

Joint Letter to the UK Government: Urgent Call to End the Two-Child Benefit Cap

Dear Prime Minister,

We, the undersigned leaders of the Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) and its members write to urge the UK Government to abolish the two-child benefit cap, a policy that has trapped families in poverty since its introduction in 2017. This cap is not only detrimental to the financial well-being of families but also has a lasting impact on children's development and future opportunities. We welcome the launch of the new Child Poverty Task Force and its commitment to reducing child poverty, but we firmly believe that without addressing the two-child benefit cap, many children will continue to be trapped in poverty.

Poverty is one of the greatest challenges facing families in the UK, and the two-child limit exacerbates this issue by restricting financial support for larger families. Government figures show that 1.6 million children are affected by the cap, with many families missing out on up to £3,455 per child annually. Further, 59% of the 450,000 households affected have at least one parent in work. These figures reflect the policy's failure to support working families and its disproportionate burden on larger families, single parents, and ethnic minorities.

Research from the Child Poverty Action Group highlights that abolishing the two-child limit would lift 300,000 children out of poverty and reduce poverty's severity for an additional 700,000 children, at a relatively modest cost of £1.3 billion. This investment in the welfare of children would not only reduce immediate hardship but also alleviate the long-term social and economic costs of child poverty, which Save the Children estimates at £39 billion per year. We appreciate the cost of such a move in challenging financial times, however we believe that those with the broadest shoulders can take on more of the burden.

The adverse effects of this policy on mental health and well-being have been well-documented. A study by the University of York in 2023 found that the two-child limit increased stress, anxiety, and insecurity among affected families, with knock-on effects on children's opportunities and mental health. Catholic charities and diocesan agencies have witnessed first-hand the desperation of families unable to afford basic necessities, with parents skipping meals to feed their children and children enduring preventable stress and hardship.

At a time when the cost of living is increasing and more families are facing financial insecurity, this policy adds unnecessary strain on those who are already struggling. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has long opposed the two-child cap, emphasising that it undermines the dignity of family life and disproportionately affects the most vulnerable.

We call on the Government to end this harmful policy and prioritise the well-being of children and families as a matter of urgency. We cannot stand by while more families are pushed into poverty. The future of our children depends on decisive action now.

Yours Faithfully,

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