

# Measuring adaptation with immigrants' subjective wellbeing: evidence from European countries

Jan Brzozowski,<sup>a</sup> Joanna Sikorska<sup>b</sup>

**Abstract.** The socio-economic adaptation of immigrants in Europe is the source of great concern both to experts and policy-makers. The literature on the subject regards the traditional approach to measuring the adaptation of foreigners to the host country, involving the use of indicators such as full-time employment or income level, as insufficient, and advocates a more diversified and inclusive approach. Our study answers this call by taking into account the subjective wellbeing (SWB) of individuals (life satisfaction scores) while researching the socio-economic adaptation of immigrants in Europe.

The main aim of the study is to empirically assess the socio-economic adaptation of first-generation immigrants and persons with immigrant background (i.e. those who have at least one immigrant parent) in European states. To this end, we analyse the determinants of the SWB based on the data from the European Social Survey conducted in 2018 in 29 European countries on the population aged 15+. In our model, we use the religious affiliation and religiosity of individuals as an additional measure of cultural identity. We also take into account control variables such as labour market participation, education, marital status and disability. We apply Ordinary Least Squares regression, a method commonly used in analyses of this type.

We find that the first-generation immigrant status does not impact directly on the SWB, i.e. the life satisfaction scores of foreign-born persons are similar to those of the local community. What has a more significant influence is the immigrants' religious affiliation: Muslims are the religious group dissatisfied with life to the largest extent. Yet, their life satisfaction increases considerably among the second-generation immigrants, i.e. persons who have at least one foreign-born parent. Therefore, our results confirm that the new generation of Muslims with immigrant background born in European host countries is better adapted to the socio-economic conditions than their parents' generation or native Muslims.

**Keywords:** immigrants, adaptation, subjective wellbeing, immigrant background

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<sup>a</sup> Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie, Wydział Studiów Międzynarodowych i Politycznych, Instytut Studiów Europejskich, Polska / Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Faculty of International and Political Studies, Institute of European Studies, Poland. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8517-3485>. Autor korespondencyjny / Corresponding author, e-mail: [jan.brzozowski@uj.edu.pl](mailto:jan.brzozowski@uj.edu.pl).

<sup>b</sup> Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Krakowie, Kolegium Ekonomii, Finansów i Prawa, Instytut Ekonomii, Polska / Krakow University of Economics, College of Economics, Finance, and Law, Institute of Economics, Poland. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3740-1137>. E-mail: [sikorskj@uek.krakow.pl](mailto:sikorskj@uek.krakow.pl).

# Pomiar adaptacji imigrantów z wykorzystaniem subiektywnego dobrostanu na przykładzie krajów Europy

**Streszczenie.** Adaptacja społeczno-ekonomiczna imigrantów w Europie jest tematem, nad którym pochylają się zarówno eksperci, jak i decydenci polityczni. Tradycyjne podejście do pomiaru adaptacji cudzoziemców w kraju przyjmującym polegające na zastosowaniu takich wskaźników, jak zatrudnienie na pełny etat czy poziom dochodów uznaje się w literaturze przedmiotu za niewystarczające i zaleca się bardziej zróżnicowane i inkluzyjne podejście. Badanie omawiane w artykule odpowiada na to zapotrzebowanie, uwzględniając subiektywny dobrostan (ang. *subjective wellbeing* – SWB) jednostek, w tym ocenę satysfakcji z życia.

Głównym celem badania jest empiryczna ocena adaptacji społeczno-ekonomicznej pierwszego pokolenia imigrantów oraz osób z pochodzeniem imigranckim (tj. mających co najmniej jednego rodzica imigranta) w krajach europejskich. Przeanalizowano determinanty SWB na podstawie danych z Europejskiego Sondażu Społecznego przeprowadzonego w 2018 r. w 29 krajach Europy na populacji w wieku powyżej 15 lat. Opracowano model uwzględniający przynależność do wyznania religijnego i stopień religijności badanych osób jako dodatkową miarę tożsamości kulturowej, a obecność na rynku pracy, wykształcenie, stan cywilny i niepełnosprawność jako zmienne kontrolne. Posłużono się metodą najmniejszych kwadratów, powszechnie stosowaną w takich analizach.

Wyniki badania wskazują, że status imigranta w pierwszym pokoleniu nie wpływa bezpośrednio na SWB, czyli że poziom satysfakcji z życia osób urodzonych za granicą i członków lokalnej społeczności jest podobny. Natomiast istotna jest przynależność imigrantów do wyznania religijnego: najmniej zadowoleni z życia są muzułmanie, jednak satysfakcja z życia w tej grupie znacząco wzrasta w przypadku imigrantów w drugim pokoleniu, tj. osób mających co najmniej jednego rodzica urodzonego za granicą. Z badania wynika, że pokolenie muzułmanów urodzonych w europejskich krajach przyjmujących jest lepiej przystosowane do warunków społeczno-ekonomicznych niż pokolenie ich rodziców i niż muzułmanie bez rodowodu imigranckiego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** imigranci, adaptacja, subiektywny dobrostan, pochodzenie migranckie

## 1. Introduction

With the European Migration Crisis (2014–2019), Brexit and the contemporary problem of refugees at the EU eastern border, the immigration processes and foreign populations in the EU countries have become a top priority in the public agenda (Grzymała-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018). Therefore, EU governments have been working on a common approach concerning immigration policies which are crucial from two points of view: the perspective of the country authorities and the one of immigrants. In this paper we will focus on the latter, i.e. the analysis of the assimilation of individuals in the host society. One of the most important contemporary challenges in the above-mentioned process is a successful adaptation of newcomers to the social, cultural and economic systems of host countries in order to maintain social cohesion, fill vacancies on the labour markets and compensate for

the shortage of young people caused by population ageing in Europe (Motti-Stefanidi & García Coll, 2018).

The research on socio-economic adaptation has a long tradition in migration studies and has undergone a substantial evolution over the past 100 years (see Section 2 for a detailed literature review). Nevertheless, dominant approaches mostly take into account the perspective and expectations of the socio-economic, political and cultural elites of the host country (Brzozowski, 2017). Immigrants are seen as a group supposed to integrate and pursue the model of socio-economic activity similar to the dominant one in the host country. However, intensive migration to Europe in the last decades has contributed to a great cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, mostly in Western Europe: in some countries immigrants and citizens with immigrant background account for between 16% (Spain) and 30% (Belgium) of the population (Drouhot & Nee, 2019). This is why the expectations that immigrants in such countries will rapidly and fully integrate with the host country are quite unrealistic, yet logical from the policy-makers' point of view. In this approach, immigrants are perceived as passive objects of the adaptation process.

Since 1990s, though, there has been some discussion on sociological studies that assumed a different point of view: that immigrants are usually active agents of the change, ready to negotiate and reshape their own adaptation paths within the new socio-cultural and economic environment in the host country (Conzen et al., 1992). Therefore, many studies (e.g. Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011; Grzymała-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018; Portes & Rivas, 2011) suggest that the successful adaptation of immigrants is possible only when they are actively and mindfully participating in the process.

Moreover, in recent years, the research on international migration has been greatly influenced by the happiness studies, which adopt the perspective of individual subjective wellbeing (Ambrosetti & Paparusso, 2021). It is argued that the subjective wellbeing (SWB) measures reflect the influence of decisions made by economic agents on prosperity better than income or earnings. In migration studies, both happiness and life satisfaction have been used as measures of the success/failure of the migration process, or even as a driving force which leads to migration decisions (Brzozowski & Coniglio, 2021).

Our study adopts this perspective, turning to subjective wellbeing of immigrants as an alternative measure of their adaptation in a host country. The main aim of the study is to empirically assess the socio-economic adaptation of first-generation immigrants and citizens with immigrant background (i.e. persons having at least one immigrant parent) in European states. To this end, we adopted subjective wellbeing scores as a proxy measure of the subjective individual assessment of the socio-economic adaptation. We used data from the European Social Survey (ESS), 2018

wave, which is one of the major available cross-sectional studies on the European societies. We also included the religious affiliation and religiosity of individuals as additional factors for explaining diversity of the results when it comes to subjective wellbeing.

Our current paper contributes to two major areas of research, namely the socio-economic adaptation of immigrants and the subjective wellbeing and migration (to the latter by investigating the adaptation processes of first-generation immigrants and persons with immigrant background in EU countries). We use individual subjective wellbeing scores, as – in our opinion – they accurately represent the subjective assessment of the adaptation process of an individual in the host country. Our contribution to the literature on socio-economic integration is therefore twofold. Firstly, we provide an alternative assessment of forms of adaptation, taking into account the subjective wellbeing measures for immigrants, namely life satisfaction and happiness. As far as we know, such approach has been so far seldom applied in migration studies (Angelini et al., 2014; Hendriks & Burger, 2020; Paparusso, 2021). Secondly, we include the religious affiliation and religiosity of individuals as additional auxiliary variables, which is a relatively innovative approach in the studies on socio-economic adaptation.

## **2. Literature review and hypotheses**

### **2.1. Assimilation, integration and adaptation: concepts and theories**

The development of migration studies generates many concepts of immigrant behaviour in the host country (Brzozowski, 2017). In this paper, we will introduce three acculturation phases which can, to some extent, happen independently of each other. They are adaptation, integration and assimilation. This division implies fluidity of the conceptual categories and also indicates changes of identification of individual immigrants. The acculturation process is the deepest change in a group's cultural identity or in an individual attitude in response to new conditions. Alterations in the attitudes of individuals lead to adaptation, which includes immigrants' necessary social skills and wellbeing (Berry et al., 2006, p. 305).

Acculturation is understood as a bilateral process, hence it emphasises the 'exchange of cultural features' (Johnson, 2011, p. 7). What is more, immigrants' acculturation process may be considered a success when their social status or occupational position is higher than in the state of origin (Ibidem).

Apart from marginalisation and separation, the absorption of immigrants into the receiving society takes place on several levels, including the economic, social, political, cultural and the psychological sphere (Ho Lee, 1998, p. 275). It occurs

thanks to repeating contacts between an individual or a group of immigrants and members of different culture groups (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2008, p. 41). The least advanced component of acculturation is adaptation, which can be defined as 'the minimal accommodation to the environment that enables survival' (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2011, p. 45).

In migration studies, adaptation is understood as the immigrant's accommodation to the current environment, including ways to cope with problems encountered by newcomers. This implies that an individual adapts to the new society, but does not need to become similar to its members (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2008, p. 41). Importantly, adaptation does not require strong social bonds. Instead, it just involves embracing cultural patterns and norms in public domains, while cultivating one's native patterns of behaviour in the private sphere. The adaptation may take place in three key domains: economic (related to the labour activity), cultural (linked to language proficiency and knowledge of cultural norms in the host country), and social (through interactions with the host society) (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2011, p. 45; Grzymała-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018). Adaptation, as well as the broader notion of acculturation, should be analysed in a bidimensional model which does not assume disregarding the culture of one's origin, while at the same time embracing the culture of the host country (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2007, p. 1464).

The other element of acculturation is integration, which has been widely described in the literature. The phenomenon of integration should be understood as a form of the immigrant's adjustment to the new environment. As mentioned above, integration takes place in many different spheres of life, but the fact it occurred in one sphere does not necessarily mean it will do the same in another one (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2020, p. 10).

Integration is a form of an immigrant's entry into the host society, and due to its complexity and relative ambiguity, it is a concept widely used in migration studies as well as in everyday life. It refers to both the process and state in which an immigrant or group of immigrants take an active part in various spheres of life in the host country and build relationships with the members of the host society. Grzymała-Kazłowska (2008) refers to several contexts of integration: a descriptive-studying context, in which the motion towards integration with the receiving society is analysed together with visualised factors impeding and facilitating this process, a normative-ideological context, which means that cultural, structural and functional integration is perceived as useful, and a law and institutional context, which refers to the domain of politics and actions shaping the political realm. In this latter approach, the role of the state is stressed; immigrants are seen as rivals causing problems and creating threats (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2008, p. 29).

It is worth noting that integration may start before the actual emigration thanks to transnational contacts (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2020). More importantly, integration is a bilateral, not always symmetrical, relationship between an immigrant or group of immigrants and members of the host society (Grzymała-Każłowska, 2008, p. 29). In this case, an individual accepts the norms of the host society, but at the same time he or she does not reject the culture of their origin.

The last form of immigrant acculturation behaviour is assimilation. Initially, this was applied to European immigrants who reached America in the nineteenth century. Although originally there was no objective definition of assimilation (Hirsch, 1976), it was assumed that it is a (linear) process, by which the culture of the immigrant community is transformed into a larger political unit of the host country. At the same time, assimilation demands denationalisation, i.e. renouncing immigrants' behavioral patterns, which leads to panoramic homogeneity in the society. The process of assimilation is described as either an unconscious or partly conscious incorporation of an individual into the general culture. In other words, assimilation can be described as the final outcome of intercultural, close contacts in the host country (Park & Burgess, 1921, pp. 735–737). Still, the theoretical models of assimilation have undergone a substantial transformation throughout the 20th century and in the beginning of the 21st century. Initially, assimilation was perceived as a gradual and linear process with clear stages (Gordon, 1961). Then non-linearities started being taken into account, such as the possible return to previously abandoned ethnic identity across the generations of immigrants (Alba & Nee, 1997), or the active role of immigrants in reshaping and renegotiating their identities (Conzen et al., 1992). The newest approaches perceive assimilation process not as the homogenisation of the immigrant identity and culture towards the host-country cultural mainstream, but rather as 'declining significance of context-specific markers of difference like race, ethnicity or religion' for immigrants and persons with an immigrant background (Drouhot & Nee, 2019, p. 180).

Another two important theoretical approaches to assimilation and integration are the Melting Pot and the Salad Bowl theories. Both of them originated in the U.S.A. The Melting Pot is an old, yet still a relatively popular concept, in which the uniqueness of the American nation is emphasised: all race, ethnic, religious and cultural groups have been melted into one American society, and particular individuals had to adapt to the dominant cultural mainstream. The theory was very useful in the political sense, as it promoted the inclusiveness of the American nation, whose member one has been able to become through obtaining the U.S. citizenship, unlike is the case with some other countries, where one has to be born to native citizens to have the citizenship. In this sense, the Melting Pot is a classic

assimilationist theory, which promoted Anglo-conformism of newcomers to the American society.

The Salad Bowl concept, in contrast, allows cultural pluralism in the host multicultural society. As in a salad recipe, this theory makes the selection of ingredients possible, i.e. enables a 'selective integration between ethnic groups based on their need to integrate in host societies' (Berray, 2019, p. 144). The theoretical concept underlying the Salad Bowl is that immigrants have the right to follow different paths of cultural, social and economic adaptation to their host countries.

As demonstrated above, in our view adaptation is the most accurate measurement of immigrants' attitudes, as it embraces their individual perspective. It reflects the personal wishes, desires, plans and motivations of immigrants, instead of just showing the expectations of the receiving society. Thus, from this perspective, it is the opposite of integration – the process which engages the receiving society. As Favell (2019, p. 3) pointed out, 'integration is a property of a social system', and requires a system in which an individual is differentiated from his or her environment. Adaptation, on the other hand, takes place without the host country's policies, so is relatively objective and depoliticised as a measuring method. What is more, measuring adaptation is possible even shortly after the immigrant's arrival in the host country, while integration requires more time.

## **2.2. Empirical studies on socio-economic adaptation of immigrants: an overview**

The adaptation process balances between 'maintaining the heritage culture and adapting to the majority culture' (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2007, p. 1464), which should be taken into consideration while choosing the proper measuring method. The phenomenon of being engaged in two cultures is constantly intensifying in contemporary societies, as it is enhanced by mass communication broadcasts, globalisation, facilitated international transport, and transnational bonds.

There are few empirical studies on the socio-economic adaptation, as the vast majority of academic papers focuses on integration processes in every sphere of life (the economic, political, cultural, psychological and social spheres, Brzozowski, 2017; Motti-Stefanidi & García Coll, 2018). Among those few, there are papers focusing on the methods of measuring the acculturation, and on the scale of adaptation (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2007; Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011; Demes & Geeraert, 2014).

Although measuring the adaptation of an immigrant to the new environment has not been a common research practice, it should be noted that the longitudinal data may cover important new social areas, including the growing cultural and religious

diversity. The studies provide information on households and individuals, e.g. on income, employment, education and immigrant attitudes. In our paper, we will also include life satisfaction of an individual and his or her religious affiliation and religiosity.

A long debate in migration studies in Europe has been focused on the gradual adaptation and the socio-economic mobility of immigrants (Drouhot & Nee, 2019). It is expected that longer residence in the host country should enhance the upward mobility on immigrants; however, in the cross-sectional analyses, the 'unsuccessful immigrants (who fail to advance) might be excluded, as some of them might opt for returning to their home country (Laurentsyeva & Venturini, 2017). Additionally, despite the strong evidence of intergenerational advancement, children of immigrants usually cope better with the socio-economic conditions than their parents. Still, there is a big divergence between different ethnic groups or even within the same ethnic group but located in different countries (e.g. Turkish immigrants achieving much better results in education in France and Sweden than in Germany), and between citizens with immigrant background and the natives (Drouhot & Nee, 2019).

According to the recent, extensive literature review by Drouhot and Nee (2019), the most important determinants of a successful socio-economic adaptation of immigrants in Europe are: the educational attainment of an individual, social contacts with the natives, the length of stay and generational status (foreign-born/first generation and children of immigrants), fluency in the language of the host country, and the legal status in the host country. Laurentsyeva and Venturini (2017) added two important dimensions which shape the adaptation process: the naturalisation of immigrants (i.e. the adoption of the host country citizenship) and the settlement policy. The latter is particularly important: the geographical dispersion of immigrants tends to result in a more intensive interaction with the host society (yet over long period of time), whereas ethnic enclaves contribute to the effective adaptation of immigrants, especially in the first years following their settlement.

Measuring adaptation is the subject of wider analysis in the case of immigrant children only (Portes & Rivas, 2011; Sun et al, 2020). There are no papers pertaining to the attitudes of adult immigrants. On the other hand, there is a growing number of papers focusing on the adaptation of the 'environmental' immigrants (Maharjan et al., 2020; McLeman, 2019; McLeman & Hunter, 2010; Sobczak-Szelc & Fekih, 2020). In this case, migration is treated as a process of adaptation to climate changes caused by desertification, deforestation and the demise of biodiversity.



### **2.3. Happiness studies and immigrants' socio-economic adaptation**

The academic literature is much varied regarding the merge of studies on happiness and migration. It becomes frequently prevalent among migration scholars to apply the achievements of happiness studies in their research. As predominantly measuring subjective wellbeing arises from the necessity of filling the research gap on the implications of migration, the academics' attention shifts to those immigrants who were unable to meet their needs in the country of origin (Hendriks & Bartram, 2019, pp. 280–284).

Some papers aim to measure the connection between the level of subjective wellbeing (or life satisfaction) and the fact of migration, both as regards internal and international migration movements (Angelini et al., 2014; Borraz et al., 2008; Cai et al., 2014; Ivlevs, 2014; Ivlevs et al., 2019; Lovo, 2014; Nowok et al., 2013). Still, it remains unclear 'whether adaptation effects of migration on overall subjective wellbeing are structured by immigrants' socio-economic backgrounds and/or moving reasons and conditions' (Erlinghagen et al., 2019). Another empirical study on the subject of the SWB raises the question if and in what way 'the SWB develops prior to as well as after the event of migration' (Erlinghagen et al., 2019).

However, the SWB is hardly ever used as a variable to measure the adaptation process. Here we should probably mention Melzer and Muffels (2017), who investigated the effect of adaptation and social comparison on changes of immigrants' SWB in Germany after its reunification. The effect has been highly correlated with the level of income and the growth of income. Nevertheless, the notion of 'adaptation' used in their study is misleading, as it refers to the adaptation of the SWB. The authors found out that immigrants experience a temporary increase in the SWB after the act of migration due to adapting to the income increase, but afterwards their SWB quickly returns to its initial level, without any long-term benefits (Melzer & Muffels, 2017, p. 6). Another study which uses the SWB measures as a proxy for adaptation is a paper by Chow (2007) on Hong Kong adolescent immigrants in Canada, in which life satisfaction of an individual was positively influenced by a positive academic experience and lack of discrimination in the host country. Another study, relatively similar to the above-mentioned one, investigates the determinants of life satisfaction among highly-skilled immigrants in Israel (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015). This research found that those immigrants' life satisfaction was not significantly affected by their religiosity, yet the religious motivation of their migration was positively related to the SWB.

Finally, there are the most recent studies which also analyse subjective wellbeing as the proxy measure for adaptation, comparing the happiness and life satisfaction scores between immigrants and natives (Ambrosetti & Paparusso, 2021; Brockmann,

2017; Hendriks & Burger, 2020). Yet, these analyses and the previously-mentioned one by Chow (2007) do not address the role of religiosity and religious affiliation of immigrants in the adaptation process.

Another strand of the SWB-related studies and migration incorporates religion studies. Immigrants' religious affiliation (Fuller & Martin, 2012; Stillman et al., 2012) and religiosity (Borraz et al., 2008; Ivlevs et al., 2019) are used as a control variable designed to assess the SWB in the host country. Moreover, the component of religiosity and religious affiliation seems to be an important factor in analyses of socio-cultural and economic integration of immigrants (Stuart & Ward, 2011), as some religious groups (mostly Muslims) are often labelled in public discourse as 'problematic' (Adida et al., 2016). The reasoning behind this negative opinion will be explained in the next section.

#### **2.4. Development of hypotheses**

Most studies on migration measure integration, not adaptation, but our study is intended to fill this gap, contributing both to the migration and happiness studies. In the paper, we use 'subjective wellbeing of immigrants' as a dependent variable to assess the stage of the adaptation process of immigrants in the host country. We assume that the level of SWB is the measure of the immigrants' adaptation process. Moreover, we want to analyse which religious groups adapt well, therefore we use religious affiliation and religiosity as independent variables. We expect that the new measure of adaptation will shed some light on those aspects of the adaptation process that are still relatively unexplored, namely the role of religion and religious affiliation in the process of the socio-economic insertion to the host society.

According to traditional views on assimilation in migration studies, residents with immigrant background should be assimilated to a greater extent than foreign-born immigrants. This is because the former are constantly exposed to the culture of the host country, interact with the receiving society, and their socialisation process is supported by the educational institutions of the host country. Moreover, children of immigrants tend to be educated better than their immigrant parents: this intergenerational progress in educational attainment obviously contributes to successful integration (Drouhot & Nee, 2019). The same should be expected in the case of adaptation process, therefore we expect that:

**Hypothesis 1.** Persons with immigrant background exhibit higher SWB levels and thus are better adapted in socio-economic terms than foreign-born persons.

The role of religion in the assimilation process is ambiguous. On the one hand, religiosity offers psychological support, and religious institutions very often provide several services to new immigrants, like information on apartments for rent or job

offers. On the other hand, by relying on these institutions too much, there is a risk for an immigrant to remain in a hermetic ethnic group and live a life where every problem can be solved in his or her native language. In such a case, religiosity slows down the pace of assimilation. In the EU public discourse, it is communities of Muslim immigrants which most often serve as an example of insufficient assimilation (Adida et al., 2016). Despite the fact that Muslims have been present in Europe at least since the Umayyad conquest of Southern Europe (8th century), and that the majority of contemporary Muslim communities in the EU originate from post-colonial and guest-worker system of labour recruitment initialled in 1950s (De Haas et al., 2019), the 'problematic' status of Muslims' integration is a relatively new phenomenon (Preljević & Ljubović, 2021). Having started with the tragic events of 11st September 2001 (9/11), the contemporary Islamophobia in Europe is centred around two major topics: the re-islamisation of the youth with an immigrant background, which is not directed towards the home country of their (immigrant) parents, but rather towards transnational Islamic communities, and the question of securitisation of immigrant issues (Ajala, 2014). Religiosity in (mostly) secular Europe is perceived as the obstacle to further integration, as the reconciliation of sharia law with human rights in the European understanding seems difficult (McGoldrick, 2009).

It cannot be denied that Muslim immigrants in many European countries tend to be less integrated with the host society than the non-Muslim ones. This could be explained to a large extent by the growing Islamophobia, which creates a vicious circle: young Muslims often alienate themselves from the mainstream society, fearing potential hostilities (Adida et al., 2016). Additionally, Statham et al. (2005) assert that Muslim communities are unfamiliar with the concept of a liberal and secular state, and seek to renegotiate the role of Islam in the public space in several EU countries. For this reason, these people are perceived as potentially disloyal residents: according to recent surveys, only 35–45% of respondents from Germany, France and the UK considered their neighbours with an Islamic affiliation as loyal residents of their countries (Adida et al., 2016). The fear of 'politicised Muslims', who might be influenced by non-democratic or even fundamentalist organisations from outside Europe (Lenard, 2010), led to several political actions, including the Swiss referendum banning construction of minarets (in 2009) and the French ban on women's face covering (in 2010). The above-described problem became even more pronounced after the Arab Spring (2010–2012) and the subsequent massive migration from the MENA region to the EU. European societies had to face a huge wave of refugees from Syria and other countries then, most of whom were Muslim (Preljević & Ljubović, 2021).

Indeed, the above literature review demonstrated that most of the studies on acculturation and cultural assimilation in Europe perceive Muslim immigrants as problematic in terms of assimilation, especially as regards their religious identity, which in many cases remains unchanged or even becomes stronger in the generation of foreign-born immigrants' children or grandchildren (Phalet et al., 2018). One of the elements which explains this endurance of Islamic religiousness is low rates of marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims. The longer process of acculturation might lead to a poorer socio-economic performance of Muslim immigrants and their children, and increases the risk of the social marginalisation of the Muslim youth with immigrant background (Drouhot & Nee, 2019).

Still, the most recent studies on Muslim socio-economic adaptation in Europe show that religiosity is not the main determinant of integration; instead, it is the depth and intensity of contacts with the receiving society and the level of perceived discrimination of young Muslims (Leszczensky et al., 2020).

As the role of Islam in the adaptation process is still under-researched and ambiguous, we formulated the second hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 2.** The SWB rates of immigrants and persons with an immigrant background of the Islamic religious affiliation are lower than those of other immigrants, and thus the former adapt less successfully to the receiving societies.

### 3. Research method

In our study, we analyse the determinants of individuals' subjective wellbeing, based on the data from the European Social Survey (ESS). The 9th wave of the ESS in 2018 was carried out on the basis of a representative sample from 29 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom). It took into consideration the most important socio-economic characteristics of respondents aged 15+, such as education, labour market participation, etc. The full sample consisted of information on approximately 47,000 persons. The application of population weights allowed the generalisation of the results for the entire European region, including a sub-sample for the EU. What is most important from the point of view of our study is the fact the ESS enabled us to identify both first-generation immigrants (i.e. foreign-born persons) and residents with an immigrant background (i.e. persons who have at least one foreign-born parent). The ESS dataset included information on the religious affiliation and the religiosity of the respondents. Descriptive statistics of the ESS sample are provided in Table 1. What is striking is the dominance of female respondents: women accounted for 53.8% of the sample. Additionally, we found

large participation of the first- (8.7%) and the second-generation immigrants (14.8%) very useful.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics: variables used in the study

Variable	Mean or frequency	Standard deviation
happiness .....	7.372	1.949
life satisfaction .....	7.046	2.203
individual has paid work (dummy) .....	0.518	0.500
individual is disabled (dummy) .....	0.031	0.174
individual is unemployed (dummy) .....	0.058	0.234
age .....	50.655	18.645
gender (female = 1) .....	0.538	0.499
size of the household (number of persons) .....	2.556	1.358
individual is in a legal relationship (dummy) .....	0.491	0.500
holding a Bachelor's degree (dummy) .....	0.105	0.307
holding a Master's or higher degree (dummy) .....	0.125	0.331
living in a big city (dummy) .....	0.202	0.402
living in suburbs (dummy) .....	0.108	0.311
individual is foreign-born (dummy) .....	0.087	0.282
having foreign-born parent(s) (dummy) .....	0.148	0.355
Islamic religious affiliation (dummy) .....	0.029	0.169
Christian religious affiliation (dummy) .....	0.557	0.497
Judaic religious affiliation (dummy) .....	0.0008	0.029
other religious affiliation (dummy) .....	0.007	0.085
religiosity (continuous) <sup>a</sup> .....	4.56	3.145

a Religiosity is measured from 0 (not religious at all) to 10 (very religious).

Source: European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC, 2021).

Our dependent variable is the subjective wellbeing of an individual. As in most empirical analyses (cf. Brzozowski & Coniglio, 2021), there are two most popular measures of the SWB which are used interchangeably: life satisfaction and happiness. As pointed out by Ruggeri et al. (2020), the subjective wellbeing has psychological and hedonic aspects. The psychological wellbeing, called also eudaimonic, means self-fulfillment and having a meaningful purpose in life. The hedonic wellbeing, on the other hand, denotes pleasure without pain. This dichotomy is reflected in the fact that the term 'happiness' is most often used for the measurement of the hedonic wellbeing, while 'life satisfaction' is considered a suitable measurement for the eudaimonic wellbeing (Ruggeri et al., 2020). In our study, we used life satisfaction of an individual as the dependent variable, and happiness for robustness checks (the results are fairly similar in both cases and are available from the authors upon request), mostly because we believe that self-fulfillment of an individual is the most important aspect of his or her socio-economic adaptation.

As regards life satisfaction, the respondents who participated in the 2018 edition of the ESS had to answer the following question: 'All things considered, how satisfied

are you with your life as a whole nowadays?’ on a 0–10 scale (0 denoting no satisfaction at all, and 10 full satisfaction). The same range of responses applied to the question on happiness: ‘Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?’ (0 standing for extremely unhappy and 10 for extremely happy).

Consequently, in the empirical exercise we estimate the effect of an immigrant background and religious affiliation of an individual on one’s subjective wellbeing using a cross-sectional approach specified as follows:

$$SWB_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 immigrant_{it} + \beta_2 religion_{it} + \beta_3 X_{it} + \varepsilon_{it},$$

where the ‘SWB’ is a measure of subjective wellbeing (life satisfaction), the ‘immigrant’ is the immigrant status of an individual, ‘religion’ denotes religious affiliation of individual  $i$  at time  $t$ , and  $X$  is the vector of auxiliary variables including age, gender, marital status, household size, geographical location of the household and the education level.

As our dependent variable, life satisfaction, is not continuous but categorical (taking values from the range of 0–10), the obvious choice for a statistical analysis would be the ordered logit model. However, the ordered logit estimation requires the fulfillment of the proportional odds assumption, which was not met by our data. In this situation, we estimated the equation using the OLS model. To test the robustness of our model, we ran a generalised ordered logistic model (the results are available upon request, and are very similar to the ones shown in the paper). We believe this statistical method is the most popular one for analysing correlations and provides results which are easy to read for an average reader. It is crucial when collating variables which are not compared on a regular basis, e.g. religious affiliation, religiosity, life satisfaction and happiness. Also, it minimises possible estimation errors. The findings of our empirical analysis are presented and discussed in the following section.

#### 4. Results and discussion

Our model specification for life satisfaction includes a basic set of auxiliary variables, namely dummies for having or not having paid work, being or not being disabled or unemployed, age, gender, size of the household, being or not being in a legal relationship, having or not having tertiary education (both BA and MA diploma or higher), and the location of the dwelling (Table 2). As mentioned above, we applied the happiness variable to the robustness check.

**Table 2.** Determinants of the subjective wellbeing of an individual

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
paid work (dummy) .....	0.168*** (0.0389)	0.164*** (0.0389)	0.166*** (0.039)
disabled (dummy) .....	-1.228*** (0.112)	-1.223*** (0.112)	-1.225*** (0.113)
unemployed (dummy) .....	-0.981*** (0.0758)	-0.970*** (0.0761)	-0.983*** (0.0766)
age .....	-0.0736*** (0.00498)	-0.0737*** (0.00498)	-0.0733*** (0.00499)
age squared .....	0.000634*** (0.0000515)	0.000632*** (0.0000516)	0.000625*** (0.0000518)
gender (female = 1) .....	-0.026 (0.0279)	-0.0302 (0.028)	-0.0427 (0.0284)
size of the household .....	0.0429*** (0.0127)	0.0473*** (0.0128)	0.0441*** (0.0128)
legal relationship (dummy) .....	0.623*** (0.0342)	0.626*** (0.0342)	0.625*** (0.0344)
Bachelor's degree (dummy) .....	0.391*** (0.0416)	0.386*** (0.0417)	0.387*** (0.0418)
Masters' or higher degree (dummy) .....	0.530*** (0.0377)	0.526*** (0.0377)	0.524*** (0.0378)
living in a big city (dummy) .....	-0.171*** (0.037)	-0.162*** (0.0371)	-0.158*** (0.0372)
living in suburbs (dummy) .....	0.0308 (0.0457)	0.0245 (0.0458)	0.0173 (0.0457)
foreign-born (dummy) .....	.	0.053 (0.10)	0.0493 (0.111)
foreign-born parent(s) (dummy) .....	.	0.00812 (0.0783)	0.0195 (0.079)
Islamic religious affiliation (dummy) .....	.	-0.984*** (0.163)	-1.059*** (0.167)
Christian religious affiliation (dummy) .....	.	0.012 (0.0314)	-0.0624 (0.0382)
religiosity .....	.	.	0.0173*** (0.00615)
foreign-born x islamic affiliation .....	.	0.108 (0.269)	0.0513 (0.266)
foreign-born parent(s) x islamic .....	.	0.621** (0.269)	0.661** (0.267)
foreign-born x christian affiliation .....	.	0.0211 (0.150)	0.0106 (0.150)
foreign-born parent(s) x christian .....	.	0.0849 (0.115)	0.0896 (0.116)
constant .....	8.530*** (0.107)	8.537*** (0.108)	8.525*** (0.109)
observations .....	46,494	46,494	46,032
R-squared .....	0.074	0.076	0.077

Note. Estimated with the OLS. Robust standard errors in parentheses: \*\*\* –  $p < 0.01$ , \*\* –  $p < 0.05$ . For the dummies, reference categories are as follows: female (male), legal relationship (single, divorced, widowed), Bachelor's degree and Master's or higher degree (primary and secondary education), paid work, disabled, unemployed (economically inactive or in education), living in a big city and living in suburbs (small towns and rural areas), Islam, Christianity, Judaism, other religion (no religious affiliation).

Source: ERIC (2021).

All the auxiliary variables were statistically significant, and their signs complied with the expectations, while the value of parameters was robust across all model specifications (1, 2 and 3). Persons with paid occupation, living in larger households, in legal relationships, and having tertiary education, were more satisfied with life than the rest of the population, other things being equal. The disabled and the unemployed, as well as older respondents living in big cities, were less satisfied with their lives than the rest, other things being equal. Like in Zweig's research, our study showed that females are on average happier than males, but there is no significant difference in life satisfaction scores by gender (Zweig, 2015).

In the following model, we introduce our most important independent variables, namely the immigrant's status in the first (foreign-born) and the second (foreign-born parent/s) generation, the religious affiliation of the individual and, most importantly, the interaction between the immigrant's status and his or her religious affiliation. Surprisingly, and quite unlike the results of the previous studies on the SWB (Brockmann, 2017; Hendriks & Burger, 2020), both the dummies for foreign-born persons and persons who had foreign-born parents were not statistically different from those for the natives. The same phenomenon occurred for persons whose at least one parent was foreign-born.

According to our study, the main factor responsible for the lower level of life satisfaction of immigrants in Europe is actually not their immigrant status, but their religious affiliation. In fact, being Muslim is associated with a much lower level of life satisfaction than being Christian, the member of any other religious group or being a person without any religious affiliation. This result applies not only to immigrants, but also to native Muslims. As far as this religious group is concerned, the 'penalty' for the SWB is greatly lessened in the case of religious persons (i.e. when religiosity of an individual is included, see Model 2).

The situation is different as regards persons with an immigrant background (i.e. individuals with a foreign-born parent or parents). In their case, the Muslim 'penalty' mostly disappears and they reach much higher SWB scores than other Muslims (both foreign-born and native Muslims).

Such results make us question the dominant public narrative about a problematic adaptation of immigrants in most European countries, especially the immigrants with Islamic religious affiliation. According to our analysis, these persons might not cope better than or as well as natives in terms of 'hard' socio-economic indicators, but when it comes to their subjective well-being assessment, the picture is more nuanced.

Our results seem to support the Salad Bowl theory, as they emphasise the unique identities of newcomers and their ability to retain and appreciate their own ethnic and religious background, instead of losing it in the assimilation process. Preservation of the family tradition, on par with collectivist orientation facilitating it, does not impede the adaptation process. Instead, it helps living in harmony with



one's own background, and therefore contributes to increasing their SWB rate (Berray, 2019; Mahfouz, 2013; Musaitif, 2018).

## 5. Conclusions

In the paper, we argued that immigrants' adaptation might be measured by their level of life satisfaction. More specifically, if an immigrant's level of life satisfaction is close to the natives', then he or she is believed to be well adapted to the host society. The use of dependent variables like the SWB of an individual, life satisfaction level and, for robustness check, happiness, enabled us to produce credible results. They were correlated with dummies, namely: paid work, disability, being unemployed, age, gender, size of the household, partnership type, tertiary education and location of the household. As can be seen in the first model, all of the auxiliary variables were statistically significant.

When it comes to our hypotheses, we did not find any direct support for the first hypothesis about a better adaptation and higher SWB levels in the second generation of immigrants than in the first one. Actually, the SWB scores of foreign-born individuals and individuals with at least one foreign-born parent do not differ in a significant way. This result is quite positive from the public policy perspective, as it demonstrates that immigrants in Europe seem to be comparatively well adapted in the socio-economic sense, at least when an alternative measure of the adaptation success – the SWB of an individual – is taken into account. Yet, we find partial support for this hypothesis when we interact the immigrant status with religious affiliation. Muslims with foreign-born parent(s) have much higher SWB scores, other things being the same: this effect is strong and statistically significant.

When it comes to hypothesis 2, we found that indeed the Islamic affiliation is associated with a lower SWB, however this effect is significant only for the first generation of Muslim immigrants and for the natives of this denomination. For the children of immigrants, the effect is actually the opposite – citizens with Islamic background, as mentioned before, enjoy higher SWB than their parent's generation and even than Muslims native to European countries.

As regards other important findings, the most surprising one is that the level of life satisfaction among immigrants does not statistically differ from that of the natives. It applies both to the first-generation immigrants and to residents with an immigrant background. Some groups of immigrants adapt quickly to the host society due to the high SWB level and understanding of the culture of the receiving state. When it comes to children of immigrants, their average level of life satisfaction is close to that of natives from the same age group, so we can assume that they are well adapted to living in the host country. This is also demonstrated by the fact that

in our sample, the population of residents with an immigrant background is almost twice as big as the population of newcomers.

What is more, religious affiliation and religiosity impact the level of life, which in the case of Muslims is lower than that of Christians, other religious denominations or people without any religious affiliation. While religious affiliation seems to negatively impact the level of SWB, religiosity is mitigating this effect by raising it. We can then conclude that the religiosity of an individual positively influences his or her level of satisfaction with life – religious persons on average feel satisfied with their lives.

This effect is more pronounced when it comes to immigrants' children. According to our study, Muslims with foreign-born parents show higher level of life satisfaction than foreign-born or native Muslims. On that basis we can assume that residents with Islamic background are effectively adapted, or even integrated, with the host society. Therefore, a conclusion could be drawn – actually in line with previous studies on this subject (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Brzozowski & Coniglio, 2021; Chow, 2007) – that migration additionally enhances life satisfaction scores.

The use of the SWB for measuring adaptation can be an effective method if a given group is well-adapted to the host society. It can be used as an alternative or complementary method for researching immigrants' adaptation process.

Moreover, our paper contributes to the discussion about Muslim immigrants in Europe. The opponents of immigration from Islamic countries frequently complain about the immigrants' self-isolation and inability to adapt. On the contrary, we provide data on the high SWB level among citizens with an Islamic background. It is a relatively novel approach, as it sees their potential to successfully adapt to the host society.

Our study has some limitations, which stem from not ideal distribution of demographic characteristics in the sample, namely the overrepresentation of women and nearly twice as large proportion of immigrants from the second generation as the share of first-generation immigrants. What is more, it is possible that respondents from the first immigrant generation were interviewed shortly after their arrival in the new country, which could have significantly affected the obtained results, as newcomers usually feel more satisfied with life than in the country of origin because they experience improved living conditions.

Most research on migration patterns and immigrants' behaviour focus on integration, whereas this study examines the process of adaptation. As described in Section 2, adaptation is a more adequate process, because it takes into account the immigrants' perspective and is depoliticised. We believe that the assessment of adaptation should be included in the future studies on migration. Also, it would be worthwhile to determine specific factors that impact the subjective wellbeing of individuals of different religious denominations and countries of origin.

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