



European Statistical
Advisory Committee

Report of the workshop

**Measuring and Comparing the Quality of Life
within Europe**

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Committee of Regions
JDE Building

101, rue Bélliard
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Report of ESAC workshop

'Measuring and comparing the quality of life within Europe'

1. The users' workshop¹ welcomes the initiative of Eurostat and its partners in the European Statistical System (ESS) to launch actions to improve our knowledge of the quality of life of the European citizens and to better measure and compare the quality of life across Europe. Participants agree with *complementing the measure of GDP* with statistics which are relevant to Europeans' experience of well-being. They advocate that users should be involved in all stages of the work so as to improve its *legitimacy* and recommend that the measurement should cover - as far as possible - the expectations of different *stakeholders*: citizens, policy makers, social partners, NGOs, researchers.

2. The users are content with the direction taken by the Sponsorship Group (in particular TF3) and being taken forward by the Expert Group on quality of life indicators. They support the concept of measuring quality of life through a *multidimensional framework, which includes both the 'liveability' of the environment/living conditions as well as the 'life ability' (or capability) of the people*. The users recommend exploring additional dimensions to those currently planned relating to 'family circumstances and support', 'expectations and hope'. They would welcome better documentation concerning the underlying rationale for the choice of dimensions and trade-offs which have been made. It was recognized that the measurement of the data will evolve over time, but there was strong support for the early dissemination of data even if it is known to have some limitations.

3. There was significant agreement that measures of quality of life should contain *objective* as well as *subjective* dimensions and topics, since objective measures set the context and subjective measures are essential in showing the 'experienced' quality of life. The indicators set should not only include averages at an aggregated level (national or regional level), but should include *distributional measures* which are even more important to build an understanding of the range of experiences.

4. The workshop participants agree with the objective of establishing a *robust micro data* set which would allow users to examine these distributional measures as well as correlations at the *level of the individuals*. There was some discussion as to which *specific subpopulations* are of particular interest: disaggregated data would be valuable by sex, age, income, region, household situation, type of area (eg city, rural). It would also be valuable to identify people who are experiencing difficulties in a number of dimensions. There was some discussion of the fact that surveys often under-represent people on the margins of society, yet these are of especial interest in this study because of their vulnerability and because they may be in particular poor

¹ As represented at this workshop; further mentioned as 'the users'

circumstances. Mention was made of migrants, people who do not speak the national language, the homeless, the disabled, people in institutions. Users understand the problems involved in surveying these groups especially in harmonized European surveys. However it might be possible to carry out occasional special studies of some of these groups in order to try to establish their quality of life and so that non-coverage and non-response bias might be estimated.

5. The users strongly support the approach to build on existing European statistics by including the essential elements of each dimension in the framework in the main *social ESS data collection instrument (= EU-SILC)*, whenever possible.

6. However users note that a robust data set on *intra-individual variability over time* does not exist at the international level. With the appropriate variables included in EU-SILC as being considered in the survey's revision the EU-SILC longitudinal component could be a useful tool to analyse the *impact of life events* on the different quality of life dimensions. Nevertheless a longer panel approach would be preferable to measure change and differences over time.

7. The users draw the attention to the fact that *other ESS data sources* (in particular EHIS, LFS and TUS²) should also be used to contribute to obtain a more complete picture of well-being. The users note that for a number of dimensions/topics/variables, European statistics are currently missing and so they would encourage the inclusion of links to existing non-ESS data sources clearly indicating that these data come *from other than European statistics*.

They also advise Eurostat to examine the strengths and weaknesses of *non-official data sources* (in particular the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) and the European Social Survey) and to explore the possibility of setting up 'partnerships' with these providers, particularly as there is considerable expertise in measuring the circumstances and attitudes of the European populations.

8. The users recommend that further efforts are made by the ESS in order to ensure the comparability of the results in particular when subjective elements are being reported through surveys. Scientific research has shown that subjective aspects of quality of life can only be compared cross-nationally when *input harmonisation* is used. In addition, a contextual data base is needed for a good cross-country understanding of the survey data and full use should be made of new technologies whenever possible.

9. The users also recommend that priority is given to developing a system of *easy access for researchers to micro data*. They suggest a clear division of work: Eurostat's task is to provide basic (micro) data together with initial statistical analyses, while researchers carry out more detailed and sophisticated analyses of the data.

10. Particular attention should be paid to timely and user-friendly *dissemination*, particularly since the topic is likely to interest the general public and a wide range of

² European Health Interview Survey (EHIS), Labour Force Survey (LFS), Time Use Survey (TUS)

users such as policymakers, journalists and researchers. Whilst it might unfortunately be unavoidable that the media will focus on a countries' ranking, more enlightening data presentations and analyses should explore distributions, disaggregations (such as. spatial component within countries) and correlations. Dissemination might be differentiated according to different types of users (specialists versus non-specialists) and attention should be given to developing interesting ways of presenting the data. For example data might be presented in a scoreboard and use made of narratives and maps. Data presentation should allow people to situate themselves and should highlight distributional aspects, annual changes, and differences (using socio-economic as well as spatial variables such as regional and cross-national). Data should be accompanied by comprehensive and up-to-date meta-data. It was recommended to identify and improve the use of the data with the different policies relevant for quality of life at various levels (EU, national, regional...).

Users are concerned about the use of composite indicators since they mean that individual data items will be interpreted normatively. For a number of the variables being gathered it is not clear whether 'more' is 'better'.

11. The users support Eurostat and its partners in the ESS in engaging in international cooperation, in particular in the process of Rio+20 follow-up.