



## DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 2016/0238, 2 December 2016

# Household food insecurity measurement in the UK

## Summary

This pack has been prepared ahead of the debate on household food insecurity measurement in the UK to take place in Westminster Hall on 6 December 2016 at 9:30am. The subject for the debate has been chosen by Emma Lewell-Buck MP.

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

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# 1. Food insecurity

## 1.1 What is food insecurity?

Food insecurity (or security) may be defined and understood in different ways. It covers a broad spectrum of issues from food prices to dietary needs and can be considered at a national level (a country's total food supply) or at the level of individuals' ability to access food for themselves and their families.

The House of Commons Westminster Hall debate on 6 December 2016 is expected to focus on households' ability to adequately feed themselves and how this can be measured.

### Definitions

In 1996, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) World Food Summit defined food **security** as follows:

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.<sup>1</sup>

A 2014 Research Report for DEFRA used a similar definition:

"Household food security is assured when members are confident of having economic and physical access to sufficient, acceptable food for a healthy life."<sup>2</sup>

Conversely, food **insecurity** was defined in the Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey, commissioned by the Food Standards Agency and conducted across the UK between 2003 and 2005, as:

Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.<sup>3</sup>

"Socially acceptable ways" includes "without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies". This definition for food insecurity was taken from previous research in the United States and has more recently been adopted by the Food Foundation, a UK think tank.<sup>4</sup>

However, in response to a Parliamentary Question the Government cautioned against trying to capture all facets of food insecurity in a single definition:

There is no single definition of food insecurity. The factors that impact on household food security are complex. There are multiple indicators such as quality, variety and desirability of diet as well as total intake, not all of which are measured consistently.

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<sup>1</sup> UN FAO, [World Food Summit – Plan of Action](#), 13 November 1996

<sup>2</sup> H Lambie-Mumford et al, [Household Food Security in the UK: A Review of Food Aid](#), February 2014

<sup>3</sup> Food Standards Agency, [Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey](#), 2007, Volume 3, Chapter 20, p202

<sup>4</sup> For example, see the Food Foundation's report, [Too Poor to Eat: Food insecurity in the UK](#), May 2016

It is, therefore, very difficult and potentially misleading to attempt to develop a single classification of food insecurity.<sup>5</sup>

A similar concept, **food poverty**, has previously been defined by the Department of Health as “the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet”.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2 Extent of the problem

### UN FAO Food Insecurity Experience Scale

The UN FAO measures food insecurity using its Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES). Individuals’ experience of food insecurity is assessed based on their answers to eight questions, regarding their ability to afford enough food or times they went without food due to lack of money or other resources. Provisional estimates for the UK are based on a survey of 1,000 adults conducted through the 2014 Gallup World Poll:

- 10% of individuals aged 15 or over experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2014, equating to 5.3 million people. Looking across all households affected, there were a total of 8.4 million people living in households where at least one person experienced food insecurity.
- Within this group, around 2.4 million people experienced severe food insecurity. In total, there were 4.7 million people living in households where at least one person experienced severe food insecurity.

The threshold for severe food insecurity is at the level of severity where individuals have, at times, gone a whole day without eating. Moderate food insecurity represents at least some reduction in quantity of food intake below levels considered appropriate.<sup>7</sup>

### Poverty and Social Exclusion Surveys

The *Poverty and Social Exclusion* survey, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and has been conducted at roughly ten yearly intervals since 1983, ask respondents which items and activities they consider necessities and if they have access to them. The 2012 survey found that 28% of adults “skimped on their own food last year so that others in their households could eat”.<sup>8</sup>

The survey found “widespread agreement” on what constitutes a minimally acceptable diet but that a significant number of people lack some of the items necessary for such a diet:

However, very large numbers of people lack at least one of these items:

- Well over half a million children (4%) live in families who cannot afford to feed them properly

<sup>5</sup> PQ HL8165, 3 May 2016

<sup>6</sup> Department of Health, *Choosing a Better Diet: a food and health action plan*, 2005

<sup>7</sup> UN FAO, *Voices of the Hungry: Technical Report*, August 2016, p49

<sup>8</sup> D Gordon et al, *The Impoverishment of the UK: PSE UK first results: Living Standards*, 28 March 2013, p2

- Over three and a half million adults (8%) cannot afford to eat properly

... In households which cannot afford an adequate diet for their children, 93% have at least one adult who 'skimps' on their own food to try to protect the children.<sup>9</sup>

The proportion of households unable to afford minimally acceptable diet increased between 1999 and 2012 but was lower than during the 1980s:

Around 4 million adults and children are not properly fed by today's standards, which is a similar number to those who were not properly fed in 1999 by the standards of that year (which included a roast joint or its vegetarian equivalent once a week as well as the above items). This is an improvement on the overall picture in 1990 and 1983 when, by the standards set then, 5 million and 5.5 million adults could not afford one of the food items then seen to be necessities.

There have also been some improvements for children since 1983. There is one food necessity for children common to 1983 and 2012, namely having three meals a day. In 1983 nearly half a million children missed out because their parents were so short of money. Today, there are far fewer children missing out with too few cases to make a reliable estimate.<sup>10</sup>

## Destitution – Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimated that around 700,000 households in the UK were destitute and in contact with voluntary sector crisis services in 2015. These households contained around 1 million adults and 300,000 children. The survey found that 76% of destitute service users had gone without food in the month before the survey.

In the research, people were considered destitute if:

a) They, or their children, have lacked two or more of these six essentials over the past month, because they cannot afford them:

- shelter (have slept rough for one or more nights)
- food (have had fewer than two meals a day for two or more days)
- heating their home (have been unable to do this for five or more days)
- lighting their home (have been unable to do this for five or more days)
- clothing and footwear (appropriate for weather)
- basic toiletries (soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush).

OR

b) Their income is so extremely low that they are unable to purchase these essentials for themselves.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp8-9

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p13

<sup>11</sup> S Fitzpatrick et al, [Destitution in the UK](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 27 April 2016

## Use of food banks

The Government does not collect statistics on the number of or use of food banks. However, the Trussell Trust – the largest UK foodbank provider – publishes statistics on food bank users at the UK and regional level on [its website](#).

In 2015/16, 1.11 million three-day emergency food parcels were distributed by Trussell Trust foodbanks.<sup>12</sup> Usage of Trussell Trust foodbanks has rapidly expanded over the past decade:

### Number of three-day emergency food supplies given by Trussell Trust foodbanks

|         | Number    |
|---------|-----------|
| 2005/06 | 2,814     |
| 2006/07 | 9,174     |
| 2007/08 | 13,849    |
| 2008/09 | 25,899    |
| 2009/10 | 40,898    |
| 2010/11 | 61,468    |
| 2011/12 | 128,697   |
| 2012/13 | 346,992   |
| 2013/14 | 913,138   |
| 2014/15 | 1,084,604 |
| 2015/16 | 1,109,309 |

Source: Trussell Trust press releases, 15 April 2016 and 24 April 2013

However, the statistics need to be interpreted with care:

- The statistics show the number of three day emergency food parcels distributed by Trussell Trust foodbanks – this is **not the same** as the number of unique users, as someone who used a food bank twice in the year will be counted twice (and family members will be counted separately). The Trussell Trust estimates that on average, people needed two foodbank referrals in one year, meaning the number of unique users in 2015/16 was likely to be around 554,000.
- The Trussell Trust is not the only provider of food banks and figures do not include people using food banks run by other providers. Individuals must be referred from a care professional or benefits adviser in order to qualify for assistance from a Trussell Trust foodbank.

More recent statistics show 519,000 three-day emergency food parcels were distributed in the six months to September 2016, 13,000 higher than the same period last year. The most common primary reasons for referral to Trussell Trust foodbanks during this period were benefit delays (27% of referrals); low income (25% of referrals); and benefit changes (16% of referrals).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Trussell Trust press release, [Foodbank use remains at record high](#), 15 April 2016

<sup>13</sup> Trussell Trust press release, [Half a million emergency food parcels distributed by Trussell Trust foodbanks in six months](#), 8 November 2016

## 1.3 New measures of food insecurity

The Government has previously stated it has no plans to independently measure food insecurity going forwards:

Food insecurity is a global problem which the United Nations (UN) agreed to confront at the World Food Summit in 1996 and has framed subsequent sustainable development goals. Getting accurate and informative data was the motivation for the 'Voices of the Hungry' project. This project has established an annual universal metric to measure lack of access to food and the severity of this in over 150 countries, and help inform UN policy. The Department for International Development has provided financial support to enable the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to take this forward.

The United Kingdom is committed to the Sustainable Development Goals and to the data the FAO commissions and manages. There are therefore no plans for the Department of Health to independently monitor food insecurity going forward, or determine a precise estimate on which to base action to reduce food poverty.<sup>14</sup>

As noted in the Written Answer, achieving food security forms part of the second goal of the United Nations' seventeen sustainably development goals (SDGs) – "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture".<sup>15</sup>

Elsewhere, the Government has noted that the challenge in obtaining informative data on food poverty or insecurity given, "There is no single commonly agreed method for accurately measuring the extent of food poverty".<sup>16</sup>

However, the Food Foundation has argued that standardised questions on food insecurity (as used in the UN FAO Food Insecurity Experience Scale, discussed above) could be inserted into existing UK surveys such as the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Living Costs and Food Survey, or the Health Survey for England and equivalent surveys in devolved nations. It estimates that the marginal cost of adding the extra questions would be in the region of £50-75,000 per year.<sup>17</sup>

### Calls for better data

The House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's January 2015 report on [Food security: demand, consumption and waste](#) recommended the Government "collect objective and statistically robust data on the scale of household food insecurity". It suggested the Living Costs and Food Survey might be used for this purpose and that other countries, including the United States, Canada and Republic of Ireland, already monitor food insecurity and food poverty through use of surveys:

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<sup>14</sup> PQ 44475, 2 September 2016

<sup>15</sup> For more information on the Sustainable Development Goals, see the [Library debate pack](#) prepared for the Westminster Hall Debate on 24 November 2016, on the *First Report from the International Development Committee of Session 2016-17, on UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals*

<sup>16</sup> PQ HL7535, 11 April 2016

<sup>17</sup> Food Foundation, *Measuring household food insecurity in the UK and why we MUST do it: 4 facts you should know*, November 2016

47. The Government uses no official definition of 'food poverty'. It has adopted a definition of fuel poverty: someone is said to be fuel poor if their income is below the poverty line once their energy costs have been taken into account and if these costs are higher than the average bills of a similar household. The Department of Energy and Climate Change uses this definition to help it gather data and inform energy policies and programmes. It would be possible to adopt a definition for food poverty, such that a person would be considered to be in food poverty if their income fell below the poverty line once their costs of obtaining an adequate diet have been taken into account. However, more nuanced approaches may be appropriate for measuring the extent of food poverty since a complex of socio-economic and cultural factors drive demand for emergency food aid. The United States, Canada and the Republic of Ireland monitor trends in household food insecurity and food poverty through survey questionnaires. Incorporating similar questions in the Living Costs and Food Survey would enable the gathering of more detailed data on whether individuals have experienced problems in obtaining sufficient food.

48. Charities provided us with their own evidence of a growing number of people accessing emergency food aid, yet there is no national collation of this data nor sufficient analysis on how usage of foodbanks may be linked to rising food prices or constraints on incomes. We recommend that Defra commission further research into why more people are using foodbanks to provide an evidence base to inform and enhance policy responses. We recommend that the Government collect objective and statistically robust data on the scale of household food insecurity, including through the use of questions in the food costs sections of the UK's Living Costs and Food Survey. It should also monitor trends over time so that the effectiveness of policies can be accurately gauged and any necessary changes made in response to evidence of need. In its response to this report Ministers should set out detailed proposals for how it will work with partners to gather data, the timescale for establishing a work programme and its anticipated outputs.<sup>18</sup>

Responding to the Committee Report in March 2015, the Coalition Government emphasised the complexity of the issue and argued that the Living Costs and Food Survey was not suitable for collecting data on food insecurity:

When Defra published research last year on food aid in the UK, the conclusion was that the provision of food aid ranges from small, local operations to regional and national schemes. The landscape is diverse, reflecting the various communities and organisations that devote their time to helping people in need. Some of these food aid providers take records, whereas others do not. As an obstacle to collecting data on food aid provision, we would be reluctant to oblige communities to collect data on top of the hard work they are already doing.

In respect of the reasons why people are turning to food aid, the issue encompasses economic, social and environmental influences. As the All-Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry on Hunger and Food Poverty's Report noted, the reasons why people use food banks can be complex and are frequently overlapping. A single question

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<sup>18</sup> Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Food security: demand, consumption and waste](#), 22 January 2015, HC 703 2014-15

on food insecurity in the Living Costs and Food Survey would not be able to cover the complexities of the issue and may bias responses to other sections of the Survey in relation to the participant's outgoings. A more comprehensive set of questions would present continued difficulties with choosing the relevant questions, again considering the complexity of the issue. Though the current Survey includes a question on 'free food', the source is not recorded and would not exclusively capture food donated from charity. On a practical level, the Survey sample is relatively small (around 5,500 households p.a.) and only covers the entire private household population, thus excluding the homeless. It is therefore unlikely to produce sufficient data. The ONS agrees with Government that the Survey would not be suitable for collecting food insecurity data.<sup>19</sup>

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger, chaired by Frank Field MP, has similarly called on the Government to allocate research resources to "monitoring vulnerability to hunger in the United Kingdom".<sup>20</sup> It suggested that questions from the Food Insecurity Experience Scale, or similar questions, be incorporated into existing surveys.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Food security: demand, consumption and waste – Government response](#), 26 March 2015, HC 1148 2014-15

<sup>20</sup> APPG on Hunger, [A route map to ending hunger as we know it in the United Kingdom: Feeding Britain in 2015-16](#), December 2015, p9

<sup>21</sup> APPG on Hunger, [Britain's not-so-hidden hunger](#), April 2016, pp12-3

## 2. Press Articles

[Benefits sanctions plunging claimants into 'hunger and depression'](#)

Tom Peck

30 November 2016, The Independent

[Huge rise in hospital beds in England taken up by people with malnutrition; Critics blame three-fold rise on poverty, cutbacks to meals on wheels services for the elderly, and inadequate social care](#)

Denis Campbell

The Guardian, 25 November 25 2016

[Scotland may introduce a 'right to food' in its laws](#)

Lynsey Bews

The Independent, 18 November 2016

[Trussell Trust to deliver more emergency food parcels than ever before; UK's biggest food bank highlighted delays with social security payments and benefit sanctions as factors behind record use](#)

Patrick Butler

The Guardian, 8 November 2016

[The link between food banks and welfare cuts](#)

Naomi Rovnick

Financial Times, 29 October 2016

[Obesity set to soar for boys, but not girls, from poorer homes; Most boys from deprived backgrounds in England will be overweight by 2020 while better-off boys grow slimmer, says study](#)

Denis Campbell

The Guardian, 11 October 2016

[Damian Green's common sense approach to welfare is much needed in the fight against poverty](#)

Chris Mould (Chairman of the Trussell Trust)

Daily Telegraph, 1 October 2016

[Surge in malnutrition blamed on rising poverty](#)

Rob Merrick

The Independent, 15 September 2016

[More than 8 million in UK struggle to put food on table, survey says: Food Foundation reveals scale of food insecurity, with 4.7 million thought to be regularly going a day without eating](#)

Patrick Butler

The Guardian, 6 May 2016

[Who knows how many people are going hungry? The government should: The UK government's welfare policy is now dependent on food bank handouts. But surely it's time to get a proper measure of the level of food insecurity](#)

Patrick Butler

The Guardian, 20 April 2016

['Political warfare' over food bank group's million users claim hurting hungry people - MPs](#)

John Bingham

Daily Telegraph, 15 April 2016

[British left vulnerable to hunger after welfare reforms, warns Justin Welby: Archbishop of Canterbury claims benefit sanctions and bureaucratic delays in welfare mean government is partly to blame for 'tragedy' of hunger](#)

Patrick Butler

The Guardian, 10 December 2015

[A nation of inequality: How the UK is failing to feed its most vulnerable people: Deepening divisions between the haves and have-nots will increase the number of people requiring emergency food assistance](#)

Megan Blake

The Independent, 25 May 2015

[The truth about food banks: dependency or welfare crisis?](#)

Mauro Galluzzo

Channel 4, 20 February 2014

[Food poverty 'now a health emergency'](#)

Nick Triggle

BBC, 4 December 2013

[Too poor to be thin](#)

The Economist, 25 January 2013

## 3. Parliamentary material

### 3.1 Written questions

#### [Department for Work and Pensions: Trussell Trust: Written question - 54547](#)

**Asked by Margaret Ferrier**

**Asked on 23 November 2016**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his Department's policies of the statistics on emergency food aid released by the Trussell Trust on 8 November 2016.

**Answered by Damian Hinds**

**Answered on 30 November 2016**

It is widely acknowledged that the reasons people use food banks are complex and overlapping. It is misleading to link them to any one cause. The vast majority of benefits are paid on time and we have made huge improvements to the service we provide.

#### [Department for Work and Pensions: Food Banks: Written question - 53439](#)

**Asked by Tracy Brabin**

**Asked on 16 November 2016**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of collating official statistics on (a) the number of foodbanks in the UK, (b) dependency on foodbanks, (c) use of foodbanks and (d) foodbank referral causes; and if he will make a statement.

**Answered by Damian Hinds**

**Answered on 21 November 2016**

Food banks range from small, local provision, through to national networks. It would not be possible to collect this information without placing unnecessary burdens on volunteers trying to help their communities.

#### [Department for Health: Malnutrition: Written question - 53159](#)

**Asked by Jonathan Ashworth**

**Asked on 15 November 2015**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many bed days in hospitals were for people with (a) a primary diagnosis for malnutrition and (b) a secondary diagnosis of malnutrition in each of the last 10 years.

**Answered by Nicola Blackwood**

**Department: Department of Health**

Malnutrition can be caused by a variety of factors, including an inability to absorb nutrients normally, or a condition or disease which affects a patient's ability to feed normally.

The number of bed days in hospitals for a primary diagnosis of malnutrition and a secondary diagnosis of malnutrition in each of the last 10 years is presented in the following table however the cause of the malnutrition is not presented in these figures and it not possible to make assumptions on which factor was responsible for the admission.

| Year    | Primary Diagnosis | Secondary Diagnosis |
|---------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 2006-07 | 6,704             | 58,344              |
| 2007-08 | 7,695             | 57,052              |
| 2008-09 | 8,281             | 69,340              |
| 2009-10 | 10,732            | 85,062              |
| 2010-11 | 11,258            | 103,103             |
| 2011-12 | 13,013            | 115,348             |
| 2012-13 | 14,354            | 126,282             |
| 2013-14 | 13,427            | 143,500             |
| 2014-15 | 14,867            | 152,230             |
| 2015-16 | 17,166            | 167,362             |

The information requested pursuant to the Answer of 20 July 2016 to Question [42560](#), requesting provision of the figures in that Answer by each English region and parliamentary constituency is not held in the format requested.

The Department does not hold any data on the number and the proportion of care home residents who are malnourished. In 2014 the Government updated the requirements of regulation with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to provide greater clarity about how the nutritional needs should be met. The CQC can prosecute for a breach of this regulation if a failure to meet the regulation results in avoidable harm to a person using the service, or a person using the service is exposed to significant risk of harm.

**[Department for Work and Pensions: Social Security Benefits: Food Poverty: Written question - 51756](#)**

**Asked by Margaret Ferrier**

**Asked on 03 November 2016**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his Department's policies of the conclusions of sociology working paper 2016-03, published by the University of Oxford on 27 October 2016, on the impact of benefit sanctioning on food insecurity: a dynamic cross-area study of food bank usage in the UK; and if he will make a statement.

**Answered by Damian Hinds**

**Answered on: 11 November 2016**

The Work and Pensions Select Committee, in their report published in 2015, recognise that “[sanctions are] a key element of the mutual obligation that underpins the effectiveness and fairness of the social security system”.

The report the honourable member cites does not provide evidence of a causal link between sanctions rates and the use of food banks.

We know the most effective route out of poverty is work. That is why we are determined to help people find employment through a wide range of support targeted to each individual’s personal circumstances. Sanctions are only used in a small percentage of cases and in the year to March 2016 the number of JSA sanctions issued dropped by 56%.

**[Department of Health: Food Poverty: Written question - 44475](#)**

**Asked by Dr Eilidh Whiteford**

**Asked on 02 September 2016**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, with reference to the report by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, entitled Voices of the hungry, published in April 2016, what steps his Department plans to take to (a) initiate regular annual monitoring of adult and child food insecurity in the UK and (b) determine a precise estimate on which to base action to reduce food poverty.

**Answered by Mr Philip Dunne**

**Answered on 12 September 2016**

Food insecurity is a global problem which the United Nations (UN) agreed to confront at the World Food Summit in 1996 and has framed subsequent sustainable development goals. Getting accurate and informative data was the motivation for the ‘Voices of the Hungry’ project. This project has established an annual universal metric to measure lack of access to food and the severity of this in over 150 countries, and help inform UN policy. The Department for International Development has provided financial support to enable the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to take this forward.

The United Kingdom is committed to the Sustainable Development Goals and to the data the FAO commissions and manages. There are therefore no plans for the Department of Health to independently monitor food insecurity going forward, or determine a precise estimate on which to base action to reduce food poverty.

The Government is committed to tackling childhood obesity and launched Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action on 18 August. A copy of the plan is attached and is also available at:

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/546588/Childhood\\_obesity\\_2016\\_2\\_acc.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/546588/Childhood_obesity_2016_2_acc.pdf)

**Department for Work and Pensions Food Banks: Written question - 41039**

**Asked by Rushanara Ali**

**Asked on 20 June 2016**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies on benefits eligibility of the conclusion in the University of Hull report, entitled Mapping hunger, published in April 2016, that food bank use is highest in areas with people in skilled manual work or where more people are unable to work due to long-term sickness or disability.

**Answered by Justin Tomlinson**

**Answered on 4 July 2016**

This government is determined to move to a higher wage society, introducing the new National Living Wage that will benefit over 1 million workers directly this year, and spending £80 billion on working age benefits to ensure a strong safety net for those who need it most. We are also committed to supporting people with disabilities and currently spend a record £50 billion a year doing so.

There are no plans to amend our reforms that are ensuring that work always pays and are restoring fairness for hardworking taxpayers. As the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger noted, the reasons why people use food banks can be complex and are frequently overlapping. Their use cannot be attributed to a single cause.

Our welfare system provides a strong safety net to those who need extra support.

**Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Food Poverty: Written question - HL8165**

**Asked by Baroness Thomas of Winchester**

**Asked on 03 May 2016**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to gather evidence on food insecurity in the UK.

**Answered by Lord Gardiner of Kimble**

**Answered on 12 May 2016**

There is no single definition of food insecurity. The factors that impact on household food security are complex. There are multiple indicators such as quality, variety and desirability of diet as well as total intake, not all of which are measured consistently. It is, therefore, very difficult and potentially misleading to attempt to develop a single classification of food insecurity.

Defra publishes annual statistics to show the proportion of household income spent on food by (a) all households and (b) the lowest income 20% of households. Lower income families spend a greater proportion

of household income on food (15.7% compared to 11.4% for the average household). This has remained stable over recent years: 16.5% in 2013, 16.6% in 2012, 16.6% in 2011, 15.8% in 2010 and 16.1% in 2009. The most recent statistics are in the Food Statistics Pocketbook 2015 on the GOV.UK website.

Year on year food prices have continued to fall with an annual rate of inflation of -2.7 per cent in the year to March 2016. General inflation is 0.3 per cent, unchanged from January.

## 3.2 Oral questions

### [Jobcentre Advisers: Food Banks](#)

#### HC Deb 7 Dec 2015 c 692

**Diana Johnson:** What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the trial of locating jobcentre advisers at food banks. [902562]

**Mr David Hanson:** What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the trial of locating jobcentre advisers at food banks.

#### **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and**

**Pensions (Mr Shailesh Vara):** Jobcentre work coaches undertake outreach work every day in local communities and have recently been helping people with back-to-work support and advice at the Lalley Welcome Centre in Manchester, where a food bank sits alongside other support services. The test is at an early stage and the Department will make the findings public in due course.

**Diana Johnson:** Despite the fall in unemployment, many working families across the country will be relying on food banks this Christmas. I pay tribute to Sarah Sidwell and her staff at the food bank in Hull. Is putting jobcentre staff in food banks not actually an acknowledgement of the shambolic nature of the benefits system, which is affecting people? Should the Minister not think very long and hard about sorting out the system rather than applying a plaster and putting jobcentre staff in food banks?

**Mr Vara:** May I gently remind the hon. Lady that we were invited, at the request of Sister Rita, to go to Lalley Welcome Centre, which also hosts other agencies? I might also say to the hon. Lady that that particular centre has a job club, which makes eminent sense. I presume she does not object to that. If she is happy to have a job club there, why on earth does she object to our going there to help people when we have been invited to go there?

**Mr Hanson:** Will the Minister confirm whether Lord Prior will join in the evaluation of services at that job centre and food bank? As the Minister will know, Lord Prior has indicated that obesity seems to be a problem, rather than poverty. Will the Minister confirm whether the evaluation will include an examination of the reasons why sanctions and benefit delays cause problems for those going to food banks?

**Mr Vara:** There are now fewer delays in getting benefits than there were under the Government in which the right hon. Gentleman served. The number of JSA applications is down compared with 2009-10, as is the number of ESA applications.

**Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con):** From my point of view, there is great potential in co-siting jobcentres and food banks if it is done in the right way. On a related subject, can the Minister envisage a future in which jobcentres and councils are co-located across the country?

**Mr Vara:** I am happy to confirm to my hon. Friend that that is already happening.

**Kevin Foster:** In relation to this trial, has the Minister noticed today's report in the *Western Morning News*, which says that food bank usage has dropped by 25% in Devon and Cornwall? Does he agree with the Trussell Trust that that is

"a sign that economic recovery is giving more people access to secure work"?

**Mr Vara:** It is always good to have external endorsement of what the Government are doing. That is just clear evidence that the Government's long-term plan is working.

**Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab):** May I report to the Minister the progress in Birkenhead? A benefits adviser has been working in the food bank there, and the number of people having to come back for a second bag of food has dropped by 65%. Whenever the Secretary of State refers to this experiment, he talks about "benefit advisers", while other senior people in the Department talk about "work coaches". Might the Minister persuade the Secretary of State to say that his phrase is not an offensive one? If someone who is hungry thinks that the person at the food bank is a work coach, it might put them off going to the food bank in the first place?

**Mr Vara:** Both terms are applicable. May I just say that we should not get bogged down in the terminology? The important thing is to make sure that people actually have support to get them back to work. As we just heard in the quote from my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), our long-term plan is working. We want to make sure that as many people as possible are in work so that they do not have to resort to food banks.

**Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab):** Is the Minister surprised that the Secretary of State has never bothered to visit a food bank? Presumably, people in his Department have spoken to people in food banks. The message we get loud and clear from people in food banks is that the most important thing the Department can do is to fix its broken system of sanctions and stop benefit delays.

**Mr Vara:** It is always helpful if, when Front Benchers say things at the Dispatch Box, they are accurate. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has visited food banks. As far as sanctions are concerned, may I

just tell the hon. Lady that the Oakley review said that 71% of people found sanctions helpful in encouraging them to find jobs?

## **Food Security**

### **[HC Deb 5 Nov 2015 C 1101](#)**

**Debbie Abrahams:** What estimate her Department has made of the number of households affected by lack of food security. [902024]

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** The factors that affect household food security are complex and difficult to measure. However, a recent report comparing OECD countries found that a proportion of those who said that they are finding it difficult to afford food went down from 9.8% in 2007 to 8.1% in 2012.

**Debbie Abrahams:** One million people relied on food-bank meals last year, which is an increase of 38% on 2013. In Oldham, 5,000 people, including 1,500 children, relied on Oldham food bank. Given the Resolution Foundation's estimate that an additional 200,000 children will be pushed into poverty as a direct result of the social security and tax changes that this Government are intending to implement, what is the Minister doing, working across Government Departments, to address the issues of food insecurity?

**George Eustice:** Let me point out a number of things. First, food prices have fallen for the first time in around 15 years. They went down by 2.3% over the past year. In addition, since 2010, we have seen an increase in household disposable income; it is up by around £900 according to the Office for Budget Responsibility. Finally, we must bear in mind that the way to get people out of poverty and to tackle poverty is to get people off benefits and into work. That is exactly what our welfare reforms are doing.

## **Food Banks**

### **[HC Deb 22 Jun 2015 c 608-09](#)**

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh:** If he will make an assessment of the effects of the benefits sanctions and conditionality regime on use of food banks.

**Chris Law:** If he will make an assessment of the effects of the benefits sanctions and conditionality regime on use of food banks.

**The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel):** We have looked at the issue extensively, and we agree with the conclusion reached by the all-party parliamentary inquiry into hunger that the reasons for food bank use are complex and overlapping. There is no robust evidence that directly links sanctions and food bank use.

**Ms Ahmed-Sheikh:** While all Members of this House will commend the work carried out by charities such as the Gate food bank in Alloa in my constituency, it is absolutely clear from all independent evidence that the sanctions regime is having a heartbreaking effect on people such as David Duncan from Fife, who, as reported in this morning's *Daily Record*, was sanctioned after missing a jobcentre appointment, despite being in hospital recovering after major surgery following a serious heart attack. Will the Minister commit to an immediate review of the conditionality and sanctions regime to put a stop to this relentless and heartless assault on vulnerable people in this country?

**Priti Patel:** Food banks play an important role in local welfare provision. I do not accept anything that the hon. Lady has said. In Scotland, the number of jobseeker's allowance sanctions has decreased from 84,000 in 2013 to 55,000—

**Stewart McDonald:** Thanks to the Scottish Government.

**Priti Patel:** Well, we are devolving welfare, and we can have this debate next week on the Floor of the House. It is also important to emphasise that the purpose of sanctions is to encourage claimants to comply with reasonable requirements to help them develop and move into the world of work. That is vital.

**Chris Law:** I thank the Minister for her response, but in the year following the introduction of benefits sanctions, approximately 2,500 people were sanctioned in my city of Dundee, leading to a 51% increase in referrals to Dundee's Trussell Trust food bank, including many parents with young children. The number is rising year on year, despite what she just said about falling figures. Does she not accept that there is an intrinsic link between the two, and that it is an absolute disgrace to have rising food poverty in the 21st century?

**Priti Patel:** Sanctions were in place for a significant amount of time before this Government and the previous Government. Let me reiterate the point, made in the recent Oakley review of benefits sanctions, that sanctions are a

“key element of the mutual obligation that underpins both the effectiveness and fairness of the social security system.”

For the benefit of the hon. Gentleman, let me say that we have accepted all the recommendations made by Oakley. This brings us back to the fact that sanctions play an important role in encouraging and supporting people to go back to work.

**Mr David Nuttall:** Does the Minister agree that those who pay for these benefits through their taxes expect an effective mechanism to be in place, such as sanctions, to ensure that the rules are complied with?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend is right, because at the end of the day we are speaking about hard-working taxpayers who support and contribute to the welfare system. Of course, we have a duty to support those who are seeking work and who are in receipt of benefits, but at the same time, hard-working taxpayers want to ensure that their taxes are spent fairly.

**Andrew Percy:** All I know is that those at Mission Trinity, an excellent independent non-political food bank in Goole, tell me that benefits sanctions are driving people to use it. I support the benefit sanctions system, but one issue that seems to be a problem is the consistency with which sanctions are applied. May we have a review of this and ensure that the recipients of the sanctions properly understand the consequences?

**Priti Patel:** I commend my hon. Friend's local food bank, and him, on the work done in his constituency. If he has specific examples that he would like to draw to my attention, I will happily discuss them with him.

**Helen Goodman:** May I welcome the Minister to her new role? Before the election, we had a most unsatisfactory debate on benefits sanctions with her predecessor. I have to say, Mr Speaker, that in a disappointing election for Labour, the result in Wirral West was one bright spot.

One person in four is now being sanctioned, and sanctions are cited as one of the top reasons for people visiting food banks. Will the Minister take steps to make sure that DWP staff apply the good reasons code correctly and end these vicious and arbitrary sanctions?

**Priti Patel:** I thank the hon. Lady for her welcome, although I must say I thought her comments about my predecessor were ungracious.

Regarding sanctions, I assure the House that for those in genuine need, hardship payments are on offer, as is support for those who have been sanctioned. Support is there for those who can demonstrate that they require financial assistance to buy essential items. It is absolutely right that in our jobcentres and in the interactions with claimants, we give them the right sort of support, guidance and advice, and I assure the hon. Lady that that does take place.

## **Food Poverty**

[\*\*HL Deb 11 Dec 2014 c 1921-24\*\*](#)

### **Asked by: The Lord Bishop of St Albans**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the recommendations of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Food Poverty's recent report, *Feeding Britain*.

**Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD):** My Lords, this report is a serious contribution to an important and wide-ranging debate, which recognises the multiple factors behind demand for emergency food assistance. As a country, we have enough food to go round. We agree that it is wrong that anyone should go hungry at the same time as surplus food is going to waste. There is a moral argument, as well as a sustainability one, to ensure that we make the best use of our resources.

**The Lord Bishop of St Albans:** I thank the Minister for his reply. I pay tribute to my colleague, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Truro, for co-chairing the inquiry. When the most reverend Primate the

Archbishop of Canterbury launched the report, he said that a party - political approach will not solve a problem such as this because of its complexity. I wonder whether the Minister would agree with that sentiment and whether, therefore, a genuine cross-party approach can be adopted to implementing the recommendations of the report. In particular, will the Government liaise and work closely with voluntary agencies, with the food banks and with industry to address the pressing problem of food waste and redistribution, whereby millions of tonnes of perfectly good food are going to waste at great cost, at a time when hundreds of thousands of people are still hungry?

**Lord Wallace of Saltaire:** My Lords, the Government are very happy to do that. After all, the whole food bank movement is a major civil society initiative. I entirely agree with the right reverend Prelate that this is a long-term problem and that we should not approach it in a partisan manner. Perhaps I might quote from the report:

“How a society protects the poorest from what appears to be a fundamental change in the way economies of the Western world are operating – which results in cuts in their living standards” —

that is, those of the poor—

“faster than other groups – calls for developing a political agenda which can only be delivered over decades” .

**Baroness Corston (Lab):** My Lords, will the Minister accept that the number of families using food banks rose considerably during the recent half-term? What does he think is the reason for that?

**Lord Wallace of Saltaire:** My Lords, I have been told by a friend who is involved in the food bank movement that demand for food banks has dipped when schools go back. The Government take some comfort from the fact that the expansion of free school meals in primary schools is clearly, therefore, a help in this regard, whatever the *Daily Mail* may have said in attacking the whole initiative.

**Baroness Jenkin of Kennington (Con):** My Lords, noble Lords may be aware that I have been a member of this inquiry, which over the past few months has travelled from Birkenhead and South Shields to Cornwall and Salisbury to take evidence, as well as indeed taking evidence from a large number of witnesses and organisations in London, many of whom do outstanding work in their local communities. I would like to take this opportunity to say how much I regret the wording of my remarks at the launch on Monday, not least because they have overshadowed the 76 other recommendations in the report. I ask my noble friend to urge Ministers in the eight different departments responsible to read the report and its recommendations with great care.

**Lord Wallace of Saltaire:** My Lords, I pay tribute to the enormous amount of work that the noble Baroness, together with others, has put into this inquiry. I know that she has been committed to these issues for some years. Perhaps I might draw particular attention to the chapter on resilience in this report, which talks about the problems of families who

do not have the skills or confidence to cook. I note that the Trussell Trust has been providing courses on cooking for some of those in order to help with diet, so that they eat well and spend less.

**Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab):** My Lords, noble Lords will be aware that the noble Baroness, Lady Jenkin, and I have taken part for four years now in the Live Below the Line extreme poverty initiative every spring, and I welcome very much her statement here today and the way that it was received in the House. I also chair the Cash for Kids charity in the west of Scotland and have done for three years. This year, we experienced a 12% increase in the number of families and children applying for Christmas grants for food vouchers, cash or gifts to ensure that they have some pleasure on Christmas Day. It seems to me that, regardless of what debates take place in 2015 on welfare benefits, the economy or other issues, it would be an absolute tragedy if that figure were to be increasing again this time next year. Therefore, I hope that the Government will indeed take this report and our discussions with NGOs and charities throughout the land on board, to ensure that the Government, the public sector and the third sector can work together to serve those families who are still going to be in need, regardless of the initiatives that we take on welfare benefits or other aspects of the economy in the immediate future.

**Lord Wallace of Saltaire:** I thank the noble Lord for that. The report is also addressed to the utility companies and to problems such as having mobile phones on “pay as you go” tariffs meaning that you pay more. The poor pay more due to a whole range of structural reasons and the report therefore identifies a large number of targets to be addressed. It talks about debt, addiction, utility pricing, low pay, housing costs and mental health. The problem of low pay and the minimum wage, and how we increase pay, turn around troubled families and rebuild local social networks, are all part of the issues we need to address.

**Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer (LD):** My Lords, I declare an interest as chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Food and Health Group, and I must say that we have had so much evidence over the years on why the national diet is inadequate, with malnourished people, obese people and so on. The noble Baroness, Lady Jenkin of Kennington, correctly identified that responsibility for food in the national diet is spread across eight government departments. Does my noble friend agree that the time has come for a national food strategy?

**Lord Wallace of Saltaire:** We do not need just a national food strategy. The Government are well aware of the complexities of this, which is why I am answering this Question on behalf of the Cabinet Office. This is a large, long-term problem. I was struck to read in the report that there are 1,000 food banks in Germany and 2,000 in France. It is not just a British problem.

**Baroness Scotland of Asthal (Lab):** My Lords, now that the report has identified a gap, particularly in relation to children when they are not in school, can the noble Lord, with that knowledge, assure us that the Government will address the issue with urgency?

**Lord Wallace of Saltaire:** My Lords, that takes a great deal of consideration and the Government certainly will do so. The report recommends that free school meals should be provided in the holiday period. That involves a lot of implications and cost, which the Government of course will have to consider.

**The Countess of Mar (CB):** My Lords, does the noble Lord agree that many of these people are living in multioccupancy buildings, with either shared cooking facilities or none, and have extreme difficulty in providing proper square meals for their families? Can that be taken into account when people are criticising them for not being able to support themselves?

**Lord Wallace of Saltaire:** My Lords, I agree with that. Another of the recommendations in this excellent report, which I encourage noble Lords to read in full, is that landlords should be expected to supply basic cooking facilities and equipment. There was also some good material on encouraging people to grow their own food. I have had some association with the charity in Shipley that deals with people who have mental health problems, runs a series of allotments and indeed encourages people to grow their own food and then cook it themselves. There is a whole range of issues that we need to address, some of which the Government can address but quite a lot of which civil society is at least as well equipped as government in addressing.

### 3.3 Debates

#### [Reducing Health Inequality](#)

HC Deb 24 Nov 2016 cc1084-1131

#### [In-work Poverty](#)

HC Deb 28 Jan 2016 cc207-222WH

#### [Childhood Obesity Strategy](#)

21 Jan 2016 cc1595-1635

#### [Sugary Drinks Tax](#)

HC Deb 30 Nov 2015, cc1-48 WH

#### [Child Food Poverty](#)

HC Deb 16 Oct 2015 cc625-634

#### [Food Banks](#)

HC Deb 17 Dec 2014 cc1480-1524

**Food Security**

HC Deb 24 Nov 2014 cc337-376 WH

**Food Prices and Food Poverty**

HC Deb 23 Jan 2012 cc38-86

### 3.4 Parliamentary Briefings

**Barriers to Healthy Food**, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology briefing, April 2016

**Poverty in the UK: Statistics**, House of Commons Library briefing, 15 November 2016

**Food Banks and Food Poverty**, House of Commons Library briefing, April 2014

**Government Response to the House of Commons Health Select Committee report on Childhood obesity – brave and bold action, First Report of Session 2015-16**, Cm 9330, September 2016

## 4. Further reading

### 4.1 Food Insecurity and Food Poverty

[Household food insecurity: the missing data](#), Food Foundation, November 2016

[Measuring household food insecurity in the UK and why we MUST do it: 4 facts you should know](#), Food Foundation, 2016

[Hungry and Obese: The challenge of household food insecurity](#), Cambridge Global Food Security Strategic Network, June 2016

[Too Poor to Eat: Food insecurity in the UK](#), The Food Foundation, May 2016

[Time to count the hungry: The case for a standard measure of household food insecurity in the UK](#), Food Poverty Alliance, April 2016

[Food security: demand, consumption and waste](#), Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, HC 703, January 2015

[Mapping Hunger: New Technology to Help Tackle UK Poverty](#), University of Hull in partnership with the Trussell Trust, April 2016

[Hungry for Change: The final report of the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty](#), The Fabian Society, October 2015

[A Recipe for Inequality: Why our food system is leaving low-income households behind](#), The Fabian Society, March 2015

[Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland The report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom](#), All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom, December 2014

## 4.2 Food Banks and Food Aid

[Household Food Security in the UK: A Review of Food Aid](#), Food Ethics Council and the University of Warwick (study commissioned by DEFRA), February 2014

[The impact of benefit sanctioning on food insecurity: a dynamic cross-area study of food bank usage in the UK](#), Department of Sociology, University of Oxford, October 2016

[Why food insecurity and food banks have become commonplace](#), University of Manchester, February 2015

[Making the Connections: A study of emergency food aid in Scotland](#), The Poverty Alliance, January 2015

[Emergency Use Only Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK](#), The Child Poverty Action Group, Church of England, Oxfam GB and The Trussell Trust, November 2014

[UK Faculty of Public Health response to the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger and Food Poverty in Britain](#), UK Faculty of Public Health, 2015

[Walking the breadline: the scandal of food poverty in 21st century Britain](#), Oxfam and Church Action on Poverty, May 2013

## 4.3 Obesity

[Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action](#), HM Government, August 2016

[House of Commons Health Committee Childhood obesity— brave and bold action](#), House of Commons Health Committee, HC 465, November 2015

## 4.4 Poverty and Obesity

[Food for thought: promoting healthy diets among children and young people](#), British Medical Association, July 2015

[Living in a 'fat swamp': exposure to multiple sources of accessible, cheap, energy-dense fast foods in a deprived community](#), British Journal of Nutrition, 113, 2015

[Health-related taxes on foods and beverages](#), Food Research Collaboration, May 2015

[The Growing Price Gap between More and Less Healthy Foods: Analysis of a Novel Longitudinal UK Dataset](#), PLoS ONE 9, October 2014

[Gluttony in England? Long-term change in diet](#), Institute for Fiscal Studies, November 2013

[Food expenditure and nutritional quality over the Great Recession](#), Institute for Fiscal Studies, November 2013

[Relationship Between Poverty and Obesity](#), Food Research and Action Centre

[Understanding the Connections: Food Insecurity and Obesity](#), Food Research and Action Centre, October 2015

[Do 'food deserts' exist? A multi-level, geographical analysis of the relationship between retail food access, socioeconomic position and dietary intake](#), University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 2004

## 4.5 General

[Food Statistics Pocketbook 2016](#), Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, September 2016

[Family Food 2014](#), Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, December 2015

[UK Food Prices: cooling or bubbling?](#) Food Research Collaboration, July 2014

[The future of food: Giving consumers a say](#), Which? Consumer Report, April 2013

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