

Statistical bulletin

Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: September 2024

Social insights on daily life and events, including important issues, cost of living and the NHS, from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

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1 . Main points

The following information is from data collected from 4 to 29 September 2024, based on adults in Great Britain.

- When asked about the important issues facing the UK today, the most commonly reported issues were the NHS (89%), the cost of living (88%), the economy (72%), crime (65%), immigration (62%) and housing (62%).
- Around half (52%) reported that their cost of living increased in the past month, and just under half (46%) reported that it stayed the same; the proportion reporting an increase in their cost of living was higher two years ago when 74% reported an increase in the past month, and 24% said it stayed the same (between 14 to 25 September 2022).
- In the latest period, the most commonly reported reasons for a rise in cost of living remains the price of their food shop (92%), gas and electricity bills (68%) and fuel (40%); this has been the case since we first asked the question in November 2021.
- Among the 14% of adults in Great Britain (GB) that told us that they were currently on an NHS hospital waiting list, around a quarter (26%) were waiting around 4 to 6 months for an appointment; similar proportions were reported for other waiting times (13% for less than 1 month; 18% for 1 to 3 months; 15% for 7 to 11 months; 12% for 12 to 18 months and 13% for more than 18 months).
- Among the 14% of adults currently on an NHS hospital waiting list, around half (51%) strongly agreed or agreed that this had negatively affected their life, while just under 4 in 10 (37%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 13% strongly disagreed or disagreed.

The number of respondents on a hospital waiting list refers to the number of individuals who self-report being on a hospital waiting list in the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, which covers adults in Great Britain. Therefore, the percentage may differ from other sources.

2 . Important issues facing the UK

Estimates in this section of the release are based on data collected between 4 to 29 September 2024 (the "latest period").

The NHS (89%) and the cost of living (88%) have remained the two most commonly reported important issues facing the UK today. Both measures have remained relatively stable since we first started asking the question in October 2022.

The proportion of adults reporting the NHS as an important issue has increased slightly (from 82% between 26 October to 6 November 2022 to 89% in the latest period), while those reporting the cost of living as an important issue has decreased slightly over the same period (from 93% to 88% in the latest period).

The proportion of adults reporting the economy (72%) as an important issue has gradually fallen over the two years from 79% in October 2022. The proportion of adults reporting crime (65%) and immigration (62%) as an important issue has increased since October 2022, when these proportions were 49% and 43%, respectively (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The NHS, the cost of living and the economy have been the most commonly reported important issues facing the UK since October 2022

Proportion of adults reporting each important issue, Great Britain, October 2022 to September 2024

Notes:

1. Question: "What do you think are important issues facing the UK today?".
2. Base: All adults.
3. Respondents could select more than one option, estimates and associated confidence intervals for all response categories are provided in the datasets associated with this release.
4. The length of each data collection period presented in this time series may be different.

Download the data

Estimates of important issues by age group are available for all time periods collected in Table 25 of the [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: personal well-being and loneliness dataset](#) provided with this release.

3 . Adult experiences of the cost of living in Great Britain

The cost of living continues to be one of the most commonly reported issues among adults in Great Britain.

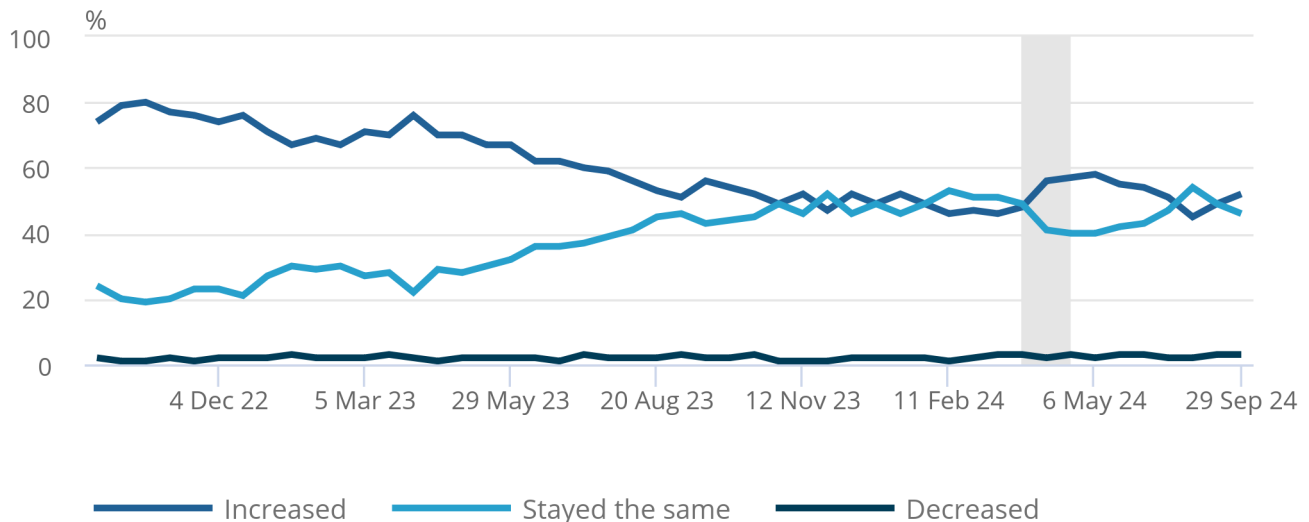
In the latest period, 52% of adults said their cost of living had increased compared with one month ago (46% said it had stayed the same and 3% said it had decreased). The proportion of adults reporting that their cost of living had increased has gradually decreased since the highest peak in October 2022, when 80% of adults reported this.

Figure 2: Adults reporting an increase in their cost of living has fallen since October 2022, while those reporting that their cost of living has stayed the same has increased over the same period

Proportion of adults reporting changes to their cost of living in the past month, Great Britain, September 2022 to September 2024

Figure 2: Adults reporting an increase in their cost of living has fallen since October 2022, while those reporting that their cost of living has stayed the same has increased over the same period

Proportion of adults reporting changes to their cost of living in the past month, Great Britain, September 2022 to September 2024



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

Notes:

1. Question: "Has your cost of living changed compared to one month ago?"
2. Base: All adults.
3. In the period 27 March to 7 April 2024 changes were made to the survey design to allow us to measure the short- and long-term impacts of the cost of living. These may have had an impact on responses to this question.
4. The length of each data collection period presented in this time series may be different.

Estimates of the cost of living by age group are available for all time periods collected in Table 4, Table 5 and Table 13 of our [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: household finances dataset](#) provided with this release.

Previous articles on the [Impact of increased cost of living on adults across Great Britain](#) consistently show disabled adults are a group more likely to report being affected by increases in cost of living. More information on the cost of living by impairment type can be found in our [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: Impairment and the Cost of living, 4 January to 24 March 2024 dataset](#).

Reasons for increases in the cost of living

In the latest period, the most commonly reported reason given by adults for a rise in their cost of living remains the price of their food shop (92%). This has been the case since we first asked the question in November 2021 (Figure 3).

Over half (68%) of adults reported that increases in their cost of living are because of increases in their gas and electricity bills. This proportion has risen since July (45% in the period 5 to 28 July 2024) but remains lower than the height seen at the start of 2024 (85% in the period 4 to 14 January 2024). This trend may be partly explained by seasonal patterns in energy use.

In the latest period, 4 in 10 (40%) adults reported the price of fuel as a reason for an increase in their cost of living. This proportion has fallen since a height in May 2024 (63%) and is now similar to the proportion at the start of 2024 (41% in the period 4 to 14 January 2024).

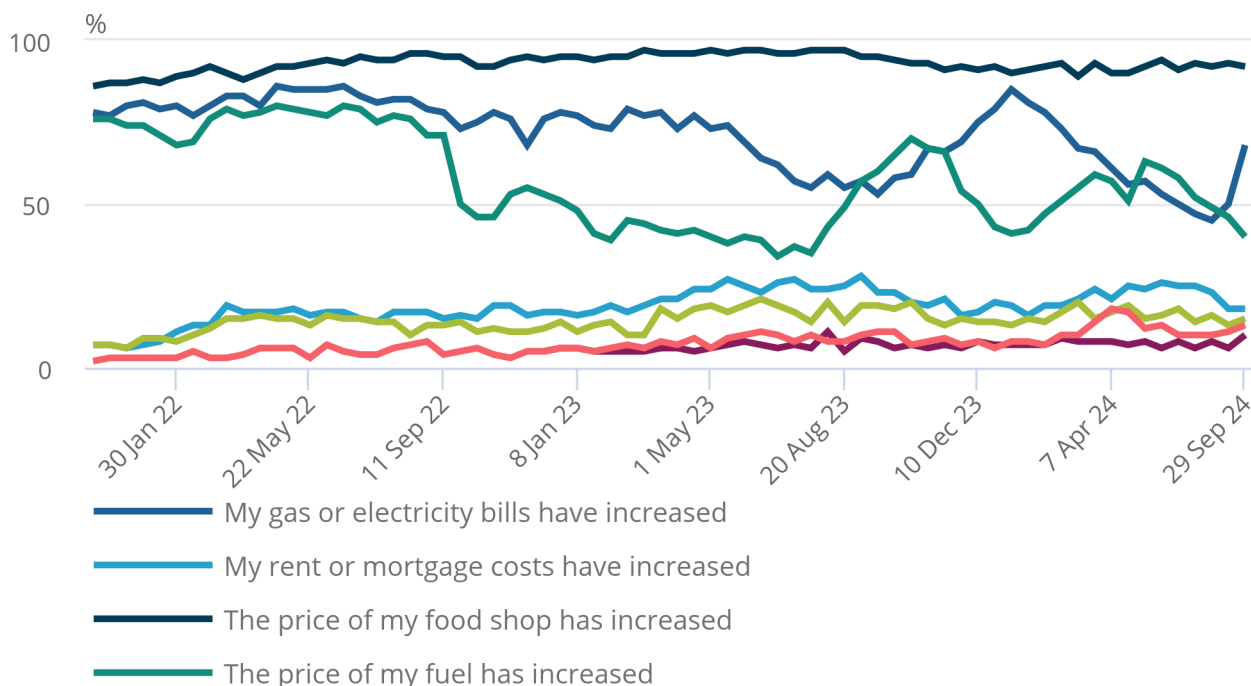
More information on fuel prices can be found in the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero [weekly fuel price release](#), available on the Gov.uk website.

Figure 3: The price of a food shop has remained the most commonly reported reason for cost of living increases since November 2021

Proportion of adults reporting reasons for increases in their cost of living, Great Britain, November 2021 to September 2024

Figure 3: The price of a food shop has remained the most commonly reported reason for cost of living increases since November 2021

Proportion of adults reporting reasons for increases in their cost of living, Great Britain, November 2021 to September 2024



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

Notes:

1. Question: "Over the last month, in which ways has your cost of living increased?"
2. Base: Adults who had reported their cost of living had increased in the past month.
3. Respondents could select more than one option, estimates and associated confidence intervals for all response categories are provided in the [datasets associated with this release](#).

Affordability of household expenses

In the latest period, just under 4 in 10 (38%) adults who are currently making rent or mortgage payments reported that these payments had gone up in the last six months, with 34% reporting that they are finding it very or somewhat difficult to afford these payments.

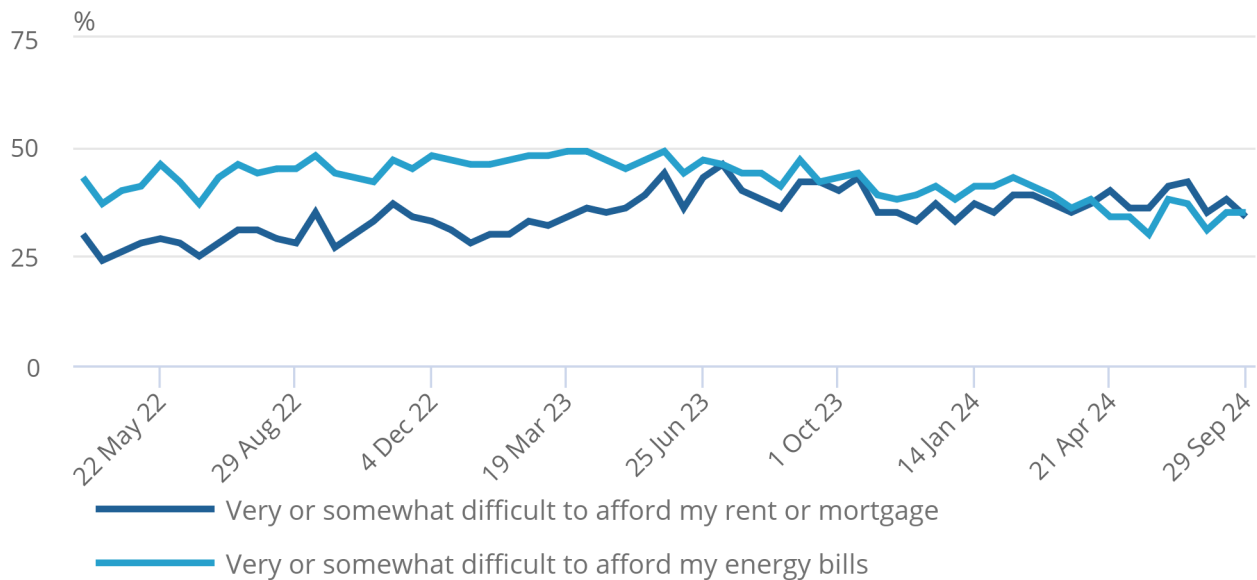
The proportion of adults reporting difficulty affording rent or mortgage payments has increased slightly from March 2022 (30% in the period from 16 to 27 March 2022). In contrast, over the same period, those finding it very or somewhat difficult to afford their energy bills has decreased from 43% to 35% (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Over 3 in 10 adults are finding it difficult to pay their energy or housing bills

Proportion of adults who find it difficult to pay energy bills, rent or mortgage, Great Britain, March 2022 to September 2024

Figure 4: Over 3 in 10 adults are finding it difficult to pay their energy or housing bills

Proportion of adults who find it difficult to pay energy bills, rent or mortgage, Great Britain, March 2022 to September 2024



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

Notes:

1. Questions: "How easy or difficult is it to afford your energy bills?" and "How easy or difficult is it to afford your rent or mortgage payments?".
2. Base: adults who pay for energy bills and adults who make rent or mortgage payments.
3. From 17 to 29 May 2023, changes were made to the survey design to allow us to route to the questions on rent and mortgage payments more accurately. This change does not appear to have had an impact on responses to this question.
4. From 16 to 27 March 2022, changes were made to the survey design to allow us to route to the questions on energy payments more accurately. This change does not appear to have had an impact on responses to this question.
5. Estimates and associated confidence intervals for all response categories are available in the datasets associated with this release.
6. The length of each data collection period presented in this time series may differ.

4 . Adult experiences of the NHS in Great Britain

In the latest period, we asked respondents about their experiences of being on an NHS hospital waiting list.

The number of respondents on a hospital waiting list refers to the number of individuals who self-report being on a hospital waiting list in the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, which covers adults in Great Britain. Therefore, the percentage may differ from other sources.

In the latest period, 14% of adults in Great Britain told us that they were currently on an NHS hospital waiting list. Around a quarter (26%) of adults were on the waiting list for 4 to 6 months, which was the most commonly reported time frame. Similar proportions were reported by adults for other waiting times (13% for less than one month; 18% for 1 to 3 months; 15% for 7 to 11 months; 12% for 12 to 18 months; and 13% for more than 18 months).

Among those on an NHS hospital waiting list, around half (49%) of adults strongly agreed or agreed that they understood the information that was given to them relating to the management of their condition. Just under a quarter (23%) of adults neither agreed nor disagreed; 1 in 10 (10%) strongly disagreed or disagreed and just under 2 in 10 (18%) said they did not receive information.

Effect of being on an NHS hospital waiting list

When asked whether being on a hospital waiting list negatively affected their life, around half (51%) of adults strongly agreed or agreed; just under 4 in 10 (37%) neither agreed nor disagreed and 13% strongly disagreed or disagreed.

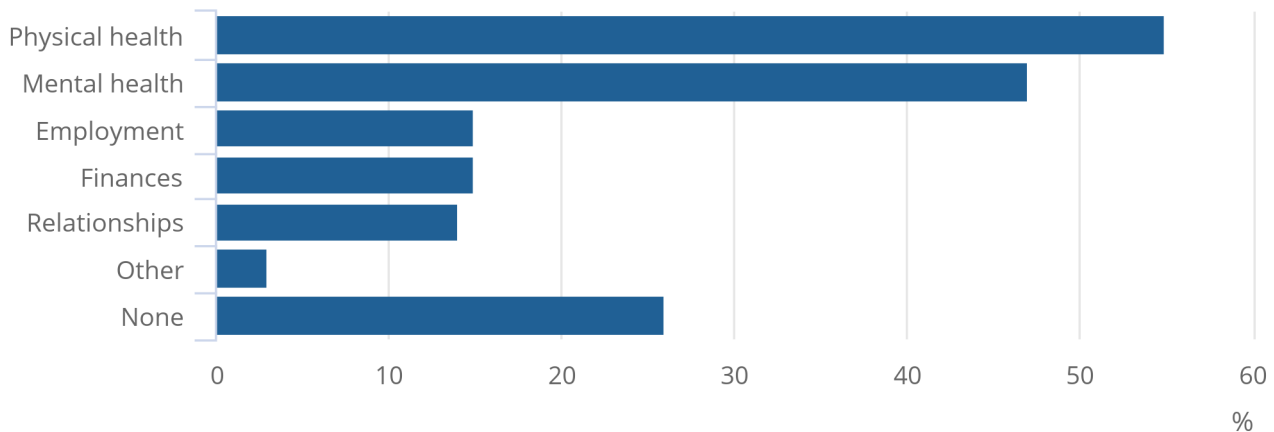
Among those currently on an NHS hospital waiting list (14%), the most commonly reported areas of life that were negatively affected were physical health (55%) and mental health (47%). Around a quarter (26%) of adults reported no negative affect on their life (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Physical and mental health were the aspects of life most commonly reported to have been negatively affected while on an NHS waiting list

Proportion of adults who reported the following aspects of life as having been negatively affected while on a hospital waiting list, Great Britain, 4 to 29 September 2024

Figure 5: Physical and mental health were the aspects of life most commonly reported to have been negatively affected while on an NHS waiting list

Proportion of adults who reported the following aspects of life as having been negatively affected while on a hospital waiting list, Great Britain, 4 to 29 September 2024



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

Notes:

1. Question: "What aspects of your life, if any, have been negatively affected while being on a hospital waiting list?"
2. Base: Adults who reported that they are currently on an NHS waiting list.
3. Respondents could select more than one option, estimates and associated confidence intervals for all response categories are provided in the datasets associated with this release.

5 . Data on public opinions and social trends

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

Dataset | Released 18 October 2024

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 18 October 2024

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) of personal well-being, loneliness and what people in Great Britain felt were important issues.

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

Dataset | Released 18 October 2024

People's experiences of being on an NHS hospital waiting list in Great Britain; indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

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

Dataset | Released 18 October 2024

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: social mobility](#)

Dataset | Released 18 October 2024

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) of the extent to which people in Great Britain agree they have done better in life than their parents, that children will have a better future than the current generation, that everyone has a fair chance or that their background influences their outcomes in life.

6 . Data sources and quality

NHS hospital waiting times

The results presented in this release may differ compared with those reported in other surveys such as the GP Patient Survey (GPPS) and the Health Insights Survey (HIS). This may be explained by differences between the questionnaires such as coverage and sample characteristics that have not been fully adjusted for in the weighting methodology, wording of questions and the ordering of when questions were asked. This survey collects information which aims to provide an understanding of people's experience of being on an NHS hospital waiting list. The data collected should not be used to monitor the number or proportion of the population in Great Britain who are currently on a hospital waiting list.

Sampling and weighting

The analysis in this bulletin is based on adults aged 16 years and over in Great Britain. Data referring to the "latest period" are based on 3,840 responding adults for the period 4 to 29 September 2024.

In the latest period, we sampled 8,400 households. This sample was randomly selected from people who had previously completed the Labour Market Survey (LMS) or Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN). The responding sample for the latest period contained 3,840 individuals, representing a 46% response rate.

Survey weights were applied to make estimates representative of the population, based on our population estimates. Estimates for some groups of the population may be subject to greater uncertainty because of smaller sample sizes for these groups (for example, younger adults).

For all estimates in the datasets, confidence intervals are provided. Where changes in results from previous weeks are presented in this release, or comparisons between estimates are made, associated confidence intervals should be used to assess the statistical significance of the differences. More information on confidence intervals and statistical significance can be found in our [Uncertainty and how we measure it in our surveys methodology](#).

Further information on the survey design and quality can be found in our [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\)](#).

7 . Related links

[Economic activity and social change in the UK, real-time indicators: 10 October 2024](#)

Bulletin | Released 10 October 2024

Early data on the UK economy and society. These faster indicators are created using rapid response surveys, novel data sources and innovative methods. These are official statistics in development.

[Impact of increased cost of living on adults across Great Britain: July to October 2023](#)

Article | Released 4 December 2023

Analysis of the groups of the population affected by recent increases in the cost of living using data from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey and of the characteristics associated with financial resilience from the Wealth and Assets Survey.

[Private rent and house prices, UK: October 2024](#)

Bulletin | 16 October 2024

The Price Index of Private Rents (PIPR) produces rent price and inflation statistics for the UK, tracking prices paid for new and existing tenancies in the private rental sector. Includes headline UK House Price Index statistics.

[Retail sales, Great Britain: September 2024](#)

Bulletin | Released 18 October 2024

The Retail Sales Index (RSI) is an important economic indicator and one of the earliest short-term measures of economic activity.

[Public awareness, opinions and attitudes towards artificial intelligence: July to October 2023](#)

Article | Released 30 October 2023

An analysis exploring adults' awareness of artificial intelligence (AI) use and attitudes towards the adoption of AI, including benefits and risks.

8 . Cite this statistical bulletin

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 18 October 2024, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: September 2024](#)