



Emergency food parcel distribution in the UK

March 2026

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2026: 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 January to 31 December 2025 (inclusive). During this time, food parcels were distributed from 1,671 locations across the UK, as part of the Trussell community.¹

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.² There are also many people who are food insecure who do not access support from any form of charitable food provision.³

- Cost-of-living pressures, driven by the rapid increase in the cost of essentials, have eased for some people over the past 18 months, with food banks in the Trussell community distributing fewer parcels in 2025 than the peak seen in 2023. Wider data suggests there has been a corresponding fall in need for food banks, not just use. This decrease is largely explained by the easing of inflation and fewer people losing their jobs.
- Easing inflation hasn't stopped appalling levels of severe hardship across the UK. Despite these recent improvements, the number of emergency food parcels distributed in 2025 remained significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels.
- The impact of policy change in driving this recent reduction is likely to be limited:
 - There have been positive changes such as the introduction of the Fair Repayment rate in Universal Credit (limiting the impact of deductions for debt).
 - But the net impact of these has been mitigated by other decisions such as the freeze to Local Housing Allowance rates from April 2025, the continued impact of the two-child limit over this period, and the impact of managed migration on Universal Credit.
- Other potential drivers have a mixed or low level impact in driving these recent decreases:

¹ 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 1,712 locations in the previous year.

² 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 charitable food providers including soup kitchens and social supermarkets.

³ Research with Ipsos found that 61% of people who experienced food insecurity had not used any form of charitable food provision in the last year. Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in the UK 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

- Successive years of incredibly high need for food banks has led to some facing significant operational difficulties. Capacity issues in the advice sector also mean some people may find it difficult to be referred to a food bank. Taken together these are reducing the amount of support food banks are providing.
- Some food bank use will have been displaced to other charitable food provision which has grown in recent years. However, available evidence indicates this expansion in provision is unlikely to be making a significant contribution to tackling underlying need.
- Food banks have contributed through providing access to further support and improving the support that people get before turning to a food bank. There is evidence to suggest advice services meaningfully improve the finances of people supported.⁴ However, current advice provision at food banks does not have the capacity to address financial hardship at scale.
- We must not be complacent about the change needed to ensure that we can end hunger in the UK. The pandemic and the cost of living crisis have left deep scars on living standards across the UK. With the bold action to scrap the two-child limit from April 2026 confirmed in the recent Spring Statement we expect further decreases in the use of food banks across the UK. However, we do not expect the use of food banks to fall below 2019 levels even with this change. It is likely that improvements in living standards will not happen for everyone or happen fast enough.
 - Food banks are supporting far more people than they did in 2019 and are increasingly supporting people experiencing sustained hardship – meaning they are needing support more often. Planned cuts to the health element of Universal Credit from April 2026 mean that people who fall ill will be more likely to experience hardship.
 - Further action is also needed for people living alone and people who do not own their home. In particular, the continued freeze to the Local Housing Allowance will drive more renters into hardship, leaving many at risk of homelessness.
 - Pensioners still make up a small proportion of people facing food insecurity and turning to food banks. However, in recent years we have started to see far more pensioners supported by food banks than in previous years, a trend that needs to be reversed.
- The priorities for further action to end hunger in the UK include: making progress on embedding an ‘Essentials Guarantee’ in Universal Credit; ensuring that under-22s are still able to receive the health element of Universal Credit; and removing the freeze on Local Housing Allowance from April 2026 and permanently link it to changes in rents

⁴ Finney, A. et al. (2024), *Evaluating our money matters advice and support services*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/evaluation/evaluating-our-money-matters-advice-and-support-services>

Deep scars on living standards are evident as far more people need support from food banks than in 2019

Food banks in the Trussell community provided over 2.6 million emergency food parcels from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025. This was a decrease (-12%) compared to 2024 when 3 million parcels were distributed. A larger decrease was seen compared to 2023 (-18%), the Trussell community's busiest year on record.

Despite these decreases, the level of emergency food provision seen across food banks in the Trussell community in 2025 remained well above pre-pandemic levels. The number of parcels distributed in 2025 was 45% higher than the number distributed in the pre-pandemic year of 2019. Data ([Figure 2](#)) further confirms that there remain deep scars on living standards as the underlying need for food banks remains far higher than six years ago.



We had a slight drop; it was an 8% drop...[But] we've almost doubled since pre-pandemic. So, an 8% drop in the grand scheme of things is nothing...It still felt so busy...because that 8% drop is from 5,667 to 5,220. So, it's not a huge amount of people.



Manager of a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 2026

In 2025, over 900,000 parcels were distributed for children by food banks in the Trussell community, an increase of over 230,000 parcels since 2019. This marks a 34% increase since 2019 and is the fourth year in succession that the number of parcels provided for children has been above 900,000.

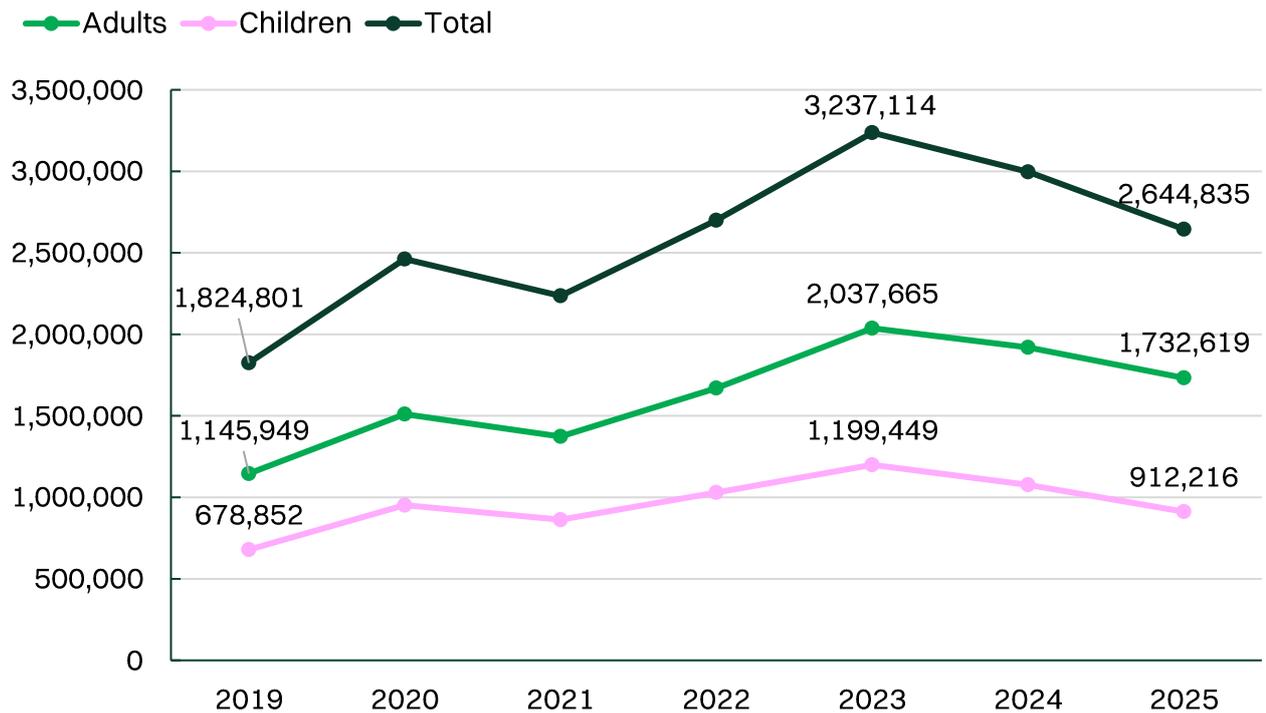
Table 1 Number of parcels for adults, children, and in total distributed, UK: 2019-2025

	2025			Percentage change from 2019			Percentage change from 2024		
	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total
United Kingdom	1,732,619	912,216	2,644,835	51%	34%	45%	-10%	-15%	-12%
England	1,437,794	766,312	2,204,106	63%	44%	56%	-9%	-15%	-11%
Scotland	151,086	67,752	218,838	-4%	-16%	-8%	-10%	-17%	-13%

Wales	102,347	51,693	154,040	26%	8%	19%	-11%	-19%	-14%
Northern Ireland	41,392	26,459	67,851	68%	49%	60%	-14%	-22%	-17%

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

Figure 1 Number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell community, UK: 2019-2025



Source: Trussell administrative data.

Emergency food parcel data from the Trussell community is only one part of understanding the picture of the underlying need for food banks. To understand the scale of underlying need, Trussell monitors the number of people experiencing food insecurity⁵ and the number of people experiencing severe hardship across the UK.⁶ Recent data from these measures shows a similar trend to this most recent food parcel data. It is likely that the need for food banks peaked in 2023, with slight decreases since. As with food bank figures these measures remain far higher than pre-pandemic levels - showing little progress on living standards over the last six years.

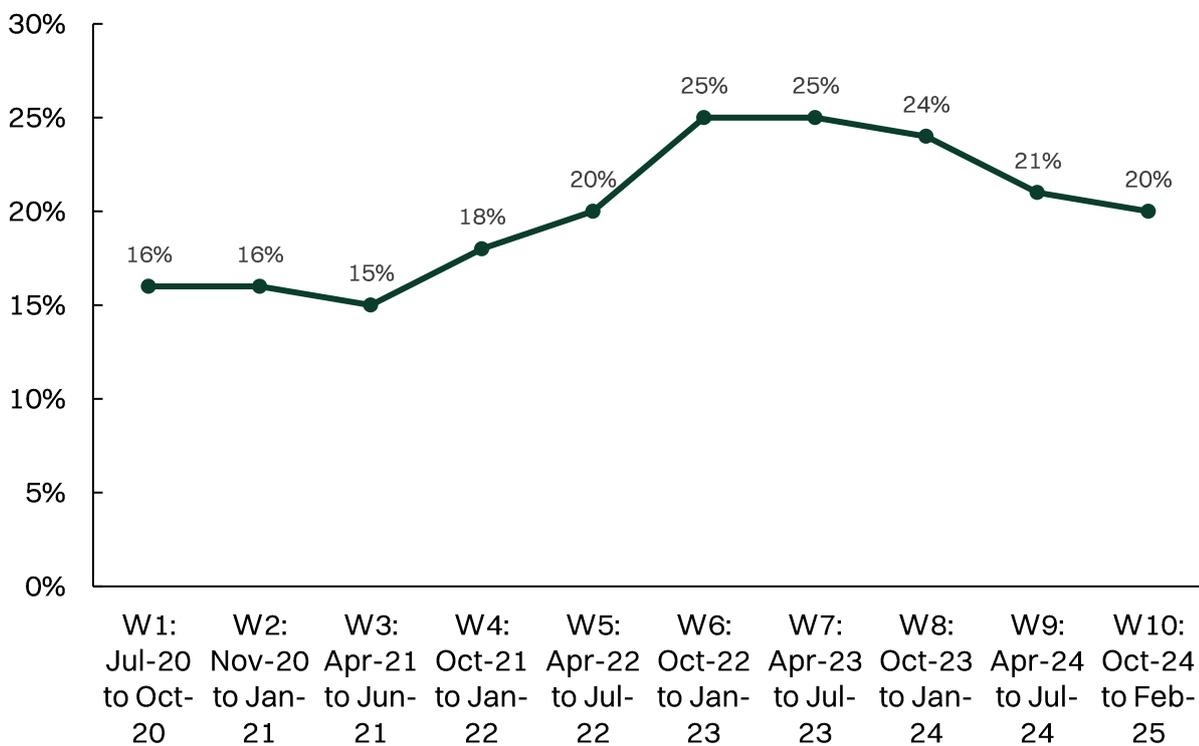
⁵ Food insecurity means going without or cutting back on quality or quantity of food because people can't afford it: Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in the UK 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

⁶ Severe hardship measures the number of people who have available financial resources so low that they are at risk of needing to use a food bank. For more information on the definition and measurement of severe hardship please see: Weekes, T, et al, (2024), *The cost of hunger and hardship - interim report*, Trussell, https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/Cost%20of%20hunger%20and%20hardship_Interim%20report%202024_4.pdf

Food and You 2 is the most recent and robust measure of food insecurity.⁷ As **Figure 2** indicates food insecurity appears to be following a similar pattern to Trussell parcel data. There was a clear increase from 2020 into a peak of 2023 when 25% of adults experienced food insecurity. This has declined to 20% in the latest figures for October 2024 – February 2025.⁸ This five percentage point decrease represents a 20% decrease in the number of adults experiencing food insecurity between 2023 and 2025.

As with food bank use, the number of people experiencing food insecurity remains well above previous levels. In 2020, 16% of adults were experiencing food insecurity – at the start of 2025 this remained at an elevated rate of 20%.

Figure 2 Percentage of adults experiencing food insecurity in previous 12 months - Food and You 2



Source: Food Standards Agency - Food and You 2

In the absence of recent data on the number of people experiencing severe hardship⁹, we can look at some similar measures to understand changes to people’s financial situation / resilience between 2023 and 2025. These include:

- The National Red Index - this is a measure developed by Citizens Advice which shows the number of people in a negative budget.¹⁰ This has reduced from a peak of 4.19 million in

⁷ Food Standards Agency, (2025), *Food and You 2*, <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you-2>

⁸ Food Standards Agency, (2025), *Food and You 2*, <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you-2> This data covers Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The Scottish Health Survey’s data on food insecurity shows a similar pattern to Food and You 2.

⁹ This measure is derived from the Family Resources Survey – the most recent data available at the time of writing for this survey was 2023/24.

¹⁰ A negative budget means that after paying for essentials, households have a deficit, often resulting in debt accumulation.

2023/24 to 4.00 million in 2024/25 - with further reductions projected for 2025/26 (to 3.80 million). As with previous figures the number of people in a negative budget remains far higher than pre-pandemic levels (3.5 million in 2019/20).¹¹

- People are now more confident about managing unexpected costs: In August 2023, close to six in 10 (57%) adults reported that their household would be able to afford an unexpected, but necessary, expense of £850. By August 2025 this had increased to 63% with a further increase to 65% in October 2025.¹²
- People are also less pessimistic about their likelihood of being able to save some money: In August 2022 almost half (48%) of adults reported that their household would be unable to save any money in the next 12 months. By August 2025 this had decreased to 36% with a further reduction to 31% in October 2025.¹³

What's driving recent changes in parcel numbers?

Many factors can contribute to reductions in the use of food banks, and some may play bigger roles in different parts of the UK, and within local communities. Based on a review of the available evidence, Trussell has identified the following factors (in order of magnitude) as being the main drivers of reduced use of food banks across the UK:

- Reductions in the rate of inflation, alongside a stabilised redundancy rate, have had the most substantive impact on driving the reduced use of food banks.
- After years of extremely high levels of need, food banks and their referral partners are at the limit of the support that they can provide. There are key capacity constraints in the advice sector, with the need for these services far outstripping provision, which mean that some people may not be able to get a referral to food banks. Food banks are also facing challenges in operating, particularly due to the cost of increasingly having to purchase food. This means some food banks have had to close locations or reduce the hours they are open for. Some food banks are also operating limits on the number of times that people can get support (most commonly up to six times in six months).
- There has been a rapid growth in the number of organisations and locations providing charitable food provision. This is particularly the case in the provision of social supermarkets. It is likely that this growth in support has displaced some use of food banks to these services. The evidence suggests it is unlikely that the growth in these services has had a significant impact on the underlying need for food banks.

¹¹ Citizens Advice, (2025), *The National Red Index 2025: negative budget households face a debt crisis like quicksand*, <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/policy/publications/the-national-red-index-2025-negative-budget-households-face-a-debt-crisis/>

¹² ONS, (2025), *Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: December 2025*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/publicopinionsandsocialtrendsgreatbritain/latest>

¹³ ONS, (2025), *Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: December 2025*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/publicopinionsandsocialtrendsgreatbritain/latest>

- Far more food banks in the Trussell community are now providing access to broader support for people coming to them – particularly through advice services. Evidence indicates that these services are improving the financial situation of the people supported by them, reducing their risk of needing to use food banks in the future. However, current advice provision at food banks does not have the capacity to address financial hardship at scale

An easing of cost of living pressures and fewer job losses are the main drivers of reduced food bank use

The rapid increase in the cost of essentials through inflation between late 2021 and the end of 2023 was a key driver of the increased use of food banks during that period.¹⁴ During this period the overall rate of annual CPI inflation peaked at 11.1%. Prices for key essentials like food and electricity, gas and other fuels rose at a far higher rate than this. Food prices rose by a peak of 19.6% in March 2023 – with a longer period of sustained increases than overall inflation – inflation on electricity, gas, and other fuels peaked at 90% in January 2023.¹⁵

These inflationary pressures were felt more acutely by low income households as they exposed years of income stagnation and below inflation increases to social security payments leading up to the cost of living crisis. Essential products like food and energy take up a larger proportion of low-income household's budgets and they often cannot reduce spending on these areas without incurring significant harm. Lower income households also have the fewest financial options to absorb price rises e.g. switching to cheaper items, access to savings, or access to credit cards, which may act as a buffer to unexpected price rises.¹⁶

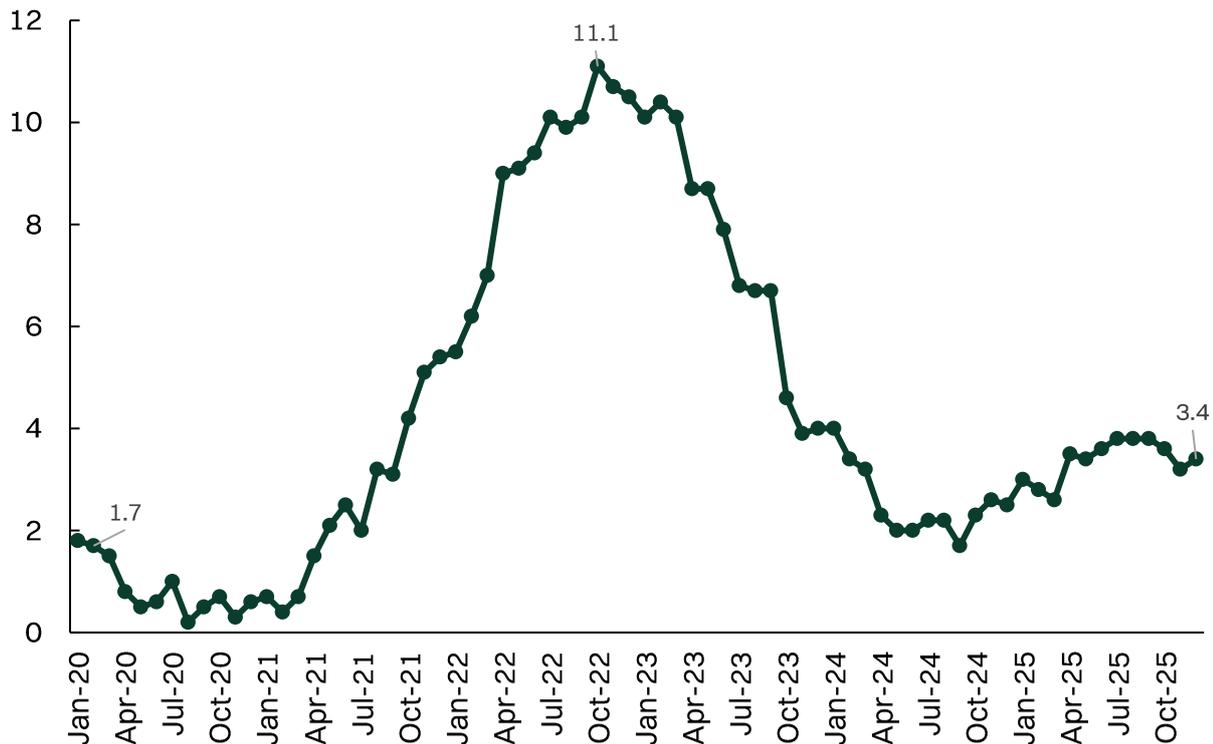
Since the 2023 peak, the overall inflation rate has reduced significantly to 3.4% in December 2025. Inflation on food has also decreased to 4.4% and inflation on fuels has fallen to 2.5% as of December 2025.¹⁷ While for the most part this means that prices aren't decreasing, they are not increasing at a pace that is as damaging or unmanageable as previously seen. This is likely to have played a substantive role in reducing the use of food banks in the Trussell community since 2023.

¹⁴ Bull, R, et al, (2023), *Hunger in the UK*, Trussell, <https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/2023-The-Trussell-Trust-Hunger-in-the-UK-report-web-updated-10Aug23.pdf>

¹⁵ ONS, (2026), *Consumer Price inflation, UK: December 2025*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/december2025>

¹⁶ NIESR, (2022), *The unequal impact of rising inflation*, <https://niesr.ac.uk/blog/unequal-impact-rising-inflation>

¹⁷ ONS, (2026), *Consumer Price inflation, UK: December 2025*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/december2025>

Figure 3 CPI inflation January 2020 – December 2025

Source: ONS – Consumer Price Inflation

Similarly, during the Covid-19 pandemic, job loss was identified as a significant driver of the rapid increase in people turning to food banks.¹⁸ Wider evidence has also shown a link between job loss and food insecurity.¹⁹

The financial impact of rapid changes to people's income through job loss can have short and medium term impacts:

- In the short term, for people who move from work and need to claim Universal Credit the income shock is likely to be significant – making it difficult to manage their finances. Universal Credit has one of the lowest 'income replacement rates' amongst high-income OECD countries.²⁰

¹⁸ Trussell, (2020), *Lockdown, Lifelines and the Long Haul Ahead*, <https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf>

¹⁹ See: Milovanska-Farrington, S, (2022), *Job loss and food insecurity during the Covid-19 pandemic*, Journal of economic studies, <https://www.emerald.com/jes/article-abstract/50/2/300/1118828/Job-loss-and-food-insecurity-during-the-Covid-19?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

Mabli, J, (2023), *Food insecurity transitions and changes in employment and earnings*, American Journal of Preventative Medicine, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379722005050>

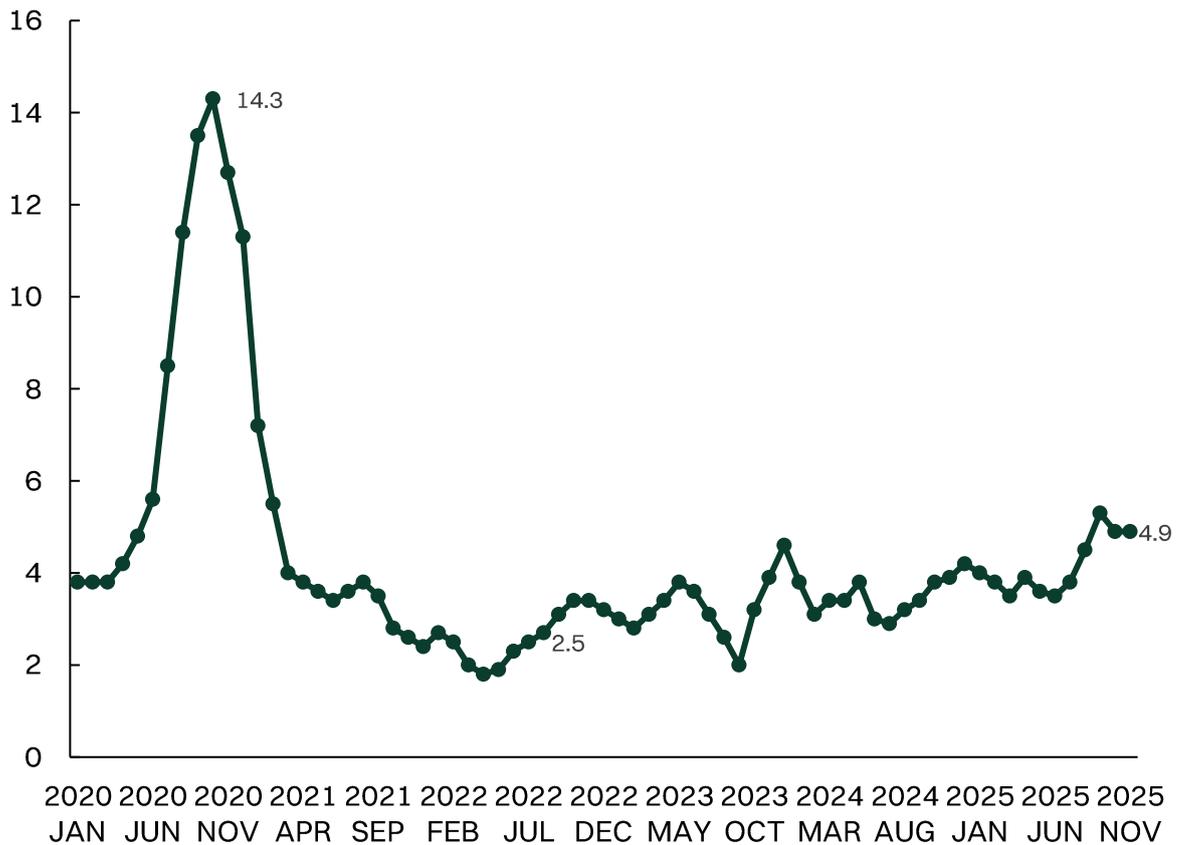
Raifman, J, Bor, J, and Venkataramani, A, (2021), *Association between receipt of unemployment insurance and food insecurity among people who lost employment during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the United States*, JAMA Network, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7402065/>

²⁰ Trussell and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, (2026), *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#:~:text=Social%20security->

- It is also likely to have medium term scarring effect on people's financial situation and capacity to return to work, which perpetuate someone's likelihood of needing to turn to a food bank beyond the initial period.²¹

The redundancy rate (the rate at which people lose their jobs) per 1,000 employees peaked across the UK in October 2020 (14.3) and remained elevated into early 2021. This rate has recovered in recent years, with the latest figures putting this at 4.9 in November 2025.²²

Figure 4 Redundancy rate – per 1,000 employees – ONS Labour Force Survey: ILO redundancy rate



Source: ONS – Labour Force Survey

As more time has elapsed from 2020 and 2021, when the largest number of jobs were lost, it is reasonable to suggest that the medium term impacts of job loss have eased. This is likely to have contributed to the reduced use of food banks.

Taken together the decreases in the rate of inflation, and fewer job losses are the main drivers in the reduced use of food banks between 2023 and 2025.

[.Guarantee%20our%20Essentials:%20reforming%20Universal%20Credit%20to%20ensure%20we%20can,%2C%20but%20it%20doesn't.&text=When%20life%20events%20such%20as,to%20repay%20debts%20to%20DWP.](#)

²¹ Weekes, T, Ball, E, and Padgett, S, (2025), *The Cost of Hunger and Hardship – final report*, Trussell, https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/cost_of_hunger_and_hardship_june25.pdf

²² ONS, (2026), *LFS: ILO redundancy rate: UK:All:SA*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/redundancies/timeseries/beir/lms>

The positive impact of policy change on food bank use has been mitigated by other decisions

We know that policy change can have a positive impact on food bank use. Previously, we have seen reductions in the use of food banks due to increased income through social security. The £20 uplift to Universal Credit between April 2020 and October 2021 led to reductions in both food insecurity²³ and child poverty.²⁴ Trussell has also reported on a reduction in the use of food banks during the months in which the UK Government's Cost of Living Payments were made to people in receipt of means tested social security payments.²⁵



It's interesting, what we found is when the government have given out additional money in terms of Universal Credit, we find a reduction in referrals soon afterwards. So that to us vindicates the fact that people don't come to us to scrounge, they come to us in absolute need, you know.



Chair of Trustees of a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 2026

Since 2023 policy change, particularly the uprating of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) in line with local rents in April 2024, the introduction of the Fair Repayment Rate from April 2025, and the introduction of Breakfast Clubs (early adopters from April 2025) will undoubtedly have had a positive impact on people's ability to afford the essentials, reducing their risk of needing to turn to a food bank. Without the introduction of these policies, we would have seen far more people needing to turn to food banks in 2024 and 2025 respectively.

Existing support such as the Household Support Fund and the Scottish Child Payment will also have prevented more people from needing to turn to food banks. Although there were no changes in 2024 or 2025 which would have increased the impact of these policies since 2023.

However, the impact of these positive changes to policy has been mitigated by the growth in the impact of the two-child limit in this period, the short-term challenges of migrating to Universal Credit, and the decision to freeze LHA from April 2025. Overall, during this period it is most likely that policy related to social security has had a net neutral impact on the change in the use of food banks.

²³ Welfare at a Social Distance (2021), *Food insecurity and the welfare state: Food insecurity amongst benefit claimants in the UK*, <https://www.distantwelfare.co.uk/food-insecurity-report>

²⁴ Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University (2022), Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs, 2020/21, <https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty/>

²⁵ Bull, R, et al (2023), *Hunger in the UK*, Trussell, <https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/2023-The-Trussell-Trust-Hunger-in-the-UK-report-web-updated-10Aug23.pdf>

Food banks and partners have contributed through access to wider support, but operational difficulties are also likely to have been a factor in recent decreases

There is increasing evidence that additional support provided by food banks is playing a role in reducing food bank use

Food banks continue to do all they can to support people in their communities and in recent years provision of additional support has substantively increased. This is particularly the case for the provision of access to some form of financial inclusion support – that is, support or advice on money matters. Between 2020/21 and 2024/25 the proportion of food banks offering advice services in the Trussell community increased from 28% to 92%. More recently the number of people supported to access advice has increased from 37,300 in 2022/23 to 85,000 in 2024/25.

Trussell's administrative data on the impact of this advice shows that the average financial gain for people supported was £1,000 in 2023/24. An independent evaluation of the advice and support services provided by food banks highlighted that this support was making a tangible difference to people's finances, with over one in four (28%) people using these services saying that it reduced their need to use a food bank.²⁶

The impact of financial inclusion services in reducing referrals was repeatedly mentioned by food banks as a factor in the reduced use of their food banks – particularly when it prevented people from needing to return to a food bank.



We've got a financial inclusion project running, that's been really, really successful. So, we have an outreach advisor...in each of [our] sessions. So, when [people] come in, it's not a matter of giving them a phone number and saying, you know, you can phone these for further advice. They actually can sit and have a face-to-face meeting straight away. So that is actually quite significant, I think, in that this last year we've been running it and that's the first time we've seen a significant decrease in the referrals.



Chair of Trustees of a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 2026

However, current advice provision at food banks does not have the capacity to address financial hardship at scale. The overall use of advice services at food banks in the Trussell community remains low relative to headline food bank use. In 2024/25 85,000 people were supported to access

²⁶ 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>

advice services, compared to over 465,000 households supported with emergency food. There are also concerns from food banks, in the context of continuing high levels of need and funding challenges, about how sustainable these advice services are.

“

We have good results, good income maximisation and so on. I think, that is one of my big concerns at the moment is how we keep that going, because it's just so integral to what we do...So that's our fundraiser's kind of main focus at the moment is what we do with that.

”

Manager of a food bank in the Trussell community, Scotland, 2026

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 independent evaluation on advice services supports this - 38% of people supported said that their likelihood of needing support from a food bank was about the same after receiving advice.²⁷ Food banks felt that that even when they had worked with people to maximise their incomes and receive additional support, this wasn't always enough to stop them needing to use the food bank. This highlights the insufficiency of Universal Credit and the wider social security system.

“

And you know you [families] might have a parent working as well, but they've looked at every means possible and it's just not going to get any better because the benefit system is not at a level that supports modern day living, is it?

”

Staff member at a food bank in the Trussell community, England, 2026

Alongside directly facilitating the provision of advice services, food banks have also worked with their referral partners to emphasise the importance of additional support and signposting before, or in addition to, a food bank referral. Conversations with food banks who have seen a decrease in the number of emergency food parcels distributed this year often referred to improved relationships with referral partners as being a factor in explaining this change. In practice this will often mean that people referred to food banks are signposted or provided with additional support before they use a food bank or soon after.

Work by food banks in Scotland to develop pathways to cash and advice in eight local authorities across Scotland, is showing an impact – an evaluation of the project reports evidence that some people supported through the project have used food banks less.²⁸

²⁷ 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>

²⁸ Rocket Science, (2025), *Trussell: Pathways to Advice and Cash Scotland (PACS)*, Trussell, [trussell_pacs_evaluation.pdf](#)



So, yes, it's about streamlining it, working with the people with lived experience, working with the businesses, working with referrals. Because our mission statement is ending poverty one person at a time, not ending food poverty. So, that's why we need everybody else to work with us



Staff member at a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 2026

Successive years of incredibly high need alongside increasing constraints on delivery have led to operational difficulties – with some food banks unable to continue to provide the same levels of support

As discussed above, food banks continue to provide a critical service in their community and work tirelessly to innovate and find proactive ways of improving access to the right support for people. However, the scale of support they are providing has become overwhelming for food banks – particularly after successive years of incredibly high need for their services.

Alongside these new services and the innovations food banks have made, food banks we spoke to described how they are also having to make difficult decisions to change how they deliver their services. These changes may reduce the amount of support that they are able to provide. In winter 2025 40% of food banks told us that they currently had voucher or parcel limits in place. The most common limit was six vouchers within a six-month period, although some food banks operate a limit of three vouchers per month. Other food banks have had to reduce the opening hours they are able to provide and have had to close locations that they operate, to protect their core support provision. Taken together the operational challenges in continuing to meet extremely high levels of use have partially driven the reduced use of food banks in recent years.



Our numbers have decreased over the last year, this was due to us implementing a strict six voucher rule (six in six months). We did this because donations had dropped off so significantly that we were concerned the food bank would run out of food, our numbers have decreased by 30% since implementation of the voucher limit.



Food bank in the Trussell Community, England, September Survey 2024²⁹

These operational changes should be seen in the context of clear financial difficulties for food banks. In conversations with food banks, they described how public food donations have dropped in recent years, and with use still far higher than previous levels this is presenting operational challenges. Food banks highlight that their wider communities have been affected by the cost-of-living crisis, and that donations have fallen, leading them to need to increase their own purchasing of food. These

²⁹ The September Food Bank Network Survey is an annual survey of the Trussell community of food banks that gives us the opportunity to hear from food banks and build a picture of the provision and activity across the community.

funding challenges are reflected in Trussell's latest survey of food banks -in winter 2025 two in five (40%) food banks were concerned that they wouldn't be able to cover operating costs over the next 12 months.



Yes, it's definitely a lot busier and we can see that as well and the stock that we're having to buy in, we're buying in a lot more stock. You know, the general public are amazing and without their donations, you know, we would struggle, but it's a lot less than what we've had in the past. And I know that's I know that's the same across the board and all food banks are the same. But yeah, we're definitely having to buy in more stock



Staff member at a food bank in the Trussell community, Scotland, 2026

Food banks who have seen a decrease in their number of referrals over this last year, also told us that it hasn't necessarily felt like there has been a substantial change in the support they were providing or how busy it feels. In some cases, drops in referral numbers only equate to a handful fewer people needing to use the food bank. Also, where referral numbers have dropped as a result of financial inclusion or wraparound support provided by the food bank, the time, energy, and cost of providing this additional support has often stretched food banks even further.



At times, we are absolutely on our knees because things are so very, very busy or, you know, we are doing other things out in the community to keep the food bank on the map, to provide other activities for people who are living in perpetual poverty



Chief Officer of a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 2026

People are referred to food banks in the Trussell community by a range of services, and frequently through advice services. Alongside the challenges food banks are facing there are currently critical capacity issues in the delivery of advice services. This is leaving some people unable to receive advice or to be referred to food banks when they need that support. Evidence from the advice sector highlights recent increases in individuals and families seeking free and independent advice, alongside major recruitment and retention difficulties of staff and volunteers. The average advice service needs three more advisers to meet demand and has lost three staff or volunteers in the past year.³⁰

These issues came through strongly in our conversations with food banks, who warned about how increasing pressure on the statutory sector and local support services is creating both additional pressure on food banks to support people and meaning some people aren't able to get the support they need.

³⁰ Advice UK, (2025), *Staff shortages undermine access to life-saving free, independent advice*, <https://www.adviceuk.org.uk/2025/10/20/staff-shortages-undermine-access-to-life-saving-free-independent-advice/#:~:text=Despite%20the%20drastic%20increase%20in,giving%20them%20reasons%20to%20stay>.

“

I think another thing that we are seeing, is we know the statutory sector is struggling, they are understaffed, their tight on budget.... So, we do think the statutory bodies' struggles and budget problems and staffing issues is impacting on their clients as well.

”

Secretary of a food bank in the Trussell community, Scotland, 2026

Provision of other forms of charitable food support has rapidly increased, with some use of food banks displaced to these services

There has been significant growth in other charitable food support, particularly through an expansion in the provision of social supermarkets and pantries, over the last 3-5 years. Administrative data from a variety of the largest social supermarket networks highlights a substantive growth in the number of locations operated since 2021 (**Figure 5**).

This growth in other forms of charitable food support is likely to have driven some of the reduced use of food banks in the Trussell community as use is displaced to these services. Our Hunger in the UK data shows that many people using food banks do co-use other forms of charitable food provision. Of people who had used a food bank in the last 12 months, 50% had also used a social supermarket or food pantry.³¹

In conversations with food banks, we heard concern that the growth in other forms of charitable food provision may be displacing the use of food banks to these services - with a risk that reduced food bank use is interpreted as a reduction in overall need.

“

I don't know whether what we see through the doors is the true extent of what's going on in the community. So, there is a big question mark over that, like, has [need] actually gone down or is it just because, you know, people are going to all different food sources.

”

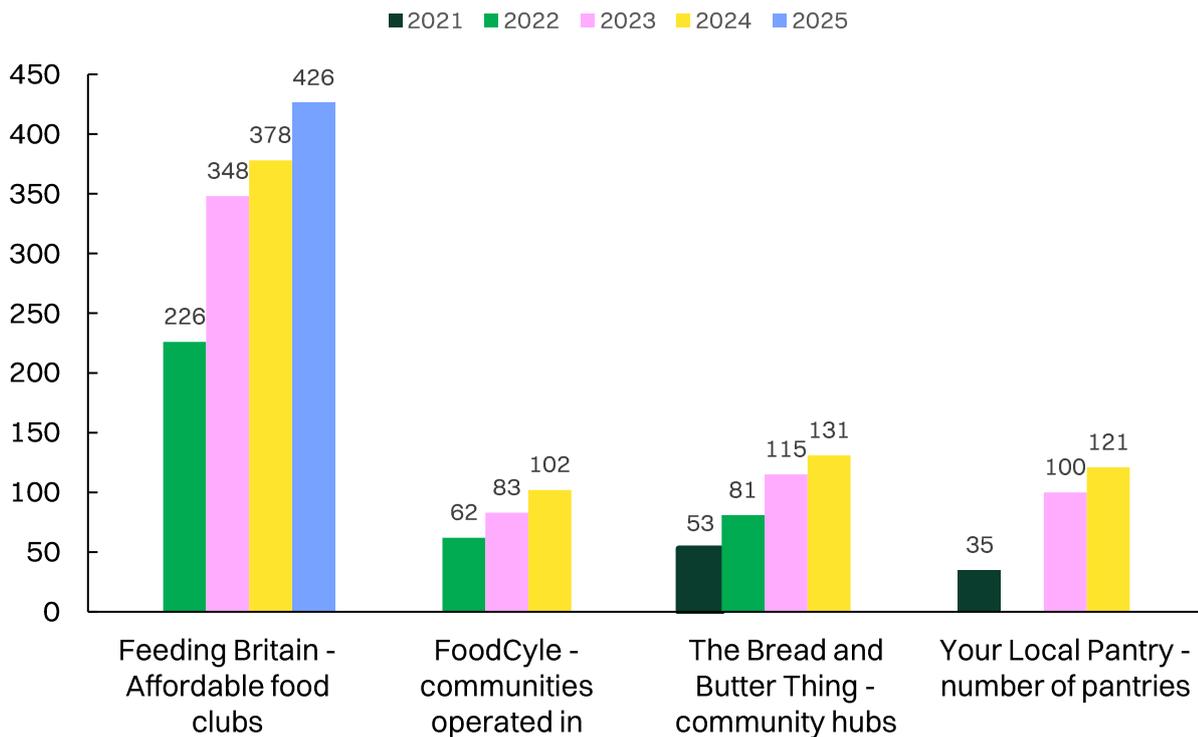
Staff member at a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 2026

Indeed, there is little evidence that the displacement of use of food banks to other forms of charitable food support will have a significant impact on the actual underlying need for food banks. Evidence shows that most people using other forms of support remain at high risk of needing to turn to a food bank in the future. The use of food banks for people using both food banks and food clubs most

³¹ Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in the UK 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

commonly stays the same (53%) or increases (17%) after joining a food club.³² Further, the vast majority of people (77%) using Affordable Food Clubs are food insecure.³³ This indicates that charitable food provision, regardless of the model used, is alleviating some of the impacts of hunger and hardship, rather than solving it.

Figure 5 Change in number of locations operated / communities operated in by social supermarket models from 2021 to 2025



Source: Feeding Britain, FoodCycle, The Bread and Butter Thing, and Your Local Pantry - impact / annual reports

Use of food banks remains extremely high with some people at higher risk of needing support

- The nature of food bank use has changed in recent years. Food banks are now supporting people with entrenched levels of hardship, who require more frequent support.
- Where improvements in food bank use have been seen it is most likely that these have been for people who are newly experiencing or in shallower forms of hardship. People on the lowest

³² Blake, M, (2026), *Building Resilience: The role of food clubs in UK food security*, Comic Relief, https://assets.ctfassets.net/zsfivwzfgl3t/5Nkxh11c3EiNcw2EwfIDMG/3b835a7cef5fb0f7b7a7bbb6a60c280d/Building_Resilience_The_Role_of_Food_Clubs_in_UK_Food_Security_Full_Report.pdf

³³ Feeding Britain, (2025), *Feeding Hope - The impact of affordable food clubs on nutrition and wellbeing*, <https://feedingbritain.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Feeding-Hope.pdf>

incomes continue to find it difficult to afford essentials and inequality of living standards and income has grown.

- Recent decreases have been seen across the UK. But the scale of these changes and the longer term trends vary. London has seen the biggest increases since 2019, and Scotland is the sole nation / region to see decreases since 2019.
- Children, and particularly young children continue to be disproportionately supported by food banks. Support for families with three or more children makes up a substantive proportion of the parcels provided by food banks – welcome change on the two-child limit will hopefully begin to reverse this.
- Food banks are now providing far more support for pensioners than they previously did. Increased housing costs relative to their income, poor health, and challenges in saving for later life are likely to be driving this.
- Insufficient incomes, particularly through the social security system are the main driver of the use of food banks. Health problems also remain a notable driver, while reasons for use vary by the sources of people's income – particularly for people who do not have any income coming in.

Food banks are supporting people trapped in severe hardship – as many people have been left behind as others get back on their feet

The positive improvements in people's financial circumstances, and the reduction seen in food bank use in the Trussell community are hugely welcomed. However, food banks continue to tell us that they are 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 and living in increasingly challenging situations, which are putting immense pressure on them.

There are strong signs that food bank use in the UK is being increasingly driven by people who need to return to a food bank, rather than people who are using food banks for the first time. Overall, just over half of people referred to a food bank in the Trussell community in 2025 had not used a food bank in the Trussell community before. But this proportion has fallen from 64% to 54% between 2019 and 2025.

Signs of entrenched hardship are also reflected in the increase in the number of people who are having to return to food banks more frequently between 2019 and 2025. Over that period, the number of people referred to a food bank four or more times within that year increased by 56%. This was far higher than the increase for people referred once (18%) and people referred two to three times (24%).

This increase in entrenched hardship, reflected in more frequent need to use food banks, is a core component of the increase in use since 2019 and suggests that provision by food banks in the Trussell community is being driven to a greater extent by people needing to return to a food bank, rather than people needing support for the first time or once in a year.

In 2025, just over half of the families (54%) 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 minority of people (3%) made over 10 visits to the food bank to access emergency food.

These figures are supported by data on the average (mean) number of visits between 2019 and 2025 – this shows an increase from 2.2 visits in 2019 to 2.6 visits in 2025.

In conversations with food banks, they detailed how the situations people are presenting for support with are becoming increasingly complex and difficult to unpick. Food banks also highlighted that they are supporting more entrenched severe hardship in their communities. This was particularly seen through people needing to use the food bank repeatedly for longer periods of time.

“

I would say we are having more complex issues presenting, and for our financial inclusion project that makes it harder to unpick [the support they need]. I think stats wise we are seeing, as I said, more complex cases and entrenched users of the food bank.

”

Staff member at a food bank in the Trussell community, England, 2026

Food banks also told us how the stories they hear are becoming increasingly difficult, and the impact that this is having on their staff and volunteers.

“

And of course, like the staff, the volunteers, they're frontline. So, what I have become very conscious of, especially the last maybe six or nine months, is their mental wellbeing, because it's emotionally tough...So all my staff know that they can self-refer if they need counselling at any moment, no judgment, they can come and talk to me, I'll refer them. The stories are getting a lot more...Gruesome, if you like.

”

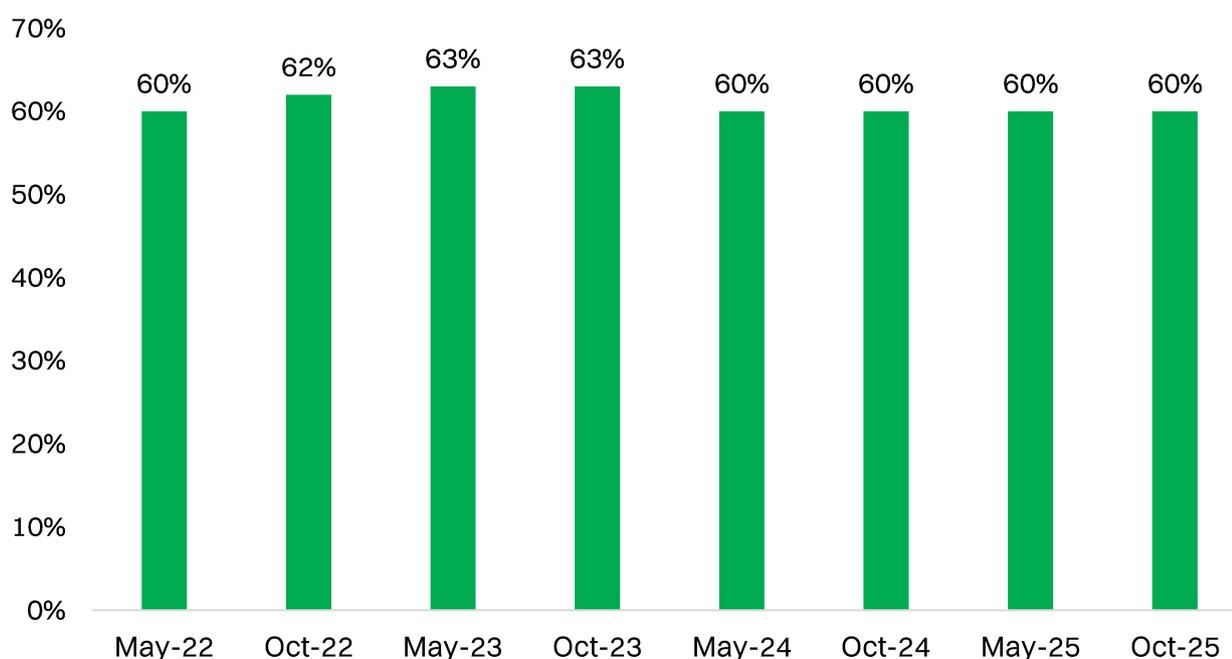
Staff member at a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 2026

Wider evidence also suggests that many people are being left behind with little progress on their living standards – while others see improvements. The evidence suggests that the improvements in both food bank use and the wider underlying need for food banks discussed [previously](#) have been primarily for people in shallower forms of hardship and/or people newly facing hardship due to the cost of living crisis.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's (JRF) cost of living tracker captures the experiences of households with incomes in the bottom 40% across the UK. As [Figure 6](#) highlights there has been little progress in the proportion of low income households going without essentials over the last three years. In late 2025 60% of low income households were going without essential items, only a slight decrease from the 2023 peak of 63%. This represents just a 5% decrease in the number of low income households going without essentials between 2023 and 2025. This is far smaller than the

20% reduction in the number of adults going without food across the whole population reported [previously](#). This suggests that reductions in food insecurity are likely taking place among households in shallower or more recent forms of hardship, whilst the underlying position of many on low incomes and their ability to afford a range of essential items, is not improving to any great extent.

Figure 6 Proportion of low-income households in the UK going without essentials, May 2022 – October 2025



Source: JRF - Cost of living tracker

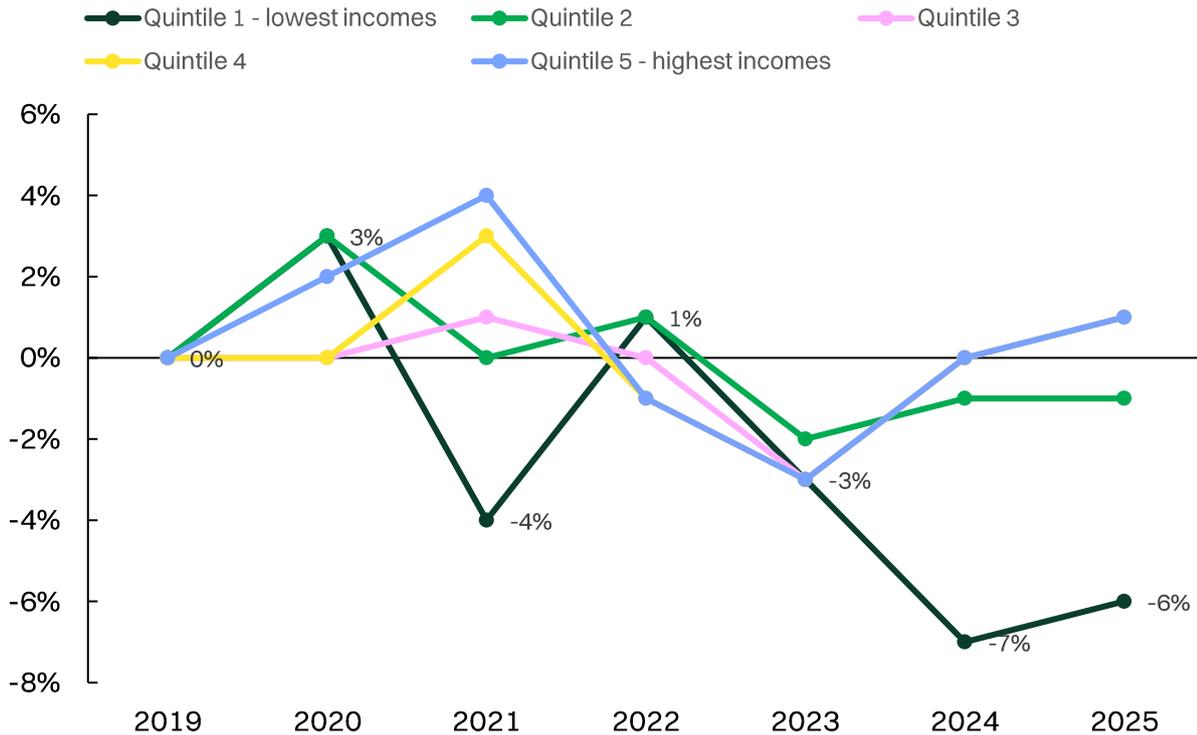
This is likely due to increasing income inequality since 2023. [Figure 7](#) shows that since 2023 real disposable income, for households in the bottom 20% of incomes, has fallen far faster than other households higher up the income distribution.³⁴ This has been driven by rising housing costs, which reduce disposable incomes across the distribution, but the impact is felt most by the poorest households as they spend the highest share of income on housing costs.

The Resolution Foundation have also highlighted how living standards for the poorest families have fallen faster than richer families between 2019 and 2025 – perpetuating existing inequality in living standards. This is particularly through the disproportionate impact of inflation – annualised inflation experienced by the poorest families ran at a rate that was 0.7 percentage points faster than for the richest families, serving to ensure already stretched incomes were able to cover even less of a household's essential costs.³⁵

Figure 7 Real percentage change in household disposable income after housing costs by population quintiles, April 2019 – April 2025

³⁴ Milne, B, et al, (2025), *A year of Labour but no progress: JRF's cost of living tracker, summer 2025*, JRF, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/cost-of-living/jrfs-cost-of-living-tracker-summer-2025>

³⁵ Resolution Foundation (2026), *Unsung Britain: A portrait of the country's poorer half*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/unsung-britain/>



Source: JRF analysis using the IPPR tax and benefit microsimulation model. Modelling from October 2024 onwards based on OBR forecast data rather than outturns.

With people more commonly needing to repeatedly use food banks and increasing inequality in income and living standards, it is clear that unacceptable levels of severe hardship are becoming entrenched in our communities. Where improvements have been seen, they are most likely for people in shallower or more recent forms of hardship, and it is likely that we have not made significant progress on pre-pandemic levels of food bank need.

Recent decreases are common across the UK, but the scale of change and long term trends vary

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. The factors that we identified [earlier](#) as driving recent changes in food bank use may scale up or down depending on the local context. This may include local, regional and national variations in policy, changes to local employment or demographics, provision of advice services, as well as funding for the provision of alternative charitable food provision in an area.

This variation is seen in the experience of food banks. While most (83%) food banks in the Trussell community saw decreases in the amount of support provided between 2024 and 2025 a substantive minority of food banks reported an increase in this period (17%).

As [Table 1](#) showed, there are recent decreases in the number of parcels provided between 2024 and 2025 across the UK; in Northern Ireland (-17%), Wales (-14%), Scotland (-13%), and England (-11%).

Despite these recent decreases the level of emergency food provision remains significantly higher in 2025 than pre-pandemic levels in Northern Ireland (60%), England (56%) and Wales (19%). This reflects the data on underlying need presented [previously](#). In Scotland, the picture is different when we look back at the pre-pandemic year of 2019, with emergency food parcel distribution -8% lower this year than in 2019. In Scotland levels of food insecurity in 2024 were also more similar to the 2019 levels - indicating that while levels have returned to pre-pandemic figures, there has been limited progress on living standards in the last 7 years.

There is also a wide variation in the change in emergency food parcels distributed across England ([Table 2](#)). London is the only region where parcel distribution peaked in 2024, rather than in 2023 (as was the case for all other nations and regions). In 2024, 462,800 emergency food parcels were distributed in London by food banks in the Trussell community. While 2025 parcel distribution was still down in London compared to 2024, we saw the smallest decrease (-4%) of any region. Total parcels in the capital have more than doubled compared to 2019 (129%). Food banks in Yorkshire and the Humber have also seen a larger increase in the support provided since 2019 (86%).

Food banks in the North East saw an increase of 11% in the number of parcels distributed in 2025, in comparison to the pre-pandemic year of 2019. However, parcels distributed to support children declined marginally from 2019 to 2025 (-1%). The North East has also seen the largest decrease across all the English regions since 2024 (-21%).

As discussed above, the differences in the changing use of food banks across the English regions does not necessarily reflect higher or lower levels of need in those areas. It may be that the use of food banks is being picked up by different charitable food providers in the area, or changes to services in some areas may 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: 2025, compared to 2019 and 2024.

	2025			Percentage change from 2019			Percentage change from 2024		
	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total
East Midlands	82,797	42,539	125,336	40%	17%	31%	-15%	-21%	-17%
East of England	186,468	109,035	295,503	71%	55%	65%	-14%	-16%	-15%
London	291,416	151,014	442,430	137%	116%	129%	-3%	-6%	-4%
North East	73,162	35,779	108,941	19%	-1%	11%	-19%	-24%	-21%
North West	196,127	103,349	299,476	30%	9%	22%	-10%	-17%	-13%

South East	181,706	102,612	284,318	58%	43%	53%	-10%	-17%	-13%
South West	149,477	78,258	227,735	58%	38%	50%	-5%	-11%	-7%
West Midlands	150,800	78,473	229,273	45%	33%	41%	-7%	-12%	-9%
Yorkshire and The Humber	125,841	65,253	191,094	95%	72%	86%	-12%	-17%	-14%
England	1,437,794	766,312	2,204,106	63%	44%	56%	-9%	-15%	-11%

Source: Trussell administrative data. See [Table 1](#) for comparison of England to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Children, and particularly young children, continue to be disproportionately supported by food banks

Despite decreases across the UK in the number of parcels provided for children last year (-15%), the distribution of support provided by the Trussell community continues to be heavily weighted towards children and their families.

Comparing the distribution of food parcels by age to the distribution of people by age in the UK ([Figure 8](#)), we see a notable difference for children aged 0-16. The proportion of parcels distributed for children aged 0-16 (34%) was almost double their population share across the UK (19%).³⁶ In 2025, one in four (24%) parcels provided by food banks were for younger children aged 0-11 - despite them making up just 13% of people across the UK.

These figures show that, at a crucial time in a child's development, far too many children are needing support from a food bank. The experience of growing up in a household experiencing severe hardship can have profound impacts on children's health, wellbeing, education and future economic opportunities.³⁷ It also puts unmanageable pressure on parents, who often have to make decisions on whether to take on debt or leave bills unpaid, or let their child go without something like a school trip - which would isolate them from their peers.³⁸

³⁶ ONS, (2024), *Estimates of the population for UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalescotlandandnorthernireland>

³⁷ Weekes, T, Ball, E, and Padgett, S, (2025), *The Cost of Hunger and Hardship - final report*, Trussell, https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/cost_of_hunger_and_hardship_june25.pdf

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2026), *UK Poverty 2026*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2026-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>

³⁸ Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in the UK 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

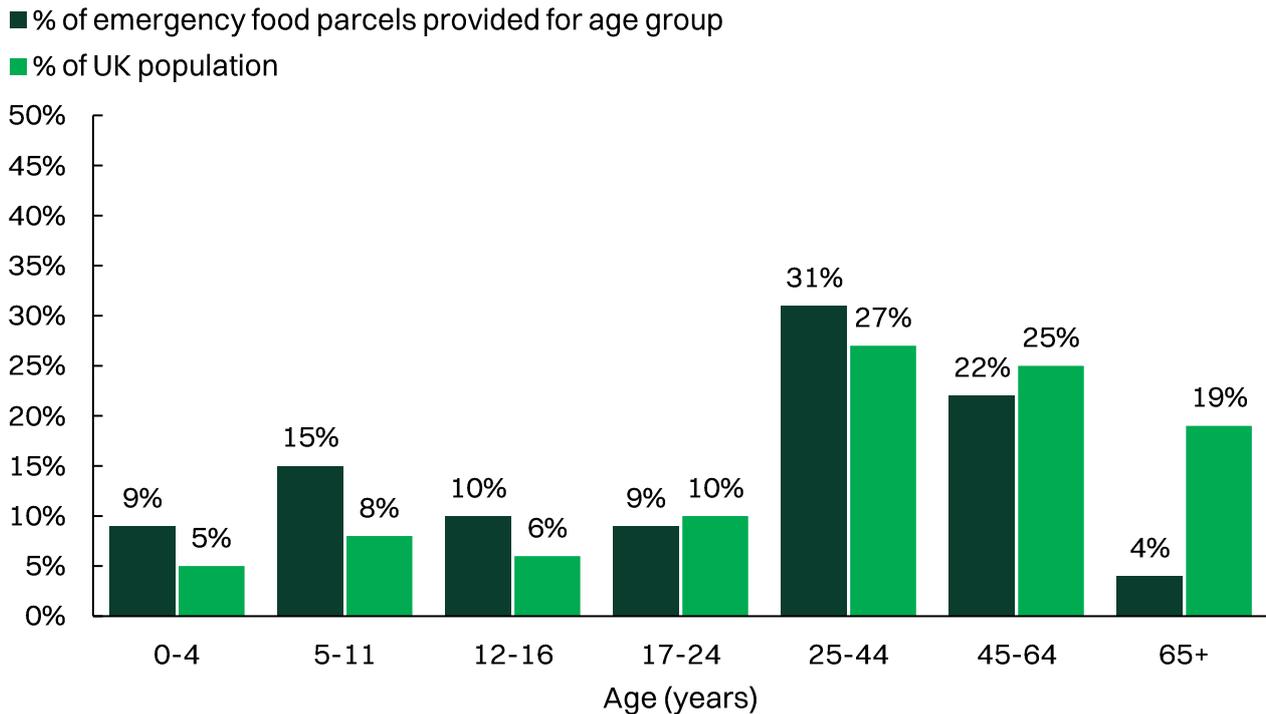


We have to be cold and all be freezing as the heating is so much... me and my husband have gone hungry to make sure our kids have one meal a day.



Person claiming Universal Credit interviewed in February 2025³⁹

Figure 8 Percentage of emergency food parcels distributed for different age groups compared to population distribution, UK: 2025



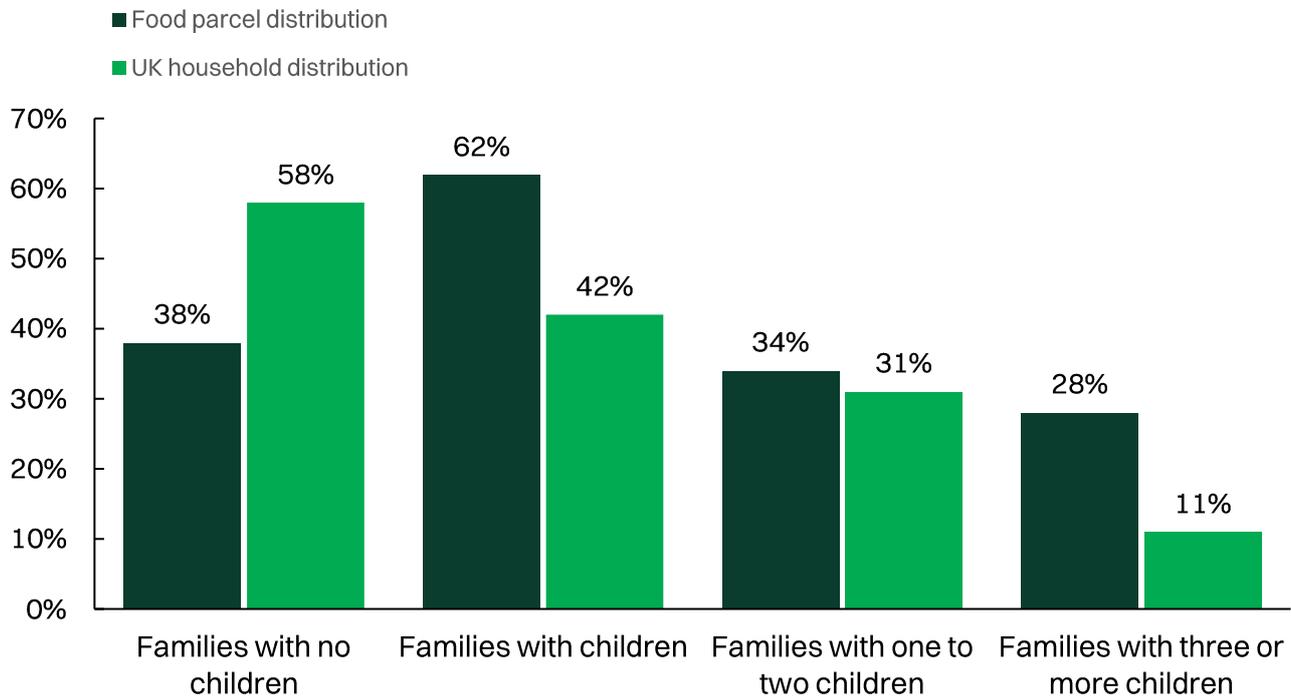
Source: Trussell administrative data and ONS population estimates.

Unlike the pre-pandemic period, growth in parcels for children no longer outstrips or matches the growth in parcels for adults. The latest six-year trend (2019-2025) shows a 51% increase for adults and a 34% increase for children in parcels provided. This is a trend we will continue to monitor over the next year.

When taking a whole household view, the majority (62%) of support provided by food banks in the Trussell community is for families with children (**Figure 9**). This is despite people living in these families making up just 42% of the UK population. This over-representation is largely 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 (28%) was well over double their population share (11%) in 2025. For families with one to two children the proportion was similar, with 34% of parcels distributed to families of this size and 31% of people living in families of this size in the UK population.

³⁹ An online survey by YouGov of 1,209 adults (16+) currently claiming Universal Credit. Fieldwork was undertaken 21 January – 3 February 2025

Figure 9 Percentage of emergency food parcels distributed by family type, UK, compared to percentage of UK population living within each family type: 2025



Source: Trussell administrative data and Households Below Average Income dataset.

Our Hunger in the UK research outlined how the number of children in a household matters to their risk of food insecurity and needing to turn to a charitable food provider for support. Over one in five (22%) households with three or more children had used some form of charitable food provision in 2024, far higher than the rates for households with one child (9%) and two children (12%).⁴⁰ The experience of families with three or more children is driven in part by the continued implementation of the two-child limit in this period.⁴¹

We warmly welcome the decision to remove the two-child limit from April 2026, which is projected to protect hundreds of thousands of children from growing up experiencing severe hardship.⁴² We will be monitoring the impact the change to this policy has on emergency food parcel distribution over the coming year.

⁴⁰ Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in the UK 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

⁴¹ This is a policy introduced in 2017 which prevents families from claiming Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit for more than two children (depending on the age of the third child) and affects families who are in work as well as families where no adult is working.

⁴² Weekes, T, Ball, E, and Padgett, S, (2025), *Cost of Hunger and Hardship – final report*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/cost-of-hunger-and-hardship-final-report>

Food banks now providing far more support for pensioners



We're gradually, not just this year, but we're gradually seeing a few more older people. I think it's widely known that older people are less likely to come forward for support, but we are gradually seeing, you know, more than we did.



Manager of a food bank in the Trussell community, Scotland, 2026

Pensioners remain far less likely to experience severe hardship, or to have needed to use a food bank than children or working age adults.⁴³ However, there are concerning signs of a resurgence in pensioner hardship. Since 2013/14 there has been a 31% increase in the number of pensioners experiencing severe hardship.⁴⁴ More recently, the number of pensioners experiencing food insecurity increased by 83% between 2019/20 and 2023/24- a far higher increase than that seen for children (50%) or working age adults (48%).⁴⁵

While it is from a low base, and they are still significantly under-represented relative to their share of the UK population (see [Figure 8](#)), there has been a rapid increase in emergency food provision for people aged over 65 since 2019. In 2025, 90,400 parcels were distributed for someone aged 65 and over. This is over three times the number provided in 2019 when 26,000 parcels were distributed.

As seen in [Table 3](#), the rate of growth in the number of parcels provided for people over 65 is by far the highest growth rate for any age group between 2019 and 2025.⁴⁶

Table 3 Percentage increase in the number of parcels by age group, UK: 2019 – 2025

Age	Percentage increase from 2019
0-4	24%
5-11	29%
12-16	56%
17-24	53%

⁴³ Weekes, T, et al, (2024), *The cost of hunger and hardship - interim report*, Trussell, https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/Cost%20of%20hunger%20and%20hardship_Interim%20report%202024_4.pdf

⁴⁴ Weekes, T, et al, (2024), *The cost of hunger and hardship - interim report*, Trussell, https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/Cost%20of%20hunger%20and%20hardship_Interim%20report%202024_4.pdf

⁴⁵ DWP, (2026), *Households Below Average income*, Stat-Xplore

⁴⁶ 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 2025 have been recoded to the pre-2023 codes.

25-64	43%
65+	247%

Source: Trussell administrative data.

Our Hunger in the UK research highlighted some of the differences between pensioners referred to food banks and pensioners across the UK. Pensioners referred to a food bank were more likely to be renting, and less likely to own their home in comparison to pensioners in the general population (18% owned their homes outright, compared to 79% of pensioners in the general population). The majority of pensioners referred to food banks were disabled (69%), twice the rate for pensioners in the general population (34%). In addition, pensioners referred to a food bank were more likely to live alone (73% vs 32%), lack family support (23% vs 8%) and to be socially isolated (25% vs 4%) than pensioners across the UK.⁴⁷

These patterns chime with wider evidence which suggests that people facing hardship earlier in life limits their ability to save, and compounds hardship into older age.⁴⁸ The data likely also reflects established findings highlighting how the lack of affordable housing, increasing risk of being disabled, and inadequacies in social security for pensioners are increasing the financial strain faced by older people.⁴⁹

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

“

...the level of need we see it shows that too many people are simply, they don't have enough income to afford the basics. So again, banging our same drum, guarantee the essentials.

”

Staff member at a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 2026

Referral data from food banks in the Trussell community continues to support wider evidence that the main reason people need to use a food bank is because their incomes are too low and are insufficient to cover the cost of essentials and often drives people into unmanageable debt (72% of referrals).

Food banks were clear in our conversations with them that they are supporting people managing incredibly tight budgets, where often there is nothing left to cut back on. A lack of income was the biggest driver of the use of food banks, who frequently referenced how incomes have not kept up with the cost of living.

⁴⁷ Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in the UK 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

⁴⁸ Independent Age, (2022), *Poverty in later life*, <https://www.independentage.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/IA%20Poverty%20in%20later%20life%20report%20Jan2022.pdf>

⁴⁹ Independent Age, (2025), *Too little, too late*, https://www.independentage.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/Too_little_too_late_report_Independent_Age.pdf

“

People are coming in, sitting down and they're going through budgeting and they literally cannot save any more money. So, you know, how are you supposed to kind of move on from that? You know, it's crazy.

”

Staff member at a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 2026

Table 4 Reasons for referral for people supported, UK: 2025

Reason for referral	% of referrals with reason selected
Income or debt	72%
Health	22%
Issue with social security payments	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.

Most people referred to food banks in the Trussell community are in receipt of some form of income from social security, with the level of these payments being a major contributor to people being unable to afford essentials.⁵⁰ Food banks commonly described how income from social security payments was too often insufficient to meet people's basic needs. Food banks are seeing families whose social security payments are just not enough to cover their day to day costs, leaving them trapped and unable to move out of hardship.

“

85% of the people we support, their sole income is benefit...So...you know, the amount of income someone gets on Universal Credit not being enough... is it feels very much like almost that we're subsidising the sort of welfare system and subsidising the DWP because the vast, vast, vast majority of the people we help, their income is Universal Credit or some other form of benefit”

”

Manager of a food bank in the Trussell community, Scotland, 2026

⁵⁰ Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in the UK 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

Inadequate income, particularly through the social security system, was often coupled with issues with social security payments such as long waits, delays or sanctions which affect a significant minority of referrals to food banks (17%). Ongoing issues with the design of the social security system were frequently mentioned by the food banks we spoke to. In particular, the five-week wait for the first Universal Credit payment, which for some people is stretching to as long as eight weeks. This is often leaving people with huge gaps in income, often at times of hardship and acute need.



For us, the number one thing is benefits. Benefits delays, benefits sanctions, waiting for the first payments.



Staff member at a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 2026

Changes in work hours or unemployment affected 6% of referrals to food banks in the Trussell community in 2025. Most households referred to food banks are not in work. However, our Hunger in the UK data shows that a significant and increasing minority are. Three in 10 (30%) people referred to food banks in 2024 were in working households, an increase from 2022 (24%) showing how, increasingly, work is not providing reliable protection from, or a route out of, severe hardship. Poor quality and insecure work can push people into severe hardship for a range of reasons, including low pay, unpredictable hours and wages, and inadequate protection from hardship when workers become sick or disabled.⁵¹

Low pay and insecure work were key issues raised by food banks we spoke to, with many citing an increase in people referred this year who are in-work. People supported by food banks are often working multiple jobs to make ends meet and navigating the insecurity of zero-hour contracts. Food banks also commented that they are seeing people from a range of professions need the support of the food bank, with many working people living on the edge of hardship where any small income disruption or unexpected cost can lead to them needing to turn to a food bank.



I mean, for us, I think seeing the in-work poverty people, that really struck home. To see that much increase in the year, like... You know, we've always said this: you're only one pay check away from needing the food bank.



Staff member at a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 2026

Health is a notable trigger for referrals to food banks

Beyond issues with income, problems with health were reported as one of the most common reasons for referral – affecting over one in five (22%) referrals to food banks in the Trussell community (**Table 5**). Illness and disability drive up costs for households, and a lack of healthcare,

⁵¹ Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in the UK 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

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.⁵²

An absence of statutory mental health support was an issue raised by food banks, with insufficient support in the community for people to recover from ongoing mental health issues.



...a big percentage of our clients will, you know, when it says they've got an ongoing health condition, for some of them it's mental health issues. And a food parcel, much as it might help them physically to fill their tummies, it's not helping in the absence of proper mental health support. So, there's, you know, I think we're seeing sort of the impact of quite a lot of issues across society and across all sectors.



Secretary of a food bank in the Trussell community, Scotland, 2026

Reasons for needing support can vary depending on people's income sources

Some drivers of people's use of food banks are more or less prevalent depending on people's income sources. Issues with work such as unemployment, were more common for people who were in receipt of earned income than people who were solely in receipt of social security payments. One in six people only in receipt of earned income (16%) and people with earned income and social security payments (18%) reported issues with work when they were referred – compared to 5% of people only in receipt of social security payments. Challenging experiences at work such as a pay cut, being offered fewer working hours, and unpaid sick leave have previously been shown to significantly increase the likelihood someone will need to use a food bank.⁵³

Issues with health were higher for people solely in receipt of social security payments (24%), compared to people with other forms of income. This potentially reflects how health conditions are either preventing people from being able to work or making it more difficult for them to find and sustain work. Our Hunger in the UK research found that most (69%) working-age disabled people referred to food banks, who were out of work, were not in work because their impairment or condition meant they were unable to work.⁵⁴

⁵² Weekes, T, Ball, E, and Padgett, S, (2025), *The Cost of Hunger and Hardship – final report*, Trussell, https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/cost_of_hunger_and_hardship_june25.pdf

⁵³ Bull, T, et al, (2023), *Hunger in the UK*, Trussell, <https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/2023-The-Trussell-Trust-Hunger-in-the-UK-report-web-updated-10Aug23.pdf>

⁵⁴ Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in the UK 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

Households who report that they have no income or limited access to it have distinct reasons for referral. The most common of these was issues with their immigration status (39%), which was far higher than average (5%). The majority of people moving to the UK to join family, work or study, have 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF), meaning they are unable to access many mainstream social security payments and are at high risk of experiencing severe hardship.⁵⁵ JRF 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.⁵⁶

“

We have seen an increase though in the amount of clients with no recourse to public funds if they're here on work visas or student visas and then either they've lost the job or they've got, they've had kids, and then they're not working, and they can't claim anything. We have seen a bit of an increase in that. And it's a tough one because what do you do? And obviously if they've got no recourse and they've got no job, nothing coming in at all, you know, they're going to want to come every week.

”

Manager of food bank in the Trussell community, England, 2026

Table 5 Reason for referral amongst households, by income sources, UK: 2025

Reason for referral	Social security payments, not earning	Social security payments, earning	No social security payments, earning	No income, or insufficient access to it	Total % of referrals with reason selected
Income or debt	75%	80%	74%	41%	72%
Health	24%	20%	17%	14%	22%
Issues with Social security payments	18%	13%	10%	19%	17%
Insecure housing	8%	3%	5%	10%	7%
Change in work or unemployment	5%	18%	16%	9%	6%
Immigration status	1%	1%	11%	39%	5%
Change in personal circumstances	4%	6%	6%	5%	4%
Domestic abuse	2%	3%	2%	4%	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.

⁵⁵ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023), *Protection for everyone in our communities*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/neighbourhoods-and-communities/protection-for-everyone-in-our-communities>

⁵⁶ 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 bank use is expected to continue to decline, but more urgency is needed to make meaningful inroads on entrenched hardship

We expect to see further decreases in the distribution of emergency food parcels by food banks in the Trussell community over the next year.⁵⁷ This will likely be driven by the introduction of welcome policy changes to address child poverty such as the scrapping of the two-child limit, the continued roll out of breakfast clubs, and the expansion of Free School Meal provision.

However, it is unlikely that these interventions alone will be enough to reverse levels of emergency food parcel distribution back to pre-pandemic levels, as they do not address the full picture of food bank need. Support for families with children is hugely welcome. However, our evidence shows that food bank need is not only disproportionately experienced by working-age families with children, but also people living on their own, people who face discrimination and other challenges (e.g. because of their race, sexuality, or gender), and people who rent rather than own their own home.⁵⁸ Disability was the most common factor underpinning food bank use in 2024⁵⁹, and planned changes to the health element of Universal Credit from April 2026 mean that people who fall ill will be more likely to experience hardship. We are also seeing persistent increases in food parcels for pensioners.

A more ambitious strategy to end the need for food banks is needed, therefore, to ensure we don't continue to see extraordinarily high levels of severe financial hardship in our communities and truly end the need for emergency food in the UK.

We will be closely monitoring the impact of global instability on the prices of essentials in the UK. The OBR suggest that this instability could have a 'significant impact' on the UK economy. Recent improvements in people's financial positions are likely to be fragile and far too many people are still experiencing hardship. If prices rise significantly there is a real risk of food bank use rapidly increasing again.

⁵⁷ This is the case if we do not see significant increases in the cost of essentials due to global instability.

⁵⁸ Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in the UK 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

⁵⁹ Disability was one of the most common factors underpinning hunger in the UK in 2024. Three in four (74%) people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in 2024 were disabled. In comparison, 28% of people across the UK were disabled. Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in the UK 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025> 11/hunger_in_the_uk_261125.pdf

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

Our social security system is the most effective tool we have to end the need for food banks

The continuing scale of the problem is a compelling rationale for greater action to reduce the need for food banks. Hunger and hardship remain at historically high levels. Over the last decade, we have seen a huge increase in the number of people who need a food bank, as well as people at very high risk of needing a food bank in the future. Millions of people are left with no option other than to turn to food banks, while millions more go hungry without even seeking help from charitable food providers, often because they feel that others need support more.

The evidence is clear that the need for food banks is overwhelmingly due to people being trapped on incomes too low to afford essentials. The single biggest driver of this is in our social security system, including difficulties with claiming, inadequate rates of social security, and deductions or caps that push already low incomes even further below what is needed to afford life's essentials.

Around one in six (16%) households, or 14.1 million people, are going without enough food because they cannot afford it.⁶⁰ A growing number of people having to turn to food banks are working (30% of people referred to food banks in 2024 were in working households, up from 24% in 2022) and 72% of these households are on incomes so low they need it to be topped up by Universal Credit.⁶¹ Cuts, deductions and the benefit cap push families even deeper below what they need for food, rent and heating, trapping many in a cycle of debt and severe hardship.

The consequences of persistent levels of entrenched hunger and hardship do not just come at an immense cost to individuals and the community provision that seeks to support them. The economic and societal costs are profound: severe hardship cost the UK over £75 billion in 2022/23.⁶²

The government has taken bold action to tackle child poverty by removing the two-child limit from April 2026 - a landmark step that will lift hundreds of thousands of children out of severe hardship, helping to reduce the need for emergency food provision for some families. It has also taken much-needed action to reform renters rights, employment rights and invest in social housing which should help to create longer term change.

Yet current policy proposals under consideration risk undermining this progress on tackling hunger and hardship. These include proposals to cut the Universal Credit health element for disabled adults under the age of 22, an expansion of mandatory jobcentre requirements to around two million

⁶⁰ Weekes, T, et al, (2025), Hunger in the UK 2025, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/publications/hunger-in-the-uk>

⁶¹ Weekes, T, et al, (2025), Hunger in the UK 2025, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/publications/hunger-in-the-uk>

⁶² Weekes, T, Ball, E, and Padgett, S, (2025), The Cost of Hunger and Hardship, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/cost-of-hunger-and-hardship-final-report>

disabled people who are currently exempt and the continued freeze of Local Housing Allowance which creates a growing gap between the rent people on low incomes have to pay and the support they receive to do so.

Income adequacy is the strongest determinant of food bank need, and our social security system is the most effective tool we have to address it.

This year could mark a turning point in restoring the principle that support via our social security system should reflect the situations of people who need it. The UK government must build on the progress it has made by further improving the adequacy of the social security system as part of a serious targeted approach to reducing the need for emergency food.

Change is possible - and we know the necessary next steps to ensure people are not forced to turn to a food bank

To ensure no one in the UK is forced to turn to a food bank to survive the UK government must both ensure our social security system provides enough for everyone to afford the essentials and tackle the underlying factors that drive people to need this support in the first place.

We urge the UK Government to prioritise the following measures in order to reduce hardship and help move us closer to a future where no one needs a food bank:

1. Update Universal Credit with further steps towards an 'Essentials Guarantee'.

Universal Credit should protect people from going without essentials and needing to turn to a food bank to get by. The planned increase in the UC standard allowance to £98 from April 2026 is welcome but still falls far short of covering the cost of essentials like food, bills and travel to work. The government should take further steps towards changing this:

- **Establish an independent process:** Decisions about how much money people need to live on should be driven by how much things cost. The UK Government should establish an independent process – similar to the Low Pay Commission created for the minimum wage in 1997 – to help advise on setting Universal Credit rates at a level that covers the cost of life's essentials.
- **Build on the Fair Repayment rate with a Protected Minimum Floor:** Debt deductions and the benefit cap pull already insufficient Universal Credit payment far below the level needed to cover essential living costs. Households lose an average of £256 a month from the benefit

cap. The average monthly amount taken for debt deductions is £67.^{63,64} A Protected Minimum Floor would provide a safety net by limiting reductions to Universal Credit for deductions and the benefit cap to 15% below the standard allowance, provide people with more security over their income and help to significantly reduce deep hardship.

2. Keep the Universal Credit health element for under-22s

Young disabled adults already face high levels of hardship, and one in five people receiving UC alongside disability benefits used a food bank in the last month.⁶⁵ Proposed reforms that reduce or remove the UC health element for younger disabled adults could push this already at-risk group of people into deeper hardship, reducing their incomes at the point that many disabled young people will be navigating decisions about living independently and the transition from child to adult health services. Maintaining the UC health element is crucial to ensure young disabled people aren't held back from being able to successfully undertake education and training and move into sustained work.

3. Unfreeze local housing allowance from April 2026.

The Local Housing Allowance freeze is a significant driver of both homelessness and food bank need. High rents in the private rented sector, a shortage of social homes and inadequate support leave many renters unable to afford food and other essentials, and constantly at risk of losing their home. Half (50%) of private renters receiving support through the security system for housing payments experienced food insecurity in 2024 – twice the rate of private renters who did not receive social security housing payments.⁶⁶

After being frozen for several years, Local Housing Allowance rates, the level of support that people receive for their housing costs, were updated in April 2024 which provided short term relief for households. However, the decision to freeze rates again from April 2025 means that a growing number are now facing shortfalls between their payments and their housing costs. This is likely to drive up homelessness, hunger and hardship, and increase the pressure on local authorities who have to place rising numbers of people in unsuitable and expensive temporary accommodation.^{67,68}

⁶³ Department for Work & Pensions (2025), *Universal Credit deductions statistics, June 2024 to May 2025*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-10-july-2025/universal-credit-deductions-statistics-june-2024-to-may-2025>

⁶⁴ Department for Work & Pensions (2025), *Benefit cap: number of households capped to May 2025*, [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/benefit-cap-number-of-households-capped-to-may-2025/benefit-cap-number-of-households-capped-to-may-2025#:~:text=the%20benefit%20cap-,2.,Housing%20Benefit%20\(%20HB%20\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/benefit-cap-number-of-households-capped-to-may-2025/benefit-cap-number-of-households-capped-to-may-2025#:~:text=the%20benefit%20cap-,2.,Housing%20Benefit%20(%20HB%20))

⁶⁵ Trussell, (2025), Almost one in five people receiving Universal Credit and disability benefits used a food bank in the last month, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/news/almost-one-in-five-people-receiving-universal-credit-and-disability-benefits>

⁶⁶ Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in the UK 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/publications/hunger-in-the-uk>

⁶⁷ National Audit Office (2017), *Homelessness*, Department for Communities and Local Government, <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Homelessness.pdf>

⁶⁸ National Audit Office (2024), *The effectiveness of government in tackling homelessness*, The Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/effectiveness-of-government-in-tackling-homelessness.pdf>

LHA rates should always cover the cheapest 30% of rents in each area, with a commitment at the Autumn budget to annual uprating to ensure that support keeps pace with real housing costs. It is essential to re-establish this link between the payments people receive for their housing costs and actual rents as a fundamental baseline of support.

Unit 9, Ashfield Trading Estate,
Ashfield Road, Salisbury SP2 7HL

enquiries@trussell.org.uk

trussell.org.uk

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