

Foreword

The first report on equitable and sustainable well-being was published in 2013. It was the result of a major challenge undertaken by Istat through an unprecedented, internationally pioneering process of constructing a system of well-being indicators beyond GDP. The project was a challenge in terms of content and methodology, which resulted from a process of dialogue with the scientific community and civil society. Launched in 2010, it involved setting up two commissions. The first, coordinated by Istat and the National Council for Economics and Labour (CNEL), consisted of representatives of civil society, such as trade unions, charities, environmental, business, and women's organisations. The second, coordinated by Istat, included representatives of the international scientific community. Citizens were also consulted through a sample survey of 45,000 people, who gave their opinion on the importance of the various dimensions of well-being.

The reasons for this project are still relevant today: the system of well-being indicators provides policy-oriented information on issues that are relevant to the lives of citizens. This great commitment, full of passion and competence, has left its mark on the country's history. The recognition that GDP cannot be the sole measure of a country's development is almost as old as GDP itself, and many influential scholars in the second half of the last century looked at the need for complementary instruments. The first decade of our millennium has seen a revival of these efforts. Between 2007 and 2009, the international scientific community, in an unprecedented dialogue with governments and institutions, proposed solutions based on innovative multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks that placed the notion of well-being at the centre of reflection.

Examples include the OECD's Better Life Index project, the EU's Beyond GDP programme, and the report of the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission, in which they state that the Commission recommends measuring well-being through a multidimensional approach, including aspects of citizens' subjective evaluations and indicators of sustainability, not only environmental but also economic and social¹. The BES project has fully embraced and accelerated this path. The BES system is in full development. The 134 indicators that described the evolution of the twelve fundamental dimensions of well-being at national and regional level in the first edition of 2013 have now grown to 152. The pandemic, the climate crisis and the acceleration of the technological revolution have made it necessary to add new indicators to the system.

While maintaining the initial approach of using data already held by Istat or by other institutes that are part of the National Statistical System (Sistan) to populate the indicators, ad hoc data were also collected to supplement some surveys. The experiments, now increasingly consolidated and mature, were launched in response to the growing interest in measurements at provincial and local level, and comparisons with the countries of the European Union were strengthened. In just a few years, the BES has been recognised by the highest institutional bodies in the country as the basis for new and useful evidence for policy. In fact, with Law 163/2016, which reformed the Budget Law, the main instrument of public financial manoeuvre along with the Stability Law, the BES, with a selection of indicators, entered the process of defining economic policies, drawing attention to their

¹ Stiglitz, J.E., A. Sen, and J.-P. Fitoussi. 2009. Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/8131721/8131772/Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Commission-report.pdf>.

impact also on some fundamental dimensions of quality of life. The comparison with international trends and standards and the articulation of measures by regional areas and, where appropriate, by gender, age, and educational level, make the BES a precise tool for measuring inequalities and critical areas and highlight the greatest needs for public intervention and investment in policies and services.

The series of data - almost all of which now cover a ten-year period - which accompany each Report as a statistical annex, trace, beyond the simple comparison between one year and the next, progress, stagnation, and medium- and long-term setbacks. The introduction of a new domain on democracy, which will further enrich the set of measures, is currently being tested. By virtue of its characteristics as an information system that is both broad in scope and very detailed in the phenomena it tracks, the BES has proved to be a particularly sensitive tool for recording the impact on the country of the last three dramatic years, marked by the pandemic, the environmental crises, and the outbreak of war in Ukraine. This edition of the report aims to make the reader aware of the country's transformation since 2019, the last year before the pandemic. The juxtaposition of the indicators effectively portrays the social, economic, and cultural processes that have withstood the upheavals without being too deeply affected by them and that are now characterised by a decidedly positive sign. The comparison also reveals the processes that have suffered regressions, but have resumed, albeit with some setbacks. Finally, the comparison highlights the areas that, already weak and insecure before 2019, still show no significant signs of recovery in 2022 and remain behind pre-pandemic levels. The BES measures show how territorial disparities, many of which are long-term, have increased and, moving from the North to the South and the Islands, indicators with a negative sign predominate compared with the previous period. Reading by gender the 88 indicators allowing this breakdown, the 2022 Report indicates that, for women, most (52.8%) of the measures show an improvement compared to 38.9% for men, for whom there are more measures that are worse than in 2019. However, 39% of the indicators still show a net disadvantage for women compared to men. In particular, the female employment rate is so far from the European average and so low that almost half of women are excluded from economic independence. There are also generational differences. While more than half of the indicators relating to adults recorded an improvement in well-being, to the point of exceeding the pre-pandemic level in the latest year available, only 44% of the indicators for young people under 24 years of age improved, and almost as many (43%) deteriorated. The phenomena and processes described by the very rich statistical documentation on well-being made available with the report and accompanying it - with subsequent in-depth studies at a finer granularity - make it possible to draw a remarkably accurate and concrete map of the policy needs expressed by the country. We are committed to making this map even more specific and detailed. It is our contribution to the national community's targets for progress. The first report in 2013 clearly and effectively defined the ethos and strategy of this great enterprise of measuring well-being. Today, the aim is to make it a flexible tool, open to the introduction of new measures, and better adapted to the changing reality, while always guaranteeing its continuity.

Francesco Maria Chelli
Istat Acting President