UK Measures of National Well-being framework user guide

User guide for the UK Measures of National Well-being framework (UKMNW), providing detail on the headline and comprehensive measure set. Includes metadata tables of the measures, information on how estimates are produced, and how change over time is measured.

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1 . Framework overview

What is the UKMNW framework?

The UK Measures of National Well-being (UKMNW) framework provides a comprehensive picture of how people in the UK are doing, covering well-being at individual, community and national levels, and considering the sustainability of well-being for the future.

The framework consists of two components:

- a headline measure set of seven measures, which is updated quarterly and published in our Beyond GDP insights: UK measures of National Well-being bulletins
- a comprehensive measure set of 60 measures, which is updated annually and presented in the UK Measures of National Well-being dashboard

Together, these provide both timely insights and a detailed evidence base on national well-being.

Background and development of the framework

The Measuring National Well-being programme was launched by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in November 2010 to provide a comprehensive picture of how we are doing as individuals, as communities and as a nation, and how sustainable this is for the future.

The programme included a national debate where we asked the public: "What matters to you?". This generated over 34,000 responses, which were used to develop the national well-being framework that the ONS has been reporting on ever since. For more details on the national debate, see our Measuring what matters: National Statistician's Reflections on the National Debate on Measuring National Well-being (PDF, 1.16MB).

For more information on the background of the national well-being framework, see our Findings from the National Well-being Debate release (PDF 408KB) published in July 2011, and our well-being publications archive. For more information on the associated children and young people's well-being frameworks, see our Children's views on well-being and what makes a happy life, UK: 2020 article. You can also explore our Children's well-being measures dataset and our Young people's well-being measures dataset.

Review and update of the framework (2022 to 2023)

In 2022 to 2023, we undertook a review into the measures we report on and the ways in which we communicate them to ensure they continue to reflect what is important to well-being in the UK and provide users with information in a useful way.

As part of the review, we gathered evidence through surveys, literature reviews, and analysis of UK and international well-being dashboards, alongside feedback from users, stakeholders, and the general population on what matters most to individual and community well-being. We also commissioned targeted qualitative research with underrepresented groups and worked with a Technical Advisory Group of experts to ensure the measures reflect diverse experiences and are informed by robust evidence.

Following this review, the framework was expanded from 44 to 60 measures, accompanied by the launch of a new interactive dashboard. More information on the review research activities and its outcomes can be found in our Review of the UK Measures of National Well-being, October 2022 to March 2023 article.

The UKMNW framework from 2026 onwards

The revised comprehensive framework provides a broad and detailed view of well-being. However, differences in update frequency across data sources made it challenging to publish synchronised quarterly results.

To address this, the comprehensive UKMNW set will be updated annually and a headline measure set of seven measures, introduced in February 2026, will be updated quarterly.

In June 2026, a number of changes were implemented to the comprehensive UKMNW framework. For a full account of these changes, including the rationale underpinning each change, please refer to the Changes and Corrections tab in the June 2026 edition of the UKMNW data tables.

2 . What the framework measures

Measures of individual, community and national well-being

The framework was designed to measure how we are doing as individuals, as communities and as a nation, and how sustainable it is for the future. As part of our review into the measures used in the framework, we took care to ensure that we maintained a balance of measures that represent the well-being of individuals, communities and the nation. For more details, see our Review of the UK Measures of National Well-being, October 2022 to March 2023 article.

Subjective and objective measures of well-being

The framework includes both subjective and objective measures of well-being. Subjective measures are based on directly asking people about their feelings, opinions and sentiments. Objective measures focus on reporting facts about people's lives and the spaces in which they live.

Some measures may also be based on a mixture of subjective and objective elements. For example, the "Healthy life expectancy" category uses self-reported health measures along with calculations from mortality statistics.

Sustainability of well-being

While the UK Measures of National Well-being covers and tracks the current well-being of people in the UK, it is also crucial to consider the sustainability of well-being. In the framework, sustainability is captured in part by using the four capitals: human capital, social capital, economic capital and natural capital. The four capitals constitute the stock of resources which underpin people's welfare and are used to evaluate the future sustainability of well-being.

We have captured human, social, economic, and natural capital through various measures in the framework. More information about which measure captures which theme and aspect of well-being can be found in our UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata.

3 . Framework structure and content

Comprehensive measure set

The comprehensive set of UK Measures of National Well-being (UKMNW) is organised into 10 “topic areas” (also referred to as “domains” in our publications). The topic areas provide a structure to measure national well-being. They reflect what is important to national well-being in a comprehensive and mutually exclusive way.

Topic areas

The 10 topic areas within the comprehensive measure set are:

Personal well-being

Personal well-being is the most direct representation of how people are doing. Measures in this topic area cover people's opinions on aspects of their current well-being.

Our relationships

People's relationships can affect their well-being outcomes, including quality of life and happiness. Measures in this topic area cover the presence and quality of relationships people may have with family, friends, and the community around them.

Health

Physical and mental health are important parts of people's personal well-being. Measures in this topic area cover both objective and subjective measures of health. They also cover satisfaction with the healthcare system to capture how the nation's health is supported.

What we do

Participation in, satisfaction with, and balance between work and leisure activities represent people's lifestyle choices. Measures in this topic area cover subjective and objective measures related to work, leisure and volunteering.

Where we live

Where people live, the quality of their local area and their community, and how they feel about it can affect personal well-being. Measures in this topic area cover housing, the local environment, access to facilities, and being part of a cohesive community.

Personal finance

How households and individuals are managing financially influences many aspects of their lives. Measures in this topic area cover household income and wealth, poverty and financial inequalities, and people's opinions about their own financial situations.

Education and skills

Education and skills can determine individuals' socioeconomic outcomes. Measures in this topic area cover human capital, as well as qualifications and skills. They also cover satisfaction with the education system to capture how people's education is supported.

Economy

The economy affects the financial welfare of individuals, communities and the UK as a whole. Measures in this topic area cover economic activity in the UK. They also cover consumer confidence to capture people's perceptions of the country's economic situation.

Governance

Good governance contributes to better social and economic outcomes. Measures in this topic area cover public trust and civic participation. They also cover satisfaction with the police and justice system to capture how public administration is supported.

Environment

The natural environment is relevant to people's quality of life because it makes human life and activity possible. Measures in this topic area cover aspects of climate change, the UK's natural environment and natural capital, and the effects of human activity on the environment.

Measures by topic area

Each topic area within the comprehensive measure set is represented by several measures. There are 60 measures in total. Full definitions and more information on the measures and their sources can be found in our UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata. We outline the measures, grouped by topic area, as follows.

Personal well-being

- Life satisfaction: people reporting low satisfaction with their lives
- Feeling things done in life are worthwhile: people reporting low levels of feeling the things they do in life are worthwhile
- Happiness: people reporting low happiness yesterday
- Feeling anxious: people reporting feeling high anxiety yesterday
- Hope for the future: people who tend to feel hopeful about their future
- Fair treatment: people who feel they are very or somewhat unfairly treated by society

Our relationships

- Unhappy partner relationships: people in fairly or extremely unhappy relationships
- Satisfaction with social relationships: people who are fairly or very satisfied with their social relationships
- People to rely on: people who agree or strongly agree that they can rely on people in their lives if they have a serious problem
- Loneliness: people who feel lonely often or always
- Local community integration: people who agree or strongly agree that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area
- Trust in others: people who in general trust most other people

Health

- Healthy life expectancy: healthy life expectancy at birth by sex
- Satisfaction with health: people who are fairly or very satisfied with their health
- Health status: people reporting good or very good health status
- Depression or anxiety: people reporting some evidence of depression or anxiety
- Satisfaction with healthcare system: people who tend to be satisfied with the healthcare system in the UK

What we do

- Satisfaction with time use: people who are fairly or very satisfied with how they spend their time in a typical week
- Satisfaction with main job: people who are fairly or very satisfied with their main job
- Time spent on unpaid work: average daily time spent on unpaid work, by sex
- Volunteering: people who gave unpaid help to clubs, groups, charities or organisations in the last 12 months
- Engagement with arts and culture: people who took part in creative or artistic activities, or attended cultural or artistic events in the last 12 months
- Sports participation: people who on average take part in "moderate plus intensity" sport and/or physical activity for at least 150 minutes a week
- Visits to nature: people who visited green and natural spaces in their free time in the last 14 days

Where we live

- Satisfaction with accommodation: people who are fairly or very satisfied with their accommodation
- Satisfaction with local area: people who are fairly or very satisfied with their local area as a place to live
- Belonging to neighbourhood: people who agree or strongly agree that they feel like they belong to their neighbourhood
- Local connectivity: measure of ability to travel to places of value (where 100 denotes the most connected Output Area in 2022); this is a new measure that is under development
- Digital exclusion: People who do not have access to the internet at home
- Crime: incidence of personal crime
- Feeling safe: people who felt fairly or very safe walking alone in their local area after dark, by sex

Personal finance

- Median household income: median equivalised household disposable income (in real terms)
- Median household wealth: median household total wealth (including private pension wealth, in real terms)
- Relative low-income: people in relative low income (after housing costs)
- Household income inequality: Gini coefficient for measure of income inequality (where 0 means complete equality of household disposable income)
- Gender pay gap: gross hourly median difference in pay between women and men (for full-time employees, excluding overtime)
- Difficulty managing financially: people who have found it fairly or very difficult to get by financially in the past month

Education and skills

- NEET: young people not in education, employment or training (seasonally adjusted)
- No qualifications: people aged 16 to 64 years with no qualifications
- A-level or equivalent qualifications: people aged 16 to 64 years with A-level equivalent qualifications or higher
- Human capital: total value of people's projected lifetime earnings (in real terms)
- Satisfaction with own education and skills: people who are fairly or very satisfied with their education and skills
- Satisfaction with education system: people who tend to be satisfied with the education system in the UK

Economy

- Unemployment rate: unemployment rate among adults aged 16 years and over (seasonally adjusted)
- Inflation rate: Annual inflation rate as measured by Consumer Prices Index (CPI)
- GDP: gross domestic product (GDP) per head
- Consumer confidence: consumers' views of their finances and the economy in the previous and next 12 months

Governance

- Voter turnout: voter turnout in UK general elections
- Trust in UK government: people who tend to trust the UK government
- Voice in government matters: people who agree or strongly agree that they do not have any say in what the government does
- Satisfaction with police: people who tend to be satisfied with the police in the UK
- Satisfaction with courts and legal system: people who tend to be satisfied with the courts and legal system in the UK

Environment

- Greenhouse gas emissions: total greenhouse gas emissions
- Renewable energy use: renewable energy as a percentage of gross final energy consumption
- Household recycling: recycling rate for waste from households
- Protected areas: extent of protected areas at land and sea
- Priority species: relative abundance of priority species
- Air pollution: average number of days when air pollution is moderate or higher at rural and urban sites
- Surface water status: percentage of UK surface water bodies awarded "Good" or "High" ecological status
- Pro-environmental lifestyle: people who have made some or a lot of changes to their lifestyle to help tackle environmental issues

Headline measure set

The headline measures are a subset of the framework designed to provide timely quarterly insights. They are published in our Beyond GDP insights: UK Headline Measures of National Well-being bulletin and complement the annual comprehensive measure set.

These measures reflect the original UKMNW intent of assessing well-being at individual, community, and national levels. They are also informed by the interim recommendations from the UN High-Level Expert Group (HLEG) on Beyond GDP (PDF 139KB).

These measures should be viewed as leading indicators of their topic areas but not exhaustive representations of each topic area. Measure selection has been guided by a set of criteria, including:

- the availability of quarterly updates
- UK-wide geographical coverage (as a minimum Great Britain)
- high data quality that meets statistical standards with minimal revisions
- broad international comparability
- ease of communication and understanding for the public

We outline the measures, as follows:

- GDP: gross domestic product (GDP) per head (seasonally adjusted)
- Health status: people reporting good or very good health status
- NEET: young people not in education, employment or training (seasonally adjusted)
- Life satisfaction: people reporting low satisfaction with their lives
- Greenhouse gas emissions: greenhouse gas emissions per head (residence-based, seasonally adjusted)
- Trust in others: people who in general trust most other people
- Trust in UK government: people who tend to trust the UK government
- Low carbon share of total energy consumption: share of energy consumption supplied by low-carbon sources

Quarterly greenhouse gas emissions per head (residence-based, seasonally adjusted) were previously used as the environmental measure in the headline set. Production of these estimates has been paused following our decision to prioritise quality over quantity in ensuring the standard of its priority statistics.

The measure has been replaced by the low-carbon share of total energy consumption, the proportion of total UK energy consumption that is supplied from low carbon sources, including renewable and nuclear energy. It provides a timely indication of the extent to which the UK energy system is moving away from higher-carbon fuels and towards sources with lower direct carbon emissions. The measure is published quarterly by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) in its Energy Trends publication and covers the UK as a whole. It is based on established national energy statistics covering energy supply and demand and it is an accredited official statistic.

An increase in the low-carbon share indicates movement towards a lower-carbon energy system, while a decrease indicates movement away from it. This makes the measure accessible for public-facing reporting and suitable for inclusion alongside other headline measures designed to provide a concise overview of national progress beyond GDP.

4 . Quality characteristics of the framework

This section of the user guide provides information on the quality of the framework and identifies issues that should be noted when using the outputs.

We have developed guidelines for measuring statistical quality based on the European Statistical System's five dimensions of quality.

Relevance

The UK Measures of National Well-being (UKMNW) were originally established following a national debate on what matters to people. These measures were revised in 2022 to 2023 to the current set of 60 measures following a six-month public review. More information about the review can be found in our Review of the UK Measures of National Well-being, October 2022 to March 2023 article and our UK Measures of National Well-being, current and upcoming work: July 2023 article.

In the future, we will take an iterative approach to updating the framework. For example, if a new data source with wider geographic coverage becomes available for a measure, we will evaluate it and, if appropriate, swap the measure in the framework.

Timeliness and punctuality

The headline measure set is published on a quarterly basis.

The comprehensive measure set is published on an annual basis.

More information on the update frequency for each measure can be found in our associated UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata.

Accuracy and reliability

Where available, confidence intervals are provided within the datasets alongside the releases. Where changes over time are presented, associated confidence intervals are used to assess the statistical significance of the differences.

This is a conservative method of assessing change, so it is possible that significant differences exist in the data that have not been identified using this method.

In our Beyond GDP insights: UK Headline Measures of National Well-being bulletin we may apply additional statistical testing to assess longerterm trends and to support stronger conclusions. Our guidance on Uncertainty and how we measure it for our surveys contains more information on how we measure and communicate uncertainty for survey data.

For some of the measures that are not based on survey data, confidence intervals are not available. In those cases, change over time has not been assessed, or has been assessed based on guidance from the data owner. When interpreting the latest estimates and the presented assessments of change, we advise users to keep in mind the potential impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on individuals' attitudes and survey responses, as well as the impact of the pandemic on data collection, given the major disruption that the pandemic caused to people's lives and to survey data collection.

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

Most of the measures used in the framework are official statistics while some are accredited official statistics. Accredited official statistics are accredited and scrutinised by the UK Statistics Authority to ensure they meet quality criteria in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Coherence and comparability

Feedback received as part of the review of the UKMNW highlighted the importance of coherence.

We have approached coherence in the framework in a number of ways, including domestic and international comparability of metrics, geographic coverage and comparability between the measures themselves.

Geographically, we aim to include the widest possible coverage of the UK to allow for greatest comparability. For measures that do not cover the entire UK, we have aimed to provide links to the relevant alternative devolved government data to support coherence across the UK.

We have also aimed for consistency in question structure and response scales across measures.

More information on the geographic coverage, questions, and devolved administration sources for each measure can be found in our associated UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata.

Accessibility and clarity

Our UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata are available online and can be downloaded in .xls file types. Graphs, summary findings and links to source data are available in our UK Measures of National Well-being dashboard and our Beyond GDP insights: UK Headline Measures of National Well-being bulletin.

We welcome feedback and enquiries regarding the framework, which can be emailed to qualityoflife@ons.gov.uk. It may be possible to meet additional data requests, but these may be chargeable depending on the time required to produce the additional data requested.

Our UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata contains information on the question, data source, frequency of update, devolved administration source, and method of assessment of change for each measure. User requested data are also published on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website.

For information regarding conditions of access to data, please refer to the following:

- Terms and conditions (for data on the website)
- Freedom of information
- Accessibility

5 . About the release

How we collect the data

Data are collated in two ways, including:

- re-publishing existing data, where data are already available
- undertaking new analysis where data are not published, but micro-datasets are available; where access to datasets is not available, we contact the data owners and request them to run the analysis for us

Data sources

New analysis is carried out using the following Office for National Statistics (ONS) surveys or publicly available datasets:

- Annual Population Survey (APS) from the ONS
- British Election Study from the University of Oxford and University of Manchester
- Labour Force Survey (LFS) from the ONS
- Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) from the ONS
- People and Nature Survey from Natural England (publicly available on the UK Data Service website)
- Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study (publicly available on the UK Data Service website)

Measures based on published data are drawn from the following sources:

- Active Lives Adult Survey from Sport England
- Air Quality Statistics from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) from the ONS
- Biodiversity Indicators from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- Community and Engagement Survey from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)
- Consumer Confidence Barometer from Growth from Knowledge (GfK)
- Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) from the ONS
- Digest of UK Energy Statistics (DUKES) from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DENZ)
- Gross domestic product (GDP) from the ONS
- Health Index for England (Physical health conditions sub-domain) from the ONS
- Healthy state life expectancies from the ONS
- Household Finances Survey (HFS) from the Department for Work and Pensions
- Households Below Average Income (HBAI) Statistics from the Department for Work and Pensions
- Human capital estimates from the Office for National Statistics
- Inflation estimates from the Office for National Statistics
- Labour Force Survey (LFS) from the ONS
- Low carbon share of total energy consumption from DESNZ
- Online Time Use Survey (OTUS) from the ONS
- Participation Survey from the DCMS
- Technology Tracker from the Office of Communications (Ofcom)
- UK statistics on waste from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- UK Territorial Greenhouse Gas Emissions from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
- Voter Turnout from the House of Commons Library
- Wealth and Assets Survey (WAS) from the ONS

For links to all sources, see our UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata.

How the data are processed

Where we carry out analysis on person-level datasets, associated quality and methodology information reports detail how data are collected and processed before we access it for analysis. The following reports provide more information:

- for APS: see Section 6 of our Annual Population Survey (APS) quality and methodology information (QMI)
- for LFS: see Section 6 of our Labour Force Survey (LFS) quality and methodology information (QMI)
- for OPN: see Section 6 of our Opinions and Lifestyle Survey quality and methodology information (QMI)
- for Understanding Society: a technical report is published for each wave, and a main user guide provides information on how the data are processed

Where data are already published and based on survey data, user guides or technical reports are available at source.

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 previously. Long-term change is assessed as the latest estimate compared with five years previously.

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 7 and 14 months because of the rotation of questions on the survey.

For healthy life expectancy, the periods used to assess change differ from other measures to reflect overlapping assessment windows; in particular, the short-term assessment is made using the last non-overlapping period, and the longterm assessment is made using the latest estimate with the earliest period available, to ensure sufficient separation from the shortterm change point. This avoids situations where overlapping years would result in assessing change over only a very short interval.

Some of the environment related measures differ in the periods that assessment of change is made based on guidance from the data owners. Short-term change is assessed by comparison of the latest period, with estimates over the previous five years and long-term change comparing the latest estimate with the earliest period available. This is to reflect the relatively slow movement of change in these measures.

We report confidence intervals and sample sizes, where available, to aid data interpretation. Where confidence intervals are available, we use these to assess the statistical significance of the change over time. For more information on confidence intervals and statistical significance, see our guidance on Uncertainty and how we measure it for our surveys.

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

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 "Feeling anxious" measure, we would report a positive change for "People reporting feeling high anxiety yesterday" if the percentage of people reporting feeling high anxiety had decreased.

How we quality assure and validate the data

For new analysis and published data, data are dual-run by independent analysts and checked for accuracy at multiple stages between analysis and final output (presented on the well-being dashboard and data tables).

Where necessary, estimates are suppressed to avoid any disclosure of personal information.

We engage and collaborate with data owners whose data we publish to review our outputs and ensure we are reporting their data in a clear and accurate way.

We conduct triangulation of findings by comparing our data with other existing data, where possible.

How we disseminate the data

The headline measure set is updated on a quarterly basis in our Beyond GDP insights: UK headline measures of National Well-being bulletin and our associated headline dataset is published alongside the bulletin.

The comprehensive measure set is updated on an annual basis in our Beyond GDP insights: UK Measures of National Well-being bulletin. The measures are published on our UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard. The dashboard presents each measure within its domain and includes:

- a chart to illustrate the latest findings or graph to show time series data
- commentary on the data
- headline findings
- filters to view data in a certain way, such as by domain or direction of change

Our associated datasets that contain further detail are published alongside the dashboard, including current and historical data, sub-population breakdowns by country, region, age and sex for the latest data (where available), accompanying quality information (where available), relevant notes to guide correct interpretation of the data, and links back to the source information.

6 . Related links

Beyond GDP insights: UK Measures of National Well-being bulletins
Bulletin | Updated quarterly
Exploring quality of life and holistic progress in the UK, drawing on the latest economic, environmental and social statistics.

UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard
Dashboard | Updated annually
A visual overview of how people in the UK are doing across 10 domains of national well-being.

UK Measures of National Well-being: measures metadata
Dataset | Updated quarterly
Metadata tables containing information on the question, data source, frequency of update, devolved administration source, and method of assessment of change for each measure.

7 . Cite this user guide

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