Why End UK Hunger?

The case for ending hunger in the UK

END HUNGER UK

November 2019

About End Hunger UK

End Hunger UK is a coalition of more than 40 national charities, frontline organisations, faith groups, academics and individuals working to end hunger and poverty in the UK.

Whilst a significant amount has been achieved over the past few years in raising the public and political profile of hunger in the UK, we believe in working together to build a broad 'food justice movement' across the UK. By mobilising thousands of people engaged in tackling food poverty in its many forms, we can build a powerful movement for change.

The amazing work being conducted by charities, community groups and individuals – as well as businesses and local authorities – will not be enough to end hunger in the UK. All members of End Hunger UK are united in their belief that to really tackle the root causes of household food insecurity we require a concerted effort from the UK and devolved governments. Only action at this level will ensure that everyone has enough money to feed themselves and their families good quality, healthy food.

Join the movement to end UK hunger at www.endhungeruk.org

ENUF (Evidence and Network on UK Household Food Insecurity)

Founded by Rachel Loopstra and Hannah Lambie-Mumford in 2018, ENUF is a hub for research and evidence on household food insecurity in the UK. It aims to promote rigorous research on the intersections between food and poverty, and, working in close partnership with stakeholders, to make evidence count by fostering connections, collaboration and knowledge exchange between academic, policy, practice and civil society communities.

Find out more about ENUF at https://enuf.org.uk

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Church Action on Poverty is a national ecumenical Christian social justice charity, committed to tackling poverty in the UK. We work in partnership with churches and with people in poverty themselves to find solutions to poverty, locally, nationally and globally. Further information can be found at www.church-poverty.org.uk.

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Introduction: the cases for ending hunger in the UK

This report follows on from the publication of 'Step up to the Plate' in 2018[1], which called for comprehensive government thinking on responding to hunger in the UK. Whilst household food insecurity is now being measured in the UK, comprehensive policy responses are still lacking. This report newly brings together leading thinkers to make renewed arguments for why it is so important to address the root causes of hunger on the basis of seven key 'cases': the moral case; the child's case; the health case; the secure income case; the human rights case; the political case; and the public opinion case.

This report further motivates End Hunger UK's new campaign goal: that the UK Government should commit to developing a cross-departmental action plan to halve household food insecurity by 2025, by addressing the underlying causes of poverty and destitution, in order to make good on its existing commitment within the Sustainable Development Goal to end hunger by 2030. Below, End Hunger UK explain the thinking behind this new goal.

About End Hunger UK's goal

Household food insecurity is caused by poverty, not by too little food. Evidence suggests key drivers of household food insecurity are: low income caused by the operation and adequacy of the benefits system, low wages and insecure work; and the rising cost of living. Until we evolve our approach to do more to prevent people reaching the point of hunger by tackling the underlying causes of income crises, the need for emergency food aid in the UK is likely to continue to grow.

What does the goal mean in practice?

As a result of End Hunger UK campaigning over the past two years, the first official UK Government household food insecurity data will be published in April 2021. This will provide a baseline for household food insecurity based on data collected from April 2019 to March 2020. End Hunger UK's goal of halving household food insecurity by 2025 represents a mid-point target halfway towards hitting the SDG goal of zero hunger by 2030.

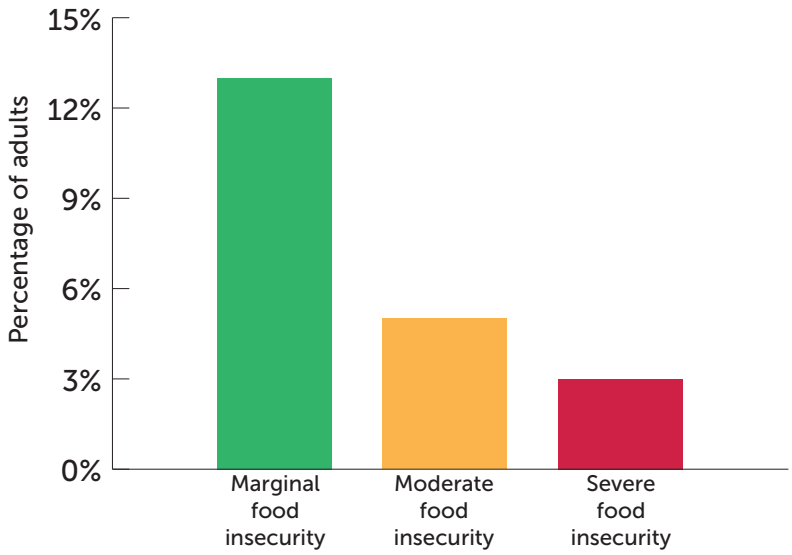
Food insecurity is defined as:

> Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (e.g. without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing or other coping strategies).[2]

END HUNGER UK

End Hunger UK's vision
A UK in which everyone can afford good food and no one has to go to bed hungry.

Food insecurity has varying degrees of severity (see chart). Early stages involve worry about whether there will be enough food, followed by compromising quality, variety and quantity of food. Going without food and experiencing hunger are the most severe stages.



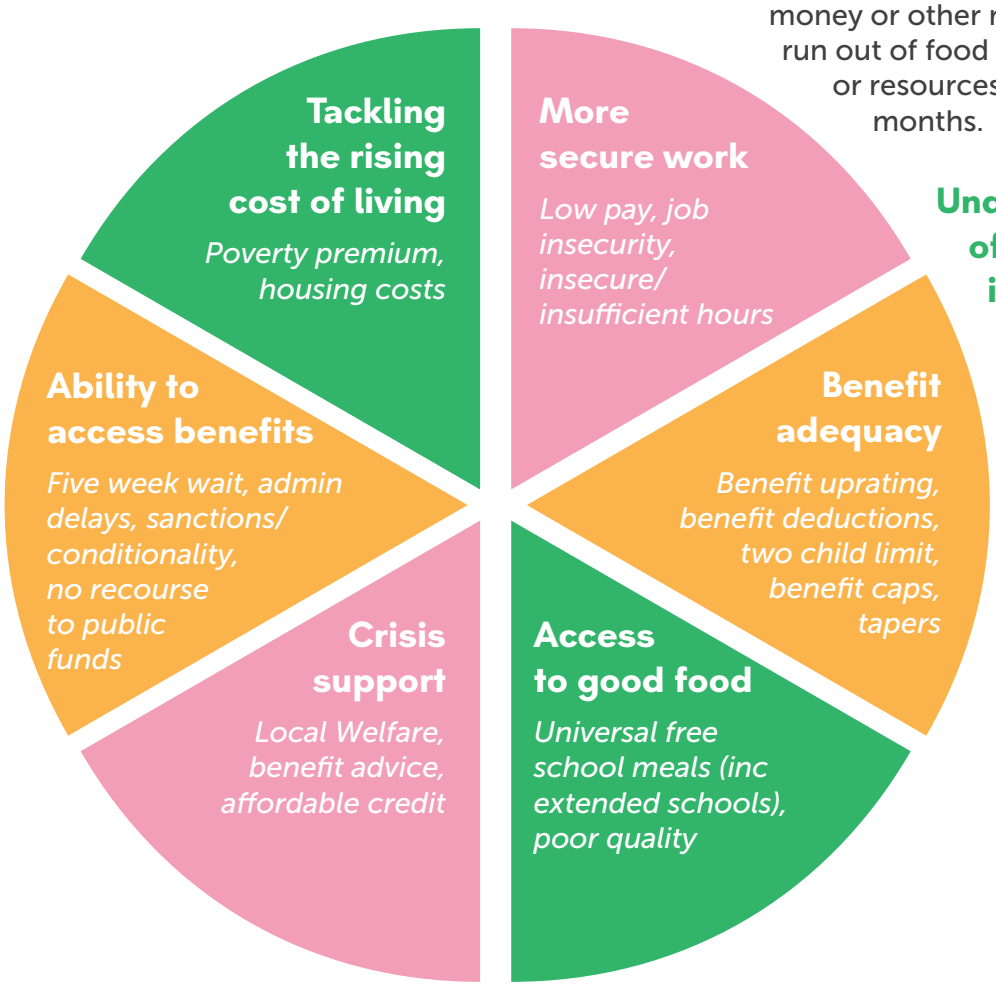
Household food insecurity amongst adults aged 16+ in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2016)

Several recent surveys provide a general indication of levels of household food insecurity, and indicate the scale of the challenge involved in halving household food insecurity by 2025.

The Food Standards Agency's 2016 Food and You Survey revealed the prevalence of food insecurity amongst adults aged 16 and over (see chart). It showed that 13% of adults were marginally food insecure, 5% were moderately food insecure and 3% were severely food insecure.

In 2016, the Food and Agriculture Organisation released data from the 2014 Gallup World Poll, which found that 5.6% of UK adults were moderately food insecure, and 4.7% were severely food insecure.

In 2017, as part of the Scottish Health Survey, 8% of adults said that, at some point in the previous 12 months, they were worried they would run out of food due to a lack of money or resources. Overall, 7% of people ate less than they should due to lack of money or other resources and 4% had run out of food due to lack of money or resources in the previous 12 months.



Underlying causes of household food insecurity

To halve household food insecurity by 2025, the cross-departmental plan will need to address the underlying drivers of poverty and destitution, which come under six broad headings – see the chart.

The moral case

Why we must tackle the root causes of hunger

Dan Crossley and Liz Dowler

In a country that claims to be fair and compassionate, the continued high levels of household food insecurity in the UK are nothing short of scandalous. There are several moral principles that suggest that, in order to address this, we have to tackle the root causes of hunger, not just hunger itself.

First, **in a wealthy society, no one should go hungry**.
In 2018, the UK was the fifth largest economy in the world. Food is a basic physiological and social need and so the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations concluded that everyone "has a right to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger". The role of the state is to ensure that the basic needs of its citizens are met. This is the basis of the social contract that justifies the power of the state, including how it can levy taxes. In relation to food, such needs include hospitality, sociability, variety and nutrition appropriate for physical and mental health.

Second, **everyone has a right to share in a country's basic resources and wealth.**
No one becomes affluent by their own efforts alone. They rely on the natural resources, legal structures and infrastructure. Because these are the property of the nation and not individuals, it is right that everyone receives some benefit from their exploitation. In an affluent society that should mean the right to access a minimum of them to lead a healthy, happy, decent life. If people are hungry, or unable to obtain enough food for health and wellbeing, that right is being denied.

Third, there is a strong **utilitarian argument** that **a rich society should not be so unequal that some go hungry**.
Even if someone does not care about the welfare of the poor, to allow an excluded underclass to grow undermines the vitality of the nation and ultimately affects economic, social and political stability and effectiveness[3].

If we accept that hunger in a rich country is morally wrong, then it quickly follows that the best way to deal with it is to address the root causes rather the symptoms. Kant's dictum "he who wills the end (if he is rational) wills the means necessary to it"[4] is helpful.
If we will the elimination of hunger and we are rational, then we must will the conditions – root causes – of that hunger to be removed. Simply offering food to those who can't otherwise get it is not a long-term solution to the problem. A case could even be made that aid-givers in fact distract from the need to understand and address the root cause. Giving food to those in need enables society to turn a blind eye to the real problems.

To varying degrees, we are all complicit in the failure to properly tackle the root causes of hunger. However, the state, as manifest by national and local government, has a fundamental responsibility and a particularly critical role. In a society such as the UK, this includes the oversight and, if necessary, regulation of activities of private sector individuals or organisations, where

"People are working hard and trying hard and it's not right that they're not getting the support they need.... There needs to be more help for people. They should come and see us and live on our budget for a week. That would make a massive difference."

A mother of two from Newcastle, who depended on a food bank to feed her children despite receiving benefits

they impinge on people's rights to access good food. It also requires ensuring all can earn enough to buy, or otherwise obtain sufficient appropriate, healthy food for an active life, and to fulfil social obligations.

The answer to ending hunger is not giving people food, nor enabling them to buy food which is 'super-cheap'. It is neither fair nor sustainable to just aim for everyone having enough food to meet calorific need. That leads to a two-tier system where only the rich have access to 'good' food and the poor are expected to 'make do'. It also means sustaining a system that delivers nutritionally deficient and unsustainably sourced food, with animals treated inhumanely. If the root causes of hunger are addressed, the food system will have to provide sufficient fair, healthy, environmentally sustainable and humane food for all. This will also give people the confidence that such access will continue, thus providing the food security that is necessary for a thriving society. We should not demonise people going hungry. Instead we must build resilience and empower people at the individual level and the systemic level, including governments ensuring there is a properly functioning safety net.

Tackling hunger without tackling the root causes only treats symptoms of the problem: it is inefficient, ineffective, short-sighted and wrong. Hence, we need to look at the root causes of this system failure, and address them so that, in fairness, all have the means to meet their human needs. This is not simply a matter of justice now but for the future. If we address the root causes of hunger, generations to come will be free from the misery and social exclusion it produces.

Emeritus Professor Liz Dowler and Dan Crossley of the Food Ethics Council[5]

The child's case

Why we must end child food poverty

Rebecca O'Connell, Abigail Knight and Julia Brannen

Food is fundamental to children's health, education, sense of self-worth and social lives. But as poverty has risen, families with children are among the hardest hit. Over four million children in Britain are growing up in poverty, with many at risk of going without nutritious or adequate food.

Our book *Living Hand to Mouth*[6] shines a spotlight on children's experiences of food and eating in low-income families and sets out why action is needed.

We interviewed 51 children and young people aged 11 to 15 years, and their parents or carers, in 45 low-income families living in two areas with high levels of deprivation – an inner London borough and a coastal town in south east England. Around half the families were in low-paid work and just under half relied on benefits. In a handful of cases, parents' immigration status meant they could not be in paid work and had no recourse to public funds (NRPF), meaning they were ineligible for benefits, including free school meals.

Children and young people in different types of families told us about their experiences of going hungry because of a lack of food at home, going without nutritious food like fruit, not having enough to eat at school and being left out of the social activities that many teenagers take for granted. Lack of money and food cause children physical pain, feelings of guilt and shame and a sense of social exclusion:

"Sometimes you don't have enough energy, you cannot cope in the classroom so you have to like try and rest a bit. You just put your head on the table and you end up falling asleep in the classroom and you get in trouble for it."
(Emmanuel, age 14, in a three-child, lone-parent family with NRPF, inner London)

"I don't want to show them that, no I don't have enough money [to eat out with friends]. I say to them, 'No, I don't really want to come.'"
(Faith, age 15, in a four-child, lone-parent family with a father who works full-time for the NHS, inner London)

Parents in low-income working families, as well as those not in work, skipped meals so their children could eat:

"... as long as the kids are fed, we don't care about us. We'll sit, we're happy to just sit there and have toast every evening, so we do cut back a lot."
(Mother, careworker on a zero-hours contract, lives with partner in full-time food retail and two children, coastal town)

As long as the kids are fed, we don't care about us

But whilst parental sacrifice protects some young people from the direct effects of food

poverty, children live with its indirect consequences:

"If there isn't enough food, we'll get it and sometimes mum will go hungry and starve and stuff. Even if it's not that much food for me and [brother], it's enough that we've actually had something, whereas mum hasn't, and it gets a bit to the point where we'll start feeling guilty because mum hasn't had anything and we've had it."
(Bryony, age 13, in a two-child, unemployed lone-parent family, coastal town)

Free school meals should be part of the solution, but are sometimes delivered in a discriminatory and stigmatising way. They are also not usually available to children in families claiming Universal Credit where parents earn above £142 a week, or to children whose parents have NRPF. Some young people told us their allowances do not buy enough to fill them up and that they are made to feel ashamed:

"... when she [lunchtime staff] was like, 'You can't get that, you're free school meals' like I was really embarrassed 'cos people were waiting behind me, I was kind of like 'Oh my God'... And it's like you're really restricted to what you can eat with free school meals... so now I just get what I know I'm safe with... so a small baguette and carton of juice."
(Maddy, age 16, in a lone-parent unemployed family, inner London)

Based on our research, we argue that healthy free school meals should be available to all children at school and provided as part of the normal school day, to mitigate some of the effects of poverty on children's health and education. Moreover, solutions to food poverty must address its root causes: low and irregular wages, inadequate benefits and the high costs of essentials that leave parents struggling to make ends meet:

"I don't know it's kind of like parents' [responsibility to make sure the family eats well] isn't it, but then parents can't really supply you with food if they don't have like a good job, like good work and pay."
(Charlie, age 15, in a two-child unemployed lone-parent family, inner London)

The government should use Minimum Income Standards research (see page 11) to ensure family incomes – from wages and benefits in combination – are adequate for a socially acceptable standard of living that recognises the fundamental role of food in health, education and social inclusion. Food poverty and its effects on children's and young people's physical and emotional wellbeing constitutes a health and social crisis[7]. In the face of piecemeal responses and government neglect, the outlook is set to remain bleak. Radical change is needed.

Rebecca O'Connell, Abigail Knight and Julia Brannen, Thomas Coram Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education

We should not have to talk about child food poverty, and it is a matter of enormous shame that we have to. That children should suffer the stress and anxiety of not having enough to eat, to be poverty-shamed at school to get a meal and still be hungry, to have to accompany stressed and anxious parents to food banks and late-night shopping for low-cost food bargains, is a stain on our society.

Child poverty, since 2010, has risen by 500,000 to 4.1 million and rising. Since 7 in 10 poor children live with a working parent, the proportion entitled to and receiving free school meals has been falling just as in-work poverty has been rising - universal free school meals for all are long overdue. Why means-test the middle of the school day in a supposedly universal service? We don't do this in hospitals. Patients need nutrition to get well, just as children need it to learn. And comprehensive extended school services before and after school and throughout the school holidays, with good food available, is an agenda that we urgently need to revive in order to eliminate the need for emergency child-hunger programmes. Enriching activities have also been shown to improve school attainment.

By 2021–22, we will be spending around £40 billion a year less on social security than in 2010[8]. There could have been little doubt back then what the impact of cuts this size would mean for child poverty numbers. So we are reaping the results. Rising child poverty never needed to happen, and it must be brought to an end.

Alison Garnham, Chief Executive of Child Poverty Action Group

The health case

Food security is fundamental for health

Rachel Loopstra

In high-income countries, where food is abundant and available in supermarkets year-round yet not affordable to those in poverty, food insecurity has devastating and widespread effects on diets and health. Food insecurity manifests in a range of experiences, from anxiety about running out of food, compromised dietary quality and reliance on low-cost foods, to not having enough food and going without. It not only impacts on what people eat, but how they feel and participate in society. It is unsurprising then that food insecurity is linked to numerous health outcomes:

Food insecurity is associated with poor dietary quality.
Though many cookbooks, blogs and public health programmes suggest it is possible to cook healthily for not much money, an abundance of evidence shows that healthier food options cost more and those experiencing food insecurity have lower intakes of vegetables, fruit, and dairy products[9,10]. The healthiest and most diverse diets in the UK are the most expensive[11] and to meet the Eatwell Guide dietary advice, households with incomes in the lowest two income deciles in the UK would have to spend 42% of their after-housing disposable income on food.[12]

Food insecurity is associated with diet-related long-term health conditions.
As a critical determinant of dietary intakes, food insecurity has been linked to many diet-related long-term health conditions including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and for some, overweight and obesity. However, beyond a link to these conditions through diet, food insecurity also associates with other risk factors for these conditions, such as poor sleep patterns.[13] Thus, there are multiple ways that experiences of food insecurity can lead to higher risk of these health conditions.

Food insecurity compromises the ability of adults living with long-term health conditions to manage their conditions.
Many long-term health conditions require patients to follow prescribed diets, eat at regular intervals, and take medication with foods. This is not possible when people are experiencing food insecurity. For example, research indicates that managing diabetes is compromised by food insecurity.[14] Food insecurity is associated with higher risk of mortality among people with long-term health conditions, and it is likely that poor disease management and being unable to follow dietary advice may underlie this association.[15,16]

Food insecurity has a profound link with poor mental health.
Highlighting how food insecurity is much more than a risk to nutritional health, numerous studies have documented its strong link with poor mental health.[17] Those experiencing food insecurity are more likely to report depression and anxiety. Food insecurity damages the mental health of children as well,[18] and early life experiences of hunger have scarring effects many years later, with child hunger associated with suicide ideation and poor mental health in teenage years.[19]

Health consequences of food insecurity have numerous downstream costs.
A growing body of evidence has shown food insecurity is associated with higher healthcare expenditure and utilisation.[20] In one Canadian study, adults who experienced severe food insecurity cost the healthcare system 121% more than those who did not report any experiences of food insecurity.

Addressing hunger and food insecurity is imperative for protecting and improving the health of the population and reducing costs to the NHS.
More people are developing diet-related long-term health conditions and mental health conditions in the UK than ever before. Growing vulnerability to food insecurity in the low-income population will undoubtedly increase this burden and widen health inequalities. In addition to the other cases laid out in this report, action to end hunger is needed because of its profound effects on health and costs to the healthcare system.

Dr Rachel Loopstra, Department of Nutritional Sciences, King's College London

Why hunger must be addressed: the public health perspective

Estimates suggest one in ten adults and one in five children in the UK experience food insecurity, to the detriment of their dignity, wellbeing and long-term health. A varied, nutritious diet, and enough of it, is essential for good health. People experiencing food insecurity go hungry or resort to an unhealthy diet, which puts their health at risk in a multitude of ways. For example, only one in 25 children from the poorest households eats the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables, fibre and oily fish[21] - the building blocks of healthy growth and development. Hunger is debilitating. It not only causes physical and psychological harm, but has far-reaching consequences, such as damaging children's school attendance and attainment. The experience of food insecurity in itself damages people's health. Studies have shown adults experiencing food insecurity are at greater risk of stress, which can manifest in both physical and mental health harm. These impacts can last a lifetime and span generations.

Food insecurity affects those who are most economically disadvantaged: an embodiment of health inequity. And poverty, the root cause of food insecurity, causes profound, wide-ranging health, social and economic harm. Poverty leads to health problems through limiting what people can materially afford, shaping people's life experiences and opportunities, and causing psychological stress that can result in physical and mental illness. Poverty and inequality damage communities, introducing stress and breaking down cohesion and connectedness between people.[22] And poverty costs the public purse, including through NHS, education and policing costs.[23]

People's health is one of the nation's greatest assets. Giving everyone the opportunity for a healthy life, such as through tackling food insecurity, will not only improve the health of the millions affected – everyone will benefit from a more equal society.

Claire Greszczuk, The Health Foundation

The income case

It's time to realign social security and food security

Donald Hirsch

The increase in hunger and food insecurity that has driven a dramatic rise in UK food bank usage over the past decade is widely recognised as a scandal in one of the world's richest countries. The very existence of food banks has clearly silenced those who denied that 'real' poverty exists in the UK. Yet it also risks creating a focus on one aspect of the consequences of poverty, hunger, that could suggest a minimalist approach to tackling it. If we could ensure that no child went to bed with an empty stomach, we would not have ended child poverty. And when designing social safety nets, it is important both to ensure that nobody faces destitution and also to set our sights higher than this, to underpin a minimum living standard that avoids social exclusion, and ensures that everybody feels able to participate in society.

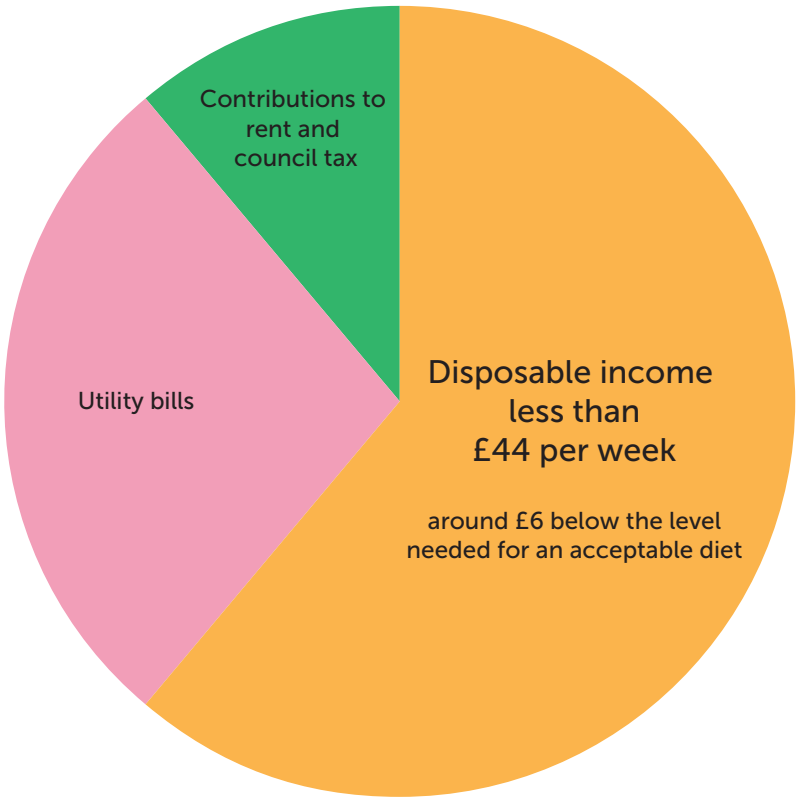
On both of these criteria, our social security system is failing in multiple ways. Some people are being deprived of any income at all for significant periods, either through benefit sanctions or through interruptions to benefits including when first claiming Universal Credit. Even for those getting their entitlements, there has been a gradual erosion of their value, caused by the benefits freeze and other cuts. For people of working age who are out of work, the benefits 'safety net' is barely worth its name, as its value relative to minimum needs continues to decline.

Here is a simple example to illustrate that point.

A single person aged over 25 is entitled to basic benefits of £72.10 a week, but this typically reduces to a disposable income of £64.25 once contributions to rent and council tax, caused by recent policies, are taken into account. That's 10% less than in 2012, even though we've seen 13% inflation since that time.

Once you deduct utility bills, this £64 reduces to less than £44 a week in your pocket to last the week. According to our research on a Minimum Income Standard for the UK[24], the minimum weekly cost of food for a single person compatible with an acceptable living standard is £49.64. So disposable income on benefits is not even enough to meet a food budget, let alone the wide

Where the money goes – bills and cuts reduce basic weekly benefits of £72.10 to less than £44



I just snack, I don't eat proper meals. The children always come first and I just eat small bits here and there. If I'm in the house on my own all day, I'll tend not to eat until 6 or 7 o'clock, if at all, and I know that I can keep food in the cupboard a bit longer, that's another day of survival.

Martin, a lone parent from Halifax, has been struggling to survive on Universal Credit

range of other things you need to buy, which add more than £100 more to disposable income requirements. Many of these are not optional, even in relation to nutrition: you need to spend money on transport just to get to the shops to buy the food, on clothing to look presentable when you get there, and on household goods that allow you to sit down, cook and eat what you have bought.

So our safety net is falling far short of paying even for a reasonable diet, let alone a decent life. In aiming for something better, it's important to recognise that food does more than just keep you alive. Our food budgets are based not just on being able to fill yourself up, but also eating healthily, having some degree of choice over what you eat, and fulfilling some social requirements such as being able to have a simple meal out occasionally with friends, and having a celebratory meal on occasions such as Christmas. It is not just about survival, but living with dignity.

These perspectives come not just from an abstract view of social rights, but from what ordinary people participating in our research agree is a minimum requirement in the UK today. They are influenced in this by the many government messages about the importance of eating healthily, with benchmarks such as five fruit and vegetables a day ingrained in our national consciousness. Ironically, the same governments that have disseminated such messages have not seen fit to give the poorest members of society the resources needed to achieve an adequate, healthy diet. If there is one aspect of joined up government that could most benefit people's well-being, it would be for officials from the Department of Health and Social Care to spend a bit more time talking to officials from the Department for Work and Pensions and the HM Treasury officials who approve benefit budgets about the evidence of what makes a healthy lifestyle, and what it costs to achieve it.

Professor Donald Hirsch, Director of the Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University

The human rights case

The UK must live up to its commitment on rights

Hannah Lambie-Mumford

The right to food is one of our most basic human rights, which everyone in the UK should be able to exercise. The right to food was set out in the United Nation's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which the UK government ratified in 1976, meaning that the UK is obliged to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food.[25]

In practice, this means:

- the state must respect existing access to adequate food and not take action which would prevent this access;
- it must protect the right by making sure that other enterprises or individuals do not deprive people of access to food;
- and should fulfil the right by facilitating peoples access to food and food security and, when necessary, provide the right directly.[26]

The public policy implications of this are far-reaching. The obligation to progressively realise the right to food for all extends across policy spheres, with implications for social security, trade and labour laws, planning and development, health, nutrition and beyond. Emphasis is on states as they are party to the ICESCR, but human rights approaches do highlight the role played by all actors in a society, including individuals, families, communities, non-governmental organisations, civil society and the business sector.[27]

The right to food is achieved when "every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement".[28] Achieving food security for all is therefore a prerequisite for the realisation of the human right and the approach sets out the rights and responsibilities, legal and institutional frameworks required to achieve it. Specifically, a right to food approach suggests states take several key steps to ensure tangible progress is made towards the realisation of the right to food – which have so far been lacking in the UK. This includes undertaking a right to food consultation in order to articulate the right to food in the UK context, developing framework laws (setting out legal provisions and obligations and well as targets, timelines and accountability processes), and establishing an institutional framework for the monitoring and assessment of progress.[29]

Importantly, however, a human rights approach situates food as one critical element in the broader right to an adequate standard of living, as enshrined in article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[30] This reminds us of the interconnectedness of different rights and the importance of a focus upon systematic public policies, entitlements and guarantees surrounding the range of elements necessary to achieve an adequate standard of living. It is important, then, for the right to food to be understood in relation to other social and economic rights including the right to housing, the right to social security and medical care, the rights of a child and women's rights. Keeping in mind the role of food in the right to an adequate standard of living can help avoid creating right to food silos where food is interpreted as the principle problem and solution.

Prospects for the right to food in the UK

The rise of food charity in the UK in recent years at first sight indicates that the prospects for the progressive realisation of the right to food may not be bright. The lack of legal and institutional frameworks through which the right can be realised persists. Welfare reforms, which have reduced social security entitlements and increased conditionality, are particularly problematic with respect to the UK state's obligations to protect and fulfil the right to food. The rise of food charity indicates that in the UK today food banks and other charitable providers are in practice assuming an increasingly significant role in the fulfilment of the right to food. This is extremely problematic from a human rights perspective.

Yet, there have been some recent moves which suggests that a human rights-based approach could be gaining some support across different political and policy spaces. The Labour[31] and Liberal Democrat parties[32] have both adopted right to food commitments as they head into the next election. The Scottish Government has also been consulting on the place of the right to food in future food-related legislation.[33] There is also a growing civil society movement calling for the human right to food to be recognised and realised which includes Sustain, Nourish Scotland, Just Fair and Human Rights Watch. Crucially, as things move forward it will be important to keep in mind the interdependency of different rights and the place of the right to food within the broader right to an adequate standard of living. Systematic public policies, including social security, which are based on entitlements, will be critical to protect people from the harshest effects of poverty, such as hunger, and facilitate full and equal participation in society, including through socially acceptable food experiences.

Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Sheffield

From 'ending hunger' towards a 'right to food'

The right to food is not aspirational. It isn't a concept that only applies when discussing development aid outside the UK. It is a part of the UK's duties under international law and should apply at home too.

The right to food exists as a protection that applies to all people as part of the right to an "adequate standard of living" guaranteed by the foundational UN treaty on social and economic rights. It also exists on its own in specific UN treaties – each one signed by the UK government – which specifically protect the right to food or nutrition of children, people with disabilities, and pregnant and breastfeeding women. Despite UK governments having ratified these treaties, adequate protection of the right to food does not yet exist in UK domestic law.

Families across the UK are going hungry, as Human Rights Watch has documented, in the context of severe cuts to governmental spending on social welfare. It is high time to talk about food insecurity and poverty in human rights terms.

So why the reticence until now about using rights language to take on this issue?

The hesitation in recent years to frame arguments in "rights" terms, focusing instead on "social justice", may be result of a fear of a backlash, because of the way some of the UK's press has portrayed human rights in the most cynical and polarizing terms.

Human Rights Watch-commissioned focus group research with people in the UK shows, however, that when presented with a list of human rights, they feel strongly about their right to a decent standard of living, but were largely unaware that it was a human right.

Local food aid and welfare advice providers should be empowered to talk clearly with their service users about why insisting on absolute basics, like having enough food, that we all need for a dignified life is a human rights issue, so in time those receiving such support have the tools to assert themselves as rights-holders.

Legislators need to be courageous and make the right to food enforceable in UK law. This would mean that the government would be bound by its own laws to ensure every person has adequate food, and if it were to fail in this duty, victims of violations would be able to hold government to account. This change in culture towards a society in which citizens can demand this basic right from the state is long overdue.

And in these turbulent times, when marginalized people may feel disenfranchised from politics and ignored by those in power, remembering that the need to eat is something we all have in common can serve as an important anchor for a society that cares about its most vulnerable members.

Kartik Raj, Human Rights Watch

The right to food – a perspective from Scotland

Measurement of food insecurity in Scotland (using three questions from the Food Insecurity Experience Scale) has been measured for the last two years as part of the Scottish Health Survey. It shows how entrenched the problem has become, with 13% of lone-parent households and 12% of single-adult households reporting having run out of food in the last 12 months.

The Scottish Food Coalition – a group of more than 30 civil society organisations, faith groups and trade unions – has been calling since 2016 for the right to food to be brought into Scots law. This of course goes wider than simply tackling food insecurity, requiring government to take a cross-cutting approach to ensure that everyone can afford to put adequate healthy sustainable and culturally acceptable food on the table.

The First Minster's Advisory Group recommended in December 2018 the full incorporation of economic, social and cultural rights in the next Scottish Parliament. However, there is a sound argument for incorporating the right to food in this Parliament through the Good Food Nation bill which will be introduced in 2020. This is supported by the Scottish Human Rights Commission's response to the consultation on the Good Food Nation bill earlier this year:

> "The Commission believes there are strong legal and policy drivers for the incorporation of the right to food in Scots law. As well as being a driver for improved outcomes for people, providing access to justice as required, the incorporation of the right to food through this legislation will be a driver for the implementation and progressive realisation of other rights, such as the right to social security or right to health. A right to food framework will assist in providing the needed cohesion across multiple policy areas from health, education, social security, agriculture. Ultimately, it would act as a catalyst and driver of change towards a stronger human rights culture in Scotland."

Pete Ritchie is Director of Nourish Scotland

The political case for ending hunger in the UK

Frank Field MP and Heidi Allen MP

Just as it affects so many aspects of our everyday lives, food touches almost every aspect of government.

Five years ago, a cross-party group of MPs and Peers asked a seemingly straightforward question: how many of our fellow citizens are hungry, and why?

The complexity of the answers we had gathered, by the conclusion of our inquiry, was demonstrated by the fact that our 77 recommendations were addressed to no fewer than eight government departments.

A key political lesson here is that a comprehensive anti-hunger programme which aims to improve the availability and affordability of decent food could lock in support from a broad coalition of groups.

Since that inquiry, the work being done by Feeding Britain, the charity we set up to implement our main recommendations, has yielded an equally significant lesson.

It is in the interests of practically every reform agenda – be it on life chances, social mobility, health and wellbeing, loneliness, or strengthening families – around which political parties seek to mobilise public support, to incorporate anti-hunger policies. Indeed, there is a whole series of wider societal advantages to be gained from countering hunger.

Breakfast clubs help to improve children's behaviour, attendance, and attainment at school. School holiday clubs help to bring families closer together, introduce parents to wider support networks, and boost children's development. Citizens' supermarkets help to reduce food waste, bind communities together, and stem at least some of the increase in demand for food banks. Innovative ways of delivering nutritious meals to older people help to reduce hospital admissions, tackle isolation, and lower the risk of illness or injury. Higher and more stable family incomes help to reduce anxiety and ward off exploitative doorstep lenders.

An anti-hunger programme, while addressing the plight of our fellow citizens who have been pushed to the brink of destitution, as well as the growing public concern around poverty in our society, would also bring much-needed cheer on so many other fronts.

Frank Field is MP for Birkenhead

In one of the wealthiest countries in the world, we really shouldn't have to make the political case to end household food insecurity. But while supermarkets continue to pile up food to tempt the ever more demanding customer, organisations like FareShare gather up the leftovers at the end of each day to distribute via the hundreds of foodbanks and poverty charities across the UK, to feed the families going hungry because of an inadequate welfare system – clearly we do.

The system is broken and so long as we allow this waste and shortage vicious circle to continue, we will continue to attract the attention of the UN and newspaper headlines.

Frank and I have taken to the road over the last year to shine a light on the poverty that exists all over the UK. It isn't constrained to rural or city, industrial or coastal, North or South. It exists everywhere. And it will continue to exist everywhere until Government accepts the fundamental design flaws in Universal Credit.

The five-week wait must end, advance payments are not the answer as they plunge people even further into debt and the benefits freeze must end now. That's the easy stuff. Far easier than breaking the retail model of abundance and waste - so only a Government with a heart so hard that it cannot see the suffering it is causing, could possibly allow it to continue.

Heidi Allen is MP for South Cambridgeshire

The public opinion case

Public attitudes to poverty and food insecurity

Elizabeth Clery and Jane Perry

The latest data on public attitudes show that the vast majority of us continue to believe that poverty involves not having enough to eat and live without getting into debt. Wider definitions of poverty – not having enough to buy the things you need, or that most people take for granted – are also gaining support.

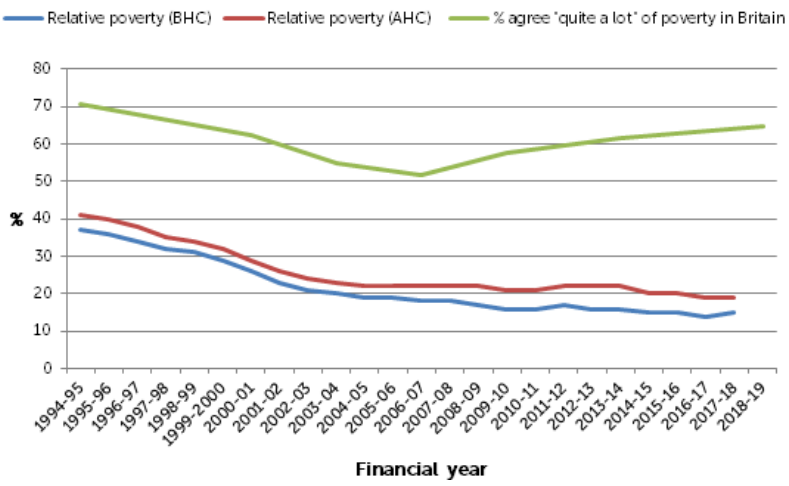
Over the past decade, the perception that there is 'quite a lot' of poverty in Britain has increased substantially – from 52% in 2006 to 65% in 2018. A growing proportion of us also believe that poverty has increased over the past decade and is set to increase further over the next.

Perceptions of poverty have always varied according to economic and political circumstances. What is unprecedented is that trends in public views of the amount of poverty in Britain are no longer following the direction of official measures of poverty. This suggests that government needs to do more than simply ensuring that poverty levels, as officially measured, are reduced. To improve public perceptions, policy must also address those aspects – around people's immediate, visible and basic needs, including signs of food insecurity – which attract political and media attention and are likely to be influencing public views of poverty.

For more than 35 years, NatCen's British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey has shed light on the public's attitudes to a range of social, moral and political issues, how these have changed over time and the factors driving this change. The BSA survey represents the gold standard in quantitative social research, as it replicates the same methodology and question wording from year to year, enabling the identification of genuine change over time.

When it comes to attitudes to poverty, BSA data show that the public does not ascribe to one consistent view of what counts as 'poverty'. Nevertheless, over the lifetime of the survey, around nine in ten people consistently agree that someone would be in poverty if they did not have enough to eat and live without getting into debt (88% stated this in 2018). Indeed, less stringent definitions of poverty are increasingly gaining support: 55% think that someone would be in poverty if they 'had enough to eat and live, but not enough to buy the other things they needed', while 28% think this would still be the case if someone had 'enough to buy the things they really needed, but not enough to buy the things most people take for granted'.

Accepting the multiplicity of definitions of poverty held by the public, there is clear evidence that more and more of us believe that



View that there is 'quite a lot' of poverty, by HBAI absolute poverty measures, 1994–95 to 2018–19

poverty and inequality are (growing) problems in Britain. Between 2006 and 2018 – the period dominated by the aftermath of the financial crisis, subsequent decade of 'austerity' and considerable publicity around growing food bank use - the proportion thinking that there is 'quite a lot' of poverty in Britain increased from 52% to 65%. Over the same period, the proportion stating that levels of poverty had increased over the past decade almost doubled (from 32% to 62%), with the proportion who expect poverty to rise further over the next decade rising form 44% to 61% – the highest level since records began.

Whilst high, the proportion agreeing there is 'quite a lot' of poverty is not unprecedented – having been 71% in 1994. Analysis of three decades of BSA data on attitudes to poverty have indicated that perceptions of poverty levels appear to respond in particular ways to specific economic and political circumstances (for instance, with the view that there is quite a lot of poverty becoming more popular during and after periods of recession or among particular groups of political party supporters when 'their' party adopts a sympathetic stance towards this issue[34]). However, previously, public views have tended to broadly move in line with official poverty statistics, as recorded in the Households below Average Income (HBAI) statistical series (see chart). From 1994–5 until 2007–08, the proportion saying there is 'quite a lot' of poverty in Britain fell steadily, broadly in line with falling rates of 'official' poverty. However, from 2007–08 public perceptions of poverty have increased, whilst official rates have remained stable or continued to fall. This divergence between official measures of poverty and public views is unprecedented.

The most recent published analysis[35] of BSA data on poverty argues that this divergence may stem from increasing recent political and media coverage of, and discussion around, poverty. Analysis shows that attitudes have shifted most markedly among those exposed to and influenced by this discourse – be they Labour Party supporters or readers of broadsheet media. On the whole, changes in perceptions of the scale, nature and acceptability of poverty and inequality more closely reflect trends in the portrayal of these concepts by politicians and the media, as opposed to the picture presented in official figures. Recent coverage of poverty has tended to focus on people's immediate, visible and basic needs, rather than long-term trends in relative income (as currently[36] measured by official statistics). This led the authors to conclude that, to reduce support for the view that there are significant amounts of poverty in Britain:

> "it may be that policy makers need to…identify and devise policies that address the issues highlighted by politicians and campaigners and in media discourse around poverty relating to people's basic needs – such as short-term deprivation, homelessness and food bank use, in order to regain a more positive view among the public."

In other words, any moves to reduce food insecurity and successes in this regard, particularly if they receive political and media attention, may have the potential to reduce the perception of widespread poverty among the British public. There is also some evidence from the latest survey that moves aimed at reducing inequality would be popular with the public, with 78% saying that the gap between those with high and low incomes is too high.

Elizabeth Clery and Jane Perry, freelance researchers, contributors to NatCen's 36th British Social Attitudes report

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