



**Cliff Edge Coalition NI: Written Evidence on the Legislative Consent  
Memorandum in relation to the  
Universal Credit (Removal of the Two Child Limit) Bill**

The Cliff Edge Coalition submits this written evidence to the Committee for Communities, as we urge the NI Assembly to grant consent for the Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) on the Universal Credit (Removal of the Two Child Limit) Bill.

We ask members of the Committee to review this updated briefing and listen to the concerns of the Advice Sector in respect of granting this request.

The Coalition considers the context across Northern Ireland, in relation to deepening poverty, managed migration to Universal Credit, and we understand the pressures facing the wider sector. We invite the Committee to pay close attention to, and careful consideration of, the wider implications pertaining to the Benefit Cap, Universal Credit claimant's transitional protection, and Universal Credit communications.

We welcome continuous engagement with the NI Assembly and Department for Communities to ensure that there is effective, sustainable and successful implementation of the two-child limit.

## About the Cliff Edge Coalition

The Cliff Edge Coalition is made up of over one hundred organisations from across Northern Ireland, which came together in 2018 to campaign to sustain and strengthen crucial welfare reform mitigations.

For some years, the Cliff Edge Coalition has had three key strengthening asks which the Coalition believes are urgently needed to strengthen the benefit system in Northern Ireland (NI). Our asks are to:

- 1) Resolve the five-week wait in Universal Credit
- 2) Remove the two-child limit
- 3) Provide support for private renters affected by the Local Housing Allowance

As a Coalition, we have led a number of successful campaigns which have resulted in the NI Assembly legislating for the following:

- Indefinitely retaining the mitigations for the Social Sector Size Criteria (Bedroom Tax);
- Closing the loopholes which had prevented many claimants from accessing financial assistance through the mitigation schemes, such as simplifying the Benefit Cap conditions which extends protections for families<sup>1</sup>;
- Extending the Benefit Cap mitigation until the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2028.

## The removal of the two-child limit

The two-child limit is a policy which affects families that receive the child element of Universal Credit (UC). This means that third, or additional, children born after 6 April 2017 only qualify for the child element of UC in a small number of exceptional cases, resulting in a loss of over £3,500 per child per year.

The Coalition welcomed the announcement by the UK Chancellor Rachel Reeves in the Autumn 2025 Budget to scrap the two-child limit and we welcome the progress of the Universal Credit (Removal of the Two Child Limit) Bill in the UK Parliament to secure its removal from April 2026.

We are pleased that there has been cross-party support to remove the two-child limit, and we thank our local elected representatives for their support in our campaign. We urge the NI Assembly to ensure that this is progressed with the same urgency in NI.

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Communities, <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/hargey-closes-bedroom-tax-and-benefit-cap-loopholes-welfare-mitigation-schemes>

## The context in Northern Ireland

As of August 2025, there were 13,780 households across Northern Ireland impacted by the two-child limit.<sup>2</sup> 48,080 children were living in these households, with 17,600 children not eligible for the child element.<sup>3</sup> Across Northern Ireland, 1 in 10 children live in a family impacted by the two-child limit.<sup>4</sup> This is more acutely felt in some constituencies, such as Belfast West, in which 1 in 5 children live in a household impacted by the two-child limit.<sup>5</sup>

The impact of this policy on children and families must be viewed in the wider context of deepening poverty across Northern Ireland. Recent statistics show that in NI: 18% of people (approximately 335,000) and 25% of children (approximately 115,000) live in relative poverty and 15% of people (approximately 279,000) and 21% of children (approximately 95,000) live in absolute poverty.<sup>6</sup> Arguably, the adverse impacts of poverty are more acutely felt by families across NI, due to larger family sizes. Statistically there are more larger families in NI – 21.4% of families in NI have three or more children compared to 14.7% in the UK.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, NI's population is considerably more rural than in the rest of the UK, with 34% of its population living rurally, compared to 17.5% in England, 17% in Scotland and 32% in Wales.<sup>8</sup> Rural families tend to be larger, and with poor transport infrastructure (particularly in the west of NI), access to schools, shops, services and employment is more expensive, contributing to rising poverty rates.

As these figures outline, the two-child limit has a disproportionate impact in NI and is being further compounded by a Cost of Living crisis and inflationary pressures for the most essential items, including food and energy costs.

## Why do we need action now?

The two-child limit will impact more and more children as time goes on.

The NI Welfare Mitigations Review Independent Advisory Panel Report noted, *“the two-child limit bears particularly hardest on the poorest families and, unchecked, would lead to a further damaging rise in child poverty”*.<sup>9</sup> The Resolution Foundation

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<sup>2</sup> Department for Communities, [dfc-ni-uc-stats-supp-tables-aug-2025.ods](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>4</sup> End Child Poverty, 2025, [New-Two-child-limit-data-April-2025.xlsx](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>6</sup> All statistics are after housing costs. Department for Communities, 2025, [dfc-ni-poverty-income-inequality-report-2324-c1-headline-poverty-figures.ods](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Families with dependent children by number of dependent children by UK countries and English regions, 2015 - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>8</sup> <https://post.parliament.uk/issues-facing-rural-communities/>

<sup>9</sup> Department for Communities, [Welfare Mitigations Review](#), p.4.

reports that 51% of families in the UK with three or more children will be in poverty by 2028-29.<sup>10</sup> The Children Poverty Action Group (CPAG) have highlighted that this policy “*is the main driver of rising child poverty*”, and that the abolition of this policy ‘is the most cost effective way of reducing child poverty’.<sup>11</sup> Research by the NI Audit Office has reported that the annual cost of child poverty in NI is between £825 million and £1 billion.

If no action is taken to remove the two-child limit, it is clear this will result in a continued rise in child poverty and the cost of poverty. The cost of inaction is too high.

However, if positive action is taken it is clear this will have a positive impact across NI as Trussell reports that the removal of this policy “*would bring benefits of around £155 million, and lift 18,500 people out of severe hardship, by 2026/27*”.

Freedom from poverty is a fundamental right, and removing the two-child limit is a significant step in helping to secure this right.

#### *What is the solution to the two-child limit?*

The Coalition wants to see the removal of the two-child limit in full from 6th April 2026.

We recommend that the Department for Communities (DfC) must ensure that there is timely, robust and accurate communication to all eligible Universal Credit claimants who will be impacted by the removal of the two-child limit. These proactive steps must include information as to how a claimants income will be affected, and clarity as to the impact upon transitional protection. Furthermore, NI specific mitigations, such as the Benefit Cap, have helped to sustain lower poverty levels in NI amidst welfare changes.<sup>12</sup> As there will be an increase in households impacted by the Benefit Cap following the removal of the two-child limit, we seek clarification from DfC as to how these payments will interact with one another, and recommend that this mitigation is legislated for beyond 2028.

We thank our local elected representatives and policy makers for listening to civil society and for continuing to engage with the Coalition on this issue. Fully removing the two-child limit will be an investment in children, families and communities as well as benefitting local economies. Children and families must be supported through a

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<sup>10</sup> Resolution Foundation, 2024, [Catastrophic caps • Resolution Foundation](#)

<sup>11</sup> CPAG, [Reducing child poverty role of two-child limit Sep 2025.pdf](#)

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [UK Poverty 2026 - the essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK.pdf](#)

robust, accessible and resourced social security system – and removing the two-child limit, without further delay, is an important part of helping to achieve this.

*For further information on the Cliff Edge Coalition and this written evidence, please contact Holly Knox, Policy and Community Engagement Officer at Law Centre NI, via email: [holly.knox@lawcentreni.org](mailto:holly.knox@lawcentreni.org)*