

How's Life in the United Kingdom?

On average, the United Kingdom performs well across a number of well-being indicators relative to other OECD countries. At 74% in 2016, the employment rate is well above the OECD average (67%), while **long-term unemployment** is below the OECD average level (1.3% compared to 2% in 2016). However, **household net adjusted disposable income** and **average earnings** fall below the OECD average levels. **Housing affordability** is also comparatively low: the average household in the United Kingdom spends a higher proportion of its disposable income (almost 24%) on housing costs than the OECD average (almost 21%). Personal security is comparatively high, and the **homicide rate** is one of the lowest in the OECD area. **Social support** also exceeds the OECD average: 93% of people in the United Kingdom report having friends or relatives whom they can count on in times of trouble, higher than the OECD average of 89%. **Life satisfaction** in the United Kingdom is also above the OECD average level.

The United Kingdom's average level of current well-being: Comparative strengths and weaknesses














Note: This chart shows the United Kingdom's relative strengths and weaknesses in well-being when compared with other OECD countries. For both positive and negative indicators (such as homicides, marked with an "*"), longer bars always indicate better outcomes (i.e. higher well-being), whereas shorter bars always indicate worse outcomes (i.e. lower well-being). If data are missing for any given indicator, the relevant segment of the circle is shaded in white.

Additional information, including the data used in this country note, can be found at:


www.oecd.org/statistics/Better-Life-Initiative-2017-country-notes-data.xlsx


Change in the United Kingdom's average well-being over the past 10 years


Dimension	Description	Change
 Income and wealth	In 2016, the level of household net adjusted disposable income was 7% higher than in 2005, despite a setback between 2011 and 2014. Household net wealth recorded little change between 2011 and 2013.	↗ ↔
 Jobs and earnings	After falling from 2008 to 2011, the employment rate has grown steadily in recent years, and is now 2% higher than in 2005. Real earnings are slightly higher than in 2005; following a sharp decrease between 2010 and 2014, they picked up slightly in 2015 and 2016. Labour market insecurity rose steeply during the crisis, but fell gradually from 2011 onwards to reach 2.6% – half a point lower than in 2005. On the other hand, both long-term unemployment and the share of workers experiencing job strain have increased over the past decade.	↗ ↗ ↗ ↘ ↘
 Housing conditions	The share of household disposable income spent on housing costs has remained relatively stable over the past decade.	↔
 Work-life balance	At nearly 12.7%, the share of employees working 50 hours or more per week in 2016 is very similar to the level reported in 2005.	↔
 Health status	Despite falling slightly between 2014 and 2015, life expectancy has increased by 1.8 years overall since 2005. Conversely, the United Kingdom is one of few OECD countries where perceived health status has worsened in the last decade, with the proportion of people rating their health as “good” or “very good” falling by nearly 5 percentage points.	↗ ↘
 Education and skills	The 10-year change in upper secondary educational attainment cannot be assessed, due to a recent break in the data. However, between 2014 and 2016, attainment rates increased by 1.6 percentage points.	↗
 Social connections	The United Kingdom is among the one-quarter of OECD countries where social support has fallen over the past decade. The share of people who have relatives or friends whom they can count on for help in case of need dropped from 97% to 93%.	↘
 Civic engagement	Voter turnout rose by 7.6 percentage points between the 2005 and 2017 general elections in the United Kingdom.	↗
 Environmental quality	The share of people satisfied with their local water quality fell by 7 percentage points since 2005-07. Annual exposure to PM _{2.5} air pollution has changed little since 2005, remaining just below the OECD average.	↘ ↔
 Personal security	Although the rate of deaths due to assault has remained relatively stable over the last 10 years, the share of people who report feeling safe when walking alone at night has improved from 62% to 77%.	↔ ↗
 Subjective well-being	People’s life satisfaction has remained relatively stable in the United Kingdom during the last 10 years.	↔


Note: For each indicator in every dimension: ↗ refers to an improvement; ↔ indicates little or no change; and ↘ signals deterioration. This is based on a comparison of the starting year (2005 in most cases) and the latest available year (usually 2015 or 2016). The order of the arrows shown in column three corresponds to that of the indicators mentioned in column two.

The United Kingdom's resources and risks for future well-being: Illustrative indicators

 Natural capital		
Indicator	Tier	Change
Greenhouse gas emissions from domestic production	2	↗ 2005-2015
CO ₂ emissions from domestic consumption	2	↗ 2001-2011
Exposure to PM _{2.5} air pollution	2	↔ 2005-2013
Forest area	3	↔ 2005-2014
Renewable freshwater resources	3	.. Long-term annual avg
Freshwater abstractions	1	.. 2013
No data available on threatened species.		

 Human capital		
Indicator	Tier	Change
Young adult educational attainment	2	↗ 2014-2016
Educational expectancy	3	.. 2015
Cognitive skills at age 15	2	.. 2015
Adult skills	2	.. 2011/2012
Long-term unemployment	1	↘ 2005-2016
Life expectancy at birth	2	↗ 2005-2015
Smoking prevalence	2	↗ 2005-2014
Obesity prevalence	3	↘ 2005-2015

 Economic capital		
Indicator	Tier	Change
Produced fixed assets	3	↗ 2005-2015
Gross fixed capital formation	2	↘ 2005-2016
Financial net worth of total economy	2	↔ 2005-2016
Intellectual property assets	2	↘ 2005-2015
Investment in R&D	2	↗ 2005-2015
Household debt	2	↔ 2005-2016
Household net wealth	1	↔ 2011-2013
Financial net worth of government	3	↘ 2005-2016
Banking sector leverage	3	↗ 2005-2015

 Social capital		
Indicator	Tier	Change
Trust in others	2	.. 2013
Trust in the police	2	.. 2013
Trust in the national government	2	↔ 2005-2016
Voter turnout	2	↗ 2005-2017
Government stakeholder engagement	1	.. 2014
Volunteering through organisations	2	.. 2011/2012

1	Top-performing OECD tier, latest available year
2	Middle-performing OECD tier, latest available year
3	Bottom-performing OECD tier, latest available year

↗	Improving over time
↘	Worsening over time
↔	No change
..	No data available

HOW LARGE ARE WELL-BEING INEQUALITIES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM?

What is inequality and how is it measured? Measuring inequality means trying to describe **how unevenly distributed** outcomes are in society. *How's Life? 2017* adopts several different approaches:

- Measures of “**vertical**” inequalities address how unequally outcomes are spread across all people in society – for example, by looking at the size of the gap between people at the bottom of the distribution and people at the top
- Measures of “**horizontal**” inequalities focus on the gap between population groups defined by specific characteristics (such as men and women, young and old, people with higher and lower levels of education).
- Measures of “**deprivation**” report the share of people who live below a certain level of well-being (such as those who face income poverty or live in an overcrowded household).

The United Kingdom shows mixed outcomes in terms of **vertical inequalities**. For example, the distributions of household income, working hours and having a say in government are relatively unequal compared to most OECD countries. However, the gap between bottom and top performers in adult skills is narrower than elsewhere.

Across OECD countries, **women** typically fare worse than **men** on most labour market outcomes, perceived health and feelings of safety. In the United Kingdom, women fare slightly better than men on unemployment, while there is no difference between men and women on perceived health. Nevertheless, women are at a greater disadvantage than in the average OECD country when it comes to voter turnout and adult skills.

In all OECD countries, **young people** are disadvantaged on income, wealth, jobs, earnings, and voter turnout, compared to **middle-aged adults**. In the United Kingdom, the youth unemployment rate is more than three times that of the middle aged. The British generational divide is also larger than in the OECD on average for outcomes such as income, adult skills, and having a say in government. However, the employment gap is narrower.

In most OECD countries, people with a **tertiary education** tend to fare better than those with only a **secondary education** across a range of well-being outcomes. However, in the United Kingdom, this gap is comparatively small in the cases of employment, social support, adult skills, and the cognitive skills of people’s 15 year old children.

Regarding **deprivations**, the United Kingdom is classified in the top or middle third of OECD countries in 15 out of 20 indicators. The poorer outcomes include the comparatively high incidence of low-paid jobs (19%), the high share of people facing housing cost overburden (12%), and the high share of people working very long hours (12.7%).

Well-being inequalities in the United Kingdom

	Vertical inequality	Horizontal inequality by			Deprivation
		Gender	Age	Education	
		Women relative to men	Young relative to middle-aged	Secondary relative to tertiary	
Household income	●		●		●
Household net wealth	●		●	○	○
Earnings	●	●	●	●	
Low pay		●			●
Employment		●	●	●	
Unemployment		●	●	●	●
Housing affordability					●
Rooms per person					●
Life expectancy	●				
Perceived health		●	●	●	●
Working hours	●	●	●	●	●
Time off		●	●		
Educational attainment		●	●		●
Cognitive skills at 15	●	●		●	●
Adult skills	●	●	●	●	●
Time spent socialising		●	●		
Social support		●	●	●	●
Voter turnout		●	●	●	●
Having a say in government	●	●	●	●	●
Air quality					●
Water quality		●	●	●	●
Homicides		●			●
Feeling safe at night		●	●	●	●
Life satisfaction	●	●	●	●	●
Negative affect balance		●			●

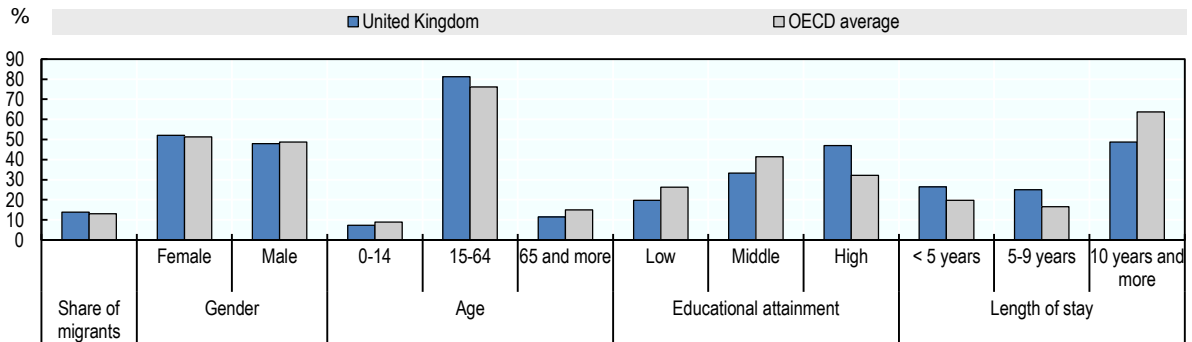
HOW'S LIFE FOR MIGRANTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM?

Migrants (defined as people living in a different country from the one in which they were born) represent an important share of the population in most OECD countries. Capturing information about their well-being is critical for gaining a fuller picture of how life is going, and whether it is going equally well for all members of society.

Who are the migrants in the United Kingdom and OECD?

More than one in eight people living in the United Kingdom (14%) were born elsewhere, similar to the OECD average (13%), and 52% of them are women (51% for the OECD average). Migrants in the United Kingdom are more likely to be of working age than in the OECD on average (81% of them are aged 15 to 64, as compared to 76% across the OECD), and are more likely to have a high educational attainment than a low or a middle level. Half of migrants arrived in the United Kingdom 10 years ago or more.

Share of migrants in the total population and selected characteristics

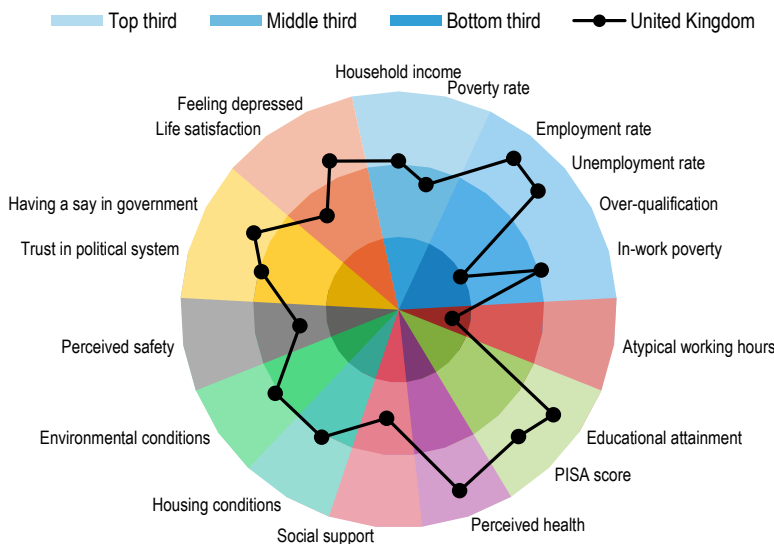


How is migrants' well-being in the United Kingdom?

Compared with the migrant populations of other OECD countries, migrants living in the United Kingdom have a relatively good situation for 11 out of 18 selected well-being indicators. Moreover, migrants settled in the United Kingdom rank in the middle third of OECD-country migrants for poverty, social support, perceived safety, life satisfaction and trust in the political system. They are in the bottom third for over-qualification and atypical working hours.

As in many other OECD countries, migrants in the United Kingdom tend to experience lower well-being outcomes than the native-born population: in the United Kingdom, this is the case for 8 out of 14 selected well-being indicators. However, migrants in the United Kingdom report the same levels of household income, wealth and feeling depressed as the native-born population, while they report higher levels of trust in the political system and perceived health than the native-born, as well as being more likely to say they feel they have a say in government.

Comparing well-being outcomes for migrants in the United Kingdom with the migrant populations of other OECD countries



Comparison of migrants' and native-born well-being in the United Kingdom

	Migrants have a worse situation	Same situation	Migrants have a better situation
Household income		▲	
Wealth		▲	
Atypical working hours	▲		
Literacy scores	▲		
PISA score	▲		
Perceived health			▲
Social support	▲		
Housing conditions	▲		
Environmental conditions	▲		
Perceived safety	▲		
Trust in political system			▲
Having a say in government			▲
Life satisfaction	▲		
Feeling depressed		▲	

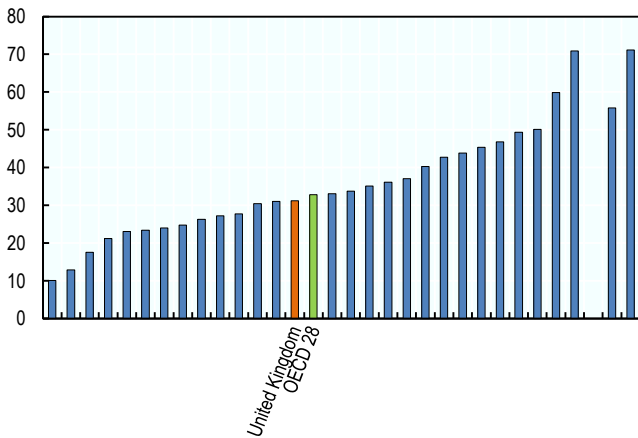
GOVERNANCE AND WELL-BEING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Public institutions play an important role in well-being, both by guaranteeing that people’s fundamental rights are protected, and by ensuring the provision of goods and services necessary for people to thrive and prosper. How people experience and engage with public institutions also matters: people’s political voice, agency and representation are outcomes of value in their own right.

Just over 31% of British people aged 16-65 feel that they have a say in what the government does, close to the OECD average of 33%. Voter turnout in the United Kingdom has increased in recent years, with almost 69% of eligible voters casting a ballot in 2017, compared to 61% in 2005. When asked about whether or not corruption is widespread across government, 44% of British people answered "yes", as compared to an OECD average of 56%. Since around 2006, the share of people in the OECD who report that they have confidence in their national government has fallen from 42% to 38%.

Having a say in what the government does

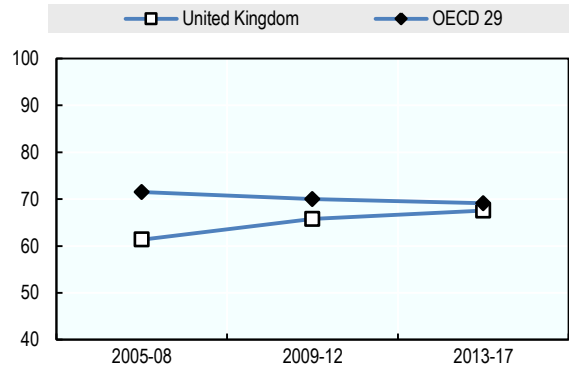
Percentage of people aged 16-65 who feel that they have a say in what the government does, around 2012



Source: OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC database).

Voter turnout

Percentage of votes cast among the population registered to vote



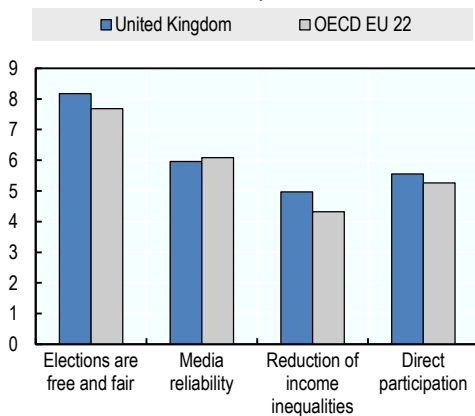
Note: Data refers to parliamentary elections. If more than one election took place over the time period indicated, the simple average voter turnout from all elections is shown. The OECD average sums elections that occurred over the time periods shown in 29 OECD countries.

Source: IDEA dataset

Similar to elsewhere in Europe, satisfaction with the way democracy works in the United Kingdom depends on which aspect of democracy is considered. British people tend to be relatively satisfied with the freedom and fairness of elections (8.2 on a 0-10 scale), while they are slightly less satisfied with policies to reduce inequalities (5.0) or the existence of direct participation mechanisms at the local level (5.6). Meanwhile, satisfaction with public services varies according to whether people have used those services in the last year: people that have had direct recent experience of using education and health services tend to be more satisfied than those without. In the United Kingdom, satisfaction with both education and health services is slightly higher than OECD European average levels.

People’s satisfaction with different elements of democracy

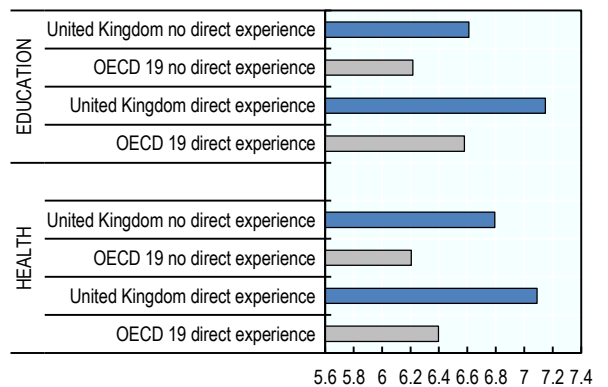
Mean score on a 0-10 scale, with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction with elements of democracy, 2012



Source: OECD calculations based on wave 6 of the European Social Survey (ESS), special rotating module on citizens’ valuations of different elements of democracy.

Satisfaction with public services by direct experience

Mean score on a 0-10 scale, with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction, 2013



Source: OECD calculations based on the EU Quality of Government (QoG) for 19 European OECD countries.

BETTER LIFE INDEX

The **Better Life Index** is an interactive web application that allows users to compare well-being across OECD countries and beyond on the basis of the set of well-being indicators used in *How's Life?*. Users chose what weight to give to each of the eleven dimensions shown below and then see how countries perform, based on their own personal priorities in life.

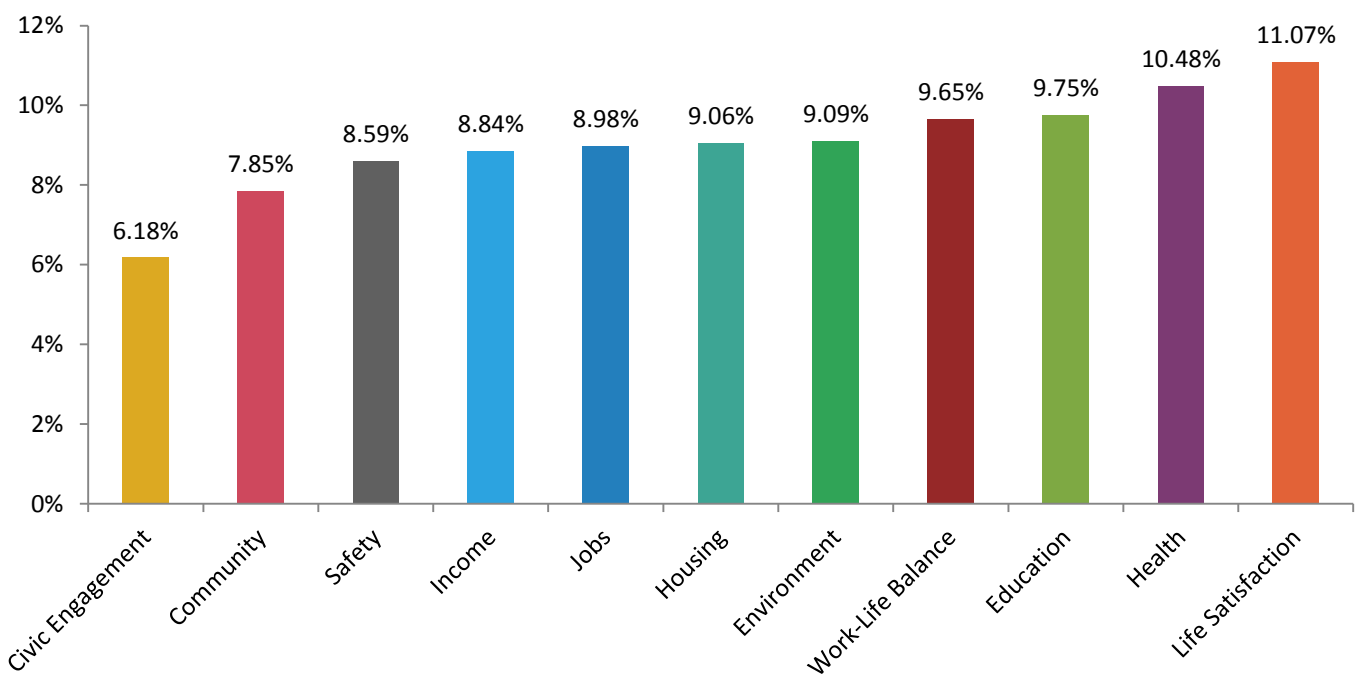


Users can also share their index with other people in their networks, as well as with the OECD. This allows the OECD to gather valuable information on the importance that users attach to various life dimensions, and how these preferences differ across countries and population groups.

WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PEOPLE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM?

Since its launch in May 2011, the Better Life Index has attracted **over ten million visits from just about every country on the planet** and has received over **22 million page views**. To date, over 544,800 people in the UK have visited the website making the UK the 5th country overall in traffic to the website. The top cities are London (36% of visits), Edinburgh, Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow and Sheffield.

The following country findings reflect the ratings voluntarily shared with the OECD by 5,130 website visitors in the United Kingdom. Findings are only indicative and are not representative of the population at large. **For UK users of the Better Life Index, life satisfaction, health and education are the three most important topics** (shown below).¹ Up to date information, including a breakdown of participants in each country by gender and age can be found here: www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/responses/#GBR.



¹ User information for the United Kingdom is based on shared indexes submitted between May 2011 and September 2017.

The **OECD Better Life Initiative**, launched in 2011, focuses on the aspects of life that matter the most to people and that shape the quality of their lives. The Initiative comprises a set of regularly updated well-being indicators and an in-depth analysis of specific topics, published in the *How's Life?* report. It also includes an interactive web application, the *Better Life Index*, and a number of *methodological and research projects* to improve the information base available to understand well-being levels, trends and their drivers.

The OECD Better Life Initiative:

- Helps to inform policy making to improve quality of life.
- Connects policies to people's lives.
- Generates support for needed policy measures.
- Improves civic engagement by encouraging the public to create their own *Better Life Index* and share their preferences about what matters most for well-being
- Empowers the public by improving their understanding of policy-making.

This note presents **selected findings for the United Kingdom from the *How's Life? 2017* report** (pages 1-6) and shows what **UK users of the Better Life Index** are telling us about their **well-being priorities** (page 7).

HOW'S LIFE?



How's Life?, published every two years, provides a comprehensive picture of well-being in OECD and selected partner countries by bringing together an internationally comparable set of well-being indicators. It considers eleven dimensions of current well-being including: income and wealth; jobs and earnings; housing; health status; work-life balance; education and skills; social connections; civic engagement and governance; environmental quality; personal security; and subjective well-being. It also looks at four types of resources that help to sustain well-being over time: natural, human, economic and social capital.

The *How's Life? 2017* report presents the latest data on well-being in OECD and partner countries, including how lives have changed since 2005. It includes a special focus on inequalities, the well-being of migrants in OECD countries, and the issue of governance – particularly how people experience and engage with public institutions. To read more, visit: www.oecd.org/howslife.

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