



Independent Food Bank Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in the UK Comparing February – May 2019 with February – May 2020

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) connects, supports and advocates on behalf of a range of 335 frontline food aid providers and envisions a society without the need for food banks. The network’s membership includes 276 organisations operating 368 independent food banks regularly distributing emergency food parcels at least once a week.¹ Since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, independent food banks have seen a large increase in need for emergency food parcels.

177% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed by independent food banks comparing May 2019 to May 2020:

This report primarily looks at data collated from 100 organisations operating 191 independent food banks across England, Scotland and Wales¹ and able to provide data for both February to May 2019 and February to May 2020.² **Comparing the months May 2019 and May 2020, independent food banks have seen a 177% increase in the distribution of emergency food parcels.**

Fig 1: No of emergency food parcels distributed by independent food banks in England, Scotland and Wales in February, March, April, May 2019/20:

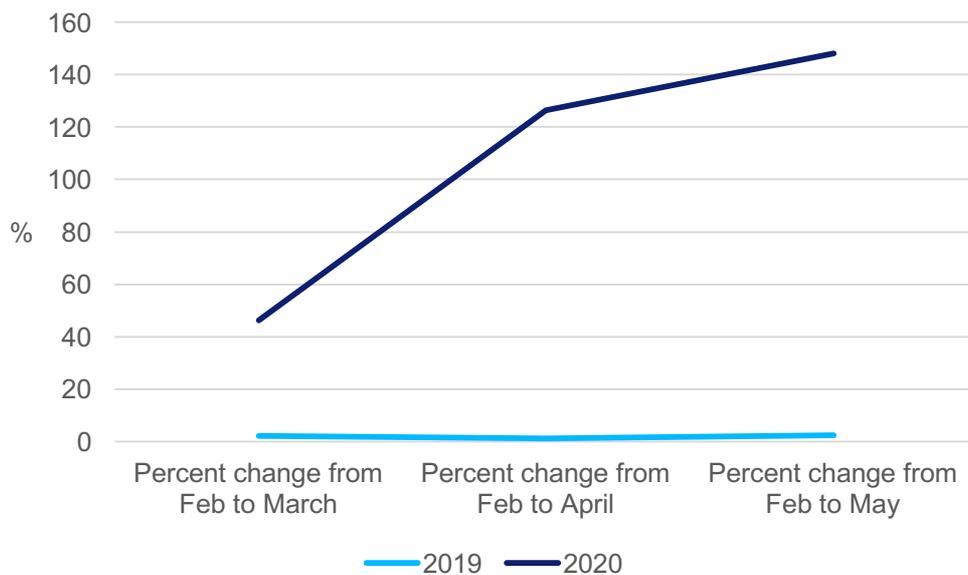


¹ Only IFAN member organisations and additional participants in the IFAN Scotland parcel project were invited to participate totalling 349 organisations across the whole of the UK. Organisations opted-in to the survey and were not randomly selected. 135 organisations including 238 independent food banks or food parcel distributors contributed data. Of the 135 organisations, 100 running 191 independent food banks were able to contribute data for both 4-month periods across 2019 and 2020. These organisations operated across 80 local authorities in England (55), Scotland (19) and Wales (6). The remaining 35 organisations were either new food banks, hadn't kept records for some months (7 organisations) or pre-COVID-19 provided food aid but not food parcels.

² 10 organisations provided data that their teams estimated, that is 10% of the organisations providing data for both time frames.

As shown in Figure 1, the number of food parcels distributed increased each month from February to May 2020. Compared to February, the number of food parcels distributed was 46% higher in March, 126% higher in April, and 148% higher in May. As shown in Figure 2, these rises are much higher than the rises observed over the same months (February to May) last year.

Fig 2: Percentage change in the number of emergency food parcels distributed across England, Scotland and Wales from February to March 2020, from February to April 2020 and from February to May 2020:



Previous data collated from IFAN independent food banks showed a 175% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed comparing April 2019 to April 2020.³

Unit of measurement used:

Like the Trussell Trust’s statistics, the number of parcels we have recorded is based on the number of people, both children and adults who have been provided with one 3-day supply of food per person. Some independent food banks have provided more than 3 days’ worth of food per person, so to enable comparison with Trussell Trust data, collated information has been converted into a shared unit of measurement.

³ 78 of the 112 organisations contributing data for comparable time frames for our last report published on 3.6.20.- www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/ifan-data-since-covid-19 - also contributed data to this new data set. An additional 22 organisations operating 44 independent food banks added their figures to this new data set.

Table 1: Number of 3-day food parcels distributed by 100 organisations running 191 independent food banks across England, Scotland and Wales:

Month	Number of 3-day food parcels distributed in 2019	Number of 3-day food parcels distributed in 2020
February	31,817	36,445
March	32,504	53,320
April	32,194	82,358
May	32,541	90,400

Increase in the size of emergency food parcels:

To accommodate both the need to reduce face-to-face contact and to support growing need since the outbreak of COVID-19, 47 organisations, or 47% of our data set contributing data to both time periods, have increased the size of their parcels to support people with a food supply for a longer time period than usual. As described above, this change has been factored into the calculation of the number of 3-day emergency food parcels distributed.

Numbers of people supported:

Given that many organisations have increased the size of their food parcels in recent months, it is important to also analyse the number of people supported behind the food parcel numbers. However, it's also relevant to note that 25% of the organisations in our data set record the number of *referrals* they support rather than the *number* of people so these figures are underestimated.⁴

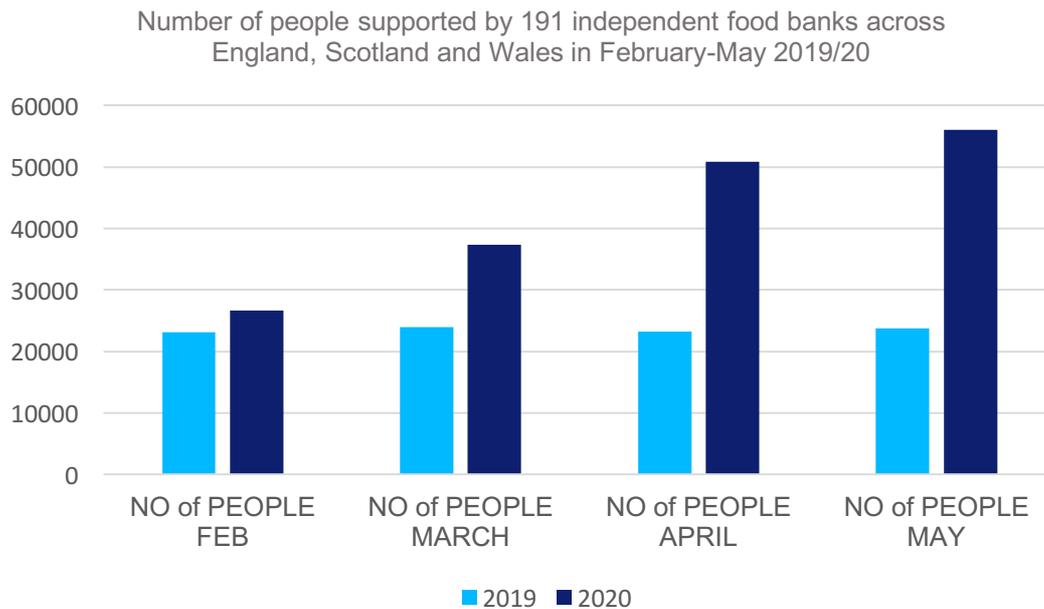
Table 2: Number of people supported with food parcels during February, March, April and May 2019 and 2020:

Month	No of people supported 2019	No of people supported 2020
February	23,160	26,623
March	23,947	37,422
April	23,292	50,906
May	23,782	56,023

⁴ 25 organisations contributed data regarding the number of referrals rather than the number of people. This means the number of people is underestimated as each referral accounts for at the very least one person.

The number of people supported with emergency food parcels was only 14% higher in February 2020 compared to February 2019. Then, in March 2020, figures were 56% higher than in March 2019. The rate of increase further accelerated in April with the number of people supported rising by 118% compared to April last year. **The rise in levels of support for people in May 2020 was 135% compared to May 2019.**

Fig 3: Number of people supported with emergency food parcels by 191 independent food banks operating in England, Scotland and Wales in February to May 2019 and 2020:



Data collated re the number of children supported through emergency food parcels:

51 organisations, operating 106 independent food banks and contributing data from both time periods, were also able to provide data on the number of children supported with emergency food parcels. This shows an 85% increase in the number of children recorded to have been supported by emergency food parcels comparing May 2019 with May 2020. However, it's important to note that children were also supported by the remaining 49 organisations not able to provide a breakdown of their figures.

Fig 4: Number of children recorded as having received support by 106 independents across England, Scotland and Wales in February to May 2019 and 2020:

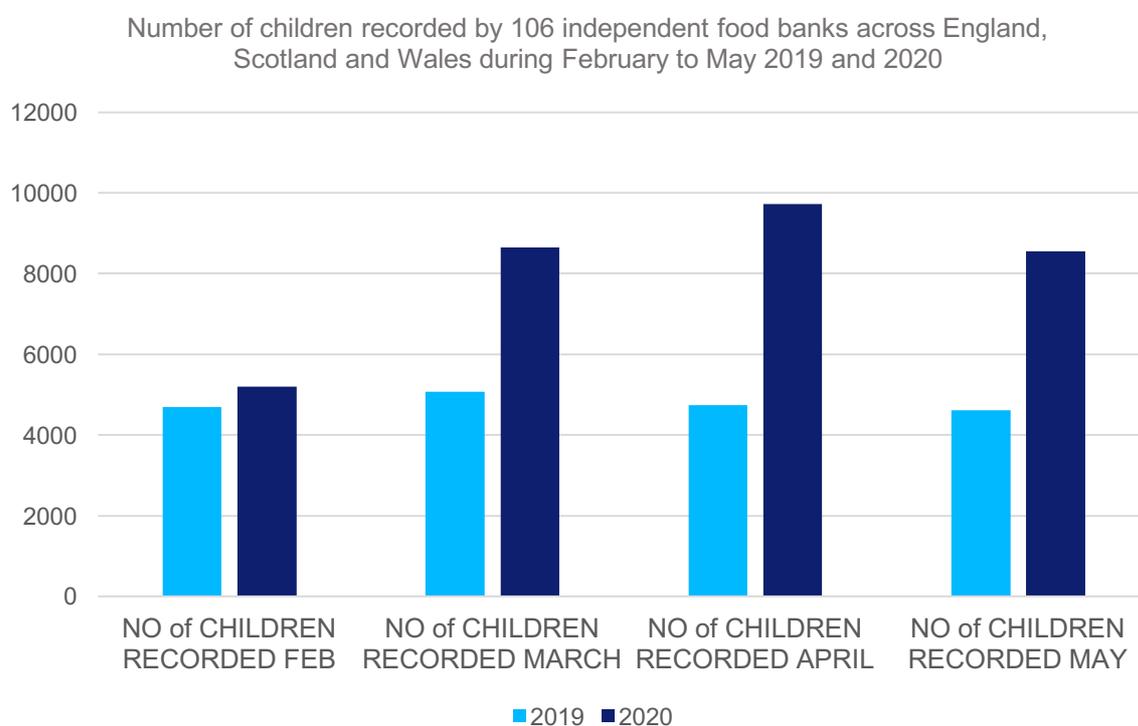


Table 2: Number of children recorded during February, March, April and May 2019 and 2020 by 51 organisations:

Month	No of children recorded 2019	No of people recorded 2020
February	4,684	5,192
March	5,066	8,643
April	4,743	9,730
May	4,611	8,552

Changes to food bank operations as a result of COVID-19 and self-referrals:

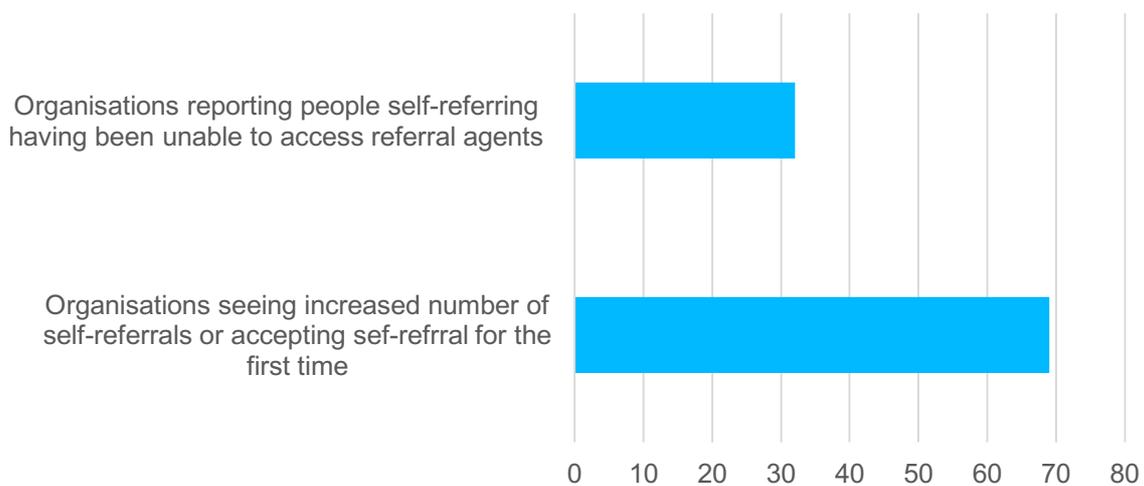
The outbreak of COVID-19, and subsequent lockdown, has meant that some independent food banks have needed to change the way they operate.

Some independent food banks do not usually operate via an official referral system.⁵ This means that they do not require external agencies to make assessments of need. 67 of the 100 organisations ran a self-referral or mixed referral/self-referral

⁵ www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/independent-food-bank-survey Dr Rachel Loopstra et al, 2019

system before the outbreak of COVID-19. **69 organisations, or 69% of our data set, have seen an increase in the number of self-referrals or have started to accept self-referrals (15%) as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.** Although telephone and internet-based systems have replaced some referral services, these are not necessarily accessible to people living with no or low income. **Of the 69 organisations reporting to have started to accept self-referrals and an increase in self-referrals, 46% reported supporting people unable to access referral agencies.** 19 of these 32 organisations had supported up to 40 households in this situation.

Fig 5: Independent food bank organisations reporting increased number of self-referrals/people unable to access agencies:



50 organisations, or 50% of our data set, reported accepting more referrals from agencies. 15 organisations reported no change in the type of referral their teams were receiving and 3 organisations reported they had stopped taking self-referrals.

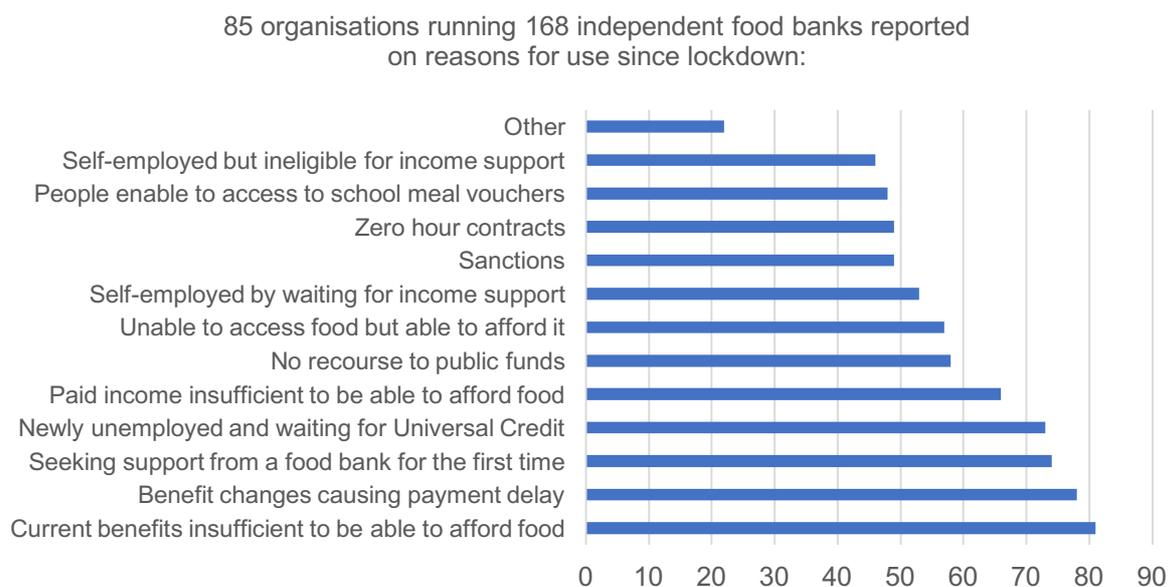
Since the outbreak of the pandemic, 39 organisations in our data set are now running larger operations involving more volunteers and additional venues. For 7% of organisations, COVID-19 has meant they have needed to run a reduced service. **19% of organisations ran a delivery service before COVID-19 while an additional 60% of organisations started to run delivery services to allow for social distancing.**

At the time of our survey (mid-June 2020), 90% of organisations reported good access to food supply while 77% of organisations confirmed they had struggled to access an adequate food supply at the start of lockdown at the end of March and during early April.

Reasons for food bank use:

85 organisations, running 168 independent food banks and contributing data on food parcel distribution for 2019 and 2020, also collated data on reasons for the need for their services since lockdown. Organisations could choose multiple options for reasons for use.

Fig 6: 85 organisations running 168 independent food banks reported on reasons for use since lockdown:



New food banks and food aid providers distributing food parcels for the first time as a result of COVID-19:

The 100 organisations contributing to our analysed data set were already open and running before February 2019. This meant they were able to provide data for all 4 months of both 2019 and 2020. **Of these 100 organisations, 73% started to distribute food parcels in or after 2010 while the remaining 27 organisations distributed emergency food parcels before 2010.** This analysis matches data collated through Dr Rachel Loopstra’s survey of food banks in England operating independently of the Trussell Trust.⁶

28 organisations running 40 venues provided food parcel distribution data to IFAN that couldn’t be included in our analysis as they started operating after February 2019⁷ or they started to distribute emergency food parcels following lockdown

⁶ A survey of food banks operating independently of the Trussell Trust network of food banks - www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/independent-food-bank-survey

⁷ 5 of these organisations provided data that was collated approximately while 4 organisations provided data on the number of referrals rather than people meaning their figures are underestimated.

instead of running their usual food aid service.⁸ 11 of these organisations running 18 independent food banks started operating a food aid service following the outbreak of COVID-19. 3 existing independent food banks also contributed data for April and May 2020 though were unable to contribute for all the previous months.⁹

We've included these figures below. Combined with the data from the 100 organisations already presented, they show the scale of distribution in April and May 2020 across a total of 234 sites.

Table 3: Number of people supported and number of 3-day emergency food parcels distributed by 25 newly operating independent food banks, 15 food aid provision venues and 3 independent food banks unable to provide data for all 8 months of our main analysis:

Month	Number of people supported	Number of 3-day food parcels
April 2020	15,195	19,434
May 2020	24,466	27,239

Table 4: Total number of people supported and total number of 3-day emergency food parcels distributed by 234 independent food banks/food parcel distributors in April and May 2020:

Month	Number of people supported	Number of 3-day food parcels
April 2020	66,101	101,792
May 2020	80,489	117,639

Conclusion:

IFAN independent food banks have been reporting huge increases in the need for emergency food parcels since March 2020. The analysis of two data sets covering February-April 2019/20 and February-May 2019/20 involving a total of 134 organisations running 257 independent food banks have seen unprecedented increases in the number of people supported and the number of 3-day emergency food parcels distributed. As the COVID-19 lockdown eases and its long-term impact

⁸ 1 of these organisations provided data that was collated approximately while 2 provided data on the number of referrals rather people meaning their figures are underestimated.

⁹ 4 further organisations/independent food banks contributed partial data but not for both April and May 2020.

becomes clearer, IFAN is deeply concerned that even more people will fall into poverty and will be forced to rely on charitable food aid.

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ⁱThe Independent Food Aid Network has identified at least 889 independent food banks operating across the UK – www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/independent-food-banks-map. This list does not include food banks run by schools or universities, some of the new independent food banks which have started operating since the outbreak of COVID-19 or food banks operated by the Salvation Army. In partnership with A Menu for Change, IFAN has published two sets of figures collated from independent food banks in Scotland in March 2019 and January 2020. This data almost doubled previously known Trussell Trust figures - www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/food-bank-data-in-scotland