





8. SOCIAL COHESION INDICATORS

1. Life satisfaction
2. Work satisfaction
3. Crime victimisation
4. Suicides
5. Bullying
6. Risky behaviour

1. Life satisfaction

Definition and measurement

The main indicator of life satisfaction used is from the Gallup World Poll 2006. The Gallup World Poll was based on nationally representative samples of people aged 15 years and older. It uses the same questionnaire in all countries, ensuring maximum comparability, although there are issues about the extent to which the English-language concept of “life satisfaction” is translatable into the different languages used across the OECD. However, the problem is less than for happiness-style questions, which is why life-satisfaction questions are used here

The Gallup World Poll ask respondents to “imagine an eleven-rung ladder where the bottom (0) represents the worst possible life for you and the top (10) represents the best possible life for you. On which step of the ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time?”. The main indicator used in this section is the average country score.

Access to detailed Gallup World Poll data by socio-demographic characteristics was not possible. There are questions about data reliability from land-line, phone-based interviews like Gallup in countries where mobile phone coverage is high. In terms of consideration of changes in life satisfaction, data came from the World Happiness Data base from a variety of sources, primarily the *Eurobarometer* survey and *World Values Survey* (see Box 1.1 in Chapter 1 for more detail).

There are considerable differences between countries regarding the degree to which people are satisfied with their lives (CO1.1). Denmark, Switzerland and Finland, the three countries with the highest life satisfaction, are 2.7 average steps higher up the 11-step ladder compared with the bottom three countries (the Slovak Republic, Italy and Turkey).

There are broad regional or cultural country groupings of life satisfaction. Three of the top six

countries are Nordic, with Iceland a Nordic outlier in the middle of the pack. Continental western and eastern European OECD members are not particularly satisfied with their lives, with the notable exceptions of the Swiss and the Dutch and, to a lesser extent, the Belgians and Spanish. Predominantly Anglophone OECD countries (United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States, New Zealand, Australia and Canada) are all in the top half of life satisfaction, and follow in a tight group after the largely Nordic top cluster.

Life satisfaction is higher in richer OECD countries (CO1.2). The relationship is strong. But it also appears to be non-linear. This non-linearity may indicate that increments in income add less to life satisfaction as countries become richer. There are interesting outliers from the regression line. Mexico, New Zealand and Denmark all generate considerably higher amounts of life satisfaction than predicted, whilst Luxembourg, Ireland and Turkey all generate much lower life satisfaction than predicted by their NNI.

Countries which achieve high satisfaction also share it more equally across their population (CO1.3). Lower country average life satisfaction is associated with greater inequality of life satisfaction within that country, as measured by the standard deviation of individual scores. The relationship is a strong one.

Life satisfaction is improving over time. Figure CO1.4 shows that average OECD life satisfaction has improved by an average 0.28 steps on the 11-step ladder. Life satisfaction rose or remained constant in 23 countries and only declined in Portugal, Hungary, the United States, Canada and Japan. The rise in life satisfaction in Turkey is particularly striking.

Further reading

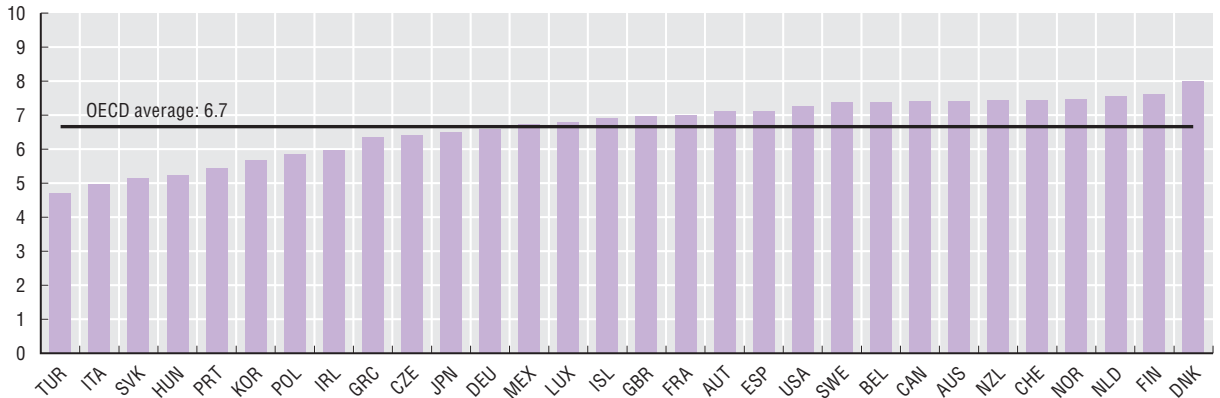
Deaton, A. (2007), “Income, Aging, Health and Wellbeing around the World: Evidence from the Gallup World Poll”, NBER Working Paper No. 13317, Cambridge, MA.

Figure note

Figure CO1.4: In most cases the life-satisfaction change data covers the six-year period 2000-06. For the sources and country exceptions, see Box 1.1 in Chapter 1.

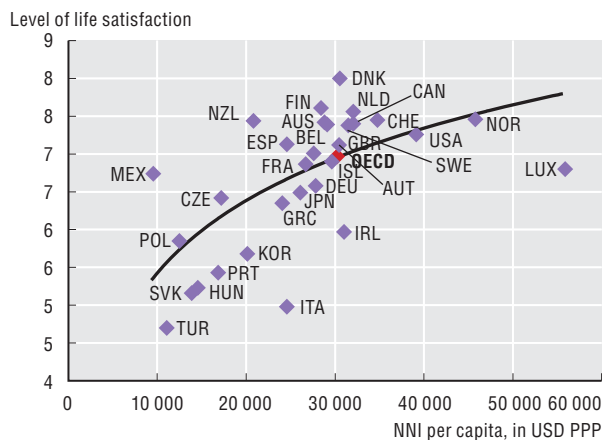
CO1.1. Considerable differences between countries regarding life satisfaction

Average points of life satisfaction on an 11-step ladder from 0-10, 2006



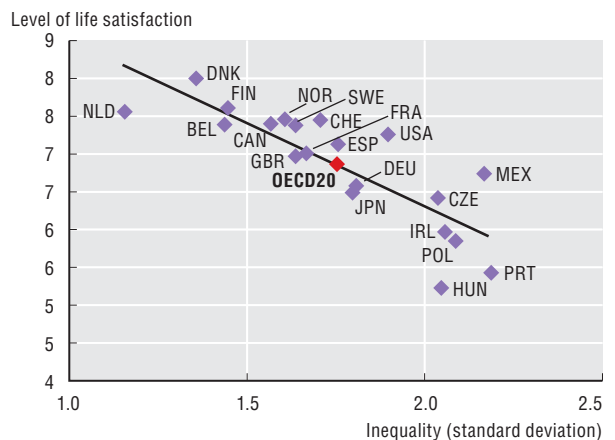
Source: Gallup World Poll.

CO1.2. Life satisfaction rises with higher NNI, 2006



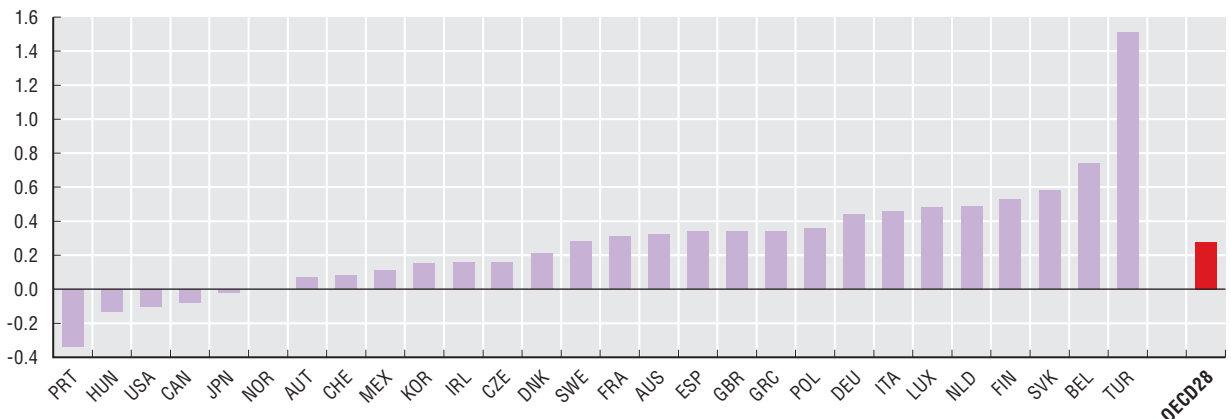
Source: Gallup World Poll; OECD National Accounts (www.oecd.org/statistics/national-accounts).

CO1.3. Lower life satisfaction is associated with greater inequality of life satisfaction, 2006



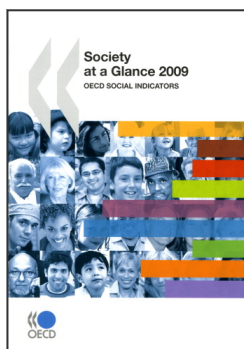
CO1.4. Life satisfaction is rising in most OECD countries

Changes in life satisfaction, points on an 11-step ladder, 2000-06



Source: World Happiness database (<http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl>).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/550664800231>



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