

# Food Security in London

## Headline findings from the Survey of Londoners

June 2019

### Summary

Being food insecure means that at times a person's food intake is reduced and their eating patterns are disrupted because of a lack of money and other resources for obtaining food.

The Mayor of London committed to measuring food security in London in his Food Strategy. The Survey of Londoners collected this data, which will be used to support the development of long-term solutions to the causes and impacts of food insecurity.

Food security is measured by the responses to a series of questions about adults' and children's behaviours and experiences associated with difficulty in meeting food needs.

- **Adults' food security:** Around one in five (21 per cent) adults in London have low or very low food security, equivalent to 1.5 million adults. Unsurprisingly, Londoners with low incomes are more likely to report food insecurity. The majority of those in low or very low food security are in work (60 per cent working either full-time or part-time) and 40 per cent are either Black or Asian, with 32 per cent being White British. Over a third (36 per cent) are single Londoners with no children. Low food security is highest in the City & East London Assembly constituency area (31 per cent).
- **Children's food security:** Around one in six (17 per cent) parents in London have children living in low or very low food security. This equates to around 400,000 children. Households with more children are more likely to experience food insecurity among children. Also, children of low income or disabled parents are more likely to experience food insecurity. Parents living in the London Assembly constituency area of City & East are most likely to have children living in low food security (32 per cent).
- **Parents' food security:** The proportion of these parents themselves living in low or very low adult food security is 27 per cent (higher than the 17 per cent who have children living in low or very low food security). A majority of these parents owe money on a loan or credit agreement, and around one-third have household bills arrears, as well as being more likely to experience a range of other economic issues.

# 1 Introduction

Having food security means having access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life<sup>1</sup>. Being food insecure means that at times a person's food intake is reduced and their eating patterns are disrupted because of a lack of money and other resources for obtaining food.

The Mayor of London committed to measuring food security in London using the Survey of Londoners, to support the development of long-term solutions to its causes and impacts in his Food Strategy, published in December 2018<sup>2</sup>.

The Survey of Londoners is a self-completion survey of 6,601 adults aged 16 and over living in London and ran from October 2018 to March 2019. The Survey used an online first methodology, followed by paper questionnaires, with a small number of face-to-face reminders to boost response. The sample was drawn from addresses in the Postcode Address File across the whole of London and was designed to provide estimates for major demographic groups in London by age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation etc. NatCen was the survey organisation contracted for the sample design, questionnaire testing, fieldwork and data preparation.

Food security is measured by the responses to a series of questions about behaviours and experiences associated with difficulty in meeting food needs. The Survey of Londoners used five questions to assess London adults' food security and seven questions to assess London children's food security (asked of parents in the Survey). The questions are the ones recommended by the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service<sup>3</sup>.

Points were assigned to the questions where the respondent indicated that they had engaged in that behaviour. The sum of points to the questions gave a raw score, with adults and children in London then being classified into three groups based on those scores: high or marginal food security; low food security; or very low food security.

Unless otherwise stated, in the analysis below the categories of 'low food security' and 'very low food security' have been combined and will be reported as 'low food security'.

These figures report a range of types of low food security, not just foodbank usage, for instance, running out of money to buy food, cutting the size of meals or skipping them, and not being able to afford balanced meals. Foodbank usage is not a good overall measure of low food security<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> A full definition of food security was provided at the World Food Summit in 1996. See FAO (2006) [Food Security: Policy Brief June 2016, Issue 2](#)

<sup>2</sup> GLA (2018) [The London Food Strategy: Healthy and sustainable food for London](#).

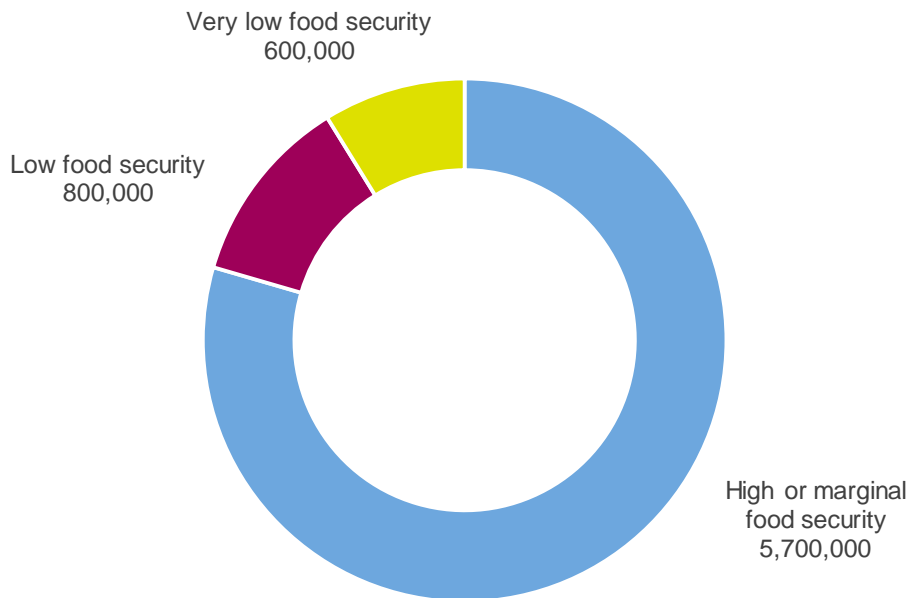
<sup>3</sup> United States Department of Agriculture (2017) [Survey Tools](#). The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced in February 2019 that they would include the ten-question food security module from the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service in the Family Resources Survey (FRS) from April 2019. The data will be reported publicly in March 2021. See Butler (2019) [UK hunger survey to measure food insecurity](#).

<sup>4</sup> According to the Food Foundation, some people who are food insecure do not use emergency food aid for a variety of reasons: stigma, access, or they may think their situation is not as bad as it could be, and the service should be reserved for those who are even worse off. See The Food Foundation (2016) [Measuring household food insecurity in the UK and why we must do it](#).

## 2 London Adult Food Security

Around one in five (21 per cent) adults in London have low or very low food security, which is around 1.5 million adults (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Food insecurity affects around 1.5 million adults in London**



Base: Londoners aged 16+ (6,601)

Looking at the composition of all those who have low food security, the majority are in work (60 per cent working either full-time or part-time). Seventy one per cent live in the two most deprived IMD quintiles. Forty per cent are Black or Asian Londoners, and 32 per cent are White British. Thirty-six per cent are single Londoners with no children.

The groups most likely to experience low food security are single parents (46 per cent), Londoners in the lowest income quintile (44 per cent), unemployed Londoners (40 per cent), Black Londoners (39 per cent) and disabled Londoners (34 per cent).

Adult Londoners in households with a greater number of children aged under 16 in the household are more likely to experience low food security. Eighteen per cent of Londoners living with no children under 16 are in low food security, compared with 23 per cent of Londoners with one child under 16 in the household, 27 per cent of Londoners with two children under 16 in the household, and 36 per cent of Londoners with three or more children under 16 in the household.

Low food security is highest in the London Assembly constituency area of City & East (31 per cent) and lowest in Merton & Wandsworth (12 per cent) and South West (13 per cent)<sup>5</sup>.

Given the importance of food as a basic human need, it comes as no surprise that Londoners with low food security also have worse outcomes on a number of other economic fairness measures measured in the

<sup>5</sup> See the Notes section for further explanation on London Assembly constituency areas.

survey. One quarter of Londoners (25 per cent) in low food security have household bills arrears compared with three per cent of those with high/marginal food security. A large majority (72 per cent) of those in low food security do not have £1,500 in savings, compared with 23 per cent of those with high/marginal food security.

Around six in ten (60 per cent) low food-secure Londoners owe money on a loan or credit agreement compared with 31 per cent of Londoners with high/marginal food security. Of those low food-secure Londoners around half (47 per cent) find their repayment obligations a heavy burden.

Londoners with low food security are less likely to be able to keep their home warm in winter (36 per cent) compared with those with high/marginal food security (six per cent).

Living in low food security is also a socially isolating and lonely experience. Forty-five per cent of Londoners living in low food security are socially isolated, while around one in five (22 per cent) of this same group feel lonely often or always.

### 3 London Children's Food Security

The United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service module also includes questions used to assess children's food security. The Survey of Londoners asked seven questions to Londoners who responded to the Survey to say that they were the parent or guardian of any children aged under 16 currently living in the household.

Around one in six (17 per cent) parents in London have children living in low food security. This equates to around 400,000 children<sup>6</sup>.

The proportion of these parents themselves living in low adult food security is 27 per cent (higher than the 21 per cent for all adults). This difference between adult and child food security within the household provides evidence that parents are more likely to protect their children's food security at the expense of their own. A comparison of responses to some of the individual questions used to assess parents' and children's food security where they asked about similar behaviours provides further evidence of this (see Figure 2).

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<sup>6</sup> As more than one parent could respond to the survey and, therefore, answer questions about the children in the household's food security, they could potentially give different responses. So, for estimating the total number of children in food insecurity in London, where more than one parent in a household answered, one parent was chosen at random as giving the definitive answer to the children's food security status.

**Figure 2: Parents are more likely to experience food insecure behaviours compared with their children**

Adult food security questions	Children's food security questions
<p>Couldn't afford to eat <b>balanced meals</b>.</p> <p>Often/sometimes true = 26 per cent</p>	<p>(I/We) couldn't feed (my/our) child/the children) a <b>balanced meal</b>, because (I/we) couldn't afford that.</p> <p>Often/sometimes true = 16 per cent</p>
<p><b>Cut the size of your meals or skip meals</b> because there wasn't enough money for food</p> <p>Yes = 22 per cent</p>	<p><b>Cut the size</b> of (your child's/any of the children's) meals because there wasn't enough money for food?</p> <p>Yes = 7 per cent</p> <p><b>Skip meals</b> because there wasn't enough money for food?</p> <p>Yes = 7 per cent</p>
<p><b>Eat less than you felt you should</b> because there wasn't enough money for food</p> <p>Yes = 19 per cent</p>	<p>(My/Our child was/The children were) <b>not eating enough</b> because (I/we) just couldn't afford enough food.</p> <p>Yes = 9 per cent</p>
<p><b>Hungry but didn't eat</b> because there wasn't enough money for food</p> <p>Yes = 12 per cent</p>	<p><b>Hungry but you just couldn't afford more food?</b></p> <p>Yes = 5 per cent</p>
<p><i>Base: Londoners aged 16+ who are the parent or guardian of any children aged under 16 currently living in the household (1,710)</i></p>	

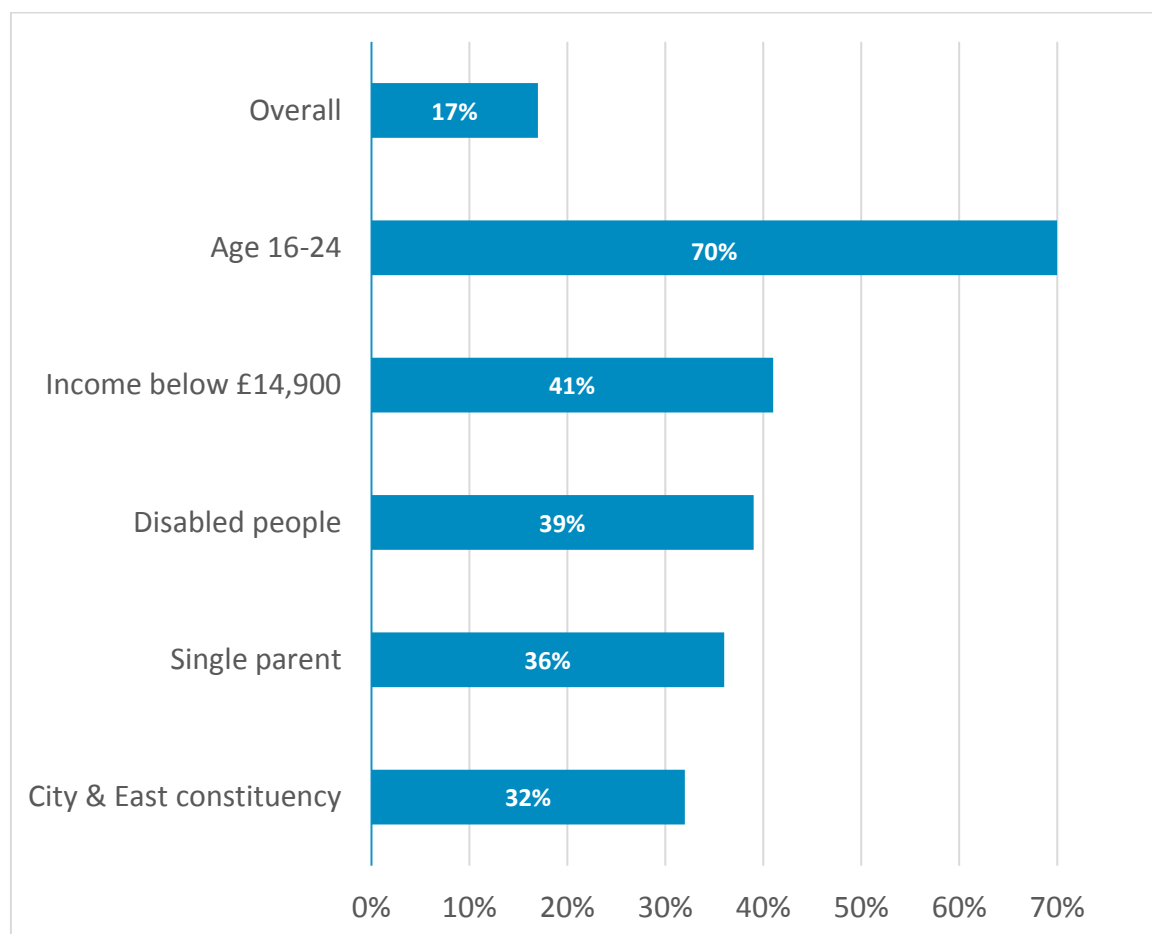
For all four of the measures common across parents and children, parents are more likely to report these behaviours compared with their children. For example, around one in five parents in London (19 per cent) are eating less than they felt they should because there is not enough money for food, compared with only around one in ten parents (nine per cent) who said that their children were not eating enough because they could not afford enough food.

The characteristics of parents whose children had low food security were similar to all adults with low food security with high rates for children whose parents are in the lowest income quintile (41 per cent), children of disabled parents (39 per cent), and children of single parents (36 per cent). Another group with a significantly high rate of 'low food security' despite being a very small group in terms of size, were the children of parents aged 16-24 (70 per cent).

Similar to adult food security, a greater number of children in the household lowers children's food security status. Of parents in London with one child under 16 in the household 15 per cent had children living in low food security, compared with those with two children (16 per cent) and 27 per cent of parents with three or more children under 16 in the household.

And the area pattern was also similar, with parents living in the London Assembly constituency area of City & East most likely to have children living in low food security (32 per cent), and those in Merton & Wandsworth (seven per cent) and South West (10 per cent) least likely.

**Figure 3: The groups in London whose children are most likely to live in 'low food security'**



*Base: Londoners aged 16+ who are the parent or guardian of any children aged under 16 currently living in the household (1,710); Age 16-24 (35); Income below £14,900 (171); Disabled people (194); Single parent (343); City & East constituency (177)*

As with adult food security, parents with children living in low food security also experience worse outcomes on a number of economic fairness measures. Around one third (35 per cent) of parents with children in low food security have household bills arrears. A large majority (73 per cent) of parents with children in low food security do not have £1,500 in savings.

Around eight in ten (77 per cent) parents with children living in low food security owe money on a loan or credit agreement. Of those parents with low food-secure children around six in ten (58 per cent) find their repayment obligations a heavy burden.

Four in ten (40 per cent) parents of children living in low food security are not able to keep their home warm in winter compared with 10 per cent of parents with children living in high/marginal food security.

Working parents of children living in low food security are more likely to be in insecure work (14 per cent) compared with working parents of children living in high/marginal food security (eight per cent).

As with adult food security, parents with children living in low food security are more likely to be socially isolated or lonely - around half (49 per cent) of parents with children living in low food security are socially isolated, while 18 per cent of this same group feel lonely often or always.

## 4 Notes

### 4.1 Statistical significance

Differences between groups are only reported on where they are statistically significant, i.e. where we can be confident that the differences seen in the sampled respondents are reflective of the population. A significant difference at the 95 per cent level means we can be confident that if we carried out the same survey on different random samples of the population, 95 times out of 100 we would get similar findings.

### 4.2 Terms and definitions

Several standard demographic and area-based classifications are used to understand how issues affect different groups of Londoners. Those that require further definition are explained below.

#### Individual classifications

**Londoners:** Adults aged 16 and over who live in London.

**Disability:** Londoners are classified as disabled if they have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses which are expected to last for 12 months or more and their condition and/or illness reduces their ability to carry out day to day activities.

**Ethnicity:** Londoners self-classified into the following ethnic groups using the official ONS ethnicity questions.

White British / White Other / Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups / Asian/Asian British / Black/African/Black Caribbean/Black British / Other ethnic group

**Income quintiles:** Londoners have been classified into five income quintile groups based on their individual/household income, and the income distribution for the UK in 2018:

Lowest income quintile: annual income less than £14,900

Second income quintile: £14,901 - £23,900

Third income quintile: £24,301 - £27,900

Fourth income quintile: £37,901 - £58,900

Highest income quintile: over £58,900

#### Area-based measures

There are two main area-based measures used.

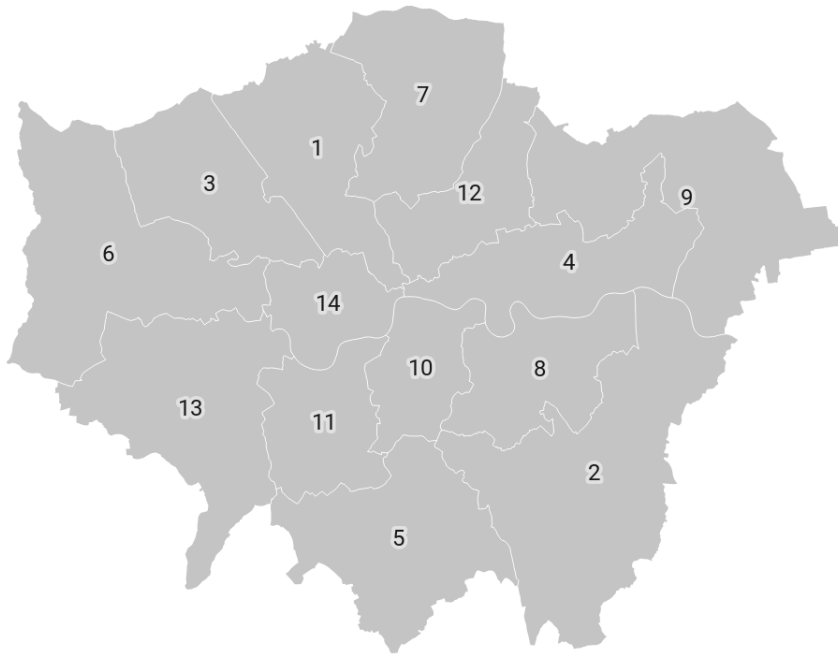
##### Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

The Index of Multiple Deprivation, commonly known as the IMD, is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England. This is calculated using several measures such as income deprivation, crime and living environment deprivation. The Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks every small area in England from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area). These areas have been clustered into 'IMD Quintiles' with 1 being the most deprived areas and 5 being the least deprived areas.

**London Assembly constituencies**

London’s boroughs are aggregated into 14 constituency areas served by a member of the London Assembly.

**Figure 4: London Assembly constituencies**



Code	Name	Boroughs	Code	Name	Boroughs
1	Barnet & Camden	Barnet Camden	8	Greenwich & Lewisham	Greenwich Havering
2	Bexley & Bromley	Bexley Bromley	9	Havering & Redbridge	Havering Redbridge
3	Brent & Harrow	Brent Harrow	10	Lambeth & Southwark	Lambeth Southwark
4	City & East	Barking & Dagenham Newham Tower Hamlets City of London	11	Merton & Wandsworth	Merton Wandsworth
5	Croydon & Sutton	Croydon Sutton	12	North East	Hackney Islington Waltham Forest
6	Ealing & Hillingdon	Ealing Hillingdon	13	South West	Hounslow Kingston Richmond
7	Enfield & Haringey	Enfield Haringey	14	West Central	Hammersmith & Fulham Kensington & Chelsea Westminster



### **4.3 Food security scoring and categorisation**

The Survey of Londoners measured Londoners' food security status with a set of questions used by the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. The six-item short form of the food security survey module was adapted for use in The Survey. This short form six-item scale provides a reasonably reliable substitute where surveys cannot implement the full 10-item measure (like the Survey of Londoners). The advantages and limitations of this version is detailed on the USDA's website<sup>7</sup>.

Five questions were used to assess adult Londoners' food security (two of the recommended questions were combined into one in this survey).

Seven questions were used to assess London children's food security. Again these were recommended measures from the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. The questions were only asked of Londoners who, in the Survey, responded that they were the parent or guardian of any children aged under 16 currently living in the household.

The population data used where the findings are presented in terms of numbers rather than proportions are the GLA's [2016-based Housing-led projections for 2018](#).

### **4.4 Feedback**

For more information about this publication, please contact:

City Intelligence

Tel 020 7983 4000

Email [intelligence@london.gov.uk](mailto:intelligence@london.gov.uk)

### **4.5 Quality**

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The GLA will not be liable for any losses suffered or liabilities incurred by a party as a result of that party relying in any way on the information contained in this report.

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<sup>7</sup> United States Department of Agriculture (2017) [Survey Tools](#).

# CITY INTELLIGENCE

Greater London Authority  
City Hall  
The Queens Walk  
London SE1 2AA

Tel 020 7983 4000  
Minicom 020 7983 4000  
Email [intelligence@london.gov.uk](mailto:intelligence@london.gov.uk)

**MAYOR OF LONDON**