

The cost of remoteness: Reflecting higher living costs in remote rural Scotland when measuring fuel poverty 2023 update

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Executive summary

The Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP), Loughborough University, has pioneered research into publicly determined minimum living standards through its Minimum Income Standard (MIS) programme since 2008. MIS sets out what the public in the UK agree households need in for a minimum socially acceptable standard of living – that is, not what is needed just for survival, but to participate in society, to live with dignity. Ongoing MIS research produces annually updated income benchmarks for a range of household types in urban UK.

The Scottish Government commissioned CRSP to undertake research in remote rural Scotland to identify what is needed for a minimum socially acceptable standard of living in these areas, and to determine where there are different and/or additional needs and costs compared to urban UK. This ongoing research and analysis is needed as the MIS income benchmarks are key to the Scottish fuel poverty calculation detailed in the [Fuel Poverty \(Targets, Definition and Strategy\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#).

The primary research – which provided the basis of the 2021 estimates (Davis et al, 2021) – in remote rural Scotland was based on discussions with groups of people from different sorts of households, living in remote rural mainland and island areas. Groups were tasked with reflecting on the needs of households in these locations and how these minimum needs – and therefore minimum household budgets – differ from those established through ongoing research in urban UK. The research established a baseline of minimum needs for these areas and used these to calculate a percentage ‘uplift’ to be applied to the MIS benchmarks in the Scottish fuel poverty calculation.

This latest report updates estimates made in 2022 of additional costs that make it more expensive to meet a minimum acceptable living standard in remote rural areas of Scotland. In 2022, minimum budgets were updated based on inflation, on updated costings in remote rural Scotland, and on adjustments to take account of new UK-wide MIS research in urban areas and the new minimum budgets that this produced. In 2023, updates to minimum budgets are based solely on changes in prices between April 2022 and April 2023, as captured through components of the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). In 2024, minimum budgets for remote rural Scotland will take account of increases in prices, updated costings in remote rural Scotland and changes made to the composition of minimum budgets as a result of new UK-wide MIS research across all household types.

The report sets out the impact of inflation on remote rural Scotland minimum budgets, and consequently on the minimum budget uplifts for 2023, set out below.

2023 remote rural Scotland minimum budget uplifts

	Mainland	Island
Family with children, rounded uplift (based on couple with two children)	14%	14%
Working-age rounded uplift (based on average of single and couple)	26%	30%
Pensioner rounded uplift (based on average of single and couple)	23%	24%

1 Introduction

This report updates estimates, made for 2022, of specific additional costs which means it is more expensive to reach a minimum socially acceptable standard of living in remote rural Scotland (Bryan et al, 2024). The report providing estimates for 2022 was not based on research with groups of people living in remote areas of Scotland, as it was in 2021. Rather, in 2022, minimum budgets for remote rural Scotland were updated based on inflation (as measured through CPI), on updated costings in remote rural Scotland, and on adjustments to budgets to take account of UK-wide MIS research in urban areas published in 2022 (Davis et al, 2022).

The estimates set out for 2023 in this report are intended to inform the Scottish Government's monitoring, from year to year, of the number of households in fuel poverty, for which targets have been set by the Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definitions and Strategy) (Scotland Act) 2019. This involves benchmarks for household spending requirements derived from the MIS, which take into account additional and/or different needs in remote rural areas, to be updated annually.

The Scottish Government legislation defines a household as being in fuel poverty if:

- (i) in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime, total fuel costs necessary for the home are more than 10% of the household's adjusted (i.e., after housing costs) net income; and
- (ii) after deducting those fuel costs, benefits received for a care need or disability and childcare costs, the household's remaining adjusted net income is insufficient to maintain an acceptable standard of living. This remaining adjusted net income must be at least 90% of the UK MIS to be considered an acceptable standard of living, with an additional amount added to the MIS for households in remote rural, remote small town and island areas.

The report updates six numbers derived from the initial research in 2020/2021: the percentage uplift that should be applied to MIS budgets for pensioner households, families with children and working-age adults without children in remote rural parts of the Scottish mainland and the Scottish islands, respectively. It does not repeat analysis or discussion of the qualitative evidence presented in each of the two previous reports describing what aspects of life and costs in remote Scotland account for higher costs, and setting out how changes in urban UK MIS budgets have been incorporated into the minimum budgets for remote rural Scotland.

2 Methodology

Background

Following the passage of the [Fuel Poverty \(Targets, Definition and Strategy\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#), the Scottish Government commissioned CRSP to:

- Carry out research in remote rural Scotland that consulted groups of citizens living in different areas about what is needed for a minimum, socially acceptable living standard in their communities, and how this varies from the research in urban UK.
- Use this research to establish a baseline of budgets for broad household types in remote mainland Scotland and in the islands, using these to calculate a percentage ‘uplift’ to be applied to the MIS benchmarks in the Scottish fuel poverty calculation.
- Update these calculations annually, based on price increases and (where appropriate) the changing composition of MIS budgets.

The plan within the initial project design was to uprate minimum budgets for remote rural Scotland based on CPI price indexation in odd-numbered years, and to carry out repricing of items and further analysis every time urban UK MIS budgets were rebased and reviewed, in even numbered years. A full refresh of the remote Scotland research is planned every eight years.

Disruptions arising from Covid-19 resulted in the first figures being published in 2021, relating to this year, rather than in 2020. As noted above, the update in 2022 incorporated price changes, re-pricing of items in remote rural locations in Scotland, and also took account of new urban UK MIS research undertaken in 2022 (Davis et al, 2022). This posed some challenges in updating minimum budgets, which were outlined in detail in the previous report (Bryan et al, 2024). In 2023, minimum budgets for remote rural Scotland have been updated based on changes in prices between April 2022 and April 2023, as captured through the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). For the most part, the point of comparison here – minimum budgets for urban UK – were also updated using inflation in 2023 (Padley and Stone, 2023). The categories within urban UK MIS budgets that were not uprated by inflation – but instead used data relating to 2023 – were rent (both private and social), council tax, domestic fuel, and childcare.

In 2024, urban UK MIS budgets for all household types have been ‘rebased’. This entails starting from ‘blank sheets’ with groups of members of the public, who are tasked with discussing, agreeing and describing what households need for a minimum socially acceptable standard of living in 2024. This is the first rebase of all households *at one point in time* since the initial MIS research, published in 2008 (Bradshaw et al, 2008). The update of minimum budgets for remote rural Scotland in 2024 will consequently take account of inflation, updated costings in remote rural Scotland *and*, significantly, changes made to the composition of minimum baskets of goods and services as a result of the UK-wide MIS rebase across all household types.

3 Results

As both minimum budgets for urban UK and for remote rural Scotland have been uprated based on increases in prices between April 2022 and April 2023, percentage differences between urban UK budgets and remote rural Scotland budgets, and hence the budget uplifts for 2023, are broadly similar to those calculated in 2022. Inflation factors are applied at the level of 'groups' within CPI – for example, the weekly food shopping basket is inflated using the inflation factor for April 2022 to April 2023 for '01.1 food' rather than at the level of division (i.e. 01 food and non-alcoholic beverages) (see ONS 2019). A full list of the CPI categories used in uprating the remote rural Scotland budgets is listed in the [Appendix](#). This is particularly important in a period where inflation has been rising dramatically, and where there have been some substantial differences in inflation rates across commodity categories.

Where there are differences between budget categories in minimum budgets, this is due to differences in the composition, for example, of other transport costs. The result of this is that different inflation factors (from different CPI groups) may have been applied to the items within this budget category for urban UK compared to remote rural Scotland. For example, other travel costs for a single working-age adult in urban UK would include travel by rail, bus and taxi, with rail and bus/taxi uprated by different categories within CPI; in remote mainland Scotland, travel by rail and bus has been replaced by a car, while some travel by taxi remains. However, the differences that this produces are small in the context of the overall budgets for each household type.

Households with children

The uplifts for families with children, shown in Table 1, remain very similar to those in 2022. For remote mainland areas, the uplift figure is 14% in 2023, compared to 15% in 2022, and for islands it is 14% as it was in 2022. These results are a consequence of the same inflation 'factors' being applied to both urban UK budgets and those for mainland and island areas.

Working-age households without children

For working-age households without children, the budget uplifts have also remained broadly similar, as shown in Table 2. For single working-age adults in remote mainland areas, the uplift is 26% in 2023, compared to 27% in 2022; for islands, the uplift is 29% compared to 31% in 2022. For working-age couples, in remote mainland areas then uplift figure in 2023 is 26% compared with 28% in 2022; in island areas, the uplift is 31% compared to 33% in 2022.

Pensioner households

As shown in Table 3, the pattern for pensioner households is very similar. For single pensioners in remote mainland areas, the uplift in 2023 is 28% in 2023, compared with 30% in 2022; for islands, the uplift figure is 25% in 2023, compared with 26% in 2022. For pensioner couples, the uplift figure in mainland areas in 2023 is 18%, as it was in 2022; for islands, the uplift is 23% in 2023, and was 24% in 2022.

Following the full rebase for all urban UK MIS households in 2024, the 2024 update of remote rural Scotland minimum budgets may result in more differences between categories, depending on decisions about how best to reflect changes in urban UK in remote and rural minimum budgets.

Table 1 Comparison of weekly budgets for UK and remote rural Scotland, 2022 and 2023, couple with two children

a) Remote Scottish mainland	Budget comparisons, with percentage differences expressed in each case as a percent of the whole budget					
	2022			2023		
Category	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference
Food	£122.37	£127.42	1.0%	£144.86	£150.84	1.1%
Alcohol	£10.64	£10.64	0.0%	£11.41	£11.41	0.0%
Clothing	£46.88	£51.71	0.9%	£53.16	£58.65	1.0%
Household insurances	£1.64	£1.28	-0.1%	£1.93	£1.51	-0.1%
Other housing costs	£2.09	£2.09	0.0%	£2.19	£2.19	0.0%
Household goods	£31.50	£32.74	0.2%	£34.08	£35.42	0.2%
Household services excluding childcare	£11.19	£11.89	0.1%	£11.97	£12.72	0.1%
Personal goods and services	£49.99	£48.36	-0.3%	£54.21	£52.44	-0.3%
Motoring	£79.38	£176.41	19.0%	£81.16	£180.36	17.8%
Other travel costs	£43.61	£3.09	-7.9%	£44.97	£3.19	-7.5%
Social and cultural participation	£112.16	£122.30	2.0%	£118.88	£129.63	1.9%
Total	£511.44	£587.93	15.0%	£558.82	£638.36	14.2%

b) Islands	Budget comparisons, with percentage differences expressed in each case as a percent of the whole budget					
	2022			2023		
Category	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference
Food	£122.37	£137.90	3%	£144.86	£163.24	3%
Alcohol	£10.64	£10.64	0%	£11.41	£11.41	0%
Clothing	£46.88	£52.70	1%	£53.16	£59.77	1%
Household insurances	£1.64	£1.33	0%	£1.93	£1.57	0%
Other housing costs	£2.09	£2.09	0%	£2.19	£2.19	0%
Household goods	£31.50	£34.73	1%	£34.08	£37.58	1%
Household services excluding childcare	£11.19	£11.89	0%	£11.97	£12.72	0%
Personal goods and services	£49.99	£50.79	0%	£54.21	£55.08	0%
Motoring	£79.38	£146.20	13%	£81.16	£149.48	12%
Other travel costs	£43.61	£3.09	-8%	£44.97	£3.19	-7%
Social and cultural participation	£112.16	£132.36	4%	£118.88	£140.29	4%
Total	£511.44	£583.73	14%	£558.82	£636.52	14%

Table 2 Comparison of weekly budgets for UK and remote rural Scotland, 2022 and 2023, working-age, no children

a) Remote Scottish mainland, single working-age	Budget comparisons, with percentage differences expressed in each case as a percent of the whole budget					
	2022			2023		
	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference
Food	£65.73	£65.90	0%	£77.21	£77.42	0%
Alcohol	£8.33	£8.33	0%	£8.97	£8.97	0%
Clothing	£13.64	£14.66	0%	£14.99	£15.61	0%
Household insurances	£1.50	£1.44	0%	£1.75	£1.70	0%
Other housing costs	£1.90	£1.90	0%	£2.01	£2.00	0%
Household goods	£14.61	£16.01	1%	£15.83	£17.33	1%
Household services excluding childcare	£8.28	£11.75	1%	£8.92	£12.70	1%
Personal goods and services	£26.22	£26.22	0%	£28.49	£28.49	0%
Motoring	£0.00	£87.37	37%	£0.00	£94.15	36%
Other travel costs	£33.26	£3.45	-13%	£34.79	£3.45	-12%
Social and cultural participation	£64.86	£64.86	0%	£67.97	£67.97	0%
Total	£238.33	£301.89	27%	£260.93	£329.78	26%

b) Remote Scottish mainland, couple working-age	Budget comparisons, with percentage differences expressed in each case as a percent of the whole budget					
	2022			2023		
Category	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference
Food	£113.34	£113.63	0%	£132.81	£133.15	0%
Alcohol	£17.16	£17.16	0%	£18.47	£18.47	0%
Clothing	£27.27	£29.31	0%	£29.97	£31.22	0%
Household insurances	£1.50	£1.44	0%	£1.75	£1.70	0%
Other housing costs	£1.90	£1.90	0%	£2.01	£2.00	0%
Household goods	£15.75	£17.26	0%	£17.05	£18.68	0%
Household services excluding childcare	£11.16	£14.63	1%	£12.01	£15.75	1%
Personal goods and services	£49.94	£49.94	0%	£54.25	£54.25	0%
Motoring	£0.00	£173.68	42%	£0.00	£179.65	40%
Other travel costs	£66.53	£2.69	-15%	£69.58	£2.94	-15%
Social and cultural participation	£109.63	£109.63	0%	£114.61	£114.61	0%
Total	£414.18	£531.25	28%	£452.51	£572.41	26%

c) Island, single working-age	Budget comparisons, with percentage differences expressed in each case as a percent of the whole budget					
	2022			2023		
Category	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference
Food	£65.73	£75.63	4%	£77.21	£89.03	5%
Alcohol	£8.33	£8.33	0%	£8.97	£8.97	0%
Clothing	£13.64	£18.84	2%	£14.99	£20.10	2%
Household insurances	£1.50	£1.03	0%	£1.75	£1.21	0%
Other housing costs	£1.90	£1.90	0%	£2.01	£2.00	0%
Household goods	£14.61	£17.89	1%	£15.83	£19.34	1%
Household services excluding childcare	£8.28	£9.44	0%	£8.92	£10.18	0%
Personal goods and services	£26.22	£27.19	0%	£28.49	£29.53	0%
Motoring	£0.00	£82.91	35%	£0.00	£85.76	33%
Other travel costs	£33.26	£3.45	-13%	£34.79	£3.78	-12%
Social and cultural participation	£64.86	£64.86	0%	£67.97	£67.97	0%
Total	£238.33	£311.47	31%	£260.93	£337.86	29%

d) Island, couple working-age	Budget comparisons, with percentage differences expressed in each case as a percent of the whole budget					
	2022			2023		
Category	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference
Food	£113.34	£129.79	4%	£132.81	£152.44	4%
Alcohol	£17.16	£17.16	0%	£18.47	£18.47	0%
Clothing	£27.27	£37.69	3%	£29.97	£40.19	2%
Household insurances	£1.50	£1.03	0%	£1.75	£1.21	0%
Other housing costs	£1.90	£1.90	0%	£2.01	£2.00	0%
Household goods	£15.75	£19.29	1%	£17.05	£20.88	1%
Household services excluding childcare	£11.16	£12.32	0%	£12.01	£13.26	0%
Personal goods and services	£49.94	£51.78	0%	£54.25	£56.25	0%
Motoring	£0.00	£165.82	40%	£0.00	£171.51	38%
Other travel costs	£66.53	£2.69	-15%	£69.58	£2.94	-15%
Social and cultural participation	£109.63	£109.63	0%	£114.61	£114.61	0%
Total	£414.18	£549.08	33%	£452.51	£593.76	31%

Table 3 Comparison of weekly budgets for UK and remote rural Scotland, 2022 and 2023, pensioner

a) Remote Scottish mainland, single pensioner	Budget comparisons, with percentage differences expressed in each case as a percent of the whole budget					
	2022			2023		
	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference
Food	£57.64	£59.45	1%	£67.65	£69.71	1%
Alcohol	£6.17	£6.17	0%	£6.63	£6.63	0%
Clothing	£8.68	£10.17	1%	£9.52	£10.82	1%
Household insurances	£1.69	£0.87	0%	£1.73	£1.03	0%
Other housing costs	£1.92	£1.92	0%	£2.01	£2.01	0%
Household goods	£19.65	£20.77	1%	£21.21	£22.44	1%
Household services excluding childcare	£10.02	£10.03	0%	£10.76	£10.77	0%
Personal goods and services	£28.35	£28.35	0%	£30.68	£30.68	0%
Motoring	£0.00	£52.03	27%	£0.00	£53.82	25%
Other travel costs	£12.37	£5.18	-4%	£12.93	£5.67	-3%
Social and cultural participation	£48.74	£58.51	5%	£51.62	£61.97	5%
Total	£195.23	£253.45	30%	£214.75	£275.55	28%

b) Remote Scottish mainland, couple pensioner	Budget comparisons, with percentage differences expressed in each case as a percent of the whole budget					
	2022			2023		
	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference
Food	£96.35	£99.19	1%	£113.36	£116.62	1%
Alcohol	£12.07	£12.07	0%	£12.99	£12.99	0%
Clothing	£17.36	£20.33	1%	£19.03	£21.63	1%
Household insurances	£1.69	£0.87	0%	£1.99	£1.03	0%
Other housing costs	£1.92	£1.92	0%	£2.01	£2.01	0%
Household goods	£22.61	£23.90	0%	£24.43	£25.82	0%
Household services excluding childcare	£12.32	£12.33	0%	£13.24	£13.25	0%
Personal goods and services	£53.60	£53.60	0%	£57.77	£57.77	0%
Motoring	£0.00	£52.97	17%	£0.00	£54.79	16%
Other travel costs	£19.73	£4.03	-5%	£20.64	£4.41	-5%
Social and cultural participation	£78.24	£93.92	5%	£82.70	£99.28	5%
Total	£315.89	£375.13	19%	£348.17	£409.59	18%

c) Island, single pensioner	Budget comparisons, with percentage differences expressed in each case as a percent of the whole budget					
	2022			2023		
Category	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference
Food	£58.47	£68.69	5%	£67.65	£80.34	6%
Alcohol	£6.17	£6.17	0%	£6.63	£6.63	0%
Clothing	£8.68	£11.66	2%	£9.52	£12.41	1%
Household insurances	£1.69	£1.04	0%	£1.73	£1.23	0%
Other housing costs	£1.92	£1.92	0%	£2.01	£2.01	0%
Household goods	£19.65	£21.88	1%	£21.21	£22.90	1%
Household services excluding childcare	£10.02	£10.60	0%	£10.76	£11.38	0%
Personal goods and services	£28.35	£29.03	0%	£30.68	£31.42	0%
Motoring	£0.00	£43.58	22%	£0.00	£45.08	21%
Other travel costs	£12.37	£2.47	-5%	£12.93	£2.70	-5%
Social and cultural participation	£48.74	£49.37	0%	£51.62	£52.29	0%
Total	£196.06	£246.42	26%	£214.75	£268.39	25%

d) Island, couple pensioner	Budget comparisons, with percentage differences expressed in each case as a percent of the whole budget					
	2022			2023		
Category	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference	UK	Remote Rural Scotland	% Difference
Food	£96.35	£112.35	5%	£113.36	£131.91	5%
Alcohol	£12.07	£12.07	0%	£12.99	£12.99	0%
Clothing	£17.36	£23.32	2%	£19.03	£24.83	2%
Household insurances	£1.69	£1.04	0%	£1.99	£1.23	0%
Other housing costs	£1.92	£1.92	0%	£2.01	£2.01	0%
Household goods	£22.61	£25.25	1%	£24.43	£27.28	1%
Household services excluding childcare	£10.77	£13.66	1%	£13.24	£13.87	0%
Personal goods and services	£53.60	£54.89	0%	£57.77	£59.16	0%
Motoring	£0.00	£45.86	15%	£0.00	£47.43	14%
Other travel costs	£19.73	£1.92	-6%	£20.64	£2.10	-5%
Social and cultural participation	£78.24	£98.74	7%	£82.70	£104.37	6%
Total	£314.34	£391.02	24%	£348.17	£427.17	23%

In summary, Table 4 gives the uplifts by household type that should be applied in the calculation of fuel poverty in 2023.

Table 4 Summary of uplifts, 2023

	Mainland	Island
Couple with two children	14.2%	13.9%
Family with children, rounded uplift (based on couple with two children)	14%	14%
Single working-age adult	26.4%	29.5%
Couple working-age adult	26.5%	31.2%
Working-age rounded uplift (based on average of single and couple)	26%	30%
Single pensioner	28.3%	25.0%
Couple pensioner	17.6%	22.7%
Pensioner rounded uplift (based on average of single and couple)	23%	24%

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Appendix: CPI categories used in uprating minimum budgets

CPI group	Description	Inflation factor 2022-2023
Food 1.1		1.1933
Food 11.1	Catering services, i.e. food consumed outside the home	1.0928
Alcohol 2.1		1.0708
Alcohol 11.1	Catering services, i.e. alcohol consumed outside the home	1.0928
Clothes 3.1	Clothing	1.0732
Clothes 3.2	Footwear, including repairs	1.0389
Household Insurance 12.5		1.1792
Other housing costs 4.3	Regular maintenance and repair of the dwelling	1.0504
Household goods 5.1	Furniture, furnishings and carpets	1.0841
Household goods 5.2	Household textiles	1.0633
Household goods 5.3	Household appliances, fittings and repair	1.0531
Household goods 5.4	Glassware, tableware and household utensils	1.0275
Household goods 5.5	Tools and equipment for house and garden	1.0509
Household goods 5.6	Goods and services for routine maintenance	1.1294
Household services 8.1	Postal services	1.0568
Household services 8.2	Telephone and telefax equipment and services	1.0785
Household services 8.3	Telephone and telefax equipment and services	1.0785
Household services 12.7	Other services	1.0367
Personal goods and services 6.1	Medical products, appliances and equipment	1.0807
Personal goods and services 6.2	Out-patient services	1.0417
Personal goods and services 12.1	Personal care	1.0991
Personal goods and services 12.3	Personal effects	1.0382
Motoring 7.1 (fixed)	Purchase of vehicles	1.0344
Motoring 7.2 (variable)	Operation of personal transport equipment	1.0030
Bus and coach travel 7.3.2	Transport services	1.0103
Other transport 7.1 (buy bike)	Purchase of vehicles	1.0344
Other transport 7.2 (maintenance/parts)		1.0030
Other transport: taxi 7.3.2		1.0402
Other transport: rail 7.3.1		1.0506
Other transport: by sea and inland waterway 7.3.4		1.0356

Soc and cultural participation 8.3	Telephone and telefax equipment and services	1.0785
Soc and cultural participation 9.1	Audio visual equipment and related products	1.0255
Soc and cultural participation 9.3	Other recreational items, gardens and pets	1.0678
Soc and cultural participation 9.4	Recreational and cultural services	1.0317
Soc and cultural participation 9.5	Books, newspapers and stationery	1.1146
Soc and cultural participation 9.6	Package holidays	1.1371
Soc and cultural participation 11.2	Accommodation services	1.1265
Soc and cultural participation 12.7	Other services (not elsewhere covered)	1.0367



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