

**News Release:** 2017 Social Progress Index

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*Editor's Notes: The complete 2017 Social Progress Index findings, executive summary, methodology, country scorecards and other resources are available online at [www.socialprogressindex.com](http://www.socialprogressindex.com).*

## Rights, Safety, Tolerance Eroding Worldwide

*Most countries, however, have improved over the past four years*

*Access to Information and Communications, Access to Advanced Education are driving progress*

WASHINGTON, DC / June 21, 2017—While quality of life is improving across the globe, world leaders must confront two deeply troubling trends: declining personal rights, personal safety, and tolerance and inclusion, as well as slow and uneven progress worldwide, according to new research, released today by the Social Progress Imperative in collaboration with Michael E. Porter of Harvard Business School and Scott Stern of MIT.

For the first time, the Social Progress Imperative, which annually publishes the Social Progress Index, is able to compare 128 countries' social progress performance across four years and reveal global, regional, and national trends.

*“Millions of people are experiencing a shameful rolling back of their freedoms, more violence and injustice, and blatant discrimination and exclusion from life’s most meaningful opportunities. And despite having access to extreme wealth and other influence, the US along with other advanced nations have hardly made much progress since 2014,” Social Progress Imperative CEO Michael Green said. “This means we’re seeing incremental change and pockets of social progress rather than widespread transformation. Some countries are even backsliding in areas that are critical to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—like Environmental Quality, Health and Wellness, Personal Freedom and Choice, and Shelter.”*

- The 2017 Social Progress Index finds that since 2014, **Personal Rights**—which includes measures of political rights and freedom of expression—declined in more countries than it improved.
  - The Index detects a rapid deterioration of rights, especially marked in terms of falling political participation and worsening freedoms of expression and assembly, in six countries including Turkey, Thailand and Hungary.
  - Thirty-three countries experienced a deterioration in rights: Brazil saw the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, and Poland is increasingly restricting free speech and dissent.
- Improvements in **Personal Safety** over the last four years remain stubbornly elusive. Almost as many countries experienced a fall as saw an increase in this category of social progress—which spans political terror and traffic deaths.
  - Inverse changes in the homicide rate and in violent crime are canceling out progress in many countries.
  - Latin America and the Caribbean accounts for many of the world’s largest declines in safety. Since 2009, Honduras has seen the most dramatic increase in homicides: from 44.5 to 74.6 deaths per 100,000 people.

*“Divisive political rhetoric on asylum and migration issues, rising xenophobia, and restrictions on access to asylum have become increasingly visible in certain regions, and the spirit of shared responsibility has been replaced by a hate-filled narrative of intolerance,” said former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on World Refugee Day last year.*

- On the Index, countries diverge the most when it comes to **Tolerance and Inclusion**—a measure that includes acceptance of immigrants, homosexuals and religious minorities. Though relatively stable on average, country-level scores are the most

volatile in the Index.

- Most countries in Europe show consistent or gradually improving scores, but there have been substantial declines in the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Russia, Slovakia where they are experiencing signs of deteriorating tolerance towards immigrants and increasing discrimination against minorities. The United States has also declined for the same reasons. The ongoing movement of refugees and migrants, and subsequent pressure on resources have likely had a negative effect on this area of social progress.
- There are some signs of improving tolerance towards homosexuals, however, particularly in regions where recorded levels of tolerance have been poorest. For example, in Nepal 83% of its population say it's a good place to live for gay and lesbian people, compared to just 56% seven years ago.
- Globally, the Index reflects a large decline in the percentage of people who indicate that they have relatives or friends they can count on, if they need help.

*“During a time when trust is in free fall, the Social Progress Index can be a tool for government, business, and civil society to regain that trust, and make transparent the case for rebuilding the institutions that matter most to citizens, communities, and nations,” said Sally Osberg, Skoll Foundation President and CEO and Social Progress Imperative board member.*

Generally, the **world is underperforming on social progress** compared to what the average GDP per capita suggests is possible. Despite progress in the last decade, our world is still failing most egregiously on Water and Sanitation (access to piped water and improved sanitation facilities) and Access to Basic Knowledge (adult literacy and secondary school enrollment).

One of the most blatant failures is **the world’s most powerful countries have failed to make significant progress over the past four years**. Despite having the greatest wealth, largest populations and strongest regional influence, G20 countries like France, the US, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Turkey and China have been largely unsuccessful at improving social and environmental outcomes and continue to underperform compared to what their GDPs suggest is possible.

As the wealthiest G7 country, **the US should have been able to make much more social progress over the past four years, but by all accounts, its progress has flat lined**. Its modest improvement in rank and change at the component level shouldn’t overshadow the fact that the nation is significantly falling behind countries with similar GDP per capita on half of the Social Progress Index measures.

*“The US is not only slow to produce social and environmental outcomes, it is failing to address basic human needs, equip citizens to improve their quality of life, protect the environment, and provide opportunity for everyone to make personal choices and reach their full potential,” said Social Progress Imperative CEO Michael Green. “Regardless of economic growth over the same period, a society which fails to meet its own social needs is not succeeding. And it is certainly not competitive on the global stage.”*

*“We have the resources to do better. The main problem is the inequality in wealth between rich and poor nations. Global aid flows are not sufficient to help the poorest countries to provide these basic needs for all,” Green said. “Greater income can easily and positively influence a country’s social progress performance in more than half of the areas measured on the Social Progress Index. But getting richer simply won’t move the needle far enough; the most stubborn challenges need innovation and other creative interventions, making social progress achievable by even the lowest resourced countries.”*

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are at stake. Social progress will need to accelerate, if our world is to see the step change required to achieve the SDGs. The world as a whole needs to reach a score of 75, an improvement of 10 points, on the Social Progress Index to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Thankfully, the issues highlighted in the Social Progress Index are solvable, and business is part of the solution.

*“Addressing the complex challenges society faces, globally and locally, is a critical role for business. That is why*

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*Deloitte has been working alongside Social Progress Imperative to empower communities with new ways to think about and measure what matters most for society to advance and prosper,” said David Cruickshank, Deloitte Global Chairman and Social Progress Imperative board member. “Today’s business leaders want to better understand the societal forces shaping our world. I believe this Index has the ability to help enable these leaders, alongside those in government and civil society organizations, to systematically identify a strategy towards responsible and inclusive growth through prioritizing the most pressing needs of their communities.”*

## Other global findings

- **Denmark tops the 2017 Social Progress Index ranking**, boasting strong performance across all the components of the Index. It leads the world in Shelter (94.27) and Personal Rights (97.89), ranks second on Access to Information and Communications (98.49) and Personal Safety (93.75).
- If the world were a country, it would rank between Indonesia (rank 79) and Botswana (rank 80) on the 2017 Social Progress Index. It would fall within the Lower Middle Social Progress Tier.
- In the last four years, social progress has advanced worldwide but not fast or far enough. The average **world score rose from 63.19 in 2014 to 64.85 in 2017**—a 2.6% increase on the Social Progress Index. Out of the 128 countries measured on the Social Progress Index, **113 countries improved since 2014**. The average improvement was 1.37 points.
- **Access to Information and Communications** and **Access to Advanced Education** are driving global social progress.
  - More than 87% of people globally have mobile phone subscription and 95% of people live in an area with a mobile-cellular network—with lower-income countries increasingly gaining widespread access. The increase in Internet users globally has also increased over the last five years: more than 49% of the world’s population use the Web—up over 8% in just four years.
  - Better access to advanced education has contributed to social progress gains over the last four years: 89 countries boast globally ranked university up from 75 in 2014. Although most world-class universities are in Europe, North America, and Australia; East Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa can now claim top quality university education. In 2014, only South Africa had any globally ranked universities in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2017, that list now includes Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda.
- The **top improvers** (moving up their scores by three or more points) over the past four years are low and lower middle-income countries, which have the most areas to improve: Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Ghana, Bangladesh, Côte d’Ivoire, Myanmar, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Nigeria.
- The countries that have shown the **most decline** (moving down their scores by more than one point) in the past four years include: Nicaragua, Hungary, Central African Republic, and Republic of Congo.
- **Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is far from being the sole determinant of social progress**. Across the spectrum, from rich to poor, we see how some countries are much better at turning their economic growth into social progress than others.
  - Costa Rica, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Nepal, Senegal and Chile are identified by the 2017 Social Progress Index as the nations that most overperform on measures of social progress.
  - Angola, Saudi Arabia, Central African Republic, Kuwait, Chad and Afghanistan are identified by the 2017 Social Progress Index as the nations that most underperform on measures of social progress.

*“Economic growth alone is not sufficient to advance societies and improve the quality of life for citizens. True success, and growth that is inclusive, requires achieving both economic and social progress,” said Professor Michael E. Porter of Harvard Business School, who co-authored the 2017 Social Progress Index report and leads the Social Progress Imperative’s scientific team. “The US is the wealthiest G7 country in terms of GDP per capita, for example, but it is lagging behind other leading countries in areas like education, health, personal safety, and inclusion. America’s failure to advance social progress is limiting our economic growth and standing in the way of prosperity that is widely shared. Countries must rethink how they measure success. Benchmarking social progress and taking the steps needed to advance it will be the key to national and local success in this century.”*

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## About the Social Progress Index:

The Social Progress Index is the first holistic measure of a country’s social performance that is independent of economic factors. The index is based on a range of social and environmental indicators that capture three dimensions of social progress: Basic Human Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing, and Opportunity. The 2017 Social Progress Index includes data

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from 128 countries on 50 indicators. It includes 98% of world population. It is designed as a complement to GDP and other economic indicators to provide a more holistic understanding of countries' overall performance.

The 2017 Social Progress Index is generously supported by Deloitte, Ford Foundation and Skoll Foundation, along with generous individual donors. Other contributors, including the primary authors Professors Michael E. Porter of Harvard Business School, and Scott Stern of MIT, are listed within the report.

## **About Social Progress Imperative:**

The Social Progress Imperative's mission is to improve the lives of people around the world, particularly the least well off, by advancing global social progress by: providing a robust, holistic and innovative measurement tool—the Social Progress Index; fostering research and knowledge-sharing on social progress; and equipping leaders and change-makers in business, government and civil society with new tools to guide policies and programs.

Learn more about the 2017 Social Progress Index and make a gift to support this movement's mission at [www.socialprogressindex.com](http://www.socialprogressindex.com).

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