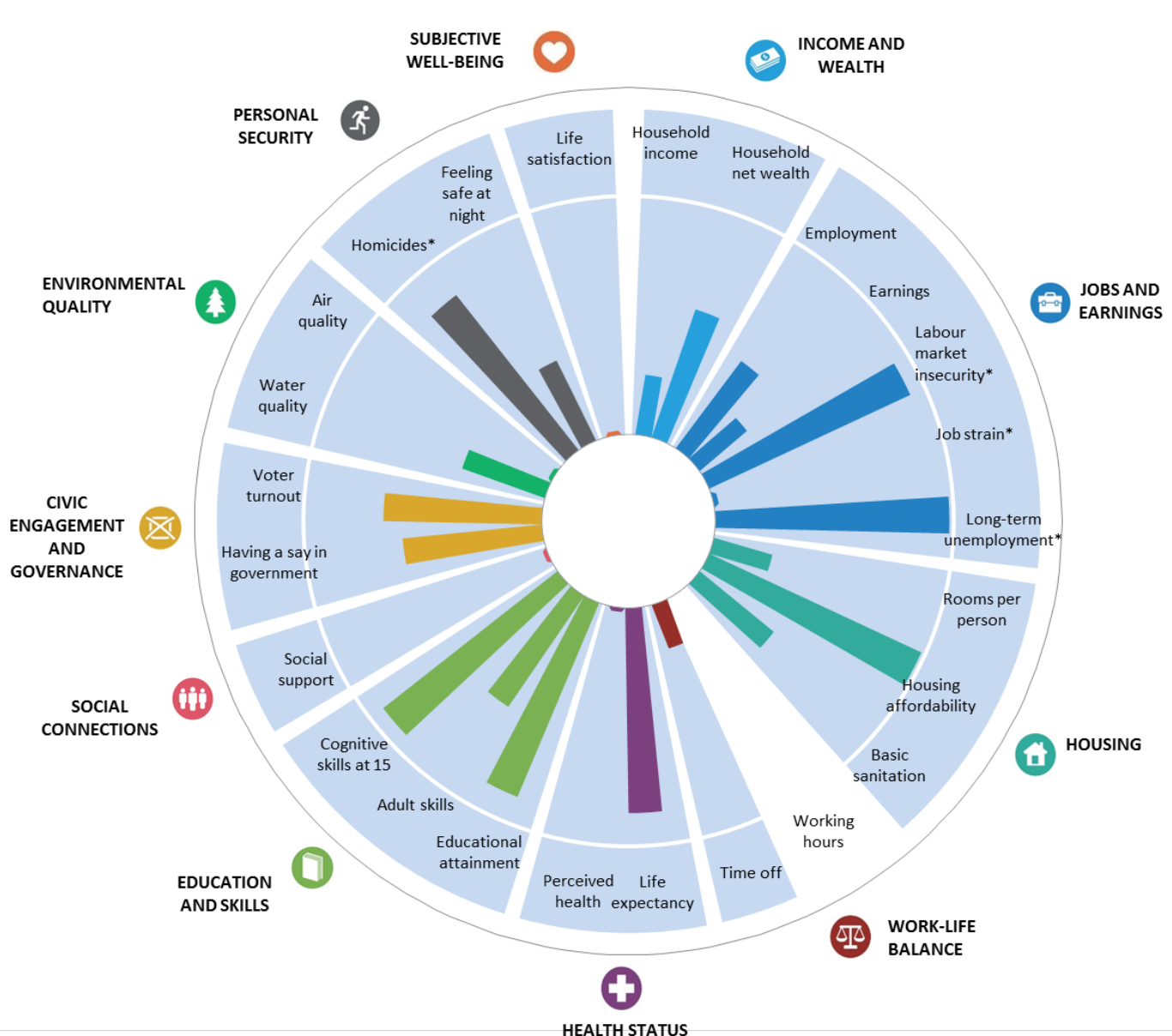


# How's Life in Korea?

Relative to other OECD countries, Korea's average performance across the different well-being dimensions is mixed. Although income and wealth stand below the OECD average, the **long-term unemployment rate** is the lowest in the OECD (almost nil in 2016), and **labour market insecurity** is also low. Nonetheless, the incidence of **job strain** among employees is among the highest in the OECD, and both **earnings** and the **employment rate** are below the OECD average. On housing, although both the average number of **rooms** per person and access to basic sanitation are below the OECD average, **housing affordability** ranks the highest in the OECD. At 82 years, **life expectancy** at birth is above the OECD average, but only 32% of Koreans **perceive their health** as "good" or "very good" (although 50% of people in Korea report to be in "fair" health, which is a larger share than in most OECD countries). Korea has comparative strengths in education and skills, but its levels of **social support** and environmental quality (particularly **air quality**) are among the worst in the OECD.

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














Note: This chart shows the Korea'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 Korea's average well-being over the past 10 years










Dimension		Description	Change
	<b>Income and wealth</b>	Household net adjusted disposable income has risen steadily in Korea over the past decade, and is now 23% higher (in real terms) than in 2005.	↗
	<b>Jobs and earnings</b>	After decreasing from 2007 to 2009, the employment rate has risen steadily in recent years and is now over 2 percentage points higher than in 2005. Despite a few setbacks, average earnings have improved gradually over the decade, with a 9% cumulative gain since 2005. Both labour market insecurity and the long-term unemployment rate have remained broadly stable.	↗ ↗ ↔ ↔
	<b>Housing conditions</b>	Housing has become more affordable since 2005, with the share of household disposable income spent on housing costs falling by 2.1 percentage points.	↗
	<b>Work-life balance</b>	[No time series data available]	..
	<b>Health status</b>	Life expectancy at birth increased by almost 4 years since 2005, and now exceeds the OECD average by 2 years. Korea is however one of few OECD countries where the share of people rating their health as “good” or “very good” has fallen (by 11 percentage points) in the last decade.	↗ ↘
	<b>Education and skills</b>	Between 2005 and 2015, the share of working-age adults who have attained at least an upper secondary level of education increased by over 11 percentage points.	↗
	<b>Social connections</b>	The percentage of people reporting that they have relatives or friends whom they can count on to help in case of need has remained relatively stable over the decade.	↔
	<b>Civic engagement</b>	Contrary to the OECD average trend, voter turnout in Korea increased by 14 points from 2007, to 77% in the 2017 presidential elections.	↗
	<b>Environmental quality</b>	The percentage of Koreans satisfied with their local water quality has remained broadly stable over the past decade. However, annual exposure to PM <sub>2.5</sub> air pollution increased by 4% between 2005 and 2013, with this worsening gaining momentum in recent years.	↔ ↘
	<b>Personal security</b>	The number of deaths due to assault has fallen by almost 40% in Korea compared to 2005. Feelings of safety are slightly better than they were 10 years ago, and are today just above the current OECD average of 69%.	↗ ↗
	<b>Subjective well-being</b>	Life satisfaction has improved slightly in Korea over the past decade, but remains below the OECD average.	↗




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 start 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.

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




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

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

 <b>Economic capital</b>		
Indicator	Tier	Change
Produced fixed assets	<b>2</b>	 2005-2015
Gross fixed capital formation	<b>1</b>	 2005-2015
Financial net worth of total economy	<b>1</b>	 2008-2015
Intellectual property assets	<b>1</b>	 2005-2015
Investment in R&D	<b>1</b>	 2005-2015
Household debt	<b>3</b>	 2008-2015
Household net wealth	<b>2</b>	.. 2013
Financial net worth of government	<b>1</b>	 2008-2016
Banking sector leverage	<b>3</b>	 2008-2016

 <b>Social capital</b>		
Indicator	Tier	Change
Trust in the national government	<b>3</b>	 2006-2016
Voter turnout	<b>1</b>	 2007-2017
Government stakeholder engagement	<b>2</b>	.. 2014
Volunteering through organisations	<b>3</b>	.. 2011/2012
No data available on trust in others and trust in the police.		

<b>1</b>	Top-performing OECD tier, latest available year
<b>2</b>	Middle-performing OECD tier, latest available year
<b>3</b>	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 KOREA?

**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).

Korea shows the second highest level of **vertical inequality** in earnings in the OECD, with those at the top of the distribution earning on average 4 to 5 times more than those at the bottom. By contrast, vertical inequalities in adult skills, feelings of having a say in government and life satisfaction are comparatively low.

Disparities between **men and women** are particularly pronounced on the Korean job market. Women earn on average almost 40% less than men, are much more at risk of low pay and are less likely to be employed. These gaps are greater than in most other OECD countries.

Korean **young people** experience mixed outcomes when compared to the middle-aged. For instance, their household income is 23% lower than that of the older group – the widest gap among OECD countries – and they are three times as likely to be unemployed. However, they fare better on adult skills than the middle-aged, unlike many of their peers in other OECD countries.

Compared to other OECD countries, Koreans who have attained a **secondary level of education** are often relatively less disadvantaged compared to those having attained a **tertiary level of education**. This applies to areas such as jobs and earnings, skills and civic engagement in particular. In fact, Koreans with a secondary education are almost as likely to find a job as those with higher attainment, are more likely to vote during national elections, and have comparatively narrow gaps in terms of skills and feelings of having a say in government. Nonetheless, individuals with a tertiary level of education report better perceived health, stronger support networks, and live in areas where they feel safer at night – more so than in most OECD countries.

**Deprivations** are relatively widespread in Korea. The country records the highest incidence of poor health (67.5%), the second highest share of people reporting that they don't have anyone to count on in case of need (19%) and one of the highest shares of people exposed to high levels of outdoor air pollution.

**Well-being inequalities in Korea**

	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		●	●	●	●

Legend:

- top third of OECD countries
- middle third of OECD countries
- bottom third of OECD countries
- data gaps
- no measures

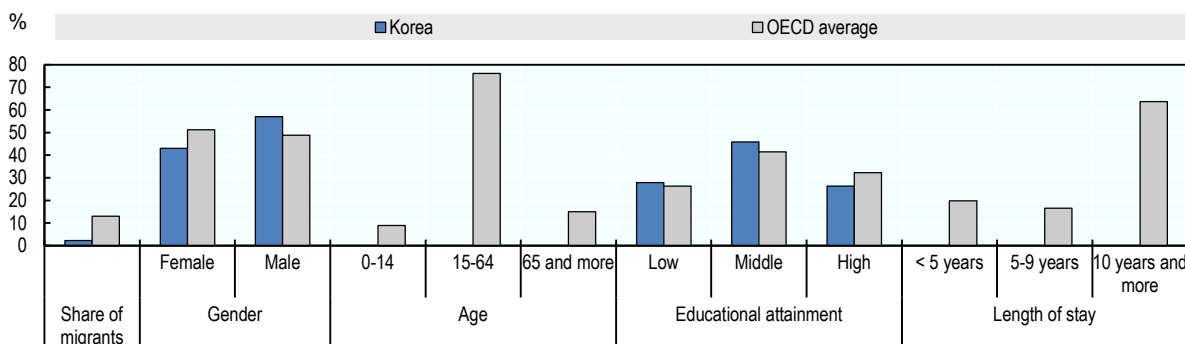
## HOW'S LIFE FOR MIGRANTS IN KOREA?

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 migrants in Korea and the OECD?

As data on the foreign-born population are not available for Korea, information about Korean migration is based on nationality. Only 2% of the total population do not have Korean nationality. Amongst Korean non-nationals, 43% are women (compared with 51% on average for the foreign-born in the OECD). Korean non-nationals are more likely to have a middle educational attainment than a low or a high level.

Share of migrants in the total population and selected characteristics

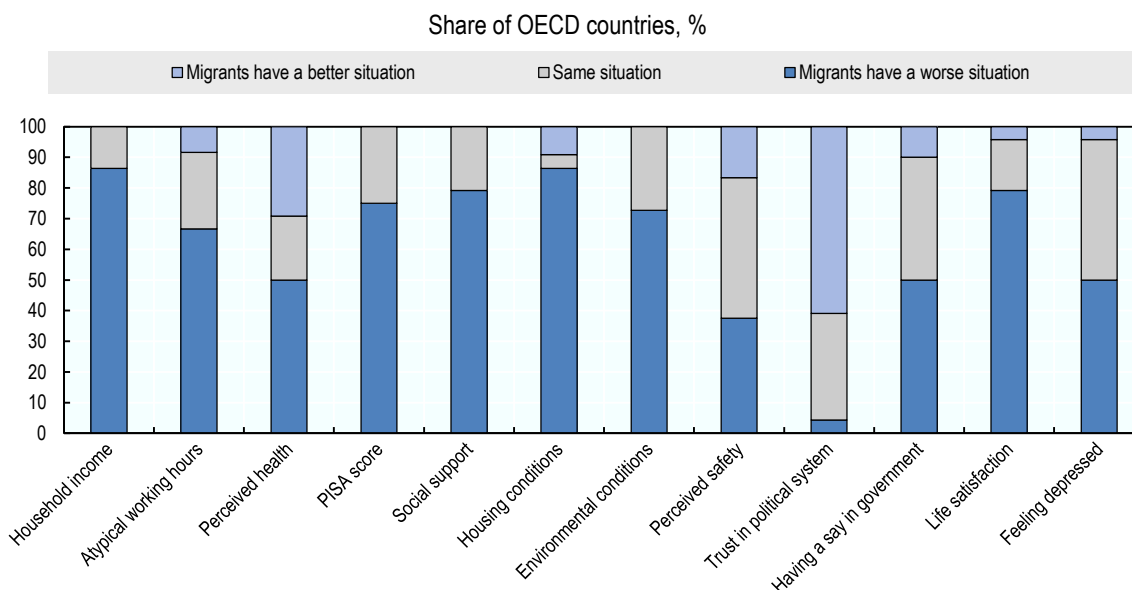


### How is migrants' well-being in OECD countries?

While detailed information on migrants' well-being in Korea is not available, in a majority of OECD countries migrants have a worse situation than the native-born population for 10 out of 12 selected well-being indicators. For household income, housing conditions, life satisfaction, social support and PISA performance, migrants in at least 75% of OECD countries report lower outcomes than the native-born population.

Trust in the political system is the only indicator where migrants report having a better situation than the native-born for a majority of OECD countries.

Relative outcomes for migrants and the native-born population for selected well-being outcomes



Note: Results are based on the analysis of the confidence intervals at 90%

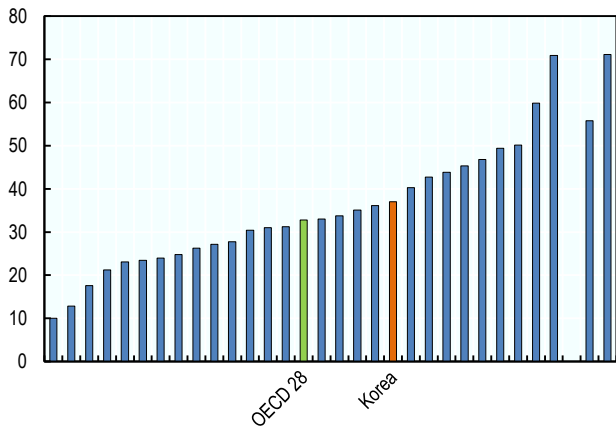
## GOVERNANCE AND WELL-BEING IN KOREA

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 Korea, 37% of the population feels that they have a say in what their government does, which is higher than the OECD average of 33%. In recent years, voter turnout has significantly increased, with over 77% of the population voting in 2017, compared to only 63% ten years earlier. When asked about whether or not corruption is widespread across government, 78% of Koreans answered "yes", as compared to the 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

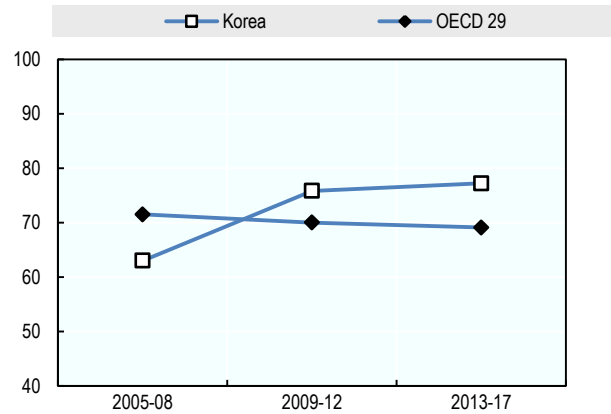
Percentage of people aged 16-65 who feel that they have a say in what the government does, around 2012



Source: OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC database)

### Voter turnout

Percentage of votes cast among the population registered to vote



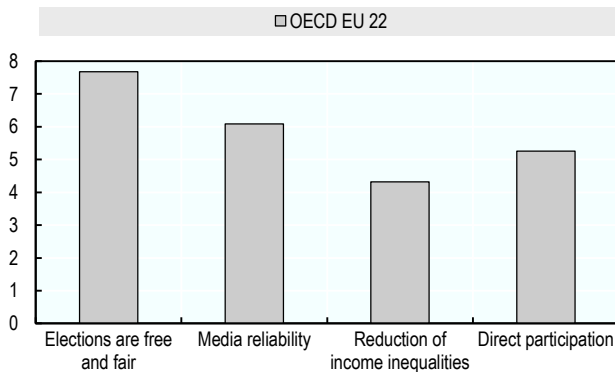
Note: Data refers to presidential elections. If more than one election took place over the time period indicated, the simple average voter turnout from all elections is shown. The OECD average sums elections that occurred over the time periods shown in 29 OECD countries.

Source: IDEA dataset

In the 22 European OECD countries where it can be assessed, satisfaction with democracy varies, depending on which aspect is considered. While Europeans tend to be reasonably satisfied with the way elections are held (7.7 on a 0-10 scale), they are relatively less satisfied with policies to reduce income inequalities (4.3) or the existence of direct participation mechanisms at the local level (5.3). Europeans’ satisfaction with public services varies according to whether people have used those services in the last year. For example, satisfaction with education is higher among those with direct recent experience (6.6 vs 6.2 on average), and this is also true of

### OECD EU average satisfaction with different elements of democracy

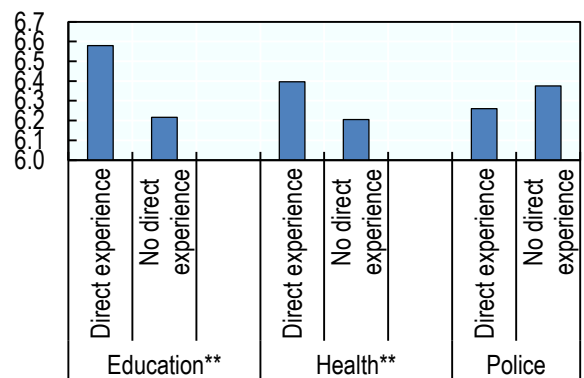
Mean score on a 0-10 scale, with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction with elements of democracy, 2012



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

### OECD EU average satisfaction with public services

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



Note: \*\* Difference is statistically significant at 95%

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

the health system (6.4 vs 6.2 on average). These data relate to 19 European countries only, and unfortunately no comparable data are available for Korea.

## 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.

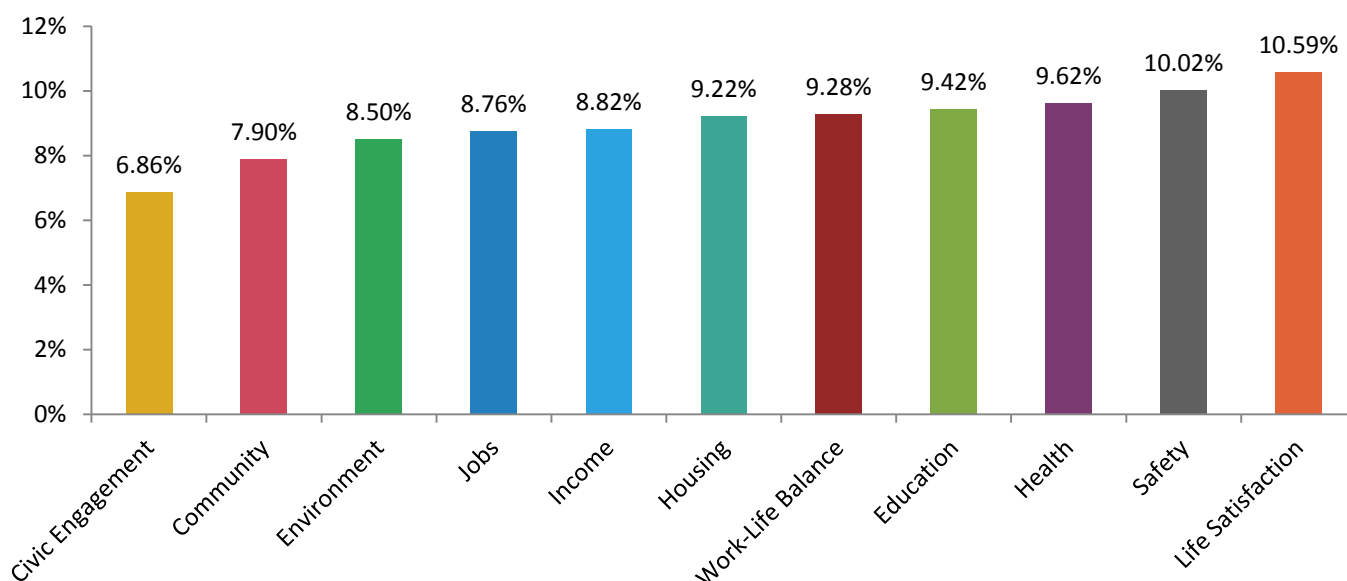


Users can also share their index with other people in their networks, as well as with the OECD. This allows the OECD to gather valuable information on the importance that users attach to various life dimensions, and how these preferences differ across countries and population groups.

## WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PEOPLE IN KOREA?

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 120,900 people in Korea have visited the website making Korea the 20th country overall in traffic to the website. The top cities are Seoul (58% of visits), Daejeon, Busan and Incheon.

The following country findings reflect the ratings voluntarily shared with the OECD by 890 website visitors in Korea. Findings are only indicative and are not representative of the population at large. **For Korean users of the Better Life Index, life satisfaction, safety and health 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/#KOR](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/responses/#KOR).



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

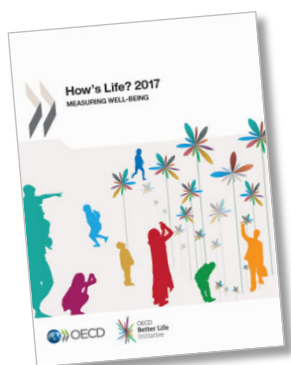
The **OECD Better Life Initiative**, launched in 2011, focuses on the aspects of life that matter the most to people and that shape the quality of their lives. The Initiative comprises a set of regularly updated well-being indicators and an in-depth analysis of specific topics, published in the *How's 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 Korea from the *How's Life? 2017* report** (pages 1-6) and shows what **Korean 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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