

Emergency food parcel distribution in the UK

April – September 2024

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Background

This factsheet reports on the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell community during the period 1 April to 30 September 2024 inclusive. During this time, food parcels were distributed from 1,611 locations across the UK, as part of the Trussell community.¹

It is important to recognise that data from food banks in the Trussell community is just one part of the picture of need across the UK. There is a wide range of charitable food aid that will be supporting people that is not captured in this parcel data. There are also many people who are severely food insecure who do not receive support from food banks.²

Key facts from the April – September statistics

Level of need for food banks in the Trussell community remains close to record level

Food banks in the Trussell community distributed over 1.4 million emergency food parcels between 1 April to 30 September 2024. This is a slight (-4%) decrease compared to the same period in 2023 when close to 1.5 million parcels were distributed. Not only is the level of emergency food provision close to this record year, but it is also significantly higher than other recent years.

This longer-term trend is stark. The number of parcels distributed in the first half of 2024/25 is 69% higher than the number in the same period in 2019. This is now the second time in a row that food banks in the Trussell community have distributed over 1.4 million parcels in the first six months of the year.

It is deeply concerning that in the first six months of 2024/25 food banks distributed more parcels than they did in the entirety of the 12-month period of 2017/18.

¹ The locations that food banks distributed parcels from are not counted at a point in time. They are instead counted if they have distributed food parcels at any stage during the time period. Some will have opened, and some will have closed during this period. For reference there were 1,575 locations in the same period in the previous year.

² Research, produced by Trussell, in partnership with Ipsos, found that in the 12 months to mid-2022 one in seven (14%) people across the UK had experienced food insecurity, equating to an estimated 11.3 million people. However, more than two thirds (71%) of people experiencing food insecurity reported that they have not used any form of food aid in the last year. Hunger in the UK (2023), Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/publications/hunger-in-the-uk>.

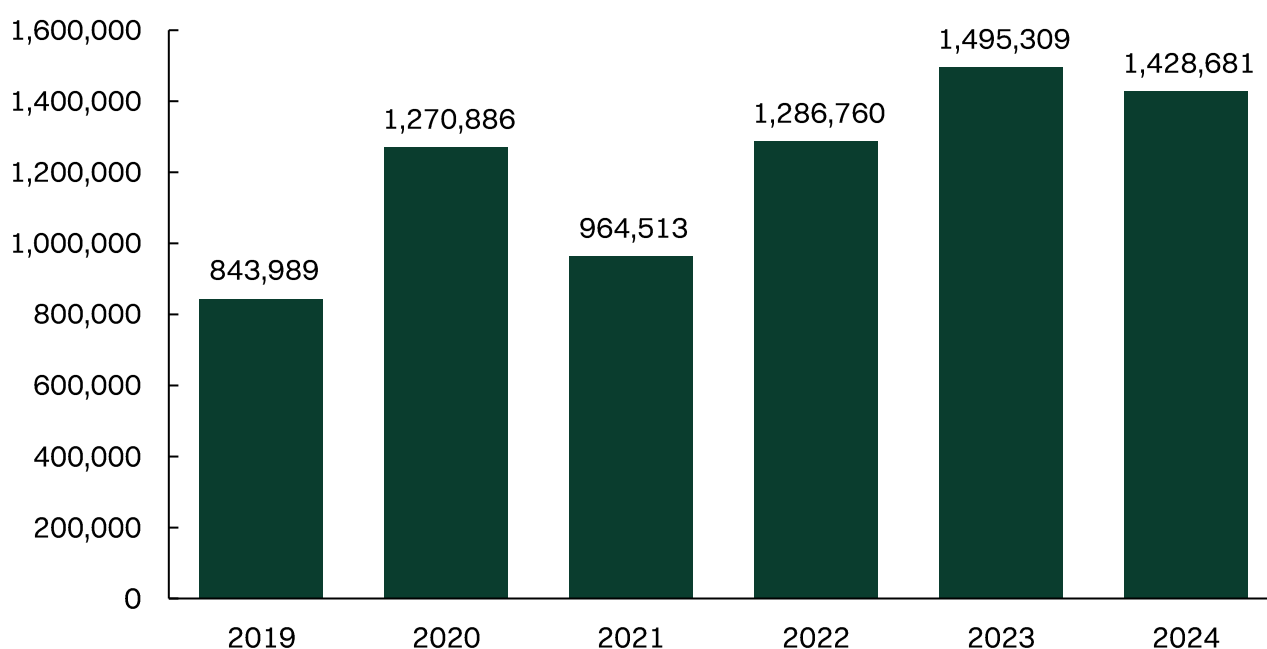
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A typical week would just be bland. It's just existing. It's trying to basically just survive mentally, physically, emotionally and financially... I didn't get diagnosed [for my condition] until 2022. I'd moved somewhere and there was just a whole lot going on because my life changed around those years. I got diagnosed quite late. I still don't get any help for it.

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Person referred to a food bank interviewed as part of Hunger in the UK research

Figure 1.1 Number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell community, UK: 1 April – 30 September 2019 to 2024



Source: Trussell administrative data on the number of emergency food parcels distributed across the UK

For the second year in a row, over half a million food parcels (508,000) were distributed for children. Over the last five years the number of parcels distributed for children has increased by 64% from 309,000 between April and September in 2019.

Unlike in previous years, the number of parcels for children didn't grow faster than the number of parcels for adults. Indeed, the figures for the first half of 2024/25 represent a slight decrease (-6%) from the same period last year. It is too early to tell if this is a one-off or a longer-term shift.

Last year, when comparing April – September 2023 with the same period in 2018, we reported a 114% increase for parcels for adults compared with a 121% increase for parcels for children. The latest five-year trend (with 2019 as the baseline year), shows a 72% increase for adults and a 64% increase for children in parcels provided April – September.

Table 1.1 Number of parcels for adults, children, and total distributed by food banks in the Trussell community, UK: 1 April to 30 September

	Apr - Sep 2024			Percentage change from Apr-Sep 2019			Percentage change from Apr-Sep 2023		
	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total
United Kingdom	921,000	508,000	1,429,000	72%	64%	69%	-3%	-6%	-4%
England	764,000	425,000	1,189,000	86%	74%	81%	-3%	-6%	-4%
Scotland	82,000	40,000	122,000	9%	8%	9%	-6%	-5%	-6%
Wales	54,000	29,000	83,000	45%	36%	42%	-5%	-10%	-7%
Northern Ireland	21,000	14,000	35,000	95%	90%	93%	-10%	-16%	-13%

Source: Trussell administrative data on the number of emergency food parcels distributed across the UK

Emergency food parcel provision remains close to record levels first and foremost due to a weakened social security system that is unable to protect people from the most severe forms of hardship, forcing more people to the doors of food banks. The soaring cost of living and COVID-19 pandemic drew more people into hardship, but it is the longer-term failings of our social security system which continues to push people into hunger and hardship.

The slight decrease seen by food banks in the Trussell community in the first half of 2024/25 may in part reflect recent income boosts. Three changes particularly stand out. First, the overall inflation rate easing. Second, the impact of benefit uprating from April 2024, where benefits increased by the higher inflation rate of 6.7% from the previous September (as per standard uprating policy). And third, the unfreezing of Local Housing Allowance rates from April 2024, meant support for private renters were re-linked to the most affordable 30% of local rents.

However, we are hearing from many food banks that they are struggling to keep up with the need in their communities, as they seek to manage the food banks resources and capacity at a time of extremely high need. We also know that when local authority and other services in an area are struggling or having to cut back, that can make it more difficult for people in those communities to be referred to our food banks. We therefore know that the data reported for this period is particularly likely to be only the tip of the iceberg of actual need in communities.

Wider data also reflects sustained levels of need. Data from Citizen's Advice indicates that the number of issues people are seeking support for remains extremely high. Between April and September 2024 Citizen's Advice supported people with 890,000 issues. This was a slight (5%) increase on the same period in 2023 – albeit slightly lower than the increase from 2022 to 2023 (8%).³

³ Citizens Advice (2024), *Advice trends*, <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/wales/about-us/browse/advice-trends/>

With only a slight decrease on the same period last year, and overall figures which remain significantly higher than historic levels, it is clear that far too many people on the lowest incomes are still facing extreme levels of financial insecurity. Trussell's recently released report looking at the scale of hunger and hardship across the UK makes clear that real change is needed – not just small steps – if we are to significantly reduce the number of people experiencing hardship.⁴



I can remember days when me and my partner just didn't have anything to eat. All we had was hot water and black coffee, honestly, or bread. It was nuts. It was crazy... It didn't even occur to me to look for help to be honest. I didn't think it was out there.



Person referred to a food bank interviewed as part of Hunger in the UK research

Children continue to be disproportionately supported by food banks

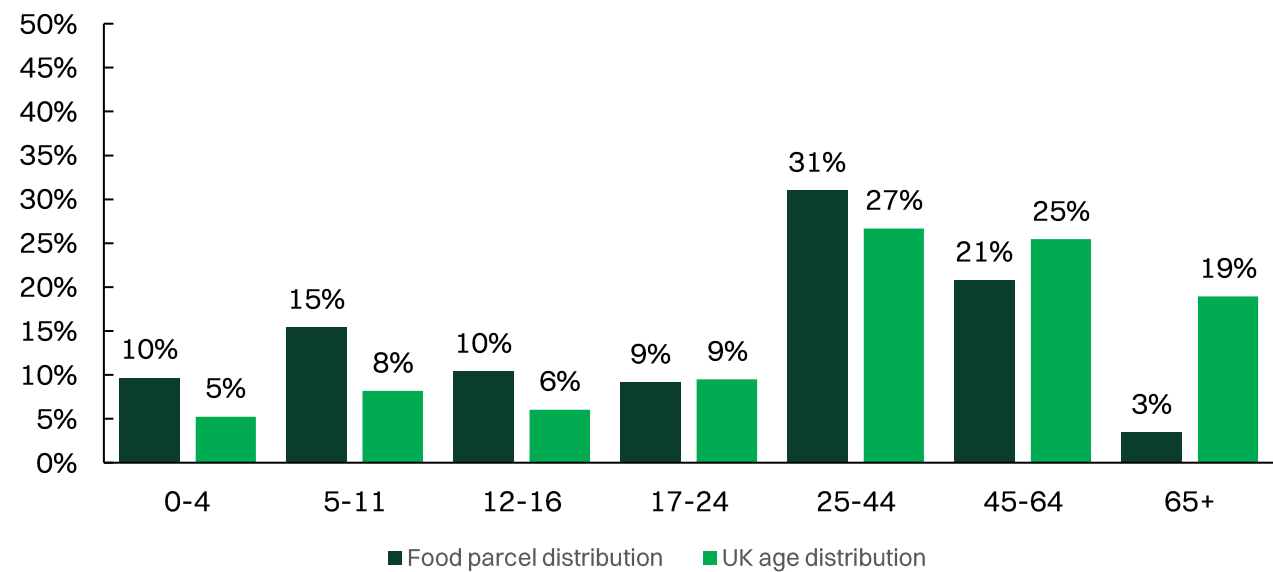
Despite a slight fall in the number of parcels for children (see above) the distribution of support continues to be disproportionately weighted towards children. Over one in three (36%) parcels provided by food banks in the first half of 2024/25 are for children aged 0-16, despite this age group making up just 19% of the UK population.⁵ It is notable that the proportion of parcels distributed for children aged 0-4 (10%) is double their population share across the UK (5%).

There are no major gaps between the distribution of food parcels and the general population for other age groups until you reach pension age at 65 and over. Just 3% of parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell community are for people aged 65 and over, despite them making up 19% of the UK population.

⁴ Weekes, T, et al, (2024), *Cost of Hunger and Hardship – interim report*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/the-cost-of-hunger-and-hardship>

⁵ ONS, (2024), *Estimates of the population for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland>

Figure 1.2 Percentage of emergency food parcels distributed for different age categories compared to population distribution, UK: 1 April to 30 September 2024



Source: Trussell administrative data on the number of emergency food parcels distributed across the UK and ONS estimates of the population for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The long-term trends do however show a significant increase in the amount of support provided for pension age adults. In the first six months of 2024/25, 48,000 parcels were distributed for someone aged 65 and over. That is four times the number provided in the same period in 2019 when 12,000 parcels were distributed. This is by far the highest growth rate for any age group across this period.⁶

Table 1.2 Percentage increase in the number of parcels by age group: 1 April – 30 September 2019 to 2024

Age	Percentage increase from 2019
0-4	52%
5-11	58%
12-16	88%
17-24	72%
25-64	63%
65+	291%

Source: Trussell administrative data on the number of emergency food parcels distributed across the UK

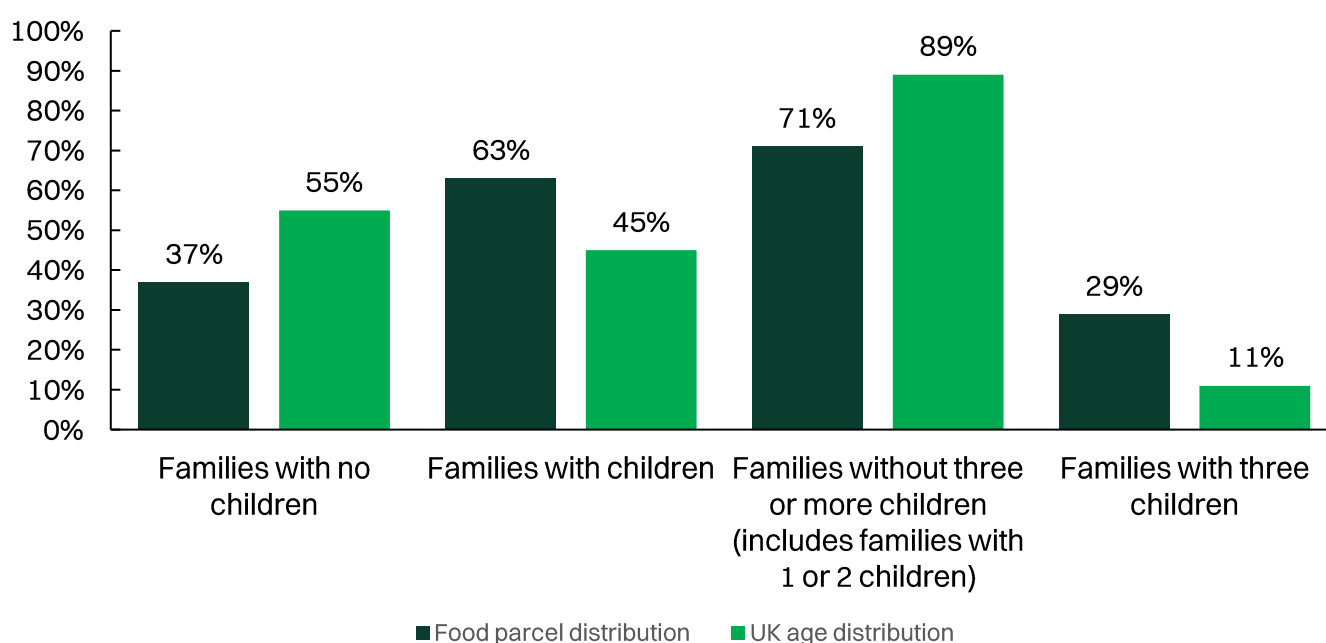
⁶ Age ranges differ to the previous figure as Trussell update the age categories it collected in 2023. To allow comparison to pre-2023 data the age categories for 2024 have been recoded to the pre-2023 codes.

Support is most commonly provided for families with children

When taking a whole household view (i.e. not just children but also the adults living with them) the majority (63%) of support provided by food banks in the Trussell community is for families with children. This is despite people living in these families making up just 45% of the UK population.⁷

Nearly one in three (29%) parcels were provided in the first half of 2024/25 for families with three or more children – in the general population people, people living in these families make up 11% of the population.

Figure 1.3 Percentage of emergency food parcels distributed for different family types compared to percentage of UK population living within each family type: 1 April to 30 September 2024



Source: Trussell administrative data on the number of emergency food parcels distributed across the UK

In previous six-month periods, the rate of growth in provision for families with children, particularly families with three or more children, has been higher than that of other families. We do not see this pattern in this latest period (Table 1.3). Comparing the first six months of 2024/25 to the same period in 2019/20 we see that there has been a 69% increase in the number of parcels distributed for both families with, and without children. A similar increase is also seen for families with three or more children (68%). As previously mentioned, it is too early to tell if this is a long-term shift or not.

The only significant difference to report for different household type is the large increase in the number of parcels for families with at least one person aged 65 and over. Since 2019, the number of parcels for these families has more than tripled – over four times the increase for families without anyone aged 65 and over (Table 1.3).

⁷ Weekes, T, et al, (2024), *Cost of Hunger and Hardship – interim report*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/the-cost-of-hunger-and-hardship>

Table 1.3 Number of parcels distributed by household type: 1 April – 30 September

Household type	Number of parcels, Apr-Sep 2024	Percentage change from Apr-Sep 2019	Percentage change from Apr-Sep 2023
Families with children	907,000	69%	-6%
Families without children	522,000	69%	-2%
Families with three or more children	411,000	68%	-8%
Families without three or more children	1,017,000	70%	-3%
Families with someone aged 65 or over	81,000	264%	-8%
Families without someone aged 65 or over	1,281,000	60%	-2%

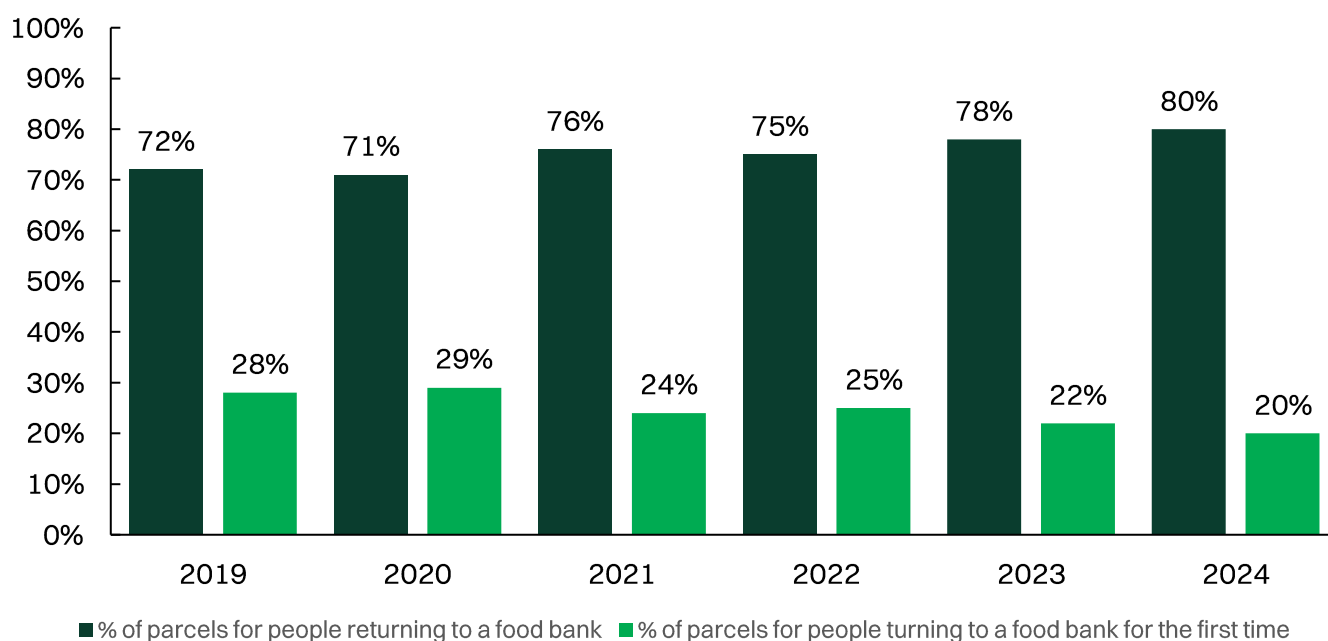
Source: Trussell administrative data on the number of emergency food parcels distributed across the UK

Almost 280,000 people forced to turn to a food bank in Trussell community for the first time

In the first six months of 2024/25, 129,000 families were forced to turn to a food bank for the first time. These families included 277,000 people (180,000 adults and 97,000 children). This is a 24% increase in the number of people having to turn to a food bank for the first time compared to the same period in 2019, but a 12% decrease compared to the same period in 2023.

The proportion of food parcels distributed for people turning to a food bank in the Trussell community for the first time has been steadily declining since a recent high of 29% in the first six months of the Covid-19 pandemic (2020). In the first six months of 2024/25, one in five (20%) parcels were distributed for families turning to a food bank in our community for the first time. This is a significant decline from the 2020 figure and a five-percentage point decline from the figure in 2022 as the cost-of-living crisis intensified.

Figure 1.4 Percentage of emergency food parcels distributed for people returning to a food bank and people turning to a food bank for the first time: 1 April – 30 September 2019 to 2024



Source: Trussell administrative data on the number of emergency food parcels distributed across the UK

This could mean that fewer people are newly facing hunger and hardship. It might also mean that people newly facing hunger and hardship are more able to draw on formal and informal support from others than in the recent past, particularly if other people's financial pressures are easing. It could also reflect the huge increases in people turning to food banks during the pandemic and early stages of the cost-of-living crisis, meaning that there is a much smaller pool of people who cannot afford the essentials, or are at risk of not being able to, who have also not yet turned to a food bank for support.

It is difficult to identify the driving factor from this data alone. Regardless, the data suggests that provision over the past six months has been driven to a greater extent by people needing to return to a food bank rather than people needing support for the first time, compared with the pandemic or peak of the cost-of-living crisis. And as emergency food parcel data still suggests more than two visits over six months is still relatively infrequent, we can surmise that recent emergency food parcel data now tends to reflect longer term hunger and hardship where people have nowhere else to turn, and/or people cycling in and out of deep financial hardship over a longer period of time.

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Well, not having a working fridge-freezer, so I'm buying food daily. It used to be alright, but the prices of food going up and that, my money seems disappear before I've even got time to spend it, really... it was just a complete financial breakdown. I completely struggled. And I was put on to the church at the end of the road, and that's when I started using the food bank.

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Person referred to a food bank interviewed as part of Hunger in the UK research

Slight decreases in parcels provided seen across the UK

As Table 1.1. shows, there have been decreases from the previous year in the number of parcels distributed across the UK in Northern Ireland (-13%), Wales (-7%), Scotland (-6%), and England (-4%).

In Wales (-10%), Northern Ireland (-16%), and England (-6%) the decreases were greater for the number of parcels distributed for children than the overall change.

However, the level of emergency food provision remains significantly higher in the first six months of 2024/25 than the same period five years ago. In comparison to the first six months of 2019/20, in Northern Ireland the distribution of emergency food parcels has almost doubled (93%). England (81%) and Wales (42%) have also seen significant increases. In Scotland, the growth rate has been relatively smaller at 9%.

Food banks in some English regions are now distributing more than twice as many parcels as the same period five years ago

Despite some decreases from the previous year, many food banks across England are now distributing more than twice as many emergency food parcels as they did five years ago. Food banks in London (142%), Yorkshire and the Humber (122%), and the East of England (98%) are now distributing double the number of parcels they did in the same period five years ago.

Table 1.4 Number of parcels for adults, children, and total distributed by food bank in the Trussell community – English region breakdown: 1 April to 30 September

	Apr-Sep 2024			Percentage change from Apr-Sep 2019			Percentage change from Apr-Sep 2023		
	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total
East Midlands	46,000	25,000	71,000	64%	46%	57%	-10%	-16%	-12%
East of England	103,000	61,000	164,000	103%	91%	98%	2%	-2%	1%
London	146,000	76,000	222,000	148%	132%	142%	6%	0%	4%
North East	45,000	23,000	68,000	63%	53%	59%	-9%	-11%	-10%
North West	106,000	61,000	167,000	52%	38%	47%	-3%	-5%	-4%
South East	96,000	58,000	153,000	80%	76%	78%	-6%	-10%	-8%
South West	74,400	40,000	114,000	67%	55%	62%	-3%	-5%	-4%
West Midlands	79,000	43,000	122,000	64%	63%	64%	-8%	-7%	-8%
Yorkshire and The Humber	70,000	37,000	107,000	127%	113%	122%	-4%	-8%	-6%
England	764,000	425,000	1,189,000	86%	74%	81%	-3%	-6%	-4%

Source: Trussell administrative data on the number of emergency food parcels distributed across the UK

What this means for policy

People need to turn to food banks because they don't have enough money for the essentials. Some are between jobs, have health conditions or are looking after relatives and children. Some people are in work that's insecure, inaccessible, and doesn't pay enough to live on. And the lack of affordable childcare, housing, and transport are further barriers holding too many people back from opportunities to increase their income.

Our latest emergency food parcel statistics continue to show appalling levels of hunger and hardship in communities across the country. Yet this can, and must, change.

We welcome the first steps the UK government has taken towards tackling the severe hardship that pushes people to the doors of food banks. Continued and longer term funding for the Household Support Fund (HSF) to support people experiencing a one-off or short-term crisis, and long-overdue changes to reduce the amount that can be taken off Universal Credit payments to repay loans and debts are a particularly welcome relief. Trussell's research shows that the lack of cash-first support in a crisis, and the heavy burden of debt can both pull people into long-term, spiralling hardship.

Plans to improve workers' and renters' rights, increase the supply of social housing and overhaul employment support are also important building blocks that must be in place to end the need for food banks.

However, there is much more to do if the UK government is to fulfil its pledge to end the need for emergency food. Our social security system is supposed to protect people from hunger and hardship, but right now problems in the design and delivery of social security are the biggest and most immediate drivers of need for food banks. Benefit levels are too low, payments are reduced further still by deductions and caps, and people struggle to access the support for which they are eligible.

We urgently need the UK government to value the role our social security system plays in providing people with the financial security to prepare for and seek work, sustain work, manage health conditions and disability, and caring responsibilities. It will not be possible for the government to achieve its broader missions – on growth, health or opportunity – unless it addresses the scale of hardship holding us back.

This is why we are calling for the UK government to swiftly follow up recent announcements with a much clearer **plan to end the need for emergency food** if we are to make meaningful inroads in turning the tide on hunger and hardship in this Parliament. Autumn Budget announcements will only be the 'downpayment' on tackling financial hardship that the government claims if it is followed by action which goes much further. In the coming months, it must prioritise:

- **Introducing a protected minimum floor in Universal Credit (UC) as a low cost but concrete step towards ensuring our social security system protects people from going without the essentials.** A protected minimum floor below which UC's standard allowance is not permitted to fall would build on the UK government's welcome plans to lower the cap on automatic debt

deductions from 25% to 15% of the UC standard allowance. It would build in stronger protections for people on the lowest incomes by reducing the impact of the benefit cap, as well as debt deductions. It would also help to lay the groundwork for the forthcoming review of UC, by ensuring that any future improvements are minimally affected by reductions to UC payments. A protected minimum floor set at 15% below UC's current standard allowance would result in around 1.9 million families seeing their reductions to UC lowered by around £48 a month on average, at a very limited annual cost of around £150 million.⁸ It is encouraging to see progress towards this with the lower cap on debt deductions, but the UK government has a chance to make a more concrete step-change by extending this protection beyond reductions for debt repayment.

- **Maintaining financial support for private renters by keeping Local Housing Allowance (LHA) linked to the lowest 30% of local rents.** It is deeply concerning that the UK government plans to freeze LHA rates at 2024/25 levels next year. With rents forecast to increase, this means a growing shortfall for private renters between their support for housing costs and actual rents paid. This is likely to drive up homelessness and hunger as people are unable to afford rent and other essential costs, and we urge the government to reconsider.
- **Ensuring reforms to health and disability benefits deliver new support and opportunities for disabled people.** We need certainty that the UK government's plans to reduce the cost of disability benefits will be achieved by genuine improvements to employment support and access to healthcare, and by opening up new opportunities for disabled people, not by cutting already precarious incomes. The previous government's plans to reform the Work Capability Assessment would end eligibility for additional support worth over £400 a month for 424,000 new claimants by 2028/29 with minimal effect on actual employment rates. This would be the wrong approach.
- **Making investment in social security the bedrock of the child poverty strategy and review of UC.** If the UK government's child poverty strategy is to make a meaningful difference to the number of children facing hunger and hardship, it must address necessary updates to our social security system to ensure everyone can afford the essentials. The two-child limit should be scrapped. This would mean that 630,000 fewer people could be facing hunger and hardship by 2025/26, including 430,000 children. The strategy should also include clear steps towards an Essentials Guarantee in Universal Credit. That includes steps to agree how the government will ensure benefit payments cover the cost of essentials, and steps to improve the sorely inadequate rate of payments in the interim. Setting the UC standard allowance at the Essentials Guarantee level would ensure over 1.9 million fewer people would be at risk of facing hunger and hardship in 2025/26, including 580,000 children.⁹
- **Delivering a multi-year funding settlement and long-term strategy for discretionary local crisis support as part of the Spending Review.** We are encouraged by the confirmation of a full year's funding for the HSF in 2025/26 which will help deliver local crisis support in

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

England. The next phase of the Spending Review should deliver multi-year funding for the HSF, or a successor programme, to ensure every local authority in England can deliver effective and dignified cash-first support schemes to people facing immediate hardship, helping them to get back on their feet. This should be supported by a long-term strategy for discretionary crisis support, setting out how to make revitalized local crisis support schemes part of a more coordinated and integrated local support system. Getting people the right support at the right time would shift local support towards preventing hardship and building financial resilience in communities.

Alongside these priority actions, the UK government should bring together the full range of policy changes and reforms it will commit to, in a plan to end the need for emergency food.

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