

Under embargo until: Thursday 29th September, 2011

QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE UK NOW WORST IN EUROPE

The UK is now officially the worst place to live in Europe, while France and Spain come out on top, according to the latest uSwitch.com Quality of Life Index^[1]. Despite enjoying the fourth highest income in Europe, people in the UK are getting a raw deal compared with their European neighbours. And things are getting so bad that one in ten (12%) are seriously considering emigrating^[19]:

- **The UK falls to the bottom of the table while the best quality of life can be found in France for the third year in a row^[1]**
- **Households in the UK struggle with a high cost of living, with food^[14] and diesel^[10] prices the highest in Europe. Unleaded petrol^[10], alcohol^[13] and cigarettes^[15] all cost more than the European average**
- **Those in the UK now have the lowest holiday entitlement in Europe^[7] as well as having one of the highest retirement ages^[6]**
- **“Broken society” is the biggest concern for people in the UK (59%). Other key concerns include the cost of living (49%) while crime and violence comes third (47%). Just 5% are happy in the UK^[17]**
- **More than one in ten people in the UK (12%) are seriously thinking about emigrating^[19].**

The UK now has the lowest quality of life in Europe, according to the latest uSwitch.com Quality of Life Index^[1]. High living costs, less holidays and later retirement have contributed to the UK slipping to the very bottom of the list. And its decline hasn't gone unnoticed – one in ten people in the UK (12%) are seriously considering emigrating^[19].

The uSwitch.com study examined 16 factors including net income, VAT and the cost of essential goods, such as fuel, food and energy bills, as well as lifestyle factors such as hours of sunshine, holiday entitlement, working hours and life expectancy, to provide a complete picture of the quality of life experienced in each country.

The findings show that people in the UK have the poorest quality of life, while the French and Spanish enjoy the highest. In fact France has topped the index for the third year in a row, despite the average household annual net income being just £31,767 - nearly £7,000 below that of the UK^[2]. The UK only lags behind the Netherlands, Ireland and Denmark when it comes to net household income, but long working hours^[4], the lowest number of days holiday a year^[7] and a high retirement age^[6] paint a bleak picture for those in the UK. We also suffer the most expensive food^[14] and diesel prices^[10], along with higher than average petrol costs^[10], while enjoying almost the lowest amount of sunshine^[5].

But the gloomy weather is not the only thing making life in the UK miserable. Those living here have a number of serious concerns some of which were highlighted by the recent riots. In fact, the “broken society” was cited as the worst thing about living in the UK at the moment^[17]. When asked for the top five worst things about living in the UK, 59% said “broken society”, 49% said the cost of living and 47% said crime and violence. Just 5% said they were happy in the UK^[17].

As a result, one in ten people in the UK (12%) are seriously considering emigrating^[19]. And even those who are staying put are not necessarily doing so because they wish to – a quarter (24%) say that although they may not be happy in the UK, they couldn't leave their friends and family^[19].

As well as topping the Quality of Life league, France and Spain are also where people in the UK would most like to live. 13% of people said that if they could live in any European country they would prefer to siesta in Spain, while 7% chose France^[18]. The Spanish can expect to live a year longer than people in the UK^[16] and enjoy the highest number of days holiday in Europe^[7] – an impressive 39 days, while a drink on your day off would be cheap too – the Spanish get to enjoy the lowest prices for alcohol^[13]. And to top it all off, the country enjoys the most sunshine^[5].

Ann Robinson, Director of Consumer Policy at uSwitch.com, says: “Last year at least our neighbours in Ireland were worse off, now we can't even console ourselves with that. We are now officially at the bottom of the pile. We may still be enjoying the fourth highest household income in Europe, but the high cost of living means that we're living to work. When coupled with many of the issues facing households in the UK today it's not surprising that one in ten of us (12%) have contemplated starting a new life abroad.

“But for those of us who decide to stick it out and ride the storm, there will be no choice but to batten down the hatches. Cutting back where possible to help combat our high living costs will go some way to improving our quality of life. This may be the only way to steer through these turbulent times until we reach a point where we can start to see our quality of life improve.”

Rank	Countries	Score total	Net household income after taxes (GBP) [2]	VAT - Goods and Services (%) [3]	Average working hours (hours per week) [4]	Hours of sunshine (hours per year) [5]	Retirement Age (Years) [6]	Number of holidays (days per year) [7]	Education spending (% of GDP) [8]	Health spending (% of GDP) [9]
1	France	8.21	£31,767	19.60%	38.0	2,124	60.0	36	5.70%	14.10%
2	Spain	6.46	£23,398	18.00%	38.6	2,559	62.3	39	4.40%	11.60%
3	Italy	2.54	£25,601	20.00%	37.8	2,409	60.1	31	5.00%	11.60%
4	Netherlands	2.25	£39,688	19.00%	30.6	1,424	63.5	31	5.00%	12.00%
5	Germany	0.91	£35,516	19.00%	35.7	1,580	62.2	29	4.60%	12.80%
6	Denmark	-0.57	£39,221	25.00%	33.5	1,524	62.3	36	8.40%	12.60%
7	Poland	-0.60	£8,759	23.00%	40.6	1,514	59.3	38	5.60%	9.60%
8	Sweden	-5.11	£36,526	25.00%	36.5	1,697	64.3	38	7.60%	10.90%
9	Ireland	-5.31	£42,447	21.00%	35.0	1,341	64.1	29	4.30%	13.50%
10	UK	-8.77	£38,547	20.00%	36.4	1,387	63.0	28	4.80%	11.20%
	Average		£32,147	20.96%	36.3	1,756	62.1	33.5	5.54%	11.99%

Rank	Countries	Fuel - Unleaded Gasoline (GBP per litre) [10]	Fuel - Diesel (GBP per litre) [10]	Cost of Gas (GBP per GJ) [11]	Cost of Electricity (GBP per kWh) [12]	Alcohol Prices (GBP - Index) [13]	Food Prices (GBP) [14]	Cigarette Prices (GBP per 20 Pack) [15]	Life Expectancy (years) [16]
1	France	£1.31	£1.15	£10.52	£0.08	£82.37	£120.78	£5.12	81.4
2	Spain	£1.15	£1.09	£10.98	£0.12	£62.93	£124.54	£3.47	81.9
3	Italy	£1.33	£1.23	£8.97	£0.11	£86.31	£125.22	£3.99	81.6
4	Netherlands	£1.43	£1.16	£9.61	£0.11	£85.49	£122.51	£4.38	80.8
5	Germany	£1.33	£1.20	£9.91	£0.12	£68.48	£123.88	£4.47	80.2
6	Denmark	£1.40	£1.22	£12.54	£0.10	£96.61	£130.09	£4.97	78.9
7	Poland	£1.10	£1.07	£8.31	£0.09	£93.03	£137.72	£2.84	76.2
8	Sweden	£1.35	£1.31	£14.13	£0.10	£122.78	£126.78	£5.71	81.7
9	Ireland	£1.28	£1.22	£10.37	£0.14	£139.25	£112.62	£7.41	79.8
10	UK	£1.33	£1.38	£9.21	£0.11	£114.65	£145.30	£6.95	80.4
	Average	£1.30	£1.20	£10.46	£0.11	£95.19	£126.94	£4.93	80.29

Source: uSwitch.com

For more information visit www.uSwitch.com or call 0800 093 06 07

-Ends-

For further information please contact:

Katherine Cooper, uSwitch.com on 020 7802 2961 or katherinecooper@uswitch.com

Anna Schirmer, Lansons Communications on 0207 294 3605 or annas@lansons.com

John Diviney, Lansons Communications on 0207 294 3696 or johnd@lansons.com

Follow the uSwitch.com PR team on Twitter: [@uswitchPR](https://twitter.com/uswitchPR)

Notes to editors:

1. Quality of Life Index –Opinium Research carried out an online survey of 2,036 UK adults aged 18+ from 26th to 29th August 2011. Results have been weighted to nationally representative criteria with further analysis conducted by uSwitch.com based on the below standardisation methodology:
A standardised score for each variable across each country was calculated based on the following:
Standardised score = (raw score - average)/standard deviation. For example, average net income across all countries is £32,147 and the standard deviation (average distance from the mean) was £10,280. Net income in Denmark is £39,221. Standardised score = (39,221 – 32,147)/ 10,280= 0.69. As this represents the distance between the raw score and the average, when the standardised score is negative, the raw score falls below the mean, and when positive, the score falls above. Overall Quality of Life is defined as the sum of the standardised scores.
2. Net Income after Tax: Source: OECD 'Taxing Wages' Report 2010; Net income after taxes (in GBP) - Two-earner married couple, one at 100% of average earnings and the other at 33%, 2 children
3. VAT: Standard VAT rates: Source: Eurostat
4. Average Working Hours: Source: OECD
5. Hours of Sunshine: Number of hours of sunshine per month. Source: German Met Office 'World Dataset' (except for Poland: www.solarventi.com)
6. Retirement Age: Average exit age from the labour market; Source: Eurostat
7. Holidays per Year: Holiday entitlements are a sum of statutory minimum holidays and public holidays in days per year. Source: Mercer Human Resource Consulting, Eurostat, Federation of European Employers
8. Education spending, % of GDP: Source: Pocket World of Figures 2011 edition – The Economist
9. Health spending, % of GDP: Source: World Health Organisation; Euromonitor database
10. Cost of Fuel – Petrol and Diesel: Cost of Unleaded Petrol per litre in GBP, average for first seven months of 2011; Cost of Diesel per litre in GBP, average for first seven months of 2011; Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Energy
11. Cost of Gas: Average national price without tax for first half of 2010 for medium size household; Source: Eurostat
12. Cost of Electricity: Average national price without tax for first half of 2010 for medium size household; Source: Eurostat
13. Cost of Alcohol: Harmonised consumer prices; Alcoholic beverages. Includes wine and beer; Source: Eurostat
14. Cost of Food: Harmonised consumer prices based on the following basket of food: Bread and cereals, meat (total), fish and seafood, milk, cheese, eggs, fats and oils, fruit, vegetables, sugar, jam, honey, chocolate and confectionary, food products; Source: Eurostat
15. Cost of Cigarettes': Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union
16. Life expectancy: Source: World Bank; Euromonitor database
17. Research carried out by Opinium Research. Sample size of 2,036 Nationally Representative (UK adults aged 18+) between 26th and 29th August 2011. When asked "What is the worst thing about living in the UK? (please rank from 1 – 15, where 1 is the worst)" 59% ranked "Broken society" in the top 5; 49% said "cost of living"; 47% ranked "crime and violence" in the top 5.; 5% said "none of these – I'm happy in the UK"
18. "If you could live in any of the following European countries, which would you chose?" 13% said Spain; 7% said France, 6% said Italy

19. "Have you ever thought about emigrating?" 2% said "Yes, I plan to do so soon"; 10% said "Yes, I'm seriously thinking about it"; 29% said "Yes, but it's only a dream"; 27% said "No, I am happy living in the UK"; 13% said "No, I'm may not be happy here, but I couldn't leave my friends and family". In total, 46% said "yes".

About us:

uSwitch.com is a free, impartial, online and telephone-based comparison and switching service, helping consumers compare prices on gas, electricity, water, heating cover, home telephone, broadband, digital television, mobile phones and personal finance products including mortgages, credit cards, current accounts and insurance. In 2010 uSwitch.com celebrated ten years of saving customers money.

uSwitch.com is the first comparison website to achieve the Plain English Campaign's Internet Crystal Mark, which is recognised as a standard that a website has clear language, is accessible and easy to use, and has been tested on a sample of its users.

uSwitch.com is dedicated to helping consumers save money whether they have internet access or not. It offers a dedicated call centre, manned by uSwitch customer service representatives, as well as a freepost 'Send us your bill' service, whereby customers can post their latest energy bills with their telephone number to FREEPOST USWITCH, to get a free call back from a dedicated customer services representative. The service is also available via fax, email and post. Consumers should fax 0203 214 8417, email CustomerServices@uswitch.com or write to Customer Services, uSwitch.com, Centro 3, 19 Mandela Street, London, NW1 0DU with their postcode and usage details.

uSwitch.com is owned by Forward Internet Group Limited, a privately funded collection of internet-based businesses focused on consumer engagement and innovation.