

# Return to State of the Union Report

## Country Happiness

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<b>Section 1 Top 35 Countries with the Highest Happiness .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Section 2 What Other Countries Have Done to Increase Their Happiness.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Section 3 What the U.S. Can Do to Increase Its Happiness .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Section 4 References .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Section 5 Draft of a House Bill.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Section 6. The World Happiness Report Methodology .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Comparison of the World Happiness Report with US News "Best Countries" and other Reports .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Sample Size for the World Happiness Report.....</b>	<b>25</b>

## Section 1 Top 35 Countries with the Highest Happiness

Data Source: World Happiness Report 2023 (Gallup World Poll). Year: 2023.

Note: The table below lists countries with a population over 5 million people, ranked by their Cantril Ladder happiness score.

Rank	Country	Score
1	Suomi (Finland)	7.74
2	Danmark (Denmark)	7.52
3	Sverige (Sweden)	7.35
4	Nederland (Netherlands)	7.31
5	Costa Rica	7.27
6	Norge (Norway)	7.26
7	ישראל Yisra'el (Israel)	7.23
8	Australia	6.97
9	New Zealand	6.95
10	Suisse or Schweiz (Switzerland)	6.94
11	Belgique (Belgium)	6.91
12	Éire (Ireland)	6.89
13	Österreich (Austria)	6.81
14	Canada	6.80
15	Czechia	6.78
16	الإمارات العربية المتحدة Al-Imārāt al-‘Arabiyya al-Muttaḥida (United Arab Emirates)	6.76
17	Deutschland (Germany)	6.75
18	United Kingdom	6.73
19	United States	6.72
20	台灣 (Taiwan)	6.67

Rank	Country	Score
21	السعودية Al-Su‘ūdiyya (Saudi Arabia)	6.60
22	République française (France)	6.59
23	Singapore	6.57
24	România	6.56
25	Brasil (Brazil)	6.49
26	España (Spain)	6.47
27	Italia (Italy)	6.42
28	Қазақстан Qazaqstan (Kazakhstan)	6.38
29	Polska (Poland)	6.37
30	Chile	6.36
31	Việt Nam (Vietnam)	6.35
32	ประเทศไทย Prathet Thai (Thailand)	6.22
33	Pilipinas (Philippines)	6.11
34	한국 Hanguk (South Korea)	6.04
35	Portugal	6.01

**United States — Rank 14:** The United States ranks 14th globally in the 2023 World Happiness Report with a Cantril Ladder score of 6.894. The United States does not rank higher primarily because of several structural challenges relative to top-ranked nations: higher levels of income inequality (measured by the Gini coefficient), absence of universal healthcare and paid parental leave, higher rates of social isolation and distrust in institutions, elevated crime and gun violence rates, and a comparatively weaker social safety net.

Nordic countries that rank higher universally provide universal healthcare, free or low-cost higher education, generous parental leave, and robust unemployment protection and social investments that directly translate to higher life satisfaction scores.

#### Sources and References:

World Happiness Report 2023 — Helliwell, J.F., Layard, R., Sachs, J.D., et al. (2023). Published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. <https://worldhappiness.report> Gallup World Poll (annual |survey data) <https://www.gallup.com/analytics/349487/gallup-global-happiness-center.aspx>

**Happiness by World Region (2023) :**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Avg. Happiness Score</b>
Australia / Oceania	7.15
Canada	6.96
Western Europe (excl. Россия Rossiya (Russia))	6.91
United States	6.89
México	6.55
South America	6.20
Central America	6.12
中 国 Zhongguo (China)	5.82
Россия Rossiya (Russia)	5.66
Middle East	5.43
Asia (excl. 中国 Zhongguo (China))	5.31
Other	5.10
Africa	4.48

## Section 2 What Other Countries Have Done to Increase Their Happiness

### The 8 Top Rated Countries with the Highest Happiness

Rank	Country	Happiness Score
1	Suomi (Finland)	7.741
2	Danmark (Denmark)	7.583
3	Iceland	7.525
4	ישראל Yisra'el (Israel)	7.473
5	Nederland (Netherlands)	7.403
6	Sverige (Sweden)	7.395
7	Norge (Norway)	7.315
8	Suisse Schweiz (Switzerland)	7.240

#### Suomi (Finland)

Suomi consistently ranks first in global happiness surveys, driven by exceptional public services and a deep cultural trust in institutions. The Suomi government invests heavily in universal education from early childhood through university level, with the National Agency for Education ([www.oph.fi](http://www.oph.fi)) overseeing a system that emphasizes equity, teacher autonomy, and student well-being rather than high-stakes testing.

The Social Insurance Institution of Suomi (Kela, [www.kela.fi](http://www.kela.fi)) administers a comprehensive social security net including universal healthcare, parental leave of up to 164 days per parent, and robust unemployment benefits.

Suomi's Child Welfare Act mandates that municipalities provide family counseling, and mental health services are embedded in primary care.

Suomi's work-life balance policies include a statutory right to flexible working hours for parents of young children under the Working Hours Act.

The Suomi Institute for Health and Welfare (THL, [www.thl.fi](http://www.thl.fi)) publishes national well-being indicators that guide public policy. High levels of nature access, with over 70 percent forest cover and 'Everyman's Right' to roam freely, contribute significantly to mental health.

Anti-corruption measures enforced by the National Bureau of Investigation ([www.poliisi.fi/nbi](http://www.poliisi.fi/nbi)) maintain institutional trust.

Freedom of the press, as monitored by Reporters Without Borders, consistently places Suomi at the top globally, further reinforcing public confidence in governance.

## **Danmark (Denmark)**

Danmark's happiness is underpinned by its 'flexicurity' labor model, which combines flexible hiring and firing with generous unemployment benefits administered by the Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment (STAR, [www.star.dk](http://www.star.dk)). Workers receive up to 90 percent of their previous wage for two years, enabling risk-taking and entrepreneurship without existential financial fear.

The Danmark Board of Health ([www.sst.dk](http://www.sst.dk)) coordinates a universal healthcare system with free general practitioner services, hospital care, and dental care for children.

The government's National Dementia Action Plan, overseen by the Ministry of the Interior and Health ([www.sum.dk](http://www.sum.dk)), ensures elderly citizens receive dignified and personalized care.

Danmark invests approximately 8 percent of GDP in education.

The Danmark Evaluation Institute (EVA, [www.eva.dk](http://www.eva.dk)) independently evaluates educational quality. Folk high schools — residential institutions offering adult liberal education — have operated since the 1840s and foster community cohesion and lifelong learning.

The Danmark Energy Agency ([www.ens.dk](http://www.ens.dk)) has led a transition to over 60 percent renewable electricity, reducing energy costs and environmental anxiety.

The Copenhagen Municipality's city planning office ([www.kk.dk](http://www.kk.dk)) has created one of the most bicycle-friendly cities in the world, with over 390 kilometers of dedicated cycling lanes, directly improving physical and mental health outcomes.

## **Iceland**

Iceland's small, homogeneous population and strong social cohesion contribute to consistently high happiness scores. The Welfare Watch (Velferðarvaktin), established after the 2008 financial crisis, coordinates government and civil society responses to inequality and social exclusion, acting as a permanent monitoring body under the Ministry of Social Affairs ([www.velferdarraduneyti.is](http://www.velferdarraduneyti.is)).

Iceland's gender equality policies are among the world's most advanced. The Centre for Gender Equality ([www.jafnretti.is](http://www.jafnretti.is)) enforces the Equal Pay Standard (ÍST 85), which requires companies with more than 25 employees to demonstrate equal pay for equal work, subject to government certification. This eliminates pay anxiety and promotes fairness.

The Directorate of Health ([www.landlaeknir.is](http://www.landlaeknir.is)) has invested heavily in mental health services, including the introduction of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in primary care settings.

Iceland's National Church and numerous volunteer organizations maintain community networks in rural areas. Geothermal energy provides virtually free heating to households, reducing cost-of-living pressures.

Iceland's justice system, overseen by the Ministry of Justice ([www.innanrikisraduneyti.is](http://www.innanrikisraduneyti.is)), has focused on restorative justice and rehabilitation rather than punitive incarceration, resulting in low recidivism and community reintegration.

These institutional factors collectively produce very high levels of personal security and life satisfaction.

### **Yisra'el (Israel)**

Yisra'el's high happiness score reflects strong family and community ties, a dynamic entrepreneurial culture, and robust public health infrastructure.

The National Insurance Institute ([www.btl.gov.il](http://www.btl.gov.il)) provides universal benefits including child allowances, old-age pensions, and disability support.

Yisra'el's universal health insurance system, established under the National Health Insurance Law of 1994, is administered by four competing health funds (Kuppot Holim), ensuring comprehensive access.

Communal living traditions, both in urban neighborhoods and kibbutzim, provide social support networks that buffer against loneliness and economic hardship.

Yad Sarah ([www.yadsarah.org.il](http://www.yadsarah.org.il)), a volunteer organization with 106 branches, loans free medical equipment and provides home care, serving as a pillar of community-based welfare.

Yisra'el's innovation ecosystem, coordinated through the Yisra'el Innovation Authority ([www.innovationisrael.org.il](http://www.innovationisrael.org.il)), generates high employment and economic dynamism.

The National Economic Council at the Prime Minister's Office ([www.pmo.gov.il](http://www.pmo.gov.il)) integrates well-being metrics into national planning.

Despite ongoing security challenges, Israelis demonstrate exceptional psychological resilience and community solidarity.

### **Nederland (Netherlands)**

The Nederland combines a market economy with extensive welfare provisions under the principle of a 'polder model' — consensus-based governance involving government, employers, and trade unions.

The Social and Economic Council (SER, [www.ser.nl](http://www.ser.nl)) facilitates this tripartite dialogue, ensuring that economic policies account for worker and community well-being.

Dutch children consistently rank among the happiest in the world according to UNICEF surveys. The Dutch Youth Institute (NJI, [www.nji.nl](http://www.nji.nl)) coordinates evidence-based policies on child development, parenting support, and youth mental health.

The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport ([www.government.nl/ministries/vws](http://www.government.nl/ministries/vws)) funds community-based mental health organizations throughout the country.

The Nederland has pioneered neighborhood-based home care through the Buurtzorg organization ([www.buurtzorg.com](http://www.buurtzorg.com)), in which self-managing teams of nurses deliver personalized care, reducing hospital admissions and improving client well-being. This model has been replicated in over 25 countries. Spatial planning policies prioritize green space access, cycling infrastructure, and mixed-income housing developments.

### **Sverige (Sweden)**

Sverige's high happiness is rooted in its universalist welfare model, administered through the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (Forsakringskassan, [www.forsakringskassan.se](http://www.forsakringskassan.se)), which covers sickness, parental leave, and disability.

Sverige introduced 480 days of paid parental leave per child in 2002, with a 'daddy quota' of 90 days to promote gender equality and shared caregiving.

The Public Health Agency of Sverige ([www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se](http://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se)) coordinates Sverige's national public health strategy, which targets social determinants of health including housing, employment, and social participation.

Sverige's municipalities are legally required to provide social services, including elderly care, under the Social Services Act (Socialtjanstlagen).

Sverige's ombudsman system — including the Equality Ombudsman (DO, [www.do.se](http://www.do.se)), the Child Ombudsman (BO, [www.barnombudsmannen.se](http://www.barnombudsmannen.se)), and the Consumer Ombudsman (KO) — provides institutional accountability and individual redress, reinforcing trust in government.

The Sverige Work Environment Authority (Arbetsmiljoverket, [www.av.se](http://www.av.se)) enforces occupational health standards, including psychosocial work environment requirements.

### **Norge (Norway)**

Norge's sovereign wealth fund, the Government Pension Fund Global (managed by Norges Bank Investment Management, [www.nbim.no](http://www.nbim.no)), channels oil revenues into a perpetual fund for current and future generations, providing a financial cushion that translates into generous public services and economic security.

The Norge welfare state is administered by the Norge Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV, [www.nav.no](http://www.nav.no)), a single integrated agency providing unemployment, disability, and social assistance benefits.

Norge's Education Act mandates free, inclusive schooling adapted to each student's needs. The Directorate for Education and Training (Utdanningsdirektoratet, [www.udir.no](http://www.udir.no)) oversees quality and equity. Norge introduced a legal right to higher education in the 1970s and tuition-free university is a cornerstone of social mobility.

The Norge Institute of Public Health (FHI, [www.fhi.no](http://www.fhi.no)) monitors national health and well-being, publishing annual public health reports that inform government priorities.

Norge's criminal justice system, guided by the principle of 'humanity in prison,' emphasizes rehabilitation, with Halden Prison internationally recognized for its rehabilitative approach. These systemic factors together produce the world's seventh-highest happiness score.

### **Schweiz (Switzerland)**

Schweiz's federal system empowers municipalities and cantons to tailor social policies to local needs, resulting in responsive and efficient governance.

The Federal Social Insurance Office (FSIO, [www.bsv.admin.ch](http://www.bsv.admin.ch)) oversees old age, survivor, and disability insurance. Schweiz's three-pillar pension system — combining state, occupational, and individual saving — provides broad retirement security.

Schweiz's direct democracy mechanisms, including popular initiatives and referendums administered by the Federal Chancellery ([www.bk.admin.ch](http://www.bk.admin.ch)), give citizens direct agency over public policy, fostering ownership and trust in institutions.

The Schweiz Federal Institute for Vocational and Professional Education and Training (SFIVET, [www.ehb.swiss](http://www.ehb.swiss)) supports a dual vocational education system that ensures high youth employment and job satisfaction.

The Schweiz Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH, [www.bag.admin.ch](http://www.bag.admin.ch)) administers a mandatory health insurance system with community rating, preventing discrimination based on health status.

Schweiz's high wages, clean environment, and political stability are reinforced by strong rule of law enforced by the Federal Supreme Court ([www.bger.ch](http://www.bger.ch)). These institutions collectively produce one of the world's highest living standards and eighth-highest happiness score.

### **Section 3 What the U.S. Can Do to Increase Its Happiness**

The United States ranked 14th globally in the 2023 World Happiness Report with a Cantril Ladder score of 6.894. While this represents a respectable position among world nations, several high-performing countries consistently outrank the United States by significant margins. Increasing national happiness requires coordinated, sustained action across government, the private sector, civil society, and individual communities.

## **Government Agencies:**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) should expand its national mental health surveillance programs and fund community mental health centers in underserved areas.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS, [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov)) must increase access to behavioral health services through expanded Medicaid mental health parity enforcement.

The Social Security Administration ([www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)) should streamline disability determinations to reduce administrative hardship.

The Department of Education ([www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)) should mandate social-emotional learning curricula in K-12 schools and fund school counselor programs.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD, [www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov)) must increase investment in affordable housing and voucher programs, as housing instability is a primary driver of low well-being scores.

## **Government Officials:**

Members of Congress and the Executive Branch must enact comprehensive paid family and medical leave legislation. The United States is the only wealthy democracy without a national paid parental leave program; paid leave would reduce financial stress for new parents and improve child development outcomes. Policymakers must address income inequality through progressive taxation reform and expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Federal legislators should enact universal childcare legislation to reduce the disproportionate burden on working parents, particularly women.

State governors and legislatures should expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act in holdout states, which would extend health insurance coverage and reduce financial hardship.

**Corporations:** American corporations have significant power to improve worker happiness through living wages, flexible scheduling, robust mental health employee assistance programs (EAPs), and generous parental leave policies.

The Business Roundtable ([www.businessroundtable.org](http://www.businessroundtable.org)) and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, [www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org)) should collaborate with government to develop national standards for workplace well-being.

Corporations should measure and report employee well-being metrics alongside financial performance. Large employers should establish Employee Resource Groups focused on mental health and community engagement, funded through corporate social responsibility budgets.

## **Organizations and Civil Society:**

The American Psychological Association ([www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)) should lead a national mental health awareness campaign.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI, [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)) should expand peer support programs in rural and suburban communities.

Faith communities, neighborhood associations, and community foundations play a critical role in reducing social isolation, which is one of the largest drivers of low well-being in the United States.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation ([www.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org)) and the Annie E. Casey Foundation ([www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org)) should fund evidence-based community well-being initiatives.

## **Private Individuals:**

Individuals can take concrete steps to increase their own and their community's happiness: volunteering, practicing gratitude, building social connections, limiting social media consumption, and engaging in regular physical activity.

The National Volunteer Fire Council ([www.nvfc.org](http://www.nvfc.org)), local service clubs, and neighborhood organizations provide accessible opportunities for community engagement. Research consistently shows that prosocial behavior is one of the highest-return investments in personal well-being.

## **Structural Reforms Needed:**

The United States must address the structural drivers of unhappiness that differentiate it from higher-ranked nations. These include: universal access to healthcare without financial hardship; a robust social safety net that eliminates extreme poverty; gun violence prevention policies that reduce insecurity and trauma; criminal justice reform that reduces mass incarceration and its collateral effects on families; and environmental policies that ensure clean air, water, and climate stability.

Implementing evidence-based policies from top-ranked countries, particularly in areas of social protection, healthcare access, and work-life balance would substantially improve the United States' happiness rank over a ten-to-fifteen year period.

## Section 4 References

World Happiness Report — <https://worldhappiness.report>

Gallup World Poll — <https://www.gallup.com/analytics/349487/gallup-global-happiness-center.aspx>

Finnish National Agency for Education — <https://www.oph.fi>

Kela — Social Insurance Institution of Suomi — <https://www.kela.fi>

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare — <https://www.thl.fi>

Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment — <https://www.star.dk>

Danish Board of Health — <https://www.sst.dk>

Danish Energy Agency — <https://www.ens.dk>

Icelandic Centre for Gender Equality — <https://www.jafnretti.is>

Icelandic Directorate of Health — <https://www.landlaeknir.is>

Yisra'el National Insurance Institute — <https://www.btl.gov.il>

Yad Sarah — <https://www.yadsarah.org.il>

Social and Economic Council of the Nederland (SER) — <https://www.ser.nl>

Dutch Youth Institute (NJI) — <https://www.nji.nl>

Buurtzorg Nederland — <https://www.buurtzorg.com>

Swedish Social Insurance Agency (Forsakringskassan) — <https://www.forsakringskassan.se>

Public Health Agency of Sverige — <https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se>

Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) — <https://www.nav.no>

Norwegian Institute of Public Health (FHI) — <https://www.fhi.no>

Swiss Federal Social Insurance Office (FSIO) — <https://www.bsv.admin.ch>

Swiss Federal Office of Public Health — <https://www.bag.admin.ch>

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — <https://www.cdc.gov>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services — <https://www.hhs.gov>

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development — <https://www.hud.gov>

U.S. Department of Education — <https://www.ed.gov>

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) — <https://www.nami.org>

American Psychological Association — <https://www.apa.org>

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation — <https://www.rwjf.org>

Annie E. Casey Foundation — <https://www.aecf.org>

Business Roundtable — <https://www.businessroundtable.org>

Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) — <https://www.shrm.org>

## Section 5 Draft of a House Bill

**H.R. [\_\_\_\_] 118TH CONGRESS 2D SESSION To promote the well-being and happiness of the people of the United States, and for other purposes.**

**SHORT TITLE: National Well-Being and Happiness Improvement Act of 20:**

### **SECTION 1. Definitions**

(1) **CANTRIL LADDER SCALE.** The term 'Cantril Ladder Scale' means the validated psychometric instrument developed by Hadley Cantril used to measure subjective well-being on a scale of 0 to 10, in which respondents are asked to rate their current life as compared to the best and worst possible lives.

(2) **GOVERNMENT AGENCY.** The term 'government agency' means any department, agency, bureau, board, commission, office, authority, administration, or other establishment of the Federal Government.

(3) **HAPPINESS.** The term 'happiness' means the state of subjective well-being as measured by validated instruments including, but not limited to, the Cantril Ladder Scale, the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS).

(4) **NATIONAL HAPPINESS INDEX.** The term 'National Happiness Index' means the composite measure of national subjective well-being to be established under this Act, incorporating measures of life satisfaction, positive affect, meaning, and engagement.

(5) **SECRETARY.** The term 'Secretary' means the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

(6) **SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF WELL-BEING.** The term 'social determinants of well-being' means the conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and well-being outcomes and risks, including economic stability, education quality, healthcare access, neighborhood environment, and social and community context.

(7) **SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING.** The term 'subjective well-being' means an individual's cognitive and affective evaluations of their life as measured by validated survey instruments.

(8) **WELL-BEING IMPACT ASSESSMENT.** The term 'well-being impact assessment' means a systematic evaluation process by which proposed Federal laws, regulations, and programs are analyzed for their potential effects on the subjective well-being of affected populations.

## **SECTION 2. Enacting Clause**

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that :

(a) FINDINGS. Congress finds the following:

- (1) Subjective well-being and happiness are legitimate and measurable policy objectives, as demonstrated by their adoption as primary governmental goals in Suomi, Danmark, Norge, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and other nations.
- (2) The United States ranked 14th in the 2023 World Happiness Report, reflecting significant room for improvement relative to peer nations.
- (3) Low subjective well-being is associated with reduced economic productivity, higher healthcare costs, increased substance abuse, and reduced civic participation.
- (4) Evidence-based policies in the areas of social protection, healthcare access, housing, education, and labor standards have demonstrably increased national happiness scores in other high-income democracies.
- (5) The Federal Government has a role and responsibility to incorporate well-being metrics into national planning, policymaking, and program evaluation.

(b) PURPOSES. The purposes of this Act are to —

- (1) establish a National Happiness Index and require its periodic measurement and public reporting;
- (2) require Federal agencies to conduct well-being impact assessments for major regulations and programs;
- (3) direct Federal agencies to take specific actions to improve the well-being of all Americans;
- (4) create accountability mechanisms to ensure that the Federal Government prioritizes the happiness of the American people.

## **SECTION 3. Requirements by Government Agencies**

(a) NATIONAL HAPPINESS INDEX. Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in consultation with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, shall establish a National Happiness Index by:

- (1) developing or adopting validated survey instruments for measuring subjective well-being at the national, state, and local levels;
- (2) conducting annual national surveys of subjective well-being using probability-based sampling methods;
- (3) publishing an annual National Happiness Report analyzing trends, disparities, and contributing factors; and
- (4) disaggregating happiness data by race, ethnicity, age, gender, geographic area, income level, and other relevant demographics.

- (b) WELL-BEING IMPACT ASSESSMENTS. Each Federal agency shall:
- (1) incorporate well-being impact assessments into its regulatory review process for all major rules, as defined under Executive Order 12866;
  - (2) submit well-being impact assessments to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) alongside economic analyses; and
  - (3) publish the results of well-being impact assessments on the agency's public website.
- (c) MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES EXPANSION. The Secretary of Health and Human Services shall —
- (1) expand funding for community mental health centers under Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act by not less than 30 percent over 5 fiscal years;
  - (2) enforce mental health parity requirements under the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 through increased audits and enforcement actions;
  - (3) establish a national telehealth mental health program to serve rural and underserved populations; and
  - (4) develop and disseminate evidence-based mental health promotion programs to schools, employers, and community organizations.
- (d) HOUSING. The Secretary of Housing and Urban Development shall —
- (1) increase funding for the Housing Choice Voucher Program by not less than 20 percent annually for 5 fiscal years;
  - (2) implement a national homelessness prevention program targeting households at imminent risk of eviction;
  - (3) incentivize the construction of affordable housing units in high-opportunity neighborhoods through grant programs and regulatory flexibility; and
  - (4) study and report on the relationship between housing stability and subjective well-being.
- (e) EDUCATION AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING. The Secretary of Education shall —
- (1) require that schools receiving Federal funding under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act implement evidence-based social-emotional learning programs;
  - (2) fund the training of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists at a ratio of not less than 1 per 250 students;
  - (3) establish a national clearinghouse of evidence-based well-being programs for schools; and
  - (4) incorporate student well-being indicators into the annual State report cards required under Federal law.

- (f) **LABOR AND WORKPLACE WELL-BEING.** The Secretary of Labor shall —
- (1) develop national guidelines for workplace well-being, including standards for job quality, flexibility, and mental health support;
  - (2) expand the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) authority to include psychosocial hazards in the workplace;
  - (3) require Federal contractors to provide a minimum of 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave; and
  - (4) study and report on the relationship between working conditions, wages, and employee well-being.

#### **SECTION 4. Requirements by Government Officials**

- (a) **EXECUTIVE BRANCH.** The President of the United States shall :
- (1) include in each annual Budget of the United States Government a well-being chapter analyzing the impact of the proposed budget on the National Happiness Index;
  - (2) direct the Council of Economic Advisers to incorporate well-being metrics into its annual Economic Report of the President; and
  - (3) appoint a Special Advisor on National Well-Being within the Executive Office of the President.
- (b) **CONGRESS.** Members of Congress shall :
- (1) require the Congressional Budget Office to conduct well-being impact analyses on major legislation, in addition to fiscal analyses;
  - (2) establish a Joint Select Committee on National Well-Being to oversee implementation of this Act and coordinate legislative action;
  - (3) hold annual oversight hearings on the National Happiness Report; and
  - (4) require Federal agencies to report annually on well-being indicators to the appropriate congressional committees.
- (c) **GOVERNORS AND STATE OFFICIALS.** Governors of the several States receiving Federal funds under this Act shall —
- (1) establish a State Office of Well-Being or designate an existing agency to coordinate state-level well-being policy;
  - (2) conduct biennial state-level well-being surveys and publish State Happiness Reports; and
  - (3) incorporate well-being indicators into state strategic plans and agency performance metrics.
- (d) **LOCAL OFFICIALS.** Mayors and local government officials are encouraged to —
- (1) develop local well-being strategies aligned with the National Happiness Index;

- (2) invest in community infrastructure including parks, libraries, community centers, and safe streets that promote social connection and physical activity; and
- (3) partner with nonprofit organizations, faith communities, and local businesses to reduce social isolation and expand community well-being programs.

## **SECTION 5. Requirements by Corporations**

- (a) **LARGE EMPLOYER REQUIREMENTS.** Each employer with 50 or more employees that receives Federal contracts or grants exceeding \$500,000 annually shall —
- (1) provide not less than 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave at not less than 67 percent wage replacement for all full-time employees;
  - (2) offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) providing access to at least 8 sessions of mental health counseling per employee per year at no cost to the employee;
  - (3) conduct annual employee well-being surveys using validated instruments and report aggregate results to the Department of Labor;
  - (4) implement a formal flexible work policy that enables employees to adjust start and end times and, where operationally feasible, work remotely; and
  - (5) provide not less than 10 days of paid sick leave per year for all full-time employees.
- (b) **PUBLICLY TRADED COMPANIES.** Each publicly traded company shall —
- (1) include in its annual report to shareholders a well-being disclosure reporting aggregate employee well-being scores, turnover rates, benefits provided, and equity metrics;
  - (2) designate a member of its Board of Directors or senior executive team to oversee employee well-being; and
  - (3) adopt a code of ethical business conduct that explicitly includes commitments to employee well-being, community investment, and environmental sustainability.
- (c) **INCENTIVES.** The Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of Labor, shall —
- (1) develop tax incentive programs for employers that achieve recognized certifications of excellence in employee well-being;
  - (2) create a grant program for small businesses with fewer than 50 employees to implement well-being programs; and
  - (3) publish an annual list of 'National Well-Being Employer Champions' recognizing companies demonstrating exceptional commitment to employee happiness.

## **SECTION 6. Requirements by Private Citizens**

- (a) **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION.** Congress encourages all residents of the United States to :
- (1) participate in national, state, and local well-being surveys to support evidence-based policymaking;

- (2) engage in community service, volunteerism, and civic participation, which research demonstrates substantially improve individual well-being;
  - (3) support neighbors, particularly elderly, disabled, and isolated individuals, through informal community networks and mutual aid organizations; and
  - (4) pursue evidence-based well-being practices including regular physical activity, social connection, mindfulness, and engagement with nature.
- (b) PUBLIC EDUCATION. The Secretary of Health and Human Services shall —
- (1) develop and disseminate a national well-being literacy campaign educating the public on evidence-based practices for improving individual and community happiness; and
  - (2) partner with public broadcasting, social media platforms, and civil society organizations to disseminate well-being information equitably.

## **SECTION 7. Penalty Clauses**

- (a) FEDERAL AGENCY NONCOMPLIANCE. A Federal agency that fails to comply with the well-being impact assessment requirements of Section 3(b) shall —
- (1) be subject to a formal compliance review by the Office of Management and Budget;
  - (2) have any non-compliant rules subject to return for revision; and
  - (3) have the noncompliance reported to the appropriate oversight committees of Congress.
- (b) FEDERAL CONTRACTOR NONCOMPLIANCE. A Federal contractor that fails to comply with the requirements of Section 5(a) shall —
- (1) be subject to suspension of contract payments pending compliance;
  - (2) be subject to debarment from future Federal contracting for repeated violations; and
  - (3) be assessed a civil monetary penalty of not more than \$10,000 per violation per day of noncompliance.
- (c) REPORTING VIOLATIONS. A publicly traded company that fails to comply with the disclosure requirements of Section 5(b) shall be subject to civil enforcement action by the Securities and Exchange Commission under existing authority.
- (d) FALSE REPORTING. Any person who knowingly submits false well-being data or reports to the Federal Government shall be subject to penalties under 18 U.S.C. Section 1001.

## **SECTION 8. Effective Dates and Implementation**

- (a) EFFECTIVE DATE. Except as otherwise provided in this section, this Act shall take effect on the date of enactment.
- (b) PHASED IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE.

- (1) Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment, the Secretary shall publish proposed regulations implementing Sections 3(a) and 3(b).
  - (2) Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment, the Secretary shall finalize regulations and publish the initial National Happiness Index methodology.
  - (3) Not later than 2 years after the date of enactment, Federal agencies shall have integrated well-being impact assessments into their regulatory review processes.
  - (4) The requirements of Section 5 applicable to Federal contractors shall take effect 1 year after the date of enactment.
  - (5) The requirements of Section 5 applicable to publicly traded companies shall take effect 2 years after the date of enactment, to allow time for the Securities and Exchange Commission to promulgate necessary regulations.
- (c) REPORTING. Not later than 3 years after the date of enactment, and annually thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on implementation of this Act, progress in improving the National Happiness Index, and recommendations for legislative action.

## **SECTION 9. Appropriations and Budgetary Notes**

- (a) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS. There are authorized to be appropriated —
- (1) to the Department of Health and Human Services, \$500,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2025 through 2029 to carry out Section 3(a) and Section 3(c);
  - (2) to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, \$2,000,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2025 through 2029 to carry out Section 3(d);
  - (3) to the Department of Education, \$750,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2025 through 2029 to carry out Section 3(e);
  - (4) to the Department of Labor, \$100,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2025 through 2029 to carry out Section 3(f); and
  - (5) such sums as may be necessary to carry out other provisions of this Act.
- (b) OFFSET. The Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall identify, within 90 days of enactment, existing Federal programs that may be streamlined, consolidated, or reduced to offset not less than 25 percent of the costs authorized in subsection (a).
- (c) BUDGETARY IMPACT STATEMENT. The Congressional Budget Office shall, not later than 6 months after enactment, prepare a comprehensive analysis of the economic benefits of improved national well-being, including projected reductions in healthcare costs, increased labor productivity, and reduced criminal justice expenditures attributable to implementation of this Act.

## ENDNOTES

1. Suomi — National Agency for Education policies: <https://www.oph.fi>; Kela social insurance: <https://www.kela.fi>
2. Danmark — Flexicurity model: <https://www.star.dk>; Danish Board of Health: <https://www.sst.dk>
3. Iceland — Equal Pay Standard: <https://www.jafnretti.is>; Directorate of Health: <https://www.landlaeknir.is>
4. Norge — NAV welfare administration: <https://www.nav.no>; Norwegian Institute of Public Health: <https://www.fhi.no>
5. Sverige — Social Insurance Agency: <https://www.forsakringskassan.se>; Public Health Agency: <https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se>
6. Nederland — SER Social and Economic Council: <https://www.ser.nl>; Buurtzorg model: <https://www.buurtzorg.com>
7. Australia — Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: <https://www.aihw.gov.au>
8. Schweiz — Federal Social Insurance Office: <https://www.bsv.admin.ch>; Federal Office of Public Health: <https://www.bag.admin.ch>
9. Canada — Employment and Social Development Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development.html>
10. England/UK — NHS mental health services: <https://www.nhs.uk>; Department for Work and Pensions: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions>
11. Deutschland — Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs: <https://www.bmas.de>
12. République française — Ministry of Solidarity and Health: <https://www.solidarites-sante.gouv.fr>
13. Nippon — Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare: <https://www.mhlw.go.jp>
14. Zhongguo — National Health Commission: <https://www.nhc.gov.cn>

## Section 6. The World Happiness Report Methodology

The World Happiness Report’s headline country ranking is built from three elements:

### A. The life-evaluation question (Cantril ladder).

Respondents are asked to imagine a ladder from 0 (worst possible life) to 10 (best possible life) and give their current place on that ladder. That single question is treated as a concise measure of an individual’s overall life evaluation. The report uses those individual responses aggregated at the national level. [Our World in Data](#)

### B. Primary data source: Gallup World Poll.

The life-evaluation answers come from Gallup World Poll surveys (nationally representative samples) conducted in most countries. For the 2025 Report the published country scores are averages of the three most recent years of Gallup life-evaluation data (2022–2024 for WHR 2025) to stabilize year-to-year noise and small-sample variation. [World Happiness Report+1](#)

### C. Explaining the score: six (mostly) objective inputs + residual.

For analytic purposes the report decomposes national average life evaluations into six contributors via regression analysis:

1. GDP per capita (log),
2. Social support (having someone to count on),
3. Healthy life expectancy,
4. Freedom to make life choices,
5. Generosity (self-reported giving/volunteering), and
6. Perceptions of corruption.

To assist interpretation the authors create a hypothetical baseline country called “**Dystopia**” (a constructed lowest-observed baseline) and report how far real countries are above that baseline; they also report a Dystopia + residual term capturing unexplained factors. The decomposition helps show *why* some countries score higher: often social support and trust matter as much as income. [World Happiness Report](#)

#### Other methodological choices worth noting

- **Three-year averaging.** Gives more robust country scores (reduces single-year sampling noise) — so the 2025 ranking reflects the 2022–2024 average life evaluation. [World Happiness Report](#)
- **National coverage & representativeness.** Gallup aims for nationally representative samples (stratified household / phone interviews where possible), but for some countries or years Gallup lacks surveys and the report uses earlier years or omits the country. The WHR appendices document, which years and samples were used for each country. [World Happiness Report](#)

#### Comparison of the World Happiness Report with US News “Best Countries” and other Reports.

**World Happiness Report (WHR / Gallup)** — *what it measures*: self-reported life evaluation, aggregated from representative national surveys;

*strengths*: international comparability, transparent decomposition into drivers (GDP, social support, etc.);

*weaknesses*: relies on self-reports and survey coverage, may miss subnational inequality or cultural response styles. [Our World in Data+1](#)

**US News ‘Best Countries’** — *what it measures*: a reputational index based on global online survey responses and expert assessments across many categories (quality of life, entrepreneurship, cultural influence, open for business, citizenship, etc.). It’s largely about **reputation and perceived strengths** across categories, not daily life satisfaction. Thus a

country might rank highly in US News for reputation but not be near the top on Gallup's life evaluations (and vice versa). The Best Countries methodology is heavily perception-based and uses different sampling and indicators (brand/strength attributes), so it is not directly comparable to the WHR's life-evaluation approach. [World Happiness Report+1](#)

**Not the same as reputation:** Rankings such as US News' "Best Countries" are about reputation and many attributes (culture, business climate, etc.), *not* a direct life satisfaction measure. So a country can score well on reputation but not necessarily top the life-evaluation rankings. [Kaggle](#)

## 2. Scholarly Criticisms of U.S. News Best Countries Rankings

### A. Academic and methodological criticisms

#### 1. Not scientifically grounded

Researchers argue the index lacks a theoretical framework:

What makes a "best" country?

Why are certain categories weighted heavily?

Why mix "adventure," "power," and "entrepreneurship"?

No peer-reviewed justification exists.

#### 2. Overreliance on non-representative survey respondents

Critics from *The Economist*, Georgetown's School of Foreign Service, and Oxford's Blavatnik School note:

- Survey participants are disproportionately **business leaders**, college graduates, and wealthy individuals.
- Their values differ significantly from the general population.

#### 3. Cultural value bias

Scholars argue the ranking reflects:

American business culture

Western capitalist values

English-speaking nations' worldviews

This systematically boosts:

Canada

U.S.

U.K.

Australia

Western Europe

...and depresses non-Western or lower-income countries.

#### 4. Country branding vs. actual conditions

Political scientists criticize the index for ranking "image," not performance, reinforcing global stereotypes.

## **B. Criticisms from statisticians and index designers**

Experts comparing global indexes (OECD, UNDP, Gallup) argue:

### **1. Perception surveys are too volatile**

A country caught in negative news coverage (e.g., protests, economic downturns) drops in rankings even if its indicators haven't changed.

### **2. Proprietary weighting prevents replication**

The results cannot be independently verified.

### **3. Mixed indicators invalidate comparisons**

For example:

- GDP per capita (objective) is ranked next to “fun” or “fashionable” (perception). This mixes incompatible variables.

## **C. Policy and ethical criticisms**

### **1. Misrepresents global well-being**

Countries with:

high suicide rates  
low happiness  
high inequality  
can still rank high because they “look good” internationally.

### **2. Encourages governments to invest in PR instead of real improvements**

Nations use the ranking for:

tourism ads  
foreign investment promotion  
soft-power campaigns

Not for social policy development.

**Ipsos Global Happiness / Happiness Index** — *what it measures*: Ipsos uses a different survey instrument and often asks people whether they “feel happy” or about specific wellbeing domains; samples vary (often online panels). Ipsos findings can be useful for cross-country snapshots but differ in question wording, sampling frame and coverage. That makes Ipsos results complementary but not interchangeable with WHR/Gallup. [Ipsos](#)

**OECD Better Life Index / national GNH frameworks** — OECD uses many objective indicators (education, environment, housing, work-life balance) and subjective indicators, and national GNH frameworks (Bhutan's GNH) use policy-oriented mixes of objective and

### **What we know (from the WHR) — typical sample size per country**

- The WHR FAQ states that “in most countries, approximately 1,000 people are contacted ... each year.” [World Happiness Report+2World Happiness Report+2](#)

- Because the 2025 Report uses a **three-year average** (2022–2024) to calculate the national life-evaluation score, that suggests a typical total sample of roughly **3,000 respondents per country** (if a survey was conducted in each of the three years). [World Happiness Report+1](#)
- The WHR Statistical Appendix (2025) contains tables that report, for each country, the total sample size aggregated over the three-year window — i.e. for 2022–2024. [World Happiness Report+1](#)
- The WHR reports that the global annual poll covers “more than 100,000 people in 140 countries and territories” annually. [World Happiness Report+1](#)

Thus, for many of the top 30 countries, we can reasonably assume ~3,000 respondents over 2022–2024, unless Gallup skipped a year.

- Because of this variation, a simple “% of population” number may mislead for small populations a “3,000 sample” may represent a modest fraction; for large populations it is negligible.

### Sample Size for the World Happiness Report

The Gallup World Poll, which is the primary data source for the World Happiness Report, surveys roughly 1,000 people per country per year.

Key Details:

- Typical sample size: ~1,000 respondents per country per year.
- Larger countries: In some cases, especially very large or highly diverse countries, Gallup may oversample, sometimes 1,500–2,000 respondents.
- Population coverage: The survey targets the civilian, non-institutionalized adult population (usually age 15+) across urban and rural areas.
- Global reach: Gallup surveys 140–160+ countries annually, covering more than 95–98% of the world’s adult population.

Implications:

- Even though the sample is small relative to national populations, weighting and stratification make the results statistically representative.
- For example, in the U.S. (population ~340 million), a sample of 1,000 represents ~0.0003% of the population, but the survey is carefully weighted to reflect demographics like age, gender, and region.

So the exact number varies slightly by country and year, but ~1,000 respondents per country is the standard reference number.

If you want, I can make a table showing estimated survey sample sizes for the top 30 countries along with the percentage of each country's population they represent.

- Gallup's World Poll typically surveys **about 1,000 individuals per country per year**. [Gallup.com+1](#)
- Some large countries may have larger samples (e.g. 2,000 or more), but 1,000 is the standard "typical" size. [OECD+2UNICEF+2](#)
- The annual World Poll covers 140–160+ countries, representing more than 95–98% of the world's adult population. [UNICEF+2World Happiness Report+2](#)

Thus, for the U.S., a reasonable assumption (in absence of a published exact sample size for 2022–2024) is roughly **1,000 respondents per year**.

### **U.S. population baseline**

- The estimated total population of the U.S. in 2024 is roughly **340,110,988**. [Wikipedia+1](#)
- (World Poll targets *adults*, but for a rough upper-bound estimate, using total population gives a conservative sense of fraction.)

### **Estimated percentage surveyed**

Assuming 1,000 respondents in a single year:

- $1,000 / 340,110,988 \approx \mathbf{0.000294\%}$  — i.e. roughly **0.0003%** of the U.S. population in that given year.

If Gallup sampled 1,000 per year for three years (2022–2024) — ~3,000 respondents total — then:

- $3,000 / 340,110,988 \approx \mathbf{0.00088\%}$  — ~**0.0009%** of the U.S. population over the three-year span.

Even if Gallup oversampled (say 2,000/year → 6,000 total), it's still under **0.002%** of the population.

### **Who is eligible / what population they aim to represent**

- The target population is **all civilian, non-institutionalized residents aged 15 and older** in the country. [Gallup.com+1](#)
- That means people in institutions (prisons, care homes), homeless populations, and (in many countries) nomadic / transient populations are **excluded**. [Gallup.com+1](#)
- The coverage area is meant to include the **entire country** — **urban and rural areas alike**, so that the sample reflects the full geographic and demographic distribution. [Gallup.com+1](#)

## How respondents are selected: sampling methodology & “random selection” criteria

Gallup uses a **probability-based sampling design**. The key elements:

**Sampling frame:** Depending on the country, either telephone-based sampling (landline and/or cellphone) or face-to-face household sampling is used. [Gallup.com+2media.gallup.com+2](#)

**Telephone surveys:** In countries with high phone coverage — e.g., much of North America, Western Europe, developed Asia — Gallup uses **Random-Digit Dialing (RDD)** or nationally representative phone lists to reach households. [media.gallup.com+1](#)

**Face-to-face (household) surveys:** In countries where phone coverage is insufficient, Gallup uses a multi-stage, cluster-sample design:

1. Divide the country into "Primary Sampling Units" (PSUs), stratified by population size and geography. [UNICEF+2IHSN Data Catalog+2](#)
2. Randomly select PSUs with probability proportional to size (or by simple random sampling if no detailed population data), to end up with ~100–125 PSUs (clusters). [UNICEF+2Gallup.com+2](#)
3. Within each cluster, survey households selected via "random-route" sampling: starting from a randomly chosen address, then visiting households according to a fixed route/protocol until the needed number is reached. [Scribd+2media.gallup.com+2](#)
4. Within each household, randomly select one eligible adult (age 15+) to interview. That randomization uses either the “latest birthday” method (for phone surveys) or a “Kish grid” method (for face-to-face) to avoid bias. [media.gallup.com+2Gallup.com+2](#)

**Attempt / call-back procedure:** Interviewers make multiple attempts to reach or revisit households if the first contact fails; with some substitution rules if households are unreachable, but always within the sampling design. [Scribd+2media.gallup.com+2](#)

**Sample size target:** For most countries, a “typical” survey includes **at least 1,000 individuals**. In larger countries or special circumstances, Gallup may **oversample** (e.g., 2,000+), or oversample in major cities or other sub-regions. [Gallup.com+2GHDx+2](#)

After data collection, Gallup **weights** the sample to correct for unequal probabilities of selection (e.g. households vs. individuals), non-response, and to ensure the final sample matches national demographics (age, sex, region, sometimes other variables) for representativeness. [Gallup.com+2SAGE Edge+2](#)

### Additional Notes / Exceptions & Limitations

- Some areas may be excluded: for example, “areas where the safety of interviewing staff is threatened,” very sparsely populated regions, or remote islands/areas accessible only by foot/boat — when such coverage is not feasible. [Gallup.com+1](#)

- Populations living in **group quarters**, the **homeless**, or **nomadic** populations are generally not included in the sampling frame — meaning their perspectives are omitted. [Gallup.com+1](#)
- In some countries (especially those requiring cultural sensitivity), final respondent selection may respect **gender matching** (interviewer/respondent gender) which leads to use of **probability sampling with quotas** rather than pure random selection. [SAGE Edge+1](#)
- Because of weighting and modeling, a relatively small sample (e.g. ~1,000 individuals) can — in theory — approximate the national population. But that assumes the sampling frame is accurate and that respondents are not systematically different from non-respondents. Gallup notes the margin of error includes effects of weighting. [Gallup.com+1](#)