

Quality of life indicators - leisure

Statistics Explained

Data extracted in May 2021.

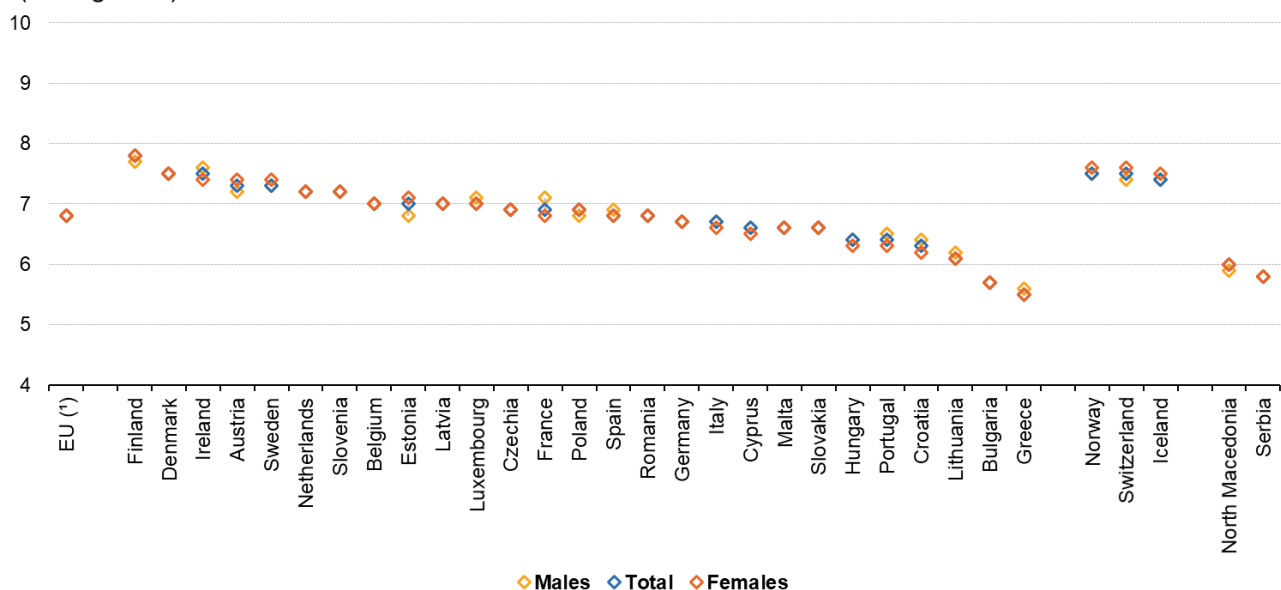
Planned article update: May 2024.

" In 2018, across the EU, men and women, as well as people with different levels of education, were equally satisfied with their leisure time at a level of 6.8 on a scale that ranges from 0 to 10. "

" In 2018, average satisfaction with leisure time in the EU has very slightly increased to 6.8, from 6.7 in 2013. "

Satisfaction with leisure time, by sex, 2018

(Rating 0-10)



(¹) Estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_pw01)

eurostat 

This publication presents a detailed analysis of various dimensions that can form the basis for a more profound analysis of the quality of life, complementing [gross domestic product \(GDP\)](#) which has traditionally been used to provide a general overview of economic and social developments.

This article focuses on the fifth dimension — **leisure and social interactions** — of the nine [quality of life indicators dimensions](#) that form part of a framework endorsed by the Eurostat [expert group on quality of life indicators](#), and more specifically on the leisure part. Leisure, the time that people spend outside their productive activities, has a major impact on their sense of well-being, happiness and life satisfaction.

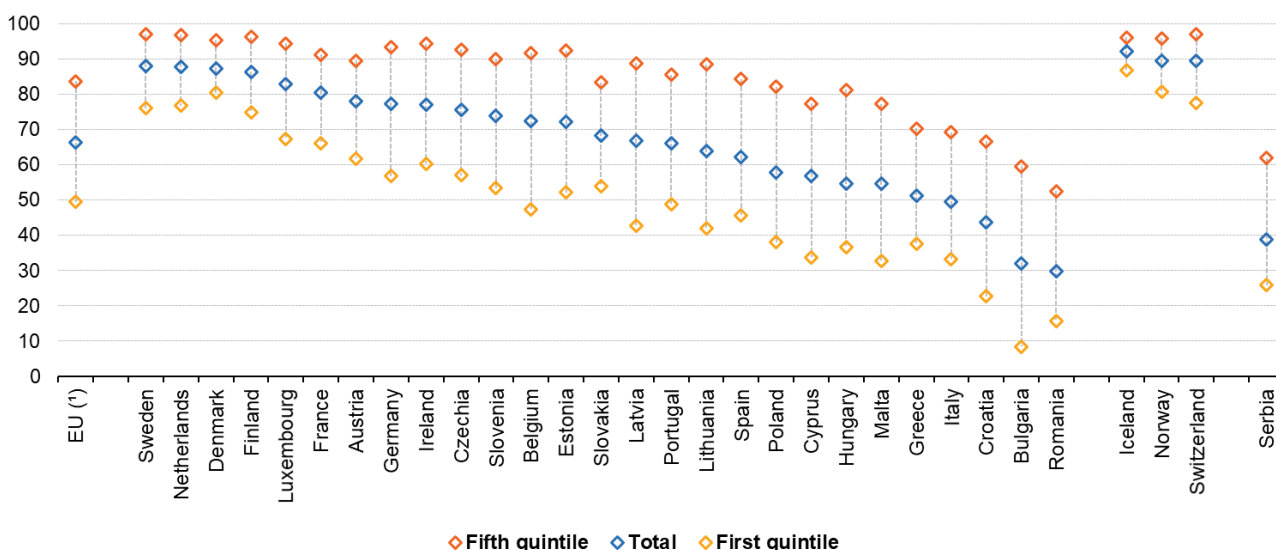
Leisure time

An analysis of the average time spent on leisure activities may be used to provide a rough quantitative assessment of leisure as a factor that affects an individual's quality of life. However, time use data for leisure activities are not widely available and are not collected on an yearly basis. Therefore, this article contains data from several sources, which have different reference years.

Data are available for the proportion of people engaging in different types of leisure activities and for those who don't, what are their main reasons for not doing so; this provides a qualitative insight and may be used to analyse some of the constraints that people face when choosing how to spend their leisure time. Figure 1 presents information on the level of participation in cultural activities (defined here as going to the cinema, going to live performances, visits to cultural sites) or attendance of live sport events during the 12 months prior to the 2015 [EU statistics on income and living conditions \(EU-SILC\)](#) data collection. It shows that approximately two thirds (66.2 %) of the EU adult population participated in at least one of these activities, a share that ranged from more than 85.0 % in Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark and Finland, down to less than 50.0 % in Italy, Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania.

As with many aspects of life, monetary constraints are one of the principal factors that restrict some people from visiting the cinema, a theatre, a concert or attending a sports event. Indeed, Figure 1 shows that an individual's level of income plays a significant role in explaining participation in any cultural activities or attendance at a sports event. Across all 27 of the EU Member States, a higher proportion of people in the fifth income quintile (in other words, the top 20 % of highest earners) participated in cultural activities or attended sports events than the share for people in the first income quintile (the bottom 20 % of lowest earners). In many of the northern and western EU Member States there was a relatively small gap in levels of participation between these different income quintiles, with somewhat larger differences generally recorded in southern Member States. However, in the eastern Member States there was a far greater divergence: for example, people in the fifth income quintile in Bulgaria were seven times as likely to participate in cultural activities or attend sports events as people in the first income quintile, while in Romania and Croatia people in the fifth income quintile were respectively 3.4 and 2.9 times as likely to participate in these activities as people in the first income quintile.

Participation in any cultural activities or sports events during the previous 12 months, by income situation, 2015
(% share of people aged 16 years and over)



Note: ranked on the share of the total population (all levels of income) participating in cultural activities and sports events.

(*) Estimate.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_scp02)

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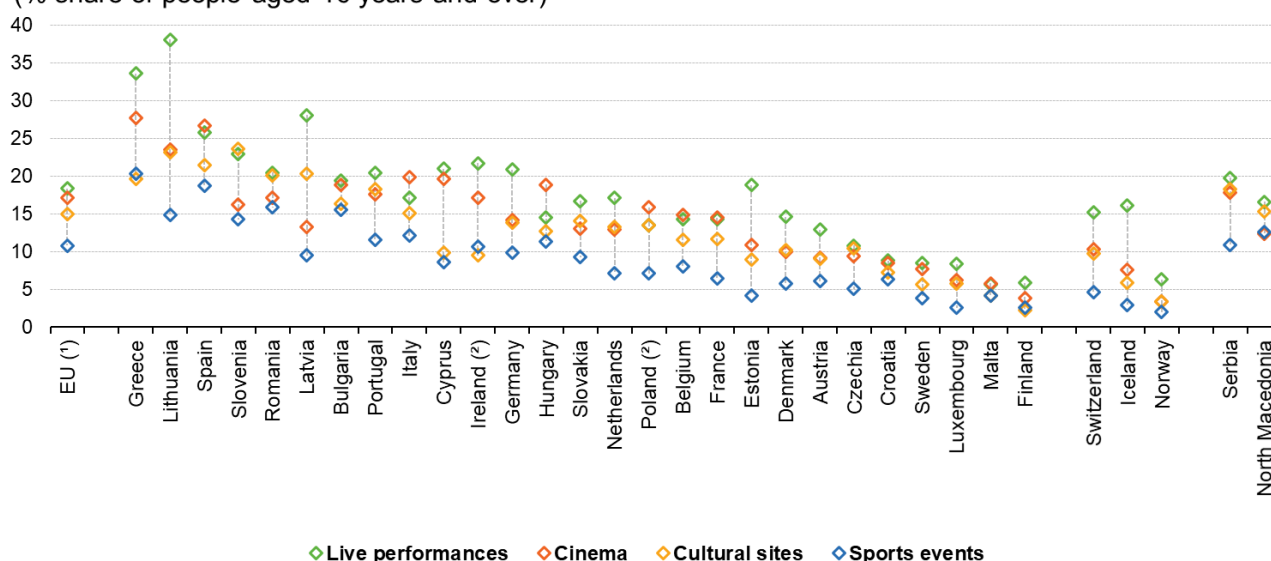
Figure 1: Participation in any cultural activities or sports events during the previous 12 months, by income situation, 2015 (% share of people aged 16 years and over) Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp02)

Figure 2 looks in more detail at one of the principal reasons why people do not participate in cultural activities or attend sports events, namely, due to financial reasons. It shows that across the whole of the EU, almost one fifth (18.4 %) of the adult population in 2015 did not participate in live performances due to financial reasons, while the shares for people not participating in trips to the cinema (17.1 %) or cultural sites (15.0 %) were only slightly lower. Just over 1 in 10 (10.8 %) people in the EU did not attend a sports event in 2015 due to financial reasons.

There were large differences between the EU Member States in 2015 regarding the proportion of people who cited financial constraints as the reason that prevented them from participating in cultural activities or sports events. For example, in Finland, Malta, Luxembourg, Sweden and Croatia, less than 10.0 % of the adult population cited financial reasons for their non-participation in any of the four activities for which information is shown. By contrast, in Greece, Spain, Romania and Bulgaria, more than 15.0 % of the adult population cited financial reasons for their non-participation in all four of the activities for which information is shown.

Non-participation in cultural activities or sports events during the previous 12 months due to financial reasons, 2015

(% share of people aged 16 years and over)



(*) Estimates.

(?) Low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_scp05)

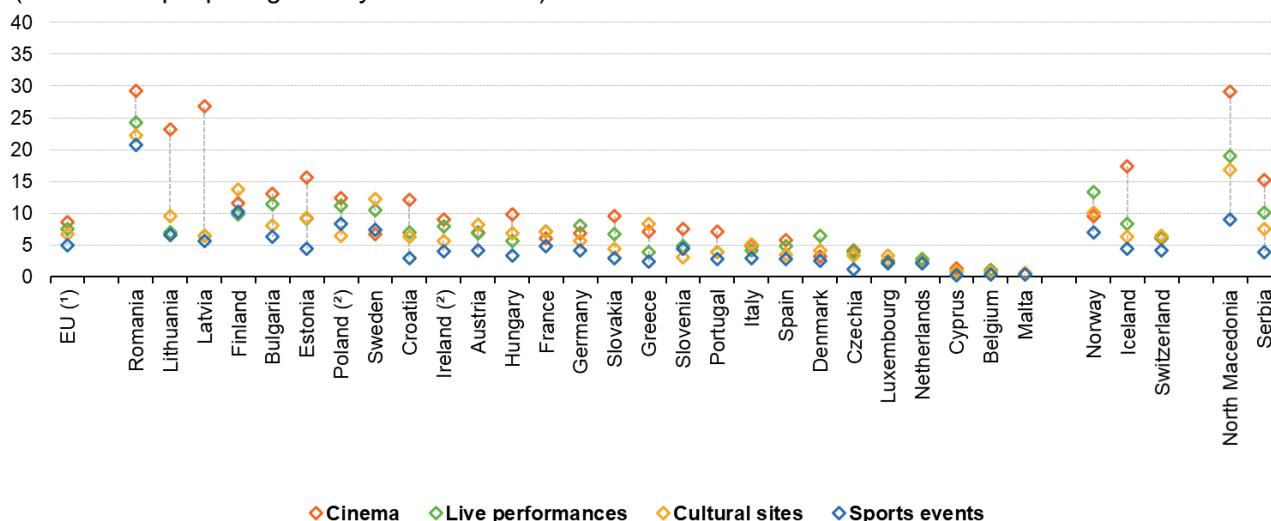
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Figure 2: Non-participation in cultural activities or sports events during the previous 12 months due to financial reasons, 2015 (% share of people aged 16 years and over) Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp05)

As noted above, non-participation may also arise due to a lack of access. Figure 3 shows that 8.6 % of the adult population in the EU did not visit a cinema because of a lack of facilities nearby (note for the purpose of EU-SILC, the question was not exclusively concerned with physical distance, but also whether or not facilities could be easily accessed through the use of public transport); the corresponding shares for live performances (7.6 %), cultural sites (6.7 %) and sports events (5.0 %) were somewhat lower. Accessibility appeared to be a relatively major reason for non-participation among the adult population of Romania, as more than one fifth of all adults stated that they did not participate in any cultural activities or attend any sports events due to a lack of facilities nearby; this was also the case for visiting the cinema in Latvia and Lithuania.

Non-participation in cultural activities or sports events during the previous 12 months due to a lack of facilities in the neighbourhood, 2015

(% share of people aged 16 years and over)



(¹) Estimates.

(²) Low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_scp05)

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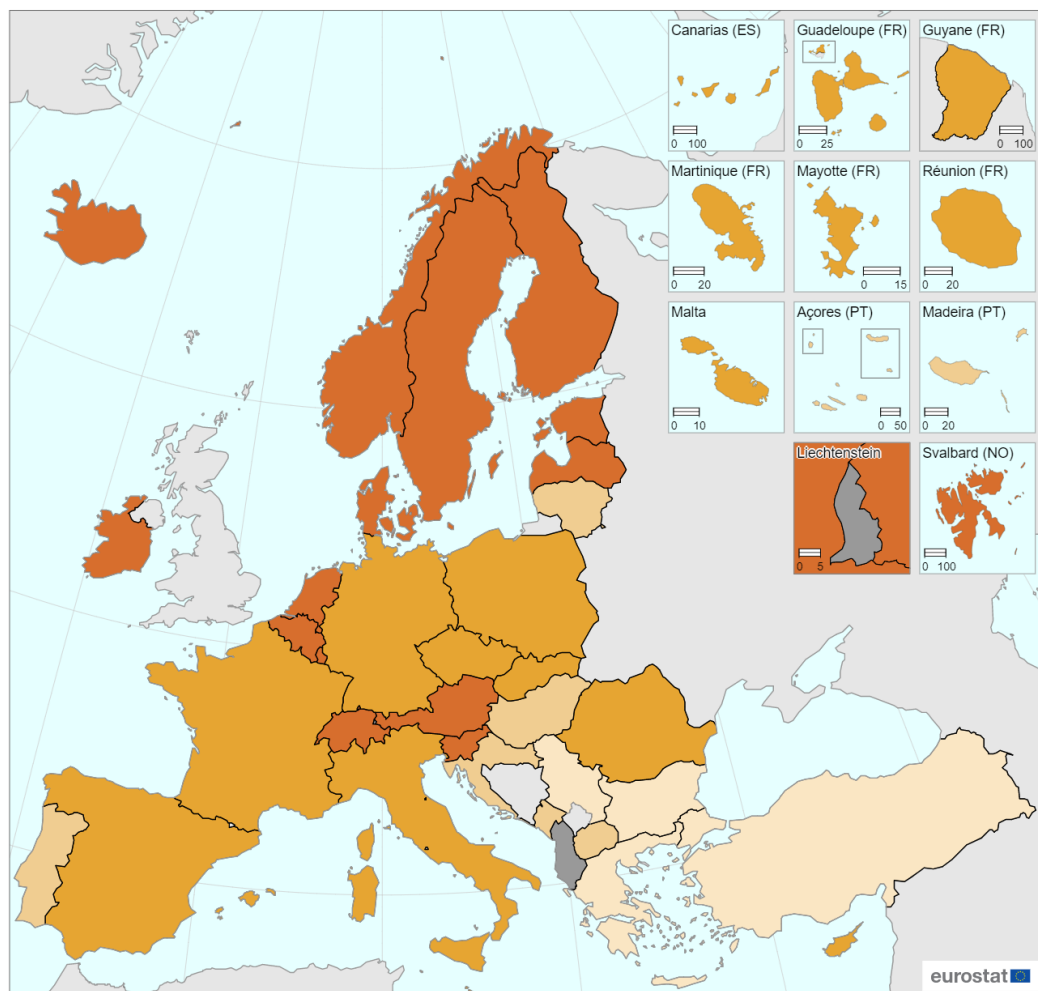
Figure 3: Non-participation in cultural activities or sports events during the previous 12 months due to a lack of facilities in the neighbourhood, 2015 (% share of people aged 16 years and over) Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp05)

Satisfaction with leisure time

When talking about leisure it is not only the time that counts but also the quality or, to put it differently, the satisfaction people get regarding their (amount of) free time. This is a significant subjective indicator which can complement objective ones with relevant information.

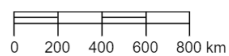
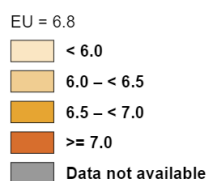
The satisfaction with (the amount of) leisure time was measured on a rating scale from 0 to 10. The average level within the EU was 6.8 in 2018. (Map 1). There were eleven Member States which scored 7.0 points or more. The highest averages were registered in Denmark, Ireland (both 7.5) and Finland (7.8). At the other end of the scale were two countries where the satisfaction level was below 6.0 points, namely Bulgaria (5.7 points) and Greece (5.5 points). Low values, of 6 or below, were also registered in the candidate countries for which data is available (Turkey, Serbia and North Macedonia). The contrary holds true for 3 EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland), whose averages were close to the highest figures of the EU Member States (7.3-7.5)

Satisfaction with leisure time, 2018
(Rating 0-10)



(Rating 0-10)

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © UN-FAO © Turkstat
Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 05/2021



Note: EU, estimate.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_pw01)

Map 1: Satisfaction with leisure time, 2018 (Rating 0-10) Source: Eurostat (ilc_pw01)

Fig. 4 shows the change across time for the satisfaction with leisure time, by comparing the data for the years 2018 and 2013. Over that period ten countries saw their satisfaction levels slightly increasing (Ireland, Slovenia, Italy, Estonia, Germany, Spain, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Finland), by 0.1-0.6 points. The largest increase was observed in Ireland (0.6 points). Twelve Member States reported slightly lower level of satisfaction, the largest decrease being recorded in Lithuania (minus 0.7 points). Across the EU, there was a very slight increase from 6.7 to 6.8 points. In five Member States the levels remained unchanged. Slight increases were also noted for the EFTA countries (0.3-0.5), except for Iceland for which the average has not changed. The opposite is true for the two candidate countries for which data is available for both years (North Macedonia and Serbia), for which the average decreased by 0.4 points.

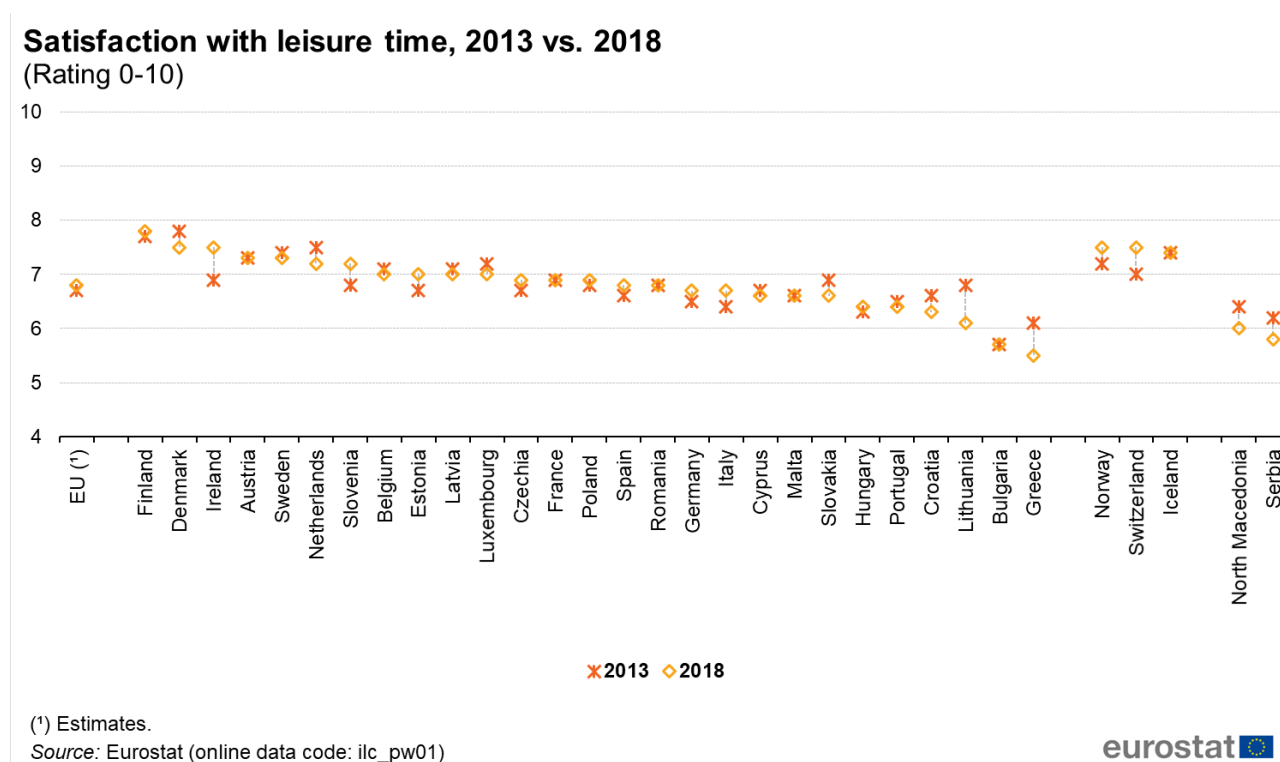
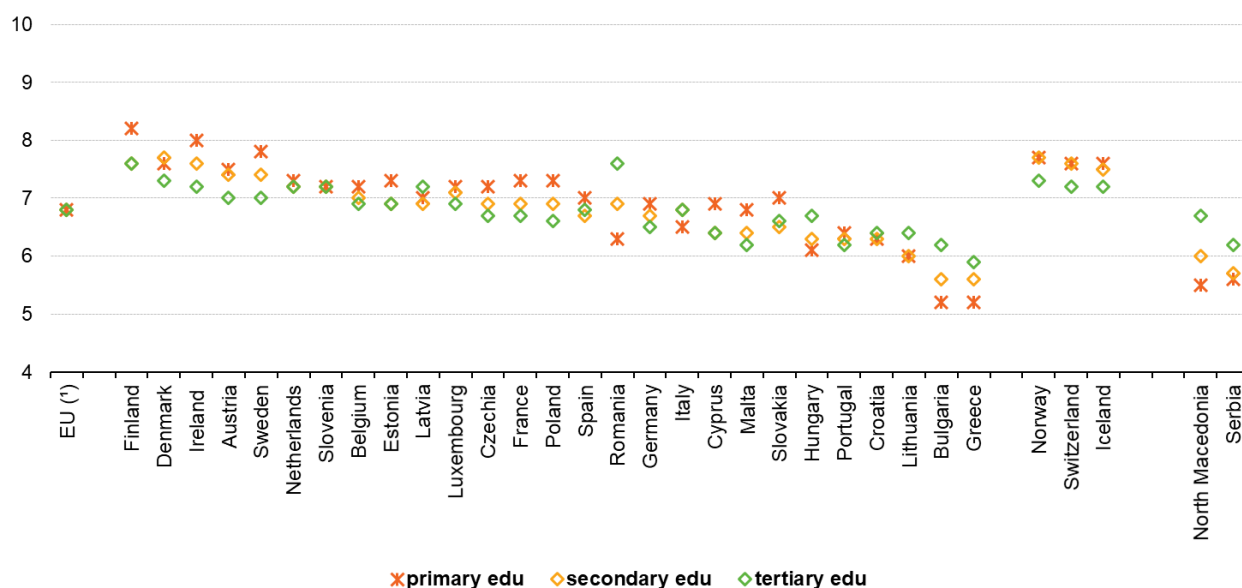


Figure 4: Satisfaction with leisure time, 2013 vs. 2018 (Rating 0-10) Source: Eurostat (ilc_pw01)

Looking at the satisfaction with leisure time by level of education reveals that across the EU the average value is the same regardless how educated one is. However, when looking at individual Member States we notice that this is due to opposing trends at national level. In a majority of Member States (18 of them) people with primary education are more satisfied with their (amount of) leisure time than persons with tertiary education. This difference is largest in countries like Ireland and Sweden (0.8 points). The same is also true for all the EFTA countries. On the other hand, in nine countries the opposite holds true. In Romania (by 1.3 points) and Bulgaria (by 1.0 points) persons with higher educational degrees are more satisfied with their leisure time than persons with a lower level of education. The same trend is noticeable in the two candidate countries for which data is available (Serbia, by 0.6 points; and North Macedonia, by 1.2 points). Slovenia is the only Member State in the same situation as the EU average, recording the same average across educational levels. (Fig. 5)

The highest levels of satisfaction among the people with primary education have been recorded in Finland (8.2) and Ireland (8.0). Finland together with Romania saw also the highest score among those with higher education degrees (both at 7.6 points). At the other end of the ladder, amongst people with primary education, the lowest values were found in Greece and Bulgaria (both 5.2). And for the tertiary educated, the lowest score was found in Greece at 5.9 (the only country for which all educational categories had averages below 6 points).

Satisfaction with leisure time, 2018 (Rating 0-10)



(*) Estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_pw01)

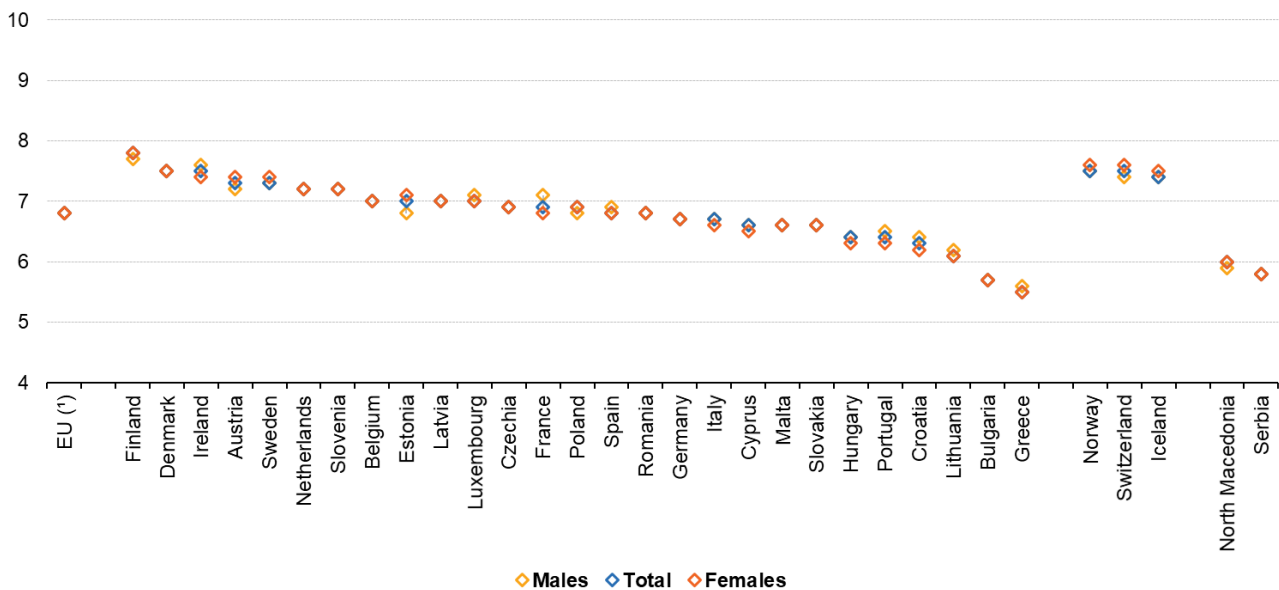
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Figure 5: Satisfaction with leisure time, by educational attainment level, 2018 (Rating 0-10) Source: Eurostat (ilc_pw01)

In Fig. 6 we look at the level of satisfaction with (the amount of) leisure time for males and females. In eleven EU countries men and women were equally satisfied with their leisure time, which was also the case across the EU as a whole. There were also eleven Member States where men appeared to be slightly more satisfied with their leisure time than women, the largest difference being recorded in France at 0.3 points. By contrast, in five Member States (Estonia, Austria, Sweden, Poland and Finland) women showed slightly higher satisfaction levels with their leisure time than men. In that case, the largest difference was recorded in Estonia with 0.3 points in favour of women. This was also the case in the three EFTA countries for which data is available (0.1-0.2 differences in favour of women).

The highest averages among both men and women were found in Finland at 7.7 and 7.8, respectively. By contrast, the lowest satisfaction averages for the satisfaction with leisure time were recorded in Greece at 5.5 and 5.6, respectively.

Satisfaction with leisure time, by sex, 2018 (Rating 0-10)



(*) Estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_pw01)

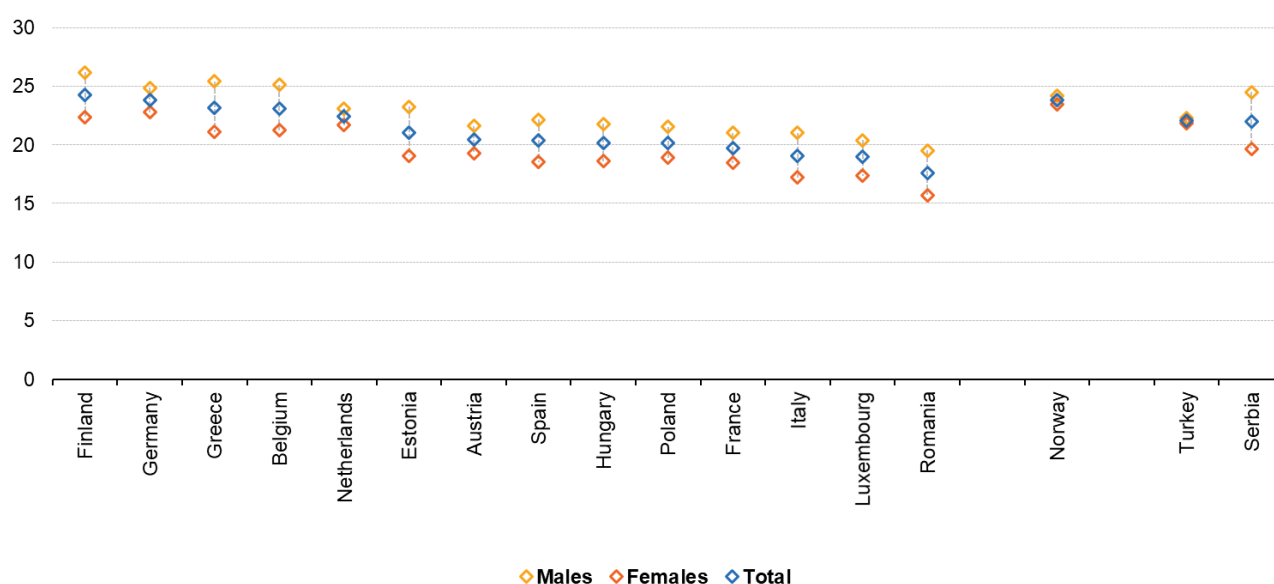
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Figure 6: Satisfaction with leisure time, by sex, 2018 (Rating 0-10) Source: Eurostat (ilc_pw01)

Time spent on leisure activities

Fig. 7 shows the amount of time spent on leisure, social and associative life as a percentage of a full day (24 hours). The data comes from the Time Use Survey. In 2010 (the last round of collection available for this survey; the data was collected between 2008 and 2015 in fact), there were significant differences amongst the countries for which data were made available (as this survey is done on a voluntary basis, it does not cover all the EU Member States). The largest amount of leisure time was recorded in Finland where people use almost a quarter (24.2 %) of a day for leisure activities. Apart from that Germany, Greece and Belgium were the only countries with values above 23 %. By contrast, Romania recorded the lowest amount of time on leisure with 17.6 %. In total, there were four countries where people used less than 20 % of their day for leisure activities, namely France, Italy, Luxembourg and Greece. (Fig. 7). It is interesting to notice that Finland is also the country in which people were most satisfied with their (amount of) leisure time, in 2018 (see previous section). On the other hand, those residing in Greece spend a larger part of their day on leisure activities compared to other Europeans, yet they are amongst the most dissatisfied with their (amount of) leisure time. On the same page, we can notice from Figure 7 that women consistently spend less time on leisure activities than men (this is the case in all the countries for which data is available, although they are not so consistently less satisfied with their (amount of) leisure time. The difference seems to be quite significant, except in the Netherlands, Turkey and Norway.

Time spent on leisure, social and associative life, by sex, 2010 (% of full day)



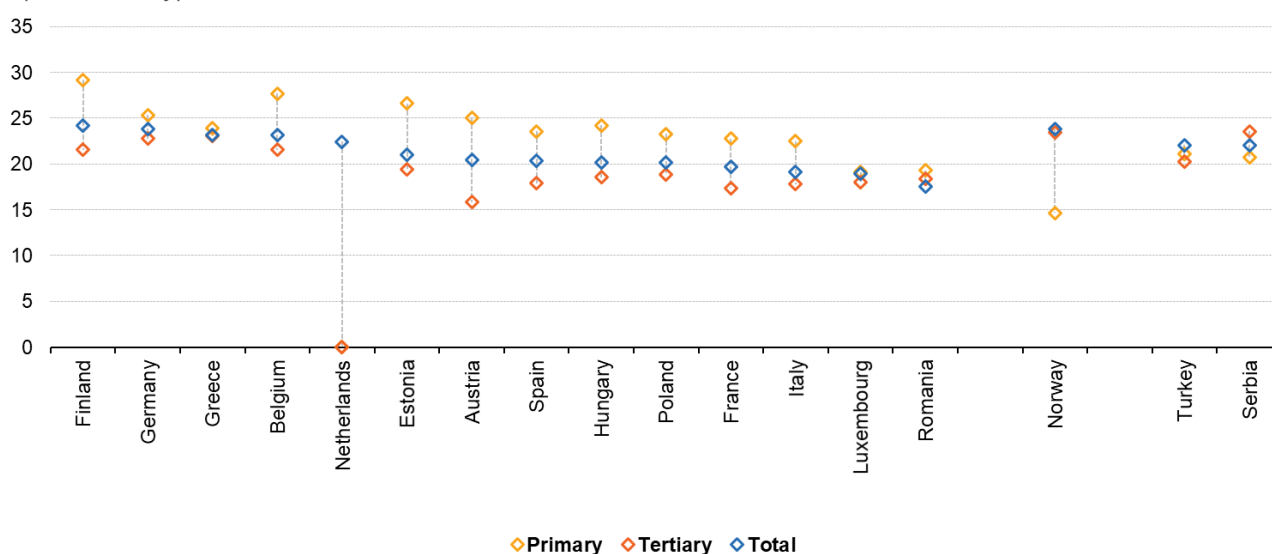
Source: Eurostat (online data code: tus_00educ)

eurostat 

Figure 7: Time spent on leisure, social and associative life, by sex, 2010 (% of full day) Source: Eurostat (tus00educ)

In Fig. 8 we analyze the time spent on leisure by educational attainment level. In all Member States which took part in the survey people with primary education spent more time on leisure activities than people with tertiary education. The differences range from 0.8 percentage points in Greece and 0.9 percentage points in Romania to 9.2 percentage points in Austria. Remarkably, the situation is just the reverse in Norway where persons with tertiary education levels are spending considerably more time on leisure (8.8 p.p.) than persons with primary education. This is also the case in Serbia (with a difference of 2.8 pp). Interestingly, although as already mentioned the perception does not always match the more objective data, in Romania and Greece for example (countries in which those with a tertiary degree are more satisfied with their amount of leisure time than those with primary education), the difference in the actual time spent on it (as recorded by the Time Use Survey) is amongst the smallest between the two educational levels.

Time spent on leisure, social and associative life, by educational attainment level, 2010 (% of full day)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: tus_00educ)

eurostat

Figure 8: Time spent on leisure, social and associative life, by educational attainment level, 2010 (% of full day) Source: Eurostat (tus_00educ)

Participation in voluntary activities

Volunteering is another way to spend leisure time that can enhance people's wellbeing. Data is available on participation in formal and informal volunteering. Formal volunteering is defined here as activities that are structured through an organisation, a formal group or a club, including unpaid work for charitable or religious organisations. Informal volunteering refers to: helping other people (including family members not living in the same household) for example, by cooking, taking care of people, taking people for a walk, or doing their shopping; helping animals; other informal voluntary activities such as cleaning a beach/forest.

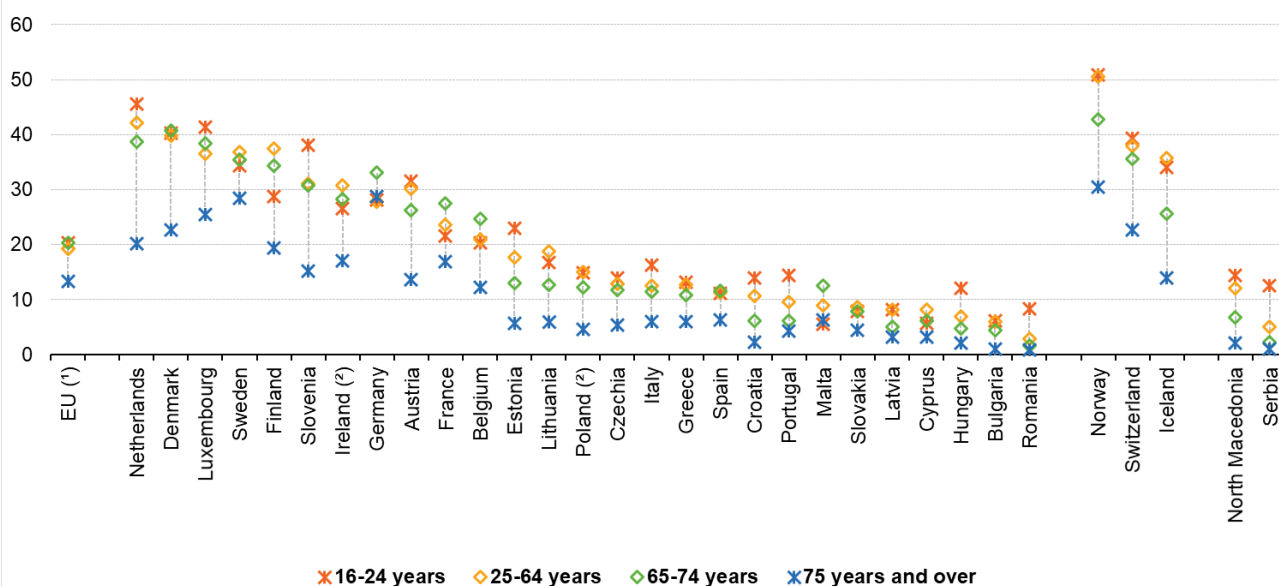
The EU-SILC's 2015 ad-hoc module asked respondents about whether or not they participated in such voluntary activities during the 12 month period prior to the EU-SILC data collection. In 2015, almost one fifth (18.9 %) of the EU adult population participated in formal voluntary activities, while a slightly higher share (22.5 %) participated in informal voluntary activities.

Figure 9 reveals that the share of people participating in formal voluntary activities reached more than one third of the adult population in the Netherlands (which had the highest share among the EU Member States, at 40.3 %), Denmark, Luxembourg, Sweden and Finland. By contrast, there were nine Member States where fewer than 1 in 10 adults participated in formal voluntary activities, with the lowest share in Romania (3.2 %).

An analysis by age shows that while close to one fifth of the adult population participated in formal voluntary activities up to the age of 74, a much smaller share of people aged 75 and over participated in these activities (13.3 %). This pattern was repeated in the vast majority of the EU Member States, although working-age people (aged 25-64) were less likely than people aged 75 and over to participate in formal voluntary activities in Germany, while young people (aged 16-24) were less likely than people aged 75 and over to participate in formal voluntary activities in Malta. In half (14 out of 28) the Member States, young people had the highest participation rate for formal voluntary activities.

Participation in formal voluntary activities, by age, 2015

(% share who participated during the 12 months prior to the survey)



Note: ranked on the share of the total population (16 years and over) participating in formal voluntary activities.

(1) Estimates.

(2) Low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_scp19)

eurostat

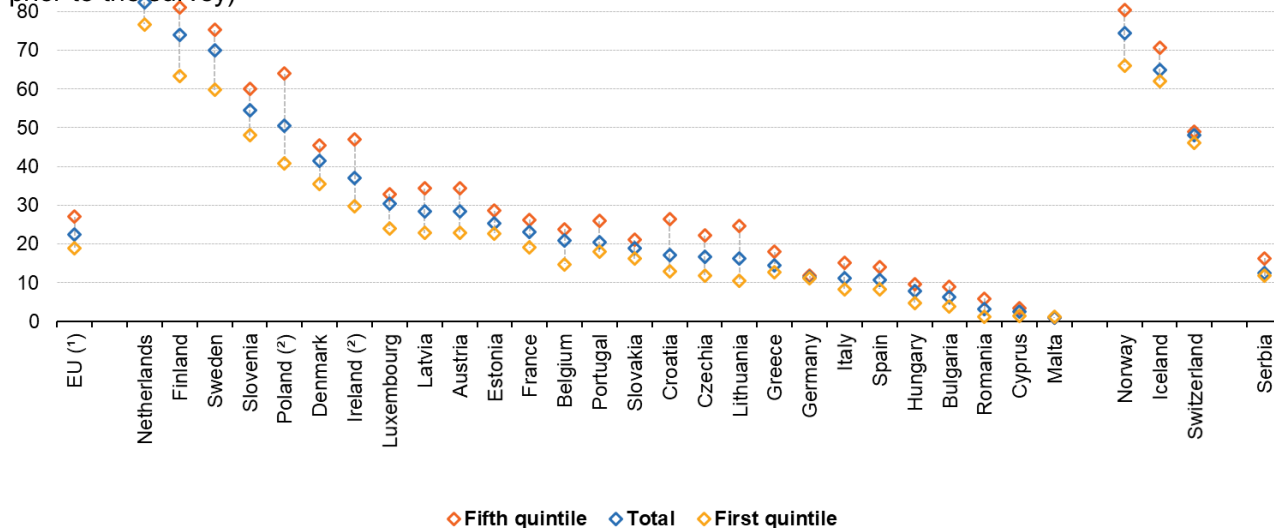
Figure 9: Participation in formal voluntary activities, by age, 2015 (% share who participated during the 12 months prior to the survey) Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp19)

Figure 10 shows that informal voluntary activities were generally more common (than formal voluntary activities): this was particularly the case in the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Slovenia and Poland, where more than half of the adult population participated in informal voluntary activities; the highest participation rate (as for formal voluntary activities) was recorded in the Netherlands (82.3 %).

An analysis by income situation confirms that people with higher levels of income were more likely to be involved in informal voluntary activities than people with lower levels of income. Across the whole of the EU, less than one fifth (18.9 %) of the adult population in the first income quintile participated in informal voluntary activities, a share that rose to more than a quarter (27.0 %) for people in the fifth income quintile. This pattern was repeated in all but one of the EU Member States, as 1.1 % of the lowest earners in Malta participated in informal voluntary activities compared with 0.9 % of the highest earners. By contrast, the highest earners in Romania were 4.5 times as likely to participate in informal voluntary activities (5.9 %) than their counterparts with the lowest income levels (1.3 %); a similar pattern was observed in Bulgaria, Lithuania, Cyprus, Croatia, and Hungary, where people in the fifth income quintile were at least twice as likely to participate in informal voluntary activities as people in the first income quintile.

Participation in informal voluntary activities, by income situation, 2015

(% share of people aged 16 years and over who participated during the 12 months prior to the survey)



Note: ranked on the share of the total population (all levels of income) participating in informal voluntary activities.

(¹) Estimates.

(²) Low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_scp20)

eurostat

Figure 10: Participation in informal voluntary activities, by income situation, 2015 (% share of people aged 16 years and over who participated during the 12 months prior to the survey) Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp20)

Conclusions

Evidence from 2015 suggests that people with low levels of income generally spent less time (than the population as a whole) engaging in (relatively expensive) leisure activities, such as going to the cinema or live performances, visiting cultural sites or attending sports events. Furthermore, people with low incomes were less likely (than the population as whole) to participate in voluntary activities. These findings suggest that low levels of income (and the risk of poverty) may be factors that have a negative impact on subjective well-being and quality of life, also in ways that may be different to those directly implied by a lack of material resources. On the other hand, evidence from the 2008-2015 wave of the Time Use Survey suggests people with a lower level of education spent a larger part of their day on leisure activities, compared to people with tertiary education. Regardless of this, at EU level all educational categories are equally satisfied on average with their (amount of) leisure time (2018 data). This is because at national level there are opposite trends. Males and females were also equally satisfied with their leisure time. At the same time, men were spending a larger amount of the day on leisure activities.

Data sources

Within the quality of life framework, information on leisure and social interactions cover quantitative and qualitative aspects, as well as an assessment of access or the proximity of such activities/services.

The data used in this article are primarily derived from EU-SILC, an annual survey that is the principal European source for measuring income and living conditions, as well as the leading source of information for analyzing different aspects related to the quality of life of households and individuals. Most of the data used in this article come from the EU-SILC ad-hoc modules on social and cultural participation (2015) and Material deprivation, well-being and housing difficulties (2018); information about this topic is not collected on an annual basis.

In the 2015 module, there were a total of 15 variables collected in relation to social and cultural participation: seven in relation to integration with family, relatives, friends and neighbours; four on participation in cultural or sport events; three on formal and informal social participation; one on artistic activities. All of the data presented refer to

individuals who were aged 16 and over (no information is presented in relation to households).

In the 2018 module, there were 15 variables on personal wellbeing, covering topics such as life satisfaction and satisfaction with different life domains (including leisure time); social support; trust in others; perceived feelings of exclusion and loneliness; and mental well-being.

Another data source used in the article is the second Harmonized European [Time Use Survey](#)

Source data for tables and graphs

- [Quality of life - leisure and social interactions](#)

Context

Our subjective perception of well-being, happiness and life satisfaction is fundamentally influenced by our ability to engage in and spend time on activities we enjoy. The importance attributed by modern societies to work-life balance underlines the role that leisure and social interactions may play in our quality of life. They have a quantitative aspect (in other words, the availability of time for taking part in activities we enjoy) and a qualitative aspect (for example, the ease of access to leisure activities).

Several EU policies affect leisure: the EU seeks to preserve Europe's shared cultural heritage (Article 167 of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#)) in language, literature, theatre, cinema, dance, broadcasting, art, architecture and handicrafts, and to help make it accessible through initiatives such as the [Culture programme](#). To this end, the EU has also developed policies for audio-visual and media markets, including the audio-visual media services (AMS) [Directive 2010/13](#), the [Creative Europe](#) framework programme on culture and media, as well as provisions for supporting public service broadcasting (Protocol No 29 of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#)). In June 2016 the [European Commission](#) and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy adopted a Joint Communication [Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations](#). This provided for a number of guiding principles for EU action within the field of cultural relations, including:

- promoting cultural diversity and respect for human rights;
- fostering mutual respect and inter-cultural dialogue;
- ensuring respect for complementarity and subsidiarity;
- encouraging a cross-cutting approach to culture;
- promoting culture through existing frameworks for cooperation.

Sport may play a vital role, not just in the health and fitness of individuals, but also a wider role in shaping European society. Within this context, some of the European Commission's priorities in the field of sport may be summarised as:

- encouraging physical and mental fitness;
- fostering a sense of social inclusion and integration;
- eliminating racism, xenophobia and sexism;
- promoting greater participation.

These areas are being tackled within the EU, among others, by the [Erasmus+ programme](#), which promotes dialogue, support and participation across all areas of sport policy.

Other articles

- [All articles on poverty and social exclusion](#)
- [Quality of life indicators](#) (online publication)

Database

- [Quality of life](#) , see:

Material living conditions (qol_mlc)

Productive or other main activity (qol_act)

Health (qol_hlt)

Education (qol_edu)

Leisure and social interactions (qol_lei)

Economic security and physical safety (qol_saf)

Governance and basic rights (qol_gov)

Natural and living environment (qol_env)

Overall experience of life (qol_lif)

- [Income and living conditions \(ilc\)](#) , see:

EU-SILC ad-hoc modules (ilc_ahm)

2015 - Social and cultural participation (ilc_scp)

2018 - Material deprivation, well-being and housing difficulties (ilc_pw)

Dedicated section

- [Quality of life](#)

Methodology

- [Income and living conditions — Ad-hoc modules](#)

Publications

- [Quality of life in Europe - Facts and Views](#)

External links

- [OECD — Better life index](#)
- [World happiness report](#)

Notes

View this article online at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Quality_of_life_indicators_-_leisure