

Food Insecurity in Households in Receipt of Benefits

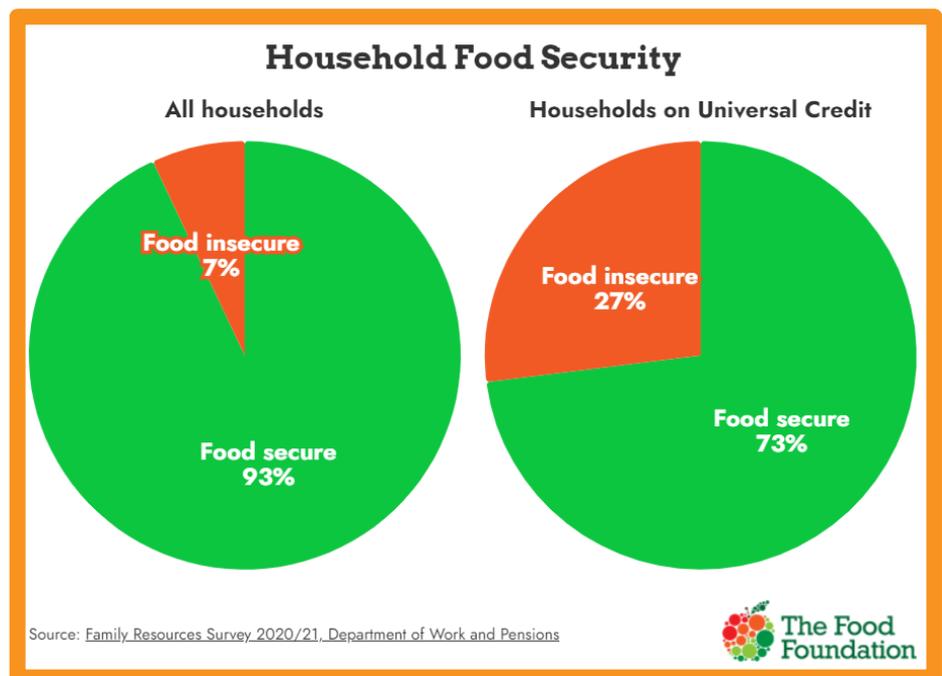
SUMMARY

- New data published by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) shows that households in receipt of Universal Credit were approximately four times more likely than the average to experience food insecurity during the first year of the pandemic (2020-21).
- Despite this, DWP have not acted on this data or taken responsibility for tackling these disproportionately high food insecurity levels among benefit claimants.
- Since the data were collected, the removal of the £20 uplift to Universal Credit and cost of living pressures, including rapidly increasing fuel and food prices, have exacerbated the problem further.
- A survey from The Food Foundation (conducted late April 2022) shows that food insecurity levels are now double pre-pandemic levels, and at their their highest level since the pandemic hit.
- The Food Foundation is calling on the Work and Pensions Committee to conduct an urgent inquiry into what the Government is planning to do to reduce levels of household food insecurity amongst benefit claimants.

Food insecurity levels in households in receipt of Universal Credit are unacceptably high

UK households in receipt of Universal Credit were approximately **four times** more likely to experience food insecurity than the average household during the first year of the pandemic

- The [Family Resources Survey 2020-21](#) conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)* found that 27% of households in receipt of Universal Credit experienced food insecurity, compared to 7% on average.
- The data show an improvement in food insecurity levels among Universal Credit claimants from the year before, likely due to the £20 uplift which was in place at the time. Since then, this has been removed and even with the uplift, levels were still disproportionately high compared to the average.

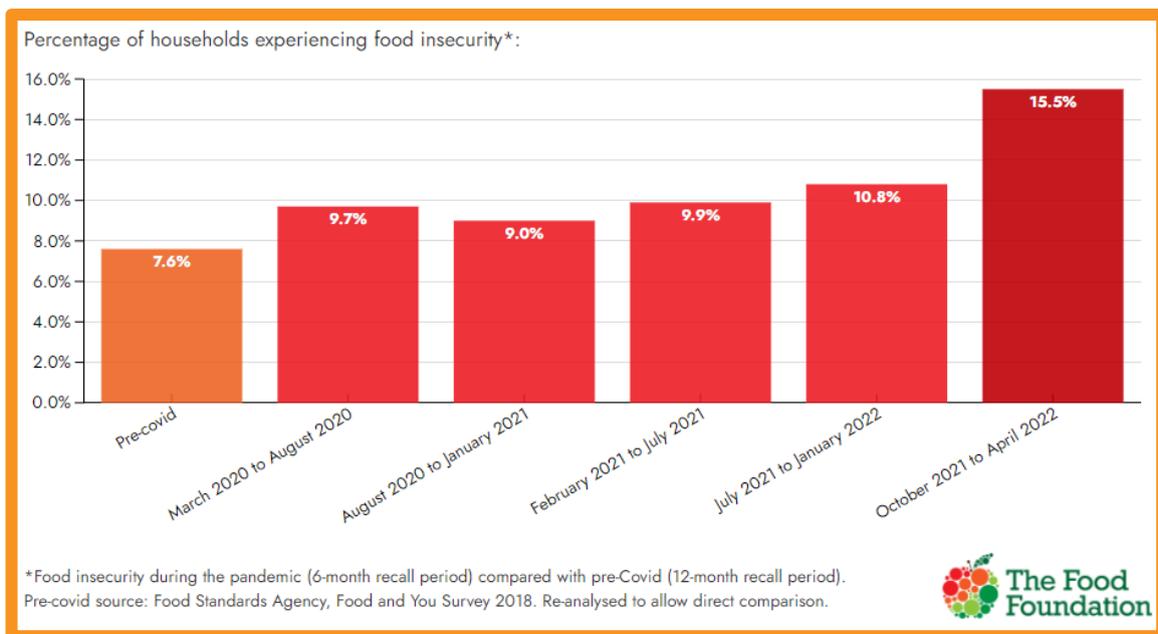


UK households with a disabled adult are also disproportionately affected by household food insecurity.

- The Family Resources Survey also found that 11% of households with a disabled adult reported food insecurity, compared to 4% of households with no disabled adult.

Food insecurity levels have been rising, now affecting 8.2 million adults and 2.6 million children

- Since the DWP data were collected, levels of food insecurity have increased further. [More recent data](#) from a nationally representative survey conducted by The Food Foundation in April 2022 shows 15.5% of households (8.2 million adults and 3.5 million children) experienced food insecurity in the past six months. This is double the level pre-pandemic, and the highest level since the pandemic hit.



There is greater need than ever to tackle the problem

Food prices are rising and predicted to continue doing so

- Food and drinks prices have risen 6.7% on average in the 12 months to April 2022 ([Food Foundation analysis of ONS data](#)) making it harder for families to afford food. These figures don't necessarily reflect how 'budget' ranges of foods have increased in price, so the impact on low-income families may be even higher.
- The Russia-Ukraine war is further driving up global food and fuel prices which will have a knock-on impact on the UK. Even before the war broke out, predictions were that food prices would persist in rising in 2022 as we continue to experience the impact of the pandemic and Brexit on labour and fuel shortages.
- Healthy diets were already unaffordable for many people on low incomes before the recent price rises. [Food Foundation analysis](#) found that healthier foods are three times more expensive per calorie than less healthy foods making it harder for people on low incomes to eat sufficiently well. The poorest fifth of the population would have to spend an unrealistic 40% of their disposable income on food to afford the Government recommended healthy diet (the Eatwell Guide).

The cost-of-living crisis is making it increasingly difficult for many UK families to afford the food they need

- Being able to afford food is affected by other financial demands on households, and food is often the first place households look to cut back their spending when disposable income is tight.
- Families have been facing increasing pressure on their disposable income in recent months due to increases in energy bills and overall inflation, as well as food prices. A number of changes introduced in April, including the increase in National Insurance and another increase in the energy bill cap, will be making this even worse.
- These changes mean many families will simply not have sufficient income to afford every day essentials including food.
- The recent announcements by the Chancellor do not fully offset these impacts, and are less generous for larger households with children.

The pandemic shone a light on health disparities in the UK and exacerbated obesity levels

- People with obesity were more likely to have serious complications from Covid-19 and [childhood obesity levels](#) have risen significantly during the pandemic with the gap between the most and least deprived widening even further.
- The increasing cost of living – including rising food prices – is likely to mean that people become more reliant on lower cost foods which tend to be calorie-dense and nutrient-poor, further increasing diet-related disease.
- Poor diets are one of the leading causes of avoidable harm to our health. Therefore, reducing food insecurity levels will be integral to achieving the Government's Levelling Up mission to improve healthy life expectancy and to reduce health disparities.

THE WORK AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE SHOULD LAUNCH AN INQUIRY INTO FOOD INSECURITY AMONGST BENEFIT RECIPIENTS

The collection of robust data assessing food insecurity is essential to being able to deliver effective policies to tackle the problem.

- DWP's annual measurement of food insecurity levels is an essential first step which we fully support. However, Government then have a responsibility to act on the data and be held to account for reducing the vast inequalities in levels of food insecurity experienced by benefit recipients.
- Despite DWP's own data clearly illustrating the scale of the problem, in statements earlier this year the Minister for DWP has refused to acknowledge any responsibility for tackling food insecurity amongst Universal Credit recipients.

The Food Foundation are calling on the Work and Pensions Committee to launch an urgent inquiry into what the Government is planning to do to reduce levels of household food insecurity amongst benefit claimants

- If we are to avoid seeing even further exacerbation of the already worrying levels of food insecurity, urgent action is needed to combat the very real pressure on the ability of people on benefits to afford sufficient food and healthy food.
- The recent publication of the second year (2020-21) of food insecurity measurement data from the Family Resources Survey is a crucial moment for Government to scrutinise the data and ensure adequate policy measures are in place to tackle the problem.

* In 2019, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) committed to start measuring household food insecurity as part of their annual Family Resources Survey. The first data was published in 2021 capturing levels of food insecurity from 2019-20 (pre-pandemic) over a 1-month recall period. It allows for analysis at a disaggregated level to understand drivers of food insecurity and identify subgroups of the population who are most at risk.

About The Food Foundation:

We are a young, dynamic, and impactful charity with a mission to change food policy and business practice to ensure everyone, across the UK, can afford and access a healthy diet supplied by a sustainable food system. We are independent of all political parties and business. We work with others who believe there is a problem with the system and want to change it.

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