

Social Rights in the North East – Facts and Figures

- As a Party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ([ICESCR](#)), the UK must take steps to the maximum of its available resources to achieve progressively the realisation of social rights: the right to education, adequate standard of living including food and housing, access to health and the right to social security.
- However, 14 million people, a fifth of the UK's population, live in poverty – four million of them are more than 50% below the poverty line, and 1.5 million are destitute, unable to afford basic essentials ([Social Metrics Commission](#) and [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)). Lone mothers, people with disabilities, people with children and BAME families are disproportionately affected ([EHRC](#)).
- Levels of [child poverty in North East](#) are above the national average: Nearly 540,000 dependent children until the age of 20 (24%) live in low-income families, compared to 20% in England.
- In-work poverty is rising faster than employment levels, especially amongst working parents; around four million workers currently live in poverty, a rise of half a million over 5 years ([Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)). [Unemployment levels](#) are higher in North East than any other part of the UK, and the region also has the highest percentage of people on [zero hours contracts](#) standing at 3.7% of its population -the national average is 2.8%.
- [Fuel poverty](#) is also above the national average: over 14% of households lie in fuel poor homes compared to 11% in the rest of England.
- The North East is home to many food banks providing much needed support. Newcastle West End Foodbank, the largest in the country, provided more than 40,000 food parcels in 2018.
- Stockton-on-Tees has the highest geographical health inequalities within a single local authority in England both for men (at a 17.3 year difference in life expectancy at birth) and for women (11.4 years) ([Public Health England](#)).
- [Research](#) from Newcastle University and Teesside University in Gateshead and Newcastle shows that people, especially those with disabilities and health conditions, are forced to wait an average of seven and a half weeks, sometimes 12 weeks, to receive Universal Credit benefits. As observed by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, [Philip Alston](#), this waiting period “pushes many who may already be in crisis into debt, rent arrears, and serious hardship, requiring them to sacrifice food or heat”.
- The number of rough sleepers rose by 29% in the North East in 2018 ([Homeless Link](#)).
- In Newcastle alone, the City Library digitally assisted nearly 2,000 people between August 2017 and September 2018. Nationally [one in three](#) universal credit claims fail the application process, and DWP has no estimate of the number of people who do not even attempt to apply due to digital exclusion. Writing about the government's “digital by default” approach to social security, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights [wonders](#) “why some of the most vulnerable and those with poor digital literacy had to go first in what amounts to a nationwide digital experiment”.

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