

This is the latest monthly summary of data from the Citizens Advice network in Scotland since the COVID-19 outbreak and covers September 2021. It shows data from the 59 Citizens Advice Bureaux in Scotland and our online advice site.

Key points

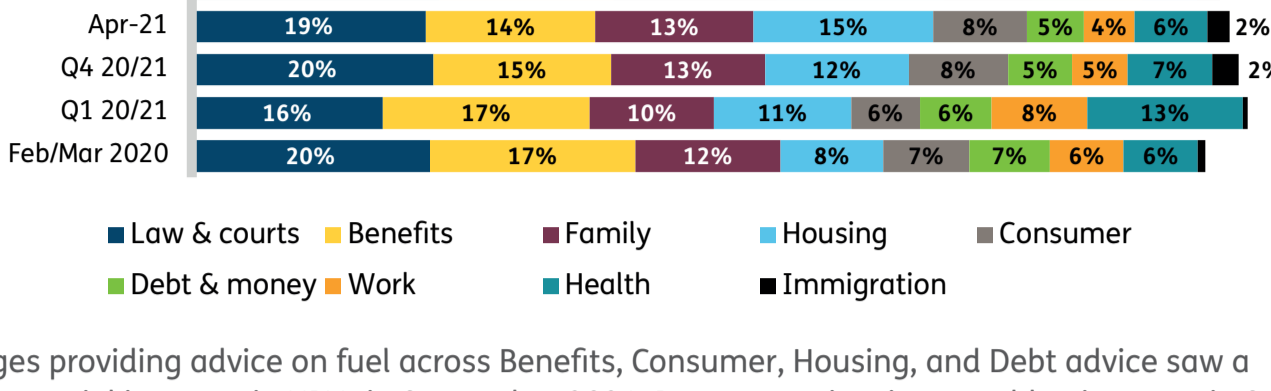
- > In September 2021 Citizens Advice Bureaux issued **85,970** pieces of advice.
- > In September 2021 pages on the website were viewed a total of **358,314** times.
- > There were **213,058** website users in September 2021
- > **84%** of these being new users.

Web pages: September 2021

- > Number of unique page views (UPV) in September 2021: **358,314** (decrease of **2%** from August)
- > Number of website users in September 2021: **213,058**
- > **84%** of these being new users.

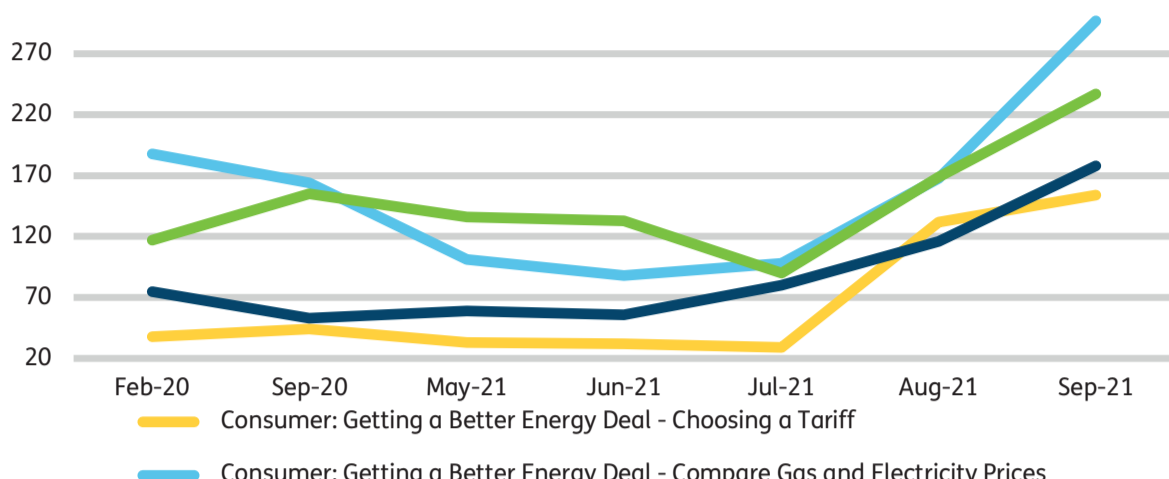
Trend data for visits to the Advice for Scotland website, as a proportion of all unique page views on the site, shows little variation between August and September 2021 other than small increases in the unique page views of pages relating to consumer advice (up **7%**) and small decreases in the unique page views of pages relating to health (down **6%**), immigration (down **5%**) and family (down **4%**).

Advice sought on the 'Advice for Scotland' website, as a proportion of all advice



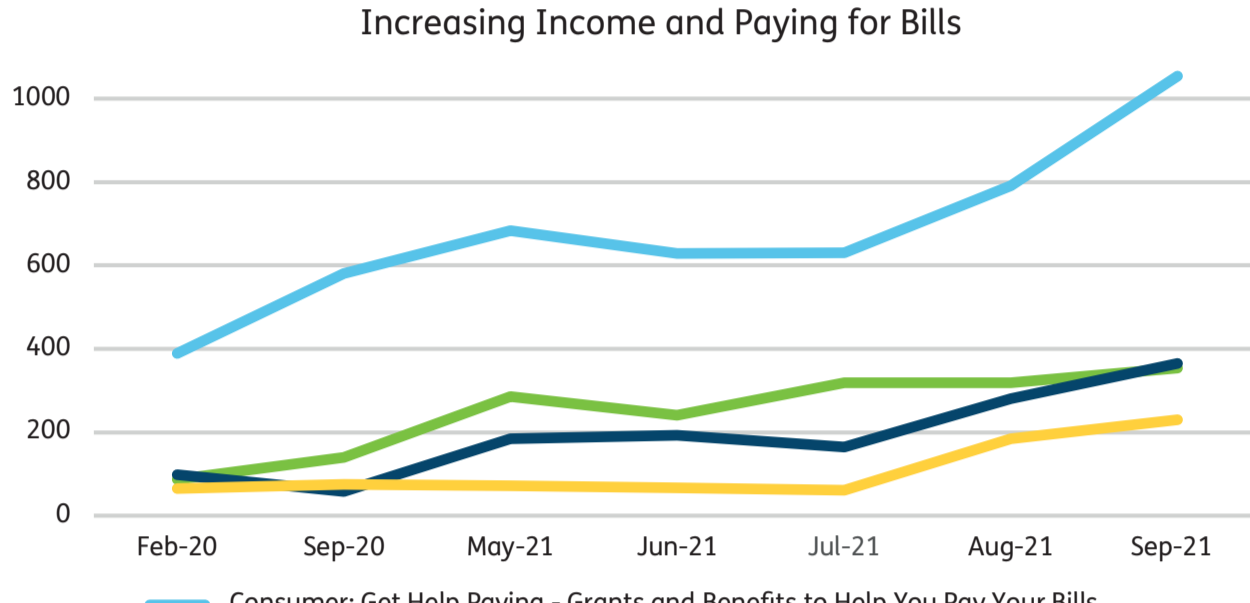
Pages providing advice on fuel across Benefits, Consumer, Housing, and Debt advice saw a substantial increase in UPVs in September 2021. Pages experiencing a sudden increase in September alone relate to 'your energy supplier has gone bust' (up **1,142%** pre-pandemic) and 'check who's taken over your energy supply' (up **6,069%** pre-pandemic). Four other fuel-related Consumer pages experienced a steady increase in UPVs since July, exceeding pre-pandemic levels in September 2021:

Consumer: Fuel Pages



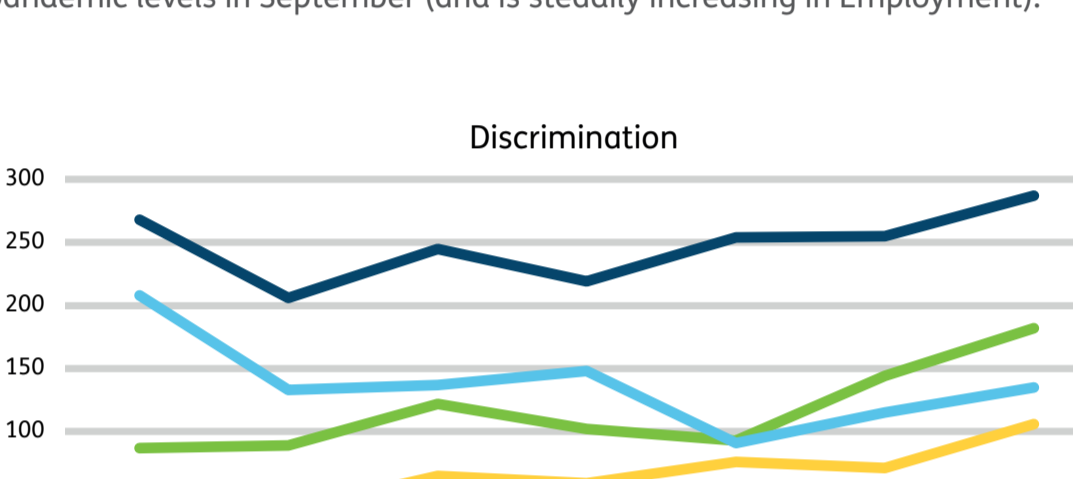
The page for Scottish Welfare Fund: Crisis Grant experienced 2,889 UPVs in September, an increase of **15%** since August, and **29%** from pre-pandemic levels. Pages providing advice on how to increase income and payments in relation to Consumer, Debt, and Housing also exceeded pre-pandemic UPVs:

Increasing Income and Paying for Bills



Although Discrimination does not as a whole attract many page views, it might be worth noting that problems relating to discrimination in Housing, and Law & Courts have also increased past pre-pandemic levels in September (and is steadily increasing in Employment).

Discrimination

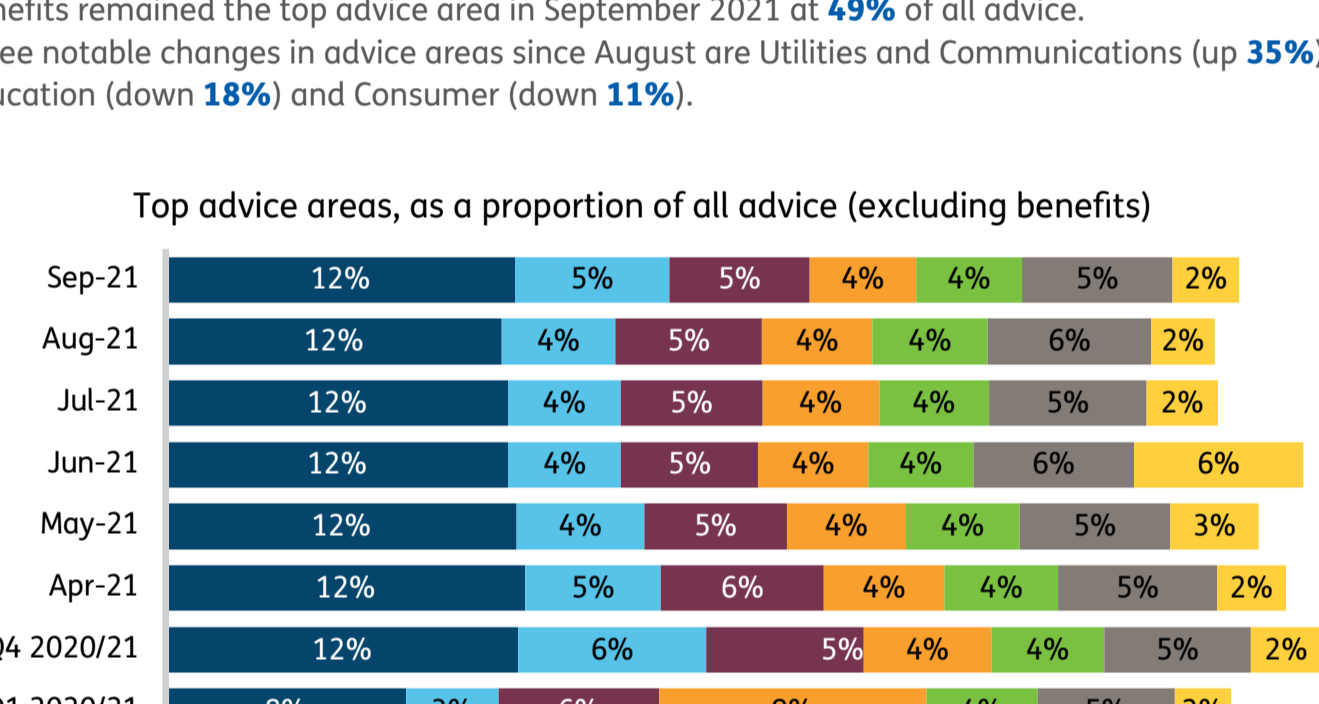


Citizens Advice Bureaux

- > **21,135** clients
- > **85,970** pieces of advice

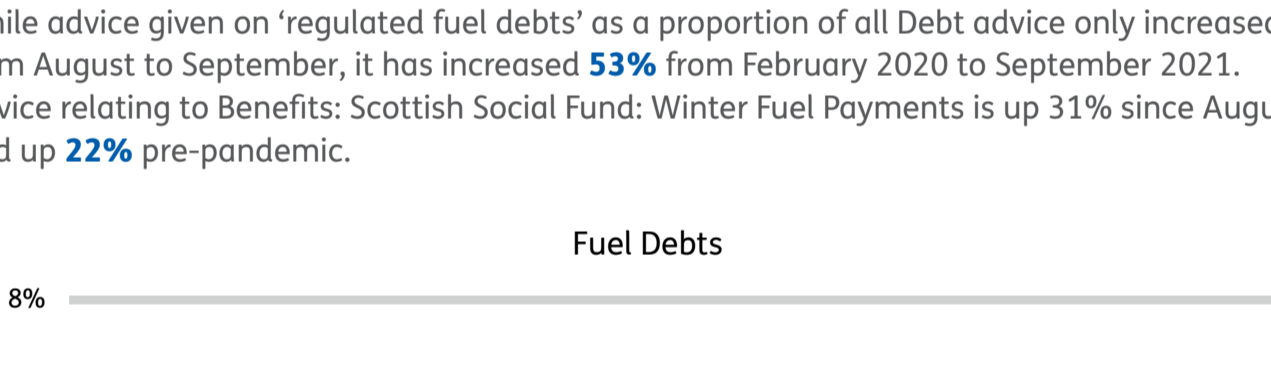
Benefits remained the top advice area in September 2021 at **49%** of all advice. Three notable changes in advice areas since August are Utilities and Communications (up **35%**), Education (down **18%**) and Consumer (down **11%**).

Top advice areas, as a proportion of all advice (excluding benefits)



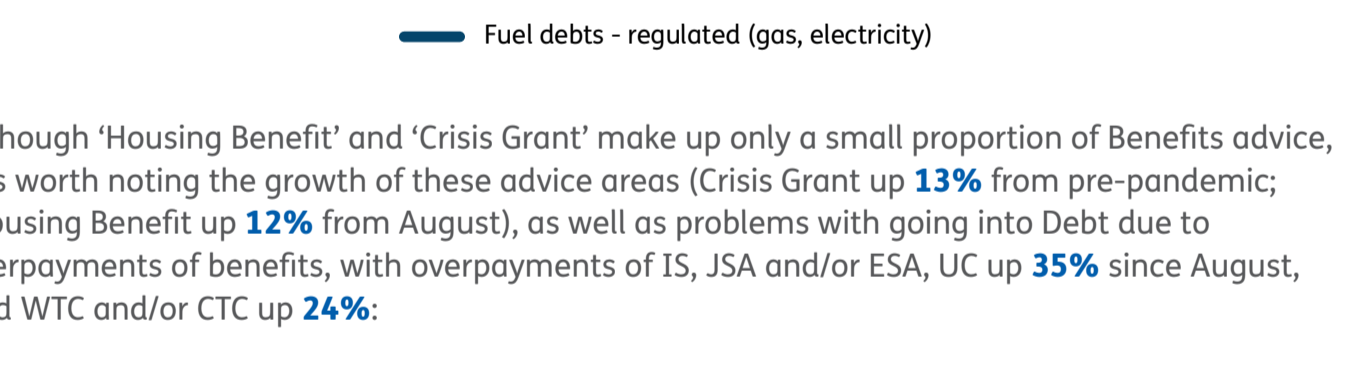
While advice given on 'regulated fuel debts' as a proportion of all Debt advice only increased **5%** from August to September, it has increased **53%** from February 2020 to September 2021. Advice relating to Benefits: Scottish Social Fund: Winter Fuel Payments is up 31% since August, and up **22%** pre-pandemic.

Fuel Debts



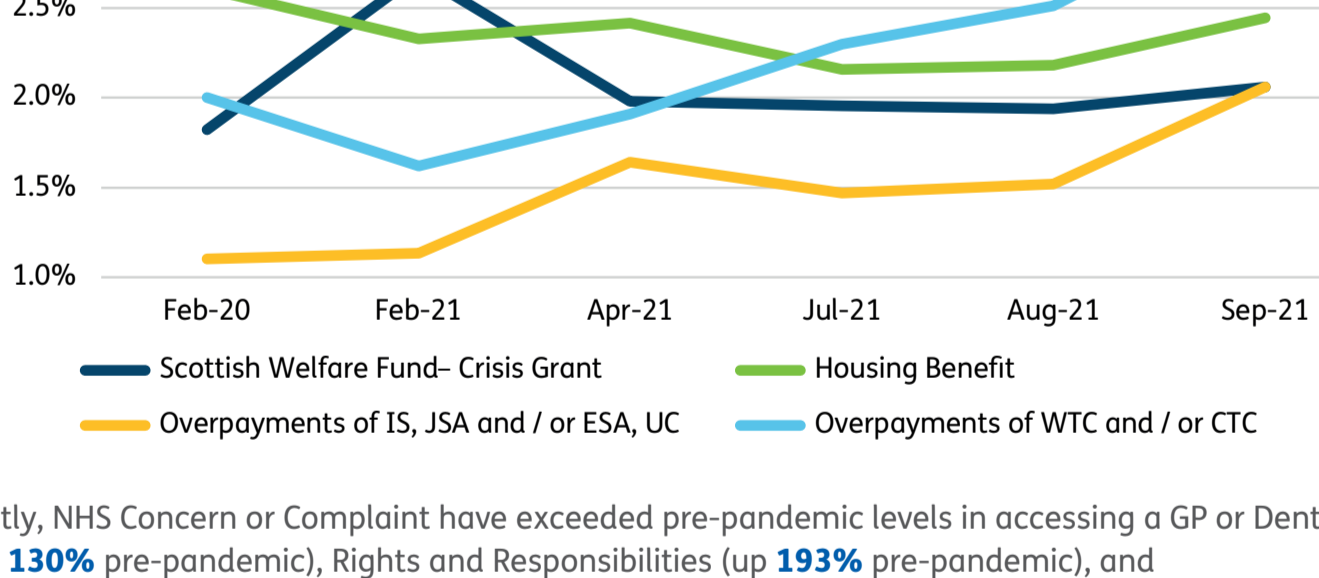
Although 'Housing Benefit' and 'Crisis Grant' make up only a small proportion of Benefits advice, it is worth noting the growth of these advice areas (Crisis Grant up **13%** from pre-pandemic; Housing Benefit up **12%** from August), as well as problems with going into Debt due to overpayments of benefits, with overpayments of IS, JSA and/or ESA, UC up **35%** since August, and WTC and/or CTC up **24%**:

Benefits and Debt



Lastly, NHS Concern or Complaint have exceeded pre-pandemic levels in accessing a GP or Dentist (up **130%** pre-pandemic), Rights and Responsibilities (up **193%** pre-pandemic), and Staff communication-oral (up **85%** pre-pandemic):

NHS Concern or Complaint



During September 2021:

The proportion of face-to-face contacts increased by **17%** between August and September 2021, with those seeking advice in relation to Immigration (**17%**) or Travel/Transport (**17%**) most likely to use this method of contact.

Advice most commonly sought via **SCAH**:

Consumer Issues

Employment

Immigration

Advice most commonly sought **face-to-face**:

Immigration

Travel

Advice most commonly sought through **direct contact with bureaux (telephone or email)**:

Benefits

Debt

Utilities/communication

September saw a dramatic rise in demand for advice in several energy advice areas even before the increase in the energy price cap.

Month in focus:

The significant increase in demand for Utilities related advice comes at a time of well publicised turmoil and increasing costs in the energy market. In addition to an explosive increase in demand for advice related to energy suppliers failing these figures show that demand for advice on Crisis Grants, Winter Fuel Payments, housing, and debt all notably exceed pre pandemic levels. These form part of a wider picture of citizens facing a 'perfect storm' this winter at a time when pandemic support measures such as furlough and the Universal Credit uplift have been removed.

It should be noted that the increase in demand for income support related advice happened before a series of changes in October which will have a further impact on people's living standards, such as the £20 reduction in Universal Credit, the end of furlough and the increase in the energy price cap.

September statistics show several other advice areas returning to what is 'normal' for pre-pandemic advice but a number of advice areas are seeing ongoing growth as the pandemic moves into a new stage. While some of these advice areas are minor in proportion to overall advice given for September, these small changes indicate the need for monitoring in the subsequent months.