Written submission to Just Fair's call for evidence to inform their 2025 report to: the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

As part of the seventh periodic review of the UK



Independent Food Aid Network

September 2024

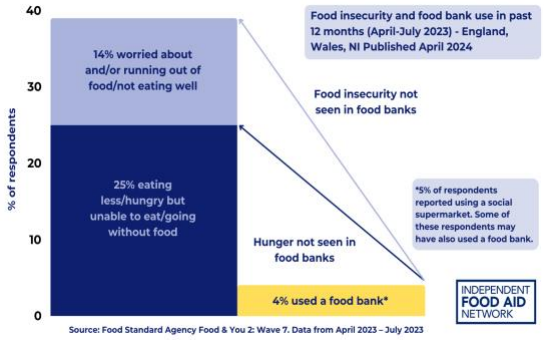
Call for Written Evidence: Just Fair report to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
Submission from the Independent Food Aid Network, September 2024

Introduction:
The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) supports and advocates on behalf of independent food aid providers based across the UK including hundreds of independent food banks running outside of the Trussell network.[1] IFAN campaigns for a 'cash first' or income-focused approach to the drivers of food bank use and wider food insecurity. The network envisions a country without the need for charitable food aid where adequate and nutritious food is affordable for all.

This submission relates to Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the right to an adequate standard of living including the right to food as well as other socio-economic rights including the right to work, right to health, and the right to social security.

Food bank use and wider food insecurity:
No one should have to turn to charity to be able to eat. Yet, over the last decade and a half, millions of people have been pushed to the doors of thousands of food banks and other food aid providers, because they haven't got enough money to afford food.[2] However, these devastating figures only tell a fraction of the story. According to recent Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data just 14% of households reporting severe food insecurity accessed a food bank.[3] Recent Food Standards Agency (FSA) data also demonstrated that most respondents reporting food insecurity did not access a food bank nor a social supermarket.

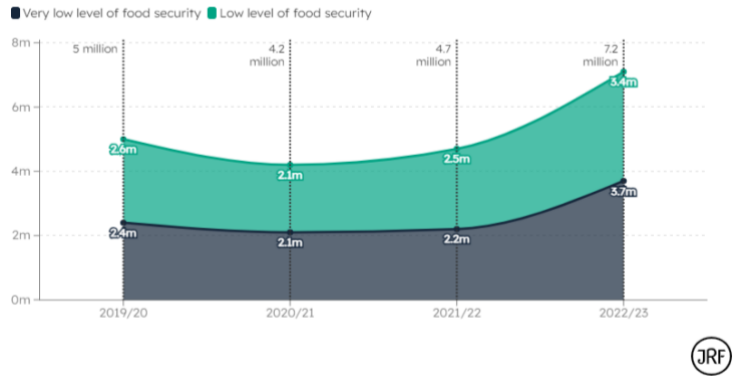
Figure 1: Food Standards Agency (FSA) Food insecurity and food bank use in past 12 months (April to July 2023)



[1] The Independent Food Aid Network website
[2] People unable to afford food access food banks but also other forms of charitable food aid including social supermarkets, food pantries, food larders and soup kitchens.
[3] Severe food insecurity relates to the eating patterns of one or more household members being disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacks money and other resources for food.

DWP data also tells us that 7.2 million people reported food insecurity in 2022/23, rising from 4.7 million in 2021/22.[4] For 3.7 million people this meant skipping meals or going hungry.[5]

Figure 2: Joseph Rowntree Foundation: Number of individuals in the UK experiencing low or very low food insecurity from 2019/20 to 2022/3



Responding to food insecurity with charitable food aid has proved ineffective and unsustainable. Since the emergence of more and more food banks as a response to the impact of austerity policies, millions upon millions of food parcels have been distributed by thousands of food banks.[6] However, it's clear from data collated by the DWP as well as the FSA that food insecurity has risen just as charitable food aid has been distributed.[7] [8] A food parcel can only ever temporarily alleviate hunger and cannot be effective at reducing food insecurity and poverty.[9] Furthermore, IFAN's recent data has consistently found that independent food bank teams are being overstretched and overwhelmed by high demand.[10] [11] Just as demand has increased, food, and financial donations have fallen, and surplus food supplies have dwindled while volunteer burnout has become commonplace.[12] [13] Using redistributed

[4] Joseph Rowntree Foundation: Annual poverty figures showed Government failed to protect most vulnerable from cost-of-living crisis, March 2024
[5] 'Who is experiencing food insecurity in the UK?, House of Commons Library, April 2024
[6] The Trussell Trust food bank network represents just some of the UK's food banks and doesn't operate in a quarter of all local authorities.
[7] Department for Work and Pensions, Family Resources Survey, March 2024
[8] Food Standards Agency, Food and You 2: Wave 7, April 2023-July 2023
[9] Poverty Research and Advocacy Network blog by IFAN's Sabine Goodwin: Latest DWP poverty statistics must surely provide the ultimate wake-up call
[10] Independent Food Aid Network: Data
[11] The Big Issue: Food banks near 'breaking point' as poverty soars, PM told, April 2022
[12] The Big Issue: UK's poverty crisis is spiralling out of control - and there's only one way to fix it By IFAN's Sabine Goodwin, November 2023
[13] The BMJ: Food banks are running out of resources – there's no time to lose, By Sabine Goodwin, November 2023

surplus food to alleviate hunger has proved itself to be an ineffectual and unsustainable response to food insecurity and poverty.[14]

What next?

A cash first approach to food insecurity is inextricably linked with the right to food and IFAN welcomes growing calls for socio-economic rights to be enshrined into UK law.[15]

Despite the new Government's manifesto commitment to end the "moral scar of emergency food parcels", there is little indication that we are any closer to reducing the hardship currently faced by millions of people across the UK or the unsustainable pressure on charitable food aid teams.[16] Inadequate social security payments and wages as well as benefit deductions, the five-week wait for Universal Credit, and insecure work alongside punitive policies such as the benefit cap, sanctions, two-child limit, and No Recourse to Public Funds status are continuing to drive unconscionable levels of food insecurity.[17] Inadequate investment in the advice section means that according to Policy in Practice, social security payments worth £23 billion go unclaimed.[18]

Structural inequalities exacerbated by policy decisions prevent many UK citizens from being able to afford food. Leaving food banks and other charitable food aid organisations to respond to food insecurity perpetuates this injustice. As Michael Fakri, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, explained to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee in November 2022 that: "The fact that a country like the United Kingdom has a developed welfare system means that you are not starting from zero. You have mechanisms that can be advanced."

A critical step would be the commencement of Section 1 of the Equality Act. Although mention of this was missing in the recent King's Speech, the Labour Party's election manifesto did commit to the establishment of the 2010 Equality Act's socio-economic duty which could, potentially provide a framework to reduce poverty and enact the Right to Food.

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[14] Trussell Trust: Hunger in the UK, June 2023
[15] Turning the tide: Cash First and the Right to Food, By Sabine Goodwin and Maria Marshall, May 2023
[16] The Big Issue: DWP extending Household Support Fund is welcome – but it's a drop in the ocean, By Sabine Goodwin, September 2024
[17] IFAN: Eradicating food insecurity while ending the need for food banks and other forms of charitable food in the UK, September 2024
[18] Policy in Practice: Missing out 2024

As IFAN wrote to the Prime Minister on the 5th of July, the new Government has a once in a generation opportunity to reverse the tide of poverty that has swept the country over the past fourteen years.[19]

IFAN is calling for immediate, cash first actions to reduce severe food insecurity leading to the adoption of rights to an adequate standard of living, work, health, and social security.

[19] IFAN's letter to our new Prime Minister, July 2024