



“ Understanding and improving wellbeing requires a sound evidence base that can inform policymakers and citizens alike where, when, and for whom life is getting better... To be most useful ... subjective wellbeing data need to be collected with large and representative samples and in a consistent way across different population groups and over time... Subjective wellbeing data can provide an important complement to other indicators already used for monitoring and benchmarking countries' performance... ”

**Martine Durand**

OECD Chief Statistician,  
Director of the OECD Statistics Directorate

Foreword to *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*, 2013

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## INFORMING THE DEBATE ABOUT EUROPEANS' WELLBEING

Questions regarding what constitutes subjective wellbeing and how both individual and societal wellbeing might be improved now occupy a prominent place on research and policy agendas. Cross-national surveys such as the European Social Survey (ESS), which provide high-quality comparative data on public attitudes and behaviour, have an important role to play in answering these questions.

This booklet 'Measuring and reporting on Europeans' Wellbeing' presents findings on Europeans' wellbeing using data from the first six rounds of the ESS. We aim to showcase the scope that ESS data provide for exploring the definition, distribution and drivers of subjective wellbeing across Europe and to encourage others to make full use of ESS data in advancing society's understanding of these important issues.

We have collaborated with leading experts on wellbeing in Europe and prominent researchers in fields such as sociology, political science, demography, psychology and geography, to identify some highlights from the rich body of research into wellbeing carried out using ESS data. By making a variety of innovative, methodologically sophisticated, and policy-relevant findings easily accessible we hope to make a valuable contribution to both academic and policy debates around wellbeing.

The ten contributions presented here include an exploration of the complex, multidimensional nature of subjective wellbeing. ESS wellbeing data provide a valuable source of data for going beyond summary measures of happiness and exploring different dimensions of individual and societal wellbeing. Contributions draw on the rich variety of topics addressed by the ESS to fully explore different drivers of wellbeing including: working conditions, gender, parenthood, migration, democracy, the environment and cultural values. The ESS also allows researchers to explore the experiences of particular subgroups within the population, for example, migrants from eastern to western Europe, and to compare the wellbeing of groups such as parents versus non-parents.

All of the research presented here offers a comparative, cross-national perspective and illustrates how experiences of wellbeing can vary significantly across countries. Many of the contributions draw on contextual data from outside the survey to explore how institutional, societal and cultural differences between and within countries might explain this variation.

This booklet provides only a brief snapshot of ESS research on wellbeing. All the contributions included here can be explored in more detail via the interactive website [www.esswellbeingmatters.org](http://www.esswellbeingmatters.org) which accompanies this publication. We encourage you to visit the site to access further results and to find out more about the different aspects of wellbeing that can be explored using ESS data. ◀

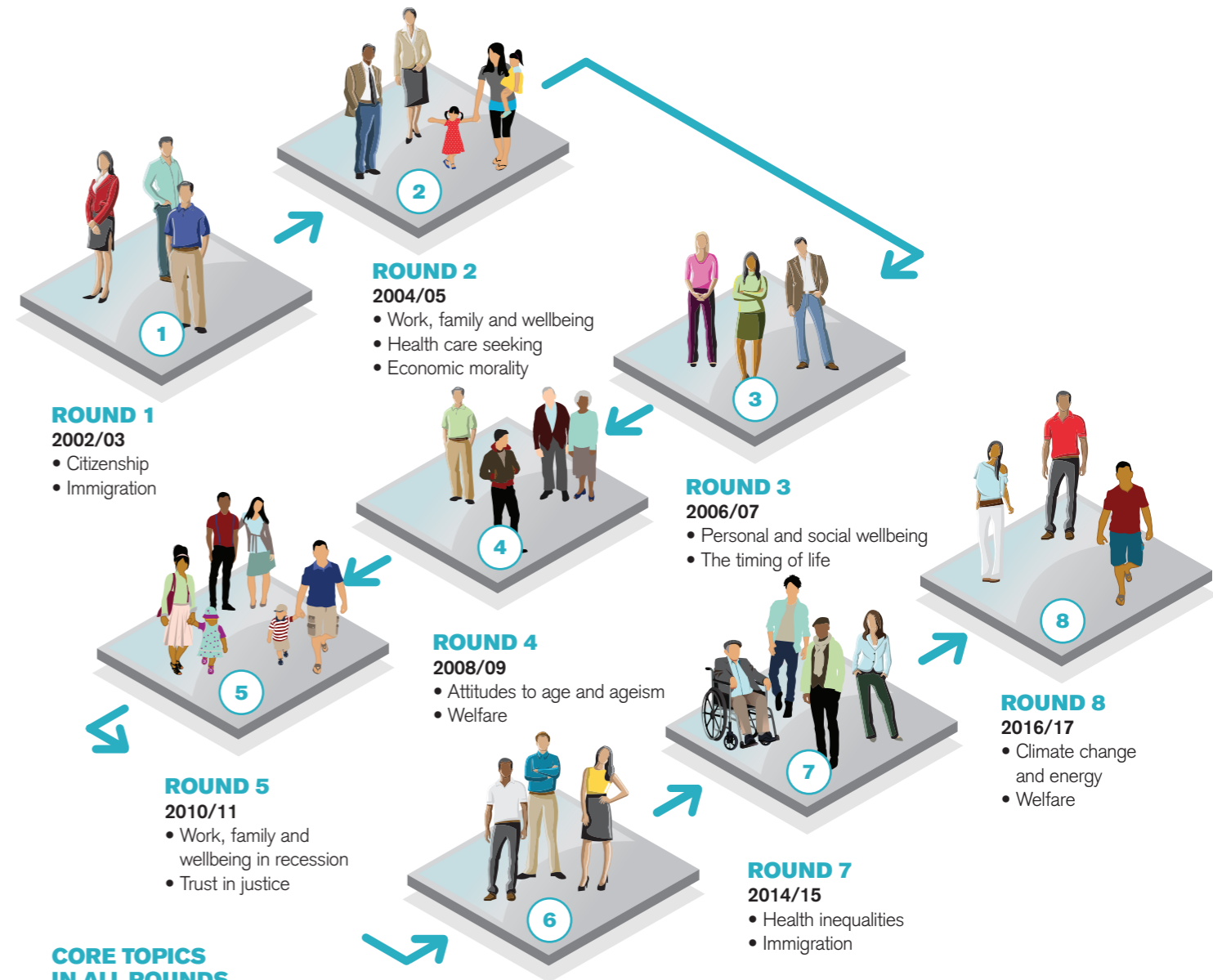
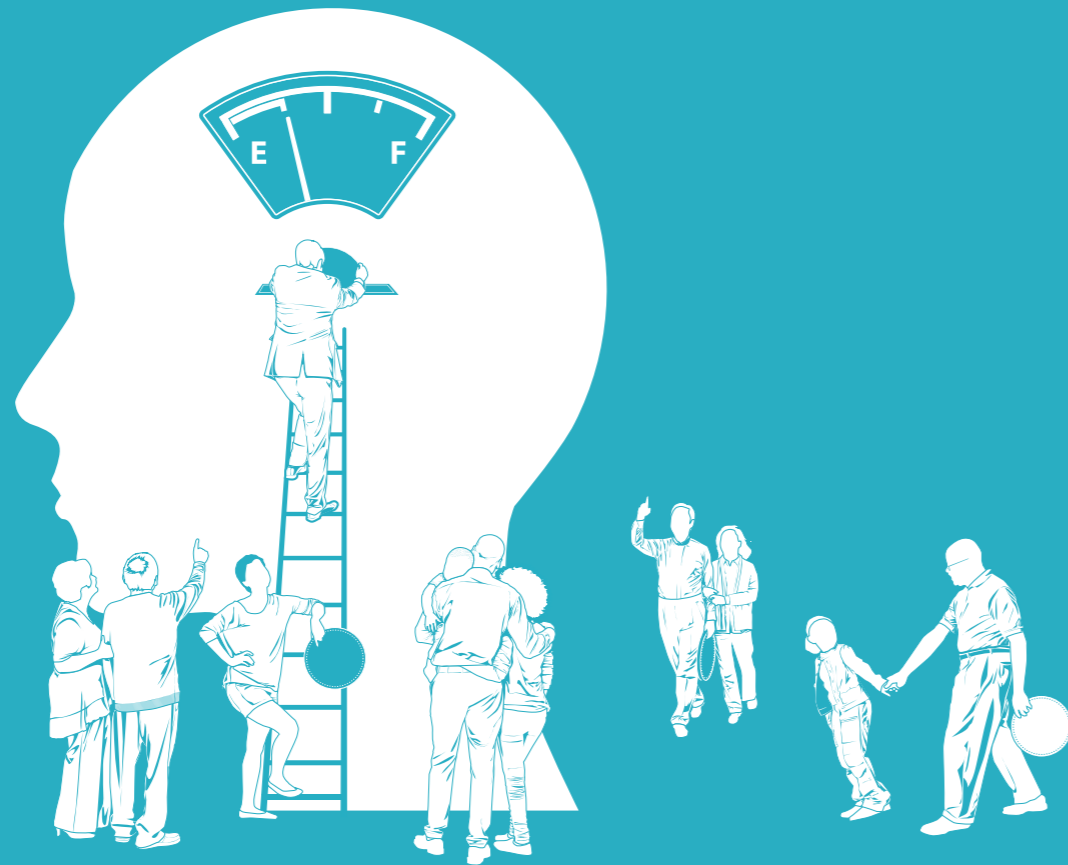
**GO ONLINE**

[www.esswellbeingmatters.org](http://www.esswellbeingmatters.org)

# MEASURING SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING IN THE ESS

The ESS provides free access to a rich variety of high quality data on different aspects of wellbeing (and other topics) for more than 30 European countries

The availability of high quality data is central to the measurement and understanding of wellbeing. The ESS has been collecting methodologically robust cross-national data on wellbeing every two years since 2002. The survey includes headline measures of subjective wellbeing such as 'life satisfaction' and 'happiness' as part of its core questionnaire, asked of respondents in each round. More in-depth data on wellbeing is also provided for some rounds where thematic 'rotating modules' (which vary from round to round) have focused on different aspects of wellbeing. These data on wellbeing are collected alongside a large number of socio-demographic background variables and questions asking about other important social and political topics, providing researchers and policymakers with a rich dataset with which to explore Europeans' wellbeing.



## CORE TOPICS IN ALL ROUNDS

- Moral and social values
- Health and wellbeing
- Trust in institutions
- Education and occupation
- Social capital and social trust
- Household circumstances
- Citizen involvement and democracy
- Social exclusion
- Political values and engagement
- Socio-demographic characteristics
- Immigration
- Crime

## ESS PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

The findings in this booklet are based on ESS data from the first six rounds. Data on wellbeing are available for more than 30 countries across Europe which took part in at least one of the first six rounds of the ESS.

### ESS Participation ROUNDS 1-6

#### 6 ROUNDS

- 1 Belgium
- 2 Denmark
- 3 Finland
- 4 France
- 5 Germany
- 6 Hungary
- 7 Ireland
- 8 Netherlands
- 9 Norway
- 10 Poland
- 11 Portugal
- 12 Slovenia
- 13 Spain
- 14 Sweden
- 15 Switzerland
- 16 UK

#### 5 ROUNDS

- 17 Austria
- 18 Czech Republic
- 19 Estonia
- 20 Slovakia
- 21 Ukraine

#### 4 ROUNDS

- 22 Bulgaria
- 23 Cyprus
- 24 Greece
- 25 Israel
- 26 Russia

#### 3 ROUNDS

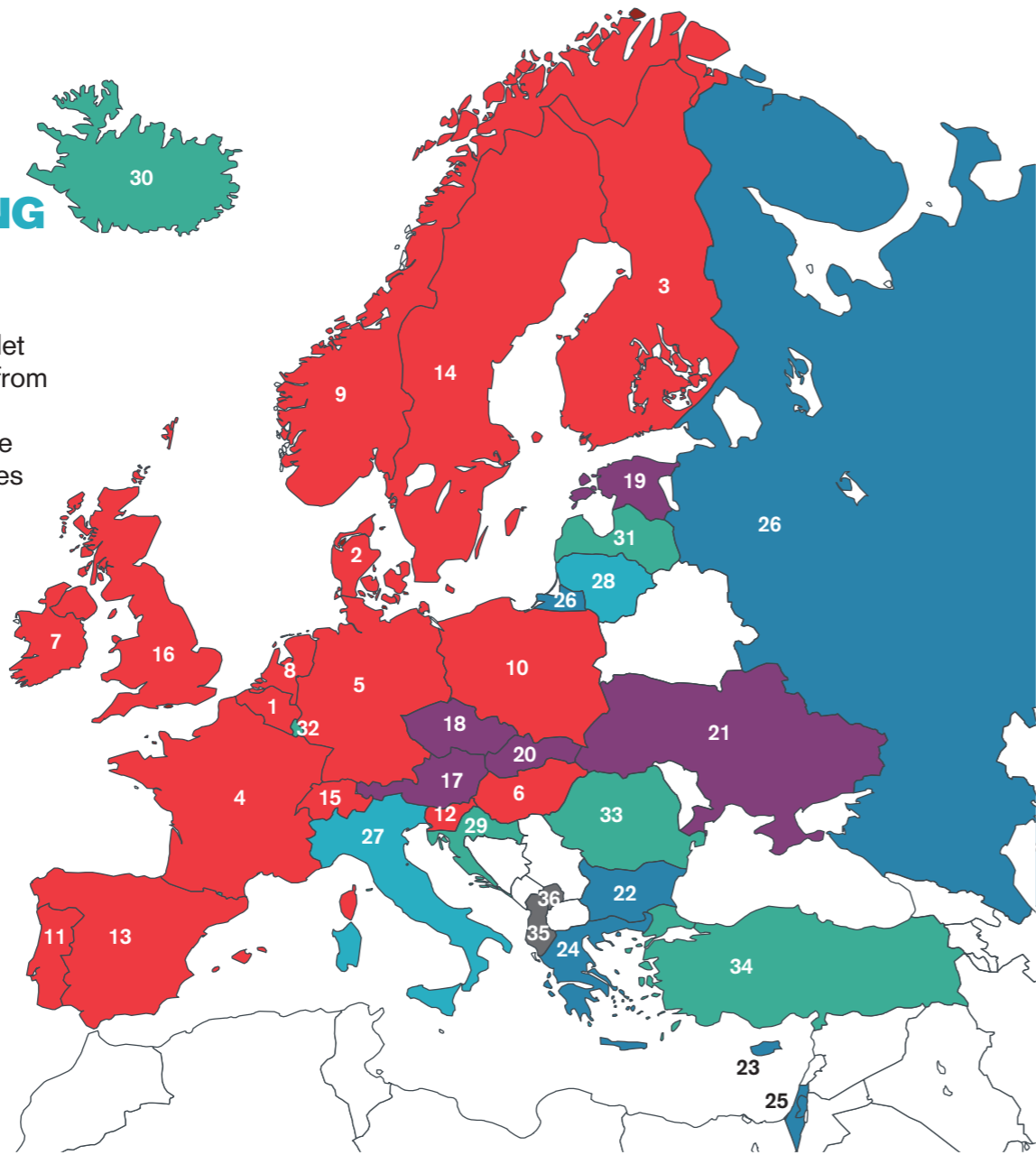
- 27 Italy
- 28 Lithuania

#### 2 ROUNDS

- 29 Croatia
- 30 Iceland
- 31 Latvia
- 32 Luxembourg
- 33 Romania
- 34 Turkey

#### 1 ROUND

- 35 Albania
- 36 Kosovo



## WELLBEING MATTERS

Annie Quick  
New Economics Foundation, UK

Researchers and policymakers increasingly recognise the importance of measuring and understanding subjective wellbeing

Many people would agree that one of the key aims of a democratic government should be to promote a life of high wellbeing. In the past, rather than focusing directly on achieving wellbeing, most countries have tended to prioritise economic growth. However, the relationship between economic growth and wellbeing is not as close as might be expected. This suggests that, rather than focusing solely on economic growth, policymakers need to look directly at the ultimate outcome – human wellbeing.

Focusing policy on subjective wellbeing has a number of advantages. Research shows that higher wellbeing contributes to many other important outcomes such as better health and higher productivity at work. Furthermore, dialogue with the public suggest that people can relate to the idea of wellbeing. By putting people's own experiences centre stage, wellbeing has the potential to reconnect people with policy, helping to overcome the high levels of citizens' disengagement with the political process.

Encouragingly, in recent years, the need to look beyond GDP and focus on wellbeing has been increasingly recognised. A 2009 commission convened by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy, the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, advocated focusing on wellbeing. There have been a number of initiatives to produce alternative headline indicators of progress, such as the OECD's Better Life Initiative, which include measures of subjective wellbeing. Wellbeing is now being studied from a range of academic perspectives drawing insights from economics, sociology, neuroscience and human needs theory.

The growing field of subjective wellbeing research has been made possible by the increasing amount of data available. Surveys such as the ESS are central to the measurement of wellbeing. The data they provide on individuals' experiences can be used by policymakers to understand:

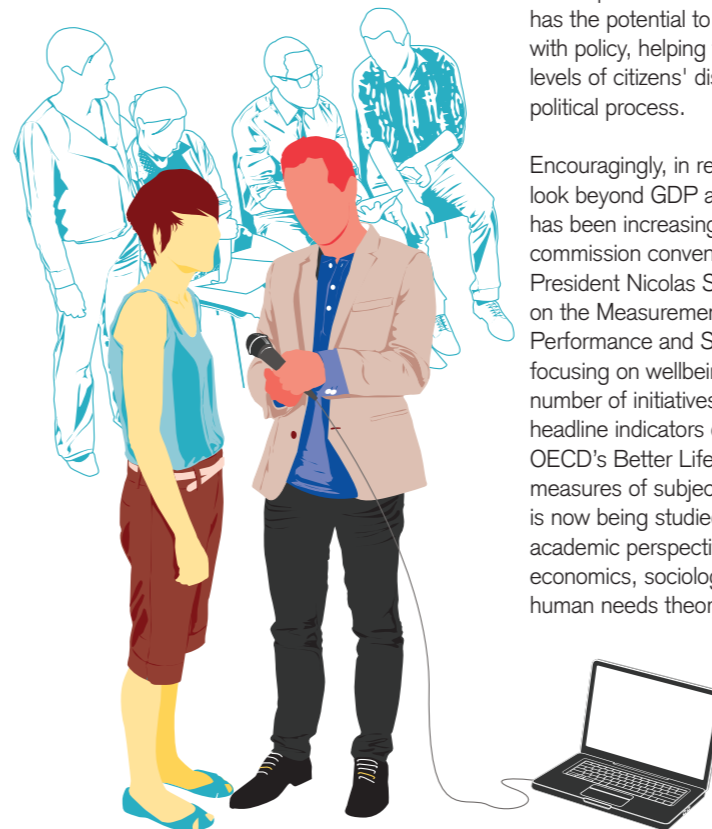
- Different dimensions of wellbeing
- Drivers of wellbeing
- How wellbeing is distributed across different groups within the population

There is also increasing interest in making cross-national comparisons, allowing the macroeconomic and societal factors that determine wellbeing, and the policies that influence them, to be explored. The ESS – and the methodologically robust cross-national data it provides on a wide range of topics – makes a particularly important contribution in this regard.

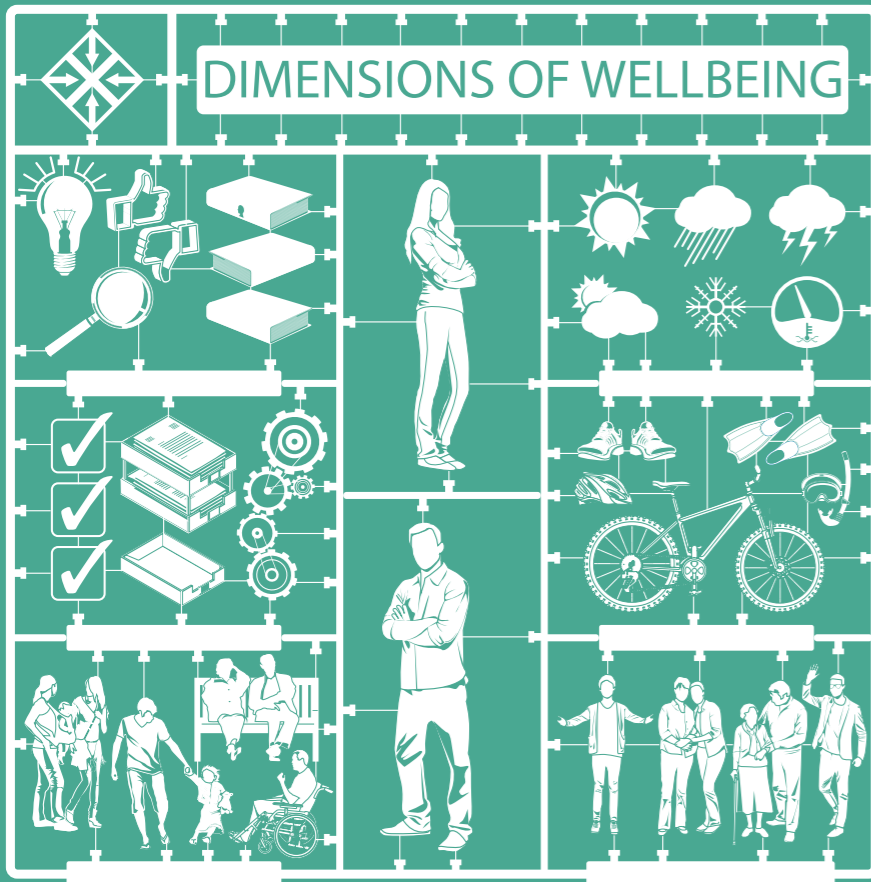
Over recent years wellbeing research has established a number of key findings regarding the drivers of wellbeing and policymakers can start shaping policy to improve wellbeing. However, our understanding of wellbeing still lags behind other domains such as health or income which have benefited from decades of research using rich data sets. Continued research on wellbeing, supported by data from surveys such as the ESS, is needed to better inform the response to the economic and societal challenges facing Europe.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Research shows that higher wellbeing contributes to many other important outcomes of interest to policymakers, such as better health and higher productivity at work



# DIMENSIONS OF WELLBEING



## HAPPY AND FLOURISHING?

**Bram Vanhoutte**  
University of Manchester, UK

Hedonism (happiness) and eudemonia (flourishing) are both important components of individual wellbeing and are present to varying degrees across Europe

Questions regarding what exactly wellbeing consists of can be traced back to philosophical debates in ancient Greece. The hedonic school of thought, exemplified by Epicurus, believed a good life to be filled with happiness. Aristotle dismissed this narrow conception, and instead proposed eudemonia, or flourishing, living in accordance with your true self, as a way to lead a good life. This same distinction between happiness and flourishing is present in debates about wellbeing today.

Although these philosophical conceptions of wellbeing may come from two different perspectives, there is a lot to be gained from thinking about them alongside one another. Large scale surveys such as the ESS which measure different aspects of wellbeing allow us to do this. We can evaluate empirically the extent to which there is in fact a distinction between hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing as experienced by individuals in society today. We can also look at whether and how levels of these two types of wellbeing vary across countries and between different sub-groups of the population within a country.

Factor analysis of the data from the ESS Round 6 (2012/13) rotating module on 'Personal and Social Wellbeing' confirms that hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing are two distinct concepts.

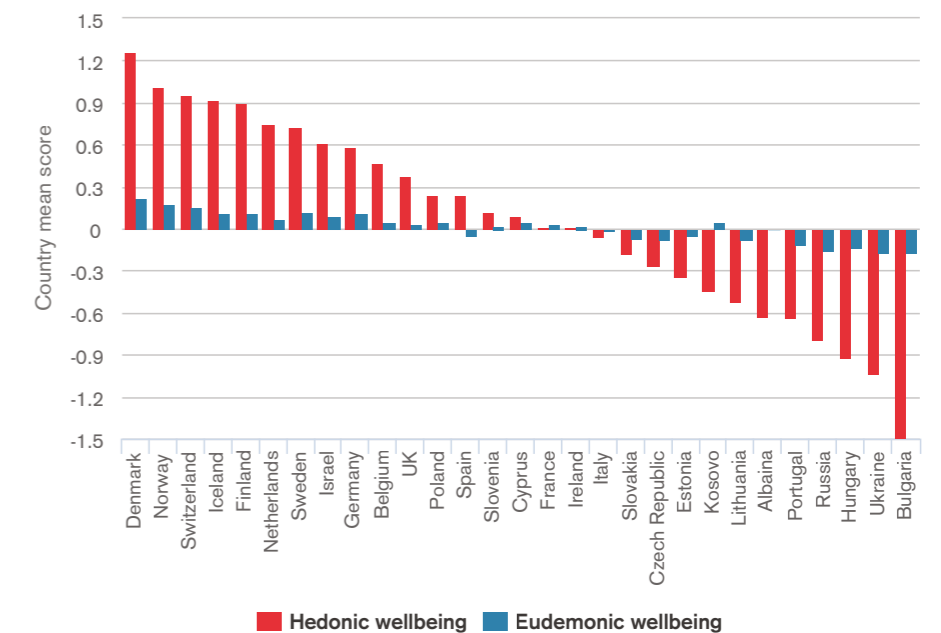
However, there is a strong correlation between both factors – meaning that people with a high score in terms of hedonic wellbeing also tend to have high scores on eudemonic wellbeing. Cross-national comparison further suggests that in nearly all countries both forms of wellbeing go in the same direction of the overall ESS mean, i.e. countries that score above average in terms of hedonic wellbeing also score above average on eudemonic wellbeing.

Wellbeing, especially hedonic wellbeing, varies across countries. For example, hedonic wellbeing tends to be higher than average in

Scandinavia and lower than average in parts of southern and eastern Europe. However, it is important to keep in mind that these country-level findings hide a significant amount of within-country variation. Analysis shows that that only 15% of the variation in hedonic and 7% of the variation in eudemonic wellbeing can be explained at the country level with the remainder explained by differences between individuals. Exploring how socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age and education are related to both the hedonic and eudemonic dimensions of wellbeing may provide useful insights for policymakers seeking to understand and address differences in wellbeing within society. ◀

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Data analysis of the ESS Round 6 rotating module on 'Personal and Social Wellbeing' confirms that hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing are two distinct concepts

Hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing across Europe by country



Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/13). Design weights applied.

# WELLBEING: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONCEPT

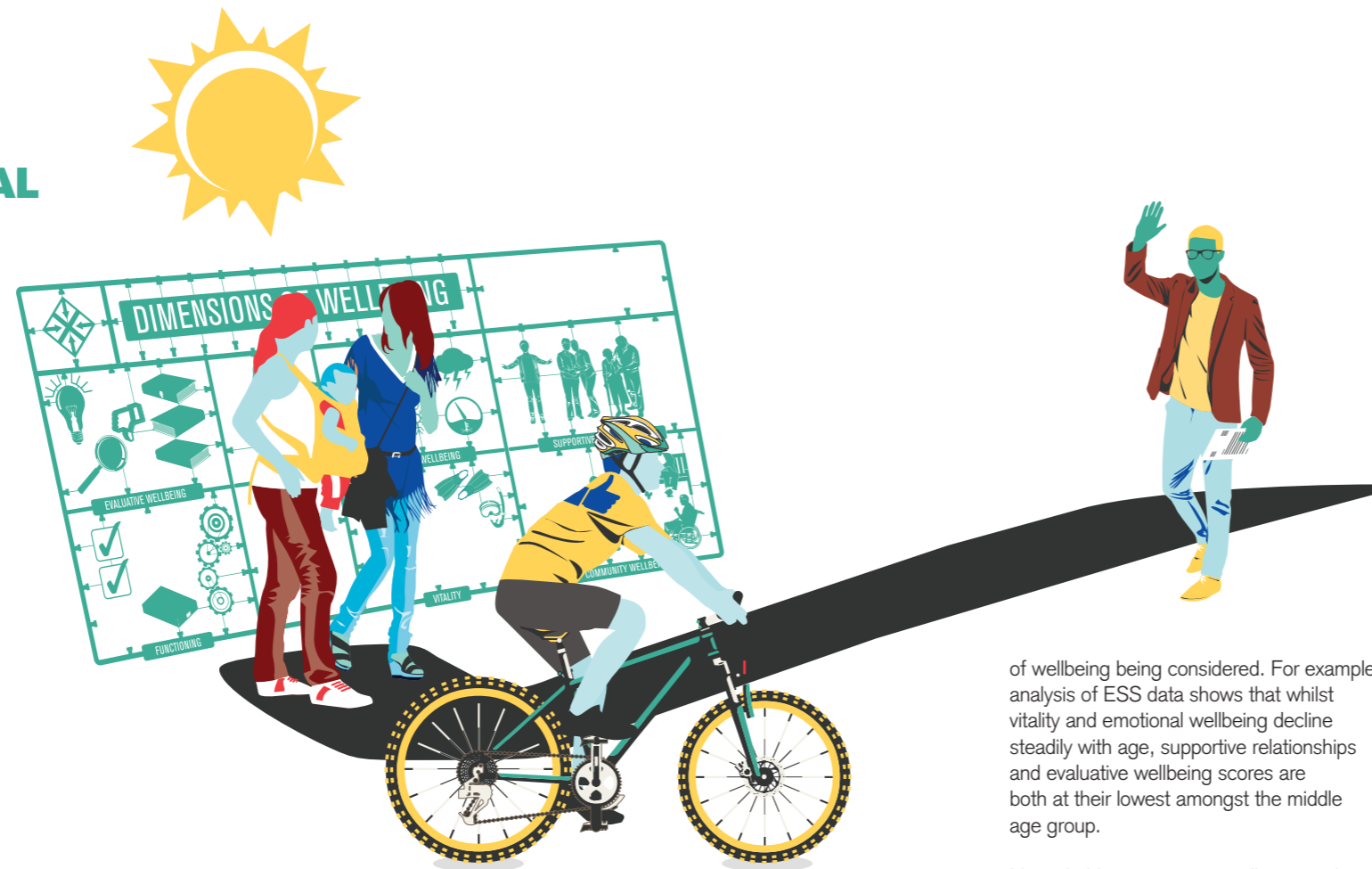
Karen Jeffrey and Saamah Abdallah  
New Economics Foundation, UK

Taking a nuanced, multidimensional approach to wellbeing can tell us much about how experiences of wellbeing vary across and within countries

Collecting robust data on wellbeing, i.e. how people evaluate and experience their lives, is essential if we are to begin to understand which features are most likely to contribute to higher wellbeing, and to identify groups within society which might benefit most from interventions designed to increase wellbeing. But how can such a complex concept as wellbeing be measured systematically?

A common approach is to ask people to evaluate their experience in terms of how happy or satisfied with life they are overall. However, whilst offering a fairly good overview of wellbeing, a single, catch-all measure might also hide interesting details that a more multidimensional approach can reveal.

Using data from the ESS Round 6 (2012/13) rotating module on 'Personal and Social Wellbeing' it is possible to identify six distinct dimensions of subjective wellbeing and conduct a nuanced analysis of how wellbeing varies both within and across countries. These six dimensions are: evaluative wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, functioning, vitality, community wellbeing and supportive relationships.



We see that where respondents within a country report high scores on one wellbeing dimension, they tend to also report high scores on the other wellbeing dimensions (e.g. Switzerland) and vice versa. However, this is not always the case. For example, in Hungary, whilst people report quite low wellbeing across most of the dimensions, they report a much higher score for the community wellbeing dimension. In Russia, the average score for the functioning dimension is much lower than the scores for each of the other five dimensions.

It is also important to consider how wellbeing is distributed across the population and whether there are notable inequalities in wellbeing between different groups. Again, this can depend on the specific dimension

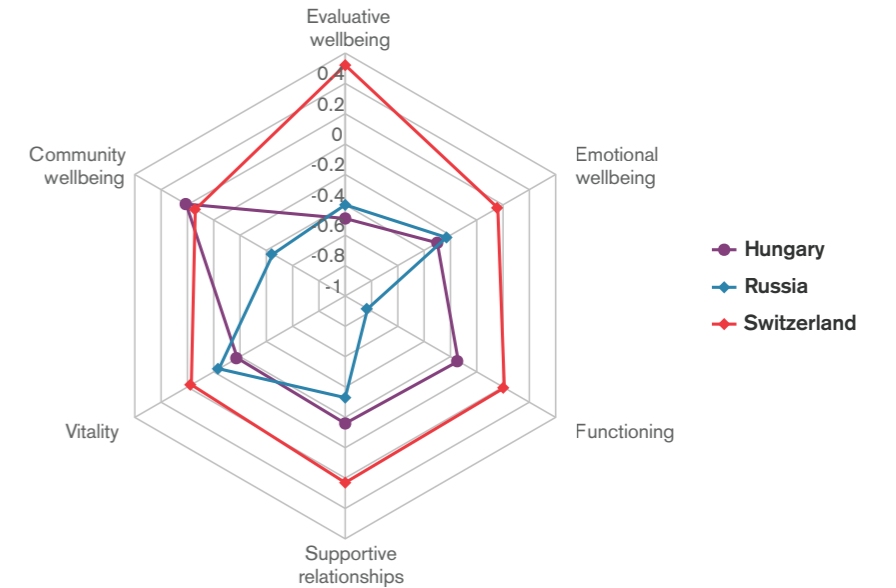
**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Where respondents within a country report high scores on one wellbeing dimension, they tend to report high scores on the other wellbeing dimensions, but not always

of wellbeing being considered. For example, analysis of ESS data shows that whilst vitality and emotional wellbeing decline steadily with age, supportive relationships and evaluative wellbeing scores are both at their lowest amongst the middle age group.

Household income is generally positively correlated with all dimensions of wellbeing though more so for some dimensions (evaluative wellbeing) than others (vitality). However, the relationship between community wellbeing and income varies across Europe. In Scandinavia and western Europe community wellbeing is positively associated with household income. However, in southern Europe there is a significant negative association between income and community wellbeing.

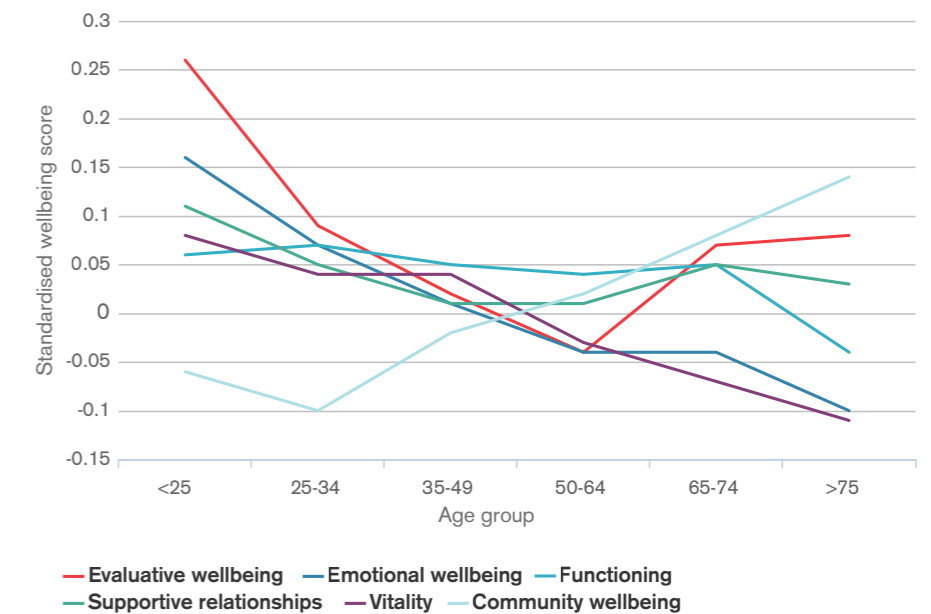
These varied findings demonstrate the importance of being able to differentiate between related but distinct dimensions of wellbeing. The insights provided by such in-depth analysis of wellbeing can help policymakers seeking to target resources effectively in order to increase the wellbeing of the population. ←

Average score on different dimensions of wellbeing by country



Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/13). Post-stratification weights applied.

Average score on different dimensions of wellbeing by age group



Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/13). Post-stratification and population weights applied.

## WHAT IS A DECENT SOCIETY?

Pamela Abbott, Claire Wallace and Roger Sapsford  
University of Aberdeen, UK

Europeans vary in the extent to which they think they live in a 'decent society', i.e. one that promotes the wellbeing of its citizens

As well as being interested in individual wellbeing, researchers and policymakers are concerned with wider societal wellbeing. Whether a country can be considered a 'decent society' will depend of course on the objective conditions in that country. However, it is also relevant to ask whether countries are perceived by their residents as fit for purpose. The ESS is a rich source of data on people's experiences and beliefs, helping us understand the extent to which Europeans think they live in a 'decent society'.

The Social Quality Model identifies four broad requirements for a 'decent society':

- Economic Security
- Social Cohesion
- Social Inclusion
- Empowerment

Using data from ESS Round 6 (2012/13) measuring aspects of society including economic evaluations, trust in institutions, attitudes towards minority groups and social and political participation, we can construct a Subjective Index of how people perceive their

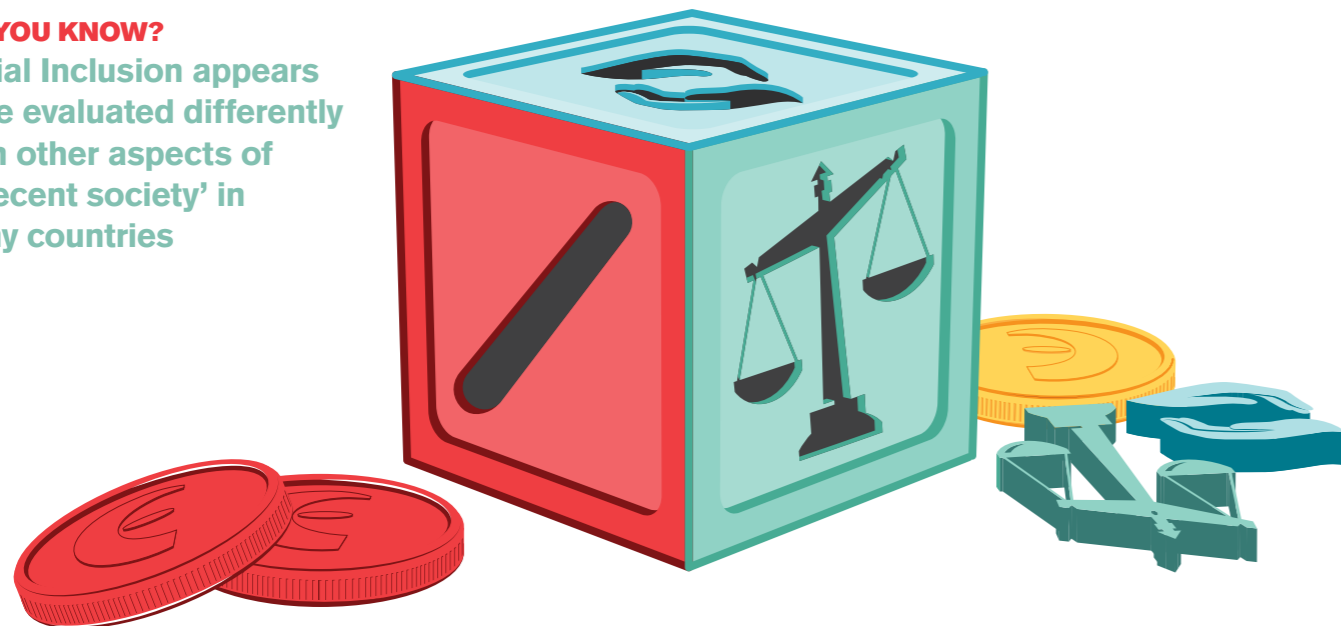
society across these four 'quadrants'. On the basis of this Subjective Index, Norway is the country where people have the most positive views of their society, closely followed by the other Scandinavian countries together with Switzerland. At the bottom lies Ukraine, together with most of the other former socialist states of central and eastern Europe.

There is a strong element of 'general approval' across different aspects of society – scores on one quadrant are fairly predictive of scores on the others at the country level. However, Social Inclusion appears to be evaluated differently (sometimes better, sometimes worse) from other aspects of a 'decent society' in many countries. For example, Switzerland and Finland perform well in terms of Economic Security and Social Cohesion in comparison to most other countries but score relatively low in terms of Social Inclusion. Iceland, on the other hand, scores relatively low on Economic Security and Empowerment but high on Social Inclusion.

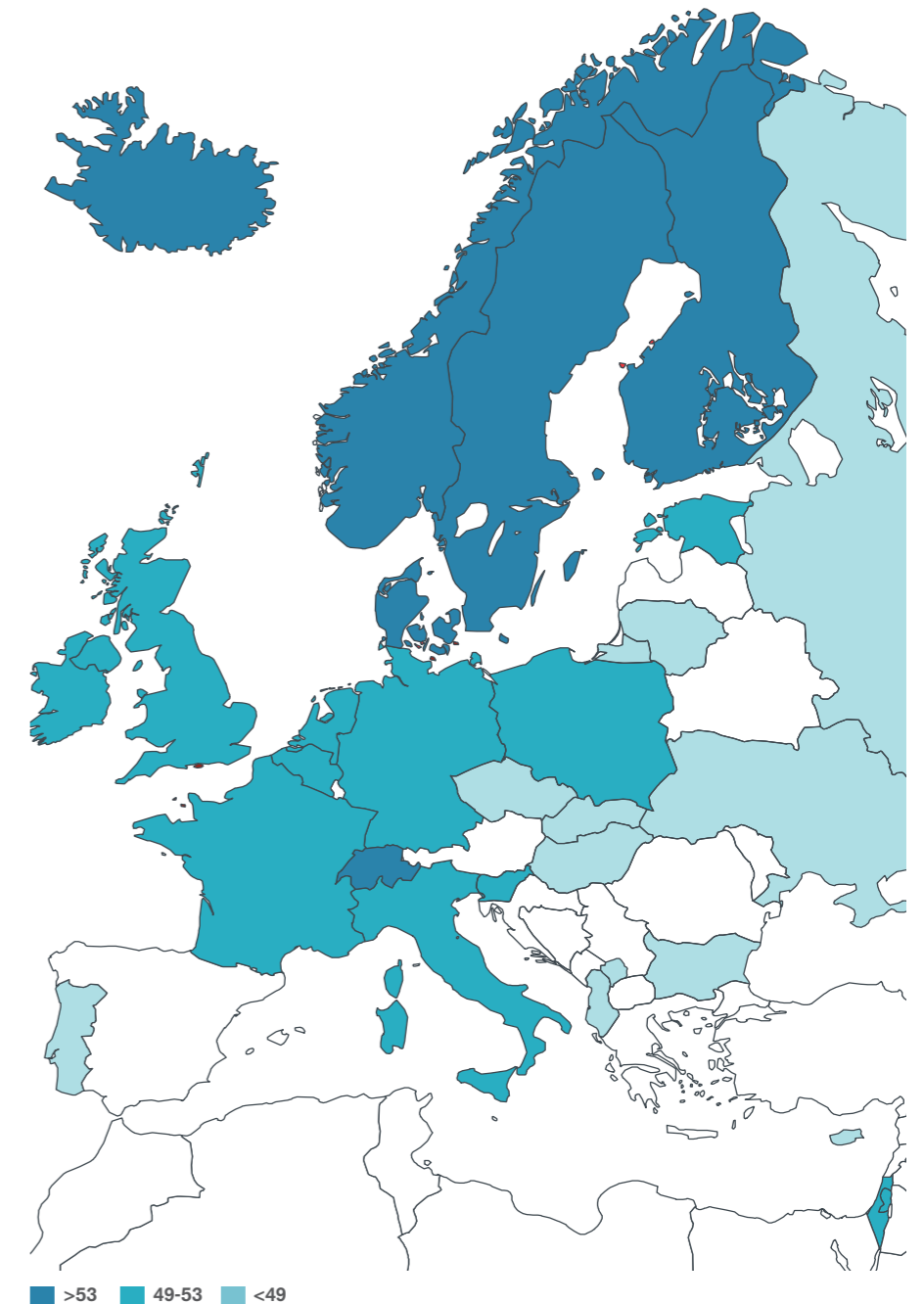
Many of the countries which rank lower on Social Inclusion than we might expect given their overall ranking (Norway, Denmark, Sweden, France, UK) have relatively low rates of self-reported church attendance, whilst other countries which perform relatively well in terms of Social Inclusion compared with their overall ranking (Ukraine, Bulgaria) are distinguished by relatively high rates of church attendance. This suggests an interesting area for further research – can the church perhaps promote social inclusion and welfare where this function is not taken on by governments?

ESS data provide valuable insights into how people perceive their society and how this varies across countries. In combination with more objective indicators on how far the conditions in a country meet the requirements for a 'decent society', such insights can offer potentially useful guidance to policymakers seeking to identify what aspects of their political and social regime may be in need of reform in order to promote citizens' wellbeing. €

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Social Inclusion appears to be evaluated differently from other aspects of a 'decent society' in many countries



## Overall Subjective Index scores across Europe



Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/13). Post-stratification weights applied.

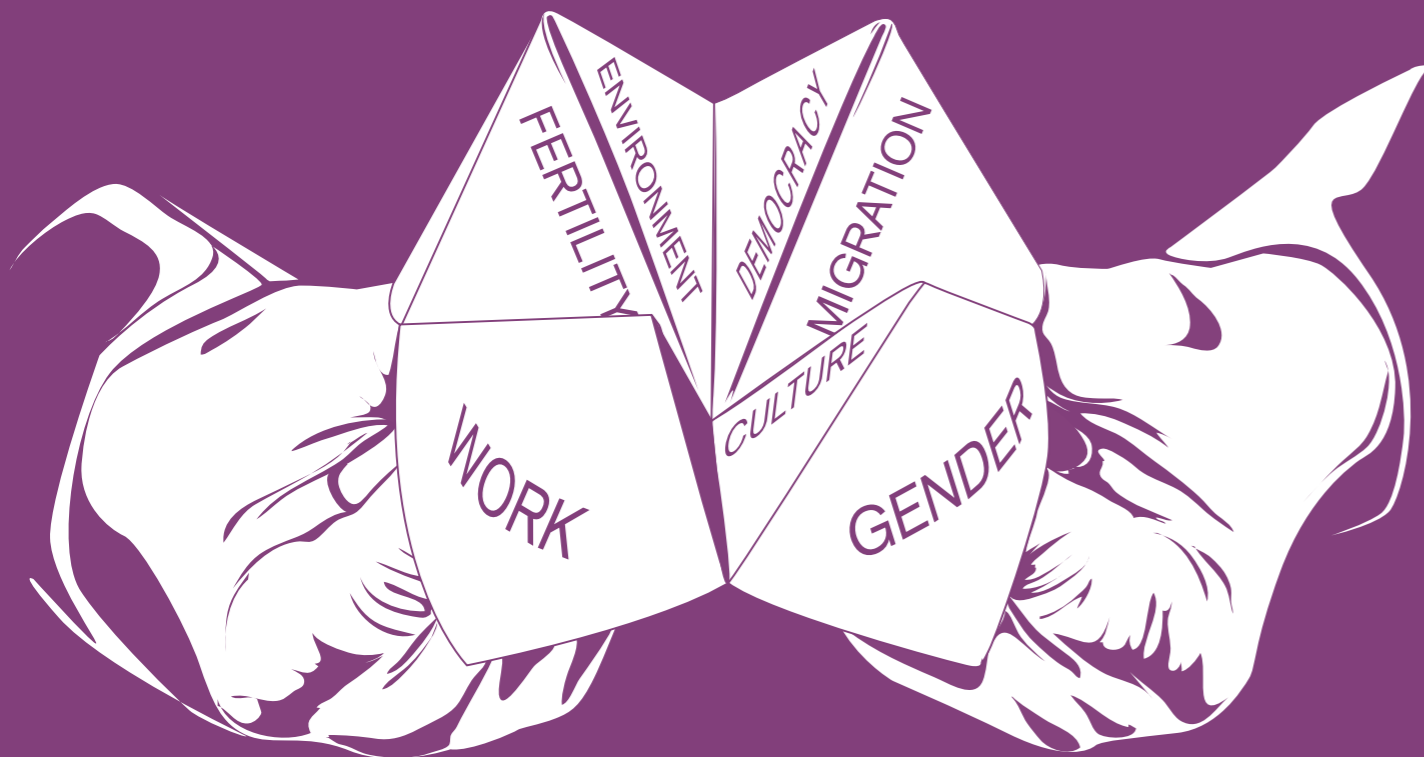
**DID YOU KNOW?**  
The country with the highest Subjective Index score, i.e. where people have the most positive views of their society, is Norway

# DRIVERS OF WELLBEING

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE ACROSS EUROPE

Helen Russell and Frances McGinnity  
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Working conditions such as working hours, autonomy and flexibility are important for work-life balance. However, working conditions – and hence feelings of work-life balance – vary significantly across Europe



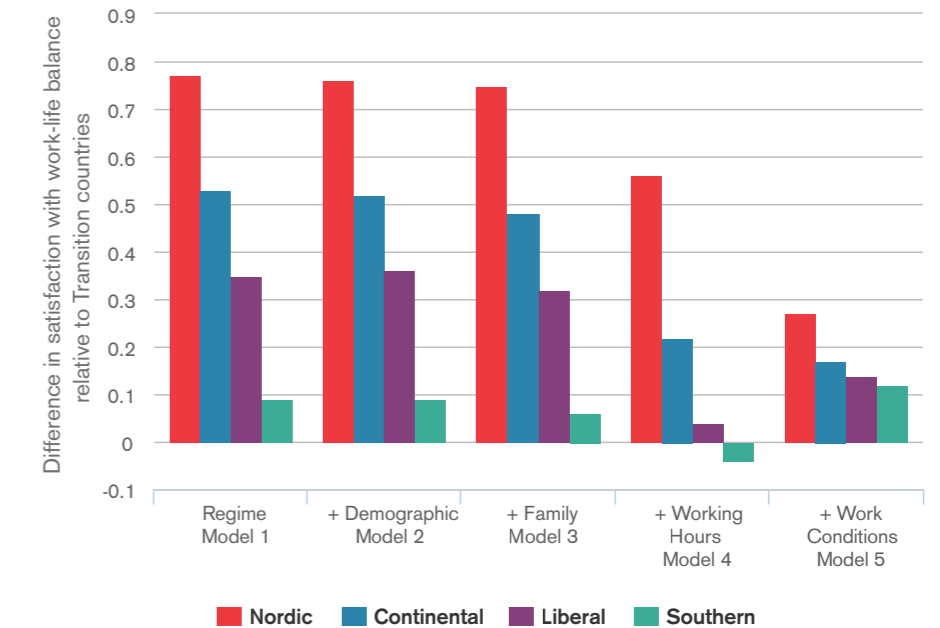
Work-life balance, i.e. how individuals integrate paid work with the rest of their life and balance the demands of different roles, is an important component of wellbeing. Rising female employment, lone parenthood, falling fertility and an ageing population have all brought the issue of reconciling work and caring demands to the fore. Conflict between the demands of work and family life has been linked to poorer outcomes in marital relations and child development as well as job satisfaction, absenteeism and stress.

The demands of work and family life are known to vary across countries depending on the different employment and welfare regimes in place to organise work and caring responsibilities. The ESS provides valuable cross-national data with which to explore the effect of these institutional differences on work-life balance.

Analysis of data from the ESS Round 5 (2010/11) module on 'Work, Family and Wellbeing' uncovers significant differences in working conditions across countries depending on the type of employment regime. Working hours are lower, and job flexibility and feelings of job control higher, in more worker-oriented employment regimes (Nordic countries and the Continental countries i.e. Belgium, Netherlands and Germany) compared with southern European and central-eastern 'Transition' countries where union density and workers' collective bargaining power is weaker.

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
High satisfaction with work-life balance in the Nordic countries is related to differences in working hours and better working conditions

### Satisfaction with work-life balance by country group



Data source: European Social Survey Round 5 (2010/11). Data weighted by labour market weights created by the authors.

Note: Regression coefficients showing difference in work-life balance relative to the Transition countries (reference category), after controlling for demographic, family and working conditions. Base for analysis is all employees, 20-64 years, living with partner.

These differences in working conditions in turn help to explain the significant variation in perceptions of work-life balance found across Europe. The figure above summarises the results of analysis which models differences in self-assessed work-life balance across country groupings as a function of a range of different family and work-related factors.

Regime type clearly matters: satisfaction with work-life balance is highest in the Nordic countries, followed by Continental and Liberal countries i.e. UK and Ireland (Model 1). Satisfaction is lowest in southern European countries and Transition countries (which provide the reference group against which other regimes are compared).

However, differences in work-life balance across the country groupings are significantly reduced when we take account of differences in working hours and other working conditions (Models 4 and 5). Family demands are also important (Model 3) but, compared with working conditions, appear to explain less of the variation in satisfaction with work-family balance across Europe.

These findings point to some clear lessons for policymakers and/or employers seeking to promote work-life balance. Predictable working hours that are not too long, employee autonomy, and the ability to decide start/finish times and working during the standard working week, are all likely to enhance work-life balance. ◀



## GENDER INEQUALITIES AND DEPRESSION

Piet Bracke, Rozemarijn Dereuddre and Sarah Van de Velde  
Ghent University, Belgium

More gender-equal societies promote better mental health among both men and women and reduce the gender gap in depressive symptoms

Mental health is an important component of wellbeing. Women are around twice as likely to report depressive symptoms and major depression as men. However, this gender gap is not observed in all countries and also varies across the life span. The ESS can be used to examine why this might be and to explore the role that gender inequality has to play in explaining differences in the depression gender gap. Because depression, lack of control, and powerlessness are related we would expect a greater gender gap in depression in more gender-unequal societies.

Analysis of ESS Round 3 (2006/07) and Round 6 (2012/13) data from 29 countries confirms that women are more likely than men to experience depressive symptoms (as measured by a shortened version of the

Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale – CES-D8) at any age. Both men and women experience an increase in depressive symptoms with age. However, the negative effect of age is more pronounced for women, leading to a more prominent gender difference in depression among those aged 61 and older.

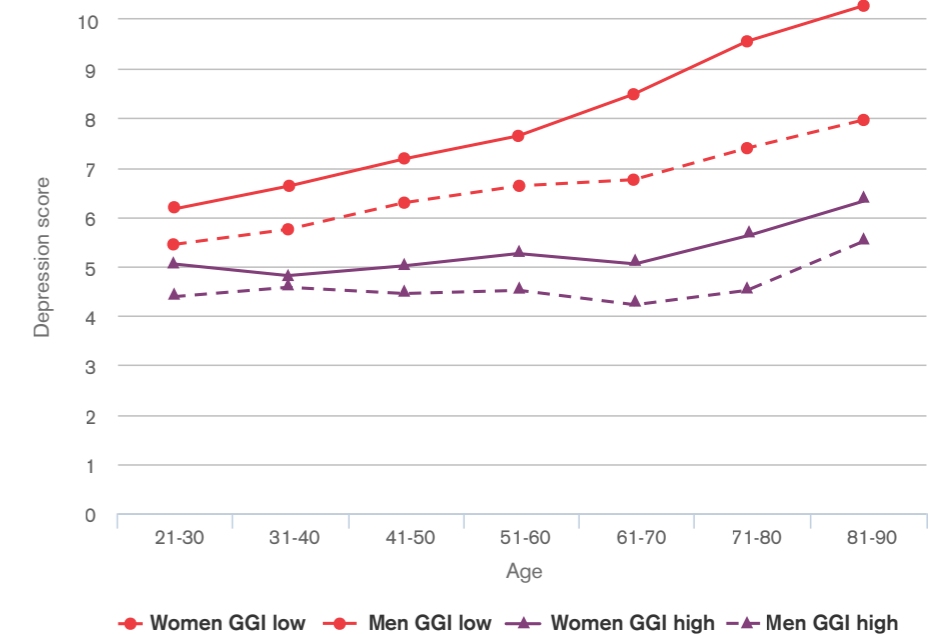
Women's relatively disadvantaged position in society (for example in terms of reduced opportunities for employment) may explain the gender gap in depression. The cumulative negative effect that this relative disadvantage has over the life course may in turn explain the presence of a larger gender gap among older people. In support of this explanation, we find that controlling in analysis for differences in individuals' family and employment status significantly reduces the gender gap in depression observed.

If the incidence of depression is related to social conditions we might also expect the degree of gender inequality in society to play an important role. The figure below shows that this is indeed the case. Both women and men experience less depressive symptoms in more gender-equal countries. However, the positive effect of gender equality in reducing depression is more pronounced among women than men. This means the gender gap in depression between men and women is smaller in more gender-equal countries (scoring high on the Global Gender Gap Index) than in less equal countries. In countries where women face more unequal treatment, the lifelong accumulation of this disadvantage is more pronounced and the gender gap in depression which emerges with age is greater.

Most studies of depression focus only on the individual social positions of women and men, and hence, underestimate the impact of gendered societal arrangements on depression. It is important to notice that less gender inequality goes hand in hand with better mental health for both women and men (though especially women). This has implications for policymakers, emphasising the important role that policies to promote gender equality may have in improving citizens' wellbeing. ☞

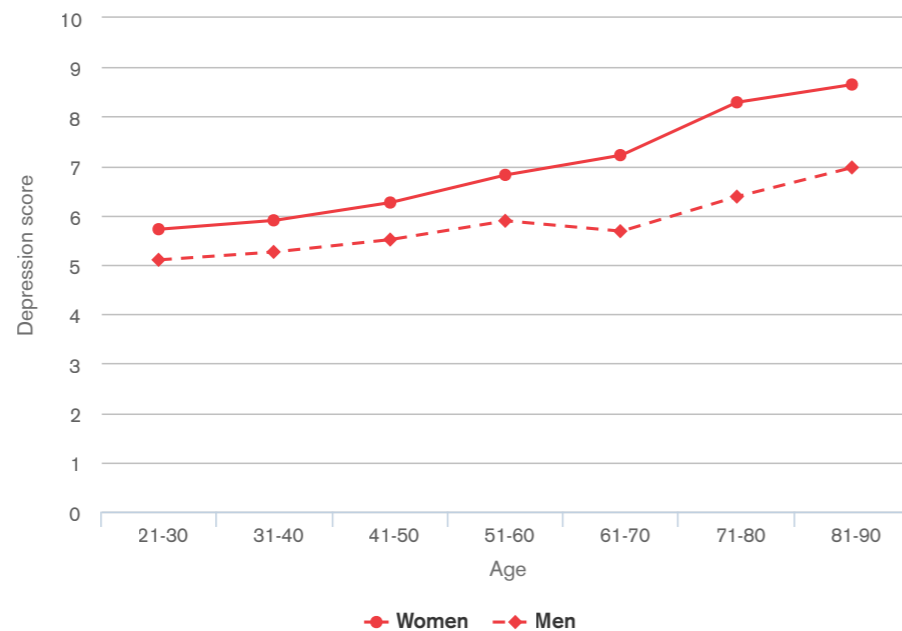
### DID YOU KNOW? The gender gap in depression between men and women is smaller in more gender-equal countries

Gender gap in depression by country-level gender inequality



Data source: ESS Round 3 (2006/07) and Round 6 (2012/13). Design weights applied.  
Note: Gender inequality measured by Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) (World Economic Forum, 2013).

Age differences in depressive symptoms among women and men



Data source: ESS Round 3 (2006/07) and Round 6 (2012/13). Design weights applied.

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
ESS data confirm the well-known gender difference in depression with women reporting higher scores on the depression scale

## DOES PARENTHOOD BRING HAPPINESS?

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Bocconi University, Italy

Letizia Mencarini  
University of Turin, Italy

Maria Sironi  
University of Oxford, UK

Whether parenthood brings happiness depends on your gender and whereabouts in Europe you live



Most European countries are now experiencing fertility levels well below the replacement level of two children per woman, posing significant challenges for policymakers faced with an ageing population. However, despite the general decline, fertility rates vary considerably across European countries. Examining the relationship between parenthood and subjective wellbeing may help to shed some light on these trends in fertility.

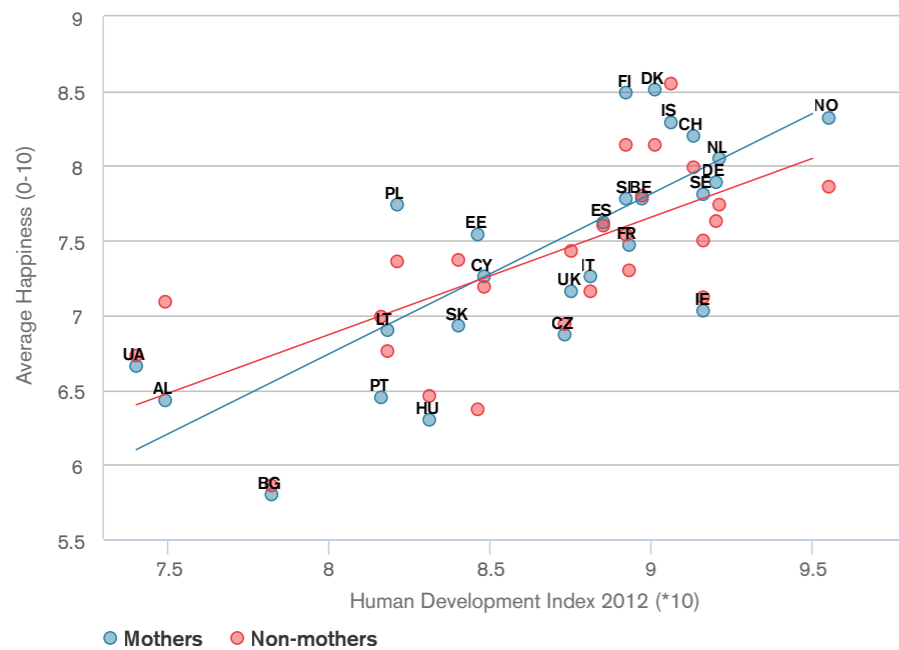
We use data from ESS Round 6 (2012/13) to explore fertility decisions across Europe.

The first notable finding is that there is a positive relationship between the level of development in society – as measured by the Human Development Index (HDI) – and both happiness and fertility rates. Despite development historically being a strong predictor of fertility decline, once countries reach a certain threshold of development – as is generally the case in Europe relative to the rest of the world – the relationship appears to be reversed. Across ESS countries, the higher the level of development, the happier people are and the higher fertility rates.

Comparing the experiences of parents and non-parents directly, it appears that across Europe fathers are happier than non-fathers. However, for women the relationship between happiness and parenthood is less straightforward. Mothers are happier than non-mothers but only in the most highly developed European countries. The relationship between motherhood and happiness also depends on other contextual factors including accessibility of childcare and the proportion of women in parliament (used as a proxy for female empowerment in society).

For women, it seems that the relationship between childbearing and happiness is dependent on societal conditions including the presence (or lack) of institutions that support the combination of childbearing and paid work. This has potentially important implications for policymakers, especially given that countries in which motherhood is associated with greater happiness also tend to be countries in which fertility rates are higher. ◀

Happiness of mothers and non-mothers by country and level of development



Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/13) and UN Human Development Index (2012). Design weights applied to ESS data.

## MIGRATING TO FIND HAPPINESS?

David Bartram  
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Migrating to a wealthier European country will not necessarily lead to an increase in happiness

One might reasonably expect that migrants moving to wealthier countries would improve their lives in significant ways. Analysis of ESS data on intra-European migration, however, suggests that migrants might not experience greater happiness after moving to a wealthier country.

A straightforward comparison between migrants from central-eastern to western Europe and stayers in central-eastern Europe, suggests that migrants are generally happier than stayers (shown by the blue bars in the figure below). More than half of this difference is due to differences in characteristics between migrants and stayers; migrants are generally younger, healthier, and therefore happier than stayers. Nevertheless, after controlling for these differences we still find that migrants from most countries are still significantly happier than stayers (red bars).

However, before concluding that migrants have gained happiness as a consequence of moving to a wealthier country, we need to consider another possibility: migrants might already have been happier than stayers prior to migration for reasons that we cannot observe. Analysis using specialist statistical techniques ('treatment effects' analysis) to isolate the 'true' effect of the decision to migrate suggests that this is indeed the case in many countries. After controlling for

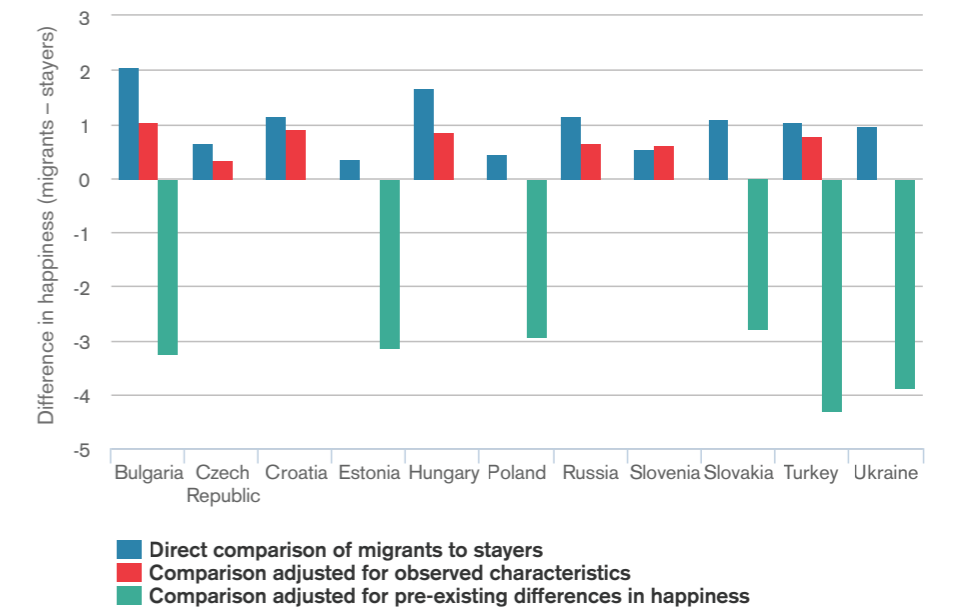


prior differences in happiness, we find that, for migrants from Bulgaria, Estonia, Poland, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine, it may even be the case that migration leads to a decrease in happiness rather than an increase (green bars).

Migrants' lives might well improve in ways that indicate higher objective wellbeing, but in subjective terms, it appears migration

may provide significant potential for disappointment. One possible explanation for this is that happiness depends on your position relative to others. Although their absolute income may be higher following migration, many migrants find themselves having to accept relatively low-status jobs, with potentially negative consequences for their sense of wellbeing. ◀

Happiness differences between migrants and stayers by country (statistically significant results only)



Data source: ESS Rounds 1 – 6 (2002/03 – 2012/13). Design weights applied.

## SATISFIED WITH DEMOCRACY, SATISFIED WITH LIFE?

Mónica Ferrín  
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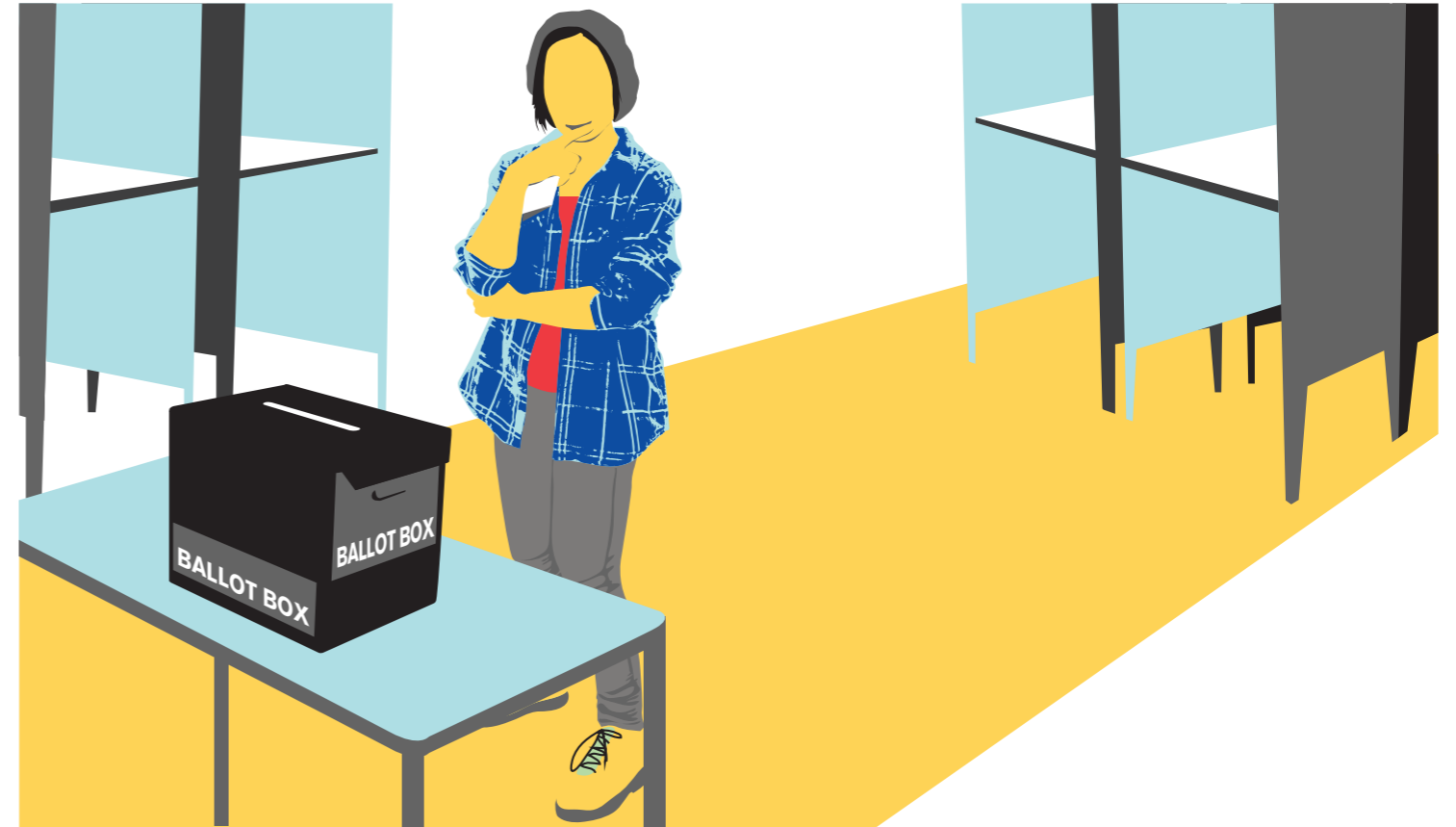
People are more satisfied with life in countries where the quality of democracy is high and when they believe in the legitimacy of their democratic regime

Most people around the world tend to think that democracy is preferable to any other political regime; and that people live better lives under democratic governments. However, is this necessarily the case? The question of whether democratic regimes do in fact result in higher wellbeing for citizens remains contested and there is a need for further evidence. The ESS Round 6 (2012/13) module on 'Europeans' Understandings and Evaluations of Democracy' provides a valuable source of data with which to examine the link between democracy and wellbeing.

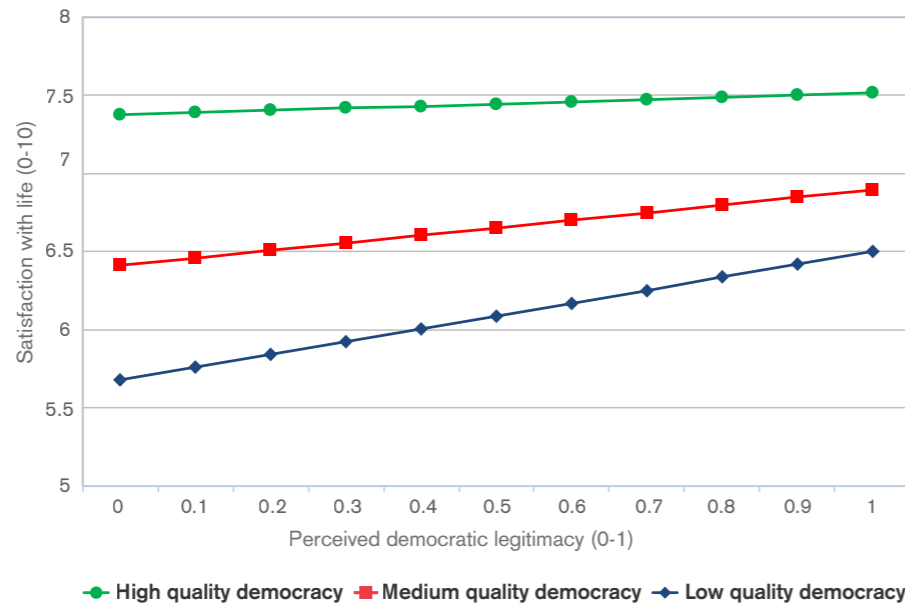
Country-level analysis reveals that subjective wellbeing varies across countries in a similar way to democratic performance. In ESS

countries, such as the Nordic countries, where democracy performs better (as measured by the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators), levels of satisfaction with life are higher than in countries where democracy performs worse (such as Russia or Ukraine). The correlation between average satisfaction with life and democratic performance is 0.79.

There is also evidence that individuals' satisfaction with life (measured on a 0-10 scale) is positively associated with their evaluations of democratic performance. Using the ESS Round 6 (2012/13) module on democracy we can test the extent to which individuals' satisfaction with life varies depending on whether or not they perceive



Effect of belief in democratic legitimacy on life satisfaction by quality of democracy



Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/13).

Note: Marginal effect of beliefs in democratic legitimacy (liberal dimension) on satisfaction with life (0-10) based on results of multilevel regression. Quality of democracy measured using Worldwide Governance Indicators (World Bank, 2012).

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
ESS Round 6 included a rotating module on 'Europeans' Understandings and Evaluations of Democracy'

their political regime to be legitimate, i.e. they evaluate that democratic reality lives up to their expectations of what democracy should be. We find a significant positive association between perceived democratic legitimacy and satisfaction with life. This is the case even after controlling for individual characteristics and the economic performance of the country, supporting the idea that it is not only economic performance which matters for satisfaction.

The importance of democratic legitimacy for wellbeing does, however, appear to vary across countries. Interestingly, the effect of democratic legitimacy beliefs on life satisfaction is stronger the less the objective democratic quality of a country (as

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Individuals' satisfaction with life varies depending on whether or not they perceive their political regime to be legitimate

measured by World Bank Indicators). As the figure shows, in countries where democracy performs worst, beliefs that the system is nevertheless legitimate clearly make citizens more satisfied with their lives whereas in countries where democratic performance is better there is a much

weaker relationship between legitimacy beliefs and wellbeing. It may be that in high quality democracies, citizens have become used to the good functioning of democracy and, therefore, their subjective perceptions as to whether democracy is or is not performing quite as well as they would like matter less.

These findings highlight the importance of democratic legitimacy not only in ensuring the continuation of democratic regimes but also for ensuring citizens' wellbeing. The challenge for governments across Europe, especially but not only those in low quality democracies, is to do everything they can to improve democratic performance in line with people's expectations. ◀

## SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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University College Dublin, Ireland

There is a significant negative relationship between regional concentrations of sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) in the atmosphere and life satisfaction across Europe

It is widely acknowledged that a person's surroundings and local environmental conditions can be important determinants of quality of life. Poor air quality, particularly the presence of the pollutant sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), has long been a concern for policymakers. We use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to combine ESS data from Rounds 1 to 3 (2002/03 to 2006/07) with data from public air quality database AirBase and produce the first cross-national examination of the association between subjective wellbeing and SO<sub>2</sub> levels at a sub-national i.e. regional level.

Our analysis shows that average life satisfaction in Europe varies not only across countries but also within countries at regional level. Similar national and regional differences are observed in SO<sub>2</sub> concentrations. Countries with the lowest SO<sub>2</sub> concentrations – Norway and Denmark – are also among the countries with the highest life satisfaction. Within countries such as Poland, the areas where SO<sub>2</sub> concentrations are highest, are also those areas where life satisfaction tends

to be lower than average. Regional analysis suggests that the association between pollution levels and wellbeing may be even stronger than previous analysis at national level has suggested.

The negative association between SO<sub>2</sub> levels and life satisfaction is robust and remains apparent even after conducting statistical modeling to control for other individual and contextual factors (e.g. economic conditions) that may influence wellbeing. Some of the negative association between SO<sub>2</sub> and wellbeing is no doubt explained by the fact that higher SO<sub>2</sub> concentrations are associated with poorer health which in turn is associated with lower life satisfaction. However, SO<sub>2</sub> has an additional direct effect on subjective wellbeing even after controlling for differences in physical health.

These findings demonstrate the importance of studying the effect of the environment on people's wider wellbeing and of taking steps to minimise the potential harmful effects of poor environmental conditions. ◀



## LIFE SATISFACTION, EMOTIONS AND CULTURAL VALUES

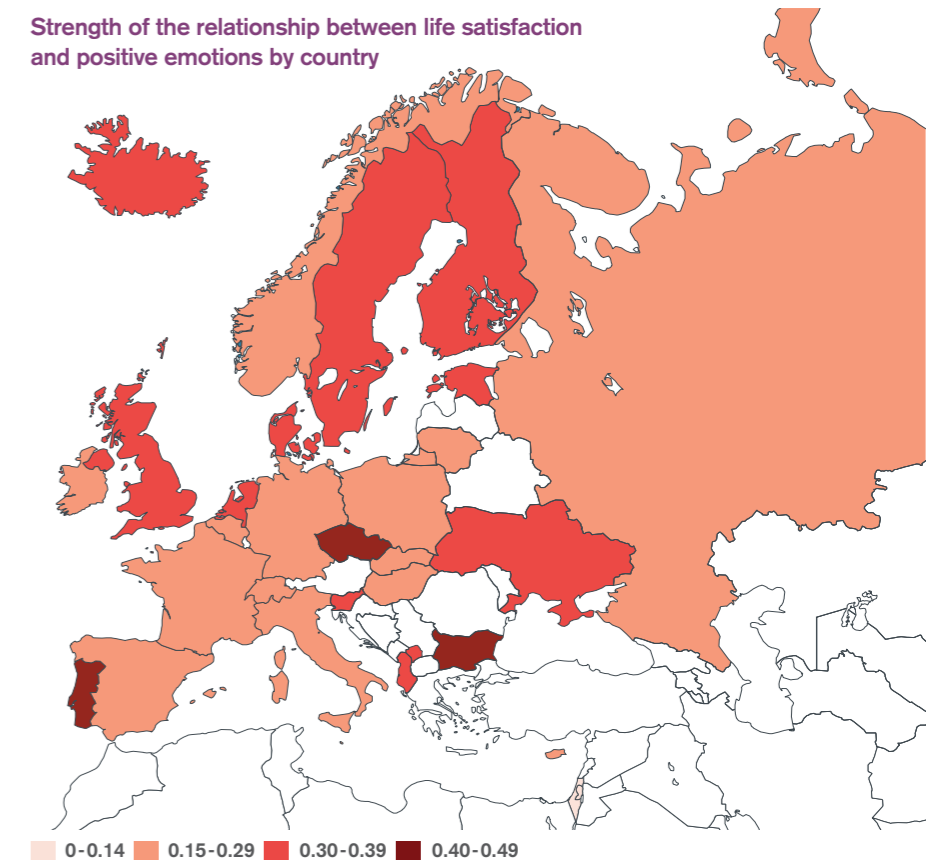
Anu Realo, Liisi Kõots-Ausmees and Jüri Allik  
University of Tartu, Estonia

In general people who experience more positive emotions also feel more satisfied with life. However, the importance of positive emotions varies depending on cultural values

At first glance, it appears self-evident that positive emotions enhance our life satisfaction, whereas negative emotions bring us down and decrease our satisfaction with life. However, can we be satisfied with life without being happy? The answer may differ depending on who you are and where you live. People with different cultural values may attach different levels of importance to emotions when determining how satisfied they are with life.

Across European countries, positive emotions are generally positively associated with life satisfaction, whereas negative emotions are negatively associated with life satisfaction. However, analysis of data from ESS Round 6 (2012/13) shows that the contribution of positive and negative emotions to life satisfaction varies significantly across countries. Of the 29 countries that participated in ESS Round 6, the relationship between positive emotions and life satisfaction is strongest in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Portugal (see the map).

Strength of the relationship between life satisfaction and positive emotions by country



Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/13). Post-stratification weights applied.

Note: Life satisfaction was predicted by positive affect scales measuring emotional experiences in each of the 29 European countries in a series of multiple regression analyses. Darker colours indicate a stronger relationship.

One factor which may influence the strength of the relationship between emotions and life satisfaction across countries is the level of socio-economic development. Analysis suggests that positive emotions matter less in determining life satisfaction in countries which score higher on the Human Development Index.

Cultural values – specifically the extent to which people value survival, i.e. physical and economic security over self-expression – may also be important. Statistical analysis shows that life satisfaction tends to be more strongly dependent on positive emotions

in ESS countries which (according to the World Values Survey) place greater emphasis on survival than in countries where self-expression is more highly valued. Interestingly, however, a lack of negative emotions appears to be equally necessary for being satisfied with life regardless of whether countries score high or low in terms of survival/self-expression.

These findings emphasise the importance of taking a cross-national perspective on wellbeing and remaining alert to the fact that the determinants of wellbeing may vary across cultures. ◀



## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

You can explore ESS findings on wellbeing in more detail by going to our interactive website:

[www.esswellbeingmatters.org](http://www.esswellbeingmatters.org)

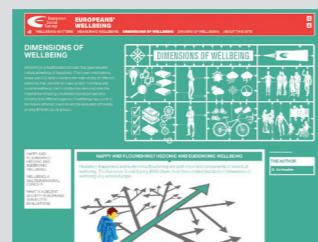
The website has fuller versions of all of the contributions summarised in this publication and offers the opportunity to explore the findings in more detail via interactive charts and tables of results. The site also has “Find out more” sections providing background on the different theoretical and methodological approaches covered and suggestions for further reading on different aspects of wellbeing to be explored using ESS data.



WELLBEING MATTERS



MEASURING WELLBEING



DIMENSIONS OF WELLBEING



DRIVERS OF WELLBEING

## ESS: LOOKING BEYOND WELLBEING

The ESS is a major European research infrastructure with resources to inform academic and policy debate on a range of social, moral and political issues

Seven ESS surveys have now been conducted, carried out every two years since 2002 and addressing the key challenges facing European society in the 21st Century. As well as the promotion of individual and societal wellbeing these include: increased migration, democratic (dis)engagement, changing patterns of work and family life, and pressures on welfare provision. The ESS contains data relevant to all these topics and many others. The survey's rigorous methodological standards and emphasis on knowledge transfer have helped to place it at the forefront of quantitative social measurement and make it a valuable resource to inform social policy at both a national and European level.

Information on the survey's coverage, methodology and findings are readily available through a range of channels:

**ESS website:** which allows unrestricted access to the project's protocols, methods, data and other resources.  
[www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org)



**Edunet:** an online training resource using ESS data to guide students through the analysis of large-scale cross-national data

**Nesstar:** an online data analysis tool which can be used to explore ESS data

**ESS multilevel Data:** combines data from ESS respondents with national and regional level data from sources such as OECD, WHO and Eurostat to make it easier for researchers to explore how contextual factors might influence attitudes and behaviour



**ESSTopline Results Series:** accessible short reports of findings on topics such as welfare, trust in justice, work and family, attitudes to democracy, and personal and social wellbeing

**ESS Policy Seminar Series:** specialist seminars bringing together leading academics and policymakers to discuss how ESS data can inform debate on the key social and economic challenges facing Europe



**ESS Findings:** compendiums of published research on a range of topics using ESS data from the first three rounds and the first five rounds of the ESS

## A SUCCESSFUL EUROPEAN COLLABORATION

The research highlighted in this booklet paints a vivid picture of the subjective wellbeing of citizens in Europe and the key drivers thereof. During a period of economic and political challenge it is especially important to identify patterns and trends in wellbeing and to evaluate the usefulness of this concept as a barometer for evaluating society. The ESS provides high quality data to support this illumination of Europeans' wellbeing. Further, the ESS also covers a range of other topics (including democracy, immigration, welfare, energy and the environment, health inequalities and institutional trust) to support academically rigorous analysis of the grand societal challenges facing Europe in the 21st Century.

It is therefore reassuring that over 80,000 people from across the world have chosen to register at the ESS website to access its detailed data or protocols. Equally significant is the growing number of publications, already numbering over 3,000, in the form of articles, books and other manuscripts that use ESS data. In addition to this output, the ESS continues to exert its influence on cross-national methodology by championing the most rigorous standards in survey design and data collection.

None of this would have been possible without the hard work and dedication of hundreds of researchers right across the European Research Area (ERA). Within the ESS itself, the Core Scientific Team (CST) has driven the project academically, supported by excellent advice from both its Scientific Advisory and Methods Advisory Boards. Meanwhile a series of National Coordination teams has excelled at the task of implementing the demanding ESS specification within their countries.



Our biggest debt, however, is to the over 300,000 respondents across Europe who have devoted around an hour of their time to share their views with trained interviewers. Continued public participation in social surveys is essential in order to produce data that can lead to better policy – and a better Europe. ◀

**Rory Fitzgerald, ESS ERIC Director,  
City University London, 2015**

**Go online to find out more:  
[www.esswellbeingmatters.org](http://www.esswellbeingmatters.org)**

# FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE ESS

The European Social Survey is a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC) that provides rigorous cross-national data about public attitudes and behaviour over time. Since 2002 the survey has been carried out in over 30 European countries. See [www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org) for further information.

This booklet presents findings on subjective wellbeing using data from the first six rounds of the ESS. Visit [www.esswellbeingmatters.org](http://www.esswellbeingmatters.org) to find out more.

**This booklet should be cited as follows:**

European Social Survey (2015) Measuring and Reporting on Europeans' Wellbeing: Findings from the European Social Survey. London: ESS ERIC.

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June 2015

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