INTERNATIONAL

# Life's Nice In The Nordic Ice: Finland, Neighbors Top U.N. Happiness Index

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COLIN DWYER

Sure, Norway may have dominated the Winter Games last month in Pyeongchang, handily sweeping the Olympic medal count — but the country has just been knocked from its perch atop another international ranking: the World Happiness Report. The country's Nordic neighbor, Finland, has unseated the Norwegians with a smile.

As of this writing, the Finns are the happiest people in the world.

At least, that's according to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Solutions Network — which on Wednesday released its annual rankings of 156 countries, using a statistical model based on a gamut of considerations ranging from their citizens' healthy life expectancy and income to their governments' levels of social support and government corruption. This model showed Finland leaping from its fifth-place finish in last year's report to first.

**The 10 happiest countries**

Finland

Norway

Denmark

Iceland

Switzerland

Netherlands

Canada

New Zealand

Sweden

Australia

**The 10 unhappiest countries**

Malawi

Haiti

Liberia

Syria

Rwanda

Yemen

Tanzania

South Sudan

Central African Republic

Burundi

in order from most to least Happy…

A fan waves the Finnish flag during the Nordic World Ski Championships last year. Finland is No. 1 on the annual World Happiness Report, released Wednesday.

Don't cry for Norway, though. The Olympic powerhouse fell no further than second.

In fact, this list's leaders may have shuffled a bit — but, as the report explains, "the top ten positions are held by the same countries as in the last two years." And that means a very Nordic leaderboard: Of those 10, only Switzerland (5), Canada (7), New Zealand (8) and Australia (10) hail from somewhere other than Europe's northern reaches.

Readers will need to skim a little lower to find the U.S., which dropped four spots from last year's list to No. 18, just above the U.K. and the United Arab Emirates. In fact, the explanation for the American slide gets an entire chapter in the report.

"The U.S. is in the midst of a complex and worsening public-health crisis, involving epidemics of obesity, opioid addiction, and major depressive disorder that are all remarkable by global standards," writes the chapter's author, Jeffrey Sachs, director of Columbia University's Center for Sustainable Development.

Sachs notes that these three epidemics, which are "likely mutually reinforcing," are exacerbated by high levels of income inequality and a "woefully inadequate" health care system. Other factors, according to Sachs, include corporate deregulation and increasing screen time on new technologies.

"The main issue for the U.S. is not the lack of means to address the crises of public health and declining well-being," he says.

"Rather, perhaps the major practical barrier is corporate lobbying that keeps dangerous corporate practices in place and imposes untold burdens on the poor and vulnerable parts of the U.S. population, coupled with the failure of the American political system to address and understand America's growing social crisis."

One central focus of this year's report — besides, you know, happiness in general — was the happiness of the 156 countries' migrant communities. In 2015, the study notes, there were 244 million people in the world living outside the country of their birth, including about 24 million refugees.

"The most striking finding of the report is the remarkable consistency between the happiness of immigrants and the locally born," another of the report's authors, John Helliwell of the University of British Columbia, told The Associated Press. "Those who move to happier countries gain, while those who move to less happy countries lose."

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/03/14/593632841/lifes-nice-in-the-nordic-ice-finland-neighbors-top-u-n-happiness-index>

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1. How does the World Happiness Report (WHR) measure happiness?
2. How do you think those measures contribute to happiness?
3. Explain whether or not you think they sufficient.
4. What is causing the United States to fall in the 2018 rankings?
5. Which of the WHR measures do you think are being impacted by these issues?