Poverty Data Gaps: Interim Findings

January 2026

Thank you to the Insight Infrastructure programme for their support. Developed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), it aims to democratise access to high-quality quantitative and qualitative data and evidence through open collaboration and innovation, working towards a more equitable and just future, free from poverty.

This report necessarily contains many acronyms: section 6.3 contains a guide to acronyms used.

Executive Summary

- **This report presents interim findings from a project to identify data gaps relating to UK poverty.** It covers the current data infrastructure (surveys, administrative data, and data access schemes); specific and systemic gaps affecting poverty research; and potential opportunities to address these challenges.
- **Stakeholders told us that UK poverty data is generally high-quality, but significant gaps remain.** While sources like the Family Resources Survey (FRS), Understanding Society, and data from Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) provide a solid foundation for understanding income-based poverty, important questions about who experiences poverty and why cannot be answered with existing data.
- **Critical data gaps exist for specific populations and issues.** We cannot adequately answer key questions on gendered poverty (including unpaid care and intra-household equality), housing insecurity, migrants and refugees, people with disabilities, and wealth. These gaps hinder effective policy design and civil society organisations' ability to target interventions.
- **Systemic gaps undermine our understanding of broader poverty and policy effectiveness.** The UK lacks a unified dataset that adequately captures all dimensions of living standards. Meanwhile, limited data sharing and access regimes mean researchers often struggle to evaluate which interventions work, or sometimes even obtain basic descriptive data relevant to their research topic.
- **Better linkage between administrative data and surveys, learning from other policy areas, could address some gaps.** Projects linking administrative data with surveys – such as the FRS Transformation project, and a planned linkage between Understanding Society and DWP's benefits data – show promise. However, innovation in poverty research seems to have been slower than in other policy areas like employment, education and justice.
- **Data access and sharing need substantial improvement.** Case-by-case approval processes, risk-averse attitudes, and technical challenges all create general barriers. Civil society organisations without academic partners find data access especially challenging. Improved access to DWP/HMRC data is especially critical for poverty research, although viable access routes seem less clear than for some other departments.
- **Practical opportunities to move forward exist.** Priority areas include improving access to data, especially for civil society, supporting emerging projects to link administrative data from DWP and HMRC to other sources, enhancing user engagement on poverty statistics, and on the systemic oversight of poverty data quality. We plan to explore these, and what might be feasible within the current official statistics landscape, in the next phase of our research.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This is the interim report from a nine-month project, funded by the Insight Infrastructure Team at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, to identify and highlight statistical and data gaps relating to UK poverty. We have looked at the impact that data gaps have on poverty researchers, civil society organisations and the communities they serve, and how we can better use data to support policymaking and research on UK poverty.

We present initial findings, covering:

- **data infrastructure** – surveys, administrative data, statistics, and data access (chapter 2)
- **data gaps** – on specific populations/issues, and systemic challenges (chapter 3)
- **early assessment of opportunities** – potential ways to address these challenges (chapter 4).

As this is an interim summary of the main themes coming out of our research to date, findings may be amended, expanded, or reframed before the end of the project. Any such changes will be reflected in our final outputs. We welcome any feedback, corrections, or other input from interested readers. Please email Dakota Langhals, RSS Policy Researcher, at d.langhals@rss.org.uk, or policy@rss.org.uk, if you would like to contribute.

In the next phase we will build on this work and look further at potential opportunities as outlined in the next steps.

1.2 Methodology

We used various methods to map the statistical and administrative public data infrastructure, and identify data gaps.

Firstly, we held semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, and held round tables on three specific poverty-related topics: gender, wealth, and disability. Between interviews and round tables, we brought together detailed insights from more than 60 stakeholders.

In parallel, we mapped the data and statistical landscape, building on these interviews and desk research; sources included statistical producers' overviews of statistics (ie, on taxes and benefits, and income and earnings); statements of administrative sources (ie, for income, benefits and population statistics); House of Commons Library briefings; information on recent transformation projects; and published Data Protection Impact Assessments and data sharing agreements.

We also began work on data gaps, which we defined as a significant question that cannot be answered using existing data, or a key limitation to existing data that hinders its usefulness for research and policymaking. This approach is in line with the RSS's vision for public statistics, and is intentionally broad. We also classified data gaps by research theme and according to a technical taxonomy (presented in the Appendices).

Initially, we identified preliminary data gaps by collating several hundred poverty-related publications by major third-sector organisations and academic sources published since 2020. Given the volume of sources, for each source, we fed each of the reports into an LLM[1] with instructions to extract quotes or other information pertaining to data gaps. Each extracted piece of information was then checked by a human researcher to verify that the information was accurate and relevant to our project. The collated list of data gaps identified in this way can be viewed here.[2] The findings in this interim summary draw on that list in conjunction with our interviews and round tables.

Our work revealed many data gaps, leading to the question of how to prioritise them. We used three criteria, though at this stage of the research we focus mainly on the first two:

1. **Demand.** Multiple stakeholders expressed a clear desire for better data on the topic.
2. **Impact.** Without the data, stakeholders could not answer a significant question about poverty or poverty-related issues, and substitute data could not obviously be obtained elsewhere.
3. **Feasibility.** We do not believe it would be unduly expensive, time-consuming or technically challenging for producers to provide data of adequate quality to fill this data gap.

1.3 Scope

In this project, we take a broad view of poverty in line with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's (JRF) definition, which is: "*when a person's resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation).*" Thus, we include at least those on low incomes or of low wealth, experiencing deprivation of various kinds, experiencing social exclusion, or in other ways materially marginalised.

There are questions around how poverty is measured that are implicit in the statistics we choose to produce, and there is no universally agreed approach. The standard poverty rates are calculated in official statistics in the UK as the proportion of households below 60% of median income, either before or after housing costs. However, we agree with the principle

[1] The LLM used for this task was Open AI's GPT 4o and GPT 5 models accessible via ChatGPT.
[2] This list contains only those gaps that have been identified at the time of writing of this interim summary document. Corrections, additions, and other amendments may be made before the conclusion of this project.

underpinning Minimum Income Standards research that this is an arbitrary (though standard) line that should not be privileged above other metrics. An expansive view of poverty is therefore warranted.

We also note that, at this stage, we limit our scope to official data (ie, data produced by government departments or the Office of National Statistics (ONS)) and other major data sources that frequently came up during our research, like Understanding Society. Moreover, in this summary we do not give detailed commentary on valuable resources that sit outside those sources, like Minimum Income Standards, although they have worthwhile contributions to make in the poverty data space.

While lived experience research provides essential qualitative insights, our focus in this project is on the quantitative data infrastructure that underpins poverty measurement and analysis. We also do not cover publications interpreting the available data, though these are clearly significant.

Lastly, given the limited time and resources available for this work, we focus on UK-wide data, rather than the picture in devolved nations, except where this was directly relevant for a specific topic in our initial research.

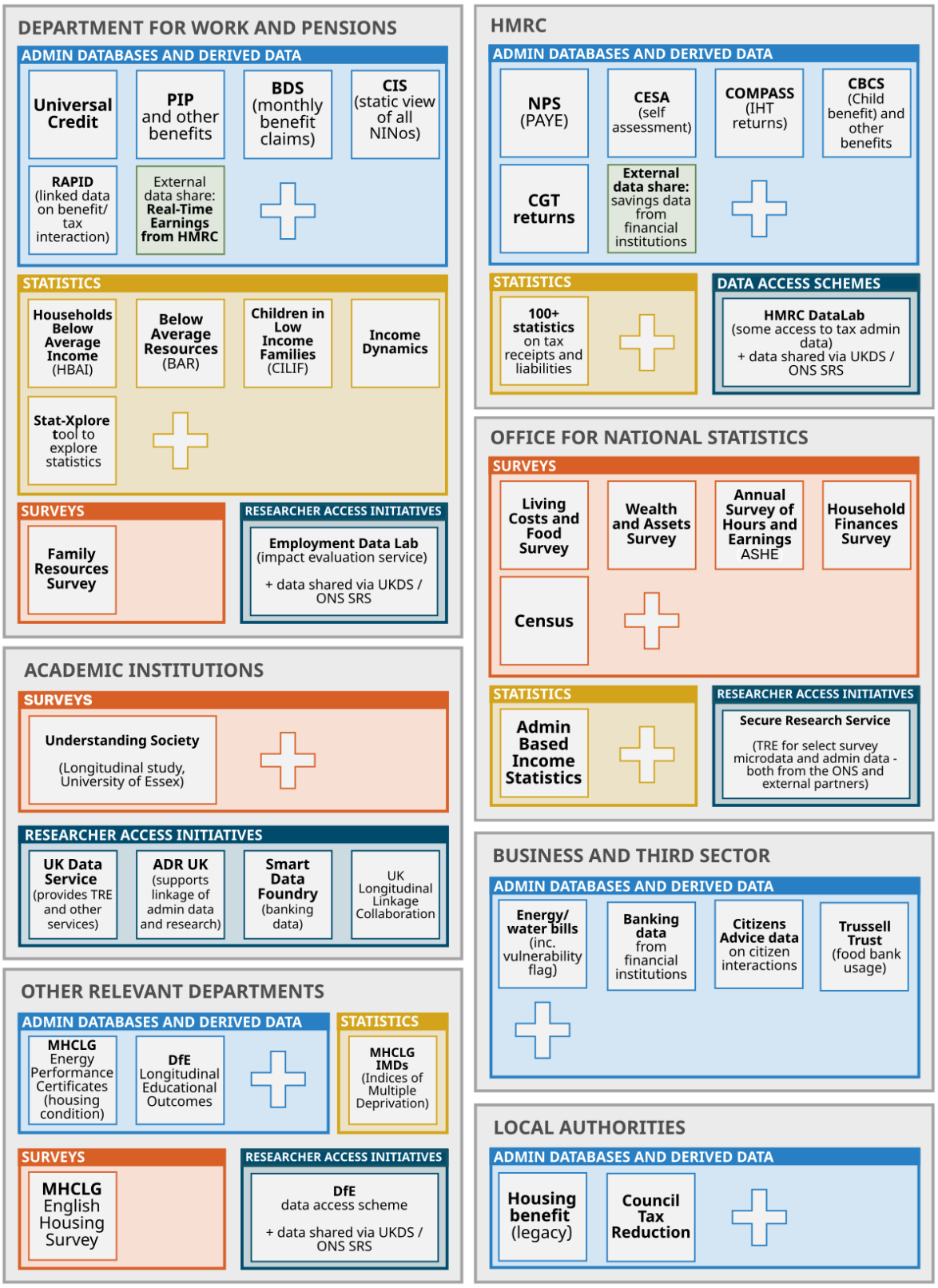
2. Setting the Scene: Overview of the UK Poverty Data Landscape

Understanding poverty in the UK requires multiple, complementary data sources:

- **Administrative data** from HMRC, DWP, and elsewhere provides records of citizens' benefits and tax interactions.
- **Surveys** from several sources capture household incomes, living standards and experiences of poverty.
- **Official statistics** translate surveys and admin data into standardised measures.
- **Third-party data** from charities and food banks reveals hardship at the margins, while data sharing from financial institutions can provide more granular insight into income and spending patterns.
- **Data access schemes** provide the secure infrastructure for researchers to analyse raw data, while protecting privacy.

Together, these form the data ecosystem through which UK poverty is currently measured and understood. In this chapter, we study each of these in turn, examining how researchers told us they were used, and their strengths and weaknesses. The diagram on the next page shows our understanding of these sources at the time of writing this report. It is likely to be incomplete, and we welcome corrections.

Schematic diagram of UK poverty data infrastructure, grouped by institutional owner



2.1 Administrative Sources

Administrative data is information collected by institutions as part of operations and service delivery, rather than for research purposes. Often this data is used for internal research, and sometimes made available to external researchers.

Overview of Major Administrative Sources

Department for Work & Pensions (DWP)

DWP runs various administrative databases to administer Universal Credit (UC), other benefits, and pensions.[3] It combines these data into analytical and research datasets, and it holds reference datasets used across government. Key databases and datasets include:

- **Operational databases:** Universal Credit Full Service (UCFS) and Live Service are used to administer Universal Credit, containing data on claims, payments and interactions. DWP also operates systems for non-UC benefits, e.g. Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and the state pension.
- **National Benefits Database (NBD):** The NBD combines monthly claim-level information about the benefits an individual has claimed from 13 different benefits distributed by DWP. It is derived from administrative systems and shared with ONS to produce experimental admin-based income statistics in combination with other sources.
- **Registration and Population Interaction Database (RAPID):** RAPID is a dataset providing a single view of interactions across benefits and earnings for anyone with a National Insurance Number (NINo). It draws on data from HMRC as well as DWP, and provides a longitudinal view of peoples' employment and benefits journeys. Among other things, it is used to produce DWP's Children in Low-Income Families (CiLIF) statistics.
- **Customer Information System (CIS):** CIS is a reference dataset providing demographic information on everyone with a NINo. DWP describes the purpose of the CIS as "to help DWP staff quickly find out about you when you contact us, and to allow decisions to be made faster and more accurately". It is used across government to verify benefits entitlement, and as it can be used to match names to NINos, it is used for data linkage.

[3] For an explanation of UC vs legacy benefits, see here.

HMRC

HMRC administers tax and some benefits in the UK, so it holds administrative data relating to these:

- **National Insurance and PAYE Service (NPS):** The ONS guide to income and earnings statistics notes that this covers 'all employees and occupational pension recipients' with a Pay As You Earn (PAYE) record. It is used to produce monthly data on earnings linked to NINos, called the Real Time Information system. The (confusingly named) Survey of Personal Incomes (SPI) is a sample of income data from HMRC admin systems, used to produce HMRC's personal incomes statistics and to model changes to tax policy. Data from the SPI is made available to researchers via HMRC's data archive and Datalab.
- **Computerised Environment for Self Assessment (CESA)**: This covers people's annual declarations of self-employment, rental or untaxed investment income.
- **Other benefits and tax databases:** systems including child benefit, tax-free childcare, statutory sick pay, tax credits, inheritance tax and capital gains tax returns. These are used to produce various HMRC statistics, some of which can be used to study poverty and wealth.
- **Savings data from banks**: HMRC also collects data on savings income directly from banks and building societies, which it uses to verify self-assessment declarations.

Other departments and public bodies

Other sources of administrative data, and derived statistics, relevant to poverty research include:

- **Department for Education (DfE)**: holds administrative data on benefits like Pupil Premium and Free School Meals; also has the National Pupil Database, which has been used to produce linked data on educational outcomes relevant to poverty research, namely the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset (discussed further in section 2.3).
- **Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG):** The MHCLG produces the Indices of Deprivation in England, alongside counterparts in devolved governments. These indices are frequently used for local-area-level analysis and capture various dimensions of hardship affecting people within those areas. They are constructed using administrative records from across government departments.[4]
- **Local authorities:** hold administrative data on Council Tax Reduction and housing benefits.

[4] For a full list of the data sources that feed into the most commonly used Index, the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), see section 3.3 of its technical documentation.

- **NHS:** Different parts of the NHS maintain administrative datasets for primary, secondary and tertiary care; often this data is partly held by private-sector providers. These can be linked with other datasets to provide information on the effect of economic circumstances on health, and vice versa, e.g. in the ONS's Public Health Research Database which links Census data to GP and hospital records.

Challenges with Administrative Data

Individual administrative sources often lack the **demographic information** that researchers want, both for analysing single characteristics and intersectional analysis. This is because data is collected in these systems for operational reasons rather than to answer research questions. Similarly, administrative systems will not record individuals' **attitudes or experiences, nor will they collect data on operationally irrelevant information,** such as certain types of income, wealth, etc., depending on the data source in question. Thus, administrative data alone is not sufficient for many research questions, especially when multiple administrative sources are not linked together.

Administrative data can also be susceptible to **coverage and representativeness** issues, because people who do not interact with the department collecting the data will not be captured – eg people who do not take up benefits will not appear in DWP databases of benefit recipients. And where data is collected, it will **not always be standardised** across, for example, local authorities or devolved nations.

A particular challenge in the poverty space is that most benefits are paid at **household level**, while incomes are reported and tax paid at the individual level. This is a challenge for researchers studying intra-household wealth and income dynamics. The mismatch between individual and household-level data is a general issue with administrative systems, since we are not able to easily tell who lives with whom – something that is of considerable importance for designing efficient tax and welfare systems.

2.2 Surveys

While administrative data captures interactions with government services, surveys are designed specifically to understand households' living standards, incomes, and experiences of poverty across the UK population.

Overview of Major Surveys

Family Resources Survey

The main household survey serving as the foundation for official UK poverty statistics is the Family Resources Survey (FRS), run by ONS for DWP and surveying around 18,000 households annually. This annual survey covers many different household

income sources and is used to produce headline statistics like Households Below Average Income (HBAI), the primary publication on absolute and relative poverty measures over time, before and after housing costs. It is also used to produce the in-development Below Average Resources (BAR) statistics, which add extra information on assets and 'inescapable' costs like childcare. The central importance of the FRS/HBAI for poverty-related research is clear – these were the most frequently referenced data sources in our research and stakeholder interviews.

Understanding Society

Understanding Society (also called the UK Household Longitudinal Study, or UKHLS) is a large longitudinal panel study tracking around 40,000 UK households annually since 2009, run by the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex. It captures data on income, employment, health, wealth, spending, housing, education, family circumstances, food bank use, and more, enabling analysis of changes within households and individuals over time and across many variables of interest.

Interviewees identified Understanding Society as one of the richest sources for analysing poverty, inequality, and social mobility. Its longitudinal nature makes it especially valuable for policy analysis, since it can be used to understand factors associated with moves into and out of poverty. Understanding Society is used to produce DWP's Income Dynamics statistics.

Living Costs and Food Survey

The Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF), run by ONS, is the UK's principal household expenditure survey. It collects detailed information on spending on goods and services, sources of income, and certain housing costs. The LCF underpins estimates of household consumption and supports distributional and poverty analyses. It also provides one of the few direct measures of spending behaviour, which is essential for understanding living standards and cost-of-living pressures. It can help contextualise income measures from, for instance, the FRS, by showing how far resources stretch in practice. LCF is used to produce ONS's Family Spending statistics.

Wealth and Assets Survey

The Wealth and Assets Survey (WAS) is a household survey run biannually by the ONS, covering c. 15,000 households across Great Britain. It provides comprehensive data on household property, physical, financial, and pension wealth, and information on debt, assets, and savings behaviour. Researchers use WAS to study wealth inequality, and how resources are distributed across demographic groups and generations. ONS uses this to publish various statistical bulletins. The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) recently conducted a review of WAS, which led to its losing its official statistics designation.

Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) is an annual survey of employers run by ONS. It provides detailed

information on employees' earnings, hours worked, and pay across industries and regions. Researchers use ASHE to understand dynamics in specific sectors or parts of the earnings distribution, making it useful for studying low-pay and insecure jobs, and in-work poverty for people who could be subject to income tax in the UK. Although it is mainly used for internal government purposes, HMRC also make this data available to researchers via its data archive and Datalab.

Other Surveys

Other official surveys useful for poverty-related research include ONS's Labour Force Survey (LFS) on employment (also currently de-accredited due to quality concerns), the Census which includes questions on work and caring responsibilities, and the MHCLG's English Housing Survey.

Challenges with Surveys

Many issues with the UK's household surveys on poverty are general challenges faced by surveys. However, these must be kept in mind when thinking about possible improvements in the poverty data landscape.

Each survey mentioned above has struggled with **declining response rates** in recent years, especially since the pandemic. This may reflect the shift away from in-person surveys to other modes like telephone or web surveys, or declining trust in institutions. Though this does not necessarily entail a loss of representativeness, there is some evidence that representativeness is slipping.

Relatedly, surveys are constrained by respondents' **willingness to participate**. There is a trade-off between adding more questions, and the response rates and sample sizes that can be achieved.

Surveys also struggle with **specific coverage gaps**. This is where they fail to obtain responses from individuals from specific groups, often at the fringe of society, who may be the people that are most at risk of poverty. These gaps can severely hinder knowledge about these groups. Moreover, even large surveys struggle to obtain **sample sizes** sufficient for intersectional analysis, or even analysis through the lens of detailed demographic characteristics, like ethnicity below the major aggregated groupings. This is especially true at granular geographical levels, which may be limiting. For instance, FRS data cannot provide robust estimates at local authority level.[5]

There are currently particular **concerns around WAS**, including its recent loss of accreditation as official statistics. Interviewees mentioned challenges around response rates and attribution, breaks in the time series for pension wealth, and exclusions and lack of granularity for certain asset classes. As mentioned, loss of accreditation has also affected the Labour

[5] Surveys sometimes make use of booster samples that can raise response rates for specific groups. However, there is still a fundamental limitation to surveys in that booster samples can only go so far, particularly towards enabling intersectional analysis.

Force Survey, but the issues with the WAS for our research are especially important because the UK lacks other good data sources on wealth, a key area flagged as needing improvement in our discussions with researchers.

In June 2025, ONS announced a survey improvement plan for economic statistics designed to tackle some of the above issues. Relatedly, the RSS held a round table in partnership with ONS and OSR focused on survey methodology, with recommendations summarised in the event's write-up. The ONS is currently increasing its survey force for WAS, but does not have active plans to link WAS to administrative data.

2.3 Data Linkage Projects

Because of the limitations of both survey and administrative data outlined above, there have been major efforts to combine surveys with administrative data to improve overall data quality.[6] This section presents some of the most relevant linkage projects for poverty research.

DWP's 2025 Statistical Work Programme states that linking surveys with administrative data is one of the department's five priorities. One example is the FRS Transformation project. It has been known for some time that the FRS undercounts benefits claimants, and the incomes of those it does cover, and the latter leads to overstating poverty levels. FRS Transformation is partially intended to address this issue by linking administrative data from DWP and HMRC to FRS survey respondents to obtain more accurate figures for income. This work has taken a number of years to come to fruition, but initial statistics derived from the FRS Transformation are expected to be released in March 2026.[7]

Promisingly, the UK Longitudinal Linkage Collaboration plans to link many administrative datasets from HMRC and DWP to Understanding Society to open up access for researchers. These include benefits and income data, Universal Credit, the National Benefits Database, and more from DWP, alongside PAYE and Self-Assessment data from HMRC. This could produce a powerful research tool for understanding how tax and benefit policies affect households' and individuals' experiences of poverty and what works best to support them out of it. This work appears to be in active development.[8]

[6] It is important to note that linkage does not necessarily guarantee more reliable measurement per se. Recent statistical literature has found that small mismatches in the linkage process and administrative data measurement error can produce results that are less reliable than unlinked survey data. Hence, although linkage can be valuable for a variety of reasons, such as reducing respondent burden, it is not a panacea for all issues that affect surveys. This section should be read with this caveat in mind.
[7] As the FRS Transformation involves the use of admin data to fill gaps in the survey, some researchers we spoke to raised concerns that this could lead to more stringent restrictions of access in the future. This is something that the DWP will want to bear in mind as the Transformation progresses.
[8] At the time of writing, the UK LLC does not appear to have access to RAPID, which is a unified, coherent view of individuals' official interactions with DWP, HMRC, and local authorities. However, they have signalled that they may get access in the future.

A well-regarded and more mature example, mentioned by a number of interviewees, is the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) dataset run by DfE. This links National Pupil Database (NPD) and higher education data on outcomes with income data from DWP and HMRC. DfE has also co-created Education and Child Health Insights from Linked Data (ECHILD), which links NPD data to health and social care data on children and their mothers, which can be used to study how education affects children's health and vice versa.

Other data linkage projects that are primarily targeted at other policy questions can also be relevant to poverty-related research. Some examples include:

- Administrative Data Research UK (ADR UK) has supported various data linkage projects around low pay. One example is the Wage and Employment Dynamics (WED) project, which links ASHE survey data to Census and HMRC records to facilitate demographic analysis and research. This integrated dataset enables detailed demographic and spatial analysis of low-paid work, earnings volatility, job transitions, employment stability, and progression pathways – issues that are central to understanding the mechanisms that push individuals into, or keep them in poverty. While WED was not designed as a dedicated poverty study, its ability to follow individuals over time, observe movements in and out of low pay, and combine earnings data with rich demographic information represents an advance in the data infrastructure needed to support future poverty-focused research and policy evaluation.
- Also in the employment space, ONS's Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) will link the LFS to PAYE data from HMRC to improve labour market statistics, though this appears to be at an early stage.
- Health Data Research (HDR) UK is also funding a linkage project focused on the social and environmental determinants of health, part of which includes development of a new approach for measuring household incomes using administrative data. This is relevant to our understanding of poverty because it may enable us to better identify the "hidden poor" in areas that otherwise may appear affluent.

2.4 Other Primary Data Sources

While this is not our main focus, it is worth noting that a range of other data sources are available to researchers studying poverty in the UK. Major examples include:

- **Citizens Advice interactions:** The charity Citizens Advice collects detailed data from hundreds of thousands of clients seeking advice on issues like debt and housing. Their National Red Index project, for example, analyzes spending data from debt clients to estimate what people at the sharp end of financial hardship actually spend on essentials, and builds this into nationally representative insights by combining it with official surveys like the LCF.

- **Food bank use:** Although the FRS and Understanding Society have some questions about food bank use, more detailed information is captured by charities like the Trussell Trust, which publishes more targeted datasets and reports on food insecurity and the use of food banks in the UK. For instance, Trussell Trust's Hunger in the UK series provides survey data from food bank users. The data is made available for researchers through the UK Data Service (UKDS), and allows analysis of drivers and patterns in food insecurity.
- **Third-party surveys:** Significant non-government surveys include the Financial Conduct Authority's Financial Lives Survey, an independent survey which covers 3,400 adults and tracks trends in ability to pay bills, savings depletion, and debt vulnerability.
- **Commercial data**: Companies like Experian offer commercial data services that shed light on real-life spending patterns. Such datasets can be used by researchers via partnerships to study the "poverty premium" and financial exclusion, and can shed light on marginalised populations who may not be recorded in administrative data. Companies also sometimes make large-scale anonymised datasets available for research (see Smart Data Foundry, below).

2.5 Data Access Schemes for Researchers

For more detailed studies than public statistics can provide, researchers on poverty have various ways to obtain data from administrative records, microdata (individual responses) from surveys, and data from data linkage projects. These include:

- The UK Data Service (UKDS) has since 2012 provided safeguarded access for approved researchers to microdata from major social surveys, including FRS, LCS, WAS and Understanding Society.
- In addition, ONS's Secure Research Service (SRS) now provides Trusted Research Environment (TRE) access for approved researchers to some poverty-related data, including FRS and LCF survey microdata. DWP has also agreed to make RAPID available through the SRS and has told us that this work is at an advanced stage, although we are not aware of a precise deadline for its completion.
- The UK Longitudinal Linkage Collaboration (UK LLC) is the national TRE for data linkage in longitudinal research. This includes Understanding Society, and HMRC and DWP have agreed to include a variety of benefits and earnings data in the UK LLC, though this is not yet available.
- Beyond official data, Smart Data Foundry, formerly part of the University of Edinburgh, provides researchers with de-identified microdata from 5.3 million UK bank accounts, aiming to support research on child poverty, household expenditure, and impacts of economic shocks.

Researchers wishing to access administrative data are supported by ADR UK, which was set up in 2018 to help researchers safely access public-sector admin data, and funds several of the above projects, as well as helping link data and support research access. ADR UK is also helping to make RAPID available for researchers.

Some departments and agencies also offer their own access schemes, tools and documentation:

- HMRC offers some approved researchers access to some administrative data in its own secure research environment, the HMRC Datalab, to which it controls access.
- DfE also offers its own data sharing scheme, as well as making data available via the UKDS and SRS. It also publishes information for researchers about how to access data, including data catalogues and descriptions of access processes.
- DWP offers a public Stat-Xplore tool where users can access aggregated benefits and survey data. It is how DWP release data from official statistical publications in more detail, although the tool has limitations discussed elsewhere in this report. DWP also offers some access to more secure data, like FRS microdata, via the UKDS and SRS, but does not explicitly publish data catalogues, or instructions for researchers on how to obtain data.

Challenges with Access

In our interviews, participants nearly uniformly described **better data sharing, access and linkage a**s the principal route to better data on poverty – yet this is often difficult to achieve.

Numerous interviewees raised concerns about the difficulty of gaining access to data, and the impact this has on research. Each access system has different application processes, governance arrangements, and technical requirements. Reported challenges included:

- **Long approval times for projects**: Projects are approved on a case-by-case basis, and external users report many months waiting for approvals.
- **Difficulty engaging**: Some civil society researchers reported simply not receiving responses to email requests.
- **Lack of transparency:** Some research environments (e.g. HMRC Datalab) do not provide data catalogues. This makes it challenging for researchers who do not already have approved access to understand whether access is useful, or what projects might be feasible.
- **Unclear or Inconsistent security requirements:** Several researchers indicated that security measures covering TREs could often change abruptly and without clear justification. Some security protocols seemed unnecessarily duplicative or poorly thought through.
- **Usability challenges**: Researchers often found certain systems hard to navigate, including Stat-Xplore. Others reported that, even once access to data had been granted (for instance, to the SRS), data documentation was

scarce or inconsistently updated. Finding experts who could robustly answer questions about the data was also flagged by some as a challenge.

The trend is toward greater integration, both through the SRS and ADR UK access schemes, but the landscape remains complex for researchers. Indeed, for civil society organisations without academic partners or pedigree, it is nearly impossible to access the highest quality data, both because of the complexity of the landscape and the stringent requirements on the types of work that are prioritised by existing access schemes.

We discuss data linkage and access projects in more detail in section 4.1.

3. Data Gaps: What We Don't Know and Why It Matters

Despite the challenges noted above for admin data and surveys, many of our interviewees were keen to note that UK poverty statistics and data sources are generally of high quality. Participants were also careful to note positive improvements in recent years.

The expanding scope of data on living standards now encompasses not only income, but also several forms of deprivation and social exclusion, and some measures of subjective and financial wellbeing. There has even been substantial movement in the use of admin data, with several projects (mentioned later) serving as positive examples.

Nevertheless, gaps remain. This section summarises the main gaps identified in our first phase of research.

3.1 Specific Gaps and Their Impacts

Our research and interviews highlighted gaps in our ability to understand poverty and gender, homelessness, migration, and disability. Separately, they also highlighted gaps in our understanding of wealth, as opposed to income.

Gendered Issues

Poverty is a gendered phenomenon, yet key questions remain impossible or difficult to answer with current public data, as highlighted by participants at our round table on gender and poverty data gaps. To help think through these gendered gaps, we can first note that the headline poverty figures in the UK are derived from HBAI and have two central features:

1. They capture income relative to the median

2. They are measured at the household level.

Firstly, **relative income alone cannot tell us the full story** about a household's (or an individual's) financial or overall wellbeing. Measuring poverty based solely on income, as in HBAI, fails to account for gendered financial resilience: women tend to have fewer savings than men, making them particularly vulnerable to poverty after joblessness.[9] Other resources beyond HBAI do better at avoiding these issues. We discuss the importance of more comprehensive measures later in this summary.

Secondly, when looking at household-level poverty measures, we implicitly **assume that resources are shared** between individuals within the household. While this may be a reasonable assumption in most households, it may fail for a significant portion of the population – non-governmental surveys have estimated that 20% of women in the UK have experienced economically abusive behaviours at the hands of a partner. However, the lack of robust official data that could be used to validate resource-sharing assumptions could itself be considered a data gap.

Caring responsibilities more generally could be better tracked in major data sources, especially with regards to how they affect life-course outcomes. The data on paid and unpaid care captured by the FRS is limited – in particular, it does not count hours spent on care for one's own children. Assessing the effect of caring responsibilities on women's poverty risk over life further requires longitudinal data, for which Understanding Society has proven useful. However, access to the microdata underlying such analyses is again an issue, as we also discuss elsewhere in this summary.

Another issue that has been highlighted by the Centre for Social Justice is the lack of data on **family structure and household composition** in administrative data sources held by government departments that oversee specific policy areas. Not collecting this kind of information limits researchers' ability to understand the role of family size or breakdown in discussions of poverty and its alleviation, as well as the differential impacts on men and women in different circumstances.

Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

The general issues that afflict surveys and data are particularly critical in the case of **homelessness data**. Here, people experiencing homelessness, rough sleeping, or insecure housing are among the most 'invisible' from a data perspective, because surveys struggle to find them. No survey adequately captures people without stable addresses. These gaps are frequently mentioned by stakeholders, but difficult to solve.

[9] Moreover, HBAI does not deduct unavoidable costs associated with things like childcare from income, even though it counts child-related benefits as income. This can lead to an overestimation of resources available to households facing such costs, and therefore an underestimation of poverty rates. The Below Average Resources statistical series takes steps towards addressing this and other issues, although it is important for policymakers not to selectively rely on the more convenient of the available poverty measures.

Additionally, despite a variety of services to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, information on these groups appears to be located in a **loose patchwork** of disconnected programmes. Where data is available, it is generally not collated systematically, and efforts to do so would be hampered by lack of standardised data collection practice and measurement of outcomes.

Migrants

These days, many surveys ask for respondents' country of birth, and (where not the UK) date of arrival to the UK. These questions give us a reasonable understanding of who has migrated to the UK, but do not determine the **reasons for migration** to the UK, or visa statuses. For poverty research, this is relevant because we have reason to expect that refugees will have very different life experiences and trajectories than people who come through education or employment routes.

Moreover, surveys face coverage issues when it comes to **refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants**, who are typically ineligible for participation and/or wary of participating. Unfortunately, unlike other populations that might be coverable via administrative sources, these populations are likely to be banned from work, or in illegal forms of work – if employed at all – and will therefore be absent from HMRC data and other administrative systems. As with the homeless population, these gaps are inherently challenging.

Disability

One well-known issue is that HBAI includes disability-related benefits in households' income, even though these are intended to help offset the additional costs associated with disabilities. BAR will seek to avoid this, but there remains a gap in that there is no currently agreed methodology for accurately **accounting for the additional costs of disability** directly, meaning that disability-related poverty is probably underestimated.

We ran a round table on disability and poverty data in December 2025 to explore data-related issues with disability in greater detail. Participants there noted specific challenges with disability and poverty. For example, disability data in major data sources generally lacks **granularity on the types of conditions** that people have and when in their lives these developed, so researchers usually have to rely on crudely aggregated categories.

Participants also noted other issues, ranging from difficulty accessing the data they want to poor comparability of data between the UK nations and regions. For further detail on disability-related data issues, we have a more thorough write-up of our round table discussion available on the RSS website.

Wealth

Participants at our round table on gaps in wealth data raised various issues that limit their understanding, while highlighting that progress has been made in recent years: **poverty research is shifting away from a focus on income** towards a more holistic view of financial wellbeing.

Intergenerational wealth dynamics and their effect on poverty risk are poorly captured in current statistics. In part, this is linked to declining response rates in the longitudinal WAS and a lack of questions on parents' financial wellbeing and behaviours. Additionally, research by the Resolution Foundation[10] has flagged that certain "irregular" lump sums are not counted in official income statistics, such as capital gains, inheritances, certain pension drawdowns, and large gifts are excluded from (or inconsistently included in) standard definitions of income that are used by, for example, the FRS.

Similarly, the **distribution of wealth across society** and between specific groups, and regional dynamics, are not well understood. This is because some groups, such as young people, are underrepresented in the WAS, but also because sample sizes do not generate sufficient data to assess wealth in small geographical areas.

Our understanding of financial precarity is limited further by data gaps stemming from a **narrow focus on income**. 'Savings and investments' are not included in HBAI when determining someone's poverty status, though the newer BAR series includes liquid assets, providing part of the picture. There are, however, concerns that the underlying FRS estimates of liquid assets are inaccurate since they are based on self-assessment. The impact of *illiquid* assets on living standards, on the other hand, is only captured by BAR insofar as these are linked to housing costs, such as rent or mortgage repayments. Also, debt is not currently included in BAR due to a lack of available data. In summary, the BAR methodology for accounting for assets in poverty contexts is somewhat simplistic, even though it is more comprehensive than HBAI.

Survey-specific data issues are particularly relevant in relation to wealth and assets, as the UK faces a relative **lack of administrative data on wealth**, compared to other countries with wealth-based taxation. Liquid and illiquid assets, debt, and irregular sources of income are all included in WAS, although the reliability of this data is constrained by issues including under-representation of those at the top and bottom end of the wealth distribution, as well as challenges specific to WAS (see above).

[10] A detailed discussion of this point can be found throughout the Resolution Foundation's 2020 report titled "Who gains? The importance of accounting for capital gains." For example, see pages 57 - 61 of that report.

3.2 Systemic Gaps And Their Impacts

Beyond the specific gaps mentioned above, there are two systemic areas frequently mentioned by interviewees where gaps affect poverty research and alleviation efforts: establishing a comprehensive view of poverty (beyond income), and evaluating 'what works'.

An Integrated View of Living Standards

The consensus seems to be that the current data landscape does reasonably **well at capturing data on incomes**. The FRS has the most comprehensive set of income questions in surveys, although the information collected in Understanding Society is also extensive, and has a longitudinal component. HMRC also holds comprehensive administrative data on incomes.

However**, the picture for wealth is less complete**. Here, the WAS is the most comprehensive survey, but declining response rates and other issues limit its reliability. The consensus appeared to be that the UK does not have a comprehensive administrative data source capturing information about all wealth held by individuals or households (largely because the UK does not assess wealth taxes that would require such a dataset), although some records may be underexploited.

Understanding Society has useful modules on household wealth, but they have their own limitations. Specifically, although they capture information about most kinds of wealth, they **exclude pension wealth**, and compared to WAS the data are collected via more highly aggregated categories. The **frequency is also lower** – once every four years instead of every two. Moreover, unlike income data, the various wealth categories are not combined into a "total wealth" variable, which adds some analytical burden for users.

Beyond wealth, surveys like Understanding Society and the FRS have modules that focus on other areas of interest like material deprivation, but some researchers **would like this data to be more comprehensive**. For instance, Understanding Society captures expenditure data that tracks spending on categories like groceries, food outside the home, alcohol, energy, etc. within the last year, but not to the same level of granularity and completeness as in the LCF.

The upshot is that the **UK lacks a unified dataset that combines all the relevant aspects of a household's material living conditions**, including incomes, wealth, debt, expenditure, subjective measures of well-being, and specific deprivation indicators. Understanding Society is the closest approximation, but it lacks certain detail and the desired frequency for some components, although it attempts to collect most relevant metrics. And, as a survey, it is not ideal for enabling analysis based on multiple demographic characteristics or small geographies.

Indeed, using surveys to collect all of this information to the level of detail that is sometimes requested will always be challenging because of inherent trade-offs between maximising detail and minimising respondent burden. This trade-off will only become more acute if survey response rates continue to decline. Therefore, **addressing this issue would likely require a substantial degree of linkage** with administrative records.

Understanding Which Interventions Work

Perhaps the most important purpose of poverty data is to evaluate policies designed to alleviate it. If we do not know what is working, we cannot hope to tackle it. So what is our evaluative capacity?

Firstly, researchers mentioned that there are **considerable lags** between when data is collected and when it is available for research (let alone public use). Some lag is to be expected, as surveys take time. But the annual (or less) frequency of most surveys means that within-year variation is often not detected[11] – this particularly affects evaluation of policies on insecure work.

Secondly, **data access regimes** are not set up with timely evaluation in mind. In some cases, administrative data like HMRC's PAYE data could be used for near-real-time analysis, but it is not clear that HMRC (or any other department) has the incentives or capacity to support this. Where external researchers can use administrative data, this is typically only after long waits for proposals to be vetted, and access controls navigated (see above).

Thirdly, the actual **data shared is often highly limited**, thanks to complex and restrictive governance regimes (see above). This seems to be true even when there is clear public benefit: research by Policy in Practice shows that DWP does not routinely share benefits data with local authorities to help them deliver or evaluate support, except in limited and patchy ways.

Fourthly, poverty statistics have lost some of their international comparability over time due to a cessation of data sharing between the ONS and Eurostat and the termination of the Survey of Living Conditions, which was used as the basis for comparisons. Having comparable data is important for enabling policy analysis that can take account of the experiences of the UK's peer countries.

[11] Organisations like Smart Data Foundry have been innovating with private banking data that enable high-frequency views of financial wellbeing and behaviour. Statistics producers may be able to learn from their experimentation in the future.

Finally, there is an **evaluation gap for third-sector organisations** that provide frontline services, like food banks. Part of this stems from a lack of data standardisation and capacity, but data access plays a part, too.[12] These organisations are generally unable to access or link their own records with administrative data to evaluate their work.

The impact of all this is that civil society organisations are often 'working in the dark', struggling to access evidence to target their interventions, assess how well they work, or lobby for changes.

4. Moving Forward: Opportunities for Change

This section is naturally more speculative at this interim stage. However, we start to consider opportunities to tackle some of the above gaps. To summarise:

- The overall picture of poverty in the UK currently depends primarily on a set of household surveys, which provide different pieces of the picture. These household surveys provide a reasonable foundation for understanding income-based poverty. There are also some more recent efforts to use administrative data to improve poverty-related data.
- But getting a more detailed or comprehensive picture of living standards at the bottom can be challenging. Limitations to surveys and administrative data constrain their effectiveness when used in isolation, and no solution is ever likely to be perfect.

In this section, we move on to consider projects that could help, including the increased use of linkage between administrative and survey data, and making data more easily available for researchers. We discuss the challenges these face, particularly around resourcing and data sharing; and we note that progress seems to have been slower in the poverty space than some other areas.

We also present comparative work from other areas. In particular, inspiration can be taken from work in economic statistics, and in education and health, where we see more mature linkage projects and sharing initiatives.

[12] One could construe the lack of standardisation as an issue that government could help with, too, in that they are the entity most able to incentivise more consistent data collection and outcomes measurement across organisations. For instance, some examples exist of administrative data being made available to charities for evaluation purposes, such as the Justice Data Lab and Employment Data Lab. If such infrastructure encourages charities to align their data with the requirements of the data labs, then some standardisation may be achievable.

4.1 Investing in Data Linkage

In our discussion of data linkage projects in section 2.3, we noted that data linkage projects relating specifically to income and poverty (FRS Transformation, Understanding Society linkage via the UK LLC) are still in development, while examples from other policy domains (eg employment, education and health) appear to be more mature.

We also note that some more ambitious linkage projects in this area have stalled. The Household Financial Statistics Transformation (HFST) was an ONS-led initiative launched in 2022 designed to modernise household income and expenditure statistics by integrating three key surveys (LCF, WAS, and the now-discontinued Survey of Living Conditions) with administrative and other data. However, the project now appears to be paused indefinitely. ONS's recent survey improvement plan does recognise that a new household financial survey design is needed, including more use of administrative data, but this work is currently unfunded.

By contrast, there is more active work ongoing to modernise and link economic statistics, particularly around employment and earnings, eg WED and the TLFS as described above. The UK would do well to invest in additional linkage projects focused on building what the RSS calls "public statistics," following the recommendations and principles in our work in this area. This should include more concerted and deliberate effort towards enabling data linkage specifically for poverty alleviation and research into the living standards of the most disadvantaged members of society.

In the next phase of this project, we are keen to understand more about the potential for data linkage to be used for poverty-relevant topics specifically, and how emerging and additional data linkage projects in this space can be supported.

4.2 Improving Data Access and Sharing

Beyond linking surveys and administrative data, another way that departments can help researchers is by improving data access and sharing.

Access to Additional Datasets

Efforts to expand data access are ongoing across many organisations and government departments. Many of these show significant promise for improving the poverty data landscape, but there are still considerable gaps in access that will need filling.

We note that the level of access allowed to DWP data for researchers currently seems lower than similar operational departments. For example, ADR UK's data catalogues suggest relatively little data is shared by DWP via TREs – currently

only the FRS, and no admin data besides what is fed into the LEO dataset, which is led by DfE. Meanwhile, HMRC only appears to share data from ASHE (though separately it does offer its Datalab). This appears to be more limited than the range offered by, for instance, DfE.

Moreover, the current access schemes for DWP and HMRC appear limited in various ways. HMRC Datalab data has contributed to helpful research on wealth and inequality, but it does not offer a data catalogue, its list of research projects suggests relatively few projects are related to poverty, and researchers report limited responsiveness. Likewise, DWP does not publish a data catalogue, and researchers report long delays applying for approval.

However, we reiterate that more administrative data from DWP and HMRC is expected to be made available via the UK Longitudinal Linkage Collaboration. It is also promising that ADR UK has been working to make RAPID available via the SRS. These efforts should be complemented by work improving transparency around the available data and speeding up approval timelines.

One specific area that could use improvement is data access for third-sector researchers. DWP's Stat-Xplore tool is perhaps its flagship data access mechanism for various administrative datasets and surveys that feed into official statistics, especially for non-academic researchers, and many users we spoke to value it for filling a gap. However, we also heard complaints about it, such as that it lacks data descriptions, it is not always user-friendly, and it does not enable some desired granular analyses by geography or combinations of demographic characteristics.

These latter limitations may stem in part from issues that affect the underlying data sources, particularly those relating to sample size and disclosure issues with surveys and administrative sources not always having desired demographic information. Regardless of the reason, the result is that Stat-Xplore is a valuable but limited resource and should not be seen as a catch-all for non-academic data access needs.

For accredited researchers, we note that ADR UK has funded a Data Access and Engagement Programme for researchers who want access to DfE data. ADR UK also funds research fellowships to use linked datasets, some of which are helpful for poverty research. The most recent round of funding includes researchers who want to make use of RAPID, and it is encouraging that the research priorities for that dataset explicitly include tackling child poverty and promoting independence for disabled people.

However, we emphasise that these schemes are generally not suitable for third-sector organisations in their current form due to stringent application requirements and timelines that do not often align with the needs of non-academic researchers. Third-sector organisations will generally value rapid approval and timeliness more highly than academic researchers will, and

also generally have more straightforward analytical needs. This is compatible with the view that currently tightly secured data could make a valuable difference to third-sector research.

For that matter, we heard from some people during our research that even academic researchers can be excluded, especially when their work is tied to fixed-term funding arrangements that are too short to benefit from data hidden behind long approval times. This issue appears to be worse for more junior academics, who may rely on shorter contracts than their more senior colleagues. Access gaps of this kind should not be ignored, especially because these excluded groups can bring unique perspectives and novel applications to the data.

For completeness, we also note that the forthcoming National Data Library is intended to increase data access for researchers, though details of what this will involve have yet to appear.

TRE Reforms

Trusted Research Environments (TREs) play a key role in enabling access to data. However, as noted above, civil society researchers often struggle to use them. It is possible that reforms here could help researchers; potential reforms on these lines might include:

- **Published data catalogues,** so that researchers can understand whether relevant data is available before going through the full access process.
- **Better data documentation**, again to support project scoping without full data access.
- **Clear, public guidance** on expected application and decision times.
- **Partnership or consortium models** to support civil society researchers, so they can pool their requests and/or work with an accredited partner to safely access data, without having to invest themselves in highly skilled researchers or secure technical environments.
- **More flexible access models** that grant programmatic approval to approved researchers – rather than ad hoc, project-based approval – so that they can refine their research organically.

Data Sharing Across Government

Linking together different datasets is crucial for filling in gaps. However, ownership of relevant surveys and admin data is split across multiple bodies as above (DWP, HMRC, ONS, etc), which often makes data sharing and linkage challenging, even though legislation permits sharing for research purposes.

The UK's current data sharing regime creates several barriers to cross-departmental sharing efforts:

- Data sharing agreements must be set up on a case-by-case basis, slowing down the process.

- Data owners are incentivised to take a risk-averse attitude towards sharing and linking of their data, as legally the risk of sharing falls on the data owner, while most benefits fall on the requester. This also decentralises responsibility for any particular linkage effort.

In addition, HMRC is governed by legislation that includes stricter provisions on information sharing than other public bodies: all taxpayer data shared by HMRC must be in support of its core functions, which are not aimed at poverty alleviation or measurement.

There is growing pressure for changes to this regime, with suggestions published recently by the DATA Alliance, a new campaign group, among others. Indeed, enabling cross-departmental data sharing should be seen as a high priority.

Data sharing and linkage across government departments (and potentially even third-sector organisations) could be improved via more technical means. For instance, there are general technical challenges related to linking data on individuals in a country without a national citizen ID: tax and benefits data is keyed on National Insurance Numbers (NINo), but surveys do not typically ask for NINo, making linkage challenging. However, some progress has been made on this in recent years e.g. in projects like FRS Transformation, which uses the CIS to link names and addresses to NINos.[13]

Topically, the government is considering plans to introduce a national ID system. We note that, depending on how exactly this is implemented, it may have meaningful benefits for data linkage efforts across government departments and potentially for other data holders as well. At the same time, it is crucial that the scheme is introduced in a way that builds and prioritises public trust.

5. Next Steps

We now move on to our proposals for the second phase of this project. We are interested in the following topics, and are keen to discuss them with interested parties:

1. **Practical steps to improve** administrative data linkage, data access, and data sharing, particularly in the context of current changes to the statistical landscape.
2. **Potential new or emerging linkage projects**, particularly relating to administrative data from DWP, or HMRC data on assets, and how these can be enabled in the context of the other demands on these departments and agencies.

[13] Although these linkage projects have been strong improvements over the status quo, they are not perfect, and the CIS itself is not a full substitute for a National Identifier.

3. **Practical reforms to improve TRE access and usability,** especially for civil society researchers.
4. **Practical steps for improving user engagement** on poverty statistics, particularly for civil society groups with limited time and resources. We would like to find positive examples and make practical proposals.
5. **Practical steps involving systemic oversight** – we note that OSR's work programme for the forthcoming year includes an update to its review of income-based poverty statistics.

We are keen to speak to stakeholders and potentially run further events on these topics, especially as this is a large space with many key players and moving parts. We already intend to reach out to many relevant parties in the second phase of our research, some of which include further contacts at DWP, ONS, and HMRC who can speak to the topics outlined in this interim summary, contacts serving on the Research Accreditation Panel within the UK Statistics Authority, contacts at the UK Longitudinal Linkage Collaboration, more civil society organisations, and others.

If you are interested in engaging with us on topics relevant to this project, please email policy@rss.org.uk, or complete our open call for input with any data gaps that you have experienced in your work.

6. Appendices

6.1 Data Gaps Taxonomy

For our desk research, we categorised data gaps identified in civil society outputs according to a taxonomy given below. This is a modified version of a taxonomy developed by Climate Change AI. For our purposes, we have only used high-level categories, primarily for conceptual purposes. The same gap can span multiple categories, and sometimes the boundaries between them are fuzzy.

Category	Description	Example
Sufficiency	Is available data sufficient for specific purposes? Can it be used to answer specific questions of interest? (Related: Timeliness)	"Does X data source enable analysis of Y group at Z geographical level?"
Quality	Is available data of reliable quality? Is it representative of the population of interest? Is it correctly capturing a variable of interest?	"Are estimates of X variable in Y survey biased?"
Standardisation	Is available data collected in a standard way across systems or geographies? Is data comparable across relevant factors?	"Do local authorities collect and report on X topic in the same way?"
Wish	Is desired data not collected at all? If collected, is it collated in a useful way?	"X data on Y topic is not currently collected."
Access / Sharing	Assuming desired data exists, can different parties access it? Is the process of gaining access cumbersome? Is it shared with key parties?	"X data is only accessible inside the SRS."
Linkage	Assuming desired data exists, has it been linked with other relevant data?	"Answering X question requires Y and Z data to be linked."

6.2 List of Interviewees for Phase 1

Charles Wilson, National Centre for Social Research
Deven Gheleni, Policy in Practice
Dr. Damian Whittard, University of the West of England
Dr. Donald Hirsch, Loughborough (Emeritus)
Fabian Chessell, Policy in Practice
Gianfranco Addario, National Centre for Social Research
Jo Lam, University College London
Joanna Littlechild, DWP
John Pullinger, former National Statistician
Dr. Juliet Stone, Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University
Lorraine Pearson, DWP
Dr. Jonathan Bradshaw, University of York (Emeritus)
Dr. Lucinda Platt, London School of Economics
Dr. Matt Padley, Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University
Natasha Gallagher, Mind
Dr. Paul Fisher, University of Essex
Dr. Selçuk Bedük, University of Oxford
Dr. Stephen Jenkins, London School of Economics
Dr. Tom Stephens, London School of Economics
Tom Wernham, Institute for Fiscal Studies

6.3 List of Acronyms

- **ADR UK:** Administrative Data Research UK
- **ASHE:** Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
- **BAR:** Below Average Resources
- **CESA:** Computerised Environment for Self Assessment
- **CiLIF:** Children in low income families
- **CIS:** Customer Information System
- **DfE:** Department for Education
- **DWP:** Department for Work and Pensions
- **FRS:** Family Resources Survey
- **HBAI:** Households Below Average Income
- **HDR UK:** Health Data Research UK
- **HFST:** Household Financial Statistics Transformation
- **HMRC:** His Majesty's Revenue and Customs

- **JRF:** Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- **LCF:** Living Costs and Food Survey
- **LEO:** Longitudinal Education Outcomes
- **LFS:** Labour Force Survey
- **UKDS:** UK Data Service
- **UK LLC:** UK Longitudinal Linkage Collaboration
- **MHCLG:** Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
- **NBD:** National Benefits Database
- **NHS:** National Health Service
- **NINo:** National Insurance Number
- **NPS:** National Insurance and PAYE Service
- **ONS:** Office for National Statistics
- **OSR:** Office for Statistics Regulation
- **PAYE:** Pay As You Earn
- **PIP:** Personal Independence Payments
- **RAPID:** Registration and Population Interaction Database
- **RSS:** Royal Statistical Society
- **SPI**: Survey of Personal Incomes
- **SRS:** Secure Research Service
- **TLFS:** Transformed Labour Force Survey
- **TRE:** Trusted Research Environment
- **UC:** Universal Credit
- **UCFS:** Universal Credit Full Service
- **UKHLS**: UK Household Longitudinal Study, also known as Understanding Society
- **WAS:** Wealth and Assets Survey
- **WED:** Wage and Employment Dynamics

About

This project is a collaboration between the Royal Statistical Society and the Centre for Public Data, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Insight Infrastructures programme, which aims to build a better picture of socio-economic inequalities in the UK. Desk research and interviews for this report were conducted between June and November 2025. We are grateful to our interviewees and round table participants for supporting this project with their time and insights.

The Royal Statistical Society is a professional body for statisticians and other data professionals dating back to 1834. It is dedicated to enabling a strong, diverse profession; facilitating innovation and growth; championing the public interest; and supporting public understanding and engagement.
Contact: Dakota Langhals, Policy Researcher. policy@rss.org.uk

The Centre for Public Data, founded in 2020, is a non-profit working for stronger public data. We work with policymakers to identify data gaps, and help organisations get the data they need.
Contact: Anna Powell-Smith, Director. contact@centreforpublicdata.org

We are grateful to Monika Hartmann for assistance with this report.