



**Opinion on
the Final Report of the Expert Group on
Quality of Life Indicators**

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ESAC Opinion on the Final Report of the Expert Group on Quality of Life Indicators

1. Improving the quality of life (QoL) of the peoples of the European Union is a prime aim of the Union and its member states. Consequently, knowing exactly where we stand in relation to quality of life is of utmost importance. The identification of regions and population groups whose quality of life is behind aspired European standards is seen as essential for the cohesion of our society. Providing robust data about how well (or not so well) we are doing has become ever more important in an era where distorted “alternative facts” are distributed widely, especially via social media. From the perspective of the Union, we should see developing data sets on the quality of the lives of European citizens as an important and strategic investment in the progress of our society.

2. Quality of life is a very broad concept with many dimensions, comprising both subjective and objective elements. Many dimensions are hard to measure and even harder to harmonize across countries, regions and population groups. The Expert Group on Quality of Life Indicators has done a very comprehensive job in structuring these many dimensions and assessing the state of the art in each domain¹. The report provides an excellent framework that permits Eurostat and the National Statistical Institutes to identify gaps in data collection, analysis and communication and to progress work in these domains.

3. ESAC strongly supports the key recommendations of the report, especially the increased emphasis on ensuring comparability across countries (‘harmonization’), the inclusion of QoL indicators in the core data sets of the European Statistical System (such as EU-SILC² or EU-LFS³), and the greater use of non-ESS sources of data.

More specifically, ESAC endorses the methodological insight that wellbeing is best measured in connection with capturing time use. Along with supporting the view on the importance of the Time Use Survey expressed in the recommendations, ESAC suggests that some of the new concepts presented could make greater use of different dimensions covered in the time use data. For instance, work/life balance is approached only from an employment perspective (working hours, flexibility of the work schedule, commuting time) while time allocated to other life activities, such as care/social support and leisure, is neglected. Moreover, this issue is not only about people doing unpaid work. It includes possibilities to help reconcile work and family life and is directly linked to the accessibility and quality of public services. The item on satisfaction with public services is not developed yet.

4. ESAC also underlines the importance of having data available on the regional and local level since much of the diversity of social and economic life circumstances is on this level, not the country level.

5. ESAC also agrees with the report’s acknowledgement of the need to have both objective and subjective data. Contrasting these oftentimes starkly diverging views of the world is not a new task for statisticians but it has gained an unexpected importance with the new emphasis on monitoring the growth of intra-country inequality and the recent rise of populist movements with their ‘alternative facts’.

¹ Final report of the Expert Group on Quality of Life Indicators: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-statistical-reports/-/KS-FT-17-004?inheritRedirect=true&redirect=%2Feurostat%2Fpublications%2Fstatistical-reports>

² European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions

³ European Union Labour Force Survey

Data about subjective wellbeing is essential in understanding how citizens feel, and what is important to them. This should be set alongside the objective measure of their QoL. For example, while the report summarizes essentially subjective data in the health and social inclusion domains, ESAC is of the view that there would be benefits from placing more emphasis on objective indicators as well in these areas. In recent years, objective measures of health and social embeddedness have been developed and validated and these have the potential to be introduced into core ESS data sets, such as EU-SILC. EHIS⁴ should be improved along similar lines.

6. As the recent growth of populist movements has shown, quality of life hinges not only on individual life circumstances but also on economic and social features of the society as a whole. Particularly salient in this respect are the distributions of income, wealth, health and longevity which are perceived by many as increasingly unequal. Quality of life statistics thus need to encompass measures of income, wealth, health and longevity which are robust and reliable across all parts of the population distribution, including the lower and upper tails, and which can be used to explore regional and sectoral disparities.

7. ESAC supports the main idea in the report of using the rotating modules on specific topics (with different rolling time periods) in the EU-SILC and LFS surveys to develop new QoL measures. Giving appropriate attention to other ESS surveys (EHIS, AES⁵, TUS⁶) will require a careful approach to the time scheduling of both types of groups of surveys as well as their data complementarity. In ESAC's view, the report presented refers to the outcomes of the first stage of work on developing the framework to evaluate the quality of life of European citizens. Consequently, continuation of these efforts is expected in the years ahead. As some of the ESS and non-ESS data sources mentioned in the report currently do not have full coverage, it is essential to extend coverage to all Member States as soon as possible in order to foster comparable quality of life data across the entire Union.

⁴ European Health Interview Survey

⁵ Adult Education Survey

⁶ Time Use Survey