

Quality of Life in Europe

By Henrik Litske

The Dublin-based European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has developed two new instruments to assess quality of life of Europeans. First of all the Foundation has initiated a representative household survey on 12 quality of life domains as well as satisfaction with services and general life satisfaction covering the EU25 plus Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. Some of the main findings are presented in this article. Secondly the Foundation launched a unique interactive database (EurLIFE) on quality of life indicators offering data based on the best available sources including the Foundation's own surveys.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions in Dublin is systematically collecting data about the quality of life of Europeans.

Domains

The Foundation is focusing on 12 quality of life domains. They are:

- Health and health care
- Employment and working conditions
- Economic resources
- Knowledge, education and training
- Families and households
- Community life and social participation
- Housing
- Local environment and amenities
- Transport
- Public safety and crime
- Recreation and leisure activities
- Culture and identity, political resources and human rights, including the European dimension

The first six areas are considered core domains which receive most attention in the Foundation's monitoring strategy.

Data on these domains are being collected in two ways. Firstly, the Foundation collects original data through its European Quality of Life Surveys; secondly, through an interactive database, EurLIFE, based on data drawn from existing published sources.

First European Quality of Life Survey

The Foundation conducted its first European Quality of Life Survey May–August 2003 on the domains listed above. A second follow-up survey is planned for fieldwork in 2007.

Methodology

The survey is a representative household survey of people aged 18+. It covers the EU 25 and the three candidate countries (Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey). The sample size was 1000 per country (600 in the five smallest countries). 26.000 people were interviewed, and the response rate was 58 %.

The household interviews take approximately 45 minutes each. They are based on a questionnaire covering around 70 questions on the 12 quality of life domains listed above, with the main focus on health and health care; employment and working conditions; economic resources; education and training; families and households; and community life. A number of questions concern quality of public services, general life satisfaction and happiness.

Key findings

The initial results are presented in the report 'Quality of Life in Europe' (2004) and coordinated by Jens Alber at the Social Science Research Center (WZB), Berlin. On the question of general life satisfaction, the results can be read in Table 1.

Still on a general level, a question was asked about people's feeling of optimism about the future (see Table 2).

A number of the more specific questions in survey are about work and family balance (see Table 3).

A number of questions in the survey concern social capital issues, such as participation in voluntary organisations, and trust. Table 4 shows the results about people's general feeling about trust in other people.

Table 1

Overall life satisfaction (1 – 10 point scale)

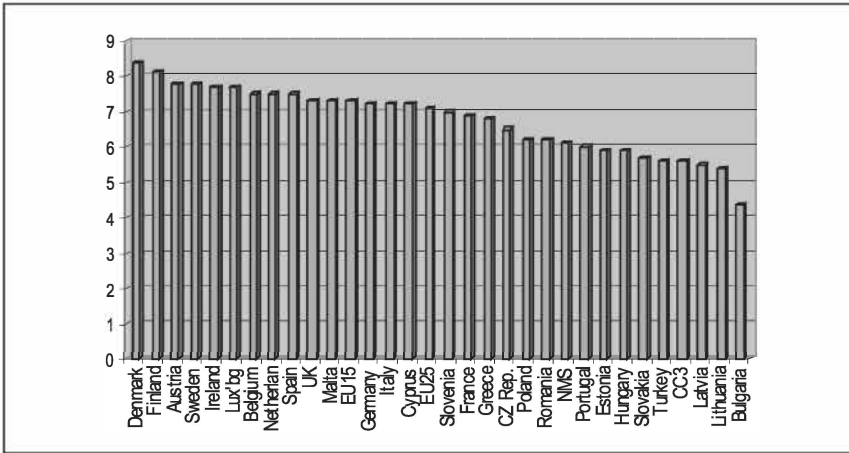


Table 2

Optimistic about the future (values in percentages)

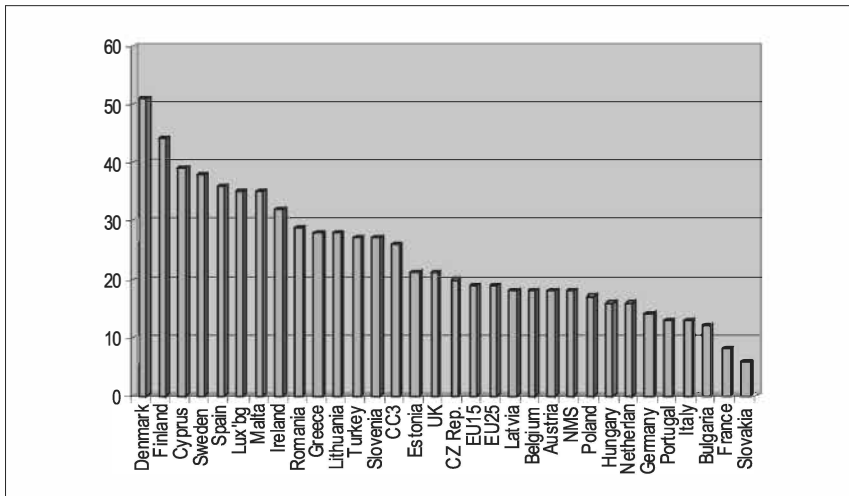
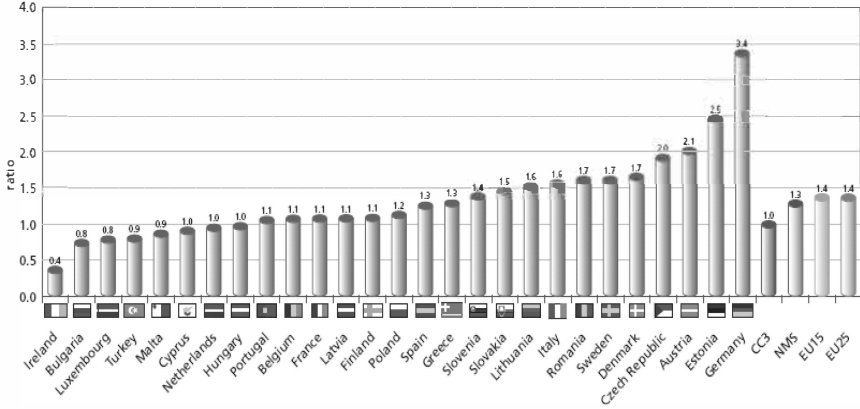


Table 3

**Difficulties fulfilling family responsibilities
several times a week: ratio of working parents with children
less than four years to all other employed persons**



Question 13b: How often has each of the following happened to you during the last year? It has been difficult for me to fulfil my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spend working. Categories: Several times a week, several times a month, several times a year, less often, never.

Note: The ratio of working parents with children aged three or younger to the total average reporting that they have difficulties fulfilling their family responsibilities several times a week because of the time they spend working. The data for the UK are missing due to missing information on household composition. The EU15 and EU25 means were computed without data from the UK.

If we compare Table 4 with Table 1 it appears that life satisfaction levels across Europe are higher than general trust.

The Foundation is preparing a series of analytical reports which further explain the survey findings. These reports, three of which have been published, cover issues such as families and social networks; income inequalities; overall life satisfaction; and housing and local environment.

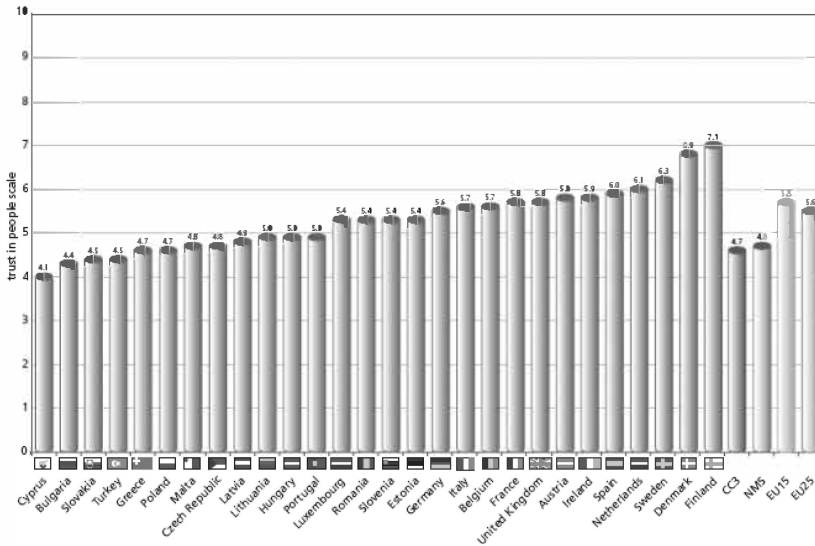
How to get access to data

The Foundation has deposited the dataset and documentation with the UK Data Archive in the University of Essex in the UK. Anyone interested in using the data can request this via their website: www.data-archive.ac.uk

What is EurLIFE?

EurLIFE is a unique interactive database on quality of life indicators across Europe, offering data drawn from published EU sources and from the Founda-

Table 4
Trust in people (1 – 10 point scale)



Question 28: Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful dealing with people? Please tell me on scale of one to 10, where one means you can't be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted.

Source: EQLS 2003.

tion's own surveys. The data provided deals with the well-being of European citizens. It covers the 25 current EU Member States and three candidate countries: Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. The database presents statistical information on the 12 specific areas mentioned above.

Who can use EurLIFE?

EurLIFE is an easy-access interactive information tool accessible to everyone interested in gathering data on Europeans' quality of life. For the first time, policy-makers, researchers and journalists will be able to access and present this data in an easy and timely manner, filling an information gap which has existed in this area to date. The database will be extended and updated next year.

How to use the database

The user can generate their own tables, graphs and figures on the basis of country, gender and time span preferences. Other categories such as groups of

countries, including the 10 new Member States, the former EU15, the EU 25 and the three candidate countries can also be used as specific selection criteria. Sub-indicators of each area are also available.

How can it be accessed?

The EurLIFE database is accessible via the Foundation's website *Eurofound*:

www.eurofound.europa.eu

It draws on data available from a wide variety of sources, especially Eurostat and specifically the most recent data from the Foundation's 28-country European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) mentioned above.

References

- Böhnke, P.* (2005): First European Quality of Life Survey: Life satisfaction, happiness and sense of belonging, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.
- Domanski et al.* (2005): First European Quality of Life Survey: Social dimensions of housing, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.
- Fahey et al.* (2004): Quality of life in Europe: First results of a new pan-European survey, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.
- Fahey, T./Whelan, C./Maitre, B.* (2005): First European Quality of Life Survey: Income inequalities and deprivation, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.
- Saraceno, C./Olagnero, M./Torrioni, P.* (2005): First European Quality of Life Survey: Families, work and social networks, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.