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# Health inequalities and food poverty: Implications for the Island of Ireland

# Starting positions

- *Foodbanks are a testimony to the failure of public authorities to deliver on the right to food and should be neither a permanent feature nor a substitute for more robust social programs. **Food assistance in the form of the right to social security, such as cash transfers, food stamps or vouchers, can be defined in terms of rights, whereas foodbanks are charity-based and depend on donations and good will.** There can also be a sense of shame attached to foodbanks.*

Olivier de Schutter, 2013.

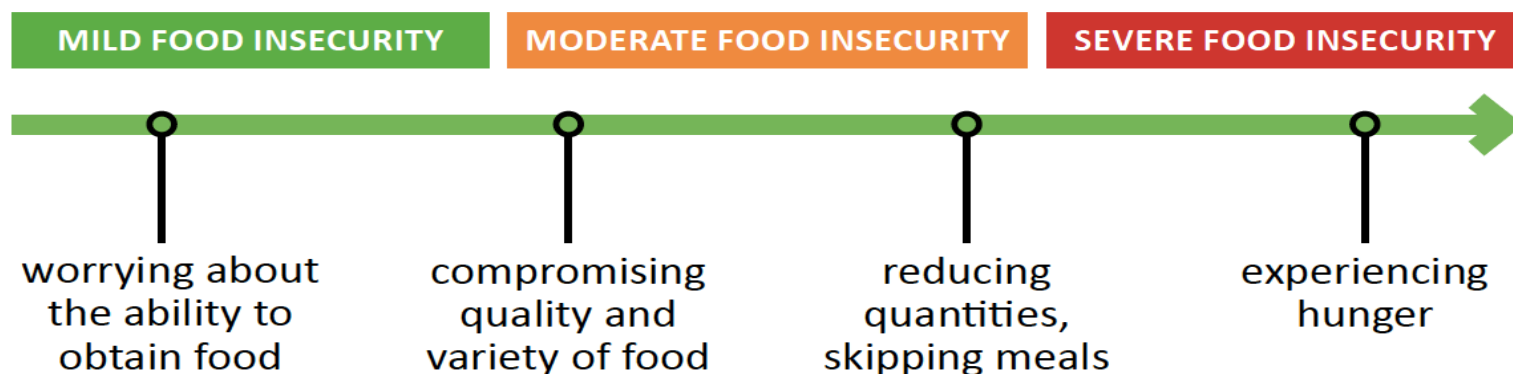
# From the Countess Kathleen by W.B. Yeats (1892)

- *It's time that poverty should bolt the door....  
(p10)*
- *If we knew how to find deserving poor*
- *We'd do our share...*
- *We know the evils of mere charity (p13)*

and experiencing hunger are most severe stages (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

# WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?



**Method**  
**Food poverty the inability to consume an adequate quality and quantity of food in socially acceptable ways or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so**  
The data reported here come from the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) developed by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), which directly measures household experiences of food insecurity (Box 1). The scale for measuring food insecurity was validated in countries across the world and consisted of asking people eight questions about their ability to get enough food in the past 12 months with scales already in use in other countries and similar to questions used in the 2003-5 Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey.

<sup>1</sup> While there is not an official government definition of food insecurity used in the UK, this definition is drawn from guidance on measuring food insecurity in the USA and was used for the UK's Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey, 2007

# The Hunger Pandemic

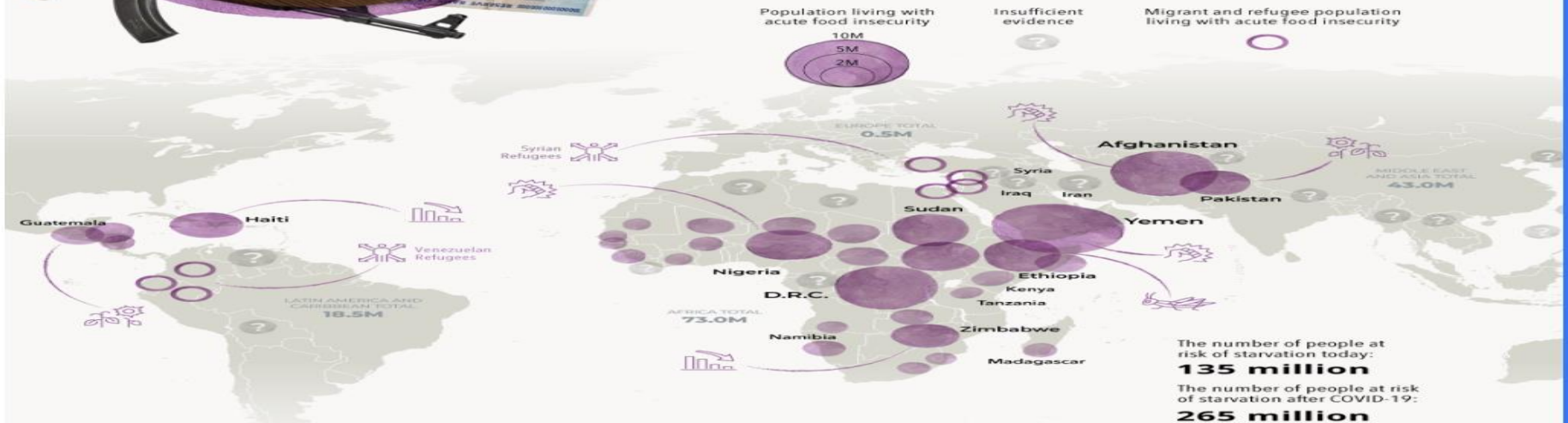
Globally, COVID-19 could double the number of people on the brink of starvation



While COVID-19 is dominating headlines, another kind of emergency is threatening the lives of millions of people around the world—**food insecurity**.

By the end of 2020, 265 million people could be in crisis level situations.

Here's the situation around the world:



Food insecurity can be caused by a number of factors, including:

- Conflict and insecurity
- Economic shocks
- Health shocks
- Weather extremes
- Pests
- Displacement

Food insecurity can also be caused by a combination of factors, as is the case with the **COVID-19 outbreak**.

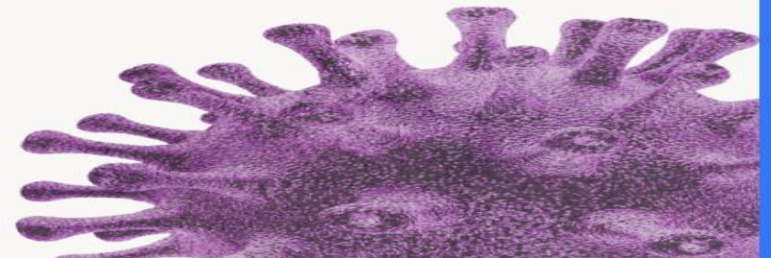
Here are some of the ways the pandemic could exacerbate hunger in high risk regions:



Funding cuts to aid programs due to economic downturn or reallocation to COVID-19 specific programs



Movement restrictions and illness limit the availability of agricultural labor, which will contribute to rising food prices



# Global food security index 2020

PERFORMANCE OF COUNTRIES BASED ON THEIR 2020 FOOD SECURITY SCORE  
<https://foodsecurityindex.eiu.com/index>

Score Rank

Global Regional

| Global ranking | Country        | Overall score | Affordability | Availability | Quality and Safety | Natural Resources and Resilience |
|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1st            | Finland        | 85.3          | =4th          | 1st          | 6th                | 2nd                              |
| 2nd            | Ireland        | 83.8          | =1st          | 3rd          | 4th                | 2nd                              |
| 3rd            | Netherlands    | 79.9          | 3rd           | 6th          | 18th               | 12th                             |
| 4th            | Austria        | 79.4          | =9th          | 14th         | =2nd               | 11th                             |
| 5th            | Czech Republic | 78.6          | =23rd         | 16th         | 24th               | 4th                              |
| 6th            | United Kingdom | 78.5          | 8th           | 17th         | 7th                | 13th                             |
| 7th            | Sweden         | 78.1          | 11th          | =32nd        | =8th               | 7th                              |
| 8th            | Israel         | 78.0          | =9th          | 4th          | 5th                | 64th                             |
| 9th            | Japan          | 77.9          | 6th           | =8th         | 34th               | 15th                             |
| 10th           | Switzerland    | 77.7          | 16th          | 20th         | 15th               | 9th                              |
| 11th           | United States  | 77.5          | 17th          | 10th         | =2nd               | 39th                             |
| 12th           | Canada         | 77.2          | 26th          | 11th         | 1st                | 29th                             |
| =13th          | Germany        | 77.0          | 18th          | 12th         | 11th               | 33rd                             |
| =13th          | New Zealand    | 77.0          | =4th          | =39th        | 35th               | 5th                              |
| =15th          | Denmark        | 76.6          | =1st          | 38th         | 14th               | 17th                             |
| =15th          | Italy          | 76.6          | 7th           | 13th         | 20th               | 41st                             |
| 17th           | France         | 76.5          | 13th          | =28th        | 10th               | 14th                             |
| 18th           | Norway         | 76.2          | 38th          | =32nd        | 12th               | 1st                              |
| =19th          | Portugal       | 75.7          | 21st          | 19th         | =8th               | 38th                             |



**1** category rank

### AFFORDABILITY

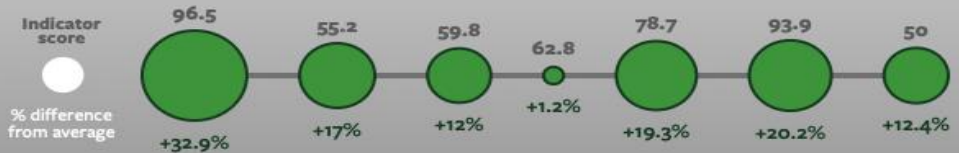
92.2 category score



**3** category rank

### AVAILABILITY

75.7 category score



**4** category rank

### QUALITY AND SAFETY

94 category score



**2** category rank

### NATURAL RESOURCES AND RESILIENCE

73.2 category score



## Food Security Index data tool



- Ireland
- Europe
- All index countries



**FREE**  
Download the index

GFSI 2020 Model

(Excel file 5.43mb)



# Situation in Ireland

- 689,000 people in Ireland are in poverty, of which 202,000 are children.
- 111,000 people living in poverty are in employment; the 'working poor'.
- The number of 65s+ in poverty has risen by 20,000 to 78,000 since 2008. The rate of poverty went from 8.7% to 11.5% for this group
- Overall there are 36,000 more people living in poverty in Ireland today compared to 2008, pre the global recession.
- Without social welfare payments 40.9 per cent of Ireland's population would be living in poverty, instead of 14 %
- This suggests a deeply unequal distribution of income.

# The figures hide:

- Inequality is most often based on measures of income
- Insecure and inconsistent income linked to working conditions
- For Ireland there has been a narrowing of income disparity partially helped by social welfare programmes
- What this hides is wealth inequality, eg savings, housing, land etc
- The living wage?? Not built on the price, availability, access and cost of food

# For low income households - a race to the bottom (NI)

- Households saved an average of 4% between 2008 and 2015 **by trading down to cheaper products.**
- While trading down to cheaper products has helped many people offset some of the food price rises, low income households have not managed to trade down, possibly as they were already buying cheaper products. The lowest income decile (bottom 10%) on average bought less food rather than **trading down.**
- Energy content of these households food fell 8.7% between 2007 and 2010, as they cut back on bread, cereals, biscuits, cake, beef, fruit and vegetables.
- **Falling income and static welfare benefits** (after housing costs) and rising food prices produced a double effect, reducing food affordability by over 20% for lowest income decile households.
- **Now trading down means.....**

snizelda



**“Mum, Dad, have we reached the bottom yet?”**

# Food on a low income

Four households tell their story

Summary Report



*“Shopping is a chore, it has to be done. I want to be in and out in 20 minutes.”*

Two-parent family, Belfast

*“I buy those pies that you can just throw in the oven and there is your meal”.*

Two-parent family, Belfast

*“Pizza from Iceland, they are only £1 and you can get a load of them – do them all week.”*

Lone parent, Belfast

*“You work out your Monday to Friday dinners before going shopping. I write a list if I’m short of money that week because you are only buying necessities, not buying any luxuries.”*

Lone Parent, Belfast

*“I find when you go to a big supermarket you buy more. You tend to put a lot of shopping in, so you would, so maybe when you come home you say ‘God knows what I spent’ and then you would think the rest of the week, well, I’ll have to make that do, y’know?”*

Single older female, Cushendall

*“Iceland is not so bad because they’ve no toys or anything. Tesco have computer games, DVDs, toys”.*

Lone parent, Belfast

# The social cost of poverty – paint the picture



## The cost of a healthy diet

Pilot study of two household types

- The cost of a food bank emergency food parcel (extrapolated for seven days) is much reduced from that of a consensually agreed, nutritionally adequate diet.
- In comparing the cost of a pensioner living alone (£57.05) to a food bank's lowest-priced one week food list (£17.66) it is appreciable that a nutritious diet is three times more expensive than the emergency food parcels distributed by foodbanks.
- Similarly, comparing the average UK household's food expenditure (£56.80) to the cost of a food bank diet (£17.66) illustrates well the shortfall in the standard of living between the two dietary experiences.



# 2008 Global crisis and now?

## Differences and similarities

- The pandemic has exposed many of the flaws with the current food and welfare systems.
- The pandemic is not the cause of these flaws but merely exposed them through a 'perfect storm' of events.
- These are different from the 2008 Great Recession where food poverty on the IOI was wider in its impact.
- Key among the contributors to wider inequality were lack of secure employment, the loss of family and community networks, the use of doorstep loans and increased food costs.
- A key factor often overlooked in the study of food poverty is that inequality itself has an impact on food poverty.

# Teaming up to tackle Food Poverty in North Belfast

3 June 2021



Rapid Antigen & PCR Travel Testing From £29.

Rapid Antigen PCR Travel Testing From £29.

**£80** Fixed penalty for littering

**THIS IS A DISGRACE!**

PUT IT IN THE BIN. NOT ON THE GROUND.

## Growing levels of food poverty 'are indefensible' – Newry MLA | Newry Times

Posted by **NewryTimes News**  
editor@newrytimes.com  
Tuesday, August 31st, 2021

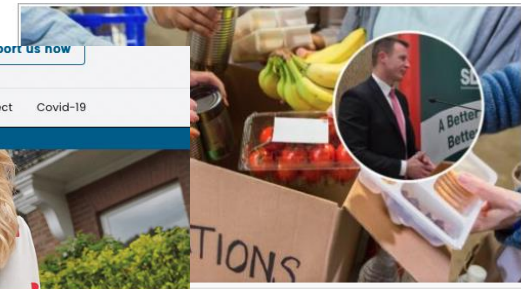
SDLP MLA Justin McNulty has branded the growing levels of food poverty in Northern Ireland as 'an abject failure of governance'.



## Seniors to Receive New Benefit

Seniors Born Before 1969  
Get a Lump Sum for Funeral & Cremation Costs

Senior Benefits



**Please Don't Ignore Her**  
Yemen Needs Us Now. Please Give Today Freedom Bakeries



## One in five Irish children go to school or bed hungry. This has to stop.

Because of the recession, many families are still struggling to put food on the table.

Apr 15th 2015, 11:00 AM 3,331 Views 199 Comments

Share 1265 Tweet 172 Email 17

FOOD POVERTY IS on the rise in Ireland with over 600,000 people in the country being affected by it in 2013. Food poverty – which is defined as the inability to afford or access healthy food – impacts on low-income groups but children, lone-parent families and the unemployed are hit particularly hard. One in five of our children go to school or bed hungry.



Image: Shutterstock/Suzanne Tucker

Because of the recession, many families are struggling to put food on the table. Indeed, families with older children would have to spend almost two thirds of



## McDonald's to strengthen ties with Irish food charity

Company will provide equivalent of 150,000 meals in agreement with FoodCloud

© Fri, Aug 27, 2021, 04:01

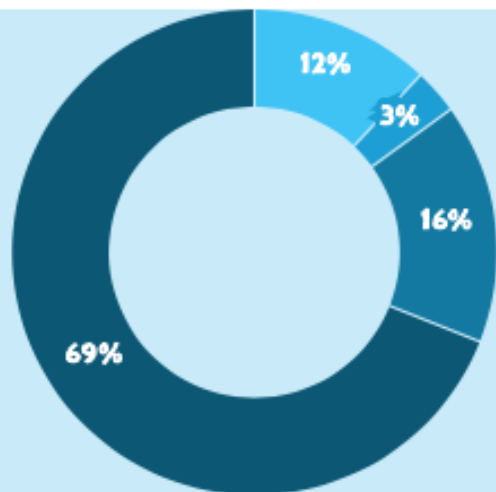
🔊 LISTEN NOW 1:53



In Galway at the launch of McDonald's and FoodCloud's new partnership were, from left, Alistair Reid, director of operations and franchising, McDonald's Ireland; Aaron Byrne, McDonald's Ireland franchisee; Alan Gannon, FoodCloud warehouse manager; and Kay Cunningham and Teresa Coughlan of Ballinasloe Social Services.

Photograph: Andrew Downes/Xposure

# So in COVID-19



- All other school-aged children\*
- Living in poverty but not eligible\*
- Eligible but not claiming
- Claiming FSM on census day



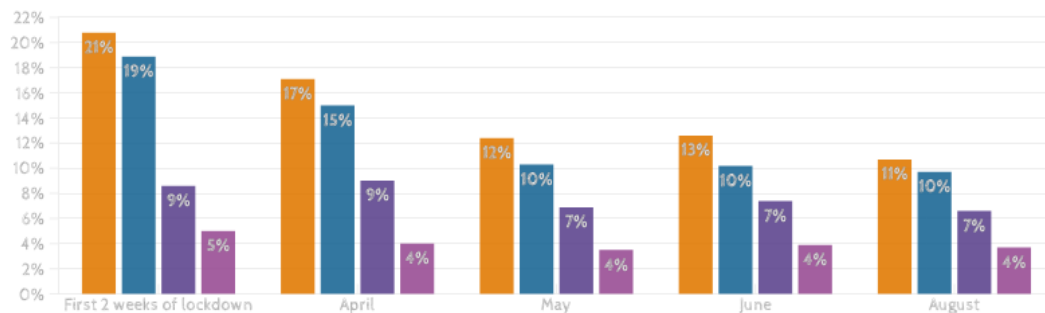
1 of 3

## Food Insecurity



Dashboard

Percentage of households with children experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity:



- Moderate or severe food insecurity
- Had smaller meals/skipped meals
- Been hungry but not eaten
- Not eaten for a whole day

Source: YouGov survey commissioned by the Food Foundation

(1) First 2 weeks of lockdown - Second survey in series. Recall period: 2 weeks. Date of data collection: 7/3-9/3. (2) April - Third survey in series. Recall period: 1 month. Date of data collection: 24/4-29/4. (3) May - Fourth survey in series. Recall period: 1 month. Date of data collection: 14/5-17/5. (4) June - Fifth survey in series. Recall period: 1 month. Date of data collection: 6/7-8/7. (5) August - Sixth survey in series. Recall period: 1 month. Date of data collection: 24/8-1/9.

- WE SAW A **FIVEFOLD** INCREASE IN THE NUMBERS SEEKING HELP
- Due to credit facilities being closed, family and community networks compromised and insecure employment being massively impacted
- Issues of measurement which mean they are predictive

# For low income groups

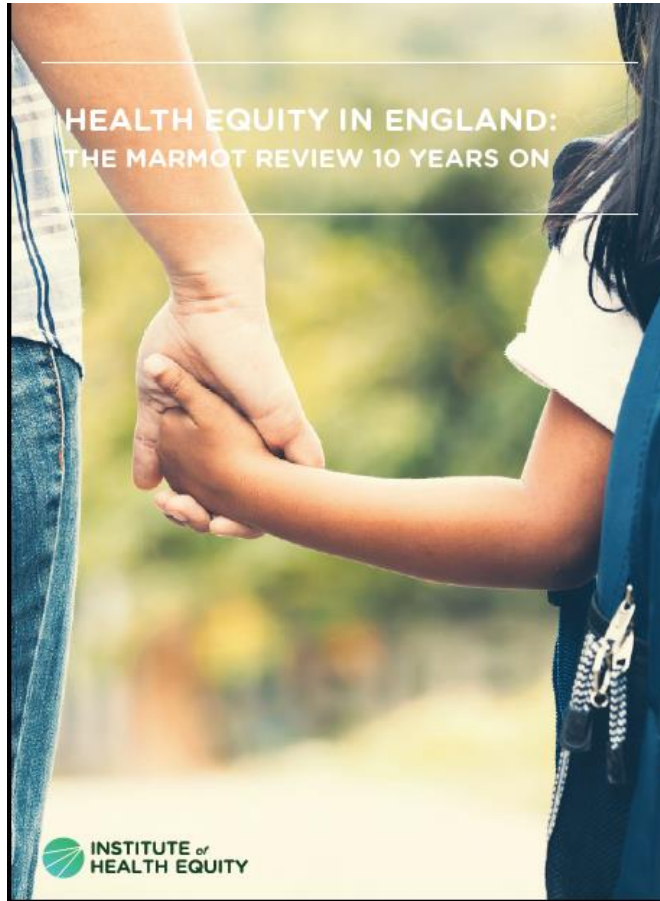
- One income or pay check away from destitution before COVID
- Used up their savings
- Families and community networks likely to be equally suffering so less support there
- Overall savings have increased but
- Indebtedness has risen among low-income households
- Loans (up to 49% interest) and debts – financial toxicity
- Food is the elastic item in the budget



# So tensions

- Hunger and obesity co-exist often in the same groups
- Children are adversely affected by poor nutrition – learning, outcomes from education and future health status
- Different budgets but same root cause -inequality
- Social life is impacted
- Families are making tough decisions good household management/poor health outcomes – eat/cook or heat ...
- Food poverty is often hidden- stigma

# Michael Marmot



- When a society is flourishing health tends to flourish. When a society has large social and economic inequalities there are large inequalities in health. The health of the population is not just a matter of how well the health service is funded and functions, important as that is: health is closely linked to the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age and inequities in power, money and resources – the social determinants of health.
- The damage to the nation's health need not have happened.

- About 8 out of 10 living in food poverty don't use a food bank or charity provision, they rely on family networks and credit/savings /borrowing.
- **The Working Poor**
- Charity does not deal with food poverty -at best tackles some issues of immediate want.
- It is not dignified and we still have a welfare state and a right to food under international law.

# DIGNITY

ENDING HUNGER TOGETHER IN SCOTLAND

The Report of the Independent Working Group on Food Poverty  
June 2016

# Post pandemic responses

- Look to formalising welfare -move away from charity or integrate charity responses within state ones as in Brazil
- Food charity does not in most cases provide appropriate food, adequate nutrition or tackle food poverty
- Think of rights not charity- food justice. Maybe through the food networks that have sprung up all over the country (eg Safefood's 13 community food initiatives, social supermarkets in NI, Transition towns etc)
- EU Child Guarantee -Ireland is now undertaking to look at this go provide meal to all children in schools. Funding will be following this EU policy (currently FEAD).
- Working poor formalise rights and work situation eg zero hour contracts with adequate incomes, living wage?
- The upcoming budget - Tánaiste said there will be tax measures aimed at 'middle-income people in particular' as well as a welfare package to offset the impact of the rising cost of living



Why are you talking about food banks existing, if you don't talk about why they exist? It's like pouring water into a boat that's leaking. There's no point in me giving the information about what we need to do to help, when you're not talking about the root cause of it.

Hayley Squires star of the film 'I, Daniel Blake' in an interview in the Observer Magazine. (Nicholson 2017, p. 16)

