

# UK Measures of National Well-being user guide

User guide for the UK Measures of National Well-being, providing more detail on the framework. Includes metadata tables of the revised measures, detail on how we produce estimates, and measure change over time.

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# 1 . Framework and review overview

The [Measuring National Well-being programme](#) was launched by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in November 2010 to provide a comprehensive picture of how we are doing as individuals, as communities and as a nation, and how sustainable this is for the future.

The programme included a national debate where we asked the public: "What matters to you?". This generated over 34,000 responses which were used to develop the national well-being framework that the ONS has been reporting on ever since. For more details on the national debate, see our [National Statistician's reflections on measuring what matters \(PDF 1.1MB\)](#).

For more information on the background of the national well-being framework, see our [Findings from the National Well-being Debate release \(PDF 408KB\)](#) published in July 2011, and our [well-being publications archive](#). For more information on the associated children and young people's well-being frameworks, see our [Children's views on well-being and what makes a happy life, UK: 2020 article](#). You can also explore our [Children's well-being measures dataset](#) and our [Young people's well-being measures dataset](#).

## Review background

It has been over 10 years since the development of the Measures of National Well-being framework. In 2022 to 2023, we undertook a review into the measures we report on and the ways in which we communicate them to ensure they continue to reflect what is important to well-being in the UK and provide users with information in a useful way.

## Summary of review activities

As part of the review, we carried out a number of stakeholder engagements and research activities.

We conducted a [user and stakeholder feedback survey](#) asking respondents what matters most to national well-being and their views on our current measures and dissemination tools. We also asked adults in Great Britain about what mattered most to their individual well-being and to the well-being of their communities through the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey. For more detail, see our [Individual and community well-being, Great Britain: October 2022 bulletin](#).

We reviewed recommended literature, as well as domestic and international well-being dashboards.

We also reviewed existing well-being insights from socio-demographic groups that were more likely to report low personal well-being. We commissioned qualitative research into groups where well-being evidence was limited to ensure we represent what matters to a diverse range of people in the UK. Specifically, we looked at people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other minority sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBT+), and Black, Black British, Black Caribbean and Black African, and Arab ethnic groups.

We chose these groups based on ONS research into the personal well-being of various demographic sub-groups in the UK, detailed in our [Annual Population Survey regression models dataset](#) and [GOV.UK's Ethnicity facts and figures website](#). This work also complemented research being carried out by the ONS Centre for Equalities and Inclusion.

The review was supported by a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) of topic experts, both belonging to and external to government, who provided ongoing feedback and advice.

More information on our stakeholder engagement and research activities can be found in our [Review of the UK Measures of National Well-being, October 2022 to March 2023](#).

## Review outcomes

The revised measures of national well-being, now called the UK Measures of National Well-being (UK MNW), contain 60 measures (an increase from 44). We added 22 new measures and removed 6 since the previous iteration, and some changes were made to the retained measures. For example, we updated the data sources for some measures to improve timeliness, consistency and geographic coverage.

We decided to continue publishing the national well-being statistics on a quarterly basis. The latest available data for our measures will be provided in our revised [UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard](#) and the associated datasets.

Based on user feedback, we decided to discontinue the [Quality of life in the UK statistical bulletin](#).

We will be publishing estimates of the UK MNW by additional breakdowns. Each quarter we will publish breakdowns by age, sex, UK country and English region, where these are available. Annually we will publish further socio-demographic breakdowns, including by disability. This work will start in autumn 2023, when we extend our [Personal well-being in the UK bulletin](#) to include personal characteristics, and will continue into autumn 2024, when we will provide these breakdowns by the additional UK MNW where possible.

More information on the review can be found in our [Review of the UK Measures of National Well-being, October 2022 to March 2023](#).

## 2 . Framework structure and themes

### Topic areas

The UK Measures of National Well-being (UK MNW) framework is comprised of 10 topic areas. Please note that we use the terms “domain” and “topic area” interchangeably in our publications. The topic areas provide a structure to measure national well-being. They reflect what is important to national well-being in a comprehensive and mutually exclusive way. We outline the topic areas and their definitions as follows.

#### Personal well-being

Personal well-being is the most direct representation of how people are doing. Measures in this topic area cover people's opinions on aspects of their current well-being.

#### Our relationships

People's relationships can affect their well-being outcomes, including quality of life and happiness. Measures in this topic area cover the presence and quality of relationships people may have with family, friends, and the community around them.

#### Health

Physical and mental health are important parts of people's personal well-being. Measures in this topic area cover both objective and subjective measures of health. They also cover satisfaction with the healthcare system to capture how the nation's health is supported.

#### What we do

Participation in, satisfaction with, and balance between work and leisure activities represent people's lifestyle choices. Measures in topic area cover subjective and objective measures related to work, leisure and volunteering.

#### Where we live

Where people live, the quality of their local area and their community, and how they feel about it can affect personal well-being. Measures in this topic area cover housing, the local environment, access to facilities, and being part of a cohesive community.

## Personal finance

How households and individuals are managing financially influences many aspects of their lives. Measures in this topic area cover household income and wealth, poverty and financial inequalities, and people's opinions about their own financial situations.

## Education and skills

Education and skills can determine individuals' socioeconomic outcomes. Measures in this topic area cover human capital, as well as qualifications and skills. They also cover satisfaction with the education system to capture how people's education is supported.

## Economy

The economy affects the financial welfare of individuals, communities and the UK as a whole. Measures in this topic area cover economic activity in the UK.

## Governance

Good governance contributes to better social and economic outcomes. Measures in this topic area cover public trust and civic participation. They also cover satisfaction with the police and justice system to capture how public administration is supported.

## Environment

The natural environment is relevant to people's quality of life because it makes human life and activity possible. Measures in this topic area cover aspects of climate change, the UK's natural environment and natural capital, and the effects of human activity on the environment.

## Measures

Each topic area is represented by several measures. There are 60 measures in total. Full definitions and more information on the measures and their sources can be found in the [UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata](#). We outline the measures, grouped by topic area, as follows.

### Personal well-being

- Life satisfaction: people rating their overall satisfaction with their life as low.
- Feeling things done in life are worthwhile: people rating how worthwhile they feel the things they do in life are as low.
- Happiness: people rating how happy they felt yesterday as low.
- Feeling anxious: people rating high feelings of anxiety yesterday.
- Hope for the future: people who tend to feel hopeful about their future.
- Fair treatment: people who feel they are very or somewhat unfairly treated by society.

### Our relationships

- Unhappy partner relationships: people in fairly or extremely unhappy relationships.
- Satisfaction with social relationships: people who are fairly or very satisfied with their social relationships.
- People to rely on: people who agree or strongly agree that they can rely on people in their lives if they have a serious problem.
- Loneliness: people who feel lonely often or always.
- Local community integration: people who agree or strongly agree that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area.
- Trust in others: people who in general trust most other people.

## Health

- Healthy life expectancy: healthy life expectancy at birth by sex.
- Satisfaction with health: people who are fairly or very satisfied with their health.
- Physical health conditions: people reporting having cancer, cardiovascular conditions, dementia, diabetes, kidney and liver disease, chronic musculoskeletal or respiratory conditions.
- Depression or anxiety: people reporting some evidence of depression or anxiety.
- Satisfaction with healthcare system: people who tend to be satisfied with the healthcare system in the UK.

## What we do

- Satisfaction with time use: people who are fairly or very satisfied with how they spend their time in a typical week.
- Satisfaction with main job: people who are fairly or very satisfied with their main job.
- Time spent on unpaid work: average daily time spent on unpaid work by sex.
- Volunteering: people who gave unpaid help to clubs, groups, charities or organisations in the last 12 months.
- Engagement with arts and culture: people who took part in creative or artistic activities, or attended cultural or artistic events in the last 12 months.
- Sports participation: people who on average take part in "moderate plus intensity" sport and/or physical activity for at least 150 minutes a week.
- Visits to nature: people who visited green and natural spaces in their free time in the last 14 days.

## Where we live

- Satisfaction with accommodation: people who are fairly or very satisfied with their accommodation.
- Satisfaction with local area: people who are fairly or very satisfied with their local area as a place to live.
- Belonging to neighbourhood: people who agree or strongly agree that they feel like they belong to their neighbourhood.
- Local connectivity: measure of ability to travel to places of value (where 100 denotes the most connected Output Area in 2022); this is a new measure that is under development, and we aim to implement it by November 2024.
- Digital exclusion: people who do not have access to the internet at home.
- Crime: incidence of personal crime.
- Feeling safe: people who felt fairly or very safe walking alone in their local area after dark by sex.

## **Personal finance**

- Median household income: median equivalised household disposable income (in real terms).
- Median household wealth: median household total wealth (including private pension wealth, in real terms).
- Relative low-income households: people with household income below 60% of contemporary household median income (after housing costs).
- Household income inequality: Gini coefficient for measure of income inequality (where 0 means complete equality of household disposable income).
- Gender pay gap: gross hourly median difference in pay between women and men.
- Difficulty managing financially: people who have found it fairly or very difficult to get by financially in the past month.

## **Education and skills**

- NEET: young people not in education, employment or training (seasonally adjusted).
- No qualifications: people aged 16 to 64 years with no qualifications.
- A-level or equivalent qualifications: people aged 16 to 64 years with A-level equivalent qualifications or higher.
- Human capital: total value of people's projected lifetime earnings (in real terms).
- Satisfaction with own education and skills: people who are fairly or very satisfied with their education and skills.
- Satisfaction with education system: people who tend to be satisfied with the education system in the UK.

## **Economy**

- Unemployment rate: unemployment rate among adults aged 16 years and over (seasonally adjusted).
- Inflation rate: annual inflation rate (as measured by Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH)).
- Public sector net debt: public sector net debt as a percentage of gross domestic product (non-seasonally adjusted).
- Consumer confidence (this is a new measure under development, which we aim to implement by August 2024).

## **Governance**

- Voter turnout: voter turnout in UK general elections.
- Trust in UK government: people who tend to trust the UK government.
- Voice in government matters: people who agree or strongly agree that they do not have any say in what the government does.
- Satisfaction with police: people who tend to be satisfied with the police in the UK.
- Satisfaction with courts and legal system: people who tend to be satisfied with the courts and legal system in the UK.

## **Environment**

- Greenhouse gas emissions: total greenhouse gas emissions.
- Renewable energy use: renewable energy as a percentage of gross final energy consumption.
- Household recycling: recycling rate for waste from households.
- Protected areas: extent of protected areas at land and sea.
- Priority species: relative abundance of priority species.
- Air pollution: average number of days when air pollution is moderate or higher.
- Surface water status: percentage of UK surface water bodies awarded "Good" or "High" water quality status.
- Pro-environmental lifestyle: people who have made some or a lot of changes to their lifestyle to help tackle environmental issues.

## **Themes and aspects of well-being covered in the framework**

### **Measures of individual, community and national well-being**

The framework was designed to measure how we are doing as individuals, as communities and as a nation, and how sustainable it is for the future. As part of our recent review into the measures used in the framework, we took care to ensure that we maintained a balance of measures that represent the well-being of individuals, communities and the nation. For more details, see our [Review of the UK Measures of National Well-being, October 2022 to March 2023](#).

## Subjective and objective measures of well-being

The framework includes both subjective and objective measures of well-being. Subjective measures are based on directly asking people about their feelings, opinions and sentiments. Objective measures focus on reporting facts about people's lives and the spaces in which they live.

Some measures may also be based on a mixture of subjective and objective elements. For example, the "Healthy life expectancy" category uses self-reported health measures along with calculations from mortality statistics.

## Sustainability of well-being

While the UK Measures of National Well-being covers and tracks the current well-being of people in the UK, it is also crucial to consider the sustainability of well-being. In the framework, sustainability is captured in part by using the four capitals: [human capital](#), [social capital](#), economic capital and [natural capital](#). The four capitals constitute the stock of resources which underpin people's welfare and are used to evaluate the future sustainability of well-being.

We have captured human, social, economic, and natural capital through various measures in the framework. More information about which measure captures which theme and aspect of well-being can be found in the [UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata](#).

# 3 . Quality characteristics of the framework

This section of the user guide provides information on the quality of the framework and identifies issues that should be noted when using the output.

We have developed [guidelines for measuring statistical quality](#) based on the European Statistical System's five dimensions of quality.

## Relevance

The UK Measures of National Well-being (UK MNW) were originally established following a national debate on what matters to people. These measures were revised in 2022 to 2023 to the current set of 60 measures following a six-month public review. More information about the review can be found in our [Review of the UK Measures of National Well-being, October 2022 to March 2023](#) and our [UK Measures of National Well-being, current and upcoming work: July 2023 article](#).

In the future, we will take an iterative approach to updating the framework. For example, if a new data source with wider geographic coverage becomes available for a measure, we will evaluate it and, if appropriate, swap the measure in the framework.

## Timeliness and punctuality

The UK MNW are published on a quarterly basis.

Of the 60 measures of national well-being, 22 are updated annually, one is updated every six months, one is updated every fortnight, 29 are updated quarterly, and five are updated monthly. One measure is updated every two years and one is updated on an ad hoc basis.

## Accuracy and reliability

Where available, confidence intervals are provided within the datasets alongside this release. Where changes over time are presented, associated confidence intervals are used to assess the statistical significance of the differences.

This is a conservative method of assessing change, so it is possible that significant differences exist in the data that have not been identified using this method. Our guidance on [Uncertainty and how we measure it for our surveys](#) contains more information on how we measure and communicate uncertainty for survey data.

For some of the measures that are not based on survey data, confidence intervals are not available. In those cases, change over time has not been assessed, or has been assessed based on guidance from the data owner. When interpreting the latest estimates and the presented assessments of change, we advise users to keep in mind the potential impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on individuals' attitudes and survey responses, as well as the impact of the pandemic on data collection, given the major disruption that the pandemic caused to people's lives and to survey data collection.

Because most of the data come from self-completion household surveys, the estimates may not be representative of individuals who do not live in private residential households.

Most of the measures used in the framework are official statistics while some are [Accredited Official Statistics](#). Accredited Official Statistics are accredited and scrutinised by the UK Statistics Authority to ensure they meet quality criteria in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

## Coherence and comparability

Feedback received as part of the review of the UK MNW highlighted the importance of coherence.

We have approached coherence in the framework in a number of ways, including domestic and international comparability of metrics, geographic coverage and comparability between the measures themselves.

Geographically, we aim to include the widest possible coverage of the UK to allow for greatest comparability. For measures that do not cover the entire UK, we have aimed to provide links to the relevant alternative devolved administration data to support coherence across the UK.

We have also aimed for consistency in question structure and response scales across measures.

More information on the geographic coverage, questions, and devolved administration sources for each measure can be found in the associated [UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata](#).

## Accessibility and clarity

The [UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata](#) are available online and can be downloaded in xls file types. Graphs, summary findings and links to source data are available in the UK Measures of National Well-being dashboard.

We welcome feedback and enquiries regarding the framework, which can be mailed to [qualityoflife@ons.gov.uk](mailto:qualityoflife@ons.gov.uk) or telephone +44 3000 67 1543. It may be possible to meet additional data requests, but these may be chargeable depending on the time required to produce the additional data requested.

The [UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata](#) contains information on the question, data source, frequency of update, devolved administration source, and method of assessment of change for each measure. User requested data are also published on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website.

For information regarding conditions of access to data, please refer to the following:

[Terms and conditions \(for data on the website\)](#)

[Freedom of information](#)

[Accessibility](#)

## 4 . About the release

### How we collect the data

Data are collated in two ways, including:

- re-publishing existing data, where data are already available
- undertaking new analysis where data are not published, but micro-datasets are available; where access to datasets is not available, we contact the data owners and request them to run the analysis for us

### Data sources

New analysis is carried out using the following Office for National Statistics (ONS) surveys or publicly available datasets:

- Annual Population Survey (APS) from the ONS
- Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) from the ONS
- Understanding Society: The UK Longitudinal Study (USoc) (publicly available on the [UK Data Service website](#))
- People and Nature Survey from Natural England(publicly available on the[UK Data Service website](#))

Measures based on published data are sourced from the following surveys:

- Labour Force Survey (LFS) from the ONS
- Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) from the ONS
- Wealth and Assets Survey (WAS) from the ONS
- Time-Use Survey (TUS) from the ONS
- Household Finances Survey (HFS) from the ONS
- Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) from the ONS
- Participation Survey from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
- Active Lives Adult Survey from Sport England
- Family Resources Survey (FRS) from the Department for Work and Pensions
- Technology Tracker from the Office of Communications (Ofcom)

Other sources come from a variety of survey and administrative data sources, to compile statistics which are used to report relevant national well-being measures:

- Healthy state life expectancies from the ONS
- Health Index (Physical health conditions sub-domain) from the ONS
- National Accounts from the ONS
- British Election Study from the University of Oxford and University of Manchester
- Electoral Commission from the House of Commons Library
- UK Territorial Greenhouse Gas Emissions from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
- UK Energy Statistics from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
- UK statistics on waste from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- Biodiversity Indicators from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- Air Quality Statistics from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

For links to all sources, see our [UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata](#).

## How the data are processed

Where we carry out analysis on person-level datasets, associated quality and methodology information reports detail how data are collected and processed before we access it for analysis. The following reports provide more information:

- for APS: see Section 6 of our [Annual Population Survey \(APS\) QMI](#)
- for OPN: see Section 6 of our [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey QMI](#)
- for USoc: a [technical report](#) is published for each wave and a [main user guide](#) provides information on how the data are processed

Where data are already published and based on survey data, user guides or technical reports are available at source.

## How we analyse and interpret the data

We publish the time series for each measure and its change over time where available. Changes in estimates are displayed over the short and long term. Short-term change is assessed as the latest estimate compared with one year prior. Long-term change is assessed as the latest estimate compared with five years prior.

However, for measures sourced from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, short-term change is based on the time point closest to the previous year. This may vary between 10 and 14 months because of the rotation of questions on the survey. Additionally, for environmental measures ("Protected areas", "Priority species", "Air pollution" and "Surface water status"), short-term change is assessed as the latest estimate compared with five years prior, and long-term change is assessed as the latest period to the first period. This is to reflect the relatively slow movement of change in these measures and based on guidance from the data owners.

We report confidence intervals and sample sizes, where available, to aid data interpretation. Where confidence intervals are available, we use these to assess the statistical significance of the change over time. For more information on confidence intervals and statistical significance, see our guidance on [Uncertainty and how we measure it for our surveys](#).

Where confidence intervals are not available, change over time is assessed based on guidance from the data owner or not assessed at all.

We assess change for each measure by evaluating whether it has had a positive change, negative change or stayed the same. We make this assessment based on the sentiment of the measure. For example, for the "Feeling anxious" measure, we would report a positive change for "People rating high feelings of anxiety yesterday" if the percentage of people reporting high feelings of anxiety had decreased.

## How we quality assure and validate the data

For new analysis and published data, data are dual run by independent analysts and checked for accuracy at multiple stages between analysis and final output (presented on the well-being dashboard and data tables).

Where necessary, estimates are suppressed to avoid any disclosure of personal information.

We engage and collaborate with data owners whose data we publish to review our outputs and ensure we are reporting their data in a clear and accurate way.

We conduct triangulation of findings by comparing our data with other existing data, where possible.

## How we disseminate the data

[The UK Measures of National Well-being](#) (UK MNW) are updated on a quarterly basis when new data become available. The headline data are published on the [UK MNW dashboard](#). The dashboard presents each measure within its domain and includes:

- a chart to illustrate the latest findings or graph to show time series data
- commentary on the data
- headline findings
- filters to view data in a certain way, such as by domain or direction of change

Our [associated datasets](#) that contain further detail are published alongside the dashboard, including current and historical data, sub-population breakdowns by country, region, age and sex for the latest data (where available), accompanying quality information (where available), relevant notes to guide correct interpretation of the data, and links back to the source information.

## 5 . Related links

[UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard](#)

Dashboard | Updated 9 May 2024

A visual overview of how people in the UK are doing across 10 domains of national well-being.

[UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata](#)

Dataset | Updated 9 May 2024

Metadata tables containing information on the question, data source, frequency of update, devolved administration source, and method of assessment of change for each measure.