

Statistical bulletin

# Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP in the UK: May 2025

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

Contact:  
Quality of Life team  
qualityoflife@ons.gov.uk

Release date:  
28 May 2025

Next release:  
February 2026

## Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Measuring personal well-being in the UK](#)
3. [UK Measures of National Well-being and upcoming changes](#)
4. [The new System of National Accounts](#)
5. [The international landscape in the future](#)
6. [Future developments](#)
7. [Glossary](#)
8. [Data sources and quality](#)
9. [Related links](#)
10. [Cite this bulletin](#)

# 1 . Main points

- Gross domestic product (GDP) and the wider National Accounts are defined internationally in the United Nations (UN) System of National Accounts (SNA); the latest version of the SNA was adopted in March 2025.
- The SNA 2025 contains improvements related to measuring the economy and captures some discussion on wider measures of well-being and sustainability (“beyond GDP”); however, these are a lighter-touch approach and do not fully define well-being or create a framework for integrating all such beyond GDP data.
- The SNA is an important contributor of relevant metrics, but it is not the best channel for elaborating on beyond GDP frameworks; however, there are other international initiatives that are, including a new High Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP, a UN technical Expert Group on well-being measurement, and several initiatives such as from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
- We recognise the need for flexibility to react to international developments and enhance comparability with other international beyond GDP statistics; to achieve this, we will be developing and updating a smaller set of measures in our UK Measures of National Well-being dashboard quarterly, starting in November 2025, and updating our full 60-measure set annually, starting in May 2026.

## 2 . Measuring personal well-being in the UK

We assess personal well-being using four measures (life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness, and anxiety). These measures ask people to evaluate how satisfied they are with their lives overall, whether they feel they have meaning and purpose in their lives, and their emotions during a particular period (both positive and negative).

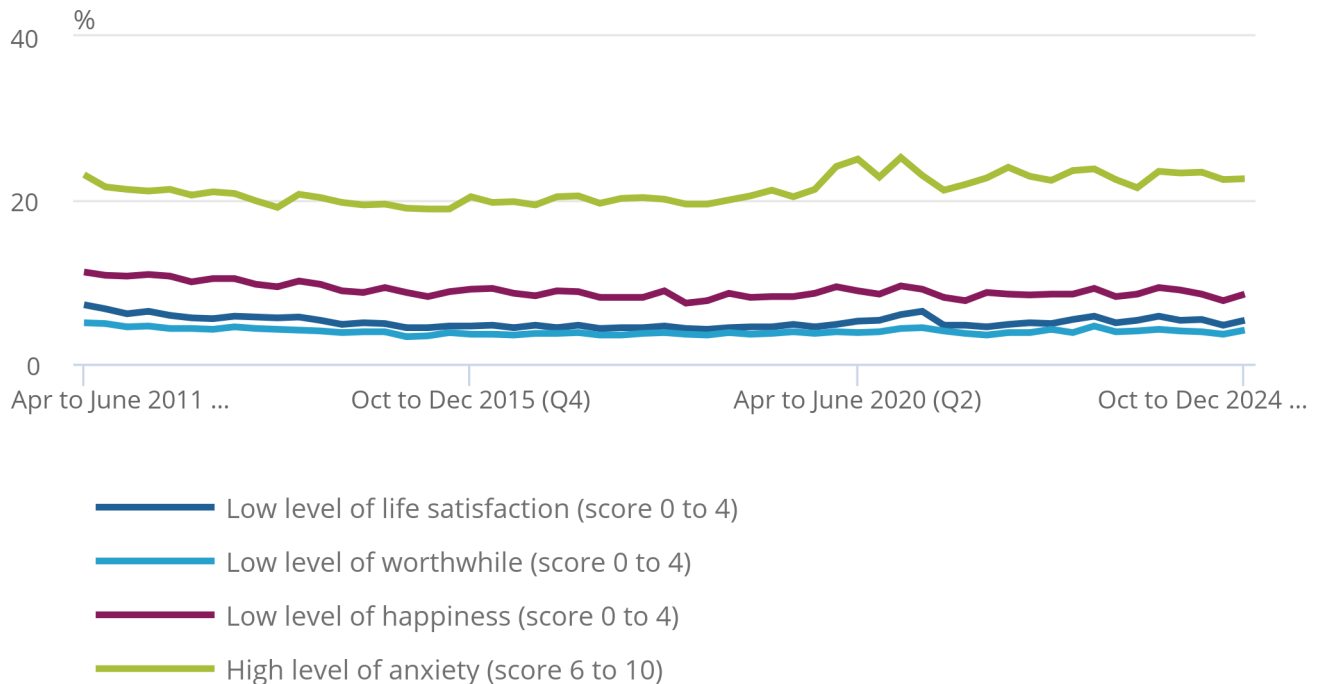
The poor well-being thresholds we use refer to low levels of life satisfaction, worthwhile, and happiness, and high levels of anxiety. For further information see [Section 7: Glossary](#).

### Figure 1: The percentage of adults reporting low levels of personal well-being across the UK has remained relatively stable over the last year

Proportion of people reporting low life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and high anxiety in the UK, April to June 2011 to October to December 2024

### Figure 1: The percentage of adults reporting low levels of personal well-being across the UK has remained relatively stable over the last year

Proportion of people reporting low life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and high anxiety in the UK, April to June 2011 to October to December 2024



Source: Personal well-being statistics from the Office for National Statistics

#### Notes:

1. Please see [Section 7: Glossary](#) for information on the threshold grouping of ratings.

We assess change for personal well-being measures both in the short and long term. Short-term change is assessed as the latest estimate, compared with one year prior. Long-term change is assessed as the latest estimate, compared with five years prior.

Of UK adults in Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2024 (as reported in our [accompanying dataset](#)):

- 5.3% reported low levels of life satisfaction, which shows no short-term change (5.8% in Quarter 4 2023) but a long-term negative change (4.5% in Quarter 4 2019)
- 4.1% reported low levels of feeling that things done in life are worthwhile, which shows no short- or long-term change (4.2% in Quarter 4 2023 and 3.7% in Quarter 4 2019)
- 8.5% reported low levels of happiness, which shows no short- or long-term change (9.3% in Quarter 4 2023 and 8.6% in Quarter 4 2019)
- 22.6% reported high levels of anxiety, which shows no short- or long-term change (23.5 in Quarter 4 2023 and 21.3% in Quarter 4 2019).

The proportion of women (26.2%) reporting high levels of anxiety was statistically significantly higher than for men (18.8%) in Quarter 4 2024. However, there were no statistically significant differences in the proportion of low levels of life satisfaction, worthwhile, and happiness reported by men and women.

### 3 . UK Measures of National Well-being and upcoming changes

Personal well-being statistics are part of our wider [UK Measures of National Well-being \(UKMNW\) programme](#), which aims to provide a holistic set of measures on tracking progress across the UK.

We consulted users in 2022/2023 on an update of our suite of well-being measures, as described in our [Review of the UK Measures of National Well-being, October 2022 to March 2023 article](#).

This consultation was carried out before wider international work on this topic stimulated by the [Our Common Agenda report](#), published by the Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN). This made the case for reconsidering “beyond gross domestic product (GDP)” metrics and how they relate to well-being and sustainable development.

Work has continued to develop. In 2024, the UK and the wider international community signed up to the UN's [Pact for the Future](#), which included a commitment to the development of new measures of sustainable development that go beyond GDP. The recommended model is for a suite of around 10 to 20 leading measures, which can be complemented with additional data at a country's discretion.

The UKMNW framework is comprehensive, but there are issues with the frequency of data for its different metrics, including different time lags. As a result, not all the measures can be revised on the same cycle. This, coupled with the high number of measures, has made it difficult for users to draw out overarching trends about recent changes in well-being.

We took this opportunity to reflect on whether the current model remains optimal. We have decided to move to a shorter dataset of timely measures that will be published on a quarterly basis from November 2025. We will update the full 60-measure dashboard once a year, starting in May 2026. This should allow us the flexibility to react to further international developments and enhance comparability with other international beyond GDP statistics. This will enable users to:

- get a rounded perspective on well-being based on a variety of internationally agreed domains
- compare how policy-making influences well-being across countries
- reflect on the fact that well-being may be affected by factors outside their own country

Our quarterly data-only personal well-being publications will remain unchanged.

## 4 . The new System of National Accounts

Gross domestic product (GDP) has many strengths but does not capture wider progress. We have previously discussed this in:

- our [Beyond GDP: How ONS is developing wider measures of well-being blog post](#)
- our [Beyond GDP: what matters to national well-being blog post](#)
- our [Looking beyond GDP and providing insights on climate change blog post](#)

We have been producing statistics that go beyond traditional economic statistics like GDP for many years. For example, we have collected data on personal well-being since 2011.

GDP and the wider national accounts are defined internationally in the United Nations (UN) System of National Accounts (SNA). The [SNA 2025](#), adopted in March 2025, considered several important themes affecting the measurement of the economy, including globalisation, digitalisation, well-being, and sustainability.

The SNA contains several substantial improvements related to measuring the economy. We will consider these improvements and will report on how we will implement them in due course. The chapters of the SNA 2025 on well-being and sustainability attempt to capture some of the scope of beyond GDP statistics. However, they are lighter-touch approaches, and do not fully define well-being or create a framework for integrating all such beyond GDP data. These chapters give recommendations on economic measures, like those used to derive inequality in household income, expenditure, and wealth in a way that is consistent with GDP measures, that could be used to update these measures in the future.

The SNA also attempts to improve the measurement of sustainability by better integrating wider resources within the national accounts. It proposes to do this by treating depletion of those natural resources that can be bought and sold, such as oil and gas, to be treated as a cost of production. As countries run down their stock of scarce resources, the loss of these resources will be recorded in net income measures.

The SNA 2025 report states that "net domestic product (NDP) is identified as the conceptually preferred measure of economic growth" and is used to complement measures of real GDP growth. This is a substantial and welcome update. However, it is incomplete because it omits the value of other natural resources that cannot be bought and sold.

Importantly, the new report does not recommend further integration of natural, human, and social capital assets into the national accounts framework. This is a step that we have taken in producing additional statistics. Therefore, the UK has advanced beyond the requirements in the SNA 2025. We report on these in our [UK inclusive income and wealth accounts articles](#) to highlight the value from assets outside the national accounts production boundary. Tracking these separate assets into one commentary allows us to observe their relative contributions to overall inclusive wealth.

### **Figure 2: Most inclusive wealth in the UK comes from human and natural capital, which are largely outside the national accounts production boundary**

Different capital assets in the UK, £ per person in current prices, 2022

#### **Notes:**

1. For the definition of the "production boundary", see [Section 7: Glossary](#).

Because the SNA does not include most of these assets, national accounts data are unable to present trade-offs between the economy and the environment. They are also unable to cover the more holistic aspects of the economy, which makes it more difficult to understand the relative importance and distribution of these sources of wealth within the UK. This highlights the ongoing need to have a range of outputs to be able to track progress in the UK more broadly than just with GDP. This also leads on from the [independent review on the economics of biodiversity led by Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta](#).

We report many beyond GDP measures that typically go beyond those laid out in the SNA. We are looking to the new structures being established by the UN and other international bodies, which are described in the next section, to guide further development.

## 5 . The international landscape in the future

Despite the limited progress in capturing beyond GDP concepts within the latest System of National Accounts (SNA) report, there are other international initiatives doing this. As mentioned in the previous section, this includes the 2024 Pact for the Future and the new United Nations (UN) [High Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP](#), with the purpose of establishing a short list of leading sustainable development indicators, taking account of beyond GDP.

The UN Statistical Commission established a new technical [Expert Group of Well-being Measurement \(EGWM\)](#) in 2024. This supports the Pact for the Future process by proposing a new framework document to support the consistent production of the short-listed leading indicators and to ensure these measures interact with the wider statistical landscape. This process aims to deliver the integrating framework not addressed by the SNA.

The UN also continues to collaborate on the guidance for measuring unpaid work, which captures the broader economic contribution and value of households outside of the market. They have also just begun a three-year review of the main framework for measuring the environmental economy – the [SEEA Central Framework](#). They published their [Initial list of issues and prioritization for the SEEA Central Framework update note](#) in July 2024. These inform our statistics, such as our [UK Environmental Accounts](#).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also has several initiatives. It has launched a new Working Party on Well-being Statistics to provide greater clarity across the range of measures that OECD produces in its Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE). The OECD also launched an updated [Handbook on the Compilation of Household Distributional Results on Income, Consumption and Saving in Line with National Accounts Totals](#) in 2024. It is also working with the UN through an expert group on natural capital to publish a similar implementation guide, as described in their [Update on expert group on natural capital report \(PDF, 266KB\)](#).

The UK continues to work with international partners to deliver comparable data. This includes the EU, which has commissioned multiple research projects on beyond GDP measurements and policy use. There are also several initiatives to bring together estimates from multiple countries, such as the World Bank's [Comprehensive Wealth estimates](#) and the UN Environment Programme's [Inclusive Wealth report](#).

## 6 . Future developments

Our next Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP bulletin will be published in August 2025.

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

## 7 . Glossary

### Personal well-being

The four personal well-being questions are:

- overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
- overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
- overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

People are asked to respond on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely". We produce estimates of the mean ratings for all four personal well-being questions, as well as their distributions.

For more information, see our [Personal well-being user guidance](#).

## Personal well-being thresholds

Thresholds are used to present dispersion in the data. For the life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile and happiness questions, ratings are grouped. The ratings are:

- 0 to 4 (low)
- 5 to 6 (medium)
- 7 to 8 (high)
- 9 to 10 (very high)

For the anxiety question, ratings are grouped differently to reflect the fact that higher anxiety is associated with lower personal well-being. The ratings are:

- 0 to 1 (very low)
- 2 to 3 (low)
- 4 to 5 (medium)
- 6 to 10 (high)

## Capital assets

A store of value representing an economic benefit or series of economic benefits accruing to the economic owner by holding or using the item over more than a year. In this article, it broadly refers to assets within the national accounts production boundary and those outside it such as human, natural and social capital.

## Gross domestic product

Gross domestic product (GDP) is 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 gross or net. It is presented in the accounts at market (or purchasers') prices.

## Net domestic product

Net domestic product (NDP) reflects the level of resources that are available for consumption. It is a proxy of the level of consumption that can be maintained while leaving capital assets used for production intact by taking depreciation into account.

## System of National Accounts

The System of National Accounts (SNA) is the internationally agreed standard system for macroeconomic accounts. The latest version is described in SNA 2025.

## Production boundary

Under the SNA 2008, the production boundary is defined as "activity carried out under the control and responsibility of an institutional unit that uses inputs of labour, capital, and goods and services to produce outputs of goods or services. There must be an institutional unit that assumes responsibility for the process of production and owns any resulting goods or knowledge-capturing products or is entitled to be paid, or otherwise compensated, for the change-effecting or margin services provided".

## 8 . Data sources and quality

Our Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP bulletin provides an opportunity to present the latest data on both observed measures of well-being and the relationships with its main impacts to holistically consider the quality of life in the UK.

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 and how that growth is shared across society.

We have been developing and improving new measures of national prosperity and well-being to offer greater understanding. We began publishing statistics on inclusive income for the first time in 2023 in our [UK inclusive wealth and income accounts articles](#). These augment GDP to account for unpaid household work, ecosystem services, and depreciation of human capital, for example. Following stakeholder feedback, we also reviewed our [UK measures of national well-being](#) to update our measures and interactive dashboard in 2023.

### Data coverage, strengths and limitations

This release brings together statistics across different geographies, sampled populations, and time periods. Please use caution when making comparisons.

We comment on trends over time data using the latest available data where possible.

These statistics include [accredited official statistics](#) (previously called National Statistics) and [official statistics in development](#) (previously known as experimental statistics). Accreditations give the user confidence in their use because they have 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 [What does it mean to be an accredited official statistic? blog post](#).

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 England and /or the devolved administrations (Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). However, differences in methodology affect the comparability of the data.

### Comparability and uncertainty

Where changes over time are presented in this bulletin, associated confidence intervals are used to assess the statistical significance of the differences. This is 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.

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.

## 9 . Related links

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

Dataset | Released 28 May 2025

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

### [Quality of information on quarterly personal well-being estimates](#)

Dataset | Released 28 May 2025

Confidence intervals and sample sizes for quarterly estimates of personal well-being in the UK.

### [UK inclusive wealth and income accounts: 2005 to 2022](#)

Article | Released 13 November 2024

Estimates and analysis of economic progress, including a broader range of economic activities and assets than gross domestic product (GDP), like unpaid household services, ecosystem services, and more.

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

Dashboard | Updated 11 February 2025

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.

### [UK natural capital accounts: 2024](#)

Bulletin | Released 8 November 2024

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

## 10 . Cite this bulletin

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 28 May 2025, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [Measuring progress, well-being and beyond GDP in the UK: May 2025](#).