



Reducing infant and maternal food insecurity in Scotland

March 2023

In February 2023, as food inflation reached 16.7%, the [Independent Food Aid Network](https://www.foodaidnetwork.org) (IFAN) ran a survey of its member organisations across the UK to track demand and their capacity to cope with increasing need.¹ Additional questions related to supporting parents/carers struggling to feed infants were included. 17 of the contributing organisations were based in Scotland running 30 independent food banks in 16 local authorities.

There are now an estimated 40,000 babies and 184,000 young children living in food insecure households in the UK.² The detrimental effects of food insecurity at such a young age will have long-term consequences on their health and development. Food prices have been putting an increasing financial strain on families with infant children (0-12 months), resulting in reduced ability to afford adequate nutrition to breastfeed or to buy infant formula. Figures from First Steps Nutrition Trust show that Between March 2021 and November 2022 the most prevalent infant formula increased in cost from between 15 to 23%.³ The effects of this increase can be seen by IFAN's membership, with a third of surveyed organisations based in Scotland reporting that more parents or carers had asked for their support to feed their babies from December 2022 - January 2023 compared to the same two-month period a year ago.

IFAN's indicative data collated from organisations in Scotland show how parents/carers are missing crucial access to advice and support to maximise income and subsequently afford food and infant formula. Surveyed food banks reported that the most common way parents or carers of infants accessed support was via "self-referral" (without accessing agencies prior to accessing food banks). The second most common route to food bank support was a referral through a health practitioner - 41% of surveyed organisations reported parents/carers being referred to their food bank this way.

As demand for their services continues to rise, independent food bank teams are working to support people as best they can under increasingly pressured conditions. It is vital that local authorities make it clear to frontline organisations what the appropriate referral pathways are for parents/carers to receive effective support. 41% of contributing organisations were not aware of any local authority guidance on how to support food insecure families with babies.⁴ Organisations reported a range of ways used to support families. The most common method was purchasing required infant formula on behalf of the person seeking support. Support was

¹ <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data>

² 'What the Cost of Living Crisis means for the diets of babies and young children and recommended actions.' <https://www.firststepsnutrition.org/reports>.

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⁴ <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/10/A-Guide-for-Local-Authorities-UNICEF-UK-Baby-Friendly-Initiative.pdf>

also provided, less commonly, through the provision of donated formula from the food bank or providing vouchers for the purchase of formula.

The current cost-of-living crisis, on top of pre-existing poverty⁵, is putting increasing pressure on parents/carers to be able to feed their infant children as well as independent food banks' capacity. The provision of charitable food aid is not an effective or sustainable response to the growing food insecurity experienced by many parents/carers with babies and young children. The need to embed a cash first approach is more urgent than ever. Living on a low income can affect a person's ability to afford food/formula but may also mean parents and carers have to compromise on food safety. These compromises may include 'ignoring best before dates, switching off fridges/freezers, and cutting corners in the preparation of powdered infant formula.'⁶

IFAN is calling on the UK Government to take immediate action to increase social security payments to levels that match the cost of living. It's also vital that fair wages and job security become the norm. And drivers of food bank demand including the 5-week wait for Universal Credit, benefit deductions, the benefit cap, the two-child limit, sanctions system, and No Recourse to Public Funds status must be eliminated.

IFAN supports recommendations made by the First Steps Nutrition Trust for the Government to address the fairness of infant formula pricing, including the price differentials between products and the rise in cost beyond general food inflation.⁷

IFAN welcomes the Scottish Government's actions to increase the Scottish Child Payment, the Best Starts Food payment including the doubling of the payment for infants under 12 months as well to mitigate the UK Benefit Cap. Further mitigation of the impact of inadequate UK social security payments, Universal Credit waiting time, the two-child limit, sanctions, and No Recourse to Public Funds status is needed. Additional increases to the Scottish Child Payment and Best Starts Food payment in line with the cost of living would also be welcome.

IFAN is calling on the Scottish Government to ensure better access and promotion of the Scottish Welfare Fund as well as adequacy of payments. And to help support the availability of additional cash first discretionary support at local authority level.

Thanks to Scottish Government funding, IFAN is glad to have been able to co-develop, keep updated and promote cash first referral leaflets, and alternative versions, in local authorities across Scotland.⁸ It's vital that health visitors and family nurses delivering the Universal Health

⁵ Even in the year prior to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, 45% of households on Universal Credit were food insecure. <http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2019-to-2020>

⁶ 'What the Cost of Living Crisis means for the diets of babies and young children and recommended actions.' <https://www.firststepsnutrition.org/reports>.

⁷ 'What the Cost of Living Crisis means for the diets of babies and young children and recommended actions.' <https://www.firststepsnutrition.org/reports>.

⁸ www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-leaflets

Visiting Pathway are aware of and are in a position to use cash first referral leaflets and access Money Counts training linked to the 'Worrying About Money?' resources.

A cash first approach to food insecurity must be prioritised at a local level including impactful investment in advice services. It's critical that cash first pathways to emergency cash payments and income maximisation advice are improved so that parents/carers are not being directed to a food bank as a default mode of support.

It's also vital that the Scottish Government ensures that food insecurity is measured at a local authority level, including questions relating to infant food insecurity, in order for the impact of cash first interventions to be understood.

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 membership in Scotland includes over 100 independent food banks operating in 25 local authorities.
- 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, thanks to Scottish Government funding, has co-produced 'Worrying About Money?' cash first referral leaflets for nearly every local authority in Scotland. 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
- This breakdown of February's survey includes data from 17 organisations operating 30 independent food banks (in 16 Local Authorities).

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Breakdown of Survey - February 2023 (Data from IFAN member organisations based in Scotland)

Table 1: Level of parents/carers asking for support to feed their babies (0-12 month olds) in December 2022 - January 2023 compared with December 2021 - January 2022 as reported by 17 organisations operating 30 food banks.

Level of need	Number of organisations
Need for support has increased	5
The need for support has stayed approximately the same	7
The need for support has decreased	0
Not sure	4
Other	1

Table 2: The number of parents/carers asking for support to feed their babies (0-12 month olds) in December 2022-January 2023 as reported by 17 organisations operating 30 food banks.

Number of parents/carers who have asked for support	Organisations
0	0
1-5	5
6-10	4
11-15	0
16-20	1
More than 20	1
Not sure	6

Table 3: How parents/carers with babies (0-12 month olds) have accessed support as reported by 17 organisations running 30 food banks.

Accessed support by	Organisation
Referral via advice agency	4
Referral via local authority	1
Referral via health practitioner (GP, health visitor)	7

Referral via school	2
Referral from another agency	3
Self-referred	11
Other	4

Table 4: Method of supporting parents/carers with babies (0-12 months) as reported by 17 organisations supporting 30 food banks.

Method of support	Organisations
Referred people to a health visitor	1
Provided donated infant formula	5
Provided a voucher to purchase required infant formula	4
Provided cash to purchase required infant formula	0
Purchased required infant formula on behalf of person seeking support	8
Other	6

Table 5: Number of independent food banks aware of local authority guidance regarding supporting food insecure families with babies (UNICEF guide for local authorities) as reported by 17 organisations supporting 30 food banks.

Awareness of local guidance	Organisations
Aware of local authority guidance	10
Not aware of local authority guidance	7