

The cost of a healthy food basket in Northern Ireland in 2020

Research programme: Consumer Interests (aka Wider Consumer Interests)

Study duration: 2020-01-01

Background

This is the fourth study to establish the cost of a food basket that meets the Minimal Essential Standard of Living (MESL) in NI. The FSA has a role in monitoring food poverty in NI, of which this research forms an important part.

The findings support the work of the All-Island Food Poverty Network, which FSA in NI co-chairs in partnership with Safefood. This network brings together government partners, academia and voluntary sector organisations who have a common interest in reducing food poverty on the island of Ireland. This facilitates a co-ordinated and strategic approach to tackling food poverty through the development of consensus on related issues, collaboration and shared learning

Research approach

The MESL research applies a methodology known as 'Consensual Budget Standards'.

This approach is consumer-led rather than expert-led. Food menus meeting the MESL, while also meeting nutritional needs, were developed by engaging with consumers through multiple, deliberative focus groups and iterative in-depth discussions. These discussions resulted in a negotiated agreement on what people regard as essential for a socially acceptable minimum standard of living.

An MESL is based on needs, not wants. It is a standard of living which people should not be expected to live below.

This report presents the cost of the minimum essential food basket for four low-income household types, adjusted to reflect food costs in 2020.

The baskets (first established for 2014 and 2016) are adjusted to 2020 prices using the United Kingdom Consumer Price Index. ?

Key findings

The research shows:

- Some families on a low income need to spend between a quarter (24%) and almost half (46%) of their take home income to afford a basic food basket that is acceptable and meets nutritional needs.
- Food costs were highest for the household with an adolescent, costing approximately one third more than a similar household with younger children.

The Consumer Council has produced a short film '[Hand to Mouth](#)' to accompany the Minimum Essential Food Basket research, which explores the difficulties people can face accessing a healthy, affordable and enjoyable diet on a limited budget.

[What is the cost of a healthy food basket in Northern Ireland in 2020?](#)