



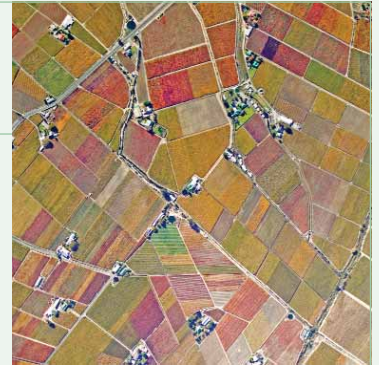
European Foundation  
for the Improvement of  
Living and Working Conditions

# Second European Quality of Life Survey – First Findings

## > résumé <

'How can the social well-being of all Europe's citizens be best advanced within a globalising world? ... Public policy imperatives, such as 'Growth and Jobs', the Lisbon strategy, and the drive for greater competitiveness are not ends in themselves – but means to an end – the well-being of European citizens.'

*Social Reality Stocktaking – Bureau of European Policy Advisers, Consultation paper, 2007*



## Context

The European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) represents a unique attempt to explore quality of life in a wide range of countries. It is a major source of information, highlighting the social and economic policy challenges facing the EU following the two recent rounds of enlargement. The survey paints a unique picture of the social situation in the enlarged Union, a picture that includes both objective and subjective elements.

'Quality of life' clearly embraces a very wide area of policy interests, with a particular need to map and understand disparities associated with age, gender, health, income, social class and region. Eurofound's work programme also emphasises the need to link the assessment of quality of life to the changing nature of employment, work-life balance and social cohesion, and to the modernisation of social protection and social welfare services.

Eurofound's approach therefore focuses broadly on quality of life rather than narrowly on living conditions – and sees quality of life primarily in terms of the scope individuals have to achieve their own ambitions. The survey developed as a tool to both document and analyse the social situation in Europe, and thus to inform the social policy debate on issues such as changing family structures, social exclusion and the demographic challenge.

The main results of the second EQLS will be published in spring 2009, followed by a series of more detailed reports around key policy themes.

## Key conclusions

Raising the levels of well-being of European citizens is the primary goal of EU public policy and it is addressed in European countries by a wide range of institutions and services. These economic and social protection systems are themselves constantly changing to meet new needs, and it is clear that there are now considerable differences, as well as similarities, between EU Member States. For example, Malta and Slovenia share some characteristics with the countries of western Europe, while citizens in the Mediterranean Member States of Greece, Italy and Portugal often have views and experiences more similar to some of the new Member States than to, say, the Nordic countries.

The variations in terms of life satisfaction and attitudes to the future – within and between countries – underline the significant inequalities in living conditions and in the experience of daily life. In particular, well-being in the former socialist countries varies greatly between social and demographic groups: there are marked disadvantages associated with low income, while older people appear less content with their situation.

Quality of life reflects not only circumstances relative to others; the EQLS documents many instances of specific deprivation and disadvantage – for example, the lack of adequate washing and toilet facilities in parts of some countries. Clearly, ownership of property is no guarantee of standards and this is evident in the significant number of properties in some new Member States with high rates of ownership that are in need of maintenance and repair.

Notwithstanding material difficulties, it is noticeable how family plays a central role in all countries, as both a basic medium for social integration and a source of satisfaction in daily life. It is important also to acknowledge how often people report problems in reconciling their family responsibilities with the demands of employment. In this respect, there are opportunities here for new developments in workplace policies as well as local services.

Satisfaction with family and personal life is generally higher than satisfaction with essential public services. A large proportion of people report difficulties in accessing health services and have concerns about the quality of health and care services. In the context of an ageing Europe – and especially considering the high levels of poor health and disability reported by older people in the new Member States – this is a key challenge.

The quality of society, both locally and more generally, is a fundamental element in quality of life. The EQLS results regarding social trust and perception of societal tensions emphasise the urgent need to address issues of social relations and social cohesion.

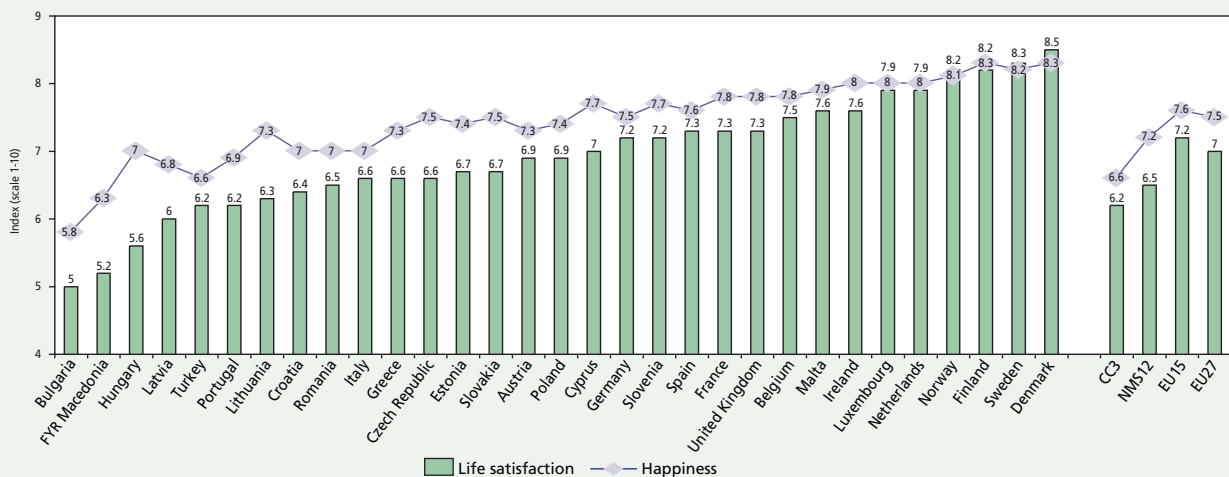
Social change is generally slow and difficult; however, it faces increasing challenges in a time of economic turmoil and the growing risk of social exclusion.

## Life satisfaction

Europeans are generally satisfied and happy with life. On a scale from one to ten, the EU27 average is 7 for life satisfaction and 7.5 for happiness. Nevertheless, both the level of life satisfaction and also the level of happiness vary considerably across countries. The level of happiness is higher than that of life satisfaction. The gap between the two is particularly large in the low income CC3 and NMS12 countries. This highlights the different nature of the indicators: happiness is more emotionally driven and less affected by the level of living standards, while the satisfaction indicator is more influenced by socioeconomic circumstances.

Differences in life satisfaction are found consistently between social and economic groups within countries.

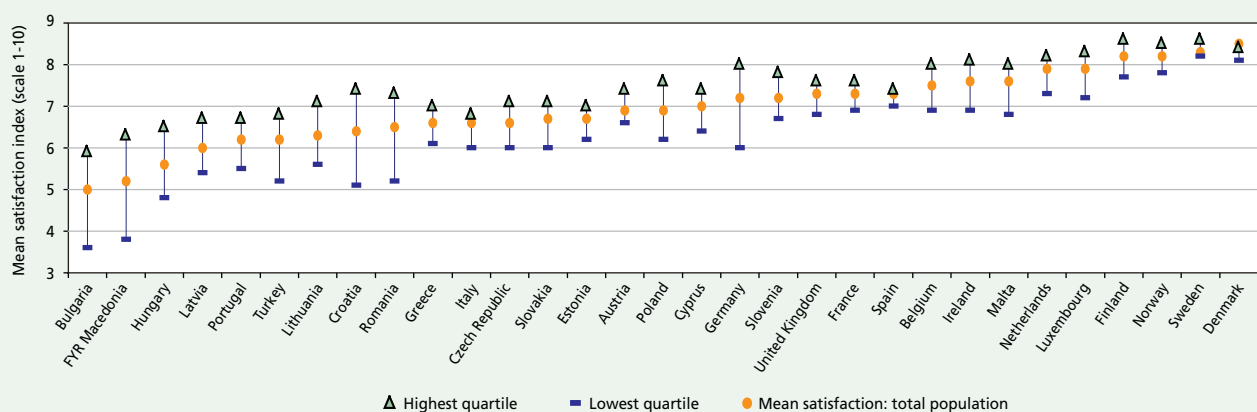
Figure 1: Life satisfaction and happiness index, by country



Question 29: All things considered, how satisfied would you say you are with your life these days? Scale from 1 ('very dissatisfied') to 10 ('very satisfied'). Question 42: Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are, on a scale from 1 to 10 where [1] means you are 'very unhappy' and [10] means you are 'very happy'.

Source: EQLS 2007 for all figures in this résumé.

Figure 2: Mean life satisfaction, by income quartile



Question 29: All things considered, how satisfied would you say you are with your life these days, on a scale from 1 ('very dissatisfied') to 10 ('very satisfied').

A number of general findings emerge.

- People with higher income, good health, well-paid jobs and higher levels of education are, unsurprisingly, more satisfied, happy and fulfilled.
- Those living with a partner and children also report higher levels of satisfaction.
- These differences are a lot more pronounced in the NMS12. In these countries, age also plays a more significant role, with younger people a lot more satisfied, possibly as a result of the political and social changes in many of the NMS12 that have opened up more opportunities for younger citizens than for the older generation.

### Optimism

When asked about the future, 55% of EU citizens said that they were optimistic, with very few differences between overall averages for two country clusters – the EU15 and the NMS12. However, the differences between EU countries and within these clusters are large.

- In all four Nordic countries (which score the highest in terms of optimism), more than three quarters of the respondents said they were optimistic about the future.
- In another 20 countries, half or even more of respondents have positive expectations about the future, including some NMS12 countries that score very highly – Poland, Slovenia, Malta and Estonia. In addition, all the CC3 countries belong to this group.
- In three EU15 countries (France, Italy and Portugal) less than half the respondents were optimistic about the future. The same holds for four of the NMS12 – the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia. Hungary has the

lowest proportion of optimists among all 31 countries with more people indicating they were more pessimistic than optimistic.

### Subjective well-being

Overall subjective well-being is measured by satisfaction, happiness and life fulfilment.

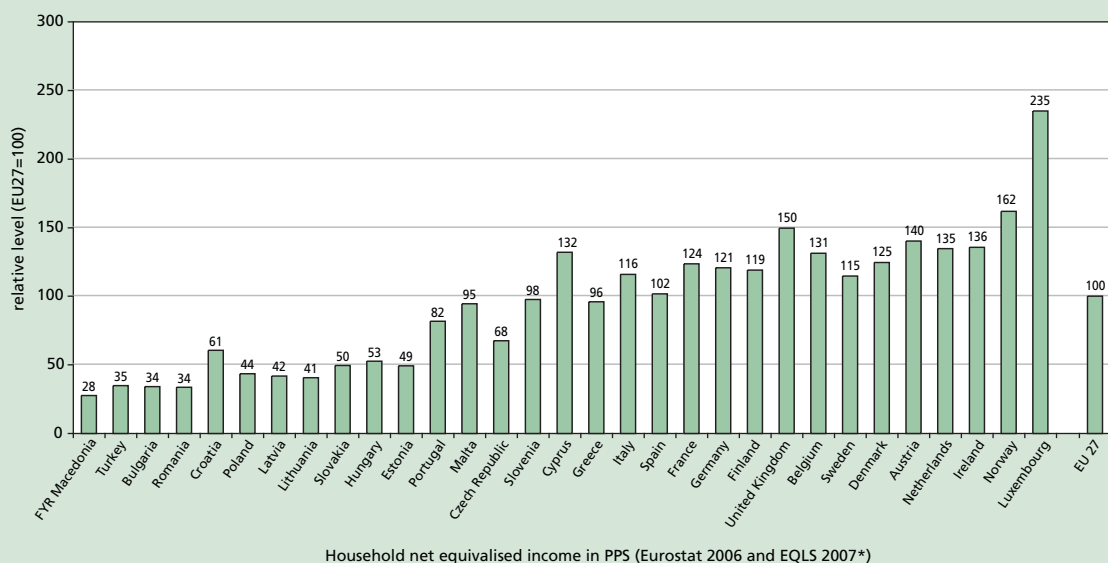
- There is a lower level of well-being in most of the NMS12 and CC3 in comparison with the EU15.
- Within the EU15, there are large variations. Nordic countries report the highest levels of satisfaction, happiness and life fulfilment, whereas Greece, Italy and Portugal are closer to the levels of the NMS12.
- However, the NMS12 are not one homogenous bloc either: Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania show exceptionally low levels of well-being, whereas Slovenia and Malta compare with levels in the EU15.

### Income and deprivation

A key dimension of people's quality of life is their standard of living reflected by their household income. By this measure, the disparities across Europe are stark: in the EU27, Bulgaria and Romania have household incomes almost as low as that of the candidate country, FYR Macedonia. Europe's wealthiest Member States are located among the EU15, all of which are above the EU average, with the exception of Greece and Portugal. The household income in FYR Macedonia is less than a third of the EU average; by contrast, the average household income in Luxembourg is more than twice the EU average.

Disparities within the countries are also substantial. FYR Macedonia and Turkey have the highest income

Figure 3: Mean equivalised household income by country – relative level in 2006 (EU27=100)



Notes: Equivalising incomes allows households of different sizes and compositions to be compared.

inequalities: the income of the wealthiest 20% of the population in both these countries is around 10 times that of the poorest 20%. In the EU, Latvia is the most unequal country, with the richest Latvians earning about eight times what the poorest earn. At the other end of the scale, Denmark, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Sweden are much more equal, with the richest citizens in these countries earning only around four times what the poorest earn.

Not surprisingly, citizens who are unemployed have a much lower income than those in paid work – on average, an equivalised household income about half that of those in employment. In addition, as other EU statistics confirm, women, those with a lower level of education, people in poor health or who have been widowed or divorced also have a lower household income.

### Household essentials and deprivation

The EQLS offers a number of non-monetary indicators of living standards and material conditions. Citizens were asked if they lacked any of a range of six items because they were unable to afford them.<sup>1</sup> By this measure, substantial differences between and within European countries are evident. In some of the poorest countries among the CC3 and the NMS12, the higher income earners are still more deprived than the poorer citizens in some of the EU15. In Turkey, FYR Macedonia and Bulgaria, for example, the richest citizens are more deprived than the poorest in the Netherlands, Sweden and Luxembourg.

The disparity in terms of deprivation also varies substantially within countries: in Romania, the poorest citizens are on average deprived of four of the essential items, while the richest are deprived of only one. By contrast, the disparity in Sweden and Denmark is almost nonexistent; this is because very few people there experience any multiple deprivation. The proportion of people who could not afford five or six of the basic necessities is five times higher in the NMS than in the EU15. In general, EU15

countries are characterised by a much greater equality than their NMS12 neighbours and the candidate countries; however, disparities in Greece and Portugal are more similar to those in the NMS12.

### Dealing with lack of income

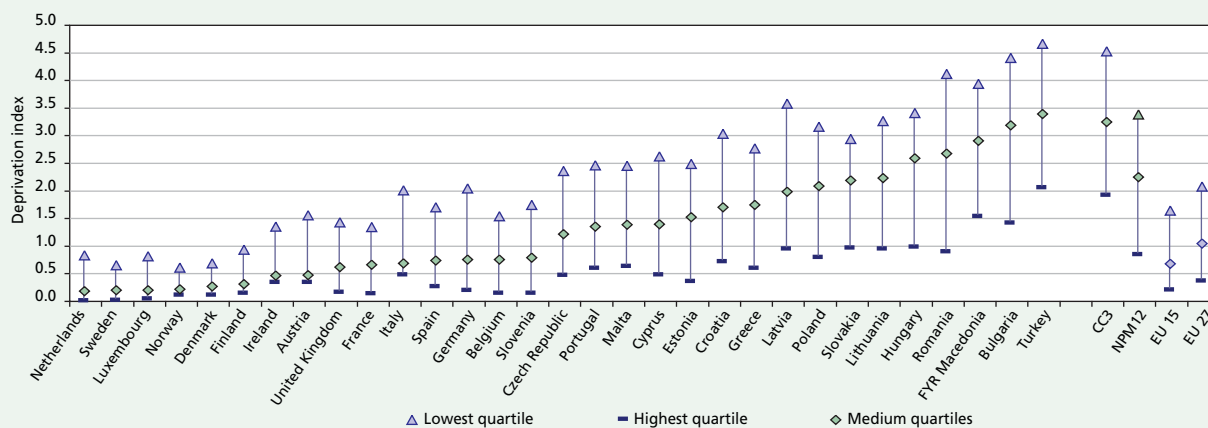
Households can try to deal with inadequate income in several ways: by producing food for their own consumption, living in multigenerational households and sharing the costs, or seeking the support of friends or family from outside the home. All these approaches are much more common in poorer countries. For instance, around half of all households in the NMS12 and CC3 (with the exception of Cyprus and Malta) grow some of their own food. By contrast, only around one household in five in Austria, Belgium and Germany do so. Around 27% of households in Romania and 25% in Lithuania are helped with either money or food by people from outside the household, as against 9% of households in the EU15, while in Croatia and FYR Macedonia, 21% and 30% respectively of the poorest households include three generations of family living together.

### Family

Results from the second EQLS emphasise the scale of family involvement in child- and eldercare, and that it remains, for most people, the first port of call for personal support in emergencies; this underlines the quality of family relationships as the most important aspect of quality of life.

Responsibilities in the household are not shared equally between men and women, women being more likely to report involvement in caring activities on a daily basis. Women also spend much more time on domestic duties. In the EU27, women report spending 33 hours per week and men over 18 hours in caring for and educating children, while women spend 18 hours per week cooking and doing housework, as against ten hours per week for men.

Figure 4: Mean deprivation index by income quartile, by country



Notes: The deprivation index runs from none (for no items missing) to six (for all six items missing).

<sup>1</sup> Adequate home heating, an annual holiday, new furniture to replace worn-out items, a meal with meat every second day, new clothes, the wherewithal to entertain guests at home.

Table 1: Daily care and housework, by sex and country group (%)

	EU27		EU15		NMS12		CC3	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Caring for and educating children	25	35	24	34	27	39	10	45
Cooking and housework	29	79	31	81	21	72	11	78
Caring for elderly/disabled relatives	4	9	3	9	5	8	4	8

Q.36: How often are you involved in any of the following activities outside of paid work? Figures indicate percentage of people who record care or domestic duties every day.

The majority of Europeans spend less time caring for elderly and disabled relatives or participating in voluntary and charitable activities than on domestic work, doing so less than once a week. In the EU27, among those who participate in these activities, men report spending on average 11 hours a week and women spend 15 hours caring for elderly or disabled relatives, while men participate in voluntary and charitable activities on average seven hours a week and women six hours a week.

Europeans have regular and frequent contact with other family members and with their friends. Half of all citizens in the EU27 with children living outside the household report face-to-face contact with one or more of their children at least every day or every other day.

Contacts by phone and email and post have become commonplace, with more than 75% of the same citizens reporting such contact with their children at least weekly and nearly half at least every day or every other day.

On the whole, people report high levels of satisfaction with their family life and, to a lesser extent, with their social life – although both are associated with income.

## Work-life balance

Enabling citizens to develop some balance between family life, personal commitments and working life has become central to the social policy debate.

Having a job generally increases life satisfaction considerably. At a basic level, those who are unemployed usually report much higher levels of unhappiness and depression than those who are working. As work takes up a considerable part of people's lives, the quality of one's work has an impact on the quality of life. Being able to reconcile the demands from work, family obligations and social life – achieving a sustainable work-life balance, in other words – clearly improves Europeans' satisfaction with life.

Almost half (48%) of citizens in paid employment in the EU27 say that at least several times a month they are too tired as a result of their work to do household jobs, while nearly a quarter (22%) say they are too tired several times a week.

Similar but smaller proportions of workers say that they had difficulties in fulfilling their family responsibilities because of the amount of time they spend in work: 29% indicate that this happens at least several times a month, and for 11% this is the case several times a week. No general differences are found between men and women, in part because difficulties with work-life balance are clearly related to the number of hours worked.

For Europe as a whole, work-life balance problems appear to be most common in south-eastern Europe.

- In Croatia and Greece, a little over 70% of working citizens say that they are too tired to do household jobs at least several times a month because of work, and slightly more than half of those in the CC3 – Croatia, Turkey and FYR

Figure 5: Average satisfaction with family and social life, by income quartile

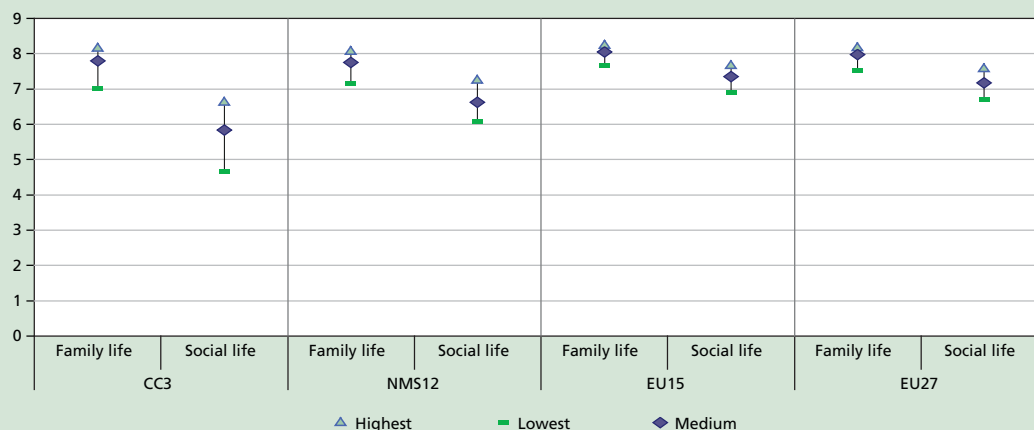
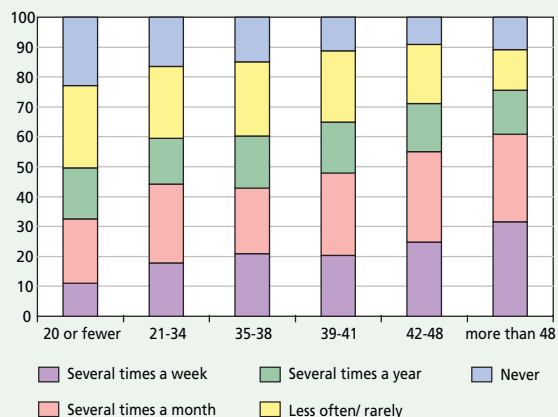


Figure 6: Extent to which citizens are too tired to do household jobs, by working hours (%)



Q11. How often has the following happened to you during the last year? (1. Several times a week, 2. Several times a month, 3. Several times a year, 4. Less often/rarely, 5. Never, 6. Don't know); I have come home from work too tired to do some of the household jobs which need to be done.

Q6. How many hours do/did you normally work per week (in your main job), including any paid or unpaid overtime?

'Don't know' answers are excluded from the analysis.

Macedonia – have difficulties in fulfilling family responsibilities because work takes so much of their time.

- Negative effects of work on private life seem least prevalent in Belgium, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway, where fewer than 40% report being too tired, at least several times a month, to do household jobs.
- In Finland, France and Sweden, 20% of workers have difficulties in fulfilling family responsibilities at least several times a month because of the time they spend in working.

Considering the employment situation and working time arrangements of men and women, it seems that in many countries men and – in particular – women adapt their professional choices to their personal circumstances (e.g. having a full- or part-time job). People working more paid hours express more problems with work–life balance. Over a quarter of workers in the EU feel that they spend too much time in work; this is more often the case for men than for women.

## Health and health care

Health is important to Europeans: 81% of EU residents said that good health was 'very important' for their quality of life. However, on average, only 21% of people rate their health as 'very good', while 46% rate it as 'good', 25% as 'fair' and 8% as 'bad or very bad'. More people rate their health as 'bad or very bad' in the CC3 and NMS12 than in the EU15: in all the NMS12 countries and the CC3, more women than men report that they suffer bad health; in the EU15, however, there is no consistent difference in this respect.

Reporting poor health is, not surprisingly, associated with increasing age: in the EU27, fewer than 2% of people aged between 18 and 34 years report bad health, as against 18% of those aged 65 and over. However, the situation for older people in the NMS12 is worse: 34% report bad health, as against 15% of the same age group in the EU15.

In all countries, poorer people more often report bad health: on average, 14% of those in the lowest income quartile report being in bad health, compared with 4% of people in the highest quartile. In some countries, however – Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia and Portugal – 30% or more of those in the bottom income quartile suffer bad health; social inequalities in the experience of poor health and disability are persistent and pervasive.

## Mental health

Mental health is a key aspect of well-being and quality of life. Marked differences are found between countries when overall mental health is considered (based on a short WHO index). The highest scores for good mental health are seen in the EU15 and Norway, with people in Norway averaging the highest at 70. Turkey comes at the bottom, at 47, followed by Malta, Romania, FYR Macedonia and Latvia (all between 53 and 55). The ranking doesn't necessarily reflect a country's position in terms of overall health: both Cyprus and Malta are lower than might be expected, while Hungary ranks higher in terms of mental health in general.

However, in other respects, patterns for mental health and general health are similar: mental health tends to be poorer among older people, tends to be better among those with higher income – most clearly in the CC3 and NMS12 – and is somewhat better among men than women.

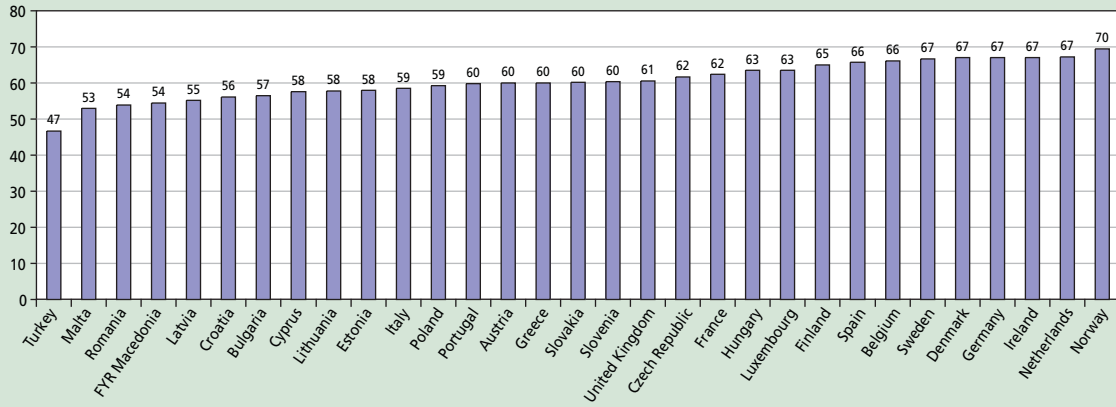
## Health care services

Issues around access to and quality of health care services are very important for social protection. Substantial numbers of Europeans report difficulty in accessing health care services. For instance, more than 25% of people feel they are too far from their doctor or hospital, more than 38% experience delays in getting medical appointments, and more than 27% have difficulty with the expense involved in seeing a doctor.

People on low incomes have more difficulty accessing services than wealthier people, and this difference is more marked in the CC3 and NMS. For 31% of those in the lowest income quartile in the EU15, the cost of seeing a doctor poses a difficulty; this compares with 17% in the highest quartile. For the NMS, the corresponding figures are 43% and 29%, and for the CC3, 48% and 22%.

Overall, people in the EU15 tend to rate health care services more highly than other Europeans. In the EU15, health services are generally rated least highest in the Mediterranean countries (except for Spain) and Ireland. In most countries, people rate childcare services as being better than those for elder care.

Figure 7: Mean mental health index, by country (%)



Mental health index: Q46.1– Q46.5. Please indicate for each of the five statements which is closest to how you have been feeling over the last two weeks – I have felt cheerful and in good spirits; I have felt calm and relaxed; I have felt active and vigorous; I woke up feeling fresh and rested; my daily life has been filled with things that interest me (all of the time, most of the time, more than half of the time, less than half of the time, some of the time, never); total score on all statements (0–5), multiplied by 4 to get a percentage of 100.

## Housing, environment and quality of society

### Home ownership

Patterns of home ownership vary substantially across Europe. In the NMS, around three quarters of people own their own home without having any mortgage payable on it (rising to more than 80% in Romania, Bulgaria and Lithuania). In the EU15, on average 40% own their home outright, the highest percentages being seen in Italy and Greece. Private renting is less common in the NMS12, where around only 5% rent, compared with an average of 19% in the EU15, while social housing is most developed in Austria, Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands and Poland, where more than 15% of people live in social or municipal housing. Being a tenant is more common in urban areas, and, not surprisingly, is more often the case among younger people.

### Quality of housing

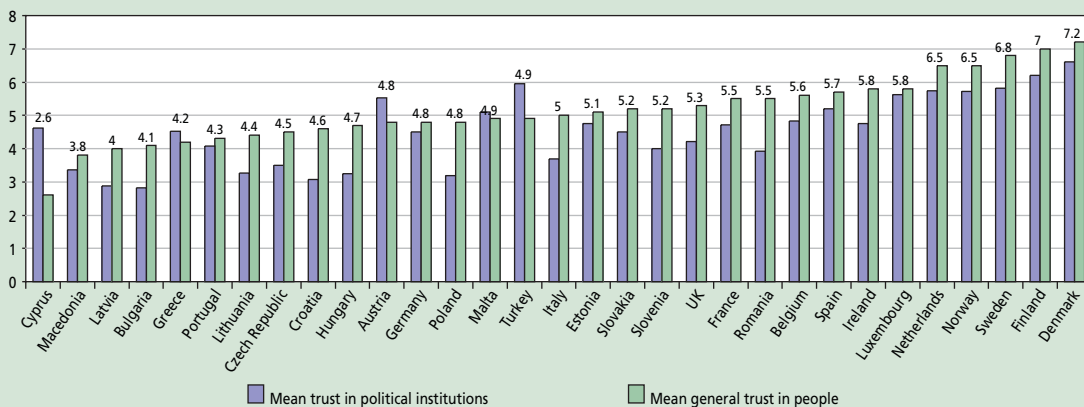
The overall quality of housing is better in the EU15 than in the NMS12 or the candidate countries: only 9% of people in Finland face at least two of six key

problems in their accommodation, compared with 42% of those in Romania.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, there is an association between household income and experience of inadequate housing, stronger in the NMS and CC3 than in the EU15. Damp or leaks are a problem facing 29% of people in the lowest income quartile in the NMS, as against 8% of those in the highest income quartile; in the EU15, 18% of households in the lowest quartile suffer damp or leaks, compared with 9% of the richest households. Of those in the lowest income quartile in the NMS12, 28% lack a bath or shower.

### Local environment

There are marked differences in how Europeans perceive the quality of their local environment. In Italy, 83% of people were dissatisfied with two or more of six key environmental aspects,<sup>3</sup> followed closely by Bulgaria (82%), Poland (79%) and FYR Macedonia (77%). People in the NMS12 are most likely to have multiple complaints about their environment, while those in the Nordic countries, and Austria, Germany and the Netherlands, are the least dissatisfied.

Figure 8: Trust in people and trust in political institutions, by country (%)



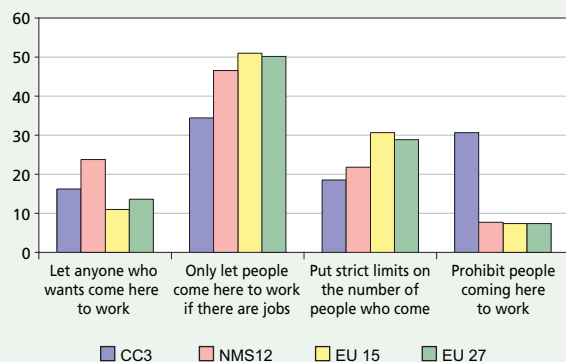
Question 23: Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? Please tell me on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means that you can't be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted.

Question 27.1: Please tell me how much you personally trust each of the following institutions using a scale from 1 to 10 where [1] means 'you do not trust the institution at all' and [10] means 'you trust it completely'. (NATIONALITY) parliament, The Government, The political parties.

<sup>2</sup> The six possible problems are: inadequate space; rot in windows, doors or floors; damp or leaks in the walls or roof; lack of an indoor flushing toilet; absence of a bath or shower; and no place to sit outside.

<sup>3</sup> Noise, air pollution, lack of access to green space, quality of tap water, crime/violence, litter or rubbish in the street.

Figure 9: Attitudes towards migrants, by country cluster (%)



Question 26: How about people from other countries coming here to live? Which one of the following do you think the government should do?

## Quality of society

### Trust in other people and institutions

When asked to rate their level of trust in other people on a scale from one to 10, people in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands express the highest levels of trust (giving a rating of between 6.5 and 7.2). People living in Cyprus express the lowest levels of trust (at only 2.6) followed by FYR Macedonia (3.8).

Those who are unemployed are less trusting of others, as are those in other vulnerable groups – such as those with poor health or single parents. Age also plays a role, but it is not uniform across countries. While those aged 65 and over in the EU15 and the CC3 are the most trusting age group in those countries, in the NMS12 those aged between 18 and 34 years are the most trusting, which may reflect the differing generational impacts of economic transition.

The level of trust that people feel for others does not always mirror the level of trust they have for public institutions, such as the parliament, the government

and political parties. People in the eastern European NMS12 – and in Italy and Portugal – trust their political institutions the least. Citizens in the Nordic countries, and in Turkey, have the most trust in their institutions.

### Tension between societal groups

Respondents were asked to rate the degree of tension between different groups in their country. Tensions between rich and poor are judged as more prevalent by citizens in the CC3 and the NMS12 (which may reflect greater income disparities following the transition to market economies in these countries.) By contrast, citizens in the EU15 are more often concerned by tensions between different racial or ethnic groups, which may reflect the greater levels of immigration in these countries over recent decades.

## Methodology

Data collection for the second EQLS took place in late 2007 in the 27 EU Member States, the three candidate countries (Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey) and Norway. Averages are provided for four cross-country groupings: the 27 current Member States (EU27), the 15 countries that became Member States before 2004 (EU15), the 12 countries that became Member States in 2004 and 2007 (NMS12) and the three current candidate countries (CC3).

All the averages are population weighted. This means that averages for country groupings (EU15/NMS12/CC3) fully reflect the size of the population of individual countries. Therefore, Poland and Romania dominate the cross-country averages for the NMS12 and Turkey those for the CC3. For this reason, the reader should bear in mind that a specific cross-country average is not necessarily shared by the majority of countries in the respective group because the average reflects the very different population sizes of the respective countries.

### Further information

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