

# The Global Youth Wellbeing Index

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth comprise a quarter of the world's population, but remain an underutilized source of innovation, energy, and enthusiasm in global efforts to achieve and promote the increased wellbeing of all. As children grow and mature into adults, they make choices that affect not only their own wellbeing, but that of their families, communities, and countries. Youth-inclusive societies are more likely to grow and prosper, while the risks of exclusion include stunted growth, crime, and unrest. Therefore, it is imperative that education and health systems, labor markets, and governments serve their interests and provide the policies, investments, tools, technology, and avenues for participation they need to thrive and succeed. Yet, at a time when policy and investment decisions are increasingly data driven, data on youth development and wellbeing is often fragmented, inconsistent, or nonexistent. Thus, our understanding of how young people are doing in their own right and vis-à-vis their peers elsewhere is limited. As a result, the needs of young people often remain unexposed and marginalized by their complexity.

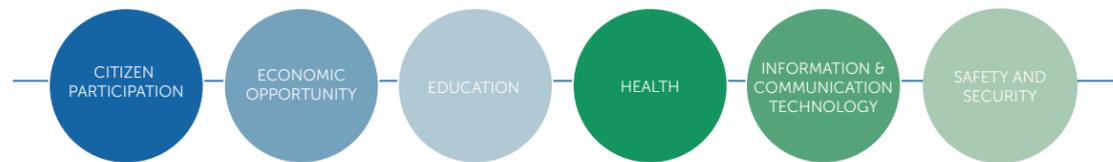
In response, the International Youth Foundation (IYF) and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), with principal financial support from Hilton Worldwide, have joined forces to develop the Youth Wellbeing Index (Index) as the flagship project of a new broader policy research agenda. The joint IYF-CSIS effort is an outgrowth of a commitment made at the 2012 Clinton Global Initiative by IYF and Hilton Worldwide.

The Index is designed to facilitate both thought and action: promoting increased attention to and consultation with, deliberate dialogue about, and investment in young people as catalysts for development, prosperity, and security. In this regard, key audiences—including the world's youth, policymakers, public- and private-sector donors and development financiers, and development program implementers—are likely to take action in different ways. While the Index can be a powerful tool to advance the youth agenda, the rigorous process of developing this first Index has also helped to identify specific areas of limitation that are important to recognize in order to inform further

research activities and allow for refinement. To this end, in addition to being a strategic guide for policy and investments in youth, the Index also highlights where more youth-specific survey and age-disaggregated data worldwide could enable audiences to better understand where further support of youth is still needed.

The final Index framework was developed and validated through extensive literature research and consultative dialogues with experts across sectors, and incorporates fundamentals of positive youth development. The Index encompasses a set of 40 indicators that address the overall national environment, youth-specific outcomes, and youths' outlook and satisfaction levels across six interconnected aspects of their lives (domains): citizen participation, economic opportunity, education, health, information and communications technology (ICT), and safety and security. This inaugural Index includes 30 countries representing income and regional diversity and nearly 70 percent of the world's youth population (aged 10 to 24).

#### INDEX DOMAINS



#### MAIN FINDINGS

- A large majority of the world's youth are experiencing lower levels of wellbeing.
- Even where young people are doing relatively well, they still face specific challenges and limitations.
- Even where youth may not be thriving, they display success in certain areas.
- How young people feel about their own wellbeing does not always align with what the objective data suggests.
- Across countries, domain average scores indicate youth faring strongest in health and weakest in economic opportunity.

The Index scores demonstrate opportunities for focus and investment in young people across all 30 countries included in the Index. A significant majority, 85 percent, of young people represented by the Index live in countries demonstrating lower median and low

youth wellbeing, while only 15 percent are living in countries in the upper ranks. Even where youth are doing well, the Index finds they may not be supported by an enabling environment or have opportunities to thrive in all aspects of their lives. The Index average score among the 30 countries is highest in the health domain, .67, and lowest, .47, in the economic opportunity domain.

Wellbeing levels are spread within and between regions, and among countries with varying income levels. Because a number of indicators are based on resources, systems, and infrastructure, richer countries tend to have higher levels of youth wellbeing when compared with less wealthy countries. Of the countries analyzed, Australian youth enjoy the highest levels of wellbeing, while the quality of life for Nigerian youth has the most scope to improve. Yet as the results for Russia and South Africa demonstrate (high income and upper-middle income by World Bank standards, respectively), young people are not necessarily equally served nor benefiting from strong economic growth. At the same time, the overall results illustrate how policies and institutions can serve youth development needs even where resources may be more constrained—as in Vietnam, for example, which performs above its lower-middle-income peers.

Within domains, however, patterns are less predictable by income. In the citizen participation domain, Colombia tops the ranks, with several low- and lower-middle-income countries in Africa and Asia also in the top group; at the same time, many Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Middle East–North Africa (MENA) region countries drop in ranks. Higher-income and OECD countries generally fare well in the economic opportunity, education, health, ICT, and safety and security domains, with some outliers. Three out of the five Americas countries, including Mexico, are ranked at the bottom of the safety and security domain. Significant opportunities for improvement exist in sub-Saharan Africa across domains, and particularly within education and health.

The results also show that youths' perceptions and outlooks, an innovative and important feature of the Index, can contradict the level of wellbeing depicted by the environment and youth outcome indicators. As actions may be driven more by perception than "reality," this reinforces the importance of understanding youth views of their own state of wellbeing.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- Advance youth voices and participation
- Promote deeper-dive and targeted research and analysis
- Consider integrated policies and programs
- Advance the body of age-disaggregated and youth survey data

As demonstrated by the important trends and results from youth outlook indicators, the Index highlights the need for closer attention to youth satisfaction and aspirations, increasing youth participation, and elevating youth voices. The Index also uncovers areas in which better data would provide a more comprehensive picture of global youth wellbeing. Regional and country-specific in-depth case studies to better understand youth wellbeing within countries, with particular emphasis on data disaggregation by gender and by rural and urban-based populations, where available could provide valuable insight into the commonalities and differences in the challenges and opportunities youth face. Lastly, the Index highlights the interconnectedness between indicators and domains, and encourages an integrated and coordinated approach to planning, policies, partnerships, and programs.

## Global Youth Wellbeing Index Rankings

- |    |                |    |              |
|----|----------------|----|--------------|
| 1  | Australia      | 16 | Mexico       |
| 2  | Sweden         | 17 | Jordan       |
| 3  | South Korea    | 18 | Turkey       |
| 4  | United Kingdom | 19 | Indonesia    |
| 5  | Germany        | 20 | Morocco      |
| 6  | United States  | 21 | Ghana        |
| 7  | Japan          | 22 | Philippines  |
| 8  | Spain          | 23 | South Africa |
| 9  | Saudi Arabia   | 24 | Egypt        |
| 10 | Thailand       | 25 | Russia       |
| 11 | Vietnam        | 26 | India        |
| 12 | Peru           | 27 | Kenya        |
| 13 | Colombia       | 28 | Tanzania     |
| 14 | China          | 29 | Uganda       |
| 15 | Brazil         | 30 | Nigeria      |

 Follow @CSIS, @IYFtweets, and @HiltonWorldwide for live updates  
[#YouthWellbeingIndex](#)

See the full report and explore the data at  
[www.youthindex.org](http://www.youthindex.org)