The European Union embraced 10 new Member States on 1 May 2004. A Europe of 25 becomes a more complex, heterogeneous body, reflecting different cultures, political traditions and living conditions. Much research by the Foundation in the run-up to enlargement has focused on documenting and better understanding the situation in the new European Union. One of the most important such initiatives was the first-ever European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) carried out by the Foundation in 28 countries in 2003. This unique monitoring tool, which examined issues such as education, household and family structures, housing, health care and employment provides a wide-ranging, up-to-date snapshot of quality of life and living conditions in the enlarged Europe.

In early 2004, the Foundation published an analysis of quality of life issues, using data from the Commission’s Eurobarometer surveys in the EU and in the acceding and candidate countries. The results of the EQLS confirm some of the earlier findings of the Eurobarometer surveys, particularly in the area of health and life satisfaction, but other important domains such as housing and education and work-life relationships are covered for the first time by the EQLS.

**What are the EQLS findings?**

The basic findings confirm the widespread perception of important economic and social divides between the former 15 EU Member States (EU15) and the acceding and candidate countries (notwithstanding certain overlaps). The differences between the 10 new Member States (NMS) and the three candidate countries (CC3) in areas such as housing and education are also underlined.

- Living standards are markedly lower in the NMS than in the former EU15.
- NMS and CC3 citizens are generally less satisfied with their quality of life than those in the EU15.
- Housing conditions are worse in the NMS and the CC3 than in the EU15.
- Workers in the NMS and CC3 report worse working conditions.
- Citizens of these countries report poorer health and less satisfaction with health services.
However, the results also provide an insight into areas which are often overlooked – areas where the new Member States may boast an advantage or where there is a common pattern across the enlarged Europe.

> Two thirds of citizens across the 28 countries are optimistic about the future.
> Families and friends provide the main social support for the vast majority of citizens in all of the countries.
> Home ownership is more common in the NMS (71%) and CC3 (67%) than in the EU15 (60%).
> Rates of completion of secondary education are higher in the NMS than in the EU15.
> Rates of completion of third-level education are similar across the EU25.
> Rates of participation in job-related training courses are similar in the EU15 and NMS.

![Percentage of households having difficulty making ends meet across countries](chart)

**Lower living standards in NMS/CC3**

> GDP per capita of the EU15 is on average up to three times higher than that of the NMS and more than four times higher than all three candidate countries.
> Nearly every second household in the CC3 and over one in five in the NMS report difficulties in making ends meet, compared to only one in 10 in the EU15.
> Based on an index of household items necessary for minimally acceptable standards of living, the NMS and the CC3 report higher levels of deprivation.
> The household income in eight of the NMS/CC3 is lower than in Portugal (least well off EU15 country).
> Deprivation levels are highest among the oldest age group in all NMS/CC3, except the Czech Republic; the young are, in general, the least deprived.
> More than 40% of NMS households grow crops or keep livestock to help meet their need for food compared to just 8% in the EU15.

**Differences between EU15 and NMS not clear-cut**

> Countries with the lowest GDP per capita in the EU15 have nearly the same level as NMS with the highest GDP per capita.
> Portugal has a deprivation level three times higher than the EU average, higher than Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Malta and Slovenia.
> Women and the youngest and oldest age groups are most disadvantaged in terms of income.
> Income inequalities are substantially higher in the EU15.

*Note:* The source for all figures and tables in this leaflet is the European Quality of Life Survey 2003.
Life satisfaction varies but Europeans are generally optimistic about the future

EU15 citizens have higher life satisfaction levels than reported in the NMS and CC3 with the exceptions of Portugal on one hand and Cyprus and Malta on the other. Unemployment diminishes life satisfaction very strongly throughout the EU25. Similarly, those in the lowest income group are considerably less satisfied with their life while those in the highest income group are most satisfied. Education and health are also strongly associated with satisfaction levels.

**Highlights**

- In the majority of EU15 countries, the least satisfied groups are more satisfied than the most satisfied groups in the NMS and CC3.
- A north-south division within the EU15 remains, with people in the Nordic countries reporting the highest levels of satisfaction.
- Average household income in the NMS and CC3 is less than half that of the average EU15 household.
- On average, 64% of Europeans are optimistic about the future, although there are big gaps between countries and a tendency for people from urban areas to be more optimistic.

More owner occupiers in NMS/CC3 but housing standards far below EU15

House ownership is more prevalent in the new Member States and the candidate countries with the majority of houses owned outright. In the EU15, more than one third of all owned houses are still subject to a mortgage. Housing and environmental conditions, however, are generally better in the EU15. Despite the EU15/NMS division, there are also clear overlaps. Portugal, for example, exceeds Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia in problems related to the condition of housing. Similarly, people in France and Italy complain more frequently about environmental problems than those in the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia or Slovenia. Greeks feel they are less safe in their surroundings than citizens of Cyprus and Slovenia.

**Highlights**

- Housing conditions are less good in rural areas: 45% of rural Lithuanians lack an indoor toilet; in Bulgaria and Romania this figure is more than 50%.
- The share of dwellings rented from public authorities in the EU25 is 15% whereas such accommodation is not common in the three candidate countries.
- In Austria, Denmark and Sweden, just one in ten citizens feel unsafe in their neighbourhood; in Latvia and Lithuania the figure is one in two.
- One in five households in the NMS and one in three in the CC3 have to contend with problems such as rot in windows, damp and leaks, or have no indoor toilet, compared with less than 10% in the EU15.

Q. 31: All things considered, how satisfied would you say you are with your life these days? Mean life satisfaction is reported on a scale from 1 ‘very dissatisfied’ to 10 ‘very satisfied’.
Social cohesion
The aim of strengthening social cohesion within the European Union is to lessen disparities between the Member States and to help disadvantaged groups within individual societies. Reducing social inequalities by promoting equal opportunities, combating poverty and social exclusion therefore ranks high on the EU social policy agenda.

- One of the main challenges for the new EU is to strengthen social cohesion to diminish the sharp discrepancies in material living conditions between Member States. Enlargement will heighten the problem of traditional social inequalities, as poor living conditions and lower subjective well-being are more pronounced in the NMS.

- Improving the living conditions of disadvantaged groups in the context of combating poverty and social exclusion is a major issue in the enlarged Europe.

- Although house ownership is widespread in the new Member States and the candidate countries, housing conditions are often poor. Therefore, in the NMS, but also in some old EU Member States, there is a need for public policies to support the establishment of better housing and environmental conditions.

- In all country clusters, women are more likely to report lower income and greater deprivation in the household. Deprivation levels are low in the EU15 but they are 50% higher for women. Deprivation levels are higher in the NMS and CC3 but gender differences are less marked.

Results from the European Quality of Life Survey highlight several major concerns for Europe’s citizens. These findings raise important issues for policy debates and initiatives.

Policy pointers
Living and working

Reconciling work and family life is an increasingly important issue across Europe. It is seen as having a direct influence on labour participation, fertility, family formation and quality of life. Issues such as working time, working conditions, lifelong learning, public sector provisions such as childcare and the pension system, all play a part in shaping measures to achieve a better work–life balance for all European citizens.

> There is some scope for implementing more flexible working time arrangements in the new Member States. They have the potential to increase labour force participation rates. Similarly, working conditions are generally worse than in the old EU Member States which provides another potential field of intervention.

> To promote a better reconciliation of work and family life, women could be given a wider scope to develop both family and career plans. In the same way, men could be given better opportunities to reduce formal working time in order to take over more family responsibilities.

> Widespread discontent with the public sector appears to reflect perceived quality gaps in the system of public provision in the NMS and CC3. Enlargement may contribute further to this perception. This will require renewed efforts at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of public services and public management.
Working for lower pay, longer hours and in worse conditions in the NMS

Despite lower employment rates in the NMS compared to the EU15, jobless households are slightly less common in the NMS (17%) compared to the EU15 (19%). This suggests that the available jobs in the NMS are more evenly distributed across households. Findings also reveal that the NMS have a somewhat higher proportion of job-rich households where two or more people have a job (50%) than the EU15 (43%). Only a small proportion of those in employment has a second job. In the EU15 the figure is 5% while in the NMS and the CC3 the figures are 8% and 7% respectively.

Nonetheless, the perception of job security is considerably lower in the NMS and the CC3, with only an average of 27%-29% feeling it ‘very unlikely’ they will lose their jobs in the next six months compared to an EU figure of 59%.

High participation in education in NMS

The proportion of citizens who complete secondary education is higher (78%) in the NMS than in the EU (64%). Most NMS countries have a higher proportion of the working age population with third-level education than many of the poorer regions in the southern EU15. Nonetheless, how well this education has equipped the citizens for the global marketplace has still to be assessed: an ability to read English (excluding in Ireland, Malta and the UK) and use the internet are two indicators. In this regard, proficiency is less evident in the NMS than in the EU15, and rural-urban divides are very wide.

Highlights

- Twice as many EU15 workers (43%) feel they are well paid compared to NMS workers (21%).
- Twice as many workers in the NMS (30%) report unhealthy working conditions compared to the EU15 (14%), although workers in Greece (31%) report high levels and workers in Malta (11%) very low levels.
- Some 42% of men in the NMS report working over 48 hours a week compared to only 29% in the former EU15.
Family comes first across 28 countries

Families and households are the key means of support and sources of help for citizens across Europe and 42% of all Europeans report high levels of satisfaction with their family life. Women, however, are less satisfied than men and the CC3 citizens are least satisfied of all. One-person households are more prevalent in the EU15. In the NMS, and particularly the CC3, children live longer with their parents, a significant minority continuing to live with parents even after they form couples of their own. Women in general still bear the main responsibility for childcare, devoting on average more than twice as much time as men, and this difference persists at a lower degree when mothers are in paid work.

Contact with family and friends outside the household by age groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country cluster</th>
<th>Frequent contact with parents/children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU15</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMS</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC3</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequent contact with friends</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-34</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highlights

- Women have more responsibility for housework and family care across all 28 countries but are more dissatisfied with family life.
- Mothers generally feel more overburdened by housework than fathers: 42% in the EU25 and 69% in the CC3.
- Over 85% of EU15 women carry out housework daily, rising to 90% in the NMS and CC3.
- Gender differences in childcare are slightly reduced in the NMS.
- Mothers not in paid work spend nearly twice as much time on childcare as mothers in employment.

Income, education and age clearly linked to health

Over a third of all Europeans report being in ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’ health. This ranges, however, from 61% in Denmark and Ireland and 68% in Cyprus down to 18% in Portugal and 9% in Latvia. Generally, health status in the NMS/CC3 is poorer than in the EU15. Those with a higher income generally report better health and people with lower education are more likely to report health difficulties.

People in the Mediterranean countries of the EU15 and the CC3 report the most difficulty in accessing health care, with significant differences between rural and urban areas. Older people also report greater difficulty in physical access to health care than the young.

Health differences between income groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household income quartiles</th>
<th>Lowest quartile</th>
<th>Middle quartile</th>
<th>Highest quartile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMS</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highlights

- People living in post-communist countries report health problems more frequently than those in Cyprus, Malta or Turkey.
- Only 21% of those who left school before 15 reported excellent or very good health compared to 41% who were educated until 20 or beyond.
- Some rural dwellers face greater disadvantage: 40% of Turkish citizens living in rural areas and 24% in urban areas say that distance made it very difficult to access their doctor.
- Income levels also influence access to health services: those in the highest income brackets across all 28 countries generally have fewer difficulties with access.
- Age also plays a key role: 20% of people over 65 in Greece found access to health care very difficult (due to distance), with equivalent results in Hungary (18%), Slovakia (21%) and Cyprus (27%).
- More than half the people aged 65 or over in the NMS and CC3 report a long-standing illness or disability – except in Cyprus and Malta.
Reconciling work and family life is a priority in the new Europe.

People in the EU15 report having fewer problems in this domain than those in the NMS/CC3. In Greece, Portugal, Spain and the UK, the difficulties are reported to be greater. Workers in Spain in particular report more difficulties in this area than the average in the NMS. Women in paid employment tend to report more difficulties in balancing work and family tasks.

**Highlights**

- Longer hours for NMS/CC3 workers compared to EU15.
- The majority of employed women in NMS/CC3 work full time; in the EU15 more women work part time.
- Around one third of workers in the NMS say they are often too tired to do household tasks and one in six reports difficulties in fulfilling family responsibilities.

**Public services rated lower in NMS/CC3**

The quality of life of individuals not only depends on objective living conditions and subjective well-being but also on the quality of services and social provision. In this sense, the NMS/CC3 have a far more critical view of public services such as education, pensions and social services than the EU15. The biggest gaps between old and new Member States are seen in the health and social services.

**Reporting a lot of tension between social groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor and rich people</th>
<th>Management and workers</th>
<th>Men and women</th>
<th>Old and young people</th>
<th>Different racial or ethnic groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>NMS</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC3</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. 29: In all countries there sometimes exists tension between social groups. In your opinion, how much tension is there between each of the following groups in [this country]? Poor and rich people, management and workers, men and women, old people and young people, different racial and ethnic groups: A lot of tension/ some tension/ no tension.

**Highlights**

- 42% of EU15 citizens and 62% in the NMS and CC3 do not believe in the future capacity of the social benefit system to deliver.
- Across the new Europe, 65% of older people trust their state pension system compared to only 41% of the young.
- Conflict between rich and poor is perceived most strongly in the NMS while racial and ethnic tensions are reported more often in the EU15.
- Single parents with young children and unemployed people are most critical of the quality of the society in which they live.

All the reports referred to in this leaflet are in the Foundation’s *Quality of life in Europe* series and are available on the Eurofound website at www.eurofound.eu.int/living/qual_life/index.htm.

**Further information**

Teresa Renehan (Information liaison officer) ter@eurofound.eu.int.
European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
Wyattville Road, Loughlinstown, Dublin 18, Ireland
Telephone: (+353 1) 204 21 00 Email: postmaster@eurofound.eu.int website: www.eurofound.eu.int