

# Emergency food parcel distribution in Scotland

## 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024



### Background

This factsheet reports on the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Scotland during the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 inclusive (2023/24). During this time period, food parcels were distributed from 144 locations across Scotland, as part of the Trussell Trust network.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to recognise that data from food banks in the Trussell Trust network is just one part of the picture of need across the Scotland. There is a wide range of charitable food aid that will be supporting people that is not captured in this parcel data. There are also many people who are severely food insecure who do not receive support from food banks.<sup>2</sup>

### Key facts from the 2023/24 statistics

- 1. Over 262,400 emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in Scotland in 2023/24 with use remaining at record levels seen in previous year.**

Food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Scotland distributed 262,400 emergency food parcels in 2023/24, similar to the record levels of 2022/23. We know that every parcel distributed is one too many and it is clear that more action is needed to make a real dent in ensuring that hunger is ended for good.

86,000 parcels for children and over 176,400 food parcels for adults were distributed over this period. The number of parcels provided for children (3% decrease) and adults (1% increase) is largely unchanged from the record levels seen in the previous year.

These figures represent a 21% increase in the number of parcels distributed five years ago in 2018/19, and a 20% increase in the number of parcels for children. They remain far above the levels seen before the rapid increases in the cost of living in 2021/22 (199,700 parcels).

---

*“We're certainly seeing a change in those that are coming through the door... As well as demand rising, I've seen the needs of people becoming more complex and the deprivation seems much more apparent.”*

Elaine, Food bank Manager at East Lothian Foodbank, in the Trussell Trust network

---

<sup>1</sup> The locations that food banks distributed parcels from are not counted at a point in time. They are instead counted if they have distributed food parcels at any stage during the time period. Some will have opened, and some will have closed during this period. For reference there were 144 locations in the same period in the previous year.

<sup>2</sup> The Hunger in Scotland research, produced by the Trussell Trust in partnership with Ipsos, reported that in the 12 months to mid-2022 17% people across Scotland had experienced food insecurity, equating to an estimated 1.2 million people. However, almost 8 in 10 (77%) of people experiencing food insecurity reported that they have not used any form of food aid in the last year.

See: *Hunger in Scotland*. The Trussell Trust and Ipsos; 2023. Available at: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do/research-advocacy/hunger-in-the-uk/>

The significant increases in need seen over the last few years are linked to the soaring cost of living for people across Scotland and the fact that people's incomes (especially from social security) have failed to keep up with these costs. Inflation measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) started at 8.7% in April 2023 and remained higher than 4% for much of the year until falling to 3.2% in March 2024.

The cost of the essentials has continued to rise in this period. Food inflation was at 19% in April 2023 and remained above 10% for much of the year until falling to 4% as of March 2024. While it is welcome that inflation is slowing, the continued high inflation in the cost of essentials, particularly food, continues to make it harder for families to make ends meet. The cumulative impact of very high levels of food inflation alone over the last few years means food prices are 24% higher in March 2024 than March 2022.<sup>3</sup>

Our most recent evidence collected in February 2024 highlights that despite the fall in inflation far too many people are having to go without the essentials. When surveyed in February more than half (51%) of people receiving Universal Credit in Scotland said that they had run out of food in the last month and couldn't afford more.<sup>4</sup>

---

*“Money is extremely tight. So we have bought cheaper/lower quality products to make sure there was enough food. More food designed to be eaten without being cooked or very quick to cook so that we don't use as much energy to prepare food. Less hot food has a bearing on health especially during cold winter months. We've had to be very careful about our use of electricity & gas, more often than not using enough heating to just take the edge off the cold in the house rather than warming it up..”*

---

Person claiming Universal Credit in Scotland interviewed in February 2024<sup>5</sup>

---

The level of need over the last year has placed a significant strain on food banks across the UK. We are hearing multiple examples of food banks placing temporary limits on the number of referrals a person can access, in order to manage the food bank's resources and capacity at a time of unprecedented need. The Trussell Trust are doing all we can to support food banks through this, as they strive to respond as fully as they can to the need in front of them. We therefore know that the data reported for this period is likely to be only part of the picture of actual need in communities.

These levels of need are part of a longer-term trend which pre-dates the cost of living crisis, and even the COVID-19 pandemic. While these two events have had a major impact on food bank need, they are not the main cause. Rather, they have exposed and exacerbated a longer-term crisis: that of a weakened social security system that is unable to protect people from the most severe forms of hardship, forcing more people to the doors of food banks.

---

<sup>3</sup> Consumer price inflation, UK: March 2024 (2024), *Office for National Statistics*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/march2024#:~:text=The%20core%20CPIH%20annual%20inflation,in%20the%20constructed%20historical%20series.>

<sup>4</sup> An online survey by YouGov of 1,370 adults (16+) including 152 in Scotland currently claiming Universal Credit. Fieldwork was undertaken 18 January – 5 February 2024.

<sup>5</sup> IBID

**Table 1: Number of parcels distributed in the Trussell Trust network in Scotland and percentage changes from previous year and five years previously**

	2023/24	2022/23	% change from 2022/23	2018/19	% change from 2018/19
<b>For adults</b>	176,466	174,018	1%	145,604	21%
<b>For children</b>	86,013	88,809	-3%	71,448	20%
<b>Total</b>	262,479	262,827	-0.1%	217,052	21%

## 2. There is clear evidence that the Scottish Child Payment is not doing enough to significantly reduce the need for food banks for most families

Overall, 60% of the support provided by food banks in Scotland in the previous year was for families with children. Families with three or more children are especially likely to face severe hardship, with 24% of parcels provided by food banks in the last year being distributed to families with three or more children.

The change in the scale of need is particularly pronounced for these families. Since 2018/19 the number of parcels provided in Scotland for families with three or more children has increased by 28% compared to an 19% increase for families living without any children.

---

*“The proportion of parcels that we give to children has remained pretty steady between 40 and 45%. It's down slightly this year compared with previous years, which we're tempted to attribute to the Scottish Child Payment, but to be honest, it's not made as much difference as we expected it might.”*

– Staff member at Glasgow SE Foodbank

---

Analysis of the distribution of support provided to different age groups across Scotland further highlights the continued over-representation of children needing support from food banks. One in ten (9%) food parcels were provided for children aged 0-4 in the last year, despite children of this age accounting for just 5% of the Scottish population. Similarly, 14% of parcels were provided for children aged 5 to 11, with this age group making up 7% of the Scottish population.

---

*“36% of those that we supported last year were children, which was an increase on 2022...I think some food banks are starting to see a reduction in the number of children. We've not really noticed that yet.”*

– Elaine, Foodbank Manager at East Lothian Foodbank

---

**Table 2: Comparison of Food Bank Support and Population Proportions by Age Group in Scotland**

Age Bands	Proportion of all parcels by age group (2023/24)	Comparative population proportions (June 2022 estimates for Scotland)
0-4	9%	5%
5 to 11	14%	7%
12 to 16	10%	6%
17 to 24	10%	10%
25 to 64	55%	53%
65+	3%	20%

Population data source: ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates, June 2022<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Detailed analysis of the data indicates that the Scottish Child Payment has had only a limited impact for some households

To support the understanding of the impact of the roll out of the Scottish Child Payment (SCP) the Trussell Trust commissioned in-depth analysis of the data from the Fraser of Allander Institute (FAI). Using the Trussell Trust's administrative data FAI assess the impact of the payment across its roll out.

FAI's preliminary analysis of the data which compares food bank usage in Scotland to the rest of the UK suggests the SCP has had a small, but statistically significant, decrease in the proportion of total parcels provided for two household types:

- Households with children aged 5-16 without younger children (a 1.8% percentage point decrease); and
- Single-adult households with children aged 0-4 (a 1.1% percentage point decrease).

The research also suggests that these impacts were greater after November 2022, which coincides with the £25 per week increase to SCP and its extension to households with children under 16. FAI find that there is some limited evidence of a decrease (2%) in food bank usage for larger families with children aged 0-4 after the increase in the payment.

When comparing trends among different groups in Scotland, FAI find food parcels for households with children aged 5-16 were 17-22% lower than they would have been if they followed the same trend as households without children. We cannot be confident in saying that the SCP caused this change, but it may indicate some shift in the use of food banks for this group relative to households without children after SCP was introduced. FAI are clear though that this particular analysis is only suggestive, and they were not able to control for other factors which may have played a role in these differences.

More work is needed to continue to identify the impact of the SCP over a longer time period, particularly given the indications that the increased payment amount may be starting to make a difference.

### 4. The continued high rate of use of food banks by families with children points to the need for further increases in the SCP to make a real dent in hunger and poverty.

While the extension of eligibility for the Scottish Child Payment in November 2022, and the increase to £25 a week per child, have been welcome steps by the Scottish Government, our statistics show

<sup>6</sup> Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: Mid-2022 (2024), Office for National Statistics, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/population-estimates-for-the-uk-england-wales-scotland-and-northern-ireland-mid-2022>

that the Scottish Child Payment does not go far enough in ensuring low-income families are able to afford the essentials. Analysis by IPPR Scotland for the Trussell Trust and Save the Children calls for the Scottish Child Payment to be increased to at least £40 a week and triple locked year-on-year to keep up with the cost of living.<sup>7</sup> This is particularly important given the fact that the latest child poverty figures released in March 2024 revealed that almost a quarter of a million (240,000) children in Scotland are growing up in poverty.<sup>8</sup>

## 5. Pension age households are increasingly likely to need to use a food bank

The prevalence of poverty among pensioners across Scotland is far lower than in the working age population and just 4% of the support provided by food banks in Scotland in the last year was for pension age households. This reflects one of the UK's most striking success stories in recent decades - which has been the enormous reduction in pensioner poverty. In Scotland in 1996/8, 31% of pensioners were living in poverty, this had fallen to 12% by 2010/12.<sup>9</sup> This change highlights just how much difference concerted action can make to achieving poverty reduction.

However, this has started to go into reverse, with poverty rates rising to 15% most recently, and this is likely to worsen in the coming years without action.

Our own figures show that food bank support for pensioner households in Scotland is rapidly increasing. Between 2018/19 and 2023/24 food bank support for these households has doubled (an increase of 100%), compared to an 8% rise amongst households without someone of pension age. This mismatched increase in food parcel provision continued from 2022/23 to 2023/24 (22% increase vs a 5% decrease).

---

*“We've seen a rise in the amount of pensioners we've been Supporting. More retired people, definitely.”*

*—Staff member, Aberdeen Foodbank in the Trussell Trust network*

---

These figures are similar to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's recent research which found a sharp increase in the number of pensioners facing destitution across the UK— up by 254% since 2019.<sup>10</sup> Although as with the proportion of parcels going to pensioner households, pensioners experiencing destitution still make up a relatively small part of the total destitute population (6% as compared with being 21% of the general population).

This evidence provides an early warning sign that the recent increase in poverty among pensioner households is leading to significant increases in severe hardship amongst this group, forcing them to turn to food banks.

---

<sup>7</sup> Tackling Child Poverty and Destitution (2022), IPPR Scotland, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/03/Scotland-Tackling-Child-Poverty-and-Destitution.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2020-23 (2024), Scottish Government, [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2020-23 \(data.gov.scot\)](https://www.data.gov.scot)

<sup>9</sup> Pensioner Poverty (2024), Welsh Government, <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Sustainable-Development/Sustainable-Development-Indicators/Pensioner-poverty>

<sup>10</sup> Destitution in the UK (2023), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/deep-poverty-and-destitution>

## 6. People most commonly need support from a food bank in Scotland because their income is insufficient to meet the cost of essentials

In the last year people who have needed to turn to a food bank in Scotland have most commonly (75%) been referred because their income is insufficient forcing them to cut back on the essentials or face being driven into unmanageable debt.

This has been clear in our operational data for many years. It was also reflected in our landmark Hunger in Scotland research published in 2023, which found that the vast majority of people referred to food banks were destitute, meaning they had an income so low that they couldn't afford essential items.<sup>11</sup>

---

*“It's the biggest problem for us [low/ insufficient income], because we'll be here forever. If it stays like this, we there's nothing else we can do.”*

– Staff member, Aberdeen North Foodbank in the Trussell Trust network

---

Problems with health are reported in one in five (20%) referrals to food banks in Scotland - with health conditions driving up costs for households and making it difficult to find or sustain employment. Our recent research found that the design of the disability benefits system was putting disabled people in impossible situations and leaving them with too little income to cover the essentials.<sup>12</sup> In Scotland almost three in four (73%) people referred to food banks are disabled, more than double the proportion of people who are disabled across the whole of Scotland (31%).<sup>13</sup>

Issues with benefits such as long waits, delays, or sanctions affect a significant minority of referrals to food banks (19%). This is illustrative of the problems with the design and delivery of the social security system which far too often leaves people waiting for payments and unable to afford essentials.

The impact of life events is also evidenced in the data with 6% of people being referred due to being insecurely housed (including being made homeless), and others seeing changes to their personal circumstance (5%) such as splitting from a partner.

---

<sup>11</sup> Hunger in Scotland. The Trussell Trust and Ipsos; 2023. Available at: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do/research-advocacy/hunger-in-the-uk/>

<sup>12</sup> Biggs H, Wildman J, Hamid A and MacGregor A (Scottish Centre for Social Research). *Disability and financial hardship: How disability benefits contribute to the need for food banks in the UK*. The Trussell Trust, 2023. Available at: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/10/Disability-Benefits-Research-Report.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> *Hunger in Scotland*. The Trussell Trust and Ipsos; 2023. Available at: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do/research-advocacy/hunger-in-the-uk/>

**Table 3: Reasons for referral for people supported by food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Scotland**

Reason for referral	% of referrals with reason selected
<b>Income or debt</b>	75%
<b>Health</b>	20%
<b>Issues with benefits</b>	19%
<b>Insecure housing</b>	6%
<b>Change in work hours or unemployment</b>	5%
<b>Change in personal circumstances</b>	5%
<b>Immigration status</b>	3%
<b>Domestic abuse</b>	2%

*This data was multiple choice – referral partners could select up to four responses. Data has been recoded to reduce categories.*

Our data highlights that different types of families need to turn to food banks for different reasons. In the last year people living without children in Scotland were more likely to be referred due to health reasons (22% vs. 15% for households with children), or because they were insecurely housed (7% vs. 3%).

Unlike the rest of the UK, the experiences of pensioner households are not as distinct, with the share of people being referred due to health problems being similar between pension age and non-pension age households (22% vs. 21%). This may indicate that health conditions are more evenly spread across households referred to food banks in Scotland than the rest of the UK. Pension-age households are more likely to be referred due to issues with their income or debt levels (80% vs. 75%) and less likely to be referred due to issues with benefits and housing.

**Table 4: Reason for referral amongst different households types in Scotland**

Reason for referral	One or more children		Three or more children		One or more pension aged person	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Income or debt</b>	74%	77%	75%	77%	75%	80%
<b>Health</b>	22%	15%	21%	13%	21%	22%
<b>Issues with benefits</b>	20%	16%	19%	15%	20%	12%
<b>Insecure housing</b>	7%	3%	6%	3%	6%	2%
<b>Change in work hours or unemployment</b>	5%	6%	5%	5%	6%	2%
<b>Change in Personal circumstances</b>	5%	6%	5%	7%	6%	4%
<b>Immigration status</b>	2%	7%	3%	9%	3%	2%
<b>Domestic abuse</b>	1%	3%	2%	3%	2%	1%

Across all households in Scotland the most common reason for referral was due to issues with income and debt levels. The vital role of the social security system in driving these trends in Scotland is clear from the fact that the majority (81%) of people referred to food banks were reported to solely have income from the social security system, with a further 5% having earned income as well as income from social security.

A minority of referred people (9%) have no income at all or do not have sufficient access to any income.

**Table 5: Source of income for people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Scotland**

Source of income	% of referrals
Benefits, not earning	81%
Earnings and benefits	5%
Earning, no benefits	4%
No income or insufficient access to it	9%

There is some variation in the income sources for particular households referred to food banks in Scotland. People living with children are more likely to report earned income (14% vs. 7% than people not living with children). Three in four (75%) people living in households with one or more children rely solely on benefits for their income compared to 85% of households without children.

The reasons why someone was referred to a food bank in Scotland also vary depending on the household's source of income. Households who report that they were receiving earned income and benefits (19%) or solely earned income (17%) are correspondingly more likely (than households solely receiving benefits - 4%) to be referred due to a change in their work hours or unemployment. Highlighting the impact of work-related experiences for a significant number of households.

Households who report that they have no income or limited access to it have distinct reasons for referral. The most common of these is issues with their immigration status (32%) which is far higher than average (3%). Households in Scotland with no income or insufficient access to it are also more likely to be referred because of issues with their benefits (26%) than households with different income sources.

**Table 6: Reason for referral amongst households with different income sources**

Reason for referral	Source of income			
	Benefits, not earning	Earning and benefits	Earning, no benefits	No income or insufficient access to it
Income or debt	78%	80%	75%	43%
Health	22%	19%	14%	13%
Issue with benefits	20%	17%	11%	26%
Insecure housing	5%	3%	5%	9%
Change in work hours or unemployment	4%	19%	17%	11%
Change in personal circumstances	6%	6%	6%	5%
Immigration status	0%	1%	9%	32%
Domestic abuse	2%	2%	1%	2%



## **7. There is consistent evidence that boosting people's incomes through the Cost of Living Payments has offered some short-term respite for people on low incomes, however levels of need quickly increased again**

Through 2023/24 the UK government provided a series Cost of Living Payments to people. The highest value payments were issued to people claiming means tested benefits and people claiming tax credits in Spring 2023 (£301 between 25<sup>th</sup> April and 17<sup>th</sup> May), Autumn 2023 (£300 between 31<sup>st</sup> October and 19<sup>th</sup> November) and Winter 2024 (£299 between 6<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> February). On reviewing these payments our data shows a consistent trend of a short significant reduction in the need for food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Scotland.

During the period when the Spring 2023 £301 Cost of Living Payment was paid out, food banks in our network in Scotland distributed 4,400 parcels on average per week to people facing financial hardship. This represented a 20% decrease from the three previous weeks when 5,600 parcels were distributed on average per week.

This respite was short-lived, however, lasting only between one and three weeks. The number of parcels distributed in the following four weeks after the payments increased by 9% to 4,800 on average per week.

The impact of the Autumn 2023 payment was initially similar seeing a 18% decrease in the average weekly number of parcels while the payment was paid out - compared to the previous three weeks. However, as people went into the winter there was a more pronounced bounce back in need. In the three weeks after the payment was distributed food banks distributed 5,600 parcels on average per week to people facing financial hardship. This represented a 33% increase on the period the payments were distributed.

The final late Winter 2024 payment saw the biggest percentage decrease – this may, in part, be due to it coinciding with the easing off of the rate of inflation. Food banks distributed 4,300 parcels on average per week in the period the payments were being distributed, a 25% decrease compared to the average of the preceding three weeks. As with the other payments there was still an increase following the payment – of 15% in the three weeks following the period the payment was in place.

In February we carried out a survey with YouGov of people receiving Universal Credit, which painted a similar picture.<sup>14</sup> Respondents were asked about their views on the impact of the Autumn 2023 cost of living payment. It is clear that the payment had some positive impact in the short-term for people receiving it, with over a third (38%) of people claiming Universal Credit in Scotland stating it had prevented them from falling into arrears on bills and over two in five (42%) stating it had prevented them from needing to borrow money to get by.

However, two in three (65%) people who received the Cost of Living Payment in Autumn 2023 reported that the payment had made just a little or no difference to improving their current financial situation when surveyed in January / February. Further, over half (53%) said the payment made just a little or no difference to their current ability to afford essentials.

---

<sup>14</sup> An online survey by YouGov of 1,370 adults (16+) including 152 people in Scotland currently claiming Universal Credit. Fieldwork was undertaken 18 January – 5 February 2024.

**Table 7: Impact of the Autumn 2023 Cost of Living Payment for people claiming Universal Credit in Scotland**

Question	A great deal/A fair amount	Just a little/Not at all
Improved current financial situation	33%	65%
Prevented you from falling into arrears on bills	38%	54%
Prevented from needing to borrow money to get by	42%	52%
Improved current ability to afford essentials	45%	53%

Across the UK the majority (87%) of people who had received the Cost of Living Payment in Autumn 2023 said they had already spent all of it when surveyed in January / February 2024. The limitations of a flat payment for different households were also highlighted with the rate higher for households with children (90%) than without (84%). Similarly, for people who had spent all of the payment the length of time it took to spend the payment was almost double for people without benefit deductions (21.6 days on average) compared to people facing deductions from their benefits (11.5 days on average).

When asked how they had spent the payment, people most commonly said it had been spent on covering the cost of essential items. Almost two thirds (61%) of people stated that they had bought food with the payment, over a third (36%) to buy basic toiletries such as soap, shampoo, toothbrush, toothpaste or sanitary items, and over two in five (43%) had used the money to heat their home.

Many (34%) also used the money to pay off existing debts and arrears on bills. We know many people have accumulated debt and arrears in between the Cost of Living Payments, our survey found 37% of people claiming Universal Credit in January / February had fallen into debt in the last three months because they couldn't keep up with essential bills. These levels of debt and the money spent on paying them off may have limited the overall impact of the payments on reducing the need for food banks and highlights a limitation of one-off payments in supporting households' financial situation when their regular income is so far below what they need to cover essentials and avoid debt.

## 8. 52,700 people were forced to use a food bank in Scotland for the first time in 2023/24

In 2023/24, 25,200 families<sup>15</sup> have been forced to turn to food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Scotland for the first time, including over 52,700 people.

**Table 8: Number people turning to a food bank for the first time in 2023/24 and 2022/23 and percentage change from 2022/23**

	2023/24	2022/23	% change from 2022/23
Number of adults	35,224	38,669	-9%
Number of children	17,539	19,605	-11%
Total number of people supported for first time	52,763	58,274	-9%

<sup>15</sup> At the Trussell Trust we define any household as a family, this means that when we talk about families they could be individuals living alone, single parents, or multi-generational households.

The number of people having to turn to a food bank for the first time reflects the long-term rise in levels of deep poverty, compounded by increasing numbers of people experiencing financial hardship due to the cost of living crisis.<sup>16</sup> The latest study on destitution (the most severe form of hardship) by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) finds that destitution was intensifying in the UK in the years running up to the pandemic, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis then compounding existing problems linked to a decade of cuts and freezes to social security. In 2022, approximately 3.8 million people experienced destitution in the UK, including around one million children. This is a 61% increase since 2019, and an increase of almost two-and-a-half-times (148%) compared to 2017.

Looking at Scotland specifically, the rate of increase in destitution in Scotland has been lower than the increases seen in Wales and the English regions. The JRF point out that this may be indicative of the divergence in welfare benefits policies in Scotland, noting in particular the introduction of the Scottish Child Payment, a point discussed earlier in this factsheet.<sup>17</sup>

The incomes of people referred to a food bank for the first time in Scotland differ from people who have been referred to a food bank previously. Potentially highlighting slight differences in experiences and drivers of need for food banks. People referred to food banks for the first time are more likely to report that they have no income or limited access to it (15% vs. 8% for people returning to food banks). They are also less likely to report solely receiving benefits (73% vs. 84%).

**Table 9: Income comparison between people with prior experience of using a food bank and people who used food bank for the first time in 2023/24**

Source of income	First Time referral	People returning to a food bank
<b>Benefits, not earning</b>	73%	84%
<b>Earning and benefits</b>	6%	4%
<b>Earning, no benefits</b>	7%	4%
<b>No income or insufficient access to it</b>	15%	8%

People needing to turn to a food bank for the first time in Scotland were more likely to be referred due to an issue with their benefits than people returning to a food bank (23% vs. 18%). This could highlight the initial impact of issues such as the wait for benefits, or a change in eligibility.

People needing to use a food bank for the first time were also more likely to be referred for reasons which could be classified as life events or shocks. For instance, people using a food bank for the first time were more likely to be referred due to issues relating to insecure housing (10% vs. 4%), due to domestic abuse (3% vs. 1%), and due to changes to their personal circumstances (8% vs. 5%). Issues with work were also more prevalent amongst people referred for the first time (8% vs. 5%).

On the other hand, people with prior experience of using a food bank were more likely to be referred due to issues around income or debt than people who had used a food bank for the first time in 2023/24 (77% vs. 68%) – perhaps better reflecting the more chronic nature of their income situations.

<sup>16</sup> To look into deeper poverty, households with an equivalised household income after housing costs that is below 50% of the median are considered to be in deep poverty. UK Poverty 2023: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK, *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, (2023), <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2023>

<sup>17</sup> Destitution in the UK 2023 (2023), *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2023>

**Table 10: Reason for referral comparison between people with prior experience of using a food bank and people who used food bank for the first time in 2023/24**

Reasons for referral	First Time referral	People returning to a food bank
Income or debt	68%	77%
Health	19%	20%
Issues with benefits	23%	18%
Insecure housing	10%	4%
Change in work hours or unemployment	8%	5%
Change in personal circumstances	8%	5%
Immigration status	5%	3%
Domestic abuse	3%	1%

### 9. Increases seen across England, Northern Ireland, and Wales since last year with a small decrease in Scotland

England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, all experienced increases in the distribution of emergency food parcels in 2023/24, when compared to the previous year. Northern Ireland experienced the largest percentage increase (11%), followed by England (5%), and Wales (1%). Food parcel distribution remained largely unchanged in Scotland on the previous year with a slight (0.1%) decrease. Looking over the last five years Northern Ireland has experienced the largest percentage increases in the distribution of emergency food parcels since the same period five years ago (143%) with Scotland seeing the smallest increase (21%).

**Table 11: Percentage change in number of parcels distributed in the Trussell Trust network by nation and region.**

Nations and Regions	Percentage change from previous year (2022/23)	Percentage change from five years ago (2018/19)
Scotland	-0.1%	21%
United Kingdom	4%	94%
England	5%	109%
Wales	1%	61%
Northern Ireland	11%	143%

### 10. Food banks are doing everything possible to keep providing desperately needed support for people in their communities

Food bank staff and volunteers are providing a critical service supporting their communities and have repeatedly adapted their operational practices to meet the level and nature of need for food aid in their local areas.

Between April and September 2023, food banks across the UK, who historically have primarily relied upon donated food, had to spend an additional third as much on food as they did the previous year

to meet the need they are seeing amongst people facing financial hardship. This follows on from the existing growth in purchasing food which was reported last year; when food banks were already spending twice as much as they did on food in 2021.<sup>18</sup> So far this year donations of food have remained at similar levels to the previous year – however, because of the significant growth in need for food banks they are having to purchase more food than ever before. Some food banks in the network, as seen in the below quote, are facing the twin pressures of increasing unaffordability of food when purchasing it and decreasing donations.

Food banks in the Trussell Trust network provide additional support beyond emergency food provision to address the root causes of financial hardship in their communities. The growing majority of food banks are offering, or signposting to, debt advice and benefits advice. In Scotland 75% of food banks provide financial inclusion support and many are working with other partners to support people to be able to afford food and essentials. In the Trussell Trust’s network in Scotland there are 33 financial inclusion programmes, Pathways to Advice and Cash Scotland in six local authorities, and food banks are supporting community organising programmes in three areas. Despite this work across the food bank network to maximise people’s incomes, food banks continue to report that people across their communities do not have enough to afford the essentials.

---

*“People aren’t just needing food...we’ve actually been helping people with socks, boots, and we’re giving out blankets”*

– Elaine, Foodbank Manager at East Lothian Foodbank

*“My team, they all work so hard...we’ve got our volunteers...they’re exhausted...It can be quite depressing what we deal with day in day out”*

– Elaine, Foodbank Manager at East Lothian Foodbank

---

*“I think a lot of people are fatigued with helping at the food bank. Just with the situation in general. And I think we were seeing a lot of volunteers who had become, what’s the word? They were just exhausted, having to deal with the same thing every week and for years and not seeing any change in people’s lives.”*

-Staff member, Aberdeen North Food Bank

---

Food banks continue to express grave concern about the levels of need and hardship across the communities that they are supporting. Both staff and volunteers continue to adapt, develop, and negotiate the challenges that have been thrown at their organisations over the last few years. With resilience, strength and compassion they continue to strive to support all people in need but there are fears that the long-term problem of social security payments being too low to cover essentials, and continued high levels of need will push some food banks to their limit and they may not be able to meet all of the need in their communities.

---

<sup>18</sup> The research is based on an online survey by the Trussell Trust of 184 food banks in the Trussell Trust network across the UK. Fieldwork was undertaken from the 30<sup>th</sup> of August – 1<sup>st</sup> October 2023 and the survey was distributed through multiple methods across the Trussell Trust food bank network.

## 11. People across Scotland are united in belief that food banks should not be needed in the UK

Food banks are stepping in to support people who can't afford to buy food, and other essentials for themselves. However, food banks are neither the right nor sustainable response to people going without essentials because their incomes are too low.

The Trussell Trust's long-term goal to end the need for food banks is one that has the support of the public. Polling by YouGov on behalf of the Trussell Trust suggests that the public are particularly concerned with issues related to poverty and hunger in the UK and the majority of people in Scotland (85%) think that food banks should not be needed in the UK.<sup>19</sup>

When it comes to how poverty and hunger can be solved in the UK, the vast majority (90%) of people in Scotland believe ensuring everyone has enough money for basic needs should be a high priority for the UK Government and that more action needs to be taken to better protect people from being unable to afford the essentials (81%). In addition, there is strong assertion from people in Scotland that the Scottish Government are responsible for keeping people out of poverty in Scotland (65%).

---

*"The more we can do to stop people needing to come to us in the first place, the better"*

– Staff member, Glasgow SE Foodbank

*"Food banks aren't inevitable...they don't have to be a thing...When we talk about a future without the need for food banks - it's achievable, because it's happened before."*

– Staff member, Glasgow SE Foodbank

---

<sup>19</sup> Polling undertaken by YouGov Plc. The total sample size in Scotland was 417 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 5th and 19th of July 2023. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults in Scotland.

## What this means for policy

It is not right that anyone should need to use a food bank because they can't afford to eat and pay bills. However, our statistics show that food bank need is at an historic high.

This is a record to be ashamed of, and the public will judge both the Scottish and UK Government's on whether they succeed in reversing this tide.

### **The next UK Government must build a future where everyone can afford the essentials**

The majority (79%) of the UK public agree that poverty in the UK is a big problem and a similar proportion (74%) believe that it is the UK government's responsibility to change this.<sup>20,21</sup>

Such high levels of hardship are damaging people's health, holding back our economy, and harming the prospects of our young people. It is only through building a society where everyone can afford the essentials that we can unlock the potential in our communities.

People need to access food banks because they don't have enough money for the essentials. But all of this can change. We know what's needed to end the need for food banks, and we know that it is achievable if we make the right decisions.

As we approach the next UK general election, we urgently need to hear how political parties will build a future where no one needs a food bank to survive. Urgent reform of our UK social security system, which currently isn't even providing enough support for people to afford the essentials, is critical. Introducing an 'Essentials Guarantee' into Universal Credit would ensure everyone has a protected minimum amount of support to afford the essentials.

Building a future without the need for food banks will also require a UK-wide effort. As we prepare for the General Election, the UK Government has important powers to turn the tide of hardship facing our communities. [Our General Election manifesto](#) sets out the actions we urge all political parties to support, and our priorities for the next UK Government.

**If we are to achieve our goal of a Scotland where no one needs to use a food bank, then it is vital that the UK Government meets its responsibilities in areas reserved to Westminster, including:**

1. **Establishing an Essentials Guarantee legal minimum in Universal Credit:** this would embed in legislation the principle that, at a minimum, Universal Credit should protect people from going without essentials, such as food and bills. This should be based on an independent process to regularly determine the Essentials Guarantee level, based on the cost of essentials. This enjoys widespread support, with 72% of the general public in favour.<sup>27</sup>
2. **Taking swift action to dramatically reduce the amount that the UK Government can claw back from people's Universal Credit payments through deductions:** delivering an Essentials Guarantee should begin by introducing a protected minimum amount in the system at a starting level which would limit the amount that the Universal Credit standard allowance can be reduced by from the current 25% to 15%. Alongside this, debt repayments to the UK government should be capped at a maximum of 5%

---

<sup>20</sup> Polling undertaken by YouGov Plc. The total sample size was 5,393 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 5th and 19th of July 2023. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 79% of the UK public agree that poverty in the UK is a very big or fairly big problem.

3. **Removal of the caps and limits that have reduced the value of children's social security support**, by introducing a protected minimum amount in the system at a starting level which would mitigate the impact of the benefit cap across the UK (already mitigated here in Scotland) , and by scrapping the two-child limit – helping to ensure that all members of a family are protected from going without essentials.
4. **New workers' rights legislation to ensure new rights to job security, effective enforcement of existing rights, predictable working hours and flexible working from day one.**

Our statistics show that hardship is at record highs and underline the risk that food banks are becoming a 'new normal' in communities the length and breadth of the UK. This is damaging our health, harming the prospects of young people, holding back our economy.

That is why we are calling on all party leaders to commit to building a future where no one needs a food bank, because we have a social security system that is fit for purpose and cross government action to ensure everyone has enough for the essentials.

UK Government action should be delivered alongside urgent action from governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and from local authorities, employers, charities and community organisations.

### **The Scottish Government must do more to ensure people can afford the essentials**

We welcome the Scottish Government's support for an Essentials Guarantee, its commitment to end the need for food banks outlined in its action plan, [Cash First: Towards Ending the need for food banks](#) and its pioneering work to promote a cash first approach.

Scotland is leading the UK in taking this approach and we hope the next UK Government will follow Scotland's lead and develop a plan to end the need for food banks across the UK once and for all.

The Scottish Child Payment is a positive example of what can be achieved when Holyrood's powers are used creatively to tackle poverty. Our latest research shows that the Scottish Child Payment is starting to make a small difference but to increase its impact and achieve larger reductions in food insecurity, the Scottish Child Payment needs to increase.

Last year we reported a record level of need across the Trussell Trust's network in Scotland and our latest parcel figures continue to mirror last year's record levels, standing at 21% higher than five years ago. While we have seen a small 3% decrease in parcels for children 60% of support provided by food banks in Scotland was for families with children, with families with three or more children especially likely to face severe hardship.

The latest child poverty statistics published in March 2024 revealed that a shocking 240,000 children in Scotland are growing up in poverty. This isn't acceptable and much more needs to be done to support people in Scotland facing financial hardship if the Scottish Government is to achieve its ambition of ending the need for food banks and meeting Scotland's child poverty target of fewer than 10% of children in Scottish households living in relative poverty by 2030

The election of a new First Minister is an important opportunity to set out a clear and urgent strategy to reduce poverty and end hunger in Scotland.



We urge the new First Minister to convene the promised Summit with the anti-poverty sector and people with lived experience of poverty in Scotland to quickly agree the actions needed in the short, medium and long term.

**If we are to ensure people in Scotland can afford the essentials, the Scottish Government should:**

1. **Increase the level of the Scottish Child Payment from £26.70 to at least £40 a week.**
2. **Boost investment into the Scottish Welfare Fund** (both programme and administration budgets) to reflect current levels of demand and the revised policy commitments under the SWF Action Plan.
3. **Mitigate the two-child cap to provide vital support to families with three or more children** who are much more likely to need to use a food bank. Our latest stats reveal that 1 in 4 families needing to use a food bank have three or more children.
4. **Reverse cuts to the housing budget and build more homes for social rent**, in line with Shelter Scotland's target of 38,500 extra homes for social rent by 2026.
5. **Pause recovery of debt to public bodies** (Scottish Government, local authorities) for at least six months for those in receipt of Universal Credit and legacy benefits to provide some relief to struggling households.

**In the longer term, the Scottish Government should:**

6. **Take concerted action to reduce the cost of living for low-income households** by further extending free and flexible childcare, tackling precarious work and promoting both a living wage and living hours.
7. **Improve support for disabled people:** With 3 out of 4 people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust's Scotland network being disabled, act upon the findings of Trussell Trust's [research with ScotCen](#), including faster decisions, reviewing benefit levels to ensure they cover essential costs, better promotion of support and action to tackle the economic and social exclusion many disabled people face.
8. **Accelerate efforts to deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee in Scotland.**

The past year has been another record year at food banks, but this increased need is not inevitable. Just as we know why people are forced through the doors of food banks, we also know what needs to change so everyone can afford the essentials. The building blocks to a better future must include a reformed social security system in Scotland and at UK level; the opportunity for all who are able to work to have decent, secure and rewarding work; and dignified and accessible support for disabled people and people with health conditions.

We need all levels of government to act together with employers, businesses, people who've needed a food bank, individuals and communities to put the right systems, policies and practices in place to end hunger in Scotland and across the UK.