Beyond the Individual: Towards Ecosystemic Flourishing

Flourish Project
The Ecology of Wellbeing

Introducing The Ecosystemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework: A new meta-framework for integrating wellbeing across human, ecological, cultural, and economic systems.

Harvard Human Flourishing Network Presentation, April 2026

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Eco-Systemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework

Developed to address fragmentation in current wellbeing models, ESF positions flourishing as a relational, systemic, and developmental process linking people, place, and planet.

Rutger Hoekstra- National Awardee of the 2026 Frontiers Planet Prize

"This review highlights ***the possibility and necessity of an interdisciplinary synthesis in the next phase of institutionalisation and harmonisation of Beyond GDP metrics.***

We propose a way to unite different scientific schools of thought (subjective wellbeing, welfare economics, needs theories,the capabilities approach, and ecological approaches), how to navigate the large number of proposed metrics, and how to balance a standardised and scientific approach with country-specific needs."

Review

Beyond GDP: a review and conceptual framework for measuring sustainable and inclusive wellbeing

Annegeke Jansen, Ranran Wang, Paul Behrens, Rutger Hoekstra

Policy making has long focused on economic growth as measured by gross domestic product (GDP), diverting attention from sustainable wellbeing for all. Despite high-quality proposals to go beyond GDP, their integration into policy and societal discourse remains limited. A new UN initiative, Valuing What Counts, provides an opportunity for establishing and institutionalising global measurement of metrics beyond GDP, a crucial step to enable a transition into a safe and just space for humanity. Here, we inform this process by consolidating 50 years of literature on Beyond GDP metrics, addressing three core challenges. First, we resolve the lack of interdisciplinary collaboration by integrating five scientific schools of thought in one measurement approach. Second, we alleviate confusion arising from numerous Beyond GDP alternatives, offering a structured analysis of 65 metrics, delineating their measurement objectives. Finally, we bridge the divide between scientific proposals and country-specific approaches. We unite country-specific needs with a standardised and interdisciplinary measurement approach, presenting a dashboard for sustainable and inclusive wellbeing.

Lancet Planet Health 2024; 8: e695-705

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A dashboard of indicators

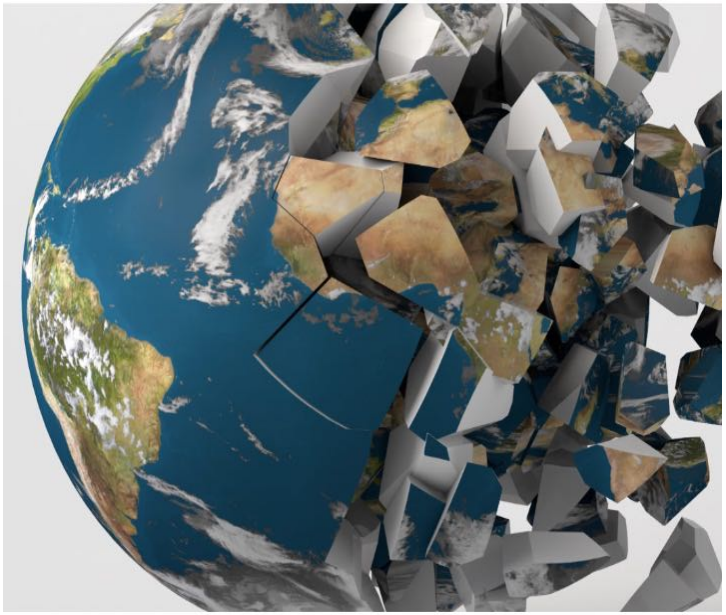
Instead of introducing a single new index, the researchers propose measuring progress using a dashboard of indicators. The dashboard could include figures on well-being, inequality and sustainability. The researchers say that applying this kind of measurement system on a broader scale would require international collaboration.

The Global Context

The 21st century is characterised by interconnected crises:

- Ecological degradation and climate instability
- Rising mental health challenges
- Social fragmentation and declining trust
- Extractive economic systems

These challenges reflect **a deeper crisis of coherence across systems and worldviews.**



All human systems are shaped by stories

Across multiple fields: science, spirituality, economics, education, policymaking

Humanity is moving toward a more relational, interconnected, and meaning-rich worldview

Limitations of Existing Frameworks

Most current wellbeing frameworks:

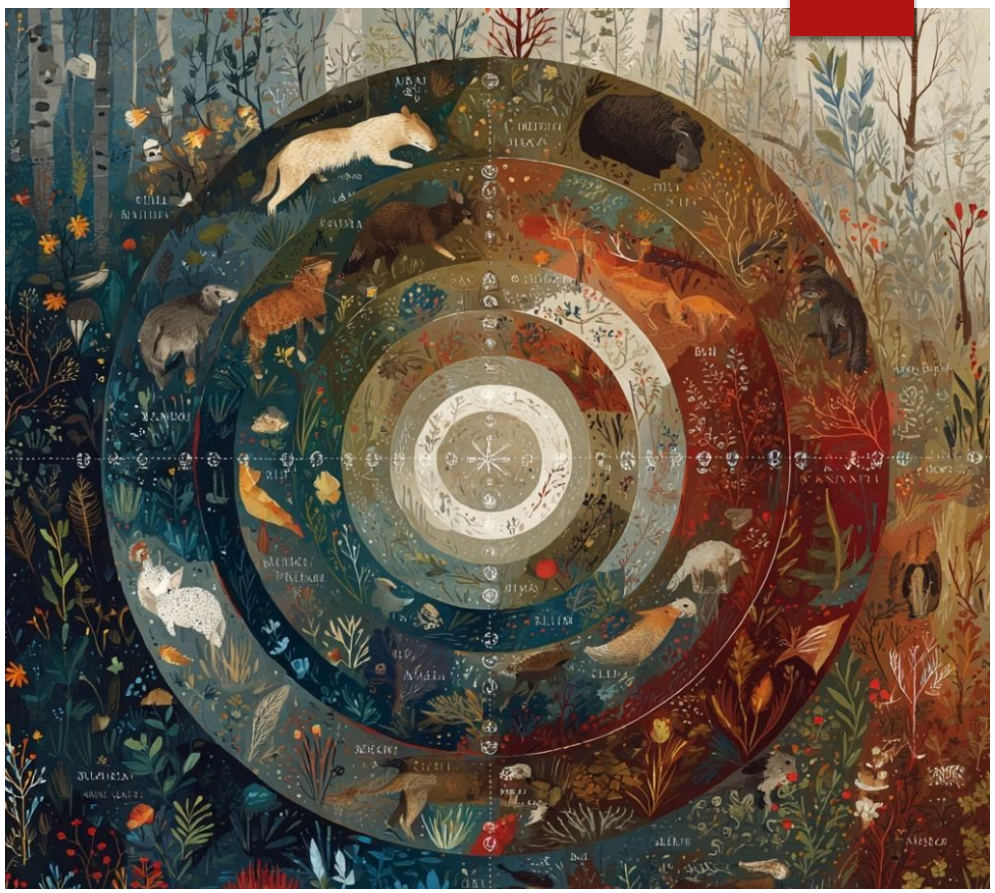
- Focus primarily on human outcomes
- Neglect the vital importance of optimising early human development
- Treat the environment as a separate domain
- Lack integration across systems
- Under-represent cultural and worldview dimensions

Core Principle of ESF

Flourishing emerges through relationships

- Between individuals and communities
- Between humans and ecosystems
- Between inner development and outer systems

Wellbeing is therefore not an isolated state **but a dynamic systemic condition.**



The Four ESF Domains

1. Natural Environment
2. Circular & Regenerative Economics
3. Cultural Values & Identity
4. Human Capacities & Potential

These domains are interdependent and co-evolving.

Natural Environment Domain

- Ecological integrity and biodiversity
- Climate stability and resilience
- Human-nature connection

Key insight:

Human wellbeing is inseparable from planetary health.

Circular & Regenerative Economics

- Transition from extractive to regenerative systems
- Circular resource flows
- Equity and distribution

Key insight:

Economies must serve prosocial worldviews and long-term wellbeing.

Cultural Values & Identity

- Intergenerational wisdom
- Shared values, meaning systems, and worldviews
- Social cohesion, trust, and belonging
- Inclusion and cultural diversity

Key insight:

Culture shapes behaviour, which shapes systems.

Human Capacities & Potential

- Physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development
- Optimisation of the early years
- Lifelong learning and agency
- Relational and ethical capacities

Key insight:

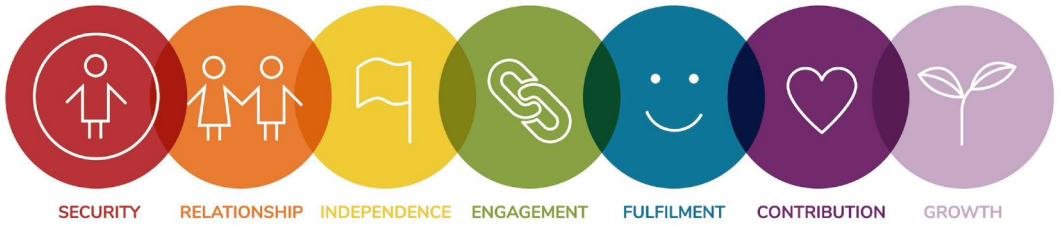
Human development is both individual and collective.

Seven Levels of Human Flourishing

Consistent across all human cultures

1. **Security** – safety and stability
2. **Relationship** – connection and belonging
3. **Independence** – agency and autonomy
4. **Engagement** – participation and curiosity
5. **Fulfilment** – meaning and creativity
6. **Contribution** – service and impact
7. **Growth** – development and transformation

These operate dynamically across the life course.



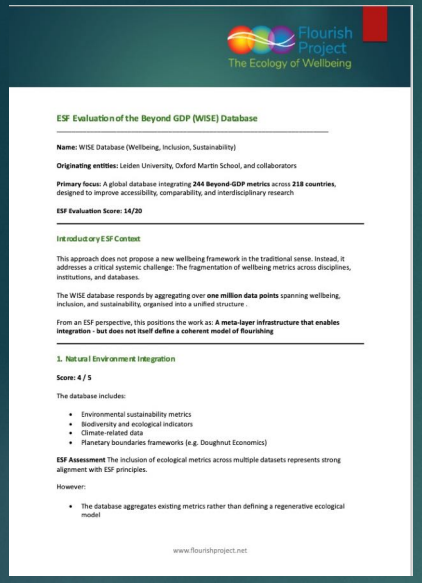
The ESF Practical Evaluation Tool: Assessing Integrated Wellbeing

The ESF Framework is not only a model of wellbeing - it is also being developed as **a diagnostic and evaluation tool**. This enables policymakers, educators, and organisations to assess:

- How well existing frameworks integrate ecological, economic, cultural, and human dimensions
- Whether systems are fragmented or coherent
- The extent to which they support long-term, intergenerational flourishing

Using a structured scoring approach, ESF evaluates any initiative across the four domains and seven levels: Each domain is scored from 1 (not integrated) to 5 (fully integrated), creating a clear picture of: Strengths, Gaps, Opportunities for systemic improvement

Prototype Evaluations



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ESF Evaluation of the Beyond GDP (WISE) Database

Name: WISE Database (Wellbeing, Inclusion, Sustainability)

Originating entities: Leiden University, Oxford Martin School, and collaborators

Primary focus: A global database integrating **244 Beyond-GDP metrics** across **218 countries**, designed to improve accessibility, comparability, and interdisciplinary research

ESF Evaluation Score: 14/20

Introductory ESF Context

This approach does not propose a new wellbeing framework in the traditional sense. Instead, it addresses a critical systemic challenge: The fragmentation of wellbeing metrics across disciplines, institutions, and databases.

The WISE database responds by aggregating over **one million data points** spanning wellbeing, inclusion, and sustainability, organised into a unified structure .

From an ESF perspective, this positions the work as: **A meta-layer infrastructure that enables integration - but does not itself define a coherent model of flourishing**

1. Natural Environment Integration

Score: 4 / 5

The database includes:

- Environmental sustainability metrics
- Biodiversity and ecological indicators
- Climate-related data
- Planetary boundaries frameworks (e.g. Doughnut Economics)

ESF Assessment The inclusion of ecological metrics across multiple datasets represents strong alignment with ESF principles.

However:

- The database aggregates existing metrics rather than defining a regenerative ecological model

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ESF Evaluation of the European Indicators 2025 Framework

Name: Measuring Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing: A Multidimensional Dashboard Approach

Originating entity: European Commission Joint Research Centre

Primary focus: A multidimensional EU dashboard designed to move beyond GDP by integrating economic, social, environmental, inclusiveness, and institutional indicators into a sustainable and inclusive wellbeing framework for present and future generations.

ESF Evaluation Score: 14/20

Introductory Context

The European Indicators 2025 framework, developed by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, emerges from a growing recognition that traditional economic measures such as GDP are insufficient for capturing the full complexity of human wellbeing. Building on decades of international work on "beyond GDP" metrics, the framework brings together a comprehensive dashboard of indicators designed to assess sustainable and inclusive wellbeing across European societies. It integrates social, economic, environmental, and institutional dimensions, with a particular emphasis on long-term resilience, intergenerational fairness, and policy relevance.

As such, it represents one of the most advanced large-scale efforts to operationalise multidimensional wellbeing measurement at a regional and supranational level

1. Natural Environment Integration

Score: 5 / 5

This is one of the strongest areas of alignment. The SIWB framework explicitly includes **Nature and planetary boundaries** as one of its six core components, and defines it in unified environmental terms that include biodiversity, land, soil, forests, air, water, climate mitigation and adaptation, sustainable resource use, and green economy and policies . The summary dashboard includes indicators such as the farmland bird index, Natura 2000 protected areas, ecological status of water, water exploitation, renewable energy share, net greenhouse gas emissions, circular material use, and consumption footprint per capita.

This aligns closely with the ESF requirement that a wellbeing model should recognise ecological health as foundational, incorporate biodiversity and environmental sustainability, and support

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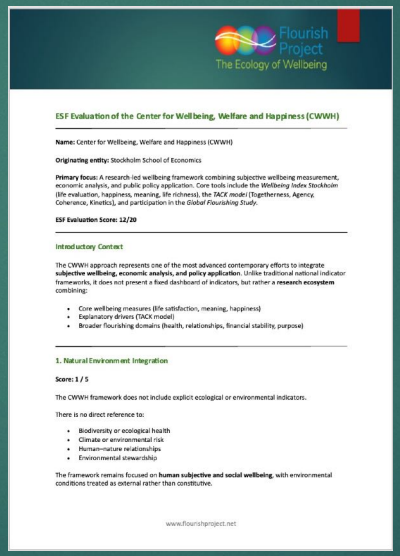

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ESF Evaluation of the Center for Wellbeing, Welfare and Happiness (CWWH)

Name: Center for Wellbeing, Welfare and Happiness (CWWH)

Originating entity: Stockholm School of Economics

Primary focus: A research-led wellbeing framework combining subjective wellbeing measurement, economic analysis, and public policy application. Core tools include the *Wellbeing Index Stockholm* (life evaluation, happiness, meaning, life richness), the *TACK model* (Togetherness, Agency, Coherence, Kinetics), and participation in the *Global Flourishing Study*.

ESF Evaluation Score: 12/20

Introductory Context

The CWWH approach represents one of the most advanced contemporary efforts to integrate **subjective wellbeing, economic analysis, and policy application**. Unlike traditional national indicator frameworks, it does not present a fixed dashboard of indicators, but rather a **research ecosystem** combining:

- Core wellbeing measures (life satisfaction, meaning, happiness)
- Explanatory drivers (TACK model)
- Broader flourishing domains (health, relationships, financial stability, purpose)

1. Natural Environment Integration

Score: 1 / 5

The CWWH framework does not include explicit ecological or environmental indicators.

There is no direct reference to:

- Biodiversity or ecological health
- Climate or environmental risk
- Human–nature relationships
- Environmental stewardship

The framework remains focused on **human subjective and social wellbeing**, with environmental conditions treated as external rather than constitutive.

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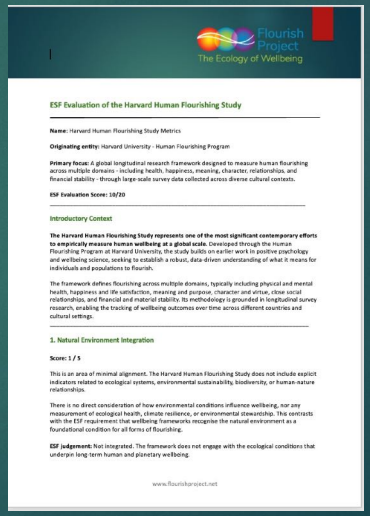

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ESF Evaluation of the Harvard Human Flourishing Study

Name: Harvard Human Flourishing Study Metrics

Originating entity: Harvard University - Human Flourishing Program

Primary focus: A global longitudinal research framework designed to measure human flourishing across multiple domains - including health, happiness, meaning, character, relationships, and financial stability - through large-scale survey data collected across diverse cultural contexts.

ESF Evaluation Score: 10/20

Introductory Context

The Harvard Human Flourishing Study represents one of the most significant contemporary efforts to empirically measure human wellbeing at a global scale. Developed through the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University, the study builds on earlier work in positive psychology and wellbeing science, seeking to establish a robust, data-driven understanding of what it means for individuals and populations to flourish.

The framework defines flourishing across multiple domains, typically including physical and mental health, happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, close social relationships, and financial and material stability. Its methodology is grounded in longitudinal survey research, enabling the tracking of wellbeing outcomes over time across different countries and cultural settings.

1. Natural Environment Integration

Score: 1 / 5

This is an area of minimal alignment. The Harvard Human Flourishing Study does not include explicit indicators related to ecological systems, environmental sustainability, biodiversity, or human-nature relationships.

There is no direct consideration of how environmental conditions influence wellbeing, nor any measurement of ecological health, climate resilience, or environmental stewardship. This contrasts with the ESF requirement that wellbeing frameworks recognise the natural environment as a foundational condition for all forms of flourishing.

ESF judgement: Not integrated. The framework does not engage with the ecological conditions that underpin long-term human and planetary wellbeing.

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ESF Evaluation of the Melbourne Metrics Framework

Name: Melbourne Metrics: Measuring Complex Competencies

Originating entity: University of Melbourne

Primary focus: A competency-based educational assessment framework designed to measure complex human capabilities - including agency, collaboration, ethical understanding, and citizenship - through behavioural indicators, developmental progressions, and performance-based evaluation

ESF Evaluation Score: 10/20

Introductory Context

The Melbourne Metrics framework was developed as part of a broader shift within education systems away from narrow academic attainment and toward the assessment of **whole-person development and real-world capabilities**. It builds on global work in 21st-century skills and competency-based education, offering a structured approach to measuring how learners develop the capacities required to participate meaningfully in society.

Unlike traditional education metrics, which focus primarily on knowledge acquisition, Melbourne Metrics seeks to capture **how individuals think, relate, act, and contribute**, positioning it as one of the most advanced current approaches to assessing human development in practice.

1. Natural Environment Integration

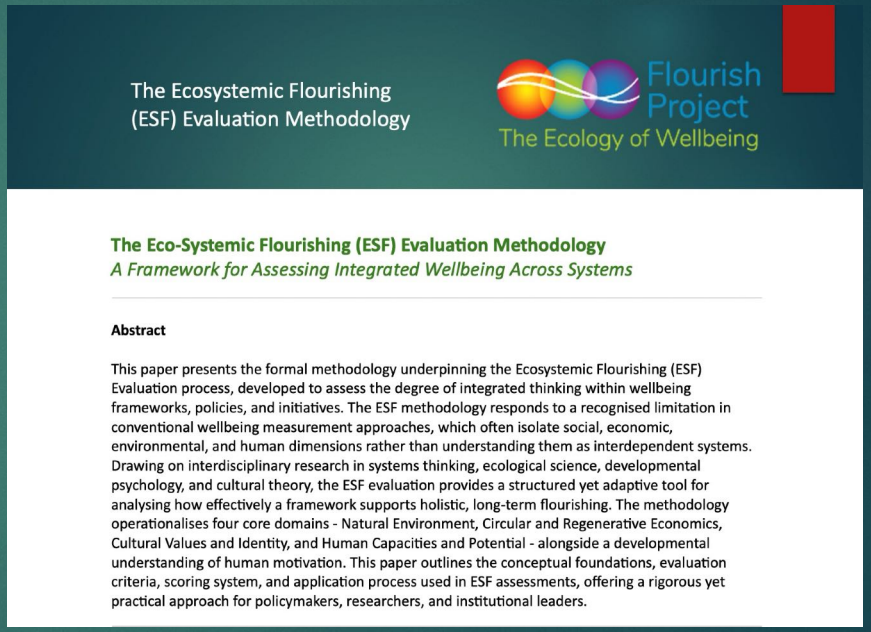
Score: 1 / 5

This is an area of minimal alignment. The Melbourne Metrics framework does not include explicit indicators related to ecological systems, environmental sustainability, or human-nature relationships. There is no reference to biodiversity, climate, environmental stewardship, or the role of ecological conditions in shaping human wellbeing. This contrasts with the ESF requirement that wellbeing frameworks recognise **ecological health as foundational**, incorporating both environmental sustainability and regenerative practices.

ESF judgement: Not integrated. The framework does not engage with the ecological conditions that underpin long-term flourishing.

2. Circular and Regenerative Economics Integration

Core Prototype Materials under development



ESF Example Ranking National Frameworks

Image 1: Top Ten National Frameworks - ESF 2026 Initial Prototype Ranking

Rank	Framework	Score	Category
1	Gross National Happiness (Bhutan)	**17**	Highly Integrated
2	Wellbeing Economy Frameworks (WEAll-aligned)	**16–17**	Highly Integrated
3	Doughnut Economics (National)	**16**	Highly Integrated
4	WISE (Wellbeing in Sustainable Economies)	**15–16**	Highly Integrated
5	European Wellbeing Frameworks (EU)	**14–15**	Moderately–Highly Integrated
6	OECD Wellbeing Framework	**14**	Moderately Integrated
7	Iceland Wellbeing Indicators	**14**	Moderately Integrated
8	New Zealand Living Standards Framework	**14**	Moderately Integrated
9	Scotland National Performance Framework	**14**	Moderately Integrated
10	Wales Future Generations Framework	**14**	Moderately Integrated

ESF Example Ranking City Frameworks

Image 2: Top Ten City Frameworks - ESF 2026 Initial Prototype Ranking

Rank	Framework	Example City	Score	Category
1	GNH (City Application)	Thimphu	**17**	Highly Integrated
2	Doughnut Economics (City Model)	Amsterdam	**16**	Highly Integrated
3	Wellbeing Economy City Approaches	Wellington	**15–17**	Highly Integrated
4	Iceland Wellbeing Indicators (City Use)	Reykjavík	**14**	Moderately Integrated
5	OECD Local Wellbeing Framework	Multiple	**14**	Moderately Integrated
6	New Zealand Living Standards (City)	Auckland	**14**	Moderately Integrated
7	Social Progress Index (City)	Multiple	**12**	Moderately Integrated
8	BeeWell (Youth Wellbeing Model)	Manchester	**12**	Moderately Integrated
9	Thriving Places Index (UK city regions)	Multiple UK cities	**12–13**	Moderately Integrated
10	Melbourne Metrics	Melbourne	**10**	Partially Integrated

ESF Example Ranking Research Frameworks

ESF Top Ten Wellbeing Research Initiatives (2026)

Rank	Framework	Score	Primary Contribution	
1	Harvard Human Flourishing Program	14	Multidimensional flourishing (meaning, purpose, relationships)	Moderately Integrated
3	Global Flourishing Study	14	Longitudinal global wellbeing data	Moderately Integrated
3	OECD Better Life Initiative	13	Comparative wellbeing measurement and policy integration	Moderately Integrated
4	World Happiness Report	13	Global benchmarking of subjective wellbeing	Moderately Integrated
5	Gallup World Poll	13	Large-scale global wellbeing data and trends	Moderately Integrated
6	European Social Survey	13	Social attitudes, trust, and wellbeing across Europe	Moderately Integrated
7	UK Office for National Statistics Wellbeing Programme	13	Applied national wellbeing measurement	Moderately Integrated
8	Canadian Index of Wellbeing	13	Multidimensional wellbeing tracking	Moderately Integrated
9	Human Development Index	12	Foundational global development metrics	Partially Integrated
10	Wellbeing Economy Alliance Research Hub	12	Integration of wellbeing economy research	Partially Integrated

What the ESF Lens Reveals

Currently, most existing frameworks perform well in some domains - but very few achieve full integration across all four.

Applying the ESF Evaluation Tool to the current leading global frameworks (e.g. EU Indicators, OECD, GNH) has revealed a consistent pattern:

There is strong alignment in:

- Environmental sustainability
- Economic resilience
- Social and institutional indicators

But only partial or weak alignment in:

- Cultural values, identity, and worldview
- Human development beyond health and education
- Meaning, purpose, and relational wellbeing

Critical gap: Most frameworks measure the external conditions of wellbeing, but **do not adequately address the inner and cultural drivers of behaviour and systems**

What makes ESF distinctive is not just *what* is measured, but *how indicators relate*

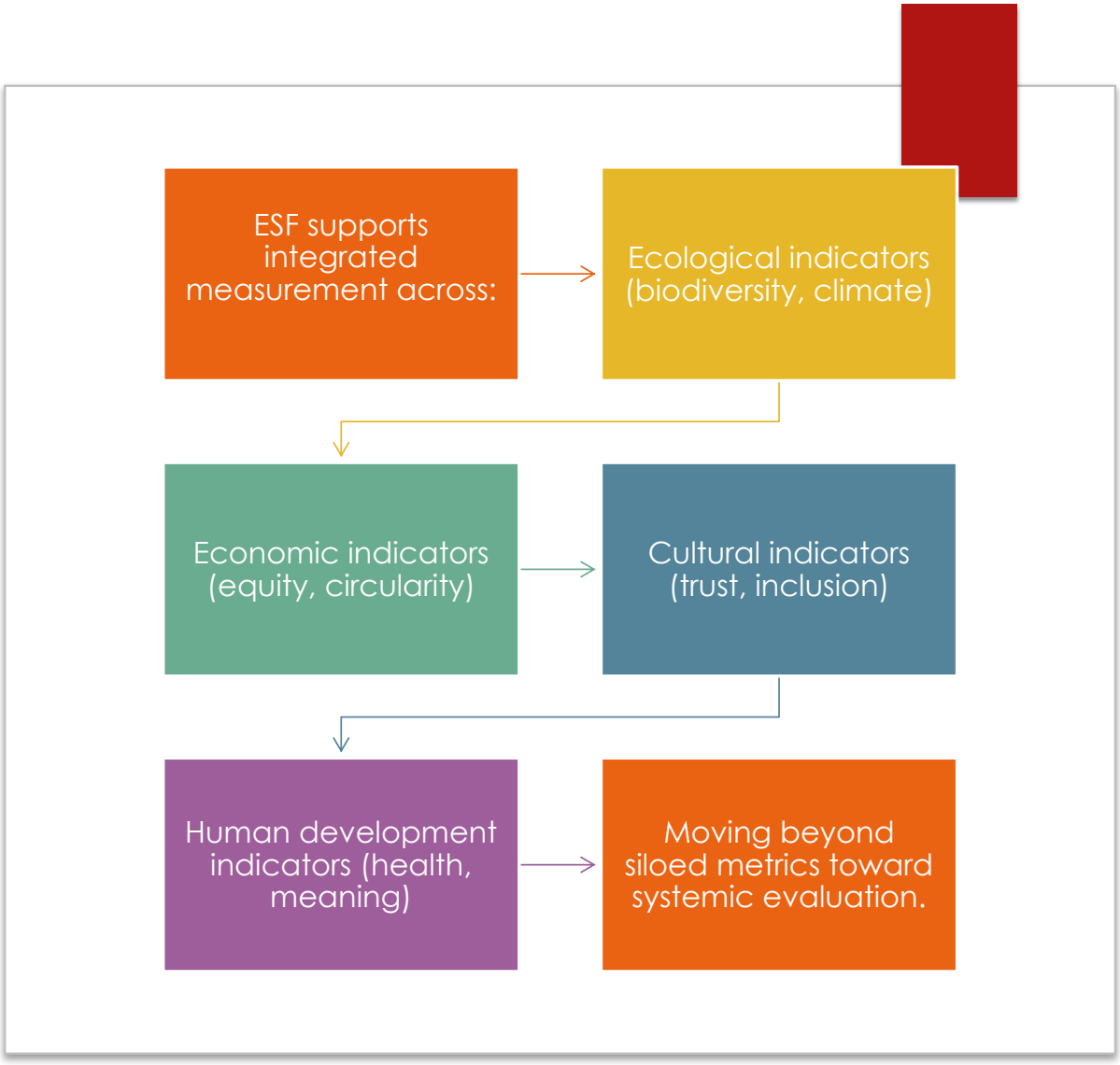
- Human wellbeing depends on ecological health
- Economic systems shape both environmental and social outcomes
- Cultural values determine system values and behaviour
- Human development both influences and is influenced by all domains
- The wellbeing of Future Generations is dependent upon population-level choices

This creates a fully integrated, and future-focused, measurement architecture, rather than fragmented indicator sets.

"A particularly important contribution from ESF is that ***it prevents frameworks from remaining flat****.*

ESF is not only four domains, but also a seven-level developmental scaffold moving from security and relationship through to contribution and growth. That means each global framework can be read both ***horizontally*** *across domains and* ***vertically*** *across human development. This is why ESF can integrate policy goals, indicator systems, inner capacities, cultural narratives and intergenerational ethics in a way most existing frameworks cannot."*

Measurement and Indicators



Natural Environment (NE)

The ESF framework positions ecological health as foundational to all other forms of wellbeing, recognising that human flourishing is inseparable from planetary systems

Ecological Integrity

- Biodiversity (species richness, habitat diversity)
- Ecosystem health and resilience
- Soil regeneration and fertility rates
- Ocean and freshwater ecosystem health

Environmental Quality

- Air quality (PM2.5, NO_2 levels)
- Water quality and access to clean water
- Noise and pollution exposure

Climate Stability

- Carbon emissions per capita
- Renewable energy share
- Climate adaptation and resilience capacity

Nature Connection

- Access to green and blue spaces
- Time spent in nature
- Nature-based education participation

Regeneration & Stewardship

- Land under conservation or rewilding
- Community participation in ecological restoration
- Integration of ecosystem services into policy

Circular and Regenerative Economics (CRE)

This domain shifts measurement from extractive growth toward regenerative, distributive, and resilient economic systems

Circularity & Resource Use

- Material circularity rate (reuse, repair, recycling)
- Waste generation per capita
- Resource productivity

Regenerative Economic Activity

- % of GDP from regenerative sectors
- Investment in green infrastructure
- Regenerative agriculture adoption

Equity & Distribution

- Income and wealth inequality
- Living wage coverage
- Access to essential services

Local & Community Economies

- Strength of local food systems
- Community wealth-building initiatives
- Local ownership of assets

Work & Livelihoods

- Employment in sustainable sectors
- Job quality and meaningful work
- Economic security and resilience

Policy Alignment

- Public procurement aligned with sustainability
- Tax incentives for regenerative practices
- Wellbeing economy policy integration

Cultural Values and Identity (CVI)

ESF recognises that worldviews, values, and cultural narratives are causal drivers of wellbeing, not secondary outcomes

Social Cohesion & Trust

- Interpersonal trust levels
- Sense of belonging
- Social capital and community connection

Cultural Vitality

- Participation in cultural practices and traditions
- Cultural heritage preservation
- Creative and artistic engagement

Inclusion & Diversity

- Representation of diverse identities in governance
- Equality across gender, ethnicity, and belief systems
- Inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems

Peace & Relational Health

- Levels of conflict and violence
- Restorative justice practices
- Community dialogue initiatives

Media & Narrative Ecology

- Diversity of media ownership and voices
- Representation of different worldviews
- Narrative sovereignty (who tells the story)

Ethics & Meaning Systems

- Values-based education (ethics, spirituality)
- Interfaith and intercultural dialogue
- Shared sense of purpose and meaning

Human Capacities and Potential (HCP)

This domain integrates whole-person development across physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions

Foundational Health & Development

Physical and Mental Health

- Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy
- Mental health prevalence (anxiety, depression)
- Access to healthcare and preventative services

Early Childhood Development

- Early years investment and outcomes
- Parental health and wellbeing
- Attachment security and caregiving quality
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

The Seven Levels – example indicators

1. Security

- Sense of physical and emotional safety
- Housing stability
- Food security

2. Relationship

- Quality of close relationships
- Social support networks
- Loneliness and isolation rates

3. Independence

- Agency and autonomy
- Self-efficacy and confidence
- Educational attainment

4. Engagement

- Participation in learning, work, and community
- Flow and intrinsic motivation
- Civic engagement

5. Fulfilment

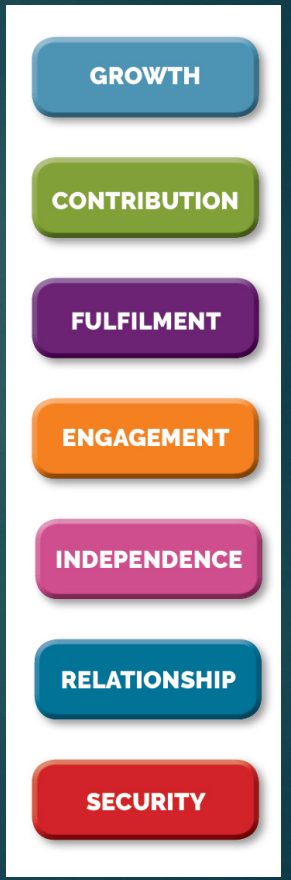
- Life satisfaction and wellbeing
- Meaning and purpose
- Creativity and self-expression

6. Contribution

- Volunteering and service
- Civic participation
- Perceived impact on society

7. Growth

- Lifelong learning participation
- Personal development
- Spiritual development and worldview expansion



Applications of ESF

- National and city wellbeing frameworks
- Education system transformation
- Community development and evaluation
- Policy design and governance
- Organisational and institutional strategy

Young children as powerful change-agents

The Project's free online Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Inner Development Goals (IDGs) handbooks are already being used by schools in more than 35 countries worldwide – *but these audiences have yet to be optimised*

ZIMBABWE, ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, INDIA, AUSTRALIA, SOUTH KOREA, VIETNAM, MONGOLIA, NEPAL, TAIWAN, SOLOMON ISLANDS, MALTA, COLUMBIA, SPAIN, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, JAPAN, CHINA, RWANDA, SWEDEN, CAMBODIA, MALAYSIA, CROATIA, SOUTH AFRICA, BAVARIA, PHILIPPINES, INDONESIA, SWEDEN, BRAZIL, TANZANIA, DENMARK, JAPAN, GERMANY, PHILIPPINES, PERU, NETHERLANDS, UZBEKISTAN, QATAR

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SDGs for Primary/Elementary Schools

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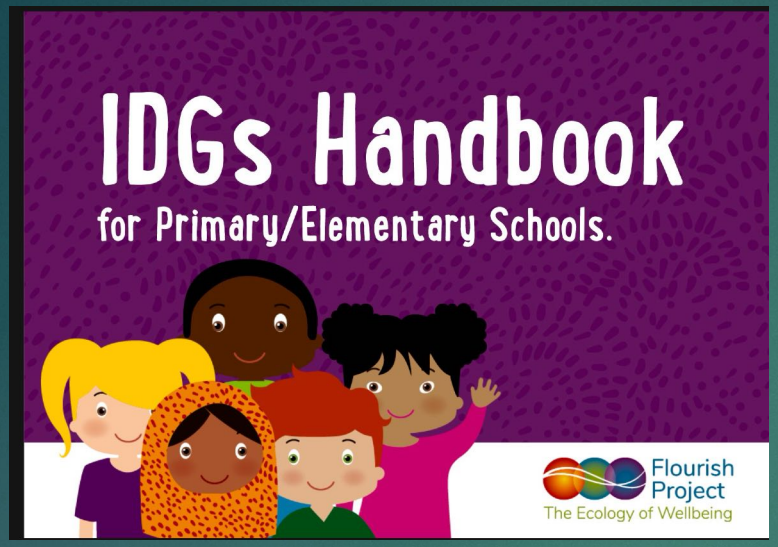
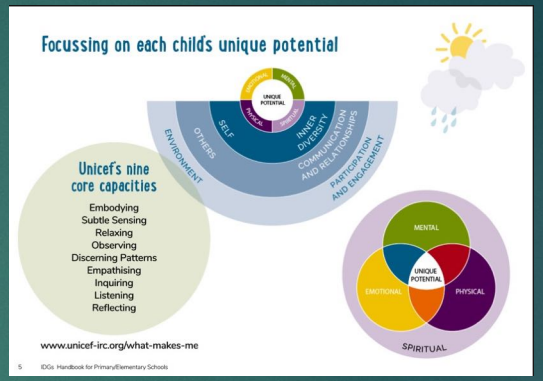
INNER DEVELOPMENT GOALS
Transformational Skills for Sustainable Development





Implications for Policy

- Shift from GDP to wellbeing and regeneration
- Integrate environmental, social, and cultural metrics
- Prioritise early human development
- Harness youth voices
- Embed long-term, intergenerational thinking
- Address the inner and cultural drivers of human behaviour and systems creation

Conclusion

The ESF Framework provides:

- A unifying architecture for wellbeing
- A diagnostic and evaluation tool
- A bridge between disciplines and sectors
- A pathway toward systemic coherence and flourishing

Flourishing is not achieved in isolation, but through the health of the whole system.

"The SDGs tell us what to achieve, the OECD helps measure conditions, the IDGs describe inner capacities, Doughnut Economics defines social and planetary boundaries, GNH broadens the meaning of progress, and Human Flourishing studies describe lived human outcomes

But ESF is the architecture that allows all of these to sit in one coherent developmental, ecological, cultural and economic whole."

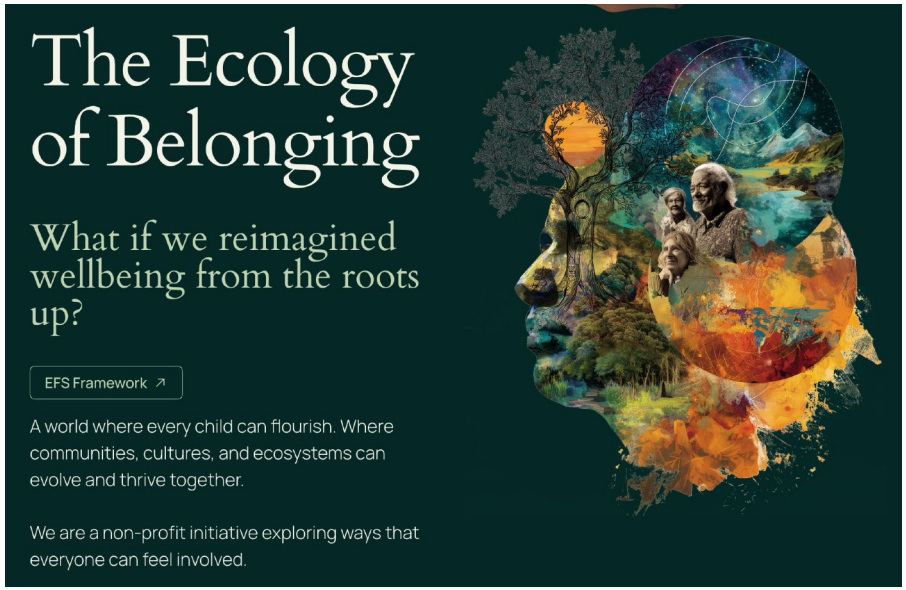
Phase 2: cross-disciplinary partnering for ecosystemic transformation

The Flourish Project has just launched its new website, creating a global hub for the Eco-Systemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework's ongoing research and development activities.

Alongside this, a core team and growing network of contributors is being developed to support the next phase of implementation and impact.

We are now seeking global collaborators and funders across disciplines to:

- Work with us as action-research partners in applying ESF in practice, across a number of Innovation Labs
- Participate in sector-specific Communities of Practice
- Contribute to the co-development of measurement, evaluation, and evidence – **including a globally accessible digital wellbeing platform**
- Help shape scalable models for systemic transformation across sectors



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What if we reimagined wellbeing from the roots up?

A world where every child can flourish. Where communities, cultures, and ecosystems can evolve and thrive together.

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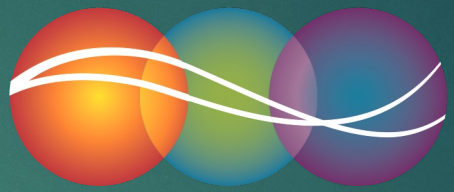

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