Measuring subjective well-being in the European Statistical System (ESS)

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Eurostat

Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union situated in Luxembourg. Its task is to provide the European Union with statistics at European level that enable comparisons between countries and regions.

Eurostat is part of the European Commission.
Three key players in the European Union

The European Parliament  
- **voice of the people**  
*Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament*

The council of Ministers  
- **voice of the Member States**  
*Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council*

The European Commission  
- **promoting the common interest**  
*José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission*
European Statistical System (= ESS) 1

Partnership between the Community statistical authority, which is the Commission (Eurostat), and the national statistical institutes (NSIs) and other national authorities responsible in each Member State for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics.

This Partnership also includes the EEA and EFTA countries.
The ESS functions as a network in which Eurostat’s role is to lead the way in the harmonization of statistics in close cooperation with the national statistical authorities. ESS work concentrates mainly on EU policy areas - but, with the extension of EU policies, harmonization has been extended to nearly all statistical fields.

The ESS also coordinates its work with candidate countries and at European level with other Commission services, agencies and the ECB and international organisations such as OECD, the UN, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.
Difference between topics/way of measurement

1. Objective topic/objective measures:
   Example: weight, measured on scale

2. Objective topic/subjective measures:
   Example: weight, asked

3. Subjective topics/subjective measures:
   Example: life satisfaction, affect
Subjective measures in the ESS

Has always provoked an intensive debate

Many examples of objective topic/subjective measure
eg social topics via household surveys
(LFS, EU-SILC, EHIS, AES…)
Also examples of subjective topic/subjective measure
EU-SILC and its Ad-hoc modules, EHIS
Well-being: Background

- “GDP & beyond” EC Communication & Stiglitz report
  - Improve the multidimensional measurement of quality of life and well-being

- Sofia Memorandum (DGINS, September 2010)
  - Improve coverage of various dimensions of quality of life statistics
  - Both objective and subjective measures
  - Develop EU-SILC as a core instrument for measuring quality of life dimensions
Stiglitz Sen Fitoussi report

Three pillars:
1. Classical GDP issues
2. Quality of life
3. Sustainable development and environment

- Well-being is multi-dimensional
  - Proposed dimensions based on capabilities approach
- Objective and subjective dimensions of well-being are both important
Sponsorship Group

Established in the ESS to advise on ‘GDP and beyond’ and ‘SSF’
Four Task forces – with participation of experts, policy DGs and OECD
Report in 2011: adopted by the ESS
Actions are now part of the Statistical Work Programme

Task force 3: Multidimensional measurement QoL
Conclusions:
- QoL: conceptual framework 8 + 1 dimensions
- Importance for data at individual level for analysis + subpopulations
- EU-SILC as core instrument
- Additional data in other social surveys + need further development
- Preliminary list with variables

(work will be continued in an Expert Group and with assistance from contract work)
Quality of life and Well-being

Quality of life → dimensions
- living conditions
- productive and valued activities
- health
- education
- leisure and social interactions
- personal insecurity
- governance and basic rights (access, trust and participation)
- natural and living environment
- life satisfaction, affect

Well-being (experienced QoL)
Subjective well-being

“People’s experiences of their lives”

Main components:
- evaluative questions, cognitive (eg life satisfaction)
- affect questions (positive and negative affect)
- questions on eudaimonic well-being (eg. purpose, meaning, flourishing)

Variables in existing surveys at European level
- European Social Survey (research consortium)
  - 6 rounds since 2001, but not all EU countries
- European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) (Eurofound)
- Eurobarometer 2010 (opinion poll – DG COMM)
- EU-SILC Ad-hoc module 2013 (ESS)
- in EU-SILC core ??
Feasibility study: ‘Overall satisfaction with life’ and ‘life expectancy at birth’ 2006 – Data Eurostat and European Social Survey

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Feasibility study: Index of ‘satisfied life expectancy’ (‘overall satisfaction with life’ and ‘life expectancy at birth’ 2006, EU countries) – data Eurostat and European Social Survey
Feasibility study - example of country profile 2006 (UK & EU - outcome variables) – data Eurostat and European Social Survey

![Outcome variables diagram]
Feasibility study - example of country profile 2006 (UK & EU - objective variables) - data Eurostat and European Social Survey

![Diagram showing objective variables]

- Objective variables
  - Index, EU unweighted average = 100
  - United Kingdom
  - EU unweighted average
  - 1. Standard of living
  - 2. Health and longevity
  - 3. Basic rights on health and income (no variable identified)
  - 4. Safety (no variable identified)
  - 5. Education
  - 6. Environment (no variable identified)
  - 7. Productive and valued activities
  - 8. Social interactions

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Feasibility study - example of country profile 2006
(UK & EU - subjective variables - positives) - data Eurostat and European Social Survey
Feasibility study - example of country profile 2006 (UK & EU - subjective variables - negatives) - data Eurostat and European Social Survey

Subjective variables, negatives

Index, EU unweighted average=100

(High value=good performance; low value=poor performance)

A. Physiological needs

E. Competence/self esteem (no variable identified)

D. Relatedness, loving, belonging (no variable identified)

C. Professional/individual activities, autonomy/self-actualisation

B. Safety/security

United Kingdom

EU unweighted average
EU-SILC: European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions

Main components:

- Core questions: primary variables
  - Cross-sectional data (annual) pertaining to a given time or a certain time period with variables on income, poverty, social exclusion, health and other living conditions, and
  - Longitudinal data pertaining to individual-level changes over time, observed periodically over a four year period.
- Ad-hoc module: ad-hoc secondary variables

Legal basis (2003): variables, common concepts, classifications, procedures
Quality requirement: large sample size by country, some larger (NUTS2)
Manual: for AHM well-being: reference questionnaire (importance of wording, order etc) in all EU languages via a translation protocol
2013 EU-SILC Ad-hoc module - aim

- Provide a **more comprehensive set of variables on well-being**
  - Cover all topics of the framework
- **Complement variables existing in EU-SILC**
  - Multivariate analysis of core and module variables
- **Use as much as possible already tested variables**
  - Priority to ESS variables (EHIS, etc..)
- **Indicators on well-being** -> Sponsorship TF
2013 EU-SILC AHM - legislation

- High participation/interest from all stakeholders
  - Biggest ever module TF (15 countries, international organisations, ISG delegates, experts)
  - Strong recommendations from experts and OECD
  - Detailed reactions from all countries

Need for compromise

  - Current list of 22 variables, divided over 7 areas
2013 EU-SILC AHM – areas and target variables 1

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
   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 Material living
     conditions (2)
     Satisfaction with recreational and green areas
     Satisfaction with living environment

VII. Economic and physical safety (1)
     Physical security
Timetable towards adoption

- May 2011: Final consultation of the Working Group
- June 2011: Consultation of the Directors of Social Statistics
- July 2011: Consultation of other Commission services
- September 2011: Consultation of the European Statistical System Committee
- October 2011: Transmission to both the European Council and the European Parliament
- Beginning 2012: Agreement from both the Council and the European Parliament (3 months)
- 1st quarter of 2012: Adoption by the Commission
Next steps

- June 2012: Expert Group on QoL indicators
- November: European Statistics Advisory Committee (ESAC) seminar on QoL
- End 2012:
  - Proposal for revised EU-SILC (WB variables in core ?)
  - Dissemination of available QoL indicators on Eurostat website

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/
Thank you for your attention!

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