DO FAMILY, HEALTH AND JOB PERCEPTIONS SHAPE WORKERS' WELL-BEING?
A JOB SATISFACTION ANALYSIS IN EUROPE[1]

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Abstract. In an evolving European context, the boundaries between professional and personal life are becoming increasingly important in shaping individual subjective well-being. The growing emphasis on Work-Life balance reflects broader societal transformations, including changes in labour market structures, shifting family dynamics, and evolving cultural attitudes toward employment. While previous works have analysed employment conditions for immigrants, few studies have focused on their perception of job satisfaction comparing them with natives.

This study analyses perceived job satisfaction among workers using data from the 10th round of the European Social Survey (2020-2022). A series of linear regression models is applied to analyse the satisfaction of workers with low, medium and high skilled jobs among natives, second-generation migrants, and individuals with a migration background. The focus is centred on the effect on work satisfaction of three domains: job characteristics, sociality and household dynamics, and perceived health. Using the Work-Life balance index to divide countries into groups, it was found that states with a low balance experience more pronounced effects, with job skill levels playing a much more significant role in shaping outcomes.

1. Introduction

Job satisfaction represents a central dimension of individual well-being, as well as an important indicator for understanding job quality and inequalities in the labour market. It is a complex, multidimensional, and interdisciplinary concept influenced by a variety of factors both internal (values, expectations, psychological capital) and external (working conditions, organizational context, remuneration) (Aziri, 2011; Luthans *et al*., 2007). Based on major theoretical models, job satisfaction emerges as the result of the interaction between personal, environmental, and organizational characteristics. Within this framework, the national context plays a crucial role, as welfare systems, work culture, and Work-Life balance policies significantly influence individual perceptions (Esser and Olsen, 2012; Hauff *et al*., 2015).

This contribution aims to comparatively analyse the role of both work-related and non-work-related factors in determining job satisfaction, with particular attention to the migration dimension and Work-Life balance in European contexts. In particular, studying how job satisfaction differs among individuals with a migration background is

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[1] This article is the result of a collaborative effort among the authors.

essential to understanding integration processes and inequalities in the labour market. Using data from the European Social Survey (Round 10th), the analysis focuses on three groups: natives, second-generation migrants and migrants. Using linear regression models and the construction of a synthetic Work-Life balance index, developed using the Mazziotta–Pareto index (MPI), differences in job satisfaction among groups with and without migrant background are examined, considering occupational skill level, and controlling for gender, age, and educational attainment. We analyse perceptions of job satisfaction by considering additional perception-based variables, measuring how satisfaction varies across three domains of individuals' lives: perceived health, household and sociality, and work.

The objectives are threefold: (1) to verify whether significant differences in job satisfaction exist between natives and individuals with a migration background; (2) to assess the moderating effect of Work-Life balance across different European countries; (3) to explore the impact of extra-work factors, such as perceived health, family pressure, and social networks. This integrated approach allows for a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying occupational well-being and advances factors about possible latent inequalities in European labour markets. This article is divided into four sections: the theoretical background of the main literature on the topic, the data and methods used, the results obtained, and the conclusions.

2. Theoretical background

Well-being can be evaluated following two main approaches: objective or subjective measures. The first primarily uses indicators related to economic and social status, providing easily comparable metrics across different studies and datasets. On the other hand, subjective measures sacrifice this comparability in order to capture the significance for the respondent, allowing individuals some freedom in interpreting the question and managing their answers according to personal priorities. A thorough review of the literature dealing with the relationship between work and subjective well-being (SWB) shows that influencing factors can be grouped into two broad categories: work-related and non-work-related factors (Wang and Jing, 2018). These factors can mediate the effect of the job on satisfaction for both migrants and natives. Satisfaction is a complex and multidimensional concept, encompassing fields such as psychology, sociology, and economics. This complexity is similarly reflected in job satisfaction (Büssing and Bissels, 1998).

The first aspect analysed in the review concerns a more straightforward relation with working conditions. Job characteristics are key to job satisfaction for both natives and migrants. It has been shown that for migrants, satisfaction significantly increases when salary levels for the same job in the host country exceed those in the home country (Itzhaki *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, an appropriate workload and the possibility to

exercise control, organisation, and autonomy in the job are factors associated with higher job satisfaction among migrant workers (Itzhaki *et al.*, 2013; Magee and Umamaheswar, 2011). Regarding work-related skills, Baernholdt and Mark (2009) suggest that high job complexity can have a detrimental effect on job satisfaction. The work environment clearly influences job satisfaction, as workplace discrimination leads to poorer outcomes over time (An *et al.,* 2016; Magee and Umamaheswar, 2011). Moreover, perceiving one's contribution as valuable is essential for greater job satisfaction (An *et al.*, 2016). Using SWB measures allows an assessment at a personal level of the effect of "personal work-related factors", such as overqualification, which disproportionately affects individuals with immigrant backgrounds compared to natives (McGuinness and Byrne, 2014). Another important element is the connection between physical or mental health and job satisfaction, which has been shown to be crucial for understanding differences between individuals with similar characteristics (Aazami *et al.*, 2015; Datta Gupta and Kristensen, 2007).

Turning to factors less directly related to the job position, typical demographic factors play a significant role in shaping job satisfaction. Age and gender are found to favour, respectively, older individuals and males (Au *et al.*, 1998; Fugl-Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Diving more deeply into "cultural factors", proficiency in the host country language significantly affects well-being at work, as it allows for better communication with colleagues and more effective problem-solving; language proficiency also mediates access to better jobs, which are associated with higher satisfaction (Bloemen, 2013; Hakak *et al.*, 2010). This effect is also driven by employers' tendency in host countries to prefer candidates with higher local language skills, enabling migrants to access more, and potentially better, job opportunities (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2015). Migrants usually have different frameworks for evaluating job satisfaction, not based solely on wages (Walczak and Vallejo-Martín, 2021). This phenomenon, often referred to as the "immigrant paradox in job satisfaction", suggests that migrants often report equal or higher levels of job satisfaction compared to natives despite facing structural disadvantages and barriers (Lu *et al.,* 2001). This paradox highlights the importance of considering cultural and subjective factors when analysing job satisfaction among individuals with migration backgrounds.

Finally, "community and policy factors" strongly influence both overall and job satisfaction. Multiple studies emphasise the importance of national contexts, particularly welfare regimes, as key determinants of job satisfaction (Esser and Olsen, 2012; Hauff *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, the strength of an individual's social network (family, friends, acquaintances) plays a key role in alleviating negative aspects of work and enhancing a sense of belonging and support (Cross and Cummings, 2004; Hakak *et al.*, 2010). The perception of being accepted into the host society is also relevant, as experiences of discrimination outside the workplace can affect job satisfaction (Esses, 2021; Hakak *et al.*, 2010). Participation in socio-cultural activities has been shown to have a significantly

positive impact on job satisfaction, at least in Germany and the United Kingdom (Giovanis, 2021). To complete the picture of influencing factors on job satisfaction, previous studies underline the importance of family, especially partners, and the consequences of work on the possibility to interact and enjoy shared time and activities, as tensions in the couple may be generated by problems or stressful workplaces (Boles *et al.,* 2001; Shirmohammadi *et al*., 2023).

Considering the findings of previous research, three main hypotheses have been formulated and will be tested in the following sections.

HP1: By jointly considering job skills and job satisfaction, we hypothesise that the variability in job satisfaction is greater among natives than among individuals with a migrant background. This may be because more complex jobs tend to reduce satisfaction, while migrants generally report higher levels of job satisfaction under similar conditions.

HP2: We hypothesise that the national context plays a significant role in shaping job satisfaction. Specifically, we expect that individuals living in countries with higher levels of work–life balance will report greater job satisfaction compared to those residing in countries with lower levels of work–life balance.

HP3: We hypothesise that subjective factors related to individual perceptions in domains such as health, household and sociality, and the work context significantly influence job satisfaction and contribute to variations in overall well-being.

It is important to underline that this research does not aim to evaluate the effect of the migration event per se, but rather to describe the differences present between natives and people with a migration background.

3. Data and Methods

This study is based on data from the 10th Round of the European Social Survey (ESS), conducted in 2020 and 2022. Since the main outcome of interest is job satisfaction, the analytical sample is limited to individuals who were employed at the time of the survey, resulting in 31,295 observations. Individuals are categorised into three groups according to their migration background: natives (84% of the sample); second-generation migrants (8%), that is, individuals born in the country with at least one foreign-born parent; and migrants (8%) born abroad to foreign-born parents.

To capture cross-national differences in work-related institutional and cultural contexts, we constructed a Work–Life Balance Index (WLB) using official statistics as Eurostat and the OECD (addition information available on request). The index integrates various indicators related to work and well-being, including public holidays, duration of paid maternity leave, national happiness scores, levels of LGBTQ+ inclusivity, average weekly working hours, the prevalence of long working hours, and the incidence of atypical work schedules such as Sunday and night shifts, and indicators of work-related

mental and physical health risks. These variables were aggregated and standardized using the Mazziotta–Pareto Index (MPI), a widely used composite index in case of geographical units that works by normalizing and summing up the variable through the mean, applying a penalty factor in case of unbalanced units. All the used variables assume the same weight in the process by construction. The resulting Work–Life Balance Index ranges from 88 to 108 across countries. We classified countries into three groups: High Work–Life balance (scores above 102), Medium (scores between 98 and 102), and Low (scores below 98). Countries classified in the High Work–Life balance group include Lithuania, Germany, Norway, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Finland, Poland, and Iceland. The Medium category comprises Belgium, Slovenia, Austria, Latvia, France, Sweden, Spain, Ireland, Slovakia, and Italy. The Low Work–Life balance group includes the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Portugal, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro.

To examine variations in job satisfaction, which is the continuous dependent variable of the analysis ranging from 0 to 10, simple linear regression models are employed. A first model is estimated on the overall sample, without distinguishing countries by their level of Work–Life balance. Subsequently, three separate models are estimated for each group of countries classified according to the Work–Life balance Index: High, Medium, and Low. Control variables include gender, age, language spoken at home, and educational attainment. The analysis compares natives with individuals of migrant background, considering the interaction between groups and the type of occupation, classified by low, medium, and high skill levels (ISCO classification) to assess whether job satisfaction also varies according to occupational skill level. The sample is composed of 50% high-skilled workers and 43% medium-skilled workers, with a balanced percentage distribution between natives and individuals with a migrant background (with a slight difference in percentage points for first-generation migrants). Low-skilled workers represent 7% of the sample, with a higher proportion among first-generation migrants (13% of this group) compared to natives and second-generation migrants (6% each).

Additional variables related to individual perceptions and experiences, aggregated into macro categories, are grouped into three thematic domains. The not work-related category is the health and subjective well-being domain, that include self-assessed general health and overall life satisfaction. The household and social sphere, identified as semi-work related category includes variables such as the frequency of social interaction (not shown in the Results, available on request); how often partner or family feel overwhelmed by the respondent's job; how often the job prevents time investment in the partner or family; how often individuals are too tired after work to enjoy personal activities; perceptions of the household's current income; and religiosity. Finally the work-related variables identified as work environment domain that includes objective variables such as the type of employment contract and the total number of hours

normally worked per week (not shown in the Results, available on request), and variables of individual's perception whether they are allowed to decide how their daily work is organised, and whether they take on extra responsibilities without additional pay.

4. Results

In Table 1, the results are presented for the main variable of interest, which combines individuals' migration background with their job skill level. Starting from the model without distinguishing by WLB and using natives with medium job skill levels as the reference category, we observe a gradient effect based on skill level, particularly pronounced among natives. A similar pattern appears for individuals with at least one foreign-born parent, although it is not always statistically significant, likely due to the smaller sample size of this group. When considering migration background as a variable to assess changes in job satisfaction, its influence appears limited, as there are no significant differences between coefficients within the same skill level. These two findings together suggest that job skill level has a greater impact on job satisfaction than migration background.

When shifting to models divided by WLB, we observe that natives experience a greater penalty in job satisfaction when working in low-skill jobs in countries with High or Medium WLB. Conversely, this factor does not affect countries with low WLB. Holding a high-skill job has a positive effect, with the strongest impact observed in Low-balance countries. These results suggest that better jobs exert a stronger positive influence on satisfaction in lower-performing countries, as if they were able to compensate more significantly. Further evidence of this can be found in the significant effect of the second generation-high skill combination, which is only relevant in this latter group of countries.

Looking at different migrant generations, we find that second-generation migrants are significant only in Low WLB countries, with a positive effect in the high-skill job category mentioned above, and a negative effect in the medium-skill category. Being a migrant does not influence job satisfaction in the case of high-skill jobs, partly due to the limited number of individuals with these specific characteristics. However, migrants show the largest absolute negative effect when combined with low-skill jobs in Low WLB countries, with a reduction in job satisfaction of nearly 0.4 points.

Table 2 presents the results for the mediating variables within the three domains previously identified. The table reports the absolute changes in the coefficients between the overall model and the WLB models, indicated using symbols for increase, decrease, or stability (+; −; ≈).

Table 1 – *Results of Linear Regression Models for migration background and level of skill job: Overall Model, Country-Specific Models Grouped by Work-Life Balance Index, showing coefficients, significance (p-values) and intervals of confidence.*

Skill job & Groups	Mod. All Countries Coef.; [int. conf.]	Mod. High W.L.B. Country Coef.; [int. conf.]	Mod. Medium W.L.B. Country Coef.; [int. conf.]	Mod. Low W.L.B. Country Coef.; [int. conf.]
Ref. Medium skill – Native				
High skill - Native	0,144*** [0,090;0,197]	0,104** [0,028;0,180]	0,083 [-0,014;0,181]	0,269*** [0,150;0,387]
High skill - Second G	0,150** [0,039;0,261]	0,125 [-0,037;0,287]	0,064 [-0,136;0,264]	0,254* [0,025;0,483]
High skill - Migrant	0,080 [-0,038;0,198]	0,003 [-0,183;0,189]	0,140 [-0,067;0,346]	0,096 [-0,132;0,325]
Medium skill – Second G	-0,063 [-0,185;0,058]	-0,062 [-0,238;0,155]	0,076 [-0,157;0,309]	-0,272* [-0,511;-0,033]
Medium skill - Migrant	-0,053 [-0,180;0,073]	-0,254* [-0,476;-0,032]	0,000 [-0,202;0,201]	0,067 [-0,176;0,310]
Low skill - Native	-0,286*** [-0,385;-0,186]	-0,363*** [-0,513;-0,214]	-0,282** [-0,463;-0,100]	-0,177 [-0,371;0,017]
Low skill - Second G	-0,095 [-0,400;0,211]	0,170 [-0,280;0,621]	-0,285 [-0,813;0,242]	-0,581 [-1,260;0,098]
Low skill - Migrant	-0,248* [-0,455;-0,041]	0,001 [-0,440;0,442]	-0,188 [-0,502;0,126]	-0,399* [-0,756;-0,042]
Cons	7,385	6,203	6,170	6,230
n. Total {mean Job Satisfaction}	29.388 {7,38}	14.361 {7,40}	8.825 {7,41}	6.202 {7,30}
n. Natives{mean Job Satisfaction}	24.742 {7,39}	12.478 {7,41}	7.234 {7,43}	5.030 {7,29}
n. Sec Gen{mean Job Satisfaction}	2.277 {7,38}	1.070 {7,42}	676 {7,37}	531 {7,30}
n. Migrants{mean Job Satisfaction}	2.369 {7,29}	813 {7,21}	915 {7,34}	641 {7,34}
Fisher	177,08	89,62	52,1	43,88
Adj. R²	0,248	0,25	0,24	0,272

Note: Statistical significance of the relationship is marked by *if p<0.05, ** if p<0.01, *** if p<0.001. Source: our elaborations on ESS data Round10th.

Table 2 – *Results of Linear Regression Models for health, household and sociality, work variable: Overall Model Coefficients and Significance (p-values); Country-Specific Models Grouped by Work-Life Balance Index, showing Significance (p-values) and ±5% Variation from the Overall Model Coefficients.*

	Variables	Mod. All Countries Coef.; P-value	Mod. High W.L.B. Country 5% change; P-value	Mod. Medium W.L.B. Country 5% change; P-value	Mod. Low W.L.B. Country 5% change; P-value
Health	*Subjective health (Ref. Very good/good)*				
	Fair	-0,125 ***	− ***	+	− **
	Bad/Very bad	-0,303 ***	− ***	+ *	+
	Satisfied with life (Ref. Unsatisfied)				
	Satisfied	0,863 ***	+ ***	− ***	≈ ***
	Extremely satisfied	1,523 ***	≈ ***	− ***	+ ***
Household & sociality	*Partner/family fed up with pressure of your job (Ref. Never/Hardly ever)*				
	Sometimes	-0,223 ***	− ***	− ***	+
	Often/Always	-0,679 ***	− ***	≈ ***	+ ***
	Tired after work to enjoy things like doing at home (Ref. Never/Hardly ever)				
	Sometimes	-0,199 ***	− ***	+ *	+ **
	Often/Always	-0,635 ***	− ***	+ ***	+ ***
	Job prevents you from giving time to partner/family (Ref. Never/Hardly)				
	Sometimes	-0,197 ***	+ ***	≈ ***	− ***
	Often/Always	-0,407 ***	≈ ***	− ***	− ***
	Feeling about household's income nowadays (Ref. Comfortably)				
	Difficult/Very Difficult	-0,439 ***	+ ***	≈ ***	≈ ***
	Religiosity (Ref. Not Religious)				
	Low	0,022	+	−	+
	Medium	0,131 ***	+ ***	+ **	≈
	High	0,352 ***	+ ***	+ ***	− ***

Table 2 (cont.)— *Results of Linear Regression Models for health, household and sociality, work variable: Overall Model Coefficients and Significance (p-values); Country-Specific Models Grouped by Work-Life Balance Index, showing Significance (p-values) and ±5% Variation from the Overall Model Coefficients.*

	Variables	Mod. All Countries Coef.; P-value	Mod. High W.L.B. Country 5% change; P-value	Mod. Medium W.L.B. Country 5% change; P-value	Mod. Low W.L.B. Country 5% change; P-value
Work	*Allowed to decide how daily work is organised (Ref. No influence)*				
	Influence	0,114	+	+	−
		***	***	***	
	Control	0,619	≈	+	−
		***	***	***	***
	Extra responsibilities at work without being paid more (Ref. No)				
	Sometimes	0,278	−	+	+
		***	***	***	***
	Yes	0,627	−	+	≈
		***	***	***	***

Note: For Cons, Obs., Fisher, and Adj. R² see Table 1
Statistical significance of the relationship is marked by *if p<0.05, ** if p<0.01, *** if p<0.001. Source: our elaborations on ESS data Round10th.
Confident intervals and standard errors available upon request

Starting with the health domain, the most influential variable is overall life satisfaction. Its effect is somewhat smaller in countries with Medium levels of WLB. Regarding subjective health, the negative impact of belonging to the worst-off group is particularly pronounced in countries with Higher WLB, as indicated by a consistently negative coefficient. In the household and social domain, all variables show a significant impact. Variables related to the partner appear especially influential, penalizing individuals whose job limits the time available for household responsibilities or creates tensions with a partner who is dissatisfied with the respondent's job. The effects range between −0.4 and −0.7, with a greater impact observed in Low WLB countries for the first variable, and in High WLB countries for the second. Religiosity exhibits a stronger positive effect in Medium and High WLB countries, reaching approximately 0.35 among individuals reporting the highest levels of religiosity. Turning to work-related characteristics, having greater control over work organization positively affects satisfaction, with an estimated effect of 0.6 points. However, this effect is less pronounced in countries with the lowest WLB. Individuals who accept increased responsibilities without corresponding financial compensation tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction, although this pattern is less evident in countries with the highest Work-Life Balance.

5. Conclusions and Limitations

This study contributes to the understanding of job satisfaction in Europe by analysing how both Work-related and Non-work-related factors shape individual experiences across natives, second-generation migrants, and first generation. Findings reveal there is no significant difference between groups with a migration background; instead, the difference lies in the level of job skill, partially confirming our first hypothesis. Among natives, disparities in satisfaction are more pronounced at the extremes of the skill distribution (high and low). The reason can be found in the fact that migrants tend to be more satisfied with their work, confirming the immigrants' satisfaction paradox, as they tend to compare themselves with individuals in their country of origin (Shen and Kogan, 2020). In this cross-sectional dataset, we don't know whether work satisfaction increases or decreases depending on the duration of stay in the country or the length of the employment episode.

Overall, our second hypothesis is not totally confirmed, because substantial cross-country differences don't emerge using the Work-Life Balance Index, but countries with Low Work-Life Balance scores displayed stronger inequalities between individuals with a migration background, particularly related to occupational skill. The limitation of the reduced sample size for migrants and second-generation migrants could influence the robustness of group-specific findings. Non-work-related factors, especially self-perceived health and overall life satisfaction, emerged as having a strong effect on job satisfaction, particularly more pronounced in countries with High Work-Life Balance. In the domains of sociality and household, although no substantial differences emerge across countries based on the Work-Life Balance Index, all variables still show a significant impact on job satisfaction. This suggests that social connections, family dynamics, and domestic responsibilities play a consistent role in shaping individuals' work satisfaction, which has consequences on all the other aspects of life, confirming our third hypothesis. Key variables such as overqualification and ethnic origin, potential factors of dissatisfaction for migrants, and stress-related work variables were not included due to data constraints. Despite these limitations, the study highlights the multifaceted nature of job satisfaction and the importance of considering both structural and subjective dimensions in labour market research.

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