



IFAN SURVEY APRIL 2025

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) collated data from IFAN member food aid organisations including 154 independent food banks operating across England, Scotland, and Wales in April 2025.

The survey found that:

- **more than half of organisations had seen increases in need comparing September 2024 – February 2025 with the same six-month period the previous year;**
- **the main drivers for their support were the high cost of living, debt, Universal Credit waiting time, and inadequate wages;**
- **local authority teams and advice services were among the agencies most likely to refer people to food banks;**
- **73% of organisations supported people who had been either signposted or referred for help by Jobcentres;**
- **every organisation reported supporting people who had not asked for their help before, 68% of organisations had seen an increase in the need for regular support, and nearly half were helping more people facing extreme hardship;**
- **nearly 62% of contributing organisations had seen a decrease in food donations and 43% a drop in financial donations.**

No one should have to turn to charity to feed themselves and their families. Yet, for over a decade and a half, an increasing number of people have been pushed to the doors of charitable food aid providers. Planned cuts to disability benefits can only make things worse. As one food bank manager said: “As so many of our clients have a disability, I anticipate that the forthcoming cuts to benefits for those with disabilities will force many more people to need our help, and that more people will be in deeper poverty than previously.”

Against this backdrop of increasing need for their services, food bank teams reported that they are “overworked and exhausted” and that volunteers were leaving because of the demanding physical work involved. Meanwhile many are struggling to keep their operations afloat with one centre manager saying: “We are moving back into survival mode - for many small charities this is the reality of life. The funding cycle is a nightmare.”

It's critical that the Government makes immediate and lasting policy changes to reduce poverty and food insecurity. The impact of hunger and hardship on people across generations as well as overwhelmed food bank teams continues to be devastating.

IFAN is calling for immediate ‘cash first’ or income-focused actions to reduce severe food insecurity including:

- the adoption of [an Essentials Guarantee](#) as a first step towards ensuring a [Living Income](#) for all;
- the removal of the two-child limit as well as the benefit cap;
- the abolition of the sanctions’ regime;
- the removal of the five-week wait for Universal Credit and any benefit deductions;
- the removal of No Recourse to Public Funds status;
- the permanent provision of local crisis support funding in England beyond March 2026;
- real Living Wages and job security for all;
- long-term investment in local advice services.

Background:

- The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) supports and advocates on behalf of charitable food aid providers operating across the UK including hundreds of 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.
- A total of 66 organisations running 162 venues, including 61 independent food banks running 154 venues, responded to IFAN’s April 2025 survey between the 14th of March and the 7th of April

2025. Questions related to September 2024 – February 2025 as compared to September 2023 – February 2025. You can access all of [IFAN's recent surveys](#).

- 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.
- According to the most recent Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) Family Resources Survey (FRS) 84% of households reporting severe food insecurity did not access a food bank.
- IFAN is calling for a cash first approach to food insecurity and has co-produced 'Worrying About Money?' cash first referral leaflets in over 130 local authorities in Scotland, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. 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.
- The DWP's 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.

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Breakdown of IFAN Survey – April 2025

Table 1 – How 66 food aid providers running 154 independent food banks operated. Participants could choose all options that applied.

Operation	No of organisations
Run a food bank or other food parcel distributor	61
Distribute shopping vouchers/cards/energy vouchers alongside of food parcels	23
Run advice services alongside food support	22
Run a food pantry	14
Other	11
Run another kind of food aid service	5

Table 2 – How people unable to afford food accessed services of 60 independent food aid providers operating 153 independent food banks.

Access to service	No of organisations
Referral and self-referral	29
Referral only	21
Self-referral only / no records of referrals from outside agencies	10

Table 3 – Agencies referring people to food aid providers as reported by 48 organisations operating 128 independent food banks. Participants could choose all options that applied.

Referral agencies	No of organisations
Local authority teams (social services, housing, welfare/benefits advice etc.)	45
Advice agencies (including Citizens Advice)	46
Schools	44
NHS services (GP surgeries, health visitors, hospitals etc.)	42
Third sector (mental health support agencies, agencies supporting people with NRPF, etc.)	40
Other	14

Table 4 – 56 organisations running 148 independent food banks reporting on whether Jobcentres have been referring or signposting clients to their services. Participants could choose all options that applied. (This follows [the DWP announcement that Jobcentres should only ever signpost clients to food banks](#)).

Jobcentres signposted/referred	No of organisations
Signposted clients to our services	29
Not signposted or referred clients to	19

our services	
Officially referred clients to our services	12

Table 5 – Levels of need from September 2024 to February 2025 compared to September 2023 to February 2024 as reported by 74 organisations operating 149 independent food banks.

Levels of need	No of organisations
We've seen a slight increase (up to 25% increase)	31
We've seen a slight decrease (up to 25% decrease)	11
We've seen a significant increase (up to 50% increase)	7
Stayed the same	6
We've seen a significant decrease (up to 50% decrease)	4
Other	2
We've seen an extremely significant increase (over 50% increase)	0
We've seen an extremely significant decrease (over 50% decrease)	0

Table 6 – Reasons behind increases in need from September 2024 to February 2025 as reported by 37 organisations operating 72 independent food banks. Organisations could report any number of reasons.

Reasons for use	No of organisations
Increases in the cost of living	35
Debt	26
Universal Credit wait times	25
Inadequate wages	25
Housing problems	23
Family breakdown	21
Sanctions	18
Insecure work	17
Benefit deductions	16
Low Social Security payments	14
No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)	12
Benefit cap	8
Two-child limit	7
Other	6

Disability related costs	5
Transport costs	5
Not sure	1

Table 7 – Whether organisations had supported people who have not needed support before from September 2024 to February 2025 as reported by 60 organisations operating 144 independent food banks.

Seeing people who have not needed help before	No of organisations
Yes	60
No	0

Table 8 – Whether there had been an increase in the number of people needing regular support from September 2024 to February 2025 as compared to September 2023 to February 2024 as reported by 61 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

Seeing more people needing regular support	No or organisations
Yes	42
No	19

Table 9 – 59 organisations operating 146 independent food banks reported on whether there was an increase in the number of people accessing their services experiencing extreme hardship from September 2024 to February 2025 when compared with September 2023 to February 2024.

Seeing more people experiencing extreme hardship	No of organisation
No	31
Yes	28

Table 10 – 60 organisations operating 153 independent food banks reported on access to resources in relation to the support they could provide from September 2024 to February 2025.

Impact of lacking resources	No of organisation
No, we have been able to support everyone	34
Yes, but we are managing to operate as per usual	24
Yes, we've needed to reduce the level of support we provide	2

Table 11 – 60 organisations operating 150 independent food banks reported on food donation levels from September 2024 to February 2025.

Food donation levels	No of organisation
Donations levels have dropped	37
Donation levels have stayed the same	21

Donation levels have increased	2
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Table 12 – 60 organisations operating 153 independent food banks reported on financial donation levels from September 2024 to February 2025.

Financial donation levels	No of organisation
Donation levels have dropped	26
Donation levels have stayed the same	25
Donation levels have increased	9

Table 13 – 57 organisations operating 146 independent food banks reported on access to surplus food from September 2024 to February 2025.

Experienced difficulties accessing surplus food	No of organisation
No	38
Yes	19

Table 14 – 57 organisations operating 146 independent food banks reported on the quality of surplus food from September 2024 to February 2025.

Experienced issues with the quality of surplus food	No of organisation
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No	33
Yes	24

Table 15 – 60 organisations operating 153 independent food banks reporting on the organisations need to purchase food to supplement for donations from September 2024 to February 2025.

Have you purchased food?	No of organisation
Yes, a broad range	48
Yes, particular items	10
No, we have not	2

Table 16 – Concerns about capacity to provide support if need continues to increase as reported by 61 organisations operating 154 independent food banks.

Level of concern about capacity to provide support	No of organisation
No - confident about being able to access supply to meet demand	36
Yes - may need to reduce parcel size/voucher support	18
Yes - may not be able to support everyone seeking our help	7