

The New Zealand Herald

We get good and bad grades on global rankings

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November 22, 2017

If New Zealand was to receive a report card from the international community, it would look like this.

We merit an A+ due to our (regained) first equal position by Transparency International for lack of corruption (Denmark also 1st, UK 10th, Australia 13th and the USA 18th).

A+ is justifiable from the Global Peace Index, which considers issues such as violent crime, terror incidents and military expenditure. We are the second (up from 4th in 2016) most peaceful country on the planet (Iceland is 1st, Australia 12th, UK 41st, USA 114th).

A+ would also be recorded for our achievements in economic, civil and political freedoms, with the Index of Economic Freedom of the Heritage Foundation and the *Wall Street Journal*, putting us, again, as third best in the world (Australia 5th, UK 12th and USA 17th).

The Human Freedom Index from the Cato Institute has New Zealand as the third most free country in the world, an improvement on the year before. However, this improvement needs to be balanced by the Freedom in the World Index by Freedom House which had us fall to 7th position (Aus 6th, UK 16th and USA 27th).

Also an A+ with the Democracy Index, as run by the *Economist*, where we came in fourth best again (Norway 1st, Aus 10th, UK 16th and USA 21st).

In terms of press freedom, perhaps an A-, as Reporters Without Borders puts New Zealand at 13th best in the world (down from 5th in 2016). Freedom House which does a similar index put us at 9th equal in press freedom (but with many others with shared scores above us), but both indices are still better scores than recorded for Australia, the UK and the USA in this area.

Where we are attracting negative attention and might be starting to slip out of the A bracket is in the environmental field. The OECD 2017 Environmental Performance Review of New Zealand expressed concern over pollution to fresh water and our response to climate change.

Of the latter, the latest Climate Change Performance Index puts us in 33rd position (albeit, still well ahead of the USA at 56 and Aus at 57), and the Climate Tracker Index puts our response, in light of the Paris Agreement, as "insufficient".

Concern was also evident with the more holistic indices, of which, on average, perhaps a A-grade is warranted. The World Happiness Report for 2017 has New Zealand falling a spot, to 9th (Aus is 11th, USA is 15th, UK is 20th).

The Human Development Index has New Zealand at 13th position (Aus 2nd , USA 10th, UK 16th), falling from 9th in 2016. The Better Life Index, of the 38 countries associated with the OECD, contains a similar conclusion, with New Zealand coming in at 11th (Norway 1st, Aus 3rd, USA 8th, and UK 16th) but we were 7th in 2016.

The Global Gender Gap Report of 2017 of the World Economic Forum has us as 9th best in terms of making progress at reducing the gap (Iceland, 1st, UK, 15th, Aus 35th, USA 49th). A cluster of other A- grades would also be deserved because we are outperforming most of the OECD in terms of high employment at 76 per cent (up from 74 per cent in 2016), lower rates of long-term unemployment and good life expectancy (82 years).

In addition, according to the 2017 Innovation Index compiled by Cornell University and the World Intellectual Property Organisation, we are 21st in the world (Switzerland is 1st, USA 4th, UK 5th and Aus 23rd). The World Economic Forum has us in 13th place in its Global Competiveness Index (USA 2nd, UK 8th, Aus 23rd) which covers 137 countries.

We are below average with other OECD countries, for which we deserve a C grade, on the average household net-adjusted disposable income per capita. New Zealand is lower than the OECD average; nearly 15 per cent of employees here routinely work very long hours; labour productivity is well below comparable OECD countries, and of no surprise, housing here is less affordable than elsewhere.

In part, this is because in real terms, house prices in New Zealand increased more than in any other OECD country between 2010 and 2016.

We deserve a fail mark of D for our economic poverty, because although we are close to the OECD averages in this area, our poverty rates have increased since the mid 1990s as has the income inequality and the gap between the rich and the poor. An Amnesty report of 2017 tagged New Zealand as having one in three children living below the poverty line, whilst an Oxfam report showed that the richest 1 per cent of Kiwis now possess 20 per cent of the country's wealth.

The 2017 Unicef Building the Future report of 41 developed countries shows that we have the highest adolescent suicide rate and the sixth highest teenage birth rate in the developed world. We are also at on the wrong side of the graphs (38th) for good health and general well-being for our youth. For these figures, an absolute fail of an E- is justified.

In short, our report contains clear excellences, but also some dismal failures, which must be attended to if we are to reach our full potential.