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Families with children are happier and satisfied, but for large families life is harder

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and living conditions. On the other hand, social progress has been recognized to be tightly connected with the wellbeing of citizens, something that has to do with economy but also with environment, health, safety, education....

Since 2009, under the recommendations made by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, the OECD has been working on a Framework for Measuring Well-Being and Progress, which is built on three main domain: material conditions, quality of life and sustainability- In the meanwhile several bodies have been studying the quality of life of the different Countries in the world and health and wellbeing has become one of the 17 sustainability development goals in the 2030 Agenda. The dimension of the wellbeing of people has become crucial in providing better and more effective public policies, starting from the family environment which is - as the hu-

It is widely recognized that macro economics statistics such as GDP are not enough to draw a complete picture of a country's real economy

man rights declaration states- the fundamental cell of society. To investigate and to promote the wellbeing of families then means to promote each individual wellbeing in its wider context, taking care of larger spectrum of aspects, such as the relational, social and cultural dimensions.

In December 2019, Eurofound published the research "Household composition and wellbeing"

The study by Eszter Sandor and Eleonora Clerici analyses different households in Europe -nuclear families with children, couples without children, same sex couples, single parents with children and singles- in order to investigate their life conditions according their family form and call for targeted policies to improve the quality of lives of each group.

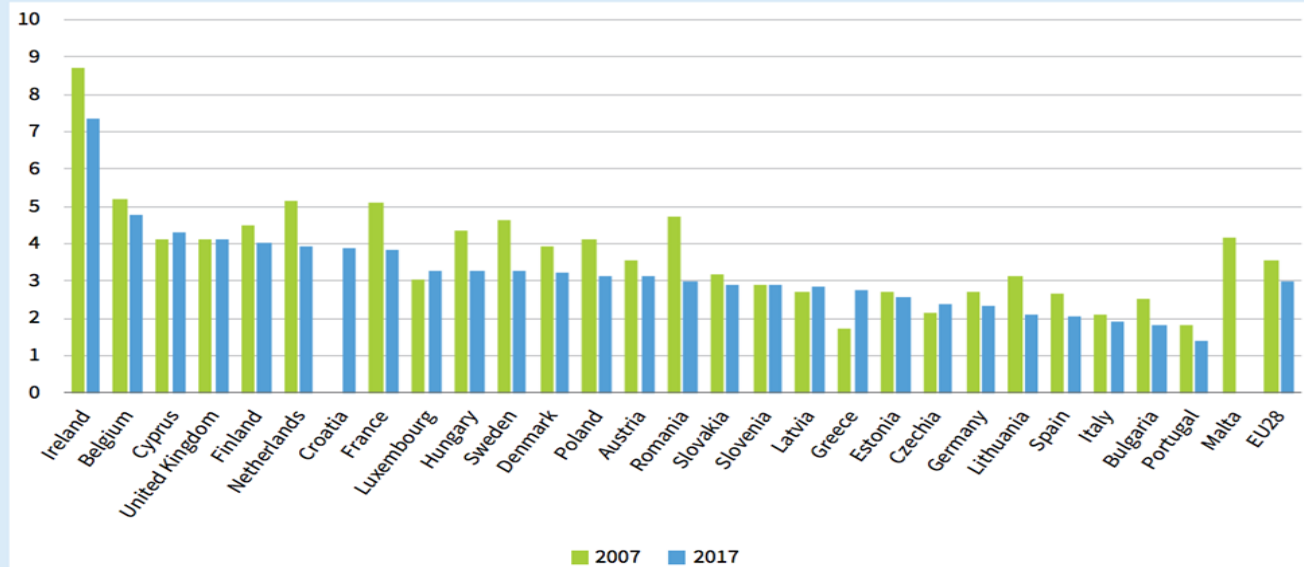
Social exclusions, life satisfaction, happiness, housing satisfaction, job satisfaction, economy conditions where among the topics investigated. "Demographic and socioeconomic changes have shifted household structures in Europe" -is

Table 9: Well-being of parents in nuclear families in comparison with other households, EU28, 2016

	Single	Couple only	Lone parent	Nuclear family with minor children
Life satisfaction	6.7	7.3	6.8	7.4
Happiness	6.7	7.6	7.0	7.8
Satisfaction with family life	6.9	8.4	7.6	8.6
WHO-5 mental well-being index	61	65	59	65
Optimistic about own future	54%	64%	64%	72%
Optimistic about children's or grandchildren's future	56%	50%	57%	63%
Satisfaction with job	7.3	7.5	7.3	7.5
Satisfaction with accommodation	7.6	8.0	7.1	7.7
Satisfaction with standard of living	6.7	7.3	6.4	7.3
Social exclusion index	2.2	2.0	2.4	2.1
Difficulty making ends meet	17%	10%	28%	13%
Lowest quartile	28%	16%	47%	24%
2nd quartile	26%	23%	29%	24%
3rd quartile	24%	26%	13%	29%
Highest quartile	22%	34%	11%	22%

Note: Green shading indicates more favourable outcomes; red shading, less favourable.
Source: EQLS 2016

Figure 20: Households with three or more children as a proportion of all households, 2007 and 2017 (%)



Note: Data were not available for Croatia for 2007.
Source: EU-SILC 2017

written in the introduction- *“The number of single-person households has increased; the number of households with children has decreased; household types have diversified with alternative family forms; and the economic crisis has meant an increase in multigenerational households and young adults living at home. This report illustrates the diversity of household types in the EU, how they have changed over 10 years and how household structure relates to subjective well-being and social exclusion.” **

Large families tend to be less optimistic about the future

One first interesting result of the study shows that nuclear families with children under 18 reports best happiness and life satisfaction rate among households.

Large families are a specific group with own characteristics and dynamics

The second relevant result of the study is the fact that for the second time** in Europe, and for the first time for Eurofound, large families are regarded with a special attention and their specificity, and otherness respect nuclear families with one or two children is taken

in account. Only a box at page 37-38 of the 170 document is devoted to large families, but it is a promising beginning.

What we learn from the study is that although life satisfac-

tion, satisfaction with standard of living and with accommodation are almost like those of smaller families, large families tend to be less optimistic about the future (67% of large families vs. 73% smaller families). Probably because of the economic conditions, which are definitely heavier for bigger families: 20% of large families vs. 12% of families with one or two children meet difficulty making ends meet.

After the "Family and Societies" research (2013-2017, www.familiesandsocieties.eu), where a specific survey was made to investigate large families, as a specific group with own characteristics and dynamics, Eurofound study provides an interesting insight of life condition of a household where 1/3 of children under 18 live in Europe.

Still, according the EU SILC data for 2017, only 3% of households have three or more children under the age of 18 family, 1% less than in 2007. Ireland is the country with most large families (7%) followed by Belgium (5%). The number of large families is shrinking in whole Europe but in Greece, where a slight recovery in the number, and particularly in Ireland, Romania and in Sweden. who live alone (34%), unless they have children: for the 42% the latters, reconciliation of work and family life is a real issue.

As previously said, nuclear families (which means with father and mother, wed or just living together) with minor-aged children turn out to be the group where it is better to live. Life satisfaction, happiness, optimism about the future of their own and of children, are better in nuclear families with small children. They devote a lot of his time to their children, but have fun with the Internet more than singles and couples without children, they practice sports and volunteer in a very similar way to the other groups under con-

Table 12: Well-being of parents in nuclear family households by number of children, EU28, 2016

	Small nuclear family (1-2 children)	Large nuclear family (3+ children)
Life satisfaction	7.4	7.3
Optimistic about own future	73%	67%
Social exclusion index	2.0	2.2
Lowest income quartile	20%	44%
Difficulty making ends meet	12%	20%
Satisfaction with standard of living	7.3	7.1
Satisfaction with accommodation	7.7	7.5
Deprivation: number of items not afforded	0.8	1.4

Life satisfaction, happiness, optimism about the future of their own and of children, are better in nuclear families with small children.

sideration, even more than singles. 35% of families with small children complain about problems with reconciliation of work and family life, but this extent is very similar to those who live alone (34%), unless they have children: for the 42% the latters, reconciliation of work and family life is a real issue.

Life satisfaction, which for singles is 6.7 and for a single parent is 6.8 rises to 7.3 for the childless couple but gets to 7.4 for couples with small children, who are happier (7.8) than those without children (7.6), single parents (7), and those who live alone (6,7). Living in a couple relation is good (65) for the mental well-being index, both with or without children, but drops to 61 for singles without or with children (59).

75% of couples with children are satisfied with their job, such as childless couples but more than singles and single parents (73%); 72% nuclear families with children are also more optimistic about the future compared to 64% of childless couples and single parents, but above all, more optimistic than singles (54%). They are also more optimistic about the future of their children (63%), compared to 57% of single parents and those who have no children: only 56% of singles and 50% of couples without children are optimistic about the future of the new generations.

But the social exclusion index is 2.1, just a little bit higher than the 2.0 for couples without children but better than the index of singles (2.2) and single parents (2.4).

Only 22% of couples with children belong to the wealthiest quartile, compared to 34% of childless couples and 22% of singles (and only 11% of single parents) but only 24% of families with children belong to lowest quartile, compared

to the 47% of single parents and 28% of singles (and only 16% of childless couples). Only 13% of couples with children struggle to make both ends meet at the end of the month, compared with 28% of single parents and 17% of singles.

According to Eurofound data, a nuclear family with minor children could be considered the "winning" household model when compared to other households. But when it comes to families with three or more children, the situation appears less rosy: life satisfaction is always high (7.3) slightly lower than that of couples with 1 or 2 children but still higher than for singles and single parents.

Problems for a family with children, if anything, start when it comes to economic conditions

Compared to the 73% of small nuclear families, however, 67% of large family parents say they are optimistic about the future. The reason of this important difference can probably be found in the (worse) economic conditions in which they are: 44% of large families belong to the lowest quartile compared to 20% of families with 1 or 2 children, confirming that the risk of poverty increases with the number of children, with 20% of large families who admit having a hard time getting to the end of the month, more than those who live alone (17%, but still less than single parents, 28%) and affording some assets (1.4), almost twice as many as smaller families (0.8).

Work-life balance problems are also increased compared to couples with one or two children, reported by 42% of large families compared to 34%, while the social exclusion index is equal to that of singles (2.2), lower than that of the single parents (2.4) but better than smaller families and childless

	Small nuclear family (1-2 children)	Large nuclear family (3+ children)
Economised on fruit and vegetables in past year	5%	8%
Economised on meat in past year	17%	24%
Formal childcare used for youngest child	22%	19%
Childminding by child's grandparent(s)	37%	21%
Childminding by other household members or relatives	20%	34%
Work-life balance problems	34%	42%

Note: All differences between types of households in this table are statistically significant.
Source: EQLS 2016

related”***, what is completely missing, are the final recommendations addressed to policy makers. There are no suggestions about helping large families reach the living standards of their fellow smaller families and fill the income gap that is related to the number of children, even if, in times of low birth rates, ageing and depopulation, supporting those families

couples. Fathers (43% to 32%) more than mothers (40% vs. 36%), probably because of the stronger involvement of large families’ fathers in the domestic care and the fact that being a mother in a working place is difficult whatever the number of children.

who decide to have more than the “usual” number of children might sound quite reasonable and fair.

While the study confirms that *“the greatest differences in well-being between large and smaller families are income-*

It should be a matter of equal opportunity to compensate those who decide to do so, thus fighting child poverty and helping society to maintain its demographic, social and economic balance. The road to recognize large families’ necessities is still long.

Notes: *the first was the survey in cooperation with ELFAC “Family and Societies”, 2013-2017 **Page 1, “Household composition and well-being”, by Eszter Sandor and Eleonora Clerici, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019 *** Page 38, ibidem

Wellbeing of families and family friendly municipalities



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“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services (...)”. The wellbeing of human beings and families is a personal right, as stated in art. 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It has to do with people’s quality of life, with material as well as spiritual conditions such as meaningfulness, sense of belonging, love. It has to do with Nature and relationships. It is the sum of a wide com-

plexity of factors that goes beyond income, housing or health, a multilevel objective that can be reached only through a multifunctional holistic approach.

At present, 72% of the population of Europe lives in urban areas and the number is going to increase. Urban setting has become more and more central in people’s lives while the wellbeing of families has become a specific goal to be achieved (SDG n.3) in the Sustainable development goal’s 2030 Agenda. From global to local, local policies have been recognized as those more effective and closer to the citizens’ needs and expectations. For a municipality, focusing on families’ well being means to prevent stress and dysfunctions as well as attract and keep families in territories, help maintain the sustainability of the service system, provides quality labour forces, enhance social cohesion and intergenerational relations, reducing loneliness. It also prevents ageing and depopulation.

In 2011, the Autonomous Province of Trento (Italy), with a Provincial Law, set a certification process that qualifies a territory as family-friendly through quality standards. In 2016, it funded with the Italian large families association the Italian Network of family friendly municipalities. In 2018, ELFAC and the Province of Trento agreed to fund the European Network of Family friendly municipalities which now gathers municipalities from Portugal, Italy, Hungary, Latvia, Poland and Croatia. - **More information on www.elfac.org/the-network**