



# Children's Well-Being

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The **Haruv** Institute



# Background

We often use the term **Well-Being** in Social Science  
but...

How do you define Well-being in different languages?

## **Dictionary Definition:**

Well-being is the desirable situation in which a person is happy, healthy and prosperous

## **Not only for researchers**

Now-a-days, the term 'well-being' provides us a wide conceptual framework to examine, change and develop services, therapeutic interventions and relevant policies.

# Well-being is a broad term

**It replaces the limited perspective of earlier terms used**

Welfare      Standard of living      GDP

**What does WELL-BEING include?**

Subjective feelings      Happiness      Life conditions      Self-fulfillment  
Opportunities for growth      Balance between pleasure and pain

**World Health Organization:**

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”

# The special place of Subjective Well-Being

Most researchers now-a-days agree that well-being includes a subjective factor - this factor has an affective part which is related to “**happiness**” and a cognitive part which is related to “**life satisfactory**”.

Although the meaning of “improvement of objective life conditions” is clear to everyone in the research field, the improvement of **subjective** life conditions is still vague.

The most important question today is: Do countries need to develop policy aimed towards rising the subjective well-being of their citizens? If so, what kind of policy will it be?



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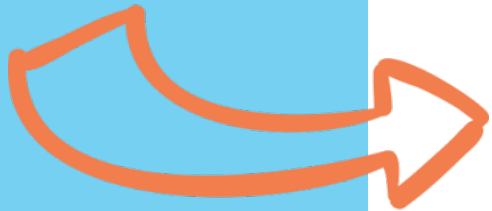
**Why is learning from children  
important?**



The importance of  
**involving  
children in  
research**  
about their lives is  
embedded in **four  
justifications**

### The Justifications are:

- 1 Incorporating children's rights
- 2 Changes in the perspective on children
- 3 The changing context of child welfare
- 4 Children know the most about their lives



# 1 Incorporating children's rights

Normative-Legislative justification

The Convention of  
the Rights of the  
Child (CRC, 1989)

The major change in the status of children is reflected in the **RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE** and to be actively involved in the decision-making process regarding their lives.

These self-determination rights are **legal rights** and must be the norm in our society.

## 2 Changes in the perspective on children

### Theoretical justification

- ▶ Criticism on developmental psychology and socialization theory that view children as “**UNFINISHED PERSONS**”.
- ▶ The shifting perspective of children and childhood from passive beings to **ACTIVE PERSONS** in their lives.

We need the children’s **SUBJECTIVE POINT OF VIEW** of their lives.



# 3 The changing context of child welfare

Theoretical justification

## Recent shifts in our understanding of children's well-being:

From survival and basic needs → Development and well-being

From negative → Positive

From well-becoming → Well-being

From what is desired → Legally established **minimums**

# 4 Children know the most about their lives

Practical-Methodological justification

- ▶ Children's experiences are different from the adults' perceptions (or "knowledge") about them.
- ▶ The adults cannot serve as a valid proxy measure for children or childhood.

**ONLY DIRECT ANSWERS FROM CHILDREN** can reveal to us their true perceptions, experiences, thoughts and feelings.



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**How did the view towards  
children changed?**



I would argue that  
this change in  
context is the

**consequence of two major sources:**

1

**Normative-legislative and theoretical  
advancements**

2

**Changes in the technical and  
methodological research abilities**

1

# “New” normative and theoretical approaches

Theories and normative approaches to children’s welfare abound.

Many have contributed to the changing context and many more continue to do so.

**The most influencing approaches on the changing child welfare context:**

- ▶ The **Ecological Theories** of child development
- ▶ The normative concept of **Children’s Rights**
- ▶ The **New Sociology of Childhood** as a stage in and of itself

# New methodological and technical abilities

Just as new theories contributed to the new context of children's well being,

**three methodological perspectives have done the same:**

- The call for using the child as the **Unit of Observation**
- The emerging importance of **Subjective Perspectives**
- The expanded use of **Administrative Data** and the growing variety of data sources



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**What can we learn from children?**



# What is important to children?

We should ask ourselves,  
and mostly ask the children...

- What do they want to talk about?
- What do they want to tell us?
- How do they describe their narratives?
- What are they interested in or concerned for?

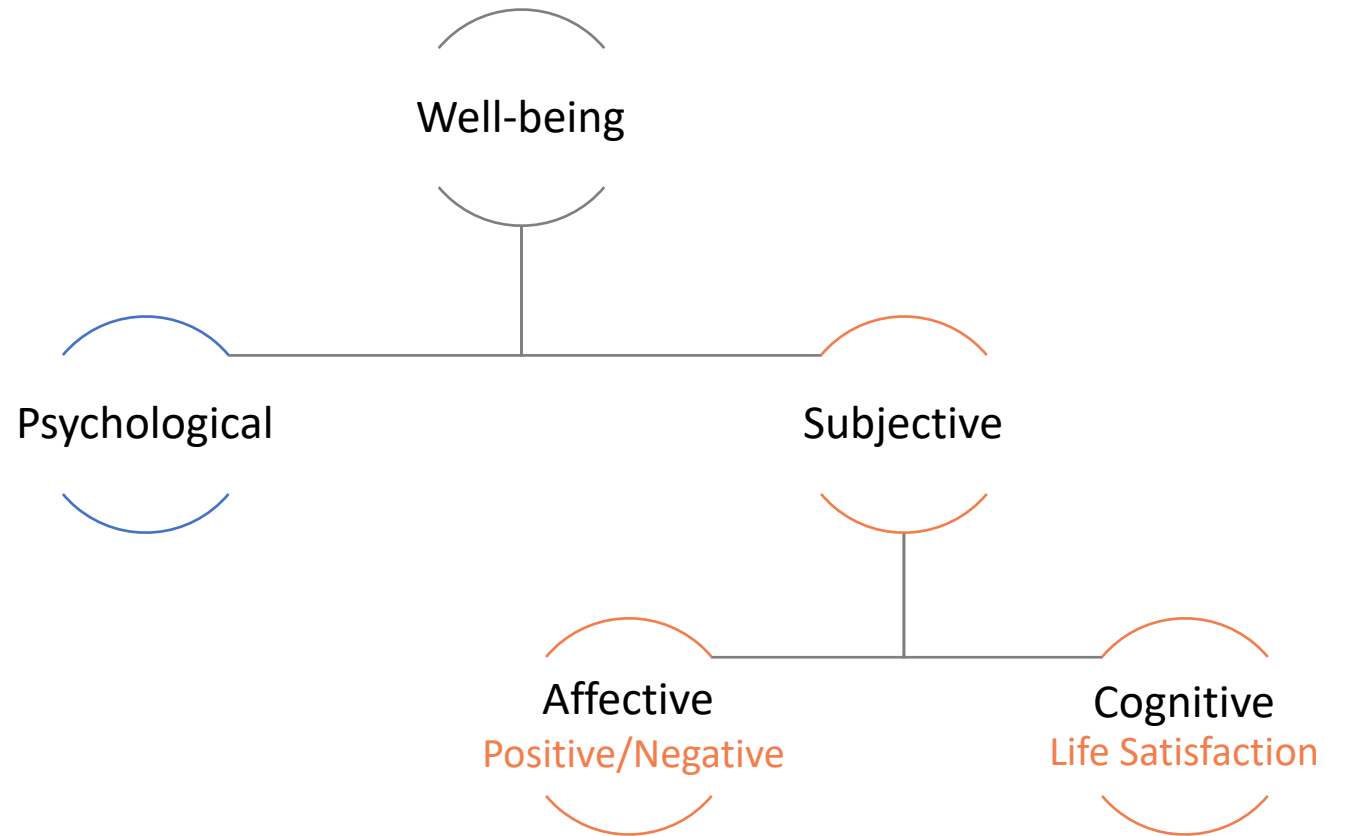
This kind of research would reveal **how do children experience their everyday lives**

Therefore...

- It would make a difference in our understanding of their interests, concerns and priorities.
- It would provide new insights into the children's capabilities.



# Children's self-reported Well-Being



# Domains of children's well-being

Derived from children's interviews

## Fundamental Themes

- 1 Positive sense of self**
- 2 Agency** [controlling everyday life]
- 3 Security and safety**

## Other Domains

- 4 Activities** [freedom, competence and fun]
- 5 Adversity** [dealing with difficulties]
- 6 Material and economic resources** [of the family]
- 7 Physical environment**
- 8 Physical health** [care, food, activities]
- 9 Social responsibility and moral agency** [being a “good person”]



# Children's Rights

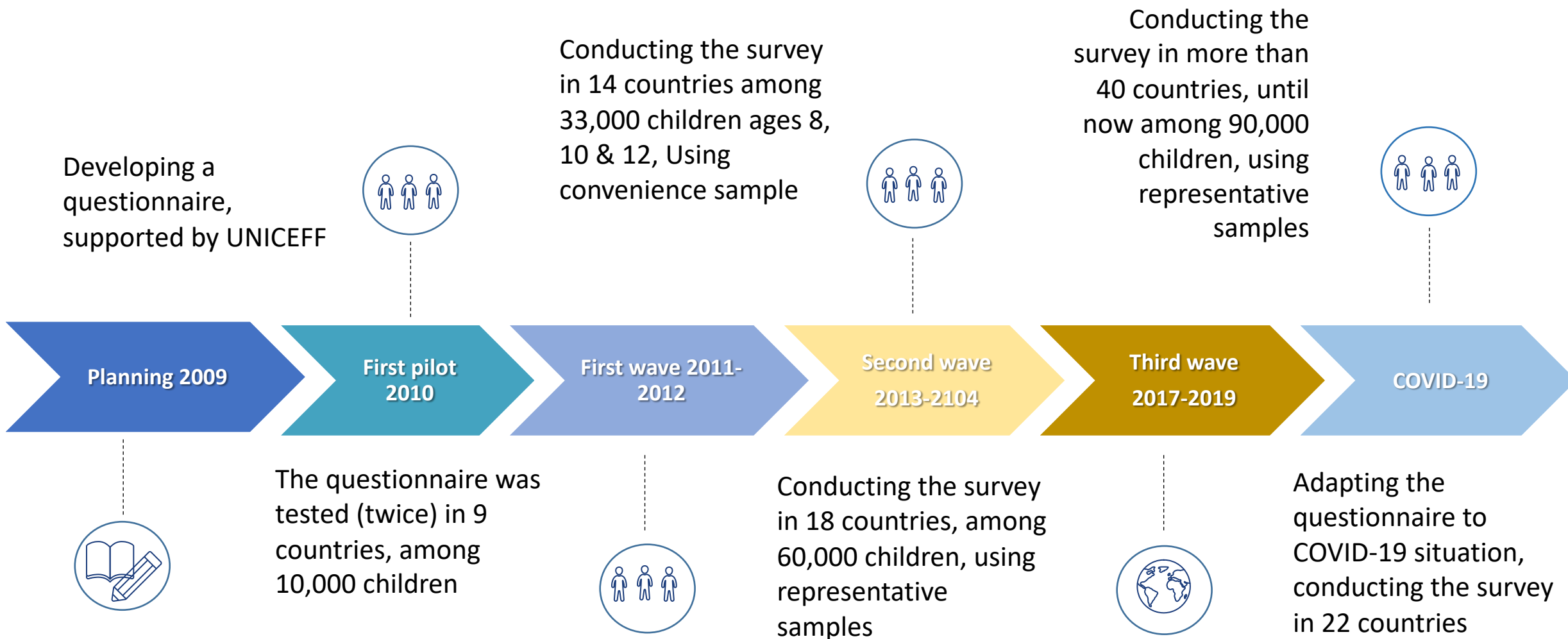
Children are mostly concerned with **their wish to be heard** and have a say in decision making; be respected and trusted; be **regarded as people**.

Yet, they do not wish to have full control, and accept and respect the **adult's power and control**.



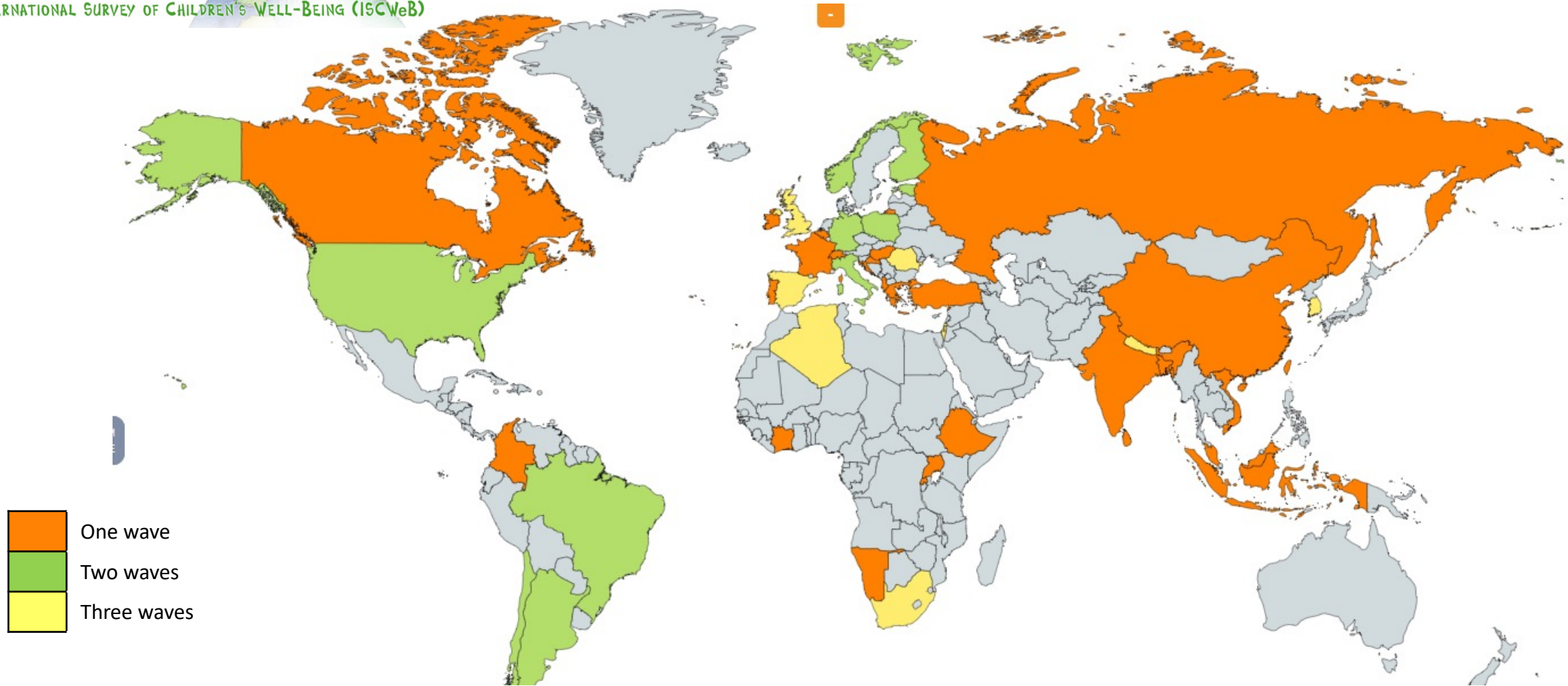
Melton & Limber, 1992  
Morrow, 1999

# The Project's Phases





# Children's Worlds World Map



47 countries in all three waves

From 5 continents

70% are developed countries and 30% are developing countries

## THIRD WAVE 2016-2019

The largest survey of its kind in the world

Over 128,000 children ages 8, 10 and 12

35 countries/districts from 4 continents

### COVID-19

22 Countries: Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Poland, Romania, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Turkey, Wales.

# Content of the questionnaire

School



Friends



Home and Family



The living environment



Time use



Money and  
Economic conditions



Subjective well- being



Myself



Children's rights



## Scope of the Samples

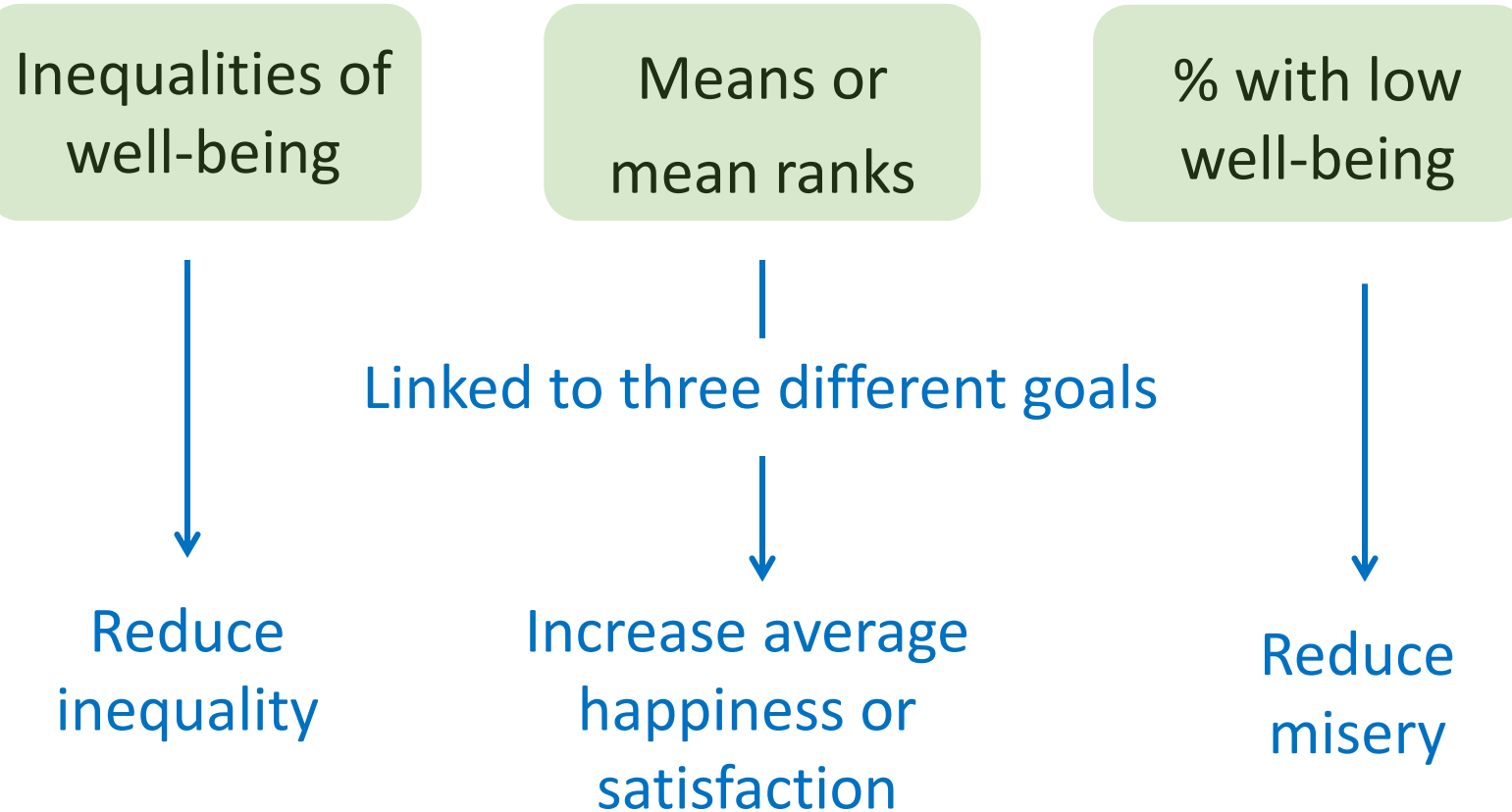
- 24 countries - a representative national sample
- 17 countries - a representative sample of one region/bit city

<b>Algeria</b>	West Algeria	<b>Ireland</b>	Cork
<b>Argentina</b>	Buenos Aires	<b>Italy</b>	Liguria Region
<b>Belgium</b>	Flanders	<b>Nepal</b>	Province No. 3
<b>Brazil</b>	South and southeast	<b>Russia</b>	Tyumen region
<b>Chile</b>	Concepción and Santiago	<b>Spain</b>	Catalonia
<b>China</b>	Guangdong	<b>Sri Lanka</b>	3 regions
<b>France</b>	Nantes, Paris and Rouen	<b>USA</b>	South Dakota, Ohio, Maryland, Kentucky
<b>Greece</b>	the periphery of Epirus	<b>Vietnam</b>	North Vietnam
<b>India</b>	Kolkata		



# Three different approaches to comparisons

What should we compare?



# Are comparisons meaningful?

## **Linguistic issues:**

Do words, phrases, statements and questions mean the same in different languages?

## **Cultural response issues:**

Do children (and people in general) tend to respond differently to the same types of response options in different countries or cultures?

Research on adult subjective well-being has attempted to tackle these issues through several means, including:

- Demonstrating correlations between macro indicators and mean national subjective well-being. But do we have enough countries and what are the salient macro indicators?
- Using 'anchoring vignettes' within questionnaires. For the future?

# Where does that leave us?

Comparing means (or % with low well-being or inequalities) between countries is potentially useful, if we can explain the reasons for variation

But, in addition:

- We can use the mean scores in other useful comparative ways
- Most (80% to 90%) of the variation is within countries not between countries, so we can look at that in a comparative way too
- There are other types of comparative analysis we can do including:
- Looking at relative positive and negative aspects of life
- Looking at sub-group differences
- There are other important topics covered in the survey – bullying, time use, children's rights.

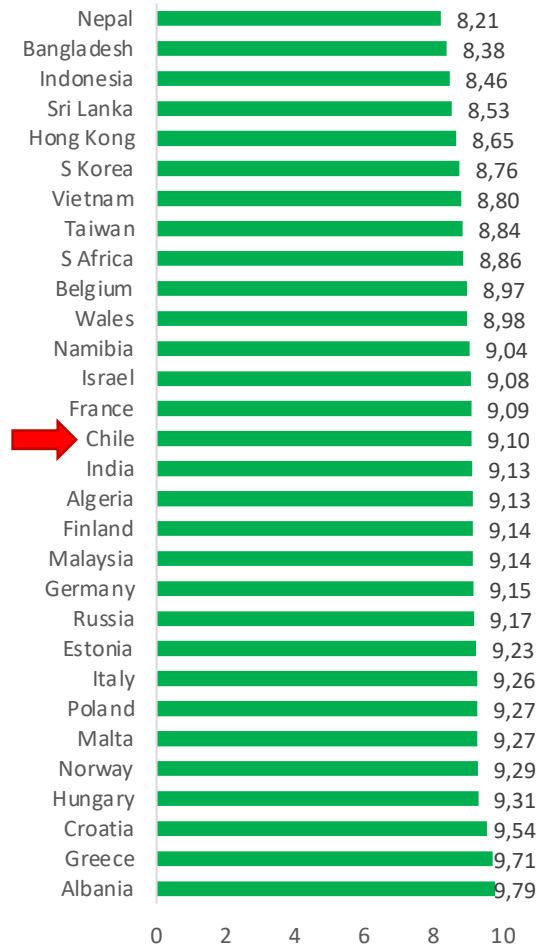
## Data presented today

- **Data:** ISCWeB 3rd wave data (10 YO dataset)
- **First group** of descriptive slides about 43,000 students across 30 countries.
- **Second group and analysis:** about 35,000 students across 22 countries. Participant countries were Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Israel, Malaysia, Malta, Nepal, Norway, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Vietnam and Wales (the U.K.).

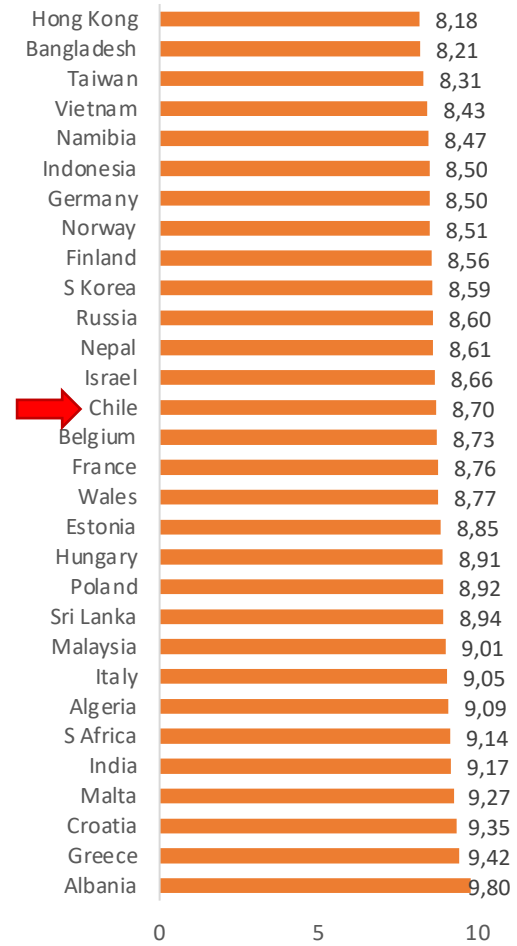
# Presentation Sample (after data cleaning)

	8yo	10yo	12yo	Total
Albania		1176	1163	2339
Algeria	1185	1137	1054	3376
Bangladesh	787	946	1012	2745
Belgium	1134	1112	1076	3322
Chile	916	913	1016	2845
Croatia	1112	1240	1155	3507
Estonia	1058	1013	1079	3150
Finland	1112	1067	1075	3254
France		2184		2184
Germany	945	829	1524	3298
Greece		822		822
Hong Kong		709	816	1525
Hungary	1016	1035	994	3045
India	994	946	977	2917
Indonesia	7444	7680	7999	23123
Israel	1487	1637	1465	4589
Italy	1044	1074	1181	3299
Malaysia	967	994		1961
Malta	567	648	752	1967
Namibia		1025	1099	2124
Nepal		1004	1041	2045
Norway	604	801	817	2222
Poland	974	1195	1157	3326
Russia		953	951	1904
S Africa		3415	3699	7114
S Korea	3170	3203	3432	9805
Sri Lanka		1154	1221	2375
Taiwan	1342	1356	1532	4230
Vietnam	930	946	1080	2956
Wales		959	1668	2627
Total	28788	43173	42035	113996

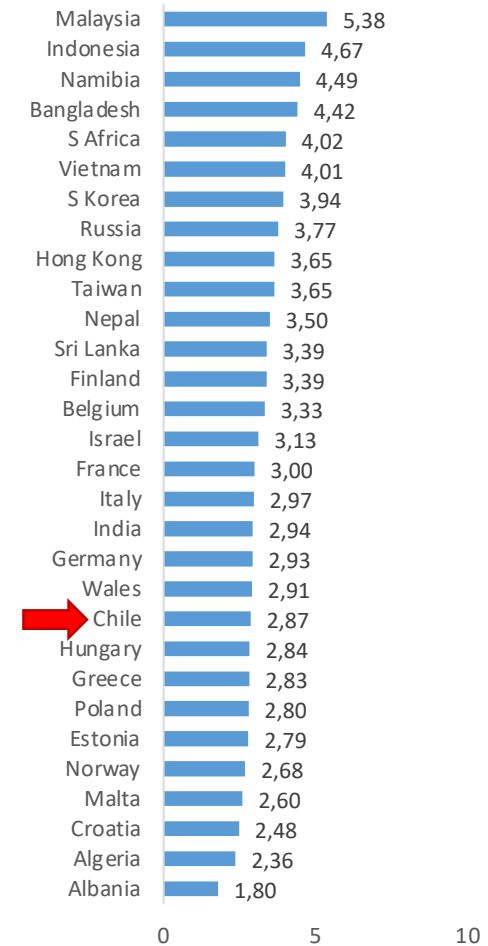
## Life satisfaction



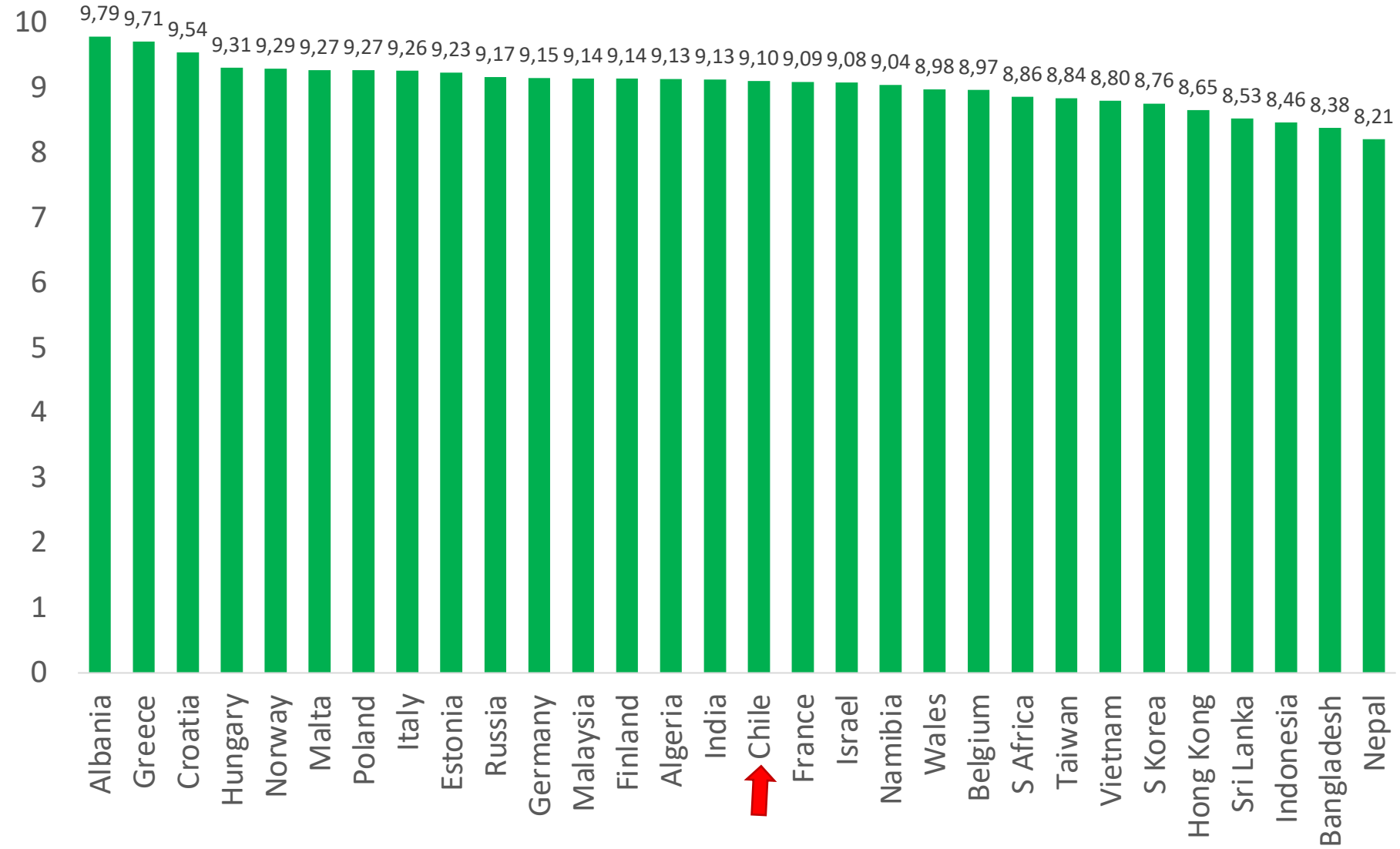
## Happiness



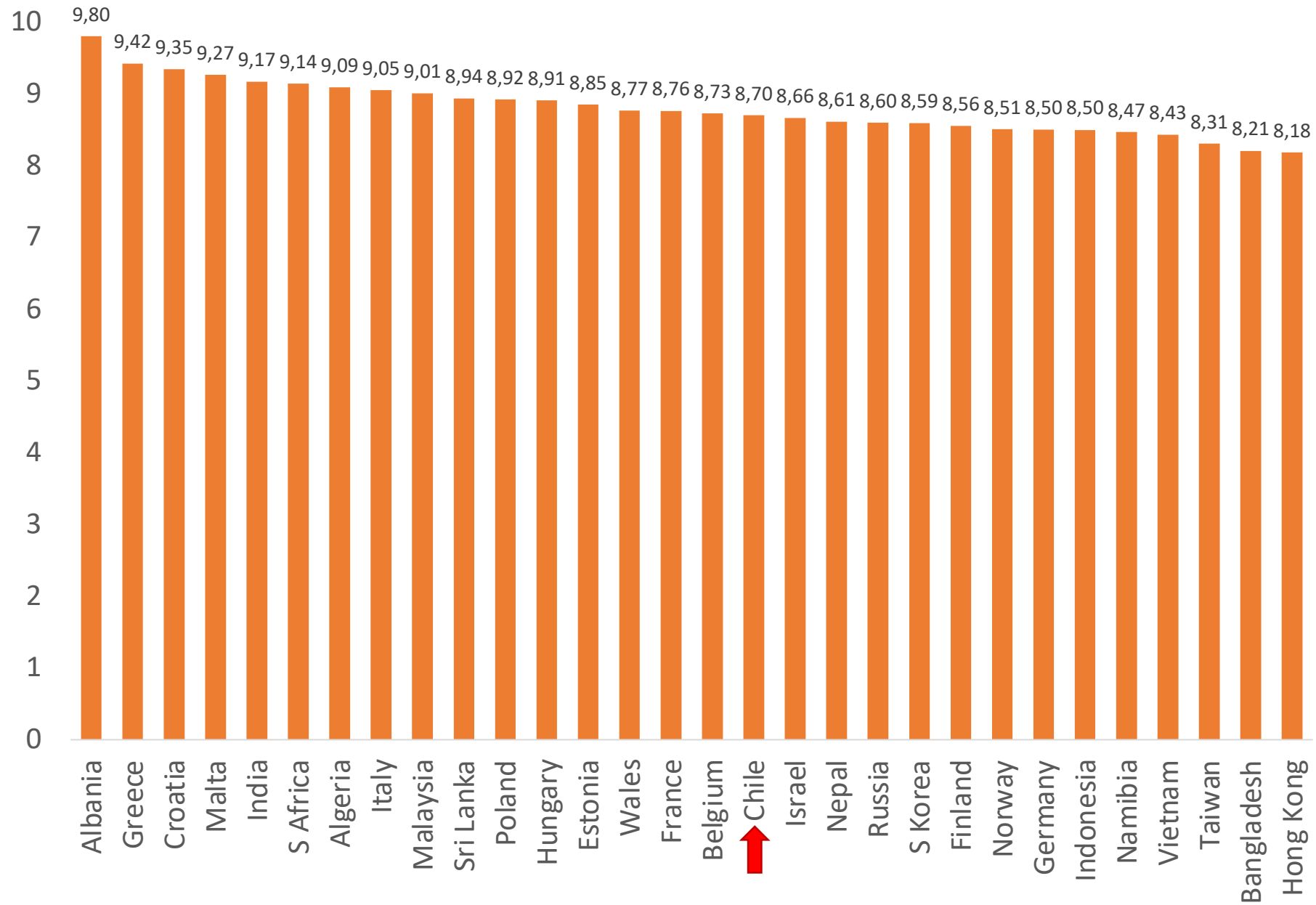
## Sadness



## Life satisfaction

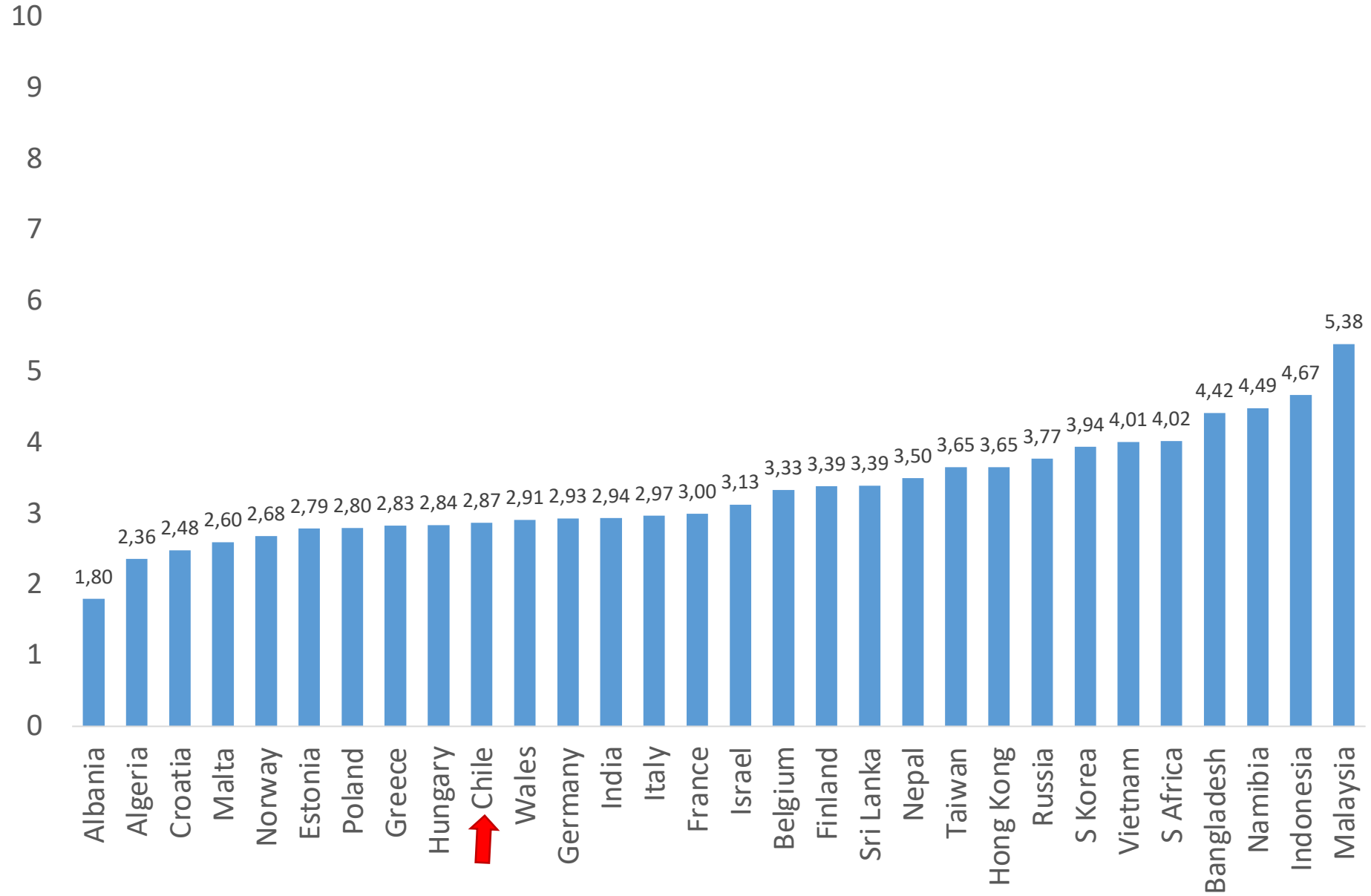


# Happiness

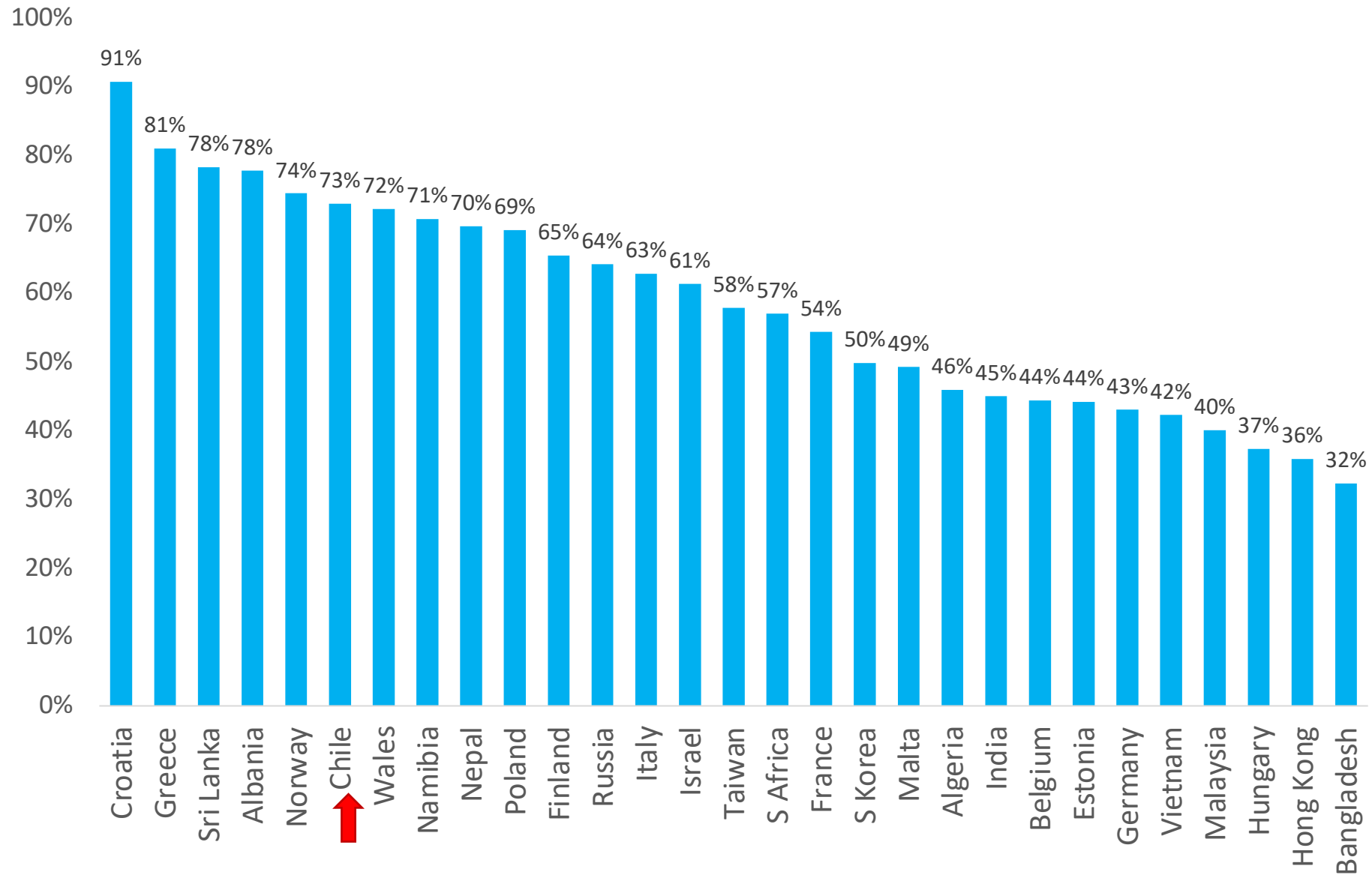




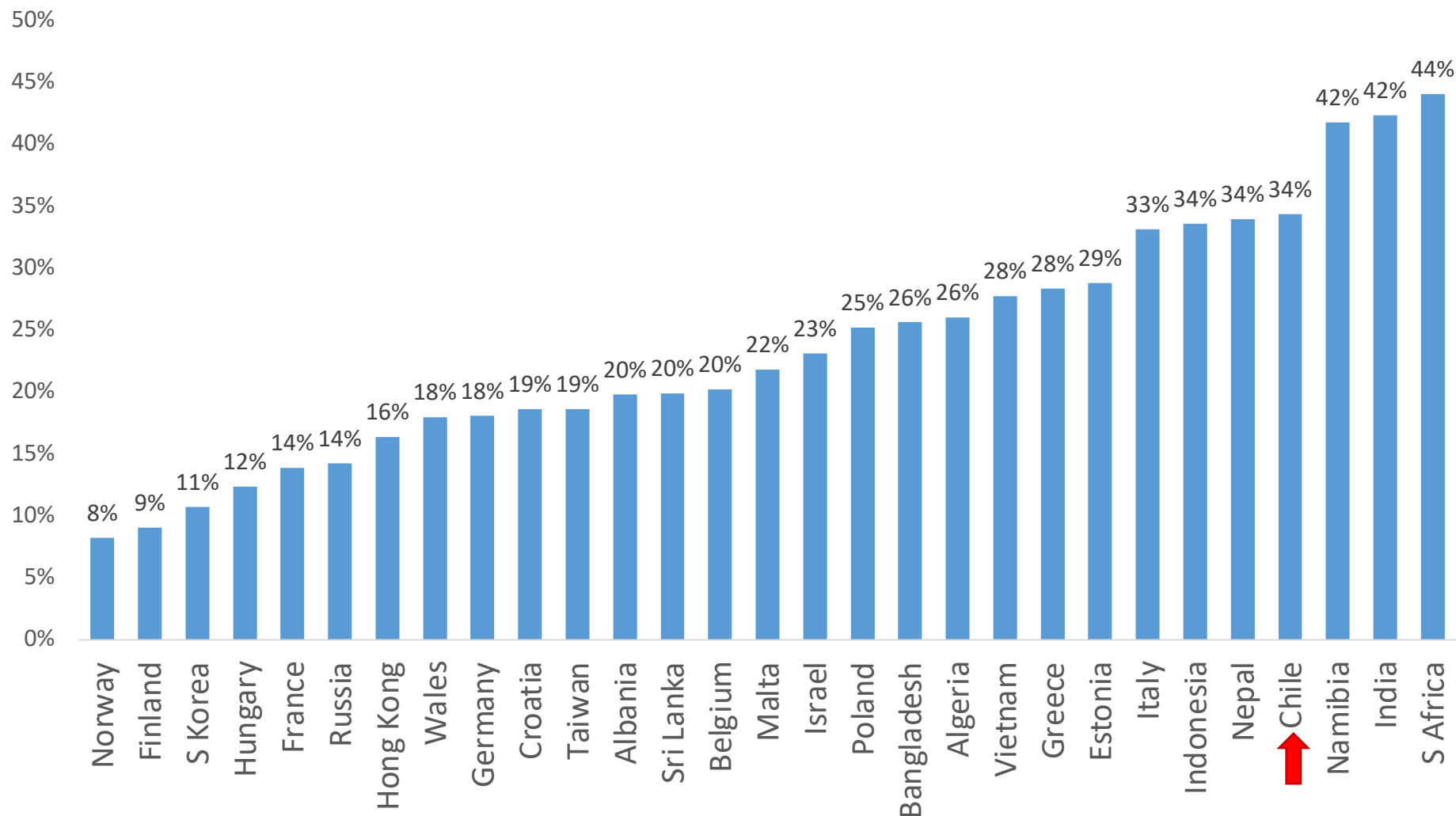
## Sadness



## % of children who answered 'yes' about knowing their rights



## % of children who often or always worry about how much money their family has



# Dependent variable: CW-SWBS

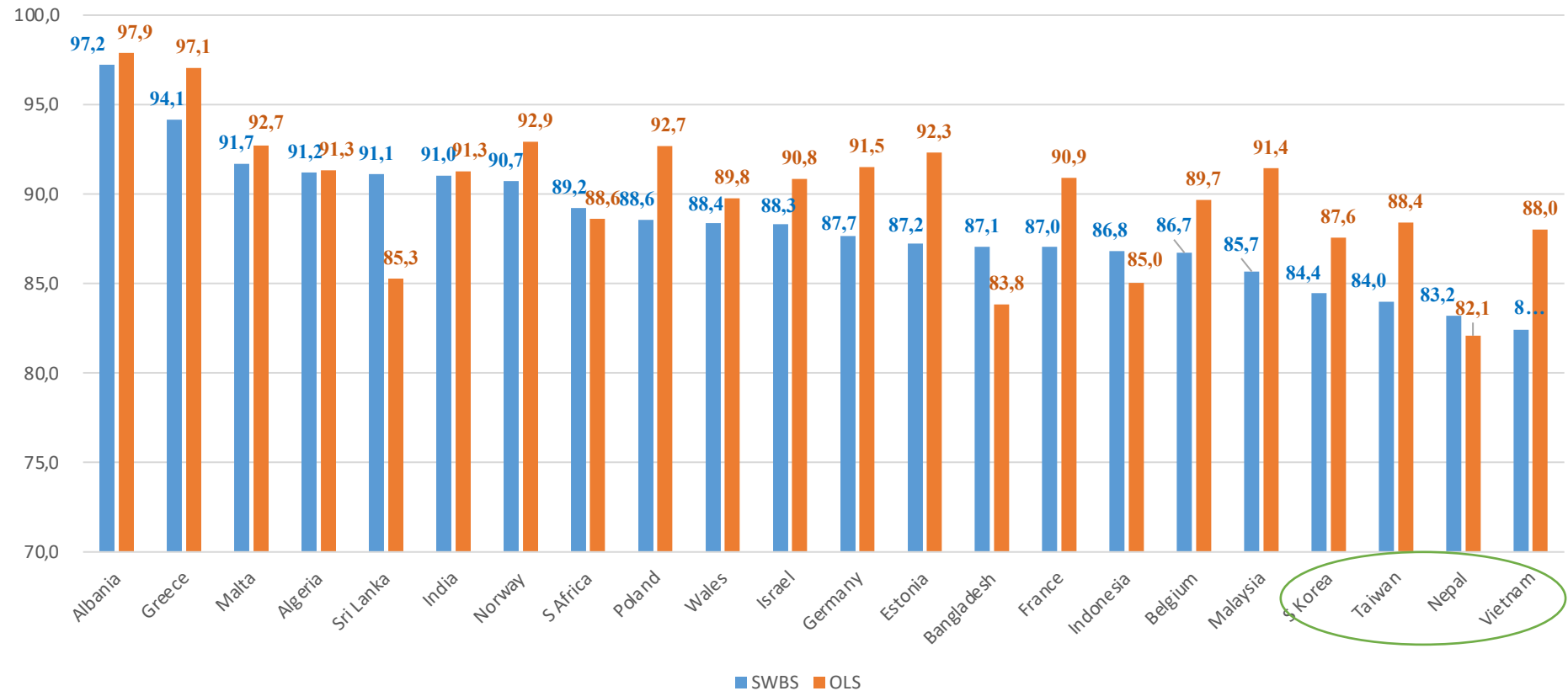
- CW-SWBS (Children's Worlds Subjective Well-Being Scale)
  - 6 items measuring cognitive subjective well-being

• Now please say how much you agree with each of the following sentences about your life as a whole.  
(These questions use a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means that you do not agree with the sentence at all and 10 means that you agree with it completely.)

	0 = Not at all agree agree										10 = totally
I enjoy my life	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My life is going well	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I have a good life	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
The things that happen in my life are excellent	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I like my life	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I am happy with my life	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Dependent Variable	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
SWBS (Children's Worlds Subjective Well-Being Scale)	33,841	0.00	100.00	87.7853	17.85335

# Children's SWB across countries



Asian bias?

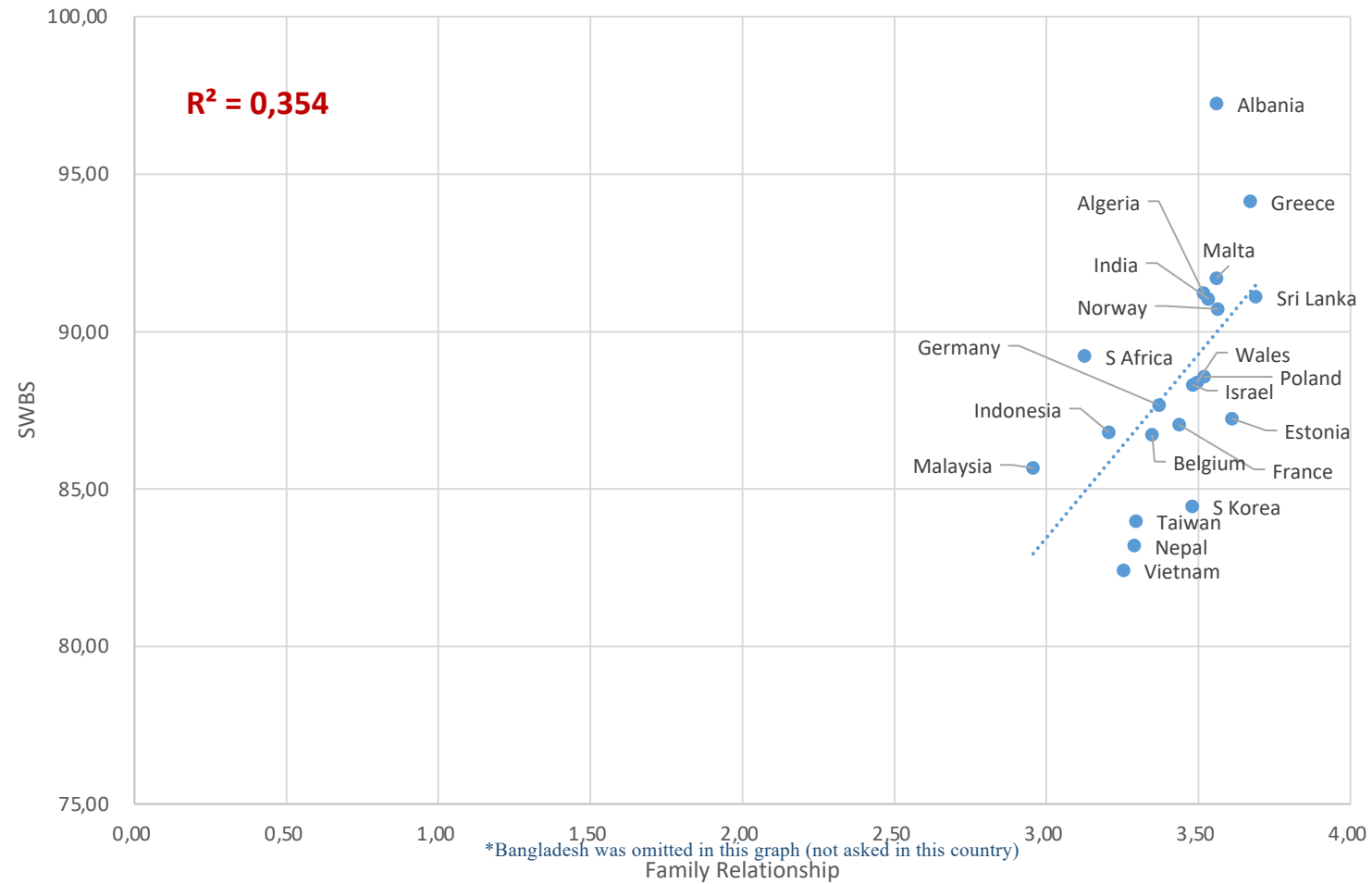
# Independent Variables: Family, School, and Community

Domain	Sub-domain	Items	Note
Family	Family Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are people in my family who care about me</li> <li>We have a good time together in my family</li> <li>My parents/carers listen to me and take what I say into account</li> </ul>	Mean items (0-4)
	Home Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I feel safe at home</li> </ul>	Single item (0-4)
	Access Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whether has: ①Clothes in good condition to go to school in, ②Enough money for school trips and activities, ③ Access to the Internet, ④Equipment/things for sports and hobbies, ⑤Pocket money / money to spend on yourself, ⑥Two pairs of shoes in good condition, ⑦Mobile phone, ⑧Equipment/things you need for school</li> </ul>	Sum items (0-8)
School	Peer and teacher Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have enough friends</li> <li>My friends are usually nice to me</li> <li>Me and my friends get along well together</li> <li>My teachers care about me</li> <li>My teachers listen to me and take what I say into account</li> </ul>	Mean items (0-4)
	Bullying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How often: ①Hit by other children in your school, ②Called unkind names by other children in your school, ③Left out by other children in your class</li> </ul>	Sum 3 binary items (0-3)
	School Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I feel safe at school</li> </ul>	Single item (0-4)
Community	Community Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I feel safe when I walk in the area I live in</li> </ul>	Single item (0-4)
	Area To Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In my area there are enough places to play or to have a good time</li> </ul>	Single item (0-4)
Demography	Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boy or Girl (Boy=1, Girl=0)</li> </ul>	(0-1)

# Independent Variables: Family, School, and Community

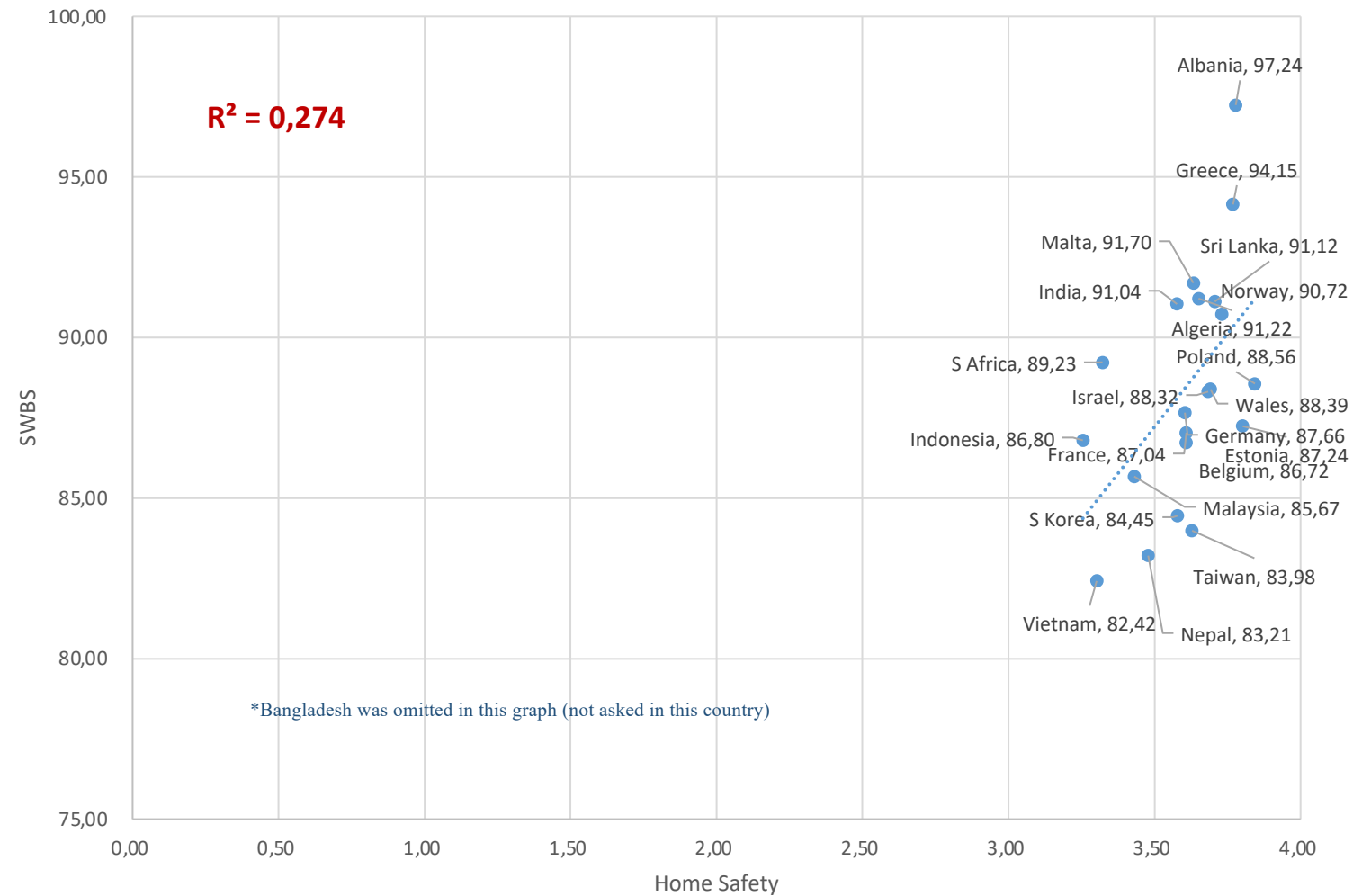
Domain	Sub-domain	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
Family	Family Relationship	33,714	0.00	4.00	3.3660	.79397
	Home Safety	32,488	0.00	4.00	3.5236	.89302
	Access Materials	34,776	0.00	8.00	6.5357	1.74491
School	Peer and teacher Relationship	33,917	0.00	4.00	3.1482	.81720
	Bullying	34,248	0.00	3.00	1.1518	1.08897
	School Safety	31,254	0.00	4.00	3.2255	1.14358
Community	Community Safety	31,589	0.00	4.00	2.9588	1.22813
	Area To Play	30,728	0.00	4.00	3.0191	1.26038
Demography	Sex (Boy=1, Girl=0)	34,694	0.00	1.00	.4930	.49996

# Independent Variables by countries: Family relationships

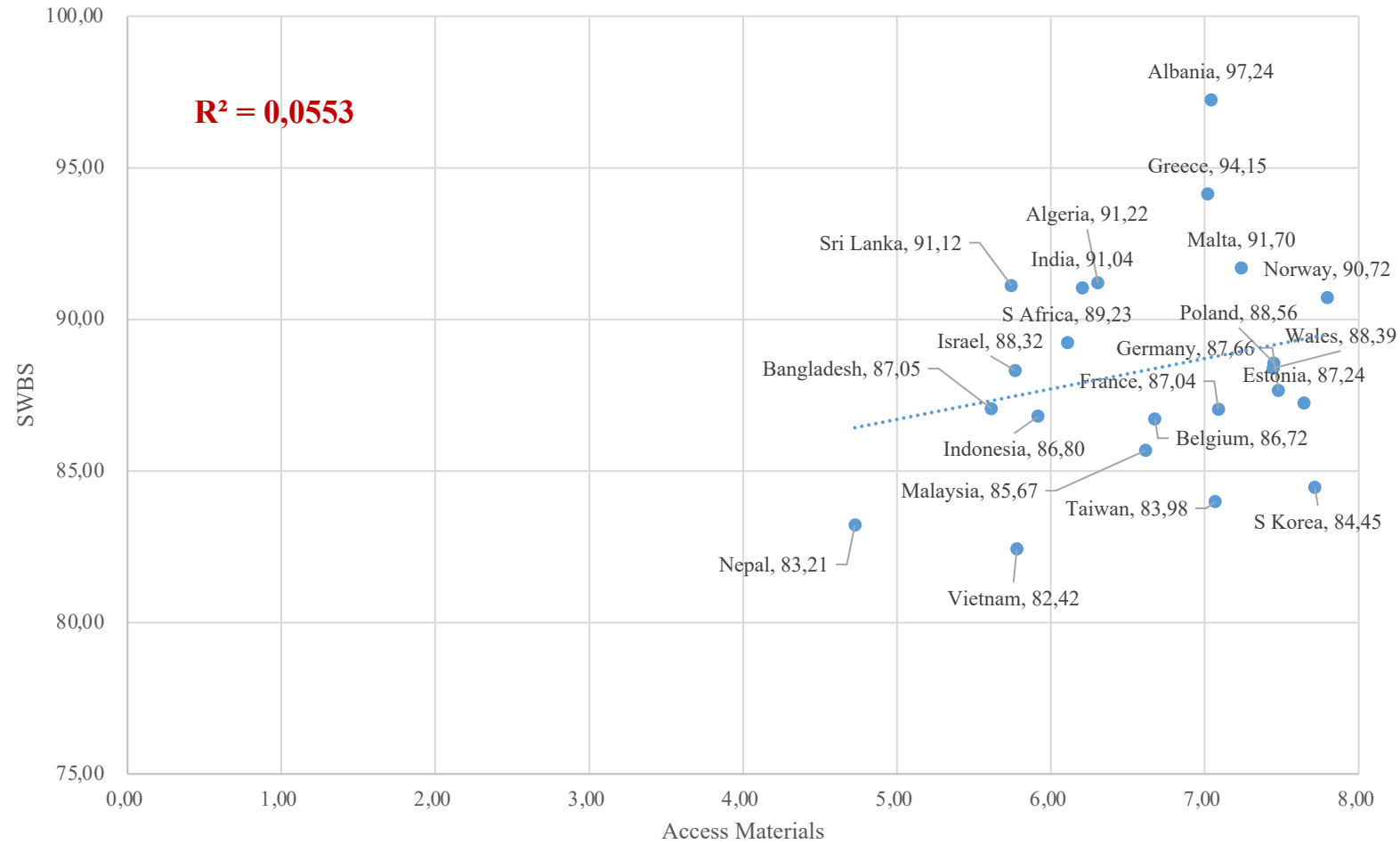




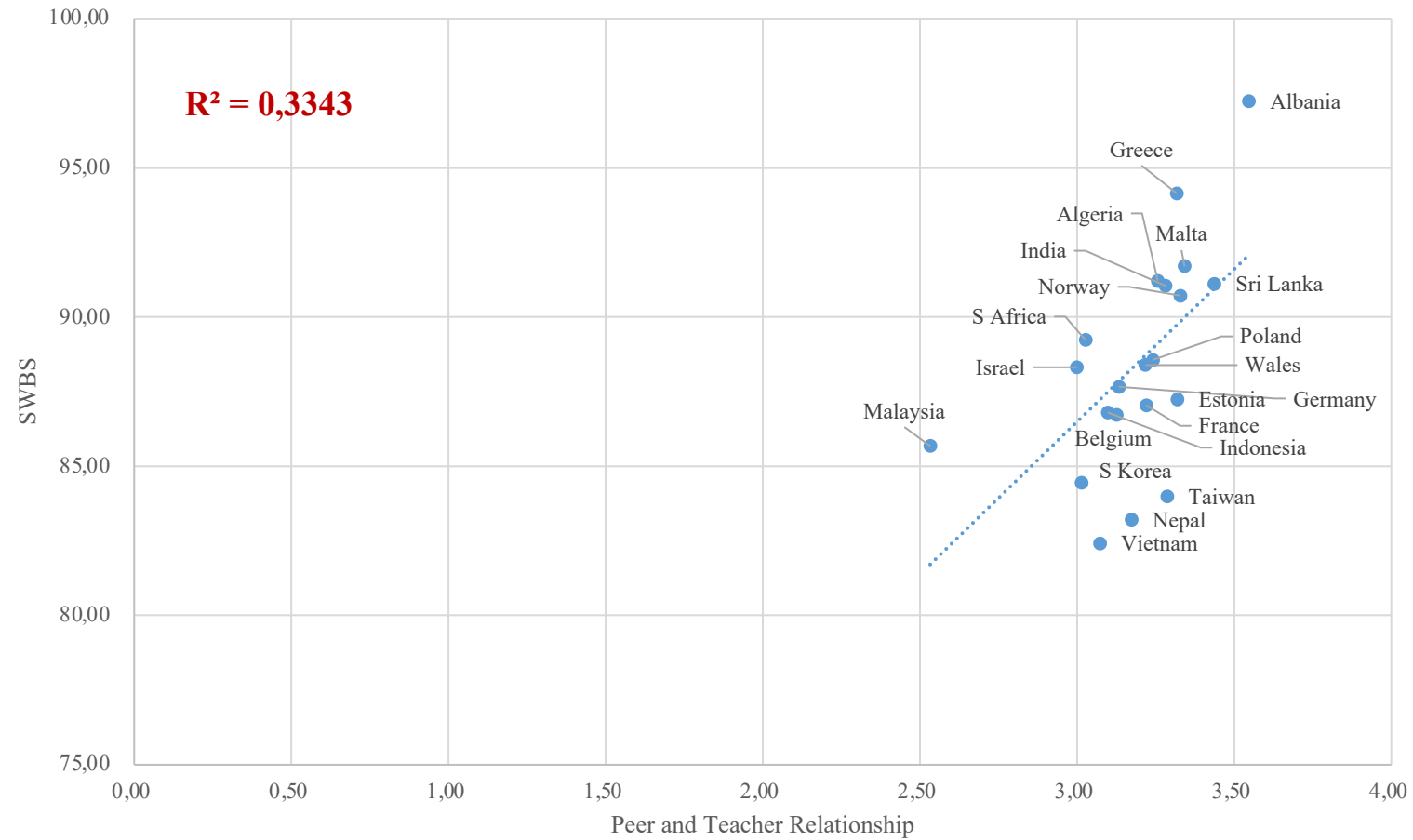
# Independent Variables by countries: Home Safety



# Independent Variables by countries: Access Materials

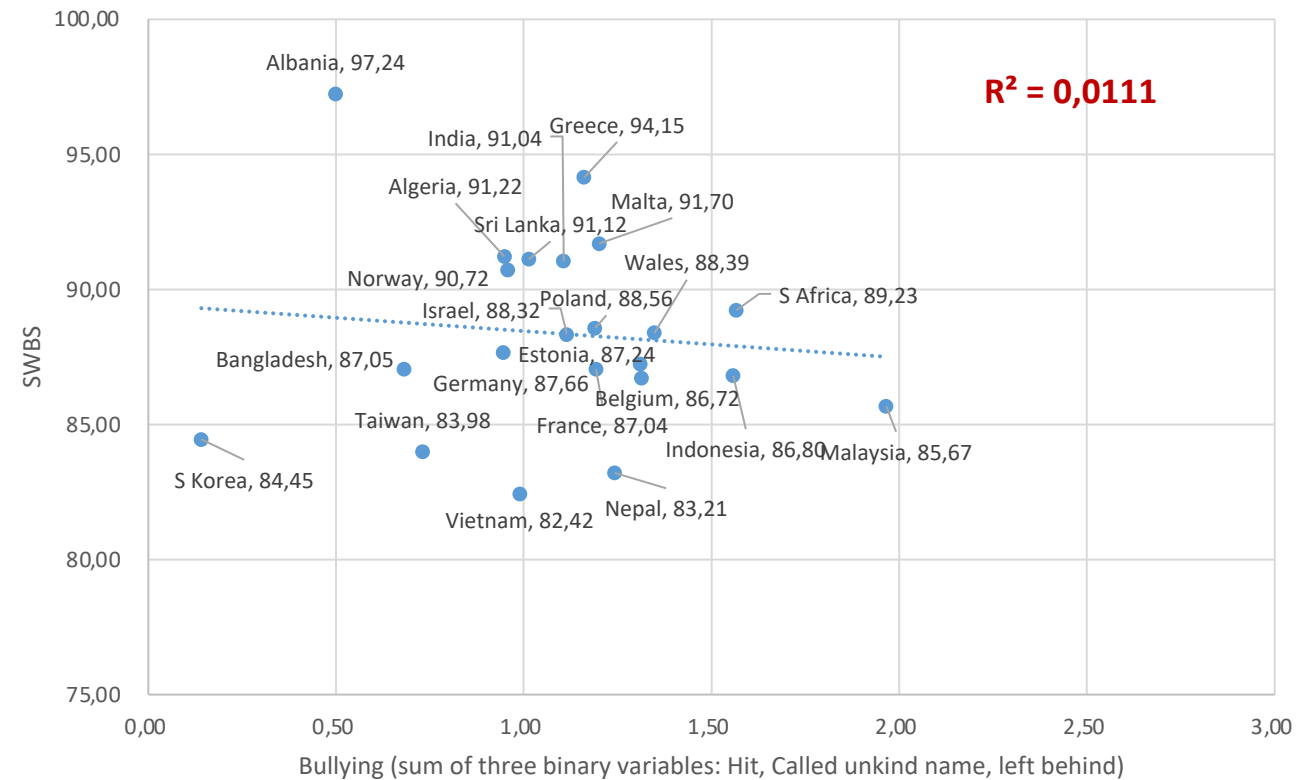


# Independent Variables by countries: Peer and Teacher Relationship

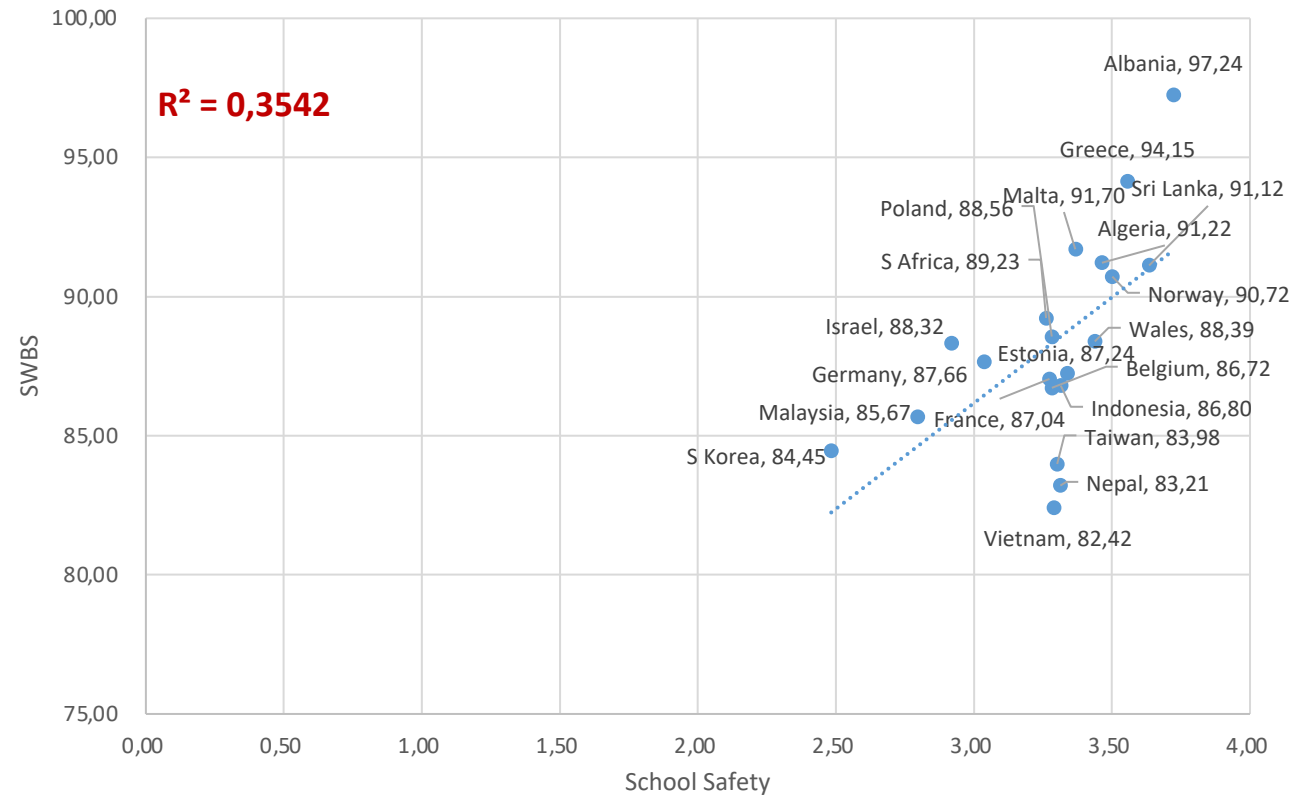


\*Bangladesh was omitted in this graph (not asked in this country)

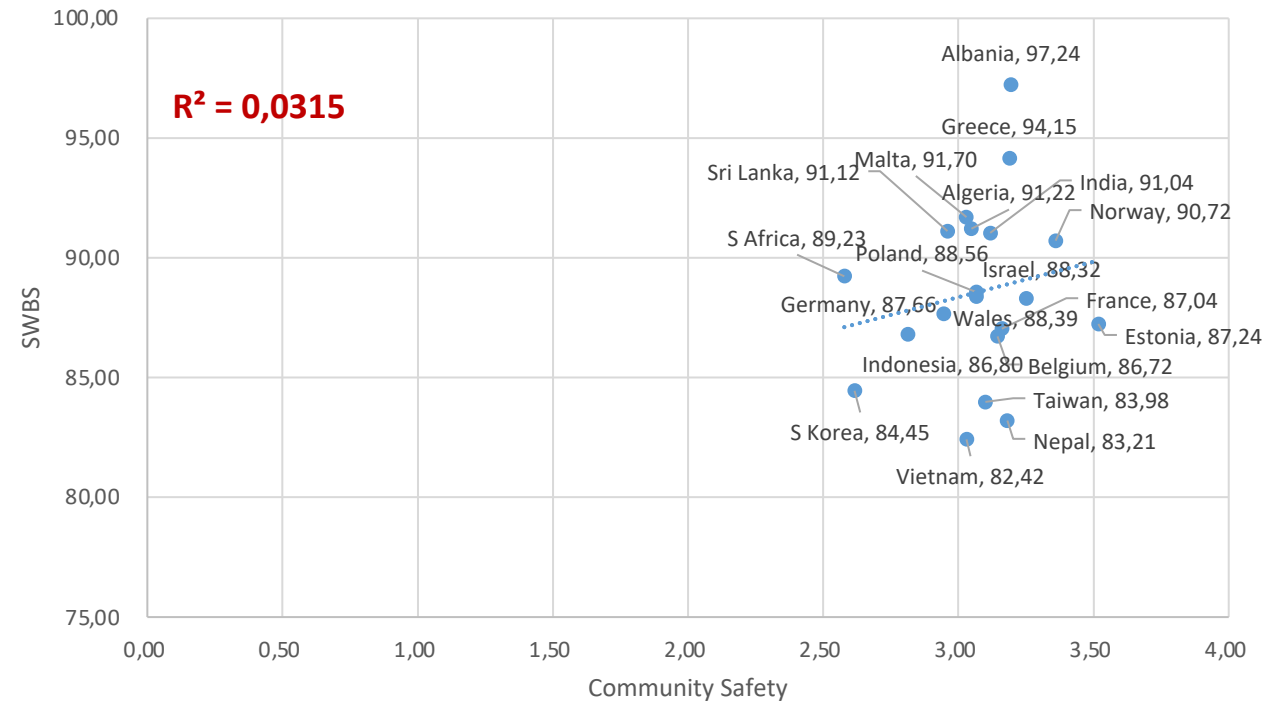
# Independent Variables by countries: Bullying



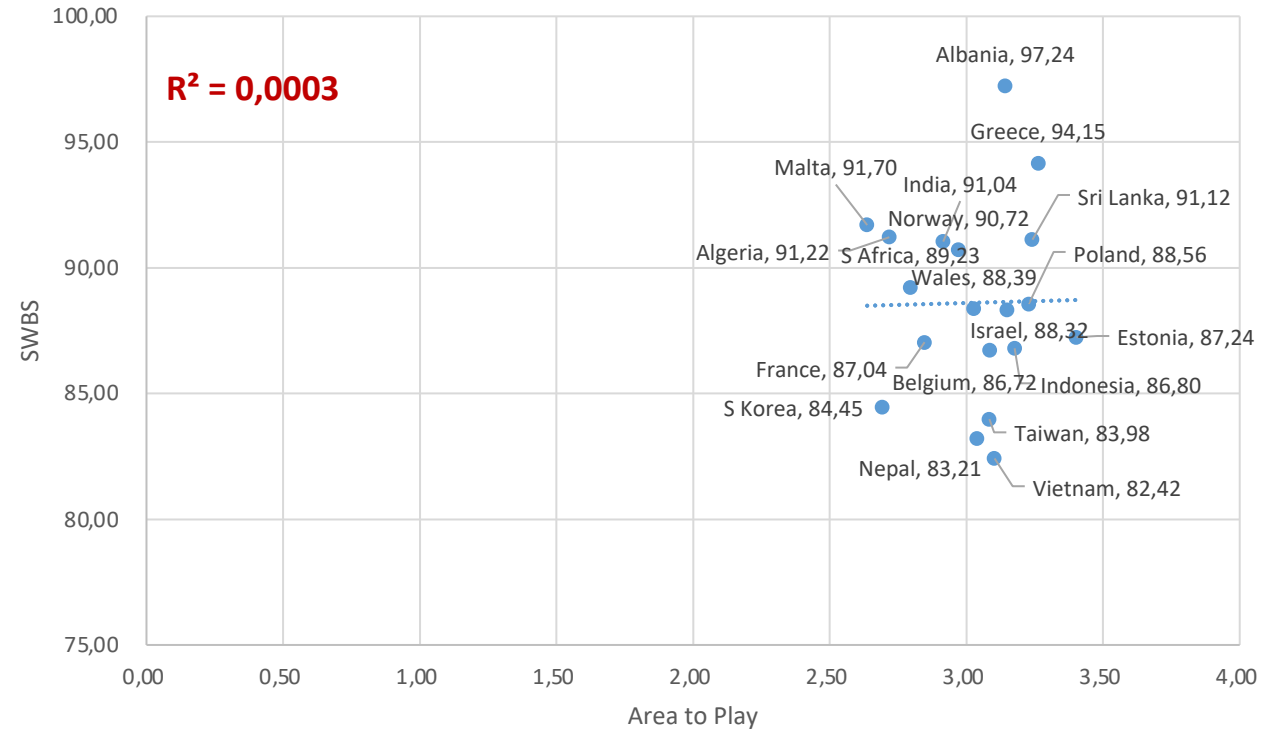
# Independent Variables by countries: School Safety



# Independent Variables by countries: Community Safety



# Independent Variables by countries: Area to Play



## Regression results: Pooled dataset (18 countries)

Domain	Sub-domain	B	S.E.	Beta	t	P-value
Family	Family Relationship	4.427	.148	.191	29.928	.000
	Home Safety	1.587	.122	.078	13.018	.000
	Access Materials	.598	.058	.055	10.329	.000
School	Peer and teacher Relationship	4.214	.150	.185	28.115	.000
	Bullying	-.872	.085	-.055	-10.207	.000
	School Safety	2.475	.094	.158	26.191	.000
Community	Community Safety	.861	.085	.060	10.127	.000
	Area To Play	1.372	.082	.098	16.802	.000
Demography	Sex (Boy=1, Girl=0)	.616	.181	.018	3.405	.001
Constant		36.090	.643		56.139	.000

a. Dependent Variable: SWBS (Children's Worlds Subjective Well-Being Scale)

**b. R square: .304**



## Regression results: 18 countries

Domain	Sub-domain	Albania	Algeria	Belgium	Sri Lanka	Taiwan	Estonia	France	Greece	Indonesia
Family	Family Relationship	.186	4.461 ***	5.846 ***	4.646 ***	7.061 ***	9.768 ***	9.155 ***	2.620 ***	2.114 ***
	Home Safety	-.601	3.432 ***	.998	1.178	2.953 ***	.579	3.272 ***	4.102 ***	1.060 ***
	Access Materials	1.218 ***	1.719 ***	.566	.996 **	1.483 ***	1.021	.678	.957 **	.892 ***
School	Peer and teacher Relationship	1.609 ***	2.355 ***	5.201 ***	3.430 ***	4.897 ***	4.367 ***	3.305 ***	4.232 ***	3.850 ***
	Bullying	-1.307 ***	-.804	-1.792 ***	-2.170 ***	-1.356 *	-.230	-2.323 ***	-.644	-1.219 ***
	School Safety	.613	.883 *	3.727 ***	1.782 **	2.645 ***	3.353 ***	1.638 ***	1.402 **	1.954 ***
Community	Community Safety	.565 **	1.266 ***	-1.188 *	1.457 ***	1.059 *	.950	.954 **	.375	.584 **
	Area To Play	.213	.476	1.665 ***	-.115	2.077 ***	1.786 ***	1.249 ***	1.201 ***	1.443 ***
Demography	Sex (Boy=1, Girl=0)	-.681	-2.226 *	3.856 ***	-.586	-.859	.916	2.923 ***	.199	1.006 **
Constant		80.727 ***	38.097 ***	30.104 ***	43.837 ***	6.382	7.278	17.761 ***	38.861 ***	48.663 ***
R <sup>2</sup>		.171	.318	.404	.245	.429	.445	.425	.356	.188
n		1066	925	856	938	1225	833	1766	753	5985

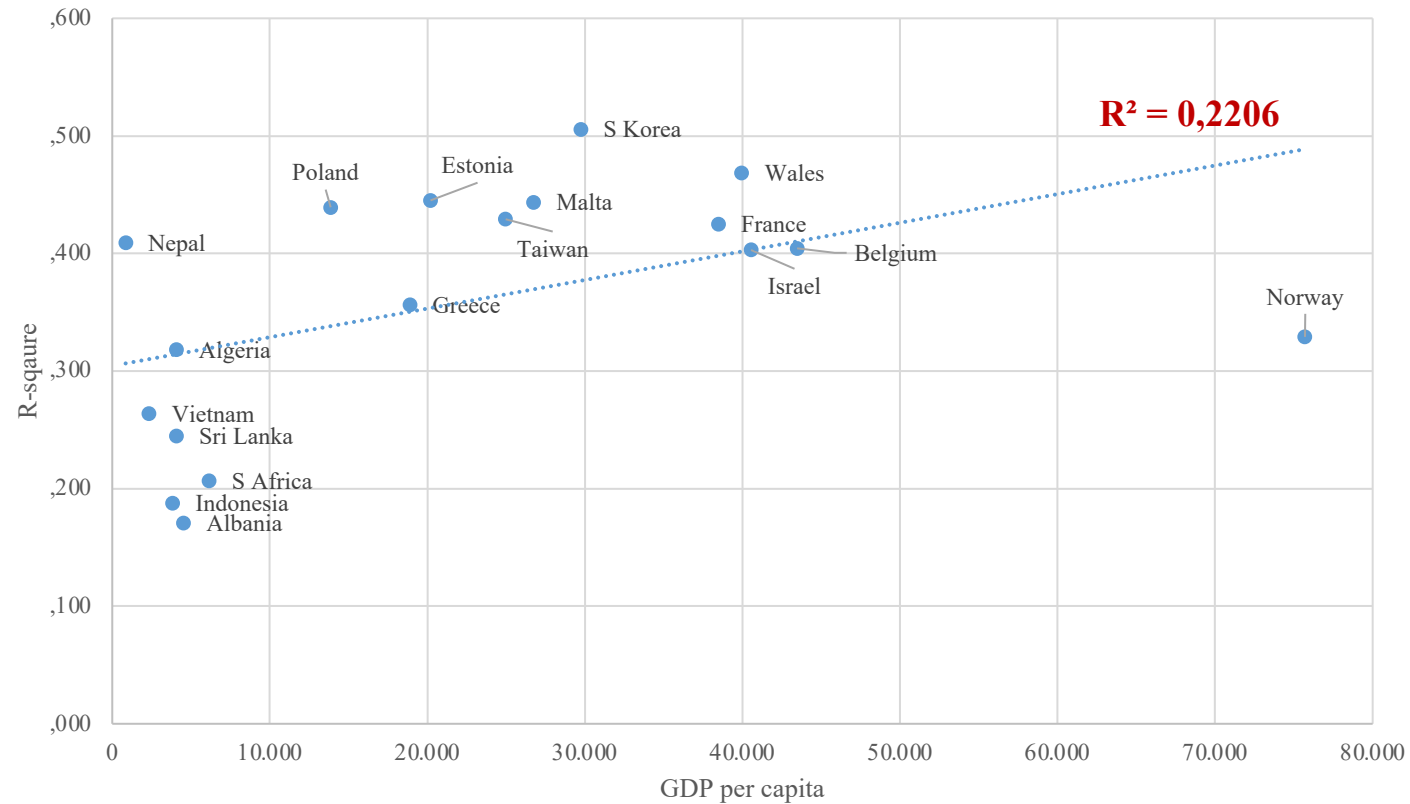
\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

## Regression results: 18 countries

Domain	Sub-domain	Israel	S Korea	Malta	Nepal	Norway	Poland	Vietnam	S Africa	Wales
Family	Family Relationship	5.568 ***	10.614 ***	8.355 ***	.781	4.291 ***	4.828 ***	2.956 **	2.035 ***	5.374 ***
	Home Safety	3.109 ***	1.144 **	5.007 ***	2.556 **	.850	1.008	2.701 ***	.828 *	4.571 ***
	Access Materials	.300 *	1.247 ***	1.130	1.019 **	.508	1.241 *	2.536 ***	.953 ***	2.773 ***
School	Peer and teacher Relationship	4.389 ***	4.088 ***	.971	7.737 ***	3.086 **	7.049 ***	3.976 ***	2.912 ***	4.868 ***
	Bullying	-1.578 ***	-2.431 ***	-1.462 **	.649	-1.110 *	-.787	-2.093 **	-1.673 ***	-.686
	School Safety	2.163 ***	1.724 ***	2.669 ***	-.476	2.195 **	3.289 ***	.488	1.147 ***	3.305 ***
Community	Community Safety	1.409 **	1.467 ***	.263	4.407 ***	1.719 **	1.496 ***	1.530 *	.964 ***	2.566 ***
	Area To Play	1.404 ***	1.536 ***	.451	1.692 **	1.633 ***	1.379 ***	.478	1.362 ***	.196
Demography	Sex (Boy=1, Girl=0)	.565	1.379 **	.165	-1.341	-1.623	1.223	.011	.666	-.416
Constant		28.894 ***	9.143 **	22.865 ***	24.294 ***	41.835 ***	15.977 **	31.220 ***	57.788 ***	-2.418
R2		.403	.506	.444	.409	.329	.439	.264	.207	.469
n		1377	2948	519	803	702	985	757	2540	809

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

## Relationship between GDP per capita and $R^2$ among 18 countries



- We can better explain the variances of SWB with the ‘usual correlates’ in rich countries.
- What does this mean?
  1. Those factors matter when the basic economic needs are met?
  2. Or, the theories and empirical research have been only developed focusing on western and developed countries?

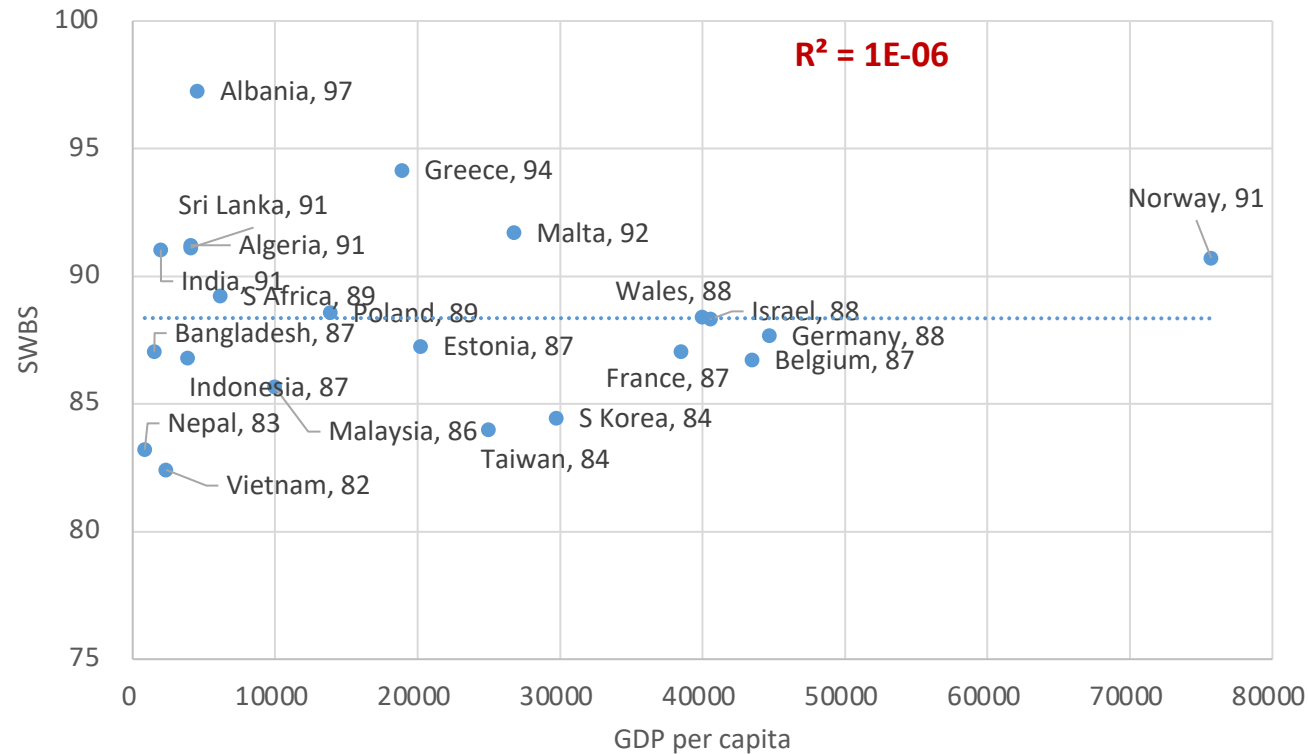
# Multi-level analysis

- Data and participants are same but we employed multi-level analysis to see whether national-level variables explain variations of children's subjective well-being.
- Dependent variable: CW-SWBS
- Level-1 (Individual level variables): family, school, and community variables
- Level-2 (national level variables)
  - GDP per capita, (\*source: World Happiness Report 2018)
  - Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births), most recent years (\*source: Worldbank database)
  - Inequality (Gini coefficient), most recent years (\*source: World Happiness Report 2018)

	N	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max
GDP per Capita	18	22134.44	20023.36	849	75704.2
Infant mortality rate	18	9.39	9.2	2.1	28.8
Inequality (Gini Coefficient)	18	0.4	0.08	0.25	0.57

## National level variable and children's subjective well-being:

Relationship between children's SWB and GDP per capita among 22 countries



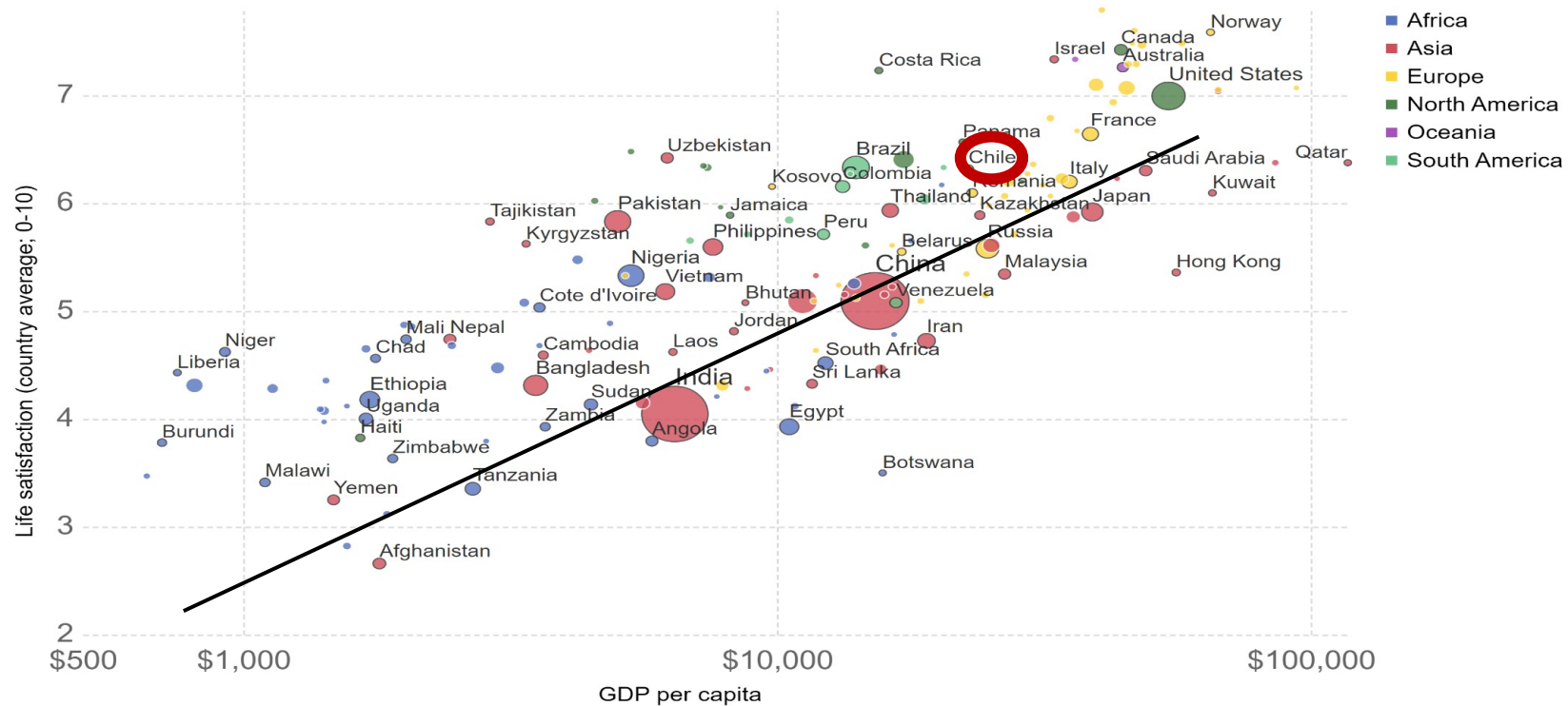
No relationship between country's wealth and children's subjective well-being!

By comparison, adults life satisfaction shows quite different pattern

## Self-reported Life Satisfaction vs GDP per capita, 2017

The vertical axis shows the national average of the self-reported life satisfaction on a scale ranging from 0-10, where 10 is the highest possible life satisfaction. The horizontal axis shows GDP per capita adjusted for inflation and cross-country price differences (expressed in international-\$ at 2011 prices).

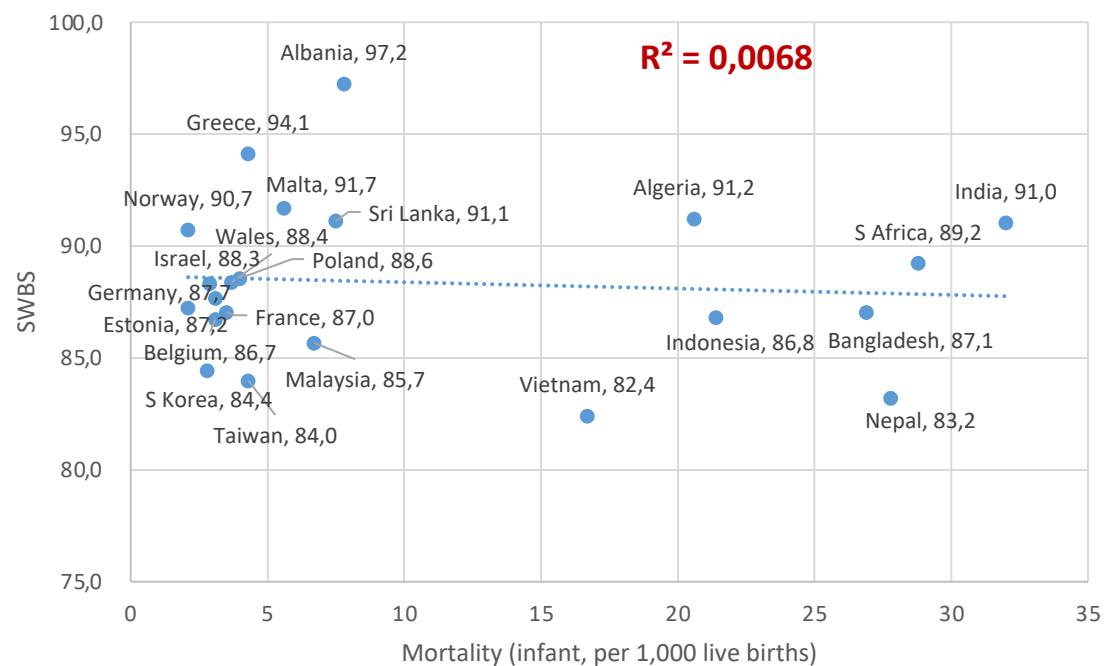
Our World  
in Data



Source: World Bank, World Happiness Report (2019), Population by country, 1800 to 2100 (Gapminder & UN)  
OurWorldInData.org/happiness-and-life-satisfaction/ • CC BY

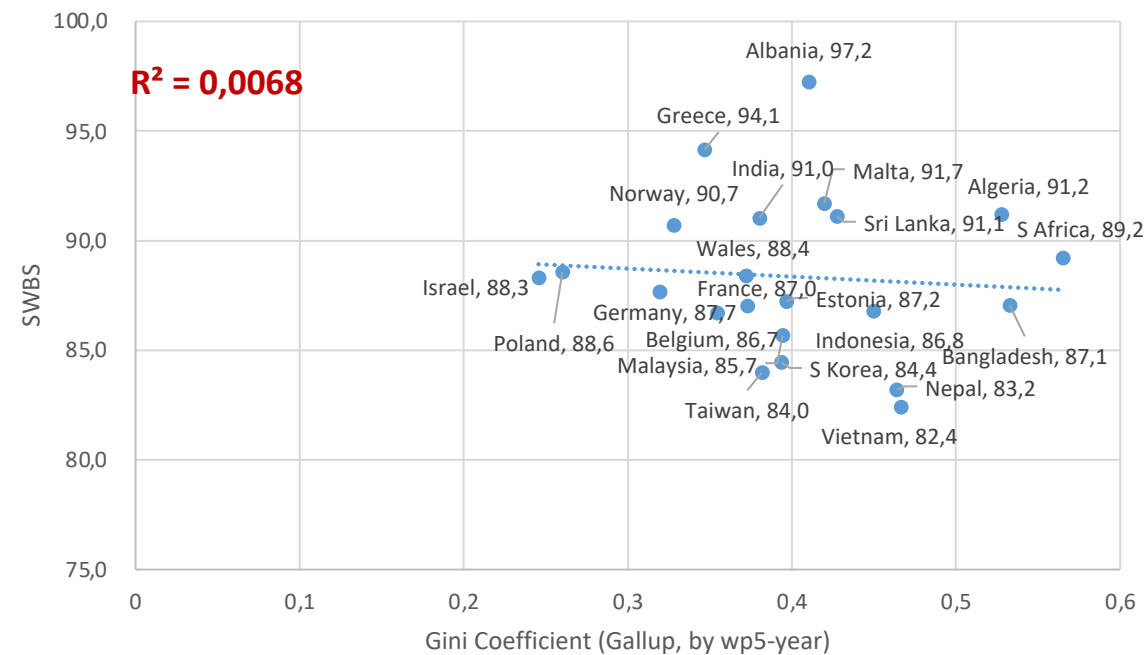
## National level variable and children's subjective well-being:

Relationship between mortality rate and SWB by countries



# National level variable and children's subjective well-being

:Relationship between Gini coefficient and SWB by countries





# Findings from analysis of the correlates

- Individual, family, and community-level factors matter for children's SWB.
- However, these factors work differently across countries.
- How much variation of SWB you can explain with these variables differ across countries – more can be explained in developed countries.
- Traditional country-level variables (mostly economy related) have limited role explaining the variation of children's SWB across countries.

# Decomposition analysis

- The primary purpose of this analysis is to examine what factors explain the SWB differences across the countries.
- In order to do that:
  - We used domain-specific life satisfaction questions to see which domain explain global life satisfaction (\*CW-SWBS is domain-free scale).
  - We examine what areas are accountable for the variations in the overall SWB.

Domain	Item(s)
Money	Satisfied things have
Time use	Satisfied time use, Satisfied free time
Learning	Satisfied life as a student, Satisfied things learned
Relationship	Satisfied people live with, Satisfied other family, Satisfied friends, Satisfied classmates
Safe environment	Satisfied house, Satisfied local area, Satisfied general safety
Self	Satisfied freedom, Satisfied appearance, Satisfied health

In total, what we learned (and confirmed!):

- Country level variables have limited power to explain variations of children's SWB around the globe.
- Individual level variables, especially self, time use, and relation variables, explain large amount of variations of children's SWB.
- These factors explain a lot of variance in children's SWB in mostly developed western countries. But, not in developing countries? Why?

## Further questions:

- The evidence shows that the importance of daily living conditions of children to their SWB (Lee & Yoo, 2015).
- However, society level factors really don't matter much? Further research is needed on how macro level variables (socioeconomic and cultural characteristics) affect micro level environment of children's lives.
- What kind of national level indicators might have more impact on children's subjective well-being?
  - More social and cultural indicators are needed other than the traditional 'economic indicators'?
- We hypothesize that the national socioeconomic environment affects children's microsystems, which in turn will shape children's daily lives and ultimately affect subjective well-being. But what is the process?

## Policy Implications:

- The task of promoting children's well-being should focus on changing children's daily lives.
- Satisfying children's basic needs, enhancing children's present and future capacities, and ultimately enhancing the level of happiness, needs to be set as the national goal of today.
- To this end, the SWB indicators work is important
  - To make scientific contribution
  - To make an impact on children's policy
  - To contribute to the promotion of child well-being around the world

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# Thank you very much!



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