



## Reducing food insecurity in UK households with infants

December 2023

### Introduction:

Adequate nutrition in the first year of life is essential to ensure the growth, health and development of children.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that households with children are particularly disadvantaged in relation to the rising cost of living.<sup>2</sup> According to Food Foundation data published in July 2023, 23.4% of households reporting food insecurity in the previous month had children as compared to 14.8% of households without children.<sup>3</sup> As a result, children were eating low cost and imbalanced meals, not eating enough and were skipping meals. Latest Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) data puts the number of destitute children in the UK at one million.<sup>4</sup>

In December 2023, UNICEF ranked 39 EU and OECD countries based on their most recent income poverty rate and their success in reducing child poverty – the UK ranked number 37 of 39.<sup>5</sup> Recent research from the End Child Poverty Coalition also found that 1 in 10 children in the UK live in a family impacted by the unfair two-child limit and are therefore much more likely to experience poverty.<sup>6</sup>

49% of infants are totally or partially breastfed in England at six to eight weeks meaning that over half of infants in England are fed either wholly or partially with infant formula during their first 12 months.<sup>7</sup> As the cost-of-living crisis persists, too many parents and carers continue to face overwhelming challenges to afford to feed their infants (0-12 months). Food insecurity makes it difficult for parents/carers to

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<sup>1</sup> 'Infant and Young Child Feeding: Model Chapter for Textbooks for Medical Students and Allied Health Professionals.' National Centre for Biotechnology information. [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK148967/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK148967/)

<sup>2</sup> 'A cost of children crisis.' Action for Children.

[https://media.actionforchildren.org.uk/documents/Cost\\_of\\_children\\_crisis\\_briefing\\_-\\_Oct\\_2023\\_k4BFayp.pdf](https://media.actionforchildren.org.uk/documents/Cost_of_children_crisis_briefing_-_Oct_2023_k4BFayp.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> 'Food insecurity tracking – round 13.' The Food Foundation.

<https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking#tabs/Round-13>

<sup>4</sup> 'Destitution in the UK 2023.' Joseph Rowntree Foundation. [www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2023](http://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2023)

<sup>5</sup> 'Child Poverty in the Midst of Wealth.' UNICEF.

<https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/reports/report-card-18-child-poverty-amidst-wealth#report>

<sup>6</sup> 'Children are living in families impacted by the two-child limit everywhere in the UK.' End Child Poverty Coalition. [https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/two\\_child\\_limit/](https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/two_child_limit/)

<sup>7</sup> 'Breastfeeding at 6 to 8 weeks after birth: annual data April 2022 to March 2023.' Office for Health Improvement and Disparities.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/breastfeeding-at-6-to-8-weeks-after-birth-annual-data-april-2022-to-march-2023>

afford infant formula and for some parents it may make it harder to breastfeed.<sup>8</sup> The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) found that nearly half of organisations responding to a recent survey supported more parents and carers struggling to feed their infants when comparing April to July 2023 with the same period in 2022.

The cost of infant formula has increased by 25% over the last two years. In December 2023, the CMA found that the increased prices of infant formula outstripped the increase in manufacturer costs.<sup>9</sup> Public concern over rises in infant formula prices, and reports of formula foraging and theft<sup>10</sup>, have led responses from a leading supermarket responding to this crisis. Iceland Foods lowered the price of infant formula while calling for an increase in the value of the Healthy Start scheme.<sup>11</sup>

In December 2023, Iceland's Executive Chair called for the Government to work with UK retailers to agree price controls on infant formula.<sup>12</sup> Following Feed/the Metro's '[Formula for Change](#)' campaign, in August 2023, Iceland had also called for the loosening of restrictions on marketing infant formula to allow the use of gift cards and loyalty points for purchase.<sup>13</sup> This call was backed by the Labour Party in October.<sup>14</sup>

Highlighting the scale and depth of infant food insecurity is important but it's vital that people's lack of income is the primary focus of policy makers. Increasing numbers of parents/carers are coming to food banks not because they can't use gift cards or loyalty points to buy infant formula but because they don't have enough income. In the long term, parents and carers need more money in their pockets through adequate social security payments, secure and fairly paid work as well as adequate and accessible cash crisis support.

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<sup>8</sup> 'What the Cost of Living Crisis means for the diets of infants and young children and recommended actions.' First Steps Nutrition Trust.  
[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f75004f09ca48694070f3b/t/64c8eacaf49b9b51a96cb93d/1690888908659/CoL+Briefing+note+\\_May+2023\\_updated.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f75004f09ca48694070f3b/t/64c8eacaf49b9b51a96cb93d/1690888908659/CoL+Briefing+note+_May+2023_updated.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> 'Price inflation and competition in food and grocery manufacturing and supply.' Competition and Markets Authority.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cma-sets-out-autumn-update-in-review-of-competition-in-groceries-sector>

<sup>10</sup> 'Desperate parents are stealing baby formula to keep their children fed.' Sky News.  
<https://news.sky.com/story/desperate-parents-are-stealing-baby-formula-to-keep-their-children-fed-12881338>

<sup>11</sup> 'It's time to change the law on infant formula.' Iceland Foods.  
<https://about.iceland.co.uk/2023/08/23/its-time-to-change-the-law-on-infant-formula/>

<sup>12</sup> 'Iceland boss hits out at parent 'exploitation' in baby milk market.' The Guardian.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/dec/01/iceland-boss-hits-out-parent-exploitation-baby-milk-market>

<sup>13</sup> There are dangers associated with the loosening of restrictions on marketing infant formula as outlined in this open letter to Wes Streeting from the Baby Feeding Law Group UK.  
[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c6bb04a65a70771b7cbc916/t/655353be27a8071cace7ea2d/1699959743825/Letter+to+Wes+Streeting+from+BFLG-UK+%2B+co-signatories\\_9Nov2023final.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c6bb04a65a70771b7cbc916/t/655353be27a8071cace7ea2d/1699959743825/Letter+to+Wes+Streeting+from+BFLG-UK+%2B+co-signatories_9Nov2023final.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> 'Labour vows to change 'outdated and damaging' restrictions on baby formula.' Metro.  
<https://metro.co.uk/2023/10/25/labour-vow-to-change-outdated-and-damaging-baby-formula-restrictions-19713021/>

### **Increasing numbers of parents and carers needing support to feed their infants:**

Recent data has shown that independent food banks in IFAN's network continue to struggle to cope with increasing demand and depleted food and financial donations alongside reduced surplus food supply.<sup>15</sup> Food banks have also been reporting volunteer exhaustion and burnout.<sup>16</sup> However, it's important to point out that most households reporting severe food insecurity do not access a food bank. Recent Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Family Resources Survey data reflects this - only 14% of households reporting food insecurity actually accessed a food bank.<sup>17</sup>

Data collected from IFAN member organisations in August 2023 included questions on supporting parents and carers struggling to feed infants.<sup>18</sup> 43% of contributing organisations had seen a rise in the number of parents and carers who had asked for support to feed their babies from April to July 2023 compared with the same period in 2022.

### **Inadequate cash first advice and support result in parents and carers having to access food banks:**

When parents and carers have to turn to a food bank, they have been let down by inadequate incomes and crisis support as well as local pathways. Nearly 60% of organisations reported supporting parents and carers who had self-referred to their service.<sup>19</sup> This indicates that opportunities to access advice and support to maximise income may have been missed.

UNICEF guidance on supporting families with infants under 12 months recommends that food banks "refer families to their Local Authority or Health Board to ensure they receive ongoing, wrap-around support".<sup>20</sup> This may not always be possible as waiting times for advice appointments and benefit payments may be long. Additionally, someone's income may have been 'maximised' but still fall short. As a result, health visitors, local authorities and advice agencies continue to refer parents and carers to local food banks for support. 48% of the independent food banks reported that parents and carers had received a referral through a health visitor, nearly 42% through their local authority as well as through an advice agency and 40% through another health visitor such as a GP. 41% of independent food bank respondents

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<sup>15</sup> 'IFAN Data.' Independent Food Aid Network. [www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data](http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data)

<sup>16</sup> 'Food bank shelves are sparse—there's no time to lose.' The BMJ. <https://www.bmj.com/bmj/section-pdf/1089828?path=/bmj/383/8407/Comment.full.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> 'Family Resources Survey.' Department for Work and Pensions. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-resources-survey--2>

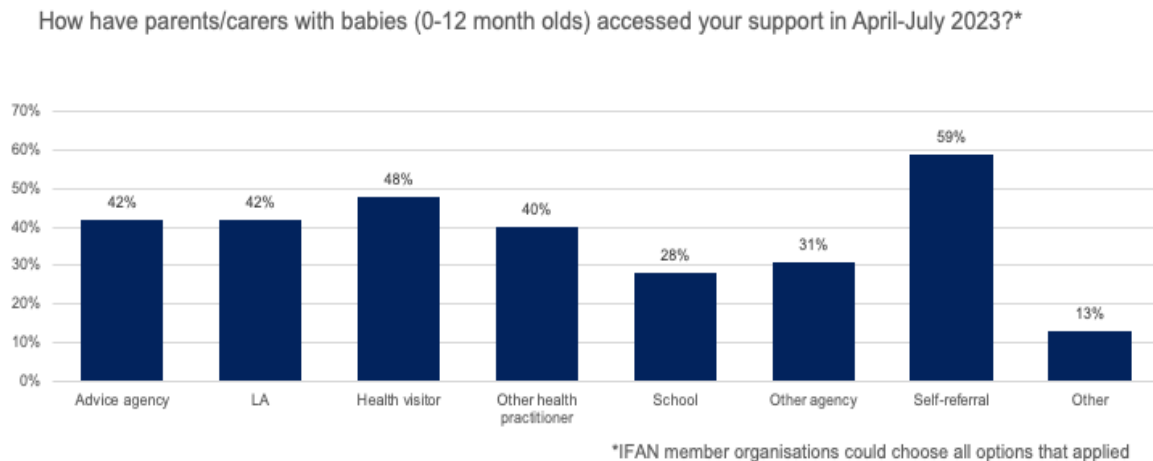
<sup>18</sup> 95 organisations operating 196 independent food banks from 89 different local authorities contributed to the survey with most responding to questions relating to infant food insecurity.

<sup>19</sup> See *Figure 1*.

<sup>20</sup> 'Supporting families with infants under 12 months experiencing food insecurity: a guide for local authorities and health boards.' UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative, First Steps Nutrition Trust and the National Infant Feeding Network (NIFN). [www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/local-authorities-guide/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/local-authorities-guide/)

reported not being aware of local authority guidance and local pathways for supporting people with infant children facing food insecurity.

Figure 1: How parents and carers with babies (0-12 month olds) accessed support



Alison Peyton of Readifood in Reading said: “We do try to have a policy of only providing infant formula to mothers who have NRPF. But this is not always practical, with the pressure of referrals that come to us. Many professional workers, social workers, and some health visitors even do not seem to be aware of the UNICEF guidance.”

### How independent food banks supported parents and carers:

Independent food banks have supported parents and carers to access infant formula in a variety of ways. Organisations reported providing parents and carers with donated formula directly (50%), they also purchased the required infant formula on behalf of the parents and carers (23%), cash was also distributed (2%) as well as shopping cards or vouchers (23%).<sup>21</sup> 19% of organisations reported referring parents and carers to health visitors.

Some organisations reported being unable to provide infant formula to parents and carers due to lack of appropriate stock. IFAN member organisations have previously reported concerns about storage of infant formula milk given its short shelf life. UNICEF guidance also advises food banks not to take in donations of infant formula.<sup>22</sup>

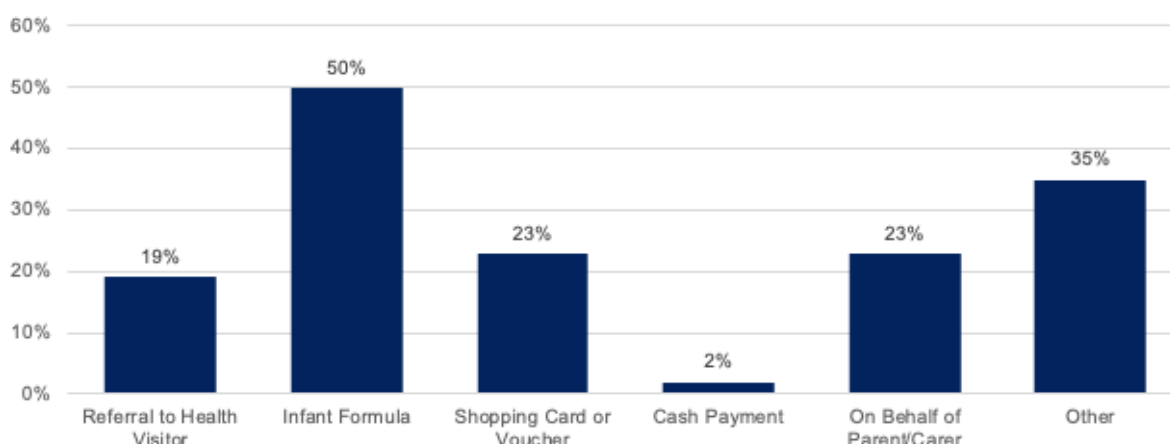
Figure 2: How organisations provided support to parents and carers with babies

<sup>21</sup> See Figure 2.

<sup>22</sup> Unicef guidance states that “Families in crisis may access food banks and baby banks. Staff at these facilities are asked not to accept or distribute donations of infant formula and should instead refer families to their Local Authority or Health Board to ensure they receive ongoing, wrap-around support.”  
<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/local-authorities-guide/>

## Ways in which food banks have supported parents/carers with babies (0-12 month olds) in April-July 2023\*

\*IFAN member organisations could choose all options that applied



One food bank manager said: “We like to check professionals are supporting the family/individual. This is why it's important to us that families are referred and a professional is aware of their situation.”

### IFAN’s Recommendations:

#### ***Embedding local cash first referral pathways (Background):***

A charitable food aid response to poverty has proved itself to be neither effective nor sustainable as the distribution of millions of emergency food parcels has not reduced food insecurity.<sup>23 24</sup> Meanwhile food banks report that they are being stretched beyond capacity as donations have fallen, surplus food has dwindled and staff and volunteers report burnout.<sup>25</sup> What’s more, having to survive on a low or no income may cause parents and carers to look past best before dates and cut corners when preparing powdered infant formula.<sup>26</sup> Parents and carers are also reported to have been forced to forage and steal infant formula.<sup>27</sup>

The Scottish Government has recently published their plan *Cash-First: Towards Ending the Need for Food Banks in Scotland* which outlines the government’s

<sup>23</sup> ‘IFAN Data.’ Independent Food Aid Network. [www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data](http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data)

<sup>24</sup> ‘UK’s food poverty crisis is spiralling out of control – and there’s only one way to fix it.’ The Big Issue. <https://www.bigissue.com/opinion/food-poverty-crisis-waste-uk-ifan-sabine-goodwin/>

<sup>25</sup> ‘Food bank shelves are sparse—there’s no time to lose.’ The BMJ. <https://www.bmj.com/bmj/section-pdf/1089828?path=/bmj/383/8407/Comment.full.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> ‘What the Cost of Living Crisis means for the diets of infants and young children and recommended actions.’ First Steps Nutrition Trust. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f75004f09ca48694070f3b/t/64c8eacaf49b9b51a96cb93d/1690888908659/CoL+Briefing+note+ May+2023 updated.pdf>

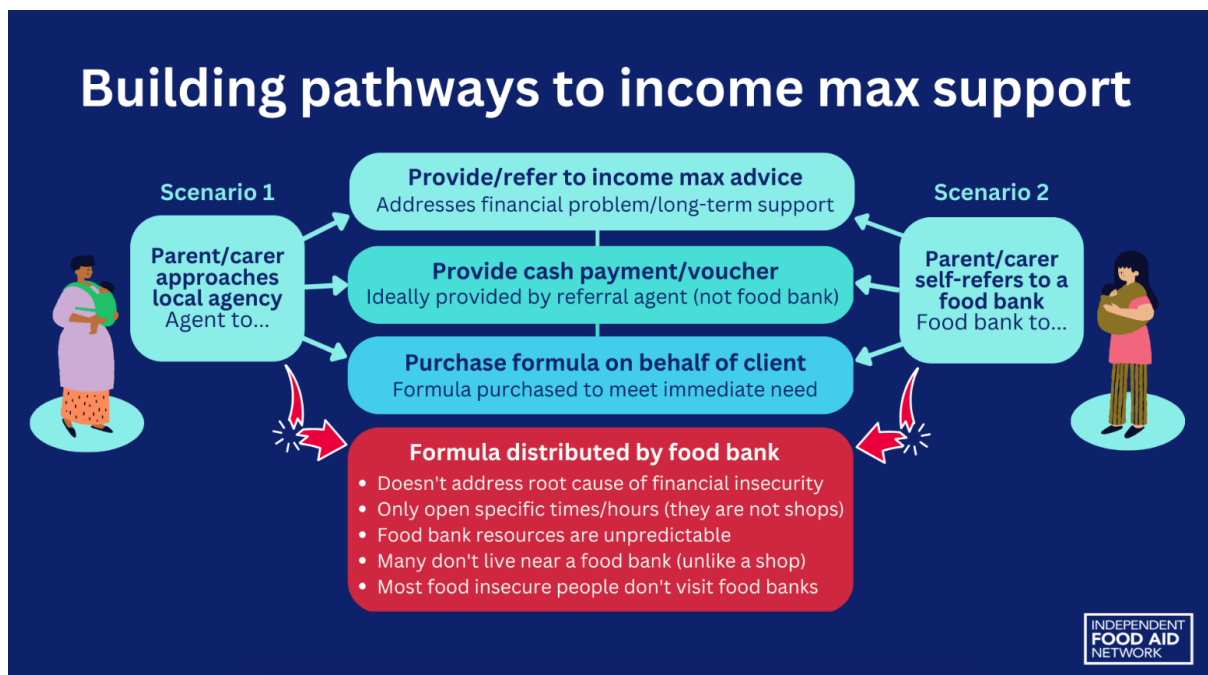
<sup>27</sup> ‘Desperate parents are stealing baby formula to keep their children fed.’ Sky News. <https://news.sky.com/story/desperate-parents-are-stealing-baby-formula-to-keep-their-children-fed-12881338>

commitment to a cash first approach to food insecurity.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the plan, the Scottish Government is looking to strengthen local infant food insecurity emergency pathways through cross-sector partnerships.<sup>29</sup> This work has so far included two roundtable discussions in March and June 2023 followed by the convening of a Short Life Working Group.<sup>30</sup> This cross-sector collaborative project aims to better understand the scale and nature of infant food insecurity in Scotland and to build a picture of local responses currently in place as well as to work towards the establishment of an emergency pathway toolkit adaptable to the context of individual local authorities.

**Recommendation 1:**

**IFAN is calling for local stakeholders to strengthen referral pathways to income maximisation ensuring a cash first response when helping parents and carers in urgent need of infant formula or when mothers are struggling to breastfeed due to inadequate income to purchase food.** Parents and carers who reach out for support should ideally be provided with advice and help to maximise income as well as access to cash or shopping vouchers/cards in the first instance in order to purchase infant formula or food to meet the immediate need.

*Figure 3: Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN), Building pathways to income maximisation support*



<sup>28</sup> 'Cash-First – towards ending the need for food banks in Scotland: plan.' Scottish Government. [www.gov.scot/publications/cash-first-towards-ending-need-food-banks-scotland/](http://www.gov.scot/publications/cash-first-towards-ending-need-food-banks-scotland/)

<sup>29</sup> 'Infant food insecurity: summary report.' Scottish Government. [www.gov.scot/publications/infant-food-insecurity-summary-report/](http://www.gov.scot/publications/infant-food-insecurity-summary-report/)

<sup>30</sup> IFAN sits on the Scottish Government's Short Life Working Group on infant food insecurity.

***Promote and invest in local advice and support services (Background):***

In order for local cash first referral pathways to work, they need to be supported by appropriately funded local advice services. Local advice services are currently overstretched and under-resourced across communities in the UK.<sup>31</sup> IFAN has been co-developing and disseminating ‘Worrying About Money?’ cash first referral leaflets alongside local partners in Scotland, England and Wales since 2020.<sup>32</sup> These are straightforward resources that help people experiencing financial crises access local advice and support as well as frontline support workers to signpost people in financial crises to relevant supporting services.<sup>33</sup>

In Scotland, as part of its collaborative work with other partners led by the Scottish Government, IFAN is adapting existing Money Counts training to support health visitors and other support workers in direct contact with parents and carers struggling to feed their infants.<sup>34</sup>

**Recommendation 2:**

**IFAN is calling for investment to be increased in existing local advice services across the UK as the provision of effective, early intervention is vital to embedding localised cash first referral pathways.**

***Bringing social security payments and wages in line with the cost of living (Background):***

Even after people have accessed advice and support to maximise income, this will still often not be enough to allow people to afford the bare essentials. Social security payments must be brought in line with the cost of living. The increase to social security payments promised in the Autumn Statement of 6.7% is the bare minimum needed.<sup>35 36</sup> There are also critical winter months ahead during which essential costs, including energy price rises in January, will outstrip many household incomes.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> 'Record number of UK households seek help with cost-of-living issues.' Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/c26926d6-b44f-4a79-8fa1-c3eb58781669>

<sup>32</sup> IFAN is funded by the Scottish Government to co-develop and disseminate ‘Worrying About Money?’ cash first referral leaflets. The promotion and dissemination of the leaflets are included in action 6 in the Scottish Government’s plan ‘Cash First: Towards Ending the Need for Food Banks in Scotland.’ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/cash-first-towards-ending-need-food-banks-scotland/>

<sup>33</sup> 'Worrying About Money? Cash First Referral Leaflets.' Independent Food Aid Network. [www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-leaflets](http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-leaflets)

<sup>34</sup> IFAN offers Money Counts training linked to the local ‘Worrying About Money?’ leaflets for frontline support workers and organisations. The one-hour training session helps the attendees gain confidence in starting conversations about money worries and help promote the leaflets across sectors as a tool to signpost people to advice and support. [www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/money-counts](http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/money-counts).

<sup>35</sup> 'Sunday.' BBC Radio 4, 3rd December 2023 (5:30-9:30). <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001t39b>

<sup>36</sup> 'IFAN Data.' Independent Food Aid Network. [www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data](http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data)

<sup>37</sup> 'Mid Year Stats.' The Trussell Trust. <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/mid-year-stats/>



The unfreezing of Local Housing Allowance is a positive but small intervention giving the enormity of the poverty crisis in the UK. It's increasingly clear that cash first or income-focused interventions are effective in reducing food insecurity. Anecdotal evidence from independent food banks shows that recent cost-of-living payments have temporarily reduced the need for support if only for a few days.<sup>38</sup> According to DWP data, the temporary £20-a-week uplift to Universal Credit decreased severe and moderate food insecurity by 16%.<sup>39</sup>

Low wages and insecure work are key drivers of food insecurity. According to polling from the Living Wage Foundation, 39 per cent of low paid workers reported that they were 'regularly skipping meals for financial reasons and falling behind on household bills.'<sup>40</sup> The planned increase to the National Minimum Wage is also welcome but it's critical to view this change in the context of the Living Wage Foundation's figures on a real Living Wage.<sup>41</sup> Zero-hour contracts also drive severe food insecurity.<sup>42</sup>

It's clear that the Scottish Government's Scottish Child Payment is helping to reduce the need for food banks but more interventions like this one are needed in Scotland and the rest of the UK.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Recommendation 3:***

Strengthening local referral pathways and funding local advice and support services will not be enough to prevent parents/carers from falling into poverty. **It's critical that increasing incomes, whether through social security payments or wages, is prioritised. IFAN is calling for a Living Income<sup>44</sup> and a Healthy Standard of Living for all.<sup>45</sup> An Essentials Guarantee<sup>46</sup> would be an important stepping stone towards these goals.**

### ***Ensuring the availability of crisis support via cash payments (Background):***

Crisis support via cash payments is available in every local authority in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland through the Scottish Welfare Fund (Scotland),

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<sup>38</sup> 'Sunday.' BBC Radio 4, 3rd December 2023 (5:30-9:30). <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001t39b>

<sup>39</sup> 'Family Resources Survey: financial year 2019 to 2020.' Department for Work and Pensions. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2019-to-2020/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2019-to-2020>

<sup>40</sup> 'Life on Low Pay as Inflation Begins to Ease.' Living Wage Foundation. <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-09/Life%20on%20Low%20Pay%20as%20Inflation%20Begins%20to%20Ease.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> 'What is a real Living Wage?' Living Wage Foundation. <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage>

<sup>42</sup> 'IFAN Data.' Independent Food Aid Network. [www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data](http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data)

<sup>43</sup> 'Letter to the First Minister of Scotland.' End Child Poverty Coalition. [https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/letter\\_to\\_first\\_minister/](https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/letter_to_first_minister/).

<sup>44</sup> 'Living Income.' New Economics Foundation. <https://neweconomics.org/campaigns/living-income>

<sup>45</sup> 'Ensure a Healthy Standard of Living for All.' Institute of Health Equity. <https://www.instituteoftheequity.org/resources-reports/ensure-a-healthy-standard-of-living-for-all->

<sup>46</sup> 'Guarantee Our Essentials.' The Trussell Trust. <https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/campaigns/guarantee-our-essentials/>



Discretionary Assistance Fund (Wales) and Discretionary Support (Northern Ireland). Crisis support varies across local authorities in England.<sup>47</sup> Many local authorities do not have a local welfare assistance scheme in place and when there is one it doesn't necessarily provide cash payments. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland people facing financial crises are often faced with barriers when trying to access crisis payments in cash.<sup>48</sup>

***Recommendation 4:***

Even if a parent or carer has been referred to crisis support via cash payments, they may still need to access a food bank if this payment is too small or is not made quickly enough. **It's vital that all UK local authorities provide crisis support via cash payments and this support needs to be sufficient, timely and accessible.**<sup>49</sup>

***Improving Healthy Start and Best Start schemes (Background):***

As inflation soars, stagnant payment levels combined with the rising price of infant formula prohibit parents and carers from being able to afford to buy infant formula with the Healthy Start allowance.<sup>50</sup>

IFAN welcomed the Scottish Government's actions to increase Best Start Foods and Best Start Grant payments including doubling of the payment for infants under 12 months from April 2023. Even in Scotland where the Best Start payments are significantly higher, the cost of infant formula doesn't necessarily match the value of the vouchers. Although the Scottish Government is also leading by example by auto-enrolling any child in receipt of Scottish Child Payment.<sup>51</sup>

***Recommendation 5:***

**IFAN supports the policy position of the Healthy Start Working Group on improving the Healthy Start scheme by widening access, expanding eligibility<sup>52</sup>, increasing**

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<sup>47</sup> 'On the Cliff Edge: The State of Crisis Support.' End Furniture Poverty.

<https://endfurniturepoverty.org/research-campaigns/rebuilding-crisis-support-local-welfare-assistance/research-on-the-cliff-edge-the-state-of-crisis-support-2022-2023/>

<sup>48</sup> 'Scottish Welfare Fund review: final report.' Scottish

Government. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/review-scottish-welfare-fund-final-report/>

<sup>49</sup> 'On the Cliff Edge: The State of Crisis Support.' End Furniture Poverty.

<https://endfurniturepoverty.org/research-campaigns/rebuilding-crisis-support-local-welfare-assistance/research-on-the-cliff-edge-the-state-of-crisis-support-2022-2023/>

<sup>50</sup> 'Briefing document on infant formula prices in the UK, for the Competition and Markets Authority investigation into the 'baby formula' category.' First Steps Nutrition Trust.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f75004f09ca48694070f3b/t/64de441430dcf203d2685789/1692288021302/Briefing+document+on+infant+formula+prices+in+the+UK+FSNT+Aug+2023.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> 'What the Cost of Living Crisis means for the diets of infants and young children and recommended actions.' First Steps Nutrition Trust.

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f75004f09ca48694070f3b/t/64c8eacaf49b9b51a96cb93d/1690888908659/CoL+Briefing+note+\\_May+2023\\_updated.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f75004f09ca48694070f3b/t/64c8eacaf49b9b51a96cb93d/1690888908659/CoL+Briefing+note+_May+2023_updated.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> The eligibility criteria for Healthy Start requiring families to earn under £408 a month excludes some families on Universal Credit from applying. Healthy Start is also not open to families with No Recourse to Public Funds (unless their children are British Citizens). [www.healthystart.nhs.uk/how-to-apply/](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/how-to-apply/)

uptake and payment levels.<sup>53</sup> An auto-enrolment system should be utilised to address low uptake of the schemes, raise awareness, eradicate barriers to application and stigma for both Healthy Start and Best Start Schemes.<sup>54</sup> These payments also need to urgently be bought in line with the cost of living to achieve their purpose of enabling families to access adequate nutrition during *pregnancy and first years of life*.

### Providing immediate support:

Given the current context it's inevitable that food banks and other charitable food aid will need to provide direct and immediate support to parents and carers struggling to afford infant formula. **IFAN recommends that food banks and other food aid providers refer to the [UNICEF Local Authority guidance](#) alongside [Feed guidance on the provision of infant formula](#).** These guidelines can help organisations to prioritise pathways to cash first and advice while supporting people in the short-term.

### 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 has previously reported on infant food insecurity in March 2023 looking at data collated in January 2023. IFAN reported on UK-wide data<sup>55</sup> as well as data specific to Scotland.<sup>56</sup>
- August's survey includes data from 96 organisations operating 197 independent food banks operating in 89 local authorities.<sup>57</sup> 38 of the 96 organisations also contributed to IFAN's January 2023 survey.

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<sup>53</sup> 'Healthy Start Working Group Policy Positions.' The Food Foundation.  
[https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/Healthy%20Start%20Working%20Group%20Policy%20Positions\\_2023.pdf](https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/Healthy%20Start%20Working%20Group%20Policy%20Positions_2023.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> 'More than 200,000 missing out on access to nutritious food.' The Food Foundation.

<https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/more-200000-missing-out-access-nutritious-food>

<sup>55</sup> 'Reducing food insecurity in UK households with infant children.' Independent Food Aid Network.

[https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/files/ugd/6bacb0\\_daf3eac73fd6429e9eab3fe52eb6809c.pdf](https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/files/ugd/6bacb0_daf3eac73fd6429e9eab3fe52eb6809c.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> 'Reducing infant and maternal food insecurity in Scotland.' Independent Food Aid Network.

[https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/files/ugd/6bacb0\\_feaccd396f614e5a8fe329156adf8de4.pdf](https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/files/ugd/6bacb0_feaccd396f614e5a8fe329156adf8de4.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> 22 organisations running 44 food banks in 16 local authorities in Scotland, 70 organisations running 148 food banks in 68 local authorities in England and 4 organisations running 5 independent food banks in 5 different local authorities in Wales.

## Breakdown of IFAN Survey – August 2023

Table 1 – Level of support provided to parents/carers to feed their babies (0-12 month olds) in April-July 2023 compared to April-July 2022 as reported by 95 organisations operating 196 independent food banks.

<b>Supporting parents/carers to feed babies (0-12 month olds)</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Increased level for support	41
Level of support has remained approximately the same	31
Not sure	12
Other	10
Decreased level of support	0

Table 2 – 92 organisations operating 180 independent food banks reported on the number of parents/carers who have requested support to feed their babies (0-12 month olds) in April-July 2023.

<b>Number of parents/carers with babies who requested support</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Not sure	30
More than 20	19
1-5	17
6-10	13
16-20	6
0	5
11-15	2

Table 3 – Ways in which parents/carers with babies have accessed support as reported by 89 organisations operating 186 independent food banks. Participants could choose all options that applied.

<b>Referral avenue</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Self-referral	53
Health visitor	43
Local Authority	37
Advice agency	37
Other health practitioner (GP)	36
Another agency	28
School	25
Other	12

Table 4 – Ways in which organisations have supported parents/carers with babies as reported by 88 organisations operating 183 independent food banks. Organisations could report any number of reasons.

<b>Provided support</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Providing donated infant formula	44
Other	31
Purchased required infant formula on behalf of person seeking support	21
Providing a voucher	21
Referring people to a health visitor	17
Providing cash	2

Table 5 –Level of awareness of local guidance regarding supporting food insecure families with babies as reported by 94 organisations operating 195 independent food banks.

<b>Level of awareness</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Yes	55

No	39
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