



Happiest Countries Prove Resilient Despite Overlapping Crises

*Ten Years After First International Day of Happiness,
Measuring and Advancing Well-Being Seen as Priority*

March 20th, 2023 — Since the publication of the first World Happiness Report in 2012, there is a growing consensus that happiness can be promoted through public policies and the actions of business and civil society. Moreover, happiness and well-being can be usefully measured in a number of ways, including through surveys of people’s satisfaction with their lives.

The World Happiness Report research leverages six key factors to help explain variation in self-reported levels of happiness across the world: social support, income, health, freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption. Governments are increasingly using this analysis to orient policies towards happiness.

This year’s Happiness Report also shows that despite several overlapping crises, most populations around the world continue to be remarkably resilient, with global life satisfaction averages in the COVID-19 years 2020-2022 just as high as those in the pre-pandemic years.

The first International Day of Happiness was celebrated 10 years ago on 20 March 2013. Since then, people all over have recognized not only the importance of measuring happiness and well-being but have made gains to support public and private policies to help promote it.

“The ultimate goal of politics and ethics should be human well-being,” said Jeffrey Sachs. “The happiness movement shows that well-being is not a ‘soft’ and ‘vague’ idea but rather focuses on areas of life of critical importance: material conditions, mental and physical wealth, personal virtues, and good citizenship. We need to turn this wisdom into practical results to achieve more peace, prosperity, trust, civility – and yes, happiness – in our societies.”

Finland remains in the top position for the sixth year in a row. Lithuania is the only new country in the top twenty, up more than 30 places since 2017. War-torn Afghanistan and Lebanon remain the two unhappiest countries in the survey, with average life evaluations more than five points lower (on a scale running from 0 to 10) than in the ten happiest countries.

The top ten countries are ordered:

1. Finland
2. Denmark
3. Iceland
4. Israel
5. Netherlands
6. Sweden
7. Norway
8. Switzerland
9. Luxembourg
10. New Zealand



“Average happiness and our country rankings, for emotions as well as life evaluations, have been remarkably stable during the three COVID-19 years,” said John Helliwell. “Changes in rankings that have taken place have been continuations of longer-term trends, such as the increases seen in the rankings of the three Baltic countries. Even during these difficult years, positive emotions have remained twice as prevalent as negative ones, and feelings of positive social support twice as strong as those of loneliness.”

The report takes a closer look at the trends of how happiness is distributed, in many cases unequally, among people. It examines the happiness gap between the top and the bottom halves of the population. This gap is small in countries where almost everyone is very unhappy, and in the top countries where almost no one is unhappy. More generally, people are happier living in countries where the happiness gap is smaller. Happiness gaps globally have been fairly stable, although there are growing gaps in many African countries.

"This year's report features many interesting insights," said Lara Aknin, "but one that I find particularly interesting and heartening has to do with pro-sociality. For a second year, we see that various forms of everyday kindness, such as helping a stranger, donating to charity, and volunteering, are above pre-pandemic levels. Acts of kindness have been shown to both lead to and stem from greater happiness, which is the focus of Chapter 4."

Social media data has become a trove of information on how people behave. Since 2010, the methods for using social media data to assess happiness have become much more sophisticated. Assessments can provide timely and spatially detailed well-being measurement to track changes, evaluate policy, and provide accountability. Together, these advances have resulted in both increased measurement accuracy and the potential for more advanced experimental research designs.

This year's report also takes a closer look at the available survey data from Ukraine. “The devastating impact of the war is evident to all, and so we also find that well-being in Ukraine has taken a real hit”, noted Jan-Emmanuel De Neve. “But what is surprising, however, is that well-being in Ukraine fell by less than it did in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea, and this is thanks in part to the extraordinary rise in fellow feeling across Ukraine as picked up in data on helping strangers and donations – the Russian invasion has forged Ukraine into a nation” added De Neve.

A breakdown of the chapters of the World Happiness Report:

- Chapter 1. The happiness agenda. The next 10 years.
John Helliwell, Richard Layard, and Jeffrey Sachs
- Chapter 2. Happiness, Benevolence, and Trust during COVID-19 and Beyond
John Helliwell, Haifang Huang, Max Norton, Leonard Goff, and Shun Wang
- Chapter 3. Well-being and State Effectiveness



Sir Timothy Besley, Joseph Marshall, and Torsten Persson

- Chapter 4. Doing Good and Feeling Good: Relationships between Altruism and Well-being for Altruists, Beneficiaries, and Observers
Shawn A. Rhoads, and Abigail A. Marsh
- Chapter 5. Towards Reliably Forecasting the Well-being of Populations Using Social Media: Three Generations of Progress
Oscar Kjell, Salvatore Giorgi, H. Andrew Schwartz, and Johannes C. Eichstaedt

“The overall goal is a happier society,” said Richard Layard. “But we only get there if people make each other happy (and not just themselves). It’s an inspiring goal for us as individuals. And it includes the happiness of future generations – and our own mental health.”

The World Happiness Report is a publication of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, powered by the Gallup World Poll data. The report is supported by the Ernesto Illy Foundation; illycaffè; Davines Group; Unilever’s largest ice cream brand, Wall’s; The Blue Chip Foundation; The William, Jeff, and Jennifer Gross Family Foundation; The Happier Way Foundation, and The Regeneration Society Foundation.

The report is edited by Professor John F. Helliwell of the University of British Columbia; Professor Richard Layard, co-director of the Wellbeing Programme at London School of Economics; Columbia University Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs, president of SDSN and director of the Earth Institute’s Center for Sustainable Development; Professor Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, director of the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford; Professor Lara B. Aknin, Director of the Helping and Happiness Lab of Simon Fraser University; and Professor Shun Wang, of the International Business School Suzhou, Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University.

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