New Report Reveals Stagnation in Global Social Progress

Social Progress Index data shows that quality of life has stalled globally since 2021 with little prospect for a recovery under populist & authoritarian leaders

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, January 21, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- According to the 2026 Global Social Progress Index, the World is at a turning point as decades of slow and steady progress has ended and, since 2021, the World has entered a new era of stagnation in quality of life. The report, published by the Social Progress Imperative, a US-based non-profit, shows that the slowdown covers almost every region, including the United States and China.

> "The leaders at the World Economic Forum need to face up to the scale of this crisis. Economic growth is not enough on its own. We need a formula for economic growth with sustainable social progress."
>
> *Michael Green, CEO, Social Progress Imperative*

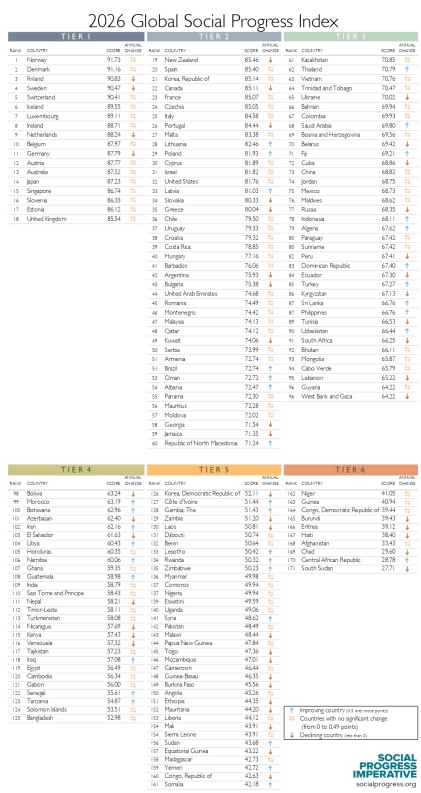
The 2026 Global Social Progress Index ("the Index") ranks 171 countries' social performance since 2011 based on 57 social and environmental outcome indicators. The findings highlight that though the world has recovered economically from the COVID crisis, social progress has not. The stagnation in global social progress has been driven by declining rights but has now spilled into deteriorating performance on safety, environmental quality and health.

The cost of the new populist authoritarian politics
Rights and Voice, which is one of 12 components of the Social Progress Index, shows a 6 point decline since 2011 and a 1.9 point decline since 2021. Scores have also fallen on press freedom and academic freedom and acceptance of gays and lesbians. Nicaragua, El Salvador, Hungary, Turkey, India and Russia are all among the countries to have shown the biggest decline in rights, where authoritarian leaders hold sway. But the slowdown in social progress since 2021 is also driven by declines in Health, Safety and Environmental Quality. The rate of improvement has also slowed for Water and Sanitation, Housing and Information and Communications.

-The United States is one of only 8 countries that has shown a decline in social progress over the last 15 years. It now ranks 32nd in the world, behind Poland & Lithuania. America's standing in the world has declined since 2011 on every component. The European Union overtook the U.S. in 2019 and is now 3 points ahead.

-The U.S., Canada and the UK are among the world's 10 least improved countries since 2011.
- China's has stalled since 2021 with declining scores on Safety, Basic Education, Health and Freedom and Choice.
- India's social progress improvement has slowed, gaining just 1.53 points since 2021. Gains in education and health are being offset in part by losses in rights and environmental quality.

CEO of the Social Progress Imperative, Michael Green, noted: "We have got used to the world making slow but steady progress since the end of the Cold War. That era could be coming to an end. Under populist and authoritarian leaders, more countries are turning away from rights and inclusive development. Looking to the future, aid cuts and disruptions to global trade that make it harder for developing countries to finance their development suggest that this negative trend will accelerate through rising undernourishment and preventable deaths from infectious diseases."



2026 Global Social Progress Index

TIER 1			
RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	ANNUAL CHANGE
1	Norway	91.73	⇆
2	Denmark	91.16	⇆
3	Finland	90.83	↓
4	Sweden	90.47	↓
5	Switzerland	90.41	⇆
6	Iceland	89.55	⇆
7	Luxembourg	89.11	⇆
8	Ireland	88.71	⇆
9	Netherlands	88.24	↓
10	Belgium	87.97	⇆
11	Germany	87.79	↓
12	Austria	87.77	⇆
13	Australia	87.52	⇆
14	Japan	87.23	⇆
15	Singapore	86.74	⇆
16	Slovenia	86.33	⇆
17	Estonia	86.12	⇆
18	United Kingdom	85.54	⇆

TIER 2			
RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	ANNUAL CHANGE
19	New Zealand	85.46	↓
20	Spain	85.40	⇆
21	Korea, Republic of	85.14	⇆
22	Canada	85.11	↓
23	France	85.07	⇆
24	Czechia	85.05	⇆
25	Italy	84.58	⇆
26	Portugal	84.44	↓
27	Malta	83.38	⇆
28	Lithuania	82.46	↑
29	Poland	81.93	↑
30	Cyprus	81.89	⇆
31	Israel	81.82	⇆
32	United States	81.76	⇆
33	Latvia	81.03	↑
34	Slovakia	80.33	↓
35	Greece	80.04	↓
36	Chile	79.50	⇆
37	Uruguay	79.33	⇆
38	Croatia	79.32	⇆
39	Costa Rica	78.85	⇆
40	Hungary	77.16	⇆
41	Barbados	76.06	⇆
42	Argentina	75.93	↓
43	Bulgaria	75.38	↓
44	United Arab Emirates	74.68	⇆
45	Romania	74.49	⇆
46	Montenegro	74.42	⇆
47	Malaysia	74.13	⇆
48	Qatar	74.12	⇆
49	Kuwait	74.06	↓
50	Serbia	73.99	⇆
51	Armenia	72.74	⇆
51	Brazil	72.74	↑
53	Oman	72.72	↑
54	Albania	72.47	↑
55	Panama	72.30	⇆
56	Mauritius	72.28	⇆
57	Moldova	72.02	⇆
58	Georgia	71.54	↓
59	Jamaica	71.35	↓
60	Republic of North Macedonia	71.24	↑

TIER 3			
RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	ANNUAL CHANGE
61	Kazakhstan	70.85	⇆
62	Thailand	70.79	↑
63	Vietnam	70.76	⇆
64	Trinidad and Tobago	70.47	⇆
65	Ukraine	70.02	↓
66	Bahrain	69.94	⇆
67	Colombia	69.93	⇆
68	Saudi Arabia	69.80	↑
69	Bosnia and Herzegovina	69.56	⇆
70	Belarus	69.42	↓
71	Fiji	69.21	↑
72	Cuba	68.86	↓
73	China	68.82	⇆
74	Jordan	68.75	⇆
75	Mexico	68.73	⇆
76	Maldives	68.62	⇆
77	Russia	68.35	↓
78	Indonesia	68.11	↑
79	Algeria	67.62	↑
80	Paraguay	67.42	⇆
80	Suriname	67.42	⇆
82	Peru	67.41	↓
83	Dominican Republic	67.40	↑
84	Ecuador	67.30	↓
85	Turkey	67.27	↑
86	Kyrgyzstan	67.13	↓
87	Sri Lanka	66.76	↑
87	Philippines	66.76	↑
89	Tunisia	66.53	↓
90	Uzbekistan	66.44	↑
91	South Africa	66.25	↓
92	Bhutan	66.11	⇆
93	Mongolia	65.87	⇆
94	Cabo Verde	65.79	⇆
95	Lebanon	65.22	↓
96	Guyana	64.22	⇆
96	West Bank and Gaza	64.22	↓

TIER 4			
RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	ANNUAL CHANGE
98	Bolivia	63.24	↓
99	Morocco	63.19	↑
100	Botswana	62.96	↑
101	Azerbaijan	62.40	↓
102	Iran	62.16	↑
103	El Salvador	61.63	↓
104	Libya	60.43	↑
105	Honduras	60.35	⇆
106	Namibia	60.06	↑
107	Ghana	59.35	↑
108	Guatemala	58.98	↑
109	India	58.79	⇆
110	Sao Tome and Principe	58.43	⇆
111	Nepal	58.21	↓
112	Timor-Leste	58.11	⇆
113	Turkmenistan	58.08	⇆
114	Nicaragua	57.69	↓
115	Kenya	57.43	↓
116	Venezuela	57.32	↓
117	Tajikistan	57.23	⇆
118	Iraq	57.08	↑
119	Egypt	56.49	⇆
120	Cambodia	56.34	⇆
121	Gabon	56.00	⇆
122	Senegal	55.61	↑
123	Tanzania	54.87	↑
124	Solomon Islands	53.51	⇆
125	Bangladesh	52.98	⇆

TIER 5			
RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	ANNUAL CHANGE
126	Korea, Democratic Republic of	52.11	↓
127	Côte d'Ivoire	51.44	↑
128	Gambia, The	51.43	↑
129	Zambia	51.20	↓
130	Laos	50.81	↓
131	Djibouti	50.74	⇆
132	Benin	50.64	⇆
133	Lesotho	50.42	↑
134	Rwanda	50.32	↑
135	Zimbabwe	50.23	↑
136	Myanmar	49.98	⇆
137	Comoros	49.94	⇆
137	Nigeria	49.94	⇆
139	Eswatini	49.59	⇆
140	Uganda	49.06	⇆
141	Syria	48.62	↑
142	Pakistan	48.49	⇆
143	Malawi	48.44	↓
144	Papua New Guinea	47.84	⇆
145	Togo	47.36	↓
146	Mozambique	47.01	↓
147	Cameroon	46.44	⇆
148	Guinea-Bissau	46.35	↓
149	Burkina Faso	45.56	↓
150	Angola	45.26	⇆
151	Ethiopia	44.35	↓
152	Mauritania	44.20	↓
153	Liberia	44.12	⇆
154	Mali	43.91	↓
154	Sierra Leone	43.91	⇆
156	Sudan	43.68	↑
157	Equatorial Guinea	43.22	↓
158	Madagascar	42.73	⇆
159	Yemen	42.72	↑
160	Congo, Republic of	42.63	↓
161	Somalia	42.18	↑

TIER 6			
RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	ANNUAL CHANGE
162	Niger	41.05	⇆
163	Guinea	40.94	⇆
164	Congo, Democratic Republic of	39.44	⇆
165	Burundi	39.43	↓
166	Eritrea	39.12	↓
167	Haiti	38.40	↓
168	Afghanistan	33.43	⇆
169	Chad	29.60	↓
170	Central African Republic	28.78	↑
171	South Sudan	27.71	↓

↑ Improving country (0.5 and more points)
⇆ Countries with no significant change (from 0 to 0.49 points)
↓ Declining country (less than 0)

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Rankings- 2026 Global Social Progress Index

There is hope from countries that have turned away from authoritarian populism. Brazil has shown significant improvement since the end of Jair Bolsonaro's term as president, becoming a Tier 2 country for the first time this year and the leading country in the BRICS group. Poland has made strong gains since the defeat of the Law and Justice government and overtook the United States for the first time.

- Norway ranks #1 (91.73) and 5 of the top 6 countries are Nordic. Germany (11th) leads the G7.
- Ireland, ranked 8th, is the top English-speaking country, ahead of Australia (13th) and the United Kingdom (18th). New Zealand (19th) and Canada (22nd) slip into the second tier of social progress.
-Two Asian countries are in the top tier: Japan (14th) and Singapore (15th).
- Chile (36th), Uruguay (37th) & Costa Rica (39th) lead in Latin America.
- Mauritius (56th) leads in Africa. South Africa ranks 91st, Nigeria 137th & Ethiopia 151st.
- Russia has fallen behind China (73rd) to 77th in the world, behind Ukraine (65th).
- Central Asia and the Caucasus have emerged as the fastest-improving region since 2011.
- Europe has seen the largest improvement in Environmental Quality. South Asia has declined since 2011.
-50 countries declined in social progress in the last year & 36 showed a significant improvement.

The Social Progress Imperative is pioneering the use of social and environmental data to support decision-makers in prioritizing equitable & inclusive growth.

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