

Article

Measuring national well-being in the UK, domains and measures: Sept 2016

An assessment of UK progress against a set of headline national well-being indicators which include our health, natural environment, personal finances and crime. Change over time is also assessed to establish whether national well-being is improving or deteriorating.

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1 . Main points

Considering the 43 national well-being indicators, 10 improved, 4 deteriorated and 22 stayed the same, compared with one year earlier.

Areas of life which are getting better have been dominated by the improving economic picture; more people are in work, real median household income and net national disposable income have both risen and fewer report finding it difficult to get by financially.

Emissions of greenhouse gases continue to fall and more energy is being consumed from renewable sources.

Despite continued improvements to the number of years we can expect to live in good health, the indicators for satisfaction with health and the proportions reporting some evidence of anxiety or depression have both deteriorated.

Although voter turnout increased at the most recent general election, there has been a fall in those reporting trust in their national government.

Fewer people felt that they belonged to their neighbourhood.

2 . Things you need to know

Also released today:

- [national well-being measures dataset](#) containing the latest data, time series data, the indicators broken down by age, sex and region where applicable, and quality information
- the static [wheel of measures](#) “print and keep” version summarising the latest data and the assessments of change, compared with one year earlier

We are constantly reviewing our indicators in response to changing coverage, frequency and other quality considerations affecting our data sources. Please refer to [background note 1](#) for a summary of changes to the indicators since the last update.

3 . Introduction and background

In November 2010, we set up the Measuring National Well-being (MNW) programme. The aim was to monitor and report “how the UK as a whole is doing these days” by producing accepted and trusted measures of the well-being of the nation. Twice a year we report progress against a set of headline indicators covering areas including our health, natural environment, personal finances and crime. The measures include both objective data (for example, crimes against the person) and subjective data (for example, feeling safe walking alone after dark) in order to provide a more complete view of the nation than measures such as gross domestic product (GDP) can do alone.

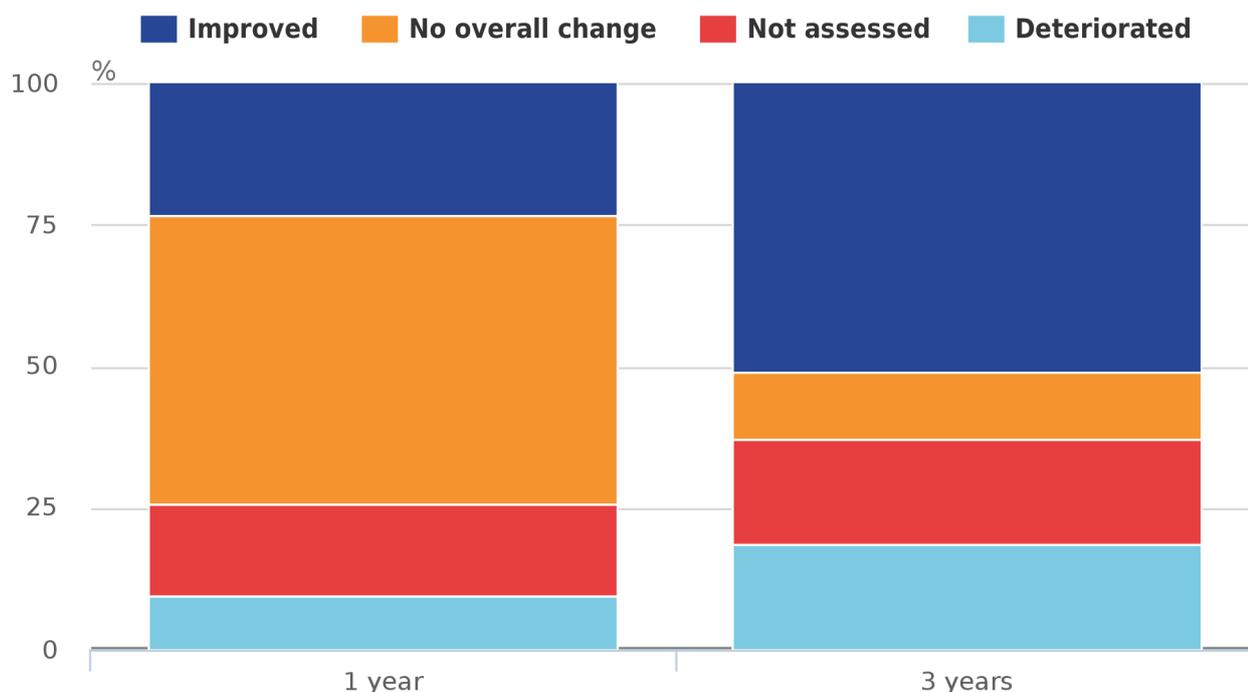
This report is based on the most recent available data as of September 2016. It is important to recognise that the data underpinning the indicators are often from different sources with different timeliness and coverage. We therefore recommend looking at the [dataset](#) to provide further information on the sources for each indicator.

4 . Assessments of change

This report includes assessments showing the direction of change for each of the measures, whether they have improved, shown no overall change, or deteriorated. Comparisons have been made with the previous year's data, or the previously published figure where year-on-year data are not available, as well as an assessment of change over a 3-year period.

Figure 1: Assessments of change - national well-being measures

UK, September 2016



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Although there are 41 indicators of national well-being, measures of healthy life expectancy and feeling safe walking alone after dark are presented for both men and women, and so there are 43 measures to assess.
2. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Looking at the 1-year change:

- 23% (10 measures) had improved
- 51% (22 measures) showed no overall change
- 16% (7 measures) were not assessed for this publication
- 9% (4 measures) had deteriorated

Over the 3-year period:

- 51% (22 measures) had improved
- 12% (5 measures) showed no overall change
- 19% (8 measures) were not assessed for this publication
- 19% (8 measures) had deteriorated

A number of measures have not been assessed, either because data are not available for comparison, or where the direction of change is not a clear indication of either improvement or deterioration.

5 . Which areas of our lives have improved?

Areas of life which are getting better include our personal finances and the economy, where real median household income and net national disposable income have both risen, the unemployment rate has fallen and fewer people are reporting finding it difficult to get by financially. In other areas of life the number of crimes against the person continues to fall, voter turnout at the most recent general election improved and human capital – the value of individuals’ skills, knowledge and competences in the labour market showed an increase, surpassing its pre-economic downturn peak for the first time. Improvements have also been seen across environmental measures. Both greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumed from renewable sources are improving as they move towards their respective international targets.

6 . Which areas of our lives have deteriorated?

Not all areas of our lives are getting better. Despite continued improvements to the number of years we can expect to live in good health, the indicators for satisfaction with health and the proportions reporting some evidence of anxiety or depression have both deteriorated. Although voter turnout increased at the most recent general election, there has been a fall in those reporting trust in their national government. This measure was collected in May 2016 and therefore does not reflect the result of the EU referendum. It does however reflect how people were feeling in the period leading up to it, during the campaign. Fewer people also reported feelings that they belonged to their neighbourhood compared with one year earlier.

There are a number of indicators which remain unchanged and of these personal well-being is perhaps the most notable. There were no annual improvements in those reporting the highest ratings of personal well-being, covering levels of life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and anxiety, between the financial years (April to March) ending 2015 and 2016.

7 . Sustainable development goals

In September 2015, world leaders came together to express their commitment to an ambitious agenda to eradicate poverty, halt climate change and reduce inequalities over the next 15 years. At the heart of this agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are underpinned by 169 global targets and 231 global indicators.

The UN will report global progress towards SDGs, using aggregated data. However, all countries will be encouraged to report their own progress towards the SDGs and targets. We are responsible for the official reporting of UK data.

In November 2016, we will be launching an open consultation to seek views on proposed national indicators for SDGs and a framework for reporting. We recognise that the measuring national well-being and SDGs agendas are closely related and will continue to consider how the two fit together when developing plans for reporting UK progress. (Update 30 January 2017 – ONS took the decision to postpone the consultation on the SDGs originally scheduled to launch on 29 November 2016. This consultation is an important element of the UK's work on the SDGs. We also recognise that the SDGs are a very important agenda and we want more time to consider fully all the material received from stakeholders. We will be launching the consultation in due course, probably in the Spring.)

Further information can be found on the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) section of our website or by contacting SustainableDevelopment@ons.gsi.gov.uk.

8. Background notes

- Changes have been made to some of the indicators that are included within the Measuring National Well-being programme. These changes are required because the statistics are either no longer collected, updated too infrequently or no longer provide an appropriate assessment of the measure. The changes will lead to significant improvements in future reporting, enabling more indicators to be assessed more frequently and assessments being made in narrower and more dynamic bands. These changes only relate to the indicators, the overall framework of domains remains unchanged and consistent with the results of the national debate upon which they were agreed.

A summary of the changes that have been made can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of removed indicators and their replacements

Removed Indicator	Source	Replacement indicator	Source	Reason
2.1 – Average rating of satisfaction with family life	European Quality of Life Survey, Eurofound	2.1 - Percentage of people in fairly or extremely unhappy relationships	Understanding Society	The data from Eurofound is only collected in five year intervals whereas the new indicator is updated biennially. Previous research has also demonstrated a relationship between the new indicator and personal well-being.
2.2 – Average rating of satisfaction with social life	European Quality of Life Survey, Eurofound	2.2 - Percentage of people feeling lonely often or always	Community Life Survey, Cabinet Office	The data from Eurofound is only collected in five year intervals whereas the new indicator is updated annually. Loneliness is of increasing interest to policy as a matter of public health.
5.5 – Households with good transport access to key services or work (2011 = 100)	Department for Transport	5.5 - Average minimum travel time to reach the nearest key services by public transport /walking	Department for Transport	The previous statistic was discontinued.
8.2 - Five or more GCSEs A* to C including English and Maths	Department for Education; Welsh Government; Scottish Government; Northern Ireland Department of Education	8.2 - Proportion of those Not in Education, Employment or Training ('NEET')	Labour Market, ONS	There is no comparable measure of educational attainment across the UK, and therefore it does not allow cross country assessment, or to provide an overall UK figure of educational attainment. NEET statistics allows a UK assessment to be made.

Source: Office for National Statistics

As well as the changes in Table 1, a further 4 indicators (satisfaction with health, job, leisure time and with household income) will remain from the same source, but now have a narrowed scope to include only those reporting “mostly” or “completely” satisfied. This will make the indicators more dynamic and better suited to assessments of change in relation to well-being.

We have also been advised by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that our indicator of “Individuals in households with less than 60% of median income” should be measuring those before housing costs, where previously we had used after housing costs.

For more information about these changes, please contact us via qualityoflife@ons.gsi.gov.uk

