Office for National Statistics

Article

Living Costs and Food Survey technical report: financial year ending March 2024

User guidance and technical information for the Living Costs and Food Survey for the financial year ending March 2024.

Contact:
The LCF Research team
lcf_enquiries@ons.gov.uk

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1 . Main points

- This report contains response information, questionnaire changes, and new or changed methodology for financial year ending (FYE) 2024.
- The purpose of this report is to update our FYE 2023 technical report; it also accompanies our Family spending in the UK: April 2023 to March 2024 bulletin.
- Further supporting data can be found in our updated Living Costs and Food Survey: technical report data tables

2 . Overview of the Living Costs and Food Survey technical report

Background

This report contains response information, questionnaire changes, and new or changed methodology for financial year ending (FYE) 2024. It does not describe methodology that has changed before FYE 2024. For changes before FYE 2024, users should refer to the relevant edition of our Family spending the UK bulletin, which links to that year's technical report. For a more in-depth explanation of Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) processes and methodology, users should refer to our LCF quality and methodology information (QMI).

The purpose of this report is to update our FYE 2023 technical report. It also accompanies our Family spending in the UK: April 2023 to March 2024 bulletin.

We also publish information on response, characteristics of the sample, confidence intervals, and interview metrics alongside this report in our Living Costs and Food Survey: technical report data tables.

3 . Response for financial year ending 2024

The overall achieved sample for the Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) in financial year ending (FYE) 2025 in the UK was 4,205 households. Of these, 407 households were from Northern Ireland and 3,798 from Great Britain (GB).

The rest of this section refers to the GB sample only. We directly collect GB data, while Northern Ireland data are collected by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). For more information on this, please refer to our LCF quality and methodology information (QMI).

The overall response rate for the LCF in Great Britain was 28% in FYE 2024. This increased by 6 percentage points compared with FYE 2023, but has not recovered to pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels of 40% or above. The issued sample of 14,862 households was approximately 5,000 fewer households than FYE 2023. Because of the increased response rate, a relatively smaller decrease was seen in the achieved sample, with 3,798 households participating in GB in FYE 2024, compared with 4,061 in FYE 2023. For more information, see Table 7 in our accompanying dataset.

We were unable to contact 24% of addresses in the eligible sample for FYE 2024, and a further 48% refused to take part. Non-response remains high since the pandemic. Of the 3,798 responding households in Great Britain, 3,745 cooperated fully, meaning they completed both the interview and diary sections of the survey.

In FYE 2024, partial responses accounted for 1.4% of all cooperating households. Of the 53 partial responses, 52 occurred because one or more adults in the household refused to keep the diary but were happy to take part in the interview and the Main Diary Keeper of the household completed both the interview and the diary (Table 6 in our accompanying dataset).

Interviewers record the main reason why people refuse before or during an interview. These are spontaneous results that are coded against a list of preset answers, with an "other" option available, where applicable. In FYE 2024, the two most commonly cited reasons for refusing to take part in the survey were (Table 10 in our accompanying dataset):

- cannot be bothered (29%), which was the top reason cited, same as in the previous year
- temporarily too busy (14%), which is a level similar to the previous year

4 . Living Costs and Food Survey questionnaire changes for financial year ending 2024

We began preparing for the April 2023 questionnaire changes (for our FYE 2024 dataset) in September 2022. This allowed us to plan the changes, liaising with stakeholders and seeking their approval.

Changes for April 2023

We implemented several changes for April 2023 that are included in our FYE 2024 dataset. The most substantial changes were the removal of questions related to coronavirus (COVID-19) and the addition of a suite of questions about material deprivation.

Questions removed

- We removed obsolete questions introduced early in the pandemic, such as questions about days of work missed because of illness or instructions to isolate, or questions about the Test and Trace Support Scheme.
- We removed EU-compliant material deprivation questions intended as poverty indicators; these questions were expanded on in our Survey on Living Conditions (SLC), but this subsequently stopped data collection in 2025.
- We have removed questions about energy bill discount vouchers.
- We removed the question about a Council Tax Rebate Grant, which was a grant available in 2022 to help households with rising energy bills.
- We removed the Welsh winter fuel payment question.

Questions added

- We have added new mortgage questions to meet the data needs of multiple government departments; questions cover the duration of the mortgage and the type of interest rates charged.
- Questions about rooms used fully or partially for business use have been reinstated.
- Additional questions have been added to capture possible further payments households may have received as part of the Ukraine Sponsorship scheme.

5 . Other changes for financial year ending 2024

Updated weights and population totals

Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) non-response weights and population totals have been updated in line with Census 2021 for financial year ending (FYE) 2024, so they more accurately represent the composition of the UK population. Exploratory analysis showed that the necessary update to weights reduced average household total expenditure by approximately 1.5%, with variation across high-level Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose 2018 (COICOP 2018) categories within margins of error.

Users should note that, because of the complexity of the data, no formal significance testing has been undertaken at this stage on the data used in our Family Spending in the UK: April 2023 to March 2024 bulletin . However, standard errors and confidence intervals have been published in our accompanying Living Costs and Food Survey: technical report data tables.

Output review

We have reviewed all tables in our associated Family spending in the UK bulletin to ensure quality and robustness and to align with the Code of Practice for Statistics. Following this review, we have removed a small number of tables and applied some additional suppression because of data volatility. Full details can be found in Section 5: Data sources and quality of our Family Spending in the UK: April 2023 to March 2024 bulletin.

6 . Future improvements to the Living Costs and Food Survey

The Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) is undergoing a range of developments, and changes will be applied from 2026 onwards. This is detailed in our recent Office for National Statistics (ONS) Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan for Economic Statistics article.

Changes include a sample boost to 30,000 issued households (pending financial approvals). This will mitigate the decline in response rates compared with pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels. It will also account for the 2025 cessation of the Survey on Living Conditions, data from which were previously combined with the LCF to produce household income statistics.

We plan to update the survey collection infrastructure to support the introduction of the Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose 2018 (COICOP 2018). We will also update processing infrastructure and pipelines, with automated methods being introduced where possible.

These improvements are being developed and implemented from 2026, so the impact will be seen from financial year ending (FYE) 2027 data onwards. We will outline these changes in future relevant technical reports.

7 . Data on the living costs and food survey: technical information

Living Costs and Food Survey: technical report data tables
Dataset | Released 10 September 2025
Information about sample sizes, response rates, household characteristics, and expenditure uncertainty metrics for the Living Costs and Food Survey.

8 . Related links

Family spending in the UK: April 2023 to March 2024
Bulletin | Released 10 September 2025
Average weekly household expenditure on goods and services in the UK, by age, income, economic status, socio-economic class, household composition and region.

Living Costs and Food Survey quality and methodology information (QMI)
Methodology | Last revised 1 August 2023
Details the strengths, limitations, uses, users and methods used for the Living Costs and Food Survey.

9 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 10 September 2025, ONS website, article, Living Costs and Food Survey technical report: Financial year ending 2024