

# Locating England's most deprived

*Blessed are the poor; for they alone have not the poor always with them. The honest poor can sometimes forget poverty. The honest rich can never forget it.<sup>1</sup>*  
~ G. K. Chesterton

*For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.<sup>2</sup>*  
~ Jesus

Research compiled by Timothy P Hein

*The material in sections 1, 2 and 3 (which is common to all regions)  
is repeated in each research paper.*

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<sup>1</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *All Things Considered*, Selected Works of G.K. Chesterton (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2018), paragraph 14.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 26:11 (ESV)

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## Introduction

Where are the most deprived in the England? The short answer: everywhere. And when we start to delve into the jungle of detail, that often leads to more questions than answers.

What do we mean by “most deprived”? How is that different from “deprived”? Is everyone in a particular area accorded the same status? What about gentrification? As governments continue to march away from schemes and council estates to housing associations, who can say (or track) what is the “low-income” housing and where is it located?

Our research has been conducted in partnership with the FIEC and is therefore focused on FIEC churches but we trust that the results will be useful to evangelical churches from other denominations who are seeking to reach our most deprived communities.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Research conducted by the author, based on data collected and analysed in 2019–20.

# 1. Methodology and poverty

## 1.1 Areas of analysis and discussion

First, this paper defines terms commonly used to describe various features of poverty research. Then it addresses the fundamental, albeit obvious, question: Is there really poverty in the UK? Third, this paper locates the “most deprived” in England. Fourth, this paper looks for FIEC church or gospel-centred activity in those areas, where it exists. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

This paper is striving for a relatively complex approach to a complex set of questions. Not only is a definition of material deprivation complex, so too are the metrics for measuring and locating persons experiencing material deprivation. And from a Christian worldview, of course, there is the added complexity of spiritual deprivation, which the broader project seeks to incorporate into current understandings of deprivation. Furthermore, the data available is conflicting and conflicted in its results.

## 1.2 Data

First, what data are we using? This paper uses several data reports in an effort to create a hybrid of analysis:

- The respective *Index of Multiple Deprivation Reports* (IMD) for each country within the UK are used as a sort of baseline. These reports prove particularly helpful in locating areas where material deprivation is most likely to be experienced.
- End Child Poverty (ECP) resources – these are helpful for locating child poverty by region within the UK – such information is helpful to corroborate locations where people experience material deprivation.
- *Social Metrics Commission Reports* (SMC) – in particular, the trajectories and patterns their reporting produces.
- Data published by the John Rowntree Foundation.
- Published research in academic, sociological, anthropological, and socio-political journals researching material deprivation.
- Online and print media – Reporting and columns found in UK newspapers, the BBC and related media where it can be helpful; local newspapers (eg *Manchester Evening News*, *Liverpool Echo*, *Irish Times*, etc) may also provide helpful insights and local stories to explain deprivation particulars in specific neighbourhoods.
- Interviews – data taken from interviews with citizens, ministers, civic and government leaders are also employed, where available.
- Survey data, including surveys conducted by 20Schemes.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.3 Limitations of data sources

Each source comes with its own challenges. The IMDs are heavily focused on income as determinative of one’s deprivation. Strictly speaking, one would have to ask each

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<sup>1</sup> Conducted by the author, based on data collected and analysed in 2019–20.

family/household to know the particulars of their material deprivation, which the IMDs do *not* do. To that extent, IMDs are particularly helpful about locating *area* where people experience deprivation, but not necessarily the particular *people* in those areas, meaning that someone could live in a “deprived area” but actually be living a rather middle-class life.

The *SMC Reports* are very helpful about lifestyle choices and the ability to live a comfortable life, tracking those trends and trajectories for those who can or cannot maintain what British people define as a minimal “comfortable” lifestyle. The careful reader can already detect the limitations. While the SMC has a researched process for identifying a “comfortable” lifestyle, it is nonetheless an elusive metric, no matter how much one tries to quantify it with data. Second, SMC is really tracking trends and trajectories, not necessarily explaining how someone experiences deprivation. Furthermore, some critics find the SMC has significantly *underestimated* the costs of living, especially for families with children (which is startling because nearly 40% of the population experiencing deprivation are families with children). Conversely, SMC research brings helpful insights into the emerging so-called “working poor”.

Similarly, the John Rowntree Foundation (JRF) is also primarily looking at trends and does not label people or areas *per se*. Their analysis of government data and their own research is indeed innovative and helpful, limited as it may be.

While media may simplify or exaggerate researcher claims, local stories can provide helpful windows into the realities statistics that open up, but cannot engage. Further, most research in the social issues surrounding material deprivation are limited by the truthfulness of those completing their survey questions and the usual faults and strengths of research.

#### 1.4 Usage of data sources

Next, how are we using that data? This paper seeks to produce a layered approach to what deprivation is, who experiences it, where they reside, and what impact church currently has and can have on people experiencing deprivation. This data is used to create a textured matrix of results. The IMDs and End Child Poverty data are used to locate material deprivation beyond the narrower view of schemes/council estates/housing associations etc, which are the second layer of locating material deprivation.

For the purposes of defining what it means to experience material deprivation, reports by IMDs, JRF and insights from SMC help us to triangulate a working definition of degrees of material deprivation. Increasingly important in this regard is to recognise the “working poor” – those who are not able to keep their financial commitments despite full-time employment (often working two jobs), or are at an income level where they do not qualify for much-needed benefits despite being unable to meet their monthly living costs. The factors are legion. For now, suffice it to say that, as most reports since at least September 2018 indicate, families with at least one adult and one or more children are most likely to be or become “working poor”. This paper argues that “working poor” status is not only a fluctuating

category – one can easily move in or out of it, and many often do – it is often the gateway into or out of material deprivation.

In short, the goal of this project is to be beholden to no one single source, but at each turn, to be reliant on two or more sources for our data.

### 1.5 Complexities

On a closing note, it must be said that defining, quantifying and locating material deprivation is a massively complex issue. A common reaction is to see poverty as “simple problem”, or to minimise the impact it has on people’s lives, or to minimise the number of people who are affected.

Even worse, a common reaction is to say some people “earned” it. Such an accusation is akin to calling you, the reader, an upper-class-self-righteous-posh-ignoramus, simply because you have the means to access this report and read it somewhere warm where you’re not under threat of eviction, or physical assault, or exhausted from working two labour-intensive jobs, because you don’t have to worry about having no food to pack for your child’s school lunch, or because you’re not under a blanket on a street debating whether to finish reading this sentence or use the paper to start a fire so you are not so cold tonight.

Unfair, right? Maybe you, the reader, *are* experiencing some degree of deprivation too. Maybe someone gave you this research paper? Indeed, such reductionisms are infantile at best, ignorant and dangerous at worst. Furthermore, it cannot be lost on readers or researchers that the subject of study is *people* who are in difficult humanitarian situations: they may not have a place to sleep tonight, not had a proper meal today, they may have a child moving school for the third time this year, or parent(s) who do not care little about whether the child attends school, and even less about whether they do their homework.

This is not a tug at heartstrings. These statistics and analysis are to help us quantify the scope and breadth of what people nearer to us than we realise are experiencing every day. Souls are going to hell because they do not know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour and, for some of them, hell may seem an improvement on their current living conditions. Such people are sleeping on the streets around our church buildings, or struggling to hang on to the flat next door to a church member, or sleeping in their car next to a deacon’s workplace. Others are second or third generation families struggling to survive on benefits, some have a criminal record (be it as a restless youth or willing to do *anything* to make ends meet), live in a council estate or on an auntie’s couch. Church, let us find them and do something to help them out of their material deprivation... As you read each sentence, please remember that there is a person in the UK struggling to survive the hour you’ve spent reading or studying. That is not a guilt trip, but a sober reminder of the stakes involved.

## 2. Defining terms

### 2.1 Definitions of poverty

It is important to clarify what one means by “poverty” or “material deprivation” – if for no other reason than that most institutions measuring and monitoring poverty tend to have their own definitions.

The Central Government has a poverty line of the anyone below the 60% median income. SMC has a poverty threshold based upon what a family reasonable needs to live “reasonably”. IMD determines that those persons or areas in the lower 30% (Decile 3) or lower are “deprived”. This is in contrast to the EU, which broadly defines poverty based on possession of basics for living – like two sets of clothes and access to running water, etc. How one defines being poor is vital to how one measures poverty, lest persons be excluded (or included) that should not be.

### 2.2 Glossary of terms

There are several terms and acronyms that can further complicate the discussions about material deprivation. In this section, we take a brief look at each term and describe their meaning with brief comment – an annotated glossary. Readers are encouraged to take any questions here charitably as they are likely answered in more detail within the appropriate context that a mere annotated glossary-like format is unable to do. Regardless, readers are encouraged to read this section carefully as well as refer back to this section later, as needed. Terms are discussed in alphabetical order for ease of reference.

For the purposes of this paper, and as a means to draw upon available data, this paper uses the various UK Indices of Multiple Deprivation Reports to construct a matrix for what constitutes “poor” or being in poverty. This paper uses the following nomenclature:

#### “Deprived”

“Deprived” and all cognates and synonyms (“material deprivation”, “poor”, “the poor”) refer to someone experiencing poverty, generally speaking. Someone is deprived when lacking one or more essentials for basic human life in the UK (according to IMD metrics, for example). It includes persons within the bottom 30–11% of the IMD for one’s country of residence; or those living at or below the poverty threshold (up to -3%). See also “Poverty threshold”.

#### Depth of poverty

Refers to the extent to which someone is “deprived” or “poor”, or to “how much they *don’t* have”. For example, a homeless man experiences a greater depth of poverty (for example, no home, work, healthy environment, etc) in that they often literally have nothing, whereas someone living on benefits alone may be poor, but not to the depths of the said homeless person.



### “Experiencing poverty”

This is a more accurate way of saying “someone is poor” and similar to “someone is materially deprived”. Poverty is a state of being that one can go “in” and “out” of, experience or not experience. For example, Susie loses her well-paying job in London, does not find employment for a year, has a bicycle accident and is disabled, has to change her line of work but cannot find work two years on, can no longer afford her flat. She is likely to experience poverty although she may come out of it someday. But Peter, whose parents were permanently unemployed and who has no qualifications and no prospect of a job, “experiences poverty” differently from Susie.

### Hardship

This defines someone on the brink – or maybe within the threshold – of poverty: that grey area where the lines are difficult to define. To quantify this, we recognised persons just beyond +3% above poverty threshold as experiencing “hardship”.

### Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

including SIMD (Scotland), EIMD (England) WIMD (Wales) and NIIMD (Northern Ireland)

The *Index of Multiple Deprivation* is Central Government’s annual report on poverty. Each nation within the UK produces independent reports. This paper refers to such reports generally as “IMD” and when discussing a particular country’s report, refers to the EIMD (England IMD), SIMD (Scotland IMD), WIMD (Wales IMD) and (NIMD) Northern Ireland. Since London functions as an area in its own right, its data is also recorded – LIMD (London). IMDs have seven domains comprising their index: Income; Employment; Health and Disability; Education, Skills and Training; Barriers to Housing and Services; Crime; and Living Environment.

### “Least deprived”

Someone or something classified within the top 10% or above of the least deprived communities according to the IMD, based upon one’s country of residence.

### Lower-tier Area (LA)

Central government’s unit of measure, a Lower-tier Area (LA) is a geographical area comprised of a city or region. Each LA is further divided into several Lower-tier Super Output Areas (LSOAs, see below). LAs are typically a major city or cluster of towns and their immediate surrounding area. For example, Liverpool is one LA. Similarly, the LA “Redcar and Cleveland” comprises the towns of both Redcar and Cleveland and their environs. (“Redcar and Cleveland 022D” and “Redcar and Cleveland 019a” are both LSOAs in “Redcar and Cleveland”). Generally, where towns are more sparsely populated, one finds such “combination” LAs. Big cities like London, Liverpool, Birmingham are individual LAs, as are some mid-sized cities like Bristol, Middlesbrough and Blackpool. The history explaining this is

political, complicated, and beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>1</sup> In short, LAs enable analysis at the city/town level, while LSOAs enable analysis at the neighborhood level.

#### Lower-tier Super Output Area (LSOA)

Central government's smallest unit of measure – a Lower-tier Super Output Area (LSOA) – is a demarcated geographical area of approximately 1,600 people. These are fixed groups of 33,485 areas based upon census data and have not varied since the 2016/17 IMD reporting. The history explaining how such lines were drawn is complicated and beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>2</sup> Data on LSOAs enable analysis at the neighbourhood level.

#### Material deprivation

The lack, or absence, in some fashion of material things which are essential for living – otherwise known as “experiencing poverty” (see above, “Deprived”). Further, this is also to distinguish from other kinds of deprivation that governments do not survey, but are nonetheless essential, namely, spiritual deprivation (see below, “Spiritual deprivation”) – though we can also mention moral, hope, health and educational deprivation, to name but a few.

#### “Most deprived”

Someone or something classified within the bottom 10% or below of the most deprived communities according to the IMD, based upon one's country of residence. Or, living at -3% or more below the poverty threshold.

#### Persistent poverty

Refers to the length of time that someone has been in poverty, which can vary. This variation complicates determining who is “most deprived” and where they are located. A family may do well until the primary provider suffers job loss, or someone suffering hardship on a part-time job cannot pay bills due to being home with a flu, causing the domino effect of becoming behind on rent, etc. In other words, there are many who go in and out of deprivation to any degree, especially near the poverty thresholds where factors contributing to deprivation can be so volatile.

#### Poor/poverty

Refers to someone who is identified as “materially deprived” (see above) and may be used synonymously with “deprived” or “deprivation”.

#### Poverty line

A so-called line of demarcation suggesting a person is either inside or outside the poverty line. This term is generally avoided as it is too arbitrary or simplistic, researchers preferring

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<sup>1</sup> See Michael Noble et al., “Measuring multiple deprivation at the small-area level”, *The English Indices of Deprivation 2015 Technical Report*, Environment and Planning A, 2006, vol. 38, 169–85.

<sup>2</sup> Noble et al., “Measuring multiple deprivation at the small-area level”.

instead “poverty threshold”.

#### Poverty threshold

The general point at which, at least statistically, one expects to find such a person or family to be experiencing poverty. Note that this is a term that is heavily, but not exclusively, dependent upon income levels. Further, this is different from a so-called “poverty line” which suggests a person is either inside or outside the poverty line. By “threshold”, researchers are trying to communicate a range, not necessarily a fixed point (eg Steve is “in poverty” because he makes £400/month, Sara is not because she makes £425/month). Rather, there are multiple indicators – income, cost of living, economic factors – that can inform a threshold and give a more realistic picture.

Admittedly, this is somewhat of a simplification. The SMC’s full report details the complexities of getting a precise definition of “poverty” and what the exact poverty threshold is, acknowledging the challenge of those “just above” whatever threshold one decides.<sup>3</sup> For example, if the threshold is 50% median income, what about the 51–55% crowd? Is an individual or family at 60% *really* “out” or “above” the poverty threshold if they are only one car repair or medical expense away from poverty? “Some self-employed people will report no income, hence appearing at the very bottom of the distribution, despite potentially having significant profits from their work.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, determining a poverty threshold by examining a combination of low income and material deprivation yields unreliable results.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, any threshold is an arbitrary one, hence the Commission’s measurement decision is here adopted: the depth of poverty should (a) reflect how far each family in poverty is below the poverty line, and (b) also capture and report on families that are just above the poverty line.<sup>6</sup>

#### Relative poverty

The experience of poverty as one who is impoverished in a given country. This threshold varies from country to country as infrastructure, economy, government, living conditions and other factors for a given country as a whole vary. (See below, 2.3 Extended discussion: “Relative poverty”.)

#### Social Metrics Commission (SMC)

The Social Metrics Commission is an independent research group dedicated to helping public policy makers and the public understand and take action to tackle poverty in the UK.<sup>7</sup> The work is led by the Legatum Institute’s CEO, Baroness Stroud. A key feature of their work is to

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<sup>3</sup> Social Metrics Commission, *A New Measure of Poverty For the UK: The Final Report of the Social Metrics Commission*, Measuring Poverty, ed. Philippa Stroud (UK: Social Metrics Commission, September 2018), 50–52. For full discussion, see 17–77., <https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/>.

<sup>4</sup> Social Metrics Commission, *New Measure of UK Poverty*, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Social Metrics Commission, *New Measure of UK Poverty*, 70–71.

<sup>6</sup> Social Metrics Commission, *New Measure of UK Poverty*, 71.

<sup>7</sup> Social Metrics Commission, <https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/>, accessed 22 September 2021.

develop new metrics for measuring poverty and identifying those who experience it, with an aim at improved understanding of poverty and appropriate action to improve outcomes for those people experiencing poverty.

#### Working poor/In-work poor

Refers to families where one or more persons who are able to participate in the workforce are gainfully employed, yet their income does not meet their weekly needs such that families experience material deprivation at or below the poverty threshold. Often, this is the “pathway” or “descent” from hardship into the poverty threshold.

#### 2.3 Extended discussion: “Relative poverty”

In conversations with people in Western countries, there is often the sentiment that being poor in a Western country is “better” than being poor in a low-income country. Or to use a specific example, better to be poor in England or Wales or Scotland or Northern Ireland than poor in the Central African Republic (hereafter, CAR).<sup>8</sup> Yet, in both places people are suffering the effects of material deprivation, though perhaps not on so different a scale as it may seem.

Several factors are at work to construct what material deprivation is.

First, we must take into account a nation’s wealth. Yet, the prosperity of a nation does not mean everyone experiences or possesses that same level of wealth. Despite how obvious this is, it is fascinating how quickly poverty debaters forget this.

Second, a nation’s poverty line, as defined by the government (or whomever), may be a statistical reality, but some people are able to live on either side of that line and experience an impoverished life. A two-income family of five may struggle to pay the bills in London or Edinburgh, but a similar family may be under less financial pressure if they live in Cardiff, Glasgow or Inverness. Does the first family qualify as “poor” despite being well above the income poverty line? The “working poor” will often struggle to make ends meet even though they have a so-called “decent” income.

In other words, thirdly, cost of living is perhaps of greater help to comparing and evaluating who actually lives in poverty as opposed to a simplistic cash amount definition (ie “making less than £X annually”).

Fourth, one must take into account national structures and infrastructures that allow or prohibit a prosperous life.

Fifth, opportunity for change tends to be a greater factor than often considered, though more difficult to define. A family in the UK *may* have more opportunity to escape poverty than a single man in the CAR – be it through government programs or charity support, grants, education, acquiring new and more marketable skills, starting a successful business,

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<sup>8</sup> Central African Republic has the world’s lowest GDP per Capita. See <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-poorest-countries-in-the-world.html>. Accessed 22 September 2021.

etc. Yet, if being in the UK makes it more difficult to access the support infrastructure and wealth of the nation to get out, that man in the CAR may be able, through temporary sacrifices, to escape poverty despite being in a less wealthy nation.

In a similar vein, commenting on the many ways to define poverty and an apparently false claim that UK poverty was above the European average, fullfacts.org wrote:

*One of the reasons that there are so many measures available is that it's not always clear how to measure what we might think of as "poverty". Looking at 60% of the median income is one way to do so, but the Office for National Statistics points out that a low income doesn't necessarily imply a low standard of living.<sup>9</sup>*

Let us consider Bob who lives somewhere in the UK and Josef in the CAR, who have the same socio-economic class relative to their nation's economy. Both live within the 10% most deprived demographic in their respective countries for education, healthcare, employment, housing, crime/safety, etc. For Josef, taking at face value for the moment a stereotype, has very basic living arrangements, his war-torn country has minimal infrastructure, meaning that everything is limited for its poorest citizens, like Josef. Though the UK has infrastructure, the execution of it leaves Bob in a similar situation: he cannot afford or access the essentials (that may be inaccessible or non-existent for different reasons in the CAR), and the government-provided aid is often too delayed or otherwise insufficient – and the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation. In effect, though living in a more stable country, Bob's experience of poverty in the UK is not all that different from Josef's experiences in the CAR. The point is simple: you can be materially deprived or poor in any nation, and no matter which nation it is, material deprivation is neither desirable nor commendable, much less humane.

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<sup>9</sup> Abbas Panjwani, Full Fact, "The UK's poverty rate is around average for the EU", 9 January 2019, <https://fullfact.org/economy/uks-poverty-rate-around-average-eu/>, accessed 9 January 2019.

### 3. Is there poverty in the UK?

This section examines whether or not poverty exists in the UK and analyses who is experiencing it.

#### 3.1 A Christian worldview

From a Christian worldview, failure to address the issue of poverty in the UK is not an option. The Lord expects generosity towards those in need, reflecting His Father's concern for the poor.<sup>1</sup> Consider the following:

- Jesus blesses the poor in spirit in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:3) and the poor in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20).
- Jesus presumes regular giving to the poor (in Matt 6:2, Jesus says, "when you give").
- The poor having the gospel preached to them is evidence of the arrival of the Kingdom of God (Matt 11:5; Luke 7:22).
- Invitations to reception/banquet, like the gospel, should be given to the poor (Luke 14:13, 21).
- Jesus told the rich young man to give all to the poor as a test of the man's maturity (Mark 10:21; Matt 19:21).
- Jesus himself said the poor would always be among the church, unlike himself (Mark 14:7; Matt 26:11).
- Paul was told by the apostles in Jerusalem to 'remember the poor' (Gal 2:10), which he gladly did – this episode is akin to the early church wrestling with how to care for poor widows (Acts 6:1–7).

To the question, "Are there poor people in...?" Jesus's reply, most likely, would be a vigorous "Yes! And if you do not know where they are or who they are, go find them."

#### 3.2 Poverty in the UK

The UK is indeed blessed with a relatively low degree of poverty. As a member of G7, G20 and seventh in world output by the *International Monetary Fund* (IMF), it is reasonable to ask whether anyone can be poor in such a prosperous nation.<sup>2</sup> The 2016 statistics reveal an estimated 23.5% of the EU population (about 18 million people) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>3</sup> When looking at people at risk of poverty, we can see that the UK is ranked 13th among EU nations with 17% of the UK population at risk of poverty, which is virtually identical to the EU's overall rate of 16.9%.

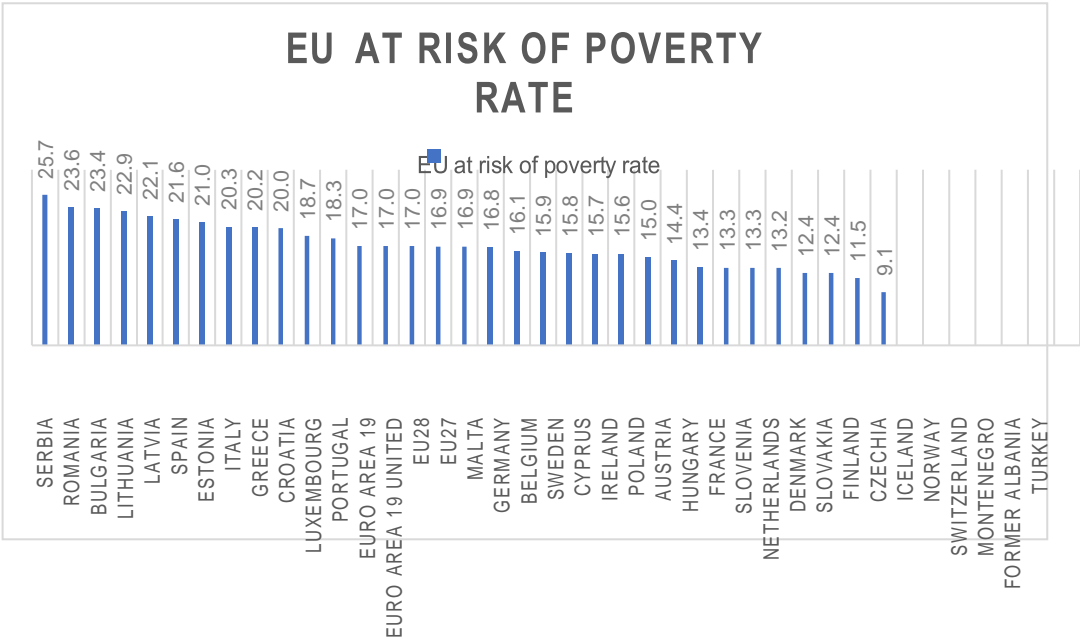
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<sup>1</sup> See Deut 15:7; 11; 1 Sam 2:8; Job 5:15; Ps 9:18; 40:17; 69:33; 72; 109; 113:7; Prov 14:31; Isa 14:32; 25:4; Jer 20:13; Ezek 18:12; Amos 2:6; 4:1; etc.

<sup>2</sup> See *World Economic Outlook: Update* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, January 2019), 8, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2019/01/11/weo-update-january-2019>, accessed 28 September 2021. Note that Brexit and the possibility of a so-called "no-deal Brexit" weigh heavily on the UK's projected standing. Otherwise, the UK's ranking has hovered around fifth for many years before this.

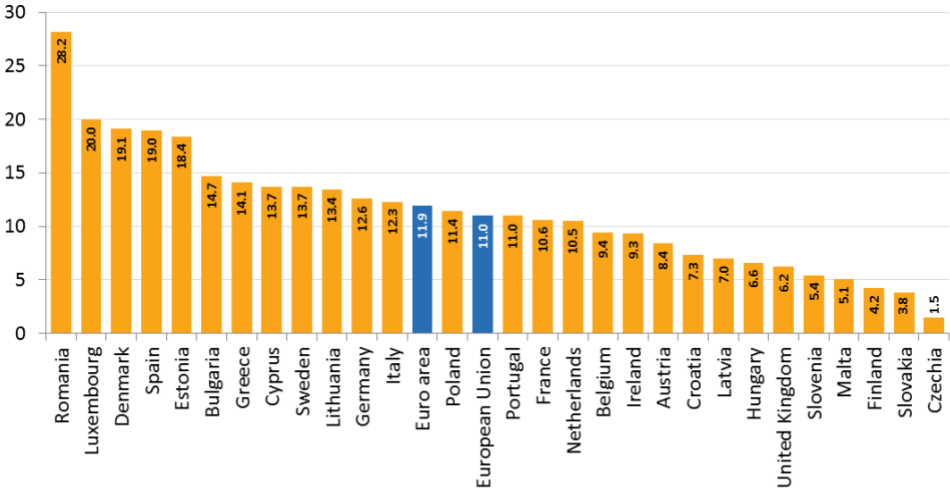
<sup>3</sup> Emilio Di Meglio, ed., *Living Conditions in Europe: 2018 Edition*, Statistical books, Populations and Social Conditions (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018), 26, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-statistical-books/-/KS-DZ-18-001>, accessed 28 September 2021.

Table 3.1 | EU At risk of poverty Rate<sup>4</sup>



Further, the UK poverty rate was lower than the EU in 2017 for in work at risk of poverty young people aged 18-24.<sup>5</sup>

Table 3.2 | In work at-risk-of-poverty rate among young people aged 18–24, 2017



ec.europa.eu/eurostat

In summary, the UK is below EU averages in two major categories of material deprivation –

<sup>4</sup> *European Living 2018*, 26. Values at zero are due to no available data.  
<sup>5</sup> Statistics and chart are from “Young People in Work and at Risk of Poverty,” *Eurostat*, 22 January 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20190122-1>, accessed 28 September 2021.

the so-called ‘working poor’ and those in poverty. It is important to note, though, that direct comparisons between the EU and UK are not entirely reliable as the EU and UK measure poverty differently.<sup>6</sup> Currently, these statistical comparisons lead only to general statements of comparison and no more. The material points here remain: despite UK’s global wealth, there is a measurable and comparable degree of poverty, comparable with the UK’s nearest neighbours in the EU.

But generalities do not suffice. In the UK 14.2 million people experience material deprivation, including families with children, disabled, elderly, young and old, working or not, single and married. Consider the following:

Table 3.3 | Composition of UK Poverty by family types (2016/17)<sup>7</sup>



Source: Family Resources Survey and HBAI dataset (2016/17), SMC Analysis.  
 Notes: Figures refer to total people in poverty in different family types. Family types taken from the HBAI dataset once SMC poverty indicators (assessed at the sharing unit level) have been allocated to each benefit unit.

Think about that... 39% of people in poverty are couples with children; 18% in lone parent families. Put another way, 57% of people in poverty are families with children (8,200,000).

<sup>6</sup> Compare methodologies in the following reports: *Measuring Material Deprivation in the EU: Indicators for the Whole Population and Child-Specific Indicators*, Methodologies and Working Papers (Luxembourg: Eurostat: European Commission, 2012), available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-statistical-working-papers/-/KS-RA-12-018>, accessed 28 September 2021; Tom Smith et al., *The English Indices of Deprivation 2015 Research Report*, Research Report (London: UK Government: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015), available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>, accessed 28 September 2021 . For example, the EU looks at metrics such as owning a car, home, quantity of clothes, and other specifics to calculate material deprivation. Conversely, UK countries use the seven categories of deprivation: income, employment, health and disability, education/skills/training, barriers to housing, crime, and living environment (each with sub-domains).

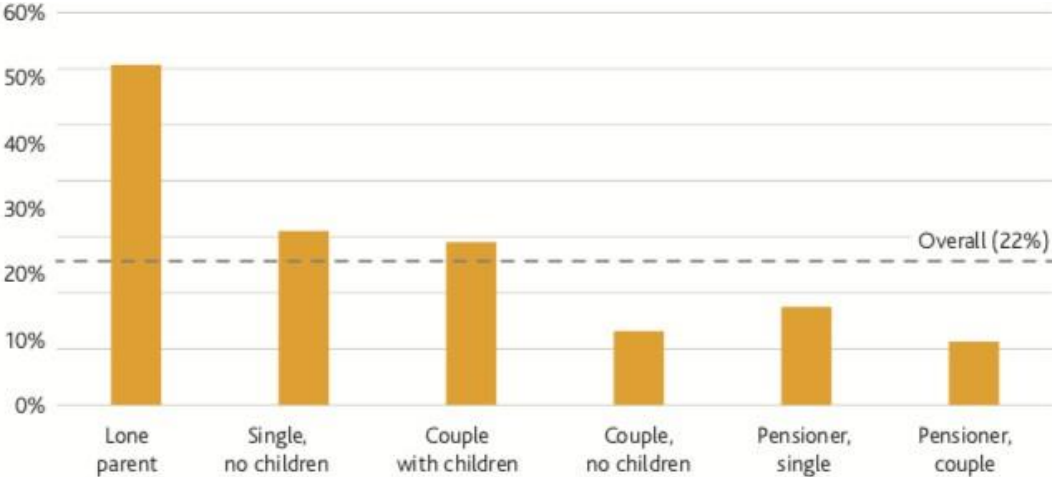
<sup>7</sup> Chart adapted from *Guide on Poverty Measurement* (New York and Geneva: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2017), 81, <https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2018/ECECESSTAT20174.pdf>, accessed 28 September 2021.



The largest group of people in poverty by family type is people living in couple families with children. SMC statistics indicate that as of 2016/17, 39% of people in poverty are couples with children and 18% are lone parent families – making a combined total of 57% of people in poverty being families with children. This is an increase from the constant since the early 2000s of about 55% (8.2 million people).<sup>8</sup>

Yet, poverty rates vary significantly between people in different family types. The second largest group by family type are singles without children (21%). SMC explains by Table 3.4 that, for example, more than half of people in lone parent families are judged to be in poverty. For people in pensioner couples and working-age couples with children, this figure falls to approximately one in ten (11.1% and 9.7% respectively).

Table 3.4 | Distribution of UK Poverty by family types (2016/17)<sup>9</sup>



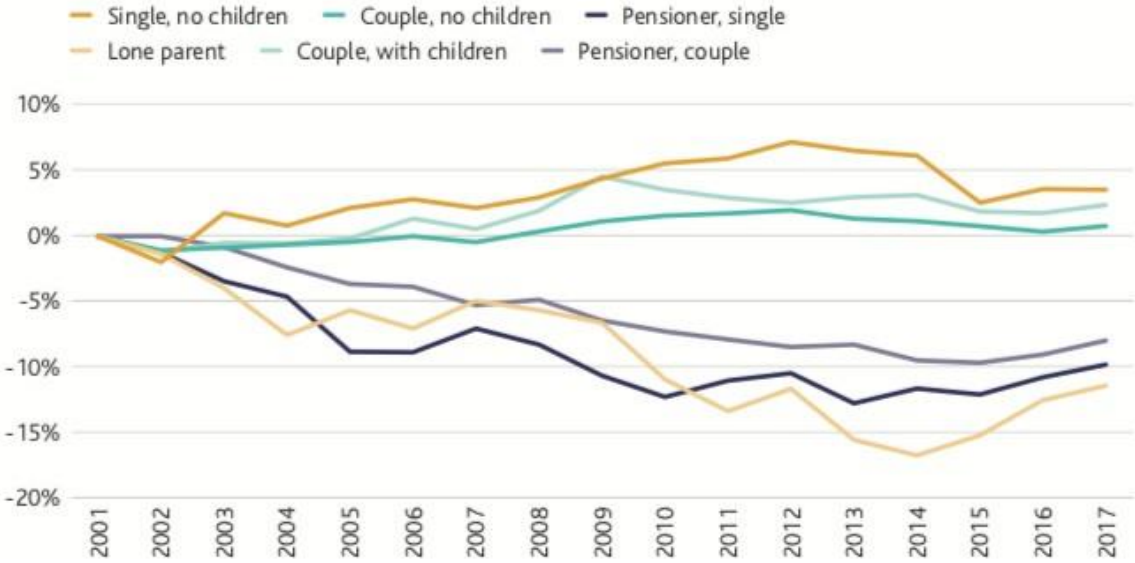
Source: Family Resources Survey and HBAI dataset (2016/17), SMC Analysis.

It is noteworthy that family types with children comprise two of the three largest highest poverty rates in this table. Also glaringly obvious is the high poverty rate of lone parents, which is more than double the overall poverty rate in the UK. Only slightly more troubling is just how consistent these findings are since 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Social Metrics Commission, *New Measure of UK Poverty*, 81.

<sup>9</sup> Chart adapted from *Poverty Measurement Guide*, 82.

Table 3.5 | Changes in UK poverty rates since 2001 by family types<sup>10</sup>



Source: Family Resources Survey and HBAI dataset (1998/99–2016/17), SMC Analysis.

In Table 3.5 we essentially see a surprising trend that seems contradictory to Table 3.4. The prevailing ‘strata of poverty’ over the last fifteen years has seen an increase in the number of singles with no children experiencing poverty. What this chart does not report is the increase in benefits and tax incentives to families with children – but notice that when those began to be cut starting in 2011 the trajectory is upwards (2012–14 likely being years of adjustment for families).

Looking for a more tangible, measurable definition of poverty is difficult. SMC defines a poverty threshold of £251.95 per week (£1007.80 per month/£12,093.60 per year) with a median income of £462 per week.<sup>11</sup> Keep in mind that this number has in view a real-world estimate of what it costs to have the bare minimum to be comfortable, as defined by UK cultural mores (which SMC regularly measures and updates via various research methods). To this extent, the SMC research provides a helpful starting point for quantifying what it means to experience material deprivation, though it is not without its challenges. Calculating thresholds for various family types generates the following calculations:<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Chart adapted from *Poverty Measurement Guide*, 82.  
<sup>11</sup> See Social Metrics Commission, *New Measure of UK Poverty*, 77–78.  
<sup>12</sup> Social Metrics Commission, *New Measure of UK Poverty*, 78, Table 9. SCM derived their analysis from of the Family Resources Survey and HBAI dataset (2016/17).

Table 3.6 | Poverty threshold by family type (Social Metrics Commission)<sup>13</sup>

Family type	2016/17 poverty threshold (£ available resources per week)	2018/19 poverty threshold (£ available resources per week)
<b>Single</b>		
No children	£146.13	£157
<b>Lone parent</b>		
One child	£196.53	£211
Two children	£302.35	£325
<b>Couple</b>		
No children	£251.95	£267.01
One child	£302.35	£320.49
Two children	£408.17	£432.66
<b>Pensioner</b>		
Single	£146.13	£154.90
Couple	£251.95	£267.01

When we extend these calculations to allow for varying numbers of children, the following additional family types can be assessed:

Table 3.7 | Estimated poverty threshold by larger family type<sup>14</sup>

Family type	2016/17 poverty threshold (£ available resources per week)	2018/19 poverty threshold (est.) (£ available resources per week)
<b>Lone parent</b>		
Three children <sup>15</sup>	£513.99	£550
Four children <sup>16</sup>	£619.81	£663
<b>Single Pensioner</b>		
One child	£251.95	£270
Two children	£357.77	£383
<b>Pensioner, couple</b>		
One child	£357.77	£383
Two children	£463.59	£496

<sup>13</sup> Table adapted from Social Metrics Commission, *New Measure of UK Poverty*, 78, which notes: “in one child cases, the child is assumed to be under 14. In two-child cases, one is assumed to be under 14 and one is assumed to be over 14.”

<sup>14</sup> Table adapted from Social Metrics Commission, *New Measure of UK Poverty*, 78.

<sup>15</sup> The 2016/17 data is determined by calculating: £302.35 + (£105.82\*2). The 2018/19 poverty line was determined by calculating 2016/17 multiplied by 7% adjusted for inflation.

<sup>16</sup> Determined by calculating: £408.35 + (£105.82\*2). The 2018/19 poverty line was determined by calculating 2016/17 multiplied by 7% adjusted for inflation.

The different impact a single adult experiences compared with a couple, or compared with a couple with children is significant. Simply said, the larger the family, the larger the income needed to support a family. The *Households Below Average Income* (HBAI) 2018 report clarifies such distinctions:

*To lie in the top half of the income distribution in 2016/17, a single individual needed a net income over £17,200, compared to a couple with two young children who required a combined net income over £36,000.<sup>17</sup>*

### 3.3 The complexities of measuring poverty

As helpful as this analysis is, flaws inevitably exist. Some believe the SMC has significantly *underestimated* the actual costs to families.<sup>18</sup> Yet, I suspect there are many that can only *dream* of having so much weekly income. For example, a couple where both are employed, paying £125/month for car costs will be much easier to manage than it will be for a single mother.

The complexities include the fact that the **age and medical needs of a child** vary widely: a family of three with two teens and an infant is vastly different from a family of two primary school pupils, yet the above reporting treats them largely the same. A family may be living in an inherited flat/home in London, but the cost of living in the area where that home is may evaporate the home cost savings if utilities, transportation, groceries, etc are inflated compared with living outside the city and commuting.

Similarly, Koch reveals how **women are helped to their demise by government benefits**.<sup>19</sup> Once a woman or mother begins receiving benefits, the process can soon turn to frenzy as women constantly battle to keep their benefits and complete required reporting and (surprise) home inspections. This can cause the kinds of interruptions that prevent developing the life habits necessary to get off the very benefits that they now require. Frequently drawn into dependence upon benefits programmes, council housing and then creating their own support networks, Koch's case study observes that many women in a given English council estate were not only dependent upon financial benefits from the government, but also informal relationships for income – doing a friend's laundry or renting a room for a few months or more to a friend or family member. These activities – just to make ends meet – are all unreported to prevent government scrutiny that would typically lead to decrease or loss of benefits. Indeed, some have been evicted from homes having

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<sup>17</sup> UK Government Department for Work and Pensions, "Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the UK income distribution 1994/95–2016/17", 22 March 2018, p.5, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/691917/households-below-average-income-1994-1995-2016-2017.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691917/households-below-average-income-1994-1995-2016-2017.pdf), accessed 28 September 2021 .

<sup>18</sup> I am indebted to Donald Hirsch for his kind conversations and insights, though any fault or error in judgment is my own.

<sup>19</sup> See Insa Koch, "The State Has Replaced the Man': Women, Family Homes, and the Benefit System on a Council Estate in England," *Focaal Brooklyn* 273 (2015): 84–96, <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2015.730107>, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1734628322/abstract/499CFECC83264962PQ/1>, accessed 28 September 2021.

thus been disqualified from benefits. In that case, the government determines that they are “choosing” homelessness, which absolves the government’s responsibility to provide emergency/homelessness housing assistance. The common stereotype that “they have it easy on benefits...” is simply a myth born of ignorance to the plight of those in need and an over-emphasis placed upon the “bad apples” of any given people group.

Third, **men and women experience poverty and homelessness quite differently**. Often, women are left to parent children alone. Ongoing research continues to show the disparity of pay for many women, which has a noteworthy impact on women’s poverty.<sup>20</sup> So much so, in fact, that Méabh Savage has shown how these differences warrant more careful legislation of social policies in Ireland and around the world. Citing the research of Mayock et al., it is common for some homeless women, for example, “to return to abusive relationships where they subsequently re-emerged into homelessness again, and were separated from their children, who were placed in the care of the state.”<sup>21</sup> Further, late 2018 saw an increasing awareness of so-called “period poverty” for women young and old, complicating work, education, and life for girls and women experiencing poverty.<sup>22</sup>

Fourth, the **ethnic composition** of these groups – which include immigrant families as well as UK families from BME backgrounds (who may or may not be immigrants) – is another matter of some complexity. Data generally supports the perception that immigrants coming to the UK from materially deprived homes are likely to experience continued material deprivation in the UK. Second and third generation children may find upward mobility, even if they often have to overcome prejudice by non-immigrant UK citizens, and navigate educational and employment policies or tendencies’ that do not account for their lived experiences. BME people in the UK consistently trend lower in most fiscal categories. While there are exceptions to these general trends, therein lies the conundrum: exceptional cases reveal the depth of inequality for many non-white UK citizens. However, when we look at the materially deprived, we find that material deprivation makes no ethno-racial distinctions, but people and policies and common practices often do.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Fran Bennett and Mary Daly, *Poverty through a Gender Lens: Evidence and Policy Review on Gender and Poverty* (Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, May 2015), 98–101, 103, 105, [https://www.spi.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Gender\\_and\\_poverty\\_Bennett\\_and\\_Daly\\_final\\_12\\_5\\_14\\_28\\_5\\_14.pdf](https://www.spi.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Gender_and_poverty_Bennett_and_Daly_final_12_5_14_28_5_14.pdf), accessed 28 September 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Méabh Savage, “Gendering Women’s Homelessness,” *Dublin Inst. Technol.* vol. 16, no. 2 (2016): 11, <https://arrow.dit.ie/ijass/vol16/iss2/4/>, accessed 28 September 2021; See, Paula Mayock et al., eds., *Women’s Homelessness and Domestic Violence: (In)visible interactions* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54516-9\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54516-9_6), accessed 28 September 2021.

<sup>22</sup> See Judith Wolf et al., “The Health of Homeless Women,” in Mayock et al., *Women’s Homelessness in Europe*, 155–78, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54516-9\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54516-9_7), accessed 28 September 2021; “Pledge to End Schoolgirl ‘Period Poverty,’” *BBC News*, 14 November 2018, sec. Bristol, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-46205554>, accessed 28 September 2021; “Free Sanitary Products ‘Boost Attendance,’” *BBC News*, 28 November 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-england-hampshire-46361899/period-poverty-sanitary-products-improve-school-attendance>, accessed 28 September 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Hunt, “Race/Ethnicity and Beliefs about Wealth and Poverty,” *Social Science Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2004): 827–53; Milly Williamson and Gholam Khiabany, “UK: The Veil and the Politics of Racism,” *Race &*

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*Class* 52, no. 2 (2010): 85–96; Ceri Hughes and Peter Kenway, “Foreign-Born People and Poverty in the UK” (York, United Kingdom: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, July 2016); “Race Disparity Audit: Summary Findings from the Ethnicity Facts and Figures Website” (Westminster: Cabinet Office, 2017), <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk>, accessed 2 November 2021; Tina Patel, “Race/Ethnicity, Crime and Social Control: An Introduction,” *Social Sciences* 7, no. 12 (2018); Omar Khan, “The Colour of Money: How Racial Inequalities Obstruct a Fair and Resilient Economy” (Runnymede, 2020), <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/2020%20reports/The%20Colour%20of%20Money%20Report.pdf>, accessed 2 November 2021. See also the racial statistic provided in: Social Metrics Commission, “Measuring Poverty 2019: A Report of the Social Metrics Commission,” *Measuring Poverty (UK: Social Metrics Commission, July 2019)*, <https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/>, accessed 2 November 2021; Social Metrics Commission, “Measuring Poverty 2020: A Report of the Social Metrics Commission,” *Measuring Poverty (UK: Social Metrics Commission, July 2020)*; Noble et al., “The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 Research Report”; Andrea Barry, “Sewell report response: what does the data really tell us?” 7 April 2021, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/sewell-report-response-what-does-data-really-tell-us>, accessed 2 November 2021. See also JFR’s myriad of illuminating resources at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/people/ethnicity>, accessed 2 November 2021. Similarly, Snowdon shows how working-class white boys are at risk; see Christopher Snowdon, “The Lost Boys,” 15 July 2020, <https://app.spectator.co.uk/2020/07/15/the-lost-boys-2/content.html>, accessed 2 November 2021.

## 4. Where are England's "most deprived"?

Where are the materially poor in England? The short answer is: everywhere – in rural, semi-rural and urban areas.

### 4.1 The challenge of locating the most deprived places and people

Identifying and locating the *most deprived* places and people is more challenging. One would naturally look at council estates and public housing neighbourhoods. However, the absence of nationwide lists requires contacting *every* local council, who are often reluctant to release such information. Furthermore, the privatisation of much public housing has also complicated the process of identifying poverty in such neighbourhoods. It is necessary, therefore, to rely on poverty reports to locate the most deprived neighbourhoods.

However, the reporting that leads to identification of "most deprived" is riddled with complexities. Identifying a place where there is a high number of people experiencing poverty does not mean *everyone* there necessarily experiences poverty. Second, the duration (how many months/years) or intensity (e.g. no income and on benefits? nearly homeless and on benefits? working poor? single? children? etc.) of the deprivation may vary for a given family or neighbourhood. Third, especially for those on benefits, is the fear of losing benefits and so respondents are often less clear on questionnaires and enquiries (be it over-reporting their need or deprivation, or under-reporting due to shame/guilt).

For many, there seems to be a discrepancy between what one sees – anecdotally or in media or journal articles – between the statistics on poverty and those experiencing material deprivation visible on the street. *How do they carry an iPhone and or have Sky TV? Where did that new Ford come from – aren't they "poor"?*

Brewer et al. explore a solution to the discrepancy between lowest income families' expenditures and income. They demonstrate that likely factors for the discrepancy include misreporting and that households completing government surveys "may feel that their responses to the survey may lead them to have higher tax bills or reduced entitlement benefits".<sup>1</sup> Indeed, why bite the hand that feeds you? And for most people in scheme or estate communities, a deep-seated distrust of government (born of multiple generations of failed government promises) would certainly not encourage reliable reporting, either.

Similarly, Belfield et al. argue that net household income inequality fell due to deliberate increases in redistribution, the tax and transfer system's insurance role during the Great

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Brewer, Ben Etheridge and Cormac O'Dea, C., "Why are Households that Report the Lowest Incomes So Well Off?", *The Economic Journal*, 127(605), October 2017, p.F46–F49, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecoj.12334>.

Recession, falling household worklessness, and rising pensioner incomes.<sup>2</sup> Bourquin et al. concluded similarly, adding rising costs of housing as fourth significant factor.<sup>3</sup>

Further complicating locating the most deprived and poor – if gentrification, homelessness and other social issues were not enough – is the continued privatisation of council housing across the UK. This process has led to changes both in landlords (from the government to individuals, corporations, housing associations or Registered Social Landlords) and tenants (who are pressured to leave or otherwise choose to leave as the property or neighbourhood changes for the worse with the transfer).<sup>4</sup> Reflecting on the National Audit Office's examination of the financial costs and benefits of retaining a council housing property *versus* transferring to housing associations, Ginsburg writes:

*They calculated that transfer was considerably more expensive for the taxpayer than retention and renovation by councils, possibly as much as 30 per cent more expensive. The NAO calculated that a renovation programme for one million council homes would cost £1.3 billion more if it were done through stock transfer rather than allowing the councils to do it. However, the NAO considered that the benefits outweigh the extra costs citing such benefits as 'the transfer of risk, the accelerated achievement of improvements, the greater tenant participation' (NAO, 2003: 32) associated with transfer. There is no question that improvements have been accelerated by transfer, but that is only because local authorities were prevented from doing them. There is undoubtedly increased tenant participation in the form of involvement in management boards, but whether tenants exert any more collective influence than they did within local electoral politics is highly debatable. The notion of "risk transfer" as a benefit involves taking a very narrow point of view on behalf of the taxpayer. It appears to be celebrating the loss of a public responsibility for meeting basic needs, and the transfer of risk to RSLs and, implicitly, tenants.<sup>5</sup>*

The British Urban Housing report makes a similar conclusion:

*Outperformance of original transfer expectations seems to have been most marked in relation to regeneration. One measure of this is the extent to which – in many instances – demolition and replacement of substandard housing has turned out to be significantly more extensive than initially anticipated.<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Chris Belfield et al., "Two Decades of Income Inequality in Britain: The Role of Wages, Household Earnings and Redistribution," *Economica* 84.334 (2017): 157–79, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ecca.12220>, accessed 28 September 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Pascale Bourquin et al., "Big Increases in In-Work Relative Poverty Rate Are about Much More than Just Low Pay," *Institute for Fiscal Studies*, 18 June 2019, <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/14196>, accessed 28 September 2021.

<sup>4</sup> See Ginsburg's helpful historical survey of these developments from the governments of Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher to Tony Blair: Norman Ginsburg, "The Privatization of Council Housing," *Critical Social Policy* 25 no. 1 (2005): 115–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018305048970>, accessed 28 September 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Ginsburg, "The Privatization of Council Housing," 124. See also, Hal Pawson and Cathy Fancie, *Maturing Assets: The Evolution of Stock Transfer Housing Associations* (Policy Press, 2003), 35–36, <https://www.irf.org.uk/report/evolution-stock-transfer-housing-associations>, accessed 28 September 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Hal Pawson et al., *The Impacts of Housing Stock Transfers In Urban Britain* (The Chartered Institute of Housing and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2009), 112, <https://www.irf.org.uk/report/impacts-housing-stock-transfers-urban-britain>, accessed 28 September 2021.



Further, transfer HAs (Housing Associations) quickly widened from property investments to activity encompassing community engagement and investment initiatives way beyond the initial undertaking.<sup>7</sup> In other words, improvement came because existing buildings were destroyed and new ones built – typically at an initially higher rent (a modest increase, but an increase nonetheless). Then, the rest of the larger neighbourhood and community began to see development. While these are, on the one hand, positive things – old things refurbished or replaced, new life and vitality – in the end it is an all-too-common recipe for the gentrification of a materially deprived neighbourhood that ultimately pushes out those most needing housing assistance. Gentrification does not happen overnight either, meaning neighbourhoods often endure extended periods of time with old and new juxtaposing or opposing each other, until one remains – often the economically-supported new to the detriment of those experiencing poverty. Similar reporting shows that both English and Scottish transfers showed that managerial effectiveness was maintained or improved slightly.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the claim that privatisation has *improved* social housing for those experiencing housing deprivation is questionable. In market terms, relying on private landlords who are trying to have a successful “business” built upon an impoverished consumer-base (who have little or no income to draw from) has produced minimal (if any) improvements for those experiencing housing deprivation.

The ongoing shortage of housing and affordable housing within England and the UK further complicates both understanding of where the materially poor live and who is there.<sup>9</sup> Maurice Mcleod voices a challenge that many face with popular and controversial “right to buy”, arguing that one’s home and community is not a commodity to sell and trade. While Mcleod no longer really qualifies on a needs basis to live on an estate, it has been his rental home twenty-four years, his community and neighbourhood – things one cannot commodify.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, to require people to move out once they are “out” of material poverty

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<sup>7</sup> Hal Pawson et al., *Impacts of Housing Stock Transfers in Urban Britain*, 112–13. Tragically, funding was typically only planned for the *development* of the dilapidated property, with no budget for improving the grounds and neighbourhood (which fell to the developer or residents, or was left undone). The net result was an “updated” house with the same failings of community infrastructure that originally led to the building’s dilapidation.

<sup>8</sup> Pawson and Fancie, *Maturing Assets*, 36. See also, Stewart Smyth, “The Privatization of Council Housing: Stock Transfer and the Struggle for Accountable Housing,” *Critical Social Policy* 33 no. 1 (2013): 37–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018312457870>, accessed 28 September 2021.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Linda van den Dries et al., “Mothers Who Experience Homelessness,” in Mayock et al., *Women’s Homelessness in Europe*, 179–208, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54516-9\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54516-9_8), accessed 28 September 2021; John Harris, “The End of Council Housing,” *The Guardian*, 4 January 2016, sec. Society, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jan/04/end-of-council-housing-bill-secure-tenancies-pay-to-stay> accessed 28 September 2021; Mark Stephens et al., “2018 UK Housing Review: Autumn Briefing Paper”, 24; Glen Bramley and Suzanne Fitzpatrick, “Homelessness in the UK: Who Is Most at Risk?,” *Housing Studies* 33 no. 1 (2018): 96–116, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957>, accessed 28 September 2021; Alan Murie, “Shrinking the State in Housing: Challenges, Transitions and Ambiguities,” *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy & Society* 11 no. 3 (2018): 485–501, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsy024>, accessed 28 September 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Maurice Mcleod, “I’ve Been Happily Renting My Council Flat for 24 Years – but for How Much Longer?” *The Guardian*, 30 September 2015, sec. Opinion,

could well perpetuate the hardships that give council estates their bad rap, as if they are staging grounds for something better instead of a neighbourhood or community of its own right to improve.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4.2 English Index of Multiple Deprivation (EIMD)

Challenges duly noted, we press on to locate England's most deprived by using the most reliable data can be found by the EIMD.<sup>12</sup> Where helpful, that data is corroborated with other reports, aware of the limitations of the data.

Interestingly, while the EIMD reports single out housing as a factor, *homelessness* and *squatters* are distinct categories of material poverty. We must remember that most statistics are estimates because it is difficult to find and count how many homeless people there actually are. Homeless and squatters, no less those who "couch surf."<sup>13</sup> Often, young people do not have a home and spend the night on couches with family, friends or otherwise. Finding them and reporting on them presents difficulties – except when sofa surfers and homeless "pop up" for emergency medical care or a police report, etc.

Further complicating matters is the declining use of the term "council estate" and the declining use of council housing itself – with the government opting for a housing association model of government-supported housing.<sup>14</sup>

The UK government uses its *Index of Multiple Deprivation* (IMD) to analyse the deprivation across the UK. These indices provide a weighted seven-domain matrix of factors which lead to people experiencing poverty, or "material deprivation":

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<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/30/renting-council-house-24-years-right-to-buy-osborne-social-housing>, accessed 28 September 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Interviews with families in any council estate will find people who work hard, consider the council estate their home, and who work for and hope for the betterment of their estate. For example, see testimonials reported in Ashley John-Baptiste, "When Council Estates Were a Dream," *BBC News*, 4 July 2019, [https://bbc.co.uk/news/extra/iZKMPd0wjP/council\\_housing](https://bbc.co.uk/news/extra/iZKMPd0wjP/council_housing), accessed 28 September 2021; Dawn Foster, "The Tory Policy That Encourages People to Work Less Hard or Lose Their Home," *The Guardian*, 23 October 2015, sec. Housing Network, <https://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2015/oct/23/pay-to-stay-housing-tory-policy-penalises-hardworking-people>, accessed 28 September 2021; Harris, "The End of Council Housing"; Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (Routledge, 2003), 137–171, <https://www.routledge.com/Council-Housing-and-Culture-The-History-of-a-Social-Experiment/Ravetz/p/book/9780415239462>, accessed 28 September 2021.

<sup>12</sup> "English Indices of Deprivation 2019 Research Report", UK Government Ministries of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 26 September 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>. This research was initially based upon the 2016 data; the author's own research projections were minimally different from the EIMD 2019.

<sup>13</sup> There is a growing number of people who avoid homelessness by rotating through the homes of family and friends, sleeping on their couches and guestrooms. See, for example, "Sofa Surfers: The Young Hidden Homeless," *BBC News*, 21 December 2017, sec. UK, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-42427398>, accessed 28 September 2021; Ciaran Jenkins, "The Hidden Homeless: Britain's Young Sofa Surfer Surge," *Channel 4 News*, 4 December 2014, <https://www.channel4.com/news/sofa-surfing-hidden-homeless-britain-youth-benefits>, accessed 28 September 2021.

<sup>14</sup> This is reflected both in gentrification and the privatisation of public housing. See Harris, "The End of Council Housing"; Murie, "Shrinking the State in Housing"; Stephens et al., "2018 UK Housing Review"; Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture*.

Table 4.1 | EIMD domains (or aspects) of material deprivation <sup>15</sup>

Domain	Weight (%)
Income	22.5
Employment	22.5
Health and Disability	13.5
Education, Skills, and Training	13.5
Barriers to Housing and Services	9.3
Crime	9.3
Living Environment	9.3

The domain weights are important because this tells us how a score is calculated for a given Lower-tier Super Output Area (LSOA). An LSOA is scored individually on each domain, then that score is put against the domain weight to be included with the other domains to calculate a score. Those scores are then ranked 1–32,845, and every 10% is called a ‘decile’ (e.g. “ten percent”). The higher the score (e.g. 98.78%), the lower the rank (e.g. #1). The scores are like a round of golf: the lowest score is the best location (meaning, least amount of poverty). Put another way, an EIMD #1 ranking is akin to being ranked #1 in penalties or #1 rank in goals allowed by an opponent.

For example, let us compare two LSOAs:

Table 4.2 | Comparison of “material deprivation” in two LSOAs

Domain	Wokingham 020E	Tendring 018A
Income	0.016	<b>0.564</b>
Employment	0.03	<b>0.568</b>
Health and Disability	-2.089	<b>2.593</b>
Education, Skills, and Training	1.082	<b>98.358</b>
Barriers to Housing and Services	7.859	<b>30.661</b>
Crime	-1.811	<b>2.432</b>
Living Environment	1.436	<b>71.692</b>
<b>TOTALS:</b>		
<b>EIMD Score</b>	<b>0.477</b>	<b>92.601</b>
<b>EIMD Rank</b>	<b>32,844</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>EIMD Decile</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>

Those scores and ranks are put together to analyse poverty in Lower-tier Super Output Areas (LSOAs), then Lower-tier Areas (LAs), then Upper Tier Authorities (UTAs – regional collections of LAs), and Unitary Authorities (UA). In this way, we can see material deprivation at various sizes of geographical regions – from a few streets in size to entire boroughs of

<sup>15</sup> “English Indices of Deprivation Research Reports”.

London or an entire region like North-East Lincolnshire or Middlesbrough or Liverpool.

Table 4.3 | How the IMD maths works

*The IMD scores each domain, then multiplies it by the domain weight to get a weighted domain score to add together with the other domains for the IMD score:*

Domain	Score x	Weight	=
Income	25	0.225	5.625
Employment	11	0.225	2.475
Health	20	0.135	2.700
Education	10	0.135	1.350
Housing	10	0.093	.930
Crime	15	0.093	1.395
Environment	10	0.093	.930
<b>IMD Score</b>	<b>.999</b>	<b>15.405</b>	

For the purposes of this paper, we are looking for the most deprived and considering how to serve them – this means those living in the IMD’s 10% most deprived (Decile 1). If we could be even more specific, we might say that the lowest 1% are the *most* deprived – that is a net total of about 328 LSOAs in England alone. However, we say this cautiously as the statistical difference between #328 and #1,328 is very slight – their day-to-day experience of poverty will not differ hugely.

The difference seems like a lot – 1,000 places better. However, statistically this is a minor 2.9% difference – essentially, their lived real-world experience regardless of the statistics is equally bad. In real world terms, this may be the difference between a mum making £11/hour and a labourer at £11.32/hour. However, the labourer pays more for groceries in her neighbourhood and must use the bus to get to work. Meanwhile, the mum walks to work, avoiding bus fares, and taking early morning shifts, avoiding gang activities, she may have granny-with-retirement benefits to watch her child – a myriad of factors make the statistical difference negligible. That 32p may helps slightly but it does not go very far. Therefore, it makes no sense to suggest neighbourhood #1,328 is living well compared to #328. It may very well be that both are in the very same situation.

In broad terms, this report associates the following terms specifically with each decile:

- Decile 1–2     Deprived
- Decile 3–4     Hardship
- Decile 5–6     Median
- Decile 7–8     Living well
- Decile 9–10    Least Deprived

In very loose terms, if you’re in Decile 1, you might say to friends that you are either on the streets or a step away from it, or dependent upon benefits for survival. Decile 2 is a step removed from that. Deciles 3–4 is where someone is experiencing hardship – at worst, a step removed from Decile 2; at best, one unexpected crisis away from needing benefits to

*survive*. We might call Deciles 1–4 “working class”, though it is increasingly common to find middle-class people experiencing in-work poverty. Deciles 5–6 are where families are surviving well enough and able to save a little something for a “rainy day” to varying degrees – the lower half of the “middle-class”. Deciles 7–8 are the upper crust of the middle class. Deciles 9–10 are the elite, especially Decile 10.

A final matter with the EIMD warrants caution. The IMD editors advise against relying on rankings, preferring readers to analyse data at the decile level. Deciles group the results into blocks of 10% because, statistically, the individual rankings become somewhat subjective and hair-splitting within the top 10%. For example, an LSOA ranked #7 versus #2 may be statistically different, but the experience of poverty and deprivation is likely to be very similar – and, on an individual level, maybe the person living in an LSOA ranked #500 is suffering greater deprivation than someone else in an LSOA ranked #5. However, the difference between #3 and #300 may be noteworthy, or #50 and #3,101, for example. So, with caution, we may take note of some rankings in a general manner. As the typical local church in the UK is roughly 100 people, measuring by LSOAs can be an effective way to measure local church outreach to these communities and inform more measurable goals. Imagine: if an entire LSOA came to church, that’s nearly 1,500 people at church – is the average FIEC church ready or willing for such capacity? If an FIEC church saw even 10% increase from a given LSOA, that 150 people could easily double the size of many congregations. Hence, an LSOA-based approach seems most helpful.

As we explore some of the current findings further, it is important to remember that just because an area has a higher percentage or concentration of material poverty does not mean that *everyone* from that area is materially deprived. This data presents a broad picture that helps us see the general state of communities of 1,500 households or more – that is 1,500 people and their families that no survey of data can ever fully explain. Further, this is only data on people that can be recorded for the survey data in question. It is unclear how many households or people are able to slip out of the survey data’s reach, but it is no secret to many working to aid those living in material poverty that the reality is: the statistics do not account for everyone – there are *more* people than the data represents experiencing *more* poverty than the data can explain. Again, this data is not determinative, but in terms of volume, it is not difficult to discover that there are *more* people in some degree of material poverty than even this data can confirm.

Where are the most deprived poor in England? In terms of concentration, the greatest concentrations of people who experience material deprivation are located in urban areas. But the real question is how to define the matter – are we asking about the most deprived LSOAs? the most deprived Lower or Upper Tier authorities? or the most deprived Metro or non-Metro districts? Consider the following top 33 of the EIMD’s 10% most deprived, where the #1 rank is *the* most deprived:

Table 4.4 | The 33 Most-Deprived Authorities by type<sup>16</sup>

→ *increasing in size of geographical area* →

	LSOA	Lower Tier Authorities	Upper Tier Authorities	Unitary Authorities	Non-Metro Districts	Metro Districts	London Boroughs
1	Tendring 018A	Middlesbrough (1)	Middlesbrough (1)	Middlesbrough (1)	Burnley (9)	Knowsley (2)	Tower Hamlets (24)
2	Blackpool 010A	Knowsley (2)	Kingston Upon Hull, city of (3)	Kingston Upon Hull, city of (3)	Hastings (13)	Liverpool (4)	Haringey (44)
3	Blackpool 006A	Kingston Upon Hull, city of (3)	Blackpool (7)	Blackpool (7)	Pendle (18)	Manchester (5)	Hackney (49)
4	Thanet 001A	Liverpool (4)	Nottingham (8)	Nottingham (8)	Great Yarmouth (20)	Birmingham (6)	Islington (61)
5	Blackpool 013D	Manchester (5)	Hartlepool (10)	Hartlepool (10)	Hyndburn (22)	Bradford (11)	Westminster (64)
6	Tendring 016B	Birmingham (6)	Blackburn with Darwen (12)	Blackburn with Darwen (12)	Barrow-in-Furness (29)	Salford (16)	Enfield (82)
7	Blackpool 013A	Blackpool (7)	Stoke-on-Trent (13)	Stoke-on-Trent (13)	Thanet (35)	Rochdale (17)	Kensington and Chelsea (84)
8	Coventry 007E	Nottingham (8)	North-East Lincolnshire (15)	North-East Lincolnshire (15)	Norwich (38)	Wolverhampton (21)	Waltham Forest (89)
9	Blackpool 011A	Burnley (9)	Halton (19)	Halton (19)	Lincoln (48)	St. Helens (25)	Brent (100)
10	Waveney 007D	Hartlepool (10)	Leicester (23)	Leicester (23)	Swale (52)	Sheffield (26)	Newham (103)
11	Blackpool 010E	Bradford (11)	Redcar and Cleveland (33)	Redcar and Cleveland (33)	Preston (53)	Oldham (27)	Lambeth (113)
12	Kingston Upon Hull 017E	Blackburn with Darwen (12)	Derby (45)	Derby (45)	Tendring (56)	Sandwell (28)	Hammersmith and Fulham (117)
13	North East Lincolnshire 006A	Stoke-on-Trent (13)	Stockton-on-Tees (47)	Stockton-on-Tees (47)	East Lindsey (60)	Newcastle upon Tyne (30)	Camden (131)
14	Burnley 010E	Hastings (13)	Plymouth (51)	Plymouth (51)	Ipswich (63)	Leeds (31)	Southwark (135)
15	Burnley 007C	North East Lincolnshire (15)	Peterborough (54)	Peterborough (54)	Wyre (67)	Barnsley (32)	Lewisham (136)

<sup>16</sup> “English Indices of Deprivation 2016 Research Report”.

	LSOA	Lower Tier Authorities	Upper Tier Authorities	Unitary Authorities	Non-Metro Districts	Metro Districts	London Boroughs
16	Mansfield 009E	Salford (16)	Bristol, city of (55)	Bristol, city of (55)	Gloucester (69)	South Tyneside (34)	Barking and Dagenham (137)
17	Blackpool 013B	Rochdale (17)	Torbay (56)	Torbay (56)	Sarborough (71)	Wirral (36)	Ealing (143)
18	Blackpool 006B	Pendle (18)	Darlington (58)	Darlington (58)	Waveney (72)	Doncaster (37)	Bromley (154)
19	Blackburn with Darwen 006E	Halton (19)	Telford and Wrekin (65)	Telford and Wrekin (65)	Copeland (73)	Walsall (39)	Croydon (158)
20	Great Yarmouth 006C	Great Yarmouth (20)	Southampton (68)	Southampton (68)	Ashfield (74)	Bolton (40)	Greenwich (173)
21	Thanet 001E	Wolverhampton (21)	Portsmouth (70)	Portsmouth (70)	Northhampton (76)	Sefton (41)	Hounslow (182)
22	Leeds 086C	Hyndburn (22)	Southend-on-Sea (75)	Southend-on-Sea (75)	Allerdale (79)	Sunderland (42)	Barnet (189)
23	Blackpool 008D	Leicester (23)	County Durham (81)	County Durham (81)	Lancaster (80)	Rotherham (43)	Sutton (194)
24	Liverpool 012A	Tower Hamlets (24)	Brighton and Hove (86)	Brighton and Hove (86)	Basildon (83)	Coventry (46)	Havering (195)
25	North East Lincolnshire 002B	St. Helens (25)	Warrington (90)	Warrington (90)	Weymouth and Portland (85)	Tameside (50)	Redbridge (196)
26	Blackpool 008B	Sheffield (26)	North Lincolnshire (94)	North Lincolnshire (94)	Corby (88)	Calderdale (59)	Wandsworth (197)
27	North-East Lincolnshire 002A	Oldham (27)	Luton (109)	Luton (109)	Gravesham (91)	Wakefield (62)	Bexley (200)
28	Liverpool 028E	Sandwell (28)	Medway (111)	Medway (111)	Mansfield (92)	Wigan (66)	City of London (200)
29	Liverpool 018F	Barrow-in-Furness (29)	Northumberland (116)	Northumberland (116)	Chesterfield (96)	Solihull (77)	Merton (200)
30	Coventry 024C	Newcastle upon Tyne (30)	North Somerset (121)	North Somerset (121)	Bassetlaw (97)	Gateshead (78)	Kingston upon Thames (200)

	LSOA	Lower Tier Authorities	Upper Tier Authorities	Unitary Authorities	Non-Metro Districts	Metro Districts	London Boroughs
31	North-East Lincolnshire 002C	Leeds (31)	Cheshire West and Chester (122)	Cheshire West and Chester (122)	Wellingborough (98)	Bury (87)	Hillingdon (200)
32	Manchester 009G	Barnsley (32)	Bournemouth (123)	Bournemouth (123)	West Lancashire (99)	Stockport (93)	Harrow (200)
33	Rochdale 010C	Redcar and Cleveland (33)	East Riding of Yorkshire (124)	East Riding of Yorkshire (124)	Worcester (102)	Kirklees (95)	Richmond upon Thames (200)

*Note: number in brackets is IMD ranking out of all authorities regardless of tier or type.*

This chart communicates several layers of information. First, the chart moves from smallest to largest land areas. Observe that “LSOA” is the smallest unit of measure (an area of approximately 1,600 people); the “districts” are the EIMD’s way of analysing urban, rural, and semi-rural areas at large. Second, this list comprises the lowest 0.001%, the bottom 33 of 32,845 LSOAs in England (rather than inundate readers with a 328-item long list). Hence, thirdly, this is meant to zoom in on the pixels at the very bottom of a much larger picture. That is why this chart also includes four less familiar categories. First, “unitary authorities” refer to a select larger group of upper tier authorities that are sometimes combined for various policy decisions or council planning. Then we list non-metro and metro districts: in non-specialist terms, cities and immediate suburbs are metro districts, while non-metro are predominantly rural (and semi-rural) areas. In so doing, we are also able to see in this chart a first glimpse at the complexities and similarities of rural and urban poverty. The last “new” category is London Boroughs. In light of London’s enormous size and unique position within England (see below), at the far end of the chart we have included London’s “top 33” most deprived boroughs. Already, we can see that even compared with the rest of England, the deprivation in these London boroughs has striking comparisons to the rest of England, which are further compounded by singular challenges of London.

That said, what stands out most is that Middlesbrough is ranked first as Lower and Upper Tier Authority as well as a Unitary Authority. Also noteworthy is that Hartlepool is not far from Middlesbrough (about 7.6 miles north-east). Similarly, Blackpool is quite deprived in own right, yet Blackpool’s neighbour, Knowsley, is just north of Liverpool, creating something of a corridor of deprivation in the area.

This chart helps us to see that of the “most deprived authorities”, if such a thing can be said, it is reasonable to conclude that Middlesbrough could be ranked “the most deprived of the most deprived.” In other words, Middlesbrough is the region of England where experiencing poverty has its greatest *depth* (the deprivation is “really bad”) and *breadth* (many people experience that “really bad”). However, the Blackpool to Liverpool corridor is likely to be the largest area of deprivation and comprises the most people experiencing



deprivation, with LSOAs of depth and breadth that exceed Middlesbrough. Hull is not far behind.<sup>17</sup>

There are likely to be individuals and people in LSOAs across England who may experience greater material deprivation than those in Middlesbrough, there may be places with greater concentrations of people that are deprived (and in some respects that in itself may add to the difficulties of the deprivation), but Middlesbrough as whole outweighs these. The experiences of poverty vary from person to person, from locality to locality, from region to region, so one must be cautious not to overstate or mischaracterise. Simply said, if we are left to generalisations, then so far as it goes, we can say that Middlesbrough is “the most deprived”, followed by Liverpool – to which we can include Blackpool and Hull. Within London, it is reasonable to conclude that the Tower Hamlets continues to be the most deprived borough, perhaps with exception of the families of Grenfell Tower.

Notice that the London boroughs seem to fare well against other “top 1%” candidates. Those familiar with these boroughs may wonder how that might be statistically, yet this is indicative of a shortcoming of the EIMD statistics. Recall that the EIMD has seven domains, but income and housing are weighted higher – justifiably so, as these two factors have a greater impact on the potential for experiencing material deprivation than other factors, but how much is a matter for debate. As such, the dramatically higher cost of housing and higher income levels in London compared with the rest of England further skew London’s EIMD statistics. This demonstrates just how exceptional London is – it really is a region unto itself compared to the rest of England (and the UK). It is very reasonable to treat London as a separate case. For now, as a rule-of-thumb within this report, it may be helpful to rethink a London LSOA in Deciles 1–3 to be 20% worse off than the scales indicate, meaning that a Decile 2 in London is likely a Decile 1 anywhere else in the UK.<sup>18</sup>

The material points from Table 4.4, I submit, are that these 33 regions: (a) are the most deprived areas, but (b) the differences between them are negligible – nearly statistical parity. To differentiate any further, practically, would require analysis of each family in these areas. That said, it is perhaps unexpected for some to see that places like Thanet, North-East Lincolnshire, Coventry, Tendring and Blackpool are ranked as suffering considerable deprivation. An analysis is beyond the scope of this paper. It is partly likely due to the accessibility of more support in urban areas – Liverpool, Birmingham and Bristol inevitably get more attention, meaning more government support/funding and development than places like Tendring, Thanet or Blackpool.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Referred to as Kingston-Upon-Hull in the EIMD reports.

<sup>18</sup> Which again reminds readers of the key point concerning “relative poverty”: every region has different pressures that can lead to material deprivation which is not so “deprived” if it were transplanted elsewhere. The fact remains that Tower Hamlets is in London, so conversations at mealtimes about how much “better” London is compared with a dump in Guatemala 5,450 miles away does not relieve the hunger pains of a child in Tower Hamlets, nor does it explain or help a single mum pay the bills.

<sup>19</sup> Frances Perraudin, “Blackpool Struggles to Kick Heroin amid Seaside Deprivation,” *The Guardian*, 6 April 2018, sec. Society, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/06/blackpool-struggles-kick-heroin->

Looking a little more closely at the Local Authority Districts that have the greatest concentrations of *most deprived* LSOAs, consider the following:

Table 4.5 | Number of Decile 1 LSOAs in Local Authorities (LA)

Sorted by average score			Sorted by number of LOSAs		
Local Authority (LA) District	Number of MD LSOAs	Average score	Local Authority (LA) District	Number of MD LSOAs	Average score
Tendring	3	83.88	Liverpool	27	73.89
Blackpool	19	79.49	Kingston Upon Hull, City of	20	73.16
Burnley	4	79.19	Blackpool	19	79.49
Thanet	5	78.49	Manchester	18	73.54
Coventry	7	77.63	Leeds	16	72.87
North East Lincolnshire	7	77.27	Knowsley	13	72.92
Waveney	3	76.81	Birmingham	12	72.89
Mansfield	2	76.61	Bradford	12	73.61
Southend-on-Sea	1	76.01	Wirral	10	74.25
Worcester	1	75.57	Middlesbrough	10	75.46
Middlesbrough	10	75.46	Newcastle upon Tyne	8	72.07
Stockport	3	75.37	Salford	7	72.29
East Riding of Yorkshire	2	75.35	Nottingham	7	74.02
Blackburn with Darwen	3	75.21	North-East Lincolnshire	7	77.27
Lancaster	3	74.98	Coventry	7	77.63
Redcar and Cleveland	3	74.80	Bristol, City of	6	73.21
Stockton-on-Tees	3	74.54	Great Yarmouth	6	74.03
Doncaster	2	74.49	Rotherham	5	69.68
Rochdale	4	74.28	Sefton	5	71.86
Wirral	10	74.25	Leicester	5	72.06
St. Helens	4	74.17	Thanet	5	78.49
Great Yarmouth	6	74.03	Stoke-on-Trent	4	70.63

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[seaside-deprivation](#), accessed 29 September 2021 ; Larry Elliott, "Sun over Blackpool and Scarborough, but Dark Days Are Not Over," *The Observer*, 30 June 2018, sec. Business, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/jun/30/blackpool-scarborough-seaside-economy-recession>, accessed 29 September 2021; See also, Patrick Collinson, "Why Blackpool Is the Most Unhealthy Place in England," *The Guardian*, 27 July 2013, sec. Money, <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2013/jul/27/blackpool-most-unhealthy-place-england>, accessed 29 September 2021; "The Poorest UK Places | UK Living Wage Commission," *Living Wage Commission*, n.d., <http://livingwagecommission.org.uk/poorest-uk-places/>, accessed 29 September 2021; Sarah Boseley, "Early Death Rate in Deprived Blackpool 'Twice That of the Most Affluent Areas,'" *The Guardian*, 25 October 2018, sec. Society, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/oct/25/early-death-rate-in-deprived-blackpool-twice-that-of-the-most-affluent-areas>, accessed 29 September 2021. Combined with Boseley, Collinson's bold claims may warrant claims that Blackpool is most (health?) deprived area of England.

Nottingham	7	74.02	Barrow-in-Furness	4	71.8
Liverpool	27	73.89	Sunderland	4	71.98
West Lindsey	1	73.85	Oldham	4	72.92
Swale	2	73.77	St. Helens	4	74.17
Bradford	12	73.61	Rochdale	4	74.28
Sheffield	3	73.58	Burnley	4	79.19
Plymouth	1	73.56	Scarborough	3	68.99
Manchester	18	73.54	Hartlepool	3	70.94
Hastings	2	73.50	Portsmouth	3	72.8
Bury	1	73.41	Sheffield	3	73.58
Bristol, City of	6	73.21	Stockton-on-Tees	3	74.54
Kingston upon Hull, City of	20	73.16	Redcar and Cleveland	3	74.8
Knowsley	13	72.92	Lancaster	3	74.98
Oldham	4	72.92	Blackburn with Darwen	3	75.21
Birmingham	12	72.89	Stockport	3	75.37
Leeds	16	72.87	Waveney	3	76.81
Darlington	1	72.84	Tendring	3	83.88
Portsmouth	3	72.80	Lincoln	2	71.36
Derby	2	72.71	Northampton	2	71.44
Wyre Forest	1	72.69	Wigan	2	72.13
Wakefield	2	72.44	North Somerset	2	72.38
North Somerset	2	72.38	Wakefield	2	72.44
Salford	7	72.29	Derby	2	72.71
County Durham	1	72.23	Hastings	2	73.5
Wigan	2	72.13	Swale	2	73.77
Newcastle upon Tyne	8	72.07	Doncaster	2	74.49
Leicester	5	72.06	East Riding of Yorkshire	2	75.35
Sunderland	4	71.98	Mansfield	2	76.61
Bolton	1	71.95	West Lancashire	1	68.84
Sefton	5	71.86	Sandwell	1	69.12
Wolverhampton	1	71.84	Tameside	1	69.23
Barrow-in-Furness	4	71.80	Chesterfield	1	69.46
Northampton	2	71.44	Southampton	1	69.52
Lincoln	2	71.36	South Tyneside	1	70.49
Torbay	1	71.30	Calderdale	1	70.51
Bournemouth	1	71.16	Erewash	1	70.65
Medway	1	71.15	Wyre	1	70.97
Copeland	1	70.99	Copeland	1	70.99
Wyre	1	70.97	Medway	1	71.15

Hartlepool	3	70.94	Bournemouth	1	71.16
Erewash	1	70.65	Torbay	1	71.3
Stoke-on-Trent	4	70.63	Wolverhampton	1	71.84
Calderdale	1	70.51	Bolton	1	71.95
South Tyneside	1	70.49	County Durham	1	72.23
Rotherham	5	69.68	Wyre Forest	1	72.69
Southampton	1	69.52	Darlington	1	72.84
Chesterfield	1	69.46	Bury	1	73.41
Tameside	1	69.23	Plymouth	1	73.56
Sandwell	1	69.12	West Lindsey	1	73.85
Scarborough	3	68.99	Worcester	1	75.57
West Lancashire	1	68.84	Southend-on-Sea	1	76.01

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the more Decile 1 LSOAs a region has, the higher the average. Remember: the higher the score, the *more* deprived an area is. Hence, the “most deprived” of the most deprived, interestingly, are in areas of greatest population density. Again, this does not mean that someone can be worse off in a rural area compared with Liverpool, for example, but it does mean that the rural area will not have nearly as many people in close proximity to each other experiencing an equal or greater level of deprivation as the urban area. This is helpful because it reminds us that rural poor face isolation challenges that are unknown to the urban poor – the rural poor can be easily forgotten or difficult to get to because of their isolation. Conversely, a specific block or neighbourhood that is densely populated can often get dismissed as “the poor part of town” and in turn become as isolating and inaccessible as some rural poor areas. Simplistic statements overlook the complexities of evaluating material deprivation and how close the statistical parity is to describe a given place as “worse” than another. For example, the Department of Work and Pensions’ *Family Resources Survey* in Scotland indicates that after housing, 21% (860,000 people) of the population live in relative poverty, whereas in rural areas it is 16% (190,000 people).<sup>20</sup>

A “top 20” weighted list of England’s *most deprived areas* based upon EIMD data could be:

Table 4.6 | Most deprived areas in England (where 1=most deprived)<sup>21</sup>

Ranking	Area
1	Middlesbrough
= 2	Knowsley
= 2	Hull

<sup>20</sup> National Statistics for Scotland, *Equality characteristics of people in poverty in Scotland, 2015/16*, (June 2017), <https://www.gov.scot/collections/poverty-and-income-inequality-statistics/#in-depthanalysis>, accessed 2 November 2021.

<sup>21</sup> “English Indices of Deprivation 2016 Research Report”.

3	Liverpool
4	Manchester
5	Birmingham
6	Blackpool
7	Nottingham
8	Burnley
9	Hartlepool
10	Bradford
11	Blackburn with Darwen
12	Stoke-on-Trent
13	Hastings
14	North-East Lincolnshire
15	Salford
16	Rochdale
17	Pendle
18	Halton
19	Great Yarmouth
20	Wolverhampton

Perhaps surprising is the absence of places like Oldham and any London Boroughs. Again, it bears repeating that the top 3,284 “most deprived” areas are all Decile 1 (i.e. top 10%). Similarly, these are *locations* where most people – not all – are experiencing material deprivation. However, labelling these authorities as the top 20 most deprived as a cohort may be a better approach than suggesting any one of them is “*the* most deprived”, lest we overstate what the data implies.

#### 4.3 Corroborating EIMD Results

A careful look at children in poverty corroborates the picture we have painted so far. Examining those same areas, we find that children experiencing poverty is at its highest levels in much the same localities based upon the research by *End Child Poverty*.<sup>22</sup>

Child poverty exists throughout the UK. While it is highest in London and other major cities, such as Manchester and Birmingham, only one local authority (Wokingham) has child poverty as low as 10% – the rate suggested by the (now largely defunct) Child Poverty Act of 2016 as the target for the proportion of children in relative poverty.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, child poverty is a major and growing concern in the UK, where all indicators are that the number of children experiencing absolute and relative poverty is *expected* to increase sharply by 2022.<sup>24</sup> For example, in some areas of Devon, nearly half the children experience material deprivation.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> End Child Poverty, <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk>, accessed 29 September 2021.

<sup>23</sup> “Feeling the Pinch”, End Child Poverty, January 2017, 1, <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/images/Feelingthepinch/ECP-FeelingThePinch-final-report.pdf>, accessed 29 September 2021.

<sup>24</sup> “Feeling the Pinch”, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Claire Miller and Daniel Clark, “Nearly Half of Children Living in Poverty in Some Areas of Devon,”

#### 4.4 Working poor: most deprived?

The working poor constitute an emerging demographic that has only recently begun to capture national attention. “Working poor” refers to families who are gainfully employed, but their income is insufficient to meet their daily needs, and far from allowing them to “save for the future”. Such families might be financially stable on paper but, in practice, they are quite volatile. One unexpected bill, sickness, unexpected job loss, car repair, could put them on benefits – some are likely to be already receiving some kind of benefit. Indeed, they are poor because of more than just low pay: rising housing costs and rising housing costs and rising median income are important factors are important factors. Recent research findings show that in-work relative poverty (i.e. “working poor”) rose between 1994 and 2017 from 13% to 18%, an increase of 40%.<sup>26</sup> While Bourquin’s report is concerned about the most deprived, what is significant here is that the “gateway” to becoming “most deprived” is widening. Hence, the report observes:

Over the same period, the worklessness rate of lone parent households fell from 66% to 36%. Because lone parents and other groups that have moved into work tend to have low earnings that do not meet their weekly needs, earnings inequality and in-work poverty have increased, despite the minor “improvement” of being employed and marginally better off.<sup>27</sup>

Notice that earnings inequality and in-work poverty have increased despite employment – the families are better off, but they are still nonetheless impoverished. Further, notice that reductions in benefit entitlements since 2010–11 have acted to increase relative in-work poverty since then.<sup>28</sup> Those who are employed but unable to support themselves are now without any government support, compounding their impoverishment. Such families might put it this way: “Yes, we can have rice and beans tonight – but now with the lights on and in a smaller flat.” This is an incremental win – the poor emphasising the “incremental”; the “not-poor” and those suspicious of poverty statistics emphasising the “win”. Meanwhile, the most deprived struggle on.

In a Chartered Institute of Housing briefing paper summarising their annual review, the authors deconstruct the clichés “it can happen to anyone” or “we are all [1–3] pay cheques away from homelessness.”<sup>29</sup> Their research demonstrates that poverty, especially childhood poverty, has more explanatory power for early adulthood poverty than health and support needs (such as drug use). Homelessness is rarely an accident equally likely to happen to any

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*Devonlive*, 25 January 2018, <http://www.devonlive.com/news/devon-news/nearly-half-children-living-poverty-1115648>, accessed 29 September 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Bourquin et al., “Big Increases in In-Work Relative Poverty Rate”.

<sup>27</sup> Bourquin et al., “Big Increases in In-Work Relative Poverty Rate”.

<sup>28</sup> See Pascale Bourquin et al., “Why has in-work poverty risen in Britain?” *IFS Working Paper W19/12* (Institute for Fiscal Studies and University College London, June 2019); Pascale Bourquin et al., *Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK 2019*, <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/201795>, accessed 2 November 2021; Chris Belfield et al., “Two Decades of Income Inequality in Britain: The Role of Wages, Household Earnings and Redistribution,” *Economica* 84, no. 334 (2017): 157–79, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecca.12220>, accessed 2 November 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Stephens et al., “2018 Housing Briefing Paper”.

of us, “but systematically found in a set of identifiable individual, social and structural factors, almost all of which, it should be emphasised, are outside the control of those directly affected.”<sup>30</sup> For example, they estimate that a mixed ethnicity female has a 71.2% probability of being homeless by age 30, whereas the predicted probability for a white male is 0.6%.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4.5 Conclusion

To summarise, this exposes a terrible reality for many UK families and massive ministry implications for the church. First, not only is there poverty in the UK – it can be clearly documented over the last seventeen years and it affects people of all ages. Over 14 million people cannot be ignored. Failing to face up to the extent of poverty in UK is a gross negligence of reality, an implicit denial divine revelation and a rejection of biblical mandates from the lips of Jesus himself.

Second, when we think about *who* is poor, more than half of those in poverty are *families*, followed by singles without children. Families can be single moms, parents who are out of work or on disability benefits, or maybe a multi-generational family raised on government benefits because that is the only viable opportunity afforded to them. The cost of rent and utilities may have pushed them over a financial cliff. A single adult may be able to say just the same. Or perhaps they are just out of prison and literally have no access to (or opportunity to access) anything more than the very conditions that landed them in prison in the first place. On one level, the needs are the same – they need help beyond their situation to get out of their situation – but the amount of help and how that help can be brought to them can be drastically different. A single dad on benefits may need more than the gospel – he may need dinner for his kids, perhaps even his first meal of the week, or help with overdue rent. Yet, he may need that because he may not have the skills or opportunity to support his family. And when government support pays as well or better than the only jobs he can get hired for, why bother?

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<sup>30</sup> Stephens et al., “2018 Housing Briefing Paper,” 11.; See also the important study that the Chartered Institute of Housing report cites from: Bramley and Fitzpatrick, “Homelessness in the UK”.

<sup>31</sup> Stephens et al., “2018 Housing Briefing Paper,” 11. More specifically, a white male from a relatively affluent childhood in rural south of England, with an unproblematic school career, who graduated from university at 21, living with parents at age 26, no partner or children; mixed ethnicity female who experienced poverty as a child, brought up by a lone parent, left school or college at 16, living as renter at 16, spells of unemployment, no partner, and has her own children.

# 5. Where are FIEC churches?

## 5.1 FIEC churches in England

FIEC churches share the priority of taking the Good News of Jesus Christ to all peoples.<sup>1</sup> In this section, we aim to measure to what extent FIEC churches are reaching the most deprived neighbourhoods of England, based on data collected and analysed in 2019–20. As stated above, due to a limitation of available data, namely a comprehensive list of council estates and government-provided housing, analysis of where the most deprived persons are living is limited.

First, the 530 recognised churches and gatherings of the FIEC in England (hereafter, FIEC-E) comprise the following breakdown by decile.<sup>2</sup>

Table 5.1 | FIEC-E Churches by decile (as of September 2018)<sup>3</sup>

Decile	Number of churches	Percentage of FIEC-E
1	63 ‡	11.89%
2	48	9.06%
3	54 ‡	10.19%
4	49	9.25%
5	53	10.00%
6	62 ‡	11.70%
7	53	10.00%
8	52	9.81%
9	49	9.25%
10	47	8.87%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>100%</b>

‡ = deciles with the highest number of FIEC-E churches

Surprisingly, perhaps, the single largest decile of FIEC-E churches is in Decile 1. The largest three (in order) are Decile 1 (63), Decile 6 (62) and Decile 3 (54). The largest continuous group of three deciles is Deciles 5–7 (168), although Deciles 1–3 (165) are nearly a statistical match; Deciles 8–10 total 148. Deciles 1–2 (112) outnumber Deciles 9–10 (92). At face value, this suggests that FIEC-E has a modest balance of churches across socio-economic strata that leans slightly away from the least deprived in England (see also, Table 5.2). Put another way, at the next FIEC-E pastors’ conference, if all churches were represented, a room of any ten

<sup>1</sup> See FIEC, “Beliefs”, <https://fiec.org.uk/who-we-are/beliefs>, accessed 29 September 2021. Our research has been conducted in partnership with the FIEC and therefore focuses on FIEC churches but we trust that the results will be useful to evangelical churches from other denominations.

<sup>2</sup> Research conducted by the author, based on data collected and analysed in 2019–20. A decile is the 10% increments up to 100%. Decile 1 is 0–10%, Decile 2 is 11–20%, etc. Decile 1 is the most deprived, Decile 10 is the least deprived.

<sup>3</sup> Author’s research.

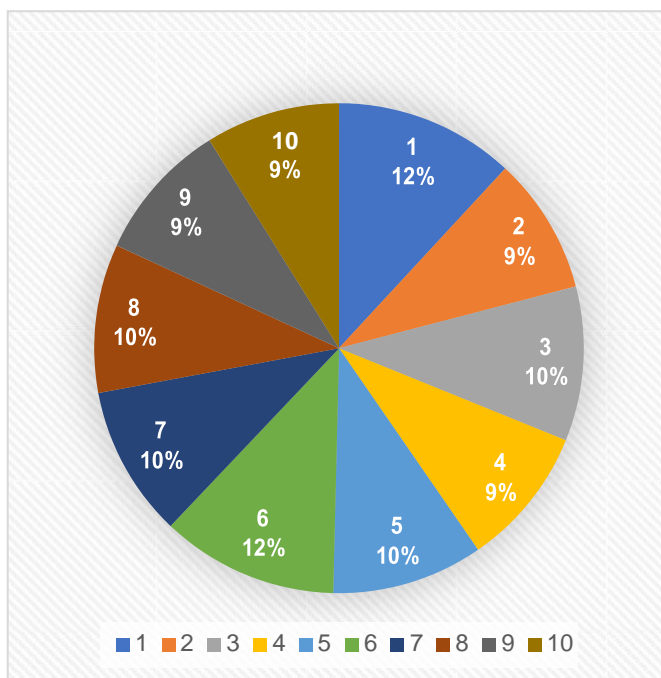


pastors is likely to include a pastor from each Decile (with possible exceptions for Deciles 2, 4, 9, 10 or over-representation of Deciles 1 and 6).

It is interesting to observe that Decile 1 and Decile 6 are the largest two categories, comprising 24% of FIEC-E between them. Deciles 5 and 7 are equal and, together with Decile 6, comprise 32% of FIEC-E – just more than Deciles 1–3 (31%).

On these data points alone, it appears that Decile 1 (the lowest 10%) has more FIEC-E churches than Deciles 2, 3 or 4. For the purposes of this paper, “deprived” are people living in Deciles 1–2, which comprise 21% of FIEC-E churches, whereas “most deprived” (the focus of this paper) is Decile 1, particularly those in the bottom third of Decile 1 – analysis these tables do not reflect.

Table 5.2 | FIEC-E churches by decile<sup>4</sup>



So far, this reveals what is likely to be common knowledge. More detailed reflection shows that these numbers do not tell the complete story. Focusing on the details, one finds that the balance of FIEC-E churches may be more affluent than this data suggests. Since we are at this time only tracking the location of the meeting place, it may well be that churches meeting in a Decile 1 neighbourhood are people commuting into the neighbourhood from near or far.

Similarly, average number of church members as reported by churches submitting membership details to FIEC by decile of FIEC-E churches is interesting.

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<sup>4</sup> Author's research, September 2018.

Table 5.3 | FIEC-E Church membership averages by decile<sup>5</sup>

	Total number of church members	Average number of church members	% of all
Decile 1	2,368	37.59	9.14%
Decile 2	2,877	59.94	11.11%
Decile 3	2,603	48.20	10.05%
Decile 4	2,821	57.57	10.89%
Decile 5	2,362	44.57	9.12%
Decile 6	3,310	53.39	12.78%
Decile 7	1,880	35.47	7.26%
Decile 8	2,925	56.25	11.29%
Decile 9	2,574	52.53	9.94%
Decile 10	2,177	46.32	8.41%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25,897</b>	<b>49.18</b>	

Table 5.3 compares the number of church members in all FIEC churches by the decile in which FIEC churches are located. Hence, FIEC-E churches located in Decile 1 LSOAs have a combined total membership of 2,368, with the average membership/church size being 37.59 members; these 2,368 members comprise 9.14% of all members of an FIEC church located in any decile. There are several features of particular note. The average church size is largest in Decile 2 communities, yet Decile 6 has the largest number of members. This coincides with the number of churches in Decile 2 and 6. Also interesting to note is that a Decile 10 church averages nearly ten members more (8.73) than a Decile 1 churches, yet Decile 1 church members outnumber Decile 10 churches by 191 members. Deciles 1 and 5 have nearly exactly the same number of members, though a Decile 5 church averages 20 members more than a Decile 1 church. Decile 7 churches are the least represented within FIEC-E, even less so than Decile 1. Deciles 2–4 comprise the largest block with 32% of FIEC-E members; Deciles 7–8 comprise 31%.

## 5.2 Engaging with deprived communities

For the purposes of this paper, and in the absence of a proper listing of council estates and low-income housing, we define the “most deprived” as the bottom third of the 10% most deprived. Of the 32,844 LSOAs in England – that means the lowest ranked 1,100 LSOAs – FIEC-E has twenty-one (21) churches in such neighbourhoods, or 1.9% of most deprived areas:

<sup>5</sup> Author’s research, September 2018.

Table 5.4 | FIEC-E Churches in “most deprived” areas<sup>6</sup>

Church	Town	LSOA	IMD rank out of 32,844
Lower Ford Street Baptist Church	Coventry	Coventry 024C	<b>30</b>
Community Church	Sheerness	Swale 001A	<b>46</b>
Sheppey Living Hope Christian Church	Hull	Kingston Upon Hull 029D	<b>61</b>
Harbourside Evangelical Church	Bridlington	East Riding of Yorkshire 005C	<b>85</b>
Bridlington Christian Fellowship	Bridlington	East Riding of Yorkshire 005C	<b>85</b>
Hull Orchard Park Evangelical Church	Hull	Kingston Upon Hull 003A	<b>87</b>
Church by the Bay	Morecambe	Lancaster 009A	<b>106</b>
Bethel Evangelical Free Church	Stoke-on-Trent	Stoke-on-Trent 015D	<b>130</b>
Trinity Church Everton	Liverpool	Liverpool 023A	<b>248</b>
Newton Heath Evangelical Church	Manchester	Manchester 011D	<b>305</b>
Central Hall	Newcastle upon Tyne	Newcastle upon Tyne 029G	<b>307</b>
Bankhall Mission Church	Bootle	Sefton 036B	<b>349</b>
Bethel Evangelical Church Heathfield Church	Bolton	Bolton 016F	<b>488</b>
Heathfield Church	Manchester	Manchester 011A	<b>511</b>
People's Church	Liverpool	Liverpool 023C	<b>636</b>
Easton Church	Bristol	Bristol 055C	<b>659</b>
The Gate Church	Birmingham	Birmingham 135D	<b>749</b>
Bethel Church	Liverpool	Liverpool 020B	<b>757</b>
Sailors Chapel	Liverpool	Liverpool 050J	<b>858</b>
New Life Church	Brighton	Brighton & Hove 002D	<b>1080</b>
Bethel Free Baptist Church	Birmingham	Birmingham 048A	<b>1111</b>

Unfortunately, this data does not tell us where members are coming from in order to attend these churches. We cannot comment on whether members of churches which meet in these places actually live in the same LSOA, LA or LTA as their church meeting place or not. Further, these numbers are based upon data supplied by churches about themselves to the FIEC, and thus omits churches that have not reported membership numbers to the FIEC. In other words, we have analysed where people gather on Sundays, but we have not yet analysed who actually are the members, visitors and outreach “targets” the churches in these locations reach.

<sup>6</sup> Author’s research, September 2018.

While it may be discouraging to some that FIEC-E's 530 churches are located in only 1.6% of England's 32,844 LSOAs, this also helps us to see just how great the need is for more church planting. For a more positive outlook, we can expand the geographical area to LAs and see perhaps a more manageable picture of FIEC-E's current reach.

Based upon membership averages and totals reported by FIEC churches, it is reasonable to conclude that FIEC-E is in fact a fairly middle-class network of churches, even if some church buildings are situated in or near poor communities. In terms of membership, Decile 1 churches (comprising 9% of FIEC-E) are among the less-represented demographic, though Decile 1 has the largest number of churches. Naturally, this confirms that FIEC-E churches in Decile 1 areas are quite small churches. The fact that there are only 63 of FIEC-E's 530 churches (1.9%) within the 3,285 most deprived LSOAs sounds quite discouraging, but in light of the fact that FIEC-E has 530 churches to cover such all of England again puts into clear perspective just how big is the church planting task to bring the gospel to all of England.

## 6. Conclusions

This paper opened with a poignant criticism by Jesus: “you will always have the poor among you” (Matt 26:11). There Jesus is criticising Judas Iscariot’s half-hearted sincerity in comparison with the woman anointing Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume. Though Matthew’s Gospel does not say so, it is evident that Jesus can see right into his disciples’ hearts and minds – but Jesus chooses to focus on what was of primary importance. Yes, the perfume was costly, but Jesus himself – and the sacrifice for sin he was soon to make – cost vastly more. This woman’s sacrifice helped prepare Jesus and his disciples for the cross, including Judas Iscariot’s betrayal. Matthew juxtaposes the woman’s devotion with Judas’s betrayal (Matt 26:14–16). Apparently, this “waste” was the last straw for Judas Iscariot.

In a very interesting series of reports, Angela Crack explores the tragic pressure that many charities feel to communicate their organisational and missions efficiency at helping the most dramatic or headline-worthy people in need.<sup>1</sup> Her research looks at the way in which governments fund NGOs, producing reports that “provide an impossibly immaculate account of success.”<sup>2</sup> By doing so, they win government funding, positively reinforcing practices of concealment with knock-on impact. “As one NGO executive aptly put it: ‘the risks around transparency undermine a lot of learning across the sector.’”<sup>3</sup>

While Christians would like to think this does not happen within the church, sadly this is often wishful thinking. Ask the decision makers in your church (missions or benevolence committees, deacons, or your pastor or elders) this question: What are your criteria for determining where to allocate church benevolence and missions funds? What kind of reporting do you expect to see? What happens if the mission makes or misses those targets? On one level, it is a very practical and, in some respects, reasonable series of questions. No gospel-minded church wants to give precious funds to an organisation that is not sharing the gospel, or not aiding those they claim to aid. But what happens when an organisation shares the gospel for five years and there is no known or visible gospel fruit? Say a five-year, multi-thousand-pound investment with zero returns. Does a church continue giving to that?

Further, let us consider too the challenges that scandals can bring. Returning to the NGO sector for a moment, recall the Oxfam scandal that found Oxfam leadership in Haiti 2011

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<sup>1</sup> Angela M. Crack, “The Oxfam Scandal Has Taught Us There Is No Reward for Honest Charities,” *The Guardian*, 16 March 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2018/mar/16/government-donors-reward-honest-charities-oxfam>, accessed 29 September 2021; See also Crack’s more complete research: Angela M. Crack, “Reversing the Telescope: Evaluating NGO Peer Regulation Initiatives,” *Journal of International Development* 28 no. 1 (2016): 40–56, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jid.3010>, accessed 29 September 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Angela Crack, “The Oxfam Scandal”.

<sup>3</sup> In “Reversing the Telescope”, Crack finds “that the initiatives have prompted positive changes in practice, but there are significant concerns about their deleterious impacts. Participants describe a host of challenges, including the tendency of peer regulation to become excessively bureaucratic and labour-intensive. They cast some doubt on the potential of the initiatives to assist NGOs to be more accountable to affected communities.”

were involved in sexual exploitations of various kinds. The point to observe is the significant drop in donor funding and the public vilification of Oxfam.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the situation was serious, but what of the hundreds of other Oxfam workers and work? These were negatively impacted because of an unrelated travesty by bad team members in another corner of the world.<sup>5</sup> The point here, without intending to dismiss the gravity of these horrors, is that donors often expect perfection from imperfect, sinful humanity – both those serving and those being served. Or perhaps a closer analogy: a situation where a pastor is disgraced and dismissed because of poor or domineering leadership (not necessarily gross immorality).<sup>6</sup> Can a church still be “the church”, a gospel-based needs ministry, and still be faithfully supported despite the fact that redeemed sinners operate it and serve unredeemed sinners. Surely, sin will enter the camp.<sup>7</sup> Ministry strategies will seem fruitless, new ideas or efforts will sometimes lead to dead ends – but is that not the purpose of such a ministry? To experiment and learn a very specific field of ministry that, perhaps, the average church does not have access to or the means to explore?

Too often, the way donors incentivise a ministry reduces those ministries to (a) only reporting good news, (b) ignoring problems, (c) putting pressure to produce perfect results, all based on getting “the best value” for their donor dollars/pounds. Is it not the charity or church’s responsibility to simply get out there and do the work, to try different ways to help, sometimes successfully, sometimes failing, to learn better how to serve those in need? Are we saying that a pharmaceutical company or an engineering firm can experiment, but an organisation helping the poor must never make mistakes and cannot experiment with new ways? That it cannot take risks on people or systems in society that may not change? Perhaps part of the problem is that we have, for too long, treated charities serving the poor more like a machine or algorithm and less like an entrepreneurial business or an art. Charities need room to fail, the people charities serve need room to fail – it is our human nature to fail. Charities cannot save, only Jesus can save. And therein lies a profound investment.<sup>8</sup> To be clear, though, the problem is not investing in/donating to ministries, but investing in healthy ways with healthy expectations.

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<sup>4</sup> “How the Oxfam Scandal Unfolded,” 21 February 2018, sec. UK, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-43112200>, accessed 29 September 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Hamish Mackay, “How Will the Haiti Scandal Affect Oxfam?,” 12 February 2018, sec. UK, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-43030705>, accessed 29 September 2021.; Crack, “No Reward for Honest Charities”; Rebecca Cooney, “One Year on from the Oxfam Scandal,” 11 February 2019, [https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/article/1525382?utm\\_source=website&utm\\_medium=social](https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/article/1525382?utm_source=website&utm_medium=social), accessed 29 September 2021.

<sup>6</sup> For example, James MacDonald, due to the way he treated people as a leader/pastor, which was not necessarily a criminal act, but indeed damaging and sinful. See Mickey McLean and WORLD Digital Magazine, “James MacDonald Takes ‘Indefinite Sabbatical,’” news, *Baptist Press*, 17 January 2019, <http://www.bpnews.net/52256/james-macdonald-takes-indefinite-sabbatical>, accessed 29 September 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Joshua 7.

<sup>8</sup> See also, Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor... and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 138–48.

Interestingly, while the Evangelical Alliance has a helpful survey reporting on evangelical responses to a variety of poverty issues, there appears to be minimal movement to reach the poor with the gospel among evangelical churches. First, a search of the *Evangelical Times* website reveals less than 20 articles directly addressing poverty in the UK since 2005 (about one article per year).<sup>9</sup>

Gospel-saturated involvement in the lives of the poor begins with the good news of Jesus Christ, but it cannot end there. The social networks and supports that families and singles require to thrive may not exist, and therein lies an opportunity for local churches to be that network for them. In short, the church must better disciple in Christlikeness, with schemes and council estates and poor areas – but there is also a massive opportunity to serve the local community by being a local church that does what God intended for the church to do: be known for their love for one another (John 13:35; 15:13).

Local churches must also keep some socio-historical perspective: some people may very well spend the majority or all of their life poor (see Lev 25; Deut 15:7–11; Mark 14:7/Matt 26:11/John 12:8). It may be that, for some, it is God’s lot for them to remain in poverty for reasons beyond our knowing. This should not deter us from helping people out of poverty, but it is also a practical reason against sliding into any form of prosperity gospel. While it is true that God may bring poverty upon someone as a consequence of their own sin or another’s, it does not necessarily follow that everyone should be exempt from material poverty. The point, simply, is that the first goal is the gospel, and if helping one’s life situation can fundamentally transform their life for Christ, or be a means to their turning to Christ, the church ought to fully embrace it.

Is there a business owner in the fellowship that can train and take on a new employee, risks and all? How can the church family encourage and support those most materially deprived beyond giving handouts? How can the church family equip those most deprived in meaningful ways? Maybe half the difficulty churches face is that the church sees itself as saviour to “the poor” instead of seeing itself as poor and needy, desperate for a Saviour too. Or maybe, deep down, that’s just it – we are not so worried about our Saviour so long as the financials are working out for us. Maybe, just maybe, the sin that so easily entangles those most deprived is not so different from the sin that so easily entangles those who are not most deprived, it just costs a few more pounds.

All this is not to demonise, patronise nor belittle those who are not materially deprived, but to wake up and see the needs around. It is not inherently sinful to have wealth or status, nor is it necessarily shameful or wrong to be middle class or wealthy any more than it is to be materially deprived. Rather, middle class and wealthy families need to make strategic and generous use of these privileges to advance the gospel and bring into our local fellowships those who literally have nothing to bring but themselves.

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<sup>9</sup> Based upon a search for the term “poverty” on the *Evangelical Times* website on 18 February 2019 at: <https://www.evangelical-times.org>.

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