



# Emergency food parcel distribution in Wales

March 2026

# Contents

<b>2026: Key facts across Wales.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Despite some progress on food bank use, levels remain well above pre-pandemic period.....	6
What’s driving recent changes in parcel numbers? .....	10
Use of food banks in Wales remains extremely high with some people at higher risk of needing support.....	22
Food bank use is expected to continue to decline, but more urgency is needed to make meaningful inroads on entrenched hardship .....	36
We have an opportunity to turn the tide on hunger and hardship.....	37

# 2026: Key facts across Wales

This factsheet reports on the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell community in Wales during the period 1 January to 31 December 2025 (inclusive). During this time, food parcels were distributed from 141 locations across Wales, as part of the Trussell community.<sup>1</sup>

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

- 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 in Wales distributing fewer parcels in 2025 than the peak seen in 2023. Wider data suggests there has been a corresponding fall in the 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 Wales. 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 the recent reduction in the number of emergency food parcels is likely to be limited.
  - There have been positive changes from the UK government such as the introduction of the Fair Repayment rate in Universal Credit (limiting the impact of deductions for debt).
  - The Welsh Government has also widened access to free school meals (full roll out of universal primary free school meals was completed in September 2024); encouraged local authorities to improve access to Welsh benefits; and in September 2025 enhanced concessionary transport for young people in Wales. Local food partnerships have also been introduced across local authorities in Wales.

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<sup>1</sup> Locations are counted if they have distributed parcels at any stage during the year. Some will have opened, and some will have closed during this period. There were 144 locations in the previous year.

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

<sup>3</sup> Research with Ipsos found that 54% of people who experienced food insecurity in Wales had not used any form of charitable food provision in the last year. Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in Wales 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

- The net impact of these measures has been mitigated by other decisions from the UK government such as the freeze to Local Housing Allowance rates from April 2025 – previous freezes have left just 1.2% of the market affordable for people in receipt of LHA in Wales<sup>4</sup>, 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:
  - Successive years of incredibly high need for food banks, including people increasingly needing support multiple times, have 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 can provide.
  - 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. 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 Wales. The pandemic and the cost of living crisis have left deep scars on living standards across Wales. 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 in Wales. 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 seeing people facing sustained hardship – meaning they are needing support more often.
  - Planned cuts by the UK government 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 by the UK government to the Local Housing Allowance will drive more renters into severe hardship and leave them at greater risk of homelessness.
  - People aged 65 and over still make up a small proportion of people turning to food banks in Wales. However, in recent years we have started to see more older people supported by food banks than in previous years, a trend that needs to be reversed.

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<sup>4</sup> Bevan Foundation, (2025), *Bevan Foundation joins calls for LHA uplift*, <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/news/2025/10/bevan-foundation-joins-calls-for-lha-uplift/>

- The priorities for further action to end hunger in Wales include:
  - Welsh Government developing a robust and ambitious plan to end the need for food banks in Wales
  - Sustaining and increasing access to cash-first support and advice
  - Scoping options to implement a 'Welsh Child Payment', with clear intent to roll out the scheme across Wales
  - Increasing access to Free School Meals
  - Significantly increasing the supply of social homes in Wales
  - Mandating the Welsh Benefits Charter for Local Authorities across Wales.

## Despite some progress on food bank use, levels remain well above pre-pandemic period

Food banks in the Trussell community in Wales provided 154,000 emergency food parcels from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025. This was a decrease (-14%) compared to 2024 when 178,000 parcels were distributed. A larger decrease was seen compared to 2023 (-21%), the Trussell community's busiest ever year in Wales.

Despite these decreases the level of emergency food provision seen across food banks in the Trussell community in Wales in 2025 remained well above pre-pandemic levels. The number of parcels distributed in 2025 was 19% 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.

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**We had a slight drop; it was an 8% drop. Like I said, I've been doing [this] a long time, and we've almost doubled since pre-pandemic. So, an 8% drop in the grand scheme of things is nothing. It's not the almost 100% increase that I've seen in the last five or six years.**

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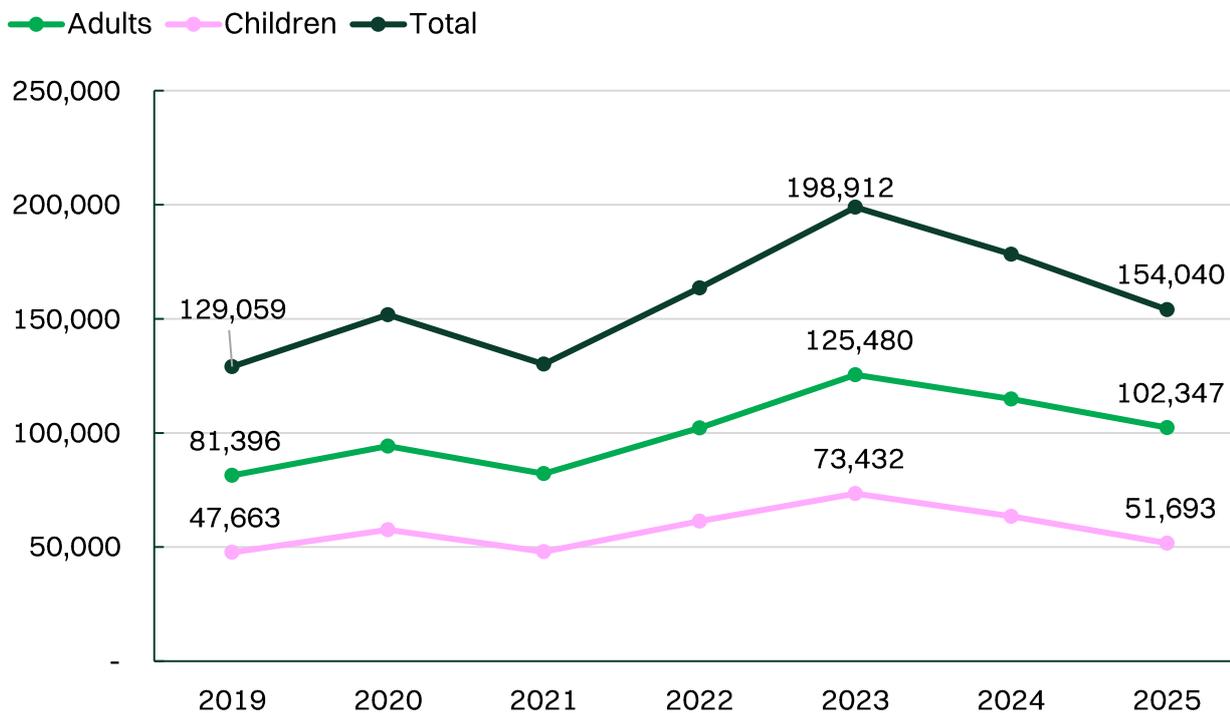
**Manager of a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 2026**

In 2025, over 50,000 parcels were distributed for children by food banks in the Trussell community in Wales, an increase of over 4,000 parcels since 2019. This marks an 8% increase since 2019 and is the fourth year in succession that the number of parcels provided for children has been above 50,000.

**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 in Wales: 2019-2025<sup>5</sup>**

Source: Trussell administrative data.

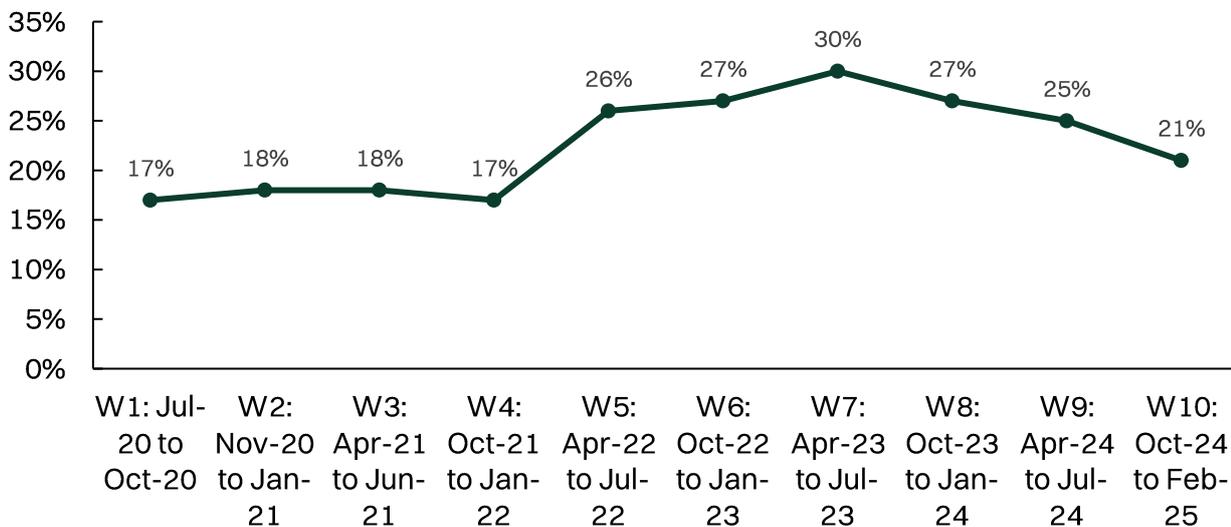
<sup>5</sup> The number of food bank centres has increased over this ten-year period. While increased provision is associated with some increase in food parcel take-up, this is relatively small in proportional terms. Increased provision of food banks results in increased uptake primarily because of the underlying unmet need in an area. See Bramley, G, et al. (2021), *State of Hunger: Building the evidence on poverty, destitution, and food insecurity in the UK*, Trussell and Heriot-Watt University, <https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/State-of-Hunger-2021-Report-Final.pdf>

Emergency food parcel data from the Trussell community is only one part of understanding the picture of the underlying need for food banks in Wales. To understand the scale of underlying need Trussell monitors the number of people experiencing food insecurity<sup>6</sup> and the number of people experiencing severe hardship across Wales.<sup>7</sup> 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.

Food and You 2 is the most recent and robust measure of food insecurity.<sup>8</sup> As **Figure 2** indicates food insecurity in Wales appears to be following a similar pattern to Trussell parcel data. There was a clear increase from 2020 into a peak of 2023 when 30% of adults experienced food insecurity. This has declined to 21% in the latest figures for October 2024 – February 2025.<sup>9</sup> This nine percentage point decrease represents a 30% decrease in the number of adults experiencing food insecurity in Wales between 2023 and 2025.

As with food bank use, the number of people experiencing food insecurity in Wales remains well above previous levels. In 2020, 17% of adults were experiencing food insecurity – at the start of 2025 this remained at an elevated rate of 21%.

**Figure 2 Percentage of adults experiencing food insecurity in Wales in previous 12 months – Food and You 2**



Source: Food Standards Agency – Food and You 2

<sup>6</sup> 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>

<sup>7</sup> 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](https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/Cost%20of%20hunger%20and%20hardship_Interim%20report%202024_4.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Food Standards Agency, (2025), *Food and You 2*, <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you-2>

<sup>9</sup> Food Standards Agency, (2025), *Food and You 2*, <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you-2>

In the absence of recent data on the number of people experiencing severe hardship<sup>10</sup>, we can look at some proxies to understand changes to people's financial situation/resilience between 2023 and 2025. These include:

- Data from the National Survey for Wales shows a decrease in households in material deprivation from 16% in 2022-23, to 11% in 2024-25. This largely reflects changes in inflation.<sup>11</sup> A household is in material deprivation if they are lacking essential items or experiences, such as being able to keep the house warm, having a week's holiday away from home, or being able to replace broken electrical goods.
- The National Red Index - this is a measure developed by Citizens Advice which shows the number of people in a negative budget.<sup>12</sup> It uses data from England and Wales. The number of people in a negative budget in England and Wales decreased between 2023/24 and 2024/25 and is expected to fall further in 2025/26. As with previous figures the number of people in a negative budget remains far higher than pre-pandemic levels.<sup>13</sup>
- People are now more confident about managing unexpected costs: In August 2023, close to six in 10 (57%) adults across Great Britain 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.<sup>14</sup>
- People are also less pessimistic about their likelihood of being able to save some money: In August 2022 almost half (48%) of adults across Great Britain 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.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> Welsh Government, (2025), *National Survey for Wales: results viewer dashboard*, <https://www.gov.wales/national-survey-wales-results-viewer-dashboard>

<sup>12</sup> A negative budget means that after paying for essentials, households have a deficit, often resulting in debt accumulation.

<sup>13</sup> 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/>

<sup>14</sup> ONS, (2025), *Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: December 2025*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/publicopinionsandsocialtrendsgreatbritain/latest> These figures are not currently available specifically for Wales

<sup>15</sup> ONS, (2025), *Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: December 2025*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/publicopinionsandsocialtrendsgreatbritain/latest> These figures are not currently available specifically for Wales

## 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 Wales, 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 Wales:

- 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 in Wales, 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.
- 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.<sup>16</sup> 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 –

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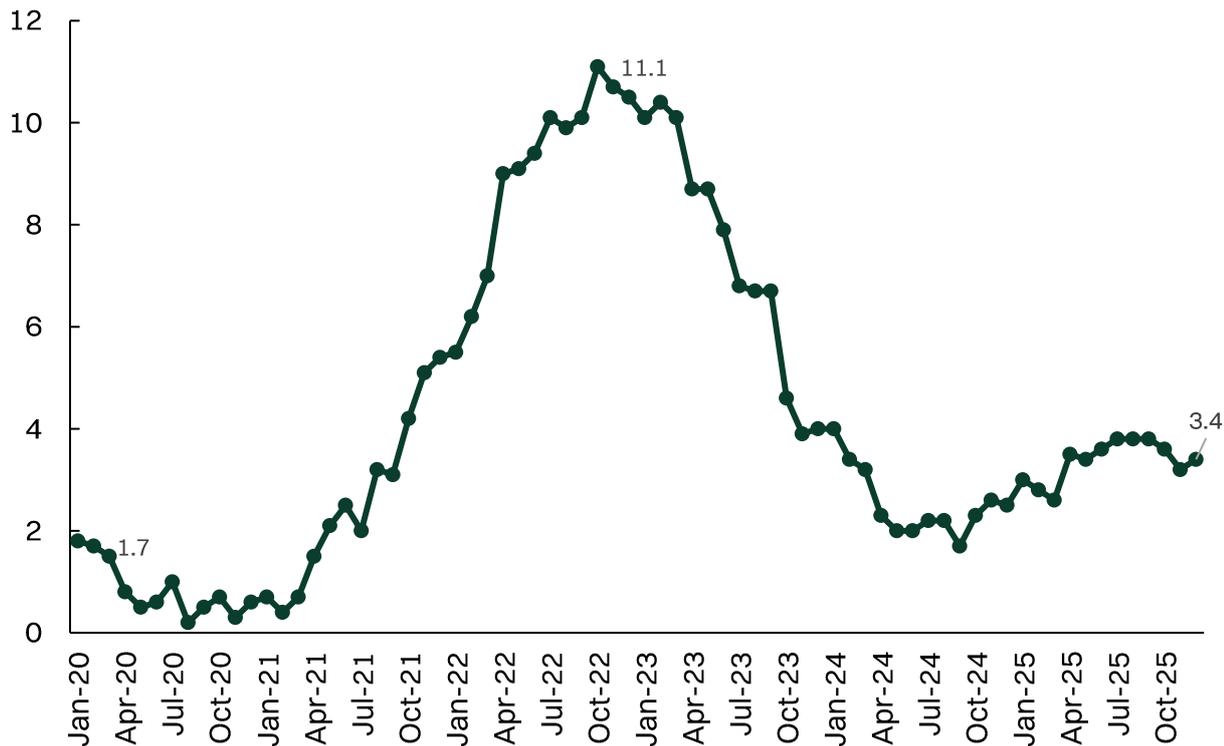
<sup>16</sup> Bull, R, et al, (2023), *Hunger in the UK*, Trussell, <https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/2023-The-Trussell-Trust-Hunger-in-the-UK-report-web-updated-10Aug23.pdf>

with a longer period of sustained increases than overall inflation – inflation on electricity, gas, and other fuels peaked at 90% in January 2023.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup> 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.

**Figure 3 CPI inflation Jan 2020 – December 2025**



Source: ONS – Consumer Price Inflation

<sup>17</sup> ONS, (2026), *Consumer Price inflation, UK: December 2025*,

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/december2025>

<sup>18</sup> NIESR, (2022), *The unequal impact of rising inflation*, <https://niesr.ac.uk/blog/unequal-impact-rising-inflation>

<sup>19</sup> ONS, (2026), *Consumer Price inflation, UK: December 2025*,

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/december2025>

Similarly, during the Covid-19 pandemic, job loss was identified as a significant driver of the rapid increase in people turning to food banks.<sup>20</sup> Wider evidence has also shown a link between job loss and food insecurity.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>
- 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.<sup>23</sup>

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.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> 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>

<sup>21</sup> 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>

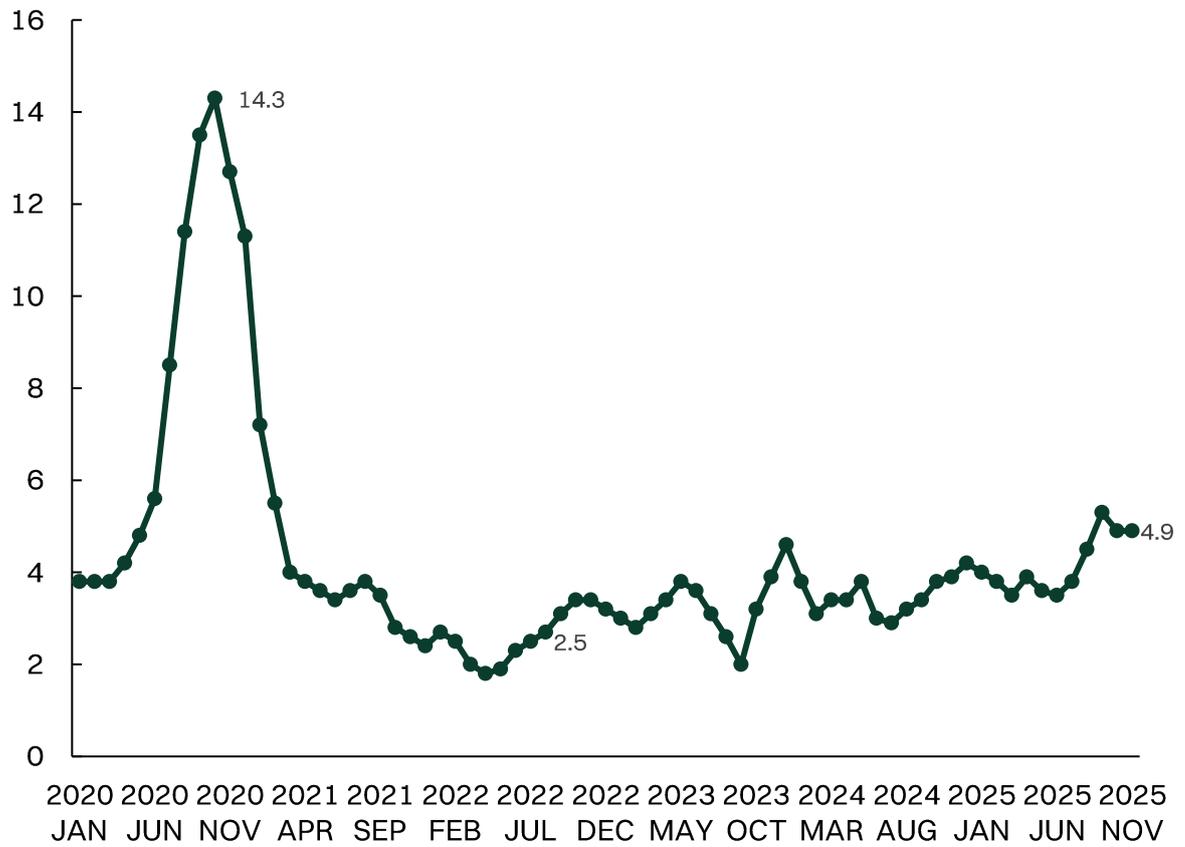
Mabli, J, (2023), *Food insecurity transitions and changes in employment and earnings*, American Journal of Preventative Medicine, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379722005050>

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/>

<sup>22</sup> Trussell and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, (2026), *Guarantee Our Essentials: Reforming Universal Credit to ensure we can all afford the essentials in hard time*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/social-security/guarantee-our-essentials-reforming-universal-credit-to-ensure-we-can-all-afford-the#:~:text=Social%20security-.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.>

<sup>23</sup> 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](https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/cost_of_hunger_and_hardship_june25.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> ONS, (2026), *LFS: ILO redundancy rate*: UK:All:SA, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/redundancies/timeseries/beir/lms>

**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 in Wales between 2023 and 2025.

## 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 insecurity<sup>25</sup> and child poverty.<sup>26</sup> Trussell has also reported on a reduction in the use of food banks during the months

<sup>25</sup> 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>

<sup>26</sup> 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/>

in which the UK Government's Cost of Living Payments were made to people in receipt of means tested social security payments.<sup>27</sup>

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**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.**

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

Since 2023, policy change by the UK government, particularly the uprating of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) in line with local rents in April 2024 and the introduction of the Fair Repayment Rate 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 Discretionary Assistance Fund<sup>28</sup>, Single Advice Fund, Universal Free School Meals for primary schools, the Schools Essentials Grant, and the increase to the Education Maintenance Allowance 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.

The Welsh Government's Claim What's Yours Campaign was also set up in 2021 to encourage access to more than £1 billion of unclaimed social security payments. Latest figures suggest that Claim What's Yours, together with the Welsh Government's Single Advice Fund unlocks around £10 million annually single people and families. This support will have ensured fewer people needed support from food banks in Wales in 2025. Continued provision of advice and support is needed in Wales to ensure everyone receives the social security payments they are eligible for.

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 by the UK government 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 in Wales.

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<sup>27</sup> 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>

<sup>28</sup> In cash terms the support available from the DAF decreased between 2023/24 and 2024/25 as the budget was held at £38.5 million. With inflation rising this means there was a real terms decrease in the value of this fund between these years. Bevan Foundation, *People in severe hardship get emergency cash*, <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/our-influence/people-in-severe-hardship-get-emergency-cash/>

## **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. From 2020/21 to 2024/25 the proportion of food banks offering advice services in the Trussell community increased from 28% to 92%. In Wales, the number of people supported to access advice has increased from 3,600 in 2022/23 to 7,900 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.<sup>29</sup>

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.

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<sup>29</sup> 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>

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**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.**

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

However, current advice provision at food banks in Wales does not have the capacity to address financial hardship at scale. The overall use of advice services at food banks in the Trussell community in Wales remains low relative to headline food bank use. In 2024/25, 7,900 people were supported to access advice services in Wales, compared to almost 35,000 households supported with emergency food across Wales. 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.

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 across the UK supports this - 38% of people supported said that their likelihood of needing support from a food bank was about the same after receiving advice.<sup>30</sup> 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.

“

**What my Support Manager is saying is that people are coming in, they are sitting down and going through their budgeting, and they literally cannot save any more money. So, you know, how are supposed to move on from that?**

”

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

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<sup>30</sup> 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>

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.<sup>31</sup>

“

**And then obviously trying to work closely with our referral partners and saying, right, if you need to issue more than three [vouchers], conversations need to happen and make sure you put as much detail as you can on the vouchers...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 communities 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 the new services and 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, three out of the 10 Welsh food banks, who responded to a recent survey of food banks in Trussell's community, told us that they currently had voucher or parcel limits in place. Across the UK, 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.

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.

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<sup>31</sup> Rocket Science, (2025), *Trussell: Pathways to Advice and Cash Scotland (PACS)*, Trussell, [trussell\\_pacs\\_evaluation.pdf](#)

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 funding challenges are reflected in Trussell's latest survey of food banks – in winter 2025, six out of the 10 Welsh food banks that responded to Trussell's Winter Planning Survey were concerned that they wouldn't be able to cover operating costs over the next 12 months.



**I think as everything's biting harder on everything and everybody, there's less help available...So we've seen a drop, but as members of the public are struggling themselves, they're less able to help us. That is going to diminish because you have to look after yourself first.**



**Manager of a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 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.

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.<sup>32</sup> Analysis for the Welsh Government estimated that there were over 900,000 issues per year in Wales that could require advice – far higher than the current level of provision could feasibly support.<sup>33</sup>

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.

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<sup>32</sup> 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>.

<sup>33</sup> Alma Economic, (2023), *A needs analysis and predictive model of social welfare information and advice services in Wales*, Welsh Government, <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2023-11/a-needs-analysis-and-predictive-model-of-social-welfare-information-and-advice-services-in-wales.pdf>

“

Unfortunately, due to the lack of public resources, support agencies are also very, very stretched. They will do a piece of work with a client, then close them, but the crisis journey may not have been concluded. And then within a few weeks, they fall through the cracks and they're back in the system.

”

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

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

Across the UK 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.

In Wales, the Welsh Government committed to funding cross-sector food partnerships as part of a series of intervention packages to help alleviate poverty. All Welsh local authorities are now developing or strengthening food partnerships, cross-sector local networks that work to improve local food systems.<sup>34</sup>

Administrative data from a variety of the largest social supermarket networks across the UK highlights a substantive growth in the number of locations operated since 2021 (Figure 5). There is no publicly available information which tracks the number of charitable food providers in Wales – but food banks and Trussell staff working in Wales highlight the increasing diversity of charitable food provision in Wales. This includes pantries, social supermarkets, provision in schools and recent developments such as the “opening of the first ‘multibank’ in Wales”.<sup>35</sup>

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 in Wales 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.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Food Sense Wales, (2025), *Status of Local Food Partnerships in 2025*, <https://www.foodsensewales.org.uk/app/uploads/2025/04/PartnershipsReportENG-1.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Welsh Government, (2024), *Wales's first 'multibank' will provide essential items to people in need*, <https://www.gov.wales/wales-first-multibank-will-provide-essential-items-to-people-in-need>

<sup>36</sup> 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>

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**

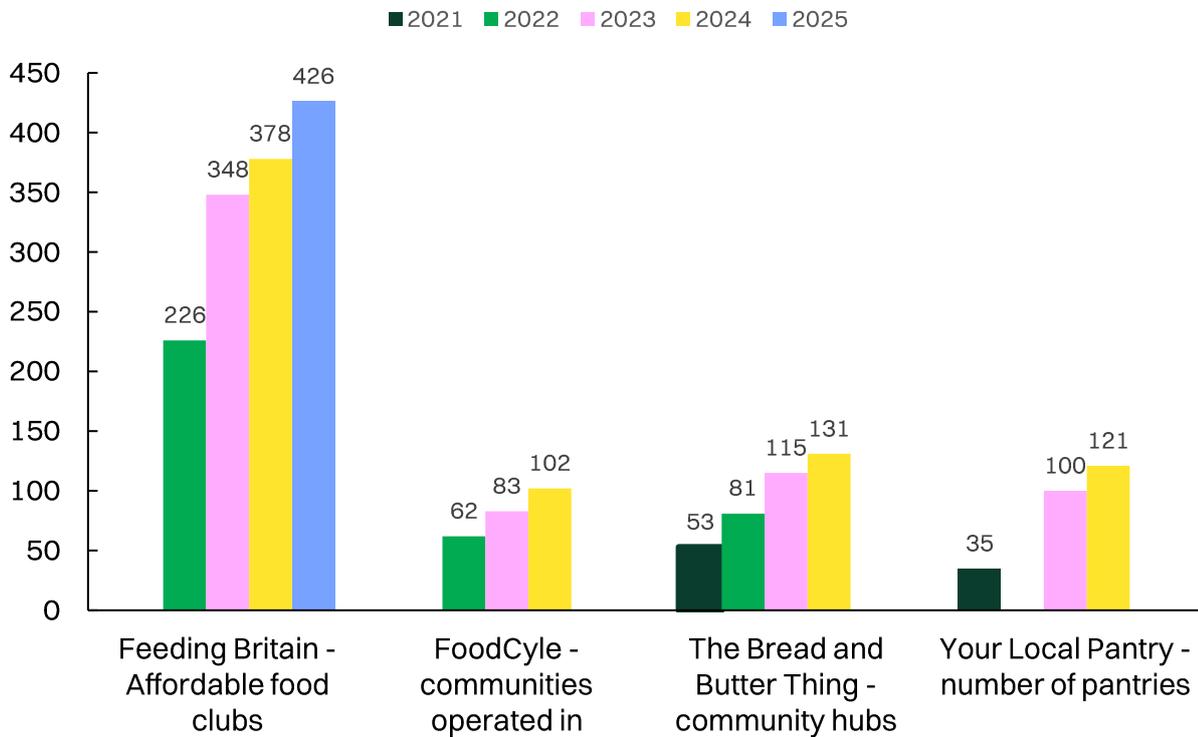
Indeed, there is little evidence that the displacement of use of food banks to other forms of charitable food support will have a significant impact on the actual underlying need for food banks. Evidence shows that most people using other forms of support remain at high risk of needing to turn to a food bank in the future. The use of food banks for people using both food banks and food clubs most commonly stays the same (53%) or increases (17%) after joining a food club.<sup>37</sup> Further, the vast majority of people (77%) using Affordable Food Clubs are food insecure.<sup>38</sup> 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.

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<sup>37</sup> Blake, M, (2026), *Building Resilience: The role of food clubs in UK food security*, Comic Relief, [https://assets.ctfassets.net/zsfivwzfgl3t/5Nkx11c3EiNcw2EwfIDMG/3b835a7cef5fb0f7b7a7bbb6a60c280d/Building\\_Resilience\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Food\\_Clubs\\_in\\_UK\\_Food\\_Security\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/zsfivwzfgl3t/5Nkx11c3EiNcw2EwfIDMG/3b835a7cef5fb0f7b7a7bbb6a60c280d/Building_Resilience_The_Role_of_Food_Clubs_in_UK_Food_Security_Full_Report.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> 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>

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



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

## Use of food banks in Wales 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 who are in shallower forms of hardship. People on the lowest incomes continue to find it difficult to afford essentials and inequality of living standards and income has grown.
- Recent decreases in food bank use have been seen across Wales. But the scale of these changes and the longer term trends vary. Caerdydd Penarth and Pontypridd Cynon Merthyr saw similar levels of parcels to last year and Ceredigion Penfro, Bangor Conwy Môn, Clwyd and Casnewydd Islwyn saw above-average decreases. Since 2019, Caerdydd Ffynnon Taf has seen the biggest increase, while Penfro and Casnewydd Islwyn have seen decreases.
- 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 older people 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 experiencing sustained severe hardship

The positive improvements in people's financial circumstances, and the reduction seen in food bank use in the Trussell community in Wales 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 Wales 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 Wales in 2025 had not used a food bank in the Trussell community before. But this proportion has fallen from 62% to 51% 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 in Wales four or more times within that year increased by 33%. This was far higher than the increase for people referred once (10%) and people referred two to three times (11%).

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 in Wales 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, over two in five people (43%) referred to food banks in the Trussell community needed to use a food bank more than once. Almost three in 10 people (29%) used the food bank two-three times, and one in seven (13%) four-nine times. A small minority of people (1%) 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 to food banks in Wales between 2019 and 2025 – this shows an increase from 1.9 visits in 2019 to 2.1 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 hardship in their communities. This was particularly seen through people needing to use the food bank repeatedly for long periods of time.



**You know, we do wrap around service, to the best of our ability. But, but even in them cases, everything is just so long-winded and drawn out. I think the days of a quick fix are well and truly gone. Really, that's just the way I see it.**



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

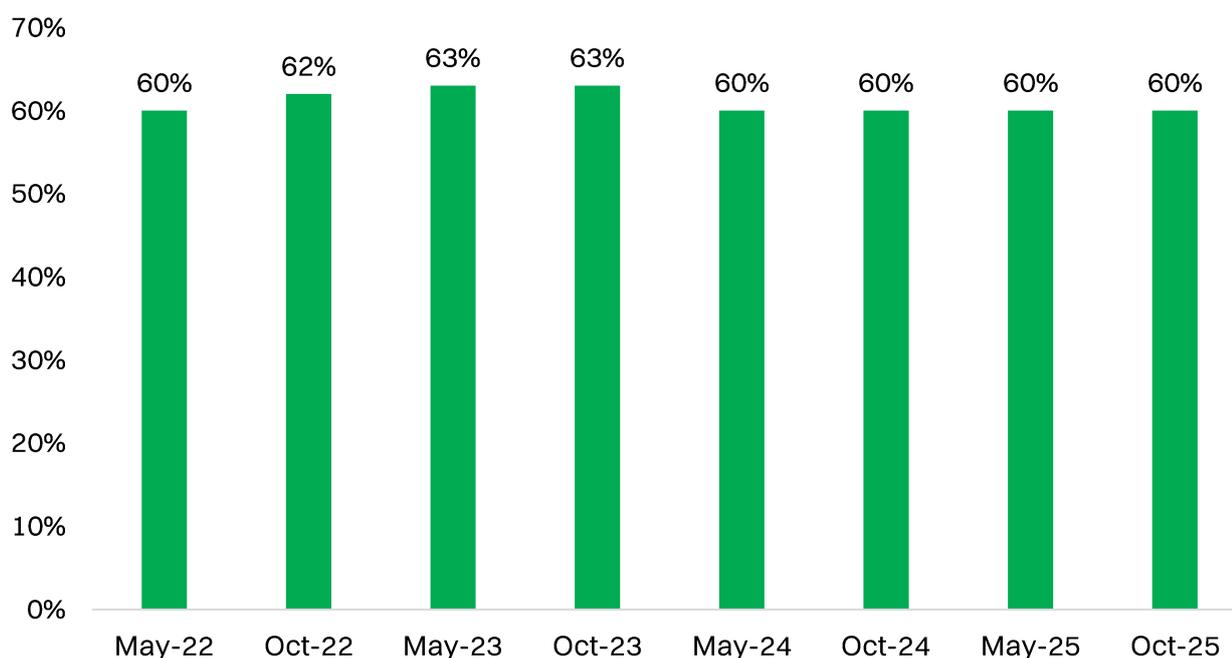


**Staff member at a food bank in the Trussell community, Wales, 2026**

Wider evidence also suggests that people facing the most severe levels of hardship have not seen any improvements in their living standards over the last few years, with situations worsening for many people. 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 30% reduction in the number of adults going without food across Wales 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. 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.<sup>39</sup>

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



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 in Wales 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 Wales, but the scale of change and long term trends vary

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

<sup>39</sup> Resolution Foundation (2026), *Unsung Britain: A portrait of the country's poorer half*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/unsung-britain/>

These local and regional contexts are most likely the drivers of the mixed picture in the change of provision across Welsh Senedd regions. Caerdydd Penarth and Pontypridd Cynon Merthyr saw similar levels of parcels to last year, with only a -4% decrease since 2024. Afan Ogwr Rhondda (-6%), Brycheiniog Tawe Need (-10%), Caerdydd Ffynnon Taf (-10%), Flint Wrecsam (-11%) and Gŵyr Abertawe (-12%) saw below-average decreases for Wales. Conversely, Ceredigion Penfro (-19%), Bangor Conwy Môn (-20%), Clwyd (-20%) and Casnewydd Islwyn (-41%) saw above-average decreases.

Looking back longer-term, there is also a mixed picture across Wales. Caerdydd Ffynnon Taf has seen a significant increase since the pre-pandemic period, with parcels distributed 91% higher in 2025 than in 2019. Other Senedd regions experiencing significant increases since the pre-pandemic period include Brycheiniog Tawe Nedd (54%), Flint Wrecsam (51%) and Gwynedd Maldwyn (36%). In contrast, some Senedd regions have seen large decreases since 2019, including Ceredigion Penfro (-27%) and Casnewydd Islwyn (-35%).

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

**Table 2 Number of parcels for adults, children, and total distributed – Senedd region breakdown: 2025, compared with 2019 and 2024**

	2025			Percentage change from 2019			Percentage change from 2024		
	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total
Afan Ogwr Rhondda	7,143	4,511	11,654	18%	35%	24%	-6%	-6%	-6%
Bangor Conwy Môn	2,612	1,448	4,060	1%	4%	2%	-21%	-19%	-20%
Blaenau Gwent Caerffili Rhymni	7,907	3,872	11,779	36%	37%	36%	-11%	-21%	-14%
Brycheiniog Tawe Nedd	8,000	3,635	11,635	63%	38%	54%	-6%	-17%	-10%
Caerdydd Ffynnon Taf	2,891	2,027	4,918	100%	80%	91%	-6%	-14%	-10%
Caerdydd Penarth	10,156	5,021	15,177	25%	2%	16%	-1%	-11%	-4%
Casnewydd Islwyn	3,728	1,634	5,362	-28%	-46%	-35%	-39%	-45%	-41%

Ceredigion Penfro	2,846	1,126	3,972	-7%	-53%	-27%	-10%	-35%	-19%
Clwyd	7,343	4,167	11,510	48%	15%	34%	-16%	-25%	-20%
Fflint Wrexham	9,544	4,568	14,112	64%	29%	51%	-8%	-18%	-11%
Gwynedd Maldwyn	4,685	2,638	7,323	37%	34%	36%	-15%	-21%	-17%
Gŵyr Abertawe	6,236	3,049	9,285	32%	19%	27%	-8%	-20%	-12%
Pen-y-bont Bro Morgannwg	6,848	3,317	10,165	21%	2%	14%	-15%	-21%	-17%
Pontypridd Cynon Merthyr	8,967	4,322	13,289	26%	28%	26%	-3%	-6%	-4%
Sir Fynwy Torfaen	6,515	2,741	9,256	2%	-23%	-7%	-13%	-19%	-15%
Sir Gaerfyrddin	6,926	3,617	10,543	13%	-11%	3%	-11%	-19%	-14%

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

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

Despite decreases across Wales in the number of parcels provided for children last year (-19%), 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 Wales (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 Wales (18%).<sup>40</sup> In 2025, one in four (24%) parcels provided by food banks were for younger children aged 0-11 – despite them making up just 12% of people across Wales.

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

<sup>40</sup> ONS, (2024), *Estimates of the population for UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland>

hardship can have profound impacts on children’s health, wellbeing, education and future economic opportunities.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup>

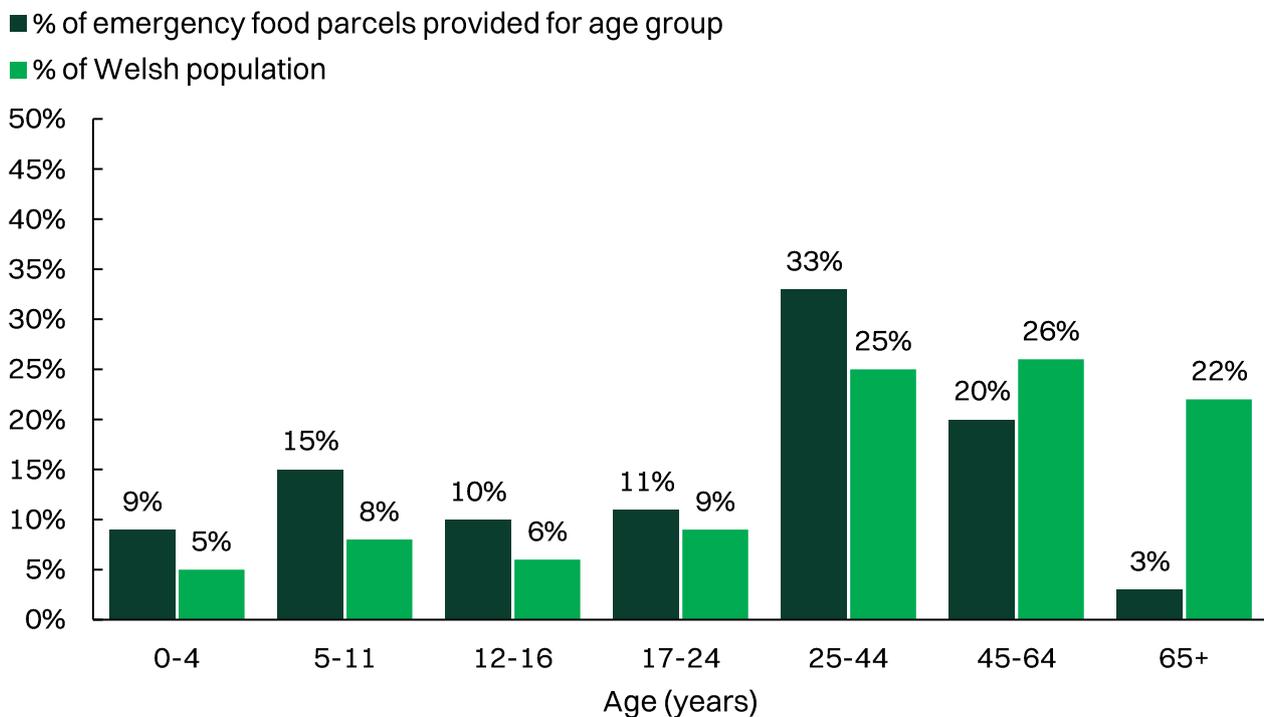


We have to be cold and all be freezing as the heating is so much... me and my husband have gone hungry to make sure our kids have one meal a day.



Person claiming Universal Credit interviewed in February 2025<sup>43</sup>

**Figure 8 Percentage of emergency food parcels distributed for different age groups compared to population distribution, Wales: 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 26% increase for adults and an 8% increase for children in parcels provided in Wales. This is a trend we will continue to monitor over the next year.

<sup>41</sup> 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](https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/cost_of_hunger_and_hardship_june25.pdf)

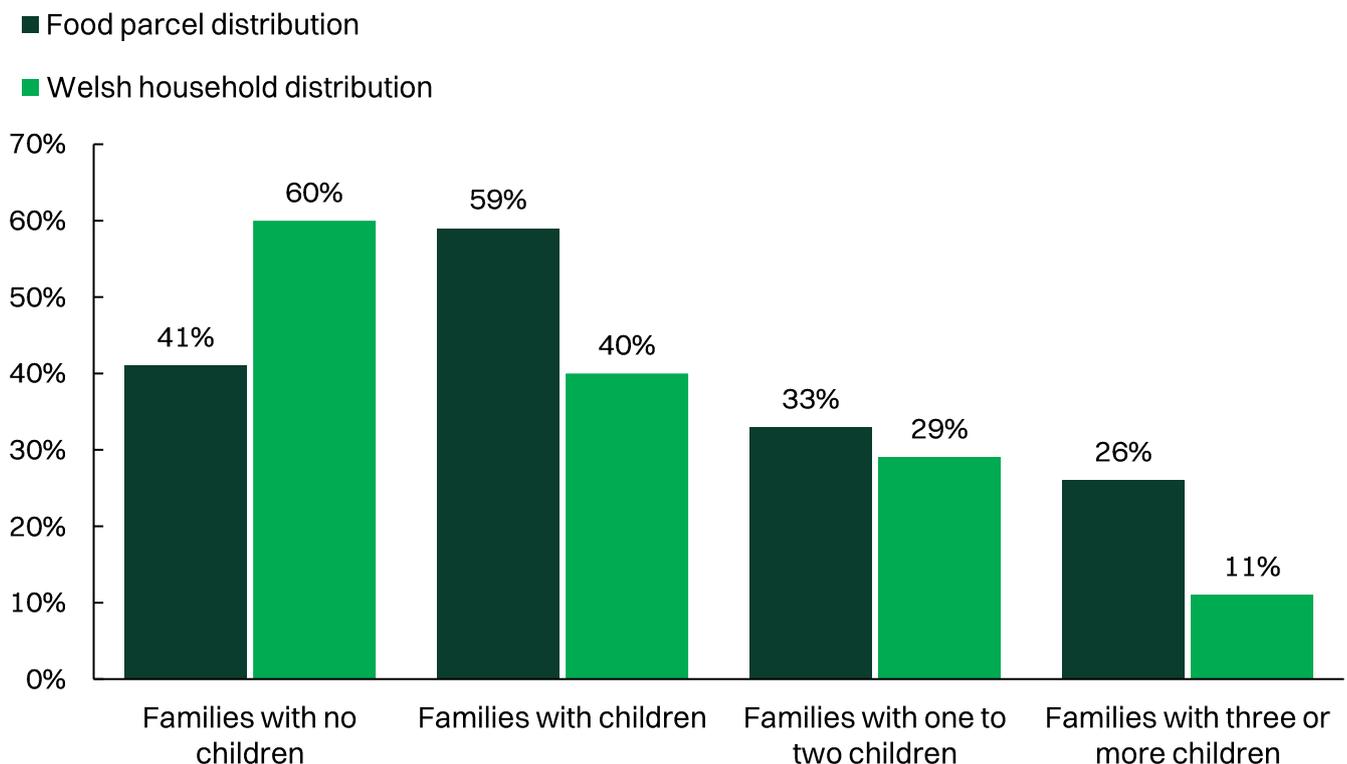
Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2026), *UK Poverty 2026*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2026-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>

<sup>42</sup> 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>

<sup>43</sup> An online survey by YouGov of 1,209 adults (16+) currently claiming Universal Credit. Fieldwork was undertaken 21 January – 3 February 2025

When taking a whole household view, the majority (59%) of support provided by food banks in the Trussell community in Wales is for families with children (Figure 9). This is despite people living in these families making up just 40% of the Welsh population. This over-representation is largely driven by support provided to families with three or more children at food banks in the Trussell community. In Wales, the proportion of parcels distributed for families with three or more children (26%) was over double their population share (11%) in 2025. For families with one to two children the proportion was similar, with 33% of parcels distributed to families of this size and 29% of people living in families of this size in the Welsh population.

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



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

Our Hunger in Wales 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. Among households experiencing food insecurity in Wales, 14% had three or more children, compared with 2% of households not experiencing food insecurity.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in Wales 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

<sup>45</sup> 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.

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.<sup>46</sup> We will be monitoring the impact the change to this policy has on emergency food parcel distribution over the coming year.

## Food banks now providing far more support for people over 65

People over 65 remain far less likely to experience severe hardship, or to have needed to use a food bank than children or working age adults.<sup>47</sup> However, there are concerning signs of a resurgence in pensioner hardship in Wales. Since 2013/14 there has been a 30% increase in the number of pensioners experiencing severe hardship – in comparison the number of working age adults experiencing severe hardship decreased by -3%.<sup>48</sup>

While it is from a low base, and they are still significantly under-represented relative to their share of the Welsh population (see **Figure 8**), there has been a rapid increase in emergency food provision for people over 65 in Wales since 2019. In 2025, 4,000 parcels were distributed for someone aged 65 and over. This is over twice as many provided in 2019 when 1,650 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 across this period.<sup>49</sup>

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

Age	Percentage increase from 2019/20
0-4	-4%
5-11	10%
12-16	31%
17-24	21%
25-64	23%
65+	143%

Source: Trussell administrative data.

<sup>46</sup> 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>

<sup>47</sup> 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](https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/Cost%20of%20hunger%20and%20hardship_Interim%20report%202024_4.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> 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](https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/Cost%20of%20hunger%20and%20hardship_Interim%20report%202024_4.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> Age ranges differ to the previous figure as Trussell updated the age categories it collected in 2023. To allow comparison to pre-2023 data the age categories for 2025 have been recoded to the pre-2023 codes.

Our Hunger in the UK research highlighted some of the differences between people over 65 referred to food banks and people over 65 across the UK. People over 65 referred to a food bank were more likely to be renting, and less likely to own their home in comparison to people over 65 in the general population (18% owned their homes outright, compared to 79% of people over 65 in the general population). The majority of people over 65 referred to food banks were disabled (69%), twice the rate for people over 65 in the general population (34%). In addition, people over 65 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 people over 65 across the UK.<sup>50</sup>

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.<sup>51</sup> 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 people over 65 are increasing the financial strain faced by older people.<sup>52</sup>

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

Referral data from food banks in the Trussell community in Wales 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 (70% 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.

**Table 4 Reasons for referral for people supported, Wales: 2025**

Reason for referral	% of referrals with reason selected
Income or debt	70%
Issue with social security payments	23%
Health	22%
Insecure housing	10%
Change in work hours or unemployment	6%

<sup>50</sup> 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>

<sup>51</sup> Independent Age, (2022), *Poverty in later life*, <https://www.independentage.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/IA%20Poverty%20in%20later%20life%20report%20Jan2022.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Independent Age, (2025), *Too little, too late*, [https://www.independentage.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/Too\\_little\\_too\\_late\\_report\\_Independent\\_Age.pdf](https://www.independentage.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/Too_little_too_late_report_Independent_Age.pdf)

Change in personal circumstances	5%
Domestic abuse	3%
Immigration status	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 in Wales 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.<sup>53</sup> 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.

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 in Wales (23%). 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 crisis 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 Trussell community, Wales, 2026**

Changes in work hours or unemployment affected 6% of referrals to food banks in the Trussell community in Wales in 2025. Most households referred to food banks are not in work. However, our Hunger in Wales data shows that a significant and increasing minority are. Three in 10 (31%) people referred to food banks in 2024 were in working households, an increase from 2022 (21%) 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.<sup>54</sup>

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

<sup>53</sup> Trussell, *Hunger in Wales 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

<sup>54</sup> Trussell, (2025), *Hunger in Wales 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

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.

“

**Now, 30% of people coming through are in work poverty. But yeah, 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 in Wales (**Table 4**). Illness and disability drive up costs for households, and a lack of healthcare, appropriate employment support, and accessible jobs can make it difficult to find or sustain suitable work. Our recent research found that severe hardship affects people’s mental and physical health, cutting people off from the things that make life enjoyable, with financial situations often exacerbating, or contributing to, the development of mental and physical health problems.<sup>55</sup>

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.

“

**We're doing an exercise at the moment where we're asking the visitors that come in just to fill out a piece of paper and pop it in a box and let us know, you know, what sort of things are they struggling to access. Which a lot of the time is things that I don't know how to rectify, [like] mental health services.**

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

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<sup>55</sup> 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](https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/cost_of_hunger_and_hardship_june25.pdf)

## 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 (19%) and people with earned income alongside social security payments (22%) reported issues with work when they were referred – compared to 4% 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.<sup>56</sup>

Issues with health were higher for people solely in receipt of social security payments (23%), 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 Wales research found that most (73%) 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.<sup>57</sup>

Households in Wales 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 (25%), which was far higher than average (2%). The majority of people moving to Wales 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.<sup>58</sup> 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, a lack of support once people are granted refugee status, and a lack of access to both cash and in-kind forms of support playing a key part in driving this increase.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> 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>

<sup>57</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in Wales*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023), *Protection for everyone in our communities*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/neighbourhoods-and-communities/protection-for-everyone-in-our-communities>

<sup>59</sup> Fitzpatrick, S, et al. (2023), *Destitution in the UK 2023*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Heriot Watt University, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/deep-poverty-and-destitution/destitution-in-the-uk-2023>

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

<b>Reason for referral</b>	<b>Social security payments, not earning</b>	<b>Social security payments, earning</b>	<b>No social security payments, earning</b>	<b>No income, or insufficient access to it</b>	<b>Total % of referrals with reason selected</b>
Income or debt	72%	77%	74%	39%	70%
Issues with Social security payments	23%	16%	13%	28%	23%
Health	23%	19%	22%	15%	22%
Insecure housing	11%	4%	7%	13%	10%
Change in work or unemployment	4%	22%	19%	12%	6%
Change in personal circumstances	5%	6%	10%	6%	5%
Domestic abuse	2%	3%	2%	3%	3%
Immigration status	*	*	6%	25%	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.\*Represents less than 1% of referral reasons by source of income.

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

Assuming Welsh policy (e.g. support through the DAF and Single Advice Fund) stays consistent, we expect to see further decreases in the distribution of emergency food parcels by food banks in the Trussell community in Wales over the next year.<sup>60</sup> This will likely be driven by the introduction of welcome policy changes by the UK government to address child poverty such as the scrapping of the two-child limit, and the end to the managed migration process for Universal Credit.

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.<sup>61</sup> Disability was the most common factor underpinning food bank use in 2024<sup>62</sup>, 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 Wales.

We will be closely monitoring the impact of global instability on the prices of essentials in Wales. 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 in Wales.

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<sup>60</sup> This is the case if we do not see significant increases in the cost of essentials due to global instability.

<sup>61</sup> Trussell, (2025), *Hunger in Wales 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

<sup>62</sup> Disability was one of the most common factors underpinning hunger in Wales in 2024. The majority (81%) of people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in Wales in 2024 were disabled. In comparison, 2832 of people across Wales were disabled. Trussell, (2025), *Hunger in Wales 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

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

## A future without the need for food banks in Wales is possible. We need the next Welsh Government to step up and play its part.

Appalling levels of hunger and hardship in Wales should serve as a wake-up call for all political parties in Wales. Around a quarter of adults (25%), or 660,000 people in Wales, are going without enough food because they cannot afford it.<sup>63</sup> People need to turn to food banks because they don't have enough money for the essentials. Some are between jobs, have health conditions or are looking after relatives and children. Some people are in work that's insecure, inaccessible, and doesn't pay enough to live on. A growing number of people having to turn to food banks are working (31% of people referred to food banks in 2024 were in working households, up from 21% in 2022).<sup>64</sup> And the lack of affordable childcare, housing, and transport are further barriers holding too many people back from opportunities to increase their income.

During the Sixth Senedd, the Welsh Government has shown a commitment to supporting food banks in Wales and tackling the need for emergency food. Widened access to free school meals, commitments to improve access to Welsh benefits, and the introduction of food partnerships across local authorities in Wales are evidence of this commitment to tackling the problems that many people needing to use a food bank are facing.

However, despite these positive steps, the levels of use for food banks have increased sharply since the beginning of this Senedd term. Compared with 2021, the number of emergency food parcels provided by food banks in the Trussell community in Wales has increased by 18%.

We are seeing charitable food provision becoming normalised in communities across Wales. While food banks, and other types of food support, can provide a lifeline, they are not the solution. The number and variety of food banks, food pantries, social supermarkets, affordable food clubs, community fridges and many more has increased a great deal in recent years. But the evidence is clear that both free and subsidised food are not the best forms of support for people facing hardship, and often do not embed preventative approaches that build financial resilience in our communities.

All political parties taking part in the Senedd elections must take a stand and set an ambition to end the need for food banks in Wales. Of course, UK government decisions impact on this, but Welsh Government can and must use all available devolved powers to make sure incomes cover essentials costs.

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<sup>63</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in Wales*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/publications/hunger-in-the-uk>

<sup>64</sup> Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in Wales*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/publications/hunger-in-the-uk>

## Our priorities for the next Welsh Government:

The next Welsh Government should set out how their approach will not just end hunger today, but for good. Charitable food provision cannot be a substitute for action to address the core drivers of hunger and hardship.

### 1. Set an ambition to end the need for food banks

- Set a clear ambition to end the need for food banks in Wales, and develop a cross-governmental action plan and monitoring framework to address the drivers of hunger and hardship.
- Ensure that ongoing funding to local authorities and food partnerships aimed at reducing 'food poverty' is focused on tackling the local drivers of needs for emergency food. Local solutions should be co-produced with people with lived experience of hardship.

### 2. Sustain and increase access to cash-first crisis support and advice

- Retain cash-first crisis support through the Discretionary Assistance Fund, ensuring support is adequate for people to cover the essentials and, at a minimum, is increased in line with inflation.
- Ensure everyone applying for the Discretionary Assistance Fund is offered funded advice and support.

### 3. Use all powers and influence to boost incomes and reduce child poverty

- Scope options to implement a 'Welsh Child Payment', with clear intent to roll out the scheme across Wales. Taking learnings from Scotland, this policy should help to ensure families with children are able to afford the essentials.
- Increase access to Free School Meals for children whose families are in receipt of Universal Credit, and all children with NRPF from households on or below levels of income comparable with Universal Credit.
- Boost childcare support for families on low incomes with young children, and stop the 'postcode lottery' of childcare support. We support the Bevan Foundation and others' calls for funded, good quality, part-time childcare for all children under the age of four. This offer should be available for all parents, irrespective of their work status.
- Call on the UK government to make sure social security is working for people in Wales, including taking steps towards increasing social security to Essentials Guarantee levels.

### 4. Make sure everyone has a safe, secure home

- Improve the quality, safety and access to essential facilities in temporary accommodation, with improved guidance and legislation, alongside annual reporting on the use and condition of temporary accommodation.

- Set out a clear plan to significantly increase the number of social homes in Wales. We support Shelter Cymru and others' calls for more social homes across Wales, to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation for long periods.
- Call on the UK government to unfreeze the Local Housing Allowance.

## 5. **Building connected and supportive communities**

- Support and increase funding to make sure advice services are reaching people at highest risk of hunger and hardship, with a focus on targeted, in-depth and high-quality advice.
- Embed the Welsh Benefits Charter across Wales, making sure all local authorities prioritise increasing and simplifying access to Welsh benefits, delivering a 'compassionate Welsh Benefits System that is based upon respect for fundamental human rights and equality'.
- Make sure people with lived experience of severe hardship, who may be excluded from being able to use public transport due to high costs, inform decision-making on routes, accessibility, and affordable travel.

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