform.

‘Someone called up our service for help. There were two people working full time and they were crying because they couldn’t afford the right tights for their child for school.’

Our focus groups, and support organisations, were angry at the government’s failure to address affordable housing and food, and instead to rely on charity, goodwill and volunteerism.

‘Why should people beg for clothes and food? It is normalised, socially acceptable begging. It’s a disgrace on society.’

‘If we can’t get enough volunteers then we can’t open, and it puts a lot of pressure on volunteers.’

‘There’s a structural problem and all of this is just a sticking plaster we don’t want to be a community services sticking plaster.’

Housing was a key theme in many of our community conversations. People talked about the lack of social housing and a growing number of second homes reducing supply.

‘I have no option but to live at home with my parents because there is no social housing.’

‘My son has been prioritised for social housing, but he can’t get a place. The council told us to make ourselves homeless so that our son can stay in our house instead of us.’

‘There is a lack of housing due to holiday lets/second homes and lack of building new homes.’

People said they were concerned with the rising costs of rent and decisions on welfare benefits have further disadvantaged people.

‘Rental costs are out of control.’

‘Benefits are not enough to cover payments.’

‘Rent increases are making rent unaffordable.’

‘Bedroom tax makes things difficult.’<sup>27</sup>

‘Benefits are inadequate for all needs – help covers housing but not food, and there isn’t enough left at the end of the month.’

People in rented accommodation were worried about the condition of their homes and the affect this had on their health. They said they often feel powerless to hold landlords

to account and too afraid to raise any issues in case there are repercussions such as rent increases or eviction.

‘Landlords have too much power. With mould it’s hard to get landlord to do something as all they tell you is to open the windows.’

‘Repairs are difficult, and they often don’t keep appointments.’

‘I’m sleeping in one room with my son, forced to live in house that is cold and damp. If you go to complain they say you are making yourself homeless.’

‘My housing arranged by a social worker just had a little bed for me and my son – no table or chair. I have to put newspaper on the floor to eat food. Mice and ants in the home eat my food.’

‘Quality of housing is bad – there is mould and the kids are living with it which is not good for their health.’

‘Private landlords don’t care as long as they are getting money. They want to increase the rent but don’t repair – for example the toilet and shower are leaking.’

‘I know someone whose kitchen floor fell through, and the housing association didn’t respond.’

Some people found their right to decent housing more challenging because of their socio-economic background or their protected characteristic. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, for example, told us they are disproportionately affected by the cost-of-living crisis and inadequate legal protection.

‘Traveller sites are challenging in that they have an unequal burden of power costs due to the use of gas canisters. The caravans cost more to heat as they have limited installations. They are also charged corporate rates for water and all on prepay meters. They have no choice of suppliers.’

‘Most families rent their caravans and those landlords for caravans are not regulated in the same way that people rent a conventional house. So where people have caravans that are unfit to live in no one supports the family regarding redress against the landlord.’

Some communities with specific needs – for example people with disabilities – reported that they are often provided with inappropriate housing for their needs. People seeking asylum who are granted leave to remain, meaning they can stay in the UK, explained that they found it challenging to move from asylum housing to rented accommodation.

‘Benefit cut-offs are too steep and too early.’

‘There were huge delays, then they rushed the process. Information on the housing discretionary fund<sup>28</sup> was not provided and other support information was not provided.’

‘Rent and heat are difficult to pay for and people get into debt at the start when they transition from asylum to a different status and don’t yet have a job.’

People experiencing homelessness explained that they face difficulty in getting housing due to restrictions on eligibility for government help.

‘I was facing eviction and the council told me to wait until the bailiffs come and then get homelessness assistance, otherwise I would be making myself intentionally homeless.’

‘Single men find it difficult to get housing.’

‘People in debt over a certain amount are excluded from social tenancies.’

‘I lost my home after a breakup. The council said I had no local link so I have to go back where I come from.’

Some people who had experienced homelessness told us about living in supported temporary accommodation as they transitioned away from homelessness. They felt the quality of support was patchy and some providers were exploiting vulnerable people for profit.

‘Supported housing isn’t focused on people, its focused-on money and tying us in as long as possible. Like modern day slavery.’

‘I have no copy of my tenancy agreement as the support staff locked it in the office.’

‘A landlord came and picked me off the street and took me into accommodation overnight.’

‘I pay a service charge for cleaning, but they don’t clean. I have no access to sanitation as toilets are broken. My door doesn’t lock so I am carrying around all of my belongings. There is no washing machine, and no cooking facilities. There are insects everywhere. I don’t know the landlords’ details to complain.’

Though Housing First<sup>29</sup> is agreed by community members to provide good support, they said it was undermined due to the wider lack of housing.

‘Housing First is there for people with complex needs but there is no housing stock.’  
Some people in temporary accommodation described the poor conditions, safety concerns and challenges they face in houses of multiple occupation (HMO).

‘I can’t leave food in fridge as it will be stolen.’

‘I have been in 14 HMOs since 2020.’

‘Lots of people opt into street homelessness because of the quality of HMOs.’

‘Individuals with profound mental health needs are housed with people who are not suitable for them to share a house with.’

‘I was sleeping rough, and police took me to some accommodation, but because they couldn’t get my papers as they were retained by previous landlord I couldn’t stay. Now because I have no papers I can’t get housed or support.’

'I came back from a trip and the door was broken. Everything was missing and someone had been sleeping in my bed and scratched the wall.'

## Facts and figures: The right to an adequate standard of living

### Food

- The Trussell Trust reports that dependence on foodbanks is higher than ever.<sup>30</sup>
- The cost of food and non-alcoholic beverages increased by about 25 per cent between January 2022 and January 2024.<sup>31</sup>

### Housing

- There were 1.29 million on local authority housing waiting lists in March 2023.<sup>32</sup>
- From 2021 to 2022 there was an increase of 13 per cent in properties owned by households who had at least one other property. The number of households owning another property remained roughly the same, suggesting an increase in the size of property portfolios.<sup>33</sup>
- The ONS applies an affordability threshold for private rentals of 30 per cent of income. London is the only place where median house rental costs rise above this threshold for households with median income. However, rents are less affordable for lower income households and cross the 30 per cent affordability threshold in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Rents increased by 4 per cent between March 2022 and March 2023. By September 2023 the increase over 12 months rose to 5.7 per cent.<sup>34</sup>
- In 2021/22, 19 per cent of households in England were in the private rented sector; 23 per cent (990,000) of these homes were estimated to fail the decent homes standard (compared to 10 per cent of the social rented sector).<sup>35</sup>
- Fifty-three per cent of households requiring adaptations reported that they did not have the adaptations they needed to make their housing suitable in 2019-2020.<sup>36</sup> It appears this question was dropped from the English Homes Survey in all subsequent years.
- The Centre for Homelessness Impact states that there has been insufficient research into the effectiveness of hostels for people experiencing homelessness.<sup>37</sup>

### Cost of living

- The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community are disproportionately affected by the fuel crisis and cost of living increase.<sup>38</sup>

# The right to social security and social insurance

## What is the right to social security?

To ensure people can afford to meet their basic needs if their own income is insufficient, governments must provide financial and other support through a social security system: a system of payments or non-financial support made by government.

## Public attitudes to the right to social security – our findings

Common themes in people's experiences are:

- Administrative hurdles that make it difficult to access benefits
- Extra costs to claiming benefits in rural areas (for example, transport costs)
- Limitations on eligibility for social security, and challenges in benefits assessments
- Inadequate benefit rates, and punitive measures (sanctions)
- Demeaning treatment at the hands of the authorities.

Communities felt that the procedure for applying for benefits was too complicated and the wait for the initial payment was excessive, causing debt and hardship. People told us they have trouble understanding what they are entitled to and in getting support to complete forms, especially where they have additional language or literacy needs. People also described the prohibitive costs of claiming benefits, such as having to use online and telephone-based services, and travel from rural areas.

'Benefit criteria, the process of applying and forms should be clearer. People are put off applying because of the confusing forms.'

'The way it is set up means everyone has to try and find out what they are entitled to, and then go through the complexity of applying – rather than the system making sure you get what you're entitled to.'

'Living in poverty means being digitally excluded. There are financial costs of the Internet, and the library is only open two hours in the afternoon. We're paying to claim. There's a poverty trap we've got to go through. I have to go in for appointments fortnightly to sign on, but I travel from a village and I have to spend some of the money to go to the offices.'

'I had a meeting every week and I had a two-hour round trip for a five-minute conversation. The bus journey into the office is £7 a week if the buses are running. They don't allow you to do it online. If you drive you even have to pay for parking. If you are in the city, you can walk to the office. They don't come out to market towns.'

Communities talked about the limitations on eligibility for certain benefits which led them to struggle to make ends meet. They described the disproportionate impact of the two-child benefits cap<sup>39</sup> on people living in poverty, and frustrations with the low level of Carer's Allowance. It was felt that this policy discriminated against single-parent households or mothers who are full time carers.

‘The two-child policy is abhorrent. It’s a violation. They need to change child benefit.’

‘If you don’t claim child benefit usually the mum who is a full-time carer loses pension credits that protect her right to state pension until her youngest is 12.’

‘Carers don’t leave their work. I never leave it. I’m snowed under with appointments and toilettings. Carer’s Allowance is a contribution but I’m still living on the breadline. It’s means tested and degrading – it’s a disgrace if that is what they think we are worth. You can’t compare the caring responsibilities of different carers. I think we should be put on the living wage.’

‘There is age discrimination in the social security system – Carer’s Allowance stops once you retire and go on to your pension.’

People who get Personal Independence Payments (PIPs, which cover additional costs relating to long-term physical and mental health needs) shared experiences of their assessment for this benefit.

They told us of assessments being carried out over the phone by a private provider and were often unannounced. People were concerned that the resulting paperwork did not accurately represent the conversation. In some cases, this led to the removal of benefits and a lengthy appeals process which left some people in debt or relying on foodbanks.

Similar experiences were reported by people who underwent a Work Capability Assessment<sup>40</sup> when applying for Universal Credit.

‘Over the last few months, since losing my Personal Independence Payment, I’ve lost a large part of my daily living costs. This reinforced my feelings towards the system because I could not predict that they were going to re-evaluate my disability. There was no warning, there was no time to prepare financial budgeting, the phone call just came, totally unexpected. Suddenly my life was changed.’

‘They carry out phone interviews and you have to pay for a device so they can do this. The report was filled in remotely and there were questions filled in that they hadn’t even asked me.’

‘Terrified and upset by removal of PIP – they wouldn’t let me speak and twisted what I said.’

‘PIP has a 12-week wait to get a response. It’s too long. I didn’t have a problem with the assessment process because I got a confirmation from my doctors. But I know some people who have to appeal, and the doctors have to fight for them.’

‘When I went through my assessment period, I was living off baked beans from the food bank, suffering for weeks, until I was given a payment. Then I had social security debt – they give you an advance prior to your assessment that you have to pay back.’

‘Work Capability Assessments have changed as they have extended the parameters to include working from home, because they say that is something you can do if you have a disability.’

Most people with experience of getting government financial support agreed that welfare payments are no longer sufficient to make ends meet. Communities want greater transparency on the calculation of amounts to meet their basic needs.

‘Joseph Rowntree Foundation just released a report that said more people than ever are living in destitution. This is destitution by public policy.’

‘Money problems are pushing people over the edge. There is a real mental health impact of the system.’

‘People with a disability have had the cost-of-living payments taken away.’

‘Statutory maternity pay is too little and not for long enough. People can’t pay for food, rent, heating and the baby’s needs, and healthy food for pregnant and new mothers.’

‘There has been a big increase in people on low benefits who can’t heat their home. They often have a damp, cold home, and are unable to feed children due to bills. The home is full of mould and mice.’

‘There is not enough money or food on Universal Credit. Not enough money to wash clothes. It’s £20 a week to wash and dry at the launderette.’

‘National Asylum Support Service payments<sup>41</sup> are far below benefit levels. It means I am destitute. No help with home, food or warm clothes, shelter, transport, holidays... and I’m vulnerable to violence and exploitation.’

‘The government are not setting rates based on the actual cost of living.’

‘Let’s start with the basics: a minimum income guarantee. Give people enough to live – this is a right we aren’t getting.’

Many people described their experiences of being sanctioned, or getting unexpected reductions in payments, while on benefits – causing hardship and mounting debt as people borrow to make ends meet.

‘If you miss one appointment and make one mistake you get sanctioned even if it’s because people can’t afford the bus fare or there’s a bus strike. If you live miles away from the benefit office sometimes people have to walk.’

‘If you’re one minute late they add a note to your journal.<sup>42</sup> You don’t really have the time to appeal or, if you do appeal, by the time the appeal’s heard you’ve done half your sanction time anyway.’

‘People get confused and get penalised with no right to appeal or justice for unfairly applied sanctions.’

‘The sanctions regime doesn’t acknowledge the chaotic lifestyles of people.’



‘You can’t enforce your rights as there is no access to legal aid if benefits are restricted.’

‘Mistakes are made in calculations of benefits and people get overpaid or underpaid and this is very difficult to sort out. It doesn’t help families manage money. You can get an overpayment then next minute great chunks come out with no warning.’

‘I got a child benefit overpayment, and they took deductions from our payments. There were mental health implications of this. It feels like an injustice. There’s a lack of basic understanding of the situation for families.’

Changes in Universal Credit payments due to fluctuating work patterns also caused difficulty for people.

‘The nature of transient work – a lot of people have access to this, but it does not work with claiming benefits so it disincentivises you from getting transient work at all.’

‘I got paid work and then I got hit with a bill [for benefits overpayments]. They left me poorer than poor because they were taking money off every week because they had made a mistake.’

Overall people who obtained benefits felt that the system is punitive and degrading, saying this had an effect on their mental health. Some reported being mistrustful of the staff and felt like they were being treated as if they were trying to defraud the system. People said they constantly carried a burden of fear – that they would get evicted, be unable to feed their family, or make a mistake that would lead to them getting less income.

‘We are demonised.’

‘It is not income support; it’s punishment and it feels intentional.’

‘Universal Credit is cruel.’

‘I often feel unbelievably by my job coach.’

‘There’s a lack of compassion in the system.’

‘People are made to feel inferior or shame.’

‘The application process causes trauma on top of trauma. You are putting someone who is going through the hardest thing they have probably ever gone through, through more trauma. And then you have to wait, wait, wait. Then they have to ask everyone what is wrong with me: my psychiatrist, Tom Jones down the street. It’s stigma.’

‘The whole system is Dickensian and punitive.’

‘The system lacks dignity for people; their mental health is impacted simply by having to go through the benefits system.’

## Facts and figures: The right to social security and social insurance

### Administrative hurdles

- Each Universal Credit (UC) claimant has to agree a claimant commitment with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) which sets out their job search requirements. They are supposed to be based on circumstances and to be regularly reviewed and adapted to changes in circumstances. An online portal is used by DWP to keep a log of job searches or inform them of changes. There are supposed to be options for claimants who cannot use the online portal. Usually appointments are face to face but can, at the discretion of the job coach, be by telephone.<sup>43</sup>

### Eligibility and assessments

- The two-child limit on benefits has led to no increase in employment. However, poverty continues to rise. The limit affects 422,000 families and 1.47 million children (that is 55 per cent of all claimants of Universal Credit or Child Tax Credit, another benefit to help with bringing up a child). Of these 59 per cent were working families, and 50 per cent of those affected were single parent families. Because 95 per cent of single parents are women, they are disproportionately affected.<sup>44</sup>

- Assessment for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), which is a benefit for people who have limited capability for work, can take up to 13 weeks. Payments may be backdated.<sup>45</sup>

- Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) and Work Capability Assessments are carried out by a variety of suppliers.<sup>46</sup> Seventy per cent of appeals against PIP assessments were overturned between October 2018 and September 2023.<sup>47</sup> Mandatory reconsiderations (which can be requested by claimants wishing to challenge a decision) of Work Capability Assessments are taking longer than usual, with on average considerations taking 37 days (as opposed to 15 days in 2020); 56 per cent of decisions were revised after mandatory reconsideration.<sup>48</sup>

### Carers

- In the 2021 census 5 million people reported that they are carers; 1.5 million are caring for more than 50 hours a week unpaid.<sup>49</sup>

- Four out of 10 carers under retirement age are unable to work as much as they would like; 17 per cent of carers claim carers allowance and 6 per cent were deemed ineligible because they claim other benefits. The amount paid to people who care for more than 35 hours a week is £69.70 weekly.<sup>50</sup>

- More than one-third of carers say they do not feel confident completing the online forms.<sup>51</sup>

- In a DWP report on experiences of Carer's Allowance, 3 per cent of the sampled claimants had received an overpayment.<sup>52</sup>

### Inadequate benefits

- For Universal Credit people are expected to wait five weeks for the first payment. People can apply for an advance on the first payment, which must be paid back within the first 24 months.<sup>53</sup>





- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation says Universal Credit benefit levels are below the level needed to protect people from destitution.<sup>54</sup>

### **Punitive measures**

- The DWP applies benefits sanctions for a variety of reasons.<sup>55</sup> Statistics on sanctions state that 7 per cent of claimants were under sanction in February 2024. In January 2024 there were 57,000 adverse sanctions decisions; 93 per cent of these decisions were because of the failure to attend an interview.<sup>56</sup>
- People can ask for a mandatory reconsideration of a DWP decision. This is done around 20,000 times per month; 51 per cent of these took more than 50 days to resolve between November 2021 and October 2022.<sup>57</sup>
- Fluctuating payments of Universal Credit make it hard for people to manage their budget.<sup>58</sup>
- People subjected to lengthy processes of mandatory reconsideration for PIP or ESA report a decline in their mental health because of the dehumanising process. They say they feel stigmatised and judged when interacting with the benefit system, and it denies them dignity.<sup>59</sup>
- The DWP's investigations into benefit claimant suicides found 69 occasions where 'alleged department activity' may have contributed to the claimant's death.<sup>60</sup>

# The right to physical and mental health

## What is the right to health?

This is the right to the best possible standard of physical and mental health. Governments must ensure access to sufficient good-quality, effective health care staff, services and treatment for everyone, without discrimination. They should aim to protect and prevent ill health and tackle underlying factors affecting health such as the environment, education and housing.

## Public attitudes to the right to physical and mental health: our findings

People shared their experiences of getting care and treatment for their physical and mental health. Generally, our focus groups said the quality of care and treatment in the NHS was good once you were on a care pathway.

However, they also said they experienced limitations in their rights to care and treatment. The common themes were:

- Challenges in getting healthcare, particularly for vulnerable groups.
- Geographic challenges
- Disparity between public and private healthcare
- Limited capacity in mental health services, and long waiting lists.

Many also spoke of difficulties in getting appointments with their GP, with long waits on the phone to book an appointment, and for appointments to become available.

‘Accessing my GP is hard and takes two to three hours of ringing. The NHS is not fit for purpose.’

Waits for elective and consultant-led care and treatment (like operations) were also long, with uncertain timescales and no updates while waiting.

‘There are waiting lists to see consultants. Some people have waited 15 months, and it impacts on their prognosis.’

Similarly, waits for urgent and emergency care were felt to be unreasonably long.

‘Ambulance – we were waiting for hours and police had to take her.’

People were also very concerned about the lack of access to a dentist, and how difficult it was to even get on waiting lists.

‘We were four years on the waiting list for braces and we have to travel 50 miles monthly.’

‘There are no dentists in coastal and rural areas and there’s a waiting list for 18 months to three-and-a-half years.’

‘Can’t get a dentist, which has a mental health impact. People are pulling out their own teeth with pliers.’

‘Dentistry is disabled; there is no free dentistry.’

Our focus groups told us that the barriers to getting health services are greater if you come from a lower income background or have a protected characteristic (protected characteristics are causes of discrimination recognised in the Equality Act). This in turn affects your ability to get a job, increase your income and generally improve your standard of living.

They said that some people have no way to get healthcare if they cannot fund it themselves<sup>61</sup>. Some individuals told us the UK is now running a two-tier health service for those who can afford to go private and those who cannot.

People were also worried about the impact of poor access to services on their longer-term health and life expectancy.

‘Access to healthcare for vulnerable groups is more difficult, for example for the elderly, those with a disability, people affected by domestic violence, mental ill-health and homelessness.’

‘Maternity services are bad but it’s even worse for women of colour.’

‘There’s a gender issue in healthcare – diagnosis for healthcare issues like endometriosis is entirely underfunded and not taken as seriously as men’s issues.’

‘Immigrants are denied healthcare if they have no recourse to public funds. Many are low-waged carers working in the healthcare industry but denied medical care or forced to pay thousands.’

‘Some people have visas that mean they cannot access healthcare. Things are so expensive that they can’t self-fund.’

People told us that it was particularly difficult getting healthcare in rural and remote areas because so many NHS services are centralised. The time it takes to get to and from treatment could have knock-on effects such as preventing people from working.

‘There’s an issue with transport that makes it difficult for people to get to and from health settings in rural and coastal areas. It can take a year to get a referral and then you’re sent very far afield.’

Many people reported challenges in getting mental health services. They told us there were long waits for assessment, difficulties in getting mental health support through their GP and in a crisis, and that people who would have been treated in hospital to keep them safe are now in the community, reliant on over-stretched outreach teams. Some reported being referred to community services and never hearing anything again.

‘Mental health services have no money. We used to have longer-term care but now can’t get admitted to hospital. People don’t know what support is available for them after discharge.’

‘There’s an 18-month wait for community mental health services. You get offered a telephone appointment but there’s no support while you’re waiting.’

‘The mental health response for people who attempt suicide is terrible. I know someone who went to A&E: they were discharged and had no contact with a mental health professional while they were there or afterwards.’

## Facts and figures: The right to physical and mental health

### Access to health care

- In March 2024 an estimated 6.3 million people were waiting for 7.5 million treatment pathways; 57.2 per cent of them had been waiting up to 18 weeks (which is the target); the remainder had been waiting longer – and 309,300 people had been waiting longer than a year.<sup>62</sup>

- Only 50 per cent of patients who had attempted to make a GP appointment were able to see someone at a time they wanted or sooner. Only 54 per cent of patients said they had a good experience of booking an appointment.<sup>63</sup>

- In 2023 only 33 per cent of people who had not attended a dental practice before succeeded in making an appointment. Of those who could not get an appointment, 40 per cent were turned away because the practice is not taking new NHS patients, and 39 per cent were told there were no appointments available.<sup>64</sup>

- The latest statistics show that ambulance response times in England for category C2 responses (emergency calls for conditions such as epilepsy and strokes) was on average 30 minutes (against a target of 18 minutes).<sup>65</sup> Waiting time targets can be found in the NHS constitution handbook.<sup>66</sup>

- The government does not report waiting times for mental health services in the community for adults.<sup>67</sup>

### Geographical disparities

- If you are from one of the most deprived parts of England, you are twice as likely to wait for more than a year for elective treatment than you are if you live in one of the most affluent areas.<sup>68</sup>

- In 2022-23, 8 per cent of children in England were referred to mental health services. Children wait an average of 108 days for treatment; 32,200 children had been waiting more than two years for treatment.<sup>69</sup> In Scotland 84 per cent of children and young people were seen within 18 weeks of referral, which is still below the 90 per cent target.<sup>70</sup>

# The right to protection and assistance for the family

## What is the right to protection and assistance for the family?

The UK government must provide help and protection for the family, especially mothers and children. They must protect mothers during and after pregnancy, which includes ensuring they get maternity pay. Children should be given special help and protected from harm. This might include things like social services, social care and childcare.

## Public attitudes to the right to protection and assistance for the family – our findings

Our focus groups shared experiences of their needs and getting support for their families.

Common themes are:

- Fear of social services
- Experience of discrimination
- Challenges in transitioning from child to adult services
- Decline in youth and community support services
- Concerns about adult social care.

People described their experience of asking, or being referred to, social services for support with issues affecting their children.

‘People are scared to talk to social services because they always think, “The children will get taken off me because I don’t have enough to live on.”’

‘There’s no help for families that doesn’t risk social services getting involved, which carries fear of children being removed. Richer people pay for help, poorer families lose their children.’

Some thought their level of income is a factor in determining if children are taken into care.

‘Move kids into care from lower socio-economic groups because their parents are poor – not because they are poor parents.’

‘Poverty is treated like neglect, which triggers child services and children are taken away.’

‘Social workers tell us I’m lying that there’s a lack of support and they don’t do in-depth investigation. They’re doing too much or too little. If they intervene, they take the child and put them through the system all because they can’t afford support to keep families together.’

Some interviewees felt there was discrimination in the response of social services – particularly towards families on lower incomes, or if the mother is single or faces discrimination for any other cause.

‘Children with a disabled mother are considered to be at risk of future harm automatically and therefore they might be taken away.’

‘There is a hostile punitive approach to mothers – especially mothers of colour, disabled mothers or single mothers.’

‘My mother has got cancer and does not get support with my brother who is autistic. She does not get support from social workers because of her visa status: there are no government funds.’

People told us that children in care moving to adult services is sometimes poorly managed, leaving vulnerable young people without adequate support.

‘Leaving care – the transition into adult services is difficult. Sometimes people end up back with their difficult families.’

‘The transition from child services to adult services is like jumping off a cliff – away from all the accessible support, people coming to the house, being in contact. The reduction in resources and staff is shocking.’

People talked about the impact of austerity and the closure of services in their area.

‘Youth services have gone, and reintroduction is needed.’

People told us that in the past services in their community took a whole family approach to understanding and meeting their needs, but this is more difficult to get now. They felt that constant change in models and providers made support more challenging.

‘We should be taking holistic view of a family and caring for children. Sure Start<sup>71</sup> was good but things change all the time and there’s not continuity of support.’

People were concerned about the quality and availability of adult social care. Some described how difficult it was to get assessed and get funding for someone’s care needs.

Some said that social care in their homes was focused on short visits of paid carers to meet a physical need without consideration of the emotional wellbeing of often isolated people. Others talked about the need for systemic reform of social care.

‘Some people have fallen between the gap and there’s arguments about whether health or social care should pay for it. There’s lots of jargon and paperwork and administration.’

‘Adult social care is shit. There’s a resource issue. When someone has dementia you get information about support, and they talk about what they will do, but not much happens after your diagnosis.’

‘The commitment the government made to overhauling social care was reneged on. It’s not fit for purpose.’

‘Carers don’t have time to talk to you. They get a very low wage and can’t be expected to do psychological work with someone.’



People said that during the pandemic, the social care system applied ‘do not attempt cardio-pulmonary resuscitation’ (DNACPR) inappropriately. (A DNACPR decision placed on someone’s medical records means staff will not attempt to resuscitate them if their heart or breathing stops.) Some people reported that this is still the case for people with a disability.

‘They are still targeting women with disabilities for DNR.’

## **Facts and figures: The right to protection and assistance for the family**

### **Removal of children by social services**

- In England, 82,170 children were removed from their parents in 2021-2022, 22.5 per cent more than 10 years before, and 37.6 per cent more than 20 years before. The UK is a continental outlier in terms of the frequency of forced/contested adoptions.<sup>72</sup>

### **Youth services**

- Since 2010-2011 youth services like youth clubs and youth workers have been cut by 69 per cent and more than 750 youth centres have closed.<sup>73</sup>

### **Adult social care**

- A Nuffield Foundation report in March 2023 stated that 27 per cent of requests for social care for older people lead to no care being provided; in December 2022 18 per cent of people who were delayed being discharged from hospital were waiting for a care bed; and one in three older people are waiting six months or more for an assessment.<sup>74</sup>
- The Care Quality Commission’s review on the use of DNACPR decisions during Covid 19 found that some people felt they were unable to make an informed choice about this decision. Others said that they not aware a decision was in place. Although they did not find evidence that there was a national blanket approach to DNACPR applied to groups of people, they did find that a disjointed approach and confusion meant that some providers felt under pressure to have DNACR in place.<sup>75</sup>

# A joined-up approach to everyday rights

*'We have had to fight for survival and this has a knock-on effect on health and education.'*

Focus group participant

For this report we asked people for their opinions about rights as defined in international conventions. However, during our research it became apparent that people's lives defy such a neat categorisation.

The everyday struggles faced by individuals, families and communities cannot be approached as isolated problems, but are multi-layered and complex, with connections between issues.

A single social or economic rights violation, therefore, can set off a chain reaction and undermine the entire support structure for a decent standard of living.

To preserve our everyday rights, government departments need to move beyond siloed decision-making and take a more holistic approach, recognising the inter-connectedness of policies and their implications for people's whole lives.

Charlotte<sup>76</sup> kindly gave us permission to tell her story to demonstrate this point.

## CASE STUDY

### Charlotte's story


I was working as a carer but lost my job after I got hit by a car. Even though I couldn't walk, I was refused disability living allowance because they said I wasn't sick enough.

I couldn't even get out of bed at that time. I couldn't take my children to school. But they said I could work if I had a wheelchair – but there was no way I could do my job in a wheelchair.

Without being able to work, there wasn't enough money and the benefits weren't enough: I only got child benefits, child tax allowance and housing benefit. I only had one meal a day and that was made up of leftovers from my children's meals, otherwise I wouldn't have had enough to feed them. Some days I didn't even have that – I mainly drank water to stop feeling hungry.

I found out that I was also in rent arrears because, even though my housing benefit was supposed to be paid direct to the landlord, it turned out my rent hadn't been paid for six months.





The bailiffs came and told me I had to leave right away if I didn't pay. Even though I had nowhere to go, this classed me as making myself intentionally homeless, which wasn't true. I had to pay the arrears – I don't know what happened to the housing benefit, where it went and why it didn't get paid.

The local authority moved us to a hotel, where we stayed for six months. It was on the other side of the city, far away from my support network. I lost the connections I needed to get by – family and friends – and we were far away from my children's schools. I watched my kids go from happy, bright and bubbly to being secluded, isolated, depressed and anxious.

We lived in one drafty room with two beds and a shower room that had mould. We had no facilities for washing our clothes. There was a shared kitchen on the ground floor, but people stole our food and used our pots and pans.

It was hard to get the food we needed, even from food banks because we have nut allergies and also we don't eat pork. One time someone took our last meal, all the food we had, and the hotel manager took pity on us and got us a takeaway so at least my children could eat.

Even though we were moved to a house, it wasn't much better. It was even further away and the kitchen and bathroom downstairs were riddled with mould. Water came in from under the front door, there were big cracks in the ceiling and fungus was growing under the kitchen sink.

I had to keep the windows open in the kitchen otherwise I couldn't breathe – I wouldn't allow the children to go in there because it was too unhealthy.

My children and I have suffered chest infections as a result of the housing conditions and also have asthma that has got worse over the years, especially for my son who now needs to use two inhalers.

We all have eczema, my daughter and I have depression, autism and ADHD, which means we find change and instability very difficult. My daughter also has dyslexia and hypermobility. My son and I also have anxiety.

Finally, after years of not getting properly assessed for my health conditions I was finally recognised as being disabled in 2021. But the system still feels, 'Oh you're homeless because you've done it to yourself – not interested.'

They're still blaming the person, and see people as homeless because they're taking drugs, drinking alcohol, or because they made a bad decision. That's not the case – but that's the narrative they're still pushing.

Nine times out of 10 someone is homeless because they are a vulnerable person being taken advantage of.

# Solutions: communities call for change

We asked communities to consider the challenges they faced in getting their social and economic rights, and what a future government should prioritise to address this. Here are the results.

## **Priority 1: Ensure people's basic needs for housing and food**

People want a government to make sure they have a decent standard of living – and to define what that is, as it can mean **different things to different people**.

Suggestions included:

- **'National standards for access to health, education, transport, housing and adequate living standards.'**
- **'Developing and protecting in law a universal living standard, including food, education, housing and health.'**

Communities felt that these rights were closely linked and tackling one issue might be fruitless without addressing the bigger picture: **'Picking one thing is like standing in the hurricane with an umbrella,'** one interviewee said. **'It will only work if there is protection in concrete.'**

People also thought the government needs to make sure no one goes hungry because they cannot afford food. Suggestions to ensure this included free school meals and engaging with food suppliers to **'Make food not so expensive'**.

In particular people wanted the government to tackle homelessness, including making sure affordable, decent homes are available. Suggested steps for government included:

- **'Guaranteeing social housing.'**
- **'Enforcing the amount of social housing and affordable housing being built.'**
- **'Controlling landlords so that housing is of a high standard before being available to rent.'**
- **'More deterrents to second homes.'**
- **'Stopping landowners just sitting on property.'**

People want to feel there is better response and protection when things go wrong. One suggestion was: **'Accountability frameworks for issues, complaints and reporting surrounding housing.'**

## **Priority 2: A social security system that genuinely protects people**

People want to feel when they need welfare benefits that they still have dignity and their experience is not degrading or stigmatising. They want **'a compassionate social security system which supports not punishes'; one which 'stops dehumanising us and has more empathy'; and where 'people know what they are entitled to'.**

Our focus groups said welfare benefits should be paid at a rate that means people can

meet their essential needs, including housing and food. They could do this by being more personalised and **'ensuring that social security takes into account a person's real-life circumstances'**.

### **Priority 3: More equality and an end to discrimination**

Communities want politicians to **'Change the narrative on human rights and stop demonising people'** and to end **'Divisive rhetoric'**.

They felt that people with power to change things should **'understand that everyone deserves not to be judged, or stigmatised based on social status, class or circumstances'**.

People want politics and politicians to better reflect them and their communities and address the **'lack of diversity in politics – they don't understand real people'**.

They suggested that the government needs to address the lack of representation of people with protected characteristics in the seats of power: **'We need proportional representation for people who are disabled. Less than 1 per cent of MPs are disabled even though there are 20 per cent of people with a disability. You can't hope to counter anti-rights discourse in the context of this.'**

People are concerned about the lack of protection and accountability for tackling inequality and discrimination. **'You can't enforce your rights because of the cuts to legal aid and shortage of lawyers.'** Some called for better **'accountability for delivering equality and equal access to justice'**.

People felt that existing laws and processes are not working, including **equality impact assessments, which are supposed to help organisations make sure their policies and practices are fair and inclusive: 'Social justice isn't rooted in their decisions.'**

### **Priority 4: Fund and reform the NHS**

Our communities said they want the government to ensure **'a fully funded and functional NHS', 'paid for by our taxes'**.

People want the right to free healthcare to be protected and for the government to **'stop the postcode lottery in health care'**.

In particular people thought the government needed to **'fix' mental health services, which included addressing waiting lists and times.**

### **Priority 5: Financial decisions that prioritise people struggling to make ends meet**

There is a sense from communities that the ways that the government make decisions now are worsening their situation: **'The tax system is unfair and people are kept in poverty. In the last 30 years it has gotten worse.'**

There was the suggestion that **'Government withholds information on human rights because it would cost too much to put it right.'**

People want the government to **'reform taxes'**. **'Make sure people and companies are paying taxes and stop loopholes so we can start levelling up.'**

The communities we spoke to are concerned about cuts to public services and that **'there will be a continuation of austerity'**. They want an end to cuts and for **'spending to prioritise rights'**. Sometimes these cuts were felt to affect some communities more than others: **'money for disability isn't ring-fenced'**.

Some were sceptical that spending made a difference: **‘Just because governments commit money doesn’t mean things will be better for people and it doesn’t always protect rights.’**

People also felt financial decisions by government were difficult to understand, so it was hard to hold them to account. They want to see **‘better transparency on how money is raised and spent’**.

**Priority 6: People want a bigger say in decisions that affect them**

People said they are crying out to be heard: **‘Listen to us!’ ‘Get down to ground level and see what it’s like. Open your eyes!’ ‘Live in our shoes for a day.’**

A key theme was relationships. Our focus groups said they want a government that **‘connects people – communities, policy makers and local decision makers’ through ‘participatory relationships and collaboration’**.

They want government to **‘co-produce policy with people who are suffering’ in a meaningful way, and not indulge in ‘tokenistic listening’**.

The overarching message was: **‘Government should be run how the citizens of the country want it, rather than what politicians think is right.’**

**Priority 7: Protect children and young people from the effects of inequality**

People were concerned about the effects of poverty and cuts on the future of children. They want the government to prioritise assistance for families with children and young people, and make sure people are not disadvantaged at school because of their family’s income and background.

Suggestions included more community-led services such as youth centres, and specialist services for children and families fleeing conflict and violence: **‘Fix the refugee system and domestic violence services.’**

Communities want the government to ensure that **‘organisations are working together and can answer questions – not being referred from one to another’**.

For children with additional needs, people want the government to **‘increase educational resources’: ‘one-to-ones in schools for those who are neurodiverse and for those who are being home educated’; ‘integrate mental health services and life-skills lessons’; and ‘address costs of education – trips, uniform – which leaves some children behind’**.

**Priority 8: Transport us to our rights**

The importance of public transport is a key theme across all the priorities; it is a ‘gateway’ to getting rights.

The government must acknowledge that poor public transport is an obstacle to people getting their social and economic rights. It needs to invest in measures that enable vulnerable or isolated people to get the public services they are entitled to.

**‘Transport affects all of these rights. If you don’t own a car or don’t have access to public transport (especially if you have a disability), or you live in a rurally isolated area, then you are disadvantaged to all other rights and how you access them.’**

# Conclusion

Amnesty International UK wanted to create a report that sheds light on where access to economic and social rights is lacking, with a focus on community perspectives.

Our goal is to highlight the issues that communities prioritise in order to guide future government policies and practice. This report reflects a broad range of opinions, but more listening is required to genuinely understand the needs and views of communities who are seldom heard.

These community priorities are not formal recommendations from Amnesty International. They belong to the people. However, we stand in solidarity with the marginalised communities we spoke to. We aim to carry out more research to better understand the challenges they face, and we will campaign for change.

These community perspectives reveal:

- A significant breakdown in how the government upholds economic and social rights in the UK
- Where new policy measures are needed
- Where existing policies are falling short.

We therefore call on the government to act in response to this – and to do it urgently.

UK policymakers need to transition from isolated policy approaches to integrating the obligations contained in the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

This would allow for the development of policy frameworks which recognise how rights are connected and help prevent inequality and people being forced into poverty. Our polling shows that there is public support for this.

The government should define and ensure a universal minimum standard of rights, as well as a Human Rights Action Plan to address inequality. This has not been done in the UK, except for some progress in devolved nations relating to devolved matters.

The government must also prioritise protecting rights wholesale to prevent issues such as welfare benefits and homelessness becoming political tools to advance a divisive agenda that demonises vulnerable communities.

Inequality is worsening, with certain groups facing greater challenges – such as disabled people, single parents, people experiencing homelessness, and people seeking asylum. This perpetuates discrimination, despite legal protections under the Equality Act 2010.

Strengthening this act, particularly through the enactment of Section 1, often referred to as the ‘socio-economic duty’, and enhancing mechanisms for holding state actors

accountable for failures to implement the act's obligations, is essential.

The debilitating impact of poverty and inequality on community participation in addressing rights violations is alarming. Better community engagement will foster more government accountability. The government must therefore prioritise building inclusive institutional frameworks that actively engage marginalised communities to ensure their voices are heard.

This report should end with words from the communities:

**'Put the humanity back into politics and get better at understanding what it is like to live in our situation.'**



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