Living Costs and Food Survey guide

Living Costs and Food Survey design and implementation, including collection methods, sample design, response rates and coverage. Includes survey changes and quality information.

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1 . Overview

TheLiving Costs and Food (LCF) Survey is an annual cross-sectional survey that measures household spending and the income of household members. It also collects demographic information about the household and its members. The LCF defines household spending as real monetary transactions made directly by household members to purchase goods and services.

The LCF is a voluntary sample survey of private households. Information about regular spending, such as rent and mortgage payments, is obtained from a face-to-face household interview along with retrospective information on certain large, infrequent spending such as those on vehicles. Household members aged 16 years and over are asked to keep records of their daily spending for two weeks. Those aged between 7 and 15 years keep a simplified record of spending.

We use data from this survey to publish regular statistical bulletins on:

- Family spending in the UK
- Average household income, UK
- Household income inequality, UK
- Effects of taxes and benefits on UK household income
- Consumer price inflation, UK
- Consumer trends, UK

Microdata for the LCF are available from the UK Data Service (UKDS) and from our Secure Research Service (SRS).

2 . Latest changes to the survey

We updated this guide on 28 September 2026 with reference to data published up to and including financial year ending (FYE) 2025. For information on survey updates, see:

- questionnaire changes in the FYE 2025 data detailed in our Living Costs and Food Survey technical report: financial year ending March 2025
- information on earlier questionnaire updates in the corresponding year's Living Costs and Food Surveys technical reports
- changes introduced after FYE 2025 described in Section 5: Changes and their effects on comparability over time

3 . Survey design and implementation

Data collection method

The Living Costs and Food (LCF) Survey obtains information about regular household spending and household members' income from a face-to-face household interview along with retrospective information on certain large, infrequent spending such as that on vehicles.

Each household member aged 16 years and over is asked to record their daily spending for two weeks, with weights and measures collected for food and drink purchases for a proportion of sampled households. Those aged between 7 and 15 years complete a simplified record.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork is conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in Great Britain and by Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) for the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland. Both organisations use largely identical questionnaires. Differences between the two questionnaires reflect the country-specific standards for ethnicity, nationality and national identity, and the different systems of local taxation used in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Households at the selected addresses receive an advance letter and £5 unconditional e-voucher. Following receipt of the letter, an interviewer visits the address to secure co-operation in the survey. The calling strategy which achieves the highest contact rate at the lowest cost is to vary calling times. Many households will be easily contacted within the first couple of calls, but for those which are not it is important to make sure that successive visits are at different times of the day (including evenings) and on different days of the week (including Saturdays).

Interviews are conducted by Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) using laptop computers. Daily spending recorded by respondents is captured using the Record of Spending (RoS) tool. See Section 5: Changes and their effects on comparability over time for more information on the introduction of this tool and improved data quality. Respondents are eligible to receive a £50 voucher on successful completion of the interview and daily spending record. Children aged 7 to 15 years are eligible for a £5 voucher.

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, for the financial year ending (FYE) 2021 and up to October 2022, the face-to-face interview was replaced with a telephone interview. The sample size was also boosted to mitigate the risk of lower response rates because of this.

Once interviewed, LCF Survey respondents were asked to provide copies of receipts (electronic or paper) for the two-week diary period, and interviewers recorded non-receipt-based spending via regular telephone calls during the two-week diary period. The receipt images and non-receipt-based items were input into a person-level excel spreadsheet by the interviewer. Not all collected data could be processed because of the change to collection and associated processing of detailed spending data, alongside a higher-than-expected response rate. This is detailed in our Living Costs and Food Survey technical report: financial year ending March 2021. More information is available in our Impact of COVID-19 on Office for National Statistics (ONS) social survey data collection methodology.

Proxy interview

Ideally, all household members aged 16 years and over should be present during the interview, so that the income section can be asked personally. However, where a member of the household is not present during the interview, another member of the household (such as a spouse) may be able to provide documentary information about the absent person via a proxy interview.

Sample design

The LCF Survey is a voluntary sample survey of private households. The basic unit of the survey is the household. The LCF Survey (in line with other government social surveys) uses the harmonised definition of a household: a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room or sitting room or dining area.

The LCF Survey sample for Great Britain is a multi-stage stratified random sample. The survey uses Royal Mail's Postcode Address File (PAF) of small users as its sampling frame. The PAF is the most comprehensive address database in the UK, containing approximately 30 million addresses and is updated daily. Postcode sectors are used as the Primary Sampling Units (PSUs), with 20 addresses selected from each PSU to form the monthly interviewer quota. Approximately 700 PSUs are selected annually after being arranged in 41 strata defined by International Territorial Level 2 (ITL2) areas and two 2011 Census variables: socio-economic group (derived from the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification) of the head of household or household reference person and ownership of cars.

The Northern Ireland LCF Survey, the companion survey to the Great Britain LCF Survey, is conducted by the Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). A systematic random sample of private addresses is drawn from the NISRA Address Register (NAR). Addresses are sorted by district council and ward, so the sample is effectively stratified geographically.

A previous Northern Ireland sample boost, which increased the issued sample to 1,000 addresses, ceased in August 2024. The Northern Ireland sample subsequently returned to its standard design.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the sample sizes were increased to combat the impact of the change to interviewer mode from face-to-face to telephone. Response rates were higher than expected, this meant sample sizes fluctuated between 40 and 28 addresses per quota starting from June 2020 until it reduced to 25 addresses in January 2023 and returned to "normal" (20 addresses) in March 2023. More information is available in our Impact of COVID-19 on Office for National Statistics (ONS) social survey data collection methodology.

Sample size

The overall achieved sample for the LCF Survey in FYE 2025 in the UK was 4,998 households. Of these, 276 households were from Northern Ireland (NI) and 4,722 were from Great Britain.

Table 1 shows the total sample, achieved sample size and response rates for Great Britain from 2011 to 2025. See our following "Response rates" subsection for more information about these.

Table 1: Summary of sample sizes for the Living Costs and Food Survey
Great Britain, January 2011 to March 2025

Time period	Set Sample	Responding Sample	Response Rate (%) [note 1]
January 2011 to December 2011	11,484	5,531	54
January 2012 to December 2012	11,484	5,425	52
January 2013 to December 2013	11,484	4,993	48
January 2014 to December 2014	11,484	4,982	48
April 2015 to March 2016 [note 2]	11,484	4,760	46
April 2016 to March 2017	11,505	4,641	45
April 2017 to March 2018	13,065	5,013	43
April 2018 to March 2019	13,306	5,092	43
April 2019 to March 2020	13,996	5,072	40
April 2020 to March 2021 [note 3]	22,516	5,170	24
April 2021 to March 2022 [note 3]	21,002	5,306	27
April 2022 to March 2023 [note 3]	19,819	4,061	22
April 2023 to March 2024	14,862	3,799	28
April 2024 to March 2025	20,001	4,722	26

Source: Living Costs and Food Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes

1. The response rate (%) is rounded to the nearest whole percent and is based on eligible households in the set sample.
2. The survey collection period changed in 2015 to cover the financial year instead of the calendar year.
3. For 2020 to 2021 the sample increased from approximately 14,000 to 20,000 to accommodate a change to telephone collection, therefore the percentage of cases within the dataset is smaller but the count is comparable with previous years. This sample increase continued for 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023.

Response rates

Response rates are available in our Living Costs and Food Survey technical report: financial year ending March 2025. In FYE 2025, the response rate was 26% in Great Britain, and 28% for the UK. This decreased by 2 percentage points compared with FYE 2024. Non-response remains high since the coronavirus pandemic and a long-term decline in response has been observed for the LCF Survey, similar to other social surveys. Non-response weighting is applied to help mitigate non-response bias. For more information, see the Weighting subsection later in this section.

The LCF Survey is conducted with people who volunteer their time to take part in the face-to-face interview and keep a record of their daily spending for two weeks. The voluntary nature of the survey means that people who do not wish to take part in the survey can refuse to do so. Reasons for not participating in the survey include people who "cannot be bothered" and "refusal to headquarters after interviewer's visit". The sample is designed to ensure that the results of the survey represent the population of the UK. The risk of the survey not being representative may increase with every refusal or non-contact with a sampled household (survey non-response). For more information, see the Representativeness subsection later in this section.

Response outcome categories

A full response denotes a household in which:

- all individuals aged 16 years and over co-operated with the interview
- no income questions in the questionnaire were refused
- all individuals kept a two-week record of their spending
- the information given was complete and usable

A partial response is recorded where all household members aged 16 and over complete the full income section of the interview, but one or more members who are not the main food shopper (MFS), refuse to keep a record of their spending. If the MFS does not provide a completed record, the household is classified as a refusal.

An outright refusal is a household that refuses to respond to the survey, and the interviewer feels that there is no chance of an interview at the given time. There are also refusals when some of the information has not been collected. These include scenarios where all adults complete the full income section, but the diary requirements are not met, including when:

- the MFS of the household refuses to keep a record of their spending
- all respondents refuse to keep a diary
- diaries are kept but not received by the interviewer

A non-contact arises when an address is occupied but it has not been possible to contact any member of the household during the fieldwork period.

Coverage

Time periods

The LCF Survey is conducted continuously throughout the year. This helps ensure that spending patterns reflect seasonal variation in household spending and reduces the potential for seasonal bias in survey estimates.

Data are processed and delivered on both a quarterly and annual basis. Annual data were collected and published on a financial year basis until 2005 to 2006. From 2006, data were published on a calendar-year basis until 2014 to 2015, when the survey reverted to a financial year basis.

Geographic coverage

The LCF Survey covers private households across the UK. Fieldwork is conducted in Great Britain by the ONS and in Northern Ireland by NISRA.

Exclusions

The LCF Survey surveys private households in the UK. This means that it omits communal establishments such as student halls of residence and armed forces.

Representativeness

Representativeness describes the extent to which survey respondents reflect the target population, whereas non-response bias occurs when respondents differ systematically from non-respondents in ways that affect survey estimates. Achieving a representative sample is important because it helps ensure that published statistics reflect the population the survey is designed to represent.

Weighting is used to improve the representativeness of the survey data and reduce the risk of non-response bias. For more information, see the Processing survey responses subsection later in this section. Other sources of bias and the approaches used to reduce them are discussed throughout this guide.

The representativeness of a survey sample can be assessed by examining the extent to which respondents reflect the characteristics of the target population. We analyse a range of characteristics to understand how the composition of respondents has changed over time.

For each characteristic, we also include the equivalent distribution from our [Census-based statistics UK: 2021](). While this acts as a benchmark against which to consider the distributions from the LCF, legitimate differences can arise for a variety of reasons, because of:

- differences in the questions asked
- differences in population coverage
- genuine change in the population as time progresses

Some characteristics are relatively static, while others can vary more over time making a fixed benchmark less useful. For example, the proportions of men and women were similar in [Census 2021]() to 2011, however, the trend of population ageing continued, with more people than ever before in the older age groups.

Our analysis shows the unweighted distribution of each characteristic of LCF Survey respondents in the UK compared with the 2021 census-based UK estimates. We also present a percentage indicating the dissimilarity between the LCF Survey respondents and the census benchmark (the Indicator of Dissimilarity, sometimes referred to as the Index of Dissimilarity or the Dissimilarity Index). This index measures how closely the distribution of a characteristic in the survey matches that of the population in the census-based statistics. A value of 0% indicates a perfect match, while larger values indicate greater differences between the survey and population distributions. Lower values therefore suggest a more representative survey sample.

Sex

There is close alignment between the unweighted sex distribution in all recent years of the LCF Survey and the 2021 census-based UK estimates. For each FYE between 2020 and 2025, the Dissimilarity Index was less than 1%.

Figure 1: The sex composition of LCF respondents is very similar to the 2021 census-based UK estimate

Unweighted distribution by sex of Living Costs and Food (LCF) Survey respondents (aged 16 years and over) in the UK compared with 2021 census-based UK statistics including dissimilarity indices, selected time periods

Downloac

Age

The Indicator of Dissimilarity for the unweighted age distribution rose during the coronavirus pandemic, but has fallen back towards pre-pandemic levels in recent years. Younger people (aged 16 to 24 years) are under-represented compared with the census-based UK estimates.

Figure 2: The age composition of LCF respondents has remained stable over the last three years of the survey

Unweighted distribution by age of Living Costs and Food (LCF) Survey respondents (aged 16 years and over) in the UK compared with 2021 census-based UK statistics including dissimilarity indices, selected time periods

Downloac

Household size

The Indicator of Dissimilarity for the unweighted household size distribution has fallen back to pre-coronavirus pandemic levels. The proportion of households with two people continues to be higher in the unweighted LCF Survey than the same proportion in the census-based UK estimates.

Figure 3: The indicator of dissimilarity for the unweighted household size distribution has fallen back to pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels

Unweighted distribution by household size of Living Costs and Food (LCF) Survey households in the UK compared with 2021 census-based UK statistics including dissimilarity indices, selected time periods

Downloac

Tenure

Households that own their home outright are over-represented in the unweighted LCF Survey compared with the census-based UK estimates. The difference between the survey sample and Census 2021-based UK estimates increased during the coronavirus pandemic, but has narrowed in recent years. Despite this improvement, the unweighted tenure composition remains less representative than before the pandemic. The Dissimilarity Index has fallen from a high of 12.3% in FYE 2021 to 8.8% in FYE 2025, meaning that 8.8% of responses would need to shift across categories for the unweighted sample to match the census-based UK estimates.

Figure 4: The unweighted tenure composition remains less representative than before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Unweighted distribution by tenure of Living Costs and Food (LCF) Survey households in the UK compared with 2021 census-based UK statistics including dissimilarity indices, selected time periods

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Unweighted distributions being out of alignment with benchmarks such as the census is one reason why we apply weights to our data. A housing tenure adjustment was added to LCF Survey weighting from FYE 2021 in response to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. The weighted distribution for tenure for FYE 2025 reduces the Index of Dissimilarity to 2.4%, indicating that weighting improves alignment with the Census 2021-based UK estimates benchmark and increases representativeness of the survey estimates.

Future work in this area includes expanding the characteristics compared with the census as well as potentially investigating the feasibility of using admin data for monitoring which groups are under-represented or over-represented in survey samples.

Processing survey responses

Data processing pipeline

The LCF Survey uses a complex delivery system, "Deliver", to process and manipulate raw data collected from the questionnaire and Record of Spending to produce data that can be used for analysis. This system is an essential part of the data processing journey. The system uses open-source software (Python) and adheres to reproducible analytical pipeline standards and best practice.

Weighting

The LCF Survey weighting process has three stages:

- design weighting
- non-response adjustment
- calibration

First, each selected LCF Survey household is assigned a design weight, equal to the reciprocal of its probability of selection. This is then adjusted for non-response, as not every selected household takes part. The adjustment uses the reciprocal of each household’s predicted response probability, estimated through a logistic regression model, to help account for differences in response rates.

Finally, the non-response-adjusted weights are calibrated to align with known population totals for the main subgroups. This calibration changes the input weights as little as possible while ensuring consistency with control totals for age and sex, region, employment status and tenure.

The weighting method was updated to be consistent with our Household Finances Survey (HFS) weighting methodology. This aligned the LCF Survey approach with other ONS household finance surveys. While annual LCF outputs moved to HFS weights from FYE 2023, national accounts quarterly datasets continued to use LCF Survey weights until FYE 2025. HFS weights are calibrated using the following groups:

- age-sex groups; age bands 0 to 15 years (children combined male and female), 16 to 24 years, 25 to 44 years, 45 to 64 years, 65 to 74 years, 75 years and over (separately male and female)
- region; person-level totals for the 12 Government Office Regions
- region; household-level totals
- employment; under 16 years, employed, self-employed, unemployed and inactive
- tenure; owning outright, owning with a mortgage and renting

In addition, we updated our LCF Survey non-response weights and population totals in line with Census 2021. Census 2021-based population estimates were introduced for the following ONS outputs:

- family spending; annual FYE 2024 datasets onwards
- national accounts: annual FYE 2025 datasets onwards and quarterly datasets from April 2025 onwards
- prices: Census 2021-based population estimates will be implemented from FYE 2026 onwards

These updates ensure that estimates more accurately reflect the composition of the UK population.

Outliers

Extreme values in the data are identified and treated during the quarterly production process. For the annual file creation, to identify and treat outliers in household and person-level datasets for income and spending, a draft run of the family spending tables is produced. From this, outliers are identified from a decimal representation of the expenditure influence, referred to as "most influence". Influence caps are set, and if the spending for the household exceeds the cap, then the expenditure can be classed as an outlier and different from the normal trend. The weight for that household is then treated accordingly to bring the weighted spending below the cap, while attempting to minimise any additional impact to other spending categories. All the annual household weights are then scaled to account for the impact of the adjusted figures. This technique effectively reduces the impact of any outlying values without deleting them altogether.

Protecting data and confidentiality

We use a statistical disclosure control methodology when processing LCF Survey data for dissemination. This ensures that information attributable to an individual is not disclosed in any publication. Standard Four of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics on managing data responsibly outlines how data producers must “protect the confidentiality of individual and business information when producing statistics".

4 . Quality of the survey

How we quality assure the survey

Before publication, Living Costs and Food (LCF) Survey data are subjected to a rigorous process of quality assurance. An initial series of automatic checks are applied to raw household and income data as they are collected from respondents and entered onto the Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) version of the questionnaire. These data are further checked by a team of editors within the Office for National Statistics (ONS) who also impute for missing values. Missing data are imputed using a combination of the following methods:

- by reference to tables based on external (non-LCF Survey) data produced elsewhere
- by reference to tables based on LCF Survey data from previous years showing average amounts according to household income
- by using information collected elsewhere in the questionnaire or by referring to the interviewers

The LCF Survey also accepts missing expenditure records if the record of the main food shopper is present. Missing expenditure records are imputed, improving data quality through receiving expenditure data from a person in another responding household with matching characteristics of age, employment status and relationship to the household reference person. In the financial year ending (FYE) 2025, 59 households had imputed records of spending.

Respondents’ records of spending are reviewed to ensure the information provided is complete. All spending data, including receipted and non-receipted items, is then manually checked and coded using Classification of Individual Consumption by Purpose (COICOP) by the Survey Validation coders.

Once the data has been processed, detailed quality assurance is conducted on each of the stakeholder outputs during the processing and outputs stage. The LCF Survey team also carries out a series of checks on the time series data to identify odd movements and extreme values or outliers in household- and person-level datasets.

Timeliness and punctuality

Quarterly datasets are provided to internal ONS customers and government departments approximately four months after the end of each quarter.

We are working towards a more timely deposit of LCF Survey microdata on the UK Data Service, with our aim being to deposit the files within one year after the end of the survey cycle.

For more details on related releases, the GOV.UK release calendar provides advance notice of release dates. If there are any changes to the pre-announced release schedule, public attention will be drawn to the change and the reasons for the change will be explained fully at the same time, as set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Strengths and limitations

Strengths

Granularity

One of the main strengths of the LCF Survey dataset is the level of detail within the collected information. Alongside disaggregated levels of expenditure, the survey collects socio-demographic, education and employment information for household members, as well as information on household composition. This means the data can provide low-level insights into expenditure trends over time. However, the survey sample is relatively small, which can cause some volatility within the results depending on the level of detail in which the analysis is conducted.

Limitations

Social desirability bias

LCF Survey expenditure data are self-reported and may therefore be affected by under-reporting, particularly for items perceived as less socially desirable. Comparisons with other data sources indicate that expenditure reported in the LCF for certain items, especially tobacco and alcohol, is lower than expected.

Household income surveys can also suffer from under-reporting at the top and bottom of the income distribution. Some ONS data producers apply an adjustment to address this under-coverage, such as the top income adjustment used in effects of taxes and benefits data.

Data quality dimensions

The Government Data Quality Framework recommends the use of the Data Management Association (DAMA UK) data quality dimensions to assess and improve data quality. These are:

- completeness
- uniqueness
- consistency
- timeliness
- validity
- accuracy

We have integrated these considerations into the guide.

5 . Changes and their effects on comparability over time

Latest changes

Questionnaire changes

For changes to the questionnaire used to create financial year ending (FYE) 2025 data, please refer to our Living Costs and Food Survey technical report: financial year ending March 2025.

Previous changes are detailed in the corresponding year's Living Costs and Food Survey technical reports.

Past changes

Variables

For information on LCF Survey variables and any changes over time, see the UK Data Service user guides that support LCF microdata deposits. These guides provide information on variable definitions, derivations, changes and continuity over time. The Living Costs and Food Survey introduction volume (PDF, 451KB) provides an overview of the LCF Survey User Documentation, together with information on database and survey definitions, as well as the survey background.

Upcoming changes

These changes are ordered by date, with the most immediate first. This survey guide is updated annually, while the ONS Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan for Economic Statistics outlines wider plans for 2025 and 2026 with updates provided in our ONS Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan for Economic Statistics: progress update December 2025 and our ONS surveys and economic statistics improvement plan, quarterly progress update: July 2026.

A new Living Costs and Food (LCF) Survey Record of Spending (RoS) tool

The new tool was successfully launched in October 2025, replacing an Excel tool used by interviewers to record detailed spending data provided by respondents. Evaluation of the benefits of the RoS tool is in progress. Initial findings have confirmed the RoS has reduced interviewer administration time. Analysis is ongoing to confirm the expected benefits of improved data quality.

The tool's implementation marks the first step in uplifting the LCF to Blaise 5 (a computer-assisted interviewing system), improving data quality and operational efficiency.

Improved data processing pipeline

The system we have been using has been classified as legacy. As such, a new pipeline has been developed, using open-source software (Python), and adhering to reproducible analytical pipeline standards and best practice.

The process to implement this new pipeline was to build, test and evaluate (parallel running and comparing outputs from the new versus old system), before final evaluation confirming the pipeline was fit for purpose. The pipeline will be implemented into LCF Survey processing for FYE 2026 data.

This new pipeline has several benefits. It is robust and transparent, and more efficient in terms of time and storage, ultimately improving the production of data outputs (efficiency, quality, transparency and ease of use). This results in an improved service for our users.

A sample boost

The LCF Survey sample was boosted in April 2026 to mitigate the decline in response rates compared with pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels. It will also partially account for the cessation of the Survey on Living Conditions in 2025, data from which were previously combined with the LCF Survey to produce household income statistics.

The issued annual sample size was increased from approximately 20,000 (FYE 2026) to 32,420 (for FYE 2027) households across Great Britain.

The boost was applied to England and Wales; there was no additional boost to the sample in Scotland beyond its original size in FYE 2026, as FYE 2026 already included a Scottish boost, which was maintained for FYE 2027.

There was no boost to the sample in Northern Ireland; the Northern Ireland data are collected and funded by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

Classification of Individual Consumption by Purpose (COICOP) 2018

The LCF Survey questionnaire and coding frame were updated in July 2026 to enable us to deliver data categorised according to the latest (2018) version of the COICOP framework.

This includes increasing the granularity of data collected in the coding frame, and some areas of the questionnaire.

The updates are designed to enable continued delivery of data categorised to the previous (1999) COICOP framework, concurrently with other important existing stakeholder requirements.

The updates will impact some data from FYE 2027 onwards, and further information on the changes and any potential impacts on comparability will be shared in due course to aid interpretation of that data.

Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2020

There will be an update to the SOC 2020 coding frame in October 2026 to add new codes and other minor changes to industry descriptions.

6 . Comparability and coherence with other data sources

The main comparator for Living Costs and Food (LCF) Survey estimates of spending data are the figures on final household consumption expenditure (HHFCE), published in our Consumer trends, UK bulletin and used in UK National Accounts. For more information, see our Differences between ONS household expenditure statistics methodology.

Wealth and Assets Survey (WAS)

The Wealth and Assets Survey, produced by the ONS, is broadly comparable with the LCF, but be aware of the following differences:

- The LCF samples private households in the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland); the WAS samples private households in Great Britain only (England, Scotland and Wales).
- The LCF focuses on income and expenditure; the WAS focuses on wealth accumulation and assets.
- The LCF includes self-reported expenditure and vehicle ownership rates (based on households with at least one car or van); the WAS includes all self-reported vehicle ownership (cars, vans, motorcycles and personalised plates).
- The LCF is annual; the WAS is biennial.

7 . Definitions

Classification of Individual Consumption by Purpose (COICOP)

TheCOICOPcoding frame is an international classification developed by the United Nations Statistics Division to categorise household spending according to its purpose, such as food, clothing, housing and transport. Its standardised structure supports international comparability of household spending statistics.

Spending

Real monetary transactions, sometimes described as out-of-pocket spending, made directly by households to purchase goods and services.

Household

One person living alone, or a group of people living at the same address who share cooking facilities and a living room, sitting room or dining area.

Indicator of Dissimilarity

A measure of how closely the distribution of a characteristic in the survey matches a benchmark population distribution. A value of 0% indicates a perfect match, while higher values indicate greater differences.

Main food shopper

The main food shopper is the household member responsible for most household food and grocery shopping.

National Statistics Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC)

In 2001 to 2002, our NS-SEC was adopted for all official surveys, replacing the social class based on occupation and socio-economic group. The long-term unemployed, which fall into a separate category, are defined as those unemployed and seeking work for 12 months or more. This group is derived from our UK Standard Occupation Classification (SOC 2020) coding frame.

Weighting

A statistical process that assigns different levels of influence to survey responses to account for selection probabilities, non-response and differences between the responding sample and known population totals.

Further definitions are available in our Family spending in the UK bulletin.

8 . Related links

Living Costs and Food Survey technical report: financial year ending March 2025
Article | Released 11 June 2026
User guidance and technical information for the Living Costs and Food Survey for the financial year ending March 2025.

Family spending in the UK: April 2024 to March 2025
Bulletin | Released 11 June 2026
Average weekly household expenditure on goods and services in the UK, by age, income, economic status, socio-economic class, household composition and region.

Differences between ONS household expenditure statistics
Methodology | Last revised 6 March 2026
Explanation of the main differences between ONS statistics on household expenditure, which are published within our Consumer trends and Family spending bulletins.

Family food statistics
Statistical release | Last revised 17 September 2026
Annual statistics about food and drink purchases in the UK.

Household income inequality, UK: financial year ending 2024
Bulletin | Released 2 May 2025
Initial insight into main estimates of household incomes and inequality in the UK, with analysis of how these measures have changed over time accounting for inflation and household composition.

Effects of taxes and benefits on UK household income: financial year ending 2024
Bulletin | Released 25 September 2025
The redistribution effects on individuals and households of direct and indirect taxation and benefits received in cash or kind, analysed by household type.

9 . Cite this page

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