What is the picture for low income families in London?

As we head into the school holidays, low-income families face [the risk](https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2019/10/23/holiday-hunger-the-government-must-remove-the-inequalities-in-childrens-access-to-holiday-clubs/) of experiencing hardship and financial pressure. Nearly [one million pupils](https://feedingbritain.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/hungry-holidays.pdf) who receive free school meals during the school term are at risk of going hungry during the holidays. Beyond the school holidays, 400,000 children in London [face food insecurity](https://www.feedlondon.org/food-poverty-children-london). With the expansion of free school meals, there are also opportunities to look at long-term solutions and the kind of infrastructure, insights or investment needed to create change. According to the latest government statistics, 4.2m people (6%) were living in food poverty in 2020 to 2021. This includes nearly one in 10 children, around 9%.[[1]](#footnote-2)

From Mayoral polling in late 2022[[2]](#footnote-3) we can see that households with children under 18 were 14% more likely to be buying less food and essentials. This data also shows that households with children under 18 are doing more to manage the cost of living crisis in certain areas including; buying cheaper products, using less water, energy and fuel, and using more credit and going in to debt. You can explore this data more [here](https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/14407506/).

A graph with multiple colored bars

Description automatically generated

In their latest ‘[The State of London](https://data.london.gov.uk/blog/state-of-london-report-june-2023-update/)’ review, the GLA identifies how stark the income inequalities have become with ‘the richest tenth of Londoners having almost 10 times the income of the poorest tenth” and that the decline in Universal Credit claimants in London we were seeing until mid-2022 has now “started to reverse”.

Our member, The Childhood Trust, states in their [latest report](https://www.childhoodtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/London-Child-Poverty-Report-2023-1.pdf) that a “decade of austerity” is one of the greatest factors in increasing child poverty and that state that the cuts to “benefits, local authorities, family support services and countless other social programmes; nearly half of London councils’ youth services despite the demand for such services being ever present”.

Our member, Trust for London, also shows a borough breakdown of the [proportion of children in poverty before and after housing costs](https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/child-poverty-borough/)[[3]](#footnote-4).

The draw the conclusion that “Tower Hamlets is the borough with the highest rate of child poverty. Almost half (48%) of children are growing up in poverty in Tower Hamlets”. They go on to note that “it also demonstrates the large impact that the cost of housing has on poverty in the capital. In the borough with the highest poverty levels (Tower Hamlets), 27% of children are classified as being in poverty before housing costs are considered. Taking account of housing costs increases this figure to 48%.

[A graph of different colored squares

Description automatically generated](https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/14430545/)

The child poverty rate at least doubles when housing costs are accounted for in 20 of the 33 London boroughs.

The [Good Food report](https://www.sustainweb.org/good-food-for-all-londoners/) from 2022 states that “since last year, there has been a promising increase in universal free school meals, holiday provision and Healthy Start food vouchers promotion, as well as provision of meals on wheels services. Progress has also been made on the London Living Wage and Living Wage Places. However, there is a reduction in active food poverty alliances and up-to-date food poverty action plans, and the number of cash first actions that councils are undertaking. We urge councils to prioritise these areas, especially during this cost-of-living crisis.”

It's also important to note that findings show that children with disabilities and those from ethnic minority groups are disproportionately affected by child poverty, and that this is the case across the UK. End Child Poverty Coalition, together with the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University’s [report](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https:/endchildpoverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Local-indicators-of-child-poverty-after-housing-costs_Final-Report-3.pdf) shows that “in 2021/22, children living in a family where someone is disabled had a poverty rate of 36% after housing costs, compared with 25% for children living in families where no-one is disabled. They also go on to say that “in every region of the UK, children from minority ethnic groups are more at risk of being in poverty than those with white ethnicity. This association is particularly strong in London, where due to the high ethnic diversity of the region, a large number of children are likely to be affected.”

What are funders doing?

In our latest [member audit](https://londonfunders.org.uk/latest/news/key-findings-our-202223-member-audit) we can see that ‘children and young people’ and ‘poverty’ are areas which are funded by the majority of our members across London.

A purple and white stripes

Description automatically generated

Some of the proactive responses from some of our members include:

London Community Fund developed the [Together for London Programme](https://londoncf.org.uk/blog/launching-our-together-for-london-fund) providing funding of up to £10,000 for six months to community-based organisations across London. This funding is focused on supporting organisations to respond to the immediate impacts of the cost-of-living crisis in their communities, including access to food and essential items

Our members, the GLA and the Mayor’s Fund for London have worked in partnership with The Felix Project to deliver announced an [emergency funding package](https://londoncf.org.uk/blog/launching-our-together-for-london-fund) of more than £3.5m to help provide around 10m free meals during school holidays and at weekends to low-income Londoners struggling with the spiralling cost of living over the next year.[[4]](#footnote-5)

The [report](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https:/endchildpoverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Local-indicators-of-child-poverty-after-housing-costs_Final-Report-3.pdf) (as mentioned earlier) by End Child Poverty Coalition, together with the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University’s concludes that while local circumstances and context are likely to have an impact on children’s risk of living below the poverty line, national polices such as the two-child limit are having a detrimental effect across the UK. Without addressing these wider issues, regional and local inequalities in the risk of child poverty are unlikely to improve.

Further reading

Feed London - <https://www.feedlondon.org/food-poverty-children-london>

End Child Poverty - <https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty/>

Hungry Holidays, APPG Holiday Hunger - <https://feedingbritain.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/hungry-holidays.pdf>

Save the Children - <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/struggling-families-sink-more-into-debt>

The Mayor’s Fund for London - <https://www.mayorsfundforlondon.org.uk/news/mayor-announces-emergency-free-holiday-meals/>

Holiday Hunger, London Assembly - <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/holiday-hunger-5>

Food Security in London, The GLA - <https://airdrive-secure.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/london/dataset/food-security-2019/2019-06-26T04%3A49%3A43/Food%20security%20in%20London%20-%20headline%20findings.pdf?X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAJJDIMAIVZJDICKHA%2F20230711%2Feu-west-1%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Date=20230711T113549Z&X-Amz-Expires=300&X-Amz-Signature=74fb73b702d621082a3722780e2467e4b8abee5d1dbdf0c27d4ac214fab6820f&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host>

1. <https://www.feedlondon.org/food-poverty-children-london> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://airdrive-secure.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/london/dataset/gla-poll-results-for-mayors-questions/2022-11-16T18%3A31%3A16/MQ3841%20GLA%20YouGov%20Food%20insecurities.pdf?X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAJJDIMAIVZJDICKHA%2F20230711%2Feu-west-1%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Date=20230711T113641Z&X-Amz-Expires=300&X-Amz-Signature=d2073127a3e25d463e0504def7cc34b91c62a6350b13982a733b0cf5e50b673a&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/child-poverty-borough/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <https://www.mayorsfundforlondon.org.uk/news/mayor-announces-emergency-free-holiday-meals/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)