



ENDING THE NEED FOR EMERGENCY FOOD IN NORTHERN IRELAND:

ELECTION BRIEFING 2022

This election offers an important opportunity to work towards an end to charitable food aid for the people of Northern Ireland. Since the Covid-19 pandemic hit, more people than ever have experienced destitution, unable to afford the essentials, such as food and shelter, that we all need to survive.

Last year food banks in the Trussell Trust network distributed 78,827 emergency food parcels in Northern Ireland. This was a 75% increase on the previous year.

This isn't right.

However, these problems are not new. Food bank use in Northern Ireland is now 40% higher than pre-pandemic levels in 2019.

There are 41 Trussell Trust food bank centres across Northern Ireland serving people in all 18 Assembly constituencies. The Covid-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on and accelerated many of the issues that food banks and their wider communities were already facing.¹

*"We have to be proactive. What we don't want to do is just hand out food packages as and when people need them. We want to be able to help them in other ways, finding out why they're in that position and getting them back to where they need to be."*²
(NI Food Bank Project Manager)

At the Trussell Trust our vision is for a UK without the need for food banks, and we have developed an organisational strategy in partnership with food banks in our network to achieve this goal. Now is the time to build a better future for our communities, one where people are not forced to seek emergency food to get by.

Even before the pandemic hit, many communities were struggling. In particular, more people were being pushed into destitution. This means that they are unable to afford the essentials that we all need to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean³.

1 [Demand for Foyle Food Bank 'almost a horror story'](#), BBC News, 2021,
2 [Cost of living crisis sees Northern Ireland's foodbanks facing unprecedented demands](#), Belfast Telegraph, February 2022.
3 For the full definition of destitution see 'Destitution in the UK 2020', (2020), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>

OUR MANIFESTO ASKS

We're calling on all parties to commit to ending the need for emergency food and for parties to support actions to help make this happen. To end the need for food banks and support resilience within communities, we need a NI Assembly that:

- **Supports food banks to deliver on their commitment to end the need for their services.**
- **Ensures everyone can buy the food and essentials they need.**
- **Helps local services work together to ensure people get the right support at the right time.**
- **Involves people with direct experience of poverty in shaping the services they need and use.**

To end the need for emergency food, we call on all parties and candidates to:

(a) Support food banks to deliver on their commitment to end the need for their services.

Even before the pandemic hit, many communities were struggling. In particular, more people were being pushed into destitution. This means that they are unable to afford the essentials that we all need to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean.⁴

According to the National Institute of Economic and Social Research every UK region is projected to suffer upwards of a 10% increase in destitution in 2022.⁵In line with commitments made under New Decade, New Approach the NI Executive agreed to the development of a suite of social inclusion strategies: including an Anti-Poverty Strategy. Recommendations for an Anti-Poverty Strategy were produced by an expert advisory panel⁶, and a co-design group was established to advise the Department for Communities on the development and drafting of a new Anti-Poverty Strategy which is evidence-based and targeted to address objective need.⁷ It's disappointing that a strategy is yet to be approved by the Executive.

Parties should work towards an equal society where poverty and its impacts are eradicated, and that respects, protects, promotes and fulfils the rights of those at risk of poverty to ensure they achieve their aspirations.

The Trussell Trust is calling for delivery of a budgeted Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland by April 2023.

(b) Ensure everyone can buy the food and essentials they need.

It is not right that anyone is unable to afford to heat their homes or put food on the table. People are forced to charities for emergency food when there isn't enough money for the essentials. The vast majority (95%) of people that need support from a food bank in the Trussell Trust's UK wide network are destitute, meaning that they cannot afford at least two of the basic essentials that we all need to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean.⁸ Provision of food will only help someone to meet one of these immediate needs and it will not address the underlying issue that the person in hardship still does not have an adequate income. Effective solutions to destitution should avoid sticking plasters and ensure people have a sufficient level of income to meet the cost of life's essentials.

4 For the full definition of destitution see 'Destitution in the UK 2020', (2020), Joseph Rowntree Foundation

5 National Institute UK Economic Outlook – Powering Down, Not Levelling Up, Winter 2022

6 [Report from the Anti-Poverty Strategy Expert Panel](#), March 2021.

7 [Anti-Poverty Strategy co-design group – Terms of Reference](#), 2002.

8 [The State of Hunger report](#), The Trussell Trust, 2020.

When people in financial crisis can't afford the essentials they should be able to access immediate support. While legislation has been passed to close the loopholes in the bedroom tax and benefit cap mitigations, with the loss of the extra £20 a week in Universal Credit, the end of the furlough scheme and the increase in energy prices, the need for social security mitigations to go towards keeping people out of poverty remains more important as ever.

Parties can play an important role in using existing social security powers to increase incomes and move away from a focus on short-term solutions. Solutions which are focused on raising incomes and reducing costs are always preferable to solutions involving the provision of food, as they ensure dignity by allowing people to make their own choices. Cash-based approaches support are preferred by families with low-incomes because of their flexibility, dignity, safety and convenience.

The Trussell Trust is calling for:

Implementation of all recommendations from the Discretionary Support⁹ and Welfare Mitigations reviews¹⁰ commissioned by the Department for Communities by April 2023.

Introduction of a £20 Child Payment for children in families eligible for means tested benefits¹¹ by April 2023.

Continued support for immediate removal of the two-child limit from the social security system¹².

Continued support for reinstatement of the £20 Universal Credit uplift¹³ and ensuring benefits keep pace with rising living costs by increasing benefits by the forecast rate of at least 7%.¹⁴

Urgent action to address the rising cost of living through minimising the impact of rising energy prices¹⁵ for people on the lowest incomes.

(c) Local services are supported to ensure people get the right support at the right time.

Ensuring funding for effective and integrated support services is vital because households with low-incomes face significant barriers when they try and access support. Over four in ten (45%) people referred to a food bank in the summer of 2020 said that a lack of support from family, friends or local organisations was directly related to their need to use a food bank.¹⁶

This is why the Trussell Trust and Advice NI are working in partnership to operate a helpline service to support people to maximise their income and navigate the benefit system so people can buy food and other essentials for themselves, without the need for a food parcel.

It is also important that people are aware of the different services available and how to access them. Parties should show leadership to ensure that local support is adequately resourced and offered in a consistent and co-ordinated way where income is maximised to prevent people from falling through the gaps so that a food bank is a last resort. We need a “no wrong door” approach, enabling people to access the support they need in one place rather than being passed from one agency to the next.

9 <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/discretionarysupportreview>, January 2022.

10 <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/review-welfare-mitigation-schemes>, February 2022.

11 Ibid.

12 [Brighter Futures: the Future Path of Child Poverty in Northern Ireland](#), Child Poverty Action Group, November 2021

13 “[The Public wants us to keep the Universal Credit Lifeline](#)” The Trussell Trust, September 2021.

14 [Nothing left to cut back – Rising Living Costs and Universal Credit](#), Child Poverty Action Group, February 2022.

15 [Consumer Council for NI - Home Energy Index](#), February 2022.

16 [Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network](#), The Trussell Trust, 2020.

The Trussell Trust is calling for:

Long-term funding support for, and greater promotion of, the role of independent, accessible, high quality advice.¹⁷

A public awareness campaign for income-maximisation services such as Make the Call.¹⁸

(d) Involve people with direct experience of poverty in shaping the services they need and use

In order to tackle complex issues of poverty and destitution, parties should work directly with people affected by poverty to learn from their experiences and co-design better policy solutions. There are examples of this in Scotland, such as the Poverty Truth Network¹⁹, and built into The Scottish Poverty and Inequality Commission.

It is important that parties also work with food bank staff and volunteers to end the need for food banks. Food banks know and serve their communities and can support transformation to address the underlying drivers of food bank use. Food banks can drive initiatives (such as financial inclusion projects), or work with existing services, that can help end the need for their services.

The Trussell Trust is calling for:

Support for local ‘Poverty Truth’ processes in which the lived experience of poverty is ethically recorded, published, and routinely brought to the attention of stakeholders and policymakers.

Commitment to listen to people with direct experience of poverty in our communities and work with groups that amplify their voices, so that they are directly involved in the design of better services and more effective policy solutions for ending poverty.

WORKING TOGETHER

The Trussell Trust works in partnership with Advice NI to deliver a helpline service and supports Advice NI’s manifesto for the Northern Ireland Assembly elections. You can read the manifesto [here](#).

The Trussell Trust is also a member of both the Cliff-Edge Coalition Steering Group and the Anti Poverty Strategy Co-Design Group.

¹⁷ [Advice NI Annual Report 2021](#), February 2022.

¹⁸ [Independent Report on the Social Return on Investment of the Make the Call Wraparound Service](#), Ipsos MORI, June 2021.

¹⁹ [What is a Poverty Truth Commission?](#), NICVA, January 2022.