



**Published Friday 11.12.20.**

## **Independent Food Bank Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in the UK *December 2020***

The UK-wide Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) supports and advocates on behalf of a membership of frontline food aid organisations including over 400 independent food banks.<sup>i</sup> IFAN envisions and campaigns for a society without the need for charitable food aid.<sup>ii</sup> Since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, independent food banks across the UK have seen a large increase in need for emergency food parcels.<sup>iii</sup>

### **Increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed by independent food banks in across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland:**

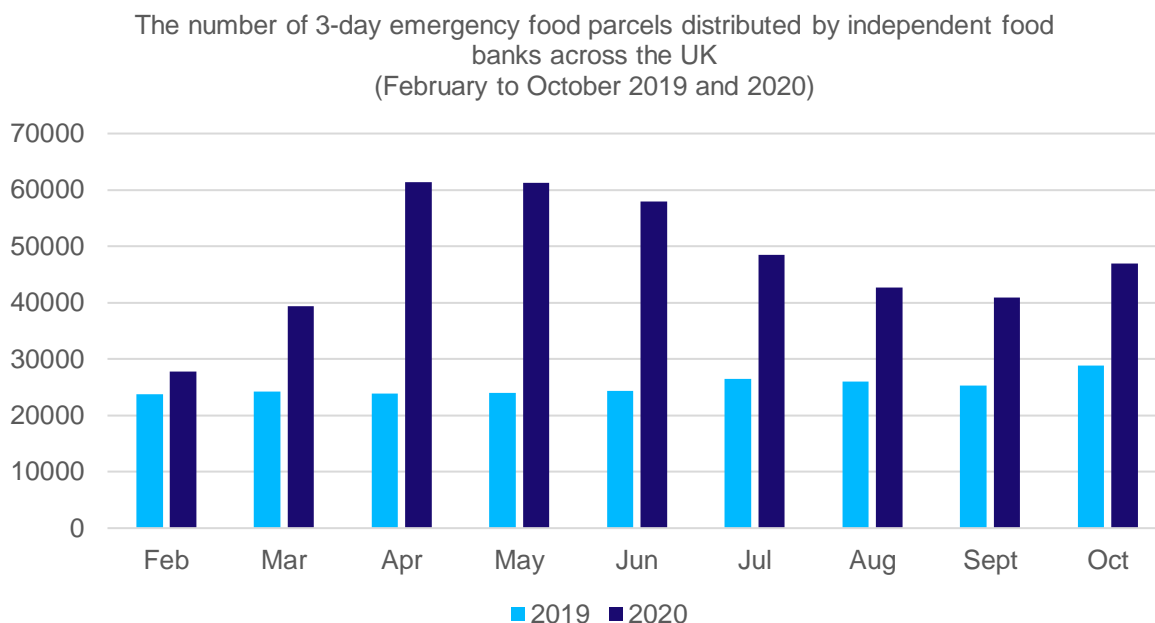
As part of a broader UK-wide analysis, we looked at data for February to October 2019 and February to October 2020, contributed by 134 independent food banks operating in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.<sup>1</sup> Comparing April 2019 to April 2020 and May 2019 to May 2020 (the height of the UK-wide lockdown), show a 156% and 155% rise respectively in the number of emergency food parcels distributed by 134 independent food banks.<sup>2</sup> From June 2019 to June 2020 these figures show a 137% rise, and from July 2019 to July 2020 an increase of 83%. More recently, our collated figures demonstrate a 62% increase comparing October 2019 with October 2020. This follows a 61% rise comparing September 2019 with September 2020. Before the onset of the Covid-19 crisis, the increase from February 2019 to February 2020 was 17%.

---

<sup>1</sup> IFAN member organisations and other independent food banks operating across the UK were invited to participate in our survey. Organisations opted-in to the survey. A total of 92 organisations operating 189 independent food banks contributed data (England - 114, Scotland - 61, Wales -12, Northern Ireland - 2). However, we were only able to a complete comparative analysis for figures provided for both 2019 and 2020 by 62 organisations operating 134 independent food banks (England - 72, Scotland - 50, Wales - 10, Northern Ireland - 2). 30 organisations running 55 independent food banks did not provide figures for every month from February 2019 to October 2020, were newly operating or distributing food parcels instead of another form of food aid or newly independent of the Trussell Trust food bank network. Of the 62 organisations, 57 organisations contributed to our previous UK-wide report while 5 organisations were new to this comparable data set.

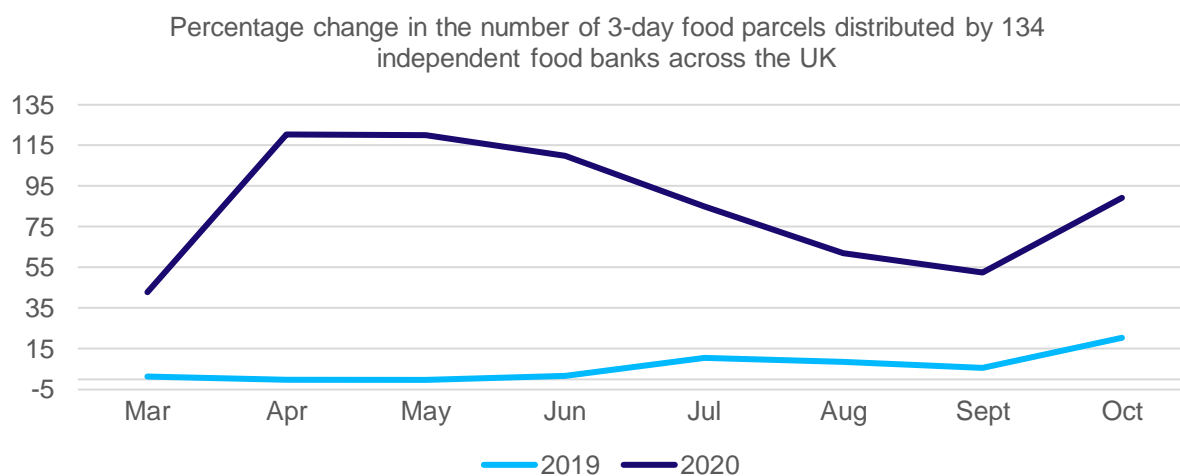
<sup>2</sup> Some data provided by 5 of 62 organisations was estimated.

*Fig 1: Number of 3-day emergency food parcels distributed by 134 independent food banks in the UK comparing February to October 2019 and February to October 2020*



It is also important to highlight the month-on-month differences from the pre-COVID baseline of February 2020. As shown in Figure 1, food parcel distribution first jumped by 41% to March, then by 120% to April. In October, usage remained significantly higher than pre-COVID-19 levels, with 46,969 parcels being distributed by 134 independent food banks compared to 27,822 in February.

*Fig 2: Percentage change in the number of emergency food parcels distributed by 134 UK independent food banks in 2019 and 2020*



## 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.

*Table 1: Number of 3-day parcels distributed by 134 independent food banks*

<b>Month</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
February	23,274	27,822
March	24,274	39,391
April	23,919	61,375
May	23,959	61,278
June	24,539	57,927
July	26,462	48,536
August	26,007	42,738
September	25,304	40,922
October	28,867	46,969
<b>Total (February to October)</b>	<b>226,605</b>	<b>426,958</b>
Total (April to September)	150,190	312,776

## Number of people supported February-October 2019/2020:

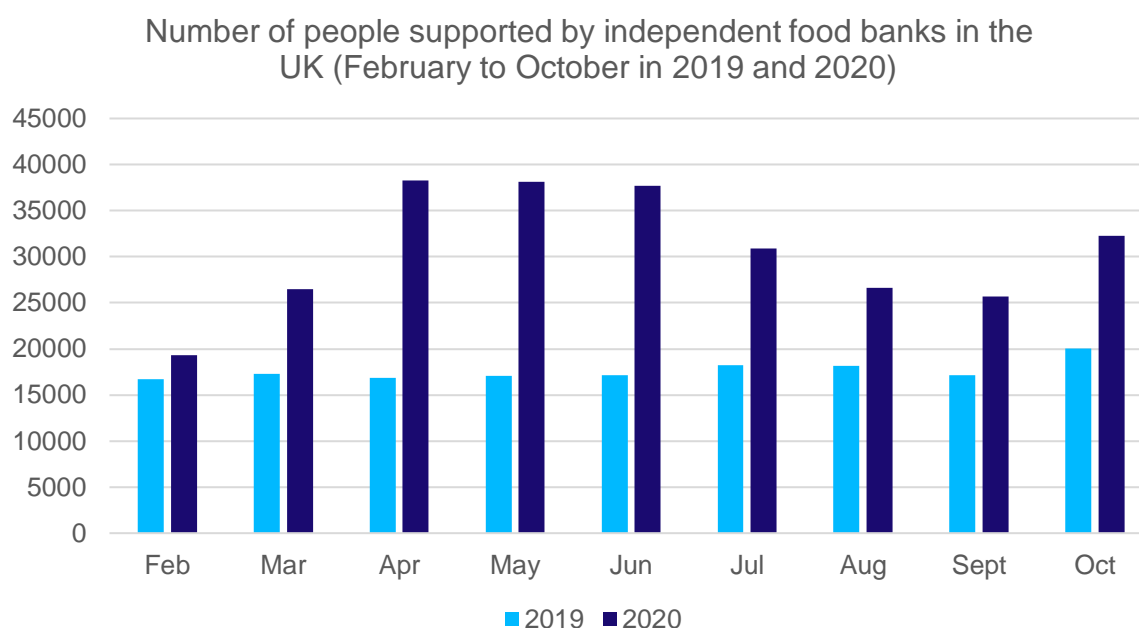
We also looked at the number of people supported by UK independent food banks contributing to both time periods. The number of people receiving food parcels each month mirrored the same patterns in numbers of food parcels distributed.

*Table 2: The number of people supported by 134 independent food banks from February-October 2019 and February-October 2020*

<b>Month</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
February	16,690	19,334
March	17,258	26,512
April	16,829	38,286
May	17,102	38,104
June	17,118	37,697
July	18,243	30,893
August	18,138	26,639
September	17,108	25,671
October	20,037	32,296
<b>Total (February to October)</b>	<b>158,523</b>	<b>275,432</b>
Total (April to September)	104,538	197,290

<sup>3</sup> The Trussell Trust's most recent data indicates that 12% of their network supporting people with emergency food parcels provided a 7-day, rather than a 3-day, supply of food.

Fig 3: Number of people supported by 134 independent food banks in the UK February to October 2019 & February to October 2020



### Referral or self-referral to food banks:

One of the challenges people needing the support of food banks faced over COVID-19 was that many referral agencies were not as accessible or available at all, especially in the early months of the crisis. Although many independent food banks have always allowed self-referrals and saw increases in this type of access, others have newly allowed self-referrals because people have been unable to access a referral agent. 38 of the 62 organisations contributing to both data sets usually accept self-referrals and third-party referrals. 50 of the 62 organisations, or 80% of our combined data set, reported having supported people unable to access a referral agent since the onset of Covid-19. 18 organisations reported having supported more than 100 people in this situation.

### Other independent food banks contributing data:

In the analysis above, we have only highlighted data from the 134 food banks that had collected and provided data for all months over February to October in 2019 and 2020. This allows us to calculate percent change in usage for food banks that existed before and through the crisis. However, 30 organisations running 55 independent food banks did not provide figures for every month from February 2019 to October 2020, were newly operating or distributing food parcels instead of another form of food aid, or newly independent of the Trussell Trust food bank network. Between April and September 2020, these additional independent food banks

distributed a further 28,218 additional 3-day emergency food parcels and supported 18,149 people.

Added to a total figure of 312,776 3-day emergency food parcels distributed by 134 independent food banks, 340,994 3-day emergency food parcels were distributed by all 189 contributing independent food banks between April 2020 and September 2020. An average of 1,813 3-day emergency food parcels was distributed by each of these food banks over this 6-month period. IFAN has identified at least 961 independent food banks operating across the UK and so these figures relate to one fifth of the UK's independent food banks.

### Reasons for use:

51 organisations running 125 independent food banks reported on the reasons why people need their services. This data was collected for the months March through to September 2020. Organisations were only asked to select categories they felt were relevant to a minimum of ten people they had supported that month.

The most selected reason for food bank use across all time frames was “Current benefits insufficient to be able to afford food” followed by “Existing benefit changes causing benefit payments delay.” Reasons listed under “Other” included debt, homelessness, lack of addiction services, and sickness.

*Table 3: Reasons for use reported by a percentage of 51 organisations running 125 independent food banks*

\*Number of organisations and food banks contributing reasons for use for each month: (March: 51 organisations/124 food banks, April: 51 organisations/125 food banks, May: 49 organisations/123 food banks, June: 49 organisations/123 food banks, July: 50 organisations/126 food banks, August: 51 organisations/125 food banks, September: 49 organisations/101 food banks).

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept
Current benefits insufficient to be able to afford food	84%	86%	92%	94%	92%	94%	92%
Existing benefit changes causing benefit payment delay	75%	67%	71%	66%	64%	65%	63%
Newly unemployed and waiting for Universal Credit	76%	78%	67%	63%	64%	53%	65%
Income from employment insufficient to be able to afford food	55%	63%	51%	53%	52%	55%	51%
Zero-hour contracts	39%	41%	39%	43%	36%	39%	35%
Unable to access food due to self-isolation or other reasons but able to afford it	45%	47%	45%	41%	38%	25%	27%
No recourse to public funds	41%	39%	37%	35%	32%	29%	27%
Self-employed but without work and waiting for Self-Employment Income Support	39%	41%	41%	29%	36%	27%	29%
Impacted by lack of access to mental health services	29%	33%	33%	33%	36%	37%	35%

People affected by lack of access to voucher scheme to replace free school meals or ineligible for free school meals	31%	41%	35%	31%	28%	22%	18%
Sanctions	35%	25%	29%	22%	28%	24%	22%
Self-employed but ineligible for Self-Employment Income Support Scheme	16%	24%	27%	27%	22%	22%	20%
Applied for Universal Credit but application refused as ineligible	16%	20%	24%	24%	18%	22%	18%
Other	10%	8%	10%	10%	12%	10%	12%

## Conclusion:

Increases in emergency food parcel distribution figures from across the UK soared in the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic, and they have remained at least 61% higher than those of the previous year. As the economic impact of Covid-19 takes hold, independent food banks are seeing yet more people unable to rely upon social security payments and/or adequate wages seeking food bank support. Using 2019's November and December figures we expect that at least 519,065 3-day emergency food parcels will be distributed by less than a fifth of independent food banks in the UK during 2020.<sup>4</sup>

The Government's recent pledge of over £400 million to help support families and individuals unable to afford to buy food is welcome but yet again policy changes that would reduce the footfall to food banks have been avoided. The provision of yet more emergency food parcels will not solve poverty and a charitable food aid system is being further embedded with every week that passes. We urge the Government to look beyond an emergency response to the systemic problem of poverty that long pre-existed the Covid-19 crisis and to make changes to our social security and wages systems that will mean everyone is able to afford to buy food.

**Author:** Sabine Goodwin, Independent Food Aid Network Coordinator

**Acknowledgements:** Sabine Goodwin would like to thank all the organisations contributing their valuable data and time to this report. She's grateful to Maria Marshall, IFAN's Project Officer for all her time and input, IFAN's Co-Chairs Dr Maddy Power and Deirdre Woods as well as Dr Rachel Loopstra.

For further information please contact IFAN's Coordinator Sabine Goodwin at [sabine@foodaidnetwork.org.uk](mailto:sabine@foodaidnetwork.org.uk)

---

<sup>4</sup> 134 independent food banks distributed 28,679 3-day emergency food parcels in November 2019, 34,375 in December 2019 and 29,053 in January 2020. Over February to October 2020 those 134 independent food banks distributed a total of 426,958 3-day emergency food parcels.

---

<sup>i</sup> IFAN has identified at least 961 independent food banks operating across the UK. You can find out more [here](#).

<sup>ii</sup> The figures represented in this report represent a fraction of the food aid landscape in UK, while we know that far more people with food insecurity than access emergency food parcel provision. IFAN has identified at least 961 independent food banks and food parcel distributors operating across the UK operating at least once a week. This number does not include food banks running from schools, universities or hospitals. The Trussell Trust currently operates 1393 food bank centres across its UK network. The Salvation Army also runs food banks and distributes food parcel from hundreds of centres. The British Red Cross has also supported people with food parcels. In response to lockdown restrictions, local authorities have run local food hubs often in collaboration with frontline food aid organisations which have helped people with food parcels who have been unable to afford food as well as people unable to access food supply. In addition to food banks and food parcel distribution services, a range of food aid providers from social supermarkets to community kitchens have supported people living food insecurity both during the COVID-19 lockdown and before 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> IFAN's most recent reports on data collated from independent food banks operating across the UK can be found [here](#).