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LIFE SATISFACTION, HAPPINESS, LONELINESS, AND MIGRATION BACKGROUND ACROSS SEVEN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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This study examines life satisfaction (LS), happiness, and loneliness across seven European countries (Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom) and differences in these outcomes based on migration background (MB). The sample involves 68136 participants (57% female, 18-60 years old). The data was collected between 2020 and 2023 as part of the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP). MB was categorised into three groups: locals, foreign-born individuals with foreign-born parents (MB group), and those with a mixed MB. The results show that there are differences in LS, happiness and loneliness between countries. Croatia had the highest levels of LS and happiness. Germany and the UK had the lowest levels of LS and happiness, but also the highest levels of loneliness. Overall, the mixed MB group had the lowest LS and happiness, while the MB group reported the highest LS and happiness levels but also showed the highest level of loneliness. Patterns varied in different countries, but generally, the locals and MB group had more similar profiles compared to the mixed MB group. Some countries followed the results obtained on the total sample, but for some, different results were obtained.

Keywords: subjective well-being, migration, happiness, life satisfaction, loneliness

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INTRODUCTION

Migration has long been one of the focal points in social sciences. People migrate for various reasons and adapt differently once they reach their destination. Many studies from various scientific fields investigate the outcomes of the migrant population upon arriving to a destination country. Objective outcomes may include employment, income or hospitalisation. On the other hand, many social scientists are exploring the subjective well-being (SWB) of migrant populations. SWB is an umbrella term typically encompassing both cognitive and affective evaluations of mental health, emotional states and life overall. According to the tripartite model of SWB (Diener, 2013), cognitive SWB refers to the rational evaluations, attitudes and opinions one holds about their life or aspects of it. Life satisfaction (LS) is a commonly used construct which reflects a cognitive component of SWB. Affective component reflects an individual's emotional life and how one 'feels about their life'. It includes measures of positive and negative affect (e.g., happiness vs. sadness). Loneliness is often defined as one of the main indicators of social well-being. It refers to an individual's evaluation of their social inclusion or isolation (De Jong Gierveld & Kamphuis, 1985). Song et al. (2025) highlighted the role of social connectedness among immigrant populations in a systematic review encompassing 43 studies. Their review shows that social connectedness significantly influences their LS, with social support and community engagement enhancing feelings of belonging and overall well-being.

For individuals who migrate, time spent in the destination country is typically related to various positive outcomes such as expanded social networks (Raghuram et al., 2010) or improved language skills (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003), but many authors found negative outcomes of migration. For example, Kirkcaldy et al. (2005) found that Russian migrants in Germany have lower health status compared to locals and Russians who did not migrate. Typically, authors report a convergence of migrants' outcomes and an increased similarity to local population as the time spent in the destination country increases (Pollene & Vargas-Silva, 2024). The trajectory of possible changes in SWB remains unclear. When discussing the differences in SWB between the local-born population and migrants, two different perspectives typically appear in the literature.

Some authors reported that migrants have lower levels of SWB compared to locals because of the distinct challenges that they may face in their destination country. In a review study of 44 papers, Hendriks (2015) reported that the migrant population has lower levels of SWB compared to locals and that the gap between the groups typically decreases with time. Immi-

grants in developed European countries often do not experience improved SWB over time, despite better living conditions. According to Hendriks and Burger (2020), negative perceptions of their destination country are linked to lower SWB among first-generation immigrants. Interestingly, those who view their new society positively tend to feel happier than natives, which means that assimilation to the new society can also be followed by an increase in SWB. A study focused on the relationship between migration and depression found that natives and second-generation migrants have similar depression risk profiles, while first-generation migrants, especially those born outside Europe, face higher depression levels. Authors claim that the increased risk stems socio-economic barriers and discrimination (Levecque & Van Rossem, 2014). Tegegne and Glanville (2018) reported that immigrants in Western Europe typically exhibit lower levels of SWB compared to the native-born population and that the gap between the groups can be partially explained by social capital. Hadjar and Backes (2013) have found that the SWB gap between participants with migration background (MB) and without it is larger in countries with a high GDP and smaller in countries with a high MIPEX (Migrant Integration Policy Index) score.

Some authors reported that migrants generally have higher SWB. Luhmann et al. (2012) reported that migration as a life event might be a genuinely positive experience that has persistent positive effects on SWB. Bartram (2013) explored happiness among migrants and stayers in a number of European countries, investigating individuals from Eastern Europe who migrated to Western Europe. The author reported that many migrant groups tend to have higher levels of happiness, but relates that to the fact that individuals with higher levels of happiness have a greater tendency towards migration. An increase in happiness is, therefore, not a consequence of migration. Variations by country were also found; migrants from Russia, Turkey, and Romania were happier than stayers, while migrants from Poland were significantly less happy than stayers. A study which longitudinally explored Ingrian–Finnish migrants from Russia to Finland reported that LS increased from pre-migration to the first post-migration measurement point, after which it stabilised (Lönnqvist et al., 2015).

A third perspective may be that differences in SWB between the migrant and native population are not significant nor detrimental. A meta-analysis focused on determinants of SWB in the immigrant population revealed that social support and individual factors are the main determinants of one's SWB, while circumstantial factors such as duration of migration have a weak or nonsignificant effect (Bak-Klimek et al., 2015). Although many studies reported differences in SWB based on

an individual's MB, it is possible that dispositional factors play a larger role in explaining SWB. A study which included Russian and American (USA) migrants and non-migrants reported that there are no significant group differences in LS and happiness in either of the two samples (Brailovskaia et al., 2019).

SWB often shows significant variation across countries, shaped by factors like economic stability and cultural norms. According to the World Happiness Report – WHR (Helliwell et al., 2024), countries like Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway consistently rank among the top 10 nations in terms of happiness, largely due to their strong social welfare systems, high standards of living, and trust in government. Germany and the UK (ranked 16th and 19th) showed somewhat lower LS compared to their northern European counterparts. Estonia ranked 34th and Croatia 63rd, reflecting lower happiness scores compared to the other six countries. These national rankings indicate the role of country-specific factors in shaping overall SWB, suggesting that regional and policy-driven differences play an important role in the well-being of individuals. The seven countries included in this study were selected based on adequate sample sizes and diversity in regional, economic, and policy contexts across Europe. These countries differ substantially in welfare state arrangements, integration policies, and overall SWB rankings, as documented in the WHR and prior migration studies (Hadjar & Backes, 2013; Safi, 2010). Previous research highlights considerable variation in SWB across countries, often attributed to differences in welfare systems, economic conditions, and social cohesion. Countries ranking higher on the WHR (e.g. Denmark), typically exhibit stronger social safety nets and higher levels of social trust, both linked to greater SWB. At the same time, studies on migration and SWB reveal a complex picture. Some findings suggest that migrants benefit from positive expectations and strong in-group support networks after migration (Song et al., 2025), while others point to persistent barriers such as discrimination, economic disadvantages, and weaker social integration that may reduce well-being relative to the native-born population (Hendriks, 2015; Tegegne & Glanville, 2018). Building on this evidence, the present study examines cross-national differences in SWB and explores how MB relates to LS, happiness, and loneliness across seven European countries with varying socio-economic conditions and integration policies. A review of the relevant literature revealed that numerous studies explored differences in SWB based on MB and SWB between countries. However, few studies have simultaneously explored differences in SWB based on MB within the context of multiple countries. The goal of this study is to explore potential differences in loneliness, happiness, and LS in seven European countries.

All the expectations stated in the hypotheses are in opposite directions for happiness/LS versus loneliness, based on the large amount of literature reporting negative associations between loneliness and LS/happiness/overall SWB. Across a wide range of populations, study designs, and measurement approaches, loneliness has been found to be consistently and strongly negatively associated with SWB or is viewed as its component or a negative indicator (Angelina et al., 2024; Seifert, 2024; VanderWeele et al., 2012). Additionally, the study aims to examine how SWB varies based on participants' MB, comparing locals, individuals with a full MB, and those with a mixed MB within each country. Although prior findings on MB and SWB are heterogeneous, several theoretical considerations suggest why individuals with mixed MB may be particularly vulnerable. Individuals with a mixed MB may experience less coherent cultural identities, weaker alignment with either the majority or minority group, which can limit social support and sense of belonging. In contrast, individuals with a full MB may benefit from stronger ethnic or cultural identification. These differences may translate into modest disadvantages for individuals with a mixed MB.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1 (Country differences). SWB will differ across countries in a tiered pattern reflecting broad differences in welfare regimes and overall well-being. Specifically, participants from countries with consistently high SWB and strong welfare systems (Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands) are expected to report higher LS and happiness than both participants from countries with intermediate levels of SWB (Germany and the UK) and participants from countries with comparatively lower levels of SWB (Croatia and Estonia). In turn, participants from countries with intermediate levels of SWB are expected to report higher LS and happiness than participants from countries with comparatively lower levels of SWB. For loneliness, the expected pattern is the reverse. Differences are expected to be more pronounced between these broader country groups than within them.

Hypothesis 2 (MB): SWB will differ based on MB. Locals are expected to report the highest levels of LS and happiness, followed by individuals with a full MB, while individuals with a mixed MB are expected to report the lowest LS and happiness. Again, the expected direction for loneliness is the reverse of that for life satisfaction and happiness.

Hypothesis 3 (Interaction). The association between MB and SWB will vary across country contexts. Specifically, MB differences in LS, happiness, and loneliness are expected to be smaller in high-well-being countries with strong welfare sys-

tems and inclusive integration contexts (Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands), larger in countries with intermediate well-being (Germany and the UK), and largest in countries with comparatively lower well-being and weaker welfare or integration support (Croatia and Estonia).

METHOD

Participants

In this study, participants from seven European countries are included (N = 68136) – Croatia (N = 7481, Čipin et al., 2024), Denmark (N = 8216, Fallesen et al., 2023), Estonia (N = 9172, Puur et al., 2023), Germany (N = 22017, Bujard et al., 2024), the Netherlands (N = 8014, Dommermuth & Lappegård, 2021), Norway (N = 5361, Dommermuth et al., 2021) and the UK (N = 7875, Perelli-Harris et al., 2024). Overall, 57% of the sample was female, and in each country, the proportion of female participants was slightly higher than that of male participants, ranging from 55.5% to 63%. However, the gender distribution remained balanced across all samples. The age ranges from 18 to 60 years (M = 37.25, SD = 10.74). Data on participants' birth year was collected and recoded to their age, based on the year when the interview was conducted (e.g., 2020–1990 = 30 years). Data was gathered as part of a large cross-national study called Generations & Gender Programme (GGP). Data used in this study is part of the Generations and Gender Survey – Round 2 (GGS-II) and was gathered from 2020 to 2023. GGP originally included seven other European countries in Round-II of their project – Belarus, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Latvia, Moldova, and Sweden. Those countries were excluded from this study based on several criteria: data was collected before 2020, small overall sample or small sample of participants with MB. Characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1. The N of the participants in Table 1 is smaller than the aforementioned one because participants with missing data on MB were excluded.

Instruments

Life satisfaction (LS). LS was measured with one item; respondents assessed how satisfied they were with their life overall on a Likert scale from 0 (extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied).

Happiness. Happiness was measured with one item; respondents assessed their overall happiness on a Likert scale from 0 (extremely unhappy) to 10 (extremely happy).

Loneliness. Loneliness was assessed using a 6-item De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale for Emotional and Social Loneli-

ness. The scale consists of six items which measure aspects of social and emotional loneliness. Respondents assess their agreement with the claims (e.g., 'I miss having people around') on a three-point Likert scale (1-yes, 2-more or less, 3-no). To measure overall loneliness, the responses were summed with scores ranging from 0 (not lonely) to 6 (extremely lonely). Scale scores were based on dichotomous item scores with the answer 'more or less' always indicating loneliness (De Jong Gierveld & Kamphuis, 1985). Processing the scale data entailed counting neutral and positive answers as indicators of loneliness. Overall, loneliness can vary on this scale from 0 (lowest loneliness) to 6 (highest loneliness). Reliability of the scale was moderate to good in this study (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.76$).

Migration background (MB). MB was determined by combining data from three variables: whether the participant was born in the country (yes/no), whether their mother was born in the country (yes/no), and whether their father was born in the country (yes/no). Participants who were born in the country where they currently reside and whose parents were both also born in that country were classified as locals (0). Those who were not born in the country and whose parents were also born outside the country were classified as having an MB (1). That group of individuals is often referred to as first-generation migrants. Participants who did not fit into either of these categories were classified as having a mixed MB (2). This category includes individuals who were born in the country but had at least one parent born abroad or two parents born abroad (second-generation migrants). It also entails individuals whose parents are local born, but the participant is not.

Procedure

Data were collected online in six of the seven countries included in this study; only Germany employed face-to-face data collection. The participants were told that the results will be used to advise policymakers on how to improve issues such as work-life balance, social relationships between generations and gender equality. Participation in the study was voluntary and all personal identifiers from the data were removed (Gauthier et al., 2024). The GGS-II data are the result of joint work of the GGP Central Coordination Team and the national team of each GGS country. Data was collected using a probability sampling method tailored to each country's context, ensuring comparability across nations. The target population originally included adult, non-institutionalised residents of a certain country.

Two primary types of sampling frames were utilised in GGS-II: area-based sampling using addresses or dwellings (UK) and population registers with individual names as the

sampling unit (six other countries). In countries with individual-based sampling frames, simple random sampling was used. In contrast, countries using address-based sampling employed a multistage sampling approach, where units were selected using probability proportional to size. Within each selected household, the respondent was identified using the last birthday method. The UK applied stratified random probability sampling to select household addresses, followed by the last birthday method for respondent selection (Gauthier et al., 2023).

TABLE 1
Characteristics of the sample

	N	Locals	MB	Mixed MB	*M* age (*SD*)	Female (%)	Response rate (%)	Year
Croatia	6811	5042	387	1382	37.78 (10.59)	56.5	28	2023
Denmark	7592	6181	689	722	34.94 (9.56)	56.2	20	2021
Estonia	8339	6026	466	1847	40.83 (11.34)	57.7	29	2021/22
Germany	18166	14301	1660	2205	34.61 (8.82)	56	21	2021/22
Netherlands	7301	5916	615	770	40.62 (12.36)	60.5	29	2022/23
Norway	4702	3773	560	369	37.09 (10.65)	57.7	33	2020
UK	7169	5170	1043	956	40.91 (11.58)	62.9	15	2022/23
Total	60080	46409	5420	8251	37.55 (10.79)	57.8	25	2020-23

Note: MB – migration background, UK – United Kingdom

RESULTS

Before conducting the main analysis, correlations among the main study variables, age, and gender were analysed. LS and happiness show a high, positive correlation ($r = 0.74$, $p < 0.01$) and both are negatively correlated with loneliness ($r = -0.44$, $r = -0.49$, $p < 0.01$). Correlations between outcome variables and demographic variables (age and gender) are all very low (from $r = -0.003$ to $r = -0.08$). Age is positively correlated with LS ($r = 0.05$, $p < 0.01$), happiness ($r = 0.08$, $p < 0.01$), and negatively with loneliness ($r = -0.08$, $p < 0.01$). Female participants reported slightly higher levels of loneliness ($r = 0.01$, $p < 0.01$).

TABLE 2
Bivariate correlations for the main study variables on total sample

	1	2	3	4	5
1 LS	1	0.74**	-0.44**	0.05**	-0.005
2 Happiness	0.74**	1	-0.49**	0.07**	-0.003
3 Loneliness	-0.44**	-0.49**	1	-0.08**	0.014**
4 Age	0.05**	0.08**	-0.08**	1	-0.004
5 Gender	-0.01	-0.003	0.01**	-0.004	1

Note: LS – life satisfaction, gender coded as 0 = male, 1 = female, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

Because group sizes differed across MB categories, additional analyses were conducted using randomly balanced sub-

samples in which the number of local participants within each country was reduced to match the mean size of the MB and mixed MB groups. These analyses yielded results that were highly consistent with those obtained using the full sample, including identical group rankings and nearly identical effect sizes. Given the negligible differences and the very small effect sizes observed overall, the results presented in this manuscript are based on the full sample.

Two-way MANOVA (country x MB x LS, happiness, loneliness)

To assess differences in LS, happiness, and loneliness across the seven countries in the context of migration groups, a two-way MANOVA with three dependent variables was performed. Country and MB were the independent variables.

Box's M test was significant (Box's $M = 10937.36$, $F = 91.02$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting a violation of the assumption of homogeneity of covariance matrices. However, Box's M test is considered overly sensitive, and MANOVA is generally robust to such violations when samples are large. Pillai's trace values are reported due to their robustness to violations of the homogeneity assumption and the equality of the groups in size (Finch, 2005). In the overall model, there was a significant effect of country (Pillai's trace = 0.040, $F_{(18, 162939)} = 121.84$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.013$) and MB (Pillai's trace = 0.011, $F_{(6, 108624)} = 97.10$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.005$) on LS, happiness, and loneliness. There was also a small but significant interaction effect between country and MB (Pillai's trace = 0.003, $F_{(36, 162939)} = 4.54$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.001$), indicating that the effects of MB on the dependent variables varied depending on the country. Following the significant multivariate effects, three two-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to examine the effects of country, MB, and their interaction on each dependent variable separately.

Two-way ANOVAs for three dependent variables

Three two-way analyses of variance were conducted to examine the effects of country, MB, and their interaction with LS, happiness, and loneliness (see Table 3).

For LS, there was a significant main effect of country, $F_{(6, 58155)} = 157.44$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.016$, and a significant main effect of MB, $F_{(2, 58155)} = 24.51$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.001$. The country × MB interaction was also significant, $F_{(12, 58155)} = 3.25$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.001$.

For happiness, significant main effects were observed for country, $F_{(6, 58367)} = 123.51$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.013$, and MB, $F_{(2, 58367)} = 38.73$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.001$. The country × MB interaction was significant, $F(12, 58367) = 4.23$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.001$.

For loneliness, there was a significant main effect of country, $F_{(6, 55097)} = 180.10$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.019$, and MB, $F_{(2, 55097)} =$

153.91, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.006$. The country × MB interaction was also significant, $F_{(12, 55097)} = 8.97$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.002$. To sum up, levels of LS, happiness, and loneliness are affected by country, MB, but also their interaction.

DV	Effect	df_1	df_2	F	p	η^2
LS	Country	6	58155	157.435	< 0.001	0.016
	MB	2	58155	24.506	< 0.001	0.001
	Country x MB	12	58155	3.249	< 0.001	0.001
Happiness	Country	6	58367	123.505	< 0.001	0.013
	MB	2	58367	38.732	< 0.001	0.001
	Country x MB	12	58367	4.229	< 0.001	0.001
Loneliness	Country	6	55097	180.104	< 0.001	0.019
	MB	2	55097	153.913	< 0.001	0.006
	Country x MB	12	55097	8.965	< 0.001	0.002

Note: LS – life satisfaction, *df* – degrees of freedom, η^2 – partial eta square

TABLE 3
Main effects and the interactions for three two-way ANOVA analyses for each dependent variable

Based on the separate ANOVAs, estimated marginal means (EMMs) are reported in Table 4 for each of the dependent variables. For LS, Bonferroni pairwise comparisons of EMMs indicated that LS did not differ significantly between Germany and the UK, between the Netherlands and Denmark, or between Norway and Estonia; all other country comparisons were significant ($p < 0.05$). For happiness, pairwise comparisons of EMMs indicated that happiness did not differ significantly between Germany and Norway, between the Netherlands and Estonia, or between Norway and Denmark; all other country comparisons were significant ($p < 0.05$). Pairwise comparisons of EMMs indicated that loneliness did not differ significantly between Estonia and Denmark; all other country comparisons were significant ($p < 0.05$).

TABLE 4
Average levels of LS, happiness, and loneliness between countries based on three two-way ANOVA analyses

		LS *EMM* (*SE*)		Happiness *EMM* (*SE*)		Loneliness *EMM* (*SE*)
Country	Croatia	7.85 (0.04)	Croatia	8.11 (0.04)	Germany	3.14 (0.02)
	Denmark	7.68 (0.03)	Netherlands	7.68 (0.03)	UK	2.92 (0.03)
	Netherlands	7.66 (0.04)	Estonia	7.63 (0.03)	Norway	2.73 (0.05)
	Estonia	7.39 (0.03)	Denmark	7.45 (0.03)	Croatia	2.53 (0.04)
	Norway	7.30 (0.04)	Norway	7.36 (0.04)	Denmark	2.33 (0.04)
	Germany	6.96 (0.02)	Germany	7.32 (0.02)	Estonia	2.25 (0.04)
	UK	6.87 (0.03)	UK	6.97 (0.03)	Netherlands	1.96 (0.04)

Note: UK – United Kingdom, LS – life satisfaction, *EMM* – estimated marginal mean, *SE* – standard error

Hypothesis 1 was supported at the global level, as countries differed in their average SWB levels. The two-way MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate main effect of country on dependent variables. However, the expected tiered ordering of country groups was not confirmed. In particular, Croatia exhibited the highest levels of LS and happiness, contrary to the initial assumption that countries in the lower-SWB group would report the lowest levels. Thus, while overall country differences were observed, the specific pattern predicted by the hypothesis was only partially supported.

For loneliness, the expected inverse pattern was partially supported: Germany, the UK, and Norway showed higher loneliness compared to several other countries, while Denmark and Estonia did not differ significantly from each other. Pairwise comparisons further indicated that not all adjacent countries differed significantly, suggesting that national differences do not follow a simple welfare-based or WHR based gradient.

After the main effect of country on SWB, the main effect of MB was explored. Based on the separate ANOVAs, EMMs are reported in Table 5. According to the pairwise comparisons of EMMs, all three MB groups differ significantly in all three dependent variables ($p < 0.01$). MB group has the highest overall LS, followed by locals and mixed MB group. The full MB group has the highest happiness, followed by locals and mixed MB. The full MB group also has the highest level of loneliness, followed by the mixed MB group and locals.

TABLE 5
Average levels of LS, happiness, and loneliness between MB groups based on three two-way ANOVA analyses

		LS *EMM* (*SE*)		Happiness *EMM* (*SE*)		Loneliness *EMM* (*SE*)
MB	MB	7.51 (0.03)	MB	7.67 (0.03)	MB	2.84 (0.03)
	Locals	7.40 (0.01)	Locals	7.49 (0.01)	Mixed MB	2.52 (0.03)
	Mixed MB	7.26 (0.02)	Mixed MB	7.35 (0.02)	Locals	2.30 (0.01)

Note: EMM – estimated marginal mean, SE – standard error, MB – migration background

Hypothesis 2 was partially supported. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of MB on LS, happiness, and loneliness, indicating that levels of SWB vary systematically across MB groups in the overall sample. For LS and happiness, the mixed MB group reported the lowest levels, consistent with the hypothesis; however, individuals with a full MB reported higher LS and happiness than locals, contrary to expectations. For loneliness, the full MB group reported the highest loneliness, despite having highest LS and happiness. Locals reported the lowest levels of loneliness, as expected.

Given the significant country × MB interactions observed for all three dependent variables, simple effects analyses were conducted to further examine how MB was associated with SWB within each country.

Differences in life satisfaction – simple effects

In Table 6, differences in LS based on MB are analysed in each country. The results indicate varying patterns of differences across countries.

Country	0 (locals) *EMMs*	1 (MB) *EMMs*	2 (mixed MB) *EMMs*	*F*	df_1, df_2	*p*	Post-hoc
Croatia	7.67	8.17	7.71	12.20	2, 58155	< 0.001	1 > 0,2
Denmark	7.76	7.74	7.55	4.34	2, 58155	0.013	0 > 2
Estonia	7.49	7.38	7.31	7.10	2, 58155	0.001	0 > 2
Germany	6.99	7.08	6.81	12.01	2, 58155	< 0.001	0,1 > 2
Netherlands	7.73	7.71	7.53	3.81	2, 58155	0.022	0 > 2
Norway	7.27	7.45	7.19	2.69	2, 58155	0.068	-
UK	6.85	7.05	6.70	9.39	2, 58155	< 0.001	1 > 0,2

TABLE 6
Differences in LS based on participants' MB in seven countries

Note: MB – migration background, UK – United Kingdom, LS – life satisfaction, *EMM* – estimated marginal mean

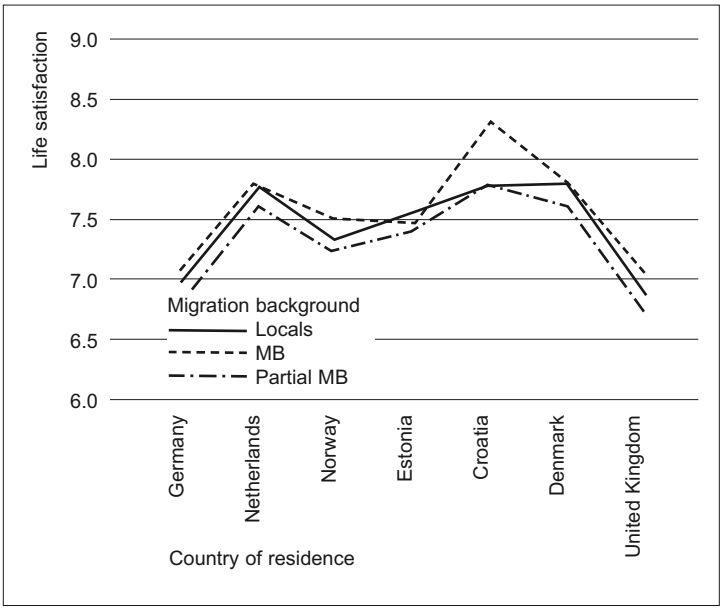


FIGURE 1
Interaction of country and MB on life satisfaction

Partial eta squared values (η^2) are 0.000, which means that the effects are extremely small in this large sample and are therefore not reported in the table. In three countries (Denmark, Estonia, and the Netherlands), the only groups that differ are locals and the mixed MB group, with locals having higher LS.

In Germany, the case is similar with the exception that both locals and the full MB group have higher LS compared to the partial MB group. In Croatia and the UK the full MB group has higher LS compared to both locals and the mixed MB group, a pattern obtained on the full sample as well. In Norway, the groups do not differ significantly.

Because the interaction effects involve many countries and three migration groups, a visual representation is provided in Figure 1. As shown, the differences between groups are generally small, indicating that the interaction effects, while statistically significant, are not large in magnitude. LS is on the scale from 6 to 9 in order for differences to be visible. EMMs are reported in Figure 1.

Differences in happiness – simple effects

In Table 7, differences in happiness based on MB are analysed in each country. The results indicate varying patterns of differences across countries. Partial eta squared values (η^2) are again 0.000 (except Germany and Croatia which are $\eta^2 = 0.001$). For happiness, there is more variation in the patterns of pairwise comparisons across countries compared to LS.

Country	0 (locals) *EMMs*	1 (MB) *EMMs*	2 (mixed MB) *EMMs*	*F*	df_1, df_2	*p*	Post-hoc
Croatia	7.91	8.49	7.93	18.34	2, 58367	< 0.001	1 > 0,2
Denmark	7.54	7.52	7.28	6.43	2, 58367	0.002	0,1 > 2
Estonia	7.62	7.73	7.54	2.47	2, 58367	0.084	-
Germany	7.34	7.51	7.10	27.80	2, 58367	< 0.001	1 > 0 > 2
Netherlands	7.77	7.73	7.55	5.03	2, 58367	0.007	0 > 2
Norway	7.32	7.53	7.24	3.66	2, 58367	0.026	1 > 0
UK	6.94	7.16	6.81	10.39	2, 58367	< 0.001	1 > 0,2

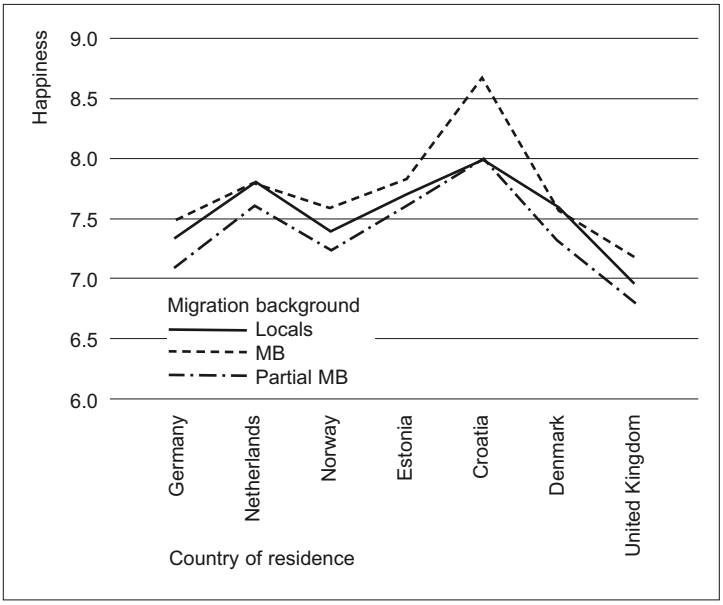
TABLE 7
Differences in happiness based on participants' MB in seven countries

Note: MB – migration background, UK – United Kingdom, LS – life satisfaction, EMM – estimated marginal mean

Only Croatia and the UK have an identical pattern, the MB group reporting higher happiness compared to locals and the mixed MB group. In Denmark, locals and the MB group report higher happiness compared to the mixed MB group. In Germany, the MB group has the highest happiness, followed by locals, and lastly the mixed MB group. In the Netherlands, only locals differ from the mixed MB group, reporting higher happiness, while in Norway the MB group reports higher happiness compared to locals. In Estonia, no significant differences were found.

Differences in happiness between MB groups across the seven countries are shown in Figure 2.

➲ FIGURE 2
Interaction of country and MB on happines



Differences in loneliness

In Table 8, differences in loneliness based on MB are analysed in each country. The results indicate varying patterns of differences across countries.

Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands have the same pattern of differences. In those countries, the full MB group has the highest loneliness, followed by the partial MB group, while locals report lowest loneliness. In Norway and the UK, the full MB group also reports highest loneliness, while locals and the partial MB group do not differ. In Estonia, the full and partial MB group have higher loneliness compared to locals. In Croatia, no significant differences were found.

➲ TABLE 8
Differences in loneliness based on participants' MB in seven countries

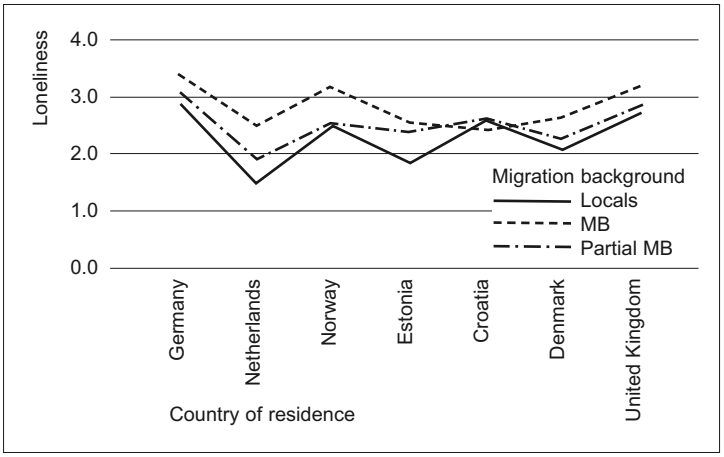
Country	0 (locals) *EMMs*	1 (MB) *EMMs*	2 (mixed MB) *EMMs*	*F*	df_1, df_2	η^2	*p*	Post-hoc
Croatia	2.57	2.42	2.60	1.18	2, 55097	0.000	0.308	-
Denmark	2.08	2.63	2.27	23.23	2, 55097	0.001	< 0.001	1 > 2 > 0
Estonia	1.85	2.53	2.35	59.63	2, 55097	0.002	< 0.001	1,2 > 0
Germany	2.88	3.42	3.10	63.91	2, 55097	0.002	< 0.001	1 > 2 > 0
Netherlands	1.49	2.53	1.85	70.31	2, 55097	0.003	< 0.001	1 > 2 > 0
Norway	2.50	3.14	2.57	21.84	2, 55097	0.001	< 0.001	1 > 0,2
UK	2.70	3.21	2.86	29.96	2, 55097	0.001	< 0.001	1 > 0,2

Note: MB – migration background, UK – United Kingdom, LS – life satisfaction, η^2 – eta square, EMM – estimated marginal mean

By comparing Tables 6, 7, and 8 it is visible that higher happiness or LS does not necessarily reflect lower loneliness. Over-

all, the MB group reported higher happiness and LS, but also highest loneliness. Differences in loneliness between MB groups across the seven countries are shown in Figure 3.

➲ FIGURE 3
Interaction of country and MB on loneliness



Hypothesis 3 was partially supported; significant interactions were observed for three dependent variables. However, the specific pattern predicted by H3 was not consistently confirmed. Differences between MB groups were generally small across all countries. In addition, the ordering of MB groups was not uniform across countries or outcomes: while locals often reported lower loneliness and mixed MB groups frequently reported lower LS, individuals with a full MB sometimes reported the highest levels of LS and happiness as well as the highest loneliness.

DISCUSSION

Although there were significant differences between countries in LS and happiness, it is important to note that the theoretical range (0–10) of both scales is quite wide, yet the mean scores across all countries were in the higher end of this range (*M*--LS = 7.28; *M*-happiness = 7.46). This suggests that, despite variations between countries, participants generally reported high levels of LS and happiness overall. The reported cross--country differences are very small, so one should interpret them with caution. The overall differences between countries reveal that Croatia has both the highest reported LS and happiness, while Germany and the UK have lowest LS, happiness, and also highest loneliness, which is different from the initial expectations. Discrepancy is found between these findings and those from WHR (2024) which highlights the complexity of measuring happiness across different contexts and methodologies. While the WHR ranks Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway among the happiest countries, this study places Cro-

atia at the top. Croatia ranks lowest on happiness based on WHR (2024) among these seven countries. One possible explanation for Croatia's high ranking is the reported increase in happiness in Central and Eastern Europe, as noted in the WHR (2024). Moreover, Croatian data was collected last (in 2023), while data from Norway was collected in 2020 and from Denmark in 2021. This also represents a possible limitation of this study due to the COVID-19 pandemic and possible drops in SWB during 2020 and 2021.

Regarding the main effect of MB on the total sample, the mixed MB group has the lowest LS and happiness, while the full MB group has the highest. Maybe the most interesting finding in this study is the fact that the MB group reported highest LS and happiness, but also the highest loneliness. This finding implies that positive and negative aspects of SWB are not necessarily two sides of the same coin; meaning that individuals can simultaneously experience both LS/happiness and loneliness. This finding is partially congruent with Levecque and Van Rossem (2014), who also reported that first-generation migrants have the highest risk for depression. On the other hand, they reported that locals and second-generation migrants have more similar profiles compared to first-generation ones. In this study, locals and first-generation migrants have more similar profiles compared to second-generation migrants and those who have a mixed MB. Building on this, a significant contribution of this study is the finding that the locals and full MB groups exhibited more similar results across all three SWB measures, in contrast to the mixed MB group.

The interaction effects indicate that the association between MB and SWB is contingent on national context, although the differences were uniformly small. For LS, the pattern is relatively consistent across countries, with individuals with a mixed MB generally reporting lower scores than locals and, in several countries, than individuals with a full MB, suggesting that mixed MB may represent a particularly vulnerable position with respect to LS. In contrast, happiness shows greater cross-national heterogeneity, with no single ordering of MB groups emerging across countries, indicating that affective well-being may be more sensitive to country-specific factors. Loneliness exhibits the most consistent interaction pattern, as individuals with full MB report higher loneliness than locals in nearly all countries, with mixed MB individuals typically falling in between. Also, it is not the case that differences are very pronounced in one country, but non-existent in others. In all countries, the effect sizes were small. Importantly, the small effect sizes and visually modest group separations suggest that these interactions reflect systematic but subtle contextual modulation of MB differences and bare little practical significance.

It is reasonable to presume that participants with mixed MB and full MB will be more similar than locals. However, that is not the case in this study and there are several ways to explain this finding. One possible explanation is that individuals with mixed MB may experience a sense of being 'in-between' cultures, leading to identity confusion and social exclusion. Unlike those with a full MB, who may have stronger ties to both their heritage, individuals with mixed MB might struggle to establish a clear sense of belonging in either group. Additionally, they may face challenges in forming deep social connections, as they might not fully integrate into local networks while also feeling disconnected from their cultural background. That is congruent with the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004), which suggests that individuals derive their identity from the groups they belong to, and a strong sense of group membership can enhance self-esteem and well-being. For the mixed MB group, the complexity of their identity may hinder their identification with either a local or migrant group identity, which leads to a fragmented social identity. This can lower their sense of belonging, which is important for overall well-being. Finally, perceived discrimination or an internalised sense of being 'outsiders' in both cultural contexts could contribute to lower LS and happiness.

It is important to notice that despite reaching statistical significance in most cases, the small effect sizes highlight that MB is only a minor factor in explaining differences in SWB. This indicates that although differences exist, the magnitude of these effects is very modest, and much of the variation in LS, happiness, and loneliness remains unexplained by the factors examined. Given the large sample size, even very small effects can reach statistical significance; therefore, caution is warranted when interpreting these findings. Although the effect sizes are small, they are expected in this type of study. Larger or even drastic differences in levels of, for example, LS across Europe would be a surprising result in this context and would mean that LS is largely dependent on country of residence.

One strength of this research is that it is not solely focused on migrants and their paths. Many published studies reported interesting findings on determinants of SWB in migrant populations, but many of those studies did not simultaneously incorporate the local population (Hendriks, 2015). Also, the inclusion of participants from seven diverse European countries ensures broad geographic representation, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of migration and SWB across different national contexts. The use of data from the GGP, a large-scale, cross-national study, strengthens the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, the study's clear and consistent meth-

odology, including the use of well-established scales for measuring LS, happiness, and loneliness, enhances the reliability of the results.

An important limitation of this study concerns the categorisation of MB. While the distinction between locals and individuals with a full MB was relatively straightforward, the mixed MB group encompassed individuals with diverse migration trajectories and socio-cultural experiences, including those born in the country to one or both parents born abroad as well as those born abroad with at least one parent born locally. This heterogeneity may contribute to the variability in SWB outcomes, as MB alone does not fully capture differences in cultural, linguistic, or social integration, nor does it account for ethnicity. Collapsing this diverse group into a single category was a deliberate decision to maintain analytic clarity and feasibility when working with secondary data; however, disaggregating this group in future research could provide a more nuanced understanding of how different migration trajectories relate to well-being.

Additionally, since the study spans seven different countries, migration histories and policies vary significantly across countries, potentially affecting how MB is perceived and experienced. Countries like Germany and the UK have long been a destination country for migrants from across the world, while in some countries, individuals in MB groups are in large part from neighbouring countries (e.g., Serbs and Bosnians in Croatia or Lithuanians and Latvians in Estonia). They have much more in common with the local population in terms of culture, language, and shared history. Ethnic homogeneity should also be considered in future research. Again, the UK and Germany have long been established as major migration destinations, attracting individuals from diverse backgrounds and professions. However, according to MIPEX scores (MIPEX, 2024), Germany and the UK are described as countries where the approach to migration is temporary, which is not favourable. In contrast, Croatia is a homogeneous society, with the recent census indicating that approximately 91.63% of the population identifies as Croat (Državni zavod za statistiku, 2021). Only in recent years has Croatia begun to experience an influx of migrants, primarily foreign workers from countries such as Nepal, India, and the Philippines. This variation in historical migration patterns and current demographic trends further complicates the comparability of findings across countries. A limitation of this study is also the absence of data on the motivations behind migration, which can significantly influence the experiences of individuals. For instance, migrants seeking asylum often face distinct challenges compared to those who

migrate for professional opportunities. These differences in motivations can result in varied socio-economic outcomes, cultural integration experiences, and consequently, SWB.

CONCLUSION

Multivariate analyses indicated statistically significant effects of country, MB, and their interaction on LS, happiness, and loneliness; however, all effects were small in magnitude. Cross-national differences were evident, with Croatia reporting the highest LS and happiness, while Germany and the UK showed the lowest LS and happiness alongside higher loneliness. In the overall sample, individuals with a full MB reported marginally higher LS and happiness, as well as the highest loneliness. Across countries, participants with a mixed MB tended to report slightly lower LS than both locals and individuals with a full MB. Differences between MB groups were most consistent for loneliness, though still small, indicating that MB-related variation is more evident for social than for evaluative or affective components of SWB. Overall, these findings underscore that while country context plays a more substantial role in shaping SWB, MB-related differences are systematic but subtle, highlighting the nuanced and multidimensional nature of SWB in large population samples.

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Zadovoljstvo životom, sreća, usamljenost i migracijska pozadina u sedam europskih zemalja

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Istraživanje ispituje zadovoljstvo životom, sreću i usamljenost u sedam europskih zemalja (Hrvatska, Danska, Estonija, Njemačka, Nizozemska, Norveška i Ujedinjeno Kraljevstvo) te razlike u tim ishodima s obzirom na migracijsku pozadinu pojedinca. Uzorak obuhvaća 68 136 sudionika (57 % žena, dob od 18 do 60 godina). Podaci su prikupljeni između 2020. i 2023. godine u okviru međunarodnoga projekta Generations and Gender Programme (GGP). Migracijska pozadina kategorizirana je u tri skupine: lokalno stanovništvo, osobe rođene u inozemstvu s roditeljima rođenima u inozemstvu te osobe s mješovitom migracijskom

pozadinom. Pronađene su razlike u zadovoljstvu životom, sreći i usamljenosti između uključenih zemalja. Hrvatski uzorak bilježi najviše razine zadovoljstva životom i sreće. Njemačka i Ujedinjeno Kraljevstvo imaju najniže razine zadovoljstva životom i sreće, ali istodobno i najviše razine usamljenosti. Općenito, skupina s mješovitom migracijskom pozadinom bilježi najniže razine životnoga zadovoljstva i sreće, dok skupina prve generacije migranata izvještava o najvišim razinama životnoga zadovoljstva i sreće, ali i najvišoj razini usamljenosti. Obrasci se razlikuju među zemljama, no općenito lokalno stanovništvo i prva generacija migranata pokazuju sličnije profile u usporedbi sa skupinom s mješovitim migrantskim podrijetlom. Neke zemlje slijede obrasce dobivene na ukupnom uzorku, dok se u drugima uočavaju odstupanja.

Ključne riječi: subjektivna dobrobit, migracije, sreća, životno zadovoljstvo, usamljenost