



Wellbeing in Malta: Progress, Paradoxes, Pressing Challenges

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The Wellbeing INDEX project is a strategic initiative, governed by a Collaboration Agreement between the University of Malta (UM) and the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society (MFWS) and guided by a Memorandum of Understanding between the UM, the MFWS and the National Statistics Office (NSO). The name “INDEX” summarizes the project’s scope (Indicators, Networking, Data Exploration and eXchange).

The data for this brief has been drawn from the Wellbeing INDEX project dashboard (www.wellbeingindex.mt), which relies on the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), collected by the National Statistics Office (NSO). This survey follows households over four years, replacing a quarter of the sample annually while maintaining population representativeness. Policymakers and stakeholders may consult the dashboards, which present a range of wellbeing and lifestyle indicators over time and across demographic groups.¹ The following are the main insights and policy recommendations as of March 2026, informed by trends and disaggregated data from 2018 to 2024.

1. In the World Happiness Report (WHR) three-year average of the Cantril Ladder, Malta moved from 48th to 43rd place, with a score of 6.44 (up from 6.32). Malta also climbed up from 15th to 12th place on Eurostat’s 11-point scale life satisfaction metric, recording a score of 7.5, 0.3 points above the EU-average of 7.2. In other indicators, Malta also performed strongly. On the Human Development Index (HDI), which combines income, health, and education, Malta ranked 24th globally with a score of 0.924 in 2023 (World average: 0.756), and median net equivalised income continued to rise to €20,430 in 2024, equivalent to 94.39% of the EU-average. **Income, HDI, and life satisfaction are key indicators of a nation’s progress and this positive performance augurs well for their delivery in Vision 2050.**

Headline Indicators	2023	2024
Eurostat Life Satisfaction 11-point scale (EU rank)	7.4 (15th)	7.5 (12th)
World Happiness Report Cantril Ladder Score (Global rank)	6.32 (48th)	6.44 (43rd)
Human Development Index Score (Global rank)	0.924 (24th)	Not Available
Median Equivalised Income EUR (% of EU Median Income)	18,940 (93.03%)	20,430 (94.39%)

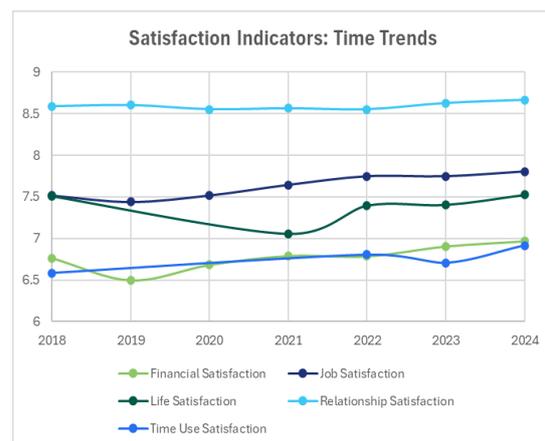
2. Following the COVID-19 downturn, satisfaction with life overall, as well as satisfaction with relationships, employment, finances and time-use displayed a positive trend (though time use

¹ Further information on data collection may be found at https://wellbeingindex.mt/wp/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/WellbeingIndex_EuSILC_Notes.pdf

satisfaction remains volatile). The year-on-year change from 2023 to 2024 was positive across all satisfaction domains, with life satisfaction reaching its highest level since data collection began in 2018. But contrary to these improvements in cognitive evaluations of life, emotional wellbeing deteriorated. Between 2023 and 2024, more people in Malta reported fewer calm and happy days alongside more frequent experiences of nervousness, agitation, feeling downhearted, feeling depressed and loneliness. Women consistently reported higher levels of negative emotions than men, with a statistically significant gender gap in 2024. **Overall, while people in Malta are increasingly satisfied with different aspects of their lives, this is not matched by improvements in emotional wellbeing. This divergence warrants policy attention, particularly to strengthen emotional resilience and address lived experiences.**

3. People in Malta consistently report very high satisfaction with interpersonal relationships, which remains the highest-rated wellbeing domain (average 8.66 in 2024). Relationship satisfaction also has a relatively low variance around the mean suggesting that the positive outcome is ubiquitous, though particularly high relationship satisfaction is associated with having high levels of trust, low social exclusion, and being in good health. Relatedly, the vast majority of people in Malta meet family and friends at least once a month (85.11% of respondents in 2024) and tend to report higher overall wellbeing than those who do not.

In contrast, satisfaction with time use remains comparatively low (average 6.91) with a high variance. Disaggregated analysis of time use reveals that elderly individuals and the unemployed tend to experience fewer time constraints. Indeed time use is the only domain in which high-income individuals report worse outcomes than other groups, though materially deprived individuals (around one-fifth of the population) and those not engaging in leisure activities (around one-third) also report low time-use satisfaction (and lower financial satisfaction).



Data source: NSO
Analysis: Malta Wellbeing INDEX

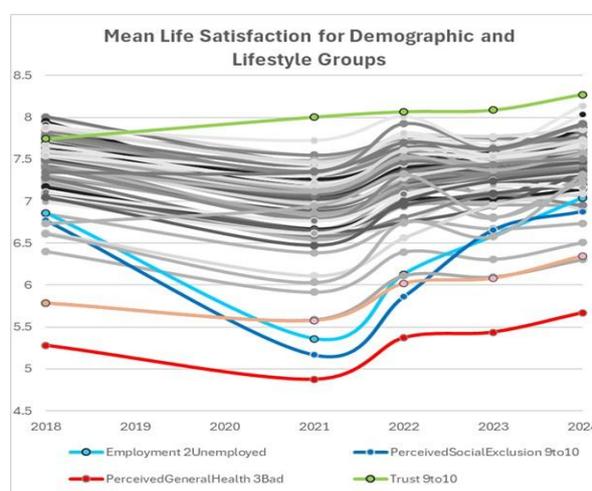
Family structure also matters: single parents and households with two adults and two children consistently report the lowest time-use satisfaction. **Though interpersonal relationships are strong, time-use concerns among higher income individuals and parents among others have important policy implications, particularly in the context of Malta’s goals to improve incomes and the fertility rate.**

4. The proportion of people exposed to environmental stressors continues to rise. In 2024, 34.5% of the population reported exposure to noise and 37.8% to pollution, equivalent to 164,656 and 180,332 individuals, respectively. Perceptions of housing conditions have also deteriorated. The number of individuals reporting issues such as leaking roofs and damp walls increased by 24% over the previous year, reaching 40,652 people – almost one in ten of the population (8.9%). The number of people who state that they have crime in their neighbourhood has also increased by 35.96% over the previous year, reaching 46,664 (10.8%

of the population). **The absolute numbers and trends in housing and neighbourhood quality issues merit policy intervention.**

5. The number of individuals in “absolute misery” (those reporting 0–1 on the life satisfaction scale) declined significantly, from 8,323 in 2023 to 4,408 in 2024. A substantial share of the population reports high life satisfaction, with particularly high levels observed among those with high levels of trust (8.27), young people (16–18) (8.03), and residents of Gozo (7.92). Emotional wellbeing follows similar patterns, though in this case, it is worth noting that foreigners report relatively high levels of happiness. Nervousness is, again, at its lowest among high-trust individuals (2.0), Gozitans (2.09), and foreigners (2.04). Similarly, those least likely to feel downhearted include foreigners (1.36), and high-trust individuals (1.47), while those least likely to feel depressed are people in Gozo (1.40) and foreigners (1.42). Yet very low levels of wellbeing continued to be observed among individuals reporting poor health, with a gap of almost 2 points on the life satisfaction scale (1.85 in 2024).

This group (of approximately 18,070 individuals, excluding those in institutions) shows no clear sign of post-COVID-19 recovery and little variation around the mean, suggesting that among them, poor life satisfaction is ubiquitous. Materially deprived individuals also report low life satisfaction, and their numbers have increased over time, reaching 42,524 in 2024. **People reporting poor health and the very poor also consistently report far lower levels of wellbeing than others in Malta and represent a clear priority for targeted policy intervention.**



Data source: NSO
Analysis: Malta Wellbeing INDEX

6. The World Happiness Report 2026 focused on problematic digital use and social media. Malta records among the highest levels of problematic social media use (PSMU) in the world. Prevalence is highest among girls and peaks at 13 years of age. The Report ranks Malta 9th globally for psychological complaints (feeling low, irritability, nervousness, and sleep difficulties) linked to PSMU, which in turn is associated with lower life evaluation. Eurostat data also sheds light on the near-universal use of social media among young people in Malta. **The scale and impact of Problematic Social Media Use point to a need to prioritise targeted policy responses.**

In conclusion, Malta is performing well on many fronts, both over time and in comparison with other countries, including within the EU. Life satisfaction is high, personal relationships are strong, and international rankings are improving. However, important challenges remain. Time poverty, environmental quality, and emotional wellbeing continue to create vulnerabilities. Particular attention is needed for individuals in poor health and those experiencing material deprivation, as well as for addressing problematic social media use among young people.