

November  
2023

# Life in the UK

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## Scotland





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## Introduction

**Over the last decade, Scotland has placed wellbeing on a statutory footing via its National Performance Framework, a set of national outcomes which sets out a wellbeing vision for the people of Scotland.**

However, there are questions over whether this has provided a clear enough vision to put wellbeing on a path to the centre of decision making. Questions remain about the extent to which the wellbeing approach has gone beyond rhetoric. In the absence of clear implementation, the benefits of a holistic approach can become confused.

At the moment, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) remains the only single comparable number used as a barometer of progress in the UK today, driving policy making and shaping public debate. GDP sits at the top of a pyramid of statistics about units of production and was developed in the 1930s to fill gaps in available information about the state of the economy. It was never intended to be a measure of wellbeing or progress.<sup>1</sup>

However, there is something about the (deceptive) simplicity of a single number, and in the absence of an alternative, GDP is often used to measure 'how life is' in the UK. But what if there were a single number that motivated governments to set collective wellbeing as the goal? Could we bring together data from different aspects of our lives to give a richer picture of how we are really doing? If so, could we track that over time to show whether things are getting better or worse? And in so doing, could we help to build the case in the UK for a broader approach to measuring and acting on what matters?

Those are the questions which inspired us to undertake this work.

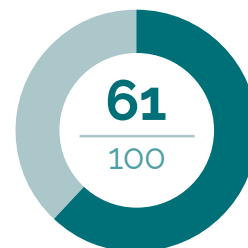
This briefing presents the findings of the first year of our new Life in the UK index. It focuses on the findings from a survey of 1132 people in Scotland, part of a the larger Life in the UK survey of 6491 people across the UK, carried out between 18 and 24 May 2023.

### Key findings

**Disabled people, people on lower incomes and social housing tenants have lower levels of wellbeing.**



**Younger people experience multiple challenges to their wellbeing while older people consistently have the highest levels of wellbeing.**



**The collective wellbeing score for Scotland in 2023 is 61 out of 100.**

<sup>1</sup> Gaukroger, 2023. A critical assessment of GDP as a measure of economic performance and social progress. Available at: <https://carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/a-critical-assessment-of-gdp-as-a-measure-of-economic-performance-and-social-progress/>.

## Why collective wellbeing?

Carnegie UK has been involved in understanding and measuring wellbeing for over a decade. Over this time, we have supported governments to take a broader view of social progress and to balance social, economic, environmental and democratic (SEED) outcomes in decision making, resource allocation and long-term planning.<sup>2</sup>

There is a growing body of research and evidence which demonstrates that putting collective wellbeing at the heart of decision making really is an effective route to a good and sustainable quality of life<sup>3</sup>. Measurement is critical to this process: if collective wellbeing became a key measure of progress, it would inform public debate and government decision making, which would in turn determine where resources go, and what gets done.

In 2019, we began to experiment with a wellbeing index. Inspired by the Canadian Index of Wellbeing and the Oxfam Humankind Index, we wanted to see if it was possible to create a single number that answered the question of 'how life is'.



### Social wellbeing

We all have the support and services we need to thrive.

### Economic wellbeing

We all have a decent minimum living standard.

### Environmental wellbeing

We all live within the planet's natural resources.

### Democratic wellbeing

We all have a voice in decisions made that affect us.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Carnegie UK has supported the development of a [Wellbeing Framework in the North of Tyne](#) and the embedding of a Wellbeing Framework in Northern Ireland.

<sup>3</sup> For example: [Impact of the Act – The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales](#) and [New Zealand's wellbeing: Is it sustainable and what are the risks? - Background paper to Te Tai Waiora: Wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand 2022 - 24 November 2022 \(treasury.govt.nz\)](#).





## Introducing the index

The Life in the UK index is the output of a process of experimentation and refinement. It is our contribution to a broad movement that seeks to put wellbeing at the heart of how governments think and what they do.<sup>4</sup>

### Our goal was to create an index that is:

-  timely – issued within six months of data collection
-  comprehensive – covering all domains of wellbeing
-  robust – both for individual indicators and index methodology
-  relevant – people across the UK see it as relevant to their lives
-  useful – for all of those interested in improving lives in the UK

### Life in the UK provides:

-  a single score for collective wellbeing that will show if we are living better or worse over time.
-  a score for each of the four domains of wellbeing: social, economic, environmental, and democratic.
-  collective wellbeing and domain scores for each of the nations and regions of the UK.
-  collective wellbeing and domain scores for different demographic groups.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example: OECD Better Life Index, UN "Beyond GDP", Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership, Co-op Community Wellbeing Index, Office for National Statistics (ONS), Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Assembly. Read more at: Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGO) : Wellbeing Economy Alliance ([weall.org](http://weall.org))

## How to read the wellbeing scores

The Life in the UK index has been designed to provide an overall assessment of 'how life is'. The overall index score is an average of the scores for each of the four wellbeing domains: social, economic, environmental and democratic. Higher scores indicate we found a higher level of wellbeing.

- The index is based upon a 26-question survey of more than 6,900 people across the UK. The questions relate to the different domains of wellbeing and were tested with focus groups and an Advisory Group. The survey was administered through the Ipsos Knowledge Panel, a random probability survey panel based on a random sample of UK households.
- The overall collective wellbeing index score and the wellbeing domain scores have a value of between 0 and 100. Note that although the scores are a scale of 0 to 100, they are not percentages.
- The collective wellbeing scores, domain scores and individual questions were analysed to compare aspects of life for different types of people and different parts of the UK. A summary table of the domain scores is contained in **Appendix 1**. We have only commented on statistically significant relationships.
- We used factor analysis to construct the index scores and regression analysis to help us understand which demographic characteristics (including gender, age, income, disability, area deprivation and tenure) are most associated both with collective wellbeing overall and with social, economic, environmental and democratic wellbeing specifically. This analysis has been used to structure our discussion of the demographic characteristics impacting on wellbeing throughout this report.

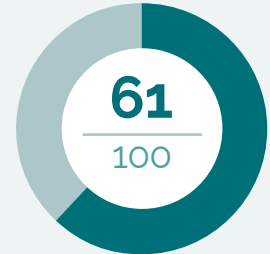
In taking this approach, the Life in the UK index is unique. In the coming years we will be able to use this measure to track whether lives are improving. This year, our focus is on what the data has revealed about the extent of inequality in the UK.

Carnegie UK and Ipsos designed, developed and analysed the index in partnership. The recommendations outlined in this report are Carnegie UK's alone. More information on the methodology is available [here](#).



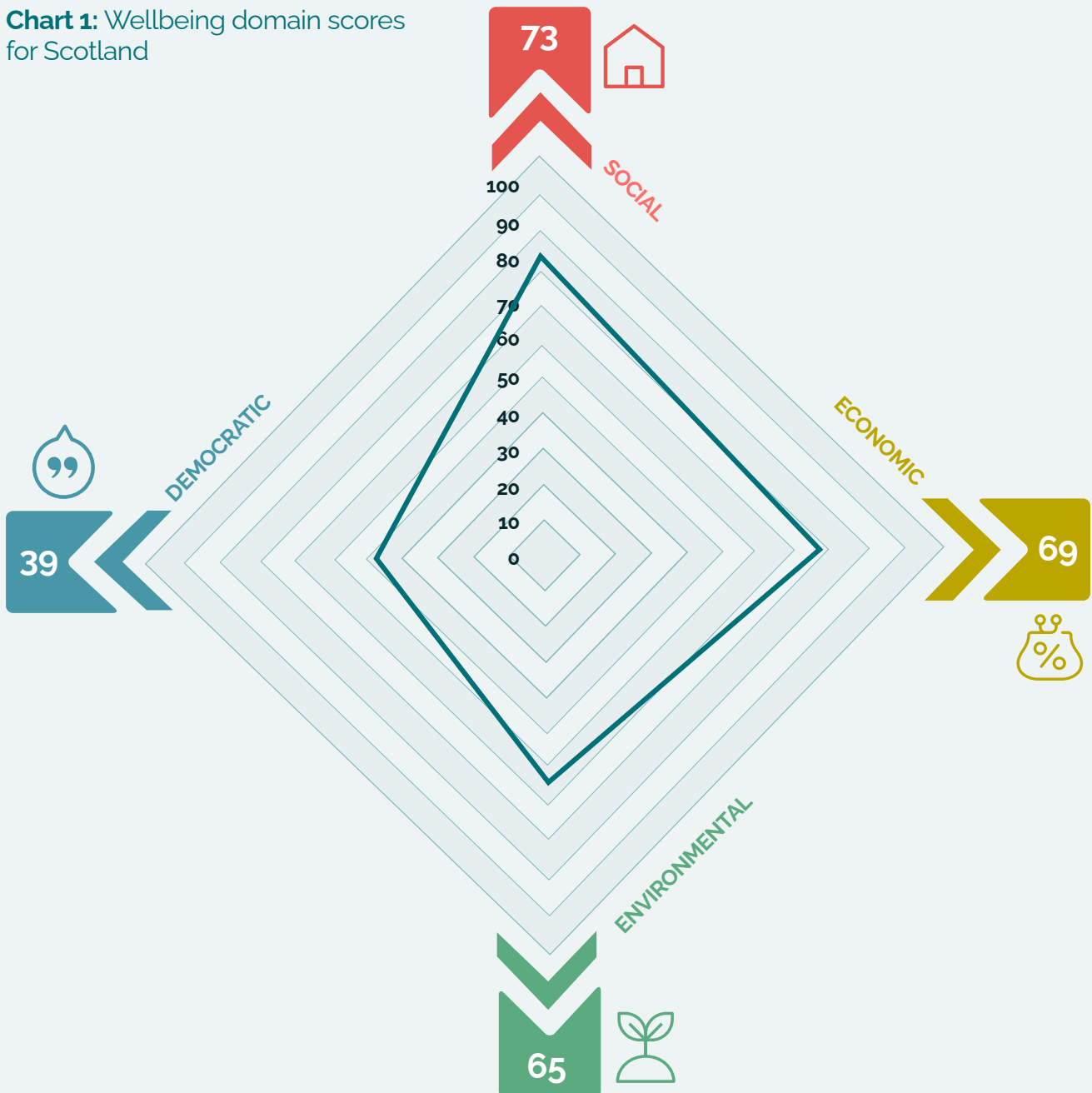
# Scotland's collective wellbeing

Overall, Scotland's collective wellbeing score is in line with that of the UK, at 61 out of a possible 100 (Chart 1). The collective wellbeing score is the average of the scores for social, economic, environmental and democratic wellbeing and measures whether we are 'living well together'.



Scotland's overall collective wellbeing is in line with the UK and other devolved jurisdictions.

**Chart 1:** Wellbeing domain scores for Scotland





## On further analysis we found that<sup>5</sup>:



**Disabled people** have a lower collective wellbeing score compared to non-disabled people<sup>6</sup> (55 compared to 64) (Chart 2).



People living in the most **deprived areas** have a lower collective wellbeing score compared to those living in the least deprived areas<sup>7</sup> (55 in the lowest quintile compared to 66 in the top quintile) (Chart 6).



People on the lowest **household incomes** have a lower collective wellbeing score compared to those on the highest (56 for those with household incomes of £25,999 and under compared to an average of 67 amongst those with incomes of £26,000 and over) (Chart 4).



Social housing **tenants** and private tenants have a lower collective wellbeing score than homeowners<sup>8</sup> (50 and 56 respectively compared with 65) (Chart 5).



**Younger** people have a lower collective wellbeing score compared to older people (56 for those aged 16 to 34 compared to 67 for those aged 55 and over) (Chart 3).



<sup>5</sup> We carried out analysis for gender inequalities but did not find any statistically significant differences

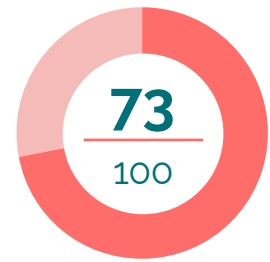
<sup>6</sup> Disability is asked about in two questions: 1) Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more? (scale: Yes/No/Don't know/Prefer not to say). All who answer Yes at 1) are then asked 2): Does your condition or illness, or any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities? (scale: Yes, a lot; Yes, a little; Not at all; Prefer not to say).

<sup>7</sup> Indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) is a measure of relative deprivation for small, fixed geographic areas of the UK. IMD classifies these areas into five quintiles based on relative disadvantage, with quintile 1 being the most deprived and quintile 5 being the least deprived.

<sup>8</sup> 'Homeowner' refers to those who own their home outright or are buying on a mortgage.

## 🏠 Social wellbeing >

**Social wellbeing includes aspects from health and mental health to neighbourhood safety and relying on each other.** A higher score means that we found higher levels of wellbeing for those people or places.

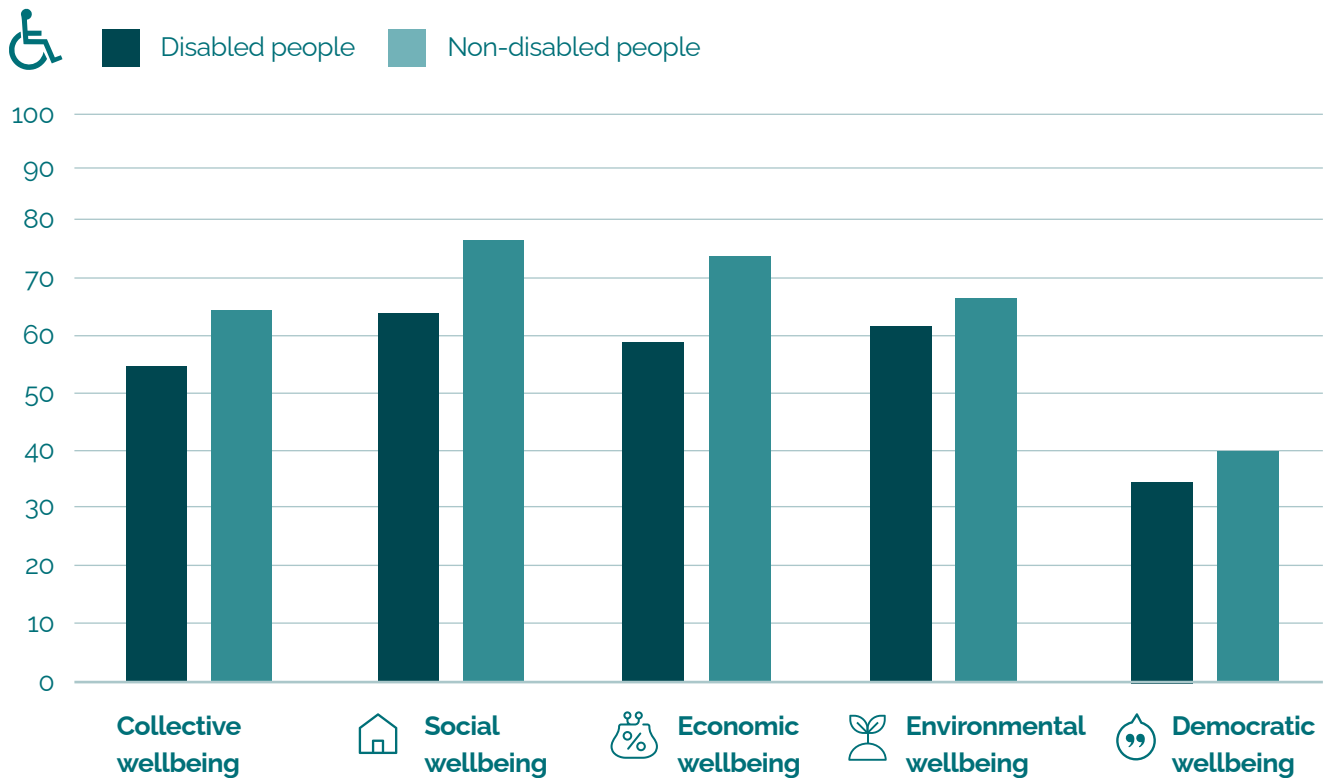


### We found: >

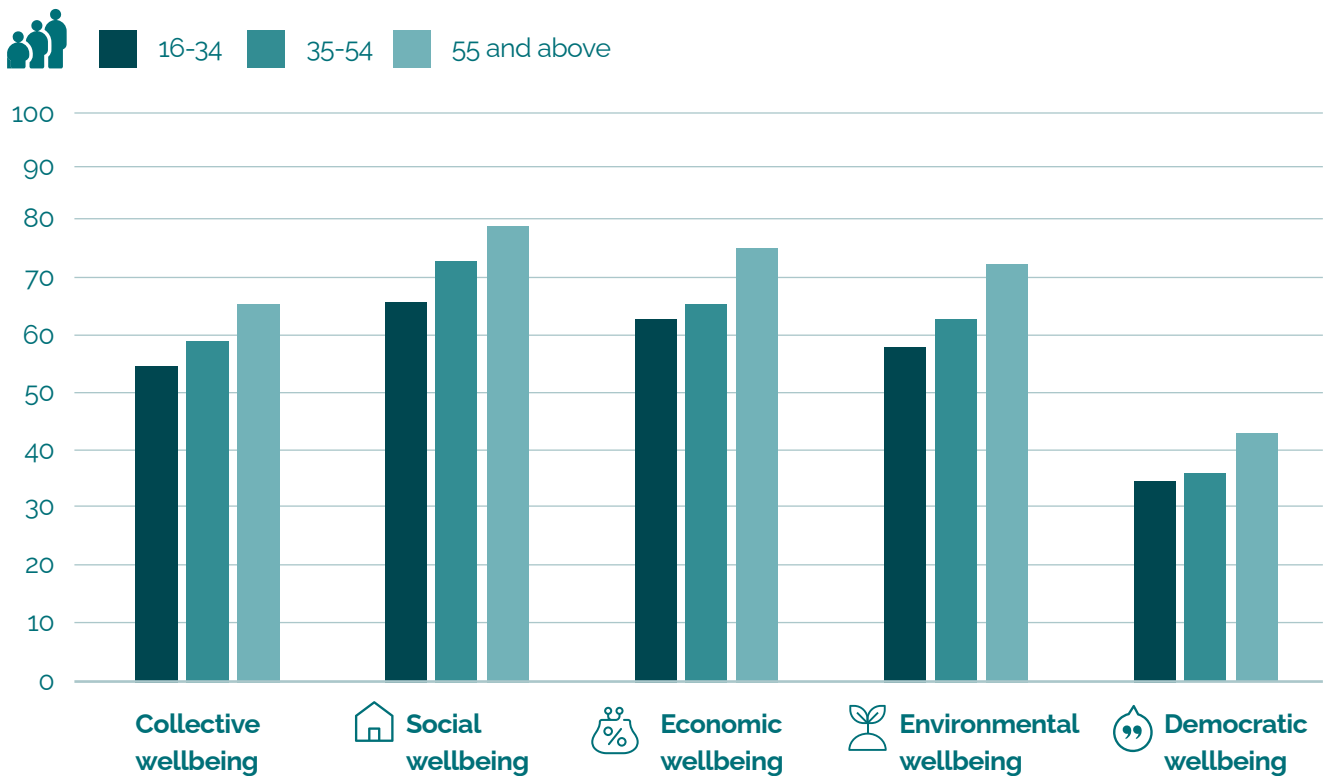
- A 13-point gap between the social wellbeing scores of **disabled people** (64) and non-disabled people (77) (Chart 2).
- A linear relationship between **age** and social wellbeing: as age increases, so too do wellbeing scores. The score for 16 to 34 year olds is 67 compared with 79 for those aged 55 and over (a 12-point gap) (Chart 3).
- An inverse linear relationship between **area deprivation** and social wellbeing. That is, as area deprivation decreases, social wellbeing scores increase. The social wellbeing score for those living in the most deprived areas is 66 compared to 77 for those in the top quintile (an 11-point gap) (Chart 6).
- A linear relationship between social wellbeing and **household income**. That is, as income increases, so too do social wellbeing scores. The social wellbeing score for those on the lowest incomes (up to £25,999) is 68 compared to 76 for those with household incomes of £26,000 and over (an 8-point gap) (Chart 4).
- A 16-point gap in social wellbeing between social housing **tenants** (61) and homeowners (77) (Chart 5).



**Chart 2:** Wellbeing domain scores by disability (see Appendix 1 for full scores)



**Chart 3:** Wellbeing domain scores by age<sup>9</sup> (see Appendix 1 for full scores)



<sup>9</sup> We have presented the analysis according to three age groups: 16 to 34, 35 to 54, and 55 and over. In making this decision, we reviewed a number of different categories. In particular we reviewed the scores for those aged 55 to 64, 65 to 74, and 75 and over. We did not find significant differences in the wellbeing scores for those aged 55 and over and therefore have used one category to represent older life.

## Health and mental health

One in ten (9%) report poor general health, and 13% have poor mental health. While experience of general health in Scotland is comparable with figures for the UK as a whole, more people in Scotland report mental health problems (13% compared to 10% for the UK).

Disability correlates with general health but also with mental health, with 31% of disabled people reporting poor mental health compared to 6% of non-disabled people.

People living in rented accommodation (private and social rented) are more likely to report having poor mental health than owner occupiers (21% and 29% respectively compared to 8% of owner occupiers).

## Safety and community

21% feel unsafe out in their neighbourhood after dark. This is lower than the figure for the UK as a whole, which is 28%. There is a pronounced gender effect. Men are more likely to report feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark than women (88% compared to 71%). Those living in the most affluent areas are more likely to report feeling safe (85% compared to 67% in the least deprived areas).

69% of people in Scotland report that they have someone to rely on in their neighbourhood if they need support (17% disagree that they have someone to rely on in their neighbourhood). Housing tenure has a marked effect: those in private rented housing were the least likely to have someone they could rely on in their local neighbourhood (37% compared to 53% of those in social rented housing and 79% of owner occupiers).

Only 6% of people in Scotland found it difficult or very difficult to access a local grocery store or supermarket in person, in line with the UK figure of 5%.

## Discrimination

40% have experienced discrimination over the past year. This figure is in line with that for the UK as a whole (40%).

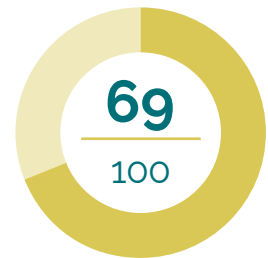
56% of those aged 16 to 34 and 43% of those aged 35 to 54 years old reported experiencing discrimination over the past year compared to 25% of those aged 55 and over.



## Economic wellbeing



**Economic wellbeing includes access to a decent income, affordability, financial resilience, job opportunities and skills.** A higher score means that we found higher levels of wellbeing for those people or places.

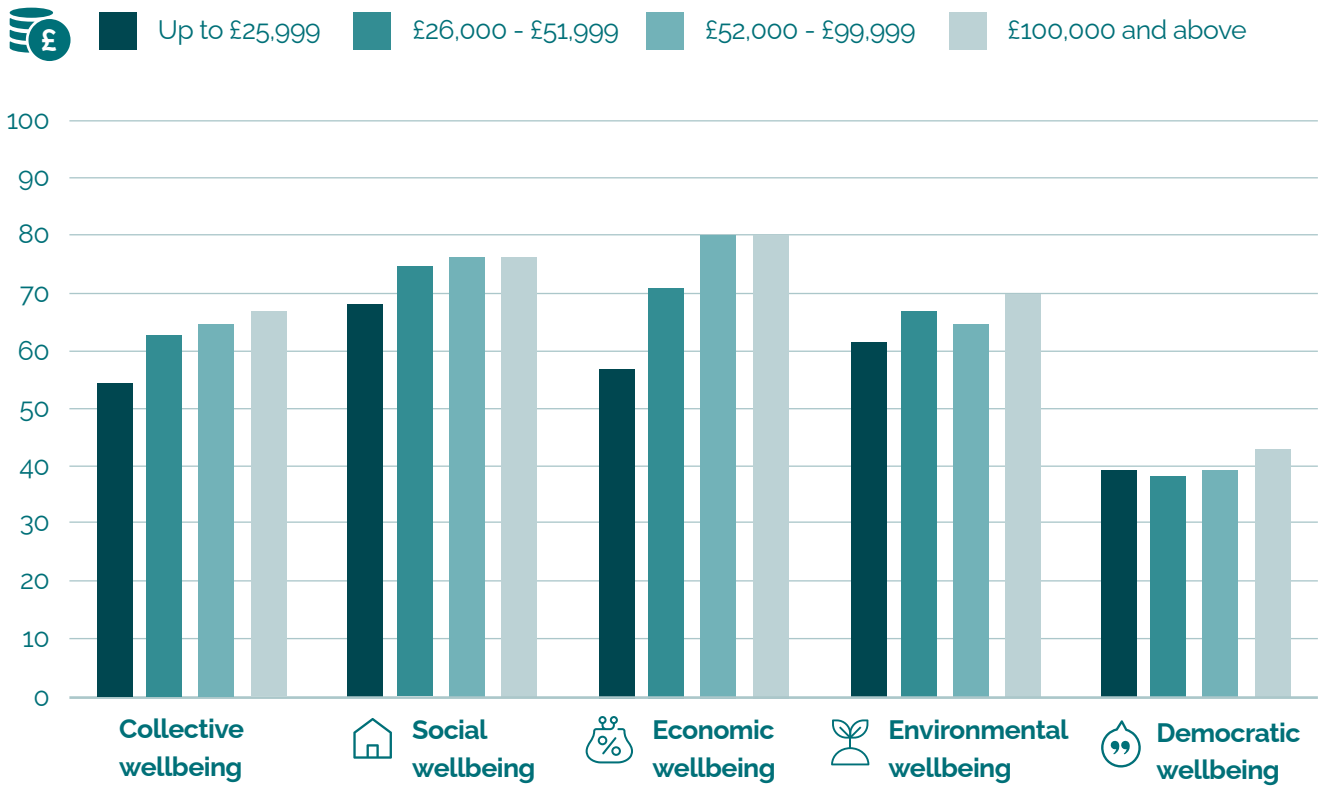


### We found: >

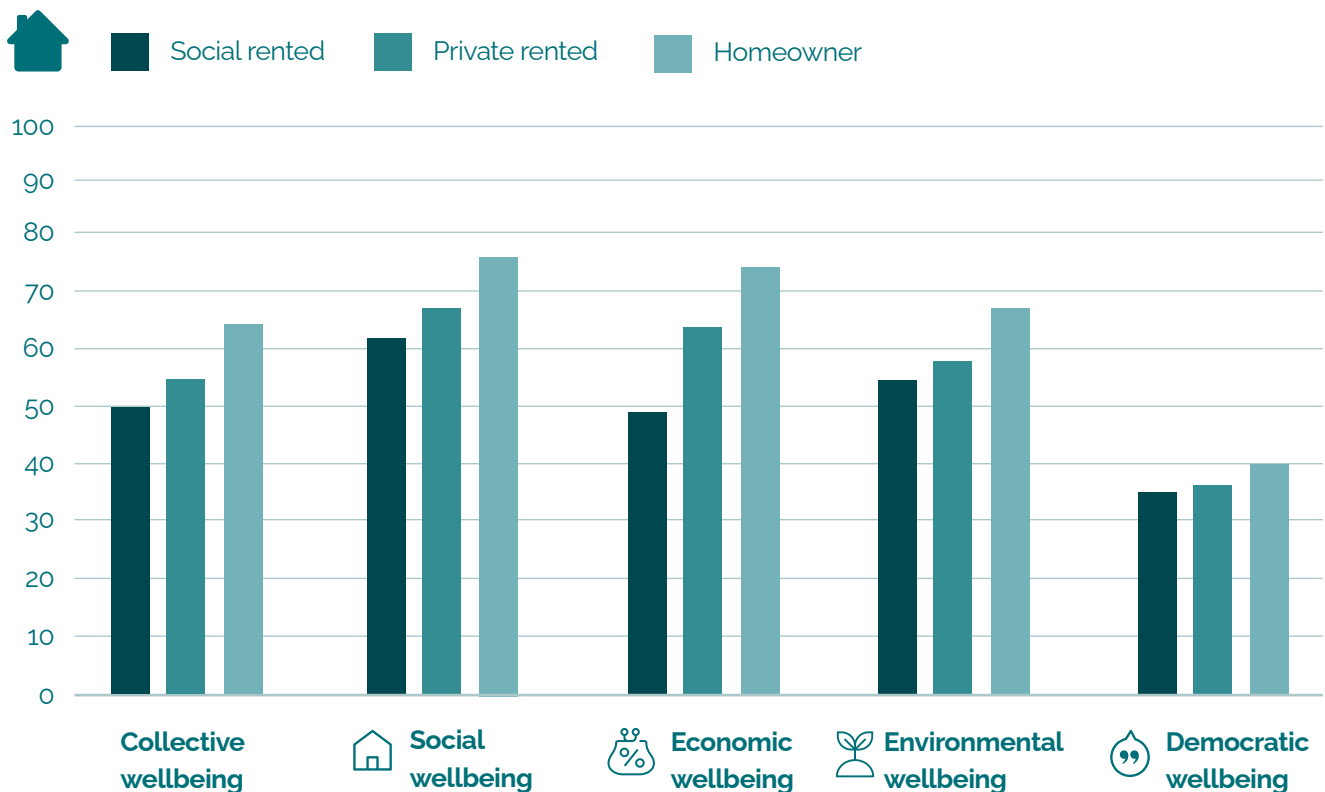
- A linear relationship between **annual household income** and economic wellbeing up to incomes of £52,000-£99,999. That is, as income increases, so too do economic wellbeing scores up to £52,000-£99,999, after which scores plateau. The economic wellbeing score for the lowest income group is 58 compared to 80 in the top quintile (a 22-point gap) (Chart 4).
- A 26-point gap between the economic wellbeing scores of social housing **tenants** (49) and homeowners (75) (Chart 5).
- A 14-point gap between **disabled people** (59) and non-disabled people (73) (Chart 2).
- An inverse linear relationship between **area deprivation** and economic wellbeing. That is, as deprivation decreases, economic wellbeing scores increase. The economic wellbeing score for those living in the most deprived areas is 60 compared to 77 in the least deprived areas (a 17-point gap) (Chart 6).
- A divide between the economic wellbeing scores of those **aged 16 to 54** on the one hand, and those aged 55 and over on the other. The scores are 63 for those aged 16 to 34 and 66 for those aged 35 to 54, compared to 76 for those aged 55 and over (Chart 3).



**Chart 4:** Wellbeing domain by household income (see Appendix 1 for full scores)



**Chart 5:** Wellbeing domain scores by housing tenure (see Appendix 1 for full scores)



## Affordability

We included two measures that relate to absolute poverty – the ability to keep one's home adequately warm and the ability to feed everyone in the household.

- Nearly one fifth identify difficulties heating their homes (19%).
- One in 20 report that they could not feed everyone in the household (6%).

We included two measures that relate to relative poverty – the ability to afford a week's annual holiday away from home (not staying with relatives) and the ability to socialise:

- 24% cannot afford a holiday.
- 12% cannot afford to socialise with friends or family outside of the home once a month if desired.

We asked whether people could afford an unexpected but necessary expense of £850, to understand whether people had financial security or a degree of wealth. We found that one in three cannot afford an unexpected expense of £850 (33%).

There were clear correlations for all of the affordability questions and household income, with the highest level of absolute and relative poverty reported by those living in households with an income of under £25,999.

## Education, skills and job opportunities

We found that 8% of people in Scotland are dissatisfied with their education and skills. Job opportunities were a cause for concern for 29% of the population, significantly higher than for the UK, where 23% reported dissatisfaction.



 Environmental wellbeing >

**Environmental wellbeing includes access to green and blue spaces, quality of the local environment and collectively living within the planet's natural resources.** A higher score means that we found higher levels of wellbeing for those people or places.



**We found:** >

- There is an inverse linear relationship between environmental wellbeing and **area deprivation**: as deprivation decreases, environmental wellbeing increases. The environmental wellbeing score for those living in the most deprived areas is 57 compared to 67 in the top quintile (a 10-point gap) (Chart 6).
- A linear relationship between **age** and environmental wellbeing: as age increases, so too does environmental wellbeing. The environmental wellbeing scores for those aged 16 to 34 is 58, and for those aged 55 and over it is 72 (a 14-point gap) (Chart 3).

**Chart 6:** Wellbeing domain scores by area deprivation (see Appendix 1 for full scores)





## Problems with noise, air and litter

We were surprised to see the high levels of 'incivilities' in local areas (noise, air and litter). Litter is a particular challenge with over two thirds of people reporting that there were problems with litter in their area (79%). This is broadly similar to the UK figure (80%).

55% of those in Scotland report issues with noise in their local neighbourhood, compared to 60% in the UK as a whole. We found that tenure plays an important role in how these problems are experienced. Owner occupiers are less likely to experience noise pollution than those living in private or social rented accommodation (49% compared to 68% and 78% respectively).

42% of those in Scotland report issues with air quality in their local neighbourhood (lower than the UK wide figure of 52%). We found a correlation between levels of deprivation and air quality. Those living in the most affluent areas of Scotland are less likely to experience major or moderate problems with air pollution than those living in areas of deprivation (16% in the least deprived quintile compared to 25% in the most deprived areas) (Chart 5).

## Local green and open space

Despite these problems, satisfaction with the quality of the local green or open space is generally high in Scotland with 69% reporting being satisfied (16% dissatisfied). The level of dissatisfaction with the quality of local green or open space is higher in Scotland than the UK wide figure of 12%. There is a relationship between local area satisfaction and age, with younger people being more likely to be dissatisfied with the quality of public, green or open space than older people (26% of those aged 16 to 34 compared to 19% of those aged 35 to 54 and 6% of those aged 55 and over).

## Efforts to preserve the environment

Our survey is focused heavily on local environmental quality but we asked one particular question about efforts to preserve the environment. We found that nearly half the people in Scotland are dissatisfied with efforts to preserve the environment (46%).



## Democratic wellbeing >

**Democratic wellbeing includes trust in key institutions and the ability to influence decisions at a national and local level.** A higher score means that we found higher levels of wellbeing for those people or places.



### We found: >

- A 6-point gap between the **democratic wellbeing score** of those aged 16 to 54 (36 for those aged 16 to 34 and 37 for those aged 35 to 54) and those aged 55 and over (42) (Chart 3).

### Influence

The majority of people in Scotland feel that they cannot influence UK Government, Scottish Government or local level decision makers (79%, 60% and 51% respectively reporting that they cannot influence decisions at these levels).

People in Scotland are more likely than at the UK level to report that they cannot influence decisions affecting the UK as a whole (79% compared to 73%).

### Trust

In line with the above, the proportion of those in Scotland who do not trust the UK Government is higher than at the UK level (60% compared to 52%). Trust in the Scottish Government sits between local and UK levels of government, with two in five reporting low levels of trust (39%).

Trust in the justice system is more positive, with approximately one in eight having low levels of trust in the police (18%). A similar number reported low levels of trust in the courts and legal system in Scotland (18%).

Scotland has relatively low levels of trust in banks compared with other parts of the UK (22% of people in Scotland report low levels of trust in banks, compared to 17% for the UK as a whole). However, age is a distinct factor in this: those aged between 16 and 54 are more likely to express low trust (28%) in banks than those aged 55 and over (14%).

## Discussion and recommendations

We started Life in the UK to help understand how different aspects of wellbeing are experienced by the population as a whole and by different communities.

In this first year, **we have found comparative strengths in Scotland: neighbourhood noise, air quality and the level of trust in local councils are all rated better than for the UK as a whole.** Despite nearly a fifth of people in Scotland feeling unsafe in their local neighbourhoods at night, this is also better than the UK as a whole.

Issues relating to trust and the ability to influence the UK Government will partly stem from the devolution settlement and political landscape in Scotland. While we found higher levels of trust in the Scottish Government than the UK Government, we would stress that these levels of democratic trust are still poor, with two in five reporting low trust in the Scottish Government.

**We are concerned about the level of financial insecurity that we found.** The scale and extent of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on household finances raises fundamental questions about the degree of financial security that we want for people. Despite the impact of the Scottish Child Payment, there is no single solution to this challenge. A multifaceted approach is required, which addresses issues such as low pay, the level of social security payments, the poverty premium when accessing a range of markets and services, and the cost of living in areas such as housing, transport and childcare.



## Recommendation 1

The Scottish Government and local councils must act to reduce the wellbeing gaps between socio-economic groups.

Scotland has been a leader in wellbeing for many years, at the forefront of developments on wellbeing frameworks through the National Performance Framework<sup>10</sup> and as a founder member of the Wellbeing Economy Governments<sup>11</sup> grouping. Despite the significant shifts in rhetoric, this has not translated into policy developments that demonstrably improve the lives of current and future generations,<sup>12</sup> as evidenced in great detail in the recent inquiry by the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

One opportunity to take meaningful action for future generations is to support plans for a **Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill**, currently being pursued as a Private Members Bill by Sarah Boyack MSP. The Bill should be used to provide a clear vision for public bodies by bringing together and strengthening a range of duties to put democratic, economic, environmental and social wellbeing at the centre of decision making. This new law would also create a Future Generations' Commissioner to push this agenda forward, following the Welsh Government's example.<sup>13</sup>

## Recommendation 2

The Scottish Government should adopt and implement legislation to protect the wellbeing of current and future generations requiring wellbeing outcomes and indicators to be meaningfully incorporated.

## Recommendation 3

We call on MSPs to support plans for a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill, currently being pursued as a Private Members Bill by Sarah Boyack MSP.

A further wellbeing lever in Scotland is the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, passed in 2015, providing a legislative framework for outcomes-based approaches to decision making in public policy. This includes a commitment to open government and a commitment by the Scottish Government and local authorities to allocate 1% of local government spending via participatory budgeting (£100 million). **The challenge is now to widen public engagement and participation and ensure that participatory democracy is used as a transformational policy tool, becoming more mainstream.**

## Recommendation 4

Political parties, the Scottish Government and local councils must invest in fresh and sustained efforts to reverse the sense of alienation from local and national decision making and increase opportunities for meaningful participation.

<sup>10</sup> Scottish Government (online) National Performance Framework <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/>

<sup>11</sup> Scottish Government (online) Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo) <https://www.gov.scot/groups/wellbeing-economy-governments-wego/>

<sup>12</sup> Carnegie UK. 2019. What are the next steps for the National Performance Framework? <https://carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/what-are-the-next-steps-for-the-national-performance-framework/>

<sup>13</sup> Carnegie UK (2023) Learning from Wales' Future Generations Commissioner <https://carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/learning-from-wales-future-generations-commissioner/>

## Appendix 1: Summary table of domain scores by key demographics

|                         |                                    | Collective wellbeing | Social wellbeing | Economic wellbeing | Environmental wellbeing | Democratic wellbeing |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
|                         | <b>Total</b>                       | <b>61</b>            | <b>73</b>        | <b>69</b>          | <b>65</b>               | <b>39</b>            |
| <b>Disability</b>       | Disabled people                    | 55                   | 64               | 59                 | 61                      | 36                   |
|                         | Non-disabled people                | 64                   | 77               | 73                 | 66                      | 40                   |
| <b>Age</b>              | 16-34                              | 56                   | 67               | 63                 | 58                      | 36                   |
|                         | 35-54                              | 59                   | 72               | 66                 | 63                      | 37                   |
|                         | 55 and over                        | 67                   | 79               | 76                 | 72                      | 42                   |
| <b>Household Income</b> | £25,999 and under                  | 56                   | 68               | 58                 | 61                      | 39                   |
|                         | £26,000 to £51,999                 | 63                   | 75               | 71                 | 67                      | 38                   |
|                         | £52,000 to £99,999                 | 65                   | 77               | 80                 | 65                      | 39                   |
|                         | £100,000 and above                 | 67                   | 77               | 80                 | 70                      | 42                   |
| <b>Area deprivation</b> | 1st quintile (highest deprivation) | 55                   | 66               | 60                 | 57                      | 36                   |
|                         | 2nd quintile                       | 58                   | 71               | 64                 | 61                      | 36                   |
|                         | 3rd quintile                       | 63                   | 74               | 70                 | 67                      | 42                   |
|                         | 4th quintile                       | 66                   | 76               | 75                 | 72                      | 39                   |
|                         | 5th quintile (lowest deprivation)  | 66                   | 77               | 77                 | 67                      | 41                   |
| <b>Housing</b>          | Social rented                      | 50                   | 61               | 49                 | 55                      | 35                   |
|                         | Private rented                     | 56                   | 67               | 63                 | 58                      | 37                   |
|                         | Homeowners                         | 65                   | 77               | 75                 | 68                      | 40                   |

# Life in the UK

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## Scotland



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