

Executive Summary

The Happy Planet Index (HPI) measures how well nations are doing at achieving sustainable wellbeing. In other words, how successful they are at supporting their inhabitants to live good lives now, while ensuring that others can do the same in the future. It is based on a simple idea: the ultimate outcome for societies should be sustainable wellbeing for all. And the ultimate input is environmental resources. If we want one single indicator to get an overall sense of how we are doing, that indicator should be a measure of how much wellbeing is achieved per unit of environmental resources, in effect a measure of socio-ecological efficiency.

The HPI operationalises wellbeing as adjusted happy life years – life expectancy combined with self-reported wellbeing. It then divides this by Ecological Footprint. Countries that perform well are those that achieve high levels of health and life satisfaction while maintaining relatively low ecological impact.

Latest results

The 2026 HPI presents data up to 2025 for 134 countries. As in previous editions, no country achieves sustainable wellbeing – that is, high life expectancy and high wellbeing within environmental limits. However, some countries come closer than others, showing that good

lives that don't cost the Earth are within reach.

- Costa Rica returns to the top of the HPI rankings. Average life expectancy in the small Central American country is higher than in the USA, self-reported wellbeing is the third highest in the world, whilst the Ecological Footprint remains moderate.
- Tajikistan comes a surprise third due to its extremely low Ecological Footprint paired with moderate wellbeing outcomes. However, the country's heavy dependence on remittances may not be a winning formula in the long-term.
- Spain comes fourth, and is the highest scoring high-income country. Despite having the lowest per capita Ecological Footprint in Western Europe, it has excellent health outcomes and a decent level of self-reported wellbeing.

The HPI again highlights that the relationship between environmental impact and wellbeing is non-linear and inefficient. Beyond a certain point, higher consumption yields little or no gain in wellbeing. Countries with similar Ecological Footprints can achieve markedly different outcomes, pointing to the importance of social, economic, and policy choices.

GDP is not the destination

The findings reinforce a central message: GDP does not measure what matters. Whilst it is true that many of the lowest income countries, for example in Sub-Saharan Africa, also have low HPI scores, the relationship between the two variables is weak and non-linear. Indeed, wealthy countries such as Singapore, Luxembourg and the USA also perform poorly on the HPI, largely due to their disproportionate environmental impacts.

Trends over time: fragile progress

Aside from a dip during the COVID-19 pandemic caused by sharp drops in wellbeing and life expectancy in some countries, the global HPI has generally increased over the past two decades, from 43.7 in 2007 to 48.5 in 2025. This reflects gradual improvements in life expectancy and, in some regions, reductions in ecological impact.

However, this progress is uneven between regions:

- Western Europe has shown steady improvement, largely through reductions in ecological footprint.
- The Eastern Europe and Central Asia region has also seen gains.
- South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa have stagnated or declined.
- Countries affected by conflict or political instability show the largest drops.

Overall, the pace of progress remains insufficient to meet the dual challenge of improving wellbeing while rapidly reducing environmental impact.

The role of gender on sustainable wellbeing

In this edition, we contrasted the HPI of men and women – both at the individual level, based on analyses of disaggregated data, and in terms of male and female leaders of nations. In both cases, we found an effect of gender on the HPI. At the individual level, women consistently achieve higher scores than men across the countries analysed, with differences of over 8 points in some countries. This is driven by higher life expectancy and significantly lower ecological footprints.

The differences in ecological impact are particularly notable in transport and diet, where men tend to engage more in high-footprint lifestyles. These findings highlight how social norms and lifestyles shape sustainability outcomes, and how, even within a single population, individuals can choose to live more sustainable lives.

Meanwhile, when countries have female leaders, they have higher HPI scores, even when controlling for income, governance, and other factors. This shows how leadership and policy can influence sustainable wellbeing, with women leaders more likely to prioritise care-oriented policies and support climate action.

In other words, sustainable wellbeing is not simply a function of wealth or geography – it is a product of choices and priorities.

Individual level-data

Data from over 40,000 respondents to our personal HPI calculator, launched in 2024, provide further insight into the relationship between lifestyles, wellbeing, and environmental impact.

The findings challenge common assumptions:

- High-carbon lifestyles are associated with lower life satisfaction and shorter life expectancy.
- Sustainable behaviours – such as lower consumption, reduced meat intake, and active transport – correlate with better wellbeing outcomes.

Importantly, a meaningful share of individuals already achieve high wellbeing with low environmental impact, showing that sustainable lifestyles are not only possible but desirable.

These results reinforce a powerful message: the transition to sustainability is not about sacrifice, but about redefining what constitutes a good life.

Key messages

Three overarching conclusions emerge from this year's HPI:

- Good lives do not have to cost the Earth : Across countries and individuals, high wellbeing can be achieved at relatively low levels of environmental impact.

- GDP does not measure what matters : Economic growth alone is an unreliable guide to progress, particularly at higher levels of income.
- Those with power are often the problem: Men have lower individual HPI scores and male leaders lead to lower national HPI scores. It's time societies pay more attention to how women are better at achieving sustainable wellbeing.

The path beyond GDP

The challenge now is not only to measure what matters, but to make it matter politically. Two priorities stand out.

First, the need to balance complexity and clarity. Comprehensive indicator frameworks are essential for analysis, but a small set of headline indicators is needed to shape public debate and guide decision-making.

Second, the importance of democratic legitimacy. Moving beyond GDP cannot be a purely technocratic exercise. Citizens must be actively involved in defining what a good society looks like, through deliberative mini-publics such as citizen assemblies.

Ultimately, indicators alone will not transform societies. But they can play a crucial role in shifting narratives, aligning incentives, and guiding collective action.