

STRATEGIC HOUSING PRESENTATION

HUNGER IN THE UK: A NATIONAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

We support a network of food banks across the UK and together we provide emergency food and support to people locked in poverty, operating on a referral basis from local organisations- many of you here.

We're an anti-poverty organisation and campaign for change to end the need for food banks.

PART ONE – LEVEL OF NEED

Slide 1: Our Vision and Upward trend in fb use

- Food banks in the Trussell Trust network distributed **almost 3 million food parcels between April 2022 and March 2023.**
- This is the **most parcels that the network has ever distributed in a financial year** and represents a **37% increase** from the same period last year (in 2021/22)
- **Levels of need seen this year are part of a longer-term trend which pre-dates the cost-of-living crisis, and even the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Our vision is for a UK without the need for foodbanks. We believe it's not right that anyone should be forced to rely long term on charitable food aid.

PART TWO – HUNGER IN THE UK RESEARCH – WHAT'S DRIVING THIS INCREASE?

Slide 2: About Hunger in the UK Research

In January 2022, we started a major 6 year research project, Hunger in the UK, alongside the research agency Ipsos, to track and examine the scale and drivers of hunger across the UK.

HUK is an imperative part of developing our understanding of the drivers of food bank use as it will help us understand some very important questions.

- **Who is at risk of a food bank referral?**
- **What is driving the increasing need for food banks?**
- **What is keeping people trapped in destitution?**
- **And how can policy and practice support people out of food insecurity and destitution ?**

We are doing this research so that we can more confidently campaign and advocate for the changes to policy and practice needed, nationally and locally, if we are to end the need for food banks.

Slide 3: How has the research been carried out?

Throughout the reports we compared the experiences of three core groups:

1. People across the UK experiencing **food insecurity** - For the purposes of this study, we define food insecurity as going without or cutting back on quality or quantity of food due to a lack of money. People who are food insecure have, at some point over the last year, run out of food and been unable to afford more, and/or have reduced meal size, eaten less, gone hungry or lost weight due to lack of money.
2. People across the UK using **any form of food aid; and**

3. People **referred to food banks** in the Trussell Trust network

Previously we have only conducted surveys of people referred to food banks in the network. But, by surveying both people in the general population, and people referred to food banks, we are able to examine and compare similarities and differences between these groups.

4 strands of data collection

- A **survey of people referred to food banks** in the Trussell Trust network (2,500 responses)
- A near-identical **survey of the general population** (4000 survey responses)
- **Qualitative interviews** with 50 people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network; and
- Participatory workshops with people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network

Fieldwork will begin again in 2024 so can track changes over time

So what has the research shown us so far?

Slide 4 & 5: Extent of hunger in the UK

14% of all UK adults (or their households) have experienced food insecurity in the 12 months to mid-2022, equating to an estimated 11.3 million people.

Slide 5 – Iceberg - While public attention often focuses primarily on the extent of food bank need, this research finds food bank use is just the tip of a much deeper iceberg of hunger in the UK.

7% of the UK population have received charitable food support, but most people facing hunger have not yet reached out for charity support. This means an estimated 5.7 million people were supported by food aid in the UK. Food bank use is just the tip of the iceberg.

Slide 6: Certain groups are more likely to face hunger

These groups include:

Carers

- When looking across the UK, nearly a quarter (23%) of unpaid carers face hunger compared to 12% of non-carers.
- A significant proportion (16%) of people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network reported that they had spent time in care as a child. This is over five times greater than the rate found across the UK (3%).

Families with children

Only 29% of UK households have children under the age of 16, and yet nearly half (47%) of all households facing hunger includes children of this age bracket.

Single parents & single adults living alone

Single adults living with children make up just 3% of the population, but 11% of people facing hunger.

People who face structural inequalities such as:

- One in four (24%) people from an ethnic minority background face hunger, almost twice the rate (13%) for white people.
- More than a quarter (27%) of people who are LGBTQ+ face hunger, compared to 13% people who are heterosexual.

Disabled people.

A quarter (26%) of disabled people across the UK have faced hunger, which is nearly three times higher than non-disabled people. We also know nearly 7 in 10 (69%) of people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network are disabled compared to 26% of the UK adult population.

Delve into a couple of these groups in more detail....

Slide 8: Variety of health conditions overrepresented

Gives a more detailed picture of the type of health conditions over represented at food banks.

Unsurprisingly mental health conditions are much higher compared to the UK average with a quarter having a long term physical condition or illness.

Slide 9: Impact mental health has on money

- The majority (62%) of people from disabled households referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network are not receiving any benefits specifically related to their disability.
- More than four in ten people (43%) who raised an issue associated with benefits or tax credits with a Help through Hardship adviser between April and October 2022 had an issue specifically about PIP.
- Amongst those who said that they could and wanted to work, the most common reason cited for being out of work was that they found it difficult to find work that was compatible with their health condition (45%).
- When asked whether they were keeping up with their credit commitments and bills, the majority (68%) of people with mental health conditions said that they struggled to keep up with their bills, compared to 38% of people who did not have such a condition.
- The majority (65%) of people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network with a reported mental health condition had not received any support relating to their mental health in the three months before receiving support from a food bank.

Slide 10: Food bank use and food insecurity are strongly associated with rented housing and homelessness

Across the UK, around a fifth (22%) of people are renting.

However, these figures are much higher for people experiencing food insecurity (53%) and people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network (68%). This compares to 6% of people who have a mortgage.

The overrepresentation of renters at food banks is seen across different types of rental arrangements:

- While only 13% of the general population live in private rented accommodation, this rises to over a quarter 27% of people experiencing food insecurity and 22% of people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network.

- Across the UK just 8% of people are living in social housing, however these figures are much higher amongst people experiencing food insecurity (27%) and people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network, with almost half (46%) living in social housing.
- Across the UK, 4% of people had experienced some form of homelessness in the past year. This includes living in temporary housing, statutory accommodation, living insecurely with friends or family (sofa surfing), living in a B&B or hostel, or sleeping rough. This rises to 10% for people experiencing food insecurity. By stark contrast, one in three (34%) people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network were either homeless at the point of referral or had experienced homelessness in the previous 12 months

Slide 11: Hunger in the UK isn't about a lack of food; it's about a lack of income

- Overwhelmingly, this is caused by problems in the design and delivery of our social security system, with the majority of people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network receiving means-tested support such as Universal Credit.
- ***Six in ten (58%) people in receipt of Universal Credit across the UK have experienced food insecurity in the last year, compared to only 3% of people in receipt of the state pension.***
- Our social security system should support us when we need help, but there is now a significant gap between people's income and their living costs. This shortfall, as well as a lack of information, difficulties claiming, and payments being reduced even further by caps and deductions, is leaving people without enough for essentials such as food.

Lack of accessible information:

- The process for applying can be confusing and there is a lack of accessible information about what people are entitled to. People involved in our research had struggled to find out what they might be entitled to or understand how payments are calculated.
- The digitalisation of information about social security benefits has made access easier for some people, but for many people turning to food banks it creates further barriers due to their digital and social isolation

Difficulties accessing benefits quickly or consistently

- While there are difficulties and delays accessing many types of benefits, by far the most problematic are entitlements related to disability. A significant challenge faced is the long wait times to receive a Work Capacity Assessment or PIP assessment. **62%** of people from disabled households referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network are not receiving any benefits specifically related to their disability.
- There is also a significant issue of people being incorrectly assessed as ineligible for PIP, demonstrated in the large proportion of people who have benefits reinstated following a tribunal.

Slide 12: Income levels from social security are insufficient

Cuts and freezes to benefit payments over the last decade have led to a large reduction in the purchasing power of benefits relative to the rising cost of living.

Research by the Trussell Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, has calculated that the cost of essentials (food, utilities, and vital household goods- so it excludes housing costs and council tax), is currently at least £120 a week for a single adult and £200 for a couple. However, the basic rate of benefits is far lower than this, as are the incomes of people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network.

Slide 13: Unaffordable monthly reductions

- In addition to the basic rate of benefits being too low to cover the essentials, there are a range of measures within the social security system which further reduce the income available to some people.
- Across the UK, more than six in ten (62%) working-age people in receipt of social security and affected by one or more caps or reductions experienced food insecurity in the previous 12 months, compared to one in five (20%) of people in receipt of those benefits but not affected by these caps or reductions.
- Almost half (47%) of people referred to food banks (or their partners) are repaying debts to local or UK government which are often completely unavoidable. The rate of repayments can be totally unaffordable as they are deducted from their already insufficient Universal Credit payments, and it is pushing people towards hunger.

Slide 14: Work is not always the answer

- This is compounded by many jobs being inaccessible, unstable and not paying enough to cover core costs.
- Food insecurity is particularly associated with some types of work and experiences of employment including insecure work such as zero hours contracts or agency work.
- One in five people forced to turn to food banks in the Trussell Trust network are in a working household, and just under a third (30%) of people in work who have had to use a food bank are in insecure work.
- While work does not always prevent destitution and food bank use, it does greatly reduce the risk of these experiences, particularly where it is secure, decently paid and offers enough hours to provide a reasonable income.

Slide 15: The experience of Hunger

People referred to the Trussell Trust are likely to have accumulated multiple forms of debt, run down whatever limited savings they may have had and exhausted all options from family and friends.

- Adverse life events play an important role in exacerbating the impacts of insufficient income and increasing the risk of people having to turn to food banks, especially combined with social and digital isolation and a lack of advice and other support.
- When we look at experiences by gender, domestic violence becomes the most common experience cited by women, with almost one in five women referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network (19%) experiencing domestic violence in the last 12 months.
- Two out of three people have more than three types of debt and nine out of ten people have no savings

Slide 16: Impact of having a lack of money leads to severe social isolation / loneliness

- The impact of having no money worryingly often leads to social isolation and loneliness, forcing people to disconnect because they simply cannot afford to meet up with friends or family. One in four (26%) people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network are experiencing severe social isolation, and are in contact with relatives, friends or neighbours less than once a month or never.
- In addition, one in six people referred to a food bank in the Trussell trust network have no access to the internet at all and less than half (42%) have access in their homes. Without this, people struggle to access financial support, manage their lives and are locked out of opportunities.

- **Lack of other support and advice before the point of a referral to a food bank** also appears to be an important factor: 36% of people referred to a food bank in the Trussell Trust network said they received no advice from other services before their latest referral to the food bank.

Slide 17: Hunger isn't inevitable

As an organisation we don't want to exist, and we don't think we should need to. No charity can replace the dignity of buying your own food. Hunger isn't inevitable – things can change. *Food banks are not the answer when people are going without the essentials in one of the richest economies in the world.* Our vision is a UK without the need for food banks. Strategy in place to move towards this and support food banks in our network to work towards ending the need for themselves.

Slide 18: Our Strategy

Changing Communities:

Empowering every food bank to orientate their work towards ending the need for their services through the provision of bespoke support, enabling them to tackle the underlying drivers of poverty and reduce the numbers of people requiring emergency food.

Financial inclusion work - trying to provide everyone with access to appropriate and affordable financial services, regardless of their background or income.

Referral pathways - Catching people upstream before get to needing a food bank. Vital that food banks become the last port of call and people can access that support first.

Changing Minds – is about getting people on board with this agenda. We will increase public will for long-term solutions to end the need for food banks; building a movement/crowd of informed and empathetic people and organisations who share our values and are willing to act to create a just and compassionate society.

Changing Policy

Not going to be able to end need food banks without policy change.

To reach a future without the need for emergency food, we need to see long-term structural change that tackles the reason why people are being left without money for essentials like food.

Slide 19: What needs to change?

Hunger in the UK: Policy briefing lays out our recommendations around four key areas: **social security and crisis support, disability and ill-health, work and housing**. Recommendations to the UK Government include:

- Introduce an [Essentials Guarantee](#) to make sure that the basic rate of Universal Credit is at least enough to afford the essentials we all need.
- Take a person-centred approach to the delivery of social security across the system involving disabled people in the system design – from application, to assessments, to decision making.
- Fund flexible and personalised employment support programmes.
- Increase Local Housing Allowance to bring it in line with at least the cheapest 30% of current rents and commit to uprating it in line with changes to rents.

Slide 20: Essentials Guarantee Campaign

In partnership with JRF we are calling on the government for an [Essentials Guarantee](#).

Universal Credit should protect people from going without essentials.

This policy would enshrine in legislation:

- an independent process to regularly determine the Essentials Guarantee level, based on the cost of essentials (such as food, utilities and vital household goods) for the adults in a household (excluding rent and council tax); **Indicative level of £120 per week for a single adult and £200 per week for a couple**
- that Universal Credit's standard allowance must at least meet this level; and
- that deductions (such as debt repayments to government, or as a result of the benefit cap) can never pull support below this level.

Petition out at the moment for people to sign and an action to email local MP – please do take part