



## **IFAN SURVEY APRIL 2023**

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As Number 10 Downing Street holds its Farm to Fork Summit, latest Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) survey of independent food banks finds:

- **89% of contributing organisations saw increased need for their help from January to March 2023**
- **If demand continues to increase, two thirds of independent food bank teams said they'd need to reduce the level of support they provide**
- **Of all agencies, local authorities are most likely to refer people struggling to afford food to independent food banks**

A new cohort of IFAN independent food banks based in England, Scotland and Wales have reported significant increases in need for their services comparing the first quarter of this year with the start of last year.

Independent food bank teams were particularly concerned about the number of people in employment who cannot afford food as well pensioners needing help on a weekly basis. Two thirds of organisations reported inadequate wages as the key driver behind the increased need for their services while most organisations said they'd been supporting people for the first time.

Nearly all food banks also reported on the striking increase in need for long-term provision. One manager explained that their food bank's food parcels were not designed to help in this way - "Our whole ethos previously has been short-term crisis/emergency support and not ongoing support."

Nearly half of the IFAN organisations contributing to the survey cited sanctions, rent increases, housing problems and Universal Credit waiting times as the reasons people needed their help.

IFAN is calling on the Government to take immediate action to increase social security payments so that they match the cost of living. Adopting [an Essentials Guarantee](#) would be a critical step towards providing an adequate safety net for all. It's also vital that the Government ensures employers pay adequate wages and provide job security.

Other key drivers behind escalating food bank demand must also be removed including the 5-week wait for Universal Credit, the benefit cap, the two-child limit, sanctions, No Recourse to Public Funds status, and benefit deductions.

A cash first approach to food insecurity, including investment in local advice services, would reduce the need for food banks and other forms of charitable food aid support as well as the devastating impact of poverty on people's physical and mental health.

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

“IFAN independent food banks have been reporting unacceptable and unsustainable levels of increasing demand for months on end. It’s critical that today’s Farm to Fork summit prioritises reducing household food insecurity and the poverty that drives it. The Government must ensure the UK’s food supply is adequate, nutritious, and affordable to all. This requires a whole system approach that includes tackling unconscionable levels of poverty in this country.”

**Kath Dalmeny, Chief Executive of Sustain:**

“On the day that Government meets with the food industry to discuss future food security, millions of people in the UK will have woken up today to gnawing hunger and too little money to buy the food they need. Lots of working people’s wages are too low to afford good food. People on very low income with children, and those stuck at home due to disability or old age, are likely to be struggling. These are the people who need the guarantee of living wages, an adequate social security safety net, decent meals-on-wheels services and universal free school meals. Anything less and talk by government and supermarkets of food security is a heartless sham.”

**Alison Peyton of Readifood in Reading said:**

"It can be mentally exhausting hearing over and over, like a broken record the same stories repeated over and over of how people are struggling, not coping and needing support from the charity. We also see how the mental wellbeing of our clients is suffering, so many of them struggling with mental health issues and as a team we have needed to face suicide attempts of clients, too many already this year. This is definitely on the rise from previous years."

**Charlotte White of Earlsfield Food Bank in Wandsworth said:**

“Sadly, we see no light at the end of the tunnel. We're in Spring now, when the numbers used to ease up a little, but our numbers going to go up and people's situations are getting much, much worse. We're now seeing the consequences of many problems including debt, anxiety, rent arrears, which have built up over an extremely tough winter.”

**Mark Lister of Ledbury Food Bank in Herefordshire said:**

“The current rate of increase is unsustainable in the medium to long term. We are now opening for longer and have added an extra session. We are anticipating an increase in numbers of visitors in excess of 80% over the year.”

**Angela Gee of Daventry Food Bank in Daventry said:**

“We, as a food bank, were not set up to support this level of need and not for long-term support. The cost-of-living crisis is affecting everyone on some level but for those who have little or none, the need is so big. We can't sustain long-term support for so many.”

**Annie McCormack of Broke not Broken in Perth and Kinross said:**

“We are seeing people returning for our support who we haven't seen in a year or two. And we are also continuing to support people for 6-9 months at a time, as they are being referred over and over. In a few cases we have supported households for 48 weeks as their financial situation is just not changing. This at a cost of £1900 for

one household. If that isn't proof of filling a social security gap, then I don't know what is.”

**Anna Taylor, Executive Director of The Food Foundation**, said: “We need to think really seriously about how we can cope with food price inflation better than we are now, and how we can strengthen not only the resilience of our supply chains but also the resilience of families living in Britain. Obviously inflation is felt more severely by those on a low income because they spend a higher proportion of their budget on food. As a result of this we've seen a doubling of the levels of food insecurity at household level – nine million adults and four million children who are living in households that are struggling to put food on the table. Ensuring we have enough affordable fruit and vegetables should be high on the list of government priorities given the soaring cost of healthy foods during the cost-of-living crisis, along with the empty fresh produce shelves we saw earlier this year. We hope the ‘Fork to Farm’ summit taking place today pays due attention to the ‘fork’ element of the challenge, and results in renewed commitment to shoring up the nation’s health, the environment, the economy, and the UK’s food security.”

### **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.
- For April’s survey, 76 organisations running 120 independent food banks in 69 local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales contributed data to IFAN from the 6th to the 20th of April 2023.
- 9 of the 76 organisations contributed to all six of IFAN's recent surveys.  
<sup>1</sup> Previous IFAN surveys can be accessed [here](#).
- 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.
- IFAN calls for a [cash first approach to food insecurity](#) and has co-produced [‘Worrying About Money?’ cash first referral leaflets](#) in over 105 local authorities in Scotland, England, and Wales. These 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.
- 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

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<sup>1</sup> 36 of the 76 organisations also contributed to IFAN's February survey. 23 of the 76 organisations also contributed to IFAN's December survey. 26 of the 76 organisations also contributed to IFAN's November survey. 31 of the 76 organisations also contributed to IFAN's October survey. 33 of the 76 organisations also contributed to IFAN's August survey.

already witnessing as well as our capacity to prevent people from going hungry in the weeks and months to come”,

- 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.”
- 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.
- [Latest annual figures from the Trussell Trust](#) show that almost 3 million (2,986,203) food parcels were given out by their food banks alone from April 2022 to March 2023.
- Food bank data represent the tip of the iceberg when it comes to wider food insecurity. [Recent Department for Work and Pensions’ Family Resources Survey \(FRS\) data](#) show that 14% of households reporting severe food insecurity from April 2021 to March 2022 used a food bank. [Food Standards Agency data](#) also 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.
- The [FRS has also 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.
- Joint statement by Sustain on No 10 Farm to Fork Summit - [www.sustainweb.org/news/may23-food-security-summit-no-10/](http://www.sustainweb.org/news/may23-food-security-summit-no-10/)

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IFAN’s data can be accessed at [www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data](http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data)

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

### Breakdown of IFAN Survey - April 2023

Table 1 – Levels of need in January–March 2023 compared to January–March 2022 as reported by 76 organisations operating 120 independent food banks.

Levels of need	No of organisations
Yes, we've seen an increase	34
Yes, we've seen a significant increase	34
Stayed the same	2
Decrease in need	2
Other	4

Table 2 – Reasons behind increases in need in January–March 2023 as reported by 68 organisations operating 109 independent food banks. Organisations could report any number of reasons.

<b>Reasons for use</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Increases in the cost of living	66
Inadequate wages	47
Insecure work	34
Universal Credit wait times	32
Rent increases	31
Sanctions	30
Housing problems	29
Benefit deductions	24
No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)	17
Disability benefits	13
Transport costs	10
Benefit cap	9
Evictions	9
Disability related costs	9
Two-child limit	7
Other	6
Not sure	5
Not being paid due to strike action	0

Table 3 – People accessing support who have not needed help before in January–March 2023 as reported by 76 organisations operating 120 independent food banks.

<b>Supporting people who have not needed help before</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Yes	68

No	8
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Table 4 – Increased number of people needing regular support in January–March 2023 compared to January–March 2022 as reported by 76 organisations operating 120 independent food banks.

Supporting more people needing regular support	No of organisations
Yes	62
No	9
Other	5

Table 5 – Agencies referring people to food aid providers as reported by 63 organisations operating 100 independent food banks.

Referral agencies	No of organisations
Local authority teams (social services, housing, welfare/benefits advice etc.)	62
Advice agencies (including Citizens Advice)	59
NHS services (GP surgeries, health visitors, hospitals etc.)	57
Third sector (mental health support agencies, agencies supporting people with NRPF, etc.)	57
Schools	50
Jobcentres	20
Other	19

Table 6 – 76 organisations operating 120 independent food banks reported on the impact of the level of resources has had on their ability to support people in January–March 2023

Impact of lacking resources	No of organisation
Yes – but we are managing to operate as per usual	37
Yes – we've need to reduce the size of our usual parcels	11
No, we have been able to support everyone	28

Table 7 – Concerns about capacity to provide support if need continues to increase as reported by 76 organisations operating 120 independent food banks.

Concern about capacity to provide support	No of organisation
Yes - may need to reduce parcel size/voucher support	34

Yes - may not be able to support everyone seeking our help	18
No - confident about being able to access supply to meet demand	24