

About us

The Poverty Alliance is Scotland's anti-poverty network. Together with our members, we influence policy and practice, support communities to challenge poverty, provide evidence through research and build public support for the solutions to tackle poverty. Our members include grassroots community groups, academics, large national NGOs, voluntary organisations, statutory organisations, trade unions, and faith groups.

Submission summary

The core driver of the current scale of hunger in Scotland, and across the UK, is the inadequacy of incomes; households are without enough money to afford the food they need to live healthy, dignified lives. It is a consequence of the political and economic choices that make poverty possible, driven by systems that have allowed incomes from work and social security to fall behind the rising cost of living, and years of austerity and wider inequalities that have left some without equitable access to food.

It is clear that we need a fundamental shift from crisis response and incremental change towards a long-term vision that is capable of delivering transformative change. We believe that the **Minimum Income Guarantee** delivers just that.

The Guarantee would establish an income floor below which nobody would be allowed to fall, ensuring everyone has the income security needed to achieve a dignified standard of living. Delivering this would require action across three areas:

- **Good jobs that pay the bills:** Most people of working age will reach the income floor through fair paid work, but change is needed to ensure more people have access to good quality, secure work;
- **Strong services:** With stronger public services, people will have more choice in their lives - increasing their opportunities for work, training, education and services - and daily living costs for those on low-incomes will be reduced; and
- **Better social security:** For people who cannot get suitable work - or who are unable to work - our social security system will be strengthened so that it once again functions as a protection against poverty.

The Minimum Income Guarantee provides the foundation for realising the right to food by ensuring everyone has what they need to live well and participate fully in society. Achieving this requires a whole-systems approach that addresses the interconnected nature of poverty; from boosting incomes, to sustainable funding for communities, accessible food systems and decision-making that centres lived experience.

Communities across Scotland have shown their expertise and determination in challenging poverty and building solution. Their voices must be central to shaping the systems that affect their lives.

A future free from hunger is possible, so the time for action is now.

1. Introduction

The core driver of the current scale of hunger in Scotland, and across the UK, is the inadequacy of incomes; households are without enough money to afford the food they need to live healthy, dignified lives. This is not inevitable. Rather, it is a consequence of the political and economic choices that make poverty possible. Food insecurity is driven by systems that have allowed incomes from work and social security to fall behind the rising cost of living, and years of austerity and wider inequalities that have left some without equitable access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food.

As Scotland's national anti-poverty network, the Poverty Alliance and its members stand together across civil society because we believe in a Scotland where everyone has the income necessary to live a decent life and the opportunities to flourish, supported through an economic system that puts people and the planet at its heart. We know that this is possible.

That is why we are tired of waiting for change on stubbornly high levels of financial insecurity. Scotland is a wealthy country, yet almost one in five people are held back by poverty.¹ That is over a million people whose human rights are being actively breached and ability to meet basic needs undermined, with severe hardship having become increasingly normalised. Food insecurity is one of the clearest and most painful manifestations of this.

That is why we welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Right to Food UK Commission's call for evidence, to strengthen understanding of the causes of hunger in Scotland, and identify the changes needed at both Holyrood and Westminster to make food security a reality for all.

Our evidence is grounded in the experiences of those living in poverty across Scotland. We hear consistently about the impossible choices people face when their income doesn't cover the cost of life's essentials: choosing between heating and eating; reducing the quality or quantity of food; skipping meals so that children or other family members have enough.

The right to food is a fundamental one, recognised through Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and protecting both the right to adequate food and the right to be free from hunger. Realising this right needs more than just reactive responses. It needs action to address the root causes of poverty and inequality.

It is therefore essential to recognise the implementation of a Right to Food legislation as inseparable from the right to live with dignity. Ensuring that everyone has an adequate income is foundational to making the right to food meaningful. Achieving this requires our political decision-makers to have a clear vision for the future. We believe that the **Minimum Income Guarantee** offers that vision, providing a path to address the underlying causes of food insecurity. The evidence given in this submission is framed around delivering the Guarantee, and we will expand more on what this means for people across the country.

It is clear that a future without hunger is both possible and within our grasp. That means that the time for action is now to ensure that everyone has the resources they need not only to access life's essentials, but to build a solid foundation for the future.

¹ Scottish Government (2026) *Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2022-25*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/poverty-and-income-inequality-in-scotland-2022-25/>

2. The Minimum Income Guarantee

We need a fundamental shift from crisis response and incremental change towards a long-term vision that is capable of delivering transformative change. The Minimum Income Guarantee delivers just that.²

The Guarantee would establish an income floor below which nobody would be allowed to fall, ensuring everyone has the income security needed to achieve a dignified standard of living.

It would also recognise the different needs of different types of households. The income floor would therefore need to interact with the Minimum Income Standard developed by Loughborough University. This reflects the real costs of achieving an acceptable standard of living - including essentials such as housing, clothing, food, household goods and personal care - alongside less tangible needs like communication and social participation, for different households types.³

As such, delivering the Guarantee requires action across three areas:

- **Good jobs that pay the bills:** Most people of working age will reach the Guarantee's income level through fair paid work, but change is needed to make sure more people have access to good quality work that is accessible through increased flexibility and support;
- **Strong services:** With stronger investment in the public services that we all rely on, people will have more choice in their lives - increasing their opportunities for work, training, education and access to essential services - and daily living costs for those on low-incomes will be reduced; and
- **Better social security:** For people who cannot get suitable work - or who are unable to work due to caring responsibilities, ill health or disability - our social security system will be strengthened so that it once again functions as a protection against poverty.

The Minimum Income Guarantee is a simple but powerful idea that can make our country better. Delivering this will need time, investment, action and a genuine national commitment for change. In recent years, the Scottish Government has taken important steps towards exploring how a Guarantee could be delivered in Scotland, including establishing an Expert Group whose final report provides a clear and costed roadmap for progress.⁴ The interim actions set out in this roadmap require urgent resourcing and collaboration across the Scottish and UK Governments. This would make a tangible difference to people on low incomes while moving us towards a fairer society.

To tackle food insecurity, we need bold, timely and equalities driven action across all policy areas and levels of government to make meaningful progress on poverty. The Minimum Income Guarantee provides the foundation to build an economy and society where everyone has the resources they need to reach a dignified standard of living.

² See further information about the Poverty Alliance's work on the Minimum Income Guarantee here: <https://www.povertyalliance.org/mig/>

³ See further information about the Minimum Income Standard here: <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/crsp/minimum-income-standard/>

⁴ Scottish Government (2025) *The Minimum Income Guarantee: a roadmap to dignity for all*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/minimum-income-guarantee-roadmap-dignity/documents/>

Strong wages and fair work

This insecurity is not experienced equally. Women are more likely to be affected by low pay, with female-dominated sectors such as care, retail and hospitality often characterised by poorer wages and precarious conditions. Disabled people, Black and minority ethnic people, and single parents also face disproportionate and structural barriers to good work. Ensuring access to decent pay and predictable hours is therefore essential not only to tackling poverty, but to addressing wider inequalities.

Living Wage Scotland was established by the Poverty Alliance in 2014 to respond to this challenge, supporting employers to recognise their central role in tackling poverty by adopting the real Living Wage, Living Hours and Living Pensions.⁷ Now, working in partnership with the Living Wage Foundation and funded by the Scottish Government, the team support a network of over 4,000 employers across the country, with real Living Wage accreditation having given a pay uplift to 72,000 workers. That is an additional £680 million into workers' pockets.

Around 276,000 workers in Scotland are not currently paid the real Living Wage. That means that more than 10% of workers earn below the wage level designed to support a good standard of living.⁸ It is clear then that the real Living Wage should be the benchmark for employers committed to ensuring work provides security.

We know that this makes a difference. A full-time worker paid the National Living Wage earns £760 less each year than someone paid the real Living Wage, a shortfall equivalent to nearly three months of food costs for a household.⁹

⁹ Living Wage Foundation (2025) *National Living Wage rise welcomed, but real Living Wage still needed as low pay surges*. Available at: <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/news/national-living-wage-rise-welcomed-real-living-wage-still-needed-low-pay-surges>

Our call to employers across Scotland is clear. They should commit to the real Living Wage, alongside Living Hours and Living Pensions, ensuring workers have both adequate pay and the stability needed to plan their lives. This means working towards accreditation in:

- **The real Living Wage:** Paying everyone aged 18 and over at least £13.45 an hour (£14.80 in London), including regular contracted workers;
- **Living Hours:** Ensuring at least 4 weeks' notice of every shift; payment for cancelled shifts; a guaranteed offer of minimum of 16 hours a week; a contract to reflect hours worked; and
- **Living Pensions:** Support employees to reach an annual savings benchmark of at least £2,950.

Whilst employers are central to tackling the injustice of in-work poverty, they cannot deliver the transformation we need alone. Our governments also have a responsibility to create a labour market with fair work at its core. They must build on the progress that has been made through the Employments Rights Bill, as well as existing Fair Work commitments, ensuring that as first steps:

- Public spending and economic policy is used to incentivise and facilitate fair pay and conditions;
- Fair Work conditionality is attached to public funding and business support is strengthened; and
- Collective bargaining is expanded in low-paid sectors such as social care and hospitality.

Strengthening social security

A fair labour market is central to making progress on poverty, but paid work alone cannot provide everyone with financial security. A strong social security system is therefore essential to ensure that all people can meet the Minimum Income Guarantee threshold.

Our social security system is a vital public service and a fundamental human right that should secure the wellbeing and dignity of all in society. It is not only a safety net that should be there for all of us when we need it, but also a springboard which provides vital support for accessing suitable educational and employment opportunities, as well as other forms of participation in society.

Life can be unpredictable; redundancy, bereavement, illness and caring responsibilities can happen to anyone, at any time, creating periods where financial support is needed. A compassionate system that is rooted in adequacy is therefore an investment in people. It gives us all a secure foundation to build a positive future.

However, years of unjust policy decisions at a UK level has resulted in a system that is causing destitution by design, inflicting the very harm it is intended to prevent. For too many people, the value of UK level social security falls well short of what is needed to meet the cost of living. Trussell Scotland highlight that most people (88%) referred to food banks are in receipt of a means-tested social security payment, including three quarters of people in receipt of Universal Credit.¹⁰ In comparison, fewer than one in 10 people in the general

¹⁰ Trussell (2025) *Hunger in Scotland*. Available at: https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-09/hunger-in-scotland_190925.pdf

population across Scotland were in receipt of Universal Credit, highlighting the reality that many low-income households receiving this support are unable to afford basic necessities.¹¹

The UK Government must therefore work towards a human rights based social security system which functions as a genuine protection against poverty and provides the foundation for a decent life.

We therefore support Trussell and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's proposal of an Essentials Guarantee as a clear and necessary first steps towards further reform.¹²

This Guarantee would establish the principle that Universal Credit should, at a minimum, enable people to afford the essentials they need to live. It would:

- Establish an independent process to regularly determine an Essentials Guarantee level, based on the cost of essential goods and services such as food, utilities and vital household items, excluding rent and council tax;
- Ensure that the Universal Credit standard allowance is at least set at this level; and
- Prevent deductions like sanctions from reducing support below this level.

The Essentials Guarantee would provide much needed transparency around the true cost of essentials in social security payments and establish a foundation for delivering a Minimum Income Guarantee. Alongside this, further action is needed to address the other flaws in the design and delivery of social security that increase the risk of hunger, including:

- Ending the five-week wait for Universal Credit;
- Ending the benefit cap; and
- Removing the age bands within Universal Credit.

With reform of reserved benefits essential, Scotland has demonstrated that a different approach to social security is possible. Although most powers around social security remain reserved to Westminster, vital support for households is delivered through the devolved Social Security Scotland. It is therefore important to recognise the additional complexity facing Scottish households, who must often navigate both devolved and reserved benefits systems.

It is welcome that Scotland's social security system was founded on the principles of dignity and respect. Through our lived experience work, we know that this is having a tangible impact in the way that processes are experienced. In 2024, we supported a Citizens Panel of 16 people living on low incomes and with experience of Scottish social security to discuss the impact of poverty related stigma on benefit take-up. Panellists largely agreed that dealing with Social Security Scotland was a far less stigmatising experience than the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). They reflected that experiences with DWP have been extremely negative and the difference between the two systems were "night and day".¹³

"I've only really felt in the past year or two that I've been able to draw breath, basically due to the change in attitude of Scottish Government rather than Westminster Government. Before that, every assessment was basically panic and dread."

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² More information on this can be found here: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/social-security/independent-process-to-ensure-universal-credit-covers-essential-costs>

¹³ The Poverty Alliance (2024) *The impact of stigma on benefit take-up: Report of a Get Heard Scotland Citizens' Panel*. Available at: <https://www.povertyalliance.org/get-heard-scotland-impact-of-stigma-on-benefit-take-up-report-of-the-citizens-panel/>

“When you open a Social Security Scotland letter, your heart isn’t pounding as much.”

The way that support is delivered through Social Security Scotland represents the positive changes that can be made when payments are valued as an investment in people.

However, we must also recognise that, for many, the value of devolved social security still falls short of what is needed to meet the cost of living. Further investment is needed to ensure that our social security system truly functions as a protection against poverty, and promotes decency and security. This includes:

- Increasing the Scottish Child Payment to £40 immediately, and at least £55 by 2030;
- Widening the eligibility for, and increase the value of, Carer Support Payment; and
- Strengthening the approach to the Scottish Welfare Fund.

To support full uptake of social security at every level, we must also **ensure full coverage access to advice services**. The growing complexity of the social security system, alongside rising costs and insufficient wages, means more people are seeking support from welfare rights services. Evidence consistently shows that many people cannot access their full entitlement without expert advice. Trussell’s latest ‘Hunger in Scotland’ report highlights that 36% of people referred to food banks in 2024 did not receive any formal support or advice prior to the referral.¹⁴

Sufficient investment must therefore be made to ensure high-quality advice services are available in every community. These services should be free, independent and stigma-free, enabling people to access the financial support they are entitled to, as well as improve mental health and reduce feelings of isolation.

Ensuring everyone can access security

A society committed to ending hunger must ensure **everyone** has access to an adequate income. The Minimum Income Guarantee should therefore be rooted in the principle that all people have the resources needed to live with dignity, recognising that some are currently excluded from both the labour market and social security system.

Refugees, people seeking asylum and those with No Recourse to Public Funds face intense challenge in accessing the support that should protect people from poverty. As part of our Rights in Action project,¹⁵ we worked with a group of lived experience researchers to examine the barriers faced by disabled people and carers who are seeking asylum or have refugee status in accessing their fundamental human rights.¹⁶ Food came out as a key theme, with participants consistently describing experiencing food insecurity and making difficult choices between essentials like food, transport, and healthcare.

Grossly inadequate levels of financial support, especially during long asylum waits, created significant challenges to meeting basic necessities such as proper nutrition, particularly during periods of illness. One research participant described the challenge of following medical dietary advice after receiving a cancer diagnosis while living on the restricted

¹⁴ Trussell (2025) *Hunger in Scotland*. Available at: https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-09/hunger-in-scotland_190925.pdf

¹⁵ See further information about our Rights in Action project here: <https://www.povertyalliance.org/rights-in-action/>

¹⁶ The Poverty Alliance (2026) *From rights to realisation: Disabled people and carers navigating the asylum system – a community research report*. Available at: <https://www.povertyalliance.org/research-from-rights-to-realisation-disabled-people-and-carers-navigating-the-asylum-system/>

income available to people seeking asylum:¹⁷

“With £5 per day and you need to pay transportation, how could I buy fresh items or herbs or the things that the doctors told me? ... I have no money, I have no food, they said to me, okay you can go to the food banks or pantries.”

This account reflects the severe hardship experienced by many people seeking asylum and demonstrates the consequences of a system that is undignified. Restrictions on access to public funds create conditions where people are unable to realise their right to an adequate standard of living.

A rights-based approach to food must therefore recognise that the right to food applies to everyone, regardless of immigration status. The UK Government should ensure that people seeking asylum receive levels of support that enable them to meet their essential needs and live with dignity. This includes increasing asylum support rates using a methodology that reflects the real experiences and costs faced by people navigating the asylum system.

4. Universal free school meals

Every child should have access to nutritious food. That is why **we support the calls of Magic Breakfast and others to deliver universal free school breakfast and lunch provision to all pupils in Scotland**, recognising that access to food during the school day is essential to boosting children’s health, wellbeing and ability to learn.

Progress on school meal provision is being made in Scotland. This includes the expansion of free school meals to all pupils in Primary 1 to Primary 5, as well as provision for children in households receiving low-income benefits, and the ambition to make free breakfast clubs available to all primary and additional support needs pupils by August 2027. However, further action is needed to ensure no child is left behind.

Hunger is a significant barrier to learning and participation. Tackling poverty through education requires all children and young people, regardless of their socio-economic background, to have equal access to opportunities to learn and thrive. Expanding universal breakfast and lunch provision is therefore a vital tool in reducing inequalities, closing the attainment gap and ensuring children can fully participate in school life.

These benefits extend beyond the classroom. Research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that providing children with a free, nutritious breakfast led to an average of two months additional progress in reading, writing and maths over the course of an academic year compared with pupils in schools without provision.¹⁸ A 2021 study examining the economic impact of Magic Breakfast’s work also found that school breakfast provision could deliver a 50 times return on investment, demonstrating that tackling child hunger creates significant wider benefits for the economy, and wider society.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Institute of Fiscal Studies (2016) *Breakfast clubs work their magic in disadvantaged English schools*. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/breakfast-clubs-work-their-magic-disadvantaged-english-schools>

¹⁹ Magic Breakfast, Heinz and Pro Bono Economics (2021) *The economic cost-effectiveness of the Magic Breakfast model of school breakfast provision*. Available at: <https://www.magicbreakfast.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/The-economic-cost-effectiveness-of-the-Magic-Breakfast-model-of-school-breakfast-provision.pdf>

5. Fair funding for community organisations

Charitable and emergency food provision, while providing a vital lifeline for people experiencing crisis, cannot be the solution to the scale of hunger and food insecurity we see in Scotland. No community organisation should be expected to fill the gaps created by inadequate incomes or rising living costs. As we have set out throughout this submission, the long-term solution is structural action to ensure everyone has the security needed to access the food they need and live with dignity.

However, moving away from crisis food provision does not mean diminishing the role of community organisations. They are central to making meaningful progress on inequality and building community.

Across Scotland, many Poverty Alliance members use food as a way to bring people together and create spaces of support, solidarity and belonging. Community pantries, food hubs and other local organisations often provide affordable and accessible food alongside a much wider range of support. They are trusted spaces where people can access advice on social security and income maximisation, build skills through volunteering and development opportunities, access employment support and connect with others in their community.

These organisations draw on deep local knowledge and relationships to provide trusted support that reflects the realities of the communities they serve. This means they are often able to reach people who are missed by statutory services, particularly those facing the greatest barriers. Their flexibility and innovation allow them to respond quickly to emerging needs and develop solutions that reflect specific cultural and local contexts. Through this experience, they also play an important role in advocating for systems change, identifying the root causes of poverty, shaping public and political debate and holding decision makers to account.

A Right to Food framework should therefore recognise communities as valued and equal partners in building a future where poverty and food insecurity is no longer a reality. Their contribution cannot be sustained through recognition and praise alone. Rather, it requires fair, secure and sustainable funding that allow organisations to plan for the future, retain skilled staff and continue delivering the support and connection that communities need.

We know that too many organisations have been left without the financial security they need to thrive, a result of the precarity of current funding landscapes. Across the country, our members face significant challenges in staff retention; recruitment and morale; continuity of service provision; and planning for the future. Some face a constant threat of closure.

Taking a Fair Funding approach is therefore an increasingly urgent action that the UK and Scottish Governments - as well as other funders - must take. To move forward on this, we must mobilise the definition of Fair Funding as set out by the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO).²⁰ They have defined Fair Funding as a long-term, flexible, sustainable, and accessible approach to funding. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Longer-term funding of three years or more;
- Flexible unrestricted core funding;
- Timely decision-making and payments;
- Accessible and proportionate application and reporting processes;

²⁰ See further information here: <https://scvo.scot/policy/fair-funding-procurement/fair-funding/what-is-fair-funding>

- Sustainable funding with inflation-based uplifts; and
- Proportionate, transparent approaches to monitoring and reporting.

Community organisations should be supported not because they are a substitute for the income security people need, but because they are an essential part of building stronger, more connected communities. A Right to Food approach must recognise both realities: people need enough income to afford food, and communities need the resources to create the conditions in which everyone can flourish.

6. Capping the cost of essential food items

Inflation hits people on low incomes the hardest, and the sharp rise in food prices has had a damaging impact on people who were already struggling to make ends meet. While rising production and supply costs have contributed to food price increases, there is also evidence that some businesses have protected or rebuilt profit margins during the cost of living crisis, while households have faced increasing pressure on their budgets.^{21 22}

We must be clear that the private sector, particularly large supermarkets and food retailers, has a critical role to play in tackling food insecurity. We are therefore supportive of the principle of government intervention to make essential food items more affordable, including through the introduction of price caps. We recognise the commitment from the Scottish Government in their manifesto to deliver this, and to publish draft legislation within its first 100 days. However, for this to make meaningful structural change, careful consideration must be given to how this intervention is designed and implemented.

The Scottish Government's proposal must be developed through meaningful consultation with communities, food producers, retailers and organisations with expertise in tackling poverty and food insecurity. An equalities-based approach will be essential to ensure that the definition of essential food reflects the needs of Scotland's diverse communities, including access to culturally appropriate food.

Consideration must also be given to the wider barriers that affect people's ability to access affordable food. Reducing prices will not, on its own, address the experiences of those who face limited access to affordable food retailers, particularly those living in rural settings. Any approach to making food more affordable must therefore be considered alongside wider action to improve food access and strengthen local food systems.

Finally, action to improve affordability must ensure that costs are not simply pushed further down the supply chain. Many food producers are themselves facing significant financial pressures while providing an essential service to society. A sustainable approach must support fair prices for consumers while ensuring that producers, farmers and workers, are not further squeezed.

Price caps on essential food items have the potential to be an important tool in reducing hunger, but they must be a part of a wider approach. At its core, tackling

²¹ Unite the Union (2023) *Food prices: The British public are hostages to 'greedflation'*. Available at: <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2023/march/food-prices-the-british-public-are-hostages-to-greedflation>

²² Oxfam (2023) *Welcome to the era of "greedflation"*. Available at: <https://views-voices.oxfam.org.uk/2023/01/greedflation/>

hunger requires urgent action on boosting incomes and investment in the resources people need to live well.

7. The inaccessibility of good food

Beyond the question of cost, access to nutritious food remains a challenge for some. Many communities face a reality where the nearest options are small convenience stores or fast food outlets, often with limited choices – particularly of fresh food - and higher prices than larger supermarkets. This means that even where people are able to afford food, they may not have meaningful access to the nutritious options needed to maintain a healthy diet.

These communities are often described as experiencing ‘food deserts’: areas where poverty, poor transport links and a lack of affordable food retailers combine to restrict access to nutritious food. **The experience of the Castlemilk community in the southside of Glasgow provides a stark example of this and demonstrates how, alongside low incomes, food insecurity is shaped by decisions about local infrastructure, investment and whose needs are prioritised.**

The 14,000 residents of Castlemilk have lacked a supermarket providing affordable access to fresh fruit, vegetables and other essential foods for many years. In response, residents have organised and campaigned for change through the Castlemilk Housing and Human Rights Lived Experience Board, framing the lack of accessible food infrastructure as a human rights concern. Their campaigning has taken place at local, national and international levels. In 2025, the group presented their case for access to affordable food to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Geneva, three years after Glasgow City Council told residents to expect an imminent announcement of a supermarket.²³

However, there is still no sign of progress. Castlemilk is still without a supermarket. Their experience reflects a wider pattern of low income communities being left without the services and infrastructure needed to exercise their rights, and opportunities to flourish. It demonstrates why a Right to Food approach must go beyond addressing the cost of food and consider whether people can access the food they need, in the places where they live.

Similar challenges are experienced in rural communities, where the rural premium - the higher cost of living associated with rural and island areas - can significantly increase the cost and complexity of accessing food. While the experiences of urban and rural contexts differ, the underlying issue is the same: people on low incomes often have fewer choices and face greater barriers to accessing essential goods.

Our Taking Action on Rural Poverty Project works to highlight and challenge the additional pressures faced by rural and island communities, including higher costs for transport, energy, housing, goods and services, ensuring rural poverty is recognised in national policy.²⁴ As part of this work, we have supported Citizens Panels made up of people with lived experience of low income and the rural poverty premium in Argyll and Bute and Aberdeenshire. Their experiences highlight that food insecurity in rural areas is driven by a combination of higher prices, limited availability, transport barriers and the additional time and costs involved in accessing essential goods.

²³ See more about the work of the Castlemilk Housing and Human Rights Lived Experience Board here: <https://ardenglen.co.uk/castlemilk-housing-and-human-rights-lived-experience-board/>

²⁴ See more information about our Taking Action on Rural Poverty Project here: <https://www.povertyalliance.org/taking-action-on-rural-poverty/>

For many people in rural communities, accessing larger supermarkets can require expensive and time-consuming journeys. As a result, people can be left with fewer choices and forced to pay more for basic essentials.

Isobel Graham, member of the Argyll and Bute Citizens Panel, shares how the additional costs associated with rural living, particularly around food, create pressures that people on low incomes are often unable to absorb.²⁵

“I spent most of my life living in the village of Tayvallich so it was a big move coming to live in the town. If I run out of milk or anything else, I just pop down the hill to get some right up to 10 pm. In the village, though we did have a wee shop it's hours were limited so when new folk moved to the village they quickly learned not to run out of the essentials.

Small local shops are a godsend to remote areas but they are a very expensive way to shop. Even here in town with easy access to a Co-op, a Tesco Express, a Morrisons Daily and a Spar, shopping is more expensive.

These shops are smaller than the supermarkets many of you will use and as a result they stock a smaller range and it seems that it is the cheaper and own brands that are missing.

I could go to Oban, where I can choose from Aldi and Lidl as well as the Big Tesco or even fill my freezer at Farmfoods. This involves an 80 mile round trip which will cost me about £15 in fuel. To go by public transport is not a viable option if you want to do a big shop but also you would either have a very limited time there or you have to make it a day trip so any money saved by taking the bus is negated by having to buy a meal.”

Whether in rural or urban contexts, these experiences demonstrate that food insecurity is shaped by wider inequalities. Tackling hunger therefore requires a joined-up approach that ensures people have enough income to afford food, while also ensuring communities have the infrastructure, services and choices required to access it.

A Right to Food approach must ensure that no community is left behind because of where they live. This means listening to the experiences of communities, investing in local solutions and ensuring that Scotland's food system works for everyone.

8. Conclusion: We need a whole systems approach to tackling hunger

The scale of food insecurity across Scotland is the consequence of systems that are failing to provide people with the security, resources and opportunities needed to live with dignity. The reality is clear: people cannot thrive when work is insecure, social security falls short and essential services are inaccessible.

The Minimum Income Guarantee provides the foundation for realising the right to food by ensuring everyone has what they need to meet their basic needs, participate fully in society and live well. Achieving this requires a whole-systems approach that addresses the

²⁵ The Poverty Alliance (2024) *Guest blog: We love where we live – but unjust added costs can push people into poverty in rural areas*. Available at: <https://www.povertyalliance.org/guest-blog-we-love-where-we-live-but-unjust-added-costs-can-push-people-into-poverty-in-rural-areas/>

interconnected nature of poverty; from boosting incomes, to sustainable funding for communities, accessible food systems and decision-making that centres lived experience.

Communities across Scotland have shown their expertise and determination in challenging poverty and building solution. Their voices must be central to shaping the systems that affect their lives.

A Scotland free from hunger, and a better future for all of us, is possible, so the time for action is now.

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