

The world's best countries

Newsweek magazine has ranked the best countries in the world. How did they decide on the order? Can we believe in such lists?

1 Which are the most important three factors when deciding on the 'best country'? Compare your choice with a partner.

political environment	health	quality of life	climate
economic strength	education	cuisine	other (specify)

2 Complete the grid with the five missing countries. Choose from: *Australia, Finland, Germany, Japan, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, United States*. Then, scan the article below in order to check your answer.

The world's best countries	3
1	4
2	5

Global rankings: a *Newsweek* study of health, education, economy and politics (August 2010)

'The best country in the world...'

Leafing through the magazine *Newsweek* at the airport the other day, I came across an intriguing article: 'The world's best countries'. I couldn't help but look at the rankings. Imagine my surprise when I saw the number one! I'd lived there many years ago. I remember it as cold and dark, and not at all the country I could have imagined would win the title of 'The world's best country'. Finland. But then, everything depends on which selection factors you choose, and exactly how you measure them.

The magazine asked: 'If you were born today, which country would give you the best opportunity to live a healthy and safe life, and to become reasonably prosperous?' There were five categories in the survey: health, education, economic competitiveness, quality of life and political environment. Economic competitiveness included calculations for growth, diversification and innovation. The political landscape included a calculation for individual freedom, and the stability of the country. No war zones or ethnic conflict, then.

Newsweek itself admits how difficult it was to create the list. It took months. It was hard to find comparable data for rich and poor countries. Indeed, there have been many studies done to evaluate 'quality of life'; one conclusion is that you have to view all such findings cautiously. There can be no denying Scandinavia has done well, with Sweden in third place, and Norway sixth. It is clear that small wealthy countries, such as Switzerland (ranked second) or Luxemburg (ranked fifth), do very well as it is easier for the government to improve well-being.

Lists are always fascinating. There are lists ranking many different things, from the happiest countries to the most corrupt! Ascertaining 'the best country in the world' is certainly a fascinating endeavour. On the one hand, we feel there is validity in the result - some places are safer or preferable to others. On the other hand, if your company offered you a promotion anywhere in the world, you might not instantly choose a country in the top placings! Having said that, Australia is fourth.....time to emigrate?

3 Read the complete article. What factors is the survey based on? Describe the tone of the article.

4 Complete the word formation grid below with the missing words.

NOUN	VERB	ADJECTIVE
competitiveness		
	improve	
		diversified

NOUN	VERB	ADJECTIVE
	innovate	
stability		
		corrupt

5 Work in small groups to discuss the questions. Be ready to report back to the class.

- If you had to move to another country, which one would you choose? List at least three reasons.
- How would you feel if you had to move to another country? What would you miss most about home?
- What problems can people who live abroad have?