

Emergency food parcel distribution in Northern Ireland: April – September 2022

Background

This factsheet reports on the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network during the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 inclusive. During this period food banks in the Trussell Trust network distributed parcels from 45 locations across Northern Ireland.

Eight key facts from the April-September 2022 statistics

1. Food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Northern Ireland experienced significant increases in need since last year

Food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Northern Ireland distributed 31,700 emergency food parcels between 1 April to 30 September 2022, including 13,400 parcels for children. This represents a 25% increase in the total number of parcels distributed across Northern Ireland compared to the same period in 2021/22 and a 194% increase since 2017/18.

It is important to recognise that data from food banks in the Trussell Trust network is just one part of the picture of need in Northern Ireland. There is a wide range of alternative emergency food provision that will be supporting people that is not captured in our parcel data. There are also many people who are severely food insecure who do not receive support from food banks.¹

2. As food banks enter this winter, they have substantially lower levels of supplies to support people with than in the same period last year

In September 2021 there were 1,200 tonnes of food stored across the UK network; this now stands at around half that amount, with 580 tonnes of food recorded in September 2022. To keep up with rising need, food banks will be forced to purchase more food at a time of rising food prices, with inflation continuing to reach record levels.²

Every day we hear food banks telling us that this is not sustainable: escalating need combined with rising costs is likely to lead to the network's most challenging winter yet.

3. The UK government's Cost of Living Payment³ had some positive impact on need for emergency food parcels across Northern Ireland, with July seeing a dip in levels of need from previous months

In July 2022, households received the UK government's first Cost of Living payment. This correlated with a dip in need seen at food banks. In this month, food banks across Northern Ireland distributed 4,100 parcels to people facing financial hardship – significantly lower than any other month this year

¹ 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/wpcontent/uploads/sites/2/2021/05/State-of-Hunger-2021-Report-Final.pdf>

² Consumer price inflation, UK: September 2022, (2022), ONS, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/september2022>

³ In July this year, the UK Government provided the first Cost of Living Payment of £326 to people in receipt of means tested benefits owing to low income. A second payment of £324 will follow in November 2022.

(although still 12% higher than the same month in 2021). Table 1 highlights that food banks in Northern Ireland distributed 5,500 parcels on average in the other five months of this year.

This reduction gives some indication that, through increasing the income of people in receipt of working age benefits, the level of need for emergency food parcels was slightly reduced, with the payment providing temporary respite for some households in the face of increasing costs and inadequate benefit levels.

The timing and arrangements for delivery of the energy bill support scheme in Northern Ireland are still unclear. Urgent clarification is needed to ensure that households do not miss out on this vital support.

4. The Cost of Living payment was spent quickly, and, following this, record levels of food parcels were distributed in August and September 2022

Following the dip in need seen in July 2022, food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Northern Ireland recorded their busiest ever August and September months. The number of parcels distributed across Northern Ireland in August 2022 was 2% higher than the same month in 2021/22, and 75% higher than the same month in 2020/21 during the COVID-19 pandemic. September 2022 saw even greater increases across Northern Ireland, with the number of parcels distributed in this month being 52% higher than last year and 82% higher than the same month in 2020/21.

This suggests that while the payment provided some crucial respite for families struggling to afford the essentials, it was not enough to help them manage the cost of living crisis for an extended period of time. Our recent survey of people in receipt of Universal Credit across the UK revealed that most (70%) people who had received their first Cost of Living Payment had already spent all of it when surveyed in August, less than a month after receiving it. Almost two in three (64%) who said they had spent some of the payment had used it to buy food.

Overall, the network is going into the autumn and winter period with the highest levels of need that we have ever seen. As we approach the winter months, where food banks usually face their busiest periods, food banks in our network are braced for further significant increases in need as families manage the increasing costs that winter brings amid a cost of living crisis.

Table 1: Monthly analysis of the number of emergency food parcels distributed across Northern Ireland in the first half of 2022/23 by food banks in the Trussell Trust network and comparison to previous years

Northern Ireland	Number of parcels per month this year 2022/23	2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
		No. of parcels	% change to this year	No. of parcels	% change to this year	No. of parcels	% change to this year
April	5,092	3,197	59%	8,646	-41%	4,707	8%
May	5,544	3,111	78%	9,071	-39%	4,061	37%
June	5,691	2,735	108%	5,339	7%	3,947	44%
July	4,096	2,755	49%	3,211	28%	3,667	12%
August	4,787	2,912	64%	2,740	75%	4,675	2%
September	6,477	3,271	98%	3,553	82%	4,271	52%
Total	31,687	17,981	76%	32,560	-3%	25,328	25%

5. 10,000 people used a food bank in the Trussell Trust network in Northern Ireland for the first time in the last 6 months

Over the last six months, 3,800 families have been forced to turn to food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Northern Ireland for the first time.⁴ This represents a 25% increase in the number of families using food banks in the network for the first time compared to the same period in 2021. These families included almost 10,000 people.

This is representative of increasing numbers of people experiencing hunger as a result of the cost of living crisis. Our recent survey of people in receipt of Universal Credit across the UK (during August 2022), conducted by YouGov, found that more than two million people receiving Universal Credit had skipped meals across the previous three months because they couldn't afford to eat and to keep up with other essential costs. Further, one in five (21%) people were unable to cook hot food this summer as they couldn't afford to use the cooker, while a quarter (23%) were unable to travel to work or essential appointments because they couldn't afford the cost of public transport or fuel.⁵

6. The increase in need for emergency food parcels over this period has been seen right across the UK

Looking across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales all areas of the UK experienced an increase in the distribution of emergency food parcels during the mid-year period of 2022/23 in comparison to the same period last year (2021/22). Wales experienced the largest percentage increase (38%), followed by Scotland and England (34% and 33%) and Northern Ireland (25%). Looking back to the pre-pandemic period, Northern Ireland has experienced the largest percentage increase in the distribution of emergency food parcels since the same period in 2019/20 (76%).

Table 2: Number of emergency food parcels distributed by nation and region 1 April – 30 September with percentage change 2019-2022

	Number of parcels per month this year 2022/23	2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
		No. of parcels	% change to this year	No. of parcels	% change to this year	No. of parcels	% change to this year
England	1,056,400	655,297	61%	1,053,861	0%	797,005	33%
Northern Ireland	31,687	17,981	76%	32,560	-3%	25,328	25%
Scotland	116,373	112,268	4%	113,040	3%	86,962	34%
Wales	76,688	58,464	31%	71,403	7%	55,507	38%
UK Total	1,281,148	844,010	52%	1,270,864	1%	964,532	33%

7. Need for food banks in Northern Ireland is growing in rural as well as urban communities

Data from food banks within the Trussell Trust network in Northern Ireland shows that the cost of living crisis is also having an impact outside of fully urban areas.⁶ The majority (91%) of food parcels were distributed in urban areas of Northern Ireland in the first half of this year. However, food banks

⁴ At the Trussell Trust we define any household as a family. This means that when we talk about households here they could be individuals living alone, single parents, or multi-generational households.

⁵ All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,846 adults claiming Universal Credit. Fieldwork was undertaken between 10th - 31st August 2022. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults claiming Universal Credit (aged 16+).

⁶ Rurality data is defined as Urban, Rural or Mixed Urban / Rural for national statistics in Northern Ireland. These findings compared the Urban figures to the total number of parcels distributed in Rural and Mixed Urban / Rural communities.

in non-urban communities in Northern Ireland have seen a 74% increase in the number of parcels distributed compared to the same period last year.

This reflects a longer-term increase in need, with food banks in non-urban communities in Northern Ireland distributing twice as many parcels in this mid-year period than they did pre-pandemic in 2019/20. Urban areas in Northern Ireland have seen a 22% increase since the same period in 2021., and a 74% increase from pre-pandemic levels in 2019/20.

8. Food banks are reporting more working people needing to turn to food banks for support

Food banks across the UK network have reported changing opening hours to ensure people who are working can access support outside of working hours. Our own data shows that one in five people (20%) referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network in mid-2022 were in working households.⁷ These figures from our ongoing research project 'Hunger in the UK', conducted by Ipsos, highlight that work does not always protect people from having to use food banks. We know as well that many people who are in receipt of social security will also be working or will have recently been in work.

"I spoke to someone recently who is working but was referred to us as his working hours had been cut and he simply had no money and no food left for the rest of the week. He had never been to the food bank before and was desperate."

Philippa Bole, Volunteer South Belfast Foodbank

⁷ Ipsos surveyed 2,364 UK adults aged 18+ who had been referred to food banks within the Trussell Trust network between 01 April and 15 July 2022. Food banks were sampled across the UK, with questionnaires randomly distributed within food parcels. In total, 99 food banks participated in the study. Data are weighted to match the profile of UK adults referred to Trussell Trust food banks.

A working household is defined if the survey respondent describe state any of the following: that their main activity as being in work; they say they have any paid work; they say someone in their household is working.

We know what is driving increased need – and what needs to be done to right this wrong

Our communities face a growing crisis of destitution, caused by a failing social security system

Food bank use is driven by acute poverty, known as destitution. Independent research for the Trussell Trust found 95% of people referred to food banks in our network in early 2020 were destitute, meaning they could not afford the essentials needed to stay warm, dry, and to feed themselves.⁸

Destitution is a symptom of inadequate income, primarily due to failings in the social security system which should provide a strong lifeline whenever any of us needs support. Below-inflation increases in benefit payments have led to a large reduction in the purchasing power of benefits relative to the rising cost of living. In 2022, we have seen the greatest fall in the value of the basic rate of unemployment benefits since the start of annual uprating fifty years ago.⁹ Benefits have been further eroded by UK Government policies including benefit deductions, the two-child limit and the benefit cap.¹⁰

Need for emergency food has been steadily rising over the years as food banks and other frontline organisations plug the gaps in a social security system that is unable to protect people from the most severe forms of hardship. As our statistics for Northern Ireland show, the level of need for emergency food parcels seen in the mid-year period 2022/23 is a 25% increase on the mid year period in 2021/2 and a 194% increase over the last five years.

This is being exacerbated by the cost of living emergency

The COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis have eroded households' financial resilience even further and have exposed the costs of a weakened social security system. The increase in need for emergency food that we have seen across the Trussell Trust network in the last six months, demonstrates how the cost of living crisis is forcing more people to the doors of food, because they simply do not have enough money to afford the essentials.

This isn't going to get any better: while inflation remains high and food becomes less and less affordable, energy prices are expected to be over £4,000 for an average household from April 2023, treble what they were in March this year. Everyone is feeling the impact of this, but those on the lowest incomes are worst affected, as pressures from all sides make their income worth less.

Food banks are not the answer: only a strong social security system can protect people from going without the essentials

Food banks are neither the right nor sustainable response to people going without the essentials due to extremely low incomes. Our social security system should protect people from harm and support people through a range of scenarios: if they lose their job; if their income is too low or insecure to make ends meet; if they are sick or their family circumstances change; or, if they are unable to work due to caring responsibilities, ill-health or disability.

We know that putting more money in people's pockets reduces the need for food banks. The implementation of the temporary £20 uplift to Universal Credit in response to the COVID-19

⁸ 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>

⁹ Fifty years of benefit uprating (2022), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/fifty-years-benefit-uprating>

¹⁰ Benefit cap: cost of living in a crisis (2022), Child Poverty Action Group, https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/post/Benefit_Cap_Inflation_Briefing_Sep22_0.pdf

pandemic provided a lifeline to families, with evidence showing this reduced food insecurity¹¹ and child poverty levels.¹² The detrimental impact of the removal of the £20 uplift in October 2021 was clearly seen within our own statistics; from November 2021 we saw persistently high rates of increase in the need for emergency food parcels compared with the same months in 2019-20, well beyond the usual busy Christmas period.¹³ In this year's statistics we see how July's Cost of Living payment reduced, if only for a very short period, the need that we were seeing at food banks.

The UK government can right this wrong

We need action now to protect people through the immediate crisis, and beyond so that the system is strong enough to support any of us in our hour of need

To deal with the immediate emergency, the UK government must realise their commitment to protect the most at risk of financial hardship with a broad package of support. As well as **ensuring benefits rise with inflation** as soon as possible, this must go further to **close the gap between price rises and incomes over the winter**. We stand with over 100 other organisations in calling on the UK government to confirm its commitment to uprating benefits without delay.¹⁴

This action will provide some respite for families over the impossible winter ahead, but it will not get them on a permanent sustainable footing. That is why serious, long-term reform is required.

Limiting the impact of deductions on benefits would be a low-cost, high-impact intervention. Almost half (47%) of people referred to our food banks are in debt to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), and research has demonstrated the severe impact this can have.¹⁵¹⁶ Straightforward service improvements could be made here to ensure debt repayment is done in a more affordable way that does not significantly reduce what is already an inadequate level of income.

Making a long-term commitment to the Household Support Fund would ensure local authorities across the UK have the certainty and secure funding needed to provide crisis support. In Northern Ireland, the Discretionary Support Scheme is in place to intervene quickly when the unexpected happens (such as job, loss bereavement, or even a broken boiler.) Recommendations from the recent review of the Discretionary Support Scheme should be implemented by a restored Executive and Assembly.

Beyond this, the UK Government must ensure that benefits levels next year reflect the significant increases in prices expected. Short-term responses are neither sustainable for government, nor dignified for people who are struggling. That is why we need **a permanent commitment that benefit rates will always be enough to afford the essentials**.

¹¹ Hunger and the welfare state: Food insecurity among benefit claimants in the UK (2021), Welfare at a Social Distance, <https://62608d89-fc73-4896-861c>

¹² Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs, 2020/21 (2022), Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University, <https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty/>

¹³ Trussell Trust data briefing on end-of-year statistics relating to use of food banks: April 2021 – March 2022 (2022), The Trussell Trust, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/>

¹⁴ JRF and over 100 organisations call on Rishi Sunak to honour his commitment to go ahead with the normal uprating of benefits by inflation (2022), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/jrf-and-over-100-organisations-call-rishi-sunak-honour-his-commitment-go-ahead-normal-uprating>

¹⁵ 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>

¹⁶ Debt to Government, Deductions and Destitution (2022), The Trussell Trust, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/02/Debt-to-government-deductions-and-destitution-qualitative-research-report.pdf>

The Northern Ireland Executive must do more

In Northern Ireland, **urgent restoration of the Executive and Assembly should be a priority**.

Government intervention is now urgently required to release the pressure people, families and communities are under. We need a Northern Ireland Executive in place to provide the policies that will protect communities this winter. Continued political inaction helps no one.

Stormont has significant policy-making powers in regard to social security that could be deployed to shield local households from the poverty and destitution so many are already facing, and that so many more are at risk of in the time ahead. We urgently need the institutions to return, set a multi-year budget and deliver the policy solutions that people in Northern Ireland need.

A functioning Northern Ireland Executive should implement the following urgent measures to help ensure that thousands more households do not fall into destitution:

1. Reinstatement of the £20 uplift to Universal Credit and extension to legacy benefits.
2. A one-off payment of £500 to people entitled to disability benefits or carers allowance.
3. Removal of the two-child limit for Universal Credit and child tax credit.

All children in a family should receive benefit entitlement to ensure that no child goes hungry this winter.