



Office for  
National Statistics

# **Measuring well-being: emerging requirements and challenges**

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# Overview – societal well-being

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- What is it?
- Why measure it?
- How to measure it?

# What is societal well-being?

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- **Well-being**
  - **Quality of life**
  - **Happiness**
  - **Life satisfaction**
  - **Welfare**
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- **How society is doing**
  - **What progress are we making?**

# What is societal well-being?

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- An overall (multi-dimensional) measure of the progress of a country
- Attempts to take account of economic, environment and social wellbeing (or outcomes)
- Difficult to theorise, define and measure
- Various kinds of capital (human, social, economic ...)
- Are we more interested in change over time?

# Why measure well-being?

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- **High on the national political agenda (cross party)**
- **Evidence base for policy (more to life than GDP)**
- **Increasing local authority interest (power but not duty to promote well-being)**
- **International developments (especially Istanbul Declaration and Stiglitz Report)**
- **=> One of ONS's priority analysis areas**

# Istanbul Declaration

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***“measuring and fostering the progress of societies in all their dimensions ...”***

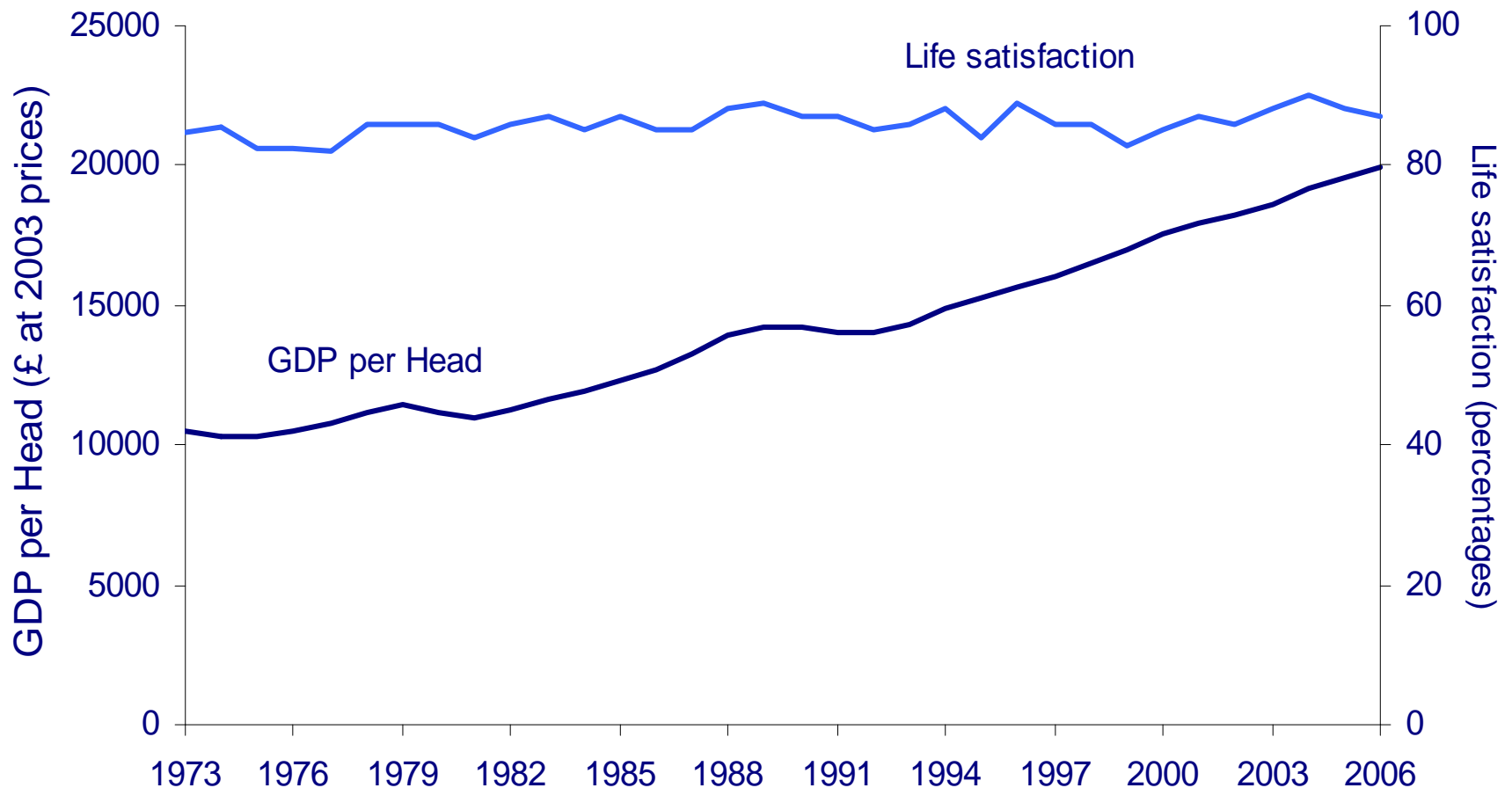
***“high-quality, facts-based information ...”***

***“to form a shared view of societal well-being and its evolution over time”***

**EC, OECD, OIC, UN, UNDP, WB, 2007**

# The Easterlin Paradox

## United Kingdom



Sources: Eurobarometer (from World Database of Happiness) and ONS

# How to measure societal well-being

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- **Happiness surveys**
- **Agreed indicator set**
- **Satellite accounts to accompany National Accounts**
- **Adjusted GDP/National Well-being Account**

# Many statistics already available

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- **Social Trends**
- **Household satellite accounts**
- **Environmental accounts**
- **Social capital**
- **Many indicator sets**
- **Sustainable Development Indicators**
- **Measuring government activity**

# Towards a statistical map of well-being

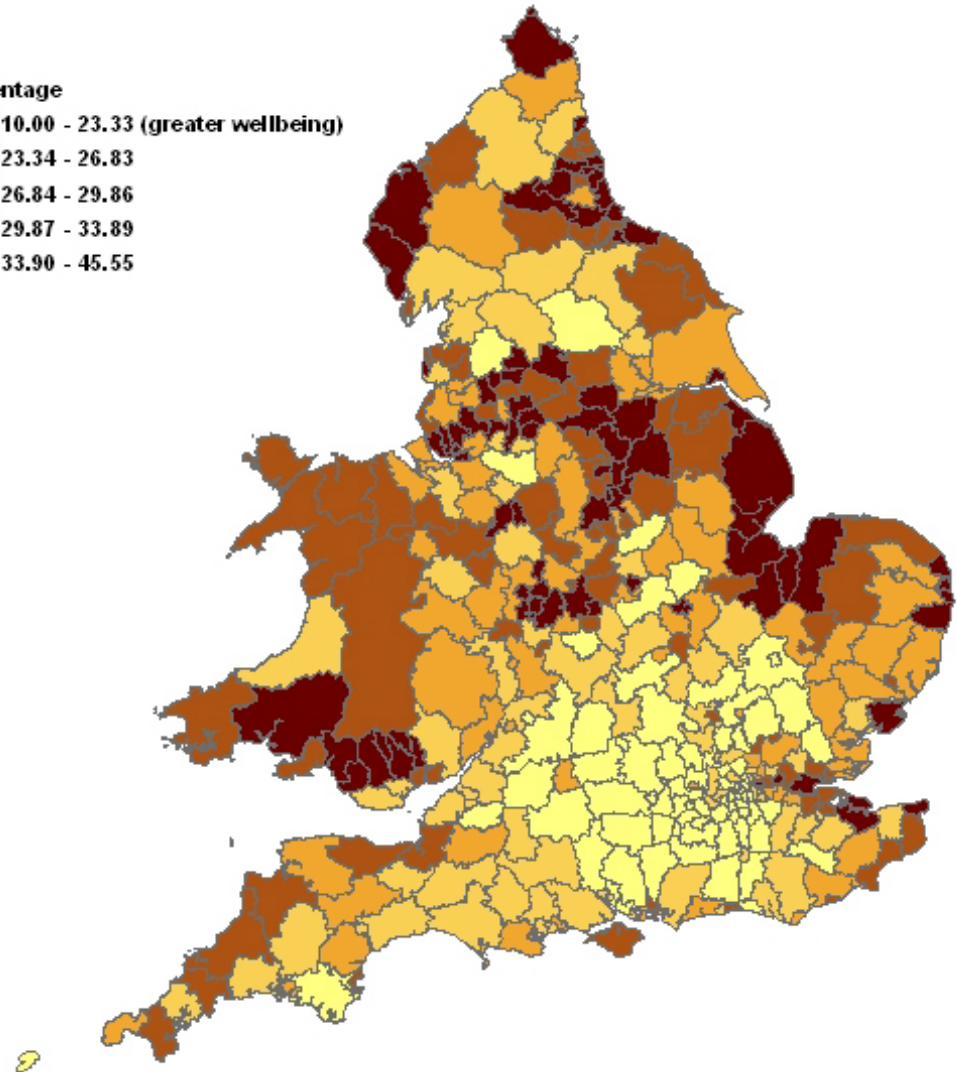
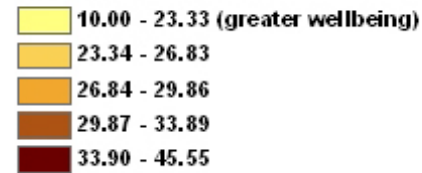
People with no qualifications by local or unitary authority, 2001 Census

## Qualifications

people with no qualifications

Key

Percentage



# Layard's Seven Happy Factors

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- **Family relationships**
- **Financial situation**
- **Work**
- **Community and Friends**
- **Health**
- **Personal Freedom**
- **Personal Values**

# What's planned – bringing clarity

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Web based knowledge bank – single repository of wellbeing links and information

- external links, e.g. OECD papers
  - downloads, e.g. articles, work plans
  - analysis – analytical outputs
  - news – press articles of interest
  - events – key well-being events
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- Likely to be underpinned by regular newsletter

# What's planned – bringing understanding

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Report/working papers covering:

- Audit and evaluation of existing measures, using Stiglitz as framework
- Identification of gaps and recommendations on how to plug them
- Collaboration with LSE and Imperial College on subjective measures

# A final thought

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**“Too much and too long, we seem to have surrendered community excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our gross national product ... measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. And it tells us everything about America except why we are proud that we are Americans”**

**Robert Kennedy, 1968**

# Conclusion

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- Open debate about societal well-being
- Working together to identify requirements
- Build shared understanding of well-being and how to measure it
- Evidence base
- Beyond GDP rather than in place of GDP
- Well-being of children is important in this