How’s Life in Korea?

Additional information, including the data used in this country note, can be found at:
HOW’S LIFE IN KOREA IN 2015?

While Korea’s average household net adjusted disposable income per capita lies below the OECD average, between 2010 and 2013 it grew by 12.3%, the largest proportional increase in the OECD area. Job security is comparatively high in Korea, and the long-term unemployment rate is the lowest in the OECD. Korea also ranks at the top of the OECD with regard to housing affordability. However, average air quality in Korea (measured as average exposure to PM$_{2.5}$ air pollution) is the lowest in the OECD area.

The share of Korean adults perceiving their health as good or better than good dropped from 44.8% in 2009 to 35.1% in 2013, the lowest share in the OECD. While the literacy and numeracy skills of Korean adults lie slightly below the OECD average, Korea ranks at the top of the OECD in terms of cognitive skills of 15 year olds. Koreans report the lowest level of social network support in the OECD. Voter turnout for presidential elections increased from 63% in 2007 to 75.8% in 2012, which is above the OECD average. Korea also has a relatively low self-reported assault rate. Life satisfaction in Korea lies substantially below the OECD average.

This chart shows areas of well-being strengths and weaknesses in Korea, based on a ranking of all OECD countries. Longer lines show areas of relative strength, while shorter lines show areas of relative weakness. For more details, see www.oecd.org/statistics/Hows-Life-2015-country-notes-data.xlsx.

Resources for future well-being in Korea

Beyond measuring well-being today, How’s Life? 2015 looks at some of the resources (or “capital stocks”) that will shape people’s well-being in the future. These include aspects of natural capital, human capital, social capital and economic capital.

For example, human capital refers to the skills, competencies and health status of individuals. The educational attainment of young adults is one indicator of the skills that are carried forward to the future. The share of Koreans aged 25-34 attaining at least upper secondary education increased from 93.3% in 2000 to 98.3% in 2013. This share lies far above the OECD average of 83.6%.
HOW'S LIFE FOR CHILDREN IN KOREA?

Giving children a good start in life is important both for well-being today, and in the future.

Child income poverty in Korea has decreased since 2007 and lies below the OECD average level. However, it remains a challenge: 9.7% of Korean children live in a household with a disposable income of less than half of the Korean median income.

Korea performs well in terms of child health outcomes: the rate of infant mortality and the rate of low birth weights are below the OECD average. Korea has also one of the lowest teenage birth rates in the OECD.

The reading and creative problem-solving skills of Korean students are among the highest in the OECD. However, the share of Korean teenagers aged 15 to 19 who are not in employment, education or training increased from 7% in 2007 to 8.5% in 2013 and now lies above the OECD average of 7.1%.

86.9% of Korean 14-year olds intend to vote in elections when they are adults compared to the OECD average of 78.7%. However, only 23.6% of Korean 14-year olds report having participated in organisations, groups or clubs in the last 12 months, one of the lowest shares in the OECD.

Children in Korea also feel a relatively low sense of belonging in school. On average, Korean children spend only 48 minutes per day with their parents, less than children in any other OECD country.

Inequalities in child well-being

Across all OECD countries there are large inequalities in child well-being. Children from wealthier households enjoy both better material living conditions, and a higher quality of life, on average. In Korea, there are wide differences in educational deprivation between children from high and low socio-economic backgrounds. By contrast, there is a relatively narrow difference in intentions to vote among 14 year olds.
THE VALUE OF GIVING: VOLUNTEERING AND WELL-BEING

Volunteering makes an important “hidden contribution” to well-being, producing goods and services that are not captured by conventional economic statistics. When you add up the value of the time people spend on volunteering in OECD countries, it amounts to roughly 2% of GDP per year.

Volunteering in Korea and the OECD

The main sectors of volunteering activity in Korea are social and health services, followed by education and culture. Volunteering through an organisation (termed “formal volunteering”) is less common in Korea than in the average OECD country. 26.4% of the Korean working-age population report that they engaged in formal volunteering during the past 12 months, which is below the OECD average of 34.2%.

How often do people volunteer? 55.2% of Koreans who participate in formal volunteering do so less than once a month. The share of formal volunteers who volunteer every day in Korea is 1.4% and the lowest in the OECD, where the average stands at 4.7%. In general, Korean volunteers tend to engage in volunteering activities on a less frequent basis than the average OECD volunteer.

Who volunteers? Across the OECD area, people with a university degree are more likely to participate in formal volunteering than those with lower levels of education. Similarly, people who are in employment are more likely to volunteer than those who are unemployed. Participation in formal volunteering also increases with people’s level of household income.

Volunteering brings benefits for volunteers themselves, as well as for the people and communities they help. For example, people who engage in volunteering are more likely to have higher literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills and receive higher wages, on average, relative to non-volunteers.

In OECD countries, older people who volunteer formally are more likely to report a better health status than non-volunteers. Furthermore, formal volunteers in the OECD, on average, also report higher life satisfaction than non-volunteers.
GOING LOCAL: MEASURING WELL-BEING IN REGIONS

Where people live has an important impact on their opportunities to live well. There can be large differences in average levels of well-being in different regions within the same country. *How’s Life in your Region?* and the OECD regional well-being web-tool assess performance across 9 dimensions of well-being in the 362 OECD large regions – 7 of which are in Korea. Drawing on this work, *How’s Life? 2015* includes a special focus on measuring well-being in regions.

Regional gaps in material living conditions

Compared to other OECD countries regional inequalities in income and jobs are small in Korea. The average household adjusted disposable income is 21% higher in the Capital Region than in Gangwon Region. Unemployment rates range from 2% in Jeju to 4% in the Capital Region. This gap (2 percentage points) is smaller than in most other OECD countries.

Regional differences in people’s quality of life

Regarding educational attainment, 86% of the labour force has at least a secondary education in the Capital Region, while this share is only 71.1% in Gangwon Region. This gap (14.9 percentage points) is larger than regional differences in Japan and many other OECD countries.

Equally, the regional variation in air quality is relatively large in Korea.

The share of households with a broadband connection ranges from 99.2% in the Capital Region to 97.2% in Gangwon Region.
BETTER LIFE INDEX

The Better Life Index is an interactive web application that invites citizens to compare well-being across OECD countries and beyond on the basis of the set of well-being indicators explored 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, on how these preferences differ across countries, and on the demographic characteristics of users.

WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PEOPLE IN KOREA?

Since its launch in May 2011, the Better Life Index has attracted over seven million visits from just about every country on the planet and has received over 15 million page views. To date, over 77,000 people in Korea have visited the website making Korea the 20th country overall in traffic to the website. The top cities are Seoul (60% of visits), Daejeon, Busan and Incheon.

The following country findings reflect the ratings voluntarily shared by 590 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, safety, life satisfaction and education are the three most important topics (shown below).1 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.

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1 User information for Korea is based on shared indexes submitted between May 2011 and April 2015.
The OECD Better Life Initiative, launched in 2011, focuses on the aspects of life that matter 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 towards a better understanding of well-being 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 brochure presents selected findings for Korea from the How’s Life? report (pages 2-5) and shows what Korean users of the Better Life Index are telling us about their well-being priorities (page 6). A supporting Excel file with the data underlying the graphs shown in this note and further information is available here: www.oecd.org/statistics/Hows-Life-2015-country-notes-data.xlsx.

HOW’S LIFE?

How’s Life?, published every two years, provides a comprehensive picture of well-being in OECD countries and other major economies by bringing together an internationally comparable set of well-being indicators that the OECD considers as essential to a good life. It looks at people’s material conditions and quality of life across the population in eleven dimensions 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.

The How’s Life? 2015 report includes for the first time a set of indicators to measure the stocks of resources that help to support well-being over time. The report also contains three special chapters focusing on child well-being, volunteering and regional well-being.