



BRIEFING PAPER

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Food banks in the UK

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Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Food aid provision during the COVID-19 crisis
3. How many food banks are there in the UK?
4. Statistics on food parcels
5. Food banks in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
6. Government food insecurity indicators introduction
7. Other food aid provision



Contents

Summary	3
1. Introduction	5
2. Food aid provision during the COVID-19 crisis	7
2.1 Food aid for the clinically vulnerable	7
2.2 Food aid for the economically vulnerable	8
2.3 Increase in food parcels numbers	9
2.4 Government action on emergency food aid during the crisis	11
2.5 EFRA Committee inquiry on COVID-19 and food supply	13
3. How many food banks are there in the UK?	14
4. Statistics on food parcels	15
4.1 UK – Trussell Trust	15
4.2 UK – Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)	16
4.3 State of Hunger report – characteristics of food bank users	16
4.4 Projections for 2020 - 21	17
4.5 Regions and nations	18
5. Food banks in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland	19
5.1 Food banks and parcels in Scotland	19
5.2 Food banks in Wales	19
5.3 Food banks in Northern Ireland	19
6. Government food insecurity indicators introduction	21
6.1 UK	21
6.2 Scotland	22
6.3 DWP review of food bank use	23
7. Other food aid provision	24
Meal providers	24
Social supermarkets	24
Provisions for schoolchildren	24



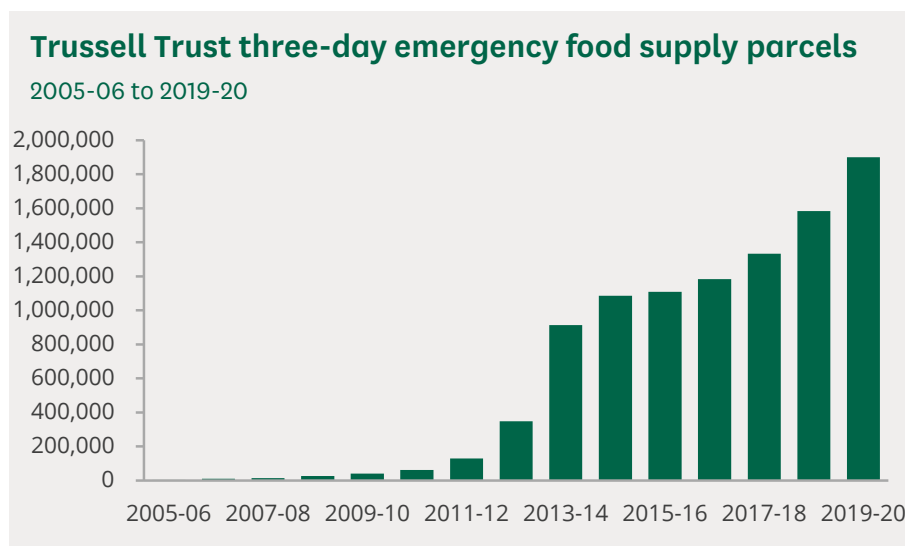
Summary

Increases in the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks have accelerated over the course of the coronavirus pandemic.¹

The [Trussell Trust reported](#) a 47 per cent increase in the number of three-day emergency food parcels it distributed in the 6 months from March to September 2020, compared to the same period in 2019. It noted a particularly marked increase in the number of food parcels going to children.

The Independent Food Aid Network, [IFAN, reported](#) a 62% increase in emergency food parcel distribution in October 2020 compared with October 2019. Independent food banks also saw a rise of 88% over the period February to October 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

Both the number of food banks and the quantity of emergency food parcels they distribute have increased. In February 2021 there were over **1,300 Trussell Trust food banks** in the UK, in addition to over **900 independent food banks**. The increase in the food parcels distributed by the Trussell Trust up to March 2020 can be seen in this chart:



Source: [Trussell Trust](#)

¹ See [Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network \(2020\)](#); for further data from the first half of 2020, with forecasts for the second half going into 2021.

⁴ See House of Commons Library briefing [Poverty in the UK: statistics](#)

4 Food banks in the UK

In its November 2019 [State of Hunger](#) report the Trussell Trust estimated that **up to 2%** of all UK households used a food bank in 2018/19.⁵ On 24 June 2020 the Food Standards Agency published data on food bank usage in England, Wales and Northern Ireland gathered for it by IPSOS Mori over April and May. In the [Covid-19 Consumer Tracker](#) a **total of 7%** of the population said they had used a food bank or food charity, with 13% of households with children having done so.

⁵ Page 32, [State of Hunger](#), Trussell Trust, November 2019.

1. Introduction

This briefing is about the use of food banks. Food banks are run by volunteers, churches and charities. Any information we have on food bank use comes from the Trussell Trust and IFAN, the Independent Food Aid Network.

Food bank statistics should not be used as a proxy for poverty measurements⁶. 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 or stability in poverty levels.

Topics related to food banks include 'food poverty' and 'food insecurity'. A food bank is a charitable resource which distributes food to those in need of it at least once a week. This note is about food bank usage, and the data here should be used cautiously in any wider context.

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. It is the primary source of data on food bank use in the UK. It 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, and generates a wide range of analysis from it, including the numbers of adults and children receiving food aid and their reasons for needing it. The Trussell Trust runs over half of the UK's food banks, and has a long archive of published data, but this data should be considered incomplete as independent food banks have also operated across the whole of the UK.

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

Food banks are a global phenomenon. First introduced in the USA⁹ in the 1960s they now exist in many wealthy countries¹⁰. [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.

This paper has sections on:

⁶ See House of Commons Library briefing [Poverty in the UK: statistics](#)

⁹ Where they are called 'food pantries'

¹⁰ See Food Bank Nations: poverty, corporate charity and the right to food by Grahame Riches, Routledge, 2018, p42 for an international comparison table.

6 Food banks in the UK

- Food aid provision during the COVID-19 crisis, including data for 2020 and projections into 2021
- The 2000+ food banks in the UK, of which 1,300 are run by the Trussell Trust and over 900 are independent
- Food parcel distribution statistics
- Regional data, the North West of England being the part of the UK where the highest number of Trussell Trust food parcels were distributed in 2019-20
- Government introduction of food insecurity indicators, following an announcement made in February 2019
- Other food aid provision, such as meal providers, social supermarkets and initiatives aimed at school children

2. Food aid provision during the COVID-19 crisis

The coronavirus pandemic has created and exacerbated several problems around some households' ability to access food in the UK. These include:

- The public health emergency requirement to self-isolate, which makes it difficult for people categorised as 'shielded' who do not have a support network to get food to their homes
- The economic crisis which has resulted in a loss of jobs and reduction in income for some people. Some of those affected may find it more difficult to afford to buy food

These difficulties can be summarised as problems of transportation, which especially affect the clinically vulnerable, and problems of ability to purchase, which especially affect the economically vulnerable.

Wider issues concerning food in relation to the current crisis are covered in the Library's briefing, [Coronavirus Act: Food supply](#).¹¹ An overview of assistance available to people experiencing economic difficulties is provided in the Library briefing [Coronavirus: Support for household finances](#).¹²

2.1 Food aid for the clinically vulnerable

On **21 March 2020** [the Government announced food aid](#) for households considered to be at greatest risk from coronavirus¹³. 1.5 million people in England most vulnerable to being hospitalised by the virus were categorised as 'shielded' and told to stay at home for 12 weeks by Public Health England¹⁴. Those without a support network of friends and family were offered free food parcels¹⁵. These were delivered through a 'Local Support System'¹⁶, sometimes called a 'community hub', a partnership between local authorities, the food industry, 'local resilience and emergency partners' (including the military) and community voluntary groups.

¹¹ [Coronavirus Act: Food supply](#), House of Commons Library Research Briefing CBP-8862, Jonathan Finlay, 31 March 2020

¹² [Coronavirus: Support for household finances](#), House of Commons Library Research Briefing CBP-8894, Andrew Mackley, 8 April 2020

¹³ [Major new measures to protect people at highest risk from coronavirus](#), Press release, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 21 March 2020

¹⁴ COVID-19: guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable, Public Health England, 21 March 2020

¹⁵ Minister for Welfare Delivery Will Quince MP, response to [WPO 31483](#), 23 March 2020

¹⁶ The Government has called the Local Support System the biggest food delivery exercise since the Second World War. Meals on Wheels was first introduced by the Women's Voluntary Services (WVS) in 1943¹⁶. This organisation is now the Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) responsible for recruiting [NHS Volunteer Responders](#).

The Communities Secretary, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP [announced](#) that free food parcels had started to be delivered to this group of clinically vulnerable 'shielded' households by 29 March.¹⁷

On **8 May** the Environment Secretary, Rt Hon George Eustice MP, [reported](#) that over a million food parcels had been delivered to these households, and that all those in the shielded cohort have been added to a list giving them priority access to supermarket delivery slots.¹⁸ There were also other provisions made for a broader group of people with disabilities through voluntary provision. For the wider population experiencing financial difficulties the Minister announced:

we also recognise that the economic impacts of coronavirus means that vulnerability is not about physical access to food, for some there is also financial vulnerability, so today we are announcing a new £16 million fund to support frontline food charities.

2.2 Food aid for the economically vulnerable

Food aid for those experiencing financial hardship has continued to come from the charities that had provided it prior to March 2020, with assistance from other organisations and Government arriving as the crisis progressed.

In March 2020 there were reports of food banks closing or struggling to operate because of conditions brought about by the Covid-19 emergency.¹⁹ The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN), which represented around 800 food banks at the time (rising to around 900 over the year), reported a lack of donations, rationed access to supermarkets, the vulnerability of volunteers, and a rise in the number of those in need of food aid as a result of the coronavirus was compromising their service, and asked supermarkets to help.²⁰ The Government worked with the supermarkets to ensure that food banks retained an access to food supplies to help the most vulnerable.²¹

Following this initial crisis several initiatives developed. Charities that had not previously distributed food parcels began to do so, often as a substitute for other forms of food aid, such as meal provision, that could not operate during the crisis. Some supermarkets and some local authorities announced direct support for food banks.²²

¹⁷ [First food parcels delivered to clinically vulnerable people](#), Press release, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 29 March 2020

¹⁸ [Environment Secretary's statement on coronavirus \(COVID-19\): 8 May 2020](#), Press release, DEFRA, 8 May 2020

¹⁹ [Coronavirus: Food banks strained as volunteers isolate and demand surges during pandemic](#), Vincent Wood, The Independent, 23 March 2020

²⁰ The Guardian, [Food banks ask UK supermarkets to set aside coronavirus supplies](#), 21 March 2020

²¹ [Government press conference led by Rt Hon George Eustice MP](#), 21 March 2020

²² [Tesco announces £15 million food donations to support food banks and local community groups](#), Trussell Trust, 1 April 2020; [Morrisons To Help Restock Britain's Foodbanks](#), News Release, Morrisons, 30 March 2020; [Asda donates £5 million to food banks](#), Third Force News, 24 March 2020

2.3 Increase in food parcels numbers

By the end of March 2020 Emma Revie, Chief Executive of the Trussell Trust, wrote how “Coronavirus has forced thousands to visit food banks in recent weeks”²³. On **1 May** the Trussell Trust confirmed its network’s busiest ever period, with an 81% increase in emergency food parcels being given out across the UK, including 122% more parcels going to children, compared to the same period in 2019.

IFAN also [reported](#) a record level of demand with an average 59% increase from February to March 2020.²⁴

On **3 June** the Trussell Trust published its [summary findings on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on food banks](#)²⁵. It noted that in April 2020 its network of food banks experienced:

- An 89% increase in the number of food parcels distributed - up from 81% in the second half of March
- a 67% increase in the number of household referrals to food banks – up from 48% in the second half of March
- A 107% increase in the number of children needing support from a food bank in April 2020 compared to April 2019
- An increase in the number of families with children receiving food parcels, up from 33% in April 2019 to 38% in April 2020
- A significant increase in need for food bank support across the UK in April 2020 compared to April 2019, but with variations across the country, from a 47% rise in Scotland to one of 142% in Northern Ireland

On the same day. IFAN reported²⁸:

- A 175% increase in the number of food parcels distributed by independent food banks across the UK comparing April 2019 to April 2020

To reduce contact and meet growing need, 35% of the independent food banks surveyed had increased the size of their parcels to support people for longer periods of time.

On **24 June** the Food Standards Agency published data on food bank usage in England, Wales and Northern Ireland gathered for it by IPSOS Mori over April and May. In the [Covid-19 Consumer Tracker](#) a total of 7% of the population said they had used a food bank or food charity, with 13% of households with children having done so. Another contrast was amongst age groups, where 20% of those aged 16 to 24 had used a food bank or food charity and 1% of 55 to 75 year olds had.²⁹

²³ [Coronavirus has forced thousands to visit food banks in recent weeks – your support is vital to changing that](#), Emma Revie, The Independent, 30 March 2020

²⁴ [IFAN data since Covid-19](#), Independent Food Aid Network, May 2020

²⁵ [Summary findings on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on food banks](#), Trussell Trust, 3 June 2020

²⁸ [Independent food bank emergency food parcel distribution in the UK: Comparing February – April 2019 with February – April 2020](#), IFAN, 3 June 2020

²⁹ [The Covid-19 Consumer Tracker](#), Food Standards Agency and Ipsos Mori, 24 June 2020

On **9 July** the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) [published data](#) comparing February – May 2019 with February – May 2020.³⁰ It reported that independent food banks had seen

- a 177% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed comparing May 2020 with May 2019
- a 46% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed comparing March 2020 with February 2020
- a 126% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed comparing April 2020 with February 2020
- a 148% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed comparing May 2020 with February 2020

It also reported increased size of emergency food parcels, increased numbers of people supported, and changes to food bank operations as a result of COVID-19, including delivery services and changes to the referral system.

In **August 2020** [Mapping responses to the risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK](#) was published. This is the first report from a UK Research and Innovation [[UKRI](#)] funded project designed to map and monitor responses to concerns about food access during the COVID-19 outbreak. [The Food Vulnerability during COVID-19](#) research project is running from July 2020 to January 2022 jointly by Kings College London and the University of Sheffield together with [Sustain : the alliance for better food and farming](#) and [Church Action on Poverty](#). This first in a planned series of reports details policies and programmes that were made available during the period March – July 2020³¹.

On **8 September 2020** IFAN published [data on Scotland](#)³². It reported

- a 108% rise in the number of food parcels distributed in July 2020 compared to July 2019
- a doubling in the number of people being helped by Scottish independent food banks, despite the [Scottish Government's 'Cash first' policy](#)³³ and [IFAN's own support for that](#) approach³⁴

³⁰ [Independent food bank emergency food parcel distribution in the UK: Comparing February – May 2019 with February – May 2020](#), IFAN, 9 July 2020

³¹ [Mapping responses to the risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK](#), Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Rachel Loopstra and Katy Gordon, Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute, August 2020

³² [IFAN's latest figures collated from Scotland's independent food banks](#), IFAN, 8 September 2020

³³ [Emergency free meals to those most in need](#), Scottish Government, 20 April 2020

³⁴ [Cash First Project](#), IFAN in Scotland, June to November 2020

On **14 September** the Trussell Trust published [Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network](#)³⁵. It found:

- over half those using Trussell Trust food banks at the start of the pandemic had never needed one before
- almost 100,000 households received support from a food bank in the Trussell Trust network for the very first time between April and June 2020
- nearly two in five households needing to use a food bank are families

IFAN has reported an increase in the number of independent food banks during 2020. There has also been an increase in other food aid initiatives. On **25 September** Sustain published [Community Food Retail and Food Poverty](#), reporting on and offering advice on setting up food pantries, also known as social supermarkets.

In **October 2020** IFAN together with [Feeding Britain](#) published a briefing on food bank usage in the period March to September³⁶. In particular it noted the increasing numbers of first-time food bank users during the pandemic, and the corresponding change in their backgrounds. This was [reported in the Observer](#)³⁷ and by Andrew Forsey, [director of Feeding Britain](#)³⁸. On 1 December the British Medical Journal (BMJ) announced it was supporting IFAN for the [BMJ Appeal 2020-21](#), observing:

Most people living with food insecurity go hungry or resort to cheaper unhealthier foods rather than use a food bank, with an impact on their long-term health that will affect the NHS for many years to come. In 2005, food related ill health was found responsible for about 10% of morbidity and mortality in the UK costing the NHS about £6 billion annually. People living on low incomes are more likely to become obese, or suffer from heart disease, type 2 diabetes or health-related conditions. Families living in deprived areas are far more likely to visit A&E and be impacted by long-term conditions.

2.4 Government action on emergency food aid during the crisis

Both the Trussell Trust and the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) campaign to end the need for the food banks they represent. They were part of a coalition of charities that [wrote to the Chancellor of the](#)

³⁵ [Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: the impact of COVID-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network](#), Trussell Trust, September 2020

³⁶ [‘What am I supposed to do? Is it destitution or prostitution?’ Hunger and the need for food banks between March and September 2020](#), Independent Food Aid Network and Feeding Britain Briefing, October 2020

³⁷ [Growing numbers of ‘newly hungry’ forced to use UK food banks](#), Patrick Butler, The Observer, 1 November 2020

³⁸ [Covid-19 has turned middle income families into ‘newly hungry’ people who rely on our food banks](#), Andrew Forsey, i-news, 3 November 2020

12 Food banks in the UK

[Exchequer](#) on **29 April 2020** calling for a temporary [Coronavirus Emergency Income Support Scheme](#).

In **May** the Government announced £16 million for food charities³⁹, notably FareShare and WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme), stating that “at least 5,000 frontline charities and community groups in England will benefit”. The Department for Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) opened the [Food Charities Grant Fund](#)⁴⁰.

On **10 June** at Prime Minister’s Questions [the Prime Minister announced](#) that £63 million would be distributed to local authorities in England to help those struggling to afford food and other essentials due to coronavirus.⁴¹ This [was confirmed](#) on **11 June** by Food Minister Victoria Prentis, leading the cross-government Food and Essential Supplies to the Vulnerable Task Force.⁴²

The House of Lords Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment report [Hungry for change: fixing the failures in food](#), was published on **6 July 2020**, and concluded:

Our evidence acknowledged the vital role that food banks play, but emphasised strongly that food banks exist to plug a hole in the social security system.⁴³

On **1 December 2020** [the Trussell Trust reported](#) that food bank users are more commonly in debt to government than to friends or payday loan firms⁴⁴. Their report [Lift the Burden](#) noted that 47% of households surveyed at food banks during the summer owed money to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) due to loans and overpayments of benefits, compared to 37% at the start of the year before the pandemic hit⁴⁵. This was reiterated in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report [Destitution in the UK 2020](#)⁴⁶.

On **8 December 2020** former government adviser on homelessness, Dame Louise Casey, urged Government to deliver a “Beveridge moment” and overhaul the welfare state. As she launched an appeal for donations from the general public she said Government needed to “work out how the legacy of this pandemic isn’t the quadrupling of food banks”⁴⁷.

³⁹ [£16 million for food charities to provide meals for those in need](#), Press release, DEFRA, 8 May 2020

⁴⁰ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Apply for the Food Charities Grant Fund](#), Guidance, DEFRA, 11 May 2020

⁴¹ [HC Deb 10 June 2020 c285](#)

⁴² [£63 million for local authorities to assist those struggling to afford food and other essentials](#), DEFRA and DWP press release, 11 June 2020

⁴³ Point 91, page 43, [Hungry for change: fixing the failures in food](#), House of Lords Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment, HL Paper 85, 6 July 2020

⁴⁴ [UK food bank trust says half of users repaying universal credit debts](#), Patrick Butler, The Guardian, 1 December 2020

⁴⁵ [Lift the Burden](#), Trussell Trust, 1 December 2020

⁴⁶ [Destitution in the UK 2020](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 9 December 2020

1. ⁴⁷ [Ex-homelessness tsar launches food appeal and urges 'Beveridge moment'](#)

Dame Louise Casey makes plea as report shows 1 million people in UK struggle for food, Robert Booth, The Guardian, 8 December 2020

2.5 EFRA Committee inquiry on COVID-19 and food supply

In March 2020 the [House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee](#) launched an [Inquiry into COVID-19 and food supply](#).

Emma Revie, Chief Executive of the Trussell Trust, [gave oral evidence](#) to the committee⁴⁸. She said that the impact of the pandemic was “instantaneous and profound” and explained that in the last two weeks of March “there was an 81% increase in demand and, quite alarmingly, a 122% increase in the number of children receiving food through our food banks”. Citing insufficient income as the primary reason for this, she argued that financial aid, in the form of the [Coronavirus Emergency Income Support Scheme](#), was needed in place of charitable food aid, and that current levels of food bank parcel distribution were unsustainable⁴⁹⁵⁰.

On **30 July** the Committee published its [first report](#)⁵¹ and [a summary](#)⁵² of it. Included in its recommendations are that:

- DEFRA should continue to provide £5 million annual funding to [FareShare](#) for a further two years. This is to redistribute surplus food to frontline food aid providers
- the Government should appoint a Minister for Food Security
- the Government should consult on whether a ‘right to food’ should be enacted in law following publication of the [National Food Strategy](#)

It noted that “Use of food banks was increasing before the pandemic and has effectively doubled during the pandemic. It is likely that the situation will get worse before it gets better.”⁵³

On **14 January 2021** the Committee opened a new inquiry: [Covid-19 and food supply: follow up](#).

⁴⁸ House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, [Covid-19 Food Supply Inquiry](#), May 2020

⁴⁹ [‘Give families cash’: Food bank chief warns charities will struggle to cope with ‘profound’ demand](#), Adam Forrest, The Independent, 15 May 2020

⁵⁰ [Food banks' stark warning to government: we can't do this alone](#), Patrick Butler, The Guardian, 15 May 2020

⁵¹ [COVID-19 and food supply](#), First report of session 2019-21, House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, HC263, 30 July 2020

⁵² [What effect did the coronavirus pandemic have on our food supply?](#) House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, 30 July 2020

⁵³ Point 47, page 21, [COVID-19 and food supply](#), First report of session 2019-21, House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, HC263, 30 July 2020

3. How many food banks are there in the UK?

The Trussell Trust started its UK food aid distribution in 2000 in Salisbury. In 2004 it founded the Foodbank Network based on the Salisbury model. Since then the Trussell Trust has partnered with churches and communities across the country, which are [mapped here](#).

It covers **429 locations** across all four nations of the UK as of 2020. Many locations have multiple branches, totalling over **1,300 individual food bank centres**.

IFAN, the [Independent Food Aid Network](#), is the UK network for independent (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 now [mapped](#) independent food banks, clarifying how many operate outside the Trussell Trust. There are **at least 929 independent food banks in the UK today**.⁵⁴

Added to the Trussell Trust's 1,300 **this makes over 2,200 food banks in total**⁵⁵, suggesting that reliance on Trussell Trust figures significantly underestimates food bank usage in the UK. As with the Trussell Trust, independent food banks can be found across most of the country.

[A joint study](#) by the Trussell Trust and the Independent Food Aid Network in 2017 calculated that food bank volunteers contributed more than 4 million hours work that year, worth 'at least £30 million'.⁵⁶ The Trussell Trust celebrated the work of over 40,000 people volunteering with it in 2015-16.⁵⁷

Access to food has been a repeated issue during the Coronavirus pandemic, and wider issues, including school meals and Government provision of emergency food parcels to clinically vulnerable people are covered in our briefing paper [Coronavirus: Support for household finances](#).⁵⁸

⁵⁴ This does not include those operating from schools, mentioned in the [National Governance Association Report](#) of 2 September 2019. [This report](#) notes an increase in the number of governors reporting that their school does provide a food bank.

⁵⁵ The Government does not maintain statistics on food banks – see [WPO UIN 121155](#)

⁵⁶ [Volunteers across the UK giving 'at least £30 million' a year in unpaid work to support foodbanks](#), Trussell Trust Blog, 17 October 2017

⁵⁷ [Volunteers' Week 2016](#), Trussell Trust, 1 June 2016

⁵⁸ [Coronavirus: Support for household finances](#), House of Commons Library briefing paper number 8894, 22 June 2020

4. Statistics on food parcels

4.1 UK – Trussell Trust

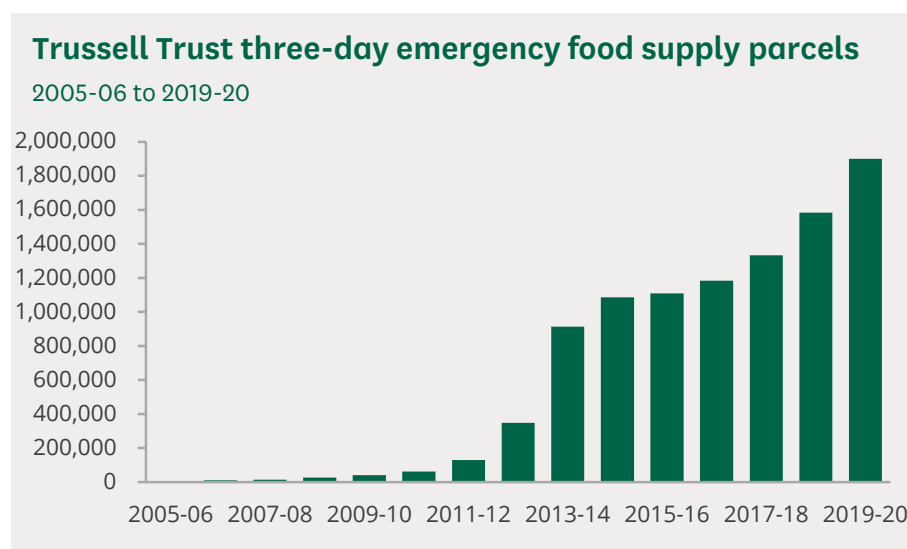
The Trussell Trust provides ‘three-day emergency food parcels’, and this is their standard unit of measurement. It also measures food in tonnes. It does not record the number of individual users of food banks.

A Trussell Trust food parcel typically consists of tinned and dried goods selected across food groups to provide healthy balanced meals⁵⁹ following nutritionists’ guidelines⁶⁰. These have expanded to include perishable items⁶¹ since the Trussell Trust partnered with Asda and FareShare in February 2018.⁶²

The Trussell Trust publishes statistics⁶³ twice a year on its website, explaining that:

Our statistics are a measure of volume rather than unique users, and on average people needed around two food bank referrals in the last year.⁶⁴

It is important not to confuse food parcel figures with the number of people accessing them.⁶⁵



Source: [Trussell Trust](#)

In 2019-20 the Trussell Trust supplied 1.9 million three-day emergency food parcels, an increase of 18% on the previous year. Around a third of these went to children. In the period 1 April – 30 September 2020 they distributed 1.2 million food parcels.

⁵⁹ [What's in a Food Parcel?](#), Trussell Trust website

⁶⁰ [A Nutritional Analysis of the Trussell Trust Emergency Food Parcel](#), Dr Darren Hughes and Edwina Prayogo, UCL, April 2018

⁶¹ [What's in a Trussell Trust foodbank parcel and why?](#), Trussell Trust, 8 June 2018

⁶² [Asda, the Trussell Trust and Fareshare launch £20 million partnership to help a million people out of food poverty](#), Trussell Trust, 8 February 2018

⁶³ [Latest stats](#), Trussell Trust

⁶⁴ [Mid-year stats](#), Trussell Trust

⁶⁵ Full Fact addressed the question of [how many people use food banks](#) in its publication of 28 April 2017.

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

In December 2019 Dr Rachel Loopstra of Kings College London and Sabine Goodwin of IFAN with others published [A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network](#). Key findings include:

- 75% of independent food banks started operating in the past 9 years, with over a third opening over 2012 to 2013.
- Over 60% of independent food banks required new clients to have a referral from a third-party agency but most indicated that exceptions can be made to this rule. Notably, almost 40% did not require clients to have referrals.
- Where referrals were received from third-party agencies, over 75% of food banks reported receiving referrals from local authorities. Jobcentre Plus offices were also very commonly reported referral agencies.
- 44% of independent food banks imposed no restriction on how often people could receive food parcels, and an additional 17.5% allowed access to food parcels 18 or more times in a 12-month period. Over 30%, however, restricted access to food parcels to 6 or fewer times in a 12-month period.
- About 45% of independent food banks gave out food parcels with more than 3 days' worth of food per person, and an additional 10% did not restrict food parcel content.
- Over 60% of food banks offered other services in addition to food parcel distribution.
- Most food banks reported that people who were unemployed or unable to work due to disability and single parent families were groups often helped in their food banks.

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) and [A Menu for Change](#) have now produced [statistics on food parcels for Scotland](#), making a more complete picture of food bank usage in that country possible.⁶⁷

4.3 State of Hunger report – characteristics of food bank users

[State of Hunger](#), first published by the Trussell Trust in November 2019, is the largest ever piece of research into food bank use in the UK. It notes:

Assuming independent food banks in England, Wales and Northern Ireland distribute a similar number of food parcels on average as those in Scotland, the total number of food parcels distributed across the UK over 2018/19 by food banks in the Trussell Trust network and independent food banks would be around 3 million

⁶⁷ [Emergency Food Parcel Provision in Scotland April 2017 to September 2018](#), IFAN, March 2019

This study is being carried out at Heriot-Watt University over three years and it identifies key characteristics of food bank users. It estimates that up to 2% of all UK households used a food bank in 2018/19.⁶⁸

It found three categories of factor contributing to a person needing a food bank:

- Problems with benefits
- Adverse life experiences such as eviction, ill health and divorce
- The exhaustion of formal and informal support such as family and friends.

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

- Over two-thirds had experienced a problem with the benefits system in the year before they needed emergency food, including long waits and reductions. In 43% of cases benefit problems were one of the main reasons for referral
- 94% were 'facing real destitution', unable to buy essentials to stay warm, dry, clean and fed. 23% were homeless
- £50 was the average weekly income after housing costs, while 20% reported no income at all in the month before (this contrasts with a median household income after housing costs of £437 in 2017/18 according to DWP [Households below average income](#) [HBAI] statistics)
- Over three quarters were in arrears, most commonly rent, and 40% were repaying debts, the majority to the DWP
- In the year prior to using a food bank 7 in 10 respondents reported at least one 'challenging life experience' such as eviction or divorce, while a large minority also reported having experienced an 'adverse work-related experience' such as losing a job or a reduction in work hours
- Nearly 75% reported at least one health issue in their household
- 2% were people of pension age (65+)
- 22% were single parents
- Nearly half were single person households
- 89% were born in the UK, slightly above the 86% of the population as a whole

4.4 Projections for 2020 - 21

The Trussell Trust commissioned Heriot Watt University and the National Institute for Economic and Social Research to model the levels of need food banks in the network would be likely to see as the economic impacts of Covid-19 unfold. Two approaches were taken – one based

⁶⁸ Page 32, [State of Hunger](#), Trussell Trust, November 2019.

on macro-economic forecasts, another a microsimulation model based on changes to household employment and income.

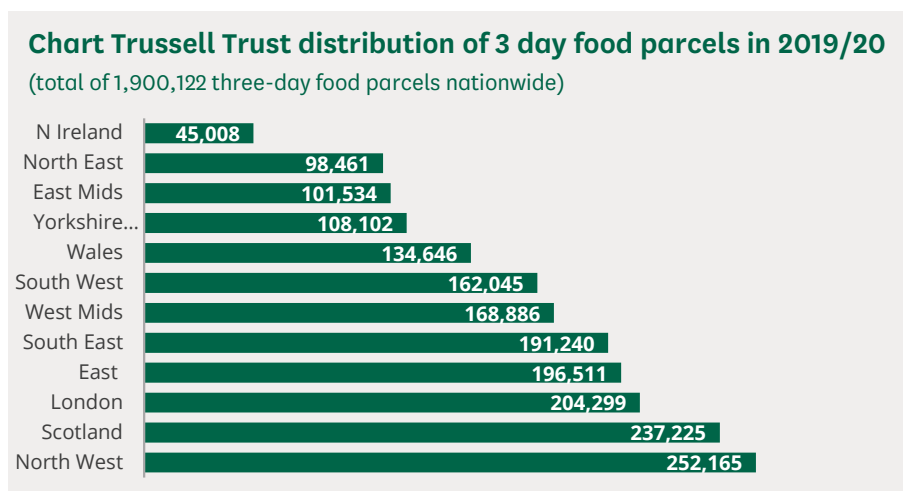
The findings anticipate a significant rise in levels of destitution in the UK by the end of the year, with at least an extra 300,000 emergency food parcels likely to be distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network in the last quarter of 2020. This would be an increase of 61% compared to the previous year.

Modelling shows that, depending on the strength of the economy and any second wave, levels of need could be even greater, up to 153% higher compared to the previous year.⁶⁹

4.5 Regions and nations

The distribution of Trussell Trust food parcels varies around the country, as the following chart shows. These are absolute numbers, and not calculated proportionately to the size of each area's population.

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.



Source: [Trussell Trust](#)

⁶⁹ As above, [executive summary here](#)

5. Food banks in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

5.1 Food banks and parcels in Scotland

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](#) during the Coronavirus pandemic in September 2020, saying⁷⁰:

From February to July 2020 emergency food parcel distribution by independent food banks has seen a 113% rise. This follows a 129% rise from February to April at the height of the lockdown.

Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 the Trussell Trust distributed 237,225 emergency three-day food parcels in Scotland.⁷¹

Between 1 April and 30 September 2020 the Trussell Trust distributed 110,965 emergency three-day food parcels in Scotland.

5.2 Food banks in Wales

In March 2016 the University of Bangor [published findings](#) on food banks in Wales. It noted a rise from 16 outlets in 1998 to 157 in 2015 and suggested that this closely matches the situation in England. Maps showing the locations, notable for being rural as well as urban, are included in the full report document [here](#).⁷²

In the year 2019-2020 the Trussell Trust distributed 134,646 emergency three-day food parcels in Wales.

Between 1 April and 30 September 2020 the Trussell Trust distributed 70,393 emergency three-day food parcels in Wales.

5.3 Food banks in Northern Ireland

The [first Northern Ireland Trussell Trust food bank](#) opened in 2012 in Newtownards. This [undated list](#) shows that many more have opened in the province since.⁷³ The Trussell Trust had 38 food banks in Northern Ireland in June 2019 and reported a 13% increase in use of its food banks in the year 2018-19.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ [IFAN's latest figures collated from Scotland's independent food banks](#), 8.9.2020

⁷¹ See <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/> for both end of year and mid year data

⁷² [Poverty and Food Banks in Wales](#), Dave Beck and Hefin Gwilym, Bangor University, March 2016

⁷³ [List of Food Banks](#) [in Northern Ireland], Citizens Advice Bureau Belfast with University of Ulster Students Union and the Social Policy department of Jordanstown

⁷⁴ [Northern Ireland food banks fear for busiest summer ever](#), Trussell Trust, 27 June 2019

20 Food banks in the UK

In the year 2019-2020 the Trussell Trust distributed 45,008 emergency three-day food parcels in Northern Ireland.

Between 1 April and 30 September 2020 the Trussell Trust distributed 32,299 emergency three-day food parcels in Northern Ireland.

6. Government food insecurity indicators introduction

6.1 UK

The UK government is to include a measure of food insecurity in an annual DWP survey of Household income and living standards.

The announcement was made at an informal meeting attended by the DWP, the Office for National Statistics, Public Health England and the Scottish and Welsh governments, as well as several food poverty charities, on 26 February 2019.⁷⁵

This development was also reported by the campaign group End Hunger UK in a blog post from 27 February 2019, [Campaign win! UK Government agrees to measure household food insecurity](#). It noted:

At a meeting on 25 February 2019, attended by various organisations who are members of the End Hunger UK campaign, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) confirmed that it was planning to include household food insecurity measurement questions in its annual [Family Resources Survey](#) starting in April 2019...

The [Family Resources Survey](#) is an annual survey carried out by the DWP that looks at income, housing tenure, caring needs, disability, and pension participation. The survey covers all four nations of the UK with a representative sample of 20,000 households and has been continuously collecting data since 1994. The first datasets on household food insecurity will be available by March 2021.

The 10 questions that will be asked in order to ascertain whether an individual is food insecure will be taken from the [US Department of Agriculture's survey](#)..

This data will help Government and civil society have a clearer picture of the scale of household food insecurity in the UK, as well as identify the groups that are the most affected. DWP assisted by the Social Metrics Commission has also developed new, experimental poverty statistics to help target support more effectively, which will be published in the second half of 2020.⁷⁶

This follows the establishment of [ENUF](#): Evidence and Network on UK household Food insecurity. This is an ESRC funded resource on household food insecurity in the UK run by Dr Rachel Loopstra and Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford. It includes reference to the UK Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey and the Food and You Survey (2016)

On 15 January 2020 Minister for Welfare Delivery, Will Quince MP, responded to Written Parliamentary Question [2416](#) on food banks, mentioning the new set of food security questions in the Family Resources Survey starting from April 2019.

⁷⁵ [UK hunger survey to measure food insecurity](#), The Guardian, 27 February 2019

⁷⁶ [New poverty statistics developed to help government target support](#), DWP, 17 May 2019

On 9 December 2020 the Social Market Foundation (SMF), a cross party think tank, published [Measuring and mitigating child hunger in the UK](#)⁷⁷. This report seeks to fill the data gap by presenting analysis of an SMF-commissioned survey from Opinium closely modelled on the questions that will form the basis of the Government's official measure.

6.2 Scotland

In 2013, the Scottish Government carried out a study into the extent of food aid provision in Scotland, [Overview of Food Aid Provision in Scotland](#), which noted a growth in demand over the 2012-13 period.⁷⁸

A Scottish Parliamentary Committee looked at the issue of food banks in 2014, with a focus on causes. In June of that year they published a report of their findings, [Food Banks and Welfare Reform](#)⁷⁹, which stated that although the [UK government] Department of Work and Pension made it clear that 'they see no direct link between the increase in use of food banks in Scotland and welfare reform', the Committee was

'convinced by the volume and strength of the evidence it has received that there is a direct correlation between welfare reform and the increase in use of food banks'.

In 2016, the Scottish Government published [Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland - The Report of the Independent Working Group on Food Poverty](#), which focussed on [recommended responses](#) to the situation.

The Scottish Government committed to monitoring household food insecurity in 2016, following recommendations from an Independent Working Group on Food Poverty.

Three priority questions from the UN Food Insecurity Experience Scale were included in the 2017 and 2018 Scottish Health Surveys, and they will be included in the 2019 Scottish Health Survey.

The 2018 Scottish Health Survey showed that 9% of adults experienced food insecurity, defined as worrying about running out of food due to lack of money or other resources, up from 8% in 2017. A quarter of single parents (25 per cent) and around a fifth of single adults aged under 65 living alone (21 per cent) had experienced this⁸⁰.

The Scottish Government is pursuing a Good Food Nation policy⁸¹ and administers a [Fair Food Fund](#). Details of its assistance to Scottish food banks was given by Aileen Campbell MSP on 10 December 2019 in response to Scottish Parliament Question [S5W-26530](#).

⁷⁷ [Measuring and mitigating child hunger in the UK](#), Social Market Foundation, 9 December 2020

⁷⁸ [Overview of Food Aid Provision in Scotland](#), Dr Filip Sosenko Dr Nicola Livingstone Prof. Suzanne Fitzpatrick, School of the Built Environment Heriot-Watt University Edinburgh, Scottish Government Social Research, 2013

⁷⁹ 2nd Report, 2014 (Session 4): [Food Banks and Welfare Reform](#), SP Paper 537

⁸⁰ Scottish Health Survey 2018 published, Scottish Government press notice, 24 September 2019 <https://www.gov.scot/news/scottish-health-survey-2018-published/>

⁸¹ [Good Food Nation policy](#), Scottish Government

6.3 DWP review of food bank use

The Department for Work and Pensions commissioned an evidence review on the drivers of food bank use in August 2018.⁸²⁸³

On 6 February 2020 Chris Stephens MP tabled [EDM 141](#) urging the Government to publish its findings.

On 2 September 2020 Emma Lewell-Buck tabled a Written Question [[UIN 84269](#)] asking when DWP would publish the evidence review on the drivers of food bank usage. On 7 September minister Will Quince responded:

The Department reallocated resources to prioritise work to helping the COVID-19 effort. As such, we will update on the literature review on the factors driving the use of food banks in due course.

On 3 November 2020 Baroness Lister of Burtersett tabled a Parliamentary Question in the House of Lords, PQ [HL9932](#), asking when DWP planned to publish the evidence review.

On 10 November 2020 Baroness Stedman-Scott responded for the Government, saying:

The Department reallocated resources to prioritise work to helping the COVID-19 effort. As such, we will update on literature reviews in due course.

⁸² [DWP to investigate link between Universal Credit and soaring foodbank use](#), Tamsin Rutter, Civil Service World, 3 August 2018

⁸³ FOI request from Anthony Collins to DWP, 1 August 2018, reported at https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/research_8?unfold=1

7. Other food aid provision

Food aid is not restricted to food banks. The Independent Food Aid Network estimates that there are at least another 3,000 independent food aid providers working beyond the food bank model across the UK including 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

Meal providers

- [Fareshare](#) distribute surplus food to frontline food aid organisations as well as other kinds of charities. It was **founded in 1994**, becoming an independent charity in 2004. It called 2019/20 its 'biggest year yet', supporting 10,962 charities to feed 933,178 people.⁸⁴ It has received high profile support from footballer **Marcus Rashford** during the coronavirus pandemic; he [became an ambassador for Fareshare](#) in March 2020.
- [FoodCycle](#) was **founded in 2009** to help communities set up groups of volunteers to use surplus food to prepare meals for those in food poverty in their community. Their 2019 Social Impact report⁸⁵ reported opening 7 new projects in the year to give a total of 41.

Social supermarkets

- Social supermarkets are another way to save 'surplus food' going to waste. The first, [Community Shop](#), was **opened in 2013**. A Financial Times article, [Social supermarkets offer working poor a lifeline](#), 25 October 2018 reports on the current extent of and demand for this provision.

Provisions for schoolchildren

- [Magic Breakfast](#), which supplies breakfasts to schoolchildren, was **founded in 2003** since when it has seen growth in demand.⁸⁶ This has been met by the Government's National School Breakfast Programme, which in 2018 saw 'Five hundred new or improved breakfast clubs signed up'.⁸⁷ Its [COVID-19 response](#) and [Food for Thought Progress Report 2019](#) can be found on its website.
- On 4 January 2020 [the Government announced](#) extension of the National School Breakfast Programme, adding 650 more schools in disadvantaged areas to the 1,800 already involved. It also announced increased provision in summer holiday free school meals for summer 2020.⁸⁸
- 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

⁸⁴ [Our Impact](#), FareShare

⁸⁵ [Social Impact report](#), FoodCycle

⁸⁶ [Calls for expansion of scheme providing free breakfasts to hungry children](#), Patrick Butler, The Guardian, 8 January 2013

⁸⁷ [Department for Education 2 November 2018 press release](#)

⁸⁸ [Free meals and summer holiday activities for children](#), Department for Education and Lord Agnew, 4 January 2020

learning opportunities to families.” The project “allows foodbanks to develop a Holiday Club without starting from scratch” and were first trialled in a Summer 2016 pilot.

- [Feeding Britain](#), a charity formed in 2015 by members of the APPG on Hunger, has also coordinated [Holiday Food and Fun Clubs](#) in its nine pilot areas, to protect children from hunger during the school holidays. It is running a COVID-19 emergency food programme.
- [Kitchen Social](#) was launched in 2017 and works with community organisations across London offering food during the school holidays. It is supported by the Mayor’s Fund for London, and with the Food Foundation and the GLA to hosted a [summit on children’s food insecurity](#) in 2019.
- Schools were closed during the first and third lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 – 21. Footballer Marcus Rashford successfully campaigned during the crisis for free school meals to be provided during the school holidays as well as term time. The families of children eligible for free school meals were at different times offered both vouchers and hampers over this period. This is covered in the Library’s briefing paper [School meals and nutritional standards \(England\)](#)⁸⁹.

⁸⁹ [School meals and nutritional standards \(England\)](#), House of Commons Library SN04195, 15 January 2021

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