

WHAT IS THE COST OF A HEALTHY FOOD BASKET IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND?



1 IN 10 HOUSEHOLDS IN IRELAND EXPERIENCE FOOD POVERTY

These households



Eat less well



Have higher level of diet-related disease

Weekly average urban household spend on food



€57

Single male living alone



€63

Female pensioner



€82

Pensioner couple



€96

Lone parent & two children (3 & 10 years)



€125

Two parent & two children (3 & 10 years)



€150

Two parent & two children (10 & 15 years)

LOW INCOME HOUSEHOLDS WOULD HAVE TO SPEND 1/4 OF THEIR BUDGET ON A HEALTHY FOOD BASKET

SPEND ON KEY FOOD CATEGORIES



Breads & Cereals



Fruits & Vegetables



Meat



Milk, Cheese & Eggs



Cost of healthy food basket

One in 10 households in Ireland report experiencing food poverty. This means that they are unable to have an adequate and nutritious diet due to issues of affordability and accessibility. Those on low income are at increased risk.

The food budget is a very flexible part of a household's expenditure. When pressure is put on the household budget cheap, highly processed and nutritionally poor food can meet basic hunger and energy needs of household members.

This research examined the cost of a healthy food basket for six household types. This research delivered figures for the cost of a weekly food basket that is both adequately healthy and acceptable for six household types.

Approach

Since 2006 the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice has conducted studies to establish the cost of a minimum essential standard of living for the six households.

Food baskets are defined as healthy based on meeting healthy guidelines and nutrient needs of all household members. Food baskets were agreed 'acceptable' for a minimum standard by participants involved in the research.

Two income scenarios were included:

- (i) dependent on social welfare and
- (ii) working and earning the national minimum wage.

Both include income generated from entitlements. Details on the methodology can be found at www.budgeting.ie

Findings

Table 1. Total food basket cost per household in 2014 (total (€) and as proportion of core expenditure)

Location	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Household type	Total Cost (€)		% Core expenditure	
Two parent & two children (3y & 10y)	125	138	26	25
Two parent & two children (10y & 15y)	150	165	26	27
One parent and two children (3y & 10y)	96	105	26	24
Single adult male of working age living alone	57	53	23	18
Pensioner couple	82	89	25	22
Female pensioner living alone	63	66	25	20

- Food required approximately a quarter of the core household budget (outgoings) for most household types (Table 1).
- Households with two adults and two older children spent the most (€) on food while a single male of working age households spent the least.
- For most households, living in rural areas increased food costs due to more food being bought in local stores which tend to be more expensive.

Table 2. Food basket costs per household as proportion (%) household income

Location	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Household type	Social welfare		Minimum wage	
Two parent & two children (3y & 10y)	29	32	23	25
Two parent & two children (10y & 15y)	34	38	27	30
One parent and two children (3y & 10y)	30	33	16	17
Single adult male of working age living alone	30	28	18	17
Household type	Non contributory pension		Contributory pension (& qualified adult payment)	
Pensioner couple	18	19	18	19
Female pensioner living alone	23	25	25	26

- Approximately a quarter to a third of a low income household income is needed to buy a healthy food basket (Table 2).
- For households working and on minimum wage a healthy food basket required less of the household income than if they are reliant of social welfare payments.

Table 3. Weekly food costs (€) for a child

Age of child	Urban €	Rural €
Pre-school (3y)	24	26
Primary School (10y)	37	40
Post Primary (15y)	49	53

- The cost of providing a nutritionally adequate diet was significant for all households with children, particularly those with an adolescent child.
- The cost of feeding a teenager was double the cost that of feeding a pre-schooler and €12–13/wk more expensive than for a primary school child (Table 3).
- The costs were higher for those living in rural areas.

Change in cost of food between 2006 and 2014

- Overall food and non-alcoholic beverage prices were 2.4% higher in 2014 than in 2006. They reached a high of 10% in 2008 than in 2006.
- Fruit and vegetables were cheaper in 2014 than they were in 2006. They were highest in 2008. Other food categories including breads and cereals; milk, cheese and eggs; oils and fats were more expensive in 2014 than in 2006.
- Between 2011 and 2014 the overall proportion of household incomes required for a nutritionally adequate food basket remained the same.

Implications of this research

The most recent data (2009–10) from the Household Budget Survey shows that the average household at risk of poverty, i.e. a household with disposable income below 60% of the national equivalised median disposable income, was spending 19.3% of household income or €103 on food. This is less than the quarter of the household budget identified in this research.

Given the fact that food is a flexible part of the household's budget low income families are at particular risk of a poor diet.

Adequate income is important to meet basic nutritional requirements in association with support in life skills such as budgeting, planning and other food skills.

To download a copy of the full report and for references visit www.safefood.eu and www.budgeting.ie