

Costa Rica tops 2016 Happy Planet Index

Tiny nation beats Western economies on sustainable wellbeing; UK trails in 34th place

- Costa Rica outperforms the USA on each of life expectancy, wellbeing and environmental sustainability
- UK comes 34th out of 140, ahead of France and Germany but behind Norway (12th) and Spain (15th)
- Luxembourg, Australia and Hong Kong are the worst environmental offenders; fewer than a third of countries consume within environmental limits

Costa Rica has topped the 2016 Happy Planet Index.

The Index, compiled by independent think tank the New Economics Foundation (NEF), is the leading global measure of sustainable wellbeing.

It ranks 140 nations on how efficiently and fairly they deliver long, happy lives for their residents given their per capita environmental resource use.

No G8 economy appears in the top 10. The Index instead highlights success stories in Latin America and Asia Pacific, where residents enjoy relatively high, and equally distributed, life expectancy and wellbeing despite much smaller ecological footprints than other, more advanced economies.

This is the fourth edition of the index – the first was launched in 2006.

Costa Rica: a more efficient economy than the USA

Costa Rica has topped the Happy Planet Index for a third time, delivering high life expectancy and high life satisfaction for its citizens at relatively low environmental cost.

Costa Rica's GDP per capita is less than half that of the USA. Despite this, Costa Ricans have higher wellbeing, and on average live longer.

Costa Rica's per capita Ecological Footprint is just one third of the size of the USA's.

UK ranks 34th out of 140 countries

The UK is the highest placed G8 economy on the Happy Planet Index.

It performs relatively strongly on wellbeing and life expectancy: both in their absolute levels and in how equally they are distributed across the population. But like other advanced economies, it is denied a place in the top 20 on its overall HPI score due to its high and unsustainable ecological footprint – 4.9 global hectares per capita.

If all countries matched the UK's resource use, we would need almost 3 planets to maintain our consumption levels.

Environmental progress – but more must be done

A number of the countries in the HPI top ten – like Costa Rica – come close to the goal of delivering high wellbeing and life expectancy within environmental limits.

But the consumption levels of fewer than a third of ranked nations are compatible with environmental limits. The worst offender – Luxembourg – consumes the equivalent resources of more than nine planets.

Saamah Abdallah, Senior Wellbeing Researcher at the New Economics Foundation, said:

“The Happy Planet Index provides a compass to guide nations towards genuine progress, and shows that it is possible to live good lives without costing the Earth. We can learn much from smaller, often overlooked economies – making huge strides for their populations with limited resources.”

“Too often governments prioritise accelerated economic growth above all other concerns. They lose sight of what truly matters – long, happy, sustainable lives for people around the world.”

Nic Marks, creator of the Happy Planet Index, said:

“The Happy Planet Index reveals a fundamental tension which societies across the world are facing – that good lives today should not come at the cost of good lives in the future.”

“Over the last ten years, the Happy Planet Index has highlighted which countries are most successful at guaranteeing positive outcomes for their people and the planet. The challenge now is how we can turn this vision into meaningful action.”

Top 10 countries by HPI score

1. Costa Rica
2. Mexico
3. Colombia
4. Vanuatu
5. Vietnam
6. Panama
7. Nicaragua
8. Bangladesh
9. Thailand
10. Ecuador

Bottom 10 countries by HPI score

130. Trinidad and Tobago
131. Burundi
132. Swaziland
133. Sierra Leone
134. Turkmenistan
135. Cote D'Ivoire
136. Mongolia
137. Benin
138. Togo
139. Luxembourg
140. Chad

Notes to editors

1. The New Economics Foundation (NEF) is the UK's leading think tank promoting social, economic and environmental justice. Our aim is to transform the economy so that it works for people and the planet.

2. The Happy Planet Index (HPI) is the leading global measure of sustainable wellbeing. It was first launched in 2006, with subsequent editions published in 2009 and 2012.

The HPI was created by Nic Marks, founder of NEF's Centre for Wellbeing. His

global TED talk on the HPI has had over 1.3m views since 2010.

http://www.ted.com/talks/nic_marks_the_happy_planet_index. Nic is now the CEO and Founder of Happiness Works.

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

- **Life expectancy:** The average number of years a person born today is expected to live in each country based on data collected by the [United Nations](#).
- **Wellbeing:** How satisfied the residents of each country say they feel with life overall, on a scale from zero to ten, based on data collected as part of the [Gallup World Poll](#).
- **Inequality of outcomes:** The inequalities between people within a country, in terms of how long they live, and how happy they feel, based on the distribution in each country's life expectancy and wellbeing data.
- **Ecological Footprint:** The average impact that each resident of a country places on the natural environment, based on data prepared by the [Global Footprint Network](#).

Full methodology paper on how the HPI is calculated is available here:

<http://www.neweconomics.org/hpimethodspaper>