





PHOTO ESSAY

Five to a room

A poignant series of images exposes the reality of what it is like to be a poor child living in Britain today

*Photographs by
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Text by Edward Platt

Shadow of success: this boy's mother can't afford to buy him a ticket to the Celtic Park stadium in Glasgow. One in every five children in Scotland lives in poverty

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Three related statistics illustrate the grotesque extremes of the times in which we live. In 2009 – a year in which British banks were beneficiaries of unprecedented largesse in the form of quantitative easing – Barclays paid the Treasury £113m in corporation tax and in 2010 it rewarded its bankers with bonuses of £3.5bn. If that does not constitute a sufficient abuse of business propriety and common sense, then consider a protest group's claim that the "rewards for success" Barclays paid its bankers in a single year were more than has been spent on education in the Borough of Tower Hamlets, east London, where the bank happens to have its headquarters, so far this century.

Such flagrant disparities exist within a city that claims to be the sixth-wealthiest in the world. Besides Barclays, London hosts the headquarters of more than 100 of Europe's largest companies, and its economy of £162bn accounts for nearly 20 per cent of the UK's total GDP. Yet four in every ten children in London live in poverty and the figure rises to above one in two in its inner boroughs.

London has a higher proportion of children living in income poverty than any region or country in Great Britain. However, there is little reason for complacency elsewhere. One in three children in Wales lives in poverty, one in four in the south-west of England, and one in five in Scotland.

Breadlines

These measures represent stark deprivation. The average household income in London is £44 per person per day, but a family living in poverty has £10 per person per day to buy everything it needs, from clothing to food.

The photographs published here, from Save the Children's campaign on poverty in the UK, illustrate the pinched and provisional nature of life on such a budget. Four children huddle in a single cot in a flat in Birmingham; three teenage girls read and do their homework on the bed because there is no table in their parents' house; a boy plays with a football in the shadow of a Glasgow stadium that offers the tantalising prospect of riches and success.

The effects are felt well beyond the domestic sphere – Save the Children's campaign asserts, self-evidently, that children living in poverty are more likely to live in unsafe neighbourhoods – and they resonate through the generations. Education is supposed to provide an escape route, and yet children in poverty are half as likely to get five good GCSEs as their better-off peers.

Worse still is to come because the public spending cuts that we have been promised are only just beginning. George Osborne has frozen child benefit and cut the child tax credit that he raised less than two years ago, and many more children will be forced into penury as a result. The coalition government has promised to end child poverty by 2020, but Save the



Children predicts that the number of those living "below the breadline" will rise.

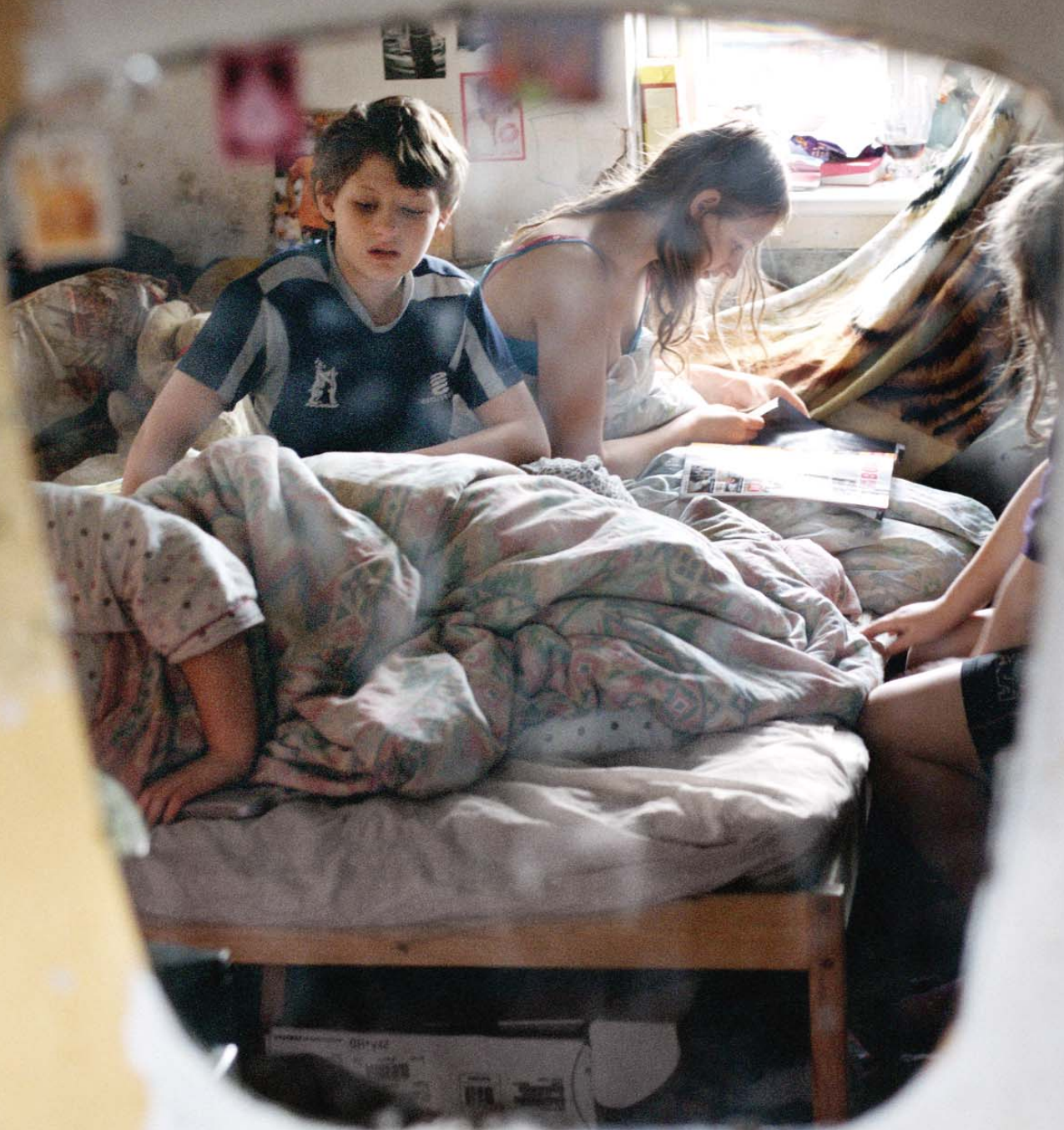
The age of austerity has begun, and the pain that is supposed to be shared by all will be felt most keenly by those who can afford it least. ● *Save the Children commissioned Carol Allen-Storey, Liz Hingley, Laura Pannack, Simon Roberts and Abbie Trayler-Smith to create a series of images documenting how 3.5 million children live in poverty in Britain today. A selection of the photographers' work will go on display in the Upper Waiting Hall of the Palace of Westminster, London SW1, from 12-16 March*

newstatesman.com/topics/society

Top: Garnlydan, Ebbw Vale. One in three Welsh children lives in poverty. Ebbw Vale is the poorest county in Wales

Above: Ashleigh, 19, lives with her parents and younger sister outside Glasgow, along with Ashleigh's toddlers Shaun, two, and Ayesha, one. "I find it difficult to buy things for the children," she says

Right: Christine, Nicola and Stacey, aged 13 to 16, live on a Wolverhampton estate. There's no money for a table or chairs, so the girls do their homework on the bed or the floor. They are determined to succeed – but children in poverty are half as likely to get five good GCSEs





Right: Mahmoud, Saamia, Ahlaam and Nasri live in a one-bedroomed flat in Birmingham. Mahmoud sleeps in the cot, the baby in a sleeping basket and the girls share a bed with their mother, Amal. Their father sleeps on the sofa in the living room

Top and above: Christine, Nicola and Stacey's parents' house in Wolverhampton is run-down but the children have a few treasured possessions



