



# Emergency food parcel distribution in Scotland

March 2026

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# 2026: Key facts across Scotland

This factsheet reports on the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland during the period 1 January to 31 December 2025 (inclusive). During this time, food parcels were distributed from 143 locations across Scotland, as part of the Trussell community.<sup>1</sup>

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

- 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 Scotland 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.
- Despite recent decreases, appalling levels of severe hardship across Scotland persist. Food bank use in Scotland has fallen since the pre-pandemic period in 2019 (a -8% decrease). However, there is still a long way to go; the number of emergency food parcels distributed in 2025 remained 64% higher than 2015, with a 57% increase in parcels for children.
- The impact of policy change in driving the recent reduction in the number of emergency food parcels is likely to be limited.
  - As with access to wider support provided by food banks (below), cash-first approaches explored through the Scotland action plan to end the need for food banks have had targeted impact but are not yet expanded sufficiently to drive down financial hardship at scale.

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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 Scotland 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 67% of people who experienced food insecurity in Scotland had not used any form of food aid in the last year. Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in Scotland 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

- 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.
- There has been no change to the delivery of the Scottish Child Payment between 2023 and 2025. This means that it is unlikely that this policy has been a driver of the recent decrease in the use of food banks in Scotland.
- Other potential drivers have a mixed or low level impact in driving these recent decreases:
  - 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 number of people food banks are able to support.
  - Some food bank use will have been displaced to other charitable food provision which has grown in recent years. There has been an increase in the scale and diversity of charitable food provision in Scotland. However, available evidence indicates this expansion in provision is unlikely to be making a significant contribution in 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 Scotland. With the bold action to scrap the two-child limit from April 2026 confirmed we expect further decreases in the use of food banks across Scotland. However, we expect to continue to see far too many people coming through the doors of food banks in Scotland. It is likely that change will not happen for everyone or fast enough – currently, it is unlikely that we will see sufficient progress to move significantly closer to the Scottish Government’s commitment to end the need for food banks in Scotland.
  - There has been limited progress on food bank use since 2019 and food banks are seeing people experiencing sustained hardship – meaning they are needing support more often.
  - While disability social security payments are devolved to Scotland, 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 to the Local Housing Allowance by the UK government 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 Scotland include:
  - taking action to develop a supportive social security system that ensures everyone in Scotland can afford the essentials, including by delivering the first steps towards a minimum income guarantee;
  - investment to support the provision of community-based money advice;
  - committing to deliver enough new social homes to reduce affordable housing need;
  - delivering more dignified and timely support for disabled people and people with health conditions;
  - and updating Scotland's action plan to end the need for food banks.

# Food bank use in Scotland is still far higher than a decade ago

Food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland provided 219,000 emergency food parcels from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025. This was a decrease (-13%) compared to 2024 when 250,500 parcels were distributed. A larger decrease was seen compared to 2023 (-21%), the Trussell community's busiest year on record in Scotland.

While the rest of the UK still hasn't recovered to pre-pandemic levels (2019), Scotland has shown some progress - provision is 8% lower than in 2019. However, the picture across Scotland is very mixed; Edinburgh and Lothians East have seen a significant increase since 2019, with emergency food parcel distribution up by 44% ([Table 3](#)).

The long-term trend is stark, with emergency food parcel distribution in Scotland increasing significantly over the past decade. Since 2015, the number of parcels distributed by the Trussell community in Scotland has increased by 64%, with a 57% increase in parcels for children.

In 2025, almost 68,000 parcels were distributed for children by food banks in the Trussell community, an increase of nearly 25,000 parcels since 2015. This is the eighth year in succession that the number of parcels provided for children has been above 65,000.

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**That's our food bank been running more than 10 years. We shouldn't be, we shouldn't be living like this. People should be able to go and buy the essentials that they need to live.**

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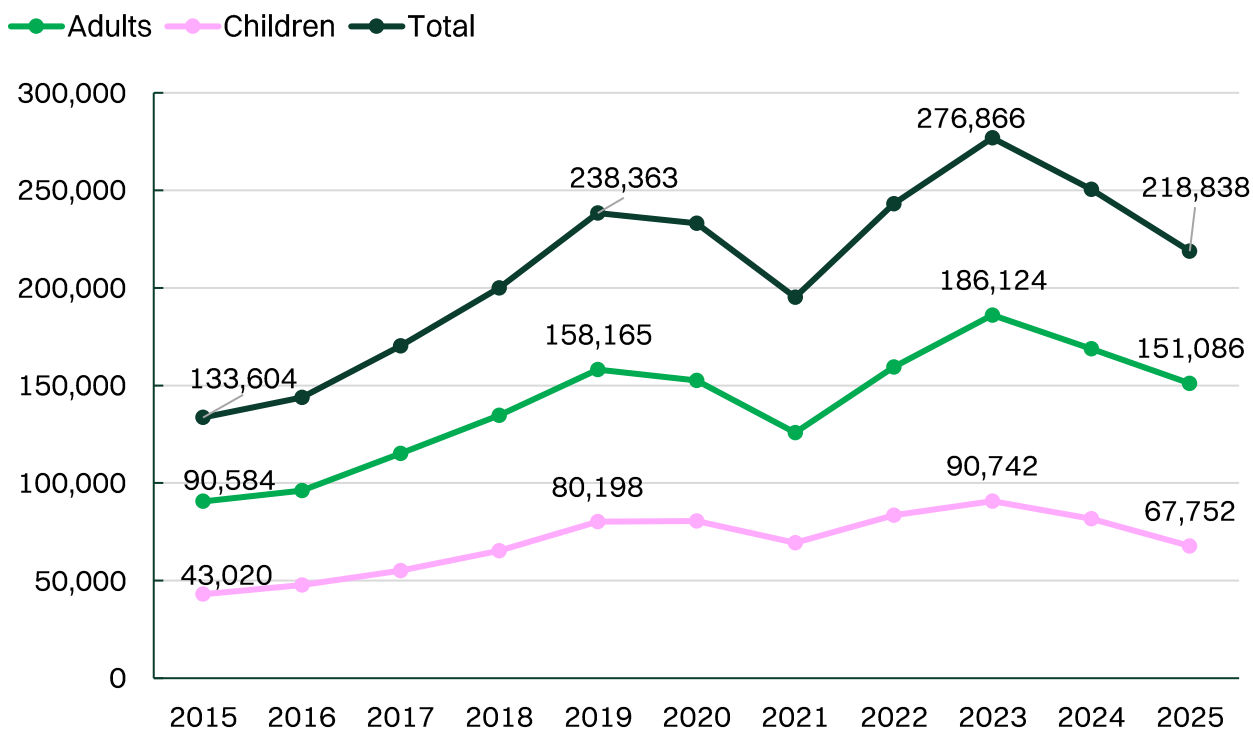
**Food bank in the Trussell community in Scotland, 2026**

These figures make it clear that communities in Scotland have a long way to travel to meet the Scottish Government's ambition to end the need for food banks in Scotland.

**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, Scotland: 2015-2025**

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 in Scotland. To understand the scale of underlying

need, Trussell monitors the number of people experiencing food insecurity<sup>4</sup> and the number of people experiencing severe hardship across Scotland.<sup>5</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.

The Scottish Health Survey is the most recent and robust tracker of food insecurity in Scotland.<sup>6</sup> As **Figure 2** indicates food insecurity appears to be following a similar pattern to Trussell parcel data. There was a clear increase from 2021 into a peak of 2023 when 14% of adults worried they would run out of food. This has declined to 8% in the latest figures for 2024.<sup>7</sup> This six percentage point decrease represents a 43% decrease in the number of adults experiencing food insecurity between 2023 and 2024.

As with food bank use, there has been limited progress in the proportion of people experiencing indicators of food insecurity over the last 10 years. In 2017, 8% of adults were worried they would run out of food – by 2024 this remained at 8%.

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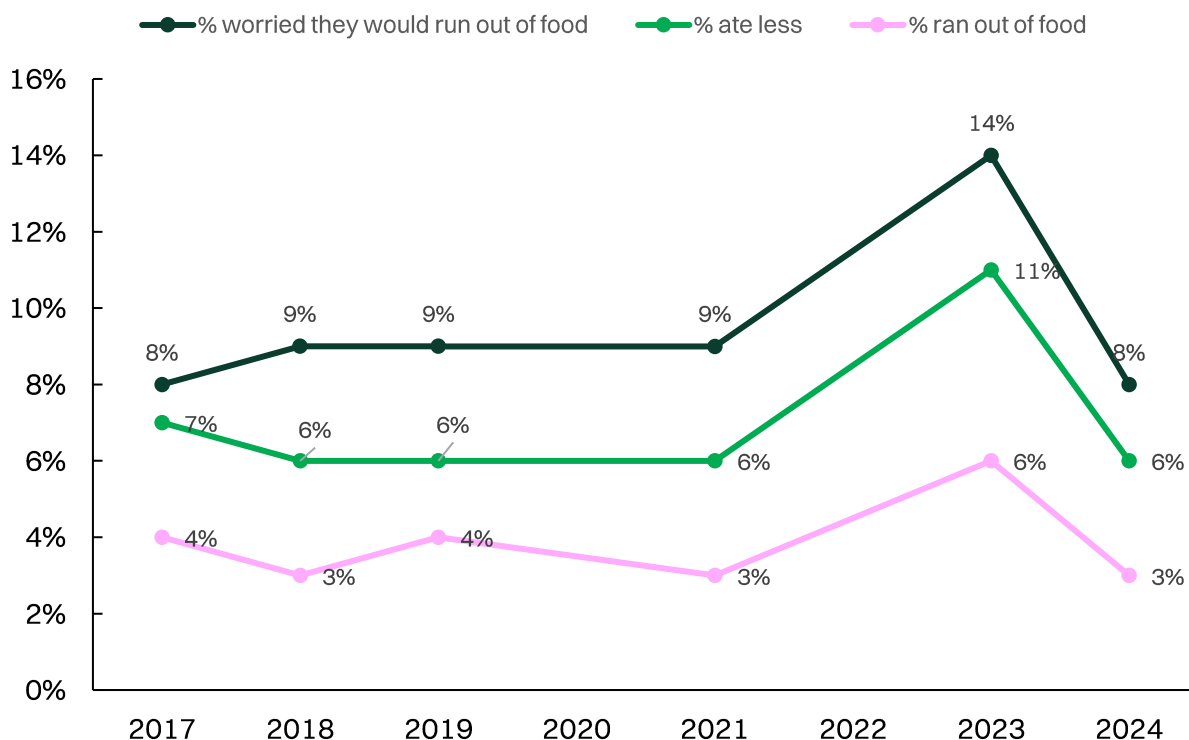
<sup>4</sup> Food insecurity means going without or cutting back on quality or quantity of food because people can't afford it: Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Hunger in the UK 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

<sup>5</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>6</sup> This Scottish Health Survey does not measure food insecurity in the same way as Trussell or other surveys – but does capture the essence of the experience. The Family Resources Survey also captures information on food insecurity but the most recent data on this is from 2023/24. Food and You 2 has recently started collecting information on food insecurity in Scotland but the most recent data from this was not available at the time of writing.

<sup>7</sup> Population Health Directorate, Scottish Government (2025), *Scottish Health Survey*, <https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-health-survey/>

**Figure 2 Percentage of adults experiencing indicators of food insecurity in previous 12 months – Scottish Health Survey**



Source: Population Health Directorate - Scottish Government – Scottish Health Survey

In the absence of recent data on the number of people experiencing severe hardship<sup>8</sup>, we can look at some proxies to understand changes to people’s financial situation / resilience between 2023 and 2025. These include:

- People are now more confident about managing unexpected costs: In November 2023, 28% of Scottish adults reported that they would be very confident they could pay an emergency expense of £500 without having to take out a loan or borrow money. By May 2025 this had increased to 34%.<sup>9</sup>
- People are also more satisfied that their income is able to cover the cost of living. In May 2023 net satisfaction that people’s income would cover the cost of living was -30%. By November 2025 this had improved to -13%.<sup>10</sup>
- Slightly fewer people are also having to borrow money from family or friends (16% in November 2023 down to 11% in November 2025) or use a credit card to afford purchases (26% in November 2023 to 22% in November 2025) than they previously did.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</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>9</sup> Diffley Partnership and Charlotte Street Partners, (2025), *Understanding Scotland*, <https://understanding-scotland.co.uk/>

<sup>10</sup> Diffley Partnership and Charlotte Street Partners, (2025), *Understanding Scotland*, <https://understanding-scotland.co.uk/>

<sup>11</sup> Diffley Partnership and Charlotte Street Partners, (2025), *Understanding Scotland*, <https://understanding-scotland.co.uk/>

## 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 nations, regions, 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 Scotland:

- 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. 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>12</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 – with a longer period of sustained increases than overall inflation – inflation on electricity, gas, and other fuels peaked at 90% in January 2023.<sup>13</sup>

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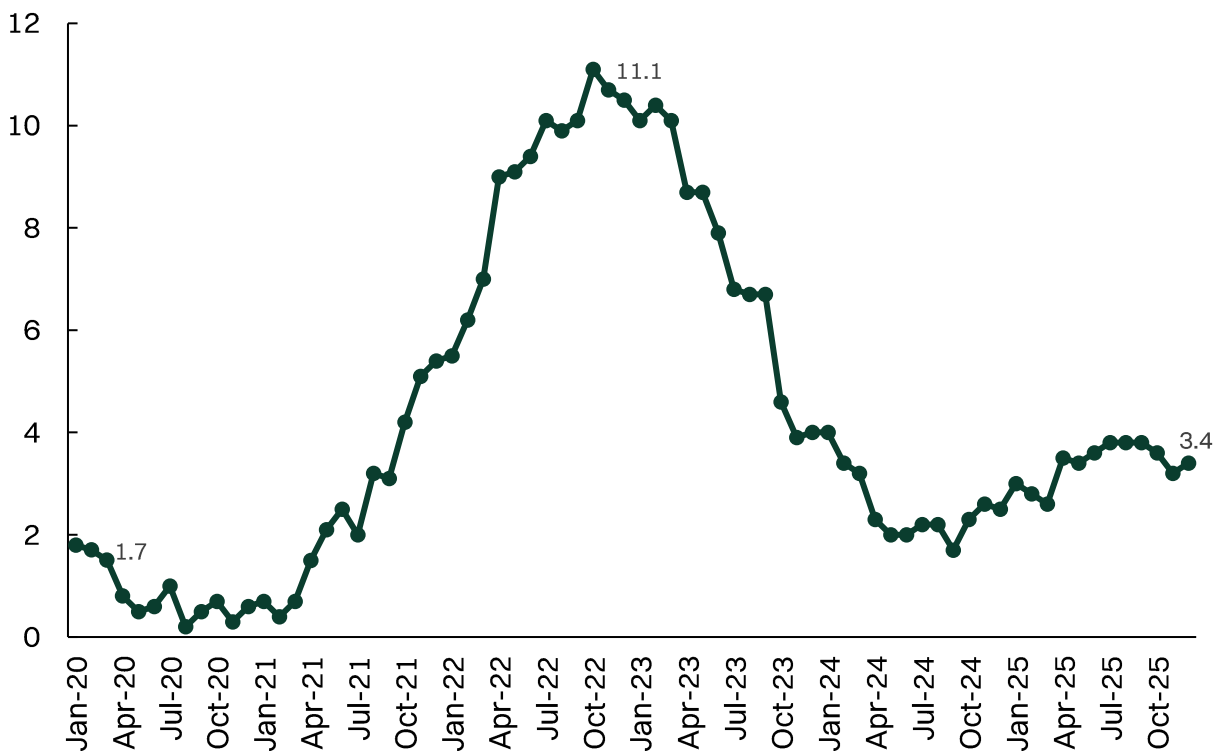
<sup>12</sup> Bull, R, et al, (2023), *Hunger in the UK*, Trussell, <https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/2023-The-Trussell-Trust-Hunger-in-the-UK-report-web-updated-10Aug23.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> ONS, (2026), *Consumer Price inflation, UK: December 2025*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/december2025>

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>14</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>15</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 January 2020 – December 2025**



Source: ONS – Consumer Price Inflation

<sup>14</sup> NIESR, (2022), *The unequal impact of rising inflation*, <https://niesr.ac.uk/blog/unequal-impact-rising-inflation>

<sup>15</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>16</sup> Wider evidence has also shown a link between job loss and food insecurity.<sup>17</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>18</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>19</sup>

These redundancy rates (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>20</sup>

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<sup>16</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>17</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>

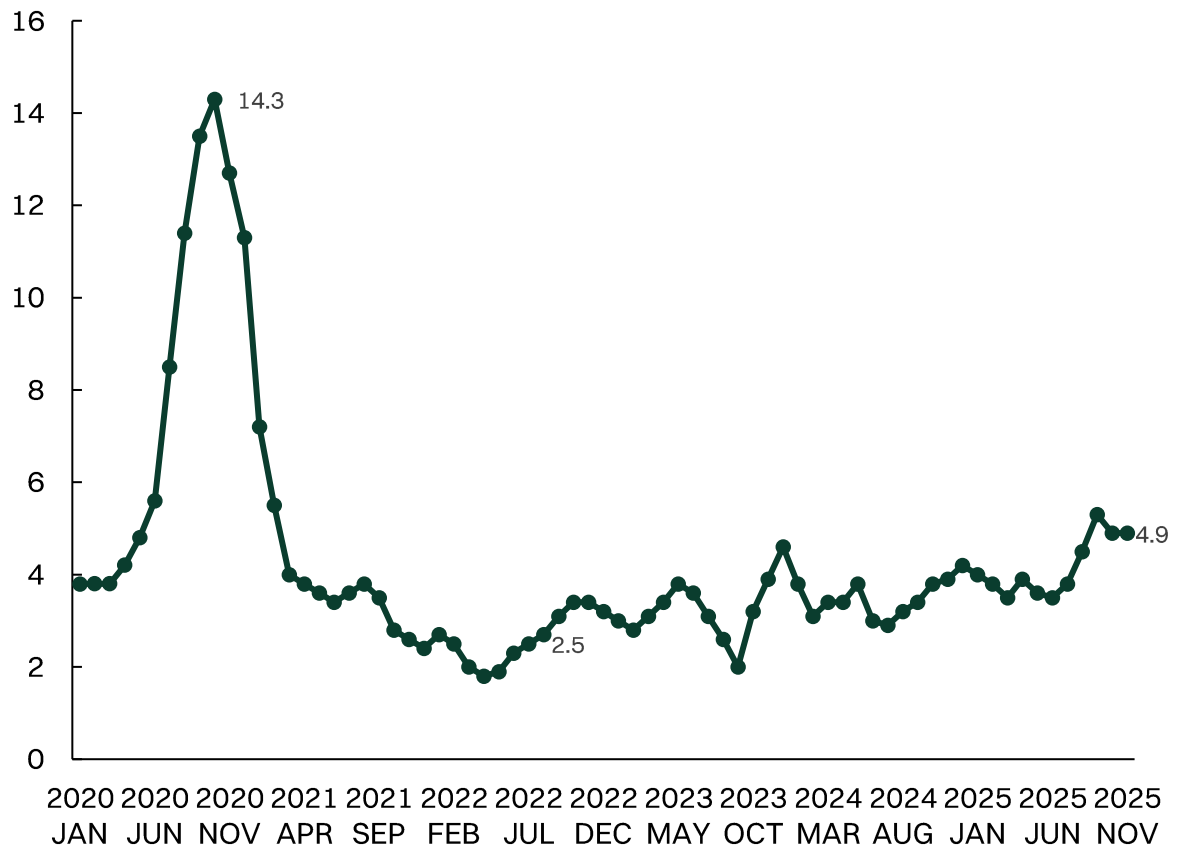
Mabli, J, (2023), *Food insecurity transitions and changes in employment and earnings*, American Journal of Preventative Medicine, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379722005050>

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>18</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>19</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>20</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 Scotland between 2023 and 2025.

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

We know that policy decisions can have an impact on food bank use. Previously, we have seen positive changes 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>21</sup> and child poverty.<sup>22</sup> Trussell has also reported on initial signs that the introduction of the

<sup>21</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>22</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/>

Scottish Child Payment has impacted on food bank use in Scotland. Wider evidence shows clear signs that this investment has reduced child poverty in Scotland.<sup>23, 24</sup>



**The Scottish child payment, we were really pleased and proud to have. Always wish it could be more, but we believe that it should, as much as possible, fill the gaps where the UK Parliament doesn't fill them.**



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

Since 2023 policy change from 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 in Scotland. Without the introduction of these policies, we would have seen far more people needing to turn to food banks in 2024 and 2025 respectively.

In Scotland, the Scottish Child Payment (SCP) which was introduced in February 2021 as part of efforts to meet Scotland's child poverty targets, has been a welcome policy intervention that ensures targeted cash support for households on the lowest incomes – with clear signs that it has made a difference to hardship in Scotland.

However, there is little evidence to suggest that this policy had been a significant driver in the change of use of food banks in Scotland between 2023 and 2025. This is due to the value and take up of the payment remaining at similar levels between these years:

- **Table 2** shows that the value of the payment did not change in real terms – meaning that it increased in line with inflation.
- **Figure 5** shows that take up of the policy did not change between 2023 and 2025 – meaning that the number of children benefiting remained about the same.
- There may be some delayed impact from the expansion in take up seen in 2022/23, but we don't have a clear evidence base to assess the impact of this.

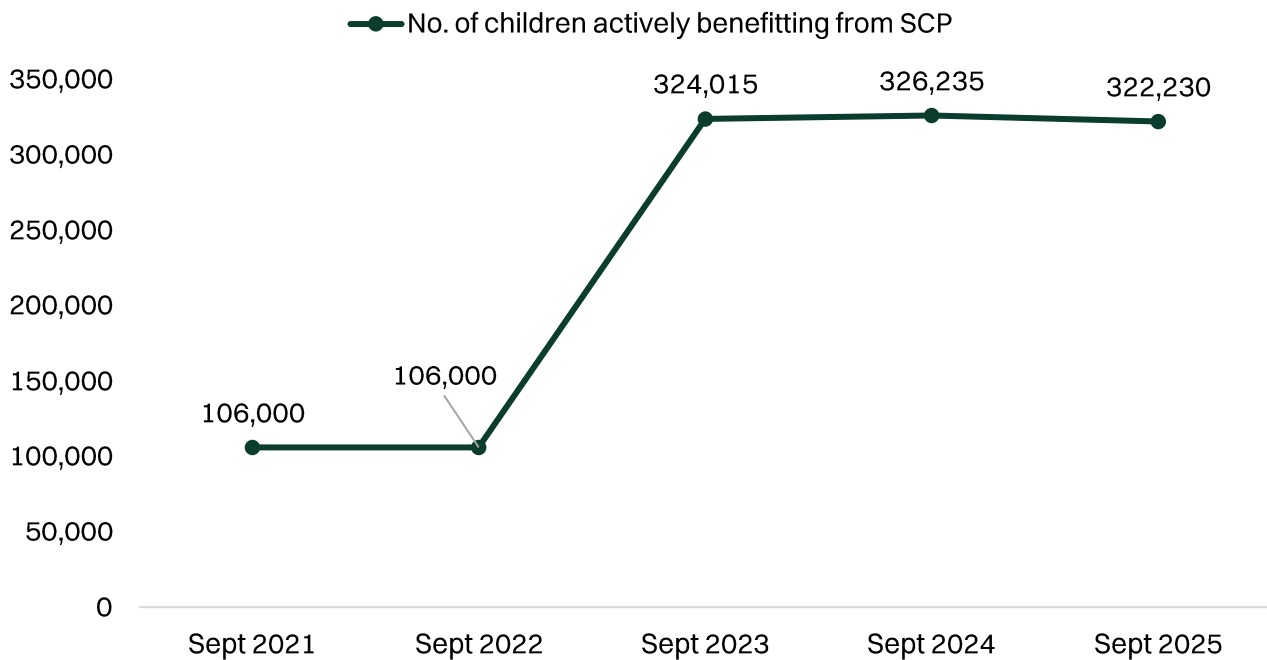
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<sup>23</sup> Randolph, H, Congreve, E, and Milne, K, (2024), *The impact of the Scottish Child Payment on the need for food banks*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/impact-of-the-scottish-child-payment-on-the-need-for-food>

<sup>24</sup> Scottish Government, (2026), *Five years of Scottish Child Payment*, <https://www.gov.scot/news/five-years-of-scottish-child-payment/>

**Table 2 Changes to Scottish Child Payment February 2021 – April 2025**

Date	Change
February 2021	Scottish Child Payment launched at £10 per week for children under 6 only
April 2022	Payment increased to £20 per week
November 2022	Payment increased to £25 per week and eligibility rolled out to under 16s
April 2024	Payment increased to £26.70 per week
April 2025	Payment increased to £27.15 per week

**Figure 5 Number of children actively benefiting from Scottish Child Payment Sept 2021 – September 2025**

Source: Social Security Scotland

Overall, there is clear evidence that during this period the SCP will have made a significant contribution to easing hardship and protecting families with children from poverty. Without the SCP many more people would have needed to turn to food banks for support. However, there have been no changes to the delivery or scale of the policy between 2023 and 2025 which would make it a key component of the change in use of food banks in that period. Our evidence suggests that the payment needs to be increased to £40 to continue to reduce the use of food banks in Scotland.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Statham, R, Smith, C, and Parkes, H, (2023), *Tackling child poverty and destitution*, Trussell and Save the Children, <https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/Scotland-Tackling-Child-Poverty-and-Destitution.pdf>

Other existing support such as the Scottish Welfare Fund, cash first partnerships and the Pathways to Advice and Cash Scotland (PACS) project will also have prevented more people from needing to turn to food banks.

- While there were no changes to the Scottish Welfare Fund in 2024, in 2025, new guidance was introduced as part of the Scottish Welfare Fund Review Action Plan, to improve both accessibility and fairness to applicants. This included the introduction of an 'Essentials Guarantee' methodology for crisis grant calculations, to ensure that they better meet need.
- Cash first partnerships delivered through funding from the Scottish Government aim to ensure fewer people need to turn to a food bank. The provision of this support began in January 2024 and is likely to have prevented some people from needing to turn to a food bank – although the overall size of the budget at £1.8 million over two years means that the provision of support was likely to be far outweighed by underlying need. The final evaluation of the project, due to be published in the coming weeks, should give more concrete evidence on impact.
- The PACS project, which kicked off in 2023 will have supported people to improve their financial situation. This is a collaborative project between the Scottish Government, Trussell, and other partners. It aims to improve access to and engagement with cash and advice. As with the cash first partnerships the provision through these projects is far outweighed by the underlying need – meaning that while it is providing beneficial support to some people it is not a main component of the reduced use we have seen of Trussell food banks.<sup>26</sup>

However, the impact of these positive changes to policy and practice 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.

## **Food banks and partners have contributed through access to wider support, but operational difficulties are likely to have also 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 in Scotland 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

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<sup>26</sup> Rocket Science, (2025), *Trussell: Pathways to Advice and Cash Scotland (PACS)*, [trussell\\_pacs\\_evaluation.pdf](#)

money matters. The number of people supported to access advice through food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland has increased from 900 in 2022/23 to 3,800 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>27</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.

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 in Scotland remains low relative to headline food bank use. In 2024/25 3,800 people were supported to access advice services, compared to 40,000 households supported with emergency food by food banks in Scotland. 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.



**[The financial inclusion] is going really, it's going really well. We are, you know, we have good results, good income maximisation and so on. I think, yeah, 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.**



**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.<sup>28</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.

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<sup>27</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>

<sup>28</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>

“

We are aware that there are people who, they're on Universal Credit, you know. Probably on the basic Universal Credit, and they just can't make it stretch to pay cheque time, you know? They can get by maybe for two-thirds of that time, like, you know, 10 days out the two weeks or three weeks out the four weeks, but they can't, they can't make it to payday. And that's challenging because they've got all their dues sort of thing and it's just not enough.

”

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

As mentioned [previously](#) 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>29</sup>

“

It was difficult to understand at first why there were less referrals coming in and why less people were coming to us for support, especially when it was obvious that people weren't getting better off. When we found out that the cash first approach was being followed by the Council, we immediately then sort of understood and agreed in principle that that was a positive step. And we want to be there for when the cash-first approach isn't available or when people reach their maximum award.

”

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

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<sup>29</sup> Rocket Science, (2025), *Trussell: Pathways to Advice and Cash Scotland (PACS)*, Trussell, [trussell\\_pacs\\_evaluation.pdf](#)

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 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, 11 out of 20 food banks in Scotland, who responded to a recent survey, 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.

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 funding challenges are reflected in Trussell's latest survey of food banks - in winter 2025 eight out of 20 food banks in Scotland, who responded to the survey, 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.**



**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 had 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. Over half (57%) of

frontline professionals in Scotland report insufficient capacity to support the need for their services and the majority (93%) say that their current funding levels are not sufficient to meet levels of need.<sup>30</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.

“

**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**

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. Administrative data from a variety of the largest social supermarket networks highlights a substantive growth in the number of locations operating since 2021 (**Figure 6**).

There is no publicly available information which tracks the number of charitable food providers in Scotland – but food banks and Trussell staff working in Scotland highlight the increasing diversity of charitable food provision in Scotland. This includes pantries, social supermarkets, provision in schools and recent developments such as the “Big House Multibank” initiative.

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 Scotland 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>31</sup> Changes to the local provision of charitable food can also increase the use of Trussell food banks – food banks we spoke to told us how in some cases closures to other forms of provision meant they saw an increase in the use of their services.

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<sup>30</sup> Money Advice Scotland, (2025), *State of the Nation report – Scotland's Money Advice Sector: At a Crossroads for Change*, <https://www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk/state-of-the-nation-report-2025>

<sup>31</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>

“

So, there's a pantry just round the corner. Which, which is very busy. Funnily enough, I was on a call with the pantry manager last week, you know, a kind of community group call, and they had thought until that day that they were going to be closing the doors next month, but they've got reprieve, so they've got funding for a year. But it does sound like they're very much they're going to change their model a lot. So that might have a knock-on effect on us. It certainly would have had they been closing their doors.

”

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

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.

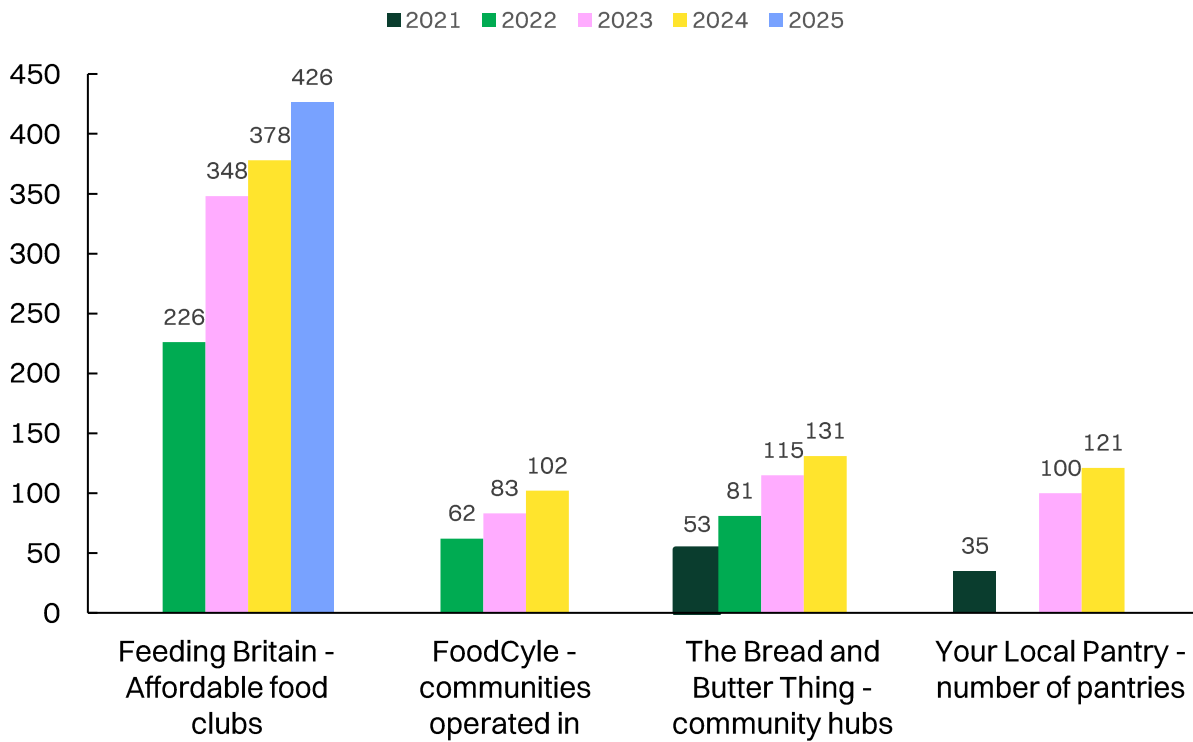
Indeed, there is little evidence that the displacement of use of food banks to other forms of charitable food support will have a significant impact on the actual underlying need for food banks. Evidence shows that most people using other forms of support remain at high risk of needing to turn to a food 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>32</sup> Further, the vast majority of people (77%) using Affordable Food Clubs are food insecure.<sup>33</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>32</sup> Blake, M, (2026), *Building Resilience: The role of food clubs in UK food security*, Comic Relief, [https://assets.ctfassets.net/zsfivwzfgl3t/5Nkx11c3EiNcw2EwflDMG/3b835a7cef5fb0f7b7a7bbb6a60c280d/Building\\_Resilience\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Food\\_Clubs\\_in\\_UK\\_Food\\_Security\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/zsfivwzfgl3t/5Nkx11c3EiNcw2EwflDMG/3b835a7cef5fb0f7b7a7bbb6a60c280d/Building_Resilience_The_Role_of_Food_Clubs_in_UK_Food_Security_Full_Report.pdf)

<sup>33</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 6 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 remains extremely high with some people at higher risk of needing support

- The nature of food bank use has changed in more 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 incomes continue to find it difficult to afford essentials and inequality of living standards and income has grown.
- Recent decreases have been seen across Scotland. But the scale of these changes and the longer term trends vary across the Scottish Parliamentary regions. Edinburgh and East Lothian have seen substantive increases since 2019, there has been little change in West Scotland, and the largest decreases have been seen in Glasgow and Highlands and Islands.
- 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 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 Scotland 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 Scotland 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 Scotland in 2025 had not used a food bank in the Trussell community before. But this proportion has fallen from 60% to 49% between 2019 and 2025.

This is reflected in the increase in the number of people who are having to return to food banks more frequently since 2019. Indeed, despite the overall decrease in the provision of support in Scotland between 2019 and 2025, the number of people referred 10 or more times within the year increased by 4% between 2019 and 2025. Over that period, the number of people referred to a food bank once decreased by -15%. This was far higher than the decrease for people referred four to nine times (-8%). A similar decrease (-13%) was seen for people referred 2-3 times.

In 2025, almost half (47%) of the people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland needed to use a food bank more than once in the year. Almost three in ten people (28%) used the food bank two-three times, and one in seven (16%) four-nine times. A small minority of people (3%) made over 10 visits to the food bank to access emergency food.

The increase in the number of people returning 10 or more times indicates that entrenched hardship, is a core component of the continued high levels of need for food banks in 2025 in Scotland. It 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.

These figures are supported by data on the average (mean) number of visits between 2019 and 2025 – this shows an increase from 2.4 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 long periods of time.

“

**There are new people, but there is a lot of people that come back week after week.**

”

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

“

**So, it's just, I guess, the food bank in itself is not as easy to run as it used to be. It's so much more complex, so much more complex, very aware of, you know, the risks are in compassion burnout... The stories are getting harder.**

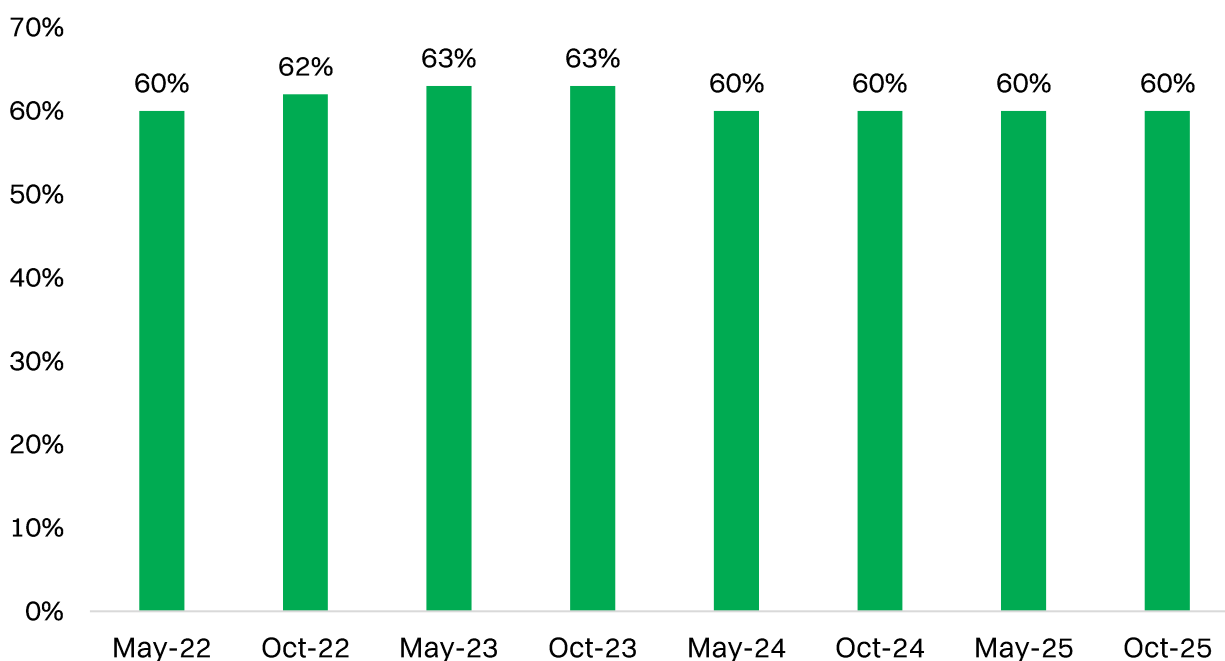
”

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

Wider evidence from across the UK 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 7](#) 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 43% reduction in the number of adults experiencing indicators of food insecurity in Scotland reported on [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 7 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 8](#) 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>34</sup>

**Figure 8 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 have been seen, they are most likely for people in shallower or more recent forms of hardship, and we have only made limited progress on pre-pandemic levels of food bank need in Scotland.

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

Food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland operate in a range of local and regional 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 and regional variations in policy, changes to local employment or demographics,

<sup>34</sup> Resolution Foundation (2026), *Unsung Britain: A portrait of the country's poorer half*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/unsung-britain/>

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 (33 out of 41 operating in both 2024 and 2025) food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland saw decreases in the amount of support provided between 2024 and 2025, a substantive minority of food banks actually reported an increase in this period (8 out of 41).

The picture of provision by food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland is mixed. Mid Scotland and Fife saw similar levels to last year, with only a -1% decrease since 2024. The Highlands and Islands (-3%), Edinburgh and East Lothian (-4%), West Scotland (-7%) and Glasgow (-10%) all saw below-average decreases for Scotland. Conversely, South Scotland (-34%) and North East Scotland (-19%) had above-average decreases.

When looking back longer-term, there is also a very mixed picture across Scotland. Edinburgh and East Lothian have seen a substantive increase since the pre-pandemic period, with emergency food parcels distributed in that area 44% higher in 2025 than in 2019. Food banks in West Scotland have also seen an increase since 2019 (2%), particularly driven by provision for children which is up by 11% since 2019. Mid Scotland and Fife have seen very little change (-0.4%) since 2019.

In contrast, some regions have seen large decreases since 2019 including Glasgow (-32%), Highlands and Islands (-24%), South Scotland (-22%) and Central Scotland and West Lothian (-18%). For Glasgow and Central Scotland and West Lothian the decreases seen since 2019 have been greater for children than for adults, whereas for Highlands and Islands and South Scotland the decrease is more balanced for adults and children.

As discussed above, the differences in parcel numbers across the Scottish regions does not necessarily reflect larger or smaller levels of need in those areas. It may be that the need is being picked up by different 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 3 Number of parcels for adults, children, and total distributed – Scottish Parliamentary Region breakdown: 2025, compared to 2019 and 2024.s**

	2025			Percentage change from 2019			Percentage change from 2024		
	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total	Adults	Children	Total
Central Scotland and Lothians West	11,596	5,278	16,874	-13%	-26%	-18%	-13%	-21%	-16%
Edinburgh and Lothians East	30,460	12,179	42,639	52%	27%	44%	-2%	-11%	-4%
Glasgow	20,197	10,120	30,317	-27%	-40%	-32%	-9%	-10%	-10%

Highlands and Islands	7,335	3,057	10,392	-23%	-25%	-24%	-2%	-5%	-3%
Mid Scotland and Fife	16,026	7,603	23,629	5%	-10%	0%	1%	-4%	-1%
North East Scotland	18,312	7,164	25,476	-9%	-29%	-16%	-18%	-24%	-19%
South Scotland	17,782	8,267	26,049	-20%	-27%	-22%	-29%	-42%	-34%
West Scotland	29,378	14,084	43,462	-2%	11%	2%	-6%	-8%	-7%
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>151,086</b>	<b>67,752</b>	<b>218,838</b>	<b>-4%</b>	<b>-16%</b>	<b>-8%</b>	<b>-10%</b>	<b>-17%</b>	<b>-13%</b>

Source: Trussell administrative data.

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

Despite decreases across Scotland in the number of parcels provided for children last year (-17%), 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 Scotland (**Figure 9**), we see a notable difference for children aged 0-16. The proportion of parcels distributed for children aged 0-16 (31%) was almost double their population share across Scotland (17%).<sup>35</sup> In 2025, one in four (22%) parcels provided by food banks were for younger children aged 0-11 – despite them making up just 12% of people across Scotland.

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.<sup>36</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>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> ONS, (2024), *Estimates of the population for UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalescotlandandnorthernireland>

<sup>36</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>37</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>

Relative child poverty decreased to 22% in 2023/24, down from 26% the previous year.<sup>38</sup> While a welcome decrease, the Scottish Government's target of fewer than 18% of children living in poverty by 2025 was missed and poverty rates have increased for families with a baby during this time.

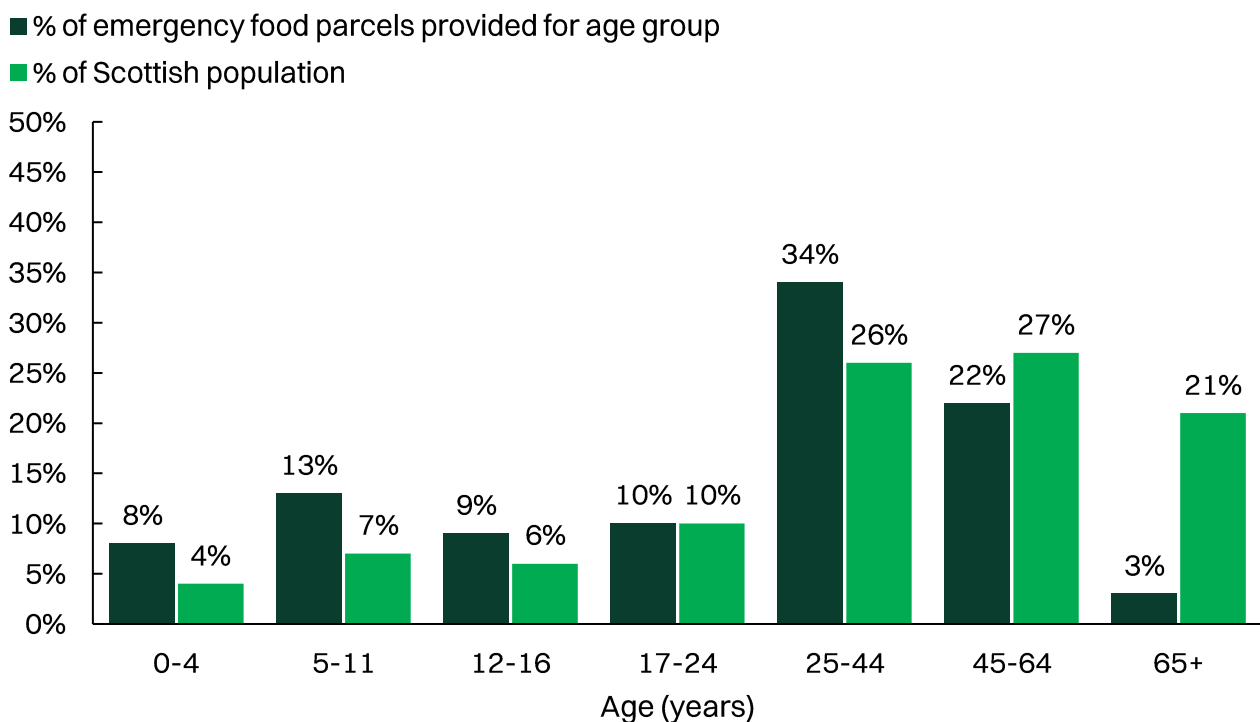


We have to be cold and all be freezing as the heating is so much... Me and my husband have gone hungry to make sure our kids have one meal a day.



Person claiming Universal Credit interviewed in February 2025<sup>39</sup>

**Figure 9 Percentage of emergency food parcels distributed for different age groups compared to population distribution, Scotland: 2025**



Source: Trussell administrative data and ONS population estimates.

The decrease in the number of parcels provided by food banks in Scotland since 2019 has been more substantive for children (-15%) than for adults (-10%). This is a trend we will continue to monitor over the next year.

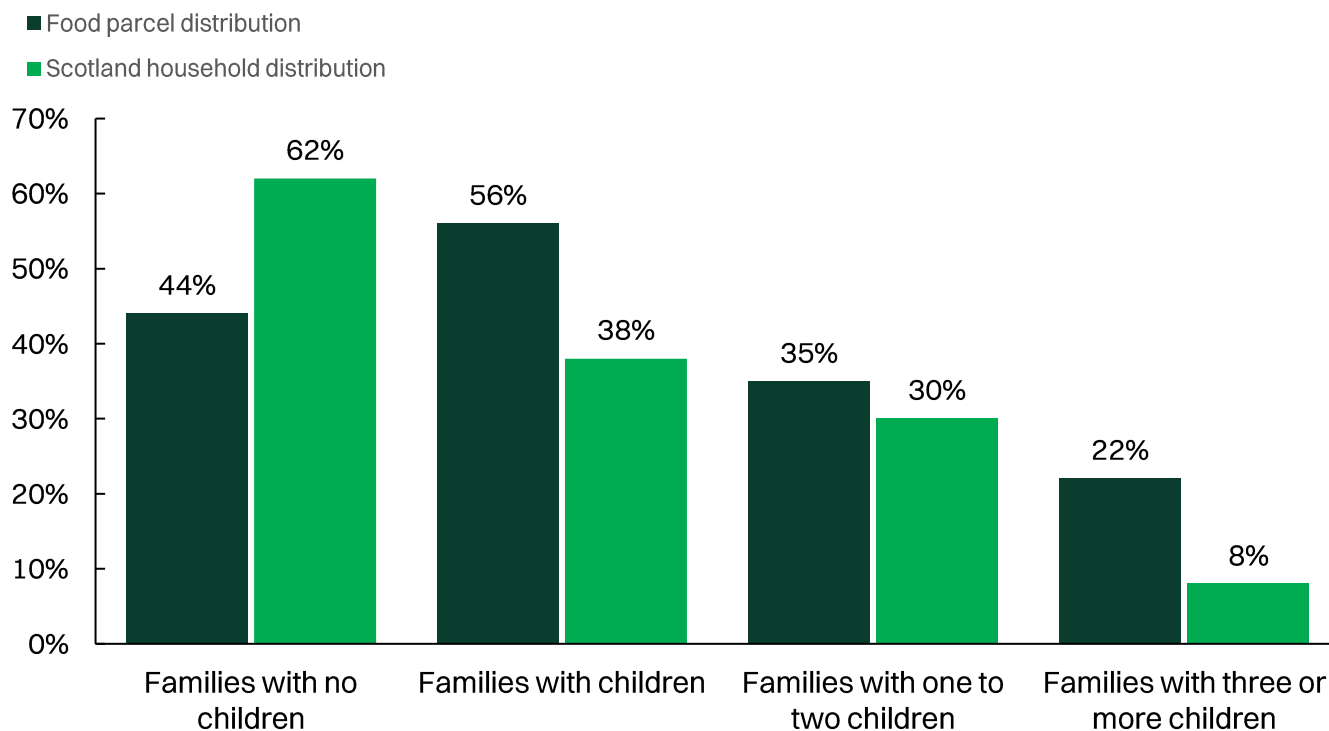
When taking a whole household view, the majority (56%) of support provided by food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland was for families with children (Figure 10) in 2025. This is despite people living in these families making up just 38% of the Scottish population. This over-representation is 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 (22%) was well over double their population share (8%) in 2025. For families with one to two

<sup>38</sup> Scottish Government (2025), *Child poverty in Scotland falls*, <https://www.gov.scot/news/child-poverty-in-scotland-falls/>

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

children the proportion was similar, with 35% of parcels distributed to families of this size and 30% of people living in families of this size in the Scottish population.

**Figure 10 Percentage of emergency food parcels distributed by family type, Scotland, compared to percentage of Scottish population living within each family type: 2025**



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

We warmly welcome the decision to remove the two-child limit from April 2026, which is projected to protect thousands of children in Scotland from growing up experiencing severe hardship.<sup>40</sup> We will be monitoring the impact the change to this policy has on emergency food parcel distribution over the coming year.

Food banks have spoken to us about the welcome relief the Scottish Child Payment, a weekly social security payment for low-income families with children under 16, has brought to many families in Scotland. However, at a crucial time in a child's development, far too many children are still needing the support from a food bank in Scotland. For the Scottish Government to meet their child poverty targets of 10% or less children in Scotland in poverty by 2030/31 further investment is needed in the Scottish Child Payment to increase its value and scope. We therefore welcome the commitment to increase the Scottish Child Payment to £40 from 2027 for families with a baby under the age of one but this alone is not enough - as explored [later](#) in this factsheet.

<sup>40</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>

## 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 in 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.<sup>41</sup> However, there are concerning signs of a resurgence in pensioner hardship. Since 2013/14 there has been a 33% increase in the number of pensioners experiencing severe hardship in Scotland – far higher than the increase in working age adults (8%).<sup>42</sup> More recently, the proportion of pensioners who worried that they would run out of food in the previous 12 months has increased from 1% in 2017 to 3% in 2024.<sup>43</sup>

While it is from a low base, and they are still significantly under-represented relative to their share of the Scottish population (see **Figure 9**), there has been a rapid increase in emergency food provision for pension age adults since 2019. In 2025, 5,400 parcels were distributed for someone aged 65 and over. This is over twice the number provided in 2019 when 2,600 parcels were distributed.

As seen in **Table 4**, it is notable that not only is this the only age group to see increases from 2019 to 2025, but the increase is of a substantive scale as well.<sup>44</sup>

**Table 4 Percentage increase in the number of parcels by age group, Scotland: 2019 – 2025**

Age	Percentage increase from 2019
0-4	-26%
5-11	-18%
12-16	-4%
17-24	-3%

<sup>41</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>42</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>43</sup> Population Health Directorate, Scottish Government (2025), *Scottish Health Survey*, <https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-health-survey/>

<sup>44</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.

25-64	-9%
65+	106%

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 in the Trussell community across the UK were more likely to be renting, and less likely to own their home in comparison to pensioners in the UK 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.<sup>45</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>46</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 pensioners are increasing the financial strain faced by older people.<sup>47</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 Scotland 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 (73% 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.



People need more money in their pocket.



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

<sup>45</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>46</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>47</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)

**Table 5 Reasons for referral for people supported, Scotland: 2025**

Reason for referral	% of referrals with reason selected
Income or debt	73%
Health	22%
Issue with social security payments	20%
Insecure housing	7%
Change in work hours or unemployment	5%
Change in personal circumstances	5%
Immigration status	3%
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 in Scotland 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>48</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.

“

**It feels very much like almost that we're subsidising the sort of welfare system... 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**

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 (20%). 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.

<sup>48</sup> Trussell, (2025), *Hunger in Scotland 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

“

**And you know, we're seeing people who have got huge levels of debt, who... don't have enough money to make ends meet. And one bill is enough you know [to] throw their whole budgeting... Universal Credit delays and sanctions, that's a big percentage [of people we see]. A big percentage.**

”

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

Changes in work hours or unemployment affected 5% of referrals to food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland in 2025. Most households referred to food banks are not in work. However, our Hunger in Scotland data shows that a significant and increasing minority are. Almost a quarter (24%) of people referred to food banks in Scotland in 2024 were in working households, an increase from 2022 (17%) showing how, increasingly, work is not providing reliable protection from, or a route out of, severe hardship.<sup>49</sup> 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>50</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 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.

“

**We're seeing people who are in work and their income is just not enough to make ends meet. So, I think the cost of living, and as I said, you know, one unexpected bill [increases risk of using a food bank].**

”

**Secretary of a food bank in the Trussell community in Scotland, 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 Scotland (**Table 5**). 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

<sup>49</sup> Ipsos, (2025), *Hunger in Scotland 2025*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

<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>

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>51</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.

“

...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 (18%) and people with earned income and income from social security payments (16%) reported issues with work when they were referred – compared to 3% 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>52</sup>

Issues with health were higher for people solely in receipt of social security payments (23%), compared to people with other forms of income (**Table 6**). 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 Scotland research found that most (71%) 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>53</sup>

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 (33%), which was far higher than average (3%). The majority of people moving to the UK to join family, work or study, have

<sup>51</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>52</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>53</sup> Trussell, (2025), *Hunger in Scotland 2025*, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/hunger-in-the-uk-2025>

'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>54</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, 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>55</sup>

**Table 6 Reason for referral amongst households, by income sources, Scotland: 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	76%	80%	70%	42%	73%
Health	23%	17%	13%	15%	22%
Issue with social security payments	20%	15%	12%	26%	20%
Insecure housing	7%	3%	6%	12%	7%
Change in work hours or unemployment	3%	16%	18%	10%	5%
Change in personal circumstances	5%	5%	6%	6%	5%
Immigration status	*	*	12%	33%	3%
Domestic abuse	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%

Source: Trussell administrative data. Data entry was multiple choice - referral partners could select up to four responses. Data has been recoded to combine categories. \*Represents less than 1% of referral reasons by source of income.

<sup>54</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>55</sup> Fitzpatrick, S, et al. (2023), *Destitution in the UK 2023*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Heriot Watt University, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/deep-poverty-and-destitution/destitution-in-the-uk-2023>

## Food bank use is expected to continue to decline, but we need sustained political action to stop entrenched hardship holding people back across Scotland

We expect to see further decreases in the distribution of emergency food parcels by food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland over the next year.<sup>56</sup> 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 across the UK and if the next Scottish Government continues to invest in the Scottish Child Payment and cash first support for low income families.

However, it is unlikely that these interventions alone will be enough to move significantly closer to the Scottish Government's commitment to end the need for food banks in Scotland, 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>57</sup> Disability was the most common factor underpinning food bank use in 2024<sup>58</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.

The UK and Scottish Governments must work together to achieve their shared ambition of ending the need for food banks and 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 Scotland.

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

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<sup>56</sup> This is the case if we do not see significant increases in the cost of essentials due to global instability.

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

<sup>58</sup> Disability was one of the most common factors underpinning hunger in Scotland in 2024. Three in four (75%) people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland in 2024 were disabled. In comparison, 32% of people across Scotland were disabled. Trussell, (2025), *Hunger in Scotland 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

## We can end the need for food banks in Scotland

Everyone in Scotland should be able to afford the essentials and we are determined to build a fairer future where no one needs to use a food bank.

While our latest parcel stats do show a reduction in referrals to food banks in the Trussell community, we are continuing to see unacceptably high levels of hunger and hardship in Scotland.

Our latest Hunger in Scotland research found that one million people in Scotland faced hunger in 2024 due to a lack of income. Too many people in Scotland need to turn to a food bank or other charitable food provider to survive.

We have seen some very welcome progress over the course of the current parliament, including the publication of the UK's only action plan to end the need for food banks, a welcome focus on cash-first approaches, and on increasing household incomes. But for too many people supported by food banks in the Trussell community in Scotland, change isn't happening fast enough.

**As we approach the Holyrood election, we are calling on all of Scotland's political parties to commit to building a Scotland where everyone can afford the essentials, where every child has a decent start in life and where food banks are consigned to history, forever.**

### Our five key asks of the next Scottish Government

- 1. Continue to invest in a supportive social security system that ensure everyone in Scotland can afford the essentials, including:**
  - Increasing the Scottish Child Payment to £40 a week immediately, rising to £55 by the end of the parliament.
  - Introducing a Scottish payment to mitigate the five week wait for Universal Credit.
  - Reforming public debt to prevent it trapping people in poverty.
  - Making it easier for people to access the support and benefit they are entitled to.
  - Significantly increasing investment into the Scottish Welfare Fund.
- 2. Increased investment in holistic, tailored advice, accessible to people experiencing hunger and hardship, to ensure everyone gets the support they need in the right place and at the right time.**
  - Continued recognition and promotion of advice as being central to ending the need for food banks.

- Funding local authorities to deliver multi-channel, community-based money and welfare advice and to ensure a 'no wrong door' approach in every community.
- Continued support for cash-first initiatives with access to advice, targeted at people experiencing or at risk of hunger and hardship.

### 3. **Ensure everyone in Scotland has a safe, secure and affordable home**

- Commit to delivering enough new social homes to reduce affordable housing need by the end of the next parliament.
- Introduce new minimum standards of cooking provision in temporary and homeless accommodation.
- Improved funding for accessible and adaptable housing.

### 4. **Deliver more dignified support for disabled people and people with health conditions.**

- Increased financial support so disabled people can afford the essentials.
- More investment in both child and adult mental health services, addiction services and community link workers.
- Focused action and support to end the disability employment gap for disabled people and to make fair work a reality.

### 5. **Commit to publishing an updated action plan to end the need for food banks**

- This should include a more ambitious and fully funded roadmap, aligned to the delivery of the 2030 child poverty targets and focused on ensuring everyone can access the support they need and can always afford the essentials.
- We are calling on all of Scotland's political parties to include a commitment in their Scottish Parliament manifestos to build a future for Scotland where no one needs to turn to charity to feed themselves or their family.

**We are also urging the new Scottish Government to work in close partnership with the UK Government to end hunger and hardship across the UK.** This should include supporting reform of Universal Credit, so it always covers the cost of essentials.

For further details of our Trussell Holyrood calls for change, visit: <https://www.trussell.org.uk/our-work/scotland>



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