

STATE OF **HUNGER**

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE ON POVERTY, DESTITUTION, AND FOOD INSECURITY IN THE UK

May 2021



BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

BACKGROUND

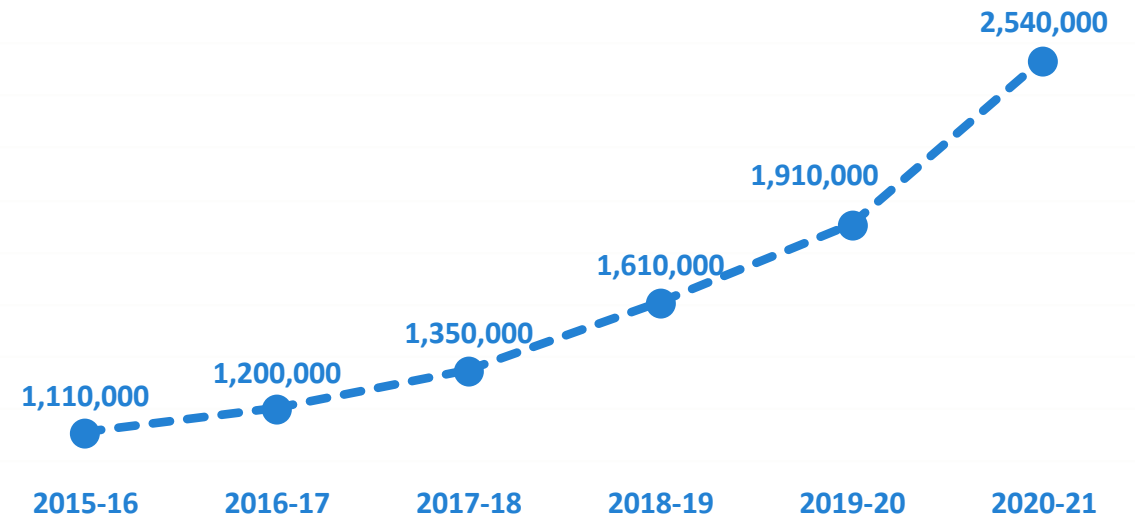
The State of Hunger research programme arose out of growing public concern about the deteriorating financial positions of many people on low incomes in recent years.

The rapid growth in the number of charitable food banks had particularly captured public attention, as had the quantity of emergency food parcels they were distributing. Food banks in the Trussell Trust's network distributed 61,000 emergency food parcels in 2010/11, rising to 2.5 million in 2020/21.

The State of Hunger project, carried out by Heriot-Watt University, was established as a major study to build a much clearer evidence base to underpin the recommendations of the Trussell Trust, and its wider sector of stakeholders, on how to address hunger in the UK.

Compared to this time five years ago, the need for food banks in our network has increased by 128%

Number of emergency food parcels distributed each year



METHODOLOGY – YEAR 2

A wide range of methodologies have been used to collect data to understand the scale of hunger in the UK, who is most affected, where, and the issues that drive people to need to use food banks. Sample sizes were smaller in Year 2 due to the pandemic.

This second report builds on the concepts, definitions, methods, and findings detailed in the first main report released in 2019.

This second report provides information on food insecurity in 2019/20 and in the opening stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. It provides socio-demographic information on people that were referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network pre-pandemic in early 2020, and during the pandemic in June and July 2020.



Surveys of people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network in early 2020 and mid-2020



25 interviews with people referred to a food bank in the Trussell Trust network in early 2020



Survey of 20 managers of food banks in the Trussell Trust network



Statistical modelling of drivers of food insecurity and need for food banks



Survey of 323 referral agencies in 16 localities across the UK who refer people to food banks in the Trussell Trust network

THE SCALE AND PROFILE OF UK HUNGER



MEASURING HUNGER

To explore hunger within the UK, the State of Hunger focuses on household food insecurity and the number of parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network. Hunger, measured as food insecurity, is detailed here as just one symptom of poverty.

Within the State of Hunger, both the scale and socio-demographics of household food insecurity, and need for food banks is explored.

THE SCALE AND PROFILE OF FOOD INSECURITY

2.7 MILLION

(10%) households in England and Wales experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months in 2018.

4%

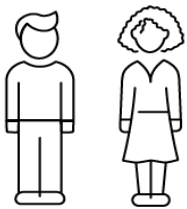
Of households in England and Wales experienced severe food insecurity in the last 12 months in 2018. A significant increase from 2016.

1.5 MILLION

(5.8%) UK households in July 2020 reported food insecurity in the previous week.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, some groups have been at higher risk of food insecurity than others. The food insecure population is generally similar to those who need support from food banks in the Trussell Trust network, with the exception of people who are aged 16-24 who are more likely to be food insecure but have low levels of referrals to food banks.

The risk of being food insecure was higher among:



YOUNGER PEOPLE



SINGLE PARENTS



SOCIAL RENTERS



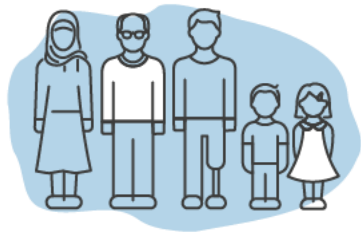
ETHNIC MINORITIES



PEOPLE IN POOR HEALTH

THE SCALE OF NEED FOR FOOD BANKS

In 2019-20 food banks in the Trussell Trust network supported:



370,000 UNIQUE HOUSEHOLDS

28% increase since 2018-19



520,000 ADULTS

30% increase since 2018-19



320,000 CHILDREN

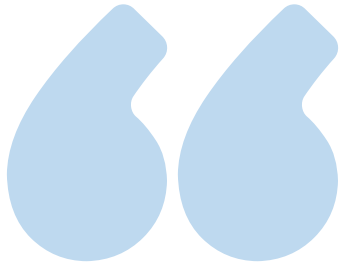
49% increase since 2018-19

1.5 MILLION UNIQUE HOUSEHOLDS

(5-6%) of all UK households were supported by a independent food bank or a food bank in the Trussell Trust network between April 2016 and March 2020.

700,000 UNIQUE HOUSEHOLDS

(2.5%) of all UK households were supported by a independent food bank or a food bank in the Trussell Trust network in 2019/20 alone.



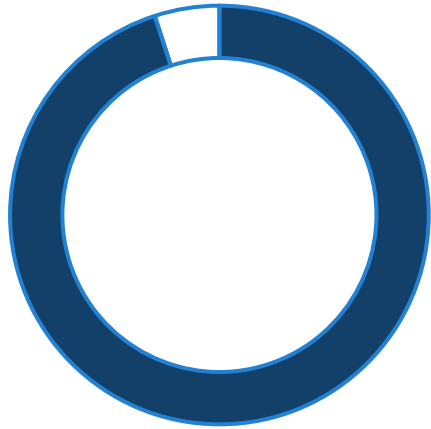
[When reducing food intake] I feel very depressed..... Especially when you're used to working and not living like it. I feel like it drains me. It makes feel tired, like you're constantly thinking of the next way to get through it. Like your brain doesn't rest. It's like, right, what can I make tomorrow for it to go further? Or what can I freeze? You're always trying to save...

STATE OF HUNGER RESPONDENT

THE PROFILE OF NEED FOR FOOD BANKS

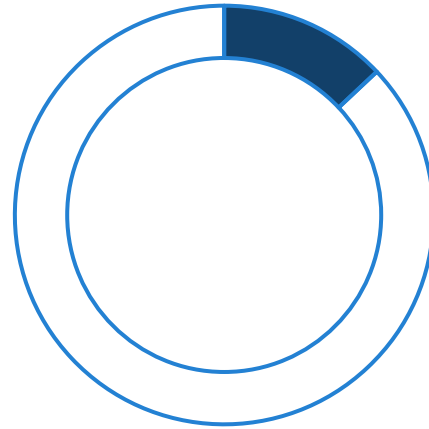
Level of income

The evidence collected shows that people referred to food banks are a very deprived group. The vast majority are classed as destitute, meaning they can't afford the essentials in life. Three-quarters are severely food insecure and one in five were homeless. The majority experienced two or more types of deprivation.



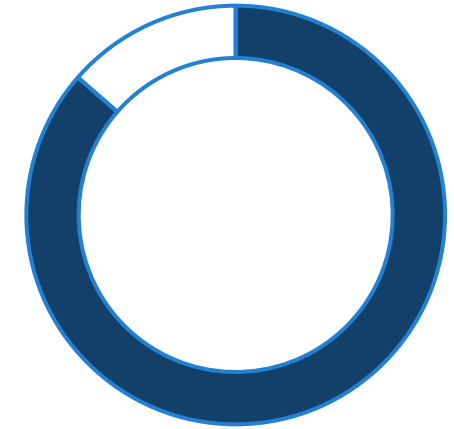
95%

of people referred to food banks in early 2020 were destitute, meaning they can't afford the essentials like heating and food.



13%

The average household income for people referred to food banks was just 13% of the national average.



86%

Of households referred to food banks were in receipt of social security. Just 16% of households had someone working.

THE PROFILE OF NEED FOR FOOD BANKS

Housing and households: People referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network were generally more likely to be renting or homeless than the UK population, with owners underrepresented. The most common household type for people referred to food banks was single people living alone. Single parents were significantly overrepresented against the UK population.



20%

Of households referred to food banks in early 2020 were homeless



42%

Of people referred to food banks in mid-2020 lived alone – almost twice the rate of the UK population.



18%

Of people referred to a food bank in mid-2020 were single parents – more than twice the rate of the UK population. Across the study, 84% of single parents were female.

Health and disability: People referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network are far more likely to be disabled than the UK population. They are also more likely to have more severe disabilities that limit their daily activities ‘a lot’.

62%

Of working age people referred to food banks in early 2020 were disabled, over three times more than in the general working age population.

51%

Of households referred to food banks in early 2020 had someone with poor mental health. See also slide 12.

THE PROFILE OF NEED FOR FOOD BANKS

What changed during the pandemic?

Overall the population of people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network during the pandemic was relatively similar to early 2020 with some key differences:

1. An increase in the proportion of people estimated to have No Recourse to Public Funds from **2%** in early 2020 to **11%** in mid-2020.
2. An increase in the proportion of **people aged 25 to 44**, from 54% in early 2020 to 62% in mid-2020. This reflects that this group were more likely to be in employment, and therefore be affected economically by the pandemic.
3. An increase in the proportion of couples with children from **19%** in early 2020 to **24%** in mid-2020.
4. An increase in the proportion of people reporting mental health problems from **51%** in early 2020 to **72%** in mid-2020.

WHAT IS DRIVING HUNGER?

WHY DO PEOPLE NEED SUPPORT FROM FOOD BANKS?

People need support from food banks because of a fundamental lack of income; most people referred to food banks do not receive enough income to afford the essentials. The most immediate driver of these low levels of income is social security, more often than not due to the design of the system. Social security issues are also compounded by other 'background' factors – namely difficult life experiences and ill health, and a lack of local support.

Factors driving need for food banks:

Social security

1. Low levels of benefit income and deductions
2. Other design issues, e.g. five-week wait for Universal Credit (UC)
3. Administrative problems

Life events & health

1. Common challenging life experiences (e.g. becoming unemployed, homeless, divorced)
2. High rates of ill health and disability

Local support

1. Lack of local support services
2. No, or limited support from family or friends
3. Limited social networks

IN-DEPTH MODELLING OF DRIVERS OF NEED FOR FOOD BANKS

The State of Hunger research includes **in-depth statistical modelling** of the **drivers of need for food banks** at the local authority level. This analysis uses data from the Trussell Trust's referral database across England and covers the period between 2011/12 and 2019/20.

The findings from this modelling support the findings on key drivers. Many elements of **benefit design** were found to have a **significant impact on food bank** provision - including the relative generosity of benefits rates, the roll-out of UC, sanctions, and the 'bedroom tax'.

Modelling found that the **increased number of food banks** results led to increased uptake because of **underlying unmet need**. In other words, food bank use in the Trussell Trust network in recent years is a manifestation of need and destitution. If there were no food bank to go to, that need would be unmet. While this is the case, the number of food banks in the Trussell Trust has remained largely static in recent years.

↑ **24**

The number of additional parcels distributed in a typical local authority for every additional 100 **benefit sanctions**.

↓ **118**

The decrease in parcels distributed in a typical local authority for every £1 increase in **UC/JSA/ESA/IS standard allowance**.

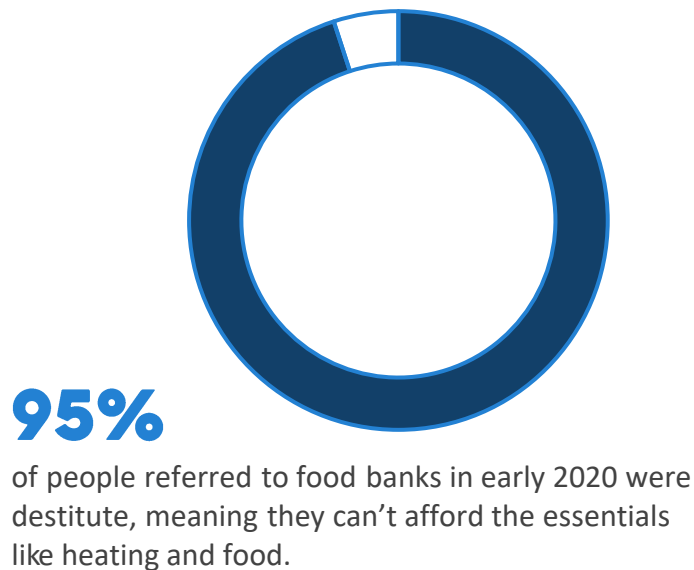
↑ **46**

The number of additional parcels distributed in a typical local authority for every additional 100 households subject to the **'bedroom tax'**.

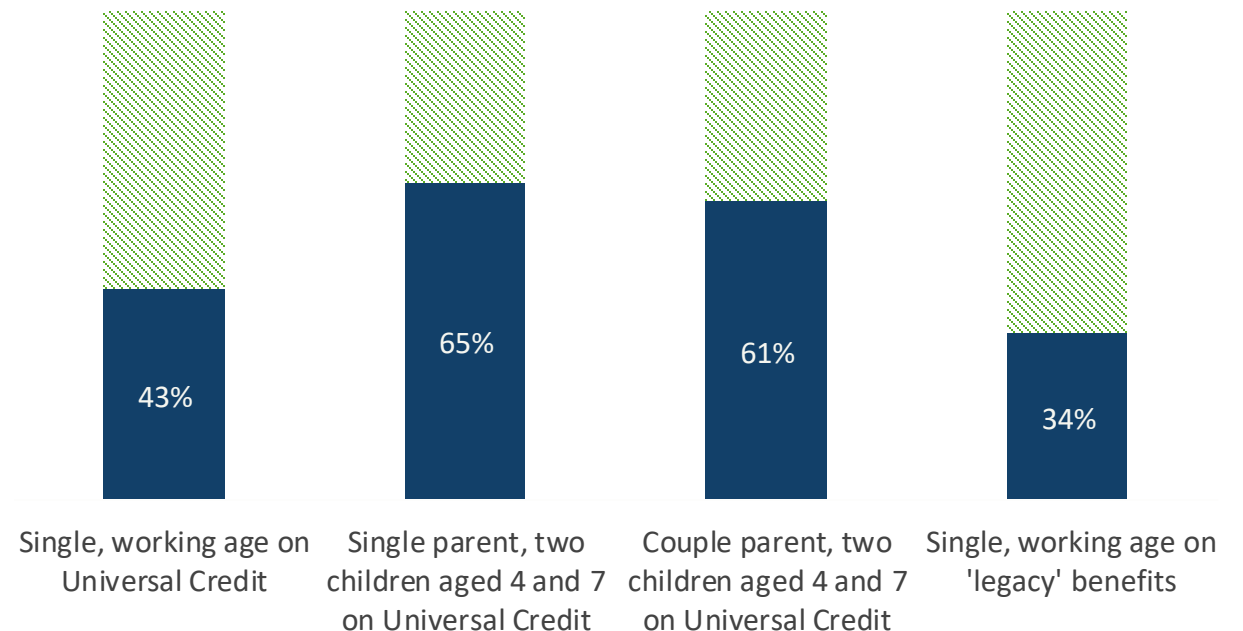
WHY DO PEOPLE NEED SUPPORT FROM FOOD BANKS?

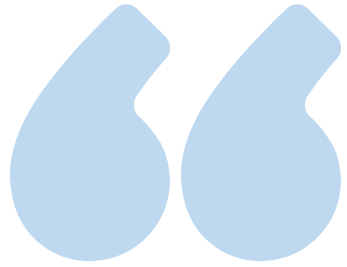
Policy in focus: Destitution and benefit income

People referred to food banks are a very deprived group, with most experiencing destitution. With 86% of households referred to food banks receiving social security this begs the question, **why are they destitute?** For many it is simply because their **income from social security is insufficient** for them to purchase the essentials. Analysis from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that for the majority of households out of work benefits do not even cover 70% of the Minimum Income Standard (this is the income necessary for a minimum acceptable standard of living).



Percent of Minimum Income Standard met by social security as of March 2020 (JRF)





It's not even enough to get essentials. When you think about it, out of £56 if I pay my £16 rent, I'm left with £40 a week, and that's supposed to, like you said, feed me, clothe me, buy all my essentials for washing and cleanliness and everything else.

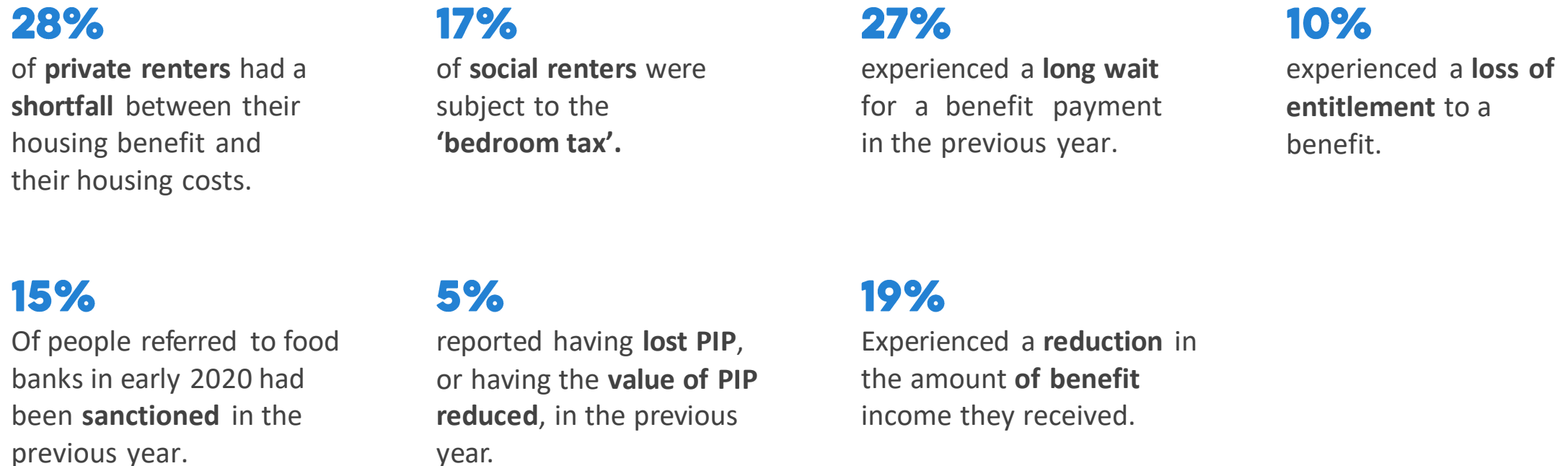
STATE OF HUNGER RESPONDENT

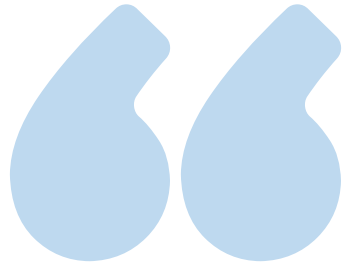
WHY DO PEOPLE NEED SUPPORT FROM FOOD BANKS?

Benefit issues

Issues with the social security system – particularly its design – is the most immediate driver of insufficient income. These can include the level of payments (and recent cuts), eligibility for support, the timing of payments, and the five-week wait for UC.

In early 2020 of people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network:





I think it's one of the PIP things, where they just no matter what, turn you down until you appeal it and gather more evidence, just to be persistent about it.

STATE OF HUNGER RESPONDENT

WHY DO PEOPLE NEED SUPPORT FROM FOOD BANKS?

Policy in focus: UC and deductions

People referred to food banks have very high levels of debt. In mid-2020, 6 in 10 households had arrears on bills and owed money on loans. This was many times higher than the equivalent figure for working age adults in the general population (6%). One of the most striking findings from this study is that during the pandemic **the DWP became the most common creditor** to people referred to food banks. Almost half (47%) owed money to the DWP. Data previously collected shows that this was most commonly because people were repaying advance payments.

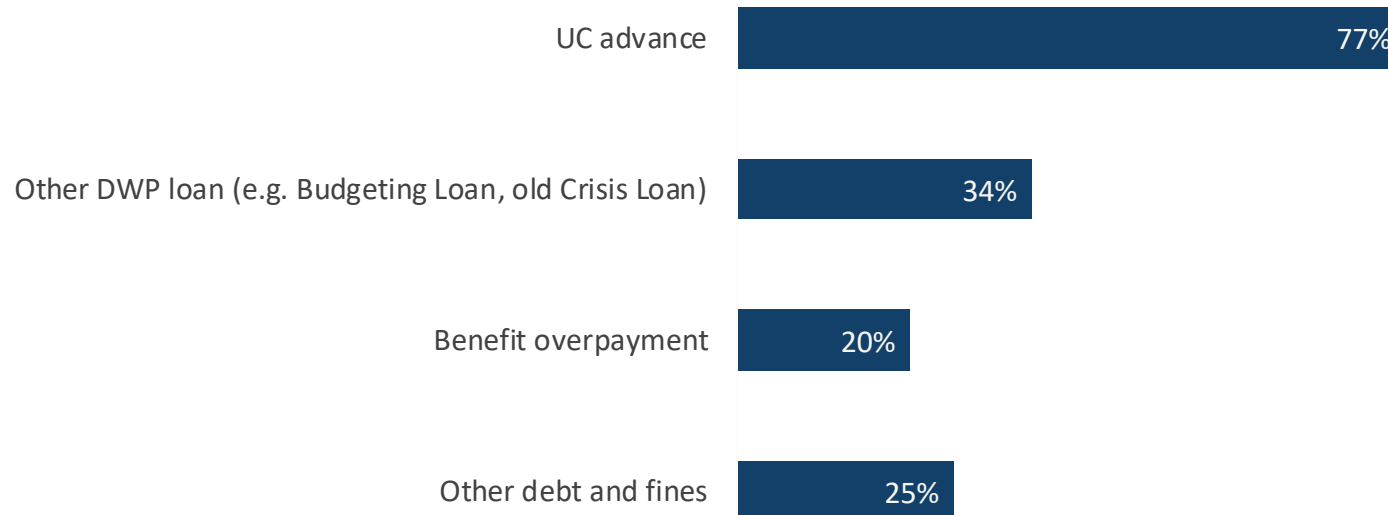


Chart shows source of debt for those referred to food banks in debt to the DWP in early 2020

WHY DO PEOPLE NEED SUPPORT FROM FOOD BANKS?

Policy in focus: UC and deductions (the five-week wait)

The alternative to taking on the advance payment is to wait five weeks for the first payment of UC. Savings levels among low-income households are either low or non-existent, meaning that these households would have very little to tide them over during the wait. Analysis of 'Understanding Society' data collected in July 2020 suggests that these weeks of either waiting for UC, or just after receiving it are extremely difficult.

In July 2020:

29%

of people who **recently started receiving** their UC payments were food insecure.

12.5%

of people **waiting** for their first UC payment were food insecure.

4%

of people on **average** were food insecure.

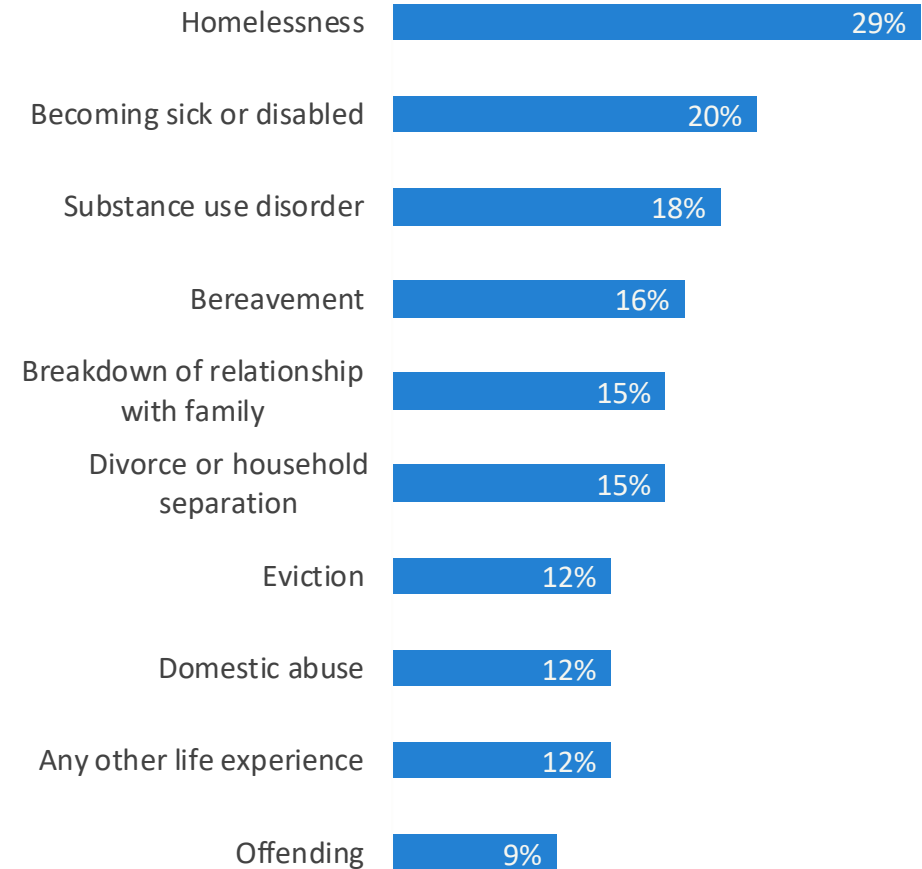
WHY DO PEOPLE NEED SUPPORT FROM FOOD BANKS?

Challenging life experiences or ill health

Living for an extended period of time on an extremely low income can drive ill health and make challenging life experiences more likely. In other ways, challenging life experiences and ill health can make people more likely to experience low income by making it harder to earn or engage with the welfare system without additional or specialist support or increasing their expenses.

In these ways, challenging life experiences or ill health can either compound existing issues or drive levels of food bank need. The evidence collected through the State of Hunger shows in early 2020 the majority (72%) of people referred to food banks had experienced a challenging life experience in the previous year.

Adverse work-related experiences were also common. Over one in three (37%) people referred to a food bank in early 2020 indicated an adverse work-related experience in the previous 12 months. Job loss was the most common experience (25%).





I had to run from my ex-partner. I had to get away. I was homeless, and I was doing okay actually for a few months, and then my benefits changed to Universal Credit and that was just a disaster. I just couldn't cope financially.

STATE OF HUNGER RESPONDENT

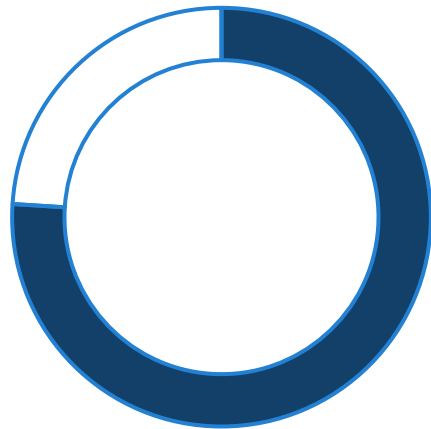
WHY DO PEOPLE NEED SUPPORT FROM FOOD BANKS?

Lack of local support

Many people experiencing destitution do not have people that they can rely on for support. For those that do, these support networks can be the difference between getting the essentials and going without. However, these links are often fragile. Any additional income shock can overwhelm these support networks. They can also be disrupted, through for instance a relation losing their job, dying, or moving away.

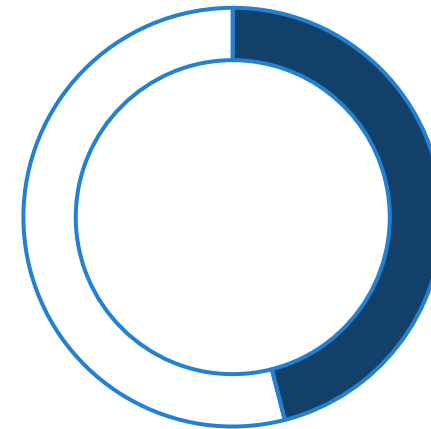
The impact of the pandemic has highlighted the fragility of these relationships. Analysis in the State of Hunger showed that during lockdown people who reported 'receiving less help from people who previously helped them' were 67% more likely to need to use a food bank than people without that experience.

76%

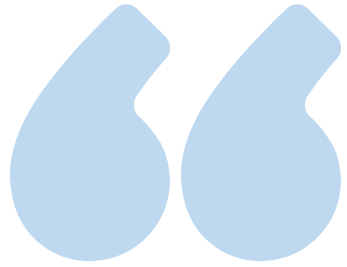


of people referred to food banks in early 2020 said that they couldn't receive help from friends or family because they had exhausted that support, they didn't have people they could ask for help, or their friends or family weren't in a position to help.

46%



of people referred to food banks in mid-2020 said that it was 'very true' that they needed to use a food bank because the support they relied on was more limited during the lockdown.



I used to borrow money off my parents, but then my dad died, and then my mum really hasn't got enough to lend now.

STATE OF HUNGER RESPONDENT

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

A PLAN TO END THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS

We know we can change this. We need government at all levels to commit to ending the need for food banks, and to develop a plan to do so. For the UK Government, this plan should include a commitment to:

- **Ensuring our UK social security system provides everyone with enough to afford the essentials.** The UK Government should ensure no one has to rely on the distribution of emergency food by making sure benefit payments are sufficient, accessible, and responsive. This should start with making the £20 weekly increase to Universal Credit permanent and extending it to legacy benefits.
- **Ensuring local lifelines are available to get people the right support at the right time.** The UK Government should ensure people have immediate support to ensure a short-term crisis does not turn into long-term hardship by investing in cash-based grants and coordinated local support services. This should start with committing dedicated long-term funding for local welfare assistance schemes in England.
- **Involving food banks and people with lived experience in shaping the plan to end the need for food banks.** The UK Government should harness the expertise and commitment in communities across the country to end the need for food banks. The plan should be developed across UK Government departments, recognising the interconnected issues which drive people to food banks.

STATE OF HUNGER

The link to the main report can be found [here](#).

The link to the press release accompanying the report can be found [here](#).

For more information on the State of Hunger or to get in touch with the Policy team at the Trussell Trust please contact Tom Weekes or Rory Weal.

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The State of Hunger research programme is a three-year research project independently carried out by researchers at Heriot-Watt University.

ASDA's Fight Hunger Create Change partnership funded this study, enabling the Trussell Trust to better understand and tackle the root drivers of need for food banks.

