Sweden is ranked most socially advanced country - Britain ranked ahead of Germany, the United States and Japan in new Social Progress Index

Team led by Harvard Business School Professor Michael E Porter designed index to guide national policies and investments, and shows social progress is about much more than economic growth

(April 11 2013) Oxford, United Kingdom — Sweden is the most socially advanced country globally according to a new index released today at the Skoll World Forum, the premier international platform for accelerating entrepreneurial approaches and innovative solutions to the world’s most pressing social issues. Britain is ranked second, above Germany, which ranks fifth, the United States, sixth, and Japan, eighth.

The Social Progress Index, which ranked 50 countries by their social and environmental performance, was designed by Professor Porter and The Social Progress Imperative. They are working in collaboration with economists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and leading international organisations in social entrepreneurship, business, philanthropy, and academia including Cisco, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited (DTTL), Skoll Foundation, Fundación AVINA, and Compartamos Banco.

The Social Progress Index is distinctive for being based entirely on social and environmental measures covering basic human needs, foundations of wellbeing and opportunity. The Index shows where nations should focus their efforts to improve the wellbeing of their people. It uses a rigorous statistical technique and the best available data from internationally recognised sources, including the World Bank and the World Health Organization.

“The ‘Arab Spring’ of 2011 and the challenges in Mexico over the last decade, have illustrated the shortcomings of economic growth as a proxy for social progress”, said Professor Porter. “In both business and economic development, our understanding of success has been incomplete.

“Previous efforts to go beyond economic measurement alone have laid important groundwork, but we need a more holistic, comprehensive, and rigorous approach. The Social Progress Index is an attempt to address these gaps and opportunities.

“Social progress depends on the policy choices, investments, and implementation capabilities of multiple stakeholders – government, civil society, and business. Action needs to be catalysed at country level. By informing and motivating those stakeholders to work together and develop a more holistic approach to development, I am confident that social progress will accelerate.”

The Social Progress Imperative asserts that traditional indicators of economic growth do not tell the whole story of a country’s progress. While certainly greater income leads to higher standards of living, it is possible to achieve a high level of social progress at a relatively modest income level or even see progress regress over time. No countries score in the top half for all 12 components of the Social Progress Index which are Nutrition and Basic Medical Care; Air, Water and Sanitation; Shelter; Personal Safety; Access to Basic Knowledge; Access to Information and Communication; Health and Wellness; Ecosystem Sustainability; Personal Rights; Access to Higher Education; Personal Freedom and Choice; and Equity and Inclusion.

Some of the key findings from the Social Progress Index include:
Scores on the health and wellness component show no correlation to spending on health as a percent of GDP for the 16 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in the Index. This poses particular challenges for countries that spend the most on healthcare. The United States, for example, leads OECD nations in total spending per capita on healthcare, but ranks only 11th of the 16 OECD countries in the Social Progress Index on health and wellness.

Spain: 10th overall, and 11th in terms of GDP ranks 22nd for Personal Freedom and Choice.

Britain (2nd) and Sweden (1st) perform highly on the Social Progress Index when compared to their performance on the United Nations Human Development Index because they perform consistently across the three dimensions of social progress – basic needs, foundations of wellbeing and opportunity - whereas the United States is weaker on foundations of wellbeing and Germany and France are weaker on opportunity. Nearly all rich countries perform poorly on ecosystem sustainability—especially large countries with abundant natural resources like Australia (46th), Canada (47th), and the United States (48th).

“The Social Progress Index shows that countries with similar levels of GDP can have very different levels of social progress,” said Michael Green, Executive Director of the Social Progress Imperative. “We expect some surprising transfers of knowledge in the next few years, as standout performers – among government, civil society, and business – document and share their approaches.”

“At Deloitte, we believe that business plays a fundamental role in shaping and creating the society of the future. We will only resolve the big issues we face today, globally and regionally, through government, business and civil society working together in new and innovative ways to design and deliver solutions that create a sustainable and prosperous future for all” said Heather Hancock, Managing Director at Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited. “We believe the Social Progress Index will make it easier for business to understand where and how it can get involved, helping to prioritise social investment decisions, and galvanise collective action.”

“The Social Progress Index is designed to help all of us make better decisions,” said Sally Osberg, President and CEO of the Skoll Foundation and a director of the Social Progress Imperative. “This elegant tool makes essential information available to those driving change from the front lines and raises our collective responsibility for results that add up.”

The Social Progress Index is the first project of the Social Progress Imperative as part of a wider set of initiatives to guide the investment and policy decisions of governments, the private sector, and civil society to have a positive impact on people’s lives.

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About the Social Progress Imperative
The Social Progress Imperative’s mission is to advance global human wellbeing, by combining national social performance and capacity indicators with solutions-oriented outreach to sector leaders, and grassroots champions, who together can effect large-scale change. The Social Progress Imperative counts organisations including Cisco, Deloitte, Skoll Foundation, Compartamos Banco, and Fundación AVINA as financial supporters.

Social progress is defined as the capacity of a society to meet the basic human needs of its citizens, establish the building blocks that allow citizens to improve their lives, and create the conditions for individuals and communities to meet their full potential.
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