How does the UNITED KINGDOM compare on child well-being?

In comparison to other OECD countries, the United Kingdom’s performance on child well-being is mixed at best. Material conditions for children, for example, are fairly average. Average disposable income for children is close to the OECD mean, while the child income poverty rate and the share of children living in overcrowded households are both moderate. However, children are comparatively likely to live in jobless households – just over 15% of 0-14 year olds in the UK live in a household where no adult works, compared to an average of roughly 10% across OECD countries. Health behaviours and outcomes are moderate too. Infant health indicators like the infant mortality rate and the low birth weight rate are close to the OECD average, while measures of adolescent health behaviours point towards lifestyles that are less healthy than in some other OECD countries. For example, a relatively high share of 15-year-olds in the UK say they skipped either breakfast or dinner on the last day they went to school (30%, versus an OECD average of 25%), and a relatively low share report engaging in regular intense physical activity outside of school (42%, compared to an OECD average of 52%). The performance of 15-year-olds in the UK on the OECD’s PISA tests is roughly average for an OECD country, but not all children seem happy at school. For example, 15-year-olds in the UK are less likely than their peers in some other countries to say they feel like they belong at school, and are among some of the likeliest in the OECD to report being the victim of bullying – 24% of 15-year-olds in the UK report being the victim of bullying at least a few times a month, compared to 19% on average across OECD countries. Adolescent outcomes are relatively poor. For example, a comparatively high share of 15-19 year-olds are ‘NEET’ (not in employment, education or training), and levels of self-reported life satisfaction among 15-year-olds are relatively low – about 28% report high levels life satisfaction (compared to an OECD average of 34%), and 16% report low life satisfaction (higher than the OECD average of 12%).

How the United Kingdom compares to other OECD countries on 23 key measures

Note: Placement in top/middle/bottom third of OECD countries with available data on each measure. ‘Top third’ (green circle) always represents good relative performance with respect to child well-being, and ‘bottom third’ (red square) poor relative performance. For measures where a larger value is generally ‘better’ (e.g. adolescents reporting high life satisfaction), ‘top third’ means the country is in the top third when countries are ranked largest to smallest value down. For measures where a smaller value is better (e.g. adolescents reporting low life satisfaction), ‘top third’ means the country is in the top third when ranked smallest to largest.

The Child Well-Being Data Portal (CWBDP) gathers data on child well-being and the settings in which children grow up. It provides information on children’s home and family environment, their health and safety, their education and school life, their activities and their life satisfaction, and also links to information on public policies for children. Information covers children from 0 to 17 years of age, although some information is available only for specific ages. Where possible, information is provided for different age groups, from early childhood to adolescence. The data portal also provides a unique source of information on disparities in child well-being by gender, family status, household income level, and parental background.