

## Chapter 4

# From the citizens' point of view

### Crisis and wellness

- In 2012, despite the recession, people continued to express an overall positive assessment of the quality of their lives: 6.8 is the average score they gave. Compared to previous years, however, the uncertainty of the economic and social situation was reflected in the satisfaction expressed for life in general: the share of people aged 14 and over who reported high levels of satisfaction (with a score between 8 and 10) has decreased passing in a single year from 45.8% to 35.2%.
- Between 2011 and 2012, citizens' satisfaction with their economic situation declined by 5.7 percentage points. In 2012 only 42.8% of the population aged 14 and over claimed to be satisfied with this aspect. The percentage of those who were not completely satisfied, too, increased from 36.1% to 38.9% and especially that of totally dissatisfied citizens (from 13.4% to 16.8%).
- Satisfaction with one's own economic situation, besides regarding lower shares of population compared to other areas of life, has been declining since 2001, with particularly negative peaks during the recession, when the gap between northern and southern regions widened. The share of residents satisfied of their own economic situation varies with the different areas of the country, passing from 50% in the North, to 44.3% in the Centre and 32% in the South and Islands.
- Data on consumer confidence suggest that an increasing proportion of citizens is pessimistic about their economic and financial conditions and the economic system as a whole, recording the lowest levels since 1993.
- The analysis presented in the Report shows that there is a relationship between the level of consumer spending and citizens' evaluation of their economic situation and that of the Country. Such evaluations also reflect a strong awareness of the changes in purchasing behavior induced by economic circumstances. In particular, if the economic difficulties induce citizens to forgo part of those expenses which, though not included among those considered strictly necessary, are considered important, their feeling on the overall situation of the country is negatively affected.
- The performance of the other components of citizens' individual well-being, however, is different. Compared to 2011, in 2012 the satisfaction with family relationships and friendships increased: among people aged 14 and over 36.8% (they were 34.7% in 2011) claimed to be very satisfied with family relationships and 26.6% (24.4% in 2011) with their friendships. Satisfaction with one's own health was widespread despite the high average age of the population: 80.8% of individuals aged 14 and over expressed a positive opinion, a

percentage which remained substantially stable over time, despite the aging of the population. The satisfaction with leisure time, too, has consistently stabilized over the past ten years at significant percentages (around 63%): the share of those who claimed to be very satisfied increased from 13.4% in 2011 to 15.6%.

- Dissatisfaction with the economic situation does not always prevent a positive evaluation of one's life. 21.6% of those who reported high levels of satisfaction with their life in general was dissatisfied with their economic situation, but they were satisfied with its relational aspects, health and leisure time.
- Looking to the future, 24.6% of Italians thought that their personal situation would improve in the next five years. 23.5% assumed a worsening, 23.3% declared a state of doubt and uncertainty, while 28.5% believed that the situation would remain the same.
- Although they are particularly affected by the crisis, young people up to 34 years are more optimistic than the others: 45% believe that their situation will improve. If you live in the richest and most dynamic areas or you have a higher education level, the attitude towards the future is more positive: 27.1% of residents in the North see a prospect of improvement in the next five years, as compared to 24.1% in the Centre and 21.6% in the South and Islands; those with a high education level are more confident in the future than those with at most compulsory education (35% as compared to 13, 9%). Having a job is important for a positive view of the future. 29.6% of employees are optimistic about it, especially those in a management or entrepreneurial role (32.5%) and women (30.8% of the employed).
- The prospects for the future seem to be linked to the level of satisfaction with one's life. Among those who are very satisfied with their lives (or indicate a score between 8 and 10), 33.8% think of a better future and 32.3% at most equal to the current one. Despite their good personal situation, 13.4% of them think, however, it will worsen.
- The analysis of data from monthly surveys conducted by Istat on household confidence shows that citizens, tend to be systematically pessimistic more about the general evolution than their own household's economic prospects. Similarly, individuals show a tendency to be more critical in assessing the ongoing economic situation, especially at the aggregate level, regardless of the area of the country where they live, gender or the other socio-demographic characteristics.
- Every aspect of life has a different impact on overall satisfaction. Changes in the economic situation impact most on the probability of being very satisfied with one's own life, followed by health and other aspects. Among these latter, however, high quality of family relationships and friendships plays a crucial role. For the less or 'not at all' satisfied with life as a whole, however, the economic situation weighs less than health conditions, which make a real difference along with the other areas of personal life.
- Data analysis shows that high levels of satisfaction with non-economic aspects of life are needed to offset the substantial decrease in the level of economic satisfaction and maintain the same probability of being satisfied with life as a whole. In 2012, satisfaction with these

aspects grew, but not to a sufficient extent, and the net effect was a decrease in overall satisfaction.

- For the employed, job is a crucial component of overall satisfaction, even more than the economic satisfaction, or other aspects. Keeping a balance between work, family life and leisure time is essential to the quality of life. Satisfaction with friendships has a minimum weight; perhaps because the work context already provides opportunities for social relations. From the results it emerges that work is the most important component of overall satisfaction: 75% has been satisfied for years now, especially for the "content of the work itself".

## Italians and immigrants: attitudes towards multiculturalism

- 61.4% of Italian citizens agree with the statement that "immigrants are needed to do the work that Italians do not want to do." A similar proportion (62.9%) partially or totally disagrees with the idea that "immigrants take jobs away from Italians". In general, therefore, the idea that immigrant labour is replacing local labour force on the jobs refused by Italian seems to prevail on the perception of a rivalry between Italians and immigrants in the labour market.
- The Italians' attitude towards the immigrants appears to be affected by the crisis. Some sections of the population, in fact, feel a sense of competition over scarce resources, in particular for workplaces. Although 86.7% of Italians agree that any person should have the right to live in any country in the world, more than 50% argue that, under conditions of labour shortage, employers should give priority to Italians rather than immigrants.
- Besides educational qualifications, the perception of greater personal vulnerability, or the risk of loss of employment raise the probability that a citizen will call for greater protection for Italians, especially where the risk of substitution of Italian with foreign labour is perceived more strongly.
- Among the individual characteristics considered, educational qualifications mostly influence the probability to perceive immigrants as competitors, thus justifying the idea of a priority access to the labour market for Italians: the less educated - that is, those with at most lower secondary education - have a chance to agree with this view more than double that of graduates (the same probability becomes equal to 1.5 for graduates).
- This result is in line with the analyses presented in the third chapter on the labour market, and shows that foreign workers are more likely to find low-skilled jobs in services, while for Italians this happens in the industry sector. In the northern regions, particularly in the North-east area, the Italians are more likely to assert their priority right than those living in the Centre. The same phenomenon, however, is not significant in the South and Islands, where foreigners mainly work in agriculture and services, activities unattractive to Italian workers.

## Quality of services and confidence in institutions

- The country is not only facing a deep economic crisis, but also widespread dissatisfaction of citizens towards politics and public institutions. Public confidence in institutions is at low levels: on a scale from 0 to 10, best ratings are assigned only to the firefighters and the security forces, while political parties are at a minimum. In particular, a vote of 8-10 is assigned by 66.2% of the population aged 14 and over to firefighters (mean score 8.1), by 34% to security forces (mean score 6.5), by 4.8% to the Italian Parliament (mean score 3.6), and by only 1.5% to political parties (average score 2.3). Confidence in local institutions is at an intermediate level: citizens assigned a mean score of 3.7 to regional and provincial governments, and 4.5 to municipal ones.
- Livability of the area and confidence in local institutions are closely linked. The possibility to access quality public services and to enjoy favorable social and environmental conditions in the area where ones lives has an impact on citizens' well-being and satisfaction and their confidence in the institutions, particularly in the local ones.
- Istat estimates show that the quality of different types of public services offered, confidence in national institutions and the region of residence affects the probability of developing a low confidence in municipal institutions (i.e. a score between 0 and 5).
- Dirty streets and poor road surfaces are some of the aspects of quality that most affect the confidence in municipal governments. Even the perception of the risk of crime influences citizens' evaluations. The accessibility of waste containers, but also the efficiency of the services are among the services they consider most important: making long rows at municipal or district registry offices or low-quality public transport increase the probability of losing confidence in municipal institutions.
- Individual characteristics, such as the socio-demographic ones (age, sex, educational level and employment status), however, do not seem to significantly influence the degree of confidence in the municipal government, while the geographical area of residence is relevant. The results of our estimates lead to the conclusion that in case of serious conditions of the territories are very degraded, with job opportunities scarce and high inequality, the propensity to trust is lower than in other areas, even in situations that are not so different in terms of quality of services