

Statistical bulletin

# Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP in the UK: May 2024

Exploring quality of life in the UK, drawing on the latest economic, environmental and social statistics. This quarter we focus on the quality of life of individuals.

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# 1 . Main points

- The percentage of people reporting low satisfaction with their lives in the UK, has increased to 5.8% in the five years to October to December 2023.
- Economic inactivity in the UK has increased, over the last quarter, and year, to 9.4 million (22.2%) adults aged 16 to 64 years, in December 2023 to February 2024, with long-term sickness the most common reason.
- Higher inflation has put pressure on household finances, with 21.8% of people in Great Britain finding it fairly or very difficult to get by financially between 13 and 24 March.
- Adults are spending less time each day on average doing entertainment, socialising and other free-time activities in Great Britain in March 2024, compared with 4 years earlier.
- Of adults in England, 68.4% visited green and natural spaces in their free time in the previous 14 days in September 2023.
- In 2022, 1.1 million fewer individuals gained health benefits from nature than in 2020 because they either did not visit often enough or for long enough.

## 2 . The percentage of people reporting low satisfaction with life has increased

Measures of a country's progress have often tended to focus on economic growth, usually measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, GDP omits important elements affecting the well-being of society and the environment, and the way these impacts are distributed. So, to complement traditional economic statistics, we have been developing new, and improving existing, measures of national progress, prosperity, and well-being.

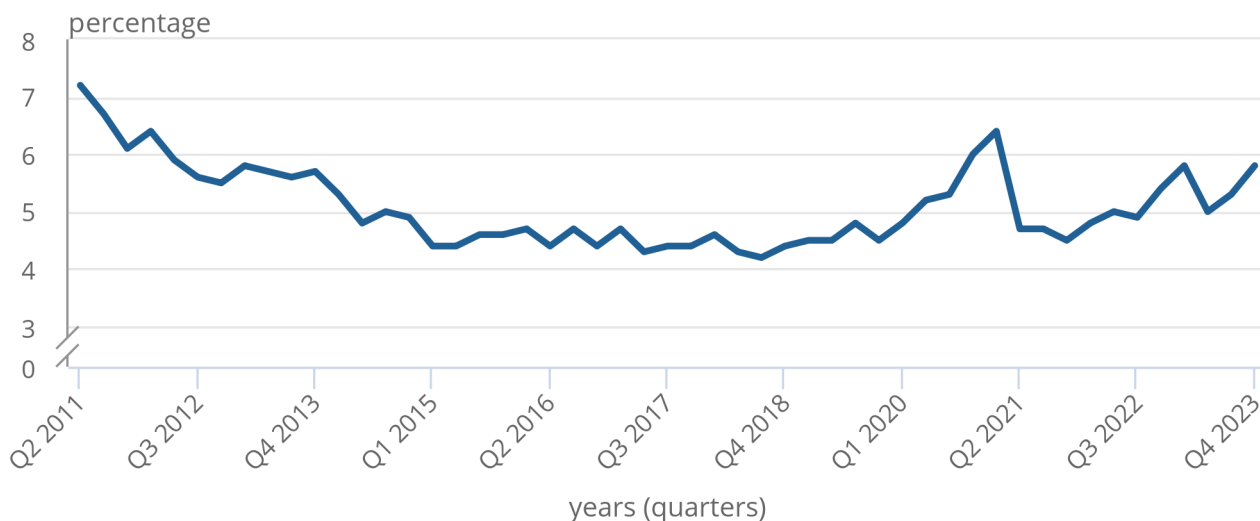
One of the best ways to evaluate a country's progress is to directly ask its residents how satisfied they are with their lives.

**Figure 1: More people felt low satisfaction with their lives in October to December 2023 compared with the same period five years earlier**

Percentage of people rating their overall satisfaction with their life as low, Quarter 2 (April to June) 2011, to Quarter 4 (October to December) 2023, UK

Figure 1: More people felt low satisfaction with their lives in October to December 2023 compared with the same period five years earlier

Percentage of people rating their overall satisfaction with their life as low, Quarter 2 (April to June) 2011, to Quarter 4 (October to December) 2023, UK



Source: Annual Population Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. People in the UK were asked, overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely.
2. Low life satisfaction is defined as those who reported 0 through to 4 on the 0 to 10 scale.

Around 1 in 17 (5.8%) people in the UK have low satisfaction with their life (answering 0 to 4 on a 0 to 10 scale) in October to December 2023, as shown on our [UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard](#). This has increased from the same period five years ago (4.4% in October to December 2018).

When asking how anxious they felt yesterday, 23.5% (almost 1 in 4) said they felt high levels of anxiety (measured as those reporting 6 to 10 on a 0 to 10 scale). This is down from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic high of 25.2% in October to December 2020, but it is still above the estimates of the same period five years ago at 20.0%.

The research presented in our [Personal well-being in the UK: April 2022 to March 2023 bulletin](#), shows employment status and self-reported health are among the characteristics and circumstances that make the largest contributions to adults' life satisfaction (after controlling for other factors).

### 3 . Long-term sickness is at a historic high as the most common reason for being economically inactive

When looking at our [Labour Market Overview, UK: April 2024 bulletin](#), 74.5% of adults aged 16 to 64 years, were in employment in the three months to February 2024. This has decreased compared with the same time last year. In the same period, 22.2% of adults (9.4 million) aged 16 to 64 years were economically inactive in the UK, which is an increase from rates seen a year ago.

Increased volatility of our [Labour Force Survey](#) estimates, resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes, means that estimates of quarterly change should be treated with additional caution. We recommend using them as part of our suite of labour market indicators alongside workforce jobs, Claimant Count data, and Pay As You Earn Real Time Information (PAYE RTI) estimates.

There are many reasons why someone could report being economically inactive. In our latest [Labour Force Survey data](#), the majority of those who reported being inactive said they did not want a job (81.9%), which could be for a variety of reasons, such as being a student, long-term sickness or looking after family or home. The most common response in the three months to February 2024 was long-term sickness, which remains at historically high levels.

We found in our [Health, demographic and labour market influences on economic inactivity, UK: 2019 to 2022](#) article, that increases in the inactivity rate were mainly caused by both our ageing population and increasing prevalence of work-limiting health conditions. However, the effect of the rise in work-limiting health conditions was larger than that of population ageing.

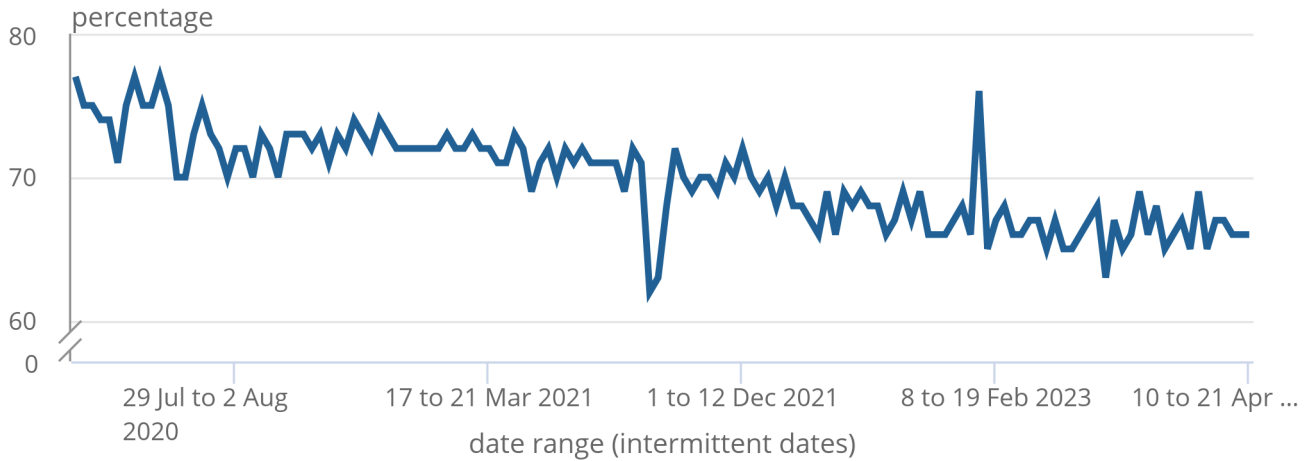
Focusing further on the nation's health, across all people in Great Britain we have seen a long-term decrease in the percentage of people self-reporting "good" or "very good" health in April 2024, as outlined in our [Opinions and lifestyle survey data](#).

**Figure 2: There has been a long-term decline in the percentage of adults reporting good or very good health**

Percentage of adults self-reporting good or very good health, March 2020 to April 2024, Great Britain

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Percentage of adults self-reporting good or very good health, March 2020 to April 2024, Great Britain



Source: Opinions and lifestyle survey, from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Survey responders were asked, how is your health in general? Response categories were very good, good, poor, bad or very bad, or don't know, prefer not to say.

## 4 . Visiting green and natural spaces and air quality, can affect our health

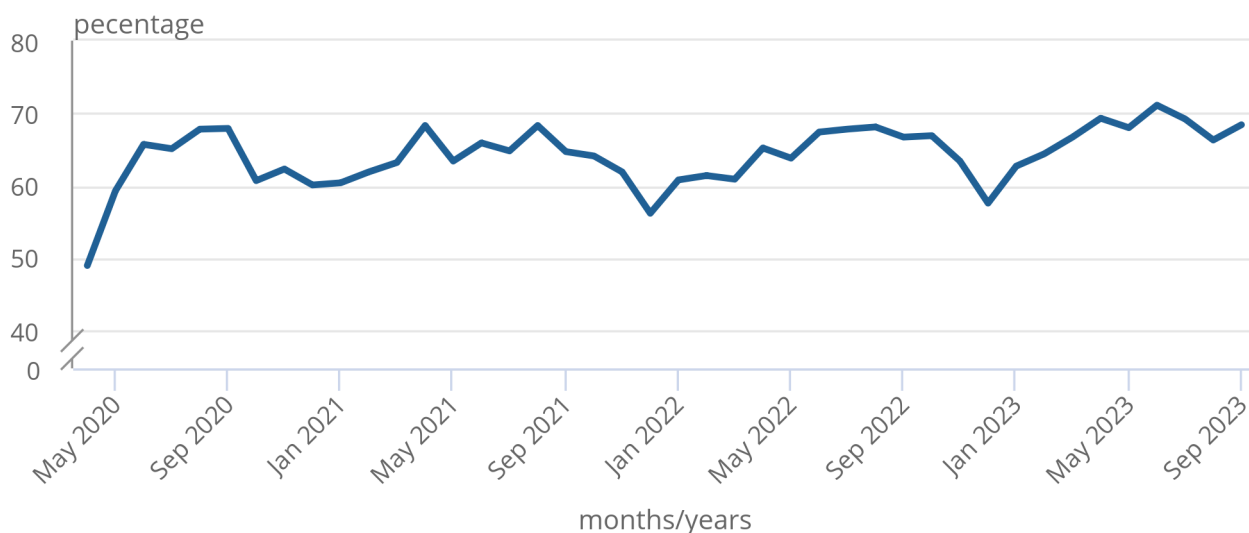
Our [Public opinions and social trends Great Britain: 10 to 21 April 2024](#) bulletin, showed that 61% of adults report climate change and the environment as an important issue facing the UK.

### Figure 3: A broadly similar number of people visited green and natural spaces in England in September 2023 and in September 2022

Percentage of people who visited green and natural spaces in their free time in the last 14 days, England, April 2020 to September 2023

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Percentage of people who visited green and natural spaces in their free time in the last 14 days, England, April 2020 to September 2023



Source: People and Nature Survey from Natural England and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

In September 2023, People and Nature Survey data on our [UK Measures of National Well-being dashboard](#) showed that 68.4% of adults in England had reported visiting green and natural spaces in their free time in the previous 14 days.

Our [latest UK natural capital accounts data](#), available up to 2022, show that the health benefits of recreation were estimated to be £7 billion.

However, these natural capital accounts data also showed that 1.1 million fewer individuals across the UK gained health benefits from spending time in nature in 2022 when compared with two years earlier, as explained in our [Health benefits from nature blog](#). This is because while more people visited nature in 2022 compared with 2020, they did not do so often enough or for long enough to gain health benefits. The value of those lost health benefits was estimated at around £390 million, equivalent to £356 per person on average. The valuation of these benefits is explained in our [UK natural capital accounts methodology guide](#): 2023.

Poor air quality is recognised as the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK, as stated in [Public Health England's air pollution guidance](#). In 2018, Public Health England estimated the total cost of air pollution, to the NHS and social care in England, to be £1.69 billion between 2017 and 2025.

The Data from our [UK Measures of National Well-being dashboard](#) tells us that the average number of days when air pollution was moderate or higher in the UK was 10.6 days in 2022, following a record low of 5.3 days in 2021. However, there has been a long-term improvement since 2010, when we experienced 14.1 days of moderate or higher air pollution in 2010.

The latest data from our [quarterly UK greenhouse gas emissions bulletin](#) also show a fall in production emissions in every quarter of 2023 compared with 2022. For more information on UK greenhouse gas emissions, please see [Section 9: Measuring the data](#).



## 5 . Average time spent on entertainment, socialising, and free-time activities has fallen

GB residents have cited in our [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, 12 to 23 October 2022](#) how they use their time as important to their well-being. This was referenced through themes of work, having a purpose, being active, free-time activities, autonomy over activities they undertake, and their access to nature and outdoor spaces.

Between 13 and 24 Mar 2024, 61.8% of people in Great Britain were satisfied or very satisfied with how they spent their time in typical week, as shown on our [UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard](#).

Our [Time Use Survey data](#) allow us to break down how people reported spending their time. The amount of time that adults spend on entertainment, socialising, and other free-time activities has been steadily declining in recent years as the country has been adjusting to living with coronavirus (COVID-19), (as explained in the government's guidance on [living with COVID-19](#)), while time spent travelling and working has increased.

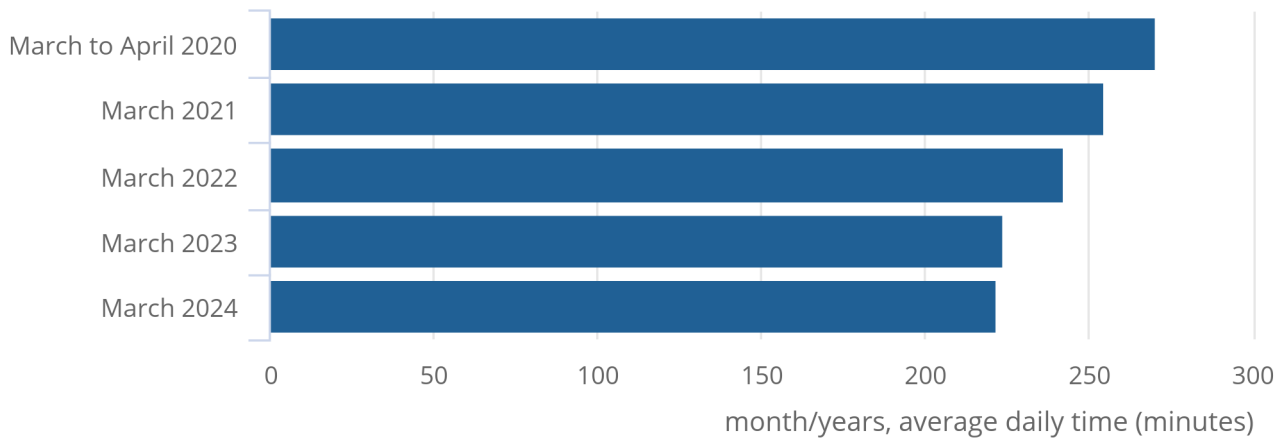
In March 2024, adults spent a daily average of 3 hours and 42 minutes on entertainment, socialising, and other free-time activities. This is 48.3 minutes lower than in March to April 2020.

**Figure 4: Adults are spending less time each day on average doing entertainment, socialising, and other free-time activities**

Average daily time (minutes) spent doing entertainment, socialising, and other free-time activities, Great Britain, March 2020 to March 2021, and United Kingdom, March 2022 to March 2024

Figure 4: Adults are spending less time each day on average doing entertainment, socialising, and other free-time activities

Average daily time (minutes) spent doing entertainment, socialising, and other free-time activities, Great Britain, March 2020 to March 2021, and United Kingdom, March 2022 to March 2024



Source: Online Time Use Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Entertainment, socialising, and free-time activities include watching television, listening to music, reading, spending time with and communicating with others, going to the cinema, theatre, concerts, sporting events, doing hobbies, and attending meetings or events.
2. Estimates are based on the main activities that respondents reported doing during their diary day. Time spent doing secondary or passive activities is not included.

## 6 . Inflation is putting pressure on finances

When we asked adults in Great Britain, in an open-text question on our Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, what mattered most to their individual well-being (as explored in our [October 2022, Individual and community well-being bulletin](#)), their personal financial situation was the third most often noted theme (after family members and their welfare, and their own physical or mental health).

The latest data show that inflation, as shown in our [Consumer Price Index including owner occupiers housing costs \(CPIH\) dataset](#), rose by 3.8% in the 12 months to March 2024, down from a high of 9.6% in the 12 months to October 2022. These increases in inflation have put pressure on household finances, and between 13 to 24 March 2024, 21.8% of people in Great Britain said they were finding it fairly difficult or very difficult to get by financially, as shown on our [UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard](#). This was more likely to be reported by those aged under 65 years than those aged 65 years and over.

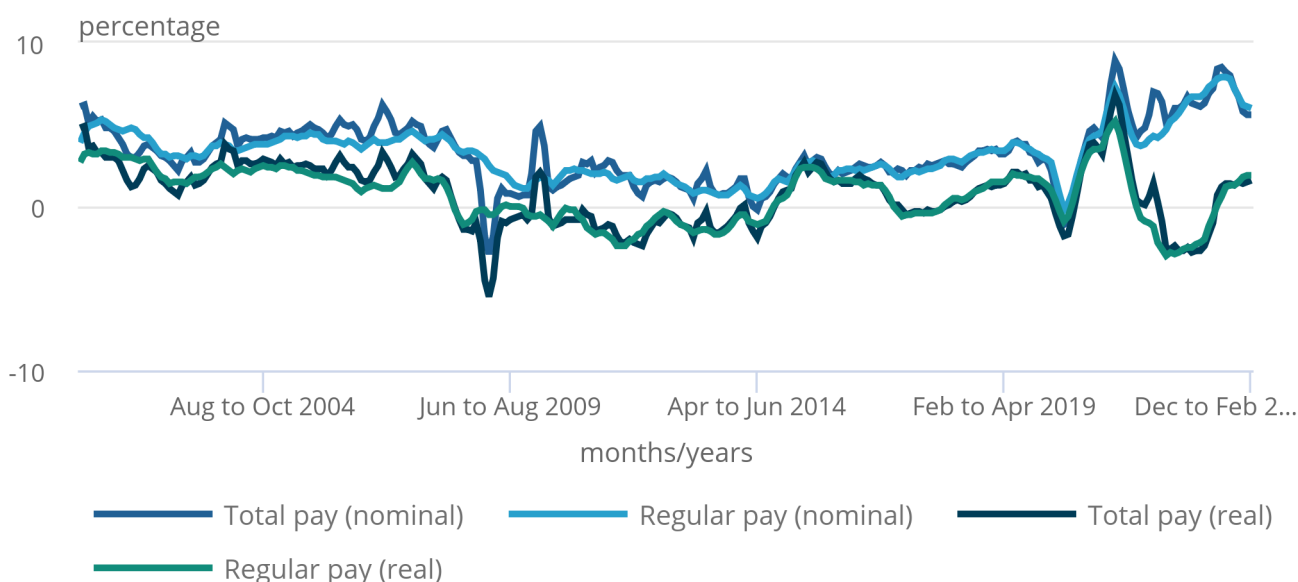
Highlighted in our [Average weekly earnings in Great Britain: April 2024 release](#), the latest data from December 2023 to February 2024 also show inflationary impact, this time on regular and total earnings. Annual growth in regular earnings (excluding bonuses) and total earnings (including bonuses) was 6.0% and 5.6%, respectively. When inflation (CPIH), was accounted for however, real income rose by 1.9% for regular pay, and 1.6% for total pay.

### Figure 5: Annual growth in both total pay and regular pay (excluding bonuses) remains relatively strong

Percentage of average weekly earnings annual growth rates in Great Britain, seasonally adjusted, January to March 2001 to December 2023 to February 2024

#### Figure 5: Annual growth in both total pay and regular pay (excluding bonuses) remains relatively strong

Percentage of average weekly earnings annual growth rates in Great Britain, seasonally adjusted, January to March 2001 to December 2023 to February 2024



Source: Monthly Wages and Salaries Survey from the Office for National Statistics

There are signs that the pressure on living standards since the coronavirus pandemic had actually started before the pandemic; gross inclusive income (shown in our [UK inclusive income: 2005 to 2021 article](#)) peaked in 2017 and did not grow again until 2021. The pre-pandemic fall was driven by several factors, some of which were not reflected in GDP, such as a fall household provision services related to food and drink (including cooking).

## 7 . Next steps

The next quarterly GDP publication will be published on 10 May 2024, covering January to March 2024.

The next Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP bulletin is expected to be published on 14 August 2024.

If you have any feedback on this bulletin, please email [qualityoflife@ons.gov.uk](mailto:qualityoflife@ons.gov.uk).

## 8 . Glossary

### Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

The total value of output in the economic territory. It is the balancing item on the production account for the whole economy, domestic product can be measured as gross or net. It is presented in the accounts at market (or purchasers') prices.

### Statistical significance

Measures have been assessed as having improved or declined if the difference between the comparison periods is statistically significant using expert advice or non-overlapping confidence intervals, where available. If a difference is said to be statistically significant, it is unlikely that it could have occurred by chance alone. More information on statistical significance and confidence intervals is available on our [Uncertainty and how we measure for it for our surveys web page](#).

## 9 . Measuring the data

GDP is a sound but incomplete measure of economic progress because it omits the gains or damage caused by GDP growth on society and the environment, or how that growth is shared among society.

We at the Office for National Statistics have been developing and improving new measures of national prosperity and well-being to offer greater understanding. For example, in 2023 for the first time we began publishing [statistics on inclusive income](#), which augment GDP to account for, for example, unpaid household, and ecosystem services. Additionally in 2023, we reviewed our [UK measures of national well-being](#), taking on board stakeholder feedback to update our measures and interactive dashboard.

From 2024 onwards, the new Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP quarterly releases will bring together existing published measures of progress to provide a more holistic view of quality of life in the UK.

### Greenhouse gas emissions

Residence-based (production) emissions are part of our [UK Environmental Accounts](#). They allow emissions to be linked to economic sectors and the activity in them. They are one of three official measures of UK greenhouse gas emissions, explained in our [Measuring UK greenhouse gas emissions methodology](#). For a list of greenhouse gases, please see [Section 7: Glossary of our UK Environmental Accounts: 2023](#).

## Data coverage

The data come from several data sources that differ in terms of covered geographies, sampled populations, and periods of data collection.

Where possible, trend-over-time data have only been commented upon where latest data are for 2023 onwards.

These statistics are a combination of accredited official statistics (previously known as national statistics) and, official statistics in development (previously known as experimental statistics). For more information on statistical accreditation, please see the Office for Statistics Regulation's blog, [What does it mean to be an accredited official statistic?](#)

Each statistic has been hyperlinked in the text to allow the user to source the original data and methodologies.

For the indicators where the UK-wide data are not available, alternative data sources may exist for the devolved administrations (Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland), but differences in methodology affect comparability of the data.

## Comparability

Where changes over time are presented in this bulletin, associated confidence intervals are used to assess the statistical significance of the differences, explained on our [Uncertainty and how we measure for it for our surveys web page](#).

For some of the indicators 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.

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

## 10 . Strengths and limitations

This release brings together a wealth of published statistics to holistically consider the quality of life in the UK.

Please note that this release brings together statistics across different geographies and time periods. Caution should be used when making comparisons.

These statistics are a combination of official statistics, accredited official statistics (previously known as national statistics) and, official statistics in development (previously known as experimental statistics). These accreditations give the user confidence in their use having been assessed against the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value as outlined in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). For more information on statistical accreditation, please see the Office for Statistics Regulation's blog, [What does it mean to be an accredited official statistic?](#)

## 11 . Related links

### [Quarterly personal well-being estimates - non-seasonally adjusted](#)

Dataset | Released 9 May 2024

Non-seasonally adjusted quarterly estimates of life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety in the UK.

### [UK Inclusive Income](#)

Article | Released 9 April 2024

Estimates of sustainable economic progress encompassing a broad range of economic activities, such as unpaid household services, ecosystem services, and more.

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

Dashboard | Released 9 May 2024

An overview of well-being in the UK on an individual, community and national level. Considers change across 58 measures of well-being, grouped by 10 topic areas.

### [UK Environmental Accounts](#)

Web page

How the environment contributes to the economy, the impact that the economy has on the environment, and how society responds to environmental issues. This page also hosts the development of natural capital accounts.

### [UK natural capital accounts: 2023](#)

Statistical Bulletin | 27 November 2023

Estimates of the financial and societal value of natural resources to people in the UK.

### [Public opinions and social trends Great Britain: 10 to 21 April 2024](#)

Statistical Bulletin | 26 April 2024

Social insights on daily life and events from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) relating to the biggest issues facing society today.

## 12 . Cite this statistical bulletin

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 9 May 2024, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP in the UK: May 2024](#)