



Published Tuesday 22.12.20.

Independent Food Bank Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in the UK February to November 2019 and 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.ⁱ IFAN envisions and campaigns for 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

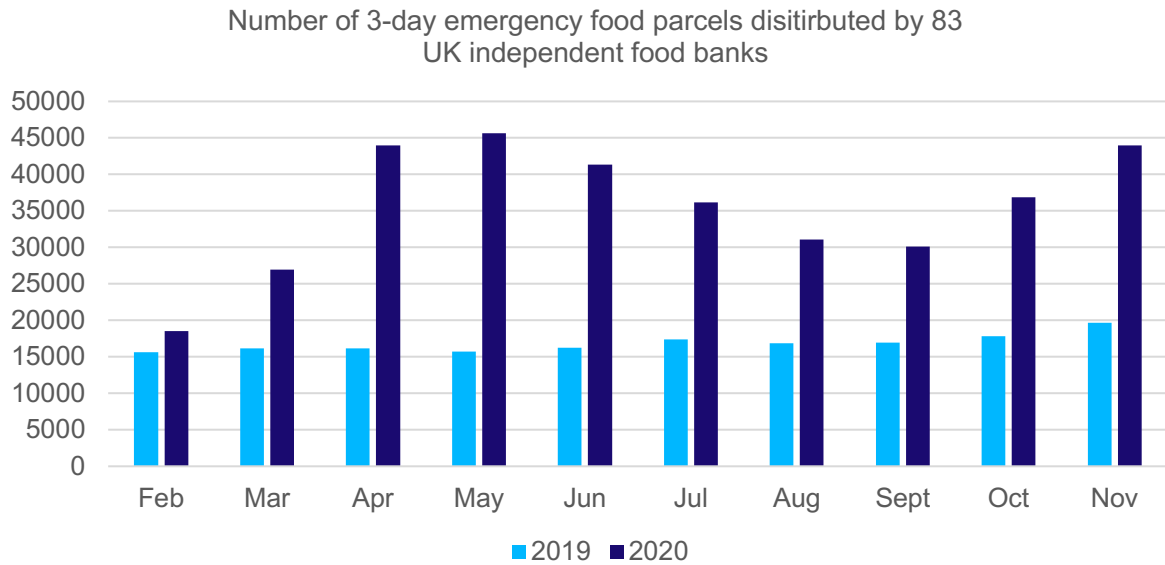
Increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed by independent food banks in across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland:

As an extension to our last report, we looked at data for February to November 2019 and February to November 2020 contributed by 83 independent food banks operating in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and able to send in statistics for November 2020.¹ Comparing April 2019 to April 2020 and May 2019 to May 2020, the data show a 171% and 190% rise respectively in the number of 3-day emergency food parcels distributed by 83 independent food banks. More recently, our collated figures demonstrate a 123% increase comparing November 2019 with November 2020. Before the onset of the Covid-19 crisis, the increase from February 2019 to February 2020 for this data set was 18%.

83 independent food banks distributed a total of 168,560 emergency food parcels between February and November 2019 while for February to November 2020 this figure rose to 354,613 emergency food parcels - a rise of 110%.

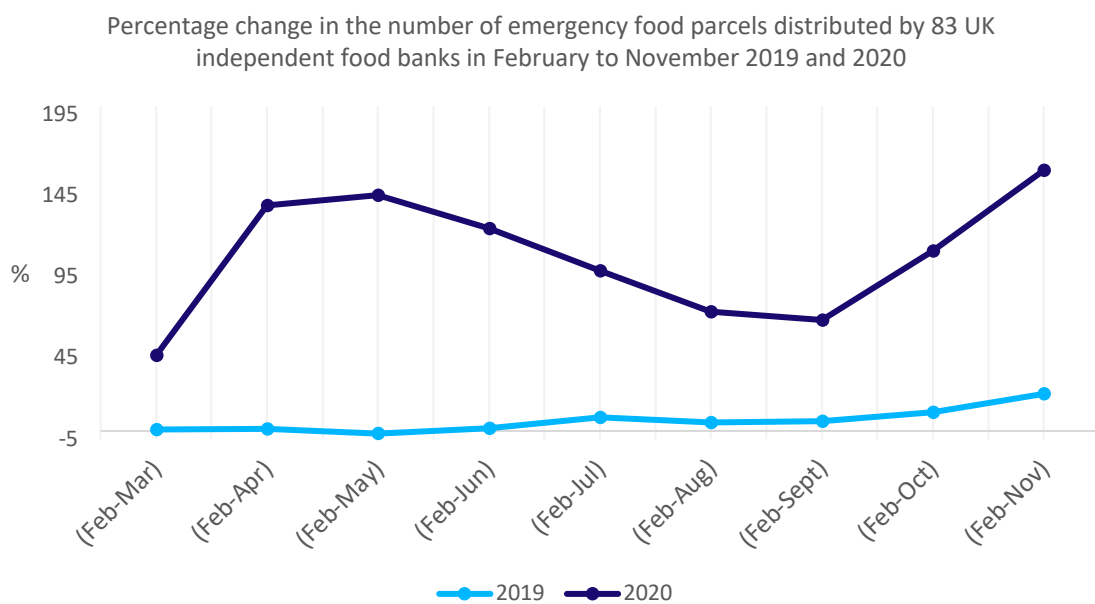
¹ IFAN member organisations and other independent food banks operating across the UK were invited to participate in our recent survey. Organisations opted-in to the survey. A total of 92 organisations operating 189 independent food banks contributed data (England - 114, Scotland - 61, Wales - 12, Northern Ireland - 2) for our report published on 11.12.20. As an extension to this report, we approached 62 organisations operating 134 independent food banks already contributing data to our analysis of both 2019 and 2020 asking them to provide additional figures for November 2020. 47 organisations operating 83 independent food banks were able to provide data for November 2020 (England - 43, Scotland - 31, Wales - 7, Northern Ireland - 2).

Fig 1: Number of 3-day emergency food parcels distributed by 83 UK independent food banks in the UK comparing February to November 2019 and February to November 2020



It is also important to look at the month-on-month differences from the pre-COVID baseline of February 2020. Independent food parcel distribution first jumped by 45% to March, then by 146% to May. In November, usage remained much higher than pre-COVID-19 levels, with 43,998 parcels being distributed by 83 independent food banks compared to 18,499 in February. This represents an 137% increase.

Fig 2: Percentage change in the number of emergency food parcels distributed by 83 UK independent food banks from February to November 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.² 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 83 independent food banks February to November 2019 and 2020

Month	2019	2020
February	15,592	18,499
March	16,158	26,918
April	16,186	43,969
May	15,730	45,680
June	16,240	41,348
July	17,352	36,175
August	16,862	31,066
September	16,961	30,067
October	17,829	36,893
November	19,650	43,998
Total (February to November)	168, 560	354,613

Number of people supported February-November 2019/2020:

We also looked at the number of people supported by the independent food banks contributing to both time periods. The number of people receiving food parcels each month replicated patterns in numbers of food parcels distributed. Comparing November 2019 with November 2020 there was an 136% increase in the number of people supported. The number of people needing emergency food supplies from independent food banks increased by 141% from the month of February to the month of November 2020.

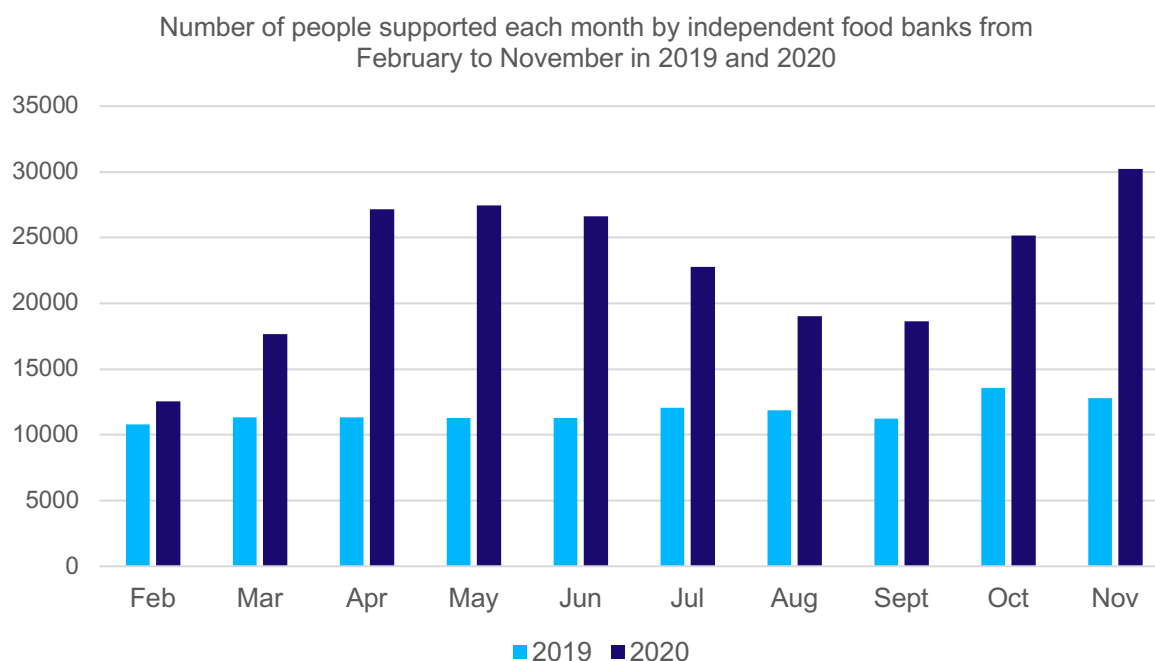
Table 2: The number of people supported by 83 independent food banks from February-November 2019 and February-November 2020

Month	2019	2020
February	10,808	12,539
March	11,351	17,670
April	11,310	27,146
May	11,281	27,463

² 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.

June	11,263	26,620
July	12,043	22,793
August	11,877	19,034
September	11,234	18,638
October	13,579	25,147
November	12,784	30,225
Total (February to November)	117,530	227,275

Fig 3: Number of people supported by 83 independent food banks in the UK February to November 2019 & February to November 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. 29 of the 47 organisations contributing to data to both time periods usually accept both self-referrals and third-party referrals. 37 of the 47 organisations reported having supported people unable to access a referral agent since the onset of Covid-19. 13 organisations reported having supported more than 100 people in this situation.

Conclusion:

Increases in emergency food parcel distribution figures from across the UK soared in the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic, and for this data set, they have remained at least 77% 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.

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

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

ⁱⁱ The figures represented in this report represent a fraction of the food aid landscape in UK. 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.

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