

Feeding Britain
55 Tufton Street
London
SW1P 3QL

W: www.feedingbritain.org T: 0207 340 6073



United Nations Human Rights Council
Special Rapporteur
Philip Alston

13 September 2018

We at Feeding Britain very much welcome Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Philip Alston's, visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland this November 2018. We are hopeful that the visit and investigation will bring both national and international attention to some of the most pressing issues on extreme poverty in this country, and that it will encourage immediate and sustained work to address especially the issue of food insecurity- a clear symptom of the scale of widespread poverty faced by UK citizens and residents.

Background on Feeding Britain

Feeding Britain is an independent charity established by members of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Hunger to undertake practical action to alleviate hunger in the UK. Our vision is a UK where no one has to go hungry. Our mission is to demonstrate how hunger and its underlying causes can be addressed, and to use this learning to advocate for system level change to eliminate hunger in the UK.

Background on food poverty in the UK

In 2013 the All Party Parliamentary group on hunger, co-chaired by the Rt Hon Frank Field MP and the Rt Revd Tim Thornton, Bishop of Lambeth, launched an investigation into the scale and causes of hunger in the UK. The inquiry heard from over 401 frontline organisations and a small number of individuals with personal experience of food insecurity, which resulted in the first Feeding Britain report *Feeding Britain, a strategy for zero hunger in England Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*.

The report highlighted that while Britain is not alone amongst advanced Western economies which are experiencing a rise in foodbanks, "there are particular economic forces that have been operating in Britain over the past decade which show how the rising costs of living have hit Britain's poorest households particularly hard." These factors include:

- Britain experienced the highest rate of general inflation. Over the ten-year period, from 2003 to 2013, prices increased by 30.4% in Britain, 28.4% in the United States, 19.8% in France and 19.6% in Germany.
- Britain experienced the highest food inflation. In the decade from 2003, food inflation was 47% in Britain, 30.4% in the United States, 22.1% in Germany and 16.7% in France.

Working to end hunger in the United Kingdom

Feeding Britain is a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in England and Wales under the charity number 1163986.
President: The Rt Hon and Most Revd Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury



- Britain experienced the highest fuel inflation. Between 2003 and 2013, the price of electricity, gas and other fuels increased by 153.6% in Britain, 76% in Germany and 58.8% in France.
- Britain experienced the highest housing inflation. Between 2003 and 2013, rents increased by 30.4% in Britain, 26.7% in France and 11.6% in Germany.
- And yet: Britain's wages haven't kept up. Between 2003 and 2013, wages grew most in Canada (36.5%) followed by the United States (30.2%). Wages in Britain grew by 28% and in France by 26.6%. Wages grew most slowly in Germany at 17.7%.
- Britain lost the highest proportion of high paying manufacturing jobs. Between 2003 and 2008, the number of manufacturing jobs as a share of all jobs declined by 2.3 percentage points in Britain; 2.1 points in Canada; 1.8 points in France; 1.2 points in the United States; and 1 point in Germany.
- Britain has a history of very large numbers of very low paid employees. The OECD calculates the average income of the bottom 20% of households in Britain at just \$9,530, much lower than the poorest 20% in France (\$12,653), Germany (\$13,381), Belgium (\$12,350), the Netherlands (\$11,274) and Denmark (\$12,183).

The inquiry found foodbanks to be a clear symptom of a much larger problem- namely that, while the cost of living has been steadily increasing since 2003, real wages have not been keeping up. This economic context is now being made worse by the rise in exploitative work environments, which include zero hours contracts, insecure labour and poverty wages, and the roll out of a new welfare system—Universal Credit—which, while having the stated aims to simplify and streamline the benefits system and tackle poverty, has been widely documented as operating with major issues both with the design and implementation which are leading to destitution and a rising need for foodbanks. Since the first Feeding Britain report was published in 2014 the need for foodbanks and other community led crisis provision has grown. The following statistics paint a more up to date picture of poverty and food insecurity in the UK today:

- There are 420 Trussell Trust foodbanks and an estimated 774 independent food banks operating in the UK, alongside thousands of smaller food aid projects (Trussell Trust, 2018 and IFAN, 2018).
- Between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018, The Trussell Trust's foodbank network distributed 1,332,952 three-day emergency food supplies to people in crisis, a 13% increase on the previous year. 484,026 of these went to children. This is a higher increase than the previous financial year, where foodbank use was up by 6% (Trussell Trust, 2018).
- There are an estimated 8.4 million people living with food insecurity in the UK (Food Foundation, 2016).
- 13% of adults surveyed in 2018 had gone without food for a full day in the last 12 months (End Hunger UK survey, 2018).

Working to end hunger in the United Kingdom

Feeding Britain
55 Tufton Street
London
SW1P 3QL

W: www.feedingbritain.org T: 0207 340 6073



13 Feeding Britain Pilot areas across the UK

Feeding Britain works with local partners to establish anti-hunger programmes across the UK and are currently supporting 13 pilot areas. These Feeding Britain pilot areas are collaborative initiatives which bring together a range of local organisations, including MPs, local authorities, charities, food banks and various food aid projects, citizens advice bureaus, churches, and social enterprises, all working, in different ways, to relieve immediate hunger and to reduce people's vulnerability to hunger in the long term.

Feeding Britain pilots come together as a national network to share learning, exchange good practice, and identify and act on common issues. We know that however hard local projects work to support people in crisis, many of the root causes of hunger need to be addressed through national policy reform and legislation. We therefore take the learning and evidence from our local pilots about what is causing hunger in their communities, and use this to call for national policy reforms that will alleviate, and ultimately eliminate, hunger for good.

We work closely with the APPG on Hunger and raise issues with a wide range of other stakeholders to make sure those responsible are aware of the real situation for people at risk of hunger today. We hold these stakeholders accountable by tracking and making public the progress that has been made against our recommendations.

The key issues

While there are a wide range of issues that Feeding Britain works on as a food poverty charity, the ones we believe to be most relevant to the Special Rapporteur's visit are:

Government measure of food insecurity

The UK government at present does not measure food insecurity. Lack of access to good nutritious food is a clear measure of poverty. Without an accurate measure of food insecurity across the UK it is impossible for the government to have a clear picture on levels of poverty and how it might be alleviated and reduced.

Measuring food insecurity does not have to be a costly, nor a time-consuming project. In fact there are already two existing survey tools which can quite easily (and in a cost neutral way) be included in an existing government survey of households. Emma Lewell-Buck MP, and a Feeding Britain trustee, has introduced a Measuring Food Insecurity Bill which would do just that. The second reading of the bill is set for the 26th October, however this issue is just starting to garner attention, and even with back from over 150 cross party MPs, it is likely that considerable lobbying and campaign work will need to continue for some time to come.

It is not enough for a government to rely on partial data collected by independent charities and the Trussell Trust foodbank to gain some limited insight into the problem of hunger in this country.

Working to end hunger in the United Kingdom

Feeding Britain is a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in England and Wales under the charity number 1163986.
President: The Rt Hon and Most Revd Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury



Universal Credit

As mentioned briefly above, Universal Credit (UC) has been well documented by the general public, local authorities, citizens advice bureaus and other professional advisors, anti-poverty charities, prominent think tanks, cross party politicians, and academics and researchers, to be the cause of extreme hardship for some claimants. In areas where UC has begun to roll out Food banks and food aid projects have reported a spike in the need for their services.

While initial criticisms of the system are damning, we have found some very specific issues and flaws with the system that can be addressed, with the hope that it will be very much improved before further roll out.

From our Feeding Britain pilot areas we have gathered evidence and case studies around the following issues in particular which are causing extreme hardship and pushing people to foodbanks:

- 1. Monthly Payment assessment periods*
The Universal Credit system as currently set up, works on the basis of monthly payments. For claimants paid on four weekly or weekly pay cycles, in some calendar months they will receive more salary payments than others. This results in the system calculating that their monthly salary has increased, and thus reduces their Universal Credit payments.
- 2. Problems with the Real Time Information System and information being passed from HMRC to UC*
The RTI allows employers to upload information on employees' salaries to HMRC, which is then used by the DWP to calculate Universal Credit payments. Our local partners frequently report people seeking emergency help because their Universal Credit payments have been delayed or incorrect, due to errors in the RTI information submitted.
- 3. Digital access and technological literacy*
Universal Credit is applied for and managed through an online portal. For many vulnerable claimants, finding reliable access to a computer and the internet to be able to do this is a challenge. Without internet access at home, and with free access to computers in public libraries and Job Centres sometimes limited, this becomes a source of stress and raises the risk of claimants being unable to meet the requirements of the system. For claimants required to apply for jobs as a condition of their benefit, a lack of reliable access to the internet makes meeting this requirement extremely challenging.
- 4. Benefit sanctions*
We have heard that instances of benefit sanctions for claimants not fulfilling their commitments under UC are sharply increasing. One of the reasons put forward for this is that claimants are finding the system confusing, and are unaware that it is now their responsibility to set up a first interview through their online account, where previously this was handled by the DWP directly. In Leicester for example, they have found that 2/3 of all sanctioning cases are due to claimants failing to arrange their first interview.
- 5. Large deductions from UC payments*
We are increasingly hearing about claimants who, when they receive their first payment, find that large unexpected deductions have been taken for unpaid debts such as old social loans and arrears on utility bills. These can be hundreds of pounds, leaving claimants with little money to live on. Claimants are having deductions taken without clear information about what loan it relates to and having to guess what the source might be, often going back several years. In some instances, there have been cases of wrongful deductions were the

Working to end hunger in the United Kingdom

Feeding Britain
55 Tufton Street
London
SW1P 3QL



W: www.feedingbritain.org T: 0207 340 6073

claimant has previously paid off the debt. To get information on the debt and to challenge unfair deductions people are passed from agency to agency with little support.

In addition to each of the above issues, there is major concern around how some groups are disproportionately impacted by the system because of their physical or mental health, extenuating family or life circumstances, age, disability, and gender.

Childhood hunger

One aspect of childhood poverty in the UK is hunger. UNICEF reported in 2017 that 10% of children in the UK live in food insecure households. This comes as no surprise when we also know that the Trussell Trust last year handed out over 484,026 emergency food supplies to children.

One key area of concern that Feeding Britain is focused on is holiday food and activity provision for children. The APPG on Hunger has found that at least 3 million children in the UK are at risk of hunger over the school holidays. This group is made up of nearly approximately 1 million children on free school meals during term time who lose this provision in the holidays and a further 2 million whose parents are on very low incomes but in many cases work for their poverty.

As a result of these findings, and the growing network of charities and community projects stepping up to fill the gap, Feeding Britain Trustee, and MP for Birkenhead, Frank Field introduced a Bill to the House of Commons in 2017, with cross party backing. The Bill sought to give local authorities both the duties and the resources they need to facilitate free meal and fun projects during school holidays.

While the Bill did not progress after its second reading the Minister for Children and Families confirmed that the Government would provide funding for research and pilots on holiday provision, which began in Summer 2018. Because of this funding Feeding Britain was able to scale up its holiday club provision across 9 local pilot areas and provided for well over the target 27,000 children. These pilots will generate data on the effectiveness of holiday provision, and the most appropriate models, with further national rollout based on the results. While holiday club provision is a step towards protecting children from hunger it is also a major symptom of the levels of poverty and food insecurity in this country.

Working to end hunger in the United Kingdom

Feeding Britain is a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in England and Wales under the charity number 1163986.
President: The Rt Hon and Most Revd Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

Feeding Britain
55 Tufton Street
London
SW1P 3QL

W: www.feedingbritain.org T: 0207 340 6073



In conclusion, Feeding Britain would like to formally extend an invitation to UN Special Rapporteur Phillip Alston to meet in person to discuss the above issues. Furthermore, any of our pilot areas across the UK would be very keen to host a visit and arrange for site visits to food banks, community food aid projects, citizen's advice bureaus, or any other local project which might have a hand in tackling poverty and destitution. Our pilot areas bring together the entire range of community actors and so would provide thorough insight in to the issue of poverty and food insecurity.

We would urge the Special Rapporteur to consider making a visit to one or more of the following Feeding Britain pilot locations:

1. Birkenhead
2. Coventry
3. Cheshire West and Chester
4. Leicester
5. Cornwall

Each of these locations experience some of the highest levels of deprivation in the UK. They also encompass a diverse range of localities- from small urban towns to very rural and widespread geographic regions. These geographic considerations impact on the types of issues individuals are faced with, and the various barriers that need to be overcome by people to access short term aid, and to break the long-term cycle of poverty and destitution.

With kinds regards and well wishes for your visit,
Annie Olivier

Programme Coordinator
Feeding Britain

Working to end hunger in the United Kingdom

Feeding Britain is a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in England and Wales under the charity number 1163986.
President: The Rt Hon and Most Revd Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury