

# How's Life in Ireland?

Relative to other OECD countries, Ireland's performance across the different well-being dimensions is mixed. While Ireland's average **household net adjusted disposable income** was below the OECD average in 2015, **average earnings** were among the highest in the OECD (around 52 000 USD compared to an average of 44 000). At around 5%, the **long-term unemployment** rate is more than twice the OECD average, but both **labour market insecurity** and **job strain** are better than average. Housing conditions, health status and environmental quality are generally good, while civic engagement and governance is an area of comparative weakness. 80% of Irish adults have attained at least an upper secondary education, which is above the OECD average (75%), yet adult literacy and numeracy skills are in the lowest tier of the OECD. Perceived **social support** is a clear area of comparative strength: almost 96% of the Irish population reported **having friends or relatives whom they can count on** in times of trouble, compared to the OECD average of 89%.

## Ireland's average level of current well-being: Comparative strengths and weaknesses














Note: This chart shows Ireland's relative strengths and weaknesses in well-being when compared with other OECD countries. For both positive and negative indicators (such as homicides, marked with an "\*\*"), longer bars always indicate better outcomes (i.e. higher well-being), whereas shorter bars always indicate worse outcomes (i.e. lower well-being). If data are missing for any given indicator, the relevant segment of the circle is shaded in white.

Additional information, including the data used in this country note, can be found at:


[www.oecd.org/statistics/Better-Life-Initiative-2017-country-notes-data.xlsx](http://www.oecd.org/statistics/Better-Life-Initiative-2017-country-notes-data.xlsx)


## Change in Ireland's average well-being over the past 10 years


Dimension	Description	Change
 <b>Income and wealth</b>	The current level of household net adjusted disposable income is 4% higher, in real terms, than in 2005. Following a sustained period of growth, household income fell between 2009 and 2013, and began to recover only in 2014.	↗
 <b>Jobs and earnings</b>	The employment rate is now 2.8 percentage points lower than in 2005; after falling significantly between 2007 and 2012, it has recovered only moderately in recent years. Conversely, earnings have risen and are currently 15% higher (in real terms) than in 2005 – although they remain just below their 2009 peak. Following a very strong increase between 2007 and 2008, labour market insecurity has now returned to its 2005 level (2%). Long-term unemployment peaked at 9.2% in 2012, and despite falling to 4.7% since then, it is still three times higher than in 2005. After having peaked at 35% in 2010, the share of Irish employees suffering from job strain has now fallen to 27%, close to the 2005 level.	↘ ↗ ↔ ↘ ↔
 <b>Housing conditions</b>	The number of rooms per person has remained relatively stable since 2005, just above the OECD average. Housing affordability has worsened: the proportion of household disposable income spent on housing costs has risen from 19.3% in 2005 to 20.8% in 2015. Ireland is one of few OECD countries where the percentage of people living in dwellings without basic sanitary facilities has increased since 2005.	↔ ↘ ↘
 <b>Work-life balance</b>	After falling to a low of 3.4% in 2009, the share of employees working 50 hours or more per week has increased back to 4.7% in 2016, the same level as in 2005.	↔
 <b>Health status</b>	Life expectancy at birth has increased by two-and-a-half years since 2005, and is now higher than the OECD average by just over a year. Perceived health status has remained relatively stable at above the OECD average.	↗ ↔
 <b>Education and skills</b>	The 10-year change in upper secondary educational attainment cannot be assessed, due to a recent break in the data. However, between 2014 and 2015, attainment rates in Ireland increased by 1 percentage point.	↗
 <b>Social connections</b>	The percentage of people who have relatives or friends whom they can count on to help in case of need has seen little change since 2005-07.	↔
 <b>Civic engagement</b>	At 69.9%, voter turnout in the 2011 parliamentary elections was slightly higher than in 2007, but then dropped to 65.1% in 2016. This is in line with the OECD average trend, which has seen voter turnout decline by 2.4 percentage points over the last decade.	↘
 <b>Environmental quality</b>	Consistent with the OECD average, satisfaction with local water quality has fallen slightly in the last few years. On the other hand, annual exposure to air pollution has changed very little since 2005 and was still half the OECD average in 2013.	↘ ↔
 <b>Personal security</b>	There have been clear signs of progress in personal security since 2005: the homicide rate has decreased by 40%, and the share of people declaring that they feel safe when walking alone at night has risen by 5 percentage points.	↗ ↗
 <b>Subjective well-being</b>	Life satisfaction in recent years is similar to the levels reported 10 years earlier.	↔


Note: For each indicator in every dimension: ↗ refers to an improvement; ↔ indicates little or no change; and ↘ signals deterioration. This is based on a comparison of the starting year (2005 in most cases) and the latest available year (usually 2015 or 2016). The order of the arrows shown in column three corresponds to that of the indicators mentioned in column two.

## Ireland's resources and risks for future well-being: Illustrative indicators

 <b>Natural capital</b>			
Indicator	Tier	Change	
Greenhouse gas emissions from domestic production	3	↗	2005-2015
CO <sub>2</sub> emissions from domestic consumption	2	↗	2001-2011
Exposure to PM <sub>2.5</sub> air pollution	1	↔	2005-2013
Forest area	2	↔	2005-2014
Renewable freshwater resources	2	..	Long-term annual avg
Freshwater abstractions	1	..	2009
Threatened birds	2	..	Latest available
Threatened mammals	2	..	Latest available
Threatened plants	2	..	Latest available

 <b>Human capital</b>			
Indicator	Tier	Change	
Young adult educational attainment	1	↗	2014-2015
Educational expectancy	1	..	2015
Cognitive skills at age 15	1	..	2015
Adult skills	3	..	2011/2012
Long-term unemployment	3	↘	2005-2016
Life expectancy at birth	2	↗	2005-2015
Smoking prevalence	2	..	2016
Obesity prevalence	2	↔	2007-2015

 <b>Economic capital</b>			
Indicator	Tier	Change	
Gross fixed capital formation	1	↗	2005-2016
Financial net worth of total economy	3	↘	2005-2016
Investment in R&D	1	↗	2005-2014
Household debt	3	↗	2005-2015
Household net wealth	2	..	2013
Financial net worth of government	3	↘	2005-2015
Banking sector leverage	3	↔	2005-2015
No data available on produced fixed assets and intellectual property assets.			

 <b>Social capital</b>			
Indicator	Tier	Change	
Trust in others	2	..	2013
Trust in the police	1	..	2013
Trust in the national government	1	↘	2005-2016
Voter turnout	2	↘	2007-2016
Government stakeholder engagement	3	..	2014
Volunteering through organisations	2	..	2011/2012

1	Top-performing OECD tier, latest available year
2	Middle-performing OECD tier, latest available year
3	Bottom-performing OECD tier, latest available year

↗	Improving over time
↘	Worsening over time
↔	No change
..	No data available

## HOW LARGE ARE WELL-BEING INEQUALITIES IN IRELAND?

**What is inequality and how is it measured?** Measuring inequality means trying to describe **how unevenly distributed** outcomes are in society. *How's Life? 2017* adopts several different approaches:

- Measures of “**vertical**” inequalities address how unequally outcomes are spread across all people in society – for example, by looking at the size of the gap between people at the bottom of the distribution and people at the top.
- Measures of “**horizontal**” inequalities focus on the gap between population groups defined by specific characteristics (such as men and women, young and old, people with higher and lower levels of education).
- Measures of “**deprivation**” report the share of people who live below a certain level of well-being (such as those who face income poverty or live in an overcrowded household).

**Vertical inequalities** are often high in Ireland, compared to other OECD countries. For instance, the wealthiest 10% households own almost 55% of total household net wealth. A high level of inequality is also found in terms of adult skills, earnings and having a say in government, while for cognitive skills at age 15 gaps are narrower than in most OECD countries.

**Gender gaps** in Ireland often less pronounced than in the OECD on average, with 16 out of 18 indicators ranked in the top or middle third of the OECD. Not only are Irish women less disadvantaged in terms of earnings and perceived health, but they actually outperform Irish men in a number of areas in which both sexes tend to obtain similar outcomes in the OECD on average. For instance, women report a 7% higher level of having a say in government, and are 7% more likely to attain more than a lower secondary level of education.

**Well-being inequalities in Ireland**

● top third of OECD countries

● middle third of OECD countries

● bottom third of OECD countries

○ data gaps

■ no measures

	Vertical inequality	Horizontal inequality by			Deprivation
		Gender	Age	Education	
		Women relative to men	Young relative to middle-aged	Secondary relative to tertiary	
Household income	●				●
Household net wealth	●			●	●
Earnings	●	●	●	●	
Low pay		●			●
Employment		●	●	●	
Unemployment		●	●	●	●
Housing affordability					●
Rooms per person					●
Life expectancy	○				
Perceived health		●	●	●	●
Working hours	●	●	●	●	●
Time off		●	●		
Educational attainment		●	●		●
Cognitive skills at 15	●	●		●	●
Adult skills	●	●	●	●	●
Time spent socialising		●	●		
Social support		●	●	●	●
Voter turnout		●	●	●	●
Having a say in government	●	●	●	●	●
Air quality					●
Water quality		●	●	●	●
Homicides		●			●
Feeling safe at night		●	●	●	●
Life satisfaction	●	●	●	●	●
Negative affect balance					●

In most OECD countries, **young people** often fare better than the **middle-aged** in terms of health, very long working long hours and life satisfaction. This remains true for Ireland, although the advantage of the young in Ireland appears much less pronounced than in the OECD on average. Furthermore, in terms of income and earnings, the young in Ireland experience gaps larger than in most other OECD countries.

Attaining **tertiary education** pays off extremely well on the Irish job market: individuals with upper **secondary education** are twice as likely to be unemployed and earn on average 37% less than those with a higher level of education. Conversely, the gaps in health and social support are narrower than in most OECD countries.

Ireland has mixed outcomes in terms of **deprivations**. For instance, income poverty, asset-based poverty and unemployment affect a larger share of the population than in the majority of OECD countries. Conversely, the country fares comparatively well in terms of housing overcrowding, and the incidence of both poor perceived health and weak social support, amongst other indicators.

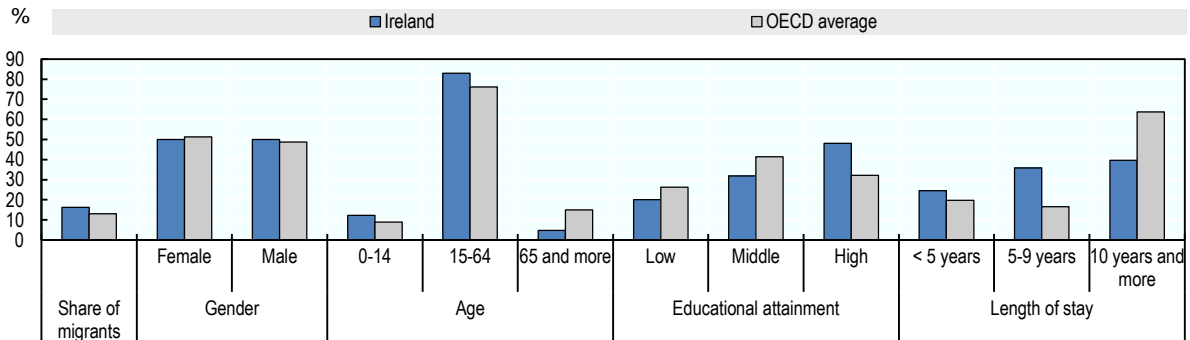
## HOW'S LIFE FOR MIGRANTS IN IRELAND?

Migrants (defined as people living in a different country from the one in which they were born) represent an important share of the population in most OECD countries. Capturing information about their well-being is critical for gaining a fuller picture of how life is going, and whether it is going equally well for all members of society.

### Who are the migrants in Ireland and OECD?

Around one in six people living in Ireland (16%) were born elsewhere, slightly above the OECD average (13%), and 50% of them are women (51% for the OECD average). Migrants in Ireland are more likely to be of working age than in the OECD on average (83% of them are aged 15 to 64, as compared to 76% across the OECD), and are more likely to have a high educational attainment than a low or a middle level. Four in ten migrants arrived in Ireland ten years ago or more.

Share of migrants in the total population and selected characteristics



### How is migrants' well-being in Ireland?

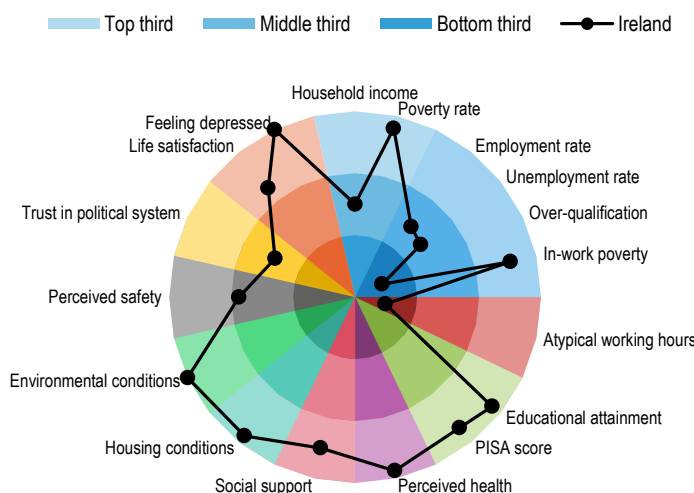
Compared with the migrant populations of other OECD countries, migrants living in Ireland have a relatively good situation for 10 out of 17 selected well-being indicators. Moreover, migrants settled in Ireland rank in the middle third of OECD-country migrants for household income, employment, unemployment, trust in the political system and perceived safety. They are in the bottom third for over-qualification and atypical working hours.

As in many other OECD countries, migrants in Ireland are more likely to have lower well-being outcomes than the native-born population: in Ireland, this is the case for 7 out of 14 selected well-being indicators. However, migrants in Ireland are just as likely as the native-born to report the same level of household income, physical health risks at work, PISA performance and feeling depressed. They report higher levels of trust than the native-born in the political system, perceived health, and perceived safety.

Comparison of migrants' and native-born well-being in Ireland

	Migrants have a worse situation	Same situation	Migrants have a better situation
Household income		▲	
Wealth	▲		
Physical health risks at work		▲	
Atypical working hours	▲		
Literacy scores	▲		
PISA score		▲	
Perceived health			▲
Social support	▲		
Housing conditions	▲		
Environmental conditions	▲		
Perceived safety			▲
Trust in political system			▲
Life satisfaction	▲		
Feeling depressed		▲	

Comparing well-being outcomes for migrants in Ireland with the migrant populations of other OECD countries



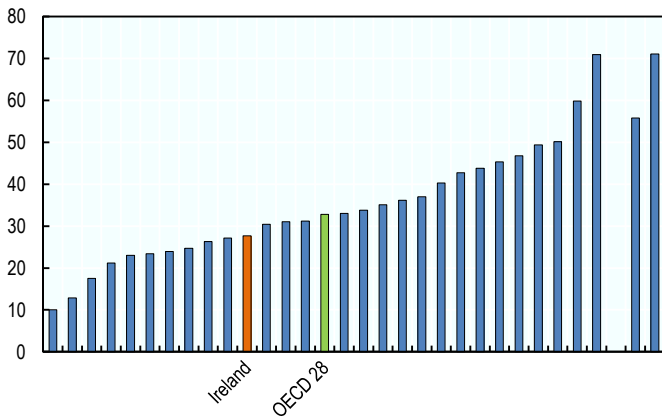
## GOVERNANCE AND WELL-BEING IN IRELAND

Public institutions play an important role in well-being, both by guaranteeing that people’s fundamental rights are protected, and by ensuring the provision of goods and services necessary for people to thrive and prosper. How people experience and engage with public institutions also matters: people’s political voice, agency and representation are outcomes of value in their own right.

In Ireland, almost 28% of the population feels that they have a say in what their government does, compared to an OECD average of 33%. In recent years, voter turnout has slightly declined, with 65% of the registered population casting a ballot in 2016, down from 67% in 2007. When asked about whether or not corruption is widespread across government, 37% of Irish citizens answered "yes", as compared to an OECD average of 56%. Since around 2006, the share of people in the OECD who report that they have confidence in their national government has fallen from 42% to 38%.

### Having a say in what the government does

Percentage of people aged 16-65 who feel that they have a say in what the government does, around 2012



Source: OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC database)

### Voter turnout

Percentage of votes cast among the population registered to vote



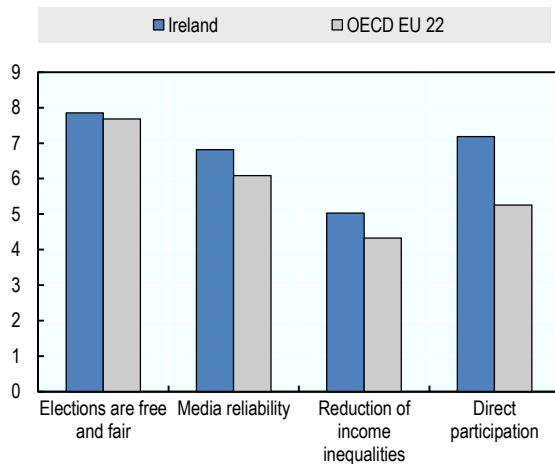
Note: Data refers to parliamentary elections. If more than one election took place over the time period indicated, the simple average voter turnout from all elections is shown. The OECD average sums elections that occurred over the time periods shown in 29 OECD countries.

Source: IDEA dataset

Overall, Irish satisfaction with the way democracy works in their country is consistently above the OECD European average. People in Ireland tend to be reasonably satisfied with the freedom and fairness of their elections (7.8 on a 0-10 scale), and in the existence of direct participation mechanisms at the local level (7.2), but less so with policies to reduce inequalities (5.0). Meanwhile, satisfaction with public services varies according to whether people have used those services in the last year: people with direct recent experience of using health and education services tend to be more satisfied than those without. In Ireland, satisfaction with health and education services is generally slightly higher than the OECD European average level.

### People’s satisfaction with different elements of democracy

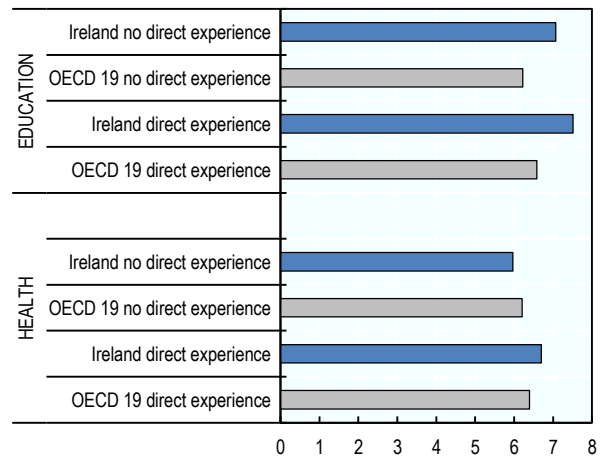
Mean score on a 0-10 scale, with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction with elements of democracy, 2012



Source: OECD calculations based on wave 6 of the European Social Survey (ESS), special rotating module on citizens’ valuations of different elements of democracy.

### Satisfaction with public services by direct experience

Mean score on a 0-10 scale, with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction, 2013



Source: OECD calculations based on the EU Quality of Government (QoG) for 19 European countries.

## BETTER LIFE INDEX

The **Better Life Index** is an interactive web application that allows users to compare well-being across OECD countries and beyond on the basis of the set of well-being indicators used in *How's Life?*. Users chose what weight to give to each of the eleven dimensions shown below and then see how countries perform, based on their own personal priorities in life.

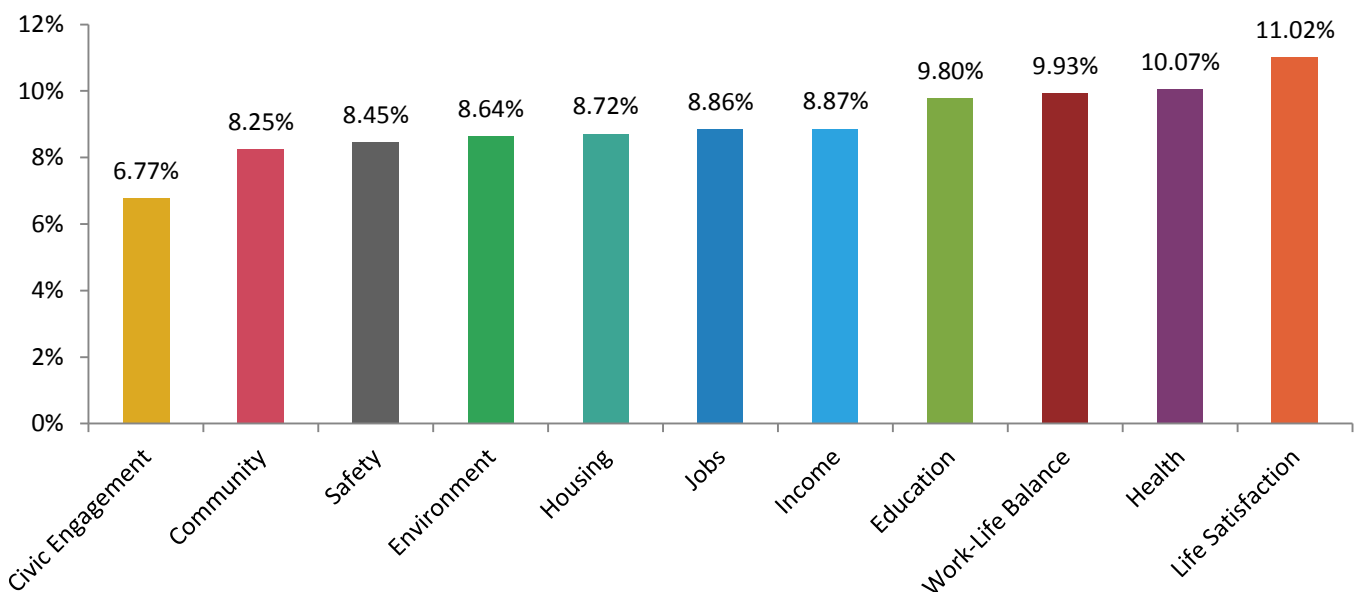


Users can also share their index with other people in their networks, as well as with the OECD. This allows the OECD to gather valuable information on the importance that users attach to various life dimensions, and how these preferences differ across countries and population groups.

## WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PEOPLE IN IRELAND?

Since its launch in May 2011, the Better Life Index has attracted **over ten million visits from just about every country on the planet** and has received over **22 million page views**. To date, over 85,500 people in Ireland have visited the website making Ireland the 29th country overall in traffic to the website. The top cities are Dublin (71% of visits), Cork, Limerick and Galway.

The following country findings reflect the ratings voluntarily shared with the OECD by 647 website visitors in Ireland. Findings are only indicative and are not representative of the population at large. **For Irish users of the Better Life Index, life satisfaction, health and work-life balance are the three most important topics** (shown below).<sup>1</sup> Up to date information, including a breakdown of participants in each country by gender and age can be found here: [www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/responses/#IRL](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/responses/#IRL).



<sup>1</sup> User information for Ireland is based on shared indexes submitted between May 2011 and September 2017.

The **OECD Better Life Initiative**, launched in 2011, focuses on the aspects of life that matter the most to people and that shape the quality of their lives. The Initiative comprises a set of regularly updated well-being indicators and an in-depth analysis of specific topics, published in the *How's Life?* report. It also includes an interactive web application, the *Better Life Index*, and a number of *methodological and research projects* to improve the information base available to understand well-being levels, trends and their drivers.

The OECD Better Life Initiative:

- Helps to inform policy making to improve quality of life.
- Connects policies to people's lives.
- Generates support for needed policy measures.
- Improves civic engagement by encouraging the public to create their own *Better Life Index* and share their preferences about what matters most for well-being
- Empowers the public by improving their understanding of policy-making.

This note presents **selected findings for Ireland from the *How's Life? 2017 report*** (pages 1-6) and shows what **Irish users of the Better Life Index** are telling us about their **well-being priorities** (page 7).

## HOW'S LIFE?



*How's Life?*, published every two years, provides a comprehensive picture of well-being in OECD and selected partner countries by bringing together an internationally comparable set of well-being indicators. It considers eleven dimensions of current well-being including: income and wealth; jobs and earnings; housing; health status; work-life balance; education and skills; social connections; civic engagement and governance; environmental quality; personal security; and subjective well-being. It also looks at four types of resources that help to sustain well-being over time: natural, human, economic and social capital.

The *How's Life? 2017* report presents the latest data on well-being in OECD and partner countries, including how lives have changed since 2005. It includes a special focus on inequalities, the well-being of migrants in OECD countries, and the issue of governance – particularly how people experience and engage with public institutions. To read more, visit: [www.oecd.org/howslife](http://www.oecd.org/howslife).

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