

Measuring National Well-being: European Comparisons, 2014

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Abstract

This article is published as part of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Measuring National Well-being programme. The programme aims to produce accepted and trusted measures of the well-being of the nation – how the UK as a whole is doing. This article explores how the UK is faring in key areas of well-being compared to the European Union and the countries within it.

Introduction

The Measuring National Well-being programme began in November 2010 with the aim to 'develop and publish an accepted and trusted set of National Statistics which help people understand and monitor well-being'.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes 41 measures of National well-being, organised by ten 'domains' including topics such as 'Health', 'What we do' and 'Where we live'. The measures include both objective data (for example, the unemployment rate) and subjective data (for example, percentage who felt safe walking alone after dark). More information is available at www.ons.gov.uk/well-being

This article explores how key areas of well-being in the UK compare with those in the European Union and the countries within it. The article uses comparable or similar European data where available from five sources, Eurostat, the European Quality of Life Survey, Eurobarometer, the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) and the World Gallup Poll.

Key points

- In 2011, 71.8% of adults aged 16 and over in the UK rated their life satisfaction as 7 or more out of 10, higher than the EU–28 average of 69.3%.
- The average rating of satisfaction with family life by people aged 16 and over in the UK in 2011 was 8.2 out of 10, higher than the EU–28 average of 7.8 out of 10.
- Over 6 in 10 people (62.7%) aged 16 and over in the UK rated their health status as very good or good in 2011, lower than the EU–28 average of 64.0%.
- In 2011, 58.4% of people aged 16 and over in the UK reported that they felt close to other people in the area where they lived, lower than the EU–28 average of 66.6%.
- A fifth (20.2%) of households in the UK in 2012 reported great difficulty or difficulty in making ends meet, lower than the estimated EU–28 average of 27.7%.
- In 2013, 79% of adults aged 15 and over in the UK scored very high, high or medium on an index of cultural practice (measuring frequency of cultural participation), higher than the EU–27 average of 66%.

Personal well-being

An important component of measuring national well-being is the personal well-being of individuals, which is measured by finding out how people think and feel about their own lives.

There are five measures in the National Well-being 'Personal well-being' domain. Directly comparable European data are not available from the same sources for these measures, but for three of the measures comparisons are made using proxy measures from different sources. For more information see Table 2 at the end of this section.

Summary

Table 1 shows that the UK was above the EU average in all three measures being compared - 'life satisfaction', 'worthwhile' and 'rating of happiness'. The rest of this section will describe this in more detail and highlight the countries that ranked highest and lowest in each of the measures.

Table 1: European comparisons summary - Personal well-being

	UK	EU average	Highest ranked country	Lowest ranked country
How satisfied are you with your life these days? (7 or more out of 10) Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)	71.8%	69.3%	Denmark (91.0%)	Bulgaria (38.3%)
I generally feel that what I do in life is worthwhile (strongly agree or agree) Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)	81.9%	78.5%	Denmark, Netherlands (91.4%)	Greece (47.8%)
Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are? (7 or more out of 10) Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)	77.9%	74.1%	Finland (90.6%)	Bulgaria (48.0%)

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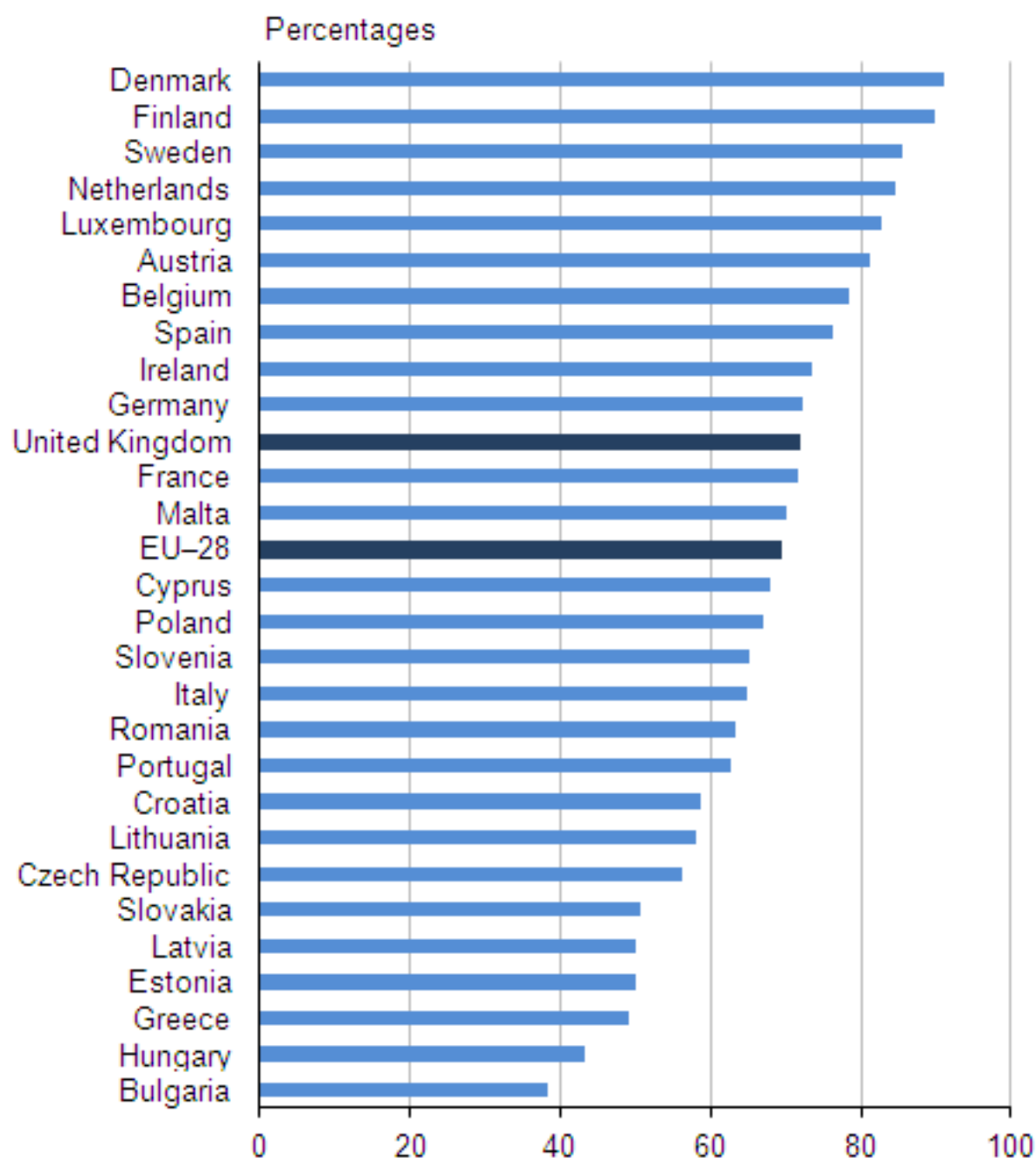
Life satisfaction

According to the European Quality of Life Survey in 2011, 71.8% of adults aged 16 and over in the UK rated their satisfaction with life as 7 or more out of 10¹ (**Figure 1**). This was slightly higher than the EU–28 average of 69.3% and was similar to both Germany (72.3%) and France (71.6%).

The highest-ranking countries were Denmark and Finland, where 91.0% and 89.8% rated their satisfaction with life as 7 or more out of 10 respectively. The lowest-ranking country was Bulgaria with 38.3% rating their satisfaction with life as 7 or more out of 10.

Figure 1: Life satisfaction (1), 2011

EU comparison



Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey

Notes:

1. Adults aged 16 and over rating their life satisfaction between 7 and 10 out of 10.

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Feeling worthwhile

The European Quality of Life Survey in 2011 also found that over 8 in 10 (81.9%) of adults aged 16 and over in the UK strongly agreed or agreed they generally felt that what they did in life was worthwhile. This was higher than the EU–28 average of 78.5%, and was similar to both Spain (81.5%) and Belgium (81.1%). The highest-ranking countries were Denmark and the Netherlands, where over 9 in 10 (91.4%) strongly agreed or agreed that they generally felt that what they did in life was worthwhile, while the lowest-ranking country was Greece (47.8%).

Happiness

According to the European Quality of Life Survey in 2011, when asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 how happy people thought they were, 77.9% adults aged 16 and over in the UK rated their happiness as 7 or more out of 10². This was higher than the EU–28 average of 74.1% and was similar to Cyprus (76.8%). The highest-ranking countries were Finland (90.6%) and Denmark (90.2%), while the lowest-ranking country was Bulgaria (48.0%).

Table 2: Comparison of National Well-being measures and European measures - Personal well-being

National Well-being measures (UK)	European comparison measures
<p>Medium/high (7 or more out of 10) rating of satisfaction with their lives overall</p> <p>Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics (2012/13)</p>	<p>How satisfied would you say you are with your life these days? (7 or more out of 10)</p> <p>Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)</p>
<p>Medium/high (7 or more out of 10) rating of how worthwhile the things they do are</p> <p>Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics (2012/13)</p>	<p>I generally feel that what I do in life is worthwhile (strongly agree or agree)</p> <p>Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)</p>
<p>Rated their happiness yesterday as medium/high (7 or more out of 10)</p> <p>Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics (2012/13)</p>	<p>Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are? (7 or more out of 10)</p> <p>Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)</p>
<p>Rated their anxiety yesterday as low (0 to 3 out of 10)</p> <p>Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics (2012/13)</p>	<p>No comparable or similar data</p>
<p>Population mental well-being (average rating out of 35)</p> <p>Source: Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study (2009/10)</p>	<p>No comparable or similar data</p>

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Notes

1. Respondents were asked 'All things considered, how satisfied would you say you are with your life these days? Where 1 means very dissatisfied and 10 means very satisfied.'
2. Respondents were asked 'Taking all things together on a scale of 1 to 10, how happy would you say you are? Where 1 means you are very unhappy and 10 means you are very happy'.

Our relationships

The quality of social connections with people around us and a correct balance between working and social life may be beneficial to an individual's overall well-being.

There are three measures in the National Well-being 'Our relationships' domain. Directly comparable European data are available for two of these measures from the same source but for the remaining measure a comparison is made using a proxy measure from a different source. For more information see Table 4 at the end of this section.

Summary

Table 3 shows that the UK was above the EU average for 'satisfaction with family life' and below the EU average for 'satisfaction with social life' and 'having support when needed'. The rest of this section will describe this in more detail, and highlight the countries that ranked highest and lowest in each of the measures.

Table 3: European comparisons summary - Our relationships

	UK	EU average	Highest ranked country	Lowest ranked country
Average rating of satisfaction with family life (out of 10) Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)	8.2	7.8	Cyprus (8.9)	Bulgaria (6.7)
Average rating of satisfaction with social life (out of 10) Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)	7.0	7.3	Denmark (8.3)	Bulgaria (5.9)
Support if needed advice about a serious personal or family matter Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)	88.7%	93.0%	Slovakia (98.8%)	France (86.1%)

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Satisfaction with family life

According to the European Quality of Life Survey in 2011, people aged 16 and over were asked to rate their satisfaction with their family life out of 10. In the UK, the average rating of satisfaction was 8.2 out of 10. This was higher than the EU-28 average of 7.8 out of 10, and the same as Spain and Luxembourg. The country with the highest average rating was Cyprus (8.9 out of 10), while the country with the lowest average was Bulgaria (6.7 out of 10).

Satisfaction with social life

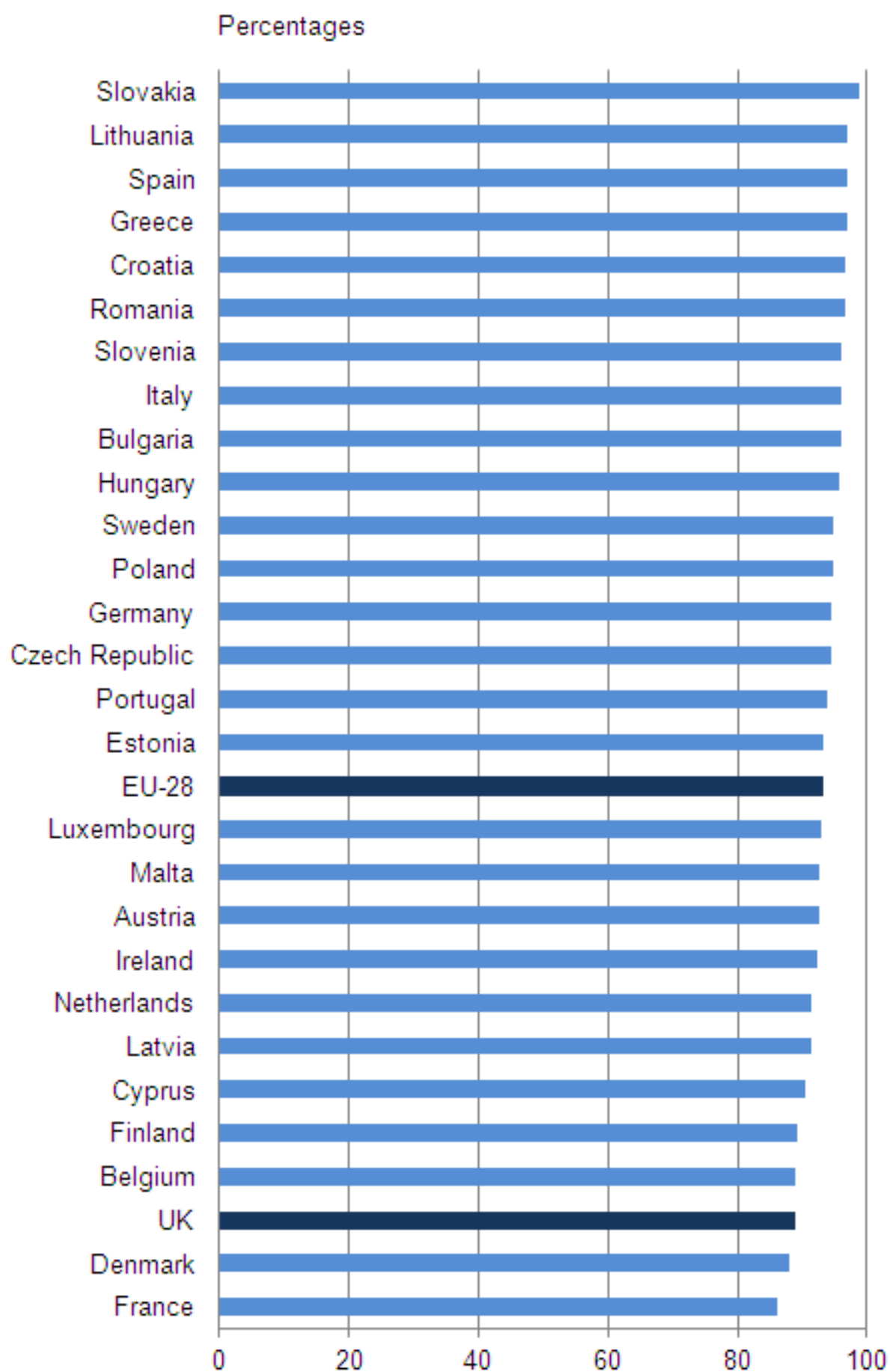
On the same European Quality of Life Survey in 2011, people aged 16 and over were asked to rate their satisfaction with their social life out of 10. In the UK the average rating of satisfaction was 7.0 out of 10. This was lower than the EU–28 average of 7.3 out of 10 and similar to Ireland and Greece (both 7.1 out of 10) and Estonia and Croatia (both 6.9 out of 10). The country with the highest average rating was Denmark (8.3 out of 10), while the country with the lowest average was Bulgaria (5.9 out of 10).

Support if needed advice about a serious personal or family matter

On the European Quality of Life Survey in 2011, people aged 16 and over were asked who would give them support if they needed advice about a serious personal or family matter. In the UK, 88.7% people said that they had support from family, friends, neighbours or someone else (**Figure 2**). This was lower than the EU–28 average of 93.0%. The highest-ranking country was Slovakia (98.8%), while the lowest-ranking countries were France (86.1%) and Denmark (88.1%).

Figure 2: Support if needed advice about a serious personal or family matter (1), 2011

EU comparison



Notes:

1. Respondents aged 16 and over who reported they got support from a member of their family, a relative, a friend, neighbour, or someone else if they needed advice about a serious personal or family matter.

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Table 4: Comparison of National Well-being measures and European measures - Our relationships

National Well-being measures (UK)	European comparison measures
Average rating of satisfaction with family life (out of 10)	Average rating of satisfaction with family life (out of 10)
Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)	Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)
Average rating of satisfaction with social life (out of 10)	Average rating of satisfaction with social life (out of 10)
Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)	Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)
Has a spouse, family member or friend to rely on if they have a serious problem	Support if needed advice about a serious personal or family matter
Source: Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study (2010/11)	Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)

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Health

According to the Department of Health¹, there is a two way relationship between well-being and health: health influences well-being and well-being influences health.

There are four measures in the National Well-being 'Health' domain. Directly comparable European data are not available from the same sources for these measures, but for three of the measures

comparisons are made using proxy measures from different sources. For more information see Table 6 at the end of this section.

Summary

Table 5 shows that the UK was above the EU average for 'healthy life years' and below the EU average for 'perceived health status', while 32.9% of people in the UK reported 'having a long standing illness or health problem' compared to the EU average of 31.5%. The rest of this section will describe this in more detail, and highlight the countries that ranked highest and lowest in each of the measures.

Table 5: European comparisons summary - Health

	UK	EU average	Highest ranked country	Lowest ranked country
Healthy life years (male)	64.5	61.3	Malta (71.8)	Estonia (53.1)
Healthy life years (female)	64.5	61.9	Malta (72.4)	Slovakia (53.1)
Source: Eurostat (2012)				
Having a long-standing illness or health problem	32.9%	31.5%	Bulgaria (18.6%)	Finland (46.7%)
Source: Eurostat (2012)				
Perceived health status (very good or good)	62.7%	64.0%	Ireland (75.3%)	Latvia, Lithuania (41.1%)
Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)				

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Healthy life years

Healthy life years are the years that a person at birth is still expected to live in a healthy condition. According to data from Eurostat, both males and females in the UK had an estimated 64.5 healthy life years in absolute value at birth in 2012. This is higher than the estimated EU–28 average of 61.3 years for males and 61.9 years for females. It was similar to Belgium for males (64.4 years) and the same as Croatia for females (64.5 years). The countries with the highest healthy life years were Malta (71.8 years for males and 72.4 years for females) and Sweden (70.9 years for males and 70.7 years for females). The country with the lowest healthy life years for males was Estonia (53.1 years) and for females was Slovakia (53.1 years).

Long standing illness or health problem

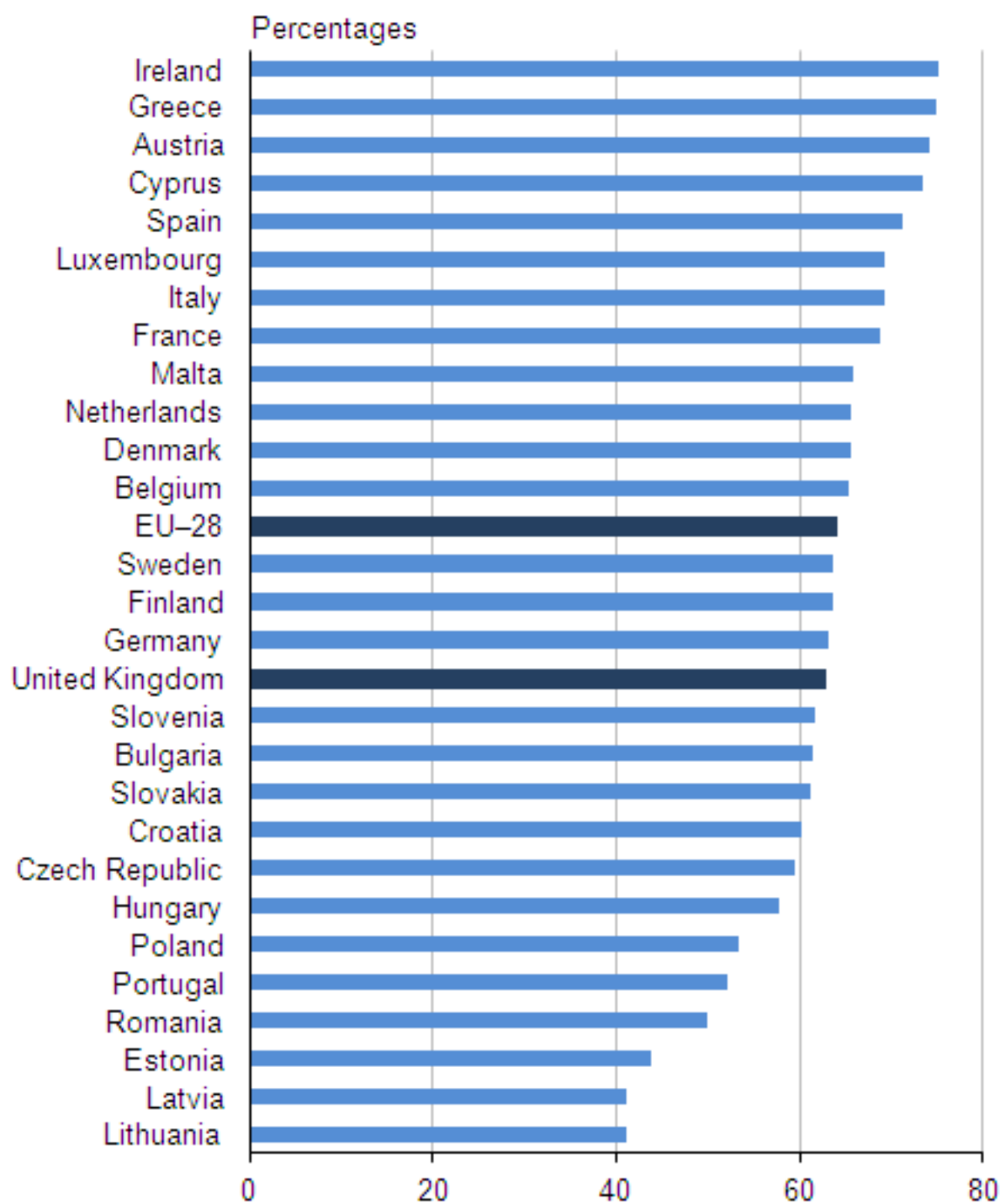
According to data from Eurostat, nearly a third (32.9%) of people aged 16 and over in the UK had a long-standing illness or health problem in 2012. This is slightly higher than the estimated EU–28 average of 31.5%, and is similar to Austria (33.1%) and Cyprus (32.6%). The highest proportion of people with a long-standing illness or health problem was in Finland (46.7%), while the lowest proportion was in Bulgaria (18.6%). The proportion of people in the UK with a long-standing illness or health problem has decreased over the years since 2005 when it was 37.4%. Over the same period the EU average has remained stable at around 31%.

Perceived health status

Over 6 in 10 people (62.7%) aged 16 and over in the UK rated their health status as very good or good in 2011 (**Figure 3**). This was lower than the EU–28 average of 64.0% and similar to Germany (63.3%). The highest proportion of people who rated their health status as very good or good were in Ireland (75.3%) and Greece (75.0%). The lowest proportions were in Lithuania and Latvia (both 41.1%).

Figure 3: Perceived health status (1), 2011

EU comparison



Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey

Notes:

1. Adults aged 16 and over who rated their health as very good or good.

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Table 6: Comparison of National Well-being measures and European measures - Health

National Well-being measures (UK)	European comparison measures
Healthy life expectancy at birth (male/female) Source: Office for National Statistics (2008–10)	Healthy life years (male/female) Source: Eurostat (2012)
Reported a long-term illness and a disability Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics (January to March 2013)	Having a long-standing illness or health problem Source: Eurostat (2012)
Somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their health Source: Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study (2011/12)	Perceived health status (very good or good) Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)
Some evidence indicating probable psychological disturbance or mental ill health Source: Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study (2011/12)	No comparable or similar data

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Notes

1. The Relationship Between Wellbeing and Health (2013). A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse, Department of Health.

What we do

Individuals divide their time between various tasks and activities. This shapes our lifestyles, our relationships with others and our overall well-being.

There are six measures in the National Well-being 'What we do' domain. Directly comparable European data are not available from the same sources for these measures, but for all measures comparisons are made using proxy measures from different sources. For more information see Table 8 at the end of this section.

Summary

Table 7 shows that the UK was above the EU average for 'job satisfaction', 'time to do things in daily life', 'cultural participation' and 'sports participation', equal for 'voluntary work' and below the EU average 'unemployment rate'. The rest of this section will describe this in more detail and highlight the countries that ranked highest and lowest in each of the measures.

Table 7: European comparisons summary - What we do

	UK	EU average	Highest ranked country	Lowest ranked country
Unemployment rate Source: Eurostat (October to December 2013)	7.1%	10.7%	Austria (5.0%)	Greece (27.4%)
Satisfaction with present job (7 or more out of 10) Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)	75.1%	73.5%	Denmark (90.4%)	Greece (59.2%)
Seldom have time to do things really enjoyed in daily life (strongly disagree or disagree) Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)	45.8%	44.8%	Netherlands (66.3%)	Romania (27.0%)
Did voluntary work Source: Eurobarometer (2011)	26%	26%	Sweden (55%)	Portugal (6%)
Index of cultural participation (very high, high or medium)	79%	66%	Sweden (92%)	Greece (37%)

	UK	EU average	Highest ranked country	Lowest ranked country
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Source:
Eurobarometer
(2013)

Taking part in sports or physical exercise (every day or almost every day or at least once a week)	46.8%	39.7%	Finland (72.5%)	Bulgaria (12.0%)
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Source: Third
European Quality
of Life Survey
(2011)

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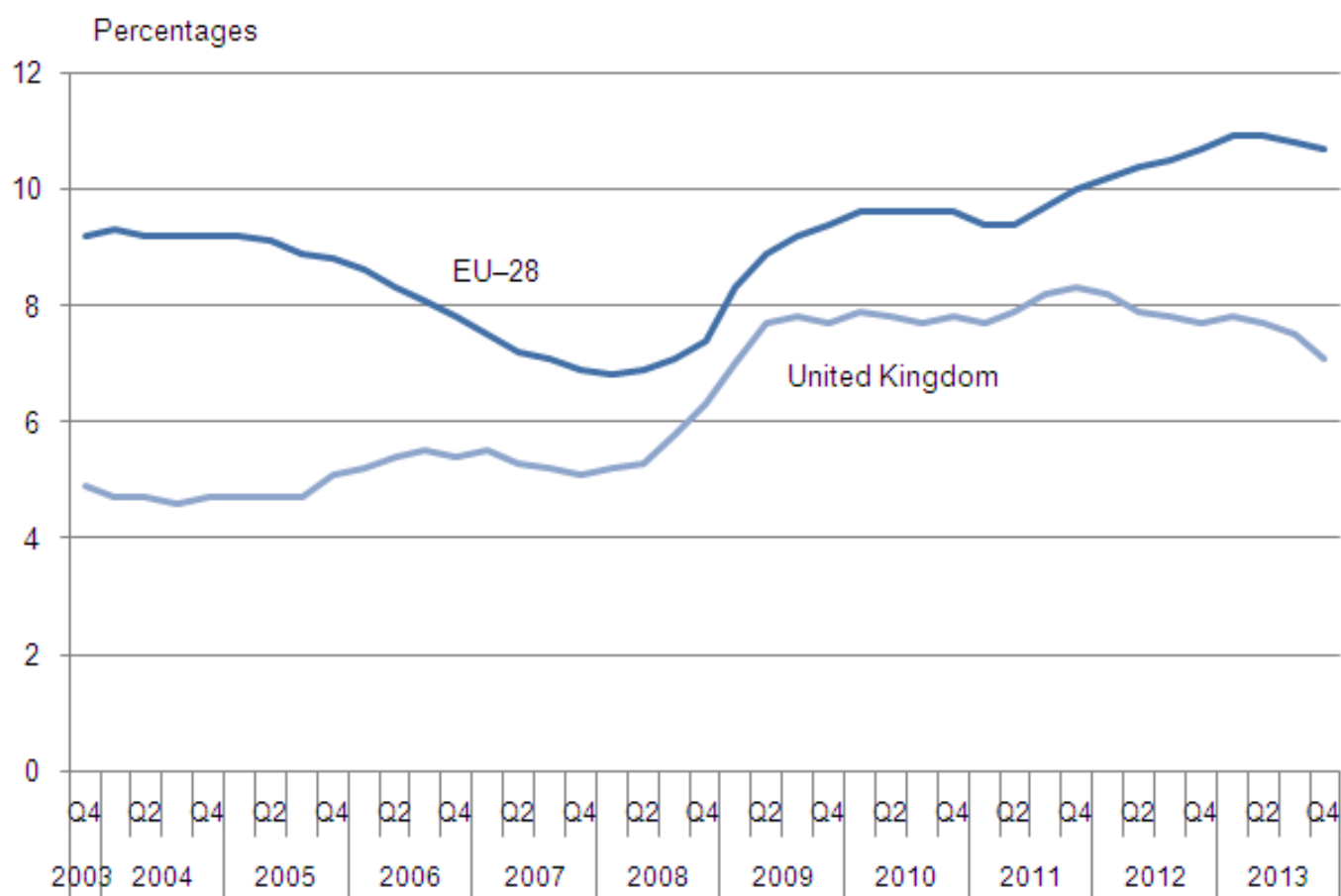
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Unemployment rate

The unemployment rate for the UK published by Eurostat was 7.1% in quarter 4 of 2013, compared with 10.7% in the EU–28 (**Figure 4**). The highest unemployment rates were in Greece (27.4%) and Spain (25.8%) while the lowest was in Austria (5.0%) and Germany (5.2%). The unemployment rate in the UK and EU–28 was higher than 10 years earlier, in quarter 4 of 2003 (the UK was 4.9% and the EU–28 average was 9.2%). Since then, the UK unemployment rate rose, reaching a peak of 8.3% quarter 4 of 2011, while the EU average fell between 2004 and quarter 1 of 2008 before rising to a peak of 10.9% in the first two quarters of 2013.

Figure 4: Quarterly (1) unemployment rate (2), seasonally adjusted

EU and UK

**Notes:**

1. Quarter 1 (Q1) is January to March, Quarter 2 (Q2) is April to June, Quarter 3 (Q3) is July to September and Quarter 4 (Q4) is October to December.
2. The unemployment rate for the UK published by Eurostat is based on the population aged 16–74 but the unemployment rate for the UK published by the Office for National Statistics is based on those aged 16 and over. There are other minor definitional differences.

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Satisfaction with present job

According to the European Quality of Life Survey in 2011, just over three-quarters (75.1%) of adults aged 16 and over in the UK rated their satisfaction with their present job as 7 to 10 out of 10. This was higher than the EU–28 average of 73.5%, and similar to Germany (76.0%). The highest proportion of people who rated satisfaction with their present job as 7 to 10 out of 10 was in Denmark (90.4%), while the lowest proportion was in Greece (59.2%).

Time to do things really enjoyed in daily life

Where people have disagreed or strongly disagreed when asked whether they seldom had time to do things they really enjoyed in daily life gives an idea of people's satisfaction with their amount of leisure time. In 2011, 45.8% of people aged 16 and over in the UK reported that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that seldom had time to do things they really enjoyed in daily life. This was similar to the EU-28 average of 44.8% and similar to Luxembourg (45.7%) and the same as Cyprus. The highest-ranking country where people disagreed or strongly disagreed was the Netherlands (66.3%), while the lowest-ranking country was Romania (27.0%).

Voluntary work

According to a special Eurobarometer survey run in September to November 2011, over a quarter (26%) of adults aged 15 and over in the UK were participating actively for a voluntary organisation or doing voluntary work at the time of interview¹. This was the same proportion as the EU-27 average and the same proportion as Estonia. The highest proportion of people who did voluntary work was in Sweden (55%), while the lowest proportions were in Portugal and Greece (6% and 8% respectively).

Cultural participation

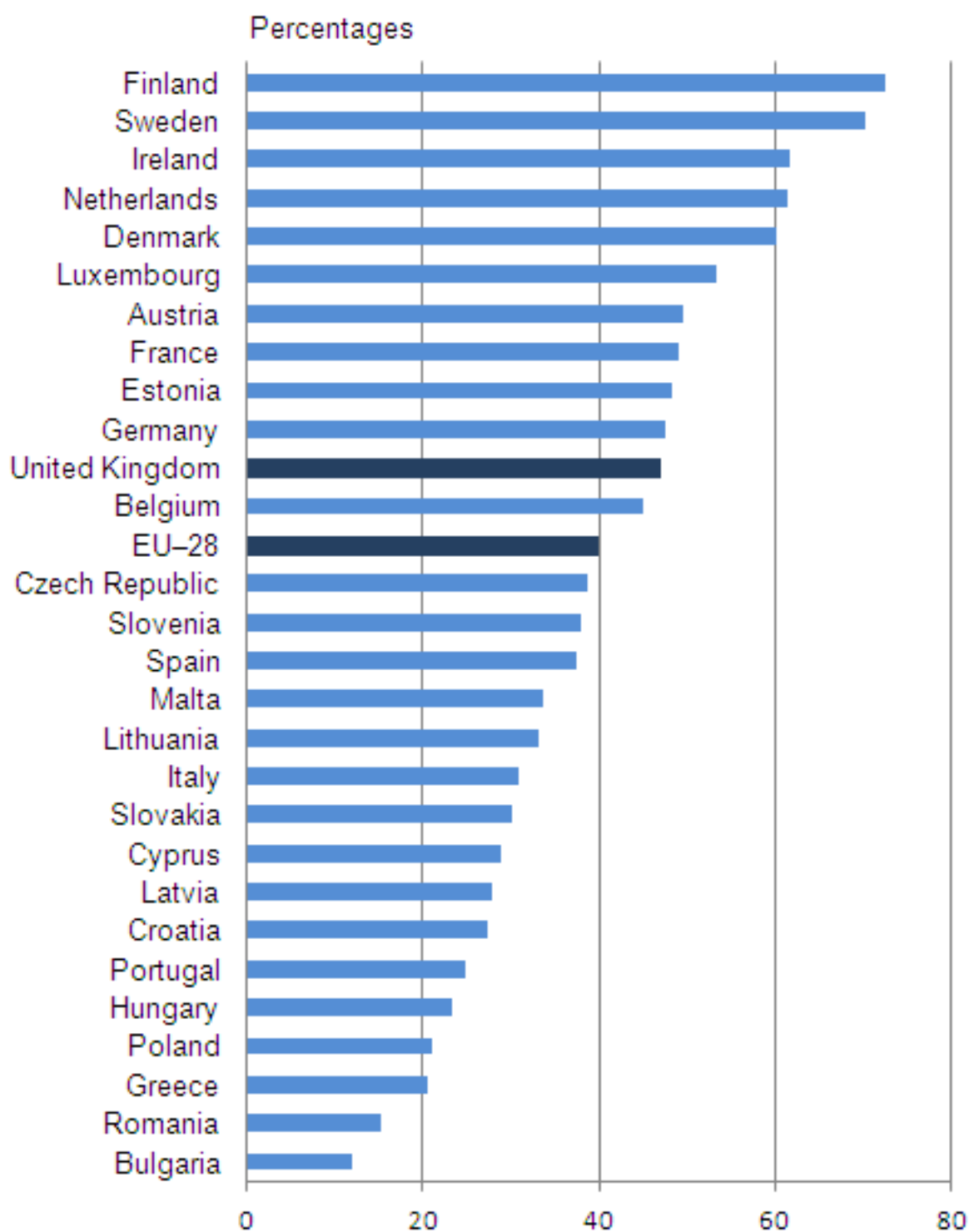
A special Eurobarometer survey run in April to May 2013 looked at cultural access and participation. Just under 8 in 10 (79%) adults aged 15 and over in the UK had a combined score of very high, high and medium cultural engagement². This was higher than the EU-27 average of 66% and similar to France and Luxembourg (both 81%). The country with the highest combined score of very high, high and medium cultural engagement was Sweden (92%) while the lowest was Greece (37%).

Taking part in sports or physical exercise

According to the European Quality of Life Survey in 2011, 46.8% of people aged 16 and over in the UK took part in sports or physical exercise at least once a week (**Figure 5**). This was higher than the EU-28 average of 39.7% and similar to Germany (47.6%). The highest proportion of people who took part in sports or physical exercise at least once a week were in Finland and Sweden (72.5% and 70.4% respectively), while the lowest proportion was in Bulgaria (12.0%).

Figure 5: Taking part in sport or physical activities at least once a week (1), 2011

EU comparison



Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey

Notes:

1. Adults aged 16 and over who took part in sports or physical exercise every day or almost every day or at least once a week.

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Table 8: Comparison of National Well-being measures and European measures - What we do

National Well-being measures (UK unless otherwise stated)	European comparison measures
Unemployment rate Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics (October to December 2013)	Unemployment rate Source: Eurostat (October to December, 2013)
Somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their job Source: Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study (2011/12)	Satisfaction with present job (7 or more out of 10) Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)
Somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their amount of leisure time Source: Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study (2011/12)	Seldom have time to do things really enjoyed in daily life (strongly disagree or disagree) Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)
Volunteered more than once in the last 12 months Source: Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study (2010/11)	Did voluntary work Source: Eurobarometer (2011)
Engaged with/participated in arts or cultural activity at least 3 times in last year (England) Source: Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2012/13)	Index of cultural participation (very high or high) Source: Eurobarometer (2013)

National Well-being measures (UK unless otherwise stated)
European comparison measures

Adult participation in 30 minutes of moderate intensity sport, once per week (England)

Taking part in sports or physical exercise (every day or almost every day or at least once a week)

Source: Sport England (2012–13)

Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)

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Notes

1. Respondents were asked 'Do you currently participate actively in or do voluntary work for one or more of the following organisations? A sports club or club for outdoor activities (recreation organisation); Education, arts, music or cultural association; A trade union; A business or professional organisation; A consumer organisation; An international organisation such as a development aid organisation or human rights organisation; An organisation for the environmental protection, animal rights, etc.; A charity organisation or social aid organisation; A leisure association for the elderly; An organisation for the defence of elderly rights; Religious or church organisation; Political party or organisation; Organisation defending the interest of patients and/or disabled; Other interest groups for specific causes such as women, people with specific sexual orientation or local issues; Other voluntary work. For more information see special Eurobarometer 378 available at [Eurobarometer](#).
2. A simple index of cultural practice was formed to help identify levels of engagement in cultural activities among citizens from the 27 EU Member States. This is based on the frequency of participation and access to the different cultural activities included in the survey. Each respondent had been given a score based on their frequency of participation, and these scores were used to identify the different cultural index types of 'very high', 'high', 'medium' and 'low'. For more information see special Eurobarometer 399 available at [Eurobarometer](#).

Where we live

An individual's dwelling, their local environment and the type of community in which they live may all have an effect on a person's well-being.

There are six measures in the National Well-being 'Where we live' domain. Directly comparable European data are not available from the same sources for these measures, but for three of

the measures comparisons are made using proxy measures from different sources. For more information see Table 10 at the end of this section.

Summary

Table 9 shows that for the two measures that have an EU average, the UK was above the EU average for 'satisfaction with accommodation' and below the EU average for 'feeling close to people in the area where they live'. The rest of this section will describe this in more detail and highlight the countries that ranked highest and lowest in each of the measures.

Table 9: European comparisons summary - Where we live

	UK	EU average	Highest ranked country	Lowest ranked country
Feeling safe walking alone at night in the city or area where lived Source: World Gallup Poll (2012)	75.0%	..	Slovenia (85%)	Lithuania (45%)
Feel close to people in the area where I live (strongly agree or agree) Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)	58.4%	66.6%	Cyprus (80.8%)	Germany (58.3%)
Satisfaction with accommodation (7 or more out of 10) Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)	80.2%	76.9%	Finland (90.9%)	Latvia (55.2%)

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Feeling safe walking alone at night in the city or area where living

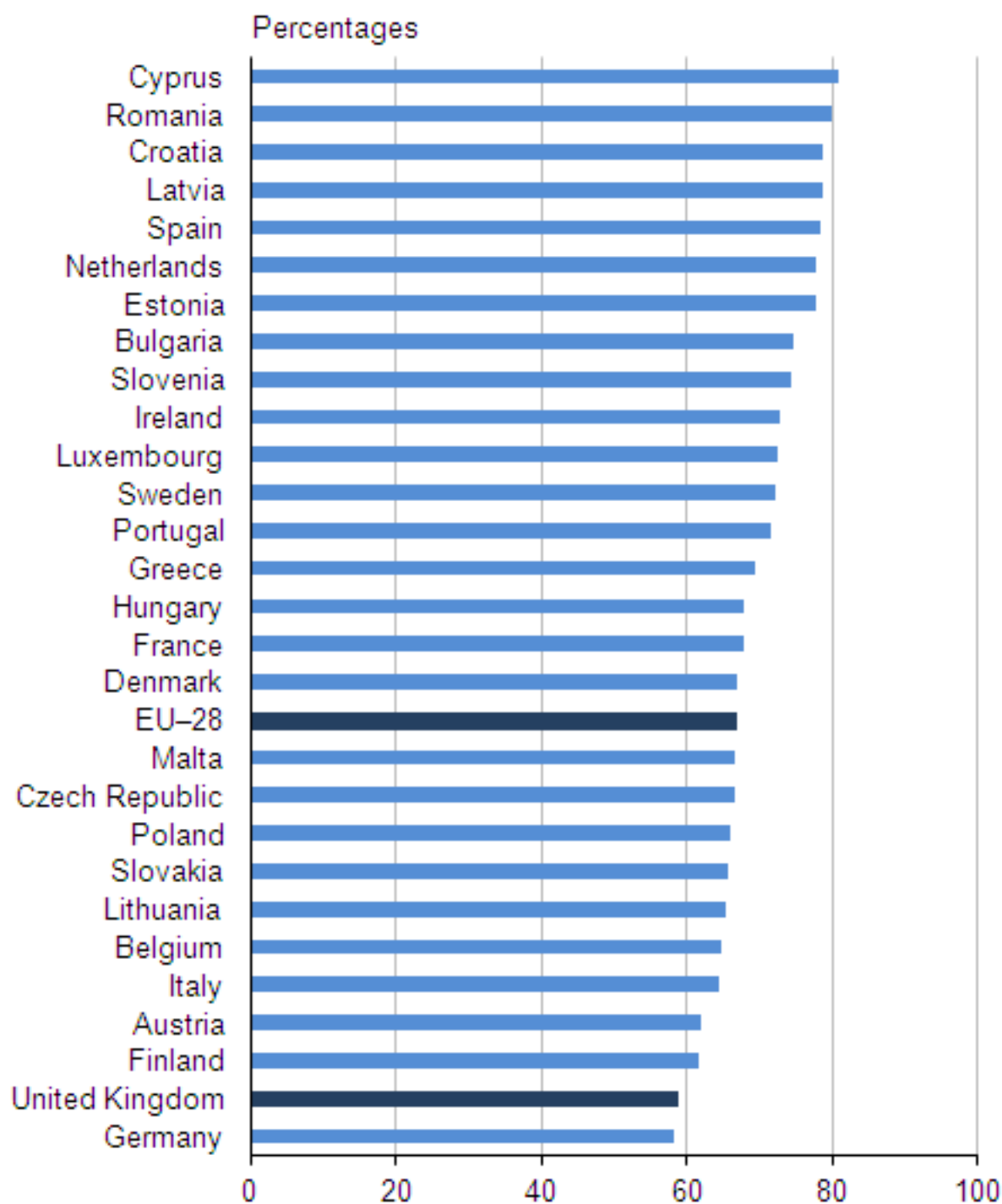
According to the 2012 World Gallup Poll, three-quarters (75%) of people aged 15 and over in the UK felt safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they lived. This was similar to Finland and the Netherlands (both 77%) and Ireland (74%). People in Slovenia felt the safest (85%), while people in Lithuania and Greece felt the least safe (45% and 47% respectively).

Feeling close to people in the local area

Looking at whether people feel close to other people in the area where they live can give a sense of whether they feel a 'belonging' to their neighbourhood. According to the European Quality of Life Survey in 2011, 58.4% of people aged 16 and over in the UK reported that they felt close to other people in the area where they lived (**Figure 6**). This was lower than the EU-28 average of 66.6% and was similar to Germany (58.3%) which was the lowest-ranking country. The highest-ranked country was Cyprus (80.8%).

Figure 6: Feeling close to people in the local area, 2011

EU comparison



Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey

Notes:

1. Adults aged 16 and over who reported that they strongly agreed or agreed that they felt close to people in the area where they lived.

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Satisfaction with accommodation

On the European Quality of Life Survey in 2011, 80.2% of people aged 16 and over in the UK rated their satisfaction with their accommodation as 7 or more out of 10. This was higher than the EU–28 average of 76.9%, and similar to Belgium (80.7%). Finland had the highest proportion of people who rated their satisfaction with their accommodation as 7 or more out of 10 (90.9%), followed by Denmark and Malta (both 89.7%). Latvia had the lowest proportion of people rating their satisfaction with their accommodation as 7 or more out of 10 (55.2%).

Table 10: Comparison of National Well-being measures and European measures - Where we live

National Well-being measures (UK unless otherwise stated)	European comparison measures
Agreed/agreed strongly they felt they belonged to their neighbourhood Source: Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study (2011/12)	Strongly agree or agree feel close to people in the area where I live Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)
Felt fairly/very safe walking alone after dark (men/women) Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics (2012/13)	Feeling safe walking alone at night in the city or area where lived (all persons) Source: World Gallup Poll (2012)
Satisfaction with accommodation (England) Source: Department for Communities and Local Government (2011–12)	Satisfaction with accommodation (7 or more out of 10) Source: Third European Quality of Life Survey (2011)
Crimes against the person (per 1,000 adults) (England and Wales) Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics (2012/13)	No comparable or similar data
Accessed natural environment at least once a week in the last 12 months (England)	No comparable or similar data

National Well-being measures (UK unless otherwise stated)
European comparison measures

Source: Natural England (2012/13)

Households with good transport access to key services or work (2010 = 100) (England)

No comparable or similar data

Source: Department for Transport (2011)

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Personal finance

Personal finance can have a significant impact on people's sense of well-being and the financial situation of the population is an important aspect of National Well-being.

There are five measures in the National Well-being 'Personal finance' domain. Directly comparable European data are not available from the same sources for these measures, but for three of the measures comparisons are made using proxy measures from different sources. For more information see Table 12 at the end of this section.

Summary

Table 11 shows that for the two measures that have an EU average, the UK was above the EU average for 'median equivalised net income' and below the EU average for 'risk of poverty or social exclusion'. The rest of this section will describe this in more detail and highlight the countries that ranked highest and lowest in each of the measures.

Table 11: European comparisons summary - Personal finance

	UK	EU average	Highest ranked country	Lowest ranked country
Median equivalised net income (PPP Euros per person)	€17,636	..	Luxembourg (€26,660)	Romania (€3,601)
Source: Eurostat (2012)				
People at risk of poverty or social exclusion	24.1%	24.8%	Netherlands (15.0%)	Bulgaria (49.3%)
Source: Eurostat (2012)				
Households making ends meet with difficulty or great difficulty	20.2%	27.7%	Sweden (6.8%)	Greece (73.1%)
Source: Eurostat (2012)				

Table notes:

1. Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) is used to adjust for different price levels between countries.

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Median equivalised net income

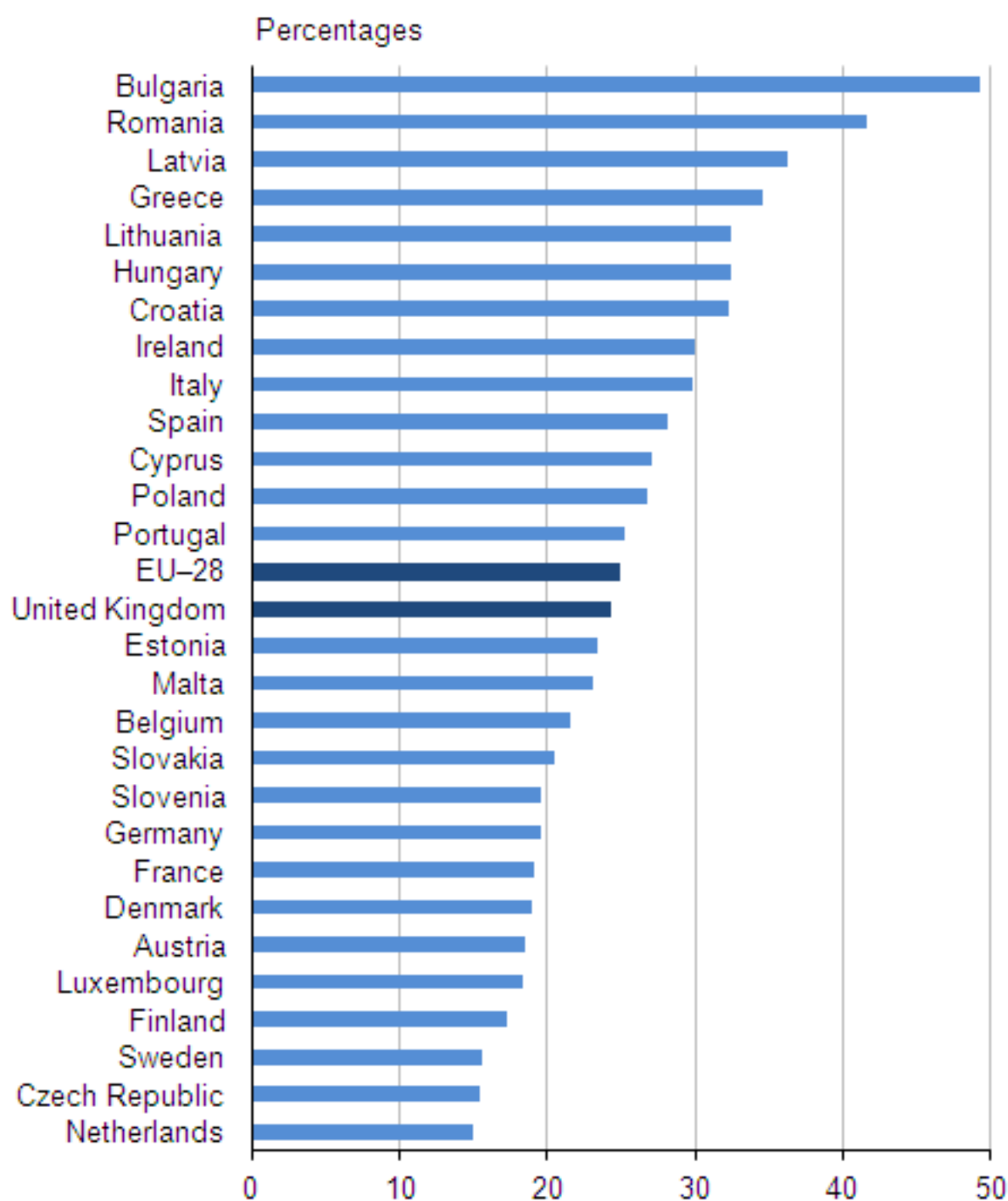
Equivalised median income is defined as a household's total disposable income divided by its 'equivalent size', to take account of the size and composition of the household, and is attributed to each household member. In 2012 the median equivalised income (PPP adjusted¹) of the UK was €17,636, comparable to Ireland (€16,215) and Finland (€18,202). Luxembourg had the highest median equivalised income (€26,660) while the lowest median equivalised income was in Romania (€3,601) and Bulgaria (€5,793).

At risk of poverty or social exclusion

In 2012, 24.1% of the population of the UK were in at least one of the following three conditions: at-risk-of-poverty², severely materially deprived³ or living in households with very low work intensity⁴. This compared with 22.7% in 2011 and 23.2% in 2008 (**Figure 7**). The 2012 UK figure of 24.1% was slightly lower than the EU–28 average of 24.8%⁵. The highest proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion were in Bulgaria (49.3%) and Romania (41.7%), while the lowest proportion of people were in the Netherlands (15.0%) and the Czech Republic (15.4%).

Figure 7: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1), 2012

EU comparison



Source: Eurostat

Notes:

1. In at least one of the following three conditions: at risk of poverty, severely materially deprived or living in households with very low work intensity.

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Households making ends meet with difficulty or great difficulty

In 2012, a fifth (20.2%) of all households in the UK reported great difficulty or difficulty in making ends meet. This was lower than the estimated EU–28 average of 27.7%, and was similar to France (19.5%). The countries with the highest proportion of households reporting great difficulty or difficulty in making ends meet were Greece (73.1%) and Bulgaria (65.9%), while the lowest proportion of households were in Sweden (6.8%) and Finland (7.1%). Between 2005 and 2012 the proportion of households reporting great difficulty or difficulty in making ends meet in the UK has increased from 13.1% to 20.2%. Over the same period, the EU average has changed very little at 25.4 % (EU–27) in 2005 to 27.7% (EU–28) in 2012.

Table 12: Comparison of National Well-being measures and European measures - Personal finance

National well-being measures (UK unless otherwise stated)	European comparison measures
Individuals in households with less than 60% of median income after housing costs	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion
Source: Department for Work and Pensions (2011/12)	Source: Eurostat (2012)
Report finding it quite or very difficult to get by financially	Households making ends meet with difficulty or great difficulty
Source: Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study (2011/12)	Source: Eurostat (2012)
Median household income	Median equivalised net income (Euros per person)
Source: Office for National Statistics (2011/12)	Source: Eurostat (2012)
Somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with the income of their household	No comparable or similar data
Source: Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study (2011/12)	

National well-being measures (UK unless otherwise stated)
European comparison measures

Median wealth per household, including pension wealth (Great Britain) No comparable or similar data

Source: Wealth and Assets Survey, Office for National Statistics (2008/10)

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Notes

1. Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) is used to adjust for different price levels between countries.
2. Persons at-risk-of-poverty are those living in a household with an equivalised disposable income below the risk-of-poverty threshold. This is set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income (after social transfers). The equivalised income is calculated by dividing the total household income by its size determined after applying the following weights: 1.0 to the first adult, 0.5 to each other household members aged 14 or over, and 0.3 to each household member aged less than 14 years old.
3. Severely materially deprived persons have living conditions constrained by a lack of resources. They experience at least four out of the nine following deprivation items: cannot afford 1) to pay rent/mortgage or utility bills on time, 2) to keep home adequately warm, 3) to face unexpected expenses, 4) to eat meat, fish or a protein equivalent every second day, 5) a one week holiday away from home, 6) a car, 7) a washing machine, 8) a colour TV, or 9) a telephone (including mobile phone).
4. People living in households with very low work intensity are those aged 0-59 who live in households where, on average, the adults (aged 18-59) worked less than 20% of their total work potential during the past year. Students are excluded.
5. The total number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion is lower than the sum of the numbers of people in each of the three forms of poverty or social exclusion as some persons are affected simultaneously by more than one of these situations.

Economy

The economy is the set of activities related to the production and distribution of goods and services. Its performance impacts on all of us financially and therefore affect our personal well-being.

There are three measures in the National Well-being 'Economy' domain. Directly comparable European data are not available from the same sources for these measures, but for all measures

comparisons have been made using proxy measures from different sources. For more information see Table 14 at the end of this section.

Summary

Table 13 shows that the UK was above the EU average for all three measures (net national income per capita, inflation rate and government consolidated gross debt). The rest of this section will describe this in more detail and highlight the countries that ranked highest and lowest in each of the measures where rankings are available.

Table 13: European comparisons summary - Economy

	UK	EU average	Highest ranked country	Lowest ranked country
Net national income per capita (Index numbers, EU-28 = 100) Source: Eurostat (2012)	108	100	Luxembourg (171)	Bulgaria (47)
Inflation rate (Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices) Source: Eurostat (March 2014)	1.6%	0.6%	n/a	n/a
Government consolidated gross debt (% of GDP) Source: Eurostat (2013)	90.6%	87.1%	Estonia (10.0%)	Greece (175.1%)

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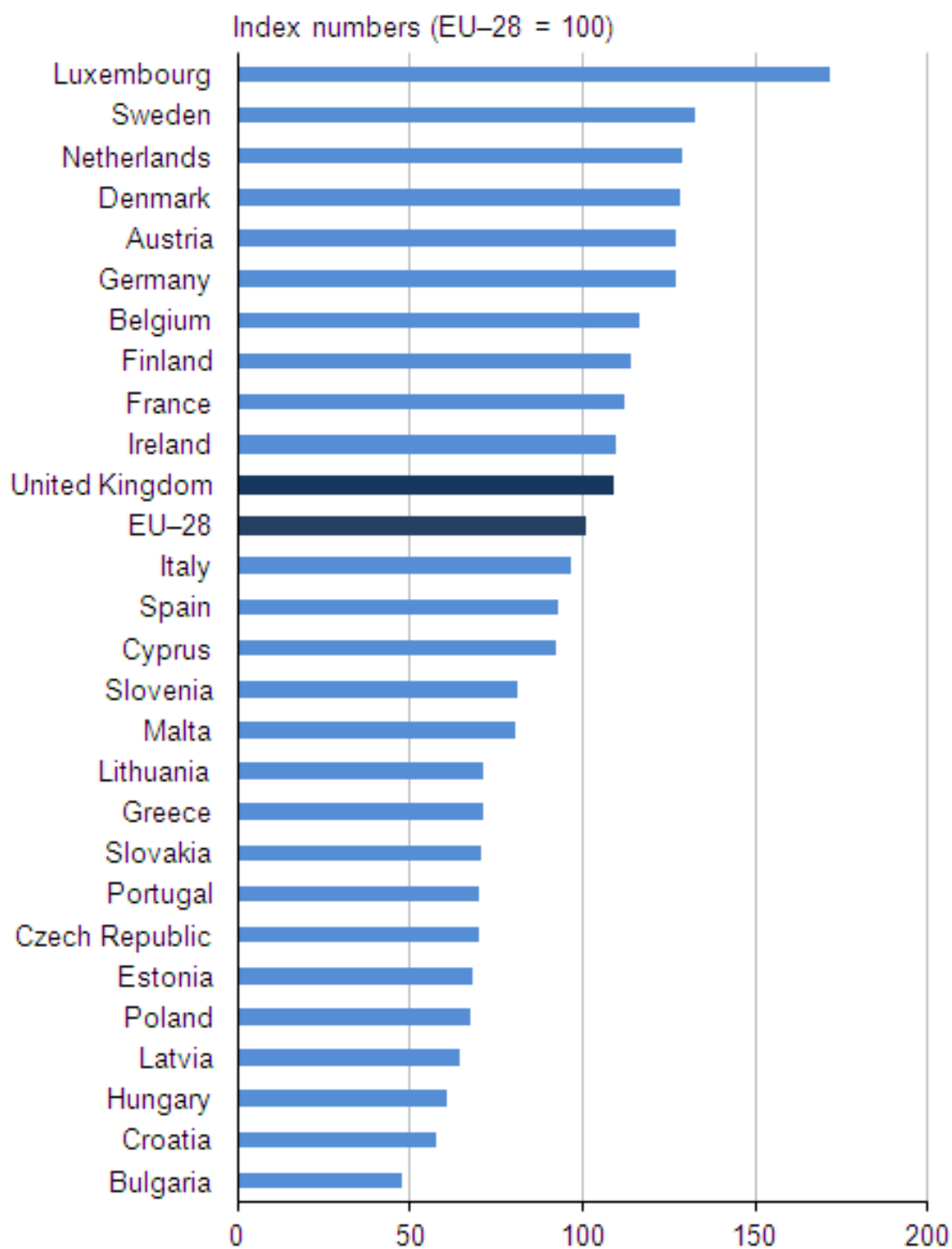
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Net national income per capita

When comparing net national income (NNI) per capita in 2012, the UK was 8% above the EU–28 average and similar to Ireland (9% above the EU–28 average) (**Figure 8**). The highest rate of NNI per capita was in Luxembourg (71% above the EU–28 average), while the lowest rates were in Bulgaria (53% below the EU–28 average) and Croatia (42% below the EU–28 average).

Figure 8: Net national income per capita, 2012

EU comparison (1)



Source: Eurostat

Notes:

1. Data for Romania is unavailable.

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Inflation rate

A comparison of inflation rates shows that prices increased faster in the UK than in other countries in the European Union. In March 2014, the UK had the highest rate of inflation in at 1.6%, though this is below the Bank of England's official target rate of 2%. This was higher than the EU–28 average of 0.6%, and was similar to Malta and Austria (both 1.4%). Some European countries, mainly in southern and Eastern Europe, have experienced falling prices, with prices falling the fastest in Bulgaria (-2.0%), Greece (-1.5%) and Cyprus (-0.9%).

Government consolidated gross debt

The UK government consolidated gross debt was 90.6% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2013. This was higher than the EU–28 average of 87.1%. The highest rates of government consolidated gross debt as a percentage of GDP were in Greece (175.1%) and Italy (132.6%), while the lowest rates were in Estonia (10.0%) and Bulgaria (18.9%).

Table 14: Comparison of National Well-being measures and European measures - Economy

National Well-being measures (UK)	European comparison measures
Real net national income per head	Net national income per capita (Index numbers, EU–28 = 100)
Source: Blue Book 2013, Office for National Statistics.	Source: Eurostat (2012)
Inflation rate (as measured by the Consumer Prices Index)	Inflation rate (Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices)
Source: Consumer Price Inflation, Office for National Statistics (March 2013 to March 2014)	Source: Eurostat (March 2014)
Public sector net debt as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product	Government consolidated gross debt (% of GDP)
Source: Public Sector Finances, Office for National Statistics (March 2014)	Source: Eurostat (2013)

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Education and skills

A wide variety of studies have investigated the relationship between education and well-being and identified a positive relationship between the two.

There were no directly comparable or similar European data for any of the three measures within the 'Education and skills' domain. However a comparison of educational performance sourced from the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA)¹ have been used for this article.

Summary

Table 15 shows the UK average (mean) scores in mathematics, reading and science in each subject. The rest of this section will describe this in more detail and highlight the countries that ranked highest and lowest in each of the measures.

Table 15: European comparisons summary - Education and Skills

	UK	Highest ranked country	Lowest ranked country
Mathematics, average (mean) score Source: Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA), 2012	494	Netherlands (523)	Bulgaria (439)
Reading, average (mean) score Source: Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA), 2012	499	Finland (524)	Bulgaria (436)
Science, average (mean) score Source: Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA), 2012	514	Finland (545)	Cyprus (438)

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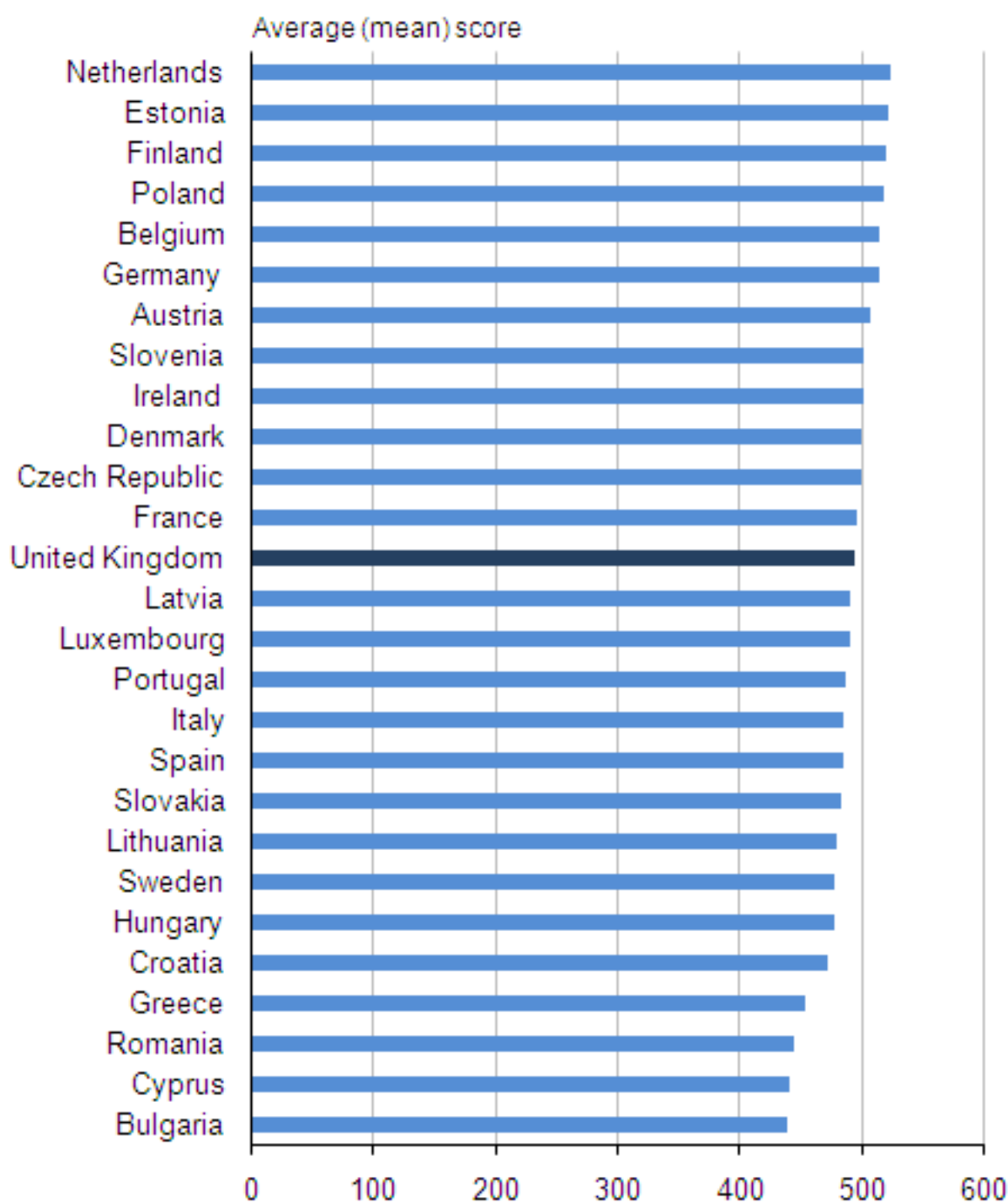
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Performance in mathematics

The UK score in mathematics in 2012 was 494 points on average, unchanged since 2006 (**Figure 9**). The UK's mean score in 2012 was similar to France (495). Netherlands and Estonia had the highest mean score in the EU at 523 and 521 respectively, while the lowest mean scores in the EU were in Bulgaria (439) and Cyprus (440).

Figure 9: Performance in mathematics, 2012

EU comparison (1)



Source: OECD PISA 2012 database

Notes:

1. Data not available for Malta.

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Performance in reading

The UK score in reading in 2012 was 499 points in reading on average in 2012, unchanged since 2006. The UK's mean score in 2012 was similar to Denmark (496). Finland and Ireland had the highest mean score in the EU at 524 and 523 respectively, while the lowest mean scores in the EU were in Bulgaria (436) and Romania (438).

Performance in science

The UK score in science in 2012 was 514 points on average, unchanged since 2006. The UK's mean score in 2012 was the same as Slovenia. Finland and Estonia had the highest mean score in the EU at 545 and 541 respectively, while the lowest mean scores in the EU were in Cyprus (438) and Romania (439).

Notes

1. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an ongoing triennial survey. It assesses the extent to which 15-year-olds students near the end of compulsory education have acquired key knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies. The assessment does not just find out whether students can reproduce knowledge; it also examines how well students can take what they have learned and apply it to unfamiliar settings, both in and outside of school. More information is available at www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results.htm.

Governance

A fundamental part of the work of government is to support a better life for its citizens and help build strong and resilient communities which in turn may improve the well-being of individuals. Much of the public's trust rests upon the Government being openly accountable for its decisions and actions.

There are two measures in the National Well-being 'Governance' domain. However the 'Voter turnout (at national elections)' measure is not being included in this article as some EU countries have different minimum voting ages to the UK, and therefore data might not be comparable. Directly comparable data are available for the 'Trust in National Government' measure and this will be the focus of this section.

Summary

Table 16 shows that the UK was above the EU average for the ‘Trust in National Government’ measure. The rest of this section will describe this in more detail and highlight the countries that ranked highest and lowest.

Table 16: European comparisons summary - Governance

	UK	EU average	Highest ranked country	Lowest ranked country
Those who have trust in National Government	24%	23%	Sweden (57%)	Spain (9%)

Source:
Eurobarometer
(Autumn 2013)

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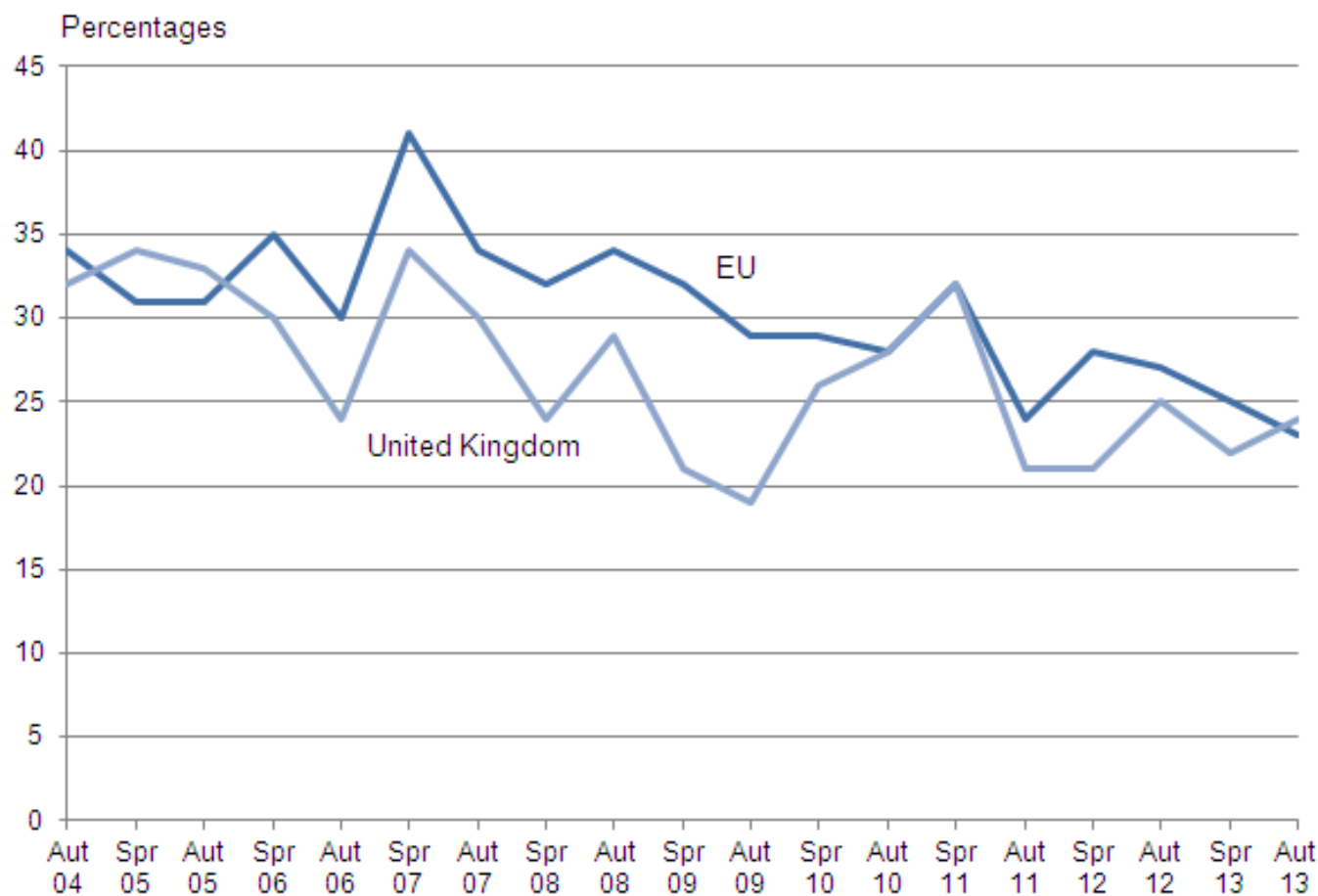
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Trust in national Government

In the autumn of 2013, just under a quarter (24%) of people aged 15 and over in the UK reported that they tended to trust their national government. This is slightly higher than the EU–28 average of 23%. The highest proportions of trust were in Sweden (57%) and Luxembourg (51%). The lowest proportions of trust were in Spain (9%) and Greece, Italy and Slovenia (all 10%). Between 2004 and 2013, the proportion of people who trusted in government in the UK and the EU peaked in spring 2007 at 34% and 41% respectively, but the proportions have remained below these peaks since then (**Figure 10**).

Figure 10: Trust in national Government (1)

EU (2) and UK



Source: Eurobarometer

Notes:

1. 'Aut' is autumn and 'Spr' is spring.
2. EU total includes Bulgaria and Romania from 2007 and Croatia in 2013.

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Table 17: Comparison of National Well-being measures and European measures - Governance

National Well-being measures (UK)	European comparison measures
Those who have trust in national Government Source: Eurobarometer (Autumn 2013)	Those who have trust in national Government Source: Eurobarometer (Autumn 2013)
Voter turnout (at national elections) Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2010)	Not included in this article

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Natural environment

The negative impacts of human activity and economic growth on the natural environment and ecosystem services are an important concern. Therefore, environmental problems such as pollution waste from the process of producing and using natural resources are an important consideration when looking at National Well-being.

There are four measures in the National Well-being 'Natural environment' domain. Directly comparable European data are not available from the same sources for these measures, but for three of the measures comparisons are made using similar or proxy measures from different sources. The 'Protected areas' measure is not being included in this article as the size of the area of protected areas is defined by each country's size, therefore making a comparison difficult to present. For more information see Table 19 at the end of this section.

Summary

Table 18 shows that where an EU average was available, the UK was higher than the EU average for 'recycling of municipal waste' and below the EU average for 'share of energy from renewable sources'. The rest of this section will describe this in more detail, and highlight the countries that ranked highest and lowest in each of the measures.

Table 18: European comparisons summary - Natural environment

	UK	EU average	Highest ranked country	Lowest ranked country
Greenhouse gas emissions (million tonnes of CO ₂ equivalent)	552.6	..	Malta (3.0)	Germany (916.5)
Source: Eurostat (2011)				
Share of energy from renewable sources	4.2%	14.1%	Sweden (51.0%)	Malta (1.4%)
Source: Eurostat (2012)				
Municipal waste that is recycled or composted	46%	42%	Germany (65%)	Romania (1%)
Source: Eurostat (2012)				

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Greenhouse Gas Emissions

In 2011 the UK's greenhouse gas emissions¹ stood at 552.6 million tonnes (Mt) of CO₂ equivalent. This figure was the second highest in the EU behind Germany (916.5 Mt of CO₂ equivalent). The UK, France and Germany accounted for about 62% of the total EU net decrease between 2010 and 2011 and most EU countries had reduced greenhouse gas emissions over the period. In the UK, greenhouse gas emissions fell by 41 Mt of CO₂ equivalent over the same period, the largest reduction of all EU Member States. In percentage terms, the largest reductions in emissions between 2010 and 2011 were in Finland (10%), Belgium (9%) and Denmark (8%). The largest percentage increases in emissions were in Bulgaria (10%) and Romania (6%).

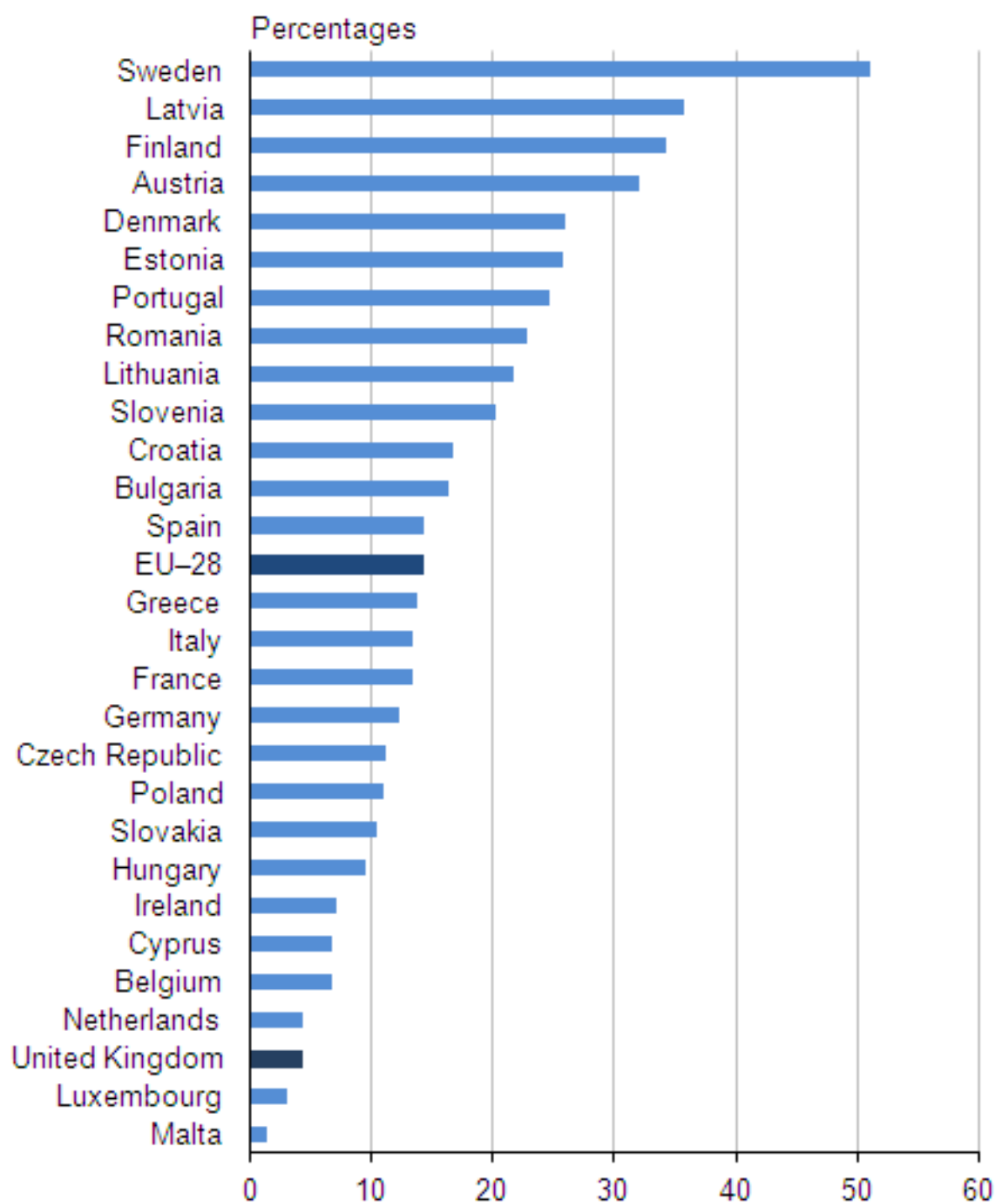
Energy from renewable sources

In 2012, energy from renewable sources in the UK was estimated to have contributed 4.2% of gross final energy consumption. This was lower than the EU–28 average of 14.1% (**Figure 11**). The

highest shares of renewable energy in final energy consumption in 2012 were found in Sweden (51.0%), Latvia (35.8%) and Finland (34.3%). The lowest shares were in Malta (estimated at 1.4%), and Luxembourg (3.1%). Since 2004, the share of renewable sources in gross final consumption of energy grew in all Member States. The largest increase during this period was recorded in Sweden (from 38.7% in 2004 to 51.0% in 2012), while in the UK the share of renewable energy rose from 1.2% to 4.2% over the same period.

Figure 11: Share of energy from renewable sources, 2012

EU comparison (1)



Source: Eurostat

Notes:

1. Data for Malta is estimated.

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Municipal waste that is recycled or composted

In 2012, an estimated 46% of the UK's municipal waste² was recycled or composted. This was above the estimated EU–28 average of 42% and was similar to Denmark and Ireland (both 45%). The country with the highest proportion of recycled or composted municipal waste was Germany (estimated at 65%). The countries with the lowest proportions were Romania (estimated at 1%), Malta and Slovakia (both 13%).

Table 19: Comparison of National Well-being measures and European measures - Natural environment

National well-being measures (UK unless otherwise stated)	European comparison measures
Energy consumed within the UK from renewable sources Source: Department for Energy and Climate Change (2012)	Share of energy from renewable sources Source: Eurostat (2012)
Household waste that is recycled (England) Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2012/13)	Municipal waste that is recycled or composted Source: Eurostat (2012)
Total green house gas emissions (million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent) Source: Department for Energy and Climate Change (2012)	Greenhouse Gas Emissions (million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent) Source: Eurostat (2011)
Protected areas in the UK (million hectares) Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2013)	Not included in this article

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Notes

1. Explanation of the various totals of UK greenhouse gas emissions reported to different authorities can be found here www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-greenhouse-gas-emissions-explanatory-notes
2. Municipal waste is mainly produced by households, though similar wastes from sources such as commerce, offices and public institutions are included.

Background notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk

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This document is also available on our website at www.ons.gov.uk.

Sources related to 'European comparisons, 2014'

European Quality of Life Survey - [European Quality of Life Survey \(2012\)](#)

Eurostat - [Eurostat](#)

Eurobarometer - [Eurobarometer](#)

World Gallup Poll - [Gallup World Poll - Gallup Worldview](#)

Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) - www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results.htm

Member states of the EU

The European Union 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 (which joined in 2013) is not included.

The 28 member states are as follows (year of entry in brackets):

Austria (1995)

Belgium (1952)

Bulgaria (2007)

Croatia (2013)

Cyprus (2004)

Czech Republic (2004)

Denmark (1973)

Estonia (2004)

Finland (1995)

France (1952)

Germany (1952)

Greece (1981)

Hungary (2004)

Ireland (1973)

Italy (1952)

Latvia (2004)

Lithuania (2004)

Luxembourg (1952)

Malta (2004)

Netherlands (1952)

Poland (2004)

Portugal (1986)

Romania (2007)

Slovakia (2004)

Slovenia (2004)

Spain (1986)

Sweden (1995)

United Kingdom (1973)