



Monitoring quality of life in Europe

info sheet

“Living conditions” generally refer to the circumstances of people's everyday lives ... as reflected in income and consumption patterns. “Quality of life” is a broader concept, referring to the overall well-being of people living in a society.’

Monitoring quality of life in Europe, May 2003.



WHAT is the context?

EU policy focus on living conditions has grown considerably in the wake of the Maastricht Agreement in 1992 with the European Commission White Papers on *European Social Policy* and on *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* and the Communication on the *Social Policy Agenda*. Previous Foundation research has examined issues of unemployment and social inclusion, especially from the point of view of reintegrating vulnerable groups into the labour market.

WHY this initiative?

Recent work has looked at new approaches to monitoring trends and changes in quality of life across the EU and candidate countries. The Foundation's working conditions surveys of 1990, 1995 and 2000 respond to this need in the working conditions sphere. In the area of industrial relations there is regular reporting from the European Industrial Relations Observatory. Against this background, the Foundation identified a need for additional comparable data in the living conditions sphere and launched a new pan-European 'quality of life' survey in May 2003. This project will provide new information and analysis on living conditions and quality of life issues throughout the 28 countries of the EU and its candidate countries. The first results, to be presented at the end of 2003, will draw on the survey's findings, together with existing information from a database of comparable EU-wide data. Analysis and reporting is being supported by a network of experts in the candidate countries.

WHAT was the process?

The Foundation consulted widely with policymakers and the social partners, public authorities and non-governmental organisations before producing a conceptual analysis and framework for monitoring living conditions and quality of life. It established a database of existing information in this field which contributed to a first report describing current living conditions and quality of life throughout the EU. A proposal for future activities, with recommendations for the establishment of an improved Foundation monitoring system, formed the final phase of the preparatory process.

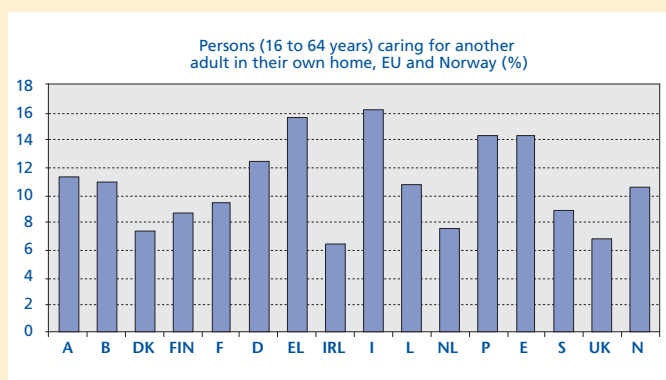
WHAT are the objectives?

To implement a monitoring tool that will:

- Define the scope of living conditions appropriate for the Foundation's mission.
- Monitor developments in this area.
- Assess new and emerging issues in living conditions.
- Build up a resource that can provide data and analysis on living conditions for EU policymakers.

WHAT is the approach?

- Focusing on quality of life primarily in terms of the scope individuals have to achieve their own ends.
- Documenting resources and, where possible, key characteristics of the life domains in which people operate.
- Measuring resources and living conditions through objective indicators and subjective assessments.
- Incorporating preferences and attitudes.
- Covering societal as well as individual well-being.



Source: Foundation Employment options of the future survey, 1997.

WHAT is the core focus?

- Domains of employment and economic resources, family and community involvement, health and education.
- The interrelationships between these domains, especially work, family and community life
- Time use as a crucial aspect of these interrelationships.
- Quality of social provision (especially health care and education) as key influences on quality of life.

Tracking change over time is at the core of monitoring, but to understand multi-dimensional entities such as living conditions and quality of life, it is also necessary to probe the relationships between the dimensions, and between them and external factors. This is a more complex task than the regular measurement of trends in key indicators; however an analytical rather than descriptive approach is essential if it is to inform policymaking effectively.

WHERE to go from here?

The initial results of the 28-country pan-European survey on quality of life issues will be available at the end of 2003. This will allow the Foundation to analyse and report trends in quality of life issues on a comparative basis. It should also help to identify emerging issues and areas of concern. The Foundation will use analysis of the new survey data and existing data from elsewhere to address key policy issues in a series of analytical reports. The data and reports will provide a basis for monitoring change in the coming years and will be used to provide EU policymakers with a solid basis from which to promote improvements in living conditions and quality of life in Europe in the coming years.

Monitoring quality of life in Europe (report)
www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF02108.htm

Illustrative report on quality of life in Europe
www.eurofound.eu.int/living/living.htm

Further information
 Teresa Renehan at ter@eurofound.eu.int

Foundation work on related issues:

Access to employment for vulnerable groups, Foundation paper no 2
www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF0244.htm

Integrated approaches to active welfare and employment policies
www.eurofound.eu.int/living/welfare.htm

Third European working conditions survey
www.eurofound.eu.int/working/surveys.htm

Illness, disability and social inclusion
www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF0332.htm (info sheet)
www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF0335.htm (report)

Quality in social public services (online casebook)
www.eurofound.eu.int/living/social.htm

Active citizenship and community involvement
www.eurofound.eu.int/living/active.htm

Towards a sustainable corporate social responsibility
www.eurofound.eu.int/transversal/csr_report.htm

Employment in household services
www.eurofound.eu.int/living/emp_hholdserv.htm