

# SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

## 1. Basic concepts

It is widely acquired in literature that collecting information on subjective aspects is of high information and analytical value. Perceptions and evaluations affect the way people face life and take advantage of opportunities. Subjective indicators are useful complement to strictly objective indicators, because they allow evaluating the possible differences between what people report and what it is captured by objective indicators. Taking into account such indicators allows having a more detailed and complete overview, which is extremely useful when describing well-being<sup>1</sup>.

The concept of well-being (which can be more generally referred to as quality of life) is organized in literature in two macro dimensions (Michalos, 2008; Zapf, 1975, 1984):

- living conditions, with both objective and subjective aspects;
- subjective well-being.

The second dimension has a cross-sectional character, because it may be related both to specific areas of life and to life as a whole. The “subjective well-being” domain proposed here concerns indeed assessments and perceptions expressed directly by individuals on their life in general, but also those related to more specific areas of life, which refer to different domains of BES. Subjective information complete the picture of several domains, such as, for instance, the indicator on satisfaction for family relationships which has been included in the domain *Social relationships*.

## 2. Dimensions considered to represent the domain

The concept of *subjective well-being* is defined by the following dimensions:

1. Cognitive dimension. It represents the process by which each individual evaluates (in terms of “satisfaction”) his life as a whole retrospectively. This subjective assessment refers to specific personal standards (expectations, desires, ideals, past experiences, etc). This consciousness allows to express a level of satisfaction which depends on the achievement of his own objectives, the realization of his own aspirations, the comparison with his own ideals, his own past experiences or results achieved by other significant people in his own life. In other words, life satisfaction is the results of an individual cognitive process that evaluates his own position in regard to standards (Nuvolati 2002) which are defined in relation to several aspects.
2. Affective dimension. It indicates emotions that people experience during their daily life. Such emotions can be positive (pleasant affect) or negative (unpleasant affect) and they are analysed conceptually in a distinct way, because they are determined by different variables (Bradburn 1969; Diener/Emmons 1984; Argyle 1987). In contrast with the cognitive component, which involves an afterthought on his own life up to a given point in time, the affective components are related to the current situation.

Research on measurement of the affective component is still in progress, therefore in this phase the definition of the indicators proposed for BES will refer only to the cognitive component.

---

<sup>1</sup> The thematic group on subjective well-being was invited to cooperate with other groups to identify what kind of subjective information could be identified to complete each area, both in terms of subjective assessment of living conditions (opinions, confidence, etc.) and in terms of subjective well-being (satisfaction).

### 3. List of the best indicators

1. Percentage of people aged 14 and over with a level of life satisfaction from 8 to 10: *Persons aged 14 and over with a level of life satisfaction from 8 to 10 / Persons aged 14 and over \* 100.*

This indicator measures how people evaluate their overall life. The satisfaction comes from knowing that they have reached their goals and aspirations. Satisfaction with life is an individual state of mind that results of a cognitive process that gives a retrospective evaluation based on personal standards. It has the advantage of allowing people to decide for themselves how is going their live without giving external criteria of evaluation. It is a question largely used at international level, even though its use in official statistics is still limited.

2. Percentage of people aged 14 and over very satisfied of their leisure time: *Persons aged 14 and over who are very satisfied with their leisure time / Persons aged 14 and over \* 100*

Leisure time is extremely difficult to measure in objective terms even with complex tools such as Time Use survey. At the same time represents an important component of individual well-being, which summarizes the satisfaction experienced in a significant and complex sphere of life. For this reason, the satisfaction for leisure time is the only indicator of specific satisfaction considered in the context of subjective well-being domain.

3. Percentage of people aged 14 and over which believe their personal situation will improve in the next 5 years: *Persons aged 14 and over which believe their personal situation will improve in the next 5 years / Persons aged 14 and over \* 100.*

It measures the perception of future expectations with respect to individual situation. The question which will be used to calculate this indicator is in the testing phase. The analysis and comparison with other indicators will assess whether to bundle it with other information or modify it.