Tackling data poverty: Innovation and collaboration

The Data Poverty Lab 2025 report

Executive summary, June 2025

This paper summarises the key takeaways and ideas put forward in the Data Poverty Lab 2025 report from Good Things Foundation with Nominet.

Data poverty is when an individual or household cannot afford sufficient, secure connectivity to meet their essential needs.

Around 1.9m households with a mobile phone, and 1.6m households with fixed broadband, struggle to afford their service (Ofcom 2025).

'Could there be a foodbank, but for data connectivity?'

'Could a single donated SIM expand into a network for several users?'

'Could people access a joined up free WiFi network with one login?'

'Could we send an internet connection across a neighbourhood?'

'Could we provide a broadband offer for people receiving benefits?'

Innovation

The last five years has been a period of innovation and collaboration to tackle data poverty:

- **The National Databank and Jangala Get Boxes** show how collaboration - commercial SIM donation and third sector delivery - can provide free connectivity to people in most need.

- **Initiatives such as Rochdale Mesh and WBA OpenRoaming** have shown how safer, easier ways to access free WiFi can be provided in places and communities.

- **Improved social tariffs** have been developed by market leaders with the regulator and government, making connectivity more affordable for some households receiving benefits.

- **Place-based leaders** have catalysed collaboration and innovation, finding resourceful ways to tailor and promote solutions to places and communities.

- **Calls to make internet access an essential utility,** or to 'zero-rate' essential public services (so poverty isn't a barrier to use) have grown as services become digital-first.

Limitations

Challenges that limit today's innovations from being more impactful are:

- **Confusion over what is available, to whom, and for how long** - confusion for people experiencing data poverty, and for those at the frontline of providing help or signposting.

- **Barriers to access** - with the burden of finding and using solutions falling to individuals, families, or over-stretched community, voluntary, and public sector services.

- **Funding models** that rely heavily on commercial and third sector collaboration, with little central government investment, making impact harder to achieve and sustain.

- **Evaluation gaps** - so stakeholders, including government, struggle to assess what works, where, for whom, and how - limiting further investment and policy development.

Opportunities

The UK Government's Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps is a window of opportunity to build on first wave innovations, and make them more impactful, sustainable, and systemic.

Inspired by 'Three Horizons' thinking, we see exciting opportunities for incremental change ('Horizon Two Plus'), for more radical change ('Horizon Three'), and for more strategic integration of a range of data poverty solutions to meet diverse needs.

Horizon Two Plus

- Government recognition (central to local) that **internet connectivity is essential**, requiring better protections and safety nets to prevent data poverty and mitigate its effects.

- Government recognition (central to local) that **publicly funded support** is needed, as well as sustained contributions from the telecoms industry, civil society, and consumers.

- Strategic **integration of different solutions with clearer signposting** in national government and place-based approaches to tackling data poverty.

- Reform of affordability support - **social tariffs** - to be more consistent, less burdensome for people to find and use, and more flexible to meet household needs.

- Reform of crisis support - **National Databank** - to be sustained where alternatives are not possible, and integrated into local services with government and industry support.

- Government-industry exploration into **zero-rating for online public services**, and the costs and benefits for data poverty of solutions like **OpenRoaming or mesh networks**.

Towards Horizon Three

- What if the Government set up a **'Connected Homes Discount'** scheme - a voucher or payment for eligible households to use with their provider and product of choice?

- What if every organisation with a touchpoint with citizens in crisis, and a requirement for customers to use their services online, **embedded the National Databank** in their offer?

- What if NHS WiFi, GovWifi, Eduroam and other WiFi networks joined to create a **super federated network** across the UK, providing safe, seamless WiFi access for all?

- What if Ofcom mandated a **basic (broadband) connectivity package for all** customers, improving customer protection and preventing disconnection?

- What if a **new public domain was created,** with no data charges to people using it, so people could safely and freely access public services and educational content online?

Read the full report

The full report, 'Tackling Data Poverty: Innovation and collaboration' by Dr Sarah Knowles with Dr Emma Stone, takes stock of existing solutions, and considers how these might be improved for greater impact in people's lives, and more sustainable, systemic change.

See the full report

Contact us to find out more

We want this report to spark ideas, debate, and action. If you'd like to follow up on the ideas put forward, please email Hannah Whelan, Policy and Advocacy Manager: **Hannah.Whelan@goodthingsfoundation.org**

About the Data Poverty Lab

The Data Poverty Lab is a collaboration between Good Things Foundation and Nominet. Set up in 2021, it is delivering a programme of work to find sustainable solutions to data poverty – the challenge of not being able to afford enough mobile and broadband data. Through Data Poverty Lab fellowships, learning from people with lived experience, thought leadership and convening, we are exploring future-facing solutions.

Inspired by the Data Poverty Lab to be bolder in exploring, catalysing, and striving for systemic change on digital inclusion, Good Things Foundation is now extending this approach to explore other areas of digital inequalities through a new 'What Works? Co-Lab'. So this Data Poverty Lab 2025 report is also the first 'What Works? Co-Lab' report, and reflects a continuing and shared commitment to action, evidence, ideas, and collaboration.

Data Poverty Lab research

Towards Solving Data Poverty (Stone 2022)

CHESS: Co-defining what counts as a 'good' solution to data poverty (McGrath 2022)

Scaling solutions to data poverty in the UK (Dixon 2022)

Internet Access: Essential Utility or Human Right? (Nathaniel-Ayodele 2023)

Addressing data poverty for care experienced young people (Parry & Elliott 2023)

Supporting people with data connectivity (Good Things Foundation with People Know How)