

Report to UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights UK 7th periodic review

Submission by the Scottish Food Coalition

1. The Scottish Food Coalition brings together 50 organisations including trade unions, grassroots community organisations, NGOs concerned with health, poverty and the environment, faith groups and others. This report focuses on the extent to which UK and Scottish Governments promote and protect the right to adequate food.
2. The Committee's Concluding Observations from the 6th Periodic Review in 2016 called for the UK :
 - a to restore the link between the rates of State benefit and the cost of living;
 - b to reduce food insecurity and reliance on food banks
 - c to increase the rates of breastfeeding
 - d to develop a comprehensive national strategy for the protection and promotion of the right to adequate food.
3. The link between the rates of benefit and the cost of living **has not been restored**. In its recent [report](#) the Work and Pensions Committee of the UK Parliament concludes: "a wide range of evidence (which) suggests that benefit levels are too low, and that claimants are often not able to afford daily living costs and extra costs associated with having a health condition or disability."
4. The Committee had previously requested that the UK Government review the adequacy of benefit levels, but the Government did not accept this recommendation because "there is no objective way of deciding what benefits should be". This has been a refrain of the UK Government for decades and reflects a continuing 'Poor Law' mindset rather than a human rights based approach which seeks to ensure an adequate standard of living for the whole population.
5. Aspects of social security are devolved to Scottish Government. The Scottish Child Payment (currently £26.70 a week for children up to 16 in low income households) has had [some impact](#) on reducing the need for foodbanks.
6. The Scottish Government has also committed to mitigate the UK Government's two-child limit on Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit payments from 2026. This policy would lift around [15,000 children](#) out of poverty.

Best Start Foods – the Scottish equivalent of the Healthy Start programme in England – has a higher uptake rate of over 90% compared to 60% for Healthy Start, and is also [more generous](#). This is partly because it is administered through Social Security Scotland and integrated with other child payments.

7. Measurement of food insecurity has been introduced as part of the Family Resources Survey. **The number of people experiencing food insecurity in the UK [increased](#)**

from 5m in 2019/20 to 7.2m in 2022/23. In Scotland, latest figures from the Scottish Health Survey show a [sharp increase in food insecurity](#) across all age groups, including older people. Only 58% [children living in relative poverty](#) in Scotland have high food security.

8. **Reliance on food banks has [increased](#).** Trussell reports a 150% increase in demand since 2016/17 and other food banks report similar growth. Food bank usage has grown more slowly in Scotland. The Scottish Government has published a strategy for 'ending the need for food banks' and has invested £2m in 'cash first partnerships' to maximise household incomes and reduce the need for food banks. Much greater investment is needed to end the need for food banks.
9. Rates of breastfeeding have increased gradually, with the gap between high income and low income parents reducing.
10. Provision of universal free school meals has been extended to all primary school pupils in London and Wales. Scottish Government provides for free school meals to Year 5 and has delayed the planned universal extension to Years 6 and 7. The Scottish Government draft budget proposes to widen eligibility for free school meals in Years 6 and 7.
11. Brexit has worsened conditions for migrant workers whose seasonal work visas are now limited to six months
12. In the UK, the [cost of a healthy diet](#) (based on the Eatwell guide) based on May 2022 food prices is estimated as £7.48 per day or £52.36 per week
13. Nourish Scotland's current [research](#) with community advisors on the weekly cost of a healthy and culturally-valued diet estimates this at £40-£52 for a child depending on age and £72-£74 for an adult at 2024 prices. Research in an [island community](#) suggests that food prices are 28% higher than on the mainland.
14. Income inequality in the UK continues to [increase](#). Affordability of a healthy diet is a problem for a significant section of the population. Within this, particular groups are affected.
15. More young men are using food banks in Scotland. While the rates of Universal Credit were increased by over 6% in 2024, the standard monthly allowance for a person under 25 is £311.68, precluding the ability to afford a healthy diet.
16. The National Care Home contract in Scotland sets the food allowance per resident at £41.25 per person per week. This is too low for vulnerable residents (including many with specific dietary requirements) to have their right to adequate food protected.
17. Asylum-seekers who have no recourse to public funds receive £49.18 per person per week. This is too little to afford an adequate diet and afford other essentials including

clothing and travel. The Scottish Government plans to introduce free bus travel for asylum-seekers.

18. Scotland has passed the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022, which requires Government to prepare a cross-cutting food strategy which has regard to the right to food. Progress on preparing the food strategy has been slow.
19. Scottish Government promised incorporation of ICESCR, including the right to food, through a new Human Rights Bill. This has been postponed indefinitely.
20. Other UK nations do not yet have a comprehensive national strategy for the protection and promotion of the right to adequate food. Given the highly integrated of the UK's food system and the limited powers of the devolved administrations, there is a pressing need for a 'four nations' approach to a rights-based food strategy.
21. The Sugary Drinks Industry Levy is an effective policy lever which has accelerated the trend to low sugar and sugar-free soft drinks. However, as a single measure, the impact on dietary health is limited. Overweight and obesity in the UK has not reduced and is correlated with low income.
22. Regulations to restrict promotions of unhealthy food have been repeatedly delayed by the UK Government. Proposed restrictions are still relatively minor, although Scottish Government is considering slightly more ambitious action by extending restrictions to include temporary price reductions and 'meal deals'.
23. Some local authorities including Transport for London have banned fast food advertising on billboards, buses and trains, and this policy should become universal
24. We call for the UK Government and devolved nations within the UK to incorporate the right to food into domestic law; and to acknowledge and act on their duty to improve and safeguard the nutrition of their populations, in particular those who are most vulnerable.
25. We call for comprehensive action by the UK Government and devolved nations within the UK to regulate for a healthier food environment, including establishing a multiple retailer and caterer mandate which requires businesses to transition their food offer to match national dietary goals.
26. The UK Government provided cost of living assistance to low income families in 2023 and also provided assistance with energy costs to all households in winter 2023. These recognised the role of the state in ensuring an adequate standard of living for the population.
27. However, energy costs for households have not fallen significantly in 2024: the cost of food has stabilised but not fallen; and housing costs both for mortgage holders and for private renters have risen.

28. We call on the UK Government and the governments of devolved nations to co-operate to ensure an adequate standard of living for all, through a combination of approaches including fair work, uprating of social security (including proactive measures to encourage uptake), domestic energy improvement measures, expansion of social housing and targeted interventions for those most at risk.

**Scottish Food Coalition
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