

Shortage problem: What's the UK running low on and why?

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Shortages are the only thing we don't seem to be running out of in the UK right now.

If you can manage to buy a car, then you might have trouble filling it with petrol, although there are signs that the fuel supply crisis is easing.

Drive to the shops, though, and you might find you can't get all the groceries you want. Christmas is coming, but times are getting lean: chocolates and pigs in blankets could be hard to find, just like toys, turkeys and trees.

Here's a list of some of the worst shortages and the reasons for them.

Cars and petrol

Let's start with one that has an easy explanation. Global vehicle production has been hit by a shortage of microchips.

Now that every new car is practically a computer on wheels, semiconductor chips are essential to keeping those production lines running.

But during the coronavirus pandemic, carmakers shut down, so microchip manufacturers diverted the chips that would normally go into those cars to the consumer electronics market.

With fewer new cars for sale, sought-after second-hand motors have shot up in price. And car industry figures say the supply crisis is unlikely to end soon.

Earlier this month, Ola Källenius, the head of Germany's Daimler and Mercedes-Benz, told the BBC that the chip shortage could continue into 2022 and even 2023.

As for petrol, the government has been keen to stress that there never was an actual shortage of petrol in the UK - there were just problems with getting it from the refineries to the petrol stations.

Those were caused by a shortage of heavy goods drivers to make deliveries, with the coronavirus pandemic, Brexit and tax changes all contributing to a lack of qualified drivers. Industry bodies estimate there is a shortfall of about 100,000.

But the Petrol Retailers Association (PRA) now says availability has improved in London and the South East, where fuel was hardest to come by.

Toys and tech

In the run-up to Christmas, there is always a mad rush by parents to secure the latest must-have toy for their offspring.

But this year, the hunt is likely to be even more frustrating, especially for kit that involves cutting-edge technology.

For instance, the same chip shortage that is curbing car supplies has been keenly felt by video gamers desperate to get their hands on Sony's PlayStation 5 console.

The device has been hard to find all year. In theory, it retails at £449, but it is out of stock everywhere and can occasionally be glimpsed commanding far higher prices online.

The PlayStation, along with about 70% of the world's toys, is made in China - and the cost of getting supplies to the UK has gone up hugely.

Containers are scarce in Asia, because of the effects of the pandemic on international supply chains, so shipping charges are now 10 times higher.