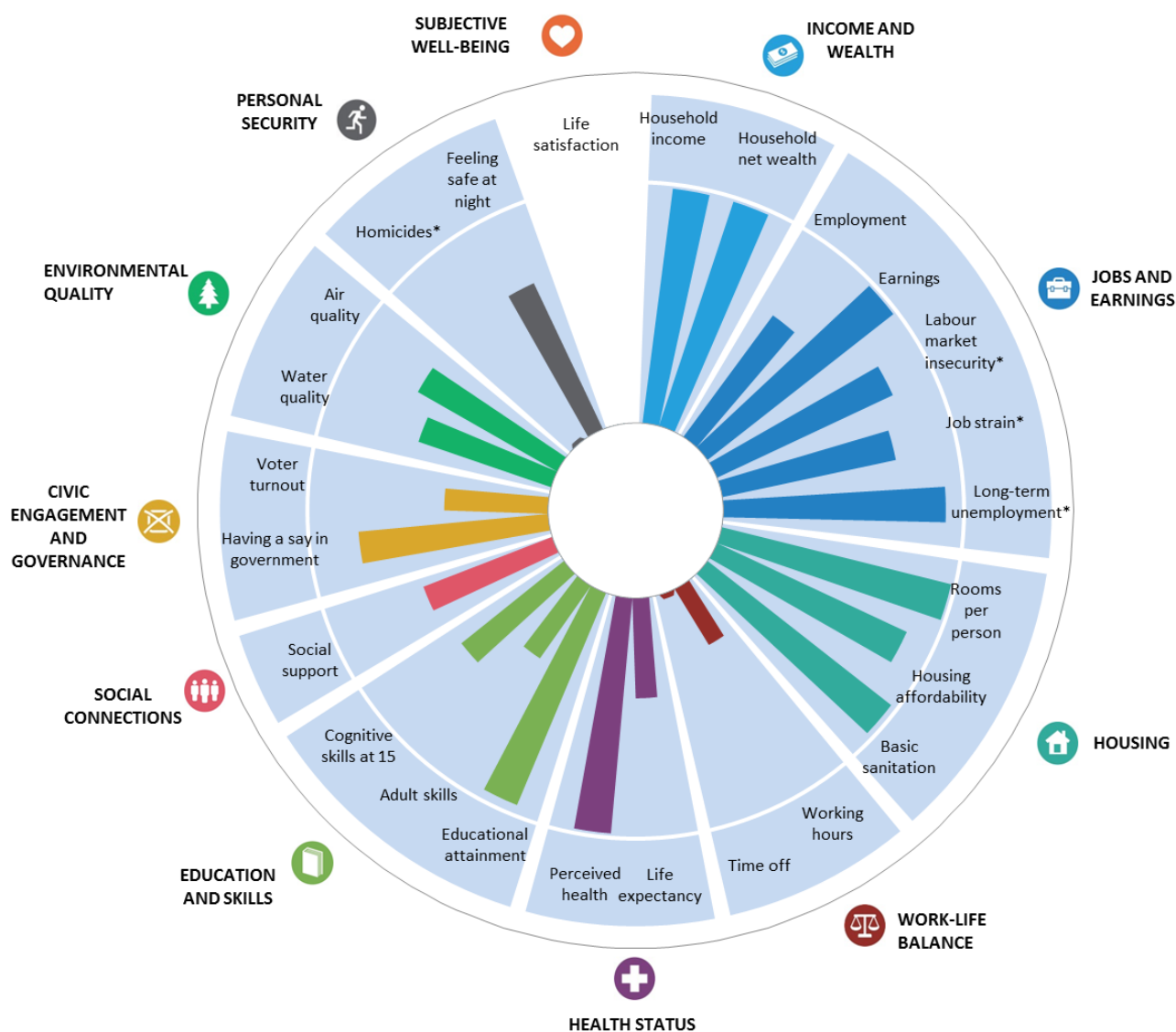


How's Life in the United States?

Relative to other OECD countries, the United States performs well in terms of material living conditions: the average **household net adjusted disposable income** was the highest in the OECD in 2015, and the average American enjoys good **housing conditions** and a low **long-term unemployment rate**. However, work-life balance is an area of comparative weakness: over 11% of employees work very long hours, and full-time employees report having less **time off** than in most other OECD countries. At 79 years, **life expectancy** falls within the bottom third of the OECD. A high share of Americans report good levels of **perceived health**, although these data are not directly comparable with those of the other OECD countries due to a difference in the reporting scale. Moreover, nearly 90% of the adult working-age population have attained at least an upper secondary education. However, the skills of both American adults and 15-year-olds are lower than the OECD averages. Furthermore, the United States has the third-highest rate of **homicides** in the OECD.

The United States' average level of current well-being: Comparative strengths and weaknesses














Note: This chart shows the United States' 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







Change in the United States' average well-being over the past 10 years









Dimension	Description	Change
 Income and wealth	The average household net adjusted disposable income has risen by 11% cumulatively over the past decade, in real terms. This is despite two periods of stalled growth in 2008-9 and 2012-13.	↗
 Jobs and earnings	Although the employment rate has made a gradual recovery since 2011, it is still below the 72% level reached in 2006. Real earnings improved consistently over the past decade. However, labour market insecurity also increased sharply during the crisis and is yet to recover. Both long-term unemployment and job strain are currently at similar levels to those recorded a decade ago.	↘ ↗ ↘ ↔ ↔
 Housing conditions	The average number of rooms per person has increased from 2.3 in 2005-2010 to 2.4 in 2011-2015, and access to basic sanitation has remained stably high. Housing affordability has improved in the last decade: the proportion of income spent on housing costs has fallen from 19.5% in 2005 to 18.4% in 2015.	↗ ↔ ↗
 Work-life balance	At 11.4%, the share of employees working 50 hours or more per week in 2016 is very similar to the level reported in 2005.	↔
 Health status	Despite an overall improvement since 2005, the United States continues to lag behind the OECD average in terms of life expectancy, and the gap has widened from 0.8 years in 2005 to 1.3 years in 2015. Perceived health has remained relatively stable.	↗ ↔
 Education and skills	Since 2005, the United States has recorded one of the highest shares of adults with at least an upper secondary level of education in the OECD. Reflecting this high starting point, the cumulative growth rate has been only 3% in the last decade.	↗
 Social connections	The share of people reporting to have relatives or friends whom they can count on to help in case of need fell over the past decade from 96% to 90%.	↘
 Civic engagement	Voter turnout in last year's Presidential elections increased slightly compared to 2012, but was still below the 70.3% turnout in 2008. This is in line with the OECD average trend, which has fallen by 2.4% since 2005.	↘
 Environmental quality	Satisfaction with local water quality has remained stable in the last few years. However, annual exposure to PM _{2.5} air pollution has improved over the past decade, and in 2013 the level reported was 14% lower than in 2005.	↔ ↗
 Personal security	Although the homicide rate has fallen by 18% over the decade, it is still among the highest in the OECD. Feelings of safety are broadly similar to their level 10 years ago.	↗ ↔
 Subjective well-being	People's life satisfaction has fallen gradually during the past 10 years, from an average of 7.3 to 6.9 (measured on a 0-10 scale). This is twice as large as the OECD average decline.	↘




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.

The United States' resources and risks for future well-being: Illustrative indicators




 Natural capital		
Indicator	Tier	Change
Greenhouse gas emissions from domestic production	3	 2005-2015
CO ₂ emissions from domestic consumption	3	 2001-2011
Exposure to PM _{2.5} air pollution	1	 2005-2013
Forest area	1	 2005-2014
Renewable freshwater resources	2	.. Long-term annual avg
Freshwater abstractions	3	.. 2010
Threatened birds	1	.. Latest available
Threatened mammals	1	.. Latest available
Threatened plants	3	.. Latest available

 Human capital		
Indicator	Tier	Change
Young adult educational attainment	1	 2005-2016
Educational expectancy	2	.. 2015
Cognitive skills at age 15	2	.. 2015
Adult skills	3	.. 2011/2012
Long-term unemployment	1	 2005-2016
Life expectancy at birth	3	 2005-2015
Smoking prevalence	1	 2005-2015
Obesity prevalence	3	 2006-2014

 Economic capital		
Indicator	Tier	Change
Produced fixed assets	1	 2005-2015
Gross fixed capital formation	1	 2005-2015
Financial net worth of total economy	1	 2005-2015
Intellectual property assets	1	 2005-2015
Household debt	2	 2005-2015
Household net wealth	1	.. 2010
Financial net worth of government	3	 2005-2016
Banking sector leverage	1	 2005-2016
No data available on investment in R&D.		

 Social capital		
Indicator	Tier	Change
Trust in the national government	2	 2005-2016
Voter turnout	2	 2008-2016
Government stakeholder engagement	1	.. 2014
Volunteering through organisations	1	.. 2011/2012
No data available on trust in others and trust in the police.		

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 THE UNITED STATES?

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).

Compared to other OECD countries, **vertical inequalities** in well-being are typically high in the United States. For example, the country has the highest share of net wealth held by the richest 10% of households (78%).

Across OECD countries, **women** typically fare worse than **men** on earnings, low pay, employment, perceived health, and feelings of safety. In the United States, women are 39% more likely than men to have low-paid jobs, a gap that is smaller than for the OECD on average (56%). However, the earnings gap is comparatively large. The US gender divide favours women for outcomes such as having a say in government and homicide rates.

In all OECD countries, **younger adults** have lower levels of income, wealth, earnings and voter turnout than the **middle aged**. In the United States these gaps are larger than for the OECD on average. Younger people also feel less safe and less like they have a say in government in the United States. Relative to older workers, young people in the OECD are typically at a large disadvantage in terms of employment and unemployment - but in the United States this divide is close or narrower than the OECD average.

In most OECD countries, people with a **tertiary education** tend to fare better than those without across a range of well-being outcomes. In the United States, these gaps are often comparatively large, especially for income, wealth, jobs, earnings, voter turnout and feeling safe.

Most indicators of **deprivation** for the United States are ranked in the bottom or middle third of OECD countries. Exceptions include unemployment, housing overcrowding, educational attainment and having a say in government – where deprivation levels are lower than for the OECD on average.

Well-being inequalities in the United States

	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

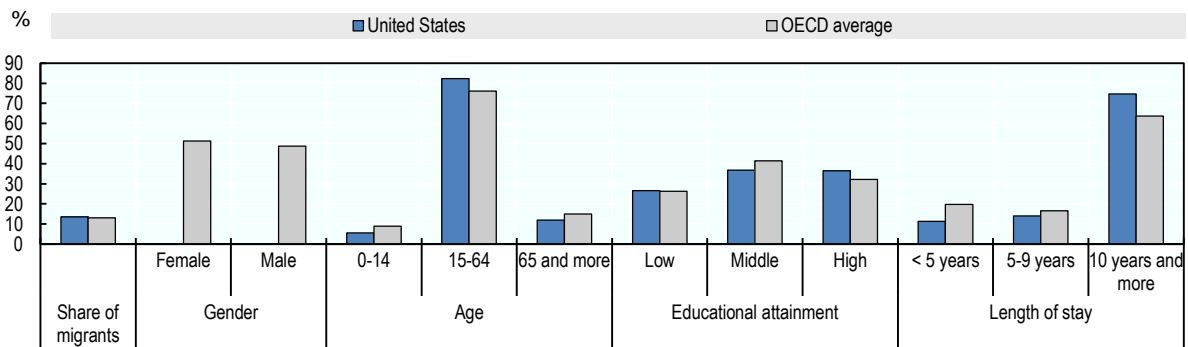
HOW'S LIFE FOR MIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES?

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 the United States and OECD?

In the United States, 14% of people were born elsewhere, similar to the OECD average (13%). Migrants in the United States are more likely to have a middle or a high educational attainment than a low level. Three-quarters of migrants arrived in the United States ten years ago or more.

Share of migrants in the total population and selected characteristics

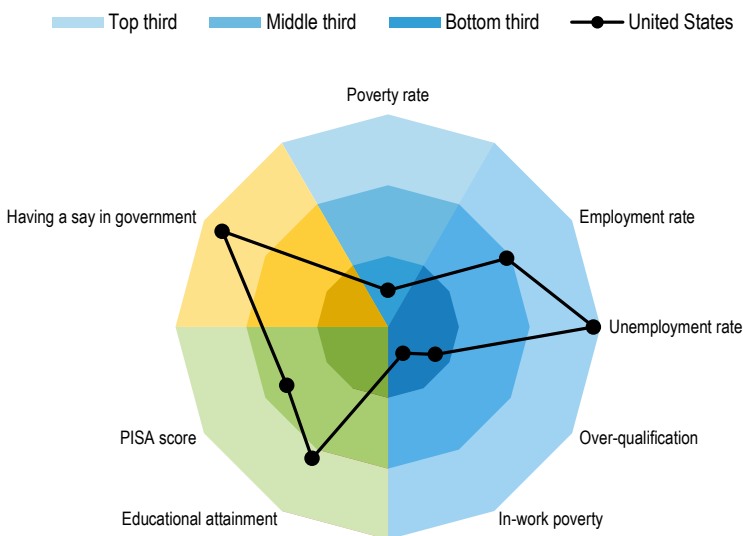


How is migrants' well-being in the United States?

Compared with the migrant populations of other OECD countries, migrants living in the United States have a relatively good situation for unemployment, educational attainment and having a say in government. Moreover, migrants settled in the United States rank in the middle third of OECD-country migrants for employment rate and PISA performance. They are in the bottom third for poverty, in-work poverty, and over-qualification.

As in many other OECD countries, migrants in the United States tend to experience lower well-being outcomes than the native-born population: this is the case for 4 out of 6 selected well-being indicators. However, migrants in the United States report similar levels of perceived health, having a say in government and life satisfaction as the native-born population.

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



Comparison of migrants' and native-born well-being in the United States

	Migrants have a worse situation	Same situation	Migrants have a better situation
Literacy scores	▲		
PISA score	▲		
Perceived health		▲	
Social support	▲		
Perceived safety	▲		
Having a say in government		▲	
Life satisfaction		▲	

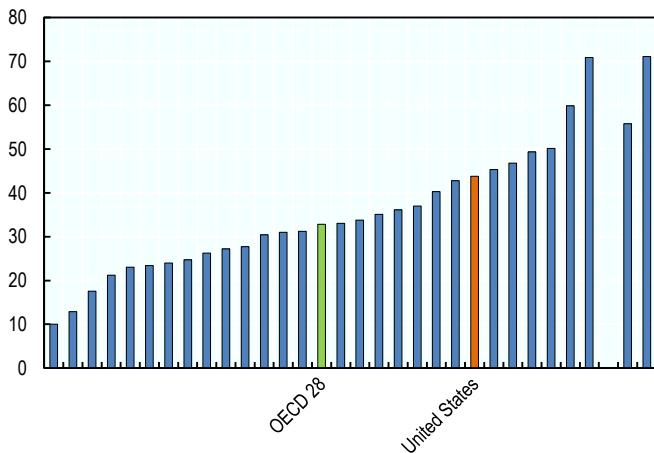
GOVERNANCE AND WELL-BEING IN THE UNITED STATES

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 the United States, almost 44% of the population feel 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 slightly decreased, with 68% of eligible voters casting a ballot in 2016, compared to 70% in 2008. When asked about whether or not corruption is widespread across government, 76% of Americans 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

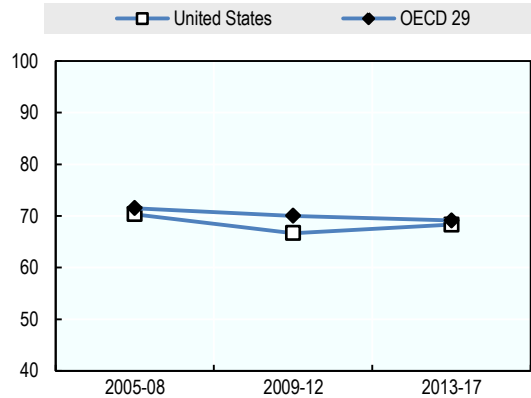
Percentage of people aged 16-65 who feel that they have a say in what the government does, around 2012



Source: OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC database)

Voter turnout

Percentage of votes cast among the population registered to vote



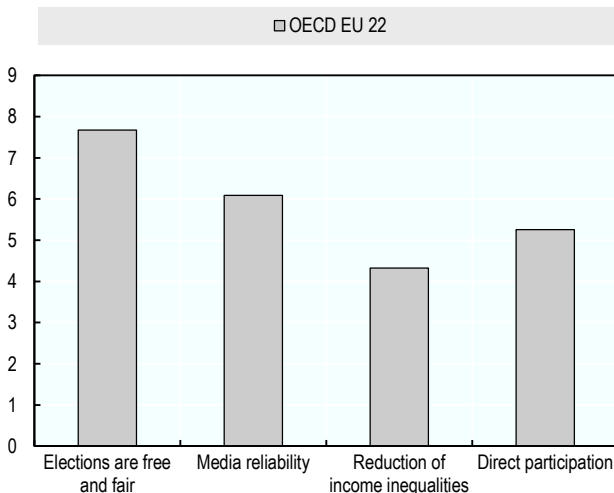
Note: Data refers to presidential elections. If more than one election took place over the time period indicated, the simple average voter turnout from all elections is shown. The OECD average sums elections that occurred over the time periods shown in 29 OECD countries.

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 run (7.7 on a 0-10 scale), they are relatively less satisfied with policies to reduce 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 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 the United States.

OECD EU average satisfaction with different elements of democracy

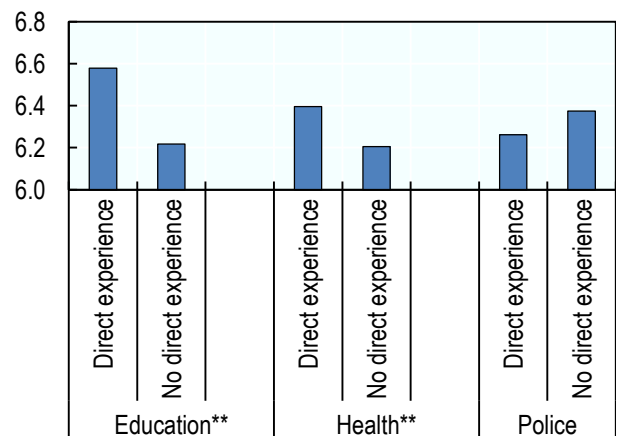
Mean score on a 0-10 scale, with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction with elements of democracy, 2012



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.

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.

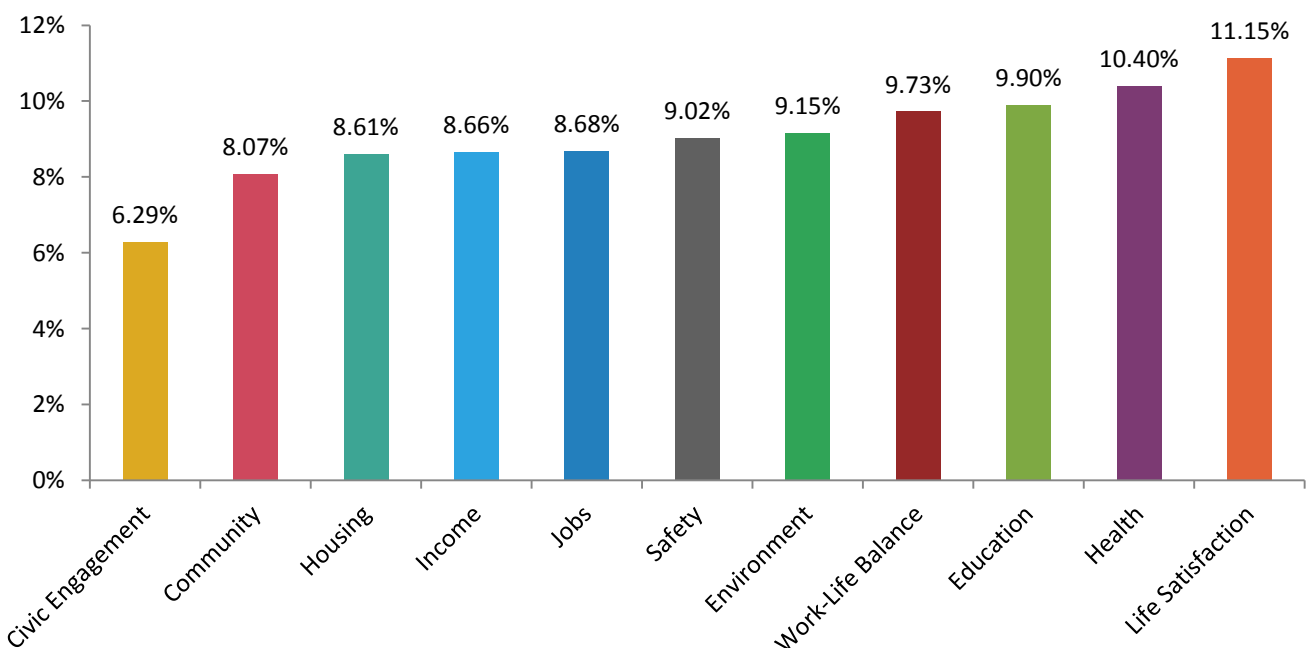


Users can also share their index with other people in their networks, as well as with the OECD. This allows the OECD to gather valuable information on the importance that users attach to various life dimensions, and how these preferences differ across countries and population groups.

WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES?

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 2,058,000 people in the US have visited the website making the US the 1st country overall in traffic to the website. The top cities are New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, Houston and San Francisco.

The following country findings reflect the ratings voluntarily shared with the OECD by 20,346 website visitors in the United States. Findings are only indicative and are not representative of the population at large. **For American users of the Better Life Index, life satisfaction, health 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/#USA.



¹ User information for the United States is based on shared indexes submitted between May 2011 and September 2017.

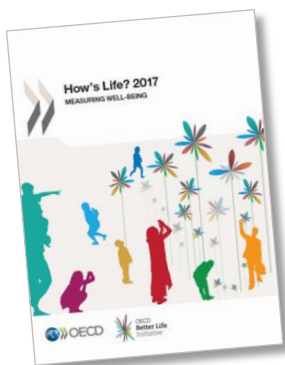
The **OECD Better Life Initiative**, launched in 2011, focuses on the aspects of life that matter the most to people and that shape the quality of their lives. The Initiative comprises a set of regularly updated well-being indicators and an in-depth analysis of specific topics, published in the *How's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

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