

STRICTLY EMBARGOED: 00.01 THURSDAY 09 JANUARY 2020

NEWS FROM A MENU FOR CHANGE

Nearly 600,000 food parcels handed out in Scotland in 18 months

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- **New figures released today reveal the full scale of food bank use in Scotland: 596,472 emergency food parcels were handed out in 18 months**
- **More than 1,000 food parcels handed out every day in Scotland**
- **22 percent increase in food parcel distribution compared to the last recorded period**

The number of emergency food parcels distributed in Scotland has increased by 22 percent, according to new figures released today by A Menu for Change and the Independent Food Aid Network.

Data collated from independent food banks, which represent 42 percent of the food bank picture in Scotland, has been combined with Trussell Trust figures to show the full scale of emergency food bank use in Scotland.

Between April 2018 and September 2019, 278,258 emergency food parcels were distributed by 91 of the 101 independent food banks operating in Scotland for which data was available. The Trussell Trust reported a further 318,214 parcels were distributed by its network of 135 venues during the most recent period.

Combining these totals means that at least 596,472 food parcels were handed out in the 18 months up to September 2019, which equates to more than 1,000 every day.

In the last 18 months, a total of 586,723 parcels were distributed by food banks included in our previous research and Trussell Trust food banks.

This represents a 22 percent rise compared to the total of 480,583 parcels given out during the previous 18 months recorded.

Food bank figures represent only the tip of the iceberg of those experiencing food insecurity with people often skipping meals or going without food instead of using a food bank. The new figures also do not account for other types of emergency food aid provision.

A Menu for Change – the partnership between Oxfam Scotland, Nourish Scotland, the Poverty Alliance and the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland – and the Independent Food Aid Network say the UK government must ensure people have sustainable and secure incomes to stop them being pushed into food insecurity.

Last year, research by A Menu for Change revealed how inadequate and insecure incomes from social security and work are causing people to become food insecure.

Now, A Menu for Change and the Independent Food Aid Network are demanding the new UK government increases the National Living Wage to the Real Living Wage, restores the value of key benefits, and uprates all benefits with inflation. They also want the income families receive to be improved by removing the two-child limit and benefit cap, zero-hours contracts banned to improve job security and better support for people who experience income shocks through life events like illness and bereavement.

Scottish ministers must also use their powers to increase funding to the Scottish Welfare Fund which has faced a real-terms cut since 2013, ensuring local authorities are fully able to support people at crisis point.

The Helensburgh and Lomond Foodbank operates two venues where people can access emergency food supplies.

Mary McGinley, from Helensburgh and Lomond Foodbank, said: "It is hard to believe that in modern day Scotland, more and more people are being forced to rely on food banks to feed themselves and their families. But until we see a significant change in direction, inadequate and insecure incomes make this continued rise in food parcels sadly predictable.

"Today's figures shine a light on the essential role independent food banks play in offering emergency help to those who are no longer being supported by the social security safety net which isn't strong enough to provide protection to those who need it.

“While it is heartening that people are willing to donate to and volunteer at food banks, there is a real need for change. There should not be a system which is driving this year-on-year increase in demand. It is not right that people should need to go to a food bank to put a meal on the table.

“Politicians must address the underlying causes of rising food bank use rather than relying on charitable organisations and goodwill to respond to food poverty.”

Margaret MacLachlan, Project Manager, A Menu for Change said: “As we start a new decade, the relentless pressures forcing people to need emergency food aid continues. These figures are deeply troubling and reveal a grim picture of rising levels of food insecurity in Scotland.

“A weakened social security system, low pay and insecure work are tightening the grip of poverty and forcing people to crisis point. The long-term solution to food insecurity is not food banks, it is ensuring people have secure and reliable incomes. In 2020, we must do more to ensure we can consign food banks to the history books.

“Today’s statistics are shocking, but experts also warn that data on food parcel distribution only provides a partial picture of the number of Scots struggling to put food on the table with many choosing to skip meals rather than use a food bank. Recent Scottish Government statistics revealed nearly one in 10 people in Scotland were worried about running out of food in 2018.

“The new UK Government must act urgently to fix Universal Credit and uprate working-age benefits, but Scottish Ministers can and should act too by increasing the Scottish Welfare Fund, which has faced a real-terms cut in its budget since 2013. No one in rich Scotland should run out of money to buy food and political leaders must act now to prevent more people being dragged into poverty.”

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Notes:

- The full April 2018 – September 2019 briefing is available here: <https://oxfam.box.com/s/dh3ydkqvjkumuxjvst3old7w2yr6kkjw>
- An emergency food parcel equates to a three-day supply of food for one person.
- Over 1,000 parcels statistic comes from: April 2018 – September 2019 = 547.5 days. 596,472 parcels / 547.5 days = 1,089 parcels.
- The previous April 2017 – September 2018 briefing is available here: <https://menuforchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Emergency-Food-Parcel-Provision-in-Scotland-Apr-2017-to-Sep-2018.pdf>
- In September 2019, the Scottish Government published statistics on the number of people in Scotland facing hunger. This revealed that 9 percent of people in Scotland faced food insecurity in the last year and 21 percent of adults under 65 living alone are worried about running out of food due to a lack of money or resources. Read more: <https://menuforchange.org.uk/more-people-in-scotland-worried-about-running-out-of-food/>
- In March 2021, the UK Government will publish inaugural statistics on the number of people facing hunger across the UK through the DWP’s Family Resources Survey.

About A Menu for Change and the Independent Food Aid Network:

- A Menu for Change is a partnership project run by Oxfam Scotland, Nourish Scotland, the Poverty Alliance and the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland, and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. It aims to reduce the need for food banks.
- The Independent Food Aid Network supports and connects a range of independent frontline food aid organisations while advocating on their behalf at a national level. Its vision is of a country that doesn’t need emergency food aid and in which good food is accessible to all.
- Read A Menu for Change’s briefing The Scottish Welfare Fund: Strengthening the Safety, Net A Study of Best Practice here: <https://menuforchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/A-Menu-for-Change-SWF-Report-FINAL-FINAL.pdf>
- Read A Menu for Change’s report Found Wanting - Understanding journeys into and out of food insecurity: a longitudinal study here: <https://menuforchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Found-Wanting-A-Menu-for-Change-FINAL.pdf>