

Norway ranked as best country to live in, according to U.N

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OSLO (AP) — The United Nations ranked Norway as the best country to live in for a sixth consecutive year Thursday, prompting the country's aid minister to tell Norwegians to stop whining about wanting more. Oil-rich Norway, with its generous welfare state, topped the U.N. Development Program's human development index, based on such criteria as life expectancy, education and income. Iceland was No. 2, followed by Australia, Ireland, Sweden, Canada, Japan and the United States.

Despite wealth, high levels of education, low unemployment, and an economic boom, Norwegians often complain of high taxes and of weaknesses in their cradle-to-grave welfare state, such as waiting lists at hospitals and a shortage of public care for both children and the elderly.

"There are unsolved problems in Norway, but let us battle this culture of whining, and look at the future with optimism," Aid Minister Erik Solheim was quoted as saying in an interview with the Norwegian news agency NTB.

According to the study, Norwegians earn 40 times more than the study's lowest-ranked country, Niger, live almost twice as long, and have nearly five times the literacy rate.

Solheim said instead of complaining, Norwegians should work on solving those problems, and to share their wealth with poorer countries. Norway is already one of the world's most generous foreign aid donors per capita, giving nearly 1% of its gross national product.

"The top place should make us show humility," said Solheim in the NTB interview. "Norway should be seen as a modern, rich and successful society, but should also be seen as a generous country. The world must see us as rich and generous, not rich and miserly."

Norway, a nation of 4.6 million people, is the world's third-largest oil exporter, after Saudi Arabia.

The five countries with the lowest scores were Guinea-Bissau in 173rd place, Burkina Faso as 174, Mali as 175, Sierra Leone as 176, and Niger 177. The report was unable to rank 17 countries, such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, because there was insufficient data.