

Chapter 3

Society at a Glance: An Overview

There are 25 social indicators presented in *Society at a Glance 2011*. In *Society at a Glance 2009*, a summary was provided through a table which selected two indicators per chapter, chosen on the basis of their *a priori* importance and through consultation with member countries, and assigned “green” for performance in the top three deciles, “orange” for performance in the middle four deciles and “red” for the bottom three deciles.

A very similar “traffic lights” approach is taken below, but for all relevant indicators. Some of the 25 indicators are excluded because they cannot be unambiguously interpreted (a higher value being desirable and a lower value being undesirable). For the general context (GE) indicators, only household income is included. Additionally, the social response indicators (education, social and health spending and pensionable years) are not included as these are policy inputs, not social outcomes.

These exclusions leave 17 out of the 25 social indicators to be summarised in Table 3.1. As before, greens are the highest seven countries, oranges are the middle 20 countries and reds are the lowest seven countries (these numbers are adjusted proportionately when there is missing indicator data for countries). Blanks are placed where no country indicator information is available.

While it provides a very useful summary snapshot of the social situation, it is necessary to make numerous caveats about meaning and interpretation of Table 3.1 in terms of national comparisons. Different governments and different countries will have different policy priorities. Their priorities may be economic outcomes (inflation, GDP, or fiscal balance, for example) rather than social outcomes such as those considered here. In such a case having red social outcomes in Table 3.1 may be the price they are willing to pay for success elsewhere. Or, given a focus on social outcomes, they may be willing to trade-off many red outcomes for the one green social outcome they deem most desirable. Alternatively there may be other social outcomes, not considered here, which are stronger priorities at a national level. Observed patterns of reds, oranges and greens may simply reflect national differences in preferences for outcomes. Equally, observed patterns may reflect lags in changes of social outcomes rather than current or recent policy settings. Lastly, the trade-offs between social outcomes may vary between countries because of societal or cultural differences, unrelated to policy choices, making it easier for some countries to generate green outcomes for a given policy effort. For all these reasons, it was deemed inappropriate to rank country performance by an aggregate social index, such as summing the numbers of green or red lights across indicators.

Table 3.1. Overview of the social situation in OECD countries

“Green circles” denotes countries are in the top two deciles, “red diamonds” those in the bottom two deciles and “yellow triangle” those in the six intermediate deciles

	GE1	SS1	SS2	SS3	EQ1	EQ2	EQ3	EQ4	HE1	HE2	HE3	HE4	C01	C02	C03	C04	C05
	Median equivalised household income, in USD PPPs	Employment to population ratio for population aged 15-64	Unemployment rate for the population aged 15-64	PISA mean scores on the reading literacy scales	Gini coefficient of income inequality	Poverty rate	Percentage finding it difficult or very difficult to manage on current income	Percentage of average gross wage to reach a poverty threshold of 60% of median income for lone parents with two children	Life expectancy at birth	Infant mortality rate	Rate of positive experience	Percentage of persons satisfied with water quality	Percentage of people expressing high level of trust in others	Corruption index	Pro-social behavior	Voting rates	Tolerance of diversity
	2007	2009	2009	2009	2007/08	2007/08	2010	2009	2008	2008	2009	2009	2007/08	2010	2010	2009 or most recent	2010
Australia	●	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	●	●	●
Austria	▲	▲	●	●	▲	●	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
Belgium	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
Canada	●	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	●
Chile	◆	◆	▲	◆	◆	◆	◆	●	▲	◆	●	▲	◆	▲	▲	●	▲
Czech Republic	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	◆	◆	▲	◆	▲	▲	◆	▲	▲	◆
Denmark	▲	●	▲	▲	●	●	●	●	●	▲	●	●	●	●	▲	●	▲
Estonia	◆	▲	◆	▲	▲	▲	◆	◆	◆	▲	◆	◆	▲	▲	◆	▲	◆
Finland	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	●	▲	▲	●	▲	●	●	●	▲	▲	▲
France	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
Germany	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
Greece	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	◆	▲	▲	▲	▲	◆	◆	◆	▲	▲	▲
Hungary	◆	◆	◆	▲	▲	●	◆	▲	◆	◆	◆	▲	▲	◆	▲	▲	▲
Iceland	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	●	●	●	●	●	▲	▲	●	●
Ireland	●	▲	◆	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	●	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	●
Israel	▲	◆	▲	◆	◆	◆	◆	▲	▲	▲	◆	◆	▲	◆	▲	▲	◆
Italy	▲	◆	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	◆	●	◆	▲	▲	▲
Japan	▲	▲	●	●	▲	◆	▲	●	●	●	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	◆	▲
Korea	▲	▲	●	●	▲	◆	▲	▲	▲	▲	◆	▲	◆	▲	▲	◆	◆
Luxembourg	●	▲	●	◆	▲	▲	●	◆	▲	●	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	●	▲
Mexico	◆	◆	▲	◆	◆	◆	●	●	◆	◆	●	◆	◆	▲	▲	◆	▲
Netherlands	▲	●	●	●	▲	●	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	●	●	▲	●
New Zealand	▲	●	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	●
Norway	●	●	●	▲	●	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	▲	▲	▲
Poland	◆	◆	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	◆	▲	▲	▲	◆	▲	▲	◆
Portugal	▲	▲	◆	▲	◆	▲	▲	▲	◆	◆	▲	▲	◆	◆	▲	▲	◆
Slovak Republic	◆	▲	◆	◆	●	●	▲	▲	◆	◆	◆	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
Slovenia	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	●	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	◆	▲	▲	▲
Spain	▲	▲	◆	▲	▲	▲	◆	◆	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	●
Sweden	▲	●	▲	▲	●	▲	●	▲	●	●	▲	▲	●	●	▲	▲	▲
Switzerland	●	●	●	▲	▲	▲	●	◆	●	▲	▲	●	●	●	●	◆	▲
Turkey	◆	▲	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	▲	▲	◆	◆	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	◆
United Kingdom	●	▲	▲	▲	◆	▲	▲	●	▲	◆	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲
United States	●	▲	▲	▲	◆	◆	▲	◆	▲	◆	▲	▲	▲	▲	●	◆	▲

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