



8.4 million struggling to afford to eat in the United Kingdom

Key statistics

- New UN data suggests that an estimated 8.4 million people, the equivalent of entire population of London, reported having insufficient food in the UK in 2014, the 6th largest economy in the world.
- An estimated 5.6% of people aged 15 or over in the UK reported struggling to get enough food to eat and a further 4.5% reported that, at least once, they went a full day without anything to eat.
- Based on these preliminary estimates, the UK ranks in the bottom half of European countries

Key recommendations

- The Food Foundation calls on the Government to urgently instate regular measurement of food insecurity, which was last measured over ten years ago.
- Government must also conduct research into who and why certain groups are affected, how food insecurity impacts food choices and health, and develop long term policy measures to tackle the problem.

A review of the new UN data by the Food Foundation and Oxford University shows that the number of people who are food insecure in the UK goes far beyond those using charitable food assistance such as food banks.

Anna Taylor, Executive Director of the Food Foundation, said

“This survey is a wake-up call reminding us that too many people are sometimes too poor to eat in the UK. Until we measure food insecurity, we cannot begin to pretend we are trying to address it.”

Dr Rachel Loopstra, from University of Oxford, said:

“We knew the number of people using food banks did not capture everyone who faces not having enough food to eat in the UK; what these figures tell us is just how much bigger the problem of hunger really is.”

Laura Sandys, Chair of the Food Foundation said:

“This new data provide a great opportunity for the Government to get on the front foot on food policy and establish a policy mix which can deliver a better food system for those on the lowest income. As with all important challenges, there is no silver bullet. Tackling the fundamental problems of our food system will be



difficult but is essential for a healthier and more secure future for all UK families.”

These new data raise important questions for the Government:

Why is access to food not currently being regularly measured? Successive governments have failed to track this problem since it was last measured 10 years ago among low-income households over 2003-2005. Regular measurement of food insecurity with a big enough sample to identify those at greatest risk, could be achieved at a marginal cost of around than £50-£70,000 per year, by adding 10-15 questions to existing annual national surveys.

Why is the UK doing so badly in comparison with other EU countries? The UK needs to learn from other countries on the policy mix which can prevent food insecurity and monitor the effectiveness of existing policies; a policy mix which covers housing costs, planning, welfare benefits, school food, public health and the relative cost of healthy food.

Notes to Editor:

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2. The Food Foundation is an independent organisation providing evidence-based research to inform government food policy. It is funded by the Esmée Fairbairn and Nuffield Foundations. More information can be found at www.foodfoundation.org.uk
3. The full policy briefing can be found www.foodfoundation.org.uk/blog
4. Methodology: The data reported here come from the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) developed by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The scale used to measure food insecurity was validated in countries across the world and consisted of asking people eight questions about their ability to get and eat enough food in the past year. To measure food insecurity in 147 countries the FAO included the Scale in the Gallup® World Poll in 2014. In the UK, 1000 people were interviewed by telephone. The survey was nationally representative. The full UN report can be found <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4830e.pdf>
5. The Nuffield Foundation is an endowed charitable trust that aims to improve social well-being in the widest sense. It funds research and innovation in education and social policy and also works to build capacity in education, science and social science research. The Nuffield Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation. More information is available at www.nuffieldfoundation.org

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