

Statistical bulletin

# Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: 22 February to 5 March 2023

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

Contact:  
Cullum Attwell, Lewis Bird,  
Bonang Lewis, Tim Vizard  
policy.evidence.analysis@ons.  
gov.uk  
+44 30 0067 1543

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## Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Personal experiences of shortages of goods](#)
3. [Important issues facing the UK](#)
4. [Impacts of industrial action](#)
5. [Cost of living](#)
6. [Personal well-being](#)
7. [Public opinions and social trends data](#)
8. [Measuring the data](#)
9. [Related links](#)
10. [Cite this statistical bulletin](#)

# 1 . Main points

The following information is for the latest survey period 22 February to 5 March 2023, based on adults in Great Britain.

- Around 3 in 10 (27%) adults experienced shortages of essential food items that were needed on a regular basis in the past two weeks; an increase from 18% in the previous period (8 to 19 February 2023).
- More than a third of adults (35%) reported that they could not find a replacement when the items they needed were not available when food shopping in the past two weeks; an increase from 25% in the previous period.
- When asked about the important issues facing the UK today, the most commonly reported issues continue to be the cost of living (93%), the NHS (84%), the economy (74%) and climate change and the environment (61%).
- In the latest period, 4 in 10 (40%) adults reported that industrial action was an important issue, while 1 in 4 (25%) adults had been impacted by industrial action.
- Among those impacted by industrial action, impacts included spending more money on travel (18%), being unable to take part in leisure activities (14%) and not being able to travel for holiday or leisure as planned (13%).
- Around half (47%) of adults reported that they were worried (very or somewhat) about keeping warm in their home this winter, down from 56% in the period when we first asked the question at the start of winter, from 26 October to 6 November 2022.

## 2 . Personal experiences of shortages of goods

Estimates in this release are based on data collected between 22 February and 5 March 2023 (the "latest period") and 8 to 19 February 2023 (the "previous period"). Analysis is based on adults in Great Britain.

## Shortages of essential and non-essential food items

In the last couple of weeks there has been a shortage of some fresh produce in UK supermarkets. During this period (22 February to 5 March 2023) around 3 in 10 (27%) adults experienced shortages of essential food items that were needed on a regular basis in the past two weeks. This was an increase from 18% in the previous period and 11% in a similar period a year ago (16 to 27 February 2022).

Around 3 in 10 (28%) adults experienced shortages of other (non-essential) food items in the past two weeks. This was an increase from 22% in the previous period and 16% in a similar period a year ago (16 to 27 February 2022).

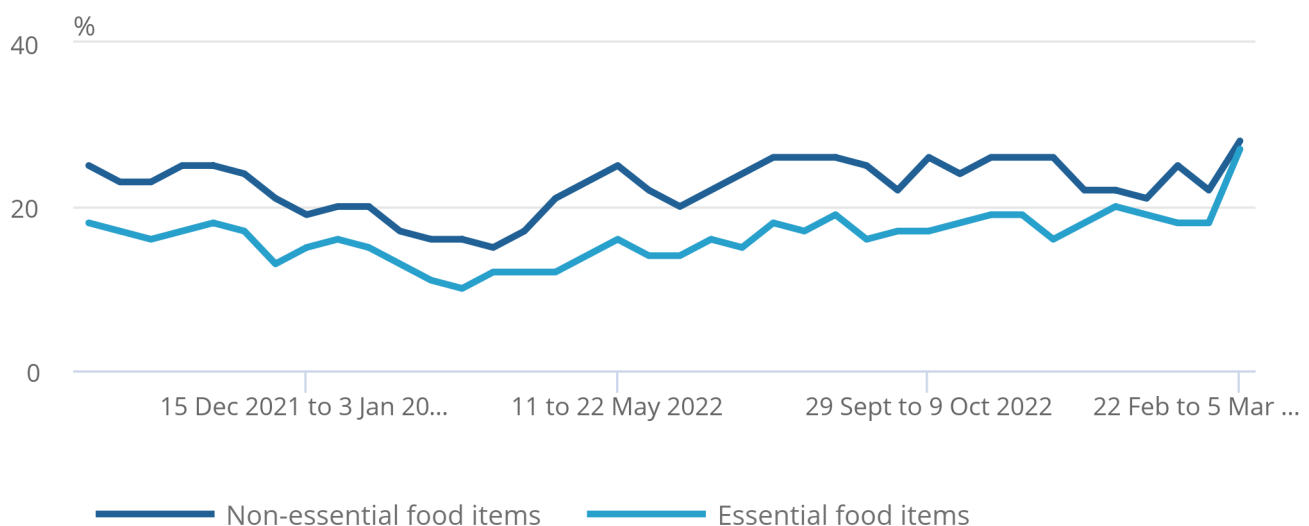
These estimates reflect the largest increases and highest percentage since we started asking about shortages in September 2021.

### Figure 1: Around 3 in 10 adults experienced shortages of food items

Proportion of all adults in Great Britain, September 2021 to March 2023

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Proportion of all adults in Great Britain, September 2021 to March 2023



Source: Opinions and Lifestyle Survey from the Office for National Statistics

#### Notes:

1. Question: "In the past two weeks, which of these things, if any, have you not been able to buy as they were not available?".
2. Base: all adults.
3. Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

## Food availability and variety

More than a third of adults (35%) reported that they could not find a replacement when the items they needed were not available when food shopping in the past two weeks. This proportion has increased from 25% in the previous period and 15% in a similar period a year ago (16 to 27 February 2022).

Around half (51%) of adults reported less variety than normal when food shopping, compared with 45% in the previous period and 35% in a similar period a year ago (16 to 27 February 2022). This is the highest percentage since data were first collected in October 2021.

### Figure 2: Around half (51%) of adults reported less variety than normal when food shopping

Proportion of all adults in Great Britain, September 2021 to March 2023

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Proportion of all adults in Great Britain, September 2021 to March 2023



Source: Opinions and Lifestyle Survey from the Office for National Statistics

#### Notes:

1. Question: "In the past two weeks, have you experienced any of the following when food shopping?"
2. Base: all adults.
3. Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

Data from the [Food Standards Agency](#) consumer insights tracker, covering January 2023, found 3 in 10 (30%) of consumers were worried about there not being enough food to buy. Additionally, more than half of adults reported that at least one of their preferred products was unavailable in January 2023, the most reported of which were:

- eggs (28%)
- fresh vegetables (18%)
- fresh milk (17%)
- frozen foods (16%)
- bread (16%)
- fresh fruit (15%)

More data on food shortages, covering February 2023, will be published in the [Food Standards Agency](#) consumer insights tracker, on 14 March 2023.

### **3 . Important issues facing the UK**

In the latest period, we asked adults what they feel are important issues facing the UK today. The most commonly reported issues were:

- the cost of living (93%)
- the NHS (84%)
- the economy (74%)
- climate change and the environment (61%)

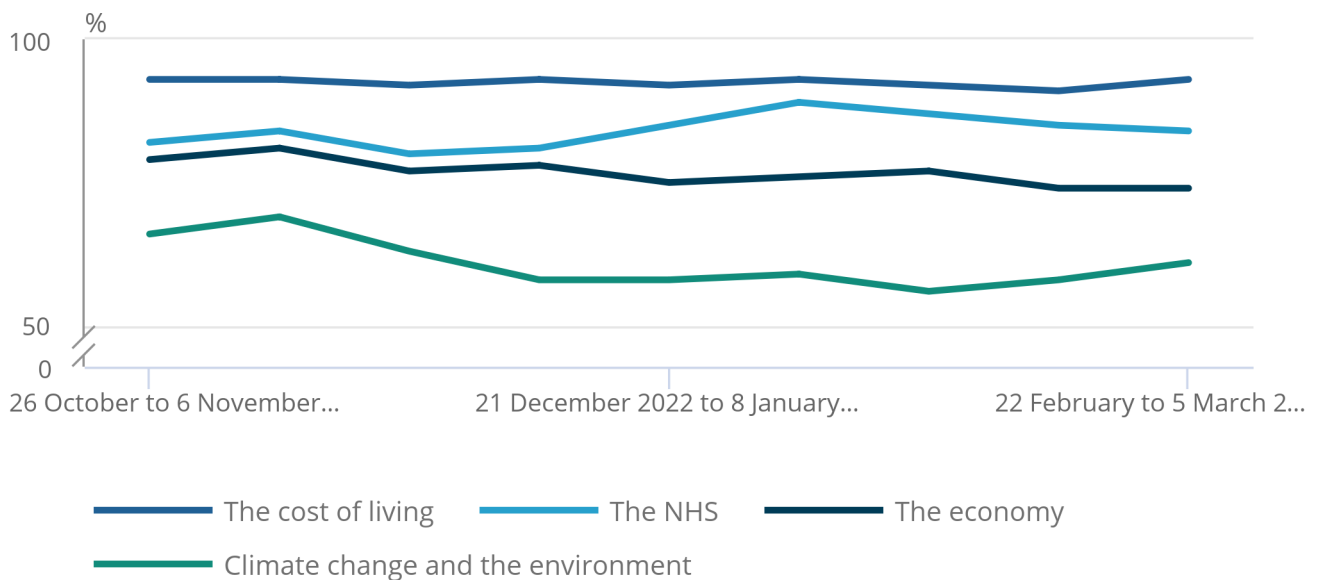
Looking at the four most common options, the majority appeared to be similar to previous weeks with some slight changes (Figure 3). There has been a general decrease in adults reporting the economy as an important issue, from 79% when we started asking the question in the period 26 October to 6 November 2022, to 74% in the current period.

**Figure 3: The cost of living and the NHS continue to be the most commonly reported important issues**

Proportion of all adults in Great Britain, 22 February to 5 March 2023

### Figure 3: The cost of living and the NHS continue to be the most commonly reported important issues

Proportion of all adults in Great Britain, 22 February to 5 March 2023



Source: Opinions and Lifestyle Survey from the Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

1. Question: "What do you think are important issues facing the UK today?".
2. Base: all adults.
3. Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

## 4 . Impacts of industrial action

In the latest period, 40% of adults reported industrial action as an important issue in the UK today.

A higher proportion in the older age groups reported this being an important issue, with 50% of people aged 70 years and over reporting this compared with 33% for those aged 16 to 29 years.

During the latest period, we asked whether people have been affected by industrial action over the last month. One in four adults (25%) reported that they had been impacted by industrial action. Among those impacted by industrial action, impacts included:

- dependent children in household unable to attend school (22%)
- spent more money on travel (18%)
- could not attend school, college, or university (15%)
- unable to take part in leisure activities (14%)
- could not travel for holiday or leisure as planned (13%)
- had to change my working hours (11%)

Please note that estimates of some impacts may be affected by the proportion of our sample experiencing certain disruptions (for example, not all of our sample are parents or working adults).

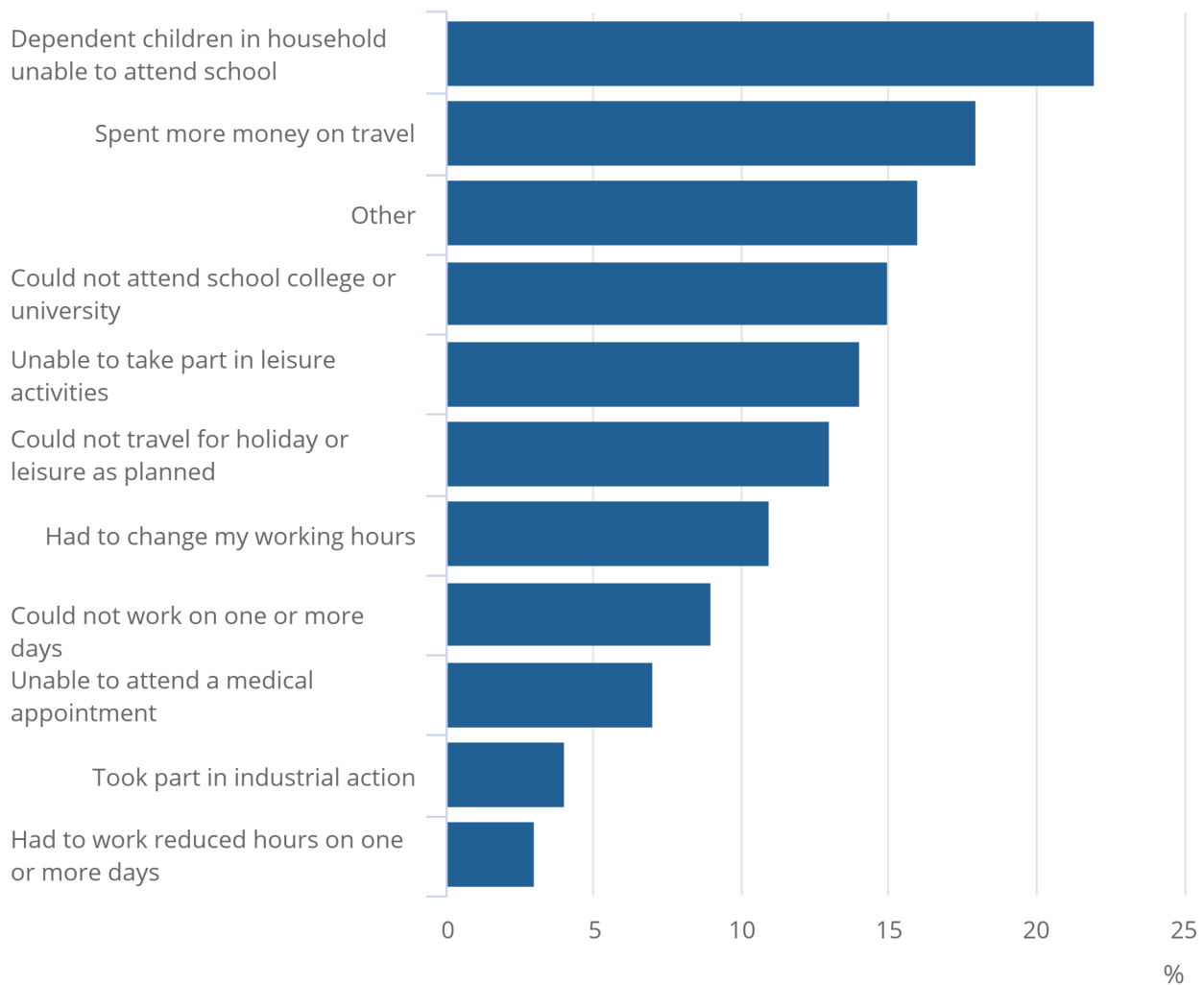


## Figure 4: Ways industrial action has affected adults in the last month

Proportion of all adults in Great Britain, 22 February to 5 March 2023

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Proportion of all adults in Great Britain, 22 February to 5 March 2023



Source: Opinions and Lifestyle Survey from the Office for National Statistics

#### Notes:

1. Question: "In the past month, in what ways, if any, has industrial action affected you?".
2. Base: all adults who reported that they had been affected by industrial action.
3. Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

## **5 . Cost of living**

### **Cost of living increases**

In the latest period, we continued to ask adults about changes to their cost of living.

Around 9 in 10 (93%) reported their cost of living had increased compared with a year ago. Compared with one month ago, 71% reported an increase in their cost of living (67% in previous period). This represents an increase from 62% when we first asked about this in the period 3 to 14 November 2021.

### **Reasons for cost of living increases**

The most commonly reported reasons given by adults for the rise in their cost of living over the past month were increases in:

- the price of food shopping (97%)
- their gas or electricity bills (77%)
- the price of fuel (44%)

### **Actions taken because of this rising cost of living**

The most common actions reported by all adults because of the rising cost of living in the latest period were:

- spending less on non-essentials (66%)
- using less fuel such as gas or electricity in their home (56%)
- shopping around more (45%)
- spending less on food shopping and essentials (43%)

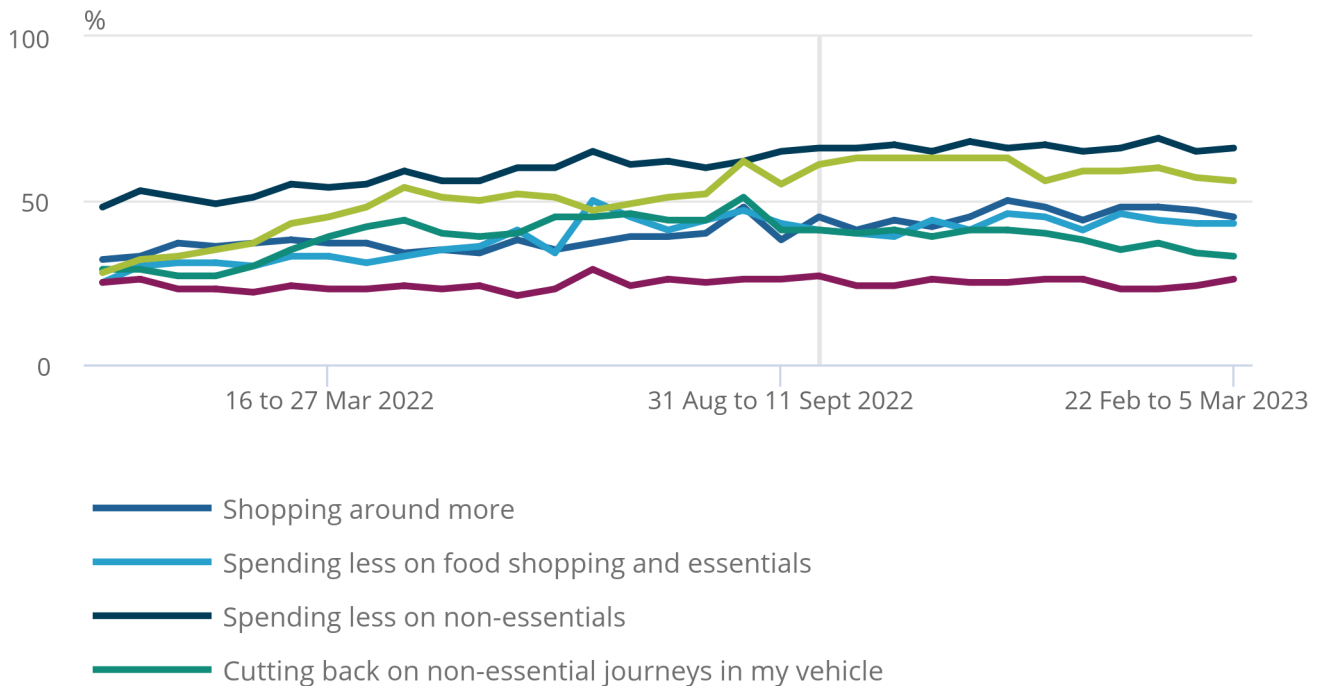
Around a third (33%) of adults reported cutting back on non-essential journeys because of the rising cost of living. This is the lowest it has been since the period 16 to 27 February 2022 (30%), and has declined from 51% over the period 17 to 29 August 2022.

**Figure 5: Cutting back on non-essential journeys was the lowest it has been since February last year**

Proportion of adults taking actions because of increases in the cost of living, Great Britain, December 2021 to March 2023

### Figure 5: Cutting back on non-essential journeys was the lowest it has been since February last year

Proportion of adults taking actions because of increases in the cost of living, Great Britain, December 2021 to March 2023



Source: Opinions and Lifestyle Survey from the Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

1. Question: "Which of these, if any, are you doing because of the increases in the cost of living?".
2. Base: Adults who said their cost of living has increased over the last month until the period 14 to 25 September from which the base is all adults.
3. Because of changes in the base of the question, there is a break in the time series from the period 14 to 25 September 2022.
4. Respondents were able to choose more than one option.
5. Not all response options are included in this chart. Please see the datasets associated with this release for estimates for each option.

## Keeping warm this winter

We continued to ask adults how worried they were about keeping warm in their home this winter. Estimates in this release cover the period before the recent [snow, ice and low temperatures](#) affecting parts of the UK.

In the latest period (22 February to 5 March 2023):

- around half (47%) reported being very or somewhat worried, compared with 56% between 26 October and 6 November 2022
- around a quarter (25%) reported being neither worried nor unworried, compared with 24% between 26 October and 6 November 2022
- around 1 in 4 (26%) reported being somewhat unworried or not at all worried, compared with 17% between 26 October and 6 November 2022

[Our Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: 18 to 29 January 2023](#) release looks at how increases in the cost of living and difficulty accessing NHS services are impacting people's lives during the winter months.

## Energy bills and rent or mortgage payments

We continued to ask adults about their energy bills and rent or mortgage payments.

In the latest period:

- just under half (48%) of adults who pay energy bills said they found it very or somewhat difficult to afford them (48% in the previous period)
- around 1 in 3 (30%) adults who are currently making rent or mortgage payments reported that these payments have gone up in the last six months (27% in the previous period)
- of those who are currently making rent or mortgage payments, around a third of people (32%) reported that they are finding it very or somewhat difficult to afford these payments (33% in the previous period)

## 6 . Personal well-being

During the latest period, we continued to ask respondents about their personal well-being. Average levels of personal well-being were:

- life satisfaction: 6.9 in the latest period (6.9 in the previous period)
- feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile: 7.3 in the latest period (7.2 in the previous period)
- happiness: 7.0 in the latest period (7.0 in the previous period)
- anxiety: 4.0 in the latest period (3.9 in the previous period)

Our [Personal well-being quarterly estimates technical report](#) provides more information on the seasonal variation associated with measures of personal well-being. You can learn more about the Measures of National Well-being from our [Quality of life in the UK: February 2023 bulletin](#) and our [Measures of National Well-being dashboard](#), which provides longer-term trends in well-being since 2012.

### Figure 6: Levels of personal well-being

Adults in Great Britain, March 2020 to March 2023

## Notes:

1. Questions included: "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?", "Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?", "Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?", and "Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?".
2. These questions are answered on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely".
3. Base: all adults.

## Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

## 7 . Public opinions and social trends data

### [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: household finances](#)

Dataset | Released 10 March 2023

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) of people's experiences of changes in their cost of living and household finances in Great Britain.

### [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: personal well-being and loneliness](#)

Dataset | Released 10 March 2023

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) of worries, personal well-being, and loneliness in Great Britain.

### [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: working arrangements](#)

Dataset | Released 10 March 2023

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) related to the working arrangements of people in Great Britain.

### [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: personal experiences of shortages of goods](#)

Dataset | Released 10 March 2023

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) of whether people experienced shortages of goods such as food, medicine, or fuel when shopping in Great Britain.

## 8 . Measuring the data

This release contains data and indicators from a module being undertaken through the Office for National Statistics' (ONS') Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

Breakdowns by age and sex, including [confidence intervals](#) for the estimates, are contained in our [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain datasets](#).

Where changes in results from previous weeks are presented in this bulletin or comparisons between estimates are made, associated confidence intervals should be used to assess the [statistical significance](#) of the differences.

## Sampling and weighting

In the latest period (22 February to 5 March 2023), we sampled 4,963 households. This sample was randomly selected from those who had previously completed the Labour Market Survey (LMS) or OPN. The responding sample for the latest period contained 2,789 individuals, representing a 56% response rate.

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 Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\)](#).

## 9 . Related links

### [Tracking the impact of winter pressures in Great Britain: 18 to 29 January 2023](#)

Article | Released 27 February 2023

Insights from our Winter Survey as we track participants to examine how increases in the cost of living and difficulty accessing NHS services are impacting people's lives during the winter months.

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

Article | Released 13 February 2023

Understanding the characteristics associated with experiencing energy and food insecurity; logistic regression analysis using data from the Winter Survey.

### [Cost of living insights](#)

Web page | Updated frequently

The latest data and trends about the cost of living. Explore changes in the cost of everyday items and how this is affecting people.

### [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.

### [How increases in housing costs impact households](#)

Article | Released 9 January 2023

Mortgage interest rates started to increase during 2022, this is likely to make borrowing more expensive for those with fixed rates deals coming to an end in 2023. Those with variable rate mortgages and private renters are also facing higher housing costs.

### [Census 2021: how homes are heated in your area](#)

Article | Released 5 January 2023

As more than half of adults report worry about keeping warm this winter, we explore how homes are heated across England and Wales.

### [Cost of living and depression in adults, Great Britain: 29 September to 23 October 2022](#)

Article | Released 6 December 2022

Analysis into the prevalence of depression among adults in Great Britain in autumn 2022. Exploring this in the context of the rising cost of living.

### [Quality of life in the UK: February 2023](#)

Bulletin | Released 10 February 2023

An update on the UK's progress across 10 domains of national well-being: personal well-being, relationships, health, what we do, where we live, personal finance, economy, education and skills, governance, and the environment.

## 10 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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