



As the cost-of-living crisis worsens, overwhelmed independent food banks fear they will not be able to meet demand this winter

Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) survey of independent food banks finds:

- On top of unprecedented increases seen since the cut to Universal Credit in October 2021, **nearly 90% of organisations saw demand rise yet further since April 2022**
- **87% of organisations** reported being impacted by supply issues since April 2022 with **one in five** needing to reduce the size of their food parcels
- **72% of organisations** reported that food donation levels have dropped since April of this year while **more than half** had needed to dip into reserves to pay for supplies
- **68% of organisations** say they may not be able to support everyone who needs their help or may have to reduce the size of their food parcels to meet increasing demand

Independent food banks operating across the UK have reported that the number of people they're supporting has grown dramatically and that, heading into winter, they fear they will not be able to meet demand. IFAN published [similar warnings in May](#).

Independent food banks say they are increasingly supporting people who have never needed to use a food bank before as well as a growing number of households facing the prospect of neither being able to heat nor eat. Food bank managers warn of the severe impact on people's mental health resulting from deepening poverty.

As demand for their services rockets, independent food banks are struggling to access adequate food supply as they are beset with a fall in financial and food donations. Many organisations do not know how they will cope in the coming months as increasing levels of need outstrip supply and their operations are hit by escalating energy costs.

IFAN is calling for immediate and targeted cash first support for people on low incomes as well as long-term policy changes that would see social security payments and wages match the soaring costs of living in the UK.

Mary McGinley of IFAN member Helensburgh and Lomond Foodbank

“Charitable food aid cannot be expected to bridge the gap between income and inflation. Food banks should not exist. Ours was intended as a short-term solution to DWP sanctions and has become an essential food aid centre for those on inadequate benefits and low incomes. The UK should be able to provide social security payments that allow people to eat and heat their home. No one should have to rely on charitable food aid to feed themselves and their families.”

Simon Lellow of IFAN member Telford Crisis Support

“The cost-of-living crisis is a clear and present danger to many in our community. The effects are already deepening the existing issues surrounding poverty and the need for food banks and other charitable welfare support services. With the most recent energy price increases, rate of inflation and lack of countermeasures, the outlook for the final quarter of the year is bleak and disturbing.”

Ian Campbell of IFAN member Kirkcaldy Foodbank

“In the first 6 months of the year, we had a deficit of £56,000, mainly due to increased food costs (due to heightened demand and rising prices) and reduced donations. This situation is completely unsustainable, and we have begun to take steps to limit the support that we can provide. We have real fears about what lies ahead - both for the people who need our help and for our ability to meet those increased needs. It remains totally unacceptable that it is charitable support that is meeting such a basic human right as the right to food.”

Su Parrish of IFAN member Easter Team

“I have a huge concern about the impact on people’s emotional well-being. I fear we will see poor mental health spiralling and potentially suicides as a result of the stress and distress people are now experiencing due to inability to support themselves, despite their best efforts to do so.”

Kathy Bland of IFAN member Leominster Food Bank

“We are extremely worried about the autumn and the number of people who will need support. This should be coming from the central government in the form of increased income not from food banks.”

Sonya Antoniou-Pamment of IFAN member Olive Branch Aid

“Like many organisations we know that the coming months as winter begins to bite will be the hardest one yet for many. We also know that our volunteers will find it difficult as we will only have resources to be able to help a fraction of the people we are expecting to see in difficulties this winter.”

Sabine Goodwin, Coordinator of the Independent Food Aid Network

“IFAN, like so many other anti-poverty charities and campaigners, is calling on the Government to introduce urgent, cash first interventions to ensure people can afford food and heating this winter. Relying on overburdened food banks and their volunteers to alleviate food poverty temporarily is both unconscionable and unsustainable. It’s for the Government to ensure the basic needs of its citizens are met, not food aid charities buckling under the strain.”

Background:

- The Independent Food Aid Network (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 calls for a cash first approach to food insecurity - ifanuk.org/infographic.
- In April 2022, IFAN members wrote to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor expressing “their deep concern about the scale of suffering that we are already witnessing as well as our capacity to prevent people from going hungry in the weeks and months to come” - www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/letter-april22
- For August’s survey, 84 organisations running 169 independent food banks in 71 local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales contributed data from 15th to the 23rd of August 2022.
- In May 2022, IFAN published [data](#) collated from a different sample of 101 IFAN members organisations running 194 independent food banks in 94 local authorities.
- IFAN has identified at least 1,172 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 as well as the Salvation Army. There are also thousands of other charitable food aid providers including food pantries, social supermarkets, and soup kitchens.
- In March 2022, IFAN published *Pushed to the Edge: Poverty, Food Banks and Mental Health* alongside mental health social worker Tom Pollard and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation - www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/blog/mental-health
- Food bank data represent the tip of the iceberg when it comes to wider food insecurity. Recent Food Standards Agency data show that 4% of people in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland used a food bank between April and June 2021 while 15% of people went hungry or reduced their food intake due to lack of income.

<https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you-2/food-and-you-2-wave-3>

- The Department for Work and Pensions' Family Resources Survey (FRS) found that in the year before the onset of the pandemic, 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 social security payment but the uplift was removed in October 2021.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2019-to-2020>
- Find out more at www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk

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Breakdown of IFAN Survey - August 2022

Table 1 - Levels of need from October 2021 to March 2022 as reported by 84 organisations operating 169 independent food banks.

Levels of need	No of organisations
Yes, we've seen a further increase	44
Yes, we've seen a significant, further increase	27
Stayed the same	7
Decrease in need	3
Other	3

Table 2 - Reasons behind further increases in need from April to mid-August 2022 (on top of increases from October 2021 to March 2022) as reported by 68 organisations operating 143 independent food banks. Organisations could report any number of reasons.

Reasons for use	No of organisations
Increases in the cost of living	66
Inadequate wages	47
Cut to Universal Credit	43
Insecure work	39
No Recourse to Public Funds	27
Benefit deductions	22
Sanctions	22
Benefit cap	12
Two child limit	15

Table 3 - Approximate percentage of people supported April to mid-August 2022 who have not needed to access support before as reported by 84 organisations operating 169 independent food banks.

% people supported	No of organisations
Up to 25%	35
From 25% to 50%	22
Around 50%	13
From 50% to 75%	5
Around 75%	2
More than 75%	2

Other	5
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Table 4 - Increased number of people needing regular support from April to mid-August 2022 compared to the same period in 2021 as reported by 84 organisations operating 169 independent food banks.

Seeing more people needing regular support	No or organisations
Yes	73
No	5
Other	6

Table 5 - Organisations impacted by supply issues April to mid-August 2022 as reported by 84 organisations running 169 independent food banks.

Impacted by supply issues	No of organisations
Yes - needed to reduce size of food parcel	16
Yes - but able operate as usual	57
No	11

Table 6 - Supply issues as reported by 73 organisations operating 155 independent food banks from April to August 2022. Organisations could report on any number of reasons.

Resources issue	No of organisations
Surplus food supply dropped	44
Quality of surplus impacted	24
Unable to purchase stock due to lack of funding	10
Unable to buy in bulk in supermarkets	22

Food donation levels dropped	53
Financial donation levels dropped	24
Having to dip into financial reserves	42
Stock levels have significantly reduced	35
Other	4

Table 7 - Concern about capacity to provide support if need continues to increase as reported by 84 organisations representing 169 independent food banks.

Level of concern about capacity to provide support	No of organisation
Yes - may need to reduce parcel size/voucher support	29
Yes - may not be able to support everyone seeking our help	28
No - confident about being able to access supply to meet demand	27