

THE FRENCH FOOD BASKET

PARIS

→ 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 French food basket indicates the monthly budget required for 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 French 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 French Food Budget: monthly amounts in euros, Paris, March 2015



The monthly budget required for a healthy diet in France is **EUR 183 for a single person** and **EUR 669 for a family of**

two adults and two children. If the budget needed for physical activity, kitchen equipment as well as the other functions of food (eating out, holidays, etc.) is also taken into consideration, the **total monthly food budget** amounts to **EUR 216 for a single person** and **EUR 757 for a family of two adults and two children.**

These costs are slightly different from those obtained within the framework of the French national reference budgets research, launched by the French National Observatory on Poverty and Social Exclusion (ONPES, 2014). In this research project, food baskets are developed using focus group data (determination of ingredients and discussion of the final basket), survey data (establishment of quantities) and expert knowledge (assurance of compliance with national dietary guidelines). Compared with the above-mentioned data, the budget for healthy food (usual menus and kitchen equipment) is 16 % higher for a single person and 13% lower for a couple with two teenagers of 11-14 and 15-17 years of age.

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 French food basket takes the following factors into account:

➔ Dietary habits

A 2012 survey on food behaviour and consumption in France revealed the typical traits of French eating habits. French people have a limited number of food intakes; they eat on average 3.9 meals/snacks a day. They consume a high variety of food products and tend to vary their menu from one day to the next. A typical view of the French eating pattern is that eating is seen as a social activity, which has to be shared with other people such as family, colleagues or friends. According to a different survey conducted in 2006 comparing the nutrition behaviour of the French people with the food recommendations of the National Nutrition and Health Programme, fewer than half the population follow the guidelines.

➔ National food guidelines

The exact composition of the healthy food basket has been developed in accordance with the national food guidelines. In 2001, the French Agency for Food Safety established a National Nutrition and Health Programme that develops nutrition guidelines for a healthy, balanced diet. The programme was most recently updated for the period 2011-2015. Eight guidelines specify the recommended number of portions of fruit and vegetables, dairy products, starchy foods, meat, poultry, fish and eggs, added fat, sweet products, salt, and water. A ninth guideline is dedicated to physical activity. Additionally, a publication of the Study Group of the Institutional Catering and Nutrition Markets (GEM-RCN) has been used as it contains more precise recommendations on the size of the portions.

➔ The pricing of the basket

The pricing of the food basket was conducted in March 2015. Most of the pricing was conducted in one of the major hypermarket chains in the Paris area, considered the second cheapest retail chain by a French consumers' association. Fruit and vegetables were priced in a discount shop, where the prices are on average cheaper than in other places. However, one cannot expect all French people to shop at the selected hypermarket chain, where shopping is likely to be very time-consuming given the size and inaccessibility of the stores, especially for consumers who do not own a car. It is reasonable to think that good portion of the shopping will be carried out in smaller shops or supermarkets. Consequently, 10% has been added to the prices of the products selected.

➔ 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 recommended daily amount of physical activity such as fast walking is an average of 30 minutes for adults and 60 minutes for children and teenagers. Considering a portion of the sporting activities such as running or cycling could be free of charge, the sport budget included in the basket is the cost of an entrance ticket to a swimming pool once every two weeks.

➔ Other functions of food

The food basket also incorporates gastronomic, cultural, emotional and social functions of food that have been identified as necessary for adequate participation in French society. Eating out once in a while, inviting friends and family over and cooking festive meals for important holidays and celebrations such as birthdays or Christmas are seen as constitutive functions of food. Giving food to a charity to help those living in poverty was also identified as part of the social dimension of food and therefore added to the food basket.