



The impact of the economic crisis

Assessing well-being across Europe

Context During recessions, inequalities in health and well-being can widen if not addressed by policies. However, in order to do this effectively, sufficient measurement for well-being must be in place on a level appropriate to assess populations with the ability to consider all points along the spectrum. Such measures allow us to understand the consequences of crises such as economic recessions, evaluate the impact of existing policies, and identify future areas of risk as well as effective levers for improvement.

Insight “Flourishing” has been used to describe those with the highest well-being as well as to identify inequalities between those doing best and those doing worst in a population. Prior to the most recent economic crisis, data from 22 countries participating in the 2006 European Social Survey were explored. These data covered ten domains relevant to well-being: competence, emotional stability, engagement, meaning, optimism, positive emotion, positive relationships, resilience, self-esteem, and vitality. These analyses found that 15.8% of Europe met the criteria for flourishing, but with marked differences in prevalence between countries, ranging from 40.6% in Denmark to only 9.3% in Portugal.

Impact But what effect did the economic crisis have on well-being? Using the data from the 2012 ESS compared to 2006 results, we consider potential insights into the impact of the crisis between 2008 and 2011 on well-being. Such insights offer the potential to go beyond GDP when considering what mark the recession had on populations as well as specific groups. These approaches result in evidence-backed areas that policymakers can target both for the continued recovery as well as for future prevention and intervention.

Key questions to be tested

- 1 Has well-being in Europe changed from 2006 to 2012?
- 2 Which regions have been most or least affected?
- 3 Which groups have improved? Worsened? Stayed the same?
- 4 What opportunities are there for policy to utilise these insights?
- 5 Can inequalities in well-being be reduced through such policies?

Further details on this project in the following:

Making Well-being Count for Policy: An ESRC-funded project using ESS Data.
Retrieved from: <http://www.wellbeingcounts.org/>

Huppert, F. A., & So, T. T. (2013). Flourishing across Europe: Application of a new conceptual framework for defining well-being. *Social Indicators Research*, 110(3), 837-861.