

Cities 'better' but behind Europe

England's cities have improved in recent years but still lag behind the top cities in continental Europe, according to a new report.

State of the Cities, an independent report published on Tuesday, shows major towns and cities in England are "recovering after years of decline".

But England's best economically performing city, London, trails behind 22 cities in continental Europe.

The study also looked at fields such as jobs, crime and racial integration.

Unveiling the report, John Prescott said England's cities had made "remarkable progress".

But the Conservative Party's local government spokeswoman said the report showed the government's regeneration programmes had led to "unimaginative design, soul-less communities and an urban vision of mediocrity".

The study was put together for the government by a group of city experts, led by Professor Michael Parkinson of Liverpool John Moores University.

It studied 56 of the largest towns and cities in England, taking into account - among other things - public opinion, academic works, case studies, reviews of international cities and interviews with policy makers.

It is considered to be the most comprehensive study ever undertaken of England's cities and towns - looking at their performance, challenges they face and their potential.

Racial integration improved

The report concluded England's cities were closer to being on a par with Europe's elite than at any other time since the end of the 19th century.

But only London (23rd), Bristol (34th) and Leeds (43rd) are among the 50 European cities with the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while Germany has 21 of the top 50.

Edinburgh is in 25th place and Glasgow 29th.

The report shows the economies of English towns and cities tend to have improved faster than less urban areas, with nine of the cities studied having economic growth rates more than 10% above the national average.

But it found cities in the North and West tended to perform worse than those in the South and East, with the exception of Manchester and Leeds.

The study found that in 2003, cities accounted for 63% of England's jobs, with 58% of the country's population living in cities.

The report also showed that, in 48 of the 56 areas studied, racial integration had improved since the early 1990s.

Only in Blackburn and Norwich was there a "significant" increase.

The growth of London's ethnic minority population accounted for almost half of England's total increase between 1991 and 2001.

The report found England's cities had improved as places to live since the turn of the century, with problems such as crime, graffiti, litter and dog fouling seen as decreasing, and more people happy with parks and urban spaces.

It found employment conditions had improved in some of the poorest cities and towns, with Wigan, Grimsby, Middlesbrough and Hull highlighted as areas where increases in employment has exceeded the national average.

It also showed a narrowing of the gap between poorer neighbourhoods and the rest of England in educational achievement and teenage pregnancy.

'Further to go'

But while health is generally improving and people living longer across England, health is worse in towns and cities than in rural areas, with the exception of London. Men in London and Bristol can expect to live three years longer than men in Liverpool.

The report also found public satisfaction with the performance of local government was low in comparison with most other public services.

Mr Prescott said: "This report, unprecedented in its scope, shows our cities are very much back in business as successful places to live and work.

"People are returning to our towns and cities, which have more jobs, rising prosperity, better public services, and a cleaner, safer, greener environment."

But local government minister David Miliband admitted: "If we want to get into the European Champions League of cities, we have got further to go and that's what we have got to do.

"Our cities, as well as being more prosperous as ever before, remain divided.

"That is something we need to address, because however important transport and skills and universities are, we have also got to carry on that fight against worklessness and social exclusion."

GDP OF 61 CITIES IN EUROPE

RANK	CITY	COUNTRY	EUROS PER PERSON
1	Frankfurt am Main	Germany	74,465
2	Karlsruhe	Germany	70,097
3	Paris	France	67,200
4	Munich	Germany	61,360
5	Düsseldorf	Germany	54,053
6	Stuttgart	Germany	53,570
7	Brussels	Belgium	51,106
8	Copenhagen	Denmark	50,775
9	Hanover	Germany	47,223
10	Hamburg	Germany	43,098
11	Mannheim	Germany	41,674
12	Nuremberg	Germany	41,456
14	Augsburg	Germany	39,360
14	Cologne	Germany	39,108
15	Amsterdam	Netherlands	38,203
16	Münster	Germany	38,149
17	Wiesbaden	Germany	37,454
18	Dublin	Ireland	36,591
19	Vienna	Austria	36,572
20	Stockholm	Sweden	35,733
21	Gelsenkirchen	Germany	35,688
22	Helsinki	Finland	35,322
23	London	UK	35,072
24	Bremen	Germany	35,022
25	Edinburgh	UK	35,018
26	Bonn	Germany	34,112
27	Antwerp	Belgium	33,090
28	Milan	Italy	32,122
29	Glasgow	UK	31,893
30	Utrecht	Netherlands	31,712
31	Saarbrücken	Germany	30,368
32	The Hague	Netherlands	30,110

33	Essen	Germany	29,760
34	Bristol	UK	29,437
35	Lyon	France	28,960
36	Bologna	Italy	28,282
37	Bochum	Germany	27,900
38	Parma	Italy	27,491
39	Dortmund	Germany	26,548
40	Rotterdam	Netherlands	26,227
41	Strasbourg	France	26,015
42	Florence	Italy	25,693
43	Leeds	UK	25,619
44	Duisburg	Germany	25,259
45	Eindhoven	Netherlands	25,226
46	Turin	Italy	25,042
47	Toulouse	France	24,852
48	Rome	Italy	24,766
49	Bordeaux	France	24,252
50	Malmo	Sweden	24,233
51	Gothenberg	Sweden	24,065
52	Grenoble	France	24,026
53	Verona	Italy	23,954
54	Berlin	Germany	23,428
55	Marseilles	France	22,809
56	Birmingham	UK	22,069
57	Manchester	UK	21,099
58	Newcastle-upon-Tyne	UK	20,499
59	Lille	France	20,191
60	Barcelona	Spain	18,449
61	Liverpool	UK	16,466

**Source: State of
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