**The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) submission to Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food: Violence and the Right to Food**

**About IFAN**

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)[[1]](#footnote-1) supports and advocates on behalf of hundreds of independent food aid providers including over 550 independent food banks. Our vision is of a country without the need for charitable food aid where adequate and nutritious food is affordable to all. We advocate for a cash first approach to food insecurity which, through income-based solutions, would reduce poverty driving the need for charitable food.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Violence and the Right to Food**

The evidence in the reports listed below demonstrate the violent impact of food inequality in the UK. This includes the following manifestations of violence:

* **Erasure.** The social security net has been decimated over the past 12 years of austerity policy, and seen increasing numbers turn to charitable food aid. Existing inequalities in UK society mean this has been worst felt by marginalised groups.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* **Discrimination.** The entrenchment of a second-tier charitable food system, undermines the dignity and agency of people who have been forced to rely on it.[[4]](#footnote-4)
* **Assault on physical and mental integrity.** A consequence ofcharitable food aid is the exacerbation of health inequalities, including impact on mental health.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**List of submitted reports**

* Structural Inequalities (2): Disability and Food Insecurity (pages: 3-7)
* Structural Inequalities (3): Secure work and a secure safety net (pages 7 and 10)
* Structural Inequalities (4): How do immigration policies impact food insecurity? (pages: 4-6)
* Pushed to the Edge: Poverty, Food Banks and Mental Health (pages: 21-30)

**Note on submitted reports**

From September 2020 to March 2022, IFAN and the University of York[[6]](#footnote-6) with partners including Feeding Britain[[7]](#footnote-7) and Sustain[[8]](#footnote-8) ran a series of webinars with a focus on how structural inequalities create and maintain food insecurity in the UK. The evidence heard at these webinars, alongside evidence submitted separately, were compiled into reports. We have submitted all 3 of these reports from the Structural Inequalities webinar series.

The final report, *Pushed to the Edge: Poverty, Food Banks and Mental Health* by Tom Pollard, was produced by IFAN and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to highlight mental health implications of relying on charitable food.

All four of these reports include the voices of people who have experienced, first hand, the violent effects of an unequal food system in the UK. We have indicated the pages of the reports that have particular relevance.

**Note on the current worsening food insecurity crisis**

The reports included in this submission range from May 2021 to February 2022. In some areas we have seen positive change, but, on the whole, the food insecurity landscape has worsened, particularly so over the last year.

IFAN surveyed its member network of independent food banks in November 2022. 94% of responding organisations had seen an increase in need since October 2021. 75% had been impacted by supply issues, with 1 in 5 having to reduce the size of food parcels they distribute.[[9]](#footnote-9) The results of this survey added to a consistent picture from previous surveys charting reduced capacity and rising demand.In October, 3,000 charitable food aid staff and volunteers signed a letter to the Prime Minister warning they were ‘at breaking point.’[[10]](#footnote-10) Frontline food aid staff and volunteers have been left to plug the gap for too long. They are overstretched and exhausted.

The UK government needs to listen to these voices, and the voices of the people they support. As Michael Fakhri pointed out on 22nd November at an Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA) hearing on food security,[[11]](#footnote-11) the UK already has the mechanisms of a social security system in place to tackle food insecurity. This cash first approach is what we need to ensure everyone can afford food with choice and dignity.

**For more information contact Maria Marshall at maria@foodaidnetwork.org.uk.**

1. https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://ifanuk.org/infographic [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See reports on disability and food insecurity (*Structural Inequalities 2*), and Immigration Policies and food security (*Structural Inequalities 4*). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. All four reports touch on the experience of relying on charitable food aid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See *Pushed to the Edge: Poverty, Food Banks and Mental Health* for stigma and shame associated with food banks [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.york.ac.uk/healthsciences/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://feedingbritain.org/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://www.sustainweb.org/ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/oct/16/uk-food-banks-at-breaking-point-urge-liz-truss-to-boost-aid-to-poorest?CMP=Share\_AndroidApp\_Other [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. https://committees.parliament.uk/work/6861/food-security/publications/ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)