

A close-up photograph of a person's hand in a purple sleeve holding a white bowl filled with a dark soup or stew, topped with orange slices. The person is holding a silver spoon. The background is blurred, showing other people and a kitchen setting.

A CRISIS WITHIN A CRISIS: The Impact of Covid-19 on Household Food Security

Insights from Food Foundation
Surveys on how the Pandemic has
Affected Food Access in the UK
(March 2020 to January 2021)



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is produced by the Food Foundation and presents data collected from seven rounds of nationally representative UK-wide surveys to monitor levels of food insecurity impacted by Covid-19. Surveying was undertaken between March 2020 and January 2021. Data referring to the current situation is from surveys conducted in January 2021.

ABOUT THE FOOD FOUNDATION

The Food Foundation is an independent charity working to address challenges in the food system in the interests of the UK public. Working at the interface between academia and policymakers (parliamentarians, civil servants, local authorities, business leaders) we use a wide range of approaches to make change happen including events, publications, media stories, social media campaigns and multi-stakeholder partnerships. We also work directly with citizens to ensure their lived experience is reflected in our policy proposals. We work with many partners on a range of different thematic areas, working closely with academics to generate evidence and campaigners who can drive change. We are independent of all political parties and business, and we are not limited by a single issue or special interest. Our Children's Right2Food Campaign is a nationwide initiative led by young people to ensure every child in the UK can access and afford good food.

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Quotations from individuals affected by food insecurity are extracts from the Right2Food podcast produced by Gilly Smith for the Food Foundation.

You can listen to Right2Food via your podcast provider.

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KEY FINDINGS

1 Despite vital emergency measures in place, more people are food insecure now than before the pandemic.

- Pre-pandemic, we saw a rising trend in levels of household food insecurity.¹ But Covid-19 has left more people than before struggling to afford or access a nutritious diet. Emergency interventions appear to have prevented the situation from worsening in recent months but turning off the tap of support risks seeing elevated levels of hunger and deprivation becoming the new normal.
- Despite community and voluntary sector groups heroically stepping in to help millions of vulnerable people, our evidence shows too many food insecure households have struggled to access support. Reliance on overstretched food banks and food aid charities is not a sustainable safety net for individuals and families who can't afford a decent diet.

2 Households with children have been hit hard, with many children still falling through the cracks in support.

- Households with children have consistently found it harder to put food on the table, particularly lone parents, large families, and low-income families. Recently, slight improvements in levels of moderate/severe food insecurity among households with children suggest targeted policy

interventions have mitigated a significant deterioration. But children reporting experiences of mild to severe food insecurity had not improved this January (2021) compared to six months ago.

- Free School Meal vouchers have represented a vital lifeline for eligible children and their families during Covid, but a series of issues with provision during school closure left many eligible children unable to rely on a regular, quality meal. Many children not currently eligible for Free School Meals face the daily stress of not knowing where their next meal comes from. An increased number of children reported they or their families visited a food bank this Christmas compared to during the summer holidays.

3 Existing support schemes have made a difference, but gaps have meant many people still struggle to eat adequately.

- Covid-19 has deepened the financial hardship faced by low-income households and has also created a newly vulnerable group who were financially stable pre-Covid. Households are balancing on a financial tightrope, increasing debt and using up savings to survive. With household budgets on a shoestring, the end of the Furlough Scheme and the proposed cut to the £20 uplift to Universal Credit can only increase the challenges faced by individuals and families already struggling to pay their food bills.

4 Covid-19 has dramatically widened inequalities in food security and nutrition.

- Exposure to food insecurity is not equal across all households. Throughout the crisis, BAME communities have consistently encountered disproportionately higher levels of food insecurity compared with white ethnic groups. Comparing our data to before the pandemic, inequality in food insecurity has widened between those from BAME backgrounds and white ethnic groups.
- Adults with disabilities have also consistently been more acutely affected by food insecurity during the pandemic compared with those without disabilities. Our most recent data show people with severe disabilities have five times greater levels of food insecurity than those without.
- Despite undertaking essential work like stocking our grocery shelves, food sector workers have reported much higher levels of food insecurity than the general population.

At a Glance: Our Recommendations

- 1. REVIEW FREE SCHOOL MEALS:** We are recommending an urgent and comprehensive review into Free School Meal policy across the UK. To support all low-income children and families in the aftermath of the pandemic, the review should ensure Free School Meals are delivering maximum nutritional and educational impact and promoting children's learning and well-being throughout the school day. It should review the current eligibility threshold to make sure no disadvantaged children are missing out on the benefits of a Free School Meal.
- 2. PAY FAIR AND KEEP THE UPLIFT:** Food insecurity levels are high among those in work and those on benefits – a strong indication that we need to strengthen the safety net and increase wages so people can afford to eat well. Businesses, especially those who have done well during the pandemic, need to step up and pay their employees the Real Living Wage. Combating the dire economic impact of the pandemic will require a broader set of policies to boost incomes for poorer households including the permanent retention of the £20 uplift to Universal Credit (and its extension to those on legacy benefits), and the removal of the 5-week wait for Universal Credit, the two-child limit and the benefit cap.
- 3. LEADERSHIP AND ACTION ON FOOD INSECURITY:** Currently, no single authority in Government has designated oversight on food insecurity tracking or responsibility to tackle it. As we move out of crisis mode, we need a designated authority in Government who has oversight of this data, with powers to inform and drive action at the national and local authority level in response to the data. We need a commitment to eradicate household food insecurity in the UK. Policies need to be developed by involving the people directly affected by experiences of food insecurity to ensure effective solutions are found.

Read full recommendations on pp. 22

Current picture of Food Insecurity



FINANCIAL IMPACT OF COVID:

22% OF ALL HOUSEHOLDS HAVE LOST INCOME SINCE BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

DRIVERS OF FOOD INSECURITY*

- › **55% NOT ENOUGH MONEY**
- › **31% ISOLATION**
- › **23% LACK OF SUPPLY**
- › **8% OTHER**

**4.7 MILLION
ADULTS**



(9%) have experienced food insecurity in the past 6 months

**2.3 MILLION
CHILDREN**



live in households that have experienced food insecurity in the past 6 months (12% of households with children)

41% of households with children on **Free School Meals** have experienced food insecurity in the past 6 months

1.5 MILLION 8-17-year-olds (20%) reported food insecurity over Christmas/January

1 MILLION 8-17-year-olds (13%) and their families have visited a **food bank** over Christmas/January

GROUPS WITH HIGHER LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY

- › **Limited a lot by health problems/disability x5** compared to those with no health problems/disabilities
- › **Food sector workers x1.5** compared to non-food sector workers
- › **Severely clinically vulnerable x2** compared to average
- › **BAME x2** compared to white British

*not mutually exclusive

INTRODUCTION

When the Covid-19 pandemic ground the UK to a standstill in March 2020, few anticipated that the monumental disruption to daily lives and livelihoods would persist a whole year later. Early scenes of panic-buying and empty supermarket shelves raised alarm bells about the challenges to come. Income shocks, stay-at-home orders and school closures forced millions of adults and children, already struggling to afford a decent diet, to limit the quantity and quality of their meals. Others who never imagined needing help before the pandemic, turned to emergency food aid for the first time.

To assess the impact of the unfolding crisis on food insecurity (sometimes referred to as food poverty) across the UK population, the Food Foundation commissioned a total of seven nationally representative surveys with YouGov between March 2020 and January 2021, one of which was specifically focussed on households with children. We commissioned a further two nationally representative surveys with Childwise to hear directly from children and young people about their Covid-19 food experiences.

The purpose of this report is to present new data from our most recent surveys conducted in January 2021 and draw comparisons to evidence compiled periodically since March 2020 – nearly a complete year of Covid-19 food insecurity tracking. In the first lockdown, our findings revealed a grave picture of the immediate and catastrophic effect on food security for the UK's poorest households and children. We reported our data findings directly to policymakers, parliamentarians, the press and the wider public. As the pandemic has evolved, our data has presented a picture of widening inequalities in food access and diet, corroborated by real-life testimonies from those at the frontline, children, individuals and families. This overview helps to understand how far policy responses have successfully mitigated against experiences of hunger and hardship.

Food insecurity, defined as the “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways”¹ predates the pandemic in the UK. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) reports 10% of adults (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) experienced low or very low food security in 2018². It's well established that both restrictions on the quantity of food and the adoption of a nutritionally poor,

low-cost diet heighten the risk of both hunger and obesity coexisting in the same household³. But the sheer scale of household food insecurity sparked by Covid, together with new evidence on the relationship between excess weight and increased risk of severe illness from Covid-19⁴, has propelled these issues into the spotlight. Food banks have been inundated, disadvantaged children have missed out on vital school meals, and a 23-year-old footballer has led the charge for action to tackle child food poverty, bringing unprecedented public attention to the issue.

Only by understanding the scale of the problem exacerbated by Covid-19 can we fully grasp what solutions are needed in the next phase of recovery. How many children have gone without a regular meal? Who has fallen through the cracks of emergency support? Answers to these difficult questions should help to shape recovery plans so they can protect everyone's basic right to a sufficient, nutritious diet. When it comes to children and families, short-term support measures have played an important role in the immediate crisis. Now we need ambitious and comprehensive long-term policies to eradicate child hunger in the UK and ensure all children have access to the nutritious food they need to grow up healthy.

“Food banks have been inundated, disadvantaged children have missed out on vital school meals, and a 23-year-old footballer has led the charge for action to tackle child food poverty, bringing unprecedented public attention to the issue.”

PREVALENCE OF FOOD INSECURITY DURING COVID-19

Food insecurity remains consistently higher than pre-Covid levels, affecting 4.7 million adults.

Food insecurity was already prevalent in the UK before the pandemic but has been dramatically exacerbated by Covid-19, leaving many people vulnerable to hunger and poor diets. Over the past 6 months (August 2020 to January 2021), 4.7 million adults (9% of all households) have experienced food insecurity. This includes 1.6 million adults who report having had to go a whole day without eating due to not being able to afford or access food. Food insecurity levels remain higher than pre-Covid levels of 7.6% over a 12-month period⁵.

Throughout our surveys, we have periodically asked people about their experiences of food insecurity over a 1-month timeframe. As the pandemic rapidly changed our daily lives, so have we been able to monitor how levels of food insecurity have changed over the course of the pandemic. It's important to note that 1-month food insecurity levels are lower than over a 6-month time period because a longer recall period picks up more people who have been transiently food insecure than a shorter recall period.

On 23 March 2020, the UK went into its first national lockdown, with instructions to stay home and minimise travel or contact with others. This resulted in a sharp spike in people being unable to access or afford sufficient food. In the first two weeks of this lockdown, 15.6% of households experienced food insecurity in Great Britain. This has subsided over the course of the year, particularly during summer when lockdown restrictions lifted. A small increase in food insecurity has been seen in January, now affecting 7.4% of households in the past month.

FIGURE 1 Percentage of all households experiencing food insecurity during the pandemic (6-month recall period) compared with pre-Covid (12-month recall period).

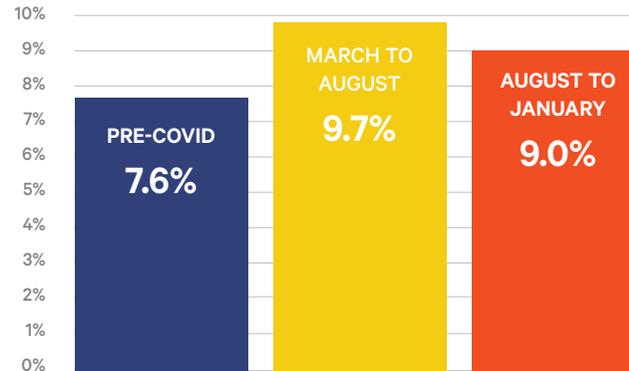
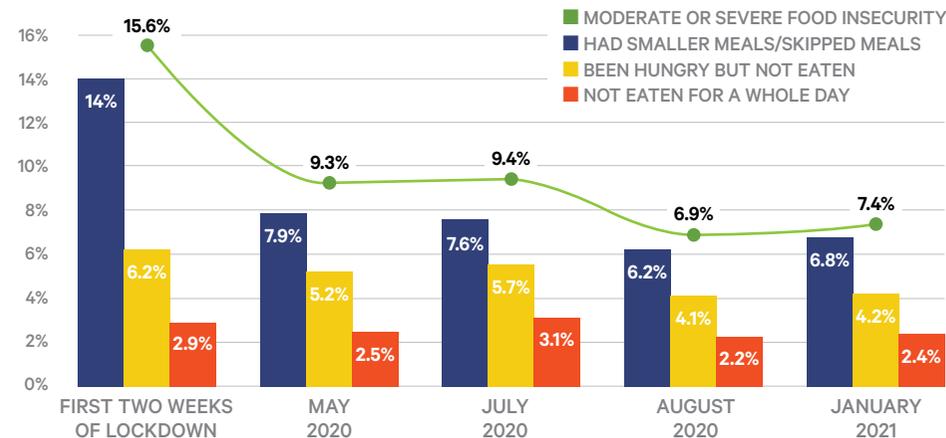


FIGURE 2 Percentage of all households experiencing food insecurity (1-month recall period). Moderate or severe food insecurity indicates answering yes to one or more of having smaller/skipping meals, been hungry but not eaten and/or not eaten for a whole day (see appendix 1 for further details on measuring food insecurity).



How our data compares to other findings

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) have also tracked food insecurity throughout the course of the pandemic and have seen similar trends to our surveys, although they found a higher overall prevalence of food insecurity. They reported between April and July 2020 food insecurity was relatively stable (16-18% of all respondents) and fell in August to 12%. It then began increasing again reaching 19% in November. Differences in the overall prevalence of food insecurity may be due to slightly different population samples – the FSA survey a slightly different age range and they do not include Scotland⁶. Another survey conducted by Feeding Britain in June found 8.5% of adults reported low food security and 7.7% reported very low food security⁷.

DRIVERS OF FOOD INSECURITY

More than half of adults report economic reasons as a cause of their food insecurity.

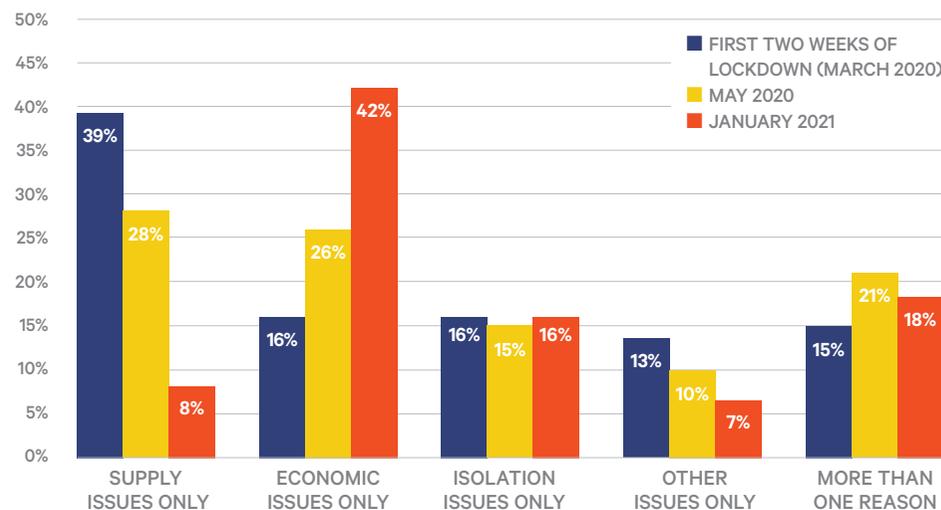
The lockdowns and restrictions put in place to curb the virus introduced new drivers of food insecurity by making access to food harder for many people, including a lack of food in the shops (food supply issues) and being unable to get to the shops (isolation issues), as well as exacerbating being unable to afford food (economic issues).

Initially, citizens were faced with food shortages and empty supermarket shelves, as people began stockpiling food supplies for fear of needing to self-isolate. This created an unprecedented surge in demand for which the 'just-in-time' supply chain was not set up. The closure of restaurants and takeaways meant that overnight society had to dramatically shift its buying habits and depend solely on supermarkets and convenience stores for sustenance. According to the British Retail Consortium, approximately £1 billion of extra food was purchased in the last 2-3 weeks of March⁸, as those with the financial means were able to stock up. Of the 8 million adults who experienced food insecurity in the first two weeks of lockdown, 50% were unable to get the food they needed from the shops due to shortages, 25% were unable to leave their homes and had no other way to get the food they needed, and 21% didn't have enough money to buy adequate food supplies (not mutually exclusive).

Over the course of the pandemic, while supply problems have improved, economic issues have become worse. In our last survey completed in January 2021, 2 million adults (53%) reported economic issues as a cause of their food insecurity in the last month, with approximately four-fifths of them naming this the only reason.

Isolation problems have remained relatively consistent throughout the pandemic.

FIGURE 3 Drivers of food insecurity (1-month recall period); percentage of food insecure adults who have experienced one or more of these drivers.



“At the beginning of the pandemic, two families were on my doorstep. Almost shaking with fear, they thought when they saw those empty supermarket shelves that they were going to be starved out. This is not food insecurity, let's call it what it really is. It's hunger and it's fear.”

SHARON GOODYER, COMMUNITY WORKER, THANET

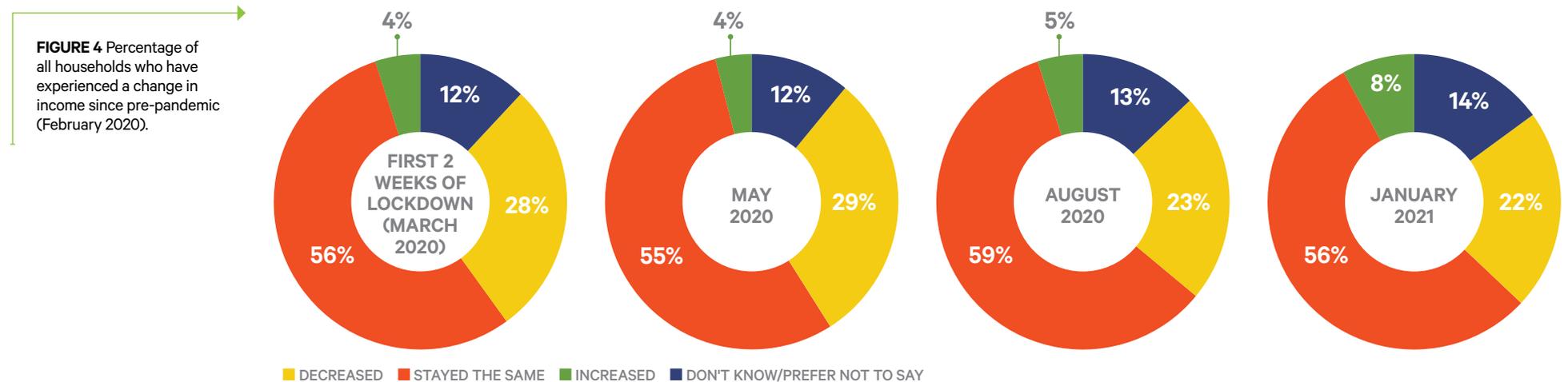
FINANCIAL HARDSHIP AND FOOD INSECURITY

Over a fifth of people have less income now than they did before the pandemic.

With the UK officially in recession since August, the economic impact of the pandemic has been life-changing for many people. Large numbers of people who were previously financially stable have experienced job losses and drops in income. This has left many struggling to pay bills; food expenditure is often the first thing to be squeezed in times of economic strain.

By May 2020, 4 million adults (8%) had borrowed money or taken out a loan as a direct result of the Covid crisis. The situation had not improved by August when 9% reported having to borrow money or take out a loan in the previous month alone. According to the Office of National Statistics (ONS), 9 million people in the UK increased their borrowing in 2020⁹.

Early in the pandemic, our data showed that 28% of people experienced a decrease in income due to either job losses, pay or hours cuts, or being furloughed. This tells a similar story to a survey by the ONS in April in which 24% of households said Covid-19 was affecting their finances¹⁰. This has now improved slightly to 22% (equivalent to 11.6 million adults) as of January 2021 but remains concerningly high. Approximately 900,000 adults (2%) report having lost all their income as a result of the pandemic.



Approximately **900,000 adults** report having **lost all their income** as a result of the **pandemic**

People are finding it harder to cope with the loss of income now compared with last summer. In May 2020, 12% of those who had lost income were struggling without replacing it; this has increased to 17% in January 2021. Similarly, previously 30% of those who had lost income in May said they were managing

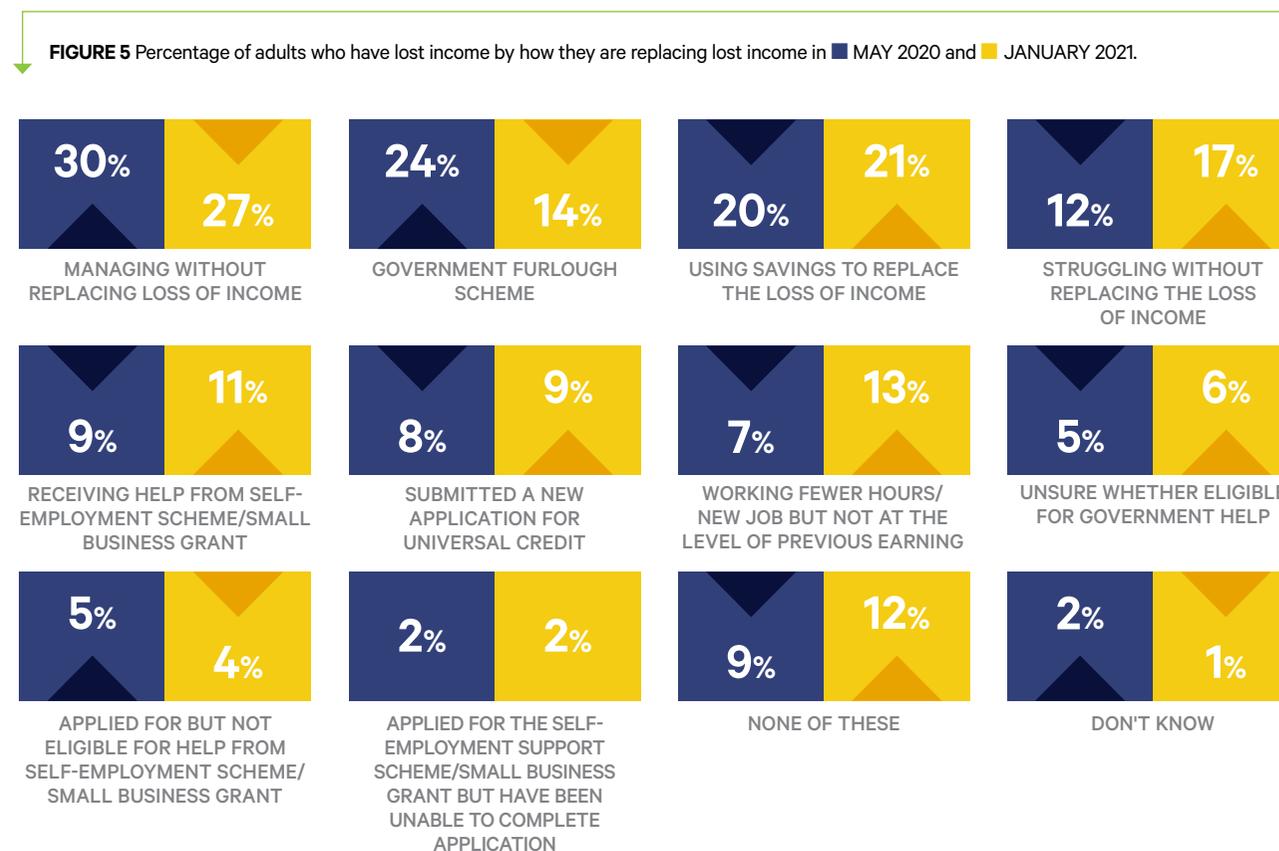
without replacing their lost income, while only 27% were managing in January 2021. Approximately 1 in 5 report having to use up savings and this has remained the same as last May. More people now report they are either working fewer hours or have a new job with lower pay (13% up from 7% in May).

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP AND FOOD INSECURITY

According to the ONS, 5 million people were away from work or furloughed in July with over 2.5 million having been away for three months or more¹¹. According to our data, in January 2021 fewer people who reported lost income said they were being supported by the furlough scheme compared to May 2020 (14% compared with 24%), but a higher proportion were being supported by the self-employment scheme (11% up from 9%).

UNIVERSAL CREDIT

As soon as the national lockdown in March 2020 was announced, Universal Credit applications skyrocketed. Official figures show between 16-31 March, 950,000 people applied for Universal Credit. However, Government reported a third of people who applied in the first of couple weeks were unsuccessful or withdrew the application and did not receive financial support from Government¹². Our results show similar findings, with 8% of those who had lost income in May having submitted an application for Universal Credit. Of those who submitted an application, only approximately half had received a payment. The Work and Pensions Committee reports that there are now 6 million people on Universal Credit, double the numbers of March 2020 before Covid hit¹³.



What help has been available?

The UK Government introduced major measures to support people experiencing income losses due to Covid-19. Furlough (or the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme) which pays businesses 80% of workers' wages (up to £2,500 per worker per month) was announced on 20 March 2020. On 26 March a Self-Employed Income Support Scheme was announced, providing direct cash grants to the self-employed equal to 80% of their profits, up to £2,500 per month.

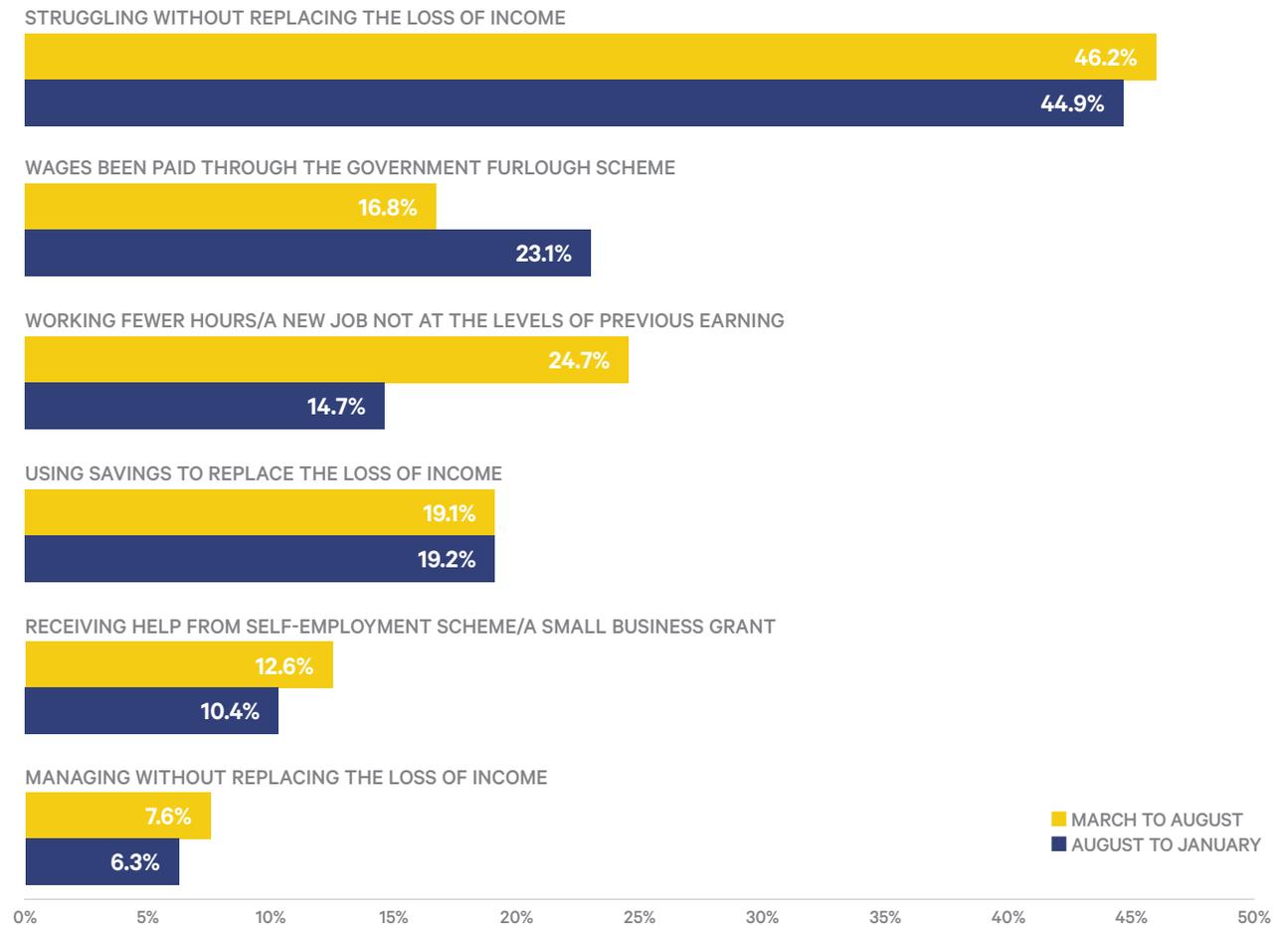
» Despite the uplift to Universal Credit, this benefit alone doesn't protect people from hunger and food hardship.

As expected, these income losses have impacted levels of food security. In the first lockdown, adults reporting income losses of 25% or more were at significantly heightened risk of food insecurity, including adults who would have been at risk of food insecurity pre-Covid, as well as those typically not at risk¹⁴. From March to August 2020, food insecurity was experienced by almost half of those who were struggling to replace their loss of income. Food insecurity was lower for those being supported by the furlough (17%) or self-employment (13%) schemes than for those using their own savings (19%) or working fewer hours (25%). In the last 6 months, there has been an increase of six percentage points in the proportion of people on furlough experiencing food insecurity.

“Trying to feed my children the right food is so expensive. My partner does work and we do get a Universal Credit top-up, but the top-up isn't much. They want us to eat healthily but fruit and vegetables are just so expensive. Sometimes it's cheaper to buy a cheeseburger from Mcdonald's than a punnet of strawberries. That's the constant battle.”

KATE, MARGATE

FIGURE 6 Percentage of people who have experienced food insecurity (6-month recall period) by how they are replacing lost income.



FINANCIAL HARDSHIP AND FOOD INSECURITY

At the start of the pandemic, a £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit was introduced to support low-paid individuals and families to cope with the adversity of the crisis. Despite this, Universal Credit has not entirely protected the most vulnerable in our society from food insecurity. People on Universal Credit before the pandemic had over 3 times greater levels of food insecurity in the first 6 months of the pandemic than average. People who have successfully applied since the pandemic had 2.5 times higher levels. Being

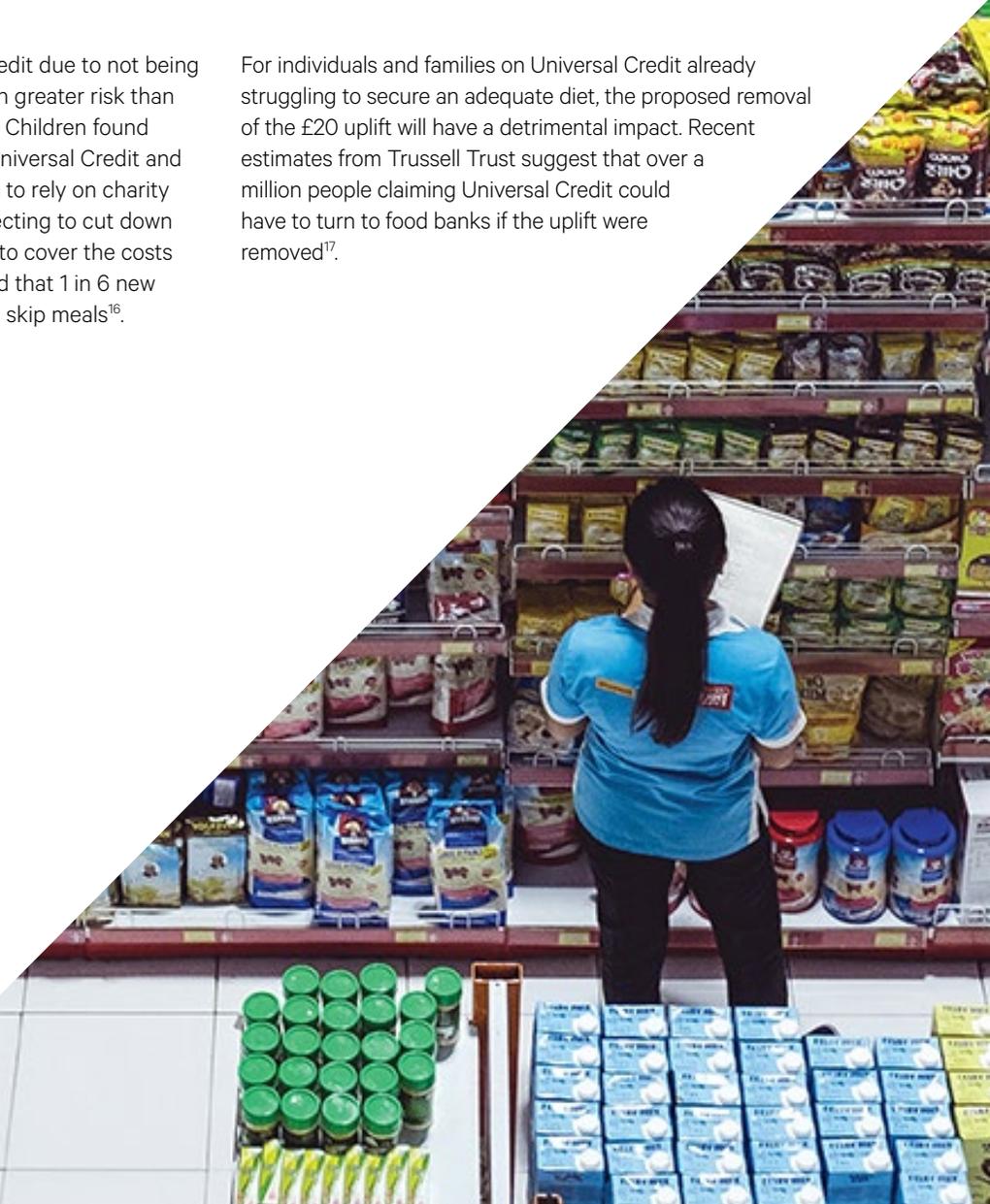
unsuccessful in applying for Universal Credit due to not being eligible or still waiting to hear was an even greater risk than those who had been successful. Save the Children found that, over Christmas, 37% of families on Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit were anticipating having to rely on charity food parcels or meals and 65% were expecting to cut down on essentials including food and heating to cover the costs of Christmas¹⁵. In February, it was reported that 1 in 6 new Universal Credit claimants were forced to skip meals¹⁶.

For individuals and families on Universal Credit already struggling to secure an adequate diet, the proposed removal of the £20 uplift will have a detrimental impact. Recent estimates from Trussell Trust suggest that over a million people claiming Universal Credit could have to turn to food banks if the uplift were removed¹⁷.

In the past 6 months, 14% of food sector workers have been food insecure compared with 9% of non-food sector workers

› Food sector workers have higher levels of food insecurity despite being in employment.

The pandemic has highlighted for many the critical role of key workers, but despite this many of them are in low-paid jobs. The IFS reported that food and social care sectors employees stand out for their low wages, with 71% of food sector workers and 58% of employees in social care earning £10 or less an hour. Food sector workers (including supermarket workers) earn the least of all at just £8.59 an hour¹⁸. As a result of these economic pressures, this group have increased levels of food insecurity. A Living Wage Foundation report found that over a quarter of full-time workers who were paid less than living wage had had to skip meals regularly for financial reasons in the past year¹⁹. They also reported 45% of supermarket workers earn less than the Real Living Wage²⁰. This is in keeping with our findings that, in the past 6 months (August 2020 to January 2021), 14% of food sector workers have been food insecure compared with 9% of non-food sector workers.



FOOD INSECURITY IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN

Households with children are at increased risk of food insecurity compared to those without.

Food insecurity in households with children has been consistently higher than in the general population. 21% of households with children under 18 years old experienced food insecurity in the first two weeks of lockdown in March 2020. The devastating effects of the pandemic were truly revealed in May when 12% of parents said that their children had directly experienced one or more forms of food insecurity. Given that we know parents often sacrifice their own food intake to protect their children, the findings reveal the depth and scale of the problem faced by many families.

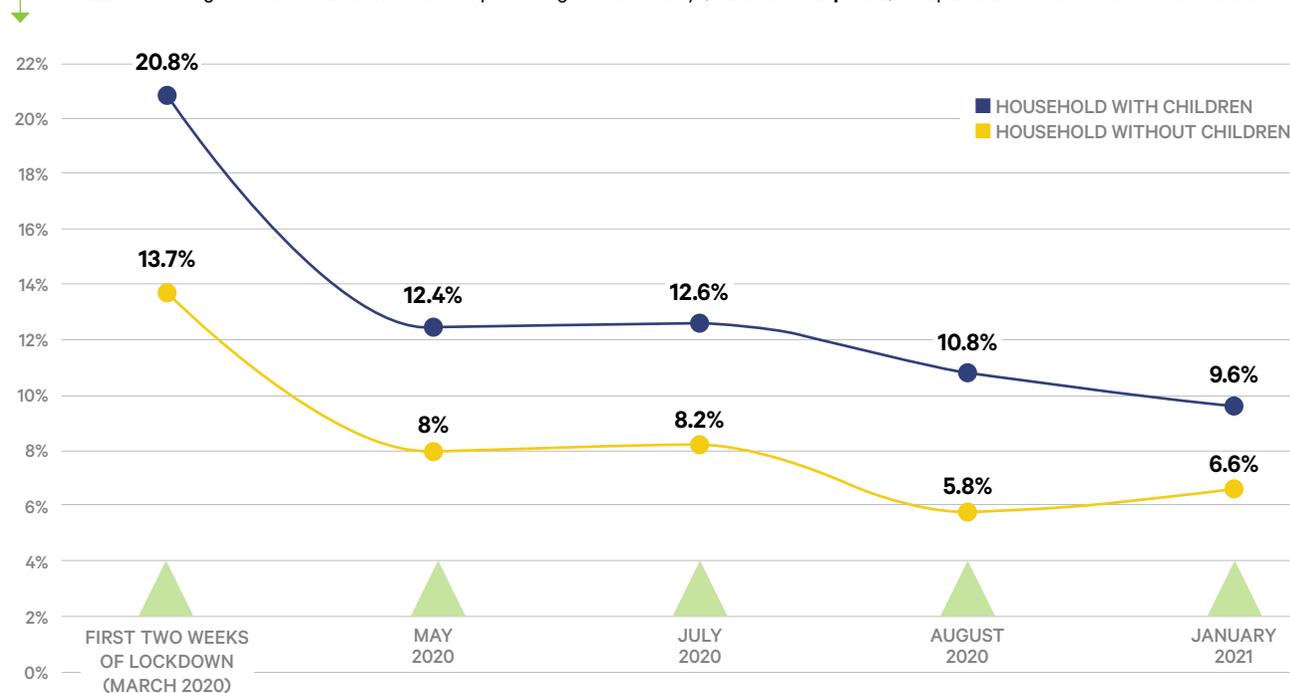
Food insecurity in households with children followed a similar trend to in the general population, improving as lockdown eased over the summer of 2020. Most recent findings indicate further improvement, suggesting Government measures like the continuation of Free School Meal provision during lockdowns and holiday provision funded through the Covid Winter Grant Scheme have helped prevent a deterioration this winter. In January 2021, 10% of households with children reported food insecurity that month; and in the last 6 months, 12% of households with children (equivalent to 2.3 million children and 1.3 million adults living with them) have experienced food insecurity.



How our data compares to other findings

Other surveys have found higher estimates of food insecurity in households with children. In June, Feeding Britain found 1 in 4 adults looking after children had eaten less during the pandemic in order to be able to feed the children in their households⁷. Similarly, a survey by the Social Market Foundation²¹ reported 1 in 4 children (3 million) had faced some form of food deprivation in the first 6 months of the pandemic. Their survey indicated 14% (1.7 million) were classified as facing very low food security.

FIGURE 7 Percentage of households with children experiencing food insecurity (1-month recall period) compared with households without children.



» **Despite food insecurity in households with children improving since the start of the pandemic, 1.5 million children (aged 8-17) report experiencing food insecurity.**

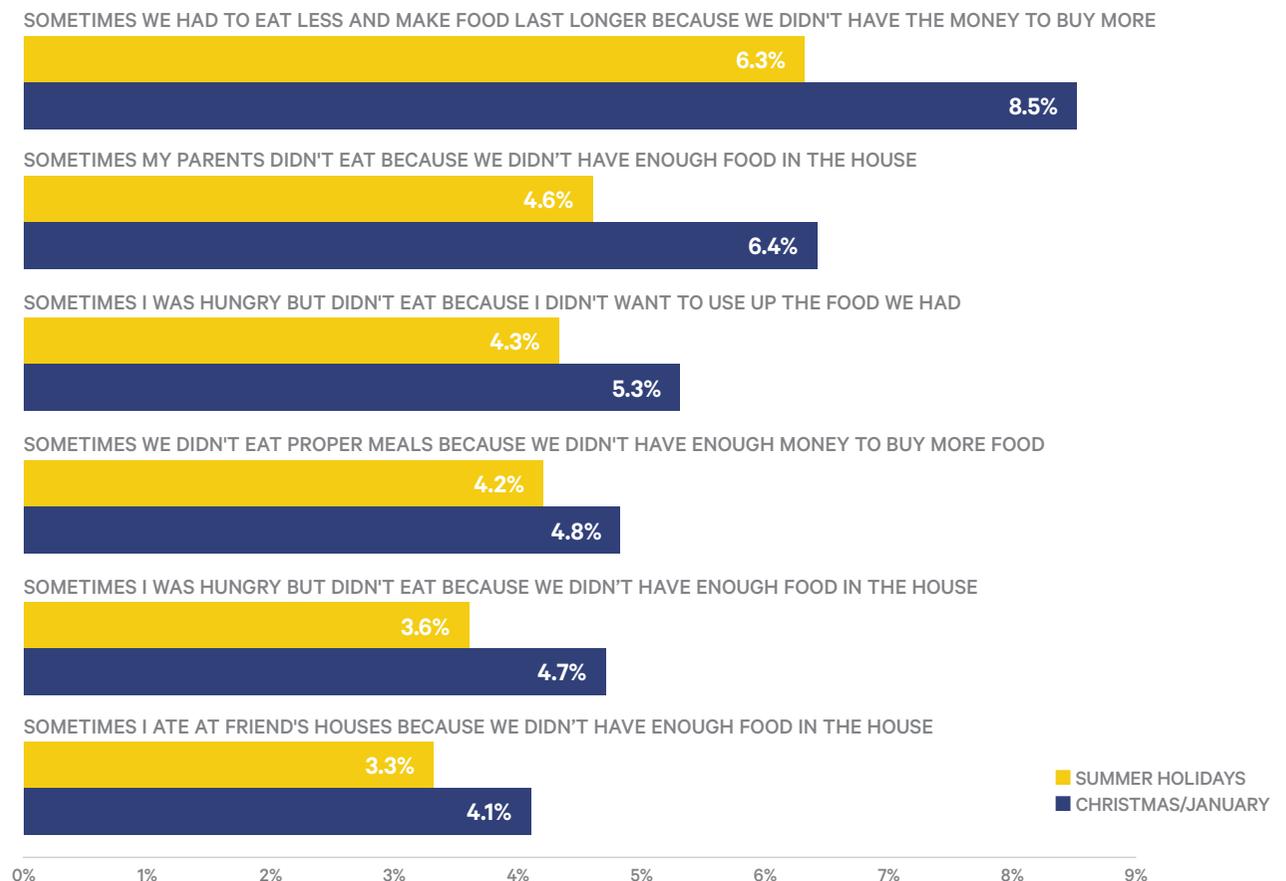
We also surveyed children directly to find out about their experiences of food insecurity. We found 1.4 million children aged 8-17 years (18%) faced some form of food insecurity (mild, moderate or severe) over the summer holidays. While vital measures like the Furlough Scheme and Free School Meal (FSM) substitutes may have prevented the situation from deteriorating, many children are still in a precarious situation when it comes to securing a healthy diet.

Over Christmas 2020 and January 2021, there has been a slight increase to 1.5 million children aged 8-17 (20%) reporting experiences of food insecurity. This includes an estimated 650,000 children who had to eat less and make food last longer because their families didn't have money to buy more.

Unfortunately, low-income families with children on FSM are suffering the effects of food insecurity more severely. In the past 6 months (August 2020 to January 2021), 41% of households with children registered for FSM reported food insecurity.

Food insecurity prevalence in households with children is also higher among households with a lone parent or with more than 3 children in the household. In May, households with a lone parent were twice as likely to be food insecure (31%) compared with couple households (15%). Among households with 3 or more children, food insecurity is estimated to have risen from 12.0% pre-Covid to 16.2% (6-month recall period between March and August 2020, after adjusting for sociodemographic risk factors).

FIGURE 8 Percentage of children aged 8-17 years old reporting experiences of food insecurity. Answering yes to one or more of the questions classifies a child as experiencing mild/moderate/severe food insecurity.





What help has been available: Free School Meal Provision during Covid

During a normal school day, disadvantaged children could rely on a free hot school meal for vital sustenance. But during school closures, many eligible children have missed out on this meal due to problems with provision. At the start of the first lockdown, UK Government guidance on Free School Meals (FSM) was for eligible children to receive prepared meals, food parcels (for collection or delivery) or supermarket vouchers from schools during the school closures. In the first few days of these school closures, more than half (54%) of parents with children aged 8-16 eligible for FSM reported they had not received a substitute. The national voucher scheme was rolled out across England on 31 March 2020 following issues regarding the nutritional quality of parcels provided to children on FSM. The parcels also didn't take into consideration those with no storage or cooking facilities, or dietary and cultural requirements.

The voucher scheme was also highly criticised for inefficiencies. The rapid set-up of the scheme and inherent administrative challenges saw vouchers rejected in supermarkets, delays in families receiving vouchers and problems with downloading vouchers as identified in a Government review of the scheme²². The vouchers were also redeemable in a limited number of supermarket chains, meaning some families would have to travel to qualifying shops, and many areas of high deprivation were not served by the supermarkets involved in the scheme. By May, only 68% of households with eligible children reported receiving some form of

FSM substitute. Provision varied across the four nations: in Northern Ireland, direct financial payments were mostly given, and in Wales and Scotland provision was devolved to local authorities.

Only 57% of parents of 8-16-year-olds eligible for FSM reported receiving provision over the Easter holidays despite a Government U-turn saying they would be provided. This improved over the summer holidays but still 31% of parents of children on FSM across the UK reported not receiving any form of help.

By January 2021, 72% of households with children not in school and registered for FSM were receiving a substitute in some form: 87% of whom reported receiving vouchers, 8% had collected food parcels, 10% could have collected food parcels but didn't want to do this and 18% had received payment substitutes. (More than one answer could have been selected if they had received a mixture of provision in January).

WHO HAS BECOME NEWLY ELIGIBLE FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS AND WHO STILL MISSES OUT?

The deepening of the impact of the crisis on families is illustrated by a reported surge in children newly qualifying for FSM as many families lost income. In September, 29% of children (an estimated 2.2 million) aged 8-17 reported to be registered for FSM. Of these children, 42% (approximately 900,000) reported being newly eligible that term. In January 2021, there was a slight increase to 32% reporting their children to be on FSM, equivalent to 2.5 million 8-17-year-olds. Official Government figures on the number of newly eligible children on FSM are yet to be released by all four UK nations.

Despite the rise in registrations, many families remain unable to claim FSM due to the low eligibility threshold, leaving children to miss out and worry about their next meal. In the summer,

Continues over >>



How our data compares to other findings

Similar to our findings, an academic study found that, in the first month of the first lockdown, 49% of eligible children did not receive any FSM provision²³. Edenred, the voucher suppliers in England, reported that 17,500 schools had made orders for FSM vouchers as of 3 June (81% of schools in England excluding independent schools). They also reported over £129 million worth of vouchers codes were redeemed as supermarket eGift cards by schools and families in the first 9 weeks that the voucher scheme was in operation. This equates to about 956,000 children receiving a voucher every week out of the 1.4 million in England who were registered (as of January 2020).

FOOD INSECURITY IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN

Continued >>

8% of 8–17-year-olds (approximately 600,000 children) said they were worried about not having enough food for lunch at school during the upcoming autumn term. Research from the Child Poverty Action Group has shown that, even before the pandemic, 2 in 5 school-aged children living in poverty were not eligible for FSM²⁴. In a survey by the Social Market Foundation²¹, 60% of children classified as having very low food security did not report receiving FSM, also demonstrating a need to increase the eligibility in order to combat child food insecurity.

In January 2021, 17% of children who don't receive FSM said they would like to be able to have them. When we asked parents, 11% of households with 8–16-year-olds said they would like their children to receive them. Of these, 36% had experienced food insecurity in the past 6 months (compared with 5% of those who said their children don't need FSM).

The future of holiday provision for disadvantaged children

In November, the Government announced that the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme would be made available to all children in England on Free School Meals during the school holidays from Easter 2021. The effective roll-out of this policy is now crucial to ensure all disadvantaged children receive a healthy meal during the holidays, as well as enriching activities that benefit their learning and wellbeing. The commitment from Government is, so far, for one year, even though the economic and social impacts of the pandemic are likely to continue to be felt by families and children until well beyond 2021.

Children commonly reported they were worried about their family's financial situation and that they did not have enough money for food.

Our January survey asked children to describe three things that they were worried about currently and three things that made them feel happy. Responses offered a candid insight into what was on children's minds during the January 2021 Covid-19 lockdown.

Though the most prominent worry was about catching Covid (with children of all ages fearful about those they loved becoming ill or dying from Covid) children also commonly reported concerns over financial security. Parents' jobs and household incomes weighed heavily on many children's minds. Some children were particularly worried about their family not having enough money to buy food. With this, children told us that they were worried about: "going hungry", "mum's job and she only eats a little" and "worried about not having enough food in the house".

A few children also spoke about getting vouchers or support: "nothing [worries me] now mum is receiving those school meal vouchers because she tends not to eat so she has enough for me otherwise."

And, though many children told us that spending more time with their family and pets (and friends online) made them happy, some children said that "having enough food", "having free vouchers from school" or "universal credit 20 more" were what made them most happy.

The End Child Food Poverty campaign

The 23-year-old footballer Marcus Rashford has played a pivotal role in raising national awareness about child food insecurity in the UK. After a successful campaign for food vouchers to be extended to FSM children over the summer holidays, in September 2020 he summoned retailers and businesses to form the End Child Food Poverty Task Force. In line with the recommendations made by Henry Dimbleby in Part 1 of the National Food Strategy, the Task Force and a plethora of civil society organisations called for three key policy commitments on children's food programmes. The Government has so far delivered on two aspects (extending holiday provision in 2021 and increasing the value of Healthy Start vouchers for low-income young families). The third ask, however, remains outstanding: the permanent expansion of Free School Meals and Healthy Start to all children from households where a parent or guardian is in receipt of Universal Credit or equivalent benefits.

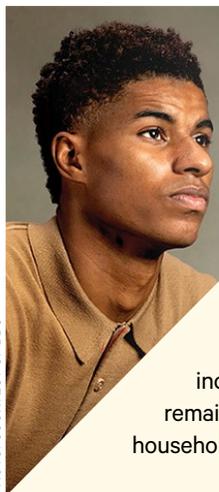


PHOTO: COURTESY OF BBC

GROUPS WITH HIGHER LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY

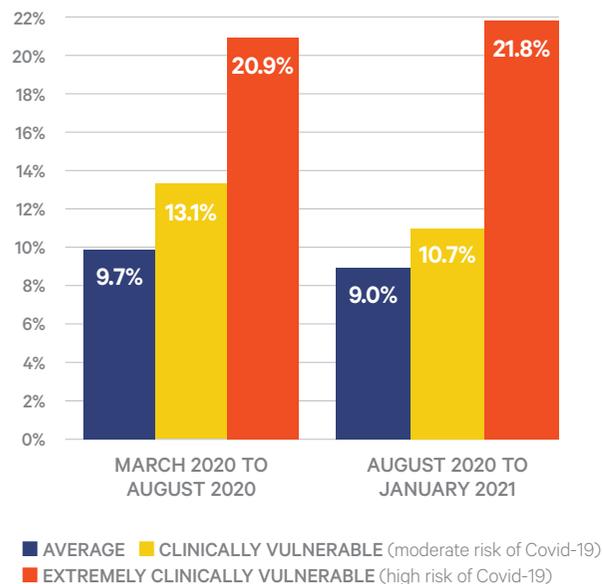
In addition to households with children, our surveys have revealed other groups of the population who are more vulnerable to food insecurity than others, and in many cases these groups have not been sufficiently reached by interventions and food aid. Some of these groups were at increased vulnerability to food insecurity before the pandemic, and in some cases these inequalities have significantly widened. Other groups have become newly vulnerable because of the adverse social and financial circumstances created by the pandemic.

Extremely clinically vulnerable people are more than twice as likely to be food insecure than average.

At the start of the pandemic, Government identified people who were medically vulnerable to Covid: people aged over 70, pregnant or usually invited for a flu jab were classified as “clinically vulnerable” and people with severe medical conditions that compromised their immunity were classified as “extremely clinically vulnerable”. This latter group of 1.5 million people were initially advised to shield for 12 weeks. Unable to leave their home, people who were shielding were dependent on food deliveries from either supermarkets or friends/family/

neighbours. In the first 6 months of the pandemic, they were more than twice as likely to be food insecure as the average population with 20.9% reporting food insecurity (compared to 9.7% average), and this has not improved in the last 6 months.

FIGURE 9 Percentage of adults experiencing food insecurity (6-month recall period) by clinical vulnerability status (high or moderate risk compared with average).



How our data compares to other findings

Similarly, a survey by *Which?* at the beginning of June found 29% of extremely clinically vulnerable people had had trouble getting essential groceries, and 14% were having to endanger their health by visiting shops themselves in order to buy food²⁵.

Physical access issues were not the only reasons why people who were shielding had higher levels of food insecurity. Citizens Advice reported that of the 2,000 people who had contacted them for help, 70% of those shielding had not been furloughed and over a quarter of them had experienced a 60% drop in income since the pandemic began²⁶. Therefore, the economic impact of having to shield has likely also been a driver of food insecurity for this group.



What help was available?

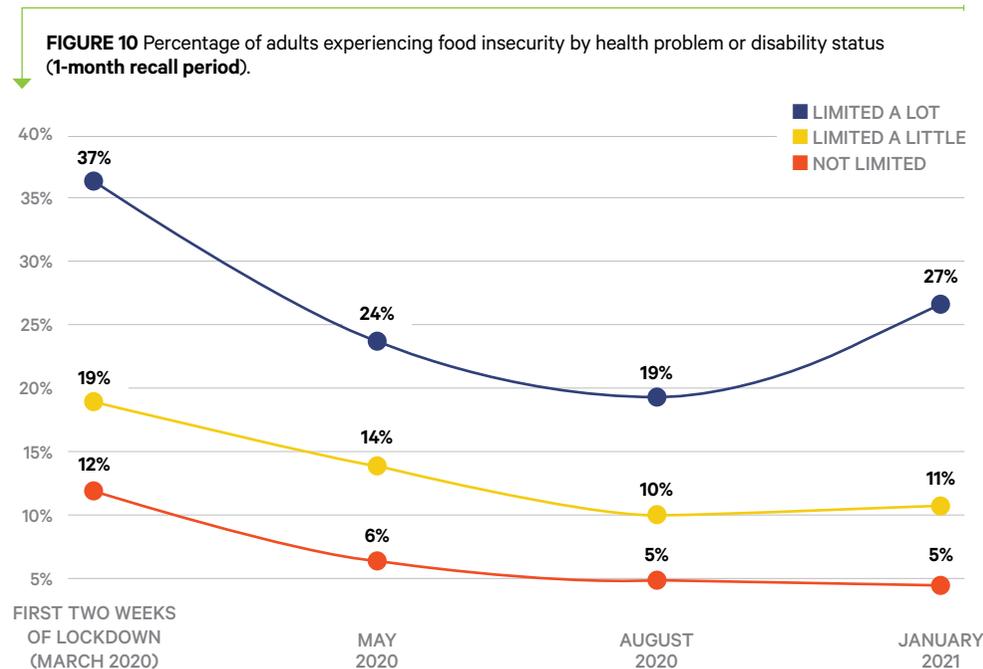
The increased risk of food insecurity amongst the extremely clinically vulnerable seen in the first 6 months of the pandemic was despite the Government offering support in the form of food parcel deliveries and priority slots for supermarket deliveries. Initially, supermarkets reported that they were struggling to identify vulnerable customers in order to prioritise them²⁷. According to *Which?*, shielding people were still struggling to book delivery slots even though supermarkets greatly increased their delivery capacity and were unable to find the help they needed locally 6 weeks into the first lockdown²⁸. The Government's food parcel scheme was fraught with issues which may have caused poor uptake. The nutritional quality of the food parcels was heavily criticised for lack of cultural appropriateness or adhering to dietary requirements. The scheme was stopped in July as restrictions were lifted.

Despite research showing that people having to shield had high levels of food insecurity, Government did not reinstate the food parcel scheme in England nor offer additional support specifically to this vulnerable group during local lockdowns or the second national lockdown in November. The Covid Winter Grant Scheme was available to Local Authorities in England to support these vulnerable people over the winter period. Different schemes and provision were offered by each of the devolved nations.

GROUPS WITH HIGHER LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY

Pre-existing inequalities experienced by people with health problems and disabilities have widened: people who are limited a lot are now five times more likely to be food insecure.

At the start of the pandemic, adults identifying as being limited a lot by health problems or a disability were three times more likely to be food insecure than those without. These inequalities have increased even further and, in January, they were five times higher.



“The food parcels have helped me out so much. I’m a lone parent and I’ve got a terminally ill husband. Things that I couldn’t afford especially fruits and veg are priceless for him.”

DONNA, LEWISHAM



What help was available?

Many people who have health problems or disabilities did not qualify for the Government Food Parcel Scheme. The newspaper *The Guardian*²⁹ reported that, due to the very strict criteria, many disabled people not eligible for the food parcels went without food. The charity Wellchild also reported 100,000 children with serious medical conditions didn’t meet the criteria²⁹. Similarly, in May, the charity Scope, found almost half of disabled adults who they surveyed had problems getting essential items and 38% were unable to book a supermarket delivery slot in the last 3 weeks²⁸.

GROUPS WITH HIGHER LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY

Isolation increases levels of food insecurity.

Unsurprisingly, having to self-isolate (i.e. staying indoors and completely avoiding contact with other people to avoid contracting or spreading Covid) has also increased the number of people being unable to afford and access food.

Food insecurity levels among people who were isolating for 12 weeks (as was advised to the clinically extremely vulnerable) improved between the first 2 weeks of the pandemic to May. This may be due to the increased availability of supermarket

delivery slots and increased help provided by councils and the voluntary sector. Unfortunately, food insecurity among those isolating still now remains high, in line with our findings on extremely clinically vulnerable people.



What help has been available?

Self-isolation support payments in England were set up so that people could apply for a £500 support payment if they were advised to self-isolate. However, 70% of applications on average had been rejected as of the first week of January, with wide variation across different councils resulting in a postcode lottery³⁰.

BAME adults are twice as likely to experience food insecurity compared to White British adults.

BAME groups have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, being more likely to be exposed to the virus due to longstanding inequalities and more likely to die from it³¹. They have also been consistently twice as likely to be food insecure as White British people. In January, 20% of BAME households had experienced food insecurity in the past 6 months compared with 9% of White British households.

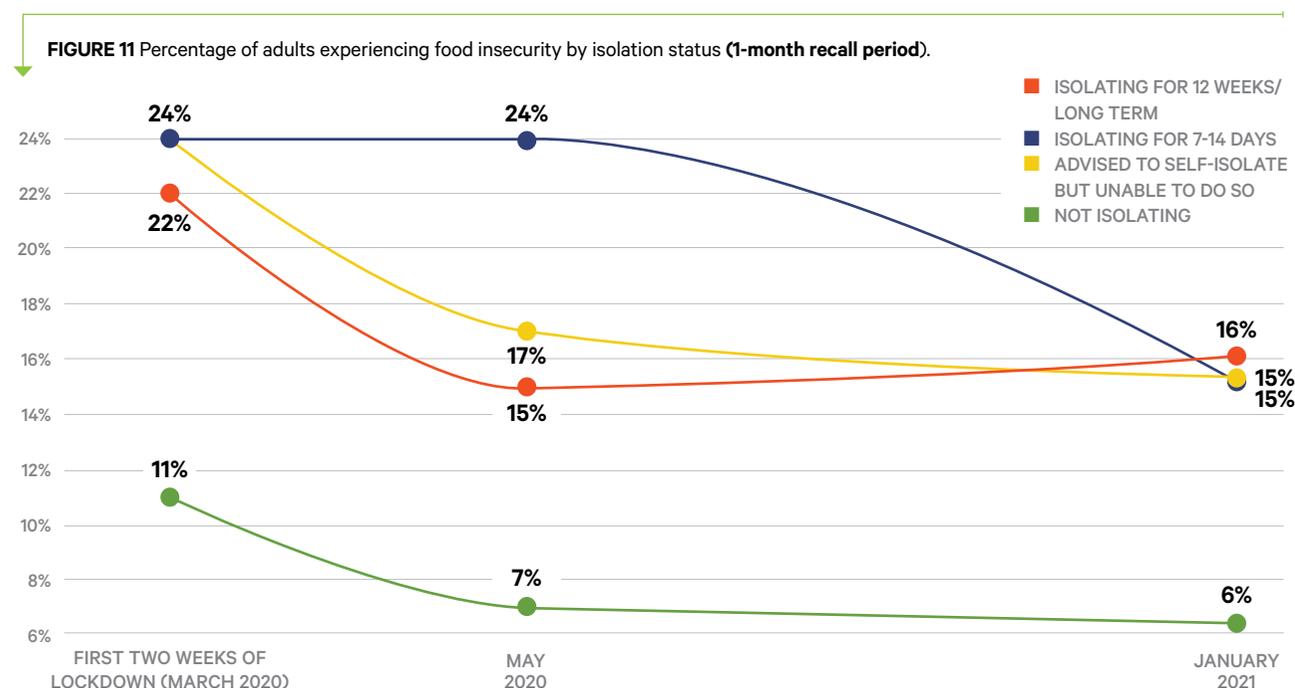
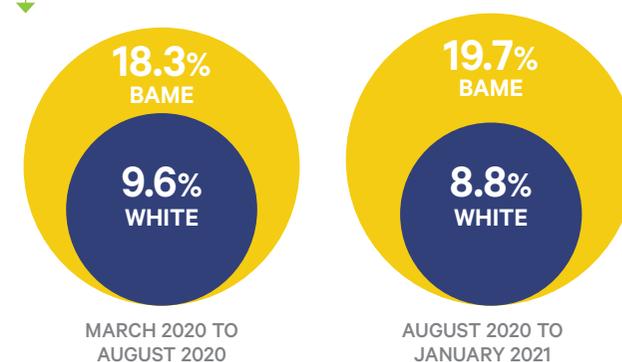


FIGURE 12 Percentage of adults experiencing food insecurity by ethnic group (6-month recall period).



HELP FOR FOOD INSECURE HOUSEHOLDS

» **Large numbers of food insecure people remain unable to find help and this has not improved since last summer.**

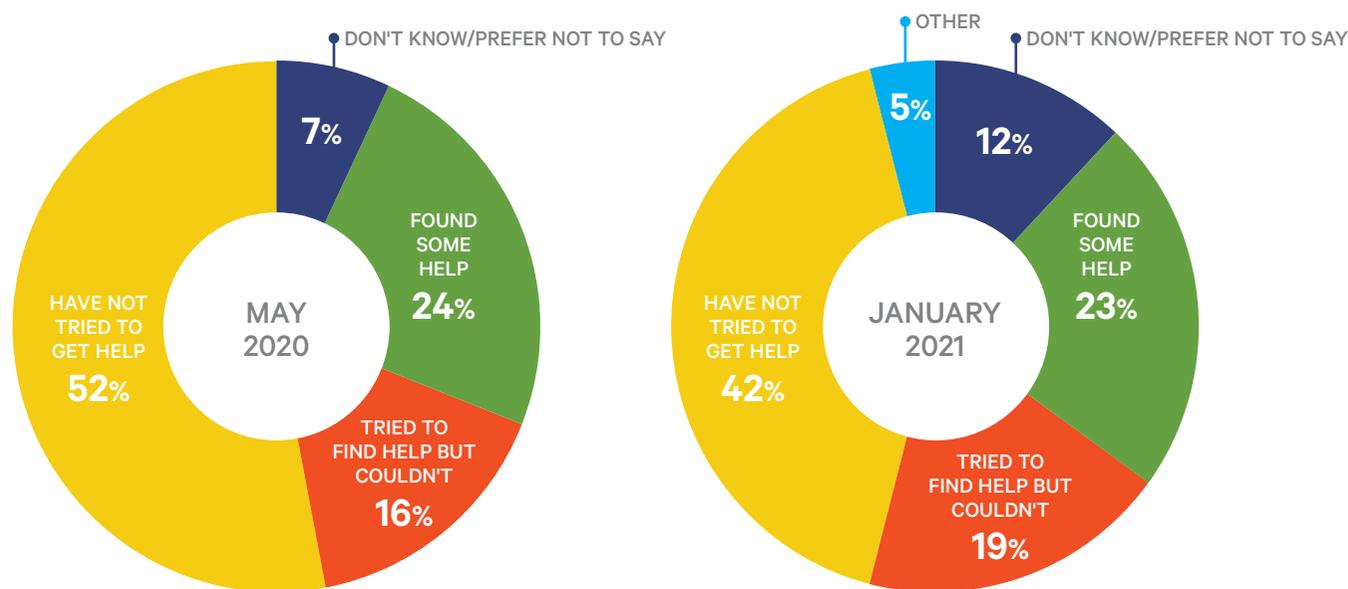
“When we started there was a system in Brighton and Hove – a central referral system via the council. Within that system, there weren’t many people from BAME communities. It came to my attention that many people were scared, especially those having issues with the Home Office, of contacting the council. They think, when I go there, I’ll be in trouble.

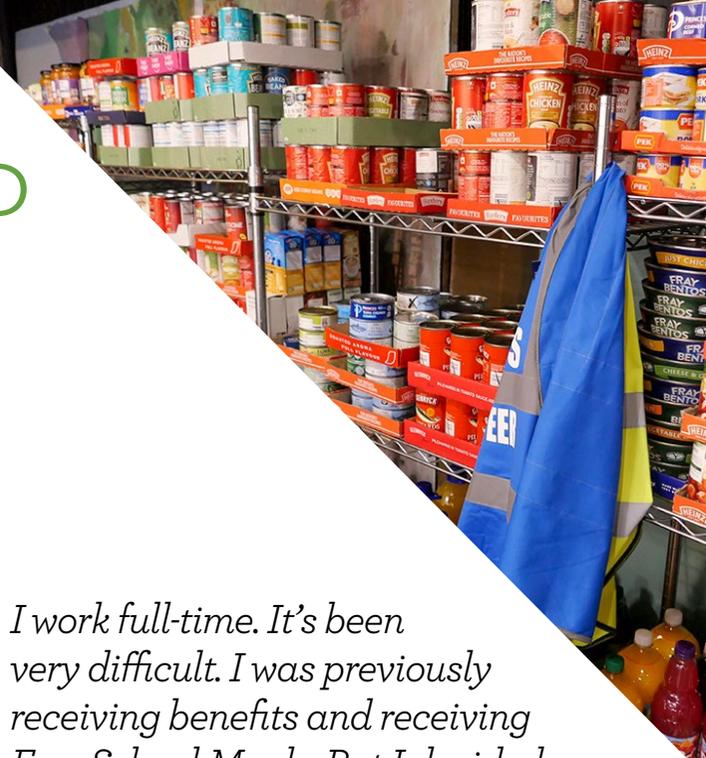
JULIET SEKITOLEKO, PROJECT MANAGER, BRIGHTON’S BLACK & MINORITY ETHNIC COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP (BMECP)

Our figures on food insecurity show the scale of the challenge in delivering food aid during the pandemic. Government, councils, voluntary organisations and individuals have all provided help to food insecure people, and there are countless examples of fantastic work that has been done to help support our most vulnerable in society. However, our surveying has uncovered that there are large numbers of people who have not been reached and have continued to struggle on their own.

Only 23% of people who were experiencing food insecurity in the past month (January 2021) managed to find help. This is approximately the same proportion who managed to find help in May. Proportionately fewer people reported that they had not tried to get help (42% compared with 52% last May), but an increased proportion were unable to find help despite trying (19%). Stigma has been widely reported as a reason why people don’t reach out for help.

FIGURE 13 How food insecure households have experienced getting help (“Other” not an option asked in May 2020).





HOW HAVE HOUSEHOLDS OBTAINED FOOD DURING THE PANDEMIC?

» Large numbers of people have had to rely on friends and family to help them get food, far more than those who have been supported by government or charitable food parcels.

FOOD BANK USAGE

Our YouGov surveys have indicated very low numbers of people (less than 2%) using food banks but this is contradictory to other reports. This may be because we are less able to capture those who use food banks through our surveys and they are not adequately represented, suggesting food insecurity may be even higher than reported in our surveys.

When we surveyed children, 13% (almost 1 million) of children aged 8-17 years reported they or their family had visited a food bank to get food over Christmas/January. This was even higher than the summer holidays when 11% had. The proportion of children on Free School Meals who said they or their families had visited a food bank over Christmas/January (32%) was 10 times higher than those not on Free School Meals (3%).

“My husband was made redundant last March and we had no choice but to claim Universal Credit. When you claim, you have to wait about six weeks for your first payment, so we had no option but to turn to the food bank. I felt very ashamed.

MIKAYLA, OXFORDSHIRE



How our data compares to other findings

Another survey found 4.3% of people were relying on food banks or food aid in June⁵. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) found even higher figures with 7-10% of people reporting using food banks between May and July. Reasons given for foodbank use in July were primarily due to economic hardship, with 25% reporting losing jobs, 27% reporting delays in benefits and 20% saying it was simply due to not having enough money⁶. The Trussell Trust, the UK's biggest foodbank network representing 1,200 food banks, reported giving out 50,000 food parcels in just one week at the start of the pandemic, double the usual amount. A similar picture emerges from the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN), whose food banks recorded a 59% rise in use for emergency food support between February and March³².

“I work full-time. It's been very difficult. I was previously receiving benefits and receiving Free School Meals. But I decided to go full-time and be a role model for my children. My monthly salary just about pays off all my bills and just a bit more for food. We try and get the basics that will carry us over to next month to get the things we need and cover us. The last 4 or 5 months when the kids were off school, I had to rely on food banks and donations to get through. Without that, I wouldn't have put food on the table.

MARNI, SINGLE MUM OF 4 GIRLS BETWEEN 6-16.

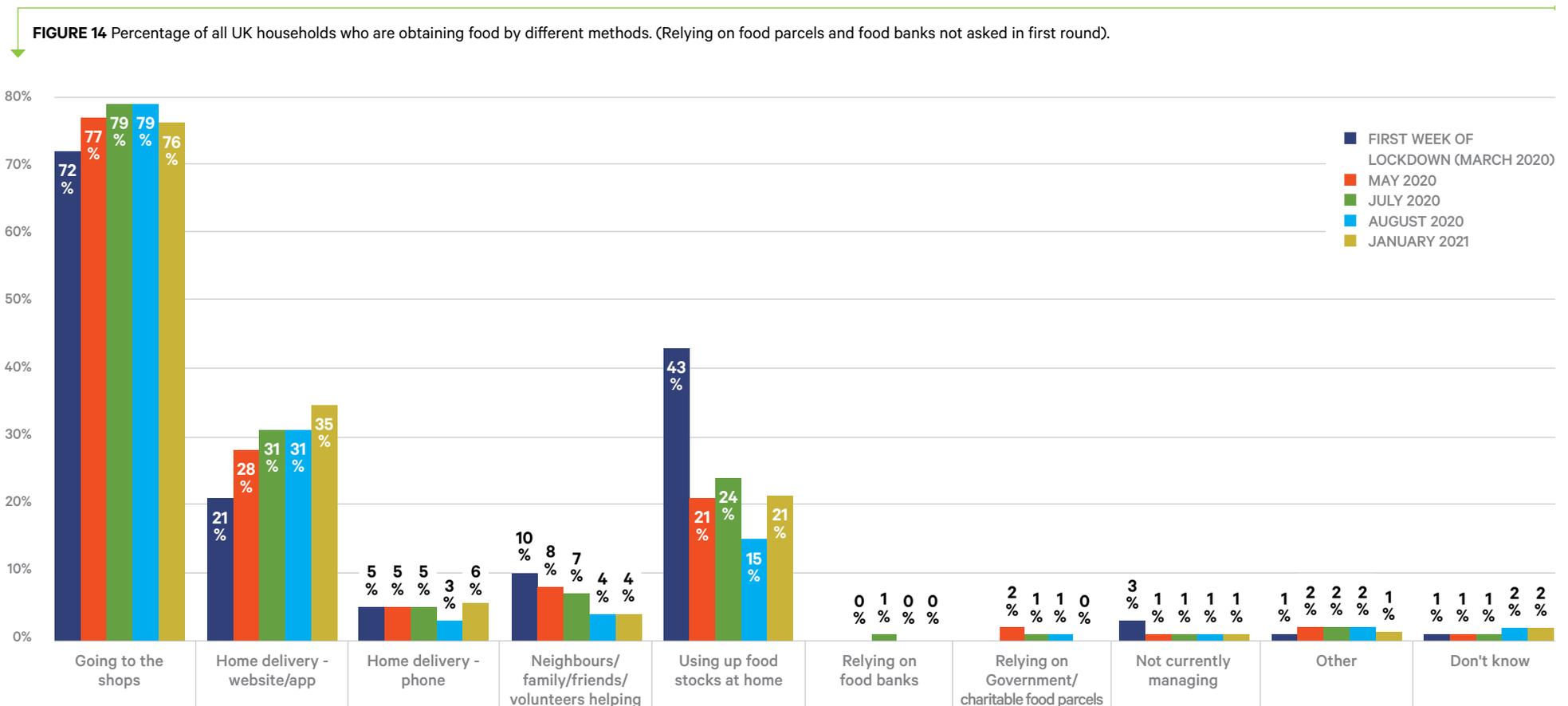
GROUPS AT HIGH RISK OF FOOD INSECURITY

GOVERNMENT PARCELS

At the height of the Government shielding parcel scheme, only 2% of the population (880,000 adults) were receiving them, while 4.4 million adults (8%) were having to rely on neighbours, family, friends and volunteers to help them get food. In May, of those who were self-isolating for 12 weeks (as was advised to the extremely clinically vulnerable at the start of the pandemic), 27% were relying on people around them and only 7% were being supported by Government or charity parcels. Government reported that by the end of May, 2 million boxes had been delivered to people in England, but it is not clear how many people this scheme supported.

NOT MANAGING TO OBTAIN FOOD

In the first week of the pandemic, 3% of UK households reported that they were not managing to obtain food. In January 2021, this had decreased to 1% (740,000 adults), showing there remains a key part of the population who are struggling without the help of emergency aid.



CONCLUSION AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



Our most recent surveys provide further evidence that the pandemic has had a devastating impact on the UK's most vulnerable populations, and the problem of household food insecurity is far from resolved. It is well-established that malnutrition and obesity increase the risks of Covid-19, and child hunger is an important determinant of health. Tackling food insecurity must be a priority for Government to ensure the long-term health and resilience of the nation. This is not political – it is a moral imperative – no one should be going hungry in a developed country in 2021. Our three key recommendations are not intended to be a full recovery package but an important starting point on the road to improving diets and food insecurity long-term.

1 REVIEW FREE SCHOOL MEALS

This report has illustrated the shocking impact that Covid has had on children's access to an adequate diet, particularly for the most disadvantaged. Ensuring that all disadvantaged children have access to enough good quality food to fulfil their potential should now be a priority for our Government. There have been repeated shortcomings in the provision of Free School Meals over the last 10 months but, even if these could have been avoided, many children are not eligible but experience food insecurity.

Now is the time for an urgent comprehensive review of Free School Meal policy. Vulnerable children should not bear the brunt of last-minute policy decisions, but should be at the centre of a systematic and comprehensive recovery plan. Child food poverty is a long-term problem that requires a considered long-term solution. Making sure we get Free School Meals right is a vital part of this. The review should be debated in Parliament, and should involve consultation with children, families and key players involved in school food.

ITS SCOPE SHOULD INCLUDE:

- **Reviewing the current eligibility thresholds for Free School Meals across all four nations to ensure no disadvantaged child is excluded.**
- **How funding for Free School Meals can deliver the biggest nutritional and educational impact,**

supporting children's learning and well-being throughout the school day and during the school holidays.

- **How schools can be supported to deliver the best quality school meals which adhere to school food standards and which ensure the poorest children receive the best possible offer.**

2 MAKE THE £20 UNIVERSAL CREDIT UPLIFT PERMANENT AND PAY AT LEAST THE REAL LIVING WAGE TO ALL WORKERS

Our surveys have shown that levels of food insecurity are largely driven by insufficient financial resources, and therefore measures to increase income and strengthen social security so everyone can afford an adequate diet are essential. Our surveys reveal worrying levels of food insecurity among food sector workers who have helped feed the nation during the pandemic. A commitment to paying the Real Living Wage should be a minimum requirement for businesses, led by those who have done well during the pandemic.

Many people have found themselves relying on benefits due to the pandemic who previously wouldn't have expected to be in this situation. Our evidence has shown that people on Universal Credit have been highly

Continues over >>

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affected by food insecurity. Research has shown that the £20 uplift to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit which was introduced at the start of the first national lockdown in March 2020 is a crucial lifeline to struggling families. Government should make the uplift permanent and extend to legacy benefits. To further support families, the benefit cap and two-child limit need to be removed. In the longer term, the cost of a healthy diet should be taken into account when setting benefits levels to ensure everyone is able to afford the Government's own recommended Eatwell Guide diet.

3 LEADERSHIP AND ACTION TO SOLVE FOOD INSECURITY

There is an urgent need for Government to develop comprehensive policies that ensure everyone in the UK has access to sufficient, healthy food both during the pandemic and beyond. The substantial investment that we have seen in emergency aid during the pandemic has provided vital support but not been sufficient to protect everyone from hunger and food insecurity. We must move away from short-term solutions and emergency food aid, recognise that poverty is at the heart of the problem, and prioritise policies that will address the underlying causes. Food banks are not a solution that protects dignity – people should have the resources and be empowered to buy what they need for a healthy diet.

To achieve this, there is a need for comprehensive monitoring and tracking of the problem. There have been several important building blocks put in place already: the Agriculture Bill that has recently passed places a duty on Parliament to report on UK food security including household expenditure on food; the Food Standards Agency have been collecting data on food insecurity throughout the pandemic; and the Department of Work and Pensions have incorporated household food insecurity measurement into their Family Resources Survey, with the first findings expected in April 2021. In addition, Local Authorities have played a leading role in strengthening charitable food provision for the vulnerable during the crisis and many now have a good understanding of levels of need in their area. However, currently no single authority in Government has designated oversight on food insecurity or responsibility to tackle it. Moreover, although Government is leading the charge to tackle the obesity crisis in the UK, its recently updated obesity strategy makes no mention of food insecurity or the link between food security and eating well.

As we move out of crisis mode, we need a designated authority in Government who has oversight of this data, with powers to inform and initiate action at the national and local authority level in response to the data. This

mandated authority needs to commit to eradicating household food insecurity in the UK, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger by 2030. In line with a wider agenda emerging on the Right to Food, policies need to be developed by involving the people directly affected by experiences of food insecurity to ensure effective solutions are reached.



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APPENDIX 1: MEASURING FOOD INSECURITY

Round	Surveyer	Dates conducted	Sample Size	Participants	Country
1	YouGov	25th-26th March 2020	2070	Adults (18+)	Great Britain
2	YouGov	7th-9th April 2020	4343	Adults (18+)	Great Britain
3	YouGov	24th-29th April 2020	2284	Adults in households with children	United Kingdom
4	YouGov	14th-17th May 2020	4352	Adults (18+)	United Kingdom
5	YouGov	6th-8th July 2020	4350	Adults (18+)	United Kingdom
6a	Childwise	8th-20th September 2020	1064	Children aged 7-17 (Year 2+)	United Kingdom
6b	YouGov	24th August-1st September 2020	10,845	Adults (18+)	United Kingdom
7a	Childwise	22nd Jan-2nd Feb	1308	Children aged 7-17 (Year 2+)	United Kingdom
7b	YouGov	29th Jan-2nd Feb	4231	Adults (18+)	United Kingdom

Since the start of the pandemic, we have conducted 7 nationally representative YouGov surveys to assess food insecurity levels. We conducted separate surveys directly with children and their parents in August 2020 and January 2021 with Childwise Ltd.

To measure food insecurity during the pandemic, in all of our YouGov surveys we consistently ask a set of three standardised questions from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Adult Food Security Survey Module 20. This 10-item scale is used to measure food insecurity amongst adults in the Food Standards Agency's Food and

You Survey (England, Wales, and Northern Ireland). We adapted the three following questions to capture moderate and severe experiences of food insecurity:

- Did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
- Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?
- Did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?

Normally when measuring food insecurity, only issues of economic access are specified as driving experiences of food insecurity, but the Covid-19 crisis raised other concerns about food access, namely those arising from people being unable to go out to purchase food, and especially in early lockdown, concerns about the reduced availability of food in shops. To account for this experience, we adapted the questions to include being unable to "get access to food". Other adaptations included specifying "not being able to afford food" rather than "not having enough money for food" and including reference to anyone else in one's household rather than just adults for all questions for the question about experiences of hunger. The phrasing "cutting size of your meals" was modified to "have smaller meals than usual" to add clarity. These modifications do not change the core construct being measured but may have captured higher levels of food insecurity than if using the usual USDA measure. We therefore used the following refined questions to define food insecurity:

- Did you/anyone else in your household have **smaller meals than usual** or skip meals because you couldn't afford or **get access to food**?
- Have you/**anyone else in your household** ever been hungry but not eaten because you couldn't **afford or get access to food**?
- Have you/ **anyone else in your household** not eaten for a whole day because you **couldn't afford or get access to food**?

Each of these questions was asked in reference to a different time period over the survey waves. In the last two household surveys we conducted, we referred to both the past month at the time of answering the questionnaire (1-month recall period) and the past six months (6-month

APPENDIX 1: MEASURING FOOD INSECURITY

recall period). This is also an adaptation from the USDA scale used in the UK, which asks respondents to recall experiences over the past 12 months. If a respondent gave an affirmative response to any of the above questions, they were classed as moderately or severely food insecure.

To measure child food insecurity, we also asked questions used by the USDA. They were:

In the past [recall period] which of the following statements apply to you:

We have relied on a few kinds of low-cost food to feed the child(ren) because we have run out of food and been unable to get more

- The child(ren) have not had balanced meals because we have run out of food and have been unable to get more
- The child(ren) have not eaten enough because we have run out of food and been unable to get more
- The child(ren) have skipped meals because we have run out of food and have been unable to get more.

If a respondent gave an affirmative response to any of the above questions, the child(ren) were classified as food insecure.

When asking children directly about their experiences of food insecurity, we asked the following questions:

Which of the following sentences describes your situation? (select all that apply)

- a. I always had enough food to eat
- b. Sometimes I was hungry but didn't eat because I didn't want to use up the food we had
- c. Sometimes I was hungry but didn't eat because we didn't have enough food in the house
- d. Sometimes my parents didn't eat because we didn't have enough food in the house
- e. Sometimes we had to eat less and make food last longer because we didn't have the money to buy more
- f. Sometimes we didn't eat proper meals because we didn't have enough money to buy more food
- g. Sometimes I ate at friend's houses because we didn't have enough food in the house

This question capture mild, moderate and severe experiences of food insecurity.

APPENDIX 2:

METHODS EXPLANATION

Deriving population estimates from YouGov surveys

YouGov survey respondents are drawn from a large pool of potential respondents. Active Sampling ensures that the right people are invited in the right proportions. In combination with statistical weighting, this ensures that results are representative of the country as a whole. Questions are sent out with a sufficient time period for response to attract at least 2000 respondents (adults, aged 18 and above). Samples are weighted to match the adult UK population by age, gender and region, social grade and highest education level. For more details on how YouGov polling works, [see here](#).

To secure a robust sample of a population sub-group – e.g. parents/guardians living with children, multiple waves needs to be run one after the other until the desired sample size is reached. While it is theoretically possible to include more than one adult from a single household in the sample, we have been assured by YouGov that in practice this is extremely rare.

In order to derive population estimates from data on percentage of respondents, the correct population figures must be used as denominators.

For adults aged 18 and over this is straight forward and we have used, up to June 2020, mid-year estimates for 2018 and after June 2020 we used mid-year estimates for 2019 as the government published these in June ([see here](#)).

For results relating to households with children, it is more complicated. The government population data on households with children distinguishes between dependent and non-dependent children ([see here](#))

"Dependent children" are:

those living with their parent(s) who are either

- *aged under 16 years, or*
- *aged 16 to 18 years*

and who are in full-time education, excluding children aged 16 to 18 years who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household.

"Non-dependent children" are:

those living with their parent(s) and who are either

- *aged 19 years or over, or*
- *aged 16 to 18 years*

and who are not in full-time education and have no spouse, partner or child living in the household

The government publishes data on:

The total population living in households with dependent children (see here Table 2)

The total number of dependent children (see here Table 4) from which can be extrapolated the total number of non-dependent children and adults living in households with dependent children:

29,822,000 (total population living with dependent children)-14,211,000 (dependent children)=15,611,000 (adults and non-dependent children living with dependent children)

Because YouGov surveys sample adults (aged 18 and over) who are living with children under age 18, it is possible that the sample will include adults who only have non-dependent children aged 16 or 17. Therefore, we examine these households from the sample before the analysis and

presentation of data on adults in households with children to determine whether they have food insecurity characteristics which are different from the whole sample and if so remove them.

In order to then derive population estimates we would do the following by way of example: if 5% of our sample report food insecurity we would take 5% of 15,611,000 and conclude that 780,550 adults living with children are affected by food insecurity.

For estimating the number of children living with adults affected by food insecurity, we total the number of children <18 years living with adults who reported food insecurity in our sample and divided this by the total number of children <18 years living in households in the entire sample to obtain a proportion. This proportion was then applied to the total national population of children aged <18 years obtained from 2019 mid-year estimates.

For estimating whether children entitled to (means-tested) Free School Meals were receiving services, we asked adult respondents if they had a child aged 8-16 years. This excluded children aged 7 and below who are, in some parts of the United Kingdom, receiving Universal Infant Free School Meals. We asked adults if their children in this age band were receiving free school meals and if so whether they had received access to other services. The resulting proportions were applied to the total number of children currently uptaking free school meals in the different UK nations (1.7 million children (Round 6 survey)). Sources for this uptake data are: Wales: Freedom of Information request 2020; Northern Ireland: School Meals in Northern Ireland 2019/2020; Scotland: School Healthy Living Survey 2019; England: School Pupil Characteristics 2020.

APPENDIX 2: METHODS EXPLANATION

Deriving population estimates from Childwise surveys

The Childwise samples are made up of children and young people aged 7-17 across the UK, sampled via an online panel of adults (including parents), using carefully constructed quotas to ensure as representative a sample as possible.

The online panel they use is the largest in the UK and globally. The panel is a member of the ESOMAR community, the primary aim of which is to increase transparency and raise awareness of key issues when considering online sampling. The panel strives to be as representative as possible, including recruiting members from the top and bottom socio-economic groups (As and Es), with members recruited by a mixture of sources (invitation only, online partnerships, online sites).

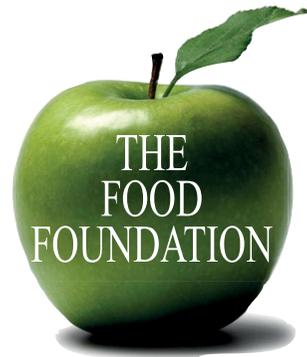
To achieve these representative quotas most efficiently, the sample approach was to utilise the panel's profiling data and target the harder demographics first, whilst releasing smaller amounts of other sample batches to trickle through. Once these were complete, sample was released to fill the other demographics. Any slight discrepancies in sample balance can be adjusted by weighting the data.

The sample was recruited to be representative by region, broad ethnic group, and spread evenly by age and gender. Childwise split the sample into three broad age bands, 7-10, 11-14, and 15-17.

It is not possible for more than one child per household to take part. The panel has many different ways of recruiting

and children are recruited via their parents, so Childwise clustering around schools is very unlikely.

In order to derive population estimates from data on percentage of respondents, we have grossed up the percentages to the population size of children aged 8-17 (7-year-olds in year 2 or equivalent were excluded from the survey as they would be on UIFSM). This has been done in the same way as for the YouGov surveys.



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