

Article

Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: November 2022 to February 2023

Insights from our Winter Survey as we tracked participants to examine how increases in the cost of living and difficulty accessing NHS services had impacted their lives during the winter months.

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1 . Main points

The following points are based on all adults in Great Britain who took part in our Winter Survey in both November 2022 to January 2023 (the previous period) and February 2023 (the latest period).

- Around 1 in 20 adults (5%) reported that they had run out of food and had not been able to afford to buy more in the last two weeks, comprising 3% who persistently reported this (both in the latest and previous period) and 2% who reported this in the latest period only; 1% reported this in the previous period but not in the latest period.
- Around 1 in 5 adults (20%) reported that they were occasionally, hardly ever or never able to keep comfortably warm in the past two weeks, comprising 13% of adults who persistently reported this and 7% who reported this in the latest period only; 9% reported this in the previous period but not in the latest period.
- Around 1 in 5 adults (21%) reported that they were waiting for a hospital appointment, test or to start receiving medical treatment through the NHS, comprising 14% who persistently reported this and 7% who reported this in the latest period only; 7% reported they were waiting in the previous period, but were no longer waiting in the latest period.

Some groups of the population appeared more likely to persistently report difficulties over the winter period, including:

- people who experienced moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms, among which 13% persistently reported running out of food and not being able to afford more in the past two weeks.
- people who lived in the most deprived areas of England, among which 25% persistently reported they were occasionally, hardly ever or never able to keep comfortably warm in the past two weeks.
- people aged 16 to 29 years, among which 22% persistently reported that they were occasionally, hardly ever or never able to keep comfortably warm in the past two weeks.
- disabled people, among which 31% persistently reported that they were waiting for a hospital appointment, test or to start receiving medical treatment through the NHS.

2 . Overview of the impact of winter pressures

Estimates in this publication are based on data collected in the period from 15 to 26 February 2023 (the "latest period") and 22 November 2022 to 8 January 2023 (the "previous period").

For the first time, we summarise changes in experiences among a variety of different groups of the population that previous analyses have shown are disproportionately impacted by pressures during winter. This includes groups such as adults with depressive symptoms, disabled adults or adults aged 16 to 29 years old.

This article provides an update to our [Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: 18 to 29 January 2023 article](#).

We use quotes from respondents to illustrate our findings in this article. Quotes are provided from the same respondent in the periods indicated. Quotes are sometimes shortened, as indicated by [...], to enable ease of reading. The underlying meaning of the quote remains the same.

Breakdowns of estimates by age, sex, economic activity status, disability status, experience of depressive symptoms, whether respondents have dependent children, and the level of deprivation of the area in which respondents live are contained in our [Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: longitudinal analysis](#) dataset (see [Section 7: Glossary](#) for definitions of these breakdowns). The dataset includes [confidence intervals](#) for all estimates.

[Confidence intervals](#) should be used to assess whether two comparable estimates are [statistically significantly](#) different. Where we find a significant difference, this is explicitly stated. See [Section 8: Data sources and quality](#) for more information.

3 . Food insecurity

I regularly go without food to make sure my kids get fed, even though I need to eat regular balanced meals because I'm diabetic.

January 2023

I go without food to make sure the kids get enough to eat and only use the heating when needed for the kids.

February 2023

(Female, aged 43 years)

Food insecurity refers to the inability of households to acquire enough food to lead a healthy life. Although overall inflationary pressures eased slightly in March 2023, as shown in our [Consumer price inflation, UK: March 2023 release](#), pressures on cost of living from food prices remain.

Changes over time in ability to afford food

In the latest period, around 1 in 20 adults (5%) said they had run out of food and had not been able to afford to buy more in the last two weeks.

This comprised 3% who persistently reported this (reported in both the latest and previous period) and 2% who reported this in the latest period only. A small proportion of adults who reported this in the previous period no longer did so in the latest period (1%).

Some groups of the population are more likely to report running out of food and being unable to afford to buy more, as shown in our [Impact of winter pressures on different population groups in Great Britain article](#).

New longitudinal analysis shows that there appear to be more adults within these groups who report experiencing this for the first time in the latest period, than adults within these groups who report no longer experiencing this.

This includes:

- people experiencing moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms (13% persistently reported this, 6% reported this in the latest period only and 1% reported this in the previous period only)
- people who were economically inactive for reasons other than being retired, such as those who are studying or have caring responsibilities (10% persistently reported this, 5% reported this in the latest period only and 2% reported this in the previous period only)
- people living in a more deprived area of England (8% persistently reported this, 6% reported this in the latest period only and 2% reported this in the previous period only)
- disabled people (6% persistently reported this, 4% reported this in the latest period only and 2% reported this in the previous period only)

Figure 1: Changes over time in running out of food

Proportion of adults, Great Britain, 22 November 2022 to 8 January 2023 and 15 to 26 February 2023

Notes:

1. Question: "In the past two weeks, have you or your household run out of food and could not afford to buy more?".
2. Base: Adults who took part during both 22 November 2022 to 8 January 2023 and 15 to 26 February 2023.
3. Totals may not sum because of rounding, or because some categories of response are suppressed and not shown as they are based on small sample sizes.
4. The "Other" category contains people who responded with "Don't know" or "Prefer not to say" in either time period included in this analysis, as well as those who did not respond to this question in one or both of the time periods included in this analysis.
5. "Most deprived (1st quintile)" and "Least deprived (5th quintile)" breakdowns refer to England only.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

4 . Energy insecurity

This has been the worst winter I have experienced physically. Feeling cold at home, unable to put heating on has caused me to feel low and depressed.

January 2023

Being frightened to put my heating on is making me feel depressed. Having to wash [...] rather than shower in the cold makes me feel unclean.

February 2023

(Female, aged 61 years)

Changes over time in not being able to keep warm

Energy insecurity is the inability of a household to meet its basic energy needs, such as heating the home.

In the latest period, around 1 in 5 adults (20%) reported that they were occasionally, hardly ever, or never able to keep comfortably warm in their home in the past two weeks.

This comprised 13% of adults who persistently reported this, and 7% who reported this in the latest period but reported being able to keep warm sometimes, often or always in the previous period.

A slightly larger proportion of adults (9%) reported that they were occasionally, hardly ever, or never able to keep comfortably warm in the previous period, but were sometimes, often or always able to keep warm in the latest period. This may reflect the [relatively warmer weather in the UK than average during February 2023 according to the Met Office](#).

Groups of the population significantly more likely than average to report being occasionally, hardly ever or never able to keep comfortably warm in their home included:

- people experiencing moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms (32% persistently reported this, 15% reported this in the latest period only and 14% reported this in the previous period only)
- people who were economically inactive for reasons other than being retired (26% persistently reported this, 10% reported this in the latest period only and 8% reported this in the previous period only)
- people living in the most deprived areas in England (25% persistently reported this, 12% reported this in the latest period and 12% reported this in the previous period only)
- people aged 16 to 29 years (22% persistently reported this, 8% reported this in the latest period and 10% reported this in the previous period only)
- disabled people (20% persistently reported this, 8% reported this in the latest period and 9% reported this in the previous period only)

Figure 2: Changes over time in being able to keep comfortably warm

Proportion of adults, Great Britain, 22 November 2022 to 8 January 2023 and 15 to 26 February 2023

Notes:

1. Question: "In the past two weeks, how often were you able to keep comfortably warm in your home?".
2. Base: Adults who took part during both 22 November 2022 to 8 January 2023 and 15 to 26 February 2023.
3. Totals may not sum because of rounding, or because some categories of response are suppressed and not shown as they are based on small sample sizes.
4. The "Other" category contains people who responded with "Don't know" or "Prefer not to say" in either time period included in this analysis, as well as those who did not respond to this question in one or both of the time periods included in this analysis.
5. "Most deprived (1st quintile)" and "Least deprived (5th quintile)" breakdowns refer to England only.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

There are strong seasonal spending patterns relating to gas and electricity that may affect these results. For more information on this please see our latest [Consumer price inflation, UK: March 2023 release](#).

5 . NHS waiting lists

The biggest issue for me, and for other members of the family, has been accessing the NHS.

January 2023

Medical appointments for myself have been a concern over recent months but I have finally been seen [...]. The unknown length of time waiting for an operation does sometimes cause anxiety when I think about it too much.

February 2023

(Female, aged 59 years)

Changes over time in waiting for an NHS appointment

The proportion of adults who reported waiting for a hospital appointment, test or to start receiving medical treatment through the NHS was stable between the two time periods.

In the latest period, around 1 in 5 adults (21%) reported that they were waiting for a hospital appointment, test or to start receiving medical treatment through the NHS.

This comprised 14% who persistently reported this and 7% who reported they were waiting in the latest period only. The same proportion of adults (7%) reported they were waiting in the previous period but were no longer waiting in the latest period.

Groups of the population significantly more likely than on average among all adults to report waiting included:

- disabled people (31% persistently reported this, 10% reported this in the latest period only and 13% reported this in the previous period only)
- people experiencing moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms (25% persistently reported this, 10% reported this in the latest period only and 12% reported this in the previous period only)
- people who were economically inactive for reasons other than being retired (23% persistently reported this, 9% reported this in the latest period only and 10% reported this in the previous period only)
- people aged 65 years or over (19% persistently reported this, 11% reported this in the latest period only and 8% reported this in the previous period only)
- retired people (18% persistently reported this, 10% reported this in the latest period only and 8% reported this in the previous period only)

Figure 3: Changes over time in waiting for NHS treatment

Proportion of adults, Great Britain, 22 November 2022 to 8 January 2023 and 15 to 26 February 2023

Notes:

1. Question: "Are you currently waiting for a hospital appointment, test, or to start receiving medical treatment through the NHS?"
2. Base: Adults who took part during both 22 November 2022 to 8 January 2023 and 15 to 26 February 2023.
3. Totals may not sum because of rounding, or because some categories of response are suppressed and not shown as they are based on small sample sizes.
4. The "Other" category contains people who responded with "Don't know" or "Prefer not to say" in either time period included in this analysis, as well as those who did not respond to this question in one or both of the time periods included in this analysis.
5. "Most deprived (1st quintile)" and "Least deprived (5th quintile)" breakdowns refer to England only.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Please note, our estimates are based on self-reported data and may therefore differ from other data sources. For administrative data on NHS waiting lists, visit [NHS England](#), [NHS Scotland](#) or [NHS Wales](#).

For more information on NHS waiting times and factors likely contributing to them, including the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic or the UK's ageing population, see the [House of Commons briefing article on NHS key statistics for March 2023](#).

6 . Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain data

[Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: longitudinal analysis](#)

Dataset | Released 24 April 2023

Main indicators of the impact of winter pressures from the Winter Survey. Tracking the responses of the same participants to the Winter Survey over time.

7 . Glossary

Dependent children

A dependent child is any person aged 0 to 15 years in a household (whether in a family or not), or a person aged 16 to 18 years in full-time education and living in a family with their parent(s) or grandparent(s). It does not include any people aged 16 to 18 years who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household.

Disabled adult

To define disability in this publication, we refer to the "core" definition set out in the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\) harmonisation guidance](#). This identifies a "disabled adult" as a person who has a physical or mental health condition or illness that has lasted, or is expected to last, 12 months or more, and that this reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

Economic activity

"Employed or self-employed" does not include people on government training schemes. The Winter Survey does not ask whether a person is on a government training scheme, so caution should be taken when comparing these figures with other labour market sources.

The "economically inactive – retired" and "economically inactive – other" categories represent people who are not in employment but are not defined as unemployed, because either they have not been seeking work within the last four weeks, or they are unable to start work in the next two weeks, or both. The "economically inactive – other" category may, for example, include people who are studying, have caring responsibilities, or disabled people.

Index of Multiple Deprivation

The [Index of Multiple Deprivation](#), commonly known as the IMD, is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England. The IMD ranks every small area in England from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area).

Deciles are calculated by ranking the 32,844 small areas in England, from most deprived to least deprived, and dividing them into 10 equal groups. These range from the most deprived 10% of small areas nationally to the least deprived 10% of small areas nationally. For this analysis, we have further grouped deciles into quintiles (five equal groups) to ensure robust sample sizes.

Moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms

We use the two-item version of the [Patient Health Questionnaire \(PHQ-2\) \(PDF, 131KB\)](#) to identify adults with depressive symptoms, to have a better understanding of the impact of winter pressures on these adults. Respondents were asked the following questions, and were presented with four response options ranging from 0 (not at all) to 3 (nearly every day):

- Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by having little interest or pleasure in doing things?
- Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by feeling down, depressed or hopeless?

A "depressive symptoms" score was then derived by summing both responses chosen, resulting in a score ranging from 0 to 6. A person's PHQ-2 score sits in one of two categories, including:

- no to mild symptoms: this refers to a PHQ-2 score of between 0 and 2 (inclusive)
- moderate-to-severe symptoms: this refers to a PHQ-2 score of between 3 and 6 (inclusive)

If respondents answered "Don't know" or "Prefer not to say" to either of the questions, they are excluded from this analysis.

8 . Data sources and quality

This release contains data and indicators from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Winter Survey, which engaged with participants who had previously taken part in the ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

Estimates provided in this article may differ slightly from estimates published in previous releases from the Winter Survey referring to the same period and question. This is because estimates in this article are based upon adults who had taken part in both periods of the Winter Survey, and not those who had taken part within a single period only.

Breakdowns of estimates by age, sex, economic activity status, disability status, experience of depressive symptoms, whether respondents have dependent children, and the level of deprivation of the area in which respondents live are contained in our [Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: longitudinal analysis](#) dataset (see [Section 7: Glossary](#) for definitions of these breakdowns). The dataset includes [confidence intervals](#) for all estimates.

Where differences between different demographic groups are presented in this article, or comparisons between estimates are made, associated confidence intervals should be used to assess the statistical significance of the differences. For information on statistical significance, see our [Uncertainty and how we measure it for our surveys](#) [article](#).

Sampling and weighting

In the latest period (15 to 26 February 2023), we sampled 5,630 individuals who took part in the Winter Survey between 22 November 2022 to 8 January 2023. The responding sample contained 4,494 individuals, representing an 80% response rate.

The sample for the Winter Survey was initially randomly selected from those who had previously completed the Labour Market Survey (LMS) or OPN survey. The Winter Survey was initially undertaken as part of the OPN survey.

Survey weights were applied to make estimates representative of the population (based on ONS population estimates). Further information on the survey design and quality can be found in our [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey QMI](#).

9 . Related links

[The impact of winter pressures on different population groups in Great Britain: 15 to 26 February 2023](#)

Article | Released 30 March 2023

In-depth analysis on how increases in the cost of living and difficulty accessing NHS services have impacted people's lives during the winter period.

[Characteristics of adults experiencing energy and food insecurity in Great Britain: 22 November to 18 December 2022](#)

Article | Released 13 February 2023

Logistic regression analysis to understand the characteristics associated with experiencing energy and food insecurity.

[Impact of increased cost of living on adults across Great Britain: September 2022 to January 2023](#)

Article | Released 20 February 2023

Analysis of the proportion of the population that are affected by an increase in their cost of living and of the characteristics associated with financial vulnerability, using data from the Opinions and Lifestyle survey.

[Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: 5 to 16 April 2023](#)

Bulletin | Released 21 April 2023

Social insights on daily life and events, including the cost of living, working arrangements and well-being from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

[Consumer price inflation, UK: March 2023](#)

Bulletin | Released 19 April 2023

Price indices, percentage changes, and weights for the different measures of consumer price inflation.

[The cost of living, current and upcoming work: February 2023](#)

Article | Released 8 February 2023

A summary of the ONS's current and future analytical work related to the cost of living.

10 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 24 April 2023, ONS website, article, [Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: November 2022 to February 2023](#)