Bringing food to the table

Findings from the Citizens Advice Scotland national survey on food affordability, access and availability

December 2018

citizens advice scotland

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Executive Summary

The Citizens Advice Network sought to better understand the day-to-day realities that people in Scotland face when bringing food to the table. In order to achieve this, a survey was launched via both Citizens Advice Bureaux and media platforms (social and traditional). Ultimately, over 2,650 people living in Scotland took the time to complete the survey.

In terms of demographic factors:

- Half of respondents (50%) were in some form of employment;
- Over one-quarter (28%) of respondents lived in households with children;
- One-third of respondents (33%) were aged 45 to 59 years, while 6% were below the age of 25 years.

With regard to purchasing food:

- Almost two-thirds of respondents (65%) regularly purchased groceries at in-town superstores or large supermarkets;
- Over one-quarter of respondents (28%) regularly used local/corner shops to buy groceries;
- Over half of respondents (53%) travelled to stores using their own car, while 20% walked.

Availability and affordability of food:

- Although numbers are small, tinned meat/chicken (9%); fresh fish products (4%); and tinned fruit (3%) were the items most likely to be unavailable to respondents;
- Fresh and frozen vegetables were also in the Top 10 least available foodstuffs, with 1% of respondents stating this;
- One-third of respondents (34%) considered fresh fish products to be unaffordable, while one-fifth (21%) considered fresh fruit to be unaffordable.

Food insecurity over the previous 12 months:

- Almost half of respondents (45%) had worried about food running out before there was money to buy more;
- More than one-third of respondents (37%) had cut down on the size of meals, or skipped meals altogether because they did not have enough money for food;
- More than one-fifth of respondents (21%) had gone for a whole day without eating because they did not have enough money for food.

Food insecurity for those in employment:

2,388 respondents provided information on their employment status with 45% in full-time or part-time employment:

- 40% respondents in employment had worried about food running out before there was money to buy more;
- More than one-third of respondents in employment (35%) couldn't afford to eat balanced meals;
- Over one-quarter of respondents in employment (29%) had cut down the size of meals, or skipped meals, because there wasn't enough money for food they needed.

Introduction

With the rising cost of food high on the political agenda it is perhaps unsurprising that Scotland's Citizens Advice Bureaux have seen a 202% increase in demand for advice relating to food banks in the last five years. The decision was therefore taken to launch a national survey to interrogate the day-to-day reality that people in Scotland face when bringing food to the table.

The *Food on the Table* campaign survey, publicised through bureaux as well as social and traditional media, reached over 2,600 Scottish residents from across the country and all walks of life to gain their perspectives.

Food on the Table survey: methodology

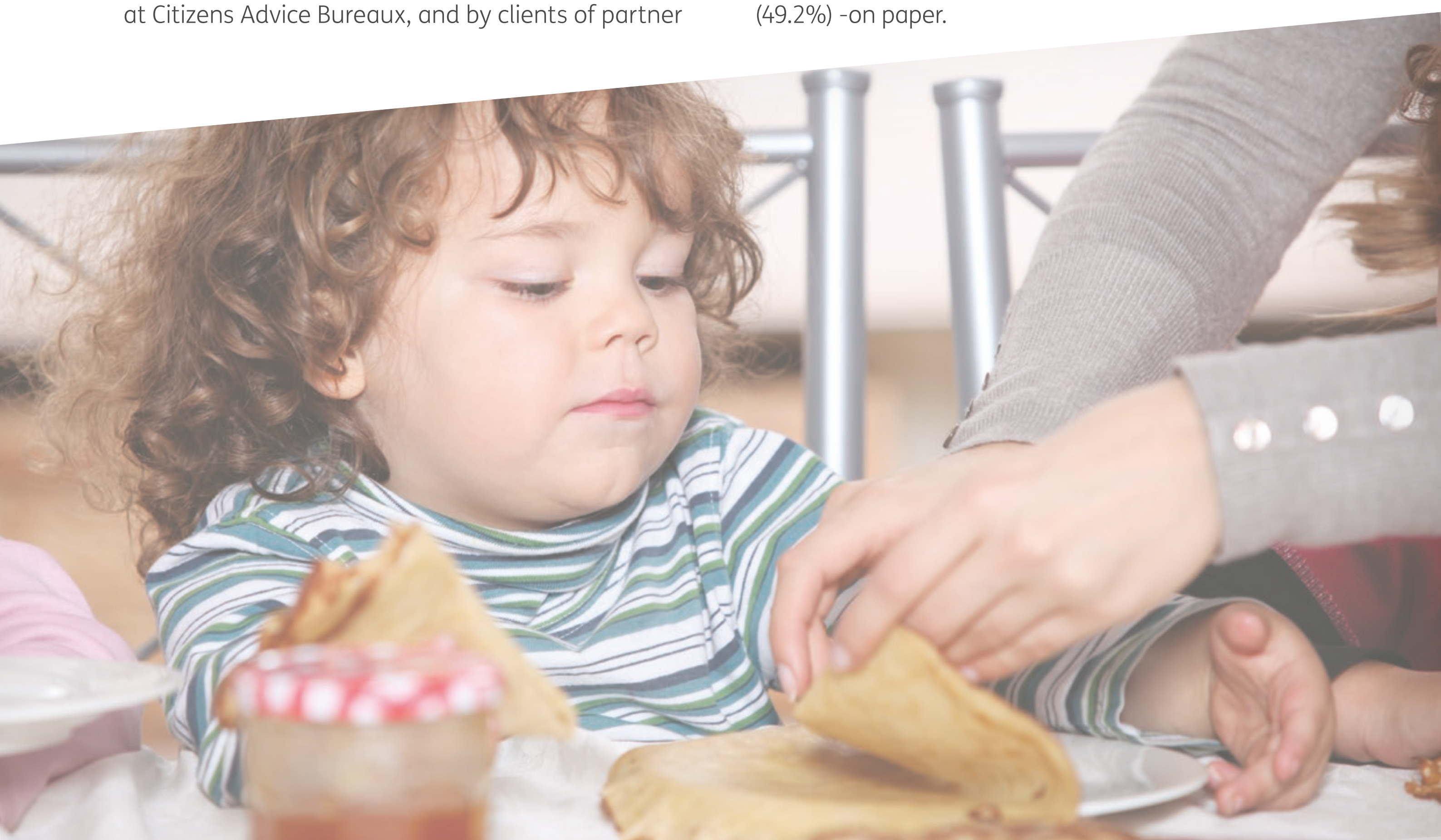
This first report presents analysis at the simplest of levels. We acknowledge that, as there were two data collection methods (online and paper) there are likely to be some differences in responses. For example, the online survey was open to all and publicised on a number of platforms (including traditional and social media), while the paper survey was completed by individuals seeking advice at Citizens Advice Bureaux, and by clients of partner agencies. As such, there are some demographic differences between respondents in relation to collection method.

It cannot, therefore, be said that the sample here is representative of the Scottish people as a whole. However, this was never the intention of this work; instead, the aim is to illustrate the experiences of real individuals in Scotland in relation to the purchase of food. No matter the drives towards a healthy diet, there remain concerns over the availability of certain food types or, in some cases, lack of availability or higher costs due to geographical constraints. If an individual simply does not have enough money to buy the food they need, then there is an issue to be addressed.

While we will return to the data for a more granular analysis, in this report it will be the findings in their entirety that are considered.

Survey administration

A total of 2,682 surveys were completed, 31 of which were discarded (all online) as responses were largely incomplete. Of the remaining 2,651 surveys, 1,348 (50.8%) were completed online and 1,303 (49.2%) -on paper.



Respondent demographics

Of those who provided details of their age group (Table 1), the largest proportion was aged between 45 and 59 years (33%) with those aged 34-44 years accounting for the next largest proportion (19%). When considered in the context of the most recent mid-year population estimates for Scotland (2017), both of these proportions are over-representative for those age groups. In contrast, the proportions of those in the sample aged 25 to 34, and aged 65 or over, are almost identical to the mid-year population estimates.

Table 1: Survey respondents by age group (n=2,421)

	N	%	Mid-year population estimate 2017
16-24	146	6%	11%
25-34	350	15%	14%
35-44	449	19%	12%
45-59	802	33%	22%
60-64	234	10%	6%
65+	440	18%	19%

Respondents who provided information on gender (2,289) were overwhelmingly female (73%), while less than 1% responded ‘other’ to this question. One-third of those who responded (2,402) stated that they had a disability or long-term health condition[1]. Of those providing information in relation to employment status (Table 2), 50% were in some type of employment while one-fifth were retired.

33% of respondents were aged 45 and 59 years

73% of respondents were female

50% of respondents were in employment

Table 2: Survey respondents by employment status (n=2,388)

	N	%
Full time work	671	28%
Retired	467	20%
Part time work	398	17%
Unable to work ill health/disability	315	13%
Unemployed	202	9%
Self-employed	108	5%
Student	90	4%
Looking after home/family	80	3%
Other	41	2%
Not seeking work	16	1%

The highest proportion of respondents either lived alone (29%) or with a partner (26%), while a further 28% of respondents had children in the household (Table 3).

Table 3: Survey respondents by household composition (n=2,651)

	N	%
Only myself – I live alone	758	29%
My partner and myself	689	26%
My family (at least 2 adults and 1 child)	513	19%
Three or more adults (incl. adult children)	298	11%
My child(ren) and myself	246	9%
Other	147	6%

1 As defined by the Equalities Act 2010

Geographical spread[2]

Although all 32 Scottish local authorities are represented in the survey this ranges from 3 responses in each of East Ayrshire and East Renfrewshire to 333 responses in Highland. Nevertheless there is a reasonable geographical spread, as can be seen in Table 4 which shows the Top 10 local authorities. There is good representation across 10 of the 14 Health Board areas in Scotland.

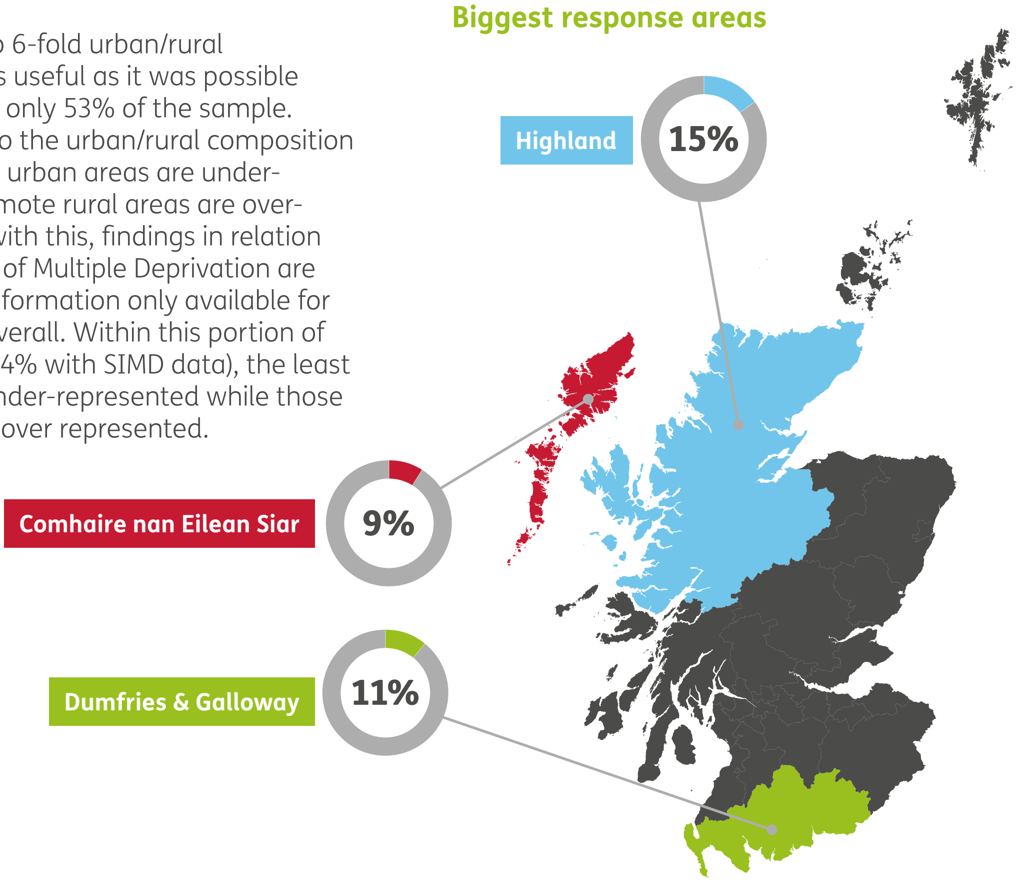
> **‘Choice is limited, especially on fresh fruit and vegetables, as I only have one local supermarket. It’s not easy on the Island I live on and prices are always steeper than mainland supermarkets.’**
>
> **Survey respondent**

Findings in relation to 6-fold urban/rural classification[3] are less useful as it was possible to establish these for only 53% of the sample. Also, in comparison to the urban/rural composition figures for 2017 large urban areas are under-represented while remote rural areas are over-represented. In line with this, findings in relation to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation are also poor, with this information only available for 44% of the sample overall. Within this portion of the sample (i.e. the 44% with SIMD data), the least deprived areas are under-represented while those in the mid-range are over represented.

Table 4: Survey respondents by Top 10 local authorities (n=2,284)

	N	%
Highland	333	15%
Dumfries & Galloway	251	11%
Comhaire nan Eilean Siar	208	9%
Glasgow City	157	7%
South Lanarkshire	156	7%
North Lanarkshire	145	6%
Aberdeenshire	106	5%
Scottish Borders	96	4%
Dundee	83	4%
Moray	76	3%

Biggest response areas



2 In respect to location, respondents provided a combination of local authority, full postcode and partial postcode

3 This is the Scottish Government classification that defines levels of rurality for an area; further information can be found on the Scottish Government website at: https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/About/Methodology/UrbanRuralClassification

Access to food

Survey respondents were asked which types of store they regularly used for grocery shopping (Table 5), along with how they reached those shops. By far the highest proportion of respondents (65%) used in-town superstores or large supermarkets.

Table 5: Types of store regularly used for grocery shopping (n=2,651)

In-town superstore/large supermarket	65%
Small supermarket (e.g. Metro; Local)	32%
Out-of-town superstore/large supermarket	28%
Local/Corner shop	28%
Independent butcher	20%
Home delivery (from supermarket)	14%
Independent baker	9%
Independent fishmonger	8%
Independent grocer	6%
Market (e.g. stalls; farmer's market)	5%
Farm shop	4%
Home delivery e.g. veg box; Amazon etc.	4%
Garage forecourt	3%
Other shop type	3%

Over half of the respondents travel in their own car when grocery shopping

In terms of travelling to the stores most often used for grocery shopping, over half of respondents (53%) travelled to stores using their own car, while one-fifth (20%) walked. Only a small proportion (7%) most often used home delivery services for regular grocery purchases and so had no need to travel.

Table 6: How respondents travel to stores for grocery shopping (n=2,651)

	N	%
In own car	1398	53%
Walk	520	20%
I travel by bus	239	9%
By car, getting lift from family/friend	233	9%
Home delivery so no need to travel	175	7%
Other	68	3%
More than one bus	18	1%

65% of respondents use in-town supermarkets and large supermarkets

20% of respondents walk

Purchase, availability and affordability of food

In developing the list of foodstuffs used in the survey there were two main considerations. The first of these was to ensure that the foodstuffs reflected a range of healthy options and so a range of information and prior research was used to inform this. Secondly it was important to reflect both ‘common’ purchases (such as teabags) and convenience items (such as cooking sauces), the latter of which is particularly relevant to those who may only have access to smaller stores.

In order to maintain the survey at a reasonable length it was therefore necessary to reflect the broadest range of foodstuffs, including both healthy and common purchases, in the fewest number of items. For those reasons it was not possible to reflect the needs of those who must purchase specific foodstuffs for reasons such as dietary needs, ethical considerations etc. It was extremely valuable, therefore, to have these dietary needs reflected in the open text comments associated with this section of the survey.

There are more healthy items in the top 10 most unaffordable foodstuffs, than there are treat items.

Cost plays a considerable role in food choices.

Three questions were asked in this section of the survey; in brief these, and the reasons for their inclusion, are:

> Which of the foods did the respondent buy regularly or have at home? This question was asked so an idea of a ‘common’ basket of food could be established;

> Which of the foods would the respondent like to buy, but were not available to them? It is known from previous research that for some, food choices are limited by the options available and wished to obtain a better understanding of this;

> Which of the foods would the respondent like to buy, but could not afford? This helps to better understand the types of foodstuffs most affected by financial constraints.

Responses to the three questions have been ranked in order to facilitate easier comparison across those questions, while the Top 10 most/least common items are illustrated below (Table 7a); non-responses are excluded from the analysis.

Table 7a: Most and least common foodstuffs purchased

	Top 10	Rank		Bottom 10	Rank
Milk	98.1%	1	**Ready meals/pizza**	80.2%	22
Dried pasta	96.9%	2	**Crisps/Nuts**	78.7%	23
Tea bags	96.7%	3	**Fresh fruit**	78.0%	24
Bread/rolls etc.	96.2%	4	**Fresh meat/chicken**	77.8%	25
Butter/Other spread	95.9%	5	**Soft drinks**	77.7%	26
Eggs	95.6%	6	**Tinned fruit**	77.6%	27
Rice	95.2%	7	**Cakes/biscuits**	75.6%	28
Cereal/porridge	93.1%	8	**Fruit juice**	72.5%	29
Frozen vegetables	92.8%	9	**Tinned meat/chicken**	70.7%	30
Coffee	90.1%	10	**Fresh fish products**	62.1%	31

33% of survey respondents would like to buy fresh fish, but they can't afford to

Survey respondents mention a lack of diet-specific foods, for intolerances and vegan diets

In terms of food purchases, a number of the free text responses mentioned that they regularly made use of the 'reduced' section in supermarkets, particularly when it came to fresh produce. Package sizes were also an issue, with a number of respondents mentioning the food waste that came as a result of having to buy 'packs' of items (particularly fruit and vegetables) that could not be used before the items became inedible. Shelf-life and quality of fresh produce was also raised, particularly by those in remote rural areas.

The availability of certain foods stuffs (Table 7b) was also a particular issue for those in remote rural areas and some respondents expressed the wish for more locally sourced foodstuffs to be made available:

> **"..can only buy fresh fish when working away from home. Ridiculous as I live [a] 19 minute walk from dock where fishing boats land catch"**
>
> **Survey respondent**

The ability to access a variety of store type was also an issue for some, due either to geographical location or cost of transport.

27% would like to buy fruit juice, but they can't afford to

21% of people would like to buy fresh meat but they can't afford to

20% of people would like to buy fresh fruit, but they can't afford to

Table 7b: Most and least common foodstuffs unavailable for purchase

		Rank			Rank
Tinned meat/chicken	8.6%	1	**Bread/rolls etc.**	0.3%	22
Fresh fish products	4.3%	2	**Butter/Other spread**	0.3%	23
Tinned fruit	2.6%	3	**Cheese**	0.2%	24
Frozen fish products	2.3%	4	**Coffee**	0.2%	25
Tinned vegetables	2.1%	5	**Cereal/porridge**	0.2%	26
Frozen meat/chicken	1.8%	6	**Tea bags**	0.2%	27
Tinned fish	1.7%	7	**Rice**	0.1%	28
Frozen vegetables	1.3%	8	**Dried pasta**	0.1%	29
Fresh vegetables	1.3%	9	**Eggs**	0.1%	30
Pulses/lentils	1.3%	10	**Milk**	0.1%	31

It is of interest to note that the rankings attached to regularly purchased food are an almost exact reverse image of those attached to affordability, illustrating that cost plays a considerable role in food choices (Table 7c). In addition, it is also noteworthy that there are more 'healthy' items in the Top 10 most unaffordable foodstuffs (6) than there are what could be described as 'treat' items. Returning briefly to availability, all of the Top 10 least available items can be considered as 'healthy', including fresh, tinned and frozen vegetables.

When asked about other foodstuffs, over 60 of the free-text responses mentioned a lack of diet-specific foods such as those for particular food intolerances or lifestyle choices (e.g. vegan), as well as the cost of these items.

> **"Poor people can be coeliac too!"**
> **Survey respondent**

Seventy-five respondents also mentioned the lack of availability of fresh foods, particularly fruit and vegetables, as well as the cost.

> **"Fresh fruit shouldn't be a luxury"**
> **Survey respondent**

A number of respondents noted the importance of budgeting, as well as the benefits (for both health and cost) of cooking meals from scratch and freezing portions for future use. Equally, however, there were respondents who noted that they did not own a freezer, or sometimes could not afford the fuel costs to prepare such meals, so the entire picture here is a complex one.

> **"I do not have a fridge freezer and I am locked in to an expensive gas electricity tariff"**
> **Survey respondent**

Table 7c: Most and least common foodstuffs considered unaffordable

		Rank			Rank
Fresh fish products	33.6%	1	**Tinned soup**	9.7%	22
Fruit juice	27.1%	2	**Cereal/porridge**	6.7%	23
Cakes/biscuits	23.9%	3	**Frozen vegetables**	5.9%	24
Fresh meat/chicken	21.7%	4	**Rice**	4.6%	25
Soft drinks	21.5%	5	**Eggs**	4.3%	26
Crisps/Nuts	20.9%	6	**Butter/Other spread**	3.9%	27
Fresh fruit	20.8%	7	**Bread/rolls etc**	3.5%	28
Tinned meat/chicken	20.7%	8	**Tea bags**	3.2%	29
Tinned fruit	19.8%	9	**Dried pasta**	2.9%	30
Ready meals/Pizza	18.9%	10	**Milk**	1.8%	31

Food insecurity[4]

Before considering the findings relating to food insecurity as a whole a consideration was first made of any potential difference in responses between surveys completed online (1,348) or on paper (1,303). No notable differences were found in relation to the three main responses and so findings are presented across the entire survey.

However, respondents who completed the survey on paper were less likely to not respond to the food insecurity questions, but also more likely to respond 'prefer not to say'. For that reason, response to the insecurity questions are considered with both of those categories removed.

45% respondents have worried about running out of food before there was money to buy more

35% respondents in work couldn't afford to eat balanced meals

4 Questions drawn from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) 'Food and You' Survey

23% of people have had to skip meals, so that their children could eat

21% of people have gone a whole day without eating because they had no money or food

Similar questions to those used in this survey have been used to define levels of food insecurity, ranging from mild to severe, and would broadly equate to the responses under 'often true' here.

As may be expected, the proportion of respondents answering 'never true' to each statement, decreases as the level of food insecurity increases (Table 8 overleaf). Nevertheless, 171 respondents stated that it had 'often' been the case in the previous 12 months that they had gone a whole day without eating as they did not have enough money for food. Of these, 11% were in full-time employment and 16% in part-time employment; 30% lived in households with children.

Among those in work, 40% had worried about food running out before they could afford to buy more and 35% couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.

Table 8: Responses to Food Insecurity Questions; experience in previous 12 months

Level of FI	Excludes non-responses and 'Prefer not to say' (%)	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true	N
Mild	I worried whether food would run out before there was money to buy more	19.9%	25.1%	55.1%	2,362
	I/We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals	15.5%	26.0%	58.5%	2,305
	The food that was bought just didn't last, and there wasn't enough money to buy more	14.0%	26.5%	59.5%	2,347
Moderate	I/We have had to cut down the size of meals, or skip meals, because there wasn't enough money for all the food we needed	13.6%	22.8%	63.6%	2,340
	There have been times when I've eaten less than I felt I should because there wasn't enough money for food	12.6%	25.5%	61.9%	2,352
	There have been times when I've been hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food	10.6%	20.6%	68.8%	2,340
Severe	I have had to skip meals so that my family/children could have food	8.9%	14.2%	76.9%	2,253
	There have been times when I/we have gone for a whole day without eating because there wasn't enough money for food	7.4%	14.1%	78.5%	2,319

Concluding remarks

Everyone in Scotland should be able to access healthy and nutritious food for themselves and their family, without barriers. Regardless of where they live; their age; disability or employment status, everyone should have choice, variety and value when buying food. The ability to prepare and cook food at home should also be an option for all.

Maintaining a good quality, balanced diet should be easy, choosing from produce at affordable prices. People shouldn't be forced to make unhealthy choices, because unhealthy is the only option. Where people live and their access to food, should not impact on their diet, location should not equate a sub-standard diet.

The *Food on the Table* campaign was developed to gather evidence which can be used to influence decisions at a Government level and effect real change in local communities. 39 Citizens Advice Bureaux activated local campaigns across the network, from Orkney to the Borders, ensuring that the views of people from across Scottish communities were listened to and heard.

This campaign was about listening to everyone, from those who worry about their weekly food bill, people who struggle to make ends meet from time to time through to people who are skipping bills because their budget simply doesn't stretch. Food affects everyone.

The Scottish Government are committed to becoming a Good Food Nation, where all food systems in Scotland are fair and sustainable. We believe that everyone should be able to eat a good quality diet within a food system that doesn't leave people behind.

Food on the Table roundtable

Citizens Advice Scotland held a roundtable at the end of November, bringing together key stakeholders from across the third sector, Citizens Advice Bureaux, public health researchers and Scottish Government representatives.

The aim of the session was to provide an early insight into some of the key findings of the national survey, around affordability, access and household food insecurity levels mapped against respondent demographics.

Attendees made suggestions on how CAS can use their evidence to support policy-making for the betterment of citizens. The findings from the roundtable will feed into our on-going work on food insecurity. The Citizens Advice network in Scotland is committed to working towards improving the difficulties that people are faced with when accessing and affording food across Scotland.

www.cas.org.uk/foodonthetable

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