

Foreword

Understanding and improving well-being requires solid evidence that can inform policymakers and citizens where, when, and for whom life is getting better. Since the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission highlighted the need to complement GDP with better measures of social, economic and environmental outcomes in 2009, the statistical community has made remarkable progress towards developing and producing such measures and regularly monitoring human well-being. Nevertheless, certain topics have not yet received the attention their importance for society's progress might warrant. Trust is one of these topics, and these Guidelines on Measuring Trust, prepared under the umbrella of the OECD Better Life Initiative launched in 2011, represent an important step towards improving and expanding the system of well-being statistics further.

The issue of trust, or lack of it, has mostly made headlines in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Indeed, people's trust in their public institutions fell sharply in most OECD countries and it has not since fully recovered to its pre-crisis levels. Yet, only a society where people cooperate with and express solidarity for one another, and where public institutions act competently and are accessible to all citizens enables a high quality of life for all. Trust in other people and trust in institutions are essential ingredients for social and economic progress while a prospering society, in turn, is one in which trust can blossom.

It is therefore no surprise that several recent policy initiatives have stressed the need for better measures of trust. For instance, the OECD Trust Strategy was initiated during the 2013 OECD Ministerial Council meeting on Jobs, Equality and Trust to provide guidance, including methodological and measurement advice, to OECD governments on how to restore trust in public institutions. As well, Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) endorsed in 2015 by all UN member countries ("Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels") focuses on trust and governance. And the UN Statistical Commission has set up a dedicated group (the Praia Group) to develop a handbook on governance statistics to inform and monitor the SDG targets under Goal 16.

With some notable exceptions, the measurement of trust does not have a long tradition, particularly within official statistics, and official measures that exist are not always collected in a regular and internationally comparable manner. These Guidelines aim at contributing to filling this gap. Their main objective is to support data producers in their own initiatives to measuring trust. In particular, the Guidelines will provide direct inputs to the UN Praia Group. They synthesize what we currently know about good practice on how trust can, and should, be measured. This knowledge might change as the evidence base on trust develops. However, especially so for measures of interpersonal trust, there is already today good evidence that the suggested survey questions produce valid data and are ready to be included in official surveys.

It is my hope that these Guidelines will contribute to a step change in the quality and availability of trust data going forward.

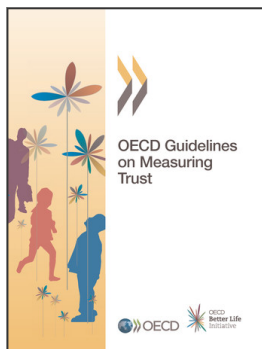
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MD' followed by a long, sweeping horizontal stroke.

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