People getting together with family and relatives at least once a week, 2015
(% share of people aged 16 years and over)

Note: EU-28, estimate, Ireland, Poland and the United Kingdom: low reliability.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: lc_socp07)

This article is part of the Eurostat online publication that focuses on Quality of life indicators, providing recent statistics on the European Union (EU). The 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. Leisure, the time that people spend outside their productive activities, has a major impact on their sense of well-being, happiness and life satisfaction. Social interactions — interpersonal activities and relationships — are a related but conceptually different issue, which may be considered as 'social capital' for both individuals and society that also affect people’s quality of life.

### 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.

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 (67.3 %) of the EU-28 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 an important role in explaining participation in any cultural activities or attendance at a sports event. Across all 28 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.
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-28, 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 (16.9%) or cultural sites (15.0%) were only slightly lower. Just over 1 in 10 (11.0%) people in the EU-28 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.

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 8.5% of the adult
population in the EU-28 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 (7.5 %), cultural sites (6.8 %) and sports events (5.0 %) were somewhat lower. Accessibility appeared to be a relatively important 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.

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)

Social interactions

Apart from their basic function of meeting the natural human need for socialising, more frequent and more rewarding social interactions are also associated with a range of different life outcomes, such as better health or improved chances of finding a job. More specifically, social support — or having someone to rely on in case of need — is considered to be a particularly important variable for explaining the distribution of happiness; for example, it has been chosen as one of six key indicators that are used within the United Nations’ World happiness report. Aside from encompassing our basic need to engage in activities, the quality of social interactions may promote the existence of supportive relationships, interpersonal trust and social cohesion.

An assessment of social interactions should distinguish between three different but interwoven aspects: (a) activities with people, that is, being in contact or doing things with family, relatives or friends and the satisfaction that one derives from these personal relationships; (b) activities for people, that is, one’s involvement in formal and informal voluntary activities; and (c) supportive relationships, shown by one’s ability to get help and personal support in case of need.

Getting together with family, relatives and friends

This next section is based on the reported frequency with which people get together with family, relatives and friends; note that the information that is presented only refers to those family members, relatives and friends who do not live in the respondent’s household. Social relationships have been shown to operate as a buffer against the negative effects of stress on an individual’s well-being. Research has also shown that the subjective well-being of people who have frequent social contact with family, relatives and friends is greater than for people who do not have such relationships.

In 2015, a small majority (51.9 %) of people in the EU-28 reported getting together with family and relatives at least once every week (see Map 1). In 13 of the EU Member States, less than half of the adult population got together with family and relatives at least once a week, this share falling to less than one third in Denmark, the Baltic Member States and Poland. By contrast, in several of the southern Member States — Cyprus, Malta, Portugal and Greece — more than two thirds of the adult population stated that they got together at least once a week with family and relatives; this may reflect differences in geographical mobility, social structures, norms and customs with regard to family ties in (extended) families.

Map 1: People getting together with family and relatives at least once a week, 2015 (% share of people aged 16 years and over)Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp09)

A similar analysis is presented in Map 2, with its focus on people getting together with friends (as opposed to family and relatives). In 2015, just over half (53.2 %) of the adult population in the EU-28 got together with their friends at least once a week; this share ranged from more than two thirds in Greece, Cyprus, Croatia, Portugal and Spain down to less than 40.0 % in Latvia and Lithuania, reaching a low of 24.8 % in Poland. Therefore, as for getting together with family and relatives, it was generally the case that people living in the southern Member States had the highest propensity to meet their friends at least once a week when compared with people living in the rest of the EU, in particular, compared with those living in the north-west of the EU.
However, there were quite some exceptions too, for example Sweden and the EFTA country Norway are amongst the countries in which a large number of persons see their friends at least once a week, while in Romania the same proportion is amongst the lowest in the European Union.

A comparison between the results for Map 1 and Map 2 reveals some interesting caveats. As already noted it was quite common for people in the southern EU Member States to get together with both family and relatives as well as with friends on a regular basis, this was particularly the case in Greece, Cyprus and Portugal, as well as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. While a high proportion of people in Sweden got together with friends at least once a week, this was not mirrored in terms of the share of people who got together with family and relatives each week, while a relatively low share of the population got together with friends on such a regular basis; a similar pattern was observed in Romania. At the other end of the range, Poland, the Baltic Member States and Denmark were each characterised by having low shares of their populations socialising with both family and relatives and with friends.

Map 2: People getting together with friends at least once a week, 2015 (% share of people aged 16 years and over)

The next section extends the analysis by looking at the share of the adult population that got together with family and relatives according to age. In 2015, a majority of each of the age groups shown in Figure 4 reported
that they got together with family and relatives at least once a week: the lowest shares across the EU-28 were recorded for people aged 16-24 and 25-64 years, while the elderly — in particular people aged 75 years and over — were more likely to get together with family and relatives.

Among the EU Member States there was no clear pattern as to the relationship between age and getting together with family and relatives. Cyprus, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Finland, Luxembourg, the Czech Republic, France, Slovenia, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia and Lithuania recorded a similar pattern to the EU-28 average, with the elderly more likely to socialise with family and relatives than younger (16-24) or working-age (25-64) adults. By contrast, young adults (aged 16-24) were the more likely (than the other age groups) to socialise with family and relatives at least once a week in Ireland, Slovakia, Romania, the Netherlands, Germany, Bulgaria, Austria and Latvia. It is also interesting to note that in Portugal, Croatia, Romania and Germany people aged 75 years and over were less inclined (than the other age groups) to socialise with family and relatives at least once a week.

Figure 4: People getting together with family and relatives at least once a week, by age, 2015 (% share)

Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp09)

Figure 5 has a similar analysis looking at the share of the adult population that got together with friends according to age. There was a much clearer pattern, insofar as young adults (aged 16-24) were usually much more likely to get together with friends at least once a week than the other age groups, with a decreasing share of the population getting together with friends as a function of age. Across the whole of the EU-28, just over four fifths (80.6 %) of all young adults got together with friends at least once a week in 2015; the corresponding share for people of working age (defined here as 25-64 years) was 50.5 %, that for people aged 65-74 years was less than half (48.9 %), while the lowest share (44.9 %) was recorded for people aged 75 years and over.

This pattern was repeated in a majority of the EU Member States, with the highest share of people getting together with friends systematically recorded for young people. There were however some differences, for example: in Cyprus, Malta, the Netherlands and Austria the share of people getting together with friends was higher among people aged 65-74 years than it was for people of working-age (25-64 years), while in Denmark, Ireland, France and the United Kingdom this was also the case for people aged 75 and over (as well as those aged 65-74 years). In Denmark, Latvia, Estonia and United Kingdom, the share of people getting together with friends was higher among people aged 75 years and over than it was for people aged 65-74 years; this might reflect, at least to some degree, the fact that those people aged 75 and over who were interviewed for the survey were likely to be in relatively good health and therefore still capable of socialising with friends (whereas individuals in poorer health are not surveyed if living in a home/hospice/other form of institution).
The final part of this section looks at information that may be used to analyse loneliness; this is thought to be particularly detrimental to the quality of life experienced by the elderly (for example, loneliness may increase the risk of diseases such as Alzheimer’s), or people who are receiving healthcare treatment. In 2015, some 7.2 % of the EU-28 adult population got together with family and relatives less than once a month; this share was higher for people with relatively low levels of income, as the share for people in the first income quintile was 10.4 %, compared with 4.8 % for people in the fifth income quintile.

This pattern was reproduced in each of the EU Member States, confirming that people with higher incomes were more likely to get together with their family and relatives. While the overall share was lowest in Cyprus (1.3 %), it is interesting to note that in Cyprus people in the first income quintile were 7.3 times as likely to get together with family and relatives less than once a month when compared with people in the fifth income quintile; this was the biggest relative difference among any of the Member States, with the next largest differential recorded in Ireland, where people in the first income quintile were 5.9 times as likely as those in the fifth income quintile to get together with family and relatives less than once a month.

Figure 5: People getting together with friends at least once a week, by age, 2015(% share)Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp09)

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Figure 5: People getting together with friends at least once a week, by age, 2015(% share)Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp09)
Figure 6: People getting together with family and relatives less than once a month, by income situation, 2015 (% share of people aged 16 years and over) Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp12)

Figure 7 shows a similar analysis for the frequency with which people get together with friends, again by income situation. In 2015, almost 1 in 10 (9.4%) adults in the EU-28 got together with their friends less than once a month; this share reached 12.9% for those people with the lowest incomes and fell to 5.7% among those people with the highest incomes, repeating the pattern observed for the frequency with which people got together with families and relatives.

Across the EU Member States the same pattern was systematically repeated with income appearing to be a key factor in determining how often individuals got together with their friends. This was once again particularly the case in Cyprus — which recorded the lowest overall share of its adult population getting together with friends less than once a month, 2.9% — as people in the first income quintile were seven times as likely as people in the fifth income quintile to meet their friends less than once a month. Relative differences between these two income groups were also quite high in Croatia (where people in the first income quintile were 5.1 times as likely as people in the fifth income quintile to meet their friends less than once a month), Hungary and the Czech Republic (4.2 and 4.0 times as high respectively).

Figure 7: People getting together with friends less than once a month, by income situation, 2015 (% share of people aged 16 years and over) Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp12)
Participation in voluntary activities

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 (19.3 %) of the EU-28’s adult population participated in formal voluntary activities, while a slightly higher share (22.2 %) participated in informal voluntary activities.

Figure 8 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 (13.9 %). 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.

Figure 9 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-28, less than one fifth (18.4 %) of the adult population in the first income quintile participated in informal voluntary activities; a share that rose to more than a quarter (26.9 %) 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, Hungary and the United Kingdom, 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.

Figure 9: 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)

Supportive relationships

It has been shown in the World Happiness Report\(^2\) that life satisfaction, a subjective indicator for the quality of life, improves with the availability of practical, moral and financial support from family and friends. Within the context of EU-SILC, this area is covered by two specific questions: on the one hand, the respondent’s capacity/possibility to ask for any kind of help — moral, material or financial — from family, relatives, friends or neighbours; on the other, the presence of at least one person with whom the respondent can potentially (whether they need to or not) discuss personal matters.

In 2015, some 5.9 % of the EU-28 adult population was not able to ask someone for help (see Table 1); only in Italy (13.2 %) and Luxembourg (12.9 %) did this share rise into double-digits. At the other end of the scale, less than 2.0 % of the adult populations of the Czech Republic and Finland did not have someone to ask for help.

In 2015, a slightly higher share (6.0 %) of the EU-28 adult population did not have someone to discuss personal matters with (see Table 1). This share rose into double-digits in France (12.4 %) and Italy (11.9 %), while in Cyprus, Spain, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia it fell to between 2.0-2.5 %.

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Table 1: People who do not have someone to ask for help and people who do not have someone to discuss personal matters with, by age, 2015 (% share)

Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp15) and (ilc_scp17)

Figure 10 shows that the share of the adult population that did not have someone to ask for help reached 20.8% for people in the first income quintile in Luxembourg, while less than 5.0% of the lowest earners in Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Finland did not have someone to ask for help. By contrast, a similar analysis for the fifth income quintile reveals there was a smaller range: some 8.9% of the highest earners in Italy did not have someone to ask for help, a share that fell to less than 1.0% among the highest earners in the Czech Republic, Finland and Spain.

Across the EU-28, people in the first income quintile were almost three times as likely not to have someone to ask for help, as nearly 1 in 10 (9.7%) of the lowest earners were in this position, compared with 3.4% of the highest earners. In each of the EU Member States, a higher share of low earners (compared with high earners) did not have someone to ask for help in 2015; in other words, income inequality seems to influence social isolation. In Spain, people in the first income quintile were 7.9 times as likely as people in the fifth income quintile not to have someone to ask for help, while in the Czech Republic, Croatia, Ireland and Sweden, the lowest earners were five to six times as likely as the highest earners not to have someone to ask for help.
Figure 10: People who do not have someone to ask for help, by income situation, 2015 (% share of people aged 16 years and over)
Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp16)

Figure 11 provides a more detailed analysis of people who did not have someone to discuss personal matters with. Across the whole of the EU-28, some 6.0% of the adult population was in this situation, with a slightly higher share of men (6.7%) than women (5.4%) not having someone to discuss personal matters with. Among the EU Member States, almost one in six men in France did not have someone to discuss personal matters with, while Italy (12.5%) was the only other Member State to record a double-digit share; Italy was also the only Member State to report that more than 1 in 10 adult women (11.4%) did not have someone to discuss personal matters with.

The highest gender gap was recorded in France, as 16.2% of the male adult population did not have someone to discuss personal matters with, compared with 9.6% of women; a gap of 6.6 percentage points. The next largest gaps between the sexes were in the Netherlands (3.7 points), Denmark and Finland (both 2.8 points). By contrast, in Latvia and Lithuania a slightly higher share of women (compared with men) reported that they did not have someone to discuss personal matters with.

Figure 11: People who do not have someone to discuss personal matters with, by sex, 2015 (% share of people aged 16 years and over)
Source: Eurostat (ilc_scp17)
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. A lower share of people with relatively low levels of income benefited from social interactions, such as regular contacts with family, relatives or friends. Furthermore, people with low incomes were less likely (than the population as whole) to participate in voluntary activities or to have someone to rely on for supportive relationships whom they could ask for help or with whom they could discuss personal matters. 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.

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 analysing different aspects related to the quality of life of households and individuals. All the data used in this article — covering both leisure and social interactions — come from an EU-SILC 2015 ad-hoc module on social and cultural participation; 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).

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
• Income and living conditions (ilc), see:

EU-SILC ad-hoc modules (ilc_ahm)
  - 2015 - Social and cultural participation (ilc_scp)

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 Bank — Measuring living standards
• World happiness report

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