

Communicating food poverty on the island of Ireland



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Executive summary

Introduction

Food poverty is an acknowledged social determinant of health and is associated with significant adverse health outcomes. Food poverty occurs when an individual or family has insufficient access to an adequate quantity and quality of food to maintain a nutritionally satisfactory and socially acceptable diet.

- In Ireland, approximately 9% of the population is estimated to be in food poverty
- In Northern Ireland, 5% of households are classified as food insecure

In the context of the environmental, geopolitical and socioeconomic turbulence globally, and the consequent threats to food systems, it is possible that food poverty will affect the health and everyday lives of a significantly greater number of families on the island of Ireland soon.

The issue of food poverty has more recently captured significant media attention, largely in response to the cost-of-living crisis. This is important, as news media reporting remains the primary source of information for the public on social issues, and health-related issues such as food poverty.

Print and broadcast media also have a key role in agenda setting, as gatekeepers with the power and influence shape and limit policy debates. It is therefore important to assess how the media's framing of food poverty affects the public's and policymakers' understanding and knowledge of the issue. This assessment could assist health promoters to develop and use more effective means of communication.

Aims and objectives of this research

The overall aim of the research was to investigate how the media portrays food poverty, and to explore public, policy and key stakeholder perceptions of food poverty.

The core research objectives were:

1. To investigate how food poverty is portrayed across policy documents, newspapers, and broadcast media on the island of Ireland.
2. To examine key stakeholder views, perceptions and understanding of food poverty.
3. To explore perceptions on how the issue of food poverty is framed in print and broadcast media.

Methods

To meet the research objectives, the following studies were carried out:

- A systematic policy analysis, drawing on 48 policy documents from Northern Ireland and Ireland
- Analysis of news media reporting on food poverty on the island of Ireland, drawing on a sample of 81 newspaper articles, and 91 TV and radio segments from across both Northern Ireland and Ireland
- Qualitative interviews with 44 key stakeholders, including 16 news media professionals, 8 members of the public, 14 third-sector community organisations and 4 policymakers

Findings

Analysis of 48 policy documents across Northern Ireland (26) and Ireland (22) showed that food poverty tends to be presented as problems of food affordability and/or accessibility; food insufficiency; a lack of varied food to maintain a healthy

lifestyle; reliance on food banks; and exclusion from social and cultural participation.

The terms “food poverty” and “food insecurity” were largely used interchangeably. In both Ireland and Northern Ireland, the default solutions to the problem include charitable food aid and redistribution of waste or surplus foods.

While both jurisdictions have anti-poverty strategies, and there is some evidence of cross-governmental coordination and linkages with other policies, neither Ireland nor Northern Ireland has an explicit national food poverty strategy.

- **Analysis of broadcast news media** (91) across the island of Ireland showed that both radio and television tended to frame food poverty as driven by factors such as government policies, and political or societal situations (upstream drivers).

These factors included the cost-of-living crisis, localised issues such as the housing crisis (Ireland) and the absence of leadership in Stormont (Northern Ireland), and the lack of government action to address the issue through policy measures. Existing measures to address the immediate issue were largely led by third-sector organisations, with calls for greater government intervention.

Some news packages included tips on shopping and budgeting as money-saving mechanisms. The increasing acceptance of the issue was highlighted through the portrayal of the “new poor” or “working poor”, along with calls for people to seek help if needed.

- **Analysis of print news media** (81) – local and national newspapers in Ireland and Northern Ireland – showed that publications tended to frame food poverty as driven by economic and societal factors, such as the cost-of-living crisis, inflation and wage stagnation, and by policy decisions such

as shortcomings in the social welfare system.

In print, some reference was also made to “individual-level drivers” – factors affecting individuals or households – such as addiction issues. Existing measures to address the immediate issue of access to food are primarily led by third-sector organisations, and there are appeals for greater government intervention.

News coverage of responses led by third-sector organisations significantly outweighed coverage of policy responses. Reporting typically portrayed families with children as the main victims, while also highlighting the emergence of the “working” poor.

- **Stakeholders across sectors** view food poverty as a complex issue, with a focus on inadequate food quantity, poor nutrition and social impacts. Mental health issues and social exclusion are commonly perceived consequences of food poverty.

Stakeholders differ, however, on ideological and regional grounds regarding the drivers or causes of food poverty and responses to it. Stakeholders in Northern Ireland emphasise governmental drivers and policies, whereas those from Ireland highlight individual-level factors. Policymakers stress the need for coordinated, cross-sectoral strategies.

Regarding media reporting, media professionals advocate impactful storytelling with personal narratives – although they face challenges finding people for case studies. Members of the public question the effectiveness of media representation and suggest involving experts in nutrition, policy and food poverty to discuss the issue. Challenges in communicating food poverty include its complexity, the stigma surrounding it and media industry

specific challenges such as labour capacity, and time. Both media professionals and third-sector stakeholders, such as charities providing access to food, recognise their interdependence in addressing the issue, but express concern about oversimplified reporting and information provided without context.

Summary of recommendations

A detailed recommendations matrix is available on pages 102, 103 and 104 of this report and highlight the need:

- To develop a position statement and agree upon a shared language among advocates on the island of Ireland for communicating on food poverty
- To establish a resource database and a panel of academics, lived experience experts and advocates
- To improve the data landscape on food poverty
- To collaboratively develop best practice guidelines for reporting on food poverty
- To develop training workshops for media professionals and journalism students
- To raise awareness of food poverty and the right to food among the public

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1 Introduction

Food poverty and food insecurity are complex phenomena, with multiple dimensions. Both terms refer to the same health and social issue and are often used interchangeably in the literature. However, there are some differences in their definitions and associated dimensions.

The term “food poverty” is relatively new and can be defined as “the insufficient economic access to an adequate quantity and quality of food to maintain a nutritionally satisfactory and socially acceptable diet” [1]. It is comprised of 4 dimensions: economic access, quantity and quality of food, duration, and social dimension [1].

The term “food insecurity” has been in existence for longer and can be defined as “the inability to consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so” [2]. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations identified 6 dimensions of food security within their definition: food availability, food access (physical and economic), utilisation, stability, agency, and sustainability [3]. Despite some differences in definition and dimensions, food poverty and food insecurity are considered interrelated concepts [1].

Food poverty and food insecurity remain relatively hidden, especially in high-income countries where there is a perception that they are not a problem [4, 5]. Research shows that household food insecurity is relatively high in some developed countries, ranging from 8% to 20% of the population. In 2022, 8.3% of people in the EU were unable to afford to afford a meal containing meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent every second day [6]. Standardised measurements and indicators of food poverty on

the island of Ireland are lacking.¹ Nevertheless, in Ireland, approximately 9% of the population are estimated to be in food poverty [7], while in Northern Ireland, 5% of households are classified as food insecure [8].

Other evidence suggests that households are increasingly being affected. A report by Barnardos recently reported that the number of parents using a food bank more than doubled in 2023 (10%) compared with 2022 (4%) [9], while 51% of respondents (1,130) in a 2022 survey in Ireland reported cutting spending on fuel and other household expenditures to afford food [10]. In 2023, Ireland was ranked as the second most expensive country in the EU, after Denmark, for household expenditure on goods and services, with prices 42% above the EU average [11].

Food poverty and insecurity have been identified as a growing societal and public health problem across rich countries with developed economies [6]. According to Campanera and colleagues, it can be understood as a manifestation of health inequality and thus a deprivation of the right to health [12].

Food insecurity is associated with significant adverse health outcomes [13]. Among children and adolescents, food poverty is associated with malnutrition and negative physical outcomes such as stunting and being underweight [14, 15]. Child food insecurity is associated with a range of adverse developmental consequences [16], including lower academic achievement [17] and a higher probability of developing acute and chronic health problems [18].

In recognising the fundamental human right to adequate food and nutrition, one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to eliminate hunger and ensure all people have access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food by 2030 [19]. Both Ireland and Northern Ireland are signatories to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which protects the right to adequate food [20]. Food (in)security is a priority for both governments on the island of Ireland, and

¹ Ireland's UN SDGs 2019 - Report on Indicators for Goal 2 Zero Hunger (see <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-sdg2/irelandsunsdgs2019-reportonindicatorsforgoal2zerohunger/hunger/>). In Northern Ireland, data on food poverty is published by the Department of Communities (see <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/northern-ireland-poverty-and-income-inequality-report-2021-22-released>).

it is particularly pertinent now in the context of significant global shifts in environmental, geopolitical and socioeconomic dynamics.

With the growing prevalence of food poverty and insecurity in developed countries, there has been a concurrent increase in news media reporting on the issue [21–24]. News media is widely consumed in Ireland. Although the role of digital platforms is considerable, traditional media still has a significant role in news consumption and is afforded greater trust than news sourced via social media.

Research in Ireland shows that TV remains the main source of news for consumers (32%). RTÉ News (71%) and BBC News (68%) are among the most trusted news brands in Ireland. Trust in local media is also high, including radio (70%) and newspapers (68%) [25]. While print media is in decline (only 5% of people buy a physical paper), 41% of consumers in Ireland access newspapers online through their digital platforms [25].

Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, TV remains the primary source of news consumption with UTV (52%) and BBC1 (50%) being the most popular sources, while 20% also consume media from RTÉ One.

Although the media often *reflect* opinions of the public (using vox pops, opinion polls and other methods), and public opinion on any topic is rarely uniform [26], news media still play a role in informing views and shaping perspectives [27]. Journalistic and editorial decisions about which aspects of an issue to spotlight have the effect of legitimising issues and their responses, sometimes along particular ideological, or otherwise biased, lines [28].

Understanding how food poverty is communicated by the media on the island of Ireland is thus important for understanding how it may be informing various stakeholder perspectives on the issue, including those of policymakers and the public. Furthermore, analysis of how the issue is framed or portrayed can give insight into the assumptions and suppositions underpinning these perspectives, including beliefs around causes, appropriate responses and where responsibility for addressing the problem lies.

Given the significant implications of food insecurity on population health, proper understanding is vital. Stakeholders interested in reducing health inequalities need

this understanding to find new and better ways to advocate and communicate effective responses.

This research project thus aimed to investigate how food poverty is communicated on the island of Ireland, with specific emphasis on its framing in the media. In analysing how the topic is portrayed, the overall study draws on Entman's framing theory as an analytical and structuring device [29]. Framing, as articulated by Entman, involves simplifying complex issues by highlighting specific aspects to make them more salient and memorable to audiences. Entman's conceptualisation involves the following elements [29]:

- Defining the problem
- Identifying the causes or drivers
- Proposing treatment recommendations or solutions
- Offering a moral evaluation

This offers a useful framework for breaking-down and analysing the constitutive parts of how a particular topic is discussed in the media. However, it can also be helpful for guiding analysis more broadly and considering how individuals conceptualise complex social issues.

Research aims and objectives

The primary research question informing this study is:

How is food poverty framed in the print (newspaper) and broadcast (TV and radio) media on the island of Ireland and, how is this issue perceived and understood by key stakeholders and the public?

The overall aim of the research is:

To investigate the representation of food poverty in the media, and to explore public, policy and key stakeholder perceptions of food poverty.

The core research objectives are:

1. To investigate how food poverty is represented across policy documents, newspaper and broadcast media in the island of Ireland.

2. To examine key stakeholder views, perceptions and understandings of food poverty.
3. To explore perceptions on how the issue of food poverty is framed in print and broadcast media.

To meet these objectives, the overall project was structured in a series of work packages. This involved:

1. Carrying out desk research, including an analysis of policy frameworks with reference to food poverty in Northern Ireland and Ireland
2. Conducting an analysis of sampled news media outputs, including broadcast news media (radio and TV) and print news media (newspapers)
3. Carrying out qualitative one-to-one and group interviews with key identified stakeholders, including members of the public, news media professionals, third-sector (voluntary) organisation staff/workers, and policymakers

The research approach further adopted a collaborative, interdisciplinary and integrated knowledge translation (iKT) approach. To this end, a stakeholder advisory panel with representatives from key stakeholder groups (including members of the public, media professionals and food poverty organisations/advocates) was embedded in the research to advise on aspects of the project related to empirical data collection. Specifically, they advised on appropriate questions and language during data collection, and on recruitment methods and strategies. An expert advisory panel also provided input into the study.

Report structure and content

This report gives a comprehensive overview of the findings of the research. The report is structured in 7 chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 provides a summary of the methods used during the project to gather and analyse data. Chapter 3 details the findings of a policy review, including an analysis of policy documents pertaining to food poverty from both Ireland and Northern Ireland. Chapters 4 summarises the analysis of broadcast media segments gathered from Northern Ireland and Ireland, and chapter 5 presents summarised findings from newspaper articles. Chapter 6 outlines the qualitative data collected from key

stakeholders, including members of the public, news media professionals, third-sector (voluntary/charitable) organisations and policymakers. In addition to outlining the findings, chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 each contain brief summaries of the findings. Finally, chapter 7 outlines a critical discussion of the findings overall and makes suggestions for knowledge translation activities based on consultation with, and feedback from, key stakeholders and expert advisers.

2 Methods

Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the methods that were used in carrying out this research. The first section describes the process involved in conducting the policy analysis. The sections that follow outline the methods that were used for the media data analysis, including details of sampling and analytical approaches. The final section discusses the steps and procedures that were taken as part of the qualitative data collection and analysis.

Policy analysis methods

Food poverty (and food insecurity) falls under the remit of different government departments and there is not one single policy document that encompasses food poverty in its entirety. For this review, we worked with policy officials in a number of departments to ensure a comprehensive collation of relevant documentation including official policy documents, technical papers and research reports.

Occasional reference is made to documents that are not official governmental policy (but to which the research team was signposted, because they serve to articulate departmental policies of relevance).

Data collection started with the central government departments accommodating the agri-food remit. In Ireland, these included the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and the Department of Health and in Northern Ireland, they included the Department of Health and Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs .

From there, other departmental policies were reviewed to ensure comprehensive coverage, since “food” is not owned by any single department. Departmental officials were contacted to ensure no relevant document was overlooked. It should be noted

that some Northern Ireland policy documentation is out of date, with updated policies currently in development or in consultation. At the time of writing, there are several indicative policies that are stalled at the consultation phase.

Policy documents with direct and indirect relevance to and for food poverty published over a period of at least 10 years across different departments in Northern Ireland (9) and Ireland (18) were considered to be within scope. This timeframe was selected to ensure the evidence is relevant to current policy priorities. Forty-eight policy documents were gathered and included in the final review – 22 from Ireland and 26 from Northern Ireland.

Policy documents were reviewed and the contexts in which the terms “food poverty” and “food insecurity” were reported were identified and discussed. The elements collated from the policy analysis seek to understand the current policies impacting upon, and material to, food poverty/insecurity on the island of Ireland. Observations were synthesised and reported within a narrative review.

The results section in chapter 3 of this report contains separate synopses and analyses of terminology and links with other policies for Northern Ireland and Ireland. Following the results section in chapter 3, a critical summary is provided in which similarities and differences between Northern Ireland and Ireland are considered, and a summary analysis using Bacchi’s framework [30] is provided. Detailed analytical matrices of the individual policies from both jurisdictions are further provided in appendices 1 and 2.

Media data research methods and analysis

Broadcast media

Sampling of broadcast materials

Broadcast materials were gathered from radio and television archives in order to analyse the framing of discourses of food poverty on the island of Ireland. A production culture approach was fostered in sampling the material pertaining to food poverty in both Ireland and Northern Ireland. Although the media industries and landscapes on the island of Ireland are exposed to global media through satellite and streaming, this research focuses exclusively on broadcasting content produced

by a production company or broadcaster in Ireland or Northern Ireland. In addition, the content produced must have been disseminated to an audience in Ireland or Northern Ireland. News and current affairs programmes on both radio and television were selected as sample materials, due to this genre’s tendency to reflect current issues through discussion and news reports. For extracting relevant broadcast materials, a purposely selected sample of broadcasters with the largest audience share of each region was used, (see table 1).

Table 1: Selected broadcaster and content sampled from each region

Ireland television	Northern Ireland television	Ireland radio	Northern Ireland radio
RTÉ One (n=43)	BBC Northern Ireland (n=6)	RTÉ Radio One (n=16)	BBC Radio Ulster (n=7)
Virgin Media (n=5)	UTV (n=7)	Newstalk (n=7)	

The databases, archives and Google news archives for each of these broadcasters were used to search for relevant materials, to ensure that the sampling strategy was as exhaustive as possible. These databases were searched using the terms “food poverty” and “food insecurity” between 1 November 2017 and 1 April 2023. This search timeframe was chosen to capture broadcast media framing with relevance. This included capturing before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis/energy crisis, and other geopolitical events impacting income and food affordability, accessibility and availability.

Selecting relevant broadcast materials

Broadcast materials were assessed to ensure that the main focus of the news stories – following the input of search terms – focused on some aspect of food poverty or food insecurity in relation to Ireland and Northern Ireland. Often, these materials would not have been tagged or given a headline that explicitly indicated the content, so the material was watched once by the researchers to ensure that the content was relevant.

Analysis of broadcast materials

The first phase of the analysis identified where food poverty and food insecurity were mentioned. Following this, the second, more in-depth phase of analysis was executed using Entman's framing theory as the theoretical framework [29]. This deductive coding process encompassed the broadcast materials being mapped to Entman's framing theory to identify definitions, "drivers" or causal factors, treatment recommendations and moral evaluations. Additional thematic analysis was used to capture sub-themes. Further analysis was performed to identify the voices of specific social actors that were included in reports.

Print media

Sampling of newspapers and articles

Newspaper articles were sampled using the LexisNexis and Irish Newspapers Archives online databases. The LexisNexis database is a comprehensive repository, containing national and regional newspaper publications, broadsheets and tabloids, from both the Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Irish Newspapers Archive is a comprehensive repository of regional and local newspaper publications from both jurisdictions.

A sample of regional and local newspapers from each province of Ireland was gathered by searching the Irish Newspaper's Archive (see table 2). These newspapers were not available in the LexisNexis database. The rationale for gathering national and regional/local newspapers was based on a research gap identified in a recent rapid review [36], which highlights the need to explore any differences in national and local news media coverage of food poverty.

Both databases were searched using the terms "food poverty" and "food insecurity" between 1 January 2018 and 1 January 2023. The rationale for not using other search words and phrases, such as "food banks" and "holiday hunger", was to avoid biasing the results in terms of print media framing of the definition of and solutions to food poverty. This search timeframe was chosen to capture print media framing with currency. This included capturing before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic,

the cost-of-living crisis/energy crisis and other geopolitical events impacting income and food affordability, accessibility and availability.

Table 2: Selected newspapers from each province of Ireland in the Irish Newspaper's Archive

Leinster	Munster	Connaught	Ulster
The Echo	Limerick Leader	Connacht Tribune	Belfast Newsletter
Meath Chronicle	Evening Echo	Connaught Telegraph	Tyrone Herald
Leinster Express	Tipperary Star	Leitrim Observer	Fermanagh Herald
Westmeath Examiner	Munster Express	Tuam Herald	Donegal Democrat
Kilkenny People	Clare Champion	City Tribune	Northern Standard
Dundalk Democrat			

Selecting relevant articles

Articles were downloaded in Word format and duplicates removed. All remaining articles were assessed by 2 researchers against the inclusion and exclusion criteria summarised in table 3. Articles from national and regional/local newspapers published in Ireland and Northern Ireland were eligible for inclusion. Online-only publications were excluded. Articles were included in the study if the main focus of the article was food poverty or food insecurity in the context of Ireland and/or Northern Ireland. Discrepancies in eligibility screening of articles were resolved through discussion.

Table 3: Article eligibility criteria

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Article type	Features, reports, news articles, opinion pieces	Letters to editor, obituaries, classifieds (ads/notices)
Publication type	National and regional/local newspapers	Industry publications, magazines, online-only publications
Topic focus	Articles that focus on food poverty/food insecurity in the context of Ireland and/or Northern Ireland	Articles where food poverty/food insecurity is not the main focus (only mentioned in passing) and/or not in the context of Ireland or Northern Ireland
Word count	Equal to/more than 250 words	Fewer than 250 words

Analysis of newspaper articles

All included articles were imported into NVivo 14 software for data management. The first phase of analysis involved 2 researchers investigating the patterns in the frequency of publication. The included articles were labelled according to newspaper title, territory (published in Ireland or Northern Ireland), coverage (national or regional/local), category (broadsheet or tabloid), and article type (news story, feature article or opinion piece). The frequency of included articles by year and month was also counted. The months containing the highest number of included articles were identified, along with the associated stories related to specific events, reports or topics. This process was data-driven.

In the second phase of analysis, framework analysis [31, 32] was performed, with Entman's framing theory as the *a priori* framework. This analysis was led by one researcher and involved a combination of deductive and inductive analysis techniques, with regular consultation with study team members through a consensus decision-making process.

As part of the deductive coding process, data on news media framing of food poverty was mapped to Entman's framing theory in order to identify definitions, drivers, treatment recommendations and moral evaluations. Additional thematic analysis was used to capture sub-themes. Further analysis was performed to identify the voices of specific social actors that were included in reports. Lastly, the frequency of articles was mapped to Entman's theory, including themes under each function, as well as newspaper territory (Northern Ireland or Ireland) and type of publication (national or regional/local).

Qualitative research methods and analysis

Two methods of data collection were used to gather qualitative data: one-to-one interviews with key stakeholders and workshop style group interviews with members of the public. This section outlines recruitment and analytical methods for both.

Recruitment of participants for individual and group interview

The research team worked with the stakeholder advisory panel and with colleagues from both the University of Galway press office and Safefood to help identify media

professionals, key third-sector organisations and policymakers to interview individually. Email invitations were sent to 72 journalists/media professionals, 19 individuals working in third-sector organisations with a remit in food poverty and 6 policymakers.

Recruitment of members of the public to take part in workshop style group interviews for the research was carried out via social media, using institutional accounts of the University of Galway College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences and the Health Promotion Research Centre, and by dissemination of WhatsApp messages and emails to specific organisations and groups (for example, parent support and networking groups, Men's Sheds Association, student clubs and societies). To ensure eligibility and to achieve a balanced sample, screening questions were asked of all who were in contact to express interest in the study. Twenty-seven participants were recruited, of which 8 were ultimately included in the study.

Data collection

All individual and group interviews were carried out online via Microsoft Teams.

Individual interview schedules were developed in collaboration with the stakeholder advisory panel, with each protocol tailored for the specific key stakeholder group (in other words, media professional, community organisation and policymaker).

Thematic areas in the individual interview schedules included: definitions of food poverty, drivers of food poverty, attitudes towards food poverty, measures to address food poverty, and perceptions of news media representations of food poverty.

For the workshop style group interviews, a protocol was developed informed by findings from an earlier review of the evidence and by findings from the print and broadcast media data analysis.

The workshop began by asking participants about their understandings of food poverty on island of Ireland – for example, prevalence, features, consequences, drivers and who is affected. Using Padlet, snippets of video and text that were typical of the dominant discourses and themes of food poverty in news media (which had been analysed previously) were shown to participants. Researchers facilitated guided discussion about the snippets/excerpts to explore participants' immediate

reactions, perspectives on included and excluded voices, and their views on the apparent causes, solutions to and moral judgements of food poverty depicted.

Analysis

Transcripts of all interviews and group interviews were generated in MS Teams and checked for accuracy by a research assistant. Cleaned transcripts were uploaded to NVivo 14 software for management and analysis. A combination of deductive and inductive coding was applied. In maintaining consistency of approach and to allow for comparison with analysis of the media data, Entman's framing theory was used as the *a priori* framework, supplemented with additional thematic analysis.

3 Policy analysis

Introduction

Food poverty is a priority for both governments on the island of Ireland and is particularly pertinent in the current context. There are significant environmental, geopolitical and socioeconomic implications for businesses, households and civic society which include the UK's exit from the EU, the synergy between food and climate change, COVID-19, the cost-of-living crisis, energy crisis and the threats to the international world order with Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Remembering the economic, social and political importance of food, it is incumbent upon policymakers to strive for a modern agri-food policy that protects the nation's food. It is essential to ensure a continuous and guaranteed food supply offering choice and health at affordable prices, while simultaneously protecting natural resources, crops, livestock and environmental assets. National food security must be linked to household food security and equality as trade agreements are negotiated.

This strategic context offers an opportunity to reflect on the adequacy of food systems and to use legislative actions to improve them as required. Therefore, it is within remit of this review to consider policies that link healthy eating with nutrition and public health, the environment, sociocultural issues, food quality, economics and governance to deliver the triple bottom line of health for people, planet and profit [1].

This review identifies where food poverty features in public policy documentation, detailing the language used and how food poverty is framed, as well as links with other policies. The findings are set out below, starting with policy pertaining to Northern Ireland and following with policy pertaining to Ireland. This chapter concludes with a brief critical summary of the findings.

Food-related and health-related policy documents with relevance to food poverty: Northern Ireland

Twenty-six policy documents relevant to this review were sourced in Northern Ireland (see table 4). These emanated principally from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (n=8; or its predecessor the Department of the Environment) and the Department for Communities (n=7; or its predecessor the Department for Social Development) (see table 4 below).

The documents were predominantly policy documents, or consultation documents to inform policy development, although a small number were statutory legislative instruments (n=2), contributions from expert advisory panels (n=2), a research report (n=1) and a scoping review (n=1). They mainly focus on the (agri-)food system and waste management reduction, and poverty/Welfare Reform. The departments of Education and Health also consider food poverty from health and children’s educational outcomes perspectives.

What follows is an overview and commentary of their language adoption and use. Detailed descriptions of each individual policy document from Northern Ireland are listed in Appendix 1.

Table 4: Policy documents from Northern Ireland

Year	Policy/document title	Department
2023	Northern Ireland Poverty and Income Inequality Report	Department for Communities
2022	Circular Economy Strategic Framework	Department for the Economy
2022	Draft Environment Strategy	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
2021	Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
2021	The Executive’s Green Growth Strategy and Delivery Framework	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
2021	Draft Programme for Government (PfG) Framework	Northern Ireland Executive

Year	Policy/document title	Department
2021	Rural Framework	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
2021	Agricultural Policy Framework	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
2021	10X Economy: Northern Ireland's Decade of Innovation	Department for the Economy
2021	A Scoping Review of the Literature on Poverty in Northern Ireland	Department for Communities
2020	Recommendations for an Anti-Poverty Strategy Report of the Expert Advisory Panel	Expert Advisory Panel commissioned by Department for Communities
2020	Children and Young People's Strategy 2020–2030	Department of Education
2019	Knowledge Framework	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
2017	Arrangements for the Provision of Milk, Meals & Related Facilities under the Provisions of Articles 58 & 59 of the Education & Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, as amended, 2017	Department of Education
2016	Child Poverty Strategy	Department for Communities
2016	Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group Report	Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group commissioned by Department for Communities
2015	Food Waste Regulations	Department of the Environment
2015	Welfare Reform	Department for Communities
2015	The Strategic Planning Policy Statement	Department for Infrastructure
2015	An insight into Food Banks in Northern Ireland	Department for Social Development
2014	Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy version 11	Department of Finance
2013	Making Life Better	Department of Health
2013	Food in Schools Policy Healthy Food for Healthy Outcomes	Department of Education

Year	Policy/document title	Department
2013	Delivering Resource Efficiency: Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy	Department of the Environment
2012	Northern Ireland Economic Strategy	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
2012	A Fitter Future for All Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012–2022	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Synopsis of Northern Ireland policy documents' use of food poverty and food insecurity

Of the 26 policy documents reviewed from Northern Ireland, 9 rely on the term “food poverty” and 7 also reference “food insecurity” although not consistently in respect of *household* food security but rather *national* food security. On a single occasion, in the Waste Management Strategy (2013), “food insecurity” is used in a standalone sense without being complemented or explained more simply as food poverty.

“Food poverty” is explicitly referred to in the 2012 Northern Ireland Obesity Prevention Strategy (A Fitter Future for All) and the 2013 Public Health Strategy (Making Life Better). The Waste Management Strategy (2013) is the first policy document in Northern Ireland to reference “food insecurity” and this is done in the context of food waste as a potential solution to food insecurity.

The next chronological reference to food insecurity is in the 2015 and 2019 revised outcomes frameworks of the Obesity Prevention Strategy. A 2015 food bank report uses “food poverty” when referencing desk research and cites the ambition to reduce rather than eradicate food poverty in Northern Ireland. A 2016 Welfare Mitigations report also uses “food poverty” synonymously with food banks but includes the first mention of more progressive efforts than food banks emerging to address food poverty. This is evidenced again in the 2020 report for the Expert Advisory Panel to the Anti-Poverty Strategy, who envision food poverty to be solved by a fit-for-purpose social security system and efforts supported by proceeds from the “sugar tax”.

The 2021 10X Economic Strategy references food insecurity but in the context of assuring national food supply rather than the food poverty sense, which is the scope of this policy analysis. A 2021 scoping review reverts to describing the food poverty problem from the dietary health and educational impact perspective. The Food Strategy Framework of 2021 restates the Northern Ireland Assembly's shared meaning of food insecurity.

Terminology and language

In Northern Ireland policy documents, "food poverty" is typically defined as a factor affecting health, wellbeing and educational attainment. These documents outline its pre-COVID-19 prevalence as well as plans for future crises and ongoing measurement. They also acknowledge its complexity and the opportunity for public sector collaboration in addressing it, notably through cross-referencing strategies aimed at reducing various forms of poverty.

Where "food insecurity" is used, this is in reference to its definition, prevalence, the development of an indicator in the future, the Sustainable Development Goal to end poverty, the need for increased household income, and new product and process developments to support food security. Less progressively, its correlation with food banks and reducing food waste is noted.

Associated terms used alongside or instead of food poverty or food insecurity in Northern Ireland tend to relate to accessibility, availability, affordability, food banks (occasionally supplemented with indications about the reluctance to and humiliation of attending them), food aid, community food, "social food initiatives" food waste, surplus food redistribution, (severe) poverty, "destitution", deprivation "material deprivation with a focus on food", "food insufficiency" and hunger (or presenting as hungry at school). Occasionally the tone shifts to more positive framing including "dignity" and "nutritious food".

Links with other policies

There is limited cross-referencing of ambitions across the policy documents reviewed. In those documents that do not mention food poverty or food insecurity specifically, there is some coordination of the (child) anti-poverty agenda with the

Programme for Government, economic and educational strategies, and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. The only document in Northern Ireland that cross references another policy document is an Expert Advisory Group’s recommendations to the Anti-Poverty Strategy that references the Sustainable Development Goal to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. This would appear to be contrary to the popular calls for government policy to be joined-up.

Food-related and health-related policy documents with relevance to food poverty: Ireland

Twenty-two policy documents relevant to this review were sourced in Ireland (see table 2). Food insecurity appeared to have a whole-of-government attention (Government of Ireland, n=4) focusing on the Programme for Government social inclusion and children and young people’s focus. Like Northern Ireland, policy documentation in Ireland centred on welfare policy/supporting citizens to afford basic material needs (Department of Social protection, n=4).

The documents were predominantly policy documents (n=12) to inform policy development, research reports (n=4), evaluations (n=2), information papers (n=2), a technical paper (n=1) and guidelines (n=1). They mainly focus on (food) poverty alleviation schemes, life stage strategies (children and older people), school meals, obesity prevention and international food security coordination. What follows is an overview and commentary of their language adoption and use. Detailed descriptions of each individual policy document from Ireland are listed in appendix 2.

Table 5: Policy documents from Ireland

Year	Policy/document title	Department
2023	Children’s Rights Alliance Report Card	Children’s Rights Alliance reporting on Ireland’s Joint Programme for Government
2023	Evaluation of the School Meals Programme	Department of Social Protection
2023	The CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Year	Policy/document title	Department
2023	Cost of a healthy food basket in Ireland ²	safefood , Food Standards Agency and Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
2022	European Social Fund Plus Food and Basic Material Support	Department of Social Protection
2022	Food poverty government programmes, schemes and supports	Department of Social Protection
2022	Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020–2025 Ambition, Goals, Commitments	Government of Ireland
2022	Implementation of Global Ireland: Ireland’s Strategy for Africa to 2025 report to government – Year 2	Department of Foreign Affairs
2022	Food Poverty: The Impact on Vulnerable Children and Families. Barnardos and Aldi	Barnardos and Aldi
2021	Food Vision 2030 Strategy	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
2021	On-Street Food Services in Dublin: A Review	Dublin Region Homeless Executive
2019	First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families: 2019–2028	Government of Ireland
2019	A Better World, Ireland’s Policy for International Development	Department of Foreign Affairs
2016	Healthy Ireland: A Healthy Weight for Ireland 2016–2025 Obesity Policy and Action Plan	Department of Health
2015	The Global Island Ireland’s Foreign Policy for a Changing World	Department of Foreign Affairs
2014	Food in Direct Provision	Nasc, the Irish Immigrant Support Centre
2014	Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children and young people 2014–2020	Government of Ireland

² Safefood has been publishing data on the cost of a minimum essential cost-of-living food basket since 2006 in Ireland and since 2014 in Northern Ireland.

Year	Policy/document title	Department
2013	The National Positive Ageing Strategy	Department of Health
2012	Constructing a Food Poverty Indicator for Ireland using the Survey on Income and Living Conditions	Department of Social Protection
No date	Healthy Ireland Nutrition Guidelines for Food Parcels	Department of Health, safefood , Health Service Executive and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland
No date	Cork Food Policy Council	Cork City Council
No date	The Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute	Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute

Synopsis of Ireland policy documents' use of food poverty/insecurity

Of the 22 policy documents reviewed from Ireland, 14 reference “food poverty” and 10 mention “food insecurity”. Food poverty entered the vernacular earlier than food insecurity in Ireland and, to date, is referred to more often than food insecurity.

The seminal food poverty document is the Department of Social Protection/Economic and Social Research Institute paper [7]. It is particularly important in its identification of food poverty as a “distinct experience of poverty” (p. 8), and consideration of the need for both generic poverty measures and anti-food poverty strategies. Food “insecurity” entered the Irish vernacular later, in 2014. It is also interesting to note how the terms of choice differ both between and within departments. Departments lack consistency in their terminology. Some use neither term, while others use one or both in their documents, resulting in inconsistent language across departments.

References to “food poverty” generally use challenging language to outline its context, definition and measurement. They discuss monitoring policy effectiveness to reduce food poverty, citing the importance of direct food aid and education. These references highlight addressing food poverty through cross-sectoral contributions and early intervention. Explicit mention is made of affordable and accessible healthy food being available. Various coping strategies used by families are itemised, with a

single reference to mental health consequences of the shame and anxiety that surrounds the experience of food poverty.

One policy document reference direct food provision negatively in respect of migrants, while more progressive income-based solutions are proposed in 2019 when querying the effectiveness of free food distribution in resolving food poverty.

Terminology and language

The use of the term “food insecurity” focuses on the complexity of the issue, the vital importance of addressing it for population health purposes, and the usefulness of including food insecurity as contributing to a composite measure of a child’s health status. One document refers to the importance of safety nets in avoiding an increase in hunger and food insecurity, rather than anything more aspirational in terms of eradicating food insecurity entirely as a national ambition.

As in Northern Ireland policy documentation, there is occasional interpretation of food insecurity at the global and national level rather than the household sense. This is particularly the case in the Department of Foreign Affairs’ documents which situate food insecurity as a key global policy challenge. This same department uses terms such as “overlapping disasters” and “high levels of displacement and humanitarian need”. It also identifies climate change as a factor contributing to decreased food security, lending further credence to the framing of food insecurity in threatening/crisis terms. The same degree of catastrophising is less pronounced in local policy contexts by other Irish government departments.

Approximate synonyms appear in the documentation which describe: poverty or struggling financially, hidden poverty, inequality, (chronic) hunger, complex humanitarian needs, acute food crises, food affordability and accessibility, nutritional wellbeing, nutrition insecurity, malnourishment, lacking sufficient food, undernutrition and famine, social exclusion and disadvantage.

Links with other policies

The Irish policy documents reviewed show more frequent cross-referencing of goals than those from Northern Ireland. In those documents that reference food poverty or food insecurity specifically, there is cross-indexing between food poverty alleviation

schemes and social inclusion. The international agenda (notably the Sustainable Development Goals) is also relied upon in documentation from Ireland, focusing on food poverty, social inclusion, children and international food security policy development. Attention is paid between documents focusing on childhood strategies, school meals, obesity prevention and children's rights. The focus on children is apparent in whole-of-government strategies (joint Programme for Government).

Critical summary

Similarities and differences between Northern Ireland and Ireland

There are some similarities between the policy approaches in Northern Ireland and Ireland. Notably, in both regions, "food poverty" appeared in policy targets before "food (in)security". Subsequently, the two terms have been used interchangeably in policy documents.

A second similarity is the shared remit of the food poverty (or insecurity) agenda by a number of government departments and agencies in both jurisdictions, and not a single accountable department. Northern Ireland and Ireland rarely connect different policy areas. When they do, it is typically between the anti-poverty and social protection fields and food poverty issues. Both regions primarily use food insecurity/poverty terminology for context setting, indicating that raising awareness remains important in discussions about alleviating food poverty.

A further important similarity is the lack of ambition to eradicate food poverty, with both jurisdictions appearing to favour food insecurity *reduction* interventions. Indeed, both Northern Ireland and Ireland revert to food bank and food aid terminology when naming such programmes. Additionally, there are differences between Northern Ireland and Ireland's approach to reporting on food poverty and food insecurity within policy documentation. There is a more pronounced commitment to intentional efforts to improve food security in Ireland. The policy documentation from Ireland references food insecurity in the contexts of Travellers and migrants in a more pronounced way than the policy documentation from Northern Ireland.

Bacchi summary

The overall summary of this policy document review uses Carol Bacchi's Framework, also known as What's the Problem Represented to Be (WPR) [30]. It is a critical policy analysis approach, with 6 questions that focus on the way problems are defined and understood, thereby impacting the solutions that are proposed and implemented.

What is the problem represented to be?

Food poverty is variously presented throughout the policy documents as problematic food affordability and/or accessibility; food insufficiency; a lack of varied food to maintain a healthy lifestyle; reliance on food banks; and exclusion from social and cultural participation.

An additional problem surrounding food poverty is the absence of data for population subgroups, meaning that the full extent and lived experience of food poverty are not understood.

What are the taken-for-granted assumptions about the problem?

The default solutions for food poverty include charitable food aid (food banks and social supermarkets), the conflation of food waste/surplus food and food poverty, and the idea that redistributing surplus food can resolve both.

What are the effects of representing the problem in this way?

Representing food poverty in this way can result in a failure to understand food poverty as a human rights issue, or to recognise the public sector as the duty bearer to ensure food access. In addition, conflating food poverty and food waste means that neither issue is given the attention or priority it deserves and requires in terms of time, capital and human resources. Meanwhile, efforts to reduce excess food production should be strengthened to make the food production system as efficient and cost-effective as possible, allowing economies of scale to benefit the entire food chain, including consumers.

The reliance on charitable food aid is problematic because not everyone who is in food poverty is able to – or chooses to – access food in this way. For this reason,

food bank use is a poor proxy for measuring food poverty as an issue and food banks as a solution. It is also important to have due regard for the mental health impact, stigma and lack of dignity surrounding accessing food in this manner.

Using the terms food poverty and food insecurity interchangeably may be viewed as beneficial in raising awareness that their existence highlights policy failure. However, using the terms interchangeably can be counterproductive, confusing or dilute their understanding by different audiences.

What are the alternative ways of representing the problem?

The “right to food” is an important alternative framing of the issue, as is making reference to “affordable food”, “hunger” and “nutrition security”. “Holiday hunger” has successfully gained traction across public policy and popular media sources. There is some nuance around “inequality”, “sustainable diets” and “food justice”, while some policy documents also suggest articulating a headline indicator in terms of quantifying the proportion of a household’s income spent on affording food. Meanwhile, the parent term of “poverty” needs to be considered.

What are the implications of these alternative representations for policy?

McDaniel [33] bemoans the use of unclear, deadened terminology such as “food insecure” (as well as other terms) that can sterilise conversations about the darker realities of life and rob the message of any sense of need or urgency, or notion that there is a genuine problem that must be solved.

Reframing the presentation of food poverty and food insecurity into human rights language would situate it as a citizens’ issue, which both governments on the island of Ireland have publicly committed to address via international declarations, treaties and Sustainable Development Goals. Associating food poverty with standards of living and health and wellbeing may be instrumental to this approach. The term “inequality” is accepted in human rights language and may serve the same purpose. “Hunger” is an emotive and comprehensible term that would secure policy attention and public empathy. The term “holiday hunger” resulted in a policy success (albeit temporary) by securing direct cash transfers as a substitute for school meals during

holiday periods and when schools were closed as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown.

“Nutrition security” may be understood as a somewhat less emotive, more clinical and more objective term than “hunger” which may secure policy attention without risking public outcry.

“Sustainable diets” may require a programme of public education to promote the social and economic pillars to the level of understanding currently enjoyed by the environmental agenda that has become interchangeable with sustainability.

“Food justice” is an interesting alternative term, included in Sustainable Food Places, which is sympathetic to tackling food poverty as a core priority.

The use of a specified proportion of household income would support earlier definitions for fuel poverty which has some synergy with food poverty due to the colloquialism of “heating or eating” commonly deployed in media and civic messaging.

Finally, it is worth considering whether there is a need for a specific term such as food poverty (or insecurity) if the fundamental issue is poverty itself which, if addressed, would simultaneously improve the situation of citizens experiencing food poverty.

This is approached in the Sustainable Development Goals where SDG2: No Poverty refers to *End(ing) poverty in all its forms everywhere*. However, the literature is not consensual on this point. There are commentators who frame food poverty simply as “poverty” with no qualifying noun, and who call for structural solutions to what they view as more than *just* a food issue. The 2020 report from the Expert Advisory Panel on Anti-Poverty makes this case poignantly:

“...hunger cannot be sustainably solved with the distribution of food parcels or emergency food aid. Food poverty can only be solved by a social security system which provides people with enough money to buy the food and essentials they need, by access to secure work, and wages that match the cost of living” [3, p.26].

However, others suggest that differentiating “food poverty” from the simple term “poverty” would allow for more specific consideration, policy attention and action as to how this aspect of poverty can be addressed. They cite the policy attention and resources allocated to tackling *fuel* poverty, which has been distinctly defined [34]. Certainly, in the UK, the efforts to secure measurement of food poverty and food insecurity in officially recognised government statistics were lauded as a massive step forward, that would provide authoritative evidence of the extent and causes of hunger. Perhaps, pragmatically speaking, individualistic and structural approaches should be brought together. It is common to read “poverty” reinforced with a subsequent use of “hunger” or “human rights”. This is because poverty and human rights (such as the right to food and social security) are interrelated, since poverty erodes or nullifies the rights to adequate food and other human rights [35]. This alternative approach uses language that can be incorporated as a recognisable policy target.

How can we disrupt the taken-for-granted assumptions about the problem?

This policy document review would suggest that there is merit in promoting the value of income-based/cash-first solutions. It also suggests dismantling the notion that charitable food aid is an acceptable and sustainable solution, given the evidence from North America where food banks have become institutionalised with no reduction in the prevalence of food insecurity.

Whatever action is taken, policy documents should go beyond merely *describing* the problem. They must instead propose and take urgent, radical and courageous action – to not just reduce food poverty but to eradicate it entirely, in fulfilment of international commitments to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. It is also important that an agreed term or form of words is used cross-departmentally, given that “food” is not owned by any one government department or agency. This will ensure that food poverty gets the policy attention it deserves through effective working partnerships.

By way of conclusion, policymakers must strive for a modern agri-food policy that protects the national food supply, providing a continuous and guaranteed food,

which offers choice and health at affordable prices while protecting our natural resources, crops, livestock and environmental assets.

This policy review found that food security is implied within a small number of whole-of-government policies (notably the Programmes for Government, social inclusion strategy, and children and young people strategies) and some dedicated cross-departmental policies (including the draft Food Strategy Framework for Northern Ireland and obesity prevention strategies on the island of Ireland). Indeed, the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework's vision is for a "transformed food system that protects natural resources for future generations, is economically and environmentally sustainable and provides safe, nourishing, accessible food to people, who make informed healthy choices."

This is a welcome articulation of the need for food policy to assign equal weight to interactions between diet and other social and economic dimensions. It is imperative that the social (people) pillar of sustainable development is not overlooked in official documents pertaining to food policy.

4 Broadcast news media analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents a narrative summary of the findings of the broadcast news media analysis. The summary elaborates themes mapped broadly under Entman's 4 framing functions [29], specifically: problem definition, causes/drivers, treatment recommendations, and moral evaluations. Key actors involved in the discourse are also considered. Key similarities and differences between Northern Ireland and Ireland will be considered under each aspect of Entman's framing functions. This has been presented in 2 core sections segregated by media type: (1) television, and (2) radio. A brief discussion follows the results, providing a summary of the key findings along with some interpretation and broader implications.

Television

Problem definition

All of the broadcast television materials defined the problem of food poverty and often did so in relation to a geopolitical event or a broader cost-of-living crisis. Food poverty was often framed as a problem in relation to the cost of living, which resulted in families having to make choices between the essentials of running a household and a family. As one news report notes:

“Demand for food is on the rise. The rising cost of living means that many parents have to prioritise how they spend their money. More than half are cutting back on fuel and petrol costs to put food on the table.” (RTÉ News, 22 February 2022)

Central to defining this problem was the recognition that food poverty was a growing issue that needed to be addressed.

“Almost 200 more families are in need of this [food service]. The highest waiting list figure the charity has ever seen.” (UTV, 11 November 2022)

One of the significant recurring definitions of the problem was the framing of food poverty as an issue that was particularly impacting children. In one instance on RTÉ, “holiday hunger” became incorporated into this, especially in the news coverage around school mid-term and Christmas breaks:

“Schools not only educate children, often they feed them too... So many of our children are fed here, that we’re worried about them for the next two weeks.” (RTÉ News, 16 December 2022)

BBC Northern Ireland similarly includes a specific anecdotal story into its framing to underpin the severity of food poverty for children, where a paediatrician comments:

“We have seen little 14-month-old infants here who are so hungry that when you offer them toast or milk, they stuff toast into their nappies because they know they are never going to see another bite. We’ve had 7-year-old children here who are so hungry, that when we give them Rice Krispies, they eat three bowls of them, then they eat toast and they’re worried: ‘Am I going to get another bite today?’” (BBC Northern Ireland, 10 November 2020)

Causes/drivers

Lack of government response, along with appropriate measures to offset the ramifications of food poverty at a government department level have been identified as a central factor causing food poverty in both Ireland and Northern Ireland:

“The government is losing control of the cost-of-living crisis, people are having to just choose between whether they go hungry or whether they pay rent.” (Virgin Media, 19 May 2022)

“[Interviewer:] Do our politicians get the seriousness of the situation?”

[Interviewee:] I think they’re beginning to get the seriousness of the situation. But I do think that they should have done a lot more before the crisis has erupted in

the way that it has or could have done. They should have identified issues with our Social Security system, which is a mechanism to help people directly and to actually make legislative changes there. We do have a devolved Social Security system, and we should be brave and bold with decisions around how we help people.” (UTV, 27 April 2022)

The specific situation around a lack of sitting government in Northern Ireland was positioned as a contributing factor towards food poverty. In one instance, a food drive was organised outside a Linfield football club, where a member of Northern Ireland food charity Foodstock noted that these kinds of drives were necessary “because of political failure at Stormont”. (RTÉ News, 17 November 2022)

However, the economic context also featured prominently in broadcasts from both regions. In particular, the rising cost of living was generally the overarching representational device through which each of these broadcasts framed the causes of food poverty:

“The Capuchin Centre said that this year was particularly busy as people are feeling the full effect of the rising cost of living.” (RTÉ News, 20 December 2022)

“You can never get anything at the usual price ... it just seems to be getting worse every day.” (BBC Northern Ireland, 19 October 2022)

Some of the coverage in this period also identified COVID-19 as a central factor in the increasing rates of food poverty nationally in Ireland, with this media focus being generated by the release of a Red C poll:

“Because of schools closures, families would have had to buy digital devices, which would have put strain on the household and then there’s also a greater use of gas and electricity with everyone at home and having people at home all day puts pressure on food.” (Virgin Media, 13 June 2022)

Similarly, the pressure of COVID-19 on food budgets accentuated food poverty issues in Northern Ireland:

“Happy healthy children will become happy, healthy, productive adults and that’s what we would like to see and we’d like to see that expedited as soon as possible. COVID-19 has made things a whole lot worse. So we think that

December '21 just isn't good enough." (BBC Northern Ireland, 10 November 2020)

While there are common trends across each of the regions, unique local factors also play a significant role, shaped by each area's distinct political and economic landscape. In Ireland, the homeless crisis was underlined as a central factor in contributing towards food poverty:

"On a national level, the Simon Community says that since the lifting of the eviction ban in Ireland last year, homelessness has been on the increase and that has led to more demands for food." (Virgin Media News, 8 December 2022)

The latter part refers to a government policy which removed protections for renters around evictions, and enabled landlords to issue tenants in private accommodation with a notice of termination. While the homeless crisis served as a causing factor in Ireland, the lack of government in Northern Ireland along with Brexit protocol negotiations were specific localised features of the reportage in Northern Ireland:

"[Reporter:] Beverley [a food bank user] believes the money would already be here if Stormont was up and running.

[Beverley:] This should have been done but now they're too busy working on protocols ... We need Stormont back." (UTV, 11 November 2022)

Treatment recommendations

Varying potential forms of treatment emerge across each of the broadcast materials. Long-term sustainable planning becomes a significant recommendation in managing food poverty. Government intervention was flagged as one of the most significant ways that the issue could be addressed:

"Volunteers [in Cork Penny Dinners] are now feeding more people than ever before. The government is being called upon to put measures in place to address the spiralling cost of living." (Virgin Media, 13 June 2022)

"While we want a food bank here, I don't think food banks are the answer. I think the money should be coming from government directly to those families." (UTV, 19 May 2021)

Food poverty requiring government intervention was a recurring theme, but how exactly this could be implemented was lacking in the coverage of both regions. A small number of broadcasts suggested increases in social welfare payments.

“There really needs to be measures brought in through social welfare increases to match the cost-of-living situation we have.” (RTÉ News, 20 December 2022)

In light of government failure, community endeavours were framed in the news reports as a necessary intervention to deal with food poverty. In this sense, community food drives, food banks and the charity sector were perceived as a form of treatment. These measures are often viewed as temporary and not long-term sustainable solutions, as noted by one food bank worker in Northern Ireland:

“And so we are trying to make sure that we look after them as best as we can and support them ... with food mind you, because we don't offer any other service than fresh food at this stage.” (UTV, 11 November 2022)

“In a survey, [St Vincent de Paul] found that almost 75% of volunteer and community groups working within the charity sector said that they are experiencing an unprecedented increase in demand for food from the public and 34% of those groups said they can't meet the basic food needs of their service.” (RTÉ News, 24 February 2022)

One recurring aspect was the fact that the community and volunteer sector is under significant pressure from the increase in food poverty. As a result, it needs to draw on local business to help meet the gaps:

“The preparation of over 6,000 hampers is a major challenge. We get assistance from a number of company workers in Limerick who help out as part of their corporate social responsibility.” (RTÉ News, 9 December 2021)

Reliance on community groups, the volunteer sector and local businesses was a recurring form of addressing food poverty, but also not a desirable long-term solution.

Another thread in treatment recommendations related to solutions targeted at individuals. These solutions focused less on resolving food poverty as a broader structural social issue. Instead, they emphasised how to manage it effectively at a

more micro or individual level. This approach prioritised informed choices and nutritional awareness. In one instance, a paediatrician discussed this:

“We give advice as to what to give them [children] to eat, you know, for iron deficiency, anaemia for example you know iron containing foods – green vegetables, red meat but these things are expensive... But if your choice is between cheap processed food to keep your children from being hungry and expensive nutritious food... the people that we’re seeing and treating every day, you know, they don’t have those options.” (BBC Northern Ireland, 10 November 2020)

“So, if we’re able to bring plenty ... and plenty of variety that we can expose our children to, that they may not have access to at home. Again, that’s opening the door to a far wider diet than they may have at home.” (BBC Northern Ireland, 30 April 2019)

While these micro-level issues around nutrition were folded into food poverty framing, most of the broadcast material noted that these solutions are not necessarily sustainable long-term.

Moral evaluations

Much of the broadcast content across Ireland and Northern Ireland noted 2 groups of people who access food banks: those who have been regular users and a growing population of people who have not needed to use food banks before. This second group incorporates the “working poor”, who, as the broadcasts suggest, through no fault of their own, have found themselves confronting the realities of food poverty:

“We are seeing issues within families that we have never seen before and even this week on Tuesday past, we have three families who have never been through our door ... So it’s affecting people who weren’t being affected before and that’s sad. Sixty-eight percent of the people who come through our door are in paid occupations. So it is not people on benefits who are coming to us, it’s mainly people on low pay and that’s an issue for us as well.” (BBC Northern Ireland, 14 February 2022)

“We had a very sad case recently of a man who came to the food bank because he had resorted to shop lifting to try and feed his kids. He had a job and he had an apartment. But he had to get his car fixed and because he did that, he didn’t have enough money to feed the children.” (RTÉ News, 20 October 2018)

There are several things at work in the way food poverty is framed. On the one hand, there is an emerging narrative of how food poverty can impact anyone – it is not just something that affects unemployed people who are on benefits. On the other hand, a label of “deservingness” emerges. This suggests those who work hard but cannot afford their bills deserve the help and goodwill of food banks, whereas those who are on social welfare do not. This moral schema appears across much broadcast content and suggests that food poverty is now more legitimate because it affects working people.

Many broadcasts deemed the situation of food poverty to be “shocking” and “disgraceful”, especially in relation to what could read as a framing of “innocent victims” of food poverty. In both Ireland and Northern Ireland, the situation of carers living in food poverty was highlighted, where the carer’s allowance and the time needed to look after a person with additional needs can result in people beginning to live in food poverty:

“She looks after her son with complex needs and her husband and she can’t work.” (UTV, 1 August 2022)

“Carers on low incomes are bearing the brunt of exceptionally high inflation, including a rapid rise in the cost of food and energy pushing them further below the poverty line.” (RTÉ News, 24 November 2022)

When the voices of those affected by food poverty are featured within news packages, appeals for sympathy form part of the framing:

“I put my begging hat on and it takes a lot out of me to actually do that. Begging from family or even friends. Can you sub me to Monday and then Monday comes and you pay that back and you realise you are sitting again with very little or nothing.” (UTV, 1 August 2022)

“It’s a great help, but the fact that I need this at my age, I shouldn’t have to.”

(RTÉ News, 30 December 2022)

These appeals for sympathy, while demonstrating the lived realities of food poverty, also underline the stigma and shame associated with it.

Actors

The television news broadcasts encompassed a myriad of actors in each of the news packages. Despite the inclusion of presenters, reporters and interviewers, a number of stakeholders were central in the construction of the food poverty stories.

Across both Ireland and Northern Ireland, food banks in local communities were often featured and, to a lesser extent, food bank users. These included Cork Penny Dinners, the Capuchin Centre, Simon MidWest in Ireland, and Foodstock and the Foyle Foodbank in Northern Ireland.

The charity and voluntary sector were similarly represented and included community centres, Dogs Trust, YMCA, Carers NI, as well as representatives in the context of children (for example, a paediatrician, a primary school principal, and representatives from Children NI and the Children’s Rights Alliance in Ireland).

Also featured were people talking about their observation and knowledge of how this affects other people (for example, children attending a youth club who donated to a food bank, members of the public, or a group such as a women’s group). They would relay second-hand or third-hand accounts of people affected, giving (often extreme) examples. Other people included: an international football player who wanted to show support to food bank workers, a lecturer, politicians, a cleric, a police spokesperson and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (either shown speaking at an event or being interviewed in the past).

People directly affected by food poverty and insecurity were included on some of the packages, but this was often minimal.

Radio

Problem definition

All the radio materials across Ireland and Northern Ireland defined the issue of food poverty. Generally, this was often done through the lens of a more local focus, or through a particular food charity or organisation dealing with a crisis at a micro or individual level. The radio package would then broaden its focus to examine the structural issues at a broader level which cause food poverty:

“Little Flower Penny Dinners on Dublin’s Meath Street has been providing meals for locals for over 100 years, but they’re now coping with a surge in demand.” (RTÉ Radio One, Drivetime, 11 August 2022)

“The Trussell Trust saw a record number of children fed over the Christmas period in what their chief executive described as their busiest period ever.” (BBC Radio Ulster, 7 January 2018)

In these instances, radio packages frame food poverty by highlighting local surges in demand. This framing also emphasises the significant pressures on small charities as a result of this growing need.

Somewhat unusually, one programme on RTÉ Radio One presented a detailed description of how food poverty is defined and measured, referencing indicators used as part of the Central Statistics Office’s Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC). The programme shared this information in these terms:

“There are three key deprivation factors. If you can’t afford a meal with meat or veggie equivalent every second day. If you can’t afford a weekly roast dinner. And if you missed a meal in the last week due to a lack of money.” (RTÉ Radio One, 11 August 2022)

As noted in this excerpt, this radio show provided an explicit definition of food poverty.

One of the radio reports from RTÉ Radio One specifically defined the problem of food poverty in relation to retailers and their price points. It highlighted how particular

grocery stores were taking advantage of the cost-of-living crisis and inflating to increase food prices and their profits:

“Earlier, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Simon Coveney said the coalition is ‘not happy’ about the increasing cost of food and he expects to see reduction in prices as inflation falls.” (RTÉ Radio One, 10 May 2023)

In this instance, the radio packages saw the government shift the blame away from a lack of legislative intervention and direct it more explicitly towards the retailers.

Much of the radio programming also defined the problem of food poverty in relation to time. Christmas and the winter months were identified as a key issue in worsening problems relating to food poverty. Frequent references were made to Christmas and colder months. Where Christmas was mentioned, it was the interviewer or reporter who was most likely to make direct reference to it and this was often done at the start and/or end of the item:

“The Christmas rush has brought on a lot of pressures to families ...” (RTÉ Radio One, 21 December 2018)

Some of the radio coverage noted that food poverty was an issue that represented the failure of modern society and tended to underline the problem as human society regressing to previous societal failures:

“Nurses going on strike. Petrol prices rocketing. Heating bills even bigger. The rising cost of food. It could be the 1970s, but the cost-of-living crisis is very much real in 2022.” (BBC Radio Ulster, 13 November 2022)

Causes and drivers

The cause of food poverty is given significant consideration across each of the radio packages. Drivers of food poverty centred on predominantly upstream macro-level factors.

One of the major issues, highlighted particularly by left-wing parties appearing as panellists or featuring in radio package reports, is the inadequacy of social welfare payments and minimum wage. This is usually accompanied by calls for both issues to be addressed at a policy level. As Labour Party TD Ged Nash notes:

“To deal with the rising cost of food prices, a simple solution is to increase social welfare payments along with the minimum wage. Without doing either, there really won’t be any effective change” (RTÉ Radio One, 8 February 2023)

In the case of BBC Radio Ulster in Northern Ireland, the cause of food poverty has similarly been attributed to the wage situation where wage increases have not aligned with inflation rates:

“What we’ve seen is undoubtedly a situation where over the last 10 years, as compared to the past, where we took it for granted that year on year, most people would work or find their living standard was growing. They were getting an annual wage increase, higher than the increase of prices and that stopped happening over the last decade. Now it’s something that many of your listeners will be familiar with, but obviously if you started from a lower position, the impact of that is even more harsh.” (BBC Radio Ulster, 10 December 2017)

The Northern Ireland radio coverage, much like the television coverage reported above, framed the government paralysis in Stormont as a central contributing factor towards the food poverty crisis:

“And at the minute, because of the paralysis of government, we are seeing no help. So that is what I would like to focus on, the fact that we are seeing no help and we are in a complete leadership vacuum and everybody will suffer because of that.” (BBC Radio Ulster, 13 November 2022)

More specific groups are identified within the radio packages, such as the Traveller community in ., who experience particularly acute instances of food poverty due to broader discrimination within the Irish state:

“10% of Traveller children are going to bed hungry as a result of poverty and social exclusion.” (Newstalk, 7 December 2020)

More generally, the radio packages, as with television broadcasts, pinpoint the broader political-economic context as a central contributing factor in the significant increases of food poverty:

“The Ukraine War, COVID and Brexit have created a perfect storm, where people just can’t seem to get a break, and food prices just continue to increase.” (RTÉ Radio 1, 1 February 2023)

Factors also include policy-level issues which determine minimum wage and social welfare rates; increasing inflation; and, , significant social, political and economic factors nationally and internationally.

Treatment recommendation

Most radio packages identified increased targeted measures and supports as central strategies in improving the conditions around food poverty:

“Additional targeted supports are required for people outside of regular government budgets.” (RTÉ Radio One, 8 February 2023)

Measures varied but generally included provision of a back-to-school allowance. Help with costs for school uniforms and books allowed families to put more money towards their food budgets. Other measures included a cap on food price increases for retailers, along with a higher minimum wage and increased social welfare payments.

Community responses were often framed as part of food poverty solutions, such as food banks and community centres providing hot meals. However, many of the radio programmes tended to frame these community responses as requiring broader structural treatment:

“Can food banks help people move out of poverty, or are they just about ensuring survival? The North-West Foodbank in Strabane is about to pilot a new project which seeks to do more than just simply feed people. The food bank is a crisis intervention method.” (BBC Radio Ulster, 7 January 2018)

“The community centres can only deal with so much of the demand, this cannot be a long-term solution and a better strategy is needed nationally to tackle this.” (RTÉ Radio One, 6 March 2021)

Pathways out of these community responses were thus central to the framing of the treatment recommendations. Much of the radio coverage acknowledged that current community-based responses, while honourable, were a less-than-ideal solution.

The radio packages – unlike the television broadcasts – encouraged listeners who may be going through food poverty not be afraid to ask for help and emphasised that help was available:

“And there’s no shame in saying, ‘I can’t afford something right now.’ I think that possibly needs to become the social norm.” (BBC Radio Ulster, 6 December 2021)

“If you are struggling, and you do need something and even don’t want to be seen, just give us a call and we can go from there. Ask for help, there is no shame in it.” (Newstalk, 6 February 2023)

As these examples demonstrate, the framing attempted to shift attitudes towards seeking help and looked to remove narratives of shame and stigma. A less commonly expressed recommendation, but one aiming to provide short-term solutions for people finding themselves in food poverty for the first time, was to provide education in how to manage limited resources:

“It’s maybe more so about being clever with how you shop and moving away from big brands to the retailers’ own brands, which can result in big savings for consumers.” (RTÉ Radio One, 15 September 2022)

What is notable about these treatment recommendations is the fact that media coverage appears to be mainstreaming and normalising the issues of food poverty. Food poverty has become such a structural issue that lifestyle changes need to be a significant part of the news coverage. One of the radio packages from BBC Northern Ireland referred to this as “wraparound services”, so the food bank cannot be the only form of treatment that is provided to people living with food poverty:

“Wraparound services are education, skills, training, budget planning, cooking programmes. It’s a vast, vast array of various wraparound services. And we feel that is the aim, and that’s how it’s going to work. That’s how it’s going to lead people ... into pathways, out of poverty.” (BBC Radio Ulster, 7 January 2018)

The wraparound services and pathways out of poverty approach proved to be a recurring treatment recommendation in both regions:

“This is a very real issue for many people and we need to put a pipeline in place to get people out of the dire situations that they are living through.” (Newstalk, 7 December 2020)

Generally speaking, while these varying treatment recommendations were noted across both Ireland and Northern Ireland. News reports tended to position specific recommendations within broader political and economic solutions.

Moral evaluations

The universality of food poverty and the ways in which it could affect anyone at any time was one of the most recurring threads across both regions. This was often conveyed through framing food poverty in relation to households where there was one person or more who was working. A lot of the radio coverage was dedicated to focusing on working people who are affected by food poverty. One headline from BBC Radio Ulster noted:

“In work, in debt and queuing at a food bank.” (BBC Radio Ulster, 10 December 2017)

Similarly in the context of Ireland, working people were considered as being increasingly vulnerable to falling into the “poverty trap”:

“As working people try to keep their head above water, the rising cost of food prices means that the risk of falling into the poverty trap continues to be a very real threat.” (Newstalk, 23 September 2022)

Although loaded, emotive language is used here to frame food poverty – in particular, through the use of the words “trap” and “threat” – the report goes some way to frame working people as innocent victims as of circumstances far beyond their control:

“If you’ve just joined us on Sunday Sequence, I’d just like to remind you that we’re discussing poverty and why even a job offers no protection against it in the twenty-first century.” (BBC Radio Ulster, 10 December 2017)

The terms “new poor” and “working poor” emerge as a vernacular of much of the radio reportages’ representational strategy. This develops a moral approach that

suggests the “working new poor” are more respectable or “victimised” than other people living with food poverty.

Another significant facet of the framing concerns societal failure, both economically and politically. This is often seen in the various actors participating in the radio coverage asking questions along the lines of:

“How have we got here?” (BBC Radio Ulster, 10 December 2017).

“What might seem like a throwback to the 1970s is actually very much a reality in the 2020s.” (RTÉ Radio One, 15 September 2022)

“It’s just awful, you work hard and you try to provide for your kids, only for everything to constantly be working against you. We just can’t get a break.” (RTÉ Radio One, 7 March 2022)

These comments tended to come from politicians, people affected by food poverty and from journalists’ narrations. Talking about food poverty as a form of societal decline demonstrated how material deprivation is an indicator of how society has failed to create an appropriate environment for people to live sustainably, with choice around food consumption.

As a means of evaluating the magnitude of the problem, disbelief and shock were often expressed. Expressions of disbelief were used by an actor to convey their own shame at being part of a society where this existed. Alternatively, their views can be interpreted as occupying a high moral ground insofar, that they were willing to “put their head above the parapet” to talk about the issue:

“It should be a basic human right to be able to purchase the essentials in life that your family need.” (BBC Radio Ulster, 29 November 2017)

“There is something outrageous, absolutely outrageous, about us paying 40 billion to leave the European Union and there are people in homes in our province who have nothing in their larders. This is obscene.” (BBC Radio Ulster, 10 December 2017)

In one instance on BBC Radio Ulster, one of the participants expressed what he regarded as the unpopular (but, in his view, reasonably well accepted) point that people need to be educated into living within their means:

“But I think maybe there’s a difficult point to make here, maybe not a popular one. There’s an element of behaviour in this. People can sometimes make their own situation worse. And whilst it’s easy in the sort of comfort of the studio to say, you know, people should be careful about taking on extra debt, there’s a sense in which we should all be very careful about taking on extra debt. And some of this is also, I think, linked to a question about people’s aspirations, about what they want to consume. Whereas 50 or 100 years ago, certainly people would have said, ‘Look, I’ll wait before I buy whatever that item is’, if it existed then. Now, there’s a sort of feeling of: ‘Right, I want it now.’” (BBC Radio Ulster, 10 December 2017)

In this instance, there was the emergence of a moral judgement of sorts. It suggested that societal failures needed to be normalised to the extent that ordinary people would need to strategise in their own lives to avoid falling into food poverty.

Actors/contributors

The radio material was much more diverse in terms of the range of contributors that were included in their broadcasts. In addition to the presenters and reporters, a number of stakeholders were central in the construction of the food poverty stories. Across both Ireland and Northern Ireland, food banks in local communities were a recurring theme – and, to a lesser extent, food bank users. Additional actors included food bank (or similar) representatives; representatives from an organisation within which the food bank operated; people employed by agencies such as Citizens Advice; political or economic spokespersons; others (including cleric, lecturer, student and business owners).

Various actors contributed to the discussion within the context in Ireland. These included newspaper journalists reporting on the issue and participating in radio programmes. Additionally, politicians from left-leaning parties such as the Green Party, Labour and the Social Democrats, were also involved. Some specific community groups who had particular experience of food poverty also featured, such as the Traveller group Pavee Point and the Roma Centre.

Summary

Both television and radio coverage of food poverty covered the political and social dynamics of food poverty, with both identifying failing government action and the cost-of-living crisis as central contributing factors. Both framed food poverty less as personal failure due to a lack of hard work and lack of individual motivation, and more as a significant societal issue that can affect anyone. This was evident in the increased use of the terms “working poor” or “new poor”.

The media conventions relevant to television and radio lead to some variety around how food poverty is framed and communicated. In the case of television broadcast content, food poverty is usually represented in the context of a news package of around 3 minutes. This generally presents the issues with commentary from some relevant social actors. These tend to be bite-sized and shaped by the imperatives of programming conventions and the television schedule.

However, radio programmes offer more space for more complex and nuanced discussions of food poverty as a current pressing social issue. This also often includes a wide range of voices, through panel participation, that can shape the discussion about issues relating to food poverty. For example, on one of the radio packages on RTÉ Radio One, there was discussion over the necessity for a mini-budget to tackle the issues of food poverty and this encompassed varying politicians and journalists from the Green Party, Labour and *The Sunday Times*. The format of shows on radio had more flexibility in structure, as well as the number and diversity of voices. As a result, there was far more variety in terms of the treatment recommendations in the radio packages than there was in the context of television.

Audio-visual elements also had varying notable dynamics. The inclusion of the voices of those most affected by food poverty was more frequent across radio than it was on television. This could have been down to any number of reasons, but television, as a visual medium, does not confer as much anonymity to potential participants. Participants on television broadcasts were often framed through over-the-shoulder shots, with the camera facing the news reporter. While providing anonymity, this representational strategy also implicitly confers shame and stigma on those living in food poverty.

Another feature of both television and radio segments was providing information for food-insecure households to manage their food budgets and mitigate against food poverty. While food insecurity was not explicitly mentioned, a spectrum of food insecurity was evident – from worrying about food access, to children going through hunger, and, to a lesser extent, the quality of food people eat when experiencing food poverty.

What was interestingly absent, albeit with a number of exceptions noted in the findings, was the lack of media coverage framing food poverty with poor health outcomes, given that food poverty and poverty more generally, has a detrimental effect on a population's health. Solution-oriented recommendations were missing from most of the broadcast materials, with some exceptions.

5 Print news media analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents a narrative summary of the findings of the print news media analysis. First sample characteristics and frequency of reporting are described. A summary of results is then presented elaborating themes under Entman's 4 framing functions, specifically: problem definition; causes/drivers: treatment recommendations; and moral evaluations. Consideration of key actors involved in the discourse is also given. Key similarities and differences between Ireland and Northern Ireland, and between type of newspaper publication, are outlined. Finally, a brief discussion summarises the key findings.

Study objectives

The primary objective of this study is to determine the level and framing of newspaper coverage of food poverty and insecurity on the island of Ireland. A secondary objective is to assess differences in newspaper framing of food poverty and insecurity between Ireland and Northern Ireland, and national and regional/local newspapers.

Results

Sample characteristics

Of the 823 articles screened, 81 (10%) met the eligibility criteria for inclusion in the study. The number of news articles included varied by newspaper (see table 3). Over half the articles were from newspapers published in Ireland (60%, n=49), with

40% (n=32) from newspapers published in Northern Ireland. Regional/local newspapers accounted for 65% (n=53) of the total sample of articles, with national newspapers representing 35% (n=28) of articles. Most national newspapers were broadsheet (82%, n=23), with tabloid newspapers accounting for 18% (n=5). Of the total sample of articles, 54% (n=44) were news stories, 40% (n=32) feature articles and 6% (n=5) opinion pieces. The *Belfast Telegraph* was responsible for the largest proportion of articles (27%, n=22), followed by *The Irish Times* (14%, n=11).

The number of news articles fluctuated by year and month (see figure 1). The largest proportion of articles was published in the year 2022 (33%, n=27), followed by 2020 (23%, n=19). December was the most frequent month of publication, accounting for 23% (n=19) of the total sample of articles. The lowest proportion of articles was published in January (1%, n=10), followed by the months March, April, May and August which each contributed to 5% (n=4) of the total articles. The month with the highest number of included articles was July 2022 (n=7), followed by December 2022 (n=5) and December 2020 (n=5).

The peak in July 2022 resulted from both reactive and proactive reporting on food poverty. The reactive reporting consisted of the latest statistics from recently published reports, such as the Report on Food Poverty: Government Programmes, Schemes and Supports and the Child Poverty Monitor. Articles with proactive reporting provided more in-depth reporting on the problem, its drivers and solutions – for example, discussions around the expansion of the social supermarket programme to tackle the cost-of-living crisis.

Framing of food poverty

A narrative summary of themes under Entman's 4 framing functions is presented below. Key differences in these themes by newspaper and territory type are also presented. A threshold of $\geq 25\%$ was used to define difference across themes. Table 25 in Appendix 3 illustrates the frequencies of articles mapped to Entman's theory, including themes under each function, and by newspaper territory (Northern Ireland or Ireland), and type (national or regional/local).

Table 6: Number of included articles by newspaper title, territory, coverage and category

Newspaper title	Number of articles (%)	Territory	Coverage	Category
Belfast Telegraph	22 (27)	NI	Regional	Broadsheet
Bray People	1 (1)	IE	Regional	ND
Corkman	1 (1)	IE	Regional	Tabloid
Irish Daily Mail	3 (4)	IE	National	Tabloid
Derry Journal	10 (12)	NI	Regional	Tabloid
Enniscorthy Guardian	1 (1)	IE	Regional	ND
The Herald	2 (2)	IE	National	Tabloid
Irish Examiner	9 (12)	IE	National	Broadsheet
Irish Independent	3 (4)	IE	National	Broadsheet
The Irish Times	11 (14)	IE	National	Broadsheet
Limerick Leader	1 (1)	IE	Regional	Broadsheet
The Echo/Evening Echo	10 (12)	IE	Regional	Tabloid
Westmeath Examiner	3 (4)	IE	Regional	Broadsheet
Wexford People	3 (4)	IE	Regional	Tabloid
Your Lurgan	1 (1)	IE	Regional	ND
Total	81 (100)			

NI, Northern Ireland. IE, Ireland. ND, no data.

Communicating food poverty on the island of Ireland

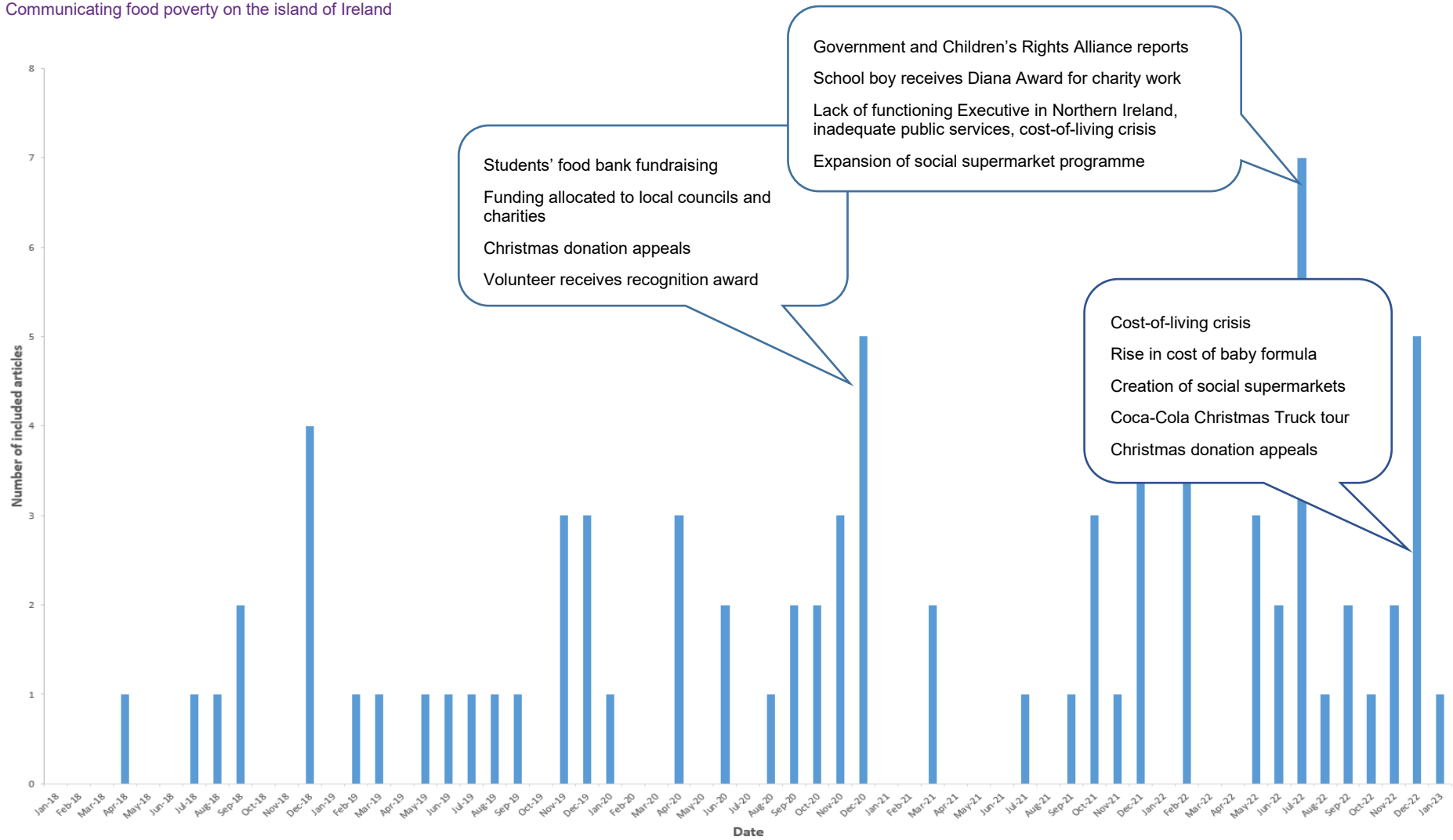


Figure 1: Newspaper article frequency in Ireland and Northern Ireland (2018–present), peak months and top stories

Figure 1 shows the frequency of articles published in newspapers in Ireland and Northern Ireland since 2018, and details the stories covered in the 3 months with the highest number of publications. Figure 1 contains a bar chart showing the number of articles with food poverty as a topic published per month between January 2018 and January 2023:

- In 2018, nine articles were published: one each in April, July, and August; two in September; and four in December.
- In 2019, 13 articles were published: one each in February, March, May, June, July, August, and September; and three each in November and December.
- In 2020, 19 articles were published: one in January; three in April; two in June; one in August; two each in September and October; three in November; and five in December.
- In 2021, 12 articles were published: two in March; one each in July and September; three in October; one in November; and four in December.
- From January 2022 to the end of January 2023, 28 articles were published: four in February; three in March; two in June; seven in July; one in August; two in September; one in October; two in November; five in December; and one in January 2023.

The bar chart also contains three labels, marking the months with the highest proportion of articles, specifically December 2020, July 2022, and December 2022.

These labels outline the subjects of the reporting during these months:

- In December 2020, articles were published on: Students food bank fundraising; Funding allocated to local councils and charities; Christmas donation appeals; and Volunteer receives recognition award.
- In July 2022, articles were published on: Government and Children's Rights Alliance reports; Schoolboy receives Diana award for charity work; Lack of functioning Executive in NI, inadequate public services, cost-of-living crisis; Expansion of social supermarket programme.
- In December 2022, articles were published on: Cost-of-living crisis; Rise in cost of baby formula; Creation of social supermarkets; Coca-Cola Christmas truck tour; Christmas donation appeals.

Problem definition

The term “food poverty” was used across most articles, with limited use of the term “food insecurity”.

Across most news articles, food poverty was largely defined as a limited quantity of food available for children and adults. It was also described in terms of its symptoms, such as hunger and skipping meals. A greater proportion of these articles was published in national newspapers compared with regional/local newspapers:

“Then we have had children over time literally ravenous, literally taking it with their hands, they can’t get enough of it into their mouths and can’t get it in quick enough.” (Chef at Barnardos, quoted in the *Irish Examiner*, 23 February 2022)

A few articles referred to the term “hidden hunger” to define the extent of stigma around food poverty linked to other people knowing – with food poverty not always being visible:

“One of the key challenges in addressing food poverty is that it’s not always visible. There is a lot of ‘hidden hunger’ around us, where people are trying to do their best and avoid the stigma of food poverty.” (Chief Specialist in Nutrition with Safefood quoted in the *Irish Examiner*, 30 September 2021)

A few articles used the term “holiday hunger” to define the extent and timing of child food poverty:

“Hundreds of thousands of children in Northern Ireland run the risk of going hungry this Christmas when school holidays mean school dinners are no longer on the menu, it has been warned ... And now CiNI [Children in Northern Ireland] is asking all political parties to commit to ending child and family poverty and to make it a priority as well as urging local businesses to provide vital financial support to its Holiday Hunger projects to help the organisation ultimately achieve its end goal of ‘ending holiday hunger’.” (*Belfast Telegraph*, 11 December 2019)

News articles frequently presented charity and food bank usage as synonymous with food poverty and as an indication of the severity of the problem on the island of Ireland:

“The broadcaster paid a visit to the People’s Kitchen on the Springfield Road, a project launched last September as more people find themselves homeless and rely on food banks to get by. He saw at first-hand how food parcels are prepared every day, with around 200 families and individuals being helped each week.”

(*Belfast Telegraph*, 3 July 2021)

Some articles made mention of diet quality, illustrated by consumption of typically “healthy” foods such as fruit and vegetables:

“While volunteering at a food bank, he said he felt compelled to act when one man told him he didn’t remember the last time he ate fresh fruit.”

(*Belfast Telegraph*, 24 December 2020)

Across some news articles, food poverty and charity usage were used to illustrate poverty and deprivation:

“Thousands of the country’s poorest children are at risk of ‘holiday hunger’ if free school meals programmes are not extended – or substituted – through the summer, child advocates warn.”

(*The Irish Times*, 11 June 2020)

There was limited emphasis on the social participatory aspect of food with only 2 articles reporting on this topic, corresponding with the publication of a research report by Safefood:

“A healthy diet is more expensive than appreciated by many. Research by Safefood, published in September, looks at the minimum cost of a socially acceptable healthy diet for six household ‘types. It found 2020 costs ranged from €48 for a single adult in an urban area, to €169 for a two-parent, two-child household (rural).”

(*The Irish Times*, 2 July 2019)

Consequences

News articles frequently reported on the mental and social consequences of food poverty for individuals. This included anxiety, shame (leading to internalised stigma), reluctance to seek help, social isolation and despair (leading to suicidal ideation):

“It’s the anxiousness that you can feel. When you’re anxious you’re in the moment all the time, you’re living from hour to hour, day to day. It’s different from stress.”

(Trustee of Crosscare quoted in *The Irish Times*, 28 November 2022)

There was also recognition within news articles of the physical health consequences of food poverty. These included malnutrition, obesity, non-communicable diseases (such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes), stunted growth, poor dentition and serious illness:

“Let’s start with the children. You hear about stunted growth, rotten teeth, diabetes and malnourishment. All of those things are prevalent.” (Founder of LifeHub NI quoted in the *Belfast Telegraph*, 24 December 2020)

Some articles reported on how families distributed scarce food, with parents cutting back to ensure children were fed, in order to cope with food poverty:

“Some parents who we support tell me that they’ll always make sure their children have a decent meal but that means the parent is going without a meal. They might have a sandwich instead.” (National Policy Manager for Barnardos quoted in *The Irish Times*, 26 November 2022)

A few articles mentioned educational underachievement for children and unsafe feeding methods for babies:

“We know that families experiencing food poverty resort to unsafe feeding methods, such as stretching out time between feeds and watering down formula. The government cannot stand by as babies are placed at risk of malnutrition and serious illness due to the cost-of-living crisis and the soaring price of infant formula.” (Chief Executive of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service quoted in the *Derry Journal*, 6 December 2022)

Causes and drivers

Drivers of food poverty centred predominantly on societal, economic and political factors, including insufficient income, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and government policies. Coverage of these factors was evident in 65% of articles, compared to 20% of articles which referenced individual level factors. Articles which focused predominantly on these drivers of food poverty tended to be found in national newspapers and in those published in Ireland.

News articles frequently discussed the impacts of the high cost of living on families and individuals’ ability to afford food and other essentials. This was frequently cited

as a reason for food poverty among the “working poor”. A greater proportion of these articles was from national newspapers and those published in Ireland:

“The founder of a local food poverty charity is receiving more and more calls from seemingly ‘well to do’ working families struggling to feed their children due to the cost of living.” (*Westmeath Examiner*, 25 June 2022)

Across some news articles, low wages and unstable incomes were cited as reasons for food poverty, especially among the “working poor”. Low wages were more likely to be reported as a contributing factor in national newspapers compared with regional/local newspapers:

“... many nurses were struggling five days out from pay day.” (Member of the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation Executive Council quoted in the *Irish Examiner*, 7 May 2022)

Some news articles cited unemployment (for example, due to job loss) or no paid work (for example, homemakers) as other reasons for food poverty:

“I have three young children and I had to give up my job due to childcare costs. Ever since then, it has just been downhill and I’m finding myself struggling more and more as the weeks go on.” (Member of public experiencing food poverty quoted in *Westmeath Examiner*, 25 February 2022)

The costs associated with Christmas were also cited in some articles as contributing to food poverty:

“Concerns have been raised at the number of children, young people and parents who will have no food on the table during the festive season amid the additional stress and pressure on parents of buying Christmas presents and toys.” (*Belfast Telegraph*, 11 December 2019)

Other factors less frequently cited as direct reasons for food poverty included: issues of accessibility (for example, living in rural areas), homelessness problems (for example, no access to cooking facilities), school and service closure during pandemic, domestic abuse, food chain supply issues, and poverty in general.

The COVID-19 pandemic – and the resulting economic fallout – was frequently cited as one of the drivers of food poverty. This was regularly attributed as a reason for individuals experiencing food poverty and engaging with services for the first time:

“Barnardos saw an increase in the number of families needing help during the pandemic. ‘We were experiencing people coming to us looking for help who had never come before.’” (Chief Executive Officer of Barnardos quoted in the *Irish Independent*, 22 February 2022)

Specific policy-level drivers of food poverty were more likely to be a focus of articles published in national newspapers compared with regional/local newspapers. Articles frequently pointed to issues with the social welfare system, such as inadequate welfare payments, benefit sanctions and delays in COVID-19 pandemic payments:

“Kerri Smith, Associate Director of children’s services at Barnardos, said in the last two weeks of January, some families came to the centre on a Wednesday, the day before social welfare payments, as they had no money left and had to decide between heat or light or buying food.” (Associate Director of Children’s Services at Barnardos quoted in the *Irish Examiner*, 23 February 2022)

Other policy-level drivers less frequently linked to food poverty, included: absence of school meals scheme, austerity measures, no functioning Executive in Northern Ireland, inadequate public services and underfunding of third level education:

“The absence of free school meals is even more important during holiday periods as family budgets are even more stretched.” (Chief Executive of Children in Northern Ireland quoted in the *Belfast Telegraph*, 6 September 2018)

Individual factors, such as disability, illness, money management and substance abuse or addiction were mentioned in some articles as contributing to food poverty:

“At Purple House Cancer Care, we support individuals and families that are affected by cancer. By working with FoodCloud, we are able to deliver food out to families. Many of the families we support are attending hospital for treatment and when they return home, the last thing they can think of is going to the supermarket to buy food to feed themselves and their children. Our deliveries of food ensure that a family living with cancer has food in the fridge to feed

themselves.” (Volunteer chef at Purple House Cancer Support Centre quoted in *Bray People*, 2 December 2021)

Other factors less frequently linked to food poverty, included housing insecurity, inflation (due to the war in Ukraine) and forced migration:

“It’s clear the housing emergency is worsening and driving a new level of deprivation that is leading to not just homelessness, but also hunger.” (Chief Executive Officer of Doras quoted in the *Irish Examiner*, 15 October 2022)

Treatment recommendations

Solutions to food poverty were reported as currently existing, and/or proposed but not yet enacted. Charitable actions such as food banks dominated reporting (78%) and there was a lesser focus on structural or policy solutions (38%).

Charity-based solutions

Existing solutions to food poverty reported within articles were predominantly led by the third sector and charity-based, and were described as providing food and other supports to those in need. Food banks were most often mentioned as a charitable solution:

“The role being played by food banks across Northern Ireland has never been more vital to families in need. Rising inflation, in combination with soaring household costs due to the energy bill crisis and a real wages fall means the numbers of those arriving at food banks is growing, and increasing fast.” (*Belfast Telegraph*, 12 February 2022)

Redistribution of food waste initiatives were also commonly reported as a charitable solution, with surplus food from retailers redistributed to food banks and other charity initiatives. A greater proportion of articles which focused on redistribution of food waste initiatives were from newspapers published in Northern Ireland:

“Asda FareShare is a collaboration between the supermarket giant and the hunger charity that diverts surplus products appearing at the retailer’s depot level to people in need.” (*Belfast Telegraph*, 12 February 2022)

Some news articles reporting on social supermarkets as a charity-based solution, described as providing access to discounted food to those in need:

“We opened Northern Ireland’s first social supermarket in 2017 and through the charity FareShare, which accesses surplus stock from Tesco, Asda and Lidl, we can sell good, in-date food to our members at 50 to 70% below supermarket prices.” (Chief Executive Officer at Footprints Women’s Centre quoted in the *Belfast Telegraph*, 25 March 2021)

Over a third of news articles that reported on charity-based solutions acknowledged the need for structural solutions to combat the root causes of food poverty. These articles tended to emanate from national newspapers compared with regional/local newspapers:

“Food banks do all they can to help families in Northern Ireland over the summer and many run holiday clubs to support parents who find that their income simply won’t stretch to meet the extra pressure of missing free school meals or paying for extra childcare ... But no charity can replace the dignity of having enough money for the basics ... one step would be to end the five-week wait for a first Universal Credit payment, which the charity said is a key driver of increased need at food banks.” (Area Manager for The Trussell Trust in Northern Ireland quoted in the *Belfast Telegraph*, 27 June 2019)

Structural solutions

Structural solutions to food poverty were often mentioned within news articles – although to a lesser extent than charitable solutions. Articles published in national newspapers were more likely to reference structural solutions compared with regional/local newspapers.

The most frequently reported structural solution to food poverty, both currently existing and proposed, included the provision of free school and holiday meals:

“We know the school meals programme is one effective way of reaching very vulnerable children ... We are calling for its extension through the summer months to help support families who are bearing the weight of this public health crisis and, ultimately, prevent children going hungry. Holiday hunger isn’t

acceptable.” (Chief Executive of the Children’s Rights Alliance quoted in *The Irish Times*, 11 June 2020)

Other structural solutions less frequently mentioned within news articles included calls for welfare reform and policies to tackle poverty:

“The Government should consider proofing social welfare payments against rising living costs.” (Chief Executive Officer of Barnardos quoted in the *Irish Examiner*, 22 February 2022)

A few articles called for other structural solutions to be implemented. Specific actions included: increasing nurses’ pay, a government cost-of-living package, COVID-19 pandemic recovery plan, free childcare for families on lower incomes, a nationwide rent freeze, income security, increased student assistance fund/grant, an increased minimum wage, and addressing homelessness.

Individual interventions

Interventions targeted at individuals experiencing food poverty were less frequently discussed across news articles. Those that were mentioned included skills-based such as cooking and budgeting – often provided through charity and other community initiatives:

“Moffatt says that some of the ways charities can help are by arming people with life skills such as cooking and budgeting. While charities understand that most people they support are already budgeting, there are people who need support with that and other life skills.” (National Policy Manager for Barnardos quoted in *The Irish Times*, 26 November 2022)

Other reported solutions

Other solutions to food poverty mentioned less frequently across news articles included those targeted at the general public. These included public activism and raising awareness of food poverty to help reduce the stigma around it, and putting food poverty on the agenda for politicians and policymakers:

“Everyone has been affected by the Coronavirus, how we live, interact, educate and work. We wanted to support local families in need, Christmas brings added pressures and if we can alleviate some of that pressure then we must try to do

so. We know our actions will not end food poverty and austerity, this is also about students demonstrating the importance of activism and raising awareness, acknowledging that lobbying is key to ensuring these issues are a priority for our politicians and policy makers.” (Senior Lecturer and the Subject Lead for Social Work at Ulster University quoted in the *Derry Journal*, 30 December 2020)

A few articles called for enhancing interagency collaboration to tackle the problem of food poverty:

“At *safefood*, we build partnerships across the island to encourage a joined-up public health approach so that changes are easier to make.” (Chief Specialist in Nutrition with *safefood* quoted in the *Irish Examiner*, 30 September 2021)

Moral evaluations

The news coverage often evoked the idea of “deservingness” by portraying recipients of charity or government assistance as desperate, typically families with children. These individuals were presented as having been thrust into difficult situations beyond their control, such as those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, thus forcing them to seek support:

“The role being played by foodbanks across Northern Ireland has never been more vital to families in need. Rising inflation, in combination with soaring household costs due to the energy bill crisis and a real wages fall means the numbers of those arriving at foodbanks is growing, and increasing fast.” (*Belfast Telegraph*, 12 February 2022)

The “working poor” and “people like us” were also depicted in news coverage, conveying that food poverty was an issue that reached, to some extent, across different social classes:

“As a nurse who lives in the Midlands, I can tell you that nurses are not immune to food poverty. At least six nurses are receiving assistance from food banks. This is shocking in 2022.” (General nurse at Tullamore Hospital quoted in the *Irish Independent*, 7 May 2022)

News articles depicted the stark choices faced by individuals and families experiencing food poverty when deciding how to spend their money. A greater

proportion of this type of news article was published in national newspapers than in regional/local newspapers:

“... in the last two weeks of January, some families came to the centre on a Wednesday, the day before social welfare payments, as they had no money left and had to decide between heat or light or buying food.” (Associate Director of Children’s Services at Barnardos quoted in the *Irish Examiner*, 23 February 2022)

A strong sense of shock and outrage associated with the existence of hunger in Ireland was evident across news coverage. Food poverty was presented as not compatible with modern-day living and its existence as unacceptable:

“Thousands of children are missing out on the main meals of the day or eating less nutritious food ... Good nutrition is vital for the development of children and young people and those who do not receive it are at a disadvantage ... That is unacceptable in this day and age and our local political parties need to help put a stop to this.” (Chief Executive of Children in Northern Ireland quoted in the *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 December 2019)

The altruism of fundraisers and donors (such as selflessness, kind-heartedness and compassion) was highlighted as a positive attribute across news reporting. Articles which reported on these positive attributes tended to emanate from regional/local newspapers and those published in Northern Ireland:

“... the virtual army of volunteers who nobly give up their time to look out for those who are worse off.” (*Belfast Telegraph*, 14 November 2019)

The rewards for volunteers and fundraisers (such as feelings of joy, pleasure and fulfilment) were also evident in media reporting:

“I never could have imagined that the small ideas I came up with in my bedroom to keep me active and raise some money for two worthy charities could grow so big or have such a massive impact on the lives of people across the UK. I didn’t do it for reward, I just wanted to help young people less fortunate than myself in a fun way, so to receive the Diana Award doing something I enjoy is just the icing

on the cake.” (Northern Ireland school boy quoted in the *Belfast Telegraph*, 1 July 2022)

Expected behaviours of charity recipients, such as appreciation and enjoyment, were evident in some news articles:

“I know you do this with no thought of recognition, but let me thank you for the extraordinary way in which you have responded to this pandemic, bringing food, Christmas gifts and some much needed joy to those you help.” (UK Prime Minister quoted in the *Belfast Telegraph*, 24 December 2020)

Some articles encouraged donations from the public and reported on challenges faced by charitable initiatives (such as getting enough volunteers and funding). A few articles critiqued the charitable model, such as the model being unsustainable and addressing the symptoms rather than the root causes of food poverty:

“The charity [Trussell Trust] has warned that food banks are not a long-term solution, and more must be done to ensure people have enough money for essentials like food.” (*Belfast Telegraph*, 27 June 2019)

A few articles depicted food redistribution initiatives as a more sustainable approach and a double win for both the environment and food poverty:

“Here at Footprints we tackle food poverty from a sustainable living approach.” (Chief Executive Officer at Footprints Women’s Centre quoted in the *Belfast Telegraph*, 25 March 2021)

The right to food and to feed oneself in dignity was mentioned across a few articles:

“Food and access to it is a basic human right but, concerningly, food poverty for Irish people is increasingly on the rise.” (*The Irish Times*, 26 November 2022)

Social actors involved

Groups involved in the public discussion of food poverty were predominantly third-sector charities, followed by government/policy officials. A greater proportion of articles which included the voice of government/policy officials was published in national newspapers compared with regional/local newspapers. Across some

articles, the private sector (for example, supermarket chains, banks) was present within newspaper discussions.

Few articles included the voices of those affected by food poverty. Charities and other actors (for example, church leaders, academics, healthcare professionals) sometimes acted as a proxy voice for people experiencing food poverty. Some articles included the following voices: other public figures, non-governmental organisations, university academic staff and students, teacher and nurse unions, journalists/media, healthcare professionals, church leaders/priests, members of the public, school principals and teachers, and a not-for-profit research institute.

Summary

This is one of the first studies to explore newspaper coverage of food poverty on the island of Ireland. The findings revealed greater coverage of food poverty in regional/local newspapers than national newspapers. Reporting on this issue was more prevalent in the month of December, with calls for donations and fundraising events, positive news stories (for example, volunteer recognition awards) and discussions around the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

The problem of food poverty was often defined as limited food quantity (linked with charity usage) and by its symptoms, such as hunger and skipping meals. The mental and social health implications of food poverty were often presented within newspaper articles, with some reference to the physical health consequences of food poverty and strategies used by families to distribute scarce food.

The drivers of food poverty were mostly framed as insufficient income (due to the high cost of living, followed by low wages and unstable incomes), and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and specific policy-level factors (issues with welfare system). Some articles proposed individual failings as a driver of food insecurity (for example, lack of money management skills, and substance abuse/addiction).

The reported existing solutions to food poverty predominantly focused on charity, with calls for action largely focused on structural solutions (mostly the provision of free school and holiday meals for children). Newspaper coverage often evoked the idea of “deservingness”. Frequently, recipients of charity or government assistance

(typically presented as families with children) were presented as having been thrust into difficult situations beyond their control. A number of “working poor” and “people like us” were presented as those in need of food assistance. Articles often contained views from charities (followed by government/policy officials), with individuals’ experiences of food poverty largely absent.

6 Stakeholder interview analysis

Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings of the individual and group interviews with key stakeholders, including news media professionals, third-sector stakeholders (charity and voluntary organisation), members of the public, and policymakers. First, a summary of the participants is provided. The results are then sub-divided into 2 sections.

The first sub-section summarises stakeholder views, perceptions and understandings of food poverty, including: definitions of and understandings of food poverty, perceived drivers of food poverty, and perceptions of measures to address food poverty. Findings on these topics are reported separately for each stakeholder group. An overview of the themes generated for each is then provided, followed by a table of the themes with illustrative quotes.

The second sub-section focuses on stakeholder perceptions of news media reporting on food poverty. This section also reports findings separately for each stakeholder group and is structured similarly to the first section, with an overview of themes provided, followed by a table of illustrative quotes.

Participants

News media professionals

Of the 72 news media professionals invited to participate, 16 (22%) responded. Over half the participants were from Ireland (63%, n=10), with 38% (n=6) from Northern Ireland. Participants worked across newspapers (25%, n=4), radio (25%, n=4),

television (19%, n=3), and a combination of both print and broadcast media (31%, n=5). News media types had national (50%, n=8) and regional or local (50%, n=8) coverage. Participants included news producers and editors (n=5), journalists (n=6) and broadcasters (n=5).

Third-sector stakeholders

Of the 19 third-sector organisations invited to participate, 14 (74%) responded. Over half the participants were from community organisations in Ireland (57%, n=8), with 43% (n=6) from Northern Ireland. Participants included CEOs and founders of charity organisations (n=3), senior management and staff (n=7), research and policy officers, and a social care worker (n=4).

Members of the public

Focus groups with members of the public (n=8) took place on MS Teams and included people from both Northern Ireland (n=5) and Ireland (n=3). There was an even gender split among participants.

Policymakers

Of the 6 policymakers invited to participate, 4 (67%) responded. Interviews lasted on average 43 minutes (range 34–51 minutes). Two of the participants were from Ireland and 2 from Northern Ireland.

Section 1: Stakeholder perspectives on food poverty

This section summarises stakeholders' understandings and definitions of food poverty. In addition, it identifies the factors considered to be drivers of food poverty and measures to address it.

Definitions and understandings of food poverty

Journalists/media professionals

Many media professionals highlighted the umbrella term “poverty” as their preferred choice over food poverty, when referring to individuals or families unable to afford basic foods items. Definitions and understandings of food poverty among media professionals centred mostly on insufficient food quantity. This was linked also to

poor dietary quality, a lack of home-cooked meals and consumption of ultra-processed foods. Some media professionals also included those on lower incomes, who have less choice in their diets, as part of a broader definition of food poverty. Groups perceived to be most affected were families – particularly one-parent households – followed by the “working poor” and older people. Perceived consequences centred on mental health impacts. Among media professionals uniquely, a link between food poverty, crime and exploitation was cited. See table 7 below.

Table 7: Media professionals – definitions and understandings of food poverty

Definition	Understanding
Insufficient quantity of food	“...people who have a great difficulty in buying or getting a solid dinner every day... often unemployed... that need to go to food banks.” (Journalist for regional newspaper, Northern Ireland)
Poor dietary quality	“...they buy a lot of processed foods, a lot of cheap foods ... to me, this is a broader definition of food poverty” (Local radio broadcaster, Ireland). So, you may well be buying chicken rolls, eating in the car, eating at your lunch table, not getting exercise properly and coming home and not cooking properly.” (Local radio broadcaster, Ireland)
Restricted choices on lower incomes	“...not being able to afford say the product, the brand of product or whatever that you normally would buy... It could be people with more income, maybe start to think more carefully about what they’re buying, rather than, you know, being really stuck and having to rely on charity.” (Journalist for regional newspaper, Northern Ireland)
Affected groups	“... single parent families are usually the worst affected and most at risk...” (Editor of national newspaper, Ireland)
Mental health impacts	“They’re just surviving... worrying about putting food on the table... that puts an awful lot of anxiety into the family home and then something cracks...” (Local radio presenter, Ireland)
Crime	“There have been some horrendous stories that flow from that around, women who’ve had to borrow money to pay a bill, and then they end up having to, like, pay, like, you know, pay back 10 times over or have been forced into prostitution to pay it back...” (Freelance journalist for print and broadcast media, Northern Ireland) “...crimes going up... shop lifting... it’s come through the courts where people are having to resort to that to feed families.” (Journalist for regional newspaper, Northern Ireland)

Public

Food poverty was conceptualised and understood by members of the public to encompass a spectrum – with scarcity and hunger on one end and limited choices on the other. Poor dietary quality was also included in a broader definition, with particular reference to fast foods consumption and lack of home-cooked meals, often linked to being time-poor. Groups perceived to be most affected were families with children – particularly one-parent households.

In Northern Ireland, participants referenced the “working poor” and third-level students. In Ireland, older people, migrants and asylum seekers were cited. Consequences centred on mental health impacts, aggravated by anxiety, stigma and shame. In Ireland, participants emphasised social dimensions and the effect of food poverty exacerbating social exclusion. See table 8 for illustrative quotes.

Table 8: Members of the public – definitions and understandings of food poverty

Definition	Understanding
Insufficient quantity of food	“I hear a lot of times with parents having to, you know, cut out meals or take smaller portions than they need in their diet just so specifically so kids or younger family members or disabled family members can eat.” (Member of public, Northern Ireland)
Poor dietary quality	“...generally speaking, more unhealthy foods such as fast food can tend to be cheaper and more affordable for a lot of families.” (Member of public, Ireland)
Restricted choices due to time	“...not having enough time to prepare good food. And instead, spending it on fast food.” (Member of public, Ireland)
Affected groups	“Single parents, sort of go into the food poverty line. I know I am a single parent of 2 young children, so I know and it’s very hard...” (Member of public, Northern Ireland) I don’t really know any students who have never had to skip a meal or things like that, who are living away from home particularly.” (Member of public, Northern Ireland)
Stigma	“Children who were going to school with less than balanced food in their lunch box... were sent... a note saying they’re not part of the healthy food policy. So, the child goes hungry, is shamed, and goes in with nothing rather than something they’re not allowed to eat.” (Member of public, Ireland) “There not so long ago, I had to go out with my hand out... It took a while to do it, I didn’t want to do it, but I had to swallow me own

Definition	Understanding
	pride and say, look you need the help, go out and do it, just for your children sort of thing, you know.” (Member of public, Northern Ireland)
Social impacts	“They [service users] don’t even have the communal, cultural kind of opportunity to sit at the table as a family.” (Member of public, Ireland)

Community stakeholders

Many community stakeholders highlighted “food insecurity” as their preferred term or language of choice over food poverty, as it was perceived as less stigmatising and captured a more comprehensive and more nuanced understanding of the problem. It was felt that this definition better encompassed a spectrum, to include those at risk of (or on the margins of) food poverty. It additionally represented the interconnected nature of problems within the food system.

However, some reported a preference for using the term “food poverty” when communicating with policymakers in order to attract policymaker attention and underscore the severity of the problem. Similar to media professionals and members of the public, most community stakeholders defined food poverty as insufficient food quantity, and further linked it with poor dietary quality, referencing fast food, ultra-processed foods, and a lack of fresh fruit and vegetables. They also emphasised the social dimensions, including issues with cultural appropriateness of food. See table 9 for illustrative quotes.

Table 9: Community stakeholders – definitions and understandings of food poverty

Definition	Understanding
Food poverty v food insecurity	<p>“I try not to use the word poverty... because just chatting to parents... once I use that word... they immediately associate it with something much more entrenched... they think it’s something much worse off than what they are experiencing...” (National policy manager for charity, Ireland)</p> <p>“Anytime you use the word poverty... it sort of does grab a bit more attention... policymakers they straight away think about the really potentially harsh end of things... it becomes maybe slightly more intangible when you start going about food insecurity.” (National policy manager for charity, Ireland)</p>

Definition	Understanding
Insufficient quantity of food	“You’ve parents going hungry to make sure that their children are fed, or they’re limited on the amount of food that they can give to their families.” (Supervisor for charity, Northern Ireland)
Poor dietary quality	“There is something about looking at the ultra-processed foods and why are companies able to go to the lowest common denominator in terms of their ingredients... We should have a higher standard.” (Manager of charity, Northern Ireland)
Stigma	“I know that people don’t like that term [food poverty]... because there’s a stigma attached to it ... language is important.” (Supervisor for charity, Northern Ireland)
Social dimensions	“They [migrant mums] had box of Cornflakes but they but they didn’t know what to do with them... Cornflakes would have been an unfamiliar food.” (Manager of charity, Ireland)

Policymakers

There was a lack of agreement among policymakers over what terminology was appropriate. Like community stakeholders, some policymakers highlighted that “food insecurity” (rather than “food poverty”) as their preferred term or language of choice. This was because it was seen to be less stigmatising than food poverty and avoids the binary distinction between “poor”/“not poor”.

The term “food insecurity” was also seen as reflecting the transitional nature of people moving in and out of food insecurity depending on their circumstances, while also recognising the wider societal and economic factors beyond an individual’s control.

However, one policymaker highlighted that the broader scope of the term “food insecurity” might complicate matters and blur the issue, particularly since the term can be used to describe wider food chain issues, including food safety. The benefit of “atomising” the concept of poverty was a further consideration. One policymaker warned that this ran the risk of “creating ... silos” – inadvertently fragmenting the issue, disregarding the systemic nature of poverty and limiting the potential for coherent, holistic responses.

Use of language aside, similar to the other groups, policymakers largely defined food poverty as inadequate food quantity and described it in terms of symptoms of hunger

and skipping meals. Emphasis was further placed on a life-course perspective of food poverty affecting specific nutritional needs at different stages of life, and the social dimensions. See table 10 for illustrative quotes.

Table 10: Policymakers – definitions and understandings of food poverty

Definition	Understanding
Food poverty v food insecurity	<p>“Food insecurity is ... probably less stigmatising ... recognises that people’s circumstances change ... that it’s not primarily an income factor, although income may be part of it. It’s not just a poverty issue that affects one group and doesn’t affect another. It’s a system issue, so that’s why I would prefer it ...” (Policymaker, Ireland)</p> <p>“I think the slight problem is food insecurity and food security kind of overlaps with actual food chain security.” (Policymaker, Northern Ireland)</p>
Policy atomisation	<p>“They’re all so closely aligned, and it is kind of that heat or eat issue ... are we creating these silos, you know? Should we be looking at everything as poverty? I feel at times that we’re very conveniently packaging things, but I’m not sure that supports a kind of a holistic response from government policymakers.” (Policymaker, Ireland)</p>
Insufficient food: access and affordability	<p>“...being unable to access food, like just any food, to like just not being able to afford to eat like enough food.” (Policymaker, Ireland)</p>
Life-course conceptualisation	<p>“...an appropriate diet for a woman who’s planning a baby is different to ... an 80-year-old woman who has osteoporosis... there’s specific nutritional needs and at times that might be a bit more expensive to pay for... I would see that as a phenomenon that has not really been terribly well understood.” (Policymaker, Ireland)</p>
Social dimensions	<p>“...being unable to go out for a meal or to be able to invite people around, that there is that other aspect of food beyond just being able to sustain yourself.” (Policymaker, Ireland)</p>

Perceived drivers of food poverty

Media professionals

Among media professionals broadly, perceived drivers of food poverty largely centred on societal, political and economic factors such as insufficient income, high cost of living, low income and wage stagnation. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the ensuing global inflationary impact was also mentioned.

Many media professionals in Northern Ireland also cited unemployment, job loss and inability to work due to illness or caring responsibilities as contributing factors. Media professionals in Northern Ireland placed greater emphasis on specific policy- and political-level factors including issues with the Universal Credit system in Northern Ireland. These issues included inadequate payments to match the rate of inflation, delays in payment and removal of the COVID-19 pandemic Universal Credit uplift of £20 a week. Other factors commonly cited by stakeholders in Northern Ireland included the lack of a functioning Executive, political instability and lack of leadership from either Stormont or Westminster.

In Ireland, media professionals were often less critical of the government and placed greater emphasis on individual drivers of food poverty, such as levels of skill and knowledge linked with cooking. Some perceived this as a generational gap, where the transfer of skills to the next generation was declining and driving consumption of ultra-processed foods. Other commonly reported individual drivers by media professionals in Ireland, included substance abuse or addiction. See table 11 for illustrative quotes.

Table 11: Media professionals – perceived drivers of food poverty

Perceived driver	Understanding
<p>Cost of living, insufficient income, wage stagnation, COVID-19</p>	<p>“Inflation ... particularly since the conflict between Ukraine and Russia started out... I mean it was going that way before that, but [the conflict] just kind of exacerbated it.” (Deputy Editor of regional newspaper, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“Wages are not keeping up in line with the price of living at the moment ... and it’s exacerbated that problem, expanded that gap.” (Reporter, news agency, Ireland)</p> <p>People’s incomes are not going up while the price of food is.” (Journalist for regional newspaper, Northern Ireland)</p>
<p>Northern Ireland – political and structural factors</p>	<p>“Universal Credit ... and also the [pandemic] uplift of £20 a week being removed, has had a massive impact on people in the north who were right on that sort of poverty line.” (Freelance journalist for print and broadcast media, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“We have all the northern parties, but there is a certain amount of impotence whereby it’s almost like it doesn’t matter what we think or how we vote. You’re an add-on to what happens in London, you know ... the likes of Rishi doesn’t care about single mother Lizzy in Strabane.” (Deputy Editor of regional newspaper, Northern Ireland)</p>
<p>Ireland – individual level factors</p>	<p>“My own view would be that we can’t run to the government with every tittle-tattle, that the government can’t be held responsible for food poverty.” (Local radio presenter, Ireland)</p> <p>“A lot of them don’t know how to cook and their lifestyles leads them to a warped understanding of what food is... so you’re spending maybe a lot more of your disposable income on items that you don’t really have to cook. And this would include takeaways.” (Local radio broadcaster, Ireland)</p> <p>“...families, maybe with addiction issues or where they’re chaotic or dysfunctional households, they may choose or be driven to expend more of their income not on food, and certainly not on nutritious food, but maybe on other things like alcohol or drugs or cigarettes or whatever.” (National radio broadcaster and newspaper journalist, Ireland)</p>

Members of the public

Among members of the public broadly, the perceived drivers of food poverty included the high cost of living, insufficient income and “price gouging” by food retailers, the practice of increasing the price of goods to a level much higher than it is considered reasonable or fair by some

In Northern Ireland, wage stagnation was specifically cited as a driver of food poverty, while participants in Ireland linked the housing and accommodation crisis as a contributing factor in limiting access to adequate kitchen facilities and the ability to store and cook food. Lack of (or limited availability of) public transport and/or the inability to pay for fuel was considered to be a factor for some in accessing reasonably priced supermarkets.

Among participants from Ireland, there was no reference to political factors. However, individual factors including addiction, levels of education and knowledge linked to cooking and understanding of healthy eating were mentioned.

Participants in Northern Ireland mentioned issues such as inadequate student maintenance loans. There was scepticism that a functioning Executive would affect much change around food poverty.

Table 12: Members of the public – perceived drivers of food poverty

Perceived driver	Understanding
Cost of living, insufficient income, wage stagnation	<p>“...everything across the board has gone up.” (Member of public, Ireland)</p> <p>“I could have gone out and done a family shop 2 years ago for £100. That same family shop is now £200.” (Member of public, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“...a lot of the supermarkets... they’ve increased the prices dramatically ... it’s just disproportional, the amount that food retailers are selling their product for.” (Member of public, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“20 years ago, a staff officer was a good wage and a good job, now it’s not. There’s people at that level who are struggling ... I think that’s a big factor in a lot of people that they’re getting squeezed and squeezed and squeezed....” (Member of public, Northern Ireland)</p>
Barriers to access – transport	<p>“... without a car or access to some sort of transport, it would be very difficult ... so you’re stuck with just the sort of corner shop kind of things, and maybe not a great array of fruit and veg.” (Member of public, Northern Ireland)</p>
Ireland – housing crisis	<p>“You might be living in a hotel room, or you might be living in apartment or certain accommodation where you don’t have the facilities to cook. So ... you literally can’t cook, so your choices around food are very limited.” (Member of public, Ireland)</p>

Perceived driver	Understanding
	“I think specifically in Ireland, a lot of poverty, not just food poverty, comes, comes down to accommodation.” (Member of the public, Ireland)
Northern Ireland – political-level factors	“... they keep saying this on the radio, you know, if we had an Executive and you have different political parties saying if we only had an Executive... They’ve been there for 30 years, they’ve done very limited amounts for anything along those lines.” (Member of public, Northern Ireland)
Ireland – individual level factors	“So, whether it’s paying the bills, it could be feeding an addiction, gambling or alcohol addiction ... So, food poverty, from my experience, in some cases it’s where food is a lower priority.” (Member of the public, Ireland)

Community stakeholders

Among community stakeholders, the perceived drivers of food poverty included high cost of living, wage stagnation and inflation. Participants also noted that many service users had linked in with them first during and since the COVID-19 pandemic.

In common with members of the public, other perceived structural factors acting as barriers to healthy eating included access to and availability of transport, accommodation and housing.

Participants in Ireland also pointed to individual drivers such as levels of education and knowledge linked to cooking and understanding of healthy eating, as well as poor mental health.

Participants in Northern Ireland more commonly raised government policy and political factors, such as insufficient income support and delays via the Universal Credit system, Brexit, the lack of government in Stormont and the legacy of conflict.

Table 13: Community stakeholders – perceived drivers of food poverty

Perceived driver	Understanding
Cost of living, insufficient income, wage stagnation, COVID-19	<p>“Incomes haven’t been keeping up with the high cost of living in Ireland.” (Research and policy officer for charity, Ireland)</p> <p>“I think the cost-of-living crisis definitely had an impact.” (CEO, community organisation, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“And from COVID really, we haven’t really looked back and that trajectory of people who find themselves living in real hardship and</p>

Perceived driver	Understanding
	real difficulty continues to go upward.” (Founder of charity, Northern Ireland)
Barriers to access –Transport	“If you’re living in the countryside and you don’t have access to a big supermarket... then you have to get in your car because there’s no local transport. And the price of petrol and diesel.” (Social care worker with Charity, Ireland)
Ireland – housing crisis	“We work with quite a few families who are living in emergency accommodation. That’s a massive problem.” (National Policy Manager for charity, Ireland)
Northern Ireland – Universal Credit	“He [service user] gets Universal Credit twice a month. Sometimes that can be 12 days apart and sometimes that can be 19 days apart ... so how do you begin to build a life and a rhythm and budget ... it’s madness.” (CEO of charity, Northern Ireland)
Northern Ireland – political leadership	“I certainly think political instability is a major factor... it’s just that lack of decision making, and that lack of protection, and having a government to be able to adapt to the circumstances that surround us.” (Founder of charity, Northern Ireland)
Ireland – individual level factors (mental health)	“During those periods [of ill mental health], they don’t do as much food shopping. They don’t do it as regularly. Their budgeting skills are reduced, so it’s just that those periods of crisis points, you know, children and food can be a bigger issue.” (National policy manager for charity, Ireland)

Policymakers

Among policymakers broadly, the perceived drivers of food poverty included cost of living, low-income and wage stagnation. Lack of transport and environmental factors were perceived as contributing factors which created barriers to access, and availability of affordable, nutritious food. The housing crisis was also mentioned as a salient factor.

Policymakers in Northern Ireland also emphasised political and government policy factors, including the Universal Credit system, Brexit and the absence of government in Stormont. One policymaker in Ireland perceived the lack of a cross-cutting national food and nutrition strategy to be a contributing factor.

Reference to individual drivers including poor mental health, substance abuse or addiction. In addition, levels of education and knowledge linked to cooking,

budgeting and understanding of healthy eating were identified by policymakers in both Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Table 14: Policymakers – perceived drivers of food poverty

Perceived driver	Understanding
<p>Cost of living, inadequate social welfare payments, wage stagnation</p>	<p>“The amount of people who are very much living from pay cheque to pay cheque to be able to get through and similarly from social welfare payments to social welfare payments... with rent increases ... and utility bills ... it’s really quite significant ...” (Policymaker, Ireland)</p> <p>“I don’t think there’s been a big shift in people’s wages and incomes. And I know that was always kind of a system change that was required.” (Policymaker, Northern Ireland)</p>
<p>Barriers to access – transport and environment</p>	<p>“So actually, what’s available in an area to somebody, what their choices are in terms of what they can purchase ... They may not have the means to get in the car to go to a supermarket to avail themselves of the cheapest prices or the widest choice.” (Policymaker, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“... areas of deprivation may have less access to certainly healthier ... whole foods ... We tend to see clustering of unhealthy foods in areas of deprivation as well. So, both in terms of actual shops, but also options to eat out-of-home.” (Policymaker, Northern Ireland)</p>
<p>Housing crisis</p>	<p>“If you’re homeless or living in communal living conditions and you can’t access cooking facilities, that’s obviously going to be a big driver for food poverty ... Even if you can afford to buy food, just the quality of food that you’re buying could just be things like getting it from the chipper or something, where what’s available to you and that you can eat easily.” (Policymaker, Ireland)</p>
<p>Northern Ireland – policy level</p>	<p>“People being at a disadvantage ... because the benefit system has failed them. There’s something within one department [of Communities] that’s has anti-poverty within its remit – to be then having the benefit system that’s working against people. And you know, at times, putting people on the poverty line at times, you know, benefits are paid late and that’s too late for some people.” (Policymaker, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“We don’t have a ... national nutrition strategy.” (Policymaker, Ireland)</p>
<p>Ireland – individual level factors</p>	<p>“I think for particular groups and people with particular vulnerabilities, whether it’s health issues, drugs and alcohol issues. I just think that complexity then just goes through the roof, you know, because you’re dealing with multiple kind of issues.” (Policymaker, Northern Ireland)</p>

Perceived driver	Understanding
	“... other elements of it ... Do you actually even have the knowledge to know what a nutritious meal is.” (Policymaker, Ireland)

Perceptions of measures to address food poverty by group

Media professionals

Among media professionals, existing solutions to food poverty largely centred on responses by community and voluntary organisations, who were perceived to be plugging a gap in public service provision. Most media professionals in the Ireland reported positive action from government. For example, measures singled out included increasing investment in the provision of the hot school meal programme. Others called for greater government action in tackling food poverty. In Northern Ireland, this centred on restoration of the Executive, followed by implementation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy. In Ireland, government action to address food poverty largely focused on the need for increased social welfare payments.

Table 15: Media professionals – perceptions of measures to address food poverty

Third sector response	“I suppose it does largely come down to a charity response, and you would question whether there’s a kind of a more of a role for government there.” (Editor of national newspaper, Ireland)
Policy measures in Ireland (school meals)	“I think the government’s schools initiative for the children, and once that’s up and running, I think that will alleviate an awful lot of food poverty.” (Local radio presenter, Ireland)
Restoration of government in Stormont	“... having a government back isn’t a sort of silver bullet that would resolve every problem overnight, but it would certainly help because there could be some form of poverty strategy implemented.” (Freelance journalist for print and broadcast media, Northern Ireland)
Re-alignment of social welfare rates	“... social welfare rates are not in line with inflation either and there is calls obviously to index pension rates and other social welfare rates in line with the cost of living.” (News reporter with national news agency, Ireland)

Members of the public

Among members of the public, existing solutions to food poverty were perceived to come largely from third-sector responses. While most participants reported positive

action from this sector, some identified problems associated with the food charity model. These included the fact that it was a temporary solution, an *ad hoc* approach, not available in all areas, self-serving interests.

In terms of actions required to tackle the problem of food poverty, some participants in Northern Ireland were sceptical that the return of a functioning Executive would address this issue, while other participants reported that government and political action in Northern Ireland was necessary.

In Ireland, participants' views were also somewhat mixed, highlighting the government's responsibility in tackling the problem of food poverty. However, there was a lack of clarity about what actions would be required. In Ireland, additional emphasis was placed on individual interventions aimed at families and individuals, including the need for education around cooking, budgeting and healthy eating.

Table 16: Members of the public – perceptions of measures to address food poverty

<p>Third sector responses</p>	<p>“... it solves your problem short-term, ..., they have to look at it a different kind of way, it's not the long-term sort of answer.” (Member of public, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“If you're in Dublin, you're far more likely to come across some kind of a food bank or some kind of a mutual aid group that will provide free food and cooking facilities and stuff, as opposed to in if you were in the Gaeltacht, you know, like or out in Connemara.” (Member of public, Ireland)</p> <p>“A lot of them, say, are run by [charity name] or the church groups, various church groups, which will try to sort of bring you into their church.” (Member of public, Ireland)</p>
<p>Mixed views on political responses in Northern Ireland</p>	<p>“... it doesn't matter if [the Executive] comes back or not, it'll still do absolutely nothing, it's incredibly ineffective, even at the best of times... They have essentially done nothing over the last 30 years.” (Member of public, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“Greater political involvement and more legislation that, like, would help people in those circumstances.” (Member of public, Northern Ireland)</p>
<p>Mixed views on types of interventions needed in Ireland</p>	<p>“... the state needs to step in and actually enact policies that are going to actively aid the people who are suffering from this issue, and you know broader issues... because it's not in isolation, you know.” (Member of public, Ireland)</p>

	<p>“Maybe with assistance and support to be able to manage a couple of meals during the week and learn how to make healthy food and on a budget.” (Member of public, Ireland)</p>
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Community stakeholders

Among community stakeholders, existing solutions to food poverty were perceived to come largely from (their own) third-sector responses. Stakeholders described the provision of food support and, increasingly, a range of other wraparound services and moves towards sustainable community action. Among their roles they included advocacy and lobbying policymakers for systemic changes.

Stakeholders in the sector identified problematic aspects of a reliance on charity-led responses. These included the problem of addressing symptoms rather than causes, issues with food quality, the cost to human dignity, and food waste solutions that support unsustainable food production practices. Participants in Northern Ireland felt inaction from their government meant a reliance on the third sector was necessary and inevitable, while participants in Ireland were more positive about governmental measures, such as the proposed roll-out of universal hot meals in schools.

Table 17: Community stakeholder – perceptions of measures to address food poverty

<p>Third sector responses</p>	<p>“... it’s not just sort of handing over a few parcels of food for families... we have basically a wraparound service as such, where people can come and get advice around housing, around mortgage payments, around debt management, and also point people towards training and employment.” (Founder of charity, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“We’ve kind of changed the dynamic of how we operate, then it wouldn’t be a standard sort of food bank operation – now we are working to grow vegetables in the community, trying to empower people to so they can grow their own vegetables in the community and incorporate that into their own meals as well.” (Founder of charity, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“... to try and pull information from our staff and from the people using our services, working with our staff on issues that are government-level issues that are having an impact on their lives... I’m just really trying to use that information that’s provided to try and influence government to improve policies, legislation.” (National Policy Manager of charity, Ireland)</p>
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<p>Problematic aspects of charity-led responses</p>	<p>“... pot noodles, for example, was one of the food items that is available through that programme [Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD) programme] ... That is a standard one and I would say in all of our services, so the way we manage it is we would put out the product list to all of the services and with their request for requirements for the month and the amount that is requested for that [pot noodles] is phenomenal. And I really struggle with that myself because I think, there’s something wrong, this is not right, we shouldn’t actually be enabling this.” (Manager of charity, Ireland)</p>
<p>Inaction from government v community solidarity (Northern Ireland)</p>	<p>“So that that’s where we’re at in terms of that sort of, I don’t know, inaction from government, that we’re seeing community stepping up, you know, and these initiatives coming to the forefront, and many working families availing of that scheme as well, who were maybe just falling below the criteria of getting support in terms of a grant.” (Founder of charity, Northern Ireland)</p>
<p>Positive policy measures (Ireland)</p>	<p>“So, the Minister’s commitment is that by 2030 there will be universal provision of hot school meals. But she has said that she anticipates it will be a lot quicker and certainly when we look at the investment this year and how it aligns with the road map, we would say they are, you know, not only on track but really moving ahead in terms of that level of investment.” (Senior Research & Policy Manager of charity, Ireland)</p>

Policymakers

Policymakers who were interviewed were involved in different roles – one each from Ireland and Northern Ireland were civil servants in government departments, and one each were in organisations external to government departments. Perhaps unsurprisingly, views on the effectiveness of approaches to address food poverty were mixed along these lines.

One policymaker in Ireland highlighted the range of actions being taken across government. However, another viewed the approach taken by government as fragmented, overly reliant on the third sector, and lacking coherent strategy and leadership. Policymakers in Northern Ireland, on the other hand, both acknowledged limitations of governmental responses, albeit to varying degrees. However, 3 out of 4 of the policymakers were largely in agreement that a more coherent, strategic, cross-governmental and cross-sectoral approach would be more effective for meaningful progress on poverty more broadly and food poverty specifically.

Challenges that were identified included a lack of consensus on definitions and standardised indicators, and potential corporate capture (influence) of policymakers, given the role of the agri-food industry in Ireland. The need for better evidence and more in-depth research was also highlighted.

Table 18: Policymakers – perceptions of measures to address food poverty

<p>Ireland policymaker critical of political/policy response</p>	<p>“Given that there’s not a sort of policy lead or a defined policy ... you’re sort of dipping in and out of food poverty issues in other policy areas.” (Policymaker A, Ireland)</p> <p>“I think we can sometimes have those individualistic charitable approaches to addressing food poverty, where we need to sort of take a little bit more state responsibility beyond providing money to charities.” (Policymaker A, Ireland)</p> <p>“It’s quite chaotic and I think there’s a lot of duplication ... There hasn’t really been a structured approach to support them [charities] in relation to sort of governance, coordination.” (Policymaker A, Ireland)</p>
<p>Ireland policymaker supportive of government response</p>	<p>“So, there’s a range of services, range of different things being done across government ... There’s a focus on income supports ... over time [there] is kind of a gradual attempt to reduce the cost-of-service provision for ... childcare costs ... school transport fees, the prescription charges ... We’ve kind of started a lot of things that will hopefully have a positive effect.” (Policymaker B, Ireland)</p> <p>“We also have a caseworker pilot that we’ve started... to assist people out of the circumstances that they’re in by signposting them... Initial stages, it looks as though it’s proving to be effective.” (Policymaker B, Ireland)</p>
<p>Northern Ireland policymakers critical/recognising limits of government responses</p>	<p>“We’re not really doing anything proactive and it feels like we’re offering crisis support... It’s sticking plaster kind of stuff and it’s sort of ignoring the problem.” (Policymaker A, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“For the last 2 and a bit years ... we’ve had to work within existing policy frameworks ... and the other challenge is we’ve obviously been working in a very difficult and constrained financial and envelope and the absence of ministers.” (Policymaker B, Northern Ireland)</p>
<p>Need for formal policy/strategy</p>	<p>“I think there could be a more strategic approach across departments ... you probably can’t just invest in one thing; it probably needs to be in a strategic package of action that looks at the different drivers.” (Policymaker B, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“I think we all need to come together, you know, at a higher level ... People who are academics and organisations ... are saying this. I think we’re probably missing a trick, if I’m being honest, in</p>

	<p>dealing with structural issues that are at play.” (Policymaker A, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“A cross-departmental strategy primarily led by Department of Social Protection but with participation by health, education, environment and so on. That’s what I would see as the Holy Grail.” (Policymaker A, Ireland)</p>
<p>Challenges</p>	<p>“One of the pieces of work that we have to do is to try and come up with an agreed definition ... as to what does food poverty mean, so that when we measure it, we’re all talking about the same thing.” (Policymaker B, Ireland)</p> <p>“Is it any accident that we don’t have a national food policy because at a policy level, who owns food? It’s not the Department of Health, I’ll tell you that ... you have to legislate and protect to ensure that there’s not corporate capture of state responses to food poverty.” (Policymaker A, Ireland)</p>
<p>Need for research/evidence</p>	<p>“I think we’re really lacking research at the moment, to be honest with you, to get an understanding of what the situation is and really get a grasp on it, because I think we’re still, as policymakers, we’re still looking at something which we’re treating it the way we treated it 10 or 20 years ago rather than actually almost moving with what the situation is now and how it’s caught up into other kind of issues as well.” (Policymaker, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“We also need to identify vulnerable groups in terms of the consequences of food poverty. So, who really misses out and how they miss out... like women in their childbearing years. Maybe perimenopausal women might be another. Maybe, you know, older men might be ... I suppose it’s the nutritional lens on food poverty as well as the food access piece.” (Policymaker, Ireland)</p>

Section 2: Perceptions of news media framing of food poverty

This section explores how different stakeholders perceive media coverage on food poverty.

Stakeholder views on media coverage of food poverty

News media professionals

News media professionals reported that core drivers of food poverty included a perceived public interest in the cost-of-living crisis. The release of reports by organisations prompted news coverage by media professionals and therefore their coverage tended to focus on food banks and the work of other third-sector organisations.

News media professionals expressed a preference for stories and case studies focused on families, women and children, as these groups were considered more impactful in terms of engaging readers or listeners and policymakers. Personal stories of individuals or families experiencing food poverty were also considered more relatable to readers and helped to signpost readers to available supports, if needed. Media professionals noted the challenges associated with securing participation of people experiencing food poverty in news report case studies, with stigma considered a major barrier.

Coverage of what the government needs to do to address the growing problem of food poverty was largely avoided due to a perceived lack of reader interest. This was especially the case in tabloid newspapers.

The limits and potentials of specific formats were highlighted: news media professionals in Ireland perceived that broadcast media was more suitable than print media for debates or discussions on the government's role in addressing food poverty, because of print media's restrictions in terms of article word limit.

The narrow scope of news coverage on the food poverty problem was noted. This was attributed to a reliance on and co-dependency with third-sector organisations. For example, it was perceived that charities contributed to one-dimensional reporting of food poverty by releasing reports or figures on charity usage. There was also a

perception that charities’ engagement with the media was often part of a public relations strategy linked to the need to raise funds.

Another factor contributing to this narrow scope of coverage was the complex nature of the food poverty problem resulting in a lack of clear messaging and no clear solutions or calls to action.

News media professionals also highlighted industry challenges that shaped their reporting in various ways. These included broad briefs and time constraints, resulting in a greater reliance on information/guidance from charities. Economic pressures due to changes in news media revenue models were also highlighted as a barrier to proper investigation by journalists into issues such as food poverty.

In Ireland, some news media professionals highlighted the need for better data on food poverty, independent of charities, while their colleagues in Northern Ireland highlighted the absence of expert academic voices.

Table 19: Media professionals – perceptions and experiences of news media reporting of food poverty

Theme	Quotes
Core drivers of reporting	<p>“Like the last year and a half, it became very popular and very like click-bait to have articles written about the cost of living and the cost of food ... So I think it became very popular within the media to talk about it.” (Editor of national newspaper, Ireland)</p> <p>“... figures coming out from [charity name], that kind of thing would spark a kind of flurry of reporting.” (Journalist for regional newspaper, Northern Ireland)</p>
Case studies	<p>“Editors tend to look at stories with children as more impactful as well, and probably charities think the same way too. When they need to get eyeballs and awareness on things.” (Editor of national newspaper, Ireland)</p> <p>“So you’re always looking for a personal angle if possible ... and also help signpost people to where help is available as well..” (Journalist for regional newspaper, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“If you have a mother, a picture of a mother with 3 kids saying ‘I’m struggling to make ends meet’, that will have more impact.” (News reporter with national news agency, Ireland)</p>
Stigma	<p>“People are so reluctant because there’s such a shame associated with it. ... It would be very hard to find a mother with 3 kids to say nationally, ‘I can’t afford to feed my kid’ ... there’s a massive</p>

Theme	Quotes
	<p>stigma there of being like I'm a bad parent." (Broadcast producer, Ireland)</p> <p>"... some people don't want to speak out and are more comfortable allowing the charity to speak on their behalf." (Journalist for regional newspaper, Northern Ireland)</p>
Perceived reader interest	<p>"... if your article is solely based on government and what they can do and what they haven't been doing, it's not particularly interesting to your reader ... You know these stories, sometimes they don't sell newspapers." (Broadcast producer, Ireland)</p>
Limit and potentials of specific formats	<p>"... those things [discussions on government role in food poverty] I think in terms of radio and TV freely take off, whereas ... it's extremely difficult trying, I suppose, to tell that story in a newspaper in 500 words." (Broadcast producer, Ireland)</p>
Industry challenges	<p>"... there's been a lot of cutbacks ... A lot of national newspapers and national radio stations, they don't have time to send people out to do these type of work." (Local radio broadcaster, Ireland)</p> <p>"... media budgets are tighter than they used to be" (Freelance journalist for print and broadcast media, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>"... it's also about making sure that we're fed with the information so that we know what's happening on the ground at the moment as I haven't a clue ... You know, my brief is so broad ... I don't have time to be finding out." (Correspondent with national broadcaster, Ireland)</p>
Co-dependency with the third sector	<p>"You are often relying on talking with the charities ... we do need a more independent look at exactly what's happening... I'm not saying we wouldn't trust charities ... It's just that it's their story then and not the story that we would put together, if that makes sense." (Editor of national newspaper, Ireland)</p>
Lack of clear messaging	<p>"You know, like with housing there was protests for the reintroduction of the eviction ban ... You know, there's a clear kind of call to action which gets people out on the streets ... Where I think maybe with food poverty people aren't really clear what the call to action is." (News reporter with national news agency, Ireland)</p>
Absence of independent expert/academic voices	<p>"So, it would be really useful to find out who, who the academics are, and who would want to speak out ... To ask them what needs to be done and tell us the solutions." (Broadcast producer, Northern Ireland)</p>

Members of the public

Among members of the public from both Northern Ireland and Ireland there was limited critique of news media coverage of food poverty. Participants noted that the

prominent voice in news media coverage of food poverty was that of third-sector service providers. Many participants preferred hearing from third-sector providers, such as charities, rather than individuals affected by food poverty, as it was felt that they could perhaps communicate the problem more effectively. Additionally, it was noted that people experiencing food poverty may not want to speak to the media due to the perceived stigma and shame.

In Ireland, some participants perceived other barriers to engagement with the media. In particular, the fast-paced nature of the news cycle was not considered conducive to including the voice of the lived experience. Participants also highlighted how news coverage of food poverty was often problem-focused rather than solution-focused. The high levels of exposure to this problem-focused narrative in the news coverage were perceived to be contributing to the public becoming numb to the impact of food poverty on individuals and families. Participants in Ireland suggested there may be a role for the media in providing greater coverage of community and voluntary supports that were available to those affected by food poverty.

Table 20: Members of the community – perceptions of news media reporting of food poverty

Theme	Quotes
Preference for expert voices	<p>“I think the volunteers can kind of come across a bit better and maybe put their case across for people experiencing food poverty. They’ve a better understanding, they’ve seen it and they could maybe voice their opinion a bit better.” (Member of public, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“They [charity workers] can kind of give more information and maybe articulate it better.” (Member of public, Ireland)</p>
Perceived stigma	<p>“There’s a huge stigma around the issue and that in itself is a barrier too, for people to come forward to talk about it. And so that’s a stumbling block straight away.” (Member of public, Ireland)</p>
Barriers to engagement with media	<p>“... to get to some of the groups that, you know, to access the people ... it takes trust and sensitivity. And often those things aren’t present in the media when it’s a very quick turnaround for a sensational story.” (Member of public, Ireland)</p>
Problem-oriented coverage v	<p>“I’m kind of sad to say it, but it doesn’t shock me anymore, which is terrible because it is shocking, and it’s nearly become the norm that we hear this narrative on a constant basis. But we hear the</p>

Theme	Quotes
solution-oriented coverage	<p>problem, we don't hear the solutions so much which is tough." (Member of public, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>"... an ongoing story about the social supports across all ages as to what's available, whether it's the, you know, Healthy Food Made Easy Programme or the programmes like Food Dudes in schools and so on ... but maybe short clips that describe or showcase these things that are portrayed across not just the news media, but social media as well, so that there's a heightened awareness of what's out there." (Member of public, Ireland)</p>

Community stakeholders

Most community stakeholders perceived that news coverage presented a largely simplistic view of the problem of food poverty, mainly focused on immediate drivers and emergency responses. A lack of public interest was one factor perceived to be contributing to a one-dimensional reporting on the topic. Stakeholders further perceived that sensational reporting on the problem of food poverty generated more engagement and readership from the public. Some stakeholders highlighted the fact that the voluntary sector was contributing to this superficial coverage of food poverty by providing the media with decontextualised data or statistics on service-use.

In Northern Ireland, some stakeholders highlighted the influence of the political/ideological leaning of newspapers when reporting on the topic of food poverty. Stakeholders also reported feelings of discomfort in their role as gatekeepers for media professionals seeking access to individuals to use as case studies in their reporting.

Table 21: Community stakeholders – perceptions of news media reporting of food poverty

Theme	Quotes
Perceptions of audience needs and drivers of reporting	<p>"... there is no crisp and clean and easy answer to any of the stuff that we're facing. And so, the complexity of the question is boring to the general public and so it's not going to, not going to sell papers." (CEO of charity, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>"I think you know people like sensationalism, to be honest with you. They like the like the media to pull at their heartstrings and it's really difficult to get into an in-depth discussion." (Senior Research & Policy Manager of charity, Ireland)</p>

Theme	Quotes
<p>Decontextualised data and co-dependency between media and third-sector organisations</p>	<p>“I’ll read a newspaper headline that says like, ‘local charity serves 40,000 meals to homeless in a week’ or something like that ... the average person reading that sees 40,000 homeless people queuing outside in their mind, you know and like, that’s not what that means. That’s not what that represents at all.” (CEO of charity, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“I don’t want to be overly critical. I’m surprised at times when I see voluntary sector organisations or other organisations release reports with headline stats with very little information behind those stats and the media don’t question it and query it ... I see that happen with our own work at times. The media sometimes want to be – ‘spoon fed’ is probably a derogatory term – but they want it broken down ... and they don’t take the time to read the longer reports and really delve into it. A lot of the time, if I’m being honest.” (National Policy Manager of charity, Ireland)</p>
<p>Ideological leanings of media outlets</p>	<p>“I think also the government are really happy for the voluntary sector to pick this up. You know, continue to meet a need really they should be meeting. And so, if you’ve got a more government-affirming media outlet, they’re not going to pick up the fact that actually we shouldn’t be doing this.” (CEO of charity, Northern Ireland)</p>
<p>Gate-keeping service users</p>	<p>“... we have journalists have come to us and ask us to link them in with one of our service users to talk about their situation, but we haven’t really felt like involving them in it ... I don’t want to cross the line or boundary or ask them because I don’t want to put them on the spot, because then the power dynamic comes in. They feel like ‘Oh well, if I say no, maybe they won’t give me food anymore’.” (Social care worker with charity, Ireland)</p>

Policymakers

Policymakers perceived news media reporting on food poverty as largely reactive. In addition, they highlighted how media coverage minimised the structural and systemic underpinnings of food poverty, as well as its reliance on third-sector organisations for input into the debate. Policymakers in both Northern Ireland and Ireland also perceived that some news coverage tended towards narratives of the “responsibilisation.” (assigning responsibility to people who are affected) and the undeserving/deserving poor.

In Northern Ireland, a policymaker (correctly) perceived that local news coverage was less polarised and more sympathetic than national coverage (which was more polarised, with right-wing and left-wing media). They further observed that news

coverage in Northern Ireland suggested that everyone was affected by the cost-of-living crisis, without acknowledging its disproportionate effect on some members of society.

However, another policymaker in Northern Ireland perceived a sense of dichotomisation in news coverage, where people experiencing food poverty were portrayed in ways that set them apart from the viewer or reader and created an “othering.” effect. In Ireland, a policymaker highlighted the positive aspects of using visual images of food parcels in news media coverage, as a way of increasing public awareness.

Table 22: Policymakers – perceptions of news media reporting of food poverty

Theme	Quotes
Reactive reporting	<p>“The media kind of perception that I get is that we’re reporting the problem, but ... there doesn’t seem to be any accountability for policymakers and within the media, you know, it’s just constantly reporting a crisis issue, but not really saying why is this happening.” (Policymaker, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“There’ll be a quote from somebody who either commissioned a study or they will be talking about the extent to which their services are availed of ... like spokespeople from different charities involved in the space.” (Policymaker, Ireland)</p>
Responsibilisation	<p>“Some of the media coverage, and some of the depoliticisation of these issues ... people themselves can solve this through agency by just getting the skills to turn, you know, 45p carrots into a whole meal, but not sort of realising the wider circumstances.” (Policymaker, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“I’ve also seen stuff in relation to, you know, sort of personalising it, too: ‘Well you spent your money on that, so now you don’t have enough food.’ ... So, say a few people who have addiction, that they have spent their money on alcohol or drugs rather than on food, and it’s their own fault ... So, I do see a little bit of that creeping in the odd time to some of the food poverty narrative... Media discussion around the deserving poor and that sort of thing.” (Policymaker, Ireland)</p>
Local coverage v national coverage	<p>“... local coverage is probably more sympathetic in general than it might be at a more national level ... I’d say it’s probably more polarised in that you probably get more of the unsympathetic from the kind of more traditionally right-wing media outlets. and probably then more sympathetic or policy focus from the more left-wing.” (Policymaker, Northern Ireland)</p>

<p>Universalisation v dichotomisation</p>	<p>“I think probably food poverty has been caught up in the cost-of-living crisis and it’s like, ‘Oh, sure everybody has it bad.’ ‘You know, everybody’s having a hard time.’ ... No mention of [the fact that] some people are having a harder time than others.” (Policymaker, Northern Ireland)</p> <p>“... there’s a poor person getting their food from the food bank or you know somebody who’s a refugee or asylum seeker... It’s just shaped in a particular way that I sort of feel at times that it’s probably focusing the issue on, you know, those are the people that are in food poverty.” (Policymaker, Northern Ireland)</p>
<p>Positive visuals</p>	<p>“I remember seeing one [news article] before Christmas, where they basically had a sports hall full of food packages for people to come and collect. So that’s quite a strong visual. I think it is a helpful visual because I suppose it makes it real that each of those is a family and each of them is sort of reliant ... It’s a visual of something that’s unseen.” (Policymaker, Ireland)</p>

Summary

Across all groups, definitions of food poverty tended to focus on insufficient food quantity and be linked with poor dietary quality and reliance on fast-food and ultra-processed foods. All stakeholders, except for media professionals, also included a social dimension to their understanding. All stakeholders perceived poor mental health as a consequence.

Social exclusion was raised by members of the public and policymakers. Community organisations and policymakers additionally drew attention to the impacts on health, growth and development at different life stages. News media professionals highlighted perceived links with crime and exploitation.

Ideological differences in perceptions of drivers of food poverty and measures to address it were noted. Stakeholders from Northern Ireland were more likely to highlight governmental and policy-level drivers of and responses to food poverty. In contrast, participants from Ireland tended to emphasise individual level drivers and individual or community-level responses. Policymakers in Northern Ireland and Ireland highlighted the need for more coordinated, cross-sectoral and cross-governmental strategies.

In terms of perceptions or experience of news media reporting, news media professionals highlighted how case studies, personal stories and a focus on families,

women and children created impact. However, third-sector stakeholders drew attention to the problematic nature of acting as gatekeepers for the media in accessing service users to use as case studies. Members of the public also identified those working in the field as more effective advocates for the issue.

Challenges were noted among all stakeholders in communicating food poverty effectively. These challenges included: the complexity of the problem, the perceived interest of readers/viewers, stigma and shame associated with being involved in media coverage, and industry-specific challenges including labour capacity and time. Both news media professionals and third-sector stakeholders underscored the co-dependency of their organisations in communicating food poverty. They saw this as contributing to the problem of one-dimensional reporting on the issue. Specific problems that were highlighted included a lack of evidence and reporting of information without context or a narrative.

7 Critical analysis and discussion

The primary aim of this research was to investigate the discursive construction of food poverty in the media and to explore public, policy and key stakeholder perceptions of food poverty.

To meet that aim, a series of interlinked studies were conducted including:

- A policy analysis
- An investigation of the framing of food poverty in the print media (newspapers) and broadcast media (TV and radio)
- A series of individual and group interviews with key stakeholders (n=44), including news media professionals (n=16), members of the public (n=8), third-sector stakeholders (n=14) and policymakers (n=4)

The findings of those studies were outlined in the preceding chapters.

This chapter will provide a brief critical analysis of the findings, discuss the wider implications and suggest strategies for re-framing the discourse on food poverty.

Core discursive frames

Across all data sources analysed, food poverty is acknowledged as an abnormal and undesirable phenomenon – especially in the media and interview data. There is universal agreement that no person should ever go hungry. Following from this, 4 core interlinked and overlapping discursive frames – or explanations – can be identified to account for *the why* and *the how* of food poverty. From these 4 core frames or explanatory frameworks, a variety of perspectives flow in relation to appropriate responses to the problem (see figure 2 below).

The 4 core discursive frames include:

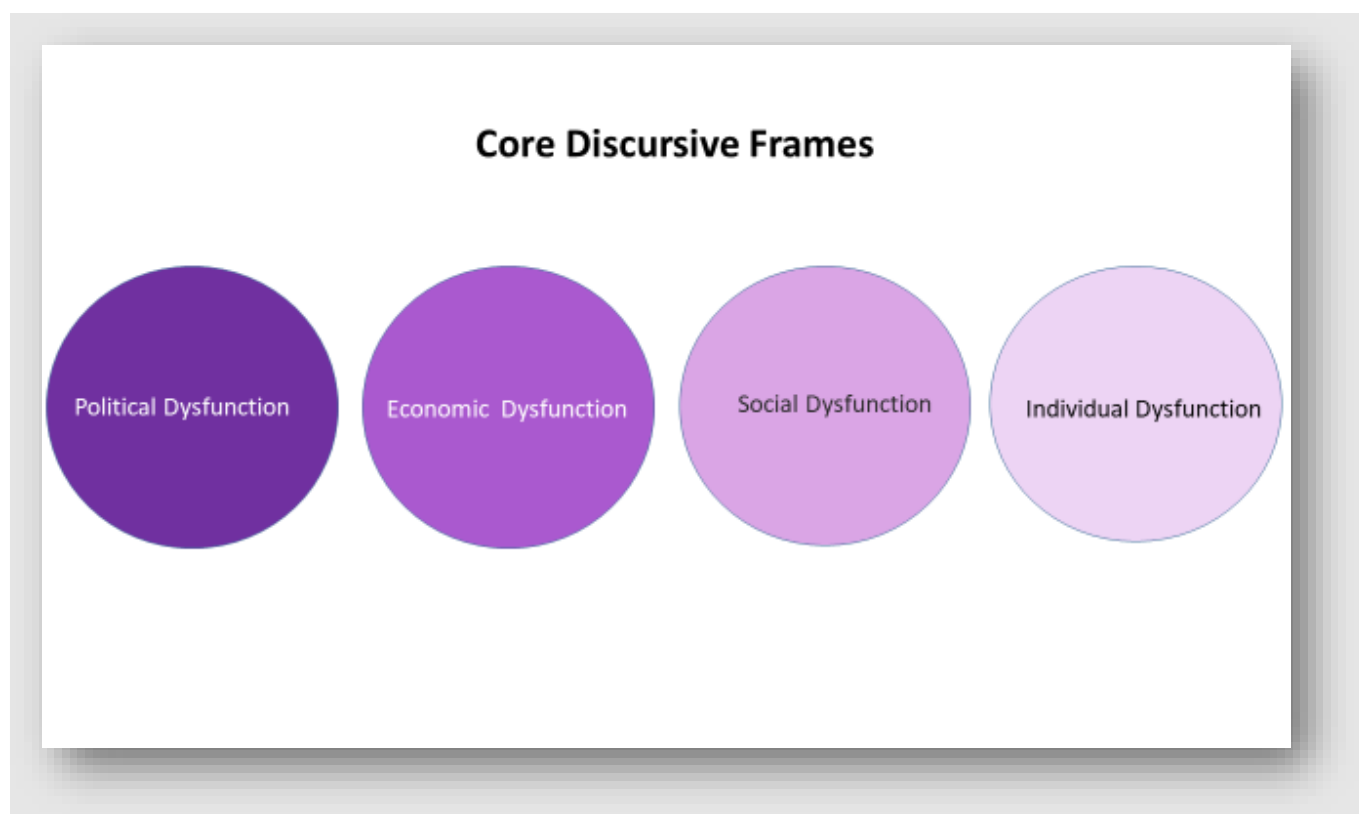
1. **Political dysfunction:** Food poverty is seen as arising from or exacerbated by failures in the governmental sphere, including absence of (or shortcomings in) leadership, failure to adequately legislate and/or develop and implement appropriate policy, and failure to adequately respond to the emerging needs of the population adversely affected by external events.
2. **Economic dysfunction:** Food poverty is seen as increasingly exacerbated by external factors such as inflation, wage stagnation and unstable or low-paid employment. This is giving rise to the growth of a new "precarariat." – the "working poor." whose income and employment is insecure – and who, despite adhering to social norms and expectations, still find themselves at the margins of society.
3. **Social dysfunction:** Food poverty is understood to be linked to a breakdown in the social contract, with significant barriers to securing basic fundamental needs – such as housing and childcare. The nature of modern employment creates knock-on effects, including increased risks of food poverty and negative impacts on dietary and nutritional health.
4. **Individual dysfunction:** Food poverty is seen to be linked (more neutrally) to knowledge and skills deficits, such as a lack of education on nutrition or a lack of skills to budget adequately or cook. More negatively, perceived "lifestyle." choices in contravention of social norms are identified, including addiction, gambling and poor health choices.

Elements of each of these frames or perspectives were clearly evident in interviews, to varying degrees. For example, almost all stakeholders agreed that cost-of-living crisis and inflation (economic dysfunction), and the housing crisis (social dysfunction) were significant factors in food poverty. At the same time, participants in Northern Ireland and Ireland differed on whether lifestyle factors (individual dysfunction) or structural factors (political dysfunction) were additional salient drivers.

However, those who leaned more towards understandings of food poverty that included individual dysfunction showed greater endorsement of individual and

community interventions. In contrast, those who leaned more towards understandings that included political dysfunction showed greater endorsement of policy-led interventions. Although it is worth noting that this was not particularly true of the media discourses of food poverty. Media coverage tended to focus on solutions to problems as they arise (downstream solutions). This is despite acknowledging that causes were often societal, economic or political (upstream drivers). By contrast, solutions created by policy changes (upstream solutions) were often portrayed as desirable and frequently necessary. However, at the same time, upstream solutions were also aspirational, abstract and sometimes ill-defined.

Figure 2: Core discursive frames of food poverty



Downstream solutions to upstream problems

A key finding of this research is that media discourse more prominently highlighted community-led responses to food poverty, despite acknowledgement of its upstream drivers.

Print media coverage was especially contradictory in this regard: almost twice as much focus was given to solutions led by the third sector compared with policy-led solutions. This is perhaps not unusual and indeed echoes findings of a recent rapid review of print media discourse on food poverty [36].

Several possible explanations for this finding were proposed by interview participants. These included an apparent co-dependency between third-sector organisations and news media professionals resulting in the reporting of decontextualised data, as well as a lack of objective sources of data and evidence.

Other challenges noted which may account for the surface-level reporting include the perceived complexity of the issue. Certainly poverty, more broadly, represents a complex, "wicked problem". where the solution is ideologically contested. This was also apparent with respect to stakeholder perceptions of drivers and solutions [37].

The issue was likely compounded by challenges inherent to the news media industry, including: constrained resources and the perception among media professionals that readers/viewers were less interested in policy-focused reporting. The relative absence of expert academic voices to provide evidence and expertise-led opposing points of view is also likely a contributing factor in the varied reporting on drivers of and solutions to food poverty on the island of Ireland.

The problem of ethical representation

Another key finding of the research, more broadly, is that the voices of those experiencing food poverty tended to be missing from news media reporting on the issue.

News media professionals expressed a need for case studies and a preference for featuring stories about families, women and children. This approach raises questions about ethical engagement with vulnerable populations, particularly where third-sector service providers are obliged to act as gatekeepers to people who are dependent on their services for survival. There is a further question about the function of media coverage that features people experiencing food poverty. On the one hand, it may be argued that increased visibility may help to de-stigmatise food

poverty. On the other, it could be argued that certain representational strategies can (perhaps inadvertently) reproduce certain biases and stereotypes.

Certainly, if editors and producers always default to showcasing the plight of single mothers and children, it is likely to result in biases and stereotypes, rather than highlighting the issue of food poverty. Such depictions do not necessarily reflect the population most affected: the highest consistent poverty rate is to be found in households with a single adult under the age of 65 [38].

Where reporting is more ideologically driven, there is an additional risk of responsabilisation of individuals for their situation, particularly in Ireland. Some of the news media professionals in Ireland appeared to lean towards the frame of "individual dysfunction," and earlier research identified comparable patterns of responsabilisation relating to other health and social issues [28].

With reporting on poverty specifically, evidence elsewhere suggests that *episodic* news coverage (individual-victim focus) rather than *thematic* representation (general focus) was associated with greater responsibility. This effect was greatest where reporting was gendered and single mothers were depicted [39]. This casts doubt then on whether inclusion of the lived experience in this instance is a positive thing, and whether case studies create or complicate impact.

Alternative framings: A rights-based paradigm

As mentioned in the overall introduction to this report, one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to eliminate hunger by ensuring all people have access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food by 2030 [19]. Both Ireland and Northern Ireland are signatories to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which protects the right to adequate food [20]. As signatories to those conventions and to the SDGs, the governments of each nation have a responsibility as duty-bearers to ensure the rights of their citizens to adequate nutritious food are respected, protected and fulfilled.

Therefore, it is notable that media reporting on food poverty rarely framed the issue as a human rights concern, although this reflects reporting trends elsewhere [36]. Only 11% of newspaper articles sampled mentioned rights to food and dignity, for

example. Perhaps more disappointingly, policy analysis revealed a lack of *explicit* reference to food as a human right. This omission is further compounded by the disproportionate emphasis on charity-led treatment recommendations.

Charity, while laudable as an expression of altruism and social solidarity, says nothing of the right to food and elides the obligations of state actors as duty-bearers [40]. In thinking about new paradigms for re-framing food poverty discussion, interested stakeholders might look to the impact stemming from the adoption of the Convention of the Rights on People with Disabilities. This Convention has shifted the discourse on the treatment of people with disabilities from objects of charity to individuals with rights to autonomy, dignity and participation in society. Such a paradigm shift has yet to occur in respect of the right to food, despite this being enshrined as part of the broader cultural and social rights to which all humans are entitled.

Re-framing food poverty in such a way may help to counter the policy atomisation effect referred to by one of the policymakers by underscoring the legal and ethical imperatives of the State to implement more coherent cross-governmental and cross-sectoral responses. In this regard, one of the challenges in communicating food poverty outlined by interview participants may be turned into an opportunity.

Given that the news media relies on third-sector organisations as a source of reporting, the adoption of rights-inflected language in their communication and publicity strategies may serve to counter one-dimensional reporting and perhaps achieve more meaningful impact.

Recommendations

The recommendations outlined here were developed collaboratively following two consultations. One was held online with a group of stakeholders (n=6) including members of the public, representatives of third sector community organisations, and a journalist with a national broadcaster. The second consultation was held in person with members of staff from Safefood (n=12), and included personnel in a range of roles, including communications, research, and corporate. During both consultations findings of the project were presented using PowerPoint, and discussion was

facilitated. In the case of the online consultation, additional written feedback was elicited using Padlet. Specifically participants in both consultations were asked how best knowledge from the project could be translated and what they would like to see happen next. They were also asked to identify any potential stakeholders and collaborators who could be involved in actions.

Notes from both events were written up and synthesised to produce the recommendations laid out in the table below.

Study recommendations by domain and potential stakeholder group

Policy and practice	Potential stakeholders
<p>Develop a position statement and agree upon a shared language among advocates on the island of Ireland for communicating on food poverty</p> <p>In order to more effectively communicate on food poverty, it is clear there is a need to develop a shared language among advocates and stakeholder organisations whose goal it is to eliminate food poverty on the island of Ireland. This should involve agreeing upon a position statement that includes an accessible and consistent definition for food poverty, and which emphasises a holistic perspective that acknowledges the impacts on the health, and social and cultural well-being of affected citizens.</p> <p>It is <u>strongly recommended</u> that as part of this process of consensus building, stakeholders should consider adopting a rights-based approach that emphasises adequate and appropriate access to food as a fundamental right implicated in the rights to life, health and dignity of all citizens. Re-framing the conversation on food poverty in such a way will help to better advocate for effective measures to address the issue.</p>	<p>Safefood All-island food poverty network Third sector organisations Academics/researchers Public health policy makers/professionals Advocates</p>
<p>Establish a resource database and a panel of academics, lived experience experts and advocates</p> <p>Minimising the pressures on third sector organisations and individual service users to provide case studies to media professionals who wish to report on food poverty is necessary. A key recommendation therefore is that a panel of experts be established. This should include both lived experience and academic experts, with whom media professionals can easily consult when reporting on food poverty. Appropriate media engagement training should be provided to all experts who agree to participate on this panel, but particularly to lived experience experts.</p> <p>Similarly it is recommended that a database of relevant reports, fact-sheets, statistical data and case studies, be developed and maintained so as to provide a readily accessible resource for journalists to draw upon when reporting on food poverty.</p>	<p>Safefood All-island food poverty network Academics/researchers Third sector organisations Advocates</p>
<p>Research</p>	
<p>Improving the data landscape on food poverty</p> <p>The findings of the research point to a need to improve the data landscape on food poverty more broadly. This is necessary, not just for the purposes of communicating and reporting on food poverty, but also in order to provide a sound evidence</p>	<p>Safefood Policy-makers Academics/Researchers</p>

<p>base from which to advocate for more effective policy measures. Specifically there is a need to develop a common set of measures and indicators of food poverty which will have all-island applicability. A scoping exercise of measures used elsewhere may be useful in developing appropriate policy-level responses. Qualitative studies with a diverse sample of individuals, families and households would be helpful in shedding light on how food poverty is experienced by disparate groups in order to tailor more effective interventions, including policy and programming initiatives.</p>	
<p>Collaborative development of best practice guidelines for reporting on food poverty</p> <p>In order to minimise stigma and to address the ethical issues implied by the co-dependency between third sector organisations and media professionals, there is a need for formative research to be carried out to help inform the development of responsible and ethical reporting guidelines on food poverty. In order for there to be buy-in from media professionals, it is recommended that a collaborative approach be used to their development, involving key stakeholders, including media and communication professionals, academic and lived experience experts, and other relevant organisations.</p>	<p>Safefood All-island food poverty network Academics/Researchers News media professionals Third sector organisations National Union of Journalists (NUJ) Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) Comisiún na Meán</p>
<p>Training and education, and awareness raising</p>	
<p>Training workshops for media professionals and journalism students</p> <p>The findings suggest a strong rationale for the development of training and education workshops for media professionals and third level journalism students. Workshop developers should consider content to encourage students to critically reflect on how representation can shape and constrain policy and public perceptions, and the role of discourse in re-producing stigmatising tropes and stereotypes. Practical guidance on alternate representational strategies, constructive journalism approaches, and the ethics of reporting on/with people experiencing poverty should be included.</p>	<p>Safefood All-island food poverty network Academics/University teachers</p>
<p>Awareness raising on food poverty and the right to food</p> <p>There is scope to develop an information campaign to raise awareness about food poverty among the public in order to mitigate the stigma attached to experiences of food poverty and to signpost people to support and resources. There is</p>	<p>Safefood All-island poverty network</p>

<p>merit also in considering framing any such campaign vis a vis right-based language to further promote and legitimise the concept of access to adequate nutritious food as a right that should be protected, respected and fulfilled</p>	
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Appendix 1: Food poverty policies in Northern Ireland

Table 23: Summary of policies/strategies/frameworks that reference “food poverty” or “food insecurity” in Northern Ireland

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
Northern Ireland Poverty and Income Inequality Report 2021/22 (2023)	No reference made.	19 references to food (in)security pertaining to definition and prevalence of food insecurity by cohorts.	Six references to food bank usage.
Circular Economy Strategic Framework (2022)	Cites FareShare’s and food banks’ involvement in food redistribution to tackle food waste and food poverty	No reference made.	The singular reference to “food poverty” within the Strategy conflates food poverty and food waste: “FareShare and Foodbank, both involved in food redistribution to tackle food waste and food poverty” (p.61). The term “food (in)security” does not feature at all.

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
Draft Environment Strategy (2022)	No reference made.	No reference made.	The singular indirect reference to food insecurity is included in the Environment Strategy's citation of the Food Waste Regulations 2015. These Regulations seek to continue to work with food redistribution charities to use Northern Ireland's food surplus to help feed some of the most vulnerable members of society and repeats this ambition in its future vision/outcome for increased food redistribution.
Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition (p.3) • Context setting as one of the significant societal challenges facing Northern Ireland (p.5) • Ambition to improve food poverty in Northern Ireland (p.8) • Significant chronic issues exacerbated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic (p.16) • Opportunity for collaborative policy working (p.16) • The conflation of rising food waste and rising food poverty narrative (p.19) • Security of food in times of future crisis (p.21) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition (p.3) • Food bank figures (p.16) • Food bank figures (p.16) • Non-reliance on a food bank (p.16) • Five-fold uplift in food insecurity prevalence due to COVID-19 (p.16) • Referencing the Food Security in Northern Ireland report • Prevalence of food insecurity during COVID-19 (p.16) • Future vision for food insecurity to decline (p.16) 	There appears to be a significant reduction in use of food insecurity (8 fewer mentions) and food banks terminology (5 fewer references) in the post-consultation version of the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework.

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Strategy (to include food poverty) (p.35) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food insecurity appears in a report title 	
The Executive's Green Growth Strategy and Delivery Framework (2021)	The Green Growth Strategy does not use the term "Food" in the context of food poverty or food (in)security. Reference is made to the Sustainable Development Goal to end poverty.		
Draft Programme for Government (PfG) Framework (2021)	The draft Programme for Government makes no specific reference to "food poverty" or "food (in)security". At best, one can imply that food insecurity will be addressed through the possible inclusion of food poverty in the forthcoming Anti-Poverty Strategy.		
Rural Framework (2021)	The term "food poverty" is used twice throughout the Framework concerning food poverty as a health and wellbeing issue raised by stakeholders and its identification as a subset of rural poverty.	No reference made.	
Agricultural Policy Framework (2021)	The only reference to "affordable food" is in the annex to the Framework where the historical purpose of the farm support payments of the Common Agricultural Policy is mentioned.		
10X Economy: Northern Ireland's Decade of Innovation (2021)	No reference made.	A singular reference to "food security" (p.24) discusses the potential to support food security by exploiting new product and process opportunities.	

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
<p>A Scoping Review of the Literature on Poverty in Northern Ireland (2021)</p>	<p>References to “food poverty” (n=3) focus on how income can influence the ability of individuals and households to obtain a healthy diet, with those on low incomes at risk of suffering from “food poverty” due to eating energy-alongside contributing to coronary heart disease deaths and increased falls and fractures in older people, low birth weight, increased childhood mortality, increased dental caries in children and has the biggest impact on children’s education due to being too tired and hungry to focus.</p>	<p>No reference made.</p>	<p>This poverty report aligns “food poverty” on each occasion with health and educational deficits.</p>
<p>Recommendations for an Anti-Poverty Strategy Report of the Expert Advisory Panel (2020)</p>	<p>The report references food poverty twice – firstly in a visionary sense that it can only be solved by a fit-for-purpose social security system and the recommendation that work on food poverty should be supported by proceeds from the “sugar tax”.</p>	<p>There are 5 mentions of food insecurity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When recommending enshrining in law the commitment of the Northern Ireland Executive to Sustainable Development Goal to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere” to ensure that children are well-nourished and free from “food insecurity”. • The assertion that only increased income can reduce food insecurity (insufficiency). 	<p>Other synonyms include “destitution”, “hunger”, “severe” poverty, “food insufficiency”, “material deprivation with a focus on food”.</p> <p>Other food-related statements of relevance include the “humiliation” of attending food banks.</p>

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calls for annual poverty reporting to include estimates of “destitution” to supplement survey-based “food insecurity” data to include additional subgroups of people. 	
<p>Children and Young People’s Strategy 2020–2030 (2020)</p>	<p>The Strategy does not explicitly refer to “food poverty” or “food insecurity”. “Food” is referenced twice concerning parental responsibility and public sector support to meet basic essential needs such as food. It continues with a focus on the impact of poverty on families around food costs among other household financial pressures. “Accessibility” and “affordability” are never used in the context of food throughout the document.</p>		
<p>Knowledge Framework (2019)</p>	<p>No reference made.</p>	<p>No reference made.</p>	
<p>Arrangements for the Provision of Milk, Meals and Related Facilities Under the Provisions of Articles 58 and 59 of the Education &</p>	<p>No reference made.</p>	<p>No reference made.</p>	<p>The Arrangements reference what to do if a child presents as hungry at school.</p>

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, as Amended, 2017			
Child Poverty Strategy (2016)	The Strategy references the Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 27's commitment food for physical health needs (p.15). The Strategy further references the promotion of a healthy diet in schools via a Food in Schools Policy. There is a singular mention of affordable food.		
Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group Report (2016)	Food poverty is cited 4 times, each time in the context of "tackling" or "addressing" it and is situated as being "synonymous with food banks" (but the authors are encouraged with the promise that "far more thoughtful strategies are developing").	No reference made.	Other (in)directly related terms used throughout include "dignity", "nutritious food", "affordable food", "community food", "food aid", "food banks", "surplus food" and "social food initiatives" for those "reluctant to use food banks".
Food Waste Regulations (2015)	No reference made.	No reference made.	Regulations conflate the redistribution of food surplus to feed society.
Welfare Reform (2015)	No reference made.	No reference made.	Explicit mention is made in the Welfare Mitigations Review Independent Advisory Panel Report to "food poverty" when recounting how initial welfare mitigation measures provided £8 million to tackle food poverty (p.37) among other measures.
The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (2015)	No reference made.	No reference made.	The Strategy does make clear the regional strategic objectives for town centres and retailing including securing a town centres first approach for the location of future retailing and other main town centre uses

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
			which one could argue is important in order to retain physical access to food in town centres.
An Insight into Food Banks in Northern Ireland (2015)	The report adopts "food poverty" as its term of choice, citing it 12 times. Notably, all food poverty references are presented in the context of desk research and the term is not used alongside any primary research cited in the report. Food poverty references relate to its definition, multifactorial complexity, its measurement, and recommendations for future action. These include the identification and mitigation of systemic issues that may contribute towards food poverty and consensus to address the root causes of food poverty, with a clear goal to ultimately reduce the numbers of people who find themselves in the position of having to turn to food banks for help, thereby ensuring that the phenomenon is not institutionalised across Northern Ireland.	There is a singular mention of food security in the context of signposting an external report.	It is notable that the ambition is to <i>reduce</i> rather than <i>eradicate</i> food poverty in the region.
Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy version 11 (2014)	No reference made.	No reference made.	

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
Making Life Better (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context setting re: the importance and complexity of food poverty (p.110) • Definition (p.110) • Its manifestation as the consumption of less nutritionally balanced diets and suffering from higher rates of diet-related chronic diseases • Measuring food poverty (p.82) • Developing a measurement indicator (p.110) 	No reference made.	Making Life Better is one of only 2 Northern Ireland strategies to discuss the measurement of food poverty in an agreed way (the other being A Fitter Future for All, Obesity Prevention Strategy).
Food in Schools Policy Healthy Food for Healthy Outcomes (2013)	No reference made.	No reference made.	The Policy recognises the meal provided at school may be the only or main meal children experiencing deprivation may receive that day.
Delivering Resource Efficiency – Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy (2013)	No reference made.	The Strategy’s singular reference to food security is in the context of the reduction of food waste/waste prevention to contribute to solving food security and citation of FareShare’s role in diverting food from landfill.	
Northern Ireland Economic Strategy (2012)	No reference made.	No reference made.	

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
<p>A Fitter Future for All Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012–2022 (2012)</p>	<p>Seeks to develop a coordinated approach to address food poverty, including an indicator for the percentage of adults experiencing food poverty and local support, resources and facilities to be available to those experiencing food poverty (p.72). Also referenced in the 2015 and 2019 Revised Outcomes Framework.</p>	<p>The original Strategy (2012) does not rely on the term “food insecurity”. However, the revised outcomes frameworks introduce food insecurity in 2015 and 2019 when referring to the anticipated indicator.</p>	<p>This was the first Northern Ireland policy to explicitly discuss food poverty, its agreed measurement and coordinated action for the island of Ireland, succeeded in 2013 with Making Life Better, Northern Ireland’s strategic framework for public health.</p>

Appendix 2: Food poverty policies in Ireland

Table 24: Summary of policies/strategies/frameworks that reference "food poverty" or "food insecurity" in Ireland

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
Children's Rights Alliance Report Card (2023)	47 explicit references to food poverty principally in the context of the Social Inclusion Roadmap research but recommending that this evidence be translated into actions to address food poverty by 2025, in line with published commitments.	No reference made.	
Evaluation of the School Meals Programme (2023)	The Evaluation references food poverty 69 times in the contexts of its definition and prevalence over time in Ireland. The language is overwhelmingly negative when discussing food	Food insecurity is referenced 7 times and occasionally extrapolated to include the term "hunger". It is discussed in the context of its prevalence, its contribution to a child's mental health and	

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
	poverty initially. The Evaluation concluded the perception that school meals contributed as “part of the puzzle” of alleviating food poverty.	being useful in informing a more general measure of a child’s health status.	
The CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027 (2023)	Food poverty appears once as a weakness due to the persistent level of food poverty in Ireland.	There are 11 references to food security but they are never aligned with household food security.	
ESF+ Food and Basic Material Support (2022)	No reference made.	No reference made.	The support works with not-for-profit organisations to provide food and basic material assistance.
Food poverty government programmes, schemes and supports 2022 (2022)	<p>Food poverty is cited 48 times throughout the report regarding its:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition • Complexity • Measurement • Prevalence • Government’s commitment to addressing food poverty • (In)direct government expenditure for food poverty 	No reference made.	There are general references to food affordability and accessibility and the identification of food waste as an initiative to (in)directly address food poverty.

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Poverty Working Group • Cross-sectoral infrastructure with food poverty within its remit 		
Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020–2025 Ambition, Goals, Commitments (2022)	The majority of food citations (n=13/24) reference the definition and measurement of food poverty and responses to it.	No reference made.	
Implementation of “Global Ireland: Ireland’s Strategy for Africa to 2025” Report to Government – Year 2, 2022	No reference made.	The Strategy mentions “food insecurity” 3 times when referencing overlapping disasters, its contribution to high levels of displacement and humanitarian need, and when discussing the provision of multiannual funding to address the causes of food insecurity.	The documents references “hunger”, “poverty” and “inequality”. The Strategy also uses the term “nutrition insecurity” as a problem to be tackled.
Food Poverty: The Impact on Vulnerable Children and Families. Barnardos and Aldi (2022)	There are 12 references to food poverty in the contexts of affordability and accessibility of food, borrowing money to feed the family, the budget available for family food	There are 9 latter references to food insecurity (always in co-existence with food poverty). It is notable that food insecurity appears to enter the report’s vernacular only in the self-measurement	

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
	shopping, altering spending habits on other areas to afford food, skipping meals so that children can eat, reducing the size/quality of a meal, receiving school meals during term time, missing out on social occasions around food, using a food bank, and experiencing shame/ anxiety.	sense, perhaps as an attempt to soften the language when presented as a direct question.	
Food Vision 2030 Strategy (2021)	No reference made	<p>The term food security is used 13 times:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of food systems in achieving food security, nutrition and health for all • The role of Ireland’s agri-food security in contributing to overcoming challenges and threats to global food security and planetary health • Promotes food <i>accessibility</i> over food <i>availability</i> as a food security threat 	

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety nets are essential to avoid an increase in hunger and food insecurity • Calling for research and innovation around food insecurity to be a priority action 	
<p>On-Street Food Services in Dublin: A Review (2021)</p>	<p>“Food poverty” is used 5 times with similar terms including “hunger”, “struggling financially”, “hidden poverty” or “feeding the homeless”, etc. Mentions of food poverty propose income-based solutions and query the effectiveness of free food distribution.</p>	<p>No reference made.</p>	
<p>First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families: 2019–2028 (2019)</p>	<p>There are 8 explicit references to food poverty in the contexts of food poverty prevalence and impact on children’s health, wellbeing and development, as well as their social participation. It calls for the introduction of measures to address food poverty for young children</p>	<p>No reference made.</p>	

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
	<p>in early learning centre settings and primary schools and sets a national target to identify and scope the issue of food poverty as a cross-sectoral priority.</p>		
<p>A Better World, Ireland's Policy for International Development, 2019</p>	<p>No reference made.</p>	<p>“Food insecurity” is referenced once in the context of global agricultural policy responding to food insecurity and growing populations with a focus on increasing yield conventionally.</p> <p>“Food (and nutrition) security” is referenced 4 times. Two references discuss ensuring local food and nutrition security and the role of fish as an important food commodity.</p> <p>Two food security references are more pernicious when discussing how illegal fishing is threatening global food security while climate change has a role in eroding food security.</p>	<p>The policy references chronic hunger, acute food crises, lacking sufficient food, food crisis, undernutrition and famine.</p> <p>More progressively, the Policy discusses how “Cash-based transfers are increasingly replacing food transfers as a means of responding to complex humanitarian needs.” (p.9)</p>

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
<p>Healthy Ireland: A Healthy Weight for Ireland 2016–2025 Obesity Policy and Action Plan (2016)</p>	<p>There is only one explicit reference to food poverty, when introducing “Healthy Food for All” as an all-island charity addressing food poverty by promoting access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups.</p>	<p>No reference made.</p>	<p>There are additional references to healthy and affordable food (3 times), access to healthy, fresh, nutritious food (6 times) and access to information on healthier choices (twice) as determinants of overweight and obesity status.</p>
<p>The Global Island: Ireland’s Foreign Policy for a Changing World, 2015.</p>	<p>No reference made.</p>	<p>While the term “food insecurity” is not used, “food security” is used 5 times in the contexts of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food and nutrition security for a growing global population • Ireland’s foreign aid record for promoting food security internationally • the prevention of obstacles to development and a threat to public health • defining food security in terms of “ensuring enough nutritious food to feed a growing world population and making more efficient and more sustainable use 	<p>There is internal inconsistency in the Department of Foreign Aid and Trade which uses different terms in different strategy documents.</p>

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
		<p>of the world’s natural resource” (p.42)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • situating it as a key challenge in the global policy agenda 	
<p>Food in Direct Provision (2014)</p>	<p>This 2014 report itemises food poverty 4 times in disparaging the food conditions in direct provision. It cites the impact of lack of income in restricting food choice as merely one aspect of food poverty compounding social inequality.</p>	<p>There are 7 references to food insecurity in the definitional context and alignment with physical/mental health implications and reduced circumstances of asylum seekers. It is used on 3 occasions alongside “hunger”.</p> <p>There are 6 references to food security again in terms of defining it and its complexity and criticality in population health terms.</p>	<p>Additionally, the report uses “nutritional wellbeing and security” in reference to children and elaborates on a second occasion by again situating food security alongside adequate nutrition.</p>
<p>Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children and young</p>	<p>There are 4 references to food poverty:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the food poverty challenge • its definition 	<p>No reference made.</p>	<p>Additionally, the Framework references affordable food to protect young people from poverty and social exclusion.</p>

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
people 2014–2020 (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the implications of food poverty on a child’s developmental goals, their current and future health status, and its impact on their education outcomes • the importance of education to inform healthier choices to address food poverty 		
The National Positive Ageing Strategy (2013)	The Strategy references food poverty only tangentially regarding food access.	No reference made.	The Strategy references poverty generally and fuel poverty specifically. It also references income/financial security and health but never in the context of food/nutrition.
Constructing a Food Poverty Indicator for Ireland using the Survey on Income and Living Conditions, 2012.	There are multiple (n=316) references to “food poverty” in context setting; its definition; alongside food deprivation, at risk of poverty and experiencing consistent poverty; its usefulness for measurement and monitoring (including monitoring of policy effectiveness to reduce food poverty).	Food insecurity is referenced in the context of a citation of another published paper. “Food security” is used when thanking workshop participants.	The technical paper identifies food poverty to be a “distinct experience of poverty” (p.8) with different risk factors and clarifies the potential need for exclusive, focused strategies to be deployed if it is to be reduced.

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
Healthy Ireland Nutrition Guidelines for Food Parcels (no date)	<p>The Guidelines make 3 references to food poverty:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting the context of direct food provision as a response to food poverty • Identifies how someone may already be experiencing food poverty or facing challenges in accessing food • Stipulates how the Guidelines are intended for organisations and groups providing healthy food parcels to households in Ireland in response to food poverty 	No reference made	
Cork Food Policy Council (no date)	Cites food poverty and improving the availability of affordable healthy food within its values.	References food security challenges.	
The Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute (INDI) (no date)	No reference made.	No reference made.	The INDI's A Good Practice Guide for Breakfast Clubs details how breakfast clubs have been set up to combat poverty and malnourishment in disadvantaged communities.

Policy	Food Poverty	Food Insecurity	Comment
			In its Good Health Begins with Breastfeeding section, it references the life-changing impact of better nutrition's on a child's future and in helping to break the cycle of poverty.

Appendix 3: Articles mapped to Entman's theory

Table 25: Frequencies of articles mapped to Entman's theory

Entman's framing function	Total articles (n=81)	By newspaper territory		By newspaper type	
		Northern Ireland (n=32)	Ireland (n=49)	National (n=28)	Regional/ local (n=53)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Problem definition	81 (100)	32 (100)	49 (100)	28 (100)	53 (100)
Definition	81 (100)	32 (100)	49 (100)	28 (100)	53 (100)
"Food poverty" term used	77 (95)	32 (100)	45 (100)	28 (100)	49 (92)
Charity usage synonymous with food poverty	64 (79)	23 (72)	41 (84)	22 (79)	42 (79)
Inadequate food quantity	49 (60)	19 (59)	30 (61)	23 (82)	26 (49)
Hunger	26 (32)	9 (28)	17 (35)	10 (36)	16 (30)
Skipping meals or reduced portions	9 (11)	0 (0)	9 (18)	7 (25)	2 (4)
Poor dietary quality	23 (28)	9 (28)	14 (29)	11 (39)	12 (23)
Illustrates poverty and deprivation	18 (22)	6 (19)	12 (24)	7 (25)	11 (21)

	Total articles (n=81)	By newspaper territory		By newspaper type	
		Northern Ireland (n=32)	Ireland (n=49)	National (n=28)	Regional/ local (n=53)
Entman's framing function	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
“Food insecurity” term used	5 (6)	3 (9)	2 (4)	1 (4)	4 (8)
Less socially acceptable food choices	2 (2)	0 (0)	2 (4)	2 (7)	0 (0)
Multidimensional problem	2 (2)	0 (0)	2 (4)	1 (4)	1 (2)
Consequences	40 (49)	15 (47)	25 (51)	13 (46)	27 (51)
Mental and social consequences	33 (41)	10 (31)	23 (47)	12 (43)	21 (40)
Physical health consequences	12 (15)	6 (19)	6 (12)	4 (14)	8 (15)
Families distributing scarce food	11 (14)	3 (9)	8 (16)	7 (25)	4 (8)
Educational underachievement for children	5 (6)	2 (6)	3 (6)	1 (4)	4 (8)
Poor health outcomes	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)	1 (4)	0 (0)
Unsafe feeding methods for babies	1 (1)	1 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (2)
Causal Interpretation	75 (93)	27 (84)	48 (98)	28 (100)	47 (89)
Immediate drivers	65 (80)	22 (69)	43 (88)	25 (89)	40 (75)
Insufficient income	62 (77)	22 (69)	40 (82)	23 (82)	39 (74)
High cost of living	34 (42)	8 (25)	26 (53)	16 (57)	18 (34)
Low wages	12 (15)	1 (3)	11 (22)	10 (36)	2 (4)
Unemployment / not working	11 (14)	1 (3)	10 (20)	6 (21)	5 (9)
Christmas costs	10 (12)	6 (19)	4 (8)	1 (4)	9 (17)
Unstable incomes	9 (11)	3 (9)	6 (12)	3 (11)	6 (11)

Entman's framing function	By newspaper territory		By newspaper type		
	Total articles (n=81)	Northern Ireland (n=32)	Ireland (n=49)	National (n=28)	Regional/local (n=53)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Household size/structure	6 (7)	0 (0)	6 (12)	4 (14)	2 (4)
Lone parent families	4 (5)	1 (3)	3 (6)	2 (7)	2 (4)
Back to school costs	2 (2)	0 (0)	2 (4)	0 (0)	2 (4)
Issues of accessibility to food	7 (9)	0 (0)	7 (14)	6 (21)	1 (2)
Homeless problem	6 (7)	0 (0)	6 (12)	4 (14)	2 (4)
School and service closure	5 (6)	0 (0)	5 (10)	3 (11)	2 (4)
Domestic abuse	2 (2)	1 (3)	1 (2)	1 (4)	1 (2)
Food chain supply issues	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)	1 (4)	0 (0)
Poverty	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)	0 (0)	1 (2)
Upstream drivers	53 (65)	16 (50)	37 (76)	23 (82)	30 (57)
COVID-19 pandemic	28 (35)	8 (25)	20 (41)	12 (43)	16 (30)
Governmental drivers	25 (31)	10 (31)	15 (31)	13 (46)	12 (23)
Issues with welfare system	14 (17)	4 (13)	10 (20)	8 (29)	6 (11)
Absence of school meals scheme	6 (7)	3 (9)	3 (6)	3 (11)	3 (6)
Austerity measures	3 (4)	2 (6)	1 (2)	1 (4)	2 (4)
No functioning Executive in Northern Ireland	3 (4)	3 (9)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (6)
Inadequate public services	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)	1 (4)	0 (0)

Entman's framing function	By newspaper territory		By newspaper type		
	Total articles (n=81)	Northern Ireland (n=32)	Ireland (n=49)	National (n=28)	Regional/local (n=53)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Underfunding of third level education	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)	1 (4)	0 (0)
Individual drivers/responsibility	16 (20)	2 (6)	14 (29)	5 (18)	11 (21)
Disability or illness	5 (6)	1 (3)	4 (8)	2 (7)	3 (6)
Debt	4 (5)	1 (0)	4 (8)	0 (0)	4 (8)
Substance abuse or addiction	3 (4)	0 (0)	3 (6)	1 (4)	2 (4)
Lack of cooking skills	2 (2)	0 (0)	2 (4)	2 (7)	0 (0)
Low literacy skills	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)	1 (4)	0 (0)
Care responsibilities	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)	1 (4)	0 (0)
Poor mental health	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)	0 (0)	1 (2)
Housing insecurity	8 (10)	0 (0)	8 (16)	6 (21)	2 (4)
Inflation	6 (6)	0 (0)	5 (10)	2 (7)	3 (6)
Forced migration	4 (5)	3 (9)	1 (2)	1 (4)	3 (6)
Treatment recommendations	80 (99)	32 (100)	48 (98)	27 (96)	53 (100)
Charity-based solutions ^a	63 (78)	23 (72)	40 (82)	21 (75)	42 (79)
Food banks	31 (38)	14 (44)	17 (35)	8 (29)	23 (43)
Redistribution of food waste initiatives	15 (19)	11 (34)	4 (8)	2 (7)	13 (25)
Social supermarket pilot programme or social grocery	8 (10)	7 (22)	1 (2)	0 (0)	8 (15)

Entman's framing function	By newspaper territory		By newspaper type		
	Total articles (n=81)	Northern Ireland (n=32)	Ireland (n=49)	National (n=28)	Regional/local (n=53)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Other charity solutions	15 (19)	2 (6)	13 (27)	7 (25)	8 (15)
Charity-based solutions but acknowledge need for structural solutions	23 (37)	8 (25)	15 (31)	14 (50)	9 (17)
Structural solutions ^{a,b}	31 (38)	11 (34)	20 (41)	17 (61)	14 (26)
Free school and holiday meals	15 (19)	4 (13)	11 (22)	9 (32)	6 (11)
Welfare reform	7 (9)	2 (6)	5 (10)	4 (14)	3 (6)
Policies to tackle poverty	5 (6)	3 (9)	2 (4)	1 (4)	4 (8)
Other structural solutions	9 (11)	2 (6)	7 (14)	6 (21)	3 (6)
Solutions targeted at individuals ^{a,b}	12 (15)	5 (16)	7 (14)	6 (21)	6 (11)
Skills-based	11 (14)	6 (19)	5 (10)	5 (18)	6 (11)
Knowledge-based	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)	0 (0)	1 (2)
Activism and raising awareness of food poverty ^b	6 (7)	4 (13)	2 (4)	1 (4)	5 (9)
Enhancing interagency collaboration ^b	2 (2)	0 (0)	2 (4)	1 (4)	1 (2)
Research to guide better decision and target resources ^b	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)	0 (0)	1 (2)
Moral evaluation	79 (98)	31 (97)	48 (98)	28 (100)	51 (96)
Deserving of assistance – desperate situations	37 (46)	15 (47)	22 (45)	15 (54)	22 (42)
A sense of shock or outrage	23 (28)	11 (34)	12 (24)	9 (32)	14 (26)

	Total articles (n=81)	By newspaper territory		By newspaper type	
		Northern Ireland (n=32)	Ireland (n=49)	National (n=28)	Regional/ local (n=53)
Entman's framing function	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Positive attributes of fundraisers or donors	22 (27)	13 (41)	9 (18)	3 (11)	19 (36)
Stark choices in how to spend money	19 (23)	5 (16)	14 (29)	11 (39)	8 (15)
Calls for donation and volunteers	14 (17)	5 (16)	9 (18)	2 (7)	12 (23)
Working poor – nobody immune	12 (15)	1 (3)	11 (22)	7 (25)	5 (9)
Challenges faced by food banks or other charities	11 (14)	2 (6)	9 (18)	3 (11)	8 (15)
Rewards for volunteers or fundraisers	11 (14)	7 (22)	4 (8)	2 (7)	9 (17)
Critique of food charity	10 (12)	7 (22)	3 (6)	3 (11)	7 (13)
Volunteers framed as saviour/rescuer of “poor” people	9 (11)	6 (19)	3 (6)	1 (4)	8 (15)
Right to food and dignity	9 (11)	3 (9)	6 (12)	5 (18)	4 (8)
Expectations of gratitude from food charity recipients	7 (9)	5 (16)	2 (4)	0 (0)	7 (13)
Frustration with government lack of action	4 (5)	3 (9)	1 (2)	0 (0)	4 (8)
Praise for food redistribution initiatives	3 (4)	1 (3)	2 (4)	1 (4)	2 (4)
Food aid recipients framed as underserving	2 (2)	0 (0)	2 (4)	1 (4)	1 (2)
Charitable food aid as a lifeline	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (2)	1 (4)	0 (0)
Actors	81 (100)	32 (100)	49 (100)	28 (100)	53 (100)
Charities	70 (86)	28 (88)	42 (86)	22 (79)	48 (91)

	Total articles (n=81)	By newspaper territory		By newspaper type	
		Northern Ireland (n=32)	Ireland (n=49)	National (n=28)	Regional/ local (n=53)
Entman's framing function	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Government/policy officials	42 (52)	16 (50)	26 (53)	21 (75)	21 (40)
Private sectors	20 (25)	6 (19)	14 (29)	9 (32)	11 (21)
Other actors/voices	40 (49)	21 (66)	23 (47)	18 (64)	26 (49)

^a Existing solutions to food poverty

^b Proposed solutions to food povert

