



World Happiness Report 2026: Complex global picture of social media and happiness

Heavy social media use appears to be contributing to the drop in wellbeing among young people in English-speaking countries and Western Europe, especially among girls, according to findings published today (19 March) in *World Happiness Report 2026*.

Life evaluations among under 25s in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have dropped dramatically (by almost one point on a 0-10 scale) over the past decade, while the average for the young in the rest of the world has increased, according to Gallup World Poll data.

One international survey¹ of 15-year-olds in nearly 50 countries suggests heavy social media use is associated, on average, with a significant drop in wellbeing among the students surveyed, though any effect is highly dependent on the type of social media platform being used, how it is used, as well as demographic factors such as gender and socio-economic status.

Other factors, such as social connections and a sense of belonging, are associated with much bigger changes in how respondents feel about their lives.

Young people who use social media for less than one hour per day report the highest levels of wellbeing — higher than those who do not use social media at all. But adolescents are, by one estimate,¹ spending an average of 2.5 hours a day on social media.

The findings are published today ahead of the UN's International Day of Happiness. The rankings are powered by Gallup World Poll data and other sources, and are analyzed by an international team of leading experts in wellbeing science.

Contributors include the psychologist Jonathan Haidt, author of *The Anxious Generation*, generational differences expert Jean Twenge, and *Nudge* co-author Cass Sunstein.

The evidence describes a complex global picture at a time when many countries² are seeking to implement greater legislative protections for under-16s online.

Further key findings published in *World Happiness Report 2026* include:

- The largest drops in wellbeing among young people are observed in English-speaking countries, in particular in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

- An association between social media and reduced wellbeing is found in multiple sources including surveys, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, and natural experiments ...
- ... but there is considerable variation in the interpretation of evidence by professional science organizations, including differences in citation accuracy, contextual detail, acknowledgement of limitations and conclusion strength.
- Platforms driven by algorithmically curated content tend to demonstrate a negative association with wellbeing, yet those designed to facilitate social connections show a clear positive association with happiness.
- Social media creates a standard collective action problem — if social media channels exist, people lose out by not joining, but most people agree they would be better off if they did not exist.

This 14th edition of the World Happiness Report also contains a ranking of the world's happiest countries. Finland leads the world in happiness for a record ninth year in a row, with Finns reporting an average score of 7.764 (out of 10) when asked to evaluate their lives.

Costa Rica (4th) climbs to its best-ever position, continuing a multi-year rise from a low of 23rd in 2023, while former table-topper Switzerland (10th) re-enters the top 10 after a one-year absence.

Continued upward trends for countries such as Kosovo (16th), Slovenia (18th) and Czechia (20th) underline the convergence of happiness levels between Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe.

The 2026 rankings mark the first time since the World Happiness Report was first published in 2012 that none of the English-speaking countries, New Zealand (11th), Ireland (13th), Australia (15th), United States (23rd), Canada (25th) and the UK (29th) appear in the top 10, with only half in the top 20. Nations in or near zones of major conflict remain at the foot of the rankings.

Rankings are based on a three-year average of each population's average assessment of their quality of life. Experts then seek to account for the variations across countries and over time using factors such as GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, having someone to count on, a sense of freedom, generosity and perceptions of corruption.

These factors help to explain the differences across nations, while the rankings themselves are based solely on the answers people give when asked to rate their own lives.

John F. Helliwell, Emeritus Professor of Economics at the University of British Columbia and a founding editor of the World Happiness Report, said:

“When it comes to happiness, building what is good in life is more important than finding and fixing what is bad. Both need doing, now more than ever.”

Jon Clifton, CEO of Gallup, said:

“Every year, Gallup asks people across more than 140 countries to evaluate their lives. Most of the world’s young people are happier today than they were 20 years ago, and that’s a trend that deserves attention.”

Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, Director of Oxford’s Wellbeing Research Centre, Professor of Economics at the University of Oxford, and an editor of the World Happiness Report, said:

“The global evidence makes clear that the links between social media use and our wellbeing heavily depend on what platforms we’re using, who’s using them and how, as well as for how long. Heavy usage is associated with much lower wellbeing, but those deliberately off social media also appear to be missing out on some positive effects.

“Beyond the complexity, it is clear that we should look as much as possible to put the ‘social’ back into social media.”

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

The editorial board consists of John F. Helliwell (University of British Columbia), Richard Layard (London School of Economics and Political Science), Jeffrey D. Sachs (Columbia University), Jan-Emmanuel De Neve (University of Oxford), Lara B. Akinin (Simon Fraser University) and Shun Wang (Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University).

Read the report in full at worldhappiness.report, and explore the data at data.worldhappiness.report.

Ends

Notes to Editors

1. OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 2022. This survey does not include life satisfaction data for the United States, Canada, Australia or New Zealand.
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media_age_verification_laws_by_country

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About the World Happiness Report

The World Happiness Report (WHR) is a partnership of Gallup, the Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the WHR’s Editorial Board. The

report is published by the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford and produced under the editorial control of the WHR Editorial Board.

Powered by data from the Gallup World Poll, the World Happiness Report is the world's foremost publication on global happiness: an annual publication which provides valuable, interdisciplinary insights into the wellbeing and happiness of people across the globe.

In addition to the rankings of the world's happiest countries, the report includes original research and curated submissions from experts at the forefront of wellbeing science.

For more information, visit worldhappiness.report.

About Gallup

[Gallup](#) delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 85 years of experience and a global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

About the Wellbeing Research Centre

The [Wellbeing Research Centre](#) at the University of Oxford is an interdisciplinary research group focused on the empirical study of wellbeing.

The Centre is a stimulating home for scholars engaged in world-class research on wellbeing across the life course and in the context of schools, businesses and public policy. We are proud to be the publishing hub of the world's foremost annual publication on wellbeing, the World Happiness Report, and a founding member and academic partner of the World Wellbeing Movement.

Through our work, we seek to advance our collective understanding of human wellbeing in order to help communities around the world improve quality of life for both current and future generations.

Findings made by the Centre's research group have been published in leading international journals including *Nature*, *Science*, *PNAS*, *Management Science*, *The BMJ*, and *Scientific Reports*, and highlighted by major media outlets such as BBC News, The Guardian and The New York Times.

For more information visit wellbeing.hmc.ox.ac.uk.

About the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network

Under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) mobilizes the world's largest knowledge network to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change through education, research, policy advice, and global collaboration. Via its unique global network of over 2,100 academic institutions, coordinated by 59 national and regional networks worldwide, the SDSN pioneers scientifically rigorous, scalable, interdisciplinary, and systemic approaches for an inclusive, sustainable, and just future. For more information, visit www.unsdsn.org.

