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**MYWEB (Measuring Youth Well Being)**  
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**WP4: Direct engagement with children and young people (CYP)**

**Deliverable 4.1: Country level reports on interviews and focus groups from delivery partners (Portugal)**

Editors	Magda Nico, Nuno de Almeida Alves (CIES-IUL, ISCTE-IUL)		
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WP Leaders	Mariona Ferrer-Fons (UPF)		
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## 1. Introduction

This report presents the main conclusions taken from the qualitative data collected from children and young people in Portugal about the definition and measurement of well-being through the development of interviews and focus groups, in school contexts and others. The report follows the outline suggested by the WP4 leading team.

The first point presented focuses on the fieldwork characteristics. Several difficulties in carrying out the fieldwork were presented: the need to have an authorization from the Ministry of Education Services to apply any kind of survey or inquiry in the school settings (which was rejected) and alternative strategies to overcome this problem and collaborate with a set of schools (characterized by social heterogeneity). The recruitment strategies and results are also presented in this point, as well as some time-consuming and bureaucratic obstacles that had to be overcome and that have to be taken into account in the future, especially when working with minors. Finally, the demographics of the interviews and focus groups are also presented.

The second point consists of the presentation and analysis of the material collected itself. Main empirical findings are divided in two groups: children and young people. This initial option was reinforced by the findings themselves. In fact, while children tend to have more difficulties in defining than in measuring well-being, they tend to define it through emotional features of life, although recognizing that structural conditions determine the inequalities of well-being among them; young people tend to have a more heterogeneous set of answers. Some give holistic definitions of well-being (where they include mental/philological, physical and most of all emotional well-being), others give definitions that are highly situation-dependent (in domains), others lack the skills to give definitions other than self-evident ones and still others give layered definitions based on a scaled approach of well-being. The major determinants identified by young people for the existence of well-being inequalities include economic conditions, some personality issues and also the family context (if it is a loving and peaceful environment or not).

The most important remarks made on the definition and operationalization of well-being in the fieldwork have to do with the specificity of “younger” young people (asking questions differently, which was felt as necessary, may compromise comparability through time and through participants in different age groups) and some important time-varying covariates and contextual variables (whose inclusion either in the survey or in the dataset may have to be considered and discussed in the future). The main determinants of the variability of the understanding of well-being are coincidentally the ones that most of the participants also identify as the most important to determine the inequalities of well-being among children: family situation and economic conditions (and also geographical belonging). Gender and

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voluntary participation did not, contrary to what could be expected, produce serious effects in the variability of the answers provided.

The last point, encompassing children and young people having their voices heard and their survey engagement, is rather straightforward. Young people and children tend to declare themselves unheard, either by parents, teachers or by society in general. They feel rather side-lined by adults based on their lack of experience. Although predominant, this feeling is not shared by all interviewees. Some state they are usually heard by grown-ups, and others consider that sometimes young people have childish behaviours, contributing to a general and sometimes justified disregard of young people's voices by adults.

In general, all interviewees consider it important to measure children's and young people's well-being. Almost all are available to participate in a future survey on this matter, even if repeatedly in a panel survey. While this demonstrated a willingness to engage in a future survey, there are some issues which deserve consideration, namely places where interviews should be conducted and the strategic use of incentives in certain hard-to-get cases. There are some differences according to age with respect to the richness of the pleas made by children and young people, but the other independent variables, such as gender and volunteer participation, did not contribute to the emergence of significant differences in involvement and participation.

## 2. Fieldwork characteristics

### 2.1. Fieldwork

#### ***Institutional hurdles***

WP4 fieldwork execution in Portugal was disturbed by several factors that have to be considered in a future longitudinal survey on the well-being of children and young people. There are numerous regulatory and procedural hurdles that turn survey procedures with children and young people into huge time-consuming efforts.

The first hurdle is of a regulatory nature: fieldworks planned for school environments in Portugal require authorization from the Ministry of Education Services. This authorization usually does not take longer than two to three weeks (especially in the case of a quantitative survey on educational subjects); but as MyWeb WP4 fieldwork required audio and video recordings with children and young people concerning personal data and reflections on their own well-being, the authorization was refused because the request should have been accompanied by a statement issued by the National Commission on the Protection of Personal Data. Considering that several weeks of valuable time had already been lost in this process and unaware of how much time the statement from this specific body would take, the team opted for other strategies to reach young students.

Through some personal contacts, the team found a group of schools (José Gomes Ferreira, which includes several schools, from high schools to kindergartens)<sup>1</sup> willing to collaborate with MyWeb, notwithstanding the previous refusal from the Ministry of Education. This group of schools was selected because it is located in a rather socially heterogeneous neighbourhood of Lisbon, a middle class neighbourhood surrounded by working class urban areas and local council estates. A first meeting was held in the third week of November, where the schedule of interviews with children and young people was set and documents (information sheet and parents' and participants' consent forms) were delivered to head teachers. The schedule was easy to arrange but difficult to keep due to the late arrival of the signed consent forms (the forms were delivered to the students that took them home and were later returned to the teachers). This process took almost two weeks in some cases, pushing the interviews and focus groups to the end of the term in mid-December. The recruitment process tried to integrate some students with known difficulties:

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<sup>1</sup>The Portuguese school system is organized through groups of schools, including one head school (usually secondary) and several other schools, including other secondary, lower secondary and primary schools. Some groups even include kindergartens. In some cases these groups of schools have 2,000 students and several hundred teachers.

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severe attrition, attention disorders, etc. Unfortunately, the lack of parental authorisation limited the integration of these cases: a single child with ADHD was able to participate.

### ***Recruitment of participants and interview schedule***

Despite this lengthy process, the team managed to finish one focus group with eight students between 15-16 years old, four interviews with students in this same age cohort and four interviews with children aged 10-12. The focus group with children in this last age group had to be conducted outside school due to the lack of authorized participants and time to recruit them (beginning of the Christmas holiday). This last focus group was organized through a market research company which processed the recruitment of five children between 10 and 13 years old according to MyWeb WP4 criteria. Although the pupils recruited in the José Gomes Ferreira (JGF) group of schools represented quite socially diverse groups, they were rather uniform in respect to the ages and school grades concerned. The younger group of pupils contains a large group of children aged 10 enrolled in the 5th grade (ISCED 2011 Level 1), as the second group of older pupils is formed by young people aged 15 enrolled in the 10th grade (ISCED 2011 Level 3). This happened because all interviewed pupils came from the same classes for organizational convenience of the schools collaborating with MyWeb.

All the other interviewees and participants in the focus groups were recruited by the same market research company, according to the criteria delivered by the MyWeb team, although the majority of interviews and focus groups were led by team's members or specially recruited experienced interviewers<sup>2</sup>. Through this procedure, a group of eight young boys and girls between 16 and 18 years old without associative participation was recruited, along with a smaller group of five young people in the same age cohort with some associative participation (with participation in sports associations being the modal activity, although also integrating participants involved in social solidarity volunteering, with this specific form of participation being characterised by its sporadic character). Involved young people were by far the hardest to recruit due to their scarcity in Portuguese society (Portugal has a structural record of low political/social participation and civic engagement, being even lower in the younger cohorts of the population). To overcome this difficulty, the team contacted a small number of youth associations in the Lisbon area in order to recruit some interviewees and focus group participants. Some agreed to participate, though stating that their members were all significantly older than the upper age limit requested. After many contacts and interactions, the team managed to recruit a single participant aged 24 to join a focus group. Apart from the

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<sup>2</sup>We would like to express our gratitude to Ana Alexandre, Augusta Correia and Nuno Ferreira for their competent work on delivering most of the interviews and focus groups conducted for this report.

participants in the focus group, only three other individuals were interviewed in this category of young people with some kind of participation in associations. Two are involved with sports associations but also sporadically collaborate with a food bank (one of these is also a scout) and the third is a volunteer in an animal welfare association.

Based on what was reported above, it is easy to conclude that the recruitment of participants in the several age cohorts and contexts (school and outside school) was not an easy task. The contacts with regulatory agents, schools and associations took some time and it was not always successful, at least considering the time available to execute the WP4 fieldwork. More time and planning will be needed for a similar future venture. The willingness to participate in MyWeb activities by contacted participants was relatively positive. At schools, the teachers cooperating with MyWeb were very generous, but the families took some time to answer the call and about half of them refused or did not answer the teacher's request. Outside the school context, the participants recruited through the market research company received an incentive of a €20 voucher from a well-known multimedia retailer. This incentive was extremely important to get enough participants in WP4 activities. Otherwise, the team got the sense that the interviewees would not participate in them.

WP4 fieldwork highlighted the usual difficulties of working with very young children. Apart from the understandable shyness of talking with unknown grown-ups, there were also some difficulties caused by the main theme of the interviews and focus groups (well-being) and by the format and content of the interview schedule. The interviews made it clear that questions about an abstract theme such as well-being are not clearly understood by young children and consequently the information collected is of limited value. The interview schedule used with the younger children also was not as clearly differentiated according to the age differences as it should be, but, again, an abstract theme such as well-being may be hard to translate into clear and simple questions to ask young children.

**Table 1. Main socio-demographic characteristics of the participants in the fieldwork**

	Interviews	Focus groups
<b>Pupils from primary school</b>	4 pupils aged 10 and 11 (1) 4 girls, 1 boy 5 whites 4 live in the school neighbourhood, 1 in the suburbs 3 live with both parents, 2 with the mother	--

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	All have siblings 3 from middle classes, 2 from low middle classes 1 girl with ADHD	
<b>Pupils from secondary school</b>	4 pupils aged 15 2 boys, 2 girls 4 whites 4 enrolled in the 10 <sup>th</sup> grade 3 live with both parents, 1 with mother Only two have siblings 3 live in the middle class neighbourhood of Benfica, 1 on its suburbs 3 from middle class, 1 from low middle class	8 pupils aged from 14 to 16 5 boys and 3 girls 7 whites, 1 mixed All enrolled in the 10 <sup>th</sup> grade 3 live in Benfica, 1 in the suburbs of Lisbon 4 live with both parents, 4 with their mothers 6 have siblings
<b>Children (10-12)</b>	--	5 children from 10 to 13 2 boys and 3 girls From the 5 <sup>th</sup> grade to the 8 <sup>th</sup> 5 whites Three live with both parents and siblings, one with mother and stepfather and sister, one with mother
<b>Non-organised young people</b>	6 young people, 2 girls and 4 boys Aged 15 to 19 4 enrolled in the 10 <sup>th</sup> grade (3 vocational), 1 in the 11 <sup>th</sup> and 1 which did not finish low secondary education 3 whites, 3 blacks All living in the suburbs of Lisbon 3 live with both parents, the other 3 only with their mothers Only two have siblings 3 come from households with multiple unemployment 1 comes from the middle classes, the other from the working classes 1 case with complex sexual identity issues	8 young people, 5 girls and 3 boys Aged 16 (3), 17 (2) and 18 (3) 4 enrolled in the 11 <sup>th</sup> grade, 2 in the 12 <sup>th</sup> and 2 already enrolled in Higher Education All whites 7 live with their parents, 1 with friends close to the university where she studies 5 have siblings All come from a middle class background
<b>Involved young people</b>	2 young boys aged 18, 1 girl aged 19 All enrolled in Higher	6 young people, 3 girls and 3 boys aged 15 (2), 16 (1), 18 (2) and 24 (1)

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	<p>Education</p> <p>Two live with their parents, one only with her mother although the father sometimes stays at home for some time</p> <p>Two have siblings, although one is from a previous marriage and does not live at home anymore</p> <p>Two with a middle class background, one included in the low middle class</p> <p>All involved with associations. 2 are volunteers in a food bank and 1 of them is also a scout. The other is a volunteer in an Animal Welfare Association</p>	<p>1 enrolled in the 9<sup>th</sup>, 2 in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, 2 in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 1 is a university graduate currently unemployed</p> <p>All live with their parents and siblings except one boy that lives with his mother and an older girl that recently moved to Lisbon to live with a friend</p> <p>All have some sort of associational involvement, although some are more integrated than others. 1 boy is integrated in a sports club, but as a sports player. Two girls are involved in two different youth associations, 1 boy in a national association to prevent the spread of AIDS and 1 is a volunteer at a food bank and a Catholic catechist. 1 boy is a junior volunteer fireman.</p>
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Despite the difficulties of the recruitment process, the sample of children and young people gathered may be considered quite diverse according to age, gender, and social background. Some of the quotas were not entirely accomplished, namely the amount and diversity of voluntary participants in associations and the number of interviewees in the quota 15-16 enrolled in the education system, due to the unavailability of interviewees or time-related constraints. However, the sample of 45 interviewees and participants in focus groups obtained is able to meet the challenges encompassed in the following pages.

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### 3. Main empirical findings

This section aims to present and critically analyse the data collected through the interviews and focus groups developed with children and young people. This presentation is organized by age group: the first part is dedicated to children and the following to young people. Besides the variety of social features that characterizes both groups of participants (important to achieve some representation of different social milieu), the group of young people is even more heterogeneous than the group of children, due to the inclusion of participants 15 years old, 18, or even older (mainly in the focus groups, due to difficulties of recruitment already explained above).

The period from childhood to adulthood is a demographically and emotionally dense period of life (Rindfuss, 1991) when personal development evolves rapidly and with extreme fluctuations. As Sara<sup>3</sup> puts it: “As an adolescent, my thoughts are not that much structured yet!” (Interview, Sara, female, 15 years old, JGF). Therefore, the views of 15-year-olds are indeed very likely to be significantly different from the views provided by 18-year-olds or even older “young people”. So although these two groups are going to be analysed conjointly in section 3.2, this age distinction will be taken into account and made explicit whenever considered necessary. This distinction, in a way, already reinforces the very idea of having a longitudinal survey from childhood to, eventually, adulthood (on well-being).

Interviews and focus groups were partially transcribed and the data analysis developed was based on a thematic content analysis (Bardin, 2009 [1977]), identifying the major types of answers given to each topic: global understanding/definition of well-being, the major domains of well-being, happiness and satisfaction with life, and the changes of the life course (relatively independently of the social characterizes of the respondents, contrary to what happens in Section 4

#### 3.1. Understanding and measuring well-being among children

The levels of complexity of the answers given by the participant children can be roughly divided in two sets: (i) a relatively low level of clarity, detail and complexity patent in the answers given to the questions concerning the overall definition of well-being, on one hand; (ii) and a relatively high level of explanation, rationalization and exemplification provided by the children in response to the questions about their opinions, practices and experiences (measurement of their well-being). Although still “underdeveloped”, it is thus in the second set of questions (about measurement) that the “reflexive monitoring of actions”, human skill discussed by

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<sup>3</sup>All names appearing in this report are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the data provided by the interviewees.

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Giddens (1984), is more visible in children's abilities. According to this view, (young) people have the faculty of situating their action in relation to themselves, their social context and 'others'. They have a relative "theoretical understanding" of the grounds of their activity" Giddens (1984). However, by the adjective "undeveloped" mentioned above, we mean that children seem to situate themselves always in the mainstream special milieu (middle class), and to admit their life experiences to be moderate, regular or plain "normal", somewhat between extremely low or extremely high levels of well-being (and its predictors), despite their more concrete social backgrounds and geographical environment.

### ***Global understanding/definition of well-being***

As stated above, children tend to find it difficult to define well-being, and find it easier to respond to concrete questions about experiences, feelings or expectations. Therefore, children's answers on what is well-being do not vary dramatically. Unlike what happens with young people, who as we will see tend to give more complex, holistic or interdependent definitions of well-being, children mainly and almost exclusively evoke emotional well-being.

There are mainly two ideas behind this emotional well-being:

**(1) Well-being from within.** Children tend to evoke that having well-being means to have tranquillity, peace of mind and autonomy of will. Not having diseases was also mentioned, but only in the focus group, mentioned by one of the participants and picked up later by other participants (Focus Group, Paulo, male, 11 years old).

*I feel good when I go to sleep in my own bed and when I am relaxed.*  
(Interview, João, male, 10 years old, JGF)

*Living in peace, the way a person wants, I guess. Not being always... I don't know the word but... Being able to have my own opinions and not living by anyone else's.* (Interview, Mafalda, female, 10 years old, JGF)

**(2) Well-being from the surroundings.** When mentioning this, children are most of the time indirectly referring to their family, to their household. They might refer to their family's company and/or their love and support.<sup>4</sup> So although this is an emotional feature of well-being, children explicitly focus its cause in exterior settings and characteristics. Their well-being is a consequence of something outside their control, or at least this is how they transmit this idea. These are some examples:

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<sup>4</sup>This is also mentioned in the focus group with pupils from secondary school.

*It means to feel good, to have love all around me to make feel good.*  
(Interview, Mariana, female, 10 years old, JGF)

*It's when a person is comfortable, when a person likes the way life is.*  
(Interview, João, male, 10 years old, JGF)

*It's to be good in terms of health, having friends and living with whom we love, I guess.* (Interview, Maria, female, 10 years old, JGF).

But the fact that the initial definition of well-being lies on these emotional features does not mean that when asked about well-being inequalities (among children), the participants were not able to identify other aspects. According to the participants, the main predictors for well-being inequalities include, from the more to the less structural:

#### **+++War environments**

If it's a country in war, like Syria, for example, children do not have any well-being, most probably. (Interview, João, male, 10 years old, JGF)

#### **++Health**

The example of Ebola was also given by Rui (Focus Group, male, 12 years old).

#### **+Living conditions**

*In the way children think, probably not. But there are people that live in worst conditions than others. Some live on the streets while other live in big properties. It's different. There are children that only think about material things, and others don't. Others think about having bread and a blanket...* (Interview, Maria, female, 10 years old, JGF)

#### **-Purchase power**

*There are boys that bring money to school every day to buy candy. I don't, I only do that once a week. My father is at the moment in Brazil to work. We cannot spend everything he earns just like that!* (Interview, Mariana, female, 10 years old, JGF)

#### **-- Loneliness**

*Sometimes I see children in the street, alone, without any adult nearby. I can tell they don't feel very good about it...* (Interview, João, male, 10 years old, JGF)

To sum up, for children, while the definition of well-being lies in the intimate and private sphere, the factors for well-being inequalities lie in more structural contexts

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and circumstances. This is quite a “mature” way of looking at the issue of well-being, we might add.

### ***Major domains***

The domains most referred to go in line with what was previously mentioned: emotional and social well-being (in this case, being with family and having and getting along with friends):

*No conflicts at home, having my friends in a good mood with me, that's it.* (Interview, Mafalda, female, 10 years old, JGF)

*For me to feel good, I only need my family, my friends, my health, and having people's love. I don't need anything else to be happy.* (Interview, Mariana, female, 10 years old, JGF)

*To be with my family, to have friends. Things that for some people have no meaning, but for others have a lot.* (Interview, Maria, female, 10 years old, JGF)

Within the family, different relations are identified and ranked in terms of the frequency of conflict (with siblings being the most problematic, though important). An important fact to mention is that most of the children emotionally understand the restrictions of liberty as an act of love and a protection strategy from their parents. This is also true in the case of young people, but more surprising in this case of the children, as it demonstrates an indicator of maturity to understand the social limitations of being a child (in the public sphere, at least). The mother is, in the case of single-parent families but certainly not only in those, indicated as the person the child most trusts and supports.

*When I am sad, the only person that makes me feel good is my mother. I don't talk with anyone the way I talk with her.* (Interview, Mariana, female, 10 years old, JGF)

School, neighbourhood, and residential conditions are mentioned much less. School is mentioned as a source of well-being only in two senses: having good grades (instrumental motive), and because it is the context of many friendships (contextual motive). However, some children mentioned the fact that they think they spend too much time at school while they would prefer to be with their family.

### ***Happiness and life satisfaction***

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Children do not tend to be very critical about their life and relations. Therefore, they usually state that they are happy about their lives. The aspects in their lives where they acknowledge room for improvement are usually related to school, regarding either grades or their relationships with some specific teachers.

### ***Well-being over the life course***

When talking about changes to their well-being from the past (3 years ago) and the factors that explain them, children with recent changes in their lives (such as changing schools or house) tend to evaluate changes from past to present in a negative way. They mention that in the past they were in a better school, had more and better friends and nicer teachers. In some interviews the deteriorated health of some of their relatives is also mentioned. On the other hand, aspects stated as justifications for acknowledging that their lives and well-being have improved have to do mostly with personality development such as having more freedom, more life experience, and more maturity.

*Every day we learn something new. For ten years, learning something new every day... It must be a lot! (Interview, Maria, female, 10 years old)*

The most frequent changes expected for the determinants of well-being in the future are, in the short run, educational success, good grades and university enrolment. In the long run, aspects mentioned are again related to their current relatives and to potential new family members (partners and/or children), their relationships, health and their social ties. The retrospective exercise is far simpler for them to do than the exercise of projecting into the future.

## ***3.2. Understanding and measuring well-being among young people***

### ***Global understanding/definition of well-being***

In a general matter, when asked very generally what is the meaning of well-being, young people first refer to “feeling good”, “peace of mind”, “getting along with family and friends”, “giving and receiving affection” and “feeling good about yourself”. Although physical and material well-being are also mentioned, they assume a secondary role in all the statements. Physical well-being is more mentioned by boys, and material well-being is more mentioned by individuals with lower or disadvantaged social background or experiences, that state that well-being implies not having economic struggles on a daily basis.

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Nonetheless, the global understanding of well-being provided in the interviews with young people can be divided in four sets of answers concerning the scope and complexity of the concept.

### **Holistic definitions**

Some young people, interestingly enough mainly the youngest ones in this group (approximately 15 years old), tend to give holistic definitions of well-being that unite mental/philological, physical and most of all emotional and social well-being (having support, confidence, love, etc.). These are the first things that come to their minds when they are asked about the meaning of well-being.

*Mental and physical health. Mental health is feeling good about myself. Self-esteem should be high but not too high, nor very low. (Interview, Manuel, male, 15 years old, not involved)*

*Psychological and physical well-being, having friends and family. (Interview, Laura, female, 17 years old, not involved).*

*My social well-being, and also mental and physical well-being. Being satisfied with my life, with no problems at all. (Interview, Guilherme, male, 15 years old, JGF)*

*Having people in our lives that love us and that we love back. (Interview, Sara, female, 15 years old, JGF)*

*Well-being is getting along with people, with all sorts of people, feeling good and healthy, doing what I want to do. It's trying to do what I believe in and not what other people think. (Interview, Rodrigo, male, 15 years old, JGF)*

### **Situated definitions**

There is also a tendency, visible in a more heterogeneous group of young people when it comes to age, to give more structural, situated, concrete answers on the meaning of well-being. It is not clear why this specific group of people mention more than others the relation between well-being and basic needs, for they are a socially heterogeneous one and not necessarily a less advantaged one, as could be expected. Here are some examples:

*Having a home, food on the table, friends and family. I think that is enough for a person to have well-being. (Interview, Gil, male, 18 years old, not involved)*

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*Not having economic struggles.* (Interview, Diana, transgender, 19 years old, not involved)

*Having healthy nutrition and a good home and not having economic struggles.* (Interview, Sara, female, 15 years old, JGF)

### **Self-evident definitions**

There is a third group of young people that, probably because they experienced more difficulties in defining well-being, tend to give more generalist, redundant and self-evident definitions such as:

*Being comfortable, feeling good.* (Interview, Francisco, male, 18 years old, not involved)

*For a person to feel good and comfortable with herself.* (Interview, Hugo, male, 16 years old, not involved)

*Joy, happiness, being comfortable, at ease.* (Interview, Madalena, female, 16 years old, JGF)

### **Layered definitions**

This last set of definitions appeared more relevant both among older young people and in focus groups, where the participants got the chance to deepen the layers and nuances of the concept between themselves. In these definitions, the youngsters made a point of distinguishing well-being from happiness. Well-being is for them the achievement of basic objective and subjective conditions of life, while happiness is at a higher level, and is usually merely momentary or gradual, or cumulative. Well-being is then considered a compulsory but not sufficient condition to experience happiness.

*Well-being is a basic characteristic that you have to have in order to reach happiness, but it's a different thing.* (Focus Group, Pedro, male, 17 years old)

*It's like well-being is merely to survive.* (Focus Group, Magda, female, 18 years old)

*It's a mean to an end: happiness.* (Focus Group, Margarida, female, 16 years old)

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*When I finish my degree, I will be very happy. Then I will be out looking for a job... not so happy, then when I find one, I will be very happy. Little by little, that's how I will be happy... (Focus Group, Vanessa, female, 18 years old)*

This distinction between these two levels of well-being was also visible in non-involved and younger people. They state that first come the basic commodities (health, education, housing, food) and secondly the “superfluous” things (clothes, going on holiday outside Lisbon, etc.) (Focus Group, with pupils from secondary school).

There are three sets of determinants of well-being inequalities pinpointed by young people:

(i) Economic conditions. The most important factor, mentioned first and most frequently by young people, is the economic one. Two sub-aspects are mentioned: the comfort of not having to worry about money (objective condition of life) and the tendency that some people have to brag about their better economic condition (subjective condition of life, which young people relate to issues of personality). By connecting the two features, young people are in fact recognizing the existence not only of social inequalities (which create inequalities of well-being), but also of a sort of “class identity”, behaviour or lifestyle.

*Yeah, rich people always have “well-being”. For rich people, well-being is an everyday thing. (Interview, Diana, transgender, 19 years old, not involved)*

*There are people that are much richer than others. So there are people that are much poorer than others, and do not have as many possibilities. Unfortunately, I think having money has an influence on personal well-being. So there are people that have more well-being than others! The causes for the differences are personality and the relation each person has with others. (Interview, Gil, male, 18 years old, not involved)*

(ii) Personality and self-esteem. Some differences about the level of well-being felt by each person are attributed to personality aspects and to the relationship young people have with significant others, especially the closest family.

*The causes for the differences are personality and the relation each person has with others. (Interview, Laura, female, 17 years old, not involved)*

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*There are people that feel at ease with other and friends, others don't.*  
(Interview, Madalena, female, 15 years old, JGF)

(iii) The family context. Related to the aspect mentioned before is the family context and the emotional support that the family members are able to give, and actually give, to their children.

*Some teenagers may have family problems, in badly structured families, with parents that don't care about them and are not worried about the course of their lives.* (Interview, Sara, female 15 years old, JGF)

### **Major domains**

The domains mentioned as having important effects on well-being are mainly those already mentioned and explained, plus school and sports:

Friends: namely having someone to trust and talk with about anything, not having to make new friends all the time, having fun, etc.

Family: namely not feeling pressured, happy and in a fun environment, feeling that they care, receiving their relatives' affection, emotional validation, etc.

*Family always helps because it is our safe haven when things are not going well. It's where we go to find shelter and try to fix our problems.*  
(Interview, Vera, female, 19 years old, not involved)

Not having economic problems and not being discriminated against by the "popular" and rich kids at school.

*Money is a means for us to be able to do things that make us feel good: having lunch or dinner with friends, going on holiday with our friends, etc.*  
(Focus Group, Vasco, male, 16 years old, JGF)

Self-esteem or psychological well-being: feeling good about yourself, not keeping your anxieties for yourself, having someone to talk to.

School: namely for instrumental reasons, because it is a good example for the future. On the other hand, some of the youngsters specifically say that school does not bring any well-being. These kids are more focused on the present and the more immediate satisfaction they could get from it. Because these are usually kids that don't like to study, they feel no pleasure being enrolled in schools, especially "ordinary" and non-professional ones. School plays an ambiguous role in the level of well-being. At present it is considered a "drag", but its usefulness for the future, to have a good profession, a good quality of life and a high level of well-being is acknowledged.

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Sports: is a two-fold source of well-being. It provides the social well-being of being part of a team, having shared goals and individually contributing to a collective achievement. On the other hand, sports provide physical challenges and well-being. This a topic mentioned much more by boys than girls. The few girls that mention this as an importance source of well-being are the “older” youngsters (for example, Raquel, Focus Group, female, 18 years old, involved).

### ***Well-being over the life course***

The retrospective and prospective exercise that was proposed in the interview actually worked very well with young people, and this is a question that would indeed work very well in a survey.

The major changes identified from the past to the present in terms of well-being are:

- Increasing concerns and investment with and in physical health
- More investment in school and more satisfaction taken from it
- Increasing concerns with getting families approval and pride
- Not giving that much importance to gifts or material stuff
- More preoccupation with significant others (their well-being is important)

*I will probably give more value to things when I am older. When I am the one paying for things...* (Interview, Gil, male, 18 years old, not involved).

*I will give less value to material things, but value earning money more. And I will continue to value my friends and family.* (Interview, Rodrigo, male, 15 years old, JGF)

On the other hand, the most relevant changes identified for the future are:

- Giving more importance to financial stability
- Organizing the household
- Not taking material goods for granted
- More freedom to have fun alone and socially
- Having a good, stable job that makes them happy
- Having good relations with family (new)

*Probably when I am older I will give much more importance to my family than to my friends. I will live more for my family and my work than for my friends.* (Interview, Vera, female, 19 years old, not involved)

- Friendships will lose importance (the nature of the friendships will change). Friendships will become more superficial and less affectionate.

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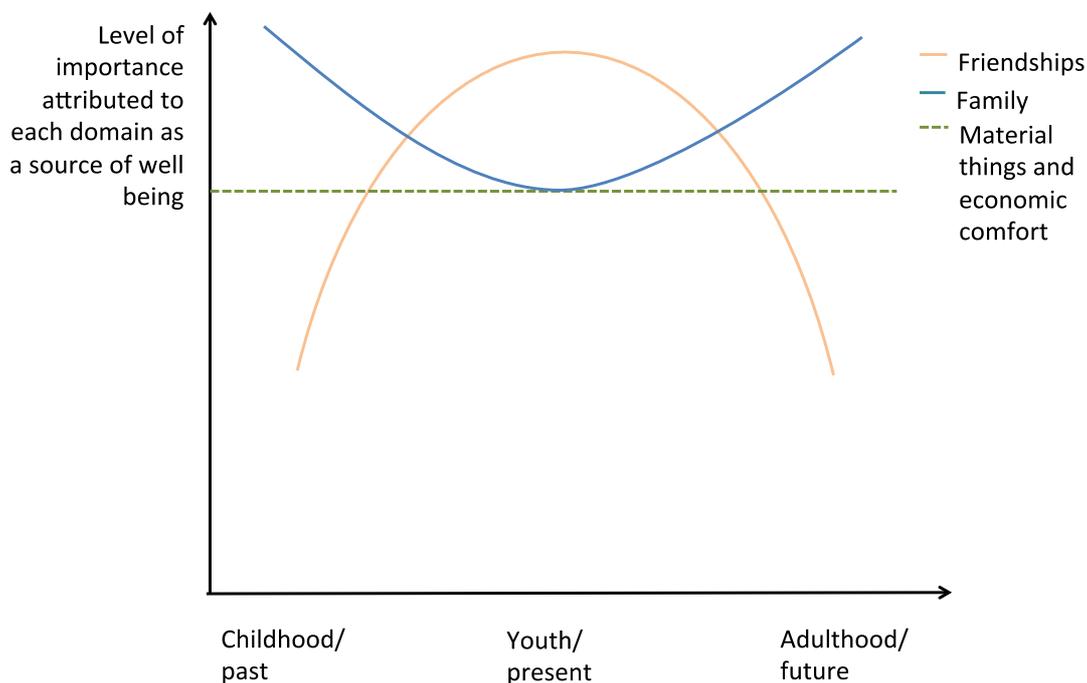
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*When I am as old as my parents, if I already have a family, their well-being will be very important to me. I will also value being able to go out at night and having a good job. (Interview, Hugo, male, 16 years old)*

*Having a good job, not having problems at work, not being bored by my colleagues, liking them and them liking me. Being able to pay my bills, basic stuff, having a house where I feel good. (Interview, Sara, female, 15 years old, JGF)*

The next scheme shows the most frequent tendencies and oscillations of the importance mentioned by young people, from past to future (Figure 1). Although the nature of the relationship with money and economic comfort will change (in childhood, it was important to have toys, in youth it is important to have nice clothes and money for leisure activities with friends and in adulthood it will be important to reach economic autonomy and well-being), its general importance is relatively transversal and stable across time. The importance of friends reaches its peak in youth and starts to decrease towards adulthood (friendships become more superficial). Finally, family is always important, being only potentially surpassed by friendships during the youth period.

**Figure 1. Changes in the importance attributed to life domains over time**



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### ***3.3. Remarks on the definition and operationalization of ‘well-being’ in the fieldwork***

Although the interviews and focus groups did not have a specific exploratory function in the project, they indeed help to anticipate some of the difficulties in inquiring children (and young people) in a longitudinal manner. These can be divided in two major topics: one is related to the (age) heterogeneity of the participants and the need to have flexible and adequate scripts, vocabulary and surveys *versus* the need to have repeated and comparable models of inquiry over time and across groups.

#### ***Specificity of younger young persons: asking and comparing answers***

Although the consensus around the idea that children's voices must have a legitimate place to be heard and considered is growing among social scientists and slowly arriving in the social and public policy arena, methodological challenges and setbacks persist. Ethical problems of working with children have perhaps been addressed and unravelled faster than the methodological ones. The latter are produced by the fact the participants have the specificity of being a particular kind of young person: more immature, less used to being asked for opinions in a general matter and even more so in relatively formal contexts such as an “interview” with an older researcher.

Therefore, asking the right questions in the right way, in an adequate context, and specially being able to adapt them if necessary, is even more crucial when working with children than with young people who are more frequently eager to talk, give opinions and their points of view and exercise their already self-perceived reflexivity. These are some of the reasons why interviewing children is such a hard task. In this specific experience of fieldwork, these difficulties were exacerbated by other factors:

#### **The topic of the interview is abstract for children OR... *what to ask***

This abstract feature of the topic of the interview was felt in several ways: there were children who did not understand the questions at all (asking something like “How so?” or admitting “I don’t get it”) and there were children who did not know how to answer the questions (and were aware of that) or that could not answer correctly (therefore giving examples or statements about other things, sometimes unrelated).

We realized, however, that it was easier for children to provide information about the measurement of their concrete well-being than to define well-being in a general manner. In this sense, the survey could/should especially when developed for MYWEB: FP7-613368

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children (i) have a more detailed focus on the measurement than on the definition of well-being and (ii) have different and alternative ways of asking the more abstract questions, especially when developed for children.

### **The zigzag order of the script OR... *how to order the questions***

We think it could have been easier for children to develop some aspects of the script if it was divided in three parts: what contributes positively to well-being (in general, per domain, for "others", the example of last week, etc.), what contributes negatively to well-being (in general, per domain, for "others", the example of last week) and a comparison of the two (past versus present, future versus present, levels of overall satisfaction, etc.). It would probably have made it simpler to answer and therefore easier to provide more detailed answers. This is also true, although less problematic, for young people. We have to raise the hypothesis that people, especially young people and even more so children, have their intimate framework organized by good and bad rather than by domains of life (or analytical differences such as well-being, happiness, satisfaction, etc.). The order of the questions is perhaps even more important in a survey, where there are many more questions and thus a higher risk of demobilizing the participant, and the monitoring process of each participation is even more difficult to develop, especially if the application of the survey is a collective one (like in a classroom, for instance).

### **Inquiring as a necessary interaction OR... *how to answer***

The adjustment of the questions and the order of the questions to the age/development specificity of the participants lead us to another issue. Are the surveys all going to be self-fulfilled? This might bring problems of misunderstood questions, high rates of invalid answers and missing answers. Especially in the case of children, the interaction between the interviewee and themselves is a very important contribution to the mere quality of the material and data collected. How will this importance be translated in the development of a large-scale survey? How to combine the singularity of the participant with the interaction with the interviewee, on one hand, and with the quality and quantity of the material collected, on the other? This remains, obviously, an open question.

### **The inclusion of "extreme" social variability in the group of interviewed children OR... *who to include***

The younger the child, the more the aforementioned problems were felt. This is even more so in the cases of other characteristics, such as children with learning disabilities, attention deficits, etc. This example is based on a concrete experience of an interview with a 10-year-old child with ADHD. The interview was very hard to carry out. Questions had to be asked several times and answers were often

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unsatisfactory (in the sense that they were not sufficiently close to the topic in question).

These situations unquestionably ask for different instruments to collect the data. But this necessity may have several issues of comparability as a consequence. How representative are these groups of children? Is their presence in a large-scale survey of the utmost importance? The pros and cons of including young people with special development characteristics have to be considered and assessed.

To sum up, either different questions are posed to these children (and eventually better answers are obtained but the comparability potential is lost) or people with very different personal development and learning and comprehension skills are asked the same questions (thus getting answers with much less quality and losing the comparability potential anyway).

### ***Time varying covariates and contextual variables: what to include in the survey and in the dataset***

There are also issues that have to do with contextual variables and variables that change over time. Some might have to be included as social characterization questions in the survey, others *a posteriori*.

#### **Geographical belonging**

Variability of the neighbourhoods is higher than the answers given about them. Although in general the participants like the place where they live, feel at home and acknowledge the problems in a very optimistic manner, the places to which they refer are extremely variable. For that reason, to analyse the gap between the interviewee's perspective on the neighbourhood and the concrete reality of that specific territory (cognitive dissonance about the territory), and to make the distinction between those who like where they live *despite something* and those who like where they live *because of something*, some official and standardized information about the neighbourhood would perhaps have to be added *post hoc* to the data set. This standardized information would include some geographical and social variables about the territory: accessibility, type of housing, predominant social class, mobility and accessibility, level of crime and violence, etc.

#### **Measuring networks across time**

Friends acquire extreme importance in young people's well-being, but this seems to be a very age-specific feature of networks. With time, family and friends tend to change their competing roles and importance, at least according to the information shared by young people both in the interviews and in focus groups.

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For this reason, it could be a very useful strategy to include a module specifically on social networks in the survey. The analysis could then have a longitudinal view on how the number and quality of friends change, how friends are renewed, their origin, how family members' role and importance also change, etc. and how the ranking constituted by both family and friends change over time. This would also have an innovative feature, since network analysis is not normally analysed longitudinally. In other words, the age, period and cohort effect are usually difficult to disentangle in network analysis.

#### **4. Differences on the understanding of well-being depending on certain factors**

There are three main variables that seem to influence the patterns of defining, understanding and experiencing well-being. Due to some aspects related to the different stage of personal development and reflexive monitoring that characterize the children participants, the following accounts refer mainly to the material collected from young people, where the link between their social belongings and the variability of their answers are easier to uncover.

##### ***Geographical belonging***

There seems to be a relation between the sense of belonging to the neighbourhood and the mature nature of life plans and of social mobility. In this sense, the larger the sense of belonging to the neighbourhood (which reaches the extreme of saying “I was born here, this is where I want to die”) – usually a poor or problematic one – the more acute the lack of plans of life for the future. On the other hand, young people from middle class background tend to see the disadvantages of living, for example, in the suburbs (Interview, Miguel, male, 17 years old, not involved) or outside Lisbon (Focus Group, Ana, female, 24 years old, involved) more clearly and see it as something that will have to change in the future in order for them to maintain their well-being and perception of having quality of life.

##### ***Family situation***

As was mentioned before, family is extremely important for the well-being of all the respondents. However, the family situations are very variable (from single parenthood, to extended families, to divorced parents, etc.) and it seems that, in the long run, the importance and expectations of the family or origin and a possible new family of their own are going to change dramatically according with their new and reflexive understandings of their own experiences and family lives. This appears to be a very strong time-varying covariate for well-being.

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### ***Economic conditions***

There seems to be relevant variability in the answers concerning the importance of material things and economic and financial prosperity in the definition of well-being. The cause of this variability seems to lie in real economic conditions and experiences. People from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or more difficult economic situations and experiences tend to mention money much more than anything else as important for well-being and survival and as the variable that mostly differentiates well-being among children and young people.

To sum up, people that suffer from economic and social inequality recognize this as a problem in general and as an indicator of their own well-being in the present and in the future. On the other hand, young people from middle class backgrounds and/or with higher educational levels so far tend to refer to economic aspects of well-being as related to the result of their effort and their professional success, their concerns about their economic autonomy and stability in the long-term and the fact that they will value the money they will earn in the future even more.

The focus group led with older young people confirms this evolution in the understanding of the importance of money in well-being, with most of the participants talking about employment, unemployment, personal effort, generational conflicts and gaps and meritocracy (Focus Group with involved young people).

### ***Gender and participation in NGOs or volunteer activities***

Contrary to what would be expected, these variables did not generate recurrent differences in the answers about the meaning and understanding of well-being. Boys mention sports as a source of well-being more and girls tend to mention clothes more. But besides this relative cliché, the differences were not relevant, contrary to what would be expected by some authors. Kimmel (quoted by Reifman, 2011), for example, states that the period of transition to adulthood is the most gendered of all human development. Perhaps these differences would be found in a slightly older age groups.

On the other hand, volunteer activities are mentioned by those doing them as an additional source of well-being (because they feel they are contributing to someone else's well-being). But all the remaining answers are similar to the ones given by the so-called "non-involved" youth.

## **5. Having their voices heard and survey engagement**

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## 5.1 Being heard and survey engagement among young children

Young children generally feel rather unheard and misunderstood by adults in a similar fashion to young people (below), although with simpler pleas:

*I think that adults do not understand children very well because they think differently. I also think that adults have already forgotten what being a child is like. Teachers also do not pay much attention to what worries little children. (Interview, João, male, 10 years old, JGF)*

This feeling also comes with the assumption of their smaller role in society when compared to adults, almost with the implicit notion that they know that their assertions are not right or that they do not deserve much attention, although in some cases children are more knowledgeable than adults and should be heard in these situations:

*I believe that society does not hear young children... Adults are giving all their effort to keeping us on the right track, but they do not listen to what we have to say. (Interview, Maria, female, 10 years old, JGF)*

*I think that, as a child, my voice is not heard in society. But I really do not have anything important to say. But I think children should be heard when they are aware of the subjects in hand. (Interview, Mafalda, female, 10 years old, JGF)*

*They believe we are very childish, that we are not at the right age to be heard. (Focus Group, Alexandra, female 13 years old)*

*After growing up we will be heard. But there are children that are born more intelligent than adults. I think that when grown-ups make choices they should listen to younger people more often. My dad wanted to buy a new mobile phone and I wanted to share my opinion with him... and he would not listen. (Focus Group, Paulo, male, 11 years old)*

Most the interviewed young children would like to be involved in a future survey on well-being, even on a panel survey, although with a few noteworthy exceptions:

*I do not know if I would like to participate. (Focus Group, Paulo, male, 11 years old)*

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*I would not accept to answer a questionnaire. I had to fill one questionnaire at school and I did not like it. (Interview, Mafalda, female, 10 years old, JGF)*

*I do not want to fill out a questionnaire. I would prefer an interview, such as this one, because I could understand the questions better. (Interview, Clara, female, 11 years old)*

One last quote introduces an interesting aspect: one of the participants in the focus group with young children said that:

*I would not mind to participate if the single subject was not me, if I could share my opinion about well-being in general. (Focus Group, Rui, male, 12 years old)*

Regarding the fieldwork conditions of such a survey, a significant number said that they would prefer to do it at home, a quieter and more comfortable place. At first this position could be justified by the fieldwork conditions of the interviews conducted at the young children's school, a rather noisy place.

*It would be better if we could do it in a quieter place, without so much noise. (Interview, João, male, 10 years old, JGF)*

*I would prefer to do it at home. It would be more comfortable. (Interview, Mariana, female, 10 years old, JGF)*

But the same was said in the focus group, probably meaning that young children feel more confident with single interviews done at a place they know well and where they feel comfortable. Only two children cited the school as an option, giving privilege to the number of children that could be interviewed if such an option were made, but the general feeling is rejection of the school as a comfortable place for fieldwork purposes.

A few references to incentives were made. Three children think that an incentive could make participation more attractive and this could be done through a voucher or even a ticket to a football match, but the most references to incentives underline that they would not be needed. One of the children even said:

*I would feel bad if I gave my opinion in exchange for a gift. (Interview, Clara, female, 11 years old, JGF)*

## **5.2 Being heard and survey engagement among young people**

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All the interviewees generally state that young people are not heard in Portuguese society, although with some mild differences among them. The majority said that:

*Society does not pay attention to young people.* (Interview, Laura, female, 17 years old, not involved)

*Even in similar conditions, the voices of adults have more weight than the voices of young people.* (Focus Group, Filipe, 17 years old, not involved)

Several reasons are mobilized for this to happen, such as the status of young people in Portuguese society (in the adult's point of view) that wrongly limits their deservedness of being heard, such as:

*We are considered lazy and it is thought that we live an easy life.* (Interview, Laura, female, 17 years old, not involved)

*People say that young people do not know what life is, that they have little or no experience of life and, in this way, they do not have much to say that deserves to be heard by adults.* (Interview, Miguel, male, 18 years old, involved)

The reasons given may include a self-deprecatory notion of the value of young people's voices, such as:

*I think that young people do not want to be heard.* (Focus Group, Magda, female, 18 years old, not involved)

*Young people do not really make an effort to be heard.* (Focus Group, Ana, female, 24 years old, involved)

*Young people do not want to assume responsibility for making themselves heard.* (Focus Group, Raquel, female, 18 years old, involved)

In respect to this subject, it is important to say that there were two references by two young girls to the awarding of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize to Malala Yousafzai, both stating their incredulity that such a prestigious and important prize was awarded to a young girl:

*At least this girl was heard.* (Focus Group, Carla, female, 16 years old, not involved; Focus Group, Raquel, female, 18 years old, involved)

A minority of the young people interviewed said that things are rather different from some years ago, where young people's voices were completely disregarded in Portuguese society:

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*It depends. Nowadays people are more open to what young people have to say. In my case, people [family] are starting to hear me more than they used to. (Interview, Guilherme, male, 15 years old, JGF)*

*Nowadays young people's voices are heard, clearly more than before. Sometimes they are heard more than they deserve... Sometimes young people say things without thinking, totally superficial and disregarding others... Before, if someone wanted to organize a demonstration it would immediately raise a problem... Now we have the freedom of speech on our side. We are super heard. (Interview, Sara, female, 15 years old, JGF)*

In sum, the majority of the interviewees state that young people are generally not heard by adults (parents, teachers) and by society in general. In contrast, some say that the disregard for young people's voices is a thing of the past, that they feel more heard than ever. The fault for this lack of dialogue is mainly attributed to adults, although some also recognize that young people usually do not make an effort to be heard, that they have not much to say due to lack of experience or even that some say things they should not when they have the opportunity.

Young people that collaborated with MyWeb also found it important to measure young people's well-being. The basic justification is rather stereotypical:

*Young people are the future of this nation, so it is important to measure their well-being. If young people feel well and happy, they may grow up soundly and later contribute to the country's wealth. (Interview, Hugo, male, 16, not involved)*

*If young people's problems are not heard and attended to, adolescents will never fully become adults. (Interview, Laura, female, 17 years old, not involved)*

Other interviewees focus on the outcome of such a process, stating the importance of data availability to characterize young people's situations in Portugal and Europe and the possibility of comparing countries and social classes and, in the future, generations:

*It is important to compare the notion of well-being of today's young people with the same notion with respect to adults. As it will be important to compare the same notion between the young people from today with the one of the young people in the future. (Interview, Francisco, male, 17 years old, not involved)*

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*It is important to measure young people's well-being and to compare between rich and poor young people. (Interview, Gil, male, 18 years old, involved)*

*It is worthwhile to measure well-being among children and young people because in this way we will be able to compare well-being among the different ages. It is interesting to understand why some people feel happy and others do not. Which circumstances make young people happy and others do not. What contributes to happiness and well-being? (Interview, Sara, female, 15 years old, JGF)*

*We know that this things change very quickly and measuring youth well-being would be a process of checking these changes rapidly. (Focus Group, Ana, female, 24 years old, involved)*

Others underline that the simple fact of having their voice heard would already be good:

*It is a way of making ourselves heard, to be able to contribute. (Focus Group, Ana, female, 24 years old, involved)*

A small group goes even further, already thinking about the policy effects and outcomes of such a process:

*It is important to measure young people's well-being. However, it would not change a thing. It will serve a single purpose: data availability. Nowadays people consider this important. (Interview, Guilherme, male, 15 years old, not involved)*

*It would be important if this data could provide stronger support for young people. (Focus Group, Margarida, female, 16 years old, not involved)*

This general interest concerning having their voices heard and the generation of European data on children's and young people's well-being does not clearly reciprocate in automatic mobilization to participate in future data gathering processes.

Despite the general mobilization to participate in a future survey or in a panel survey on children and young people's well-being in Portugal and Europe, there are certain nuances that must be considered. The first is the mention of a (restricted) number of young people that clearly say they are not interested in participating in a future survey:

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*I am a bit lazy, I admit it. So I think that I will not be available to participate in a future survey. (Interview, Laura, female, 17 years old, not involved)*

*Filling out questionnaires is not on the top of my priorities. I would not participate unless I had nothing better to do. (Interview, Guilherme, male, 15 years old, JGF)*

Others show an initial unavailability that turns less affirmative if an incentive (monetary or a voucher such as the one given to the interviewees recruited outside the educational system) is given:

*The incentive is important. In that case, I would consider participating. (Interview, Guilherme, male, 15 years old, JGF)*

*If I did not have anything better to do, I would participate. If I earned something, it would help. (Interview, Manuel, male, 15 years old, not involved)*

The incentive is welcomed even by interviewees that initially stated that they would not need it to participate.

*I would like to participate in future surveys on children and young people's well-being because I want to share what I have to say, and eventually to contribute to raise young people's well-being. An incentive would be welcomed, but not crucial. (Interview, Vera, female, 19 years old, involved)*

Others feel that incentives are not necessary unless to recruit those that would not participate otherwise:

*I think that many young people would like to participate even without incentives. A good explanation of the objectives would be enough to mobilize participants. Incentive use would only be important to recruit the ones that would not participate without gaining some profit. (Interview, Madalena, female, 15, JGF)*

A limited group of participants also suggests that incentives could be important to compensate for participation if it was rather time consuming. The same reasoning was applied when the possibility of a panel survey was mentioned:

*I would like to participate in a survey on well-being. If the participation went on for some time, it could become tiresome. In that case I think that*

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*a small compensation would be in order, and everybody would be willing to join in.* (Interview, Rodrigo, male, 15 years old, JGF)

However, a small number of interviewees stated that they were willing to participate in a panel survey even without incentives, just for the sake of the experience:

*I would like to be included in a future survey, even if it was a panel survey. It would be interesting to compare what I've said before with the stuff I was saying at the moment. Incentives are important but not determinative, at least in my case.* (Interview, Miguel, male, 18 years old, involved)

There are, however, other factors beyond incentives to be considered in the willingness of young people to participate in a future survey. These are related to the techniques applied and specific characteristics of the interviewees: one girl said that she would not participate in a survey, but could consider an interview, and a boy showed a preference for surveys or interviews that he could answer alone, stating he was too shy to feel comfortable in a focus group.

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