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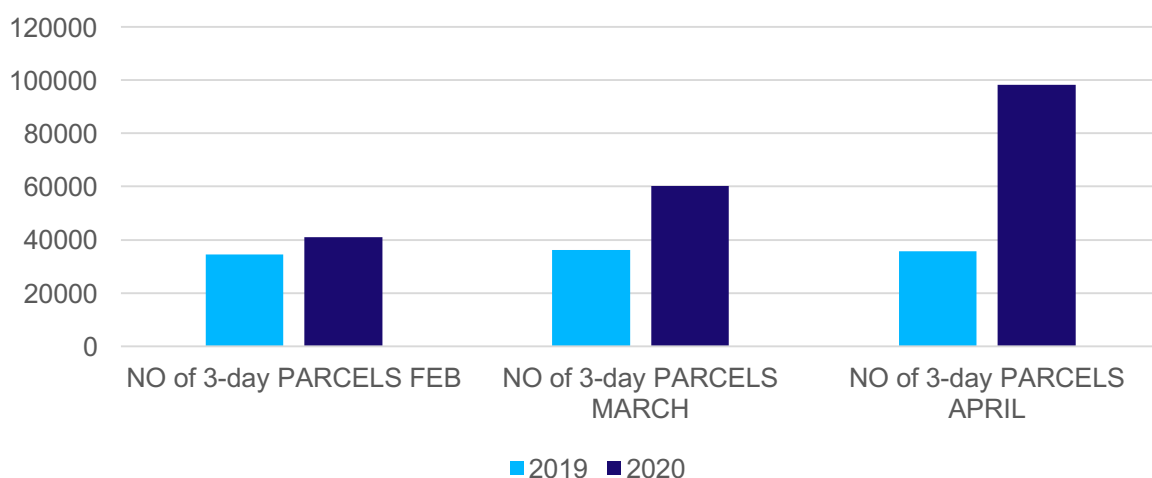
Independent Food Bank Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in the UK Comparing February – April 2019 with February – April 2020

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) connects, supports and advocates on behalf of a range of over 300 frontline food aid providers and envisions a society without the need for food banks. The network’s membership includes 259 organisations operating 346 independent food banks regularly distributing emergency food parcels at least once a week.ⁱ Since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, independent food banks have seen a large increase in need for emergency food parcels.ⁱⁱ

175% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed by independent food banks across the UK comparing April 2019 to April 2020:

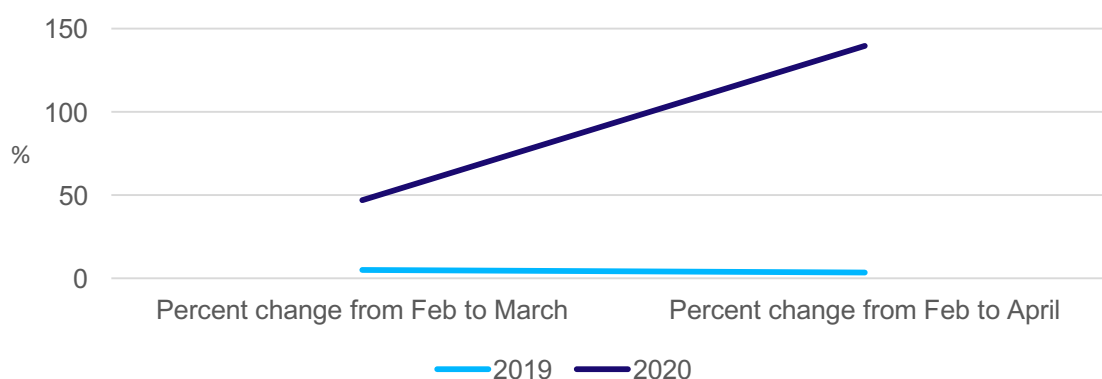
This report looks in particular at data collated from 112 organisations operating 213 independent food banks operating across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Irelandⁱⁱⁱ and able to provide data for both February to April 2019 and February to April 2020.^{iv} Comparing the months April 2019 and April 2020, independent food banks have seen a 175% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed.

Fig 1: No of emergency food parcels distributed by UK independent food banks February, March, April 2019/20



As shown in Figure 1, the number of food parcels distributed increased each month from February to April 2020.¹ In March, the number of food parcels was 46% higher than in February. In April, the number distributed was 139% higher than it was in February. As shown in Figure 2, these rises over these months are much higher than the rises observed over these same months last year.

Fig 2: Percentage change in the number of emergency food parcels distributed across the UK from February to March 2020 and from February to April 2020



Unit of measurement used:

Like the Trussell Trust’s statistics, the number of parcels we have recorded is based on the number of people, both children and adults who have been provided with one 3-day supply of food per person. Some independent food banks have provided more than 3 days’ worth of food per person, so to enable comparison with Trussell Trust data, collated information has been converted into a shared unit of measurement.

Table 1: Number of 3-day parcels distributed by 112 organisations running 213 independent food banks across the UK

Month 2019/2020	Numbers of 3-days food parcels distributed
February 2019	34,472
February 2020	40,983
March 2019	36,244
March 2020	60,195
April 2019	35,688
April 2020	98,301

¹ 15 independent food banks provided data that their teams estimated, that is 13% of the organisations providing data for both time frames.

Increase in the size of emergency food parcels:

To accommodate both the need to reduce face-to-face contact and to support growing need since the outbreak of COVID-19, 40 organisations, or 35% of our data set, have increased the size of their parcels to support people with a food supply for a longer time period than usual.

Numbers of people and referrals supported:

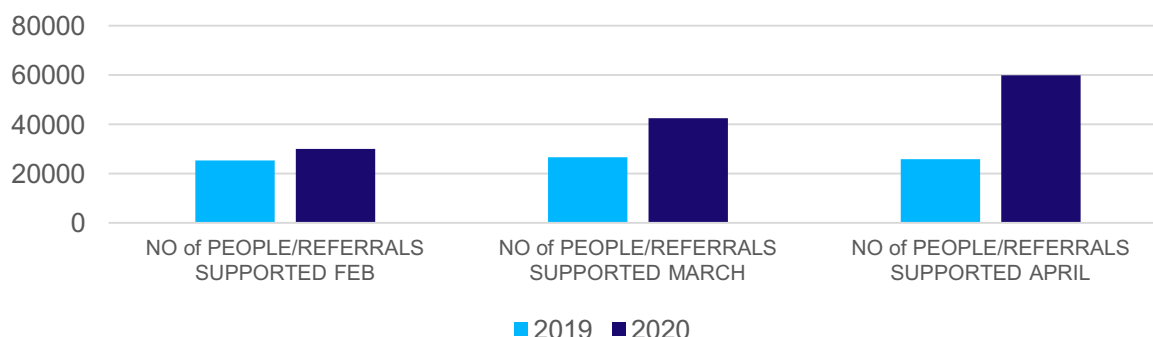
Given that many organisations have increased the size of their food parcels in recent weeks, it is important to also analyse the number of people and referrals² supported behind the food parcel numbers.

Table 2: Number of people and referrals supported during February, March and April 2019 and 2020

Month 2019/2020	Numbers of people or referrals supported
February 2019	25,332
February 2020	30,037
March 2019	26,616
March 2020	42,427
April 2019	25,775
April 2020	59,835

The number of people or referrals supported was only 18% higher in February 2020 compared to February 2019. Then, in March 2020, figures were 59% than in March 2019. The rate of increase further accelerated in April, with a **132% rise in levels of support for people or referrals in April 2020 compared to April 2019.**

Fig 3: Number of people/referrals supported February-April 2019/20



² 24 organisations contributed data regarding the number of referrals rather than the number of people. This means the number of food parcels counted is underestimated as the number of people is not accounted for.

Changes to food bank operations as a result of COVID-19 and self-referrals:

The outbreak of COVID-19, and subsequent lockdown, has meant that some independent food banks have needed to change the way they operate.

Some independent food banks do not usually operate via an official referral system.³ This means that they do not require external agencies to make assessments of need. **88 of the 112 organisations ran a self-referral or mixed referral/self-referral system before the outbreak of COVID-19.** 27 organisations, or 24% of our data set, have seen an increase in the number of self-referrals or have started to accept self-referrals as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Although telephone and internet-based systems have replaced some referral services, these are not necessarily accessible to people living with no or low income. This could partly account for the increase in numbers seeking support from independent food banks reporting self-referrals.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, 52% of our full data set of 132 organisations are now running larger operations involving more volunteers and additional venues. For others, around 4%, COVID-19 has made it difficult to operate at full capacity, and they have had to run a reduced service. 4% of the organisations in the wider sample ran a delivery service before COVID-19; and an additional 53% of organisations have now started to run delivery services to allow for social distancing.

Reasons for food bank use:

79 organisations, running 156 independent food banks and contributing data on food parcel distribution for 2019 and 2020, also collated data on reasons on the need for their services. These are shown in table 4. Organisations could choose multiple options for reasons for use and these figures were not broken down by frequency or time period.

³ www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/independent-food-bank-survey Dr Rachel Loopstra et al, 2019

Table 4: The reasons for food bank use as reported by 79 UK organisations operating 156 independent food banks

Reasons for Use	No. of organisations reporting
Newly unemployed and waiting for first universal credit payment	73
Current benefits insufficient to be able to afford food	70
Income is insufficient to be able to afford food	68
Benefit changes causing payment delay	64
Self-isolating/shielded but can afford to buy food	55
Self-employed but waiting for income support	53
Sanctions	52
Cannot access voucher scheme to replace free school meals	46
Self-employed but ineligible for support with income	45
Voucher scheme for free school meals insufficient to cover food costs	43
Other	22

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ⁱ The Independent Food Aid Network has identified at least 859 independent food banks operating across the UK – www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/independent-food-banks-map. This list does not include food banks run by schools or universities, some of the new independent food banks which have started operating since the outbreak of COVID-19 or food banks operated by the Salvation Army. In partnership with A Menu for Change, IFAN has published two sets of figures collated from independent food banks in Scotland in March 2019 and January 2020. This data almost doubled previously known Trussell Trust figures – www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/food-bank-data-in-scotland

ⁱⁱ IFAN previously published data on how food bank usage changed in food banks over February to March 2020, comparing figures to the same time period in 2019. These figures are not comparable to the figures reported here as they focused on within-food bank changes in the distribution of parcels or referrals, and a common metric of 3-day food parcel distribution was not totalled across all sites. In contrast, this new data set consists of a summation of the total number of 3-day food parcels distributed across all food banks in the sample, reports the percent change for the total number of food parcels distributed between time points and looks at the number of people and referrals supported. In addition, different IFAN organisations contributed data to this report.

ⁱⁱⁱ Only IFAN member organisations and additional participants in the IFAN Scotland parcel project were invited to participate totalling 276 organisations and 371 independent food banks. Organisations opted-in to the survey and were not randomly selected. 132 organisations and 244 independent food banks contributed data that we were able to analyse. 4 of these organisations based in England were set up in response to COVID-19. An additional 10 organisations contributed data that was not analysed as part of this data set as they were not contributing food parcels regularly every week or their data was incomplete.

^{iv} 15 independent food banks provided data that their teams estimated, that is 13% of the organisations providing data for both time frames.