

World Happiness Report 2018

Executive Summary

The main focus of this year's report, in addition to its usual ranking of the levels and changes in happiness around the world, is on migration within and between countries.

The overall rankings of country happiness are based on the pooled results from Gallup World Poll surveys from 2015-2017, and show both change and stability. There is a new top ranking country, Finland, but the top ten positions are held by the same countries as in the last two years, although with some swapping of places. Four different countries have held top spot in the four most recent reports- Denmark, Switzerland, Norway and now Finland.

All the top countries tend to have high values for all six of the key variables that have been found to support well-being: income, healthy life expectancy, social support, freedom, trust and generosity. Among the top countries, differences are small enough that that year-to-year changes in the rankings are to be expected.

The analysis of happiness changes from 2008-2010 to 2015-2017 shows Togo as the biggest gainer, moving up 17 places in the overall rankings from the last place position it held as recently as in the 2015 rankings. The biggest loser is Venezuela, down 2.2 points on the 0 to 10 scale.

Five of the report's seven chapters deal primarily with migration, as summarized in Chapter 1. For both domestic and international migrants, the report studies not just the happiness of the migrants and their host communities, but also of those left behind, whether in the countryside or in the source country. The results are generally positive.

Perhaps the most striking finding of the whole report is that a ranking of countries according to the happiness of their immigrant populations is almost exactly the same as for the rest of the population. The immigrant happiness rankings are based on the full span of Gallup data from 2005 to 2017, sufficient to have 117 countries with more than 100 immigrant respondents.

The ten happiest countries in the overall rankings also fill ten of the top eleven spots in the ranking of immigrant happiness. Finland is at the top of both rankings in this report, with the happiest immigrants, and the happiest population in general.

The closeness of the two rankings shows that the happiness of immigrants depends predominantly on the quality of life where they now live, illustrating a general pattern of convergence. Happiness can change, and does change, according to the quality of the society in which people live. Immigrant happiness, like that of the locally born, depends on a range of features of the social fabric, extending far beyond the higher incomes traditionally thought to inspire and reward migration. The countries with the happiest immigrants are not the richest countries, but instead the countries with a more balanced set of social and institutional supports for better lives.

While convergence to local happiness levels is quite rapid, it is not complete, as there is a 'footprint' effect based on the happiness in each source country. This effect ranges from 10% to 25%. This footprint effect, explains why immigrant happiness is less than that of the

locals in the happiest countries, while being greater in the least happy countries.

A very high proportion of the international differences in immigrant happiness (as shown in Chapter 2), and of the happiness gains for individual migrants (as studied in Chapters 3 and 5) are thus explained by local happiness and source country happiness.

The explanation becomes even more complete when account is taken of international differences in a new Gallup index of migrant acceptance, based on local attitudes towards immigrants, as detailed in an Annex to the Report. A higher value for migrant acceptance is linked to greater happiness for both immigrants and the native-born, by almost equal amounts.

The report studies rural-urban migration as well, principally through the recent Chinese experience, which has been called the greatest mass migration in history. That migration shows some of the same convergence characteristics of the international experience, with the happiness of city-bound migrants moving towards, but still falling below urban averages.

The importance of social factors in the happiness of all populations, whether migrant or not, is emphasized in Chapter 6, where the happiness bulge in Latin America is found to depend on the greater warmth of family and other social relationships there, and to the greater importance that people there attach to these relationships.

The Report ends on a different tack, with a focus on three emerging health problems that threaten happiness: obesity, the opioid crisis, and depression. Although set in a global context, most of the evidence and discussion are focused on the United States, where the prevalence of all three problems has been growing faster and further than in most other countries.

The Report's chapters and authors are as follows:

Chapter 1. Happiness and Migration: An Overview

John F. Helliwell, Richard Layard and Jeffrey D. Sachs

Chapter 2. International Migration and World Happiness

John F. Helliwell, Haifang Huang, Shun Wang, and Hugh Shiplett

Chapter 3. Do International Migrants Increase Their Happiness and That of Their Families by Migrating?

Martijn Hendriks, Martijn J. Burger, Julie Ray, and Neli Esipova,

Chapter 4. Rural-Urban Migration and Happiness in China

John Knight and Ramani Gunatilaka

Chapter 5. Happiness and International Migration in Latin America

Carol Graham and Milena Nikolova

Chapter 6. Happiness in Latin America Has Social Foundations

Mariano Rojas

Chapter 7. America's Health Crisis and the Easterlin Paradox

Jeffrey D. Sachs

Annex: Migrant Acceptance Index: Do Migrants Have Better Lives in Countries That Accept Them?

Neli Esipova, Julie Ray, John Fleming, and Anita Pugliese