



Hunger in Scotland

Executive summary

September 2025



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Executive summary

This report outlines the scale, nature, and drivers of hunger in Scotland. It finds compelling evidence that, despite falling inflation, severe hardship is becoming entrenched in Scotland, with too many people continuing to go without food because they can't afford it.

It is increasingly clear that there is no path to achieving the Scottish Government's commitments to end the need for emergency food and eradicate child poverty, without addressing the disturbingly high level of severe hardship in our

communities. The worrying signs of the deepening of hardship, and normalisation of basic needs going unmet, speak to the wider public discontent with living standards in our communities, and the desire for change.

This report provides further robust and comprehensive evidence to understand the nature of hunger and the use of food banks in the Trussell community, and to design solutions to reverse these trends for good and bring tangible change to people's lives.

No clear progress in reducing hunger or food bank use, and signs of engrained hardship

Far too many people are still experiencing food insecurity in Scotland. In 2024, one million people across Scotland, including 210,000 children, lived in food insecure households. This represents 15% of Scottish households. This is statistically no different from the levels seen in same period in 2022 (17%), when 1.2 million people (including 335,000 children) lived in a food insecure household. This means that, at some point in the previous year, they ran out of food and were unable to afford more, reduced the size of their meals or ate less because they couldn't afford food, or went hungry or lost weight due to a lack of money.

Despite falling inflation levels, there has been no progress on the use of charitable food provision. One in 20 (5%) households in 2024 used at least one type of charitable food provision in the last year. This remains statistically consistent with 2022(7%).

There is a gulf in the risk of hunger based on where you are living in Scotland – households in the most deprived areas of Scotland were three times as likely to be food insecure than households in the least deprived areas (26% vs. 8%).

There are concerning signs that the number of people living in deeper forms of hardship is becoming entrenched in Scotland. The proportion of households in Scotland reporting 'very low' food insecurity is unchanged since 2022 (8%), while the proportion reporting low food insecurity has decreased one percentage point (6% in 2024, 7% in 2022). This means that over half (56%) of households experiencing food insecurity in Scotland have very low levels of food security.

We are at risk of seeing severe hardship becoming normalised in communities across Scotland. Two thirds (67%) of people who experienced food insecurity did not turn to any form of charitable food provision in the last year. Despite frequently going without essentials like food, people commonly didn't consider themselves to be facing hardship, meaning they did not want to turn to a food bank for support.

Some groups of people still face much higher risks of hunger and food bank use than others

Hunger was experienced disproportionately by particular groups of people across Scotland, including people facing structural inequalities, working-age families with children, and people who do not own their home.

Disability was one of the most common factors underpinning hunger in Scotland in 2024. Three in four (75%) people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland in 2024 were disabled. In comparison, 32% of people across Scotland were disabled. When looking at households, the rate of disability rises even higher. Eight in 10 (78%) people referred to food banks reported that they, or a member of their household, were disabled. This compares to 39% of people across Scotland who were living in a disabled household.

More than a quarter of disabled people (27%) experienced food insecurity in 2024 – over twice the rate among non-disabled people (8%). This rises to 31% for people with a mental health condition.

People from **racialised communities** were over-represented among people referred to food banks. One in eight (12%) of people referred to food banks were from a racialised community, compared to 5% of people in Scotland as a whole.

People from the **LGBTQIA+ community**, who make up 6% of the Scottish general population, were over-represented among people who have experienced food insecurity (8%).

Other groups of people also experienced higher risks of hunger, often driven by an increased likelihood of interacting with the social security system. This is particularly the case for **working-age people** who were far more likely to experience food insecurity than people over the age of 65 (19% vs. 2%). Most (96%) people referred to food banks in Scotland in 2024 were of working age. This compares to three quarters (75%) of people in

Scotland who were 18-64.

Children were at particular risk of living in a food insecure household. In 2024, one in four (25%) children were growing up in food insecure households. Households with more children were over-represented among people experiencing food insecurity. Among households experiencing food insecurity in Scotland, 5% had three or more children compared with 1% of household not experiencing food insecurity.

Adults living alone were particularly over-represented among people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland, making up half (55%) of households. In comparison, 21% of adults across Scotland reported living alone.

Other personal circumstances can increase the risk of hunger for people across Scotland. This is particularly the case for **renters**. Around one in seven (13%) of the Scottish population lived in social housing; however, people living in social housing made up two fifths (42%) of people who are food insecure. Food banks see a particularly high number of social renters – 56% were social renters.

Most households referred to food banks were not in **work**; however, a significant and increasing minority were. One in four (24%) people referred to food banks in 2024 were in working households, an increase from 2022 (17%).

Extremely low incomes continue to bite, made worse by an absence of savings and pervasive debt levels

As we have seen in successive reports, extremely low incomes and a lack of financial resources were the primary drivers of hunger in 2024. People were often left without enough get by on because of the way the social security system is designed and delivered. This was most clearly seen with the insufficient amount of support provided by Universal Credit (UC).

People referred to food banks in 2024 had **extremely low levels of income**. On average they had just £148 a week to get by on, after paying their housing costs. This represented just 23% of what the average household across Scotland has to spend (£638), and is just 72% of the amount required for a couple to afford the essentials (£205).¹

A **dearth of savings and high levels of indebtedness** further reduced the financial resources people could draw on to avoid hunger. Most (91%) people referred to food banks had no savings, and a further 4% had less than £100 of

savings. Nearly all (92%) people referred to food banks were in some type of debt or arrears.

The knock-on consequence of this picture of extremely limited financial resources is that **changes to people's circumstances** can put someone at greater risk of hunger. Changes to life circumstances, such as bereavement or loss of a job, increased the likelihood of someone needing to turn to a food bank. Nearly eight in 10 people (79%) referred to food banks experienced at least one change to their life circumstances in the last year. This was far higher than the average across Scotland, where a third (35%) of people experienced at least one change.

Homelessness is a particularly damaging experience for people and often underpins someone's use of a food bank. Two fifths (38%) of people referred to food banks had experienced some form of homelessness in the past year (5% of people across Scotland had experienced homelessness); similar findings were seen in 2022.

Social security and work are failing to protect people from hunger, leaving finite support networks as the only defence

Social security is evidently not providing sufficient protection alone to ensure people avoid turning to food banks. Most (88%) people referred to food banks were in receipt of a means-tested social security payment, including three quarters of people (75%) in receipt of UC. In comparison, fewer than one in 10 people (8%) in the general population across Scotland were in receipt of UC.

The data shows yet further evidence of how reductions to, or caps on, social security payments people receive significantly increase people's risk of hunger. Over half (52%) of people in receipt of UC across the UK experienced food insecurity, rising to 62% for people with deductions from their payments.

¹ Trussell & Joseph Rowntree Foundation, (2025), *Guarantee our Essentials: reforming Universal Credit to ensure we can all afford the essentials in hard times*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/social-security/guarantee-our-essentials-reforming-universal-credit-to-ensure-we-can-all-afford-the>

Other **flaws in the design and delivery of the social security system** increased the risk of hunger. We found that barriers to receiving social security payments leave many waiting an extended period for them, meaning they are at greater risk of hunger as their needs are unaddressed. For others, the challenges of navigating the system may put them off applying for payments, or mean they don't appeal against an incorrect decision. Disabled people in particular can face significant barriers in accessing the social security payments for which they are eligible.

Work did not always protect people from hunger. Work that was insecure, had poor conditions, or offered low pay increased the risk of hunger. One in six (15%) working-age people in work referred to food banks were on zero-hours contracts, compared to 3% across Scotland.

The **informal and formal support networks** that people could draw on played a key role in either mitigating someone's risk of hunger or increasing their likelihood of being exposed to it. Social

isolation was a common experience for people referred to food banks. 30% of people referred to food banks were severely socially isolated, compared to 12% of people across Scotland. Few people referred to food banks had accessed crisis support through the Scottish Welfare Fund, with nearly half (48%) of people not aware of that support. Over a third (36%) of people had not accessed any formal advice or support prior to a food bank referral. This includes support around mental health, debt, housing and employment.

Once in severe hardship, people we spoke to identified a range of **barriers** that prevented them from moving into a position where they could sustainably afford the essentials. These included how the impact of severe hardship made it harder to improve mental and physical health, ongoing deductions from social security payments leaving people without enough to get by on, challenges in applying for and receiving social security payments, insecure and inflexible work, and the impact of housing insecurity, high rents and poor housing conditions.

A future without hunger in Scotland is possible, but now is the time to act

Increasing food bank use has been a long-term trend, accelerated but not started by the twin crises of the pandemic and cost of living crisis. **This report illustrates that, despite the threat of those recent crises starting to fade, the shadow of this long-term picture hangs heavy over Scotland.** Hunger and food bank use remain at appallingly high levels. Indeed, the scale of food insecurity has not improved since our last report. The roots of severe hardship in Scotland are buried deep; we need bold and concerted action if we are to reverse the patterns outlined by this data.

People we spoke to offered examples of the **kinds of change which enabled them to move out of severe hardship**. These included increasing their income from social security payments and accessing advice or support to do this, receiving advice and support with debt management, improvements in their physical or mental health, or receiving social security support for their health conditions, finding decent, secure, and fairly paid work, improvements in their housing situation which could include improved conditions, security, or affordability, and finally whether they built relationships within their community to increase the reach and strength of their support networks. If we are to tackle severe hardship in Scotland, we must see concerted and scaled up action to deliver real change for people, and an end to the need for charitable food aid in Scotland.

The public is clear that no one should experience hunger in Scotland today – or have to turn to a food bank to survive.² More than this, there are clear signs of public consensus that we need strong public services, like our social security system, to protect people from hunger and food bank use. In the wake of the UK Government's Pathways to Work green paper, polling for Trussell found that most of the public across political lines agrees that social security should be enough to cover life's essentials.³ The subsequent public and political backlash against cuts to social security to deliver short-term savings was a clear reminder of the strength of feeling that government action must not push people deeper into poverty and hardship. Scots are the people in the UK most concerned about poverty – with 95% saying hunger is a problem in the UK, 52% agreeing that it is the most important issue the country is currently facing, and 83% agreeing that food banks should not exist in a modern society. This was higher than the UK public (75%).⁴

Yet despite the Scottish Government's commitments to end the need for food banks and eradicate child poverty, there has been little progress on reducing the use of food banks in Scotland. Next year's elections are 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 support through charitable food providers. While the UK government holds significant responsibilities, there is still much the Scottish Government can do to deliver a tangible reduction in food bank need. This report illustrates two inescapable facts relating to these commitments. First, that hunger and food bank need are driven by multiple factors, requiring a cross-government approach to this commitment.

Second, that there can be no serious pathway to ending the need for emergency food without investing in further updates to our social security system in Scotland.

Recent analysis by Trussell shows that the Scottish Government taking bolder action would not just mean fulfilling political commitments or moral obligations, but delivering economic gains too. For example:

- **Following through on commitments to fully mitigate the two-child limit** would bring benefits of around £115 million, and lift 27,000 people out of hunger and hardship by 2026/27.
- **Ensuring everyone receives the social security income they are eligible for** would drive £800 million in annual economic and fiscal benefits, and lift 100,000 people out of hunger and hardship by 2026/27.
- **Extending the Scottish Child Payment to £40 a week** would drive around £435 million in annual economic and fiscal benefits, and lift 84,000 people out of hunger and hardship by 2026/27.
- **Providing a grant to mitigate against the five-week wait for UC** would drive £30 million in economic and fiscal benefits, and lift 6,000 people out of hunger and hardship, by 2026/27.
- **Reducing the disability employment gap by 20%** would bring about £230 million in economic and fiscal benefits, and lift 36,000 people out of facing hunger and hardship, by 2026/27.

2 An online survey by Survation on behalf of Trussell of 10,274 UK adults (18+). Fieldwork was undertaken 22 May - 1 June 2025. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

3 An online survey by YouGov on behalf of Trussell of 4,236 adults (18+). Fieldwork was undertaken 13-17 March 2025. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

84% of people across Northern Ireland agree that 'it is not right that anyone should experience hunger in the UK today'

77% of people in Northern Ireland agree that 'In the long-term, we should aim to ensure food banks are not needed'

4 Trussell, (2025), *Scots are more concerned about poverty than people elsewhere in the UK*, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/news/scots-are-more-concerned-about-poverty-than-people-elsewhere-in-uk>

Taken together, this evidence is an urgent reminder of the need for more determined action. With the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections on the horizon, the stark scale of food insecurity and use of charitable food provision laid out in this report is a benchmark from which progress made on the Scottish Government's flagship pledge to end the need for food banks should be measured. We have seen some welcome action and signs of intent.

We now need to see more concerted and scaled-up action to invest in and update social security, and to support local interventions that can prevent hardship spiralling. Together, this would create the step change needed to ensure people have enough to afford the essentials and weather the changes that life brings for us all. Only then will we be able to truly turn the tide of hunger in Scotland and end the need change to charitable food provision.

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