



Responses to household food insecurity in the UK during COVID-19

Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Rachel Loopstra and Katy Gordon



Food Vulnerability in the UK during COVID-19

- Project website: <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/>
- Funded by the Economic and Social Science Research Council (ESRC) as part of the UK Research and Innovation's rapid response to COVID-19: <https://www.ukri.org/research/coronavirus/covid-19-research-and-innovation-supported-by-ukri/>
- Project runs July 2020 – January 2022

Project team

Academic Team

- Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Sheffield
- Dr Rachel Loopstra, Department of Nutrition, King's College London
- Katy Gordon, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Sheffield
- Professor Peter Jackson, Department of Geography, University of Sheffield

NGO partners

- Niall Cooper, Director of Church Action on Poverty
- Simon Shaw, the head of the food poverty programme at Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming

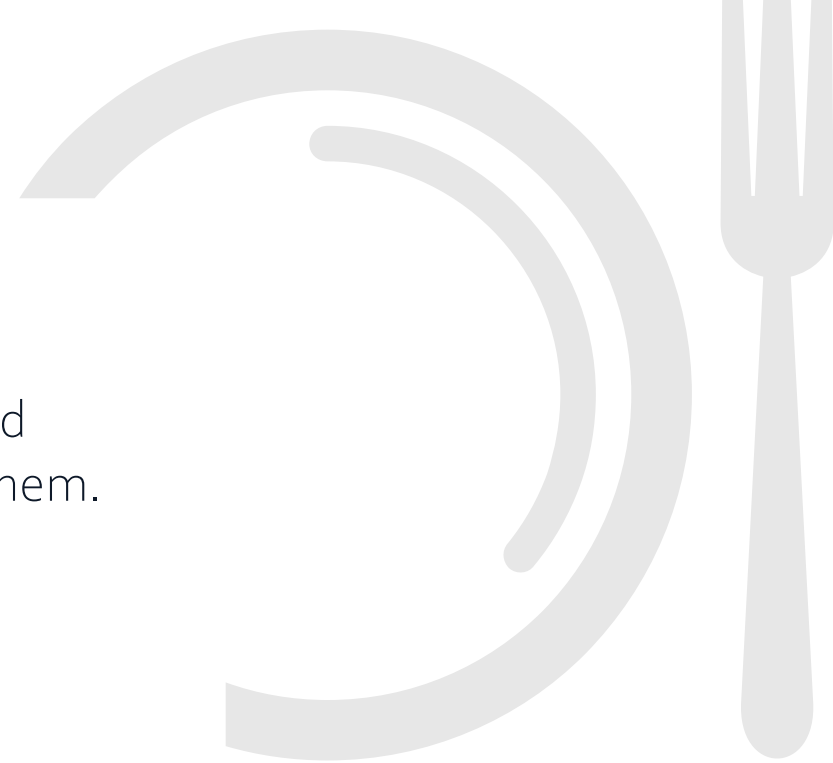


Background and aims

- The scale and complexity of the threats COVID-19 presented to food security in the UK and the range and scale of responses we saw to them.

Project Aims

- Mapping responses to food access challenges during COVID-19
- Developing and applying methods for monitoring and evaluation
- Develop 'exit strategies'
- Inform future resiliency planning



Project methodology: 3 pillars

1. National systems mapping

Mapping and monitoring responses at a national level: both UK and at constituent country level.

Methods include: workshops, interviews, online monitoring. As well as secondary analyses of existing data sets.

2. National food access system user panel

Participatory panel comprised of people who have accessed support with food. This panel will also form a crucial aspect of the national and monitoring work.

Methods include: individual case studies, interviews, visual methods and collaborative workshops.

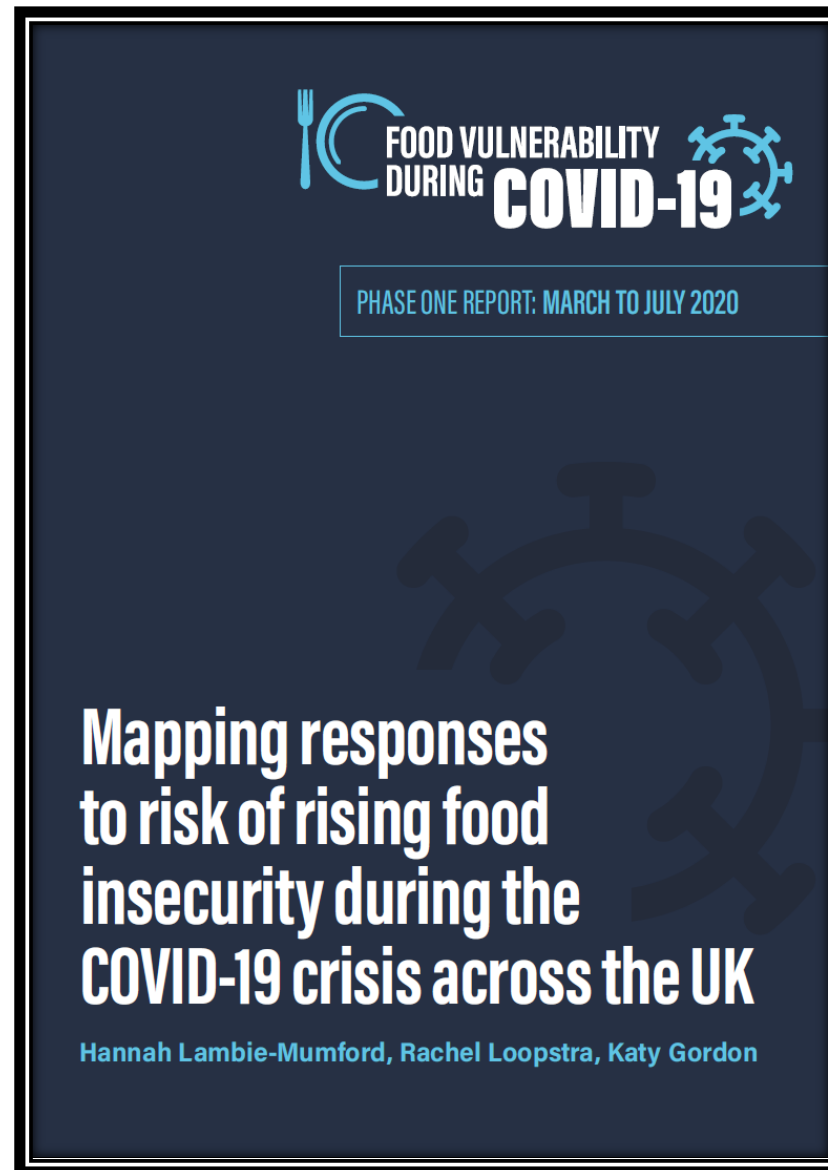
3. Local systems mapping

Local Authority-level research to explore local responses.

Methods include: in-depth case study research in eight case study areas across the UK ; analysis of data published at local authority level; local authority website capture at regular intervals.



- Report published August 2020 at:
<http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Food-Vulnerability-During-COVID-19-first-project-report.pdf>
- Presenting key findings today



Mapping methodology

- The mapping involved systematically searching and analysing publicly available information on responses to food insecurity during the crisis March – July 2020.
- Findings were 'sense checked' at workshops with national policy and NGO stakeholders in each constituent country of the UK in July 2020. The report was also reviewed by several stakeholders and corrections invited after publication.



Key topics

- Threats to household food security during the pandemic
- Responses across the four constituent countries of the UK – similarities and differences
 - 5 key interventions



Threats to the 4 dimensions of food insecurity under COVID-19

Figure 1 Threats of COVID-19 to household food security across the UK.

Impacts on household food access	Impacts on availability of food for individual/household consumption	Impacts on stability of household food supplies	Impacts on individuals' utilisation
<p>Economic Access: Income losses (employment, self-isolating, shielding)</p> <p>Physical Access: Extremely clinically vulnerable unable to go out to purchase food</p> <p>People at moderate risk but also general population avoiding going out to purchase food</p>	<p>Food shortages in shops</p> <p>Food project interruptions (supplies, social distancing requirements, volunteers)</p> <p>Closure of institutional food locations</p> <p>Closure of cafes/restaurants</p> <p>Closure of some food markets</p>	<p>Early weeks: interruptions in supplies in supermarkets; interruptions in operational hours of food projects (e.g. food banks).</p> <p>Changes in regularity of food acquisition</p>	<p>Diets potentially less diverse</p> <p>Access to specialist diets compromised</p> <p>Concerns for food safety in homes</p> <p>Altered food practices</p> <p>Overlaps of clinical risk to complications of COVID-19 with nutritional vulnerability</p>

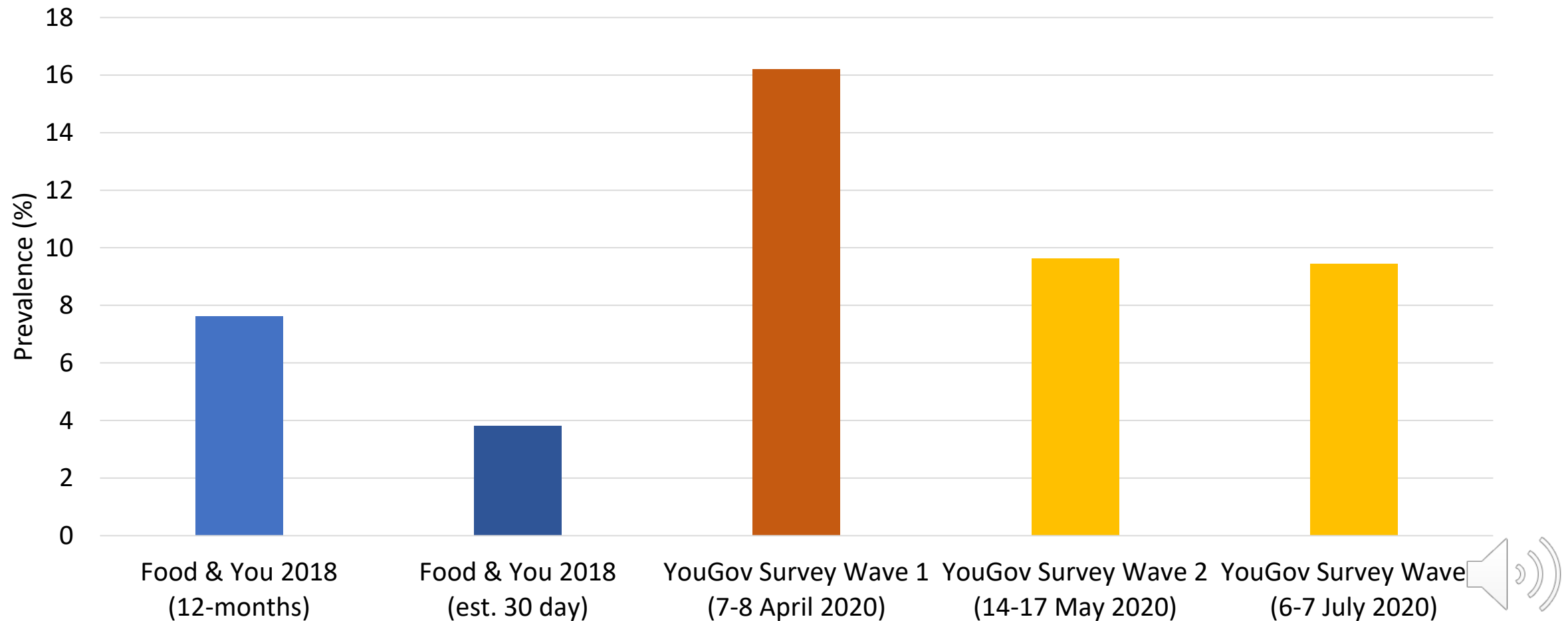


Food Foundation's YouGov polling work (Loopstra 2020)

- Modified versions of three questions from USDA Adult Food Security module
 - Did you/anyone else in your household have smaller meals than usual or skip meals because you couldn't afford or get access to food?
 - Have you/anyone else in your household ever been hungry but not eaten because you couldn't afford or get access to food?
 - Have you/ anyone else in your household not eaten for a whole day because you couldn't afford or get access to food?
- Recall periods for three survey waves: 3-4 weeks
 - 7-8 April: since lockdown
 - 15-16 May: since Easter
 - Early July: since early June



Comparison of prevalence of food insecurity during COVID-19 to 2018 Food and You data (Loopstra 2020)



**Vulnerability to food insecurity since the
COVID-19 lockdown**

Preliminary report

14 April 2020

*Rachel Loopstra
King's College London*



Consistent with Food & You 2018 data before COVID-19:

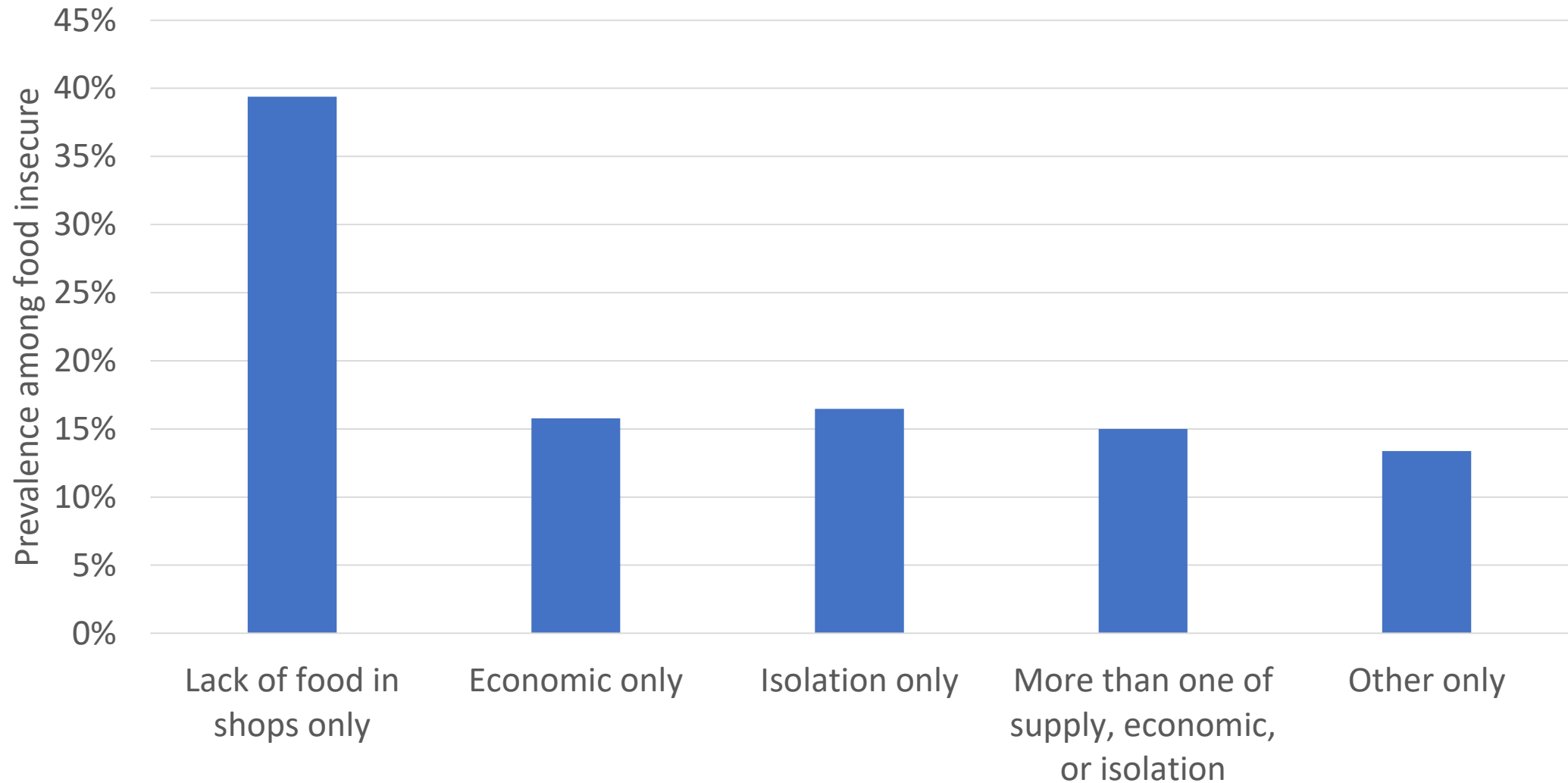
- Younger age groups higher odds of food insecurity
- Non-white ethnicities higher odds of food insecurity
- Retired: lower odds of food insecurity
- Households with children: higher odds of food insecurity
- People with disabilities: higher odds of food insecurity
- Unemployment



Availability and stability of food supply - Retail



About 40% of food insecurity in sample in early lockdown explained by lack of food in shops (Loopstra 2020)



Availability and stability of food supply - Retail

Food supply

- We mustn't forget the early weeks of the crisis and what they exposed about the food system
 - E.g. Just-in-time supply chains struggling to keep up
- Impact on consumers
 - But also on food charity systems
- On-going threats/issues posed by the (global) pandemic
 - Harvesting, planting
 - Food manufacturing
 - Brexit + COVID



Responses to access barriers to food available

Whilst the retail market adjusted in response to supply/availability issues in shops, policy and practice responses focused on:

- Economic and physical household access barriers
- Alternatives for food previously available through institutions (schools), services or community settings (including food projects and food aid)



'Food vulnerability'

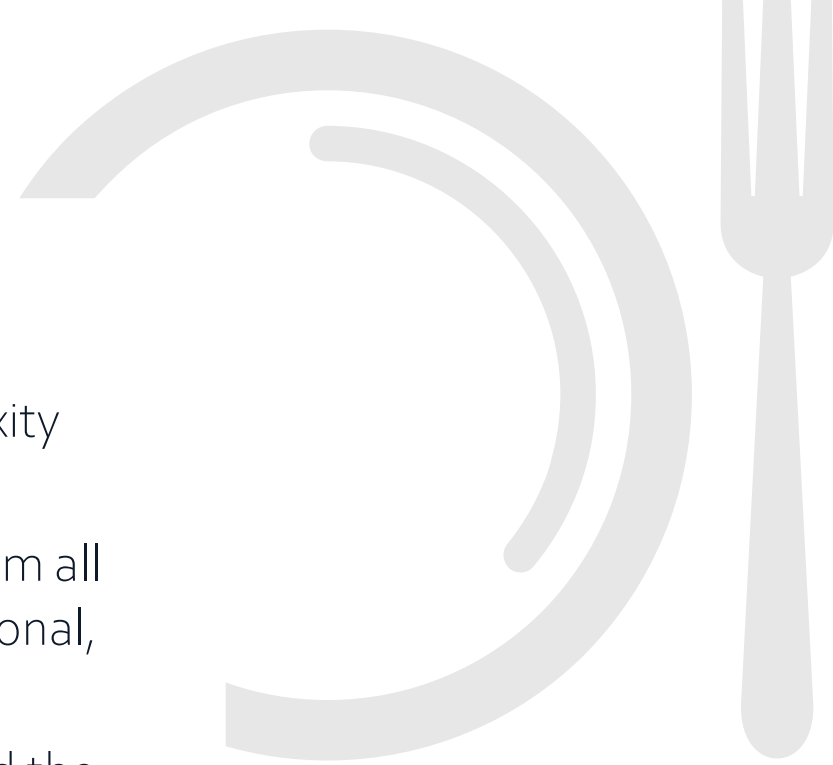
Key groups UK policy makers identified as particularly at risk of food insecurity during this phase of the crisis (March-July 2020):

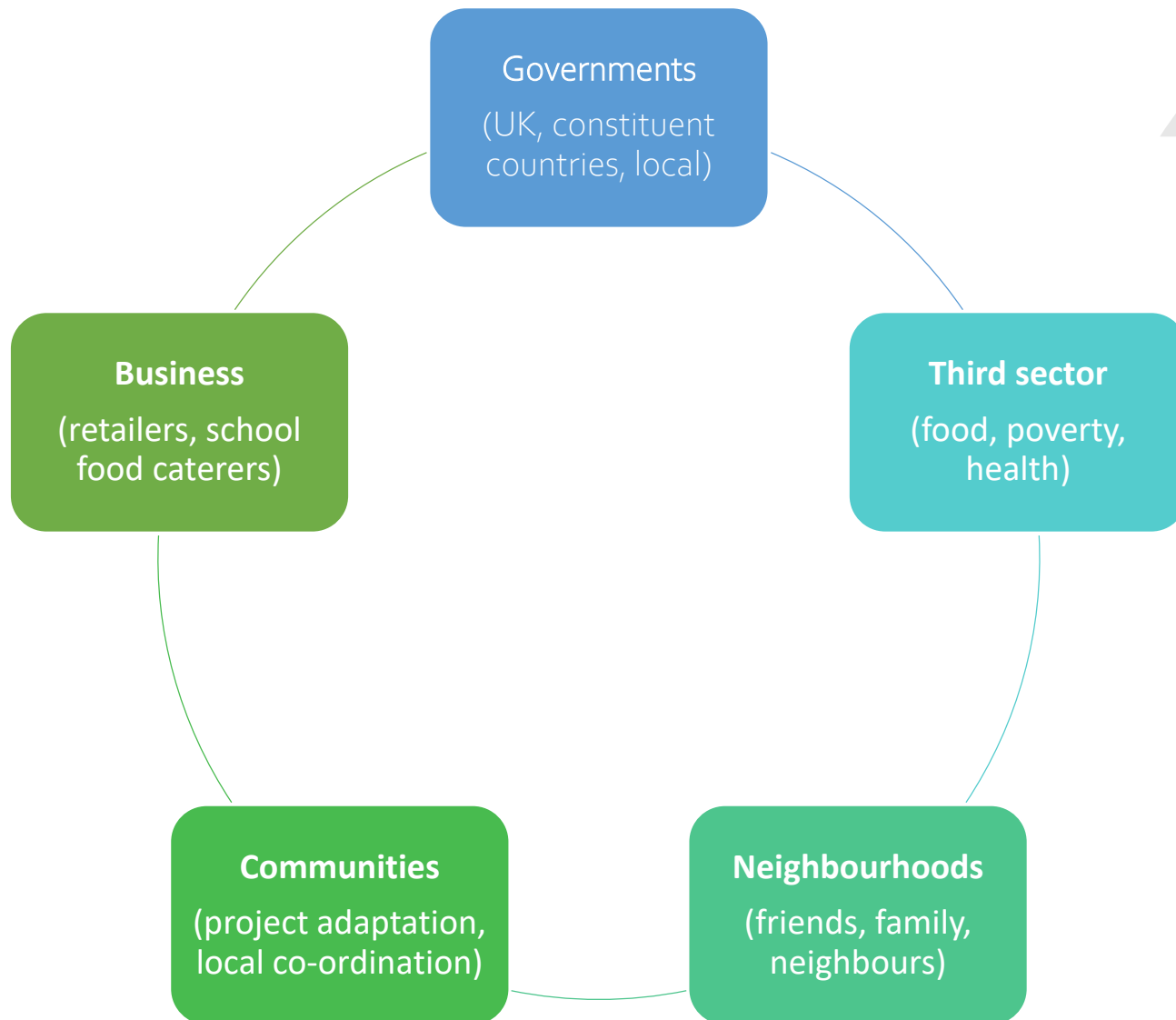
1. extremely clinically vulnerable people, who were asked to 'shield'
2. moderately clinically vulnerable people, who were asked to limit contact outside their home (non-shielding vulnerable)
3. Those who could not afford to access food but could leave their home ('financially vulnerable')



Responses to household food access

- Responses to food insecurity have been on a scale and of a complexity not seen in recent times in the UK.
- The responses to risks of food insecurity during COVID-19 came from all sectors (government, private, voluntary) and at all levels (local, national, UK).
- They've been funded by new funds available from governments and the food industry and have targeted groups at risk of food insecurity in a way that hasn't been seen in recent times.
- The voluntary food aid sector has played a prominent role in responding to economic vulnerability to food insecurity throughout the crisis.





Governance

- **Devolution** - food, health and aspects of social policy are made by the Northern Ireland Executive, Welsh and Scottish Governments and by Whitehall departments overseeing policy in England including the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Department for Health and Social Care, the Department for Education (DfE), and the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.
- **UK-wide** interventions have also played a role, but there are important nuances of implementation – for example, differences in the delivery of Universal Credit in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- **Local authority level** - even where funding or policies were developed at devolved or UK levels, implementation may have involved local authorities.

Interventions in focus

1. Shielding box scheme (similarities and differences)
2. School food replacements (similarities and difference)
3. State financial protection (UK and constituent countries)
4. Emergency financial and food assistance (UK)
5. Retailer adaptations (UK)



1. shielding food boxes

England <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scheme ran 29th March to 31st July• 2.2 million people on shielding list• People had to fill out an online form to register for the service or call a hotline• Weekly box for single individual provided by Brakes and Bidford wholesalers	Northern Ireland <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Announced 6th April and ran until 31st July• Up to 95,000 on shielding list but also covered people in critical need of food and not shielding• People register for food box through the COVID-19 Community Helpline• Delivered by councils
Scotland <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scheme ran 3rd April – 31st July• 179,728 people on shielding list• Boxes ordered through the Scottish Government SMS Shielding Service• Weekly box for single individual provided by Brakes and Bidford wholesalers	Wales <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scheme ran 3rd April to 16th August• 130,000 people on shielding list• Boxes ordered by contacting the local authorities• Weekly box for single individual provided by Brakes and Bidford wholesalers



2. Free school meal replacements

England <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scheme announced 31st March• Schools could choose to provide meals/food parcels to families, but nationwide FSM voucher scheme implemented from DfE in partnership with Edenred• Schools signed families up for eCode vouchers; redeemed for eGift card to national retailers• £15 per week per child• Continuation of scheme through summer announced on 16th June• Schemes extended to children with parents ineligible for public funds from mid-June	Northern Ireland <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scheme announced 26th March• Direct payments to families in receipt of FSM: into bank accounts or cheques posted, every two weeks• £13.50 per week per child• Summer Food Payment Scheme, announced on 30th June, continued the provision of these payments, throughout Summer: two payments over the summer
Scotland <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Funding for provision of free school meals announced with closure of schools on 19th March• Local Authorities chose to either provide meal replacements, cash replacements or food vouchers.• Value of substitution varied across local authorities (from £10 per week to £20 per week)• Continuation of scheme through summer announced on 16th June	Wales <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scheme announced 21st March• Schools/local authorities most often provided substitutes through vouchers (retailer gift cards or vouchers); delivery of food items; or funds transferred to bank accounts• £19.50 per week per child• Continuation of scheme through summer announced on 22nd April• Welsh government encouraged local authorities to use discretion to include families with no recourse to public funds in scheme



3. State financial protection

Coronavirus Job Retention scheme

- Announced 20th March
- Employers able to claim compensation for employees' wages from 20th April
- Extended until 31 October (with contributions from employers from 1st August)
- Covers employees with any type of contract if employed and on PAYE payroll on/before 19 March (able to re-employ if employees made redundant on or after 28th Feb)
- Covers 80% of wages up to £2,500 per month; employer top-up optional
- Employees with no recourse to public funds eligible

Self-Employment Income Support Scheme

- Announced 26th March
- Available to check eligibility for claim from 4th May; submit claim on 13th May
- Provided first grant of up to 80% of three-months' worth of average trading profits based on previous three years' earnings, to max of £7,500
- Second grant (if business adversely affected after 14 July): 70% of three-months' average trading profit to max of £6,570
- Eligibility: had to have traded in 2018-19 tax year; trading profits no more than £50,000 and at least equal to non-trading income
- Employees with no recourse to public funds eligible

Universal Credit and other changes to social security

- UC/Working Tax claimants: increase in standard allowance by £20 per week for 12 months
- All benefits uplifted by 1.7% in line with lifting of benefit freeze (pre-COVID-19 budgetary decision)
- Increase in Local Housing Allowance rates (benefits to private renters in receipt of housing benefit/housing support-UC)
- Abolished minimum income floor assumption for self-employed claiming UC
- Conditionality requirements lifted/no sanctions applied until 1st July

Statutory Sick Pay

- Statutory Sick Pay for self-isolating
 - £95.85 per week
 - Available from day 1 isolation



Food insecurity, unemployment and the furlough scheme (Loopstra 2020)

- the furlough scheme appears to have protected people from the major rise in food insecurity experienced by people who transitioned into unemployment.
- Rates of food insecurity among the newly unemployed are extremely high: 18.5%
- Compares to 7.4% among people who remained in employment
- and 10.2% among adults on furlough.



4. Emergency payment schemes

England <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No national emergency payments scheme• Local authorities administer Local Welfare Assistance schemes, but these are not required to be cash-based assistance	Northern Ireland <p>Discretionary Support COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Short-term Living Expenses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Announced 25th March• Grant to cover people from day of application to the date of their next income.• Amount calculated on individual circumstances (no upper limit)• People were eligible for the scheme if they (or an immediate family member) were diagnosed with COVID-19 or asked to self isolate and had income of less than £20,405 a year• Discretionary support was made available to full-time students (not eligible previously)
Scotland <p>Scottish Welfare Fund: Crisis Grants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides grant for people in crisis for essential living costs• People apply through their local authority• On the 18th March £45 million additional funding committed to the Fund during the COVID-19 crisis• More flexibility was given in how the funds could be administered during the crisis	Wales <p>Discretionary Assistance Fund: Emergency Assistance Payments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• From 18th March, COVID-19 related Emergency Assistance Payments were provided through the scheme• As of the 9th July, 37,459 payments had been made, (value £2,320,690)• Flexibilities in the system included ability for people to apply for up to five awards, which could be given consecutively (i.e. one a week for five weeks in a row).



4. Charitable emergency food assistance (UK)

- Changing landscapes of provision
 - Closure of community / social eating projects (cafes, lunch clubs) some re-working of this to food aid
 - New food aid projects (chill/cook, ambient food parcels)
- Adapted access
 - Existing projects (e.g. Trussell Trust food banks) adapting to covid-guidance (social distancing) and/or doing more delivery
 - Self / electronic referral processes
- Supply and operations
 - Funding (government, private industry, public donations)
 - In-kind support (British Gas staff supporting Trussell Trust food banks)
 - New food sourcing (joining FareShare, Tesco food donations to Trussell Trust)



5. Retailer responses

- Priority delivery slot schemes working with governments
- Changing shopping practices:
 - delivery expansion
 - opening hours for the elderly and other groups
- Funding / donations / in kind support to voluntary sector projects (£49.5 million)



Resources

- Loopstra 'Vulnerability to food insecurity since the COVID-19 lockdown', https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Report_COVID19FoodInsecurity-final.pdf
- Loopstra 'COVID-19: What impacts are unemployment and the Coronavirus Job Retention scheme having on food insecurity in the UK?' https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/BriefReport_Unemployment_v5.pdf



Thank you

Contact:

h.lambie-mumford@sheffield.ac.uk

