

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.

Denmark Offers Best Quality of Life in the World

The country tops the 2017 Social Progress ranking with outstanding Personal Rights, Access to Information and Communications

Nordic neighbors fill out the top 10—Finland (second), Iceland and Norway (tied for third), Sweden (8th)

WASHINGTON, DC / June 21, 2017—Denmark beats out 127 other countries by making exceptional social and environmental progress across all dimensions of the 2017 Social Progress Index. Not far behind, its Nordic neighbors—Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden—also demonstrate strong social progress performance.

New research, released today by the Social Progress Imperative in collaboration with Michael E. Porter of Harvard Business School and Scott Stern of MIT, shows these countries excel at meeting basic human needs, at providing a foundation for wellbeing with basic education and environmental protection, and at creating opportunities for all citizens to make personal choices and reach their potential. Distinct from simply making residents happy, the Social Progress Index recognizes these countries for having produced the greatest social and environmental outcomes through effective policy making, inclusive programs and bold investment in social progress.

Yet, analysis by Social Progress Imperative also reveals Denmark along with other advanced nations have hardly made much progress in the past four years.

“Denmark has long been heralded for its successful welfare policies and quality of life. While not surprising, its strong performance on the 2017 Social Progress Index is impressive and will serve for others as a model of what works in social progress,” Social Progress Imperative CEO Michael Green said. “Still, even the country at the top of the charts can improve and strive for more inclusive growth.”

Social Progress Imperative, for the first time, is able to compare 128 countries' social progress performance across four years and reveal global, regional, and national trends. Denmark made positive progress in areas like Health and Wellness, and Access to Advanced Education (moving up those scores more than two points each) over the past four years, but countries with a similar GDP per capita are still doing better in these areas.

Denmark (rank 1):

- A world leader on **Access to Information and Communications** due to the high rate of mobile phone subscriptions (on average one mobile phone for each Danish resident) and a high level of Internet usage (over 96% of Danes use the Web, compared to less than 75% of citizens in the US and 91% in Sweden).
- It also leads the world in **Shelter** thanks in part to the availability of affordable housing, which is an issue that is proving difficult to solve for many other European nations.
- On **Personal Rights**, Denmark finishes first globally, for effectively enabling political rights, freedom of expression,

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freedom of assembly, and private property rights (that is, all indicators under this component).

- Overall, Denmark is performing within the expected range of the 15 countries with a similar GDP per capita and remains atop the Index due to its consistent prioritization of social progress (and strengths mentioned above).
- Denmark's performance standouts from wealthier countries too because of how effectively it applies its \$44,042 GDP per capita to address the social and environmental needs of its country. At tenth in the world, this is significantly lower than Norway (\$63,650) and the US (\$52,704) which rank 2 and rank 18 on the 2017 Social Progress Index respectively.

Finland (rank 2):

- Top performing nation on **Personal Freedom and Choice**, registering first for freedom of religion and scoring particularly well for freedom over life choices (more than 93% satisfaction among Finns on this measure).
- Finns also enjoy the top spot on **Nutrition and Basic Medical Care** thanks in part to the lowest maternal mortality rates in the world and exceptionally low child mortality (second globally).
- On **Shelter**, Finland overperforms compared to countries with similar sized economies, thanks to particularly good availability of affordable housing.
- Across the 50 indicators which make up the Social Progress Index this year, Finland finishes first in 16.
- Finland registers its worst result on **Access to Basic Knowledge** (rank 44), owing to poor gender parity in secondary school enrollment.
- A high suicide rate and lower than expected life expectancy (an average of just over 84 years for those currently aged over 60) also account for a relatively poor ranking on **Health and Wellness** (rank 31).

Iceland (tied, rank 3):

- It demonstrates the strongest **Tolerance and Inclusion** worldwide: discrimination and violence against minorities are the lowest globally. Iceland scores top on religious tolerance and it also offers a strong community safety net.
- On **Access to Information and Communications** (rank 5) it scores strongly thanks in part to having the most people anywhere in the world using the Internet (more than 98% of the population uses the Web) and due to high mobile phone subscription rate (100 phones per 100 citizens).
- The big weakness in Iceland is on **Environmental Quality** (rank 25): owing in part to the adverse effects of increased tourism, it scores poorly on measures of biodiversity and habitat (rank 103) and the treatment of wastewater (rank 26).

Norway (tied, rank 3):

- It is the best place in the world to live for **Access to Information and Communications** owing to the high degree of Internet literacy (more than 96% of the population use the Web) and high press freedom (rank 3 on the Press Freedom Index).
- Norwegians also score well on **Personal Safety** thanks to extremely low levels of violent crime, political terror and perceived criminality (each ranking first globally).
- Residents are let down by a relative underperformance on **Access to Advanced Education** owing to the relatively low number of globally ranked universities located in the country.

Sweden (rank 8):

- The nation scores within the expected range—in relation the strength of its economy—across all of the components measured by the Social Progress Index with the exception of underperformance in **Access to Basic Knowledge** (rank 54). This is a result of poor gender parity in secondary enrollment (rank 104).
- Sweden is, however, the safest country to live in the world according to the 2017 Social Progress Index thanks in part to having the lowest number of traffic deaths of any nation (2.8 per 100,000).
- On **Environmental Quality**, Sweden scores well (rank 2) because of very low greenhouse gas emissions (rank 2) and just over 11 deaths per 100,000 attributable to air pollution (rank 3).

Encouragingly, **those in the highest tiers of social progress are not all Nordic countries**. Other regions of the world are also achieving high outcomes. More than half (9/14) of the countries with the very highest social

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progress scores fall outside the Nordic sub-region—Canada (rank 6) as well as Australia and New Zealand (tied for rank 9) are the highest ranking non-European countries. Of the top 50 countries on the Social Progress Index, 40% are located outside of Europe. And all nine of the top improvers—that is those that improved by three or more points over the past four years—are low and lower middle-income countries in Asia and Africa, which have the most areas to improve.

Generally, though, 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).

“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 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.”

“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.

Other global findings:

- 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 Educations are driving global social progress.**
 - Despite these achievements, **Personal Rights, Personal Safety, Tolerance and Inclusion are eroding worldwide.**
 - In areas like Environmental Quality, Health and Wellness, Personal Freedom and Choice, and Shelter **progress is slow and uneven**. This means we’re seeing incremental change and pockets of social progress rather than widespread transformation. Some countries are even backsliding in these areas.

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- One of the most concerning trends is that **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.
- **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 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 the www.socialprogressindex.com.

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