People should not have to choose between food and identity, says René Cassin report

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Food, Dignity and Belonging calls for a right to adequate food that protects cultural and religious life

René Cassin, the Jewish voice for human rights, has published a report examining how food insecurity is experienced by Jewish communities across the UK.

Food, Dignity and Belonging: Jewish Experiences of the Right to Adequate Food in the United Kingdom examines how barriers to kosher food affect not only nutrition, but access to healthcare, educational choices, religious practice and participation in community life.

The report identifies institutional misunderstanding, exclusion from services, the additional costs of maintaining religious practice and stigma and shame around poverty as barriers to accessing adequate food. It finds that food inadequacy rarely has a single cause: poverty, geography, institutional design and social expectations can combine to prevent people from accessing food that meets their needs.

The report draws on evidence gathered by René Cassin for the UK Right to Food Commission, where community representatives from a range of different faith communities were interviewed

Whilst focused on Jewish experiences, the report highlights similar concerns apparent in Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Christian and Bahá'í communities and calls for greater recognition of food adequacy: the principle that food must be compatible with people's health needs, cultural identity, religious beliefs, and dignity.

The report also addresses legislative attempts to limit kosher and halal food, and calls for policymakers to have greater sensitivity regarding the needs of different communities and to accommodate different needs rather than view difference in terms of competition.

René Cassin endorses the UK Right to Food Commission's call for a UK Right to Food Act. Alongside that wider roadmap, the report calls for:

- Government to explicitly recognise cultural and religious adequacy as part of the right to food and assess food policy's impact on minority faith communities.
- National guidance and staff training on culturally and religiously appropriate food, including provision in hospitals, schools, prisons, care settings and temporary accommodation.
- Clear complaints, feedback and redress mechanisms when food provision fails to meet people's needs.
- Food providers and charities to consult communities directly and improve transparency around sourcing, preparation and labelling.
- Faith communities to challenge poverty-related stigma, share expertise and work together for systemic change.

The report calls for a framework that ensures not only that people have enough to eat, but that they can eat with dignity, maintain their identity and fully belong.

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