# BBC Question Time sparks fresh urgency to scrap UK’s two-child benefit cap amid soaring child poverty



The recent episode of BBC Question Time in Cheltenham ignited a fiery debate surrounding the appalling state of child poverty in the UK. Political journalist Ava-Santina Evans inadvertently became the center of attention after making a light-hearted yet troubling comment regarding the two-child benefit cap—an unpopular policy restricting both child tax credit and universal credit. While she advocated for its removal, claiming it could help lift one million children out of poverty, the reality is far more grim than her sunny quips suggest.

Evans' comment about the meager £20 a week for the first child and £17 for subsequent children being an inadequate incentive drew laughter from the audience, but the underlying issue remains dire. As she smoothly transitioned back to the dire circumstances faced by many families, she highlighted the heart-wrenching fact that "children are going to school every single day hungry." This highlights a broader failure, as families grapple with inadequate financial support in an economy increasingly hostile to the vulnerable.

Introduced in 2017, the two-child benefit cap has come under intense scrutiny, particularly as the number of children living in poverty climbs to a staggering 4.3 million. Campaigners argue that abolishing this cap could provide immediate relief to hundreds of thousands, a desperate necessity in the face of rising living costs and an ineffective welfare system. Sophie Howes from the Child Poverty Action Group suggests that lifting the cap could uplift 300,000 children overnight, with an additional 700,000 feeling the positive effects. This indictment of current policies underscores the urgent need for reform that traditional parties seem hesitant to deliver.

Though the Labour Party, under Sir Keir Starmer, has signaled some openness to reconsidering the cap, it raises the question: will they act decisively or merely tinker around the edges in a bid to placate their party’s unions and constituents? On the other hand, voices from the right, notably from political figures seeking to challenge the status quo, have brought attention to the necessity of bold reforms. These leaders recognize the pressing need for real solutions that resonate with working-class voters who feel abandoned by current welfare policies.

Compounding the issues, the Conservative government finds themselves mired in internal divisions, particularly regarding welfare spending and its consequences for child poverty. Their promises increasingly ring hollow as families continue to struggle. The planned comprehensive strategy to tackle child poverty set for spring 2025 seems a long way off for those grappling with hunger today, revealing a lack of urgency that is all too common amidst political jargon.

As the national discourse around welfare reform escalates, Evans’ remarks underscore a crucial reality: for families across the UK, the outcomes of political decisions are deeply personal and immediate. With rising concerns about hunger and the ever-growing rates of poverty, it is clear that the time for mere discussions has passed. There is a pervasive belief that addressing these issues is not just an economic imperative but a moral obligation that calls for leaders who are willing to champion real change—including policies that truly support families in distress.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2061920/bbc-question-time-guest-says-she-can-think-other-ways-make-money-saucy-swipe> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/5b951d4f-1cd5-4b7a-bd2d-ef4b820de9bf> - Nigel Farage, leader of Reform UK, plans to announce the lifting of the two-child benefit cap and full reinstatement of winter fuel payments, measures expected to cost up to £5 billion. This move is aimed at appealing to working-class voters and influencing Labour Party policy, particularly as Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and Chancellor Rachel Reeves face internal pressure over welfare spending. Starmer recently reversed a decision affecting winter fuel payments to pensioners, but has not detailed implementation plans. While he is also open to ending the two-child benefit cap, the fiscal implications are significant, with £3.5 billion required by decade's end. Reeves insists such decisions be made during major fiscal events, with the next not scheduled until autumn. Deputy PM Angela Rayner, advocating for tax increases of up to £4 billion on the wealthy to fund societal needs, denies leadership ambitions despite internal tensions. Meanwhile, Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch supports winter fuel payments’ principle but questions universal application. Reform UK’s surge in polls underscores the political challenge to the Labour government amid rising borrowing costs and fiscal constraints.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benefit_cap> - The benefit cap is a UK welfare policy that limits the amount in state benefits that an individual household can claim per year. It was introduced by the Cameron-Clegg coalition government in 2013 as part of the coalition government's wide-reaching welfare reform agenda which included the introduction of Universal Credit and reforms of housing benefit and disability benefits. The government cited wide public support for the measure, despite it being highly controversial. The benefit cap primarily affects families with children, high rents, or both. By 2024, two-thirds of the families affected by the cap were single-parent families, half of which had a child under five. A two-child policy restricting child tax credit and universal credit was introduced in 2017. It limits these benefits to the first two children in most households, and is referred to as the 'two-child benefit cap'. These two benefit caps form part of a set of three benefits policies designed by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, as part of the United Kingdom government austerity programme. The third policy, introduced in 2013, was known as the bedroom tax.
4. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-10-22/debates/E3647396-21B6-41C9-8FEF-67AEF47EDDEA/ChildPovertyBenefitCap> - In a House of Lords debate on 22 October 2024, Lord Roberts of Llandudno raised concerns about the impact of the benefit cap on child poverty, particularly in Wales following the closure of the blast furnaces at Port Talbot, which resulted in 2,700 job losses. Baroness Sherlock, responding on behalf of the government, acknowledged the need to revisit the support provided to individuals and families affected by the benefit cap. She highlighted the government's commitment to tackling child poverty and mentioned the forthcoming publication of a White Paper outlining a new approach to supporting people into work. The discussion underscored the complex interplay between welfare policies and local economic challenges, emphasising the necessity for tailored solutions to address child poverty effectively.
5. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-11-11/debates/04B4634E-DA1E-4FF0-87FD-5922EE9282E0/OralAnswersToQuestions> - During a parliamentary session on 11 November 2024, Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (Lab) questioned the Minister for Employment, Alison McGovern, about the government's steps to reduce child poverty levels. McGovern highlighted initiatives such as the introduction of breakfast clubs to ensure children are ready to learn and the implementation of fair payment rates to prevent families from falling into destitution due to debt. She also mentioned the establishment of a ministerial taskforce, chaired by the Work and Pensions and Education Secretaries, which is set to publish a child poverty strategy in spring 2025. This strategy aims to utilise all available governmental levers to achieve a lasting reduction in child poverty over the course of the Parliament, as part of a 10-year plan for enduring change.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/c250v53jz5dt> - In a BBC News live report, child poverty campaigners emphasised the importance of lifting the two-child benefit cap to alleviate poverty. Sophie Howes from the Child Poverty Action Group stated that scrapping the cap could lift 300,000 children out of poverty overnight, with an additional 700,000 children experiencing less deep poverty, making an immediate difference to over one million children. The report also highlighted the government's refusal to lift the two-child limit, with anti-poverty campaigners expressing disappointment over the lack of measures to reform the social security system, which they argue is currently inadequate. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation noted that low-income families cannot afford to wait for the economy to grow and called for immediate action.
7. <https://archive.org/details/BBCNEWS_20240910_100000_BBC_News> - An archived BBC News broadcast from 10 September 2024 includes discussions on various topics, including the two-child benefit cap. The segment features a question about the government's plans to alleviate the poverty experienced by 4.3 million children across the UK. The broadcast also addresses issues related to sexual harassment, with a focus on the shocking figure of 60% of individuals affected. The discussion highlights the need for stronger protection against sexual harassment and the urgency of implementing measures to combat this issue. The broadcast underscores the importance of addressing both child poverty and workplace harassment as critical societal concerns.