

Statistical bulletin

# Beyond GDP insights, UK headline measures of National Well-being: February 2026

Exploring quality of life and progress beyond GDP in the UK, drawing on the new quarterly headline national well-being measures.

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Release date:  
27 February 2026

Next release:  
May 2026

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# 1 . Main points

- GDP per head fell by 0.1% for the second consecutive quarter in Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2025, but is up by 0.6% compared with the same quarter a year ago.
- Mean life satisfaction, which had broadly moved in line with GDP per head before the pandemic, diverged sharply during the pandemic and has remained below its pre-pandemic peak, while GDP per head has recovered.
- The share of adults reporting good or very good health fell significantly - from 76.0% in Quarter 4 2020 to 70.9% in Quarter 4 2025 - indicating a sustained postpandemic decline in overall health.
- Trust in the UK government increased following the 4 July 2024 General Election, but later fell back to its pre-election levels; we have only collected data for this measure since January 2023, so it is currently unclear whether these are typical post-election fluctuations.

## 2 . The UK measures of national well-being framework

This publication launches the UK Headline National Well-being Measures. These headline measures have been introduced to provide timely insight into how we are doing as individuals, communities, and as a nation. They are also designed to complement the UK Measures of National Well-being comprehensive measure set, which is presented in the [UKMNV dashboard](#).

The UK Measures of National Wellbeing (UKMNV) framework has tracked national well-being since 2011. Following our extensive [Review of the UK Measures of National Well-being in 2022 to 2023](#), we redesigned our interactive [UK Measures of National Wellbeing \(UKMNV\) dashboard](#), expanding from 44 to 60 measures in July 2023.

The dashboard provides a holistic view of national wellbeing. However, differences in data availability and update frequency make quarterly publication of the comprehensive measure set challenging. From May 2026, the UKMNV dashboard will therefore be updated annually each May.

To maintain regular insight, we have developed a seven-measure headline set, which will be updated quarterly. These act as measures of change across individual, community, and national wellbeing, and are informed by [UN recommendations on measuring progress beyond GDP \(PDF, 139KB\)](#).

The headline set comprises seven measures representing different facets of our lived experiences:

- life satisfaction, representing personal well-being
- trust in others, representing social capital
- self-reported health status, representing health
- young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET), representing education and opportunity
- gross domestic product per head, representing material well-being
- trust in government, representing governance
- greenhouse gas emissions per head as an environment-related measure

These measures are not intended to capture their domains in full, but to serve as proxies or leading signals of change.

Further detail on the framework and the headline measure selection process can be found in our [UK Measures of National Well-being user guide](#) and our [How the ONS is streamlining its approach to national well-being' blog](#).

### 3 . **Headline measures of national wellbeing at a glance**

This section summarises the latest quarterly data for each headline measure and assesses both short and longterm change. We assess change for each measure by evaluating whether there has been a positive change, a negative change, or it has stayed the same. We make this assessment based on the sentiment of the measure. For more information on how we assess change over time, see [Section 15: Data sources and quality](#).

While some measures show sustained improvement over the long term, others are more volatile, particularly those that reflect people's lived experiences.

### 4 . **Material well-being**

GDP per head fell by an estimated 0.1% in Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2025, as shown in our [GDP first quarterly estimate, UK: October to December 2025 bulletin](#). This is the second consecutive quarterly decline.

Over several decades, GDP per head has generally trended upward, with a clear decline during the pandemic. GDP per head has been notably weak during the post-pandemic period.

In Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2025, GDP per head was 0.6% higher than in the same quarter a year earlier and 0.7% above its pre-pandemic level in Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2019. This represents modest growth over a sixyear span and is weaker than longterm averages.

### 5 . **Environment**

UK greenhouse gas emissions per head (GHG) have continued their longterm decline, as shown in our [Estimates of quarterly greenhouse gas emissions bulletin](#).

Residence-based emissions were 1.69 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) per head in Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2025. This was 8.6% lower than a year earlier, extending a downward trend seen for more than two decades.

While emissions remain an important environment measure, they only capture one element of environmental quality. Other data on biodiversity, natural capital, and ecosystem condition, continue to show longterm pressures, as explored in our [Beyond GDP insights – environment, climate and nature, UK article](#).

The production of quarterly GHG estimates has been paused because of the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) decision to prioritise quality over quantity](#). We will therefore consider options for the measurement of this dimension in the future.

## 6 . Health

The proportion of adults reporting good or very good health has declined since 2020. Between Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 and Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2025, this proportion fell from 76.0% to 70.9%. This is a statistically significant decline that highlights a sustained postpandemic reduction in overall health. However, looking at shorter term, year on year change, there is no statistically significant movement, suggesting that while good health levels remain lower than they were in 2020, the more recent trend has been relatively stable, as seen in our [accompanying data tables](#).

Other Office for National Statistics (ONS) health data provide context to these findings. Long-term health conditions have increased compared with pre-pandemic levels, as shown in our [Rising ill-health and economic inactivity because of long-term sickness, UK article](#). For example, 36% of working-age people reported at least one long-term health condition in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2023, up from 31% in the same period in 2019.

While people in the UK are living longer than at the height of the pandemic, the proportion of their lives spent in good health continues to decline. Despite modest increases since 2019 to 2021, healthy life expectancy at birth in 2022 to 2024 decreased to its lowest level since the time series began in 2011 to 2013, as shown in our [Healthy life expectancy, UK bulletin](#). This was the case for both males and females, with males in the UK expecting to spend 60.7 years (77% of life) in "good" general health, compared with 60.9 years (73%) for females.

## 7 . Personal well-being

After a long period of stability through the mid 2010s, low levels of life satisfaction rose sharply during 2020 to 2021 before falling again in the following years. Since then, trends have remained steady, with estimates of low life satisfaction largely unchanged at 5.1% in Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2025, with no clear signs of improvement in the post-pandemic period.

Our [quarterly personal well-being estimates](#) also include estimates for:

- the extent to which people feel the things they do in life are worthwhile
- levels of happiness
- levels of anxiety

Each of these captures a different aspect of personal well-being.

## 8 . Social capital

In Great Britain, trust in others has remained broadly stable over time, with around three in five adults (65.0%) reporting that, in general, they trust most people, when asked in December 2025 to January 2026 as shown in our [accompanying data tables](#). However, other measures show lower levels of social cohesion.

Data from our [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: January 2026 bulletin](#) indicate that around one in four adults (23%) report feeling lonely at least some of the time, with higher levels of loneliness among younger adults. Nearly half of adults (48%) disagree that everyone has a fair chance to progress based on talent and hard work, and 62% believe that a person's background has the greatest influence on their life outcomes. Taken together, these findings suggest that while interpersonal trust remains relatively high, perceptions of fairness and social connection are more mixed.

## 9 . Governance

Trust in the UK government remains low, with around one in five adults (21.9%) in Great Britain reporting trust in Dec2025 to Jan2026, as shown in our [accompanying data tables](#). This is a statistically significant fall compared with the same period last year.

Trust increased to 27.6% after the July 2024 General Election, but declined steadily, reaching its lowest level since before the election by December 2025 to January 2026. As data are only available from January 2023, it is not yet clear whether these postelection shifts are typical.

## 10 . Education and opportunity

Around 1 in 8 young adults (12.8%) were not in work, education or training (NEET) in Quarter 4 (October to December) 2025, as shown in our [NEET bulletin](#). There has been no statistically significant change, either in the short or long term, when compared with Quarter 4 2020 (11.7%) or Quarter 4 2024 (13.2%), although figures have shown fluctuation during and after the pandemic.

NEET rates, which had remained at roughly 11.0% from 2019, fell to 9.7% in Quarter 2 (April to June) 2021. By late 2022, levels had risen back to 11.7%, and they have continued to trend upwards since. As a result, the latest estimate indicates that 957,000 young adults were NEET in October to December 2025.

## 11 . How national wellbeing has changed since the pandemic

To understand how national wellbeing has changed since the pandemic, we calculated standardised values showing how far each data point sits from its longterm average, measured between Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2011 and Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2019.

**Figure 1: GDP per head has gone back to its pre-pandemic levels, emissions are continuing to decline, and life satisfaction has not returned to its pre-pandemic peak**

**GDP per head, greenhouse gas emissions per head, mean life satisfaction, UK, zero = average Quarter 2 2011 – Quarter 4 2019, series started in Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2011**

### Notes:

1. Only three of the seven headline measures appear in this graph. Selfreported health, trust in others and trust in government do not have sufficiently long time series for inclusion, and NEET data are excluded because a break in the series before 2019 prevents reliable comparison.
2. For life satisfaction, we use the mean (nonseasonally adjusted) scores. All other measures included in the chart are seasonally adjusted.
3. The latest quarter for greenhouse gas emissions per head and life satisfaction is Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2025, while for GDP per head is Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2025.
4. Greenhouse gas emissions per head indicator has been reversed. This means that an increase in this indicator on the chart now represents a reduction in emissions per person.

All three measures experienced pronounced changes during the pandemic. GDP per head fell sharply at the start of the pandemic period, as well as emissions, which saw a sudden decline because of reduced activity. In Quarter 4 2020 and Q1 (Jan to Mar) 2021, mean life satisfaction dropped to its lowest point since the time series began. Since then, GDP per head has returned to its prepandemic level but is growing more slowly. Life satisfaction has improved but remains below its prepandemic peak, and emissions have continued their gradual decline.

## 12 . Future developments

The next annual update of the full UK Measures of National Wellbeing dashboard, alongside the next quarterly headline update and personal wellbeing estimates, will be published in May 2026.

Measures featured in the headline national well-being measure set that are not yet part of the comprehensive set will be incorporated from May 2026.

Feedback on this bulletin can be sent to [qualityoflife@ons.gov.uk](mailto:qualityoflife@ons.gov.uk).

## 13 . Data on Beyond GDP: UK headline measures of national well-being

[Beyond GDP insights: UK headline measures of national well-being](#)

Dataset | Released 27 February 2026

Quality of life and progress beyond GDP in the UK, drawing on the new quarterly headline national well-being measures.

## 14 . Glossary

### Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)

A person is NEET if they are aged 16 to 24 years and are not in education, employment or training. Within the Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimate, a person is considered to be in education or training if they:

- are doing an apprenticeship
- are on a Government employment or training programme
- are working or studying towards a qualification
- have had job-related training or education in the last four weeks
- are enrolled on an education course and are still attending or waiting for term to (re)start

### Gross domestic product (GDP) per head

GDP is the total value of output in the economic territory. GDP per head is GDP divided by the population. In this bulletin, GDP per head is presented as a chain volume measure (CVM) to remove the effect of price changes (inflation) over time.

## Greenhouse gas emissions per head

We refer to residence-based (or production) emissions in this release. The territorial emissions measure from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero is generally used for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions targets, including net zero UK emissions by 2050. The footprint (or consumption) emissions measure from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs includes emissions from trade. More information on the three emissions measures can be found in [Measuring UK greenhouse gas emissions methodology](#).

For a list of greenhouse gases, please see [Section 7: Glossary of our UK Environmental Accounts: 2025 bulletin](#).

These gases contribute directly to global warming and climate change, because of their positive radiative forcing effect. The potential of each GHG to cause global warming is assessed in relation to a given weight of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), so all GHG emissions are measured as carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e).

## Social capital

Social capital is a term used to describe the extent and nature of our connections with others and the collective attitudes and behaviours between people that support a well-functioning, connected society.

## 15 . Data sources and quality

This release brings together statistics across different geographies, sampled populations and time periods. Users should take care when making comparisons across measures, as the underlying data sources may differ in their definitions, coverage, question wording and frequency. Where possible, we describe trends using the latest available data and comparable time points (for example, using the same quarter or period in a previous year).

The bulletin includes a combination of accredited official statistics and official statistics in development. Accreditation indicates that statistics have been assessed against the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). Each statistic is linked in the bulletin text to the relevant source so that users can access additional detail on data quality, collection methods and revisions.

For some measures, UK-wide estimates are not available, and data may instead be presented for Great Britain, England and Wales, or another geography depending on the data owner and collection approach. Alternative sources may exist for the devolved administrations, but differences in methodology can limit comparability.

Some measures are produced using self-completion household surveys. These estimates may not be representative of people who do not live in private residential households, such as those living in communal establishments.

## How we analyse and interpret the data

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

However, for measures sourced from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, short-term change is based on the time point closest to the previous year. This may vary between 10 and 14 months because of the rotation of questions on the survey.

For GDP per head, the periods reflect dataowner guidance. Short-term change compares the latest estimate with the previous quarter, and long-term change compares the latest estimate with the same quarter one year earlier.

We report confidence intervals and sample sizes, where available, to aid data interpretation. These can be found in our [accompanying data tables](#). Where confidence intervals are available, we use these to assess the statistical significance of the change over time.

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

We assess change for each measure by evaluating whether it has had a positive change, negative change or stayed the same. We make this assessment based on the sentiment of the measure. For example, for the "Life satisfaction" measure, we would report a positive change for "People reporting low levels of life satisfaction" if the percentage of people reporting feeling low life satisfaction had decreased.

## 16 . Related links

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

User guide | Updated 27 February 2026

User guide for the Beyond GDP insights, UK: National Wellbeing Headline Measure Set and Dashboard. Includes metadata tables of the measures, information on how estimates are produced, and how change over time is measured.

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

Dashboard | Updated 11 February 2026

An overview of well-being in the UK on an individual, community and national level. Considers change across 59 measures of well-being, grouped by 10 topic areas.

### [Quarterly personal well-being statistics, February 2026](#)

Dataset | Released 27 February 2026

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

### [Beyond GDP insights – environment, climate and nature, UK: 2025](#)

Article | Released 18 November 2025

Annual review of UK progress from an environmental, climate and nature perspective, drawing on a range of official statistics. This article supplements our Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP in the UK releases, and our environmental and natural capital accounts.

## 17 . Cite this bulletin

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 27 February 2026, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [Beyond GDP insights, UK headline measures of National Well-being: February 2026](#)

