



Quality of life in Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey

Executive summary

Introduction

This report presents comprehensive analysis and policy-relevant findings on the quality of life in three EU candidate countries: Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey (the CC3).

Findings are based on Eurofound's second European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS 2007). Quality of life is analysed in different social domains, based on objective as well as subjective indicators. The report addresses the perceived economic situation of households, family life, housing and local environment, health and access to health services, perceived quality of society, and subjective well-being, as well as interrelations between these factors. In investigating these domains in greater detail and comparing social groups within and between the countries, the report provides essential information both for understanding country backgrounds and for future policy planning.

Policy context

The candidate countries have different profiles and development trajectories, but are engaged in their pre-accession reforms, by which they contribute to creating the area of common policy concerns and common rules shared with EU Member States.

The Europe 2020 strategy identifies priorities for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It also offers a framework for candidate countries to anchor their own reform efforts. Research into quality of life issues can help in assessing progress towards these goals. Some of the ambitious targets for inclusion in the labour force, raising populations out of poverty and extending education can be challenging for these countries to meet. This report gives some pointers as to where these efforts should be targeted.

Differences between older and newer Member States and the candidate countries in terms of quality of life and social welfare infrastructure present a challenge for understanding country backgrounds, for addressing the situation of disadvantaged groups in societies, and for finding efficient means for improving cohesion in Europe. In this respect, the report provides input for thinking about the system of monitoring and collecting indicators across countries.

Key findings

Overall life satisfaction in the countries examined is notably lower than in the 27 EU Member States (EU27), and this is largely related to poverty. Those with a low education, not in the labour market and living in rural areas suffer from inadequate income and material deprivation. Multiple dimensions of social exclusion are related to inadequate income, poor working conditions and job insecurity, lack of care services and poor health.

The extent of the informal economy, which differs by country, has implications for quality of life because those not in formal employment report more disadvantages than people with jobs – in terms of health, well-being, material deprivation and housing quality.

Despite the high rate of home ownership in the countries, housing costs are a heavy burden particularly for people in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey. The physical housing stock is often inadequate as owners cannot afford to maintain or improve it. People living in urban areas are also more concerned about problems with the local environment.

Families are highly important in candidate countries both for subjective well-being and as a source of support. This is partially related to traditional

household structures, even though they are changing, most noticeably in Croatia. Still, men are less involved in household tasks than women and less involved than men in the EU27.

Gender inequality is noticeable, with women reporting more disadvantages than men. Women's labour force participation is generally low and jobs (of men and women) are characterised by long hours and poor work–life balance. About 45% of women in all three countries (compared with 35% in the EU27) reported daily involvement with caring for and educating children. Looking only at women with children, the share of those who are involved daily is again higher in the CC3 – 53% in Croatia and in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and 59% in Turkey (45% in the EU27).

Informal social support is very important for general life satisfaction in each country, suggesting that it may function as a substitute for welfare institutions found elsewhere in Europe.

Candidate countries have uneven rates of approval for public services and trust in institutions. Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are characterised by distrust in institutions and might need to address transparency issues, while people in Turkey show more trust in the main political and social institutions than the EU27 average.

Policy pointers

- Since low labour market participation is a major issue, policies for raising employment are important for targeting not only the officially registered unemployed but also young people who have not entered the workforce and women.
- Ensuring the inclusion of women through access to education, training and employment is an issue in all three countries for tackling family poverty and social development. To improve work–life balance, there may also be a need for good territorial coverage, quality and affordability of care services for children and elderly people.
- Bringing more work out of the informal and into the formal sector would enable better social security coverage and would generate government revenues. Addressing the problems of those on short-term contracts or with no contract and no social security contributions should be a priority, especially in Turkey.
- Social inclusion policies should target vulnerable groups affected by poverty and deprivation. Efforts should be directed to older people in general and to young people in Turkey, to rural areas, to those with a low level of education and also to women. Social inclusion of the elderly could be improved by increasing coverage of the public pension systems and ensuring adequate pension income.
- In line with EU policy, further investments in education and lifelong learning are needed to increase labour market inclusion and pull people out of poverty. National developments show a demand for higher education, especially in Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. However, the rapid expansion of higher education, as in the latter country, has brought its own regulation problems that need to be addressed.
- Housing policies should focus on affordability of adequate quality housing for lower income groups. A range of measures would be needed to help upgrade poor standard accommodation. Policies should further help overcome spatial mismatch and inadequate housing stocks.
- Regarding the high environmental impact on health, policies to improve the environmental quality of neighbourhoods should be strengthened, especially in urban areas.
- Reforming spending in health services through investing in health-related prevention programmes and reducing regional disparities in service provision is highly important. The focus should be on improving the health situation of older people, especially in Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the situation of women having bad health and suffering from chronic illness in Turkey. Proposals for improving mental well-being for people with chronic illness or disability are needed in all three countries.
- Welfare provision and public services should be developed to compensate for the support that may no longer be available via the family. Promotion of social and political participation, including EU support for civil society organisations, can help in creating new mechanisms of societal cohesion.

Further information

The EQLS report, *Quality of life in Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey*, is available online at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1136.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/>

Tadas Leončikas, Research Manager
tte@eurofound.europa.eu