

Food charities here face transport, storage, manpower issues: Study

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There may not be a lack of food donations in Singapore, but the larger issue facing food charities and community groups that feed those in need here involves more practical constraints.

Transportation, storage, manpower and funding are among the issues that most affect their operations, a new study of local food support has found. These challenges create bottlenecks and limit the reach and effectiveness of food distribution.

The researchers identified 146 organisations here that distribute food to the needy and others, though not all may be active.

The study was commissioned by The Food Bank Singapore and led by researchers from the Institute of Policy Studies. A total of 52 food charities and groups were surveyed online and 26 were interviewed in-depth from April to November 2025.

The study's findings were released on May 15. This is the third edition of the Hunger Report, which highlights the importance of better identifying households in need and more collaboration among different parties to address food insecurity more effectively.

The first two editions of the Hunger Report focused on the beneficiaries of food support.

To address the gaps it found, the study makes three key proposals: introducing a screening tool to identify and assess the extent of household needs, setting up shared

infrastructure like a centralised warehouse to reduce operational costs, and a town-level pilot to test these ideas.

"There's a lot of heart in the community... but there's not a lot of co-ordination," said Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Social and Family Development Eric Chua at the launch of the report, which was held at EHL Campus (Singapore) in Lady Hill Road, near Orchard Road.

The event was attended by Food Bank's partners, including representatives from other non-profit organisations and corporate donors.

Mr Chua also highlighted that food-insecure households may often face other difficulties in areas including unemployment or mental health. In the process of extending food support, these households could be connected with other forms of social support, he said.

Transportation issues were most commonly encountered, like the lack of self-owned vehicles that result in a reliance on volunteer and platform drivers.

Meanwhile, storage capacity impacted operations most severely.

This includes space constraints and a lack of appropriate storage facilities, such as cold storage for fresh produce and frozen products, challenges exacerbated by Singapore's tropical climate. Providers have also had to turn away food supplies when they reach their maximum capacity.

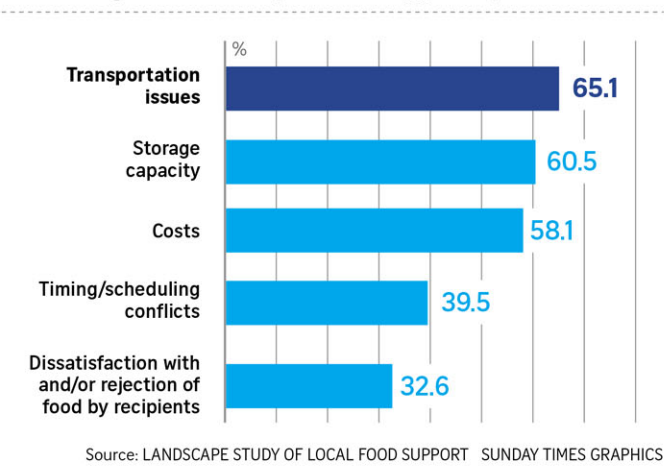
In addition, they face manpower shortages, with about two-thirds reporting having fewer than 10 staff.

Many rely on a shrinking pool of



A volunteer sorting through donations at The Food Bank Singapore's warehouse in Pandan Loop in 2024. One problem faced by charities surveyed was storage capacity, including space constraints and a lack of appropriate facilities. ST FILE PHOTO

Challenges faced by food support providers



volunteers to support the labour-intensive nature of food distribution, including transportation, last-mile distribution and administrative work.

These experiences are echoed by food charities who spoke to The Sunday Times.

Fridge Restock Community founder Daniel Yap said his charity operates on a "rescue today, distribute today" model that makes reliable transportation critical in its weekly rescue operations. He added that the organisation does not run a storage facility to avoid financial strain.

Similarly, Food Rescue Sengkang co-founder Janet Lee cited limited cold storage capacity, rising transportation costs and the continued challenge of recruiting volunteers.

The study found that dry rations

were the most commonly distributed items, with providers prioritising the need to address food insecurity over other considerations like nutritional value.

Building on the findings, the study suggests a few ways to improve food security in Singapore.

One recommendation is to develop and deploy a screening tool that goes beyond traditional indicators such as income and housing status to better identify people experiencing food insecurity, and assess the severity and extent of their needs. This would help identify households that may become food insecure owing to factors such as high bills or debt, health limitations and time constraints.

Another proposal is to have shared infrastructure to reduce operating costs. One model suggested is a centralised warehouse with cold-chain capacity that can supply a network of community shops across the island, such as those located in community centres or void decks.

The report also proposes a town-level pilot to test the feasibility of these suggestions and refine them before scaling.

During a panel discussion at the event, Mr Chua said it is key to understand varied needs on the ground.

This could include giving seniors with swallowing difficulties blenders to process their food, on top of the rations given, so they can consume the food safely.

Sustained and consistent giving is also important, he said, rather than efforts only during festive seasons like Christmas.

The other members on the panel were Mr Chan Peng Guan, co-sponsor for Micron Singapore corporate social responsibility, and Ms Wee Su-Lyn, director and co-founder of Optimo Foods. The panel was moderated by The Food Bank Singapore's board director Cindy Tan.

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