

The OECD Guidelines on Subjective Well-being: towards a common measurement framework, and the statistical agenda ahead

Conal Smith*

OECD, Paris, France conal.smith@oecd.org

Notions of subjective well-being or happiness have a long tradition as central elements of quality of life, but until very recently these concepts were generally deemed beyond the scope of statistical measurement. Over the last two decades, however, an increasing body of evidence has shown that subjective well-being can be measured in surveys, that such measures are valid and reliable, and that they can usefully inform policy-making. Reflecting the increasing interest in subjective well-being from both researchers and policy-makers, the *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress* (2009) recommended that national statistical agencies collect and publish measures of subjective well-being. In March 2013 the OECD published a set of *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being* aimed at putting the measurement of subjective well-being on a sound statistical basis and encouraging greater international comparability in measures. This presentation outlines the OECD framework for measuring subjective well-being and identifies both what is known about best practice and also the key methodological challenges that remain. As national statistical offices start regularly collecting and publishing data on subjective well-being, many of these methodological questions are likely to be resolved due to better data. The paper identifies the main research questions for his statistical agenda and indicates what questions might need to be addressed before contemplating the development of a more formal international standard on measuring subjective well-being.

Key words: subjective well-being, life satisfaction, happiness, measuring progress