

Building blocks for a better future

Ending the need for food banks
in Northern Ireland





About Trussell

We are an anti-poverty charity and community of food banks. We work together to ensure no one in the UK needs a food bank to survive, while providing emergency food and practical support for people left without enough money to live on.

We are 1,400 food bank locations, supported by 36,000 volunteers, 12,000 churches, 100,000s of community groups and schools, and millions of people around the UK.

There are 23 food banks in the Trussell community, Northern Ireland (NI), distributing parcels at 50 locations across all six counties. Northern Ireland is the smallest region in the Trussell community, but between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, these food banks distributed 90,375 emergency parcels, including 60,831 for children. This represents an 11% increase from last year and a 143% increase compared to the same period five years ago. In the same period, 23,700 people in Northern Ireland were forced to turn to a food bank in the Trussell community for the first time.¹

A future without the need for food banks in Northern Ireland is possible

Together we will build a future where no one needs a food bank. A compassionate society, with an updated social security system that supports anyone who needs it to afford the essentials.

A future where everyone gets the right support at the right time, in a way that reflects the reality of their lives. A future where everyone has the security we all need to unlock opportunities and have hope for the future: where there's secure and rewarding work and everyone can live in an affordable, secure home. This is the future we need and together we will make it a reality.

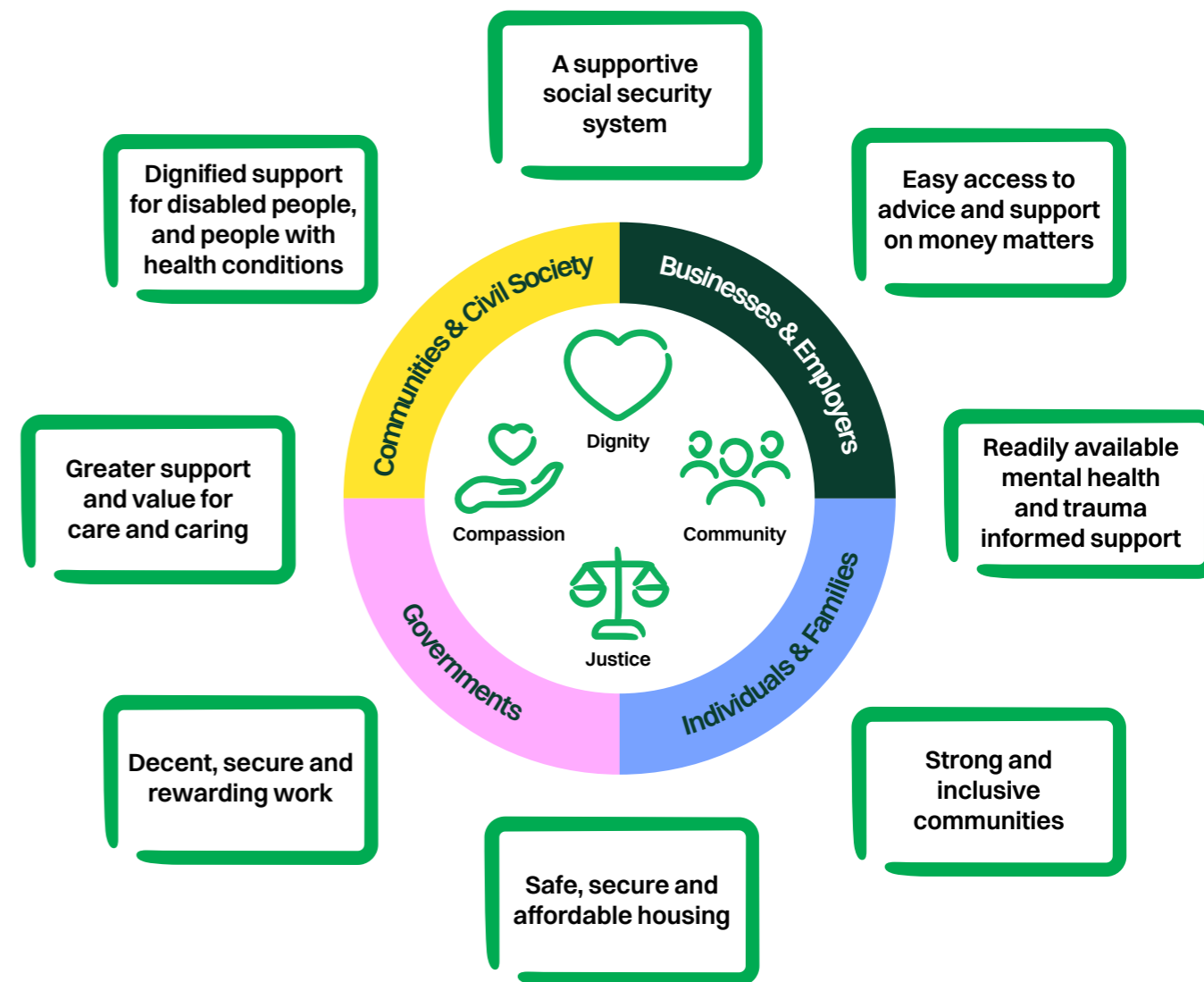
There's a clear way forward, and we can all help. We know what's pushing people to food banks, so we know what needs to change so everyone can afford the essentials. We build consensus for the changes that will end hunger for good: an updated social security system, secure and rewarding jobs, affordable homes, and supportive services.

Civil society, employers, businesses and all levels of government, including the NI Executive – acting together with people who've needed a food bank, individuals and communities – will drive this change.

The return of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly is an opportunity to prioritise decisions that will end the need for emergency food through making full use of Stormont's devolved powers.

The recommendations in this document are all within the remit of the NI Executive to end hunger for good.

Building a future where no one needs a food bank



To end the need for food banks, we need to make sure:

- 1** We have a supportive **social security system**, which ensures everyone can afford the essentials.
- 2** Everyone can get the right support at the right time, especially when things are hard. We can do this with **easy access to advice and support on money matters** and **readily available mental health and trauma-informed support**.
- 3** People are supported in a way that reflects the reality of their lives, especially if they're facing higher costs and barriers. We can do this with **dignified support for disabled people and people with health conditions**, and **greater support and value for care and caring**.
- 4** Everyone has the security we all need to access opportunities and have hope for the future. We can do this with **decent, secure and rewarding work, safe secure and affordable housing and strong and inclusive communities**.

A supportive social security system, that ensures everyone can afford the essentials

Social security should protect all of us, across Northern Ireland, from needing to use a food bank. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis, inadequate payment levels meant people were going without essentials such as heating or food.

But our social security system is not fit for purpose. The vast majority of people (88%) referred to food banks in the Trussell community in NI are in receipt of some form of income from social security. The people accessing food banks have voiced how difficult the decision is to accept help: how grateful they are for its support, but the shame and stigma they feel for having to rely on it.²

“

People are not earning enough and will never earn enough and will always struggle. We are here to offer emergency help but also ongoing wraparound support. If we continue to hand out food without addressing the bigger picture, that's all we will do forever and a day.

”

Food bank
Northern Ireland



What is the problem?

Incomes from social security are too low for people to afford the essentials. Benefit caps and reductions are pulling people deeper into destitution. Reductions to social security payments are making things significantly worse, decreasing already inadequate rates of social security.

The social security system can feel hostile and like it is setting people up to fail. Reliance on punitive sanctions to encourage job-seeking undermines trust and increases hardship. Accessing and understanding the necessary information can be challenging for some people receiving payments.

Delays in receiving payments can drive food bank need. Among people referred to food banks in the Trussell community who were not receiving any income from social security payments, the most common reason for referral was that they had applied for them but were waiting for the result of an initial claim or appeal.

A clear example of this is the five-week wait that applicants for Universal Credit face before they receive their first payments. Furthermore, a lack of information on crisis support leaves many people unable to meet sudden, unexpected costs.

88%

of people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in NI are in receipt of some form of income from social security.

Source: Trussell's Hunger in Northern Ireland report, 2023

200,000

people in Northern Ireland currently face hunger in hardship in 2024 - if nothing changes, this is projected to increase by 44,000 by 2026-2027.

Source: Trussell's The Cost of Hunger and Hardship report, 2024

Trussell recommends that:

- The NI Executive calls on the UK Government to implement an Essentials Guarantee, to protect people in receipt of Universal Credit from going without the essentials.
- The Welfare Supplementary Payments (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 is extended beyond March 2025, and costed proposals are approved to mitigate the two-child limit.
- All new Universal Credit claimants are provided with discretionary support during the five weeks after a claim is made, and alternative solutions to the five-week wait are prioritised.
- The NI Executive must ensure no one is negatively affected during the transition of legacy welfare benefits to Universal Credit.

Easy access to advice and support on money matters

Everyone should be able to access the right advice and support when they need it, with high-quality advice services that prioritise people on the lowest incomes. Living on a persistently low income makes it much harder to cover essential outgoings.

40%

of people referred to a food bank in the Trussell community in Northern Ireland said they received no advice from other services before their latest referral to the food bank.

Source: Trussell's End of Year Stats Northern Ireland, 2024

“

Because I'm not working, I'm only getting £165 a fortnight. I'm in debt, I can't pay the HP on the car, I can't pay bills, I'm in arrears with rent. I couldn't pay the internet.

”

Male, age 45-54, unemployed, and in receipt of Universal Credit

Source: Trussell's Hunger in the UK report, 2023



What is the problem?

Everyone who faces a sudden unexpected cost, or income shock, that puts them at risk of falling into financial hardship, should quickly receive effective and dignified 'cash-first' crisis support, coupled with access to advice. Unexpected events and emergencies are also much harder to weather for people with no savings or financial buffer.

When there are gaps in access to discretionary support and advice, people are forced to turn to emergency food to get by. Ready access to support would mean people wouldn't need to turn to a food bank in the first place, while others might not need to return if they can address the underlying drivers.

Debt collection practices should be fair, compassionate and take account of individual circumstances. While illegal lending is an area difficult to gather evidence about, due to its underground nature and the fear and secrecy surrounding this type of credit, research has found that in Northern Ireland illegal lending is often linked with perceived paramilitary activity.³

A lack of access to affordable credit is pushing people to high cost and risky alternatives, where these problems are even more acute. No one at risk of destitution should have to take on high cost or risky credit.

No one should be forced to turn to a food bank in an emergency to receive advice about benefits, debt or other money matters. We need to ensure people can access advice and support much earlier.

89%

of people referred to food banks in Northern Ireland's Trussell community have some form of debt, while only 14% have savings.

Source: Trussell's Hunger in Northern Ireland report, 2023

14%

of children (that's one in seven) in Northern Ireland currently grow up facing hunger and hardship.

Source: Trussell's Cost of Hunger and Hardship report, 2024

Trussell recommends that:

- The NI Executive must immediately reverse the ending of free school meal payments during holiday periods.
- The NI Executive must increase awareness of, and the budget available for, discretionary support, as well as implement recommendations of the DfC Review of Welfare Mitigations (2021) and Discretionary Support (2022).
- The NI Executive should promote and value the role of independent advice through stable and secure funding support, in order to enhance job security and allow for the long-term planning, development and delivery of top quality independent advice services.

Readily available mental health and trauma-informed support

Across Northern Ireland, one in four (26%) people have low levels of mental wellbeing. Among people who have experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months, this rises to more than half (56%).⁴ Northern Ireland has the highest prevalence of mental health problems in the UK, with a 25% higher overall prevalence of mental health problems than England.⁵

65%

of people with a mental health condition referred to food banks had not received any mental health support in the three months before they were forced to turn to a food bank.

Source: Trussell's Hunger in Northern Ireland report, 2023



What is the problem?

There is a strong relationship between experiencing mental health conditions and financial hardship, with the two factors often reinforcing each other. Anyone experiencing financial difficulty lives with heightened stress and anxiety, especially when essential needs are unmet.

Nearly two thirds (65%) of people with a mental health condition referred to food banks had not received any mental health support in the three months before they were forced to turn to a food bank.

Barriers to employment and inadequacies in the social security system expose people with mental health conditions to a higher risk of needing a food bank. In turn, going without the essentials impacts negatively on people's mental health.

The unstable foundation of living on a very low income exposes people to various adverse life events and harms, which can combine to pull people under – and social isolation compounds the problem.

Multiple disadvantages interact with mental health and money in a distinct and damaging way. 58% of people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in Northern Ireland have experienced an adverse life event in the last 12 months.

Among those referred to food banks in Northern Ireland, the most common adverse life experience for men was alcohol dependency (23%) while for women it was relationship breakdown (16%).⁶

The legacy of the Troubles is also recognised as having a significant impact on mental health in Northern Ireland. Services and systems which are not tailored to help people with mental health conditions – or the impacts of trauma – risk exacerbating people's mental health conditions.

63%

of people reporting a mental health condition said they struggled with debt and bills compared with 42% who do not.

Source: Trussell's Hunger in Northern Ireland report, 2023

Trussell recommends that:

- The successful delivery and resourcing of Northern Ireland's Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 must be a priority for the NI Executive.
- The strategy should be supported to effectively promote mental wellbeing, resilience, and good mental health across society; to ensure the right support is provided at the right time; and to explore new ways of working that take the importance of regional services into account.
- Public services should be co-designed with people with lived experience of trauma – in order to create trauma-informed services that are more empathetic and supportive.

Dignified, accessible support for disabled people, and people with health conditions

People with disabilities and long-term health conditions face a much higher risk of needing support from a food bank.

61%

of those who accessed a food bank in NI identified as having a disability issue.

Source: Trussell's Hunger in Northern Ireland Report, 2023

“

Because food prices are so high, you eat stuff that isn't actually good for you, a lot of processed foods. That has a long-term effect on your health because you put weight on and get sick.

”

30s, Northern Ireland

Source: Cost of Hunger and Hardship report



What is the problem?

It's not right that increasing numbers of disabled people, including people with mental health conditions and people experiencing long-term health conditions, need to use a food bank because they can't afford to eat and pay the bills.

Disabled people face significant additional costs and lower incomes that put them at greater risk of going without essentials. Those additional costs are often associated with the nature of people's health conditions – such as for prescriptions or maintaining equipment for their condition.⁷

The types of jobs disabled people are employed in are more likely to be associated with lower pay and lower growth prospects. Empowering disabled people to enter a more diverse range of occupations is therefore an important challenge for government. Lower incomes are driven by the barriers disabled people face to enter and sustain work, the often low-paid and part-time nature of work, and the very low level of income replacement support available from the social security system.

This situation is also compounded by a social security system that provides inadequate disability support, is often experienced as being punitive

by those who rely on it, and which fails to provide dignity and the financial protection people need to participate fully in society.

Disability payments should help everyone participate fully in society – but flawed assessments, long waits, and incorrect decisions in the social security system are damaging people's health and deepening exclusion. Furthermore, the low level of uptake and the low value of disability support is pushing people deeper into poverty and damaging people's health and wellbeing.

Trussell recommends that:

- Everyone should have access to meaningful, person-centred employment support, that is not detrimental to benefit entitlements. The NI Executive must implement and resource a Disability Strategy in line with commitments made under New Decade New Approach (2020).
- Personal independence payments (PIP) should be assessed with dignity and understanding of a person's disability or health condition. Everyone should get a decision on their disability support application as swiftly as possible, and it must be right first time.
- In line with the Fuel Poverty Coalition recommendations, the NI Executive should provide more accessible targeted support and funding such as targeted grants, concessionary funds, and energy tariffs. This should be focused on the most vulnerable groups, while ensuring Carers Allowance is included within the list of qualifying benefits for targeted fuel poverty intervention schemes.

Greater support and value for care and caring

All of us, at some point in our life, will require some form of care. This may be when we are very young, when we are older, or when we are sick or are unable to care for ourselves. Caring is critical for both the people receiving it, and for wider society. Yet parents, people providing unpaid care or paid care, and those who have experienced the care system are all at increased risk of financial hardship.

Over a quarter (27%) of people providing unpaid care are experiencing food insecurity, compared to one in 10 (12%) of those who do not provide care.⁸

“

It's having to say no to your child's after-school activity because it costs £5 a month. Imagine trying to explain to a child with additional needs why they can't have a nice dinner every night, or they can't have the new trainers they want?

”

30s, Northern Ireland

Source: Trussell's Cost of Hunger and Hardship report, 2024



What is the problem?

An overstretched adult social care sector is piling unsustainable pressure on unpaid carers, pushing many to breaking point. The gaps in provision of social care are significantly increasing the amount of unpaid care that carers need to provide, putting them at greater risk of financial hardship.

Unpaid carers hold society together but face high rates of financial hardship and unsustainable levels of pressure. The value of unpaid care work is estimated to be worth £5.8 billion in Northern Ireland each year. This work is critical for both the people receiving it, and for wider society.⁹

Unpaid carers find it very difficult to find and maintain employment, which puts them at increased risk of needing to use a food bank. This is because it can be challenging to find affordable replacement care, resulting in carers reducing their hours or working part time to balance employment with their caring responsibilities.

Exiting the labour market to provide unpaid care means carers have to rely on income from social security, including Carer's Allowance, but the level of payment is low, at just £81.90 a week.¹⁰

A lack of affordable childcare is pushing parents in the UK deeper into poverty. While recent measures from the Department for Education on childcare are welcome,¹¹ there are still concerns that challenges with recruitment and retention (linked to low pay) will result in a reduction in childcare places available.¹²

48%

of people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in Northern Ireland are living with children under the age of 16.

Source: Trussell's End of Year Stats Northern Ireland, 2024

27%

of carers in Northern Ireland live in poverty. Being unemployed is the strongest predictor, with 55% of unpaid carers who are out of work living in poverty.

Source: Carers Poverty Commission (2024) Making the Case for Change

Trussell recommends that:

- The NI Executive implements recommendations from the The Carers Poverty Commission report on Policy measures to tackle poverty among unpaid carers, 2023 - including improving Carers Allowance eligibility criteria, introducing a Carers Allowance supplement, and a new Carer Essentials Payment.
- The Early Learning and childcare strategy should ensure flexible, affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare, while removing barriers to parents' and carers - particularly women's - participation in work.

Decent, secure and rewarding work

Insecure, lower paid, and part-time work can leave many people without enough to cover essential costs: 85,000 people in families where someone is working face hunger and hardship across Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, 25% of families with part-time work face hunger and hardship.¹³

26.7%

of Northern Ireland's working age population (more than one quarter) is economically inactive.

Source: Pivotal (2023) Economic Inactivity In Northern Ireland

“

We are very worried about the most vulnerable and those on the margins, who earn just too much to receive benefits, but not enough to be able to afford all the essentials - and have to struggle every day to stretch their income to pay all the bills and have enough to eat.

”

Food bank
Northern Ireland



What is the problem?

While paid work can offer a vital route out of poverty, too often it is not protecting people from having to use food banks. In-work poverty affects part-time workers disproportionately, as well as disabled workers, carers, and households where there is only one worker.

Insecure work, low pay, and reduced hours are leaving many without enough to cover essential costs. Just under a third (30%) of people in paid work referred to food banks in the UK are in insecure work, including being on a zero-hours contract or in seasonal work.¹⁴

Too many jobs are inaccessible to parents, disabled people, and those with caring responsibilities. While work does not always prevent destitution and food bank use, it does greatly reduce the risk of these experiences, particularly where it is secure, decently paid and offers enough hours to provide a reasonable income. People referred to food banks in Northern Ireland faced barriers to finding and sustaining work caused by childcare, caring responsibilities, disability and health conditions.

Women are also more likely to work part-time due to caring responsibilities, which typically leaves them in lower-paid jobs with fewer opportunities for progression and provides far less protection from poverty and food insecurity than full-time work.

Personalised and tailored employment support can play a pivotal role in addressing the barriers to work - but limited funding, fragmented delivery, and a lack of long-term planning is undermining these efforts.

The very low levels of income people receive through Universal Credit also create significant barriers to people taking on new opportunities, holding back innovation and growth.

“

People are struggling day in day out, even those working full time. They do not have enough income and are unable to afford the essentials we all need to live. It is unacceptable, and something needs to change.

”

Food bank
Northern Ireland

Trussell recommends that:

- The NI Executive should use its powers to influence and deliver fair work, including promoting a Real Living Wage and Real Living Hours for all. These should be included as a condition of all public procurement contracts.
- The NI Executive should prioritise policies that would make the workforce more inclusive of those with disabilities, mental health conditions, older workers, and those from marginalised groups. Simplistic solutions should be avoided.
- Employers should engage more with carers and carer organisations to introduce carer-friendly policies and more supportive workplace cultures for carers.

Safe, secure and affordable housing

Having a safe, secure, and affordable place to call home provides the stability we all need to move out of financial hardship.

The waiting list for social housing has increased by 72% in the last 20 years, with 27,515 on the social housing waiting list in 2003/04 compared with 47,312 households now on the social housing waiting list in Northern Ireland. According to the NI Housing Executive, budget cuts will allow for only 400 new social homes to be built in 2024-25, rather than the target of 2,000.¹⁵

72%

increase in the waiting list for social housing in the last 20 years.

Source: NISRA (2024) Annual Housing Statistics



What is the problem?

The need for food banks is strongly associated with rented housing, with high rents in the private rented sector being a particular problem. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in NI are renters.¹⁶ Alongside the spiralling cost of other essentials, rents have risen steeply during the cost of living crisis, piling pressure on low-income households. Over a fifth (22%) of those referred to food banks in Northern Ireland live in private rented accommodation.

The impact of high rents is exacerbated by the risk of being evicted at short notice. The private rented sector is characterised by a high risk of eviction. This is often a trigger which leaves people having to turn to a food bank. Eviction is traumatic and expensive, forcing people away from their communities and support networks at very short notice. It also places further costs on people who are already struggling to afford the essentials.

Homelessness has a hugely negative impact on people's lives, their mental and physical health, and their ability to afford the essentials. One in four (26%) people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in Northern Ireland were either homeless at the point of referral or had experienced homelessness in the previous 12 months.¹⁷

Being placed in temporary accommodation is often a traumatic experience, dividing people from their communities and support networks and trapping them in unsuitable and unsafe environments. People attending food banks in the Trussell community are much more likely to be living in temporary accommodation compared to the general population.

In addition, too few social and affordable homes are being built, leaving increasing numbers of families crowded into the private rented sector. Limited social stock, combined with Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates that are rarely in line with local rents, means that people on low incomes often do not have a choice about the quality of their home. In Northern Ireland, the Local Housing Allowance entitlement falls considerably short of the contractual rent charged by the landlord, and tenants must meet the shortfall through other means to preserve their tenancy and avoid eviction.

Trussell recommends that:

- The NI Executive is responsible for ensuring everyone can live in safe, secure, and affordable homes, including building the much-needed social homes and securing a fairer private rented sector. It should commit to funding social housing development.
- The NI Executive must increase awareness of, and the budget available for, discretionary support, as well as implement recommendations of the reviews of welfare mitigations and discretionary support.
- A Financial Inclusion Service should be established to provide advice and money management to low-income families who have been impacted by the shortfalls caused by the Local Housing Allowance rates.

Building strong and inclusive communities and relationships

People referred to food banks are much more likely to be socially isolated and disconnected from their communities.

22%

of people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in Northern Ireland are experiencing severe social isolation.

Source: Trussell's End of Year Stats Northern Ireland, 2024

“

Every week I think 'can I afford to put £8 into my electricity?', 'can I afford to do this or that?'. Because then I go into overdraft... There are all these bills that have to be paid, so it's a constant balance

”

30s, Northern Ireland

Source: Trussell's Cost of Hunger and Hardship report, 2024



What is the problem?

Being unable to afford the essentials often leads to people being cut off, unable to fully participate in society. Being socially isolated then reinforces patterns of hardship and hunger, which in turn then drives further isolation. This is especially true for women, disabled people, carers, parents, ethnic minority communities, LGBTQ+ people, and those living in rural communities.

The unstable foundation of being on a very low income exposes people to a range of adverse life events and harms, which can combine to pull people under. Relationship breakdown, domestic abuse, and other adverse life experiences are overrepresented among people referred to food banks – and often combine to push people further into hardship.

Family and friends provide vital sources of connection, social, and informal financial support, but not everyone has access to these connections – and living on very low incomes can put them under strain. Almost a quarter (24%) of people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in NI say that they can't rely on immediate family at all¹⁸.

Many places across NI do not have adequate spaces for local connection. The type of places and spaces we have available in our communities are vital to help build strong connections.

This 'social infrastructure' includes places of worship, libraries, leisure centres, community hubs, the local volunteering infrastructure, and easy access to public space and facilities.

Community organisations, food banks and low-cost food providers – such as social supermarkets and food pantries – offer opportunities for social connection locally, the value of which cannot be overstated. But the need to support increasing numbers of people in financial hardship, coupled with an uncertain funding environment, makes it much harder for community organisations to dedicate time to nurture relationships and connections locally.

11%

of people referred to food banks in Northern Ireland say they never (in italics) have contact with relatives, friends, or neighbours, compared to 2% of the general population.

Source: Trussell's Hunger in Northern Ireland report, 2023

Trussell recommends that:

- The NI Executive must implement recommendations for a fully resourced Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland, and implement the wider suite of social inclusion strategies in line with commitments made under the New Decade, New Approach agreement (2020).
- The NI Executive should also refresh place-based interventions that will address key societal challenges, including supporting citizens and communities out of poverty – such as the Neighbourhood Renewal strategy.
- The NI Executive must work in partnership with the voluntary and community sector and local councils to jointly develop place-based action plans, and promote the use of full cost recovery and multi-year budgeting approaches.

Conclusion

Our vision is for a UK, and a Northern Ireland, without the need for food banks.

We want to ensure everyone can afford the essentials in life. We're working towards a compassionate, just society without the need for large-scale emergency food distribution. The NI Executive can play a key role in driving this change through implementation of these building blocks recommendations.*

*Trussell has purposefully used the NI Executive as the main responsibility holder of all recommendations, not individual Ministers or Departments. This is intentional to highlight the intersectionality of recommendations, beyond individual departments and their collective responsibility to end the need for food banks in Northern Ireland.



Appendix

- 1 Trussell (2024) End of Year Statistics Northern Ireland
- 2 Trussell (2023) Hunger in Northern Ireland
- 3 Consumer Council (2023) Illegal Money Lending
- 4 Trussell (2023) Hunger in Northern Ireland
- 5 Trussell (2023) Hunger in Northern Ireland

NB: Mental Wellbeing in Northern Ireland's population was measured through the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale
- 6 NIAPN (2023) Women and Hunger
- 7 Fuel Poverty Coalition (2023) A Fuel Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland
- 8 Commons Library (2024) Who is experiencing food insecurity in the UK?
- 9 Zang et al. (2021) Valuing Carers 2021: Northern Ireland
- 10 NI Direct (2024) Carers Allowance
- 11 DfE (2024) Minister announces £25 million package of measures for early learning and childcare in NI
- 12 Employers for Childcare (2023) Childcare Survey
- 13 Trussell (2024) Cost of Hunger and Hardship Northern Ireland
- 14 Trussell (2023) Hunger In The UK
- 15 Housing Rights (2024), Statement NISRA (2024) Annual Housing Statistics
- 16 Trussell (2024) End of Year Statistics Northern Ireland
- 17 Trussell (2023) Hunger in Northern Ireland
- 18 Trussell (2024) End of Year Statistics Northern Ireland

Trussell recommends that:

- The NI Executive calls on the UK Government to implement an Essentials Guarantee, to protect people in receipt of Universal Credit from going without the essentials.
- The Welfare Supplementary Payments (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 is extended beyond March 2025, and costed proposals are approved to mitigate the two-child limit.
- All new Universal Credit claimants are provided with discretionary support during the five weeks after a claim is made, and alternative solutions to the five-week wait are prioritised.
- The NI Executive must ensure no one is negatively affected during the transition of legacy welfare benefits to Universal Credit.
- The NI Executive must immediately reverse the ending of free school meal payments during holiday periods.
- The NI Executive must increase awareness of, and the budget available for, discretionary support, as well as implement recommendations of the DfC Review of Welfare Mitigations (2021) and Discretionary Support (2022).
- The NI Executive should promote and value the role of independent advice through stable and secure funding support, in order to enhance job security and allow for the long-term planning, development and delivery of top quality independent advice services.
- The successful delivery and resourcing of Northern Ireland's Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 must be a priority for the NI Executive.
- The strategy should be supported to effectively promote mental wellbeing, resilience, and good mental health across society; to ensure the right support is provided at the right time; and to explore new ways of working that take the importance of regional services into account.
- Public services should be co-designed with people with lived experience of trauma – in order to create trauma-informed services that are more empathetic and supportive.
- Everyone should have access to meaningful, person-centred employment support, that is not detrimental to benefit entitlements. The NI Executive must implement and resource a Disability Strategy in line with commitments made under New Decade New Approach (2020).
- Personal independence payments (PIP) should be assessed with dignity and understanding of a person's disability or health condition. Everyone should get a decision on their disability support application as swiftly as possible, and it must be right first time.
- In line with the Fuel Poverty Coalition recommendations, the NI Executive should provide more accessible targeted support and funding such as targeted grants, concessionary funds, and energy tariffs. This should be focused on the most vulnerable groups, while ensuring Carers Allowance is included within the list of qualifying benefits for targeted fuel poverty intervention schemes.
- The NI Executive implements recommendations from the The Carers Poverty Commission report on Policy measures to tackle poverty among unpaid carers, 2023 - including improving Carers Allowance eligibility criteria, introducing a Carers Allowance supplement, and a new Carer Essentials Payment.
- The Early Learning and childcare strategy should ensure flexible, affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare, while removing barriers to parents' and carers – particularly women's - participation in work.
- The NI Executive should use its powers to influence and deliver fair work, including promoting a Real Living Wage and Real Living Hours for all. These should be included as a condition of all public procurement contracts.
- The NI Executive should prioritise policies that would make the workforce more inclusive of those with disabilities, mental health conditions, older workers, and those from marginalised groups. Simplistic solutions should be avoided.
- Employers should engage more with carers and carer organisations to introduce carer-friendly policies and more supportive workplace cultures for carers.
- The NI Executive is responsible for ensuring everyone can live in safe, secure, and affordable homes, including building the much-needed social homes and securing a fairer private rented sector. It should commit to funding social housing development.
- The NI Executive must increase awareness of, and the budget available for, discretionary support, as well as implement recommendations of the reviews of welfare mitigations and discretionary support.
- A Financial Inclusion Service should be established to provide advice and money management to low-income families who have been impacted by the shortfalls caused by the Local Housing Allowance rates.
- The NI Executive must implement recommendations for a fully resourced Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland, and implement the wider suite of social inclusion strategies in line with commitments made under the New Decade, New Approach agreement (2020).
- The NI Executive should also refresh place-based interventions that will address key societal challenges, including supporting citizens and communities out of poverty - such as the Neighbourhood Renewal strategy.
- The NI Executive must work in partnership with the voluntary and community sector and local councils to jointly develop place-based action plans, and promote the use of full cost recovery and multi-year budgeting approaches.

trussell.org.uk

    [trussellUK](#)

 [trussellNI](#)

Photography: © Trussell images / Robert Stothard

Trussell is the operating name of The Trussell Trust – a registered charity in England & Wales (1110522) and Scotland (SC044246).
Registered Limited Company in England & Wales (5434524).