

Article

# Measuring national well-being in the UK: international comparisons, 2019

This article explores how the UK is faring in important areas of well-being compared with the member states of the European Union (EU) and the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

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# 1 . Main points

- Overall, personal well-being levels have improved in the UK, as have mental well-being scores – the latter increasing by 4.6 percentage points between 2011 and 2016 to 63.2%, close to the EU-28 average of 64.0%.
- The proportion of people in the UK reporting feeling close to those in their neighbourhood increased by 3.6 percentage points to 62.0% between 2011 and 2016, compared with an average decrease of 4.0 percentage points across the EU-28 to 63.0%.
- In the UK, 14.1% of people reported struggling to make ends meet in 2017, below the EU-28 average of 21.6%, and one-fifth reported that they were “very satisfied” with their household income in 2018, above the EU-28 average.
- In the UK, people had a lower level of trust in the EU in 2018 than the average across the 28 countries of the EU (30.0% and 42.0% respectively).
- In 2017, 9.6% of the UK’s total primary energy supply came from renewable sources; this proportion has increased year-on-year since 2010, but it is still below the OECD average (10.2%).
- In the UK, health and social security (33.0%) and housing (22.0%) were the most important concerns; while across the EU-28, the most frequently cited issues in 2018 were unemployment (25.0%) and health and social security (23.0%).

## 2 . Things you need to know about this release

### Measuring “people, prosperity and the planet”

In November 2010, we set up the [Measuring National Well-being Programme](#) to monitor and report UK progress by producing accepted and trusted measures of the well-being of the nation. We have pioneered the measurement of well-being in the UK in addition to traditional measures of prosperity, enabling policy-makers to make better, more well-informed decisions.

In February 2019, we introduced a new series on “[people and prosperity](#)” as part of our “[Beyond GDP](#)” initiative bringing together [personal and economic well-being](#) for the first time. In measuring economic growth, we want to know the extent to which it benefits different groups in society. This will make it easier for policy-makers and other users to consider questions such as whether changes in the size of the economy are reflected in our incomes or our life satisfaction.

Our recent user [feedback survey](#) suggested the need for more in-depth analysis and an interest in how the UK’s exit from the EU may impact on people’s well-being. To increase the value of our work to decision-makers and in keeping with our aspiration to “[leave no one behind](#)”, this release aims to provide a comparative picture of well-being in the UK and other countries across the European Union (EU) or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) by looking at people’s experiences from different perspectives to better understand who is struggling and who is thriving.

Understanding the well-being of individual people and communities both within and across countries can help identify inequalities from more than one angle and compare strengths and weaknesses in different areas of life over time. In this article, we cover the [traditional national well-being domains](#), such as personal well-being, our relationships and health. Additionally, we look at opinions of civic engagement, trust in civic institutions and the most frequently reported concerns of people in the UK and EU. This will enable us to assess current well-being as well as to monitor changes in the future.

## Quality and methodology

The article uses the latest data available from sources including the [OECD](#), [Eurobarometer](#), [European Quality of Life Survey](#), [Eurostat](#), [Gallup World Poll](#), the [International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance](#), the [United Nations](#) and the [World Health Organisation](#).

Most of the data used in this article are for adults aged 15 years and over (unless otherwise stated) and cover different survey dates, which are defined in the text.

This release is based on the most recent available data as of February 2019. It is important to note that the data underpinning the indicators are often from different sources with different timeliness and coverage. A lot of the data come from household surveys so people not living in households are not included in the data (for example, people who live in communal establishments such as nursing homes, homelessness hostels, care homes, barracks or prisons) and accordingly, these findings are unlikely to accurately reflect their quality of life.

This article includes data for the UK or Great Britain. It is worth noting that different groups or different areas of the UK may feel very differently about their lives and have different experiences. Also, for this article, we have used the more recent data available at an international level. We will be publishing an update of the UK national well-being measures later in 2019, which will use the latest data available for the UK and allow comparisons across groups and geographies in the UK.

Comparisons have been made with the previous year's data, or the previously published figures where year-on-year data are not available. Additionally, where further previous data were available, longer-term comparisons and trends have been reported. To assess change between the two most recent data points, the overall average change across available countries was calculated. When the UK change was more than 1 percentage point away from the overall average, this was reported as a change over time. When only a single data point for an indicator is available, the measure has not been assessed over time.

Bar charts showing where the UK stands in comparison with other OECD or EU-28 countries have been included for a selection of indicators, using the most recent data point. On these charts, the top- and bottom-ranking countries have been presented alongside the UK and the countries scoring most similarly to the UK. Where possible, the OECD average or EU-28 average have also been included on these charts to show the position of the UK and other countries in relation to the average.

This article only covers a selection of national well-being indicators, for more information on all the data and sources, please see [Measuring national well-being international comparisons dataset](#).

## 3 . Personal well-being

Personal well-being is a subjective assessment of how people feel about their own lives. [Our measures of personal well-being](#) focus on overall satisfaction with life, the extent to which we feel the things we do are worthwhile and daily emotions such as happiness and anxiety. [These measures are strongly related to other important aspects of quality of life such as our health, relationships and employment](#).

Overall, personal well-being levels have increased in the UK.

Mental well-being improved by 4.6 percentage points between 2011 and 2016, compared with the EU-28 average change of 2.2 percentage points.

Feelings of worthwhile increased by 4.1 percentage points between 2011 and 2016 in the UK, compared with the EU-28 average decrease of 0.5 percentage points.

There was little change in ratings of happiness between 2011 and 2016, but the UK remains similar to the EU-28 average of 7.4 out of 10.

It is important to note that figures for personal well-being only cover the period up to 2016 because these are the latest internationally-comparable data. For users interested in [more recent UK estimates](#), please see our latest release.

## Life satisfaction

According to data from the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\)](#), the average (mean) rating of life satisfaction of people aged 15 years and over in the UK was 6.7 out of 10 from 2014 to 2016 (Figure 1).

This figure was the same as Chile and similar to the Czech Republic and Mexico (6.6 out of 10). The UK was slightly higher than the OECD average, which was 6.5 out of 10.

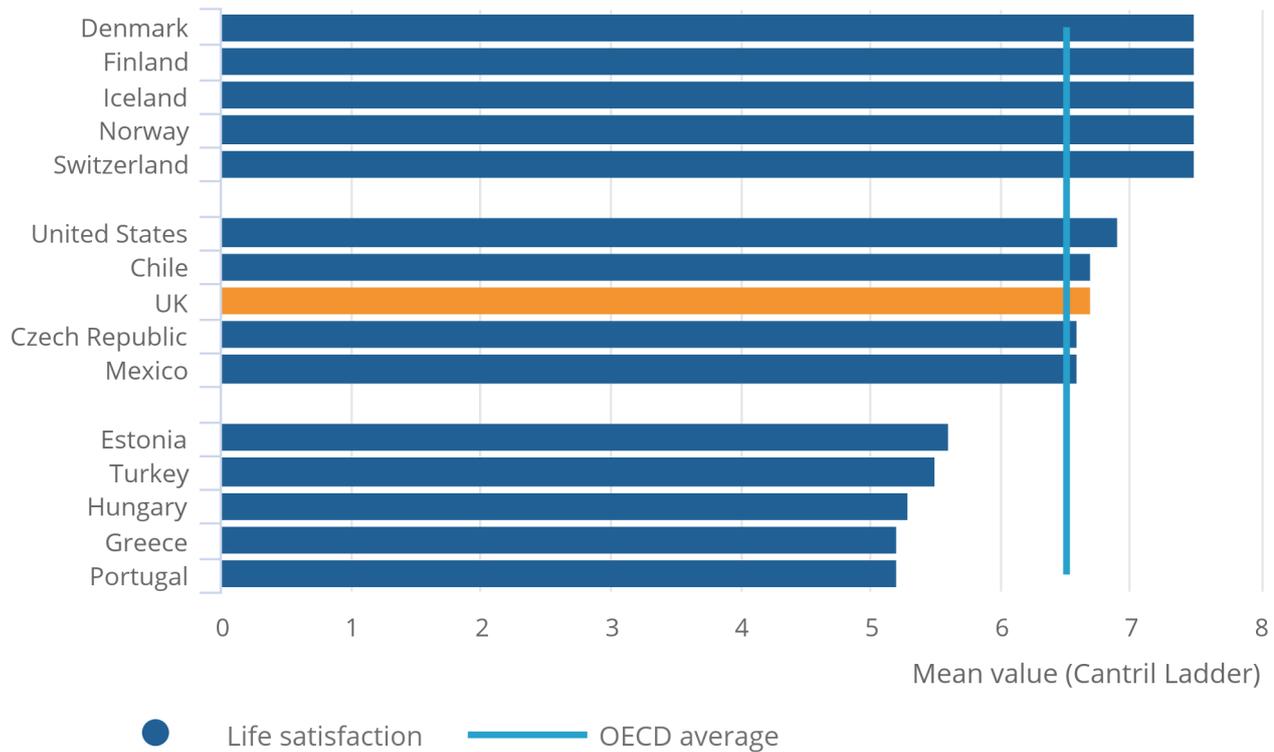
The highest-ranked countries for life satisfaction were Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland (all 7.5 out of 10), while the lowest-ranked countries were Greece and Portugal (both 5.2 out of 10).

## Figure 1: The UK's mean rating of life satisfaction was slightly higher than the OECD average

OECD countries, 2014 to 2016

### Figure 1: The UK's mean rating of life satisfaction was slightly higher than the OECD average

OECD countries, 2014 to 2016



Source: Gallup World Poll

#### Notes:

1. The reference period is the three-year average 2014 to 2016 for all the countries. Chart shows the countries with the highest and lowest values along with the countries that have the same or similar values to the UK.
2. Respondents were asked to: "Imagine an 11 rung ladder where the bottom (0) represents the worst possible life for you and the top (10) represents the best possible life for you. On which step of the ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time?"

## Feeling worthwhile

According to 2016 data from the [European Quality of Life Survey \(EQLS\)](#), 86% of adults aged 18 years and over in the UK agreed or strongly agreed that they generally felt that what they did in life was worthwhile. This was a 4.1-percentage point increase from 2011, where 82% agreed or strongly agreed.

The proportion in the UK in 2016 was higher than the EU-28 average of 78% in 2016 and was similar to Austria and Luxembourg (85%). The highest-ranked countries in 2016 were both Ireland and the Netherlands, where 9 in 10 (90%) people agreed or strongly agreed that what they did in life was worthwhile. The lowest-ranked country in 2016 was Greece (53%).

## Happiness

When the [EQLS](#) asked adults aged 18 years and over to rate how happy they were, the average happiness rating for the UK was 7.8 out of 10 in 2016.

This was the same as Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden, and was slightly higher than the EU-28 average of 7.4 out of 10. The highest-ranked country in 2016 was Finland (8.2 out of 10). Greece was the lowest-ranked country in 2016 (6.0 out of 10).

## Mental well-being

The [EQLS](#) also asked adults aged 18 years and over the questions on the World Health Organisation's (WHO-5)'s mental well-being index. This comprises five questions about feeling cheerful, calm, active, rested, and interested. A higher percentage score on the index indicates better mental well-being.

The UK scored an average of 63.2% on the scale in 2016; an increase from 58.6% in 2011.

In 2016, the UK was similar to the EU-28 average of 64.0% and the Czech Republic (63.4%), Latvia and Poland (both 62.6%). The highest-ranking country for mental well-being was Ireland, scoring 70.5%, and the lowest-ranking country was Croatia, scoring 57.3%.

## 4 . Our relationships

Our previous research has shown that having [positive relationships is one of the most important factors shaping people's personal well-being](#). To explore how people in the UK and EU compare on the quality of their relationships, we consider the extent to which people feel they have someone to rely on in times of trouble and whether they feel lonely.

There was little change between 2011 and 2016 in the proportion of people in the UK saying they were lonely most or all of the time, with the UK remaining on par with the EU-28 average of 6%.

It is important to note that figures for our relationships only cover the period up to 2014 to 2016 because these are the latest internationally-comparable data. For users interested in more recent UK estimates, please see our [Measuring national well-being dashboard](#).

## Loneliness

Inadequate social connectedness, or poor relationships, may lead to people experiencing loneliness. However, the feeling of loneliness is subjective and related to personal expectations about relationships. A person may feel lonely even in the company of family and friends.

As of January 2018, the UK was the first country to have a Minister for Loneliness, highlighting its importance as an important social issue [with a range of implications for people's health and well-being, as well as for societal and community well-being \(PDF, 2.8MB\)](#). Some research suggests that persistent loneliness may be as bad for your health as [smoking 15 cigarettes a day \(PDF, 160KB\)](#).

Loneliness was measured on the [European Quality of Life Survey \(EQLS\)](#) by asking adults aged 18 years and over to rate how often they felt lonely in the past two weeks.

In 2016, of respondents in the UK, 5% reported that they felt lonely most or all of the time (Figure 2), compared with 7% in 2011.

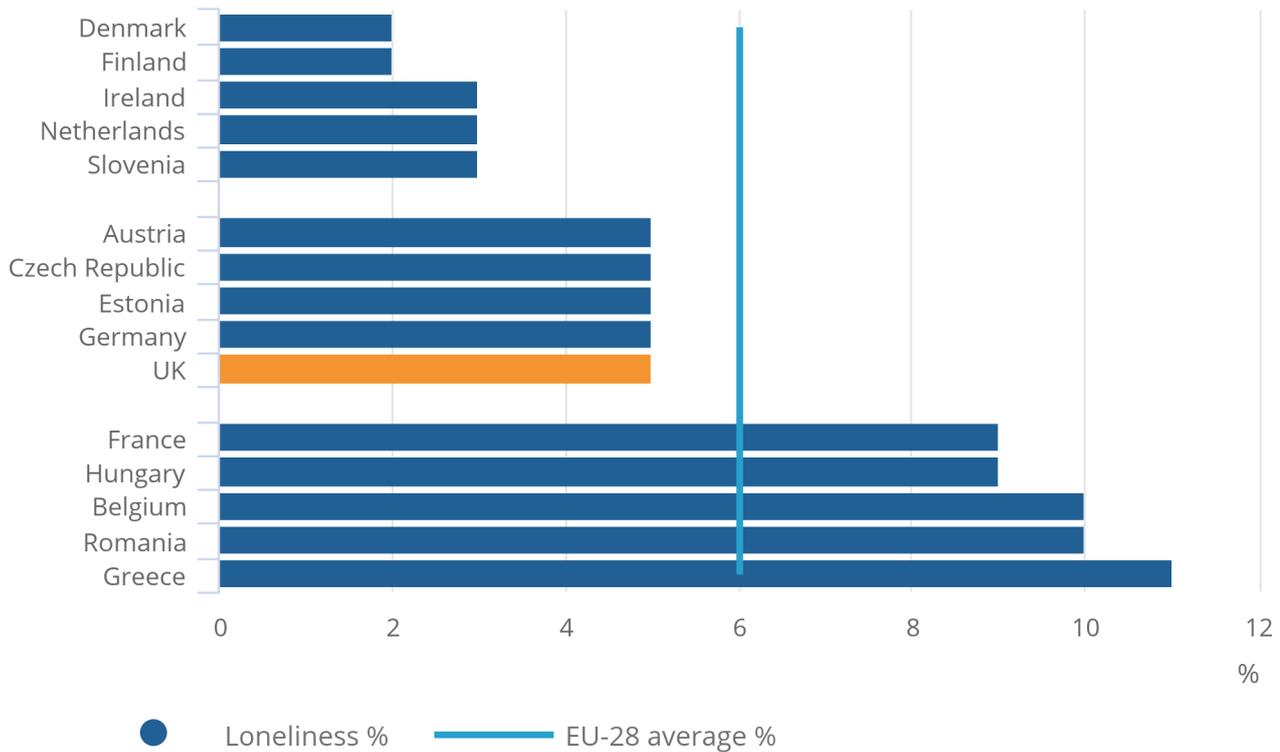
For 2016, the proportion of people reporting frequent loneliness was the same as in Austria, the Czech Republic, Estonia and Germany, and was similar to the EU-28 average of 6%. The highest-ranking countries were both Denmark and Finland, where only 2% of people reported feeling lonely most or all of the time. Greece was the lowest-ranking country with 11% of people reporting frequent loneliness.

**Figure 2: The proportion feeling lonely all or most of the time in the UK was similar to the EU-28 average**

EU-28, 2016

Figure 2: The proportion feeling lonely all or most of the time in the UK was similar to the EU-28 average

EU-28, 2016



Source: European Quality of Life Survey

Notes:

1. Based on the question "Which is closest to how you have been feeling lonely over the last two weeks".
2. Chart shows the countries with the highest and lowest values along with the countries that have the same or similar values to the UK.

## Perceived social network support

An average of 93% of respondents in the UK (aged 15 years and over) from 2014 to 2016 answered positively to the question "If you were in trouble, do you have relatives or friends you can count on to help you whenever you need them, or not?", saying that they did have a relative or friend they could count on.

This was the same proportion as Canada and was higher than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 89%. The highest-scoring country was Iceland, where 98% of respondents reported having someone to count on. The lowest-scoring country was Korea, where only 76% of respondents reported having someone to count on.

## 5 . Health

Our previous research has shown that [how people view their health is one of the most important factors contributing to overall personal well-being](#). Despite increases in estimated health-adjusted life expectancy at birth of males and females in the UK (between 2000 and 2016), there has been a decrease in self-reported health in the UK since 2010, suggesting that more people in the UK are believing themselves to be in worse health despite the fact that World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates showed we were living longer, healthier lives on average over this period.

It is important to note that the WHO estimates used here for the sake of international comparisons use a different method of calculation to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates of healthy life expectancy and produce a slightly different picture for the UK. The figures also only cover the period up to 2016 because these are the latest internationally-comparable data. For users interested in more recent [UK estimates of healthy life expectancy](#) , please see our latest release.

### Health-adjusted life expectancy (HALE) at birth

Health-adjusted life expectancy at birth is an estimate of the average number of years babies born in a particular year would live in a state of good general health if mortality levels at each age and the level of good health at each age, remain constant in the future.

According to data from the [WHO](#), males in the UK had an estimated health-adjusted life expectancy of 70.9 years at birth in 2016, an increase of 3.5 years in good health since 2000. In 2016, this was the same as Austria and was similar to Denmark and Korea (both 70.7 years) and to Ireland and Luxembourg (both 71.1 years).

[Females in the UK had an average health-adjusted life expectancy of 72.9 years at birth in 2016](#), gaining 2.5 extra years in good health on average since 2000. This was a similar expectancy to the Netherlands (72.8 years) and to Belgium, Denmark and Germany (all 73.0 years). Japan was the highest-ranking country for health-adjusted life expectancy at birth in 2016 for both males (72.6 years) and females (76.9 years). Latvia was the lowest-ranking country for males (62.4 years) and Turkey was the lowest-ranking country for females (67.6 years).

This means that, compared with the highest-ranking country (Japan), females in the UK can expect to live 4.0 fewer years in good health, while males will live 1.7 fewer years in good health. However, the UK has much higher health-adjusted life expectancy at birth than the lowest-ranking countries, with females in the UK expected to live 5.3 years longer in good health on average than those in Turkey and males 8.5 years longer in good health than those in Latvia.

## Percentage reporting to be in good or better than good health

Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) showed that just over two-thirds (69.0%) of adults aged 15 years and over in the UK reported being in very good or good health in 2016.

This proportion peaked at 79.4% in 2010 and has been decreasing each year since, suggesting more people in the UK believe themselves to be in worse health. The UK decrease (10.4 percentage points) between 2010 and 2016 compares with an average decrease of 0.4 percentage points across the EU-28.

The deterioration in our assessments of our health is at odds both with improvements in objective measures of health like average health-adjusted life expectancy at birth and in improvements in our mental well-being, as measured by the WHO-5 mental well-being index.

In 2016, the UK had around the same proportion (69.0%) as Luxembourg (69.1%) and Turkey (69.4%) reporting good or better than good health (Figure 3). The highest-ranking country was Canada (88.4%), while the lowest-ranking was Korea (32.5%).

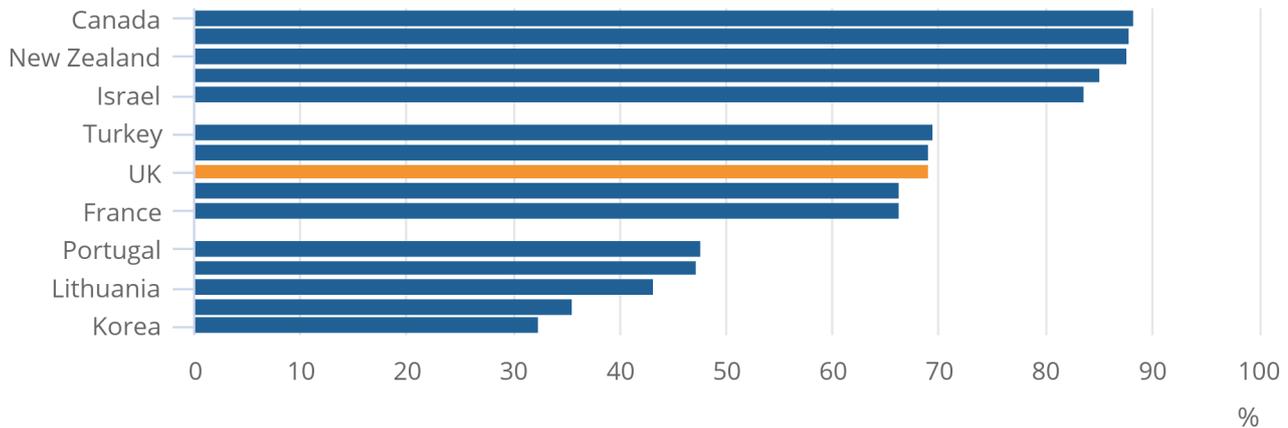
Interestingly, in 2016, only 35.5% of respondents in Japan regarded themselves as being in good or better health, making it the second-lowest ranking country, despite being the country with the highest health-adjusted life expectancy at birth for both males and females.

**Figure 3: Around 7 in 10 people in the UK reported very good or good health**

OECD countries, 2016

## Figure 3: Around 7 in 10 people in the UK reported very good or good health

OECD countries, 2016



Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**Notes:**

1. Results for Australia, Canada, Chile, Israel, New Zealand and the United States are not directly comparable with those for other countries, due to differences in reporting scales, which may lead to an upward bias in the reported estimates.
2. The reference period for Australia is 2014.
3. Chart shows the countries with the highest and lowest values along with the countries that have the same or similar values to the UK.

## Prevalence of depressive and anxiety disorders

Another important aspect of health is good mental health. According to [data from WHO](#), the prevalence of depressive disorders in the UK in 2015 was 4.5% (PDF, 1.6MB). This was a similar proportion to Turkey (4.4%) and Israel (4.6%). The country with the lowest prevalence of depressive disorders was Korea (3.7%), while the countries with the highest prevalence were Australia, Estonia and the United States (all 5.9%).

The prevalence of anxiety disorders in the UK in 2015 was 4.2%. This was similar to Spain (4.1%) and Turkey (4.0%). The country with the lowest prevalence of anxiety disorders in 2015 was Israel (2.8%) while the country with the highest was Norway (7.4%).

## 6 . What we do

What we do in life shapes our lifestyles, our relationships with others and our well-being. People have many different lifestyles based on individual choices, characteristics, personal preferences and circumstances. Individuals divide their time between various tasks and activities, including paid or unpaid employment, volunteering and numerous leisure activities.

In the UK, the [unemployment rate has continued to fall since 2011](#), as the labour market continues to strengthen since the economic downturn. Along with the longer-term fall in the unemployment rate, the number of people saying they would like to work more hours (the underemployed) remained relatively flat between 2011 and 2014, before falling after 2014. In comparison, the number of people saying they would like to work fewer hours even with less pay (overemployed) has been increasing steadily since 2013.

This increase in overemployment and fall in the underemployment rate can be partly attributed to an improvement in the labour market conditions, as firms could be increasing the number of hours worked of their existing workforce, instead of hiring new staff. In the UK, analysis has shown that the [quality of the job may also have a part to play in well-being](#). For other countries across the EU-28, such as Greece and Spain, where there are higher unemployment rates, we can see that [unemployment is more of a main concern than it is in the UK](#).

Although volunteering, participating in cultural activities and sports participation are not discussed in this section, they are included in the [Measuring national well-being: international comparisons dataset](#).

It is important to note that figures for what we do only cover the period up to 2016 to 2017 because these are the latest internationally comparable data. For users interested in more recent UK estimates, please see our [Measuring national well-being dashboard](#) and [recent UK estimates for unemployment rates](#).

## Harmonised unemployment rates

There is strong evidence showing that being in work is generally good for physical and mental health and well-being, though the extent of the benefits may depend on job quality and job satisfaction. [Worklessness, on the other hand, is associated with poorer physical and mental health and well-being \(PDF, 1.2MB\)](#) (Waddell and Burton, 2006) and also has important implications for living standards.

Looking first at unemployment, harmonised unemployment rates refer to the number of people of working age who are available to work and have taken specific steps to find work, but who are not currently in employment.

In the UK, [harmonised unemployment rates have been improving year-on-year since 2011](#), from 8.1% in 2011 to 4.4% in 2017, according to data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In 2017, the harmonised unemployment rate in the UK was the same as in the United States and similar to the rate in Israel (4.2%) (Figure 4).

The countries with the lowest harmonised unemployment rates in 2017 were Japan and Iceland (both 2.8%), while those with the highest rates were Greece (21.5%) and Spain (17.2%).

Given the very high unemployment rates in 2017 in countries like Italy (11.2%), Spain (17.2%) and Greece (21.5%) compared with the OECD average (5.8%), it is perhaps not surprising that unemployment was most frequently cited as a main concern facing their country by people in the EU in both 2016 and 2018.

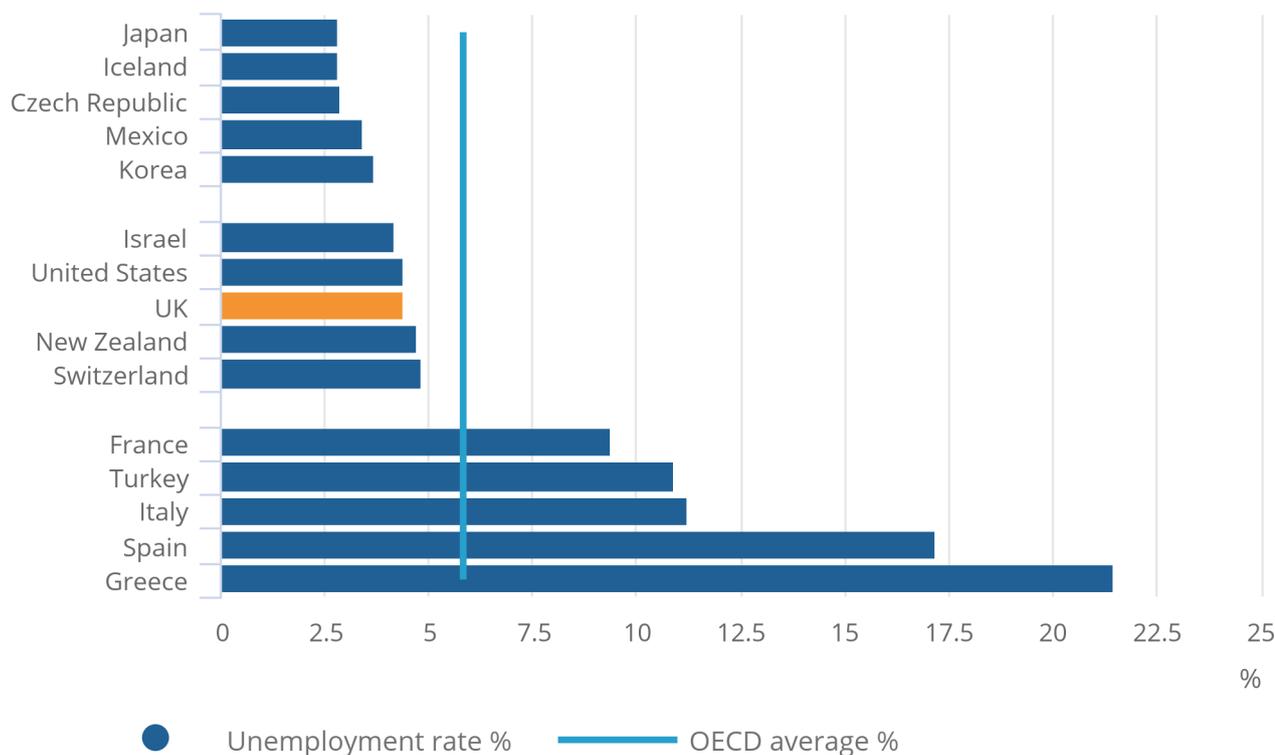
Meanwhile, the unemployment picture in the UK has been much more positive and improving, as reflected in the fact that unemployment was only the fifth most frequently cited concern in the UK in 2016, falling back to seventh-ranked concern in 2018 ([see section 13](#)).

**Figure 4: The harmonised unemployment rate in the UK was lower than the OECD average**

OECD countries, 2017

**Figure 4: The harmonised unemployment rate in the UK was lower than the OECD average**

OECD countries, 2017



Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Notes:

1. Harmonised unemployment rates define the unemployed as people of working age who are without work, are available for work, and have taken specific steps to find work. The uniform application of this definition results in estimates of unemployment rates that are more internationally comparable than estimates based on national definitions of unemployment. This indicator is measured in numbers of unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force and it is seasonally adjusted. The labour force is defined as the total number of unemployed people plus those in civilian employment.
2. Chart shows the countries with the highest and lowest values along with the countries that have the same or similar values to the UK.

## Job satisfaction

Work can be a very important part of our lives, providing structure, routine and a sense of self-worth, which are all important to well-being. This section considers how satisfied people in the UK are with their jobs compared with those in other European countries.

According to data from the [European Quality of Life Survey \(EQLS\)](#), the average rating of job satisfaction in the UK for those aged 18 years and over in 2016 was 7.4 out of 10, similar to 2011 levels (7.5 out of 10). This was the same as the EU-28 average, as well as Bulgaria, Czech Republic and France.

Austria and Finland had the highest levels of job satisfaction (both 8.1 out of 10), closely followed by Denmark (8.0 out of 10). Greece had the lowest levels of job satisfaction in 2016 (6.4 out of 10), followed by Spain and Croatia (both 7.0 out of 10). Coupled with the fact that Greece and Spain also had the highest rates of unemployment, this suggests that those in work were not particularly satisfied with their jobs.

## Views about citizens from the EU working in their country

People in the UK became more favourable towards EU citizens working in the UK between the spring of 2016 and spring of 2018. Figure 5 shows how different countries compare in views about EU citizens working in their country.

Overall, it was perceived as a good thing by at least half of people in the 28 EU member states in 2018, led by Luxembourg (91%) and Ireland, Spain and Sweden (all 87%). People were least likely to think that this was a good thing in Italy (50%), Cyprus (57%) and Croatia and Austria (both 58%).

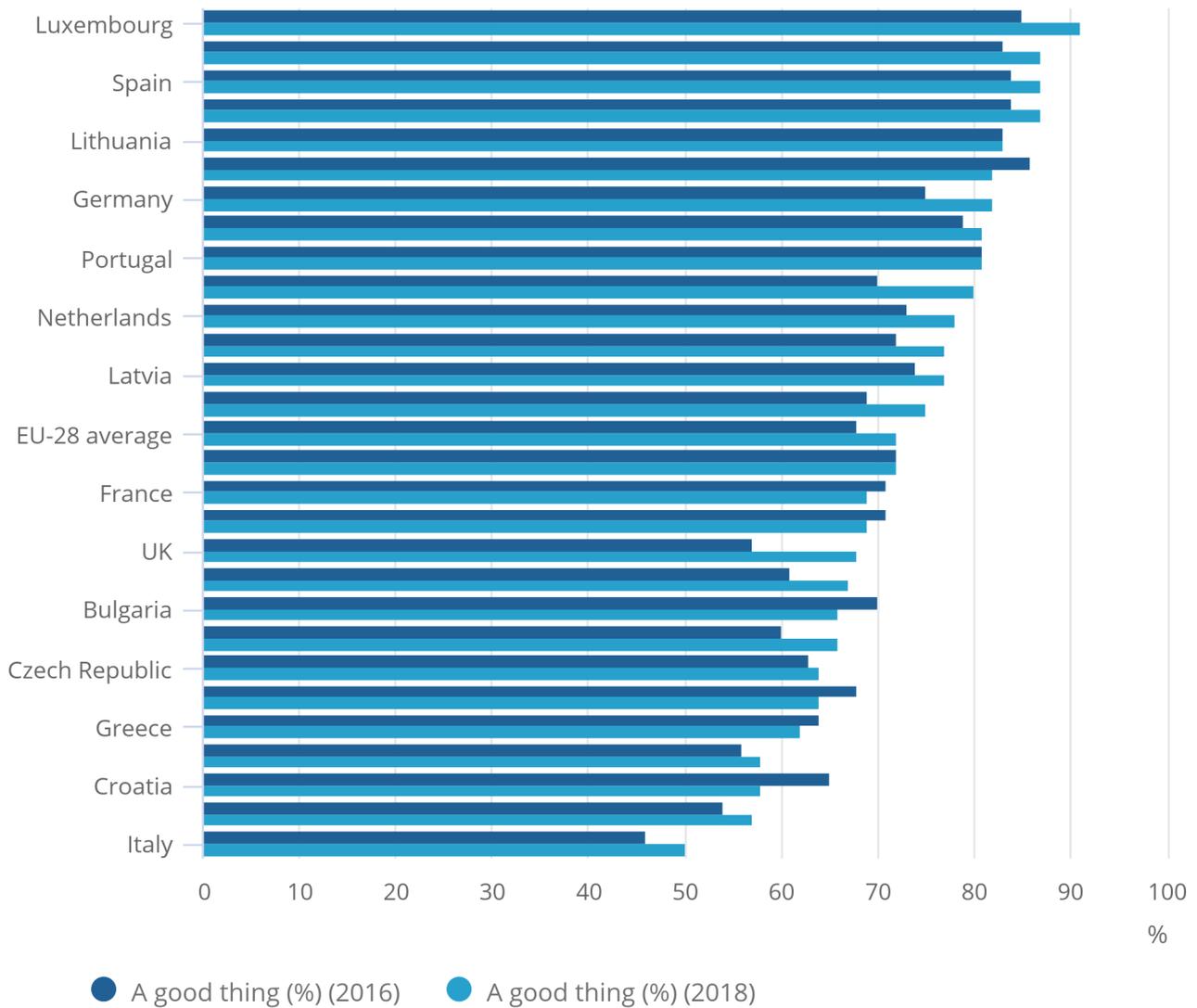
Between spring 2016 and spring 2018, support for EU citizens working in their country increased in 18 countries, led by the UK (up 11 percentage points) and Poland (up 10 percentage points). It decreased in seven countries, led by Croatia (down 7 percentage points) and was unchanged in three countries.

**Figure 5: At least half of respondents reported it was a good thing for EU citizens to have the right to work in the respondent's country in spring 2018**

EU-28, spring 2016 and spring 2018

Figure 5: At least half of respondents reported it was a good thing for EU citizens to have the right to work in the respondent's country in spring 2018

EU-28, spring 2016 and spring 2018



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 85 and 89

**Notes:**

1. Respondents were asked "For the following statement, please tell me if you think that it is a good thing, a bad thing or neither a good or a bad thing - The right for EU citizens to work in (Our Country)". This chart contains only those that reported "A good thing".

## 7 . Where we live

Where we live can have a significant impact on our sense of well-being. Homes that meet our individual needs and provide us with shelter and security are made all the better by having positive relationships with people who live in the local area.

Overall, this area of life has improved in the UK since 2011. The proportion of people in the UK reporting feeling close to those in their neighbourhood increased by 3.6 percentage points between 2011 and 2016, compared with an average decrease of 4.0 percentage points across the EU-28.

There was little change in people's satisfaction with their accommodation in the UK during the same period, though we remain slightly above the EU-28 average of 7.7 out of 10.

It is important to note that figures for where we live only cover the period up to 2014 to 2016 because these are the latest internationally comparable data. For users interested in more recent UK estimates, please see our [Measuring national well-being dashboard](#) and [recent UK figures on household income](#).

### Feeling safe walking alone at night in the area where living

Feeling safe in and around our homes is an essential aspect of leading a healthy, happy life. The Gallup World Poll collected [data on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\) countries](#), assessing [the percentage of people aged 15 years and over who felt safe walking home alone at night](#) in the city or area where they lived.

Between 2014 and 2016, of people in the UK, 77.4% said they felt safe walking alone at night. This was similar to Germany and Sweden (both 75.9%) and to Austria (80.7%), and was higher than the OECD average of 68.6%.

People in Norway were most likely to say they felt safe (87.7%), while people in Mexico least likely to say this (45.9%).

### Feeling close to people in the local area

Feeling close to others in the area where you live is another aspect of social connectedness and belonging. According to the [European Quality of Life Survey \(EQLS\)](#) in 2016, 62% of people aged 18 years and over in the UK reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that they felt close to the people in the area in which they lived. This was similar to the EU-28 average of 63%, and Austria and Belgium (also 63%).

The lowest-ranked countries in 2016 were Germany and Finland (both 54%), while the highest-ranking country was Latvia (83%).

## Satisfaction with accommodation

According to the [EQLS](#), on average, [people aged 16 years and over in the UK rated their satisfaction with their accommodation as 8.1 out of 10](#) in 2016. This was similar to 2011 (7.9 out of 10) and similar to Sweden and Malta (both 8.2 out of 10) (Figure 6). This was also higher than the EU-28 average of 7.7 out of 10.

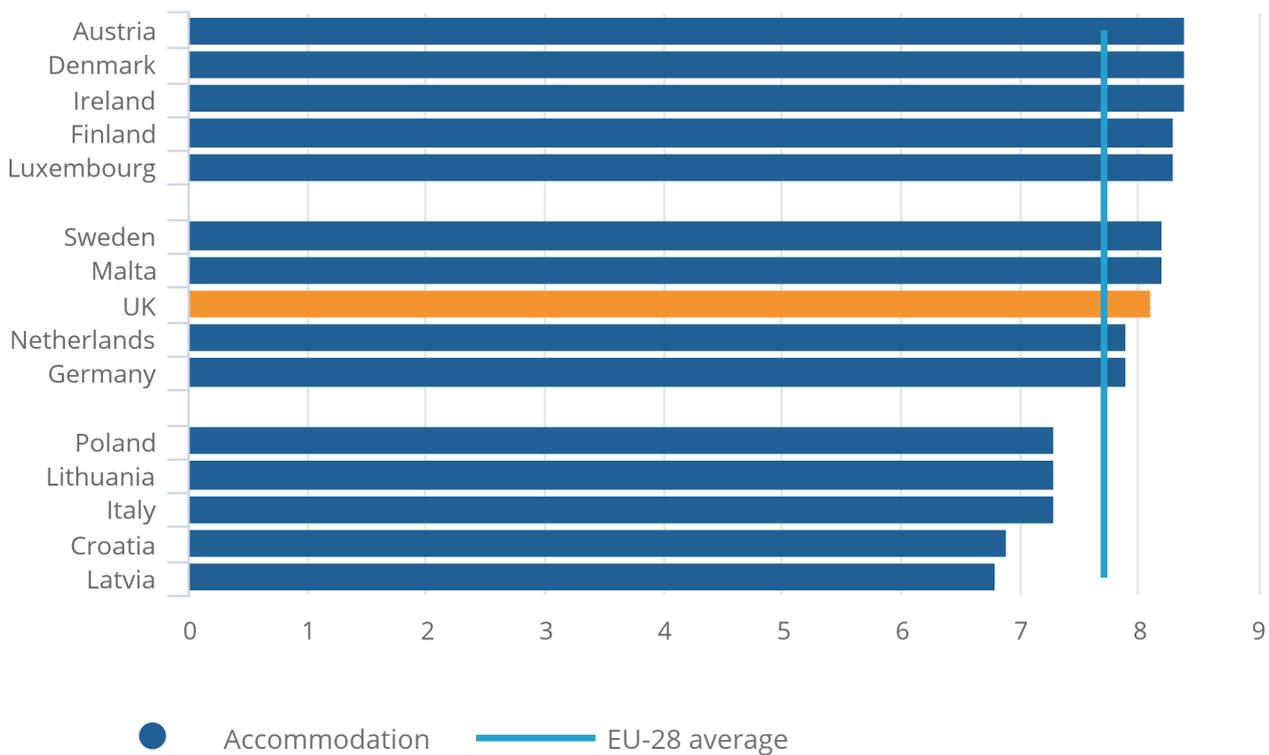
The highest-ranking countries in 2016 were Austria, Denmark and Ireland, all with an average rating of 8.4 out of 10, while the lowest-ranking country was Latvia (6.8 out of 10).

**Figure 6: The mean rating of satisfaction with accommodation was higher than the EU-28 average**

EU-28, 2016

Figure 6: The mean rating of satisfaction with accommodation was higher than the EU-28 average

EU-28, 2016



Source: European Quality of Life Survey

Notes:

1. Based on the question "Could you please tell me on a scale of 1 to 10 how satisfied you are with your accommodation, where 1 means you are very dissatisfied and 10 means you are very satisfied?".
2. Chart shows the countries with the highest and lowest values along with the countries that have the same or similar values to the UK.

Housing has become a more frequently cited concern for people in the UK recently. Respondents to the Eurobarometer Survey aged 15 years and over were asked what the two most important issues facing their country were. In 2018, over one in five (22%) reported housing was an important issue in the UK (compared with 11% for the EU-28 average) ([see section 13](#)).

Factors that can affect people's satisfaction with their accommodation in the UK could be [younger people living with parents more](#), [housing quality and energy efficiency \(XLS, 279KB\)](#) and [affordability](#). There are a few possible reasons for this; for example, the costs of both renting and buying homes have increased and the introduction of stricter mortgage lending rules after the 2008 economic downturn. There are [significant relationships between owning or renting and well-being](#) and [loneliness](#); those that [own outright or with a mortgage have higher life satisfaction \(XLS, 421KB\)](#).

## 8 . Personal finance

Office for National Statistics research in 2015 showed that [individuals in households with higher incomes report higher life satisfaction and happiness \(PDF, 215KB\)](#) and lower anxiety, holding other factors constant.

In 2017, the UK had a similar proportion of people defined as at risk of poverty as the EU-28 average and, in 2018, a higher proportion of people in the UK expressed satisfaction with their household financial situation than the EU average. In 2017, the UK had a lower proportion of people saying their household was struggling to make ends meet than the EU average. Overall, this is quite a positive picture when comparing the UK with other EU countries.

When we switch the focus to look at personal finance measures within the UK, there are indications of important disparities in how we are faring financially. In 2017, the UK had a similar proportion of people defined as at risk of poverty (17.0%) as the EU-28 average (16.9%) and, in 2018, a higher proportion of people in the UK expressed satisfaction with their household financial situation (20.0%) than the EU average (12.0%). In 2017, the UK had a lower proportion of people saying their household was struggling to make ends meet (14.1%) than the EU average (21.6%). Overall, this is quite a positive picture when comparing the UK with other EU countries.

In the UK, the proportion of people reporting satisfaction with their financial situation decreased by 3.0 percentage points between 2017 and 2018, compared with an average increase of 0.2 percentage points across the EU-28. There was little change to the levels of those at-risk-of-poverty between 2016 and 2017, but the UK remained in line with the EU-28 average of 16.9%.

There was little change to the proportion of people struggling to make ends meet between 2016 and 2017, though the UK scored 7.5 percentage points lower than the EU-28 average of 21.6%. The UK's median equivalised income remained stable between 2016 and 2017.

One of the measures in this domain, namely median household income, is not discussed in this section, but is included in the [Measuring national well-being international comparisons dataset](#). "Median household income" is the income of the middle household if all households are ranked from the lowest income to the highest.

It is important to note that figures for personal finance only cover the period up to 2017 to 2018 because these are the latest internationally comparable data. For users interested in more up-to-date UK estimates, please see our [Measuring national well-being dashboard](#).

## At-risk-of-poverty rate

The well-being of people who are at-risk-of-poverty may be low as they face important challenges in many aspects of life, including having more limited resources and, therefore, choices. They may be at greater risk of being in debt, suffer poorer health, experience educational disadvantage and may live in poorer housing in less-safe neighborhoods.

An individual is considered to be in poverty if they live in a household with an equivalised disposable income below 60% of the national median. Equivalisation adjusts the income to consider the size and composition of the household. This type of relative indicator does not measure absolute wealth or poverty, but low income in comparison with other residents in that country, which does not necessarily imply a low standard of living.

According to data from the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey, [in the UK, 17.0% of people were at risk of living in poverty](#) in 2017, which was very similar to the EU-28 average of 16.9% and that of Malta (16.8%). This proportion has remained generally stable in the UK since 2009 (range: 15.9% to 17.3%).

The lowest-ranking country in 2017 was Romania, with 23.6% of people at risk of living in poverty, while the highest-ranking country was the Czech Republic, with 9.1% of people at risk of poverty.

## Satisfaction with household financial situation

Eurobarometer asked people aged 15 years and over how satisfied they were with the financial situation of their household. In the spring of 2018, of people in the UK, 20% reported that the financial situation of their household was very good. This was the same proportion as Austria and Luxembourg, and is higher than the EU-28 average of only 12%. The UK has scored 7 to 12 percentage points above the EU-28 average each year since 2014.

In spring 2018, Denmark had the highest proportion of people rating their household financial situation as very good (43%), while Greece showed the lowest proportion (1%).

## Households making ends meet with difficulty or great difficulty

In 2017, of households in the UK, 14.1% were making ends meet with difficulty or great difficulty, according to the EU-SILC survey data (Figure 7). This was a similar proportion to Estonia (14.3%) and was lower than the EU-28 average of 21.6%. In the UK, this proportion has decreased each year since 2013 (21.1%).

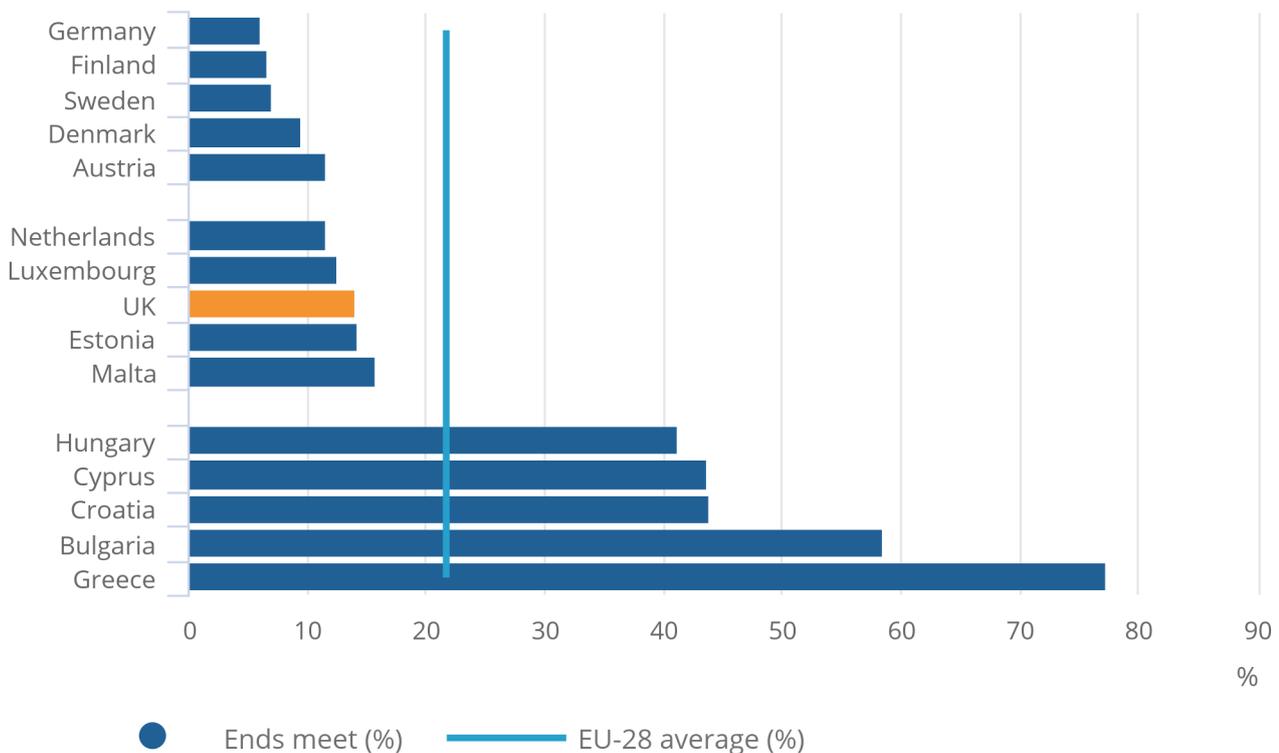
The highest-ranking country was Germany, with 6.1% of households reporting making ends meet with difficulty or great difficulty. The lowest-ranking country, with the highest proportion of households struggling to make ends meet, was Greece (77.2%), as has been the case each year since 2011.

**Figure 7: The proportion in the UK who find it difficult to make ends meet was lower than the EU-28 average**

EU-28, 2017

Figure 7: The proportion in the UK who find it difficult to make ends meet was lower than the EU-28 average

EU-28, 2017



Source: Eurostat

Notes:

1. Chart shows the countries with the highest and lowest values along with the countries that have the same or similar values to the UK.

## 9 . Economy

The UK's government debt increased by 0.9 percentage points between 2016 and 2017. This compared with an average decrease of 0.4 percentage points across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Net national income (2015 to 2016) and inflation rates (Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2018 to Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018) all remained similar. Inflation in the UK is similar to the average inflation rate of 2.3% across OECD countries.

For more detailed information, please see the [Measuring national well-being international comparisons dataset](#).

It is important to note that figures for “economy” only cover the period up to 2016 to 2018 (Quarter 3) because these are the latest internationally comparable data. For users interested in more up-to-date UK estimates, please see [Measuring national well-being dashboard](#) and [recent UK figures on inflation rates](#) and [government debt](#).

## 10 . Education and skills

Equipping current and future generations with the necessary skills to keep the UK in a strong and favourable position is an important part of sustaining both our personal and societal well-being into the future.

The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training has declined in the UK year-on-year since 2012 and in 2017 was below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 15.6%. At the same time, when comparing with other countries, the UK had a higher proportion of those aged 25 to 64 years that attained less than an upper secondary level of education (18.8%), whilst Japan had the lowest at 0.5%.

It is important to note that figures for education and skills only cover the period up to 2017 because these are the latest internationally-comparable data. For users interested in more up-to-date UK estimates, please see our [Measuring national well-being dashboard](#) and [recent UK figures on those not in employment, education or training](#).

### 20- to 24-year-olds not in employment, education, or training

A young person identified as not in employment, education, or training (NEET) is either unemployed or economically inactive and is either looking for work or is inactive for reasons other than being a student, an apprentice or a carer at home.

In 2017, in the UK, 12.9% of people aged 20 to 24 years were NEET. This was a similar proportion to Austria (11.8%) and was lower than the OECD average of 15.6%. The proportion of NEETs in the UK has decreased each year since 2012, down from 20.2%.

The highest-ranking countries, with the lowest proportions of NEETs in 2017, were Iceland (5.6%) and the Netherlands (7.7%). The lowest-ranking country, with the highest proportion of 20- to 24-year-olds NEETs was Turkey (32.9%), followed by Italy (30.1%), which have alternated bottom two ranking countries each year since 2013.

## Educational attainments below upper secondary education

Educational attainment may be a predictor of an individual's future financial well-being. For example, people who have completed higher levels of education are more likely to achieve economic success than those who have not.

According to data from the OECD, in 2017, [nearly one in five people \(18.8%\) aged 25 to 64 years in the UK had attained less than an upper secondary level of education](#) (equivalent to UK "A" Levels). This means their highest level of qualification was only up to lower secondary education (Figure 8). This was similar to Australia (19.0%) and the OECD average (21.8%).

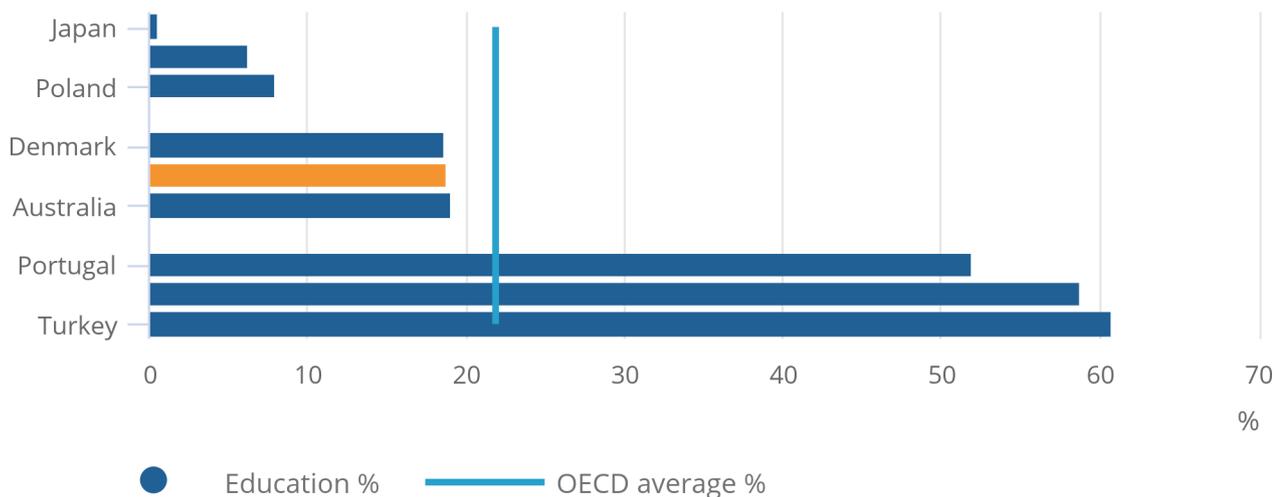
The highest-ranking countries in 2017 were Japan (0.5%) and the Czech Republic (6.2%). Conversely, the lowest-ranking countries were Turkey (60.7%) and Mexico (58.8%).

**Figure 8: Proportion of those aged 25 to 64 years with below upper secondary education was lower than the OECD average**

OECD countries, 2017

Figure 8: Proportion of those aged 25 to 64 years with below upper secondary education was lower than the OECD average

OECD countries, 2017



Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Notes:

1. Chart shows the countries with the highest and lowest values along with the countries that have the same or similar values to the UK.

# 11 . Governance

Political engagement and voicing political opinions matters to national well-being as it helps shape government activities, which in turn help build strong and resilient communities. People's quality of life may be affected by the functioning of the EU, the national government or parliament, and devolved and local governments, all of which exert an influence over different areas of life.

It is important to note that figures for governance only cover the period up to 2016 to 2017 because these are the latest internationally-comparable data. For users interested in more up-to-date UK estimates, please see [Measuring national well-being dashboard](#).

## Confidence in national government

Having confidence in government is essential for social cohesion and well-being. It represents the confidence of citizens and businesses in the actions of the government.

In Great Britain, 41% of people aged 15 years and over reported having confidence in the national government in 2016, [according to data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\)](#). This was an increase of 5 percentage points since 2007 and was similar to the OECD average of 42% and the findings for Belgium and the Czech Republic (both also 42%).

In Switzerland, four-fifths (80%) of people reported feeling confidence in their national government in 2016, making it the highest-ranked country. Greece had the lowest proportion reporting confidence in their national government (13%).

Although voting turnout is not discussed in this section, it is included in the [Measuring national well-being international comparisons dataset](#).

To provide further insight into how the views of people in the UK compare with those of people in other European countries on matters of governance we look in greater detail at findings on trust in public institutions, perceptions of having a voice and feeling attached to the EU, satisfaction with democracy and views about a possible future outside the EU.

The data are from the [Standard Eurobarometer Survey](#) and focus on differences between people aged 15 years and over in the UK and the EU. Two Standard Eurobarometer surveys have been used to compare changes over time, [spring 2016](#) (fieldwork carried out May 2016) and [spring 2018](#) (fieldwork carried out March 2018).

## Trust in institutions

Figure 9 compares the views of people in the UK and the EU-28 average on the extent to which they have trust in important civic institutions.

Compared with the EU-28 average, people in the UK are less likely to trust the EU. Looking at the proportion in the UK who said that they did not trust the EU, a similar proportion also said they did not trust the UK Parliament and government. On the other hand, people in the UK tended to trust the army, police and judicial system more than the EU-28 average.

In spring 2016, the percentage of people in the UK saying they trusted the EU was very similar to the EU-28 average (30% and 33% respectively). By the spring of 2018, people in the UK remained unchanged in their level of trust in the EU, while across the EU-28, trust in the EU had increased on average by 9 percentage points.

In spring 2018, Lithuania (66%), Portugal and Denmark (both 57%) led the EU-28 on reporting that they tended to trust the EU. Conversely, Greece (69%), the UK (57%) and the Czech Republic (56%) reported that they tended not to trust the EU.

A similar pattern emerged in relation to trust in the UK government or Parliament with these remaining stable over the period or falling slightly, while the EU-28 averages for trust in these national institutions increased over the period. In spring 2018, Luxembourg (72%) and the Netherlands (67%) led the EU-28 on reporting that they tended to trust their national government. Conversely, Greece (87%), Croatia (82%) and Spain (81%) reported that they tended not to trust their national government.

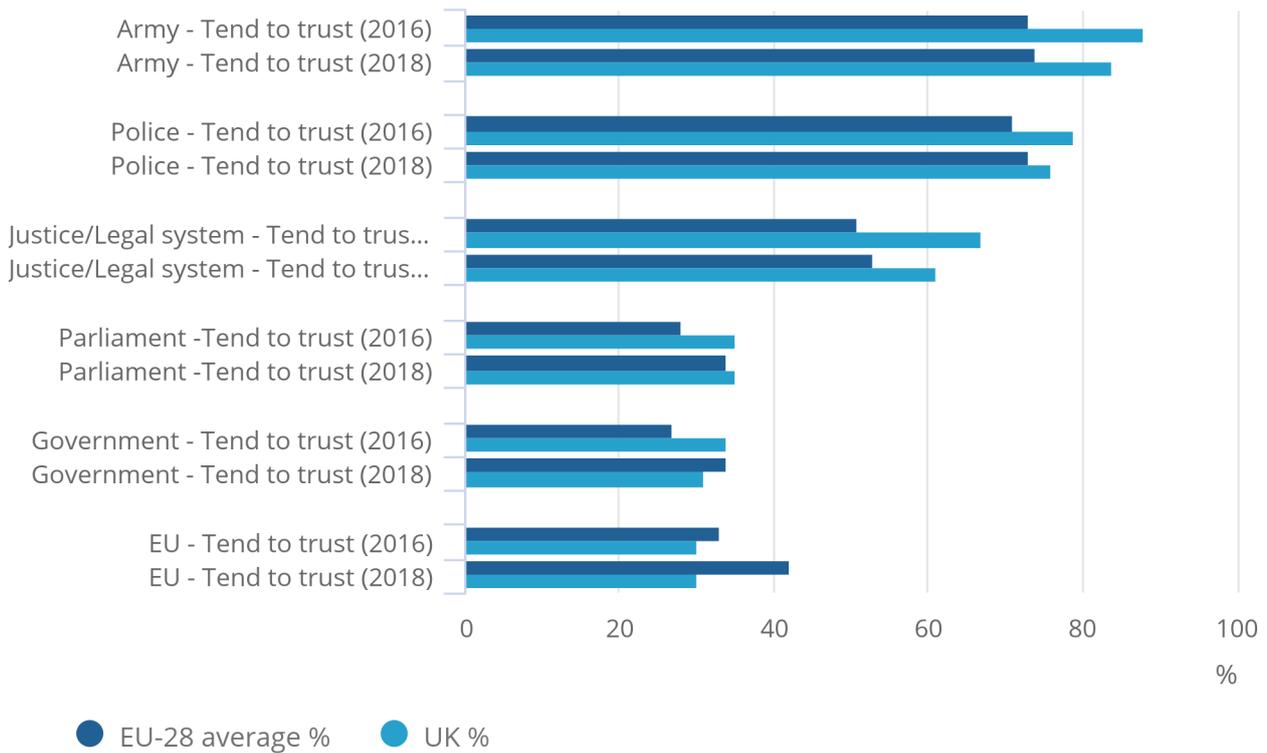
Figure 9 also shows the tendency to trust institutions such as the army, police and legal systems. In spring 2018, the majority of people in the UK reported that they tended to trust the army (84%), the police (76%) and the UK legal system (61%). A higher proportion of people in the UK tended to trust these institutions when compared with the EU-28 average.

**Figure 9: People in the UK trusted the army, police and judicial system more than the EU, government and Parliament in spring 2018**

EU-28 average and UK, spring 2016 and spring 2018

Figure 9: People in the UK trusted the army, police and judicial system more than the EU, government and Parliament in spring 2018

EU-28 average and UK, spring 2016 and spring 2018



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 85 and 89

Notes:

1. Respondents were asked "For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it." The chart includes only those who reported "Tend to trust".

## Having a voice and feeling attached

Civic engagement and governance are essential for democracies. [OECD stated in 2011](#) that “Civic Engagement allows people to express their voice and to contribute to the political functioning of their society. In turn, in well-functioning democracies, civic engagement shapes the institutions that govern people’s lives.”

In spring 2018, nearly 6 in 10 people in the UK (59%) disagreed that their voice counted in the EU, compared with 35% who agreed their voice counted in the EU. In the same period, the EU average of those who agreed that their voice counted in the EU reached a new high of 45% (up 7 percentage points since spring 2016). However, the proportion of people in the UK who agreed or disagreed that their voice counted in the EU remained the same as in 2016.

Figure 10 shows an even split across all the EU-28 countries as to whether the majority of people feel their voice counts in the EU or not – with the UK being one in which people were more likely to say that their voice did not count.

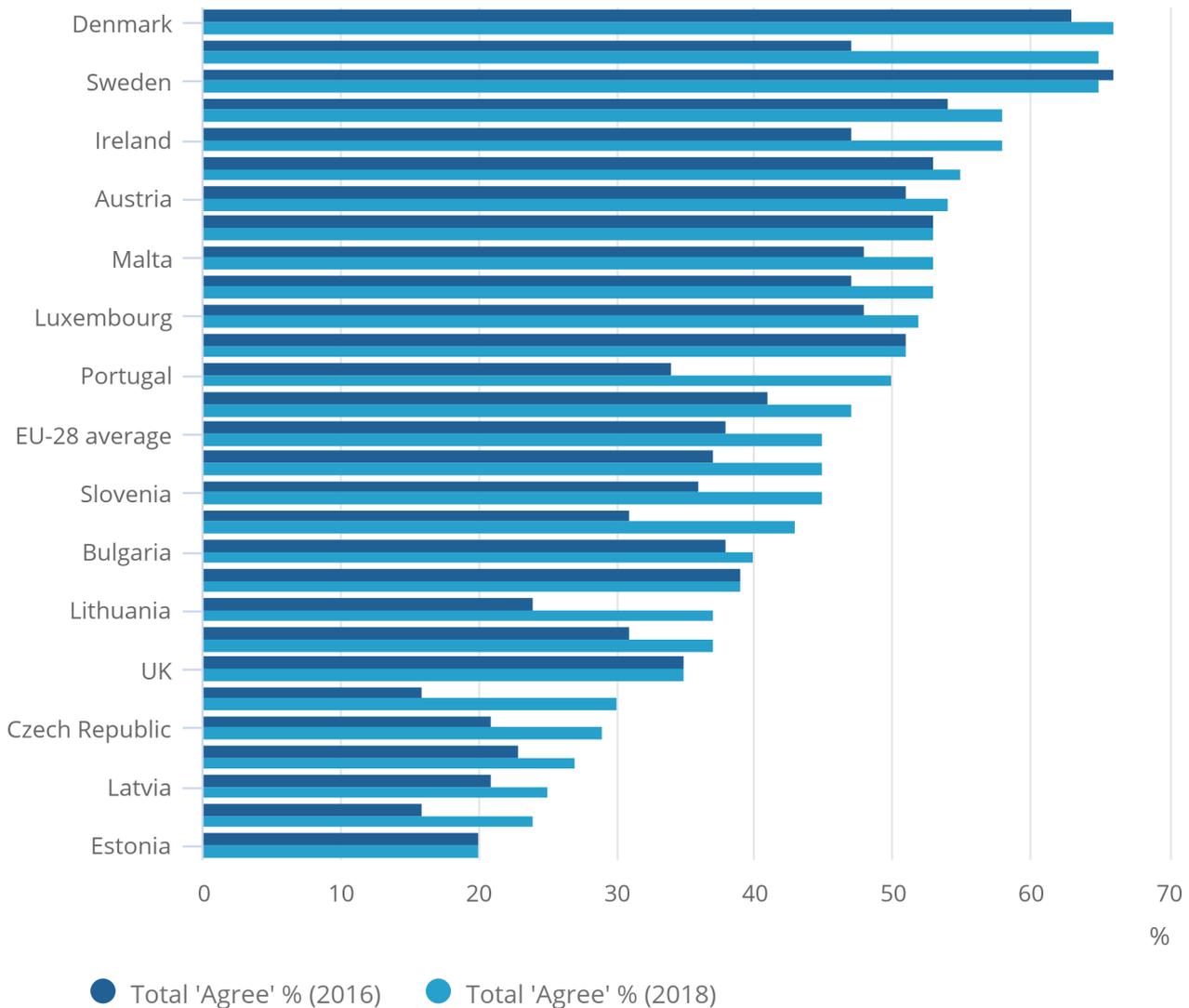
Other countries in which a greater proportion of people also disagreed that their voice counts in the EU include Greece (73%), Estonia (70%) and the Czech Republic (67%) all having higher percentages of people than the UK disagreeing they have a voice in the EU. A majority of respondents agreed that their voice counts in the European Union in 14 member states led by Denmark (66%) and Germany and Sweden (both 65%).

**Figure 10: Over half of respondents in 13 member states agreed that their voice counted in the EU**

EU-28, spring 2016 and spring 2018

Figure 10: Over half of respondents in 13 member states agreed that their voice counted in the EU

EU-28, spring 2016 and spring 2018



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 85 and 89

Notes:

1. Respondents were asked "Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statement - My voice counts in the EU". This chart includes only those that agreed with the statement.

In 2018, over half of people (53%) aged 15 years and over in the UK reported that they were “not attached” to the EU compared with 44% that reported that they were. Interestingly, when asked about an attachment to “Europe”, over half (57%) reported an “attachment”, while 40% reported a “non-attachment”. This may be evidence that people in the UK might see themselves as European without connecting strongly to EU governance.



## Satisfaction with democracy

People were also asked about their satisfaction with democracy in their own country and in the EU. Democracy can be measured in many ways, for example: regular, free and fair elections; open public debate on major policies and legislation; and citizens' rights to information about the national government and the way it functions. People, themselves, also may have different interpretations of what democracy is or should be.

In spring 2018, just over 6 in 10 people in the UK (61%) reported that they were satisfied with the way democracy works in the UK, a similar proportion to spring 2016 (62%). However, when asked if they were satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU, the proportion was lower at 42% (up from 38% in spring 2016).

Figure 11 shows a comparison of satisfaction with democracy (in their own country and the EU) among people in the EU member states in spring 2018.

Of the 18 countries where a majority of people were satisfied with the way democracy works in their respective countries, Denmark (90%) and Luxembourg (88%) ranked the highest, while Greece ranked the lowest (23%).

Of the 20 countries where a majority of people were satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU, Ireland ranked the highest (75%), while Greece again ranked the lowest (30%).

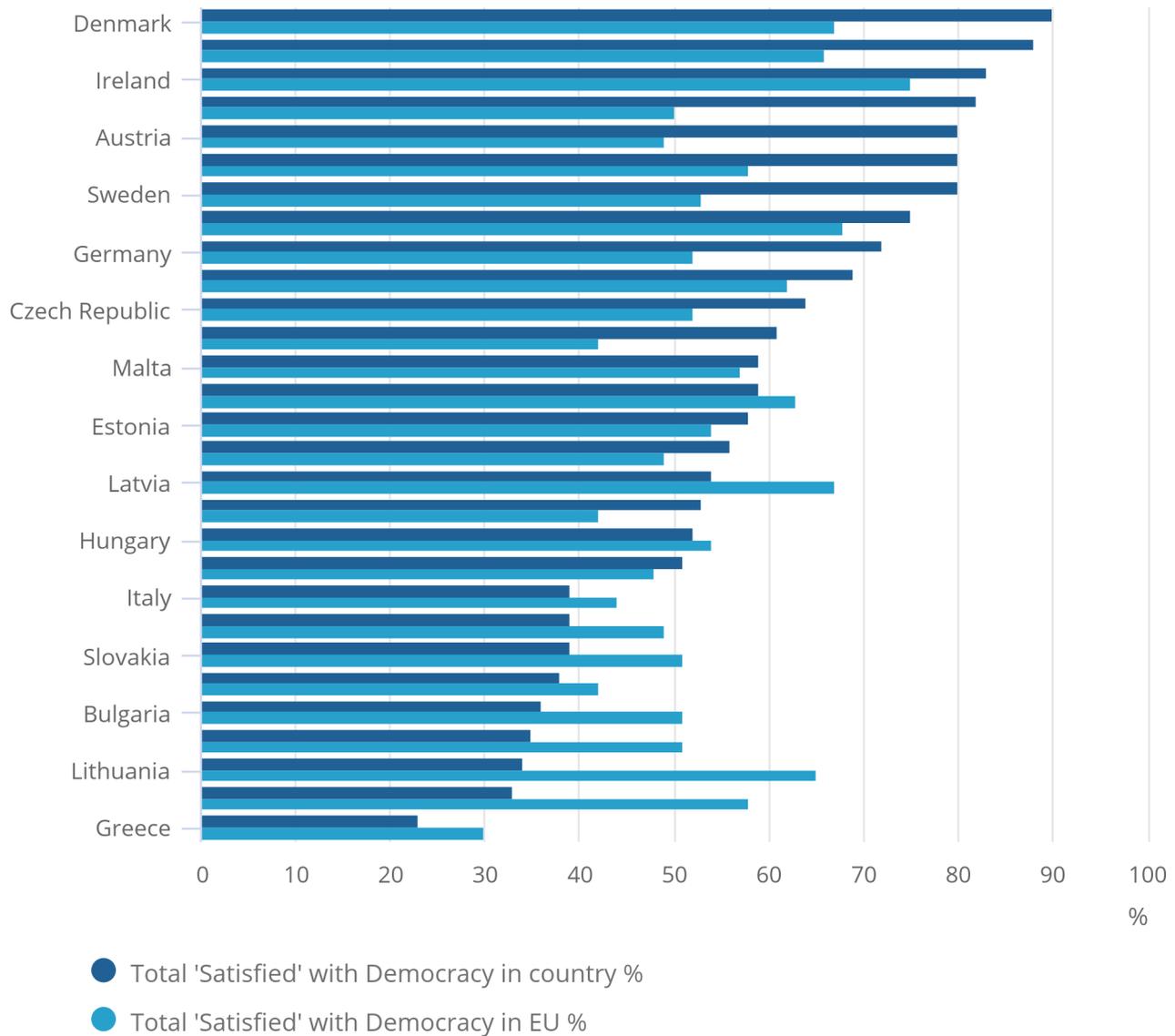
It is also interesting to note, that some countries, such as Croatia, Italy, Greece and Latvia among others, were more satisfied with democracy in the EU than in their own country while other EU countries, such as Belgium, Denmark, Ireland and Finland, were more satisfied with how democracy works in their own country than in the EU. This suggests people in the UK are not alone in having greater faith in democracy in their own country than in the EU, but equally, people in many other countries have more faith in the EU than in their own democracy.

**Figure 11: UK are not alone in having greater faith in democracy in their own country than in the EU**

EU-28, spring 2018

Figure 11: UK are not alone in having greater faith in democracy in their own country than in the EU

EU-28, spring 2018



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 89

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that their country could face a better future outside the EU. In 2018, a similar proportion of people in the UK either agreed (44%) or disagreed (43%) with the statement, with 13% reporting that they did not know. This compared with an EU average of 30% and 61% respectively. In 2018, the proportion of people who agreed that the UK could better face the future outside the EU hardly changed from the proportion in spring 2016 (45%).

Although the UK had the highest proportion of people among the 28 EU member states agreeing that their country faced a better future outside the EU in spring 2018, the proportion in the UK disagreeing that the country faced a better future outside the EU increased by 6 percentage points since spring 2016.

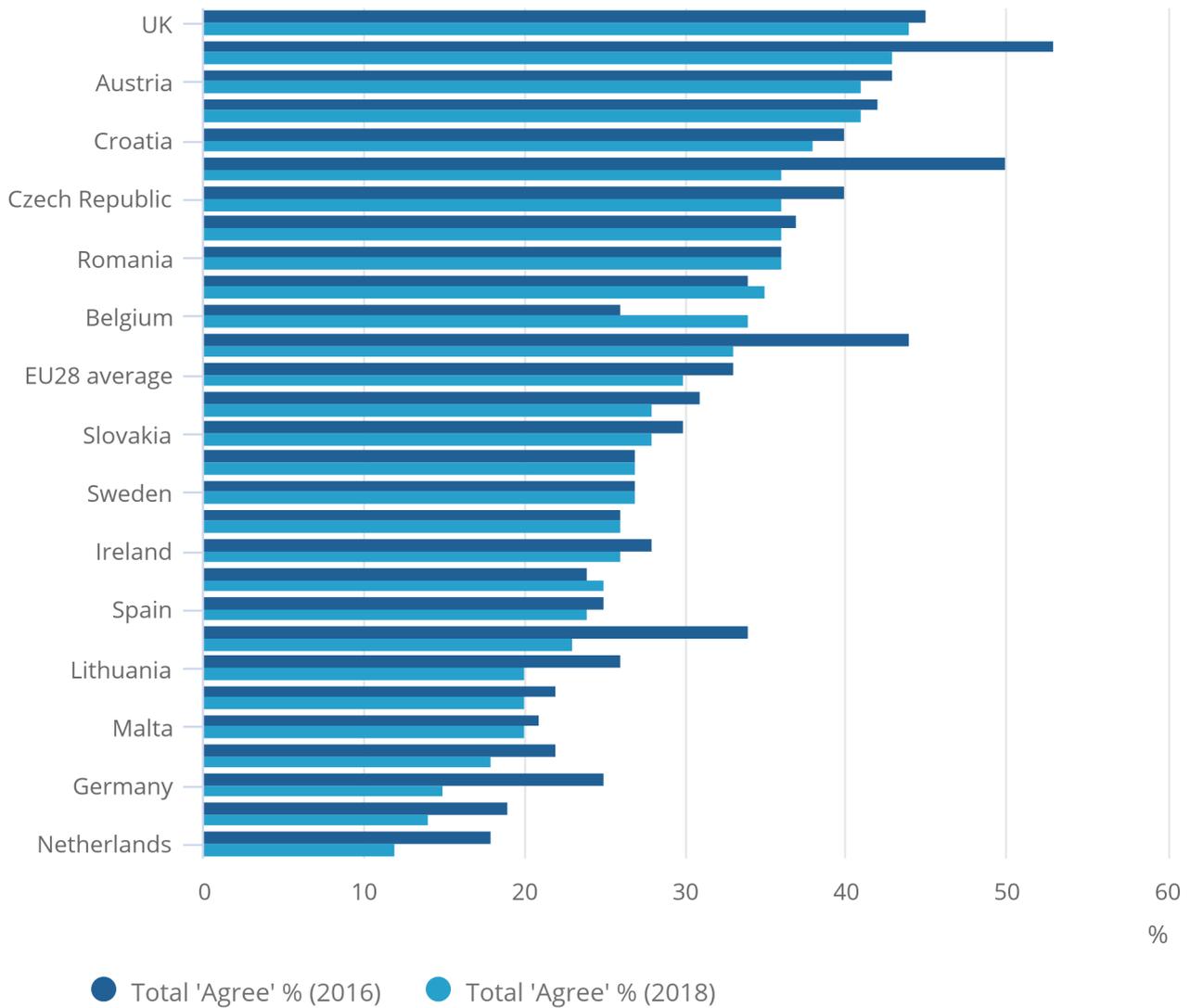
Figure 12 shows that, after the UK, the countries in which the highest proportions of people agreeing their country faced a better future outside the EU in spring 2018 were Slovenia (43%), Austria and Italy (both 41%). Countries in which the smallest proportions of people agreed with this were the Netherlands (12%), Denmark (14%) and Germany (15%).

**Figure 12: The UK had the highest proportion of people that agreed that their country faced a better future outside the EU in spring 2018**

EU-28, spring 2016 and spring 2018

Figure 12: The UK had the highest proportion of people that agreed that their country faced a better future outside the EU in spring 2018

EU-28, spring 2016 and spring 2018



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 85 and 89

Notes:

1. Respondents were asked "Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statement - (Our Country) could better face the future outside the EU". The chart includes only those who agreed with the statement.

## 12 . Natural environment

Well-being is determined by physical and non-physical factors. The ability of a society to produce and consume goods and services determines its standard of living, but in the long-run even more critical is its ability to build and maintain the natural environment that meets basic needs like food, water and clean air, and preserving this for future generations.

Overall, some indicators of environmental quality suggest improvements in the UK. For example, the proportion of marine and terrestrial protected areas increased by 6.1 percentage points between 2010 and 2014, although this is lower than the average increase of 7.5 percentage points across Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Recycling and composting, and renewable energy usage remained stable between 2015 and 2016 in the UK.

Although protected areas are not discussed in this section, it is included in the [Measuring national well-being international comparisons dataset](#).

It is important to note that figures for natural environment only cover the period up to 2014 to 2016 because these are the latest internationally-comparable data. For users interested in more up-to-date UK estimates, please see [Measuring national well-being dashboard](#).

### Greenhouse gas emissions

To mitigate climate change, countries around the world are developing policies to enhance environmental sustainability in areas such as transportation, housing and energy use, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to their effects on greenhouse gas emissions, these policies are likely to have consequences, such as accessing high-quality, natural spaces close to where they work and live, encouraging people to spend more time in them benefitting health and well-being.

Figures from the OECD show that the [UK's greenhouse gas emissions were 486.3 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent \(MtCO<sub>2e</sub>\)](#) in 2016, making it the ninth-highest among OECD countries. Greenhouse gas emissions in the UK have been declining each year since 2008, down from 657.0 MtCO<sub>2e</sub>. In 2016, this figure was similar to Turkey (496.1 MtCO<sub>2e</sub>).

The countries with the highest total emissions in 2016 were the United States (6,511.3 MtCO<sub>2e</sub>) and Japan (1,304.6 MtCO<sub>2e</sub>), while Iceland had the lowest emissions (4.7 MtCO<sub>2e</sub>).

## Energy from renewable sources

Using renewable sources for supplying energy may enhance human welfare in terms of health and environmental improvements, and contribute to a climate safe future.

In 2017, [renewable energy sources accounted for 9.6% of the UK's total primary energy supply](#), according to data from the OECD (Figure 13). This proportion has been increasing each year, up from 3.6% in 2010. A similar proportion of renewable energy usage in 2017 was seen in Slovakia (9.5%) and France (9.8%), although all were lower than the OECD average of 10.2%.

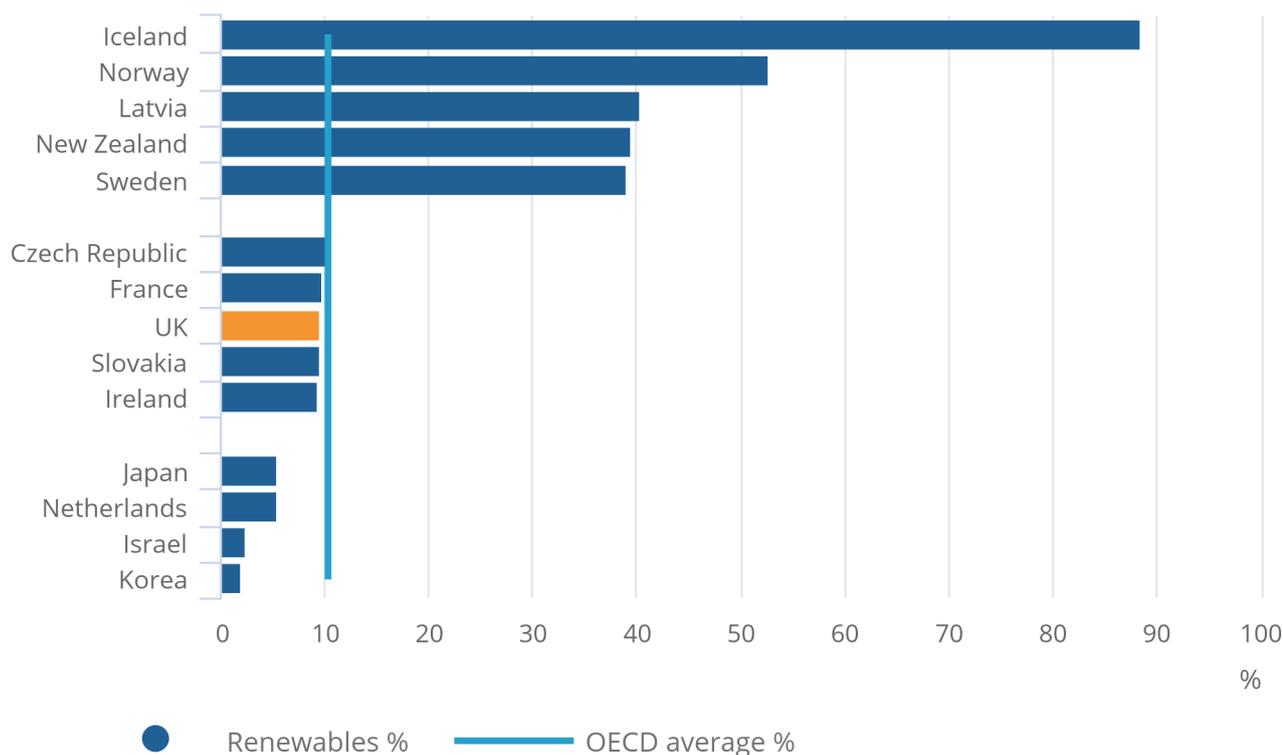
The lowest shares of renewable energy as a percentage of primary energy supply in 2017 were found in Korea (2.0%) and Israel (2.4%). The highest proportions were found in Iceland (88.5%) and Norway (52.8%).

**Figure 13: The UK's renewable contribution to the total primary energy supply was just under the OECD average**

OECD countries, 2017

Figure 13: The UK's renewable contribution to the total primary energy supply was just under the OECD average

OECD countries, 2017



Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Notes:

- Renewable energy is defined as the contribution of renewables to total primary energy supply (TPES). Renewables include the primary energy equivalent of hydro (excluding pumped storage), geothermal, solar, wind, tide and wave sources. Energy derived from solid biofuels, biogasoline, biodiesels, other liquid biofuels, biogases and the renewable fraction of municipal waste are also included. Municipal waste comprises wastes produced by the residential, commercial and public service sectors that are collected by local authorities for disposal in a central location for the production of heat and/or power.
- The reference period for Greece is 2016.
- Chart shows the countries with the highest and lowest values along with the countries that have the same or similar values to the UK.

## Material recovery (recycling and composting)

According to data from the OECD, [44% of the UK's municipal waste was recycled or composted](#) in 2016, a proportion that has remained stable since 2010 (range: 40% to 44%). This was the same proportion as Poland and higher than the OECD average of 36%.

In Germany, two-thirds (66%) of municipal waste was recycled or composted in 2016, making it the highest-ranking of the OECD countries, followed by Slovenia (60%). The lowest-ranking country in 2016 was Turkey, where only 10% of waste was recycled or composted.

## 13 . What are our main concerns at national level?

To set the full range of well-being indicators in context, it is crucial to understand people's priorities and concerns. In response to user feedback requesting more timely and detailed analysis on important issues that may affect well-being, we have analysed data from the [Standard Eurobarometer Survey](#) comparing the views and priorities of people aged 15 years and over in the UK and the EU.

Two Standard Eurobarometer surveys have been used for comparison, [spring 2016](#) (fieldwork carried out in May 2016) and [spring 2018](#) (fieldwork carried out March 2018). People aged 15 years and over were asked what the two most important issues facing their country were in spring 2016 and again in spring 2018.

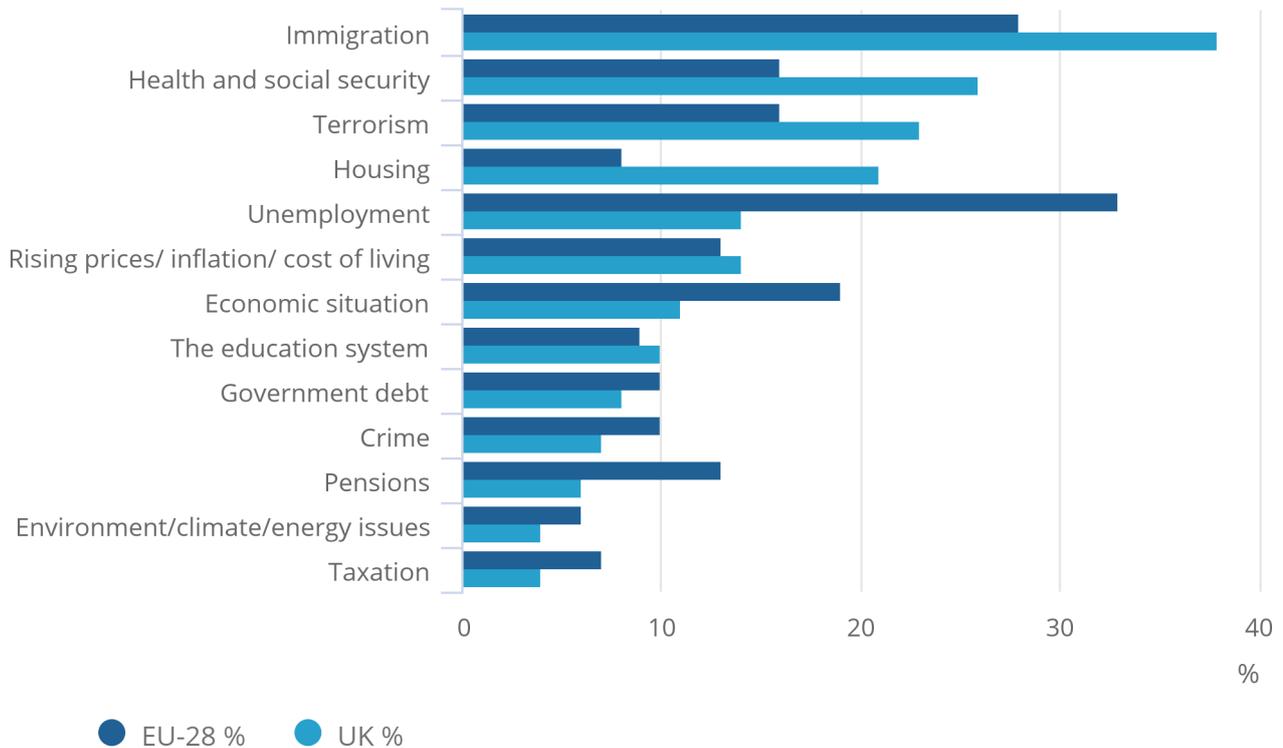
Figure 14 shows the top concerns for the UK and the EU-28 in spring 2016. Unemployment and immigration were the two most frequently reported concerns across the EU-28 (33% and 28% respectively). For the UK, the issues that people said they were most concerned about were immigration at 38% and health and social security at 26%.

**Figure 14: The most important issue facing the UK in spring 2016 was immigration**

EU-28, spring 2016

**Figure 14: The most important issue facing the UK in spring 2016 was immigration**

EU-28, spring 2016



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 85

Notes:

1. Respondents were asked "What do you think are the two most important issues facing in your country at the moment? " A maximum of two issues were allowed. The chart does not include those who stated "Other", "None" and "Don't know".

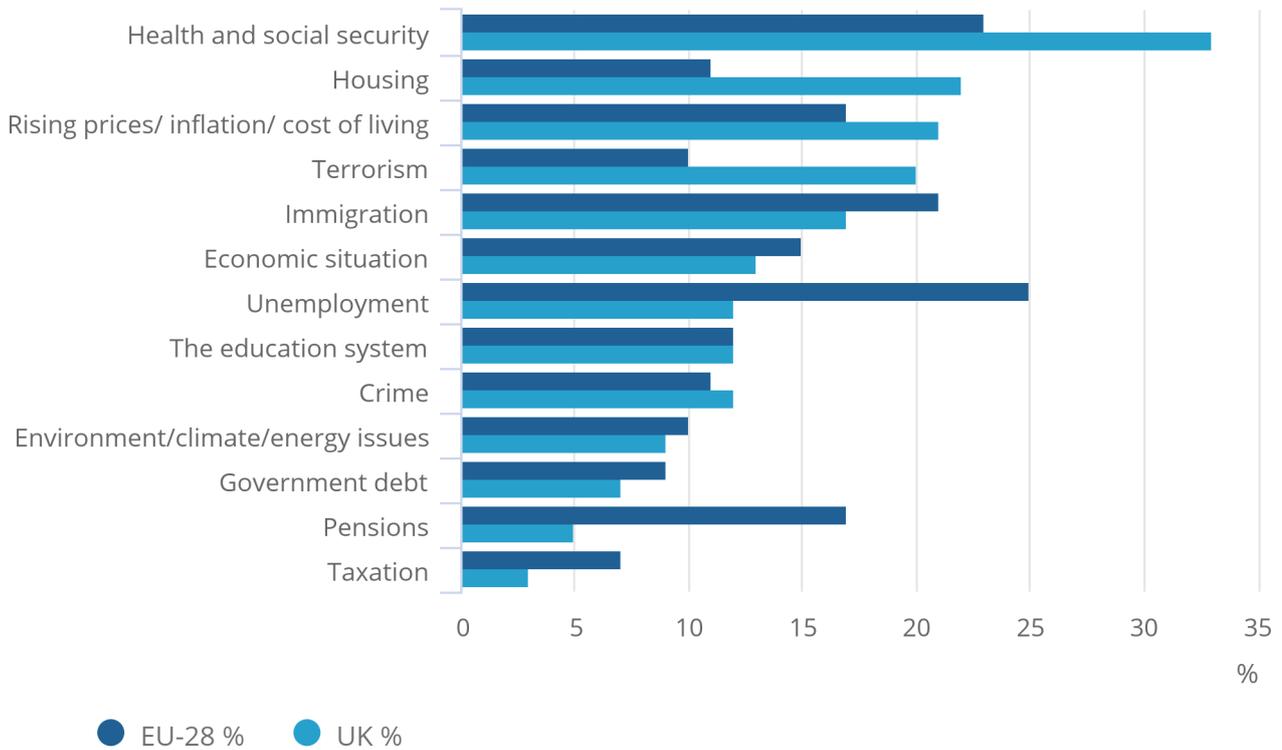
As shown in Figure 15, by the spring of 2018, unemployment (25%) remained the top concern on average across the EU-28 but health and social security (23%) had become the next most important concern, with immigration dropping back to third place (21%). Over the same period, concerns about health and social security became the top concern for people in the UK, followed by housing (33% and 22% respectively).

**Figure 15: The most important issue facing the UK in spring 2018 was health and social security**

EU-28, spring 2018

Figure 15: The most important issue facing the UK in spring 2018 was health and social security

EU-28, spring 2018



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 89

Notes:

1. Respondents were asked "What do you think are the two most important issues facing in your country at the moment? " A maximum of two issues were allowed. The chart does not include those who stated "Other", "None" and "Don't know".

## 14 . Next steps

This article has explored how quality of life and well-being in the UK compares with that in other countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) or the European Union (EU) countries, using measures similar to those adopted as part of the UK's national well-being measures. Looking at the measures within these areas of life from an international perspective gives us a sense of whether quality of life in the UK is better or worse than in other countries.

We plan to explore well-being inequalities, particularly in relation to personal and household circumstances and we will continue to monitor changes in well-being to assess how we feel about our lives and our daily emotions. We also intend to focus more on the environmental aspects of well-being, both in terms of how the environment affects our living standards now and the extent to which growth is environmentally sustainable. In doing this, we will move a step closer to looking holistically at “people, prosperity and the planet”.

## 15 . Technical notes

### Sources used in International comparisons, 2019

[Eurobarometer](#)

[European Quality of Life Survey](#)

[Eurostat](#)

[Gallup World Poll](#)

[International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance](#)

[Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#)

[United Nations Statistics Division](#)

[World Health Organisation](#)

### The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

The OECD is an international economic organisation of 36 countries, founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade. It is a forum of countries describing themselves as committed to democracy and the market economy, providing a platform to compare policy experiences, seeking answers to common problems, identify good practices and coordinate domestic and international policies of its members.

OECD member countries are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea (South Korea), Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the UK and the United States.

### The European Union (EU)

The EU was created on 1 November 1993, when the Maastricht Treaty came into force. It encompasses the old European Community (EC) together with two intergovernmental “pillars” for dealing with foreign affairs and with immigration and justice. The European Union consists of 28 member states (EU-28); where the EU-27 is referred to in this article, Croatia is not included.

The 28 member states are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK.