Executive summary

analysis also shows that there are differences in the evaluation of society within countries associated with differences in income, age and gender.

Policy context

The aim of advancing the quality of society in Europe today creates fresh challenges in an EU that brings together 27 different countries. It means promoting social cohesion in societies that are becoming more diverse internally, as increasing numbers of people take advantage of the entitlement to travel and work across the Union. In addition, the economic crisis leads to demands to prevent European societies from being divided between those who have not been immediately affected by the downturn and others who have. The EU’s success in responding to these challenges is essential, insofar as European integration depends for its legitimacy on effectively promoting the quality of European society for all Europe’s citizens. But it is not only the EU and its institutions that are challenged by these developments. All those providing services that contribute to the quality of society – national, regional and local governments, as well as social partners and civil society institutions – must address the evaluations made by citizens and hence improve policies and action.

Key findings

- The Public Services Index covers education, healthcare, public transport, childcare, care for the elderly and the pension systems. The majority of European citizens assess these services positively. Evaluations regarding public services are, however, relatively higher among Europeans who have an adequate income and lower in countries where government corruption is regarded as being at a high level.

- The Neighbourhood Services Index deals with air and noise pollution, waste collection, water quality, green spaces and crime. Overall, the
Given that low income is consistently a cause of individuals having an unfavourable assessment of their society, boosting the income of the poorest people should have an impact on how they assess public services and access to healthcare, but also on levels of trust and feelings of economic tension.

Training public officials to show more positive engagement with problems that low-income members of society have in dealing with public bureaucracies could improve their access and therefore their evaluation of the quality of public services.

Increasing trust in public institutions requires reducing perceived corruption – a problem among some EU15 countries as well as the NMS12. Governments must strengthen anti-corruption policies and their enforcement in order to make procedures more transparent.

Where neighbourhoods have sub-standard services, service providers should give priority to preventing further deterioration and to raising standards to the norm for the city or region as a whole.

It is important for governments to deal with racial, ethnic and religious tensions by introducing policies that encourage migrants to develop a good understanding of national norms where they live. At the same time, governments should encourage all citizens to appreciate the positive features of economic and cultural integration.

With an overall score of ‘6’ on a 10-point index scale, the average European tends to rate the quality of public services positively, while indicating that more could be done to improve the quality of society. Combined with the scepticism expressed vis-à-vis political institutions, this result gives a clear message to policy makers to let words be followed by action.

Further information
The EQLS report Evaluating the quality of society and public services is available online at: http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef09110.htm.
The EQLS overview report and further secondary analyses of survey data are available on the Eurofound website at: http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/qualityoflife/eqls/.
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