Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) submission to the Right to Food UK Commission

June 2026

Executive Summary

This submission to the Right to Food UK Commission outlines the vision and objectives of the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) which represents and supports hundreds of grassroots independent food aid providers operating in nearly 800 locations across the UK. IFAN has long championed and advocated for a cash-first or income-focused approach to food insecurity and poverty and the embedding of policies to increase people's incomes through fair wages, secure work, and adequate social security payments as well as for access to advice and support to maximise income. IFAN publishes data, briefings, and infographics, and provides platforms for member organisations to share evidence with researchers, government inquiries, and the media. IFAN is a strong advocate for partnership work and cross-sector collaboration and works with academics, co-runs events, and co-publishes reports.

IFAN has highlighted, promoted, and reported the efficacy of cash-first approaches and interventions in reducing food insecurity and has worked to ensure people can find advice and support to maximise income long before they reach crisis point through its cash-first 'Worrying About Money?' resources project which has expanded from Scotland into every nation in the UK. This project was the focus of the sixth action in Scotland's pioneering Cash-First: Towards Ending the Need for Food Banks plan (2023) and IFAN took part in the DWP's co-design process for the new Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) guidance in England alongside other members of the Crisis Support Working Group (CSWG) and is part of the newly formed CRF Alliance.

A major theme within IFAN's advocacy to date has been challenging the narrative that surplus food redistribution can address hunger and poverty. IFAN warns that the National Programme to Redistribute Surplus Food, which will triple surplus redistribution, risks entrenching charitable food aid responses just as cash-first interventions and approaches are rightly gaining traction.

IFAN has consistently highlighted that food bank usage in the UK represents the 'tip of the iceberg' referring to Department for Work and Pensions' Family Resources survey data on severe food insecurity and food bank use. IFAN has drawn attention to the exhaustion and burnout experienced by food aid staff and volunteers as well as their struggles with capacity to cope with demand arguing that a charitable response to poverty is neither effective nor sustainable (multibanks, baby banks fall into the same category of 'sticking plaster' options).

IFAN points out that progress is being made towards ending mass dependence on emergency food parcels in the form of the lifting of the two-child limit and the establishment of the CRF but much more needs to be done to establish income equality including removing the five-week wait for Universal Credit, sanctions, the benefit cap, No Recourse to Publics Funds status, and ensuring the adequacy of social security payments alongside fair wages and job security as well as investment in local advice services.

IFAN argues that the Right to Food UK Commission should join forces with other existing actors across sectors to champion and embed income-focused solutions in the medium term with a view to building momentum in relation to the incorporation of a broad range of economic, social, and cultural rights in the longer term and outlines key actions that are particularly relevant at this pivotal moment as we make progress towards our shared goal of reducing food insecurity and tackling the causes and impact of poverty.

Introduction to the work of the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) was set up in 2016 to provide a platform for a growing number of grassroots, independent food aid providers operating outside of the then Trussell Trust

network of food banks.[1] IFAN's vision is a country without the need for charitable food aid where adequate and nutritious food is affordable to all.[2] The UK-wide network of hundreds of independent food aid providers has long advocated for a cash-first or income-focused approach to food insecurity.[3]

Through its support of hundreds of member food aid organisations and its 'Worrying About Money?' resources project, IFAN aims to help people facing financial hardship while also calling for cash-first policy changes to reduce and eventually eliminate food insecurity at a local, regional, national, and UK-wide level.[4] IFAN publishes data, reports, briefings, and infographics including via its *Why Cash First?* page while providing a platform for its member organisations to share valuable evidence with research projects, government inquiries, and through the media.[5][6][7] IFAN has highlighted the extent to which independent food banks have struggled to keep up with the demand, the exhaustion and burnout experienced by food aid teams, and the struggles of volunteers and staff in contending with redistributed surplus food.[8][9][10][11] In the Autumn of 2022, IFAN collaborated with Trussell and Feeding Britain to facilitate the signing and delivery of a letter from frontline food aid teams to the Prime Minister urging action to increase people's incomes and by so doing to reduce demand on overstretched and exhausted staff and volunteers.[12][13]

IFAN works collaboratively with a range of organisations and strongly advocates for coalition work and cross-sector partnership efforts to address food insecurity in the UK. IFAN is a member of numerous coalitions and alliances including the newly formed Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) Alliance and the Crisis Support Working Group (CSWG) in England, Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming, the End Child Poverty coalition (UK and Scotland), the Poverty Alliance (Scotland), the Scottish Food Coalition, the Disability Benefits Consortium, the Carer Poverty Coalition, the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, and the Global Solidarity Alliance for Food, Health, and Social Justice.[14][15]

IFAN regularly works in partnership with Trussell, Sustain, and Feeding Britain to co-produce events, webinars, and reports alongside other sector partners. Most recently IFAN has co-run Building Cash First Communities in the South West webinars and a fourth in-person Cash First Communities conference in Glasgow alongside Trussell; put together a FAQs document for food partnerships and the charitable food sector on the CRF and co-run webinars on the CRF for frontline food aid providers with Sustain; and co-published a report on Young people, systems and hardship and co-run a series of webinars on Living Costs in Context with Trussell, Sustain,

[1] Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) website, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk
[2] IFAN Who we are? page, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/who-we-are
[3] Sabine Goodwin, Maria Marshall, Building 'cash first' momentum while breaking the food bank paradox from the ground up, Child Poverty Action Group Poverty Journal (February 2024) https://cpag.org.uk/news/building-cash-first-momentum-while-breaking-food-bank-paradox-ground-1
[4] IFAN's 'Worrying About Money?' resources project, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-leaflets
[5] IFAN publications, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/publications
[6] IFAN's infographics, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/infographics
[7] IFAN's Why Cash First? page, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/why-cash-first
[8] Sabine Goodwin, Ending the food bank paradox The BMJ (December 2022), https://www.bmj.com/content/379/bmj.o2919
[9] Dan Whitworth, Dan England, Food banks warn they are struggling to keep up with demand BBC New (July 2022), https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-62228972
[10] Sabine Goodwin, Food banks are running out of resources – there's no time to lose The BMJ (November 2023) https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/383/bmj.p2649.full.pdf
[11] Jessica Sinclair Taylor, Sabine Goodwin, Food banks are just sticking plaster on poverty The Grocer (April 2025), https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/comment-and-opinion/food-banks-are-just-a-sticking-plaster-on-poverty/702879.article
[12] Michael Savage, UK food banks at breaking point urge Liz Truss to boost aid to aid to poorest The Observer, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/oct/16/uk-food-banks-at-breaking-point-urge-liz-truss-to-boost-aid-to-poorest
[13] Our joint letter to the Prime Minister, IFAN, Trussell, Feeding Britain (October 2022), https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/blog/joint-letter
[14] Crisis and Resilience Fund Alliance, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/crf-alliance
[15] IFAN Collaborating for Change page, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/collaborations

Feeding Britain, the Food Foundation, and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.[16][17][18]

IFAN has also collaborated with academics on numerous studies including the 2019 study on independent food banks led by Dr Rachel Loopstra and is currently collaborating with the University of Bristol Personal Research Centre on NIHR-funded study to understand the impact of food bank advice services on the mental health and wellbeing of people with unmanageable debt.[19][20] IFAN's board of trustees includes academics Professor Jon May, Dr Sinead Furey, Dr Maddy Power, and Dr Kayleigh Garthwaite (two of whom have independently provided oral evidence to the Right to Food UK Commission in Newcastle and Belfast).[21] IFAN's director, Sabine Goodwin, has been a member of numerous steering groups and advisory boards including most recently the Scottish Government's Steering Group linked to its plan towards ending the need for food banks; the Research Advisory Board attached to the ScotCen study on Disability and Financial Hardship: How disability benefits contribute to the need for food banks in the UK funded by Trussell; the Advisory Group linked to the Swansea University-led study led by Professor Amy Browm examining the infant formula milk affordability crisis in the UK funded by the Medical Research Council; and the Steering Group Committee linked to Fair Food Futures UK.[22][23][24][25]

IFAN's director, Sabine Goodwin, is the author and co-author of numerous opinion pieces and blogs advocating for a cash-first approach to food insecurity, articulating IFAN's long-term goal of ending the need for charitable food aid and ensuring a Living Income and a Healthy Standard of Living for All, and often highlighting the reality that Trussell's food bank data represents 'the tip of the iceberg'.[26] In 2026, these articles have covered the significance of the new Crisis and Resilience Fund, the manifesto commitment to end mass dependence on emergency food parcels alongside Trussell's Helen Barnard, and the need to disentangle the conflation of the food waste and food poverty problems.[27][28]

Following the publication of a first list of independent food banks in 2017, IFAN worked with the A Menu for Change project in Scotland to collate food parcel data from independent food banks in Scotland in 2019.[29][30] IFAN has since advocated for a cash-first approach to food insecurity in Scotland, and elsewhere in the UK, taken part in regular food insecurity stakeholder meetings led

[16] IFAN Trussell Cash First Communities, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/communities
[17] Crisis and Resilience Fund FAQs for food partnerships and the charitable food sector IFAN, Sustain, Sustainable Food Places (February 2026), https://www.sustainweb.org/reports/feb26-crisis-and-resilience-fund-faqs-for-food-partnerships/
[18] Young people, systems and hardship: A Living Costs in Context report Trussell, IFAN, Feeding Britain, Sustain, The Food Foundation, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2026-06/young_people_systems_and_hardship.pdf?_gl=1*122pgns*_gcl_au*OTEzMDE4MTc4LjE3ODAwODE4NDg.
[19] Dr Rachel Loopstra, Sabine Goodwin, Barbara Goldberg, Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Professor Jon May, Dr Andrew Williams A survey of food banks operating independently of the Trussell Trust network of food banks (December 2019), https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/reports/independent-food-bank-survey
[20] University of Bristol Personal Finance Research Centre, https://www.bristol.ac.uk/geography/research/pfrc/
[21] IFAN's board of trustees, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/the-team
[22] Cash-first: Towards Ending the Need for Food Banks in Scotland Scottish Government (June 2023), https://www.gov.scot/publications/cash-first-towards-ending-need-food-banks-scotland/pages/3/
[23] Disability and financial hardship: How disability benefits contribute to the need for food banks in the UK ScotCen, The Trussell Trust (October 2023), https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/Disability-Benefits-Research-Report.pdf
[24] What are the solutions to the infant formula milk affordability crisis? Savage and Gray in partnership with Professor Amy Brown of Swansea University, the Medical Research Council, First Steps Nutrition Trust, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Independent Food Aid Network, Mammas, Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and the University of Hertfordshire, https://savageandgray.co.uk/animation-for-infant-formula-affordability-research/
[25] Fair Food Futures UK A research study to help achieve food security communities, https://www.fairfoodfuturesuk.org
[26] Sabine Goodwin, Number of people turning to food banks is shocking – but it's the tip of the hunger iceberg The Big Issue (November 2024), https://www.bigissue.com/opinion/food-banks-users-uk-hunger/
[27] Sabine Goodwin, How the groundbreaking Crisis and Resilience Fund can help end the need for food. Banks The Big Issue (January 2026), https://www.bigissue.com/opinion/crisis-and-resilience-fund-end-need-food-banks/
[28] Helen Barnard, Sabine Goodwin, Britain cannot normalise food banks: government must act to end mass dependence on emergency food LabourList (March 2026), https://labourlist.org/2026/03/britain-cannot-normalise-food-banks-government-must-act-to-end-mass-dependence-on-emergency-food/
[29] Patrick Butler, Report reveals scale of food bank use in the UK The Guardian (May 2017), https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/29/report-reveals-scale-of-food-bank-use-in-the-uk-ifan
[30] A Menu for Change, IFAN, Nearly 600,000 food parcels handed out in Scotland in last 18 months (January 2020), https://amenuforchange.wordpress.com/2020/01/09/ifan-january-2020/

by the Scottish Government from the start of the pandemic, and been involved with the development of the Scottish Government's plan towards ending the need food banks.[31] IFAN provided one of over 400 responses to the Scottish Government's consultation on a plan on ending the need for food banks, advocating for the extension of the plan's objective to ending the need for charitable food aid as did the Trussell Trust.[32][33][34] In March 2023, IFAN and Trussell co-ran their first Cash First Communities conference in Glasgow highlighting the extent of cash-first practice already underway and urging the Scottish Government to publish the long-awaited plan.[35] Ahead of the new First Minister Hamza Yousuf's anti-poverty summit in Edinburgh in May 2023, IFAN's Sabine Goodwin and The Trussell Trust's Polly Jones wrote 'As food insecurity soars in Scotland, the First Minister's anti-poverty summit must lead to immediate, comprehensive Scottish Government actions to reduce the need for charitable food aid.'[36] Scottish Government's groundbreaking plan Cash-First: Towards Ending the Need Food Banks was published in June 2023, the first of its kind anywhere in the world.[37][38]

Based on learning from the A Menu for Change project, IFAN's 'Worrying About Money?' resources project has been funded by the Scottish Government since 2020.[39] This work is the focus of action six of the plan towards ending the need for food banks.[40] IFAN has collaborated with local partners to co-produce 'Worrying About Money?' leaflets in every local authority in Scotland. Interactive, easy read, translated, poster, BSL, and audio versions have also been co-produced. IFAN has also collaborated with local partners to also run Money Counts training sessions aimed and helping frontline staff and volunteers gain confidence in using the resources and identifying local cash-first support options. This training was originally co-developed by the Highland Money Counts Partnership collaborating on the Highland 'Worrying About Money?' resources. The project has been evaluated twice by ScotCen, in 2021 and 2024, and their reports highlight the positive impact the leaflets, their alternative versions, and the accompanying training have been able to make.[41][42] IFAN has recently started working with Migration Policy Scotland to co-produce resources specifically for migrants including people with No Recourse to Public Funds 'Moved to Scotland and Worrying About Money?' leaflets and translated versions have so far been published in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Dumfries and Galloway, and East Lothian.[43]

IFAN's director, Sabine Goodwin, was pleased to be able to provide oral evidence to the Right to Food UK Commission evidence-gathering session in Glasgow on the 12th of June 2026 alongside Annie McCormack representing IFAN member Broke not Broken.

From 2020, IFAN has been able to co-develop over 100 'Worrying About Money?' resources in English local authorities and 100,000s of leaflets have been printed and distributed sometimes

[31] National plan to end the need for food banks Scottish Government (October 2021), https://www.gov.scot/news/national-plan-to-end-need-for-food-banks/
[32] Scottish Government, Independent analysis of responses to the public consultation on the national plan to end the need for food banks (October 2022) https://www.gov.scot/publications/consultation-analysis-draft-plan-ending-need-food-banks/
[33] IFAN's response to the Scottish Government's consultation on Ending the need for food banks: a draft national plan (Response 49088061 of 289 published responses) https://consult.gov.scot/housing-and-social-justice/ending-the-need-for-food-banks/consultation/view_respondent?_b_index=180&uuId=49088061
[34] The Trussell Trust's response to the Scottish Government's consultation on Ending the need for food banks: a draft national plan (Response 718890532 of 289 published responses) https://consult.gov.scot/housing-and-social-justice/ending-the-need-for-food-banks/consultation/view_respondent?_b_index=240&uuId=718890532
[35] A Cash First Future, Glasgow (March 2023), https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/events/cash-first-future
[36] Sabine Goodwin, Polly Jones, A cash-first approach to food insecurity isn't simply a dream, it's becoming a reality IFAN blog page (May 2023), https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/opinion/a-cash-first-approach-to-food-insecurity-isn-t-simply-a-dream-it-s-becoming-a-reality
[37] Scottish Government, Cash-First: Towards Ending the Need for Food Banks (June 2023) https://www.gov.scot/publications/cash-first-towards-ending-need-food-banks-scotland/
[38] Sabine Goodwin, Could food banks be relegated to the history books The Big Issue (June 2023) https://www.bigissue.com/opinion/could-food-banks-be-relegated-to-the-history-books/
[39] IFAN's 'Worrying About Money?' resources, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-leaflets
[40] Scottish Government, Cash-First: Towards Ending the Need for Food Banks (June 2023) https://www.gov.scot/publications/cash-first-towards-ending-need-food-banks-scotland/
[41] Worrying About Money?: Scotland's cash first referral leaflet: Impact findings ScotCen (November 2021) https://cdn.sanity.io/files/vujd5l5m/production/2147ed1dd1b54b350d34752d1b94bfd0da16df40.pdf
[42] 'Worrying About Money?' Scotcen (November 2024) https://cdn.sanity.io/files/vujd5l5m/production/05cc7fd45f6d4b30b1445e82132478b8383c3b07.pdf
[43] Local service maps suited to migrant needs Migration Policy Scotland, https://migrationpolicyscotland.org.uk/project/service-maps-suited-to-migrants-needs/

via council tax bills.[44] This work has enabled critical conversations about taking a cash-first approach to food insecurity and has helped to demonstrate the effectiveness of taking this approach. In some areas, further collaborative work has focused on cash-first approaches and interventions have emerged as a result of partnerships established during the co-development of local 'Worrying About Money?' resources.[45]

As part of the CSWG, IFAN has long advocated for permanent cash-first crisis support in England and in February 2025 the CSWG called for a 'Financial Crisis and Resilience Fund with at least £1.25 billion in annual, upfront investment to replace the patchwork of temporary schemes. This would ensure financial security for local authorities in England allowing them to plan and deliver effective support.'[46] Alongside other CSWG members and local authorities, IFAN took part in an exemplary co-design process run by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) during the Summer/Autumn of 2025.[47] In the August 2025, the CSWG published a briefing on taking Cash first but not cash only approach.[48] In November 2025, IFAN and Trussell co-published a briefing on the Crisis and Resilience Fund and charitable food provision outlining the potential for the CRF to support people build financial resilience.[49]

The paradigm-shifting CRF guidance was published in January 2026 requiring local authorities in England to prioritise default cash-first crisis payments alongside the ways to access help and support to build financial resilience through local community networks of support.[50] Alongside other members of the CSWG, IFAN has been involved with DWP-run webinars for local authorities on aspects of the guidance and has co-run multiple online sessions on prioritising cash-first crisis payments and building financial resilience with partners including the Money Guiders England Network.[51] Together with the DWP CRF team and the Local Government Association (LGA), CSWG members have gone on to form the CRF Alliance in England that seeks to help facilitate the sharing of resources and best practice and to collaborate to build an evidence base on the implementation of the CRF in individual local authorities.[52]

IFAN worked with Sustain and the Sustainable Food Places network to put together a FAQs document for food partnership and the charitable food provision sector as detailed above.[53] Some of IFAN's member organisations have already made transformative changes to include extensive wraparound support in line with the CRF guidance thus building a pathway away from charitable food aid provision. People can access some providers for a range of services without necessarily accessing food support.[54]

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[44] Sabine Goodwin, Finding hope in cash first approaches in the bleakest of times Sustain (February 2022), https://www.sustainweb.org/blogs/feb22-finding-cash-first-hope/

[45] Clinton Seeley, Strengthening cash-first support and tackling poverty in 2026 Transformation Cornwall, Trussell, IFAN, Cornwall Council (January 2026) https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/blog/strengthening-cash-first-support-and-tackling-poverty-in-2026

[46] Shaping the future of Local Welfare and Crisis Support in England Inquiry Report The Children's Society, End Furniture Poverty, IFAN, Trussell, Carers Trust (February 2025), https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/Shaping%20the%20Future%20of%20Local%20Welfare%20and%20Crisis%20Support%20in%20England.pdf

[47] Isabel Rice, First of its kind £1 billion Crisis and Resilience Funds comes into effect Sustain (April 2026), https://www.sustainweb.org/news/apr26-dwp-launches-crisis-and-resilience-fund/

[48] Cash first but not cash only Crisis Support Working Group (August 2025), https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/briefings/cash-first-but-not-cash-only

[49] The Crisis and Resilience Fund and charitable food provision IFAN Trussell (November 2025), https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/briefings/the-crisis-resilience-fund-and-charitable-food-provision

[50] £1 billion resilience fund and next step towards removal of two-child limit provide safety net for families DWP (February 2026), https://www.gov.uk/government/news/1-billion-resilience-fund-and-next-step-towards-removal-of-two-child-limit-provide-safety-net-for-families

[51] Understanding the Crisis and Resilience Fund Money Guiders England Network IFAN (February 2026), https://vimeo.com/1162518074/fc9eb67f93?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci&mc_cid=455464a53b&mc_eid=757d6b0780

[52] CRF Alliance, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/crf-alliance

[53] Crisis and Resilience Fund FAQs for food partnerships and the charitable food sector IFAN, Sustain, Sustainable Food Places (February 2026), https://www.sustainweb.org/reports/feb26-crisis-and-resilience-fund-faqs-for-food-partnerships/

[54] IFAN presentation with IFAN members The Collective Sharehouse, The Welcome Centre, and Spring Community on Supporting people to build financial resilience while ending the need for charitable food aid (DWP webinar for local authorities on the CRF) (June 2026), https://cdn.sanity.io/files/vujd5l5m/production/844da12889a897e9227dd2e451f101db25a9ef31.pdf

Felicia Boshorin was glad to be able to provide evidence to the Right to Food UK Commission evidence-gathering session in London on the 5th of June representing IFAN member the Spring Community Hub based in Southwark.

In Wales, IFAN has collaborated with local partners to co-produce 'Worrying About Money?' resources in Blaenau Gwent, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea, and Rhondda Cynon Taff. Resources for Carmarthenshire, the Vale of Glamorgan, and Conwy will be published soon. IFAN is a member of the Wales Anti-Poverty Coalition coordinated by the Bevan Foundation. Vince Hotten of the IFAN member the Pantry Foodbank based in Pontardawe, Neath Port Talbot was pleased to be able to provide evidence to the Right to Food UK Commission evidence-gathering session in Cardiff on the 27th of March 2026.

In Northern Ireland, IFAN has collaborated with local stakeholders to co-produce two 'Worrying About Money?' resources in Northern Ireland for Fermanagh and Omagh and Lisburn and Castlereagh. IFAN recently contributed a keynote presentation at the Pathways to end the need for food banks in Northern Ireland Information Exchange in Belfast.[55]

Current UK context

The Right to Food UK Commission's work is being undertaken at a critical moment in terms of policy shifts and narrative change. Some significant steps have been made towards the shared goal to reduce and eliminate food insecurity.[56] It's vital that the Commission's next steps link up with and complement existing efforts in this space ensuring that the considerable body of invaluable evidence that is very likely to be collated can be referenced and highlighted within collective efforts to reduce food insecurity at UK-wide, national, regional, and local level. There is a great deal of impactful work that is already underway that the Right to Food UK Commission could potentially usefully add to and enhance including the Government's work to build a strategy to reduce mass dependence on emergency food parcels.

In 2024, the Labour party committed to end mass dependence on emergency food parcels.[57] Since the Government has come into power, the long-awaited child poverty strategy has been published, two-child limit has been finally removed, and the Crisis and Resilience Fund has been established.[58] As a result of the lifting of the two-child limit, 450,000 children will be lifted out of poverty by 2030.[59] As IFAN's director Sabine Goodwin said at the time that the new fund's guidance was published: "The eagerly awaited Crisis and Resilience Fund is set to be groundbreaking for households living on low incomes in English local authorities. Its newly published guidance outlines the delivery of effective crisis support via prioritised cash payments enabling choice and dignity as well as the need to help residents build financial resilience through bolstered community support. Taking a cash-first approach to poverty, this multi-year funding pot has the capacity to reduce the number of people having to turn to charitable food providers and to help fulfil the Government's commitment to end mass dependence on emergency food parcels."[60]

It's also important to highlight the significance of the CRF guidance in terms of busting the myth that people can't be trusted to be supported in crisis through a cash-first approach. Even the Household Support Fund guidance of 2025-26 included a reference to shopping vouchers being preferable to cash payments: 'Although they still carry fraud risks, vouchers should be used

[55] IFAN presentation – Building and maintaining cash-first momentum to tackle food insecurity ending the need for charitable food aid, https://cdn.sanity.io/files/vujd5l5m/production/71586b44b2b6f5ecdcdd693036042dfbd616d5ea.pdf
[56] Sabine Goodwin, How the groundbreaking Crisis and Resilience Fund can help end the need for food. Banks The Big Issue (January 2026), https://www.bigissue.com/opinion/crisis-and-resilience-fund-end-need-food-banks/
[57] Labour Party Manifesto 2024, https://labour.org.uk/change/
[58] Our Children, Our Future Tackling Child Poverty UK Government (December 2025), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/696646bc99fbdc498faecd98/child-poverty-strategy.pdf
[59] How removing the two-child limit to benefits will help children and families Save the Children (February 2026), https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2026/removal-two-child-limit-benefits
[60] £1 billion resilience fund and next step towards removal of two-child limit provide safety net for families DWP (February 2026), https://www.gov.uk/government/news/1-billion-resilience-fund-and-next-step-towards-removal-of-two-child-limit-provide-safety-net-for-families

instead of cash where possible as this helps to mitigate the risk of the money being spent by the recipient on things outside the policy intent.'[61] The CRF guidance now requires local authorities to distribute default cash-first crisis payments explaining 'Offering cash payments empowers individuals and families to make informed choices to best suit their circumstances.'[62]

There is much more to be done in terms of initiating and maintaining cash-first or income-focused interventions to reduce food insecurity but it's important to acknowledge these significant shifts in the right direction. IFAN has consistently called for the removal of sanctions, the five-week wait for a first payment of Universal Credit, the benefit cap, and No Recourse to Public Funds status.[63] IFAN also supports calls for an Essentials Guarantee as advocated for by Trussell and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation however this would be seen as a first step towards the establishment of access to a Living Income for all alongside a Healthy Standard of Living for All.[646566] In advocating for a cash-first approach to food insecurity, IFAN also consistently maintains the need to invest in local advice services and promoting these to ensure people can be supported long before crisis point is reached and £24.1 billion in unclaimed benefits and social tariffs can be accessed.[6768] IFAN has also consistently advocated for a real Living Wage and real Living Hours and the abandonment of zero-hour contracts.[69] In-work poverty is a growing phenomenon and one that IFAN member organisations have been responding to. In August 2023, Gerrie Messer of Kingsbridge Area Foodbank in South Hams said: "We are seeing more elderly clients asking for help and more working families – sometimes up to three jobs in the household are not covering outgoings." And Su Parrish of The Easter Team in Crawley said: "Our fastest growing group of clients are those who are working in low paid jobs, especially those with children."[70] The problems our social security system are enormous and there is more to the equation that the adequacy of benefits and the need for well-functioning, easy-to-access, and well-promoted safety net.

Implementation of the CRF at local authority level is at a critical stage. The CRF guidance is not mandatory but the DWP's requirements for local authorities to prioritise default cash-first crisis payments alongside investment in help and support to help individuals build financial resilience through local community networks of support have the capacity to be transformative. Finding ways to share best practice and establish records of the benefits to individuals of a cash-first approach to poverty both in terms of crisis support and financial resilience-building is key. That's why the CRF Alliance has an invaluable role to play.[71]

Disentangling the food waste and food poverty problems

Against the backdrop of the establishment of the groundbreaking CRF, it's concerning to see the announcement of the National Programme to Redistribute Surplus set to triple the amount of

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[61] 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026: Household Support Fund guidance for council councils and unitary authorities in England, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/1-april-2025-to-31-march-2026-household-support-fund-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england

[62] Crisis and Resilience Fund: Guidance for local authorities in England DWP (Updated April 2026) https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crisis-and-resilience-fund-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england-1-april-2026-to-31-march-2029/the-crisis-and-resilience-fund-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england-1-april-2026-to-31-march-2029

[63] Sabine Goodwin, DWP extending hardship fund is welcome – but we need concrete, rapid actions to end poverty crisis The Big Issue (September 2024) https://www.bigissue.com/opinion/dwp-household-support-fund-extension-food-banks-ifan/

[64] Guarantee our Essentials: reforming Universal Credit to ensure we can all afford the essentials in hard times Joseph Rowntree Foundation, https://www.jrf.org.uk/social-security/guarantee-our-essentials-reforming-universal-credit-to-ensure-we-can-all-afford-the

[65] Living Income New Economics Foundation, https://neweconomics.org/campaigns/living-income

[66] Ensure healthy standard of living for all Institute of Health Equity, https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/taking-action/evidence-to-action-reports/ensure-healthy-standard-of-living

[67] Abby Preston, Paving the way for permanent crisis support in England IFAN blog (May 2025), https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/blog/paving-the-way-for-permanent-crisis-support-in-england

[68] Missing Out 2025 Policy in Practice, https://policyinpractice.co.uk/publication/missing-out-2025/

[69] Emily Roe, Sabine Goodwin, If businesses are serious about ending food poverty, they must pay their own staff a Living Wage The Living Wage Foundation (November 2021) https://www.livingwage.org.uk/news/if-businesses-are-serious-about-ending-food-poverty-they-must-pay-their-own-staff-real-living

[70] IFAN Survey August 2023 – Overburdened food bank teams fear a devastating winter as unprecedented demand soars through the summer, https://cdn.sanity.io/files/vujd5l5m/production/ccb241beedb91232cc4f3ba8fefd63845b06b439.pdf

[71] CRF Alliance, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/crf-alliance

surplus food flowing into our communities be accompanied by messaging that conflates the food waste and food poverty problems. This damaging counter-narrative portrays redistributed food surplus as the 'win-win' solution to address both poverty and food waste.[72] Unfortunately, the National Programme to Redistribute Surplus Food was introduced by the then Prime Minister Keir Starmer to ensure “no one in this country needs to go hungry because of the conflict overseas”. Meanwhile a plethora of unhelpful messages continue to frame the benefits of redistributed surplus food in terms of addressing hunger. The King’s Coronation Food Project still frames its existence: ‘By working together with the food industry, we aim to solve two problems at once: tackling waste and reducing hunger.’[73]

It's important to note that Felix (formerly FareShare UK and The Felix Project), alongside others in the ‘food surplus redistribution sector’, made it clear as the announcement was made that 'Surplus food redistribution is not a substitute for the structural reforms needed to address the root causes of poverty'.[74] Alongside many other organisations, Felix, has also agreed that ending the need for charitable food aid is the long-term objective in a society where people access community food venues because they want to not because they have to: 'Everyone has the right to food security. This means ubiquitous availability of – and adequate income to afford and reliably access – nutritious and culturally appropriate food that is good for all people, livelihoods and the planet. Achieving this will move towards ending reliance on emergency food parcels and wider charitable food aid.'[75]

However, there is a tremendous amount of work to do at speed to ensure that the tripling of food surplus redistribution doesn’t serve to further entrench a charitable food aid response to poverty a local level just as there is clearly progress in terms of responding to food insecurity with cash-first interventions and approaches. It’s long been established that feeding people in hunger with surplus food is ‘a short-term band aid’ on the deep-rooted problem of poverty.[76] There’s a long legacy of faulty messaging to reverse so that we ensure that it’s widely understood that redistributed surplus food cannot possibly address or ‘fight hunger’.[77][78] Yes, there may be a role for unavoidable surplus food within community food settings that people access because they want to not because they have to. However, for us to ensure that we arrive at this long-term scenario, any surplus food redistributed to charitable food aid providers in the here and now must be framed as a temporary response with clear objectives articulated in terms of how unavoidable surplus food would be used in the future. As Pete Ritchie of Nourish Scotland and the Food Ethics Council says: ‘If the food we are redistributing is good enough for people, then it is good enough for all of us.'[79]

Alongside others, IFAN has long called out the problem of framing the redistribution of food surplus as a solution to poverty. As IFAN’s director Sabine Goodwin wrote to The Guardian alongside 57 other signatories including Professor Olivier de Schutter (former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food), Professor Tim Lang, and Professor Janet Poppendieck: ‘Charitable food aid is a sticking plaster on a gaping wound of systemic inequality in our societies. On both sides of the Atlantic, the elimination of food poverty demands social and economic justice. At the heart of this approach must be a guarantee of the human right to adequate food and nutrition: living wages, income security, and a fit-for-purpose welfare system,

[72] Sabine Goodwin, A cursory National Food Strategy lacks substance and joined up thinking on food insecurity The BMJ (June 2022) https://www.bmj.com/content/377/bmj.o1549.long
[73] Coronation Food Project King Charles III Charitable Fund, https://www.kccf.org.uk/coronation-food-project/
[74] Suzanne McClelland, PM announces national programme to redistribute surplus food Institute of Grocery Distribution (May 2026) https://www.igd.com/about-us/press-centre/articles/pm-announces-national-programme-to-redistribute-surplus-food/73195
[75] Dignified access to food Sustain https://www.sustainweb.org/foodpoverty/four-pillars-of-dignified-food-access/
[76] Martin Caraher, Sinead Furey, Is it appropriate to use surplus food to feed people in hunger? Short term band-aid to more deep-rooted problems of poverty Ulster University (January 2017), https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/en/publications/is-it-appropriate-to-use-surplus-food-to-feed-people-in-hunger-sh-3/
[77] Sabine Goodwin, UK’s food poverty crisis is spiralling out of control – and there’s only one way to fix it (November 2023), https://www.bigissue.com/opinion/food-poverty-crisis-waste-uk-ifan-sabine-goodwin/
[78] Sabine Goodwin, A cursory national food strategy lacks substance and joined up thinking on food insecurity The BMJ (June 2022), https://www.bmj.com/content/377/bmj.o1549.long
[79] Pete Ritchie, The illusion of a solution: faulty maps and food redistribution Nourish Scotland (May 2026), https://www.nourishscotland.org/the-illusion-of-a-solution-faulty-maps-and-food-redistribution/

not “leftover” food for “left behind” people.’[80] FareShare’s then Chief Executive Lindsay Boswell said at the time: “The real scandal, and the academics and others would be more useful if they focused on this, is that only 6% of the food that is fit for human consumption and is surplus is diverted to organisations like FareShare.”[81]

And in March 2023, a legion of academics and activists including IFAN’s director Sabine Goodwin alongside Dr Kayleigh Garthwaite and Professor Graham Riches wrote to The Observer: “While the expansion of organised surplus food redistribution might seem like a win-win solution, this practice fails to reduce food waste levels while undermining policies designed to address food insecurity. We need long-term solutions based on rights and social justice. Only governments can guarantee these rights. Adopting a “cash first” approach to food insecurity is vital to ensure people can access income before charity, but equally vital is the prioritisation of systemic changes to truly tackle poverty and inequality. Guaranteeing the right to food and a living income through real living wages, together with adequate social security provision, is essential to ending the need for charitable food aid in all societies.”[82] And an accompanying article in The Observer quoted from the letter: “The extraordinary efforts of food bank teams, increasingly backed by corporate involvement, should not blind us to the fact that an emergency food parcel cannot do more than temporarily alleviate hunger.”[83]

Following evidence given by the then UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Professor Michael Fakhri, Maria Marshall represented IFAN at a hearing of the Envionment, Food, and Rural Affairs Committee on food security in November 2022: “It is a scandal that we have a food system where so many people cannot afford to eat and there is so much food that is going to waste. However, it is a mistake to try to use one of those problems, food waste, to try to solve the other one, food insecurity. If we do that, there is going to be no action taken on either of those problems. Separate them at the root.”[84] FareShare CEO Lindsay Boswell’s response at the time: “I entirely agree with my colleague. Nobody in FareShare suggests that the diversion of surplus food is a solution to poverty.”

Foodrise (formerly Feedback) released a vital report entitled Used by: How businesses dump their waste of food charities that focuses on the experiences of food aid teams having to deal with poor quality redistributed food surplus (referenced later in this submission).[85] IFAN’s director, Sabine Goodwin, spoke at the parliamentary launch of the report in March 2025 saying: “Redistributing food waste through the charitable food aid sector simply cannot stop hunger from happening in the first place. What’s more, it inevitably further entrenches both these problems. Even though millions upon millions of emergency food parcels have been distributed over the last 15 years, levels of food insecurity have remained stubbornly high. Emergency food parcels, and the contents of food pantry shelves, can only ever act as sticking plasters on the problem of poverty…The solutions are clear. We must address the root causes of both problems – poverty in the case of food insecurity, and overproduction when it comes to food waste. Terms like “fighting hunger” or “ending hunger” are used when channelling surplus in the direction of people struggling to afford food. Emotive language might draw in donations, but it can hide the real

[80] Food banks are no solution to poverty The Guardian Letters (March 2019), https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/mar/24/food-banks-are-no-solution-to-poverty
[81] Patrick Butler, Food banks risk being ‘captured’ by corporate PR drive, say activists The Guardian (March 2019), https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/mar/24/food-banks-captured-by-corporate-pr-drive-say-campaigners
[82] All the world’s a stage or should be The Observer Letters (March 2023), https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/commentisfree/2023/mar/26/all-the-worlds-a-stage-or-should-be-letters
[83] Michael Savage, Expanding food banks is no substitute for tackling poverty, charities warn The Observer (March 2023), https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/mar/26/expanding-food-banks-is-no-substitute-for-tackling-poverty-charities-warn
[84] Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Oral evidence: Food security HC 622 House of Commons (November 2022), https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/11922/pdf/
[85] Used by: How businesses dump their waste on food charities Foodrise (March 2025), https://foodrise.org.uk/research/used-by/#:~:text=Research&text=March%202025&text=Used%20By&text=How%20businesses%20dump%20their%20waste,on%20food%20charities.&text=Download&text=Stay%20involved&text=Campaigns%2C%20wins%2C%20and%20ways%20to,make%20a%20difference

reasons behind poverty and hunger. Surely the collective priority must be to point out the inadequacy of social security payments, low wages, and insecure work."[86]

The damaging counter-narrative perpetuating the myth that food surplus redistribution can tackle hunger runs alongside the establishment of multibanks creating another 'sticking plaster' response to poverty based on charity and surplus.[87] Food banks are clear: a charitable response to poverty isn't working.[88] A growing number of baby banks, warm spaces, fuel banks and other 'banks' representing modern day food banks inadvertently help to normalise temporary responses rather than long-term solutions to poverty.[8990] It's also important to note that the disaggregation of poverty into food, fuel, period, digital, furniture poverty is counterproductive in terms of developing long-term solutions.[91]

Scale of food insecurity in the UK and its impact on the health and well-being of people struggling to afford food and other essentials

Commissioners will have already heard about the challenges faced by disabled people, families, older people, and single men amongst other cohorts. They will also have heard about the additional challenges and poverty premiums faced by people on low incomes living in rural communities. People struggling on low incomes and insecure work represent another large cohort of individuals facing financial precarity and food insecurity in unique ways. These are all realities reported by IFAN member organisations through IFAN's surveys over many years.[92]

The Family Resources Survey has found that the vast majority of households reporting severe food insecurity (skipping meals/running of food because of lack of income) do not access food banks.[93] Food Standards Agency data reveals similar findings in terms of the number of people in England Wales who are food insecure and not accessing the support of food banks or social supermarkets.[94]

So, against the backdrop of steps in the right direction, it's also important to keep in mind the enormity of the problem that's faced. Not only is the scale of food insecurity enormous but the impact this has on people's health and well-being can be devastating.

In 2022, IFAN co-published a report with Tom Pollard and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on poverty, food banks and mental health based on interviews undertaken at IFAN food banks in south west London and Kent. The testimonies shared made clear not only the inadequacy of support but the shame, stigma, and mental health impacts of having to resort to using food banks.[95]

The impact of food insecurity on people's physical health is well-documented. The UK Parliament POSTnote (Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology) to which IFAN contributed is a

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[86] Food aid or a 'disposal channel?' Writing the Use By report Food Waste Stories (April 2025), https://foodwastestories.com/2025/04/26/writing-the-used-by-report/
[87] Sabine Goodwin, Tackle poverty's roots with a living income The Guardian Letters (April 2024), https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/02/tackle-poverty-roots-with-a-living-income-put-children-first-and-tax-the-wealth-of-the-1-percent
[88] Sabine Goodwin, Maria Marshall, Tackle the grim reality of food poverty in Britain The Guardian Letter (November 2023), https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/21/tackling-the-grim-reality-of-food-poverty-in-britain
[89] Jem Bartholomew, 'Bills keep going higher': community 'warm spaces' on the rise in the UK The Guardian (December 2025), https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/dec/21/community-warm-spaces-rise-uk-walworth-living-room
[90] Sally Weale, Anti-poverty campaigners raise concerns over royal visits to baby banks The Guardian (December 2023), https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/12/anti-poverty-campaigners-raise-concerns-over-royal-visits-to-baby-banks
[91] Stephen Crossley, Kayleigh Garthwaite, Ruth Patrick, The different 'types' of poverty: is there a problem with how we currently talk about poverty? (October 2019) https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/uk-poverty-whats-the-problem/
[92] IFAN's member surveys, https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/publications
[93] DWP Family resources Survey: financial year 2025 to 2026 (March 2026), https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2024-to-2025/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2024-to-2025#household-food-security-1
[94] Food and You 2: Wave 10 Key findings Food Standards Agency (September 2025), https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20251202022951mp_/https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/Food%20and%20You%202%20Wave%2010%20Key%20Findings%20v10%20final%20edit.pdf
[95] Tom Pollard, Pushed to the Edge: Poverty, Food Banks, and Mental Health IFAN JRF (February 2022), https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/reports/pushed-to-the-edge

valuable collation of evidence on diet-related health inequalities referencing food insecurity, food poverty, and food banks.[96] Of course, there is more that could be done to link the long-term impacts food insecurity to unavoidable action. As Professor Valerie Tarasuk of PROOF Canada has pointed out: "Smoking cessation began to be effective when the medical profession began to lobby for regulating the tobacco industry."[97]

Impact on frontline food aid teams – a charitable food aid response to poverty is unsustainable

As already mentioned, IFAN has highlighted the extent to which independent food banks have struggled to keep up with the demand, the exhaustion and burnout experienced by food aid teams, and the struggles of volunteers and staff in contending with redistributed surplus food.[98][99][100][101] In the Autumn of 2022, IFAN collaborated with Trussell and Feeding Britain to facilitate the signing and delivery of a letter from frontline food aid teams to the Prime Minister urging action to increase people's incomes and by so doing to reduce demand on overstretched and exhausted staff and volunteers.[102][103] The letter warned that food banks are "struggling to cope" and demand was outstripping donations: "We are overstretched and exhausted. Many of our organisations are at breaking point". They urged the government to take "action to end the need for charitable food aid by ensuring everyone has enough income, from work and social security, to buy the essentials".[104]

Later that year, IFAN again highlighted that food banks were at breaking point framing the solution not in donating to food banks alone but in tackling the root causes of poverty by ensuring a collaborative approach. IFAN's director wrote: 'A recent trend brings this into stark relief. People who once donated to food banks are now in need of food aid themselves, stretching the already whisker-thin resources of grassroots providers. Food parcels can't address poverty. They will only ever alleviate the symptoms of food poverty temporarily…..There's no question that food banks can't avoid having to prepare for unprecedented levels of need coming their way. But appeal messaging needs to be loud and clear as to how we can bring this perpetual state of crisis to an end. We'd argue that food banks shouldn't be needed and that campaigners, food bank teams, academics, elected representatives *as well as donors and funders* can all do something about this.' [105]

The recent work of the Alliance for Dignified Food Support on this topic has been valuable in identifying 'hunger trauma' and 'moral injury'.[106] In reporting on systemic betrayal, moral injury in staff and volunteers, researchers found that 'many food aid volunteers and staff feel betrayed by those in a position of national leadership and economic authority and fear the ethical implications of propping up system that isn't working. For some it felt akin to a form of moral blackmail where

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[96] Diet-related health inequalities PostNOTE Number 686 UK Parliament (December 2022), https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0686/POST-PN-0686.pdf
[97] Jane Feinmann, How doctors can help end food insecurity The BMJ (January 2021), https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/372/bmj.n53.full.pdf
[98] Sabine Goodwin, Ending the food bank paradox The BMJ (December 2022), https://www.bmj.com/content/379/bmj.o2919
[99] Dan Whitworth, Dan England, Food banks warn they are struggling to keep up with demand BBC New (July 2022), https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-62228972
[100] Sabine Goodwin, Food banks are running out of resources – there's no time to lose The BMJ (November 2023) https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/383/bmj.p2649.full.pdf
[101] Jessica Sinclair Taylor, Sabine Goodwin, Food banks are just sticking plaster on poverty The Grocer (April 2025), https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/comment-and-opinion/food-banks-are-just-a-sticking-plaster-on-poverty/702879.article
[102] Michael Savage, UK food banks at breaking point urge Liz Truss to boost aid to aid to poorest The Observer, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/oct/16/uk-food-banks-at-breaking-point-urge-liz-truss-to-boost-aid-to-poorest
[103] Our joint letter to the Prime Minister, IFAN, Trussell, Feeding Britain (October 2022), https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/blog/joint-letter
[104] Isabelle McRae, Food banks warn Liz Truss they are at 'breaking point' in open letter delivered to Downing Street The Big Issue (October 2022), https://www.bigissue.com/news/social-justice/food-banks-warn-liz-truss-they-are-at-breaking-point/
[105] Sabine Goodwin, Food banks are at breaking point. We need to change the script. The Big Issue (November 2022), https://www.bigissue.com/opinion/food-banks-are-at-breaking-point-we-need-to-change-the-script/
[106] Carl Walker, Hilary Schan, Brian Devlin, Sarah Davenport, Mark Erikson, Paul Hanna, Managing hunger trauma in community food support: Systemic betrayal, moral injury and distress in staff and volunteers Alliance for Dignified Food Support (February 2025), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/660a812fd1985f13334416c2/t/67bd97402181e720960eaad9/1740478276594/Managing+hunger+trauma+in+community+food+support+Systemic+betrayal%2C+moral+injury+and+distress+in+staff+and+volunteers.pdf

volunteers feel that the government failure becomes their moral failure if they don't act to meet the need.'

The topic of possible food bank strikes has come up over the years but ultimately the buck stops at food banks which means the only solution is for frontline teams to work towards ending the need for their services by advocating for policy changes that would ensure people had enough money in their pockets so as not to need charitable food aid. As IFAN's director said earlier this year: "Food bank volunteers have often wondered if they should go on strike. They wouldn't make demands for themselves, only the people they support, asking the government to increase social security payments and for employers to raise wages to help end the need for food banks. But food bank volunteers have never gone on strike – not wanting to hurt the people who need them. However, fragile their operations have become, they know the buck stops at their doors and shutting them doesn't feel realistic. They know that the route to ending the need for their services, and simultaneously the pressure they are under in terms of their own wellbeing, is in the hands of the governments not through further institutionalising a charitable food aid response. And so, they continue to live the paradox of filling a gap they can't possibly close."[107]

This is an approach that has been championed at a grassroots level for many years by IFAN member organisations. 2022 saw not only independent providers in the IFAN network feeling the strain but also Trussell food banks with more financial capacity culminating in the letter to the Prime Minister signed by over 3,000 food aid workers and volunteers referenced above. IFAN's director wrote in The BMJ on ending the food bank paradox in December of that year: 'Recent months have clearly demonstrated that the charitable food aid status quo is both unsustainable and unacceptable. Relying on dwindling surplus food supplies, the public's ability to donate and the willingness of volunteers is clearly not the answer. It's become more obvious than ever that ensuring adequacy of income through social security payments and wages is the real solution.'[108]

However, this doesn't mean that IFAN member organisations and IFAN haven't done all they can to support teams and volunteers with the relentless pressures they are facing. Su Parrish representing IFAN member The Easter Team explained in September 2023: "Our volunteers really feel the injustice of that. You want to help the clients but you can't just wave a magic wand and make all the things in their lives better. You want to make a difference, and yet you go home having taken on the emotional burden of your clients' lives. We are setting up support sessions for our volunteers.[109] IFAN has run courses to help member teams build personal resilience while aiming to keep the drumbeat going that ultimately the solution is to reduce demand and ensure fewer people need charitable food aid support. IFAN member organisations have been open to distributing shopping vouchers instead of or alongside food parcels to ensure that people can access more choices but also to reduce the pressure on food bank workers to sort, distribute, and dispose of food waste.[110]

It's also very important to highlight the work of Foodrise (formerly Feedback) in highlighting the concerns of food aid workers and volunteer in relation waste dumped on food charities. BBC journalist, Sheila Dillon, said at the time of the launch of the report Used by: How business dump their waste on food charities: "Their voices make one thing clear: we need systemic change. Businesses must be held accountable for their waste, policymakers must ensure fair wages and social protections, and we must move beyond the short-term fix of redistribution to build a food system that works for everyone."[111] Foodrise found 91% of food aid workers were forced

[107] Isabella McCrae, What would happen if the UK's volunteers stopped volunteering? The Big Issue (April 2026) https://www.bigissue.com/news/social-justice/what-would-happen-if-the-uks-volunteers-stopped-volunteering/
[108] Sabine Goodwin, Ending the food bank paradox The BMJ (December 2022), https://www.bmj.com/content/379/bmj.o2919
[109] Patrick Butler, UK food banks bring in counsellors and private GPs to help exhausted workers The Guardian (September 2023), https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/03/british-food-banks-bring-in-counsellors-and-private-gps-to-help-exhausted-workers
[110] Charlotte White, Sabine Goodwin, Putting cash first into practice while running a food bank IFAN blog (May 2024), https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/blog/putting-cash-first-into-practice-while-running-a-food-bank
[111] Isabella McRae, 'Frustrated, angry, exhausted': Food banks forced to 'throw out food donated by supermarkets' The Big Issue (March 2025), https://www.bigissue.com/news/social-justice/food-banks-dispose-supermarkets-food-waste/?mc_cid=d1dbfc7784&mc_eid=757d6b0780

to discard food donations from businesses, due to them being damaged or inedible and 85% of food aid workers felt frustrated angry or sad when receiving unusable food donations.[112]

Cash-first interventions and approaches reduce food insecurity

Cash-first approaches mean prioritising the option of cash payments over shopping vouchers or in-kind support in a crisis, finding routes to income maximisation and access to existing entitlements, and promoting ways to identify local cash-first options and ways to maximise income at the earliest opportunity. Cash-first intervention might include the Scottish Child Payment, the £20 uplift to Universal Credit, or cash-first crisis payments distributed by local authorities.[113]

Previous UK Governments' inconsistency on the distribution of cash payments to people in emergency situations is a striking starting point in analysing the efficacy of cash-first approaches and interventions. The UK Department for International development made clear in January 2017:'Cash transfers are an effective way of directly helping some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world, and are good value for money...They empower the poorest and most vulnerable people to make their own decisions and enable them to spend it in their own communities.'[114] A previous UK Government also co-led the donor working group that jointly advocated for more cash where and when appropriate in humanitarian responses in March 2019.[115]

GiveDirectly has found that 'More than two thirds of countries run cash transfer programmes. This is not by chance – the evidence on positive impacts of cash transfers is overwhelming.' Cash transfers have the largest and deepest evidence base of all anti-poverty programmes (with over 1,000 studies). Evidence confirms that direct cash given to people in poverty improves multiple dimensions of people's lives – typically all at the same time.[116] And a review of global evidence in 2014 examined 19 studies across 10 countries and found that cash transfers had either no impact, or a negative impact, on spending on alcohol and tobacco.[117]

The British Red Cross shared some key learning from the distribution of the temporary British Red Cross Covid-19 Hardship Fund: 93% of people stated that they felt it had a positive impact on their lives and enabled them to afford the essentials; Cash-based support was used by recipients to buy food (78%), other household items (32%), hygiene products (28%), and to pay bills (17%); Cash transfers can unlock wider benefits beyond supporting people to afford the absolute essentials.; 92% felt that the financial assistance they received reduced feelings of stress and anxiety. The British Red Cross recommended that: Emergency financial support schemes should adopt a cash-first approach, helping people to access essentials in a way that promotes dignity and choice.[118]

In 2019–2020, 43 per cent of Universal Credit claimants reported food insecurity with the Family Resources Survey. This was higher than any other claimant group falling to 27 per cent in 2020–2021. However, there was no apparent change in food insecurity amongst legacy benefit claimants who did not receive the £20 uplift to their social security payments. Prevalence remained around 31 per cent. The £20 uplift was removed in October 2021. Dr Rachel Loopstra

[112] Isabel Rice, New Feedback report exposes business 'dumping' food waste on food aid charities Sustain (March 2025), https://www.sustainweb.org/news/mar25-use-by-report-food-waste/
[113] IFAN presentation – Making the case for cash first (June 2026) https://cdn.sanity.io/files/vujd5l5m/production/8db6fc1c09275568c361c320e59b01ef83678352.pdf
[114] Case study: Help for those who need it most Department for International Development (January 2017), https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/cash-transfers-help-for-those-who-need-it-most
[115] Joint Donor Statement on Humanitarian Cash Transfers (March 2019), https://reliefweb.int/report/world/joint-donor-statement-humanitarian-cash-transfers-march-2019
[116] GiveDirectly, https://www.givedirectly.org/research-on-cash-transfers
[117] Anna Popova, David Evans, Cash Transfers and Temptation Goods: A Review of Global Evidence. Policy Research Working Paper; No. 6886 (2014) https://hdl.handle.net/10986/18802
[118] Financial Hardship Policy Briefing: Learning from the British Red Cross Covid-19 Hardship Fund British Red Cross (2022), https://assets.redcross.org.uk/82b1e254-5524-0172-0612-9ce813c7824c/6aed660a-7fc5-4276-ac99-f63347e763ee/Financial%20Hardship%20Briefing%20December.pdf

and colleagues found that ‘Our analyses suggest that the extent of food insecurity in the UK would probably fall if the generosity of the social security system increased’.[119]

In a 2020 briefing, Greater Manchester Poverty Action (now Resolve Poverty), outlined the benefits of taking a cash-first approach to local welfare delivery: giving people dignity by removing the stigma that often comes with using in-kind support; giving people choice and control by enabling them to use support in a way that works best for them, enabling them to meet the multiple needs that they have. This boosts household wellbeing and has significant benefits in households with dependent children; giving people what they want – cash is the preferred option for most people on low incomes; simplicity and efficiency - cash payments are the most simple, efficient and cost-effective means of providing people with support as cash payments can be made directly into people’s bank accounts. It can be a more efficient approach for local authorities as it removes need for the partnership arrangements that come with in-kind support; increasing take up - cash payments encourage greater take up of support by households experiencing financial hardship; giving a boost to the local economy by increasing the likelihood of payments being spent with local, independent retailers; preventing people from falling into high interest debt when they face a financial crisis, and therefore preventing them from spiralling deeper into hardship; and bolstering wider financial inclusion efforts by linking cash payments to other sources of financial support such as credit unions.[120]

An evaluation report was published following a 2021 pilot which saw three food banks in Leeds, Leeds Food Aid Network (LFAN) and the then Trussell Trust set up a cash-first pilot scheme. The evaluation found cash grants: have an immediate impact on a person’s financial situation; are a more dignified form of support; and can also unlock additional benefit. And that people used ‘cash to buy the essential items, particularly food, gas, and electricity’ and there was no evidence of misuse of the cash grants’.[121]

The then Trussell Trust’s literature review of Cash-first approaches to supporting people facing financial hardship locally referenced two benefits of cash-first approaches over the provision of in-kind support: ‘they are efficient, because people have a better understanding of their specific needs and circumstances than the government; and that they are more dignified, allowing people to make their own choices with the same agency as others.[122]

IFAN member North Paddington Foodbank’s recent cash-first pilot saw cash payments twinned with income maximisation support result in 53% of households not returning to the food bank for further support.[123]A participant from the pilot was able to contribute to a recent DWP-run webinar on cash first for local authorities, alongside two other experts by experience and Expert Link, explaining why cash payments made all the difference as a mode of crisis support.

Following an initial cash-first pilot in 2021, IFAN member the Legendary Community Club ran a recent cash-first trial finding that through three cash-first delivery mechanisms, participants reported: flexibility and choice; stigma avoided; disability barriers reduced; stress reduced; and that food parcels were limiting.[124] As a participant said: “It gives you the choice of where…You’re not cap in hand… You’ve got the autonomy to choose what you need, rather than be grateful for things.”

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[119] Rachel Loopstra, Ben Baumberg Geiger, Aaron Reeves, Did increasing the UK’s Universal Credit and working tax credits by £20 a week in 2020-21 reduce food insecurity? Cambridge University Press (April 2025), https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-social-policy/article/did-increasing-the-uks-universal-credit-and-working-tax-credits-by-20-per-week-in-20202021-reduce-food-insecurity/9CDAA69B84E5EA4183D57106BB3D547B

[120] Graham Whitham, ‘Cash first’ – Responding the needs of low-income residents through the provision of local welfare support Greater Manchester Poverty Action (August 2020) https://www.resolvepoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GMPA-Briefing-‘Cash-first-August-2020.pdf

[121] Liz Lipscomb, Dr Cat Walker, An evaluation of the Leeds City Council Cash Grant Pilot Programme (July 2022), https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/Vantage-Point-Research-Leeds-Cash-First-evaluation.pdf

[122] Cash-first approaches to supporting people facing financial hardship locally: A literature review The Trussell Trust (2022), https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/Cash-first-literature-review.pdf

[123] From Food Parcels to Cash First: NPFB Impact Report 2026 (Westminster), https://www.npfoodbank.org.uk/NPFBCashFirstReport2026Westminster.pdf

[124] Andra McMillan, Rachel H Tribe, Cash First LCC Trial 2025, https://cdn.sanity.io/files/vujd5l5m/production/23bbb26421ee7b0e9068334fa5844915fa293cc3.pdf

The Family Finance Study published a policy briefing on the Scottish Child Payment earlier this month.[125] Their team found that: Direct cash transfers for children have substantial positive impacts, and the UK Government should draw on Scotland's experience; And to reduce child poverty, the UK Government should increase Universal Credit and Child Benefit which remain insufficient to meet basic living costs. Early findings from this first cross-nation study finds deprivation and food insecurity would be "between 8 and 9 percentage points higher without Scottish child payment" and both qualitative and quantitative evidence that the Scottish Child Payment is making a significant difference to family finances and child well-being.[126]

And, as previously mentioned, through the lifting of the UK-wide two-child limit it's expected that 450,000 children will be lifted out of poverty by 2030.[127]

IFAN's recommendations for the Right to Food UK Commission in June 2026:

IFAN recommends that the Right to Food UK Commission works alongside existing actors and groups across sectors to push forward cash-first medium-term solutions with a view to the Right to Food being incorporated as part of International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in the long term. We have collectively managed to establish a good level of understanding that food insecurity is predominantly the result of lack of income in UK through the joint championing of a cash-first approach.

In establishing that income-related drivers of poverty are key to addressing food insecurity, it's important to note that there's been a move away from describing poverty in disaggregated terms such as food poverty. There is value in continuing to drive home that message and IFAN would be concerned that advocacy around a siloed Right to Food might potentially confuse matters.

Establishing the adequacy of the social security payments and wages in relation to food insecurity is a critical step on a road map to the establishment of economic, social, and cultural rights. Taking a cash-first approach to food insecurity is fundamental to the establishment of long-term human rights – 'A cash first approach can work to reverse the UK's institutional reliance on food aid. But to survive the test of time, a cash first approach needs a functioning legal framework that is justiciable.'[128] IFAN agrees that if ICESCR were enshrined in UK law, they would provide a clear route for the UK Government, not potential donors and volunteers, to be held responsible for hunger but in order to arrive a point that this can be meaningfully considered we need to establish the premise of income equality in the UK.

Both the DWP and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs are developing their own road maps, and it is vital to share evidence, ideas, and to work collaboratively. The Food Foundation, the Green Alliance, and Sustain are also leading critical work on a Good Food Bill to transform the UK's food system and protect British households, farmers and the economy from the next food crisis.[129] Following the manifesto commitment on the commencement of Section 1 of the Equality Act, work is underway on this within the Office of Equality and Opportunity.[130] Working across departments and sectors is key to building consensus and effect long-term change while avoiding duplication and the dangers of siloed approaches. Collaborative actions to prioritise cash-first interventions and approaches to food insecurity as a first stage in a road map towards economic equality and the subsequent establishment of a broad set of human rights are key.

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[125] Kate Andersen, Suzanna Nesom, Ruth Patrick, Ilona Pinter, Kitty Stewart and Emma Tominey Policy Briefing: What difference does the Scottish Child Payment make? Family Finances (June 2026), https://familyfinances.study/policy-briefing
[126] New evidence backs case for Scottish Child Payment Budget boost, say campaigners Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland (December 2025) https://cpag.org.uk/news/new-evidence-backs-case-scottish-child-payment-budget-boost-say-campaigners
[127] Restoring security: Understanding the effects of removing the two-child limit across the UK IPPR (December 2025), https://www.ippr.org/articles/restoring-security-understanding-the-effects-of-removing-the-two-child-limit-across-the-uk
[128] Sabine Goodwin, Maria Marshall, Turning the tide: Cash First and the Right to Food IFAN blog (September 2023), https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/opinion/turning-the-tide-cash-first-and-the-right-to-food
[129] Good Food Bill Joint Statement (February 2026) https://www.sustainweb.org/news/feb26-good-food-bill/
[130] The socio-economic duty Just Fair, https://justfair.org.uk/campaigns-2/1forequality/

IFAN would also recommend focusing on and advocating for the following complementary actions at this critical time:

1.Measure food insecurity at a local level in correlation with the DWP's Family Resources Survey food insecurity questions:

In 2019, the DWP started measuring food insecurity through the DWP Family Resources Survey.[131] More recently questions on food bank use have been added to the ten food insecurity questions in relation to both a 30-day period (food insecurity questions are asked in relation to the last 30 days) and a 12-month period. IFAN advocates for the expansion of the Family Resources Survey sample size to ensure disaggregation of this invaluable data at local authority level. Without a robust measure of food insecurity at the local level, it would be difficult to establish to what extent food insecurity is reducing. This call is referenced in the Coventry University Policy Brief on the Right to Food and made by the FILL Consortium of which IFAN is a member.[132][133] IFAN also made this call into its submission to the Scottish Government's consultation on the draft national plan to end the need for food banks in Scotland.[134]

2.Highlight and promote the cash-first interventions and approaches that it's been established reduce food insecurity

The more we can collectively highlight the efficacy of cash-first approach and interventions, the easier it will be to make the argument for adequate social security payments, the removal of the punitive elements of the social security system driving hardship like sanctions, and the need for Living Wages and Living Hours.

3. Be careful to identify ending the need for charitable food aid as a key goal

As you will have read, a range of different organisations working in this space have got behind the Sustain Four Pillars document aiming to end the need for charitable food aid.[135] It's been established that 'the key fault line' shaping lived experiences of the UK community food sector is not the 'type' of provision but demography (age, gender and parenthood, race and ethnicity).[136] Critically the DWP's CRF guidance defines charitable food aid as 'Charitable help with food for free or at very low cost for people experiencing financial or food insecurity. Providers include food banks, food pantries, social supermarkets and food clubs.'[137] There may come a time that food aid providers become sustainable community food venues but so long as there's dependence on volunteers, redistributed surplus food, and charitable grants alternative providers are filling the same gap as food banks. That chasm shouldn't exist in the first place. We should collectively aim for a time when people can access community food venues because they want to not because they have to. When considering the funding of community-based initiatives this long-term vision is key.

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[131] Patrick Butler, UK hunger survey to measure food insecurity The Guardian (February 2019), https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/feb/27/government-to-launch-uk-food-insecurity-index

[132] Dr Rachel Loopstra, Professor Greta Defeyter, Professor Paul Stretesky, Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Sabine Goodwin, Time to measure and monitor local food insecurity: Time for a harmonised approach across local authority areas FILL (June 2022), https://cdn.sanity.io/files/vujd5l5m/production/283ea224f8289a82e5e7c6f59dfedd93bf55f2e2.pdf

[133] Imogen Richmond-Bishop, Jasber Singh, Policy Brief The Right to Food in the UK Coventry University (November 2023), https://www.coventry.ac.uk/globalassets/media/global/08-new-research-section/cawr/cawr-policy-briefs/cawr-policy-brief-2023-09---right-to-food-in-the-uk-final-accessible.pdf

[134] IFAN's response to the Scottish Government's consultation on Ending the need for food banks: a draft national plan (Response 49088061 of 289 published responses) https://consult.gov.scot/housing-and-social-justice/ending-the-need-for-food-banks/consultation/view_respondent?_b_index=180&uuId=49088061

[135] Dignified access to food Sustain https://www.sustainweb.org/foodpoverty/four-pillars-of-dignified-food-access/

[136] Maddy Sarah Power, Madeleine Baxter, Free and equal? The realities of lived experiences of food aid in the UK Journal of Social Policy Cambridge University Press (2026), https://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/id/eprint/4678868/1/Power-etal-2026-Free-and-equal.pdf

[137] Crisis and Resilience Fund: Guidance for local authorities in England DWP (Updated April 2026) https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crisis-and-resilience-fund-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england-1-april-2026-to-31-march-2029/the-crisis-and-resilience-fund-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england-1-april-2026-to-31-march-2029

4. Support efforts to bust the myth that food surplus redistribution can tackle food insecurity and poverty

It would be very helpful if the Right to Food UK Commission could support the efforts of IFAN, the Food Ethics Council among others to disentangle the notion that redistributed surplus food can possibly address food insecurity and poverty. Please see the points made earlier in this submission (pp.7-10).

5. Frame the struggles of frontline food aid workers and volunteers in terms of cash-first solutions

It's vital we do not build further infrastructure in relation to charitable food aid provision. There is a danger that by highlighting the struggles of food aid teams without simultaneously framing the solution in terms of addressing the drivers of the need for their services that we risk embedding a charitable response. Please see the points made earlier in this submission (pp.11-13)

6. Support the transformative changes of practice that charitable food aid providers are already making

As referenced earlier in the submission, food aid providers are transforming into community hubs and including a range of wraparound support into their services. Understanding and supporting these transformations is fundamental to building a route away from charitable food aid provision. (p.5)

7. Track new forms of 'banks' and multibanks ensuring they are not normalised as a response to poverty

See points made earlier in this submission (p.10). This lends itself to the argument for focusing on wider rights and the overall focus of reducing poverty and establishing ICESCR as the longer-term goal.

8. Interventions like universal free school meals must not be seen in isolation

Establishing universal free school meals for all age groups is a vital call that IFAN supports but not in isolation. In terms of dignity, it's a critical intervention. In terms of income inequality, it's a critical mitigation rather than a cash-first intervention that tackles the root cause of poverty. Like other social protections, it is one tool that is part of the bigger picture.

9. Work collaboratively with supermarkets and big business

It's important to work with supermarkets and big businesses to ensure their role in changing the narrative and the status quo on the real solutions to food insecurity can be co-produced. The Food Ethics Council and the Food Foundation do some very valuable work in this space.[138][139] We need to call out the inconsistencies but work with supermarkets and big businesses to develop shared understandings around the impact of their practices.[140][141]

10. Collaborate across sectors including with philanthropies

The legions of people struggling to afford food and other essentials are one part of the equation. Frontline staff and volunteers, campaigners, and academics are key to the solution.

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[138] Food Ethics Council Join our Business Forum, https://www.foodethicscouncil.org/engage/our-business-forum/
[139] The Food Foundation Food Businesses, https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-businesses
[140] IFAN statement on the ASDA, FareShare, Trussell Trust £20 million Partnership Announcement (February 2018), https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/statements/statement-on-the-asda-fareshare-and-trussell-trust-gbp20-million-partnership-announcement
[141] Emily Roe, Sabine Goodwin, If businesses are serious about ending food poverty, they must pay their own staff a Living Wage The Living Wage Foundation (November 2021) https://www.livingwage.org.uk/news/if-businesses-are-serious-about-ending-food-poverty-they-must-pay-their-own-staff-real-living

Governments at UK-wide, national, regional, and local level as well as employers have pivotal roles to play. Philanthropies also represent a critical cohort within any road map to end the need for charitable food aid and eliminate food insecurity.

IFAN is also a signatory to the UK ESCR Network statement coordinated by Just Fair as well as a joint statement coordinated by Trussell linked to our joint Living Costs in Context webinar series and reports.[142]

As the Commissioners already know, there is a considerable body of evidence and learning from Scotland on the Right to Food. Evidence shared at the Glasgow session and through the Scottish Food Coalition submission will be invaluable.

The 2019 Human Rights Watch report, Nothing Left in the Cupboards: Austerity, Welfare Cuts, and the Right to Food in the UK, by Kartik Raj to which IFAN contributed covers 'Human Rights Watch's first project explicitly focused on obstacles to ensuring the right to food, as part of the right to an adequate standard of living, in the context of a welfare system in a rich democracy with a relatively well-functioning rule of law system.'[143]

IFAN would be pleased to receive any feedback or discuss any points raised in this submission.
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[142] Joint Statement to the Right to Food UK Commission UK ESCR Network (June 2026), https://justfair.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/UK-ESCR-Network-joint-statement-Right-to-Food-UK-Commission-June-2026-2.pdf
[143] Nothing Left in the Cupboards: Austerity, Welfare Cuts, and the Right to Food in the UK Human Rights Watch (May 2019), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/04/uk0519web.pdf