



Survey of members of the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) May 2022

As UK inflation figures for April soar to 9%, independent food banks are struggling to cope with increases in demand for their services.

- **93% of organisations** reported an increase or significant increase in the need for their services since the start of 2022
- **More than 80% of organisations** reported that they have struggled with food supply issues over the last four months
- **78% of these organisations** saw a drop in food and/or financial donations and **half of these organisations** have needed to dip into their financial reserves to pay for food or vouchers
- **95% of organisations** reporting increases say that the cost-of-living crisis is the reason behind this

Independent food banks have been seeing particularly dramatic increases in need for their services since the Autumn of 2021 with patterns replicated across the country. They are reporting that they are supporting a growing cohort of people who have not needed to use a food bank before, people who have got back on their feet because of the temporary £20 boost to Universal Credit but can no longer manage on meagre benefit payments, more people than ever who are working, and increasing numbers of children among their beneficiaries. People are arriving at food banks desperate to eat while many are asking for foods which don't require cooking or that they don't need to refrigerate because of energy costs.

Meanwhile food bank teams across the UK are struggling to find the resources to cope with the levels of demand they are seeing. Food and financial donations have dropped, and some food banks are having to dip into their financial reserves to pay for food. The situation is becoming more alarming by the day and charitable food aid providers are running out of options.

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) recently wrote to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor warning them that food banks are reaching breaking point. IFAN is calling on the UK Government to urgently introduce cash first interventions to reduce rapidly increasing poverty levels across the UK and at the very least to uprate benefits in line with inflation.

Annie McCormack of IFAN member Broke Not Broken, Kinross:

“The cost-of-living crisis is affecting everyone, and those on a low income are getting hit the hardest. Independent food banks run by volunteers fill a gap left by an inadequate social security system and low wages. The drop in donations we're seeing coupled with increase in usage shows exactly how unsustainable a crutch the charitable food aid system really is. People need to be able to access adequate incomes whether through social security payments or their wages.”

Charlotte White, of IFAN member Earlsfield Foodbank, Wandsworth: "Guest numbers are continuing to go up week after week just as our donation levels are going down. We are having to compromise more and more, and we are deeply concerned about what the future holds for all concerned. More than ever, we are seeing people who are in work struggling to afford food. Everyone deserves an adequate income and food banks have reached breaking point."

Mairi McCallum of IFAN member Moray Food Plus, Moray that has seen a 39% increase in the numbers of people supported in April 2022 compared to April 2021: "The sharp increase in demand for our emergency food provision has meant that we have had to make significant changes to what we provide. Major changes need to take place to take the pressure off food banks and provide people with more appropriate support."

Emma Greenough of IFAN member The Welcome Centre, Huddersfield says: "The number of children we're supporting now is up 132% on pre-Covid levels. Children who genuinely are going without because their families can't put food on the table. And we all know how this can affect a child's mental health, ability to learn and future prospects."

Kathy Bland of IFAN member Leominster Food Bank, Herefordshire that gave out 86 food parcels in April 2021 and 179 in April 2022 says "We can't replace the welfare system, and neither should we. Providing long-term support for people unable to afford food isn't sustainable."

Rosie Oakley of IFAN member Fair Frome, Somerset: "Since the start of 2022, we have seen a steady increase of first-time users to the food bank, nearly all of them have been in full-time employment and are struggling to cope with the cost of living. Since the beginning of April, the numbers have increased massively with the numbers of families accessing the food bank doubling within the month. It's hard to anticipate what will happen in the coming months with demands for our services rising dramatically."

Kate Brewster of IFAN member One Can Trust, Buckinghamshire that has seen the need for their services double with the cost-of-living crisis and the cut to Universal Credit: "We're seeing the highest sustained level of demand in our 10-year history. We're supporting hundreds of people with heart-breaking stories, and we know that having to exist like this affects mental health for many. It's an appalling state of affairs. Wages and benefits must be sufficient to afford the essentials."

Sabine Goodwin, Coordinator of the Independent Food Aid Network said: "Today's alarming inflation figures will inevitably mean that the numbers of people seeking the support of food banks will rise yet further. Independent food bank teams are already struggling to cope and are desperately worried about how they can possibly continue to operate as poverty levels spiral out of control. The Government needs to take immediate action to introduce cash first interventions and boost the incomes of people unable to afford food and other essentials. At the very least, benefit payments must be uprated in line with inflation."

Background:

- 101 Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) organisations running 194 independent food banks operating in 94 local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales took part in the survey that ran from 4.5.22. to 9.5.22.
- IFAN's recent letter to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor - www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/letter-april22
- IFAN supports and advocates on behalf of charitable food aid providers operating across the UK including over 550 independent food banks. IFAN's vision is of a country without the need for charitable food aid where adequate and nutritious food is affordable to all.
- IFAN has identified at least 1172 independent food banks operating across the UK in addition to over 1,300 Trussell Trust food banks and hundreds of food banks run by schools, universities, hospitals and by the Salvation Army. There are also thousands of other types of charitable food aid provider including food pantries, social supermarkets, and soup kitchens.
- Food bank figures represent the tip of the iceberg when it comes to wider food insecurity data. Recent Food Standards Agency data show that 4% of people in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland used a food bank in the 12 months up to June 2021 while 15% of people went hungry or reduced their food intake due to lack of income.
- The Department for Work and Pensions' Family Resources Survey (FRS) found that in the year before the onset of Covid-19, 43% of UK households on Universal Credit were food insecure. Thanks to the £20 weekly increase to Universal Credit, there was a 16% reduction in severe and moderate food insecurity levels for those households relying on this benefit but the £20 uplift was removed in October 2021.
- Find out more at www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk

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Breakdown of IFAN survey - May 2022

Table 1 - Levels of need from January to April 2022 as reported by 101 organisations representing 194 independent food banks.

Levels of need	No of organisations
Significant increase	38
Increase	55
Stayed the same	7
Decrease in need	1

Table 2 - Reasons behind increase in need as reported by 93 organisations representing 186 independent food banks re January to April 2022. Organisations could report any number of reasons.

Reasons for use	No of organisations
Increases in the cost of living	89
Cut to Universal Credit	61
5-week wait for Universal Credit	44

Inadequate wages	56
Insecure work	45
Sanctions	31
Benefit Cap	22
Two-Child Limit	15
No Recourse to Public Funds	31
Not Sure	4
Other	13

Table 3 – Food supply issues as reported by 82 organisations representing 168 independent food banks re January to April 2022. Organisations could report on any number of reasons.

Resources issue	No of organisations
Surplus food supply dropped	44
Unable to purchase stock due to lack of funding	14
Unable to buy in bulk in supermarkets	18
Food and/or financials donation levels have dropped	64
Having to dip into financial reserves	41
Stock levels have significantly reduced	40
Other	5