



BRIEFING PAPER

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Food banks in the UK

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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
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 | 8 |
| 3.3 Local statistics | 8 |
| 4. Food banks in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland | 9 |
| 4.1 Food banks and parcels in Scotland | 9 |
| 4.2 Food banks in Wales | 9 |
| 4.3 Food banks in Northern Ireland | 10 |
| 5. Government food insecurity indicators | 11 |
| 5.1 UK | 11 |
| 5.2 Scotland | 11 |
| 6. Other food aid provision | 13 |
| Meal providers | 13 |
| Social supermarkets | 13 |
| Provisions for schoolchildren | 13 |

Summary

The primary source of data on food bank use is the [Trussell Trust](#). This national charity provides food parcels to people referred to it by professionals such as doctors, health visitors, social workers and the [Citizens Advice](#) who meet certain requirements. 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 delivered food parcels.

This briefing has sections on:

- The 2000 food banks in the UK, of which 1,200 are run by the Trussell Trust and 800 are independent
- Food parcel distribution statistics including the 19% rise from April 2018 to March 2019 in Trussell Trust figures
- Regional data; the North West being the part of the UK where the largest total 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 charities. Any information we have on food bank use comes from the charities and they are under no obligation to publish it.

Food bank statistics should not be used as a proxy for poverty measurements. 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.

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 requesting food aid and their reasons for needing it.

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

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.

It 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 these charities, but this has recently changed.

The network has now [mapped](#) independent food banks, giving some indication of how many operate outside the Trussell Trust. There are **at least 807 independent food banks in the UK in 2019**.

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.

The [Charity Commission records](#) that on 31 March 2018 the Trussell Trust was overseen by 7 trustees, employed 87 people and had 2,000 volunteers.

[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'.¹

Food banks are a global phenomenon. First introduced in the USA in the 1960s they now exist in many wealthy countries.² [FEBA, the European Food Banks Federation](#) has a map showing the location of its members across the continent.

¹ [Volunteers across the UK giving 'at least £30 million' a year in unpaid work to support foodbanks](#), Trussell Trust Blog, 17 October 2017

² See *Food Bank Nations: poverty, corporate charity and the right to food* by Grahame Riches, Routledge, 2018, p42 for an international comparison table.

3. Statistics on food parcels

3.1 UK

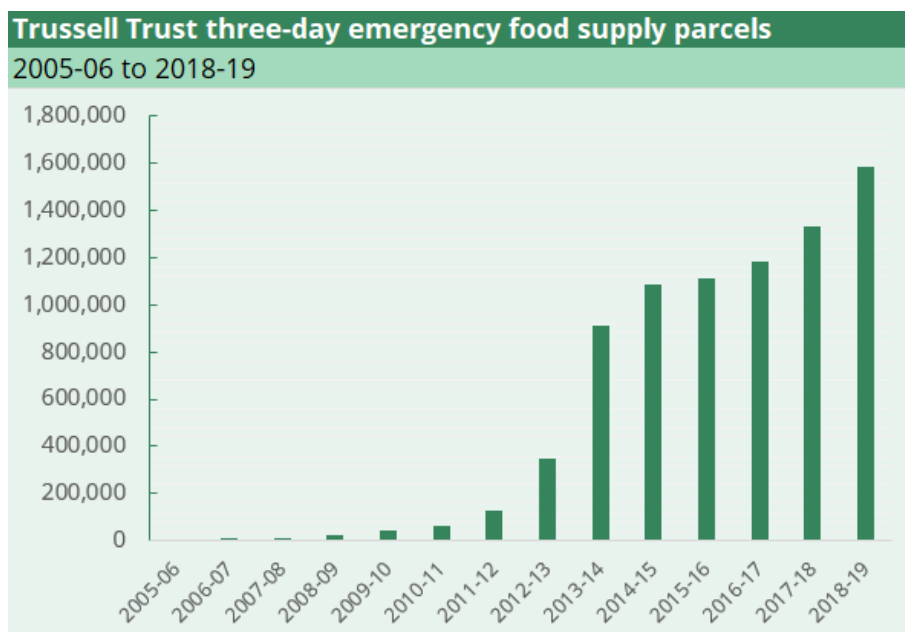
The Trussell Trust provides 'three-day emergency food parcels', and this is their standard unit of measurement. It also measures food in tonnes. It does not record the number of individual users of food banks.

A food parcel typically consists of tinned and dried goods selected across food groups to provide healthy balanced meals³ following nutritionists' guidelines.⁴ These have expanded to include perishable items⁵ since the Trussell Trust partnered with Asda and FareShare in February 2018.⁶

The Trussell Trust publishes statistics⁷ 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.⁸

It is important not to confuse food parcel figures with the number of people accessing them.⁹



Source: [Trussell Trust](#) (Years run from April to March)

³ [What's in a food parcel?](#) Trussell Trust

⁴ [A Nutritional Analysis of the Trussell Trust Emergency Food Parcel](#), Dr Darren Hughes and Edwina Prayogo, UCL, April 2018

⁵ [What's in a Trussell Trust foodbank parcel and why?](#) Trussell Trust, 8 June 2018

⁶ [Asda, the Trussell Trust and FareShare launch £20 million partnership to help a million people out of food poverty](#), Trussell Trust, 8 February 2018

⁷ [Latest Stats](#), Trussell Trust

⁸ [Mid-year Stats](#), Trussell Trust

⁹ Full Fact addressed the question of [how many people use food banks](#) in its publication of 28 April 2017.

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 delivered because of the large number of independent food banks who also deliver food parcels but are not part of the Trussell Trust network.

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) [have now produced statistics](#) on food parcels for Scotland, making a more complete picture of food bank usage in that country possible.¹⁰

In June 2017 The Trussell Trust with the University of Oxford and King's College London published [Financial insecurity, food insecurity, and disability: the profile of people receiving emergency food assistance from the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network in Britain](#).

It is the single biggest nationwide study on food bank use to date.¹¹ Key findings include:

- Lone parents and their children constitute the largest number of people receiving food parcels
- Though single male households are the most common household type receiving food parcels
- Half of households receiving food parcels included someone with a disability
- Food bank users experience multiple forms of destitution

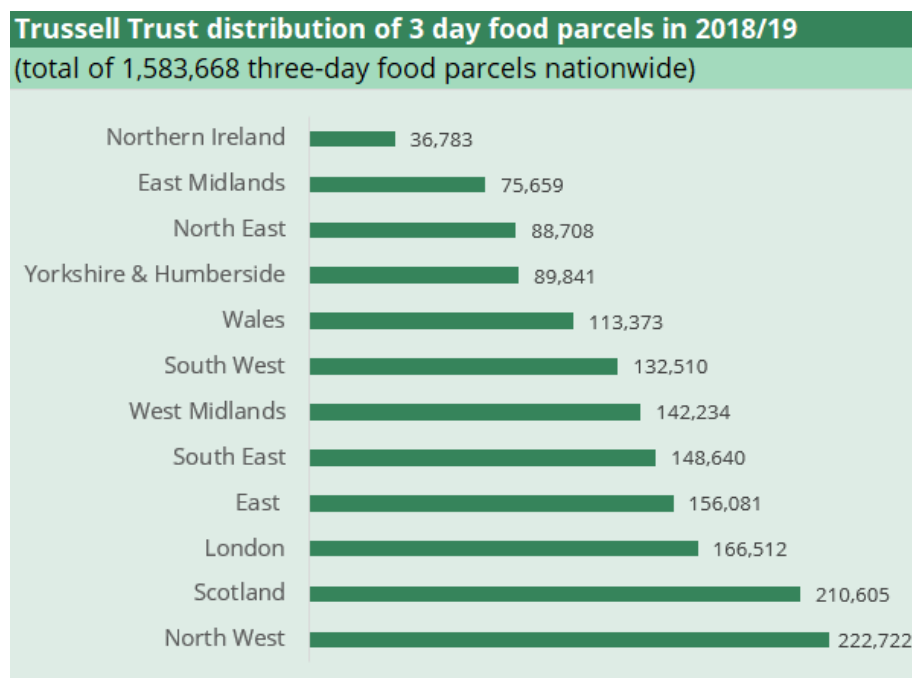
¹⁰ [Emergency Food Parcel Provision in Scotland April 2017 to September 2018](#), IFAN, March 2019

¹¹ [Financial insecurity, food insecurity, and disability: the profile of people receiving emergency food assistance from The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network in Britain](#).

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.

Please remember there are some areas where the Trussell Trust does not operate, but where independent food banks may deliver food parcels.



Source: [Trussell Trust](#)

3.3 Local statistics

The Trussell Trust publishes data at national and regional level. Individual food banks sometimes include a headline figure for the previous year on their individual websites.

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 has identified 94 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.¹²

The figures are 258,606 parcels from Trussell Trust food banks, 221,977 parcels from independent food banks, making 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.

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 are included in the full report document.¹³

¹² [Emergency Food Parcel Provision in Scotland April 2017 to September 2018](#), IFAN, March 2019

¹³ [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](#) suggests that many more have opened in the province since.¹⁴

¹⁴ [List of Food Banks](#) [in Northern Ireland], Citizens Advice Bureau Belfast with University of Ulster Students Union and the Social Policy department of Jordanstown

5. Government food insecurity indicators

5.1 UK

The UK government has agreed 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 February 2019.¹⁵

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 [Food and Resources Survey](#) starting in April 2019...

The [Food and 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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷

A Scottish Parliamentary Committee looked into 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](#)¹⁸, which stated

¹⁵ [UK hunger survey to measure food insecurity](#), The Guardian, 27 February 2019

¹⁶ [New poverty statistics developed to help government target support](#), DWP, 17 May 2019

¹⁷ [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

¹⁸ 2nd Report, 2014 (Session 4): [Food Banks and Welfare Reform](#), SP Paper 537

12 Food banks in the UK

that although the [UK government] Department for Work and Pensions 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 is pursuing policy that by 2025 Scotland will be

a Good Food Nation, where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they produce, buy, cook, serve, and eat each day.¹⁹

[Food insecurity and poverty](#) has become a subject of key policy concern of the Scottish Government of recent years, and according to the [Scottish Government Statistics web pages](#) “The Scottish Government is currently considering the measurement of food insecurity in Scotland.”

¹⁹ [Good Food Nation policy](#), Scottish Government, 2014

6. Other food aid provision

Food aid is not restricted to food banks. The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) estimates that there are at least 2,000 more social supermarkets, soup kitchens, community food projects, social eating projects, drop-in kitchens and school holiday and breakfast clubs operating across the UK.²⁰

Some other forms of food aid are described below.

Meal providers

- [Fareshare](#) 'redistribute surplus food to charities that turn it into meals'. It was **founded in 1994**, becoming an independent charity in 2004. It calls 2018/19 its 'biggest year yet', supporting 10,943 charities and community groups to provide 46.5 million meals.²¹
- [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 2018²² 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 considerable growth in demand.²³ 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'.²⁴
- The Trussell Trust runs a [Holiday Clubs project](#) for children who cannot access Free School Meals during school holidays, providing "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.

²⁰ [Emergency Food Parcel Provision in Scotland April 2017 to September 2018](#), IFAN, March 2019

²¹ <https://fareshare.org.uk/what-we-do/our-impact/>

²² <https://www.foodcycle.org.uk/social-impact-report/>

²³ [Calls for expansion of scheme providing free breakfasts to hungry children](#), Patrick Butler, *The Guardian*, 8 January 2013

²⁴ [Department for Education 2 November 2018 press release](#)

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