

New global aging index gauges health and wellbeing of aging populations

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The John A. Hartford Foundation
Index of Societal Aging



The five countries in the index coping best with their aging populations are: Norway, Sweden, the United States, the Netherlands and Japan. Credit: John A. Hartford Foundation Index of Societal Aging

Researchers from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public

Health and University of Southern California Schaeffer Center for Health Policy & Economics, with the support of The John A. Hartford Foundation, have developed a new barometer that estimates how countries are adapting to the dramatic increases in the number and proportion of older persons. The Index is composed of specific measures across five social and economic Indicators that reflect the status and wellbeing of older persons in a country and which can be followed over time and used to compare across nations.

"Now that previously unimagined numbers of [older persons](#) are living longer it is critical that we shift from our prior sole focus on the characteristics of individuals and their immediate environments to one that includes a strategy for the entire society to successfully adapt to an aging population" said John Rowe, MD, Julius B. Richmond Professor of Health Policy and Aging, Health Policy and Management at the Mailman School of Public Health, who led the interdisciplinary team of researchers.

Developed for 30 countries at the outset, the Index can track national sources of data for countries with aged populations including the United States and Western Europe. A sample analysis of the data shows that the five countries in the [index](#) coping best with their aging populations are: Norway, Sweden, the United States, the Netherlands and Japan. (See chart)

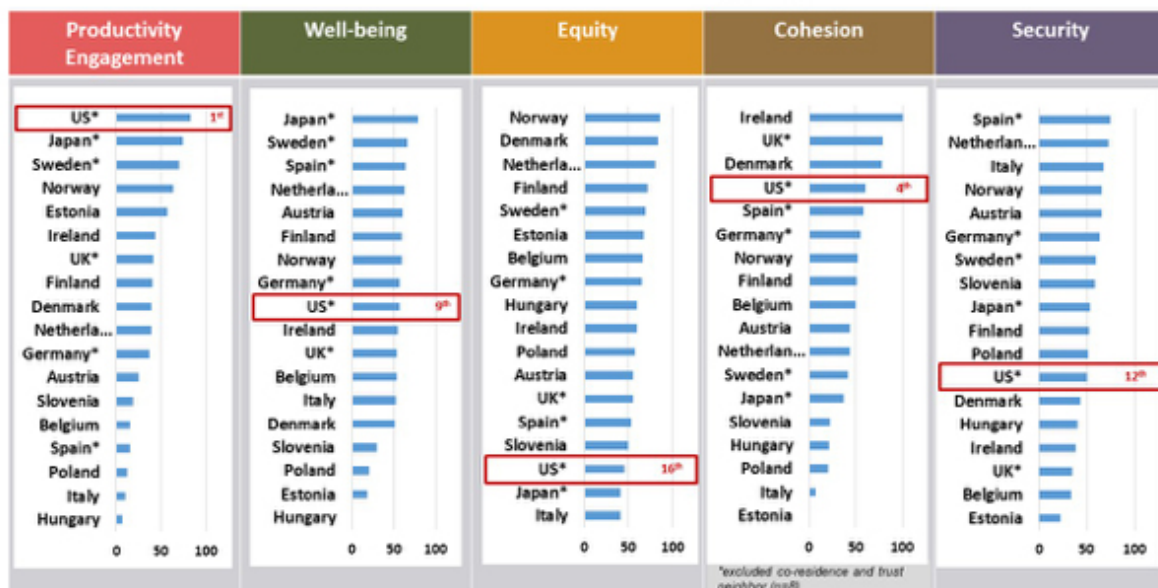
"Interestingly, the Index demonstrates that the United States - despite general problems with inequity and social cohesion - has done well in keeping older Americans financially secure, productive, and engaged," noted Dana Goldman, PhD, Distinguished Professor and Leonard D. Schaeffer Director's Chair at the USC Schaeffer Center for Health Policy & Economics.

The John A. Hartford Index of Societal Aging's five indicators provide

new context for measuring the [health](#) of aging populations including an evidence-based metric to assess effectiveness over time and across many countries. Earlier indexes either made comparisons for a select group of industrialized nations only, sometimes excluding the U.S., were heavily weighted on economic metrics, such as late life labor force participation, did not fully capture inequalities within the advanced developed aging societies or did not measure many other characteristics of an aging society.

"The Index provides an accurate look at how well societies are adapting to this aging challenge," said Goldman. "Utilizing reliable and sensitive economic and social indicators that are widely available, the tool allows countries to take a broader view of both current conditions and likely future demographic realities."

Domain scores: Hartford Aging Index



Elements of the index. Credit: John A. Hartford Index of Societal Aging

Elements of The Hartford Index

- Productivity and Engagement - Measures connectedness within and outside the workforce.
- Well-being - Measures the state of being healthy.
- Equity—Measures gaps in well-being and economic security between the haves and have-nots.
- Cohesion - Measures across generations and social connectedness
- Security—Measures support for retirement and physical safety.

"Failure to adapt to aging is a risky strategy for a country," noted Rowe. "If we neglect to develop and implement effective policies we will be left with a society rife with intergenerational tensions, characterized by enormous gaps between the haves and the have-nots, and unable to provide needed goods and services for any of its members—especially a progressively older and more dependent population. The good news is this gloomy scenario is avoidable."

In addition to Drs. Rowe and Goldman, the Index was presented at the conference by Cynthia Chen, a postdoctoral fellow at the USC Schaeffer Center who worked on the project. Other members of the MacArthur Research Network on an Aging Society served as advisors to the project.*

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

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