

Hunger in the UK 2026



Contents

Contents.....	2
Executive summary.....	3
Increasing scale and severity of hardship.....	3
Inadequate incomes, high costs, and a lack of support continue to drive the need for food banks ...	4
Introduction.....	6
We need a re-commitment to ending the need for emergency food.....	6
Tackling food bank need is key to building a preventative state.....	7
Financial insecurity means hope feels out of reach for many people right now	8
Methodology.....	10
Food insecurity and charitable food provision	10
Severe hardship.....	11
Updates from previous reports	12
No progress on the scale of hunger in the UK	13
Despite positive steps the number of people experiencing severe hardship has increased	13
Hunger is all too common, as numbers at risk increase since 2024.....	16
Millions of people continue to need to turn to charitable food provision for support.....	20
There are clear drivers of hunger across the UK.....	24
Incomes do not cover the cost of essentials.....	24
High costs are weighing down people on the lowest incomes.....	31
Unmet support needs and social isolation are deepening hunger and hardship in our communities	35
What do governments need to do to reduce hunger in the UK?	45

Executive summary

This briefing outlines the scale, drivers and solutions to hunger in the UK.

Two years on from the UK Government's commitment to end the "moral scar" of the need for emergency food parcels, there has been no progress in the number of people at risk of hunger and hardship. There are also concerning signs that the hardship many people face continues to get deeper.

Tackling food bank need is vital in order for the Prime Minister to deliver on his promises to build a more "preventative state", and "bring back hope". The evidence is clear that experiencing hunger and hardship has a severe and lasting impact on people's ability to build a successful life.

Increasing scale and severity of hardship

Despite positive steps, the number of people experiencing severe hardship has increased. Almost 9 million people are experiencing severe hardship in 2026/27, including 6 million adults and 3 million children. This represents one in seven people (13%) across the UK, rising to one in five (20%) children who are growing up in a family experiencing severe hardship. Between 2024/25 and 2026/27, the number of people experiencing severe hardship increased by over 500,000, including an additional 115,000 children. Our analysis shows this figure would have been far higher, had the UK government not taken the welcome decision to remove the two-child limit.

Without further action, 165,000 more people, including 55,000 children, will experience severe hardship in the last full year of this Parliament. This means 9.1 million people would be living with such limited financial resources that they are at risk of needing a food bank by 2028/29.

Hunger in the UK is all too common, as numbers at risk increase since 2024. 17.6 million people experienced food insecurity in 2026, including 13.0 million adults and 4.6 million children. This means that they had run out of food and were unable to afford more, reduced the size of their meals or ate less because they couldn't afford food, or went hungry or lost weight due to a lack of money in the past year. This is an increase of over 3.5 million people between 2024 and 2026, including an additional 840,000 children. One in five (20%) households in the UK experienced food insecurity in 2026, an increase from 16% in 2024 and 14% in 2022.

Millions of people continue to need to turn to charitable food provision for support. There is a clear impetus for a renewed commitment to ending the need for food banks in the UK. In 2026, 8.3 million people, including 5.8 million adults and 2.5 million children needed to turn to charitable food provision for support. One in 10 households (10%) reported needing to turn to this provision for support in the previous 12 months. These figures are an increase from 2024 (7%) when 6.5 million people used any form of charitable food provision (4.6 million adults and 1.9 million children) and 2022 when 5.9 million people used any form of charitable food provision (4.2 million adults and 1.7 million children).

Inadequate incomes, high costs, and a lack of support continue to drive the need for food banks

Across the three waves of this research programme, we have built a clear and consistent picture of what is driving hunger and hardship in the UK.

Incomes do not cover the cost of essentials

The inadequacy of Universal Credit has consistently been shown to be central to the need for food banks across the UK. The majority (64%) of people in receipt of Universal Credit were food insecure in 2026 – over three times the rate for people across the UK (20%). More than a third (35%) of people in receipt of Universal Credit had used any form of charitable food provision in the past year, compared to 10% across the UK.

Additional costs and inadequate support drive hunger and hardship for disabled people. One in three (32%) disabled people are food insecure and one in six (15%) have accessed charitable food provision in the past year (compared to 20% and 10% of the general population, respectively). The risk is even higher for households with a disabled child, where 47% of households are food insecure and 32% are accessing charitable food provision.

Disabled people are far more likely to be exposed to the inadequacy of Universal Credit than people who are not disabled. One in three (32%) working-age disabled people are in receipt of Universal Credit compared to 10% of working age people who are not disabled.¹ This is commonly leading to poor outcomes for disabled people with two thirds (68%) of disabled people in receipt of Universal Credit being food insecure.

Income from work is frequently not providing enough for people to afford their day-to-day costs. One in four (23%) working-age people who were in work were experiencing food insecurity in 2026, and 11% had needed to use charitable food provision. In 2026, 73% of people who said they were in food insecure households were working.

High costs are weighing down the people on the lowest incomes

Housing is one of the biggest costs that people on the very lowest incomes face. Private renters in the lowest income quintile spend 63% of their household income on rent.² It is perhaps unsurprising then that the costs associated with renting are increasingly driving hunger and hardship. One in three (32%)

¹ Trussell analysis of Households Below Average Income 2024/25. DWP, (2026), *HBAI – Data from 2021/22 (admin-linked)*, <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/dataCatalogueExplorer.xhtml>

² Worsdale, R, Elliot, J, and Blower, R, (2026), *Under pressure: The affordability challenges facing private renters*, JRF, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/housing/under-pressure-the-affordability-challenges-facing-private-renters>

private renters face food insecurity, and one in seven (13%) have accessed charitable food provision in the past year.

The risk of hunger and hardship is even higher for private renters who are in receipt of Local Housing Allowance (LHA). In 2026, 29% of private renters in receipt of LHA had needed to turn to charitable food provision in the last year (compared to 11% in 2024). Over half (55%) had experienced food insecurity – far higher than the rate for private renters who were not in receipt of LHA (29%).

Energy bills are another big cost affecting people on the lowest incomes and are set to rise significantly in 2027. Two in five (42%) people referred to Trussell food banks are behind on their energy bills. Among people across the UK behind on their gas or electricity bills, 87% were food insecure and 54% had accessed charitable food provision in the past year. These stark figures are likely to be closely linked to the fact that the majority (76%) of people behind on their energy bills are facing three or more forms of debt and arrears.

Unmet support needs and social isolation are deepening hunger and hardship in our communities

People experiencing food insecurity commonly face multiple challenges including issues with debt, housing, health and work. The majority (80%) of people experiencing food insecurity were experiencing other issues (including with debt, their health, housing, or work).

It is likely that many people facing hunger and hardship will not have access to the advice and support they need. In 2024, a third (34%) of people referred to food banks didn't receive any formal support or advice prior to a food bank referral. This is particularly due to a lack of available support and difficulties in accessing it when it is available. Two in five (42%) people experiencing food insecurity are confident in asking for a decision to be reconsidered when it negatively affects them, and just half (49%) are confident in dealing with organisations to resolve an issue. This is far lower than people across the UK (57% and 66% respectively).

A lack of social and community connection is leaving people at risk of hunger and hardship. Almost half (47%) of socially isolated people experienced food insecurity in 2026, compared to 17% of people who were not socially isolated. Relationships can help to mitigate the impacts of hunger and hardship, and support people to access wider forms of support.

Changes to people's circumstances are too often pushing them into hunger and hardship: 46% of people who have had to take unpaid leave from work due to caring responsibilities experienced food insecurity. There is a clear need for effective crisis support to ensure these changes don't push people into hunger and hardship – but Trussell's evidence shows that just one in 10 (10%) people referred to food banks had received local crisis support.

Introduction

This is the third briefing in the 'Hunger in the UK' series, which provides a 'state of the nation' look at the scale and drivers of hunger and hardship across the UK.

This briefing updates this evidence base and for the first time brings together two key measures of hunger and hardship across the UK:

1. **Food insecurity** – this measures whether people are having to go without or cut back on the quality or quantity of food because they can't afford it.
2. **Severe hardship** – this measures whether someone's available financial resources are so low that they are at high risk of needing to turn to a food bank.

This is a critical point for living standards in the UK, with a real risk that they will continue to slide in the face of escalating inflation over the next year. This new evidence highlights:

- There is an urgent duty on the UK Government to re-commit to ending the need for emergency food.
- Tackling food bank need is essential for meeting the new Prime Minister's goal of building a preventative state.
- Improving living standards is crucial to restoring hope across the UK – with too many people trapped in appalling experiences of severe hardship.

We need a re-commitment to ending the need for emergency food

Under the last Prime Minister, the UK government committed to end the "moral scar" of the need for emergency food parcels.³ This commitment was made after sharp increases in the use of food banks – between 2019 and 2023 the number of parcels provided by food banks in the Trussell community increased by 77%.⁴ This was accompanied by increases in deeper forms of hardship including:

- Severe hardship – a record number of people across the UK were experiencing severe hardship in 2022/23 – which increased by 13% between 2019/20 and 2022/23.⁵

³ Labour, (2024), *Change Labour Party Manifesto 2024*, <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Labour-Party-manifesto-2024.pdf>

⁴ Trussell, (2026), *End of Year Food bank Stats*, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/latest-stats/end-of-year-stats#factsheets-and-data>

⁵ Weekes, T, et al, (2024), *The Cost of Hunger and Hardship – interim report*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/the-cost-of-hunger-and-hardship>

- Destitution – the number of people experiencing destitution in the UK increased by 61% between 2019 and 2022.⁶
- Being unable to cover day to day bills – 4.2 million people across England and Wales were in a negative budget in 2023/24 up from 2.6 million in 2020/21.⁷ People are in a negative budget when the cost of essentials exceed their income.

Two years on, this briefing reaffirms the urgent need for ambitious action to meet this commitment. There has been no progress in the number of people at risk of hunger and hardship and there are concerning signs of deepening and more persistent hardship. The public agree; polling for this research shows that in 2026 82% of the UK public thought that hunger and hardship were a big problem in the UK. We have seen welcome announcements from the new Prime Minister on ending rough sleeping and we now need to see a similar recommitment to ending the need for food banks. We can't afford to wait.

Tackling food bank need is key to building a preventative state

We welcome the Prime Minister's focus on improving living standards and commitment to a "more preventative state, investing in people's success, rather than paying for failure". Tackling hunger and hardship will be a vital step towards ensuring people have the foundations for success.

We know that once someone is experiencing hunger and hardship, it is difficult to escape it, and the impact is severe and long-lasting. In 2026, our new evidence reinforces that tackling hunger and hardship is critical for building a preventative state to ensure people don't face long lasting consequences:

- 73% of people experiencing food insecurity say that financial pressures have negatively affected their mental health.
- 50% say that pressures have negatively affected their physical health.
- 48% say that pressures have negatively impacted on their relationships with friends or family.
- 27% say that pressures have impacted on their ability to find or go to work.

These findings mirror previous Trussell research which found that hunger and hardship can have a devastating impact across all aspects of life, affecting education, work and finances, housing, mental

⁶ Fitzpatrick, S, et al, (2023), *Destitution in the UK*, JRF, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/deep-poverty-and-destitution/destitution-in-the-uk-2023>

⁷ Kardahji, N, et al, (2025), *The National Red Index 2025: negative budget households face a debt crisis like quicksand*, Citizens Advice, <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/policy/publications/the-national-red-index-2025-negative-budget-households-face-a-debt-crisis/#h-what-is-the-national-red-index>

and physical health, and relationships.⁸ This impact compounds over time, creating further barriers to building financial resilience and making it harder for people to escape hunger and hardship.

Young people in particular are being locked out of opportunities to build financial security, which makes it far harder to navigate the transition into adulthood. Young people who experienced financial hardship growing up are almost twice as likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) as people who didn't experience financial hardship (27% compared with 15%).⁹ It is clear that there is a whole generation of young people facing the consequences of growing up experiencing financial hardship – without the foundations they need to succeed.

Alongside supporting people to live better lives, we know preventing severe hardship can have wider benefits to the economy and public services. Previous Trussell research found that the UK Government could save at least £79.1 billion in 2026/27 in costs to the economy, the public purse and public services by tackling severe hardship.¹⁰ These savings are made from increasing the number of people finding and sustaining employment, as well as decreased spending on healthcare, education and homelessness.

Financial insecurity means hope feels out of reach for many people right now

The new Prime Minister has spoken about ensuring that “Britain starts to believe again” and creating a moment where “we bring back hope”.¹¹ It is clear that, for many people, this feels out of reach.

Our research shows that over half of people across the UK (56%) thought the UK government (prior to the change of Prime Minister) was doing a bad job at improving living standards (just 10% thought they were doing well), and a third (33%) felt that they were less financially secure than they were a year ago. The findings also suggest a public that is deeply pessimistic about the future, with nearly three quarters (74%) of the UK population feeling it's unlikely that their living standards will improve in the next year.

These fears are justified. Findings published in this briefing show that, without further action, over 9.1 million people will be at risk of needing to use a food bank in the last full year of this Parliament, including

⁸ 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>

⁹ Trussell, (2026), *Survey of Young People Aged 16-25*, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/news/financial-hardship-delaying-major-life-milestones-for-young-people>

¹⁰ 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>

¹¹ Wheeler, R, and Fenwick, J, (2026), *Burnham pledges to 'bring back hope' as he makes Healey chancellor*, BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvg9w2e29eno>

an additional 55,000 children¹² and there are concerning signs of further increases in the cost of living over the next 18 months.¹³

Hunger and hardship are not inevitable. The new UK government can make real progress by ensuring incomes cover the cost of essentials, by reducing the costs facing people on the lowest incomes, and by strengthening support in communities to prevent crises before they escalate.

¹² For full figures see: **Even with positive action in some areas, more people are experiencing** severe hardship and food insecurity, and millions of people have no option but to turn to charitable food provision for support.

Despite positive steps the number of people experiencing severe hardship has increased

¹³ Bank of England, (2026), *Interest rates and Bank Rate: our latest decision*, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/the-interest-rate-bank-rate>

Methodology

This briefing draws on two pieces of quantitative research to explore severe hardship, food insecurity, and charitable food provision. This is the first time Trussell has jointly published these measures.

Trussell has recommended focusing on severe hardship and food insecurity to explore the scale of the need for food banks. The severe hardship measure represents people at high risk of needing to use a food bank because they have extremely low financial resources. The food insecurity measure represents people at high risk of needing to use a food bank because they are already having to cut back on food because they don't have enough money.

These joint measures strengthen our understanding beyond the use of a single measure of food bank need because they mitigate some gaps in each measure. For example, the severe hardship measure has limitations in how this methodology captures the ongoing costs of debt and disability, as well as the impact of income volatility.¹⁴ Meanwhile the food insecurity measure narrowly focuses on food without considering people who may be cutting back on other essentials. We believe understanding trends in both these measures will better paint a picture of changes to the underlying need for food banks.

As we have more in-depth socioeconomic data for the food insecurity and charitable food provision dataset, we focus on this data when considering the drivers of hunger and hardship in the UK.

Food insecurity and charitable food provision

Definitions:

- **Food insecurity (or household food insecurity):** Households are considered food insecure if they experience low or very low food security as measured by the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM). Food insecurity means going without or cutting back on quality or quantity of food because people can't afford it. Respondents are asked about their experiences over the last 12 months.
- **Charitable food provision:** Support from a food bank or another charitable food provider, such as a soup kitchen, or low-cost food from models such as food pantries or social supermarkets. Respondents are asked about their experiences over the last 12 months.

These figures are based on quantitative analysis of a survey of the UK general population carried out by Ipsos. It also draws on comparable surveys collected in 2022 and 2024 to build long-term evidence on the scale and nature of food insecurity and use of charitable food provision in the UK. Across all waves, surveys were boosted in Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland to increase the accuracy of estimates in

¹⁴ For example, the measure cannot currently capture the additional costs of disability to calculate the residual income that households have to spend on essential items. This means that some disabled people will have lower financial resources than they appear to have and may not be classified as experiencing severe hardship.

those areas. For this wave, we have also boosted the population of people in social and private renting to understand those populations in more detail.

All analysis of this data and reporting in this briefing is Trussell's own.

Table 1 Technical details of Hunger in the UK general population surveys

Survey	Technical details
Wave 1 general population survey	3,948 surveys completed by adults aged 18+ across the UK general population between May and August 2022.
Wave 2 general population survey	4,427 surveys completed by adults aged 18+ across the UK general population between May and July 2024.
Wave 3 general population survey	5,614 surveys completed by adults aged 18+ across the UK general population between May and July 2026.

Severe hardship

Definitions:

- **Severe hardship:** Families whose resources are more than 25% below the Social Metrics Commission poverty line, after accounting for income, housing costs, savings and other unavoidable costs such as childcare and debt repayments. This measure focuses on people whose resources are so low they are highly likely to be unable to afford essentials and be at risk of needing emergency food.

This analysis is based on the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) dataset from the Family Resources survey and was carried out by WPI Economics. It uses the Social Metrics Commission method of calculating poverty to better understand the overall financial resources that a household has at its disposal. The severe hardship measure was created by Trussell to better estimate the underlying need for food banks. More information on this measure is available in our *Cost of Hunger and Hardship* report.¹⁵

Data from 2025/26 onwards are projections of the expected level of severe hardship and were calculated using Policy Engine (to project changes in household incomes, costs and resources) in tandem with Social Metrics Commission poverty analysis (to determine the resultant impact on the number of households in severe hardship). These projections use OBR forecasts and take into account policy announcements such as the uprating to Universal Credit, the removal of the two-child limit, and

¹⁵ Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *Cost of Hunger and Hardship*, Trussell, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/publications/report/cost-of-hunger-and-hardship-final-report>

expansion of free school meals. Data pre-2022/23 for severe hardship is not currently available.¹⁶ More information on this approach is published in our separate technical annex.

Analysis of this data was carried out by WPI Economics. All reporting is Trussell's own.

Updates from previous reports

In Waves 1 and 2 (published respectively in 2023 and 2025), we brought together survey data and lived experience research in a single report to build a comprehensive picture of hunger and hardship. For Wave 3 we have not conducted a survey of people referred to food banks. This provides in-depth insight into the composition and experiences of people referred to food banks in the Trussell community (e.g. the proportion of people referred to food banks who are disabled, demographics on household composition, receipt of social security payments, and experiences in the lead up to needing to use a food bank). With minimal identified changes between Waves 1 and 2, we are delaying the update of this evidence base.

Instead, in Wave 3, we first publish this briefing to understand the current scale of hunger and hardship in the UK as the new Prime Minister sets out his policy platform. Across 2027, we will publish further findings from the data.

¹⁶ The DWP have recently completed an exercise to match administrative data on the receipt of social security payments to data collected through the Family Resources Survey. This matched data is only currently available from 2022/23.

No progress on the scale of hunger in the UK

Even with positive action in some areas, more people are experiencing severe hardship and food insecurity, and millions of people have no option but to turn to charitable food provision for support.

Despite positive steps the number of people experiencing severe hardship has increased

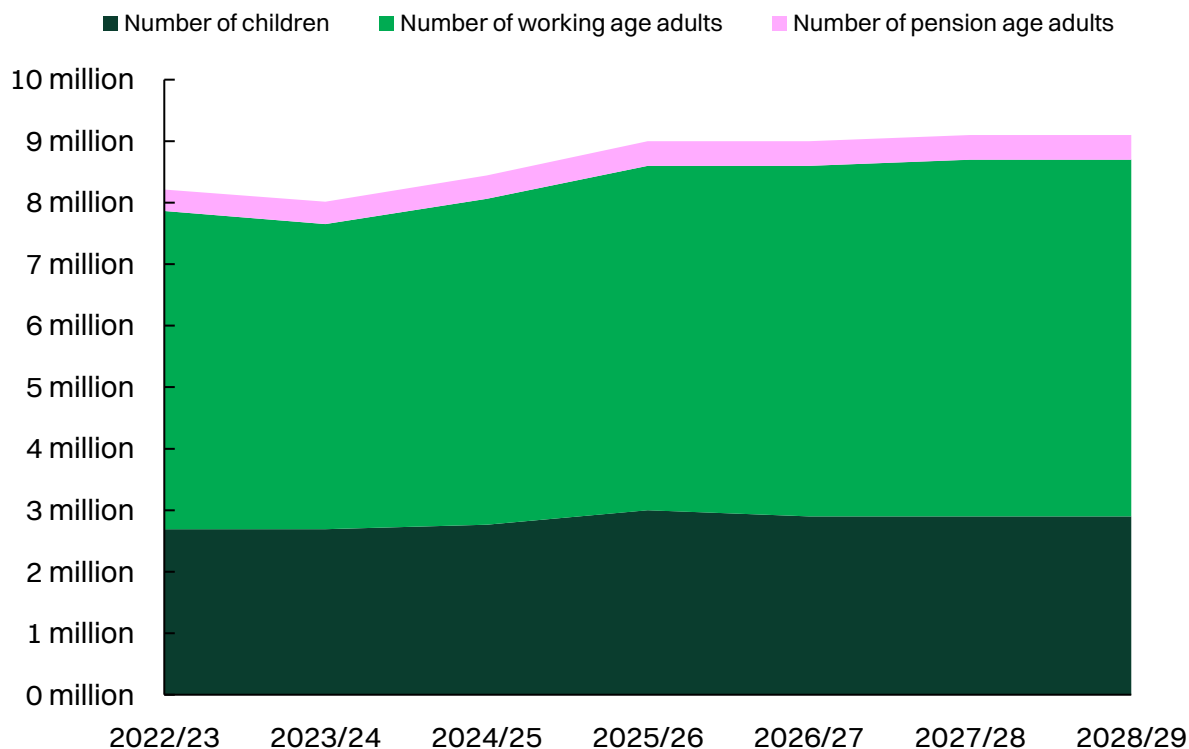
Almost 9 million people are experiencing severe hardship in 2026/27, including 6 million adults and 3 million children. This represents one in seven people (13%) across the UK, rising to one in five (20%) children who are growing up in a family experiencing severe hardship. One in seven (14%) working-age adults are experiencing severe hardship – pension-age adults are at far lower risk (3%).

These are people living well below the poverty line, with extremely limited financial resources to cover their daily living costs. They are highly likely to need to turn to a food bank now, or in the future. One in eight (13%) people experiencing severe hardship have needed to use a food bank in the previous 12 months – more than three times the average across the UK (4%).¹⁷ Our *Cost of Hunger and Hardship* report detailed the long lasting and profound impact that living without enough to get by on can have on people's health, relationships, and capacity to find and stay in work.¹⁸

Between 2024/25 and 2026/27 the number of people experiencing severe hardship increased by over 500,000, including an additional 115,000 children, reflecting the enduring hunger and hardship that people are facing across the UK. Without further action, over 9.1 million people are projected to experience severe hardship in the last full year (2028/29) of this Parliament. This would represent an increase of 165,000 people, including an additional 55,000 children.

¹⁷ Trussell analysis of Households Below Average Income 2024/25. DWP, (2026), *HBAI – Data from 2021/22 (admin-linked)*, <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/dataCatalogueExplorer.xhtml>

¹⁸ 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>

Figure 1 Number of people experiencing severe hardship by age from 2022/23 to 2028/29

Source: Family Resources Survey and Households Below Average Income dataset (2022/23–2024/25), WPI Economics analysis. Data for 2025/26–2028/29 are projections.

While rates of severe hardship have increased since 2024/25 the scale of the increase is far smaller than it would have been without some of the steps the previous UK government announced. In particular, if the two-child limit had not been lifted from April 2026 an additional 610,000 people, including 415,000 children, would have been experiencing severe hardship in 2026/27.

Table 2 Percentage of people experiencing severe hardship by age from 2022/03 to 2028/29

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Children	19%	18%	19%	21%	20%	20%	20%
Working-age adults	13%	12%	13%	14%	14%	14%	14%
Pension-age adults	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
All	12%	12%	12%	13%	13%	13%	13%

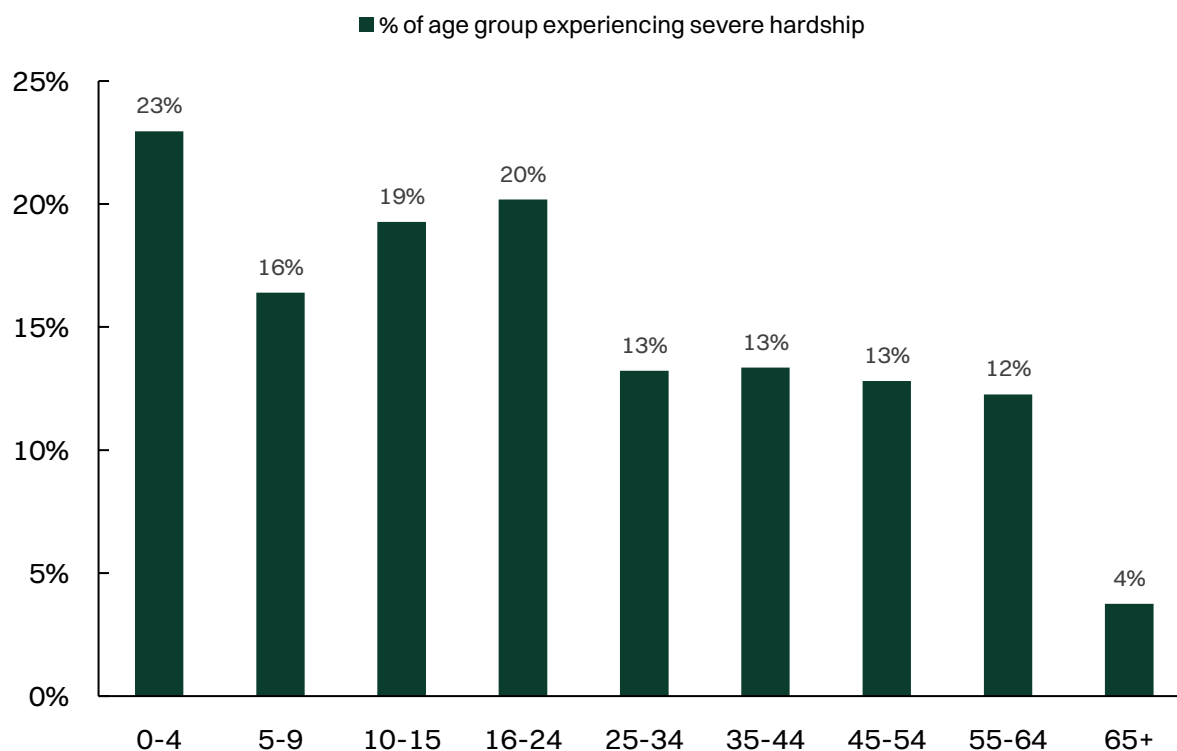
Source: Family Resources Survey and Households Below Average Income dataset (2022/23–2024/25), WPI Economics analysis. Data for 2025/26–2028/29 are projections.

Rates of severe hardship in 2026/27 are highest for children but particularly for children aged 0-4 (23%). The higher rates of severe hardship for people aged 16-24 (20%) is a sign of the challenges facing

young people. Wider Trussell research has shown that almost a third (31%) of young people are cutting back on food so they can afford other essentials – equivalent to 2.5 million people aged 16-25.¹⁹

Severe hardship as a child or as a young person can prevent people from building the foundations that they need to thrive in life. The impact of severe hardship on early educational experiences and outcomes can set the course for the rest of people's lives. Trussell's research shows that young people who experienced financial hardship growing up are almost twice as likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) as people who didn't experience financial hardship (27% compared with 15%).²⁰ Evidence from JRF found that growing up in persistent poverty more than triples the risk of being out of education and work.²¹

Figure 2 Percentage of people experiencing severe hardship by detailed age – 2026/27



Source: Family Resources Survey and Households Below Average Income dataset (2022/23–2024/25), WPI Economics analysis. Data for 2026/27 is a projection.

The risk of severe hardship is far higher in different parts of the UK. It is highest in London, where 23% of people are experiencing severe hardship in 2026/27. Rates are also higher than average (13%) in the

¹⁹ Trussell, (2026), *Financial hardship delaying major life milestones for young people*, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/news/financial-hardship-delaying-major-life-milestones-for-young-people>

²⁰ Trussell, (2026), *Financial hardship delaying major life milestones for young people*, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/news/financial-hardship-delaying-major-life-milestones-for-young-people>

²¹ Casey, R, Richardson, I, and Schmucker, K, (2026), *Falling through the cracks: how childhood hardship shapes life chances*, JRF, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/social-security/falling-through-the-cracks-how-childhood-hardship-shapes-life-chances>

West Midlands (14%). People in the South West are the least likely to be experiencing severe hardship (7%), followed by Northern Ireland (9%), and Scotland (10%).

Table 3 Percent and number of people experiencing severe hardship by the nations and regions of the UK – 2026/27

Nation and region	% of people experiencing severe hardship	Number of people experiencing severe hardship
UK	13%	8,950,000
Northern Ireland	9%	180,000
Scotland	10%	550,000
Wales	11%	365,000
North East	13%	340,000
North West	13%	995,000
Yorkshire and Humber	13%	735,000
East Midlands	13%	640,000
West Midlands	14%	850,000
East of England	11%	675,000
London	23%	2,135,000
South East	11%	1,070,000
South West	7%	410,000

Source: Family Resources Survey and Households Below Average Income dataset (2022/23–2024/25), WPI Economics analysis. Data for 2026/27 is a projection.

While it is clear that removing the two-child limit has had a marked positive impact on the number of people experiencing severe hardship, the scale and consequences of severe hardship are stubborn, with clear impacts for individuals and society. Pressures on incomes and failures in the housing, health, social security and other systems people rely on are the reason for this, which we’ll discuss further in the **section** below. Tackling the drivers of hunger and hardship must be at the heart of any plan to build a preventative state.

Hunger is all too common, as numbers at risk increase since 2024

Food insecurity has also increased during this period. 17.6 million people experienced food insecurity in 2026, including 13.0 million adults and 4.6 million children. This means that they had run out of food and were unable to afford more, reduced the size of their meals or ate less because they couldn’t afford food, or went hungry or lost weight due to a lack of money in the past year.

This is an increase of over 3.5 million people between 2024 and 2026, including an additional 840,000 children. One in five (20%) households in the UK experienced food insecurity in 2026, an increase from 16% in 2024 and 14% in 2022.

Table 4 Percent of households and number of people, adults, and children in food insecure households – 2022,2024, and 2026

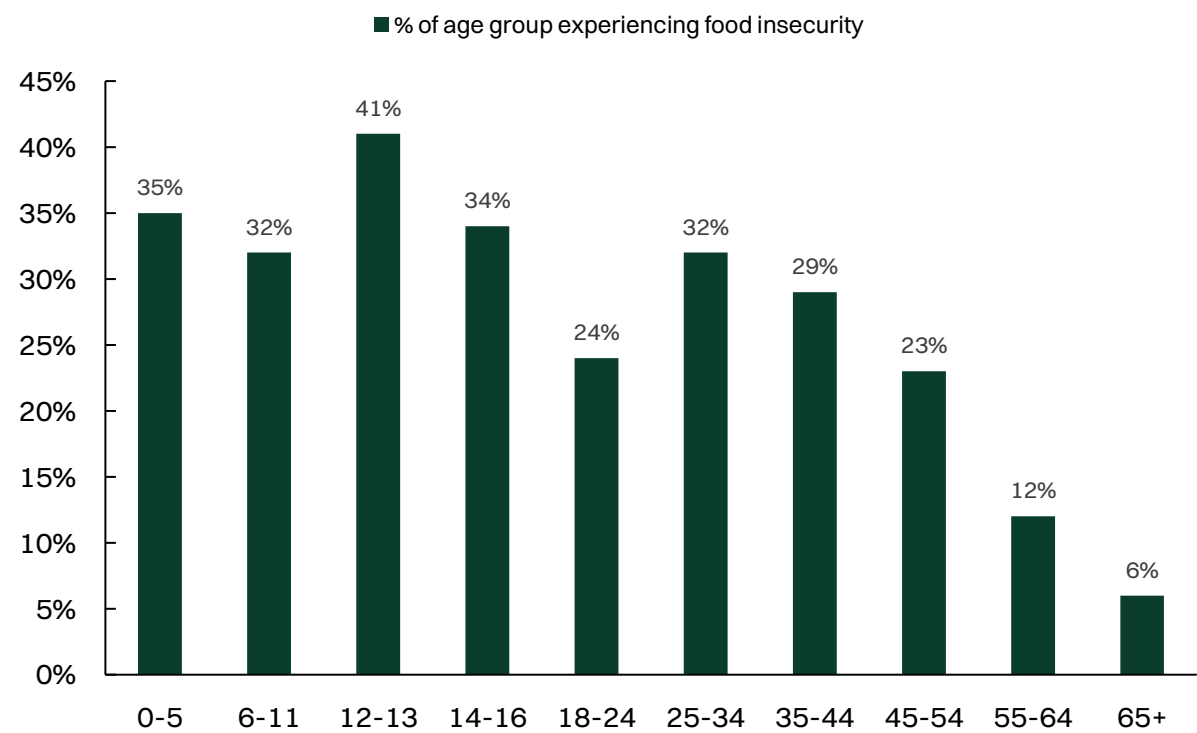
	2022	2024	2026
Percent of households	14%	16%	20%
Number of people	11.6 million	14.1 million	17.6 million
Number of adults	8.4 million	10.4 million	13.0 million
Number of children	3.2 million	3.8 million	4.6 million

Source: Hunger in the UK Wave 1,2, and 3 general population surveys.

We consistently find that working-age adults across the UK are at far greater risk of experiencing food insecurity and needing to turn to charitable food provision across the three waves of this research. Just under a quarter (24%) of working-age people experienced food insecurity in 2026, compared to 6% of people aged 65 or over. When looking at more detailed age categories, the risk of food insecurity among adults was greatest for people aged 25-34, with the risk decreasing as the population ages.

As in our previous report we find concerning levels of food insecurity amongst children. One in three children aged 0-5 (35%) and 6-11 (32%) are growing up in food insecure households, rising to 41% of children 12-13. Taken together with the severe hardship figures reported previously, these show the challenges that families with children continue to face.

Figure 3 Percentage of people experiencing food insecurity by detailed age – 2026

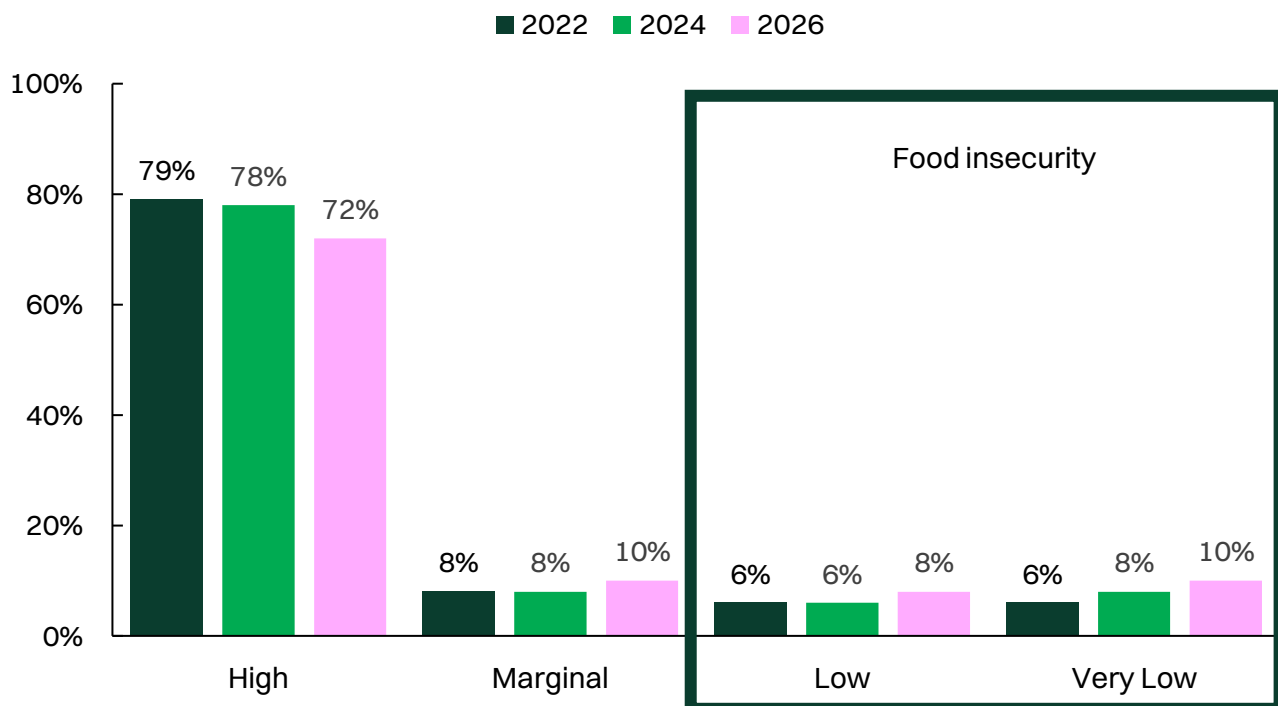


Source: Hunger in the UK Wave 3 general population survey. Data was not collected for people aged 17.

We continue to find concerning signs that the experience of hunger and hardship is deepening across the UK. There has again been an increase in the proportion of households reporting ‘very low’ food insecurity, which has been steadily increasing since 2022 (10% in 2026 vs. 8% in 2024, and 6% in 2022). This means that over half (54%) of households experiencing food insecurity have experienced very low levels of food security.

Figure 4 Detailed food security scores for households across the UK – 2022, 2024, and 2026²²

²² Note: The percentages provided here do not sum to the overall prevalence of food insecurity across the UK (20% vs. 18% in the chart). This is due to data limitations meaning we were not always able to distinguish whether someone was experiencing low or very low food security. These cases were removed from the detailed analysis, lowering the overall sample of people experiencing food insecurity.



Source: Hunger in the UK Wave 1, 2, and 3 general population surveys. People are food insecure if they experience low or very low food insecurity.

These increases in food insecurity are slightly higher than wider evidence but reflect concerning signs of building hunger and hardship. The Food Foundation have reported on increases in food insecurity between 2025 and 2026²³, and JRF have recently reported on a record number of low-income households going without essentials.²⁴

As with severe hardship, the risk of food insecurity is not evenly spread across the UK. London is again higher than average (26% vs. 20%) – highlighting the consistent issue of hunger and hardship in the capital. Households in the West Midlands also continue to show higher rates, with one in four households experience food insecurity (27%).

Households in the North East however report the highest levels of food insecurity (33%), but are on the UK average for severe hardship. As mentioned in the Methodology, the different measures may show different results depending on the experience of hunger and hardship people are facing. Households in the South West (11%) and South East (14%) experience lower than average levels of food insecurity (similar to their findings on severe hardship) – as do households in Scotland (17%).

²³ Food Foundation, (2026), *Food insecurity tracking*, <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking#tabs/Overview-of-surveys->

²⁴ Belfield, C, and Percival, N, (2026), *Record numbers cannot afford the essentials: JRF's cost of living tracker, summer 2026*, JRF, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/cost-of-living/jrfs-cost-of-living-tracker-summer-2026>

Table 5 Percentage of households experiencing food insecurity by the nations and regions of the UK – 2026

Nation and region	% of households experiencing food insecurity
UK	20%
Northern Ireland	20%
Scotland	17%
Wales	20%
North East	33%
North West	18%
Yorkshire and Humber	23%
East Midlands	18%
West Midlands	27%
East of England	21%
London	26%
South East	14%
South West	11%

Source: Hunger in the UK Wave 3 general population survey.

It is clear that too many people across the UK are having to cut back on essentials like food because they don't have enough to get by on. With the cost of living set to increase again, the new Prime Minister must act to tackle these unacceptable experiences of hunger and hardship in our communities to build hope that living standards can improve.

Millions of people continue to need to turn to charitable food provision for support

There is a clear impetus for a renewed commitment to ending the need for food banks. In 2026, 8.3 million people, including 5.8 million adults and 2.5 million children needed to turn to charitable food provision for support. One in 10 households (10%) reported needing to turn to this provision for support in the previous 12 months.

These figures are an increase from 2024 (7%) when 6.5 million people used any form of charitable food provision (4.6 million adults and 1.9 million children), and 2022 (7%) when 5.9 million people used any form of charitable food provision (4.2 million adults and 1.7 million children).²⁵

Food banks in the Trussell community continue to provide millions of emergency food parcels to people experiencing hunger and hardship. In 2025 they provided over 2.6 million emergency food parcels, including over 900,000 parcels for children. Despite recent reductions in the use of food banks in the

²⁵ The increase between 2022 and 2024 was driven by an increase in the mean number of people living in households who had used any form of charitable food provision.

Trussell community since 2023, the level of emergency food provision remains well above pre-pandemic levels. The number of parcels distributed in 2025 was 45% higher than the number distributed in 2019.

Recent decreases in the use of Trussell food banks have been principally driven by a slightly more settled economic situation since 2023 (e.g. lower levels of inflation and reductions in the economics consequences of Covid-19). There are also signs of food bank use being displaced to other charitable food provision, which has grown in recent years. For example, Feeding Britain's Affordable Food locations have increased from 248 locations in 2023 to 426 locations in 2025.²⁶

This is supported by data on the increase in the overall use of charitable food provision reported for this study, which has principally been seen in the use of social supermarkets. In 2026, 7% of people said that they or someone in their household had used a social supermarket or food pantry in the previous year – up from 5% in 2024 and 2022.²⁷ Figures on the use of food banks or other emergency provider (4%), and support from a soup kitchen or similar service (2%) remain the same as in 2024 and 2022.²⁸ With food insecurity increasing alongside use of social supermarkets, it is clear that a focus on charitable food provision is not an effective solution to the problem of hunger and hardship in the UK.

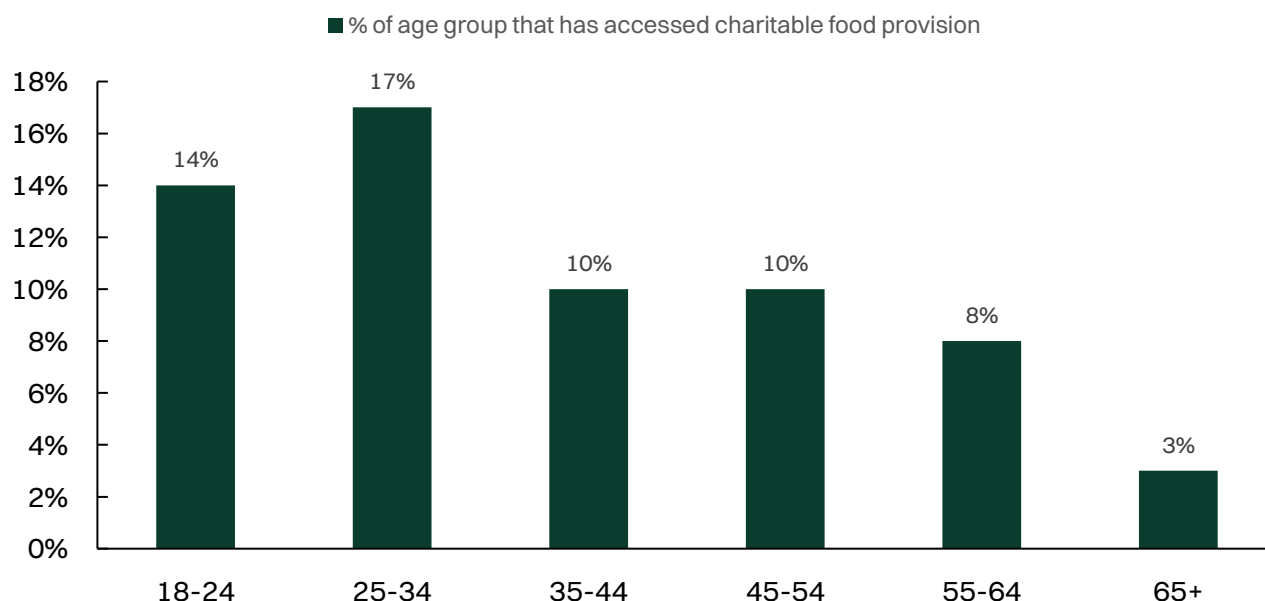
As with food insecurity, working-age people are at far higher risk of needing to turn to charitable food provision for support. One in nine (11%) working-age people said that they had been supported in the last year. The risk was highest for people aged 25-34 (17%), falling with age to 3% for people aged 65 and over.

Figure 5 Percentage of people reporting use of charitable food provision by detailed age – 2026

²⁶ Feeding Britain, (2025), Affordable Food Clubs Impact Report (2025), <https://feedingbritain.org/affordable-food-clubs-impact-report-april-2025/>

²⁷ Defined as: Some people buy food at a low cost for themselves and their households from places other than mainstream food shops or supermarkets, especially when they are finding it difficult to make ends meet. For instance, they might go to a food pantry or social supermarket where you can obtain a range of food items for a single low-cost payment or low-cost monthly membership fee

²⁸ Defined as: an organisation providing free hot or cold prepared meals to people facing financial hardship



Source: Hunger in the UK Wave 3 general population survey. Data for children is not available for this measure due to sample size limitations.

Similar regional patterns are seen for the use of charitable food provision to those for food insecurity and severe hardship. Figures are again higher for London (14%). As with food insecurity, households in the North East (23%) have the highest rates of use of charitable food provision. Households in the South West have the lowest rates of use (3%).

Table 6 Percentage of households using charitable food provision by the nations and regions of the UK - 2026

Nation and region	% of households using charitable food provision
UK	10%
Northern Ireland	9%
Scotland	8%
Wales	11%
North East	23%
North West	9%
Yorkshire and Humber	12%
East Midlands	10%
West Midlands	8%
East of England	7%
London	14%
South East	8%
South West	3%

Source: Hunger in the UK Wave 3 general population survey.

As in our previous reports, there is a gulf between the number of people experiencing food insecurity and the number that receive support from charitable food provision. Just 31% of food insecure households had been supported by charitable food provision in the previous 12 months.

It is clear that charitable food provision cannot meet the scale of the problem. We need a recommitment to end the need for emergency food, and action to ensure incomes cover the cost of essentials – to tackle the costs that households have, and to build wider support in communities.

There are clear drivers of hunger across the UK

Across the three waves of this research, we have built a clear and consistent picture of what is driving hunger and hardship in the UK. Inadequate incomes, high costs, and a lack of support continue to drive unacceptable experiences of hunger and hardship and the need for food banks.

Incomes do not cover the cost of essentials

- The basic rate of Universal Credit is insufficient to meet people's day to day costs. The majority (64%) of people in receipt of Universal Credit were food insecure in 2026, over three times the rate for people across the UK (20%).
- The additional costs faced by disabled people and inadequate support mean that one in three (32%) disabled people are food insecure and one in six (15%) have accessed charitable food provision in the past year. This compares to rates of 20% and 10% across the UK, respectively.
- Work is not providing the route out of hunger and hardship that it should. In 2026, 73% of people who said they were in food insecure households were working.

Inadequacy of Universal Credit

A lack of income has consistently been shown to be central to the need for food banks across the UK. This is most commonly because of the inadequacy of the basic rate of Universal Credit.

The majority (64%) of people in receipt of Universal Credit were food insecure in 2026 – over three times the rate for people across the UK (20%). More than a third (35%) of people in receipt of Universal Credit had used any form of charitable food provision in the past year, compared to 10% across the UK.

Despite an above-inflation boost in 2026, the basic rate of Universal Credit is now at its lowest ever level as a proportion of average earnings, with a sizeable gap between the support people get and the amount people need to be able to afford the essentials – such as food, bills and toiletries. At £98-a-week for a single person (aged 25 or over), the standard allowance leaves single-adult households facing a shortfall of at least £22, and couples a shortfall of £51, between their support and the cost of essentials. The absence of any evidence-based assessment of adequacy when setting rates of Universal Credit means levels of support are disconnected from the costs households face, resulting in large income shortfalls that drive food bank need.

Figure 6 Universal Credit's standard allowance compared to indicative Essentials Guarantee level (£ per week in 2026/27)



Source: JRF and Trussell analysis²⁹

As in previous reports, we also find that deductions from people's social security payments leave them at far greater risk of hunger and hardship. In 2026, 85% of people receiving Universal Credit with deductions from their payments were experiencing food insecurity (compared to 64% on average for people receiving Universal Credit). Half of people (51%) with deductions had needed to use charitable food provision in the last 12 months (compared to 35% for all people receiving Universal Credit). The previous UK government announced the Fair Repayment Rate which limited the amount that people's payments could be deducted by. But this evidence highlights the need for further action to ensure people receiving Universal Credit can afford the essentials.

Living on such limited financial resources means that people in receipt of Universal Credit are at far higher risk of debt and entrenched hunger and hardship. Nearly half (48%) of people in receipt of Universal Credit are struggling or behind with bills and financial commitments, compared to 14% of

²⁹ JRF and Trussell, (2026), *Guarantee our Essentials: reforming Universal Credit to ensure we can all afford the essentials in hard times*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/social-security/guarantee-our-essentials-reforming-universal-credit-to-ensure-we-can-all-afford-the>

people across the UK. People in receipt of Universal Credit are also three times more likely to be facing multiple forms of debt or arrears (43% vs. 16% of people across the UK).

Our previous Cost of Hunger and Hardship research found that people experiencing severe hardship were often stuck in a cycle of debt, where they struggled to make repayments while affording essential costs with limited income. This led to long-lasting impacts, with people repaying debts for years. As well as practical impacts, the pressure and worry of debt can quickly build up and feel completely overwhelming.³⁰

This lack of financial resilience coupled with inadequate income leaves people unable to build the foundations of a healthy and fulfilling life, including finding and going to work:

- 63% of people receiving Universal Credit say that financial pressures have negatively affected their mental health, and 45% say they have negatively affected their physical health.
- 41% say financial pressures have negatively affected their relationships with friends and family.
- 23% say that they have negatively affected their ability to find or go to work.

It is clear that Universal Credit is not adequate to protect people from hunger and hardship, with millions of people going without what they need because the financial support they get is not enough.

Recommendations:

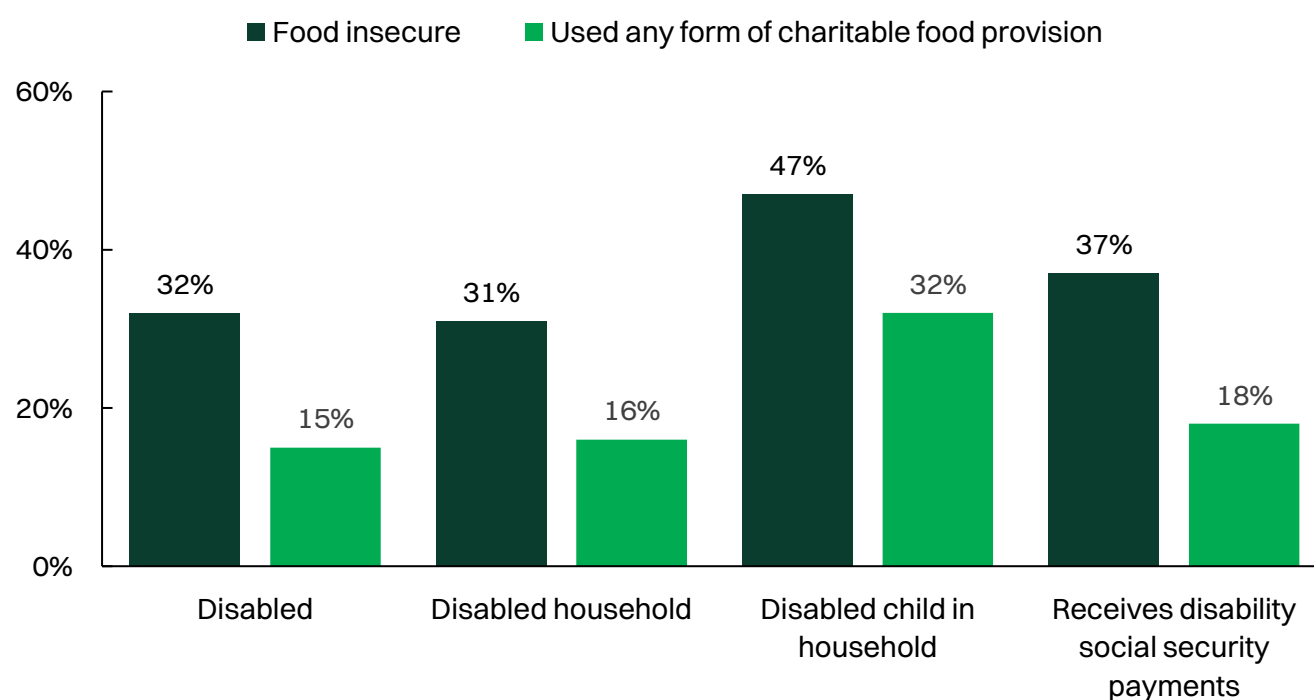
- Ensure that Universal Credit at least covers the cost of essentials.
- Introduce a protected minimum floor below which Universal Credit's standard allowance is not permitted to fall.
- Establish an independent process to help advise on setting UC rates at a level that takes account of the evidence of what it costs to cover life's essentials.

Additional costs and inadequate support drive hunger and hardship for disabled people

Disabled people face many additional costs relating to their health conditions, and it is clear that the income they receive is often not sufficient to meet them.

One in three (32%) disabled people are food insecure and one in six (15%) have accessed charitable food provision in the past year (compared to 20% and 10% of the general population, respectively). The risk is even higher for households with a disabled child, where 47% of households are food insecure and 32% are accessing charitable food provision.

³⁰ Weekes, T, et al, (2025), *The 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>

Figure 7 Rates of food insecurity and charitable food provision by individual and household disability

Source: Hunger in the UK Wave 3 general population survey.

Disabled people are far more likely to be exposed to the inadequacy of Universal Credit than people who are not disabled. One in three (32%) working-age disabled people are in receipt of Universal Credit compared to 10% of working-age people who are not disabled.³¹ This is commonly leading to poor outcomes for disabled people with two thirds (68%) of disabled people in receipt of Universal Credit being food insecure.³² Wider evidence highlights that 41% of working-age disabled people in families in receipt of Universal Credit are food insecure compared to 24% of the same group who are not disabled.³³

³¹ Trussell analysis of Households Below Average Income 2024/25. DWP, (2026), *HBAI – Data from 2021/22 (admin-linked)*, <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/dataCatalogueExplorer.xhtml>

³² This compares to 57% of people in receipt of Universal Credit who are not disabled – although this result is not statistically significant.

³³ Trussell analysis of Households Below Average income 2024/25. DWP, (2026), *HBAI – Data from 2021/22 (admin-linked)*, <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/dataCatalogueExplorer.xhtml>

Disabled people face barriers to boosting their income through work. There remains a substantive employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people – 83% of working-age people who are not disabled are employed compared to 53% of disabled people.³⁴ When disabled people are in work, they are also likely to be paid less than people without a disability – in 2023, the national disability pay gap was 13%.³⁵ Disabled people are also more likely to be underemployed, in low pay, on a zero-hour contract, or in a job with fewer career opportunities and less employee involvement.³⁶

This low pay and job insecurity means work is therefore often not enough to ensure that disabled people do not face hunger and hardship – in our data 38% of working-age disabled people who were in work were experiencing food insecurity and 20% had needed to turn to charitable food provision. This compares to 19% and 8% of working-age people, in work, who were not disabled.

Disability social security payments such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP) are designed to support disabled people with additional costs relating to their health condition, such as equipment, transport, higher insurance costs, and hospital parking charges. With Universal Credit not covering the cost of essentials, and common ways of cutting costs often being unavailable to disabled people due to health needs, disabled people increasingly rely on disability social security payments such as PIP to pay for essential items like food and bills.

However, findings show that these payments are frequently not providing enough support – over a third (37%) of disabled people who are in receipt of disability social security payments are food insecure, and nearly one in five (18%) have needed to turn to charitable food provision in the past year. Qualitative research with people receiving disability social security payments supports this, with payments often insufficient to enable people to afford a basic standard of living – borrowing from family and friends, and through overdrafts, loans or credit cards was needed to afford essentials.³⁷

The lack of adequate social security support for disabled people also affects people who are providing unpaid care. Carers are at increased risk of hunger and hardship themselves, with nearly one in three (29%) experiencing food insecurity and 17% accessing charitable food provision. Carers often face their own additional costs and barriers to working, and carers who provide care for 17 hours or more a week

Figures for food insecurity are lower here because this source uses a 30 day measure. Hunger in the UK uses the 12 month measure.

³⁴ DWP, (2026), *The employment of disabled people 2025*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2025/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2025>

³⁵ Office for Equality and Opportunity, (2026), *Consultation on mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting: government response*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/equality-race-and-disability-bill-mandatory-ethnicity-and-disability-pay-gap-reporting/outcome/consultation-on-mandatory-ethnicity-and-disability-pay-gap-reporting-government-response>

³⁶ DWP, (2026), *The employment of disabled people 2025*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2025/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2025>

³⁷ Biggs, H, et al, (2023), *Disability and financial hardship: How disability benefits contribute to the need for food banks in the UK*, Trussell, <https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/wp-assets/Disability-Benefits-Research-Report.pdf>

are at increased risk of experiencing food insecurity (38%) and needing to access charitable food provision in the past year (21%).

When disabled people are already struggling with the day-to-day challenges of getting by because they don't have enough income to cover their costs, the Prime Minister is right to commit to avoiding 'crude cuts' to social security. This includes cuts to support for disabled young people – Trussell's previous research with young people found that 41% of disabled people aged 16-25 had cut back on food to afford other essential costs – compared to 27% of young people who were not disabled.³⁸

The public are also clear disabled people should not be disproportionately burdened by hunger and hardship in the way our evidence outlines. Over three quarters (77%) of the public agree that the government should reform the social security system, so it provides better protection from hunger and hardship for disabled people.³⁹

Recommendations:

- Retain eligibility for the UC-health element for young people and avoid cuts to already inadequate rates of social security.
- Reform Personal Independence Payment (PIP) to make assessments and award reviews more efficient, introduce a strengthened Right to Try, and ensure any changes to the assessment process or criteria for PIP do not lead to reductions in eligibility which would plunge disabled people deeper into hunger and hardship.

Low paid and insecure work is driving people into hunger and hardship

Income from work is frequently not providing enough for people to afford their day-to-day costs. One in four (23%) working-age people who were in work were experiencing food insecurity in 2026 and 11% had needed to use charitable food provision. In 2026, 73% of people who said they were in food insecure households were working.

Work intensity matters in the household both in terms of hours worked and the number of people working in the household. Working-age people who were working part time were far more likely to be experiencing food insecurity than people working full time (32% vs. 21%). One in four (22%) working-age people who said they and another adult in the household were working were food insecure, compared to 27% of people who said just they were working and not another adult.

Food insecurity rates are higher for occupations which are associated with lower pay; these include people in routine and semi-routine occupations such as cleaners, labourers, or porters. One in three

³⁸ Trussell, (2026), *Young Lives Under Pressure*, https://cms.trussell.org.uk/sites/default/files/2026-09/Young_Lives_Under_Pressure.pdf

³⁹ Survey conducted by Thinks Insights on behalf of Trussell with a nationally representative sample of 2,099 respondents weighted by age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and region. The survey ran between 19th – 21st June 2026.

(34%) people in these occupations were food insecure, compared to 17% of people in managerial, administrative and professional occupations. Rates were also higher for people in insecure work – 26% of working people on a zero-hours contract were food insecure.

Wider evidence highlights the issues with low pay. Data from the Living Wage Foundation shows that three in five low-paid workers (61%) were forced to cut back on food, were unable to heat their homes, fell behind on bills or took out a pay-day loan to cover their essentials in the past year. Over a third (37%) have been forced to use food banks.⁴⁰

People who had experienced a challenging or harmful work event, such as a job loss, pay cut, reduction in hours, sick leave, unpaid leave for caring commitments or parental leave in the past year were substantially more likely to experience food insecurity (35%, compared to 20% for the UK on average). They were also more likely to have accessed charitable food provision in the past year (15% vs. 10% UK average).

The findings also show an increased risk of hunger among people who had experienced a challenging or harmful work event within the past five years (32% were food insecure and 16% had accessed charitable food provision). This demonstrates the long-term scarring that these events can cause, and the importance of secure work, as well as adequate protection against income shocks through the social security system.

However, hunger and hardship is not only driven by low-paid and insecure work. Every day, food banks in the Trussell community support people facing complex barriers to work. Disabled people, carers and single parents are all disproportionately affected by food insecurity and are more likely to need to turn to charitable food provision for support. Good employment support and good quality, accessible job opportunities can help break down some of these barriers to work, but impersonalised, 'one size fits all' approaches to employment support can push people further from engaging with support and ultimately work.

Work is not providing the route out of hunger and hardship that it should. Where decent, secure, accessible work is lacking, there is a significant risk of hunger and hardship.

Recommendations:

- Invest in the training and capacity of Jobcentre and wider employment support delivery staff.
- Prioritise the delivery of employment support in community settings alongside wider advice and support to address barriers to work, including financial insecurity.

⁴⁰ Living Wage Foundation, (2026), *Life on low pay: 2026*, <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/life-low-pay-2026-impact-low-wages-uk-workers>

- Redesign mandatory requirements to foster trust and adult-to-adult relationships between employment advisors and people receiving support – this should include moving away from the ‘any job’ approach, and ensuring sanctions are only ever used as a last resort.

High costs are weighing down people on the lowest incomes

- Housing costs make up the largest part of expenditure for households experiencing hunger and hardship, and they are most commonly behind on their energy bills. There are clear levers to pull to support people with these costs.
- The costs associated with renting are increasingly driving hunger and hardship. One in three (32%) private renters face food insecurity, and one in seven (13%) have accessed charitable food provision in the past year.
- Among people behind on their gas or electricity bills, 87% were food insecure, and 54% had accessed charitable food provision in the past year.

Affordable housing

Housing is one of the biggest costs that people on the very lowest incomes face. Private renters in the lowest income quintile spend 63% of their household income on rent.⁴¹ It is perhaps unsurprising then that the costs associated with renting are increasingly driving hunger and hardship. One in three (32%) private renters face food insecurity, and one in seven (13%) have accessed charitable food provision in the past year.

These figures rise even further for private renters who are in receipt of Local Housing Allowance (LHA). LHA is intended to help ensure that some of the cheaper private rented homes in an area are affordable for people on low incomes, but rates have been frozen since April 2024 while rents have continued to rise. Over 1.5 million households receive LHA through Universal Credit. Of these, 900,000 households face a shortfall between their LHA payment and their rent costs – that’s more than half (56%) of these households.⁴² Across England, the monthly rent of a two-bedroom home at the 30th percentile now sits £158 on average above the LHA rate.⁴³

⁴¹ Worsdale, R, Elliot, J, and Blower, R, (2026), *Under pressure: The affordability challenges facing private renters*, JRF, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/housing/under-pressure-the-affordability-challenges-facing-private-renters>

⁴² Department for Work and Pensions, (2026), *Households on Universal Credit data set*, accessed from <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/login.xhtml>

⁴³ Aldridge, H, et al, (2026), *Saving private renters: Why the Government should unfreeze Local Housing Allowance*, Resolution Foundation. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/saving-private-renters/>

In 2025 we reported on a positive change in the use of charitable food provision by private renters in receipt of LHA – seeing a fall from 31% in 2022 to 11% in 2024 – and linked this to the end of a four-year freeze in LHA rates and realignment with the 30th percentile of local rents in April 2024. We did however warn that a failure to continue to uprate payments would lead to hunger and hardship increasing again.

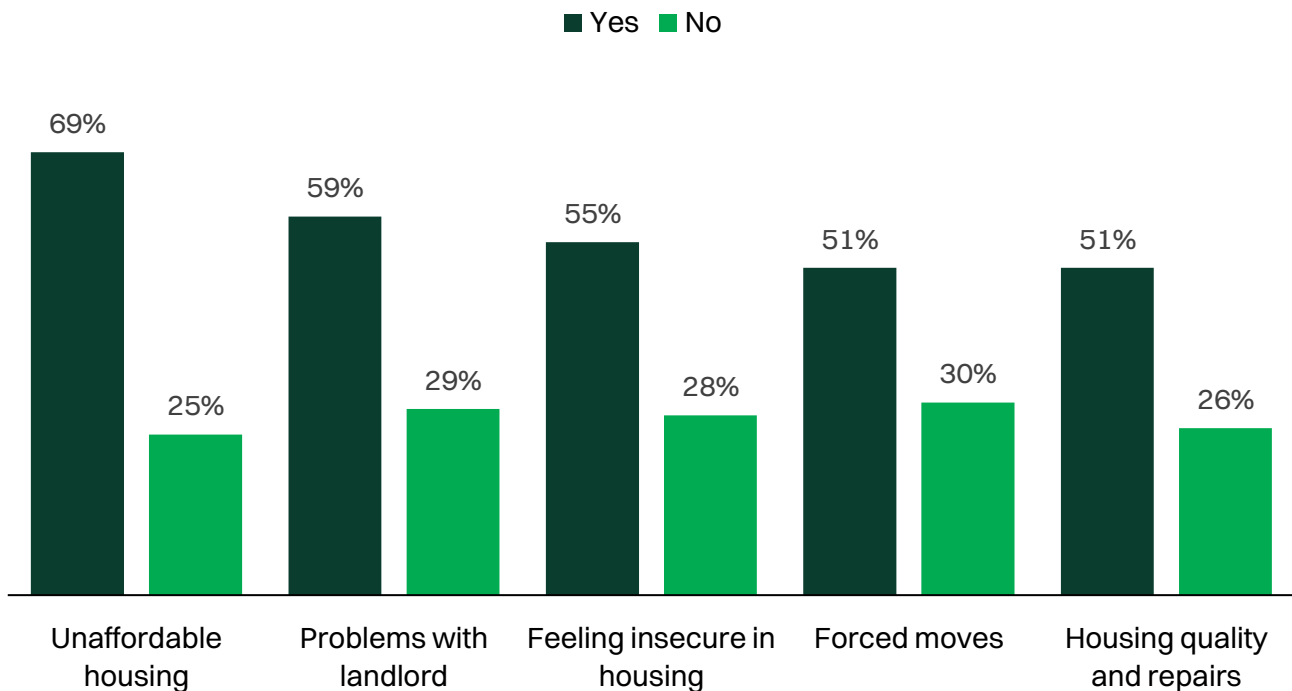
We are now seeing that impact – in 2026, 29% of private renters in receipt of LHA had needed to turn to charitable food provision in the last year (compared to 11% in 2024). 55% had experienced food insecurity in 2026 – far higher than the rate for private renters who were not in receipt of LHA (29%).⁴⁴

Alongside a lack of adequate support, challenging experiences that are all too common in the private rental sector – like being forced to move, unexpected rent increases and living in poor quality housing – can drive up costs and put pressure on limited incomes.

As Figure 8 shows, private renters that have experienced a harmful or challenging event relating to their housing were more likely to experience food insecurity. Almost half (45%) of private renters who had experienced any event were food insecure, and one in five had accessed charitable food provision (19%). In a sign of how unaffordable housing often goes hand in hand with needing to cut back on food, the majority (69%) of private renters who had experienced issues with their housing affordability were food insecure.

Figure 8 Rates of food insecurity for private renters who have and have not experienced different challenging or harmful housing experiences

⁴⁴ Some caution should be applied to the absolute changes in these figures. The overall sample sizes were c. 60 in Waves 1 and 2 and 140 in Wave 3. The figures are presented to show the statistically significant changes between these waves.



Source: Hunger in the UK Wave 3 general population survey.

Shortfalls in LHA rates are linked to these harmful housing issues, including housing insecurity, homelessness, and poor housing conditions. Our data shows that private renters in receipt of LHA are more likely to have experienced housing issues in the last 12 months than private renters not in receipt of LHA (44% vs. 30%). Looking at the specific housing issues, private renters in receipt of LHA were at higher risk than private renters not in receipt of LHA of:

- Issues with housing quality and repairs like living in overcrowded accommodation (27% vs. 18%).
- Facing issues with unaffordable housing, such as an unexpected rent increase that they struggled to afford (24% vs. 13%).
- Feeling insecure in their housing (22% vs. 10%).
- Problems with their landlord, such as not reporting an issue due to fears of repercussions (15% vs. 7%).
- Being forced to move in the last 12 months (13% vs. 5%).

The scale of hunger and hardship for people living in private rented accommodation is exacerbated by a shortage of social housing in the UK. Research from Shelter found that, despite more than 1.3 million households being on social housing waiting lists, only 12,200 social rent homes were delivered by councils, housing associations and private developers across England in 2025.⁴⁵ The shortage of social

⁴⁵ Shelter, (2026), *Building social homes at current speed will take 119 years to clear housing waiting lists*, https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/building_social_homes_at_current_speed_will_take_119_years_to_clear_housing_waiting_lists. Similar shortfalls are reported in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales:

Northern Ireland: Chartered Institute of Housing, (2026), *CIH Northern Ireland's analysis of Northern Ireland's annual housing statistics*, <https://www.cih.org/news/cih-northern-ireland-s-analysis-of-northern-ireland-s-annual-housing-statistics/>

homes leaves people stuck in unaffordable housing and contributes to rising homelessness levels. In the past 15 years, the number of social rent homes delivered per year in England has decreased by 64% whilst the number of households homeless in temporary accommodation has more than doubled (155% increase).⁴⁶

Our data shows that the majority (71%) of people who had moved into social housing in the past year said it had a positive impact on the affordability of their housing, and an even bigger majority (80%) said it had a positive impact on how secure they felt in their housing. Wider research supports that moving into social housing has a range of benefits including sustained health and wellbeing benefits, positive financial impacts and stronger connections with the local community.⁴⁷

Recommendations:

- Lift the freeze on Local Housing Allowance and create a permanent link between rents and support.
- Increase the supply of social housing, including building more and buying more social homes.
- Make sure social housing is adequately furnished when people move in, such as having curtains and carpets.
- Carefully design and implement rent controls, including trialling caps on rent increases both within and between tenancies, to make rents more affordable, and reduce the cost of uprating housing support.

Affordable energy

Alongside housing, energy is one of the costs people on low incomes most struggle with. Low income households spend 16% of their income on energy compared to 8% on average.⁴⁸ Energy prices are expected to increase significantly, from the current household average of £1,663 per year to £2,084 per year by March 2027.⁴⁹ This is particularly concerning given that 34% of the UK population surveyed for

Scotland: Shelter Scotland, (2026), *Urgent progress on social home building needed as Scottish Government falls further behind on promise, latest stats show*, https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/urgent_progress_on_social_home_building_needed_as_scottish_government_falls_further_behind_on_promise_latest_stats_show

Wales: Dearden, W, (2026), *Understanding the need for more homes in Wales*, Bevan Foundation, <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/views/understanding-the-need-for-more-homes-in-wales/>

⁴⁶ Shelter, (2026), *Building social homes at current speed will take 119 years to clear housing waiting lists*, https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/building_social_homes_at_current_speed_will_take_119_years_to_clear_housing_waiting_lists

⁴⁷ Rich, H, (2026), *Stories of Home: new findings from a Shelter and IKEA research partnership*, Shelter, https://england.shelter.org.uk/what_we_do/updates_insights_and_impact/stories_of_home_new_findings_from_a_shelter_and_ikea_research_partnership

⁴⁸ Department for Energy Security & Net Zero, (2026), *Fuel Poverty Strategy for England*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fuel-poverty-strategy-for-england/fuel-poverty-strategy-for-england--2>

⁴⁹ Money Saving Expert, (2026), *How will energy prices change? What will happen to the Energy Price Cap in 2026 and beyond?*, <https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/utilities/energy-price-cap-prediction/>

this research in late summer do not feel confident that they could manage further increases in the cost of living over the next six months.

Our previous survey of people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in 2024 found that 42% were behind on their energy bills. This was by far the most common household bill that people referred to food banks were behind on, followed by water and sewage (33%). This was higher for disabled households (45% behind on energy bills, vs. 37% of non-disabled households).⁵⁰

Among people across the UK behind on their gas or electricity bills, 87% were food insecure and 54% had accessed charitable food provision in the past year. These stark figures are likely to be closely linked to the fact that the majority (76%) of people behind on their energy bills are facing three or more forms of debt and arrears. This demonstrates the scale of financial difficulty people with energy debt are facing, leaving them struggling to get out of the cycle of severe hardship and debt.

Recommendations:

- Provide targeted support on energy costs to help people on low incomes in the face of cost increases coming as a result of global events.

Unmet support needs and social isolation are deepening hunger and hardship in our communities

- There is a clear need for wider support for people experiencing hunger and hardship: 80% of people experiencing food insecurity have experienced other issues (including with debt, their health, housing, or work). However, a third (34%) of people referred to food banks have not received any formal support or advice prior to a food bank referral.
- Services must take into account the needs of the people they are supporting: 42% of people experiencing food insecurity are confident in asking for a decision to be reconsidered when it negatively affects them and 49% are confident in dealing with organisations to resolve an issue. This is far lower than people across the UK (57% and 66% respectively).
- A lack of social connections or support leaves people at higher risk of hunger and hardship: Almost half (47%) of socially isolated people experienced food insecurity in 2026, compared to 17% of people who were not socially isolated.
- Changes to people's circumstances are too often pushing them into hunger and hardship: 46% of people who have had to take unpaid leave from work due to caring responsibilities experienced food insecurity.

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

Advice and support are essential for people facing multiple challenges, but many won't receive it

People experiencing hunger and hardship commonly face other challenges that require support alongside financial difficulty. However, despite evidence showing how advice can boost people's incomes⁵¹, support their mental health⁵², and improve their housing situations⁵³, previous research from Trussell indicates that for many people these support needs are likely to be unaddressed. In 2024, a third (34%) of people referred to food banks didn't receive any formal support or advice prior to a food bank referral.⁵⁴ This often includes not receiving much needed advice on social security payments, debt, and mental health:

- 14% of all people referred to food banks had received advice with social security payments.
- 16% of people had received debt advice.
- 17% of people who were currently homeless had received any advice or support with housing.
- 36% of people with a mental health condition had received any advice or support related to mental health.

Figure 9 highlights the additional challenges facing people experiencing food insecurity. Almost half of people experiencing food insecurity are behind or struggling to keep up with bills (49% vs. 14% of people across the UK), a similar proportion have experienced issues with their health (47% vs. 30%), one in three have experienced difficulties at work (33% vs. 19%), and housing issues were also more prevalent

⁵¹ Finney, A, et al, (2024), Evaluating the advice and support services provided through food banks: An evaluation report for Trussell from the Personal Finance Research Centre at the University of Bristol, Personal Finance Research Centre and the University of Bristol, https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/geography/pfrc/documents/Evaluating-the-advice-and-support-services-provided-through-food-banks_REPORT.pdf

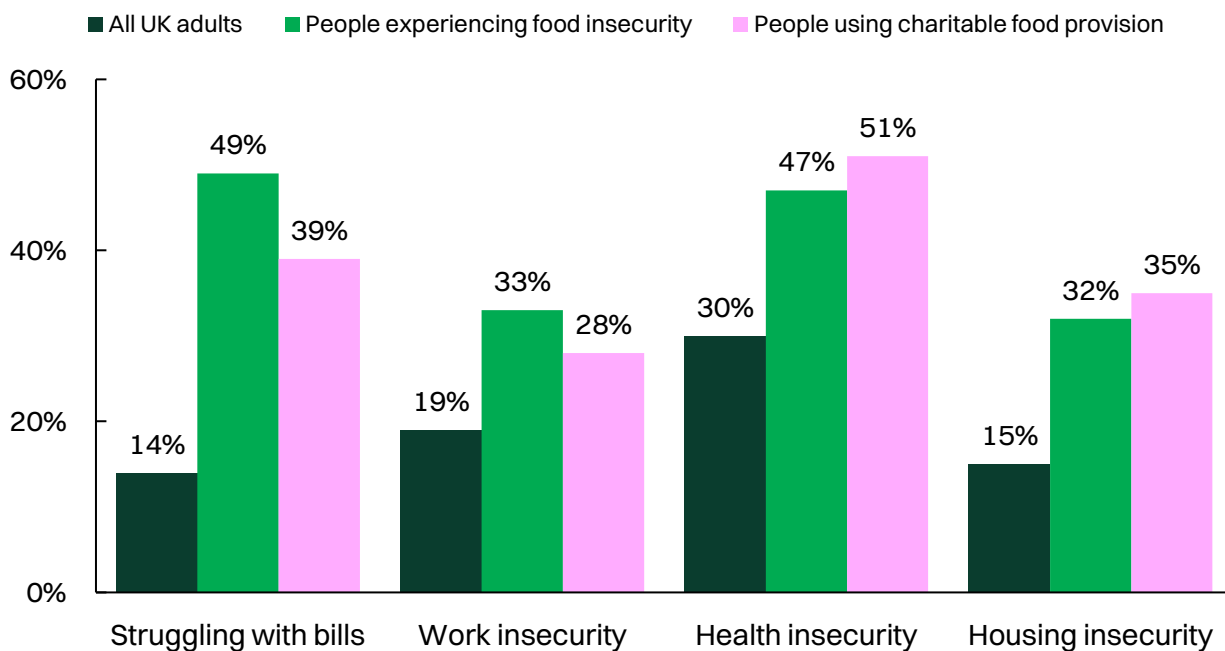
⁵² Forster, N, et al, (2016), *Exposing the impact of Citizens Advice Bureau services on health: a realist evaluation protocol*, BMJ Open, <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/6/1/e009887>

⁵³ Pearce, N and Bretherton, J, (2017), *Crisis Skylight – Final report of the University of York Evaluation*, University of York and Crisis, https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20620/crisis_skylight_evaluation-report_final_2017.pdf

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

(32% vs. 15%). Similar differences are seen for people who are needing to turn to charitable food provision for support.

Figure 9 Proportion of people experiencing different insecurities – UK, people experiencing food insecurity, and people using charitable food provision.



Source: Hunger in the UK Wave 3 general population survey.

These issues often overlap to mean that people are presenting with multiple needs (multiple needs are calculated by counting how many of the experiences people reported in

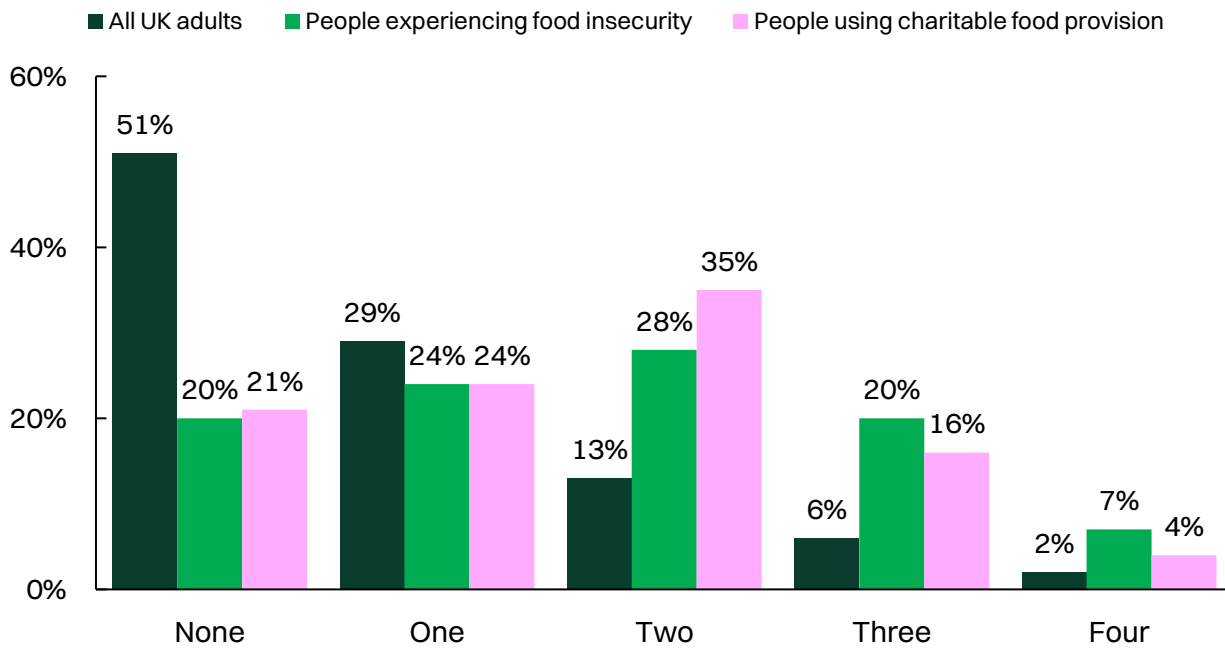
Figure 9). There are signs that these multiple challenges are becoming increasingly common for people experiencing hunger and hardship. Discussions with food banks in the Trussell community have highlighted how the people they support are increasingly experiencing deepening and persistent hardship. This has been reflected in the use of food banks being increasingly driven by people returning for support. Between 2019 and 2025 the number of people referred to a food bank four or more times within that year increased by 56%. This was far higher than the increase for people referred once (18%) and people referred two to three times (24%).

Figure 10 shows that 28% of people experiencing food insecurity were experiencing two insecurities (compared to 13% of people across the UK), 20% were experiencing three (vs. 6%), and 7% were experiencing four (vs. 2%).

There are signs that these multiple challenges are becoming increasingly common for people experiencing hunger and hardship. Discussions with food banks in the Trussell community have highlighted how the people they support are increasingly experiencing deepening and persistent hardship. This has been reflected in the use of food banks being increasingly driven by people returning for support. Between 2019 and 2025 the number of people referred to a food bank four or more times within that year increased by 56%. This was far higher than the increase for people referred once (18%) and people referred two to three times (24%).⁵⁵

Figure 10 Proportion of people experiencing multiple insecurities – UK, people experiencing food insecurity, and people using charitable food provision

⁵⁵ Trussell, (2026), *End of Year Food bank Stats*, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/latest-stats/end-of-year-stats#factsheets-and-data>



Source: Hunger in the UK Wave 3 general population survey.

Wider evidence shows that the number of people facing ‘multiple insecurity’ – defined as combined financial, housing, and health insecurity – increased from 3.4 million adults (6% of the adult population) to 5.2 million (9%) between 2014/15 and 2022/23.⁵⁶ This has likely contributed to a significant increase in the need for advice services; data from Advice UK shows that annual caseloads in 2024–25 were around 40% higher than the 2018–2022 average.⁵⁷

The general pattern across the sector has been for increased levels of demand combined with increased complexity and depth of support needed, which can lead advice providers to serve fewer people than before. Citizens Advice casebook data for England and Wales shows that, in 2019–20, 81% of ‘clients’ had only one advice issue, 15% had two issues, and 4% had three or more. In 2025–26, this increased to 67% having one issue; 20% had two, and 13% had three or more.⁵⁸

There are clear barriers for people trying to access additional support because of a lack of provision. Across the UK, local services providing vital advice on social security, debt and housing have faced significant strain over the last decade, owing to a combination of funding cuts and an increase in demand. In England, steep reductions to central funding grants for local authorities, which have fallen on

⁵⁶ Tunstall, R, et al, (2025), *Insecure lives: The growth and impact of multiple insecurities*, CASE, https://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/_new/publications/abstract/?index=11618

⁵⁷ Advice UK, (2025), *Advice Works – Building a skilled advice sector workforce*, <https://content.adviceuk.org.uk/advice-works-report>

⁵⁸ Citizens Advice, (2026), *The cost of living: Early signs of rising pressure in the UK*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EazilsQzGKE>

the most deprived local authority areas the hardest,⁵⁹ have forced councils to scale back their in-house welfare rights services and reduce funding for third sector services such as Citizens Advice.⁶⁰

While advice services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have tended to fare better than England, real-terms reductions in local authority spending power have hampered their ability to provide vital advice and to help people navigate the social security system. In Wales, the Welsh Government has needed to step in to support funding for advice services.⁶¹

Other Trussell research has shown that community spaces are crucial for the provision of advice and support. People living in the most deprived areas are more than twice as likely to say that local facilities helped them access advice or support on social security and money matters (24%) than people in the least deprived areas (12%). Yet one in 10 people (10%) in the most deprived areas have little or no access to community spaces (compared to 5% of people in the least deprived areas).⁶² These findings mirror those from JRF, which found higher rates of closure of community spaces, and reductions in the number of community workers in double disadvantaged communities (communities with high levels of deprivation and low provision of community spaces, groups, and activities).⁶³ Similarly, the Law Society has detailed how 82% of the population do not have access to a welfare legal aid provider in their local authority area, leaving them unable to challenge or appeal decisions.⁶⁴

There is a clear lack of confidence amongst people experiencing food insecurity and using charitable food provision in accessing and ensuring they get the best from services. This builds on the existing

⁵⁹ Institute for Government, (2024), Fixing public services: local Government, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/fixing-public-serviceslabour-government/local-government>

⁶⁰ The Guardian, (2024), *When a Citizens Advice has to close despite demand being 'off the scale'*, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/feb/03/citizens-advice-closing-mansfield-council-funding>

Leicester City Council, (2015), *Welfare Advice Services Review*, <https://cabinet.leicester.gov.uk/documents/s68802/Welfare%20Advice%20Review%20-%20Decision%20report.pdf>

Stourbridge news, (2025), *Councillor writes open letter on welfare rights team cuts*, <https://www.stourbridgenews.co.uk/news/24862251.councillor-writesopen-letter-welfare-rights-team-cuts/>

⁶¹ Improvement Service, (2024), *Impact of Local Authority Funding of Money and Welfare rights Advice Services in 2023/24*

The Detail, (2018), *Uncertain future for Citizens Advice Northern Ireland's regional office due to funding crisis*, <https://www.thedetail.tv/articles/uncertainfuture-for-citizens-advice-northern-ireland-after-it-loses-vital-stormont-funding>

Welsh Government, (2024), *Written Statement: Funding for Advice Services*, <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-funding-advice-services>

⁶² Trussell, (2026), *Almost half of UK residents lost community spaces in past three years*, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/news/almost-half-of-uk-residents-lost-community-spaces-in-past-three-years>

⁶³ Ibison, Y, (2026), *Essential but unequal: the need for social infrastructure in every place*, JRF, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/neighbourhoods-and-communities/essential-but-unequal-the-need-for-social-infrastructure>

⁶⁴ The Law Society, (2026), *Welfare benefits - legal aid deserts*, [Welfare benefits - legal aid deserts | The Law Society](https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/welfare-benefits-legal-aid-deserts)

barriers to accessing support that lower income households face – including digital exclusion, costs, stigma, trauma from previous negative experiences, and concerns about losing support.^{65,66,67,}

Figure 11 highlights how confidence is lower for people experiencing food insecurity in situations which will shape how effective the support they receive will be – and particularly in ensuring that they get the support that they need.

This mirrors wider evidence which highlights how lower income households may face barriers to accessing support. Evidence from healthcare services show that people with higher incomes access healthcare earlier and get more preventive and specialist care, while poorer people access healthcare later and experience worse health outcomes.⁶⁸ This is partly explained through the concept of ‘cultural capital’ (education, networks, skills and resources) which can support people in navigating access and negotiating with service providers.⁶⁹

Figure 11 Proportion of people confident in different situations – UK, people experiencing food insecurity, and people using charitable food provision

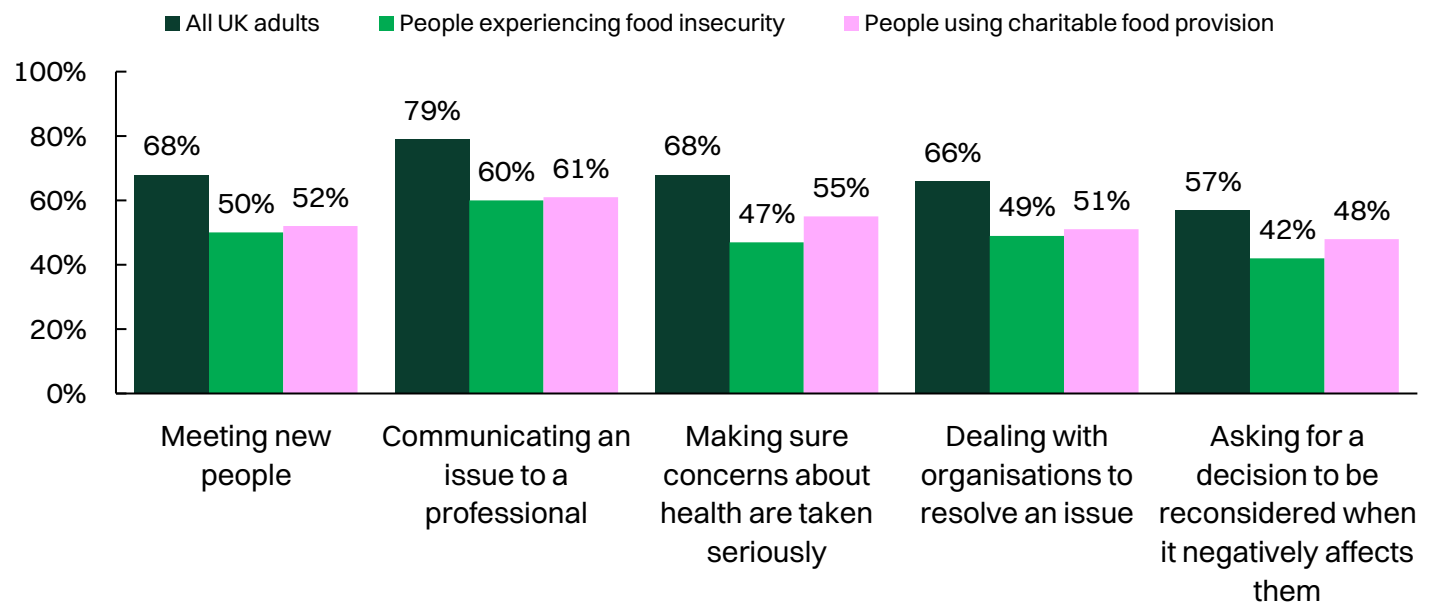
⁶⁵ Scottish Government, (2025), *Engaging with families living in low-income households through system change, place-based initiative*, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/engaging-families-living-low-income-households-through-system-change-place-based-initiatives/pages/6/>

⁶⁶ Mallorie, S, (2024), *Illustrating the relationship between poverty and NHS services*, Kings Fund, <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/long-reads/relationship-poverty-nhs-services#poverty-and-difficulties-accessing-health-care>

⁶⁷ Turn2us, (2025), *From stigma to support - rebuilding trust in our social security system*, <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/getmedia/912d8bd6-6cd1-4461-bf26-deb05233aad2/Turn2us-stop-the-stigma.pdf>

⁶⁸ Bidmead, E, (2024), *Poverty proofing healthcare: A qualitative study of barriers to accessing healthcare for low-income families with children in Northern England*, PLOS ONE, <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0292983>

⁶⁹ Hasting, A, and Matthews, P, (2011), *“Sharp Elbows”: Do the middle-classes have advantages in public service provision and if so how?*, University of Glasgow, <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/57021/>



Source: Hunger in the UK Wave 3 general population survey.

This has practical consequences, with people with lower incomes shown to be less satisfied with the support they receive. People in the most deprived areas of the UK report lower satisfaction with the quality of health services (27%) compared to their more affluent counterparts (35%). This is linked to difficulty in accessing timely and quality healthcare services.⁷⁰

Recommendations:

- Increase the breadth, availability and accessibility of advice to prevent hunger and hardship.

A lack of social and community connections is leaving people at risk of hunger

Social and community connections can help to mitigate the impact or reduce the risk of hunger and hardship⁷¹ and support people to get access to wider forms of support. People referred to food banks in the Trussell community who were not socially isolated were more likely to have received advice and support before turning to a food bank than people who were (54% vs. 49%). A similar pattern was found for people who could rely on their community for support, compared with people who couldn't (57% vs.

⁷⁰ Bogdan, A, et al, (2024), *Low Satisfaction with health services highlights health inequalities*, Ipsos, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/low-satisfaction-health-services-highlights-health-inequalities>

⁷¹ Dabis, A, (2025), *Oxford research explores how poverty and loneliness are linked to pain, fatigue and low mood*, University of Oxford, <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2025-05-20-oxford-research-explores-how-poverty-and-loneliness-are-linked-pain-fatigue-and-low>

49%). Previous Trussell research has also shown how building new connections can support people to move out of hunger and hardship.⁷²

The risk of food insecurity and use of charitable food provision was far higher for socially isolated people and for people who said they could not rely on their friends, family, or community for support. The differences are particularly stark in relation to social isolation. Almost half (47%) of socially isolated people experienced food insecurity in 2026, compared to 17% of people who were not socially isolated.

Table 7 Rates of food insecurity and charitable food provision by whether people have access to social connections and support

Measure	% who have used any form of charitable food provision	% experiencing food insecurity
Does not have family support	13%	23%
Has family support	9%	19%
Does not have community support	9%	24%
Has community support	10%	17%
Does not have support from friends	14%	30%
Has support from friends	9%	18%
Socially isolated	14%	47%
Not socially isolated	9%	17%

Source: Hunger in the UK Wave 3 general population survey.

The conditions for social connection are not being supported in the most deprived communities. Social infrastructure can provide the foundations for connection, and support people to bounce back from setbacks and everyday challenges. It helps to build social capital and networks that protect economic security (e.g. good health and wellbeing, plus higher educational attainment, skills, and earnings).⁷³ Trussell research has shown that people in the most deprived communities are less likely to have access to community spaces such as a community centre or hall (74% vs. 84%), library (81% vs. 87%), or

⁷² 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>

⁷³ Ibison, Y, (2026), *Essential but unequal: the need for social infrastructure in every place*, JRF, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/neighbourhoods-and-communities/essential-but-unequal-the-need-for-social-infrastructure>

a sports or leisure centre (80% vs. 87%), than people in the least deprived. They are also far more likely to have lost access to them in the previous three years (23% vs. 14%).⁷⁴

There are also clear issues with trust attached to this lack of social connection for people experiencing hunger and hardship. Across the UK, 8% of people say that you ‘can’t be too careful’ when asked about their trust in people. People experiencing food insecurity are twice as likely to say this (18%). To build communities that support and prevent people facing hunger and hardship, we need both financial investment and to build relationships, trust and shared purpose.⁷⁵

Recommendations:

- Ensure a holistic, ambitious and joined-up approach to reducing hunger and hardship in Pride in Place areas by supporting Pride in Place Neighbourhood Boards to:
 - Develop community-led plans to strengthen local support for people facing hunger and hardship.
 - Develop close and practical alignment between their Pride in Place plan and, in England, their local authority’s Crisis and Resilience Fund delivery plans and wider local anti-poverty strategies.

Too many people are being left to fall deeper into hunger and hardship without receiving crisis support in their communities

Every day, food banks see how people living on the lowest incomes can be quickly tipped into crisis by an unexpected cost or financial shock, such as illness or a job loss. Effective crisis support is crucial to prevent people from falling into severe hardship, so they can still afford the essentials we all need. Our evidence shows a clear impact of changes to people’s circumstances:

- 46% of people who have had to take unpaid leave from work in the last year due to caring responsibilities were food insecure (vs. 20% overall).
- 43% of people who had been forced to move when they didn’t want to in the last year were food insecure.
- 41% of people who had been diagnosed with a long-term physical or mental health condition in the last year were food insecure.
- 40% of people who had lost their job in the last year were food insecure.

⁷⁴ Trussell, (2026), *Almost half of UK residents lost community spaces in past three years*, <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/news/almost-half-of-uk-residents-lost-community-spaces-in-past-three-years>

⁷⁵ Demos, (2026), *A Nation of Neighbours: Rebuilding Britain from the Ground Up*, <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/NoN-May-26-UCL-x-Demos.pdf>

Our previous evidence shows that far too many people are not receiving the support that they might need to better cope with these experiences. Only one in 10 people (10%) referred to food banks in the Trussell community in 2024 had received crisis support in the previous three months.⁷⁶

There have been positive steps in the announcement of three-year funding for the Crisis and Resilience Fund in England alongside guidance which recommends prioritising cash payments over other forms of support for people facing financial crisis. But with millions of people still needing to turn to charitable food provision for support with affording the essentials, it is clear that more is needed in our communities. This should include cash-first approaches which are combined with wider support. An evaluation of support provided via the Cash-First Programme in Scotland found that people who received both emergency income and wider support reported improved financial confidence, better debt management, and greater ability to cope with day-to-day pressures.⁷⁷

Recommendations:

- Ensure local crisis support prioritises cash-first crisis payments alongside accessible routes to holistic advice and wider support in local communities.
- Following the positive evaluation of its Cash-First Programme, the Scottish Government should continue and expand this to all local authority areas.

⁷⁶ This includes the Scottish Welfare Fund, the Discretionary Assistance Fund in Wales, Discretionary Support in Northern Ireland, and schemes run by local authorities across England.

⁷⁷ Scottish Government, (2026), *Cash-First Programme: final evaluation report*, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/cash-first-programme-final-evaluation-report/>

What do governments need to do to reduce hunger in the UK?

Labour's general election manifesto committed to ending the need for emergency food, calling it a 'moral scar on society.' Yet it is clear from the evidence that millions simply do not have the income to cover the cost of the essentials we all need.

But none of this is inevitable. Hunger and hardship are shaped by systems that can be improved with political will and policy solutions.

The recommendations in this report are primarily intended for the UK government unless specifically stated otherwise.

Ensure incomes cover the essentials

Low incomes have been consistently identified by Trussell evidence as the main driver of hunger and hardship. Social security payments are too often inadequate to cover the cost of essentials, reductions in payments take those levels even lower, and inadequate employment support traps people in low income, or fails to reach people who could benefit.

A social security system that tackles hunger and hardship and prevents crisis:

- **Re-establish the link between Local Housing Allowance and actual rents** as a fundamental baseline of support so that LHA always covers at least the cheapest 30% of properties in every area. Our modelling shows this would lift 105,000 people out of severe hardship in the last full year of this UK parliament (2028/29).
- **Ensure Universal Credit provides enough support to afford life's essentials.** An Essentials Guarantee is a policy popular with the public and backed by a coalition of over 100 organisations. It would ensure all households receive a protected minimum amount of support in UC to afford the essentials, like food and household bills, when they need it. Our modelling shows this would lift 1.6 million people out of severe hardship.

The UK government should take the following steps towards embedding an Essentials Guarantee in UC:

- Introduce a protected minimum floor below which Universal Credit's standard allowance is not permitted to fall. This would extend this government's Fair Repayment Rate principle to all deductions, including the benefit cap, creating a protected minimum floor 15% below UC's current standard allowance.

- Establish an independent process – similar to the Low Pay Commission created for the minimum wage – to help advise on setting UC rates at a level that takes account of the evidence of what it costs to cover life's essentials.

Dignified and effective support for disabled people:

- **Protect the UC health element for disabled young people.** Restricting young people's eligibility for the health element in Universal Credit or cutting already inadequate rates of social security support would cause serious harm to disabled young people and their carers without delivering meaningful fiscal or employment effects.
- **Reform Personal Independence Payment (PIP) to reduce fear and give disabled people the breathing space to take steps towards improved health, employment and participation.** This means changes to make PIP assessments and award reviews more efficient, a strengthened Right to Try, and ensuring any changes to the assessment process or criteria for PIP do not lead to reductions in eligibility which would plunge disabled people deeper into hunger and hardship.

An employment support system that increases engagement and improves outcomes for people with complex barriers to work:

- **Invest in the training and capacity of Jobcentre and wider employment support delivery staff,** splitting roles into more specialisms and ensuring points of contact have the time and knowledge to build trust, coach, provide tailored support and address wider needs that are holding people back, including those related to mental health and financial insecurity. Employment support should be delivered in community settings alongside wider advice and support and split from the administration of social security.
- **Redesign mandatory requirements to foster trust and adult to adult relationships.** Engagement should be voluntary in the first instance, and expectations should be broad, and flexible enough to recognise the different pathways towards work people may need to take such as volunteering, or training. This would be an effective alternative to rigid conditionality, improving engagement and outcomes. Sanctions are proven to be counterproductive and harmful and should only be used as a last resort.

Tackle the costs that are weighing down people on the lowest incomes:

The last few years have seen the cost of essentials increase to record highs. Housing and energy, in particular, as two of the biggest bills households face, need to be made affordable to people on low incomes.

Affordable housing:

- **Support an increase in the supply of social housing,** including building more and buying more social homes, and facilitating the efforts of councils to do so.

- **Make sure social housing is adequately furnished when people move in**, such as having curtains and carpets, so people aren't forced to access charitable food provision because they're having to buy expensive items.
- **Carefully design and implement rent controls**, including trialling caps on rent increases both within and between tenancies, to make rents more affordable. These should draw on the growing base of promising evidence on how negative impacts can be avoided – and housing quality, housing availability, and rates of house building can be maintained. Ideas for how this can be done can be found in recent JRF,⁷⁸ NEF⁷⁹ and IPPR⁸⁰ reports. Alongside substantial gains for private renters, this would also help to reduce government spending on housing benefit.

Affordable energy in the face of global events:

- **Provide targeted support on energy costs.** One option would be implementing an Affordable Energy Guarantee, providing a portion of cheaper energy to all households, with extra support for people on low incomes and people with high energy needs, as proposed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.⁸¹ Another option would be implementing a social tariff, as proposed by the Resolution Foundation.⁸² Targeted support would help people on low incomes in the face of cost increases coming as a result of global events.

Cash-first support in communities to prevent and address crisis

Direct financial assistance should be the default when someone needs crisis support – because it is faster, more flexible, more dignified, and better value for government. Combined with wrap-around support to maximise income, including easy to access, dignified and timely advice, we can do better to both prevent and address crisis when it occurs.

Embed cash-first crisis support which encourages prevention:

- Ensure crisis support schemes across the UK prioritise cash-first crisis payments with accessible routes to securing advice and support in local communities that helps to build financial resilience.
- Ensure local crisis support does not apply unnecessarily strict eligibility criteria and high evidence burdens, and ensure that people who have No Recourse to Public Funds are able to access crisis support, as is already the case in Wales.

⁷⁸ Worsdale, R, et al, (2026), How tax reform would make rent controls feasible to deliver, Joseph - Rowntree Foundation <https://www.jrf.org.uk/housing/how-tax-reform-would-make-rent-controls-feasible-to-deliver>

⁷⁹ Bangham, G, et al, (2026), A Modern System for Fair Rents, New Economics Foundation <https://neweconomicsf.files.svdcdn.com/production/files/A-modern-system-for-fair-rents.pdf?dm=1778670498>

⁸⁰ Hobbs, M S, Parkes, H, and Walden, T, (2026), High Housing Costs in the Private Rental Sector – The Case for Action, Institute for Public Policy Research <https://www.ippr.org/articles/housing-costs-in-the-private-rental-sector>

⁸¹ Moore, M, et al, (2026), *An Affordable Energy Guarantee*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation <https://www.jrf.org.uk/cost-of-living/an-affordable-energy-guarantee>

⁸² Clegg, A, et al, (2026), *Power Struggle: Assessing the options for supporting families with the rise in the cost of energy*, Resolution Foundation <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/power-struggle/>

- In England, the UK government should monitor the impact of the Crisis and Resilience Fund with a specific focus on its local impact in reducing the need for emergency food provision.
- Looking beyond this initial Crisis and Resilience Fund period, the UK government should work in partnership with emergency food sector organisations, lived experience experts and wider civil society to design future models of local crisis and resilience support, sustaining a commitment to multi-year funding for local authorities.
- Ensure a holistic, ambitious and joined-up approach to reducing hunger and hardship in Pride in Place areas by supporting Pride in Place Neighbourhood Boards to:
 - Develop community-led plans to strengthen local support for people facing hunger and hardship and to prevent people reaching crisis
 - Develop close and practical alignment between their Pride in Place plan and, in England, their local authority's Crisis and Resilience Fund delivery plans and any existing wider local anti-poverty strategies.
- In England and Scotland, areas receiving either Good Food Neighbourhoods funding or developing Good Food Nation plans should be encouraged through guidance and support to ensure a direct link between crisis support and advice services and local food projects and plans.
- Following the success of its Cash-First Programme, the Scottish Government should continue and expand this to all local authority areas.
- In Wales and Northern Ireland there should be a focus on ensuring adequate, long-term funding for cash-first crisis support to help people back on their feet following a financial shock and prevent more sustained hardship.

Increase the breadth, availability and accessibility of advice to prevent hunger and hardship:

- Invest in holistic advice provision that prioritises people facing hunger and hardship, ensuring the availability of easy-to-access, dignified, and timely advice relating to income maximisation, social security, housing, debt, and employment.
- The UK government should provide an evidence base and clear strategy that would empower regional and local government in England to design and deliver advice services best suited to the needs of their communities.

This data sets out the limits on progress on severe hardship, food insecurity, and the use of charitable food provision since 2024/25. Charitable food should not be the only way for people in the UK to put food on the table. The public agrees this isn't a UK they want.

At the same time, it is clear that policy choices make a real and tangible difference – we have seen the positive impact of removing the two-child limit, preventing hundreds of thousands more people from experiencing hunger and hardship in 2026/27. These are positive foundations; but for a government committed to prevention, hope, and a promise to end the need for emergency food parcels, it must go further and faster.

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