

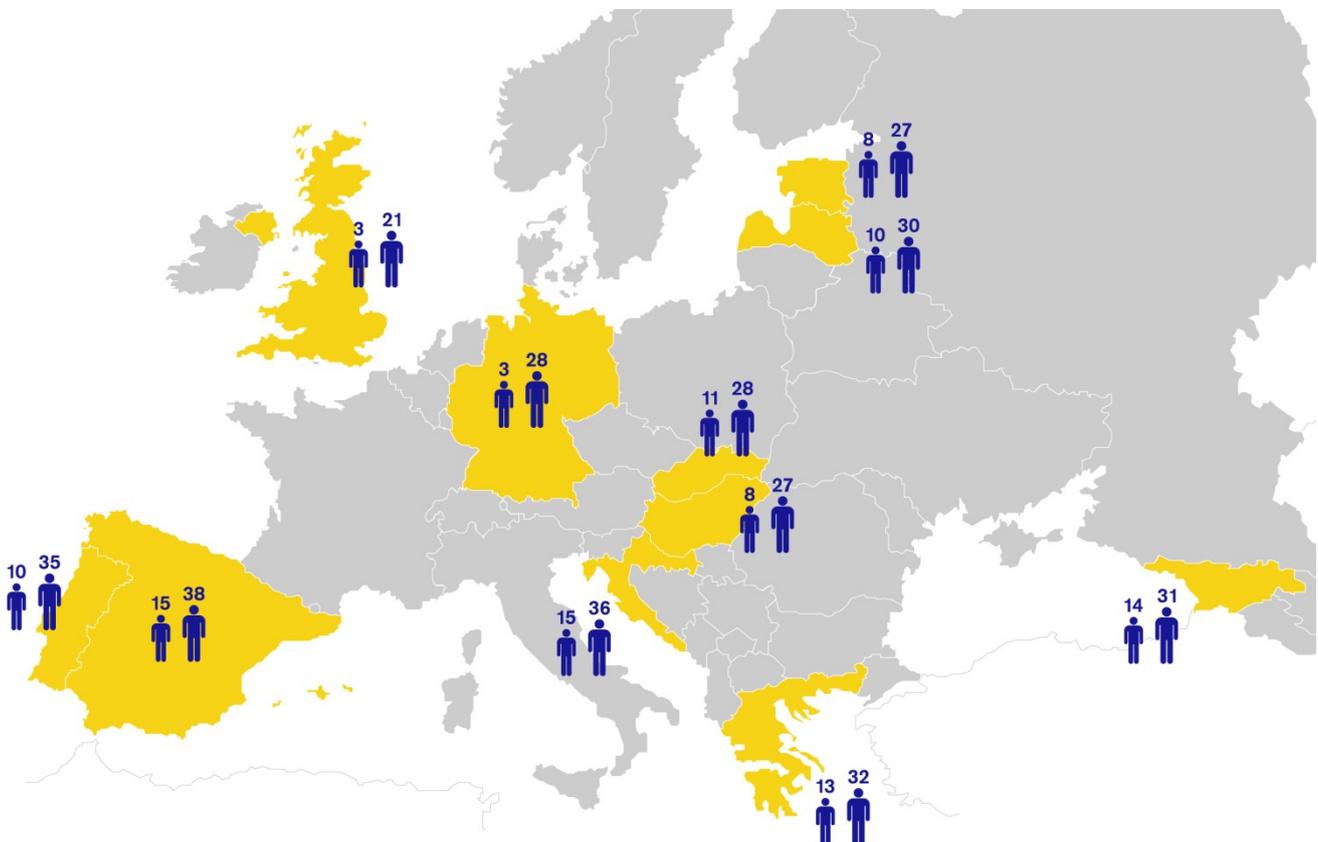
The well-being of youth

Direct work with children and young people

What does well-being mean? How is the well-being of children and young people in Europe? Are there any differences between children and young people? Is their well-being growing or decreasing?

The European Commission would like to run a survey in order to answer all these questions, but before starting we need to know exactly how the survey should be. This is why the European Commission asked a group of 13 universities across Europe to run a research to cast light on the subject. One of the first things they did was talking with children and young people about their understanding of well-being and their voice in society.

This document presents the results of the research undertaken between October 2014 and January 2015 in schools from 11 European countries. Participants were mainly aged between 10 and 19 years old. The research consisted of individual interviews and debates between groups of children (under 14 years old) and young people (over 14 years old). The following map shows the countries and the number of children and young people involved (450 in total):



What is well-being composed of?

One of the main conclusions after exchanging with many children and young people is that well-being is understood in very different ways. However, some ideas appear quite often: feeling happy, satisfied with your life and good in your head.

There are different aspects or domains that children and young people consider key for their well-being:

- **Relationships.** These are the main ones:

Family: the relationship with parents is essential, and that means having a good relationship with both mum and dad. For children and young people it is very negative to experience permanent and strong conflict within the family. Besides, the relationship with brothers and sisters is central, whether it is good or bad. Family is vital for children, but it becomes less important as they grow up.

Friends: for teenagers friends are very important, as they suffer when they are isolated or have problems. For many young people, friends are a part of the process of growing up.

School/institute: it is where the important relationship with **teachers and schoolmates** happens. Many young people say that a teacher can be a very positive influence in their lives, but that he/she can also make them lose interest in studies. Many highlight the importance of having good relationships with schoolmates, and the negative effect of being isolated.

Therefore, well-being is much related to the relationships children and young people have with their family, friends and in their school/institute.



- **Money, housing and living conditions.** Many children and young people affirm that their material situation is very important for their well-being, and that it is a negative aspect for those coming from families with financial problems. They feel unhappy when their family doesn't have enough money, when they live in disadvantaged areas or attend problematic schools, when they have no access to public transport or health, and when they or their family are not legal. Those who do not face these situations recognize that they do not value what they have and acknowledge the difficulties others might face.

In all studies the living conditions are essential to be happy, satisfied and good in your head.



- **Studies.** Children and young people who study declare that studies are very important because they rule their lives, both inside and outside school. Teachers, exams or homework take up a lot of space and worry them –they often feel bad because of the results, the routine, the pressure of exams or the fact that some subjects are not interesting to them. However, even if participants talk a lot about their studies, they are not considered a main source of well-being.

There are other elements that children and young people consider important for their well-being, as the **problems related to health** or the fact of **being mature and accepting themselves**.

When children become young people their understanding of well-being is transformed. For children it is more difficult to explain what well-being is, and this is why family, friends and school are so important. Moreover, children spend less time on their own and their free-time activities are just for having fun. In contrast, young people are more mature and have more independence, so for them it is important to participate in associations or political groups.

Making yourself heard and participating in research



Another important aspect of creating a survey for children and young people is understanding the extent to which they feel that adults listen to them, to their needs and demands. So we asked children and young people their opinion on how their voice is heard and the importance they give to it.

Being heard is not the same for children and for young people. On one hand, **children relate with family, friends and teachers, so this is where it is important for them to be heard.** Some think that their opinions are listened to by adults, others don't. On the other hand, **young people have more diverse relationships.** Most of them believe they are not listened to.

Children and young people affirm that their well-being is important and appreciate the fact that it is studied. Most of them are willing to participate in other researches about it, because:

1. research allows them to **express their opinions,**
2. this can facilitate that adults **understand their needs,**
3. and this can **change their position in society.**

In all countries young people affirm that they feel happy to participate if research can improve their situation. Even if it was difficult for children to understand the meaning of well-being, both youngsters and children **showed interest in participating in other researches about their lives.** Receiving a **feedback** of the results and understanding its impact can motivate them to participate in the future research.

The most important element to make children and young people participate in the research was **to understand it well, to know that it will help adults hear their opinions and to highlight the fact that it can change things.**

We would like to **thank all of you** for participating in this survey, for your time and effort in sharing your opinions. We will do our best to make sure they are taken into account when it comes to studying the well-being of children and young people in Europe.



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