

Statistical bulletin

Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: 8 to 19 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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1 . Main points

The following information is for the latest survey period 8 to 19 March 2023, based on adults in Great Britain.

- When asked about the important issues facing the UK today, the most commonly reported issues continue to be the cost of living (91%), the NHS (84%), the economy (71%), and climate change and the environment (57%).
- Around a third (36%) of adults who are currently making rent or mortgage payments reported that these payments have gone up in the last six months; this is an increase of 7 percentage points (29%) from when we first asked this question during the period 3 to 14 November 2021.
- In the latest period, just over one in three (36%) adults reported that industrial action was an important issue, while one in four (25%) adults had been affected by industrial action in the last month.
- Among those affected by industrial action, impacts included spending more money on travel (20%), not being able to travel for holiday or leisure as planned (16%), and being unable to take part in leisure activities (15%).
- Over half (55%) of adults reported less variety than normal when food shopping, compared with 51% in the previous period and 35% in a similar period a year ago (3 to 13 March 2022); this is the highest percentage since data were first collected in October 2021.

2 . Important issues facing the UK

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

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 (91%)
- the NHS (84%)
- the economy (71%)
- climate change and the environment (57%)

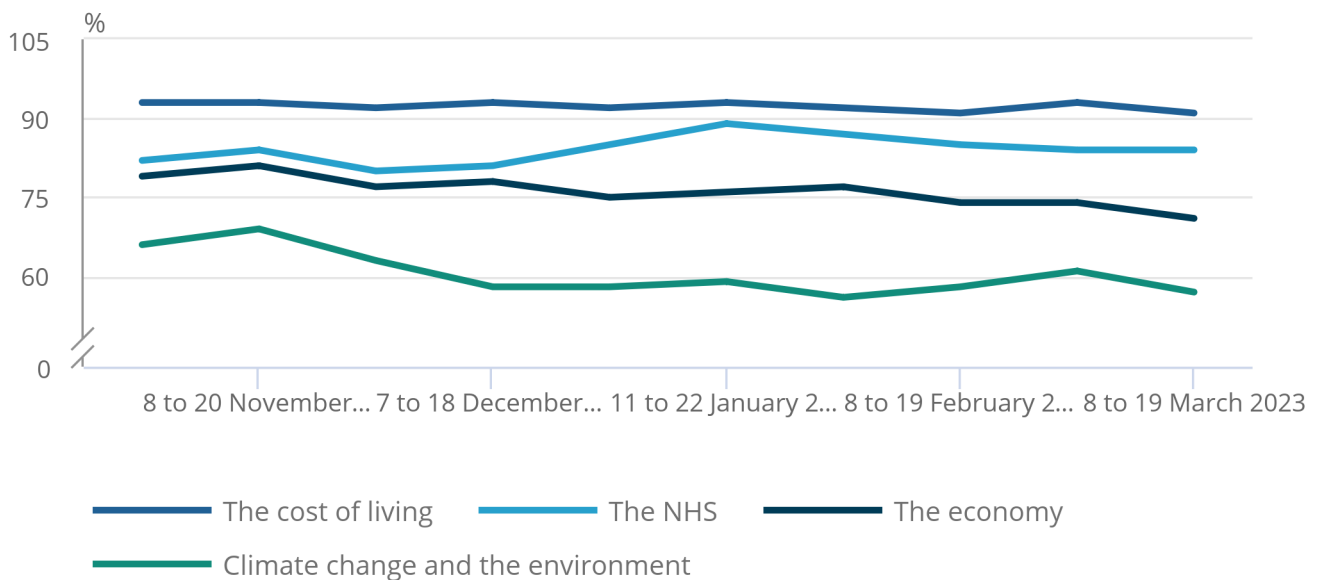
Looking at the four most common options, the majority appeared to be similar to previous weeks with some slight changes (Figure 1). There has been a general decrease in adults reporting the economy as an important issue. This has decreased from 79% when we started asking the question in the period 26 October to 6 November 2022 to 71% in the current period, which is the lowest it has been since we began asking this question.

Figure 1: The cost of living and the NHS continue to be the most commonly reported important issues

Proportion of all adults in Great Britain, October 2022 to March 2023

Figure 1: The cost of living and the NHS continue to be the most commonly reported important issues

Proportion of all adults in Great Britain, October 2022 to 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.

3 . Cost of living

Cost of living increases

Consumer price inflation data released in our [Consumer price inflation, UK: February 2023 bulletin](#) show that the Consumer Prices Index rose by 10.4% in the 12 months to February 2023, up from 10.1% in January 2023. This section explores individuals' experiences and responses to continued high inflation and increased cost of living.

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

Over 9 in 10 (93%) reported their cost of living had increased compared with a year ago. Compared with one month ago, 70% reported an increase in their cost of living (71% in the 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 (96%)
- their gas or electricity bills (78%)
- the price of fuel (42%)

Actions taken because of the rising cost of living

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

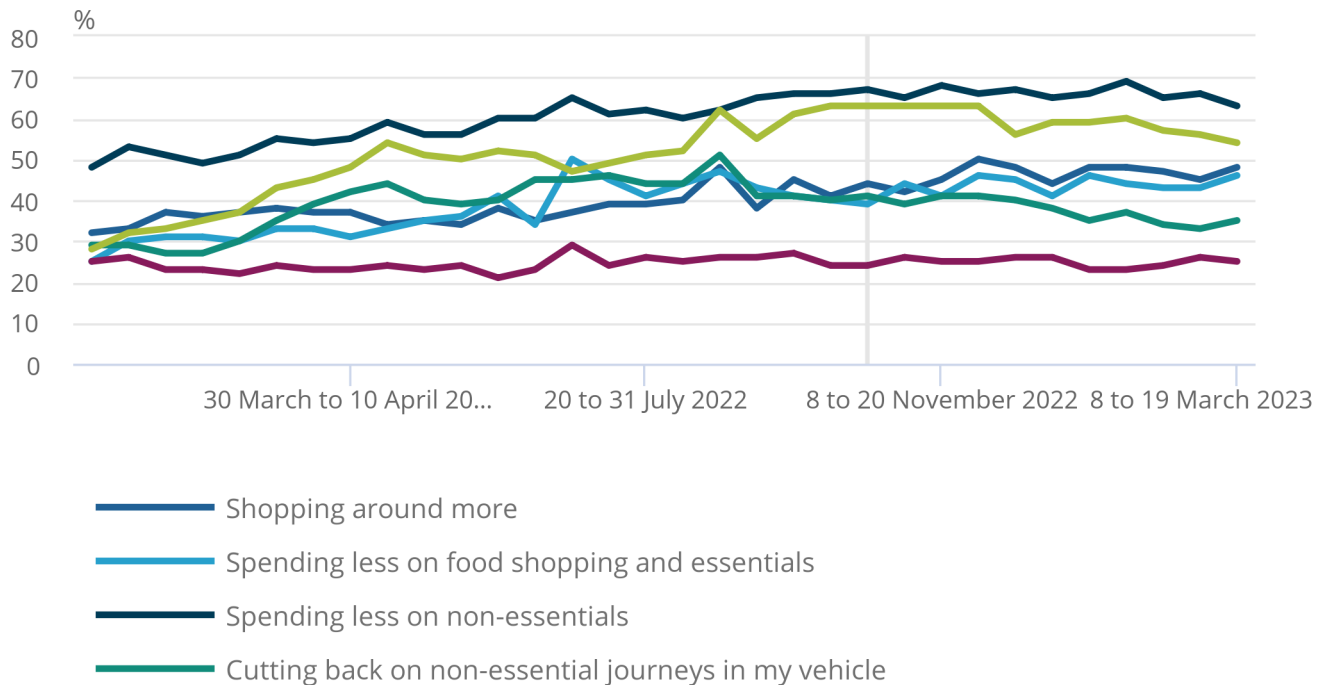
- spending less on non-essentials (63%)
- using less fuel such as gas or electricity in their home (54%)
- shopping around more (48%)
- spending less on food shopping and essentials (46%)

Figure 2: Around 6 in 10 adults reported spending less on non-essentials because of the rising cost of living

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

Figure 2: Around 6 in 10 adults reported spending less on non-essentials because of the rising cost of living

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 2022 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.

Borrowing and saving

On 23 March 2023, [the Bank of England increased the Bank Rate](#) by 0.25 percentage points, to 4.25%; this is the highest level in 14 years. This will affect the interest rates that banks charge customers to borrow and that they pay to customers for their savings. We will continue to monitor the impacts of this change on household finances.

In the latest period (8 to 19 March 2023), one in four (25%) adults reported using their savings because of the rising cost of living (26% in the previous period).

Around one in four (24%) adults have had to borrow more money or use more credit in the last month, compared with a year ago. This is an increase from around one in five (18%) adults when we first asked this question in the period 3 to 14 November 2021.

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:

- around half (49%) of adults who pay energy bills said they found it very or somewhat difficult to afford them (48% in the previous period)
- around a third (36%) of adults who are currently making rent or mortgage payments reported that these payments have gone up in the last six months (30% in the previous period); this is an increase of 7 percentage points (29%) from when we first asked this question during the period 3 to 14 November 2021
- of those who are currently making rent or mortgage payments, just over a third of people (34%) reported that they are finding it very or somewhat difficult to afford these payments (32% in the previous period)

You can learn more about the effect of rising housing costs in our [How increases in housing costs impact households article](#).

Actions taken because of rising energy bills

We also asked what actions people had taken to cut down their energy use over the last month and found that:

- around 6 in 10 (60%) had turned down the thermostat in their house
- around half (48%) reported turning radiators off in unused rooms
- less than half (45%) reported turning down radiators

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

4 . Impacts of industrial action

In the latest period, 36% 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 39% of people aged 50 to 69 years and 44% of those aged 70 years and over reporting this. This is compared with 29% for those aged 16 to 29 years and 32% for those aged 30 to 49 years.

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

- dependent children in the household being unable to attend school (22%)
- spending more money on travel (20%)
- not being able to travel for holiday or leisure as planned (16%)
- being unable to take part in leisure activities (15%)
- not being able to attend school, college, or university (12%)

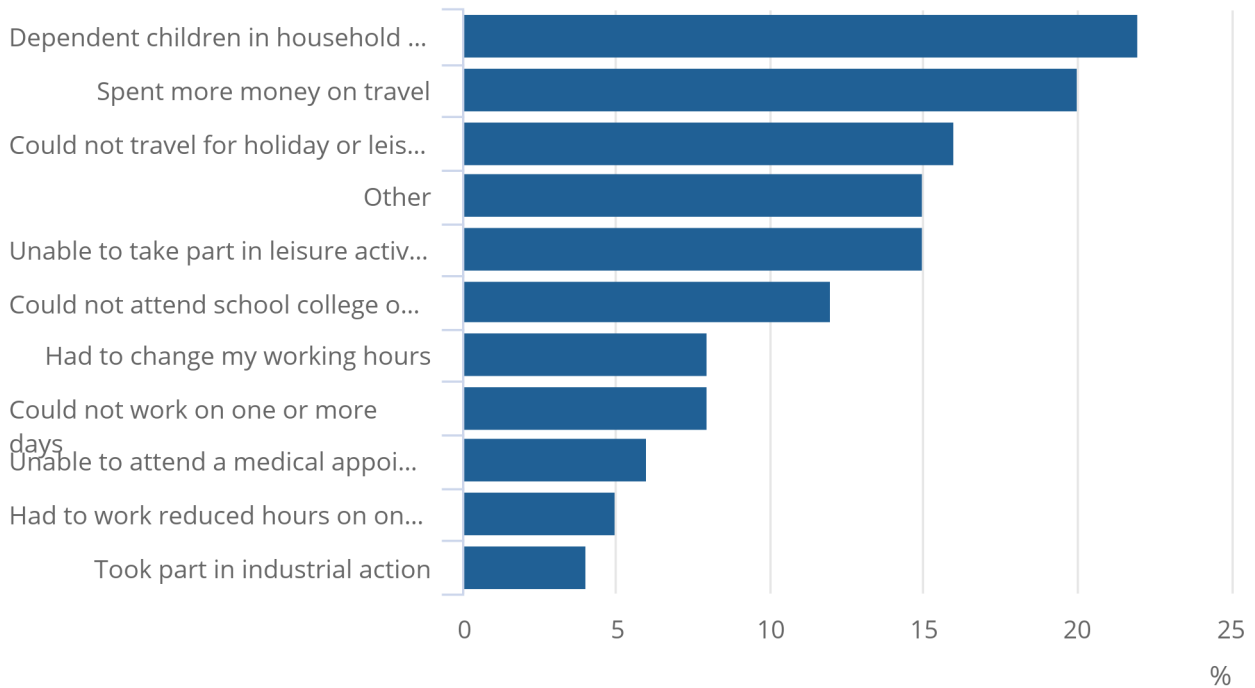
Please note that estimates of some impacts may be affected by the proportion of our sample experiencing certain disruptions (for example, not all of our sample are parents or working adults).

Figure 3: Ways industrial action has affected adults in the last month

Proportion of adults affected by industrial action in Great Britain, 8 to 19 March 2023

Figure 3: Ways industrial action has affected adults in the last month

Proportion of adults affected by industrial action in Great Britain, 8 to 19 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 . Personal experiences of shortages of goods

Shortages of essential and non-essential food items

During this period (8 to 19 March 2023), around one in four (26%) adults experienced shortages of essential food items that were needed in the past two weeks. This is similar to 27% in the previous period and an increase from 10% compared with a similar period a year ago (3 to 13 March 2022).

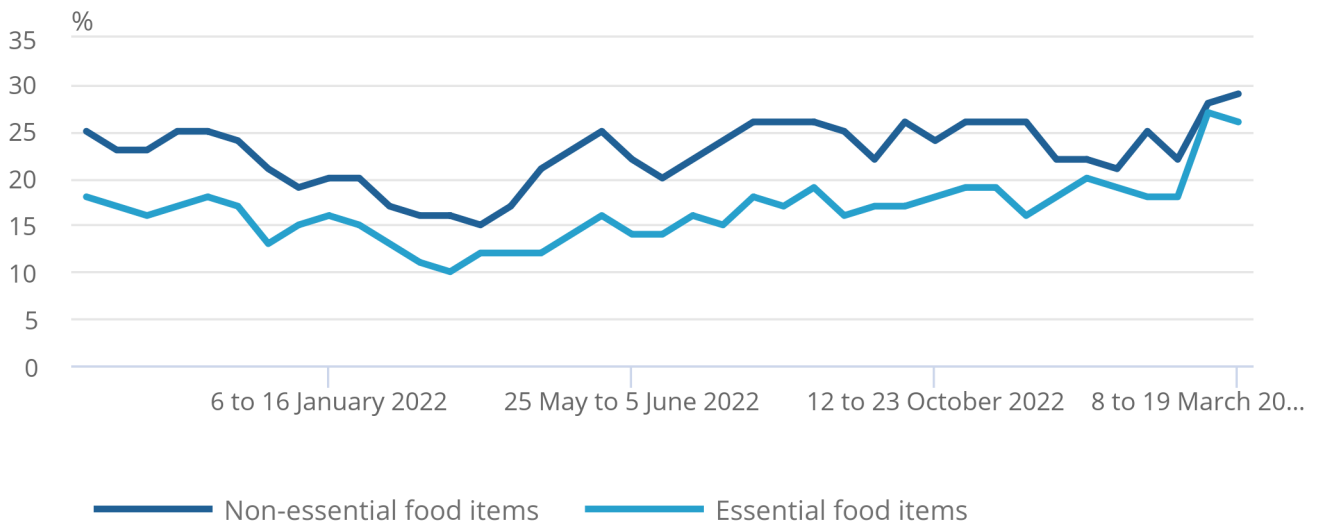
Around 3 in 10 (29%) adults experienced shortages of other (non-essential) food items that were needed in the past two weeks. This is similar to 28% in the previous period and an increase from 16% compared with a similar period a year ago (3 to 13 March 2022).

Figure 4: Around one in four adults experienced shortages of food items

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

Figure 4: Around one in four adults experienced shortages of food items

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 (36%) 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 is similar to 35% in the previous period and 15% in a similar period a year ago (3 to 13 March 2022).

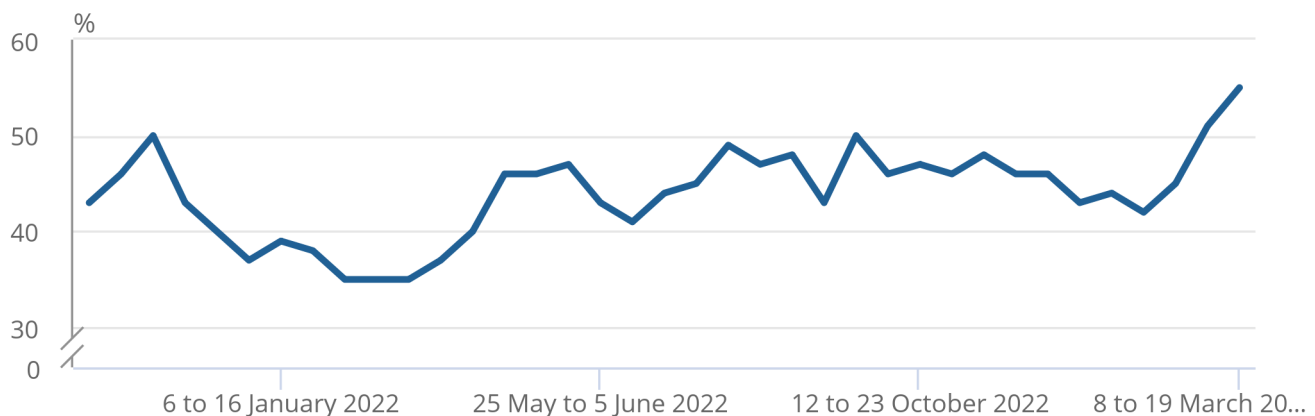
Over half (55%) of adults reported less variety than normal when food shopping, compared with 51% in the previous period and 35% in a similar period a year ago (3 to 13 March 2022). This is the highest percentage since data were first collected in October 2021.

Figure 5: Adults reporting less variety than normal when food shopping is at its highest level

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

Figure 5: Adults reporting less variety than normal when food shopping is at its highest level

Proportion of all adults in Great Britain, October 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.

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: 7.0 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 (7.3 in the previous period)
- happiness: 6.9 in the latest period (7.0 in the previous period)
- anxiety: 4.1 in the latest period (4.0 in the previous period)

Section 3 of 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: "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?", "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](#)

Around half (49%) of adults reported that they were very or fairly unsure about the future. This is similar to (48%) when we last asked this question (8 to 19 February 2023) and an increase (41%) from when we first asked this question in the period 14 to 25 September 2022.

7 . Public opinions and social trends data

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

Dataset | Released 24 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 24 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 24 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 24 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 (8 to 19 March 2023), we sampled 4,993 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 2,561 individuals, representing a 54% 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, examining how cost-of-living rises and difficulty accessing NHS services are affecting people 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

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 24 March 2023, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: 8 to 19 March 2023](#)