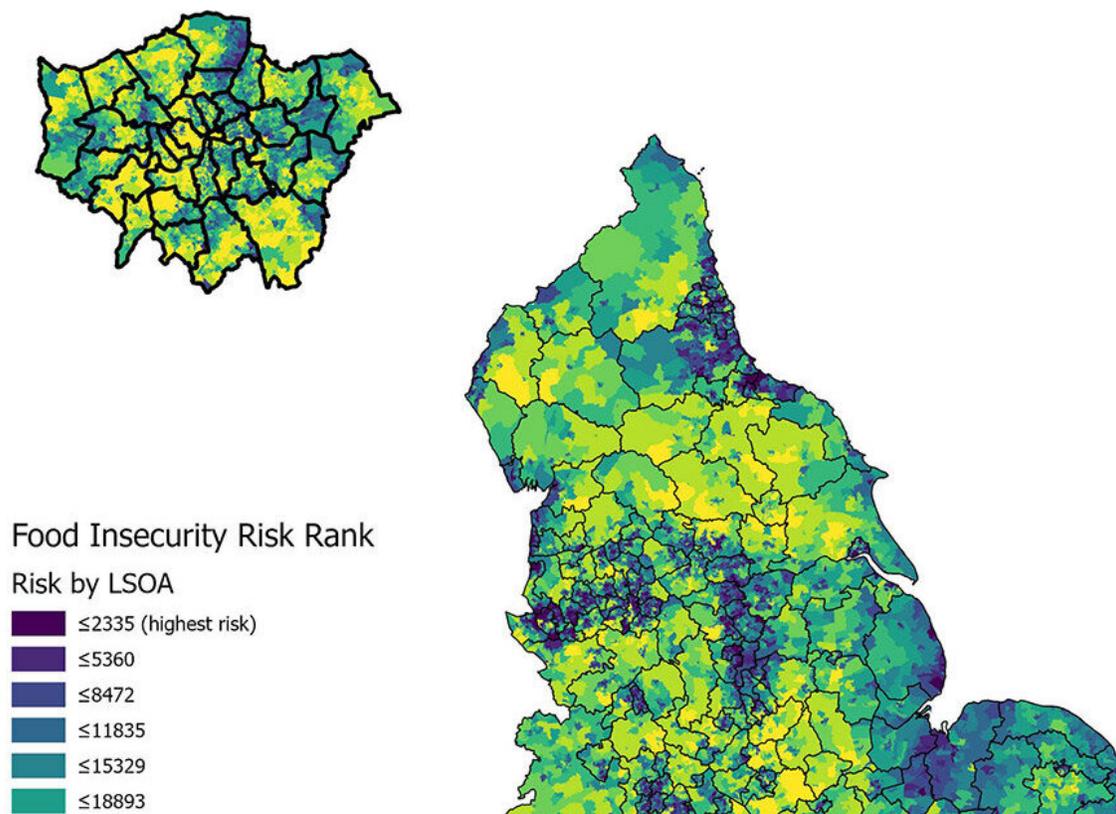


# New index shows regions in the north of England have higher risk of food insecurity

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Food Insecurity Risk Ranks Composition in England. Credit: University of Southampton

A new index developed by researchers at the University of Southampton reveals neighborhoods in the north of England have the highest risk of

food insecurity.

Published in the journal *PLOS ONE*, the Food Insecurity Risk Indices can identify risk to a smaller scale than ever before as it not only includes details about the [geographical area](#), but also the characteristics of the population.

The Index showed a third of at-risk areas were in the north-west and 96% of those were [urban areas](#) including areas such as the Wirral, Blackpool, Stockport, Middlesbrough and St Helens.

The researchers say the map and data can be used by [local authorities](#) to better target support and help those households most at risk, ensuring their limited budgets are spent in the areas that need it the most.

Dianna Smith, Associate Professor in Geography at the University of Southampton, said, "Food security for households is influenced by multiple factors, from individual circumstances to local access to affordable resources.

"We worked with [local governments](#) and charities to create a measure of [food insecurity](#) risk in neighborhoods that captures these barriers. By creating a detailed picture of an area, local authorities and charities can be better informed of where they need to put their resources to help the people most in need. This is particularly important in [rural areas](#) where there are pockets of high deprivation amongst areas of affluence."

The Index was developed for more than 30,000 neighborhoods across England with populations between 1,000 to 3,000 people. The index calculates food insecurity risk for all areas based on benefits claimants and [low-income](#) at a household level, as well as data on mental health and adult educational attainment.

The study also created another index (structural risk) which included data on the obstacles people face when living in those areas, such as distance to large supermarkets where food is cheaper, broadband speed and public transport links. The researchers say this Structural Index is important to provide details of barriers in more rural areas alongside the main Index.

The researchers have made the maps and data freely available at [My Local Map](#) to encourage local authorities to be better prepared and provide targeted help and support.

Nisreen Alwan, Professor of Public Health at the University of Southampton who was also involved in the research, added, "Food insecurity in England is not a new social challenge, and while data has been collected about household food insecurity the detail of where more people experience food insecurity is lacking. Where people live is closely linked to their well-being and shapes health inequalities. Our work developing a food insecurity risk [index](#) for rural and urban settings in England, supported by the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Wessex, gives local government and charities a tool to target resources and services to help those most at need particularly during this cost of living crisis."

**More information:** Dianna M. Smith et al, Household food insecurity risk indices for English neighbourhoods: Measures to support local policy decisions, *PLOS ONE* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0267260](#)

Provided by University of Southampton

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