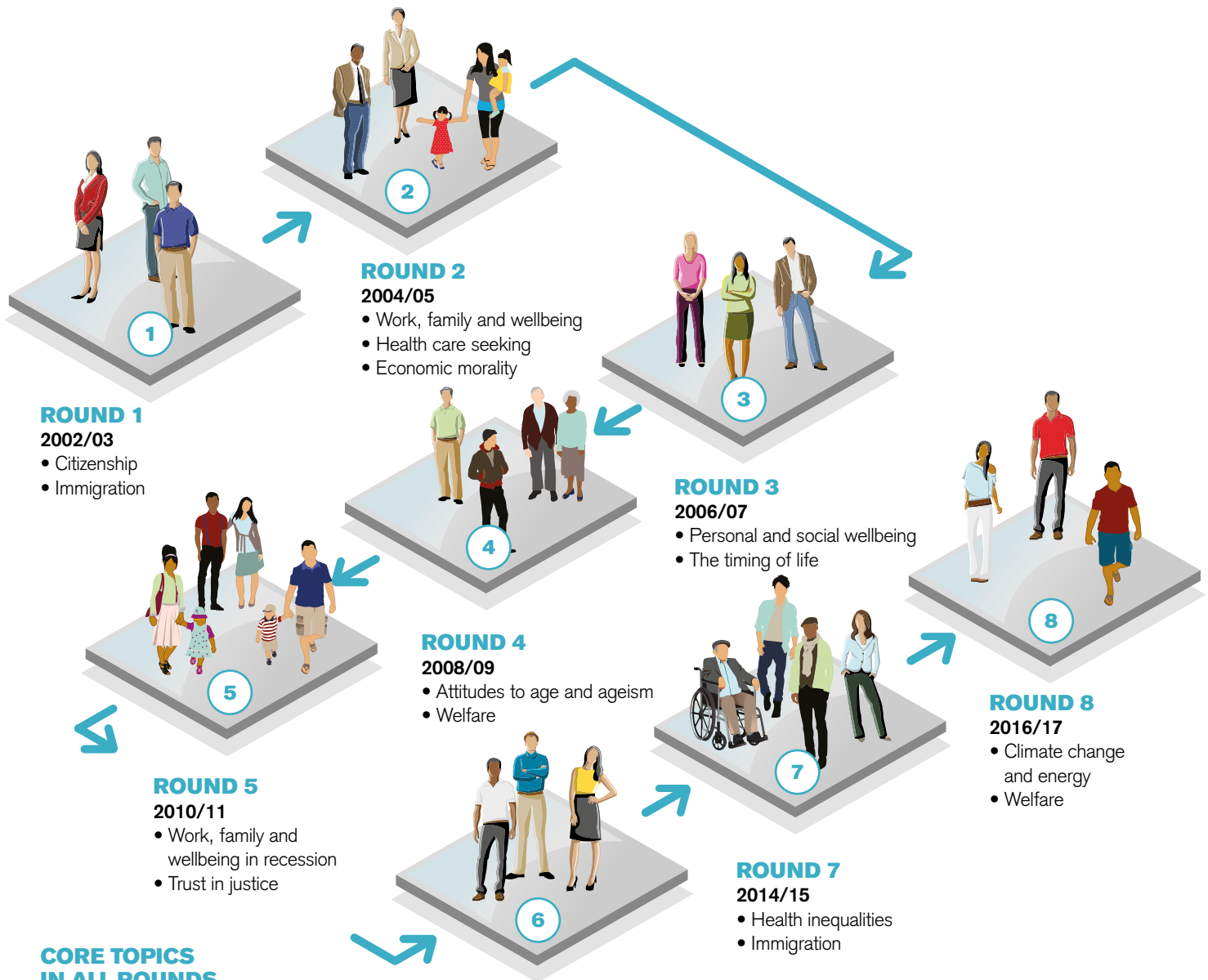


MEASURING SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING IN THE ESS

The ESS provides free access to a rich variety of high quality data on different aspects of wellbeing (and other topics) for more than 30 European countries

The availability of high quality data is central to the measurement and understanding of wellbeing. The ESS has been collecting methodologically robust cross-national data on wellbeing every two years since 2002. The survey includes headline measures of subjective wellbeing such as 'life satisfaction' and 'happiness' as part of its core questionnaire, asked of respondents in each round. More in-depth data on wellbeing is also provided for some rounds where thematic 'rotating modules' (which vary from round to round) have focused on different aspects of wellbeing. These data on wellbeing are collected alongside a large number of socio-demographic background variables and questions asking about other important social and political topics, providing researchers and policymakers with a rich dataset with which to explore Europeans' wellbeing.





CORE TOPICS IN ALL ROUNDS

- Moral and social values
- Health and wellbeing
- Trust in institutions
- Education and occupation
- Social capital and social trust
- Household circumstances
- Citizen involvement and democracy
- Social exclusion
- Political values and engagement
- Socio-demographic characteristics
- Immigration
- Crime

ESS PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

The findings in this booklet are based on ESS data from the first six rounds. Data on wellbeing are available for more than 30 countries across Europe which took part in at least one of the first six rounds of the ESS.

ESS Participation ROUNDS 1-6

6 ROUNDS

- 1 Belgium
- 2 Denmark
- 3 Finland
- 4 France
- 5 Germany
- 6 Hungary
- 7 Ireland
- 8 Netherlands
- 9 Norway
- 10 Poland
- 11 Portugal
- 12 Slovenia
- 13 Spain
- 14 Sweden
- 15 Switzerland
- 16 UK

5 ROUNDS

- 17 Austria
- 18 Czech Republic
- 19 Estonia
- 20 Slovakia
- 21 Ukraine

4 ROUNDS

- 22 Bulgaria
- 23 Cyprus
- 24 Greece
- 25 Israel
- 26 Russia

3 ROUNDS

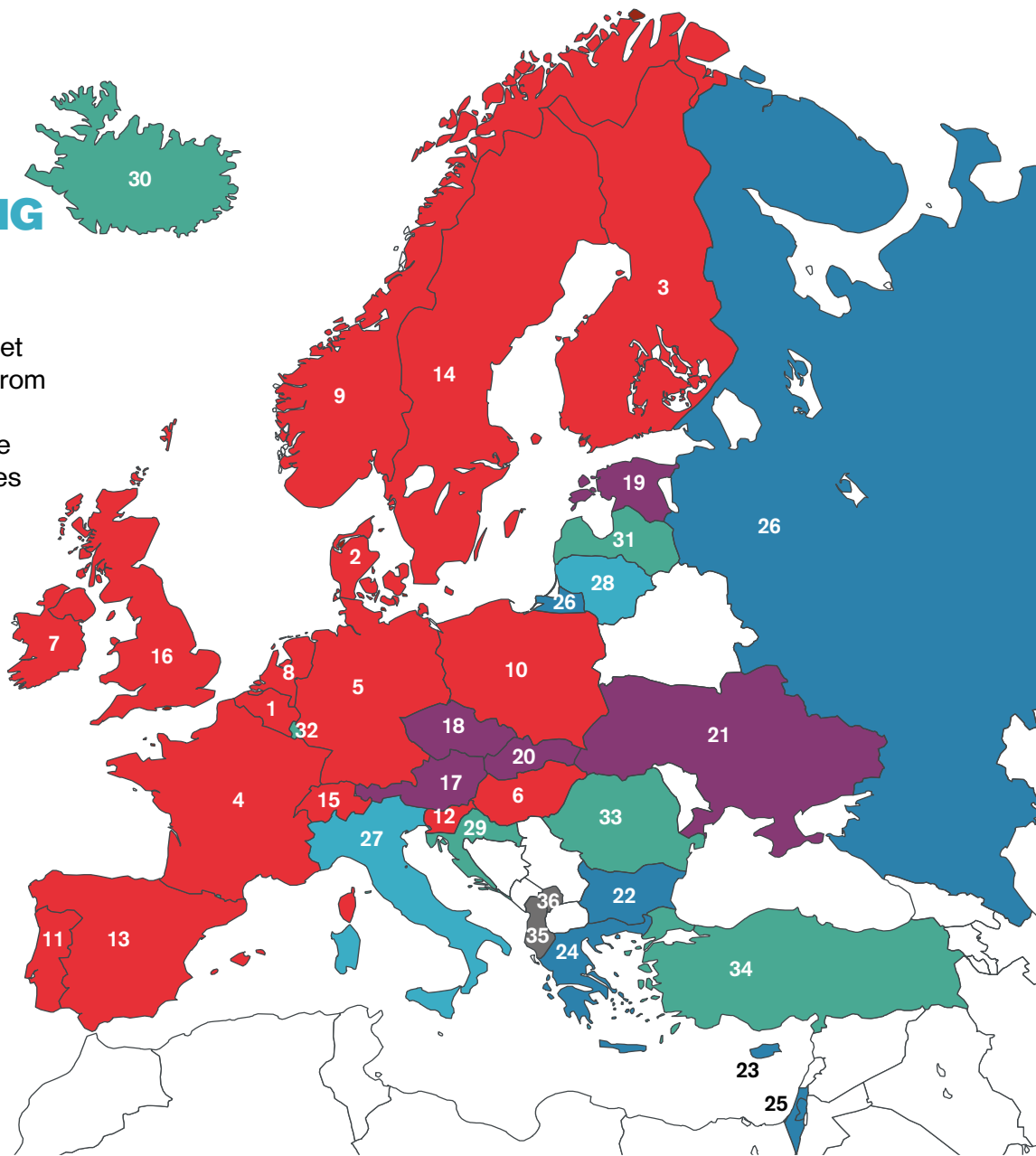
- 27 Italy
- 28 Lithuania

2 ROUNDS

- 29 Croatia
- 30 Iceland
- 31 Latvia
- 32 Luxembourg
- 33 Romania
- 34 Turkey

1 ROUND

- 35 Albania
- 36 Kosovo



WELLBEING MATTERS

Annie Quick

New Economics Foundation, UK

Researchers and policymakers increasingly recognise the importance of measuring and understanding subjective wellbeing

Many people would agree that one of the key aims of a democratic government should be to promote a life of high wellbeing. In the past, rather than focusing directly on achieving wellbeing, most countries have tended to prioritise economic growth. However, the relationship between economic growth and wellbeing is not as close as might be expected. This suggests that, rather than focusing solely on economic growth, policymakers need to look directly at the ultimate outcome – human wellbeing.

Focusing policy on subjective wellbeing has a number of advantages. Research shows that higher wellbeing contributes to many other important outcomes such as better health and higher productivity at work. Furthermore, dialogue with the public suggest that people can relate to the idea of wellbeing. By putting people's own experiences centre stage, wellbeing has the potential to reconnect people with policy, helping to overcome the high levels of citizens' disengagement with the political process.

Encouragingly, in recent years, the need to look beyond GDP and focus on wellbeing has been increasingly recognised. A 2009 commission convened by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy, the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, advocated focusing on wellbeing. There have been a number of initiatives to produce alternative headline indicators of progress, such as the OECD's Better Life Initiative, which include measures of subjective wellbeing. Wellbeing is now being studied from a range of academic perspectives drawing insights from economics, sociology, neuroscience and human needs theory.

The growing field of subjective wellbeing research has been made possible by the increasing amount of data available. Surveys such as the ESS are central to the measurement of wellbeing. The data they provide on individuals' experiences can be used by policymakers to understand:

- Different dimensions of wellbeing
- Drivers of wellbeing
- How wellbeing is distributed across different groups within the population

There is also increasing interest in making cross-national comparisons, allowing the macroeconomic and societal factors that determine wellbeing, and the policies that influence them, to be explored. The ESS – and the methodologically robust cross-national data it provides on a wide range of topics – makes a particularly important contribution in this regard.

Over recent years wellbeing research has established a number of key findings regarding the drivers of wellbeing and policymakers can start shaping policy to improve wellbeing. However, our understanding of wellbeing still lags behind other domains such as health or income which have benefited from decades of research using rich data sets. Continued research on wellbeing, supported by data from surveys such as the ESS, is needed to better inform the response to the economic and societal challenges facing Europe. ➔

DID YOU KNOW?

Research shows that higher wellbeing contributes to many other important outcomes of interest to policymakers, such as better health and higher productivity at work

