

Quality of life indicators - natural and living environment

Statistics Explained

Data from March 2025
Planned article update: May 2027

Highlights

" In 2023, almost 1 in 5 city dwellers compared to 1 in 10 in rural areas in the EU felt grime, pollution or other environmental issues were a problem for their household. "

" In 2023, more than 1 in 6 people in the EU felt noise from neighbours or from the street was a problem for their household. "

" In the EU, the proportion of people who felt pollution, grime or other environmental issues were a problem for their household decreased by 3.0 percentage points between 2010 and 2023. "

" In 2023, the proportion of people at risk of poverty in the EU who felt environmental issues were a problem was on average 2.2% higher than that of people not at risk of poverty regarding pollution and grime and 3.5% higher than that of people not at risk of poverty regarding noise pollution. "

This article is part of a [Eurostat](#) online publication on [quality of life indicators](#) . The publication presents a detailed analysis of various dimensions that can form the basis of 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. The focus of this article is dimension 8 — **natural and living environment** — of the 9 dimensions which form a framework endorsed by an [expert group on quality of life indicators](#) . Although the environment is usually discussed within the context of sustainability, it is equally important for an individual's quality of life. Environmental conditions not only affect human health and well-being directly, but also indirectly, as they may have adverse effects on ecosystems and biodiversity, or even more extreme consequences such as natural disasters or industrial accidents. Environmental indicators are relatively abundant. However, they are often too specific to assess their direct impact on the individual's quality of life. That said, some environmental indicators, especially those that analyse an individual's assessment of their environment, might provide valuable information in this respect. The information below presents indicators for self-reported exposure to pollution, grime and noise.

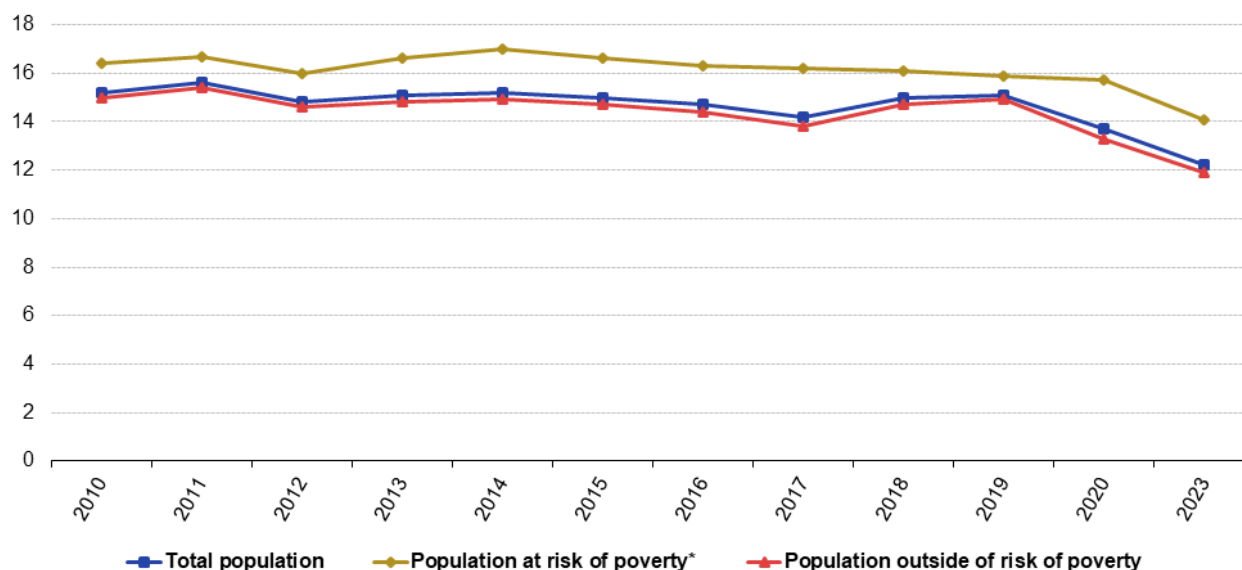
Pollution, grime or other environmental problems

On average, 12.2% of the EU population felt pollution, grime or environmental issues were a problem for their household, ranging from 34.7% in Malta to 4.2% in Croatia in 2023.

The proportion of the EU population that felt pollution, grime or other environmental issues were a problem for their household decreased from 15.2% in 2010 to 12.2% in 2023 (see Figure 1). People at risk of poverty consistently reported higher exposure to pollution, grime or other environmental problems. The difference between those at risk of poverty and those not at risk of poverty ranged from 1.0 [percentage point](#) (pp) in 2019 to 2.4 pp in 2017 and 2020. In 2023, the proportion of people at risk of poverty reporting exposure to pollution, grime or other environmental issues was 2.2 pp higher compared to that of those not at risk of poverty.

Population reporting exposure to pollution, grime or other environmental problems, EU, 2010-2023

(%)



*People living below the national poverty threshold (60% of median equivalised income).
All data are estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_mddw02)

eurostat

Figure 1: Population reporting exposure to pollution, grime or other environmental problems, EU, 2010-2023 (%) Source: Eurostat (ilc_mddw02)

These averages, however, conceal considerable variations between different EU countries. In 2023, as in recent years, Malta recorded by far the highest share of (34.7%) of population reporting exposure to pollution, grime or other environmental problems were a problem for their household followed by Greece (20.5%), Germany (16.8%) and France (16.0%). At the other end of the scale, Croatia, Sweden, Slovakia and Poland recorded the lowest shares (4.2%, 5.0%, 5.8% and 7.1%, respectively).

As noted, the proportion of people at risk of poverty who reported being exposed to pollution, grime or other environmental problems was higher than the average for people not at risk of poverty: 14.1% compared to 11.9%. This was the case in most EU countries, however not in all (see Figure 2).

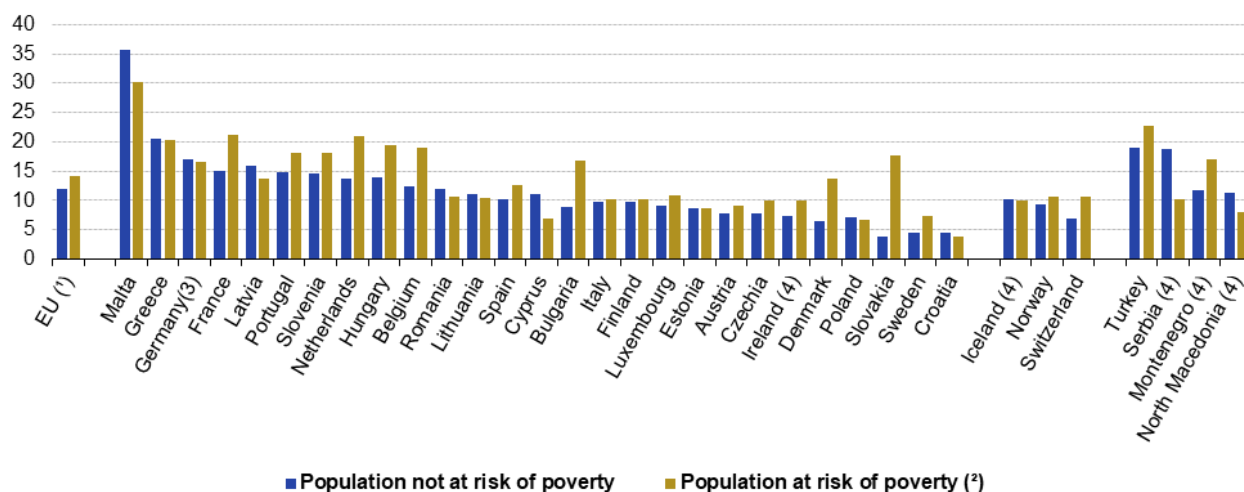
In 2023:

- the largest differences were observed in Slovakia, where 17.6% of the population at risk of poverty felt pollution was a problem compared to 3.8% of the population not at risk of poverty, as well as Bulgaria (16.8% compared to 8.8%), Denmark (13.8% compared to 6.4%), and the Netherlands (21.0% compared to 13.8%).
- there were 9 EU countries where the proportion of people at risk of poverty who felt pollution, grime or other environmental issues were a problem was lower than the proportion of those not at risk of poverty who felt these same issues were a problem. These included Malta (5.5 pp lower), Cyprus (4.3 pp lower), Latvia (2.2 pp lower) and Romania (1.4 pp lower).

The different situations among EU countries may reflect, at least to some degree, the at-risk-poverty population distributions across the various levels of urbanisation. In some countries these are concentrated in cities (where pollution, grime and other environmental problems may be greater), while in other regions it is more common to find people at risk of poverty living in rural areas (that are generally characterised by lower levels of pollution, grime and environmental problems).¹

¹In 2023, 19.5% of the population was at risk of poverty in cities in Belgium, compared to 10.9% in rural areas. On the other hand, in Romania this was the case for 6% of those living in cities and 35.5% of those living in rural areas (see Eurostat data table with online data code ilc_li43).

Population reporting exposure to pollution, grime or other environmental problems, by income situation, 2023 (%)



(*) Estimate.

(2) People living below the national poverty threshold (60% of median equivalised income).

(3) Low reliability.

(4) Data from 2020 instead of 2023.

Ranked by total population.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_mddw02)

eurostat

Figure 2: Population reporting exposure to pollution, grime or other environmental problems, by income situation, 2023 (%) Source: Eurostat (ilc_mddw02)

Pollution, grime or other environmental problems by degree of urbanisation

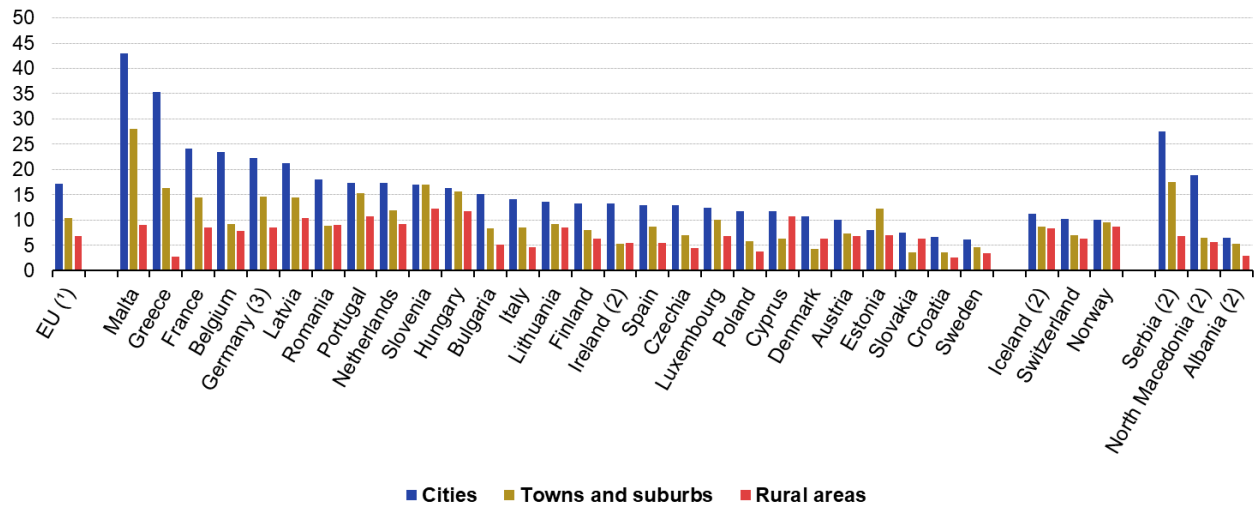
The following differences can be observed for the self-reported exposure to pollution, grime or other environmental problems by [degree of urbanisation](#) (as shown by Figure 3):

- In 2023, in Malta and France more than 1 in 3 city dwellers felt that pollution, grime or other environmental issues were a problem for their household.
- In 6 EU countries (down from 8 in 2020) more than 20% of their city population felt they were affected by environmental problems, while in 17 more countries this rate was between 10 and 20%.
- In 4 EU countries, this share was less than 10% of their city population. These were Sweden (6.2%), Croatia (6.7%), Slovakia (7.6%) and Estonia (8.1%). * In 22 EU countries less than 10% of the population living in rural areas felt pollution, grime or other environmental problems were an issue for their household.
- The lowest shares of people living in rural areas who reported pollution, grime or other environmental problems were an issue for them were in Croatia (2.7%), Greece (2.8%) and Sweden (3.4%).
- In 5 EU countries (down from 7 in 2020), the proportion was higher than 10% of rural dwellers.
- The highest shares of people living in rural areas who reported pollution, grime or other environmental problems were an issue for them were in Slovenia (12.3%), Hungary (11.7%) and Cyprus (10.8%).
- In towns and suburbs, the proportion of those who felt pollution, grime and other environmental problems were an issue for their household ranged from 28.1% in Malta to 3.6% in Croatia.

At EU level, city dwellers are more likely to feel affected by these problems than people living in rural areas. The difference can be quite substantial in terms of percentage points, reaching 33.8 pp in Malta, 32.5 pp in Greece, 15.7 pp in Belgium and 15.5 pp in France (difference computed between cities and rural areas). The countries with the least difference between people living in cities and those living in rural areas were Cyprus (0.9 pp), Estonia (1.0 pp), and Slovakia (1.3 pp).

Population reporting exposure to pollution, grime or other environmental problems, by degree of urbanisation, 2023 (%)

(%)



(*) Estimate.

(2) 2020 instead of 2023

(3) Low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_mddw05)

eurostat

Figure 3: Population reporting exposure to pollution, grime or other environmental problems, by degree of urbanisation, 2023 (%) Source: Eurostat (ilc_mddw05)

Noise pollution from neighbours or from the street

In 2023, 18.2% of the EU population felt that noise pollution from neighbours or the street was a problem for their household. This is 2.4 pp lower than in 2010.

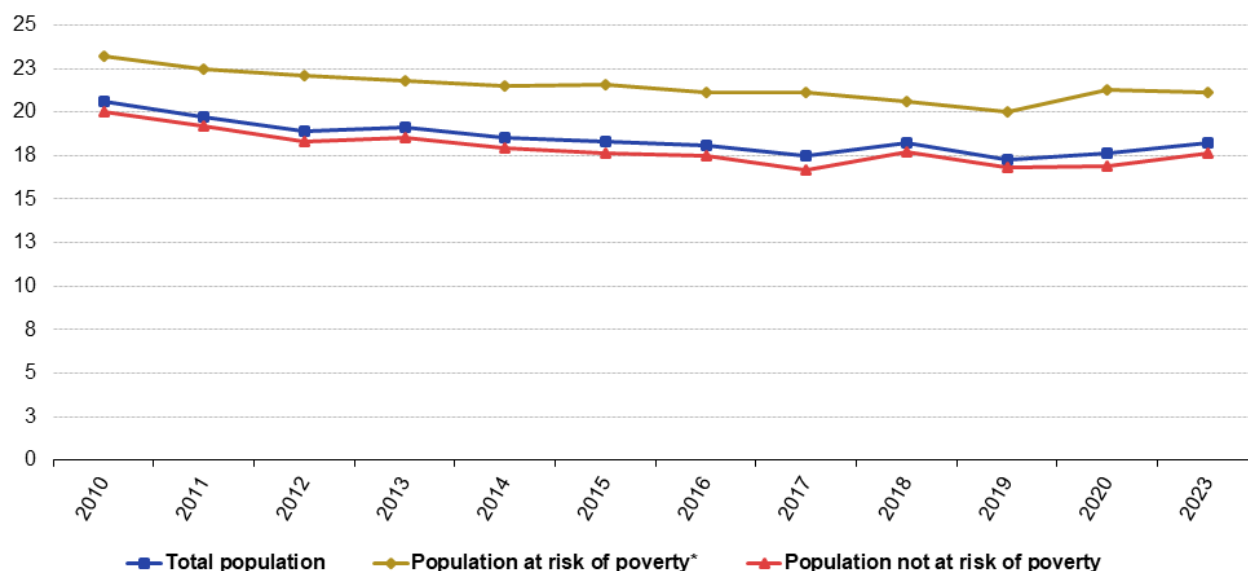
Noise pollution provides one measure of the effect that noise may have on an individual's quality of life. It is formally defined as exposure to ambient sound levels that are beyond usual comfort levels. The information that follows is based on self-reported disturbance from noise originating from neighbours or the street.

In 2010, more than one fifth (20.6%) of the EU population felt that exposure to noise pollution was a problem for their household (see Figure 4). In 2023, this share was 18.2%, a decrease of 2.4 pp from 2010.

People at risk of poverty consistently reported higher levels of exposure to noise than people not at risk of poverty. This difference ranged from 2.9 pp in 2018 to 4.4 pp in 2017 and 2020.

Population reporting exposure to noise from neighbours or from the street, EU, 2010 - 2023

(%)



*People living below the national poverty threshold (60% of median equivalised income).

All data are estimates

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_mddw01)

eurostat 

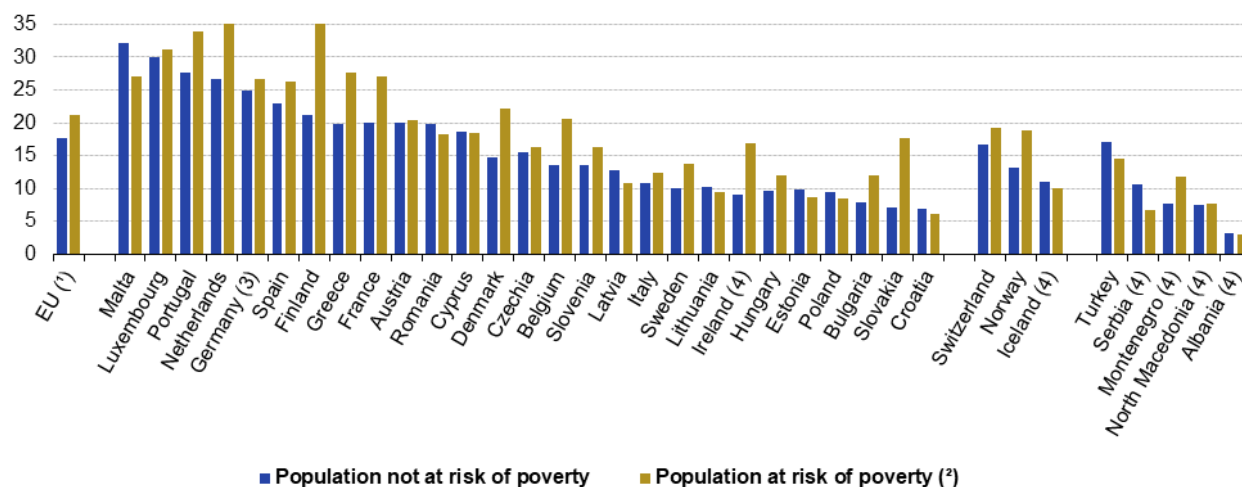
Figure 4: Population reporting exposure to noise from neighbours or from the street, EU, 2010 - 2023 (%)
Source: Eurostat (ilc_mddw01)

Across the EU countries, in 2023, the share of the population who felt that noise from neighbours or from the street was a problem was the highest in Malta (31.3%), Luxembourg (30.2%), Portugal (28.7%) and the Netherlands (28.2%). The lowest shares were in Croatia (6.7%), Slovakia (8.6%) and Bulgaria (8.7%).

In 2023, more than one fifth (21.1%) of the population at risk of poverty felt that noise from neighbours or from the street was a problem for their household. At EU level, people at risk of poverty were, on average, 3.5 pp more likely to experience this issue compared to people not at risk of poverty. This was the case in most EU countries, with the biggest differences reported in Finland (difference of 14.2 pp), the Netherlands (difference of 11.9 pp) and Slovakia (difference of 10.5 pp). There were 8 EU countries where the reported exposure to noise for the population at risk of poverty did not exceed the share reported by those not at risk of poverty, particularly Malta (-5.1 pp), Latvia (-2.0 pp) and Romania (-1.5 pp).

Population reporting exposure to noise from neighbours or from the street, by income situation, 2023

(%)



(1) Estimate.

(2) People living below the national poverty threshold (60% of median equivalised income).

(3) Low reliability.

(4) 2020 instead of 2023

Ranked by total population.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_mddw01)

eurostat

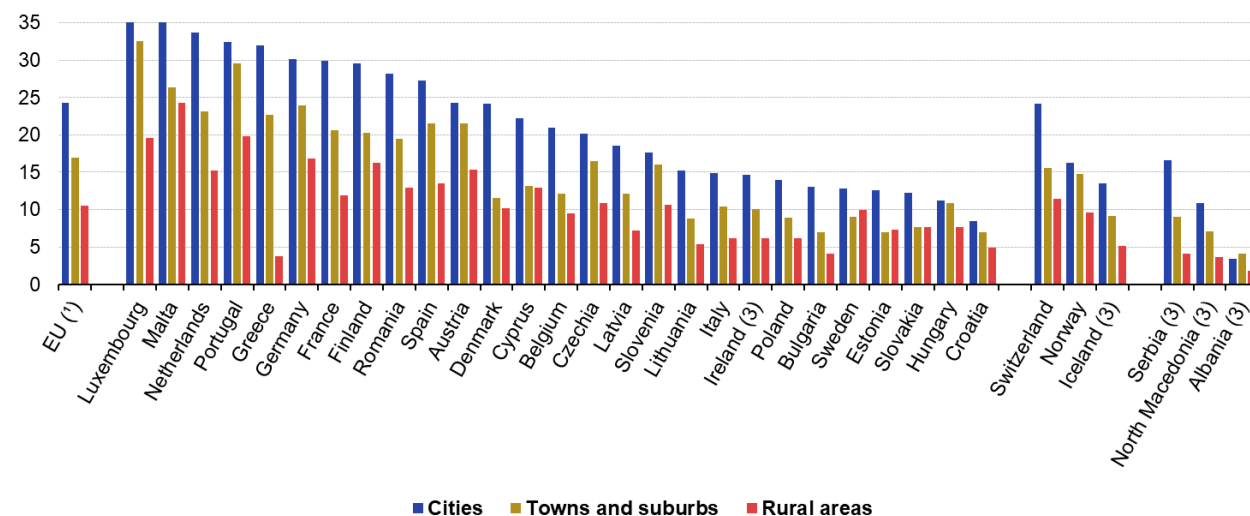
Figure 5: Population reporting noise from neighbours or from the street, by income situation, 2023 (%)
Source: Eurostat (ilc_mddw01)

Noise pollution from neighbours or the street by degree of urbanisation

In 2023, in the EU, 24.3% of people living in cities felt that noise from neighbours or from the street was a problem for their household, compared to 16.9% in towns and suburbs and 10.5% in rural areas (see Figure 6).

There were 6 EU countries where more than 30% of city dwellers felt affected by the problem, namely Luxembourg (42.4%), Malta (36.7%), the Netherlands (33.7%) and Portugal (32.4%). The lowest shares of people living in cities who felt affected by noise were in Croatia (8.5%), Hungary (11.2%) and Slovakia (12.2%). In all EU, EFTA and EU candidate countries, larger shares of city dwellers than people living in rural areas felt noise pollution was a problem. The difference was highest in Greece (28.3 pp), followed by Luxembourg (22.8 pp), the Netherlands (18.5 pp) and France (18.0 pp). In 9 EU countries, the differences were above 10 pp. The smallest differences were reported in Sweden (2.9 pp), Hungary (3.5 pp) and Croatia (3.6 pp).

Population reporting noise from neighbours or from the street, by degree of urbanisation, 2023 (%)



(1) Estimate.

(2) Low reliability.

(3) 2020 instead of 2023.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc_mddw04)

eurostat

Figure 6: Population reporting noise from neighbours or from the street, by degree of urbanisation, 2023 (%)
Source: Eurostat (ilc_mddw04)

Source data for tables and graphs

- [Quality of life — Natural and living environment](#)

Data sources

The variables used for calculating the indicators presented in this article are from the [EU-SILC 2023 three-yearly module 'Labour market and housing'](#), which collects data on respondents' employment and housing conditions. An individual's quality of life is strongly affected by inherently local environmental factors. Therefore, an effective analysis of the quality of life can be provided through surveys that collect information based on self-reporting of subjectively perceived environmental issues, rather than on aggregated measures of environmental conditions (air pollution or emissions). [EU statistics on income and living conditions \(EU-SILC\)](#).

Context

The natural and living environment dimension of the quality-of-life framework refers to environmental aspects that effect an individual's quality of life. Environmental conditions affect human health, well-being and other quality of life aspects, both directly, e.g. through pollution, and indirectly, e.g. by affecting property prices that could in turn affect an individual's economic prosperity. At the same time, growing environmental awareness means that an increasing proportion of the EU's population value their rights to access (often intangible) environmental resources. These types of indicators are also included within the [sustainable development goals monitoring framework](#).

The [8th environmental action programme \(EAP\)](#) entered into force on 2 May 2022, as the EU's legally agreed common agenda for environment policy until 2030. Its key objectives are to: i) protect, conserve and increase the EU's natural capital; ii) turn the EU's economy into one that is resource-efficient, green and competitive, low-carbon and circular (reduce green gas emissions); and iii) safeguard EU citizens from environmental pressures that present a risk to health and well-being.

Within its action programme, the EU has committed to reduce noise pollution considerably, for example, by changing the way cities are designed or reducing noise at source. The Environmental Noise Directive ([Directive 0049/2002/EC](#)) is the EU's main policy instrument to assess and manage environmental noise. It does not apply to noise from domestic activities, created by neighbours, at work places or inside means of transport.

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Explore further

Other articles

- [Air pollution statistics - air emissions accounts](#)
- [Living conditions in Europe - housing](#)
- [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 - detailed datasets \(ilc\)](#) , see:

Material deprivation (ilc_md)

Environment of the dwelling (ilc_mddw)

EU-SILC ad-hoc modules (ilc_ahm)

2014 — Material deprivation (ilc_mdm)

2013 — Personal well-being indicators (ilc_pwb)

2012 — Housing conditions (ilc_hcm)

Thematic section

- [Quality of life](#)
- [Sustainable development goals](#)

Publications

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

Selected datasets

- [Income and living conditions - selected datasets \(t_ilc\)](#) , see:

Material deprivation (t_ilc_md)

Environment of the dwelling (t_ilc_mddw)

- [Sustainable development goals](#) , see:

Goal 3 — Good health and well-being (sdg_03)

Goal 11 — Sustainable cities and communities (sdg_11)

Goal 12 — Responsible consumption and production (sdg_12)

Goal 13 — Climate action (sdg_13)