

Article

# Measuring National Well-being: Domains and Measures, September 2015

Measures of National Well-being. Drawing social and economic data from government and other organisations; painting a picture of UK society and how it changes.

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Release date:  
29 September 2015

Next release:  
To be announced

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# 1. Introduction

Measures of national well-being are designed to help us understand how we are doing, as individuals, as communities and as a nation, and how sustainable this is for the future. They include measures of personal well-being (latest figures were published 23 September 2015), which indicate how we feel about our lives overall, but it is only through examining changes in the other areas, or “domains”, of national well-being, such as health, education, where we live and the economy, that we can impact on national well-being.

We look at overall change, and whether national well-being is improving or deteriorating, as well as individual assessments of change for each of the 41 measures. While it is acknowledged that the measures are headline measures and so do not represent the complete picture for each domain, they provide a useful signpost to areas that may need further attention to improve national well-being.

Comparisons have been made with the previous year’s data, or – if year on year data are not available – with the previously published figure, as well as an assessment of change over a 3 year period. In future years, as more data become available, we will publish assessments of change over a longer time series.

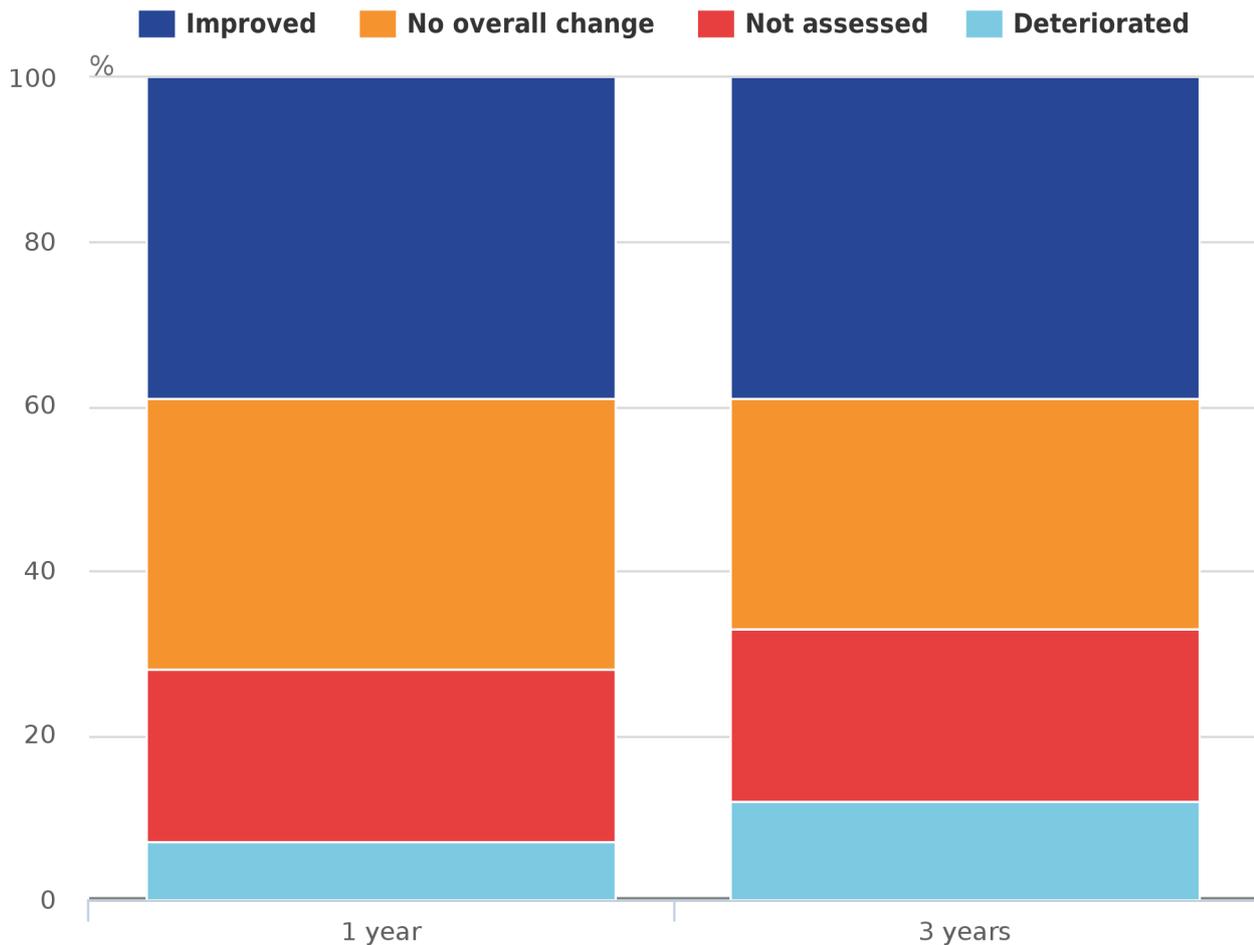
For the majority of measures, change is assessed based on whether 95% confidence intervals overlap. For a small number, actual change is measured, for example, the proportion of registered voters who voted. In some cases, the assessment is based on progress towards a target, or the advice of the data provider.

## 2. Summary of changes in national well-being in September 2015

Figure 1 summarises the assessments of change in measures of national well-being. These include 43 measures in total; the headline measures of healthy life expectancy and feeling safe walking alone after dark are presented for both men and women.

**Figure 1: Assessments of change - National Well-being measures**

September 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

Looking at the 1 year change<sup>1</sup>:

- 40% (17 measures) had improved
- 33% (14 measures) showed no overall change
- 21% (9 measures) were not assessed for this publication
- 7% (3 measures) had deteriorated

Over the 3 year period<sup>1</sup>:

- 40% (17 measures) had improved
- 28% (12 measures) showed no overall change
- 21% (9 measures) were not assessed for this publication
- 12% (5 measures) had deteriorated

Since the last assessment of change, published in [March 2015](#):

- over both the short and long-term, 40% of measures showed an improvement
- the largest change has been in the 3 year assessment of those showing improvement, rising by 12 percentage points from 28% to 40%
- the number of measures that have deteriorated increased in the short term from 5% to 7%, but decreased in the long term from 19% to 12%
- the number of measures not assessed in the long term has fallen from 30% to 21%, this is mainly because long term assessments are now possible for the 4 personal well-being questions
- a number of measures have not been assessed, because data are not available for comparison, or where the direction of change is not a clear indication of improvement or deterioration

## Notes for Summary of changes in national well-being in September 2015

1. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding

### 3. What has changed?

A fuller picture of the changes that have occurred is available in [Life in the UK](#), which is published in March. This publication looks at examples of change from two domains, “Governance” and “Where we live”. Governance is the domain with the fewest measures, and is also the only domain where all measures have been assessed as improving over the 1 year and 3 year periods. In comparison, “Where we live” is one of two domains with 6 measures, which together are showing no clear direction of change over either the 1 year or 3 year period.

Where we live has a direct impact on our well-being. Housing costs are one of our biggest expenses – and for some, investments. However, according to a report published by the ONS based on the [Wealth and Assets survey](#), there is no significant relationship between net property wealth and the personal well-being of individuals living in those households.

We spend a lot of time in our homes, and so how we feel about where we live is naturally important to our personal, and therefore national, well-being. In the financial year ending 2014, 89.2% of adults in England were very or fairly satisfied with their accommodation. This was a deterioration compared with the financial year ending 2013 (90.6%). Looking beyond the physical aspects of our accommodation to the area we live in, the proportion of people who feel a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood is an important factor, not only to personal well-being but also to the local community, because people are more inclined to live, work and invest in an area they have an affinity with. In the financial year ending 2012, 62.8% of adults in the UK reported that they strongly agreed or agreed that they felt that they belonged to their neighbourhood. Again, this was a deterioration compared with the previous period (financial year ending 2010, 66.0%).

High or increasing crime levels have a negative effect on local communities. This can result in residents increasing desire to move house and a weaker attachment and satisfaction with their neighbourhood. Although crime rates in England and Wales improved over the 1 year and 3 year periods, this was not reflected in measures of how safe people felt. The proportion of women who felt safe walking alone after dark improved over the 1 year period, but deteriorated over the 3 year period. The proportion of men who felt safe walking alone after dark showed no overall change. Almost 25% more males felt comfortable walking alone after dark than females (85.8% and 61.7% respectively) in the financial year ending 2015 even though men were more likely to be victims of crime than women.

The proximity of housing to a range of services and facilities and green space could have a bearing on the satisfaction level with the area in which they live. The proportion of households with good transport access to key services in England, and the proportion of people accessing the natural environment in England at least once a week, show little or no overall change in the short term.

Governance is a contextual domain of well-being; it may not be immediately apparent how voter turnout or trust in government affects our personal well-being, but political engagement is important to our national well-being. It provides citizens with a voice and can help shape government activities, which in turn help build strong and resilient communities.

Voting is the most prominent form of political participation and, for many people, it is the only engagement with politics that they have. In the General Election of 2015, 66.2% of those aged 18 and over in the UK voted, an improvement on both the 2010 (65.1%) and 2005 (61.4%) elections. Trust in, and accountability of, the national government was one of the main concerns reported during the National Well-being debate. In the spring of 2015, 37% of adults in the UK reported that they trusted the government, a significant improvement over the 3 year period from spring 2012 (21%).

## **4. Why measure change?**

The original aim of the Measuring National Well-being (MNW) programme was to, “develop and publish an accepted and trusted set of National Statistics which help people to monitor national well-being”. To assist policy makers (and others) in their decision making and help them make sense of and monitor well-being, it is vital to be able to show how things have changed.

## **5. The measurement of national well-being**

The measurement of national well-being is a long term process. We are already building increasing evidence by providing an overall indication of progress in national well-being and highlighting how individual measures are changing over time. This provides information for policy making and supporting further research. Examples include:

- implementing policies that are focussed on well-being - the Department for Transport have used our well-being domains in a tool to help policy makers assess the social impacts of major transport investment decisions. The UK Airports Commission used our domains to conduct a quality of life impact assessment for a third London runway/alternative flight path scenario
- adding well-being to existing surveys to generate new evidence across a broad range of policy areas - our 4 personal well-being questions are now used in over 20 different government surveys, covering topics such as health, crime, housing and taking part in sport and culture
- valuing social goods and services using subjective well-being - the Cabinet Office and the Department for Work and Pensions released '[Well-being and civil society](#)', in 2013, which estimated the value of volunteering using subjective well-being data. The analysis estimated that the value a frequent volunteer gives to volunteering is about £13,500 per year, at 2011 prices, and that not being able to volunteer equates to a 1.9% reduction in life satisfaction
- implementing staff well-being strategies to support productivity and performance – an example is the Boorman Review (2009) which undertook a review of NHS health and well-being; an important area identified in the associated report was taking action on health and well-being in the NHS workforce, including:
  - improving organisational behaviours and performance
  - achieving an exemplar service
  - embedding staff health and wellbeing into NHS systems and infrastructure

## 6. Where to find the latest national well-being measures data

The latest release of domains and measures is available in various formats:

- [National Well-being Measures Excel \(1.19 Mb Excel sheet\)](#) spreadsheet containing the latest and time series data, plus links to data sources; this spreadsheet has also been revised to include age, sex and regional breakdowns for some headline measures and confidence intervals have been included where possible
- [interactive Wheel of Measures](#), which includes data for the latest and previous periods plus time series charts
- [Wheel of Measures PDF \(128.2 Kb Pdf\)](#) “print and keep” version showing the latest data
- [interactive charts](#) showing the latest data for selected measures by region and country

## 7. Background notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting [www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html) or from the Media Relations Office email: [media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk)