

# Social mobility in England is a 'postcode lottery'

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A major new study by the UCL Center for Education Policy and Equalizing Opportunities (CEPEO) with the Institute of Fiscal Studies, has revealed social mobility is "postcode lottery" for young adults in England, highlighting significant differences in career opportunities.

Conducted for the Social Mobility Commission, the research report also finds the effect of deprivation in dozens of English [local authorities](#) is now so persistent that some families face being locked into disadvantage for generations.

The key principle behind [social mobility](#) is that everyone gets a fair chance of success in life, whether in big cities or small towns, and whether your parents are rich or poor.

Researchers linked educational data and HMRC earnings to identify young sons from disadvantaged families—those entitled to free school meals. The sons, who were born between 1986 and 1988 and went to state school in England, were followed from aged 16 to 28. The study concluded:

## Where you grow up matters

Social mobility in England is a postcode lottery, with large differences across areas in both the adult pay of disadvantaged sons and the size of the pay gap for sons from deprived families, relative to those from affluent families from the same area.

Most existing research focuses on the national story, but very little research has been done to understand how the picture varies in different places and why.

## There is a large earnings gap

Disadvantaged [young adults](#) in areas with high social mobility can earn twice as much as their counterparts in areas where it is low—over £20,000 compared with under £10,000 on average.

Pay gaps between deprived and affluent sons in areas with low social mobility are two and a half times larger than those in areas with high social mobility.

## One in six local authorities are low-mobility localities

Fifty English local authorities (one in six) have both low adult pay for disadvantaged sons and large pay gaps between those from deprived and affluent families. Low life chance localities include Bolton, Bradford, Chiltern, Hyndburn and Thanet. They typically have fewer professional and managerial occupations, fewer outstanding schools, higher levels of areas of deprivation and moderate population density.

## Education alone is not a 'way up' everywhere

In areas of high social mobility, gaps in educational achievement account for almost all the earnings differences between individuals from deprived and affluent families.

In areas of low social mobility, it is far harder for someone from a deprived background to escape deprivation. Up to 33% of the pay gap is driven by non-educational factors. These could include limited social networks (fewer internships); inability to move to more prosperous areas; limited or no financial support from [family](#); less resilience to economic turbulence due to previous crisis such as 2008 financial crash; and less developed soft skills.

Report author, Professor Lindsey Macmillan, Director of CEPEO and Research Fellow at IFS, said: "This new evidence highlights the need for a joined up-approach across government, third sector organizations, and employers. The education system alone cannot tackle this postcode lottery—a strategy that considers the entire life experience, from birth through to adulthood, is crucial to ensuring fairer life chances for all."

Provided by University College London

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