

# Trussell Trust data briefing on mid-year statistics relating to use of food banks – April to September 2020



This data briefing provides information on how the statistics released by the Trussell Trust on 12 November 2020 were gathered, summarises the key findings, and discusses some of the operational and external factors which may lie behind variation in the figures below UK-level.

## Introduction

Since the introduction of significant measures to restrict the spread of Covid-19 in the United Kingdom, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of people relying on the social security safety net and other forms of support. During this time the number of people supported by Universal Credit in the UK has increased by almost 90 per cent, from 3 million in March 2020 to 5.6 million in September.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, food banks across the country have seen historic levels of need, with many new food banks opening to support people through the crisis. Alternative providers such as councils, community groups and schools also began distributing emergency food parcels to support people shielding in their communities, and those who cannot afford or access food.

In April 2020 food banks in the Trussell Trust network reported their busiest ever month. Data at the time showed an 89 per cent increase in the number of parcels given to people across the UK, including a 107 per cent increase in the number given to children, compared to the same period in 2019.

Levels of need throughout the crisis have continued to be significantly higher than those seen in the same period in 2019. During the later months of the crisis (July to September) food banks in the Trussell Trust network saw lower levels of need than in the initial period (April to June). Despite lower overall percentage increases, the number of parcels distributed between July and September remains significantly higher than the previous year.

### 1.1. Headline findings for the UK

The Trussell Trust has now collected data that broadly covers the first 6 months of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK, from 1 April to 30 September 2020 inclusive.

- Overall, food banks in the Trussell Trust's network have seen a 47 per cent increase in the number of emergency food parcels needed across the UK, when compared to the same period last year.
- Children have been disproportionately affected by the crisis, with the number of parcels given to children rising by 52 per cent, compared to an increase for adults of 44 per cent. Between April and September 2020, 2,573 parcels were given, on average, to children every day.
- There has been a 59 per cent increase in the total weight of food distributed this year compared to last. Some food banks have been giving out larger parcels during the crisis which may have reduced the total number of parcels given out, while increasing the average weight.

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<sup>1</sup> Universal Credit statistics: 29 April 2013 to 10 September 2020, (2020), DWP, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-10-september-2020>

### 1.1.1. Variation in food parcel distribution

Trussell Trust food banks in the UK have seen a 47 per cent increase in the number of parcels distributed in the 6 months to September 2020, compared to the same period last year. The increase has been slightly higher for children than adults (52% vs. 44%), indicating that children have been disproportionately impacted during the crisis.

When looking at the number of parcels distributed, children were disproportionately supported during the crisis. Between April and September 2020, 38 per cent of parcels went to children. This is despite those aged 0-16 making up just 20 per cent of the UK population.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1.1. Almost 2,600 parcels given out every day to children during the crisis**

	April – September 2020		Number of parcels distributed April - September 2020:	
	No. of parcels	% change from 2019	Per minute	Per day
Parcels distributed to adults	768,545	44%	2.9	4,200
Parcels distributed to children	470,854	52%	1.8	2,573
Total	1,239,399	47%	4.7	6,773

### Changes over the six-month period

The initial stages of the crisis (1 April – 30 June) saw an 83 per cent increase compared to the same period last year. The increase in the ensuing months (1 July – 30 September) was lower, at 13 per cent. It is, however, important to recognise that this 13 per cent increase builds on years of significant growth in need for food banks. Each individual month from July to September shows record levels of need for that period.

Later sections of this briefing discuss potential reasons for varying levels of need across local areas, and these are also likely to be relevant to changing levels of need across this time period.

**Table 1.2. Levels of need highest in early months of crisis but remain at historic levels in following months.**

	April – June 2020		July - September 2020	
	No. of parcels	% change from 2019	No. of parcels	% change from 2019
Parcels distributed to adults	466,199	76%	302,346	12%
Parcels distributed to children	286,324	94%	184,530	14%
Total	752,523	83%	486,879	13%

<sup>2</sup> Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (2020), ONS, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland>

### 1.1.2. Reasons for referral at the UK level

The most common reason for referral to a Trussell Trust food bank is still ‘Low Income,’ by a significant margin – now 47 per cent of referrals, up from 36 per cent during the same period in 2019. Excluding ‘Other’, ‘Benefit Delays’ has remained the second most common reason for referral, despite accounting for a smaller number of referrals than previously.

**Table 1.3. Low levels of income remain the most common reason for referral in 2020**

2019	Number of referrals	% of total referrals	2020	Number of referrals	% of total referrals
Low Income	139,586	36%	Low Income	243,738	47%
Benefit Delays	69,286	18%	Benefit Delays	46,202	9%
Benefit Changes	62,459	16%	Sickness / Ill Health	30,400	6%

In addition, the proportion of referrals that were made because of sickness or ill health<sup>3</sup> doubled in April-September 2020 compared to the same period last year. It rose from three per cent to six per cent and this increase accounts for 16 per cent of the overall increase in referral numbers during this time.

### 1.1.3. National and regional differences across the UK

There is significant variation across local authorities, regions and constituent countries in the recorded change in the number of parcels distributed across the UK. As will be discussed, it must be recognised that many factors can affect the number of parcels that are distributed in different areas. Lower percentage increases should not be interpreted as lower levels of overall need or destitution in these areas.

London saw the largest percentage increases compared to last year and is the only region of the UK where the number of parcels distributed has more than doubled (a 129% increase). Other regions in England have seen smaller percentage increases, between 25 per cent and 68 per cent, while England has on average seen a 57 per cent increase.

Looking at the constituent countries of the UK, Northern Ireland saw the largest percentage increase (80%) and Scotland saw a very small decrease (-1%). This follows the pattern of the data we previously released relating to the month of April, in which Northern Ireland saw the largest percentage increase (142%) and Scotland experienced the smallest (47%).<sup>4</sup> Northern Ireland is also the only region in which the percentage increase in the number of adults supported is bigger than that for the number of children.

Scotland’s data stands out as the only area of the UK to experience a decrease, albeit a small one. It must be recognised that this does not indicate that rates of destitution and poverty have declined or

<sup>3</sup> Guidance to referring agencies states that people should be referred for sickness / ill health when the underlying issue relates to short- or long-term issues, mental health issues and disabilities. It is not possible from this data to determine if the increase in referrals due to sickness is due to Covid-19, or to people having to self-isolate.

<sup>4</sup> Summary findings on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Food Banks, (2020), *Trussell Trust*, [https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/06/APRIL-Data-briefing\\_external.pdf](https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/06/APRIL-Data-briefing_external.pdf)

remained stable during the Covid-19 crisis. Indeed, the Scottish Government’s impact assessment suggests that<sup>5</sup>:

*The effects of COVID-19 will layer on top of existing structural imbalances and are predicted to be particularly severe for people on low incomes, who are more likely to have poorer health and are also more likely to be in insecure work without financial reserves.*

Data from the Scottish Welfare Fund also shows that the number of people struggling on low incomes is increasing. A 32 per cent increase was recorded in the number of applications for Crisis grants between April and September 2020, in comparison to the previous year.<sup>6</sup> The Claimant Count statistics presented subsequently also indicate that Scotland has not seen a significantly different employment shock than the rest of the UK.

Conversations with food banks as well as early findings from commissioned research from King’s College London<sup>7</sup> instead suggest a significant proportion of people in need in Scotland during the crisis have been supported by additional emergency food provision within their areas. This could have included new emergency food providers set up through the increase in funding through initiatives such as the Scottish Food Fund.<sup>8</sup> As well as food banks, local councils have been distributing food parcels, as have other community organisations such as churches, football teams and mutual aid groups.

Example: In one of Kings’ case study areas (a large city in Scotland), before the pandemic, in addition to the 14 Trussell Trust distribution centres operating, there were at least 31 independent food banks involved in weekly food parcel distribution according to the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN). Based on recent desk-based research, IFAN has now identified at least 14 more independent food banks regularly distributing food parcels each week since the COVID-19 outbreak.

Differences in rates of change may also in part be reflective of existing trends in the data. Between the financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20 there was an 18 per cent increase in parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network. The increase was only nine per cent in this period for Scotland.

**Table 1.4. Regional results show variation in the number of parcels distributed**

Region	April-Sept 2019			April - Sept 2020			% change from 2019		
	To adults	To children	Total	To adults	To children	Total	Adults	Children	Total
UK	534,565	309,090	843,655	768,545	470,854	1,239,399	44%	52%	47%
England	411,530	243,665	655,195	629,347	396,395	1,025,742	53%	63%	57%
Northern Ireland	10,565	7,416	17,981	20,440	11,859	32,299	93%	60%	80%

<sup>5</sup> Equality and Fairer Scotland Impact Assessment: Evidence gathered for Scotland’s Route Map through and out of the Crisis, (2020), *Scottish Government*, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equality-fairer-scotland-impact-assessment-evidence-gathered-scotlands-route-map-through-out-crisis/pages/4/>

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Welfare Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments: monthly data, (2020), *Social Security Directorate*, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/swf-monthly-management-information/>

<sup>7</sup> This commissioned research, conducted over October and November, led by Dr Rachel Loopstra (King’s College London) and Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford (University of Sheffield) has involved conducting six case studies in urban areas of England and Scotland to explore outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage. The detailed findings from this research will be available on request in the coming weeks.

<sup>8</sup> On the 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the Scottish Government announces a £70 million Food Fun to put in place support for those who would otherwise be unable to access food through the usual routes.

Scotland	75,328	36,879	112,207	73,840	37,125	110,965	-2%	1%	-1%
Wales	37,142	21,130	58,272	44,918	25,475	70,393	21%	21%	21%
East Midlands	28,281	17,002	45,283	39,919	24,366	64,285	41%	43%	42%
East of England	50,812	32,102	82,914	68,157	47,223	115,380	34%	47%	39%
London	58,811	32,893	91,704	130,790	79,216	210,006	122%	141%	129%
North East	27,528	15,182	42,710	40,849	23,533	64,382	48%	55%	51%
North West	69,729	43,780	113,509	95,701	58,395	154,096	37%	33%	36%
South East	53,204	32,672	85,876	90,069	59,016	149,085	69%	81%	74%
South West	44,271	26,066	70,337	61,044	38,831	99,875	38%	49%	42%
West Midlands	48,149	26,492	74,641	66,026	42,369	108,395	37%	60%	45%
Yorkshire and The Humber	30,745	17,476	48,221	36,792	23,446	60,238	20%	34%	25%

Variation is also seen at a local authority level. Overall, in mid-2020, there were food banks from the Trussell Trust network based in 295 local authority areas across the UK. Of those, 289 also had food banks in those areas in 2019.

One in five (22%) local authorities which had a food bank in both 2019 and 2020 experienced a doubling in the number of parcels distributed between April and September compared to the same period in 2019. One in four (25%) reported a decrease.

Local authority level statistics can be affected by changes to the operational structure (e.g. changes to opening hours, number of days open, or switch to a distribution model) of food banks and of the agencies and organisations that refer people to food banks.<sup>9</sup> Changes to employment and poverty in the local area may also impact on the magnitude of rates of change. Importantly, while there has been evidence of some local areas being harder hit by economic impacts of COVID-19 than others, there has been no evidence of economic hardship, and in turn, food insecurity decreasing in local areas over this period. As such, reductions in food bank use in Trussell Trust food banks should not be interpreted as a decrease in need.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1.5. More than one in five local authorities saw a doubling in the number of food parcels distributed**

Banded change	% of local authorities
100% and above	22%
50% – 99%	16%
0%-49%	36%
Decrease	25%

## 1.2. Factors that may affect levels of need seen across the UK

Statistics from the Trussell Trust are often used as a barometer of the scale and change in food insecurity and levels of destitution at a national and local level. During the Covid-19 crisis it has become clear that the data collected by food banks in the Trussell Trust network is not the complete picture of need for this period. Many food banks in the network have seen decreases in reported

<sup>9</sup> Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. (Forthcoming), *Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford*.

<sup>10</sup> IBID

figures, at the same time as measurements of financial insecurity such as unemployment have increased in the area that they are based.

Research conducted by the Food Standard Agency suggests that the population of people provided with food parcels during the crisis has been wider than just those supported by food banks in the Trussell Trust network. Its figures show almost one in ten (9%) of the adult population aged 16-75 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland were delivered food from a food charity or food bank in the month to mid-July.<sup>11</sup> This is equivalent to over 4 million people.<sup>12</sup>

The following section draws together evidence from our network and externally to suggest factors that may contribute to differing levels of use of food banks in the Trussell Trust network during the crisis.

### 1.2.1. Operational differences

Trussell Trust food banks across the UK have faced significant challenges in continuing to support their local communities during the pandemic. Many have had to change how they operate, such as by shifting their opening hours, centralising to single distribution locations or implementing a delivery model.<sup>13</sup> Some food banks have also had to adapt to operating with fewer volunteers, for example when a large proportion of their volunteer base were asked to shield. All these factors may affect the number of parcels that they distributed across this six-month period.

#### Food banks face challenges in remaining open

Many food banks across the UK have needed to reduce or alter their service provision to work safely during the pandemic. This may have included reduced hours or choosing to open only some distribution centres and not others. Temporary closures, changes to the distribution model, and opening hours have a more significant impact on the figures for the areas of the UK with fewer food banks.

Between April and September 2019, 1,486 distribution centres distributed food parcels. This fell to 1,393 between April and September 2020. This may reflect that some food banks closed distribution centres as they decided to centralise their distribution centres to a single location to allow for a more effective delivery model. Research conducted through June and July showed that two in five (39%) households which received a Trussell Trust food parcel had it delivered in that period.<sup>14</sup>

As data is collected based on where the distribution centres are physically located, the closure of individual distribution centres may impact on the figures for some local authority areas.

Switching to a delivery model may have increased distribution from some food banks due to:

- Increased accessibility and a reduction in the stigma of visiting a food bank.

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<sup>11</sup> Covid19 Research Tracker – Wave Four, (2020), *Food Standards Agency*, <https://data.food.gov.uk/catalog/datasets/da60fd93-be85-4a6b-8fb6-63eddf32eeab>

<sup>12</sup> Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (2020), *ONS*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland>

<sup>13</sup> Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. (Forthcoming), *Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford*.

<sup>14</sup> Lockdown, Lifelines and the Long Haul Ahead (2020), *Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf>

- An increase in referrals for individual food banks - if one food bank in an area offered a delivery service and another didn't.

The switch to a delivery model may however have reduced the number of parcels distributed by some food banks due to:

- People believing a food bank was closed or lacking information on how to access their services.
- Inability to guarantee delivery due to high levels of need, which may have driven people to seek alternative provision.

### Parcel sizes

Some food banks have increased the size of some or all the parcels they provide. Food banks typically distribute a three-day parcel, but during the crisis seven-day parcels were commonly distributed, accounting for around 12 per cent of parcels between April and September 2020. No adjustment has been made to our figures to attempt to equalise three- and seven-day parcels, with just the total number of parcels distributed recorded. Each parcel is counted as one unit regardless of size.

A larger parcel may prevent repeat use of food banks due to the increased level of support being provided. At a local level some food banks that have been providing a high proportion of seven-day parcels may see smaller percentage increases in parcels distributed, despite offering a higher level of support to people. This is seen in the statistics that the Trussell Trust collects on the total weight of food distributed. While total parcels distributed has increased by 47 per cent, the increase in the weight of food distributed is significantly higher at 59 per cent.

### Closures among food bank referral agencies

Just as lockdown and social distancing had an impact on the running of individual food banks, so did they affect the agencies and partners that in normal times refer people to food banks. Many struggled to operate in the opening weeks of the crisis and had to move to operating online or over the phone, and in some areas, there continue to be fewer referral partners than normal.

Food banks in the Trussell Trust network normally require a referral in order to access support so this additional barrier may have meant that people had to, or chose to, access emergency food through services that did not require a referral. Findings from the case study research suggested that fewer referrals from some referral partners due to their inability to operate as usual had an impact on the numbers being referred to and in turn, using Trussell Trust food banks. Other referral partners began to direct people to new food parcel provision made available in local areas over the pandemic.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.2.2. Food banks operate in a variety of local, regional and national contexts

Several factors external to food banks and their operations have also had an impact on the numbers of parcels that have been distributed by Trussell Trust food banks. These include local, regional and national variations in policy and populations, as well as the wider crisis response environment in the area.

### Local community food provision

One of the most significant factors may be the huge increase in alternative emergency food provision that has occurred since the start of the pandemic. Emerging research indicates that the scale of

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<sup>15</sup> Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. (Forthcoming), *Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford*.

response to food insecurity during the crisis has been of a historic scale and complexity across the UK. Additional support has come from all sectors (public, private and voluntary) and at all levels (local, national and UK).<sup>16</sup> Both this research and work from the Trussell Trust<sup>17</sup> indicate that the scale of alternative provision may have resulted in people experiencing food insecurity (or destitution) accessing these forms of provision rather than using food banks in the Trussell Trust network.

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) has reported growing levels of need at food banks in its UK-wide network since the outbreak of Covid-19, as well as identifying growing numbers of food banks. IFAN found that its member food banks distributed 177 per cent more parcels in May 2020 compared to May 2019. IFAN data for Scotland shows major growth in the number of parcels provided during February to July 2020, compared to the same period in 2019; at least 182,863 three-day emergency food parcels were distributed by 70 independent food banks representing nearly half of all identified independent food banks. IFAN has also seen an increase in the number of food aid providers joining its network. Of over 160 organisations joining IFAN since the end of March, more than a third of them were newly operating food banks. IFAN's membership includes over 400 independent food banks, while the organisation has identified at least 961 independent food banks distributing food parcels regularly at least once a week. More information is available at [IFAN data since COVID-19 - Independent Food Aid Network UK](#)

Research carried out on behalf of the APPG on Faith and Society found that 71% of Local Authority respondents said at least one new food bank had been started in their area to support people in financial crisis in response to Covid-19.<sup>18</sup> Over two in five (44%) stated that other organisations such as food pantries had also been started in response to Covid-19.

Example: In one case study area (a London borough) that saw a decrease in Trussell Trust food bank use over April to September, the council initiated a new food parcel delivery scheme specifically aimed to target people who were classed as “non-shielding vulnerable” over April to August. This targeted both people who were economically vulnerable and not economically vulnerable but in either case, were unable to go out to shop for food.

In this same area, existing community organisations were also supported to integrate food provision into their activities through the council and their partners, which provided access to surplus food and emergency individual meals. Of the 34 organisations supported in this way, only 7 had been offering food before the crisis and 19 had not been (it was unclear whether the remaining 7 had or had not offered food before the crisis).

Food banks in the Trussell Trust network provide support through a referral system where people can receive emergency food because they are referred by a specific agency or support organisation to the food bank. This is designed to help the food bank target support to people experiencing financial hardship and link to external organisations that can help tackle the underlying cause of their crisis. Some of the new emergency food provision schemes may have chosen not to have formal referral

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<sup>16</sup> Mapping responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK, (2020), *Lambie-Mumford et al* <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Food-Vulnerability-During-COVID-19-first-project-report.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Lockdown, Lifelines and the Long Haul Ahead (2020), *Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Keeping the Faith: Partnerships between faith groups and local authorities during and beyond the pandemic, (2020), *Baker, C, Report for the APPG on Faith and Society*

processes of the type that are in place in Trussell Trust food banks. This may mean that at points during the crisis people may have found it easier to access food through these routes than through Trussell Trust food banks.

This may also depend on which services local councils promoted. The case study research identifies that several agencies actively contacted their client base to ensure that they knew where to access support. This had contrasting impacts, in some areas it meant people were better equipped to avoid food insecurity and needing support from a food bank. In other areas organisations actively signposted to food bank which could have increased support levels<sup>19</sup>.

At a personal level people may have also felt more comfortable accessing support from new community food provision. Research by the Food Standards Agency suggests that for some people there may be a degree of stigma attached to using a food bank.<sup>20</sup> Receiving support from a school, or a community group that they were already engaged with, may have presented less of an emotional barrier than support through a food bank.<sup>21</sup>

### Government food provision

Much of the additional food provision and distribution in the last six months has been organised or managed by governments of different levels.

Food parcels were provided during April to June via local and devolved government, to support people whose health conditions required them to shield. Although these were delivered to people vulnerable because of their health and not targeted at those experiencing financial crisis, we know that there is significant overlap between the two. Previous research has found that 75% of people using a Trussell Trust food bank reported that health issues affected someone in the household, while a quarter of households were affected by a long-term physical health condition.<sup>22</sup> The delivery of food parcels to people told to shield might therefore have resulted in fewer people in financial crisis needing to visit a food bank.

In some areas, however, supporting the delivery of food for shielding people may have had the opposite effect on the number of food parcels given out by Trussell Trust food banks. For example, some food banks in Northern Ireland were involved in distribution, although food delivered to those shielding is not included in this data, these food banks believe they distributed an increased number of parcels to those in financial need as a result, possibly because of the increased visibility of their service and the partnership working that was developed.

Beyond providing support for people who were shielding, many councils have often also been involved in the co-ordination of emergency food provision for those who are economically vulnerable. This may have had varied impacts in different areas. For instance, some food banks saw significant increases from local authorities as people were signposted to them.<sup>23</sup> In other areas people may have been

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<sup>19</sup> Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. (Forthcoming), *Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford*.

<sup>20</sup> The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19 (2020) *Food Standards Agency*, <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-food-insecurity-2020-report-v5.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. (Forthcoming), *Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford*.

<sup>22</sup> State of Hunger (2019), *Trussell Trust*, <https://www.stateofhunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/State-of-Hunger-Report-November2019-Digital.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. (Forthcoming), *Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford*.

referred directly to other food providers, or they may have been referred to local welfare assistance programmes where they would have been referred to a Trussell Trust food bank in the past.

Example: In one city where the Trussell Trust food bank was embedded within the local welfare support system before the COVID-19 crisis, during the crisis, partners who would normally have directed people to the Trussell Trust food bank, were instead directing them to the Local Welfare Support Scheme. This operated a triaging system, with the council delivering parcels to those in most urgent need and referring to community hubs throughout the city for those whose need was less pressing.<sup>24</sup>

There have often been specific programmes run for groups that may be more at risk of financial and food insecurity. For instance, the government made available up to £16 million for frontline charities and community groups in England – such as refuges and homeless shelters to enable them to provide meals<sup>25</sup>. Councils have also provided specific schemes for these groups.

Some examples from our case study areas include meals being provided by the council for homeless people who were temporarily housed over the lockdown. As rough sleepers have been over-represented in food banks, providing meals and shelter may have meant they did not access food banks over this period.

Some food bank research has also found that people leaving prison are at risk of needing to rely on food banks. In one case study area, in conjunction with an early release programme, the council provided food aid to people leaving prison for 6 weeks, to cover the period of waiting for a first Universal Credit payment to be made.

### 1.2.3. Policy differences

Policy differences between different local and devolved governments may also be a factor in the differing levels of need seen by food banks in the Trussell Trust network. Local welfare assistance, for example, is a form of crisis support that varies greatly across the UK, with a centralised approach taken in Wales and Northern Ireland, a central fund delivered through local councils in Scotland, and local councils in England each having different approaches.<sup>26</sup> The criteria and assessment processes for accessing these schemes are varied, as are the types of support available following a successful application. This could have had an impact on the role food banks in the Trussell Trust network have played within their local crisis support context.

Access to support for the families of children eligible for free school meals has also varied across the UK – for example, while 18 of 22 local authorities in Wales opted for a bank transfer to be available in place of in-kind free school meal provision, the scheme rolled out across England provided supermarket vouchers.

### 1.2.4. National and regional variation in the economic impact of the crisis

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<sup>24</sup> IBID

<sup>25</sup> £16 million for food charities to provide meals for those in need, (2020), *DEFRA and DCMS*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/16-million-for-food-charities-to-provide-meals-for-those-in-need>

<sup>26</sup> Local Lifelines (2020), *Trussell Trust*, [https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/10/LWAS\\_1020\\_v3.pdf](https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/10/LWAS_1020_v3.pdf)

Other national and regional differences, such as demographic variations and the concentration and type of employment in the area, are also likely to have affected the number of parcels distributed by food banks in our network.

For example, experimental DWP data shows regional variation in the Claimant Count, and the extent to which the Claimant Count has increased since mid-March 2020. The Claimant Count assesses the number of people who receive unemployment-related benefits. The table below indicates that London has seen the greatest increase in claims, with the North East the smallest.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 1.5. The rates of people receiving unemployment benefits vary across the UK**

Region	Claimant count - People 12th March 2020	Claimant count - People 10th September 2020	Percentage increase from March to September
<b>UK</b>	<b>1,275,575</b>	<b>2,709,210</b>	<b>112%</b>
England	1,069,415	2,306,555	116%
Northern Ireland	30,305	62,250	105%
Scotland	115,185	222,020	93%
Wales	60,670	118,385	95%
North East	76,125	124,315	63%
North West	170,625	325,720	91%
Yorkshire & Humber	119,060	227,415	91%
East Midlands	81,180	170,475	110%
West Midlands	145,065	271,845	87%
East of England	91,065	214,905	136%
London	188,485	488,140	159%
South West	76,125	179,225	135%
South East	121,680	304,520	150%

Food banks in areas which have experienced larger increases in the rate of unemployment may have seen increased levels of need as a result. The demographics of an area may also play a role: the Food Standards Agency found that food insecurity was higher among younger respondents, with 16-24 year olds around twice as likely to be experiencing food insecurity as all respondents.<sup>28</sup> Food banks in our network have also noted that people with no recourse to public funds may need more frequent support from a food bank because they are more likely to be entirely reliant on voluntary sector support in a financial crisis.

<sup>27</sup> Regional labour market: Claimant Count by unitary and local authority (experimental) (2020), ONS, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/datasets/claimantcountbyunitaryandlocalauthorityexperimental>

<sup>28</sup> Covid-19 Consumer Tracker Report waves 1-4, (2020), Food Standards Agency <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/covid-19-wave-1-4-report-final-mc.pdf>

## About the data

### Data collection

Data from food banks in the Trussell Trust network is collected via vouchers that are issued by referral agencies, such as health visitors, schools, social workers and Citizens Advice. These agencies assess people for financial hardship before referring them to a food bank. This means that the overwhelming majority of people supported via a food bank in the Trussell Trust network do so because of financial hardship.<sup>29</sup>

Most vouchers are digital, ensuring data processing is complete as soon as the voucher is fulfilled. However, a significant minority of vouchers continue to be issued on paper. These vouchers must be manually uploaded by food bank staff. This can often lead to significant lags in the data collection.

Following a period to allow food banks to complete their data entry, the data set out here acts as a census of the total number of parcels distributed in the Trussell Trust network during the stated period. Food banks are included regardless of whether they have confirmed their data is up to date, or whether they closed for periods during the crisis.

The mid-year statistics cover 1 April – 30 September 2020 (inclusive) and compares to the same period in 2019. Data was collected up until 5pm 23 October 2020 and comes from the 1,393 distribution centres in the Trussell Trust network across the UK. In 2019, 1,486 distribution centres supported people with emergency food parcels across the 1 April – 30 September. Data collected for 2019 has been revised from its last publication to account for additional data processing.

### Data at regional and local authority level

Data at the local level has been analysed based on the location of the distribution centre from where someone was supported, rather than where that person is living. This means that there might be some changes to local authority statistics that are heavily influenced by the opening or closing, or other operational changes of the distribution centres based in those local authorities.

As an example, the South London Warehouse is a new food bank based in Lambeth. Due to operational efficiencies this food bank now distributes all parcels referred via the pre-existing Vauxhall, Waterloo, Norwood & Brixton, and Clapham Park food banks. The Waterloo food bank was based in Southwark, so this will have the effect of increasing Lambeth's numbers, while decreasing Southwark's.

We would recommend not comparing directly between local authority statistics, this is because our analysis of the data indicates that there are too many overlapping factors that are driving variations in the data. This makes comparisons, and the identification of drivers of change between areas difficult

### Parcel size statistics

The Trussell Trust has normally reported parcels as 'three-day emergency food parcel'. In response to the operational challenges that many food banks were facing some took the decision to distribute larger seven-day parcels. These were more practical to deliver, and it was felt that they may reduce the incidence of repeat support being needed.

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<sup>29</sup> Research conducted during the pandemic indicates that 95% of households that needed to use a food bank were living in relative poverty after housing costs. Lockdown, Lifelines and the Long Haul Ahead (2020), *Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf>

As such, for this release the Trussell Trust has simply combined both three-day and seven-day parcels together to report the total number of emergency food parcels that were distributed. As discussed, this means that the overall 47 per cent increase that is reported does not fully reflect the additional support that has been provided, with a 59 per cent increase in the total weight of food distributed. However, because some food banks distributed a higher proportion of seven-day parcels than others this may skew some statistics at a local authority level.