

Statistical bulletin

Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: August 2026

Social insights on important issues facing the UK, water use and restrictions, and the cost of living, from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

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Release date:
18 September 2026

Next release:
16 October 2026

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1 . Main points

The following information is from data collected from 5 to 30 August 2026, based on adults in Great Britain.

- The cost of living (89%), the NHS (79%), and the economy (70%) were the most commonly reported issues facing the UK today.
- The proportion of adults reporting climate change and the environment as an important issue (62%) has increased since June 2026 (53%); this proportion is currently the highest it has been since late 2024.
- Nearly 9 in 10 adults (88%) reported taking at least one action to cut back on the amount of water they use in the past month; the most commonly reported actions included not leaving the tap running (65%) and waiting until the washing machine or dishwasher is full before putting on (55%).
- Nearly half of adults (48%) reported using less tap water, including hosepipes, in the garden, which is an increase from July 2026 (36%) and coincides with a period of water use restrictions across parts of Great Britain.
- Just over half of adults (55%) reported that their cost of living had increased compared with a month ago; this is a decline from 79% in April 2026.
- Among those who reported that their cost of living had increased, the most commonly reported reasons for this increase were the price of food shopping (94%), the price of fuel (72%), and gas or electricity bills (64%).

2 . Important issues facing the UK

In the latest period (5 to 30 August 2026), the most commonly reported issues facing the UK today continued to be:

- the cost of living (89%)
- the NHS (79%)
- the economy (70%)

These have consistently been the most commonly reported issues since we started asking this question in October 2022.

Other commonly reported issues in the latest period included:

- climate change and the environment (62%)
- immigration (61%)
- crime (58%)

Figure 1: The cost of living, the NHS, and the economy have been the most commonly reported important issues facing the UK since October 2022

Proportion of adults reporting each important issue, Great Britain, October 2022 to August 2026

Notes:

1. Respondents could select more than one option.
2. The length of each data collection period presented in this time series may be different.
3. See our [accompanying datasets](#) for confidence intervals, additional response options and related footnotes.

The proportion of adults reporting climate change and the environment as an important issue (62%) has increased since June 2026 (53%) and is currently the highest it has been since late 2024.

This increase occurred during a period of heatwaves across Great Britain. The Met Office [provisionally declared summer 2026 the hottest on record](#) for the UK. On 14 August 2026, people across England and Wales received an [Emergency Alert](#) about the risk of wildfires, as hot, dry conditions intensified.

The proportion of adults reporting employment as an important issue has been increasing over time (Figure 1). Between 5 to 30 August 2026, just over half (54%) of adults reported employment as an important issue. This was higher than in similar periods in 2025 (42% between 6 and 31 August 2025) and 2024 (31% between 7 August and 1 September 2024).

3 . Water use and restrictions

Throughout August 2026, parts of Great Britain experienced drought conditions, with increasing numbers of people affected by water use restrictions, which are known as temporary use bans. For more information on how this affected people across England, Wales and Scotland, see [Section 7: Related links](#).

Between 5 and 30 August 2026, nearly 9 in 10 adults (88%) reported taking at least one action to cut back on the amount of water they use in the past month. The most commonly reported actions were:

- not leaving the tap running (65%)
- waiting until the washing machine or dishwasher is full before putting on (55%)
- using less tap water, including hosepipes, in the garden (48%)
- taking shorter showers (42%)

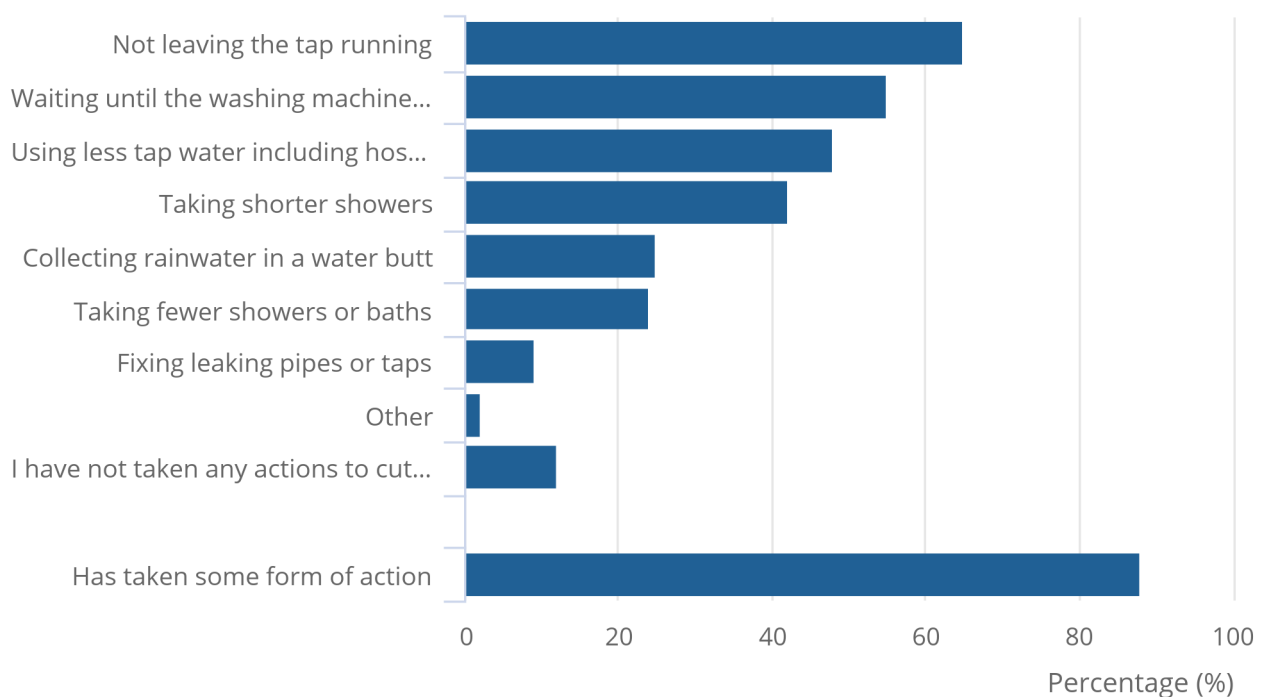
The proportion of adults who reported using less tap water, including hosepipes, in the garden was higher in August (48%), compared with July 2026 (36%).

Figure 2: Nearly 9 in 10 adults (88%) reported taking at least one action to cut back on the amount of water they use in the past month

Proportion of adults reporting actions to cut back on the amount of water they use in the past month, Great Britain, 5 to 30 August 2026

Figure 2: Nearly 9 in 10 adults (88%) reported taking at least one action to cut back on the amount of water they use in the past month

Proportion of adults reporting actions to cut back on the amount of water they use in the past month, Great Britain, 5 to 30 August 2026



Source: Opinions and Lifestyle Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Respondents could select more than one option.
2. See our [accompanying dataset](#) for confidence intervals and related footnotes.

Women were more likely to report taking at least one action to cut back the amount of water they use (92%), compared with men (83%). Women were also more likely than men to report:

- not leaving the tap running (71%, compared with 58%)
- waiting until the washing machine or dishwasher is full before putting on (64%, compared with 46%)
- using less tap water, including hosepipes, in the garden (52%, compared with 44%)
- collecting rainwater in a water butt (29%, compared with 21%)

When asked about water use restrictions, 40% of adults reported that there were currently water use restrictions in their local area, 51% said there were no water use restrictions in their local area, and 9% said they did not know.

Younger adults (those aged 16 to 29 years) were more likely to report not knowing whether there were water use restrictions in their local area, compared with older adults (those aged 50 to 69 years and those aged 70 years and over). This is broken down as:

- 16% of those aged 16 to 29 years
- 10% of those aged 30 to 49 years
- 7% of those aged 50 to 69 years
- 5% of those aged 70 years and over

Adults who reported water use restrictions in their local area were more likely to report taking at least one action to reduce their water use (92%) than those who said there were no water use restrictions in their area (85%). They were also more likely to report using less tap water, including hosepipes, in the garden (61% compared with 40%) and collecting rainwater in a water butt (30% compared with 24%).

4 . Cost of living

Between 5 to 30 August 2026, just over half of adults (55%) reported that their cost of living had increased compared with one month ago. This proportion remains below the level reported in April 2026 (79%) and is also lower than this time a year ago (62% between 6 to 31 August 2025).

Among those who said their cost of living had increased in the past month, the most commonly reported reasons for this increase were:

- price of food shopping (94%)
- price of fuel (72%)
- gas or electricity bills (64%)

The most commonly reported actions taken because of increases in the cost of living were:

- spending less on non-essentials (59%)
- shopping around more (43%)
- spending less on food shopping and essentials (38%)

Adults aged 16 to 29 years were less likely to report shopping around more because of increases in the cost of living compared with all other age groups. Those aged 50 to 69 years were more likely to report shopping around more compared with all other age groups. This is broken down as:

- 24% of those aged 16 to 29 years
- 44% of those aged 30 to 49 years
- 56% of those aged 50 to 69 years
- 43% of those aged 70 years and over

Around 6 in 10 adults (62%) reported being very or somewhat worried about rising costs of living in the past two weeks, compared with around 2 in 10 who were neither worried nor unworried (18%), or who were somewhat unworried or not at all worried (17%).

Adults aged 30 to 49 years were more likely to report being very or somewhat worried about the rising cost of living when compared with older adults. This is broken down as:

- 62% of those aged 16 to 29 years
- 69% of those aged 30 to 49 years
- 59% of those aged 50 to 69 years
- 52% of those aged 70 years and over

5 . Data on public opinions and social trends

[Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: household finances](#)

Dataset | Released 18 September 2026

People's experiences of changes in their cost of living and household finances in Great Britain; indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

[Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: personal well-being and loneliness](#)

Dataset | Released 18 September 2026

Personal well-being, loneliness and what people in Great Britain felt were important issues; indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

[Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: water restrictions and use](#)

Dataset | Released 18 September 2026

Experiences of water use and water restrictions for people in Great Britain; indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

[Opinions and Lifestyle Survey: sample sizes, response rates and user requested data](#)

Dataset | Released 18 September 2026

Survey information including sample sizes, response rates and user requested data for the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

6 . Data sources and quality

Sample

The analysis in this bulletin is based on adults aged 16 years and over in Great Britain.

In the latest period, 5 to 30 August 2026, we sampled 8,730 households. This sample was randomly selected from people who had previously completed the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) or the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN). There were 3,560 individuals in the responding sample for the latest period, representing a 41% response rate.

Data quality

We applied survey weights to make estimates representative of the population, based on our population estimates. Estimates for some groups of the population may be subject to greater [uncertainty](#) because of smaller sample sizes for these groups (for example, younger adults).

From the 1 to 26 April 2026 data collection period onwards, the population totals used in weighting OPN estimates are based on 2024 mid-year estimates using updated population projections. They are initially projected forward using scaling factors derived from 2022-based subnational population projections by local authority, age, and sex, and subsequently constrained to 2022-based national population projection totals. Further, these estimates are adjusted to cover only the population living in households and student halls of residence.

We provide [confidence intervals](#) for all estimates in our datasets. Where comparisons between estimates are made, associated confidence intervals should be used to assess the [statistical significance](#) of the differences.

Further information on the survey design and quality is available in our [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey quality and methodology information \(QMI\)](#).

7 . Related links

[Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: July 2026](#)

Bulletin | Released 14 August 2026

Social insights on daily life, including experiences of the cost of living and water use and restrictions, from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

[Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: June 2026](#)

Bulletin | Released 17 July 2026

Social insights on daily life, including important issues facing the UK and attitudes to artificial intelligence, from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

[Economic activity and social change real-time indicators, UK, dashboard](#)

Interactive tool | Last updated 17 September 2026

An overview of the UK economy and society, based on rapid response surveys, novel data sources, and innovative methods.

[Coordinated drought response intensifies amid extreme weather](#)

Press release | Released 20 August 2026

UK Government press release discussing drought conditions and water scarcity across parts of England.

[Water scarcity report](#)

Webpage | Released 20 August 2026

Scottish Environment Protection Agency report discussing water scarcity and temporary water restrictions across parts of Scotland.

[The hosepipe ban has been lifted](#)

Webpage | Released 4 September 2026

Welsh Water announcement discussing their lifting of hosepipe bans across Wales, including a downloadable infographic on the duration and location of hosepipe bans in Wales since July 2026.

8 . Cite this statistical bulletin

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 18 September 2026, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: August 2026](#)