

## Short considerations on the un World Happiness Report (2018) and Migration

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### *Abstract*

*The phenomenon of globalization, identification and implementing of practical solutions for sustainable development, environmental security, and human development as a whole has also led to a strengthening of the right to happiness. The emergence of the World Happiness Report, as a reference survey of the state of global happiness, shows that happiness does not have the same content and the same configuration everywhere, but it is certainly an ideal to achieve. This article highlights the conclusions of the World Happiness Report for 2018, with special attention to migration, by emphasizing the right to migrate in search of happiness. The originality of this report is represented by the emphasis on the happiness-migration relationship, analyzing this relationship from the point of view of the economic, social, territorial and not only.*

**Keywords:** *the right to happiness, globalization, sustainable development, migration.*

### **Introduction**

Worldwide, the influence and importance of human rights is undeniable, and the permanent emergence of new rights, determined by the phenomenon of globalization, with a progressive character, including *the right to happiness*, comes to reinforce the value and effects of human rights in society.

In a society forced to respond to the phenomenon of globalization, to identify and apply practical solutions for sustainable development<sup>1</sup>, environmental security<sup>2</sup> and human development as a whole, we are currently witnessing a strengthening of the right to happiness, although the assessment of the effects of exercising the right to happiness shows that happiness does not have the same content and the same configuration everywhere. Starting from the

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<sup>1</sup> See the Sustainable Development Objectives (ODD), 17 of which are contained in Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which are grouped together as Global Objectives, adopted by O.NUU Member States at the December 2015 Development Summit.

<sup>2</sup> See the Paris Climate Change Agreement, signed in Paris on 12 December 2015.

premise that happiness is an objective, a universal aspiration<sup>3</sup>, it is worthwhile to consider and appreciate in terms of the effects produced [1]:

- The Butan state initiative, where a measure of happiness was conceived, by transforming the Gross Domestic Product into Gross National Happiness, and thus happiness is analyzed by a balance between material and spiritual, the concept of gross national happiness (FNB) promulgated in its 2008 Constitution,

- United Nations (UN) Resolution 65/309, adopted on 19 July 2011 entitled "*Happiness: Towards a holistic approach to development*", through which the right to happiness of persons, as a human right, appears from a legal point of view,

- establishing the International Day of Happiness, which is celebrated each year on March 20th<sup>4</sup>,

- The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guide on measuring subjective<sup>5</sup> well-being as an essential part of measuring the quality of life alongside other social and economic dimensions,

- The World Happiness Report as part of UN measures and commitments, mainly through the United Nations Sustainable Development Network (SDSN), which has been operating since 2012 and under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, but also

- The Global Happiness Policy Report, which seeks to identify best practices at national and local level in seeking and achieving happiness and well-being.

It is interesting to look at the evolution of the impact of happiness on a global scale in time, and if starting from the World Happiness Report, it can be noticed that only eight of the 28 European Union (EU) states were among the happiest 20 countries in the world. This finding may justify the financial crisis, the unhappiness of EU citizens being a recent phenomenon. This phenomenon may also be due to the fact that "interventions to promote subjective well-being were not explicitly at the heart of a European social policy strategy." Thus, it was considered that "a subjective quality of life as a main provider of individual well-being can be improved by raising people's living standards by developing political and democratic culture and by providing citizens with better opportunities to live a life depending on their needs and aspirations". [2]

In its follow-up, the World Happiness Report for 2016<sup>6</sup> brings novelty to the concept of inequality, one of its consequences being that people should be

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<sup>3</sup> UN Resolution no. 66/281 of 12 July 2012.

<sup>4</sup> UN Resolution no. 66/281 of 12 July 2012.

<sup>5</sup> OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-Being, published March 20, 2013, available at <http://www.oecd.org/fr/statistiques/oecd-guidelines-on-measuring-subjective-well-being-9789264191655-en.htm>, accessed on 17.07.2019.

<sup>6</sup> John Helliwell, Richard Layard And Jeffrey Sachs, *World Happiness Report 2016 | Volume I*, available at <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2016/>, accessed on July 17, 2019.

happier to live where there is greater equality of opportunity, such as and higher incomes in general. On 20 March 2018, on the occasion of the International Day of Happiness, the significance of which is to emphasize and accentuate in some places that "the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human purpose" and that a "more inclusive, fair and balanced approach to growth is needed to promote economic growth, sustainable development, poverty eradication, happiness and well-being of all peoples", launched at the United Nations Headquarters of the Sixth Worldwide Happiness Report 2018<sup>7</sup>, a benchmark survey of global happiness, also being debated on the first Global Happiness Policy Report<sup>8</sup> attempting to identify best practices at national and local level for seeking and achieving happiness and well-being.

### The Un World Happiness Report. 2018

The World Happiness Report released to the public in 2018 is a thorough analysis of the last three years, structured in chapters as follows:

1. *Happiness and Migration: An Overview* by John F. Helliwell, Richard Layard and Jeffrey D. Sachs

2. *International Migration and World Happiness* by John F. Helliwell, Haifang Huang, Shun Wang and Hugh Shiplett

3. *Do International Migrants Increase Their Happiness and That of Their Families by Migrating?* by Martijn Hendriks, Martijn J. Burger, Julie Ray and Neli Esipova

4. *Rural-Urban Migration and Happiness in China* by John Knight and Ramani Gunatilaka

5. *Happiness and International Migration in Latin America* by Carol Graham and Milena Nikolova

6. *Happiness in Latin America Has Social Foundations* by Mariano Rojas

7. *America's Health Crisis and the Easterlin Paradox* by Jeffrey D. Sachs

**Annex:** *Migrant Acceptance Index: Do Migrants Have Better Lives in Countries That Accept Them?* by Neli Esipova, Julie Ray, John Fleming and Anita Pugliese

156 countries have been taken into account in the Report on the basis of their happiness, and the novelty element for 2018 is the analysis of 117 countries in terms of immigrant happiness. Special attention to migration is more than obvious; the report says that "2018 promises to be an entrepreneurial year for the movement of global happiness"<sup>9</sup> and we could complete a year of deepening the

<sup>7</sup> UN Resolution 66/281 of 12 July 2012.

<sup>8</sup> The first report was launched in 2012. On this occasion, discussions were held on the first Global Happiness Policy Report.

<sup>9</sup> For more details: <http://unsdsn.org/news/2018/03/28/international-day-of-happiness-2018/>, accessed on 20.07.2019.

right to migrate in search of happiness. Therefore, much of the chapters of the report analyze the globalization of the phenomenon of migration as a priority and include not only the happiness of migrants and host communities, but also those left behind either in the countryside or in the country of origin. In this respect, in the literature, globalization is considered to be a multicultural process, which is the result of events taking place in a part of the globe, with repercussions on societies from other parts of the world on the globe. [...] [2] At the same time, the same authors believe that migration is one of the significant aspects of globalization. One of the authors of the report, Professor John Helliwell<sup>10</sup>, author of the *Synthesis of Global Happiness Policy 2018*, highlighted the importance of focusing on migration as "happiness is considered to be a key measure of social progress and a fundamental objective of public policy," and "emerging migration as a defining feature of the 21st century."

The report and achievement of the country-specific happiness ranking are based on the results gathered from Gallup World Poll polls in the period 2015-2017, following both change and stability. In the surveys and rankings, six key variables were used which explain the overall sample of national annual average scores over the entire period 2005-2017 (eg Gross Domestic Product per capita, social support, healthy life, hope, freedom social, generosity and absence of corruption).

According to the polls and findings of those involved in the report, "perhaps the most striking finding of the whole report is that a ranking of countries according to the happiness of immigrants is almost exactly the same as that for the rest of the population."<sup>11</sup> They also consider that "the happiness of immigrants depends primarily on the quality of life they live now, illustrating a general model of convergence." "Happiness can change according to the quality of the society in which people live. The happiness of immigrants, like that of national citizens, depends on a number of features of the social structure, expanding far beyond the larger incomes traditionally thought to inspire and reward migration. The countries with the happiest immigrants are not the richest countries, but countries with a strong balance in terms of social and institutional support for a better life."<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, the new Gallup Migration Acceptance Index, which comes to answer the question of *whether or not migrants have a better life in countries that accept them?* it is based on "local attitudes towards immigrants, so greater value

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<sup>10</sup> University of British Columbia, CIFAR.

<sup>11</sup> The World Happiness Report 2018, available at <http://worldhappiness.report/ed/2018/>, accessed on 20.07.2019, p.30.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p.42.

for migrants' acceptance is linked to greater happiness for both immigrants and natives of countries in almost equal volumes."<sup>13</sup>

Since migration is a "spatial expression of social mobility" and because identifying measures and instruments that could temper and balance migration are points of interest all over the world, the report points out that rural-urban migration within countries was much higher than international migration and continues to remain so, especially in developing countries. [4] The top of these countries is China where, for the period 1990-2015, the urban population has grown by 463 million people, of which about half are migrants from villages to cities and metropolises. By contrast, for the same period of growth, the number of international migrants around the world was 90 million. Instead, globalization has increased considerably in recent years (around 10% of these are refugees), and estimates show that there are still 700 million people who would like to migrate but who have not yet done so. It is noted that migration has a mixed impact on the happiness of the rest of the family members remaining in the country of origin, the assessment of their quality of life being positive after the migration of a family member, a plausible motive for this positive impact being the receipt of money from those who have migrated. However, there are also some negative effects due to the disadvantages of migration, such as emotional support deficiencies.

There are also situations where migrants have not achieved a desired state of happiness, yet have been willing to sacrifice this less or greater happiness for the benefits of the family left in the country origin. Migrants can offer happiness to exchange, they can think of it as an exchange currency, even to give up for other purposes, such as economic security, freedom, security and health. At the level of normal countries, immigrants are as happy as locally born, but in the happiest countries, immigrants are significantly less fortunate than locals, as the happiness of every immigrant is believed to depend not only on the happiness of locals, but also by reporting to the level of happiness in the immigrant's home country as well as by the way they are accepted by locals.<sup>14</sup>

If the presence of immigrants in host countries affects or not the happiness of the host country is another sensitive subject, both from a socio-human point of view and from an economic point of view; "an immigration quota" has been created, with moderate immigration levels causing fewer problems than quick ones, especially through the impact of unskilled people in the host country, although there are situations where immigrants' contribution is often underestimated. At the same time, attitudes towards immigrants are also

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<sup>13</sup> Available at: <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2018/>, accessed on 20.07.2019

<sup>14</sup> World Happiness Report 2018, available at <http://worldhappiness.report/ed/2018/>, accessed on 20.07.2019, p.6

important, with better long-term outcomes (eg, familiarity, acceptance and inter-marriage).<sup>15</sup>

As a conclusion of the report, there are great gaps in happiness in some countries, and they will continue to create major pressures for people who are going to migrate to achieve a higher degree of happiness. However, migration will continue to represent both opportunities and costs for migrants, for their families remaining in their countries of origin and for natives in the countries where immigrants arrive. Even if there is goodwill, the desire to ensure good integration, a tolerant attitude and support, it is considered that there are clear limits of annual flows that do not cause the deterioration of the social structure, the country's main attraction to immigrants. One of the solutions identified in this regard is to provide them with support in developing their own levels of trust and the existence of institutions to make life a better life in happier countries.<sup>16</sup>

The report also addresses emerging health problems, especially in the US, problems that more or less threaten happiness: obesity, opiate crisis and depression. The crisis of opiate addiction in the U.S. is considered to be an emerging state of American public health, which has grown steadily and constantly in recent years, as the percentage of deceased<sup>17</sup> people in this case is rivaled by the number of people deceased during the 1990s due to AIDS. The problem of obesity is also a sensitive issue in the US, but not only, obesity is a major public health problem, especially in middle-income regions (South America, North Africa, the Middle East, the Pacific, etc.). It is currently booming worldwide, affecting 13% of the world's population (650 million adults), and estimates are that this figure could reach 20% by 2025.<sup>18</sup>

In terms of the rankings of happiness, the top 10 countries are the first to rank first in the World Happiness Report of 2017: Finland, Norway, Denmark,

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9

<sup>17</sup> According to the information on the CDC's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (USA) (<http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>), from 1999 to 2016, more than 630,000 of people have died of drug overdose. Approximately 66% of over 63,600 deaths due to drug overdoses in 2016 involved an opioid. As a statistic in 2016, the number of deaths from overdoses involving opiates (including prescription opioids and illegal opioids) was 5 times higher than in 1999.

<sup>18</sup> On the occasion of World Obesity Day, marked on October 11, the World Health Organization launched a study in 2017 with Imperial College London in 2017, which found that worldwide the number of obese children increased from 11 million in 1975, to 124 million in 2016, to which 213 million overweight children are added, but which for the time being do not fall into the category of obesity. Available information at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(17\)32129-3/fulltext?elsca1=tlpr](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(17)32129-3/fulltext?elsca1=tlpr), accessed on 20.07.2019

Iceland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, Australia. In this ranking, Romania is ranked 52th.

## Conclusions

This report is a starting point in the development of appropriate public policy proposals, on the basis of examples designed and proposed for different purposes but which have also entered into these policies of happiness because they support some form of happiness. For the future, regular and widespread collection of data on subjective well-being is needed, thus improving the scientific basis for evaluating policies designed to improve happiness.

"Looking ahead, there is, therefore, a broad scope of policy-driven strategies of happiness, better coordination between government activities, supported by experimental evidence. Wide coordination and applicability are much more likely to be supported by government guidelines for evaluating policies based on happiness (eg Bhutan and the United Arab Emirates)".<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, happiness can be a convincing opportunity and vision, but this requires "involvement in all areas (political, administrative, data collection and policy development) in order to extend the transformation of public thinking coupled with high-level political will to support a widespread dissemination of local innovation culture, implemented through shared information, trust, collaboration and a shared vision."<sup>20</sup> As it is well established in the doctrine and as can be seen from the conclusions of the Report that we have analyzed in the pages above, "the right to the happiness of the people has a close connection with each of the solidarity rights, those of the third generation (the peoples' right to peace and stability, the peoples' right to a healthy natural and social environment)", which determines the "interdependence of the solidarity rights, a balance for the state of happiness of the peoples under the criteria of the XXI century, a stability under the umbrella of the UN, through the consensus of the participating states in such a project, responding to the challenges and risks of globalization." [5]

As a conclusion, we can say that the right to happiness, happiness and welfare are the way to a better future of human rights in the world, a goal to be pursued and achieved for the main "actors" of the current global system, encompassing the nation-states and international organizations that provide not only the legislative framework for the adoption of measures within the public policies in order to achieve these rights and desiderata, but also the necessary mechanisms for transposing these decisions into concrete actions.

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<sup>19</sup> The World Happiness Report 2018, available at <http://worldhappiness.report/ed/2018/>, accessed on 20.07.2019, p. 23

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24

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### *Legislation*

UN Resolution no. 66/281 of 12 July 2012

The Paris Climate Change Agreement, signed in Paris on 12 December 2015