



The Wellbeing INDEX project – Wellbeing Averages & Inequalities: 2018-2023

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***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).**

1. On the 20th March 2025, the International Day of Happiness, the Wellbeing INDEX project presented wellbeing trends at the Parliament of Malta, with a view to highlighting inequalities and the potential of data to inform evidence-based wellbeing policy. The data in use, gathered by the National Office of Statistics through EU-standardised methodologies, involves 10,000 individuals from 4,000 households annually for the last 6 years. The data collected in 2023 is based on the 2021 Census as a sampling frame (rather than 2011).
2. Data visualisations on the revamped Malta Wellbeing INDEX dashboards reveal a slightly positive trend from 2018 to 2023 in all the wellbeing indicators, including self-assessed life satisfaction, job, relationship and financial satisfaction; a positive trend in frequency of feeling emotions like happiness and calm, and a downward trend in frequency of negative emotions like loneliness, depressed, nervous and feeling down. Between 2022 and 2023, the already low time use satisfaction declined further.
3. Beyond average trends, the data reveals that significant portions of the population struggle with stress and unhappiness. Scaling up from the sample, some 64,178 individuals feel nervous most of the time, while an additional 120,854 feel this way at least some of the time. Chronic loneliness affects 13,110 individuals, while 19,944 experience frequent depression. Furthermore, 67,703 people rarely or never feeling calm, and 29,820 rarely or never feel happy. The number of people in absolute misery (that is scoring only 0-1 on the 11-point scale of life satisfaction) went up from 5,398 in 2022 to 8,323 in 2023.
4. The Wellbeing INDEX dashboard also reveals demographic changes and conditions of life that could be contributing to these wellbeing trends. While the population continues to age, foreigners now total 133,446, skewing the gender balance towards more men (+26,650). Foreign-born residents in Malta consistently report marginally higher life satisfaction compared to those born in Malta, more frequent positive emotions and fewer negative emotions.

5. Economic conditions have improved, with many earning higher incomes than six years ago. Yet, 8,079 individuals earn less than €10,000 in equivalized household income¹ per year, and material and social deprivation² affects 40,990 people – a 17.6% increase from 2018. Across all wellbeing indicators, the materially deprived score lower than average.
6. Education levels have steadily improved with many reaching higher education levels. Health trends were negatively impacted by COVID-19 and there remain 19,015 people reporting bad health in 2023. This excludes individuals living in institutions, who are not captured by these statistics. People in poor health consistently score worse across all wellbeing indicators. This is a key policy area to improve wellbeing in Malta.
7. Despite general improvements in housing conditions, challenges persist here too: 42,069 still reside in dark dwellings, and 32,771 report living under leaking roofs. Poor housing conditions are associated with negative emotions and lower overall satisfaction with life and finances.
8. Externally, environmental concerns such as noise and pollution have become more prevalent, affecting 143,684 and 161,708 people respectively in 2023. Crime levels initially declined but rose again in 2022 and 2023. Noise contributes to heightened stress and nervousness and remains one of the least regulated environmental pollutants in Malta: construction, traffic and entertainment are some key sources exerting negative pressure on lived experiences in Malta.
9. Marriage and childbirth rates broadly continue to decline. Separated and divorced individuals are on the rise and they report lower satisfaction levels – including finance – as well as more frequent negative and less frequent positive emotions. In contrast, married and single individuals tend to report better overall wellbeing. Widowed individuals, while reporting high time use satisfaction, experience greater loneliness. Single parents face significant challenges across most wellbeing indicators. Taken together, these trends suggest greater scope for interventions that assist diverse family structures to reduce inequalities in wellbeing.
10. Social interactions – known to be a crucial driver of wellbeing- were significantly impacted by COVID-19 but have since picked up. Economic constraints continue to affect leisure participation for some, though ever fewer people struggle to afford them. Volunteering has declined steadily over the 6-year period, a worrying trend considering the intimate positive relationship between “giving” and wellbeing.
11. Comparing Malta to the European Union (EU) using commensurate measures reveals that Malta scored above the EU average of 7.2 at 7.4 (on a scale from 0 to 10), but lower than Finland’s 7.8. However, when using Gallup data to compare Malta globally, we find that that in 2025, Malta was ranked 48th globally in life evaluation – a decline from 40th place in 2024. This suggests that some countries are making faster strides at improving wellbeing than we are.

¹ Defined as a household’s total disposable income divided by its “equivalent household size”.

² Defined as the proportion of people living in ordinary housing who are unable to meet the costs of at least five out of thirteen basic necessities of life considered desirable or necessary for an acceptable standard of living.