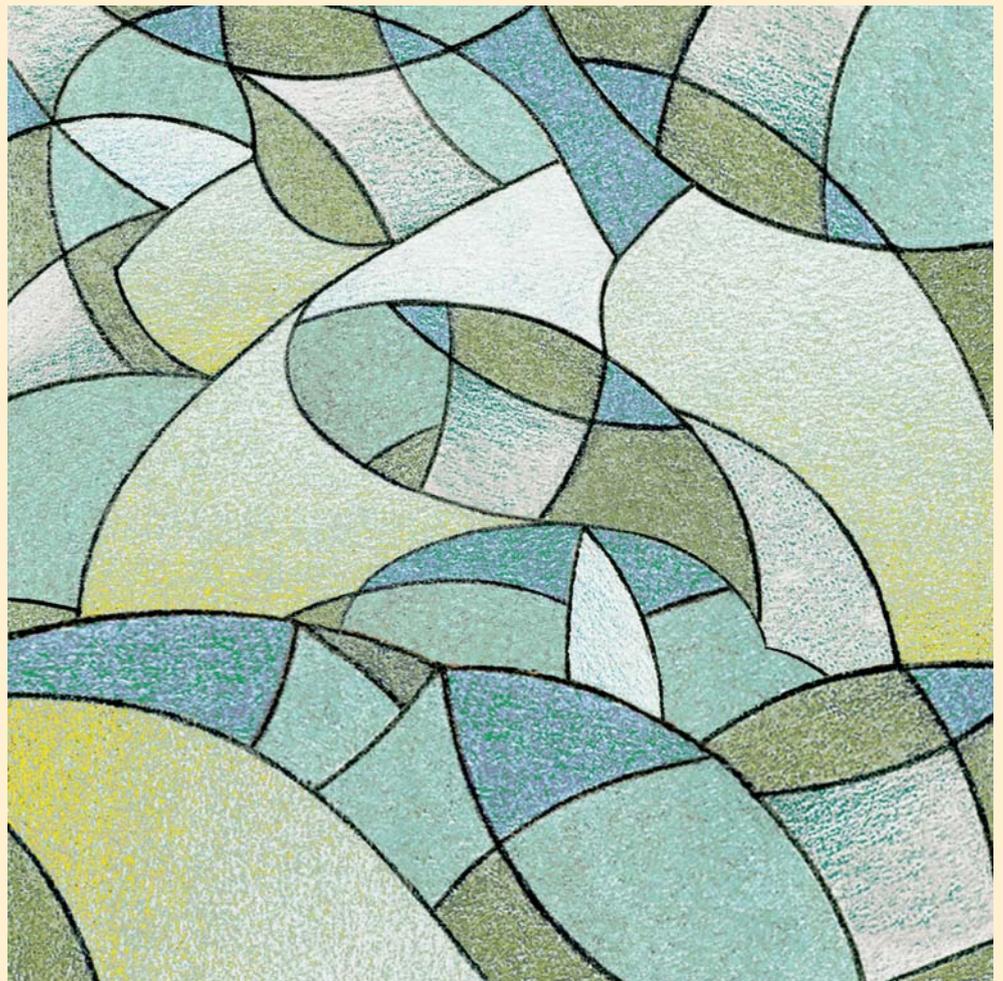




First European Quality of Life Survey: Key findings from a policy perspective



First European Quality of Life Survey:
Key findings from a policy perspective

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European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

First European Quality of Life Survey: Key findings from a policy perspective

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Foreword

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has been committed to obtaining comprehensive and comparative information about how Europeans perceive their living and working conditions. In 2003, the Foundation conducted fieldwork for its First European Quality of Life Survey across 28 countries: the present 27 EU Member States and one candidate country, Turkey. The survey was a questionnaire-based, representative household survey, which aimed to analyse how various life factors affect Europeans' quality of life. It addressed a number of key areas such as employment, economic resources, housing and local environment, family and household structure, participation in the community, health and healthcare, knowledge/education and training.

The results of the Foundation's First European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) were published in 2004. Since then, the Foundation has been engaged in more extensive analysis of how different aspects impact on individual quality of life in the EU. This activity has produced a series of in-depth analytical reports, which look at key components of quality of life across all 28 countries, identifying differences and similarities as well as policy implications.

This report summarises the main findings of the survey as presented in the reports and explores the implications of these findings for EU policy, along with challenges for future policies. Among the more interesting findings are the perception of strong social support networks across Europe, the differences in levels of satisfaction both within and between countries, and the variation in perceived sources of tension in EU countries. Another key finding is the significant impact of social circumstances on perceived quality of life – for example, the strong influence that individual income levels, as well as national prosperity levels, appear to have on subjective well-being.

A central part of the report is outlining the implications that the EQLS findings raise for both existing and future policy: for example, the need for policy that assigns greater priority to subjective aspects of quality of life; the importance of a policy response that is coordinated across different domains of social life; and the significance of good governance for promoting life satisfaction. At the same time, the report underlines some potential challenges, in particular those raised by the enlargement of the EU and the ever-growing levels of diversity, especially between some of the older and new Member States. Moreover, it highlights the interplay between social and economic policy, suggesting how policies aimed at increasing economic growth across Europe can in fact make a significant contribution to social policy.

We hope that the findings of this report will contribute to shaping EU policies, as well as providing a greater insight into the complex range of issues that affect the quality of life and overall life satisfaction of people across Europe.

Jorma Karppinen
Director

Willy Buschak
Deputy Director

Country codes used in the report (situation in 2004)

EU15

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
DK	Denmark
FI	Finland
FR	France
DE	Germany
EL	Greece
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LU	Luxembourg
NL	Netherlands
PT	Portugal
ES	Spain
SE	Sweden
UK	United Kingdom

NMS

CZ	Czech Republic
CY	Cyprus
EE	Estonia
HU	Hungary
LV	Latvia
LT	Lithuania
MT	Malta
PL	Poland
SK	Slovakia
SI	Slovenia

Acceding countries

BG	Bulgaria
RO	Romania

Candidate country

TR	Turkey
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Abbreviations

EQLS	European Quality of Life Survey
GDP	Gross domestic product
EU15	15 EU Member States (pre May 2004)
NMS	10 new Member States that joined the EU in May 2004
EU25	25 EU Member States (post May 2004)
ACC3	Two acceding countries, Bulgaria and Romania, and one candidate country, Turkey

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Introduction

A favourable quality of life is integral to the European social model. Europe has long promised its citizens greater access to a broad range of life opportunities and that public resources will be channelled to enable people to realise their preferences and expectations. At the same time, Europe relies heavily on collective institutions and shared values. Among the fundamental features of European society are a high degree of integration between economic and social policy, the presence of a well-developed architecture of public social provision and the anchoring of individual and collective rights in national and cross-national legal and institutional systems.

Against this background, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions carried out the First European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) in 2003, covering 28 countries: the current 27 Member States of the European Union and Turkey. These countries were grouped according to their political situation vis à vis the EU at the time of publication of the survey findings. The three country groups that comprise the 28 countries covered in the survey are as follows: the original 15 EU Member States (EU15), the 10 so-called 'new' Member States (NMS) that joined the EU in May 2004 and the three acceding and candidate countries (ACC3) – Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. Specifically, the EQLS examined six key areas of quality of life: employment; economic resources; family and households; community life and social participation; health and healthcare; and knowledge, education and training. One of the first studies to bring the EU15 and ACC3 countries together in an analysis of prevailing social conditions, the EQLS has led to the creation of a harmonised database of information obtained from some 26,257 respondents. Since the Foundation published the results of this survey in 2004, it has been engaged in more in-depth analysis of key components of quality of life, based on the initial findings of the EQLS. This activity has produced some 10 analytical reports, which explore a diverse range of quality of life components (see Annex 1). The purpose of this analysis is to review, from a policy perspective, the central findings of these 10 analytical reports. In this respect, the report has the following key objectives:

- to abstract and evaluate key points of policy relevance from the existing set of reports;
- to draw out connections across different domains of life covered by the reports;
- to identify key social, economic and employment policy implications at national and European policy levels.

Quality of life concept

The EQLS reports provide a rich source of policy-related information, serving to reveal – if not a new Europe – then a contemporary one. The survey is underpinned by an analytical approach which highlights the multi-dimensional nature of quality of life, along with the interconnectedness of the different dimensions, the links between objective conditions and people's subjective assessment of their situation, and the significance of time use and of people's perceptions of the quality of their society. Ultimately, the quality of life approach champions the micro-perspective and the mix of the objective and subjective, seeking an insight into the conditions under which people live and the manner in which they evaluate and experience such conditions. The core set of ideas involved in the quality of life concept is captured in the triad of 'having, loving and being', referring respectively to material resources, personal and social relationships, and the extent to which people feel respected and recognised for who they are. This concept is holistic in another sense also, as it uncovers the connections between individual well-being and the general 'quality' of society. In the latter regard, the EQLS contains information about people's evaluations of social services and other public provisions, as well as their perceptions of the level of solidarity in society and of trust and lines of tension or conflict among groups.

EQLS approach

The EQLS is based on interviews conducted with individuals in their homes and thus provides a bottom-up perspective on European society, which complements the top-down view of national and European-level policymakers. Given that the ‘outputs’ of public policy are the result of ‘inputs’ aimed at improving the lives of individuals and households, creating a mechanism for feedback between these interconnecting levels of European society is desirable. This is also consistent with the EU principle of ‘subsidiarity’, which views both governance and the quality of life as being shaped by influences at multiple levels of society. Ultimately, people’s quality of life is influenced by their activities and relationships within their own household, at work and in their community, by their interaction with authorities at local and national level and by transnational links across Europe, including EU policymaking and institutions.

The specific topics covered in the EQLS analytical reports – which, in turn, provide the canvas for this particular report – are: life satisfaction, happiness and sense of belonging; income inequalities and deprivation; social aspects of housing; families, work and social networks; quality of work and quality of life; urban–rural differences; time use over the life course; and participation in civil society. These topics represent a blend of information, which, based on people’s judgement of their own living conditions, provides a more comprehensive picture of what life is like for Europeans today.

In applying the quality of life concept, the EQLS represents something of a departure from existing research, which tends to over-rely on income as a substitute for well-being. The quality of life concept encompasses three particular strengths for policymaking purposes. Firstly, subjective well-being provides an important additional indication of the degree to which the population’s needs are being met (Fahey et al, 2004, p. 64). Secondly, asking people’s opinions about quality of life is one of the best ways to gain an insight into what people want (Delhey, 2004). Thirdly, the concept and approach seem fitting given the nature of society in today’s Europe – where personal choice is ranked highly and where people expect to have a range of opportunities and experiences open to them. In this and other ways, the EQLS gives full recognition to the fact that there is a powerful subjective element to the way in which income and other material resources affect well-being: for example, people make comparisons to others all the time, and their evaluations of how well they are faring ultimately rest on their value systems, which are in turn socially determined.

Policy relevance

The results of the EQLS provide an opportunity to take a fresh look at key aspects of policy. These findings bear significance for policy debates in three main ways. In the first instance, the focus on individuals shows how the effects of policies produced at multiple levels of government – local, regional, national and European – take effect within the household. People’s views represent the conjoint effect of all of these policies on their quality of life. Such a global picture of the benefits of public policy is often missing. Secondly, in covering a wide range of countries and domains, the results of the EQLS provide a basis, for policy purposes, for underlining the problems inherent in the diversity evident within the EU. In the third instance, the findings provide a sharp focus on particular and potential problem areas, not only measuring general levels of satisfaction, but also the factors that contribute to and detract from satisfaction levels. Overall, therefore, because quality of life is such a multi-dimensional concept, it places a broad range of factors and considerations on the policy table.

Key findings of the survey

1

This chapter identifies and explores some of the key findings that have emerged from the results of the EQLS. Overall, the report focuses on the following six premises, which provide an insight into quality of life in Europe.

- Most Europeans are socially integrated and marginalisation is a minority experience.
- There are significant differences in satisfaction levels both within and between countries.
- There are differences in perceptions of the causes of social tension.
- Social circumstances play a huge role in perceived quality of life.
- Income and national prosperity are powerful predictors of quality of life.
- There is a legacy of distrust of institutions among the NMS.

Most Europeans are socially integrated and marginalisation is a minority experience

Social support networks are strong in all of the 28 countries covered in the EQLS: throughout the EU, a large majority of the population, around 80%–95%, are confident of receiving help from relatives, friends and neighbours should they experience personal problems (Saraceno et al, 2005). In fact, mutual family support appears to be strong across the 28 countries; this would indicate that, among other things, family support represents the most reliable form of assistance for Europeans when they need help. In 25 of the 28 countries examined, a greater proportion of people are optimistic rather than pessimistic: on average, around 64% of individuals in the enlarged EU are optimistic about their future (Fahey et al, 2004, pp. 67, 69). Moreover, those who adapt to adverse circumstances by maintaining a positive outlook outnumber the proportion of people who adopt a negative attitude (Alber and Fahey, 2004, p. 21). Europeans are also politically engaged: some 95% of people participate in either voluntary or informal activities or both, while 92% engage in conventional political activities or have the potential to engage in dialogue across national borders through the internet, or both (Rose, 2006, p. 6). Taken together, the evidence paints a picture of a relatively vibrant civil society, as manifested by the high levels of participation across the range of formal and informal contacts and activities (*ibid*).

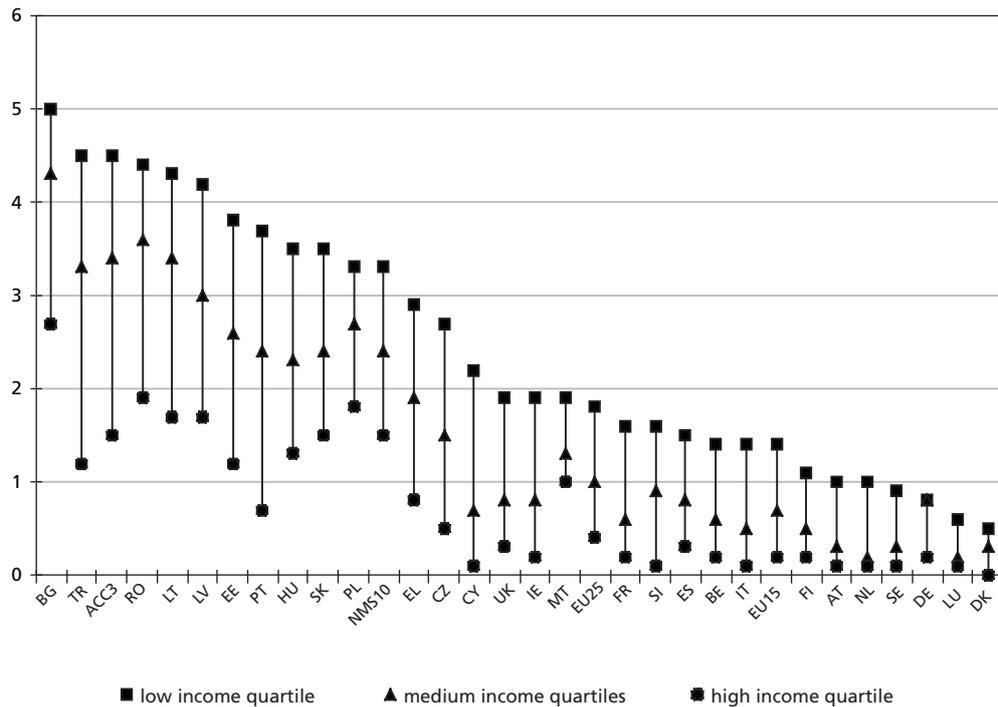
There are significant differences in satisfaction levels both within and between countries

In most countries, about a third of people feel very satisfied with their quality of life; half of the respondents are fairly dissatisfied with their quality of life, while about one fifth of people face problems that lead to dissatisfaction and discontent (Böhnke, 2005, p. 33). The significance of this finding from a policy perspective is two-fold: policymakers need to continue targeting inequalities and to renew their efforts to improve access to material and other resources; for policy purposes, a risk group analysis or framework would have merit. With regard to access to material and other resources, it is clear that material disadvantage, far from being random, is distributed along particular fault lines, among which the more traditional sources of inequality – income, education, employment status and occupational class – continue to dominate (Alber and Fahey, 2004, p. 20).

A second meaning can also be extrapolated from the European divide – namely, the differences that exist across countries or regions of the EU. People who earn above-average incomes in the less affluent countries – that is, those in the NMS and ACC3 – tend to be less well-off than those who earn below-average incomes in the richest countries of the EU15. For example, in Bulgaria and Romania, the average level of net equivalised household income in 2003 was below €300 a month in purchasing power parity (PPP), less than a third of the EU average (Mărginean et al, 2006, 82). The divide is manifested across a range of dimensions – for example, in relation to working conditions,

general life satisfaction, people's housing situation and internet usage. Therefore, while well-being is widespread in Europe, it is not equally distributed between the east and west; moreover, the intensity of this divide is striking. For instance, the results show that in the ACC3, along with many of the NMS countries, households that are in the high income brackets nationally are more likely to be deprived of basic consumption goods than those households that are in the low income brackets in many of the EU15 countries (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Average deprivation levels, by income quartile and country



Note: Average level of deprivation refers to the average number of six items that respondents are unable to afford. The six items are: 1) keeping your home adequately warm; 2) paying for a week's annual holiday; 3) replacing any worn-out furniture; 4) having a meal with meat every second day if you wanted; 5) buying new, rather than second-hand clothes; 6) having friends or family over for a drink or meal at least once a month.

Source: Whelan and Maître, 2004, p. 9

However, as the results in Figure 1 also show, it would be wrong to conclude that the EU15 countries have no problem with inequality. People in the lowest income quartiles in the EU15 may not be as badly off in an absolute sense as those who are deprived in other parts of the EU; nonetheless, they are marginalised in their own countries, owing to the sense of deprivation they feel relative to their fellow citizens who are the best off in Europe in an absolute sense (Fahey et al, 2005, p. 46).

Nevertheless, ideas about what constitutes quality of life do not differ greatly across Europe: the dominant concerns in all countries, and those determining people's level of satisfaction, pertain to having an income, enjoying a satisfactory family life and having good health (Delhey, 2004, p. 70). The question remains, however, as to how people judge their own situation. Given the increased 'Europeanisation' of society, people may use a dual frame of reference, comparing themselves not only to others in their own country but also using a generalised European norm as a frame of reference (Fahey et al, 2005, 36). Insofar as this does occur, it implies a Europeanisation of standards

and expectations, such that social cohesion and sense of well-being are not necessarily locally or even nationally determined. From a policy perspective, this underlines the need for dual-track policies aimed at addressing income inequalities and for national policies to be complemented by EU-level policies.

There are differences in perceptions of the causes of social tension

The causes of perceived social tensions vary between regions in Europe. Perceived class tensions appear to be highest in the NMS and ACC3, where the dominant social divides are perceived as arising between rich and poor and between management and workers. In contrast, in the EU15, the most common perception of social tension is racial or ethnic divisions (Böhnke, 2005, p. 63). On average, one third of the EU15 population are aware of conflicts between rich and poor people, compared with a half of citizens in the NMS. Such differences in concern imply the need to go beyond the current EU focus on social exclusion, which tends to attribute tensions to economic – and particularly labour market – exclusion. Problems of unemployment may disproportionately affect some ethnic and racial minorities, while members of majorities may be uneasy about increasing diversity within their society. However, attributing the tensions of multiculturalism solely to economic problems is inappropriate. Instead, the EU needs to develop strategies aimed at addressing divisions arising from cultural and racial diversity and discrimination; such a need is more pertinent than ever today, given that problems can easily ‘migrate’ to the European level with the free movement of racial and ethnic minorities among Member States.

Social circumstances play a huge role in perceived quality of life

At an individual level, a very strong association emerges between income and subjective well-being, such that those earning the highest incomes express the greatest satisfaction with their lives, while those on low incomes appear to be the least satisfied (Figure 2). Moreover, respondents who are less educated, in ill-health or unemployed also express lower levels of satisfaction with their quality of life (Böhnke, 2005, p. 37). Another factor that has a large impact on life satisfaction is people’s perceptions of the quality of society in which they live (Böhnke, 2005, pp. 65–70). Accordingly, people who have trust in the benefit system and in their fellow citizens are more likely to have higher levels of satisfaction, as are those who view social and other services in a positive light. Perceptions of society and of societal circumstances have an effect on satisfaction, happiness and alienation, irrespective of living standards and social support (*ibid*, pp. 81, 94). In many countries, particularly the most affluent Member States, social support from family and friends has a strong influence on levels of satisfaction and well-being. One of the policy implications of these findings is that policymakers will need to target a range of different factors to improve life satisfaction, although the underlying close correlation between access to material resources and quality of life remains robust across the countries.

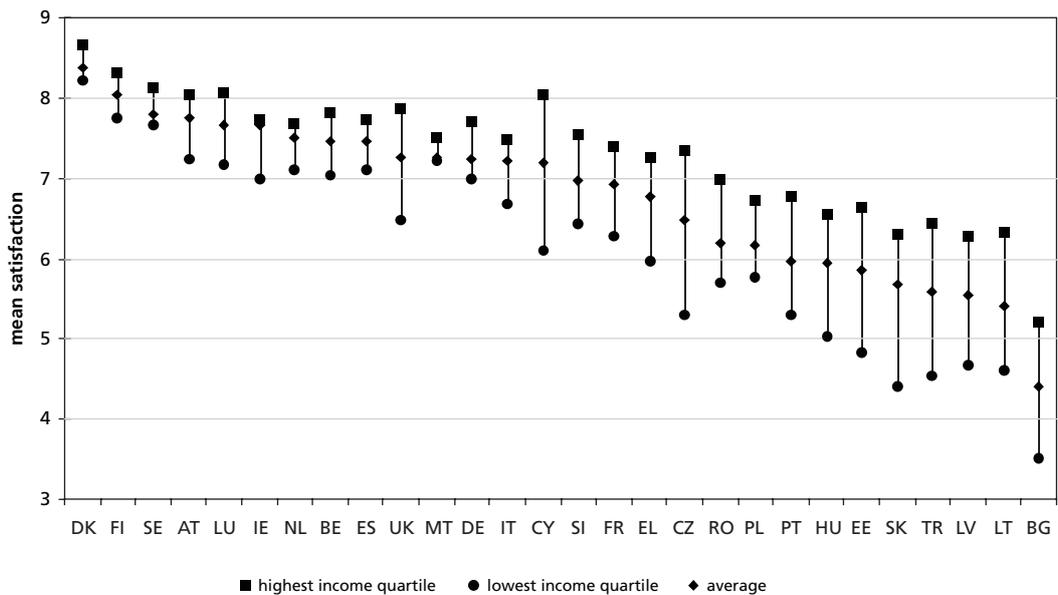
Income and national prosperity are powerful indicators of quality of life

It is possible to observe the relationship between income and well-being at a cross-country level. Based on a cross-country comparison, factors such as level of prosperity, quality of society and quality of governance are, on the one hand, all closely linked together; at the same time, they represent quite far-reaching indicators of quality of life. The following conclusions can be made in this context:

- The lower the level of national income, the higher the level of alienation and the lower the level of subjective well-being in a country (Böhnke, 2005, p. 38).
- A country's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita constitutes an important differentiating factor in terms of people's evaluations of quality of work and job satisfaction (Wallace et al, 2006).
- The less affluent the nation is, the less active its citizens appear to be in strengthening civil society structures (Böhnke, 2005, p. 58).
- Perceptions of the 'quality' of society – judged, for example, in terms of trust in public services and in other citizens – vary in line with national economic performance (*ibid*, p. 77).

Given the association between access to resources and life satisfaction, policies directed at raising income levels and national prosperity are likely to produce spin-off effects in improving levels of satisfaction and in reducing feelings of alienation.

Figure 2 Average life satisfaction and deviation from the average, by income quartile and country



Notes: Q.31: 'All things considered, how satisfied would you say you are with your life these days?' Figure 2 shows average life satisfaction levels on a scale from one to 10, where one means 'very dissatisfied' and 10 means 'very satisfied'.

Source: Keck and Delhey, 2004, p. 67

There is a legacy of distrust of institutions among NMS

Although the NMS countries have confirmed their democratic credentials by gaining admission to the EU, the former communist regimes of these countries have left a legacy of widespread distrust of state institutions and of civil society. In the past, the communist regimes forced individuals to participate in political and civic organisations, irrespective of whether they wanted to or not. Moreover, such institutions were not representative of civil society, but rather comprised organisations controlled by the party state.

High levels of participation in civil society institutions encourage social cohesion in countries, as do governments engaging in dialogue with representative associations. However, the history of compulsory political mobilisation in the NMS has left a legacy of aversion to participation in voluntary organisations, whether educational, charitable, trade union or recreational bodies. It is not surprising, therefore, that participation in voluntary organisations is up to 10 times higher in Scandinavian societies compared with the NMS and that a large majority of NMS citizens do not participate in any voluntary organisation whatsoever (Rose, 2006, p. 21; Fahey, Whelan and Maitre, 2005, p. 29). Perceptions of government corruption, which tend to be higher in the NMS, also reduce the level of participation in voluntary organisations and, in turn, the degree of social cohesion (Rose, 2006, p. 52). Lower levels of participation also correlate with a poor level of trust in national social benefit systems (Böhnke, 2005, p. 64).

Broadly speaking, no single interpretation or policy response to differences in perceived quality of life appears to have been made. This is in spite of the fact that the legacy of the past, including the transition to the market economy in the 1990s, has left large minorities in many of the NMS countries, as well as in the ACC3, with both objective and subjective grounds for dissatisfaction with their quality of life. This turns the spotlight on the need for policies directed at raising income levels and national prosperity, and suggests that such policies could have a spin-off effect in improving satisfaction levels and reducing feelings of alienation. Nevertheless, there are limits to this approach, both as an interpretation and as a complete policy response, not least because a threshold effect exists. In any case, Europe is also marked by other lines of division. For instance, a north–south divide is discernible in relation to the extent to which people feel satisfaction, happiness and a sense of belonging. Whereas the most widespread source of discontent in the NMS is material standard of living, in the EU15 it is education. Once again, these findings confirm that quality of life in Europe differs both cross-nationally and among social groups within the various countries.

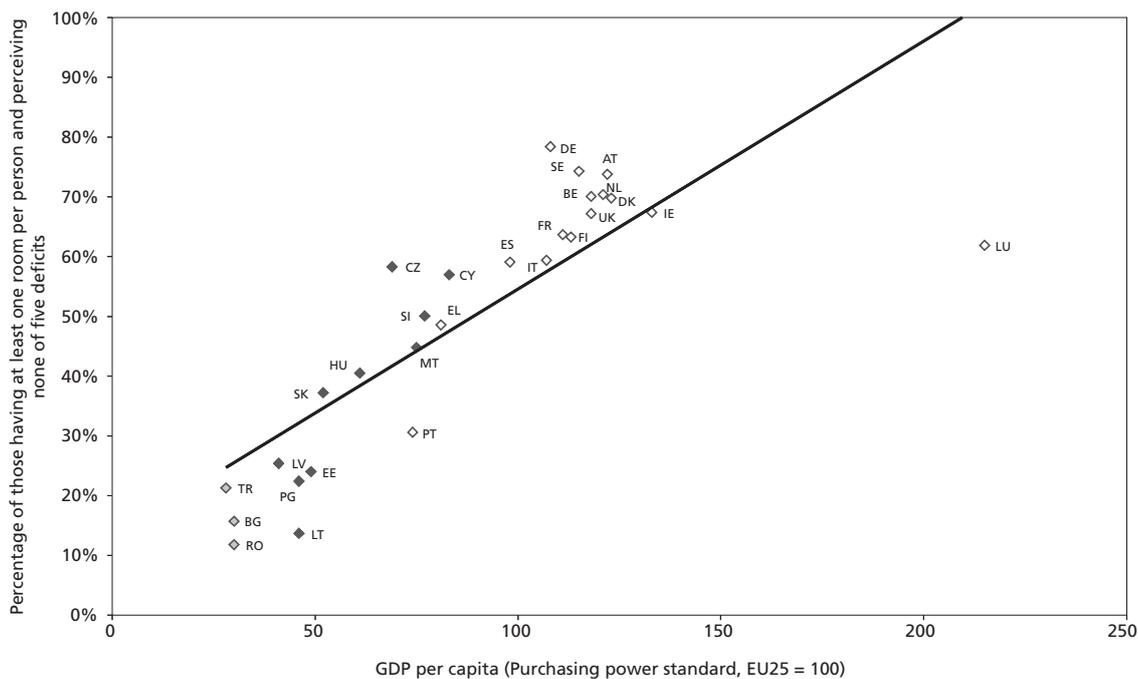
To summarise, the Europe of today consists of different kinds of societies. Hence one cannot – and for policy purposes, one should not – focus on one dimension alone. Since there are, in effect, multiple ‘Europes’, policymakers must envisage a more complex image of European societies, subject to both processes of integration and differentiation.

Implications for different policy domains

The results outlined in Chapter 1 have many implications for policy and relate to numerous policy domains. The findings can be taken to provide a new rationale for existing policy approaches, as well as pointing policy in new directions. They also provide some insight into what does not work or what might constitute an undesirable policy response. However, a degree of caution needs to be taken in linking the findings to policy, for two main reasons. Firstly, the EQLS was not designed to provide an evaluation of policy and so has clear limitations in terms of what it reveals about the functioning or effectiveness of policies. Secondly, while its limited sample size of about 1,000 respondents per country is a sufficient basis to make generalisations about large groups within the population – such as men and women or young and old people – the EQLS cannot address social policy questions relating to vulnerable sub-groups within national populations, such as single-parent families or disabled people. For these reasons, the EQLS has to be used cautiously as a tool for social policy analysis.

Bearing in mind these limitations, this report avoids making policy recommendations as such. However, confident that the findings have major implications for policy, it will identify on the one hand challenges for policy and on the other hand desirable policy directions. The implications are considered from a range of different perspectives, as explored under the subsequent headings in this chapter. While it is true that the findings call into question the efficacy of what might be considered a strict domain approach – whereby problems, and by implication ‘quality of life’, are broken down so that they fit existing administrative categories – it is still a useful exercise to identify the implications of the findings for particular policy domains. While these pertain mainly to national level policy domains, they also have relevance at EU level.

Figure 3 Relationship between GDP per capita and percentage of people having adequate housing conditions



Source: GDP per capita – Eurostat news release 145/2004; index of housing quality calculated on basis of EQLS findings

Housing and environment

The EQLS reveals a number of pressing problems with regard to housing and local environment and shows that low levels of economic development usually translate into poor housing conditions (EBRD, 2005).

People in the NMS and ACC3, for example, tend to live in significantly poorer housing conditions compared with those living in the EU15, and below the level of that stipulated by EU policy (Domański et al, 2005, p. 76). Caution is advised, nevertheless, in making any simple east–west comparison, given that western Europe also has problems with housing deprivation. One way in which the EQLS could be of use to policymakers, however, is in identifying the groups most at risk within and across countries. Research conducted by Domański et al (2005) highlights the following risk groups:

- young people in Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia, whose transition into independent living is delayed due to housing-related shortages;
- elderly people in Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Romania who, while they own property, lack the means to make essential repairs and improvements;
- rural inhabitants in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Turkey who live in low-standard accommodation;
- people on low incomes in some of the EU15 countries (Greece, Italy and Portugal) in the Baltic states and in Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Turkey.

From an EU perspective, the results generally endorse housing as an issue, in line with the Lisbon Agenda's social inclusion process. Ideally, in responding to the social inclusion process, Member States should give priority to improving the national housing stock and to a whole range of policies aimed at enhancing equity of access to housing. In countries where the cost of housing has risen faster than the average national income, there is a need to create a viable housing sector for those on low incomes; this could be achieved, for example, through social housing policies, innovative policies enabling young people to achieve equity of access to housing and income-supplementing measures for households unable to pay rent (*ibid*, p. 76). In the NMS, where the housing stock is most in need of improvement and where there is a tradition of families engaging in elaborate measures to renovate or even build homes, special policies could be adopted to provide materials to those who appear willing to carry out home improvements themselves.

A larger EU-level response is also needed to address the pan-European aspects. The spotlight in this regard could be shifted onto cohesion policy. While the long-term exclusion of housing as an eligible domain of spending for EU structural funds purposes was removed in 2005 – when the NMS governments agreed to remove housing from the list of non-eligible spending – there is still a long way to go before housing is accepted as a legitimate domain of EU cohesion policy. The EQLS results underline the urgency of this issue.

The EQLS findings also suggest that policy in this area cannot be limited to housing only: the local environment is also critical to well-being and for many people is a source of dissatisfaction, particularly in the poorer regions within and across countries. Greater public effort is needed to create

more favourable environmental conditions across Europe as a whole. The EQLS is helpful in pinpointing the situation of particular groups that could be prioritised. These include:

- inhabitants living in urban areas of Cyprus, Greece, France, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Romania and Turkey: these people cite the highest level of complaints about noise, air pollution and quality of water;
- elderly people in the Czech Republic, the three Baltic states, Greece, Hungary and Romania: these people complain the most about unsatisfactory access to the local infrastructure (Domański et al, 2005, p. 78).

Throughout the EU, there is a need to make or to keep neighbourhoods safe from crime, given that people who perceive their neighbourhoods as being unsafe are less likely to engage in a variety of forms of social participation.

Reconciliation of work and family life

Reconciling work and family life is not just a major theme of contemporary social policy in Europe: it is also a policy area that has grown rapidly. The EQLS results support this area as a valid policy focus, suggesting that people who manage to establish a balance between their work and family life are much more satisfied than those who perceive difficulties in this respect. While a causal argument cannot be made, it is worth emphasising in this context that people living in any of the EU15 countries have fewer difficulties than those living elsewhere in Europe in maintaining a viable work–family balance, as well as in developing a family–work system that allows time for both facets of life (Saraceno et al, 2005, p. 36). However, this finding has to be immediately qualified by adding that the success of such an arrangement rests on a strong gender division of opportunities and costs. This gender division has marked consequences: robust gender gaps in satisfaction exist with regard to the division of household tasks, with women, especially those with children, reporting much lower levels of satisfaction than men (Torres et al, 2006).

While reconciliation policy has the merit of seeking coherence between the two most important domains of life, the meaning of ‘reconciliation’ – particularly with regard to the balance to be struck between the demands of these two domains – has never been clearly spelt out. The EQLS results suggest that there is a need to review and make explicit the meaning of ‘balance’, and indeed to reconsider the entire reconciliation approach, which arguably has never fully accepted the complexities associated with the role of care provision. Evidence of an imbalance emerges in the finding that paid work affects family life more strongly than the other way around; accordingly, employed people report difficulties in carrying out housework or fulfilling their family responsibilities because of job demands more often than they report problems in concentrating at work because of family responsibilities (Fahey et al, 2004, p. 52). There are other reasons to reconsider this area of policy. In the EU15, the introduction of work–life balance policies has not acted to break down the gender division of labour; as a result, increasing women’s labour force participation – a dominant thrust of the European Employment Strategy (EES) – has also increased their level of unpaid work, particularly if all other factors, such as men’s contribution and the availability of supporting services, remain unchanged (Saraceno et al, 2005). Moreover, reconciling work and family life does not appear to represent an area of strong policy concern in the NMS, given that women and men with family responsibilities in these countries tend to have an extremely heavy workload from both paid and unpaid activities. In fact, in some of these countries and those in southern Europe, working parents

tend to have the heaviest total workload, that is, the total number of paid and unpaid working hours combined (Torres et al, 2006, p. 78). In addition, vulnerable groups exist throughout Europe who are not adequately provided for. In all of the countries, and especially in the NMS, lone-parent households appear to find it extremely difficult to balance time commitments, mainly because their family-work system has fewer human resources among which to redistribute the required paid and unpaid work (Saraceno et al, 2005, p. 108).

Overall, therefore, the findings of the EQLS should provide an opportunity to reconsider the entire policy approach to reconciling paid work with family relationships and responsibilities. The complexities involved are systemic; as Saraceno et al (2005, p. 109) point out, in order to improve this situation, changes are required in all parts of the system, and particularly with respect to the gender balance between paid and unpaid work. Employment policy, equal opportunities, housing, education, taxation, social security and social services all have a role to play in providing the appropriate balance and range of options and services.

The variety of ways in which people would like to and can maintain a work-life balance implies that the goal of European policy should be greater flexibility, thus enabling workers and employers to arrive at combinations that will suit their particular needs. Rather than simply reducing their working time, Europeans express a preference for greater control over working time and also for time-saving schemes, whereby overtime is saved up and taken as extra time off later on (Torres et al, 2006). This underlines an important meaning of the term 'flexibility' in today's Europe. Options that involve a reduction of income – such as career breaks and early retirement – appear to be less popular. Moreover, the adequacy of existing policy is called into question by the fact that, in relation to preferred options for balancing work and family life, a mismatch between preference and availability emerges in many cases. With the exception of citizens in Scandinavian countries, people's preferred options for balancing work and family life are not available to them in sufficient quantities (*ibid*). For example, options paid for by employers – such as paid leave to care for relatives or for study purposes – tend to have a low availability although they are popular, whereas the reverse is the case in relation to unpaid leave.

Care provision

Issues concerning the supply and quality of care need to be considered in their own right, rather than as outcomes of changing demographics or labour market participation. Dedicated policies targeting care provision are therefore needed. On the basis of the EQLS results, Saraceno et al (2005, p. 111) recommend two key aims in relation to such policies. The first involves offering women and men a genuine choice in balancing time for caring responsibilities with time to do paid work. Secondly, care policy should address the increasing imbalance between the demand or need for care and the resources available to and provided by caregivers. In addition, the authors point to the fact that provision and supervision of different forms of care, particularly in the case of frail elderly people, might contribute to regulating a market that has become increasingly deregulated, partly due to immigration, and so reduce the risk of exploitation of both the carer and the person receiving care.

Family policy and social support

Policy does not necessarily have to constitute a response to negative situations. The EQLS results tend to show the family in a highly positive light, representing one of the most effective institutions

of social integration in contemporary Europe. Moreover, in the NMS, the extended family is shown to play a particularly important role in buffering economic risks and in socially integrating people (Saraceno et al, 2005, p. 108). However, two caveats must be raised at this point. Firstly, family solidarity can be selective and may not always be readily available to certain members, such as elderly people and those who are unemployed. Secondly, among the different living situations, being childless offers the best opportunities for achieving favourable levels of support and satisfaction with family life (*ibid*, p. 109). Together, these results suggest that policymakers should no longer continue to take family support and solidarity for granted and that, given the importance of the family, policy needs to shift the focus to creating conditions for a favourable family life. One issue that might be taken up by policymakers is the question of whether existing patterns allow people to establish a family life. In countries where the transition from school to employment is difficult, largely due to a lack of employment opportunities, moving from the parental home to independent living is frequently postponed or delayed, as is forming a stable union and entering parenthood (Saraceno et al, 2005; Torres et al, 2006, p. 75). This pattern can mainly be found in the southern countries, as well as in central and eastern Europe.

Employment policy

The findings of the EQLS underline the significance of being in employment: life satisfaction is higher if one has a job, even if it is a poor quality job, than if one is unemployed (Wallace et al, 2006). The relatively low employment rate and the high level of long-term unemployment in some countries – for example Bulgaria and Romania – serve to heighten dissatisfaction, while making life more difficult for people (Tzanov et al, 2006). These and other findings confirm the significance of employment creation as an important policy aim. The findings also place the spotlight on issues of quality, underlining the fact that employment policy should not be one-dimensional. Along with the volume of jobs, issues of quality should represent a key concern, particularly in the NMS and ACC3, where working time arrangements tend to be much less flexible. Overall, the findings highlight three relevant priorities for policy. Firstly, addressing the prevalence and role of job security is important, given the strong relationship observed between feelings of job insecurity and lower job satisfaction. This correlation was evident in all of the countries, but was particularly strong in the poorer EU countries and in the ACC3, where job security is least prevalent (Wallace et al, 2006, p. 37). Secondly, extrinsic concerns, particularly pay levels, career prospects and time flexibility, need to be strongly targeted in the NMS and ACC3. The regional differences and inequalities observed underline the importance of raising standards of remuneration, security and worker satisfaction as a core dimension of EU employment policy. Thirdly, the question of training emerges as an important concern, especially since training provision seems to be particularly scarce for some Europeans. For example, only 5% of employees in Bulgaria, 12% of employees in Romania and 18% of workers in the six lowest-income EU countries have participated in training (Tzanov, 2006, p. 85). Moreover, Wallace et al (2006, p. 70) make a relevant point by emphasising how labour market reforms aimed at improving the security of those already in employment should also take into account the situation of those not in employment and avoid creating a more divided society and Europe.

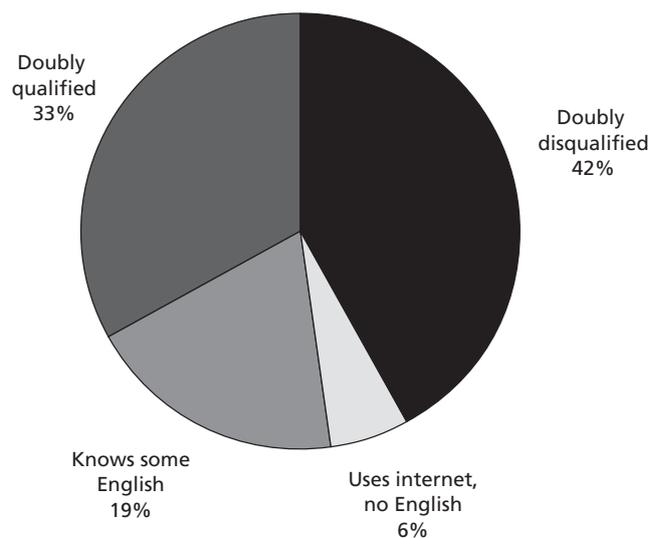
Social and political participation

The EQLS provides positive evidence that, irrespective of the limits of public policy coverage and consistent with the doctrine of subsidiarity, individuals have informal networks to which they can turn for support when it is not available from public institutions. The importance of choice in informal

networks is underlined by the fact that far fewer people see their neighbours socially, compared with their family and friends (Rose, 2006). This implies that any attempt to create local institutions for neighbourhood development cannot count on mass participation, insofar as people prefer to associate with individuals on the basis of choice rather than proximity.

The multi-level system of governance in the EU distances top-level political deliberations from the majority of ordinary citizens. Nevertheless, the free movement of people throughout the EU, combined with the common impact of EU-level policies on citizens of many countries, provides an incentive for Europeans living in different countries to associate across national boundaries on matters of common interest. Such an approach would constitute a proactive commitment to Europe, which goes well beyond a passive identification with Europe as merely an idea. The internet now offers a means of instant and inexpensive transnational communication. Young people's familiarity with this medium means that an increasing majority of future generations will be accustomed to using the internet; at the same time, the fall in relative cost barriers is making internet usage increasingly common in the poorest parts of Europe. In addition, the EQLS shows a widespread readiness to adopt English as the common language of transnational communication (Figure 4). The fact that a large proportion of Europeans capable of communicating in the English language are not UK or Irish citizens is not so much a sign of the dominance of the language as it is evidence of an increasing ability to communicate with foreigners; such an ability is no longer just a proficiency of the elite, as was the case in past centuries when French or Latin was the European *lingua franca* (common language). While a common language is not necessary for distributing printed documents or legal regulations of the EU, the need for a *lingua franca* as a necessary precondition for communication is increasing, particularly in light of EU expansion, which today encompasses more than 20 different national languages in total.

Figure 4 Potential to participate in a European public space, by type of proficiency



Note: 'Doubly qualified' means the respondent knows some English and uses the internet; 'doubly disqualified' means they know no English and do not use the internet.

Source: Rose, 2006

Implications and challenges for EU policy

3

In the context of European integration, enlargement has raised some important questions and challenges. The EQLS findings make a case for the need for critical reflection on EU social policy as it currently exists and on how it might be reformed. The discussion that follows in this chapter is organised along the three main themes of insights, challenges and future options or considerations for EU policy.

Implications for EU policy

The EQLS results have four major implications for EU policy. In particular, the findings can help to gain an insight into what policy contexts are relevant for EU policy.

The first implication is that the results support many aspects of the existing focus and structure of EU policy. For instance, the wisdom of concentrating resources, from 2007 onwards, on the NMS under the reformed Structural Funds programme is generally endorsed by the findings. So too is the opening up of the Structural Funds to expenditure on housing. The results also generally support the aims of the National Reform Programme,¹ particularly its employment targets and the emphasis on high-quality jobs and gender equality. However, the EQLS survey also shows that the NMS, which have the strongest claim for funds on the basis of economic needs, also have the lowest level of widespread participation in the civil society institutions that ought to be involved in a national process of consultation (Rose, 2006, pp. 21, 26).

The second implication looks more critically at policy. Convergence policies – that is, regional policy and policies aimed at economic cohesion and equality between countries and regions – should constitute as much a reference point for the EU as does social policy (employment conditions, health and safety, equal opportunities, protection of migrant workers) in the conventional EU sense. The EQLS results underline the close links between economic and social factors and show how the combined legacies of a communist past and a strong west–east gradient in objective living conditions can lead to a sharp divergence in what might loosely be referred to as ‘national morale’. Regional inequalities, in turn, highlight the need for a significant transfer of resources from the EU15 to the NMS and ACC3 in order to achieve equality (Fahey et al, 2004, p. 80). Of course, there is no one way in which such a transfer of resources can be effected. Up until now, however, the cohesion funds have effected regional redistribution. This would seem to be the future intention, in light of the decision to direct the 2006 cohesion funds towards the NMS. However, some questions remain: for example, are the funds adequate in volume and will the intention to link the distribution of funds to competitiveness and economic development merely intensify existing inequalities, implying a focus on the already prosperous regions and groups? One likely outcome, as Shucksmith et al (2006, p. 71) point out, is the possibility that the more rural, remote and less developed regions will be perceived as having limited growth potential and, therefore, will not receive their share of investment; this is in spite of the fact that, as the EQLS findings indicate, people in these areas tend to experience the highest levels of deprivation and the poorest quality of life.

¹ Every Member State is required to draw up a National Reform Programme (up until 2005 referred to as National Action Plans), which describes how EU Employment Guidelines are to be put into practice at national level.

In any case, there are limitations to the understanding of cohesion as being mainly 'economic' in character, in accordance with the GDP approach and with that of the Structural Funds. The results of the EQLS provide three strong arguments against the reductionist approach of using a country's GDP as a measure of overall living conditions. Firstly, the EQLS findings suggest that while the distribution of income within a country is relevant for individual life satisfaction, so too is the quality of social service and welfare architecture. Therefore, the absolute level of GDP is not the only significant factor, but also how prosperity is distributed. Secondly, the human development index, which takes into account life expectancy and educational attainment, offers a marginally better explanation than GDP of national variations in life satisfaction overall, particularly with regard to the EU15 (Böhnke, 2005, p. 24). Thirdly, a threshold effect can be observed in the relationship between GDP and well-being. In the richest EU countries, higher living standards tend to have a decreasingly positive impact on subjective evaluations once people achieve a certain threshold of living conditions (Fahey et al, 2005, p. 58). This threshold roughly appears to be at a level just above the bottom income quartile in the 12 richest EU Member States. A threshold effect was also found in the relationship between earnings and increased satisfaction with employment. Once a more prosperous standard of living is achieved, more intrinsic aspects of job quality come into play – such as having interesting work and favourable career prospects (Wallace et al, 2006, p. 68). All of these observations point towards a 'GDP plus' approach, which not only gives priority to GDP growth in poorer countries, but which also ensures that cohesion funds are spent in ways that directly benefit the most vulnerable groups within society.

The third major policy implication of the EQLS is the need for greater harmonisation between the goals of national policies and those of EU social policies. People in Europe can be disadvantaged in two ways: if they live in a region or country that is economically underdeveloped in line with EU standards; and/or if they are on the margins of their own society, irrespective of how rich or poor that society might be (Fahey et al, 2005, p. 5). The underlying message for policymakers interested in enhancing and equalising economic resources and material standards of living is two-fold: firstly, policy needs to be active at both national and EU levels; and secondly, the two levels of policies should be complementary, although this does not necessarily imply that they should be the same. In many ways, this relates to the appropriate division of labour between the national and transnational levels – or of 'competences' in EU terms.

The principle of subsidiarity – combined with the limited financial resources available to the EU to allocate to policies requiring substantial funding – place tough constraints on the development of an expansive EU social policy portfolio. However, the emergence of what are referred to as 'soft' methods of governance has allowed the EU to establish a policy foothold in areas which were previously closed to it. Developments in relation to social exclusion, which the Lisbon Agenda in 2000 championed as the flagship of EU social policy, represent a significant step forward and an opportunity for further development. In general, the results of the EQLS support the need for a pan-European strand of social policy. It also endorses specific features of the social inclusion process. For example, the social inclusion process – or the social protection and social inclusion process as it is now known – generally considers social exclusion to be multi-dimensional in nature. Such an outlook is therefore in tune with a quality of life approach. In addition, the 'mobilisation' focus of the social inclusion process recognises people as actors and is therefore concerned with their potential for empowerment. This represents an intelligent policy in a society and age in which people expect to have a say in decisions that affect them and where, as the EQLS shows, their life satisfaction is

affected by this. Nevertheless, the social inclusion process, particularly since it is put into effect at Member State level, remains primarily influenced by national level considerations. Moreover, it depends on national fiscal resources, which tend to be at their lowest where the need is greatest. Such an approach is therefore insufficient as a response to reducing cross-national differences in social exclusion. One recommendation could thus be to strengthen the cross-national level in the social inclusion process. A starting point in facing this challenge in relation to the social inclusion process might be to introduce a set of indicators that measure the risk of poverty relative to the EU25 average, alongside the existing set of indicators, which are based on risk of poverty relative to national standards (Fahey et al, 2005, p. 34).

The EQLS results challenge the traditional and rather strict demarcation of policy domains in the EU policy system, particularly that between social policy and regional or convergence policy. Although the social inclusion process is taking the EU into new territory, the process itself is a manifestation of EU demarcations: labelled as ‘social policy’, the social inclusion process is institutionally and politically separated from the arguably more influential economic and employment policy processes, which have been merged into a single process at EU level, namely under the National Reform Programme. The EQLS results indicate that regional policy is potentially an extremely important arm of anti-poverty policy, even though it is classified as otherwise within the EU system. There is a need, therefore, to increase the harmonisation between social and regional policy at EU level.

Agricultural policy plays a major role in this regard, which raises the issue of the fourth set of policy implications inherent in the EQLS findings. A primary challenge in this context is how to promote stronger rural economies and quality of life in the rural areas of the poorer countries, particularly given that Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) spending is so heavily directed towards agriculture, as distinct from the broader aspects of rural development (Shucksmith et al, 2006, p. 72).² The question remains as to whether it is possible to reduce the disparities within poorer countries and across the EU primarily through agricultural policy measures. Furthermore, there is a territorial dimension to the challenge in so far as current support under the CAP goes predominantly to the richer agricultural regions of the better-off countries of northern and western Europe; ironically, the lowest levels of support are assigned to the very areas identified in this report as having a lower perceived quality of life (Shucksmith, Thomson and Roberts, 2005). The funding under Pillar 2 of the CAP aimed at supporting ‘integrated rural development’, while less concentrated on the core regions of Europe than Pillar 1, has tended to work against cohesion objectives. Effectively, regions with higher GDP per capita have received greater levels of agri-environmental support (*ibid*). How, therefore, might the CAP be used to promote territorial cohesion?

A number of suggestions have been put forward in this respect (Shucksmith et al, 2006, pp. 74–76). First of all, it is recommended that the Pillar 2 budget should be increased progressively, as planned. It would also be of assistance to the poorer rural regions if the Rural Development Regulation (RDR) 2007–2013 contained a broader range of permitted measures under the four proposed axes – building on the lessons of the LEADER project and Objective 5b – by including more measures that address sustainable rural development beyond the agricultural sector and that have a territorial dimension.³

² The CAP was established in the 1960s to secure Europe’s food supply and to stabilise prices to the benefit of both producers and consumers. Pillar 1 of the CAP covers direct aid to farmers and market measures, while Pillar 2 covers rural development measures.

³ LEADER is an EU initiative for rural development, which provides approved local action groups with funding for the development of their own areas.

It is important that the aim of ‘supporting rural community development’ should thus be understood as an approach to working with and building on the capacity of individuals and groups within their communities. Consistency with cohesion objectives could also be improved through allocating the RDR budget to Member States based on the criteria of relative need for rural development and environmental management, as proposed by the EU Commission in 2002. As regards Pillar 1, Shucksmith et al (2006) suggest that the Commission should explore models through which Single Farm Payments might be modulated more progressively in richer regions of the EU. Local development strategies, as proposed by the Commission in axes 3 and 4 of the 2007–2013 RDR, offer a means of integrating the approach to policy delivery and combining various instruments and funding streams for maximum effectiveness. Such strategies should seek horizontally integrated solutions, combining actions in the different areas – namely, economic, social and environmental. Nonetheless, it is also imperative that such strategies achieve vertical integration between local, regional, national and international funding and actors. Finally, larger spending under the CAP on a LEADER-type approach will be necessary if territorial cohesion is to be pursued in rural areas of the poorest countries in Europe.

The results of the EQLS also go beyond the contours of existing EU policy and how it is organised, to raise more profound questions about issues relating to the EU’s interest in social policy, the nature of processes of integration or differentiation in Europe, and what constitutes a good policy from a quality of life perspective.

Policy challenges

Given the differences that the EQLS has identified among social groups and countries in Europe today, the EU and its Member States must turn their attention to questions concerning the existence and meaning of the European social model. Enlargement has presented the EU with its greatest challenge yet in terms of working out a meaningful concept and process of integration in the context of differentiation and inequality. In particular, enlargement has greatly increased the number of people who are restricted by one or another form of social exclusion, whilst adding to the number of Member States that currently lack the financial and administrative resources to contribute to a high quality of life of their citizens.

Against this backdrop, EU commitment to social issues appears to be underdeveloped, whilst its contribution to influencing individual living conditions, quality of life and social cohesion in the context of its macroeconomic market goals has yet to be clearly worked out.

The EU has, over time, applied several frameworks to organise its orientation to social policy. Social cohesion represents one longstanding concept and social exclusion another. For some 20 years, both of these concepts have been referred to in EU discourse, although they have varied in meaning and priority from time to time. The advantages of both concepts are convincing, even if their central set of references is different. As a concept, social cohesion refers to the extent to which societies are integrated and to which people feel a commitment to society as a whole. EU social policy actors often consider cohesion as being threatened by an income much lower than the national average wage, whereas for economic actors cohesion relates to inequalities in GDP per capita among Member States. In contrast, social exclusion focuses on those who are at the margins of society and who are unable to participate in formal and informal social activities with family, friends and neighbours. This concept is rarely used in an EU context by economic policy actors, although it is being promoted

through the Lisbon Agenda social inclusion process and the attempt to introduce links between the social inclusion process and the National Reform Programme. As it has evolved in the EU, social exclusion has come to focus on two main policy impulses: activation of the 'non-active' sectors of society to enable them to participate in employment and to be self-supportive; and measures to combat what are considered as being the worst failures of contemporary societies, such as homelessness and child poverty.

At a time when economic growth is slow within the EU15 and when globalisation processes are driving a search for policies to promote economic performance and international competitiveness, it is all the more important to have a clear vision of social policy objectives. While the EU can be criticised for not being consistent in adhering to policy visions, its leaders have never been reluctant to set out a guiding vision and concepts. At times, social considerations have maintained a central place in the EU vision, as exemplified by the Lisbon Agenda. Both the Lisbon and Nice European Councils went beyond economic concerns regarding marketplace flexibility and competitiveness to set out a vision of a European society in which all the relevant agencies are mobilised, in turn allowing people to access a range of resources, rights, goods and services, including employment, whilst providing assistance to the most vulnerable groups and minimising the risk of social exclusion. Arguably, this vision no longer prevails as, since the Kok report and the reforms of 2005,⁴ the social inclusion process has been altered considerably so that, among other things, its objectives focus more closely on policy inefficiencies and how they lead to social exclusion (Daly, 2006). Nonetheless, the efficacy of setting out a vision of social policy principles is still to be emphasised, something which for many EU Member States would constitute an innovation. The quality-of-life concept and the results of the EQLS suggest the following recommendations as important components of contemporary social policy in Europe.

Focus on subjective dimension of quality of life

One of the most important insights to be obtained from the EQLS is the need for policy that assigns greater priority to subjective aspects of quality of life, along with the objective aspects. While income is a necessary precondition, on its own it is insufficient for individual well-being. There is no direct relationship between people's material resources and how they evaluate their lives. This raises a number of implications: policymakers need to recognise that a whole range of factors affect well-being, that many of these are qualitative, and that subjective factors are central to the context in which policies work. This is not to suggest that policy can or should always intervene to bring about specific outcomes in domains that might be considered as 'private'; rather, policymakers should, at the very least, recognise that the effectiveness of all policies is also conditioned by private factors and that non-material dimensions are as likely to be important as material aspects in this and other respects. Many existing policies already create the conditions for positive social interactions: for example, policies that support non-waged carers of family members; policies that promote a balance between family and work commitments; and anti-discrimination legislation protecting groups from exclusion or harassment (Burchardt, 2006, p. 154). Insofar as total welfare in the family is the sum of activities of the state (healthcare, education), the market (income, food supplies) and the household (informal caring and affection), policymakers need to think in terms of achieving greater harmonisation between what the state can and should do and those features of social life where individuals expect to be free to make their own choices and to determine their own priorities.

⁴ Report on the progress of the Lisbon strategy by a high-level group chaired by Wim Kok, former prime minister of the Netherlands

Paying attention to subjective dimensions of social provision

Systems of social provision have a subjective dimension, reflecting how service providers approach intended recipients and how they are received by them. Sense of stigma is a relevant consideration in this regard. Social provision systems should concern themselves with how people view their situation and receive the services that are being provided for them. Service providers should seek to avoid the risk of a 'negative subjective trajectory': services should be designed to intervene before individuals embark on a life course pattern that is considered negative – for example, long-term unemployment or early departure from the education system. Some life events represent obvious points at which intervention is needed, for example imprisonment, onset of impairment or bereavement (Burchardt, 2006, p. 155). A pathway approach could be appropriate in this context for individuals, groups and localities. Instead of viewing people and places as static entities or in terms of the status quo, they should be seen in dynamic terms – that is, in relation to what they can achieve and how they can be empowered to change their lives or community situation. New programmes may not necessarily be required, but rather more intensive versions of what already exists. In addition, social provision systems should be oriented towards enhancing the confidence of and creating opportunities for people, enabling them to have more positive experiences (*ibid*).

Quality services that are 'close' to people have an important role to play in enhancing confidence and capabilities. The EQLS finds that the quality of services in the EU25 is, on average, rated at a score of six on a 10-point scale, suggesting that there is still considerable room for improvement. The results also indicate that differences exist within every society in the way in which access to key services operates to the advantage of higher income groups, and the way that unemployed people risk being disadvantaged (Fahey et al, 2004, pp. 61–62). Evaluations of other services, especially health, pension and education services, also average around the middle range, with citizens in the EU15 generally rating their public services higher than people living in the NMS and ACC3.

Among the most common problems in the delivery of public policies is their design and culture. Good practice is more likely to exist when the organisational culture is conducive to treating all individuals as rights holders and to subjecting public officials to public accountability. A culture of rights could be thought of as a set of linked principles determining general rules of procedures. Among the principles that deserve consideration as a guiding ethos for public provision are the following:

- a strong orientation towards meeting users' needs, by maintaining a focus on individual concerns;
- services that enable and empower people to meet their needs, while increasing their capabilities and sense of well-being;
- services that create a partnership between providers and users;
- services that are transparent and open in terms of communication and participation by recipients;
- services that treat people equally and with respect.

Recognising interconnectedness across policy domains

One of the strongest findings from the EQLS is how different aspects of public policy touch the lives of individuals. A child receives both education and healthcare from different government agencies, which are, in turn, likely to operate at different levels of local, regional or national government. Parents must not only deal with such agencies, but with a host of other bodies: for example, local government institutions maintaining neighbourhoods to ensure that they are safe from crime and

free of environmental pollution; employment agencies providing job training and job seeking services; or government agencies providing child benefits.

The implication is that social policies, even if they are directed at one domain, also have an impact on other domains. This leads to many positive outcomes, such as the beneficial effects that income maintenance policies can have on well-being, or the positive impact of good housing policies on improving people's health and welfare. However, negative interactions can also emerge: for example, when a sole emphasis on employment for parents lowers the quality of care received by children, or when housing policies lead to the creation of ghettos. The main implication of the interconnectedness that exists across policy domains is the need for a policy response that is coordinated across different domains of social life. Established administrative divisions among various government departments and agencies should not be seen as sacrosanct. Attempts have already been made to treat policy in a more integrated manner: for example, the increasingly popular term 'mainstreaming' recognises that the needs of target groups are best met when they are integrated into all policy domains, rather being confined to a specific policy area.

Recognising importance of transitions

From a social policy perspective, the needs of individuals differ greatly throughout the life cycle. At certain stages – for example in childhood and advanced old age – citizens will be net beneficiaries of public benefits; citizens at other phases of the life course – for instance young adults without children or late middle-aged working couples – are likely to be net contributors in tax terms. Policymakers should interpret this as the need to think in terms of the lifetime distribution of resources and the facilitation of transitions between one life phase and another. Since adults are already aware of the transition from childhood to working age and can anticipate retirement or see its consequences in the way it affects their own parents, this provides a social basis for intergenerational solidarity within society.

An appropriate policy goal is that social provision should not only recognise people's needs as they progress through the lifecycle, but also that people are enabled to make transitions from one life phase to another, for example to adulthood or parenthood. There is also a need for public policies that intervene early on in life, preventing individuals from becoming caught up in a cumulative series of disadvantage. Examples include pre-school education for children and, in particular, 'head start' policies that target children from deprived homes. As previously mentioned, thinking in terms of pathways through the life course means rejecting a view of individuals as having fixed resources and needs. A dynamic view must thus be taken, and those who are at risk of becoming caught up in a cycle of deprivation should be targeted with special policies enabling people to escape potential traps – whether this involves special coaching for educationally disadvantaged school pupils, job training, or post-retirement programmes enabling older people to live independently into advanced old age.

Addressing sources of tension and division

Today's EU encompasses a population that is divided by income, religion, language, ethnicity and race, thus constituting a multi-cultural society in the extreme. However, the extent to which social differences cause tensions within Member States varies significantly. In the NMS and ACC3, people are most conscious of tensions between rich and poor and between management and workers. In part, this tension is a legacy of the way in which the transformation from a Soviet-style non-market

economy led to the rapid enrichment of small numbers of people through ‘nomenklatura’⁵ privatisation and the inability of many governments to reduce corruption within its own divisions. In the EU15, the main source of perceived tension derives from ethnic and racial differences in society. In the latter context, increasing cultural diversity is turning the potential virtues of pluralism into a negative, as can be seen in the Netherlands, France and Britain. Concerns about the consequences of multiculturalism in EU15 countries are not concentrated in the low-skilled sector but are evenly spread across socioeconomic groups. Such concerns are reflected in anxieties about immigration, which have led most EU15 countries to establish barriers to the free movement of workers from NMS countries.

Against this backdrop, it is important to point out that cohesion in an EU context has never implied cultural homogeneity. Rather, a cohesive Europe will be one in which tensions arising from divisions of all kinds are well managed. As Jenson (1998, p. 31) argues: ‘Social cohesion will be at risk only if differences are mobilised, becoming grounds for conflicting claims, and management of these claims is fumbled’. This underlines the need for conflict management. As for cross-national tensions arising from the unwillingness of the majority of EU15 countries to receive workers as immigrants from the NMS and ACC3 countries, experience suggests that the removal of these barriers depends not so much on multicultural education as it does on a lowering of unemployment to levels achieved in countries such as Britain and Ireland, which have been among the countries most open to NMS immigrants.

Good governance promotes life satisfaction

The EQLS highlighted a considerable degree of life satisfaction among EU citizens. However, satisfaction varies among different domains of life and regions. Life satisfaction tends to be highest in those areas most distant from government, such as family life, just as it tends to be lowest in the areas in which government has direct responsibilities, such as with regard to individual standards of living and education.

While many factors affecting people’s life satisfaction reflect personal circumstances, such as health, having friends and being self-confident in social relations, life satisfaction is also influenced by matters that are the direct responsibility of government. People who are satisfied with major public policies, such as those concerning health services, education, social services, the pension system and public transport, are significantly more likely to be satisfied with their lives as a whole. Those living in countries where the government is perceived as being more honest and transparent rather than corrupt are also more likely to be satisfied with their lives (Rose, 2006, p. 68). Integrity in government and social policies that produce widespread satisfaction therefore represent good governance goals that all democratic governments should strive to achieve; citizens of the NMS are particularly likely to perceive the need for much greater efforts to achieve good governance.

Insofar as policies aimed at increasing life satisfaction require more funding, there are constraints in the short term on what poorer national governments can do to boost satisfaction – even with the help of EU Structural Funds. However, that is not to say that a country’s level of GDP excuses bad governance. Moreover, many economists argue that corruption in government is an obstacle to

⁵ The system of patronage to senior positions under the bureaucracy of the Soviet Union and other communist states, controlled by committees at various levels of the Communist Party.

economic growth. Thus, the adoption of effective anti-corruption measures could contribute to material well-being, greater satisfaction with public policy among citizens, and a higher level of subjective life satisfaction. It is for this reason that the need for good governance as part of a 'GDP plus' approach is highlighted in this report.

Future policy considerations

Since its inception, diversity in material living standards and subjective perceptions of the quality of life has always been a reality in the EU. Such diversity is evident, for example, between the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) and Italy, or between the Scandinavian and Mediterranean Member States. Prior to the recent rounds of enlargement, new EU Member States tended to counterbalance each other: some countries were well above the European average in terms of quality of life, while others joined in the hope that it would raise their quality of life, which in general proved to be the case. The enlargement of the EU to 25 Member States in 2004 has reduced the extent of social cohesion within the EU, not just because the new Member States tend to have a quality of life below the average of the EU15, but also due to the scale of the enlargement. The 2004 enlargement has thus greatly increased the demands on the limited funds that the EU redistributes to promote social cohesion.

Bulgaria and Romania's entry to the EU in 2007 and the opening of membership discussions with Turkey present further challenges to social cohesion. Instead of trying to achieve cohesion among three categories of countries – high, intermediate and low-income countries – EU policymakers must add a fourth category – that of the lowest income states – as the average income in Bulgaria and Romania and the candidate country Turkey is lower than that of the new Member States.

The EQLS uncovers similarities between Bulgaria and Turkey, which are at or near the bottom of the survey's objective and subjective indicators, as is Romania in many cases. For example, whether the indicator of policy satisfaction focuses on health services, education, social services, pensions, or public transport, respondents in Bulgaria and Turkey are, on average, less satisfied than citizens in 24 of the 25 EU Member States. Only Slovakia shows a similarly low level of policy satisfaction. Bulgaria stands out as having the worst economic growth rate. Like most of the new Member States, reported GDP shrank in Bulgaria during the country's transition from a non-market command economy to a market economy. However, Bulgaria differs in the sense that its national economy is recovering at a much slower pace than countries in the NMS (EBRD, 2005). The EQLS reflects this finding, revealing that Bulgarians' quality of life rating is the lowest in the EU.

The claim of Bulgaria and Romania for EU assistance appears greater than that of the 10 NMS countries. Moreover, the scale of population of the lowest income countries also differs: the addition of 30 million Bulgarians and Romanians to the 60 million people in the existing six low-income countries increases by half the population with the greatest need for EU cohesion funds. If Turkey, with more than 70 million people, is added to this group, this would raise the population of the low and lowest income countries in Europe to 160 million people. This raises questions about the sustainability of EU funds, given that the increase in the number of Europeans with a claim on cohesion funds is not matched by an increase in the population of high-income countries which could finance cohesion funding.

Nevertheless, care should be taken when grouping countries together, given that there are substantial and in some cases surprising differences between the three countries. For example, Turkey is a much more urban society than the average high-income EU country, while Romania is among the most rural of the countries surveyed in the EQLS (Shucksmith et al, 2006, p. 34). In terms of overall life satisfaction, while Bulgaria has the lowest satisfaction levels of all the countries surveyed, life satisfaction in Romania is closer to the EU average than it is to that of Turkey or Bulgaria (Rose, 2006, p. 67). In Romania, quality of life is low compared with that of the high-income Member States, but not so different to that of the NMS. Similarly, in relation to many indicators of subjective well-being, Romanians tend to be within the range of variation found among the NMS. In years of crisis, the Romanian economy did not shrink as much as Bulgaria's economy or as abruptly as the Turkish economy. Moreover, Romania's economic recovery has been cumulatively greater than that of Latvia and Lithuania. In addition, the EQLS finds that the proportion of respondents in Turkey and Romania who are optimistic about the future is above the EU average; only in Bulgaria are the majority of respondents pessimistic. The challenge to EU applicant countries is, building on their stock of positive resources, to seize the opportunity offered by the prospect of membership to make positive progress.

Most Europeans participate in holding their government accountable at national elections, and citizens tend to be satisfied with the performance of their national government across a range of policies. However, significant differences emerge across Europe in the types of policies with which citizens express satisfaction: for example, between the collective redistributionist policies of Scandinavian countries and the more market-oriented, neoliberal approach of countries such as the UK. The Copenhagen criteria used to assess applicant countries require that all Member States share a commitment to elections. The EQLS has found that political participation – in elections, attending meetings and contacting public officials – is higher than the EU average in Romania and Turkey, and higher in Bulgaria than in France or Britain (Rose, 2006, p. 26). Similarly, respondents in the ACC3 appear to have more frequent contact with family and neighbours than citizens in the high-income EU countries (Böhnke, 2005, p. 49). However, the conditions imposed by the EU when it agreed to admit Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 imply that there are concerns about their ability to meet another requirement of the Copenhagen criteria for admission – namely, respect for the rule of law. Membership was granted on the condition that the two countries were expected to make rapid progress toward benchmarks regarding the rule of law, corruption and judicial independence. Failure to do so would result in a reduction of the country's rights to participate in EU policymaking with respect to justice and home affairs.

Turkey raises a particular challenge due to its unique characteristics in an EU context. Even though the state is constitutionally secular, its society is Muslim. This is reflected not only in nominal religious identification, but also in the fact that a much higher proportion of the population engage in prayer or other religious observances. Although Muslim practices are not intended as a challenge to a secular constitution, a second distinctive feature is that Muslim norms influence many aspects of social behaviour, including those deemed integral to European quality of life criteria. For example, Turkish women are far less likely to participate in paid work than women in any EU society (Rose and Ozcan, forthcoming). Moreover, the Turkish economy is erratic: an annual rate of economic growth of more than 8% can abruptly be followed by a contraction of the economy of up to 9%. Thus, any reference to economic growth in Turkey is very sensitive to the years chosen for analysis; the EQLS survey in 2003 was taken when the economy was booming following a slump of 9.5% in 2001.

Large and erratic shifts in the economy are disturbing to quality of life. Moreover, the rapid and large increase in the Turkish population, which rose by more than 10 million people between 1994 and 2004, has led to a substantial difference between the average annual growth rate in aggregate GDP (4.0%) and the per capita growth in GDP (2.2%).

A further set of challenges concerns matters of governance. Throughout Europe, people's quality of life is affected by actions taken at three or more levels of governance – local, national and European. The underlying logic of EU policies is to shift responsibility up to the level of the European Parliament, Commission and Council of Ministers. Doing so is particularly important for measures addressing inequalities between the EU15, the NMS and ACC3. However, the EU level of governance is the most distant from ordinary people and most Europeans do not participate actively in the formulation of policies at European level. Nonetheless, the EQLS shows that there is the potential to create a European public space through internet dialogue. However, the spread of the internet is primarily driven by entertainment, work or study rather than political participation.

While every household combines the multiple benefits derived from social policies, the responsibility for delivering these policies is dispersed among many different public agencies at local, regional and national levels. Each agency has a functionally specific responsibility for a limited range of programmes dealing with health or education or social security benefits. New public management reforms have further dispersed responsibility to semi-independent agencies headed by appointed boards that are not directly elected, as well as to non-profit institutions and to profit-making organisations tendering for contracts. EU countries differ in how responsibilities are divided – or as some critics would say, 'fragmented' – among different levels and types of institutions. Given the scale and variety of social policies today, the functional division of responsibilities in relation to policies affecting a single household is inevitable. 'Joined up government' is a rhetorical goal rather than an administrative reality.

Even though many social services must be delivered locally, assigning greater discretion to local areas suffering from multiple deprivation will not necessarily improve the situation, as long as these areas lack the financial and administrative resources. Thus, areas of need require the transfer of substantial funds from central government in order to increase expenditure, whether additional funding comes from national taxation or EU funds. However, increased central government funding is likely to be accompanied by higher levels of centralised monitoring and controls. One way in which national governments have dealt with this problem is to direct policies at individuals and households. For example, income-maintenance programmes provide the same level of monetary benefits to individuals, whether they are poor residents of prosperous cities or of a remote village.

The preceding analysis has identified major arguments in favour of redistributive social policies aimed at reducing inequalities and promoting social cohesion among the current 27 EU Member States. However, transnational redistribution requires some countries to pay the costs of benefits provided in other countries, and the amount of money that the EU has to spend on transfers across countries is much less than that which would be required to deal promptly with problems at hand. Moreover, in some of the less affluent countries, a communist past has left a legacy of an inefficient government, which results in waste or, even worse, in inadequate delivery of social policies. The EU has recognised this in the conditions it has attached with regard to the admission of Bulgaria and Romania.

The EU's priority in relation to promoting economic growth as well as social policy points to another method of funding social policies, which is intended to promote greater cohesion between low-income and high-income countries in Europe; namely, by increasing public revenue through the fiscal dividend of growth. Over a period of time, higher growth rates give national governments the opportunity to increase expenditure on social policies aimed at reducing social exclusion and inequalities, without imposing higher taxes; conversely, lower growth rates present national governments with a choice between raising taxes, resorting to potentially inflationary borrowing, cutting expenditure on some programmes to finance others, or simply maintaining the status quo.

The legacy of a non-market communist economy has left new Member States relatively poor, and in the early 1990s imposed major economic costs in transforming economies into functioning market economies – one of the conditions stipulated in the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership. Once these costs were met, making EU membership a possibility, each country saw a substantial growth in its economy (Rose, 1994; EBRD, 2005; UNICEF, 2005). This encouraged domestic initiatives that promoted growth, albeit sometimes through means that also promoted inflation, which is inconsistent with membership of the Eurozone. As the date of entry to the EU approached – from the five-year period beginning in 2000 – the annual economic growth rate of the eight eastern European NMS countries averaged at 3.6%. In the same period, economic growth in Bulgaria and Romania averaged at 4.9% and at 4.1% in Turkey. In contrast, the average rate of economic growth of the 12 high-income countries stood at 2.5%. If the additional monies generated are spent effectively, high rates of economic growth can give national governments in the low and lowest-income EU countries an opportunity to increase social cohesion at national level and to thus contribute to social cohesion at European level.

Given its historic focus on promoting economic growth, the EU can make a major contribution to social policy by promoting policies aimed at increasing economic growth across Europe. Since the 12 richest EU countries are more populous and have more financial resources than the poorest countries, should economic growth in the long-established EU Member States rise, it would provide national governments with the funds to promote social policies in accordance with their own national priorities and it could also provide the EU with a fiscal dividend to spend on transnational measures aimed at increasing social cohesion across the whole of Europe.

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Annex:

Analytical reports based on the EQLS findings

- Böhnke, P., *First European Quality of Life Survey: Life satisfaction, happiness and sense of belonging*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, 2005.
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This report summarises the main conclusions of the survey analysis and goes on to consider the implications of the findings for policymakers. It looks at their relevance for current policy and possible directions for future policy. It also highlights the interplay between social and economic policy, suggesting that policies aimed at increasing economic growth across Europe can in fact make a significant contribution to social policy. At the same, the report underlines some potential challenges, in particular those raised by the enlargement of the EU and the growing levels of diversity in society.

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