



BFAWU Members: Food Insecurity and Cost of Living Report 2025



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“Single mother. Doing my best but sometimes it is eat or heat.”

Introduction

This is the third in a series of reports that we, the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU), have published about food insecurity and wider cost of living pressures facing our members.

This research, just like our previous two reports in 2021 and 2023 did, surveyed our members and heard from them directly. This current research also saw us asking how our members and their families are managing in the lead up to Christmas.

Our previous reports found that our members were struggling with cost of living pressures. In effect, this meant that they were struggling to afford the very food that they themselves produced.

In our 2023 report we said:

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

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

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

Our assessment in 2023 is as true today as it was then. In fact, the data we have gathered from our members in this report would suggest that in some cases conditions for them are worse than they were in 2023. In spite of a change of government our members are still struggling with the cost of living as a result of low and stagnating wages that have not kept up with food and energy inflation. It is clearer than ever that our economy is failing many people, that redistribution is happening in reverse from the poor to the rich, that levels of poverty and inequality are getting worse and that food insecurity and 'foodbank' Britain has been normalised as a result.

What makes all our surveys so shocking is that we have found that food workers are themselves often unable to afford to eat what they produce. They show that food insecurity is rife amongst food workers, as is the impact from wider cost of living pressures such as rising and unaffordable energy prices.

This must change and be addressed as a matter of urgency. Our union will play our part in helping persuade policy makers to do something about this situation facing our members. We will always fight to improve the wages, terms and conditions for our members and get involved in wider political campaigns such as the Right to Food Campaign.

Four years ago we were active participants in supporting the Right to Food campaign, led by Labour MP Ian Byrne MP. Since then things have not improved, leading to Ian Byrne MP launching a Right to Food Commission, with a view to developing a road map for right to food legislation. In our 2021 report we said:

'A right to food enshrined in law and delivered in practice is urgently required. The time is right to make the case for 'the right to food', to make food truly accessible, affordable, healthy, safe to eat and fairly produced by well-paid and protected staff throughout the food sector.'

That is why we are fully supportive of the recently launched Right to Food Commission and are playing an active role in it, with Sarah Woolley, our General Secretary, sitting as vice chair of the commission. The findings in this report illustrate exactly why we supported the Right to Food campaign from the beginning and why we continue to support and play an active part in it today.

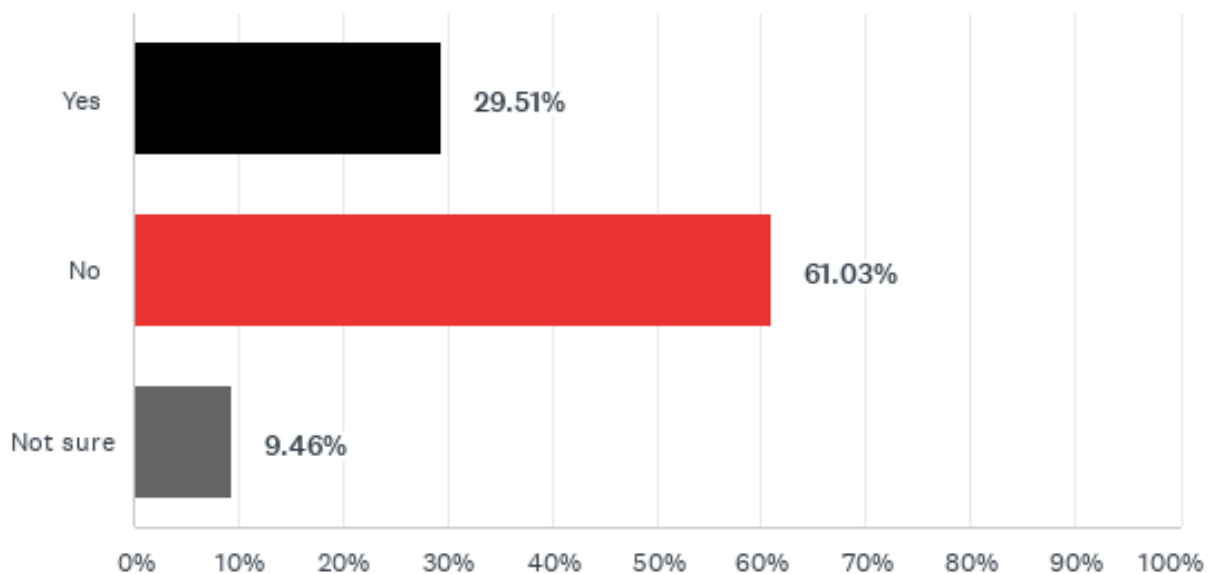
A Right to Food Campaign is necessary because millions of people, including many people in work, in this country do not know where their next meal is coming from, and/or have reduced the amount they eat and/or now choose to eat less nutritious food which affects their health and well-being and that of their children. As a consequence child development, educational attainment and the long-term life outcomes for children are hugely impacted.

Normalising and accepting a system that cuts opportunities and builds in disadvantage for so many children before they even reach primary school in 2025 Britain represents a huge indictment on our wider political and economic system. Our data once again confirms this unacceptable situation and makes the case again for urgent action to instigate action for change.

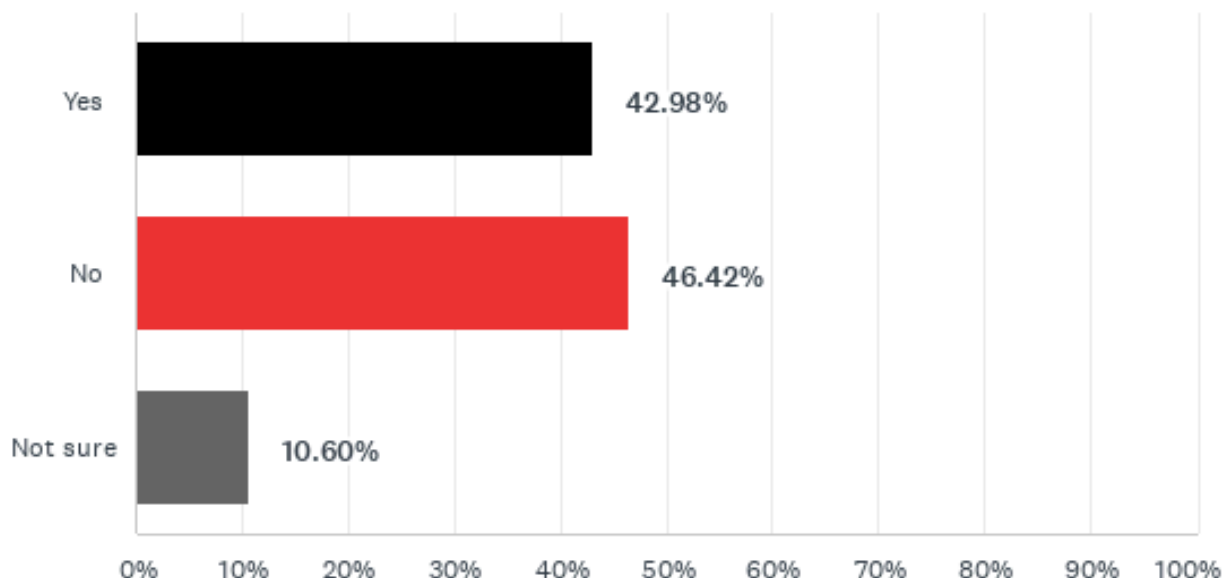
Data section 1

The evidence we have gathered from our members is set out below. It presents a picture that is consistent with our 2021 and 2023 surveys, in some instances it actually shows a worsening situation for our members. This is a disgrace and needs to change. We hope that in presenting this latest evidence, policy makers will take note and do something about wages, the cost of living and the right to food for our members and wider workforce.

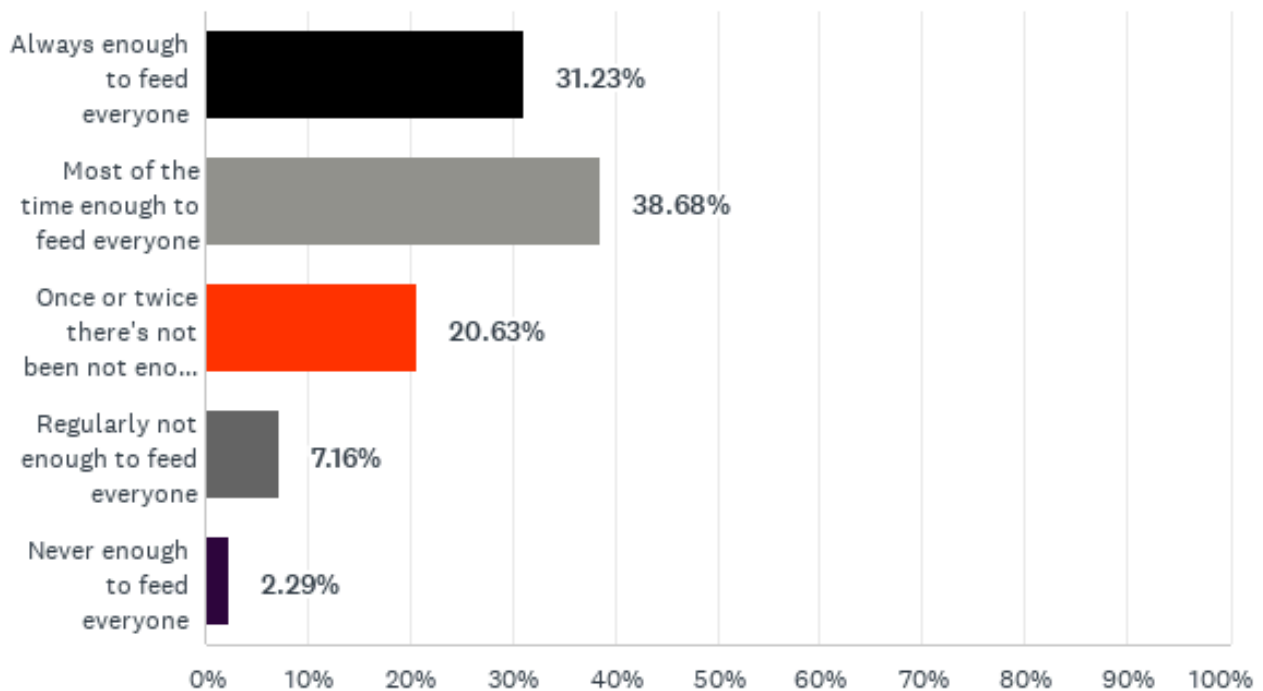
We asked our members if their wages were enough to meet their basic needs, such as food, heating and electricity. Over 61% said no their wages were not enough to meet their basic needs. This is slightly below the 63% of our members who replied in 2023.



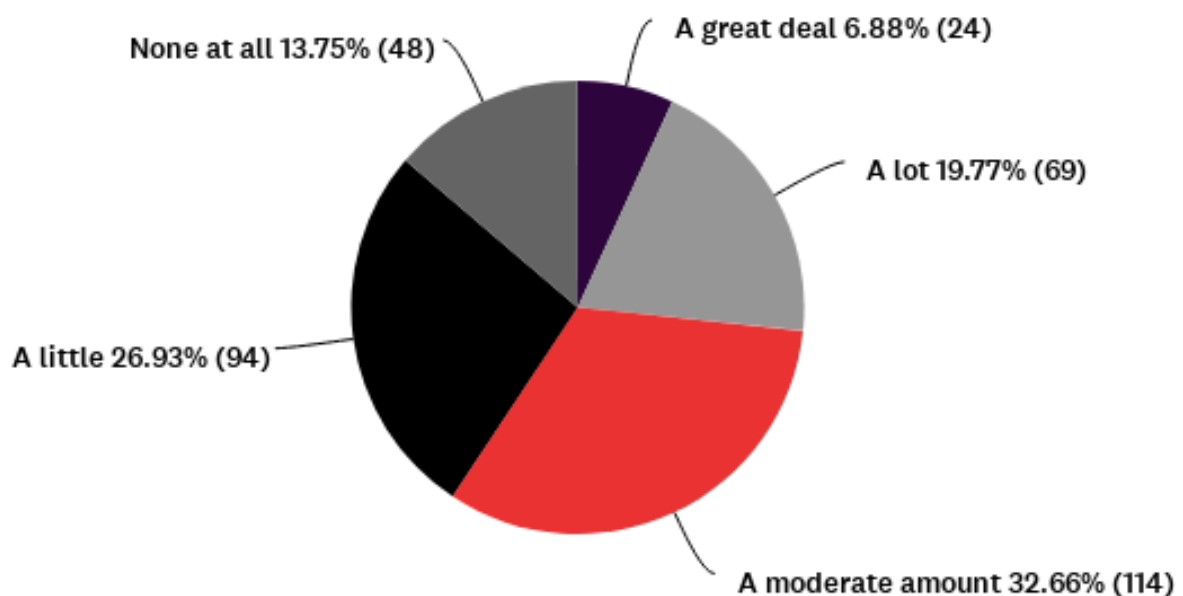
We also asked if they felt secure about food and their ability to feed themselves and their family. 43% said they were, nearly 46.5% said they didn't feel secure and over 10% said they were not sure.



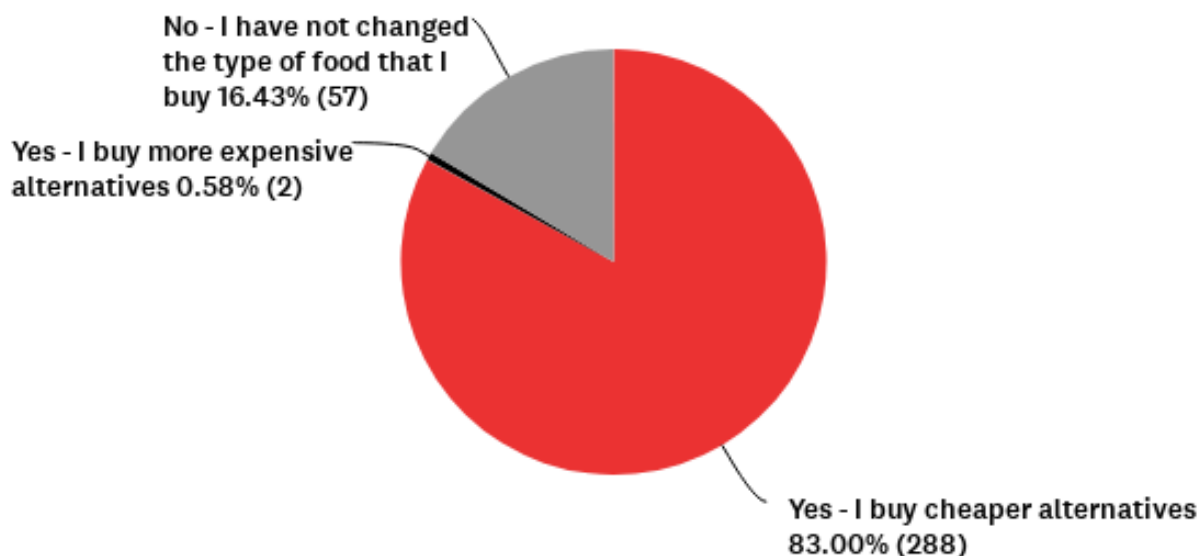
When we asked if they felt they had enough to feed them and their families over 30% intimated they didn't feel they had, ranging from once or twice there hasn't been enough to there's 'never enough to feed everyone'.



When asked if people had reduced the food they ate, only 13.5% said they had not done so. 7%, said they had reduced their food intake a great deal, 20% said they had reduced it a lot, 33% said they had reduced their food sometimes and 27% said they had by just a little. This is a significant increase from 2023 when nearly 40% said they hadn't reduced the amount of food they ate.

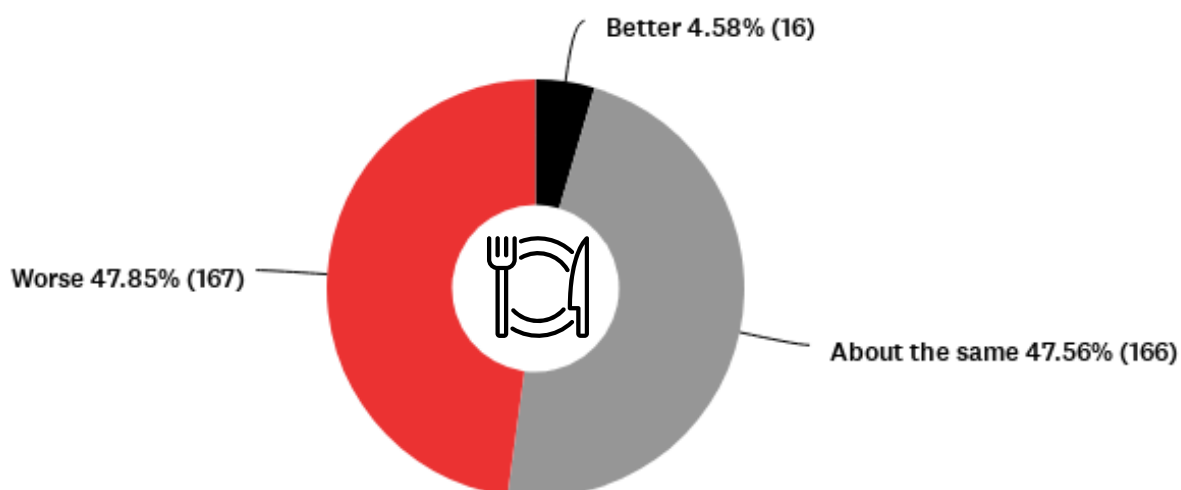


When asked if they had changed the type of food they eat, 83% said they buy cheaper alternatives. This is a slight increase from 2023, when 80% said they did.

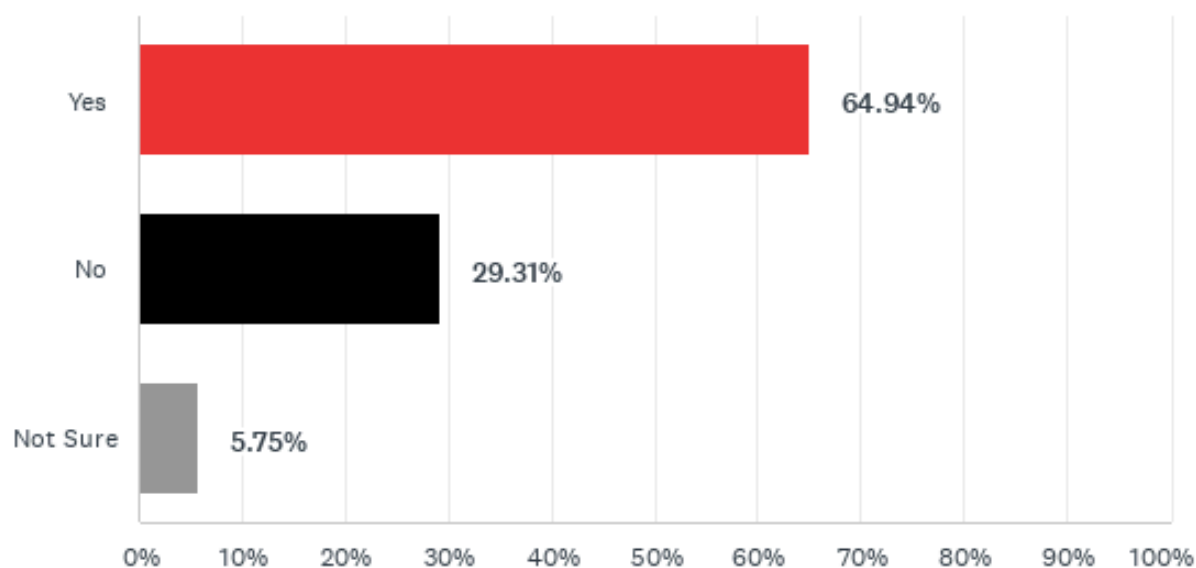


We asked do you feel the food you eat now is better or worse than the food you ate before?

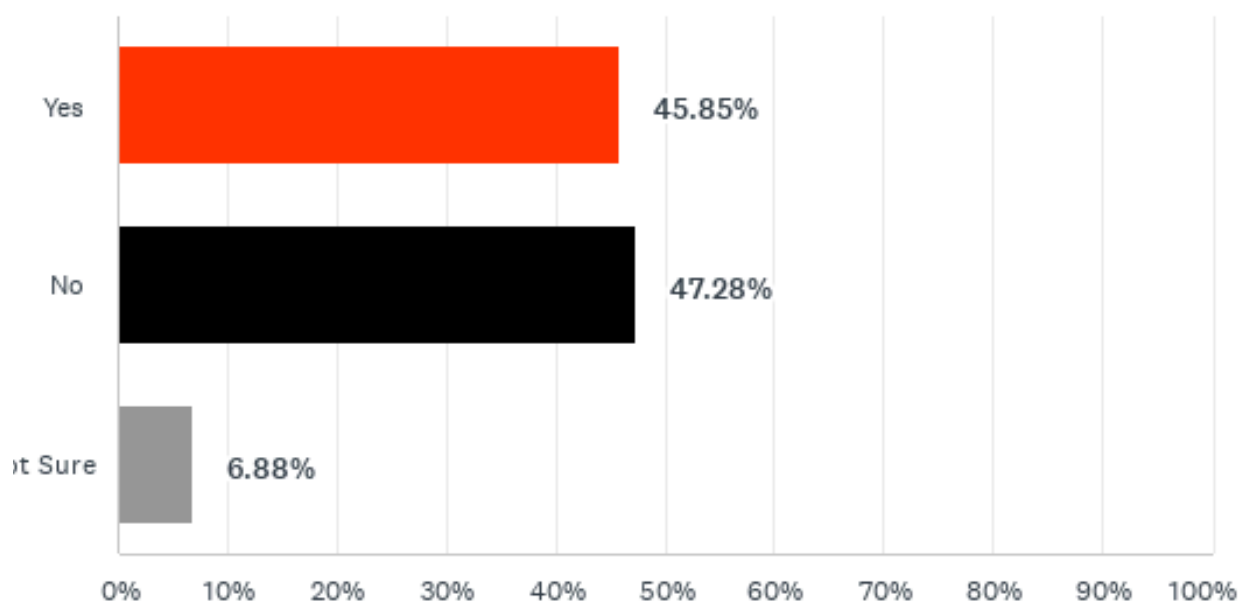
Only 4.5% said the food they eat now is better than before. 47.5% said it was about the same and 48% said it was worse.



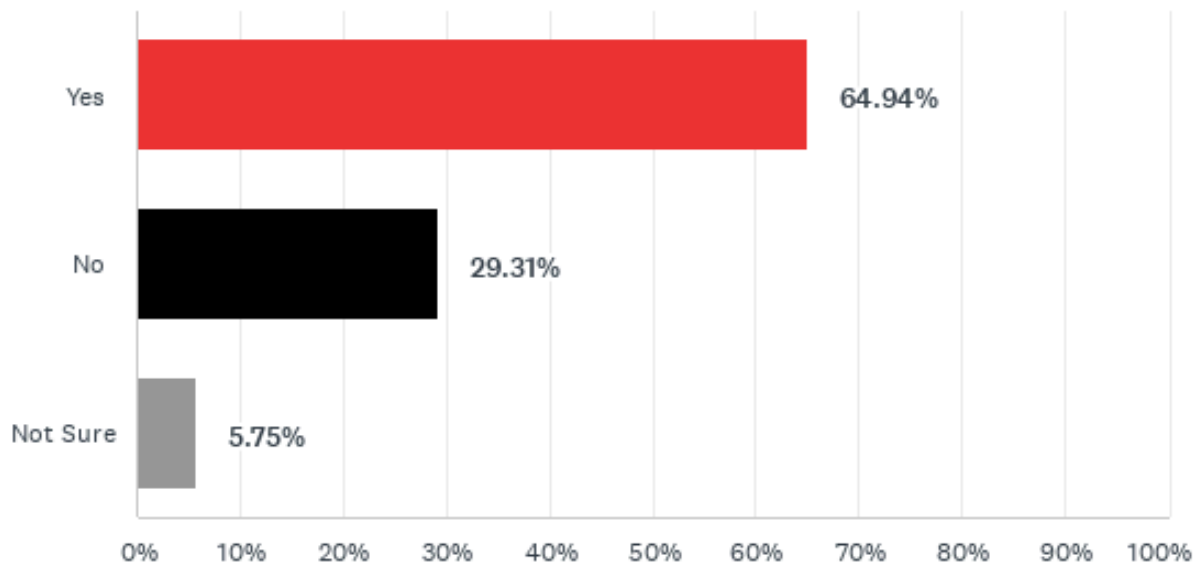
When asked has there been a time when you ate less than you thought you should due to a lack of money? 65% said yes, 29% said no and 6% were not sure. This is a significant increase from 2021 and 2023. In 2021 40% said they ate less due to a lack of money with 60% saying so in 2023.



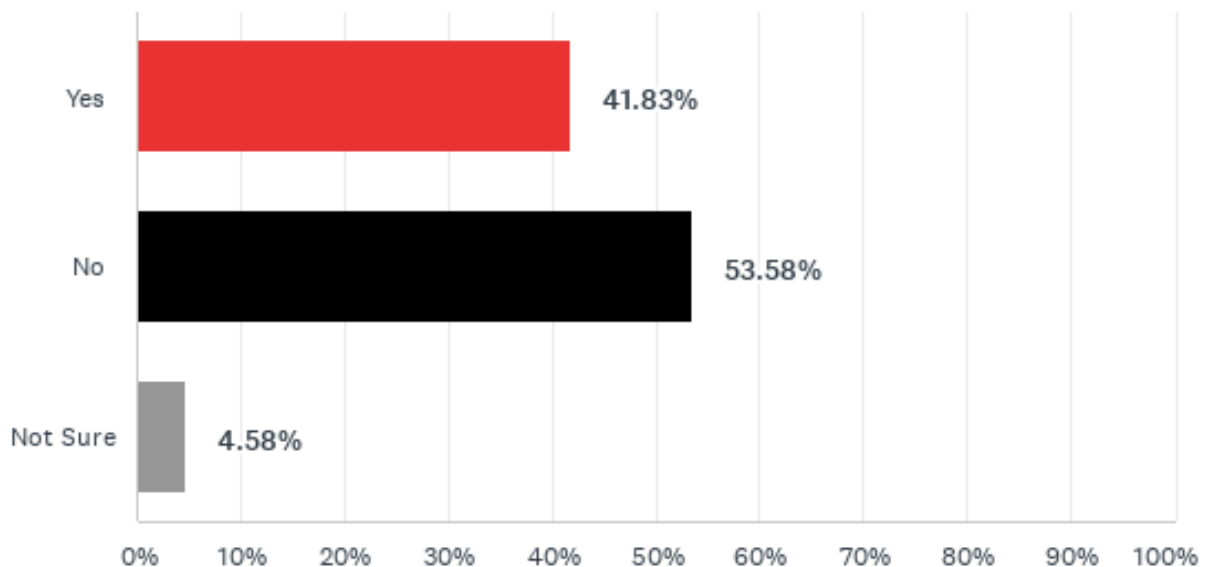
When asked if they skipped meals/ate less to make sure someone else gets enough to eat. 46% said they did. This is a tiny increase from 2023, when 45.5% said they had. However it is a big increase from 2021, when 35% said they had.



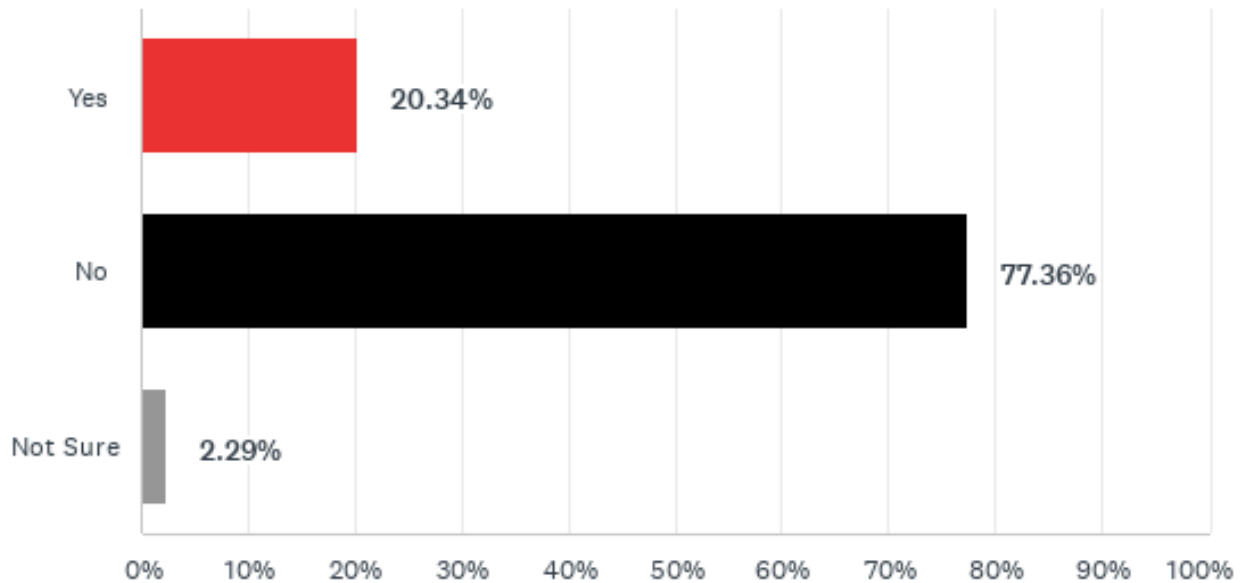
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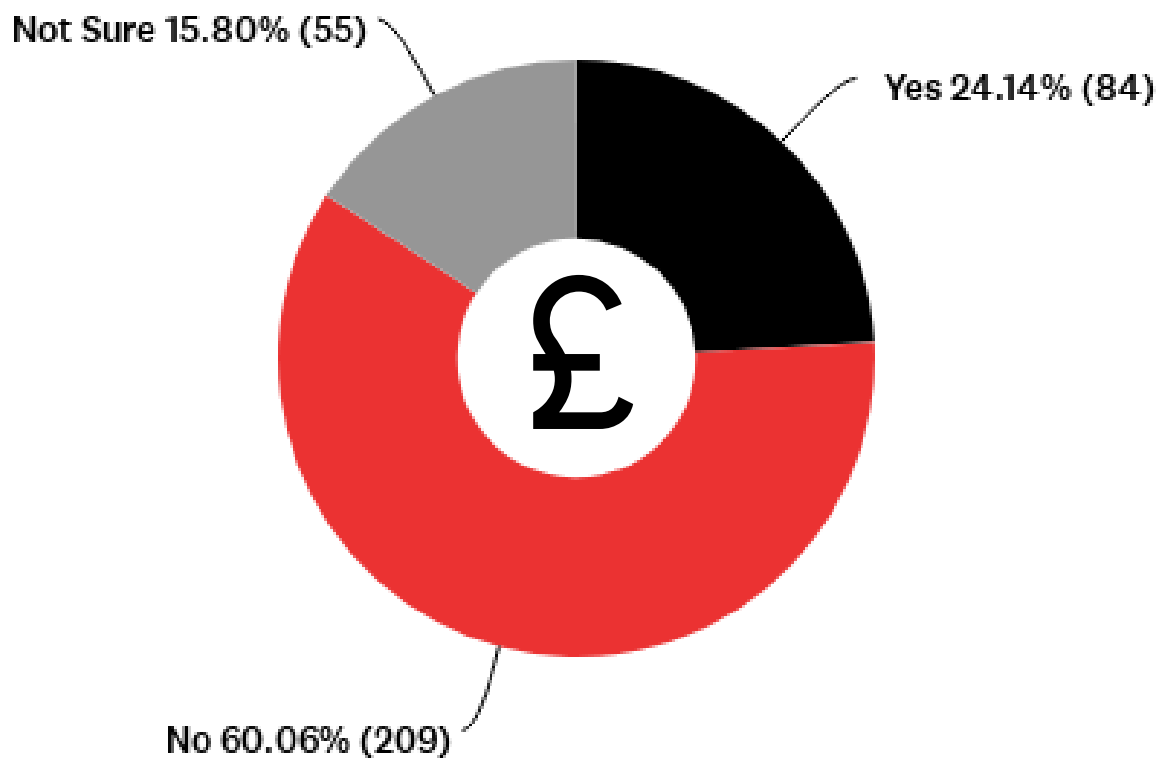
We asked if they ever had to depend on family or friends to help you feed yourself and your family? Around 42% said they had. This is more than 2023 when 33% said they had and 2021 when 25% said they had relied on family and friends.



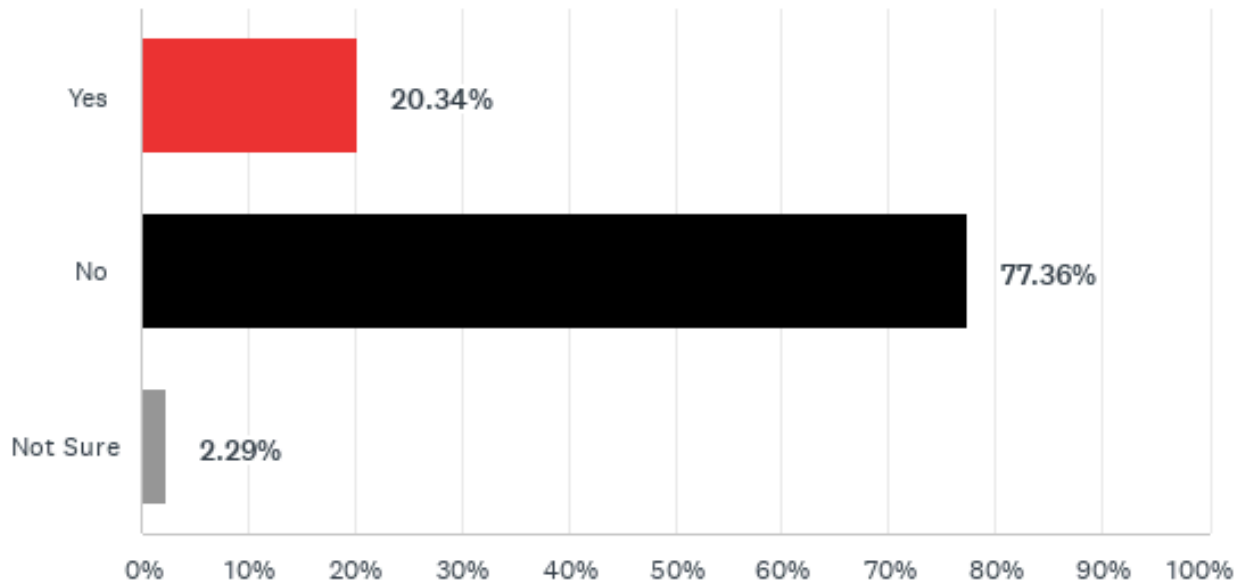
We asked if our members ever had to get help from a food bank to help feed them and their family? Around 20.5% said they had, which is an increase from 17% in 2023 and a significant increase from 2021 when 7.5% said they had to



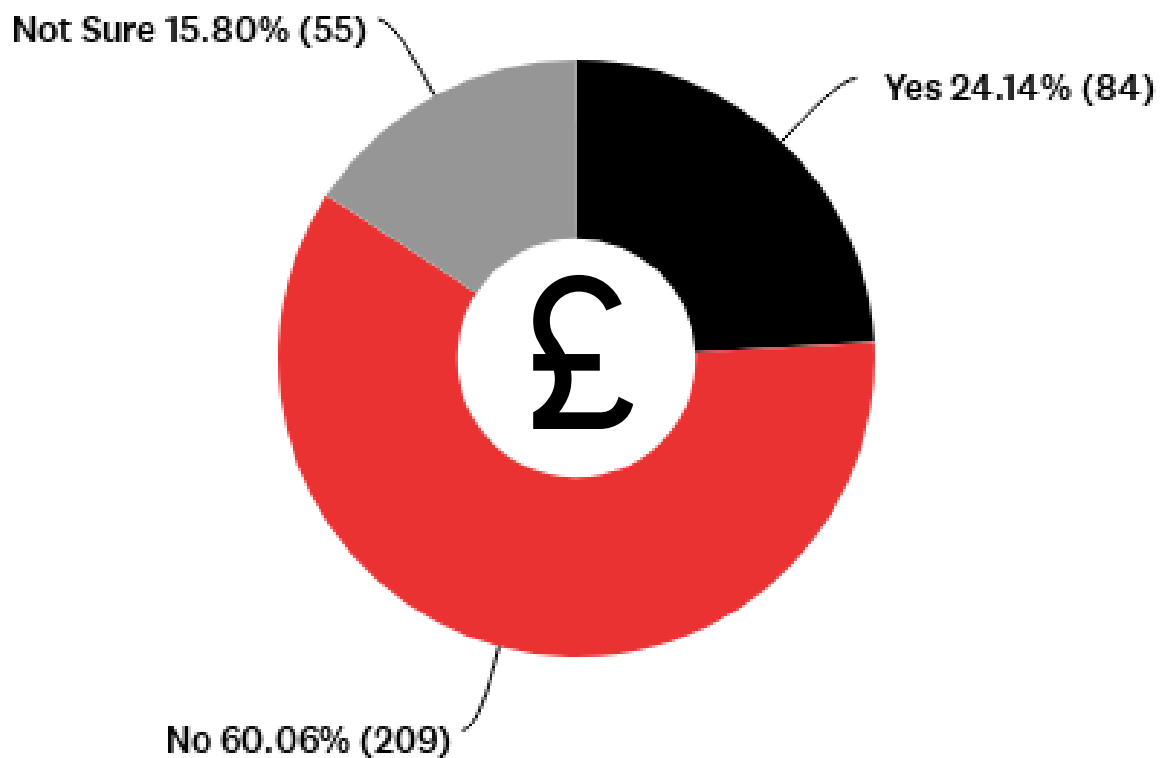
We asked do you feel that your wages give you enough to properly feed you and your family good food? 60% said no. This is slightly less than what we found in 2023, but still shows a significant majority who say their wages are insufficient for them to purchase good food.



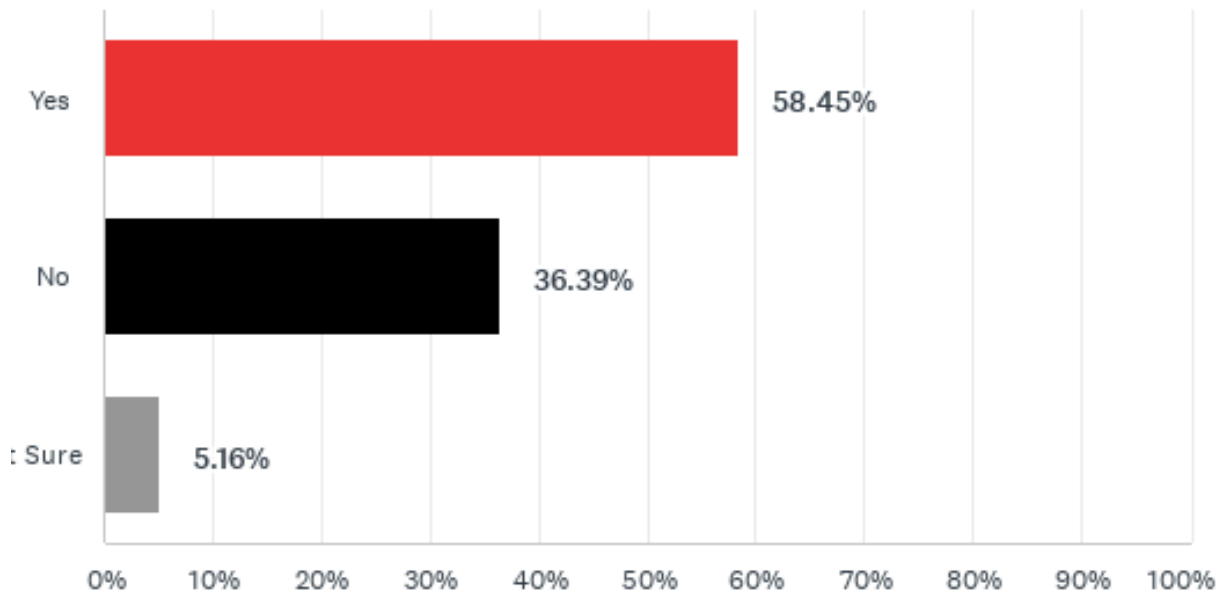
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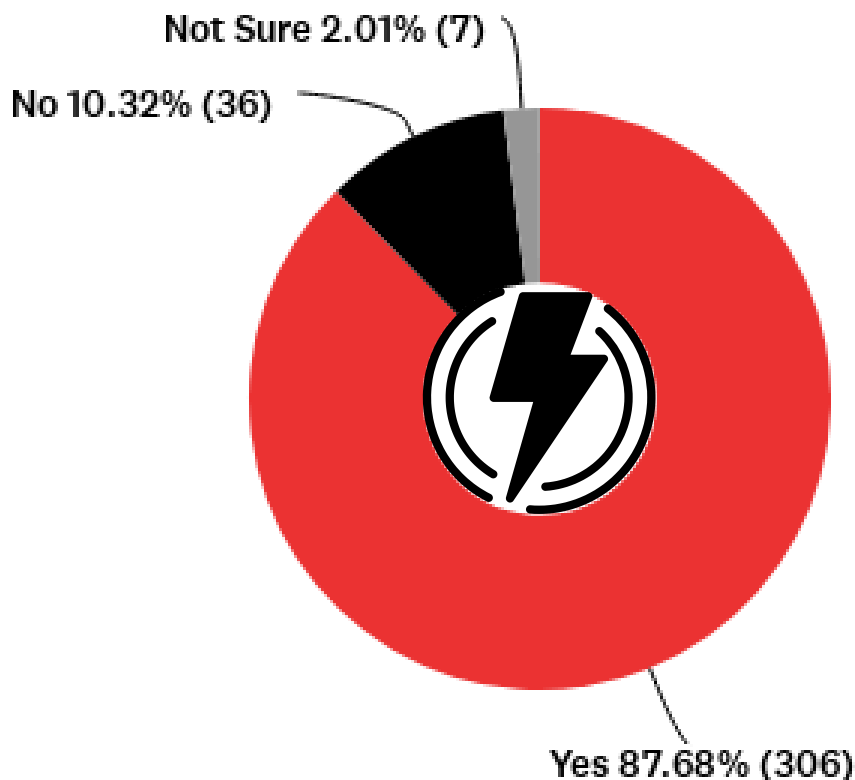
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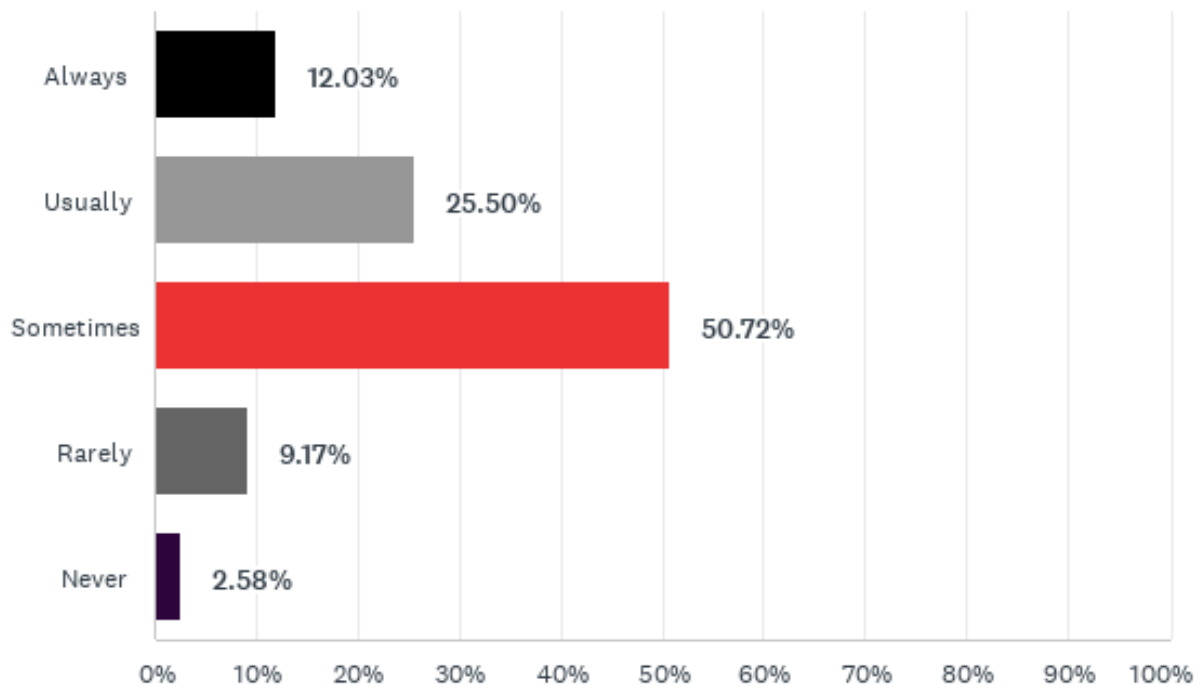
We asked, has there been a time when you were worried you would run out of food because of a lack of money or other resources? 58.5% said they had, which is an increase from 2023 when 55.5% said they had.



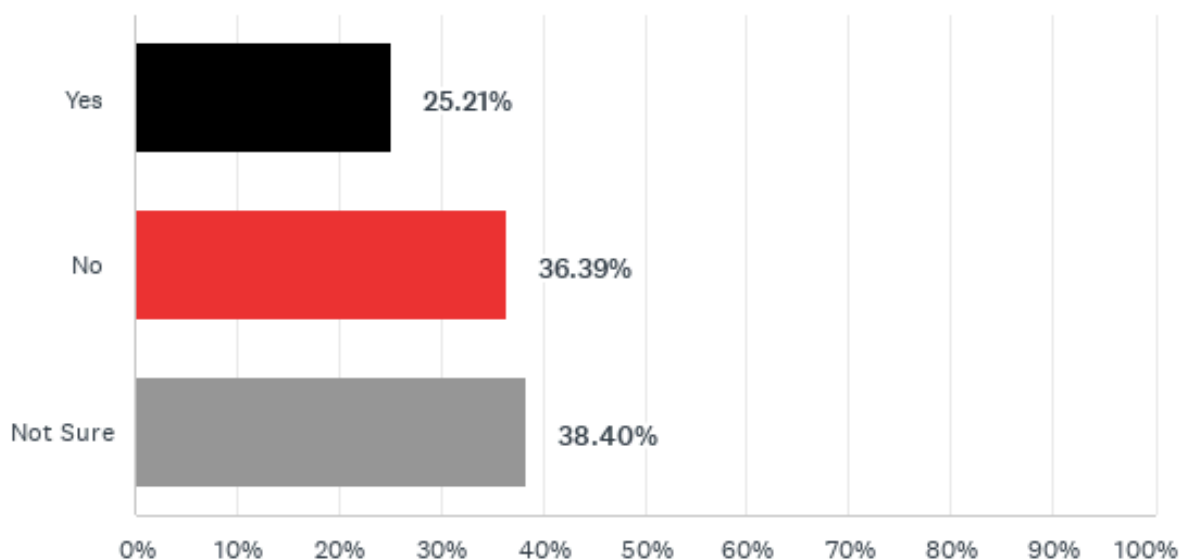
We also asked our members if they had at any time reduced their heating/energy use in your home to save money. An incredible 88% said they had. This is almost identical to the number of our members who completed the survey in 2023.



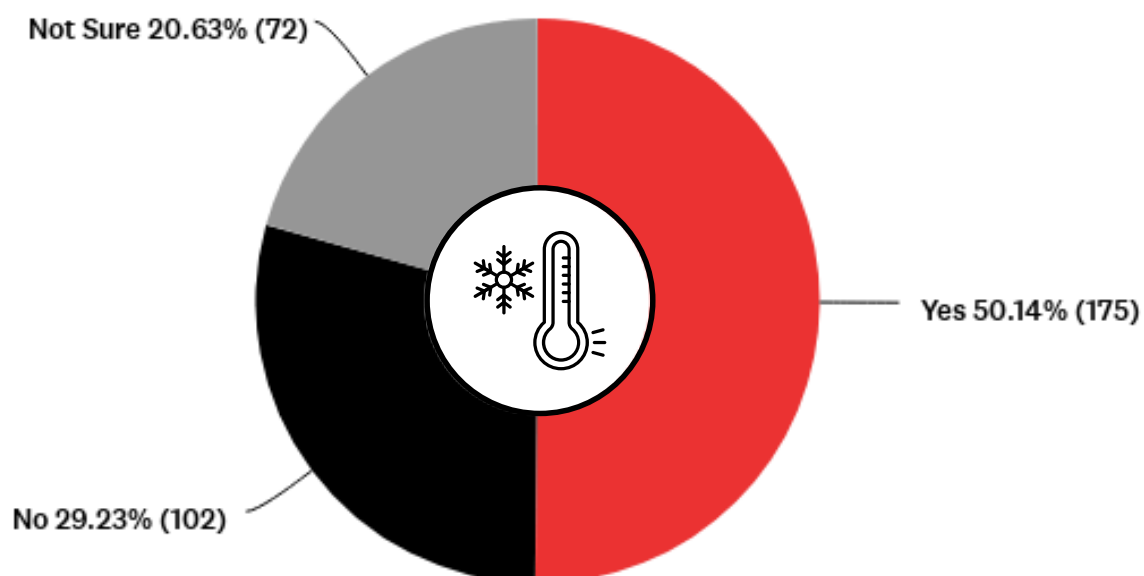
We also asked how often they felt cold in their own homes. 12% said they always felt cold, an increase from 2023, 25% said they felt cold most of the time, a decrease from 2023 and 50% said they felt cold sometimes, an increase from 2023. Only 2.5% said they never felt cold, down from 3.77% in 2023.



We asked if our members felt confident that they will be able to afford heating and electricity this coming winter? 36% they were not, 25% said they were with the remainder unsure.



We asked if BFAWU members were dreading the winter in case they couldn't afford to heat their homes. Over 50% said they were and 29% said they weren't, with the rest unsure.



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Members' voices 1

We asked people about the impact of cutting their energy use on them and their family, and, how did it make them and others in the household feel?

This was an open question, allowing people to respond in any way they wanted to. The following is a snapshot of the replies we received.

"No one likes being cold".

"We are cold, sometimes hungry, I don't wash clothes as much because of electric and water, I still don't have enough for my rent".

"Kids hate the house being cold. They don't like to layer up with cardigans etc"

"Depressed."

"It greatly impacts my health as I have a long-term condition."

"Clock-watching and metre-watching anxiety about energy prices. Physically cold and sometimes hungry. Waiting to eat until I go to work where I get a meal per shift and the heating is on."

"It's constantly cold in the house, we only put hot water on when needed, sit in darkness too sometimes, making everyone depressed."

"Ashamed"

"I have a medical condition which is worse in the winter months and there are days when I stay in bed longer due to how cold it is as my budget for heating has to be limited to a set amount on a daily/monthly basis."

"It makes you feel degraded when you work so hard for your wages and then struggle to buy food , whether to put heating on or sit under a duvet and a coat."

"It's not nice to be cold in your own home, working full time should pay enough for essentials."

"I feel guilty when I put the heating on - like it's a luxury and I'm being wasteful."

"Damp in the house, sad, ashamed I can't afford to eat."

"We are cold, sometimes hungry, I don't wash clothes as much because of electric and water, I still don't have enough for my rent".

"Miserable"

"Cold and uncomfortable, didn't feel like home or I want to be at home."

"Worried and fed up."

"Cold and uncomfortable."

"Wages are not high enough to cover costs. Food prices up and food quality down."

"The main impact is on my children. Feel like a failure not being able to provide for them properly."

"It makes others cold in the house, sometimes skipping meals close to payday and cutting back on cheaper alternatives that are not as nice and eating less. It makes people generally in the household feel down a lot of the time especially when I'm fully working and bringing in a full time wage."

"Like life shouldn't be this hard. I earn a good wage and it should be enough to afford to eat and heat without worry but it's not."

"Single mother. Doing my best but sometimes it is eat or heat."

"Dreading a cold snap"

"It has affected my mental health."

"Embarrassing."

"The energy prices are going high but our wages remain the same its not working out."

"Negatively affects mental health, physical health and generally increases stress levels. Once prices go up they never come down. We are at the mercy of corporate greed which is facilitated and supported by our elected officials."

"Being unwell more often."

"Degraded"

"Minimal heating Quick showers no baths Not very good but has to be done"

"Feeling colder on occasions and now dreading the winter months ahead."

"Depressed and ashamed. It's harder to sleep when it's cold. Washing doesn't dry properly. Cold exacerbates physical health conditions. Worrying about electric costs means fear of losing connections with services because everything is online."

"Cheap and useless. Can't heat a home enough for the kids to not be wrapped up in blankets some nights"

"Its very upsetting and stressful."

"I suffer from asthma so often colds turn into full blown chest infections."

"More colds, less immunity, lower energy , some nights off work due to feeling unwell."

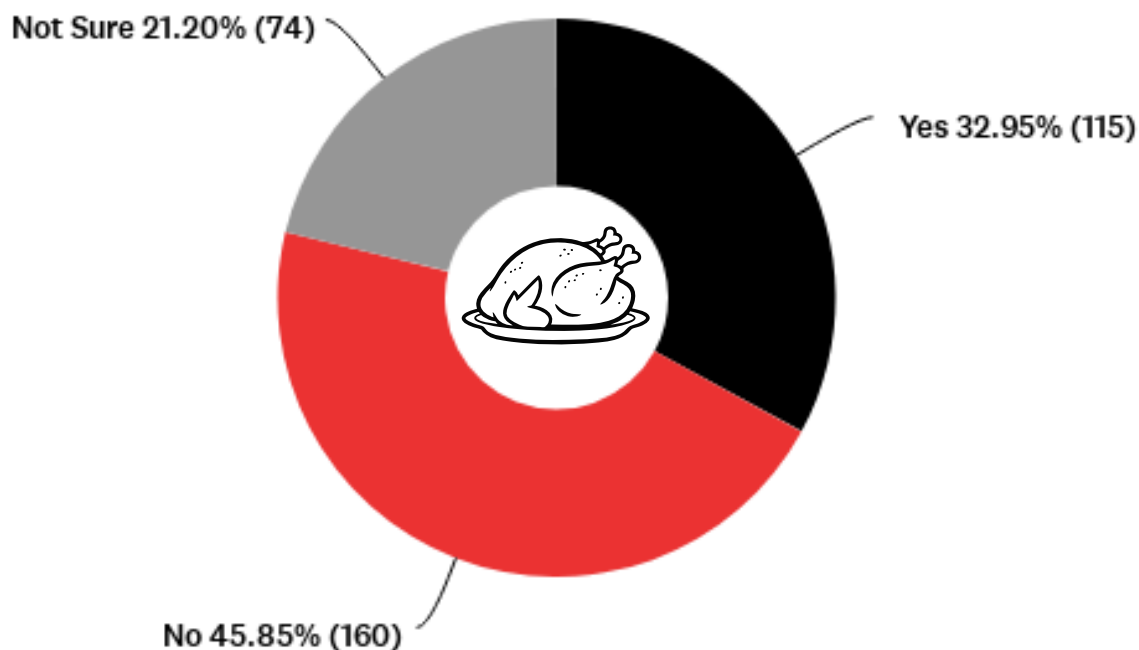
"I feel depressed and sometimes feel why bother been here because nothing seems to get better it just like been a hamster going round in a nightmare circle."

"Like being a 3rd world citizen in a country that increasingly takes more, but gives less."

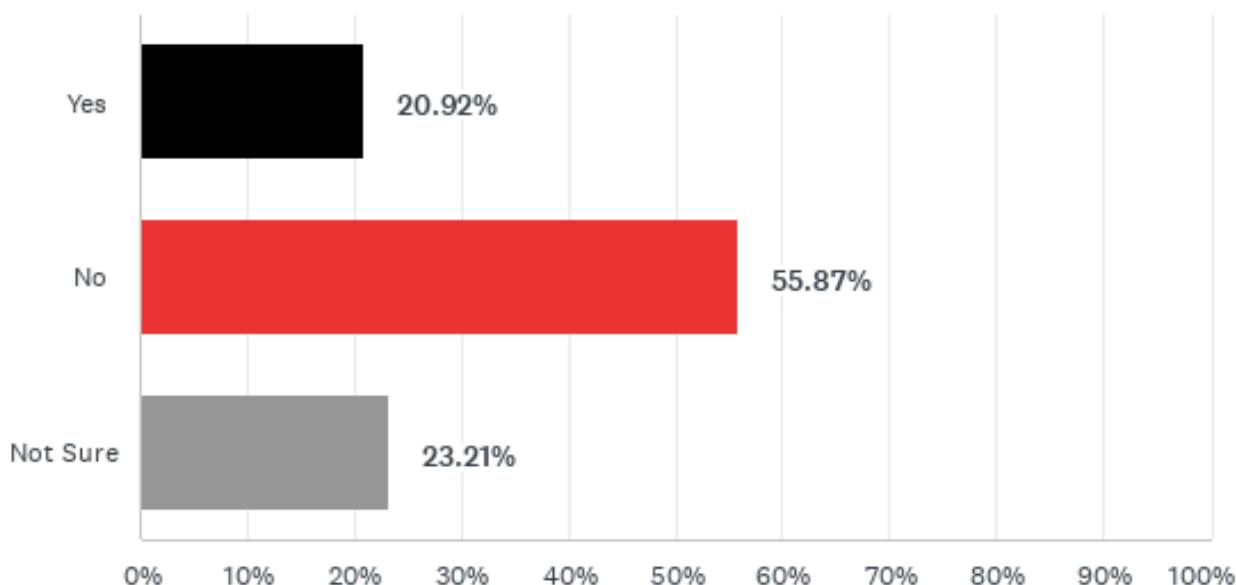
"Wintertime is the worst for this. It's sometimes a toss up between buying food, shopping or putting money on the gas to heat the home."

Data section 2

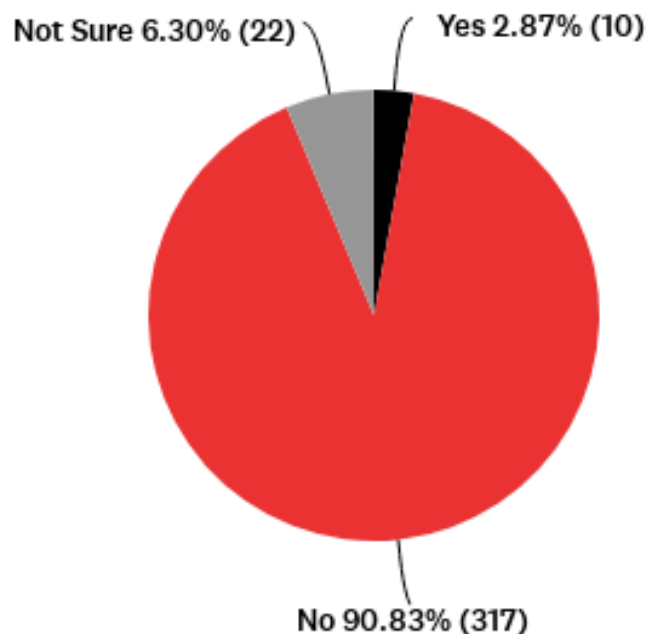
With Christmas on its way we asked our members if they thought they would be able to eat what they wanted during the festivities. 33% said they would, but 46% said they would not with the rest unsure if they would or not.



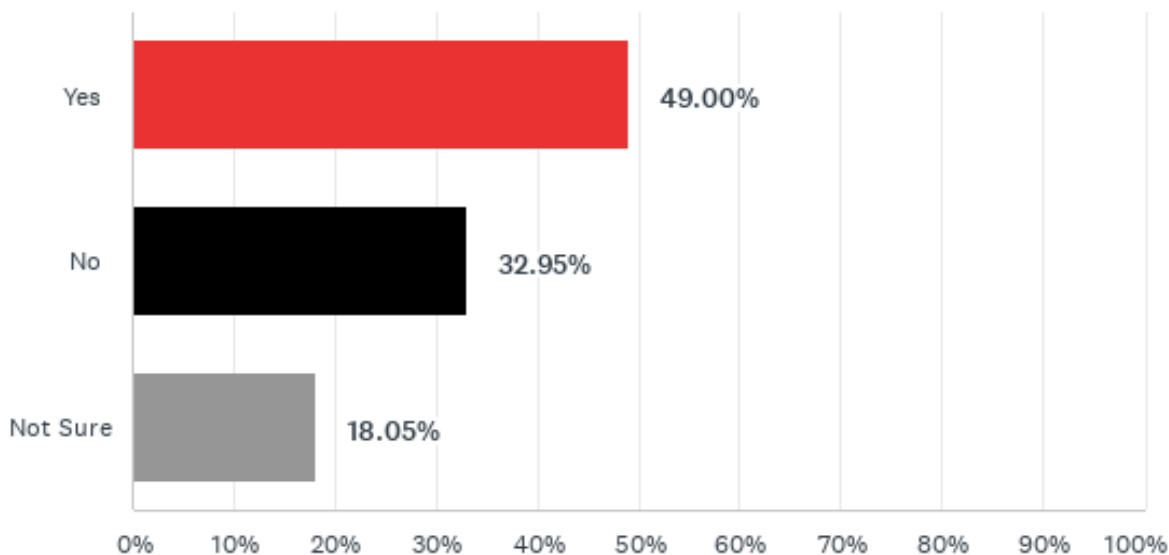
In relation to Christmas we also asked, do you think you will be able to provide everything for your family that you would like to? 56% said no they wouldn't, while 21% said they would and 23% were not sure.



We also asked for our members' views on the performance of the current government in tackling the cost of living. We asked firstly, do you think the current government is doing enough to help families struggling with the cost of living? 3% said yes, 91% said no and 6% were unsure.



We also asked if they had noticed any difference to their ability to provide for themselves and their family since the new government was elected in July 2024? 49% said they had, 33% said they hadn't and 18% they were unsure.



Members' voices 2

We asked people what they would like to see the government do to help those struggling with the cost of living and to eat and pay for energy. The following is a snapshot of the responses we received.

The responses in this section provide an insight into the views of our members of what needs to be done by the government, in so doing showing political and social understanding of our members to be at an advanced level.

"Reduce costs of utilities - get rid of private companies creaming profit from everything we need to survive. Cap rental rates for private tenants, abolish the 2 child benefit cap. Reduce food profits allowed to be made at supermarkets. Tax corporations more. Increase minimum wage to an actual living wage. Stop shrinkflation on products. Tax billionaires into oblivion. Abolish the monarchy. House the homeless in the palaces/ open them to tourists and make a fund to house the homeless among other things."

"Higher the income tax bracket to at least £15,000 before tax kicks in."

"Lower utilities, don't let landlords rent at extortionate prices. I've been evicted, I have fibromyalgia, adhd and my 18 year old son has autism. Where can we go? I'm priced out of my area."

"I am an immigrant who is mostly unfamiliar with specific things that the UK government as an institution is capable of doing in the first place. I could answer this question better about my native country. But I do feel that raising taxes on the most wealthy tier of tax payers and using that money to fund public welfare programs such as those helping with food, energy, etc costs is usually a good place to start."

"Remove all taxes from energy and food bills. Give aid in winter to low income families to help eat and heat."

"Put a cap on energy bills to stop companies putting prices up during winter months."

"I request from our government to support people on low income with the costs of living."

"Its time the well off were made to pay their way e.g. in taxes and large companies should be targeted to do the same. I also think MPs and some others should not claim energy costs as their wages as quite adequate for them to pay their own."

"Stop treating people with long-term sickness, as playing the system. As most of us are very ill, and could not do any work, due to conditions. Build more bungalows (council one's). Process housing needs better and quicker. As in my case, where I had to move house due to not being able to manage stairs. Stop forcing people into private renting. Bring the price of rent down to affordable housing, make it easier to get a mortgage, as sometimes it's cheaper than paying rent."

"More help in terms of food services in the local areas. A lot of companies bin surplus food when it could be given away. Maybe they should introduce incentives for the food companies to do so."

"Stop raising taxes and make these companies reduce their profits so that families can enjoy their time together instead of worrying where the next meal is coming from. In this day and age we should be working to enjoy life and time together not working to just survive. If people decide to work overtime for this better life it should be exempt from taxation and the national living wage should be higher. Also the amount you earn should be greater than it is, we all need more money in our pockets to enjoy life."

"Rent controls and higher wages."

"Price cap on energy lowered, energy companies profits are sky high while people are struggling to heat their homes."

"They need to stop the hike in prices of food, gas, and electric. There are gross profits being taken in bonuses for the so called 'fat cats' and they're only interested in lining their own pockets. The politicians do not look after their constituents. It's disgraceful that people are homeless and hungry, and very little is done for those people."

"Raise wages, lower cost of food and energy, tax the rich, spend more on public services, universal basic income."

"I would like to see the government clamp down on the energy companies, who are taking advantage of their high costs and complicated tariffs, despite making a huge profit!"

"Raise the minimum wage to £15 per hour, help people with energy costs by lowering bills because the energy companies are making millions and millions so are supermarkets making millions and millions lower the food prices also."

"Give food and energy vouchers to people that do work. Reduce all bills and listen to us that do struggle. Also free nhs dental and prescriptions for workers who cannot afford them. Also get doctors to start seeing patients when want an appointment, not just doctor ringing to see if they need an appointment, some people need to talk properly face to face."

"I'm not sure But Something HAS TO BE DONE."

"Tax the super rich. Invest in public works. Create jobs."

"Better pay rises and lower cost of living. Pointless having minimum pay rises when cost of living is constantly rising. After all monthly payments, we hardly have anything left for ourselves. We are working to survive, not working to live."

"Increase the personal tax allowance. Increase the national living wage. Stop the utility firms charging ridiculous amounts. No council tax rises that were promised and broken."

"Not sure. I think it needs more time for us to see any changes coming from the government."

"Increase universal credit, don't cut PIP, consider universal basic income/ services, increase minimum wage, wealth taxes and nationalising private industries that are profiting whilst workers can't afford to eat. Consider food provision for workers who struggle to feed themselves like the NHS, care, refuse workers etc."

"Nationalise energy. Have socially owned grocery stores."

"End austerity, tax the wealthy."

"Tax billionaires."

"Public ownership of essential services. Wealth tax. Rent caps. Public housing."

"Improve wages and our ability to provide adequately for our families."

"Nationalise energy. Increase minimum wage in line with inflation. Rent caps. Nationalise water. Nationalise railways."

"This government came into an enormous mess. We know that, to get the grip of NHS and the rest, it's not easy to get it right, I will give them 2 years to get this country on the right path."

"The government needs to stop the extortionate prices the energy companies charge. The price of food in supermarkets has gone up again. Rent for private housing is too high."

"Not attack PIP, cap energy costs, tax large corporations and put that back into helping poor and vulnerable families. You know - what Labour USED to stand for."

"Reduce VAT on basic food products. Reduce VAT on energy costs."

"Get back to basics and be the party they were set up to be - for the working class citizens and persons in need. Food vouchers available, take the energy companies to heel and stop the ridiculous over charged pricing in the UK."

"Shift the responsibility to providers and owners of energy companies and big food chains. Tax those companies much more heavily. Replace food banks with community kitchens but only for acute lack - the normalisation of reliance on food banks and similar should shame a government not patch up the gaps they chose to make. Supermarkets make money from food donations that people already hit by costs contributing with additional shopping. This is despicable. If food banks are necessary they should be paid for by the businesses themselves if not the government. Pay for previously mentioned community kitchens to be staffed and resourced to a high standard. Reinstate energy storage facilities instead of selling them off and converting them into 'luxury' property - see Oval Gas Works in South London for example. Nationalise energy basically! Also water - another bill that is skyrocketing to pay shareholders and bosses for failing to provide basic human needs."

"Raise the minimum wage. Do not allow profit to be made off of food production. Break supermarket monopolies. Install a solar panel on every house. Build more council housing and genuinely affordable housing. Universal basic income."

"A nationwide house insulation program to improve the quality of the housing, and subsidised roll out of solar and ground source heat pumps to enable each house / community to generate more of its own electricity."

"There should be much more support financially to help all those struggling to eat and heat . Renationalise energy companies so that bills can be severely reduced... clamp down on supermarkets and chains to stop overcharging for basic needs and food prices overall."

"Get energy back into public ownership as well as a government run food cooperative. Supermarkets rinse the country."

"Nationalise Energy. Create networks of municipal grocery stores, or give cooperatives a way to compete on pricing with large chains that have cornered the market and price gouge."

Conclusion

We said in 2023 that the evidence gathered then was worse than what we found in 2021. In this latest 2025 survey, we have found that many of the measures used to assess the cost of living pressures facing our members are painting an even worse picture than in 2023.

In spite of the election of a Labour government in July 2024, it is clear that the cost of living is still hitting our members hard. It is also apparent that our members believe that the government is not doing enough to help alleviate the cost of living. 91% said they didn't think the government was doing enough.

Wages are still seen as insufficient to meet their basic needs and to feed them and their families with good food. The number skipping meals is growing, as is the proportion saying they are not eating enough due to a lack of money and those who say they are eating less to ensure others in their household eat.

While the numbers of our members who have had to visit a food bank has jumped from 7.5% in 2021 to over 20% today. Let that sink in 1 in 5 of our members in work, producing, delivering and serving food, do not get paid enough to eat and sometimes have to rely on charities to eat.

These figures indicate that low wages and the food insecurity and reliance on charity run food banks, that are the result of inadequate incomes, has become normalised in this country. That normalisation is shameful and an indictment on the current political and economic system and the governments and politicians whose policies have created the challenging conditions facing our members.

Similarly, fuel poverty has also become a standard, normal feature of our society. Almost nine out of ten of our members said they had reduced their heating to save money. This huge number of people going cold is almost identical to the numbers we found in 2023. People are continuing to go cold in their own homes and they are dreading the onset of winter and what that might mean for them because they can't afford to put the heating on.

When we asked them how they felt they told us that it was impacting their mental and physical health and going cold (and hungry) left some of them feeling 'ashamed', 'degraded', 'cold and miserable' 'distressed', 'stressed', 'upset', 'fed-up' and 'embarrassed'.

This is no way for the workers, the people, the human beings who produce, distribute and serve our food to be feeling in Britain in 2025. It is an outrage and a stain on our country that hard working food workers are not being paid enough to ensure they can meet their basic needs, such as being able to heat their home and purchase adequate levels of good, nutritious food that they themselves produce.

Our members have had enough. But, from their own understanding based on their experiences they also have the solutions to the problems they and the whole country face. When asked what they thought this Labour government should do to address the cost of living crisis they provided answers showing that food workers are insightful, knowledgeable and politically and economically conscious of why our economy is so imbalanced and unequal and what needs done to address the current situation.

Amongst other things they said wealth should be taxed, wages raised (with a higher statutory minimum wage), prices capped on food and energy, energy and water utilities nationalised, more social houses built, the creation of socially owned grocery stores and public restaurants and a complete and unequivocal end to austerity. Nothing less will do.

In the meantime despite working so hard all year round our members are worried about Christmas. 46% don't think they will be able to eat what they want at Christmas and 56% say they won't be able to provide everything they would like to for their family. To learn this from our members is both infuriating and deeply upsetting. In spite of their efforts all year round to ensure the British people are fed (what can be more important than this?) the biggest proportion of them won't have enough to eat what they want at Christmas and give the presents they would like to give to their children.

This is a wretched situation and one that should provoke every progressive politician into action as a matter of urgency. The real human beings who keep our country going are being denied enough wages to lead a contented life that pays them enough to meet their basic needs and to lead a life of contentment, dignity and happiness in the knowledge that they have a sufficient income to have what they need and have the financial freedom to be able to do what they want.

Our union will never stop highlighting these injustices and in so doing fighting for our members. We will do this in our day to day work with our members in their workplaces. We will also do it through work like this, which we will use to make arguments to politicians across different parliaments and local council areas.

It is why we will campaign for legislative change outside the specific situations facing our members in their employment. Our members, just like every other worker in this country, need to see water and energy nationalised. This will result in reduced bills, as profits are removed from bills. Thus, allowing them to put their heating on when they need to. Similarly those members paying exorbitant private rents need to see a huge social house building programme; and those struggling to eat what they want absolutely need to see a right to food legislated.

We will support these campaigns and more to help support our members in their wider lives outside of the workplace. Some reforms have been introduced by this government but much, much more needs to be done. Our members are suffering, as are the working class generally, and radical, redistributive, solutions are needed. We will stand alongside our members and others to fight for those changes.

This Labour government was elected on a prospectus of change. So far this change has not been seen by our members. Some are prepared to give them the benefit of doubt but most others are not. They need to turn their electoral rhetoric into tangible and manifest actions. We at the BFAWU will continue to make those arguments to them and this survey helps provide us with the tools to do so. We are as always grateful to our members for taking part in this survey and helping us to help you. Solidarity forever.

