

An Inquiry into the cost of infant formula in the UK



All Party Parliamentary Group on
Infant Feeding and Inequalities

FIRST STEPS NUTRITION TRUST



An inquiry into the cost of infant formula in the UK

- All Party Parliamentary Group on Infant Feeding and Inequalities (APPGIFI)
- Chaired by Alison Thewliss MP
- **What is an inquiry?**



The UK in 2018

‘Parents skipping meals so children don’t go hungry’



1 in 4 parents have skipped a meal as they cannot afford it

1 in 4 worry about not having enough food to eat

1 in 8 have gone without eating for a whole day

END HUNGER UK

www.endhungeruk.org/measure

The infographic features a green background with white and yellow icons of families. The statistics are presented in large, bold, yellow and white text. The logo for 'END HUNGER UK' is at the bottom left, and the website URL is at the bottom right.

UN Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

- Professor Philip Alston has been in the UK for the past 2 weeks on a fact finding mission.
- He will report tomorrow on his findings on the causes and effects of poverty in the UK.



Infants are often missed out of discussions on food insecurity

- Highly unlikely that the crisis around hunger is not impacting on families with infants.
- Consequences of nutritional compromise in infancy can be severe.
- Whole family likely to be impacted both physically and mentally.



The inquiry

- Open in June 2018
- Members of APPGIFI used social media and their own contacts to encourage responses.
- Responses were requested to a series of questions and email responses were also welcomed.
- We had 108 responses.
- 81 from individuals and 27 from organisations.
- All of the responses were useable and many were detailed.
- Responses chiefly fell into 6 key themes.

- **The cost of infant formula significantly impacts on some family budgets.**

Cost of formula was a big stressor & had a big impact on our food budget

Yes, I've had to borrow from family and payday loan companies

Yes I have cared for families who will have the money for formula but won't have the money to buy essentials such as soap, fruit and veg, won't wash clothes

My partner and I had to eat a lot less fresh food items and go for cheaper, unhealthier options

- **Families who cannot afford formula may resort to unsafe practices in order to feed their babies.**

Formula is just so expensive no matter which brand that I have to think twice about when I need to buy it next and do I have the money, what will the baby be fed with if I can't afford the next box of formula?

Families can be forced to budget on other things to enable them to pay for formula milk. I have been told by some families that they have not made up the concentration of milk correctly to try and save formula milk and also don't throw it away after use

I am aware of a few cases when families added extra water to the powder to "Stretch" the amount

I know a number of families used cows milk for bottles from 6 months

Using rusks and cereal to bulk out feed and fill Baby for longer, and use much before 6 months of age

I have also known mothers stretch out feed times (i.e the gap between feeds) so effectively under-feeding their babies because of concerns about the cost of formula

I was really concerned about an infant that just never gained weight. We tried everything including referral for this infant. Nothing was found to be wrong but 2 years later the mother admitted to me that she just couldn't afford the cost of infant formula and so made the one pot go a long way...

- **The small number of families where breastfeeding is contraindicated, and who have been advised to formula feed, and vulnerable families, are particularly at risk of hardship.**

Women who are asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers and those with nil recourse to public funds because of their immigration status are extremely vulnerable. It is likely they will have challenging and un-met health needs. These women who have no entitlement to Healthy Start. [We] believe there could be a direct impact on the long-term wellbeing of children of migrants

Supporting women with HIV.

GP should prescribe formula if donor breast milk not available, government should provide funding for this to ensure the baby comes to no harm

They should be given access to milk banks where screened donor milk could be provided

Provision of sterilising equipment, bottles and access to milk. And education on how to do so safely

- **The Healthy Start scheme is valuable but needs to be reviewed.**

Families I have worked with have depended on healthy start vouchers to help pay the cost of the formula.

Despite increasing food and infant formula costs over the last 10 years, the value of Healthy Start vouchers has remained the same at £3.10 per voucher. A review of this would very much be welcomed. When families use their vouchers to purchase infant formula, this means they can't use them to purchase fruits or vegetables which is a disadvantage of the scheme

- We await a consultation on Healthy Start (Scotland have already reviewed the scheme).
- We have a long list of recommendations in our new report – including that the scheme better supports women who breastfeed with an enhanced voucher offer.



- **There are some significant influences on the choice of infant formula, particularly the marketing and advertising of products.**

I think that the strongest influence is marketing, especially on the television and in social media used by parents. While this purports to be advertising 'follow on milk' the cross branding means that parents identify the brand, not the product

We are concerned that messages implying that some infant formulas vary in range, quality or safety adds to the pressure on families to buy the most expensive milks

One health professional reported that a mum had told her, "Of course when she is six months I have to stop breastfeeding and go to the bottle." When asked why she thought this, "well the advert on the TV says so"

I have heard "it's closer to breast milk" about a certain brand come out of a health visitor's mouth!

We didn't know anything before having to use formula milk so we went with the one the midwife recommended in the hospital

[They use] what their friends and family recommend and to some degree the cost as they feel the most expensive must be the best.'

- **There is a lack of adequate support for families who formula feed.**

...it is improving with the introduction of Unicef Baby Friendly standards around supporting formula feeding families but many professionals are still ignorant about cheaper formulas available and that they are the same as other more well known brands

Parents have reported to us that following the focus of breastfeeding during infant feeding education, they are hesitant to ask HCP's about infant formula

Bottle feeders are shamed and discriminated against

What do we want to happen next?

- **Government should set up an independent body to regularly review data on infant feeding in the UK** and work across departments to ensure that the needs of infants are considered in any changes to welfare, benefits, immigration rules and health and social care services.
- **Research is urgently needed into possible unsafe infant formula use** in low income and vulnerable families and the potential risks this may pose to short and long term child health.

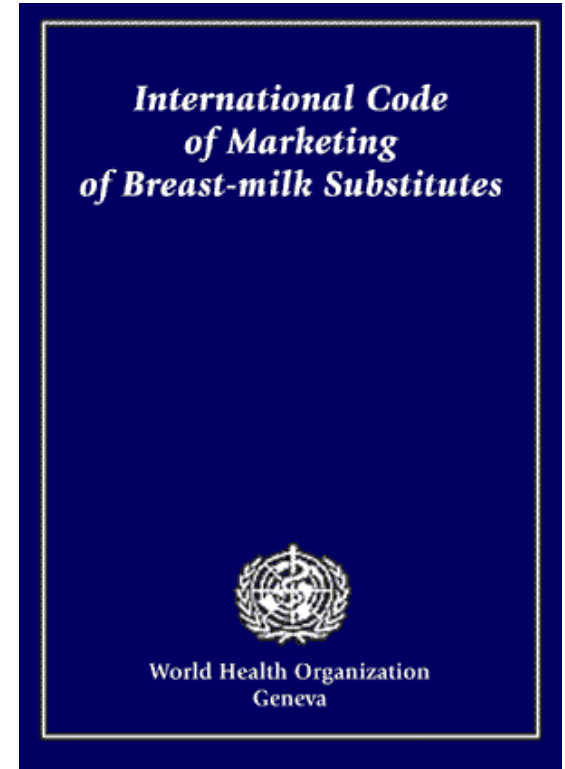
- **All infants in the UK should be born in a Unicef UK Baby Friendly accredited service** to ensure that health professionals are adequately trained to support formula feeding families and that practices are in place so that parents receive accurate, timely and considerate support and information, free from commercial interests.



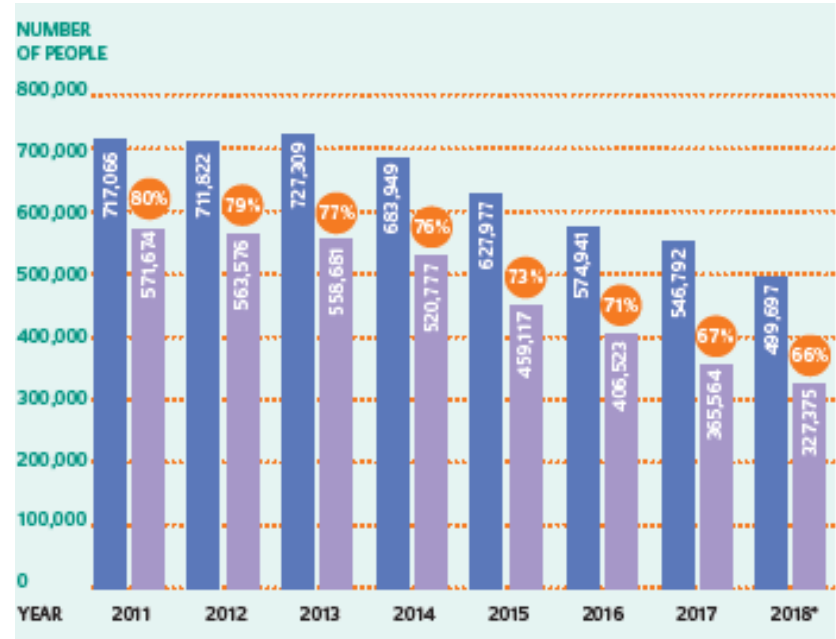
- **London Food Strategy**
- Will be out at the beginning of December.
- We expect further Mayoral support for Baby Friendly accreditation and breastfeeding in London.
- **What can other cities do?**



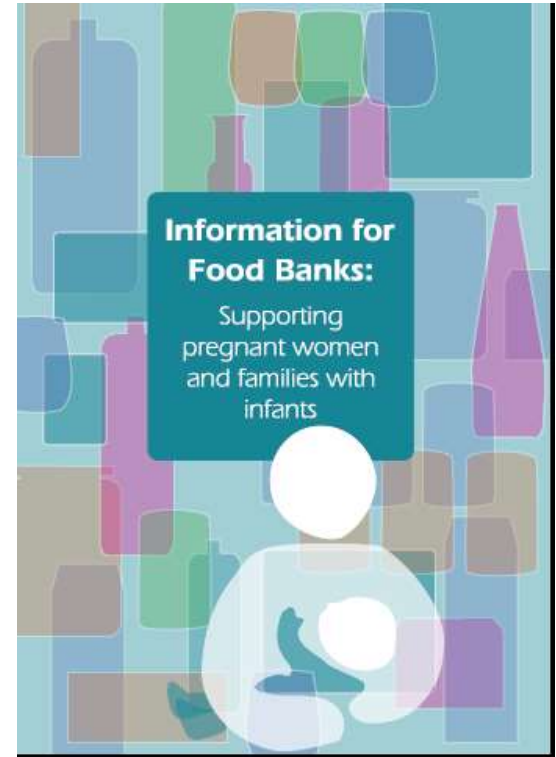
- The UK should bring the **International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes** and subsequent **WHA resolutions (the Code)** into UK law to remove advertising of breastmilk substitutes to the general public, and to ensure that health services are free from conflicts of interests.
- **Unambiguous public health messaging** is needed which makes clear that there is no significant nutritional difference between brands of first infant formula and that they must all conform to the same compositional regulations.



- The **Healthy Start** scheme should be reviewed with the threshold for eligibility raised to include a greater number of low income families and the value of the voucher updated so that it acts as a safety net for the feeding of infants in vulnerable families.



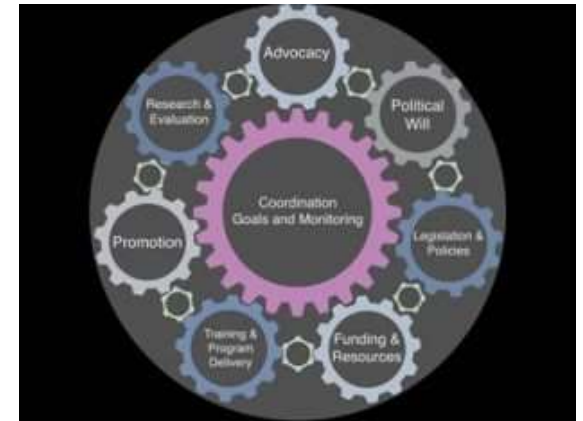
- All agencies working to support families experiencing food insecurity and financial crisis should ensure they have **clear pathways of financial and practical support for families feeding infants with infant formula**, and that this is integrated across those providing health, welfare, economic and emotional support.



- NHS maternity and other settings where infant formula is provided should look at ways to minimise the influence of the brand of product when providing this to families.



- **Breastfeeding remains the normal and optimum way to feed infants** and all four health and social care departments in the UK should invest in better support for breastfeeding following internationally agreed methods to 'gear up' and become more breastfeeding friendly nations.

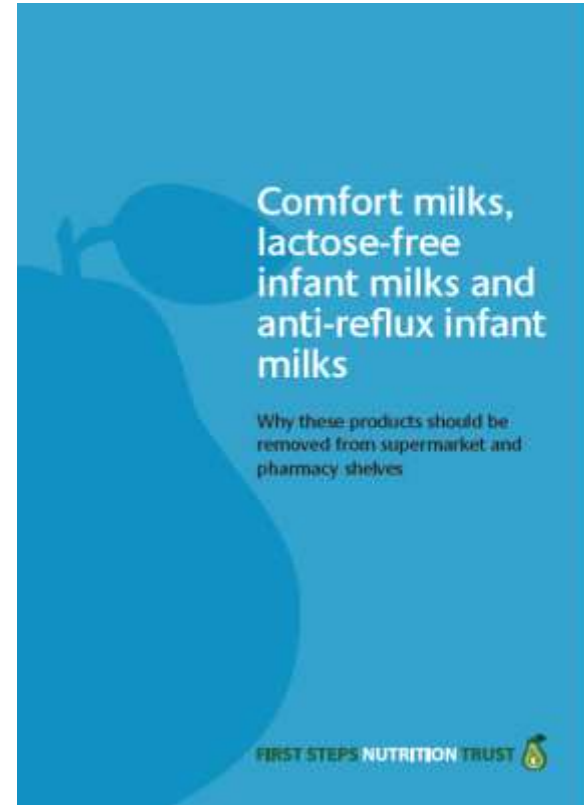


What can you do?

- Ensure that all those working to support families in poverty in your area are aware of the specific needs of families with infants and young children.
- Ensure that formula feeding families are given the support they need to feed their infants as safely and knowledgeably as possible.

What will First Steps do?

- We will look at ways we can better support health professionals to explain infant formula choices more clearly to families.
- We will continue to lobby for products to be removed from open sale which should only be used under medical supervision and which cause confusion.



- And we will continue to ensure mothers and babies are included in conversations, and actions on food insecurity in the UK.

Everyone should have access to good food. No one should have to go to bed hungry.

We commit to do what we can to end hunger locally, and to call on the UK government to play its part in ending hunger in the UK.

WE'RE
STEPPING
UP TO THE
PLATE

END
HUNGER
UK



FIRST STEPS
NUTRITION
TRUST

You can access the Inquiry report at:

- www.infantfeedingappg.uk
- www.firststepsnutrition.org/statements-press-releases

We also have some copies on our stand.

