



THE FOOD BANK OF YORK REGION'S

# REPORT ON HUNGER 2021

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### About The Food Bank of York Region

The Food Bank of York Region (FBYR) serves as the food collection and distribution hub for York Region. In this capacity, the Food Bank of York Region collects and delivers surplus food to local food pantries, homeless and women's shelters, social housing, school meals programs, and other non-profit organizations that provide meals and food in their programs. In 2021, FBYR distributed \$7.24 million worth of food and supplies to 60+ non-profit community organization partners who provided food services to 22,793 York Region residents facing food insecurity.

### About this Report

The Food Bank of York Region's 2021 Report on Hunger provides an analysis on the state of food insecurity in York Region, based on numerous sources. This report reflects findings published by Food Banks Canada, Feed Ontario, the 2021 Census Reports, and York Region reports. This report also provides insights to severe food insecurity in York Region through an analysis of the data gathered by the Food Bank of York Region's network of non-profit community partners that provide food and meals in their programs. This data was gathered through the Link2Feed client intakes system from January 01, 2021 to December 31, 2021.



### Our Affiliations:



Supported by **Regional  
Municipality of York**



Member of  
**Feed Ontario**



Affiliate Member of  
**Food Banks Canada**



# The Face of Food Insecurity in 2021

Food insecurity is a public health crisis that negatively impacts people's physical, mental, and social health. Recent studies and surveys to analyze the state of food insecurity in Canada have raised the alarm regarding "the volatile combination of rising food prices and housing costs and low income," which risks creating a "perfect storm when looking at food affordability."<sup>1</sup>

PROOF Institute concluded their annual research on Household Food Insecurity in Canada in 2021 with a word of warning: "With the record inflation since 2021, we can expect the prevalence and severity of food insecurity to worsen if measures aren't taken to address the socioeconomic circumstances that give rise to it and to ensure that the incomes of vulnerable households can keep up with the rising costs of living."<sup>2</sup>

According to research conducted by Food Banks Canada, after an initial decrease in the surge of food bank usage at the beginning of the pandemic, usage rates started to trend upward again from June 2020 onwards due to the combined impacts of low income and rapidly rising costs of living.<sup>3</sup>



## Growing levels of food insecurity in 2021 have been linked to:

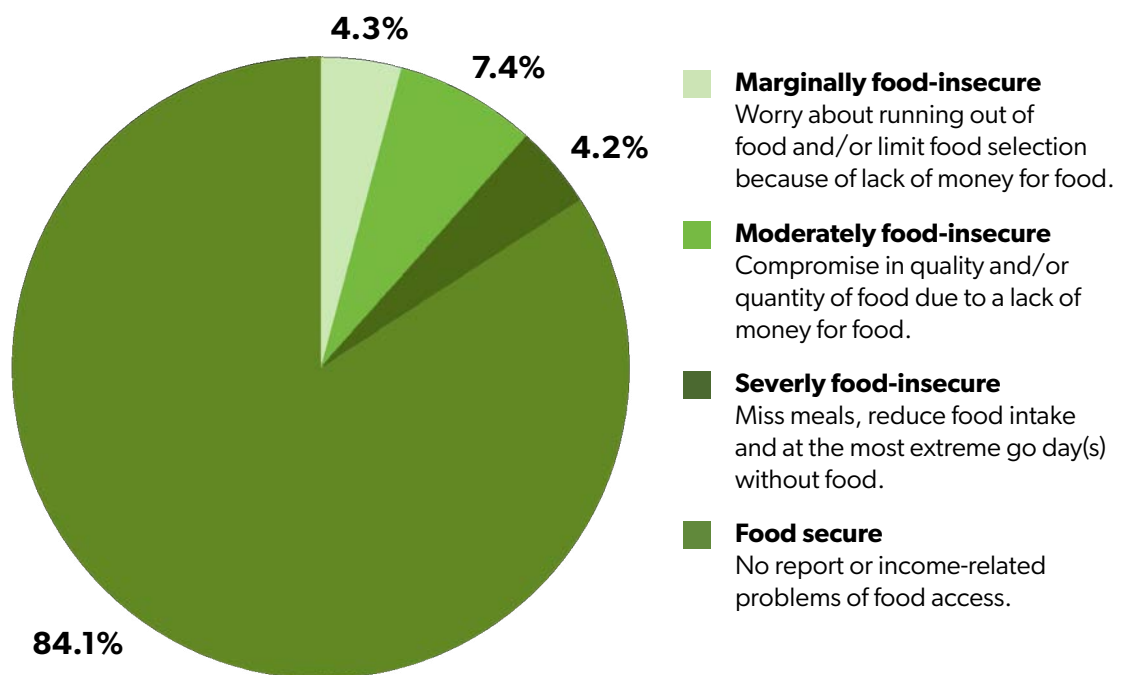
- Rising costs of food and high inflation rates significantly outpacing median incomes:**  
 A report by Statistics Canada stated that from April 2021 to April 2022, the price of food alone rose by 9.7%.<sup>4</sup>
- Rising cost of housing and effects of skyrocketing rental markets:**  
 In 2021, a national poll showed that 46% of Canadians ranked the cost of housing as the largest obstacle to affording food—up from 21 per cent only a year before.<sup>5</sup> In Ontario, 69.2% of people who use food banks lived in rental market housing, and an additional 17.3% lived in social housing.<sup>6</sup>
- The Insufficiency of Social Assistance:**  
 The social assistance provided to seniors and persons with disabilities, dependent on OAS or disability support, has not kept pace with inflation and rising costs of food and housing. Feed Ontario reported that the annual income for recipients of Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) is well below the poverty line.<sup>7</sup>
- Precarious and Low-Wage Work:**  
 People with low or minimum wage work and precarious contract work have been identified as representing 9.6% of people who seek food from food banks in Ontario.<sup>8</sup> The pandemic brought to light the vulnerable position of people in precarious and low-wage work to economic storms, as they were found to have experienced the greatest loss of wages during the pandemic.<sup>9</sup>

Households most vulnerable to food insecurity include households with children led by lone parents, households with minimum wage jobs and precarious work, those who identify as Indigenous or Black, and those who rent rather than own their housing.<sup>10</sup>



# What is Food Insecurity?

"Household food insecurity, as this problem is measured and monitored in Canada, refers to the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. The experience of food insecurity can range from concerns about running out of food before there is money to buy more, to the inability to afford a balanced diet, to going hungry, missing meals, and in extreme cases, not eating for whole days because of a lack of food and money for food."



[Courtesy of Tarasuk V, Li T, Fafard St-Germain AA. (2022)  
Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021. Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/><sup>11]</sup>



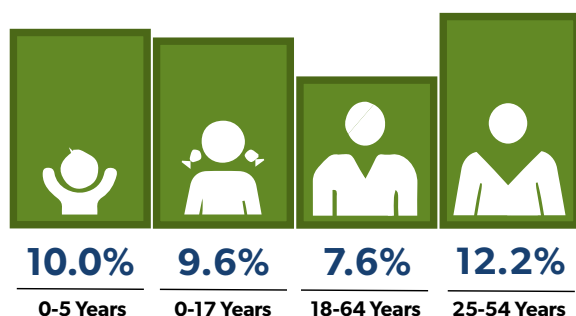
# A Profile of York Region

With a population of nearly 1.2 million as of the last census, York Region is made up of a mix of nine urban and rural municipalities and Georgina Island. The region is relatively affluent with a median household income of \$112,000 (2021 Census).<sup>12</sup> Eighty-two percent of York Region households are owned, which is the highest rate of ownership in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).<sup>13</sup>

Despite the perceived affluence and wealth of York Region, at the 2021 census, 102,225 York Region residents lived in low-income households, representing 8.8% of households in York Region. Of these, nearly 20% were children.<sup>14</sup> The 2021 Census indicated a higher prevalence of low-income and a greater proportion of working poor in the municipalities of Markham and Richmond Hill (see chart on [page 09](#)).

A study published in 2022 by the York Region Food Network found that over half (52%) of renters and almost 30% of owner households spend more than 30% of their income on housing.<sup>15</sup> As a result, many York Region residents are placed in precarious and insecure financial positions, often forcing them to choose between paying for housing or purchasing food.

## Proportion of Population in Low-Income Households by Age Group



Statistics based on Low Income Measure After-Tax (LIM-AT).  
Courtesy of [York Region | 2021 Census Release Report | Income](#).

## Food Insecurity in the Region

"It's so hidden," said Kate Greavette, executive director at York Region Food Network. "We have so many million-dollar homes and there's great employment opportunities here, but huge inequities as well. People in precarious work, people working minimum wage. I think we all know minimum wage is just not enough to afford to live in York Region."

"When rent and utilities are fixed expenses, food becomes a discretionary expense, Greavette says".

— [When Band-Aids are not enough: solving hunger in York Region](#), Kim Zarzour, YorkRegion.com, March 1 2022.



# The Role of Food Banks and Food Providers

Food banks and other food providers throughout Canada work tirelessly to bridge the gap for members of their community experiencing food insecurity. They provide an effective emergency response to people and families that lack the purchasing power to afford sufficient food. In emergency situations, such as the Covid pandemic, Food Banks have come to the fore to provide food services to people in need. They have innovated, created new services, such as home delivery programs, and responsively addressed a surge in food insecurity. While food banks and other food providers are not a permanent solution to food poverty, they play a critical role in providing access to food for people in vulnerable situations and advocating for lasting solutions that address the root causes of food insecurity.

Food banks also play a critical role in rescuing and recycling food that would otherwise go to waste and burden the environment. Research has estimated that 20% (or 11 million tons) of all food produced in Canada “becomes avoidable food loss or waste – food that could have been eaten, but was instead landfilled, incinerated or managed as organic waste.”<sup>16</sup> This \$31 billion worth of avoidable food waste on an annual basis also represents a significant environmental burden.<sup>17</sup> The rescue and reallocation of surplus food to relieve food insecurity plays an important role in the attainment of Canada’s commitment to the UN Sustainable Development [Goal 12.3](#) to halve global food waste by 2030.<sup>18</sup>

Research published by Second Harvest, “Canada’s Invisible Network,” identified 61,310 organizations that have arisen to address food insecurity within their local communities throughout Canada.<sup>19</sup> This highlights the important role of food banks such as the Food Bank of York Region that collect and distributed food to networks of food providers throughout the region, enabling them to provide their programs.



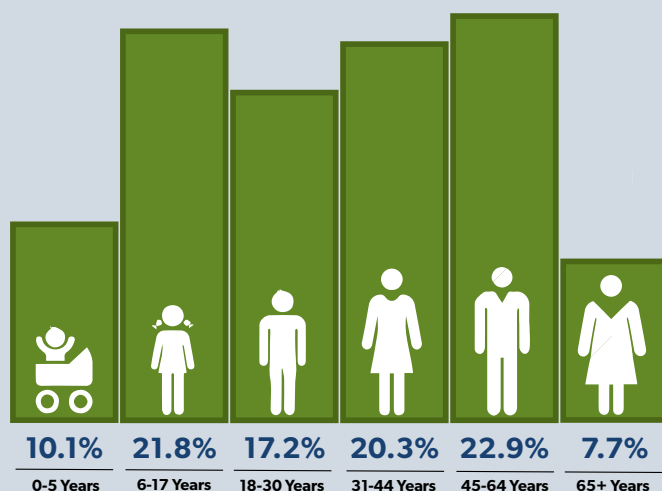
“Beyond the obvious food banks, soup kitchens and homeless shelters, people are getting food from schools that offer breakfast and lunch; churches, temples, mosques and other faith-based organizations that provide meals or food vouchers; community centre day programs for young people, adults, and people with disabilities that provide beverages and snacks; and drop-in centres and mental health programs where people can access fresh groceries.

“The invisible food network also includes recreational and social clubs; libraries; job support programs; outreach organizations for new immigrants; low income and housing support programs; clinical services providing residential treatment and addiction rehabilitation; justice and corrections facilities; and medical services facilities among the 61,000-plus organizations working to make a difference.”

— *Canada’s Invisible Network*, Second Harvest



## Age Demographic of Food Bank Users in Ontario in 2021



Statistics Courtesy of Feed Ontario <sup>20</sup>

## Affordable Housing Crisis in York Region

"Rising costs of rent and food place immense pressure on low-income households, leaving them vulnerable to food insecurity and higher risk of poor physical and mental health," said Alex Bilotta, Founder and CEO of FBYYR. In early 2021, York Region Council rectified the issue by officially declaring an affordable housing crisis. But effective long-term change to loosen the financial constraints that surround the housing market will take time to happen. ...

Bilotta said to address the issue, all levels of government must commit and build on affordable housing and sufficient income for a food secure York Region.

— ["Affordable housing crisis hikes hunger as food bank users make enough 'to cover rent, nothing more,'"](#) by Aileen Zangouei, YorkRegion.com, March 2, 2022

## Statistics For Individuals Accessing Food Services

The Food Bank of York Region is committed to alleviating food insecurity for York Region's most vulnerable residents in collaboration with our network of community organizations that provide food and meals in their programs. Our mission is to provide a nexus between the abundance of surplus food in Ontario and the organizations that provide food services to at-risk residents.

This partnership strategy has proven to be highly effective in enabling local agencies and community organizations to focus on their primary services without having to divert scarce resources to sourcing food. (For a full list of FBYYR's community partners, see <https://fbyr.ca/community-partners/>.)

The statistics that follow have been collected from the 61 food banks/meal providers of the network that the Food Bank of York Region (FBYYR) provided food for in York Region in 2021, as well as FBYYR's Covid Home Delivery Program. These organizations provided food to 22,793 people. These statistics provide insights regarding the state of severe food insecurity in York Region.





### Gender:

Based on 18,737 respondents

Male	43.1%
Female	50.2%
Transgender	.02%
Unknown	6.68%



### Age:

Based on 15,985 respondents

0-17 years old	32%
18-64 years old	60%
65+ years old	8%



### Primary Income By Household:

Respondents represent 7,096 households

Government Benefits*	33.6%**	Pension/OAS	4.8%
No Income	12%	Other	7.6
Part-time Work	6%	Undisclosed	31.2%
Full-time Work	4.8%		

\*EI, OW, ODSP, OSAP, CCB, CRB

\*\*10.6% of respondents on benefits receive disability benefits



### Housing Status:

Respondents represent 7,026 households

Private Rental	46.42%	On the Street	0.25%
Social Housing	15.51%	Group Home/Shelter	0.69%
Own Home	3.65%	Band Owned	0.38%
Stays with Friends/Family	0.85%	Other	2.97%
Rooming House	0.27%	Undisclosed	29.01%



# Low Income in York Region

(Statistics compiled from Statistics Canada 2021 Census<sup>21</sup>)

Municipality	Population	Low Income Population*	% of Population Low Income*
Aurora	62,057	4,585	7.5%
East Gwillimbury	34,637	2,235	6.6%
Georgina	47,642	3,715	7.9%
King	27,333	1,660	6.1%
Markham	338,503	36,445	10.8%
Newmarket	87,942	6,450	7.5%
Richmond Hill	114,180	16,350	14.4%
Vaughan	323,103	20,460	6.4%
Whitchurch-Stouffville	49,864	3,005	6.1%

[\*In low income based on the Low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT)]

## 2021 Food Program Access in York Region by Municipality

The following statistics represent 58 food banks, food pantries, First Nations food banks, homeless and women's shelters, and other agencies that provide meals and food to their clients in York Region.

Municipality	Individuals Served	Adults Served	Children Served	Seniors Served	Households Served	# of Food Providers Reporting
Aurora	1,279	725	462	91	474	3
East Gwillimbury	460	204	152	104	196	4
Georgina	1,871	1,093	536	230	811	10
King	39	32	5	2	32	2
Markham	3,036	1,805	943	283	1,063	6
Newmarket	2,642	1,553	985	71	1,141	12
Richmond Hill	3,374	2,042	1,204	121	1,362	12
Vaughan	1,151	590	282	279	470	8
Whitchurch-Stouffville	22	11	8	3	11	1
Undisclosed	8,421	6,655	1,161	663	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>22,295</b>	<b>14,710</b>	<b>5,738</b>	<b>1,847</b>	<b>6,901</b>	<b>58</b>

# Recommendations

As the statistics presented in this report indicate, food insecurity has continued to be an issue of concern in York Region in 2021 and portends to continue to do so throughout 2022. High levels of inflation and rising costs of rent and food are placing immense pressure on low-income households and leaving them vulnerable to severe food insecurity. In order to address the increasing gap between income and the cost of living, the Food Bank of York Region proposes the recommendations that follow.



## Recommendation 1: Continue to build the food rescue and food distribution sector

Food Banks work across the region to provide emergency assistance to at-risk members of the community facing food insecurity and struggling to make ends meet. Food banks and other food providers commit to providing a safety net for people experiencing food poverty. While food banks acknowledge that their services are not end solutions to poverty and severe food insecurity, they play a critical role in providing food aid to address the immediate crisis of food insecurity. They also ensure that avoidable food waste is reduced by the collection and distribution of surplus food to people in need of food assistance.

### We recommend that:

- Government at all levels continue to build and support the emergency food sector to immediately address severe food insecurity and prevent avoidable waste of food.
- Food Banks that serve as distribution centers to local food banks, non-profit organizations, agencies, and grassroots food programs be supported so that their infrastructure can accommodate the ongoing increased demand for emergency food assistance.
- Government at all levels continue to support food rescue programs and educate corporations to reduce Canada's enormous burden of avoidable food waste by ensuring that it is recycled through food security programs.

## Recommendation 2: Affordable Housing

In 2021, rental tenants represented 86 percent of all food bank users in Ontario.<sup>22</sup> Within that group, according to the Rental Housing Index, the majority of people fall within the lowest income group and are paying over 50 per cent of their income for the cost of rent and utilities.<sup>23</sup> This high level of expenditure on housing has been deemed a "crisis" level and places people at risk of food insecurity and homelessness.<sup>24</sup>

### We support Feed Ontario and Food Bank Canada's recommendations that the province of Ontario:

- Invest in affordable and supportive housing programs
- Expand the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB)
- Invest in the construction of new affordable rental homes to increase access to affordable housing<sup>25</sup>







### Recommendation 3: Address the disparity between low income and cost of living

Minimum wage and social assistance provided to seniors and persons with disabilities, dependent on OAS or ODSP, or people dependent on Ontario Works have not kept pace with inflation and rising costs of food and housing. Feed Ontario found that the income of recipients of social assistance is below the poverty line, and the gap will continue to grow as prices continue to rise.<sup>26</sup>

#### We support the following recommendations from Feed Ontario, Food Banks Canada, and PROOF that:

- Ontario's social assistance rates align with the poverty line established by the Market Basket Measure, and that these rates be adjusted for inflation.<sup>27</sup>
- The provincial government work to reduce food insecurity experienced by those who are employed by increasing minimum wage.<sup>28</sup>
- The vulnerability of households that are reliant on employment incomes and unable to make ends meet is addressed.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusions

York Region's Food Bank network, representing an array of non-profit organizations, works tirelessly in all nine municipalities to meet the ongoing need for food aid in York Region. The advent of the Covid-19 resulted in an increase in demand for food assistance throughout the country, as well as in York Region, where food distribution increased by over 100% in one year. While provincial and federal support helped to ensure that food banks could continue to provide and grow their vital services to meet the demand during Covid, ongoing support is critical to address heightened food insecurity and to eliminate food waste.

According to Food Banks Canada, most food banks have not been operating at the levels of the height of the pandemic; however, other factors have contributed to increased food bank exceeding pre-Covid levels.<sup>30</sup> The combination of rising food prices and housing costs and low income are creating what has been dubbed "the perfect storm."<sup>31</sup> In order to address these issues, it is essential that food insecurity and poverty, and their underlying causes, are made a top priority by government at all levels. It is essential that food bank services are supported, and the infrastructure of food bank distribution centers is bolstered to provide immediate food aid for those facing food insecurity. A collaborative effort is imperative to reduce poverty and hunger so that an improved quality of life can be enjoyed by all York Region residents.



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The Food Bank of York Region is a registered charitable organization  
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