



# Joint statement to Right to Food UK Commission

June 2026

We submit this joint statement as members of the [UK Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Network](#). The Network is a collective of over 200 organisations and individuals committed to the realisation, promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights without discrimination in the UK as a whole and across the devolved nations and jurisdictions.

We are non-governmental organisations, charities, researchers and academics, as well as campaign groups working across all four nations and jurisdictions of the UK. The purpose of this statement is to lay out the key recommendations we want the Commissioners to consider as part of their Roadmap.

The absence of a legally protected right to food is resulting in a [crisis of food insecurity](#) in the UK which is cumulative in both a historical and a horizontal sense.<sup>1</sup>

It is cumulative in the historical sense in that those who are at the sharpest end of having their right to food violated have experienced the severest impact of a number of crises – including austerity, Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis.<sup>2</sup> In their end of year report for 2025, Trussell related that the Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis have left deep scars on living standards. In 2025 Trussell distributed 2.6 million emergency food parcels, representing a 25 per cent increase compared to 2019 and this included over 900,000 parcels provided for children.<sup>3</sup> While we commend the vital work charities are doing to meet the urgent need for these food parcels, reliance on charity to meet food needs does not align with the right to adequate food.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Human Rights Watch's 2019 report, 'Nothing Left in the Cupboards Austerity, Welfare Cuts, and the Right to Food in the UK' available here: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/20/nothing-left-in-the-cupboards/austerity-welfare-cuts-and-the-right-to-food-in-the>

<sup>2</sup> See for example Human Rights Watch's submission to the European Committee of Social Rights in July 2024: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/19/human-rights-watch-submission-european-committee-social-rights>

<sup>3</sup> Source: [End of year food bank stats | Trussell](#)

<sup>4</sup> It is also important to stress that food bank usage represents the tip of the iceberg when it comes to severe food insecurity. Department for Work and Pensions Family Resources Survey data for 2024-2025 demonstrates that as many as 86% of households reporting severe food insecurity over a 30-day period did not use a food bank - <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2024-to-2025/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2024-to-2025#household-food-security-1>

<sup>5</sup> In a 2019 report following his visit to the United Kingdom as the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Philip Alston highlighted that charity 'is not an adequate substitute for a Government fulfilling its [international human rights law] obligations' (available here: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc4139add1-visit-united-kingdom-great-britain-and-northern-ireland>). Instead, in the view of Olivier De Schutter, writing before succeeding Alston as the

The crisis is being experienced cumulatively in the horizontal sense in that particular groups with protected characteristics are more likely to experience a violation of their rights – the same Trussell report notes that children, particularly young children and families with three or more children (and impacted by the two-child limit) continue to require disproportionate support – they note the removal of the two-child limit will hopefully reverse this.<sup>6</sup> As the submission to this call for evidence by [René Cassin](#) highlights - groups who experience discrimination based on ethnic and/or religious characteristic are also more likely to have added food access needs – both in terms of food insecurity and accessing culturally appropriate support.

Insufficient income, due to low wages and precarious work (72 per cent of children living in poverty across the UK were from working households)<sup>7</sup> as well as inadequate support via the social security system are notable drivers for those seeking support from Trussell.<sup>8</sup> This contributes to worsening health outcomes which in turn places greater strain on support systems as people may be unable to work.

The supports that are currently available for people in the UK can be removed as easily as they can be put in place, they are therefore often precarious and do not represent a long-term solution. It does not have to be this way.

## The right to food

We need an alternative approach which results in lasting solutions and deals with the underlying structural issues. We believe that bringing the right to food into domestic law across the UK is an alternative which offers better outcomes to those who need it most. As [noted by Just Fair](#), the right to food is essential because:

1. Human rights offer a **universal, dignity-based framework**, including **specific legal duties** for states, which aim to counter exclusionary narratives and support cohesive communities. A right to food in the UK would apply to all people in the UK, irrespective of any status or characteristic.
2. A **legal duty** provides clarity to duty-bearers based on established human rights principles and guarantees routes to redress for rights-holders. It shifts systems from crisis response toward prevention and accountability.
3. A domestically incorporated, legal right to food encourages and can require **joined-up, preventative, and innovative policymaking** across government and other duty bearers (such as public bodies and local authorities).
4. Food insecurity is widespread and **intersects with other rights**, including the right to health, education, culture, religion, housing, and just and favourable conditions of work.

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U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, a reliance on charity to ensure adequate standards of living represents a failure by governments in their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil social and economic rights. (Olivier De Schutter, 'Foreword' in Graham Riches and Tiina Silvasti (eds), *First World Hunger revisited: Food charity or the Right to Food?* (Palgrave Macmillan 2014) ix–xi, x.)

<sup>6</sup> Source: [End of year food bank stats | Trussell](#), p. 19

<sup>7</sup> North East Child Poverty Commission note that 72 per cent of children living in poverty across the UK were from working households in 2024/2025: <https://nechildpoverty.org.uk/facts/>

<sup>8</sup> Source: [End of year food bank stats | Trussell](#)

Realising the right to food will have a positive knock-on effect on the realisation of these other rights.

5. Certain groups—including Disabled people, women, and single parent households—face disproportionate violations of their right to food; a legal right requires **non-discrimination and targeted action**.

## Elements of a right to food

The right to food consists of four core elements. Each one must be provided for if a right to food is to be impactful:

- **Availability:** food should be obtainable from natural resources for example through the production of food. Food should be on sale in markets and shops.
- **Accessibility:** requires economic and physical access to food to be guaranteed. Food must be affordable and people should be able to have an adequate diet without compromising on other basic needs, such as medicines or rent.<sup>9</sup> Food should be physically accessible to all, including those who may have difficulty going out to get food including children, people who are unwell, Disabled people and older people. Food must also be available to people in remote areas.
- **Adequacy:** Food must satisfy dietary needs, taking into account a person's age, living conditions, health, occupation, sex, etc. Food should be safe for human consumption and free from adverse substances. Food should be culturally acceptable – for example food provided for people in temporary accommodation or through school meals should meet their religious and cultural needs. Food should also be safe and suitable for people with allergies and other medically indicated dietary restrictions.
- **Sustainability:** Food should be accessible for both present and future generations. It must be accessed in a way that doesn't undermine our right to a healthy and sustainable environment now and in the future. The rights of those who produce, process and prepare our food must also be considered.

Taking the four elements together situates food as something that is about the health and well-being of those who consume the food, but also the conditions for those producing, preparing and serving food, and the impact our production of food has on current and future generations. Any right to food in UK law must account for all these elements.

## Access to justice

Accessing justice is an essential element of incorporating a right. We believe that accessing justice could be made less burdensome for those experiencing a violation of their right to food by putting the following measures in place:

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<sup>9</sup> The 'Factsheet on the Right to Adequate Food' produced by the Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights clarifies that 'the affordability of food can be guaranteed by ensuring that the minimum wage or social security benefit is sufficient to meet the cost of nutritious food and other basic needs.' (Available here: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FactSheet34en.pdf>). Whether food is affordable is not only about the cost of food, but also the cost of other essential items and ultimately ensuring people have sufficient incomes.

- The establishment of a **complaints mechanism** and **supervision of the right in practice** – including through a reporting duty for listed duty bearers.
- Making the access to justice journey easier to navigate – including having a **central contact point** or national hub for human rights advice and training of frontline workers to identify rights violations.
- Support for those who have experienced a violation of their rights through **independent advocacy services**.
- Strong **protections against victimisation for complainants**. This could be reinforced by also **allowing organisations with ‘sufficient interest’ to bring legal challenges** when the right to food is violated, on behalf of impacted individuals or groups.
- Providing for both **structural and hybrid remedies**<sup>10</sup> to address systemic failings and the underlying issues. This is about ensuring the individual rights holder can access justice, but also to ensure the issue is fixed so that others do not suffer the same experience.

For more information on these elements, please read [Just Fair’s response](#) to the call for evidence.

## Engaging with the international rights monitoring

In 2022 the previous [UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food](#) (Professor Fakhri) sent a request to the UK Government to carry out a country visit to the UK. This request remains outstanding as it has not been facilitated by the UK Government. We believe the Committee should urge the UK Government to facilitate this request for the new Special Rapporteur who took up the post on 1 May 2026 - Ms. Sofia Monsalve Suarez. A visit from the Special Rapporteur could help us better understand the situation in relation to access to the right to food across the UK and suggest practical solutions.

In addition, the UK has not ratified the [Optional Protocol](#) to the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), which would allow individuals and groups to raise complaints with the [UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) if their rights under the Covenant (including the right to food) had been violated. The Committee should urge that the UK Government ratifies the Optional Protocol to ensure this path to access justice is available.

The UK has not ratified the [Revised European Social Charter 1996](#), which provides a right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, nor has it signed or ratified the [Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter Providing for a System of Collective Complaints 1995](#). The Committee should urge that the UK Government ratifies the Revised Charter and signs and ratifies the Additional Protocol to improve protections and access to complaints mechanisms

## Recommendations

In summary we recommend that:

- The Roadmap developed by the Right to Food Commission should set out:
  - That there should be legislation to incorporate the right to food across the UK.

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<sup>10</sup> For more information, please see Katie Boyle, Diana Camps, Kirstie Ken English, Jo Edson Ferrie, Aidan Flegg, and Gaurav Mukherjee ‘Access to Social Justice: Effective Remedies for Social Rights’ 2025

- A law incorporating the right to food across the UK must cover four elements: availability, accessibility, adequacy and sustainability.
- There must be effective systems in place to ensure access to justice when the right to food is violated, including a complaints mechanisms and supervision of the right in practice.
- The Committee should urge the UK Government to facilitate a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food to the UK.
- The Committee should urge the UK Government to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- The Committee should urge the UK Government to ratify the Revised European Social Charter 1996, and sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter Providing for a System of Collective Complaints 1995.

## Signatories

### Individuals

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Paul Atherton FCL FRSA   | 14. Daniel Kwok                               |
| 2. Fatiha Benmerzouk        | 15. Andrada Labuschagne                       |
| 3. Dr David Barrett         | 16. Tammy Mayes                               |
| 4. Amber Cagney             | 17. Sarah McGoogan                            |
| 5. Dr Amanda Cahill-Ripley  | 18. Elaine O'Flaherty                         |
| 6. Joanne Cox               | 19. Justina Pinkeviciute                      |
| 7. Professor Alice Donald   | 20. Dr Natalie Sedacca                        |
| 8. Dr Pier-Luc Dupont       | 21. Rona Topaz                                |
| 9. Dr Kayleigh Garthwaite   | 22. Richard Umpleby                           |
| 10. Dr Luke D. Graham       | 23. Professor Emerita Geraldine Van Bueren KC |
| 11. Professor Simon Hoffman | 24. Dr Aristi Volou                           |
| 12. Dr Clare James          |   |
| 13. Jenny Joyce             |   |

### Organisations

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|--|--|
| 1. <a href="#">4in10 London's Child Poverty Network</a>            | 14. <a href="#">Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland</a> |
| 2. <a href="#">AICEM UK</a>  | 15. <a href="#">Equality Network</a>                         |
| 3. <a href="#">Amnesty International</a>                           | 16. <a href="#">Food Ethics Council</a>                      |
| 4. <a href="#">Asylum Matters</a>                                  | 17. <a href="#">Future Strategy</a>                          |
| 5. <a href="#">ATD Fourth World</a>                                | 18. <a href="#">Human Rights Consortium Cymru</a>            |
| 6. <a href="#">Black Equity Organisation</a>                       | 19. <a href="#">Human Rights Consortium Scotland</a>         |
| 7. <a href="#">Black South West Network</a>                        | 20. <a href="#">Human Rights Watch</a>                       |
| 8. <a href="#">Campaign for Freedom of Information in Scotland</a> | 21. <a href="#">Just Fair</a>                                |
| 9. <a href="#">Citizens Advice Newcastle</a>                       | 22. <a href="#">Legal Aid Practitioners Group</a>            |
| 10. <a href="#">Dandelion Solidarity CIC</a>                       | 23. <a href="#">MLegal</a>                                   |
| 11. <a href="#">Difference North East</a>                          | 24. <a href="#">Nourish Scotland</a>                         |
| 12. <a href="#">Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC)</a>            | 25. <a href="#">Nutriri</a>                                  |
| 13. <a href="#">Early Education and Childcare Coalition</a>        | 26. <a href="#">Participation and the Practice of Rights</a> |
|  | 27. <a href="#">Positive Money</a>                           |
|  | 28. <a href="#">Quaker Social Action</a>                     |

29. [René Cassin](#)
30. [Scottish Communities Climate Action Network \(SCCAN\)](#)
31. [Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance \(SIAA\)](#)
32. [Share The World's Resources](#)
33. [VOICES ADFOCAD](#)
34. [Welfare Scotland](#)
35. [Womens Platform NI](#)
36. [Women's Regional Consortium NI](#)
37. [Women's Support Network, NI](#)