

# Trussell Trust data briefing on end-of-year statistics relating to use of food banks: April 2020 – March 2021



This data briefing provides information on how the statistics released by the Trussell Trust on 22 April 2021 were gathered and summarises the key findings. It also identifies and discusses some of the operational and external factors which may lie behind variation in the figures at local, regional and national levels.

## 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 claiming support from the social security safety net and other forms of support. During this time, the economic impact of the crisis has been severe, with the number of people supported by Universal Credit in the UK doubling from 3 million in March 2020 to more than 6 million in March 2021.<sup>1</sup>

During this period, 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.

For each quarter throughout the crisis, levels of need have continued to be significantly higher than those seen in the same period in the previous financial year. However, there have been some fluctuations through the year. As shown in Table 1.2, in 2020/21, the number of parcels distributed was lowest in the summer quarter (Q2: July to September). However, need was still at an all-time high for the quarter compared with previous years. The increases seen in the last year come after what were record levels of food bank use the previous year – with 1.9 million parcels distributed in 2019/20.

Destitution – and the resulting inability to afford essentials – is the main reason for people needing to use a food bank. This lack of income is most often associated with the social security system, either directly due to the value of benefits not being sufficient to meet living costs, or through design or operational issues such as the five-week wait, or delays to payment.

People are more likely to need support from a food bank if they are living with ill health or have experienced challenging life experiences such as eviction or divorce. Those without access to informal support networks such as friends and family, or more formal support are also more likely to need support from a food bank.<sup>2</sup>

The ongoing crisis will have drained many people's financial and interpersonal resources and forced many to take on debt, meaning the pandemic will likely continue to affect people's ability to afford essentials – even as restrictions ease and the wider economy begins to recover.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> People on Universal Credit, *DWP*, Stat-Xplore

<sup>2</sup> State of Hunger (2019), *Trussell Trust*, <https://www.stateofhunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/State-of-Hunger-Report-November2019-Digital.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Caught in a (Covid) Trap, (2020), *Resolution Foundation*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/caught-in-a-covid-trap/>

## Headline findings for the UK

The Trussell Trust can now publish data covering the whole 2020/21 financial year, 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 inclusive, showing the impact that food banks in our network have seen through the Covid-19 pandemic so far.

- Overall, food banks in the Trussell Trust's network have distributed more than 2.5 million emergency food parcels across the UK in the last year. This is a 33% increase in the number of parcels needed compared to the previous financial year.
- The figures indicate children have been more likely to be impacted by the crisis than adults. Last year the number of emergency food parcels distributed to children rose by 36%, compared to an increase for adults of 32%. Between April 2020 and March 2021, 2,685 parcels were given, on average, to children every day.
- There has been a 53% increase in the total weight of food distributed this year compared to last. Some food banks have given out larger parcels during the crisis which may have reduced the total number of parcels given out, while increasing the average weight.

## Drivers of food bank use

With 94% of people who use a food bank living in destitution, research shows that the main reason for needing to use a food bank in the UK is being unable to afford essentials. There are three main factors which can tip people into crisis, and all three have been prevalent during the pandemic:<sup>4</sup>

- **Welfare benefits that are too low to live on, have gaps or are inaccessible.** The social security system should function to help people keep people afloat during hard times. Before the pandemic this was frequently not the case, and though some policy changes since the start of the pandemic – such as the £20 uplift to Universal Credit (UC) and the increase to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) – have increased the level of benefits that many people are receiving, significant issues and gaps remain. Further, policies like the benefit cap mean that many households haven't received the uplift amount, and No Recourse to Public Funds visa conditions means migrant workers who've lost their jobs are often unable to receive any support from the benefit system.
- **Difficult life experiences like poor health, job loss, eviction, bereavement, and relationship breakdown.** Challenging life events like these can uproot people's lives, reduce their incomes, increase their expenditure and make it harder to engage with support services without additional support. It's clear that people have experienced disruptive and difficult life events at a higher rate as a direct result of the pandemic. As well as the illness and tragic deaths caused by the virus itself, restrictions have indirectly resulted in further repercussions including job losses, increased caring responsibilities and pressure on intimate relationships, and poorer mental health.

In the summer of 2020 72% of households referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network had someone living with poor mental health, up from just over half pre-pandemic. This reflects overall trends seen in the general population. Almost one in five adults (19%) were likely to

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Stormy weather, (2021), *StepChange*, <https://www.stepchange.org/Portals/0/assets/pdf/Coronavirus-impact-dashboard-January-2021-StepChange.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Lockdown Lifelines, (2020), *Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf>

be experiencing some form of depression in June 2020. This has almost doubled from around one in 10 (10%) before the pandemic (July 2019 to March 2020).<sup>5</sup>

- **A lack of informal or formal support.** Before the pandemic, the vast majority of people referred to food banks had either exhausted the support that was available from family and friends, or had resource-poor social networks who weren't in a position to help. Others were unable to access more formal support such as advice services, or debt management agencies. The pandemic has caused huge disruption to people's social circles and informal support networks, as well as civil society organisations, making it harder to receive this kind of support.

## Patterns in food bank use

### Variation in food parcel distribution

Food banks in the Trussell Trust network UK have seen a 33% increase in the number of parcels distributed in the 12 months to the end of March 2021, compared to the same period in 2019/20. The increase has been slightly higher for children than adults (36% v 32%), which indicates that children, and households with children, have been more likely to need to turn to food banks during the crisis.

When looking at the number of parcels distributed, children are overrepresented among those receiving a food parcel. This has consistently been the case in previous years, and between April 2020 and March 2021, 39% of parcels went to children. This is despite those aged 0-16 making up just 20% of the UK population.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1.1. Nearly 7,000 parcels given out every day during the pandemic**

	April 2020 – March 2021			
	No. of parcels	% change from 2019/20	Average number distributed per minute	Average number distributed per day
Parcels distributed to adults	1,557,116	32%	3.0	4,266
Parcels distributed to children	980,082	36%	1.9	2,685
Total	2,537,198	33%	4.8	6,951

### Changes over financial year

Across the UK, the initial stages of the crisis (1 April – 30 June) saw an 84% increase compared to the same period last year. The increase in the following three months (1 July – 30 September) was lower, at 16%. Although the rate of increase fell, it's important to recognise that this 16% increase built on years of significant growth in need for food banks. Each individual month from July to September continued to show record levels of need for that period.

In the next quarter, 1 October to 31 December, the year-on-year percentage increase in need rose again to 22%. The final quarter, 1 January to 31 March, then saw a continued increase in need,

<sup>5</sup> Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain: June 2020, (2020), ONS, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/>

<sup>6</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>

compared to the year before, with a 19% increase on the same period in 2020 – even though the pandemic crisis began in the middle of March last year. The last two weeks of March 2020 saw an extraordinary 81% increase in parcels distributed, compared to the same period in 2019, and this will influence the year-on-year comparisons for the fourth quarter.<sup>7</sup> Food banks in the Trussell Trust network would normally see a drop off in need after the Christmas period. But this data shows need continued to be high at the start of 2021.

This pattern suggests some correlation between the extent or duration of lockdowns during a period and the number of parcels distributed, with the quarters that had fewer restrictions in general across the UK also seeing lower levels of need. This correlates with other research which suggests that the pressures on people’s incomes increased during lockdowns.<sup>8</sup> In 2020/21 governments across the UK also extended free school meal provision during the summer months and the Christmas holidays: this may have reduced the level of need seen by food banks in the Trussell Trust network, compared to the previous year, as in 2019/20 there was no provision of free school meals during school holidays.

Later sections of this briefing discuss potential reasons for varying levels of need across and within different areas. These factors are also likely to be relevant to understanding the changing levels of need seen by food banks in the Trussell Trust across the last year.

**Table 1.2. Levels of need were highest in early months of crisis, remained at historic levels in following months and then crept upwards following the summer period<sup>9</sup>**

	Apr – June 2020	July – Sept 2020	Oct – Dec 2020	Jan – Mar 2021
Total parcels distributed	759,308	499,286	643,514	637,984
% change from 2019/20	84%	16%	22%	19%

### 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 will affect the number of parcels that are distributed in any given area. Neither lower percentage increases, nor lower overall numbers, should necessarily be interpreted as demonstrating lower levels of destitution or overall need in these areas.

London saw the largest percentage increases compared to the previous financial year and is the only region of the UK where the number of parcels distributed has more than doubled (a 106% increase). Other regions in England have seen smaller percentage increases, between 13% and 52%, while overall England has on average seen a 41% increase.

Looking at the constituent countries of the UK, Northern Ireland saw the largest percentage increase (75%) and Scotland saw a small decrease (-7%). The experiences of England and Wales sit between the two, though the year-on-year increase seen in Wales (8%) is considerably smaller than that seen

<sup>7</sup> Trussell Trust press release: Food banks report record spike in need as coalition of anti-poverty charities call for strong lifeline to be thrown to anyone who needs it (May 2020), <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/05/01/coalition-call/>

<sup>8</sup> Caught in a (Covid) Trap, (2020) Resolution Foundation, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/caught-in-a-covid-trap/>

<sup>9</sup> These figures do not sum to the totals elsewhere in this document. This is because they were downloaded three days later – a small amount of additional data may have been added in this time.

in England (41%). This follows the pattern of the data we previously released for our mid-year statistics, in which Northern Ireland saw the largest percentage increase (80%), followed by England (57%) and Wales (21%), while Scotland experienced a 1% decrease.<sup>10</sup> This pattern emerged at the beginning of the pandemic crisis, with Northern Ireland seeing the largest growth in the number of food parcels distributed (141%) and Scotland experiencing the smallest (47%).<sup>11</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. It must be recognised that this does not indicate that rates of destitution and poverty have declined or remained stable during the Covid-19 crisis. Indeed, the Scottish Government's impact assessment suggests that<sup>12</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. The most recent data shows a 31% increase in the number of applications for crisis grants that were received in the 12 months to January 2021 (inclusive: Feb 2020 – Jan 2021), compared to the 12 months prior (Feb 2019 – Jan 2020). Further, there was a 52% increase in the amount given out in crisis grants, between these two 12-month periods.<sup>13</sup> The Claimant Count statistics presented later in this document 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 findings from commissioned research from King's College London, 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.<sup>14</sup> This could have included new emergency food providers set up through the increase in funding through initiatives such as the Scottish Food Fund.<sup>15</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.

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<sup>10</sup> Trussell Trust data briefing on mid-year statistics relating to use of food banks – April to September 2020, (2020), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/11/Mid-year-stats-2020-data-briefing.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Food banks report record spike in need... (2020), *Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/05/01/coalition-call/>

<sup>12</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>13</sup> Scottish Welfare Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments: monthly data, (2021), *Social Security Directorate*, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/swf-monthly-management-information/>

<sup>14</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.

<sup>15</sup> On 18 March 2020, the Scottish Government announced a £70 million Food Fund to put in place support for those who would otherwise be unable to access food through the usual routes.

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% increase in parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network. The increase was nine percent in this period for Scotland.

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

Region	April 2019 – March 2020			April 2020 – March 2021			% change from 2019/20		
	To adults	To children	Total	To adults	To children	Total	Adults	Children	Total
<b>UK</b>	1,183,672	722,953	1,906,625	1,557,116	980,082	2,537,198	32%	36%	33%
England	916,330	571,708	1,488,038	1,273,275	817,714	2,090,989	39%	43%	41%
Northern Ireland	26,160	18,974	45,134	47,799	31,028	78,827	83%	64%	75%
Scotland	157,512	81,049	238,561	144,431	77,123	221,554	-8%	-5%	-7%
Wales	83,670	51,222	134,892	91,611	54,217	145,828	9%	6%	8%
East Midlands	62,501	39,284	101,785	81,728	52,162	133,890	31%	33%	32%
East of England	113,793	76,246	190,039	142,593	102,002	244,595	25%	34%	29%
London	129,323	74,864	204,187	262,436	158,990	421,426	103%	112%	106%
North East	62,038	36,483	98,521	78,140	46,084	124,224	26%	26%	26%
North West	153,637	100,135	253,772	192,494	120,521	313,015	25%	20%	23%
South East	120,544	78,698	199,242	180,572	122,333	302,905	50%	55%	52%
South West	100,369	62,838	163,207	122,372	79,599	201,971	22%	27%	24%
West Midlands	106,882	62,255	169,137	137,953	88,284	226,237	29%	42%	34%
Yorkshire and The Humber	67,243	40,905	108,148	74,987	47,739	122,726	12%	17%	13%

Variation is also seen at a local authority level. Overall, in 2020/21, there were food banks from the Trussell Trust network based in 295 local authority areas across the UK. Of those, 292 also had food banks in those areas in 2019/20.

More than one in six (17%) local authorities which had a food bank from the Trussell Trust network in both 2019/20 and 2020/21 experienced a doubling in the number of parcels distributed between April 2020 and March 2021 compared to the same period in 2019/20. Three in ten (31%) 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>16</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

<sup>16</sup> Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. *Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford.*

period. As such, reductions in use in food banks in the Trussell Trust network should not be interpreted as a decrease in need.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 1.5. One in six local authority areas saw a doubling in the number of food parcels distributed between 2019/20 and 2020/21**

Banded change in number of emergency food parcels distributed within local authority	% of local authority areas
100% and above	17%
50% – 99%	11%
0%-49%	41%
Decrease	31%

### Factors that may affect the number of emergency food parcels distributed 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, and that relative increases seen within the network may not accurately reflect relative increases in economic hardship across the UK. Many food banks in the network have seen decreases in reported 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 1.8% 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-November 2020 because they did not have enough money to buy food.<sup>18</sup> This is equivalent to over 800,000 people.<sup>19</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.

#### Operational differences

Food banks in the Trussell Trust network 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>20</sup> Some food banks have also had to adapt to operating with fewer volunteers, for

<sup>17</sup> IBID

<sup>18</sup> Covid19 Research Tracker – Wave Four, (2020), *Food Standards Agency*, <https://data.food.gov.uk/catalog/datasets/da60fd93-be85-4a6b-8fb6-63eddf32eeab>

<sup>19</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>20</sup> Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. *Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford*.

example when a large proportion of their volunteer base were asked to shield. Any difficulties faced by partners in making referrals will also need to have been accommodated by food banks, and this may have had knock-on effects for how the food banks operated. All these factors may affect the number of parcels that they distributed across 2020/21.

### *Food banks faced challenges staying open and operating as usual*

Food banks across the UK have needed to reduce or alter their service provision to work safely during the pandemic. This may have included reducing opening hours or choosing to open only some distribution centres and not others. A temporary closure, or one food bank making changes to their distribution model and opening hours, will have a more significant impact on the figures for an area of the UK with fewer food banks.

Between April 2019 and March 2020, 1,504 distribution centres distributed food parcels. This fell to 1,471 between April 2020 and March 2021. The decrease was more significant in particular areas. In Scotland for instance the number of distribution centres fell by 21%. 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, or to manage with fewer volunteers. 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>21</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.
- An increase in referrals for particular food banks. In urban areas, where referral agencies are nearby to several food banks, they may be more likely to refer to a food bank in their area which offered a delivery service, if 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.
- Delays to delivery, or an inability to guarantee delivery at all due to high levels of need, which may have pushed 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 have been distributed, both as a response to increased need and as part of moving to a delivery model. Around 12% of households who received a parcel between April 2020 and March 2021 received seven days of food. 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.

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<sup>21</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>

A larger parcel may reduce 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. Some of these differences can be seen in the statistics that the Trussell Trust collects on the total weight of food distributed. While total parcels distributed in the UK has increased by 33%, the increase in the weight of food distributed is significantly higher at 53%. This trend is seen in most places in the UK, with the percentage increase in the weight of food distributed generally higher than the percentage increase in the number of parcels distributed, except in Northern Ireland. As can be seen in Table 1.6, this serves to slightly reduce the differences seen in the four nations and devolved administrations of the UK.

**Table 1.6. Comparing changes to parcel numbers to changes to tonnage amounts.**

	% change in number of parcels distributed	% increase in tonnage of food distributed
UK	33%	53%
England	41%	62%
Northern Ireland	75%	67%
Scotland	-7%	6%
Wales	8%	25%

### *Food bank referral agency closures*

Just as lockdown, restrictions 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. In some areas there continue to be fewer referral partners than normal, and many referral partners have continued to deliver telephone or digital referrals only throughout the last year.

In the vast majority of circumstances, food banks in the Trussell Trust network require a referral in order to access support. These additional barriers may therefore have meant that people had to, or chose to, access emergency food through alternative emergency food providers 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, food banks in the Trussell Trust network. Other referral partners began to direct people to new food parcel provision made available in local areas over the pandemic.<sup>22</sup>

### *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 food banks in the Trussell Trust network. These include local, regional and national variations in policy and populations, as well as the crisis response environment in each 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. Research indicates that the scale of response to

<sup>22</sup> Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. *Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford.*

food insecurity during the crisis has been of a historic scale and complexity across the UK.<sup>23</sup> Additional support has come from all sectors (public, private and voluntary) and at all levels (local, national and UK).<sup>24</sup> Both this research and work from the Trussell Trust 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.<sup>25</sup>

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>26</sup> Over two in five (44%) stated that other organisations such as food pantries had also been started in response to Covid-19.

Similarly, research conducted on behalf of Kellogg's in February indicated that it was common for schools to set up new emergency provision for children and families, as a response to the pandemic. In total, 81% of teachers said their school had started providing some form of emergency support to children and families as a result of the crisis, including 18% of teachers reporting that their school had started a food bank and 5% saying their school had started providing emergency loans to families.<sup>27</sup>

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN), which represents more than 500 independent food banks across the UK, have identified at least 1034 independent food banks operating in the UK in addition to Trussell Trust, Salvation Army and school-based food banks. Their latest UK-wide data showed an 110% increase in need for emergency food parcels, when comparing February to November 2020 with the same period in 2019.

Evidently, in many local communities, food banks in the Trussell Trust network have only been a part of the emergency food provision during the pandemic.

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<sup>23</sup> Monitoring responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Monitoring-responses-to-risk-of-rising-food-insecurity-during-the-COVID-19-crisis-across-the-UK-FINAL-1.pdf>

<sup>24</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>25</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>26</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*, [https://www.faithandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/APPG\\_CovidReport\\_Full\\_V4.pdf](https://www.faithandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/APPG_CovidReport_Full_V4.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> 1097 UK Primary and Secondary teachers aged 18+ were interviewed online by YouGov on behalf of Kellogg's, 8th – 17th February 2021.

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

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, while in other areas organisations actively signposted to food bank which could have increased support levels.<sup>28</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 which makes it harder to use a food bank, or means people look for other ways of managing first.<sup>29</sup> Receiving support from a school, or a community group that a person is already engaged with, may present less of an emotional barrier than receiving support through a food bank.<sup>30</sup>

### *Government food provision*

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

Food parcels were provided during April to June 2020 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

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<sup>28</sup> Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. *Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford.*

<sup>29</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>30</sup> Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. *Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford.*

a quarter of households were affected by a long-term physical health condition.<sup>31</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 the Trussell Trust network.

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 food banks in the Trussell Trust network. For example, some food banks in Northern Ireland were involved in distribution, although food delivered to those shielding is not included in this data. This may partially explain why Northern Ireland has experienced the largest percentage increase in the number of food parcels distributed over the last year.

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>32</sup> In other areas people may have been referred directly to other food providers, or they may have been referred to local and devolved welfare assistance programmes where they would have been referred to a Trussell Trust food bank in the past.<sup>33</sup>

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>34</sup>

There have often been specific programmes run for groups that may be more at risk of financial and food insecurity. For instance, the UK government made up to £16 million available for frontline charities and community groups in England – such as refuges and homeless shelters – to enable them to provide meals.<sup>35</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 previously been over-represented in food banks, providing meals and shelter may have meant they did not access food banks over this period.

## Policy differences

Beyond food provision and lockdown measures, other 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

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<sup>31</sup> State of Hunger (2019), *Trussell Trust*, <https://www.stateofhunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/State-of-Hunger-Report-November2019-Digital.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. *Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford*.

<sup>33</sup> Local and devolved welfare assistance refers to schemes providing support to low income households in crisis, run by some local authorities in England, and by national governments in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

<sup>34</sup> IBID

<sup>35</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>

Trussell Trust network. Local and devolved 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>36</sup> The criteria and assessment processes for accessing these schemes are varied, as are the types of support available following a successful application.

In some cases, schemes have been made more generous, more accessible, or both, as a result of the pandemic. One example is the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) in Wales, a centralised assistance scheme which provides grants to people in Wales who are experiencing crisis. One aspect of the DAF is an Emergency Assistance Scheme, which provides cash support to those who are unable to cover essential costs such as food. Between 1 May 2020 and 31 September 2021, applications made for an EAP because of hardship caused by the coronavirus pandemic have more relaxed eligibility criteria. The maximum number of grants a person can receive has increased from three to five, and the minimum length of time between grants has reduced from 28 days to seven.

Although more evidence is needed on the impact of local and devolved welfare schemes, these changes have been welcomed by front-line service providers, who generally view these as important steps for supporting people in crisis.<sup>37</sup> Local welfare provision in each area could well 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.

### *Differences in lockdown restrictions*

Our data suggests that strict lockdowns may play a part in the different levels of need reported by food banks in the Trussell Trust network. It's possible that this is related to the availability of informal support from friends and family: research shows that having informal support available can help prevent people from needing to use a food bank, and lockdowns severely restrict or even end the availability of this support for many. The first lockdown in the UK did not include any 'support bubble' provision – later lockdowns generally have, although this has varied. Lockdowns have also been associated with lower levels of economic activity that might reduce people's incomes.

Since May 2020, restrictions in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have differed from each other, including with different rules around support bubbles and in-person schooling. Although restrictions have varied, periods with fewer restrictions generally across the UK saw lower numbers of parcels provided. It is difficult to identify the extent to which this was a causal factor given the many other possible factors as outlined here.

### *National and regional variation in the economic impact of the crisis*

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<sup>36</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)

<sup>37</sup> Monitoring responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Monitoring-responses-to-risk-of-rising-food-insecurity-during-the-COVID-19-crisis-across-the-UK-FINAL-1.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 alternative Claimant Count, and the extent to which the alternative Claimant Count has increased since February 2020.<sup>38</sup> The table below indicates that London has seen the greatest increase in claims, with the North East the smallest.<sup>39</sup>

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

Region	Alternative Claimant count: Feb 2020	Alternative Claimant count: Feb 2021	Percentage increase, Feb 2020 – Feb 2021
<b>UK</b>	<b>1,401,527</b>	<b>2,867,136</b>	<b>105%</b>
England	1,181,312	2,461,917	108%
Northern Ireland	34,357	64,760	88%
Scotland	118,237	217,599	84%
Wales	66,685	119,040	79%
East Midlands	89,873	177,402	97%
East of England	102,479	228,872	123%
London	227,414	565,056	148%
North East	77,345	121,075	57%
North West	176,388	331,465	88%
South East	138,581	325,583	135%
South West	82,797	182,134	120%
West Midlands	157,941	290,009	84%
Yorkshire & The Humber	128,494	240,321	87%

Food banks in areas which have experienced larger increases in the rate of unemployment may have seen increased levels of need as a result. It's clear that different sectors of the labour market have been differently affected by the pandemic – and the uneven spread of employment in each sector across the UK is one reason for the uneven distribution of unemployment increases. For example: the ONS noted in March 2021 that, of the 693,000 decrease in payrolled employees since February 2020, more than a third (368,000) are the result of a reduction in employees working in the accommodation and food services sector, while a further sixth (123,000) of the reduction was experienced in the wholesale and retail sector.<sup>40</sup> Both the accommodation and food services, and retail sectors are concentrated in urban areas, and in city centres in particular.

Demographic factors may also play a role. The Resolution Foundation notes that young people have been more likely to experience negative employment consequences than other working-age people, and have lost working hours, experienced lower pay, been put on furlough and lost jobs at higher

<sup>38</sup> The alternative Claimant Count measures unemployment by modelling what the count would be if Universal Credit had been fully rolled out since 2013. This helps provide more meaningful insights to changes in the local labour market than the Claimant Count measure.

<sup>39</sup> Alternative Claimant Count statistics January 2013 to February 2021, (2021), DWP, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/alternative-claimant-count-statistics-january-2013-to-february-2021/alternative-claimant-count-statistics-january-2013-to-february-2021>

<sup>40</sup> Labour market overview, UK: March 2021, (2021), ONS, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/march2021#labour-market-data>

rates.<sup>41</sup> Workers under 25 have accounted for nearly two-thirds (437,000) of the total fall in payrolled employment.<sup>42</sup>

As well as uneven labour market impacts on different demographic groups, the Food Standards Agency shows that food insecurity is far higher in some demographic groups: most notably young people, families with children, people identifying as Black or Black British, and those in poor health.<sup>43</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, and for longer periods of time.

These factors combined may mean that urban areas have seen proportionally bigger increases in need than rural areas.

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<sup>41</sup> Uneven steps: Changes in youth unemployment and study since the onset of Covid-19, (2021), *Resolution Foundation*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2021/04/Uneven-steps.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Labour market overview, UK: March 2021, (2021), *ONS*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/march2021#labour-market-data>

<sup>43</sup> Food and You 2 Survey: Wave 1, (2021), *Food Standards Agency* <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you-2/food-and-you-2-wave-1>

## 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 organisations such as Citizens Advice. These agencies assess people for financial hardship before referring them to a food bank. This means that the overwhelming majority of people receiving support via a food bank in the Trussell Trust network do so because of financial hardship.<sup>44</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. Food banks that left the network during the year are also included in these statistics.

The end-of-year statistics cover the period 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021 (inclusive) and compares to the same period in 2019/20. Data was collected up until 5pm 12 April 2021 and comes from the 1,471 distribution centres across the UK which provided emergency food parcels as part of the Trussell Trust network, in 2020/21. In 2019/20, 1,504 distribution centres supported people with emergency food parcels at some point between 1 April – 31 March. Distribution centres are not counted as a point in time. They are instead counted if they've distributed food parcels at any stage during the specified period. Some will have opened and subsequently closed during this period.

Data collected for 2019/20, including on the number of centres in operation, 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 which provided each parcel, rather than where the household receiving each parcel 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.

Some food parcels are distributed as 'emergency food boxes' these are made up and given to frontline services such as the fire service to immediately distribute to those in acute need. Where these parcels

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<sup>44</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 LongHaul 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>

are not recorded as being distributed by a particular distribution centre, they have been proportionally distributed across the other distribution centres within that food bank.

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 and difference between areas, difficult.

Distribution centres are matched to local authorities using postcodes provided by the food bank, and looking them up to the national statistic postal lookup file (NSPL). Some food banks provide emergency food boxes. These are pre-prepared food parcels that are given to frontline organisations such as firefighters, or police to give immediately to people in need. These parcels are not tagged to any distribution centre. Where a food bank distributed emergency food boxes these have been proportionally distributed across the local authorities in which the distribution centres of that food bank operate.

### Parcel size statistics

The Trussell Trust has previously reported parcels as “three-day emergency food parcels”. 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. Around 12% of households who received a parcel between April 2020 and March 2021 received seven days of food.

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. More work needs to be carried out to determine what impact providing a seven-day parcel has on repeat visitation before the Trussell Trust can accurately equalise between the two. It is unclear whether providing seven days of food will significantly reduce the likelihood of needing support from a food bank in the near, medium, or long term.

As discussed, this means that the overall 33% increase that is reported does not fully reflect the additional support that has been provided, with a 53% 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 or regional level.