



## **Background**

Is life getting better? Are our societies making progress? Indeed, what does “progress” mean to the world’s citizens? There can be few questions of greater importance in today’s rapidly changing world. Without the right information, what hope do citizens have to engage in democratic debate about their future and make the right choice at the ballot box? How can policy makers make adequately-informed decisions? And yet how many of us have the evidence to answer these questions?

For a good portion of the 20th century there was an implicit assumption that economic growth was synonymous with progress: an assumption that a growing Gross Domestic Products (GDP) meant life must be getting better. But now the world recognises that it isn’t quite as simple as that. Despite high levels of economic growth in many countries, many experts believe we are no more satisfied with our life (or happier) than we were 50 years ago; that people trust one another – and their governments – less than they used to; and that increased income has come at the expense of increased insecurity, longer working hours and greater complexity in our lives. Much of the world is healthier and people live longer than they did just a few years ago, but environmental problems like climate change cast a shadow over an uncertain future. Indeed, it sometimes seems that for every action to demonstrate societal progress, an equal but opposite reaction demonstrates precisely the opposite.

Hundreds of initiatives already exist that aim to understand and measure progress. These initiatives are being undertaken across the globe and in every sector of society, including national and local governments, international agencies, civil society, statistical agencies, and academia.

## **The Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies**

The OECD launched in 2004 the World Forum on “Statistics, Knowledge and Policy”, with the aim of discussing how systems of key indicators can support policy discussions. The OECD organised the second World Forum in June 2007 (Istanbul, Turkey) on “Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies”. As a follow-up to the Istanbul Forum, the OECD proposed to launch a Global Project on “Measuring the Progress of Societies”, in co-operation with other international and regional organisations. The Global Project brings together in “network of networks” thousands of people around the world working in different disciplines to exchange ideas and best practices to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of understanding and measuring progress. The European Commission, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program are just

some of the organisations who are collaborating with the OECD on this work in recognition of the fact that these issues truly are global.

### **The Forum**

On September 29 and 30 the ROSSTAT and the OECD, in collaboration with the Academy of Labour and Social Relations, are organising an international Forum on “*Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies: A New Approach for CIS and Eastern European Countries*” to discuss these issues in Moscow.

The forum will bring together 200 high level participants from CIS and Eastern European countries. The audience will comprise statisticians, economists and policy makers, as well as leaders from NGOs, the business world and the media: in short all those who share an interest in promoting a stronger facts-based discussion on whether and how their societies are progressing.

Support for a few selected participants from some countries in the region should be available.

For information on the Global Project and this forum please visit [www.oecd.org/oecdworldforum](http://www.oecd.org/oecdworldforum) or contact:

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