



BRIEFING PAPER

Number 8585, 30 January 2020

Food banks in the UK

By Gloria Tyler

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Contents:

1. Introduction
2. How many food banks are there in the UK?
3. Statistics on food parcels
4. Food banks in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
5. Government food insecurity indicators introduction
6. Other food aid provision

Contents

Summary	3
1. Introduction	4
2. How many food banks are there in the UK?	5
3. Statistics on food parcels	6
3.1 UK	6
3.2 Regions	9
4. Food banks in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland	10
4.1 Food banks and parcels in Scotland	10
4.2 Food banks in Wales	10
4.3 Food banks in Northern Ireland	11
5. Government food insecurity indicators introduction	12
5.1 UK	12
5.2 Scotland	13
6. Other food aid provision	14
Meal providers	14
Social supermarkets	14
Provisions for schoolchildren	14



Summary

The primary source of data on food bank use is the [Trussell Trust](#). This national charity provides food parcels to people who meet certain requirements and are referred to it by professionals such as doctors, health visitors, social workers and the Citizens Advice. Other charities also operate food banks or similar services, but there is no centrally collected data on them, [except in Scotland](#). The data used here is mostly from the Trussell Trust, and so it should be considered incomplete – there are some areas where the Trussell Trust does not operate, but where other services may have distributed food parcels.

This note has sections on:

- The 2000+ food banks in the UK, of which 1,200 are run by the Trussell Trust and over 800 are independent
- Food parcel distribution statistics including the 19% rise from April 2018 to March 2019 in Trussell Trust figures and the 23% rise in Trussell Trust mid-year statistics for April – September 2019
- Regional data; the North West being the part of the UK where the highest number of Trussell Trust food parcels are distributed
- Food banks and parcels in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with Scottish independent food banks being available in addition to Trussell Trust statistics, permitting a more complete picture
- Government introduction of food insecurity indicators, following an announcement made in February 2019
- Other food aid provision, such as meal providers, social supermarkets and initiatives aimed at school children

1. Introduction

This briefing is about the use of food banks. Food banks are run by volunteers, churches and charities. Any information we have on food bank use comes from the Trussell Trust and IFAN, the Independent Food Aid Network.

Food bank statistics should not be used as a proxy for poverty measurements¹. The comprehensiveness and accuracy of food bank data, and the number of food aid outlets in existence, will affect food bank figures regardless of any changes or stability in poverty levels.

Topics related to food banks include 'food poverty' and 'food insecurity'. This note is about food bank usage, and the data here should be used cautiously in any wider context.

A food bank is a charitable resource which distributes food to those in need of it at least once a week. The [Trussell Trust](#) is an anti-poverty charity that operates a network of volunteer-run food banks across the UK while campaigning for the end of their necessity.

The [Trussell Trust](#) gathers its administrative data from the referrals required to access its support, and generates a wide range of analysis from it, including the numbers of adults and children receiving food aid and their reasons for needing it.

Food banks are a global phenomenon. First introduced in the USA² in the 1960s they now exist in many wealthy countries³. [FEBA, the European Food Banks Federation](#). has a map showing the location of its members across the continent. However, definitions of what a food bank is and measurement of what it does varies across countries, so that international comparison is not straightforward.

¹ See House of Commons Library briefing [Poverty in the UK: statistics](#)

² Where they are called 'food pantries'

³ See Food Bank Nations: poverty, corporate charity and the right to food by Grahame Riches, Routledge, 2018, p42 for an international comparison table.

2. How many food banks are there in the UK?

The Trussell Trust started its UK food aid distribution in 2000 in Salisbury. In 2004 it founded the Foodbank Network based on the Salisbury model. Since then the Trussell Trust has partnered with churches and communities across the country, which are [mapped here](#).

It covers **428 locations** across all four nations of the UK as of 2019. Many locations have multiple branches, totalling over **1,200 individual food bank centres**.

IFAN, the [Independent Food Aid Network](#), is the UK network for independent (non-Trussell Trust) food aid providers. Historically there has been little data on the operation of independent food banks, but this has recently changed.

On behalf of the network, Sabine Goodwin has now [mapped](#) independent food banks, giving some indication of how many operate outside the Trussell Trust. There are **at least 822 independent food banks in the UK today**.⁴

Added to the Trussell Trust's 1,200 **this makes over 2,000 food banks in total**, suggesting that reliance on Trussell Trust figures significantly under estimates food bank usage in the UK. As with the Trussell Trust, independent food banks can be found across most of the country.

[A joint study](#) by the Trussell Trust and the Independent Food Aid Network in 2017 calculated that food bank volunteers contributed more than 4 million hours work that year, worth 'at least £30 million'.⁵ The Trussell Trust celebrated the work of over 40,000 people volunteering with it in 2015-16.⁶

⁴ This does not include those operating from schools, mentioned in the [National Governance Association Report](#) of 2 September 2019. [This report](#) notes an increase in the number of governors reporting that their school does provide a food bank.

⁵ [Volunteers across the UK giving 'at least £30 million' a year in unpaid work to support foodbanks](#), Trussell Trust Blog, 17 October 2017

⁶ [Volunteers' Week 2016](#), Trussell Trust, 1 June 2016

3. Statistics on food parcels

3.1 UK

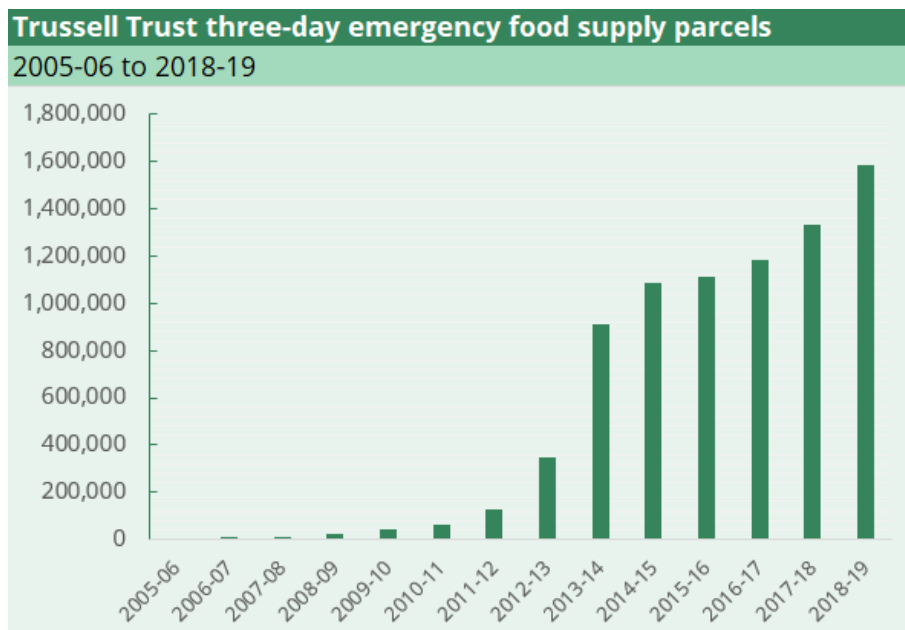
The Trussell Trust provides 'three-day emergency food parcels', and this is their standard unit of measurement. It also measures food in tonnes. It does not record the number of individual users of food banks. In its November 2019 [State of Hunger](#) report the Trussell Trust estimates that up to 2% of all UK households used a food bank in 2018/19.⁷

A food parcel typically consists of tinned and dried goods selected across food groups to provide healthy balanced meals⁸ following nutritionists' guidelines⁹. These have expanded to include perishable items¹⁰ since the Trussell Trust partnered with Asda and FareShare in February 2018.¹¹

The Trussell Trust publishes statistics¹² twice a year on its website, explaining that:

Our statistics are a measure of volume rather than unique users, and on average people needed around two food bank referrals in the last year.¹³

It is important not to confuse food parcel figures with the number of people accessing them.¹⁴



⁷ Page 32, [State of Hunger](#), Trussell Trust, November 2019. This echoes the figure given in

⁸ [What's in a Food Parcel?](#), Trussell Trust website

⁹ [A Nutritional Analysis of the Trussell Trust Emergency Food Parcel](#), Dr Darren Hughes and Edwina Prayogo, UCL, April 2018

¹⁰ [What's in a Trussell Trust foodbank parcel and why?](#), Trussell Trust, 8 June 2018

¹¹ [Asda, the Trussell Trust and Fareshare launch £20 million partnership to help a million people out of food poverty](#), Trussell Trust, 8 February 2018

¹² [Latest stats](#), Trussell Trust

¹³ [Mid-year stats](#), Trussell Trust

¹⁴ Full Fact addressed the question of [how many people use food banks](#) in its publication of 28 April 2017.

Source: [Trussell Trust](#)

In 2018-19 the Trussell Trust supplied 1,583,668 three-day emergency food parcels, an increase of 18.8% on the previous year. Around a third of these - more than half a million - went to children.

Note that this data does not include all food parcels distributed because of the large number of independent food banks who also distribute food parcels but are not part of the Trussell Trust network.

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) and [A Menu for Change](#) have now produced [statistics on food parcels for Scotland](#), making a more complete picture of food bank usage in that country possible.¹⁵

[State of Hunger](#), published by the Trussell Trust in November 2019, is the largest ever piece of research into food bank use in the UK. It notes:

Assuming independent food banks in England, Wales and Northern Ireland distribute a similar number of food parcels on average as those in Scotland, the total number of food parcels distributed across the UK over 2018/19 by food banks in the Trussell Trust network and independent food banks would be around 3 million

This study is being carried out at Heriot-Watt University over three years and it identifies key characteristics of food bank users. It found three categories of factor contributing to a person needing a food bank:

- Problems with benefits;
- Adverse life experiences such as eviction, ill health and divorce;
- The exhaustion of formal and informal support such as family and friends.

Notably, of those people who have been referred to a Trussell Trust food bank:

- Over two-thirds had experienced a problem with the benefits system in the year before they needed emergency food, including long waits and reductions. In 43% of cases benefit problems were one of the main reasons for referral;
- 94% were 'facing real destitution', unable to buy essentials to stay warm, dry, clean and fed. 23% were homeless;
- £50 was the average weekly income after housing costs, while 20% reported no income at all in the month before (this contrasts with a median household income after housing costs of £437 in 2017/18 according to DWP [Households below average income](#) [HBAI] statistics);
- Over three quarters were in arrears, most commonly rent, and 40% were repaying debts, the majority to the DWP;
- In the year prior to using a food bank 7 in 10 respondents reported at least one 'challenging life experience' such as eviction or divorce, while a large minority also reported having

¹⁵ [Emergency Food Parcel Provision in Scotland April 2017 to September 2018](#), IFAN, March 2019

8 Food banks in the UK

experienced an 'adverse work-related experience' such as losing a job or a reduction in work hours;

- Nearly 75% reported at least one health issue in their household, 54% of which were mental health problems;
- 2% were people of pension age (65+)
- 22% were single parents
- Nearly half were single person households
- 89% were born in the UK, slightly above the 86% of the population as a whole;

The Trussell Trust has reported a further increase of 23% in food bank usage in its mid-year statistics for the period April – September 2019.¹⁶ This the highest usage they have yet experienced, and the highest percentage increase in usage since 2013.

In December 2019 Dr Rachel Loopstra of Kings College London and Sabine Goodwin of IFAN with others published [A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network](#). Key findings include:

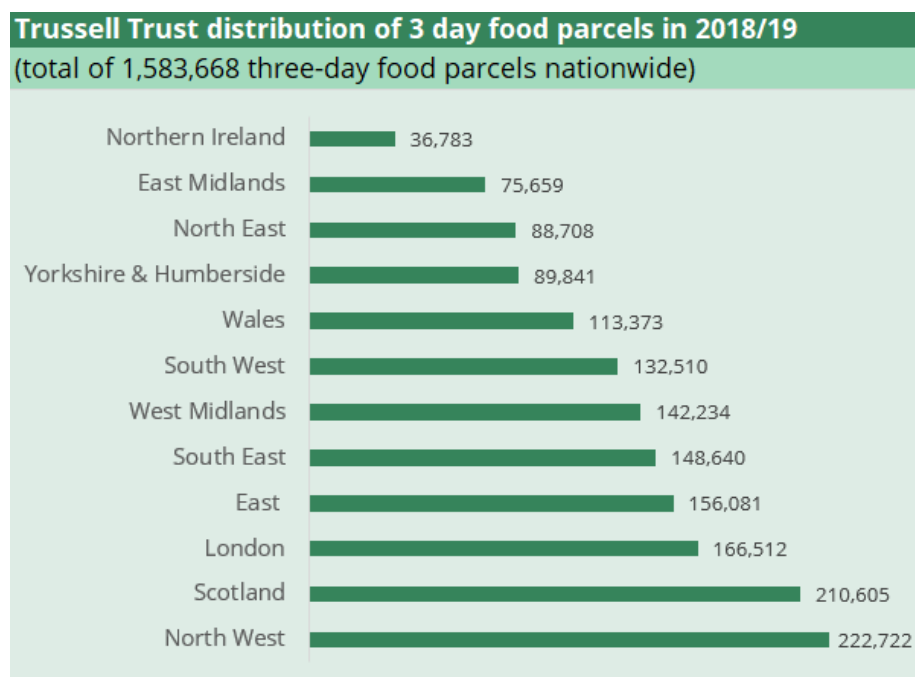
- 75% of independent food banks started operating in the past 9 nine years, with over a third opening over 2012 to 2013.
- Over 60% of independent food banks required new clients to have a referral from a third-party agency but most indicated that exceptions can be made to this rule. Notably, almost 40% did not require clients to have referrals.
- Where referrals were received from third-party agencies, over 75% of food banks reported receiving referrals from local authorities. Jobcentre Plus offices were also very commonly reported referral agencies.
- 44% of independent food banks imposed no restriction on how often people could receive food parcels, and an additional 17.5% allowed access to food parcels 18 or more times in a 12-month period. Over 30%, however, restricted access to food parcels to 6 or fewer times in a 12-month period.
- About 45% of independent food banks gave out food parcels with more than 3 days' worth of food per person, and an additional 10% did not restrict food parcel content.
- Over 60% of food banks offered other services in addition to food parcel distribution.
- Most food banks reported that people who were unemployed or unable to work due to disability and single parent families were groups often helped in their food banks.

¹⁶ [Steepest increase in people needing food banks for past 5 years as need soars by 23%](#). Trussell Trust, 13 November 2019

3.2 Regions

The distribution of Trussell Trust food parcels varies around the country, as the following chart shows. These are whole numbers, and not calculated proportionately to the size of each region's population.

Around 60% of food banks are run by the Trussell Trust. There are some areas where the Trussell Trust does not operate, but where independent food banks may distribute food parcels.



Source: [Trussell Trust](#)

4. Food banks in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

4.1 Food banks and parcels in Scotland

Working with [A Menu for Change](#), an alliance of poverty charities, the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) has been collecting data on food banks in Scotland that are not part of the Trussell Trust network with the support of the Scottish Government.

In March 2019 IFAN published detailed data on [Emergency Food Parcel Provision in Scotland April 2017 to September 2018](#).

It identified 94¹⁷ independent food banks and food parcel distributors across Scotland, added to the 118 Trussell Trust food banks already known to be operating in the country, putting the total number of food banks in Scotland at 212.

IFAN calculates that although there are fewer independent food banks, they distribute almost as many three-day emergency food parcels as the more numerous Trussell Trust outlets.¹⁸

The figures are 258,606 Trussell Trust food banks, 221,977 independent food banks, a total of at least 480,583 food parcels delivered in April 2017 to September 2018 in Scotland (this is a different period from the period reported in the tables above).

The research concludes

Despite showing food bank use to be nearly twice as much as previously thought, these combined food bank statistics still remain the tip of the iceberg as they do not reflect the use of other types of emergency food aid provision nor the scale of people going hungry without accessing help at all. The [2017 Scottish Health Survey](#) found 8% of adults in Scotland worried about running out of money for food, rising to 21% among lone parents and single households

In January 2020 Menu for Change [published data for the period April 2018 to September 2019](#), and reported a rise of 22% on the previous 18 month period¹⁹.

4.2 Food banks in Wales

In March 2016 the University of Bangor [published findings](#) on food banks in Wales. It noted a rise from 16 outlets in 1998 to 157 in 2015 and suggested that this closely matches the situation in England. Maps showing the locations, notable for being rural as well as urban, are included in the full report document [here](#).²⁰

¹⁷ At the time of writing, ten months after the report, this figure is now 101

¹⁸ [Emergency Food Parcel Provision in Scotland April 2017 to September 2018](#), IFAN, March 2019

¹⁹ [Emergency Food Parcel Provision in Scotland April 2018 to September 2019](#), Menu for Change, January 2020

²⁰ [Poverty and Food Banks in Wales](#), Dave Beck and Hefin Gwilym, Bangor University, March 2016

4.3 Food banks in Northern Ireland

The [first Northern Ireland Trussell Trust food bank](#) opened in 2012 in Newtownards. This [undated list](#) shows that many more have opened in the province since.²¹ The Trussell Trust had 38 food banks in Northern Ireland in June 2019 and reported a 13% increase in use of its food banks in the year 2018-19.²²

²¹ [List of Food Banks](#) [in Northern Ireland], Citizens Advice Bureau Belfast with University of Ulster Students Union and the Social Policy department of Jordanstown

²² [Northern Ireland food banks fear for busiest summer ever](#), Trussell Trust, 27 June 2019

5. Government food insecurity indicators introduction

5.1 UK

The UK government is to include a measure of food insecurity in an annual DWP survey of Household income and living standards.

The announcement was made at an informal meeting attended by the DWP, the Office for National Statistics, Public Health England and the Scottish and Welsh governments, as well as several food poverty charities, on 26 February 2019.²³

This development was also reported by the campaign group End Hunger UK in a blog post from 27 February 2019, [Campaign win! UK Government agrees to measure household food insecurity](#). It noted:

At a meeting on 25 February 2019, attended by various organisations who are members of the End Hunger UK campaign, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) confirmed that it was planning to include household food insecurity measurement questions in its annual [Family Resources Survey](#) starting in April 2019...

The [Family Resources Survey](#) is an annual survey carried out by the DWP that looks at income, housing tenure, caring needs, disability, and pension participation. The survey covers all four nations of the UK with a representative sample of 20,000 households and has been continuously collecting data since 1994. The first datasets on household food insecurity will be available by March 2021.

The 10 questions that will be asked in order to ascertain whether an individual is food insecure will be taken from the [US Department of Agriculture's survey](#)..

This data will help Government and civil society have a clearer picture of the scale of household food insecurity in the UK, as well as identify the groups that are the most affected. DWP assisted by the Social Metrics Commission has also developed new, experimental poverty statistics to help target support more effectively, which will be published in the second half of 2020.²⁴

This follows the establishment of [ENUF](#): Evidence and Network on UK household Food insecurity. This is an ESRC funded resource on household food insecurity in the UK run by Dr Rachel Loopstra and Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford. It includes reference to the UK Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey and the Food and You Survey (2016)

On 15 January 2020 Minister for Welfare Delivery, Will Quince MP, responded to Written Parliamentary Question [2416](#) on food banks, mentioning the new set of food security questions in the Family Resources Survey starting from April 2019.

²³ [UK hunger survey to measure food insecurity](#), The Guardian, 27 February 2019

²⁴ [New poverty statistics developed to help government target support](#), DWP, 17 May 2019

5.2 Scotland

In 2013, the Scottish Government carried out a study into the extent of food aid provision in Scotland, [Overview of Food Aid Provision in Scotland](#), which noted a growth in demand over the 2012-13 period.²⁵

A Scottish Parliamentary Committee looked at the issue of food banks in 2014, with a focus on causes. In June of that year they published a report of their findings, [Food Banks and Welfare Reform](#)²⁶, which stated that although the [UK government] Department of Work and Pension made it clear that 'they see no direct link between the increase in use of food banks in Scotland and welfare reform', the Committee was

'convinced by the volume and strength of the evidence it has received that there is a direct correlation between welfare reform and the increase in use of food banks'.

In 2016, the Scottish Government published [Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland - The Report of the Independent Working Group on Food Poverty](#), which focussed on [recommended responses](#) to the situation.

The Scottish Government committed to monitoring household food insecurity in 2016, following recommendations from an Independent Working Group on Food Poverty.

Three priority questions from the UN Food Insecurity Experience Scale were included in the 2017 and 2018 Scottish Health Surveys, and they will be included in the 2019 Scottish Health Survey.

The 2018 Scottish Health Survey showed that 9% of adults experienced food insecurity, defined as worrying about running out of food due to lack of money or other resources, up from 8% in 2017. A quarter of single parents (25 per cent) and around a fifth of single adults aged under 65 living alone (21 per cent) had experienced this²⁷.

The Scottish Government is pursuing a Good Food Nation policy²⁸ and administers a [Fair Food Fund](#). Details of its assistance to Scottish food banks was given by Aileen Campbell MSP on 10 December 2019 in response to Scottish Parliament Question [S5W-26530](#).

²⁵ [Overview of Food Aid Provision in Scotland](#), Dr Filip Sosenko Dr Nicola Livingstone Prof. Suzanne Fitzpatrick, School of the Built Environment Heriot-Watt University Edinburgh, Scottish Government Social Research, 2013

²⁶ 2nd Report, 2014 (Session 4): [Food Banks and Welfare Reform](#), SP Paper 537

²⁷ Scottish Health Survey 2018 published, Scottish Government press notice, 24 September 2019 <https://www.gov.scot/news/scottish-health-survey-2018-published/>

²⁸ [Good Food Nation policy](#), Scottish Government

6. Other food aid provision

Food aid is not restricted to food banks. The Independent Food Aid Network estimates that there are at least another 3,000 independent food aid providers working beyond the food bank model across the UK including social supermarkets, soup kitchens, community food projects and school holiday meal providers.

Some other forms of food aid are described below.

Meal providers

- [Fareshare](#) distribute surplus food to frontline food aid organisations as well as other kinds of charities. It was **founded in 1994**, becoming an independent charity in 2004. It calls [2018/19](#) its 'biggest year yet', supporting 10,943 charities to feed 924,325 people.²⁹
- [FoodCycle](#) was **founded in 2008** to help communities set up groups of volunteers to use surplus food to prepare meals for those in food poverty in their community. In their Social Impact report for 2018³⁰ they say that they have opened 7 new projects in the year to give a total of 39.

Social supermarkets

- Social supermarkets are another way to save 'surplus food' going to waste. The first, [Community Shop](#), was **opened in 2013**. A Financial Times article, [Social supermarkets offer working poor a lifeline](#), 25 October 2018 reports on the current extent of and demand for this provision.

Provisions for schoolchildren

- [Magic Breakfast](#), which supplies breakfasts to schoolchildren, was **founded in 2003** since when it has seen growth in demand.³¹ This has been met by the Government's National School Breakfast Programme, which this year has seen 'Five hundred new or improved breakfast clubs signed up'.³²
- The Trussell Trust [Holiday Clubs project](#) for children who cannot access Free School Meals during school holidays, provides "meals (breakfast & lunch), as well as a variety of fun activities and learning opportunities to families." The project "allows foodbanks to develop a Holiday Club without starting from scratch" and were first trialled in a Summer 2016 pilot.
- Feeding Britain, a charity formed in 2015 by members of the APPG on Hunger, has also coordinated [Holiday Food and Fun Clubs](#) in its nine pilot areas, to protect children from hunger during the school holidays.
- [Kitchen Social](#) was launched in 2017 and works with community organisations across London offering food during the school holidays. It is supported by the Mayor's Fund for London.

²⁹ [Our Impact](#), FareShare

³⁰ [Social Impact report](#), FoodCycle

³¹ [Calls for expansion of scheme providing free breakfasts to hungry children](#), Patrick Butler, The Guardian, 8 January 2013

³² [Department for Education 2 November 2018 press release](#)

- On 4 January 2020 [the Government announced](#) extension of the National School Breakfast Programme, adding 650 more schools in disadvantaged areas to the 1,800 already involved. It also announced increased provision in summer holiday free school meals for summer 2020.³³

³³ [Free meals and summer holiday activities for children](#), Department for Education and Lord Agnew, 4 January 2020

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).