

# Measuring Subjective Issues of Well-Being and Quality of Life in the European Statistical System

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**Abstract** Over the last decades, the European Statistical System has developed many European statistics and indicators to measure social progress and sustainable development. Initially only in a few cases the measuring instruments contained questions on subjective issues. With the adoption of its Communication on “gross domestic product and beyond” the Commission has given an impetus to the development of subjective social indicators. This has led to the establishment of a first set of indicators on quality of life and well-being and to a new instrument (the 2013 EU-SILC ad-hoc module for measuring subjective well-being). This new step in European statistics creates an important potential for researchers to engage in in-depth analysis and for national and European Union policy makers to use the resulting indicators—and in casu subjective well-being indicators—for developing and monitoring policy strategies and programmes.

**Keywords** European Statistical System (ESS) · Subjective well-being · European statistics · Quality of life · Well-being

## 1 Introduction

There is a growing debate at all levels—at international and European Union (EU) level, at national and sub-national level—on how to best *measure societal progress* beyond the economic and financial indicators such as the gross domestic product (GDP). This debate is even more topical in these actual times of crises and austerity.

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This article gives an overview of the work in the European Commission<sup>1</sup>—and more in particular on the activities of Eurostat together with its partners in the European Statistical System (ESS)<sup>2</sup>—on measuring *well-being and quality of life*.

It describes the importance of measuring quality of life and well-being in the European social context and of considering quality of life as a concept that identifies *a number of dimensions* which all need to be measured. These dimensions range from material living conditions, employment and income, to life satisfaction and they cover not only objective conditions but also *subjective aspects of life*, such as self-reported health and security.

## 2 Social Policies for a Good Life Quality in the EU

Aiming for a good quality of life and for well-being of its citizens is a key objective of the EU: over the years and following different versions of the treaties, the EU increased its focus to balance economic development with social and environmental sustainability. From the recognition of the right to equal pay for men and women as written in the Treaty of Rome, the treaties' texts evolved with more and broader societal objectives: in 1992 "...improving quality of life of its citizens..." was added as an objective to the Treaty of Maastricht, and the Treaty of Lisbon signed in 2007, and leading to the Treaty on the functioning of the EU clearly states *well-being* as an explicit objective of the EU: "The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its people" (European Commission 2010a).

So over the years the EU has developed an increasingly focussed set of policies within the field of social cohesion. Initial social policies looked at the freedom of movement for migrant workers (workers who move to take up employment in another state within the EU) social security arrangements and the establishment of the European Social Fund in 1957.

Further on, social policies developed at EU level to improve the living and working conditions for particularly vulnerable groups in society. The Single European Act, which was signed in 1986, emphasised the importance of *strengthening economic and social cohesion* in the Community and the Community charter of the fundamental social rights of workers was adopted in 1989.

In 1992, the Maastricht Treaty introduced a *public health mandate* for the EU and since then, the Commission gradually launched various action programmes and strategy papers on public health matters with the actual overall health programme (European Commission 2007) now running until end 2013.

The Amsterdam Treaty (1997) integrated an agreement on *social policy* and inserted a chapter on *employment*. The Lisbon strategy, which was set out in March 2000, has led to the Council and European Parliament adopting the *Social Policy Agenda*<sup>3</sup> in 2000 as well as the adoption of an Open Method of Coordination as a voluntary, flexible and decentralised form of co-operation. The Lisbon strategy has also given impetus to European education and training policies leading ultimately to the actual strategic framework for education and training—ET 2020<sup>4</sup> (adopted in 2009).

<sup>1</sup> Further referred to as "the Commission".

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat together with the national statistical authorities of the 27 Member States (MS) and of the EEA/EFTA countries.

<sup>3</sup> A first Social Policy Agenda run from 2000 to 2005; a second Social Policy Agenda covered the period 2006-2010.

<sup>4</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/framework\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/framework_en.htm).

On the basis of the Commission's Communication Working together, working better (European Commission 2005a), the European Council adopted in 2006 a new framework for the *social protection and social inclusion process*: the existing Open Method of Coordination in the fields of social inclusion and pensions, and the current process of co-operation in the field of health and long-term care, were brought together under common objectives and simplified reporting procedures.

National governments translate the common objectives into national plans—submitted as national strategic reports. These national reports are assessed by the Commission and Council in joint reports, which reflect what EU-level initiatives have been achieved in individual countries. As such, the Open Method of Coordination aims to develop a mutual learning process involving the scrutiny of specific policies, programmes or institutional arrangements presented as good practices in the national strategic reports.

### 3 The EU's Commitment Towards Sustainable Development

The focus on social development is also part of the EU's commitment to *sustainable development*. The first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 led to an EU-wide sustainable development strategy, which was adopted by the European Council in Gothenburg in June 2001, and renewed in June 2006. By this broader strategy, the EU chose to dovetail the policies for economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development, its goal being *sustainable improvement of the well-being and standard of living of current and future generations*.

The *EU Sustainable Development Strategy* launched a vision of progress that links economic development, protection of the environment and social justice. The renewed strategy set out a single, coherent approach for addressing key challenges, including on public health, social inclusion, demography and migration.

The financial and economic crisis, which started in 2008, has however challenged years of economic and social progress and exposed structural weaknesses in Europe's economy. The EU and the world are also *facing important and long-term challenges* such as: globalisation, pressure on resources, ageing.

In order for our own and future generations to continue to enjoy a high-quality of healthy life, underpinned by Europe's unique social models, the European Council has adopted in June 2010 the *Europe 2020 strategy*, with the objective to turn the EU into a *smart, sustainable and inclusive economy* delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.

Amongst others, the strategy sets Member States and the Commission the goal of promoting social inclusion, in particular through the reduction of poverty, by aiming to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion by 2020.

For the main policy themes relevant for the Europe 2020 Strategy (European Commission 2010b), *thematic summaries*<sup>5</sup> have been developed to facilitate a comparison between Member States and to put the economic challenges they face into a broader context. A set of key indicators has been selected for each theme which allows the different achievements of the Member States to be compared. The summaries also contain general guidelines on policies that should be followed to tackle current shortcomings and foster progress towards attainment of relevant targets.

<sup>5</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/key-areas/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/key-areas/index_en.htm).

#### 4 Social Statistics for Underpinning Social Indicators

The impetus for preparing and implementing European social policies and programmes was given by *more and better data and reports* becoming available in the 1960s–1970s and revealing important differences in the social situation in European societies.

Over the following decades a solid and transparent *underlying knowledge-base* was further developed in the EU to underpin the different steps in the democratic decision-making process up for establishing European and national social policies and this is where independent, *high-quality official European statistics* have a crucial role to play.

With more and specific social policies being launched, gradually the EU knowledge base and data set on a variety of social topics became broader, more robust and more detailed, with different *indicator sets* being established on employment, living conditions, income, education, health, social protection, crime, etc.

In this process, Eurostat provided technical assistance to policy departments for setting up these indicators sets. Together with its partners in the ESS and according to its role as laid out in European statistical law (European Commission 2009a, 2012a) Eurostat took a leading role in developing *common European statistical instruments*—through specific legal requirements or by way of common guidelines—for assuring comparability of the European statistics.

Examples of European statistical legislation for establishing a robust and comparable data set on social issues are mentioned in Table 1

The data resulting from the legislation above-mentioned have been analysed in-depth and are used for Community indicators such as for the calculation of Healthy Life years (European Commission 2005b) including data from subjective social indicators.

#### 5 GDP and Beyond; Measuring in a Changing World

But even with all the existing data sets in the economic, social and environmental domain, it became clear that some basic information on the real progress of our societies was still lacking. Therefore, the Commission launched in November 2007, a conference on GDP

**Table 1** Common European statistical instruments

EC Regulation on the Labour Force Survey	Council Regulation of 1998, together with further modifications and implementing measures <sup>a</sup>
The European Community Household Panel <sup>b</sup>	No legal basis, but agreed in the ESS with first wave in 1994
EC Regulation on EU-Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) <sup>b</sup>	Framework Regulation adopted by EP and Council in 2003 (European Commission 2003)
EC Regulation on the production and development of statistics on education and lifelong learning	Framework Regulation adopted by EP and Council in 2008
EC Regulation on public health and health and safety at work <sup>b</sup>	Framework Regulation adopted by EP and Council in 2008
Commission Regulation on the second wave of the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS) <sup>b</sup>	Adopted by the Commission in 2013 (European Commission 2013a)

<sup>a</sup> See: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/EU\\_labour\\_force\\_survey\\_%E2%80%93\\_93\\_main\\_features\\_and\\_legal\\_basis](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/EU_labour_force_survey_%E2%80%93_93_main_features_and_legal_basis)

<sup>b</sup> Includes variables on subjective issues

and beyond. This has set the basis for the Commission to develop a *new road map* setting out the main actions for better measurement of progress of our societies.

In its Communication of August 2009 on GDP and beyond: measuring progress in a changing world (European Commission 2009b), the Commission concluded to complement GDP with *additional indicators*, such as indicators on *quality of life* and on *well-being*, on environmental sustainability and on household income, consumption and wealth.

The publication—1 month later (September 2009)—of the *Stiglitz–Sen–Fitoussi Report* has also put the measurement of quality of life high on the agenda (Stiglitz et al. 2009). Both initiatives responded to a growing need for a wider view on *what makes a society successful* and for a new benchmark that looks at development beyond pure economic progress. This need came (again) at the forefront in a time of tackling the impact of the economic and financial crisis.

For the first time, the *measurement of subjective issues* has been put—through these two high-level texts—clearly in the spotlight for further consideration through official statistics.

## 6 Measuring Quality of Life

Arriving at a good *quality of life* is an individual aspiration as well as a collective objective for society. But what makes our lives of good quality? Using a subjective approach, quality of life is determined by what people themselves consider as important for making a good living: having sufficient economic resources such as a decent income is obviously important, but also non-economic properties are important, such as having good social relations, living close to/in harmony with the natural environment and living in good health. *Subjective well-being* is what people finally perceive them-selves; overall it includes first and foremost measures of how people experience and evaluate their life as a whole (OECD 2013).

The ESS recognised at an early stage that new initiatives and also new European statistics would be needed for measuring progress in the GDP and beyond context. It therefore established a so-called *Sponsorship Group*<sup>6</sup> on *Measuring Progress, Well-being and Sustainable Development*.

From spring 2010 until summer 2011, the Sponsorship Group worked through three topical Task forces (including one on the multi-dimensional measurement of quality of life and one overall Task Force on cross-cutting issues). The final Sponsorship Group's report sets out concrete actions and development work to be undertaken to update the statistical system so as to respond to the changing needs on measuring progress in a broad perspective.

In 2011, the European Statistical System Committee<sup>7</sup> adopted this Sponsorship Group report<sup>8</sup> and the actions proposed in the report are now integral part of the Commission's Annual Statistical Work Programmes and of the 2013–2017 European Statistical Programme (European Commission 2013b).

<sup>6</sup> Representatives of most EU and the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) statistical offices as well as of European Central Bank (ECB), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations Economic Commission for Euro (UNECE) participated in this Group and its four Task forces.

<sup>7</sup> The Commission should consult the ESSC inter alia on developments and priorities in the European Statistical Programme.

<sup>8</sup> All reports and information on the Sponsorship Group can be found at the ESS website at: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/pgp\\_ess/about\\_ess/measuring\\_progress](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/pgp_ess/about_ess/measuring_progress).

**Table 2** Subjective and objective issues and methods

	Issue under study—objective	Issue under study—subjective
Measurement method—objective	Register/employment status	–
Measurement method—subjective	Survey/employment status	Survey/life satisfaction

The measurement of quality of life is a relatively new field in European statistics. The European Statistical System Committee agreed that quality of life indicators need to be understood through a *multidimensional* framework such as proposed in the Stiglitz–Sen–Fitoussi Report. It however put forward its own multi dimensional framework comprising nine dimensions, which cover both societal opportunities and individual capacities or resources:

- Material living conditions (income, wealth and consumption)
- Health
- Education
- Productive and valued activities (including work)
- Governance and basic rights
- Leisure and social interactions (inclusion/exclusion)
- Natural and living environment
- Economic and physical safety
- Overall experience of life.

There is also an increasing interest in measuring not only objective outcomes, but also in collecting data on *people's subjective perceptions of life*. These subjective perceptions could either relate to the outcome overall experience of life or to the subjective perceptions of each of the other dimensions (satisfaction with income, with health, with social relationships etc.).

## 7 Measuring Subjective Issues Through Official Statistics

When looking at measuring subjective issues more in detail we need at first to make a distinction between the issue under study and the method of measurement, which both could be either subjective or objective (see Table 2).

Subjective measurement methods—surveys—are well accepted and frequently used in official statistics for measuring objective issues, such as employment status. But with the shift towards well-being, it became obvious that also subjective issues, such as life satisfaction, and trust in institutions need to be part of the quality of life indicators set and hence the pressure on official statistics to develop the relevant statistical instruments and data sets. Naturally the only way to arrive at these statistics about such subjective topics is to ask people directly about their evaluation and attitude, which de facto could only be done through surveys.

This raises both fundamental questions and technical questions, which were discussed in the context of the work of the Sponsorship Group.<sup>9</sup> For many years most people working on official statistics in the ESS were (and still are)—in principle—reluctant towards

<sup>9</sup> See especially in the Sponsorship Group Task force three on “multi-dimensional measurement of quality of life”.

measuring subjective issues. Main motive behind this attitude was/is the fear for a negative reaction from households and individuals and as a consequence an increase in non-response. But also the lack of agreed standards relative to the main quality criteria: relevance, accuracy, coherence, comparability, timeliness, cost-effectiveness held official statistics away from measuring subjective issues.

However, not all Member States were so reluctant: some Member States (France, Italy, UK, Poland), in accordance with their national practices, strongly supported the implementation of subjective indicators in official statistics. Others, such as Luxembourg and Slovakia, have changed during the last years and gradually started to measure subjective well-being through household surveys and their experience has paved the way for others to follow.

Secondly also the Stiglitz–Sen–Fitoussi-Report has been very influential for this change: its recommendations clearly state the following:

Recent research has shown that it is possible to collect meaningful and reliable data on subjective well-being.... National statistical agencies should incorporate questions on subjective well-being in their standard surveys to capture people's life evaluations, hedonic experiences and life priorities (Stiglitz et al. 2009: 216)

Third, existing European social statistics already covered not only objective issues, but also European statistics were gathered on subjective issues and some of the common ESS statistical instruments, such as the European Community Household Panel, EU-SILC and the European Health Interview Survey, include questions on *subjective issues*, such as self-perceived health. So for some social domains, such as health and safety, surveying subjective issues is already used in the ESS since the 90s. Experience with subjective data from EU-SILC has pointed to the need not only for common concepts and variables but also for better guidelines on order and mode of the interview and for common questions.

Especially in the context of the first wave (2008–2009) of the European Health Interview Survey, carried out before EU legislation was adopted, the national statistical authorities have dedicated a lot of effort to a correct understanding of the social concept to be measured, to agreeing on a reference questionnaire (in English) and to assure correct translations into the different EU languages, by using a strict translation protocol.

And finally, social surveys established outside official European statistics—such as the European Social Survey or the European Quality of Life Survey—have demonstrated a decade-long experience in measuring subjective issues.

Technically, 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 (OECD 2013) and these are:

- life evaluations which involve a cognitive evaluation on life as a whole; this could be surveyed by a question such as: *All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life these days?*
- measures of affect (positive and negative), which capture the feelings experienced by the respondent at a particular point in time; this could be examined by asking a question such as *How often during the past 4 weeks have you felt downhearted/happy?*
- the eudaimonic aspect (psychological “flourishing”), which reflects people’s sense of purpose and engagement, which could be surveyed by asking: *Do you feel that what you do in life is valuable and worthwhile?*

Measuring regularly the subjective well-being of citizens allows evaluating whether they assess their lives being improved or not, irrespective of whether this progress is linked

to a change in GDP. In the past decade, a number of European projects—mainly in the research field—have started more comprehensive survey work. Since 2003 the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) carries out—every 4 years—a *European Quality of Life Survey*, with questions on experienced quality of life and questions about the dimensions that are considered as contributing to a good life quality.

Analysis of the results<sup>10</sup> of the 2007 wave of the European Quality of Life Survey (Eurofound 2009) confirmed that a number of *dimensions*—such as employment, health and good social contacts—affect quality of life and that it is important to measure not only observable inputs, outputs and outcomes, but also *people’s reported perceptions and assessments of life*.

Measuring whether people are going well and in addition gathering information (subjective and objective) about the different dimensions<sup>11</sup> of quality of life allows to evaluate the impact of these dimensions on well-being, how existing social and other policies influence well-being and to identify where additional actions should be launched.

For example, research (European Commission 2010c) using well-being indicators has demonstrated that the amount of social spending per se is not likely to enhance significantly the life satisfaction. The enhancement of individuals’ well-being depends rather on the *type and quality of spending*. The study further stresses inter alia the positive role of the unemployment benefit safety net in protecting well-being.

A first cornerstone in the ESS towards common measurement of subjective well-being was the agreement reached by the Directors-General of the National Statistical Institutes at their meeting in autumn 2010 in Sofia. They endorsed the need for both subjective and objective indicators in order to have a comprehensive picture of the social situation, warning at the same time that special care should be taken when comparing the answers to subjective and objective questions, as well as making comparisons between countries.

As a next step the use of subjective indicators was agreed by the European Statistical System Committee by its adoption in November 2011 of the recommendations of the Sponsorship Group report.

## 8 Towards a Common EU Set of Quality of Life Indicators

Eurostat is now working on a complete detailed set of common *quality of life indicators* covering the full range of quality of life dimensions and bringing together objective and subjective data. Such a set would complement GDP in indicating whether a population is going well from a view point wider than only an economic perspective.

The ESS agreed for the *EU-SILC* to be developed as a core instrument for measuring quality of life and its dimensions (see below).

The EU-SILC data collection results in a vast *micro data set*, which allows connecting the different dimensions of quality of life at the individual level and as such could show their dynamic interdependencies. The large sample size (about 130,000 households and

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/qualityoflife/eqls/third\\_party\\_research\\_2008.htm](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/qualityoflife/eqls/third_party_research_2008.htm).

<sup>11</sup> For a number of these dimensions, such as “Productive and valued activities (including work)”, “Material living conditions”, “Governance and basic rights”, “Leisure and social interactions (inclusion/exclusion)”, “Natural and living environment”, “Economic and physical safety”, European statistics and comprehensive indicators sets are already available and are used to monitor the topical EU actions and national policies.



270,000 persons aged 16 and more) of EU-SILC makes it possible to look at distributions and inequalities between different regions within a country (for the majority of countries) and between different possible vulnerable groups within a society (Eurostat 2010).

International cooperation on developing common instruments, such as the Guidelines on how best to measure current subjective well-being in household surveys (OECD 2013) will further contribute to improving international comparability

In its work on establishing quality of life indicators, Eurostat is assisted by an Expert Group<sup>12</sup> consisting of representatives of about 10 National Statistical Institutes of representatives of OECD and Eurofound and of a number of scientific researchers experienced in the field. The work is also followed by the respective Commission policy services.

The overall objective of this Expert Group is to construct *a robust and comprehensive quality of life indicators set* based on European statistics. This set consists of primary and context indicators (for each dimension) and out of which a small and forceful set (dashboard) of headline and/or synthetic indicators still has to be chosen.

The Expert Group's work includes the following steps:

- description and delineation of the different dimensions
- identification of topics/subtopics within the dimensions
- identification of indicators for each of the topics/subtopics
- selection of headline and context indicators and of the relevant data sources.

A list of dimensions and topics/subtopics is added in “Appendix 1”.

The Sponsorship Group was not in favour of developing a *composite indicator* for quality of life. Such a composite indicator would require decisions on the type and number of dimensions to be combined as well as social judgements about the weights to be placed on the different dimensions, and this is outside the scope of official statistics.

In March 2013 the Directors of Social Statistics approved *this first set of quality of life indicators, which is now made public at Eurostat's website*.<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that especially for the subjective issues, the data collection methodology is still in its early days and by consequence Eurostat considers the related statistics still of an experimental nature.

## 9 EU-SILC As the Core Instrument to Measure Different Aspects of Quality of Life and Well-Being

Over the years Eurostat has—together with its partners in the ESS—developed extensive common statistical instruments to measure social progress.

In a number of European countries, national surveys on income and living conditions existed before the 1990s when the first EU-scale survey—the European Community Household Panel—was launched. This Panel survey ran from 1994 to 2001 in 14 of the then 15 Member States (the exception being Sweden). Despite a relatively high level of overall harmonisation in most countries, this Panel survey suffered from some comparability and timeliness issues.

It was with the triple aim of solving technical problems, conforming to the internationally agreed definition of income and extending the data collection to the enlarged EU (and beyond), that the decision was taken to stop the European Community Household Panel and launch the EU-SILC. After starting on the basis of a gentlemen's agreement in

<sup>12</sup> Established by the European Directors of Social Statistics (DSS) and reporting back to the ESS.

<sup>13</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/quality\\_life/introduction](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/quality_life/introduction).

2003 in seven countries (six EU countries plus Norway), the EU-SILC project was then implemented by means of a legal basis which was gradually adopted as from 2003 and implemented from 2004 onwards.

Since then, all EU Member States are required to implement EU-SILC, which is based on the idea of a common framework as opposed to a common survey. The common framework consists of common procedures, concepts and classifications, including harmonised lists of target variables to be transmitted to Eurostat. EU-SILC is one of the most extensive data collection exercises in the EU, with data collected—on a large set of socio-economic variables—of more than 130,000 households and 270,000 persons aged 16 and more in the EU.

Two types of European statistics are resulting from the data collection through EU-SILC and provided to Eurostat:

- *cross-sectional data* pertaining to a given time period, including variables on income, poverty, social exclusion and other living conditions. The data for the survey of Year N are to be transmitted to Eurostat by November of Year (N + 1);
- *longitudinal data* pertaining to changes over time at the individual level are observed periodically over a four-year period. Longitudinal data are confined to income information and a reduced set of critical qualitative, non-monetary variables of deprivation, designed to identify the incidence and dynamic processes of persistent poverty and social exclusion among subgroups of the population. The longitudinal data corresponding to the period between Year (N – 3) and Year N are to be transmitted to Eurostat by March of Year (N + 2).<sup>14</sup>

The survey design is flexible in order to allow countries to anchor EU-SILC within their national statistical systems. The *primary target variables* relate to either household or individual (for persons aged 16 and more) information and are grouped into areas:

- at household level, five areas are covered: (1) basic/core data, (2) income, (3) housing, (4) social exclusion and (5) labour information;
- at the personal level, there are five areas: (1) basic/demographic data, (2) income, (3) education, (4) labour information and (5) health.

The *secondary target variables* are introduced through ad-hoc modules and only in the cross-sectional component. One ad-hoc module per year has been included since 2005:

- 2005: inter-generational transmission of poverty
- 2006: social participation
- 2007: housing conditions
- 2008: over-indebtedness and financial exclusion
- 2009: material deprivation
- 2010: intra-household sharing of resources
- 2011: inter-generational transmission of disadvantages
- 2012: housing conditions
- 2013: subjective well-being.

Currently the legal EU-SILC framework is being revised. An essential prerequisite will be an analysis of the cost-efficiency of the whole operation—in particular its longitudinal

<sup>14</sup> EU-SILC cross-sectional data are available in the form of tables 12 months after the end of the data collection period while the longitudinal data are available 18 months after the end of the data collection. In addition, anonymised EU cross-sectional *micro data files* to be used for research purposes are available 15 months after the end of the data collection and 20 months for the longitudinal files.

component and the annual ad-hoc modules—as well as the length and content of EU-SILC. The overarching objective of this revision is to stabilise and foster the main core components of EU-SILC, while considering some possible changes (both to include emerging topics of interest—such as variables related to quality of life and to omit less fundamental aspects).

EU-SILC is a highly valuable source in measuring both outcome variables relevant to well-being and the components that may be seen as drivers of these outcomes, the drivers typically including standard of living, employment, education, health, environment, social interactions, safety, and civil rights. This is why—by adopting the Sponsorship Report<sup>15</sup>—the ESS has recommended to use EU-SILC as the core instrument to measure the different aspects of quality of life at individual level and as such to construct a large micro dataset.

In 2011 the ESS has agreed on an additional set of topical questions on subjective aspects of well-being that is now attached—for the first time—as a so-called *ad-hoc module* to the EU-SILC of 2013 (European Commission 2012b), for which the variables and the procedure as laid down in a Commission Regulation (see “Appendix 2”). This module is the first common instrument launched in the ESS which is almost exclusively targeted to measuring subjective issues. EU-SILC is of course not the only source, nor does it cover all components. As recommended by the Sponsorship Group, the quality of life indicators set will be completed where needed with other ESS statistical instruments,<sup>16</sup> complementing EU-SILC.

## 10 Conclusion

Over the last 15 years many indicators (and underlying European statistics) have been established in the European Statistical System (ESS) to measure social progress and sustainable development. These social indicators are used to monitor the respective EU and national social policies and programmes.<sup>17</sup> In 2010, the European Council agreed on the Europe 2020 strategy whereby it has set five EU headline indicators with targets. Three of these headline indicators are in the social domain, covering employment, education, poverty and social exclusion.

Gradually subjective measures are becoming part of official social statistics, i.e. data on self-perceived health are used to construct social indicators, such as for establishing the Healthy Life Years.

The existing indicator sets will be further completed by indicators resulting from the five key actions as set out in the Commission’s Communication on *GDP and beyond: measuring progress in a changing world*.

The ESS is now working on the implementation of these key actions, one of these already resulted in a first set of indicators on *quality of life and well-being*. Some of the indicators of this new set are concerned with subjective issues, such as subjective well-being and self-perceptions of satisfaction of the different dimensions.

European statistics on subjective social issues such as on *self-perceived health*—are already available through common measuring instruments developed and used in the ESS,

<sup>15</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/pgp\\_ess/about\\_ess/measuring\\_progress](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/pgp_ess/about_ess/measuring_progress).

<sup>16</sup> I.e. Labour Force Survey, Adult Education Survey and European Health Interview Survey. The ESS also recommended to further develop an EU common approach for the Household Budget Survey and the Time Use Survey.

<sup>17</sup> Through the Open Method of Coordination or through Europe 2020.

i.e. EU-SILC or the European Health Interview Survey. For other topics—such as on *life satisfaction overall*—data are available through sources outside European official statistics (such as through EQLS).

The EU quality of life indicator set will gradually be further expanded and completed with European statistics on objective and subjective issues as part of the official statistics collected through the ESS and using EU-SILC as the core instrument. The 2013 EU-SILC ad-hoc module on subjective well-being is the first common measuring instrument in the ESS almost exclusively concerned with *measuring subjective issues*.

With European statistics, social indicator sets and a vast micro data base been and being established, there is an important potential for researchers to engage in in-depth analysis and for national and EU policy makers to use these indicators—and in casu subjective well-being indicators—for developing and monitoring policy strategies and programmes.

## Appendix 1

List of dimensions, topics and subtopics for which indicators are published on Eurostat's website.<sup>18</sup>

This list as well as the set of indicators will continuously be updated and completed.

Dimension	Topic/subtopics
(1) <i>Material living conditions</i>	
1.1	Income
1.2	Consumption
1.2.1	Constrained Consumption
1.2.2	Non-market consumption and government provided services
1.3	Material conditions
1.3.1	Material Deprivation
1.3.2	Housing conditions
(2) <i>Productive or main activity</i>	
2.1	Quantity of employment
2.1.1	Unemployment
2.1.2	Underemployment, quantity
2.1.3	Underemployment, quality
2.2	Quality of employment
2.2.1	In work poverty
2.2.2	Health and safety at work
2.2.3	Work/life balance
2.2.4	Temporary work
2.2.5	Perception of quality of employment
2.3	Other main activity
(3) <i>Health</i>	
3.1	Outcomes
3.1.1	Life expectancy

<sup>18</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/quality\\_life/introduction](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/quality_life/introduction).

Dimension	Topic/subtopics
3.1.2	Morbidity and health status
3.2	Drivers: (un) healthy behaviours
3.3	Access to healthcare
<i>(4) Education</i>	
4.1	Competences and skills
4.1.1	Educational attainment
4.1.2	Self-reported skills
4.1.3	Assessed skills PIAAC
4.2	Lifelong learning
4.3	Opportunities for education
<i>(5) Leisure and social interactions</i>	
5.1	Leisure
5.1.1	Quantity of leisure
5.1.2	Quality of leisure
5.1.3	Access
5.2	Social interactions
5.2.1	Activities with people (including feelings of loneliness)
5.2.2	Activities for people (volunteering and care)
5.2.3	Supportive relationships
5.2.4	Social cohesion (interpersonal trust, perceived tensions, inequalities)
<i>(6) Economic and physical safety</i>	
6.1	Economic security and vulnerability
6.1.1	Wealth (assets)
6.1.2	Debt
6.1.3	Income insecurity (including job)
6.2	Physical and personal security
6.2.1	Crime
6.2.2	Perception of physical safety
<i>(7) Governance and basic rights</i>	
7.1	Institutions and public services
7.1.1	Trust and/or satisfaction in institutions
7.1.2	Trust and/or satisfaction in public services
7.2	Discrimination and equal opportunities
7.3	Active citizenship
<i>(8) Natural and living environment</i>	
8.1	Pollution (including noise)
8.2	Access to green and recreational spaces
8.3	Landscape and built environment
<i>(9) Overall experience of life</i>	
9.1	Life Satisfaction
9.2	Affects
9.3	Meaning and purpose

## Appendix 2

Variables of the 2013 ad-hoc module on “Subjective well-being” for EU-SILC

- I. Overall experience of life (2)
  - Overall life satisfaction
  - Meaning of life
- II. Material living conditions (2)
  - Satisfaction with financial situation
  - Satisfaction with accommodation
- III. Health (5)
  - Being very nervous
  - Feeling down in the dumps
  - Feeling calm and peaceful
  - Feeling downhearted or depressed
  - Being happy
- IV. Productive and valued activities (3)
  - Job satisfaction
  - Satisfaction with commuting time
  - Satisfaction with time use
- V. Governance and basic rights (3)
  - Trust in the political system
  - Trust in the legal system
  - Trust in the police
- VI. Leisure and social interactions (4)
  - Satisfaction with personal relationships
  - Personal matters (anyone to discuss with)
  - Help from others
  - Trust in others
- VII. Natural and living environment (2)
  - Satisfaction with recreational and green areas
  - Satisfaction with living environment
- VIII. Economic and physical safety (1)
  - Physical security

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