

New report ranks the happiest countries

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As heads of state get ready for the United Nations General Assembly in two weeks, the second World Happiness Report further strengthens the case that well-being is a critical component of economic and social development. The report is published by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), under the auspices of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, and was launched at an international workshop on September 8.

The World Happiness Report 2013 will be available at <http://unsdsn.org/>.

The landmark Report, authored by leading experts in economics, psychology, survey analysis, and [national statistics](#), describes how measurements of well-being can be used effectively to assess the progress of nations. The Report is edited by John F. Helliwell, Professor, University of British Columbia, and Senior Fellow and Program Co-Director at CIFAR (the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research); Lord Richard Layard, Director of the Well-Being Programme at the London School of Economics and Political Science's Centre for Economic Performance; and Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, Director of the SDSN, and Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General.

"This year's [report](#) provides country-level [happiness](#) rankings and explains changes in national and regional happiness," said Report editor John Helliwell. Professor Helliwell worked with other CIFAR researchers to analyze data from the Gallup World Poll. "The report reveals important trends and finds six key factors that explain much

about national happiness."

The first World Happiness Report, released in 2012 ahead of the UN high-level meeting on Happiness and Well-being, drew international attention as a landmark first survey of the state of global happiness. This new Report goes further. It delves in more detail into the analysis of global happiness data, examining trends over time and breaking down each country's score into its component parts, so that citizens and policy makers can understand their country's ranking. It also draws connections to other major initiatives to measure well-being, including those conducted by the OECD and UNDP's Human Development Report; and provides guidance for policy makers on how to effectively incorporate well-being into decision making.

"There is now a rising worldwide demand that policy be more closely aligned with what really matters to people as they themselves characterize their well-being," said Professor Jeffery Sachs. "More and more world leaders are talking about the importance of well-being as a guide for their nations and the world. The World Happiness Report 2013 offers rich evidence that the systematic measurement and analysis of happiness can teach us a lot about ways to improve the world's well-being and sustainable development."

The 2013 report identifies the countries with the highest levels of happiness in the 2010-2012 surveys, with Canada ranking sixth:

1. Denmark
2. Norway
3. Switzerland
4. Netherlands

5. Sweden

6. Canada

The World Happiness Report 2013 reveals several fascinating trends in the data. On a scale running from 0 to 10, people in over 150 countries reveal a population-weighted average score of 5.1. Six key variables explain three-quarters of the variation in annual national average scores over time and among countries: real GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, having someone to count on, perceived freedom to make life choices, freedom from corruption, and generosity (Table 2.1 of the Report).

The Report also shows significant changes in happiness in countries over time, with some countries rising and others falling over the past five years. There is some evidence of global convergence of happiness levels, with happiness gains more common in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, and losses more common among the industrial countries. For the 130 countries with available data, happiness (as measured by people's own evaluations of their lives) significantly improved in 60 countries and worsened in 41 (Figure 2.5 of the Report).

For policy makers, the key issue is what affects happiness. Some studies show mental health to be the single most important determinant of whether a person is happy or not. Yet, even in rich [countries](#), less than a third of mentally ill people are in treatment. Good, cost-effective treatments exist for depression, anxiety disorders and psychosis, and the happiness of the world would be greatly increased if these treatments were more widely available.

The Report also demonstrates the major beneficial side-effects of happiness. Happy people live longer, are more productive, earn more, and are also better citizens. The Report suggests, therefore, that well-

being should be developed both for its own sake and for its side-effects.

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