

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## HISTORY

For over fifty years, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has helped governments design better policies for better lives for their citizens. It provides a forum in which leaders and policy makers can work together to share experiences and seek solutions to common problems, and produces high-quality internationally comparable statistics used to understand what drives economic, social and environmental change.

Ever since the OECD started out in 1961, GDP has been the main factor by which it has measured and understood economic and social progress. But it has failed to capture many of the factors that influence people's lives, such as security, leisure, income distribution and a clean environment.

*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?* A pioneer in this emerging field of research, the OECD has been working for almost ten years to identify the best way to measure the progress of societies – moving beyond GDP and examining the areas that impact everyday people's lives. Today, the fruit of this work is manifested in the OECD *Better Life Initiative*.

## BETTER LIFE INITIATIVE

The OECD Better Life Initiative allows 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. These 11 dimensions are explored and analysed in detail in the *How's Life report*, the first attempt at an international level to present the best set of comparable and comprehensive well-being indicators. At the same time, the OECD has created the “Your Better Life Index” to support policy making to improve the quality of life.

## **YOUR BETTER LIFE INDEX**

A key instrument of the Better Life Initiative, *Your Better Life Index* is reaching out to those most affected by this research: **you**. Your voice is critical in this debate on what matters most for the progress of our societies.

*Your Better Life Index* is an interactive tool that allows you to see how countries perform according to the importance you give to each of 11 topics –community, education, environment, civic engagement, health, housing, income, jobs, life satisfaction, safety, work-life balance– that contribute to well-being.

*Your Better Life Index* currently profiles the 34 OECD member countries as well as key partners Brazil and Russia across the 11 topics of well-being, and will eventually include other key OECD partner countries (, China, India, Indonesia and South Africa), representing the world's major economies. The Index contains an overall description of the quality of life in each country, followed by its performance across the 24 individual indicators that make up the 11 topics of well-being. The Index also lets you see how life compares for men and women, and for those at the top and bottom of the social and economic ladder.

*Your Better Life Index* allows you to put different weights on each of the topics, and thus to decide for yourself what contributes most to well-being. It also helps show how prioritising specific issues of well-being affects the overall picture. By comparing your vision of a better life with the actual progress of your country, you can become a better-informed citizen and better impact the policymaking process. You can also compare your personal Index with those of other people in your own country and elsewhere, as well as sharing it with your friends and telling us how you would improve it. It is a pioneering, interactive tool combining OECD substance with modern technology in order to educate, promote dialogue and encourage consensus on the balance between societal and economic well-being. Freely-accessible OECD reports and other sources of information are just a click away if you want to delve even further into a particular topic.

## **YOUR FUTURE**

*Your Better Life Index* will be maintained on an ongoing basis. Already the geographical coverage has been expanded beyond the OECD to include Brazil and Russia, key partners and major world economies. The data has been updated in 2012 to include the latest figures, with added dimensions such as earnings and water quality, as well as comparisons for gender and inequality. We aim to continue to provide updated data when available, add in new indicators representing the priorities that matter to you, and fine tune our research methodologies as this field of study evolves. We, as an organisation, will continue to listen closely to your feedback on this exciting project and are eager to learn what matters most to citizens worldwide.

Over more than 50 years, the OECD has developed a rich set of recommendations on policies that can best support economic growth. The task that we face today is to develop an equally rich set of policies to support societal progress. We hope you will join us in this mission to deliver *better policies for better lives*.