

# Emergency food parcel distribution in Scotland

April 2024 - March 2025

21 May 2025

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# 2024/25: Key facts across Scotland

This factsheet reports on the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland during the period 1 April 2024 to 30 March 2025 (inclusive). During this time, food parcels were distributed from 143 locations across Scotland, as part of the Trussell community.<sup>1</sup>

Data from the Trussell community is just one part of the picture of need across Scotland. There is a wide range of charitable food provision supporting people in communities that is not captured in this data.<sup>2</sup> There are also many people who are food insecure who do not access support from any form of charitable food provision.<sup>3</sup>

- Emergency food provision in Scotland remains concerningly high. Over the last decade, provision has doubled.
- Positive steps in policy and practice in Scotland have been important in stemming the rising tide of severe hardship. However, there are clear warning signs that food bank need is either being displaced to alternative providers or simply left unmet.
- Trends vary, and some areas like West Scotland have seen an increase in the number of emergency parcels provided. Two-thirds of parcels go to families with children.
- Food banks are struggling under the weight of persistent poverty. Many people seeking help still cannot afford the essentials, even after acting on advice and support.
- The recent Programme for Government was a missed opportunity to take the bold action and change we need to see in Scotland if we are to turn the tide on hunger and hardship. Ahead of 2026 elections, all parties need to consider how they will deliver significantly more investment in policies that get cash directly into the pockets of families on the lowest incomes, so that everyone in Scotland can afford the essentials.

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<sup>1</sup> The locations from which food banks distributed parcels are 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 145 locations in Scotland in the same period in the previous year.

<sup>2</sup> The Independent Food Aid Network has identified at least 124 independent food bank sites across Scotland. There are also Salvation Army food banks, as well as food banks run from schools and hospitals. Beyond this, there are many other food aid providers including soup kitchens and social supermarkets.

<sup>3</sup> Research produced by Trussell, in partnership with Ipsos, reported that in the 12 months to mid-2022 one in six (17%) people across Scotland had experienced food insecurity, equating to an estimated 1.2 million people. However, over three quarters (77%) people experiencing food insecurity reported that they had not used any form of food aid in the last year. Hunger in Scotland, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/publications/hunger-in-the-uk>

## Level of emergency food provision in Scotland's Trussell community remains concerningly high

Food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland distributed 239,500 emergency food parcels between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. This is a decrease (-10%) compared to 2023/24 when close to 265,000 parcels were distributed, the most parcels ever distributed in a year.

The number of parcels distributed in Scotland is similar to the level seen in 2019/20, on the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic. The longer term trend is stark. Over the past ten years, emergency food parcel distribution in Scotland has doubled (101%; 119,214 parcels were distributed in 2014/15), with an even greater increase for children seen over this period (111%).

The figures make it clear that we are still seeing unacceptably high levels of emergency food provision in the Trussell community in Scotland. There is a real risk that, without any significant shift, we are facing a new normal of extraordinarily high levels of severe financial hardship in our communities.

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**It feels a lot like the country is broken and it's not fit for purpose in terms of what the welfare state is supposed to be.**

”

**Male, 30s, Scotland. Participant in 'The Cost of Hunger and Hardship' research.<sup>4</sup>**

## Persistently high need far outweighs positive steps in policy and provision

Emergency food parcel provision remains concerningly high 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.

As noted in our Mid-Year Statistics update, easing income pressures might have helped to prevent further rises in emergency food provision and contributed to the slight decrease in provision. At a devolved level in Scotland, this includes:

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<sup>4</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *The Cost of Hunger and Hardship*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/cost-of-hunger-and-hardship-final-report>

- Uprating Social Security Scotland benefits; the decision to follow standard policy, as with UK social security, meant most rates increased by September 2023 CPI of 6.7%, which helped more than expected when actual inflation had fallen by April 2024.
- The ongoing impact of the Scottish Child Payment, a weekly benefit for low-income families with children under 16, although our own research found that it has had a limited impact on reducing need for a food parcel and only since the end of 2022, when the level of the payment was increased and rolled out to all children under 16.<sup>5</sup>

At a UK level, this includes overall high inflation easing and policy choices under the last UK government to maintain benefits uprating at CPI inflation, as with Social Security Scotland benefits, and unfreeze Local Housing Allowance rates from April 2024, re-linking support for private renters to the most affordable 30% of local rents.

Local initiatives enabled by both Scottish government and charitable food aid providers have improved access to support for people experiencing financial hardship which may have had an impact on food bank need. These include: cash first partnerships operating from early 2024 in eight local authorities across Scotland, aiming to deliver activities that improve urgent access to cash in a crisis and reduce the need for emergency food parcels, and the Pathways to Advice and Cash Scotland (PACS) project which, since June 2023, supported people in five areas (Dundee, Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, Orkney and Perth & Kinross) to access emergency income and advice across Scotland. A forthcoming evaluation of the PACS project reports that a significant share of people achieve financial gains through the support provided.

However, the impact of these initiatives on emergency food provision during 2024/25 is mixed. They are currently relatively small scale. In some areas, the presence of these initiatives have increased referrals to food banks as awareness of support becomes more widely known. In others, the need for emergency financial support may have been addressed by these projects, thereby reducing the need for emergency food provision.

Efforts from food banks to improve access to support which addresses people's underlying financial hardship may also have contributed in some local areas. For example, some food banks have described working more closely with referral partners to improve referral processes so people get access to the right support more quickly. The majority of food bank charities in the Trussell community in Scotland now also provide access to some form of financial inclusion support – that is, support or advice on money matters. A recent evaluation shows how this support can make a tangible difference to people's finances.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Randolph, H, et al (2024), *The impact of the Scottish Child Payment on the need for food banks*, Fraser of Allander Institute and Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/impact-of-the-scottish-child-payment-on-the-need-for-food>

<sup>6</sup> Through income gains, debts managed, and debts written off it was estimated an average financial impact of around £1,000 was achieved per person accessing a Trussell advice service. Finney, et al, (2024), *Evaluating the advice and support services provided through food banks*, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/evaluation/evaluating-our-money-matters-advice-and-support-services>

However, current additional provision at food banks does not have the capacity to address financial hardship at scale. Moreover, we know that even where financial inclusion services are in place, advisors are regularly finding people still cannot make ends meet even after people have exhausted all options to maximise their income. The overall decrease also covers a mixed picture across Scotland, as explored further below. Most importantly, there is clear evidence that a slight decrease in provision does not necessarily reflect a decrease in need, with some factors standing out from our review of food banks' experiences:

- First, as reported in November, we are hearing even more clearly that many food banks are struggling to keep up with the need in their communities. Many food banks are having to carefully manage resources and capacity at a time of extremely high need.
- Second, there are many cases when local authorities and other services in an area are struggling or having to cut back provision, making it more difficult for people in those areas to be referred to the Trussell community.
- Third, parcels provided through signposting from Jobcentres are substantially down on previous years<sup>7</sup>, likely due to the renewal of the DWP position that Jobcentres should not formally refer people to food banks. In some cases, referrals will simply have gone through other agencies instead but, in some areas, the additional step is likely to have delayed or prevented access to emergency food.
- Fourth, food banks report that the food aid landscape continues to diversify and there is a wide range of other charitable food aid provision that is supporting people and is not captured in this parcel data. This includes pantries, social supermarkets, provision in schools and recent developments such as the "Big Hoose" multibank initiative.
- Fifth, charitable food provision is just the tip of a much deeper iceberg of hunger in Scotland. In 2022, just 7% of people who are food insecure in Scotland accessed charitable food aid, whether from food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland or from the wider ecosystem of food aid that exists across Scotland.

Taken together, the picture our 2024/25 evidence paints is one of unrelentingly high levels of severe hardship in our communities. Any green shoots from inflation easing, policy choices under the previous UK government and Scottish government, or action by food banks themselves are far outweighed by persistently high need that is either now having to be increasingly supported by other similar charitable community support or simply unmet.

As flagged in November, wider data from Citizens Advice caseload figures, deep poverty trends, to the latest Family Resources Survey data on food bank use, bears out that the level of severe hardship in the UK is far from easing.

The evidence all points to headline trends in emergency food provision that reflect a high level of hunger and hardship in our communities, which show no signs of substantial change. It is also increasingly clear from speaking with food banks in the Trussell community that it is impossible for food banks to have the capacity and resources to turn this tide. Without others playing their part,

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<sup>7</sup> In 2022/23 referrals from Jobcentres made up 4% of the total referrals to food banks in the Trussell community across the UK, this was down to 1% this year (2024/25).

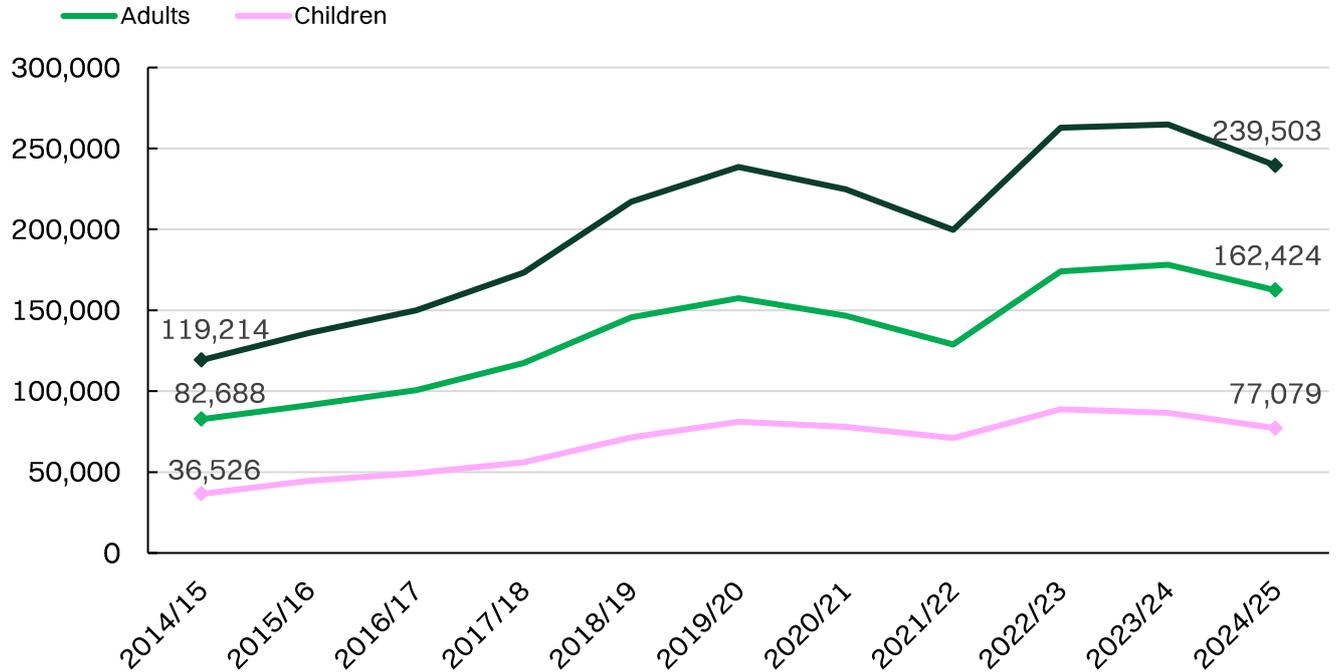
particularly government at all levels, we are placing an unrealistic and increasingly overwhelming burden on volunteer-led community provision like food banks.

**Table 1 Number of parcels for adults, children, and total distributed by food banks in the Trussell community, UK: 2019/20-2024/25**

	2024/25			Percentage change from 2019/20			Percentage change from 2023/24		
	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total
UK	1,860,909	1,024,177	2,885,086	57%	41%	51%	-6%	-11%	-8%
England	1,541,71	855,142	2,396,853	68%	49%	61%	-6%	-10%	-7%
Scotland	162,424	77,079	239,503	3%	-5%	<1%	-9%	-11%	-10%
Wales	111,515	60,158	171,673	32%	16%	26%	-6%	-13%	-9%
Northern Ireland	45,259	31,798	77,057	73%	68%	71%	-13%	-18%	-15%

Source: Trussell administrative data.

**Figure 1 Number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell community, Scotland: 2014/15-2024/25<sup>8</sup>**



Source: Trussell administrative data.

<sup>8</sup> The number of food bank centres has increased over this ten-year period. While increased provision is associated with some increase in food parcel take-up, this is relatively small in proportional terms. Increased provision of food banks results in increased uptake primarily because of the underlying unmet need in an area. See Bramley, G, et al. (2021), *State of Hunger: Building the evidence on poverty, destitution, and food insecurity in the UK*, Trussell and Heriot-Watt University, <https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/State-of-Hunger-2021-Report-Final.pdf>

# Food banks in Scotland are witnessing a deepening and more prolonged level of severe hardship

There has been a considerable number of people who have newly faced hunger and hardship in 2024/25, with 20,894 households<sup>9</sup> forced to turn to a food bank for the first time this year. These households included 42,885 people (28,882 adults and 14,003 children). This is a 26% decrease compared to the same period last year (2023/24). This decrease suggests that provision over the last year in Scotland 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.

In line with this, food banks have told us that they are now supporting people who are experiencing a deepening and more prolonged level of hardship. They are seeing people who are stuck in a cycle of financial difficulty, living in increasingly challenging situations, which are putting immense pressure on people's mental health. This reflects wider trends, which show a long-term increase in people living in very deep poverty, with incomes far below the standard poverty line.<sup>10</sup>

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**It's not crisis intervention anymore...there's a chronic need going on.**

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## Food bank in the Trussell community in Scotland

Consistent with previous years, almost half of the people (47%) referred to the Trussell community in Scotland needed to use a food bank more than once in 2024/25. Almost 3 in 10 people (28%) used the food bank two-three times, and one in six (16%) four-nine times. A small, but notable, minority of people (3%) made over 10 visits to the food bank to access emergency food. Notably, we have also seen a small, but statistically significant, increase in the average number of visits over the last five years – from 2.2 visits in 2019/20 to 2.6 visits in 2024/25 in the UK. This trend is also seen in repeat visits to food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland. This further indicates that there are more people for whom support from a food bank is not a one-off emergency at a point of crisis, but a means of managing a more entrenched level of need.

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<sup>9</sup> Trussell have previously used the word 'family' to define this measure. Households include individuals living alone, single parents, or multi-generational households. Households also include people that are homeless or with no fixed address.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025), *UK Poverty 2025*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2025-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>

“

It's about having a future that is worth aiming for, which gives people hope and makes them happier. It's about having no future other than poverty and bad health.

It's about how the pain and drudgery of poverty grinds you down so you have continual bad mental health and develop substance abuse to dull the pain and the long-term effects the substances have on your body.

It's about living in cold, damp homes, breathing in mould spores, which badly affect health. It's about not being able to warm your home or living rough and how this cuts your lifespan down.

”

Female, 50s, Scotland. Participant in 'The Cost of Hunger and Hardship'.<sup>11</sup>

## Trends vary widely, including across Scotland

As Table 1 shows, there have been decreases across the UK from the previous year in the number of parcels distributed, with Northern Ireland seeing the biggest decrease (-15%), followed by Scotland (-10%), Wales (-9%), and England (-7%). The decrease in number of parcels distributed for children in Scotland is broadly in line with the UK average.

The picture of provision by food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland is mixed. Despite an overall decrease in the number of parcels distributed in Scotland, West Scotland has seen a 16% increase this year, with a 28% increase in the number of parcels distributed to children since 2023/24. Conversely, North East Scotland (-14%), Central Scotland (-15%), Glasgow (-17%) and Lothian (-18%) have seen above-average decreases for Scotland.

When looking longer term, food banks in South Scotland (20%) and West Scotland (20%) have seen the most significant increases since 2019/20, particularly for the number of parcels distributed to children in West Scotland (39%). Food banks in Lothian have also seen an increase (10%), particularly driven by provision for adults. Large decreases have been seen in Glasgow (-24%).

As discussed above, the differences in parcel numbers across the Scottish regions does not necessarily reflect larger or smaller levels of need in those areas. It may be that the need is being picked up by different food aid providers in the area, or changes to services in some areas have made it harder for people to be referred to the Trussell community.

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<sup>11</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2025)

**Table 2 Number of parcels for adults, children, and total distributed – Scottish region breakdown: 2024/25, compared to 2019/20 and 2023/24**

	2024/25			Percentage change from 2019/20			Percentage change from 2023/24		
	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total
Central Scotland	13,594	7,089	20,683	-4%	-9%	-6%	-14%	-17%	-15%
Glasgow	23,437	11,822	35,259	-19%	-31%	-24%	-17%	-18%	-17%
Highlands and Islands	7,586	3,098	10,684	-12%	-13%	-12%	-7%	-10%	-8%
Lothian	25,939	10,451	36,390	17%	-4%	10%	-14%	-25%	-18%
Mid Scotland and Fife	15,701	7,659	23,360	-0%	-15%	-6%	-4%	-10%	-6%
North East Scotland	21,864	9,065	30,929	4%	-18%	-4%	-11%	-21%	-14%
South Scotland	24,939	13,514	38,453	20%	20%	20%	-12%	-10%	-11%
West Scotland	29,364	14,381	43,745	12%	39%	20%	11%	28%	16%
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>162,424</b>	<b>77,079</b>	<b>239,503</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>-5%</b>	<b>&lt;1%</b>	<b>-9%</b>	<b>-11%</b>	<b>-10%</b>

Source: Trussell administrative data.

## Some groups are particularly at risk of needing support from food banks

### Children continue to be disproportionately supported by food banks

While there has been a decrease in the number of parcels for children this year, the distribution of support provided by food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland continues to be weighted towards children.

Comparing the distribution of food parcels by age to the distribution of people by age in Scotland (Figure 2), we see a notable difference for children aged 0-16. The proportion of parcels distributed to children aged 0-16 (32%) is almost double their population share across Scotland (17%).<sup>12</sup> At the

<sup>12</sup> ONS, (2024), *Estimates of the population for UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalescotlandandnorthernireland>

other end of the scale, just 2% of parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland are for people aged 65 and over, despite them making up 20% of the population in Scotland.



The kids have a birthday party of two friends to attend we won't be going as I can't afford to purchase 2 presents, therefore will try keep them occupied by taking them to the park or something... if they remember I will get tears and have angry kids that will blame and hate me asking why they can't go and saying it's all my fault, to which I suppose it is. Just wish I could give them the life they deserve.



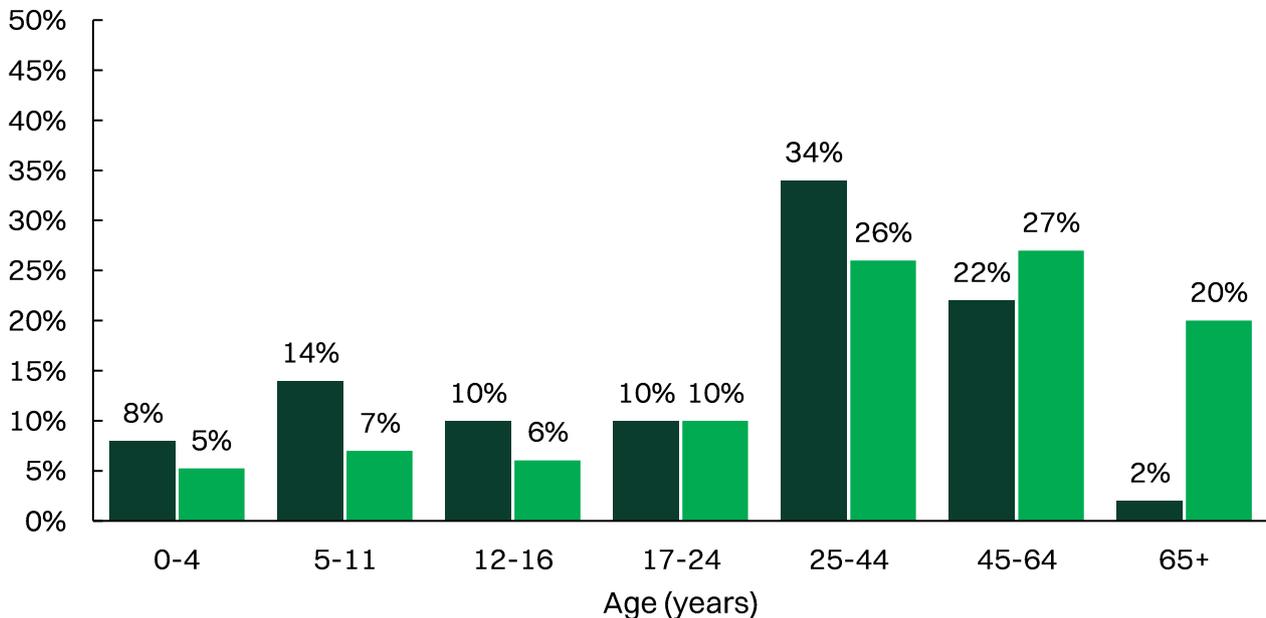
Female, 30s, Scotland, has children. Participant in 'The Cost of Hunger and Hardship'.<sup>13</sup>

This year, over 77,000 parcels were distributed for children by food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland. This is a -11% decrease since last year (2023/24) and a -5% decrease over the last five years (since 2019/20). Looking back longer-term, however, the number of parcels for children has more than doubled (111%) over the last decade since 2014/15.

**Figure 2 Percentage of emergency food parcels distributed for different age categories compared to population distribution across Scotland: 2024/25**

■ % of emergency food parcels provided to age group

■ % of Scottish population



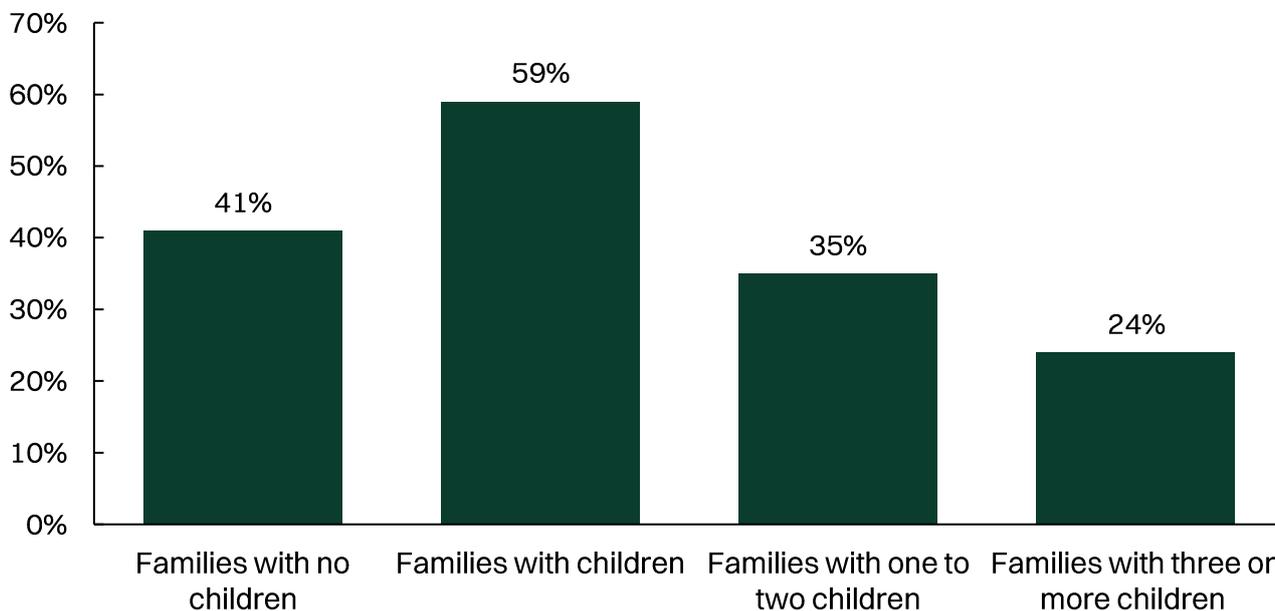
Source: Trussell administrative data and National Records of Scotland (NRS) estimates of the population for Scotland.

When taking a whole household view, the majority (59%) of support provided by food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland is for families with children (Figure 3). A significant minority (24%) of

<sup>13</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2025)

parcels were provided in 2024/25 to families with three or more children.

**Figure 3 Percentage of emergency food parcels distributed by family type, Scotland: 2024/25**



Source: Trussell administrative data.

## Food bank provision for pensioners is still rising

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We're probably seeing more elderly people...there is a slight increase in people that are maybe of pension age, which is new to us, particularly when older people are a bit more reluctant to ask for help.

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### Food bank in the Trussell community in Scotland

While it is from a low base, and they are still significantly under-represented (see Figure 2) there is a large increase in emergency food provided for pension age adults by food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland. In 2024/25, close to 5,600 parcels were distributed for someone aged 65 and over. This is double the number provided in 2019/20 when close to 2,800 parcels were distributed. As seen in Table 3 the rate of growth for pension aged adults is by far the highest growth rate for any age group across this period.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 3 Percentage change in the number of parcels by age group, Scotland: 2019/20 - 2024/25**

Age	Percentage change from 2019/20
0-4	-17%

<sup>14</sup> Age ranges differ to the previous figure as Trussell updated 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.

5-11	-8%
12-16	7%
17-24	3%
25-64	-3%
65+	101%

Source: Trussell administrative data.

This long-term trend can also be seen when we look at the number of parcels distributed by household type. Since 2019/20, the number of parcels for families with at least one person aged 65 and over living in the household has more than doubled. While this is from a low base, this is an extremely sharp increase – particularly when compared with the 6% decrease in the number of parcels provided for families without someone aged 65 and over living in the households over the same period (Table 4).

**Table 4 Number of parcels distributed by household type, Scotland: 2024/25, compared with 2019/20 and 2023/24**

Household type	Number of parcels, 2024/25	Percentage change from 2019/20	Percentage change from 2023/24
Families with children	140,221	-2%	-11%
Families without children	99,282	5%	-7%
Families with one to two children	83,335	-3%	-11%
Families with three or more children	56,886	-2%	-12%
Families with someone aged 65 or over	9,504	104%	-4%
Families without someone aged 65 or over	208,492	-6%	-6%

Source: Trussell administrative data.

## People need support from a food bank because their income is insufficient to meet the cost of essentials

Referral data from food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland continues to support wider evidence that people need to use a food bank because their incomes are too low and insufficient to cover the cost of essentials and/or is driving people into unmanageable situations (74% of referrals). From looking at the specific reasons selected, concerns around the increasing cost of essentials is particularly prevalent. This is often coupled with issues with benefits such as long waits, delays or sanctions which affect a significant minority of referrals to food banks (19%).

**Table 5 Reasons for referral for people supported by food banks, Scotland: 2024/25**

Reason for referral	% of referrals with reason selected
Income or debt	74%
Health	20%
Issue with benefits	19%
Insecure housing	6%
Change in work hours or unemployment	5%
Change in personal circumstances	5%
Immigration status	3%
Domestic abuse	2%

Source: Trussell administrative data. This data was multiple choice - referral partners could select up to four responses. Data has been recoded to combine categories.

Wider Trussell research has consistently shown that inadequate and insecure incomes are the primary driver of food bank need. People referred to food banks have usually exhausted all possible finances before a food bank referral, don't have enough money to live on and are regularly unable to afford essential items such as food and heating. Most people referred to food banks in the Trussell community are in receipt of some form of income from social security, with the design and delivery of the social security system being a major contributor to people being unable to afford essentials.<sup>15</sup> This is reflected in the sources of income for people referred to the Trussell community in Scotland (Table 6). The vast majority (82%) of people referred to food banks in 2024/25 report their sole source of income is social security, with a further 5% having earned income as well as income from social security.



**The introduction of Universal Credit was a big, a big factor [in driving food bank need] which was something that was supposed to help people. And obviously experience has taught us that it's, it's not been that helpful. And you know, that's still an issue for lots of people.**



### **Food bank in the Trussell community in Scotland**

Paid work is also not always a solution in reducing the risk of needing a food bank. This year, almost one in ten (10%) people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland were earning. Low pay and insecure jobs can leave people with insufficient income to afford the essentials. Households who reported that they were receiving earned income and benefits, or solely earned

<sup>15</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2023), *Hunger in the UK*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/publications/hunger-in-the-uk>

income, were also more likely to be referred due to a change in their work hours or unemployment than the overall average (Table 7).

**Table 6 Source of income for people referred to food banks, Scotland: 2024/25**

Source of income	% of referrals
Benefits, not earning	82%
Earnings and benefits	5%
Earning, no benefits	4%
No income or insufficient access to it	8%

Source: Trussell administrative data.

## Health is a notable trigger for referrals to food banks

Beyond income, problems with health are reported as a reason for referral in one in five (20%) referrals to food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland (Table 7). Illness and disability drive up costs for households and a lack of healthcare, appropriate employment support, and accessible jobs can make it difficult to find or sustain suitable work. Our recent research found that severe hardship affects people's mental and physical health, cutting people off from the things that make life enjoyable, with financial situations often exacerbating, or contributing to, the development of mental and physical health problems.<sup>16</sup>

Households who report that they have no income or limited access to it have distinct reasons for referral. The most common is their immigration status (31%), which is far higher than average (3%). The majority of people moving into the UK to join family, work or study, have 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF), meaning they are unable to access many mainstream benefits and are at high risk of experiencing severe hardship.<sup>17</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation report that since 2019/20, there has been a 92% increase in the number of migrant households experiencing destitution, with long waits for an asylum decision, lack of support once people are granted refugee status, and a lack of access to both cash and in-kind forms of support playing a key part in driving this increase.<sup>18</sup>

**Table 7 Reason for referral amongst households, by income sources, Scotland: 2024/25**

Reason for referral	Benefits, not earning	Benefits, earning	No benefits, earning	No income, or insufficient access to it	Total % of referrals with reason selected
Income or debt	77%	82%	73%	44%	74%
Health	22%	16%	13%	13%	20%

<sup>16</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2025)

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023), *Protection for everyone in our communities*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/neighbourhoods-and-communities/protection-for-everyone-in-our-communities>

<sup>18</sup> Fitzpatrick, S, et al. (2023), *Destitution in the UK 2023*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Heriot Watt University, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/deep-poverty-and-destitution/destitution-in-the-uk-2023>

Issues with benefits	20%	14%	10%	25%	19%
Insecure housing	6%	3%	5%	10%	6%
Change in work or unemployment	3%	15%	18%	9%	5%
Change in personal circumstances	5%	4%	6%	6%	5%
Immigration status	<1%	<1%	13%	31%	3%
Domestic abuse	1%	2%	2%	3%	2%

Source: Trussell administrative data. Data entry was multiple choice – referral partners could select up to four responses. Data has been recoded to combine categories.

## Food banks remain deeply concerned about the future

“

**I think by the end of last year... we were all feeling quite deflated and I'm going to be quite honest here and say that I felt like I was fighting the losing battle.**

**I think that we just, whatever we do, we want people to see us as a place that they can come and it's welcoming and it's safe and we'll see them and hear them and we will acknowledge them. But, you know, we also don't want this to be their forever.**

”

### Food bank in the Trussell community

Food bank staff and volunteers in Scotland continue to provide a critical service in their communities. They have repeatedly adapted their operational practices to meet a 101% increase in need for their support in the last ten years.

Food banks provide a lifeline for so many people facing hardship, but they shouldn't have to exist in a just and compassionate society. They also weren't set up to respond to this level of need. Food banks have told us that they are struggling to keep up with need in their communities. Reduced donations mean many food banks are having to purchase food themselves and therefore must also manage high food prices (following recent high inflation) within their limited budgets.

“

**I love the job, but I hate the fact that we need a food bank**

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### Food bank in the Trussell community in Scotland

Despite food banks' concerted work to increase access to wider advice and support, particularly on money matters, food banks continue to report that people across their communities do not have enough to afford the essentials. They are seeing people living in persistent poverty, who continue to

need support from a food bank because incomes, even when maximised, are insufficient to match the cost-of-living.

Food banks remain deeply concerned about the future. The proposed reforms to disability benefits set out in the UK government's Spring Statement are a key source for concern. These concerns are borne out when data shows the already disproportionate risk of severe hardship facing disabled families. 390,000 people living in disabled families in Scotland face severe hardship now, with people living in disabled families in Scotland much more likely to experience severe hardship than people in a non-disabled family (17% vs 9%).<sup>19</sup>

Food banks are already supporting people whose only option is to cut spending on essential items, who have been making impossible decisions between necessities for some time. They are concerned about the long-lasting impact that going without essentials is having on people in their community, and that more people will be pushed into requiring emergency food in the face of the UK government's plans to cut disability benefits.

“

**If a child is going to school hungry, they're not going to be able to focus. I think if they have got a healthy breakfast and everything, they are more likely to be engaged in the class.**

”

**Female, 50s, Scotland, has children. Participant in 'The Cost of Hunger and Hardship'.<sup>20</sup>**

Food banks continue to support people in their communities facing hunger and hardship with resilience, strength and compassion. However, food banks are neither the right nor sustainable response to people going without essentials because their incomes are too low. The impact of severe hardship is harming people's chances of finding or keeping work; damaging people's health, education, and housing security; and worsening people's future employment and wages strains our public services and holds back our economy. It is only through building a society where everyone can afford the essentials that we can unlock the potential in our communities and remove the need for emergency food. We know what's needed to end the need for food banks, and we know that it is achievable if we make the right decisions.

## **We have an opportunity to turn the tide on hunger and hardship**

Everyone in Scotland should be able to afford the essentials and we are determined to build a fairer future where no one needs to use a food bank. Yet despite the very welcome commitment of the Scottish Government to end the need for food banks and the action plan in place to achieve this goal,

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<sup>19</sup> Weekes, T, et al. (2025)

<sup>20</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2025)

the number of parcels distributed by Scottish food banks in Trussell's community is almost identical to five years ago and has increased significantly in some regions of Scotland.

Across the nation, 670,000 people in Scotland are experiencing hunger and hardship. This is not only appalling and unacceptable, but also costly. Trussell's latest research [Cost of Hunger and Hardship](#) estimates severe hardship costs Scotland £5.6 billion a year; money that could be invested into our NHS, schools and public services and into delivering a Minimum Income Guarantee for all.

Despite the very welcome commitment of the Scottish Government to eradicate child poverty and to end the need for food banks, both child poverty and food bank use remain stubbornly high. It is a shocking fact that many schools and nurseries are now having to provide food, clothing and toiletries to parents and carers.

While we have seen an 11% drop in parcels for children over the past year, this has been mirrored across the UK and so it is difficult to credit policies such as the Scottish Child Payment for the reduction since 2023/24.

With 6 out of 10 emergency food parcels from the Trussell community going to families with children, 1 in 4 parcels going to families with three or more children, and recent Trussell research revealing that 170,000 children are experiencing hunger and hardship across the nation, we need to see decisive action in Scotland if we are to achieve our ambition of ending the need for food banks.

**The recent Programme for Government was a missed opportunity to take the bold action and change we need to see in Scotland if we are to turn the tide on hunger and hardship.** We welcome the focus on maximising incomes through advice provision in community settings and the actions to reduce the disability employment gap. However, if we are to reduce child poverty and the need for food banks, significantly more investment is needed in policies that get cash directly into the pockets of families on the lowest incomes and that support people in crisis.

The First Minister is right to put eradicating child poverty at the heart of his government's programme but this ambition and commitment needs to be matched with action and at scale. Almost five years on from the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver an action plan to end the need for food banks and two years since it was published, it is time now to step up delivery with clear timescales and a longer-term strategy.

**As we approach the Holyrood elections next May, all of Scotland's political parties must reflect on why after almost two decades of devolution, an extraordinary high level of Scots are experiencing hunger and hardship.** Next year's elections should be an opportunity to reflect collectively on how to put the building blocks in place here in Scotland to ensure everyone has enough money to afford the essentials and no one needs to access charitable food aid.

**The Scottish Government should:**

1. Reaffirm support for an Essentials Guarantee, to ensure that Universal Credit always covers the cost of food and other essentials.
2. Increase the level of the Scottish Child Payment to £40 a week, as recommended in our Tackling Child Poverty & Destitution research<sup>21</sup> and supported by the End Child Poverty Coalition in Scotland.
3. Significantly increase funding for the Scottish Welfare Fund; Barnett consequentials from the extension of the Household Support Fund should be invested into local crisis support.
4. Commit to updating its action plan to end the need for food banks, to align with the timescales for the delivery of the 2030 child poverty reduction targets.
5. Use all its powers across fair work, public services, taxation and social security, to progress the delivery of a Minimum Income Guarantee.

While many of the most important powers to tackle hunger and hardship are devolved to Holyrood, delivery of Universal Credit and some disability health support continues to be reserved to Westminster. Any cuts to Personal Independent Payment in Westminster are likely to affect funding for the Adult Disability Payment in Scotland. We therefore urge the Scottish and UK governments to work together to build a future where everyone can afford the essentials – particularly through stopping planned cuts to Personal Independence Payment and health payments within Universal Credit, and updating Universal Credit with steps towards an 'Essentials Guarantee'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Statham, R, et al. (2023), *Tackling Child Poverty and Destitution: Next steps for the Scottish Child Payment and the Scottish Welfare Fund*, Trussell and Save the Children, <https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/Scotland-Tackling-Child-Poverty-and-Destitution.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> See our UK factsheet for more, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/latest-stats/end-of-year-stats>.

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