

THE BELGIAN FOOD BASKET

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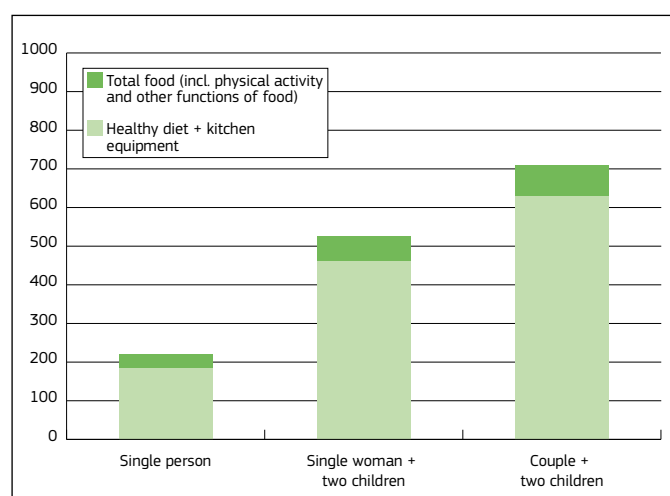
→ The European Reference Budgets Network is a project financed by the European Commission that aims to develop cross-national comparable reference budgets in all EU Member States. Reference budgets are baskets of goods and services considered necessary for an individual household to achieve an acceptable standard of living within a given country, region or city. Preparing reference budgets with a common methodology can help EU Member States to design effective and adequate income support measures and to encourage mutual learning and the exchange of best practices. More information about the project as well as the full country reports can be found on the European Commission website: <http://europa.eu/!CC79TD>

The Belgian food basket indicates the monthly budget required for an adequate food intake by three reference households (consisting of children and people of working age, in good health, without disabilities and living in the capital city). The basket includes a budget for food and for the kitchen equipment required to prepare, serve, consume and preserve this food. Furthermore, it takes into account the necessary budget for physical activity

and for other functions of food, such as its social function for example. The food basket has been developed in accordance with nutritionist recommendations and national dietary guidelines, and takes into account the cultural specificities of Belgian eating habits. The feasibility and acceptability of the basket have been verified through focus group discussions involving citizens with different socio-economic backgrounds.

1. Key findings

The Belgian Food Budget: monthly amounts in euros, Brussels, March 2015



The monthly budget required for a healthy diet in Belgium is **EUR 170 for a single person** and **EUR 630 for a family of two adults and two children**. If the other functions of food are also taken into consideration, such as eating out,

holidays, etc., the **total monthly food budget** amounts to **EUR 206 for a single person** and **EUR 709 for a family of two adults and two children**.

2. National specificities

Developing cross-national comparable European reference budgets requires the differences between the respective budgets of the Member States to be explained according to the institutional, cultural, climatological and economic context of the country concerned. The Belgian food basket takes the following factors into account:

→ Dietary habits

A Belgian food consumption survey clearly revealed that the eating habits of most Belgians are not in line with the nutritional recommendations. Belgians do not eat enough fruit and vegetables and their intake of products from the groups *Meat, fish, eggs*

and meat substitutes and Nutrient-poor, energy-dense food exceed the upper limit of the recommendations. Their daily intake of beverages amounts to 80 % of the recommended intake. Furthermore, they are among the most sedentary citizens in Europe. Only 27.7 % of the population appears to be sufficiently physically active.

➔ National food guidelines

The exact composition of the healthy food basket has been developed in accordance with the national food guidelines. The Belgian Superior Health Council, the scientific advisory body of the Federal Public Service for Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, formulated nutritional recommendations for Belgium in 2009. Regional authorities used these to develop two food pyramids. The content of the healthy food basket was developed in accordance with the Flemish active food guide pyramid. It consists of nine groups: seven essential food groups (water, grains and potatoes, vegetables, fruits, dairy and calcium-enriched soya products, meat, fish, eggs and meat substitutes and fats), a physical activity group and, lastly, an energy-dense foods group.

➔ The pricing of the basket

The pricing of the food basket was conducted in March 2015. For practical reasons, a single supermarket chain, which offers a broad range of basic quality products and is on average

10 % cheaper than other supermarkets, was chosen for pricing the basket items. However, one cannot expect all Belgians to shop at the selected supermarket chain. Stores are not always easily accessible, especially for people who do not own a car, and it would curtail people's freedom of choice to restrict the provenance of the products to a single retailer. Therefore, 10 % has been added to the prices of the selected products.

➔ Physical activity

Besides the budget required for a healthy diet, the food basket also includes a minimum budget for paid physical activity, as this is presented in the national guidelines as a general requirement for a healthy lifestyle. The active food guide pyramid recommends one hour of physical activity a day for children and adolescents, and half an hour for adults.

➔ Other functions of food

The food basket also takes other functions of food into account, which have been identified as necessary for adequate participation in Belgian society: the gastronomic, emotional, cultural and social functions of food. Eating out once in a while, inviting friends and relatives over and cooking festive meals for important holidays and celebrations, such as Christmas or birthdays, are seen as constitutive functions of food.