

The cost of a healthy food basket

Study of six household types in the Republic of Ireland



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Pilot study for six household types in the Republic of Ireland

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1 Introduction

Research context

A Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) is derived from a negotiated consensus on what people believe is a minimum standard. It is a standard of living that meets an individual's or a household's physical, psychological and social needs. This is calculated by identifying the goods and services required by different household types in order to meet their needs. While an MESL is based on needs, not wants, it is a standard of living below which nobody should be expected to live.

This report focuses on food, one of the 16 elements of the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) data. It is based on a methodology called Consensual Budget Standards (CBS). The report is presented in the context of increasing concerns about the issue of food poverty in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and an increase in the number of people reporting that they do not have enough money to buy food. Recent data from The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have shown that the number of people believing they cannot afford food doubled from 4.2% in 2008 to 9% in 2014(1). Data from Eurostat show that in 2013, food and non-alcoholic beverage prices in Ireland were 17% higher than the EU average (2). Moreover, research by Carney and Maitre (3), using data from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), found that one in ten people are living in food poverty in Ireland. Food poverty is defined as the inability to have an adequate and nutritious diet due to issues of affordability and access to food. This has related effects on health, culture and social participation.

The 2013 data from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) show that 1.4 million people, almost 31% of the population, suffer from deprivation. This means that they are unable to afford two items from a list of 11 very basic items (of which one is not being able to eat a meal with meat, chicken, fish or a vegetarian equivalent every second day). The highest levels of deprivation are experienced by lone parents (63%), unemployed people (55%) and people not at work because of illness or disability (53%). The experience of the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) is that expenditure on food tends to be one of the least important considerations when households are dealing with competing demands on an inadequate income.

Objectives of this report

1. To examine the food element of the Minimum Essential Budget Standards (MESL) data in the Republic Of Ireland (ROI) from 2006 to 2014 for six sample household types:
 - Two parents and two children, one in pre-school (age 3) and one in primary school (age 10)
 - Two parents and two children, at primary school (age 10) and in second level (age 15)
 - One parent and two children, one in pre-school (age 3) and one in primary school (age 10)
 - Single adult male of working age, living alone
 - Pensioner couple
 - Female pensioner, living alone
2. To examine the expenditure on food as a proportion of core minimum essential expenditure. Core expenditure excludes items that can vary according to location, employment status and secondary social welfare entitlements. Therefore, the cost of housing, childcare and entitlement to secondary benefits, such as a medical card, which affects health expenditure, is excluded from the analysis.
3. To examine expenditure on food in the context of household income for two income scenarios:
 - i. Dependent on social welfare transfers
 - ii. Working and earning the national minimum wage in working age households
4. To analyse food costs for children as part of a household.

2 Methodology

Background and development of the methodology research

Measuring deprivation

In 1999, the VPSJ studied 118 low-income households dependent on social welfare payments or low wages to highlight their experience of deprivation (4).

This work was in a response to a plea from a group of women who asked, “Will no one ever show the Government what it is like to never have enough to make ends meet?”

The findings showed that none of the households could meet the weekly cost of rent, energy, clothing, education, over-the-counter medication and food. A significant finding was that an inadequate diet, and, at worst, the experience of hunger on a weekly basis, was the reality for the majority of these households.

The cost of a minimum essential standard of living with the primary focus on experts

In 2004, the focus of the VPSJ changed from measuring deprivation to determining the minimum level of expenditure needed for a Minimum Essential Standard of Living using Low Cost but Acceptable (LCA) Budget Standards, as developed by the Family Budget Unit (FBU) at the University of York (5). This methodology uses empirical data from national surveys of poverty and exclusion to determine prevailing patterns of consumption in society and to arrive at a consensus on what the essential necessities of modern living are. Input from focus groups was also used to:

- Gain information on the shopping patterns of low-income households
- Draw up a framework for the food menus and shopping lists
- Assist in the validation process of the budgets
- Learn about the realities of life on a low income

This methodology was used in a study of a low-cost but acceptable standard living for three household types (6).

The cost of a minimum essential standard of living with the primary focus on people

Budget standards based on the actual expenditure choices and judgments of people in real life as they manage their money to contribute to a final consensus (7, p.63) were developed as a methodology by the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) at the University of Loughborough. It avoided expert judgments and reaching consensus by coincidence. This approach is known as Consensual Budgets Standards (CBS) methodology (7).

Determining the cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living according to the people with input from the experts

Consensual Budgets Standards (CBS) based on the expenditure of people in real life on goods and services that everyone in Britain should be able to afford, while at the same time drawing on expert knowledge about basic living requirements and expenditure patterns(8), were developed as a methodology in 2004 by the Family Budget Unit at University of York in partnership with the Centre for Research in Social Policy at the University of Loughborough.

In 2006, the VPSJ (9) applied the CBS methodology, but used Irish sources to establish the individual items for each of the 16 areas of expenditure.

The following are the 16 areas of expenditure in the MESL data

Table 1: 16 Minimum Essential Standard of Living expenditure items in the VPSJ research

Food	Household Goods	Education	Insurance
Clothing	Household Services	Transport	Savings and Contingencies
Personal Care	Communications	Household Energy	Housing
Health-related Costs	Social Inclusion and Participation	Personal Costs	Childcare

The CBS approach is being increasingly adopted internationally, and variations of the methodology have been used in New Zealand, Australia and the US. Budget standards using the CBS approach are currently being developed in France, Austria and Portugal, as well as in Japan (10, 11).

Since 2006, the VPSJ has extended the use of the CBS approach and has undertaken studies to develop budget standards for additional household types, as well as households in rural areas. The MESL data is updated every year, and the website, www.budgeting.ie, presents a wide range of information on the expenditure and income necessary for a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. The Minimum Income Standard Calculator, www.misc.ie, allows individuals and households to calculate the expenditure and income needs for their particular situation. In 2014, the VPSJ in partnership with **safefood** undertook a pilot study on the cost of a minimum essential food basket for two household types in Northern Ireland.

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How is a minimum essential standard of living determined?

An MESL is determined using the Consensual Budget Standards methodology. This methodology, which is grounded in the experience of people, involves detailed research, with members of the public specifying the items that need to be included in a minimum household budget. Focus groups are held for each household type. Each group consists of between eight and 12 people from a mixture of social and economic backgrounds, and represents the household under consideration. For example, the focus groups of parents with children determine the minimum requirements of such households. In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the research, three different focus groups are established for each household type. While the process is detailed and time consuming, it is thorough and robust. In a series of sessions, the groups arrive at a negotiated consensus about the goods and services a household requires to have an MESL. Where necessary, experts are consulted in order to ensure that the negotiated consensus meets basic criteria, such as nutritional standards and home heating standards. However, “ultimately the people themselves are the experts” (12, p.63).

What does it include?

While an MESL is concerned with more than survival, its focus is on needs, not wants. It identifies the minimum goods and services that everyone should be able to afford. There are approximately 2,000 items in the budget, and these goods and services are subsequently categorised into 16 areas of expenditure. The goods and services are then priced in shops or outlets identified by the focus groups. The totals of each of the 16 categories of household budgets show the expenditure required to meet a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.

While some items are bought every week, others may only be bought every couple of months or even years. For example, furniture is expected to last a number of years, while a large proportion of food items are bought on a weekly basis, e.g. fruit and vegetables. However, there are food items which are bought every couple of weeks or even months, e.g. salt and oil. To calculate the weekly cost of each item, the price of the item is divided by the number of weeks it is expected to last. For example, salt, which costs €1 and has a lifespan of 26 weeks, costs €0.04 per week.

Food is one of the 16 categories of expenditure. It is a significant area of household expenditure, and when housing and childcare are excluded, it is the most expensive component of an MESL. The process of how the food baskets were established and how they have evolved is outlined in detail below.

Establishment and evolution of the minimum essential food baskets

The current tranche of research began in 2006 with the publication of minimum essential budgets for six households (urban) (9). The current study, focusing on households living in urban areas, uses Consensual Budget Standards methodology to determine the cost of an MESL for six household types. The six household types are:

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- Two parents and two children, with one child in pre-school (age 3) and one in primary school (age 10)
- Two parents and two children, with one child in primary school (age 10) and one in secondary school (age 15)
- One parent and two children, with one child in pre-school (age 3) and one in primary school (age 10)
- Single adult male of working age, living alone
- Pensioner couple
- Female pensioner, living alone

This study established the minimum requirements for each household type in order to have a standard of living that meets their physical, psychological and social needs at a minimum but acceptable level. Focus groups representing the different household types constructed the food baskets. The focus groups completed an inventory of their food cupboards and fridges and were asked to keep a weekly food diary. The focus groups constructed food menus for each day of the week, and in the course of the work, the focus group members were directed to keep in mind the requirements of the Food Pyramid.

The seven-day menus developed by the first focus groups were studied and, where necessary, amended by the two subsequent focus groups before being sent to experts for evaluation regarding their nutritional adequacy. The menus were sent to the Family Budget Unit at the University of York in the UK and were analysed using Tinuviel Software (9, p.72). The feedback from the nutritional experts “showed that for the most part the menus and food items were adequate” (9, p.37). Some of the changes recommended by the nutritionists included exchanging white bread for brown bread for the adults in the household, and replacing full-fat milk with skimmed milk for older people. The menus, which were examined by nutritionists, were then brought back to the focus groups for their approval. The final menus provide the basis for the food shopping baskets. The menu drawn up in 2006 by the two parents and two children (one child in primary school (age 10) and one in secondary school (age 15)) household type, is detailed below. The items were then priced in stores identified by the focus groups.

In the 2006 study, the majority of food items was bought in Tesco, while meat was purchased in a butcher's. This reflects the stores identified by the focus groups and the predominance of Tesco in the Irish retail market at that time.

Since 2006, the MESL dataset has been extended to include rural households and other household types. The entire MESL dataset, including the food baskets, was also subject to a review in 2012. The outcome of the 2012 review indicated that the menus drawn up in 2006 were still applicable in 2012. These developments and how they have affected the minimum essential food baskets are outlined below. A sample menu is provided in Table 2 and a full set of menus is available at www.budgeting.ie.

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Table 2: Sample menu – two parents and two children, one at primary and one at second level

Day	Breakfast	Mid-morning	Lunch	Mid-afternoon	Dinner	Evening snack
Mon	<p>7 Weetabix (2 for each adult, 2 for 15-year-old boy, 1 for 10 year-old-girl) with 4 x portions of dried apricots and 200ml of milk</p> <p>7 slices of bread, toasted, with a small portion of Flora and marmalade (2 wholemeal per adult, 2 white for 15- year-old, 1 for 10-year-old)</p> <p>4 x 200ml glasses orange juice</p> <p>2 x cups of tea and 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x medium- sized bananas</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x 2 slices of brown wholemeal bread (2 per household member) with a slice of ham and a small portion of Flora</p> <p>4 x strawberry yoghurts (125g pot)</p> <p>2 x 200ml glasses of diluted orange</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee and 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x medium-sized apples</p> <p>Portion of beans and 1 slice of white bread, toasted, with a small portion of Flora (15-year-old).</p> <p>2 x glasses of milk/juice/water</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x chicken curry with rice and salad (includes portion of chicken fillet, curry sauce with onions, portion of salad with tomato, portion of lettuce, cucumber and mixed peppers)</p> <p>4 x 200ml glasses of milk</p>	<p>4 x small bars of chocolate</p> <p>30g bowl of cornflakes with 200ml of milk (15-year-old)</p> <p>2 x glasses of milk/juice</p> <p>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</p>
Tue	<p>4 x 30g bowl of Rice Krispies with 4 x 200ml of milk</p> <p>7 slices of brown wholemeal bread, toasted, with a small portion of Flora (2 per adult, 2 per for 15-year-old, 1 for 10-year-old)</p> <p>4 x 200ml glasses of orange juice</p> <p>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x medium-sized pears</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x 2 slices of brown wholemeal bread (2 per household member) with cheese, turkey, portion of coleslaw and a small portion of Flora</p> <p>2 x 200ml glasses of diluted orange</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee and 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x 2 plain biscuits</p> <p>Portion of noodles (15-year-old)</p> <p>4 x medium-sized oranges</p> <p>2 x 200ml glasses of diluted orange</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x beef stew with portion of carrots, portion of onions, portion of broccoli and 7 medium-sized boiled potatoes (two each for parents and 15-year-old, 1 for 10-year-old)</p> <p>4 x 200ml glasses of milk</p>	<p>4 x white scones with a small portion of Flora and jam</p> <p>2 slices of white bread, toasted, with a slice of ham and a small portion of Flora (15-year-old)</p> <p>2 x 200ml of warm milk with cocoa</p> <p>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</p>

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Table 2: Sample menu – two parents and two children, one at primary and one at second level *Continued*

Day	Breakfast	Mid-morning	Lunch	Mid-afternoon	Dinner	Evening snack
Wed	<p>2 x 30g bowl of Rice Krispies with 2 x 200ml of milk</p> <p>2 x 30g bowl of cornflakes with 2 x 200ml of milk</p> <p>7 slices of bread, toasted, with a small portion of Flora and marmalade (2 brown per adult, 2 white for 15-year-old, 1 white for 10-year-old)</p> <p>4 x 200ml glasses of orange juice</p> <p>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x bananas</p> <p>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x 2 slices of brown wholemeal bread with cheese, turkey, 2 slices of tomato and a small portion of Flora</p> <p>4 x yoghurts (125g pot)</p> <p>2 x 200ml glasses of diluted orange</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x medium oranges</p> <p>2 slices of white bread, toasted, with a slice of cheese and a small portion of Flora (15-year-old)</p> <p>2 x 200ml glasses of diluted orange</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x medium pork chops, 7 medium-sized baked potatoes (2 for each adult, 2 for 15-year-old boy, 1 for 10-year-old girl), portion of turnip and cauliflower with a small portion of gravy</p> <p>4 x 200ml glasses of milk</p>	<p>4 x 2 plain biscuits</p> <p>30g bowl of cornflakes with 200 ml of milk (15-year-old)</p> <p>2 x 200ml glasses of milk</p> <p>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</p>
Thu	<p>7 weetabix (2 for each adult, 2 for 15 yr old boy, 1 for 10 year old girl) with 4 x portion of dried apricot and 200ml of milk</p> <p>7 slices of brown wholemeal bread, toasted with small portion of flora and marmalade (2 per adult, 2 for 15 yr old, 1 for 10 yr old)</p> <p>4 x 200ml glass orange juice</p> <p>2 x cup of tea with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x low fat strawberry yoghurts (125g pot)</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>8 slices of bread with portion of tinned salmon, portion of lettuce and coleslaw and small portion of mayonnaise (2 brown per adult, 2 white per child)</p> <p>2 x 200ml glass of diluted orange</p> <p>2 x cup of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x medium size apples</p> <p>4 x bowls of homemade soup (includes turnip, cauliflower, carrot and potato)</p> <p>4 x brown bread roll with small portion of flora</p> <p>2 x 200ml glass of diluted orange</p> <p>2 x cup of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x chicken fillets, 7 medium size baked potatoes (2 for each adult, 2 for 15 year old boy, 1 for 10 yr old girl), portion of frozen peas and portion of carrots</p> <p>4 x 200ml glass of milk</p>	<p>4 x small bar of chocolate</p> <p>portion of noodles and slice of brown wholemeal bread with small portion of flora (15year old)</p> <p>2 x 200ml glass of milk</p> <p>2 x cup of tea with 35ml of milk</p>

Table 2: Sample menu – two parents and two children, one at primary and one at second level *Continued*

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Day	Breakfast	Mid-morning	Lunch	Mid-afternoon	Dinner	Evening snack
Fri	<p>4 x 30g bowl of Rice Krispies with 4 x 200ml of milk</p> <p>7 slices of bread, toasted, with a small portion of Flora and jam (2 brown per adult, 2 white for 15-year-old, 1 for 10-year-old)</p> <p>4 x 200ml glasses of orange juice</p> <p>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x medium-sized bananas</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee and 35ml of milk</p>	<p>3 x 2 slices of brown wholemeal bread with portion of tuna, sweet corn and a small portion of Flora</p> <p>1 x white bread roll with portion of warm chicken, mayonnaise, sweet corn and mixed peppers (15-year-old)</p> <p>2 x 200ml glasses of diluted orange</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x packets of crisps (Friday treat)</p> <p>2 cream crackers with slice of cheese (15-year-old)</p> <p>2 x 200ml glasses of diluted orange</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>3 x portions of frozen cod (adults and teenager)</p> <p>2 fish fingers (10-year-old)</p> <p>4 x portions of beans and portion of oven chips</p> <p>4 x 200ml glasses of milk</p>	<p>4 x 2 plain biscuits</p> <p>30g bowl of cornflakes with 200ml of milk (15-year-old)</p> <p>2 x 200ml of warm milk with cocoa</p> <p>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</p>
Sat	<p>7 Weetabix (2 for each adult, 2 for 15-year-old boy, 1 for 10-year-old girl) with 4 x portions of dried apricots and 200ml of milk</p> <p>7 slices of brown wholemeal bread, toasted, with a small portion of Flora and marmalade (2 per adult, 2 for 15-year-old, 1 for 10-year-old)</p> <p>4 x 200ml glasses orange juice</p> <p>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x medium-sized apples</p> <p>2 x tea/coffee with 35ml milk</p> <p>2 x 200ml of glasses of milk</p>	<p>4 x 2 potato waffles and portion of scrambled eggs</p> <p>2 x 200ml glasses of diluted orange</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x low-fat strawberry yoghurts</p> <p>2 x cream crackers and slice of cheese (15-year-old)</p> <p>2 x 200ml glasses of orange juice</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>	<p>4 x spaghetti bolognese and salad (portion of pasta, portion of mincemeat, portion of bolognese sauce, including chopped tomatoes, onions, peppers and mushrooms)</p> <p>4 x 200ml glasses of milk</p>	<p>2 x 2 plain biscuits (adults)</p> <p>2 x small bar of chocolate (children)</p> <p>4 packets of crisps (weekend treat)</p> <p>2 x 200ml of warm milk with cocoa</p> <p>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</p>

Table 2: Sample menu – two parents and two children, one at primary and one at second level *Continued*

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Day	Breakfast	Mid-morning	Lunch	Mid-afternoon	Dinner	Evening snack
Sun	<p>4 x fried/boiled egg, 2 grilled sausages and 2 grilled rashers</p> <p>7 slices of bread, toasted, with a small portion of Flora and jam</p> <p>(2 brown per adult, 2 white for 15-year-old, 1 for 10-year-old)</p> <p>4 x 200ml glasses of orange juice</p> <p>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</p>		<p>4 x portion of roast ham/pork/chicken with 7 medium-sized boiled potatoes (2 for each adult, 2 for 15-year-old boy, 1 for 10-year-old girl), portion of cabbage, portion of carrots and parsnips and gravy</p> <p>4 x portions of ice-cream and jelly</p> <p>4 x 200ml glasses of diluted orange</p> <p>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</p>		<p>4 x 2 slices of brown wholemeal bread, slice of ham and a small portion of Flora</p> <p>4 x slices of sponge cake</p> <p>4 x 200ml glasses of milk</p>	<p>4 x medium-sized oranges</p> <p>4 x 2 plain biscuits</p> <p>1 portion of spaghetti hoops and slice of white bread, toasted, with a small portion of Flora (for 15-year-old)</p> <p>2 x 200ml glasses of milk/juice</p> <p>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</p>

Rural households

In 2009, research began to ascertain the cost of an MESL for rural households. Using focus groups living in rural areas, the research sought to establish the additional or different costs for rural households (13). The menus and basket of goods and services drawn up in the 2006 study for each household type (9) were brought to focus groups in rural areas. The groups were asked to examine and study the contents of the baskets and the shops that items were purchased in. The focus groups were then asked to identify the additional or different costs and the shops in which items should be purchased.

The rural focus groups identified a number of differences between the urban and rural MESL food baskets. Such differences included the tendency of rural households, in particular pensioner households, to buy goods locally, and, for that reason, a number of food items were bought in local stores as opposed to large multiples to reflect rural shopping patterns.

The contents of the food baskets, however, are broadly similar between urban and rural households and despite some very minor adjustments, “the composition of the food basket is essentially identical for the rural and urban households” (MacMahon, Weld & Thornton, 2010: 33) (13, p.33).

However, rural focus groups identified a car as a minimum essential requirement. Focus groups strongly stressed the need to include a car or cars in the MESL data in recognition of the limited, if any, public transport in rural areas. While a car is necessary for tasks other than food shopping, without one, rural households have limited choices as to where they shop. This point is important to bear in mind as accessing food can be a challenge for some due to a lack of, or limited, transport. While households may be aware of healthier options, physical constraints can limit a household’s ability to purchase healthy food.

A minimum income standard for Ireland

In 2012, the VPSJ in conjunction with the Policy Institute at Trinity College Dublin published *A Minimum Income Standard for Ireland* (14). While the main focus of this report was to establish the gross income households required to afford the expenditure needed for an MESL, the study also extended the MESL research to include a broader number of household types by individualising the costs for each household member. To do this, the focus shifted from the MESL needs of aggregate households to the MESL needs of specific individual types within the context of an entire household¹. A result of the individualisation process, for example, was that the direct costs of children could be extracted from the aggregate household expenditure. The direct costs of children focuses on costs that can be solely attributed to a child, such as

¹ Further information on the individualisation process can be found in Collins, M.L., MacMahon, B., Weld, G and Thornton, R. (2012), *A Minimum Income Standard for Ireland – a consensual budget standards study examining household types across the lifecycle – Studies in Public Policy No. 27*, Dublin: Policy Institute, Trinity College Dublin, pp. 40–46..

their food, clothing, personal care and so forth, and exclude costs shared in common with parents such as home heating and use of the family car, etc. The outcome of this was a separate piece of research, *The Cost of a Child*, which examined in detail the cost of a child at the four different stages of childhood (15). The food costs for children are explored in detail in section 7 of this report.

Review of the food baskets

In 2012, the VPSJ conducted a review of the minimum essential baskets drawn up in 2006 for urban households and in 2010 for rural households (16). The review of the baskets involved focus groups examining changing attitudes of what was considered necessary for an MESL between 2006, when the expenditure baskets were first drawn up, and 2012. The contents of the existing baskets were reviewed, and, where necessary, goods and services were added, subtracted or re-priced in new stores identified by the focus groups. The lifespan of goods was also reviewed. Subsequently, any necessary adjustments were made to the baskets based on the discussions with focus groups and expert opinion where necessary.

The review of the baskets did not show a seismic shift in the attitudes of members of the public towards what constitutes an MESL. The outcome of the review indicated that the menus drawn up in 2006 were still applicable in 2012. A similar finding was also found in the UK budget standards research. In a review of the budget standards research in the UK, which was conducted by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at the University of Loughborough, it was found that the content of menus based on items that are essential for an adequate diet remain relatively consistent over time. They note that “the final menus are very similar to those originally developed in 2008”, which was when they began their current tranche of research (17, p.12).

The most fundamental change in the food basket relates to the shops in which items are purchased. In the review, urban and rural focus groups identified different stores for their food shopping, demonstrating the emergence of low-cost multiples in the Irish retail market. The review resulted in a number of changes to the food baskets.

Since 2006, when the baskets were first drawn up, Aldi and Lidl have increased their foothold in the Irish retail market, and this was reflected by the review focus groups’ choices. As a result, a large proportion of food items in the MESL dataset is now purchased in Aldi and Lidl. However, meat items such as chops and joints continue to be purchased in local butcher shops in urban and rural areas. These changes necessitated a re-pricing of the food baskets in their entirety.

Further specific changes were made to the rural food baskets following the review process. When the rural food baskets were first established, rural-based pensioners in particular bought a large proportion of food items in local shops. However, the review focus groups felt that while a proportion of shopping items continue to be purchased locally, such as bread, milk and some fruit and vegetables, other food items and perishable goods are purchased in Aldi or Lidl. The focus groups reasoned that a car is included in the MESL budget for rural pensioner households, and highlighted the impact of living through a recession, and this explains the shift from predominantly local shopping to shopping in multiples, which tend to be cheaper,

and is more in keeping with a minimum standard of living. For that reason, while all rural households continue to do a proportion of their food shopping locally, the majority of food items are now purchased in low-cost German retailers.

The menus and the subsequent food baskets that are under consideration in this paper were therefore first established in 2006. Rural households were added to the dataset in 2010. In 2012, the food baskets, along with the rest of the MESL data, were reviewed, and a number of changes were made, notably the decision to buy the majority of food items in Aldi and Lidl for both urban and rural households. Fundamentally, the menus that were first established by focus groups in 2006 still form the basis of the food baskets for each household type in urban and rural areas.

Methodology for the analysis of the food data

All of the MESL data were reviewed and re-priced where necessary in 2012. The food baskets were re-priced in their entirety in 2012. The baskets for all categories of expenditure, including food, were subsequently updated for inflation in 2013 and 2014, based on changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The MESL data were updated annually on a March-to-March cycle.

For the purposes of this report, and in order to examine the impact of inflation on the cost of the minimum essential food basket between 2014 and 2006, the cost of an MESL for each household type in 2014 was taken as the starting point. The appropriate inflation rates for each category of expenditure, e.g. food and clothing, and for each year from 2014 to 2006 were applied to the MESL data. Using 2014 as the starting point and adjusting the cost of the basket retrospectively to correct for inflation ensured that an identical basket of goods was compared year on year. Furthermore, it was necessary to adjust all other categories of core expenditure to be able to put the food baskets in the context of the overall cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living between 2006 and 2014.

This approach to analysing the trend in the cost of food is necessary as the 2012 review process resulted in changes to the MESL data, as outlined above. Furthermore, in 2011 it was decided to change the update from a June-to-June cycle to a March-to-March cycle.² Using this approach and correcting for inflation retrospectively from 2014 to 2006, ensured an identical basket of goods was compared year on year.

Section 5 of the report, Breakdown of the food basket by sub-category, examines the food basket in detail. In order to provide an in-depth analysis of the food basket, the most detailed sub-index rate possible was applied to each food item. The cost of each food item was corrected for inflation individually and then categorised under an appropriate CPI heading. For example, sausages were corrected for using the CPI rate for “dried, salted or smoked meat” and then categorised under “Meat”. A fuller description of the methodology applied to examine the food basket by sub-category is detailed in section 5 of the report.

² From 2007–2010, the MESL data were updated in June of each year. In 2011, a decision was made to update the MESL data in March of each year to allow more time to prepare for the pre-budget process.

3 Impact of inflation on the minimum essential food basket 2006–2014

Introduction

This section analyses the trend in food inflation from 2006 to 2014 and the impact that it has had on the minimum essential food baskets. The data are based on the cost of food and non-alcoholic beverages in March of each year.

Figure 1: Overall inflation, food and non-alcoholic beverage inflation 2006–2014

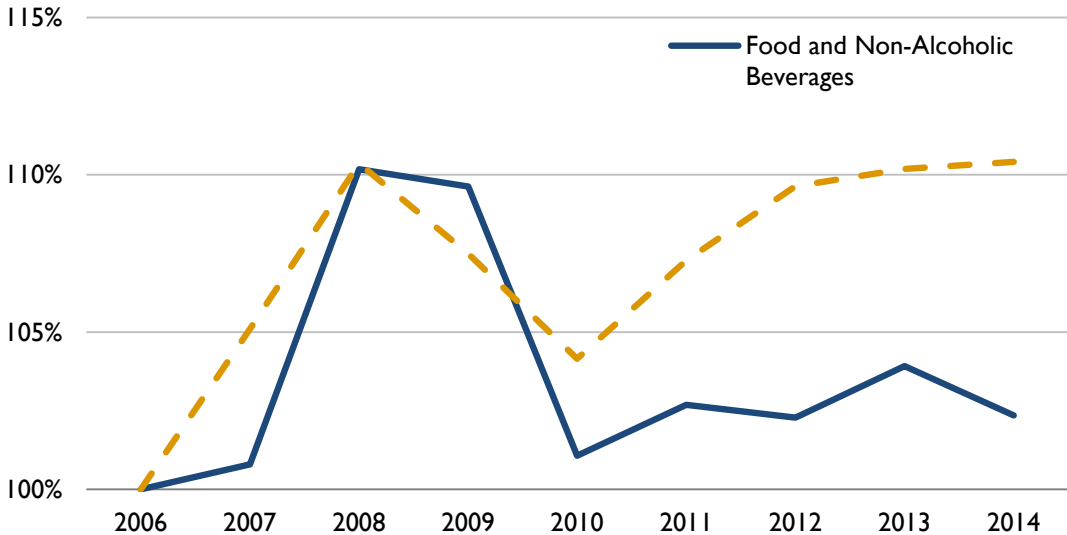


Figure 1 illustrates the annual percentage change from 2006 to 2014 in the prices of “food and non-alcoholic beverages”. Also illustrated is the annual percentage change in overall average prices for the same period.

Between 2006 and 2008, food and non-alcoholic prices increased by an average of 10%, as did prices generally. Prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages spiked in 2008 and prices were 10.2% higher than they were in 2006. In 2009, average prices fell back and were 7.5% higher than in 2006, but prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages remained over 9.5% higher than they were in 2006. However, by 2010 prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages fell sharply and were only 1.1% higher than they were in 2006, while average prices were 4.2% higher in 2010 than they were in 2006.

The overall year-on-year change from 2006 to 2014 shows that 2014 prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages were 2.4% higher than they were in 2006, but overall average prices were up by 10.4% in the same period.

Tables 3 to 14 detail the impact of inflation on the cost of an MESL from 2006 to 2014 for the six household types under consideration in both urban and rural settings. Core expenditure excludes the cost of housing, childcare and entitlements to secondary benefits such as a medical card. By concentrating on core expenditure, these variables, which can fluctuate depending on a household's situation and employment status, are removed from the analysis.

The cost of a minimum essential food basket 2006–2014

Urban households

When housing and childcare costs are excluded from the MESL data, food is the biggest area of expenditure for all household types. Food accounts for over 25% of total core expenditure from 2006 to 2014 for all household types, with the exception of the single adult household. For this household, food is between 23.14% (2014) and 25.2% (2008) of total core expenditure.

Between 2007 and 2008, prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages rose by 9.3%, and in line with this sharp rise in inflation all households saw a considerable increase in the cost of the minimum essential food basket in 2008. For example, the food basket for the pensioner couple increased by €7.55 between 2007 and 2008, demonstrating the impact of inflation on household expenditure on food. This was followed by a sharp drop in prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages in 2010. Between 2009 and 2010, prices fell by 7.8%. Again, giving the example of the pensioner couple household, the weekly cost of the food basket for this household type fell from €88.26 in 2009 to €81.37 in 2010, a decrease of €6.89.

The cost of a minimum essential food basket is greatest for a two-parent household with two children of primary and secondary school-going age. The cost of the food basket for this household type ranged from €146.91 per week in 2006 to €161.86 in 2008. In 2014, the cost of the minimum essential food basket was €150.37 and accounted for 26.23% of total core expenditure.

The minimum essential food basket is least expensive for the single adult household. The cost of the food basket for this household fluctuated between €55.74 in 2006 and €61.41 in 2008, when food inflation was at its highest. Similar to other households, the cost of the food basket fell in 2010. In 2014, the food basket cost €57.05 per week, which was €1.31 more expensive per week than it was in 2006.

Rural households

With the exception of the single adult household type, the cost of the minimum essential food basket is more expensive for rural households when compared to their urban counterparts. While the majority of items in the rural food baskets were purchased in Aldi or Lidl, a proportion of food items was bought locally, and, similarly to the urban households, meat was purchased in a local butcher's. As a result, there is a difference in the cost of food between urban and rural households.

Similar to the urban households, food is the biggest area of expenditure, and the rural food baskets follow the inflation trajectory, with all households seeing notable increases in the cost of food in 2008, followed by

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a considerable decline in cost in 2010. Again, the household with the highest food costs was the two-parent household with two children, one attending primary school and one attending secondary school. The cost of the food basket for this household type ranged from €161 in 2006 to €177.38 in 2008. In 2014, the weekly cost of the food basket for this household type was €164.79 and amounted to 26.46% of total weekly core expenditure.

As expected, the one-parent household spent less per week on food than either of the two-parent households. The cost of the food basket for the one-parent household fluctuated from €102.30 in 2006 to when it peaked in 2008 at €112.71 per week, demonstrating the impact of inflation on the minimum essential food basket.

Although the rural pensioner households spent more per week on food than their urban counterparts, food accounted for a lesser proportion of total core expenditure. This is because a car was included in the rural basket, plus all associated expenses, such as tax and insurance. The baskets for urban-based pensioners did not include any transport costs as it was assumed in the MESL research that public transport was available in urban areas and that pensioners living there were able to make full use of the Free Travel Pass. As a consequence, food was a smaller percentage of expenditure for rural dwellers as transport costs were also included in the core expenditure.

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 3: Two parents with two children, at pre-school and primary school – core expenditure 2006–2014

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

Urban	2006 €	2007 €	2008 €	2009 €	2010 €	2011 €	2012 €	2013 €	2014 €
Food	€ 122.31	123.29	134.75	134.08	123.62	125.60	125.09	127.10	125.19
Clothing	€ 36.58	€ 35.63	€ 34.34	€ 31.39	€27.09	€ 26.38	€26.20	€25.91	€24.82
Personal Care	€ 20.82	€ 21.17	€ 21.91	€ 21.85	€19.90	€19.86	€19.29	€19.09	€ 18.88
Health	€ 13.67	€ 14.08	€ 14.88	€ 15.58	€15.52	€16.16	€16.25	€16.38	€ 16.33
Household Goods	€ 25.63	€ 25.24	€ 24.91	€ 24.44	€23.10	€22.56	€22.09	€21.36	€20.76
Household Services	€ 6.40	€ 6.69	€ 6.75	€ 6.74	€6.56	€6.27	€6.32	€6.36	€ 6.46
Communications	€ 14.09	€ 14.16	€ 14.30	€ 14.41	€14.38	€14.97	€15.03	€14.21	€13.77
Social Inclusion and Participation	€ 72.52	€ 74.04	€ 74.93	€ 74.70	€73.73	€72.77	€72.26	€72.34	€71.76
Education	€ 18.12	€ 15.07	€ 14.35	€ 12.46	€10.57	€10.08	€9.44	€9.12	€8.70
Transport	€ 55.03	€ 56.08	€59.22	€ 55.25	€58.01	€59.98	€64.54	€63.64	€62.30
Household Energy	€ 31.32	€ 36.57	€ 34.02	€ 40.34	€32.85	€34.42	€39.95	€43.64	€44.84
Personal Costs	€ 5.24	€ 5.39	€ 5.62	€ 5.77	€€5.68	€5.68	€5.75	€7.03	€ 8.71
Insurance	€ 15.86	€ 17.08	€ 18.36	€ 22.41	€24.38	€29.16	€32.76	€36.00	€39.09
Savings and Contingencies	€ 26.97	€ 27.08	€ 28.76	€27.95	€27.93	€28.09	€28.18	€28.21	€29.98
Total Core Costs	€ 464.54	€ 471.56	€487.10	€487.37	€463.31	€472.00	€483.16	€490.37	€491.59
Food as % MESL Core	26.33%	26.14%	27.66%	27.51%	26.68%	26.61%	25.89%	25.92%	25.47%

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 4: Two parents with two children, at primary school and in second level – core expenditure 2006–2014

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

Urban	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 146.91	€ 148.08	€ 161.86	€ 161.05	€ 148.49	€ 150.86	€ 150.26	€ 152.66	€ 150.37
Clothing	€ 47.16	€ 45.93	€ 44.28	€ 40.47	€ 34.93	€ 34.02	€ 33.78	€ 33.41	€ 32.01
Personal Care	€ 28.45	€ 28.93	€ 29.95	€ 29.86	€ 27.20	€ 27.14	€ 26.36	€ 26.09	€ 25.81
Health	€ 14.13	€ 14.55	€ 15.38	€ 16.10	€ 16.04	€ 16.70	€ 16.80	€ 16.93	€ 16.88
Household Goods	€ 26.81	€ 26.41	€ 26.06	€ 25.57	€ 24.16	€ 23.60	€ 23.11	€ 22.35	€ 21.72
Household Services	€ 6.40	€ 6.69	€ 6.75	€ 6.74	€ 6.56	€ 6.27	€ 6.32	€ 6.36	€ 6.46
Communications	€ 18.77	€ 18.86	€ 19.05	€ 19.21	€ 19.17	€ 19.95	€ 20.03	€ 18.93	€ 18.34
Social Inclusion and Participation	€ 93.70	€ 95.66	€ 96.81	€ 96.52	€ 95.27	€ 94.03	€ 93.37	€ 93.46	€ 92.72
Education	€ 32.12	€ 29.29	€ 28.92	€ 27.03	€ 25.07	€ 24.57	€ 24.41	€ 24.41	€ 24.25
Transport	€ 55.03	€ 56.08	€ 59.22	€ 55.25	€ 58.01	€ 59.98	€ 64.54	€ 63.64	€ 62.30
Household Energy	€ 31.32	€ 36.57	€ 34.02	€ 40.34	€ 32.85	€ 34.42	€ 39.95	€ 43.64	€ 44.84
Personal Costs	€ 5.24	€ 5.39	€ 5.62	€ 5.77	€ 5.68	€ 5.68	€ 5.75	€ 7.03	€ 8.71
Insurance	€ 15.76	€ 16.98	€ 18.25	€ 22.28	€ 24.24	€ 28.98	€ 32.56	€ 35.79	€ 38.85
Savings and Contingencies	€ 26.97	€ 27.08	€ 28.76	€ 27.95	€ 27.93	€ 28.09	€ 28.18	€ 28.21	€ 29.98
Total Core Costs	€ 548.77	€ 556.52	574.93	574.14	€ 545.58	€ 554.32	€ 565.43	€ 572.90	€ 573.23
Food as % MESL Core	26.77%	26.61%	28.15%	28.05%	27.22%	27.22%	26.57%	26.65%	26.23%

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 5: One parent and two children, at pre-school and primary school – core expenditure 2006–2014

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

Urban	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 94.00	€ 94.75	€ 103.57	€ 103.05	€ 95.01	€ 96.53	€ 96.14	€ 97.68	€ 96.22
Clothing	€ 27.79	€ 27.07	€ 26.10	€ 23.85	€ 20.58	€ 20.05	€ 19.91	€ 19.69	€ 18.86
Personal Care	€ 12.39	€ 12.60	€ 13.04	€ 13.00	€ 11.84	€ 11.82	€ 11.48	€ 11.36	€ 11.24
Health	€ 11.24	€ 11.58	€ 12.24	€ 12.81	€ 12.76	€ 13.28	€ 13.36	€ 13.47	€ 13.43
Household Goods	€ 24.17	€ 23.81	€ 23.50	€ 23.05	€ 21.78	€ 21.28	€ 20.84	€ 20.15	€ 19.58
Household Services	€ 6.40	€ 6.69	€ 6.75	€ 6.74	€ 6.56	€ 6.27	€ 6.32	€ 6.36	€ 6.46
Communications	€ 9.40	€ 9.44	€ 9.54	€ 9.61	€ 9.60	€ 9.99	€ 10.03	€ 9.48	€ 9.18
Social Inclusion and Participation	€ 50.09	€ 51.15	€ 51.76	€ 51.61	€ 50.93	€ 50.27	€ 49.92	€ 49.97	€ 49.57
Education	€ 18.12	€ 15.07	€ 14.35	€ 12.46	€ 10.57	€ 10.08	€ 9.44	€ 9.12	€ 8.70
Transport	€ 29.96	€ 30.53	€ 32.24	€ 30.08	€ 31.58	€ 32.66	€ 35.14	€ 34.65	€ 33.92
Household Energy	€ 31.13	€ 36.36	€ 33.82	€ 40.11	€ 32.64	€ 34.21	€ 39.71	€ 43.38	€ 44.57
Personal Costs	€ 4.18	€ 4.30	€ 4.48	€ 4.60	€ 4.53	€ 4.53	€ 4.58	€ 5.60	€ 6.94
Insurance	€ 10.47	€ 11.18	€ 11.96	€ 14.61	€ 15.91	€ 18.93	€ 21.11	€ 23.06	€ 24.91
Savings and Contingencies	€ 22.72	€ 22.81	€ 24.22	€ 23.55	€ 23.52	€ 23.66	€ 23.73	€ 23.76	€ 25.25
Total Core Costs	€ 352.06	€ 357.33	€ 367.55	€ 369.12	€ 347.81	€ 353.57	€ 361.72	€ 367.72	€ 368.82
Food as % MESL Core	26.70%	26.52%	28.18%	27.92%	27.32%	27.30%	26.58%	26.56%	26.09%

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 6: Single adult male living alone – core expenditure 2006 to 2014

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

Urban	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 55.74	€ 56.18	€ 61.41	€ 61.10	€ 56.34	€ 57.24	€ 57.01	€ 57.92	€ 57.05
Clothing	€ 15.45	€ 15.05	€ 14.51	€ 13.26	€ 11.45	€ 11.15	€ 11.07	€ 10.95	€ 10.49
Personal Care	€ 15.17	€ 15.43	€ 15.97	€ 15.92	€ 14.50	€ 14.47	€ 14.05	€ 13.91	€ 13.76
Health	€ 5.18	€ 5.34	€ 5.64	€ 5.91	€ 5.88	€ 6.12	€ 6.16	€ 6.21	€ 6.19
Household Goods	€ 7.30	€ 7.19	€ 7.10	€ 6.96	€ 6.58	€ 6.43	€ 6.29	€ 6.09	€ 5.92
Household Services	€ 2.85	€ 2.98	€ 3.01	€ 3.01	€ 2.92	€ 2.80	€ 2.82	€ 2.83	€ 2.88
Communications	€ 9.43	€ 9.48	€ 9.57	€ 9.65	€ 9.63	€ 10.02	€ 10.06	€ 9.51	€ 9.21
Social Inclusion and Participation	€ 38.76	€ 39.57	€ 40.05	€ 39.93	€ 39.41	€ 38.90	€ 38.62	€ 38.66	€ 38.35
Education	€ 12.16	€ 9.54	€ 8.99	€ 7.61	€ 6.47	€ 5.99	€ 5.65	€ 5.47	€ 5.26
Transport	€ 30.37	€ 30.95	€ 32.68	€ 30.49	€ 32.02	€ 33.10	€ 35.62	€ 35.12	€ 34.38
Household Energy	€ 20.06	€ 23.28	€ 21.71	€ 25.68	€ 21.27	€ 22.22	€ 25.61	€ 27.95	€ 28.77
Personal Costs	€ 4.79	€ 4.92	€ 5.14	€ 5.27	€ 5.19	€ 5.19	€ 5.25	€ 6.42	€ 7.95
Insurance	€ 6.83	€ 7.22	€ 7.69	€ 9.41	€ 10.25	€ 12.14	€ 13.44	€ 14.59	€ 15.67
Savings and Contingencies	€ 9.57	€ 9.61	€ 10.21	€ 9.92	€ 9.91	€ 9.97	€ 10.00	€ 10.01	€ 10.64
Total Core Costs	€ 233.67	€ 236.75	€ 243.68	€ 244.12	€ 231.81	€ 235.75	€ 241.67	€ 245.65	€ 246.53
Food as % MESL Core	23.85%	23.73%	25.20%	25.03%	24.30%	24.28%	23.59%	23.58%	23.14%

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 7: Pensioner couple – core expenditure 2006–2014

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

Urban	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 80.51	€ 81.15	€ 88.70	€ 88.26	€ 81.37	€ 82.67	€ 82.34	€ 83.66	€ 82.41
Clothing	€ 24.85	€ 24.20	€ 23.33	€ 21.32	€ 18.40	€ 17.92	€ 17.80	€ 17.60	€ 16.86
Personal Care	€ 15.51	€ 15.77	€ 16.33	€ 16.28	€ 14.83	€ 14.80	€ 14.37	€ 14.23	€ 14.07
Health	€ 20.33	€ 20.93	€ 22.13	€ 23.17	€ 23.08	€ 24.02	€ 24.17	€ 24.36	€ 24.29
Household Goods	€ 22.88	€ 22.54	€ 22.24	€ 21.82	€ 20.62	€ 20.15	€ 19.72	€ 19.07	€ 18.54
Household Services	€ 6.03	€ 6.31	€ 6.36	€ 6.35	€ 6.18	€ 5.91	€ 5.96	€ 5.99	€ 6.09
Communications	€ 12.97	€ 13.03	€ 13.16	€ 13.27	€ 13.24	€ 13.79	€ 13.84	€ 13.08	€ 12.68
Social Inclusion and Participation	€ 55.06	€ 56.21	€ 56.89	€ 56.72	€ 55.98	€ 55.25	€ 54.87	€ 54.92	€ 54.48
Education	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -
Transport	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -
Household Energy	€ 37.13	€ 43.64	€ 40.47	€ 48.12	€ 38.50	€ 40.47	€ 47.32	€ 51.73	€ 53.06
Personal Costs	€ 3.98	€ 4.09	€ 4.27	€ 4.38	€ 4.31	€ 4.31	€ 4.37	€ 5.33	€ 6.61
Insurance	€ 9.92	€ 10.63	€ 11.40	€ 13.92	€ 15.15	€ 18.07	€ 20.22	€ 22.14	€ 23.97
Savings and Contingencies	€ 14.36	€ 14.42	€ 15.31	€ 14.88	€ 14.87	€ 14.96	€ 15.00	€ 15.02	€ 15.96
Total Core Costs	€ 303.52	€ 312.94	€ 320.59	€ 328.49	€ 306.53	€ 312.32	€ 319.97	€ 327.13	€ 329.00
Food as % MESL Core	26.52%	25.93%	27.67%	26.87%	26.55%	26.47%	25.73%	25.57%	25.05%

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 8: Female pensioner living alone – core expenditure 2006–2014

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

Urban	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 61.15	€ 61.64	€ 67.37	€ 67.03	€ 61.80	€ 62.79	€ 62.54	€ 63.54	€ 62.59
Clothing	€ 14.90	€ 14.52	€ 13.99	€ 12.79	€ 11.04	€ 10.75	€ 10.68	€ 10.56	€ 10.12
Personal Care	€ 10.68	€ 10.87	€ 11.25	€ 11.21	€ 10.22	€ 10.19	€ 9.90	€ 9.80	€ 9.69
Health	€ 10.19	€ 10.50	€ 11.10	€ 11.62	€ 11.57	€ 12.05	€ 12.12	€ 12.22	€ 12.18
Household Goods	€ 21.20	€ 20.88	€ 20.61	€ 20.21	€ 19.10	€ 18.66	€ 18.27	€ 17.67	€ 17.17
Household Services	€ 5.84	€ 6.11	€ 6.16	€ 6.15	€ 5.99	€ 5.73	€ 5.78	€ 5.81	€ 5.90
Communications	€ 13.08	€ 13.15	€ 13.28	€ 13.39	€ 13.36	€ 13.91	€ 13.96	€ 13.20	€ 12.79
Social Inclusion and Participation	€ 41.31	€ 42.17	€ 42.68	€ 42.55	€ 42.00	€ 41.45	€ 41.16	€ 41.20	€ 40.87
Education	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -
Transport	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -
Household Energy	€ 35.82	€ 42.17	€ 39.08	€ 46.49	€ 37.04	€ 38.96	€ 45.64	€ 49.90	€ 51.17
Personal Costs	€ 3.82	€ 3.92	€ 4.09	€ 4.20	€ 4.13	€ 4.13	€ 4.18	€ 5.11	€ 6.33
Insurance	€ 5.73	€ 6.03	€ 6.41	€ 7.84	€ 8.54	€ 10.10	€ 11.14	€ 12.06	€ 12.91
Savings and Contingencies	€ 9.57	€ 9.61	€ 10.21	€ 9.92	€ 9.91	€ 9.97	€ 10.00	€ 10.01	€ 10.64
Total Core Costs	€ 233.29	€ 241.56	€ 246.22	€ 253.41	€ 234.71	€ 238.70	€ 245.37	€ 251.07	€ 252.36
Food as % MESL Core	26.21%	25.52%	27.36%	26.45%	26.33%	26.31%	25.49%	25.31%	24.80%

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 9: Two parents and two children, at pre-school and primary school – core expenditure 2006–2014

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

Rural	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 134.70	€ 135.77	€ 148.40	€ 147.66	€ 136.14	€ 138.32	€ 137.77	€ 139.97	€ 137.87
Clothing	€ 38.60	€ 37.59	€ 36.24	€ 33.12	€ 28.58	€ 27.84	€ 27.65	€ 27.34	€ 26.19
Personal Care	€ 20.16	€ 20.50	€ 21.22	€ 21.15	€ 19.27	€ 19.23	€ 18.67	€ 18.49	€ 18.28
Health	€ 12.61	€ 12.98	€ 13.72	€ 14.37	€ 14.31	€ 14.90	€ 14.99	€ 15.11	€ 15.06
Household Goods	€ 26.77	€ 26.36	€ 26.02	€ 25.53	€ 24.12	€ 23.57	€ 23.07	€ 22.31	€ 21.69
Household Services	€ 10.41	€ 10.89	€ 10.98	€ 10.97	€ 10.67	€ 10.21	€ 10.29	€ 10.35	€ 10.51
Communications	€ 14.09	€ 14.16	€ 14.30	€ 14.41	€ 14.38	€ 14.97	€ 15.03	€ 14.21	€ 13.77
Social Inclusion and Participation	€ 75.40	€ 76.98	€ 77.91	€ 77.67	€ 76.66	€ 75.67	€ 75.14	€ 75.21	€ 74.61
Education	€ 18.47	€ 15.45	€ 14.76	€ 12.91	€ 11.11	€ 10.59	€ 10.07	€ 9.81	€ 9.44
Transport (1 car)	€ 62.13	€ 63.31	€ 66.86	€ 62.38	€ 65.50	€ 67.72	€ 72.87	€ 71.85	€ 70.34
Household Energy	€ 42.14	€ 42.03	€ 49.15	€ 39.03	€ 44.42	€ 55.86	€ 61.06	€ 62.18	€ 60.48
Personal Costs	€ 5.70	€ 5.86	€ 6.11	€ 6.28	€ 6.18	€ 6.18	€ 6.25	€ 7.64	€ 9.46
Insurance	€ 22.04	€ 22.61	€ 23.42	€ 28.02	€ 30.05	€ 35.17	€ 39.02	€ 41.87	€ 45.21
Savings and Contingencies	€ 26.97	€ 27.08	€ 28.76	€ 27.95	€ 27.93	€ 28.09	€ 28.18	€ 28.21	€ 29.98
Total Core Costs	€ 510.17	€ 511.59	€ 537.84	€ 521.45	€ 509.32	€ 528.32	€ 540.07	€ 544.54	€ 542.90
Food as % MESL Core	26.40%	26.54%	27.59%	28.32%	26.73%	26.18%	25.51%	25.70%	25.40%

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 10: Two parents and two children, at primary school and in second level – core expenditure 2006–2014

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

Rural	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 161.00	€ 162.29	€ 177.38	€ 176.49	€ 162.73	€ 165.33	€ 164.67	€ 167.30	€ 164.79
Clothing	€ 49.21	€ 47.93	€ 46.20	€ 42.23	€ 36.45	€ 35.50	€ 35.25	€ 34.86	€ 33.40
Personal Care	€ 27.29	€ 27.75	€ 28.72	€ 28.64	€ 26.09	€ 26.04	€ 25.28	€ 25.03	€ 24.75
Health	€ 13.15	€ 13.55	€ 14.32	€ 14.99	€ 14.93	€ 15.55	€ 15.64	€ 15.76	€ 15.72
Household Goods	€ 27.88	€ 27.46	€ 27.11	€ 26.59	€ 25.13	€ 24.55	€ 24.03	€ 23.24	€ 22.59
Household Services	€ 10.41	€ 10.89	€ 10.98	€ 10.97	€ 10.67	€ 10.21	€ 10.29	€ 10.35	€ 10.51
Communications	€ 18.77	€ 18.87	€ 19.05	€ 19.21	€ 19.17	€ 19.95	€ 20.03	€ 18.93	€ 18.35
Social Inclusion and Participation	€ 95.48	€ 97.49	€ 98.66	€ 98.36	€ 97.08	€ 95.82	€ 95.15	€ 95.24	€ 94.48
Education	€ 31.07	€ 28.22	€ 27.80	€ 25.90	€ 23.95	€ 23.42	€ 23.27	€ 23.25	€ 23.08
Transport (1 car)	€ 62.13	€ 63.31	€ 66.86	€ 62.38	€ 65.50	€ 67.72	€ 72.87	€ 71.85	€ 70.34
Household Energy	€ 42.14	€ 42.03	€ 49.15	€ 39.03	€ 44.42	€ 55.86	€ 61.06	€ 62.18	€ 60.48
Personal Costs	€ 5.70	€ 5.86	€ 6.11	€ 6.28	€ 6.18	€ 6.18	€ 6.25	€ 7.64	€ 9.46
Insurance	€ 21.95	€ 22.51	€ 23.31	€ 27.89	€ 29.90	€ 35.00	€ 38.82	€ 41.65	€ 44.97
Savings and Contingencies	€ 26.97	€ 27.08	€ 28.76	€ 27.95	€ 27.93	€ 28.09	€ 28.18	€ 28.21	€ 29.98
Total Core Costs	€ 593.15	€ 595.23	€ 624.41	€ 606.90	€ 590.10	€ 609.21	€ 620.80	€ 625.49	€ 622.90
Food as % MESL Core	27.14%	27.26%	28.41%	29.08%	27.58%	27.14%	26.53%	26.75%	26.46%

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 11: One parent and two children, pre-school and primary school – core expenditure 2006–2014

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

Rural	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 102.30	€ 103.12	€ 112.71	€ 112.15	€ 103.40	€ 105.05	€ 104.63	€ 106.31	€ 104.71
Clothing	€ 28.37	€ 27.63	€ 26.64	€ 24.34	€ 21.01	€ 20.46	€ 20.32	€ 20.10	€ 19.25
Personal Care	€ 12.36	€ 12.57	€ 13.01	€ 12.97	€ 11.82	€ 11.79	€ 11.45	€ 11.34	€ 11.21
Health	€ 10.33	€ 10.64	€ 11.25	€ 11.78	€ 11.73	€ 12.21	€ 12.28	€ 12.38	€ 12.34
Household Goods	€ 25.39	€ 25.01	€ 24.69	€ 24.22	€ 22.89	€ 22.36	€ 21.89	€ 21.17	€ 20.58
Household Services	€ 9.99	€ 10.45	€ 10.54	€ 10.53	€ 10.24	€ 9.80	€ 9.88	€ 9.93	€ 10.09
Communications	€ 9.40	€ 9.44	€ 9.54	€ 9.61	€ 9.59	€ 9.99	€ 10.03	€ 9.48	€ 9.18
Social Inclusion and Participation	€ 52.66	€ 53.77	€ 54.41	€ 54.25	€ 53.54	€ 52.85	€ 52.48	€ 52.53	€ 52.11
Education	€ 18.47	€ 15.45	€ 14.76	€ 12.91	€ 11.11	€ 10.59	€ 10.07	€ 9.81	€ 9.44
Transport	€ 62.03	€ 63.21	€ 66.75	€ 62.28	€ 65.39	€ 67.61	€ 72.75	€ 71.73	€ 70.23
Household Energy	€ 41.96	€ 41.83	€ 48.96	€ 38.81	€ 44.22	€ 55.65	€ 60.83	€ 61.93	€ 60.22
Personal Costs	€ 4.63	€ 4.76	€ 4.97	€ 5.10	€ 5.02	€ 5.02	€ 5.08	€ 6.21	€ 7.69
Insurance	€ 16.90	€ 16.94	€ 17.22	€ 20.45	€ 21.80	€ 25.19	€ 27.63	€ 29.17	€ 31.28
Savings and Contingencies	€ 22.72	€ 22.81	€ 24.22	€ 23.55	€ 23.52	€ 23.66	€ 23.73	€ 23.76	€ 25.25
Total Core Costs	€ 417.53	€ 417.64	€ 439.66	€ 422.94	€ 415.28	€ 432.25	€ 443.07	€ 445.83	€ 443.59
Food as % MESL Core	24.50%	24.69%	25.64%	26.52%	24.90%	24.30%	23.62%	23.84%	23.61%

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 12: Single adult male living alone – core expenditure 2006–2014

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

Rural	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 51.65	€ 52.07	€ 56.91	€ 56.62	€ 52.21	€ 53.04	€ 52.83	€ 53.68	€ 52.87
Clothing	€ 11.51	€ 11.21	€ 10.81	€ 9.88	€ 8.53	€ 8.30	€ 8.25	€ 8.16	€ 7.81
Personal Care	€ 8.32	€ 8.46	€ 8.76	€ 8.73	€ 7.95	€ 7.94	€ 7.71	€ 7.63	€ 7.55
Health	€ 4.96	€ 5.11	€ 5.40	€ 5.66	€ 5.63	€ 5.86	€ 5.90	€ 5.95	€ 5.93
Household Goods	€ 20.20	€ 19.89	€ 19.63	€ 19.26	€ 18.20	€ 17.78	€ 17.41	€ 16.84	€ 16.36
Household Services	€ 9.86	€ 10.31	€ 10.39	€ 10.38	€ 10.10	€ 9.67	€ 9.75	€ 9.79	€ 9.95
Communications	€ 9.43	€ 9.48	€ 9.57	€ 9.65	€ 9.63	€ 10.02	€ 10.06	€ 9.51	€ 9.21
Social Inclusion and Participation	€ 46.86	€ 47.85	€ 48.42	€ 48.28	€ 47.65	€ 47.03	€ 46.70	€ 46.75	€ 46.37
Education	€ 12.01	€ 9.38	€ 8.82	€ 7.43	€ 6.27	€ 5.79	€ 5.44	€ 5.25	€ 5.03
Transport	€ 38.05	€ 38.78	€ 40.95	€ 38.21	€ 40.12	€ 41.48	€ 44.63	€ 44.01	€ 43.08
Household Energy	€ 33.62	€ 33.33	€ 39.36	€ 30.66	€ 35.34	€ 44.82	€ 48.96	€ 49.73	€ 48.23
Personal Costs	€ 5.25	€ 5.39	€ 5.63	€ 5.78	€ 5.68	€ 5.68	€ 5.75	€ 7.03	€ 8.71
Insurance	€ 12.59	€ 12.37	€ 12.39	€ 14.60	€ 15.47	€ 17.69	€ 19.23	€ 20.01	€ 21.35
Savings and Contingencies	€ 9.57	€ 9.61	€ 10.21	€ 9.92	€ 9.91	€ 9.97	€ 10.00	€ 10.01	€ 10.64
Total Core Costs	€ 273.88	€ 273.25	€ 287.25	€ 275.05	€ 272.69	€ 285.09	€ 292.62	€ 294.33	€ 293.10
Food as % MESL Core	18.86%	19.05%	19.81%	20.59%	19.15%	18.61%	18.05%	18.24%	18.04%

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 13: Pensioner couple – core expenditure 2006–2014

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

Rural	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 87.10	€ 87.79	€ 95.96	€ 95.48	€ 88.03	€ 89.44	€ 89.08	€ 90.51	€ 89.15
Clothing	€ 28.54	€ 27.80	€ 26.80	€ 24.49	€ 21.14	€ 20.59	€ 20.44	€ 20.22	€ 19.37
Personal Care	€ 15.39	€ 15.65	€ 16.20	€ 16.15	€ 14.71	€ 14.68	€ 14.26	€ 14.12	€ 13.96
Health	€ 20.06	€ 20.66	€ 21.84	€ 22.86	€ 22.77	€ 23.71	€ 23.85	€ 24.04	€ 23.97
Household Goods	€ 24.71	€ 24.34	€ 24.02	€ 23.57	€ 22.27	€ 21.76	€ 21.30	€ 20.60	€ 20.02
Household Services	€ 7.93	€ 8.29	€ 8.36	€ 8.35	€ 8.13	€ 7.78	€ 7.84	€ 7.88	€ 8.00
Communications	€ 12.97	€ 13.03	€ 13.16	€ 13.27	€ 13.24	€ 13.79	€ 13.84	€ 13.08	€ 12.68
Social Inclusion and Participation	€ 55.06	€ 56.21	€ 56.89	€ 56.72	€ 55.98	€ 55.25	€ 54.87	€ 54.92	€ 54.48
Education	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -
Transport (1 car)	€ 48.89	€ 49.82	€ 52.61	€ 49.09	€ 51.54	€ 53.29	€ 57.34	€ 56.54	€ 55.35
Household Energy	€ 43.08	€ 42.65	€ 50.48	€ 39.12	€ 45.25	€ 57.52	€ 62.82	€ 63.76	€ 61.79
Personal Costs	€ 4.44	€ 4.56	€ 4.76	€ 4.89	€ 4.81	€ 4.81	€ 4.87	€ 5.95	€ 7.37
Insurance	€ 14.88	€ 15.07	€ 15.45	€ 18.41	€ 19.69	€ 22.89	€ 25.23	€ 26.84	€ 28.87
Savings and Contingencies	€ 14.36	€ 14.42	€ 15.31	€ 14.88	€ 14.87	€ 14.96	€ 15.00	€ 15.02	€ 15.96
Total Core Costs	€ 377.39	€ 380.30	€ 401.84	€ 387.28	€ 382.43	€ 400.46	€ 410.75	€ 413.46	€ 410.97
Food as % MESL Core	23.08%	23.09%	23.88%	24.65%	23.02%	22.33%	21.69%	21.89%	21.69%

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 14: Female pensioner, living alone – core expenditure 2006–2014

Excludes Housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

Rural	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 64.86	€ 65.38	€ 71.46	€ 71.11	€ 65.56	€ 66.61	€ 66.34	€ 67.40	€ 66.39
Clothing	€ 17.04	€ 16.60	€ 16.00	€ 14.63	€ 12.62	€ 12.29	€ 12.21	€ 12.07	€ 11.57
Personal Care	€ 11.05	€ 11.23	€ 11.63	€ 11.59	€ 10.56	€ 10.54	€ 10.23	€ 10.13	€ 10.02
Health	€ 10.09	€ 10.39	€ 10.99	€ 11.50	€ 11.46	€ 11.93	€ 12.00	€ 12.09	€ 12.06
Household Goods	€ 22.05	€ 21.72	€ 21.44	€ 21.03	€ 19.87	€ 19.41	€ 19.01	€ 18.38	€ 17.87
Household Services	€ 7.93	€ 8.29	€ 8.36	€ 8.35	€ 8.13	€ 7.78	€ 7.84	€ 7.88	€ 8.00
Communications	€ 13.08	€ 13.15	€ 13.28	€ 13.39	€ 13.36	€ 13.91	€ 13.96	€ 13.20	€ 12.79
Social Inclusion and Participation	€ 41.31	€ 42.17	€ 42.68	€ 42.55	€ 42.00	€ 41.45	€ 41.16	€ 41.20	€ 40.87
Education	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -
Transport	€ 48.80	€ 49.72	€ 52.51	€ 48.99	€ 51.44	€ 53.19	€ 57.23	€ 56.43	€ 55.25
Household Energy	€ 41.78	€ 41.19	€ 49.11	€ 37.51	€ 43.81	€ 56.03	€ 61.17	€ 61.96	€ 59.92
Personal Costs	€ 4.27	€ 4.39	€ 4.57	€ 4.70	€ 4.62	€ 4.62	€ 4.68	€ 5.72	€ 7.08
Insurance	€ 11.13	€ 10.87	€ 10.83	€ 12.74	€ 13.49	€ 15.36	€ 16.61	€ 17.18	€ 18.27
Savings and Contingencies	€ 9.57	€ 9.61	€ 10.21	€ 9.92	€ 9.91	€ 9.97	€ 10.00	€ 10.01	€ 10.64
Total Core Costs	€ 302.96	€ 304.73	€ 323.06	€ 308.01	€ 306.83	€ 323.10	€ 332.44	€ 333.66	€ 330.72
Food as % MESL Core	21.41%	21.46%	22.12%	23.09%	21.37%	20.62%	19.96%	20.20%	20.08%

4 Breakdown of the food basket by sub-category

Methodology applied to examine food by sub-category

Section 4 details the cost of the minimum essential food basket for the overall food and non-alcoholic beverage inflation rate from 2006–2014. However, it was necessary to use the appropriate sub-index rate for each food item to examine expenditure on food in more detail. While each method is correct, using the sub-index rates allowed for a more thorough analysis of the food basket. However, it resulted in the total weekly cost of the basket being slightly different from that reported in the previous section.

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the food basket by applying the most detailed sub-index rate possible, correcting each item for inflation individually and then categorising each item under an appropriate heading. For example, the cost of sausages was corrected for inflation using the CPI rate for “dried, salted or smoked meat” and categorised under “Meat”, ice-cream was adjusted using the rate for “edible ices and ice-creams” and categorised under “Snacks and treats”, and margarine was corrected using the “margarine and other vegetable fats” inflation rate and categorised under “Oils and fats”. The items are categorised into 12 CPI sub-categories (an additional category of “snacks and treats”, which is not a category used by the CPI, was created for the purpose of the report for items such as crisps and chocolate). There are a total of 13 sub-categories detailed in Table 15. Overall, 43 different rates were applied to the food baskets and recompiled into 13 subtotals, which effectively correspond to the CPI sub-categories.

Table 15: Consumer Price Index food sub-categories

Bread and cereals	Sugar, jam and honey
Meat	Food products n.e.c. ³
Fish	Coffee, tea and cocoa
Milk, cheese and eggs	Mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices
Oils and fats	Snacks and treats
Fruit	Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food
Vegetables	

³ n.e.c. refers to not elsewhere classified and are miscellaneous items. Included in this category are spices, herbs, sauces and condiments.

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 16: Two parents and two children, at pre-school and primary school – food sub-categories 2006–2014

Urban	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bread and cereals	€ 15.59	€ 15.67	€ 17.98	€ 17.60	€ 16.65	€ 17.22	€ 16.85	€ 17.19	€ 16.84
Meat	€ 35.35	€ 35.00	€ 36.85	€ 36.01	€ 32.53	€ 31.52	€ 31.40	€ 32.37	€ 31.80
Fish	€ 7.04	€ 6.91	€ 7.42	€ 7.57	€ 7.14	€ 7.28	€ 7.42	€ 7.58	€ 7.28
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 15.22	€ 15.64	€ 19.24	€ 19.15	€ 18.03	€ 18.06	€ 18.07	€ 18.09	€ 18.19
Oils and fats	€ 1.92	€ 1.92	€ 2.23	€ 2.39	€ 2.16	€ 2.32	€ 2.53	€ 2.49	€ 2.60
Fruit	€ 13.08	€ 13.57	€ 14.01	€ 13.97	€ 12.34	€ 13.48	€ 12.93	€ 13.01	€ 12.80
Vegetables	€ 21.55	€ 21.82	€ 22.81	€ 22.59	€ 20.72	€ 20.36	€ 19.83	€ 21.24	€ 19.68
Sugar, jam and honey	€ 0.45	€ 0.44	€ 0.51	€ 0.51	€ 0.49	€ 0.49	€ 0.53	€ 0.56	€ 0.56
Food products n.e.c.	€ 2.28	€ 2.24	€ 2.36	€ 2.40	€ 2.28	€ 2.34	€ 2.39	€ 2.44	€ 2.38
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 2.07	€ 2.09	€ 2.17	€ 2.16	€ 2.04	€ 2.18	€ 2.23	€ 2.24	€ 2.19
Mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices	€ 3.86	€ 3.90	€ 4.09	€ 4.00	€ 3.52	€ 3.73	€ 3.80	€ 3.86	€ 3.79
Snacks and treats	€ 3.62	€ 3.57	€ 3.93	€ 3.94	€ 3.58	€ 3.60	€ 3.53	€ 3.52	€ 3.53
Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food	€ 3.36	€ 3.49	€ 3.63	€ 3.69	€ 3.64	€ 3.61	€ 3.56	€ 3.55	€ 3.60
Total	€ 125.39	€ 126.26	€ 137.23	€ 135.98	€ 125.12	€ 126.19	€ 125.07	€ 128.14	€ 125.24

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 17: Two parents and two children, at pre-school and primary school – food sub-categories 2006–2014

Rural	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bread and cereals	€ 19.05	€ 19.19	€ 22.17	€ 21.81	€ 20.64	€ 21.41	€ 20.94	€ 21.31	€ 20.88
Meat	€ 39.49	€ 39.68	€ 41.82	€ 41.33	€ 37.20	€ 36.34	€ 36.69	€ 37.66	€ 37.33
Fish	€ 7.04	€ 6.91	€ 7.42	€ 7.57	€ 7.14	€ 7.28	€ 7.42	€ 7.58	€ 7.28
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 17.08	€ 17.57	€ 21.77	€ 21.67	€ 20.42	€ 20.46	€ 20.50	€ 20.51	€ 20.67
Oils and fats	€ 1.92	€ 1.92	€ 2.23	€ 2.39	€ 2.16	€ 2.32	€ 2.53	€ 2.49	€ 2.60
Fruit	€ 13.08	€ 13.57	€ 14.01	€ 13.97	€ 12.34	€ 13.48	€ 12.93	€ 13.01	€ 12.80
Vegetables	€ 21.55	€ 21.82	€ 22.81	€ 22.59	€ 20.72	€ 20.36	€ 19.83	€ 21.24	€ 19.68
Sugar, jam and honey	€ 0.45	€ 0.44	€ 0.51	€ 0.51	€ 0.49	€ 0.49	€ 0.53	€ 0.56	€ 0.56
Food products n.e.c.	€ 2.28	€ 2.24	€ 2.36	€ 2.40	€ 2.28	€ 2.34	€ 2.39	€ 2.44	€ 2.38
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 2.90	€ 2.93	€ 3.04	€ 3.04	€ 2.90	€ 3.06	€ 3.11	€ 3.13	€ 3.04
Mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices	€ 3.86	€ 3.90	€ 4.09	€ 4.00	€ 3.52	€ 3.73	€ 3.80	€ 3.86	€ 3.79
Snacks and treats	€ 3.62	€ 3.57	€ 3.93	€ 3.94	€ 3.58	€ 3.60	€ 3.53	€ 3.52	€ 3.53
Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food	€ 3.36	€ 3.49	€ 3.62	€ 3.68	€ 3.64	€ 3.60	€ 3.55	€ 3.54	€ 3.59
Total	€ 135.68	€ 137.23	€ 149.78	€ 148.9	€ 137.03	€ 138.47	€ 137.75	€ 140.85	€ 138.13

Two Parents and two children, at pre-school and primary school

Tables 16 and 17 detail the cost of each sub-category of food from 2006 to 2014 for the two-parent, two-child household type. A selection of the sub-categories are analysed below.

The category of “Meat” was by far the largest one of expenditure, yet spending on “Meat” fell between 2006 and 2014. In 2014, this sub-category accounted for 25.39% of the total basket, whereas in 2006, it was 28.19%. For this household type, the cost of “Meat” in the urban minimum essential food basket was 10.04% less in 2014 than it was in 2006. As the sub-category of “Meat” includes meat products purchased in local butcher shops, there was a difference in the cost of meat products in the urban and rural food basket. In 2014, “Meat” accounted for 27.02% of the total rural food basket, while in 2006 it was higher again, at 29.10%. Despite meat remaining the biggest area of food expenditure for this rural household, it was 5.47% less expensive in 2014 than it was in 2006.

In both the urban and rural basket, all “Fruit” and “Vegetables”, were bought in Aldi and Lidl. When these two categories are combined, they form a very significant proportion of the basket. In 2014, “Fruit” and “Vegetables” came to €32.48 per week and accounted for 25.93% of the urban food basket and 23.38% of the rural food basket. However, these two sub-categories were less expensive in 2014 than they were in 2006. The sub-category of “Fruit” was 2.4% cheaper in 2014 than it was in 2006, while “Vegetables” were 8.67% cheaper in 2014 than they were in 2006.

“Bread and cereals” and “Milk, cheese and eggs” are two other significant categories of food expenditure. Following the views of the focus groups, the rural food basket contains milk and bread products purchased in local stores rather than in a multiple store, and hence there is a difference in cost between the urban and rural basket for these two sub-categories of expenditure. Both of these categories recorded increases in the 2006–2014 period, peaking in 2008 when the overall inflation rate for food was at its highest in the period being analysed. In the urban minimum essential food basket, “Bread and cereals” were 8.01% more expensive in 2014 than they were in 2006, while “Milk, cheese and eggs” were 19.51% more expensive in 2014 than they were in 2006. For the rural household, “Bread and cereals” were 9.6% more expensive in 2014 than they were in 2006, while “Milk, cheese and eggs” were 21.02% more expensive in 2014 than they were in 2006.

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 18: Two parents and two children, at primary school and in second level – food sub-categories 2006–2014

Urban	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bread and cereals	€ 18.37	€ 18.47	€ 21.19	€ 20.73	€ 19.61	€ 20.29	€ 19.87	€ 20.26	€ 19.86
Meat	€ 41.48	€ 41.06	€ 43.25	€ 42.24	€ 38.13	€ 36.94	€ 36.80	€ 37.93	€ 37.25
Fish	€ 8.16	€ 8.01	€ 8.61	€ 8.77	€ 8.28	€ 8.43	€ 8.60	€ 8.76	€ 8.41
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 17.36	€ 17.85	€ 21.95	€ 21.84	€ 20.57	€ 20.59	€ 20.61	€ 20.63	€ 20.74
Oils and fats	€ 2.21	€ 2.20	€ 2.56	€ 2.75	€ 2.48	€ 2.67	€ 2.91	€ 2.87	€ 2.99
Fruit	€ 15.69	€ 16.27	€ 16.82	€ 16.77	€ 14.87	€ 16.21	€ 15.60	€ 15.71	€ 15.48
Vegetables	€ 25.38	€ 25.68	€ 26.86	€ 26.60	€ 24.40	€ 23.99	€ 23.38	€ 25.01	€ 23.20
Sugar, jam and honey	€ 0.53	€ 0.52	€ 0.59	€ 0.59	€ 0.57	€ 0.57	€ 0.62	€ 0.65	€ 0.65
Food products n.e.c.	€ 2.66	€ 2.62	€ 2.77	€ 2.81	€ 2.67	€ 2.74	€ 2.80	€ 2.86	€ 2.79
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 2.24	€ 2.26	€ 2.35	€ 2.34	€ 2.21	€ 2.37	€ 2.41	€ 2.43	€ 2.37
Mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices	€ 4.54	€ 4.60	€ 4.81	€ 4.71	€ 4.15	€ 4.39	€ 4.48	€ 4.54	€ 4.46
Snacks and treats	€ 4.30	€ 4.24	€ 4.67	€ 4.67	€ 4.25	€ 4.28	€ 4.22	€ 4.20	€ 4.21
Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food	€ 7.52	€ 7.81	€ 8.12	€ 8.26	€ 8.14	€ 8.07	€ 7.95	€ 7.94	€ 8.06
Total	€ 150.44	€ 151.59	€ 164.55	€ 163.08	€ 150.33	€ 151.54	€ 150.25	€ 153.79	€ 150.47

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 19: Two parents and two children, at primary school and in second level – food sub-categories 2006–2014

Rural	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bread and cereals	€ 22.37	€ 22.52	€ 26.02	€ 25.59	€ 24.22	€ 25.12	€ 24.59	€ 25.02	€ 24.52
Meat	€ 45.97	€ 46.18	€ 48.68	€ 48.09	€ 43.26	€ 42.25	€ 42.64	€ 43.76	€ 43.37
Fish	€ 8.16	€ 8.01	€ 8.61	€ 8.77	€ 8.28	€ 8.43	€ 8.60	€ 8.76	€ 8.41
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 19.45	€ 20.00	€ 24.77	€ 24.66	€ 23.23	€ 23.28	€ 23.32	€ 23.33	€ 23.5
Oils and fats	€ 2.21	€ 2.20	€ 2.56	€ 2.75	€ 2.48	€ 2.67	€ 2.91	€ 2.87	€ 2.99
Fruit	€ 15.69	€ 16.27	€ 16.82	€ 16.77	€ 14.87	€ 16.21	€ 15.6	€ 15.71	€ 15.48
Vegetables	€ 25.38	€ 25.68	€ 26.86	€ 26.60	€ 24.40	€ 23.99	€ 23.38	€ 25.01	€ 23.20
Sugar, jam and honey	€ 0.53	€ 0.52	€ 0.59	€ 0.59	€ 0.57	€ 0.57	€ 0.62	€ 0.65	€ 0.65
Food products n.e.c.	€ 2.66	€ 2.62	€ 2.77	€ 2.81	€ 2.67	€ 2.74	€ 2.80	€ 2.86	€ 2.79
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 3.32	€ 3.36	€ 3.49	€ 3.50	€ 3.32	€ 3.51	€ 3.57	€ 3.60	€ 3.49
Mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices	€ 4.54	€ 4.60	€ 4.81	€ 4.71	€ 4.15	€ 4.39	€ 4.48	€ 4.54	€ 4.46
Snacks and treats	€ 4.30	€ 4.24	€ 4.67	€ 4.67	€ 4.25	€ 4.28	€ 4.22	€ 4.20	€ 4.21
Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food	€ 7.51	€ 7.80	€ 8.10	€ 8.24	€ 8.13	€ 8.05	€ 7.94	€ 7.92	€ 8.04
Total	€ 162.09	€ 164.00	€ 178.75	€ 177.75	€ 163.83	€ 165.49	€ 164.67	€ 165.03	€ 165.11

Two Parents and Two Children, at Primary and in Second Level

The minimum essential food basket is more expensive for the two-parent, two-child household where one is at primary school and one in second level, than it is for any of the other household types analysed in this paper (Tables 18 and 19). Having an adolescent in the household has a marked effect on the cost of the minimum essential food basket. In 2014, for example, the urban two-parent household with two children, one of which was an adolescent, needed to spend €5.45 more per week on “Meat” and €3.52 more per week on “Vegetables” than the equivalent household with a pre-school and primary school-aged child.

“Meat” purchased in a local butcher’s was the largest sub-category of expenditure and has consistently been so from 2006 to 2014, peaking in 2008 when overall food inflation increased by 9.3% between 2007 and 2008. In 2014, expenditure on “Meat” amounted to 24.75% of the total urban food basket and 26.27% of the rural food basket. However, “Meat” was less expensive in 2014 than it was in 2006.

While “Meat” cost less in 2014 than it did in 2006, other food products recorded increases. “Bread and cereals”, and “Milk, cheese and eggs” were more expensive in 2014 than they were in 2006, but so were other less notable sub-categories of expenditure. For example, although expenditure on “Oils and fats”, which includes margarine and oil, was relatively low, this sub-category of expenditure was 35.29% more expensive in 2014 than it was in 2006. Similarly, the sub-category of “Sugar, jam and honey” also recorded a substantial increase, and this category was 22.64% more expensive in 2014 than it was in 2006.

Expenditure on “Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food” was higher for this household than any of the other households with children. In 2014, this sub-category came to approximately 5% of the total weekly food expenditure. Included in this sub-category is a sandwich from a deli once a week for the adolescent. Focus groups included this item as they regarded being able to purchase a sandwich once a week, rather than having homemade sandwiches, a necessary part of social inclusion and participation for adolescent children, enabling them to participate in activities that are considered the norm by society in general.

Overall, for this household type, the largest categories of expenditure were “Meat”, “Bread and cereals”, “Milk, cheese and eggs”, and “Fruit” and “Vegetables”. “Sugar, jam and honey” and “Coffee, tea and cocoa” were the least expensive components of this household’s food basket.

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 20: One parent and two children, at pre-school and primary school – food sub-categories 2006–2014

Urban	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bread and cereals	€ 11.88	€ 11.94	€ 13.68	€ 13.38	€ 12.65	€ 13.08	€ 12.79	€ 13.05	€ 12.79
Meat	€ 29.71	€ 29.40	€ 31.01	€ 30.23	€ 27.16	€ 26.28	€ 26.18	€ 26.94	€ 26.44
Fish	€ 5.41	€ 5.32	€ 5.72	€ 5.82	€ 5.49	€ 5.58	€ 5.68	€ 5.74	€ 5.48
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 10.42	€ 10.70	€ 13.13	€ 13.08	€ 12.30	€ 12.31	€ 12.30	€ 12.31	€ 12.36
Oils and fats	€ 1.40	€ 1.40	€ 1.62	€ 1.75	€ 1.58	€ 1.70	€ 1.86	€ 1.83	€ 1.91
Fruit	€ 10.20	€ 10.60	€ 10.91	€ 10.88	€ 9.56	€ 10.44	€ 10.00	€ 10.06	€ 9.88
Vegetables	€ 17.43	€ 17.64	€ 18.48	€ 18.31	€ 16.77	€ 16.53	€ 16.11	€ 17.16	€ 15.97
Sugar, jam and honey	€ 0.36	€ 0.35	€ 0.40	€ 0.41	€ 0.39	€ 0.39	€ 0.43	€ 0.45	€ 0.45
Food products n.e.c.	€ 1.89	€ 1.86	€ 1.96	€ 1.99	€ 1.89	€ 1.94	€ 1.99	€ 2.02	€ 1.97
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 0.81	€ 0.81	€ 0.85	€ 0.85	€ 0.80	€ 0.88	€ 0.90	€ 0.91	€ 0.90
Mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices	€ 3.33	€ 3.36	€ 3.53	€ 3.45	€ 3.04	€ 3.22	€ 3.27	€ 3.33	€ 3.27
Snacks and treats	€ 2.54	€ 2.51	€ 2.79	€ 2.80	€ 2.54	€ 2.56	€ 2.49	€ 2.50	€ 2.52
Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food	€ 2.00	€ 2.08	€ 2.16	€ 2.20	€ 2.17	€ 2.15	€ 2.12	€ 2.11	€ 2.14
Total	€ 97.38	€ 97.97	€ 106.24	€ 105.15	€ 96.34	€ 97.06	€ 96.12	€ 98.41	€ 96.08

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 21: One parent and two children, at pre-school and primary school – food sub-categories 2006–2014

Rural	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bread and cereals	€ 14.47	€ 14.58	€ 16.83	€ 16.54	€ 15.65	€ 16.22	€ 15.86	€ 16.15	€ 15.82
Meat	€ 31.45	€ 31.54	€ 33.28	€ 32.79	€ 29.40	€ 28.68	€ 28.90	€ 29.63	€ 29.32
Fish	€ 5.41	€ 5.32	€ 5.72	€ 5.82	€ 5.49	€ 5.58	€ 5.68	€ 5.74	€ 5.48
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 11.46	€ 11.79	€ 14.56	€ 14.49	€ 13.64	€ 13.66	€ 13.66	€ 13.67	€ 13.75
Oils and fats	€ 1.40	€ 1.40	€ 1.62	€ 1.75	€ 1.58	€ 1.70	€ 1.86	€ 1.83	€ 1.91
Fruit	€ 10.20	€ 10.60	€ 10.91	€ 10.88	€ 9.56	€ 10.44	€ 10.00	€ 10.06	€ 9.88
Vegetables	€ 17.43	€ 17.64	€ 18.48	€ 18.31	€ 16.77	€ 16.53	€ 16.11	€ 17.16	€ 15.97
Sugar, jam and honey	€ 0.36	€ 0.35	€ 0.40	€ 0.41	€ 0.39	€ 0.39	€ 0.43	€ 0.45	€ 0.45
Food products n.e.c.	€ 1.89	€ 1.86	€ 1.96	€ 1.99	€ 1.89	€ 1.94	€ 1.99	€ 2.02	€ 1.97
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 2.08	€ 2.10	€ 2.17	€ 2.18	€ 2.08	€ 2.20	€ 2.24	€ 2.25	€ 2.19
Mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices	€ 3.33	€ 3.36	€ 3.53	€ 3.45	€ 3.04	€ 3.22	€ 3.27	€ 3.33	€ 3.27
Snacks and treats	€ 2.54	€ 2.51	€ 2.79	€ 2.80	€ 2.54	€ 2.56	€ 2.49	€ 2.50	€ 2.52
Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food	€ 2.02	€ 2.10	€ 2.18	€ 2.22	€ 2.19	€ 2.17	€ 2.13	€ 2.13	€ 2.16
Total	€ 104.04	€ 105.15	€ 114.43	€ 113.63	€ 104.22	€ 105.29	€ 104.62	€ 106.92	€ 104.69

One parent and two children, at pre-school and primary school

Similarly to the other households with children, “Meat” was the largest sub-category of expenditure for the one parent and two children, one at pre-school and one at primary school, household type, and in 2014, it accounted for 27.52% of the urban food basket and 28.01% of the rural food basket (Tables 20 and 21). “Fish” was a much smaller proportion of the food basket, accounting for approximately 5% of the food basket in 2014.

The rural one-parent household, similar to the other rural households, spent more on “Bread and cereals” and “Milk, cheese and eggs” when compared to their urban counterparts as they bought a proportion of these items locally. Nevertheless, these two categories of expenditure were each a significant proportion of the minimum essential food basket, and these items were more expensive in 2014 than they were in 2006. For example, in the rural basket, “Breads and cereals” were 9.33% more expensive in 2014 than in 2006, while the corresponding figure for the urban basket was 7.66%.

“Fruit” and “Vegetables”, all of which were bought in Aldi and Lidl, accounted for a significant proportion of the minimum essential food basket for this household type. The combined cost of these two sub-categories of expenditure in 2014 was €25.85. This accounted for 26.9% of the urban food basket and 24.69% of the rural basket. However, these two categories of expenditure cost less in 2014 than they did in 2006. “Fruit” for this household type cost approximately 3% less in 2014 than they did in 2006, while “Vegetables” cost approximately 8% less in 2014 than they did in 2006.

The least expensive component of the minimum essential food basket for this household type was “Sugar, jam and honey”. In 2014, the total cost of this sub-category was €0.45 per week, which is approximately 0.4% of the urban and rural food baskets. Similarly, expenditure on “Snacks and treats” was also relatively low, at €2.52 per week, in 2014 and accounted for just over 2% of the urban and rural minimum essential food basket.

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 22: Single adult male of working age – food sub-categories 2006–2014

Urban	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bread and cereals	€ 4.47	€ 4.50	€ 5.22	€ 5.16	€ 4.89	€ 5.10	€ 5.03	€ 5.13	€ 5.04
Meat	€ 14.34	€ 14.58	€ 15.59	€ 15.38	€ 13.75	€ 13.64	€ 13.59	€ 13.62	€ 13.60
Fish	€ 3.56	€ 3.53	€ 3.82	€ 3.84	€ 3.63	€ 3.63	€ 3.68	€ 3.52	€ 3.27
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 3.64	€ 3.73	€ 4.50	€ 4.47	€ 4.21	€ 4.20	€ 4.20	€ 4.20	€ 4.18
Oils and fats	€ 1.10	€ 1.10	€ 1.27	€ 1.38	€ 1.25	€ 1.35	€ 1.47	€ 1.46	€ 1.51
Fruit	€ 7.19	€ 7.50	€ 7.70	€ 7.67	€ 6.60	€ 7.25	€ 6.86	€ 6.85	€ 6.67
Vegetables	€ 5.22	€ 5.30	€ 5.60	€ 5.56	€ 5.18	€ 5.21	€ 5.15	€ 5.30	€ 5.12
Sugar, jam and honey	€ 0.17	€ 0.17	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.21	€ 0.21	€ 0.21
Food products n.e.c.	€ 2.07	€ 2.03	€ 2.14	€ 2.18	€ 2.08	€ 2.14	€ 2.17	€ 2.23	€ 2.17
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 2.02	€ 2.04	€ 2.11	€ 2.11	€ 1.98	€ 2.07	€ 2.10	€ 2.11	€ 2.05
Mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices	€ 1.64	€ 1.66	€ 1.74	€ 1.70	€ 1.50	€ 1.58	€ 1.62	€ 1.64	€ 1.61
Snacks and treats	€ 0.83	€ 0.82	€ 0.92	€ 0.93	€ 0.85	€ 0.87	€ 0.87	€ 0.89	€ 0.91
Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food	€ 9.53	€ 9.89	€ 10.28	€ 10.46	€ 10.30	€ 10.21	€ 10.07	€ 10.05	€ 10.21
Total	€ 55.78	€ 56.85	€ 61.10	€ 61.04	€ 56.40	€ 57.44	€ 57.01	€ 57.20	€ 56.55

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 23: Single adult male of working age – food sub-categories 2006–2014

Rural	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bread and cereals	€ 4.49	€ 4.51	€ 5.24	€ 5.18	€ 4.90	€ 5.12	€ 5.04	€ 5.15	€ 5.06
Meat	€ 10.53	€ 10.81	€ 11.31	€ 11.32	€ 10.31	€ 10.22	€ 10.24	€ 10.46	€ 10.48
Fish	€ 2.24	€ 2.21	€ 2.38	€ 2.41	€ 2.27	€ 2.30	€ 2.34	€ 2.31	€ 2.19
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 3.97	€ 4.06	€ 4.94	€ 4.91	€ 4.62	€ 4.62	€ 4.62	€ 4.62	€ 4.60
Oils and fats	€ 1.10	€ 1.10	€ 1.27	€ 1.38	€ 1.25	€ 1.35	€ 1.47	€ 1.46	€ 1.51
Fruit	€ 7.19	€ 7.50	€ 7.70	€ 7.67	€ 6.60	€ 7.25	€ 6.86	€ 6.85	€ 6.67
Vegetables	€ 5.22	€ 5.30	€ 5.60	€ 5.56	€ 5.18	€ 5.21	€ 5.15	€ 5.30	€ 5.12
Sugar, jam and honey	€ 0.17	€ 0.17	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.21	€ 0.21	€ 0.21
Food products n.e.c.	€ 2.07	€ 2.03	€ 2.14	€ 2.18	€ 2.08	€ 2.14	€ 2.17	€ 2.23	€ 2.17
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 2.51	€ 2.52	€ 2.62	€ 2.59	€ 2.41	€ 2.54	€ 2.57	€ 2.59	€ 2.52
Mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices	€ 1.64	€ 1.66	€ 1.74	€ 1.70	€ 1.50	€ 1.58	€ 1.62	€ 1.64	€ 1.61
Snacks and treats	€ 0.83	€ 0.82	€ 0.92	€ 0.93	€ 0.85	€ 0.87	€ 0.87	€ 0.89	€ 0.91
Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food	€ 4.91	€ 5.09	€ 5.30	€ 5.39	€ 5.31	€ 5.26	€ 5.19	€ 5.17	€ 5.26
Extra for visitors	€ 1.63	€ 1.64	€ 1.80	€ 1.79	€ 1.65	€ 1.67	€ 1.67	€ 1.69	€ 1.67
Total	€ 48.48	€ 49.43	€ 53.15	€ 53.20	€ 49.10	€ 50.30	€ 50.00	€ 50.56	€ 49.97

The cost of a healthy food basket

Single adult male of working age

The single adult male of working age spent the least on food per week when compared to the other household types under consideration (Tables 22 and 23). The sub-categories for this household type followed the same trend as the other households, with costs rising in 2008 and the sub-category of “Meat” accounting for the largest share of expenditure. In 2014, the sub-category of “Meat” accounted for 24.05% of the urban basket and 21% of the rural basket. However, while expenditure on “Meat” was still the largest category of expenditure, it cost less in 2014 than in 2006.

“Vegetables” and “Fruit” also accounted for a large proportion of the total cost of the food basket. The combined spend on these two categories was €11.79 per week, which accounted for 20.81% of the urban basket and 23.59% of the rural basket. Again, similarly to other household types, these two sub-categories of expenditure were less expensive in 2014 than they were in 2006. “Fruit” cost approximately 7% less in 2014 than in 2006, while “Vegetables” cost approximately 2% less in 2014 than in 2006.

One of the most notable sub-categories for a single adult male living in an urban area is “Restaurants, Cafes, fast food and takeaway food”. Expenditure for this sub-category was €10.21 per week, which was 18.05% of the total food basket. This category is made up of a sandwich from a deli once a week, a takeaway meal once every six weeks and a small sum of money to have Sunday lunch out once every six weeks. This reflects the views of focus groups. The focus groups regarded these items as a normal part of the spending pattern on food for a single adult living alone and also viewed them as necessary from a social inclusion and participation perspective.

The rural household spends less on “Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food” in comparison to its urban counterpart. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, unlike single adult households in urban areas, rural focus groups did not specify money for an occasional Sunday lunch out and instead opted to include additional money for visitors, which has been classified under the sub-category “Extra for visitors”. Secondly, while the rural minimum essential food basket contains a sandwich from a deli once a week and a takeaway once every six weeks, in line with the urban basket, these items cost less in rural areas.

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 24: Pensioner couple – food sub-categories 2006–2014

Urban	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bread and cereals	€ 8.05	€ 8.08	€ 9.18	€ 8.95	€ 8.44	€ 8.59	€ 8.29	€ 8.38	€ 8.19
Meat	€ 24.97	€ 25.66	€ 27.04	€ 27.06	€ 24.33	€ 23.99	€ 24.48	€ 24.91	€ 24.95
Fish	€ 4.10	€ 4.05	€ 4.38	€ 4.43	€ 4.18	€ 4.20	€ 4.27	€ 4.18	€ 3.93
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 5.91	€ 6.03	€ 7.34	€ 7.29	€ 6.88	€ 6.89	€ 6.91	€ 6.92	€ 6.92
Oils and fats	€ 1.38	€ 1.37	€ 1.60	€ 1.72	€ 1.56	€ 1.68	€ 1.83	€ 1.81	€ 1.87
Fruit	€ 5.97	€ 6.21	€ 6.40	€ 6.38	€ 5.54	€ 6.09	€ 5.78	€ 5.77	€ 5.64
Vegetables	€ 12.75	€ 12.96	€ 13.60	€ 13.48	€ 12.34	€ 12.19	€ 11.85	€ 12.67	€ 11.76
Sugar, jam and honey	€ 0.18	€ 0.18	€ 0.20	€ 0.20	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.22	€ 0.22	€ 0.22
Food products n.e.c.	€ 1.06	€ 1.04	€ 1.11	€ 1.12	€ 1.06	€ 1.09	€ 1.11	€ 1.12	€ 1.13
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 3.03	€ 3.06	€ 3.17	€ 3.17	€ 2.98	€ 3.10	€ 3.16	€ 3.17	€ 3.08
Mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices	€ 1.81	€ 1.82	€ 1.91	€ 1.87	€ 1.65	€ 1.75	€ 1.78	€ 1.81	€ 1.77
Snacks and treats	€ 2.61	€ 2.59	€ 2.83	€ 2.82	€ 2.58	€ 2.58	€ 2.51	€ 2.45	€ 2.42
Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Extra for visitors	€ 9.94	€ 10.01	€ 10.95	€ 10.89	€ 10.04	€ 10.20	€ 10.16	€ 10.32	€ 10.17
Total	€ 81.75	€ 83.08	€ 89.71	€ 89.37	€ 81.76	€ 82.55	€ 82.34	€ 83.72	€ 82.06

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 25: Pensioner couple – food sub-categories 2006–2014

Rural	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bread and cereals	€ 9.76	€ 9.81	€ 11.25	€ 11.02	€ 10.41	€ 10.66	€ 10.30	€ 10.42	€ 10.18
Meat	€ 27.43	€ 28.37	€ 29.89	€ 30.11	€ 27.16	€ 26.86	€ 27.60	€ 28.06	€ 28.23
Fish	€ 4.10	€ 4.05	€ 4.38	€ 4.43	€ 4.18	€ 4.20	€ 4.27	€ 4.18	€ 3.93
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 6.56	€ 6.70	€ 8.21	€ 8.16	€ 7.71	€ 7.72	€ 7.75	€ 7.76	€ 7.76
Oils and fats	€ 1.38	€ 1.37	€ 1.60	€ 1.72	€ 1.56	€ 1.68	€ 1.83	€ 1.81	€ 1.87
Fruit	€ 7.37	€ 7.67	€ 7.90	€ 7.87	€ 6.81	€ 7.49	€ 7.10	€ 7.09	€ 6.92
Vegetables	€ 12.94	€ 13.16	€ 13.82	€ 13.69	€ 12.54	€ 12.39	€ 12.05	€ 12.87	€ 11.96
Sugar, jam and honey	€ 0.18	€ 0.18	€ 0.20	€ 0.20	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.22	€ 0.22	€ 0.22
Food products n.e.c.	€ 1.06	€ 1.04	€ 1.11	€ 1.12	€ 1.06	€ 1.09	€ 1.11	€ 1.12	€ 1.13
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 2.30	€ 2.32	€ 2.40	€ 2.41	€ 2.28	€ 2.36	€ 2.40	€ 2.41	€ 2.34
Mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices	€ 1.81	€ 1.82	€ 1.91	€ 1.87	€ 1.65	€ 1.75	€ 1.78	€ 1.81	€ 1.77
Snacks and treats	€ 2.61	€ 2.59	€ 2.83	€ 2.82	€ 2.58	€ 2.58	€ 2.51	€ 2.45	€ 2.42
Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Extra for visitors	€ 9.94	€ 10.01	€ 10.95	€ 10.89	€ 10.04	€ 10.20	€ 10.16	€ 10.32	€ 10.17
Total	€ 87.42	€ 89.11	€ 96.43	€ 96.31	€ 88.15	€ 89.18	€ 89.08	€ 90.52	€ 88.91

Pensioner couple

“Meat” was the largest sub-category of expenditure for the pensioner couple household type (Tables 24 and 25). However, unlike all of the other households under consideration, this sub-category was marginally more expensive for the rural household in 2014 than it was in 2006. Rural focus groups indicated a preference for beef over other types of meat, and so included in the food basket for the rural pensioner couple are a number of beef products, such as roast beef and stewing steak, that are not included in the other food baskets. Beef, unlike some other meat products, such as chicken, has increased in cost and, as a result, the cost of the overall sub-category of “Meat” was more expensive for rural households in 2014 than it was in 2006.

Again, similarly to other households, “Fruit” and “Vegetables” accounted for a notable proportion of the total food basket. In 2014, the combined weekly total of these two sub-categories of expenditure in the urban basket was €17.40, while the cost for the rural basket was slightly higher at €18.88. The rural pensioner households continued to buy a small proportion of their fruit and vegetables locally, reflecting the shopping patterns of rural pensioners, and hence the difference in cost between the two baskets. Both of these sub-categories were less expensive in 2014 compared to 2006.

While spending on “Oils and fats” was relatively small at €1.87 per week in 2014, it is interesting to note that this category of expenditure was 35% more expensive in 2014 than it was in 2006, while “Sugar, jam and honey” was 22% more expensive in 2014 than it was in 2006.

Finally, also included in the basket for this household type is approximately €10 per week to buy additional food for visitors. This falls under the “Extra for visitors” category. Focus groups spoke of the importance of being able to afford to have friends or relatives visit and saw this as important for social and psychological wellbeing. This sub-category of expenditure accounted for 12% of the urban food basket and 11% of the rural food basket.

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 26: Female pensioner, living alone – food sub-categories 2006–2014

Urban	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bread and cereals	€ 7.37	€ 7.41	€ 8.46	€ 8.28	€ 7.81	€ 7.97	€ 7.71	€ 7.78	€ 7.60
Meat	€ 11.18	€ 11.28	€ 11.93	€ 11.75	€ 10.31	€ 10.16	€ 10.21	€ 10.42	€ 10.35
Fish	€ 2.78	€ 2.73	€ 2.94	€ 2.99	€ 2.82	€ 2.87	€ 2.93	€ 2.97	€ 2.84
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 3.28	€ 3.38	€ 4.09	€ 4.06	€ 3.82	€ 3.83	€ 3.83	€ 3.84	€ 3.87
Oils and fats	€ 1.10	€ 1.10	€ 1.27	€ 1.38	€ 1.25	€ 1.35	€ 1.47	€ 1.46	€ 1.51
Fruit	€ 6.72	€ 7.00	€ 7.20	€ 7.17	€ 6.18	€ 6.80	€ 6.44	€ 6.43	€ 6.27
Vegetables	€ 12.41	€ 12.59	€ 13.13	€ 13.01	€ 11.98	€ 11.76	€ 11.45	€ 12.32	€ 11.40
Sugar, jam and honey	€ 0.17	€ 0.17	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.21	€ 0.21	€ 0.21
Food products n.e.c.	€ 1.69	€ 1.66	€ 1.77	€ 1.80	€ 1.71	€ 1.77	€ 1.80	€ 1.83	€ 1.82
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 2.55	€ 2.56	€ 2.66	€ 2.64	€ 2.46	€ 2.58	€ 2.62	€ 2.64	€ 2.57
Mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices	€ 0.90	€ 0.91	€ 0.96	€ 0.94	€ 0.82	€ 0.87	€ 0.89	€ 0.90	€ 0.89
Snacks and treats	€ 2.97	€ 2.93	€ 3.22	€ 3.21	€ 2.92	€ 2.92	€ 2.83	€ 2.75	€ 2.71
Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Extra for visitors	€ 9.94	€ 10.01	€ 10.95	€ 10.89	€ 10.04	€ 10.20	€ 10.16	€ 10.32	€ 10.17
Total	€ 63.06	€ 63.73	€ 68.77	€ 68.31	€ 62.33	€ 63.26	€ 62.54	€ 63.87	€ 62.21

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 27: Female pensioner living alone – food sub-categories 2006–2014

Rural	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bread and cereals	€ 8.23	€ 8.27	€ 9.49	€ 9.31	€ 8.80	€ 9.00	€ 8.71	€ 8.80	€ 8.60
Meat	€ 11.63	€ 12.08	€ 12.70	€ 12.93	€ 11.69	€ 11.64	€ 12.06	€ 12.32	€ 12.45
Fish	€ 2.78	€ 2.73	€ 2.94	€ 2.99	€ 2.82	€ 2.87	€ 2.93	€ 2.97	€ 2.84
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 3.60	€ 3.71	€ 4.53	€ 4.50	€ 4.24	€ 4.24	€ 4.25	€ 4.26	€ 4.30
Oils and fats	€ 1.10	€ 1.10	€ 1.27	€ 1.38	€ 1.25	€ 1.35	€ 1.47	€ 1.46	€ 1.51
Fruit	€ 6.92	€ 7.21	€ 7.41	€ 7.38	€ 6.37	€ 7.00	€ 6.63	€ 6.62	€ 6.46
Vegetables	€ 12.60	€ 12.79	€ 13.34	€ 13.22	€ 12.18	€ 11.96	€ 11.65	€ 12.52	€ 11.59
Sugar, jam and honey	€ 0.17	€ 0.17	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.19	€ 0.21	€ 0.21	€ 0.21
Food products n.e.c.	€ 1.69	€ 1.66	€ 1.77	€ 1.80	€ 1.71	€ 1.77	€ 1.80	€ 1.83	€ 1.82
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 2.64	€ 2.65	€ 2.76	€ 2.74	€ 2.55	€ 2.68	€ 2.72	€ 2.73	€ 2.66
Mineral waters, soft drinks, fruit and vegetable juices	€ 0.90	€ 0.91	€ 0.96	€ 0.94	€ 0.82	€ 0.87	€ 0.89	€ 0.90	€ 0.89
Snacks and treats	€ 2.97	€ 2.93	€ 3.22	€ 3.21	€ 2.92	€ 2.92	€ 2.83	€ 2.75	€ 2.71
Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Extra for visitors	€ 9.97	€ 10.05	€ 10.99	€ 10.93	€ 10.08	€ 10.24	€ 10.20	€ 10.37	€ 10.21
Total	€ 65.21	€ 66.27	€ 71.58	€ 71.53	€ 65.61	€ 66.73	€ 66.34	€ 67.74	€ 66.26

Female pensioner living alone

The in-depth analysis of the food basket for the female pensioner living alone household type shows that all of the sub-categories of food were at their most expensive in 2008 when overall food inflation increased by 9.3% from 2007 (Tables 26 and 27). The sub-categories for this household type follow the same trend as the other households, with “Bread and cereals”, “Meat”, “Fruit” and “Vegetables” making up the majority share of the food basket. Following the views of the rural focus groups, the “rural pensioner living alone” carries out a proportion of shopping locally and therefore spends slightly more on “Bread and cereals”, “Milk, cheese and eggs” and “Fruit” and “Vegetables” than their urban counterpart.

In 2014, the sub-category of “Meat” accounted for 16.64% of the urban basket and 18.79% of the rural food basket. “Vegetables” also accounted for a significant proportion of total food expenditure, amounting to 18.33% of the urban food basket and 17.49% of the rural food basket in 2014. “Bread and Cereals” were also a notable proportion of the total food basket. In 2014, these items amounted to 12.22% of the urban basket and almost 13% of the rural basket. This was in contrast to spending on “Sugar, jam and honey”, which came to €0.21 per week and was only approximately 0.3% of the total food basket.

The food basket for this household type also includes additional money to spend on food for visitors, classified as “Extra for Visitors”, which came to approximately €10 per week. In 2014, this was 16% of the urban food basket and 15% of the rural food basket. While this is a significant sub-category of expenditure, the focus groups regarded it as a necessary component of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. An MESL, which is grounded in Consensual Budget Standards methodology, is not based on what people can afford; it is based on what people need to have in order to have a standard of living that meets their physical, psychological and social needs at a minimum but acceptable level. Moreover, being unable to afford to have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month is one of the 11 deprivation indicators in the Republic of Ireland, and so the inclusion of this item in the basket is necessary not only from a social inclusion and participation perspective, but also from a deprivation perspective.

Key findings in the price of the food basket by sub-category 2006–2014

The detailed breakdown of the food basket into sub-categories of expenditure reveals that for all household types, the sub-category of “Meat” takes up the largest share of the food basket. “Meat” was at its most expensive in 2008 when inflation for food rose sharply, but was less expensive in 2014 than it was in 2006 for all household types, with the exception of the rural pensioner couple.

“Fruit” and “Vegetables” accounted for a large share of the food basket for all household types, and while these two sub-categories of expenditure were at their most expensive in 2008, in line with a sharp increase in overall food inflation in that year, these items were less expensive in 2014 than they were in 2006.

The sub-categories of “Bread and cereals”, and “Milk, cheese and eggs” also make up a large part of the total food expenditure. However, these items were more expensive in the rural food baskets as a proportion of these goods are bought in local stores, which tend to be more expensive than multiples. Overall, both of

these sub-categories of food were more expensive in 2014 than they were in 2006. The analyses of the baskets reveal that other sub-categories of expenditure were also more expensive in 2014 than they were in 2006. For example, although the sub-categories of “Sugar, jam and honey” and “Oils and fats” made up a very small proportion of total food expenditure for all household types, these two categories were more expensive for all household types in 2014 than they were in 2006.

Finally, the two categories “Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food” and “Extra for visitors” are an important part of the minimum essential food basket for all household types and their inclusion highlights the social and cultural aspect of food. These items enable households to have a standard of living that meets not only a household’s physical needs, but also its social and psychological needs. The inclusion of these items ensures that the minimum essential food baskets reflect the behaviour and shopping patterns of members of the public and that households are able to participate in activities and practices that are considered a normal part of everyday life. The latest Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) data shows that in 2013, 18.7% of the population was unable to afford to have family or friends over for a meal or a drink once a month (18). This demonstrates that a large cohort of people are experiencing this particular form of deprivation and that while the category “Extra for visitors” is included in the MESL food baskets, in reality many people are unable to afford this cost.

5 Food and household income

Introduction

Having established the cost of a minimum essential food basket and analysed spending on sub-categories of food, this section examines the cost of the minimum essential food basket as a proportion of household income from 2006 to 2014⁴. Tables 28–40 demonstrate the proportion of household income that households would need to spend in order to be able to afford the minimum essential food basket from 2006 to 2014.

For working age households, two income scenarios are examined:

- Households in receipt of social welfare transfers;
- Households earning the national minimum wage. This is based on fulltime work, working 37.5 hours per week. In the two-parent scenario, it is assumed that one parent is engaged in fulltime work while the other parent is engaged in stay-at-home duties. For the one-parent household, fulltime work is assumed. For the single adult male household, fulltime work is assumed.

For pensioner households, the following scenario is examined:

- Households in receipt of the state pension and any additional entitlements, such as the Household Benefits Package. A number of state pension scenarios are examined, e.g. the Contributory Pension and the Non-contributory Pension. It is assumed that the pensioner households are solely reliant on the state pension and have no other source of income.

⁴ A detailed breakdown of income from 2006–2014 is contained in the appendices on each household type and each income scenario.

The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 28: Two parents and two children, at pre-school and primary school, dependent on social welfare

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total social welfare income	€ 382.45	€ 453.10	€ 482.56	€ 485.79	€ 462.62	€ 444.71	€ 439.90	€ 434.32	€ 434.32
Urban food	€ 122.31	€ 123.29	€ 134.75	€ 134.08	€ 123.62	€ 125.60	€ 125.09	€ 127.10	€ 125.19
% of income	31.98%	27.21%	27.92%	27.60%	26.72%	28.24%	28.44%	29.26%	28.82%
Rural food	€ 134.70	€ 135.77	€ 148.40	€ 147.66	€ 136.14	€ 138.32	€ 137.77	€ 139.97	€ 137.87
% of Income	35.22%	29.96%	30.75%	30.40%	29.43%	31.10%	31.32%	32.23%	31.74%

Table 29: One parent working and earning the national minimum wage (NMW), the other parent at home

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
NMW and SW Entitlements (net)	€ 494.60	€ 559.75	€ 577.21	€ 577.64	€ 567.87	€ 560.57	€ 555.76	€ 550.18	€ 550.18
Urban food	€ 122.31	€ 123.29	€ 134.75	€ 134.08	€ 123.62	€ 125.60	€ 125.09	€ 127.10	€ 125.19
% of income	24.73%	22.03%	23.35%	23.21%	21.77%	22.41%	22.51%	23.10%	22.75%
Rural food	€ 134.70	€ 135.77	€ 148.40	€ 147.66	€ 136.14	€ 138.32	€ 137.77	€ 139.97	€ 137.87
% of income	27.23%	24.26%	25.71%	25.56%	23.97%	24.67%	24.79%	25.44%	25.06%

Two parents and two children, at pre-school and primary school

Scenario: Dependent on social welfare

In this welfare-dependent scenario, the food basket alone consumes over a quarter of household income in all years from 2006 to 2014 (Table 28). For this household type in an urban area, the percentage of household income that needed to be spent on the food basket ranged from 26.72% in 2010 to 31.98% in 2006. The percentage of income that needed to be spent on the food basket in a rural area was higher still, reflecting the higher cost of the minimum essential food basket in rural areas. The percentage ranged from 29.43% in 2010 to 35.22% in 2006.

In 2007, the percentage of household income that needed to be spent on the food basket fell significantly. This is because primary social welfare rates were increased by €20, and this household also benefited from the introduction of the Early Childcare Supplement⁵. In 2010, despite a significant drop in income, the proportion of income absorbed by the minimum essential food basket was at its lowest due to the sharp decrease in the cost of food in that year. In 2014, this household needed to spend 28.82% (urban) or 31.74% (rural) of their social welfare income on the minimum essential food basket.

This particular scenario highlights not only the impact of inflation on the cost of food, but also the impact that increases or decreases in social welfare rates can have on a household's capacity to afford a minimum essential food basket.

Scenario: One parent working fulltime on the national minimum wage

The scenario in Table 29 is based on one parent working fulltime (37.5 hours per week) while the other parent is engaged in stay-at-home duties. Income is based on net income from the national minimum wage (NMW) and any other additional social welfare entitlements, such as Family Income Supplement (FIS) and Child Benefit (CB). While food costs remained largely static between 2006 and 2007, the NMW was increased from €7.65 to €8.65 per hour in 2007. This resulted in this household needing to spend a lesser proportion of its income on food. In 2008, while there was a sharp rise in the cost of food, this was coupled with an increase in FIS and CB. In 2014, food absorbed 22.75% and 25.06% of this household total net income in urban and rural areas respectively. Therefore, while this household needed to spend a smaller proportion of their income on food compared to a household in receipt of social welfare, the food basket was still a significant expense for a minimum wage household.

⁵ This direct payment ceased in 2010 and was replaced by the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE), which is an indirect, non-cash benefit that provides a free year of early childhood care and education for children of pre-school age.

Two parents and two children, at primary school and in second level

Table 30: Dependent on social welfare

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total social welfare income	€ 383.79	€ 435.89	€ 463.43	€ 478.23	€ 464.64	€ 446.73	€ 444.71	€ 438.17	€ 438.17
Urban food	€ 146.91	€ 148.08	€ 161.86	€ 161.05	€ 148.49	€ 150.86	€ 150.26	€ 152.66	€ 150.37
% of income	38.28%	33.97%	34.93%	33.68%	31.96%	33.77%	33.79%	34.84%	34.32%
Rural food	€ 161.00	€ 162.99	€ 177.38	€ 176.49	€ 162.73	€ 165.33	€ 164.67	€ 167.30	€ 164.79
% of income	41.95%	37.39%	38.28%	36.90%	35.02%	37.01%	37.03%	38.18%	37.61%

Table 31: One parent working and earning the national minimum wage, the other a stay-at-home parent

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
NMW and SW entitlements (net)	€ 495.94	€ 542.54	€ 558.08	€ 570.08	€ 569.89	€ 562.59	€ 560.57	€ 554.03	€ 554.03
Urban food	€ 146.91	€ 148.08	€ 161.86	€ 161.05	€ 148.49	€ 150.86	€ 150.26	€ 152.66	€ 150.37
% of income	29.62%	27.29%	29.00%	28.25%	26.06%	26.82%	26.80%	27.55%	27.14%
Rural food	€ 161.00	€ 162.99	€ 177.38	€ 176.49	€ 162.73	€ 165.33	€ 164.67	€ 167.30	€ 164.79
% of income	32.46%	30.04%	31.78%	30.96%	28.55%	29.39%	29.38%	30.20%	29.74%

Two parents and two children, at primary school and in second level

Scenario: Dependent on social welfare

Food costs are higher for this household compared to any other household type analysed (Table 30). Food costs increase significantly when there is an adolescent in the household, yet the only child income support that differentiates by age is the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. The data illustrate that in 2014, this household received €3.85 more per week in social welfare transfers than a two-parent household with a pre-school and a primary school-going child, yet for this household type living in an urban area, the household's food basket was €25 more expensive than a two-parent household with a pre-school and a primary school-going child. Moreover, when the overall cost of an MESL is analysed for this household type in an urban area and in social housing, the data show that it has a shortfall of approximately €123 per week⁶. Such a large shortfall may therefore constrain a household's ability to afford goods and services that members of the public believe are necessary for a standard of living that meets their physical, psychological and social needs.

Scenario: One parent working fulltime on the national minimum wage

While income from work and any additional social welfare entitlements increase this household's net income, it nevertheless needs to spend a very significant proportion of its income on the minimum essential food basket (Table 31). In 2010, in line with a sharp decrease in food costs, the share of income absorbed by the food basket was at its lowest, at 26.06%, in urban areas and, at 28.55%, in rural areas. In 2006, when the national minimum wage was €7.65 per hour, the share of income that needed to be spent on the food basket was at its highest, at 29.62%, in urban areas and, at 32.46%, in rural areas. Since 2011, the cost of the minimum essential food basket has not significantly changed and the proportion of income that needs to be spent on the food basket has remained relatively stable, yet it still has a very significant impact on household expenditure and income. Indeed, if the focus was on weekly-earned net income alone, which in this instance is €315.26, the minimum essential food basket amounts to 47.69% of earned net income in urban areas and 52.27% in rural areas in 2014. This underscores the considerable burden that the minimum essential food basket places on low-wage families⁷. The two income scenarios illustrate that costs increase when there is an adolescent in the household, and they underline the challenge faced by those on a low income to meet those additional costs.

⁶ VPSJ 2014 data available online: http://budgeting.ie/images/stories/Publications/MESL_Update_Paper/VPSJ_2014_Minimum_Essential_Standard_of_Living_Update_2014.pdf

⁷ After tax and USC net income for this household type is €315.26. This is based on working fulltime (37.5 hour week) and earning the national minimum wage of €8.65 per hour.

The cost of a healthy food basket

One parent and two children, at pre-school and primary school

Table 32: Dependent on social welfare

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total social welfare income	€ 280.26	€ 339.84	€ 361.64	€ 362.50	€ 344.83	€ 332.22	€ 325.10	€ 319.52	€ 319.52
Urban food	€ 94.00	€ 94.75	€ 103.57	€ 103.05	€ 95.01	€ 96.53	€ 96.14	€ 97.68	€ 96.22
% of income	33.54%	27.88%	28.64%	28.43%	27.55%	29.06%	29.57%	30.57%	30.11%
Rural food	€ 102.30	€ 103.12	€ 112.71	€ 112.15	€ 103.40	€ 105.05	€ 104.63	€ 106.31	€ 104.71
% of income	36.50%	30.34%	31.17%	30.94%	29.99%	31.62%	32.18%	33.27%	32.77%

Table 33: One parent working and earning the national minimum wage

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
NMW and SW entitlements (net)	€ 553.55	€ 621.80	€ 645.22	€ 651.78	€ 641.73	€ 631.05	€ 625.29	€ 616.86	€ 612.86
Urban food	€ 94.00	€ 94.75	€ 103.57	€ 103.05	€ 95.01	€ 96.53	€ 96.14	€ 97.68	€ 96.22
% of income	16.98%	15.24%	16.05%	15.81%	14.81%	15.30%	15.38%	15.84%	15.70%
Rural food	€ 102.30	€ 103.12	€ 112.71	€ 112.15	€ 103.40	€ 105.05	€ 104.63	€ 106.31	€ 104.71
% of income	18.48%	16.58%	17.47%	17.21%	16.11%	16.65%	16.73%	17.23%	17.09%

One parent and two children, at pre-school and primary school

Scenario: Dependent on social welfare

In all years, and for both urban and rural households, the minimum essential food basket absorbs more than a quarter of this household's income when it is dependent on social welfare (Table 32). One-parent households are the household type most at risk of poverty, and in 2013, 31.7% of one-parent households with children were at risk of poverty, while 63.2% experienced deprivation (18). Similarly to the two other households with children, food as a percentage of household income was at its lowest in 2010 and at its highest in 2006. In 2007, income rose considerably due to increases in social welfare and the introduction of the Early Childcare Supplement. As a result, the proportion of income absorbed by the food basket fell considerably in that year. Since 2011, the proportion of income that needed to be spent on the food basket has begun to rise slightly due to decreasing social welfare rates.

In 2014, the share of income that needed to be spent on the food basket was 30.11% for an urban one-parent household and 32.77% for its rural counterpart. It is apparent that when such a significant amount of income is consumed by just one area of expenditure, as is the case with food, that many households in this position are unable to afford to spend such a considerable proportion of their income on the food basket alone. As a consequence, limited financial resources may put a nutritionally adequate diet beyond the reach of low-income families.

Scenario: One parent working fulltime on the national minimum wage

More so than for other households with children, there is a substantial difference between the proportions of income that need to be spent on the food basket by a household in receipt of social welfare compared to one engaged in fulltime work (Table 33). This is because in this scenario, one parent working fulltime on the NMW also qualifies for a partial One Parent Family Payment, which substantially increases their income, and therefore lowers the proportion of household income that needs to be spent on food. This household also benefits from the Fuel Allowance. In 2014, a one-parent household living in an urban area and working full-time spent 15.7% of its income on the food basket compared to 30.11% for a household in receipt of social welfare.

This particular scenario emphasises the contribution of in-work benefits for low-wage households and the impact that they can have on a household's weekly income and, consequently, its ability to meet the cost of a minimum standard of living.

The cost of a healthy food basket

Single adult male of working age

Table 34: Single adult male of working age dependent on social welfare

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total social welfare income	€ 165.80	€ 185.00	€ 197.80	€ 204.30	€ 196.00	€ 188.00	€ 188.00	€ 188.00	€ 188.00
Urban food	€ 55.74	€ 56.18	€ 61.41	€ 61.10	€ 56.34	€ 57.24	€ 57.01	€ 57.92	€ 57.05
% of income	33.62%	30.37%	31.05%	29.91%	28.74%	30.45%	30.32%	30.81%	30.35%
Rural food	€ 51.65	€ 52.07	€ 56.91	€ 56.62	€ 52.21	€ 53.04	€ 52.83	€ 53.68	€ 52.87
% of income	31.15%	28.14%	28.77%	27.71%	26.63%	28.21%	28.10%	28.55%	28.12%

Table 35: Single adult male working fulltime and earning the national minimum wage

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
NMW and SW entitlements (net)	€ 286.88	€ 324.38	€ 324.48	€ 324.38	€ 324.38	€ 313.85	€ 313.85	€ 313.87	€ 313.89
Urban food	€ 55.74	€ 56.18	€ 61.41	€ 61.10	€ 56.34	€ 57.24	€ 57.01	€ 57.92	€ 57.05
% of income	19.43%	17.32%	18.93%	18.84%	17.37%	18.24%	18.16%	18.45%	18.18%
Rural food	€ 51.65	€ 52.07	€ 56.91	€ 56.62	€ 52.21	€ 53.04	€ 52.83	€ 53.68	€ 52.87
% of income	18.00%	16.05%	17.54%	17.45%	16.10%	16.90%	16.83%	17.10%	16.84%

Single adult male of working age

Scenario: Dependent on social welfare

Unlike the other households under consideration in this paper, the single adult household does not ordinarily qualify for any additional cash payments such as Fuel Allowance, and therefore, for the purposes of this paper, the focus is on the primary Jobseeker's Benefit payment.⁸ Both the urban and rural minimum essential food basket consumed more than a quarter of this household's primary social welfare payment from 2006 to 2014 (Table 34).

This household's social welfare payment increased by €20 in 2007, which resulted in a fall in the proportion of income that needed to be spent on the food basket. However, since 2011, this payment has remained static at €188, and food as a proportion of household income has hovered around the 30% mark for the urban food basket and 28% for the rural food basket.

Food, however, is only one area of expenditure, and when, as in this scenario, such a considerable proportion of household income is absorbed by the food basket alone, it highlights the difference between social welfare rates and the actual cost of a minimum essential standard of living, as established in the VPSJ's research. Households in this situation are vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion and are unlikely to have a standard of living that meets their needs at a minimum but acceptable level.

Scenario: Working fulltime on the national minimum wage

In this scenario, the proportion of income that needs to be spent on the food basket drops considerably when this household moves from welfare to work. Between 2006 and 2014, the amount of household income that needed to be spent on the urban food basket ranged from 17.37% in 2010 to 19.43% in 2006, while the corresponding figures for the rural basket were 16.1% in 2010 and 18% in 2006 (Table 35).

Fulltime minimum wage workers were brought into the tax net in 2011 and have seen a decrease in net income of approximately €10, and so the proportion of income that needed to be spent on the food basket increased marginally in 2011, but has remained relatively static ever since. Nevertheless, the minimum essential food basket is still a significant area of expenditure and absorbs a large share of household income.

The latest data from the SILC, which is for 2013, highlight that 27.2% of adults aged 65 and under who live alone are at risk of poverty (18). The SILC data underscore how this household type is particularly exposed to being at risk of poverty. It is apparent from this research that the cost of a minimum essential food basket is beyond the financial capabilities for many low-income single adults living alone.

⁸ It is assumed that the single adult male is over the age of 26 and in receipt of the full Jobseeker's Payment.

The cost of a healthy food basket

Pensioner couple⁹

Table 36: One contributory pension and qualified adult payment

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total social welfare income	€ 373.07	€ 420.43	€ 461.17	€ 475.46	€ 476.90	€ 476.56	€ 472.66	€ 468.01	€ 465.84
Urban food	€ 80.51	€ 81.15	€ 88.70	€ 88.26	€ 81.37	€ 82.67	€ 82.34	€ 83.66	€ 82.41
% of income	21.58%	19.30%	19.23%	18.56%	17.06%	17.35%	17.42%	17.88%	17.69%
Rural food	€ 87.10	€ 87.79	€ 95.96	€ 95.48	€ 88.03	€ 89.44	€ 89.08	€ 90.51	€ 89.15
% of income	23.35%	20.88%	20.81%	20.08%	18.46%	18.77%	18.85%	19.34%	19.14%

Table 37: One contributory pension and one non-contributory pension

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total social welfare income	€ 405.77	€ 447.43	€ 473.17	€ 488.16	€ 489.60	€ 489.26	€ 485.36	€ 480.71	€ 478.54
Urban food	€ 80.51	€ 81.15	€ 88.70	€ 88.26	€ 81.37	€ 82.67	€ 82.34	€ 83.66	€ 82.41
% of income	19.84%	18.14%	18.75%	18.08%	16.62%	16.90%	16.96%	17.40%	17.22%
Rural food	€ 87.10	€ 87.79	€ 95.96	€ 95.48	€ 88.03	€ 89.44	€ 89.08	€ 90.51	€ 89.15
% of income	21.47%	19.62%	20.28%	19.56%	17.98%	18.28%	18.35%	18.83%	18.63%

⁹ The income for pensioner households is based on their primary social welfare payment and any additional entitlements, including the Household Benefits Package.

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Table 38: Both in receipt of a Non-contributory Pension

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total Social Welfare Income	€ 394.47	€ 438.13	€ 461.87	€ 476.86	€ 478.30	€ 477.96	€ 474.06	€ 469.41	€ 467.24
Urban food	€ 80.51	€ 81.15	€ 88.70	€ 88.26	€ 81.37	€ 82.67	€ 82.34	€ 83.66	€ 82.41
% of income	20.41%	18.52%	19.20%	18.51%	17.01%	17.30%	17.37%	17.82%	17.64%
Rural food	€ 87.10	€ 87.79	€ 95.96	€ 95.48	€ 88.03	€ 89.44	€ 89.08	€ 90.51	€ 89.15
% of income	22.08%	20.04%	20.78%	20.02%	18.40%	18.71%	18.79%	19.28%	19.08%

Pensioner Couple

Tables 36, 37 and 38 detail three different income situations for a pensioner couple in receipt of the state pension. In all scenarios, the proportion of income that needed to be spent on the minimum essential food basket was at its highest in 2006 and at its lowest in 2010. However, of the six household types analysed, this household is one of the households that needs to spend a lesser proportion of its income on food.

The household that needs to spend the largest proportion of its income on food is the household with the lowest income, which in this case is the household in receipt of the Contributory Pension and Qualified Adult payment (Table 36). The household that needs to spend the least amount of its income on food is the one in receipt of one Contributory Pension and one Non-contributory Pension (Table 37). This household has the largest income of the three households.

While the recession has resulted in reductions in and changes to the eligibility criteria to qualify for secondary benefits¹⁰, the rate at which the state pension is paid has not been reduced. In the context of the overall cost of a minimum essential standard of living, the research shows that this household type has an adequate income and has consistently been able to afford a minimum standard of living from 2006 to 2014¹¹.

¹⁰ Secondary benefits refer to additional payments or benefits that a household may be entitled to, such as a medical card and fuel allowance.

¹¹The 2014 VPSJ update data are available online at:

http://budgeting.ie/images/stories/Publications/MESL_Update_Paper/VPSJ_2014_Minimum_Essential_Standard_of_Living_Update_2014.pdf

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Female pensioner living alone

Table 39: Contributory pension

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total Social Welfare Income	€ 231.47	€ 255.13	€ 268.87	€ 276.86	€ 278.30	€ 277.96	€ 274.06	€ 269.41	€ 267.24
Urban food	€ 61.15	€ 61.64	€ 67.37	€ 67.03	€ 61.80	€ 62.79	€ 62.54	€ 63.54	€ 62.59
% of income	26.42%	24.16%	25.06%	24.21%	22.21%	22.59%	22.82%	23.58%	23.42%
Rural	€ 64.86	€ 65.38	€ 71.46	€ 71.11	€ 65.56	€ 66.61	€ 66.34	€ 67.40	€ 66.39
% of income	28.02%	25.63%	26.58%	25.68%	23.56%	23.96%	24.21%	25.02%	24.84%

Table 40: Non-contributory pension

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total Social Welfare Income	€ 220.17	€ 245.83	€ 257.57	€ 265.56	€ 267.00	€ 266.66	€ 262.76	€ 258.11	€ 255.94
Urban food	€ 61.15	€ 61.64	€ 67.37	€ 67.03	€ 61.80	€ 62.79	€ 62.54	€ 63.54	€ 62.59
% of income	27.77%	25.07%	26.16%	25.24%	23.15%	23.55%	23.80%	24.62%	24.45%
Rural food	€ 64.86	€ 65.38	€ 71.46	€ 71.11	€ 65.56	€ 66.61	€ 66.34	€ 67.40	€ 66.39
% of income	29.46%	26.60%	27.74%	26.78%	24.55%	24.98%	25.25%	26.11%	25.94%

Female pensioner living alone

A female pensioner living alone household needs to spend a much greater proportion of income on the food basket when compared to a pensioner couple (Tables 38–39). The urban female pensioner spends two thirds of the amount a pensioner couple spends on food. In 2014, for example, the weekly cost of the urban food basket for a pensioner couple was €82.41, compared to €62.52 for a female pensioner living alone. However, the pensioner living alone had only one income to meet all of their costs, and while they did receive an additional €7.70 Living Alone Increase, this was not enough to offset the additional costs faced by living alone.

This household's spending on food follows the same pattern as the other household types, with the proportion of income absorbed by the minimum essential food basket at its highest in 2006 and at its lowest in 2010. For the household in receipt of the Contributory Pension, the proportion of income that needed to be spent on the urban food basket ranged from 22.21% in 2010 to 26.42% in 2006 (Table 38). The corresponding range for the rural food basket was from 23.56% in 2010 to 28.02% in 2006.

For the household in receipt of the Non-contributory state pension, the proportion of income required was marginally higher, reflecting the lower income for this household type (Table 40). The proportion of income that needed to be spent on the food basket ranged from 23.15% in 2010 to 27.77% in 2006 for the urban food basket, while the range for the rural food basket was from 24.55% in 2010 to 29.46% in 2006.

It is clear from the data that the minimum essential food basket is a significant area of expenditure for this household type and absorbs a large share of this household's income. The high proportion of income that needed to be spent on food alone highlights the cost of a minimum standard of living in Ireland and underscores the ability of and the extent to which social welfare payments meet the cost of living. Pensioners have very little, if any, scope to increase their income in retirement, and the MESL data show that pensioners living alone and solely reliant on the state pension are particularly vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion.

Overall trends in food and household income 2006–2014

This section has demonstrated that the minimum essential food basket absorbs a significant proportion of household income for all household types and in all hypothetical scenarios considered in this study. Food as a percentage of household income was at its highest in 2006 when social welfare payments were at their lowest and the national minimum wage was €7.65 per hour. In 2007, there was a €20 increase in primary social welfare payments and a €1 increase in the national minimum wage, and so the percentage of household income absorbed by the minimum essential food basket fell in that year.

In 2010, when there was a notable drop in food prices and the food baskets were only 1.1% more expensive than they were in 2006, the proportion of income consumed by the food baskets was at its lowest for all household types. Since 2011, there has been no real change in the proportion of income needed to be spent on

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food, but food continues to be a significant area of household expenditure and absorbs a sizeable share of household income for welfare-dependent and low-income working households.

The analysis of the cost of the minimum essential food basket and the relationship to household income highlights the impact that just one area of expenditure can have on a household's income. The food basket is only one area of expenditure and the data show that a considerable proportion of income is required if households are to afford a minimum food basket. This underscores the point that for certain household types, the minimum essential food basket may be financially out of reach.

In their research, Dobson et al. (19) highlighted how financially constrained households regard food as a flexible item within the controllable household budget, and when other necessary household expenditure is taken into consideration, the food budget is reduced. Limited economic resources and the cost of a nutritionally adequate diet can act as barriers to sustaining a healthy diet and subsequent good health. On the basis of the findings in this report and the level of income required to afford the minimum essential food basket, it appears that low-income households struggle to allocate the high expenditure necessary for healthy eating.

The cost of food and household income are two important factors that can shape the priorities and decisions of households. For those households operating within a finite and limited budget, financial constraints can play a large role in determining food choices. Studies have repeatedly shown that those people on the lowest incomes tend to have poorer diets and are more likely to experience food poverty. Research by Carney and Maitre (3) on food poverty in Ireland shows that income quintile is a significant predictor of food poverty¹². The odds of experiencing food poverty are two times higher for households in the lowest income quintile in comparison to all other income quintiles.

¹² The income quintile ratio compares the percentage of the total disposable income received by individuals in the bottom 20% (quintile) of the income distribution to that received by the top 20%.

6 Minimum essential food costs for children

Introduction

This section examines the minimum essential food costs for children as part of a household. The latest SILC data show that 17.9% of children were at risk of poverty in 2013 (18). Moreover, the Health Behaviour in School Aged Children (HBSC) Survey 2010, which describes the health behaviour in children aged between nine and 18 found that 13% of children surveyed reported never having breakfast on a weekday, while a further 21% of children surveyed reported going to school or bed hungry because there was not enough food at home. The survey found that boys, younger children and children from lower social classes were all more likely to report going to school or to bed hungry (20, p.7).

The *Growing up in Ireland* study examined the prevalence of overweight or obesity among nine-year-olds. A total of 75% of nine-year-olds in the study were defined as having a healthy weight, 19% were overweight and 7% were obese (21, p.14). Furthermore, the study also found that children, particularly girls, from less socio-economically advantaged households were more likely to be overweight.

Poor diet can have a detrimental effect on children. Friel and Conlon (22) note that research has demonstrated that poor nutrition in childhood is causally linked to health-related problems later in life such as chronic illnesses and can impair a child's development and capacity to learn. Layte and McCrory also note that "excess non-lean body mass, known as adiposity, at a young age is associated with both immediate and long-term health risks"(21, p.8). These findings demonstrate that the cost of a minimum, essential but nutritionally adequate food basket for children is a particularly pertinent issue.

This section presents food costs for children from the MESL aggregate household data based on the methodology described in Collins et al. (14). Food costs for children as part of a household between 2006 and 2014 are examined at three distinct ages:

- Pre-school
- Primary
- Second level

This approach shifts the focus from the MESL needs of whole households to the MESL needs of individuals. The result is a set of minimum essential standard budgets for each person in the household. However, it should be noted that these individual budgets demonstrate the minimum requirements for individuals who are part of a larger household and do not correspond to the minimum requirements of such an individual living alone.

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Individualised component budgets are derived for the adults as parents in a household with children, and for the children as members of the family household (19, p.41)¹³.

The 2014 MESL baskets have been corrected for inflation retrospectively to examine how food costs have changed from 2006 to 2014. The data are based on the direct cost of a child, i.e. costs that can be directly attributed to a child, and exclude costs shared in common with parents, such as home heating, furniture (with the exception of the child's bedroom furniture) and use of the family car. Tables 41–46 detail the food costs for the three child ages under consideration from 2006 to 2014 and food as a percentage of direct overall expenditure¹⁴.

¹³ For a full description of the individualisation process, see pp. 41–46 of Collins, M.L. MacMahon, B. Weld, G. and Thornton, R. 2012. *A Minimum Income Standard for Ireland A consensual budget standards study examining household types across the lifecycle*. Dublin: The Policy Institute

¹⁴ A more detailed breakdown of expenditure for each child age group is contained in the appendices

Pre-school child

Table 41: Urban – direct cost of a child
Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 23.34	€ 23.53	€ 25.72	€ 25.59	€ 23.59	€ 23.97	€ 23.88	€ 24.26	€ 23.89
MESL other costs	€ 28.20	€ 28.42	€ 29.03	€ 28.68	€ 27.80	€ 28.36	€ 28.88	€ 29.16	€ 29.51
Total core costs	€ 51.55	€ 51.95	€ 54.74	€ 54.27	€ 51.39	€ 52.33	€ 52.76	€ 53.42	€ 53.40
Food as % MESL core	45.29%	45.30%	46.98%	47.16%	45.91%	45.81%	45.26%	45.41%	44.74%

Table 42: Rural – direct cost of a child

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 25.52	€ 25.72	€ 28.12	€ 27.98	€ 25.79	€ 26.21	€ 26.10	€ 26.52	€ 26.12
MESL other costs	€ 24.85	€ 24.98	€ 25.42	€ 25.22	€ 24.23	€ 24.69	€ 25.02	€ 25.34	€ 25.75
Total core costs	€ 50.37	€ 50.71	€ 53.54	€ 53.19	€ 50.03	€ 50.90	€ 51.12	€ 51.86	€ 51.87
Food as % MESL core	50.67%	50.73%	52.52%	52.59%	51.56%	51.49%	51.06%	51.14%	50.36%

Pre-school Child

When childcare is excluded from the MESL data, food is the largest area of expenditure for a child of pre-school age (Tables 41 and 42). This age group has the lowest food costs of the three child ages considered, yet food as a percentage of overall expenditure is at its highest for this age group of all the age groups. This is because expenditure on other areas, such as clothes and education, is relatively low. As a result, food costs for a pre-school child in the urban basket are between 45.29% (2006) and 47.16% (2009) of total core expenditure. For the rural basket, the figures are 50.67% (2006) and 52.59% (2009). Interestingly, expenditure on food in the rural food basket is greater than on all of the other core MESL costs combined.

The cost of the minimum essential food basket follows the inflation trajectory with costs being at their lowest in 2006 and at their highest in 2008. While the minimum essential food basket is the least expensive for a child of this age when compared to other child age groups, it still is in excess of €20 per week. In 2014, expenditure on food in urban areas was €23.89, while the corresponding cost for rural areas was €26.12.

Primary School Child

Table 43: Urban – direct cost of a child

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 36.07	€ 36.36	€ 39.74	€ 39.54	€ 36.46	€ 37.04	€ 36.89	€ 37.48	€ 36.92
MESL other costs	€ 49.69	€ 50.06	€ 50.80	€ 50.01	€ 48.19	€ 48.57	€ 48.99	€ 49.28	€ 49.44
Total core costs	€ 85.76	€ 86.42	€ 90.54	€ 89.55	€ 84.65	€ 85.61	€ 85.89	€ 86.77	€ 86.37
Food as % MESL core	42.06%	42.07%	43.89%	44.15%	43.07%	43.27%	42.96%	43.20%	42.75%

Table 44: Rural – direct cost of a child

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 39.20	€ 39.51	€ 43.18	€ 42.97	€ 39.62	€ 40.25	€ 40.09	€ 40.73	€ 40.12
MESL other costs	€ 47.96	€ 48.32	€ 48.92	€ 48.31	€ 46.42	€ 46.65	€ 46.99	€ 47.37	€ 47.63
Total core costs	€ 87.16	€ 87.83	€ 92.11	€ 91.28	€ 86.04	€ 86.90	€ 87.08	€ 88.10	€ 87.76
Food as % MESL core	44.97%	44.99%	46.89%	47.07%	46.04%	46.32%	46.04%	46.23%	45.72%

Primary School Child

When childcare is excluded from the MESL data, food is the largest area of expenditure for a primary school-going child, and it is a significant proportion of overall expenditure (Tables 43 and 44). As expected, food costs rise for this age group when compared to a child of pre-school age. In 2014, the cost of the urban minimum essential food basket was €39.92, which was €13.03 more expensive than for a child of pre-school age.

Between 2006 and 2014, the cost of the urban food basket ranged from a low of €36.07 per week in 2006 to a high of €39.74 in 2008. The cost of the rural food basket was higher, and between 2006 and 2014, expenditure on food ranged from €39.20 in 2006 to €43.18 in 2008, a difference of €3.98.

As Tables 43 and 44 illustrate, food accounted for a notable proportion of total expenditure, and in all years under consideration, food accounted for more than 40% of total core expenditure. Food as a percentage of total expenditure peaked in 2009 at 44.15% in urban areas and at 47.07% in rural areas. In 2014, food accounted for 42.75% of the urban MESL basket and 45.72% of the rural MESL basket.

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Secondary school child

Table 45: Urban – direct cost of a child

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 47.95	€ 48.33	€ 52.82	€ 52.56	€ 48.46	€ 49.24	€ 49.04	€ 49.82	€ 49.08
MESL other costs	€ 87.84	€ 88.58	€ 89.75	€ 88.47	€ 85.20	€ 85.41	€ 85.98	€ 86.12	€ 85.97
Total core costs	€ 135.78	€ 136.90	€ 142.57	€ 141.03	€ 133.66	€ 134.65	€ 135.02	€ 135.94	€ 135.05
Food as % MESL core	35.31%	35.30%	37.05%	37.27%	36.26%	36.57%	36.32%	36.65%	36.34%

Table 46: Rural – direct cost of a child

Excludes housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Food	€ 51.82	€ 52.24	€ 57.09	€ 56.81	€ 52.38	€ 53.22	€ 53.00	€ 53.85	€ 53.04
MESL other costs	€ 81.53	€ 82.11	€ 83.01	€ 81.84	€ 78.43	€ 78.57	€ 78.85	€ 78.97	€ 78.83
Total core costs	€ 133.35	€ 134.35	€ 140.10	€ 138.65	€ 130.81	€ 131.79	€ 131.86	€ 132.82	€ 131.87
Food as % MESL core	38.86%	38.88%	40.75%	40.97%	40.04%	40.38%	40.20%	40.54%	40.22%

Secondary school child

When a child enters adolescence, costs rise considerably in a number of categories of expenditure, including clothes, education, social inclusion and participation, and, of course, food. The cost of the minimum essential food basket increases significantly, and food costs for this age group are substantially higher than for any of the other child age groups examined. In 2014, the cost of the urban food basket for this age group was €49.08. This is €12.16 more than for a child at primary school and €25.19 more than for a child of pre-school age (Table 45).

The high cost of food for this age group was highlighted by the focus groups. In the 2006 study, focus group participants spoke of the expense of feeding an adolescent: “We’re really dealing with three adults; the teenager will eat what the adults are eating (9, p.73).

Between 2006 and 2014, the cost of the urban food basket ranged from a low of €47.95 per week in 2006 to a high of €52.82 in 2008. This is a difference of €4.87 (Table 45). This demonstrates the impact of inflation on the minimum essential food basket. In terms of the percentage of overall expenditure, the food basket amounted to between 35.31% (2006) and 37.27% (2009) of total core expenditure. The corresponding cost for the rural basket was from €51.82 in 2006 to €57.09 in 2008, while food as a percentage of core expenditure ranged from 38.86% in 2006 to 40.97% in 2009 (Table 46).

Expenditure on food and the contribution of child income supports

Tables 47 and 48 illustrate the weekly cost of food for three child ages in 2014 and the weekly value of child income supports for households dependent on social welfare. The tables also detail the cost of the food basket as a proportion of these supports.

The MESL data clearly indicate that the minimum essential food basket is a significant cost for all households with children, particularly for those with an adolescent. For low-income or welfare-dependent households, the cost of food accounts for a significant proportion of household expenditure and absorbs a large share of household income. Moreover, with the exception of the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA), child income supports do not take account of the fact that costs for children vary over the course of childhood and increase substantially in adolescence. Therefore, the contribution they make to a household is dependent on the age of the child.

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Table 47: Urban food costs and the weekly value of child income supports in 2014

Urban	Pre-school	Primary school	Secondary school
Food costs 2014	€23.89	€36.92	€49.08
Qualified child increase	€29.80	€29.80	€29.80
Child benefit	€30.00	€30.00	€30.00
Back to school clothing and footwear allowance	€00.00	€1.92	€3.85
Total child income supports	€59.80	€61.72	€63.65
Food basket as a % of child income supports	39.94%	59.82%	77.11%

Table 48: Rural food costs and the weekly value of child income supports in 2014

Rural	Pre-school	Primary school	Secondary school
Food costs 2014	€26.12	€40.12	€53.04
Qualified child increase	€29.80	€29.80	€29.80
Child benefit	€30.00	€30.00	€30.00
Back to school clothing and footwear allowance	€00.00	€1.92	€3.85
Total child income supports	€59.80	€61.72	€63.65
Food basket as a % of child income supports	43.68%	65.00%	83.33%

As demonstrated in the tables above, food as a proportion of child income supports varies by the age of the child and by location. The cost of the rural adolescent food basket comes to 83.33% of the child income supports, while the corresponding figure for the urban basket is 77.11%.

While the combined weekly value of child income supports exceeds the cost of the minimum essential food basket for the three child ages examined, food is only one area of expenditure, and households with children also face other costs, such as clothing, personal care, social inclusion and participation and education. Taking these other costs into account in 2014, child income supports for children in welfare-

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dependent households met the direct minimum essential costs for a pre-school child but were inadequate for primary and, in particular, secondary school-going children. Child income supports met 50.1% of the total direct expenditure for an adolescent in an urban area and 51.3% for an adolescent in a rural area.¹⁵

A total of 17.9% of children were at risk of poverty in 2013 (18). Furthermore, 31.7% of one-parent households with children under the age of 18 were at risk of poverty in 2013, while 11.1% of two-parent households with 1–3 children were at risk of poverty in the same year (18). These statistics, coupled with the analysis of the cost of providing a minimum essential food basket for children, demonstrates the considerable challenge facing low-income households to afford a minimum essential, but nutritionally adequate, diet for their children.

¹⁵ Further information on the contribution of child income supports to the cost of a child in 2014 can be found at pages 7 and 8 of the 2014 MESL update paper. The paper can be accessed at: budgeting.ie/images/stories/Publications/MESL_Update_Paper/VPSJ_2014_Minimum_Essential_Standard_of_Living_Update_2014.pdf

7 Conclusions

The research demonstrates what the cost of a minimum essential food basket for six household types was from 2006 to 2014. This report highlights the challenge faced by welfare-dependent, low-income households to provide a healthy diet and all the other components of an acceptable lifestyle to their members. Given that one in ten people are experiencing food poverty in Ireland, which can also affect social behaviour and can cause or exacerbate social exclusion, this research provides further evidence of the need to address the inter-related issues of food poverty, income adequacy and living costs in Ireland. The key conclusions to be drawn from this research are outlined below.

Key conclusions

Methodology

- This research, which is grounded in focus group-led Consensual Budget Standards methodology, has provided an analysis of the cost of a minimum, essential, but nutritionally adequate, food basket for six household types in Ireland.

Food and household expenditure

- A minimum essential food basket is a significant area of expenditure for all household types.
- When childcare and housing are excluded from expenditure, food is the most expensive category of expenditure.
- Food costs are more expensive for the majority of household types in rural areas than in urban areas.
- The cost of the minimum essential food basket fluctuated between 2006 and 2014. The food basket was 2.4% more expensive in 2014 compared to 2006.
- The sub-category “Meat” accounts for the largest share of the food basket. “Fruit” and “Vegetables” are the second and third largest share of the food basket.
- Spending on “Restaurants, cafes, fast food and takeaway food”, and “Extra for visitors” are an important part of the food baskets for all household types. These categories highlight the social and cultural aspects of food and enable households to have a standard of living that meets not only their physical needs, but also their social and psychological needs. This ensures that the minimum essential food baskets reflect the behaviour and shopping patterns of members of the public and that households are able to participate in activities and practices considered to be a normal part of everyday life.

Food and Household Income

- Food as a percentage of household income was at its highest in 2006, when social welfare payments were at their lowest and the national minimum wage was €7.65 per hour. In 2007, there was a €20 increase in primary social welfare payments and a €1 increase in the national minimum wage, and so the percentage of household income absorbed by the minimum essential food basket fell in that year.
- The proportion of income taken by the food baskets was at its lowest for all household types in 2010.
- Between 2011 and 2014, there was no significant change in the proportion of income that households needed to spend on a minimum food basket.
- Households with children and dependent on social welfare need to spend a very considerable proportion of their income to be able to afford a minimum food basket.
- Many welfare-dependent households were unable to afford a minimum essential standard of living in 2014 and in all likelihood struggled to allocate a significant proportion of their income to the food basket alone when there were other costs that had to be met.
- The findings in this report demonstrate the need to examine the cost of a nutritionally-adequate diet in the ROI and the extent to which social welfare transfers and the national minimum wage allow households to have a standard of living that meets their physical, psychological and social needs.

Food Costs for Children

- Food costs rise as children grow older, and are, in particular, a significant cost for households with an adolescent. However, with the exception of the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, child income support rates remain static regardless of the age of the child and do not take account of the fact that costs for children vary over the course of childhood and increase substantially in adolescence.
- The examination of the contribution of child income supports and the high proportion of income that needs to be spent on the food basket alone demonstrates the challenge facing low-income households to provide their children with a minimum, but acceptable, standard of living.

Food Poverty

- This research has added to the evidence on the role of cost in food poverty. Financial resources affect the dietary choices that people make. The research will help to inform policymakers about the cost of a healthy food basket and the need for households to have the financial resources to be able to afford a food basket that meets their physical, psychological and social needs at a minimum but acceptable level.

8 References

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