

THE GREEK FOOD BASKET

ATHENS

- 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 Greek 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 Greek 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 Greek Food Budget: monthly amounts in euros, Athens, March 2015



- The monthly budget required for a healthy diet in Greece is **EUR 240 for a single person** and **EUR 791 for a family of two adults and two children**. If the budget needed for physical activity and the other functions of food (eating out, holidays, etc.) is also taken

into consideration, the **total monthly food budget** amounts to **EUR 295 for a single person** and **EUR 915 for a family of two adults and two children**.

- It is worth noting the **discrepancy between the cost of the food basket and the earnings of the majority of Greeks**. The minimum wage in Greece is currently EUR 683 before taxes, and wages have been falling since the onset of the crisis. Hence, a full time employee earning the minimum wage will have to spend 38% of their take-home income on food consumption alone. Moreover, the proportion of people who cannot afford a meal including meat, chicken or fish every other day has almost doubled from 7.1% in 2008 to 13.2% in 2014.
- A study conducted by the Greek Policy Analysis Research Unit also used reference budgets to estimate the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty, the latter being defined as not being able to purchase the cheapest basket of goods consistent with dignified living. The study revealed that the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty in 2013 amounted to 14% of the general population and 20% of 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 Greek food basket takes the following factors into account:

➔ Dietary habits

A survey conducted in 2001-2002 revealed that dietary habits in Greece have been moving away from the traditional Mediterranean diet. The results highlighted that Greek people tend to have an above-average intake of red meat and sweets and a lower intake of fish, poultry, vegetables, cereals and dairy products than recommended in the guidelines. However, most of the survey participants had adopted olive oil as the main added fat in their diet and consumed an amount of fruit and vegetables that fell within the recommended range. Another study, evaluating the dietary habits of Greek children aged from 3 to 18, found that a quarter of all children were overweight or obese and consumed more sweets and healthy snacks and fewer vegetables than other children.

➔ National food guidelines

The food basket has been developed in accordance with Greek national dietary guidelines, presented in the Mediterranean food pyramid. The pyramid includes the recommended categories of food as well as the frequency with which they should be consumed. It consists of 12 food types: pasta, rice and wholemeal cereals; vegetables; fruit; olive oil; dairy products; fish; poultry; olives, legumes and nuts; potatoes; eggs; sweets;

and red meat. The main characteristics of the Mediterranean diet balance, variety and moderation.

➔ The pricing of the basket

The pricing of the food basket was conducted in March 2015. A single retail chain was selected that offers a wide variety of products of good quality at relatively low prices and can be found throughout Athens. Many of the priced food items have the brand name of the chosen retailer and are cheaper on average than products with well-known brand names, though still of good quality.

➔ 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. The Greek dietary guidelines recommend undertaking 15 to 30 minutes of physical exercise every day in order to keep fit and maintain a normal body mass index. The budget included for physical activity is calculated on the basis of the average price of a monthly swimming and gym subscription.

➔ Other functions of food

The food basket also incorporates the social, cultural, religious and emotional functions of food that have been identified by focus group participants as necessary for adequate participation in Greek society. Cooking festive dishes for holidays and celebrations such as Name Days or Christmas, eating out once in a while and inviting friends and family over are seen as constitutive functions of food.