

Foodworkers on the breadline

The impact of the cost of living crisis on BFAWU Members

Introduction

The [Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union \(BFAWU\)](#) conducted the [first survey of our members in the early part of 2021](#). Since then the economic challenges facing our members and other workers have intensified, placing huge pressure on them and their families.

Our members have faced 10 years of austerity and falling wages, a pandemic and now a cost of living crisis where inflation has surged past wages and is leaving many without the means to pay for their basic needs such as food, energy and housing costs, let alone have an income to pay for the things that provide happiness, enjoyment and contentment, like a social life, recreational and family activities.

Our 2021 survey found that the people who grow, distribute and supply our food are often unable to purchase the very food that they produce. We found that food workers experience food insecurity as they do not earn enough to feed themselves and their families. Resulting in some depending on friends and family for food, skipping meals, and eating cheaper inferior and unhealthy food with some even having to rely on food banks. This was and continues to be, a disgrace and an indictment of an economy that is not working for our members and far too many other people in this country.

Since 2021, rather than tackle this national scandal things have got much worse. The cost of living crisis, which should be known as an income and earnings crisis, has deepened. Inflation has reached record levels, with the poorest people, in and out of work, disproportionately impacted by food and energy inflation (the poorest spend proportionately more of their income on these bills), which is increasing at a rate much greater than overall inflation.

Given this context, we wanted to assess how our members were being impacted by the current economic situation. We wanted to establish if things had remained as they were, improved or gotten even worse. The survey results that we got back are unequivocal. Things are getting much worse for working people and it is taking a huge toll on them and their families.

This short report is broken down into 2 main sections. The first section outlines our survey data. The second part presents qualitative data based on the words of our members who took part in this research, and who grimly described how the cost of living crisis is impacting on them and their families.

Survey Data

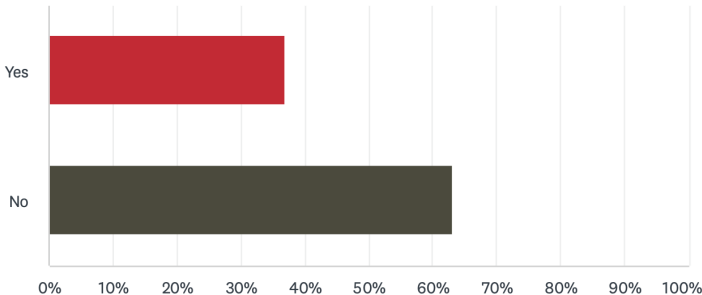
We surveyed our members in the same way we did in 2021. The response saw 373 members taking part in the survey, including people from all four nations of the United Kingdom. The results are sobering and clear evidence that the cost of living crisis, manifested in our members feeling food insecure and unable to heat their homes, has gotten worse over the past 2 years.

The workers who responded to the research were made up of food production workers: (61.02%), food retail workers (21.77%), Food distribution (8.60%), and other roles (8.60%).

Over 60% of respondents (234) said that their wages are not currently high enough to meet their basic needs.

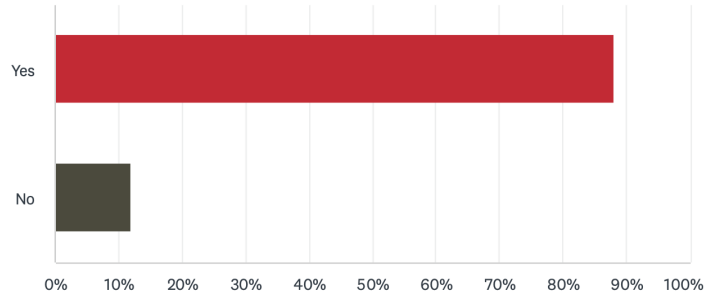
Q2 Are your wages currently high enough for you to meet your basic needs? e.g. rent, heating, electricity, food etc.

Answered: 371 Skipped: 2



Q3 Have you at any time reduced your heating/energy use in your home to save money?

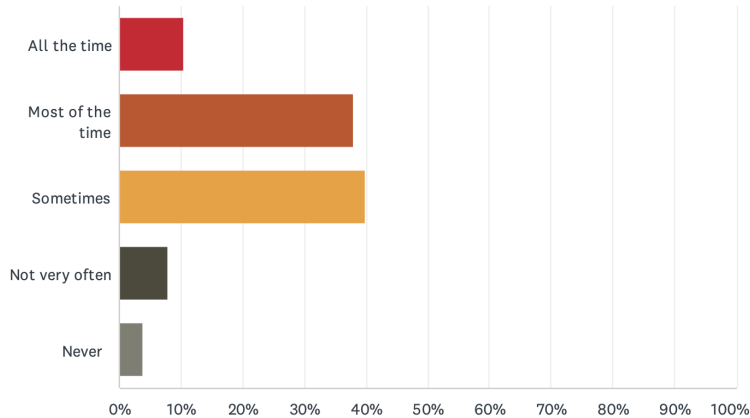
Answered: 371 Skipped: 2



88% of respondents had reduced heating/energy use in their home to save money.

Q5 How often do you feel cold in your own home due to the level of heating you use

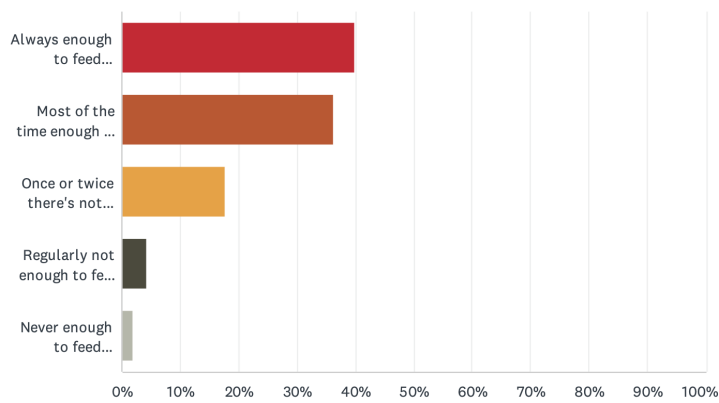
Answered: 371 Skipped: 2



1 in 10 respondents reported feeling cold in their homes “all the time” with a further 38% of respondents saying they felt cold in their own homes “most of the time”. By contrast only 3.77% said they “never” felt cold at home due to the level of heating used.

Q6 Do you feel that you have enough food to feed you and your family?

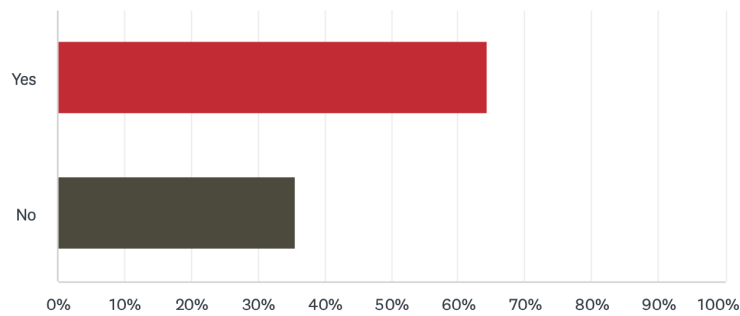
Answered: 372 Skipped: 1



When asked about access to enough food to feed themselves and their families, less than half of respondents said they always have enough to feed everyone.

Q7 Have you reduced the amount of food that you eat?

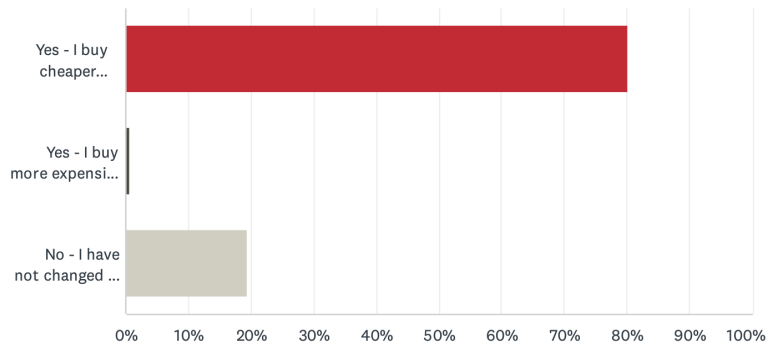
Answered: 373 Skipped: 0



Given the level of responses to the previous question, it is sadly unsurprising that over 60% of respondents have already reduced the amount of food they eat.

Q8 Have you changed the type of food that you eat?

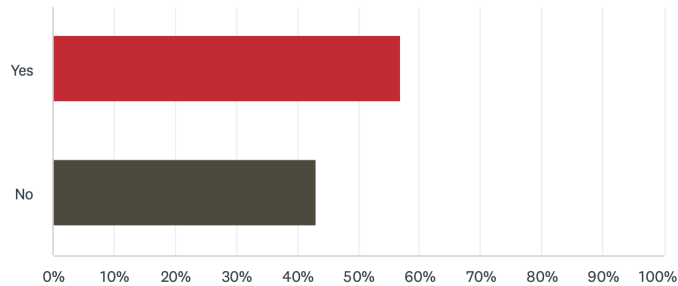
Answered: 373 Skipped: 0



Not only have people reduced the amount of food they eat but respondents have overwhelmingly changed their purchasing habits with 80% of people now buying cheaper food.

Q10 Has there been a time when you ate less than you thought you should due to a lack of money?

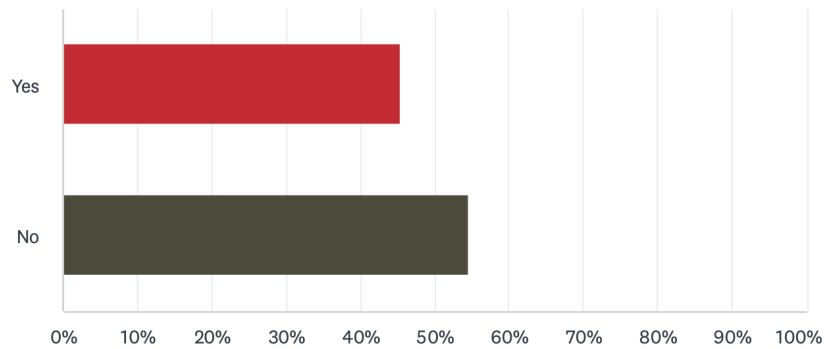
Answered: 373 Skipped: 0



As well as reducing the amount of food they eat and purchasing cheaper alternatives, the majority of people believed that they had eaten less than they thought they should due to a lack of money.

Q11 Have you ever skipped meals to make sure someone else gets enough to eat?

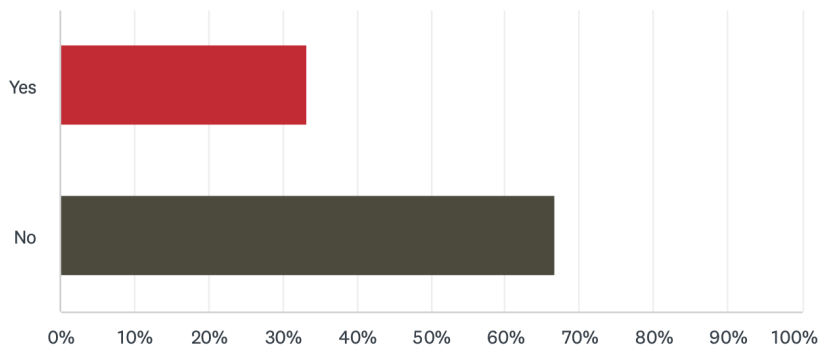
Answered: 372 Skipped: 1



Just under half of respondents (45.43%) reported having skipped meals to make sure others could eat enough.

Q12 Have you ever had to depend on family or friends to help you feed yourself and your family?

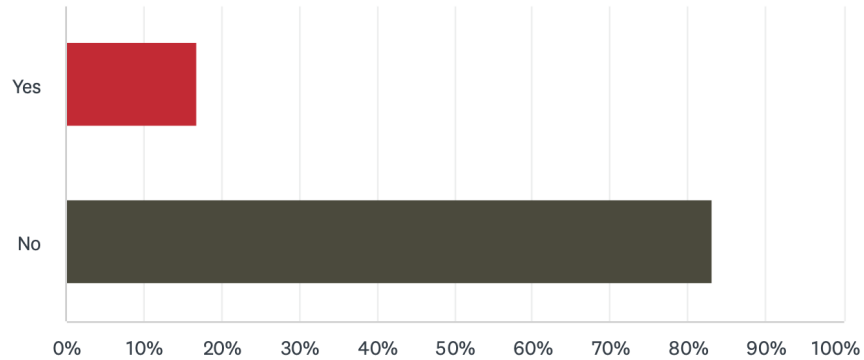
Answered: 372 Skipped: 1



A third of respondents have had to depend on family or friends to help feed them or other family members.

Q13 Have you ever had to get help from a food bank to help feed you and your family?

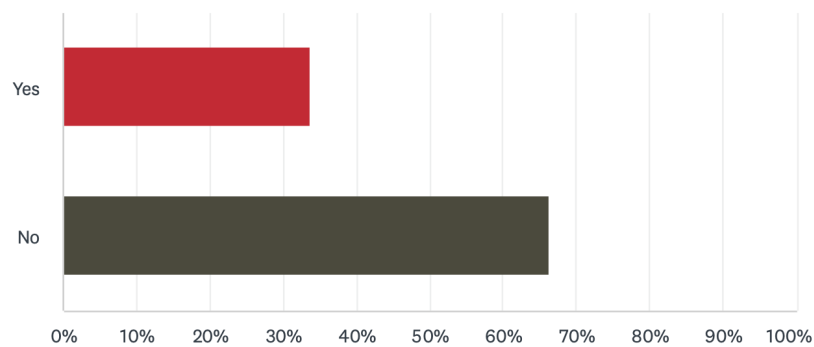
Answered: 373 Skipped: 0



Almost 17% of the food workers who took part in this research have had to use a foodbank.

Q14 Do you feel that your wages give you enough to properly feed you and your family good food?

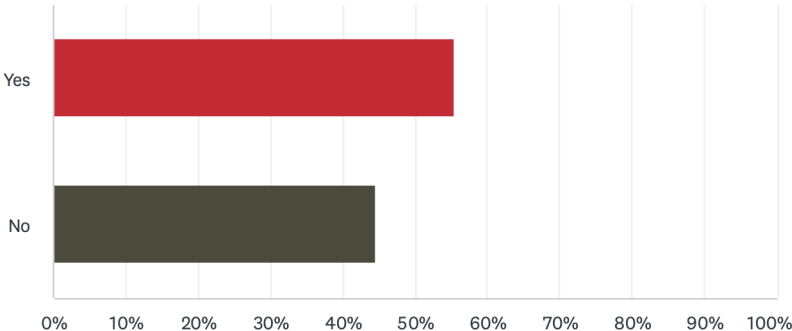
Answered: 373 Skipped: 0



BFAWU members who responded to the survey overwhelmingly believe that their wages are not enough for them and their families to access good food.

Q15 Has there been a time when you were worried you would run out of food because of a lack of money or other resources?

Answered: 373 Skipped: 0



It is concerning, but not surprising given other responses that more than half of respondents (55.5%) have been worried about running out of food because of a lack of money.

We also asked our members: *What impact is cutting your energy use on you and your family? How has it made you or others in your household feel?*

"COLD AND POOR.
QUITE ISOLATED. HOME
HAS BECOME A BIT OF A
PRISON."

"POORLY. WE HAVE TO WEAR
LOTS OF CLOTHES TO FEEL
WARM, OR SIT IN HALF-DARK
ROOM TO SAVE MONEY ON
ELECTRICITY AND GAS. OR WE
WON'T BE ABLE TO BUY FRESH
HEALTHY FOOD."

"THE HOUSE IS PERMANENTLY
COLD AS WE DO NOT HAVE ANY
HEATING ON AT ALL,
CONDENSATION IS NOW CAUSING
HUGE PATCHES OF DAMP WHICH
WE HAVE NEVER HAD BEFORE
UNTIL THIS WINTER."

"WE KEEP THE HEATING OFF
UNLESS WE NEED TO DRY
CLOTHES, THE PRICE IS
BECOMING UNAFFORDABLE EVEN
WITH HOW LITTLE WE USE IT
AND THE MOULD IN OUR HOUSE
IS GETTING WORSE DUE TO HOW
DAMP AND COLD IT IS."

What impact is cutting your energy use on you and your family? How has it made you or others in your household feel?

"COLD AT PRESENT AND MY HUSBAND HAS CANCER SO IS HAVING TO WRAP UP."

"I FEEL NO MATTER HOW HARD I WORK AND THE HOURS I PUT IN AT WORK I CAN'T WIN. I SPEND LESS MONEY ON FOOD TO KEEP THE HEATING ARE ELECTRIC ON AS I HAVE MY GRANDSON LIVING WITH US."

"MAKES ME FEEL LIKE I AM UNABLE TO PROVIDE FOR MY FAMILY."

"I DON'T HAVE RUNNING HOT WATER, SO I CAN'T WASH MY HANDS THOROUGHLY. EITHER TRYING TO KEEP WARM IN BED OR RUNNING ON THE SPOT. STAYING AT WORK LONGER TO KEEP WARM. COOK IN BULK AND HAVE THE SAME FOOD FOR 4 DAYS. THIS WINTER HAS BEEN VERY BAD FOR MY MENTAL HEALTH (DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY)."

Conclusion

The results of our survey show that things are getting worse. This is self-evident when the 2021 results are compared with our most recent data. The number of people relying on food banks has increased from 7% to 17%. Those relying on friends and family have gone from 20% to 34%, and those eating less have gone from 35% to 57%. 80% are eating cheaper (unhealthier) meals. 55% have been worried about running out of food and 45% skipped meals.

There is a clear reason for this as evidenced by the 63% of our members who informed us that their wages are insufficient to meet their basic needs and the 66% who said their wages are insufficient to feed themselves and their family with 'good food'.

In this survey, we also asked about the impact of energy price rises. The harrowing testimonies of our members in the qualitative data section above speak for themselves. The impact on people is negatively and very significantly affecting people's physical and mental health and quality of life, especially in winter time. People have been left unable to meet their basic needs let alone afford any kind of social life.

The testimonies of people were backed up by the survey responses. A staggering 88% said they had reduced their heating and energy use to save money. While 10% said they feel cold, in their own home, all the time. 38% said they felt cold most of the time and 40% said they felt cold sometimes.

The suffering of our members, the key workers who kept people fed during the pandemic and who continue to ensure people are fed all of the time, is a national disgrace. The fact that food workers cannot afford the food they grow, produce, distribute and supply should be seen as a national embarrassment and scandal.

It is a situation that cannot be allowed to continue. Things have to change. The BFAWU is a campaigning union and we will continue our work to enhance the lives of our members and every other worker in this country.

That is why we will campaign to raise wages and for a minimum wage of at least £15 an hour so that people can afford to meet their basic needs and lead lives of dignity and enjoyment.

That is why the BFAWU will continue to campaign for a right to food so that no child or adult goes hungry or feels food insecure in the 5th richest country in the world. This

country is facing a national food emergency, our data, and many other studies show this to be the case. Universal free school meals and good nutritious food for all adults, enshrined in right to food legislation are principles that will continue to fight and campaign for. We are proud to have initiated the [Food and Work Network](#) and will continue to support its development and make these arguments for the right to food and for people to have sufficient incomes so that they can eat well, heat their homes and enjoy fulfilled and contented lives.

Workers also need security and protection in their workplaces. That is why we will also campaign to repeal Tory anti-trade union legislation, increase the rate of sick pay, and curb the excess profits of the supermarkets and energy companies. We will also be campaigning for a change in the law so that so-called 'phoenix companies' cannot shut down, go into administration and avoid their financial obligations to their workers. Too often redundant workers are driven to food banks as they wait on their statutory payments from the Government, whilst these often very wealthy owners sail off (quite literally) to their next victims.

Our data shows clearly that people are suffering and that radical solutions are required. The BFAWU alongside other trade unions and other campaigning organisations will fight for the change that people need.

However, we also require a change in our politics and economics. The current cost of living crisis needs a radical set of solutions and we expect an incoming Labour Government, and the devolved administrations, to step up and ensure that no person, child or adult, goes cold or hungry in Britain in 2023. These are basic requirements that any civilised, self-respecting country should aspire to. Nothing less will do. If governments do not even try to accomplish these basic tenets of a good society then the BFAWU will fight and campaign until they do.