

What is the cost of a healthy food basket in Ireland in 2022?



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Foreword

This research updates the cost of a Minimum Essential Food Basket, for six household types, in Ireland to 2022.

This research uses Consensual Budget Standards methodology to establish the cost of the food element of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) for six household types in Ireland

This report presents the cost of a minimum essential food basket for six household types adjusted to reflect food costs in 2022. The cost of a minimum essential food basket and the cost of the minimum essential standard of living these household types builds on previous research which presented costs for these household types for 2014 (1), 2016 (2), 2018 (3) and 2020 (4).

To ensure the minimum essential standard of living data is reflective of the lived experience, it is necessary to periodically review what is required for a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. The 2022 minimum essential standard of living data is the product of a two-year review. The price changes were recorded in March 2022 and this update does not reflect the full extent of food cost increases in 2022.

Executive Summary

Aim

This research presents the cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) Healthy Food Basket in Ireland in 2022.

Method

This data is based on the ongoing MESL research, where researchers work with members of the public to reach agreement on the minimum needed to live and partake in the social and economic norms of everyday life. The research identifies the cost of what is required to enable a life with dignity, at a minimum but acceptable standard that people have agreed nobody should be expected to live below. The food basket is part of a minimum essential standard of living and this research identifies the cost of a basket that is nutritious and that everyone should be able to afford. The cost of a food basket in 2022 is presented for 6 household types in urban and rural areas and the cost is presented in the context of the income for these households. This 2022 update to the cost of a minimum essential standard of living healthy food basket series is based on the MESL dataset which was reviewed and rebased in 2018/2019.

Key findings

Table 1 presents the cost of a weekly minimum essential food basket (€) and the cost of the basket as a percentage of core MESL expenditure and as a percentage of net income for 6 household types in Ireland in 2022.

- From March 2020, average food costs first decreased by 0.8% in the year to March 2021, and then increased by 3.1% to March 2022. This amounts to an overall increase of 2.3% in the 24 months to March 2022, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) category for food and non-alcoholic beverages. Food price inflation continued over the course of 2022, with a further increase of 8.1% from April to October 2022 (latest CPI data available at the time of writing).
- The MESL healthy food basket also decreased in cost in 2021 by an average of 4.0%. By March of 2022, average prices in the MESL basket had increased by 2.3%. Overall, this meant an average decrease of 1.7% since 2020.

- The cost of a minimum healthy food basket represents a larger proportion of household income when this income is from social welfare, as compared to income from minimum wage employment. Households who rely on social welfare spend a larger percentage of their income on food compared to households with an employed adult.
- Basic staples, such as bread and cereals, meat, fruit, vegetables, milk, cheese and eggs, account for the largest proportion of spending in the MESL food basket.
- The cost of the food basket depends on household composition. Food costs rise as children grow older, so food is a significant cost for households with an older child. The cost of feeding a teenager is more than double the cost of feeding a pre-school child.
- Households that include a teenager and rely on social welfare would need to spend 30% of their income to meet the cost of an MESL healthy food basket. Households that have younger children and rely on social welfare would need to spend 25% of their income on the basket. When the household has an adult in minimum wage employment, this proportion improves to 24% and 20% of income, respectively.
- Low-income families may sacrifice a healthy diet, given other competing budget demands. This research highlights the challenge of trying to balance the cost of a healthy food basket against the cost of meeting other needs and expenses on a low income.
- Spending on social eating (providing for visitors, an occasional takeaway or visit to a café, and extra for Christmas) is an important part of the food basket. This reflects the social and cultural aspects of food. It aims to ensure that the minimum standard still enables households to take part in activities that are a normal part of everyday life.

Table 1: MESL healthy food basket 2022: summary of results

Two parents and two children at pre-school and primary school	€496	€691	€122	€133	25%	19%	Social welfare	€494	25%	27%
							NMW employment	€611	20%	22%
Two parents and two children at primary and secondary school	€583	€774	€150	€162	26%	21%	Social welfare	€507	30%	32%
							NMW employment	€617	24%	26%
One parent and two children at pre-school and primary school	€379	€499	€93	€100	24%	20%	Social welfare	€383	24%	26%
							NMW employment	€703	13%	14%
Single adult Working age, living alone	€249	€312	€49	€49	20%	16%	Social welfare	€208	23%	24%
							NMW employment scenario	€365	13%	14%
Pensioner, female Living alone	€293	€383	€58	€61	20%	16%	Contributory pension	€330	18%	18%
							Non-contributory pension	€319	18%	19%
Pensioner, couple	€376	€477	€71	€75	19%	16%	Contributory pension, qualified adult	€503	14%	15%
							Contributory and non-contributory pension	€577	12%	13%
							Both on non-contributory pension	€566	13%	13%

Contents	
Foreword	ii
Executive Summary	iii
1 Introduction.....	1
2 Objectives.....	2
3 Methodology	3
MESL update process	3
Income Calculations	4
Social welfare scenario	4
Employed scenario.....	5
4 Results	6
Cost of the minimum essential food basket in 2022.....	6
Why has the MESL food basket reduced in price from 2020 to 2022?	8
Cost of food basket as a proportion of household income.....	11
Factors contributing to the change in the proportion of income required to meet the MESL healthy food cost	12
Cost of the food basket by sub-category	17
Social aspects of food	17
Cost of the food basket by the age of the child in the household	18
Pre-school age	20
Primary-school age	20
Second-level age.....	20
Food as a proportion of social welfare child income supports	20
References.....	22
Appendix	23

1 Introduction

The Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) Research Centre works with members of the public to reach agreement on the minimum needed to live within the social and economic norms of everyday life in Ireland. The research identifies the cost of what is needed to live with dignity at a minimum acceptable standard that people agree nobody should be expected to live below. Through working with multiple focus groups, in-depth discussions with members of the public produce a negotiated consensus on what people regard as essential for a socially acceptable minimum standard of living.

The research places an emphasis on ‘needs, not wants’, and produces comprehensive, transparent, itemised lists (of over 2,000 items, goods and services) detailing what is required to meet minimum needs and enable an acceptable minimum standard of living. From this, budgets specifying the actual average weekly cost of a minimum acceptable standard (the Minimum Essential Standard of Living) are compiled, producing MESL budgets for 90% of households across urban and rural Ireland. This understanding of an acceptable minimum standard of living, embodies the concepts which underpin the human right to an adequate standard of living, and reflect the Irish Government definition of poverty which emphasises the ability to have a “standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally” and to participate in normal activities.

The MESL uniquely shines a light on the extent to which individuals and households can afford a standard of living which enables participation in the social and economic norms of Irish society. An income below the MESL threshold means individuals & households must choose which essentials to go without, in order to make ends meet. Further information on the research, and the detailed MESL expenditure and income needs can be found on www.budgeting.ie.

2 Objectives

1. To determine the cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) Healthy Food Basket for 2022, and to present the cost as a proportion of the core minimum essential standard of living for 6 household types in Ireland in both rural and urban areas:
 - a. 2-parent, 2-children (pre-school and primary school age)
 - b. 2-parent, 2-children (primary and secondary school age)
 - c. 1-parent, 2-children (pre-school and primary school age)
 - d. Single adult of working-age living alone
 - e. Pensioner, living alone
 - f. Pensioner couple.
2. To provide a breakdown of the cost of the food basket by subcategory.
3. To present the cost of the food basket as a percentage of household net income for:
 - a. Working-age households
 - i. Household dependent on social welfare payments only
 - ii. One adult employed full-time and earning the National Minimum Wage (NMW)
 - b. Pensioner households
 - i. Contributory pension
 - ii. Non- contributory pension
4. To analyse the cost of food for children

3 Methodology

The cost of a minimum essential food basket and the cost of the minimum essential standard of living for 6 household types was previously determined in 2012. The costs were subsequently updated for 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2020. To ensure the minimum essential standard of living data is reflective of lived experience, it is necessary to periodically review what is required for a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. The 2022 minimum essential standard of living data is the product of a two-year review completed in 2020, which included an update to the contents of the food basket and repricing of the items for each household type. As a result of the review and rebase, the 2020 and 2022 findings are not directly comparable with the findings from previous years. The minimum essential food basket is based on the final seven-day menus for each of the six households which are published in a separate document.

MESL update process

To ensure the MESL data continues to reflect lived experience, remaining relevant and grounded in social consensus, the researchers hold a series of focus groups. Here members of the public meet to review what is required for a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.

The last review took place during 2018/19, with the finalised data published in 2020. Its findings were included in the report on the cost of the MESL healthy food basket for 2020, and have formed the basis of all MESL updates since then.

MESL costings are updated annually. They are adjusted for inflation each year for up to two years in succession, and the basket is repriced in the third year. Regular repricing ensures the MESL costings remain accurate and do not rely solely on adjustment for inflation. In years when repricing is not due, the costs are adjusted for inflation.

As they had previously been priced in 2018, the MESL food baskets were repriced in 2021.

In the 2022 MESL update, the food baskets were adjusted in line with CPI inflation rates as of March 2022. Since 2020 a new method of adjusting for inflation has been used. This method applies a specific CPI sub-rate item by item, using 128 separate sub-rates. Instead of generalising price changes over the whole of the CPI basket, this approach gives a more accurate estimate for the cost of a MESL in the years between repricing the baskets.

Income Calculations

- Income calculations are based on the 2022 rates for National Minimum Wage, personal taxation and Social Welfare.
- The income scenarios are detailed below, and the calculations are shown in appendix, tables F and G.

Social welfare scenario

The social welfare income scenarios are based on 2022 rates, and assume the household has full entitlement to the relevant payments:

Table 1: State benefit payments for each household type

Two parents: JS Personal Rate + Qualified Adult + Qualified Child, Child Benefit, Back to School Clothing and Footwear

One parent: One-Parent Family Payment + Qualified Child, Child Benefit, Fuel Allowance, Back to School Clothing and Footwear

Single adult: JS Personal Rate

Pensioner, living alone: State Pension (Contributory) **OR** State Pension (Non-Contributory)

AND Living Alone Increase, Fuel Allowance, Telephone Support Allowance, Household Benefits Package

Pensioner couple: State Pension (Contributory and Qualified Adult) **OR** State Pension (Contributory and Non-Contributory) **OR** State Pension (both Non-Contributory) **AND** Fuel Allowance, Household Benefits Package

All social welfare-dependent households are assumed to be eligible for a full medical card.

Employed scenario

- Two-parent households: based on one adult in full-time (37.5 hours) employment and one stay-at-home parent
- One-parent and single-adult households: based on one adult in full-time (37.5 hours) employment

Income is net household income after tax (PAYE, PRSI and USC) and includes applicable social welfare supports, for example. Child Benefit. Means-tested social welfare supports for households with children, for example. Working Family Payment, One-Parent Family Payment, are included as applicable.

The medical card means test applies in each scenario, following HSE guidelines on medical cards.

4 Results

Cost of the minimum essential food basket in 2022

The cost of an MESL healthy food basket in 2022 for six household types in Ireland (urban and rural) is presented in Table 1. This research updates previous analyses of MESL food costs in 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020.

- In March 2022, MESL food baskets cost an average of 1.7% less than in March 2020. The MESL food budgets were repriced in 2021, and it was found that the cost of the baskets fell by an average of 4.0% between 2020 and 2021. When we compare the repriced 2021 baskets to the inflation-adjusted 2022 baskets, we see the 2022 costs have increased by an average of 2.3%. (The MESL updating process will be discussed in the following section.)
- The CPI for food and non-alcoholic beverages estimated an increase of 2.3% in average food costs from 2020 to 2022. This covers a decrease of 0.8% from 2020 to 2021 and an increase of 3.1% from 2021 to 2022.
- Food continues to account for a large proportion of minimum essential spending and is one of the most expensive categories of core MESL household expenditure. Core MESL excludes costs that vary per household, such as housing, childcare and the effect of secondary benefits. The appendix tables show a breakdown of core MESL expenditure for each household type.
- Food is the largest category for urban household with children. In the case of a working-age single adult, a pensioner living alone and pensioner couples, social inclusion costs exceed food costs.
- Food is the second-largest category for four of the six rural household types examined. In rural areas, the need for a car means that transport costs are the largest category of spending for all household types. This is due particularly to considerable increases in the cost of fuel and second-hand vehicles. Food is the

third-largest category for both pensioners living alone and pensioner couples after transport and social activities.

- Minimum food costs are highest for a two-parent household with a primary and second-level-age child, highlighting the additional minimum needs (and costs) associated with older children aged 12 and over.
- The minimum food basket costs more in a rural area: an additional 7.9%–8.3% for households with children, 1.7% for a single adult of working age household and 4.6–5.9% for pensioner households. In rural areas households need to purchase certain perishable food items, such as milk and bread, in more expensive local shops, as they live further away from larger grocery stores with lower prices.
- The minimum food costs for the working-age single-adult household type are the least expensive. In this case, both the urban and rural single-adult food basket costs €49.

Why has the MESL food basket reduced in price from 2020 to 2022?

As previously mentioned, the 2022 MESL minimum food costs are approximately 1.7% lower, on average, than in 2020. In the CPI section for food and non-alcoholic beverages, prices increased from 2020 to 2022 by 2.3%.

Several factors explain why the cost of the MESL food basket has decreased between 2020 and 2022, whereas that of the average CPI food basket has increased. Firstly, the MESL minimum food basket contains different items from the CPI average food basket.

The CPI basket contains an average selection of goods. It does not reflect the specific selections needed and consumed by different groups in society. The MESL healthy food basket, on the other hand, reflects what various types of household need for a minimum essential standard of living.

Changes in prices affect the overall cost of a MESL basket differently from the national average basket. This is because the basket of goods required for a minimum standard of living is different from the average household basket used in measuring inflation. For a fuller discussion see the [MESL 2022 Annual Update](#) report, page 10:

www.budgeting.ie/publications/mesl-2022/

The minimum food basket contains a more limited set of items than that of the average household in Ireland, and therefore does not reflect all the same changes.

Spending on staples (dairy products, fruit and vegetables, meat and fish, bread, etc.) accounts for a significantly higher proportion of the MESL food costs than in the CPI basket. Fruit and vegetables account for an average of 24% of food costs in the MESL basket, compared to 13.8% of the CPI food basket. Meat and fish similarly account for almost twice the proportion of food spending in the MESL basket as compared to the CPI food basket, at an average of 30% and 16.7% respectively. Dairy products account for an average of 12% of MESL food costs compared to 6.2% of CPI food expenditure. In the MESL basket, social spending on food represents on average 11% of food costs. (This includes the additional costs for Christmas, the pensioners' allocation for visitors, and the allowance for an occasional take-away.) In the CPI, spending on food prepared outside the home (i.e. restaurant, take-away, etc.), accounts for considerably more, at 36.6%.

The rate of change measured by the CPI gives the greatest significance to changes in price of the goods which represent the larger share of the average basket. When these items have a great (or lesser) significance in the minimum basket, the cost of that basket changes in a different way than the cost of the average basket.

For example, from 2020 to 2021, the CPI noted a decrease of 1.7% in the cost of meat, with meat accounting for 16.7% of the total CPI food basket. However, for pensioner households the MESL cost of meat fell by an average of 4.5% between 2020 and 2021, and meat accounted for 21-24% of the total pensioner MESL food basket.

Within the 2021 pensioner MESL food baskets, the cost of roast beef reduced by 24.6%, and stewing beef by over 10%. In the CPI average food basket, the cost of beef and veal decreased by 5.5%. Similarly, the cost of chicken breasts in the 2021 MESL pensioner food basket reduced by 20%, while the CPI's average decrease in the cost of poultry was 1.9%.

Also, the MESL cost of fruit and vegetables for a single adult of working age decreased by an average 1.47% between 2020 and 2021, with fruit and vegetables making up approximately 19% of the total MESL food basket for a single adult in 2021. By contrast, the CPI reported a decrease of 0.1% in the cost of fruit and 0.2% in the cost of vegetables from 2020 to 2021, with fruit and vegetables making up 16.2% of the CPI average food basket at this time.

In both examples above, the rate of price decreased in the more limited MESL food basket more sharply than in the average CPI food basket. The food groups discussed (meat and fruit and vegetables) account for a higher proportion of the overall MESL food basket cost than of the average CPI food basket. Therefore, the prices would lead to a greater overall decrease in the cost of the minimum food basket from 2020 to 2021 than in the cost of the CPI basket.

Another factor affecting the rate of change of the cost of the MESL food basket from 2020 to 2022 is the timing of the 2022 update. The annual MESL update takes place at a particular point in time, usually in the first half of the year, based on the pricing, CPI

rates, social welfare rates, minimum wage rates etc. at that time. In a typical year, when inflation rates change minimally throughout, the timing of the MESL update would not greatly affect the findings of the update.

As mentioned, the 2022 price changes were recorded in March 2022. The rest of 2022 saw exceptional levels of uncertainty and volatility around prices and inflation, especially within core MESL areas such as food. So, the 2022 MESL update did not reflect the full extent of food cost increases, which should appear in the 2023 update.

The CPI has reported 8.1% inflation in the food and non-alcoholic beverages sub-rate from April to October 2022.

Cost of food basket as a proportion of household income

The cost of the minimum food basket uses up a significant proportion of household income. However, the same minimum food cost represents a smaller proportion of household income for people in employment (due to their higher income), compared to those who depend on social welfare only.

- For working-age households dependent on social welfare, meeting the cost of the MESL food basket would require 23 – 32% of household income.
- For working-age employed households, the same minimum food basket would need 13 – 26% of household income.

Pensioner households have seen the largest decrease in the percentage of their income spent on food from 2020 to 2022. The percentage of income required for a healthy food basket has fallen by approximately three percentage points for both the pensioner living alone and pensioner couples. This is because increases in the State Pension, the Living Alone Allowance and related supports have improved their income, while the cost of the MESL food basket has fallen (as of March 2022).

Despite this improvement, and the increases in the Living Alone Allowance that have been introduced during this time, there remains a difference in the proportion of household income spent on food, when a pensioner couple is compared to a pensioner living alone. The pensioner living alone needs to use a larger percentage of their income for food. The cost of food for a pensioner living alone in an urban setting with a non-contributory pension amounts to 18.2% of their income, whereas for a pensioner couple household it amounts to 12.6%.

Working-age households depending on social welfare or in minimum wage employment have also needed to spend a lower proportion of their income on food than in 2020 (again, as of March 2022).

For a one-parent household with two children (at pre-school and primary school) and relies on social welfare, the cost of an MESL healthy food basket represents 24% of

household income. For a one-parent household in full-time NMW employment, the same food costs would represent 13% of household income.

A one-parent household in employment who is eligible for both a partial One-Parent Family Payment and Working Family Payment, would significantly increase their income compared to social welfare only. However, if they worked full time, they would need to pay for childcare. A two-parent household would not face this cost, assuming that one adult were employed and one remained a stay-at-home parent.

Of all household types, the two-parent household with an older child needs to spend the highest proportion of household income on food. Meeting the cost of an MESL healthy food basket would require 30% of this household's social welfare income in an urban setting, and 32% in a rural setting. It would require 24% of income for a household in minimum wage employment in an urban setting, and 26% in a rural setting.

Factors contributing to the change in the proportion of income required to meet the MESL healthy food cost

- The cost of the minimum food basket was an average of 1.7% lower in March 2022 than in 2020.
- The National Minimum Wage (NMW) increased from €10.10 to €10.50 per hour between 2020 and 2022.
- The higher rate of Qualified Child Increase for households with children over 12 has risen further. It increased to €45 per week in 2021 (€7 higher than the rate for children under 12) and further increased to €48 per week in 2022 (€8 higher than for children under 12).
- The Qualified Child increase for households with children under 12 increased to €38 per week in 2021 and further increased to €40 per week in 2022.
- Both Contributory and Non-Contributory State Pension rates increased by €5 a week in 2022.
- The Living Alone Allowance increased by €5 in 2021 and by a further €3 in 2022. The Living Alone Allowance now stands at €22 weekly for people aged over 66 who live alone and receive a social welfare payment.

- The weekly rate of Fuel Allowance increased by €3.50 in 2021 and €5.00 in 2022. There were further cost-of-living lump sum payments (€225 in total) to people receiving Fuel Allowance in the first half of 2022. The income calculations in this report take these Fuel Allowance increases and lump sums into account where relevant.
- The Fuel Allowance is included in the household income of the older-person and one-parent household types.

Table 3 MESL healthy food basket by sub-category for six household types (urban and rural)

	Two parent, two child		Two parent, two child		One parent, two child		Single adult		Pensioner, female		Pensioner couple	
	Pre-school and primary school		Primary and secondary school		Pre-school and primary school		Working-age, living alone		Living alone			
Urban	Cost per week	Percent of food MESL	Cost per week	Percent of food MESL	Cost per week	Percent of food MESL	Cost per week	Percent of food MESL	Cost per week	Percent of food MESL	Cost per week	Percent of food MESL
Bread and cereals	€ 12.81	10%	€ 15.47	10%	€ 9.10	10%	€ 2.89	6%	€ 3.76	6%	€ 5.69	8%
Meat	€ 30.42	25%	€ 35.68	24%	€ 25.52	27.6%	€ 12.91	27%	€ 14.30	25%	€ 15.61	22%
Fish	€ 6.62	5%	€ 8.14	5%	€ 4.44	5%	€ 2.67	5%	€ 3.69	6%	€ 4.64	7%
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 19.93	16%	€ 22.63	15%	€ 13.12	14%	€ 4.27	9%	€ 4.29	7%	€ 6.34	9%
Oils and fats	€ 1.53	1%	€ 1.77	1%	€ 1.15	1%	€ 0.80	2%	€ 0.88	2%	€ 1.02	1%
Fruit	€ 9.46	8%	€ 11.01	7%	€ 7.52	8%	€ 3.25	7%	€ 4.44	8%	€ 6.79	10%
Vegetables	€ 19.06	16%	€ 22.35	15%	€ 14.68	16%	€ 7.82	16%	€ 9.96	17%	€ 13.41	19%
Sugar, jam, honey etc.	€ 1.71	1%	€ 1.93	1%	€ 1.07	1%	€ 0.49	1%	€ 0.56	1%	€ 0.98	1%
Food products n.e.c.	€ 3.33	3%	€ 3.89	3%	€ 2.75	3%	€ 1.07	2%	€ 1.57	3%	€ 2.26	3%
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 2.39	2%	€ 2.44	2%	€ 2.37	3%	€ 0.74	2%	€ 1.58	3%	€ 1.71	2%
Soft drinks, juices etc.	€ 2.46	2%	€ 2.89	2%	€ 2.06	2%	€ 0.80	2%	€ 0.93	2%	€ 0.93	1%

	Two parent, two child		Two parent, two child		One parent, two child		Single adult		Pensioner, female		Pensioner couple	
	Pre-school and primary school		Primary and secondary school		Pre-school and primary school		Working-age, living alone		Living alone			
	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%
Rural	Cost per week	Percent of food MESL	Cost per week	Percent of Food MESL	Cost per week	Percent of food MESL	Cost per week	Percent of food MESL	Cost per week	Percent of food MESL	Cost per week	Percent of food MESL
Snacks and treats	€ 5.36	4%	€ 6.40	4%	€ 3.99	4%	€ 1.31	3%	€ 3.84	7%	€ 3.35	5%
Cafes, take-away, etc.	€ 4.98	4%	€ 12.47	8%	€ 3.07	3%	€ 8.88	18%	€ 0.00	0%	€ 0.00	0%
Social	€ 2.28	2%	€ 2.63	2%	€ 1.72	2%	€ 0.75	2%	€ 8.17	14%	€ 8.42	12%
Bread and cereals	€ 21.25	16%	€ 25.22	16%	€ 15.43	15%	€ 3.82	8%	€ 6.16	10%	€ 9.60	13%
Meat	€ 30.42	23%	€ 35.68	22.2%	€ 25.52	26%	€ 12.91	26%	€ 14.30	24%	€ 15.61	21%
Fish	€ 6.62	5%	€ 8.14	5%	€ 4.44	4%	€ 2.67	5%	€ 3.69	6%	€ 4.62	6%
Milk, cheese and eggs	€ 21.27	16%	€ 24.16	15%	€ 13.99	14%	€ 4.49	9%	€ 4.50	7%	€ 6.55	9%
Oils and fats	€ 1.53	1%	€ 1.77	1%	€ 1.15	1%	€ 0.80	2%	€ 0.88	1%	€ 1.02	1%
Fruit	€ 9.46	7%	€ 11.01	7%	€ 7.52	8%	€ 2.85	6%	€ 4.44	7%	€ 6.79	9%
Vegetables	€ 18.03	14%	€ 21.31	13%	€ 14.68	15%	€ 7.82	16%	€ 9.96	16%	€ 13.42	18%
Sugar, jam, honey etc.	€ 1.71	1%	€ 1.93	1%	€ 1.07	1%	€ 0.49	1%	€ 0.56	1%	€ 0.98	1%
Food products n.e.c.	€ 3.33	3%	€ 3.89	2%	€ 2.75	3%	€ 1.07	2%	€ 1.57	3%	€ 2.26	3%

	Two parent, two child		Two parent, two child		One parent, two child		Single adult		Pensioner, female		Pensioner couple	
	Pre-school and primary school		Primary and secondary school		Pre-school and primary school		Working-age, living alone		Living alone			
Coffee, tea and cocoa	€ 2.39	2%	€ 2.44	2%	€ 2.37	2%	€ 0.74	1%	€ 1.58	3%	€ 1.73	2%
Soft drinks, juice etc.	€ 2.46	2%	€ 2.89	2%	€ 2.06	2%	€ 0.80	2%	€ 0.93	2%	€ 0.90	1%
Snacks and treats	€ 5.36	4%	€ 6.40	4%	€ 3.99	4%	€ 1.31	3%	€ 3.84	6%	€ 3.35	4%
Cafes, take-away, etc.	€ 5.21	4%	€ 12.92	8%	€ 3.10	3%	€ 8.93	18%	€ 0.00	0%	€ 0.00	0%
Social	€ 2.46	2%	€ 2.85	2%	€ 1.86	2%	€ 0.76	2%	€ 8.22	14%	€ 8.50	11%

n.e.c – not elsewhere classified

Cost of the food basket by sub-category

A breakdown of the cost of the basket by sub-category is presented in Table 2. Looking at the food basket by category, we see that five categories – meat, bread and cereals, dairy products, fruit, vegetables – account for 71%-78% of the overall minimum food costs for households with children; 63%-70% for pensioner households; and 65% for the working-age single adult.

As in previous years, these categories (meat, bread and cereals, dairy products, fruit, and vegetables) are amongst the largest areas of food expenditure for all household types.

Meat continues to represent the largest share of the food basket cost. It accounts for 21-28% of the household's MESL food basket cost, and the combined cost of fruit and vegetables represents a further 20-29% of the cost:

- Meat: 21% for a pensioner couple, rural area; 27.6% for one parent with two children at pre-school and primary school, urban area
- Fruit and veg: 20% for two parents with two children at primary and secondary school, rural area; 29% for a pensioner couple, urban area

A household with an older child has higher minimum food costs in all categories, reflecting the additional needs for this age group.

Social aspects of food

The social aspects of food are important for all household types, especially for single individual household types. Food poverty is multi-dimensional. It encompasses both the lack of access to a nutritionally adequate diet, and the consequential impact on health and social participation.

The MESL food baskets are based on nutritionally balanced weekly menus. The budgets also allow for the social aspects of food, which vary by household. Parents and working-age adults have an allowance for a monthly takeaway as a break from cooking; and working-age adults can also have a deli-lunch on a Friday.

Pensioners are allotted extra for visitors. Since 2020, the social aspect of the food basket has also included additional food costs for Christmas. The focus groups agreed that an

extra amount equivalent to an average week's grocery bill would be appropriate for Christmas.

These allocations ensure that the social and cultural aspects of food are reflected in the healthy food baskets, and that households can take part in activities that are seen as a normal part of everyday life.

Spending in this area accounts for 14%-20% of minimum food costs for a household with a working-age single adult and for a pensioner living alone. The focus groups agreed that these costs are a minimum need and reflect the extra costs of social inclusion for people living alone.

Working-age single adults spend a higher proportion of their overall food costs on social eating than other households do. It represents 20% of their minimum food expenditure in both urban and rural areas.

Expenditure for pensioner households include extra spending for visitors. This amounts to approximately €7.20 of the weekly food costs. The focus groups consider it essential to be able to afford to host family or friends for a drink or a meal once a month; this is a necessary part of an acceptable minimum standard of living.

Social eating costs for households with children are considerably smaller than for households of single individuals. The social eating costs for family households averages 7% of their total food costs, which is one-third of what a working-age single adult spends on it.

Cost of the food basket by the age of the child in the household

The cost of a child's minimum food needs are presented for three stages of childhood: pre-school, primary school and secondary school age (Table 4). These costs represent the proportion of a household's minimum food basket needed for a child, by age (For more, see the 2012 *Cost of a Child* report:

budgeting.ie/download/pdf/cost_of_a_child_full_report.pdf)

Table 4 MESL core and food expenditure by child age-group

		Pre-school	Primary	Secondary
Urban	Food	€22.53	€33.98	€49.89
	MESL other costs	€29.76	€57.31	€89.59
	Total MESL core	€52.29	€91.29	€139.48
	Food % MESL core	43.1%	37.2%	35.8%
Rural	Food	€24.46	€36.55	€53.54
	MESL other costs	€29.70	€54.22	€84.38
	Total MESL core	€54.16	€90.77	€137.92
	Food % MESL core	45.2%	40.3%	38.8%
Child social welfare income supports				
Income	Child Benefit	€32.31	€32.31	€32.31
	Increase for a Qualified Child	€40.00	€40.00	€48.00
	Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance	€0.00	€3.08	€5.48
	Total social welfare	€72.31	€75.38	€85.79
Food % income	Urban	31%	45%	58%
	Rural	34%	48%	62%

- Food costs for a child increase as the child gets older, resulting in significant costs for a house with a child aged 12 or over of second-level age.
- A minimum essential food basket for a teenager in an urban area is 47% more expensive per week than the costs for a primary-school-age child, and more than double (121%) those for a pre-school-age child.

- Food remains the largest core MESL cost for the three urban child age-groups examined, apart from childcare.

Pre-school age

Food expenditure as a percentage of core MESL costs is 43.1% in an urban area and 45.2% in a rural area. Other core MESL costs are lower in a rural area at this stage of childhood, and therefore food represents a larger proportion of spending.

This age-group has the lowest food costs of the age-groups considered.

Primary-school age

Food represents between 37.2% and 40.3% of core MESL expenditure for urban and rural areas respectively.

As expected, food costs rise for this age-group. Food costs €11.45 (51%) more per week for a primary-school child than for a pre-school child.

Second-level age

In 2022, the cost of an MESL healthy food basket in urban areas for this age-group was €49.89. This is €15.91 more than for a primary-school-age child and €27.36 more than for a pre-school-age child.

Food as a proportion of social welfare child income supports

Table 3 also compares the MESL food cost for each age-group to the weekly value of child-related social welfare income supports.

The percentage of child-related payments required to meet the cost of the minimum food basket has decreased from 2020 to 2022 by between 1% and 9%. This is because child income supports have increased at a greater rate than MESL food costs.

Qualified Child Increase has gone up in both 2021 and 2022, with a further increase in the higher rate for children over 12. This increase acknowledges the additional costs of having an older child as a part of a household. However, the higher costs for an older

child's minimum food need still require a larger proportion of income than for younger children.

While the combined weekly value of child income supports exceeds the cost of the food basket for the three age-groups in question, food is only one area of expenditure.

Households with children also face other costs – including clothing, education and social inclusion – and the cost of meeting the minimum needs of the household overall.

References

1. Macmahon B, Weld, G. The cost of a minimum essential food basket in the Republic of Ireland. Study for six household types. Dublin: **safefood**; 2015.
2. MacMahon B, Moloney, N. What is the cost of a healthy food basket in the Republic of Ireland in 2016?; 2016.
3. What is the cost of a healthy food basket in the Republic of Ireland in 2018?; 2018.
4. What is the cost of a healthy food basket in the Republic of Ireland in 2020?; 2020.

Appendix Supplementary tables

Table 5. Urban Household Core MESL Expenditure in 2022 excluding Housing, Childcare and the effect of secondary benefits.

		Two Parents	Two Parents	One Parent	Single Adult	Pensioner	Pensioner
		Pre-School & Primary	Primary & Secondary	Pre-School & Primary	Working Age	Living Alone	Couple
Core MESL	Food	€122.33	€149.69	€92.58	€48.65	€57.96	€71.14
	Clothing	€34.17	€36.56	€25.46	€12.58	€13.05	€24.15
	Personal Care	€19.60	€24.49	€13.04	€9.75	€11.30	€17.44
	Health	€14.38	€17.88	€11.02	€5.31	€12.78	€25.42
	Household Goods	€24.58	€24.79	€23.64	€6.14	€20.85	€22.48
	Household Services	€6.21	€6.21	€6.21	€4.15	€15.39	€8.47
	Communications	€20.64	€26.24	€15.04	€14.83	€19.82	€25.95
	Social Inclusion & Participation	€78.26	€99.58	€62.28	€55.98	€70.43	€87.00
	Education	€14.16	€31.73	€14.16	€3.24	€0.00	€0.00
	Transport	€50.70	€53.40	€26.70	€33.12	€6.92	€6.92
	Household Energy	€38.67	€41.35	€36.47	€24.14	€33.02	€37.81
	Personal Costs	€9.22	€9.22	€7.69	€7.53	€4.91	€2.29
	Insurance	€36.85	€35.82	€22.39	€13.88	€16.93	€31.79
	Savings & Contingencies	€26.29	€26.29	€22.58	€10.00	€10.00	€15.00
Expenditure	Core MESL	€496.07	€583.26	€379.25	€249.31	€293.36	€375.87
	Food	€122.33	€149.69	€92.58	€48.65	€57.96	€71.14
	% MESL	24.7%	25.7%	24.4%	19.5%	19.8%	18.9%

Table 6. Rural Household Core MESL Expenditure in 2022 excluding Housing, Childcare and effect of secondary benefits.

		Two Parents	Two Parents	One Parent	Single Adult	Pensioner	Pensioner
		Pre-School & Primary	Primary & Secondary	Pre-School & Primary	Working Age	Living Alone	Couple
Core MESL	Food	€132.55	€161.63	€99.94	€49.46	€60.62	€75.32
	Clothing	€34.95	€37.32	€26.30	€12.92	€13.14	€24.31
	Personal Care	€19.60	€24.49	€13.03	€9.46	€11.30	€17.54
	Health	€13.13	€16.14	€10.06	€5.02	€12.20	€24.26
	Household Goods	€24.08	€24.29	€23.07	€6.30	€20.85	€22.35
	Household Services	€8.37	€8.37	€8.37	€2.02	€15.25	€12.76
	Communications	€22.99	€28.59	€17.38	€16.78	€19.82	€25.95
	Social Inclusion & Participation	€77.15	€97.28	€62.14	€47.11	€62.28	€78.08
	Education	€14.09	€30.56	€14.09	€3.24	€0.00	€0.00
	Transport	€207.68	€207.68	€115.98	€85.07	€84.51	€92.17
	Household Energy	€51.05	€54.09	€48.56	€36.20	€45.42	€50.08
	Personal Costs	€9.22	€9.22	€7.69	€7.53	€4.91	€2.29
	Insurance	€49.40	€48.36	€29.03	€20.45	€22.86	€37.33
	Savings & Contingencies	€26.29	€26.29	€23.03	€10.00	€10.00	€15.00
Expenditure	Core MESL	€690.54	€774.30	€498.67	€311.58	€383.15	€477.44
	Food	€132.55	€161.63	€99.94	€49.46	€60.62	€75.32
	% MESL	19.2%	20.9%	20.0%	15.9%	15.8%	15.8%

Table 7. Comparison of cost of a minimum essential food basket by year

MESL Healthy Food Cost by Year			Adjusted by CPI Division - Food and Non-alcoholic beverages								Rebase		
			2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Urban	Two Parents & Two Children	Pre-School & Primary School	€125.09	€127.10	€125.19	€121.81	€121.20	€118.05	€115.92	€115.23	€120.75	€119.59	€122.33
	Two Parents & Two Children	Primary & Secondary School	€150.26	€152.66	€150.37	€146.31	€145.58	€141.79	€139.24	€138.41	€147.44	€146.41	€149.69
	One Parent & Two Children	Pre-School & Primary School	€96.14	€97.68	€96.22	€93.62	€93.15	€90.73	€89.10	€88.56	€91.69	€90.61	€92.58
	Single Adult	Working-age, living alone	€57.01	€57.92	€57.05	€55.51	€55.23	€53.80	€52.83	€52.51	€47.58	€47.54	€48.65
	Pensioner, Female	Living Alone	€62.54	€63.54	€62.59	€60.90	€60.59	€59.02	€57.96	€57.61	€60.04	€56.63	€57.96
	Pensioner Couple		€82.34	€83.66	€82.41	€80.18	€79.78	€77.71	€76.31	€75.85	€74.69	€69.69	€71.14

What is the cost of a healthy food basket in Ireland in 2022?

Rural	Two Parents & Two Children	Pre-School & Primary School	€137.77	€139.97	€137.87	€134.15	€133.48	€130.01	€127.67	€126.90	€138.14	€129.27	€132.55
	Two Parents & Two Children	Primary & Secondary School	€164.67	€167.30	€164.79	€160.34	€159.54	€155.39	€152.60	€151.68	€168.94	€157.72	€161.63
	One Parent & Two Children	Pre-School & Primary School	€104.63	€106.31	€104.71	€101.89	€101.38	€98.74	€96.96	€96.38	€102.72	€97.58	€99.94
	Single Adult	Working-age, living alone	€52.83	€53.68	€52.87	€51.44	€51.19	€49.86	€48.96	€48.66	€50.51	€48.27	€49.46
	Pensioner, Female	Living Alone	€66.34	€67.40	€66.39	€64.60	€64.28	€62.61	€61.48	€61.11	€62.15	€59.18	€60.62
	Pensioner Couple		€89.08	€90.51	€89.15	€86.74	€86.31	€84.06	€82.55	€82.06	€76.74	€73.73	€75.32
CPI	Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages			1.6	-1.5	-2.7	-0.5	-2.6	-1.8	-0.6	-1.6	-0.8	3.1

Table 8. Comparison of cost of a minimum essential food basket by sub-category for urban households

	Two Parents & Two Children			Two Parents & Two Children			One Parent & Two Children		
	Pre-School & Primary School			Primary & Secondary School			Pre-School & Primary School		
	2020	2022	Change	2020	2022	Change	2020	2022	Change
Bread and cereals	12.71	12.81	0.7%	15.56	15.47	-0.6%	9.15	9.10	-0.5%
Meat	29.32	30.42	3.7%	34.40	35.68	3.7%	24.61	25.52	3.7%
Fish	5.17	6.62	28.0%	6.53	8.14	24.7%	3.56	4.44	25.0%
Milk, cheese and eggs	17.86	19.93	11.6%	20.34	22.63	11.3%	12.00	13.12	9.3%
Oils and fats	2.66	1.53	-42.4%	3.06	1.77	-42.2%	1.94	1.15	-40.8%
Fruit	10.24	9.46	-7.7%	11.92	11.01	-7.7%	8.14	7.52	-7.5%
Vegetables	19.80	19.06	-3.7%	23.06	22.35	-3.1%	15.21	14.68	-3.5%
Sugar, jam, honey ...	1.28	1.71	33.8%	1.45	1.93	33.5%	0.81	1.07	31.7%
Food products n.e.c.	3.22	3.33	3.3%	3.76	3.89	3.5%	2.63	2.75	4.2%
Coffee, tea and cocoa	2.51	2.39	-4.6%	2.55	2.44	-4.6%	2.49	2.37	-4.7%
Soft drinks, juices ...	2.36	2.46	4.5%	2.76	2.89	4.5%	1.98	2.06	4.5%
Snacks & treats	5.13	5.36	4.6%	6.13	6.40	4.4%	3.84	3.99	3.9%
Cafes, take-away, etc.	6.26	4.98	-20.5%	13.36	12.47	-6.6%	3.65	3.07	-15.7%
Social	2.22	2.28	2.4%	2.57	2.63	2.3%	1.69	1.72	1.7%

Table 8 continued

	Single Adult			Pensioner			Pensioner Couple		
	Working-age, living alone			Living Alone					
	2020	2022	Change	2020	2022	Change	2020	2022	Change
Bread and cereals	2.80	2.89	3.4%	5.35	3.76	-29.8%	7.94	5.69	-28.3%
Meat	12.30	12.91	4.9%	15.11	14.30	-5.4%	16.92	15.61	-7.8%
Fish	2.24	2.67	19.3%	2.87	3.69	28.6%	3.81	4.64	21.8%
Milk, cheese and eggs	4.39	4.27	-2.8%	4.39	4.29	-2.3%	7.02	6.34	-9.6%
Oils and fats	0.99	0.80	-19.0%	1.06	0.88	-17.5%	1.30	1.02	-21.3%
Fruit	3.28	3.25	-1.0%	5.14	4.44	-13.5%	7.39	6.79	-8.2%
Vegetables	7.80	7.82	0.3%	10.36	9.96	-3.8%	13.68	13.41	-1.9%
Sugar, jam, honey ...	0.35	0.49	36.8%	0.42	0.56	31.5%	0.72	0.98	35.9%
Food products n.e.c.	1.13	1.07	-5.4%	1.44	1.57	8.5%	2.05	2.26	10.4%
Coffee, tea and cocoa	0.68	0.74	8.7%	1.43	1.58	10.3%	1.59	1.71	7.4%
Soft drinks, juices ...	0.76	0.80	4.5%	0.90	0.93	2.8%	0.90	0.93	2.8%
Snacks & treats	1.34	1.31	-1.7%	3.57	3.84	7.6%	3.11	3.35	7.7%
Cafes, take-away, etc.	8.78	8.88	1.2%	0.00	0.00	0.0%	0.00	0.00	0.0%
Social	0.73	0.75	2.5%	7.98	8.17	2.3%	8.26	8.42	1.9%

Table 9. Comparison of cost of a minimum essential food basket by sub-category for rural households

	Two Parents & Two Children			Two Parents & Two Children			One Parent & Two Children		
	Pre-School & Primary School			Primary & Secondary School			Pre-School & Primary School		
Bread and cereals	19.17	21.25	10.8%	22.52	25.22	12.0%	14.52	15.43	6.3%
Meat	33.47	30.42	-9.1%	38.89	35.68	-8.2%	26.30	25.52	-3.0%
Fish	6.53	6.62	1.5%	7.54	8.14	8.0%	4.89	4.44	-9.2%
Milk, cheese and eggs	19.92	21.27	6.8%	22.66	24.16	6.6%	13.25	13.99	5.6%
Oils and fats	2.40	1.53	-36.2%	2.76	1.77	-36.1%	1.77	1.15	-35.0%
Fruit	12.47	9.46	-24.2%	15.09	11.01	-27.1%	9.63	7.52	-21.9%
Vegetables	18.47	18.03	-2.4%	21.76	21.31	-2.1%	14.96	14.68	-1.8%
Sugar, jam, honey ...	0.50	1.71	240.8%	0.58	1.93	230.3%	0.40	1.07	166.4%
Food products n.e.c.	2.24	3.33	48.7%	2.62	3.89	48.6%	1.86	2.75	48.1%
Coffee, tea and cocoa	2.86	2.39	-16.2%	3.28	2.44	-25.7%	2.05	2.37	15.8%
Soft drinks, juices ...	3.59	2.46	-31.5%	4.23	2.89	-31.8%	3.10	2.06	-33.4%
Snacks & treats	3.14	5.36	70.9%	3.76	6.40	70.4%	2.22	3.99	80.0%
Cafes, take-away, etc.	3.83	5.21	36.0%	8.56	12.92	50.8%	2.30	3.10	34.5%
Social	0.00	2.46	0.0%	0.00	2.85	0.0%	0.00	1.86	0.0%

Table 9 continued

	Single Adult			Pensioner			Pensioner Couple		
	Working-age, living alone			Living Alone					
Bread and cereals	4.64	3.82	-17.7%	7.89	6.16	-21.8%	9.33	9.60	2.9%
Meat	9.56	12.91	35.0%	11.33	14.30	26.2%	25.87	15.61	-39.7%
Fish	1.93	2.67	38.2%	2.54	3.69	45.4%	3.46	4.62	33.7%
Milk, cheese and eggs	4.39	4.49	2.2%	4.13	4.50	9.0%	7.39	6.55	-11.3%
Oils and fats	1.41	0.80	-43.0%	1.41	0.88	-37.6%	1.74	1.02	-41.1%
Fruit	6.50	2.85	-56.1%	6.28	4.44	-29.3%	6.72	6.79	1.0%
Vegetables	4.77	7.82	64.0%	10.91	9.96	-8.7%	11.23	13.42	19.5%
Sugar, jam, honey ...	0.19	0.49	150.0%	0.19	0.56	187.1%	0.21	0.98	377.7%
Food products n.e.c.	2.03	1.07	-47.1%	1.73	1.57	-9.4%	1.07	2.26	110.3%
Coffee, tea and cocoa	2.38	0.74	-69.0%	2.51	1.58	-37.2%	2.23	1.73	-22.6%
Soft drinks, juices ...	1.53	0.80	-47.6%	0.84	0.93	10.2%	1.68	0.90	-46.7%
Snacks & treats	0.81	1.31	62.2%	2.40	3.84	60.2%	2.15	3.35	55.4%
Cafes, take-away, etc.	5.60	8.93	59.5%	0.00	0.00	0.0%	0.00	0.00	0.0%
Social	1.54	0.76	-50.5%	9.45	8.22	-13.1%	9.42	8.50	-9.8%

Table 10. Household Income calculations for working-age households in 2022

		Two Parents	Two Parents	One Parent	Single Adult
Social Welfare		Pre-School & Primary	Primary & Secondary	Pre-School & Primary	Working Age
Primary SW	Adult 1 (JS / OFP)	€208.00	€208.00	€208.00	€208.00
	Adult 2 (JS / QA)	€138.00	€138.00	€0.00	€0.00
	Qualified Child Increase	€80.00	€88.00	€80.00	€0.00
	TOTAL PRIMARY SW	€426.00	€434.00	€288.00	€208.00
Secondary SW	Child Benefit	€64.62	€64.62	€64.62	€0.00
	BSCFA	€3.08	€8.56	€3.08	€0.00
	Fuel Allowance	€0.00	€0.00	€22.10	€0.00
	Christmas Bonus	€0.00	€0.00	€5.54	€0.00
	Medical Card	Full	Full	Full	Full
	Household Income	€493.69	€507.17	€383.33	€208.00

Table 10 continued

		Two Parents	Two Parents	One Parent	Single Adult
Minimum Wage					
Nmw Salary	Gross Salary	€393.75	€393.75	€393.75	€393.75
	PAYE Income Tax	€0.00	€0.00	€18.68	€13.37
	USC	€4.41	€4.41	€4.41	€4.41
	PRSI	€10.71	€10.71	€10.71	€10.71
	Net Salary	€378.63	€378.63	€359.95	€365.27
	Child Benefit	€64.62	€64.62	€64.62	
	Working Family Payment	€165.00	€165.00	€64.00	
	BSCFA	€3.08	€8.56	€3.08	
	One-Parent Family			€185.50	
	Fuel Allowance			€22.10	
	Christmas Bonus			€3.57	
	Medical Card	Full	Full	Full	FULL
	Household Income	€611.32	€616.80	€702.80	€365.27

Table 11. Household Income calculations for pensioner households in 2022

		Pensioner Living Alone	Pensioner Living Alone	Pensioner Couple	Pensioner Couple	Pensioner Couple
State Pension		Non-Contributory	Contributory	Both Non-Contributory	Contributory & Non-Contributory	Contributory & Qualified Adult
Primary Social Welfare	Pension 1	€242.00	€253.30	€242.00	€253.30	€253.30
	Pension 2 / QA / Living Alone	€22.00	€22.00	€242.00	€242.00	€168.70
	Fuel Allowance	€22.10	€22.10	€22.10	€22.10	€22.10
	HBP (Electricity/Gas, TV Licence)	€25.17	€25.17	€50.33	€50.33	€50.33
	Telephone Support Allowance	€2.50	€2.50	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
	Christmas Bonus	€5.08	€5.29	€9.31	€9.53	€8.12
	TOTAL PRIMARY SW	€318.84	€330.36	€565.74	€577.26	€502.55
Secondary Social Welfare	Household Benefits Package	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE
	Medical Card	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE
	Household Income	€318.84	€330.36	€565.74	€577.26	€502.55

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