

Trussell Trust data briefing on mid-year statistics relating to use of food banks: April 2021 –September 2021



This data briefing provides information on how the statistics released by the Trussell Trust on 24 November 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 a local, regional and national levels.

Introduction

The mid-year period¹ of 2021 has seen a significant increase (11%) in the level of support given out by food banks in the Trussell Trust network when compared to the same period in 2019. This increase builds on the long-term trend of year-on-year increases in support with a 74% increase in the number of parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network compared to the same period in 2016.

The mid-year period of 2021 introduced a period of relative stability in contrast to the economic upheaval and uncertainty of the same period in 2020. Following the introduction of significant measures to restrict the spread of Covid-19 in the United Kingdom in 2020, there was an unprecedented increase in the number of people claiming support from social security. The number of people supported by Universal Credit (UC) in the UK almost doubled from over 3 million in March 2020 to over 5.7 million in September 2020. This figure has remained substantively constant at this same high level since and stood at 5.8 million in September 2021.²

During 2020, food banks in the Trussell Trust network saw a significant increase in need on top of the existing record levels of food bank use before the pandemic. When the crisis struck, the number of people struggling to make ends meet was already on the increase, with years of low wage growth and frozen, capped working age benefits leaving people on the lowest incomes particularly vulnerable to the income shocks caused by the pandemic.³⁴

The use of food banks in the Trussell Trust network that was seen in the extraordinary year of 2020/21, has not been sustained in the mid-year period of 2021. As shown in Table 1.1, the number of emergency food parcels distributed between April 2021 and September 2021 saw a 26% decrease compared to the same period in 2020, which fell during the first six months of the measures put in place to reduce the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK.

However, compared to the mid-year period of 2019 there has been an 11% increase in the number of parcels distributed. Moreover, there has been a 74% increase compared to the same time period in 2016. This most recent data shows that the long-term trajectory of levels of need has continued on an upward trend. Treating 2020/21 as an outlier, we are continuing to see a worrying pattern of

¹ The 'mid-year period' referred to in this document relates to the 6-month period 1st April – 30th September inclusive.

² People on Universal Credit (2021), DWP, Stat-Xplore

³ Destitution in the UK 2020 (2020), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>

⁴ Lockdown, Lifelines and the Long Haul Ahead: The Impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network (2020), The Trussell Trust, trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf

year-on-year increases in food bank use in the Trussell Trust network.

During the mid-year period in 2021 the substantial policy interventions put in place in response to the Covid-19 pandemic likely played a significant role in preventing larger increases in need for food banks in the Trussell Trust network when compared to the same period in 2019. Food bank managers across the network have spoken about the positive impact of the uplift to Universal Credit, increased funding for Local Housing Allowance, and financial boosts to local and national welfare schemes across each devolved administration⁵ in protecting many people from falling into destitution.

Food bank managers in our network have also spoken about the significant growth in the number of alternative emergency food providers operating in their local area. The support that these providers delivered during the mid-year period of 2021 may have reduced the overall level of need seen by food banks in the Trussell Trust network in this period.

Destitution – and the resulting inability to afford essentials – is the main reason for people needing to use a food bank. The social security system is often the only source of income for people who are unable to work or face additional barriers to finding work. However, this income is consistently insufficient to meet basic living costs and often leaves people unable to afford the essentials. This is more often than not due to design choices such as the value of benefits or the five-week wait for a first Universal Credit payment.

People are more likely to need support from a food bank if they are living with ill health or have been through challenging life experiences such as eviction or divorce. People without access to informal support networks such as friends and family, or more formal local support are also more likely to need support from a food bank.⁶

The economic impact of the pandemic has further highlighted the structural and socio-demographic factors that increase individuals' likelihood of experiencing destitution or needing support from a food bank. The significant number of redundancies during this period, reduction in wages due to furlough, the long-term financial effects of school closures on families, an increase in mental health support needs, and the huge disruption in access to informal support networks and civil society organisations, are additional reasons for the use of food banks in this period that managers of food banks in the Trussell Trust network have informed us of. Our statistics from mid-2021 indicate that the collective impact of the economic crisis and societal disruption caused by the pandemic is likely to lead to sustained increases to the scale and prevalence of destitution in the UK.

The winter ahead poses many challenges that could lead to increased levels of destitution and food bank use. While the reduction in the taper rate to Universal Credit will mean some families can keep more of their earnings, this cannot make up for the £20 a week cut to Universal Credit which many organisations, including the Trussell Trust, warn will have a huge impact on the ability of people to

⁵ Local and devolved welfare assistance 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. For more on the amount of support and mechanisms for providing support in each devolved administration in response to the pandemic see Lockdown, Lifelines and the Long Haul Ahead: The Impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network (2020), *The Trussell Trust*, [trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf](https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf)

⁶ State of Hunger (2019), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.stateofhunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/State-of-Hunger-Report-November2019-Digital.pdf>

afford essentials.⁷ The reduction in the taper rate will not benefit the millions of people claiming UC who are between jobs, who cannot work more hours, or cannot work at all, which are life circumstances that we know can lead to food bank need.⁸ These challenges are also likely to be compounded as benefits (e.g. the Local Housing Allowance rates) are not keeping up with the rate of inflation, which is predicted to rise above 4% in the coming months.⁹ We are also yet to see the impact of rising living costs this winter and the effects of the closure of the Job Retention Scheme (furlough) and Self-Employment Income Support Scheme on 30 September 2021.¹⁰

Headline findings for the UK

This new data collected by food banks in the Trussell Trust network covers the period from 1 April to 30 September 2021 inclusive. Comparative data for the same period in 2016, 2019 and 2021 has also been analysed to contextualise these results. Discussion in this briefing also includes results from a survey of 118 food bank managers operating across the Trussell Trust network conducted July - August 2021.

- In comparison to the same period in 2019, there has been an 11% increase in the parcels distributed during this time period and a 74% increase compared to the same time period in 2016. This shows that long term levels of need remain on an upward trend.
- Overall, food banks in the Trussell Trust network distributed 936,000 emergency food parcels between 1 April to 30 September 2021 inclusive. This is a 26% decrease in the number of parcels distributed in the same time period last year.
- The figures on the scale of support provided by food banks indicates that children continue to be more likely to need support from food banks; two in five (38%) emergency food parcels were distributed to children in this period despite people aged 0-16 making up just 20% of the UK population.¹¹The rate of increase is also greater for children, with the increase in the number of parcels given to children from 2019 to 2021 almost double that for adults (15% vs. 8%).
- Between 1 April to 30 September 2021, 1,948 parcels were given, on average, to children every day.
- The £20 uplift to Universal Credit, the Job Retention Scheme (furlough), the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme and funding for local and national welfare schemes across each devolved administration are likely to have been protective factors in preventing additional need

⁷ See Dignity or Destitution? The case for keeping the Universal Credit lifeline (2021), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/dignity-or-destitution-UC-standard-allowance-report-final.pdf>

⁸ State of Hunger (2019), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.stateofhunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/State-of-Hunger-Report-November2019-Digital.pdf>

⁹ Monetary Policy Summary and minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee meeting (September 2021), *Bank of England*, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy-summary-and-minutes/2021/september-2021>

¹⁰ Evidence is beginning to emerge about the impact the closure of the JRS has had on the UK labour market. The Resolution Foundation's survey on post-furlough labour market outcomes does not show a large increase in unemployment, with the rate of unemployment among working-age adults only 0.5 percentage points higher in October 2021 than August 2021. However, this research shows that the end of the JRS is clearly impacting on some people with furloughed workers being six times more likely to be out of work than regular employed workers. See Post-furlough blues: What happened to furloughed workers after the end of the Job Retention Scheme? (2021), *Resolution Foundation*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/post-furlough-blues/>

¹¹ Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland(2020), *ONS*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/data/sets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland>

for emergency food in this period.

- The end of the £20 uplift to Universal Credit, the Job Retention Scheme and Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, along with increases in the costs of living and rises in fuel costs at the onset of winter, were all referenced by food bank managers as likely to impact on food bank use going forwards.

Change in use of food banks in the Trussell Trust network over time

The number of food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network remains significantly higher in comparison to the same period in 2019, before the pandemic. Since 2019 there has been an 11% increase in the number of parcels distributed and looking further back a 74% increase compared to the same time period in 2016. This shows that long term levels of need remain on an upward trend.

More recently, food banks in the Trussell Trust’s UK wide network saw a 26% decrease in the number of parcels distributed in the 6 months to the end of September 2021, compared to the same period in 2020.

The figures indicate that children continue to be more likely to need support than adults when looking at the support given out by food banks in this period. Two in five (38%) food parcels were distributed to children in the mid-year period of 2021, despite people aged 0-16 making up just 20% of the UK population.¹² The rate of increase in the number of parcels since the same period in 2019 is also greater for children, rising by 15% compared to an increase for adults of 8%.

Table 1.1. Long term levels of need remain on an upward trend

	April – September 2021	Percentage change over time		
	No. of parcels	% change from 2020	% change from 2019	% change from 2016
Number of emergency food parcels distributed to adults	579,179	-26%	8%	69%
Number of emergency food parcels distributed to children	356,570	-26%	15%	83%
Total	935,749	-26%	11%	74%

A new normal? The growth in people at risk of needing support from food banks

The previous mid-year period (April - September 2020) coincided with the first 6 months of the measures implemented to reduce the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This period saw a 47%

¹² IBID.

increase in the number of parcels distributed, compared to the same period in 2019. Although the level of support distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network has fallen in 2021, in comparison to 2020, it is important to recognise that 2020/21 was an unprecedented year in which many people newly found themselves in crisis as a result of the pandemic.¹³

This initial period of the pandemic saw the highest level of redundancies since the 2008 financial crisis, a doubling of the number of people claiming Universal Credit, substantive increases in mental health problems¹⁴ and the withdrawal of the informal support networks that people rely on to get by. All of these factors place people at greater risk of needing support from a food bank.

The 11% increase seen in 2021, in comparison to the same period in 2019, represents a significant addition to the underlying scale of need and should be seen in the context of years of significant growth in need for food banks. As the UK moves into calmer waters following the economic storm of 2020 there is a real risk that these increased levels of need are both sustained and built on.

Levels of need for food banks in the Trussell Trust network were rising steadily in the years before the pandemic. In the five years to 2019/20 food banks in the Trussell Trust network experienced a 74% increase in the number of food parcels distributed, including an 18% increase in the year to 2019/20.¹⁵ In this section, we explore factors that could have driven this continued long-term upward trend in use of food banks in the Trussell Trust network in 2021.

The economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has increased underlying need for food banks

The most recent data from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) shows that, even before the pandemic, destitution was rapidly growing in scale and intensity in the UK. More than a million households experienced destitution at some point in 2019, which is a 35% increase since 2017. These households contained 2.4 million people, including 550,000 children.¹⁶ This report further estimates that the rate of destitution will approximately double as a result of the pandemic.

We know that the majority (95%) of people that need support from food banks in the Trussell Trust network are destitute and the available evidence indicates that the impact of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic has deepened the experience of destitution for some, but also driven new groups of people into destitution.¹⁷ Indeed, in the opening stages of the pandemic over half of the people referred to food banks in April 2020 had never used a food bank in the Trussell Trust network, up from 34% in February 2020. Overall, between April and June 2020 over 99,000

¹³ In mid-2020, around 40% of food bank visits were mainly due to the pandemic, indicating people who had newly found themselves in crisis. State of Hunger (2021), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/05/State-of-Hunger-2021-Report-Final.pdf>

¹⁴ Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain: June 2020, (2020), ONS, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/june2020>

¹⁵ End of Year Statistics 2019/20 (2020), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/>

¹⁶ Destitution in the UK (2020), *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>

¹⁷ The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's 2020 report estimates that destitution may have doubled as a result of the pandemic. Significant increases in the use of food banks can also be used as a proxy measure of scale and severity of destitution.

households needed support from a food bank in the Trussell Trust for the first time.

We know that the experience of destitution varies between people but for some it will unfortunately be long term, and many of this new population of people pushed into destitution in 2020 will likely have needed repeat support from a food bank in 2021.

Underlying rates of food insecurity have also increased from 2019 to 2021. Surveys, conducted by the Food Foundation to track food insecurity across the UK, show that 5.2 million adults (9.9% of households) experienced food insecurity between February and August 2021 which remains higher than pre-Covid levels (7.6% of households).¹⁸ This data also shows an increase in food insecurity for children, with 2.5 million children living in households experiencing food insecurity (February to August 2021), a 27% increase to pre-Covid levels.

The increases in estimated destitution, new households requiring support from food banks, and food insecurity reported in these studies help to explain the upward trend in use of food banks in the Trussell Trust network. They also highlight that the data collected within the network forms just one part of the picture of need and is not a complete reflection of economic hardship across the UK.

“We have heard from an increasing number of people who have not been out of work before, not applied for benefits before and not used a foodbank before.” Food bank manager

Increase in Universal Credit claimants

This increase in underlying need is best evidenced by the sustained increased in the number of people supported through social security. Last year the number of people claiming UC in the UK doubled from 3 million in March 2020 to more than 6 million in March 2021.¹⁹ This high level of claimants has remained, with the figure standing at 5.8 million in September 2021.

Most people who need to use a food bank are receiving support from social security through benefits and research has consistently shown that the design and delivery of Universal Credit is a driver of need for food banks.²⁰ Indeed, in 2019/20 government data collected on behalf of the DWP showed that people claiming Universal Credit were four times more likely to be experiencing food insecurity compared to all people receiving state support.²²

“With more people being moved onto Universal Credit, then because of the 5 week wait, this increased the numbers needing to apply for food parcels.” Food bank manager

While the uplift to the value of UC will have undoubtedly reduced overall levels of need for food banks in this mid-year period, the sustained increase in the number of people requiring support from

¹⁸ A Crisis within a Crisis: The Impact of Covid-19 on Household Food Security (2021), *Food Foundation*, <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/crisis-within-crisis-impact-covid-19-household-food-security>

¹⁹ People on Universal Credit (2021), *DWP*, Stat-Xplore.

²⁰ Dignity or Destitution? The case for keeping the Universal Credit lifeline (2021), *Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/dignity-or-destitution-UC-standard-allowance-report-final.pdf>

²¹ Hunger and the welfare state: Food insecurity among benefit claimants in the UK (2021), *Welfare at a (Social) Distance*, <https://www.distantwelfare.co.uk/food-insecurity-report>

²² Family Resources Survey: financial year 2019-2020 (2021), *DWP*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2019-to-2020>

UC and the known link between issues with the benefits system (insufficient income, the five-week wait, delays to payment, sanctions and deductions etc.) and food bank use, suggests this increase is likely to be a strong contributing factor to the upward trend in food bank use.

The economic shocks caused by the pandemic have long lasting effects

The immediate impact of the pandemic meant that many people newly found themselves in crisis and the profile of people referred to food banks changed slightly. Private renters, people born outside of the UK/Europe, people aged between 25 and 44, and couples with children were found to be using food banks more than before the pandemic.²³ While there has been a decrease in the number of emergency food parcels distributed during this period in comparison to last year, comments from food bank managers suggests that we are continuing to see people more at risk of needing to use food banks as a result of the economic and societal shocks caused by the pandemic.

The economic impact of the pandemic has eroded many households' financial resilience. Reductions to earnings because of the lower level of income from the furlough scheme, lower levels of income due to reduced hours and the income shock of moving from employment onto social security have all forced people to either dig into their savings to manage ongoing costs or take on additional debt. The Office for National Statistics found that by December 2020, nearly 9 million people had to borrow more money than usual because of the Covid-19 pandemic.²⁴ This erosion of financial resilience both impacts on people individually, by placing them at greater risk of falling into destitution, but also reduces their ability to support friends and family in crisis.

The people that were more likely than average to have taken on more debt closely overlap with people who have previously been shown to be at greater risk of needing support from a food bank. Including renters, people from minority ethnic groups, parents and carers, disabled people and people who are shielding, and young people.

Ill health, including mental health problems have been identified as a background driver of need for food banks.²⁵ Recent data collected during this mid-year period shows that the rates of mental health problems in the general public remain significantly higher than the period before the pandemic. In July to August 2021 around one in six (17%) adults aged 16 years and over in Great Britain experienced some form of depression. This is significantly higher than the equivalent figure before the Covid-19 pandemic (10%).²⁶ Food bank managers told us of their concern that increases in mental health support needs may lead to difficulties with work/finances and longer term increases in need for food banks.

²³ State of Hunger (2021), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/05/State-of-Hunger-2021-Report-Final.pdf>

²⁴ Personal and economic well-being in Great Britain: January 2021 (2021), *ONS*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/personalandeconomicwellbeingintheuk/january2021>

²⁵ State of Hunger (2021), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/05/State-of-Hunger-2021-Report-Final.pdf>

²⁶ Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain: July to August 2021, *ONS*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/julytoaugust2021#prevalence-of-depressive-symptoms-over-time>

“Mental health issues have seen a significant increase which has impacted [on] ability to work or manage financially.” Food bank manager.

“The majority of people are either on benefits or in ill health, especially mental health. The difficulties of being able to access other, usual support during the pandemic has driven more of these cases to us and for longer.” Food bank manager.

This increase in the underlying population of people at risk of needing support from a food bank, the erosion of financial resilience, and long-term mental health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are likely to have contributed to the upward trend in food bank use in the Trussell Trust network seen in 2021, in comparison to the same period in 2019.

The experience of food banks in 2021 highlights the differences to 2020

This section will look at the factors that may have driven the 26% decrease in the number of parcels distributed in the 6 months to the end of September 2021, reflecting on why need was so high in the same comparative period in 2020.

Immediate impact of the pandemic

The comparison period for these new statistics in 2020 coincided with the introduction of significant measures to restrict the spread of Covid-19 in the UK which led to the closure of a quarter of UK businesses and prevented millions from working.²⁷ People with zero-hour contracts were more likely to face the most immediate consequences, with cancelled shifts meaning an instant loss of income.

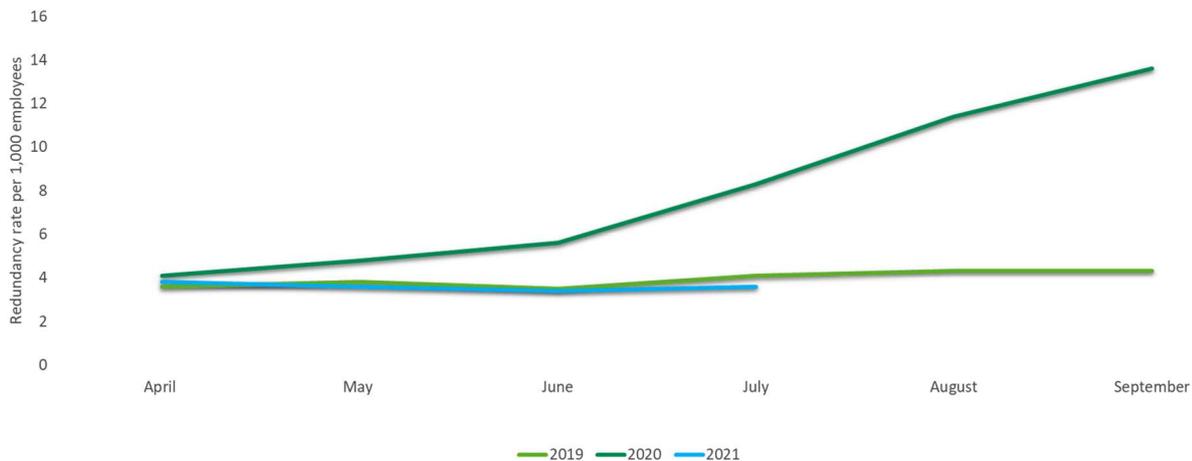
While the UK Government introduced a raft of interventions at the outset of the national lockdown in March 2020 to support the incomes of millions, there were big gaps which left many people without support and therefore vulnerable to being swept into destitution at the height of the pandemic. For example, the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS) was not in place in the first few months of the pandemic, with applications not opening for this until 13th May 2020.

Even once the SEISS was in place, more than 1.5 million self-employed people were not eligible to claim this form of support, and it also did not cover people who paid themselves in dividends.²⁸ In addition, the JRS did not offer support to people that had already been made redundant before the scheme was announced and employers were not able to rehire people who had been let go. Graph 1.1 shows that the UK redundancy rate increased significantly during the comparative period of April - September 2020, and that this rate has now fallen to pre-pandemic levels for the same time period this year.

²⁷ Covid-19: the impact of the pandemic on inequality, (2020), *Institute for Fiscal Studies*, <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/14879>

²⁸ Self-Employment Income Support Scheme statistics: August 2020, (2020), *HMRC*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/self-employment-income-support-scheme-statistics-august-2020/self-employment-income-support-scheme-statistics-august-2020>

Graph 1.1. UK redundancy rate (source dataset: [Labour market statistics time series](#))



These factors, in part, help to explain the huge increase in emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network during the initial stages of the crisis.²⁹ The comparison between the number of emergency food parcels distributed between April - September 2020, and the same period in 2021, therefore, needs to be understood within the uncertain economic conditions associated with the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Interventions from the UK Government

“Personally, I do think that the government interventions have and still are making a significant difference and I fear that if these are removed, I believe that we are going to be inundated again with families who experience long term hardship.” Food bank manager

As outlined above, the immediate impact of the pandemic helps, in some way, to explain the difference between the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network between April-September 2020 and the same period in 2021. However, as we have moved to a more stable economic situation in 2021 the significant interventions the UK Government put in place may have played an important role in preventing additional use of food banks in the Trussell Trust network and reducing the overall increases in need since 2019.

In addition to the introduction of the JRS and SEISS, the UK Government also increased the levels of support provided by the social security system. The UC Standard Allowance and Working Tax Credit, and statutory sick pay personal allowance were raised by £20 per week (26%) and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates were raised back to the 30th percentile of private market rents.³⁰

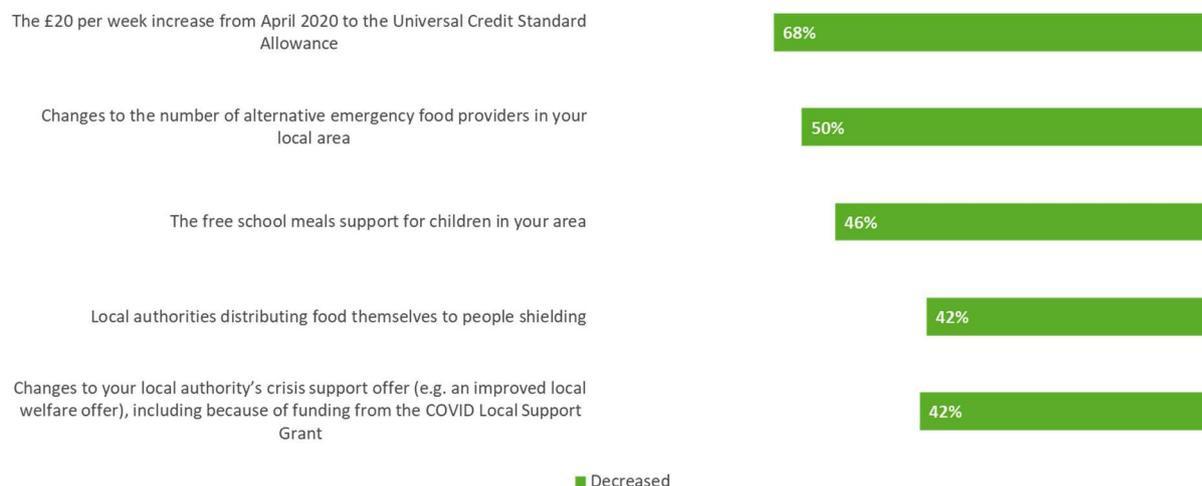
Graph 1.2 shows the top five reasons that food bank managers in the Trussell Trust network have

²⁹ The initial stages of the crisis (1 April – 30 June 2020) saw an 83% increase in emergency food parcels distributed in the Trussell Trust network compared to the same period in the previous year, the increase in the ensuing months (1 July – 30 September) was lower, at 13%. Trussell Trust data briefing on end-of-year statistics relating to use of foodbanks: April 2020 – March 2021 (2021), *The Trussell Trust*, https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/04/Trussell-Trust-End-of-Year-stats-data-briefing_2020_21.pdf

³⁰ State of Hunger (2021), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/05/State-of-Hunger-2021-Report-Final.pdf>

identified as suppressing overall levels of need for support since March 2020. The national interventions featured on this graph will be discussed in this section, and the local interventions will be discussed in later sections of this briefing to help explain varying levels of need across and within different areas.

Graph 1.2 Top 5 reasons for decrease in referrals³¹



“Anecdotally I spoke to a couple of families on how things were, especially last summer. One in particular who often struggles, is in receipt of UC and generally has work (might be a zero hours contract), but needs help with food once every 6-7 weeks to tie [sic.] her over... However, she had not required help from the foodbank from March until August. She put this down to the increased UC and her generous free school meal vouchers.” Food bank manager

“The increase in LHA and UC rates meant that many of our 'semi-regular' clients pre-Covid had sufficient income to get by and were less likely to fall into crisis.” Food bank manager

The £20 increase to the UC Standard Allowance was the reason food bank managers said had the biggest impact on a decrease in referrals since March 2020, with 68% of respondents stating this. This finding is supported by further research conducted by YouGov, on behalf of the Trussell Trust, with 72% of people (seven in ten) claiming UC since early 2020 saying that the uplift had made buying essentials such as food, clothing and toiletries easier than before.³²

National and regional differences across the UK

There is significant variation across local authorities, regions and the constituent countries of the UK in the recorded change in the number of parcels distributed in this period in 2021. 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

³¹ Food bank managers were asked 'Thinking about your food bank's experience: How do you think each of the following factors has affected the number of people referred for support since March 2020?'

³² Dignity of Destitution? The case for keeping the Universal Credit lifeline (2021), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/dignity-or-destitution-UC-standard-allowance-report-final.pdf>

areas.

As reflected in the overall total for the UK, all of the nations and regions in the UK saw a decrease in the number of food parcels distributed in comparison to the same period in 2020, as shown in Table 1.2.

London saw the largest percentage increases compared to the same period in 2019 (a 48% increase). Other regions in England have seen smaller percentage increases, between 1% and 32%, and one region has seen a decrease, North West (-4%).

Looking at the higher areas of the UK, Northern Ireland saw the largest percentage increase in comparison to the same period in 2019 (40%) and decreases were seen in Scotland (-25%) and Wales (-5%). England sits in the middle of this with an increase of 18%.

Table 1.2. Regional results show variation in the total number of emergency food parcels distributed

	Total number of emergency food parcels distributed April – September 2021	% change from 2020	% change from 2019	% change from 2016
United Kingdom	935,749	-26%	11%	74%
England	770,910	-26%	18%	86%
Northern Ireland	25,170	-23%	40%	80%
Scotland	84,555	-25%	-25%	29%
Wales	55,114	-22%	-5%	30%
East Midlands	56,387	-15%	25%	128%
East of England	97,500	-16%	18%	90%
London	135,461	-37%	48%	158%
North East	43,141	-34%	1%	44%
North West	108,778	-32%	-4%	37%
South East	113,729	-24%	32%	136%
South West	73,226	-27%	4%	61%
West Midlands	89,718	-18%	20%	78%
Yorkshire and The Humber	52,969	-19%	10%	64%

As stated above, lower percentage increases should not necessarily be interpreted as demonstrating lower levels of need in these areas. Table 1.3 shows data collected by YouGov on behalf of the Trussell Trust, on overall levels of food bank use in the 30 days to mid-August 2021 amongst the UK population. This data shows that, for instance, reported use of food banks in Scotland is not lower than the UK average and in fact may be slightly higher. These statistics include use of food banks in the Trussell Trust network and also report on use of food banks and other emergency food provision that sit outside of the network.

This finding is reinforced when looking at the most recent data from the Food Foundation from August 2021. This survey found that levels of food insecurity in Scotland remained high (10.3%) and were comparable to Northern Ireland (11%) and Wales (12.6%). Levels were also higher than some English regions including the East of England and South East.³³

Data from the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) provides some indication of overall trends in the number of people facing crisis in Scotland.³⁴ It shows that while the number of people applying for a crisis grant in the April-June period of 2021 is lower than the equivalent figure in 2020 (75,685 to 62,015) they remain significantly higher than the same period in 2019 (51,065). Indeed, this most recent data highlights that applications to the SWF in the second quarter of 2021 (April to June) were higher than at any stage in 2019 or at any stage since the introduction of the statistical release in 2013 (excluding 2020). 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.

Table 1.3. Population statistics on food bank use show that need is high across each area of the UK

Area	% in each area that say they used a food bank or similar service in the 30 days to mid-August 2021. *
United Kingdom	4%
England	3%
Northern Ireland	3%
Scotland	7%
Wales	6%

*Excludes people that had used a food bank or similar service solely because of issues physically accessing food.

Data from food banks in our network in Scotland does however remain an outlier in terms of being the only area of the UK to experience a significant (25%) decrease since the same period in 2019.

Different policy interventions in Scotland to boost the income of people in receipt of social security may have impacted on the levels of need for food banks in this period. In February 2021, the Scottish Government introduced the Scottish Child Payment (SCP); £10 a week, per child under the age of six,

³³ Food Insecurity Tracking, Round 8 (2021), *Food Foundation*, <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking>

³⁴ The Scottish Welfare Fund helps families and people in Scotland who are on low incomes. Scottish Welfare Fund statistics: update to 30 June 2021, (2021), *Social Security Directorate*, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund-statistics-update-to-30-june-2021/>

to support eligible families with the costs of living, although early evidence suggests the take-up level is only around 60%.³⁵

While we are yet to see evidence of the impact the SCP has had on supporting low-income families, previous research suggests that the increase in income for families with children who have accessed the payment could result in a decrease in the need for emergency food parcels. Significant evidence exists to show that increasing the value of benefits reduces overall levels of need for food banks.³⁶ Statistical modelling carried out as part of the State of Hunger (2021) research found that an increase of £1 in the value of all main income replacement benefits was associated with a decrease of 2.6% in the number of parcels given out in a typical local authority.³⁷ With this in mind, action by the Scottish Government to improve the take up level, alongside a faster roll out to children aged 6-15 and increasing the level of the SCP, could have a significant impact on levels of food bank use and destitution in Scotland.

The temporary increase in funds made available to the SWF during the Covid-19 pandemic, which offers support to people facing crisis, are also worthy of note when considering factors that may have prevented additional need for food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Scotland. Local authorities in 2020/21 were allocated £57.5 million for SWF awards, an increase of £24.5 million from 2019/20.³⁸ In 2021/22 the allocation has returned to a similar level as 2019/20 (£35 million).³⁹

However, data from partners and collected by the Scottish Government indicates that overall levels of need in Scotland remain high, and our data should not be taken to indicate that rates of destitution have declined or remained stable during this period. Indeed, the Scottish Government's impact assessment suggests that⁴⁰:

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.

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.⁴¹ This could have

³⁵ Scottish Child Payment (2021), *The Scottish Parliament*, <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2021/7/13/c9019cbc-3242-4f2c-9d37-fa7cb34f1376>

³⁶ State of Hunger (2021), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/state-of-hunger/>

³⁷ IBID.

³⁸ Scottish Welfare Fund Statistics: Annual Update 2020/21 (2021), *Social Security Directorate (Scottish Government)*, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund-statistics-annual-update-2020-2021/>

³⁹ Scottish Welfare Fund Statistics: Update to 30 June 2021 (2021), *Social Security Directorate (Scottish Government)*, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund-statistics-update-to-30-june-2021/>

⁴⁰ Equality and Fairer Scotland Impact Assessment: Evidence gathered for Scotland's Route Map through and out of the Crisis, (2020), *Fair Work, Employability and Skills Directorate (Scottish Government)* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equality-fairer-scotland-impact-assessment-evidence-gathered-scotlands-route-map-through-out-crisis/pages/4/>

⁴¹ This commissioned (unpublished) 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.

included new emergency food providers set up through the increase in funding through initiatives such as the Scottish Government Food Fund.⁴² 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 outbreak⁴³.

There is significant regional variation in the experiences of food banks in the Trussell Trust network in 2021

Variation in the change in the rate of support given out by food banks in the Trussell Trust network is also seen at a local authority level across the UK. Between 1st April – 30th September 2021, there were food bank centres in the Trussell Trust network based in 292 local authority areas across the UK.⁴⁴

The majority (80%) of local authorities which had a food bank from the Trussell Trust network in both 2020 and 2021 experienced a decrease in the number of parcels distributed between April – September 2021 compared to the same period in 2020. Showing the large variation at this more local level just over one in six (16%) local authorities saw a doubling in the level of support given out by food banks in the Trussell Trust network when compared to 2020.

When looking back to 2019 just over half (53%) of local authorities saw an increase in the number of food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network. Almost one in three (31%) saw a doubling or over in the amount of support given to people in crisis. A significant minority (47%) of local authorities saw decreases in comparison to this period.

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.⁴⁵ In some cases food banks have also left the Trussell Trust network at some point in 2021.⁴⁶ At this more local level expanding or contracting opening hours, or opening or closing distribution centres could increase the overall levels of parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust in that area.

⁴³ Data collected by IFAN in September 2020 so the number of independent food banks in the area likely to have changed.

⁴⁴ Of those, 290 also had food bank centres in those areas in the same period in 2020 and 285 also had food bank centres in the same period in 2019.

⁴⁵ Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford.

⁴⁶ State of Hunger (2021), *Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/05/State-of-Hunger-2021-Report-Final.pdf>

Changes to employment and levels of need 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 the 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 when compared to 2019. As such, reductions in use in food banks in the Trussell Trust network should not be interpreted as a decrease in need.⁴⁷

Table 1.4. One in six local authority areas saw a doubling in the number of food parcels distributed April –September 2020 vs. April – September 2021

Banded change in number of emergency food parcels distributed within local authority	% of local authority areas in 2020	% of local authority areas in 2019
100% and above	16%	31%
50% – 99%	2%	11%
0%-49%	2%	12%
Decrease	80%	47%

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 but must be looked at with an awareness that these statistics form only part of the picture of need.

Since the pandemic, it has become even more important to understand what factors could be driving changes to the level of use of food banks in the Trussell Trust network at a local and national level. In particular it is crucial to continue to acknowledge the role of alternative emergency food providers that sit outside of the Trussell Trust network, in order to fully understand the scale of destitution and subsequent need for support from food banks or other forms of emergency food provision. Therefore, any relative increases or decreases seen within the network may not accurately reflect the overall scale of 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 YouGov on behalf of the Trussell Trust suggests that the population of people provided with food parcels during this period in 2021 has been wider than just people supported by food banks in the Trussell Trust network. Figures presented in Table 1.3. show 4% of the adult population age 16+ in the UK were supported by a food bank or a similar service in the 30 days to mid-August 2021. This is the equivalent of over 2 million people and does not include the support that would have been provided to children.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ IBID.

⁴⁸ Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (2020), ONS,

Operational differences

This 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 this period in 2021.

During the initial phases of the pandemic in 2020, food banks in the Trussell Trust network across the UK faced significant challenges in continuing to operate according to their pre-pandemic service delivery models. Some of these changes may have been maintained into 2021, while others may have had to respond again to new challenges this year.

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.⁴⁹ Some food banks have also had to adapt to operating with fewer volunteers, for example if volunteers have been required to self-isolate.

Food banks faced challenges staying open and operating as usual

In the initial phases of the pandemic food banks across the UK 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. Operational challenges and subsequent changes to working practices impacted differently on food banks across the UK, meaning some saw a surge in use and others reduced levels. For some food banks these changes have been carried over from 2020 to 2021 which will impact on the long term trends of need in their local areas.

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

“Having to close down a centre that we had open in the mornings on Thursdays [reduced the support we provided]. It meant that our location is very central, which is good, but people on the outskirts of xxx are finding it harder to access our services. However, we are attempting to reopen this centre as well as another one on Tuesday mornings within the next few months” Food bank manager

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.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland>

⁴⁹ Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford.

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 of 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 10% of households who received a parcel between April and September 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.

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 the total number of parcels distributed in the UK has decreased by 26% from the same period in 2020, the change in the weight of food distributed is smaller at 18%. Looking further back to 2019, the percentage increase in weight of food distributed (33%) is far higher than the overall increase in the number of parcels distributed (11%) when comparing to the same period in 2021. Changes to the size of parcels that food banks distribute may play a part in different trends seen at a local level when comparing to 2019.

Table 1.5. Comparing changes to parcel numbers to changes to total weight of food distributed.

Comparison to mid-year period of 2021	% increase in the number of food parcels distributed	% increase in the total weight of food distributed
From 2019	11%	33%
From 2020	-26%	-18%

Food banks operate in a variety of local, regional and national contexts which impact on levels of need

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.

In order to understand levels of food insecurity across the UK, it is important to recognise that, while programmes and funding schemes to support with the Covid-19 crisis have been announced by the governments of the UK, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, these schemes have been delivered on the ground by local governments, schools and local charities. This means that the use of funds and responses vary across local areas.⁵⁰

Local community food provision

One of the most significant factors that can drive differences seen in both local area need for food banks in the Trussell Trust network but also the national differences may be the huge increase in alternative emergency food provision that has occurred since the start of the pandemic. Research indicates that the response to food insecurity during the crisis has been of a historic scale and complexity across the UK.⁵¹ Additional support has come from all sectors (public, private and voluntary) and at all levels (local, national and UK).⁵²

“There have been local community food banks in at least 3 villages in our area and we believe this has led to a decrease in the number of people referred to us.” Food bank manager

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-19.⁵³ 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 2021 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.⁵⁴

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. This was reflected in our survey of food bank managers in the Trussell Trust network, with 50% of respondents saying that changes to the number of alternative food providers in their local area had reduced the number people being referred to the

⁵⁰ 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/2021/03/Food-Vulnerability-During-the-COVID-19-Crisis-first-project-report.pdf>

⁵¹ Monitoring responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK (2021), *Lambie-Mumford et al*, <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>

⁵² 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>

⁵³ 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.faihandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/APPG_CovidReport_Full_V4.pdf

⁵⁴ 1,097 UK Primary and Secondary teachers aged 18+ were interviewed online by YouGov on behalf of Kellogg’s, 8th – 17th February 2021.

food bank since March 2020 (Graph 1.2).

Example: In one case study area (a London borough) that saw a decrease in Trussell Trust food bank use over April to September 2020, 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 2020. 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).⁵⁵

The picture presented from these different sources suggests that overall food banks in the Trussell Trust network are likely to have seen fewer people coming through the doors because of the growth of alternative food provision across the country. The local government and local community response will have had different impacts in different areas, further driving differences in reported use across the network.

Central and local government food provision

Much of the additional food provision and distribution provided since the beginning of the pandemic has been organised or managed by different levels of government.

During the pandemic many local authorities took on the role of providing food parcels to both people that were in economic need and people who were asked to shield as a result of the pandemic⁵⁶. Some have continued to do so going into this year. This support can be as a result of additional central government funding. In Wales, for instance, the Welsh Government have invested considerably in distributing food via local authorities⁵⁷ and some of that funding has been used to purchase food⁵⁸. Local authorities distributing food themselves to people shielding was seen to have

⁵⁵ This commissioned (unpublished) 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.

⁵⁶ For a summary of key interventions put in place by each devolved administration to provide food parcels to people who were shielding see 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/2021/03/Food-Vulnerability-During-the-COVID-19-Crisis-first-project-report.pdf>

⁵⁷ In 2019/20 the Welsh Government distributed £1.25m through local authorities to tackle food poverty & insecurity. Funding was made on a ‘carry forward’ basis which enabled schemes to be developed in 2020 and delivered from April 2021.

⁵⁸ Similar practices have happened in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

For practices in Scotland see Local action to tackle food insecurity: summary of activities, trends and learning (2021), Housing and Social Justice Directorate (Scottish Government), <https://www.gov.scot/publications/local->

led to a decrease in referrals since March 2020 by 42% of respondents to our food bank managers survey (Graph 1.2).

Beyond providing support for people who were shielding, many councils have often also been involved in the co-ordination of emergency food provision for people 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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰

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.⁶¹

Policy differences

Beyond food provision, 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 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.⁶² 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 extended, made more generous, and/or more accessible, 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 that was given a £11m boost in May 2020. One aspect of the DAF is an Emergency Assistance Scheme, which provides cash support to people who are unable to cover essential costs such as

[action-to-tackle-food-insecurity-summary-of-activities-trends-and-learning/pages/activities-delivered/](#).

For practices in Northern Ireland see Second Report – Overview of the Northern Ireland Executive’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic (2021), *Northern Ireland Audit Office*,

<https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/publications/overview-northern-ireland-executives-response-covid-19-pandemic-second-report>

⁵⁹ Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. *Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford*.

⁶⁰ 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.

⁶¹ *IBID*.

⁶² Local Lifelines (2020), *The Trussell Trust*, https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/10/LWAS_1020_v3.pdf

food. Between 1 May 2020 and March 2022, 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.

Investment in local welfare assistance in England, via the Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies, the Covid Winter Grant Scheme and the Covid Local Support Grant, provided £433 million to local authorities to scale up their local welfare support offer. The most recent scheme, the Covid Local Support Grant, ran 21 June – 30 September 2021 and gave out £160 million (of the £433 million) to local authorities during this period. These grants helped councils in England to expand their capacity to provide support to people in financial crisis. However, the time-limited nature of these grants has meant that it has not been possible for all local authorities to deliver this additional support within existing infrastructures. It is also not a statutory obligation for local authorities to provide a local welfare assistance scheme in England, further highlighting the varying levels of crisis support offered that can impact on the need seen by food banks in the Trussell Trust network.

Local authorities in Scotland were provided with a number of flexible funding streams during 2020 - 2021 to tackle financial insecurity and support people to access food and other essentials, including £30 million to tackle food insecurity, £40 million to tackle financial insecurity, £57.5 million invested in the Scottish Welfare Fund and Self-Isolation Support Grants, over £56 million to provide free school meal alternatives during school holidays and remote learning, £30.8 million for Pandemic Support Payments, and £50.3 million for shielding grocery parcels. Over £80 million was also invested in community and third sector organisations to support a range of food-based activity alongside wider wellbeing action.⁶³

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.⁶⁴ 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. Indeed, 42% of food bank managers responding to our survey said that changes to their local authority's crisis support offer, including because of funding from the COVID Local Support grant led to a decrease in referrals (Graph 1.2).

Certain aspects of the design of the benefit system that put people at greater risk of needing support from a food bank are also mitigated in different parts of the UK. In Northern Ireland the welfare mitigation scheme 'tops-up' the financial loss due to some policies such as the benefit cap and the bedroom tax.^{65,66}

⁶³ Local action to tackle food insecurity: summary of activities, trends and learning (2021), *Housing and Social Justice Directorate (Scottish Government)*, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-action-to-tackle-food-insecurity-summary-of-activities-trends-and-learning/>

⁶⁴ Monitoring responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK (2021), *Lambie-Mumford et al*, <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>

⁶⁵ Cliff Edge NI Coalition's Submission to the Joint inquiry into Welfare policy in Northern Ireland (2020), *Cliff Edge Coalition NI*, <https://www.housingrights.org.uk/news/cliff-edge-coalition-updated-briefing>

⁶⁶ On 15 November 2021 Stormont ministers agreed to extend the welfare mitigations for 3 years to 31 March

National and regional variation in the economic impact of the crisis

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. These differences can drive significant variation in impact and recovery from the economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

For example, experimental DWP data shows regional variation in the alternative Claimant Count, and the extent to which the alternative Claimant Count has changed since August 2020.⁶⁷ The table below indicates that London has seen the smallest decrease in claims from August 2020 to August 2021, with the South West the largest.⁶⁸

Table 1.6. The rates of changing in the number of people receiving unemployment benefits vary across the UK

Region	Alternative Claimant count: August 2020	Alternative Claimant count: August 2021	Percentage increase, Feb 2020 – Feb 2021
UK	2,624,992	2,035,404	-22%
England	2,230,268	1,750,302	-22%
Northern Ireland	62,802	48,101	-23%
Scotland	211,092	151,328	-28%
Wales	117,964	83,176	-29%
East Midlands	165,317	123,866	-25%
East of England	207,286	155,188	-25%
London	465,119	401,180	-14%
North East	120,416	90,684	-25%
North West	316,697	249,156	-21%
South East	292,101	218,391	-25%
South West	174,795	118,440	-32%
West Midlands	265,615	216,959	-18%
Yorkshire & The Humber	222,922	176,438	-21%

Food banks in areas which have experienced larger decreases in the rate of unemployment may have seen lower 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

2025 with a statutory obligation to review the measures ahead of that point in the 2024/25 financial year.

⁶⁷ 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.

⁶⁸ 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>

experienced in the wholesale and retail sector.⁶⁹ Both the accommodation and food services, and retail sectors are concentrated in urban areas, and in city centres in particular.

Demographic factors may also in part define the economic recovery in local areas. The Resolution Foundation notes that young people have been more likely to experience negative employment consequences during the pandemic than other working-age people, and have lost working hours, experienced lower pay, been put on furlough and lost jobs at higher rates.⁷⁰ Workers under 25 have accounted for nearly two-thirds (437,000) of the total fall in payrolled employment.⁷¹

Looking ahead

“We believe we will see an increase in the need of the foodbank once the furlough scheme ends and if the UC uplift is removed. Oct-Dec are already our busiest months due to winter fuel costs increasing and with Christmas on the horizon.” Food bank manager

As we approach winter this year food banks in our network are braced for significant increases in need. While the Trussell Trust has welcomed the recently announced reduction in the taper rate to Universal Credit which means some families can keep more of their earnings, this cannot make up for the £20 a week cut to Universal Credit. In addition, the reduction in the taper rate will have no benefit to people who are between jobs, who cannot work more hours, or cannot work at all, which are life circumstances that we know can lead to food bank need.⁷² These challenges are also likely to be compounded as benefits (e.g. the Local Housing Allowance rates) are not keeping up with the rate of inflation, which is predicted to rise above 4% in the coming months. We are also yet to see the impact of rising living costs this winter and the effects of the closure of the Job Retention Scheme (furlough) and Self-Employment Income Support Scheme on 30 September 2021.

In our survey of food bank managers in the Trussell Trust network, we asked them to tell us, what factor, if any, they thought would have the biggest impact on the number of people referred to the food bank they run in the next six months.

£20 per week cut to Universal Credit

“We anticipate that the loss of the UC uplift will cause a sharp spike in demand from October onwards.” Food bank manager

The most common response from food bank managers was the impending £20 per week cut to Universal Credit, with 68% of respondents stating this would have the biggest impact on increasing the number of people referred to the food bank they run. Many respondents commented on how the uplift had allowed many families to “just about manage”, with the removal of £20 per week to

⁶⁹ Labour market overview, UK: March 2021, (2021), ONS, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/march2021#labour-market-data>

⁷⁰ 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>

⁷¹ Labour market overview, UK: March 2021, (2021), ONS, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/march2021#labour-market-data>

⁷² State of Hunger (2019), The Trussell Trust, <https://www.stateofhunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/State-of-Hunger-Report-November2019-Digital.pdf>

already tight budgets likely to push families into crisis. Food bank managers also reflected on the increase in the number of people claiming UC for the first time since the start of the pandemic who have only known the income they receive from UC to include this amount.

“We have a number of clients who have only begun claiming UC as a result of the pandemic and so have never known the benefit without the additional weekly £20 and so this could have a large impact on people's ability to manage month to month.” Food bank manager

Many organisations, including the Trussell Trust, have warned about the impact of the cut going ahead and the effect this may have on pushing people into destitution.⁷³

Increase in the cost of living

While the cut to the £20 uplift and end to the JRS and SEISS were prevalent in responses, it was noted by food bank managers that these policy changes will be compounded for families as the cost of living and fuel prices are on the rise as we enter the more expensive winter period. This was seen by 8% of food bank managers as likely to increase the number of referrals to the food bank they run in the coming months.⁷⁴

The Bank of England has predicted that inflation will rise above 4% in the coming months.⁷⁵ The rise in wholesale gas prices has also led to an increase in the energy price cap to £139 per year, which could translate to an additional £11.60 per month added to energy bills.⁷⁶

These increases to the cost of living do not correspond with the forecasted growth in average weekly earnings, which are set to increase by 2.25%.⁷⁷ This is also coming at a time in which families claiming UC have just had their incomes cut by the removal of the £20 per week uplift. For the average person on UC, the cut represents a loss of 13% of income, and for some families the figure will be as high as 21%.⁷⁸

⁷³ For example see Dignity or Destitution? The case for keeping the Universal Credit lifeline, *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/dignity-or-destitution-UC-standard-allowance-report-final.pdf>; Coalition warns it would be a terrible mistake to cut the £20 uplift to Universal Credit, (2020), *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/coalition-warns-it-would-be-terrible-mistake-cut-20-uplift-universal-credit>; Life on less than zero, (2020), *Citizens Advice*, <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/our-work/policy/policy-research-topics/debt-and-money-policy-research/life-on-less-than-zero/>.

⁷⁴ This survey was conducted before the recent impact of fuel costs were realised so may under-count the impact of these rising living costs.

⁷⁵ Monetary Policy Summary and minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee meeting (September 2021), *Bank of England*, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy-summary-and-minutes/2021/september-2021>

⁷⁶ Record gas prices drive up price cap by £139 (August 2021), *Ofgem*, <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications/record-gas-prices-drive-price-cap-ps139-customers-encouraged-contact-supplier-support-and-switch-better-deal-if-possible>

⁷⁷ The big squeeze: Assessing the changes to family incomes over the next six months (2021), *Resolution Foundation*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/the-big-squeeze/>

⁷⁸ Dignity or Destitution? The case for keeping the Universal Credit lifeline (2021), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/dignity-or-destitution-UC-standard-allowance-report-final.pdf>

Closure of JRS and SEISS

“The factor which I believe will have the biggest impact on our foodbank in the next 6 months is the end of the furlough scheme. We are based in an affluent area with high employment, high mortgage and rent bills and expensive food shops. I think that people will lose their income and may slide into crisis and ask for food parcels.” Food bank manager

The Job Retention Scheme (furlough) and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, that were put in place to protect the incomes of millions during the pandemic, closed on 30 September 2021. The closure of these schemes, and potential job losses/reduction in hours/loss of income as a result of this, was referred to by 44% of food bank managers as likely to have an impact on the increase in referrals to the food bank they run in the next 6 months.

Modelling carried out by the New Economics Foundation at the end of September 2021 estimated that 710,000 jobs would be at risk of redundancy, loss of hours or loss of pay after the closure of the scheme.⁷⁹ Evidence is beginning to emerge about the impact the closure of the JRS has had on the UK labour market. The Resolution Foundation’s survey on post-furlough labour market outcomes does not show a large increase in unemployment, with the rate of unemployment among working-age adults only 0.5 percentage points higher in October 2021 than August 2021⁸⁰. However, this research shows that the end of the JRS is clearly impacting on some people, with furloughed workers being six times more likely to be out of work than regular employed workers.⁸¹ It is too soon to comment on how the closure of the JRS will impact in the longer-term on unemployment levels and losses to hours or pay for people who have relied on the furlough scheme. It is also too early to see how the closure of the JRS and SEISS has impacted on the number of people claiming UC and we are yet to see the impact this will have on the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network. If current projections come to fruition, the impact on people with low incomes, without the safety-net of savings, is likely to lead to an increase in people claiming social security benefits. Given the known association between social security benefits and food insecurity, this could leave even more people at risk of destitution and subsequent need for food banks.

This combination of the removal of the £20 uplift, the end of the JRS and SEISS, and the increase in living costs are likely to mean that the coming winter months will be very tough for low-income households. The impact this will have on the use of food banks in the Trussell Trust network is yet to be seen.

⁷⁹ Over 700,000 jobs at risk as furlough scheme ends next week (2021), *New Economics Foundation*, <https://neweconomics.org/2021/09/over-700-000-jobs-at-risk-as-furlough-scheme-ends-next-week>

⁸⁰ Post-furlough blues: What happened to furloughed workers after the end of the Job Retention Scheme? (2021), *Resolution Foundation*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/post-furlough-blues/>

⁸¹ IBID.

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.⁸²

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.

These mid-year statistics cover the period 1 April– 30 September 2021 (inclusive) and compares to the same period in 2020, 2019 and 2016. Data was collected up until 5pm 20 October 2021 and comes from the 1,468 distribution centres across the UK which provided emergency food parcels as part of the Trussell Trust network, in this period in 2021. In 2020, 1,415 distribution centres supported people with emergency food parcels at some point between 1 April – 30 September. 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 2020, 2019 and 2016, 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

⁸² 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), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf>

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 people in acute need. Where these parcels 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 10% of households who received a parcel between April - September 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 11% increase that is reported since 2019 does not fully reflect the additional support that has been provided, with a 33% 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.