

# Malaysia's Performance in World Happiness Report 2019

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The **World Happiness Report (WHR)** is a landmark survey of the state of global happiness **produced annually** by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (**SDSN**). Now in its **seventh edition**, the report **ranks 156 countries** by how happy their citizens perceive themselves to be.

This year's report, apart from providing the usual country rankings of life evaluations, focuses on happiness and the community: how happiness has evolved over the past dozen years, with a focus on the technologies, social norms, conflicts and government policies that have driven those changes.

The overall rankings of country happiness are based on the pooled results from Gallup World Poll (GWP) surveys 2016-2018. The GWP survey responses around six factors: GDP per capita, social support, life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity and corruption levels.

Finland was the happiest nation last year, came top again, followed by Denmark, Norway and Iceland. The Netherlands joined them in the top five. These top countries tend to have high values for most of the key variables that have been found to support well-being; **i) income, ii) healthy life expectancy, iii) social support, iv) freedom, v) trust and vi) generosity.**

## 2.0 MALAYSIA'S PERFORMANCE

### 2.1 Malaysia's Overall Performance

Malaysia is the **80<sup>th</sup> happiest country in the world**, a massive drop of 45 places from last year's 35<sup>th</sup>, with a **score of 5.339** as compared with last year's score of 6.322. Among the ASEAN countries, Malaysia ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> last year, now ranks at 4<sup>th</sup> place, with Thailand (52<sup>nd</sup>) and Philippines (69<sup>th</sup>) overtaking at 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place.

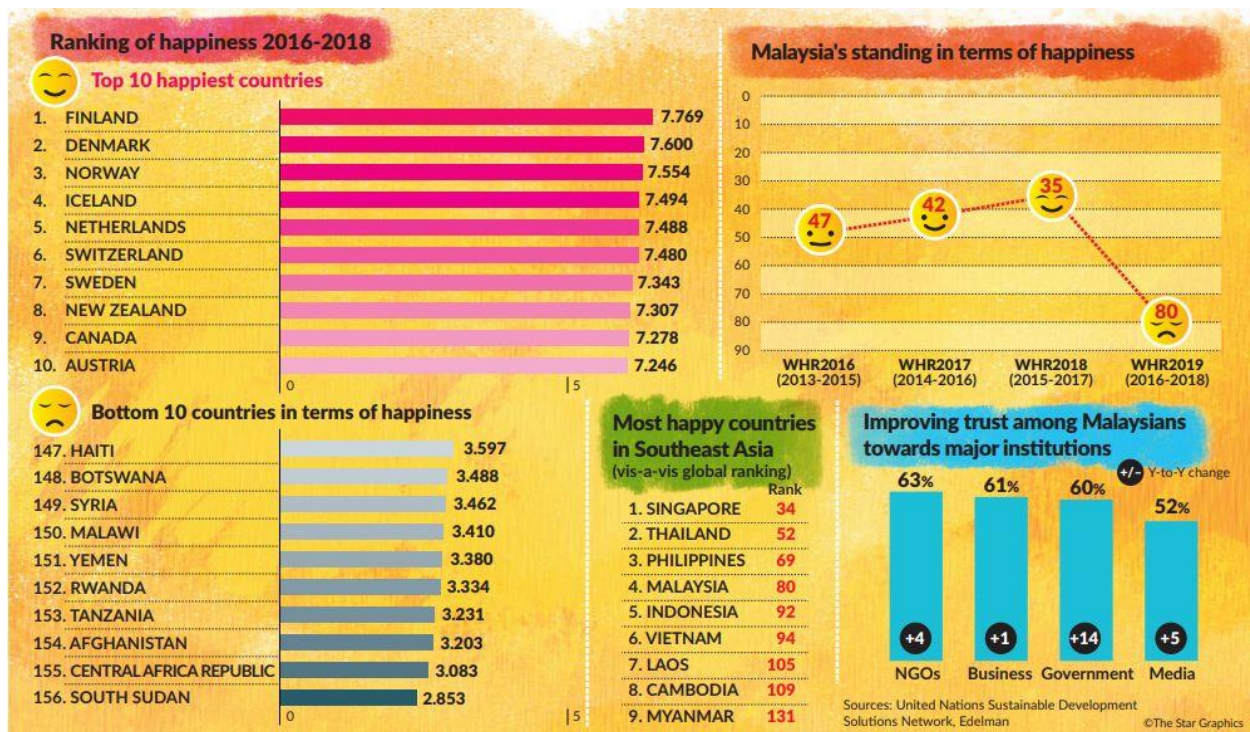
The top 10 happiest countries in the world in order are Finland, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, New Zealand, Canada and Austria. The overall ranking for 156 countries is shown in **Appendix 1**. The top 20 countries for 2018 and 2017 report are shown in **Table 1**. Malaysia and the top 10 happiest and unhappiest countries is shown in **Figure 1**. Malaysia's trend performance from WHR 2012-2018 is shown in **Figure 2**.

**Table 1: World Happiness Ranking 2019 & 2018 for Top 20 Countries vs Malaysia**

COUNTRY	RANK 2019	SCORE 2019	RANK 2018	SCORE 2018
Finland	1	7.769	1	7.632
Denmark	2	7.600	3	7.555
Norway	3	7.554	2	7.594
Iceland	4	7.494	4	7.495
Netherlands	5	7.488	6	7.441
Switzerland	6	7.480	5	7.487
Sweden	7	7.343	9	7.314
New Zealand	8	7.307	8	7.324
Canada	9	7.278	7	7.328
Austria	10	7.246	12	7.139
Australia	11	7.228	10	7.272
Costa Rica	12	7.167	13	7.072
Israel	13	7.139	11	7.190
Luxembourg	14	7.090	17	6.910

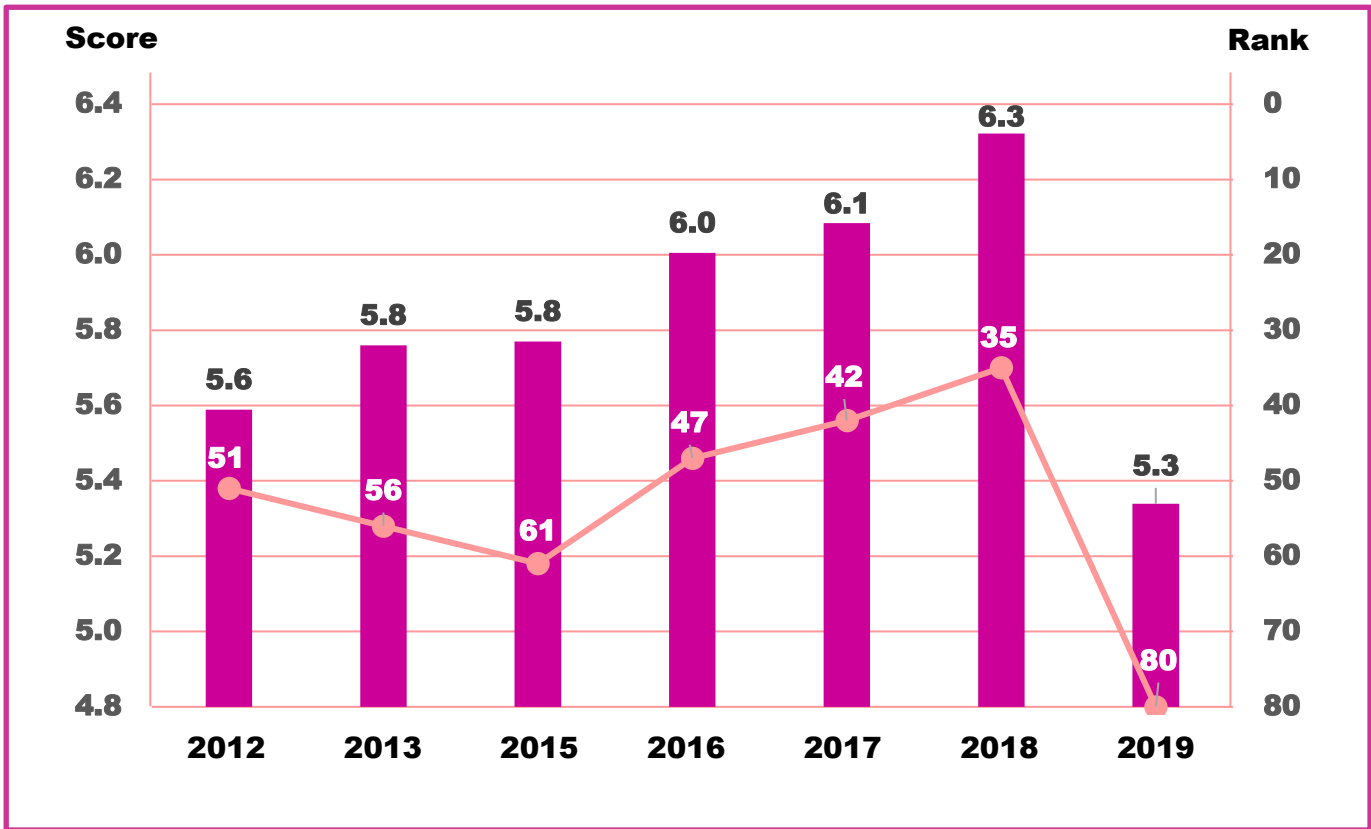
COUNTRY	RANK 2019	SCORE 2019	RANK 2018	SCORE 2018
United Kingdom	15	7.054	19	6.814
Ireland	16	7.021	14	6.977
Germany	17	6.985	15	6.965
Belgium	18	6.923	16	6.927
United States	19	6.892	18	6.886
Czech Republic	20	6.852	21	6.711
<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>5.339</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>6.322</b>

Figure 1: Malaysia and the top 10 happiest and unhappiest countries in World Happiness Report 2019



Source: The Star Online

Figure 2: Malaysia's Trend Performance in World Happiness Report 2012-2019



## 2.2 Malaysia's Regional Performance

**Malaysia** ranks 4<sup>th</sup> in the **ASEAN region**, behind Singapore (34<sup>th</sup>), Thailand (52<sup>nd</sup>) and the Philippines (69<sup>th</sup>), compared with the previous report which ranked Malaysia the second happiest in the region. The **ranking for ASEAN region** is shown in **Table 2**.

Among the **Asia Pacific countries**, **Malaysia ranks the 11<sup>th</sup>**, overtaken by 6 countries that were behind Malaysia previously; Thailand, Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Pakistan and Hong Kong. The **ranking for Asia Pacific region** is shown in **Table 3**.

**Table 2: Malaysia in the ASEAN Region**

COUNTRY	RANK 2019	SCORE 2019	RANK 2018	SCORE 2018
Singapore	1	6.262	1	6.343
Thailand	2	6.008	3	6.072
Philippines	3	5.631	4	5.524
<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5.339</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6.322</b>
Indonesia	5	5.192	6	5.093
Vietnam	6	5.175	5	5.103
Laos	7	4.796	7	4.623
Cambodia	8	4.700	8	4.433
Myanmar	9	4.360	9	4.308

**Table 3: Malaysia in the Asia Pacific Region**

COUNTRY	RANK 2019	SCORE 2019	RANK 2018	SCORE 2018
New Zealand	1	7.307	1	7.324
Australia	2	7.228	2	7.272
Taiwan	3	6.446	3	6.441
Singapore	4	6.262	4	6.343
Thailand	5	6.008	6	6.072
South Korea	6	5.895	8	5.875
Japan	7	5.886	7	5.915
Pakistan	8	5.653	10	5.472
Philippines	9	5.631	9	5.524
Hong Kong S.A.R	10	5.430	11	5.430
<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5.339</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6.322</b>
Mongolia	12	5.285	13	5.125
Indonesia	13	5.192	15	5.093
China	14	5.191	12	5.246
Vietnam	15	5.175	14	5.103
Bhutan	16	5.082	16	5.082
Nepal	17	4.913	17	4.880
Laos	18	4.796	18	4.623

COUNTRY	RANK 2019	SCORE 2019	RANK 2018	SCORE 2018
Cambodia	19	4.700	21	4.433
Bangladesh	20	4.456	19	4.500
Sri Lanka	21	4.366	20	4.471
Myanmar	22	4.360	22	4.308
India	23	4.015	23	4.190

### 3.0 CHANGES OF HAPPINESS

Every year, the report analysed country-by-country ranking of changes in life evaluations. This year, the report takes advantage of the ever-growing length of the Gallup sample to compare life evaluations over a longer span, averaging ten years, from 2005-2008 to 2016-2018. There are 132 countries that have sufficient numbers of observations for both 2005-2008 and 2016-2018.

**Table 4: Changes of Happiness from GWP 2005-2008 to 2016-2018 for Selected Countries**

COUNTRY	RANK 2018	CHANGES OF HAPPINESS
Benin	1	+ 1.390
Nicaragua	2	+ 1.264
Bulgaria	3	+ 1.167
Latvia	4	+ 1.159
Togo	5	+ 1.077
Iceland	26	+ 0.605
Taiwan	29	+ 0.578
South Korea	42	+ 0.404
United Kingdom	63	+ 0.137
Hong Kong S.A.R	66	+ 0.100
Finland	67	+ 0.097
Norway	75	+ 0.030
Switzerland	78	+ 0.007
Netherlands	79	- 0.028
Sweden	82	- 0.035

COUNTRY	RANK 2018	CHANGES OF HAPPINESS
New Zealand	89	- 0.109
Japan	95	- 0.215
Singapore	109	- 0.379
United States	112	- 0.446
<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>- 0.697</b>
Yemen	128	- 1.097
India	129	- 1.137
Botswana	130	- 1.606
Syria	131	- 1.861
Venezuela	132	- 1.944

Table 4 indicates average changes in life evaluations from the earliest years of the Gallup World Poll (2005-2008) to the three most recent years (2016-2018). Most countries show significant changes, with slightly more gainers than losers. The biggest gainer was Benin, up 1.4 points and 50 places in the rankings. The biggest life evaluation drops were in Venezuela and Syria, both down by about 1.9 points.

#### 4.0 METHODOLOGY

The rankings of country happiness are based on the pooled results from Gallup World Poll surveys from 2016-2018. The rankings are based on answers to the main life evaluation question asked in the poll. This is called the Cantril ladder: it asks respondents to think of a ladder, with the best possible life for them being a 10, and the worst possible life being a 0. They are then asked to rate their own current lives on that 0 to 10 scale.

The report cites six significant factors contributed to the country's ladder: GDP per capita, social support, life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity and corruption levels. The full description of the six factors is shown in **Table 5**.



**Table 5: Six Factors That Contribute to the Happiness of a Country**

FACTOR	DESCRIPTION
i) GDP  (a measure of income)	GDP per capita is in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) adjusted to constant 2011 international dollars, taken from the World Development Indicators (WDI) released by the World Bank on November 14, 2018. The equation uses the natural log of GDP per capita, as this form fits the data significantly better than GDP per capita.
ii) Healthy life expectancy	The time series of healthy life expectancy at birth are constructed based on data from the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Health Observatory data repository, with data available for 2005, 2010, 2015, and 2016.
iii) Social support	Social support is the national average of the binary responses (either 0 or 1) to the Gallup World Poll (GWP) question "If you were in trouble, do you have relatives or friends you can count on to help you whenever you need them, or not?"
iv) Freedom to make life choices	Freedom to make life choices is the national average of binary responses to the GWP question "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose what you do with your life?"
v) Generosity	Generosity is the residual of regressing the national average of GWP responses to the question "Have you donated money to a charity in the past month?" on GDP per capita.
vi) Perceptions of corruption  (a measure of trust)	<p>Perceptions of corruption are the average of binary answers to two GWP questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. "Is corruption widespread throughout the government or not?"</li> <li>and</li> <li>ii. "Is corruption widespread within businesses or not?"</li> </ul> <p>Where data for government corruption are missing, the perception of business corruption is used as the overall corruption-perception measure.</p>

*Note: No details on scores given in the report for each of the factors above.*

## **5.0 NEW IN WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT 2019**

In addition, this year's report considers more broadly some of the main forces that influence happiness by changing the ways in which communities and their members interact with each other. There are three sets of factors:

- i. Links between government and happiness – Happier people are not only more likely to engage in politics and vote but are also more likely to vote for incumbent parties. This has significant implications for the electoral incentives that politicians face while in office. There appears to be a significant electoral dividend to improving societal happiness, beyond ensuring a buoyant economic situation. Governments around the globe that are moving in the direction of focusing their policymaking efforts on the population's broad well-being are not only doing so to improve people's happiness for its own sake, but they also appear to have electoral reasons to do so out of enlightened self-interest.
- ii. The power of prosocial behaviour – the report identified several key ingredients that seem to be important for turning good deeds into good feelings. Specifically, people are more likely to derive joy from helping others when; they feel free to choose whether or how to help, they feel connected to the people they are helping and they can see how their help is making a difference.
- iii. Changes in information technology – the large amount of time adolescents spend interacting with electronic devices may have direct links to unhappiness and/or may have displaced time once spent on more beneficial activities, leading to declines in happiness. It is not as certain if adults have also begun to spend less time interacting face-to-face and less time sleeping. However, given that adults in recent years spent just as much time with digital media as adolescents do, it seems likely that their time use has shifted as well.

**World Happiness Ranking 2019**

