

# Emergency food parcel distribution in the UK

April 2024 – March 2025

21 May 2025

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# 2024/25: Key facts across the UK

This factsheet reports on the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell community during the period 1 April 2024 to 30 March 2025 (inclusive). During this time, food parcels were distributed from 1,711 locations across the UK, as part of the Trussell community.<sup>1</sup>

Data from the Trussell community is just one part of the picture of need across the UK. 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 across the UK remains extraordinarily high, with close to 3 million parcels provided in 2024/25. Provision sharply rose over the last 5 years and is two and a half times the level seen a decade ago.
- Positive steps in policy and practice are far outweighed by the clear warning signs that food bank need is either being displaced to alternative providers or simply left unmet.
- Trends vary across the UK; provision in London and Yorkshire and the Humber has at least doubled in the last five years. Two-thirds of parcels go to families with children.
- Food banks are struggling under the weight of persistent and deepening poverty. Many people seeking help still cannot afford the essentials, even after acting on advice.
- The current trajectory looks bleak, with an uncertain child poverty strategy, record cuts to social security for sick and disabled people, and public service cuts on the horizon in the Spending Review. The UK government risks leaving a legacy of soaring food bank need and rising child poverty, breaking its manifesto pledges to reverse these trends.
- With investment in our social security system and local crisis support in England, the UK government can plot a better future for people on the lowest incomes and ease the pressure on our economy and public services. There is a clear moral and economic imperative to act, and act swiftly.

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<sup>1</sup> Locations are counted if they have distributed parcels at any stage during the year. Some will have opened, and some will have closed during this period. There were 1,703 locations in the previous year.

<sup>2</sup> The Independent Food Aid Network has identified at least 1,172 independent food banks across the UK. There are also Salvation Army food banks, as well as food banks run from schools and hospitals. Beyond this, there are thousands of other food aid providers including soup kitchens and social supermarkets.

<sup>3</sup> Research with Ipsos found that more than two thirds (71%) of people experiencing food insecurity said that they had not used any form of food aid in the last year. Trussell, (2023) <https://www.trussell.org.uk/publications/hunger-in-the-uk>.

# Emergency food provision has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels, embedding a 'new normal'

Food banks in the Trussell community distributed 2.9 million emergency food parcels between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. This is a decrease (-8%) compared to 2023/24 when 3.1 million parcels were distributed, the most parcels ever distributed in a year. The level of emergency food provision seen across food banks in the Trussell community in 2024/25 remained close to these record levels.

The longer-term trend is stark. The number of parcels distributed in 2024/25 is 51% higher than the number distributed in the same period five years ago, in 2019/20, and more than two and a half times (156%) the amount distributed ten years ago in 2014/15.

For the third year in a row, food banks distributed over 1 million parcels to children. This marks a 41% increase since 2019/20, including a 32% rise in parcels to support children under the age of five over the same period and reflecting the wider rise (46%) in parcels provided to families with children over the past five years.

The figures make it clear that we are yet to return to (already high) pre-pandemic levels of emergency food provision in the Trussell community. 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.

“

There's no wiggle room anymore there. And people are reducing costs as much and to the best of their ability. But it's virtually almost impossible because the high cost of living is increasing and food has increased... so it's becoming an impossible task.

”

Food bank in the Trussell community

“

I'm struggling to afford to just exist and keep a roof over my head...I don't live or experience life... I have nothing and I do nothing other than debt

”

Person claiming Universal Credit interviewed in February 2025<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> An online survey by YouGov of 1,209 adults (16+) currently claiming Universal Credit. Fieldwork was undertaken 21 January – 3 February 2025.

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

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

As noted in our Mid-Year Statistics update, easing pressure on household finances might have helped to prevent further rises in emergency food provision and contributed to the slight decrease in provision. 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 (the decision to follow standard policy meant most rates increased by September 2023 CPI of 6.7%, which helped more than expected when actual inflation had fallen by April 2024) and unfreeze Local Housing Allowance rates from April 2024, re-linking support for private renters to the most affordable 30% of local rents.

Efforts from food banks to improve access to support which addresses people's underlying financial hardship may also have contributed to easing income pressures in some 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 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>5</sup>

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. 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.

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<sup>5</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>

- Third, parcels provided through signposting from Jobcentres are substantially down on previous years<sup>6</sup>, likely due to the renewal of the Department for Work and Pensions 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, with people accessing different forms of charitable food aid from providers outside the Trussell community.

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, 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.<sup>7</sup>

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

“

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

”

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

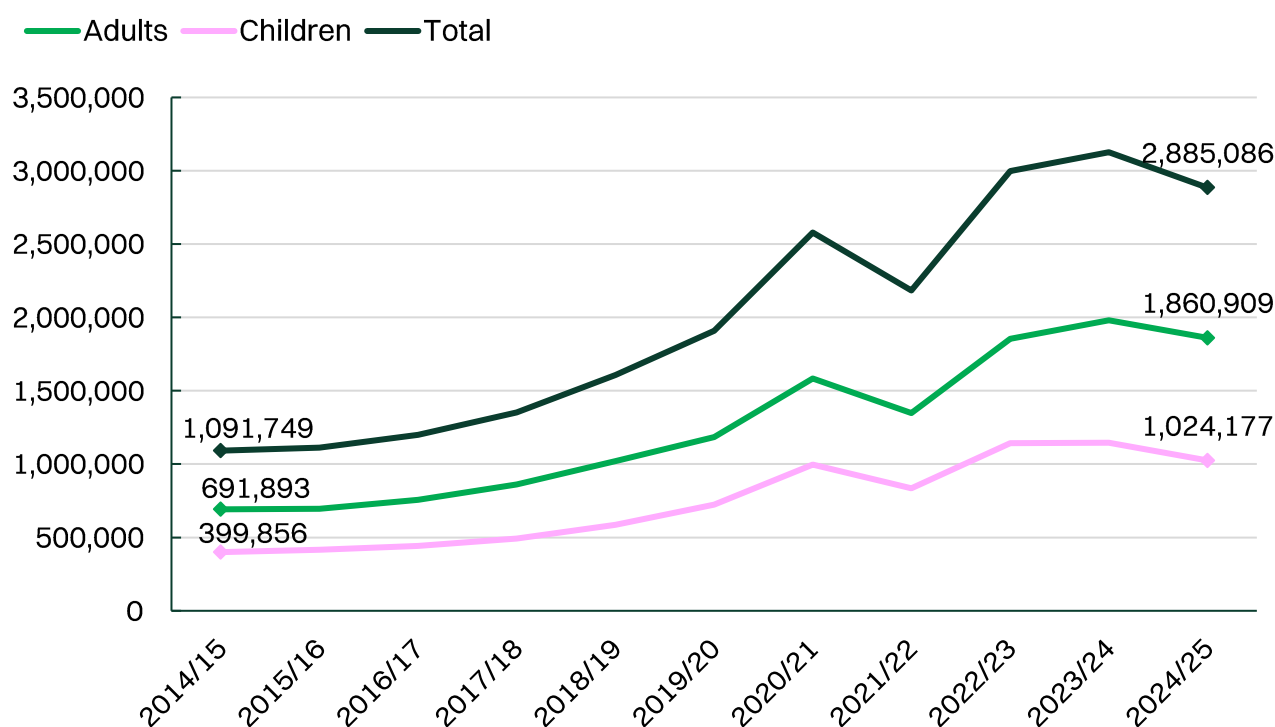
<sup>6</sup> In 2022/23 referrals from Jobcentres made up 4% of the total referrals to food banks in the Trussell community across the UK, this was down to 1% this year (2024/25).

<sup>7</sup> Trussell (2024), *Emergency food parcel distribution in the UK: April-September 2024*, <https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-11/MYS%202024%20UK%20factsheet.pdf>

**Table 1 Number of parcels for adults, children, and in total distributed, 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
United Kingdom	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 on the number of emergency food parcels distributed across the UK.

**Figure 1 Number of emergency food parcels distributed, UK: 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 are witnessing a deepening and more prolonged level of severe hardship

There has also been a considerable amount of people who have newly faced hunger and hardship in 2024/25, with 257,600 households<sup>9</sup> forced to turn to a food bank for the first time this year. These households included 567,235 people (366,989 adults and 200,246 children). This is a 15% decrease compared to the same period last year (2023/24). The decrease seen this year suggests that provision over the last year in the UK 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>

“

**What we're seeing is that situations are more critical now than ever. People are living in constant poverty. People are staying with us longer because they have no other option.**

”

### Food bank in the Trussell Community

Consistent with previous years, almost half of the people (47%) referred to food banks in the Trussell community needed to use a food bank more than once. Almost three in ten people (28%) used the food bank two-three times, and one in seven (15%) 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. 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.

“

**My mental health is in decline due to the stress of poverty. Life feels like it is not worth living. There is nothing to look forward to. It's pushed me... very close to a mental breakdown from the stress of poverty. Really, it's crushing me.**

”

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

<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>

<sup>11</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>



## Trends vary widely across the UK

Food banks in the Trussell community operate in a range of local, regional and national contexts that have an impact on the number of parcels distributed. These include local, regional and national variations in policy, as well as funding for the provision of alternative charitable food provision in an area.

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 level of emergency food provision remains significantly higher in 2024/25 than the same period five years ago in Northern Ireland (71%), England (61%) and Wales (26%). In Scotland, the numbers have remained more stable over the five-year period (0.4%). However, there has been a significant increase over the last decade in Scotland, with emergency food parcel distribution doubling since 2014/15 (101%). The potential factors behind these devolved differences are explored in more detail in the corresponding factsheets for Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

There is also a wide variation in the change in emergency food parcels distributed across England. In some English regions, food banks are now distributing double the number of parcels they did in the same period five years ago. This is the case for London (123%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (95%) who have seen the highest increases. The remaining English regions have still seen significant increases over the five-year period.

Looking at the change in emergency parcels distributed from last year, London is still showing the same record level of need this year.

As discussed above, the differences in parcel numbers across the English 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.

**Table 2 Number of parcels for adults, children, and in total distributed by food banks in the Trussell community, by region, England: 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
East Midlands	91,813	49,146	140,959	47%	25%	38%	-13%	-20%	-16%
East of England	207,924	124,616	332,540	83%	63%	75%	-3%	-8%	-5%
London	298,751	156,820	455,571	131%	109%	123%	2%	-3%	0%
North East	85,032	43,979	129,011	37%	21%	31%	-13%	-16%	-14%

North West	212,676	119,577	332,253	38%	19%	31%	-5%	-9%	-7%
South East	195,424	116,567	311,991	62%	48%	56%	-8%	-14%	-10%
South West	154,187	84,750	238,937	54%	35%	46%	-5%	-8%	-6%
West Midlands	157,763	86,224	243,987	48%	39%	44%	-9%	-10%	-10%
Yorkshire and The	138,141	73,463	211,604	105%	79%	95%	-6%	-13%	-9%
<b>England</b>	<b>1,541,71</b>	<b>855,142</b>	<b>2,396,853</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>-6%</b>	<b>-10%</b>	<b>-7%</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



There's some very harrowing stories on how children are living and how they're not living...one story...where there was no beds, no white goods, no nothing.



#### Food bank in the Trussell community

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

Comparing the distribution of food parcels by age to the distribution of people by age in the UK (Figure 2), we see a notable difference for children aged 0-16. The proportion of parcels distributed to children aged 0-16 (36%) is almost double their population share across the UK (19%).<sup>12</sup> At the other end of the scale, just 3% of parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell community are for people aged 65 and over, despite them making up 19% of the UK population.

<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/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland>

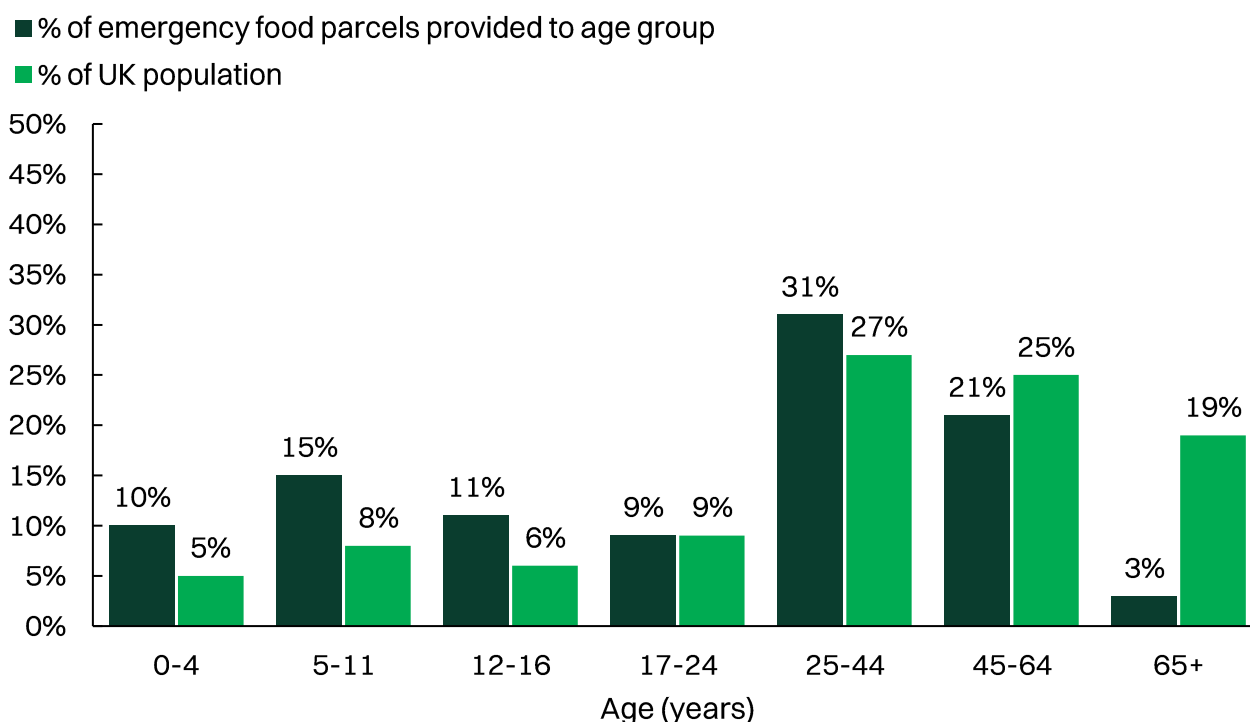
“

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, 30s, England. Participant in 'The Cost of Hunger and Hardship'.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 2 Percentage of emergency food parcels distributed for different age groups compared to population distribution, UK: 2024/25**



Source: Trussell administrative data and ONS population estimates.

As reported on in our Mid-Year Statistics, we have seen a slight change in the long-term pattern in provision for children. Unlike previous years, growth in parcels for children no longer outstrips or matches the growth in parcels for adults. The latest five-year trend (2019/20-2024/25), shows a 57% increase for adults and a 41% increase for children in parcels provided. It is too early to tell if this is a longer-term shift towards adults driving more of the growth in emergency food parcels provided.

“

We have to be cold and all be freezing as the heating is so much...me and my husband have gone hungry to make sure our kids have one meal a day.

”

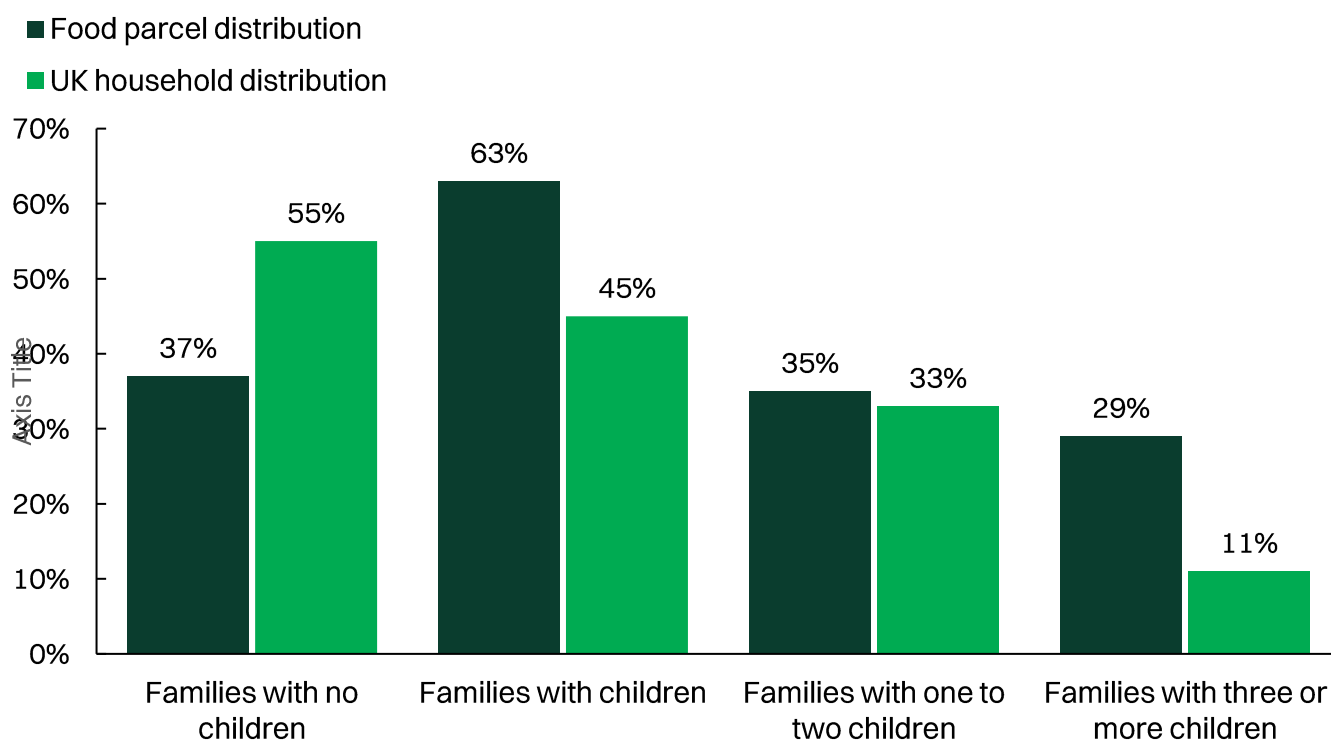
Person claiming Universal Credit interviewed in February 2025<sup>14</sup>

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

<sup>14</sup> An online survey by YouGov of 1,209 adults (16+) currently claiming Universal Credit. Fieldwork was undertaken 21 January – 3 February 2025

When taking a whole household view, the majority (64%) of support provided by food banks in the Trussell community is for families with children (Figure 3). This is despite people living in these families making up just 45% of the population. This over-representation is mainly driven by support provided to families with three or more children at food banks in the Trussell community. The proportion of parcels distributed for families with three or more children (29%) is well over double their population share (11%). For families with one to two children the proportion is similar, with 35% of parcels distributed to families of this size and 33% of people living in families of this size in the UK population.

**Figure 3 Percentage of emergency food parcels distributed by family type, UK, compared to percentage of UK population living within each family type: 2024/25**



Source: Trussell administrative data and Family Resources Survey dataset (2022-23).

# Food bank provision for pensioners is still rising

“

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

”

## Food bank in the Trussell community

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 provision for pension age adults. In 2024/25, 97,000 parcels were distributed for someone aged 65 and over. This is over three times the number provided in 2019/20 when 29,000 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>15</sup>

Table 3 Percentage increase in the number of parcels by age group, UK: 2019/20 – 2024/25

Age	Percentage increase from 2019/20
0-4	32%
5-11	35%
12-16	62%
17-24	59%
25-64	49%
65+	236%

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, the number of parcels for families with at least one person aged 65 and over living in the household has more than tripled. While this is from a low base, this is five times the increase for families without anyone aged 65 and over living in the household (Table 4).

<sup>15</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.

**Table 4 Number of parcels distributed by household type, UK: 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	1,831,838	46%	-10%
Families without children	1,053,248	60%	-3%
Families with one to two children	1,000,266	50%	-9%
Families with three or more children	831,572	42%	-12%
Families with someone aged 65 or over	169,835	218%	-5%
Families without someone aged 65 or over	2,584,248	43%	-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 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 (72% of referrals). From looking at the specific reasons selected, concern 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 (17%).

**Table 5 Reasons for referral for people supported, UK: 2024/25**

Reason for referral	% of referrals with reason selected
Income or debt	72%
Health	22%
Issue with benefits	17%
Insecure housing	7%
Change in work hours or unemployment	6%
Immigration status	5%
Change in personal circumstances	4%
Domestic abuse	2%

Source: Trussell administrative data. Data entry is 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>16</sup> This is reflected in the sources of income for people referred to the Trussell community (Table 6). The vast majority (79%) of people referred to food banks in 2024/25 report their sole source of income is social security, with a further 7% having earned income as well as income from social security.



**Universal Credit, that's always been a struggle, that 6-7 week gap is horrendous. It's absolutely a brutal process that people have to go through...it's what it's doing to them, to their self-esteem, their mental health. It's just pulling people down**



**Food bank in the Trussell community**

Paid work is also not always a solution in reducing the risk of needing a food bank. This year, over one in ten (11%) people referred to food banks in the Trussell community were earning (Table 6). 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 income, were also more likely to be referred due to a change in their work hours or unemployment than the overall average (Table 7).

While these figures are broadly the same as last year, some food banks have told us that they are seeing more working people struggling to get by, with some adjusting their operating hours to allow working people to access emergency food.



**We've started to open at night time to meet that demand because people can't afford to take time off work**



**Food bank in the Trussell community**

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

Source of income	% of referrals
Benefits, not earning	79%
Earnings and benefits	7%
Earning, no benefits	4%
No income or insufficient access to it	10%

Source: Trussell administrative data.

<sup>16</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2023), *Hunger in the UK*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/publications/hunger-in-the-uk>

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

Beyond income, problems with health are reported as a reason for referral in over one in five (22%) referrals to food banks in the Trussell community (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>17</sup>

Households who report that they have no income or limited access to it have distinct reasons for referral. The most common of these is issues with their immigration status (38%), which is far higher than average (5%). 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>18</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation report that since 2019, 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>19</sup>

**Table 7 Reason for referral amongst households, by income sources, UK: 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	76%	81%	74%	40%	72%
Health	24%	19%	16%	14%	22%
Issues with benefits	18%	14%	10%	20%	17%
Insecure housing	8%	4%	5%	10%	7%
Change in work or unemployment	5%	17%	16%	9%	6%
Immigration status	1%	1%	12%	38%	5%
Change in personal circumstances	4%	5%	6%	5%	4%
Domestic abuse	2%	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.

<sup>17</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2025)

<sup>18</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>19</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>



# 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 continue to provide a critical service in their communities. They have repeatedly adapted their operational practices to meet a 51% increase in need for their support in the last five 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.

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. Proposed reforms to disability benefits set out in the UK government's Spring Statement have been prominent in our conversations with food banks in recent months. These concerns are borne out when data shows the already disproportionate risk of severe hardship facing disabled families. Five million people living in disabled families in the UK face severe hardship now, with people living in disabled families much more likely to experience severe hardship than people in a non-disabled family (17% vs 11%).<sup>20</sup>

“

...lately as well, we've had a lot of people that have been very traumatised about these proposed benefits cuts

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## Food bank in the Trussell community

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



**It's a worrying time. So whilst we've done everything we can up to this point...It's what happens next...we've got around...22% of people using our service because they've got an ongoing mental and physical health condition. So, whilst we've seen a decrease this year, with the PIP application changing and the access to disability benefits changing my concern would be how will that number be affected because that is a high percentage of people accessing the service.**



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

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.



**The cost of food, utilities, rent, pet supplies etc has gone up dramatically. My local council is going to put council tax up and my wages and benefits only just cover the essentials. I am terrified at the thought of disability benefits being cut/reduced as all my PIP goes on bills, which is not what it's supposed to do. I am unable to afford to visit family & friends and don't have the heating on at all.**



### **Person claiming Universal Credit interviewed in February 2025<sup>21</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.

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<sup>21</sup> An online survey by YouGov of 1,209 adults (16+) currently claiming Universal Credit. Fieldwork was undertaken 21 January – 3 February 2025.

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

As the evidence behind these statistics on emergency food parcels shows, this data only tells part of the picture of hardship in our communities. Our latest research, the Cost of Hunger and Hardship, reports that in 2022/23 a record 9.3 million people faced severe hardship across the UK, including 3 million children.<sup>22</sup> This is a measure of deep poverty which includes both people who are very likely to be unable to afford essentials and be at risk of needing a food bank now, and people who are at high risk of needing food bank support in the future. It reveals the bigger picture of food bank need beyond simply who receives an emergency food parcel.

The long-term trend is alarming: there has been a 39% increase in the number of people facing hunger and hardship in the two decades since 2002/03. Without change, a further 425,000 people, including 170,000 children, are projected to face hunger and hardship by 2026/27.

This level of entrenched hunger and hardship does not just come at an immense cost to individuals and the community provision that seeks to support them. Recent modelling found these levels of severe hardship cost our public services, the economy, and the public purse in the UK over £75 billion in 2022/23. Without urgent change, this will increase to just over £79 billion in 2026/27 – even before proposed cuts to social security for disabled people go ahead.<sup>23</sup>

The current UK government was elected on an ambitious platform including commitments to improve living standards, end the need for emergency food, and to tackle child poverty. The last year of continued, near-record levels of emergency food provision by the Trussell community alone and the trajectory of record cuts to support for disabled people, a child poverty strategy yet to be published, and public service cuts expected at the Spending Review, means the outlook looks bleak. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that, without action, this UK government's legacy on living standards risks being one of rising food bank need, and increased child poverty.

Trussell has previously outlined the action needed in a number of areas to end the need for food banks in the long-term.<sup>24</sup> The UK government is making welcome changes to areas like renters' rights, employment rights, employment support, and investment in social housing which should help to create longer term change. But this will not help stem the tide of hardship we see now, and it will not go far enough to see meaningful change. Evidence consistently shows incomes are the key driver of food bank need, and the most effective lever to address this is our social security system.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2025)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Trussell (2024), Policies to end the need for food banks in the UK, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/publications/policies-to-end-the-need-for-food-banks>

<sup>25</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2025)

With this in mind, there are five steps the UK government should prioritise to get back on course to reduce the need for emergency food by the end of this parliament, helping to boost our economy and improve living standards for us all:

1. **Stop planned cuts to Personal Independence Payment and health payments within Universal Credit.** The UK government is planning changes which will result in a £7bn reduction to social security payments for disabled people and their carers by 2029/30. These are the largest cuts to social security in a decade and would push between 300,000 and 400,000 people into poverty, including at least 50,000 children. Already three in four (75%) people who need to use a food bank live in a disabled household and almost one in five (19%) people receiving Universal Credit (UC) and disability benefits have used a food bank in the last month. For the UK government to meet its pledge to end the need for emergency food parcels, it must press pause on the cuts to disabled people's social security and instead prioritise the overhaul of employment support. Future reform of PIP and UC health payments must be shaped by meaningful consultation with disabled people. Rushing ahead with deeply damaging cuts to reduce spending will only push more people into hunger and hardship which comes at a high cost to individuals, the UK economy and our public services.
2. **Update Universal Credit with steps towards an 'Essentials Guarantee'.** The basic rate of UC is at its lowest level as a share of average earnings. It falls far short of protecting people from going without essentials and needing to turn to a food bank to get by. Recognising that this has contributed to rising hardship and has put additional pressure on health and disability benefits as a way of making ends meet, the UK government has announced plans to increase the UC standard allowance. This is welcome, but the increase is small reaching only £5 a week above inflation by April 2029. In line with the commitment to review UC, the UK government should:
  - Urgently bring forward the planned boost to the standard allowance, so the full £5 a week above inflation increase comes into effect from April 2026 rather than April 2029.
  - Seek independent advice on setting the UC standard allowance, including evidence on the level needed to cover essential living costs.
  - Build on the Fair Repayment Rate with a proper protected minimum floor to limit all reductions, including the benefit cap. This could be set initially at 15% below the standard allowance and would provide people with more security and certainty about how much they will receive each month at very little cost to government.<sup>26</sup>
3. **Deliver a multi-year funding settlement and long-term strategy for discretionary local crisis support as part of the Spending Review.** The Household Support Fund (HSF) is now the primary source of funding for local crisis support, helping people facing immediate hardship back on their feet. The seventh round of the HSF is now underway and due to end in March 2026. Short-term funding pots are not an effective or appropriate way to deliver discretionary crisis support, which is a key component in any system designed to protect against severe financial hardship and local authorities are clear this vital protection will be lost without continued, ring-fenced funding. The

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<sup>26</sup> Porter, I, and Rabindrakumar, S, (2024), *A protected minimum floor in Universal Credit*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Trussell, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/social-security/a-protected-minimum-floor-in-universal-credit>

UK government must use the Spending Review to deliver a new approach to local crisis and resilience support, backed by a multi-year funding settlement of at least £1.25 billion per year. This would enable every local authority in England to offer a scheme where anyone facing a financial crisis can receive cash-first support quickly and be connected to advice and wider support focused on building resilience and preventing the repeated need for crisis support.

4. **Make investment in social security the bedrock of the child poverty strategy.** The UK government's forthcoming child poverty strategy will only work if it pays attention to the aspects of our social security system that are pushing families with children into hunger and hardship. The two-child limit is responsible for too many children not having enough food or a warm home. Scrapping this policy would lift 470,000 children out of hunger and hardship and is a cost-effective way of reducing child poverty, with the additional spending required being almost entirely met by £3.1 billion in fiscal and economic benefits.
5. **Increase the number of homes affordable to people on the lowest incomes.** A key driver of the UK's crisis of hunger and hardship is the fact that there are simply not enough safe, secure and affordable homes being built. We welcome the changes being sought through the Renters Rights Bill and investment through the Warm Homes Plan to improve security and standards for renters, but there is still an urgent need to increase the number of homes affordable to people on the lowest incomes to prevent rising homelessness and food bank need. The UK government should:
  - Use the Spending Review to invest in building social rent homes at the levels required across the UK, in communities where they are most needed. Building 90,000 homes for social rent every year in line with housing need in England would end the housing emergency and generate substantial benefits from increased economic activity, increased employment and reduced pressure on healthcare, homelessness and other public services.
  - Re-establish the link between housing benefits and actual rents as a fundamental baseline of support. LHA should always cover at least the cheapest 30% of properties in every area and the UK government should commit to annual uprating of LHA in line with rents. This would drive fiscal and economic benefits of £1.5 billion and lift 265,000 people out of facing hunger and hardship.

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