

# **Submission from the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) to the APPG on Ending the Need for Food Banks Inquiry: Cash or food? Exploring effective responses to destitution - Call for Evidence for organisations**

July 2022

*A representative of IFAN would be able to give evidence at the Inquiry's evidence sessions in September and October.*

## **Summary**

*The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) is calling for crisis support to be delivered in the form of cash payments and for this support to be timely, accessible, well promoted and linked to well-funded advice and support services. This submission looks at the disadvantages of crisis support in the form of charitable food aid and the advantages of a cash first approach to food insecurity both in terms of crisis support and ending the need for charitable food aid in the UK.*

## **Introduction**

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) supports and advocates on behalf of hundreds of independent food aid providers, including over 550 independent food banks. Our vision is of a country without the need for charitable food aid where adequate and nutritious food is affordable to all. We advocate for a cash first approach to food insecurity which, through income-based solutions, would eliminate poverty driving the need for charitable food.<sup>1</sup> IFAN has identified at least 1,172 independent food banks currently operating in the UK. This is in addition to hundreds of food banks operated by the Trussell Trust, the Salvation Army, schools, universities, and hospitals as well as other kinds of charitable food aid such as social supermarkets, food pantries, and soup kitchens.

It is unacceptable that anyone should need to turn to charitable food aid to avoid hunger. The UK Government has a responsibility to both respond to and prevent financial emergencies so that everyone can afford adequate and nutritious food and other essentials.<sup>2</sup> IFAN would argue that the remit of the APPG should be broadened to ending the need for *charitable food aid*, not simply ending the need for food banks. Both IFAN and the Trussell Trust have argued for this planned outcome in their responses to

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<sup>1</sup> How to End the Need for Food Banks, Independent Food Aid Network. <https://ifanuk.org/infographic>

<sup>2</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966. Part III, Article 11. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>. Accessed 01.07.22.

the Scottish Government's consultation on its draft plan to end the need for food banks.<sup>3</sup> There are now a growing number of food aid organisations operating differently from a food bank and supporting people unable to afford food. It is vital that "ending the need for food banks" doesn't simply shift the responsibility of supporting people unable to afford food from food banks to other charitable food aid providers. In the sixth richest economy in the world, no one should need to rely on the support of any charitable food aid organisation depending on donations, surplus food, and volunteers to fill the gap left by lack of income.

To eliminate the need for charitable food aid, there needs to be fundamental changes made to the UK's social security system. This includes raising the level of social security payments as well as eliminating its restrictive and punitive elements, such as the benefit cap and two-child limit.<sup>4</sup> Ensuring job security and a real Living Wage, as well as bolstering advice and wider support services, are also all vital to building a future where everyone can afford food.

Since October 2021, the cut to Universal Credit and the growing cost of living crisis have pushed IFAN members to breaking point. In a letter to the Prime Minister and Chancellor in April 2022, IFAN wrote that, with reducing donations and volunteer capacity coupled with a steep rise in the people needing to use their services, food bank teams are "overstretched and exhausted."<sup>5</sup> In May 2022, 93% of organisations responding to an IFAN survey reported a rise in need since the start of the year and 80% of these organisations said they had struggled with food supply issues.<sup>6</sup> It is clearer than ever that the increasing reliance of the UK Government on charitable food aid providers to support people living in poverty is unsustainable. We need an alternative approach that tackles the root causes of poverty driving the need for charitable food aid, including robust preventative measures to stop people from falling into financial crisis in the first place.

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<sup>3</sup> Ending the need for food banks: a draft national plan: Published responses, Scottish Government. [https://consult.gov.scot/housing-and-social-justice/ending-the-need-for-food-banks/consultation/published\\_select\\_respondent?\\_b\\_index=240](https://consult.gov.scot/housing-and-social-justice/ending-the-need-for-food-banks/consultation/published_select_respondent?_b_index=240). Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick, P., Garthwaite, K., Power, M., Kaufman, J., Page, G., Pybus, K., Warnock, R., Aldridge, H., Flew, L., Lee, T., and Howes, S. with Covid Realities participants (2022), *Covid Realities documenting life on a low income during the pandemic*. Final report to The Nuffield Foundation. <https://covidrealities.org/learnings/write-ups/covid-realities>. Accessed 05.07.22.

<sup>5</sup> *Letter to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor*, Independent Food Aid Network, 8th April 2022. <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/letter-april22>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>6</sup> *Independent Food Banks in the UK: May 2022*, Independent Food Aid Network, May 2022. [https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/944f3722-c7b4-452e-bf43-322aa0c971eb/IFAN%20independent%20food%20bank%20survey\\_PRESSRELEASE\\_18.5.22.\\_1.30pm.pdf?id=3904134](https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/944f3722-c7b4-452e-bf43-322aa0c971eb/IFAN%20independent%20food%20bank%20survey_PRESSRELEASE_18.5.22._1.30pm.pdf?id=3904134). Accessed 01.07.22.

## Effective Crisis Support:

***Drawing on expertise across the UK, the APPG has highlighted the importance of choice, dignity and flexibility in delivering crisis support. Are there any other best practice principles that effective crisis support should uphold?***

***and***

***What is the most effective, appropriate, and dignified form of crisis support and why?***

IFAN advocates for a cash first approach to food insecurity which tackles the root causes of poverty through income-focused solutions. This approach extends to the provision of local crisis support in the form of cash payments. This kind of support is preferred by individuals and families due to its ability to enable choice, dignity, and flexibility.<sup>7</sup> Crisis cash payment support is also taken up to a greater extent than its in-kind or voucher counterparts, improves wellbeing and helps to boost the local economy.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, crisis cash payment support, such as a well-functioning social security system, does not rely on unpaid volunteers, donations, and surplus food.

However, for crisis cash payment support to be effective, it should be:

- timely
- accessible
- well promoted
- bolstered by effective advice services and signposting

Adopting these as best practice principles in delivering crisis cash payment support will ensure that people facing financial crises are afforded the choice, dignity, and flexibility that a cash first approach can offer and will bring us closer to the goal of eliminating the need for charitable food aid. Unlike in England, where local welfare assistance has been decimated over the past decade,<sup>9</sup> crisis cash payment support is available in every local

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<sup>7</sup> *Using Covid-19 Funding to Tackle Child Poverty: Guidance for Local Councils in England*, Child Poverty Action Group, January 2021. [https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/Guidance-for-councils-January-2021\\_FINAL.pdf](https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/Guidance-for-councils-January-2021_FINAL.pdf). Accessed 05.07.21.

<sup>8</sup> Simon Watts, *Strengthening the role of local welfare assistance*, Greater Manchester Poverty Action, December 2020. <https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/strengthening-role-lwas>. Accessed 06.07.22. Regarding uptake, see: *Using Covid-19 Funding to Tackle Child Poverty: Guidance for Local Councils in England*, Child Poverty Action Group, January 2021. [https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/Guidance-for-councils-January-2021\\_FINAL.pdf](https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/Guidance-for-councils-January-2021_FINAL.pdf). Accessed 05.07.21. For information on

<sup>9</sup> As of July 2021, almost 1 in 5 local authorities in England did not operate a local welfare assistance scheme [Adam Nichols and Claire Donovan, *The State of Crisis Support: Local Welfare Assistance*

authority in the devolved nations - through the Scottish Welfare Fund in Scotland, the Discretionary Assistance Fund in Wales, and Discretionary Support in Northern Ireland.

These best practice principles should be applied across all four nations to ensure crisis cash payment support is effective.

**Timely:**

Cash payment support needs to be timely for people facing a financial crisis to avoid needing to access charitable food aid provision. The longer someone is waiting for support, the more likely they are to fall behind on rent and utility payments, or to take out loans with long-term financial repercussions. The Centre for Social Justice reported in March 2022, that as many as 1.08 million adults in England could be borrowing from an illegal money lender, often due to an unexpected shortfall in their incomes. Up to 90% of people who had used an illegal money lender said that “they would find it difficult to raise £200–£300 in an emergency.”<sup>10</sup> Having to wait for support in a financial crisis compounds costs, and timely crisis cash payments are essential to prevent destitution.

**Accessible:**

Crisis cash payments also need to be accessible to anyone - including older people, disabled people as well as migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

We know that for many struggling with poverty, particularly older people or people living in rural areas, lack of digital access can be a significant barrier to accessing support. The pandemic has exacerbated the transition of many support services to only being accessible online, leaving many people effectively shut out as a result. Age UK analysis in 2021 showed that nearly two million over 75s in England were digitally excluded.<sup>11</sup> Yet, in England, less than one third of councils allow face-to-face applications for local welfare assistance.<sup>12</sup> The

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through Covid and Beyond, February 2022. <https://endfurniturepoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/02/The-State-of-Crisis-Support-Final.pdf>. Accessed 01.07.22.]

<sup>10</sup> *Swimming With Sharks: Tackling illegal money lending in England*, The Centre for Social Justice, March 2022. <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/swimming-with-sharks>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>11</sup> *Digital inclusion and older people – how have things changed in a Covid-19 world?* Age UK, March 2021. [www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/2021/nearly-two-million-over-75s-in-england-are-still-digitally-excluded-in-a-covid-19-world/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/2021/nearly-two-million-over-75s-in-england-are-still-digitally-excluded-in-a-covid-19-world/). Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>12</sup> Amanda Bailey, *The safety net beneath the safety net? A briefing on local welfare assistance in the North East*, October 2021. [https://nechildpoverty.org.uk/content/images/uploads/The\\_safety\\_net\\_beneath\\_the\\_safety\\_net.pdf](https://nechildpoverty.org.uk/content/images/uploads/The_safety_net_beneath_the_safety_net.pdf). Accessed 01.07.22.

growing digital divide must be addressed for crisis cash payment support to be effective, including the provision of offline alternatives for application processes.

In addition, disabled people are disproportionately likely to be affected by poverty and to require help from food banks.<sup>13</sup> The application and distribution processes for crisis cash payments need to be accessible for disabled people, and their voices must be listened to when designing such options. Applications should be easily available and accessible in different formats such as audio-described and easy-read, as well as available on and off-line. The process of application submission should be made as flexible as possible whether online, by post, email, phone or via home visit (if necessary).<sup>14</sup>

Another group that is disproportionately represented at food banks is migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). Migrants with NRPF status are inordinately represented in independent food banks and removing NRPF status was one of the core calls made in IFAN's members' letter to the Prime Minister and Chancellor in April 2022.<sup>15</sup>

It is also important to consider potential language barriers when identifying and applying for crisis cash payment support. Currently, the majority (58%) of local welfare schemes in England do not provide any translation option at all, and of those that do, in 18% of cases these are difficult to find.<sup>16</sup>

IFAN food aid providers work tirelessly to support disabled people, people who are digitally excluded, and migrants with NRPF who cannot afford to buy food. If the process of applying for and receiving crisis cash payment support is not

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<sup>13</sup> *Structural Inequalities and Food Insecurity Series Briefing Note #2: Structural Inequality, Disability and Food Insecurity*, Independent Food Aid Network, 4th June 2021. [https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/d836cd0a-027c-4028-9fd3-8356333a7e2a/FINAL%20040621%20Structural%20Inequality.%20Disability.%20and%20Food%20Insecurity%20\(2\)%20\(2\).pdf?id=367453](https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/d836cd0a-027c-4028-9fd3-8356333a7e2a/FINAL%20040621%20Structural%20Inequality.%20Disability.%20and%20Food%20Insecurity%20(2)%20(2).pdf?id=367453). Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>14</sup> These considerations are laid out in the DBC's submission to Submission by the Disability Benefits Consortium (DBC) to the Health and Disability Green Paper consultation regarding DWP applications. IFAN is a member of the DBC. [*Shaping future support: Submission by the Disability Benefits Consortium to the Health and Disability Green Paper consultation*, Disability Benefits Consortium, October 2021. <https://disabilitybenefitsconsortium.files.wordpress.com/2021/10/dbc-2021.10-shaping-future-support-green-paper-submission-final.pdf>. Accessed 01.07.22.]

<sup>15</sup> Independent Food Aid Network, *Letter to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor*, 8th April 2022. <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/letter-april22>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>16</sup> Adam Nichols and Claire Donovan, *The State of Crisis Support: Local Welfare Assistance through Covid and Beyond*, February 2022. <https://endfurniturepoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/02/The-State-of-Crisis-Support-Final.pdf> Accessed 01.07.22.

accessible to these groups, then this sort of crisis support will fail to contribute to our shared goal of eliminating the need for charitable food aid.

### **Well promoted:**

As it stands, awareness amongst the general public of the local welfare assistance available to them is very low.<sup>17</sup> As stated in End Furniture Poverty's report on the state of local welfare assistance, this is exacerbated by the "postcode lottery" of local support available in England and inconsistency in the naming of local support funds.<sup>18</sup> Where the administration of local welfare assistance is under-funded, local authorities may be less likely to promote these services due to the risk of being overwhelmed. Properly funded local crisis cash payment support that is recognisable under a consistent name, as is the case in devolved administrations, would improve awareness.<sup>19</sup>

In Scotland, IFAN welcomes the review currently underway to evaluate the funding, promotion, take up, and accessibility of the Scottish Welfare Fund. However, there is already plenty of evidence to support changes that the Scottish Government could commit to in the here and now which would also be critical for their proposed plan to end the need for food banks in Scotland.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, as found in an independent review of the Discretionary Support scheme in Northern Ireland in January 2022, awareness is low and increased promotion is vital for more people to understand the extent of support available and how to access it.<sup>21</sup> In Wales, IFAN welcomes the extension of flexibility applied to the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) in response to the pandemic but more could be done to ensure the DAF is the first port of call in a time of crisis.<sup>22</sup>

### **Effective advice services and signposting:**

Advice and support to help people access local cash first options is fundamental to a cash first approach to food insecurity. Adequate investment in these services is vital to ensure people and support workers can access any crisis cash

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> David Hilber and Dr Mary Anne MacLeod, *The Scottish Welfare Fund: Strengthening the Safety Net A Study of Best Practice*, June 2019.  
<https://amenuforchange.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/a-menu-for-change-swf-report-updated.pdf>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>21</sup> *Independent Review of Discretionary Support*, Department for Communities, February 2022.  
<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/dfc-independent-review-of-discretionary-support-22.pdf>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>22</sup> *The Cost of Living Crisis: a Welsh Action Plan*, The Bevan Foundation, February 2022.  
<https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Cost-of-Living-Action-Plan-Final-.pdf>. Accessed 01.07.22.



payment support. It is critical that advice services can cope with increasing demand and that people don't end up needing to access charitable food aid simply because they didn't know about or haven't been linked to local cash first options. As we co-develop cash first referral leaflets across multiple local authorities in the UK, we are acutely aware that connecting people to advice and support services can make a fundamental difference to whether people access available cash first options.<sup>23</sup> Effective and well-funded advice services and signposting support are integral to helping people to access local financial entitlements and to our shared goal of ending the need for charitable food aid.

### ***What forms of crisis support do people facing destitution prefer to access and why?***

Charitable food aid organisations put a great deal of thought and effort into making the experience of people using their services as dignified as possible and ensuring as much choice as possible. Some IFAN members have chosen to distribute shopping vouchers instead or alongside food parcels.<sup>24</sup> However, despite these efforts, accessing a charitable food aid provider will not allow someone the choice and dignity of having enough money to choose and afford food in the same way as someone with adequate income. For this reason, cash first support has been demonstrated to be the preferred form of crisis support for someone facing financial difficulties.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, while a food parcel or bag of low-cost shopping helps to temporarily alleviate food poverty in the here and now, and food aid provider teams make great efforts to ensure the experience of accessing food aid is as dignified as possible, they cannot resolve underlying poverty.

Aside from avoiding the stigma that can come with the provision of other types of support, cash payments also offer simplicity and flexibility where a food parcel, shopping voucher or in-kind support cannot. The distribution of vouchers, while preferable to food parcels, runs contrary to the way that many people naturally shop -

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<sup>23</sup> 'Worrying About Money?' cash first referral leaflets are co-designed as straightforward resources for people facing money worries or financial crises - and support workers - to quickly see which local agencies are best placed to help with available cash first options. ['Cash First Referral Leaflets', Independent Food Aid Network. <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-leaflets>. Accessed 01.07.22.]

<sup>24</sup> *Using shopping vouchers instead of or alongside food parcel provision*, Independent Food Aid Network, July 2021. <https://ifanuk.org/shopping-voucher-briefing>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>25</sup> Recipients of cash in a pilot initiative by an IFAN member have spoken about their preference for cash over food support [*Cash First: The LCC Pilot*, Legendary Community Club, November 2021. <https://legendarycommunityclub.org/>. Accessed 01.07.22.] 72% people on universal credit said the £20 weekly uplift made buying the essentials easier. [*Dignity or Destitution? The case for keeping the Universal Credit lifeline*, the Trussell Trust, February 2021. <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/dignity-or-destitution-UC-standard-allo-wance-report-final.pdf>. Accessed 01.07.22.]

going to multiple shops due to budget or preference. For example, when the Department for Education announced the Free School Meal Voucher Scheme during the pandemic - many parents were unable to redeem vouchers at their local shops or online, requiring them to pay for travel to the closest large supermarket where these could be redeemed (especially those living in rural areas).<sup>26</sup> Similarly, refugees and asylum seekers who use Aspen cards are often unable to purchase culturally preferred food from local shops that only take payment in cash.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, crisis cash payment support can enhance overall wellbeing. A cash first pilot was run by IFAN Member Legendary Community Club last year.<sup>28</sup> Feedback from participants who had previously been receiving in-kind support or food vouchers spoke of the empowering effect this had. One parent spoke of their children being encouraged “to want to be in the kitchen to discover new recipes.”<sup>29</sup> Being able to offer cash provided “more choice, less waste and better budgeting opportunities.”<sup>30</sup> Providing cash payments as a permanent alternative to emergency food would have an overwhelmingly positive impact on the people in need of support.

***In what ways should crisis support be tailored to meet the needs of people from different demographics? For instance, families with children, disabled people, people with no recourse to public funds, different ethnic groups and religious backgrounds.***

As stated in response to questions above, to be able to effectively tailor crisis cash payments to meet the needs of different demographics, support must be timely, accessible, well promoted, and bolstered by effective advice services and signposting able to support people with different needs. It is also vital to seek out and listen to the voices of people from various groups to design effective systems of support and crisis cash payment administration. It is important to consult with people from the outset on decisions that impact them.

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<sup>26</sup> Anna Tims, *I'm shielding but have to go to a supermarket to spend food vouchers*, The Guardian, 26th May 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2021/may/26/im-shielding-but-have-to-go-to-a-supermarket-to-spend-food-vouchers>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>27</sup> *Structural Inequalities and Food Insecurity Series 29/09/2021 Briefing Note #4: How do immigration policies impact on food insecurity?*, Independent Food Aid Network, 29th September 2021. <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/9ac7e20b-6b9e-4e0b-8fbc-3e53f81e1e75/Final%20briefng%20note%20-%20immigration.pdf?id=3872228>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>28</sup> *Cash First: The LCC Pilot*, Legendary Community Club, November 2021. <https://legendarycommunityclub.org/>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



## The role of food banks:

### ***What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of the provision and supply of emergency food parcels by food banks?***

Nobody should have to turn to charitable food aid because of a lack of income. Food bank managers and volunteers opened their services in response to immediate need in their community and look forward to a future in which they will no longer need to distribute charitable food aid. The disadvantages of supplying food aid, such as emergency food parcels, fit into five main strands:

#### **1. Stigma and lack of dignity.**

The sense of stigma and shame around food bank use is well documented.<sup>31</sup> Recent research from Cardiff University published in June 2022 stated that, particularly in small close-knit communities, people were likely to wait until they were 'absolutely desperate' to seek help, with some walking 12 miles to a different town to receive support.<sup>32</sup> No matter how the provision operates (food bank, food pantry, social supermarket), having to rely on charity to feed yourself and your family is a denial of basic human rights including the right to food and nutrition.

#### **2. Lack of choice to meet dietary and cultural preferences.**

While IFAN member organisations work incredibly hard to try and tailor food support to meet people's needs and preferences, their supply is often reliant on donations and surplus food offering limited choice.<sup>33</sup> It's extremely challenging for food aid organisations to meet the cultural and dietary needs of the increasingly large numbers of people seeking their support. This was made even more difficult by food supply issues in the Autumn of 2021 as well as by increasing demand and dropping donations seen so far this year.<sup>34</sup> People know how to cater for their own needs and should be able to access an adequate income to

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<sup>31</sup> Kayleigh Garthwaite, *Stigma, shame and 'people like us': an ethnographic study of foodbank use in the UK*, Policy Press 24:3. 277-289. <https://doi.org/10.1332/175982716X14721954314922>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>32</sup> Sarah Dickens, *Cost of living: Food bank shame drives needy away - study*, BBC Wales, 3rd June 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-61664584>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>33</sup> IFAN has co-developed cultural and nutritional guidelines for food parcels for the use of their members. ['Nutritional Guidelines for Food Parcels', Independent Food Aid Network. <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/nutritional-guidelines>. Accessed 01.07.22.]

<sup>34</sup> IFAN has developed nutritional and cultural guidelines for members providing food support, but as supply is depleting this becomes more challenging ['Nutritional Guidelines', Independent Food Aid Network, <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/nutritional-guidelines>. Accessed 07.07.22.]

do so.

### **3. Exacerbates health inequalities.**

There are significant physical health implications for people who are food insecure regardless of whether they use charitable food aid. Food insecurity will negatively impact health both in terms of the quality and quantity of food affordable and available to an individual as well as their ability to manage and treat ill-health.<sup>35</sup> This also has repercussions for mental health including the stress of not having enough money to feed your family, difficult decisions on skipping meals, reducing portions, or being restricted to an extreme lack of choice.<sup>36</sup> Findings from a report co-produced by IFAN, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) and Tom Pollard considered the impact of poverty and food bank use on people's mental health. Based on a series of interviews, findings touched on feelings of isolation, shame, and suicidal thoughts.<sup>37</sup> The widening of health inequalities in the UK since the pandemic is well-documented.<sup>38</sup> And this growing chasm has been exacerbated by the normalisation of a charitable food aid system in place of the changes needed to raise people's incomes, relieve the pressure of food insecurity, and ensure a healthy and nutritious diet affordable to all.

### **4. Food banks only support a fraction of the people struggling to afford food.**

The distribution of emergency food parcels only reaches a fraction of people struggling to afford food. Despite shockingly high food bank statistics, we know that most people who are food insecure will not access a food bank. Recent Food Standards Agency (FSA) data show that 15% of people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland were severely and moderately food insecure from April-June 2021, with only 4% using a food bank. A disadvantage of the food bank model is that, despite high levels of use, this sort of inadequate support does not reach a large number of people struggling to afford food.

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<sup>35</sup> Douglas, F., MacIver, E. & Yuill, C. A qualitative investigation of lived experiences of long-term health condition management with people who are food insecure. BMC Public Health 20, 1309 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09299-9>. Accessed 06.07.22.

<sup>36</sup> Sabine Goodwin, Food poverty set to worsen as September's Universal Credit cliff edge approaches, BMJ Opinion, August 2021. <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/08/26/food-poverty-set-to-worsen-as-septembers-universal-credit-cliff-edge-approaches/>. Accessed 06.07.22.

<sup>37</sup> Tom Pollard, Pushed to the Edge: Poverty, food banks and mental health, February 2022. <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/blog/mental-health>. Accessed 06.07.22.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Marmot, Build Back Fairer: The COVID-19 Marmot Review, The Health Foundation, December 2020. <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/build-back-fairer-the-covid-19-marmot-review>. Accessed 06.07.22.

Figure 1: Food insecurity and food bank use (England, Wales and Northern Ireland). *Source: Food Standards Agency Food & You 2: Wave 3. Data from April - June 2021. All food insecurity questions ask about a lack of money for food. Graphic: Dr Rachel Loopstra, Department of Nutritional Sciences, King's College London.*



## 5. The charitable food aid system is unsustainable.

The charitable food aid model, often reliant on surplus food, has proved itself to be unsustainable, particularly over the past year. IFAN members have struggled to cope in the recent cost of living crisis with the combination of a surge in demand alongside a drop in donations.<sup>39</sup> Just as demand is rising, IFAN members have been reaching breaking point - with some having to reduce the size of their parcels, dip into charitable reserves to pay for food, or even consider turning people away.

## 6. It's a "sticking plaster" solution.

Finally, the supply of charitable food aid is a "sticking plaster" solution that cannot help with people's financial situation in the long-term and cannot address the underlying issues behind people falling into financial hardship in the first place. Most independent food banks have only been in existence in the UK over the last 12 years.<sup>40</sup> Over this time food insecurity levels, the number of charitable food

<sup>39</sup> *Independent Food Banks in the UK: May 2022*, Independent Food Aid Network, May 2022. [https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/944f3722-c7b4-452e-bf43-322aa0c971eb/IFAN%20independent%20food%20bank%20survey\\_PRESSRELEASE\\_18.5.22\\_1.30pm.pdf?id=3904134](https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/944f3722-c7b4-452e-bf43-322aa0c971eb/IFAN%20independent%20food%20bank%20survey_PRESSRELEASE_18.5.22_1.30pm.pdf?id=3904134)

<sup>40</sup> Dr Rachel Loopstra et al, A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network, December 2019. [https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/0681ad7a-2d07-489f-9c11-77dc3d1aa968/Report\\_IndependentFoodBankStudy\\_Dec2019-pdf.pdf?id=201158](https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/0681ad7a-2d07-489f-9c11-77dc3d1aa968/Report_IndependentFoodBankStudy_Dec2019-pdf.pdf?id=201158). Accessed 01.07.22.

aid providers, and the number of emergency food parcels distributed have grown relentlessly.

***In a future society where food banks are no longer needed to provide emergency food, what are the values and attributes of food banks that you would want to see held onto by communities, and why?***

The proliferation of food banks and charitable food aid organisations over the last 12 years was born out of the values and attributes that already existed in communities across the UK. Food aid organisations have opened as a response to immediate need in communities and with the intention to rectify the injustice that people are unable to afford essentials such as food. Strengthening the safety net and helping to make sure people are prevented from falling into financial crisis is in line with these values.

Volunteers give their time, skills and energy to make life better within their community. However, the charitable food aid system is not an efficient way to help people who are food insecure and it's clear that a cash first approach to food insecurity provides an effective alternative. In this sense, the time and energy of tens of thousands of volunteers are currently being “misspent” on handling and moving food to support this system.<sup>41</sup> The end for the need for charitable food aid would mean that volunteers could use their valuable time and resources to strengthen their community in more effective ways. For example through Community Hubs or befriending and other community support services.

For these organisations to be able to stop distributing food aid, it is vital that their teams feel confident in the effectiveness of the UK's social security safety net and in the local advice and support available to people. These organisations may well have a role in a future without the need for charitable food aid as community food venues or community hubs. However, it is vital that everyone taking part in these initiatives would be there out of choice not due to inadequate income. If they are forced to turn to community food initiatives because they cannot afford food, then we have not met the shared aim of eliminating the need for charitable food aid.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In 2017, IFAN and the Trussell trust estimated that volunteers across the UK were 'giving 'at least £30 million' a year in unpaid work to support food banks.' 'Food Bank Volunteer Hours Research', Independent Food Aid Network. <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/food-bank-volunteer-hours>.

<sup>42</sup> IFAN argued this in its response to the Scottish Government's Draft Plan to End the Need for Food Banks. [IFAN's response to the Scottish Government's consultation on the draft national plan for ending the need for food banks, Independent Food Aid Network, January 2022. <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/blog/ifan-response>. Accessed 01.07.22].

Food aid organisations have a key role to play in bringing about this change and it's important that the voices of community organisations are heard to best understand the needs of individual communities. Exit strategies should focus on the confidence of food aid provider teams in local support and advice services and the availability of cash first options at a local level.

### **The effectiveness of alternatives to providing emergency food:**

***What are the comparative advantages and/or disadvantages of providing other forms of crisis support to food banks, namely: low cost community food support (e.g. social supermarkets, food pantries), other in kind support, and cash grants?***

Food poverty is poverty and results from lack of income. It cannot be solved through the provision of food whether through low-cost community food support such as social supermarkets and food pantries or through food banks. See Table 1 below for a comparison of different forms of crisis support.

The only way to end the need for charitable food aid is through raising people's incomes. IFAN has produced an infographic (see Figure 2 below) showing a path away from the use of emergency food parcels. While shopping vouchers and some forms of in-kind support may offer more choice and dignity, to address the root causes of poverty, and end the need for charitable food aid, we need adequate social security payments, fair wages and job security, and reliable local crisis cash payment support. If we continue to see the proliferation of crisis support that doesn't take a cash first approach to food insecurity, then we will not see an end for the need for charitable food aid.

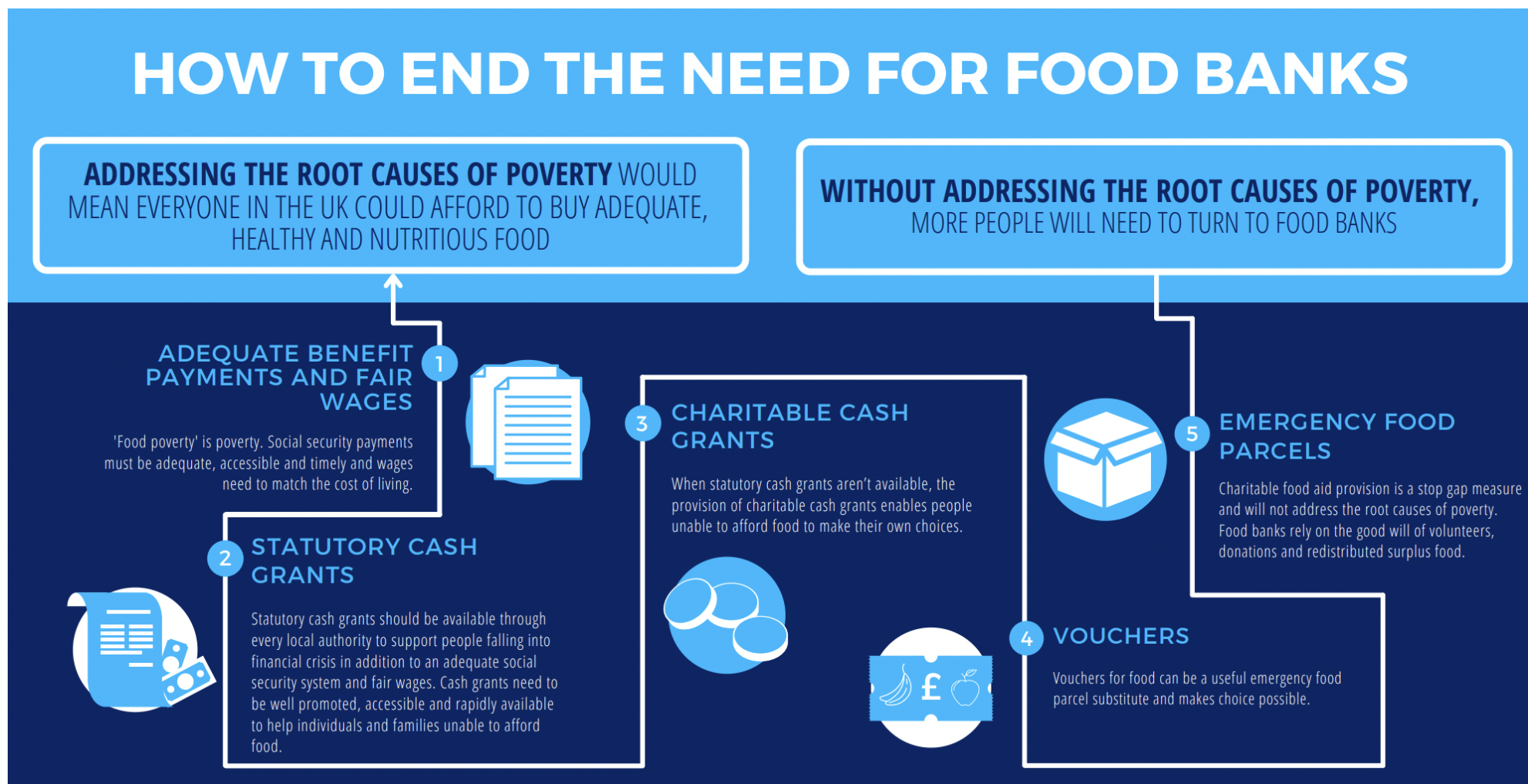
Table 1: Different forms of crisis support

Type of crisis support	Does it offer choice?	Does it offer dignity?	Is it sustainable? (use of surplus food and volunteers)	Does it address the root cause of poverty?
<b>Food Bank:</b> <i>A charitable or community organisation that distributes food parcels to people experiencing financial hardship. May operate on a referral basis.</i>	Food bank teams usually aren't in a position to offer more than some choice or no choice.	Teams will work to enhance people's experience of using food banks, but charitable response is not as dignified as a rights-based response.	Reliant on donations, food surplus and volunteers. This approach is not sustainable.	Food parcels distributed by food banks cannot address the root causes of poverty.
<b>Social Supermarket:</b> <i>A charitable or community shop helping people unable to afford full-priced food. May operate on a membership model.</i>	Can offer more choice than a food bank with a small cost.	May offer more dignity through choice but charitable response is not as dignified as a rights-based response.	Like food banks, these operations are usually reliant on donations, food surplus and volunteers. This approach is not sustainable.	Like the distribution of food parcels, this approach does not address the root causes of poverty.
<b>Food Pantries:</b> <i>A charitable or community shop helping people unable to afford full-priced food. May operate on a membership model.</i>	Can offer more choice than a food bank with a small cost.	May offer more dignity through choice but charitable response is not as dignified as a rights-based response.	Like food banks, these operations are usually reliant on donations, food surplus and volunteers. This approach is not sustainable.	Like the distribution of food parcels, this approach does not address the root causes of poverty.
<b>Shopping vouchers/cards distributed by food banks:</b> <i>Can be exchanged at pre-determined shop(s) for food. Some IFAN members distribute vouchers instead or alongside food parcels.</i>	Provides more choice than a food parcel but still restrictive/may not allow someone to meet needs and preferences.	More dignity in terms of choice but stigma still attached to use of vouchers and is second-tier to using money at shops without restriction.		This approach does not necessarily address the root causes of poverty.
<b>Shopping vouchers/cards distributed by referral agencies:</b> <i>Can be exchanged at pre-determined shop(s) for food. The Scottish Government is piloting the use of shopping cards as an alternative to a food bank</i>	Provides more choice than a food parcel but still restrictive/may not allow someone to meet needs and preferences.	More dignity in terms of choice but stigma still attached to use of vouchers and is second-tier to using money at shops without restriction.		This approach does not necessarily address the root causes of poverty.



referral from Citizens Advice agencies.				
<b>Charitable cash grants:</b> <i>Direct cash transfers for people in financial crisis delivered by a third sector organisation.</i>	A charitable cash grant offers more choice than a voucher or in-kind support.	A charitable cash grant offers more dignity through choice than vouchers or in-kind support.		This approach increases people's incomes but still relies on charitable distribution.
<b>Shopping cards/vouchers distributed by local authorities:</b> <i>Can be exchanged at predetermined shop(s) for food.</i>	Provides more choice than a food parcel but still restrictive/may not allow someone to meet needs and preferences.	More dignity in terms of choice but stigma still attached to use of vouchers and is second-tier to using money at shops without restriction. Sometimes challenging to access local authority distributed shopping vouchers.		This approach does not necessarily address the root causes of poverty.
<b>In-kind support from local authorities:</b> For example, white goods for people in financial difficulty.	Limited choice on offer.	Lack of choice does not provide dignity.		This approach will not address the root causes of poverty.
<b>Crisis cash payments from local authorities:</b> <i>Direct cash payments for people in financial crisis.</i>	Allows maximum choice for someone to meet needs and preferences.	Crisis cash payments are empowering and offer dignity to someone in a financial crisis if timely, well promoted, and accessible.	A sustainable response not reliant on surplus food, donations. Charities, and volunteers.	Putting cash into people's pockets makes it possible to meet competing needs including for food and helps to address the root causes of poverty.

Figure 2: IFAN infographic on *How to end the need for food banks*



## ***What lessons can be learnt from the pandemic about the role of cash-based support?***

During the pandemic, the UK Government funded surplus food redistribution as a response to a rapid increase in food insecurity.<sup>43</sup> Instead of using this money to strengthen local welfare assistance and increase benefit payments, a huge amount of money and resources were put into further institutionalising a system that:

- **put the health and safety of volunteers and frontline workers at risk.**  
Transporting, packaging, and redistributing surplus food relies on the work of countless numbers of volunteers. Many food bank volunteers are retired people who fell into the category of vulnerable to Covid-19 infection. IFAN members wrote to the Prime Minister in January of 2021 about the unnecessary risk their teams were being put under.<sup>44</sup>
- **put the health and safety of people in financial crisis at risk.**  
Instead of isolating at home, doing weekly shops or ordering food online like much of the rest of the population – many people who couldn't afford to buy food had to travel to local food banks and pick up parcels. If the food bank operated on a referral basis, they also had to try and secure a referral when many local agencies were closed. Many food banks changed their models to deliver food parcels further increasing risk for volunteers and food bank teams.
- **was insufficient to support the people who needed it.**  
Surplus food often spoils by the time it reaches food banks or may not meet dietary needs and preferences. As our members report, much of it is thrown away, and, ultimately, this is a far more wasteful approach than cash first support which would enable people to buy what they need.

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<sup>43</sup> In May and December of 2020. [*£16 million for food charities to provide meals for those in need*, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 8th May 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/16-million-for-food-charities-to-provide-meals-for-those-in-need>. Accessed 01.07.22. *New £16 million Winter Support grant to FareShare to provide meals for those in need*, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 1st December 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-16-million-winter-support-grant-to-fareshare-to-provide-meals-for-those-in-need>. Accessed 01.07.22.]

<sup>44</sup> Independent Food Aid Network Letter to the Prime Minister, 4th January 2021. [https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/f2659244-fb8b-4ee2-bfc102eed12850b7/IFAN\\_LETTER\\_FOR%20THE%20PRIME%20MINISTER\\_4.1.21..pdf](https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/f2659244-fb8b-4ee2-bfc102eed12850b7/IFAN_LETTER_FOR%20THE%20PRIME%20MINISTER_4.1.21..pdf). Accessed 01.07.22.

If more appropriate cash first options had been made available during the pandemic, the Government could have supported more people, and protected the health of both food bank teams and the people who needed their help.

An example of cash-based support that produced a positive impact was the £20 a week uplift made to Universal Credit in response to the challenges of the pandemic. This saw a significant reduction in severe and moderate food insecurity. Data from the Family Resources Survey published in March 2022 say that there was a 16 percentage drop in food insecurity, from 43% to 27%, for households in receipt of Universal Credit comparing April 2019 to March 2020 with April 2020 to March 2021. For people on legacy benefits, and therefore not entitled to the uplift, there was no reduction in food insecurity.<sup>45</sup> The removal of the uplift in October 2021 was estimated to have plunged 500,000 people into poverty and was strongly protested by many anti-poverty groups at the time.<sup>46</sup>

Local authorities using funding during the pandemic for cash first support rather than bolstering charitable food aid were able to demonstrate the difference that cash-based support schemes could make at a local level. These included the Flexible Food Funds in Moray<sup>47</sup> and Argyll & Bute<sup>48</sup> in Scotland and the Liverpool Citizens Support Scheme<sup>49</sup> in Liverpool, and the Household Support Fund and Individual Assistance Payment (IAP) in Barking and Dagenham<sup>50</sup> in England.

With food banks at breaking point in the current cost of living crisis, the lessons of the pandemic have continued to resonate. Charitable food aid is unsustainable and cash-based support as an alternative is more cost-effective, practical and achieves better outcomes both for people struggling to afford food and to reduce food insecurity levels.

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<sup>45</sup> *Family Resources Survey: financial year 2020 to 2021*, Department for Work and Pensions, March 2022. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2020-to-2021>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>46</sup> *Coalition warns it would be a terrible mistake to cut the £20 uplift to Universal Credit*, JRF, 29th November 2020. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/coalition-warns-it-would-be-terrible-mistake-cut-20-uplift-universal-credit>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>47</sup> *Food fund for those facing financial hardship re-opens for applications*, Moray Council, 18th November 2020. <https://newsroom.moray.gov.uk/news/food-fund-for-those-facing-financial-hardship-re-opens-for-applications>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>48</sup> 'Flexible Food Fund', Argyll and Bute Council. <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/forms/flexible-food-fund>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>49</sup> 'Liverpool Citizens Support Scheme', Liverpool City Council. <https://ehd.liverpool.gov.uk/kb5/liverpool/fsd/service.page?id=xQfAwKBil8g>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>50</sup> 'Household Support Fund', Barking and Dagenham Council. <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/household-support-fund-and-individual-assistance-payment-iap-hardship-support-schemes>. Accessed 01.07.22.

***How do experiences of alternatives to emergency food (low cost community support, other in-kind support, cash grants) differ for different demographic groups? For instance, families with children, disabled people, people with no recourse to public funds, and different ethnic and religious backgrounds.***

Research shows that disabled people and migrants, asylum seekers and refugees face specific challenges when accessing charitable food aid. Through joint webinar sessions with Feeding Britain, Sustain, and the University of York, IFAN heard first-hand from experts by experience about these challenges.<sup>51</sup> For example, for asylum seekers this included difficulties with language barriers and lack of culturally appropriate options at food banks as well as trying to meet competing needs when living on £39.63 a week.<sup>52</sup> Disabled experts by experience spoke of accessibility issues and a lack of appropriate choices - especially for people whose disability requires specific dietary requirements.<sup>53</sup> Tailoring food and in-kind support to meet the needs of different demographic groups is an enormous challenge, and charitable food aid groups often make great efforts to enhance the experience of their service users. However, looking at Table 1 (above) for a comparison of alternatives to food bank support, it is clear, when looking at all the alternatives to the food bank model, crisis cash payments offer people the most dignity and choice. Having the income to make choices is the most important and effective way to make sure the needs of these different demographic groups can be met.

***How do experiences of alternatives to emergency food (other food-based support, other in-kind support, cash grants) vary across different geographic areas? For instance, rural and urban areas, areas at high risk of destitution (e.g. coastal communities, post-industrial towns).***

We know that, regardless of location and the levels of destitution in any given area, crisis cash payment support gives individuals in crisis more choice and dignity than food, shopping vouchers, or in-kind support (see Table 1). The challenges faced alongside tackling food insecurity, or lack of income, in different areas (rural, urban, coastal communities, post-industrial towns) may be different, and these will require

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<sup>51</sup> 'Structural Inequalities and Food Insecurity Webinar Series', Independent Food Aid Network. <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/webinar-series>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>52</sup> *Structural Inequalities and Food Insecurity Webinar Series 29/09/2021 Briefing Note #4: How do immigration policies impact on food insecurity?*, Independent Food Aid Network, 29th September 2021. <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/9ac7e20b-6b9e-4e0b-8fbc-3e53f81e1e75/Final%20briefng%20note%20-%20immigration.pdf?id=3872228>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>53</sup> *Structural Inequalities and Food Insecurity Webinar Series Briefing Note #2: Structural Inequality, Disability and Food Insecurity*, Independent Food Aid Network, 4th June 2021 [https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/d836cd0a-027c-4028-9fd3-8356333a7e2a/FINAL%20040621%20Structural%20Inequality,%20Disability,%20and%20Food%20Insecurity%20\(2\)%20\(2\).pdf?id=367453](https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/d836cd0a-027c-4028-9fd3-8356333a7e2a/FINAL%20040621%20Structural%20Inequality,%20Disability,%20and%20Food%20Insecurity%20(2)%20(2).pdf?id=367453). Accessed 01.07.22.

specific and targeted approaches (such as an emphasis on availability of public transport or internet access). As stated earlier in this response, when designing appropriate support, it is vital to seek out and listen to the voices of food aid and community organisations who understand the needs of individual communities.

### **Learning from best practice and new ideas:**

#### ***What can we learn from international examples of best practice in terms of effective emergency provision in supporting people facing destitution – and what has the impact been?***

Research on emergency provision in the UK and internationally show that cash payments provide better dignity, better value for money, and better outcomes than the provision of emergency food. The Department for International Development (DFID) stated that when cash transfers are provided they “empower the poorest and most vulnerable people to make their own decisions and enable them to spend it in their own communities. Money can be withdrawn and spent when needed, saved up, [or invested].”<sup>54</sup> DFID also emphasised the value of cash payments which “[cut] waste, delivers value for money for UK taxpayers and makes the cash go further.”<sup>55</sup> A systematic review by DFID in 2016 on humanitarian aid in a number of countries conclusively stated that “the effects of cash transfers are strongest for food security.”<sup>56</sup>

We can also learn from international examples about the consequences of not taking urgent action on the proliferation of food banking as a response to growing food insecurity. Developments in the United States and Canada show how the unchecked growth of charitable food has now become embedded within the social system.<sup>57</sup> Food

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<sup>54</sup> Cash transfers: Help for those who need it most, Department for International Development, 11th January 2017. <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/cash-transfers-help-for-those-who-need-it-most>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *Cash-Based Approaches in Humanitarian Emergencies: A Systematic Review*, Department for International Development, May 2016 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0895bed915d3cfd0001da/61229\\_Cash-in-humanitarian-emergencies\\_policy-response-May2016.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0895bed915d3cfd0001da/61229_Cash-in-humanitarian-emergencies_policy-response-May2016.pdf). Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>57</sup> *Charitable food provision as an emergency response: sharing evidence from Canada, the USA and the UK*, UK Poverty Alliance. [https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/dfdd1734-47c6-4cac-b6ec-914c35eced1b/14-February-2019-Summary-of-UK-Food-Poverty-Alliance-November-2018-Roundtable\\_For-EHUK-website.pdf](https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/dfdd1734-47c6-4cac-b6ec-914c35eced1b/14-February-2019-Summary-of-UK-Food-Poverty-Alliance-November-2018-Roundtable_For-EHUK-website.pdf). Accessed 01.07.22. Cash first measures in the United States since the outbreak of the pandemic (namely the Stimulus Check and Enhanced Child Tax Credit) have proven to be more effective in tackling food insecurity than third sector support. However, it's currently unclear if the Child Tax Credit will be renewed. [J. Berg and A. Gibson, *Why the World Should Not Follow the Failed United States Model of Fighting Domestic Hunger*, International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, January 2022 Jan 12;19(2):814. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8775625>. Accessed 06.07.22.]



banks are still a relatively new phenomenon in the UK with most having been established since 2010. There is still time to reverse this trend.<sup>58</sup>

The UK is the sixth richest economy in the world, and the outcomes of using cash transfers show that it is “cheaper and more effective for both households and states to provide hungry families with cash for food rather than to provide food directly.”<sup>59</sup> There is also plenty of evidence on the success of a cash first approach at a UK local level in helping individuals and families facing destitution.<sup>60</sup>

***How can rights-based approaches be used to support people facing destitution (for example, a statutory right to food, right to social security)? What role could these approaches play in tackling short-term crises and ending the need for food banks?***

The existence of a right to food in the UK would provide an opportunity to set a national standard for a quality of life that the Government should be striving to deliver for all people. Our Government is a signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and Sustainable Development Goals: Zero Hunger. Using a rights-based approach would be a powerful tool in reversing the normalisation of charitable food aid and the expectation that has steadily grown over the last 12 years that it is the responsibility of volunteers and charitable organisations to support people who cannot afford food. Ensuring a right to food would be a fundamental shift away from the charity-based model which we have seen to be an ineffective and unsustainable response to food insecurity. A right to food would compel the Government to take responsibility for growing hunger and food insecurity in the UK.

Ensuring a right to food would prioritise raising people’s incomes and provide an opportunity to take a joined-up approach to food insecurity. For example, this would involve looking at connected issues such as the cost and availability of transport to shops which would also help to ease pressures on households currently struggling to afford food. The right to food would give people choice, dignity and a greater ability to participate in society.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> IFAN is a founding member of the Global Solidarity Alliance for food, health and social justice that advocates for adequate food and nutrition as a fundamental human right. [Global Solidarity Alliance for Food, Health and Social Justice. <https://rightsnotcharity.org>. Accessed 07.07.22.]

<sup>59</sup> Stephen Bush, *Cash transfers work. So why don't states do more of them?*, Financial Times, 20th June 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/2925da6a-20fa-466a-9b2e-d6c87a0a9470>. Accessed 01.07.22.

<sup>60</sup> See a list of resources on the IFAN website [‘IFAN and Cash First’, Independent Food Aid Network. <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first>. Accessed 01.07.22.]

<sup>61</sup> IFAN is a member of the Scottish Food Coalition who are calling for a right to food in Scots law

***How can setting income levels, such as Minimum Income Guarantee or a Universal Basic Income, be used to support people facing destitution? What role could these measures play in tackling short-term crisis and ending the need for food banks?***

Much like establishing a right to food in national law, setting an income level such as Universal Basic Income or a Minimum Income Guarantee would lay out a minimum standard of living and prevent people from relying on charitable food aid because the social security system is unable to provide adequate support. This could take the form of a minimum guaranteed social security payment that ring-fences a minimum amount for essential food expenditure.

Independent food banks increasingly support people who are in work. Setting a minimum income level would also provide an opportunity to require higher standards from employers.<sup>62</sup>

***From your experience and/or observation, what is the one policy change you would prioritise to end the need for food banks?***

The single most important policy change that would help to end the need for charitable food aid would be to bring social security payments in line with the cost of living.

IFAN members are increasingly supporting people who are already in receipt of all the social security payments they are entitled to and are still unable to afford food. Charitable food aid organisations see a high number of referrals coming from local authority services and job centres reflecting the reality that the state is relying on a charitable food aid system to be there to support people as social security payments are regularly not enough for people to make ends meet.

The focus of this Inquiry has been on crisis support, and while crisis cash payment support is fundamental to reducing charitable food aid provision, systemic changes need to be made to stop people from falling into financial crisis in the first place. No matter how well we restructure crisis support and bolster advice services, it's not possible to resolve people's lack of income if social security payments are not enough to live on.

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['Right to Food', Scottish Food Coalition. <https://www.foodcoalition.scot/right-to-food.html>. Accessed 01.07.22.]

<sup>62</sup> See data on IFAN members supporting people in employment. 'IFAN data since the outbreak of Covid-19', Independent Food Aid Network. <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/ifan-data-since-covid-19>. Accessed 06.07.21.

