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### **The Real Issue with the Not-So-United Kingdom**

Food insecurity is a serious problem within developed countries in the world, such as the United Kingdom (UK); this epidemic leaves people without food, going hungry for days at a time. This should not be such a big situation within one of the most developed countries in the world. When the United Kingdom does so much for its citizens, why is there still a large pocket of citizens who are going without food to this degree? Despite this issue, there are ways the United Kingdom has started to help and can continue to help its citizens. More funding to the programs it has already put in place, providing better timing on employee benefits, and stabilizing the workplace are just a few of the ways the UK can fix this.

The United Kingdom is a highly developed country—according to the United Nations (n.d.), the United Kingdom is the fourteenth most developed country in the world. Although the UK is one of the most developed countries, one in every five children lives in a home that is severely food insecure in the United Kingdom (Bullman, 2019). A person with severe food insecurity classifies as someone who has feelings of hunger without eating or not eating for an entire day or more due to a lack of money or other resources. This makes the United Kingdom the worst country in Europe for child hunger (Bullman, 2019). Since the government has not provided enough resources for these families to succeed, they have to rely on other organizations to help them afford meals.

The Food Foundation is an organization working alongside researchers, campaigners, government officials, and citizens to push the United Kingdom into taking action against the food crisis. In 2019, they published an estimate of eight million households in the country who struggle to put food on their tables; they also revealed that more than half of them regularly went an entire day without food (The Guardian, 2019). This number is lower than the expected real number of households who are severely food insecure. Families, especially those with children, are one of the first to start having trouble with food insecurity. Part of the reason this is as big of a concern as it is is due to the escalating rate of food prices. These families are being forced to choose between paying the utility bills or buying food because they simply cannot afford both. This never-ending cycle, along with the spike in food prices, will keep people on the losing side of this battle. When families decide they need to buy food, it's usually not the nutritious food they can afford. The price of food increasing leads to people being forced into eating cheaper, more unhealthy food (Orenstein, 2018). When families only have \$15 to spend on dinner, they can't afford to go to the grocery store and make something filling for their family; when they want something to fill

them, they go somewhere like McDonald's, where \$15 feeds everyone and can get them full. This is how malnutrition and obesity rates expand within food-insecure households. Families will continue to be out of food, out of resources without government action.

Even though the UK is a very highly developed country in the world, they still have these major pockets of people who fall severely food insecure each year, and it isn't only families. According to the House of Commons of the United Kingdom (2019), undernourishment is found in 25-34% of people who are admitted into the hospital, 30-42% of those 65 years and older who live in nursing homes, 18-20% of

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those who are admitted into mental health facilities. Not being able to afford enough food does not belong to one set group of people. This is being expressed by people all across the board. The reason why 2.2 million people are currently suffering from severe food insecurity can be blamed on a combination of different problems in the UK: high living costs, lowering wages, and unstable employment with benefit delays (Bullman, 2019; House of Commons of the United Kingdom, 2019; Guardian, 2015). All of these problems within the United Kingdom are the reason why people do not have enough money for the essentials in their life. When the cost to live rises, it is taking more money from the paycheck that is continuously shrinking. Then, on top of that, the jobs they work are not something they can hold for a long period of time due to corporate budget cuts and lack of stable employers. It all piles up leading to over two million people who don't have enough money to feed themselves or their family. This problem is not simply caused by one small issue. Household incomes are also continuously going down which, in turn, means they have less money to spend on food. The result of this is that the average UK citizen spends 20% more on food than they did five years ago, but eats 7% less (Orenstein, 2018). Incomes declining steadily, along with the spike in food prices, will keep that 7% number growing, leaving more people to starve. The growing price of food leads to eating cheaper, which, normally, is unhealthy food. This is how malnutrition grows within food-insecure households.

This is a huge problem for such a developed, wealthy country. Thankfully, the United Kingdom is starting to make changes that may help solve food insecurity. One step the UK has taken to combat food insecurity is providing families with free school meals and the Healthy Start Vouchers system to help get children under the age of four nutritious food. This will help eliminate obesity in their country because these families will not be forced into eating unhealthy foods. These programs have proven to be successful and, with more funding, could help even more. Another step that is starting to be taken is a proper measurement of food insecure individuals in the United Kingdom. In April, a survey is set to be sent to households in the country about eating habits and income (Guardian, 2019). These results are not set to be released until March of 2021. When asked about food scarcity, one government spokesperson declared they know there is more to do in providing healthy foods to families, but incomes within households are at a record high and the number of families without jobs have never been lower (Bullman, 2019). The employment rate for families in the United Kingdom is still an issue, however. As stated in previous paragraphs, the employment in the UK is not steady and even when they can keep jobs, the benefits that

come with it are not enough. Another way the United Kingdom has started to help families is by introducing a national living wage in 2016. This implementation has greatly curbed the number of people who are financially struggling but it has not abolished the issue (Guardian, 2015). In order to help curb the amount of food that was being wasted, the UK has developed a project to donate the overabundance of food at grocery stores instead of simply throwing it away. A solution that still has not been tackled by the United Kingdom is the waiting list for receiving benefits. The Department for Work and Pensions had 205,000 people make a claim in 2015 for a single benefit or jobseeker's allowance; although, over half of the applicants ended up waiting over 16 days (Guardian, 2015). The department stated their average benefit processing being 10 days. Even if that were true, each day they are kept waiting is another day that they cannot afford to eat. A report written for the United Kingdom government stated immediate payment of benefits along with less harsh benefit sanctions would split the number of people who depend on emergency food services in half (Guardian, 2015). Emma Revie, chief executive of Trussell Trust— one of the largest food banks in the United Kingdom— speaks on the rapid need of food banks in the UK: “A failure to address the root causes of poverty has led to soaring need for food banks, with more than 1.3 million food parcels provided to people by our network last year. This change would affect people by not having to rely on these emergency services. This improvement will greatly improve both the country as a

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whole and the individual lives of its citizens. These changes will give those in need more stability in their allowances and more importantly, help put food on everyone's table.

For one of the richest and most developed countries in the world, the United Kingdom has some problem-solving they need to do for the citizens struggling in their country. They have begun contributing meals to those who cannot afford nutritious food, but they could also implement better employment rates and faster benefits to ensure citizens are not living from paycheck-to-paycheck, oftentimes without food. The United Kingdom is the fourteenth most developed country in the world; therefore, they need to show the strugglers that they can fix food insecurity and malnutrition to give them a better life.

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