



DATA BRIEF

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Nigeria's Ranking in the 2026 World Happiness Report: Implications for Citizens' Declining Well-being

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nigeria's position in the 2026 World Happiness Report has slipped to 106th globally, extending a troubling downward trajectory from prior years and signaling eroding life satisfaction among its citizens despite persistent economic reforms. Thus, the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network report evaluates well-being through multifaceted indicators beyond income, including social support, health, governance, and personal freedom. Of grave concern is the sharp decline in youth well-being, which threatens Nigeria's long-term development prospects. Persistent low happiness rankings stem from entrenched structural issues: economic hardship, inadequate social protection, governance shortfalls, high youth unemployment, and growing inequality. These drivers have yielded stagnant well-being outcomes and a steady erosion of Nigeria's global standing, underscoring the limited effectiveness of current policy measures on everyday lives. The stakes are high. This trajectory risks curtailing economic productivity, fueling social unrest, exacerbating mental health crises, and eroding public trust in institutions. Without intervention, it imperils national development and social cohesion.

To reverse course, the brief calls for holistic, people centered policy approach, emphasizing bolstering legislative oversight, refining economic stewardship, fortifying social protections, advancing good governance, and embedding well-being metrics into national planning frameworks. Tackling these interconnected challenges is essential to elevating quality of life and securing sustainable development for Nigeria.

1. BACKGROUND

Nigeria's position in the World Happiness Report 2026 shows a drastic decline to 106th globally, reflecting a persistent downward

trajectory from 102nd in 2024 and 105th in 2025¹. This decline underscores a

worsening perception of life satisfaction among Nigerians despite ongoing economic and policy reforms of the current

¹ BusinessDay (2026). Nigeria slips to 106th in 2026 World Happiness Report as youth well-being concerns deepen. <https://businessday.ng/business->

[economy/article/nigeria-slips-to-106th-in-2026-world-happiness-report-as-youth-well-being-concerns-deepen/](https://businessday.ng/business-economy/article/nigeria-slips-to-106th-in-2026-world-happiness-report-as-youth-well-being-concerns-deepen/)



administration. The World Happiness Report, produced under the auspices of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, evaluates countries based on key indicators such as GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and perceptions of corruption². These indicators collectively provide a multidimensional assessment of citizens' well-being beyond traditional economic metrics.

Recent analyses highlight growing concerns about youth well-being, suggesting that the decline in Nigeria's happiness ranking is not merely economic but also deeply social and psychological³. With over 60% of Nigeria's population under the age of 25⁴, this trend presents a significant risk to long-term national development.

2. The Issue

Despite ongoing macroeconomic adjustments including fiscal reforms and monetary tightening, Nigeria continues to report alarmingly low levels of subjective well-being. The 2026 World Happiness Report ranks Nigeria below over 100 countries, underscoring a critical governance challenge that demands immediate attention⁵. This decline stems from multifaceted

determinants across key dimensions such as entrenched structural constraints like poverty, inflation, unemployment, and deficient infrastructure, which profoundly undermine citizens' daily lives and life satisfaction, eroding youth well-being, which threatens future workforce productivity and social stability, and a consistent downward trajectory⁶. This flight trajectory signals a profound policy shortfall, risking broader socioeconomic instability if unaddressed.

3. Indices

Nigeria's performance in the World Happiness Report 2026 was characterized by consistently weak outcomes across key well-being indicators, explaining its low global ranking of 106th with a score of about 4.7–4.8 (Sachs et al., 2026). The country performs poorly across core indices which include GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity, and perceptions of corruption, revealing deep structural challenges. In particular, low income levels and high inflation continue to erode purchasing power, while limited macroeconomic gains have not translated into improved living standards⁷.

Beyond economic constraints, Nigeria also struggles with weak social support systems and poor health outcomes, both of which

² Sachs, J., et al. (2026). *World Happiness Report 2026*. New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

³ Op cit.

⁴ Adegboruwa, E. (2026). Leveraging nigeria's young population for national growth and development. <https://www.newdawnngr.com/2026/03/02/leveraging-nigerias-young-population-for-national-growth-and-development/>

⁵ Vanguard (2026). Nigeria drops to 106th in 2026 World Happiness Ranking.

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/03/nigeria-drops-to-106-in-2026-world-happiness-ranking/>

⁶ Sachs, J., et al. (2026). *World Happiness Report 2026*. New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

⁷ BusinessDay (2026). Nigeria slips to 106th in 2026 World Happiness Report as youth well-being concerns deepen.



significantly depress life satisfaction. While informal family networks exist, the absence of strong institutional safety nets reduces resilience in times of need. Similarly, low healthy life expectancy driven by inadequate healthcare infrastructure and high disease burden remains a major drag on well-being. Although Nigerians demonstrate relatively strong interpersonal generosity, and moderate levels of perceived freedom, these factors are constrained by poverty, insecurity, and limited opportunities, thereby limiting their overall impact⁸.

A critical factor undermining happiness in Nigeria is the high perception of corruption, which weakens trust in public institutions and reduces confidence in governance⁹ (Sachs et al., 2026). Overall, Nigeria's low happiness score reflects a combined deficit in economic stability, social protection, health systems, and institutional quality. Addressing these challenges will require comprehensive and people-centered reforms that go beyond economic growth to strengthen governance, expand social welfare, and improve human development outcomes.

4. Key Drivers of Nigeria's Declining Happiness Index

A combination of interrelated structural and institutional factors drives the decline in

Nigeria's happiness ranking. These factors include:

- i. **Economic Pressures:** Low income levels, high unemployment rates, and rising cost of living exacerbated by inflation and currency instability continue to erode purchasing power and reduce quality of life among majority of Nigerians¹⁰.
- ii. **Weak Social Support Systems:** Limited access to healthcare, education, and social safety nets reduces citizens' ability to cope with economic shocks and personal crises. The absence of robust welfare systems contributes to vulnerability and insecurity¹¹. Current poor budgetary allocation and releases to the health sector and the poor managed social safety nets in Nigeria have made the greater majority of Nigerians vulnerable and unable to afford good life.
- iii. **Governance and Institutional Challenges:** High levels of perceived corruption and weak institutional performance undermine public trust. The World Happiness Report consistently identifies trust in institutions as a critical determinant of life satisfaction¹². The persistent government borrowing which do not

⁸ Vanguard (2026). Nigeria drops to 106th in 2026 World Happiness Ranking.

⁹ Sachs, J., et al. (2026). *World Happiness Report 2026*. New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

¹⁰ BusinessDay (2026). Nigeria slips to 106th in 2026 World Happiness Report as youth well-being concerns deepen. [https://businessday.ng/business-](https://businessday.ng/business-economy/article/nigeria-slips-to-106th-in-2026-world-happiness-report-as-youth-well-being-concerns-deepen/)

[economy/article/nigeria-slips-to-106th-in-2026-world-happiness-report-as-youth-well-being-concerns-deepen/](https://businessday.ng/business-economy/article/nigeria-slips-to-106th-in-2026-world-happiness-report-as-youth-well-being-concerns-deepen/)

¹¹ Op cit.

¹² Sachs, J., et al. (2026). *World Happiness Report 2026*. New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.



impact positively in the lives of majority of Nigerians and perceived governments disinterest in fighting corruption have further eroded citizens' trusts in government/ public institutions.

- iv. **Youth Vulnerability:** Nigeria's youth face high unemployment, underemployment, and limited opportunities, leading to frustration, migration pressures (the "Japa" phenomenon), and declining mental well-being. This state of affairs has also pushed several Nigerians young people into internet fraud, kidnapping and other crimes as their escape route. Several young people are currently battling substance addictions due to declining wellbeing and its attendant unhappiness.

- v. **Inequality and Limited Opportunities:** Regional disparities, income inequality, and unequal access to education and economic opportunities deepen dissatisfaction and reinforce social exclusion¹³.

5. Implications for Nigeria

The continued decline in Nigeria's happiness ranking has far-reaching consequences if not adequately checked. Below are some of the identified implications:

- i. **Economic Productivity Risks:** Low well-being negatively affects motivation, creativity, and workforce efficiency, ultimately constraining economic growth.

- ii. **Social Instability:** Rising dissatisfaction, particularly among youth, may increase the likelihood of crime, protests, and irregular migration. These are already manifesting across the country but may get worse with time.
- iii. **Public Health Concerns:** Poor well-being is closely associated with mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression, which remain under-addressed in Nigeria's health system.
- iv. **Governance Legitimacy:** Persistent dissatisfaction can erode citizens' trust in government, weakening democratic institutions and policy compliance.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria's drop to 106th in the 2026 World Happiness Report highlights a critical policy challenge indicating that economic growth alone is insufficient to guarantee citizens' well-being. The increasing concern over youth happiness further emphasizes the urgency of addressing both material and non-material dimensions of development. A shift toward people-centered, inclusive, and accountable governance, combined with targeted investments in youth, social protection, and institutional reform, is essential. Addressing the structural drivers of low well-being will not only improve Nigeria's global ranking but also foster sustainable development, social cohesion, and national stability. To converse this trend, Nigeria must adopt a holistic and multidimensional well-being strategy:

¹³ Vanguard (2026). Nigeria drops to 106th in 2026 World Happiness Ranking.

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/03/nigeria-drops-to-106-in-2026-world-happiness-ranking/>



1. National Assembly may wish to increase its oversight activities around the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, and Poverty Reduction, Ministry of Youths Development and related MDAs to ensure comprehensive strengthening of youth-focused policies. This requires expanding job creation and entrepreneurship opportunities tailored to young people, while simultaneously integrating mental health services into primary healthcare to address rising psychological stress. In addition, promoting digital skills and innovation-driven employment will better position Nigerian youth to compete in a rapidly evolving global economy.
2. Legislators may wish to synergize with the executive agencies to push the need to improve overall economic conditions through deliberate macroeconomic and structural reforms. Stabilizing inflation and exchange rates is essential to restoring purchasing power and economic confidence.
3. Lawmakers may wish to strengthen their social protection systems to enhance resilience among citizens. Expanding access to universal healthcare and social insurance schemes will reduce vulnerability to shocks, while reinforcing conditional cash transfer programmes can provide immediate relief to low-income households.
4. National Assembly may wish to consider intensifying its functions of lawmaking and oversight targeted at promoting good governance and transparency. This is critical to improving citizens' trust and overall life satisfaction. This entails strengthening anti-corruption institutions and ensuring effective enforcement of accountability mechanisms.
5. National Assembly may wish to strengthen its collaboration with the presidency to institutionalize well-being within its policy planning framework. This involves adopting well-being indicators alongside traditional economic metrics such as GDP, aligning national development strategies with global frameworks like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and establishing regular mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating citizens' life satisfaction.

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