

# VOICES BEYOND THE FOOD BANK

Testimony, Food Poverty & Dignity



RENÉ CASSIN

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# INTRODUCTION



## ABOUT RENE CASSIN

We believe that the Right to Food must be enshrined in UK law as a matter of urgency. The purpose of this resource is to draw attention to the lived experience of people who have had to access emergency food provision, whose experiences are rarely centred in conversations about food poverty. This resource forms part of our ongoing work campaigning for a right to food. As a human rights organisation we offer a unique rights-based approach to the issue of food poverty. As a charity we work to promote and protect universal human rights, drawing on Jewish experience and values. We achieve this by campaigning for change in defined areas of human rights – including the right to food and the right not to be discriminated against– through a combination of advocacy, policy analysis, public campaigning and education and building the capacity of activists to promote and protect human rights.

For more information on our campaigns including the right to food and the right to not be discriminated against visit <https://www.renecassin.org/what-we-do/campaigns/>

## THE RESOURCE

This is an awareness-raising resource which will add to our bank of existing publications, through expanding on the lived experience of those affected by food poverty, by representing a range of other UK marginalised groups. With the purpose to investigate minorities issues with food poverty and to give voice to marginalised experiences. The minority groups will be used to show the extent of the issues of food poverty and the food bank situation, as due to being discriminated against, they face these issues more commonly and more severely. As well as a reminder of the failure of the UK government to successfully enshrine the human right of the right to food in the UK, but also the right to not be discriminated against. With the overall aim to help end food poverty for all, and advocate for the right to food to be adequately enshrined within the UK, we are calling on the UK government to adequately enshrine the human right of the right to food.



# THE RIGHT TO FOOD

## A HUMAN RIGHT

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services..." (Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).

The right to food is part of the right to an adequate standard of living for one's well-being and health, enshrined within the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (OHCHR 2010).

The right to food in international law is part of the right to an adequate standard of living, first laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), article 25, and in treaties such as the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 27.

The right to food is protected in international law by Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which the UK Government has signed, ratified and agreed to be legally bound by. However, while these rights are binding in international law, we can't currently take the UK Government or devolved governments to court if our rights are violated because we don't have these rights in our domestic laws across the UK. The missing step in much campaigning to end food poverty is the incorporation of economic, social, and cultural rights – including the right to food – into domestic law. If these rights were incorporated into domestic law, the UK Government would have to act to protect people and if they didn't, we could (as a matter of last resort) take legal action. Access to decent, nutritional food impacts all aspects of life. We must take action now to protect the right to food in the UK.

Using a human rights framework when campaigning against food poverty is crucial as it acknowledges that access to food is a basic human right. It emphasizes that individuals and communities have a right to food that is adequate, nutritious, safe, and culturally appropriate. Furthermore, a human rights approach ensures that the focus shifts from charity to addressing the root causes of the problem. This includes identifying and challenging systemic issues such as inequalities in income, resources, and power that lead to food insecurity. It also guarantees that the voices of those experiencing food poverty are heard and that their dignity is respected. Adopting a human rights framework helps to ensure that efforts to address food poverty are sustainable, effective, and equitable, promoting a society that respects and protects human rights for all.



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# FOOD POVERTY



## What Is Food Poverty?

People living in food poverty either do not have enough money to buy sufficient, appropriate and nutritious food; or struggle to get it because it is not easily accessible in their community; or both. It can be a long-term issue in someone's life or can affect someone for a shorter period of time because of a sudden change in their personal circumstances. Food insecurity leaves many people reliant on emergency parcels from food banks, or forced to go without healthy food. Low wages, irregular income and financial precarity, including unemployment and debt, combined with weaknesses in the welfare system are all causes of food poverty.

## Food Poverty In the UK

The cost-of-living crisis is exposing the severity of food poverty in the UK. The Trussell Trust has seen record numbers of people seeking help between April and September 2022, with 320,000 people forced to turn to the charity's food banks (The Trussell Trust 2022b). That is a 40% increase in comparison to the previous year, and altogether there has been a 50% increase from pre-pandemic levels. According to the latest government statistics, 4.2 million people (six per cent) were living in food poverty in 2020 to 2021 (House of Commons 2022). A recent Trussell Trust campaign has warned that need for food banks is outstripping donations for the first time in its history and has subsequently declared a food bank emergency (The Trussell Trust 2022a). Therefore, to ensure the UK's population is being sufficiently fed, changes need to be made, and food banks cannot be the sole solution.

The UK's food poverty rate is among the highest in Europe. Reasons for this include, firstly, a rise in living costs, - food and non-alcoholic beverage prices have risen by 13.1 per cent in the 12 months to August 2022, up from 12.7 per cent in July (ONS 2022a). Josie Barlow, food bank manager at Bradford Foodbank, said: "Someone who came to the food bank recently told me that 'buying milk is a luxury now'" (The Big Issue 2023). Secondly, the UK is facing increasing food poverty because of local authority budget cuts and a failing welfare safety-net as a major driver of food bank use, with the five-week wait for universal credit, the two-child limit and the benefit cap among some of the policies trapping people in poverty (Human Rights Watch 2019). The number of households with incomes limited by the benefit cap soared by more than 137 per cent during the pandemic, according to government figures (Department for Work and Pensions 2021).

If the human right of the right to food was properly enshrined into UK law, food poverty would be eradicated and the need for food banks, which as seen are not a sustainable answer to this issue, would not need to be relied on.

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# THE RIGHT TO NOT BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST

## A HUMAN RIGHT

Everyone has the right to not be discriminated against under Article 14 of the UK's Human Rights Act, meaning there must be no discrimination when applying the other protections in the Act on any grounds. This includes grounds such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or any other status which would include sexual orientation, gender identity/reassignment status, marital status, pregnancy or maternity status or disability.



## MINORITY GROUPS

### What is a minority group?

A minority group is a subgroup of the population with unique social, religious, ethnic, racial, and/or other characteristics for example, disability, that differ from the majority of the population. Despite the human right to not be discriminated against, many minority groups are facing higher rates of food poverty than the general population.

### Minority groups in the UK

It is estimated that 18.6% of the UK's population are from minority ethnic groups including Asian, Black, Mixed Race, Gypsy, Roma or Travellers, or other (ONS 2022b). This translates to around 11,100,000 people in the UK. Religious minority groups in the UK consist of an estimated 10.7% of the UK population (ONS 2022c). In addition, 14.6 million people in the UK have a form of disability, approx. 22% of the population (ONS 2023). When looking at unique social characteristics of the population, there are approximately 185,000 individuals in the UK who are asylum seekers and refugees (House of Commons 2023b). All of these represent a diversity of multiple different types of minority groups in the UK.

### Minority groups and food poverty

Minority groups are more likely to suffer from food poverty due to the marginalization they face, based on discrimination often experience on the grounds of their group's differences. This discrimination causes minority groups to be more susceptible to poverty, having less access to basic services, income opportunities, and jobs, and therefore less money or access to food.

Food poverty risk factors include low wages, an uncertain social security system and benefit sanctions. All of which factors make it more difficult to cover food costs. For example, non-white ethnic groups are more likely to be food insecure than white ethnic groups (26.9 per cent in comparison to 18.5 per cent) (Food Foundation 2022). In addition, on top of what members of the public experience - such as economic decline, weaknesses in the welfare system, and stigma and shame in asking for and accessing help - there are also specific additional factors specific to each minority groups, which affect their risk of food poverty. The following sections will look into a range of different minority examples of this, including the Jewish community, the Gypsy Roma and Traveller (GTR) community, disabled people or those with a disabled family member, ethnic minorities, and refugees and asylum seekers. To closely identify their communities specific issues with food poverty and accessing food, as well as to give voice to their experiences surrounding this struggle.

**“Although we are all weathering the same storm, we are not all in the same boat” Helen Barnard, Acting Director of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation**

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# JEWISH COMMUNITIES

The Jewish community is a religious, racial and ethnic minority which makes up around 0.5% of the British population, with the borough of Barnet having the highest concentration of Jews in the UK – 21% of the community, followed by Hertfordshire (10%) and Manchester (4%) (JPR 2022). The Jewish charity Give It Forward Today has seen a 50% rise in the number of families appealing for help over the past 12 months, with an increase of 100 weekly parcels compared to 2021. The Jewish Community Council of North London has also had to double its efforts this year to provide culturally significant kosher food at the time of Jewish festivals (Frazer 2022). Whilst Jewish families experiencing food poverty largely for the same reasons as other families across the country (increasing gap between wages and bills, difficulty receiving universal credit), there are also some cultural factors at play, which are not being equally accounted for and included into supporting the UK population from food poverty.

The Office for National Statistics published the 2021 census data in November this year. In order to start understanding the ways in which food poverty affects the Jewish community, it is important to understand the makeup of the community in the UK. The census identified 271,000 Jews, meaning the community still makes up around 0.5% of the British population. Also interesting for our consideration is that the borough of Barnet remains the borough with the highest concentration of Jews in the UK - 21% of the community (56,616); 4% Manchester; 10% in Hertfordshire. Given how widespread food poverty is across the country, it is unsurprising that Jewish people make up those who are affected by the sharp turn in the cost-of-living.

A Jewish News article from May reports that kosher food prices have been rocketing even higher than inflation, which has already reached a 40-year high. One recipient told the paper Jewish Chronicle: “I still don’t know how I am going to cover the monthly costs of just living. My heart hurts when my children tell me their school shoes don’t fit and I haven’t the money to buy a new pair... but that’s our current reality.” Kosher retailers across London and Manchester have reported that costs of kosher food have been increasing on a weekly basis. One business-owner who wishes to remain anonymous said “Prices that we are giving now on products that are on special offer are more expensive than the items were six months ago without an offer.” For many Jewish families living in the UK, the rising costs of kosher foods stand between eating and going hungry.

## **Provisions for Jewish Festivals:**

The rising cost of kosher food comes into focus around the time of Jewish festivals, which often require specific items of food in order to fulfil the ritual requirements of the festival. This year, the festival of Passover came at a time when food prices experienced a sharp rise. In response, This year, the Jewish Community Council of North London helped to feed thousands of Jewish families by holding a Pesach Food Distribution event, with each family receiving £600 pounds worth of kosher-for-Pesach food. The Community Council told The Jewish News that they have has doubled its efforts this year, providing anything from grape juice, matzah, fish and meat to help meet the rising need. A representative said “the demand for food assistance has tripled as a direct result of rising food prices. Passover, a time of year when we are supposed to celebrate in happiness, becomes a nightmare for some families who struggle to feed their children on the festival.” At the ritual Passover meal, the seder, we collectively tell the story of our affliction and the story of our freedom – for many Jewish families in the UK, the story of affliction is one that is felt right on the surface, with limited kosher food options and seemingly no way out from the cycle of poverty.

## **Kosher School Meals**

For those concerned with tackling food poverty, the question of school meals is an important one. The cost-of-living crisis is having an awful impact on children with many going hungry and not getting the nutrition they need to grow up healthily. Footballer Marcus Rashford fronted a free school meals campaign (summer 2021), sharing his story of growing up experiencing food poverty. Moving to make school meals free to all children would feed another 8000,000 children, an initiative that campaigners in this area have long been calling for. According to a survey by the Food Foundation at YouGov, 72 per cent of the English public support the expansion of free school meals to all children on universal credit.

How might this issue map onto Jewish schools, and what could it mean? This summer, PaJeS, the Jewish schools network announced a scheme to help struggling families by providing food vouchers over the summer holidays. The work is set to benefit up to 12,000 children from 41 primary and secondary schools across the religious spectrum. This scheme is focused on supporting families with the extra cost of food bills over the holidays.

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# JEWISH COMMUNITIES

Jewish schools in the UK are finding it hard to provide student meals amidst the skyrocketing costs of energy. Sandy Rashty writes in The Jewish News that at least two Jewish secondary schools in north-west London will stop providing kosher meals to students from the end of October 2022, asking Parents parents to send in packed lunches instead. The article reports that a leading figure in Stamford Hill's Orthodox Jewish community said teachers have started bringing in food for young students to prevent them from going hungry as parents are struggling to pay for catered school meals or send in a packed lunch. Hasmonaeen Boys and Girls schools sent round a letter to parents and guardians informing them that "rising supply costs have meant it is no longer financially viable for [our catering supplier] to continue supplying our schools." Many refer to this kind of situation as characteristic of the 'economic pandemic' which affects Jewish institutions including care homes. Hasmonean's school meals' provider comments on the percentage rise for kosher school meals "Food inflation nationally is running at more than 12 per cent, so add in the kosher element, and it is up to a 30 percent rise". Added costs for kosher meals also include kosher ingredients, licensing and shomer fees. The issue of kosher school meals emerges here as an interesting site on which to note the gaps in government provision when it comes to faith institutions. Jewish schools have kashrut needs which incur bigger overheads, and these needs are not represented in Government support packages. Many refer to this kind of situation as characteristic of the 'economic pandemic', which affects Jewish institutions including care homes.

## The Role(s) of Stigma and Shame

Another major factor at play in the discussion of food poverty in the Jewish community is the role played by stigma and shame. Many families experiencing food poverty in Jewish schools don't want people to know that they are struggling, this can mean that families are less willing to register their eligibility for free school meals.

At René Cassin we understand the experiences of food poverty, shame and dignity to be complex and linked experiences that inform one another. A move towards poverty is a move towards dignity, this requires an appreciation of the complex roles played by shame and stigma in the lived experiences of food poverty.

## SPOTLIGHT ON: TEEN ACTION

Teen Action is a predominantly women-led organisation supporting the orthodox Jewish community. They have been operating at a grassroots level in Hackney and Haringey for almost two decades, supporting young Orthodox Jewish women and school leavers into employment by helping them to develop skills at this transitional period in their lives.

Teen Action have always worked to address community-specific needs, such as early transitions and adulthood responsibilities (the average age of marriage in the community is 19), plus skills disparities, low employment levels and social exclusion. In the current crisis, however, their work has developed to accommodate the higher cost of living within the Orthodox Jewish community, due to the disproportionate inflation of kosher ingredients coupled with larger family sizes – typically of 6-7 people.

Poverty within Hackney and Haringey's Orthodox Jewish community is high and the majority of the organisation's service users reside in areas ranking in the lowest third on the index of multiple deprivation (IMD) scale. Food poverty poses a particular cultural problem, due to the exorbitant costs of kosher food, which has risen by as much as 25%, or four times the inflation rate for non-kosher food. Children and young people are particularly impacted, be that by prioritising low-cost carbohydrates and fruit veg at home, saving protein for Jewish holidays and special occasions, or in some schools which can no longer afford to provide kosher school meals, by parents being asked to provide children with packed lunches.

For the young women Teen Action supports, these issues can be compounded by their gender. Women are more likely to be living in poverty, more anxious about being able to pay their bills and 30% more women than men are in temporary work and on zero-hours contracts, worrying about unemployment and unable to make ends meet.

**Teen Action are helping to fight food poverty with dignity.** They are coordinating the delivery of 240 free, kosher, upscale community dinners and packaged meals for members of their community over winter. However, the benefits of the project go beyond the immediate and vital need for food, as the meals will be cooked and prepared by their nine budding young women chefs, who are studying towards an accreditation in Food and Nutrition. To put it simply: the project feeds the community, while providing an opportunity for these young women to develop their portfolio of practical/technical work.



# JEWISH COMMUNITIES

## ISSUES FACED WITH ACCESSING FOOD

- Rising costs of Kosher food four times the inflation rate of non-kosher food, reaching a 40 year high (JC 2022)
- Inability to buy kosher food, which holds cultural significance at the time of Jewish festivals
- Jewish schools not being able to provide Kosher school lunches due to the rising supply costs as it is no longer financially viable despite the free school meals campaign
- Large families to feed meaning it is harder to get enough suitable food, and these families are also more vulnerable to poverty

## THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH ACCESSING FOOD

“I remember sitting in the waiting room, with my daughter, waiting to be given a food parcel. I was holding back my tears not wanting my daughter to see me upset and thinking ‘how has it got to this?’ (Anita)”

“Without them, [Jewish charities] she says, she could have gone under. ‘It’s a huge contrast to the terrible way I am treated by the benefits system and the council. I can see why people outside our community become desperate and do desperate things.’ (JC, 2019).”



LISTEN TO AN AUDIO TESTIMONY HERE:



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# GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES

The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups are both ethnic minorities and a minorities often with the unique social characteristic of living a nomadic way of life. In 2014 it was estimated that the UK's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population was in the region of 400,000, with Basildon being home to the highest concentration of all the groups' individuals living there (Gov.UK 2022).

A stark example that shows the food poverty GTR population is facing, is that 63% of Travellers of Irish heritage are eligible for free school meals, higher than any other minority group in the UK, compared to 22.5% of the wider UK population (House of Commons 2023a). This is especially problematic considering that this minority has the highest absence rates for any minority with an average of 65% of Gypsy, Rom and Traveller pupils are persistently absent, or not even registered to a school (The Education People 2023). As noted previously, whilst they are experiencing food poverty largely for the same reasons as others across the county, these communities' cultural factors are not being equally accounted for and included in supporting the UK population from going hungry.

## ISSUES FACED WITH ACCESSING FOOD

- Food delivery to certain locations/type of locations
  - Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are often discriminated against when trying to receive food deliveries to their addresses (Cemlyn et al. 2009)
- Discrimination when accessing food from the hospitality industry such as restaurants (Hawken 2018)
- Access to healthy fresh food at affordable prices
  - These communities' commonly secluded living environment means the majority of local stores available sell healthy food at expensive prices – seen with local convenience stores (Inclusion Health 2016)
- Fuel poverty effect on being able to safely cook meals due to reliance on expensive gas canisters and rising energy prices, unequally impacting these communities (FFT 2022b)
  - The majority of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities do not have access to gas mains, often forcing a reliance on incredibly expensive gas bottles to cook food
  - Due to not being linked to mains electricity (even for those who are on permanent sites) the majority of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers communities are not eligible for the Government's £400 Energy Bill Support Scheme grant which is issued to their supplier
- Issues with resources to store food making food planning and storing difficult (Bristol City Council 2013)
- Language barriers in accessing services that would help.
- Low school attendance and high home-schooling meaning less access to free school meals (Gov.UK 2019)
- Limited access to local GP's for food vouchers, as well as from schools
  - Despite it being illegal to refuse GP appointments with those who do not have photo ID, a permanent address, or the ability to fill out necessary forms independently (which is common within the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities) many individuals from these communities are struggling to get appointments and therefore are less able to access food bank vouchers (FFT 2022a)



# DISABLED COMMUNITIES

In the UK there are an estimated 14.6 million people who have a disability, making up 22% of the total population - an increase of 2.7million since 2010 (Gov.UK 2021). René Cassin adhere to the social model of disability -

This section looks at households in which people with lived experience of disability live. More than six in ten (62%) working-age people referred to food banks in early 2020 were disabled (The Trussell Trust 2021a). The disabled community face multiple disadvantages when it comes to accessing food, major factors that contribute include lack of catering to specific dietary/, medical needs, lack of transport accessibility, as well as many others. Broadly speaking, the disabled community are not being equally accounted for and included into supporting the UK population from food poverty.

## ISSUES FACED WITH ACCESSING FOOD

- More likely to be in debt
  - Twenty three per cent of households with a disability were losing more than a quarter of their income on repaying debt or loans, compared to 14% among households not affected by disability. Four in ten (41%) of disabled people were in debt to the Department of Work and Pensions (The Trussell Trust 2021a)
- Additional expensive payments, which disabled people already allocate for their needs- such as heating, insurance, equipment and therapies.
  - One in five disabled people faced extra costs of more than £1,000 a month, for example the need for more heating as some disability affect ability to regulate body temperature (Food Foundation 2022)
  - These costs can dramatically reduce what disabled people have left to cover other costs, putting them at greater risk of hardship.
- Reliance on hard to access benefits
  - Disabled people are entitled to Personal Independent Payments (PIP) or the Disability Living Allowance (DLA), however, due to an increasingly demanding criteria to apply and successfully receive these benefits, many disabled people are left without additional support to cover the costs associated with their disability (The Trussell Trust 2021a)
  - If disabled individuals are able to access these benefits it often is a lengthy process of challenging assessments before getting to the stage of receiving payment
- Level of disabled support being insufficient in the cost of living crisis
  - For those who are receiving disability benefits, the level of support is often insufficient to prevent hardships seen with the disabled people being referred to food banks who were in receipt of PIP/DLA being in more acute material deprivation than households not affected by disability (The Trussell Trust 2021a)

## THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH ACCESSING FOOD

“ Access to food is supposed to be one of life's certainties, however, finding cheaper places to shop is not easy if you have food allergies, swallowing issues or autism (Food Foundation 2022) ”

“ The basic rate of support I was getting wasn't enough to live on and it took a good part of a year before I was assessed properly Steve - (Leonard Ceshire 2022) ”

“ My partner and I sometimes go without food and live off tea and coffee to ensure Nathan's [their disabled son who relies on support machines] needs are met - Louise (Mirror, 2023) ”



Louise and Ant Peet with son Nathan (Paul David Drabble, Mirror, 2023)

# ETHNIC MINORITIES

It is estimated that 18% of the UK's population are from an ethnic minority background. Although this umbrella term refers to multiple individual races and cultures which all have their own set of experiences, they all unfortunately receive the commonality of challenges such as racism, and inequality due to the colour of their skin. It is this racial prejudice which makes them more vulnerable to food poverty and having a dependence on food banks. A report by the Open Data Institute has revealed that Black (21% of these households are classed as food insecure), Mixed-Race (13% are food insecure) and Bangladeshi (12% are food insecure) families throughout the country are suffering from some of the highest rates of food poverty (ODI 2022). With data showing that 20% of individuals of an ethnic minority background have experienced food poverty in the last six months compared to only 9% of white British individuals (Food Foundation 2021). Whilst ethnic minorities are experiencing food poverty largely for the same reasons as other families across the country (increasing gap between wages and bills, difficulty receiving universal credit), the racial prejudice that this group experiences is not being equally accounted for and included when working to support the UK population in food poverty.

**“To reach a UK without the need for food banks, we must address structural racism”  
Trussel Trust (The Trussell Trust 2021b)**

## ISSUES FACED WITH ACCESSING FOOD

- Longstanding inequalities in employment
  - More likely to work in insecure, low-paid, zero-hour contract work, and are more likely to be unemployed due to systematic racism
  - Jobs that ethnic minorities are more likely to have, incomes have reduced faster and further in recent years (Butler 2022)
- More likely to experience an average increase in the cost of living 1.6 times higher than their white counterparts
  - Due to their living and economic arrangements they are often forced into pricier arrangements such as prepayment meters, higher-cost credit or being unable to buy everyday goods such as food in bulk (The Runnymede Trust 2022)
- More likely to live in poverty due to systematic racism
  - Have to juggle: a higher rate of high rents, growing bills, health conditions, and caring responsibilities
- More likely to be eligible for free school meals however there is no national free school meals scheme during severe holidays which can place a severe strain on ethnic minority households (ODI 2022)
- Language barriers creating obstacles in accessing support services.

## THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH ACCESSING FOOD



**What families are going through now, I've once had to go through that — and it's very difficult to find a way out.**

**Food poverty is contributing to social unrest. Add school closures, redundancies, and furloughs into the equation and we have an issue that could negatively impact generations to come. It all starts with stability around access to food.**

**Marcus Rashford (2020)**

Campaigner against child hunger and racism and England football player



Oasis Charitable Trust UK



# REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Refugees (someone who has fled armed conflict or persecution) and asylum seekers (someone claiming to be a refugee but their claims have not been evaluated yet) make up 185,000 of the UK population. These individuals are a minority group due to their unique social characteristics of fleeing armed conflict or persecution to obtain safety and freedom within the UK. However it is important to add that in addition many refugees and asylum seekers are also BAME, and also experience racism and its socioeconomic effects. However, more particular to them, is the way that they are treated by the government, and the specific policies that apply to them which affect their access to money and food. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reports that 80% of the world's refugees are suffering from food insecurity (Nisbet et al. 2022). Whilst refugees and asylum seekers experience the same drivers of food poverty that the public does, their status provokes situations which means they unequally suffer from food poverty and are not being supported by the UK government from this issue.

## ISSUES FACED WITH ACCESSING FOOD

- More likely to be in low-paid insecure work than the general population and face a disproportionate risk of destitution
- Reluctance to claim support for fear of deportation, detention and other harsh measures (Refugee Council 2022), E.g. fears of being sent to Rwanda
- Insecure accommodation, employment and access to benefits increasing poverty and decreasing ability to access food (Refugee Council 2022)
  - When asylum is granted, refugees are given 4 weeks to secure an income and somewhere to live before they are evicted from their asylum accommodation
  - Newly granted refugees can apply for a one-off loan to help with integration, but the Government has no target for processing these loans so refugees can be left with nothing for periods of time
- Those subjected to immigration control and the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) are at heightened risk of deep poverty and debt due to being barred from accessing the social safety net (Praxis 2023), this includes 1.3 million migrants
  - Not able to access universal credit, in-work benefits, child benefits
  - Face significant financial challenges due to the cost of living crisis, and as previously seen in many cases face socioeconomic disparity due to racism, but are unable to access a significant proportion of the support rolled out by the Government since the crisis began
  - Children within this are not able to access free school meals
- Long periods of time with no physical proof of their status for extended periods preventing them being able to work and increasing their vulnerability to not be able to access food
  - Some migrants face issues in finding or keeping jobs because they are required to reapply for leave to remain every 30 months, and the Home Office is currently taking 11 months on average to process these re-applications, leaving people with no physical proof of their status for an extended period (Praxis 2023)
  - Migrants have to pay various fees to renew their leave to remain in the UK, costing £2,608 per adult every 30 months, which is difficult for those low on money and excluded from welfare support
- Language barriers

## THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH ACCESSING FOOD

“ I couldn't access anything, because I have no recourse to public funds. So I live on a foodbank...I had to sleep, in the church, with my children - Grace (Food Foundation 2022) ”

“ When I did not have Home Office support, it was not easy to get food. Those were starving days for me. I starved - Ali Martin (Refugee Council 2023) ”

“ It's terrible, it's frustrating, it's hard, because [...] you can't work, you can't buy the food you want. You can't eat what you want to eat - Evelyn (Food Foundation 2022) ”

“ I get £40 a week to live on, I am finding it very difficult, everything seems to have increased. I was recently diagnosed with diabetes, so it is a big challenge to buy the right foods for my health - Omer (Refugee Council 2023) ”

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# CULTURALLY SENSITIVE FOOD PROVISION

This resource makes clear the urgent need for culturally sensitive food provision, that embraces the different and intersecting needs of minority groups. In the case of the Jewish community: According to the Jewish Chronicle, the cost of Kosher food has increased by as much as 25% this year, or four times the inflation rate for non-Kosher food. . This rising trajectory presents a set of new barriers for many Jewish families. Jewish aid charity Give It Forward Today (GIFT) said it had seen a 50 % rise in the number of families appealing for help over the last 12 months. GIFT, which provides families with a weekly food parcel, said that a year ago, it was giving 250 families a weekly dry food parcel. That number now stands at 350.

The leading social care charity for the Greater Manchester Jewish community, the Fed, reports that they are supporting one in seven Jewish homes affected by the cost of living, having seen a 55% increase in demand over the past year. The cost-of-living crisis impacts Jewish families across a broad spectrum of religious observance. As far as the Orthodox Jewish community is concerned, the Jewish Community Council based in Stamford Hill has said that children are going to sleep hungry because families are unable to meet the rising cost of food and utility bills. A spokesperson told the Jewish Chronicle: “We are seeing a huge increase in families reaching out to us for help for food services, especially over Pesach (Jewish festival ). We are providing food vouchers and weekly food packages delivered to their homes, but the reality is children are going to sleep hungry” (Jewish Chronicle, 2022). In addition, according to the Interlink Foundation, which acts as the umbrella organisation for charities supporting the Orthodox Jewish community, families within the Charedi community are increasingly feeling the negative effects of the rising cost of living, particularly regarding food and energy. As it stands, families across the UK are trapped in making impossible decisions between eating or heating. For families in the Jewish community, already expensive Kosher food has continued to rise in cost, adding barriers to accessing culturally appropriate and nutritious food. We cannot rely on the goodwill of charities to continue supporting families through a difficult winter. The evidence given here is alarming, and together with evidence from other civil society organisations, sends a clear message that the UK government must enshrine the Right to Food in UK law and take heed of Article 11. It is only when the Right to Food is enshrined together with accompanying economic, cultural and social rights, that those who need our support will be able to live dignified lives.



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# CONCLUSION

## WHAT CAN MARGINALISED GROUPS EXPERIENCE WITH FOOD POVERTY TELL US

As it can be seen food poverty within the UK is an ever-increasing problem, for which food banks are not a permanent solution. Throughout the different cases looked at, it becomes evident that minority groups are faced with myriad structural barriers to accessing food, whether that be because of price-point or particular cultural sensitivities. Enshrining the Right to Food in UK law has the potential to increase access to food across the board, making the Government accountable for the epidemic of hunger.

Considering the unequally disadvantaged, on top of their already apparent struggles, there is a clear problem in accessing food. Despite each minority having its own unique challenges of discrimination and marginalisation affecting their ability to access food, they all share one similar solution - enshrining the right to food in UK law as well as in practice. Not only would this help to decrease the discrimination faced by minority groups, but also ensure that the British public does not have to worry about where their next meal will come from, and choosing between other necessities and going hungry. Ensuring the right to food would improve access to food and give people the best chance of living fulfilled and dignified lives.

# REFLECTIONS

## THE RIGHT TO FOOD

### ENSHRINEMENT INTO DOMESTIC UK LAW

In order for the UK population to receive their human right to food, with dignity, and in doing so it needs to include everyone, including the marginalised groups highlighted in this research. With this human right being specifically enshrined in domestic law, it is more possible for the end to inadequate access to food to be experienced in reality. However, what is also vital within this application of the right to food in British law, is that the law accounts for different cultures and living situations, including appropriate food for religions, and religious festivals, and the ability for this to be accessed through avenues that are accessible to all walks of life, rather than just in schools, referrals from GP appointments and online referrals. The Right to Food should be accessible to individuals who do not have access to the internet, to a permanent address, and those who don't attend classroom education. In addition, it is imperative that people not only have access to food but to fresh nutritious food too and not just cheaper unhealthy food. With this enforced, where the right to food is enshrined and brought into reality in an inclusive manner, access to food will be eased, and both the human right to food and the human right to not be discriminated against within this realm would have a far better chance of being realized.

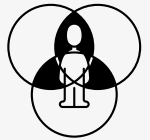


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# REFLECTIONS

## RIGHT TO NOT BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST TO BE ACTUALISED

Secondly, despite the fact that the right to not be discriminated against is enshrined in domestic law, it fails to be seen in reality. Discrimination is extremely common place, as seen with its relevance to food poverty. Therefore more needs to be done to actualise the domestic law of policies such as the Equality Act 2010. The ways in which this could and should be done are never ending, however examples include changing the UK education system to be racially inclusive and to tackle racism on a more individual basis through listening to individuals subjected to it directly. Although there is no quick fix for ending racism which is so ingrained in the UK, there are many steps which we can all take to make this country and the world a more equal place.



## INTERSECTIONALITY AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

### Issues ascertaining the full picture

Thirdly, when reflecting on this piece and looking at different minority groups it is important to acknowledge that by looking at minority groups separately, it is difficult to get the full picture of food poverty's impact. This is because isolated analysis does not utilize the intersectional framework that considers multiple facets of identity but rather investigates one aspect which does not accurately reflect the multiple barriers to support. For example, many refugees in the UK are also members of the BAME community, so experience multifaceted discrimination of both these aspects. Therefore to understand all experiences of access to food, an intersectional framework emerges as critical if we are to centre the value of dignity in our Right to Food campaigning work.

Another reflection to this piece is that some communities, despite their discrimination, food poverty and inadequate access to food being well documented in both academic resource and the media, were increasingly difficult to find lived experiences on. We reached out to many charities and organisations throughout the UK from different communities as we believe it is very important to bring voice to those from minority groups experiencing this directly, however despite our best efforts were unable to get lived experiences for some areas of this research.



## CHANGES TO BE MADE ABOUT THE WAY WE TALK ABOUT FOOD POVERTY

### TRAPPED IN THE CYCLE

Lastly, when looking into food poverty and the Right to Food, it is clear that there is an urgent need to change the way we talk about and understand food poverty. In the majority of cases, it is a cycle that individuals are trapped in, rather than a situation that people find themselves in from time to time. Factors that are causing people to be continually trapped in this cycle need to therefore be better educated about and prevented, including discriminatory factors that indirectly affect food poverty, for example, seen with minority groups being less likely to have stable and high-paying employment. Therefore there is more work to be done to prevent the root causes of access to food, and certainly more work to be done on sensitive and appropriate messaging that respects the dignity of all those who are trapped in a cycle of poverty.



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