



European  
Commission

# THE BULGARIAN FOOD BASKET

SOFIA 

- 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 Bulgarian 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 Bulgarian 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 Bulgarian Food Budget: monthly amounts in euros<sup>(1)</sup>, Sofia, March 2015



The monthly budget required for a healthy diet in Bulgaria is **EUR 169 for a single person** and **EUR 635 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 196 for a single person** and **EUR 690 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 Bulgarian food basket takes the following factors into account:

### → Dietary habits

Research into the dietary habits of the Bulgarian population over the last 15 years has shown that Bulgarians tend to consume too much fat, meat and dairy products and insufficient fish, wholegrain bread, and fruits and vegetables, especially during winter and spring. Rates of obesity and overweight have

<sup>(1)</sup> EUR 1 = BGN 1.95583

increased significantly between 1997 and 2011. Other negative trends revealed by the study into Bulgarian eating habits are an excess of the recommended daily salt intake and high alcohol consumption among some population groups. An integrated national program has been launched by the Bulgarian Ministry of Health to tackle the challenges related to unhealthy nutrition.

### ➔ National food guidelines

The exact composition of the healthy food basket has been developed in accordance with the national food guidelines. The Ministry of Health has compiled a National Nutrition Action Plan and charged the National Centre of Public Health Protection with developing healthy eating recommendations. However, as the dietary guidelines present the recommendations in terms of the minimum intake of nutrients (vitamins, proteins, carbohydrates, etc.), it was difficult to translate the information into actual products and recommended quantities. Since Greece and Bulgaria have cultural and historical similarities, the Mediterranean diet and the Greek food-based dietary guidelines were used as a basis to determine the composition of the healthy food basket. The Greek guidelines indicate recommended daily, weekly and monthly amounts of food products.

### ➔ The pricing of the basket

The pricing of the food basket was conducted in March 2015 in easily accessible shops that offer food products of an acceptable quality. Despite the difficult living conditions experienced

by a large majority of Bulgarian households, there is a certain level of quality below which Bulgarians are unwilling to purchase products. Three popular discount retail chains were selected, as they can be found throughout the capital and Bulgaria. The pricing of the kitchen equipment was conducted in several of the most popular chain stores for household appliances.

### ➔ Physical activity

Besides the budget required for a healthy diet, the food basket also includes a minimum budget for physical activity, as this is presented in the national guidelines as a general requirement for a healthy lifestyle. However, as the Bulgarian food-based dietary guidelines only recommends free activities such as walking, gardening and hiking, no additional costs are included in the Bulgarian food basket.

### ➔ Other functions of food

The food basket also incorporates social, cultural and religious functions of food that have been identified as necessary for adequate participation in Bulgarian society. Cooking traditional dishes for important holidays and celebrations (Christmas and Easter), eating out once in a while and inviting friends and family over are seen as constitutive functions of food. Similarly, food is seen as a cultural signifier and as a way to preserve Bulgarian cultural identity.