8. Subjective well-being[1]

Subjective Well-being has improved compared to 2017 (Table 1): the proportion of those who express a high level of satisfaction with their lives has increased among people aged 14 and over, while the proportion of optimists has increased and the proportion of those who express a pessimistic attitude has decreased. On the other hand, there are no significant changes in satisfaction with leisure time after the drop observed in 2017.

Table 1. Subjective well-being indicators: value for the latest available year. Percentage variations on the previous year and on 2010

INDICATOR	Latest available year value	% variation (compared with the previous year)	% variation (compared with 2010)
1. Life satisfaction (%, 2018)	41.4	🟩	🟥
2. Leisure time satisfaction (%, 2018)	66.2	⬜	🟩
3. Positive judgement future prospectives* (%, 2018)	29.0	🟩	🟩
4. Negative judgement future prospectives* (%, 2018)	13.4	🟩	🟩

— Comparison not available	🟩 Improvement	⬜ Stability	🟥 Deterioration

(*) 2010 data not available, variation based on 2012 data.

Note: variations between two points in time above 1% are considered positive (in green), below -1% are considered negative (in red). Variations between -1 and +1% refer to stability (in grey).

The analysis by region shows some differences: positive judgements on future perspectives and leisure satisfaction are the most homogeneous indicators in the territory, while there is more variability for life satisfaction levels and, to a lesser extent, for negative judgements on future perspectives (Figure 1).
In particular, in the province of Bolzano the percentage of individuals aged 14 years and over who score high life satisfaction rates is the highest: 61.1% more than the Italian average regarding life in general and 22.7% more with respect to leisure time.
Judgements on future perspectives are more positive than the Italian average in the province of Trento, where the share of people who believe their situation will get worse in the next 5 years is 35.1% lower than in Italy, and in Lombardia, where there is the lower share of people who believe it will improve. In Molise and Sicilia live the most pessimistic (-23.1% and -18.3%).
Although the territorial gradient against Southern Italy seems to be consolidated with respect to life satisfaction, the picture is more variegated if we analyze the evaluations on future perspectives: the population seems less optimistic than the rest of the country in Sicilia, as already mentioned, but also in Liguria, Piemonte and Umbria.

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1   This chapter was edited by Rita De Carli with contributions from: Daniela Lo Castro and Silvia Montecolle.

Figure 1. Percentage variation for Subjective well-being indicators comparing to the value for Italy by region. Latest available year (a)

(a) Values above zero correspond to better well-being conditions comparing to the Italian average; on the contrary, values below zero correspond to worse well-being conditions. The calculation took into account the polarity of indicators.
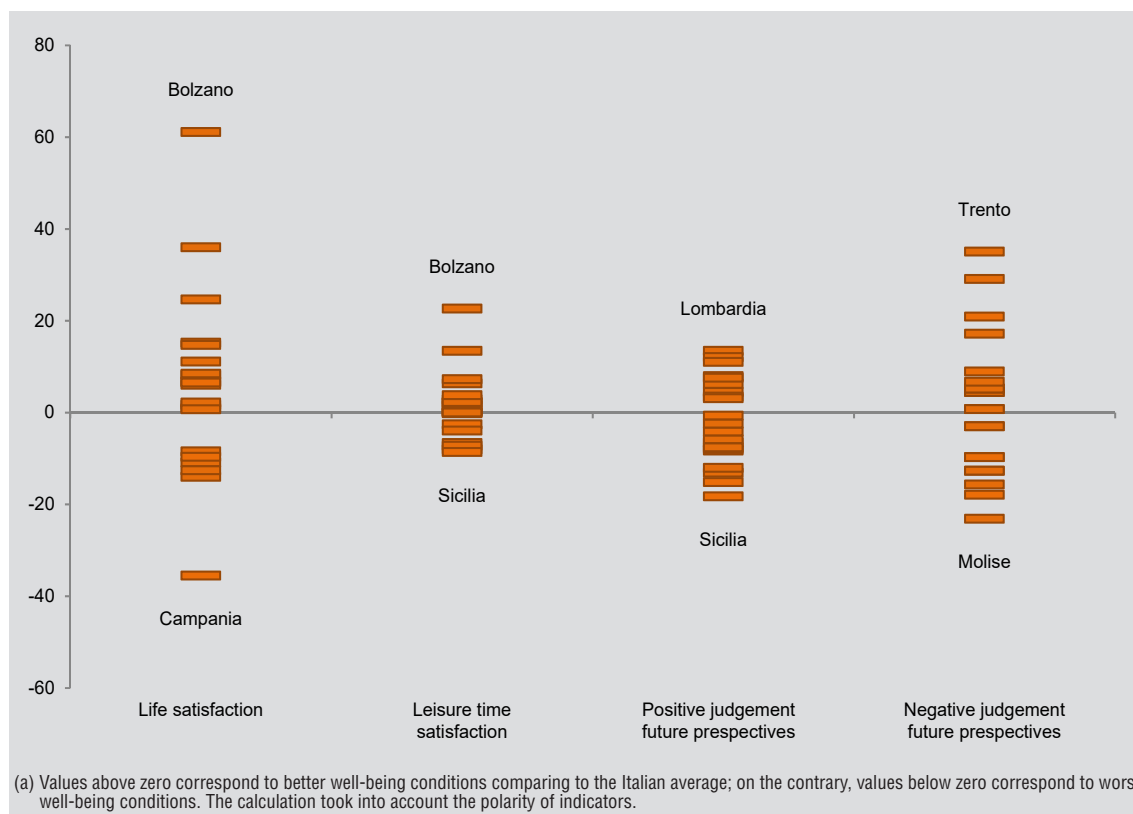
International comparison

This issue of the Report was also based on life satisfaction data collected in the 2018 ad hoc module of the EU-Silc survey on people aged 16 and over[2]. About a quarter of the European population (24.7%) give an extremely high life satisfaction score (grade 9 or 10 on a scale from 0 to 10)[3].

Country distribution shows strong heterogeneity, with more than 2 out of 5 individuals defining themselves as very or very satisfied with their lives in Denmark (41.3%) and Finland (41.1%) and about 1 out of 10 individuals in Bulgaria (9.5%) (Figure 2).

Italy (18.0%) is below the European average, in line with the results recorded in France (18.3%) and Portugal (18.6%).

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2 *Ad-hoc* European module on *Material deprivation, well-being and housing difficulties*.
3 Unlike the survey Aspects of Daily Life (Avq), whose reference population are individuals aged 14 years and over, the Eu-Silc survey data refer to the population aged 15 years and over. In addition, the proportion of very satisfied people is calculated by Eurostat considering marks 9 and 10 only, while for the Bes indicator from Avq a wider range is used (8-10).

Figure 2. Persons expressing a very high score (9-10) of life satisfaction in EU 28. Years 2013 and 2018. Percentage of population aged 16 and over

Source: Eurostat, Eu-Silc
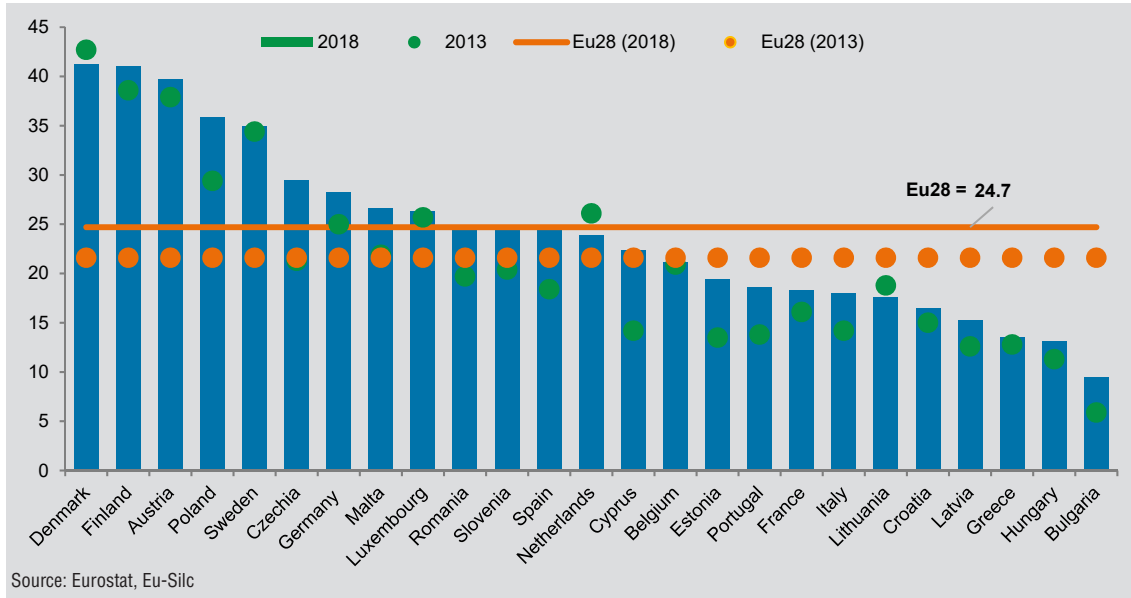
In the Eu-Silc survey ad hoc module, those interviewed were also asked to give an opinion on some very specific aspects of their lives, such as the frequency with which they felt happy in the last 4 weeks before the interview.

In Europe, most people believe that they were always or most of the time happy in the reference period (62.3%), with a linear relationship between this indicator and life satisfaction (Figure 3). A joint analysis of the two indicators shows some differences between groups of countries: Italy (18% and 49.1% respectively for satisfaction and happiness) is in the lower left quadrant of the Cartesian representation, with both indicators below the European average (equal to 24.7% and 62.3%). A small number of countries have significantly

Figure 3. People aged 16 and over expressing a very high score (9-10) of life satisfaction and reporting feeling happy most of the time in Eu countries28. Year 2018. Percentage values

Source: Eurostat, Eu-Silc
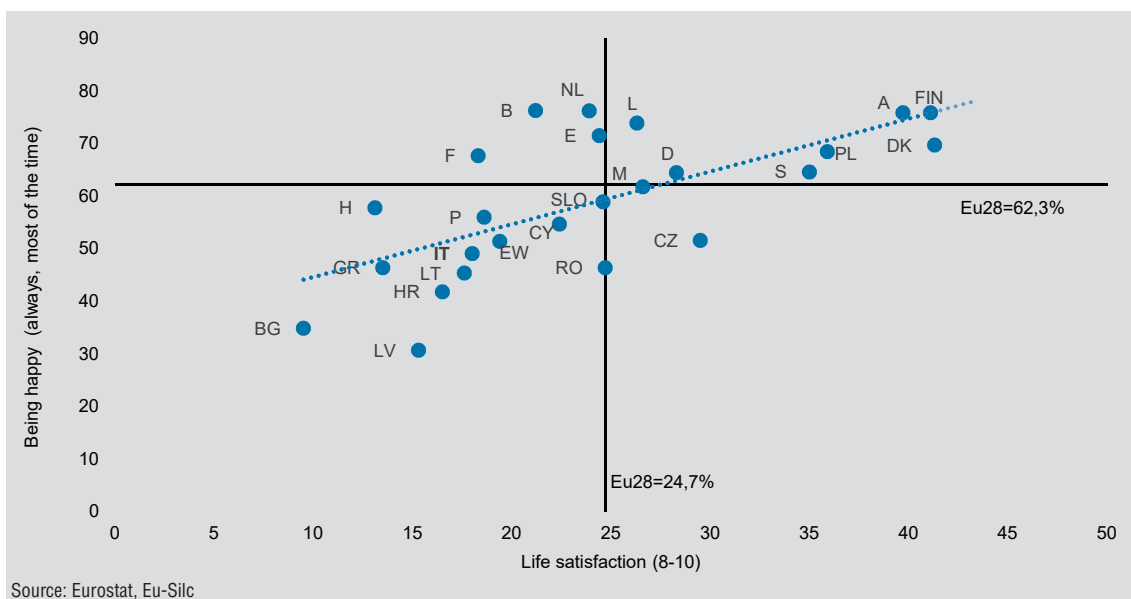
above average values in both indicators: Finland (41.1% and 75.9%), Austria (39.7% and 75.9%) and Denmark (41.3% and 69.7%). A wider number of countries show below average values, including Bulgaria (9.5% and 34.9%), Latvia (15.3% and 30.7%) and Greece (13.5% and 46.4%). In some countries the two indicators appear to be less convergent than on average, such as in France (18.3% and 67.7%), Belgium (21.2% and 76.3%) and the Netherlands (23.9% and 76.2%) where lower shares of life satisfaction correspond to higher shares of people who report feeling happy most of the time. In the Czech Republic, the above-average life satisfaction rate is associated with lower figures for the happiness indicator (29.5% and 51.6%).

Proportion of those who declare themselves to be very satisfied with their lives is clearly linked to their level of qualification. Considering the Eu28 total, those with high qualifications are significantly more satisfied with their lives than those with low qualifications (30.8% and 18.7% respectively) (Figure 4).

This gap is particularly high in Romania (44.1% among the most educated against 16% among the least educated) and in Croatia (25.6% against 7.6%). On the other hand, with reference to educational attainment the gap is extremely small in northern European countries (e.g. Estonia and the Netherlands) or even reversed, as in Sweden (33.8% compared with 37.8%). In this framework, with a gap of 11 points (24.5% vs 13.4%) Italy is close to the European average and shows a profile similar to Portugal (27% vs 14.8%).

Figure 4. People aged 16 and over expressing a very high score (9-10) of life satisfaction, by level of education. Eu28 countries. Year 2018. Percentage values

Source: Eurostat, Eu-Silc

Analysis of national data

Better life and leisure time satisfaction

According to the Aspects of Daily Life survey data, in 2018 41.4% of people aged 14 years and over were very satisfied (8-10) with their lives (it was 39.6% in 2017). Although rising, the level reached this year is still lower than in 2010 (43.4%).

Compared to 2017, the share of those who express satisfaction with leisure time was sub-stantially stable (66.2%), confirming a level that is higher than one of 2010 (+1.8 percenta-ge points) but with relatively small changes over the time considered.

In the last year, the improvement in life satisfaction has affected all macro areas of the country, although with different intensities, more contained in the Centre (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Trend of life satisfaction indicators (2010=100). Years 2010-2018. People aged 14 and over

Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life
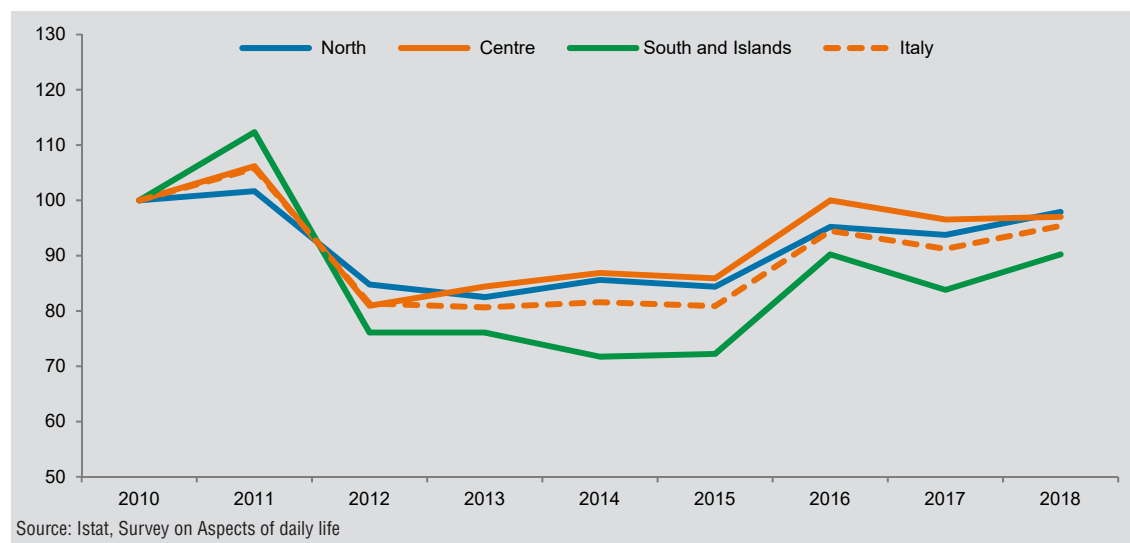
Better perspectives for the future

The number of those who believe that their personal situation will improve over the next 5 years keeps growing. In 2018, the indicator stands at 29%, up 1.8 percentage points com-pared to 2017 and with a very positive change in the Centre (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Trend of judgment indicators on future prospects (2012=100). Years 2012-2018. People aged 14 and over

Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life
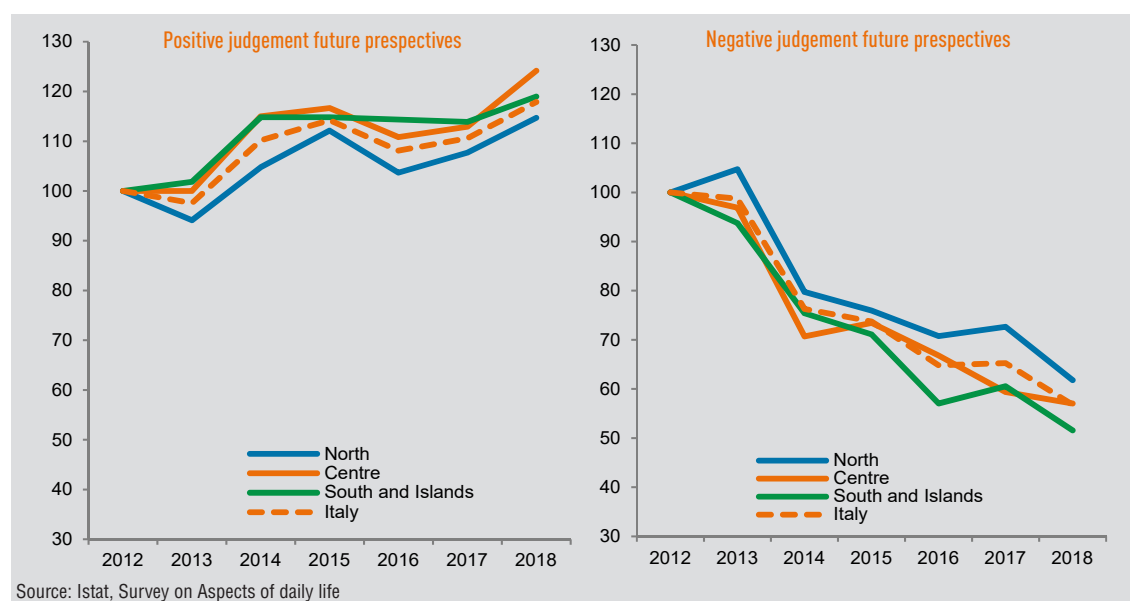
This trend is combined with the progressive reduction of those who believe that their personal situation will worsen over the next 5 years, 13.4% in 2018 (it was 15.4% in 2017) lower than in 2012, when perspectives for future were much more pessimistic (23.6%).

Better perspectives for the most educated

The qualification significantly influences both life satisfaction and, with more intensity, judgements about future perspectives. In 2018, the life satisfaction indicator is 16.2% higher for individuals with a high level of education than in Italy (Figure 7).
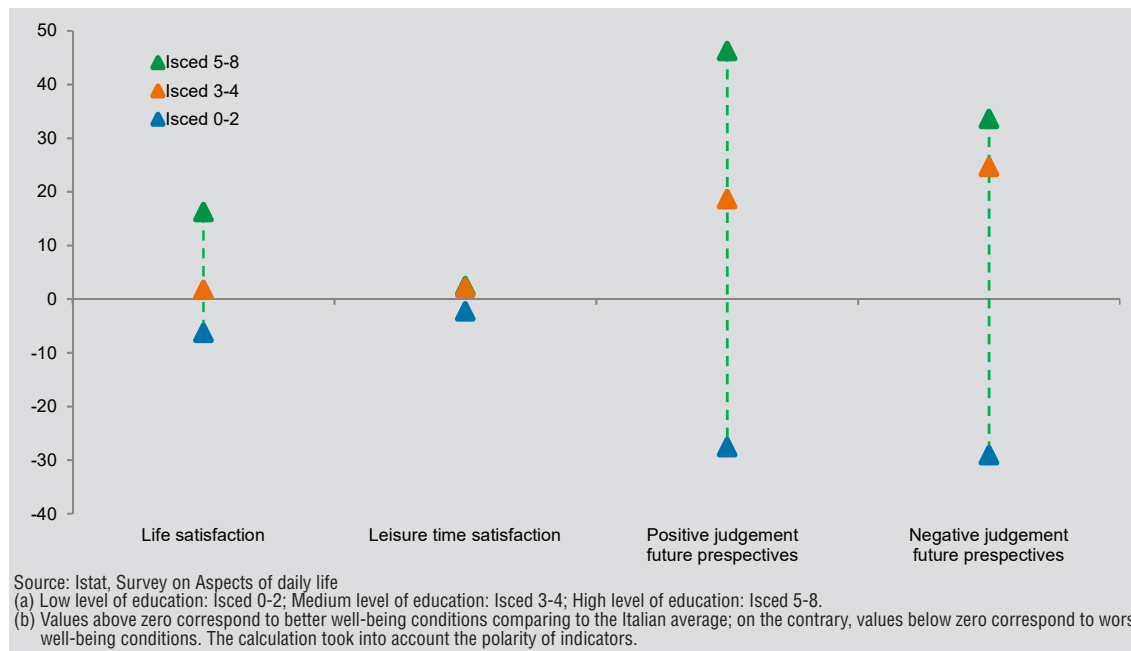People with a high educational qualification express a positive opinion on the perspectives with respect to their condition in the five years following the interview with a frequency of more than a third higher than that recorded in the reference population as a whole. On the other hand, those with a lower level of education express positive expectations with a significantly lower frequency (-27.6%). Similarly, the percentage of those who express a negative opinion on future perspectives is significantly higher among those with a low level of education (17.3%) than high (8.9%).
There are no significant changes of the leisure satisfaction indicator in relation to the qualification.

Figure 7. Percentage variation for some Subjective well-being indicators comparing to the value for Italy by level of education. Latest available year (a) (b)

Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life
(a) Low level of education: Isced 0-2; Medium level of education: Isced 3-4; High level of education: Isced 5-8.
(b) Values above zero correspond to better well-being conditions comparing to the Italian average; on the contrary, values below zero correspond to worse well-being conditions. The calculation took into account the polarity of indicators.

Leisure satisfaction tracks the lifecycle

Leisure time satisfaction is at its peak in adolescence (83.8% very or quite satisfied among 14-19 year olds), decreasing as age increases and reaching its minimum between 55 and 59 years (58.7%), then climbing by 6.8 points between 60 and 64 years, and decreasing again after 75 years. Life satisfaction indicator shows very small fluctuations in the 25-74 age group and then decreases more sharply.

Frequency of those who make positive judgements about the prospects for future is dropping steadily from 20 years onwards. In particular, from the age of 60 the values of these frequencies are lower than those of negative judgements. Overall, these indicators are not immediately comparable to those for life satisfaction, indicating a general negative orientation for future prospects that worsens with age (Figure 8).

The observed improvement in future perspectives in comparison to 2012 is especially evident for younger people, in especially the share of pessimists which falls by more than 70% among people aged 20-24. Significant improvements are also observed among older people (the indicator is 50% compared to 2012 for people aged 45-64).

Figure 8. Subjective well-being indicators by age group. Year 2018. Percentage of people aged 14 and over

Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life
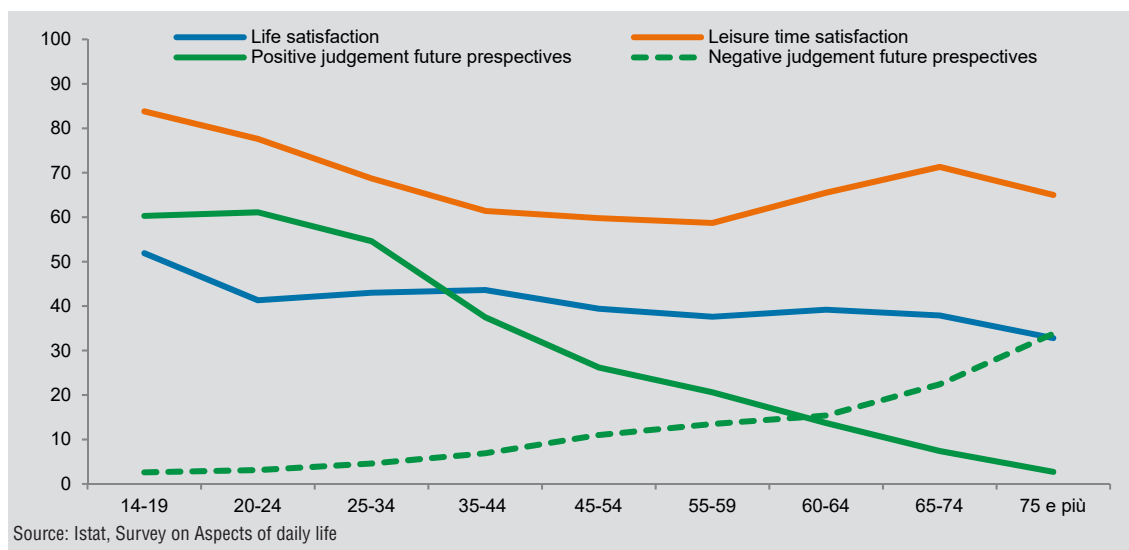
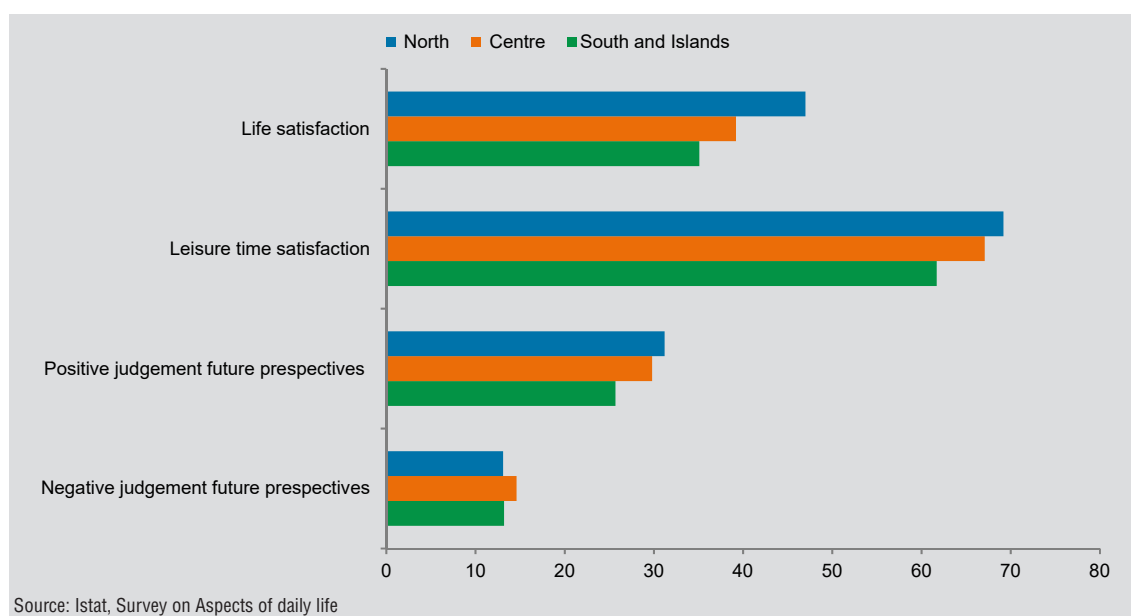## Higher subjective well-being among men

Men give more often positive evaluations for all the indicators. On average, the frequency with which men aged 14 and over report high life satisfaction scores is 2.7 points higher than for women. This gap is even greater if one considers the frequency of leisure satisfaction (+3.4 points) or the frequency of positive judgments about the future (+3.8). Also compared to the frequency with which negative opinions are expressed, men show lower levels than women (12.8% vs. 14%).

However, the picture of gender differences changes slightly when one considers the age-related development of the indicators. Between 20 and 34 in age, women are more satisfied with their leisure time than men. In adulthood, after the age of 35, women are always more likely to make positive life judgements, at least 1 point ahead of men, and to be less pessimistic about the future. From the age of 60 negative judgements about future perspectives, prevail over positive judgements in both sexes.

Higher subjective well-being in the North

Northern regions are higher in the ranking with respect to most of the domain indicators (Figure 9). Territorial differences are more pronounced especially with reference to life satisfaction, where the disadvantage of the South is more evident (-11.9 percentage points in the South compared to the North). Differences in leisure satisfaction (-7.5 percentage points) and in judgements about the future follow are shown, for which there is a territorial differential of -5.5 percentage points among the most optimistic. There is a substantial homogeneity in the share of pessimists.

Figure 9. Subjective well-being indicators by geographic area. Year 2018. Percentage of people aged 14 and over living in the same geographic area

Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life

DIMENSIONS OF SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

Among the dimensions chosen to measure well-being, those related to the estimation of subjective indicators have always been the greatest challenge, having to deal with the difficulties related to quantifying concepts that are difficult to measure. The efforts made so far in the theoretical debate have led to a convergence of opinions on defining subjective well-being as "*Good mental states, including all the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences*" (Oecd, 2013, Oecd Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being, Oecd Publishing). This theoretical definition has therefore been brought back in more operational terms to the cognitive (life satisfaction) and emotional (affect balance) structure that each individual expresses with respect to the chance of achieving their goals (meaning of life).

The inclusion in the 2018 European Survey on Income and Living Conditions (Eu-Silc) of a specific ad hoc module on well-being has made it possible to investigate this issue in more detail, providing insights into the trend of subjective and objective perceptions of well-being as the socio-demographic characteristics of the population vary.

It was possible to integrate the information acquired on the life satisfaction indicator, already monitored by the Bes, with these two other mentioned dimensions. In particular, the Affect Balance indicator was obtained as an average of the frequency with which the interviewed subjects report having experienced positive moods in the 4 weeks preceding the interview (having felt calm and serene; happy) minus the frequency with which they report having experienced negative emotions (having felt very nervous; down in the mood; discouraged or depressed). The result of this balance led to grouping the subjects who experienced more frequently positive moods (always; nearly always; part of the time) net of reported for negative moods (part of the time; nearly never; never), and comparing them to the reference population as a whole.

In addition to this information, from the Eu-Silc survey the indicator of meaning for life was calculated as a percentage of individuals aged 16 years and over who scored higher or equal to 8, on a scale from 0 to 10, in response to the question: "to what extent do you believe that your current life has a meaning?".

According to this type of approach, the data collected report a significant difference in the levels of subjective well-being assumed by the two additional dimensions, which are affected unevenly by the structure of the reference population. In particular, more than half of the adult population (55.2%) report having experienced positive moods more frequently, while more than 3 individuals out of 5 (61.1%) give a score that is equal to or greater than 8 to the meaning of their lives. The Affect Balance indicator shows unfavorable scores especially for women (-5.5 points compared to men), while the attribution of meaning to life does not vary significantly according to gender (62% in men, 61% in women). The dimensions of subjective well-being seem to be adversely affected by ageing: starting from the age of 45, the Affect Balance indicator is below average, while from age 55 this happens with reference to the judgement that each individual gives to the meaning of his or her own existence.

Overall, it is mainly the northern regions that the three dimensions of subjective well-being shown simultaneously high values, together with Toscana for the Centre and Sardegna for the South, where values of these three indicators are higher than the Italian average (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Life satisfaction, Affect Balance and Eudaimonia in the Italian regions. Year 2018. Percentage values on people aged 16 and over

Source: Istat, Aspects of daily life, AVQ (*), Eu-Silc (**)
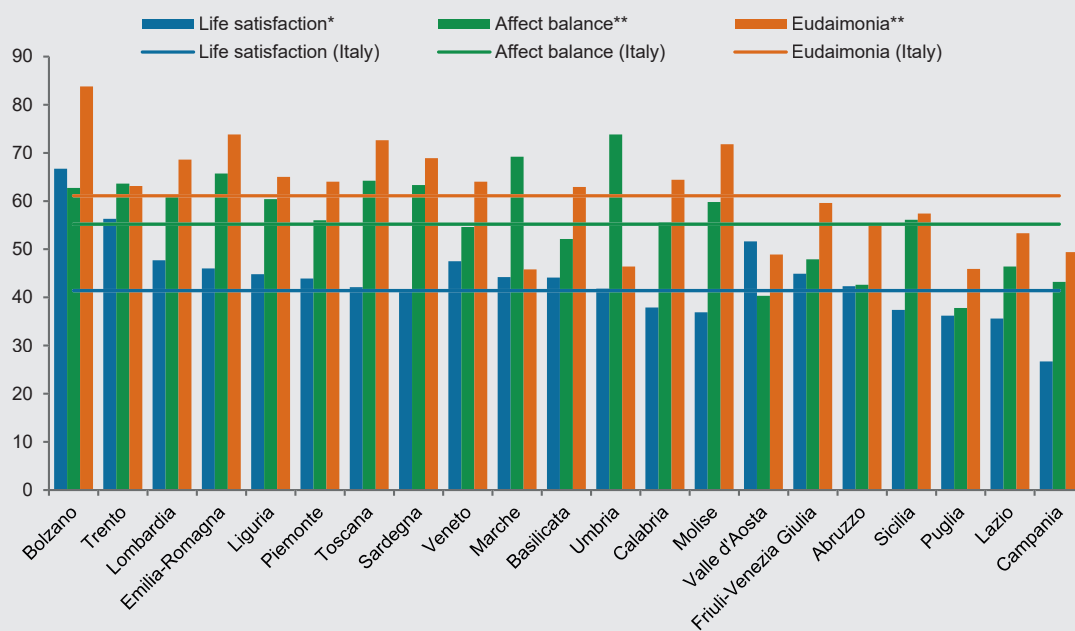
Indicators

1. **Life satisfaction:** Percentage of people aged 14 and over with a level of life satisfaction from 8 to 10 on total population aged 14 and over.
   Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life.

2. **Leisure time satisfaction:** Percentage of people aged 14 and over very or quite satisfied with their leisure time on total population aged 14 and over.
   Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life.

3. **Positive judgement of future perspectives:** Percentage of people aged 14 and over which believe their personal situation will improve in the next 5 years on total population aged 14 and over.
   Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life.

4. **Negative judgement of future perspectives:** Percentage of people aged 14 and over which believe their personal situation will worsen in the next 5 years on total population aged 14 and over.
   Source: Istat, Survey on Aspects of daily life.

Indicators by region and geographic area

REGIONS AND GEOGRAPHIC AREAS	Life satisfaction (a)	Leisure time satisfaction (a)
	2018	2018
Piemonte	43.9	67.6
Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste	51.6	67.7
Liguria	44.8	70.4
Lombardia	47.7	71.0
Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol	61.4	78.1
Bolzano/Bozen	*66.7*	*81.2*
Trento	*56.3*	*75.1*
Veneto	47.5	66.1
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	44.9	67.2
Emilia-Romagna	46.0	68.1
Toscana	42.1	67.7
Umbria	41.8	66.3
Marche	44.2	68.7
Lazio	35.6	66.5
Abruzzo	42.3	66.3
Molise	36.9	66.2
Campania	26.7	60.9
Puglia	36.2	61.8
Basilicata	44.1	64.5
Calabria	37.9	61.4
Sicilia	37.4	60.5
Sardegna	41.7	63.6
North	47.0	69.2
Centre	39.2	67.1
South and Islands	35.1	61.7
Italy	41.4	66.2

(a) Per 100 persons aged 14 years and over.

Positive judgement future prespectives (a)	Negative judgement future prespectives (a)
2018	2018
27.1	14.7
30.3	13.3
27.3	15.5
32.9	12.8
29.0	9.1
26.6	*9.5*
31.3	*8.7*
32.5	12.8
30.0	13.3
32.2	12.7
30.8	13.8
26.7	15.1
28.8	14.7
29.9	15.1
26.8	13.8
25.2	16.5
24.6	12.2
25.5	12.7
27.8	10.6
28.3	11.1
23.7	15.8
31.2	12.5
31.2	13.1
29.8	14.6
25.7	13.2
29.0	13.4