

8. SOCIAL COHESION INDICATORS

Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction measures how people evaluate their life and is a subjective indicator that complements more objective indicators of life quality.

When asked to rate their general satisfaction with life on a scale from 0 to 10, people on average across the OECD gave it a 6.7 in 2016-17 (Figure 8.1). However, life satisfaction is not evenly shared across OECD countries. People in Finland, Denmark and Norway are most satisfied with their lives, with scales of 7.5 and higher, and the other Nordic countries are not much behind. The measured level of life satisfaction in the Nordics is about 2.5 steps higher than in Greece, the country at the bottom of the ranking. Other countries with low life satisfaction include Turkey, Portugal, Hungary, Estonia and Korea. Life satisfaction also varies between emerging economies, from a scale above 6 in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica and Saudi Arabia, to below 5 in India and South Africa.

OECD average life satisfaction in 2016-17 is similar to 2006-07 levels (Figure 8.1). Life satisfaction declined in only nine out of 36 OECD countries, with major drops in Greece, Italy and Spain, three countries that were hit particularly hard by the global economic crisis in 2008-09. In contrast, satisfaction with life considerably improved in Latvia, Hungary and Iceland.

Life satisfaction varies by socio-demographic group (Figure 8.2). While men and women report similar levels of life satisfaction on average across OECD countries, there are large gender gaps in certain countries, like Italy and the United Kingdom where men report higher levels than women, and Japan and Korea where women report higher levels than men. Life satisfaction tends to decrease with age and young people are on average happier than older age groups. Youth from Finland and Iceland are the most satisfied with their lives in the OECD, while people aged 50 and over in Greece report the lowest levels. A full-time job, higher education and higher income increase the likelihood of higher life satisfaction, while the place where you live (urban versus rural) does not seem to influence life satisfaction on average. Even so, life satisfaction in Australia and the Czech Republic tend to be considerably higher in rural areas than in urban areas, while the opposite is true in Korea, Latvia, Lithuania and Mexico, as well as in all emerging economies.

A snapshot of people's daily feelings and emotions is presented in Figure 8.3, using the positive and negative experience indexes of Gallup. Among OECD countries, **the composite "positive experience" index is highest in Mexico and Norway and lowest in Turkey, while the "negative experience" index is highest in Greece and lowest in Estonia**. Across these countries, high values of the positive experience index tend to be associated with high

scores of life satisfaction, while there is only a weak negative correlation between the positive and negative experience indexes.

Definition and measurement

The Gallup World Poll asked 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. The Gallup World Poll is conducted in more than 150 countries around the world based on a common questionnaire. With few exceptions, all samples are probability based and nationally representative of the resident population aged 15 years and over in the entire country. While this data source ensures a high degree of comparability across countries, results may be affected by sampling and non-sampling errors, and variation in response rates. Data are available by some socio-demographic groups.

The Gallup World Poll also presents the positive and the negative experience indexes. The positive experience index averages country responses to five questions about whether the respondent experienced a lot of enjoyment, smiled or laughed a lot, felt well-rested and learned or did something interesting the day before the interview. The negative experience index averages country responses to five questions about whether the respondent experienced a lot of physical pain, worry, stress, sadness and anger. The index scores are the mean of all valid affirmative responses to these items multiplied by 100.

Further reading

OECD (2013), *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264191655-en>.

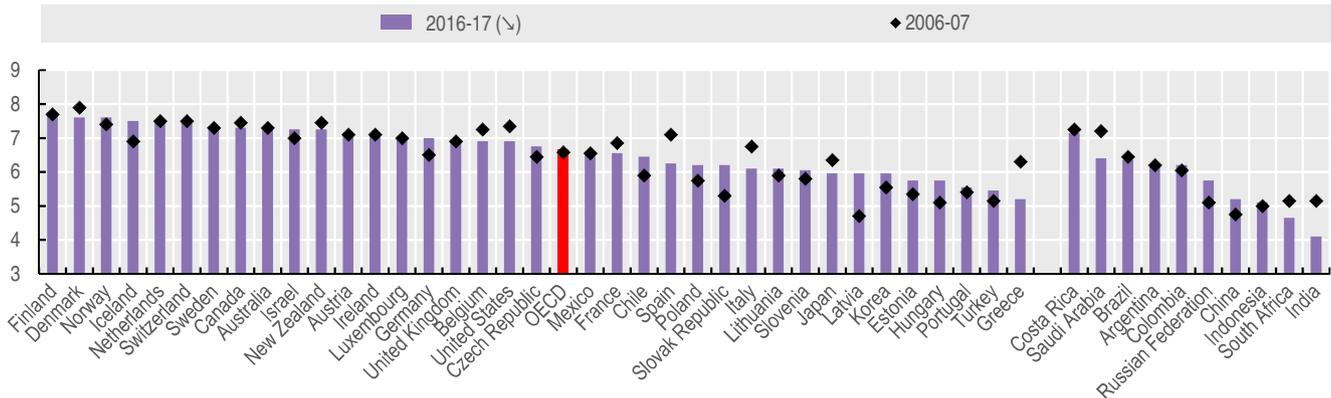
OECD (2017), *How's Life?* OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/how_life-2017-en.

Figure notes

Figure 8.1, Figure 8.2 and Figure 8.3: Results are averaged over a two-year period to minimise the impact of year-on-year fluctuations.

8.1. Levels and trends of life satisfaction vary considerably across countries

Average points of life satisfaction on a scale from 0 to 10, in 2016-17 and 2006-07

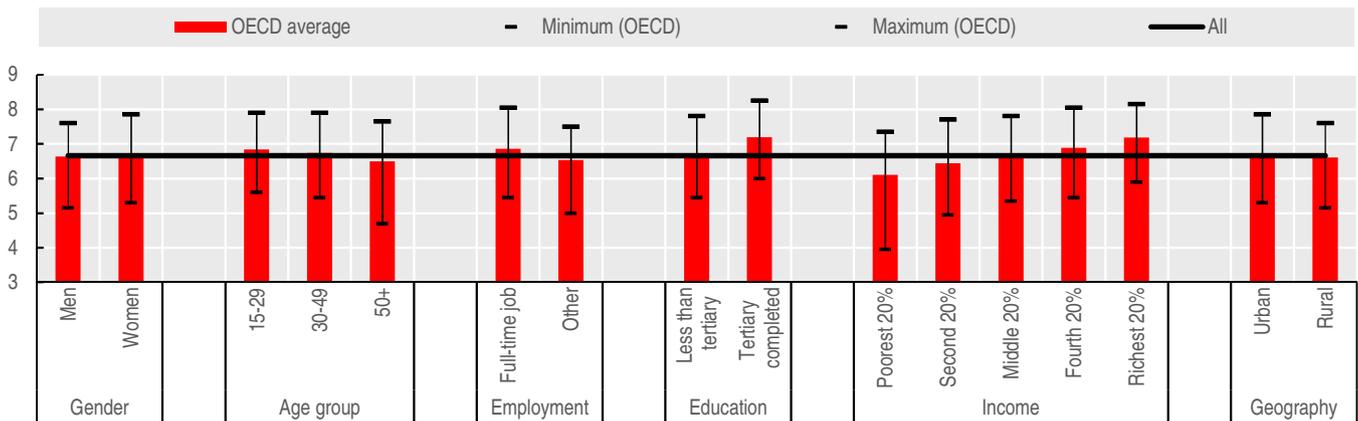


Source: Gallup World Poll, www.gallup.com.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933939598>

8.2. Life satisfaction varies by socio-demographic group

Average points of life satisfaction on a scale from 0 to 10, by socio-demographic group, OECD average, 2016-17

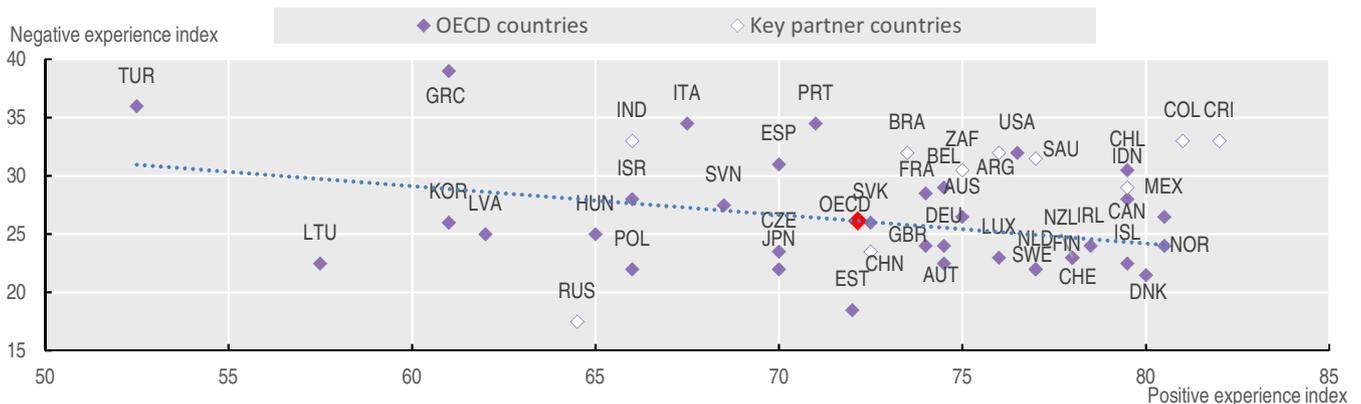


Source: Gallup World Poll, www.gallup.com.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933939617>

8.3. A snapshot of people's daily feelings and emotions

Positive versus negative experience index, in 2016-17





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