



September 2018

Visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, to the UK from 5 to 16 November 2018

Written submission by the Independent Food Aid Network

1. Introduction:

The Independent Food Aid Network¹ was set up in the spring of 2016 as a representative body for a growing number of grassroots food aid providers addressing food poverty across the UK. The growth in emergency food aid provision has been in great part the result of the deconstruction of the welfare state through benefit cuts and delays, punitive sanctions and the rollout of Universal Credit. We seek to support a range of frontline organisations while advocating on their behalf at a national level. We also endeavour to support and disseminate critical research on food insecurity and its driver poverty. Our vision is of a country that doesn't need emergency food aid in which good food is accessible to all.

2. Critical mapping of independent food banks:

Until May 2017 there was little knowledge of the extent of food aid provisioning nationally beyond the work of the growing Trussell Trust foodbank network and its food parcel distribution data². Our volunteer coordinator, Sabine Goodwin, began ground-breaking work to map and identify independent food banks and food bank style projects on behalf of IFAN in the spring of 2017. First results were published in *The Guardian* in May of that year³ and by now at least 774 independent food banks have been identified⁴. As the Trussell Trust network extends to more than 1230 foodbank centres⁵, each distributing food packages weekly, the independent food bank sector accounts for at least 38% of the national picture.

However, expanding food aid provisioning is not restricted to food banks and we estimate that there are at least 2,000 more social supermarkets, soup kitchens, community food projects, social eating projects, drop-in kitchens and school holiday and breakfast clubs operating across the UK. Beyond the numbers involved, it's important to be clear that emergency food aid projects have by now emerged across the length and breadth of the UK in both affluent and deprived areas⁶.

¹ www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk

² www.trusselltrust.org

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/29/report-reveals-scale-of-foodbank-use-in-the-uk-ifan>

⁴ www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/mapping

⁵ www.trusselltrust.org

⁶ www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/mapping/



3. Establishing a national measure of food insecurity:

IFAN's contribution to our understanding of the extent of food poverty has been valuable but no mapping exercise or analysis of food aid provision can replace a national measure of food insecurity that remains frustratingly absent in the UK. This is particularly relevant when considering the Special Rapporteur's interest in determining "to what extent do official definitions used by the state adequately encompass poverty in all its dimensions?"

We know that people will use emergency food aid as a last resort⁷ and based on UN data from 2014 food insecurity levels were found to be 17 times greater than Trussell Trust food bank use. Household food insecurity measurement is viewed as a more valuable measure of poverty than other income-based poverty measures⁸. Critical work in Canada has proved the value of routine food insecurity measurement in relation to the health implications of poverty.⁹ While food insecurity remains unmeasured routinely there is a real danger that the Government will continue to deny spiralling poverty levels while charitable food aid provisioning becomes the norm as a replacement for the broken welfare state.

IFAN actively campaigns for the establishment of a routine national measurement of food insecurity and works within the End Hunger UK alongside the Food Foundation, Sustain and the Trussell Trust¹⁰. Emma Lewell-Buck MP's Food Insecurity Bill¹¹ is set for a 2nd Reading in October but given the lack of support for this initiative we don't feel optimistic that this proceed will further despite our best efforts to inform and advocate.

The cost of including 12 FIES questions annually within existing UK surveys is estimated to be around £50-75,000¹² and in light of the mounting evidence showing how valuable such a measure would be its absence remains deeply troubling.

4. Data collection on Scottish independent food banks:

While a routine analysis of food insecurity remains missing, we are also currently initiating a joint project alongside A Menu for Change to collect food parcel distribution data across Scottish independent food banks. This will be the first time that food parcel data within the independent sector will be collectively analysed and as a result of the work of A Menu for Change and access to the Scottish Welfare Fund available we hope to see a decline in the number of emergency food parcels distributed.¹³

⁷ http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/Foodbank_Report_web.pdf

⁸ <https://www.enuf.org.uk/measurement-household-food-insecurity>

⁹ <http://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/fact-sheets/#health>

¹⁰ www.endhungeruk.org/measure/

¹¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/2017-2019/0136/18136.pdf>

¹² <http://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/MeasuringHouseholdFoodInsecurity.pdf>

¹³ <https://menuforchange.org.uk/independent-food-banks-we-need-your-help/>



5. The extent of volunteer hours involved in UK food banking:

Based on our mapping work, together with the Trussell Trust, we were able to account for the extent of food bank volunteer input across then 651 identified independent banks and 1235 Trussell Trusts foodbank centres. This study established that food bank volunteers were putting in more than 4 million hours annually equating to more than £30 million of wages at the minimum wage¹⁴.

6. Working to prevent the institutionalisation of emergency food aid in UK:

One of our main concerns is that, while establishing food aid provision to deal with the UK's food poverty crisis, thousands of frontline organisations are inadvertently perpetuating the need for charitable food aid provision – there is a real danger that the emergency response presents itself as a way to avoid Governmental responsibility. So, in pursuit of our aim to see the end for the need for emergency food aid we are key advocates against the institutionalisation of food aid. Through social media and discussions with UK Food Poverty Alliance colleagues we regularly point out the dangers of charitable food aid being seen as a permanent solution to food poverty as well as the complexity of bringing food surplus redistribution into the equation. We were clear on these critical issues in our response to the announcement by the Trussell Trust and FareShare of a £20 million partnership with ASDA.¹⁵

7. The work of our trustees:

Some of our trustees have been involved in extensive and multi-method investigations into the causes and lived experience of food poverty¹⁶. Their research has shown that the reasons for seeking charitable food are linked to problems accessing and surviving on social security benefits; navigating a low income whilst in precarious employment; multiple health issues, particularly mental ill health; alongside a considerable stigma attached to using food banks. We have also undertaken research to examine the potential exclusion of certain groups from receipt of food aid in terms of ethnicity¹⁷ and research exploring the role of food banks in ameliorating food insecurity.¹⁸

¹⁴ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2017/10/17/foodbank-volunteers-30-million-unpaid-work/>

¹⁵ <http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/asda-response> & <https://lacuna.org.uk/food-and-health/asdas-fight-hunger-create-change-partnership-what-does-it-mean-for-efforts-to-tackle-food-poverty-in-the-uk/>

¹⁶ Garthwaite, K., 2016. Hunger pains: Life inside foodbank Britain. Policy Press.

¹⁷ Power, M., Doherty, B., Small, N., Teasdale, S. and Pickett, K.E., 2017. All in it together? Community food aid in a multi-ethnic context. *Journal of Social Policy*, 46(3), pp.447-471.

¹⁸ May, J., Williams, A. Cloke, P. and Cherry, L. (2018) 'Do food banks help? Food insecurity in the UK', *Geography Review* 32 (1): 30-34



8. Final comments:

We are deeply concerned by the worsening situation as Universal Credit continues its rollout and very much welcome the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights to the UK in November 2018.

IFAN offer their services to facilitate interviews and meetings with academics and local stakeholders, including civil society groups and individuals experiencing food poverty. IFAN representatives would be happy to address any questions the Special Rapporteur may have prior to the visit or during his stay in the UK.

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