



## IFAN SURVEY FEBRUARY 2023 - 19.2.23.

### **As food inflation hits 16.7%, independent food bank teams are overwhelmed by escalating demand**

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

- **89% of organisations saw demand increase comparing December 2021/January 2022 with December 2022/January 2023**
- **Over 80% of organisations reported supporting a significant number of people needing help for the first time as well as people needing regular support**
- **Half of contributing organisations said if demand increased, they would have to reduce the level of support they could provide or turn people away**

A new group of independent food banks operating across the UK has reported an unprecedented increase in demand through December 2022 and into the new year. No contributing food bank had seen a decrease in need.

Increasing numbers of pensioners and people who never imagined they would need a food bank are seeking out emergency food support. People who have been able to manage for some time, are being forced to come back to food banks. Independent food bank teams also reported that more and more people are seeking regular support rather than occasional emergency food parcels. And nearly half of contributing organisations reported an increase in parents/carers with infants under 12 months needing support.

Reports on a growing number of employed people unable to make ends meet are striking. One food bank manager explained that working people living in rural areas with few support services and lack of affordable rent and childcare were particularly impacted by increasing poverty. While another added "We've seen a lot of cases of people who are on Universal Credit to top up a wage and as neither has risen, but their outgoings have, they cannot make ends meet." Food banks also reported supporting public sector workers including teachers, ambulance, and NHS staff.

Increases in the cost of living were the primary cause of soaring demand, followed by inadequate wages and waiting times for a first Universal Credit payment. And a third of independent food banks reported sanctions and benefit deductions as reasons behind their use this winter.

Independent food bank teams are also continuing to struggle to source adequate supplies, and many have seen continued falls in food donations as well as a reduction in surplus food supply through both December and January compared to the same period last year.

Food bank managers spoke of the extraordinary and admirable commitment and dedication of their teams but many reported burnout and volunteer exhaustion as the scale and severity of need overwhelms frontline support workers.

IFAN has repeatedly warned that the situation is unsustainable and far more needs to be done to ensure people have enough income through social security payments or work to get

by. The uprating of benefit payments in April is likely to be too little, too late as the burden of debt pushes more and more households into poverty.

IFAN is calling on the Government to take immediate action to increase social security payments to levels to match the cost of living. It's also vital that fair wages and job security become the norm. The Government must also eliminate the 5-week wait for Universal Credit, the benefit cap, the two-child limit, sanctions system, No Recourse to Public Funds status and benefit deductions all of which are drivers of food bank demand. A cash first approach to food insecurity, including investment in advice services, must be adopted to reverse the damage being caused to people's physical and mental health and to communities across the UK.

**Sabine Goodwin, Coordinator of the Independent Food Aid Network said:**

"The pressure on people struggling to afford food, and independent food bank teams trying their utmost to provide support, is relentless. However welcome April's increase in social security payments will be, they won't match the cost of living nor account for the impact of debts accrued over the winter. And work is clearly not providing a route out of poverty as more and more people in employment seek help. The Government's reliance on a charitable food aid response to the UK's poverty pandemic is unsustainable and unethical. People across our society must be able to count on a Living Income - whether that be through adequate wages or a fit for purpose social security system."

**Andi Hofbauer, St Aidan's FoodShare, Leeds:**

"The choosing between 'heating and eating' has got worse. We hear horror stories of people living in cold flats keeping their entire energy budget for keeping the fridge going and cooking meals for which they need to go to food banks."

**Su Parrish, The Easter Team, Crawley:**

"Our fastest growing client group are working people on low wages who cannot make ends meet. The majority have always managed on a low income, know how to budget, and live frugally but with costs rising there simply isn't enough money in their budgets. It's soul destroying."

"We provided a record number of Christmas parcels and changed the contents from previous years to avoid the need to use ovens as clients had told us they wouldn't be able to afford to put ovens on even on Christmas Day."

**Rosie Oakley, Fair Frome, Mendip:**

"We are seeing a rise in the number of people coming to our food bank for the first time who are in employment. This number of employed food bank users is rising each month."

**Jane Wall, Stannington Foodbank, Sheffield:**

"We are definitely seeing more families (our client base is mainly single people) and also older people, who are struggling with energy bills."

**Tina Harrison, Trinity Foodbank, Bury:**

"We saw an increase in people working or impacted by cut hours at work or job losses who would never have accessed our service before. Also, pensioners just over the limit for pension credit."

**Mary McGinley, Helensburgh Foodbank, Argyll and Bute:**

"There is a concern that social services and statutory agencies expect the food bank volunteers to fill the gap that they themselves can't fill. It is easy to signpost individuals to the food bank rather than to manage clients through a benefits review or provide access to an emergency welfare payment or energy top-up. We expect to be even busier, but it will be

difficult to cope with this increase in demand. The UK Government seems to think that if we just wait for inflation to come down all will be well. It wasn't "well" before the increase in inflation, real action is required."

**Charlotte White, Earlsfield Foodbank, Wandsworth:**

"I'm really worried about the problems that are being stored up for the future. Everyone's situation is becoming more severe and all sorts of problems (debts, loans, health issues, relationship breakdown, substance misuse) are getting worse as people struggle to get by." "We're now dealing with crisis situations on a weekly basis which is a huge emotional load on volunteers. And the day-to-day running of foodbank operations is much more time-consuming as numbers grow."

**Kathy Bland, Leominster Food Bank, Herefordshire:**

"We are consulting with our volunteers and clients to plan how to cope with increasing numbers and what we might need to do differently. We had hoped to become a smaller organisation post-Covid. We will need to become a much larger and more resilient organisation to meet the increased level of need. It should be the welfare system that supports people properly. Not us."

**Jen Coleman, Black Country Foodbank, Dudley:**

"Staff and volunteers are physically and mentally tired and we worry especially that our food bank volunteers will not be able to continue at this rate for long. The answer is to ensure our services aren't needed in the first place by ensuring people can access adequate incomes."

**Judith Vickers, Lifeshare, Manchester City:**

"Staff are reporting burnout, heavy caseloads, and constant stream of new referrals. We are coping, but the level of demand is relentless. Volunteers often feel that we can't do enough for people. But with the demand so high, our best option is to continue to support clients as best we can within the guidelines of our service."

**Felicia Boshorin, Spring Community Hub, Southwark:**

"There is significant impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of our team as they are having to replace a reduced number of volunteers as well as contend with the ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the people they support. The current situation is unsustainable and needs Government intervention to ensure people are paid higher wages and benefits are increased."

**Background:**

- The [Independent Food Aid Network \(IFAN\)](https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/) 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 and has co-produced 'Worrying About Money?' cash first referral leaflets in over 100 local authorities in Scotland, England, and Wales. The resources help people struggling to afford food and support workers to find local advice and cash first support to maximise income and reduce the need for charitable food aid - [www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-leaflets](https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-leaflets)
- 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](https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/letter-april22)
- In October 2022, IFAN, the Trussell Trust and Feeding Britain wrote to the Prime Minister calling for the end for the need for their services saying "We are

overstretched and exhausted. Many of our organisations are at breaking point.” - [www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/blog/pmjoint-letter](http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/blog/pmjoint-letter)

- For February's survey, 85 organisations running 154 independent food banks in 81 local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales contributed data to IFAN from the 10th to the 16th of February 2023.
- More than half of the IFAN member organisations contributing to IFAN's February 2023 survey did not take part in IFAN's December survey.  
37 of the 85 organisations also contributed to IFAN's December survey.  
40 of the 85 organisations also contributed to IFAN's November survey.  
37 of the 85 organisations also contributed to IFAN's October survey.  
37 of the 85 organisations also contributed to IFAN's August survey.  
12 of the 85 organisations contributed to all five of IFAN's most recent surveys.
- All of IFAN's surveys can be accessed at [www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data](http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data)
- IFAN has identified at least 1,172 independent food banks operating across the UK including those run by multiple faith groups in addition to over 1,300 Trussell Trust food banks as well as hundreds of food banks run by schools, universities, hospitals, and 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](http://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. [www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you-2/food-and-you-2-wave-3](http://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 benefit, but the uplift was removed in October 2021. [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2019-to-2020](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2019-to-2020)

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 IFAN's website: [www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk](http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk)

### Breakdown of IFAN Survey – February 2023

Table 1 – Levels of need in December 2022/January 2023 compared to December 2021/January 2022 as reported by 85 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

Levels of need	No of organisations
Yes, we've seen an increase	41
Yes, we've seen a significant increase	35
Stayed the same	8

Decrease in need	0
Other	1

Table 2 – Reasons behind increases in need in December 2022/January 2023 as reported by 76 organisations operating 141 independent food banks. Organisations could report any number of reasons.

Reasons for use	No of organisations
Increases in the cost of living	73
Inadequate wages	47
Universal Credit waiting times	38
Insecure work	33
Sanctions	30
Benefit deductions	27
Rent increases	23
No Recourse to Public Funds	21
The cut to Universal Credit	21
Housing problems	20
Transport costs	13
Two-child limit	10
Disability related costs	9
Disability benefits	9
Evictions	8
Other	8
Benefit cap	6
Not sure	4
Not being paid due to strike action	2

Table 3 – Seeing a significant number of people who have not needed support before in December 2022/January 2023 as reported by 85 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

<b>Seeing a significant number of people who have not needed help before</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Yes	71
No	14

Table 4 – Increased number of people needing regular support in December 2022/January 2023 compared December 2021/January 2022 as reported by 85 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

<b>Seeing more people needing regular support</b>	<b>No or organisations</b>
Yes	69
No	9
Other	7

Table 5 – Level of support provided to parents/carers to feed their babies (0–12-month-olds) in December 2022/January 2022 compared to December 2021/January 2022 as reported by 85 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

<b>Supporting parents/carers to feed babies (0-12 month olds)</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Increased level of support	38
Level of support has remained approximately the same	32
Decreased level of support	2
Not sure	10
Other	3

Table 6 – Support for people who are working in the following roles during December 2022/January 2023 as far as organisations aware:

NHS staff	29
Ambulance staff	9
Teachers	8
Transport staff	8
Postal workers	6
Civil servants	5
Firefighters	1
University staff	1

Table 7 – Level of surplus food supply in December 2022 compared to December 2021 as reported by 85 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

<b>Level of surplus food supply</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Surplus food supply has decreased	45
Surplus food supply has stayed the same	28
Surplus food supply has increased	12

Table 8 – Quality of surplus food supply in December 2022 compared to December 2021 as reported by 85 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

<b>Quality of surplus food supply</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Quality of surplus food has stayed the same	52
Quality of surplus food has deteriorated	25
Quality of surplus food has improved	8

Table 9 – Level of food donations in December 2022 compared to December 2021 as reported by 85 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

<b>Level of food donations</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Food donation levels have dropped	40
Food donation levels have stayed the same	23
Food donation levels have increased	22

Table 10 – Level of financial donations in December 2022 compared to December 2021 as reported by 85 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

<b>Level of financial donations</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Financial donation levels have stayed the same	41
Financial donation levels have increased	24
Financial donation levels have dropped	20

Table 11 – Level of surplus food supply in January 2023 compared to January 2022 as reported by 85 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

<b>Level of surplus food supply</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Surplus food supply has decreased	41
Surplus food supply has stayed the same	34
Surplus food supply has increased	10

Table 12 – Quality of surplus food supply in January 2023 compared to January 2022 as reported by 85 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

<b>Quality of surplus food supply</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Quality of surplus food has stayed the same	52

Quality of surplus food has deteriorated	26
Quality of surplus food has improved	7

Table 13 – Level of food donations in January 2023 compared to January 2022 as reported by 85 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

<b>Level of food donations</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Food donation levels have dropped	42
Food donation levels have stayed the same	27
Food donation levels have increased	16

Table 14 – Level of financial donations in January 2023 compared to January 2022 as reported by 85 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

<b>Level of financial donations</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Financial donation levels have increased	35
Financial donation levels have stayed the same	25
Financial donation levels have dropped	25

Table 15 – Concerns about capacity to provide support if need continues to increase as reported by 85 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

<b>Concern about capacity to provide support</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
No - confident about being able to access supply to meet demand	42
Yes - may not be able to support everyone seeking our help	29
Yes - may need to reduce parcel size/voucher support	14