



PUBLISHED 00.01. 8.9.20.

IFAN's latest figures collated from Scotland's independent food banks

The UK-wide Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) connects, supports and advocates on behalf of a range of over 340 frontline food aid organisations including nearly 400 independent food banks.ⁱ IFAN envisions a society without the need for charitable food aid.ⁱⁱ 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.ⁱⁱⁱ

IFAN has been collecting data since the Autumn of 2018 from independent food banks operating in Scotland in order to monitor and collectively report on food parcel distribution outside of the Trussell Trust network.^{iv} This is part of our work to better understand and address the reality of food insecurity in Scotland.

The report reveals that after a sharp increase in need for emergency food parcels during April and May, independent food banks have continued to distribute more than twice as many parcels in June and July than during the same months in 2019.

The figures in this report demonstrate that independent food banks across Scotland have been working tirelessly to support people who are experiencing financial crisis and hardship during this pandemic. The report also presents a worrying picture of just how many people are continuing to fall through the cracks of our social security safety net and local 'cash first' measures.

Independent food banks contributing data to this report:

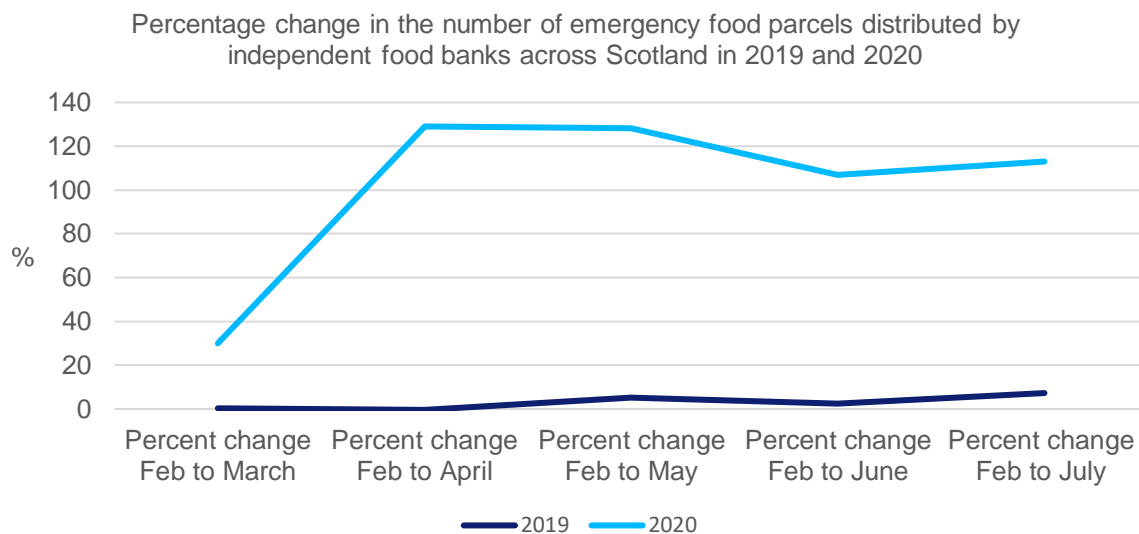
In Scotland, 45 organisations operating 70 independent food banks or food parcel distribution services in 20 local authorities have contributed data to IFAN for this new report.^v We have been able to undertake a comparative analysis of figures provided by 32 organisations usually operating 56 independent food banks located in 17 local authorities which were able to contribute data for both February to July 2019 and February to July 2020.¹ Ten of these 32 organisations did not previously provide figures for our last report on Scotland.^{vi}

¹ IFAN member organisations, previous participants in IFAN parcel data collation projects in Scotland and newly identified independent food parcel distributors were invited to participate totalling 142 independent food banks in Scotland. Organisations opted-in to the survey and were not randomly selected. A further 13 organisations operating 14 venues contributed data we could not include in the comparative analysis as they were either newly operating or couldn't provide data for every month of the 6-month periods. Their data is included at the end of this report.

113% increase in independent emergency food parcel distribution since February 2020:

From February to July 2020 emergency food parcel distribution by independent food banks has seen a 113% rise. This follows a 129% rise from February to April at the height of the lockdown.

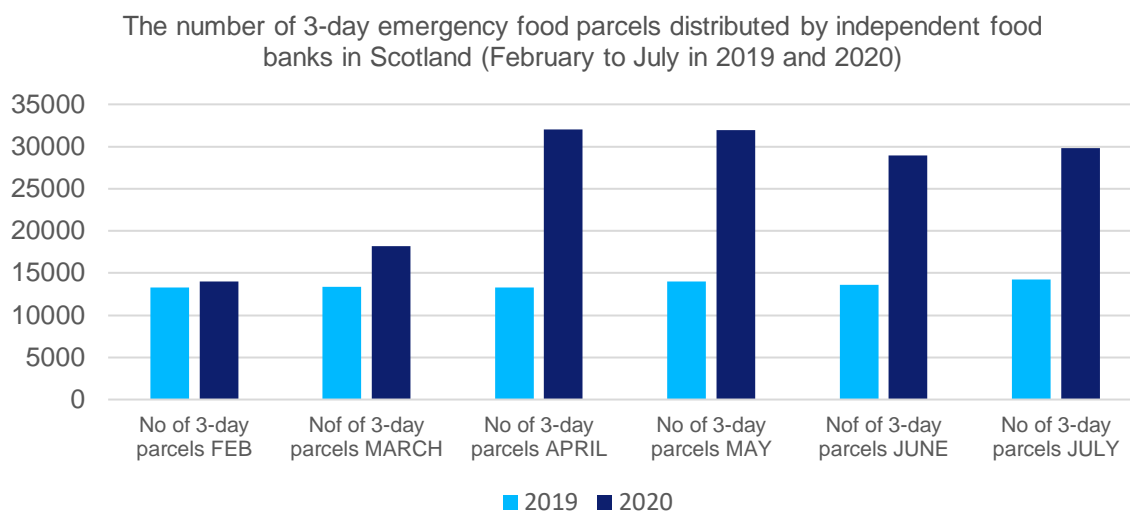
Fig 1: Percentage change in the number of emergency food parcels distributed by independent food banks across Scotland (February to July 2019 and 2020)



Figures for July 2020 as compared to July 2019 show a 108% percentage rise in the number of emergency food parcels distributed.² When we compare this year-on-year rise to figures from before the COVID-19 crisis, figures had only increased by 5% comparing February 2019 to February 2020. Comparing March 2019 and March 2020 the rise was 36% while April 2019 figures set against April 2020 data showed a 141% rise in the number of 3-day emergency food parcels distributed by the independent food banks contributing to this data set. May's figures show a 128% rise compared to May 2019 while June 2020 saw a 112% increase compared to June 2019.

² Data collated from 6 of the 32 organisations was estimated by their teams while 13 organisations provided data regarding the number of referrals rather than people. These referral figures are very likely to be underestimated in terms of the number of people supported and the number of 3-day parcels.

Fig 2: Number of 3-day emergency food parcels distributed by independent food banks in Scotland (February to July in 2019 and 2020)



Unit of measurement used and parcel size increases:

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 provide more than 3 days’ worth of food per person in a single food parcel, so to enable comparison with UK-wide Trussell Trust data, collated information has been converted into a shared unit of measurement based on a 3-day parcel.

Table 1: Number of 3-day parcels distributed by 32 organisations running 56 independent food banks operating in 17 local authorities in Scotland

Month	2019	2020
February	13,302	13,986
March	13,342	18,180
April	13,249	32,034
May	13,974	31,942
June	13,628	28,960
July	14,270	29,797

It’s important to note that because of social distancing and the need to reduce the number of visits or deliveries, as well as because of increasing need, 17 of the 32 organisations providing data have increased the size of their usual parcel. This has been taken account of in our analysis. None of the organisations in the sample reported decreasing the size of their parcels to balance supply with need.³

³ The Trussell Trust’s 48 food bank organisations in Scotland distributed 28,350 3-day emergency food parcels in April 2020 although some Trussell Trust food bank centres gave out larger sized parcels and this has not been accounted for in their data.

Number of people supported during February-July 2019/2020:

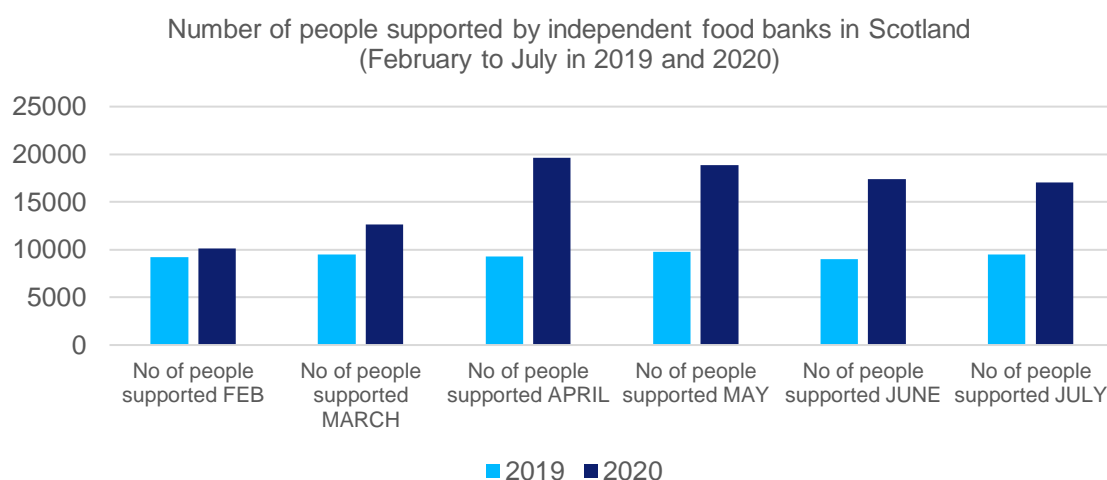
In order to better understand whether the increase in food parcels being distributed is being driven by an increase in the size of food parcels being delivered (and hence, calculated number of 3-day food parcels supplied), we also examined the number of people or referrals supported by independent food banks contributing to both time periods.⁴

Table 2: The number of people supported by independent food banks in Scotland (February to July in 2019 and 2020)

Month	2019	2020
February	9,209	10,137
March	9,483	12,614
April	9,279	19,613
May	9,778	18,897
June	8,972	17,415
July	9,470	17,060

Figures for July 2020 as compared to July 2019 show an 80% rise in the number of people supported. From June 2019 to June 2020 they show a 94% rise and from May 2019 to May 2020 the increase was 93%. In April 2020, the rise was 111% as compared to April 2019 while March 2020 saw a 33% rise from March 2019 following on from a rise of 10% in February 2020 from February 2019.

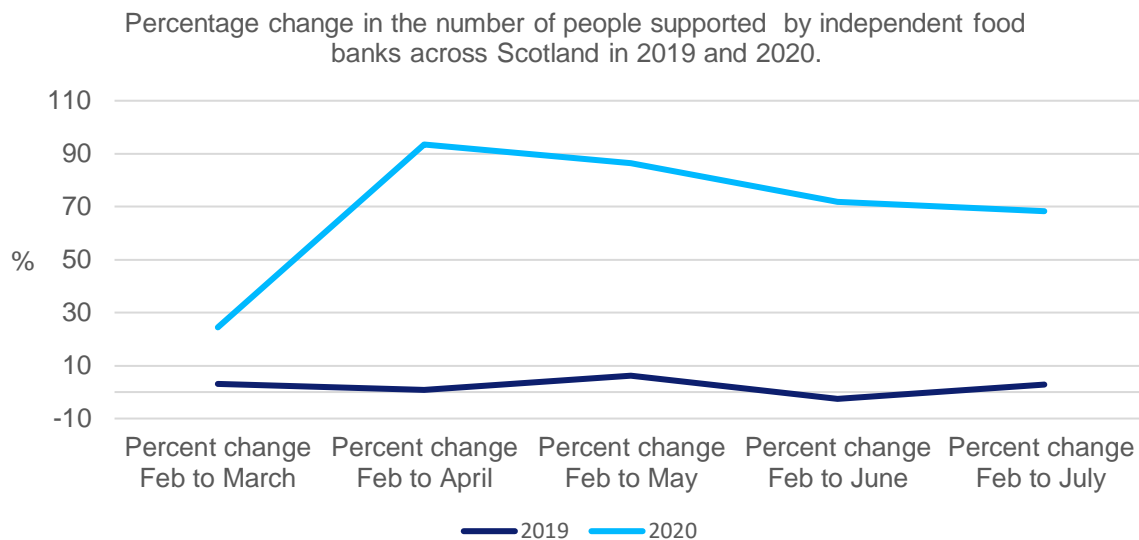
Fig 3: Number of people supported by 56 independent food banks in Scotland (February to July in 2019 and 2020)



⁴ 13 organisations provided data regarding the number of referrals rather than people. These figures are likely to be underestimated in terms of the number of people supported.

From February to July 2020 the number of people supported by independent food banks has seen a 68% rise. This follows a 93% rise from February to April at the height of the lockdown.

Fig 4: Percentage change in the number of people supported by 56 independent food banks across Scotland (February to July 2019 and 2020)



Referral or self-referral:

Of the 32 organisations, 16 used a mixture of referral and self-referral in normal times, eight ran on a self-referral only basis and eight reported only accepting referrals from agencies. Six organisations reported starting to accept self-referrals or seeing more self-referrals since the outbreak of COVID-19. Many referral systems have been compromised as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and telephone and internet-based systems that have been used to replace some services are not necessarily accessible to people living with no or low income because of the costs involved.

13 organisations reported seeing people unable to access a referral agency self-referring to their service and five of these organisations have supported more than 100 people in this situation. However, four organisations saw a decrease in the number of people accessing their service via a referral agency while 17 organisations reported an increase in formal referrals via agencies.

Operational capacity and changes:

Nine of the 32 organisations started to run larger operations involving more volunteers and additional venues as result of COVID-19. For three organisations, the pandemic has made it difficult to operate at full capacity, and they have run a reduced service. 15 organisations started to deliver food parcels as a result of COVID-19 while an additional seven organisations already delivering as part of their

services increased their capacity to do so. A further four organisations made no changes to their operations as a result of COVID-19. Since lockdown has lifted, ten organisations have seen a return to normal practice.

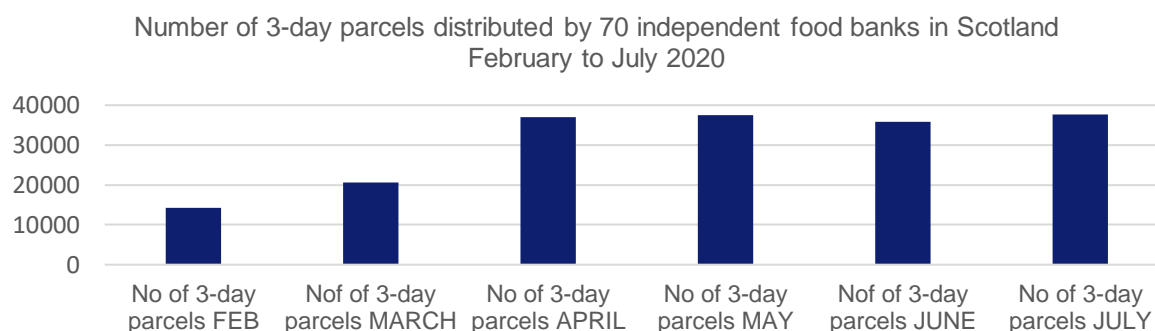
Other independent food banks contributing data:

A further 13 organisations operating 14 independent food banks contributed data which couldn't be included in our comparative analysis of both 2019 and 2020 figures because they were newly operating or weren't able to contribute data for all 12 months of our analysis. Nine of these organisations started distributing emergency food parcels during lockdown and continue to do so. **Between February and July 2020 at least 182,863 emergency food parcels were distributed by 70 independent food banks across 20 local authorities in Scotland.**

Table 4: Additional figures on 3-day emergency food parcel distribution from 13 organisations operating 14 food banks responding to our survey but unable to contribute data for all 12 months of our analysis

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Total
3-day emergency food parcels from existing analysed data set from 56 food banks	13,986	18,180	32,034	31,942	28,960	29,797	154,899
No of additional food banks contributing data	4	8	11	11	14	14	14
Additional 3-day emergency food parcels ⁵	223	2,274	5,016	5,576	6,957	7,918	27,964
Total number of food banks including additional venues	60	68	67	67	70	70	70
3-day food parcels distributed by food banks in both data sets	14,209	20,454	37,050	37,518	35,917	37,715	182,863

Fig 5: Number of 3-day parcels distributed by 70 independent food banks in Scotland (February to July 2020)



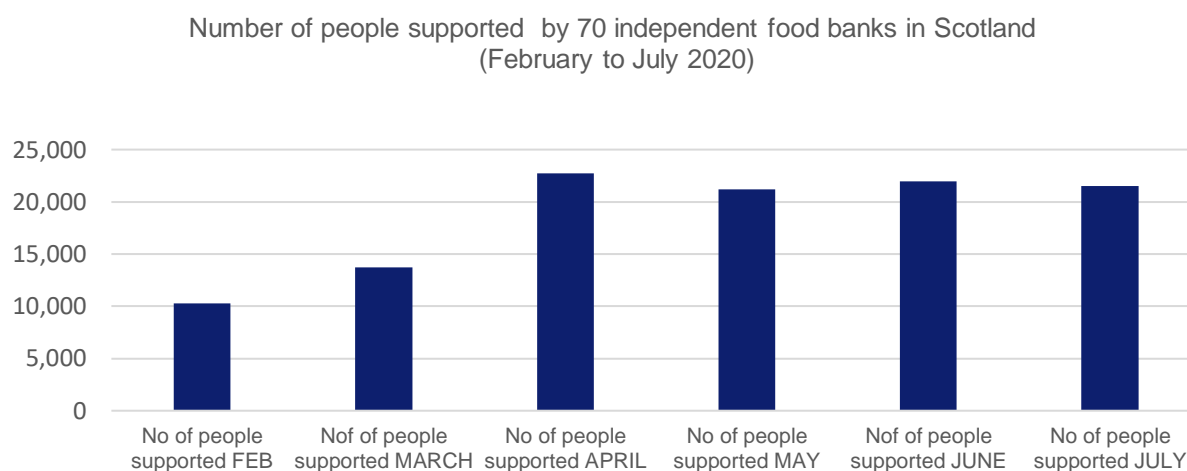
⁵ 5 of the 13 organisations collated data approximately while 3 organisations collated data in respect of referrals. These referral figures most probably represent an underestimate of the number of people supported.

Figures collated on the number of people supported by these same 13 organisations represent similar increases.

Table 5: Additional figures on the number of people supported by 13 organisations responding to our survey but unable to contribute data for all 12 months of our analysis

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Total
No of people supported by 56 food banks from data set covering 2 years	10,137	12,614	19,613	18,897	17,415	17,060	95,736
No of additional food banks contributing data	4	8	11	11	14	14	14
Additional number of people supported ⁶	130	1,136	3,136	3,306	4,564	4,451	16,723
Total number of food banks including additional venues	60	68	67	67	70	70	70
Total no of people supported by all 70 food banks	10,267	13,750	22,749	21,203	21,979	21,511	111,459

Fig 6: Number of people supported by 70 independent food banks in Scotland (February to July 2020)



Reasons for food bank use:

24 organisations running 31 independent food banks in Scotland reported on the reasons why people needed their services. This data was collected in relation to the months of March to August 2020 and organisations were only asked to select categories relevant to the support of ten or more people each month.

⁶ 5 of the 13 organisations collated data approximately while 5 organisations collated data in respect of referrals. Their figures most probably represent an underestimate of the number of people supported.

The most selected reason for food bank use across all time frames was “*Current benefits insufficient to be able to afford food*”. The reason selected least was “*Sanctions*”. This might be explained by the temporary suspension of sanctions and work-search requirements for Universal Credit and Job Seeker’s Allowance from March 2020 to June 2020. Reasons listed under “Other” included disability, debt, and sickness.

Table 3: Reasons for use reported by a percentage of 24 organisations running 31 independent food banks and reporting on ten or more people in each category

	March	April	May	June	July
Current benefits insufficient to be able to afford food	91%	96%	91%	96%	96%
Benefit changes causing payment delay	70%	65%	64%	65%	70%
Newly unemployed and waiting for Universal Credit	65%	70%	68%	65%	65%
Paid income insufficient to be able to afford food	65%	61%	68%	70%	65%
Unable to access food due to self-isolation or other reasons but able to afford it	70%	65%	64%	57%	61%
Zero-hour contracts	48%	39%	45%	39%	35%
Self-employed but ineligible for income support	48%	39%	36%	43%	39%
No recourse to public funds	35%	35%	36%	35%	39%
Self-employed but waiting for income support	39%	43%	36%	35%	35%
People affected by lack of access to voucher scheme to replace free school meals	26%	22%	32%	30%	35%
Other	17%	22%	9%	9%	13%
Sanctions	26%	22%	14%	13%	17%

On average, 75% of our contributing organisations reported supporting 10 or more people each month seeking the help of a food bank for the first time. It is likely that these figures relate to an increase in the number of people who were previously managing financially but who are newly in need of support as a result of the pandemic. Effective promotion of existing options for ‘cash first’ support, such as Scottish Welfare Fund crisis grants, is likely to be of particular help to this group.

Conclusion:

Increases in emergency food parcel distribution figures in Scotland soared in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, and they have remained double those of the previous year.

The Scottish Government advocates a ‘cash first’ approach to food insecurity and has worked to make sure that where people can safely get out to buy food that “they

have access to the cash to do so”.⁷ It is clear from the figures in this report, however, that thousands of people have still needed to turn to food banks when facing financial crisis. We believe more must be done to address these gaps.

IFAN continues to advocate for policy changes at UK-wide level to ensure that the drivers of poverty resulting in increased food bank use are addressed. We also support the recommendations of the Poverty and Inequality Commission’s reports calling on the Scottish Government to strengthen the promotion, administration, availability and access to the Scottish Welfare Fund. We continue to work towards ‘cash first’ solutions for people facing financial crisis in Scotland through our Cash First Project.⁹

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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 input as well as to Dr Chelsea Marshall currently seconded to IFAN from Nourish Scotland to lead on our Cash First Project. Sabine would also like to thank Dr Rachel Loopstra for her continued advice as well as IFAN’s Co-Chairs Dr Madeleine Power and Deirdre Woods.

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ⁱ The UK network’s membership includes 284 organisations usually operating 385 independent food banks regularly distributing emergency food parcels at least once a week. IFAN has identified at least 916 independent food banks operating across the UK.

ⁱⁱ The figures represented in this report represent a fraction of the food aid landscape in Scotland while we know that far more people live with food insecurity than access emergency food aid provision. The 2018 Scottish Health Survey found that 9% of adults in Scotland worried about running out of money to buy food. IFAN has identified at least 146 independent food banks or food parcel distributors currently operating in Scotland. There are 48 Trussell Trust food bank organisations often running multiple food bank centres while the Salvation Army operate food banks and distribute food parcels in Scotland on top of other types food aid provision. 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 with food insecurity both during the COVID-19 lockdown and before 2020. In response to lockdown, 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. The British Red Cross have also supported people with food parcels. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Scottish Government reported that 744 organisations running 1,026 venues were responding to food insecurity with free or subsidised food.

⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/news/emergency-free-meals-to-those-most-in-need/>

⁸ <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Scottish-Welfare-Fund-briefing-.pdf>

⁹ www.foodaidnetwork.org/ifan-in-scotland

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- iii IFAN has reported recently on independent food parcel distribution across the UK - www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/ifan-data-since-covid-19.
 - iv In partnership with A Menu for Change, IFAN 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. IFAN also published a breakdown for Scotland of their report on UK-wide independent food bank data covering February to April 2019/20. This is available at www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/ifan-in-scotland
 - v Independent food banks contributing to our analysed data set were based in Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City, Argyll and Bute, Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway, East Lothian, Falkirk, Fife, Glasgow City, Moray, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Perth and Kinross, Scottish Borders, Stirling and West Dunbartonshire. 13 additional organisations reported from Aberdeen City, Clackmannanshire, East Lothian, Edinburgh City, Falkirk, Fife, Glasgow City, Highland, Scottish Borders, South Ayrshire
 - vi <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/378499b3-c557-4d97-879e-a3a1692bed01/Scotland%20breakdown%20for%20IFAN%20data%20release%20June%20160620V2.pdf>