

Right to Food

Briefing

What is a Right to Food?

The right to food is included within the [United Nation's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#), which the UK ratified in 1976. Simply put;

"The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has the physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement." – [General Comment 12 \(CESCR, 1999\)](#).

The BDA believes this right to food should be enshrined in law as an important means of addressing food poverty and insecurity, [which effects millions of individuals and families in the UK](#). Food insecurity is not just an economic issue – people can become food insecure due to mental or physical incapacity or geographical isolation.

How would it work?

The right to food does not mean that the government would have a responsibility to provide anyone with food who asked for it. That would be a "positive right"*. Instead, the right to food as it is generally understood is a "negative right". This would mean that government would have to ensure that its own policies and the actions of public bodies, businesses and individuals do not deprive someone of their ability to access an adequate diet.

If enshrined in law this would mean that government would have to consider whether any action makes it harder for people to eat properly. This would have impacts in areas such as welfare, trade negotiations, health and care services and planning. For example, governments could not make changes to welfare policy that forced more people into food insecurity, such as the impact seen with the introduction of Universal Credit. At the same time, a local authority would have to consider the impact of withdrawing funding for a bus route if would make it hard for older people to access supermarkets and they had no other means of access. A social care service would have to consider whether changes to services would mean people lacked the physical support to eat a sufficient diet.

Culturally appropriate

An important aspect of the right to food is the need for access to food to be accessed in a "culturally appropriate way". That includes a way that respects someone dignity and is not associated with stigma. Despite the fantastic job that food banks do, [the Scottish Human Rights Commission](#), amongst others, have recognised that "reliance on charitable food provision is not a culturally appropriate mean of accessing food in the UK."

* In emergency situations, we still believe the government has a responsibility to ensure that people are directly provided with food.