

HOW HAPPY IS THE PLANET?

The Happy Planet Index measures what matters: **sustainable wellbeing for all**. It tells us how well nations are doing at achieving long, happy, sustainable lives.

What is the Happy Planet Index?

The crises we face: persistent inequalities, accelerating climate breakdown, and rapid biodiversity loss are interconnected and stem from the same core problem: our economies are structured, governed, and measured to promote short-term economic growth over long-term collective wellbeing.

Growth isn't working. Our current economic system is driven by a 'growth at all costs' mentality, as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). There is an entrenched belief that GDP growth is synonymous with increasing wellbeing and prosperity and is universally beneficial.

In reality, GDP growth on its own does not mean a better life for everyone, particularly in countries that are already wealthy. It doesn't take into account inequality, the things that really matter to people like social relations,

health, or how they spend their free time, and crucially, the planetary limits we are up against.

The Happy Planet Index is a measure of sustainable wellbeing, ranking countries by how efficiently they deliver long, happy lives using our limited environmental resources. It was developed in 2006 to challenge the idea that countries should focus on continuous economic growth, as measured by GDP and aims to help guide a shift in how national "progress" is understood - in as simple a way as possible, without being simplistic. The Happy Planet Index helps to answer the question: *"Is it possible to live good lives without costing the Earth?"*

Watch the TED Talk on the [Happy Planet Index](#).

To learn more, visit www.happyplanetindex.org

How is the HPI calculated?

The Happy Planet Index combines three elements to show how efficiently residents of different countries are using environmental resources to lead long, happy lives.

IT'S A COUNTRY'S

WELLBEING

MULTIPLIED BY THEIR

LIFE EXPECTANCY

AND DIVIDED BY THEIR

ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

Wellbeing

How residents of each country rate the quality of their lives overall, on a scale from zero to ten, based on data collected as part of the [Gallup World Poll](#).

Life expectancy

The number of years that an average person is expected to live in each country, according to the [United Nations](#) Development Programme (UNDP).

Ecological footprint

The average impact that each resident of a country places on the environment, based on data prepared by the [Global Footprint Network](#). Ecological Footprint is expressed using a standardised unit: global hectares (gha) per person.

For a more detailed breakdown of how we calculate the HPI, [take a look at our Methodology Paper](#)

How does the world measure up?

TOP 10 COUNTRIES

RANK	COUNTRY	LIFE EXPECTANCY	WELL BEING	ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT	HPI SCORE
1	COSTA RICA	○ 80.4 years	○ 7.00/10	● 2.65 gha/p	62.1
2	VANUATU	● 70.5 years	○ 6.96/10	● 1.62 gha/p	60.4
3	COLOMBIA	○ 77.3 years	○ 6.35/10	● 1.90 gha/p	60.2
4	SWITZERLAND	○ 83.8 years	○ 7.69/10	● 4.14 gha/p	60.1
5	ECUADOR	○ 77 years	● 5.81/10	○ 1.51 gha/p	58.8
6	PANAMA	○ 78.5 years	○ 6.09/10	● 2.1 gha/p	57.9
7	JAMAICA	● 74.5 years	○ 6.31/10	● 1.84 gha/p	57.9
8	GUATEMALA	● 74.3 years	○ 6.26/10	● 1.77 gha/p	57.9
9	HONDURAS	○ 75.3 years	● 5.93/10	● 1.58 gha/p	57.7
10	URUGUAY	○ 77.9 years	○ 6.6/10	● 2.62 gha/p	57.5

BOTTOM 10 COUNTRIES

RANK	COUNTRY	LIFE EXPECTANCY	WELL BEING	ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT	HPI SCORE
143	LUXEMBOURG	● 82.3 years	● 7.4/10	○ 12.59 gha/p	31.7
144	TRINIDAD & TOBAGO	● 73.5 years	● 6.19/10	○ 8.24 gha/p	31.6
145	CHAD	○ 54.2 years	○ 4.25/10	● 1.67 gha/p	30.4
146	AFGHANISTAN	○ 64.8 years	○ 2.38/10	○ 0.73 gha/p	29.4
147	SIERRA LEONE	○ 54.7 years	○ 3.45/10	○ 0.97 gha/p	29.0
148	ZIMBABWE	○ 61.5 years	○ 2.69/10	○ 0.98 gha/p	28.6
149	LESOTHO	○ 54.3 years	○ 3.51/10	○ 1.45 gha/p	27.3
150	CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	○ 53.3 years	○ 3.08/10	○ 1.21 gha/p	25.2
151	MONGOLIA	● 69.9 years	● 5.56/10	○ 10.08 gha/p	24.5
152	QATAR	● 80.2 years	● 6.37/10	○ 15.04 gha/p	24.3

We use a traffic light system – red, amber, and green – to give a visual representation of how each country scores on average life expectancy, average experienced wellbeing (as measured by the [Gallup World Poll's](#) 'Ladder of Life' measure), Ecological Footprint, and for the overall HPI scores.

Thresholds for components of the HPI

LIFE EXPECTANCY	WELLBEING (Ladder of life)	ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT
Less than 65 years	Less than 5/10	Below or at per capita biocapacity (1.56 gha for 2019)
65 - 75 years	5/10 - 6/10	Between per capita biocapacity and 2 times that value (1.56-3.12 gha for 2019)
75 years or more	6/10 or more	More than 2 times per capita biocapacity (3.12 gha or more for 2019)



Rethinking economic “efficiency”

What are we aiming to efficiently deliver?

HPI measures the performance of societies in achieving the ultimate goal of delivering long, happy lives.

The Happy Planet Index does not consider societies that have a per capita ecological footprint that is within the Earth’s limits but which have very low levels of wellbeing or life expectancy to be efficient. At the same time however, it does not consider societies that deliver “good lives” which use more resources than the earth can support, to be truly successful. In fact, we can no longer afford to.

On a scale of 0 to 100, a reasonable target HPI score is **58.1** - which was set based on achieving a good score on all three components of the HPI.

In 2019, the highest HPI score was **62.1** while the global average was **43.1**.

While some come close, no country delivers high levels of happy life years with a low ecological footprint and no country does well on all three indicators.

Less than a third of countries consume within environmental limits. Mongolia, Luxembourg, and Qatar are the worst environmental offenders, with Canada, USA, Trinidad and Tobago, Hong Kong, and the UAE also in the list of the 10 worst environmental offenders.

	COSTA RICA	USA	INDIA	ZIMBABWE	EUROPE
HPI Rank	1 <small>/152</small>	122 <small>/152</small>	128 <small>/152</small>	148 <small>/152</small>	NA
HPI Score	62.1	37.4	36.4	28.6	52.1
Life expectancy	80.3 <small>yrs</small>	78.9 <small>yrs</small>	69.7 <small>yrs</small>	61.5 <small>yrs</small>	NA
Wellbeing	7 <small>/10</small>	6.94 <small>/10</small>	3.25 <small>/10</small>	2.69 <small>/10</small>	NA
Eco footprint	2.65 <small>gha/p</small>	8.21 <small>gha/p</small>	1.22 <small>gha/p</small>	0.98 <small>gha/p</small>	NA

Wealthy countries

Most often today, long, happy lives come at the expense of our environment. Wealthy, western nations with high-incomes tend to score highly on life expectancy and wellbeing, but do not score highly on the Happy Planet Index because of the environmental costs of how their economies run.

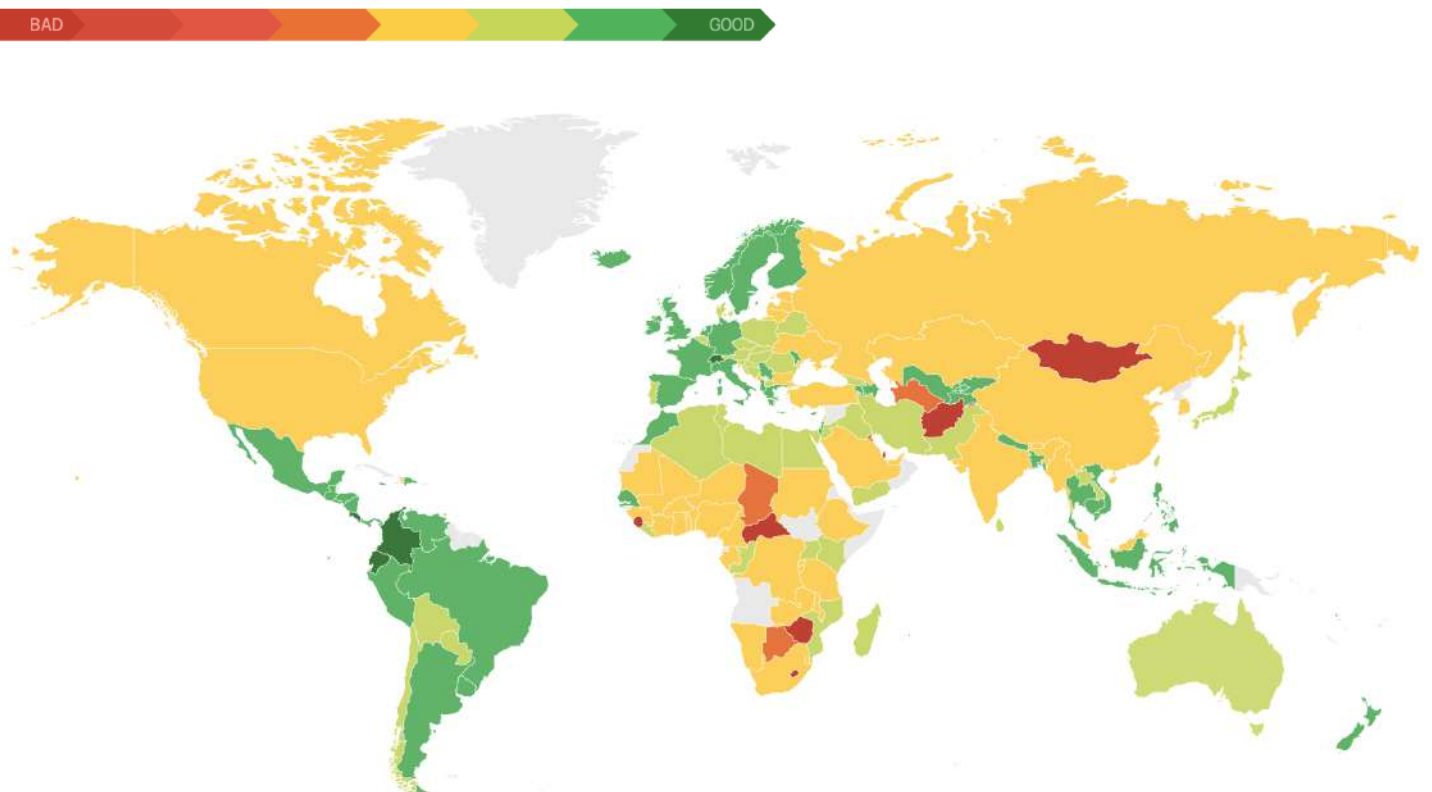
But the success of Latin American countries demonstrates that it is possible to build an economy that delivers relatively high wellbeing and long life expectancy, without having a large ecological footprint.

For example, the HPI's top ranking country, Costa Rica, has a per capita ecological footprint that

is **just one third of the US's**, while it's wellbeing and life expectancy scores are marginally higher than in the US.

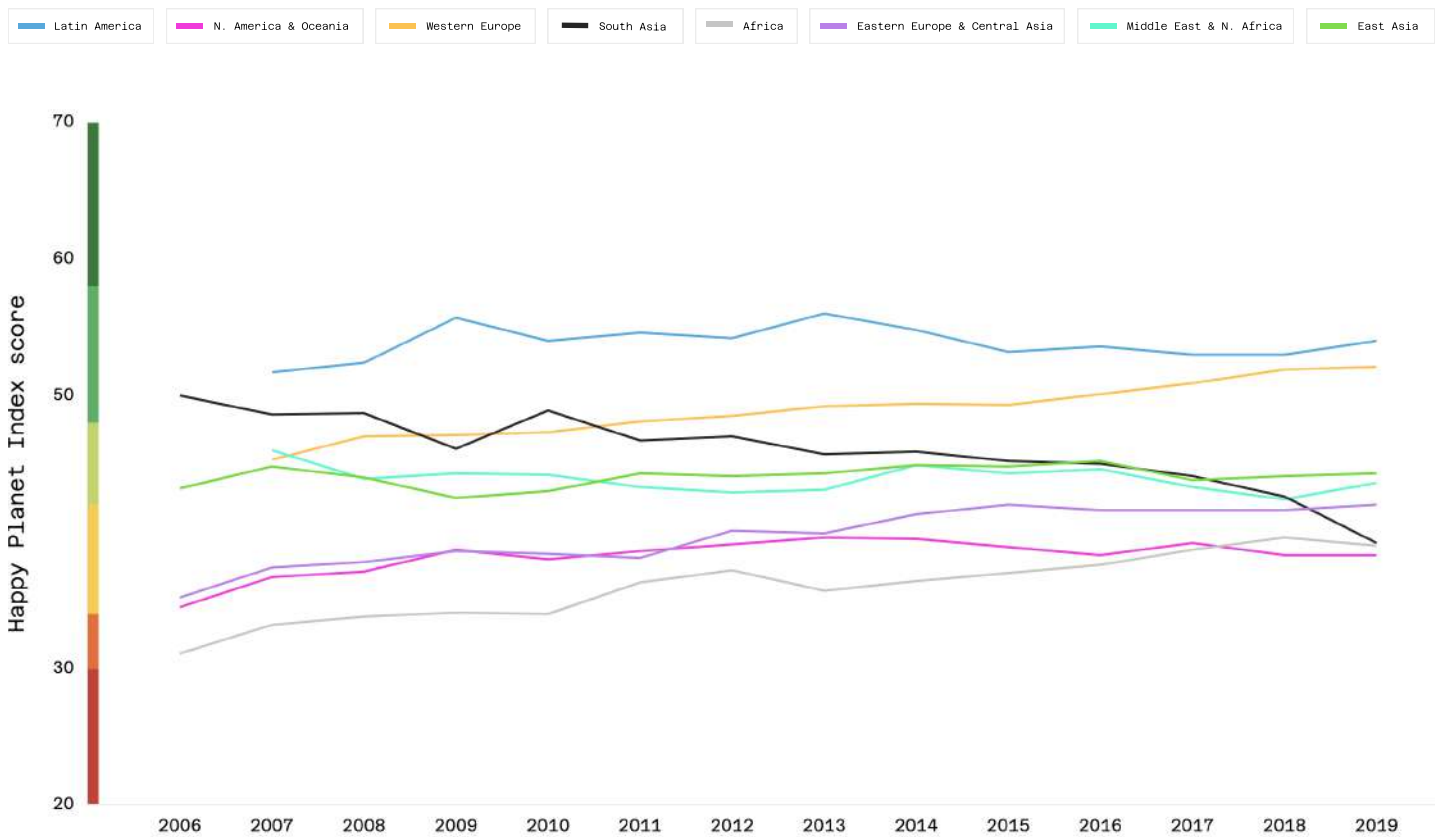
However, all countries can do better in more efficiently transforming the 'inputs' of natural resources into the ultimate 'ends' of long, happy lives - thus delivering truly "sustainable wellbeing".

[Read how societies are doing at delivering long, happy lives using environmental resources - and what needs to change to do better.](#)



The data over time

Some world regions have seen improvements in their overall Happy Planet Index scores, including Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Africa. However, these gains have been offset by declines in South Asia and the Middle East.



1. SOUTH ASIA

South Asia has seen HPI scores drop substantially, with some notable changes in wellbeing in certain countries. **India (#128)** in particular has seen its HPI score steadily decline since 2006, due mostly to declining wellbeing, along with a rising ecological footprint.

2. SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Sub-Saharan Africa's HPI scores are rising. This is mainly due to rapid increases in life expectancy without a substantial increase in ecological footprints alongside it. **Zimbabwe (#148)** is the top riser, with a sharp increase in life expectancy, but also a large drop in wellbeing since 2015.

3. LATIN AMERICA

Latin America still dominates the Happy Planet Index, with 8 of the top 10 highest ranking countries. However, there has been a decline in wellbeing in several countries in the region within the last 5-10 years, including in **Brazil (#21)**.

4. WESTERN EUROPE

Western Europe in general has seen big improvements - and scored on average only just behind Latin America in 2019 on the HPI. This is mainly due to falling ecological footprints - like in **Switzerland (#4)** and in the **UK (#14)**.

What was the impact of the pandemic in 2020?

Surprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a slight increase in the overall Happy Planet Index (3 points). Life expectancy fell worldwide, but so did ecological footprint. Meanwhile, the impact of the pandemic on subjective wellbeing worldwide was mixed, with [Gallup World Poll](#) data suggesting that many countries did not experience a massive decline in wellbeing at time of data collection (between July and December 2020), and indeed wellbeing even increased in some countries.

This raises the question of what truly matters for wellbeing - and suggests that it is possible to sustain wellbeing with a lower impact on the Earth.

Moving forward, we need to determine how we do this in a more positive and equitable way - without the impetus of a global Pandemic.



What can be done?

Countries that rank highly on the Happy Planet Index show us that it is possible to live long, happy lives with a much smaller ecological footprint than found in the highest-consuming nations. However:

- **No country** achieves good results in all three indicators
- **Only ¼ of nations** (representing 38% of the global population) consume within environmental limits.

While sustainable wellbeing has not been achieved, some progress towards sustainable wellbeing has been made since 2008. But to mitigate our impact on the planet, this change needs to be much more rapid.

To do that, we need a shift in focus in economic decision making to ensure we increase our wellbeing in a way which is environmentally sustainable and socially just.

The good news is that we designed the current economic system – so we can also design it.

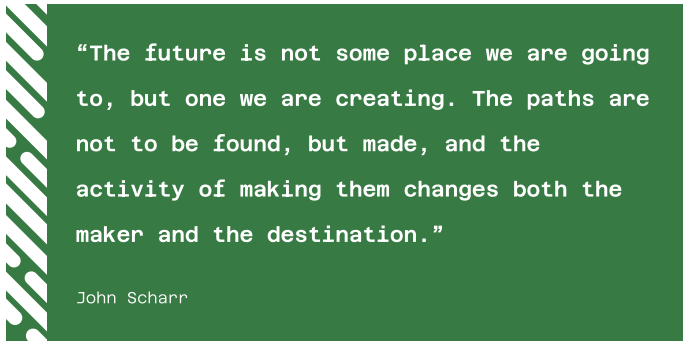
Moving towards a Wellbeing Economy

A 'Wellbeing Economy' is a broad term designed to be inclusive of the diverse movement of ideas and

actions striving towards a shared vision: an economy that delivers shared wellbeing for people and planet.

In a Wellbeing Economy, business, politics, and economic activity would exist solely to deliver collective wellbeing. GDP growth would not be the top priority. Instead, we only pursue growth in those areas of the economy that contribute to collective wellbeing and shrink those areas of the economy that damage it.

This shift in the purpose and functioning of the economy requires system change. The recovery period following the COVID-19 pandemic is a window of opportunity to truly transform our economic system. There is not one blueprint for a Wellbeing Economy; the shape, institutions, and activities that get us there will look different, both across countries and between different communities within countries. We must all push further and faster towards creating shared wellbeing for people and planet. With the crises we collectively face, no country can afford to be complacent.



“The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination.”

John Scharr

Collaborators



The Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll) is the leading global coalition of organisations, alliances, movements, and individuals working together to transform key economies and ensure that decision-makers prioritise the long-term wellbeing of people and planet.

Website: www.weall.org

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Nic Marks is the original creator of the Happy Planet Index and a recognised expert in the field of wellbeing research and undertakes innovative research in the use of well-being indicators. His 2010 [TED talk on](#) the HPI has been watched over 2.5 million times.

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Saamah Abdallah is a leading expert in the application of wellbeing science to policy and the promotion of alternative indicators of progress (e.g. the Happy Planet Index). He is a Researcher on Wellbeing and Measuring Progress and a PhD student in Communications Science.

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Collaborators

James Ryder Richardson & Andrew Ian Halloway are a creative team that specialises in crafting unique digital experiences, primarily for the third sector. With a combination of design and development skills, they are well suited to help charities and NGOs bring their digital ideas to life.

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Website: <https://theaimfoundation.org.uk/>

The New Economics Foundation (NEF), a WEAll member, launched the Happy Planet Index in 2006 and housed it until 2019. We would like to acknowledge all of the support over the years of the New Economics Foundation.

Website: <https://neweconomics.org>
Twitter: [@NEF](#)



What can I do?

We believe that being happy is good for everyone and that promoting human happiness does not need to be at odds with creating a sustainable future. There is a role for everyone in working towards a happier planet.

Consider what really makes life worth living

"A good way of defining waste is the use of planetary resources that don't improve quality of life. Instead of environmental effectiveness being based on the restrictive view that we should simply 'use less', we should instead 'use well'. This offers the intersection of environmentalism and human aspiration.

To what extent do we – as individuals and as a culture – prioritise what really makes life worth living?

How many resources are we wasting – both as individuals and as a culture – on things that don't even improve our lives? If we made a rule of targeting resources only at things that delivered quality of life, we would end up automatically saving the planet."

– Colin Beavan, [No Impact Man](#), February 2009

How sustainably happy are you?

We've built a personal Happy Planet Index test to help you reflect on how you can create your own "good life that doesn't cost the earth".

It only takes 5 minutes to complete the test.

[Take the test to find out how sustainably happy you are.](#)



Take action with the WEAll network

WEAll Citizens

Join our global community of changemakers to share ideas and collaborate on how to make wellbeing a priority in decision making.

[Explore WEAll's Citizen Platform](#)

WEAll Members

Join a global network of almost 300, organisations, governments, academics, communities, and businesses working together to transform the economic system.

[Become a WEAll Member](#)

WEAll Hubs

From California to East Africa to New Zealand, WEAll's place-based hubs facilitate collaboration and activity towards making wellbeing a priority in decision making in their own locality.

[Learn about WEAll Hubs](#)



Good lives don't need to cost the earth.