

5. WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT 2026

The World Happiness Report 2025 was released by the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford, in collaboration with Gallup, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, and an independent editorial board.

1.Introduction

1. The World Happiness Index is a comprehensive global measure of well-being that evaluates how people perceive their quality of life rather than relying solely on economic indicators.
2. It reflects a shift in development discourse from income-centric growth to holistic human well-being and life satisfaction.

2.World Happiness Index- Concept and Evolution

1. The index was first published in 2012 as part of global efforts to integrate happiness and well-being into public policy frameworks.
2. It is released annually by the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford in collaboration with Gallup and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
3. The index is based on self-reported life evaluations collected through large-scale global surveys.
4. It aligns with the broader goals of sustainable development by emphasising human welfare beyond GDP.

3.Methodology and Key Indicators

1. The ranking is based on individuals' assessment of their life on a scale, aggregated at the national level.
2. Six key determinants are used to explain variations in happiness across countries.

Economic Prosperity

1. GDP per capita reflects material living standards and economic security.
2. Higher income levels generally correlate with better access to services and opportunities.

Social Support

1. Measures the extent to which individuals have reliable social networks during times of need.
2. Strong community bonds enhance psychological well-being.

Healthy Life Expectancy

1. Indicates the ability to live a long and healthy life.
2. Reflects healthcare access, nutrition, and living conditions.

Freedom to Make Life Choices

1. Captures individual autonomy in making life decisions.
2. Greater freedom contributes to higher satisfaction and empowerment.

Generosity

1. Assesses charitable behaviour and willingness to help others.
2. Promotes social cohesion and positive societal interactions.

Perception of Corruption

1. Reflects trust in institutions and governance.
2. Lower corruption levels enhance public confidence and well-being.

4.Global Trends and Insights

1. Nordic countries consistently dominate the rankings due to strong welfare systems, high social trust, and effective governance.
2. Finland continues to rank as the happiest country globally, reflecting stable institutions and high quality of life.
3. Countries with conflict, economic instability, and weak governance occupy lower ranks.
4. Latin American countries like Costa Rica perform well due to strong community ties despite moderate income levels.

5. The report highlights the growing importance of mental health and social cohesion in determining happiness.

5. India's Performance

1. India is ranked 116th out of 147 countries, showing marginal improvement but still lagging behind many nations.
2. Challenges include weaker social support systems, perceived corruption, and disparities in life satisfaction.
3. Rapid economic growth has not fully translated into improved subjective well-being for large sections of the population.
4. Inequality, unemployment, and social fragmentation continue to affect overall happiness levels.

6. Social Media and Well-being

1. The report identifies a negative relationship between excessive social media use and mental well-being.
2. High usage among adolescents, particularly teenage girls, is associated with lower life satisfaction.
3. Moderate use of social media appears to be linked with better well-being than excessive or no use.
4. Declining life satisfaction among youth in developed countries highlights emerging mental health challenges.

7. Significance of the Index

1. Provides policymakers with insights into non-economic dimensions of development.
2. Encourages governments to prioritise mental health, social cohesion, and governance quality.
3. Highlights the importance of inclusive and sustainable development models.
4. Serves as a tool for comparing global well-being and identifying best practices.

8. Limitations of the Index

1. Subjective nature of self-reported data may introduce cultural and psychological biases.
2. Comparability across countries can be affected by differences in expectations and social norms.
3. Does not fully capture structural inequalities or regional disparities within countries.
4. Overemphasis on perception-based indicators may overlook objective conditions.

9. Way Forward

1. Integrating well-being indicators into national policy frameworks can improve governance outcomes.
2. Strengthening social support systems and community engagement is essential for enhancing happiness.
3. Addressing mental health issues, especially among youth, should be a policy priority.
4. Promoting transparency, reducing corruption, and ensuring equitable growth can improve life satisfaction.

Conclusion

1. The World Happiness Index underscores that true development extends beyond economic growth to include social, psychological, and institutional well-being.
2. For countries like India, improving happiness requires a balanced approach combining economic progress with social justice, good governance, and mental well-being.
3. A people-centric development model is essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive prosperity.

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