

# Benefit Cap: Northern Ireland

Data to February 2022

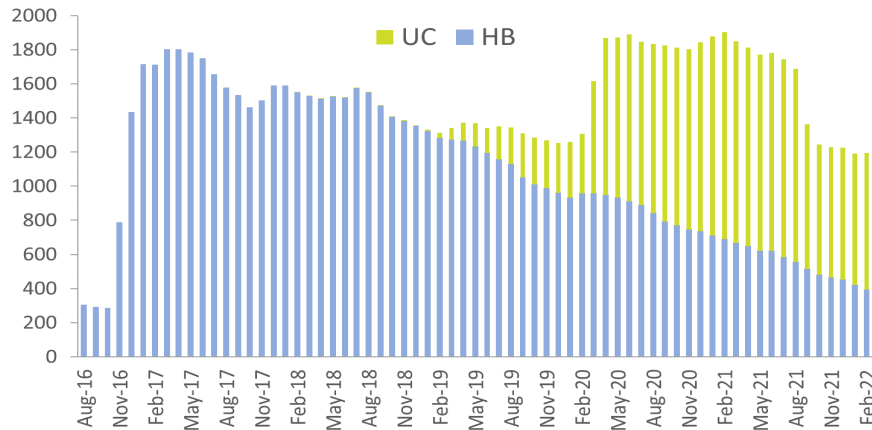


Quarterly

Experimental Statistics - Published: 25th May 2022

There is a limit on the total amount of benefit that working age people can get<sup>1</sup>. This is called the Benefit Cap. The Benefit Cap can be applied through Housing Benefit (HB) and Universal Credit (UC). This summary contains experimental statistics on the Benefit Cap in Northern Ireland.

## Households on the Benefit Cap



The number of households capped was 1,200 at February 2022. This is a decrease of 700 from February 2021.

## Average Cap Amount at February 2022

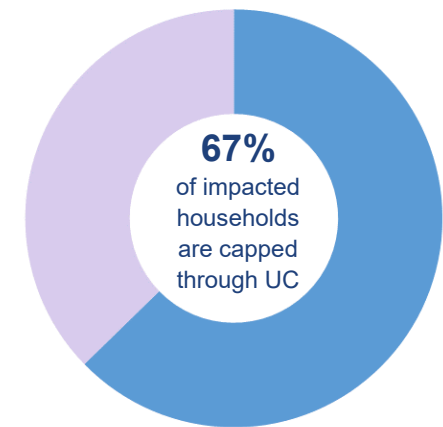
**The average amount capped at February 2022 was £45 per week.**

<sup>1</sup>There are a number of benefits which exempt households from having their total amount of benefit limited in this way. These exemptions are listed on page 2.

## Households capped via UC or HB at February 2022

800 households had their UC award capped and 390 households had their HB award capped at February 2022.

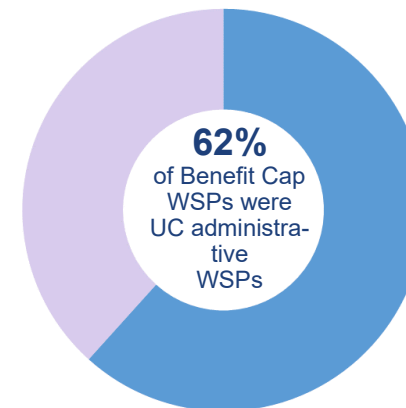
These represent 0.7% of UC households and 0.5% of working-age HB households respectively.



■ Capped via UC ■ Capped via HB

## Number of individuals mitigated at February 2022

■ UC WSP  
■ HB WSP



At February 2022, 1,070 individuals had their benefit cap reduction mitigated via an Administrative Welfare Supplementary Payment (WSP).

Of these, 660 (62%) were UC benefit cap administrative WSPs.

# Publication Overview

## At a glance

Number of capped households & family make-up

Where capped households are located

Financial impact

About these statistics

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Comments? Feedback is welcome  
[Northern Ireland Benefit Cap statistics feedback survey](#)

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### What is the Benefit Cap?

The Benefit Cap limits a working-age household's benefit income to:

- £384.62 a week for couples (with or without children living with them) and single parents whose children live with them.
- £257.69 a week for single adults without children, or whose children do not live with them.

There has been no change to the Benefit Cap policy in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The cap applies to the combined income from benefits including:

- Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, and Employment and Support Allowance (except when the Support Component is in payment);
- Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit;
- Housing Benefit;
- Universal Credit; and
- Other benefits such as Incapacity Benefit and Bereavement Support Payment.

You are not affected by the cap if you or your partner are in work or in receipt of an exempt benefit.

Exemptions from the cap include:

- Carer's Allowance;
- Disability Living Allowance or its replacement Personal Independence Payment;
- Employment and Support Allowance (support component);
- Working Tax Credit;
- Other benefits such as Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments; and
- Exemptions such as DLA/PIP also apply if received by other members of the household.

The Benefit Cap had primarily been administered through a reduction in Housing Benefit (HB). However, administration of the Benefit Cap is now more common through a reduction of Universal Credit (UC) payments. These reductions ensure that a household's total benefits no longer add up to more than the cap level.

As agreed by the NI Executive the Department for Communities currently delivers Welfare Supplementary Payments to mitigate the effects of the Benefit Cap. The Assembly has recently approved an extension of these mitigation payments until 31 March 2025.

During the period covered by this report not all claimants that were impacted by the Benefit Cap were mitigated. There could be a number of reasons for this including: Claimant was previously in receipt of a Benefit Cap mitigation, but a change of circumstances moved them off the cap, and ended their mitigation payment. A further change of circumstances moved them back onto the Benefit Cap, but they are not mitigated as it is the second time that they have been capped.

From 10 February 2022, changes to the mitigation scheme means that in future all families with children who have their benefit capped will be eligible for a Welfare Supplementary Payment equivalent to the loss of benefit.

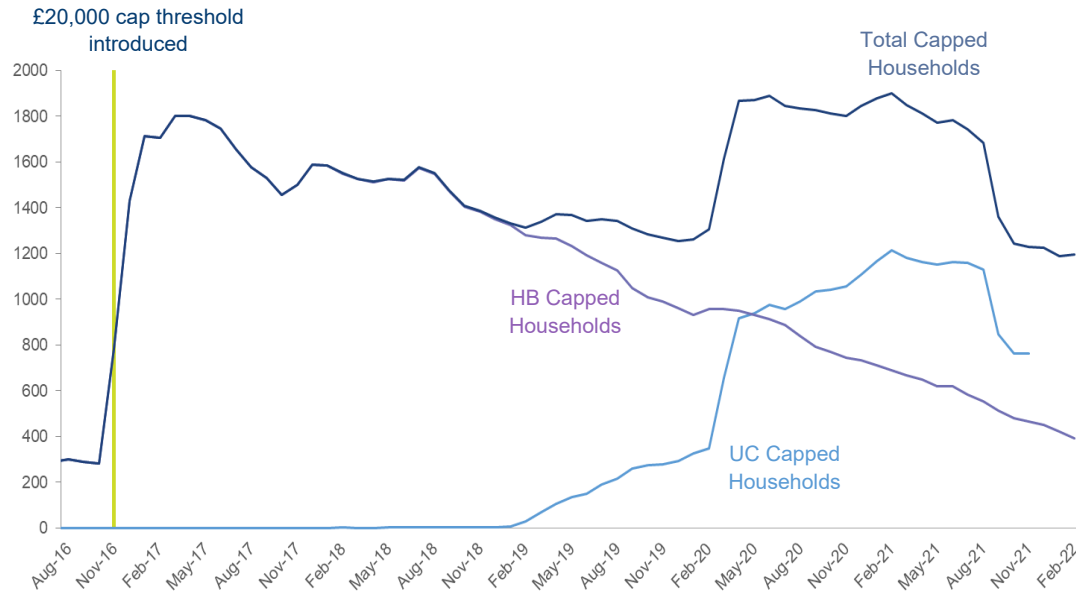
### How is it measured?

The two main sources of Benefit Cap data are the NIHE Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) and the Universal Credit Full Service System (UCFS), which are used to get data on households capped through HB and UC respectively.

From August 2020 the publication has been streamlined to report on one measure, **Point-in-time caseload**, this counts the number of capped households each month.

# Households Capped

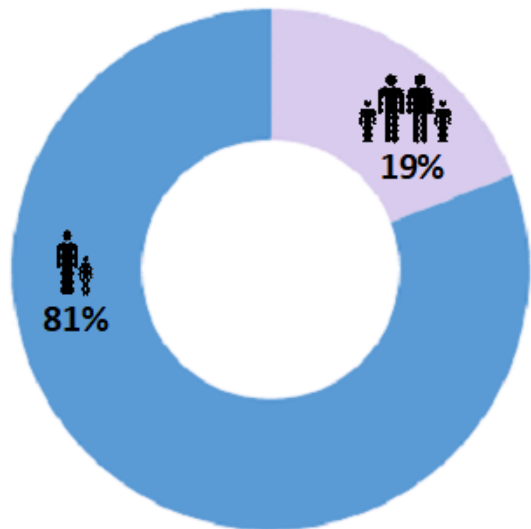
## Point-in-time Capped Households - June 2016 to February 2022



The Benefit Cap is a limit on the total amount of benefit that working-age people can receive. From 31 May 2016, the amount a household could receive in benefit income was limited to £26,000 per annum. On 7 November 2016, this threshold was lowered to £20,000 per annum.

- The number of capped households each month rose between November 2016 (790) and April 2017 (1,800). After this time, there was a general decline in the number of capped households, which continued until February 2020 (1,310).
- From March 2020, the number of households capped through UC increased notably due to a spike in the UC caseload as a result of COVID-19, reaching a peak of 1,210 UC capped households in February 2021. This corresponded with a peak in total capped households in the same month (1,900).
- In January 2022 the number of capped households reached its lowest level (1,190) since after the £20,000 threshold was introduced following a notable drop from September 2021.
- At February 2022, 1,200 households had their benefits capped. Of these, 800 were UC capped households and 390 were HB capped households.
- May 2020 was the first month the number of capped households under UC outnumbered the number of capped households under HB.

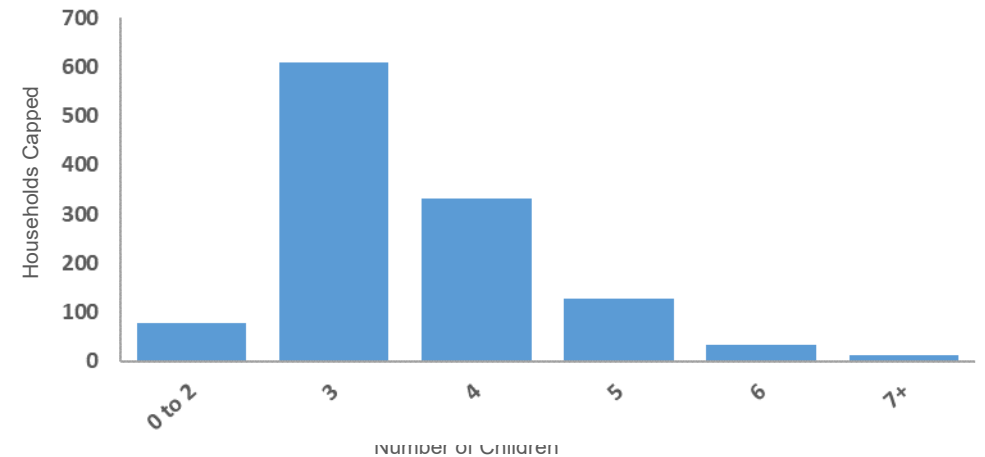
## Percentage of Capped Households by Family Type at February 2022



Child Benefit and Child Tax Credits are both included in the Benefit Cap, so families with more children, in receipt of higher amounts of these benefits are more likely to be capped.

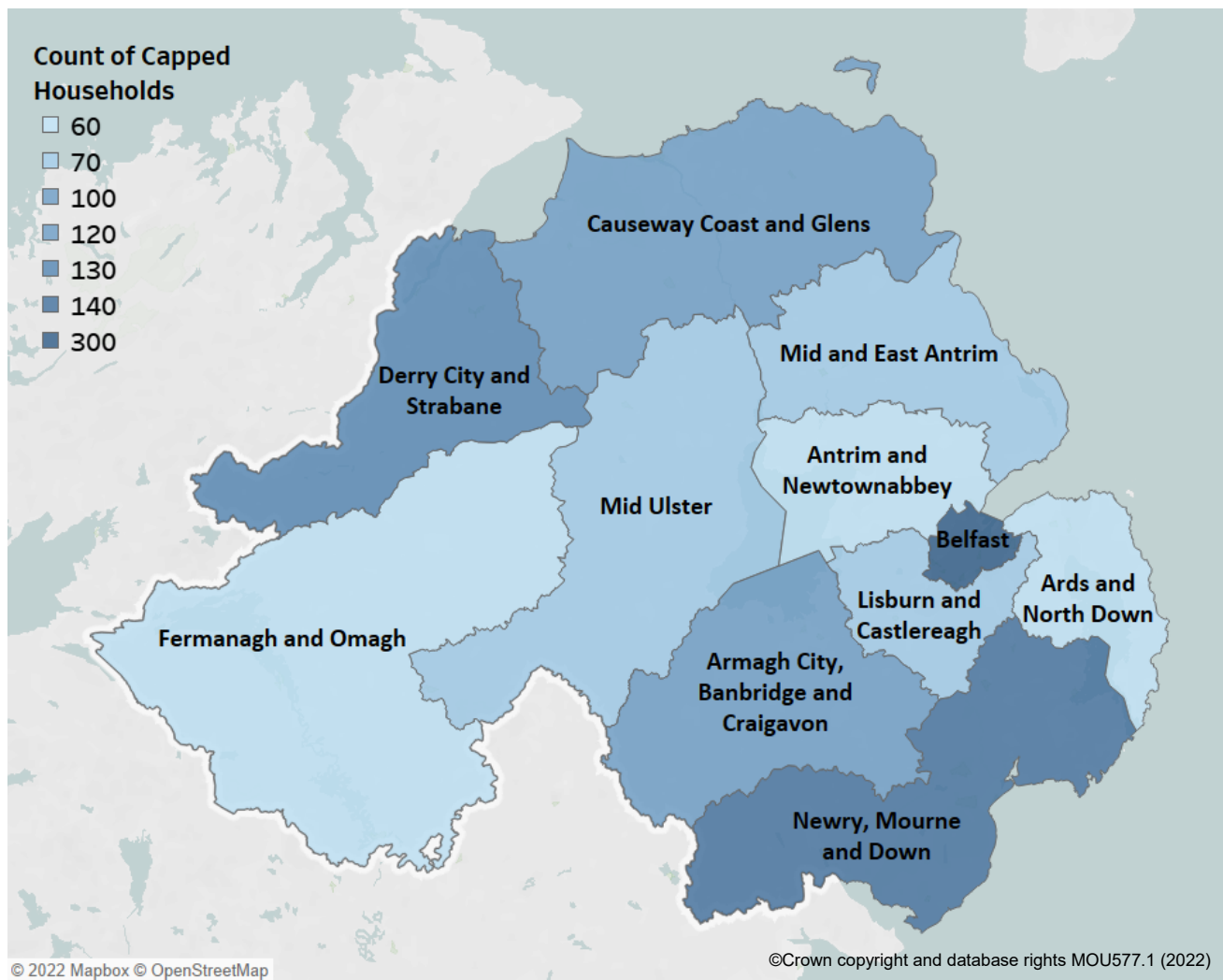
- At February 2022, 81% (970) of the total capped households were single parent households, while 19% (230) were couples with children.

## Capped Households by Number of Children at February 2022



# Where Capped Households are Located

## Capped Households by Local Government District at February 2022



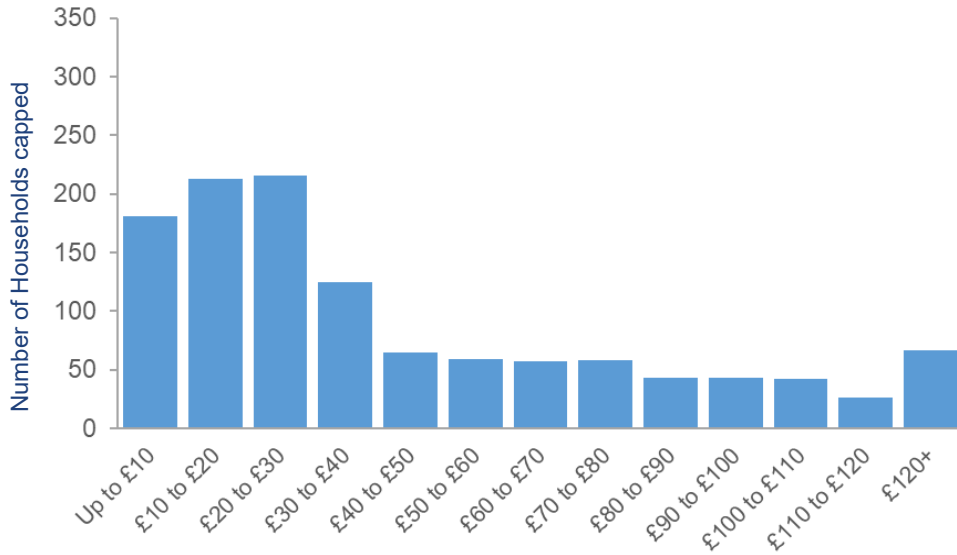
**25%** of capped households were in Belfast LGD (in February 2022)

Local Government District	Total Number of Households Capped
Belfast	300
Newry, Mourne and Down	140
Derry City and Strabane	130
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	120
Causeway Coast and Glens	100
Lisburn and Castlereagh	70
Mid and East Antrim	70
Mid Ulster	70
Antrim and Newtownabbey	60
Ards and North Down	60
Fermanagh and Omagh	60
Unknown	20
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1,200</b>

Figures in table and map are based on the totals of those capped through both HB and UC. Breakdowns for months prior to February 2022 at LGD and Assembly Area (AA) levels are available in Supplementary Table 6.

# The Financial Impact of Being Capped

## Capped Households by Weekly Amount Capped at February 2022



Unlike legacy benefits, UC is assessed and paid monthly and it is calculated based on household circumstances. The Benefit Cap is applied to the full UC award and not only to housing costs. For these statistics, a weekly cap equivalent has been calculated for UC households.

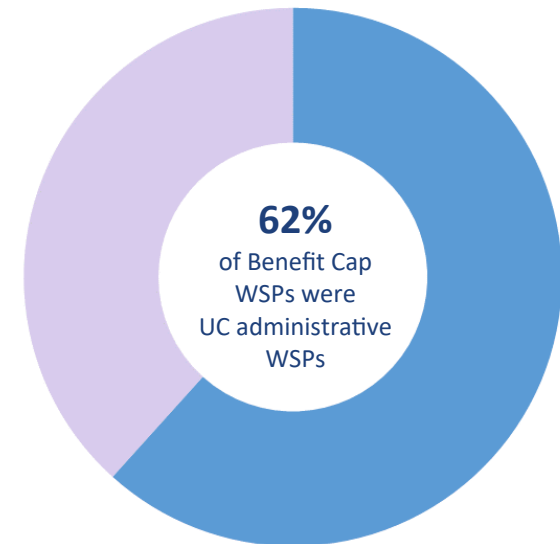
- The average **weekly** impact of the Benefit Cap in Northern Ireland, during February 2022, was a reduction of £45.
- 67% (800) of all capped households have their benefits capped by £50 or less per week.
- 11% (140) of all capped households have their benefits capped by more than £100 per week.

## Benefit Cap Welfare Supplementary Payments at February 2022

Some claimants who have had their benefit amount capped are eligible for Welfare Supplementary Payments (WSPs) to mitigate the reduction.

- In February 2022, 1,070 individuals received a Benefit Cap Administrative Welfare Supplementary Payment. Of these, 660 (62%) were UC Benefit Cap Administrative WSPs.
- Not all claimants that are impacted by the Benefit Cap are mitigated. There could be a number of reasons for this including:
  - Claimant was not in receipt of a qualifying benefit during the relevant period (from 6th November 2016 when the current Benefit Cap was introduced).
  - Claimant was previously in receipt of a Benefit Cap mitigation, but a change of circumstances moved them off the cap, and ended their mitigation payment. A further change of circumstances moved them back onto the Benefit Cap, but they are not mitigated as it is the second time that they have been capped.

■ UC WSP  
■ HB WSP



## About these statistics

The Benefit Cap was introduced in Northern Ireland on 31st May 2016 with a £26,000 per annum threshold for couples and households with children, and £18,200 per annum for single people without children. In November 2016 these thresholds were lowered to £20,000 per annum, and £13,400 per annum respectively.

This summary contains experimental statistics on the number of households capped since the introduction of the Benefit Cap. Where available, it includes key features of these households in terms of amount capped, number of children and family type and caseload is broken down by local government district and assembly area.

The two main sources of Benefit Cap data published here are the NIHE Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) and the Universal Credit Full Service System (UCFS) which are used to get data on households capped through HB and UC respectively. The Benefit Cap had primarily been administered through a reduction in Housing Benefit (HB). However, administration of the Benefit Cap is now more common through a reduction of Universal Credit (UC) payments as numbers in the report will support.

Since the Universal Credit Full Service system (UCFS) is a live system, the UC figures and the combined HB and UC figures contained within the publication and supplementary tables are subject to scheduled revisions. This is to account for retrospective actions on the UCFS system. These revisions are performed in accordance with T3.9 of the [UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Statistics](#). Figures contained within this publication have been rounded to the nearest ten and the nearest whole percent unless otherwise stated. Percentages and totals shown are calculated using unrounded figures before rounding. Some totals therefore may not sum due to rounding.

The difference between the number of households capped and the number of individuals receiving a Benefit Cap Administrative Welfare Supplementary Payment in a month is not the same as the number who are unmitigated. The Benefit Cap data is at household level, and the mitigations data is at an individual level, so they are not comparable. Furthermore not all claimants that are impacted by the Benefit Cap are mitigated (see page 5). Furthermore, claimants may be eligible for an Administrative Welfare Supplementary Payment, but don't appear in the dataset for a particular month. This is because Administrative Welfare Supplementary Payments are paid every four weeks in arrears from the date of the first Benefit Cap deduction from UC, so a claimant may be eligible for mitigation, but not receive their payment that month.

## Data Quality statement

These statistics are in an experimental stage and as such are subject to retrospective revision in any future releases.

The methodology for gathering these statistics is still in development and is also in the process of being quality assured. The methodology may change, leading to a revision of the figures contained within.

The August 2020 publication underwent a streamlining exercise as feedback suggested too much data was presented and this detracted from the key statistics.

## Further Information

For more information on Benefit Cap statistics, including detailed tables, please visit the [Northern Ireland Benefit Cap statistics website](#)

For more information on Benefit Cap Administrative Welfare Supplementary Payments, please visit the [Northern Ireland Administrative Welfare Supplementary payments website](#)

Alternatively, contact DfC Professional Services Unit at [psu@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:psu@communities-ni.gov.uk)

We would appreciate if you completed a short questionnaire to give us your views on the publication. An online version of this questionnaire is available at the following link: [Northern Ireland Benefit Cap statistics feedback survey](#)

More information about the Benefit Cap in general can be found on the NI Direct Benefit Cap [website](#).