

Trussell Trust data briefing on end-of-year statistics relating to use of food banks: April 2021 – March 2022



Executive Summary

Background

This data briefing reports on the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 inclusive, with a discussion about what has driven people to require support during this period. Comparative data for the same period in the years 2015-2021 has also been analysed for context.

Alongside this data briefing, we have a [short report](#) highlighting the people behind the statistics, who have experienced the often impossible circumstances discussed in this briefing.

Summary

1. Overall, food banks in the Trussell Trust network have faced almost unprecedented levels of need this winter

In our [mid-year statistics briefing](#), which reported on the first six months of the financial year (April-September 2021), we voiced concerns about a likely increase in need for support from food banks in the next six months. Our data now clearly shows that **most of these concerns have been realised** and we have seen an **overall acceleration of need for emergency food parcels** at food banks within the Trussell Trust network since October 2021:

- For the first time outside of the Covid-19 pandemic year (2020/21) food banks in the Trussell Trust network have distributed **over 2.1 million food parcels in 2021/22**. This represents an **81% increase from the same period five years ago** and a **14% increase from 2019-20**.
- Food banks in the Trussell Trust network, overall, have experienced an acceleration of need since October 2021. There was a **17% increase** in the number of parcels distributed in **October-December 2021** compared to the same period in 2019, and a **22% increase** from **January-February 2022** compared to the same period in 2020.¹

These increases have coincided with the **removal of the £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit** (UC), that came into force in October 2021. This reduced the annual income of millions of people by £1,040², **further weakening a social security system that was already increasingly threadbare**. UK government policies such as below-inflation increases in benefit payments, and a complete freeze on working age benefits in 2016 have consistently reduced the support our social security system provides.

These increases also **reflect the erosion of households' financial resilience** because of the **economic crisis and societal disruption caused by the pandemic**. This includes the impact of redundancies,

¹ Comparisons to March 2020 are not included as this month saw an unprecedented spike in need during the initial stages of the Covid-19 pandemic.

² UK heading for the biggest overnight cut to the basic rate of social security since World War II (2021), *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/uk-heading-biggest-overnight-cut-basic-rate-social-security-world-war-ii>

reduction to incomes, and the income shocks of moving from employment to social security that many households have experienced. **The increase in people claiming UC**, seen at the start of the pandemic, has been sustained in this period.³ The known link between issues with the benefit system and food bank use means that this has **increased the population at risk of needing to turn to food banks** to get by.

These shifts, alongside the gradual weakening of the social security system, have left **more people exposed to the impact of the current cost of living crisis**. We know that food banks are **running out of tools to prevent people from needing long-term support from a food bank** in the face of increasing costs and inadequate benefit levels.

2. The picture of need is mixed across the UK

While there has been an overall acceleration in need seen at food banks in the Trussell Trust network, this has not been the case in all areas. It is important to acknowledge that there is **significant variation across local authorities, and the nations and regions of the UK** in the recorded change in the number of parcels distributed in 2021/22.

For example, there have been recorded decreases in the number of parcels distributed in Scotland (-17%) and Wales (-4%) when compared to the same period in 2019/20, however, need in these areas remains concerningly high – with almost 200,000 parcels distributed last year in Scotland alone. **Lower percentage increases or decreases should not necessarily be interpreted as demonstrating lower levels of need** in these areas as data from food banks in the Trussell Trust network forms only part of the picture of need.

There are **many factors that affect the mixed picture of need seen across the UK**, including operational differences in the way food banks are run, the availability of alternative emergency food provision, policy differences and the differential sustained economic impact of the pandemic.

3. There are strong warning signs that the effects of persistent low income and lack of UK Government action will increase levels of need in the coming months

The number of people unable to afford the essentials is likely to **increase** as inflation and energy prices continue to rise and **benefits are not brought in line with these increases in costs**. The UK government's decision to not bring benefit payments in line with the true cost of living, as announced in the Spring Statement on 23 March, will lead to a **£11 billion real terms cut in benefits in 2022/23**.⁴ The return to pre-pandemic policies and practices within the social security system, such as the return of benefit sanctions, are also likely to be compounding the effects of low benefit levels and rapidly increasing prices.

The financial picture ahead for people across the UK is an uncertain one. Without further government action at all levels, there is a **very real risk that the cost of living crisis will turn into an emergency for families** that simply do not have enough to continue to afford the essentials.

The perfect storm of increased prices and even further reduction in benefits has meant that *'food banks are expecting a tsunami of need in the next few months'*⁵. **Low income households face being**

³ The number of people supported through social security, a key indicator of underlying need, doubled from 3 million in March 2020 to more than 6 million in March 2021 with this high level sustained this year, standing at 5.6 million in March 2022. People on Universal Credit (2022), DWP, Stat-Xplore.

⁴ Inflation Nation: Putting Spring Statement 2022 in context (2022), Resolution Foundation, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2022/03/Inflation-nation.pdf>

⁵ Quote from Area Manager, Trussell Trust.

pushed into desperate territory, cutting back on multiple essentials at once, with serious risks to mental and physical health.

Food bank staff and volunteers have been at the forefront of the economic and social crisis over the past couple of years and are exhausted. **Food banks are neither the right, nor sustainable, response to people going without the essentials due to extremely low incomes.** While food banks continue to do everything they can to support people in their communities, no charity can replace the dignity of being able to buy your own food.

Introduction

Destitution, which means that people cannot afford to buy the absolute essentials that we all need to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean⁶, drives the need for food banks in the UK. The social security system is often the only source of income for people who are unable to work or face additional barriers to finding or sustaining 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 the first Universal Credit (UC) payment. We know that low benefit income and other issues with the social security system are the most immediate drivers of need for food banks in the UK.⁷

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.⁸

Against this backdrop, our latest annual statistics illustrate how these patterns have played out across the UK over the last year, 2021-22.

As noted in our mid-year statistics briefing on the first six months of 2021-22⁹, the first half of the year was characterised by a period of relative stability in contrast to the economic upheaval and uncertainty of the same period in 2020-21, which coincided with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The substantial policy interventions put in place in response to the pandemic were still in place during the first half of this period, and likely played a significant role in preventing larger increases in need for food banks in the Trussell Trust network.

However, our mid-year statistics for 2021-22 still pointed towards an upward trend in food bank need and, on publication, we warned about the existing fragility of people's finances, eroded away by the collective impact of the economic crisis and societal disruption caused by the pandemic.

The second six months of 2021-22 have seen the cost of living crisis emerge and grow in intensity, as food and energy prices have soared, alongside other basic costs such as rent and fuel. During this period, in addition to the very real threat the cost of living crisis has posed to people already struggling to afford the essentials, the inadequacy of the social security system has been further laid bare. In October 2021, we saw £20 a week cut from the budget of household's claiming UC, which significantly reduced the incomes of millions of people. This policy decision brought benefits down to their lowest real-term level in 30 years and added fuel to the fire for the millions of people claiming UC, many of whom already faced benefit reductions from deductions to repay debt and benefit sanctions (the delivery of which also gained pace during this period).¹⁰

⁶ Destitution in the UK (2021), *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>

⁷ 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>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Trussell Trust data briefing on mid-year statistics relating to use of food banks: April 2021- September 2021 (2021), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/11/Trussell-Trust-Mid-Year-stats-data-briefing-April-to-September-2021-1.pdf>

¹⁰ The implementation of benefit sanctions, which were suspended between 31 March 2020 and 30 June 2020, picked up pace from July 2021 onwards. The latest statistics show that, in November 2021, a record number of people receiving UC were sanctioned (49,994). Benefit sanctions statistics to October 2021 (experimental)

The year ahead poses many challenges that are likely to lead to increased levels of destitution and food bank need. The decision to not bring benefit payments in line with the true cost of living, as announced by the Chancellor in the Spring Statement on 23 March 2022, will lead to a £11 billion real terms cut in the value of benefits in 2022-23. This further devaluing of benefits comes at a time when inflation is set to be at least 7% for the rest of the year, with a further rise in the energy price cap due in October 2022. The substantial reduction in the value of benefits, coupled with significant rising costs, is likely to push households into desperate territory, cutting back on multiple essentials at once, with serious risks to mental and physical health. The economic picture ahead is an uncertain one, and without further government action at all levels, there is a very real risk that the cost of living crisis will turn into an emergency for families that simply do not have enough money to afford the essentials.

The following data briefing covers data from food banks in the Trussell Trust network for 2021-22, providing explanations around the data, and an exploration of the geographic variations in the number of parcels distributed across the network. This briefing will also look ahead to what we expect to see in the coming months and year, setting the scene ahead of the biggest squeeze in living standards in a generation.

Headline findings

This new data collected by food banks in the Trussell Trust network covers the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 inclusive. Comparative data for the same period in the years 2015 – 2021 has also been analysed to contextualise these results.

Discussion in this briefing also includes an exploration of themes that came out of semi-structured interviews with 11 Area Managers who work for the Trussell Trust and support food banks within the network across the different nations and regions.¹¹ These interviews were conducted in March 2022.

The headlines here relate to UK-wide data, please see the '[National and regional differences](#)' section for a discussion on national and regional variations in the distribution of food parcels.

- For the first time outside of 2020-21, the first year of the pandemic, food banks in the Trussell Trust network have distributed over 2.1 million food parcels in 2021-22.
- Long term levels of need remain on an upward trend: in comparison to 2019-20, there has been a 14% increase in the parcels distributed in 2021-22, and an 81% increase compared to 2016-17.
- Two in five (38%) food parcels were distributed to children 2021-22, despite people aged 0-16 making up just 20% of the UK population.¹²

(2022), *Department for Work and Pensions*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/benefit-sanctions-statistics-to-october-2021-experimental>. We know from our own research that benefit sanctions are linked to food bank need. See *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>, P.86.

¹¹ Area Managers are employed by the Trussell Trust to provide support and services to food banks in the Trussell Trust network. Area Managers operate within each region and nation of the UK and are a first point of contact for food banks within the network, dealing with a range of tasks including providing advice and support through new initiatives and partnerships, training, and encouraging robust governance practices.

¹² Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland(2020), *Office for National Statistics*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/data-sets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland>

- Latest data suggests that there has been an overall acceleration of need at food banks in the Trussell Trust network in the second half of the year that has coincided with the cost of living crisis and follows the end of the uplift to Universal Credit in October 2021.
- From November 2021, after the UC cut started to be felt, we have seen persistently high rates of increase compared with the same months in 2019-20, well beyond the usual busy Christmas period. November 2021 saw a 21% increase in comparison to the same month in 2019, and December was one of the busiest ever months for food banks in the Trussell Trust network, seeing a 20% increase in comparison to 2019 (Table 1.4).
- Increases in January and February 2022 have followed a similar trend, with January seeing a 18% increase and February a 25% increase in comparison to the same months in 2019.

Comparison with pre-pandemic levels (2019-20)

The number of food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network remains significantly higher in comparison to 2019-20, before the pandemic. Since 2019-20, there has been a 14% increase in the number of parcels distributed. For the first time outside of 2020-21, the first year of the pandemic, food banks in the Trussell Trust network have distributed over 2.1 million food parcels.

Table 1.1 Increase in number of food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network 2019-2022

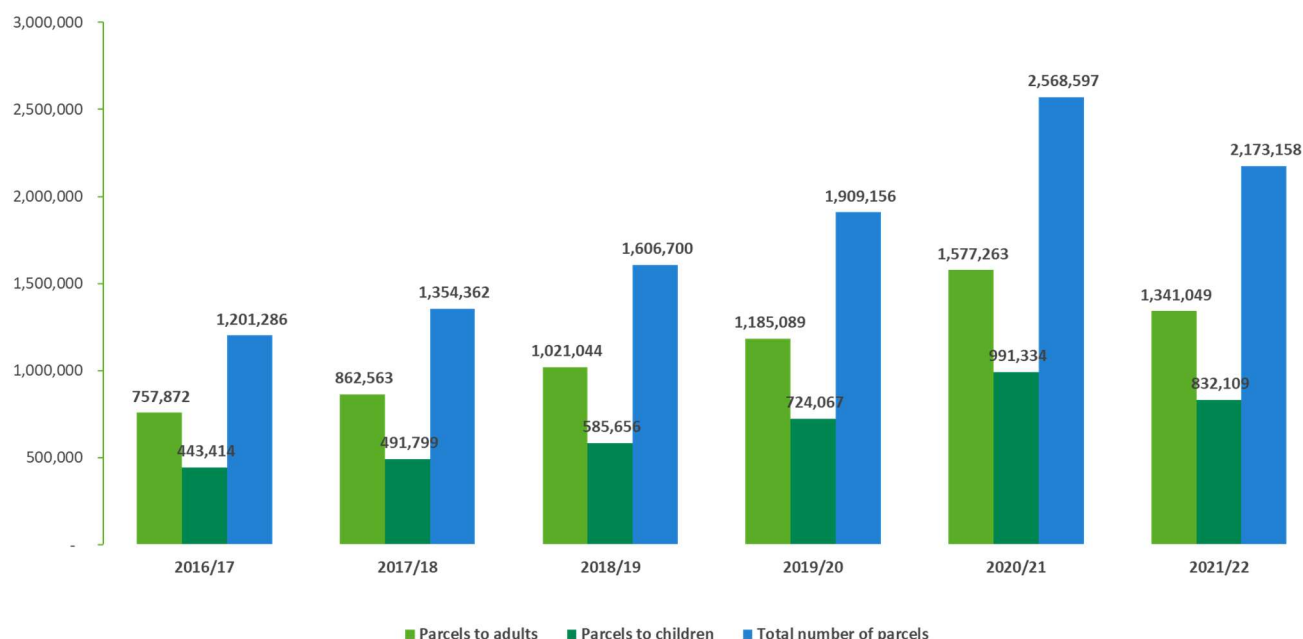
	April 2019 – March 2020	April 2021 – March 2022	% Change from 2019/20
Number of emergency food parcels distributed to adults	1,185,089	1,341,049	13%
Number of emergency food parcels distributed to children	724,067	832,109	15%
Total	1,909,156	2,173,158	14%

The 14% increase seen in 2021-22, in comparison to the same period in 2019-20, 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. Indeed, the number of parcels distributed in 2021-22 represents an 81% increase from the same period five years ago.

The figures also 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 2021-22, despite people aged 0-16 making up just 20% of the UK population.¹³

¹³ Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (2020), *Office for National Statistics*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/data/sets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland>

Graph 1.1: Number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network - Long-term levels of need remain on an upward trend



These increases build on years of successive increases, with 2020-21 being a clear outlier driven by the economic and social upheaval caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The year 2020-21 saw a 47% increase in the number of parcels distributed, compared to the same period in 2019-20. Although the level of support distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network has fallen in 2021-22 in comparison to 2020-21, 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.¹⁴

Levels of need for food banks in the Trussell Trust network were rising steadily in the years before the pandemic (see Graph 1.1). We know that the majority (95%) of people that need support from food banks in the Trussell Trust network are destitute, and this long-term upward trend in need can be understood within the context of the steady rise in destitution levels in the UK. The most recent data from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) shows that, even before the pandemic, destitution was rapidly growing in scale in the UK. More than a million households experienced destitution at some point in 2019, which is a 35% increase since 2017, with modelling suggesting further increases during the pandemic. These households contained 2.4 million people, including 550,000 children.¹⁵

On top of this pattern of increasing need over time, more recently Area Managers from the Trussell Trust have expressed concerns that the food banks they support are seeing increasing numbers of people accessing emergency food because of persistent need, rather than as a result of a temporary crisis. They also reported that food banks are seeing people needing to access emergency food parcels more than once more frequently, and food banks supporting people who have never needed to use a food bank before. These concerns are explored in more detail later in this briefing.

“Lots of food banks are talking about the chronic need, so we’ve got people who have had their income maximised in terms of benefits, working as much as they can for those that are

¹⁴ 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>

¹⁵ UK Poverty 2022 (2022), *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2022>

working, but it's just not enough... [there is just] really limited stuff that the food bank can do to change that situation...there's a frustration for them that they are not able to easily move people out of that situation with advice and signposting."- Area Manager, the Trussell Trust

"A lot [of food banks] have seen a lot of first-time users, so people that are experiencing poverty for the first time and I guess along with that comes an inability to navigate the benefits system" – Area Manager, the Trussell Trust

Comparison with the first year of the pandemic (2020-21)

There has been a 15% decrease in the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network, in comparison to the first year of the pandemic 2020-2021. This next section will look at the factors that may have driven this decrease, reflecting both on why there was an unprecedented spike in food bank need in 2020-21 and exploring some of the protective factors put in place in response to Covid-19 that may have continued to have a positive impact in 2021-2022. It will then move on to looking at the long term of impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and how this has impacted on the financial resilience of households and communities.

Table 1.2 There has been a decrease in the number of emergency food parcels distributed in the Trussell Trust network since 2020-21

	April 2020 – March 2021	April 2021 – March 2022	% Change from 2019/20
Number of emergency food parcels distributed to adults	1,577,263	1,341,049	-15%
Number of emergency food parcels distributed to children	991,334	832,109	-16%
Total	2,568,597	2,173,158	-15%

Immediate impact of the pandemic and gaps in UK Government interventions

The first six months of 2020-21 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.¹⁶ People with zero-hour contracts were more likely to face the most immediate consequences, with cancelled shifts meaning an instant loss of income, and no protection from the impact of redundancy or lost hours.¹⁷

The UK government introduced a raft of interventions at the outset of the national lockdown in March 2020 to support the incomes of millions, including the Job Retention Scheme (JRS) and the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS). In addition, the levels of support provided by the social security system were also increased. The UC Standard Allowance and Working Tax Credit, and

¹⁶ Covid-19: the impact of the pandemic on inequality, (2020), *Institute for Fiscal Studies*, <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/14879>

¹⁷ Covid 19 and Insecure Work (2021), *TUC*, <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/covid-19-and-insecure-work>

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.¹⁸

However, despite these measures, 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.¹⁹ In addition, the Job Retention Scheme 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. The UK redundancy rate increased significantly during the first six months of 2020-21, reaching a peak of 14.4 per thousand employees Sep-Nov 2020, which is likely to have contributed to the spike in need for food banks seen during this period.

Further, there were families living on a low income that fell between the gaps of the interventions put in place by the UK government. For example, people and households with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) were particularly exposed to income shocks caused by the pandemic because of reliance on 'flexible' and informal forms of employment that were not protected by the furlough scheme. Larger families who may not have felt the benefit of the £20 uplift as significantly as the uplift was not proportionate to family size. The decision to only uplift UC and Working Tax Credit and not other legacy benefits also meant that people claiming these benefits, a large majority of whom are disabled and would be worse off if they moved to UC, also left many families cut out of the government's package of support.⁴⁶

These factors, in part, help to explain the huge increase in emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network in 2021-22. The comparison between the number of emergency food parcels distributed in 2020-21 and 2021-22, therefore, needs to be understood within these uncertain economic conditions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Impact of UK Government interventions in reducing the level of need for food banks

There were significant gaps in the UK government interventions put in place at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, that left some groups particularly exposed to destitution. However, these interventions may have played an important role in preventing additional use of food banks in the Trussell Trust network both during the second six months of 2020-21 (after the immediate shock of the pandemic subsided) and during the first six months of 2021-22 when these interventions were still in place.

During the first six months of 2021-22 the JRS and SEISS, that protected the incomes of millions during the pandemic, were still in place, and may have served to protect further increases in need during the first six months of 2021-22.

The £20 uplift to the UC Standard Allowance was also in place during this period. In August 2021 we asked food bank managers what they thought had had the biggest impact on a decrease in referrals

¹⁸ 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>

¹⁹ 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>

since March 2020, and the most prevalent response was the £20 uplift to UC, cited by 68%. As one food bank manager summarised:

“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, August 2021

The positive impact of the UC uplift has been evidenced by various sources. Research conducted by YouGov, on behalf of the Trussell Trust, found that 72% of people claiming UC since early 2020 said that the uplift had made buying essentials such as food, clothing and toiletries easier than before.²⁰ Further, research conducted by Welfare at a Social Distance on the impact of Covid-19 on food insecurity, evidences that for benefits that increased during Covid-19 (UC and Working Tax Credit), there was little change in food insecurity or severe food insecurity over time. However, for people claiming legacy benefits, including Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), there was a sharp increase in food insecurity and severe food insecurity during the pandemic. For example, 18% of people claiming ESA were severely food insecure in 2019/20, which rose sharply to 28% during the pandemic.²¹

These pieces of research evidence the impact that the social security system can have in supporting low income households in an effective way, and how the packages of support offered by the UK government during the pandemic may have served to prevent additional referrals to food banks in the Trussell Trust network. Indeed, the Resolution Foundation highlight that, despite the huge economic impact of Covid-19, public policy²² made a remarkable difference to household incomes and helps to explain the 1% reduction in absolute poverty²³ seen in the latest UK government statistics on household incomes, poverty and inequality.^{24,25} The removal of these income boosts in the latter part of 2021-22 are likely to have already undone this progress.

The long-term effects of the pandemic have reduced the financial resilience of households

While the significant interventions introduced by the UK government in response to the Covid-19 pandemic played a key role in preventing additional referrals to food banks in the Trussell Trust

²⁰ 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>

²¹ Hunger and the welfare state: Food insecurity among benefit claimants in the UK (2021), *Welfare at a Social Distance*, https://62608d89-fc73-4896-861c-0e03416f9922.usrfiles.com/ugd/62608d_015cb3bf1815496e94f1658de377bf5c.pdf

²² Including the £20 a week boost to UC and Working Tax Credit, restoring LHA to the 30th percentile of local market rents, suspending UC’s Minimum Income Floor for the self-employed, and the restoration of some of the English Council Tax Support that was removed over the previous decade. Living Standards Outlook 2022 (2022), *Resolution Foundation*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2022/03/Living-Standards-Outlook-2022.pdf>

²³ A person is in absolute poverty if they are living in households with income below 60% of the 2010/11 median, uprated for inflation. By using an income threshold that is fixed in time, this measure looks at how living standards of low income households are changing over time. Poverty in the UK Statistics (2021), *House of Commons Library*, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN07096/SN07096.pdf>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Households Below Average Income: for financial years ending 1995 to 2021 (2022), *Department for Work and Pensions*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-for-financial-years-ending-1995-to-2021>

network during the first half of 2021-22, the economic impact of the pandemic has eroded many households' financial resilience which has long lasting effects.

The early stages of the pandemic saw the highest level of redundancies since the 2008 financial crisis. 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 also 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.²⁶ 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.

This step-change in people's finances also drove far more people to need support from social security. As discussed earlier in this briefing, the number of people supported through Universal Credit, a key indicator of underlying need, doubled from 3 million in March 2020 to more than 6 million in March 2021 with this high level sustained this year, standing at 5.6 million in March 2022.²⁷ Not only were more people dealing with depleted finances, but they were also exposed to the social security system. The known link between issues with the benefits system and food bank use²⁸ means that the drastic increase in people claiming UC has increased the population at risk of needing to turn to food banks to get by, as more people are reliant on a weakened social security system that fails to protect people from the most severe forms of hardship.

This initial period of the pandemic also saw substantive increases in mental health problems²⁹ and the withdrawal of the informal support networks that people rely on to get by. All of these factors placed people at greater risk of needing support from a food bank and have continued to impact on communities.

This erosion of financial resilience, increase in the underlying population of people requiring support from social security, and long-term mental health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that more people were at greater risk of being negatively impacted by the cost of living changes that took hold in the last six months of this year.

The last six months, benefit cuts and the cost of living crisis

Changes in the last six months are "Slowly stripping each layer off people who are just about managing", Area Manager, Trussell Trust.

In our mid-year statistics briefing we warned about how the pandemic has reduced individuals and communities' financial resilience, increasing the risk posed by price increases. This is exactly what we have seen in the last six months as the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network has accelerated.

²⁶ Personal and economic well-being in Great Britain: January 2021 (2021), *Office for National Statistics*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/personalandeconomicwellbeingintheuk/january2021>

²⁷ People on Universal Credit (2022), *DWP*, Stat-Xplore.

²⁸ The proportion of working age claimants in receipt of Universal Credit is statistically associated with an increase in levels of need for food banks. *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>

²⁹ Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain: June 2020, (2020), *Office for National Statistics*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/june2020>

Table 1.3: Quarterly analysis against 2019/20

Period	2019/20	2021/22	% Change from 2019-20 to 2021/22
Q1 (April -June)	412, 097	491,244	19%
Q2 (July- September)	431,909	473,240	10%
Q3 (October-December)	526,241	613,948	17%
Q4 (Jan- Feb) ³⁰	316,746	385,449	22%

Table 1.4: Monthly analysis against 2019/20³¹

Month	2019/20	2021/22	% Change from 2019-20 – 2021/22
September	143,361	163,097	14%
October ³²	153,776	165,272	7%
November	159,923	192,811	21%
December	212,542	255,954	20%
January	165,930	196,596	18%
February	150,816	189,146	25%

As Table 1.4 shows, there has been an acceleration of need for food banks in the Trussell Trust network that has coincided with the £20 cut to UC seen in October and the cost of living crisis that the UK has experienced since late 2021. December was one of the busiest ever months for food banks in the Trussell Trust network – on a par with levels of need during the height of the pandemic in 2020. Data from food banks in the Trussell Trust network is also only one part of the picture of need. There is a wide range of alternative emergency food provision that exists outside of the Trussell Trust network of food banks that will be supporting people through this crisis. This includes, but is not limited to, food banks that are part of the Independent Food Bank Network (IFAN)³³,

³⁰ Comparisons to March 2020 are not included as this month saw an unprecedented spike in need during the initial stages of the Covid-19 pandemic.

³¹ The monthly totals in Table 1.4 do not sum to the quarterly totals in Table 1.3 as this data was downloaded subsequently to Table 1.3. Additional data entry by food banks after the initial download accounts for the differences.

³² The £20 per week cut to Universal Credit came into force in October 2021.

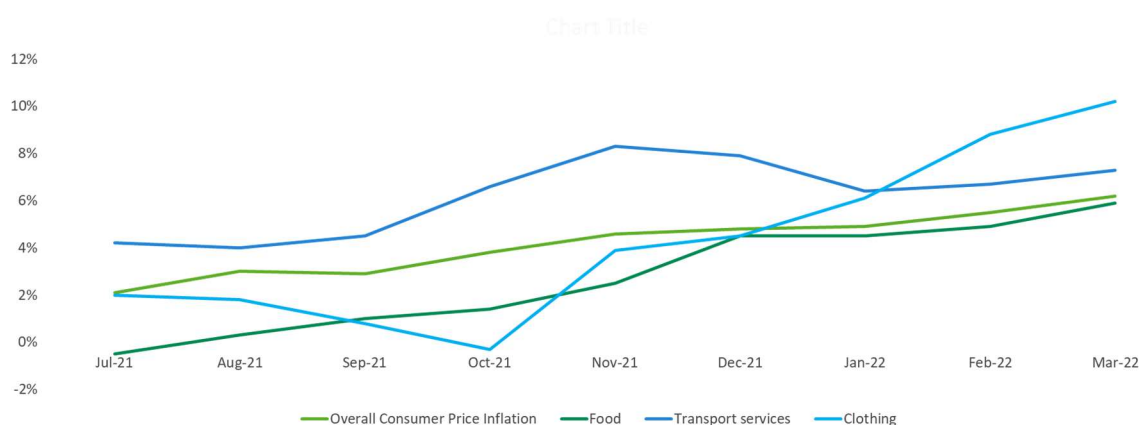
³³ The Independent Food Network (IFAN) have around 550 independent food banks as part of their membership: <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/our-members>

pantries, larders, community food hubs and social supermarkets. Many of these providers are reporting similar patterns of escalating need in recent months.³⁴

The cost of living crisis has seen food and energy prices soar. Between October 2021 and January 2022 wholesale gas and electricity prices increased by 400% and 300% respectively, leading to an increase in energy bills, petrol prices and a knock-on effect on the price of consumer goods such as food.³⁵ The average cost of renting for UK tenants also rose by 2% in the 12 months to January 2022, which is the largest annual increase since 2017.³⁷

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) for March 2022 shows the significant increases in the price of energy in the last 6 months, most recently recording a 25.1% annual increase to March 2022. As can be seen in Graph 1.2, inflation has not been restricted to energy with essential items including food, transport services, and clothing also seeing significant increases to the rate of inflation over the last six months, and overall consumer price inflation reached its highest level in 30 years in March 2022 (6.2%).

Graph 1.2. CPI inflation rate on goods and services



Source: [Consumer price inflation tables published 13 April 2022](#), ONS.

Recent analysis by the Trussell Trust of YouGov polling conducted between January and February 2022³⁸, of people claiming Universal Credit, showed that people are already struggling to afford the essentials and are facing impossible decisions between falling into deeper spirals of debt or cutting back further on absolute essentials. This research revealed that half (50%) of people claiming UC are already behind on their bills or are facing a constant struggle to keep up with them, and more than

³⁴ IFAN's letter to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor (2022). *Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)*, <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/letter-april22>

³⁵ The Living Standards Outlook (2022), *Resolution Foundation*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2022/03/Living-Standards-Outlook-2022.pdf>

³⁶ Consumer price inflation, UK: March 2022, *Office for National Statistics*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/march2022>

³⁷ Index of Private Housing Rental Prices, UK: January 2022 (2022), *Office for National Statistics*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/indexofprivatehousingrentalprices/january2022>

³⁸ Figures from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,506 UK adults claiming Universal Credit. Fieldwork was undertaken between 24 January – 15 February 2022. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Great British adults claiming Universal Credit (aged 18+). All figures are the Trussell Trust's own analysis of data collected online by YouGov.

half (56%) reported that they are going without at least one of the absolute essentials we all need to keep warm, fed, and clothed, which is the equivalent of over 3 million people.

The increase in need we have seen at food banks in the Trussell Trust network so far described is also reflected in the findings of other third sector organisations.

In January 2022, Citizens Advice reported that 270,000 people sought help from their services in England and Wales, a record for the charity and more than any point since the pandemic began. In this month, 24,000 people who were helped by the charity required some type of crisis support such as food bank vouchers.³⁹

Citizens Advice Scotland's recent YouGov polling found that 52% of Scottish adults in debt or at risk of debt since the pandemic started cited the cost of living as a key reason.⁴⁰ The link between the cost of living crisis, increased financial pressure on households and increased debt has also been referred to by Advice NI, an advice charity in Northern Ireland, who have stated that the average household debt of their clients in the first two months of 2022 was 21% higher than in 2021.⁴¹

The Bevan Foundation's *Snapshot of Poverty* in November 2021 found that nearly four in ten Welsh households (39%) did not have enough money to buy anything beyond everyday items, with low income households, renters, disabled people, single parents and adults aged between 25 and 64 being more likely to have to cut back on everyday essentials than other groups.⁴²

Rising costs, falling benefits

The cost of living crisis and the acceleration of need we have seen at food banks in the Trussell Trust network across this autumn and winter has coincided with the biggest overnight cut to the basic rate of social security since the foundation of the modern welfare state⁴³ - the removal of the £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit in October 2021. While the reduction in the UC taper rate has helped some low income households who are in work, for households who cannot work, or cannot work longer hours (particularly due to disability or childcare requirements) the taper rate will not make up for the cut to the UC uplift.⁴⁴

In our mid-year statistics, we reported that the UC cut and impending increase in the cost of living would likely have an impact on food bank need in the next 6 months.⁴⁵ The Trussell Trust's YouGov

³⁹ Cost of living: The government's energy support package leaves low income households behind (2022), *Citizens Advice*, https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/campaigns/Parliamentary%20briefings/09.02.22%20Citizens%20Advice%20briefing_%20Cost%20of%20Living.pdf

⁴⁰ Over half a million people cite the cost of living as the reason for debt, *Citizens Advice Scotland*, <https://www.cas.org.uk/news/over-half-million-people-cite-cost-living-reason-debt>

⁴¹ Cost of living impacting clients (2022), *Advice NI*, <https://www.adviceni.net/about/news/cost-living-impacting-clients>

⁴³ UK heading for the biggest overnight cut to the basic rate of social security since World War II (2021), *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/uk-heading-biggest-overnight-cut-basic-rate-social-security-world-war-ii>

⁴⁴ The True Cost of living (2022), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/03/The-true-cost-of-living.pdf>

⁴⁵ In our survey of food bank managers in the Trussell Trust network, 68% of respondents stated that the impending £20 per week cut to UC would have the biggest impact on increasing the number of people referred to the food bank they run in the next 6 months. Trussell Trust data briefing on mid-year statistics relating to use of food banks: April 2021- September 2021 (2021), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/11/Trussell-Trust-Mid-Year-stats-data-briefing-April-to-September-2021-1.pdf>

of adults claiming UC in late January and early February 2022 found that over one in three (37%) had gone without two or more of the absolute essentials since December. This means that people are simultaneously having to cut back on a combination of clothing, heating, food, or toiletries. This is a reflection of the severe and deepening hardship people are already experiencing.

Table 1.4 shows that from November onwards when the UC cut started to be felt by families, the rate of increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed accelerated in comparison to the same month in 2019-20. While the Christmas period tends to be busy for food banks, and this year the emerging fuel crisis was beginning to create additional stresses, the UC cut was specifically identified by Area Managers as a core driver. For instance,

“Food banks tell us about the Universal Credit cut being a significant factor in October which added stress and strain and which they are really starting to see the impact of now” – Area Manager, the Trussell Trust.

Furthermore, these increases have persisted into February 2022, suggesting that the busy Christmas period was not the only contributing factor to the increases seen since November 2021.

The UC cut, in addition to causing a significant reduction in the incomes of millions of people overnight, added fuel to the fire of a social security system that was already increasingly threadbare and incapable of protecting the resilience of families and communities in the face of increasing costs. When we entered the pandemic the UK social security system budget was £36 billion per year less than it was in 2010. This was due to UK government policy choices, including below-inflation increases in benefit payments, and a complete freeze on working age benefits in 2016.⁴⁶

The result of this is that households claiming benefits have seen their incomes fall year on year as prices continue to increase. Figure 1 shows that the standard allowance of Universal Credit, which is intended to cover day to day living costs for working age adults (excluding additional costs such as housing, children, disability), was barely above the destitution threshold in 2021-22.⁴⁷ The low level of benefit income is further eroded by punitive deductions. These can take the form of repayments of advance UC payments taken to cover the five week wait, the repayment of benefit overpayments, and third party deductions to cover energy and water bills.⁴⁸ In November 2021, 2 in 5 (42%) UC claims had faced a deduction, with an average of £61 of UC income deducted per month.⁴⁹ Other policy choices such as the two-child limit and benefit cap also serve to reduce benefit incomes further. In addition, since the benefit cap was lowered in November 2016, it has been frozen at the same amount and has never been uprated in line with inflation, a policy that will continue into 2022-23.⁵⁰ This will further erode the value of benefits for people who are affected by this policy.

⁴⁶ Covid Realities: documenting life on a low income during the pandemic (2022), *Patrick et al*, <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/brhp578m/production/87675ee74d31a305f15c0d8de203e3dd21c50c38.pdf>

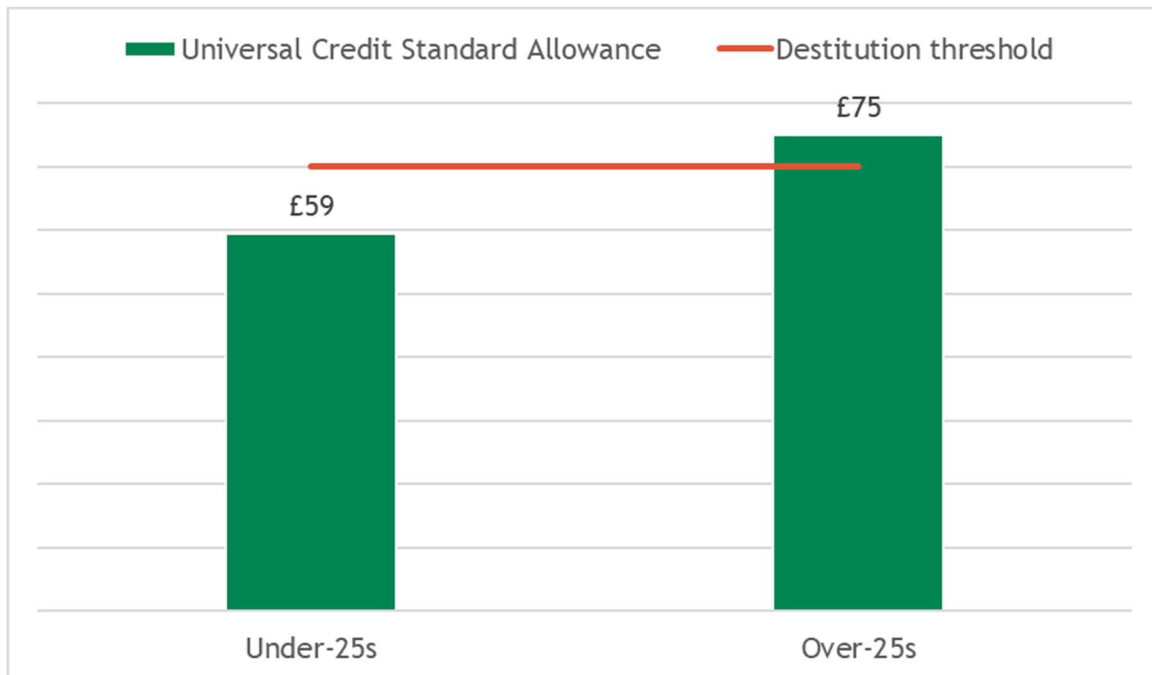
⁴⁷ The True Cost of living (2022), *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/03/The-true-cost-of-living.pdf>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Covers claims with a payment due in November 2021, calculated as a sum of deductions at constituency level. Universal Credit: Deductions written question <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-02-24/129166/>

⁵⁰ Benefits Uprating 2022/23 (2022), *House of Commons Library*, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9439/CBP-9439.pdf>

Figure 1: Comparison between weekly Universal Credit standard allowance 2021/22 and £70 destitution threshold⁵¹



We know that not having enough income from social security is a key driver of food bank need.⁵² The UC cut, and inability of benefit income to meet rising prices, is likely to have had an impact on the increase in food bank need we have seen this year in comparison to 2019-20. Further, the number of people claiming UC has soared since the onset of the pandemic, and still sits at a rate that is almost double that of pre-pandemic times.⁵³ This has led to an increase in the number of people at risk of needing to use a food bank, caused by the design of UC, and the wider policy decisions we have explored in this section.

A return to pre-pandemic sanctions and policies

In addition to the continuation of the requirement to repay benefit debt to the UK Government through benefit deductions, inadequate benefit levels and the UC cut, this period has also seen the return of pre-pandemic sanctions and policies that were halted or altered during the pandemic. From the end of March 2020 to the end of June 2020, the UK government suspended benefit sanctions, which are used to enforce the conditions of unemployment benefit. This saw benefit sanctions fall to a historic low and, with the phased return DWP took to reinstating benefit sanctions, figures up until June 2021 remained relatively low. The latest statistics showed that in

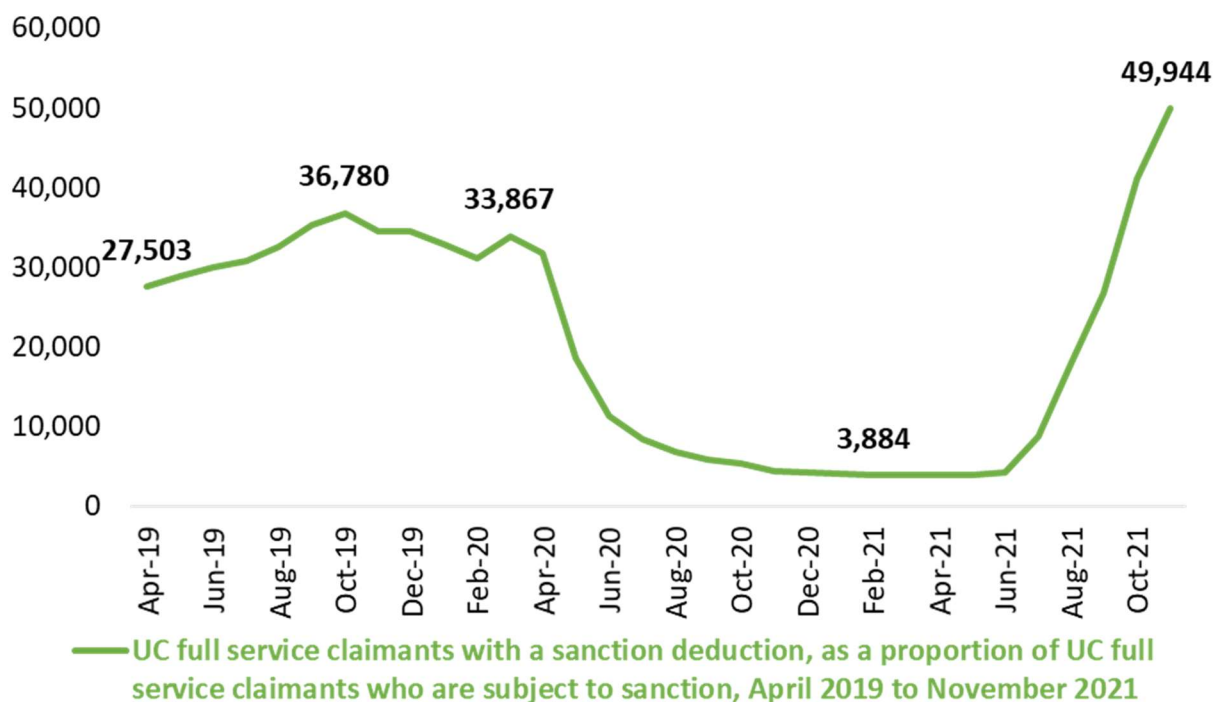
⁵¹ JRF set the 'low income' threshold for destitution at £70 a week for a single person (after housing costs), by averaging: the actual spend on essentials by the poorest 10% of the population; 80% of the JRF 'Minimum Income Standard' costs for equivalent items; and the amount that the general public thought was required for a household of their size to avoid destitution, in an omnibus survey undertaken as part of the original study. *Destitution in the UK (2020)*, JRF, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>.

⁵² *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>

⁵³ The number of people supported through social security doubled from 3 million in March 2020 to more than 6 million in March 2021 with this high level sustained this year, standing at 5.6 million in March 2022. *People on Universal Credit (2022)*, *Department for Work and Pensions*, Stat-Xplore.

November 2021 the proportion of people sanctioned returned to broad pre-pandemic levels (2.37% in November 2021, 2.51% in February 2020).⁵⁴

Graph 1.3 UC full-service claimants with a sanction deduction Apr 2019-Nov 2021



Source: [Benefit sanctions statistics to October 2021 \(experimental\) \(2022\)](#), Department for Work and Pensions.

Modelling conducted by the Trussell Trust and Herriot Watt University in the State of Hunger research, found a statistical link between benefit sanctions and the need for food banks. The analysis showed that an increase of 100 in the number of benefit sanctions was associated with an increase of 24 in the number of food parcels distributed in a typical local authority.⁵⁵ Benefit sanctions can have serious financial implications for people who are already living on a low income, and they can also impact people’s mental health⁵⁶ both of which are drivers of food bank need.

Area Managers are being told by food banks that they are seeing increases in people referred who have experienced benefit sanctions in recent months. They are also seeing people facing difficulties meeting benefit conditionality requirements, such as attending in-person interviews, due to a lack of income:

⁵⁴ Benefit sanctions statistics to October 2021 (experimental) (2022), Department for Work and Pensions, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/benefit-sanctions-statistics-to-october-2021-experimental>

⁵⁵ 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>

⁵⁶ Punitive welfare reform and claimant mental health: The impact of benefit sanctions on anxiety and depression (2020), Williams, E, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/spol.12628>

"Food banks are reporting an increase in sanctions again, seeing aggressive sanctions put in place for benefits. For example, a food bank reported that in their area [which is a large rural area] people are now being told they have to travel to [the nearest town] when they have little income to pay for transport and are being asked to apply for whatever job even if it is not in their skill set. Sanctions don't work, they don't put people in the right mind set mental health wise to get a job – at a time of rising cost of living." – Area Manager, the Trussell Trust

The ongoing issues with delays in Personal Independence (PIP) payments worsened during the last 6 months of 2021-22. The latest statistics show that, since May 2021, the median number of weeks from registration to a decision being made by the DWP for new claims has increased from 19 weeks to a peak of 26 weeks in August 2021, the longest clearance time since December 2014.⁵⁷ The DWP state that these delays are due to ongoing disruption caused by the pandemic, and because of claims that had been allowed a longer deadline for return of the PIP 2 form.⁵⁸ However, the return to delivering assessments face to face since May 2021 may have also compounded factors and contributed to increased delays.

Area Managers told us that they had heard from food banks that delays with PIP had brought people to their door during this period:

"PIP is a big issue, it takes forever, for one person [using a food bank], it took 8 weeks just to get the form." – Area Manager, The Trussell Trust

People who have health-related expenses have no additional income to cover these lengthy clearance times. These delays can be further exacerbated if an application for PIP is rejected following the assessment, and a person is required to appeal the decision. Issues with the quality of assessments can clearly be seen in the Tribunal statistics: since PIP commenced in April 2013, two thirds (67%) of decisions not to award PIP that have been taken to Tribunal have been overturned in favour of the person applying.⁵⁹

Issues with PIP are not new to this period. State of Hunger research found that within a year in a typical local authority, every 100 failed PIP assessments were associated with an additional 93 food parcels, all else being equal.⁶⁰ The further delays seen in this period in receiving PIP are likely to have meant that more people have been forced to turn to a food bank to make ends meet until the first payment arrives.

During the pandemic, tenants in social and private rented accommodation were protected from evictions. These protections were still in place during the first six months of 2021-22. Between 26 March 2020 and 30 September 2021, notice periods for most types of tenancy were temporarily extended. However, from 1 October 2021 all notice periods returned to the pre-pandemic position of two months in England. (In Scotland and Wales the extension of notice periods to 6 months remained in place until 31 March 2022, and in Northern Ireland the extension to 3 months will remain until 4 May 2022 so we are yet to see the impact of these.) In addition, at the end of May

⁵⁷ Personal Independence Payment: Official Statistics to January 2022 (2022), *Department for Work & Pensions*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/personal-independence-payment-statistics-to-january-2022/personal-independence-payment-official-statistics-to-january-2022>

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ State of Hunger (2019), *The Trussell Trust*, https://www.stateofhunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/State-of-Hunger-Report-November2019-Digital.pdf?_ga=2.28931964.1771677217.1648996018-1514737038.1641302562

2021, the legislation preventing bailiff enforcement of evictions also came to an end in England and Wales, with this happening later in Scotland on 31 March 2022.

Area Managers we spoke to in England highlighted that food banks have reported seeing an increase in people who are homeless requiring support, as well as people living in temporary accommodation and insecure housing.

“Issues linked with temporary housing – we are hearing about food banks delivering to people housed in premier inns, holiday parks, and the link that has with needing to turn to a food bank for support.” – Area Manager, the Trussell Trust.

Food bank need is strongly linked to adverse life experiences, with nearly three quarters (72%) of people who were referred to a food bank in early 2020 having had an adverse life experience in the previous 12 months. Homelessness was the most common adverse life experience (29%), with eviction (12%) also a prevalent experience.⁶¹ It is likely, therefore, that the legislation that was in place in the first six months of 2021/22 offered a level of protection in preventing additional need for food banks in the Trussell Trust network during the first six months of this period. Anecdotal evidence from Area Managers and the increase in need we have seen in the last few months suggests that we may be starting to see the consequences of the removal of these protections in England. We are yet to see the impact of these changes in the devolved nations and regions.

Finally, in our mid-year statistics briefing we suggested that the end of the JRS and SEISS schemes at the end of September 2021 were likely to lead to an increase in referrals to food banks in the Trussell Trust network, a position that was supported by the food bank managers we surveyed in August 2021.⁶²

Area Managers we spoke to, in March 2022, said that food banks have seen people referred for support who have been impacted by job losses, reduction in hours, insecure work and the sustained impact of a 20% reduction in wages during the pandemic. However, the negative impact of the closure of JRS and SEISS does not seem to have been as great as anticipated, with redundancy rates in Oct-Dec 2021 falling below pre-pandemic levels, and the unemployment rate almost dropping to pre-pandemic levels and remaining so in Dec-Feb 2021-22.⁶³ Although long-term unemployment⁶⁴ still remains significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels, with the level in Dec-Feb 2022 (397,359) being 29% higher than the same period in 2019/20 (306,945).⁶⁵ These labour market statistics suggest that the closure of the JRS and SEISS are not likely to have had as big an impact on need for food banks as anticipated.

⁶¹ 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>

⁶² 44% of food bank managers thought that potential job losses/reduction in hours/loss of income as a result of the closure of the JRS and SEISS was likely to have an impact on the increase in referrals to the food bank they run in the next 6 months.

⁶³ Labour market overview, UK: April 2022 (2022), *Office for National Statistics*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/april2022>

⁶⁴ Long-term unemployment refers to people who have been unemployed for over 12 months.

⁶⁵ Labour market overview, UK: April 2022 (2022), *Office for National Statistics*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/april2022>

National and regional differences across the UK

There is significant variation across local authorities, regions and the constituent countries of the UK in the change in the number of parcels distributed in 2021-22. 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. We also know from our State of Hunger research that there are a large number of people who are severely food insecure who do not receive support from food banks⁶⁶, further highlighting that data from food banks in the Trussell Trust network does not present the full picture of need.

Table 1.5: Comparison of data quarter to quarter for the financial years 2019-20 and 2021-22, by nation and region

	Q1 % change 2019/20 - 2021/22	Q2 % change 2019/20 - 2021/22	Q3 % change 2019/20 - 2021/22	Jan-Feb change ⁶⁷ 2019/20 - 2021/22	Total % change ⁶⁸ 2019/20 - 2021/22
United Kingdom	19%	10%	17%	22%	14%
England	29%	15%	22%	27%	20%
Northern Ireland	41%	41%	38%	57%	36%
Scotland	-24%	-21%	-15%	-5%	-17%
Wales	-5%	-5%	5%	2%	-4%
East Midlands	35%	18%	33%	30%	25%
East of England	20%	17%	20%	28%	18%
London	60%	38%	34%	38%	39%
North East	7%	-4%	-2%	10%	2%
North West	-2%	-4%	5%	10%	-1%
South East	43%	24%	33%	38%	29%
South West	10%	0%	17%	20%	7%
West Midlands	28%	13%	25%	29%	23%
Yorkshire and The Humber	67%	38%	39%	40%	44%

⁶⁶ In 2018, around one in ten (10%) households in the UK experienced food insecurity and one in 25 (4%) were severely food insecure. In contrast, an estimated 700,000 (2.5%) households used a food bank in 2019-20. This suggests that there is a large number of people who are severely food insecure but who do not receive support from food banks. 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>

⁶⁷ Comparisons to March 2020 are not included as this month saw an unprecedented spike in need during the initial stages of the Covid-19 pandemic.

⁶⁸ Comparisons to March 2020 are included in the total percentage change figures.

Table 1.6. Number of parcels distributed by nation and percentage change 2019-20 vs 2021-22

	April 2019 – March 2020			April 2021 – March 2022			% change from 2019/20		
Region	To adults	To children	Total	To adults	To children	Total	Adults	Children	Total
UK	1,185,089	724,067	1,909,156	1,341,049	832,109	2,173,158	13%	15%	14%
England	917,030	572,272	1,489,302	1,096,117	687,175	1,783,292	20%	20%	20%
Northern Ireland	26,160	18,979	45,139	35,239	26,358	61,597	35%	39%	36%
Scotland	157,546	81,052	238,598	126,997	70,040	197,037	-19%	-14%	-17%
Wales	84,353	51,764	136,117	82,696	48,536	131,232	-2%	-6%	-4%

Across the regions of England; London (39%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (44%) have seen the most significant increases, whilst the North East has experienced a slight increase (2%) and the North West a slight decrease (-1%). Looking across Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales, Northern Ireland saw the largest percentage increase in comparison to the same period in 2019/20 (36%).

Decreases were seen in Scotland (-17%) and Wales (-4%). However, the quarterly comparisons in those countries suggest a concerning change in this trend in the wake of the UC cut and as the cost of living crisis gained pace from Q3 onwards. With lower percentage decreases seen in these quarters in Scotland and increases seen in Q3 and Q4 in Wales suggesting that the decreases seen will be eroded away in the coming months.

As stated above, lower percentage increases should not necessarily be interpreted as demonstrating lower levels of need in these areas. Table 1.7 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. 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 data shows that, for instance, use of food banks in Scotland is not lower than the UK average and in fact may be slightly higher.

This data shows a similar picture for Wales, with figures indicating that reported referrals to food banks may be slightly higher than the UK average, further highlighting that data from food banks in the Trussell Trust network does not give the full picture of need. Indeed, as we discussed earlier in this briefing, the Bevan Foundation’s *Snapshot of Poverty* in November 2021 found that nearly four in ten Welsh households (39%) did not have enough money to buy anything beyond everyday items.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ A snapshot of poverty in winter 2021 (2021), *Bevan Foundation*, <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/resources/poverty-in-winter-2021/>

Table 1.7. 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.

Scotland – further context

Data from the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) provides some indication of overall trends in the number of people facing crisis in Scotland.⁷⁰ The number of people applying for a crisis grant April-January 2021/22 (229,673) is significantly higher than the same period in 2019/20 (176,110) and is slightly higher than equivalent figure in 2020/21 (226,900). The most recent data highlights that applications to the SWF have soared in recent months, with applications in January 2022 (31,051) being 52% higher than in October 2021 (20,369). Indeed, the number of people applying for a crisis grant in January 2022 is at a similar level to the level of applications seen during the immediate stages of the pandemic (April 2020, 31,895). These figures evidence that overall levels of need in Scotland are high and increasing.

Despite seeing a decrease (-17%) in the total support provided since 2019/20, the number of emergency food parcels provided by food banks in the Trussell Trust’s network in Scotland remains concerningly high, with almost 200,000 parcels distributed in 2021/22. Indeed, these figures should be seen in the context of growing demand for support from the Scottish Welfare Fund and a sustained increase in the size of alternative emergency food aid providers in Scotland who continue to report large increases in the scale of support provided.

Consistent evidence from the Trussell Trust’s State of Hunger research has shown that increasing the value of social security payments can have an impact on levels of need for food banks.⁷¹ The introduction of the Scottish Child Payment in February 2021, which targets support towards households who are at greater risk of needing support from a food bank, therefore had the potential to impact on levels of need for food banks in this period.

However, there is no evidence as yet to support this. Recent research by IPPR Scotland on the impact of the Scottish Child Payment found that since the introduction of the benefit, the largest reductions in food bank support in the Trussell Trust network in Scotland were reported among families with the oldest children. Families whose youngest child is aged 12-16 have seen a 21%

⁷⁰ The Scottish Welfare Fund helps families and people in Scotland who are on low incomes. Scottish Welfare Fund statistics: update to 30 January 2022 (2022), *Social Security Directorate*, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/swf-monthly-management-information/>

⁷¹ 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. State of Hunger (2021), *The Trussell Trust*,

decrease in food bank distribution on average since the introduction of the Scottish Child Payment, despite not benefitting from the payment at this stage.⁷²

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 2019/20.⁷³ In 2021/22 the allocation has returned to a similar level as 2019/20 (£35 million).⁷⁴

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 that⁷⁵:

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, suggests that a significant proportion of people in need in Scotland during the crisis have been supported by additional emergency food provision within their areas.⁷⁶ This could have included new emergency food providers set up through the increase in funding through initiatives such as the Scottish Government Food Fund. 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. We have also heard, anecdotally, that the use community food provision such as pantries, larders, and social supermarkets has been steadily increasing in Scotland.

Taking all these factors into account and given the higher reported use of food banks or similar services in Scotland as seen in the YouGov data in Table 1.7, the lower usage of food banks within the Trussell Trust network in Scotland is likely to be because people are accessing emergency food elsewhere, rather than this reflecting a lower level of need in this nation.

⁷² Tackling Child Poverty and Destitution: Next steps for the Scottish Child Payment and the Scottish Welfare Fund (2022), IPPR, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/03/Scotland-Tackling-Child-Poverty-and-Destitution.pdf>

⁷³ 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/>

⁷⁴ 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/>

⁷⁵ 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-scotland-route-map-through-out-crisis/pages/4/>

⁷⁶ This commissioned (unpublished) research, conducted over October and November 2021, 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.

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

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 1 April 2021 – 30 March 2022, there were food bank centres in the Trussell Trust network based in 293 local authority areas across the UK.⁷⁷

When comparing to 2019-20, 61% of local authorities saw an increase in the number of food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network in 2021-22, and 18% saw increases of 50% or higher in the amount of support given to people in crisis. A significant minority (39%) of local authorities saw decreases in comparison to this period.

Most (66%) areas in the UK where food banks in the Trussell Trust network operate saw an acceleration in need from July – Aug 2021 to October – December 2021, when comparing to the same time periods in 2019-20, and the majority (59%) also saw larger increases in January – February than they did in October – December.

Looking back to 2016-17 and the pattern of longer-term levels of need, 90% of local authorities have seen an increase in the number of food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network with 38% of these local authorities seeing at least a doubling in the amount of support delivered within communities.

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.⁷⁸ In some cases food banks have also left the Trussell Trust network at some point during 2021-22.⁷⁹ In other words, expanding or contracting opening hours, or opening or closing distribution centres could inaccurately suggest an increase or decrease in need.

Table 1.8. Banded change in number of emergency food parcels distributed within local authority in 2021-22 in comparison to 2016-17 and 2019-20

Banded change in number of emergency food parcels distributed within local authority	% change from 2016-17	% change from 2019-20
100% and above	38%	8%
50% – 99%	27%	10%
0%-49%	25%	43%
Decrease	10%	39%

⁷⁷ Of those, 283 also had food bank centres in those areas in the same period in 2019-20 and 287 also had food bank centres in the same period in 2016-17. Subsequent comparisons in this section are for local authorities which had food bank centres open in both periods.

⁷⁸ Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford.

⁷⁹ 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>

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.

This next section gives a high-level overview of some of the factors that may affect the number of parcels that are distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network, including operational differences such as an increase in the size of a single food parcel, as well as external factors including local, regional, and national variations in policy and populations, as well as the crisis response environment in each area. For a more in-depth discussion of all these factors, please see our mid-year statistics briefing.⁸⁰

Operational differences

Food banks in the Trussell Trust network operate in a variety of different ways in how they provide emergency food parcels within their communities and these models of delivery have had to move and adapt during the pandemic. During the initial phases of the pandemic, 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 continued into 2021/22, while others may have had to respond again to new challenges this year.

These changes might include shifting opening hours, centralising to single distribution locations, or implementing a new delivery model.⁸¹ Some food banks have also had to adapt to operating with fewer volunteers, for example if volunteers have been required to self-isolate. 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.

Some food banks have also increased the size of some or all of the parcels they provide both as a response to increased need and as part of moving to a delivery model. Around 9% of parcels distributed by food banks between April 21 to March 22 contained seven days of food, instead of the usual three-day food parcel. A larger parcel may reduce repeat use of food banks due to the increased level of support being provided, resulting in some food banks seeing smaller percentage increases in parcels distributed, despite offering this higher level of support.

⁸⁰ Trussell Trust data briefing on mid-year statistics relating to use of food banks: April 2021-September 2021, *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/11/Trussell-Trust-Mid-Year-stats-data-briefing-April-to-September-2021-1.pdf>

⁸¹ Investigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust food bank usage over the COVID-19 crisis in the UK. Loopstra, Goldberg, Gordon & Lambie-Mumford.

Alternative emergency food provision

There is a wide range of alternative emergency food provision that exists outside of the Trussell Trust network of food banks. This includes, but is not limited to, food banks that are part of the Independent Food Bank Network (IFAN), pantries, larders, community food hubs and social supermarkets with support being provided from all sectors (public, private, and voluntary) and at all levels (local, national and UK).⁸²

In response to the pandemic, there was a huge increase in the provision of alternative emergency food provision. Research carried out on behalf of the APPG on Faith and Society found that 71% of local authority respondents said that at least one new food bank had been started in their area, and 44% stated that other organisations such as food pantries had also started in response to Covid-19.⁸³

The provision of alternative emergency food provision varies by area. The number of emergency food parcels distributed within the Trussell Trust network is therefore likely to be significantly impacted by what alternative support is also in the area. Some of this support may be directly funded by governments. In Wales, for instance, the Welsh Government have invested considerably in distributing food via local authorities⁸⁴ and some of that funding has been used to purchase food.⁸⁵

Interviews with Area Managers has provided anecdotal evidence that some emergency food provision that was set up during the pandemic is now closing, with food banks in the Trussell Trust network within these areas seeing an increase in referrals as a result. We have also heard about areas where alternative provision has recently been set up, such as a community grocery in one area, that has resulted in a food bank in the same area seeing their numbers drop. Evidently, food banks in the Trussell Trust network form one part of the picture of emergency food provision and, therefore, lower numbers in certain areas should not be interpreted as a lower level of need in that area.

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

⁸² 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>

⁸³ 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

⁸⁴ 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.

⁸⁵ 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-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>

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.⁸⁶ The type of support varies, but often includes cash grants, low-cost loans, food or fuel vouchers, or essential items such as white goods.⁸⁷

During the pandemic, crisis support schemes have been extended, made more generous, and/or more accessible and differed in their level of support and assessment criteria.⁸⁸ Moving on from the height of the pandemic, local and devolved schemes have continued to offer support for households experiencing financial crisis. However, this continues to vary in scope and assessment process, with some nations providing more rapid financial support in a crisis than others. This continues to be a factor in the differing levels of need seen by food banks in the Trussell Trust network.

For example, the Welsh Government have taken some helpful steps such as continuing cash payments through school holidays for families entitled to school meals, increasing the flexibilities of the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF)⁸⁹ to allow for five claims instead of the original three and shortening the time period between claims, the continued availability of the Pupil Development Grant, and funding for school-based 'pay as you feel' food schemes.

In Scotland, the Scottish Welfare Fund continues to provide invaluable crisis support for people living on a low income and as mentioned above, the Scottish Child Payment was introduced in this period in an attempt to tackle child poverty in Scotland. Nevertheless, even within devolved administrations the delivery of welfare support varies, with evidence of local variations in the delivery of the SWF, in which success rates and average award levels for Crisis Grants vary substantially across Scotland's local authorities.⁹⁰

The extension of the welfare mitigations in Northern Ireland, which 'tops-up' the financial loss due to some policies such as the benefit cap and the bedroom tax is likely to have eased the impacts of some elements of Welfare Reform and provided a protective factor in reducing food bank need for some people.

Finally, in England, the delivery of crisis support continues to vary across local authorities. The Household Support Fund announced on 30 September 2021, to support households struggling to afford the essentials over winter, is also another form of crisis support that is specific to England. The devolved administrations were allocated a total of £79 million of the £500 million available in the fund, to administer as they see fit.

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

⁸⁶ Local Lifelines (2020), *The Trussell*

Trust, https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/10/LWAS_1020_v3.pdf

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Please see our Mid-year Statistics briefing for a full discussion of these crisis support schemes. Trussell Trust data briefing on mid-year statistics relating to use of food banks: April 2021-September 2021, *The Trussell Trust*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/11/Trussell-Trust-Mid-Year-stats-data-briefing-April-to-September-2021-1.pdf>

⁸⁹ A centralised assistance scheme which provides grants to people in Wales who are experiencing crisis.

⁹⁰ Tackling Child Poverty and Destitution: Next steps for the Scottish Child Payment and the Scottish Welfare Fund (2022), *IPPR*, https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/gb/reports/scotland-tackling-child-poverty-and-destitution_003.pdf

steps for supporting people in crisis.⁹¹ Local welfare provision can play a key role in supporting people with the costs of essentials without needing to use a food bank. However, the differences in the level and variety of crisis support offered locally and by devolved administration shows that exploring the differing levels of need seen by food banks in the Trussell Trust network is complex and needs to be understood within these local and national contexts.

National and regional variation in the economic impact of the crisis

The economic impact of the pandemic has not been evenly distributed across the UK. It is clear that differences in demographics and the concentration and type of employment in local areas are likely to have affected the number of parcels distributed by food banks in our network. These differences can drive significant variation in the impact of, 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 November 2019.⁹² The table below indicates that the North East has seen the smallest increase in claims from November 2019 to November 2021, with the London and the South West seeing the largest.⁹³

Table 1.9. The rates of change in the number of people receiving unemployment benefits vary across the UK

Region	Alternative Claimant count: Nov 2019	Alternative Claimant count: Nov 2021	Percentage change, Nov 2019– Nov 2021
UK	1,326,827	1,958,750	48%
England	1,114,345	1,687,013	51%
Northern Ireland	34,372	46,818	36%
Scotland	112,812	141,447	25%
Wales	64,357	81,153	26%
East Midlands	84,429	121,695	44%
East of England	95,460	151,303	58%
London	211,001	382,268	81%
North East	74,994	85,390	14%
North West	169,776	234,662	38%
South East	129,933	212,621	64%
South West	78,625	118,486	51%
West Midlands	149,578	211,107	41%

⁹¹ 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>

⁹² 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.

⁹³ Alternative Claimant Count statistics January 2013 to November 2021, (2022), *Department for Work and Pensions*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/alternative-claimant-count-statistics-january-2013-to-november-2021>

Yorkshire & The Humber	120,549	169,481	41%
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There is evidence that local employment levels influence food bank need. Modelling conducted as part of the State of Hunger research found that one percentage point higher unemployment would have led to 0.85 more food parcels per 1000 working age population, equivalent to an extra 107 in a typical local authority, or a 2% increase.⁹⁴ It is likely that the varied picture when it comes to falls in employment recovery and impact across areas, sectors⁹⁵, and demographic groups⁹⁶ will be to some extent reflected in different local patterns of food bank need.

Looking ahead

The continuing cost of living crisis is likely to rapidly increase the need for food banks

“We need systemic change in terms of basic benefits in line with inflation, if money is not stretching then there is little that can be done - food banks will need to support indefinitely”-
Area Manager, the Trussell Trust

Every April, the UK government uprates benefits in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from the previous autumn. But rising inflation means the 3.1% inflation rate last autumn will be significantly lower than the rate this spring which is forecast to be 7%.

The Spring Statement delivered by the Chancellor on 23 March was an opportunity to address the financial crisis faced by people who are already struggling to afford the essentials as prices continue to increase. The Trussell Trust and other partners in the sector urgently called on the UK government to avoid another real terms cut in the value of social security, and to follow this with a plan to strengthen the social security system to help everyone to afford the essentials, not just during a national crisis, but at all times for everyone who needs it.

The Chancellor failed to deliver this, and the decision to not bring benefit payments in line with the true cost of living will lead to a £11 billion real terms cut in benefits in 2022/23.⁹⁷ Uprating by 3.1% translates to an increase of just £2 a week⁹⁸ for households who are already struggling to survive, with benefits at their lowest level in 30 years even before current inflation projections are taken into account.

Conversely, the Scottish Government has made a welcome commitment to address this significant reduction in income by uprating some devolved benefits by 6% this Spring. We will be looking to see if this has any measurable impact when we report on mid-year statistics for 2022/23. Households on the lowest incomes are also set to see the sharpest rise in energy spending with the rise in the

⁹⁴ 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>

⁹⁵ See, for example, the uneven spread of unemployment across sectors reported in Labour market overview, UK: March 2021, (2021), *Office for National Statistics*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/march2021#labour-market-data>

⁹⁶ The Resolution Foundation notes that young people have been more likely to experience negative employment consequences during the pandemic than other working-age people. 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>

⁹⁷ Inflation Nation: Putting Spring Statement 2022 in context (2022), *Resolution Foundation*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2022/03/Inflation-nation.pdf>

⁹⁸ Benefit payments ‘too low’ to keep people out of destitution as energy bills soar, *The Independent*, January 2022 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/benefit-claimants-energy-bills-poverty-b2000017.html>.

energy price cap in April 2022, set to increase again in October 2022.⁹⁹ The proposed interventions to mitigate against the rise in the energy price cap announced in February of this year are neither an effective way to target, nor reach, people on the lowest incomes for whom essential costs are already unaffordable and set to get worse.

People on low incomes living in higher band properties will miss out on the automatic support through the £150 Council Tax rebate and instead must rely on local authorities distributing part of a separate £144 million discretionary fund in England. Furthermore, people renting privately whose bills are paid by their landlord may not see this rebate passed on. For households that are eligible, the council tax rebate and rebate loan will only cover 60% of the increase in energy costs for the average low income family.¹⁰⁰

As announced in the Spring Statement, the Household Support Fund has also been extended, with another £500 million of funding provided to councils in England to support ‘those most in need this winter’. However, this does not create (or support local authorities in England to create) a clear mechanism to deliver support to people in financial crisis. Instead, it provides very short-term funding to solve a problem which local authorities do not presently have capacity or infrastructure to fix. This crisis has manifested itself right across the UK, despite the Household Support Fund which was designed to create 152 local policy responses. This fragmented response will not help households on the lowest incomes with rising costs. The perfect storm of increased prices and even further reduction in benefits has meant that *‘food banks are expecting a tsunami of need in the next few months’*.¹⁰¹ The substantial reduction in the value of benefits is likely to push households into desperate territory, cutting back on multiple essentials at once, with serious risks to mental and physical health.

The acceleration of need we have seen in the last few months at food banks in the Trussell Trust network suggests that we are already seeing the impact of the cost of living crisis. With inflation set to increase even further in the coming months, the financial resilience of households and communities will take a further hit and it is likely that food banks and other frontline organisations will yet again be forced to plug the gaps in our social security system.

Food banks have long been at the forefront of efforts to support people facing financial hardship and have been called upon more than ever due to the economic and social crisis of the past couple of years. In our September Food Bank Survey – conducted even before this latest living standards crisis began to unfold – 34% of food banks that responded said that the challenges of the past year have meant that key members of their team were now feeling exhausted or over-stretched.¹⁰² The resilience of food bank staff and volunteers has persisted throughout the long-term increases in the distribution of emergency food parcels across the network prior to the pandemic and through the economic upheaval and surge in the need for food banks during the pandemic. It is clear though that

⁹⁹ The price is right? The April 2022 energy price rise and the Government’s response (2022), *Resolution Foundation*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/the-price-is-right/>

¹⁰⁰ 400,000 people could be pulled into poverty by real-terms cut to benefits in April, *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, February 2022 <https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/400000-people-could-be-pulled-poverty-real-terms-cut-benefits-april>.

¹⁰¹ Quote from Area Manager, Trussell Trust.

¹⁰² Food Bank Network Survey conducted by the Trussell Trust in September 2021. In total, 192 food banks completed the entire survey, and 15 partially completed the survey. In most cases, Project Managers completed the survey on behalf of their food bank.

food banks are neither the right, nor sustainable, response to people going without the essentials due to extremely low incomes.

The economic picture ahead is an uncertain one. What is clear is that energy prices are expected to rise again this October, and inflation is forecast to continue to rise later in 2022 for families that simply do not have enough money to make any further cuts. As the UK sinks deeper into the cost of living crisis, following the economic storm of 2020, there is a real risk that the increased levels in food bank need persist and, worse, increase further. While food banks continue to do everything they can to support people in their communities, no charity can replace the dignity of being able to buy your own food. Without further government action at all levels, there is a very real risk that the cost of living crisis will turn into an emergency.

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.¹⁰³

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.

Due to the significant demand many food banks have experienced in the last six months, it has not been possible for all food banks to input their data in time for this statistical release. In some areas, therefore, the number of emergency food parcels distributed is not up to date and if there are significant drops in the number of parcels in a certain area, this needs to be viewed with caution.

These end-of-year statistics cover the period 1 April– 31 March 2022 (inclusive) and compares to the same periods between 2014/15 to 2020/21. Data was collected up until 5pm 12 April 2022 and comes from the 1,630 distribution centres across the UK which provided emergency food parcels as part of the Trussell Trust network, in this period in 2021/22. In 2020/21, 1,471 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 2014/15, 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18, 2019/20, and 2020/21, 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

¹⁰³ 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-banksreport.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 9% of parcels distributed between April 2021 – March 2022 contained 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.

This means that the overall 14% increase that is reported since 2019-20 does not fully reflect the additional support that has been provided, with a 32% 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.