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Food banks in the UK



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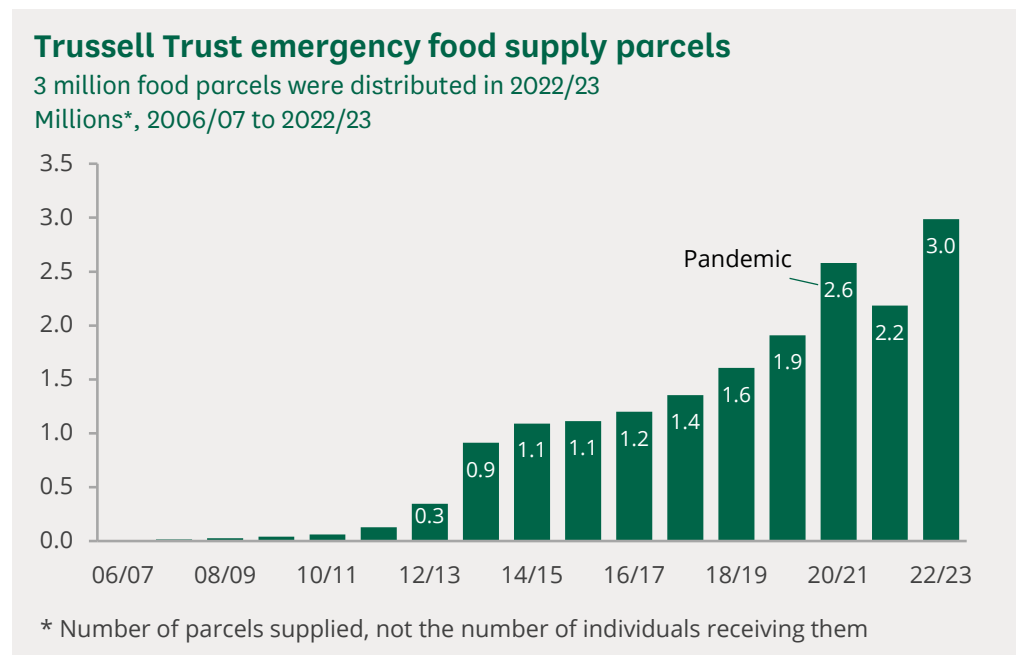
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Summary

The Trussell Trust, an anti-poverty charity that operates a network of food banks across the UK, reported a 37% increase in the number of three-day emergency food parcels it distributed between 31 March 2022 and 1 April 2023, compared to the year before. This continues a general trend of increasing need for food parcels. In 2021/22 there was an increase of 14% compared to the year 2019/2020, before the Covid-19 pandemic. The increase in the year 2020/21 was caused by the pandemic, while the most recent increase is due to the cost of living crisis.

How many food banks are there in the UK?

There are just under **1,400 Trussell Trust food banks** in the UK, in addition to at least **1,172 independent food banks**. The numbers of food parcels distributed by the Trussell Trust up to March 2023 can be seen in the chart below:



Source: [Trussell Trust End of Year Stats April 2022 – March 2023](#)

London was the region with the highest distribution of Trussell Trust food parcels in 2022/23, closely followed by South-East and North-West England.

How many households use food banks?

Food bank statistics should not be used as a proxy for the measurement of poverty. For statistics on poverty, see the House of Commons Library briefing [Poverty in the UK: statistics](#). The comprehensiveness and accuracy of food bank data, and the number of food aid outlets in existence, will affect food bank figures regardless of any changes in poverty levels.

The DWP published food bank data for the first time in 2023. In its [Households below average income \(HBAI\) statistics](#), it reported that 3% of all individuals in the UK used a food bank in the financial year ending 2022.

In June 2023 the Trussell Trust published [a report on Hunger in the UK](#). The report examined the causes of hunger in the UK, its impact and what type of people use food banks. Some of the headline findings of the report are:

- 69% of people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust are disabled, compared to 26% across the general population;
- working age people are overrepresented among those referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network;
- the majority of people (89%) referred to food banks in the network are in receipt of means tested benefits;
- 46% of people referred to food banks in the network live in social housing.¹

Rising cost of living

In February 2023, the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) published its [latest survey of independent food bank finds](#). It reported that 89% of organisations saw an increase in demand comparing December 2022/January 2023 with the same period in the previous year. More than 80% of organisations reported people needed help for the first time in addition to people needing regular support.

A report in March 2023 by the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) into infant and maternal food insecurity in Scotland stated that there are currently an estimated 40,000 babies and 184,000 children living in food insecure households in the UK.² The briefing found that increased food prices have put

¹ Trussell Trust, [Hunger in the UK](#), June 2023

² Independent Food Aid Network, [Reducing infant and maternal food insecurity in Scotland](#), March 2023

financial strain on families with babies, which resulted in a reduced ability to buy adequate nutrition to breastfeed or buy formula.

1 Where does food bank data come from?

Food banks are run by volunteers, churches and charities and there is no comprehensive dataset on UK food banks. Data in this paper comes from the Trussell Trust, the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) and, for the first time, from the Department for Work and Pensions via [the Households below average income](#) (HBAI) national statistics.

1.1 New food bank data from the Department of Work and Pensions

In the most recent publication of the DWP's [Households Below Average Income \(Financial Year Ending 2022\)](#) new data on the use of food banks was added.

The [Households Below Average Income \(HBAI\) statistics](#) are the UK's official source of poverty estimates. Estimates for the statistics are based on the [Family Resources Survey \(FRS\)](#), which is a continuous household survey collecting information on a representative sample of private households in the UK.³

The food bank statistics show the percentage of people living in low-income households where a food bank has been used within the last 30 days or the last 12 months of the FRS interview.

1.2 Data from food bank charities

The Trussell Trust is an anti-poverty charity that operates a network of food banks across the UK while campaigning for the end of their necessity. The trust provides food parcels to people who meet certain requirements and are referred to it by professionals such as doctors, health visitors, social workers and the Citizens Advice.

The Trussell Trust gathers its administrative data from the referrals required to access its support. The Trussell Trust runs over half of the UK's food banks

³ Background information and methodology about the [Family Resources Survey](#) is published by gov.uk.

and has a long archive of published data. However, as independent food banks operate across the UK this data should be considered incomplete.

The [Independent Food Aid Network](#), which represents food banks outside the Trussell Trust, is increasing the amount and range of data and analysis it produces.

Food banks were first introduced in the USA in the 1960s⁴ and now exist in many wealthy countries.⁵ [FEBA, the European Food Banks Federation](#) has a map showing the location of its members across the continent. However, definitions of what a food bank is and measurement of what it does varies across countries, so that international comparison is not straightforward.

Food bank statistics should not be used as a proxy for poverty.⁶ The comprehensiveness and accuracy of food bank data and the number of food banks in existence will affect figures regardless of any changes or stability in poverty levels. The Library briefing [Poverty in the UK: statistics](#) provides information and data on UK poverty.

1 Government food insecurity statistics

The UK Government has included food insecurity in an annual [Department for Work and Pensions survey](#) of household income and living standards since March 2021.⁷ It now includes questions taken from the [US Department of Agriculture's survey](#) to identify households in low and very low food security.⁸

'Low food security' means that the household reduces the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets. 'Very low food security' means that household members sometimes disrupt eating patterns or reduce food intake because they lack money or other resources for food.

In 2021/22, 4.7 million people, or 7% of the UK population, were in food insecure households (both low and very low food security). This included 12% of children, 7% of working-age adults, and 1% of pensioners.⁹

The Library briefing [Food poverty: Households, food banks and free school meals](#) presents the latest household food insecurity statistics.

⁴ Where they are called 'food pantries'

⁵ See *Food Bank Nations: poverty, corporate charity and the right to food* by Grahame Riches, Routledge, 2018, p42 for an international comparison table.

⁶ Library briefing [Poverty in the UK: statistics](#)

⁷ [Family Resources Survey: financial year 2019 to 2020](#), DWP, 25 March 2021

⁸ [New poverty statistics developed to help government target support](#), DWP, 17 May 2019

⁹ DWP, [Households Below Average Income](#), Tables 9.1b, 9.3b, 9.5b and 9.7b

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How many food banks are there in the UK?

The Trussell Trust distributed parcels from 1,646 locations across the UK in the period April 2022/March 2023.¹⁰

The [Independent Food Aid Network](#) is the UK network for non-Trussell Trust food aid providers. Historically there has been little data on the operation of independent food banks, but this has recently changed.

On behalf of the network, [Sabine Goodwin has mapped independent food banks](#), clarifying how many operate outside the Trussell Trust. There are at least **1,172 independent food banks** in the UK today. This figure does not include those operating from schools, as mentioned in the National Governance Association report. Published in September 2022, the most recent report states that 21% of respondents' schools provided food banks. This is an increase of nearly 13% since 2019, when it was 8.2%.¹¹

Added to the Trussell Trust's 1,646 this makes over 2,818 food banks in total¹², suggesting that reliance on Trussell Trust figures underestimates the use of food banks in the UK.¹³ As with the Trussell Trust food banks, independent food banks can be found across most of the country.

2 History of food banks

The [Trussell Trust](#) opened its first UK food bank in 2000 and operates over half of food banks in the country. IFAN represents food banks outside the Trussell Trust and since 2020 has been collecting data from them across the UK. Both the number of food banks and the quantity of emergency food parcels they distribute has increased over time, with the exception of a partial drop after the Covid-19 pandemic subsided.

¹⁰ Trussell Trust, [End of year stats 2022-23 Factsheet UK](#)

¹¹ The [National Governance Association Report](#) of September 2022, noted an increase in the number of governors reporting that their school does provide a food bank.

¹² [IFAN on Trussell Trust and independent food bank numbers](#)

¹³ The Government does not maintain statistics on food banks – see PQ 182823 [[on Food Banks](#)], 26 April 2023

3 Statistics on food bank use

3.1 DWP – food bank usage

Measures for food bank usage in the statistics from the Department of Work and Pensions are reported separately for children, working-age adults, and pensioners – see the table below. The food bank usage referred to in the [Family Resources Survey](#) (FRS) is taken from cases where emergency food parcels were obtained. Children are more likely to be living in a household where a food bank has been used, compared with working-age adults and pensioners.

Percentage of people using food banks				
2021/22, UK				
	All people	Children	Working-age adults	Pensioners
Used a food bank in the last 12 month	3%	6%	3%	low
Used a food bank in the last 30 days	1%	1%	1%	low

Note: 'low' means less than 1%

Source: DWP, [Households below average income \(HBAI\) statistics](#), tables 9.1b, 9.3b, 9.5b and 9.7

3.2 Trussell Trust data on food parcels

The Trussell Trust measures the food it gives out in volume rather than the number of people using food banks. It provides food as ‘three-day emergency food parcels’.

A Trussell Trust food parcel typically consists of tinned and dried goods selected across food groups to provide healthy balanced meals,¹⁴ following nutritionists’ guidelines.¹⁵ These have expanded to include perishable items

¹⁴ [What’s in a Food Parcel?](#) Trussell Trust website

¹⁵ [A Nutritional Analysis of the Trussell Trust Emergency Food Parcel](#), Dr Darren Hughes and Edwina Prayogo, UCL, April 2018

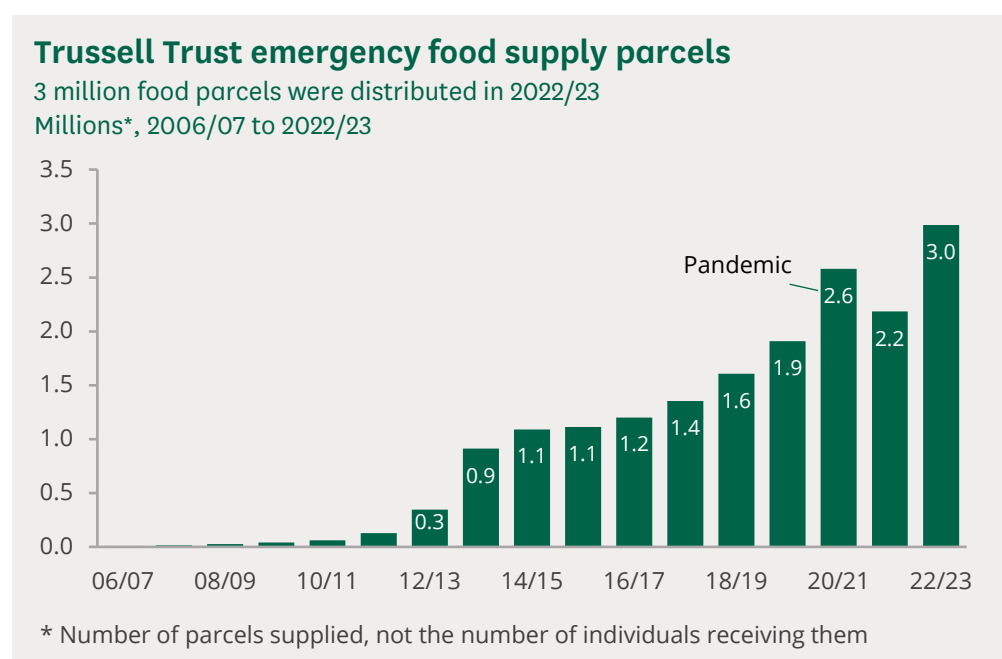
since the Trussell Trust partnered with Asda and FareShare in February 2018.^{16,17}

The [Trussell Trust publishes statistics](#) twice a year on its website.

In 2022/23 the Trust supplied **2.99 million** emergency food parcels, the highest number of parcels distributed by the network in a year and 37% higher than the same period in the previous year.¹⁸ The general trend of increasing numbers has continued. In 2021/22 there was an increase of 14% compared to 2019/20, the year before the pandemic. There was a large increase in 2020/21 caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The most recent increase is due to the rising cost of living.

In 2022/23, 1.14 million emergency food parcels went to children.¹⁹ December 2022 recorded the busiest month in the Trussell Trust network, with one food parcel being given out every eight seconds on average.²⁰

Note this data does not include all food parcels distributed in the UK because of the large number of independent food banks that are not part of the Trussell Trust network.



Source: [Trussell Trust End of Year Stats April 2022 – March 2023](#)

¹⁶ [What's in a Trussell Trust foodbank parcel and why?](#) Trussell Trust, 8 June 2018

¹⁷ [Asda, the Trussell Trust and FareShare launch £20 million partnership to help a million people out of food poverty](#), Trussell Trust, 8 February 2018

¹⁸ Trussell Trust, [End of year stats](#)

¹⁹ Trussell Trust, [End of year stats](#)

²⁰ As above

3.3 Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)

In April 2023, the IFAN survey of independent food banks found 89% of the contributing organisations reporting an increased demand for their help from January to March 2023. Of all the agencies, local authorities are the most likely to refer people who are struggling financially to food banks. Nearly half of the IFAN organisations cited the following reasons for people needing their help: sanctions, rent increases, housing problems and Universal Credit waiting times.²¹

3.4 Statistics for regions and nations

The distribution of Trussell Trust food parcels varies around the country, as the following table shows. These are absolute numbers, and not calculated proportionately to the size of each area's population. The table gives a breakdown of the figures in each region and country over a four-year period. The figures spiked during the pandemic in 2020/21, decreased in the year after and have then increased considerably in the 2022/23 period, owing to the cost of living crisis.

Around 60% of food banks are run by the Trussell Trust. There are some areas where the Trussell Trust does not operate, but where independent food banks may distribute food parcels.

Trussell Trust distribution of 3 day food parcels				
Four-year comparison by region and country				
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Northern Ireland	45,008	78,827	61,597	81,084
North East	98,461	124,224	100,114	154,403
East Midlands	101,534	133,890	126,877	172,680
Wales	134,646	145,828	131,232	185,320
Yorks & Humberside	108,102	122,726	156,120	200,562
South West	162,045	201,971	174,805	247,850
Scotland	237,225	221,554	197,037	259,744
West Midlands	168,886	226,237	207,665	278,230
East	196,511	244,595	223,962	324,477
North West	252,165	313,015	252,048	347,976
South East	191,240	302,905	258,138	349,400
London	204,299	421,426	283,563	384,477

Source: Trussell Trust, [End of Year Stats](#) (accessed 3 July 2023)

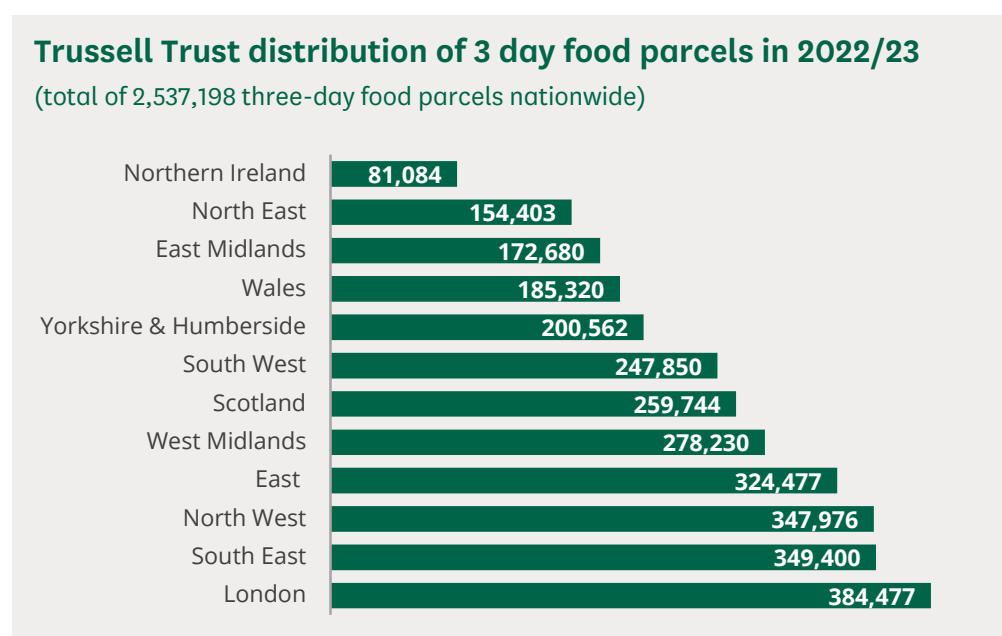
²¹ [Independent Food Aid Network data \[www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data\]](https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data) (accessed June 2023)

In most regions and nations in 2021/22, the number dropped compared to 2020/21, when there was a spike caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the figures across all regions and nations in 2022/23 have risen again since 2021/22.

Adjusting for population size, Wales counts as the largest distributor of food parcels across the regions and nations of the UK in 2022/23.²² For further information on Wales and the other devolved nations, see Section 6.

Compared to the same period last year, the North East of England saw the greatest percentage increase (54%) in the number of parcels distributed in 2022/23. Adjusting for population size, this means that the North East is the second largest distributor of food parcels across the UK.²³

The chart below shows the figures across the UK regions and countries for the financial year 2022/23.



Source: [Trussell Trust End of Year Stats March 2023](#) (accessed 3 July 2023)

²² Trussell Trust, [End of year stats 2022-23, UK factsheet](#)

²³ Trussell Trust, [End of year stats 2022-23, UK factsheet](#)

3 Universal Credit and food bank use

In 2019, the Trussell Trust published a report on the links between Universal Credit and food bank use. The five-week initial wait for the first payment especially “has led to acute financial hardship, and damaged households’ longer-term financial resilience”²⁴

The 2023 [Trussell Trust publication Hunger in the UK](#) reported that the waiting time for the first payment of Universal Credit was still five weeks. It found that 70% of people referred to food banks were in receipt of Universal Credit. The report also said 58% of people in receipt of Universal Credit in the UK had experienced food insecurity in the past year (2022/23), whereas only 3% were in receipt of state pension.²⁵

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned an evidence review on the drivers of food bank use in August 2018.²⁶ The Government has yet to publish this review.

In response to a Lords Parliamentary Question in March 2023, the DWP said:

“The Department reallocated resources to prioritise work to help the COVID-19 effort. This caused delays to some work, including this literature review. The department has subsequently decided not to restart the review, as it summarises publicly available information and does not contain any new research carried out by the Department. However, we continue to monitor new research and evidence produced by external organisations.”²⁷

The primary drivers of food insecurity

The Hunger in the UK report found that insufficient income is the main driver for most people needing to use a food bank. It states that three main factors prevent people from having enough money to avoid food insecurity:

- The design and delivery of the social security system is seen as the most significant cause of financial security.
- Work that doesn’t provide sufficient protection from financial insecurity.
- Difficulty accessing suitable jobs. This is especially the case for disabled people and those with caring responsibilities.

²⁴ Trussell Trust, [Universal Credit and Food Banks](#)

²⁵ Trussell Trust, [Hunger in the UK](#), June 2023, p44

²⁶ Civil Service World, [DWP to investigate link between Universal Credit and soaring foodbank use](#), 3 August 2018, FOI request from Anthony Collins to DWP, 1 August 2018, reported at www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/research_8?unfold=1

²⁷ PQ 5910 [[On Food Banks](#)], 9 March 2023

4 Characteristics of food bank users

4.1 Hunger in the UK

[Hunger in the UK, a new publication from the Trussell Trust](#) produced in partnership with the market research company [IPSOS](#), examines the drivers of food insecurity and food bank use in the UK in 2022. The publication builds on the Trust's previous [State of Hunger](#) research.²⁸

The report surveyed both people who are referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network as well as the UK general population.

The Trussell Trust has published separate reports on Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. For details, please see section 6.

Those most likely to need to turn to food banks

The report found that some groups of people in the UK are disproportionately forced to turn to food aid. It examined who is at greatest risk of hunger in the UK and found that some groups were “significantly overrepresented” in terms of experiencing food insecurity and the need to use food banks:

- 69% of people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust say that they, are disabled. This is compared to 26% across the general population.
- Working-age adults are more likely to need a food bank than pensioners. They represent 92% of people referred to a food bank.
- Families with children are at high risk, with 47% of households experiencing food insecurity include children under 16. This compares to them representing 29% if the general population.
- 89% of people referred to food banks receive means tested benefits; a minority (20%) are in working households.
- Asylum seekers, although representing just 0.5% of the population, represent 5% of people referred to food banks.
- People who have been in care as a child make up 3% of the UK population, but they represent 16% of people referred to food banks.

²⁸ Trussell Trust, [Hunger in the UK](#), June 2023 [accessed August 2023]

Food insecurity and food bank use linked to rented housing and homelessness

Hunger in the UK reports that in the UK 22% of people are renting but for those referred to food banks the figure in the Trussell Trust network, that figure is 68%.

- One in three (34%) of people referred to Trussell Trust food banks were either homeless when referred or had experienced homeless in the previous year.
- Nearly half of the people referred to food banks (46%) live in social housing.
- People from ethnic minority groups referred to food banks are more likely than white people (45% compared to 32%) to be homeless or have experienced homelessness.
- Men referred to food banks are more likely to be homeless or have experienced homelessness than women (37% to 30%).

Food insecurity and food bank use

In the 12 months to mid-2022 roughly 11.3 million people experienced food insecurity in the UK. Food insecurity includes running out of food and not being able to afford more, having a reduced meal size, eating less and going hungry.

Food bank use does not represent the full scale of the need across the country as more than two thirds of those experiencing food insecurity have not accessed food aid.

Barriers to accessing food aid

Certain groups of people who experience structural inequalities – that is, systemic, long-term unequal access to resources, opportunities and power – are underrepresented in the Trussell Trust food bank network. People from ethnic minority groups and those who are LGBTQ+ are overrepresented among those experiencing food insecurity. However, they are not among those referred to the Trussell Trust food banks. For example, 11% of the UK population are from ethnic minority groups, with 19% experiencing food insecurity and 26% of people using food aid. But this is not reflected in the people referred to Trussell Trust Food banks.

There could be several reasons for this disparity. It could be due to the structural inequalities which affect the number of people being referred. Studies have shown that those from ethnic minority backgrounds can face barriers in accessing food banks.²⁹ People from ethnic minority groups could

²⁹ Insights, [Improving support for black and minority \(BME\) carers.](#)

be accessing food from other sources, such as food banks run by religious institutions such as mosques, gurdwara, synagogues or temples.³⁰

In the UK 8% of the population identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. More than one in four (27%) in this group experience food insecurity, however this overrepresentation is not reflected among people referred to the Trussell Trust.³¹

4.2 State of Hunger report

[State of Hunger](#), published by the Trussell Trust in November 2019, was a three-year study carried out at Heriot-Watt University. It identified key characteristics of food bank users. It estimated that around 2.5% of all UK households – 700,000 – used a food bank in 2019/20, before the Covid-19 pandemic.³²

It found three factors contributing to a person needing a food bank, (ranked in order of significance):

- (1) not having sufficient income from social security;
- (2) ill-health or adverse life experiences (such as household separation or eviction);
- (3) lack of informal and formal support.

Notably, of those people who have been referred to a Trussell Trust food bank:

- In early 2020, 86% of households were receiving social security.
- Three-quarters of people in early 2020 were aged between 25 and 54, with the largest group aged 35 to 44.
- 42% of people referred to food banks in mid-2020 lived alone vs. 22% of the UK population.
- Nine in ten households had some form of debt; while six in ten had arrears on bills and owed money on loans. Almost half of people referred to food banks owed money to the DWP in mid-2020.
- 11% of people referred to food banks in mid-2020 are likely to have NRPF (no recourse to public funds) up from 2% in early 2020. For more

³⁰ Trussell Trust, [Hunger in the UK](#), June 2023, p39

³¹ Trussell Trust, [Hunger in the UK](#), June 2023, p40

³² Trussell Trust, [State of Hunger – full report](#), May 2021, p11

information on NRPF people, see the Library Briefing [No Recourse to Public Funds](#).

An earlier [report commissioned by the Trussell Trust, Financial insecurity, food insecurity, and disability](#), was published in June 2017.³³ Two academics from the University of Oxford and King's College London studied Trussell Trust data to understand the socio-demographic and economic profile of those receiving food parcels.

³³ [Trussell Trust launches University of Oxford study on food bank use](#), Trussell Trust [accessed 31 July 2023]

5 Food banks and the rising cost of living

Recent increases in the cost of living have affected food banks. Prices as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) have been rising, putting pressure on household budgets. Further information on the cost of living can be found in the Library briefing [Rising cost of living in the UK](#).³⁴

5.1 Food parcel demand continued to increase in 2023

The Trussell Trust saw a 37% increase in demand for food parcels between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 compared to the same period in 2021/22.³⁵ The Trust reported that food banks are helping an increasing number of working people and that they have changed their opening hours to accommodate people who work during the day.

Citizen's Advice helped 4,620 people with food bank referrals in the week to 5 June 2023, up from 3,941 in the week to 6 June 2022. Food bank referrals peaked in the week to 12 December 2022, when Citizen's Advice helped 5,968 people.³⁶ For more information please see the Library briefing [Food poverty: Households, food banks and free school meals](#).³⁷

The Independent Food Aid Network surveyed its food banks in April 2023 and 89% of respondents said they saw an increased need between January and March 2023. Two thirds said they would have to reduce the level of support they provide if demand continues to increase.³⁸

The Trussell Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation announced their research in 2023 which showed that the £85 weekly Universal Credit standard allowance is £35 less than the weekly cost of common essential items for a single person. This contributes to hundreds of thousands of people needing to use food banks because they are unable to make ends meet.³⁹

³⁴ [Rising cost of living in the UK](#), House of Commons Library Briefing Paper 9428

³⁵ Trussell Trust, [Emergency food parcel distribution in the UK: April 2022 – March 2023](#)

³⁶ Citizens Advice, Cost of living dashboard, [Key CQL trends from our data](#), Slide 7 (accessed 13 September 2023)

³⁷ [Food poverty: Households, food banks and free school meals](#), House of Commons Library Briefing Paper 9209

³⁸ Independent Food Aid Network, [IFAN Data August 2023](#) (accessed 13 September 2023)

³⁹ Trussell Trust, [Giant interactive till roll highlights imbalance between essential living costs and Universal Credit](#), 4 April 2023

In February 2023 the Trussell Trust launched a campaign with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) called Guarantee our Essentials. The campaign called on the UK government to “enshrine in law the amount people need” so that the basic rate of Universal Credit will cover the essentials.⁴⁰

In October 2022 IFAN joined the Trussell Trust and Feeding Britain to deliver a joint letter to the Prime Minister, which warned that many of their teams are “struggling to cope as demand for our support outstrips our food and financial donations”. This, they said, was due to the cut in Universal Credit in October 2021 and the rise in the cost of living.⁴¹

In May 2023, former Prime Minister Gordon Brown said that food banks were increasingly “taking over from the welfare state”, as charities, rather than the social security system, were becoming the “last line of defence against destitution”.⁴² A letter to the Observer in March 2023 signed by academics and charities from several countries said that a “growing reliance” on food banks risks discouraging state policies to deal with food insecurity and poverty.⁴³

According to the Independent, demand at some food banks has [doubled since the end of 2021](#), while research from the Trussell Trust and Deliveroo estimates that [one in ten parents expects to need to access food banks or other related support in the coming months](#).^{44,45}

Disabled people tend to have higher energy needs than the average citizen, (for example due to running essential medical equipment) and poverty and disability charities say disabled people may have to turn to food banks. The charity Carers UK warns that [32% of disabled people face this situation](#).⁴⁶

More people using food banks for the first time

The Trussell Trust end of year statistics showed that more people than ever – 760,000 – turned to food banks in its network for the first time in the most recent financial year. During this period more than 328,000 families used food banks in the Trussell Trust network for the first time. This is a 38% increase in the number of families using a food bank in the network for the first time compared to the same period in the previous year, 2021/22.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Trussell Trust, [New campaign calls on UK government to guarantee essentials](#), 27 February 2023

⁴¹ IFAN, [Our joint letter to the Prime Minister](#), October 16 2022

⁴² [When Amazon and Tesco join a ‘coalition of compassion’, you know the welfare state is failing](#), Gordon Brown, Observer, 7 May 2023

⁴³ [Expanding food banks is no substitute for tackling poverty, charities warn](#), Guardian, 26 March 2023

⁴⁴ [Britain’s food banks ‘close to breaking point’ amid rapid rise in poverty, Rishi Sunak warned](#), Independent, 10 April 2022

⁴⁵ [Almost one in 10 parents ‘very likely to use UK food bank in next three months’](#), The Guardian, 18 April 2022

⁴⁶ [Disabled people facing ‘impossible choices to survive’ in cost of living crisis](#), The Guardian, 15 March 2022

⁴⁷ Trussell Trust, [End of year statistics](#) [accessed 25 September 2023]

A recent survey undertaken by NASUWT, the Teachers' Union, reported that [just under 3% of respondents have used food banks](#).⁴⁸ Research from the NUS in Scotland states that [8% of students in Scotland](#) were using food banks, with students in further education most likely to become dependent on external assistance.⁴⁹ The Independent reported that [hospitals across the country now have food banks for nursing staff](#).⁵⁰

As well as the projected increase in the number of food bank users, there are also concerns about a fall in donations, due to people having less spare income to donate to charitable causes. The BBC reported that food banks were having to buy their own groceries due to donations not meeting the demands of food bank users.⁵¹

Government intervention

Since early 2022, the government has announced several measures to help households with the cost of living. The main one is the cap on energy prices for most households and non-domestic energy users. The Energy Price Guarantee (EPG) was introduced from 1 October 2022 and will continue until the end of March 2024, capping the unit cost of energy for households.

During the 2022/23 winter the EPG saved a typical household £900, compared to if there had been no EPG, according to the government.⁵²

Targeted cost of living payments are being provided to people who receive certain benefits and tax credits in 2023/24. Those eligible include:⁵³

- means-tested benefit recipients who receive three payments totalling £900
- pensioner households who receive a £300 payment
- households on non-means-tested disability benefits who receive a £150 payment

This support may result in a fall in food bank use once these measures come into effect. For further details on government support, please see section 6 in the Library briefing [Rising cost of living in the UK](#).

⁴⁸ [Seven in 10 teachers in England thought of leaving in past year, poll shows](#), The Guardian, 15 April 2022

⁴⁹ NUS Scotland, [Broke: How Scotland is failing its students](#), 21 February 2022

⁵⁰ [Food banks in hospitals now the norm, say nurses](#), Independent, 18 April 2023

⁵¹ BBC news, [Food banks forced to buy groceries due to shortages](#), 18 May 2023

⁵² HM Treasury, [Cost of living support Factsheet](#), 21 November 2022

⁵³ Further information is available in HM Treasury's [Cost of living support Factsheet](#)

6 Food banks in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

6.1 Food banks and parcels in Scotland

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 the Trussell Trust distributed 259,744 emergency food parcels in Scotland, including 87,968 for children. This was the highest number of food parcels that the network in Scotland has ever distributed in one financial year and represents an increase of 30% from the previous period in 2021/22.⁵⁴

Working with [A Menu for Change](#), an alliance of poverty charities, the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) has been collecting [data on food banks in Scotland](#) that are not part of the Trussell Trust network since 2018.

IFAN [published figures on Scottish food banks \(PDF\)](#) during the coronavirus pandemic in September 2020. It found that the distribution of emergency food parcels by independent food banks had risen by 113% from February to July 2020. It said between February and April 2020 there was a 129% rise, noting this was at the “height of lockdown”.⁵⁵

Hunger in Scotland

[Hunger in Scotland was published in June 2023 by the Trussell Trust](#). Like the report into food insecurity in the UK it examines the scale of hunger in Scotland, the drivers of that hunger and those at greatest risk of it. More than two thirds of people experiencing food insecurity in Scotland have not received food aid. Food bank use therefore does not reflect the entirety of need in the country.

Profile of those seeking food aid in Scotland

The demographic profile of those people referred to Trussell Trust food banks is complex and there is not one typical person. Some groups, however, are overrepresented among those seeking support at food banks:

⁵⁴ Trussell Trust, [Emergency food parcel distribution in Scotland: April 2022-March 2023](#)

⁵⁵ IFAN, [IFAN's latest figures collated from Scotland's independent food banks \(PDF\)](#), 8 September 2020

- Those with a disability. In Scotland 73% of people referred to a food bank are disabled, compared with 31% across the general population of Scotland.
- At 35%, households with children under 16 make up a far larger proportion of those who need food banks, than in the general population (23%).
- Working-age adults are also overrepresented, making up 94% of those referred to the Trussell Trust food banks, compared to comprising 76% of the population.
- Food insecurity and food bank use are associated with rented housing and homelessness, with people from these groups referred to food banks at 75% although they represent only 21% of the Scottish population.
- People living in social housing are also overrepresented. They make up 61% of those referred to food banks. This figure is higher than that for the UK (46%).

4 Scotland: Good Food Nation

The Scottish Government is pursuing a [Good Food Nation](#) policy and administers a [Fair Food Transformation Fund](#).⁵⁶

In June 2022, the Scottish Parliament passed the [Good Food Nation \(Scotland\) Bill](#).⁵⁷ A month later, the [Scottish Government announced it would establish a statutory Food Commission](#), a move backed by the Trussell Trust, IFAN and other organisations.

6.2

Food banks in Wales

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, the Trussell Trust distributed 185,320 emergency food parcels in Wales, including 69,683 for children. This represented the most parcels that the network in Wales has ever distributed in a financial year and was an increase of 41% compared with the same period in 2021/22.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Scottish Government, [Good Food Nation policy](#) [accessed 6 June 2022]

⁵⁷ Stage 3 [debate](#) of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill.

⁵⁸ Trussell Trust, [Emergency food parcel distribution in Wales: April 2022 – March 2023](#)

Hunger in Wales

[Hunger in Wales was published in June 2023 by the Trussell Trust](#). Like the report into food insecurity in the UK it examines the scale of hunger in Wales, the drivers of that hunger and those at greatest risk of it. Comparably to Scotland and Northern Ireland, more than two thirds of people experiencing food insecurity in Wales have not received food aid. Food bank use therefore does not reflect the entirety of need in the country.

Profile of those seeking food aid in Wales

The demographic profile of those people referred to Trussell Trust food banks is complex and there is not one typical person. Some groups, however, are overrepresented among those seeking support at food banks:

- In Wales 33% of people meet the Equality Act 2010 definition of disability. These figures are much higher for those experiencing food insecurity 59% and those referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network (73%).
- Working-age adults, especially those who are out of work or living alone, are overrepresented at food banks (93%). This contrasts with 73% of people in Wales being working-age adults (18-64).
- Households with children make up a higher proportion of those needing support from food banks (39%) than those of the general population (27%).
- Food insecurity and food bank use are strongly link with renting and homelessness. In Wales, around 17% of people are renting, but for those experiencing food insecurity it is much higher at 53% and for people referred to food banks the number is 53%.
- Across Wales 7% of people live in social housing, but for those referred to food banks the figure is 49%.
- In Wales 4% of people have been in care as a child, but this rises to 15% of people who are referred to food banks.⁵⁹

6.3

Food banks in Northern Ireland

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, the Trussell Trust distributed 81,084 emergency food parcels in Northern Ireland, including 35,334 parcels for children. As for the other parts of the UK, this was the most parcels that the network in Northern Ireland has ever distributed in a financial year and represented a 29% increase on the same period in the year 2021/22. The

⁵⁹ Trussell Trust, [Hunger in Wales](#), June 2023

number of parcels distributed in Northern Ireland are more than double the amount from five years previously.⁶⁰

The [first Northern Ireland Trussell Trust food bank](#) opened in 2012 in Newtownards. In April 2022, The Trussell Trust had 41 food banks in Northern Ireland.⁶¹ Some of the food banks are listed on [the Consumer Council website](#).

Hunger in Northern Ireland

[Hunger in Northern Ireland was published in June 2023 by the Trussell Trust](#).

The report describes an increasing need for food banks in the previous five years, stating that between 2017/18 and 2022/23 the number of parcels distributed in the Trussell Trust network increased by 141% in Northern Ireland, compared to an increase of 120% in the UK.

Hunger in Northern Ireland examines the scale and drivers of hunger and food bank use in the country and looks at the profile and characteristics of those experiencing such insecurity. As in Scotland and Wales, more than two thirds of people experiencing food insecurity in Northern Ireland have not received food aid. Food bank use therefore does not reflect the entirety of need in the country.

Profile of those seeking food aid in Northern Ireland

The demographic profile of those people referred to Trussell Trust food banks is complex and there is not one typical person. Some groups, however, are overrepresented among those seeking support at food banks:

- Disabled people. In Northern Ireland 30% of the population meet the Equality Act 2010 definition of having a disability, however these figures are doubled (61%) for those referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network.
- 78% of people in Northern Ireland are working-age adults (18-64), but working-age people are overrepresented among those referred to a food bank (90%).
- In Northern Ireland, 34% of households include children under 16. However nearly half (48%) of those referred to food banks are living with children under 16.
- Single adults living with children are also overrepresented within the Trussell Trust network, making up 25% of those referred to food banks. This contrasts with single parents representing 4% of the population.
- Larger families are overrepresented at the Trussell Trust food banks, with 18% saying they are living with three or more children aged 16 aged or

⁶⁰ Trussell Trust, [Emergency food parcel distribution in Northern Ireland: April 2022–March 2023](#)

⁶¹ Trussell Trust, [Four Ways to end the need for emergency food in Northern Ireland](#), 21 April 2022

under. This compares with this group representing 6% of the Northern Ireland population.

- Most of the people referred to a food bank (64%) live in rented accommodation, compared to 14% of the population.
- Those living in social rented housing make up 42% of those referred to a food bank, while for the whole population the number is only 4%.⁶²

For more details on each of the three countries, see the Trussell Trust report, [Hunger in the UK](#).

⁶² Trussell Trust, [Hunger in Northern Ireland](#), August 2023

7

Other food aid provision

Food aid is not restricted to food banks. The Independent Food Aid Network estimates there are at least another 3,500 independent food aid providers working beyond the food bank model across the UK.⁶³ These include social supermarkets, soup kitchens, community food projects and school holiday meal providers.

The following list is not exhaustive but describes some other forms of food aid.

7.1

Meal providers

- [FareShare](#) distributes surplus food to food aid organisations as well as other types of charities. It was founded in 1994, becoming an independent charity in 2004. In 2021/22 FareShare redistributed just under 54,000 tonnes of food, the equivalent of nearly 130 million meals.⁶⁴
- [FoodCycle](#) was founded in 2009 to help communities set up volunteer groups to use surplus food to prepare meals for those in food poverty in their community. Its 2021 Social Impact report stated it served 455,000 meals and launched 16 new projects.⁶⁵

7.2

Social supermarkets

- Social supermarkets are another way to prevent surplus food going to waste. The first, '[Community Shop](#)', which redistributes food and household products, opened in 2013.
- In 2019, The Guardian reported that [social supermarkets were on the rise](#).⁶⁶ In 2022, the newspaper reported that [a new social supermarket will open in the City of London](#) in September. It said the benefits of

⁶³ Independent Food Aid Network, [Mapping the UK's Independent Food Banks](#), Sabine Goodwin

⁶⁴ FareShare, [FareShare continues to deliver 4 meals every second to struggling UK families, as cost of living bites](#), 27 May 2022

⁶⁵ FoodCycle, [Social Impact report](#), 2021 [Accessed 31 July 2023]

⁶⁶ Guardian, [The rise of social supermarkets: 'It's not about selling cheap food, but building strong communities'](#), 19 May 2019

offering food at accessible prices helps people avoid “the stigma of a handout” and contributes to a sense of community and support.⁶⁷

7.3 Food for schoolchildren

The Library briefings [School meals and nutritional standards \(England\)](#) and [Food poverty: Households, food banks and free school meals](#) provide detailed information on free school meals. Below is a list of other examples of food provision for school children.

- The Government’s [national school breakfast club programme](#) provides funding to schools in disadvantaged areas. Participating schools will receive a 75% subsidy for breakfast club provision until the end of July 2024. Schools contribute 25% of the cost so that pupils in the participating schools are offered breakfast supplies at no cost to them.⁶⁸
- In April 2022, [Magic Breakfast](#), which supplies breakfasts to schoolchildren, published its Hidden Hunger report, which said that 69% of UK schools have either no breakfast provision or have barriers to access. Meanwhile, 41% of Scottish schools have no provision.⁶⁹
- The Trussell Trust [Holiday Clubs project](#) for children who cannot access Free School Meals during school holidays, provides “meals (breakfast & lunch), as well as a variety of fun activities and learning opportunities to families.” The project was first trialled in the summer of 2016.
- [Feeding Britain](#), a food charity formed in 2015, has also coordinated the [Healthy Holiday programme](#), to feed children during the school holidays.
- During the coronavirus lockdowns, footballer Marcus Rashford successfully campaigned for free school meals to be provided during the school holidays as well as term time. This is covered in the Library’s briefing, [School meals and nutritional standards \(England\)](#).⁷⁰
- In February 2021, a YouGov poll, commissioned by the food company Kellogg’s, surveyed 1,100 primary and secondary school teachers from across the UK. It concluded that one in five UK schools set up a food bank during the Covid pandemic.⁷¹

⁶⁷ The Guardian, [Social supermarkets offer choice and self-esteem to hard-up workers](#), 14 May 2022

⁶⁸ Written Parliamentary Question [122606](#), 22 February 2022

⁶⁹ Magic Breakfast, [Hidden Hunger – The State of UK Breakfast Provision 2022](#), 27 April 2022

⁷⁰ House of Commons Library [SN04195](#), [School meals and nutritional standards \(England\)](#), 23 February 2023

⁷¹ The Guardian, [One in five UK schools has set up a food bank in Covid crisis, survey suggests](#), 4 March 2021

- In 1999, [Greggs Foundation](#) opened its Breakfast Club. The foundation now oversees 680 clubs, providing a breakfast to over 44,500 school children each day, over 8.6 million each year, according to its figures.⁷²

⁷² [Greggs Foundation – Breakfast Clubs](#), accessed 31 July 2023

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