

Emergency food parcel distribution in Wales

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 in Wales during the period 1 April to 30 September 2024 inclusive. During this time period, food parcels were distributed from 137 locations in the Trussell community across Wales.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 Wales. There are many emergency food aid providers currently supporting people whose experiences are not captured here. 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 in Wales remains close to record level

Food banks in the Trussell community in Wales distributed close to 83,000 emergency food parcels between 1 April to 30 September 2024. This is a 7% decrease compared to the same period in 2023 when close to 89,000 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 this financial year is 42% higher than the number in 2019. This is only the second time that food banks in the Trussell community in Wales have distributed over 80,000 parcels in the first six months of the year - after the previous record year in 2023.

It is deeply concerning that in the first six months of 2024/25 food banks in Wales distributed almost as many parcels as they did in the entirety of the 12-month period of 2015/16 (86,000).

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 139 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 five (20%) people across Wales had experienced food insecurity, equating to an estimated 753,000 people. However, three in four (74%) people experiencing food insecurity reported that they have not used any form of food aid in the last year. Hunger in Wales (2023), *Trussell*, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/publications/hunger-in-the-uk>

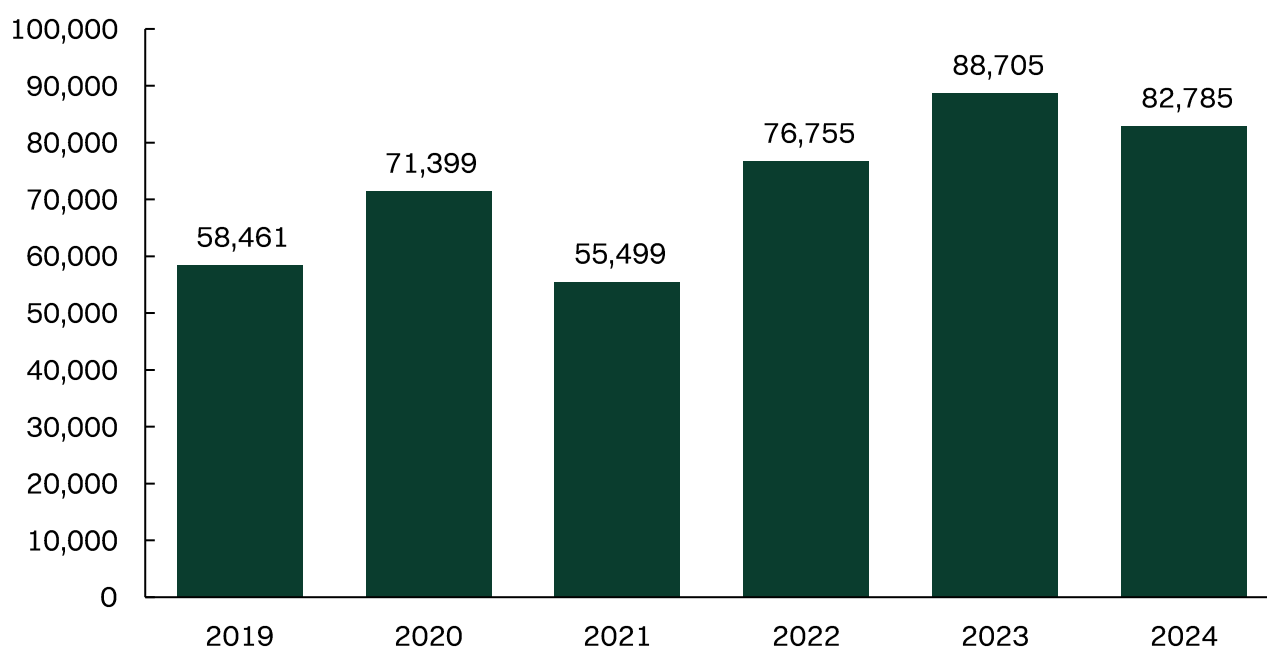
“

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

”

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

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



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

Almost 29,000 parcels were distributed for children in the first half of this financial year. Over the last five years the number of parcels distributed for children has increased by 36% from 21,000 between April and September in 2019.

Unlike in previous years the number of parcels for children did not grow at a faster rate than the number of parcels for adults. Indeed, the figures for the first half of 2024/25 represent a decrease (-10%) 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 74% increase for parcels for adults compared with an 83% increase for parcels for children. The latest five-year trend (with 2019 as the baseline year), shows a 45% increase for adults and a 36% 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: 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%
Wales	54,000	29,000	83,000	45%	36%	42%	-5%	-10%	-7%
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%
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 continue 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 was 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.

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 Wales is clear that real change is needed – not just small steps – if we are to significantly reduce the number of people experiencing hardship.³

Children continue to be disproportionately supported by food banks

Despite a 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 (35%) 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 18% of the Welsh population.⁴ It is notable that the proportion of parcels distributed for children aged 0-4 (10%) is double their population share across Wales (5%).

“

I was at my wits' end because I was trying to fill the form in [for a Discretionary Assistance Fund] to get money...[I] needed this money straight away due to summer holidays, due to my sons' birthday, due to needing school uniform. And I was at my wits' end emotionally, you know? Emotionally upset, especially when my card declined on the shoes. So, he couldn't have the shoes. And you know when you're at a till with a child and then they can't have the shoes and you've been declined, you know?

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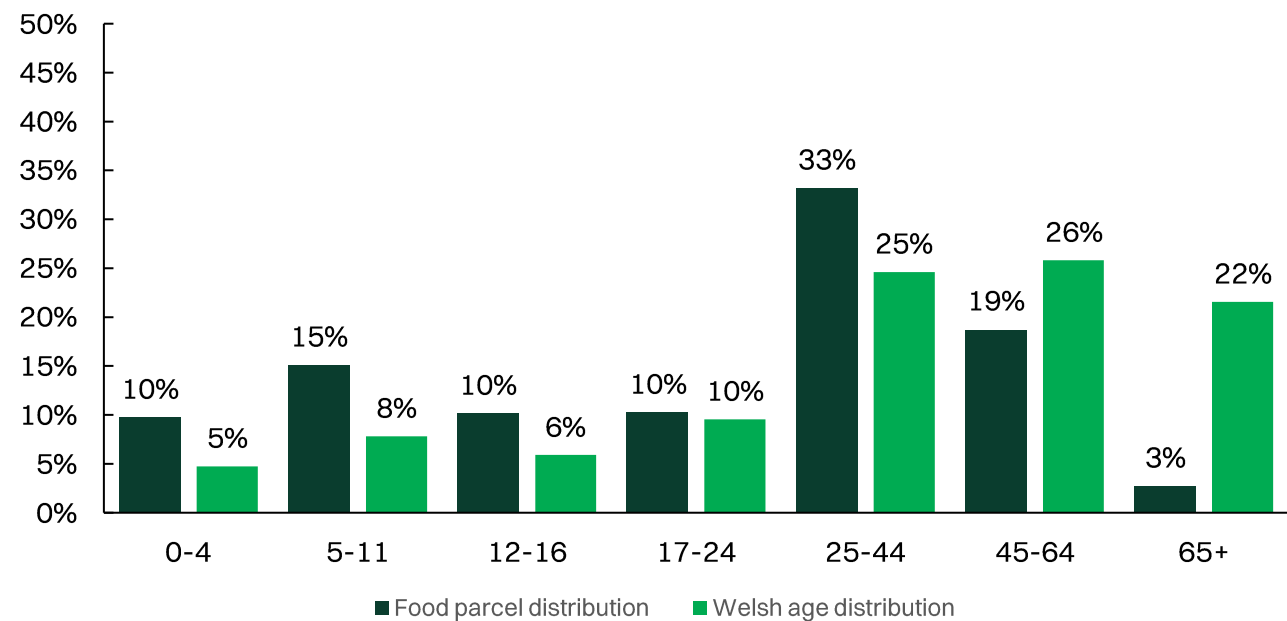
Person referred to a food bank interviewed as part of Hunger in Wales research

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 in Wales are for people aged 65 and over, despite them making up 22% of the Welsh population.

³ 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>

⁴ 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 across Wales: 1 April to 30 September 2024



Source: Trussell administrative data on the number of emergency food parcels distributed across Wales 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, 2,200 parcels were distributed for someone aged 65 and over. That is three times the number provided in the same period in 2019 when 725 parcels were distributed. This is by far the highest growth rate for any age category across this period.⁵

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

Age	Percentage increase from 2019
0-4	26%
5-11	32%
12-16	61%
17-24	33%
25-64	42%
65+	206%

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

⁵ 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 most commonly provided for families with children

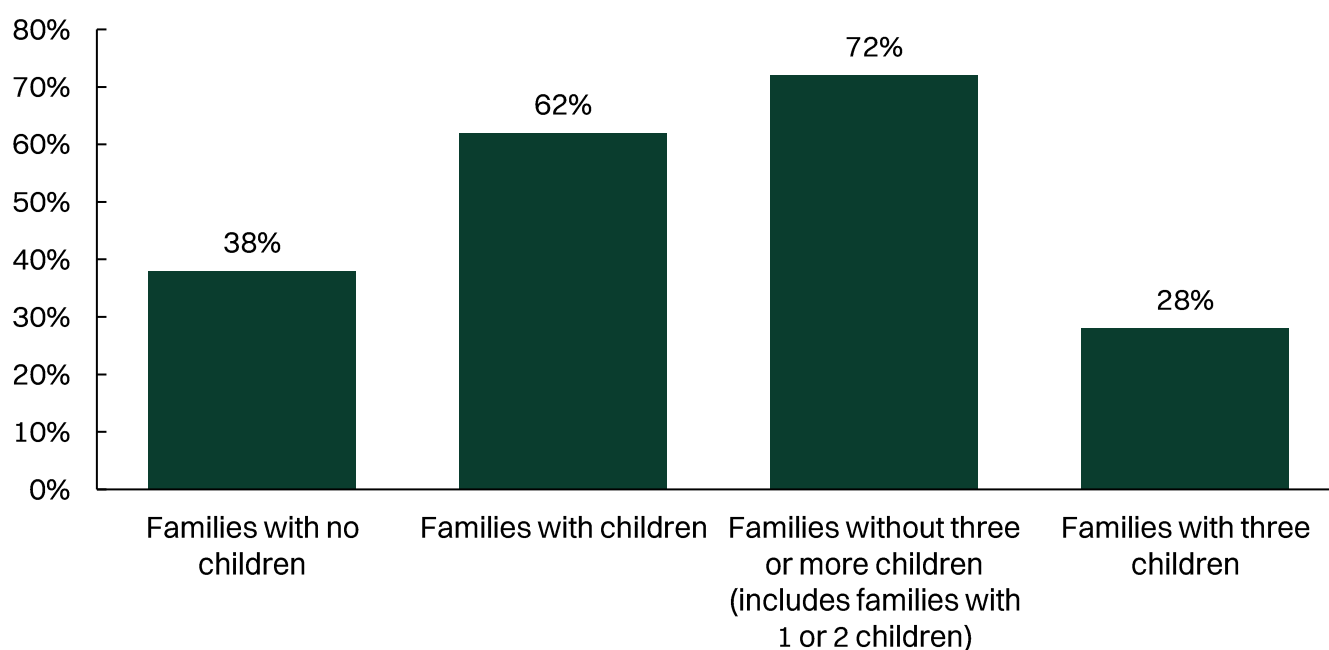
When taking a whole household view (i.e. not just children but also the adults living with them), the majority (62%) of support provided by food banks in the Trussell community in Wales is for families with children.

A significant minority (28%) of parcels were provided in the first half of 2024/25 to families with three or more children.

“Well, with all 5 children, and so much food, all the time, that we're eating, the money doesn't stretch because before you know it, you've run out again, and then you run out again, and that's [you] on the overdraft”.

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

Figure 1.3 Percentage of emergency food parcels distributed for different family types: 1 April to 30 September 2024



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

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 45% increase in the number of parcels distributed for families without children compared with a 40% increase for families with children. A slightly lower increase is also seen for families with three or more children (36%). As previously mentioned, it is too early to tell if this is a long-term shift or not.

The only notable difference to report for different household types is the large increase in the number of parcels for families with at least one person aged 65 and over. Since 2019 there has been

a near tripling in the number of parcels for these families - over five times the increase for families without anyone aged 65 and over.

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	51,000	40%	-10%
Families without children	32,000	45%	-2%
Families with three or more children	23,000	36%	-12%
Families without three or more children	60,000	44%	-5%
Families with someone aged 65 or over	3,700	191%	-8%
Families without someone aged 65 or over	76,000	37%	-6%

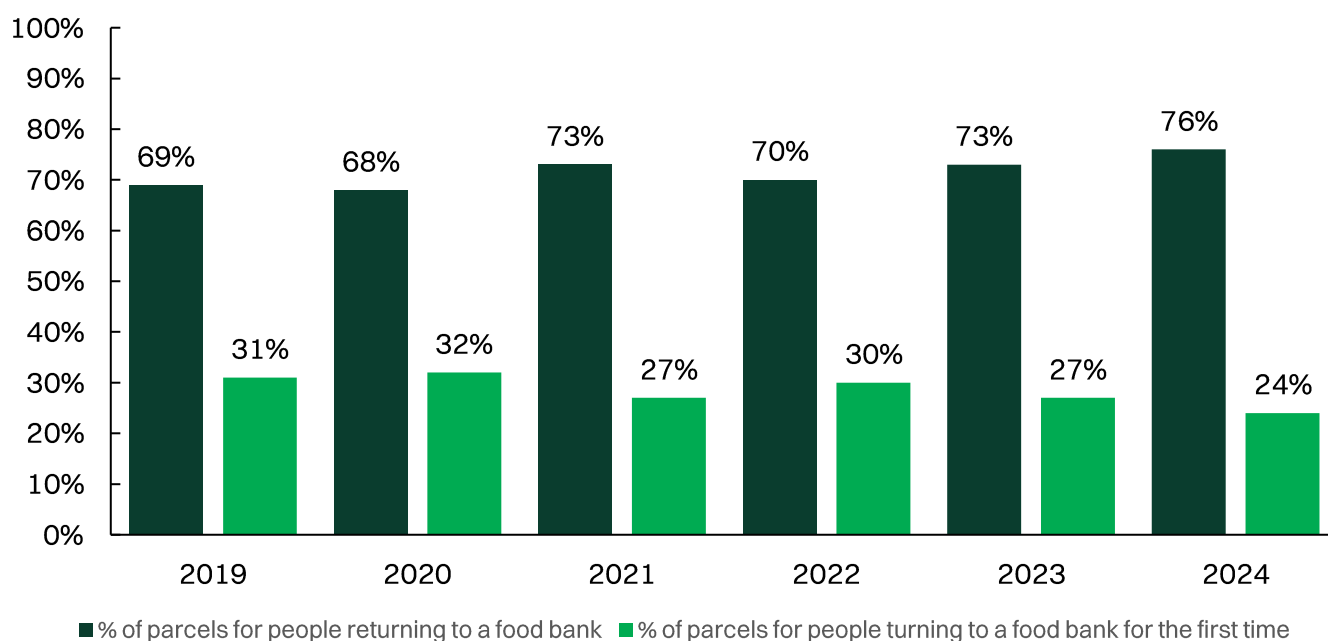
Source: Trussell administrative data on the number of emergency food parcels distributed across Wales

19,000 people forced to turn to a food bank in Trussell community for the first time

In the first six months of 2024/25, 9,100 families were forced to turn to a food bank in our community in Wales for the first time. These families included 19,000 people. This is an 11% 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 16% decrease compared to the period in 2023.

The proportion of food parcels distributed for people turning to a food bank in the Trussell community in Wales for the first time has been steadily declining since a recent high of 32% in the first six months of the Covid-19 pandemic (2020). In the first six months of this financial year, one in four (24%) 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 six-percentage point decline from the figure in 2022, when 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 Wales

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 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.

Slight decreases 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.

As noted, though, 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%.

Significant long-term growth in areas across Wales

Despite some decreases from the previous year, many food banks across Wales are now distributing significantly higher levels of support than they did five years ago. Food banks in North Wales (62%) have seen the greatest increase in the number of parcels distributed since 2019. Followed by food banks in South Wales Central (56%), South Wales West (35%), and Mid and West Wales (31%).

Table 1.4 Number of parcels for adults, children, and total distributed by food bank in the Trussell network – Senedd 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
Mid and West Wales	7,100	3,800	11,000	38%	21%	31%	-4%	-11%	-7%
North Wales	12,000	6,700	19,000	70%	51%	62%	-10%	-12%	-11%
South Wales Central	14,000	7,800	22,000	55%	56%	56%	3%	-4%	0%
South Wales East	12,000	5,700	17,000	26%	16%	22%	-2%	-11%	-5%
South Wales West	9,300	5,000	14,000	35%	33%	35%	-10%	-14%	-12%
Wales	54,000	29,000	83,000	45%	36%	42%	-5%	-10%	-7%

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

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 housing, transport, and childcare 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 Wales. All of this can, and must, change.

Our social security system is supposed to protect people from hunger and poverty, 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 welcome the first steps the UK government has taken towards tackling the severe hardship that pushes people to the doors of food banks. The long-overdue changes to reduce the amount that can be taken off Universal Credit payments to repay loans and debts are particularly welcome. Trussell's research shows that the heavy burden of debt can pull people into long-term, spiralling hardship.

While the UK government is responsible for many important aspects of social security, the Welsh Government must use every available power to work directly to reduce the need for emergency food in Wales. A plan to reduce the need for emergency food in Wales must focus on reducing the number of people trapped in the deepest forms of poverty.

This includes addressing the shortage of social housing in Wales, which means that too many people on the lowest incomes are forced into temporary accommodation for long periods of time, or into unaffordable private rented homes.⁶ Many food banks in Wales distribute 'kettle packs' for people in temporary accommodation who have little or no access to cooking facilities.

Addressing the housing crisis must be part of any plan to reduce the need for food banks in Wales, particularly given the significant powers over housing that Welsh Government hold. Measures should include accelerated efforts to boost the supply of social housing in communities across Wales, and support for local authorities to improve standards in temporary accommodation and help households move to a more stable home as quickly as possible.

For people facing immediate financial hardship, crisis support needs to be available to help prevent and alleviate suffering and get them back on their feet. The Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) was designed to provide support to people facing a financial crisis or emergency situation. However, given the record levels of hunger and hardship in Wales⁷, these vital resources are not being used as intended, but instead supporting people on a longer term basis, simply to stay afloat.⁸

Trussell food bank teams in Wales also tell us that the application process for the DAF is often problematic and there is little transparency around why some applications are successful and others not. This leads to confusion and a lack of trust in the system being there at the point of need. In addition, the DAF does not always provide compassion and dignity to people who need it. For example, a lack of choice over what furniture or cooking equipment is provided can be disempowering and, in some cases, means that inappropriate or unhelpful items are provided. The

⁶ The Bevan Foundation, October 2024, *Nowhere to call home: The shortage of social and community homes*. Accessed 11th November 2024. <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/resources/shortage-social-community-homes/>

⁷ Trussell, October 2024, *The cost of hunger and hardship in Wales*. Accessed 11th November 2024: https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/Cost%20of%20Hunger%20and%20Hardship%20Wales.pdf?_gl=1*1ho7csq*_gcl_au*NTY1NjM2Njc5LjE3MjY1Njc0ODU.

⁸ Citizens Advice Cymru, October 2024, *Reaching crisis point: The story in Wales*. Accessed 11th November 2024: https://assets.ctfassets.net/mfz4nbgura3g/43ZO5qCNicfoSCBcH6VAqy/40b358d285aedef5d3b69ce1fe75497ee/Reaching_crisis_point_the_story_in_Wales_final__2_.pdf

Welsh Government should carry out a review to ensure the DAF is delivering effective and dignified support and prioritise efforts to ensure people on the lowest incomes can cover the cost of essentials without repeatedly needing to turn to crisis support.

If we are to make meaningful inroads in turning the tide on hunger and hardship in Wales, we need to see decisive action from both the UK and Welsh governments. In the upcoming Draft Budget, we call on Welsh Government to:

1. Reaffirm support for an Essentials Guarantee, to ensure that Universal Credit always provides enough for people to afford the essentials.

As a first step, the Welsh Government should call on counterparts in the Department for Work and Pensions to introduce a protected minimum floor in Universal Credit as a low cost but concrete step towards ensuring our social security system protects people from going without the essentials. This would set a level below which payments cannot fall, for example due to debt repayments or the benefit cap.

2. Commit to ending the need for food banks in Wales and introduce a plan to reduce the need for emergency food.

This would unlock the most effective policy solutions to reduce the number of people facing hunger and hardship in Wales. The plan should encompass actions to use Welsh devolved powers as far as possible to ensure people have enough income to afford the essentials. The plan would need to include measures to deliver affordable and adequate housing, improved access to support for people with health needs and caring responsibilities, and a cash-first approach combined with advice for when a crisis or shock event hits a household.

3. Protect and invest in cash-first crisis support

We support calls from Citizens Advice Cymru to review the DAF to ensure it is providing effective and dignified support. In addition, and ahead of the Welsh Draft Budget, we call on Welsh Government to increase funding for the DAF to meet rising need for crisis support. Barnett consequential from the 2025/26 extension of the Household Support Fund should be used to fund cash-first crisis support.

4. Accelerate efforts to turn the commitments in the Welsh Benefits Charter into reality

We welcome the ambition set out in the Welsh Benefits Charter to see a 'reduction in the need for emergency aid such as food banks'. Through the Streamlining Welsh Benefits programme, efforts are being made by Welsh Government and local authorities to make it easier for people to apply for Welsh benefits. Being able to make just one application will help simplify the support from Welsh Government for many. However, this work needs to be accelerated and should be the beginning of a wider programme to help ensure people in Wales have enough income to afford the essentials.

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