

LEISURE TIME

The time that people devote to leisure activities is a key dimension of their quality of life, on par with the goods and services that they consume. Because of this, a long tradition of research has aimed at assessing the importance of leisure time for cross-country comparisons of quality of life and living standards.

Definition

The measures of the quantity of leisure time presented here are based on information drawn from national and international Time Use Surveys. Participants to these surveys fill diaries over a number of days. Information from these diaries is then aggregated into a standard activity classification, with the sum of minutes spent in various (primary) activities summing to 24 hours per day.

Time-use data from national surveys have been re-coded by the OECD to a common classification based on the five main categories of “paid work and study”; “home production”; “personal care”; “leisure activities”; and “other activities not classified elsewhere”. Adjustments have been made to account for cross-country differences in the age of people covered by the various national surveys. Finally, to account for differences across countries in time devoted to personal care, this has been set equal to the amount devoted to this activity in the country where this is lowest (Norway); the excess of daily time that residents of some countries devote to personal care has been added to leisure.

Overview

On average, across the countries considered here, people aged 15 and over spent 25% of their time during a typical day in leisure activity (as compared to 43% in personal care, 17% in paid work or study, 15% in unpaid work). The share of time devoted to leisure was lowest in Mexico (below 20%) and highest in Germany and Belgium (at 28%). The amount of leisure time is generally higher in European countries than elsewhere, although differences are not high.

Except in Norway, men spent the same or more time in leisure activities than women, reflecting the “double burden” that falls on women that cumulate paid and unpaid work. This gender gap in leisure time is highest in Italy (6 points) followed by Mexico and Poland, while it is nil in such countries as Canada and New Zealand. Leisure time declines when moving from youths (15 to 24) to young adults (aged 25 to 44) and then rises among prime aged (45 to 64) and, especially, elderly people (65 and over), with a similar U-shaped relation between age and leisure holding in all countries.

Watching TV and listening to the radio at home are the dominant type of leisure activity, especially in Mexico and Japan, where this share is around 50%. Other leisure activities (various hobbies, naps, Internet use, phone conversations, etc.) is the second most important category, on average, followed, at a distance, by visiting and entertaining friends, participating and attending events, and active sports.

Comparability

Comparability of time-use data is low, due to differences in survey-design and characteristics. Surveys differ, for example, in terms of whether they are conducted throughout the year or limited to a specific week; the number of diaries that are collected from each participant; the information collected on the setting where various activities take place (e.g. at home or outside, with or without other people); and whether information on “secondary activities” (i.e. activities performed simultaneously, such as watching television while caring for one’s child) is collected. Data refer to 2006 for Australia, Japan and Turkey; 2005 for Belgium, Canada and the United States; 2004 for Korea and Poland; 2003 for Italy and Spain; 2002 for Germany and Mexico; 2001 for Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom; 1999 for New Zealand; and 1998 for Finland and France.

At a conceptual level, the distinction between the various activities implemented in time-use surveys is also partly arbitrary, as (for example) the value of leisure to a person who is involuntarily unemployed differs from that of a person with a rewarding job.

Source

- OECD (2009), *Society at a Glance 2008: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD, Paris.

Further information

Analytical publications

- European Commission (2004), *How Europeans Spend their Time – Everyday Life of Women and Men*, Data 1998-2002, Pocketbooks.

Websites

- Eurostat Harmonized European Time Use Survey, <https://www.testh2.scb.se/tus/tus/>.
- Economic Social Research Council/University of Oxford, Centre for Time Use Research, www.timeuse.org/.



Distribution of leisure time

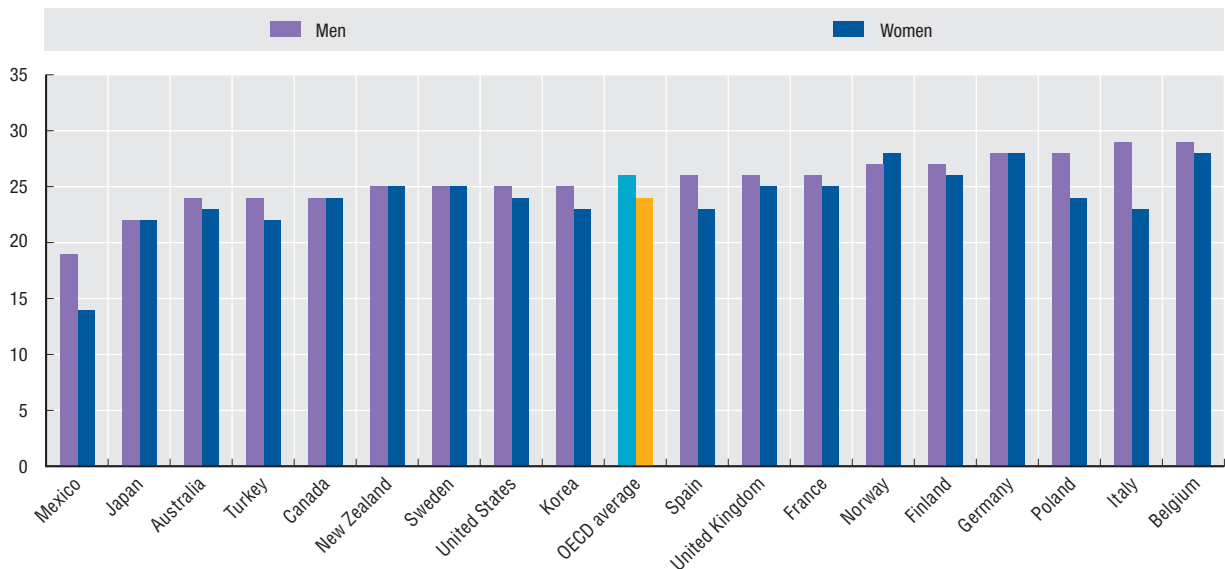
Percentages using a normalised measure of leisure, 2006 or latest available year

	Shares of leisure time by demographic groups						Composition of leisure time by activities					
	Total	Gender		Age				TV or radio at home	Other leisure activities	Visiting or entertaining friends	Participating and attending events	Sports
		Men	Women	15-24	25-44	45-64	65 and over					
Australia	23	24	23	27	17	22	34	41	47	3	2	6
Belgium	28	29	28	28	23	29	38	36	42	8	8	5
Canada	24	24	24	27	18	23	39	34	34	21	2	8
Finland	27	27	26	30	23	27	38	37	40	7	8	8
France	26	26	25	27	22	25	37	34	45	6	7	8
Germany	28	28	28	29	23	29	37	28	46	4	15	7
Italy	26	29	23	30	21	25	37	28	48	6	10	8
Japan	22	22	22	21	16	19	34	47	42	4	0	6
Korea	24	25	23	24	22	25	33	35	41	16	1	7
Mexico	16	19	14	18	11	16	25	48	33	10	4	5
New Zealand	25	25	25	30	20	22	35	25	45	24	2	5
Norway	27	27	28	29	24	28	39	31	33	14	15	8
Poland	25	28	24	28	22	26	39	41	38	6	8	6
Spain	26	26	23	28	20	26	35	31	41	4	12	12
Sweden	25	25	25	29	21	25	38	31	42	7	11	8
Turkey	23	24	22	40	25	34	0	2
United Kingdom	25	26	25	27	22	26	36	41	39	7	10	4
United States	25	25	24	27	20	23	37	44	32	16	2	5
OECD average	25	26	24	27	20	25	36	36	40	11	6	7

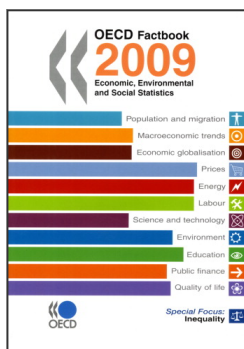
StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/544568030266>

Leisure time in a typical day

Percentages using a normalised measure of leisure, 2006 or latest available year



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/538767417284>



From:
OECD Factbook 2009
Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2009-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2009), "Leisure time", in *OECD Factbook 2009: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/factbook-2009-93-en>

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