

Canada falls to 15th in international ranking of happiness?

By Mark Pavilons

Canada has dropped to an all-time low on the happiness metre.

According to the World Happiness Report 2022, Canada ranks 15th in the world.

Finland leads the way on top for the fifth year in a row. Five Nordic countries are in the top 10.

Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Sweden and Norway all follow suit.

Israel occupies 9th spot, followed by New Zealand, Austria, Australia, Ireland and Germany.

Canada is ahead of the United States (16th) and United Kingdom (17th).

This marks a substantial fall for Canada, which was 5th in the first World Happiness Report, published in 2012.

The Nordic countries all boast high levels of personal and institutional trust. They have also had COVID-19 death rates only one-third as high as elsewhere in Western Europe during 2020 and 2021 ??7 per 100,000 in the Nordic countries compared to 80 in the rest of Western Europe.

The report noted that overall levels of life evaluations have been fairly stable during two years of COVID-19, matched by modest changes in the global rankings.

Trends over the past 15 years show slight growth in life evaluations for the typical country until 2011 and reductions since. The three countries with the greatest growth in average life evaluations over the past 10 years were Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania, with gains averaging 1.4 points on the 0 to 10 scale, or more than 20% of their levels in the 2008-2012 period.

Among the six variables used to explain these levels, there has been general growth in real GDP per capita and healthy life expectancy, generally declining perceptions of corruption and freedom, declining generosity (until 2020), and fairly constant overall levels of social support.

By far, the largest changes were in three types of benevolent actions, especially in 2021.

The report notes there was a substantial increase in help given to strangers but no substantial change in donations and volunteering. In 2021, all three types of activity were much higher than in 2017-2019, having an increase averaging about 25% of baseline activity.

Worry and sadness were both significantly higher than baseline in 2020, with about 3% more of the population feeling each of these emotions. This is equal to about 10% of people feeling these emotions pre-pandemic.

Negative affect as a whole was about 8% above its pre-pandemic value in 2020, falling almost completely back to baseline in 2021. Similarly, perceived stress was higher by 8% of its pre-pandemic frequency in 2020 but has also fallen back to baseline in 2021.

Main factors in the ranking are GDP per capita, life expectancy, social support, freedoms, generosity, perception of corruption, positive effect (daily enjoyment) and negative effect (worry and sadness).

The reports have been the product of cooperation among Canadian and U.S. universities and research institutes.