



Executive summary

Is life really getting better? How can we tell? What are the key ingredients to improving life – is it better education, environment, healthcare, housing or working hours? Does progress mean the same thing to all people, or in all countries and societies?

The OECD, a pioneer in this field of research, has been working for more than a decade to identify the best way to measure the progress of societies – moving beyond GDP and examining the areas that impact people's lives. In 2011, the culmination of this work was presented in the OECD Better Life Initiative.

Better Life Initiative

The [OECD Better Life Initiative](#) focuses on developing statistics to capture aspects of life that matter to people and that shape the quality of their lives. This allows for a better understanding of what drives the well-being of people and nations, and what needs to be done to achieve greater progress for all.

Drawing upon the recommendations of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (to which the OECD has been an important contributor), the OECD has identified 11 dimensions as being essential to well-being, from health and education to local environment, personal security and overall satisfaction with life, as well as more traditional measures such as income. The two core products of this initiative are the *How's Life?* reports and the *Better Life Index*.

Better Life Index

The Better Life Index is an interactive web-based tool created to engage people in the debate on well-being and, through this process, learn what matters the most to them. The tool invites you to compare well-being across countries according to the importance you give to 11 topics: community, education, environment, civic engagement, health, housing, income, jobs, life satisfaction, safety and work-life balance. Once you have created your [own index](#), you can see how countries' average achievements compare based on your priorities, as well as the differences in well-being between men and women in each country. You can then compare and share your index with other people who have created indexes, as well as with the OECD. You can also see the number of responses from users by country, age and gender, and what topics people think are most important for a better life.

The Better Life Index is updated every year with new data. It covers all OECD countries as well as the Russian Federation and Brazil and is currently available in English, French, German, Portuguese,

Russian and Spanish, with an Italian version added in 2015. The Better Life Index is optimised for use on portable devices (tablets and iPads) and can be embedded in websites and blogs.

How's Life? report

[*How's Life? Measuring Well-Being*](#) is a report that comes out every two years. This paints a broad picture of how life is in OECD countries and other major economies, by looking at people's material conditions and quality of life in the 11 dimensions of the Better Life Initiative.

This report responds to a demand from citizens, analysts and for better and more comparable information on people's well-being and societal progress. The second edition of *How's Life?*, released in 2013, includes in-depth studies of four key cross-cutting issues: how well-being has changed during the global economic and financial crisis; gender differences in well-being; the quality of employment and well-being in the workplace; and sustainability of well-being over time.

Understanding well-being

The well-being agenda calls for improved and new statistical measures, aimed at filling the gap between standard economic statistics and indicators that have a more direct bearing on people's life. For more than 10 years, the OECD has been looking not only at the functioning of the economic system but also at the diverse experiences and living conditions of people and households. Further to *How's Life?* the following works help to address various research areas in well-being:

- The [*How Was Life? Global Trends in Well-being since 1820*](#) report, looks at 10 dimensions of well-being from 1820 to the present day.
- [*Guidelines for Measuring Subjective Well-being*](#) helps to address measurement gaps in dimensions such as life satisfaction.
- [*How's Life in Your Region? Measuring Regional and Local Well-being for Policy Making*](#) measures people's well-being in 362 regions across 34 OECD countries, covering nine dimensions (income, job, housing, education, health, access to services, environment, safety and civic engagement). It also offers guidance for all levels of government in using well-being measures to better target policies at the specific needs of different communities.
- The [*OECD Regional Well-being web tool*](#) allows you to measure well-being in your region and compare it with 361 other OECD regions based on the nine topics.

What comes next?

In addition to the regular update of data and analysis on well-being, the OECD aims to continually adapt and fine tune the methodologies and indicators used as this field of study evolves. Since the launch of the Better Life Initiative, the discussion on well-being has expanded, with many countries and organisations introducing their own well-being programmes. For an updated list of well-being initiatives consult [Wikiprogress](#).