

# THE PORTUGUESE FOOD BASKET

## LISBON

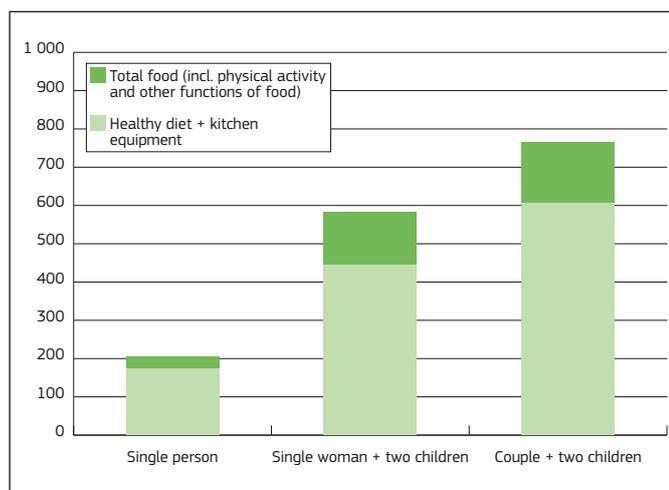
- The European Reference Budgets Network is a project financed by the European Commission that aims to develop cross-national, comparable reference budgets in all EU Member States. Reference budgets are baskets of goods and services considered necessary for an individual household to reach an acceptable 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 Portuguese 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 Portuguese 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 Portuguese Food Budget: monthly amounts in euros, Lisbon, March 2015



- The monthly budget required for a healthy diet in Portugal is **EUR 173 for a single person** and **EUR 606 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

taken into consideration, the **total monthly food budget** amounts to **EUR 204 for a single person** and **EUR 766 for a family of two adults and two children**.

- Portugal had already developed a reference budget in the framework of a research project on the Minimum Income Standard for Portugal (RAP: Rendimento Adequado em Portugal). Despite differing methods in the selection of basket items and in the pricing procedure, RAP food budgets are only a little lower than the budgets established in the framework of the European Reference Budgets Network.

## 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 Portuguese food basket takes the following factors into account:

## ➔ Dietary habits

Data on eating habits of the Portuguese population are lacking, as the only national survey on food consumption dates back to 1980. However, some information can be deduced from the estimates of surveys on households' income and expenses and from data in the food balance sheets, published annually by the National Institute of Statistics. From 2008 to 2012, during the period of the economic crisis, food availability data suggest a hypercaloric food pattern. The Portuguese tend to consume too few fruits and vegetables and to have a too high intake of meat, fish and eggs, as well as of oils and fats. Furthermore, food insecurity became a matter of concern for public health authorities, which led to the creation of a monitoring system in 2011: INFOFAMILIA Survey. The most recent data show that, in 2013, about 17.3% of the Portuguese population has reported changes in eating patterns or a reduction in food intake due to economic constraints. Data from a food consumption study conducted by the Institute of Public Health at the University of Porto also give useful information on dietary habits, even though the sample used is not representative of the Portuguese population as a whole.

## ➔ National food guidelines

The exact composition of the healthy food basket has been developed in accordance with the national food guidelines. The promotion of a healthy diet at national level is recently launched in Portugal: in 2011, the Ministry of Health initiated the National Programme for the Promotion of Healthy Eating. Originally created in 1977, the food wheel guide was revised in 2003. It gives information on the recommended quantity of food for three population groups: children aged 1 to 3, active men and male adolescents, and the rest of the population. The food wheel is composed of seven food groups: potatoes, cereals and cereal products; vegetables; fruits; milk and dairy products; meat, fish, seafood and eggs; pulses; fat and oils. Furthermore, recommendations from international organisations, such as the World Health Organisation, were used to build the food basket.

## ➔ The pricing of the basket

The pricing of the food basket was conducted in March 2015 and based on two main food-shopping patterns, suggested by the participants of the focus groups, namely weekly shopping for fresh foods in local traditional shops (e.g. market or 'local' supermarket) and monthly shopping for other foods in a hypermarket.

The selection of the hypermarket was carried out on the basis of a study of the Portuguese Association for Consumer Protection, comparing supermarket prices in Portugal. A single retailer was selected, as it offers good-quality products at acceptable prices and is present throughout Portugal. Furthermore, it offers the advantage of an online web store and of complete online information about prices.

## ➔ Variations to the Portuguese food budget

Focus group participants challenged the assumption that all meals in the healthy food basket are prepared at home. Children generally have state-subsidised lunch at school canteens. The maximum price of a canteen meal is EUR 1.46, which is cheaper than the equivalent cooked at home (EUR 1.66). Taking into account this practice in the food basket would lower the monthly household budget by EUR 6.90. On the other hand, focus group participants argued that working adults should be able to have lunch in the canteen of their workplace, or in a restaurant nearby. Given the difficulty in identifying an adequate frequency, several hypotheses were put forward and considered that the extra cost of eating out on week days was equal to the meal allowance for civil servants: EUR 4.27 per meal.

## ➔ Physical activity

Besides the budget needed 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. For adults, free activities such as walking, running, cycling or playing football are included. For children, paid activities such as the entrance fee for a municipal swimming pool, dancing classes or football lessons are also taken into account.

## ➔ Other functions of food

The food basket also takes the emotional, social and cultural functions of food into account, which have been identified by focus group participants as necessary for adequate participation in Portuguese 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. Focus group discussions also highlighted the role of food in the preservation of cultural identity and traditions.