



## Policy brief: Understanding diversity in subjective wellbeing in Malta

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1. Regular and robust national wellbeing statistics and research are required to be able to compare the wellbeing of different segments of Maltese society, over time, and with other countries, to evaluate policy performance in wellbeing terms, and to identify policy priorities. The measurement of wellbeing can influence the goals set by policy makers, the kind of society we live in, and ultimately the kind of lives that people in Malta lead. Such considerations are also relevant to children in Malta.
2. As part of the suite of studies envisaged by the project, the authors above undertook an analysis of the correlates of wellbeing in Malta. The analysis employed data collected by Malta's National Statistics Office 2018-2019 gathered in conformity with the European Union Survey on Income and Living Conditions. Almost 10,000 people in Malta were interviewed for this survey in 2018, with respondents being asked to assess their income and living conditions. Respondents were asked questions about self-assessment of satisfaction with their life, finance, job, relationships, and time. Respondents were also asked how often they felt happy, down-hearted and depressed, calm and peaceful, down, nervous or lonely during the preceding four weeks.
3. A review of the headline statistics for Malta finds that overall life satisfaction in Malta stood at 7.5, marginally higher than the EU average of 7.3 for the same period. Scores were obtained once respondents were invited to evaluate their life satisfaction on a score from 0 (Not at all satisfied) to 10 (Completely satisfied). In other domains (financial, job, relationships) the Maltese averages were all slightly higher than the European average except in the domain on time use. Here the Maltese report having lower levels of satisfaction with their time use (leisure) than their European counterparts. Eurostat statistics on Labour Force Surveys reveal that Maltese people tend to work higher hours than the EU average. In terms of emotional wellbeing, people in Malta reported happiness as a frequently felt emotion but relative to the EU average, they felt nervous more often.
4. The study examines the relationship between poverty and wellbeing in Malta. It finds a strong relationship between material deprivation (defined as lacking 3 or more basic goods) and low levels of wellbeing. Although fewer than 10% of the respondents in the sample are materially deprived, their satisfaction with life, time, jobs, relationships and finance are substantially lower than others. Life satisfaction among the materially deprived stands at 5.9 versus 7.6 for non-deprived (p-value of 0.001). People feeling deprivation also report feeling happy and calm less often than others and feeling nervous, down, depressed and lonely more frequently than those who are not deprived. Similar relationships are found when comparing wellbeing by household disposable income quantiles, but the difference in means is not so pronounced at higher levels of income. This reflects findings in the literature that after a certain level of income, its relationship with wellbeing tapers off.

5. Examining the difference between employed/self-employed people in Malta (55% of the sample) and those in other work-statuses like retirement, looking after the home, being unemployed or unable to work due to disability, similarly reveals that people who work report higher levels of overall life satisfaction (7.7 versus 7.3 for the rest, p-value of 0.001). Inability to work due to disability (to be interpreted with caution due to the small numbers and high sampling variability) seems to be strongly correlated with lower levels of satisfaction in most domains and with more negative and less positive emotions. Life satisfaction for these stood at 5.5 in contrast with others whose life satisfaction stood at 7.5 (p-value of 0.001).
6. Good health is generally well-documented to be an important determinant of wellbeing. The study likewise finds that life satisfaction in Malta is higher for those with health that ranges from fair to very good (7.5), in contrast with that of people with bad or very bad health whose life satisfaction averages at 5.5 (p-value of 0.001). While there is a big gap between the wellbeing experienced by people in poor or bad health and those with fair health, the differences for fair, good or very good health are not so pronounced.
7. With regard to marital status and children, the study finds that being separated/divorced is associated with higher frequency of negative emotions and lower satisfaction in most domains. Other studies find similar effects, including on children. We also note that separated/divorced individuals in Malta report higher levels of job-satisfaction. We find evidence that single parent households with at least one child under the age of 18 (3.3% of households) report lower levels of wellbeing than others. Their life satisfaction stands at 6.5 in contrast with 7.6 for others (p-value of 0.001). Adults in households with no children average a life satisfaction of 7.5.
8. The study finds also finds that education is linked to more positive and less negative feelings. However, the higher the education and the higher the income, the lower the satisfaction with time use in Malta. In fact, the people most satisfied with their time use in Malta are the elderly (7.9 versus 6.2 for the rest, p-value of 0.001). Yet loneliness is experienced in higher frequency among these (1.8 versus 1.5 for the rest, p-value of 0.001).
9. On the effect of internal/external environment on wellbeing, early findings indicate that pollution and crime are associated with more negative and less positive emotions. This reflects the main findings in the literature. People in Gozo experience negative emotions less often but findings are more nuanced when it comes to satisfaction. We find lower life satisfaction among respondents reporting past experience of housing difficulties (7.0 vs 7.5, p-value of 0.01) and poor housing conditions (6.6 vs 7.6, p-value of 0.001). Respondents declaring that their dwelling is too dark also report lower life satisfaction (7.1 vs 7.5, p-value of 0.001).
10. In further analysis the project has collapsed the various subjective indicators of wellbeing into a indices and modelled wellbeing in order to identify the extent to which each life-style or demographic condition individually contributed to wellbeing.

**\*The Wellbeing INDEX project is a strategic initiative, led by the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society in collaboration with the University of Malta. The name "INDEX" summarizes the project's scope (Indicators, Networking, Data Exploration and exchange). The project, launched in Parliament on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020, will pave the way for the measurement of wellbeing in Malta and evidence-based policy.**