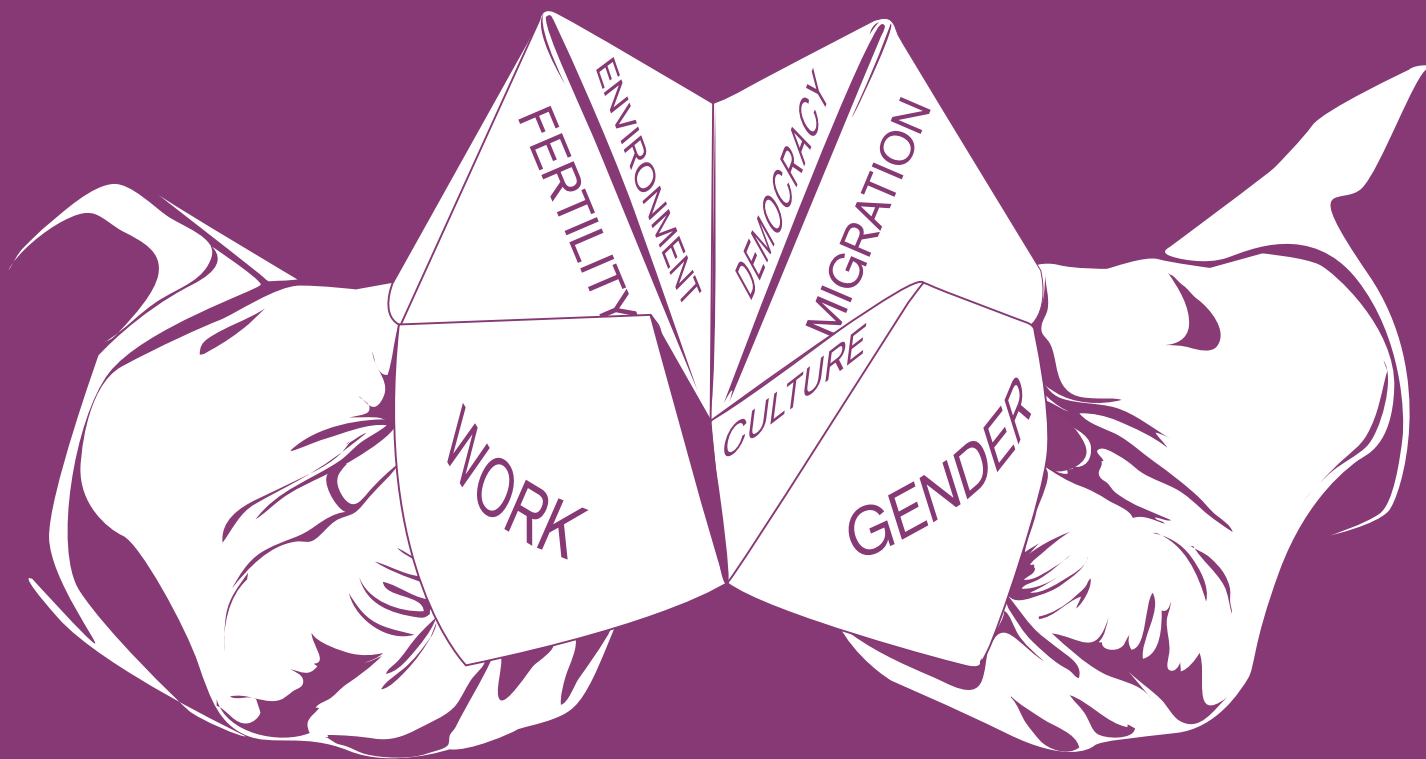


# DRIVERS OF WELLBEING

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE ACROSS EUROPE

Helen Russell and Frances McGinnity  
Economic and Social Research  
Institute (ESRI), Ireland

Working conditions such as working hours, autonomy and flexibility are important for work-life balance. However, working conditions – and hence feelings of work-life balance – vary significantly across Europe



Work-life balance, i.e. how individuals integrate paid work with the rest of their life and balance the demands of different roles, is an important component of wellbeing. Rising female employment, lone parenthood, falling fertility and an ageing population have all brought the issue of reconciling work and caring demands to the fore. Conflict between the demands of work and family life has been linked to poorer outcomes in marital relations and child development as well as job satisfaction, absenteeism and stress.

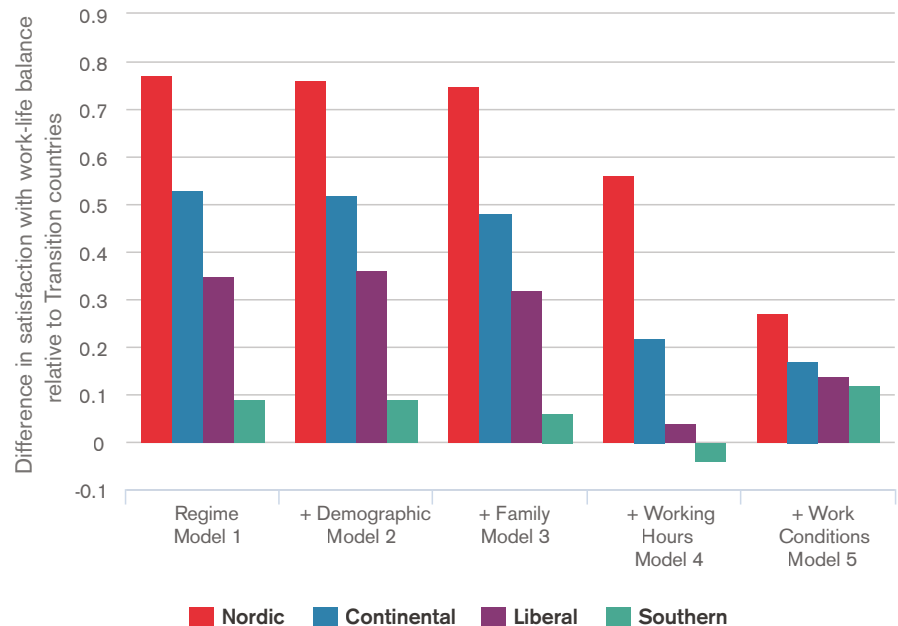
The demands of work and family life are known to vary across countries depending on the different employment and welfare regimes in place to organise work and caring responsibilities. The ESS provides valuable cross-national data with which to explore the effect of these institutional differences on work-life balance.

Analysis of data from the ESS Round 5 (2010/11) module on 'Work, Family and Wellbeing' uncovers significant differences in working conditions across countries depending on the type of employment regime. Working hours are lower, and job flexibility and feelings of job control higher, in more worker-oriented employment regimes (Nordic countries and the Continental countries i.e. Belgium, Netherlands and Germany) compared with southern European and central-eastern 'Transition' countries where union density and workers' collective bargaining power is weaker.

### DID YOU KNOW?

**High satisfaction with work-life balance in the Nordic countries is related to differences in working hours and better working conditions**

### Satisfaction with work-life balance by country group



Data source: European Social Survey Round 5 (2010/11). Data weighted by labour market weights created by the authors.

Note: Regression coefficients showing difference in work-life balance relative to the Transition countries (reference category), after controlling for demographic, family and working conditions. Base for analysis is all employees, 20-64 years, living with partner.

These differences in working conditions in turn help to explain the significant variation in perceptions of work-life balance found across Europe. The figure above summarises the results of analysis which models differences in self-assessed work-life balance across country groupings as a function of a range of different family and work-related factors.

Regime type clearly matters: satisfaction with work-life balance is highest in the Nordic countries, followed by Continental and Liberal countries i.e. UK and Ireland (Model 1). Satisfaction is lowest in southern European countries and Transition countries (which provide the reference group against which other regimes are compared).

However, differences in work-life balance across the country groupings are significantly reduced when we take account of differences in working hours and other working conditions (Models 4 and 5). Family demands are also important (Model 3) but, compared with working conditions, appear to explain less of the variation in satisfaction with work-family balance across Europe.

These findings point to some clear lessons for policymakers and/or employers seeking to promote work-life balance. Predictable working hours that are not too long, employee autonomy, and the ability to decide start/finish times and working during the standard working week, are all likely to enhance work-life balance. ➔

## GENDER INEQUALITIES AND DEPRESSION

Piet Bracke, Rozemarijn Dereuddre and Sarah Van de Velde  
Ghent University, Belgium

More gender-equal societies promote better mental health among both men and women and reduce the gender gap in depressive symptoms

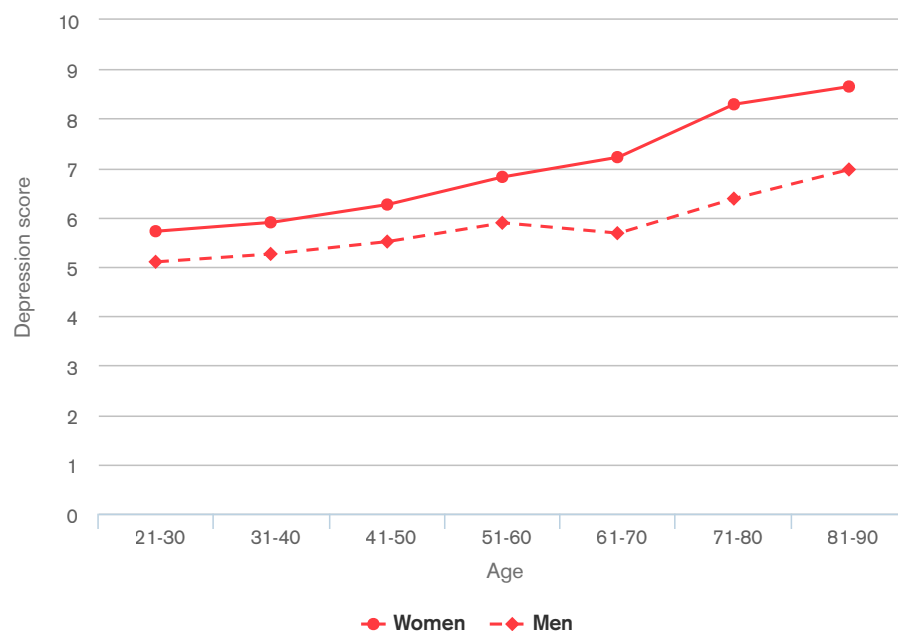
Mental health is an important component of wellbeing. Women are around twice as likely to report depressive symptoms and major depression as men. However, this gender gap is not observed in all countries and also varies across the life span. The ESS can be used to examine why this might be and to explore the role that gender inequality has to play in explaining differences in the depression gender gap. Because depression, lack of control, and powerlessness are related we would expect a greater gender gap in depression in more gender-unequal societies.

Analysis of ESS Round 3 (2006/07) and Round 6 (2012/13) data from 29 countries confirms that women are more likely than men to experience depressive symptoms (as measured by a shortened version of the

Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale – CES-D8) at any age. Both men and women experience an increase in depressive symptoms with age. However, the negative effect of age is more pronounced for women, leading to a more prominent gender difference in depression among those aged 61 and older.

Women's relatively disadvantaged position in society (for example in terms of reduced opportunities for employment) may explain the gender gap in depression. The cumulative negative effect that this relative disadvantage has over the life course may in turn explain the presence of a larger gender gap among older people. In support of this explanation, we find that controlling in analysis for differences in individuals' family and employment status significantly reduces the gender gap in depression observed.

Age differences in depressive symptoms among women and men



**DID YOU KNOW?**  
ESS data confirm the well-known gender difference in depression with women reporting higher scores on the depression scale

Data source: ESS Round 3 (2006/07) and Round 6 (2012/13). Design weights applied.

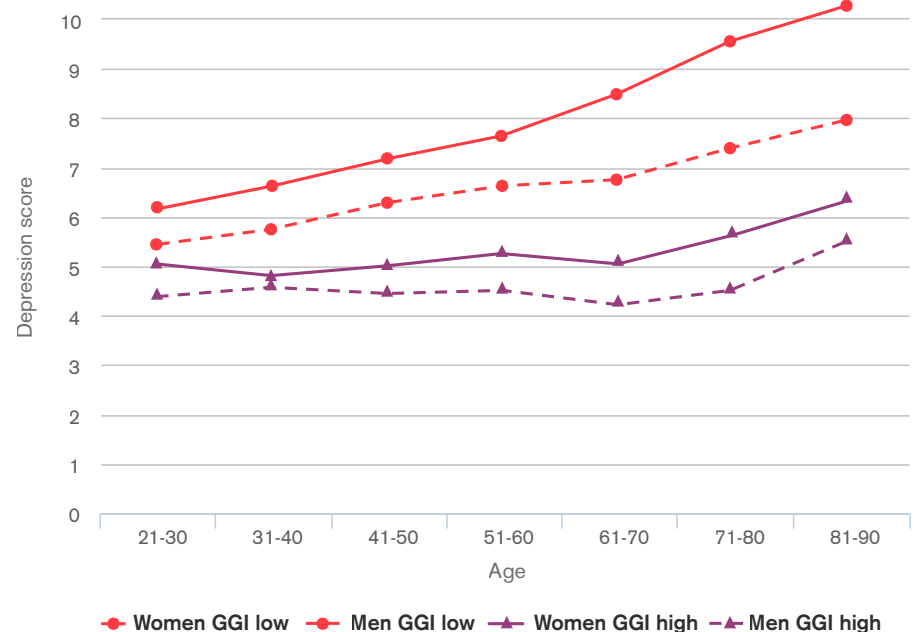
If the incidence of depression is related to social conditions we might also expect the degree of gender inequality in society to play an important role. The figure below shows that this is indeed the case. Both women and men experience less depressive symptoms in more gender-equal countries. However, the positive effect of gender equality in reducing depression is more pronounced among women than men. This means the gender gap in depression between men and women is smaller in more gender-equal countries (scoring high on the Global Gender Gap Index) than in less equal countries. In countries where women face more unequal treatment, the lifelong accumulation of this disadvantage is more pronounced and the gender gap in depression which emerges with age is greater.

Most studies of depression focus only on the individual social positions of women and men, and hence, underestimate the impact of gendered societal arrangements on depression. It is important to notice that less gender inequality goes hand in hand with better mental health for both women and men (though especially women). This has implications for policymakers, emphasising the important role that policies to promote gender equality may have in improving citizens' wellbeing. ➔

## DID YOU KNOW?

**The gender gap in depression between men and women is smaller in more gender-equal countries**

Gender gap in depression by country-level gender inequality



Data source: ESS Round 3 (2006/07) and Round 6 (2012/13). Design weights applied.

Note: Gender inequality measured by Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) (World Economic Forum, 2013).

# DOES PARENTHOOD BRING HAPPINESS?

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**Letizia Mencarini**  
University of Turin, Italy

**Maria Sironi**  
University of Oxford, UK

Whether parenthood brings happiness depends on your gender and whereabouts in Europe you live

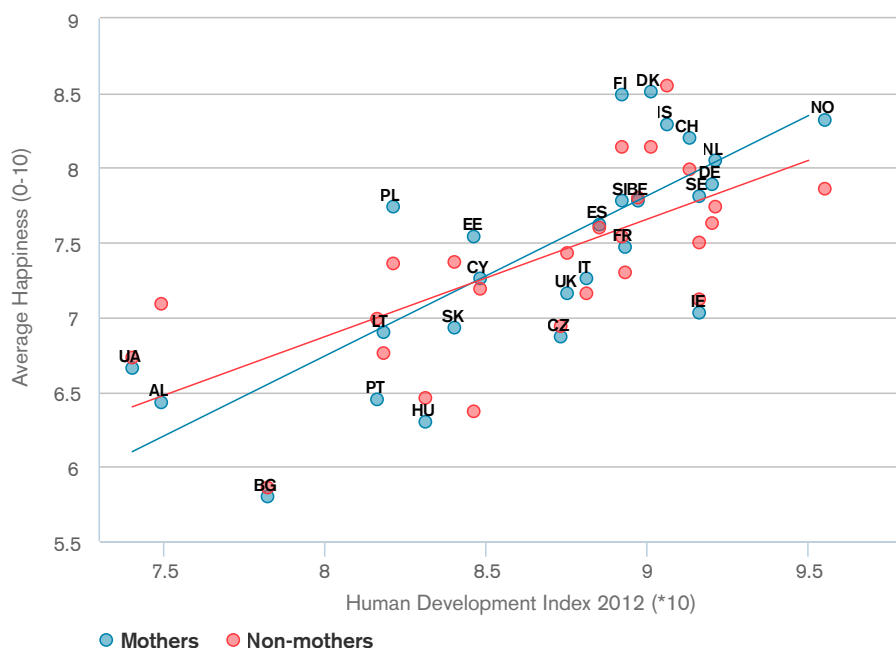


Most European countries are now experiencing fertility levels well below the replacement level of two children per woman, posing significant challenges for policymakers faced with an ageing population. However, despite the general decline, fertility rates vary considerably across European countries. Examining the relationship between parenthood and subjective wellbeing may help to shed some light on these trends in fertility.

We use data from ESS Round 6 (2012/13) to explore fertility decisions across Europe.

The first notable finding is that there is a positive relationship between the level of development in society – as measured by the Human Development Index (HDI) – and both happiness and fertility rates. Despite development historically being a strong predictor of fertility decline, once countries reach a certain threshold of development – as is generally the case in Europe relative to the rest of the world – the relationship appears to be reversed. Across ESS countries, the higher the level of development, the happier people are and the higher fertility rates.

## Happiness of mothers and non-mothers by country and level of development



Comparing the experiences of parents and non-parents directly, it appears that across Europe fathers are happier than non-fathers. However, for women the relationship between happiness and parenthood is less straightforward. Mothers are happier than non-mothers but only in the most highly developed European countries. The relationship between motherhood and happiness also depends on other contextual factors including accessibility of childcare and the proportion of women in parliament (used as a proxy for female empowerment in society).

For women, it seems that the relationship between childbearing and happiness is dependent on societal conditions including the presence (or lack) of institutions that support the combination of childbearing and paid work. This has potentially important implications for policymakers, especially given that countries in which motherhood is associated with greater happiness also tend to be countries in which fertility rates are higher. ◀

# MIGRATING TO FIND HAPPINESS?

David Bartram  
University of Leicester, UK

## Migrating to a wealthier European country will not necessarily lead to an increase in happiness

One might reasonably expect that migrants moving to wealthier countries would improve their lives in significant ways. Analysis of ESS data on intra-European migration, however, suggests that migrants might not experience greater happiness after moving to a wealthier country.

A straightforward comparison between migrants from central-eastern to western Europe and stayers in central-eastern Europe, suggests that migrants are generally happier than stayers (shown by the blue bars in the figure below). More than half of this difference is due to differences in characteristics between migrants and stayers; migrants are generally younger, healthier, and therefore happier than stayers. Nevertheless, after controlling for these differences we still find that migrants from most countries are still significantly happier than stayers (red bars).

However, before concluding that migrants have gained happiness as a consequence of moving to a wealthier country, we need to consider another possibility: migrants might already have been happier than stayers prior to migration for reasons that we cannot observe. Analysis using specialist statistical techniques ('treatment effects' analysis) to isolate the 'true' effect of the decision to migrate suggests that this is indeed the case in many countries. After controlling for

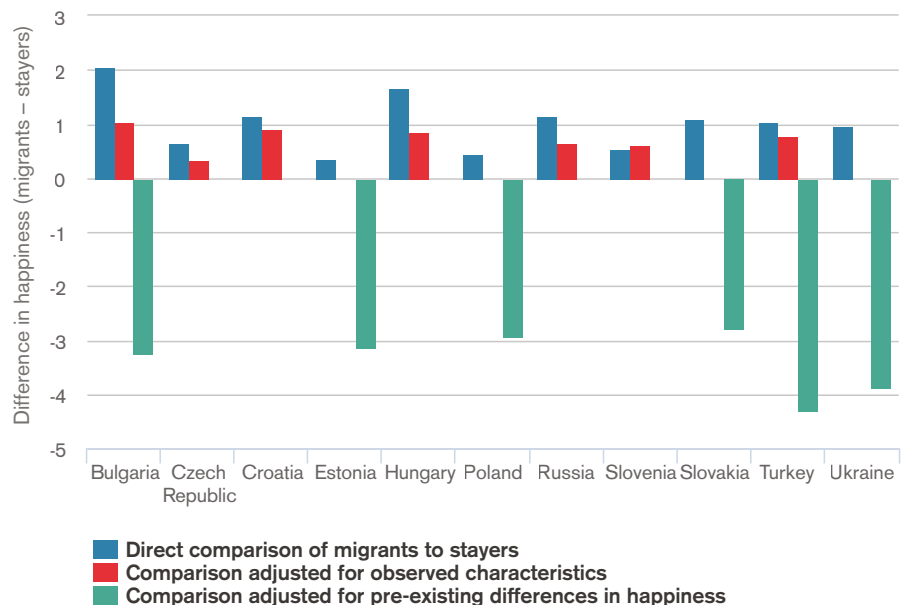


prior differences in happiness, we find that, for migrants from Bulgaria, Estonia, Poland, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine, it may even be the case that migration leads to a decrease in happiness rather than an increase (green bars).

Migrants' lives might well improve in ways that indicate higher objective wellbeing, but in subjective terms, it appears migration

may provide significant potential for disappointment. One possible explanation for this is that happiness depends on your position relative to others. Although their absolute income may be higher following migration, many migrants find themselves having to accept relatively low-status jobs, with potentially negative consequences for their sense of wellbeing. ➔

**Happiness differences between migrants and stayers by country (statistically significant results only)**



Data source: ESS Rounds 1 – 6 (2002/03 – 2012/13). Design weights applied.

## SATISFIED WITH DEMOCRACY, SATISFIED WITH LIFE?

Mónica Ferrín  
University of Zurich, Switzerland

People are more satisfied with life in countries where the quality of democracy is high and when they believe in the legitimacy of their democratic regime

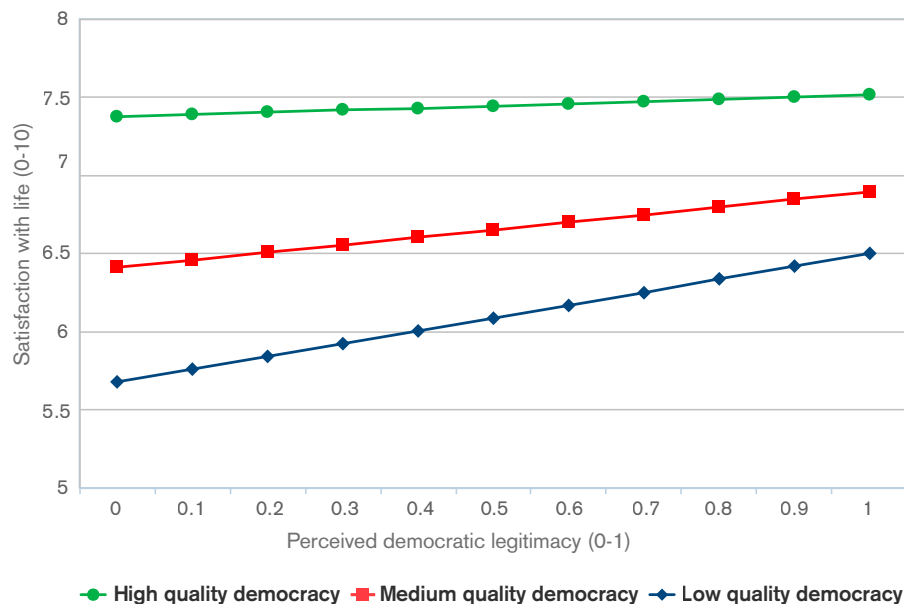
Most people around the world tend to think that democracy is preferable to any other political regime; and that people live better lives under democratic governments. However, is this necessarily the case? The question of whether democratic regimes do in fact result in higher wellbeing for citizens remains contested and there is a need for further evidence. The ESS Round 6 (2012/13) module on 'Europeans' Understandings and Evaluations of Democracy' provides a valuable source of data with which to examine the link between democracy and wellbeing.

Country-level analysis reveals that subjective wellbeing varies across countries in a similar way to democratic performance. In ESS

countries, such as the Nordic countries, where democracy performs better (as measured by the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators), levels of satisfaction with life are higher than in countries where democracy performs worse (such as Russia or Ukraine). The correlation between average satisfaction with life and democratic performance is 0.79.

There is also evidence that individuals' satisfaction with life (measured on a 0-10 scale) is positively associated with their evaluations of democratic performance. Using the ESS Round 6 (2012/13) module on democracy we can test the extent to which individuals' satisfaction with life varies depending on whether or not they perceive

Effect of belief in democratic legitimacy on life satisfaction by quality of democracy

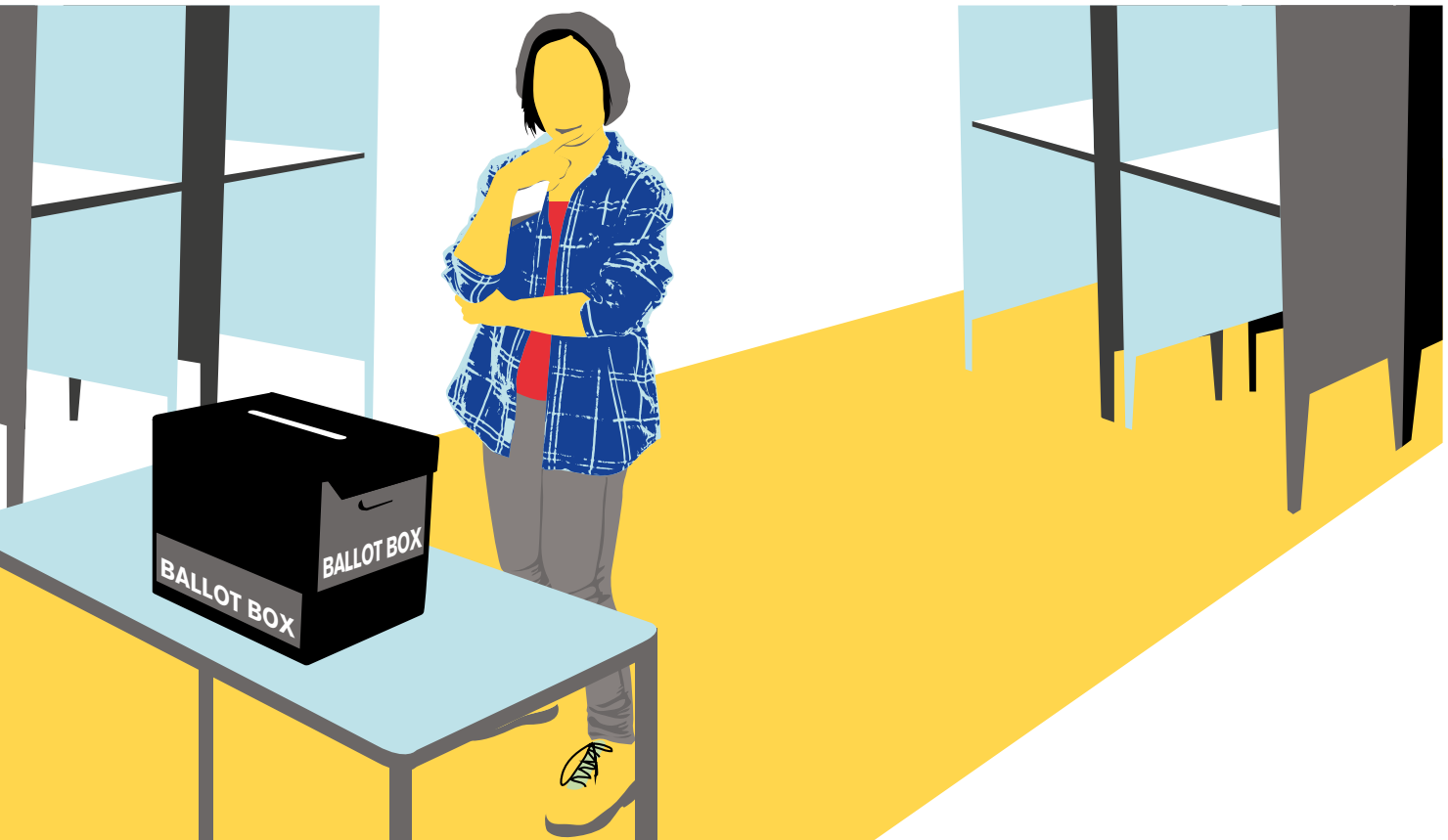


### DID YOU KNOW?

ESS Round 6 included a rotating module on 'Europeans' Understandings and Evaluations of Democracy'

Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/13).

Note: Marginal effect of beliefs in democratic legitimacy (liberal dimension) on satisfaction with life (0-10) based on results of multilevel regression. Quality of democracy measured using Worldwide Governance Indicators (World Bank, 2012).



their political regime to be legitimate, i.e. they evaluate that democratic reality lives up to their expectations of what democracy should be. We find a significant positive association between perceived democratic legitimacy and satisfaction with life. This is the case even after controlling for individual characteristics and the economic performance of the country, supporting the idea that it is not only economic performance which matters for satisfaction.

The importance of democratic legitimacy for wellbeing does, however, appear to vary across countries. Interestingly, the effect of democratic legitimacy beliefs on life satisfaction is stronger the less the objective democratic quality of a country (as

### **DID YOU KNOW?** **Individuals' satisfaction with life varies depending on whether or not they perceive their political regime to be legitimate**

measured by World Bank Indicators). As the figure shows, in countries where democracy performs worst, beliefs that the system is nevertheless legitimate clearly make citizens more satisfied with their lives whereas in countries where democratic performance is better there is a much

weaker relationship between legitimacy beliefs and wellbeing. It may be that in high quality democracies, citizens have become used to the good functioning of democracy and, therefore, their subjective perceptions as to whether democracy is or is not performing quite as well as they would like matter less.

These findings highlight the importance of democratic legitimacy not only in ensuring the continuation of democratic regimes but also for ensuring citizens' wellbeing. The challenge for governments across Europe, especially but not only those in low quality democracies, is to do everything they can to improve democratic performance in line with people's expectations. ➔



## SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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University College Dublin, Ireland


**There is a significant negative relationship between regional concentrations of sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) in the atmosphere and life satisfaction across Europe**

It is widely acknowledged that a person's surroundings and local environmental conditions can be important determinants of quality of life. Poor air quality, particularly the presence of the pollutant sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), has long been a concern for policymakers. We use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to combine ESS data from Rounds 1 to 3 (2002/03 to 2006/07) with data from public air quality database AirBase and produce the first cross-national examination of the association between subjective wellbeing and SO<sub>2</sub> levels at a sub-national i.e. regional level.

Our analysis shows that average life satisfaction in Europe varies not only across countries but also within countries at regional level. Similar national and regional differences are observed in SO<sub>2</sub> concentrations. Countries with the lowest SO<sub>2</sub> concentrations – Norway and Denmark – are also among the countries with the highest life satisfaction. Within countries such as Poland, the areas where SO<sub>2</sub> concentrations are highest, are also those areas where life satisfaction tends

to be lower than average. Regional analysis suggests that the association between pollution levels and wellbeing may be even stronger than previous analysis at national level has suggested.

The negative association between SO<sub>2</sub> levels and life satisfaction is robust and remains apparent even after conducting statistical modeling to control for other individual and contextual factors (e.g. economic conditions) that may influence wellbeing. Some of the negative association between SO<sub>2</sub> and wellbeing is no doubt explained by the fact that higher SO<sub>2</sub> concentrations are associated with poorer health which in turn is associated with lower life satisfaction. However, SO<sub>2</sub> has an additional direct effect on subjective wellbeing even after controlling for differences in physical health.

These findings demonstrate the importance of studying the effect of the environment on people's wider wellbeing and of taking steps to minimise the potential harmful effects of poor environmental conditions. 



# LIFE SATISFACTION, EMOTIONS AND CULTURAL VALUES

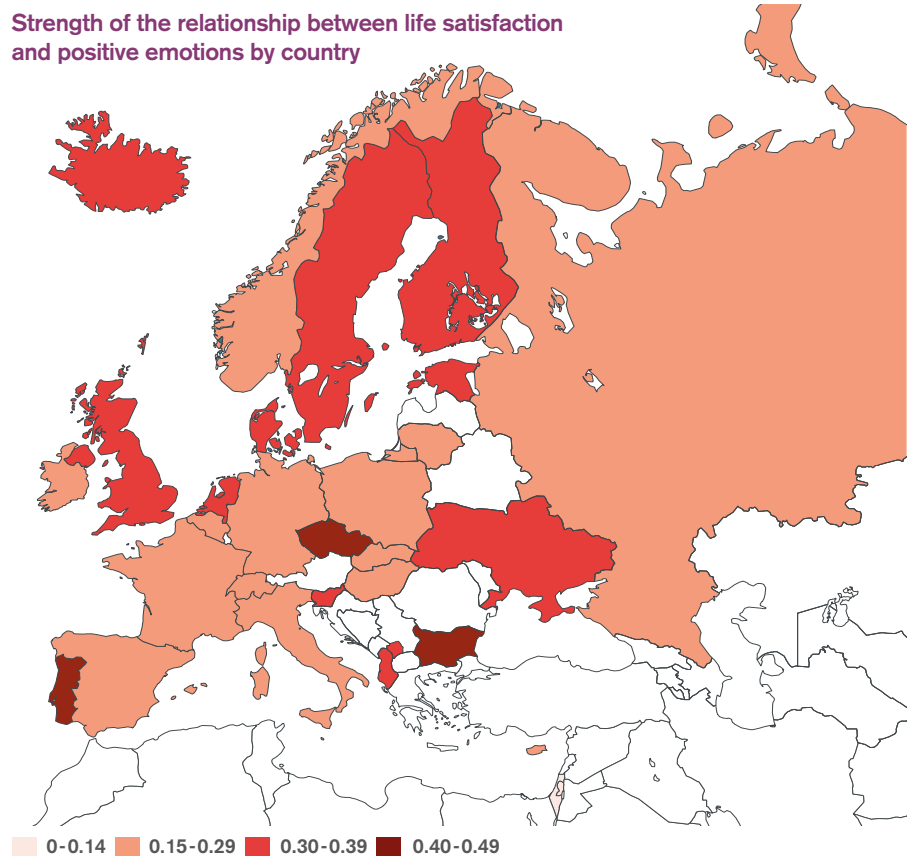
Anu Realo, Liisi Kõõts-Ausmees and Jüri Allik  
University of Tartu, Estonia

In general people who experience more positive emotions also feel more satisfied with life. However, the importance of positive emotions varies depending on cultural values

At first glance, it appears self-evident that positive emotions enhance our life satisfaction, whereas negative emotions bring us down and decrease our satisfaction with life. However, can we be satisfied with life without being happy? The answer may differ depending on who you are and where you live. People with different cultural values may attach different levels of importance to emotions when determining how satisfied they are with life.

Across European countries, positive emotions are generally positively associated with life satisfaction, whereas negative emotions are negatively associated with life satisfaction. However, analysis of data from ESS Round 6 (2012/13) shows that the contribution of positive and negative emotions to life satisfaction varies significantly across countries. Of the 29 countries that participated in ESS Round 6, the relationship between positive emotions and life satisfaction is strongest in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Portugal (see the map).

Strength of the relationship between life satisfaction and positive emotions by country



Data source: ESS Round 6 (2012/13). Post-stratification weights applied.

Note: Life satisfaction was predicted by positive affect scales measuring emotional experiences in each of the 29 European countries in a series of multiple regression analyses. Darker colours indicate a stronger relationship.

One factor which may influence the strength of the relationship between emotions and life satisfaction across countries is the level of socio-economic development. Analysis suggests that positive emotions matter less in determining life satisfaction in countries which score higher on the Human Development Index.

Cultural values – specifically the extent to which people value survival, i.e. physical and economic security over self-expression – may also be important. Statistical analysis shows that life satisfaction tends to be more strongly dependent on positive emotions

in ESS countries which (according to the World Values Survey) place greater emphasis on survival than in countries where self-expression is more highly valued. Interestingly, however, a lack of negative emotions appears to be equally necessary for being satisfied with life regardless of whether countries score high or low in terms of survival/self-expression.

These findings emphasise the importance of taking a cross-national perspective on wellbeing and remaining alert to the fact that the determinants of wellbeing may vary across cultures. ➤