

Statistical bulletin

# Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: March 2026

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

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# 1 . Main points

The following information is based on adults in Great Britain.

During the latest period (4 to 29 March 2026):

- The cost of living (87%), the NHS (81%), and the economy (72%) remained the most commonly reported important issues facing the UK today.
- The proportion of adults reporting international conflict as an important issue (63%) has increased since February 2026 (50%) and is now the highest it has been since we started asking this question in October 2022.
- Two-thirds (67%) of adults reported that their cost of living had increased compared with a month ago, which is up from 56% in February 2026.
- Among those reporting that their cost of living had increased compared with a month ago, the price of food shopping remained the most commonly reported reason (91%); the proportion reporting the price of fuel (75%) as a reason for increased living costs increased from February 2026, when it was 38%.

We also looked at how different groups of the population were affected by the cost of living, using data collected between 7 January and 29 March 2026.

- Around 1 in 30 (3%) adults reported that in the past two weeks they or their household had run out of food and could not afford to buy more; this was higher among adults who pay rent to the council, housing association, or charitable trust (15%), unemployed adults (12%), and Black, African, Caribbean or Black British adults (10%).
- Around 1 in 4 adults (23%) reported they would be unable to pay an unexpected but necessary expense of £850; this was higher among adults who pay rent to the council, housing association, or charitable trust (61%), Black, African, Caribbean or Black British adults (49%), and adults living in the most deprived areas of England (44%).

## 2 . Important issues facing the UK

In the latest period (4 to 29 March 2026), the most frequently reported issues facing the UK today continued to be:

- the cost of living (87%)
- the NHS (81%)
- the economy (72%)

Other commonly reported issues during this time included international conflict (63%), immigration (56%), crime (56%), and climate change and the environment (53%).

The proportion of adults reporting international conflict as an important issue (63%) has increased since February 2026 (50%), and is now the highest it has been since we started asking this question in October 2022.

### **Figure 1: The cost of living, the NHS, 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 March 2026

**Notes:**

1. Respondents could select more than one option.
2. The length of each data collection period presented in this time series may be different.

### 3 . The cost of living over time

In the latest period (4 to 29 March 2026), around two-thirds (67%) of adults reported that their cost of living had increased compared with one month ago. This is an increase from 56% reporting this in February 2026 (4 February to 1 March 2026), but is similar to this time last year (66% in March 2025).

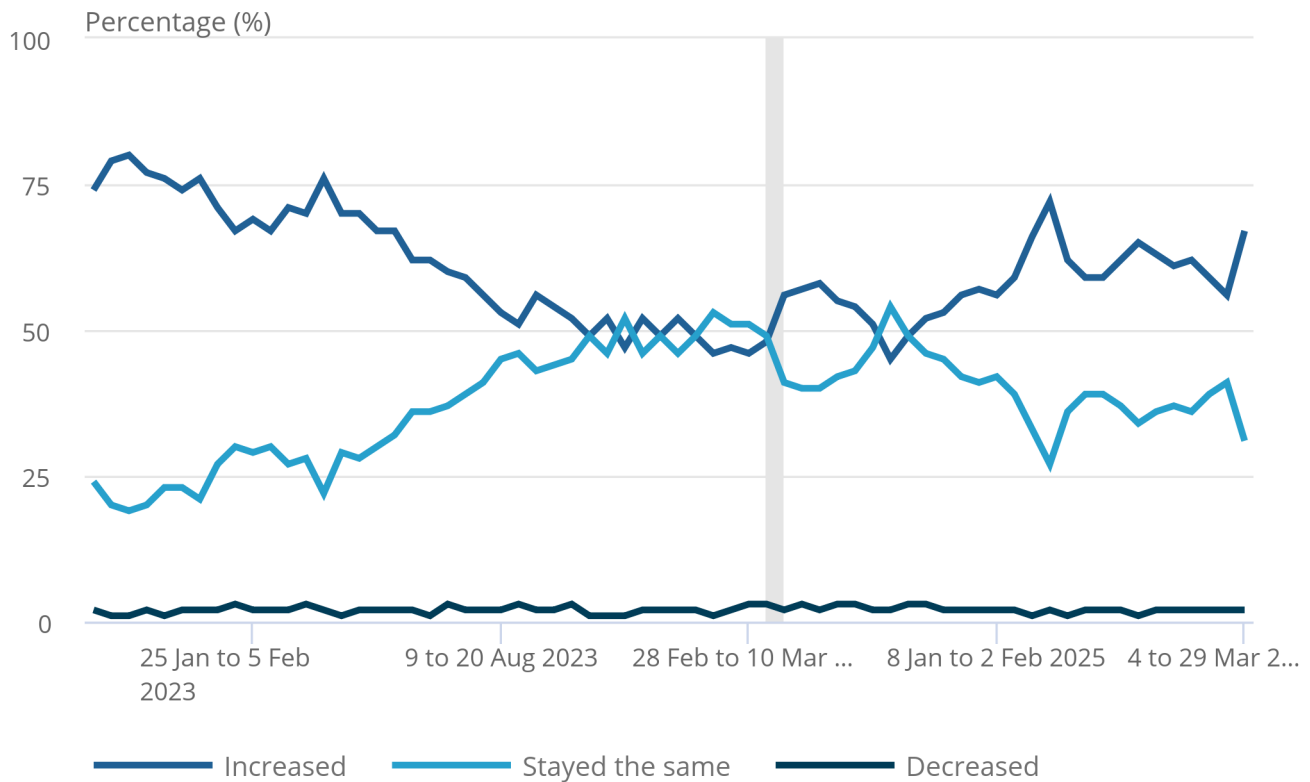
Around 1 in 50 (2%) adults said that their cost of living had decreased compared with one month ago (Figure 2), while around 3 in 10 (31%) said it had stayed the same.

**Figure 2: A higher proportion of adults reported increases in their cost of living in March 2026 than February 2026**

Proportion of adults reporting cost of living changes in the past month, Great Britain, 14 September 2022 to 29 March 2026

Figure 2: A higher proportion of adults reported increases in their cost of living in March 2026 than February 2026

Proportion of adults reporting cost of living changes in the past month, Great Britain, 14 September 2022 to 29 March 2026



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

Notes:

1. Changes were made to the survey design in the period 27 March to 7 April 2024, which may have had an impact on responses to this question.
2. The length of each data collection period presented in this time series may be different.

## Reasons for cost-of-living increases

Among those who reported that their cost of living had increased compared with a month ago, the most commonly reported reason remained the price of their food shop (91%). This has been the case since we first asked the question in November 2021 (Figure 3). Other commonly reported reasons for the increase in the cost of living included:

- price of fuel (75%)
- gas or electricity bills (63%)
- price of public transport (19%)
- rent or mortgage costs (16%)

The proportion of adults reporting the price of fuel as a reason for cost-of-living increases (75%) rose from 38% in February 2026, and is now similar to the highs seen in mid-2022. For more information on recent increases in automotive fuel prices, see our [Economic activity and social change real-time indicators dashboard](#).

The proportion of adults reporting the price of their gas or electricity bills (63%) as a reason for cost-of-living increases has decreased from 69% in February 2026.

### Figure 3: Three-quarters of adults who said their cost of living had increased in the last month reported the cost of fuel as a reason for this increase

Proportion of adults who said that their cost of living had increased compared with a month ago reporting the reasons for this increase, Great Britain, 14 November 2021 to 29 March 2026

#### Notes:

1. Based on adults who reported their cost of living had increased in the past month.
2. Respondents could select more than one option.
3. The length of each data collection period presented in this time series may be different.
4. See our accompanying datasets for confidence intervals, additional response options and related footnotes.

## 4 . Experiences of increased cost of living

Using data covering the period 7 January to 29 March 2026, we explored how different groups of the population were affected by the increased cost of living.

Associations between someone's characteristics and their experiences of the cost of living may not reflect a causal relationship.

### Food costs

Around 1 in 30 (3%) adults reported that in the past two weeks, they or their household had run out of food and could not afford to buy more. This is the same as the proportion who reported this a year ago (3% between 8 January and 30 March 2025).

Groups more likely to report this included:

- adults who are unemployed (12%), compared with those who are employed (3%), or retired (1%)
- renters (10%), compared with those currently paying off a mortgage or loan used to buy the property (2%), or those who own their home outright (1%); this was particularly evident for those paying rent to the council, housing association, or charitable trust (15%)
- adults in the Black, African, Caribbean or Black British (10%) ethnic groups, compared with those in the White ethnic group (3%)
- adults living in the most deprived areas of England (7%), compared with those living in the least deprived areas of England (1%)

#### **Figure 4: Unemployed adults and renters were among the groups most likely to report that their household had run out food and could not afford to buy more**

**Proportion of adults reporting their household had run out of food in the past two weeks and they could not afford to buy more, by characteristic, Great Britain, 7 January to 29 March 2026**

##### **Notes:**

1. These data cover the pooled period from 7 January to 29 March 2026; therefore, estimates will be different to the monthly estimates covering 4 to 29 March 2026.
2. The category of "All renters" includes the following responses: "shared ownership (also known as "part-own part-rent")", "pay rent to the council, housing association, or charitable trust", "pay rent to a private landlord" or "live rent free (including living rent-free in a relative's or friend's property but excluding squatting)".
3. See our accompanying datasets for confidence intervals, further breakdowns and related footnotes.
4. Some estimates have not been included in the chart for quality reasons. See our accompanying datasets for more information.

## **Energy costs**

In the period 7 January to 29 March 2026, around 1 in 3 (35%) adults who pay energy bills reported finding it very or somewhat difficult to afford these bills. This is similar to the proportion who reported this a year ago (34% between 8 January and 30 March 2025).

Groups who were more likely to report this included:

- adults who are unemployed (59%), compared with those who are employed (34%)
- those in the Asian or Asian British (58%) and Black, African, Caribbean or Black British (56%) ethnic groups, compared with those in the White ethnic group (33%)
- renters (51%), compared with those currently paying off a mortgage or loan used to buy the property (34%) or who own their home outright (28%)
- adults living in the most deprived areas of England (47%), compared with those living in the least deprived areas (28%)

## Housing costs

In the period 7 January to 29 March 2026, among adults currently paying rent or mortgage payments, 3 in 10 (30%) reported finding it very or somewhat difficult to afford these payments. This is similar to the proportion who reported this a year ago (32% between 8 January and 30 March 2025).

Groups who were more likely to report this included:

- adults in the Asian or Asian British (48%) and Black, African, Caribbean or Black British (44%) ethnic groups, compared with those in the White ethnic group (28%)
- adults who pay rent to a private landlord (45%), compared with adults who pay rent to a council, housing association, or charitable trust (31%) and adults who are currently paying off a mortgage or loan used to buy the property (26%)
- disabled adults (37%), compared with non-disabled adults (28%)
- adults who are a parent of a dependent child (36%), compared with those who are not a parent of a dependent child (27%)

Around a quarter (23%) of adults who currently pay rent or mortgage payments reported that their payments had increased in the last six months, down from 48% in early July 2023. Renters (31%) were more likely than mortgage holders (17%) to report that their rent or mortgage payments have gone up in the past six months.

## Actions taken because of increases in the cost of living

In the period 7 January to 29 March 2026, the most common actions reported because of increases in the cost of living included:

- spending less on non-essentials (61%)
- shopping around more (42%)
- spending less on food shopping and essentials (38%)

Groups more likely to report spending less on non-essentials, included:

- adults who are a parent of a dependent child (69%), compared with those who are not a parent of a dependent child (60%)
- those paying rent to the council, housing association, or charitable trust (68%) and those who are currently paying off a mortgage or loan used to buy the property (67%), compared with those who own their home outright (51%)
- women (64%), compared with men (58%)

Around 1 in 50 (2%) adults reported using support from charities, including food banks, because of increases in the cost of living. Groups more likely to report this included:

- those paying rent to the council, housing association, or charitable trust (8%), compared with those who own their home outright (1%) or those who are currently paying off a mortgage or loan used to buy the property (1%)
- disabled adults (4%), compared with non-disabled adults (1%)
- adults living in the most deprived areas of England (4%), compared with those living in least deprived areas of England (1%)

## 5 . Financial resilience

Using the dataset covering 7 January to 29 March 2026, we explored measures of financial resilience among different groups of the population.

### Ability to pay an unexpected but necessary expense

Around 1 in 4 (23%) adults reported they would be unable to pay an unexpected but necessary expense of £850, which is the same as this time last year (23% in the period 8 January to 30 March 2025).

Groups more likely to report being unable to pay an unexpected but necessary expense of £850 included:

- renters (49%), compared with those currently paying off a mortgage or loan used to buy the property (22%) or who own their home outright (10%); this was particularly evident for those paying rent to the council, housing association or charitable trust (61%)
- those in the Black, African, Caribbean or Black British ethnic group (49%), compared with those in the Asian or Asian British (23%) or White (22%) ethnic groups
- adults living in the most deprived areas of England (44%), compared with those living in least deprived areas of England (13%)
- adults who were unemployed (40%), compared with adults who were employed (23%), self-employed (18%), or retired (13%)

### Figure 5: Renters and Black, African, Caribbean or Black British adults were among the groups most likely to report being unable to pay an unexpected but necessary expense of £850

Proportion of adults reporting they would be unable to pay an unexpected but necessary expense of £850, by characteristic, Great Britain, 7 January to 29 March 2026

#### Notes:

1. These data cover the pooled period from 7 January to 29 March 2026; therefore, estimates will be different to the monthly estimates covering 4 to 29 March 2026.
2. The category of "All renters" includes the following responses: "shared ownership (also known as "part-own part-rent")", "pay rent to the council, housing association, or charitable trust", "pay rent to a private landlord" or "live rent free (including living rent-free in a relative's or friend's property but excluding squatting)".
3. See our accompanying datasets for confidence intervals, further breakdowns and related footnotes.

### Ability to save money

Around 1 in 3 (33%) adults reported that they think they would be unable to save any money in the next 12 months, which is similar to this time last year (34% in the period 8 January to 30 March 2025).

Groups more likely to report being unable to save any money in the next 12 months included:

- adults who were unemployed (47%), retired (39%), or economically inactive for reasons other than retirement (40%), compared with employed adults (27%)
- disabled adults (44%), compared with non-disabled adults (28%)
- renters (42%), compared with those who own their home outright (30%) or are currently paying off a mortgage or loan used to buy the property (30%); this was particularly evident for those paying rent to the council, housing association, or charitable trust (50%)
- adults working in caring, leisure and other service occupations (40%), compared with those working in professional occupations (23%) or elementary occupations (24%)

## **Borrowing money or using credit**

Around 1 in 5 (20%) adults reported that they had borrowed more money or used more credit than usual in the past month compared with a year ago. This is the same as this time last year, when it was 20% in the period 8 January to 30 March 2025.

Groups more likely to report this included:

- those in the Black, African, Caribbean or Black British ethnic groups (36%), compared with those in the White ethnic group (19%)
- adults who are a parent of a dependent child (32%), compared with those who are not a parent of a dependent child (17%)
- renters (29%) and those currently paying off a mortgage or loan used to buy the property (26%), compared with those who own their home outright (10%)
- adults living in the most deprived areas of England (26%), compared with those living in least deprived areas of England (15%)

## **Ability to pay a bill or standing order**

Around 1 in 20 (5%) adults reported they had been unable to pay a direct debit, standing order, or bill in the past month, which is the same as this time last year (5% in the period 8 January to 30 March 2025).

Groups more likely to report being unable to pay a direct debit, standing order, or bill included:

- those in the Black, African, Caribbean or Black British ethnic group (12%), compared with those in the White ethnic group (4%)
- unemployed adults (12%) and those who are economically inactive for reasons other than retirement (10%), compared with those who are employed (5%), self-employed (5%), or retired (1%)
- those working in caring, leisure and other service occupations (12%), compared with those working as managers, directors and senior officials (2%) and those working in associate professional occupations (2%)
- renters (11%), compared with those currently paying off a mortgage or loan used to buy the property (4%) and those who own their home outright (2%)

## 6 . Data on public opinions and social trends

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

Dataset | Released 17 April 2026

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

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

Dataset | Released 17 April 2026

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

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

Dataset | Released 17 April 2026

People's experiences of winter pressures in Great Britain; indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

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

Dataset | Released 17 April 2026

People's experiences of changes in their cost of living and household finances in Great Britain by personal characteristics; indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

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

Dataset | Released 17 April 2026

Personal well-being, loneliness and what people in Great Britain felt were important issues by personal characteristics; indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

### [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: winter pressures by personal characteristics](#)

Dataset | Released 17 April 2026

People's experiences of winter pressures in Great Britain by personal characteristics; indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

### [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey: sample sizes, response rates and user requested data](#)

Dataset | Released 17 April 2026

Survey information including sample sizes, response rates and user requested data for the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

## 7 . Glossary

### Deprivation

Deprivation is represented by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and 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 33,755 (least deprived area).

Deciles are calculated by ranking the small areas from most deprived to least deprived and dividing them into 10 equal groups. To ensure reliable sample sizes, we have further grouped deciles into quintiles.

### Employment status

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

## Occupation

Occupation is self-reported on the OPN and therefore estimates based on occupation should be treated with caution.

Our [Standard Occupational Classification \(SOC\)](#) is a common classification of occupational information for the UK, which classifies jobs by their skill level and content into the following nine major groups:

- managers, directors and senior officials
- professional occupations
- associate professional occupations
- administrative and secretarial occupations
- skilled trades occupations
- caring, leisure and other service occupations
- sales and customer service occupations
- process, plant and machine operatives
- elementary occupations

## Parental status

In the OPN, an adult is defined as a parent if they are the parent of a dependent child living in the household. In this case, dependent children include children and step-children.

A dependent child is someone aged under 16 years, or someone who is aged 16 to 18 years, has never been married, and is in full-time education.

## Renters

The category of tenure "all renters" includes the following responses:

- "shared ownership (also known as "part-own part-rent")"
- "pay rent to the council, housing association, or charitable trust"
- "pay rent to a private landlord"
- "live rent free (including living rent free in a relative's or friend's property but excluding squatting)"

## Other definitions

Definitions of all breakdowns of estimates used in this bulletin are available in more detail in the Notes tab of our [accompanying datasets](#).

## 8 . Data sources and quality

## Sample

The analysis in this bulletin is based on adults aged 16 years and over in Great Britain.

In the latest period, 4 to 29 March 2026, we sampled 7,910 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 3,350 individuals, representing a 42% response rate.

The latest pooled period (7 January to 29 March 2026) combined three waves of data collection, covering the following periods:

- 7 January to 1 February 2026
- 4 February to 1 March 2026
- 4 to 29 March 2026

The responding sample for the latest pooled period contained 9,670 individuals.

## Data quality

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).

From the 2 to 27 July 2025 data collection period onwards, the population totals used in weighting OPN estimates are based on 2022 mid-year estimates using updated population projections. For England and Wales, they are projected forward using scaling factors from 2021-based national population projections. For Scotland, they are projected forward using scaling factors from 2020-based national population projections.

We provide [confidence intervals](#) for all estimates in the datasets. Where comparisons between estimates are made, associated confidence intervals should be used to assess the [statistical significance](#) of the differences.

Further information on the survey design and quality is available in our [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey quality and methodology information \(QMI\)](#).

## New changes

For data collection from 7 January 2026 onwards, analysis of the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) uses the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2025 classification, updated from the previous 2019 version. When interpreting changes in estimates by IMD over time, users should be aware of the changes between IMD 2019 and 2025. Further information on these changes is available in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's [English Indices of Deprivation 2025 release](#).

## 9 . Related links

[Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: February 2026](#)

Bulletin | Released 20 March 2026

Social insights on daily life, including personal well-being, cost of living, and attitudes on important issues, from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

[Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: June 2025](#)

Bulletin | Released 20 March 2026

Social insights on daily life and events, including experiences of the cost of living, as well as attitudes to important issues from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

[Economic activity and social change real-time indicators, UK, dashboard](#)

Online tool | Updated 17 April 2026

An overview of the UK economy and society, based on rapid response surveys, novel data sources, and innovative methods.

[Business insights and impact on the UK economy: 2 April 2026](#)

Bulletin | Released 2 April 2026

The impact of challenges facing the economy and other events on UK businesses, including financial performance, workforce, trade, and business resilience.

## 10 . Cite this statistical bulletin

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 17 April 2026, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: March 2026](#)