

Measuring Subjective Well-being in the European Statistical System (ESS)

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In its Communication of August 2009, the European Commission (EC) concluded to complement GDP with additional indicators, such as indicators on 'quality of life' and on 'well-being'. For the ESS, the measurement of quality of life is a relatively new field. The ESS agreed that quality of life indicators need to be understood through a multidimensional framework such as proposed in the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission report. There is also an increasing acceptance of the necessity of measuring not only objective outcomes, but also of people's subjective perceptions of life. The measurement of subjective well-being is not an easy matter. At first the nature and the scope of the topic need to be clear. There is in fact agreement among experts on the specific aspects that comprise 'subjective well-being': 'life evaluations' which involve a cognitive evaluation on life as a whole, measures of 'affect' (positive and negative), and the 'eudaimonic' aspect (psychological 'flourishing'). An additional set of topical questions has been developed on subjective aspects of well-being and will be attached – for the first time – as a so-called "ad-hoc module" to the EU-Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) of 2013. In addition, the large sample size of EU-SILC allows to look at distributions and inequalities and to focus on vulnerable groups within our societies.

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