This paper provides background information on the increasing demand for food banks across the UK. It considers factors driving the increase, the position and actions taken by the Scottish and the UK Governments and the situation abroad. It also summarises some of the more prominent campaigns and media coverage.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Data on food bank usage is not collected centrally by Government. Statistics are available through the largest food bank provider the Trussell Trust which is reporting a significant increase in the demand for food banks. This trend has been slowly rising since 2005 which predates the current UK Government Welfare Reforms. However, in the last two financial years there has been a sharp escalation in demand. This increase in demand has also been recognised by organisations such as Citizen’s Advice Bureaux, the British Red Cross, Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam.

It is reported by the Trussell Trust that benefit delays and benefit changes are two of the main reasons for referral to food banks. However, people’s personal situations tend to be complex and include a range of other factors such as low income, debt or unemployment. The spike in world food and energy prices is also a significant contributory factor.

The Scottish Government published a study into food bank provision in Scotland in December 2013 to help establish a more comprehensive picture. It concluded that the figures released by the Trust are likely to be broadly reflective of the situation across Scotland. However, there is a range of smaller, local community food banks which is not captured in the Trust figures. This suggests that the scale of the problem may potentially be larger than currently understood. A recent letter in the British Medical Journal suggested that food poverty in the UK “has all the signs of a public health emergency”.

There has been widespread media coverage on the issue of food banks and emergency food aid across the UK. The Welfare Reform Minister, Lord David Freud and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), are clear that they see no robust evidence that welfare reforms are linked to the increase in use of food banks. A range of charitable organisations and religious groups are calling for further investigation and action on the issue. An All Party Parliamentary Group on Food Poverty lead by Frank Field MP and the Bishop of Truro has announced that it will conduct an inquiry into food bank use. The Welfare Reform Committee of the Scottish Parliament has produced a report on this issue in which it states that the Committee is convinced by the volume and strength of the evidence it has received that there is a direct correlation between welfare reform and the increase in use of food banks.
**FOOD AID MODELS**

Food banks provide emergency food aid to people in crisis, often (but not always) following referral by a health or social care professional or other agency. Food aid provision in Scotland tends to be delivered by three types of organisation: local independent organisations; larger national organisations, such as the Salvation Army and the Missionaries of Charity; and finally, churches operating a Trussell Trust food bank franchise. Most food aid providers in Scotland have a connection with a religious institution (Sosenko, Livingstone, Fitzpatrick 2013).

The Trussell Trust is the largest food bank provider in the UK. It has 428 food banks UK-wide with 47 in Scotland. The Trust was established in 1997 and the first food bank was started in Salisbury in 2000 operating out of the founders' garden shed and garage, providing three days of emergency food to local people in crisis. In 2004 the UK foodbank network was launched teaching churches and communities nationwide how to start their own foodbank.

The Trust states that its food banks are community run and often rely on donations of food by local people, schools, businesses, churches and individuals. Trussell Trust food bank clients are referred by frontline care professionals. It accepts referrals from social workers, welfare rights advisers, Citizen’s Advice volunteers and representatives from various other statutory and voluntary organisations. To prevent dependency on food banks clients are entitled to a total of three consecutive food bank vouchers within a six month period which can each be exchanged for 3 days' worth of nutritionally balanced food at a distribution centre. The Trust states that clients are signposted to other organisations to address the underlying problem driving the client to use the food bank and to help break the cycle of poverty. In rural areas the Trust will often operate delivery services to reach those unable to get to a food bank. (Trussell Trust 2014)

Other local, independent food banks may operate a more informal system with no limit on the number of food parcels or the requirement of a referral.

There are other arrangements for food redistribution such as ‘Fare Share’ and ‘social supermarkets’. However, these are not food banks. ‘FareShare’ redistribute good quality, surplus food from the food industry and make it available to charities and community groups supporting those who are suffering from food poverty. For example, hostels, breakfast clubs and drop in centres. Donors include large scale high street supermarkets.

A members only “social supermarket” model is also emerging in the UK where those on low incomes (who live in the area and are in receipt of certain benefits) can buy food at significantly reduced prices in a normal supermarket environment. The UK’s first ‘social supermarket’ opened in Barnsley, South Yorkshire in December 2013. The operator ‘Community Shop’ are able to offer savings of up to 70% off normal retail prices by selling surplus products that the larger retailers and brands can’t use and which would otherwise end up in landfill. Members will also be enrolled in a wider programme of support such as CV writing, cookery classes and debt advice. Community Shop is using the Yorkshire store as a pilot with a view to rolling out more stores in 2014 (Community Shop 2014).

**DATA COLLECTION ON FOOD BANKS**

Statistics on food bank usage are not currently collected by the UK or Scottish Governments. Data is available through the Trussell Trust which collects information using an online data collection system into which food banks enter the data from each food bank voucher. The system records the number of adults and children given three days’ emergency food. There is also optional demographic data such as ethnicity and age.
The position of the UK Government is that it is not possible to keep a record of the number of people using small, community food banks. David Heath, then Minister of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in February 2013 said:

“The provision of food aid ranges from small, local provision, through to regional and national schemes. The landscape is mostly community-led provision responding to local needs. As such, the Government does not believe it is possible to keep a record of the number of food banks, nor the potential number of people using them or other types of food aid, without placing unnecessary burdens on volunteers trying to help their communities.” (HC Deb 27 Feb 2013 c523W)

The Scottish Government and Herriot Watt University published an ‘Overview of Food Aid Provision in Scotland’ (Sosenko, Livingstone, Fitzpatrick 2013) to help establish a more comprehensive picture in Scotland. It stated that:

“The interviews conducted for this research suggest that monitoring the size and dynamics of food aid provision is possible, as is monitoring the impact of welfare reform on food aid. The challenges with the former task include identifying very small providers, arriving at a valid “parcel/household” multiplier and estimating the proportion of repeat users. The difficulties with monitoring the impact of welfare reform on food aid include engaging key food parcel providers in a “snapshot” annual survey.”

INCREASE IN DEMAND FOR FOOD BANKS

STATISTICS FOR SCOTLAND

In 2011, there was one food bank in Scotland operating in partnership with the Trussell Trust. As of June 2014, there were 47 new Trussell Trust food banks.

The Trussell Trust has an online tool which maps their food banks and those affiliated with the trust on its website (Trussell Trust 2014b). The Trust states that between 2011 and 2013, Scotland experienced faster growth in the number of food banks launching with the Trust than any other region in the United Kingdom (Trussell Trust 2014c).

In Scotland in the financial year 2011/12, the Trussell Trust provided emergency food relief to 5,726 individuals. In 2012/13 it supported a further 14,318 individuals and in 2013/14, 71,428 individuals received food aid from the trust – a 400% increase and almost five times the number compared to the previous financial year (Trussell trust 2014a).

UK wide in the financial year 2013/14, 913,138 individuals used a Trussell Trust food bank. – a 163% increase on the previous financial year. (Trussell Trust 2014).
However, there are many other independent, community and small scale providers which are not reflected in the Trussell Trust figures. This suggests that the scale of the problem may potentially be larger than currently recorded. Below the Breadline: The Relentless Rise of Food Poverty in Britain (Cooper, Purcell, Jackson 2014) is a report published by Church Action on Poverty, the Trussell Trust and Oxfam. It states that the scale of food poverty across the UK is underreported. The report calculated that 20,247,042 meals were delivered to people in food poverty in 2013/14 by three of the main food aid providers (Trussell Trust, Fareshare and Food Cycle). This is a 54 percent increase on 2012/13, when the same providers distributed just over 13 million meals.

WHY HAS DEMAND INCREASED?

The demand for food aid is not restricted to the UK and the increase has been experienced across Europe and North America. Reasons that people may be forced to use a food bank are dynamic and complex depending on their personal circumstances, for example, unemployment, family break up or ill health. According to the Trussell Trust, the majority of people using food banks were working age families. Turning to food aid is generally considered a last resort after attempting to manage by cutting back, changing eating and shopping habits, juggling budgets or relying on family and friends.

According to Warwick University (Lambie Munford et al 2014) there has been no systematic peer-reviewed evidence from the UK on the reasons or immediate circumstances leading people to seek food aid. However, there are a number of issues and trends which can be recognised as possible contributory factors.

Food and energy prices

World food prices have been subject to several spikes in the last five years and have shown a general increasing trend. According to DEFRA (2013), all food groups have risen in price in the UK since 2007 (the start of the recession) with rises ranging from 24% to 55%. Food prices in the UK (including non-alcoholic drinks) rose by 11% in real terms between 2007 and 2013 taking the UK back to the late nineties in terms of the high cost of food relative to other goods. DEFRA states that a rise in food prices is more difficult for low income households to cope with because those on low incomes spend a greater proportion of their income on food - a rise in food prices has a disproportionately large impact on money available to spend elsewhere.

Energy prices are also a factor as some individuals may have to choose between heating and eating. According to the Office of National Statistics (2014) the average 2013 electricity bill across all payment types has risen by £35 (6.5 per cent) since 2012, to £577. Meanwhile, the average annual provisional 2013 gas bill across all payment types has risen by £43 (6.3 per cent) since 2012, to £729. All of the major energy suppliers also announced price increases for
both electricity and gas between October and December 2013 to take effect in quarter 4 of 2013 and quarter 1 of 2014.

**Low income and unemployment**

In relation to low income and poverty the JRF / NPI publication *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2013* reports that 13 million people in the UK were living in poverty\(^1\) in 2011/12. For the first time, more than half of these people lived in a working family and the proportion of working-age adults, without children, in poverty is the highest on record. Average incomes have fallen by 8 per cent since their peak in 2008. As a result, around 2 million people have a household income below the 2008 poverty line but are not considered to be in poverty today.

The report notes that in the last year, the labour market has shown signs of revival. Underemployment\(^2\) has fallen slightly from 6.4 million to 6.3 million and young adult unemployment appears to have peaked at 21 per cent. However, the number of people in low-paid jobs has risen and movement in and out of work is substantial. There are now around 5 million people paid below the living wage\(^3\). (McInnes et al 2013)

The *IFS Green Budget 2014* (Emerson, Johnson, Miller Ed. 2014) found that average living standards have fallen dramatically since the recession, as income growth has failed to keep pace with the rate of inflation. Projections suggest that real median household income in 2013–14 is more than 6% below its pre-crisis peak. This fall in average incomes has largely been driven by declines in real earnings.

The *Resolution Foundation* (2013) notes that many low to middle income families are under considerable financial strain, with just over half having no savings at all and two thirds having less than a month’s income as savings. As a result, the Resolution Foundation argues that low to middle income families are “vulnerable to even small shocks such as an unexpectedly large bill” and that “major shocks such as illness or unemployment can be catastrophic.”

**Localisation of the social fund**

The Social Fund was devolved to local authorities in England and to the devolved administrations in Wales and Scotland in April 2013. The UK Government has since announced that DWP funding (£23.8M a year for Scotland) for local welfare assistance schemes will cease after 2014-15, meaning that local authorities and the devolved administrations will have to fund such schemes (if they continue them) from their overall grant settlements.

In Scotland, the successor scheme is called the Scottish Welfare Fund and Scottish Ministers have committed to provide £33 million (includes £9.2M top up from the Scottish Government) funding for years 2014/15 and 2015/16 (the current spending review period). There is also upcoming legislation on the fund to place the fund on a statutory footing.

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\(^1\) The most common measure of poverty is based on household income. A household is said to be in poverty if its income, after taxes, is less than 60% of the UK median for that year. This threshold is adjusted for household size and composition. It can also be measured before housing costs are deducted from income (BHC), or after their deduction (AHC).

\(^2\) Underemployment is defined as a situation where people are working fewer hours than they wish; Underemployment may also refer to the fact workers accept jobs that don’t fully utilise all of their skills or qualifications.

\(^3\) The living wage is based on the amount an individual needs to earn to cover the basic costs of living. The living wage is £8.55 an hour in London and £7.45 an hour in the rest of the UK. The living wage is an informal benchmark, not a legally enforceable minimum level of pay, unlike the national minimum wage. The national minimum wage is significantly lower. The living wage is currently calculated by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University for the rest of the UK (not London),
The fund is administered by local authorities and continues to have two elements, community care grants which support independent living and crisis grants (previously crisis loans) which provide a safety net for individuals experiencing disaster or emergency. The relationship between the provision of crisis grants and the use of food banks has been discussed by the Welfare Reform Committee in evidence sessions with witnesses and the Scottish Government. There was a concern based on anecdotal evidence that individuals could potentially be passed onto a food bank rather than being given an award for a crisis grant.

Evidence from the Minister for Housing and Welfare, emphasised that anyone entitled to payment from the Scottish Welfare Fund should not be referred to a food bank in the first instance –

“I do not think that anybody who has been assessed as being eligible for a payment for food support from the Scottish welfare fund should be sent to a food bank. However, there will be people who make an application to the Scottish Welfare Fund but who, for whatever reason, are not eligible for a payment from the fund, and they may be referred to a food bank.” (Official report, 18 March 2014, Col 1364)

It was also noted that sanctioned JSA claimants were not eligible for crisis grants from the Scottish Welfare Fund. However, revised guidance has since been issued in April 2014 which states that “those who are in a crisis situation, following sanction by the Department for Work and Pensions, are subject to the same eligibility criteria as other applicants.”

**Increased awareness and monitoring**

A [House of Commons Library briefing](#) (Downing, Kennedy 2014) on the topic highlights that:

“reports of increased use of food banks may be including users who have previously been helped by unmonitored organisations and have shifted to ones with more rigorous or centralised data collection procedures.

It is also probable that as the profile of the food bank has increased, alongside improved support through social franchise systems such as that employed by The Trussell Trust, the process of setting up a food bank has become more available, easier and more attractive. This in itself could lead to increased numbers and potentially usage as a latent need is filled.”

Research conducted on behalf of the Trussell Trust by Coventry University (Lambie H 2011) highlights two key aspects, central to the design of the Trust’s Foodbank model, which appear to have played a key role in the growth of the organisation to date. The research found that, through marketing and strategic targeting of places and churches through its social franchise model, the Trust has been able to stimulate a demand and promote uptake. The fact that the model is able to provide a tried and tested reputable project with ongoing support further accounts for the increase. It notes that food banks, being Church-led initiatives, also appear to have had a role to play as they allow Christians to take social action in accordance with their faith and build on the existing structure and geographical reach of churches across the country.

The report also questioned the role of the recent recession, although this was not a key focus of the research.
Supply versus demand

Some have argued that the increase in food bank usage is a supply issue rather than the result of increasing demand. That is to say, there are more of them, therefore people will use them more. In evidence (Official report, 29 April 2014, col 1458) to the Welfare Reform Committee a senior DWP official stated that:

“in my view, it is supply-led growth that is going on, which will continue over the years ahead, whatever the path of welfare policies. We live in a society in which we have poor people and rich people, and people will maximise their economic choices. That is just how economies work.”

In a House of Commons debate on the issue (Hansard HC 02 July 2013 Col1072) Lord Freud stated “It is difficult to know which came first, the supply or the demand.” He continued saying that “food from a food bank—the supply—is a free good, and by definition there is an almost infinite demand for a free good.”

Alternatively, according to research conducted by Warwick University and the Food Ethics Council on behalf of DEFRA (Lambie Munford et al 2014) there is “no systematic evidence on the impact of increased supply and hypotheses of its potential effects are not based on robust evidence”.

In evidence to the Welfare Reform Committee of the Scottish Parliament, Nicola Livingstone of Heriot Watt University said—

“I think that food banks are addressing a need rather than creating a need and that they are a symptom of a wider cause. If there was no need for them, we would not have them at all.” (Official Report, 4 March 2014, Col 1306).

REFERRALS AND ACCESS

Some but not all food bank providers require a referral from, for example, a social worker, job centre or health care professional before an individual may use their services. It is noted that the main referral agents may differ depending on local circumstances. For example, the Trussell Trust in Scotland has noted that it receives fewer referrals from GPs than elsewhere in the country.4

JOB CENTRE PLUS REFERRALS

The Job Centre has been signposting claimants towards food banks since September 2011 and the Trussell Trust states that they make up a small percentage of food bank referrals overall. (Trussell Trust 2013). However, there has been considerable interest in the role of Jobcentre Plus in this regard. The role of Jobcentre Plus in referring people to food banks was described by Mark Hoban, Minister of State for Employment at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as follows in December 2012:

“DWP, through Jobcentre Plus, operates a food bank referral service. This is a simple signposting process which builds on the Jobcentre Plus standard practice of holding, locally, the details of organisations to which we signpost claimants who tell us they are in financial difficulty. Jobcentre Plus will only signpost claimants when they can offer no more help.” (HC Deb 13 December 2012 c430W).

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4 Trussell Trust, personal communication, 18 June 2014
The Trussell Trust issued a press release (Trussell Trust 2013) on 5 September 2013 following a statement by the Prime Minister noting that the Government had introduced “the ability to say to people in Jobcentre Plus who needed help that they could go to a food bank” (HC Deb 4 September 2013 c311). The release stated that since April of that year Jobcentres had stopped using the previously agreed referral process, leading to some Jobcentres not referring people to food banks at all and others sending people to food banks without a ‘food bank voucher’. It also highlights that, from April 2013, DWP no longer records the reason why people are being referred. The Trust reports that this makes ensuring the need is genuine and keeping track of the different reasons why people need emergency food more difficult for providers. It continues:

“Whilst David Cameron clearly sees the value in the partnership between food banks and Jobcentres, the DWP has decided to alter the referral agreement without discussing their decision with the Trussell Trust or considering the consequences for people in crisis or for food bank volunteers. “

This was followed by a report in The Guardian on 6 September 2013 (Butler 2013) which said that the DWP had “unilaterally redesigned the food bank vouchers it issues to clients” – the three boxes on the previous form which had enabled Jobcentre Plus “to indicate why they referred the person: because of benefit delay, benefit change, or refusal of crisis loan … have been removed [from the new form]. The vouchers no longer tell the [Trussell] trust why the person has been referred”.

Ester McVey Minister for Employment stated in response to a parliamentary question on 17 October 2013 that:

“DWP is only a signposting body that does not get in involved in any decision to award a food parcel. The act of signposting to any local organisation including food banks is not a formal referral or endorsement on the part of the DWP. The operation of food banks is not the responsibility of the Department” (HC Deb 17 Oct 2013 Col 861W).

In response to a parliamentary question on “which organisations his Department consulted in designing the New Food Bank Signposting Slip issued by Jobcentre Plus staff to clients; and when each was consulted”, the DWP Minister Esther McVey said in a written answer on 7 November 2013: “The change made to our Signposting Slip was of a minor nature and therefore it was not deemed necessary to consult. The operation of food banks is not the responsibility of this Department”. (HC Deb 27 Feb 2013 c523W)

In March 2014, a Freedom of Information request reported in The Guardian outlined a 'high level process' to be observed by jobcentre staff for referring claimants who say that they are suffering hardship and need food. The Guardian reports the existence of a six-step flowchart for jobcentre staff which shows that the four reasons to recommend a food bank when claimants ask for help are hardship caused by benefit changes, benefit payment delays, a benefit advance has been refused, or the advance is not enough to meet their needs. It continues to say that the new slip is not to be described as a food voucher (Butler 2014).

**GP REFERRALS**

GP s have voiced concerns regarding access to food banks in some areas being dependent on receiving a doctor’s referral. The GP Magazine ‘Pulse’ surveyed (Matthews-King 2014) 522 GPs and found that 16% had been asked to refer patients to food banks, this represents one in six of those surveyed. The survey comes after Pulse reported concern among GP leaders that practices were being placed in an ‘impossible position’ by charities which require them to refer patients to food banks before agreeing to offer help.
Dr John Ip, a GP in Paisley and secretary of the British Medical Association (BMA) Glasgow Local Medical Committee, was also reported in the Herald (Duffy, Loxton 2014) as saying that doctors were concerned they were being put in an "impossible situation". Ip said:

"GPs have been expressing concerns that patients who are wanting to access food bank services have been told they are full up and to access services they will need a referral from their GP. Food banks and charities like that have historically operated as a charitable service providing support for the poor and vulnerable people. It is a sign of the times that a lot more people are accessing them, they are under pressure and they are needing to try and ration their services. But using general practice as a means to ration I don't think is appropriate. (...) Food bank services, in my view and certainly the view of the vast majority of my colleagues, should be self-presenting. If people have problems with their finances and they are having issues in managing their budgets, then they are the people who know best about their situation. I think putting GPs in that loop adds to our workload and frankly we would refer everyone, as everyone should have access to food."

The Annual Conference of Representatives of Scottish Local Medical Committees took place on Friday 14 March 2014. It made a number of resolutions including,

“That this conference is concerned that some food banks are demanding that people have to be referred to them by GPs before they are given support.”

IS THERE A LINK TO WELFARE REFORM?

Although not the sole reason for the increase in demand for food banks, many organisations are citing the more rigorous conditionality regime and sanctions, reductions in the amount of financial support available through benefits, as well as benefit delays, as significant contributory factors.⑤

The Trussell Trust (2014b) states that across the UK in 2013/14, 31% of food bank users were referred to them due to benefit delay; 20% due to low income and 18% because of benefit changes (up from 11% in 2011-12). In Scotland there was a slight variation with 28% of referrals due to benefit delays, 19% due to low income and 19% due to benefit changes. Benefit delays mostly refers to new claims and the waiting period between making an application and receiving a payment. Benefit changes includes issues such as benefit sanctions.

Figure 2: Primary referral causes 2013-2014 UK figures

⑤ See evidence submissions to Welfare Reform Committee inquiry into food banks
Dr Filip Sosenko, co-author of the Scottish Government and Herriot Watt report into food aid provision in Scotland, stated in evidence to the Welfare Reform Committee that:

“Prior to April 2013, the main reasons for the rising demand for food aid were poor administration of the benefits system such as benefit delays, which predated the welfare reform, and rising food and energy prices, which were already squeezing families and households in 2009, 2010 and 2011.

It is clear to me that, since April 2013, welfare reform has been one of the key factors that is fuelling the rise in demand for food aid. In particular, I am referring to the bedroom tax, the fact that benefits were uprated by 1 per cent rather than in line with inflation, the reassessment of people on disability living allowance, the benefit cap and—south of the border—the localisation of council tax benefit.

The strongest evidence for that link is the fact that the demand for food aid grew at a faster rate after April 2013 than it did before that date.” (Official report, 4 March 2014, Col 1309)

Conditionality and sanctions have been part of the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) since its introduction in 1996 and for Employment Support Allowance (ESA) claimants in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) since October 2008. A revised sanctions regime for JSA came into effect from 22 October 2012, and a revised sanctions regime for ESA came into effect from 3 December 2012. Sanctions also exist in a number of other benefits. Under the new sanctions regime figures show an increase in the numbers of sanction decisions being made, despite the fall in the number of JSA claimants – down to 108,824 in December 2013 from 133,503 in December 2012.6

Keith Dryburgh of Citizens Advice Scotland told the Welfare Reform Committee its national evidence and the evidence from its front line services, highlighted welfare reform and specifically benefit sanctions as the cause of the increase in demand for food banks—

“In our experience, sanctions are a major factor in the referrals and signposting that citizens advice bureaux have had to make. In that period from January to March, we have had to signpost 1,300 clients – or about one in 50—to food banks. According to a recent survey of front-line advisers 90 per cent agreed that sanctions had led directly to an increase in demand for food parcels.” (Official report, 4 March col 1427)

The UK Government dispute this view. See section on UK Government for more information.

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6 Source: NOMIS unseasonably adjusted figures.
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT’S VIEW

As mentioned above, the Scottish Government commissioned Heriot Watt University to conduct research into food aid provision in Scotland. Its findings have helped it come to the view that benefit delays, benefit sanctions and falling incomes are some of the main factors driving this increase in demand (Scottish Government 2013).

Scottish Government report

The main aim of the paper an ‘Overview of Food Aid Provision in Scotland’ (Sosenko, Livingstone, Fitzpatrick 2013) was to provide insight into the extent of food aid provision in Scotland and understand more about food aid providers' operations, monitoring systems and client bases. An additional aim was to explore the extent to which figures published by the Trussell Trust, are representative of the Scotland-wide situation and to explore the feasibility of monitoring food aid provision and demand in the future.

The study found that increased demand has been observed by all providers interviewed. Findings suggest that 'soup kitchens' in Scotland are used mainly by homeless people who also tend to have long-standing issues, such as substance dependency or poor mental health. Alternatively, food banks are mainly used by people who are housed but who have little or no income. Users of Trussell Trust food banks were found to have more clients experiencing a one-off crisis and fewer clients who have long-standing issues.

Providers participating in the study agreed that welfare reform, benefit delays, benefit sanctions and falling incomes have been the main factors driving the increased demand for food aid. The study's findings also suggest that the substantial rise in the number of clients experienced by Trussell Trust food banks, and the reasons why they would visit a food bank, is broadly indicative of the trend observed by other food parcel providers who participated in the study and, therefore, is likely to be broadly reflective of the situation across Scotland.

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7 Statistics have been taken from the DWP’s stat-xplore tool which allows users to create their own tables. Please note that data issues had been identified, these have been resolved and the most recent data replaces all previous data. Please note that in some cases slightly different numbers given for the same statistics depending on the table configuration used. This may be because of the random adjustment of cells to avoid the release of confidential data.
**UK GOVERNMENT’S VIEW**

In the [House of Lords on 2 July 2013](hansard.modern.parliament.uk), the Welfare Reform Minister, Lord David Freud shared the view that there is ‘no evidence’ of a link between the government’s welfare reforms and the increase in the numbers of people using food banks and that it was difficult to make ‘causal connections’. He said: “The provision of food-bank support has grown from provision to 70,000 individuals two years ago to 347,000. All that predates the reforms. As I say, there is no evidence of a causal link.”

A [House of Commons Library briefing](hansard.modern.parliament.uk) (Downing, Kennedy 2014) on the subject highlights that

“The Government’s view is that part of the increase in the use of food banks is due to the decision to allow Jobcentre Plus advisers from September 2011 to “signpost” people needing additional help to food banks and other local organisations. It should be noted that Jobcentre Plus only started to signpost people nationally to food banks from September 2011, while demand for food banks had increased steadily over the previous three years.”

In parliamentary questions on 24 February 2014 Iain Duncan Smith said the following in relation to Food Banks

“Food banks do a good service, but they have been much in the news. People know they are free. They know about them and they will ask social workers to refer them. It would be wrong to pretend that the mass of publicity has not also been a driver in their increased use. The Opposition, notwithstanding the fact that under them the number of food banks increased tenfold, are trying to make a political issue out of this. They have done no service to those who need help and support and no service to those who run the food banks.”

The BBC [reported a DWP spokesperson](hansard.modern.parliament.uk) as saying that the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)](hansard.modern.parliament.uk) found the proportion of UK residents finding it difficult to afford food had fallen from 9.8% in 2007 to 8.1% in 2012.

"We're spending £94bn a year on working age benefits so that the welfare system provides a safety net to millions of people who are on low incomes or unemployed so they can meet their basic needs,"

"Even the OECD say there are fewer people struggling with their food bills compared with a few years ago, benefit processing times are improving and even the Trussell Trust's own research recognises the effect their marketing activity has on the growth of their business."

"The truth is that the employment rate is the highest it's been for five years and our reforms will improve the lives of some of the poorest families in our communities by promoting work and helping people to lift themselves out of poverty."

In a [letter to Margaret Burgess Minister for Housing and Welfare](hansard.modern.parliament.uk), Ester McVey, UK Minister for Employment (McVey 2014), states that:

“There is no robust evidence linking food banks usage to welfare reform and the benefit system provides an adequate safety net for those in need. The suggestion that benefit delays are responsible for an increase in food bank usage is unfounded. (…)

Performance in processing benefits on time has strengthened year on year, with 92

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8 House of Commons Debate Hansard 24 Feb 2014 : Column 18
percent of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claims currently paid on time (within 16 days), 6 percentage points higher than in 2009/10."

She continues

“Sanctions are used as a last resort and anyone who disagrees with a decision can appeal. We also have a well-established system of hardship provision for sanctioned claimants who have little or no other resources available to them, to ensure they are supported throughout the duration of a sanction.”

**UK Government report**

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) commissioned research into food aid in 2013. The aim of the research was to arrive at a better understanding of the ‘food aid’ landscape in the UK and the ‘at risk’ individuals who access such provision, as well as the means and drivers for seeking access. Examining the impact of social security on food bank use was not a specific part of its remit.

The findings in ‘Household Food Security in the UK: A Review of Food Aid Final Report’ originally expected in summer 2013, were released on the 20 February 2014. The UK Government stated that this was due to “an appropriate review and quality assurance process” [HL Debate, 26 November 2013; Vol. 749, c. 1293]. There was pressure in the House of Commons (HC Debate 18 Dec 2013) for the Government to publish the report to clarify the reasons behind the increase in food bank use. There was also speculation in newspapers such as the Sunday Times and the Guardian that the report was suppressed to hide a causal link between the changes in the benefit system and food bank use.

The study was largely based on existing, published, empirical literature (Rapid Evidence Assessment - REA) which the researchers noted was "limited" in the UK so they drew largely on evidence from the United States, Canada and Germany. It found that, although there is a general lack of systematic UK evidence on the drivers of food aid use and trends in the UK, several key conclusions can be drawn. These have been summarised below:

- Those providing food aid, formally and informally, are consistently reporting an increase in demand, both in terms of new requests for help, and in terms of those who have been helped continuing to ask for food.
- Critical factors driving these actions are described (by many food aid providers) in terms of ‘crises’ in a range of circumstances, but particularly household income, and often underpinned by on-going problems of low income, rising food (and other) costs and increasing indebtedness.
- This growing demand may have contributed to more food aid being provided, through existing and new structures (both networked and independent). There is no systematic evidence on the impact of increased supply and hypotheses of its potential effects are not based on robust evidence.
- Households employ multiple strategies for trying to deal with food insecurity; these may, or may not, include accessing temporary food aid.
- Research suggests that where provision is adequate, appropriate and tailored to the needs of users, food aid may be able to relieve short-term symptoms of food insecurity. The literature also indicates that, whether short-term or more sustained, food aid does not address the underlying causes of household food insecurity.
- Those involved in food security policy and other responses – from across government, business and civil society – require an ongoing focus on both the short and long-term causes of household food insecurity to achieve the best outcomes.
OTHER RESEARCH INTO THE LINKS BETWEEN INCREASE FOOD BANK USE AND WELFARE REFORM

A subsequent report by Hannah Lambie-Mumford, of Sheffield University who coauthored the DEFRA work, says the rise in demand for charity food is a signal "of the inadequacy of both social security provision and the processes by which it is delivered" (Lambie –Munford 2014a).

The report ‘Food bank provision & welfare reform in the UK’ focused on the impact of recent welfare reform on driving need for food bank provision. It is based on research conducted as part of a three-year study into the growth of nationally co-ordinated or facilitated emergency food provision. None of the 25 interviews evidenced in the study took place in Scotland.  

The research indicates that welfare reforms are impacting on need for food banks in two distinct ways: people are turning to food banks as a result of (i) changes to entitlements which are leaving them worse off and (ii) inadequate processes which leave them without an income. This paper was presented, amongst others, to an all-party parliamentary group of MPs in Westminster who are conducting an inquiry into hunger and food poverty. More information on this group is available later in this briefing.

GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENTARY ACTION

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

The intention to launch an Emergency Food Aid Action Plan was announced by the Deputy First Minister on 11 April 2014. (Scottish Government 2014)

The Scottish Government states that through funding of £1 million across the 2014/15 and 2015/16 financial years, the Emergency Food Aid Action Plan will provide support to those working in the emergency food aid sector, helping to address food poverty by:

- building capacity in the sector;
- fostering stronger links to mainstream advice services, particularly money, benefits and employment advice; and
- improving sustainability by reducing food waste.

This funding includes £500,000 over the two years for FareShare to tackle food waste and food poverty across Scotland.

The balance of £500,000 will be used over the two years to support an Emergency Food Aid Grant Fund. Food banks and organisations working with those who seek emergency food aid will be able to apply for funding. Applications are invited for larger grants, up to four of which will be awarded at between £30,000 and £50,000 each. Smaller grants of up to £10,000 each will also be awarded, with £1,000 being the minimum value for any individual grant.

Grants will be given to projects that concentrate on preventing food crises recurring, those that build connections between food aid providers, advice and support agencies and organisations working to promote healthy eating and reduce food waste.

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9 This paper was highlighted as it was completed by one of the authors of the DEFRA report and was included in the deliberations of the APPG. There are other papers which may also link the increase in food bank use and welfare reform. For example, Cooper N and Dumpleton S (2013) Walking the breadline: the scandal of food poverty in 21st century Britain. Church Action on Poverty & Oxfam.
UK GOVERNMENT

Cabinet Office Minister, Nick Hurd recently described food banks as "a magnificent response to difficult times". He acknowledged that their number was growing and the underlying issues were complex. He said that the Government should place on the record its "recognition of the work being done to support them across the country in responding to need." (HC Deb 11 December 2013 c.229)

However, as highlighted in a recent House of Commons Library briefing (Downing, Kennedy 2014) the UK Government does not provide (or intend to provide) support directly to food banks. As outlined by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord De Mauley) in April 2013:

“The Government are not considering the provision of funding to support food banks. We do, however, recognise the good work of organisations that redistribute surplus food to help reduce food poverty, assist the homeless and provide access to nutritional meals for those who may otherwise struggle. In addition, most major retailers already have partnerships with redistribution charities. In 2012, Defra held a meeting with retailers and food distribution charities to explore the current barriers to redistribution and the Waste and Resources Action Programme has recently begun working with Fareshare and FoodCycle to deliver a trial to increase food distribution from retail stores.

Although not supported centrally, local authorities have the ability to fund food banks if they consider that this would benefit their local community. ( HL Deb 22 April 2013 cWA373)

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ACTION

To date, the Welfare Reform Committee has had two evidence sessions (4 March 2014 & 29 April 2014) on the impacts of food poverty and the links between the increasing demand for food banks and the stricter sanctions regimes and changes to benefits as part of Welfare Reform. Members of the committee have been to visit food banks in their constituency areas to help further inform their scrutiny. Linda Fabiani MSP also visited food bank providers in the USA and Canada as part of the Scotland week celebrations.

In addition, there has been a chamber debate on the issue of food banks on 6 February 2014 and a range of Parliamentary Questions.

The Welfare Reform Committee produced a report (Scottish Parliament 2014c) on food banks and welfare reform on 2 June 2014. It stated the following:

“The Committee is convinced by the volume and strength of the evidence it has received that there is a direct correlation between welfare reform and the increase in use of food banks. The Department for Work and Pension’s benefit sanctions are one of the key components of welfare reform which are leading to an increase in need for food banks.”

It also came to the conclusion that while the dedication of organisations working to combat food poverty should be praised, ultimately the need for food banks should be eliminated.

“Food banks should be recognised as a community, charitable response for individuals in crisis. Food banks should not be welded into the infrastructure of the welfare state.”
WESTMINSTER COMMITTEES AND GROUPS WITH AN INTEREST IN FOOD BANKS

This section highlights some relevant examples of committees and groups with an interest in food banks and financial hardship. The list is not exhaustive.

**All Party Parliamentary Group**

An ‘All Party Parliamentary Group’ (APPG) on Hunger and Food Poverty was created in October 2013, in order to proactively investigate the root causes behind hunger and food poverty. It was announced on 20 February 2014 that it would conduct a far ranging inquiry into the issues which will be chaired by the Bishop of Truro, Tim Thornton, and Frank Field MP. A series of background papers will also be published.

A food bank research seminar was held in collaboration with the APPG on 9 April 2014 to help inform debate and provide an opportunity to hear from leading researchers about the latest findings of research on food poverty and food aid provision across the UK. It also helped to refine the groups ‘Terms of Reference’ which are as follows:

- To understand the extent and geographical spread of hunger and food poverty in this country
- To investigate the underlying causes of hunger and food poverty in this country
- To identify the circumstances behind the rising number of people requiring emergency food assistance in this country
- To understand the extent, nature and organisation of emergency food assistance schemes in this country
- To discover the food choices and other forms of support available to clients when using emergency food assistance
- To investigate the source of emergency food assistance providers’ supplies – how much is supplied by consumers and institutions?
- To consider the effectiveness of emergency food assistance in meeting immediate and long-term needs, and the possibility of these schemes becoming permanent features of the welfare state
- To examine the effectiveness and sustainability of our food model in providing universal access to healthy, affordable food in this country
- To consider approaches to improving household food security in this country
- To make recommendations

The group produced its first set of interim preliminary recommendations on 2 June 2014.

**Work and Pensions Committee**

In a recent work and pensions committee report (2014) on the role of Jobcentre Plus in the reformed welfare system, the committee made a recommendation regarding food aid. It stated:

“97. We recommend that DWP take urgent steps to monitor the extent of financial hardship caused by benefit sanctions, including by collecting, collating and publishing data on the number of claimants "signposted" to food aid by Jobcentres and the reasons for claimants’ need for assistance in these cases.”

The UK Government response to the report rejected the recommendation on the following grounds.
“We continue to monitor sanctions policy on an on-going basis and collect customer feedback wherever appropriate as part of our evaluation of relevant DWP policies. The sanctions system is designed to provide clear consequences for any failure to comply.

Sanctions play a vital role in supporting the conditionality regime. They encourage claimants to comply with the requirements that are designed to help them move into or prepare for work. And we know that where sanctions are understood, they have a positive impact on claimant behaviour.

The use of food banks is not exclusive to benefit claimants and Jobcentres have no part in deciding whether support is provided. Jobcentres will continue to provide details of suitable local support services to all members of the public including food banks.”

**CAMPAIGNS AND MEDIA COVERAGE**

There has been widespread news coverage and discussion about the issue of increased demand for food banks some of which has been discussed above. This section summarises some additional examples of the more prominent campaigns and media coverage associated with food banks and food poverty.

The Trussell Trust has been campaigning on a variety of fronts as well as calling for an inquiry by the UK Government into the causes of UK food poverty and the increase in food bank usage. You can find out more information on the media coverage section of the Trussell Trust website.

The Trust has also been awarded £944,708 from the National Lottery. The money will help to enable the organisation to employ a team of dedicated staff who will provide training, support and guidance to new and existing food banks across the country.

A letter which appeared in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) at the end of November 2013 stated that food poverty in the UK “has all the signs of a public health emergency”. The letter was signed by David Taylor-Robinson, a health scientist at the Medical Research Council, and colleagues from the department of public health and policy at the University of Liverpool, University College London's Institute of Child Health, and the public health department at Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. The letter highlighted the rising number of malnutrition related admissions to hospital in England since 2008-09 and referenced Trussell Trust figures on the exponential rise in the number of people being issued food bank vouchers by frontline care professionals. It states:

“Because the government has delayed the publication of research it commissioned into the rise in emergency food aid in the UK, we can only speculate that the cause is related to the rising cost of living and increasingly austere welfare reforms. The effects of these policies on nutritional status in the most vulnerable populations urgently need to be monitored.”

In the winter of 2013 the Red Cross worked in partnership with Fareshare to provide volunteer support during one of the bi-annual Tesco Neighbourhood Food Collections events. The Red Cross acknowledged in their evidence submission to the Welfare Reform Committee (2014) of the Scottish Parliament that:

“There was also significant media interest in the food collection drive. This may be because the Red Cross is strongly associated with responding to crisis, and through our involvement there was an acknowledgement that food poverty is becoming an increasing problem in UK society.”
In a letter to the Daily Mirror published on 19 February 2014 (Beattie 2014), 27 Anglican bishops and 16 other faith leaders including Methodists and Quakers say the Prime Minister has a “moral duty” to act on the growing number going hungry and that the coalition has caused hardship and hunger through its welfare reforms. It states that society needs to:

“face up to the fact that over half of people using food banks have been put in that situation by cut backs to and failures in the benefit system, whether it be payment delays or punitive sanctions,”

This was followed by a second call on the 16th April 2014 (Butler 2014a) by religious leaders and faith groups for the UK government to take action to tackle a "national crisis" of rising hunger and food poverty. The letter coincided with the release of data by the Trussell Trust.

End Hunger Fast’, a campaign supported by the Trussell Trust, Church Action on Poverty and the Quakers, coordinated a national day of fasting on 4 April 2014 to highlight the issue of food banks to the UK Government. It also conducted a peaceful demonstration at Westminster on the 16 April 2014.

INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES

As mentioned above increasing demand for food aid is not restricted to the UK with increases being experienced across Europe and North America. When discussing international comparisons of food banks the situations in Canada and Germany have been referenced as examples of supply led demand in countries that have a comprehensive welfare system and have withstood some of the severities of the recession.

In the letter to Margaret Burgess MSP Minister for Housing and Welfare, from Ester McVey UK Minister for Employment (McVey 2014) she states that:

“It is important to put the UK’s food bank usage in context. In the UK, the Trussell Trust figures indicate that they issued food to over 900,000 people in 2013/14. Although this is a higher figure than before the recession, nonetheless, it remains much lower than other countries. In Germany, a country that has long been associated with a comprehensive welfare system, and whose economy has been amongst Europe’s best performers during the recession, Deutsche Tafel reported as early as 2009 that they were helping approximately 1.5 million people a week. Similarly in Canada, another country that has avoided the worst impacts of the recession, Food Banks Canada reported this year that in a single month over 800,000 people received food from a food bank. The figure was over 700,000 even before the recession, and this in a country with a population around half that of the UK. The rise in [UK] food banks actually predates most of the welfare reforms this Government has put in place.”

However, the DEFRA commissioned report ‘Household Food Security in the UK: A Review of Food Aid Final Report’ published in February 2014 suggested that

“Social policy contexts are different in the United States, Canada and other parts of Europe, so that drawing direct comparisons for the UK is difficult. A clear important pattern is that reductions in governmental food aid lead to increased uptake of non-governmental food aid, and that systematic government provided food assistance delivered measurable positive effects on household food security, while informal food assistance did not.”
Canada

‘Food Banks Canada’ is the national charitable organisation representing and supporting the food bank community across Canada. It serves approximately 85% of people accessing food programs in the country. It aims to meet the short-term need for food, and find long-term solutions to hunger in order to reduce the need for food banks and emergency food services in Canada.

Food Banks Canada was originally formed in 1989 to assist with what was initially believed to be a short-term demand for food banks. However, the need for food banks and food assistance programs continued to grow. The organisation is mostly funded through corporate donations in cash and kind as well as smaller amounts of individual donations and government grants.

It produces an annual ‘Hungercount’ (Food Banks Canada 2013) publication outlining the state of food poverty in Canada. In 2013 it stated “We are at a point where the welfare office refers people to the food bank rather than provide emergency funds, and where food banks provide food to government-run agencies in order for those agencies to trim their bottom lines and meet budgets.”

It views the level of dependence upon food banks as unacceptable and calls on the government to take serious action to address root causes. The ‘Hungercount’ publication also makes a number of recommendations for change:

“These problems are highly complex, and they will not be solved by tinkering at the edges of social policy. They require real investment and new thinking. While we do not have all the answers, HungerCount 2013 offers five action areas that we believe can move Canada forward.

- Commit to adequate, long-term federal funding of affordable housing in Canada, so that people are not forced to choose between paying rent or buying food.
- Increase social investment in northern Canada to address the stunning levels of food insecurity in northern regions.
- Increase federal support from $500 million to $700 million per year for existing programs funded under Labour Market Agreements, to help the most vulnerable Canadians get training to qualify for well-paying jobs.
- Revolutionize social assistance so that people can build self-sufficiency instead of being trapped in poverty.
- Increase federal and provincial support to help people working in low-paying, part-time, and temporary jobs attain better-paid, long-term employment”

In a position paper (Food Banks Canada 2014) the charity outlines its views on whether food banks create dependence among the people they help. It states that only the minority of food bank users access help for longer periods of time and that:

“we can confidently say that the food bank-dependence theory is false. Nevertheless, the theory deserves closer attention: just what is it really saying? It seems to suggest that all it takes is three or four days’ worth of free food to make a person unable to care for themselves; that people lose the will to improve their lives because they got a bit of help; that people, on the whole, lack resilience.”

“The rise of food banks in Canada is concrete evidence both of the breakdown of the social safety net and the commodification of social assistance. As such, they undermine the state’s obligation, as ratified in international conventions, to respect, protect and fulfil the human right to food. They enable governments to look the other way and neglect food poverty and nutritional health and well-being.”

Germany

Church-run soup kitchens as well as food banks are the largest and most common organisations in Germany which pass donated food to socially and economically disadvantaged people. Organisations that donate food to disadvantaged people are self-financed and receive no subsidies from the government or state. The federal Government and the federal states agreed in autumn 2012 not to impose VAT on food donations to food banks or other institutions. There are also no sales taxes imposed on those who make donations. Prof Stefan Selke of Furtwangen University (Germany) in the London School of Economics (LSE) blog sets out some of the key issues and trends relating to German food banks. He reports that the first food bank (“Tafel”) was founded in Berlin in 1983 and that in the past 20 years, the number of food banks in Germany has grown to more than 1,000 and now provides more than 1.5 million people (from children to senior citizens) with food.

Selke suggests that the main increase in food bank growth began in 2005 after a series of welfare reforms including cuts to pension and unemployment benefits. Around the same time, a new form of unemployment insurance (“Hartz IV”) was introduced, reducing previous benefit levels and the duration for which they can be received. Selke states

“It is becoming simpler and more normal in Germany to receive public approval for voluntary relief of poverty than political legitimacy for combating the roots of poverty. The offerings of food banks are only the short-term alleviation and management of poverty. The danger behind this is an indirect (and unintended) stabilisation of poverty because the tasks of the state are more and more being delegated to supported employers, subsidised agencies and private players.”

Prof. Selke offers the following final thoughts on the LSE blog:

“A society should be judged by how it deals with its weakest members. Food banks still have their reason for existence as an emergency solution for those in need, but not as an institutionalised long-term solution. This assertion marks both the fundamental boundary shift of the past 20 years and the task of a new orientation. It would be regrettable if food banks were to lead only to socially well-arranged needs for many. The question is therefore not whether voluntary commitment makes sense, but where and how it is appropriate.”

10 The information was provided on 23 April 2013 by the Bundestag in response to a request by the French Parliamentary Research Service to the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) on food aid.
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