

# 2020 SOCIAL PROGRESS INDEX

## Executive Summary



**SOCIAL  
PROGRESS  
IMPERATIVE**

# Introduction

We are excited to announce the 2020 Social Progress Index. The Social Progress Index is the only measurement tool to comprehensively and systematically focus exclusively on the non-economic dimensions of social performance across the globe with transparent and actionable data.

This is the sixth year of the index, which contains applicable and focused insight for nations and communities around the world. This short brief focuses on some of the overarching findings that we have taken away from this year's index, including four headline findings:

- Overall, social progress is advancing across the world. Since 2011, the world average increased from 60.63 to 64.24, and there has been improvement on eight of 12 social progress components.
- Despite this overall progress, Personal Rights and Inclusiveness have regressed since 2011, and there has been stagnation in the areas of Personal Safety and Access to Basic Knowledge.
- 155 of 163 countries register an improved social progress score since 2011, with several countries, including The Gambia, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Tunisia demonstrating particularly notable improvement.
- With that said, there are important negative outliers. Most notably, the United States has dropped from 86.43 to 85.71 over time, experiencing both an absolute and relative decline.

Beyond these headline empirical findings, we are excited to share this report with you in order to also continue to engage the growing social progress community. The Social Progress Imperative now works with allied initiatives across more than 50 countries covering 2.4 billion people to not only chart social progress but to use the insights from systematic measurement to make a positive difference for all.

We look forward to the exciting ways that the general public and decision-makers around the world can engage in this movement, and look forward to your feedback and continued engagement on this important mission!



## ABOUT THE SOCIAL PROGRESS INDEX

Social progress has become an increasingly critical agenda for leaders in government, business and civil society. Citizens' demands for better lives are evident in uprisings since the Arab Spring and the emergence of new political movements in even the most prosperous countries. Since the financial crisis of 2008, there has also been a growing expectation that business must play its role

in delivering improvements in the lives of customers and employees, as well as protecting the environment for us all. This is the social progress imperative.

Progress on social issues does not automatically accompany economic development. Rising income usually brings major improvements in areas such as access to clean water, sanitation, literacy, and basic education. But on average, personal security is no better in middle-income countries than low-income ones, and is often worse. And, too many people—regardless of income—live without full rights and experience discrimination or even violence based on gender, religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Traditional measures of national income, such as GDP per capita, fail to capture the overall progress of societies.

The Social Progress Index rigorously measures country performance on many aspects of social and environmental performance which are relevant for countries at all levels of economic development. It enables an assessment of not just absolute country performance but also relative performance compared to a country's economic peers. The index gives governments and businesses the tools to track social and environmental performance rigorously, and make better public policy and investment choices. The Social Progress Index also allows us to assess a country's success in turning economic progress into improved social outcomes. Overall, the Social Progress Index provides the first concrete framework for benchmarking and prioritizing an action agenda advancing both social and economic performance.

## The Social Progress Index Methodology

The Social Progress Index follows four key design principles:

**1. Exclusively social and environmental indicators:** Our aim is to measure social progress directly, rather than utilize economic proxies or outcomes. By excluding economic indicators, we can, for the first time, rigorously and systematically analyze the relationship between economic development (measured for example by GDP per capita) and social development. Prior efforts to move “beyond GDP” have comingled social and economic indicators, making it difficult to disentangle cause and effect.

**2. Outcomes not inputs:** Our purpose is to measure the outcomes that matter to the lives of real people, not the inputs. For example, we want to measure a country's health and wellness achieved, not how much effort is expended nor how much the country spends on healthcare.

**3. Holistic and relevant to all countries:** We strive to create a holistic measure of social progress that encompasses the many aspects of the health of societies. Most previous efforts have focused on the poorest countries, for understandable reasons. But knowing what constitutes a successful society for any country, including higher-income countries, is indispensable for charting a course for all societies.

**4. Actionable:** The Social Progress Index aims to be a practical tool that helps leaders and practitioners in government, business, and civil society to implement policies and programs that will drive faster social progress. To achieve that goal, we measure outcomes in a granular way that focuses on specific areas that can be implemented directly.

The design principles are the foundation for our conceptual framework and formulate our definition of social progress. The Social Progress Index uses the following working definition:

*Social progress is the capacity of a society to meet the basic human needs of its citizens, establish the building blocks that allow citizens and communities to enhance and sustain the quality of their lives, and create the conditions for all individuals to reach their full potential.*

The index is structured around 12 components and 50 distinct indicators. The framework not only provides an aggregate country score and ranking, but also allows benchmarking on specific areas of strength and weakness. Transparency of measurement based on a comprehensive framework allows change-makers to set strategic priorities, acting upon the most pressing issues in their societies.

**Figure 1 / 2020 Social Progress Index Framework**



Each of the twelve components of the framework is made up of between three and five specific outcome indicators. Indicators are selected because they are measured appropriately with a consistent methodology by the same organization across all (or essentially all) of the countries in our sample. Taken together, this framework aims to capture a broad range of interrelated factors revealed by the scholarly literature and practitioner experience as underpinning social progress.



The high-level structure of the 2020 Social Progress Index remains unchanged from 2019. To improve the measurement of component-level concepts and accommodate changes in data availability, some modifications were made to individual indicators and to the composition of several components.

A key advantage of the Social Progress Index's exclusion of economic variables is that we can compare social progress relative to a country's level of economic development. In many cases, it is more useful and interesting to compare a country's performance to countries at a similar level of GDP per capita than to all countries in the world. For example, a lower-income country may have a low score on a certain component, but may greatly exceed typical scores for countries with similar per capita incomes. Conversely, a high-income country may have a high absolute score on a component, but still fall short of what is typical for comparably wealthy countries. For this reason, we present a country's strengths and weaknesses on a relative rather than absolute basis, comparing a country's performance to that of its economic peers.

The first Social Progress Index was released in 2014, which means that this is the sixth annual index. For the first time, we are able to measure a full decade of progress, from 2011-20.

## 2020 SOCIAL PROGRESS INDEX RESULTS

The 2020 Social Progress Index ranks 163 countries that have sufficient available data to assess all 12 components. We group countries from highest to lowest social progress into six tiers. Tiers are based on hierarchical clustering to set empirically determined break points across groups of countries based on their Social Progress Index scores.<sup>1</sup> Here we present results across all countries and for the world as a whole. We then discuss the relationship between Social Progress and GDP per capita. Finally, we explore changes in social progress at the country level since 2011, with spotlights on US performance and the mandate for prioritizing social progress.

### 2020 Country Rankings

Norway ranks first on the 2020 Social Progress Index, with a score of 92.73. Canada, ranked seventh with a score of 91.40, is the top-performing G7 country. All 15 Tier 1 countries are high-income, and all score very similarly on social progress—just 3.95 points separate first-ranked Norway at the top of the tier from 13<sup>th</sup>-ranked Japan.

Tier 2 features a much wider range of scores, from Luxembourg (89.56, ranked 14<sup>th</sup>) to Greece (82.48, ranked 30<sup>th</sup>). France, the UK, Italy and the US—all wealthy G7 countries—are ranked in Tier 2 of the Social Progress Index. Most Tier 2 countries are high-income.

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<sup>1</sup> To determine tiers, we ran a number of iterations of clusters and decided upon the common breaks, with six different tiers being the best fit for the Index. We note that although these tiers show similarities among countries in terms of aggregate performance, there is significant variation in each country's performance across components.

Croatia (39<sup>th</sup>), leads Tier 3 with a score of 80.65. Fellow EU member states Bulgaria (79.86, 43<sup>rd</sup>) and Romania (78.35, 45<sup>th</sup>) also fall in Tier 3, which includes large Latin American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico.

Several resource-rich countries, including the United Arab Emirates (70.60, 80<sup>th</sup>) and Qatar (70.58, 81<sup>st</sup>) are among the leading countries in Tier 4. Notably, three of the five BRICS countries—South Africa, China, and India—are in Tier 4 of the index. Most Tier 4 countries are middle- or lower-income. Noteworthy exceptions include Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia, which ranks 101<sup>st</sup> in the world with a score of 65.06.

Tier 5 is home to several of the countries that have improved most over the past decade, including Nepal (57.60, 114<sup>th</sup>), The Gambia (55.10, 124<sup>th</sup>), and Sierra Leone (51.74, 134<sup>th</sup>). Tier 5 is mainly comprised of lower-middle- and lower-income countries, many of them in East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Tier 6 countries exhibit the widest range of scores of any of the six Social Progress Index tiers: 19.02 points separate Equatorial Guinea (50.08, 138<sup>th</sup>) from South Sudan (31.06, 163<sup>rd</sup>). Tier 6 countries are generally low income, and several are fragile states where instability has hindered social progress. Some, like South Sudan and Afghanistan, are also active conflict zones. South Sudan ranks last on the 2020 Social Progress Index.

**Figure 2 / 2020 Social Progress Index Rankings**

Tier 1			Tier 2			Tier 2			Tier 3			Tier 3			Tier 4		
Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score
1	Norway	92.73	14	Luxembourg	89.56	26	Cyprus	86.64	39	Croatia	81.92	55	Tunisia	75.02	72	Cuba	71.52
2	Denmark	92.11	15	Austria	89.50	27	Greece	85.78	40	Hungary	81.02	56	Georgia	74.85	73	Jordan	71.50
3	Finland	91.89	16	Belgium	89.46	28	United States	85.71	41	Argentina	80.66	57	Jamaica	74.75	74	Oman	71.41
4	New Zealand	91.64	17	Korea, Republic of	89.06	29	Singapore	85.46	42	Barbados	80.50	58	Montenegro	74.42	75	Suriname	71.12
5	Sweden	91.62	18	France	88.78	30	Malta	84.89	43	Bulgaria	79.86	59	Peru	74.22	76	Mongolia	71.07
6	Switzerland	91.42	19	Spain	88.71	31	Poland	84.32	44	Mauritius	78.96	60	Colombia	74.00	77	Dominican Republic	71.05
7	Canada	91.40	20	United Kingdom	88.54	32	Lithuania	83.97	45	Romania	78.35	61	Brazil	73.91	78	Maldives	70.81
8	Australia	91.29	21	Portugal	87.79	33	Israel	83.62	46	Kuwait	77.47	62	Mexico	73.52	79	Thailand	70.72
9	Iceland	91.09	22	Slovenia	87.71	34	Chile	83.34	47	Belarus	77.00	63	Ukraine	73.38	80	United Arab Emirates	70.60
10	Netherlands	91.06	23	Italy	87.36	35	Latvia	83.19	48	Malaysia	76.96	64	Sri Lanka	73.20	81	Qatar	70.58
11	Germany	90.56	24	Estonia	87.26	36	Slovakia	83.15	49	Panama	76.55	65	Republic of North Macedonia	73.16	82	South Africa	70.26
12	Ireland	90.35	25	Czechia	86.69	37	Costa Rica	83.01	50	Armenia	76.46	66	Bosnia and Herzegovina	72.74	83	Algeria	69.92
13	Japan	90.14				38	Uruguay	82.99	51	Trinidad and Tobago	76.33	67	Kazakhstan	72.66	84	Indonesia	69.49
									52	Serbia	75.54	68	Moldova	72.58			
									53	Ecuador	75.45	69	Russia	72.56			
									54	Albania	75.41	70	Paraguay	72.48			

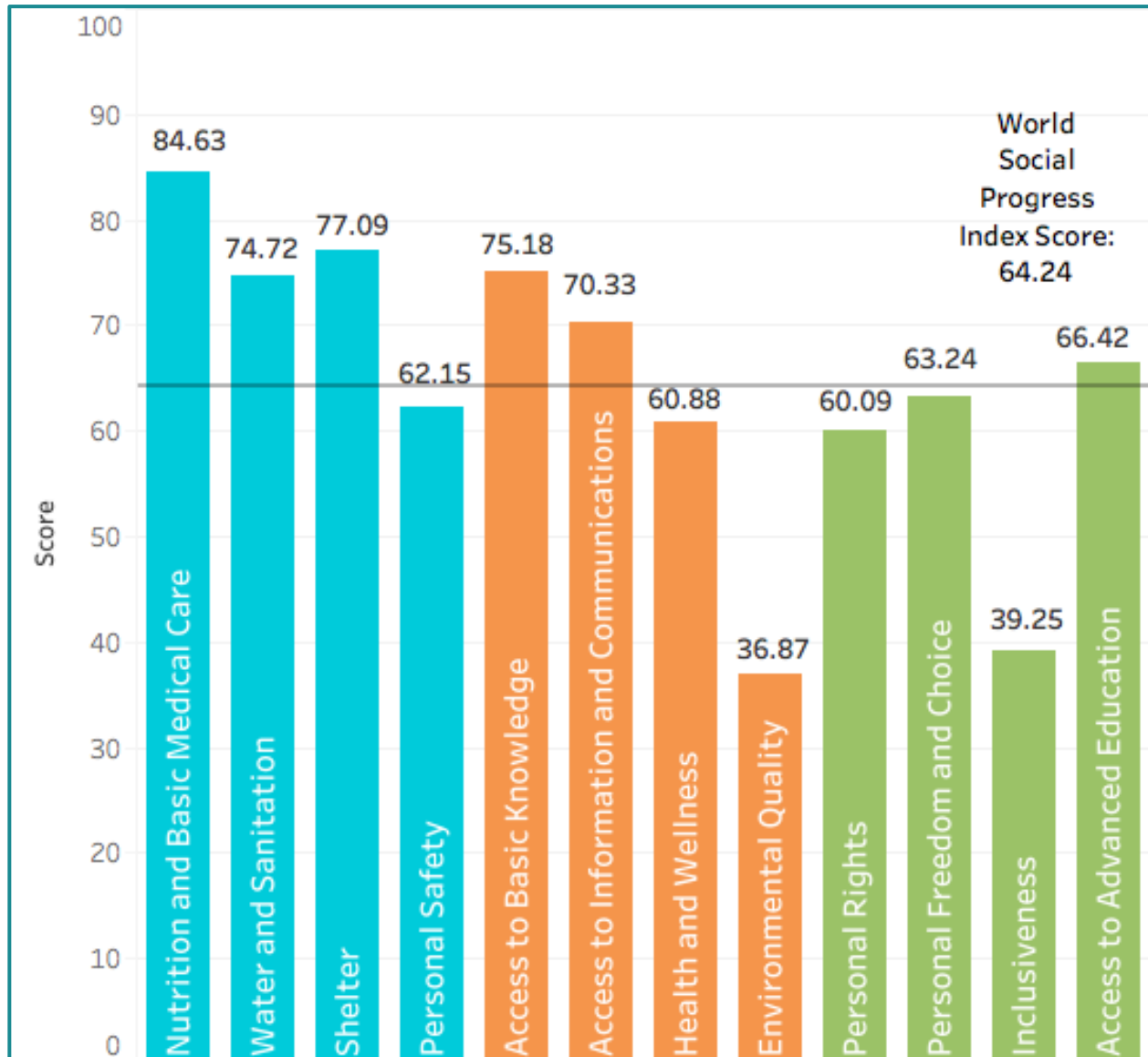
  

Tier 4			Tier 4			Tier 5			Tier 5			Tier 6			Tier 6		
Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score
85	Lebanon	69.37	98	Philippines	66.62	108	Honduras	62.41	123	Bangladesh	55.23	138	Equatorial Guinea	50.08	151	Angola	48.16
86	Botswana	69.36	99	Bahrain	66.60	109	Guatemala	61.67	124	Gambia, The	55.10	139	Korea, Democratic Republic of	50.01	152	Guinea-Bissau	46.69
87	Bolivia	69.23	100	China	66.12	110	Timor-Leste	61.08	125	Rwanda	54.13	140	Burkina Faso	49.87	153	Papua New Guinea	44.91
88	Vietnam	68.85	101	Saudi Arabia	65.06	111	Senegal	60.04	126	Malawi	54.07	141	Pakistan	49.25	154	Guinea	43.41
89	Kyrgyzstan	68.65	102	Uzbekistan	64.98	112	Egypt	59.98	127	Lesotho	53.80	142	Mozambique	49.00	155	Afghanistan	42.29
90	Fiji	68.42	103	Ghana	64.86	113	Turkmenistan	58.35	128	Côte d'Ivoire	53.59	143	Mauritania	48.95	156	Congo, Democratic Republic of	42.25
91	Bhutan	68.34	104	Azerbaijan	64.11	114	Nepal	57.60	129	Togo	53.05	144	Haiti	48.79	157	Niger	42.21
92	Turkey	68.27	105	Nicaragua	64.02	115	Kenya	57.10	130	Uganda	52.98	145	Ethiopia	48.59	158	Burundi	41.20
93	Iran	67.49	106	Gabon	63.93	116	Tajikistan	56.99	131	Eswatini	52.92	146	Djibouti	48.53	159	Somalia	35.58
94	El Salvador	67.25	107	Iraq	63.52	117	India	56.80	132	Zimbabwe	52.26	147	Sudan	48.51	160	Eritrea	35.20
95	Namibia	67.14				118	Cambodia	56.27	133	Laos	51.80	148	Madagascar	48.46	161	Central African Republic	31.62
96	Guyana	66.95				119	Tanzania	56.20	134	Sierra Leone	51.74	149	Congo, Republic of	48.45	162	Chad	31.29
97	Morocco	66.90				120	Myanmar	55.99	135	Liberia	51.37	150	Mali	48.29	163	South Sudan	31.06
						121	Benin	55.56	136	Nigeria	51.31						
						122	Zambia	55.34	137	Cameroon	51.29						

## World Average Performance

We can sum country Social Progress Index scores, population-weighted, to look at world performance. If the world were a country, it would rank between Ghana and Azerbaijan on the Social Progress Index (score: 64.24). On average, the world scores highest on Nutrition and Basic Medical Care and Access to Basic Knowledge. The world performs worst on the Opportunity dimension, particularly on Inclusiveness and Environmental Quality.

**Figure 3 /** Population-weighted world scores by component

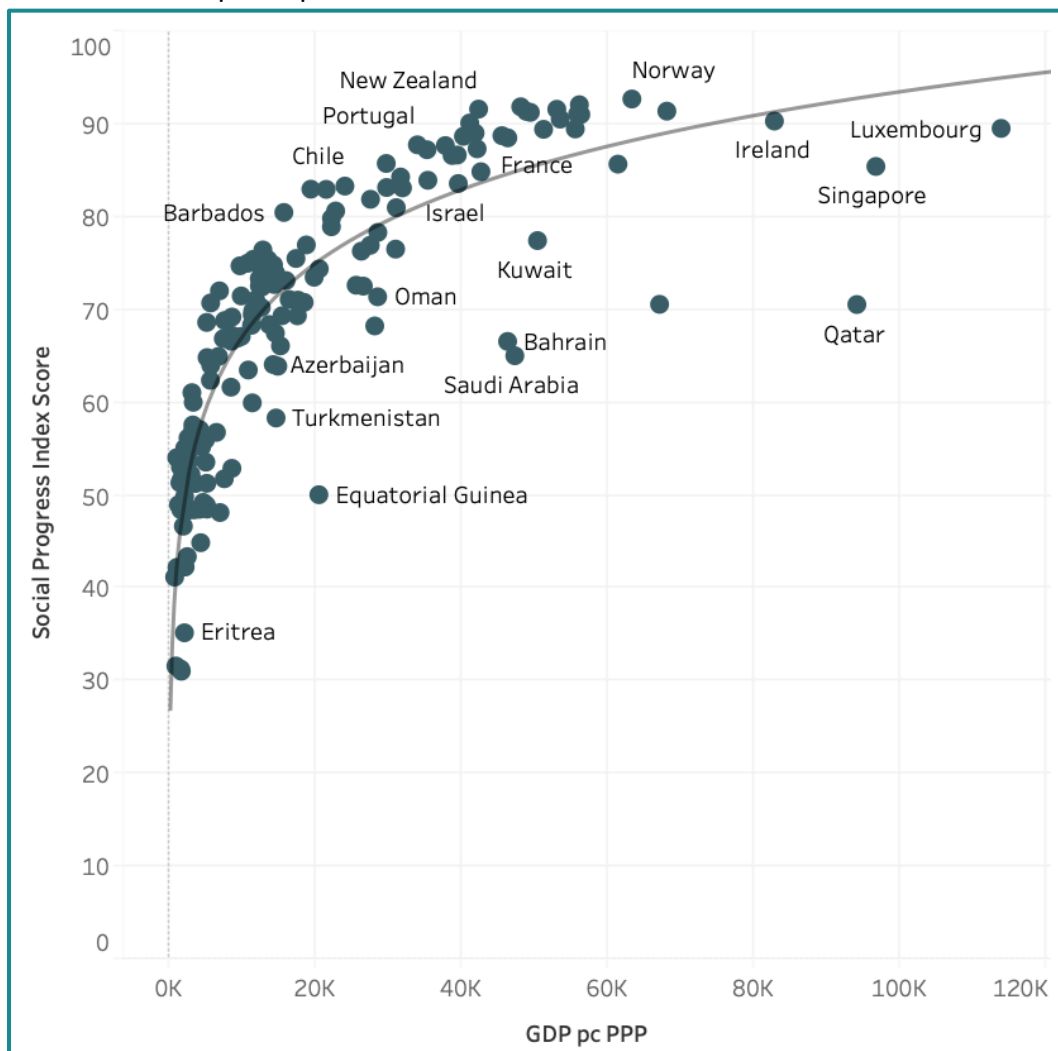


## Social Progress Index vs. GDP per capita

Figure 4 shows the relationship between GDP per capita and social progress. The data reveal several key findings:

- There is a positive and strong relationship between the Social Progress Index and GDP per capita.
- The relationship between economic development and social progress is not linear. At lower income levels, small differences in GDP per capita are associated with large improvements in social progress. As countries reach high levels of income, however, the rate of change slows.
- GDP per capita does not completely explain social progress. Countries achieve divergent levels of social progress at similar levels of GDP per capita.

**Figure 4 / SPI vs GDP per capita**



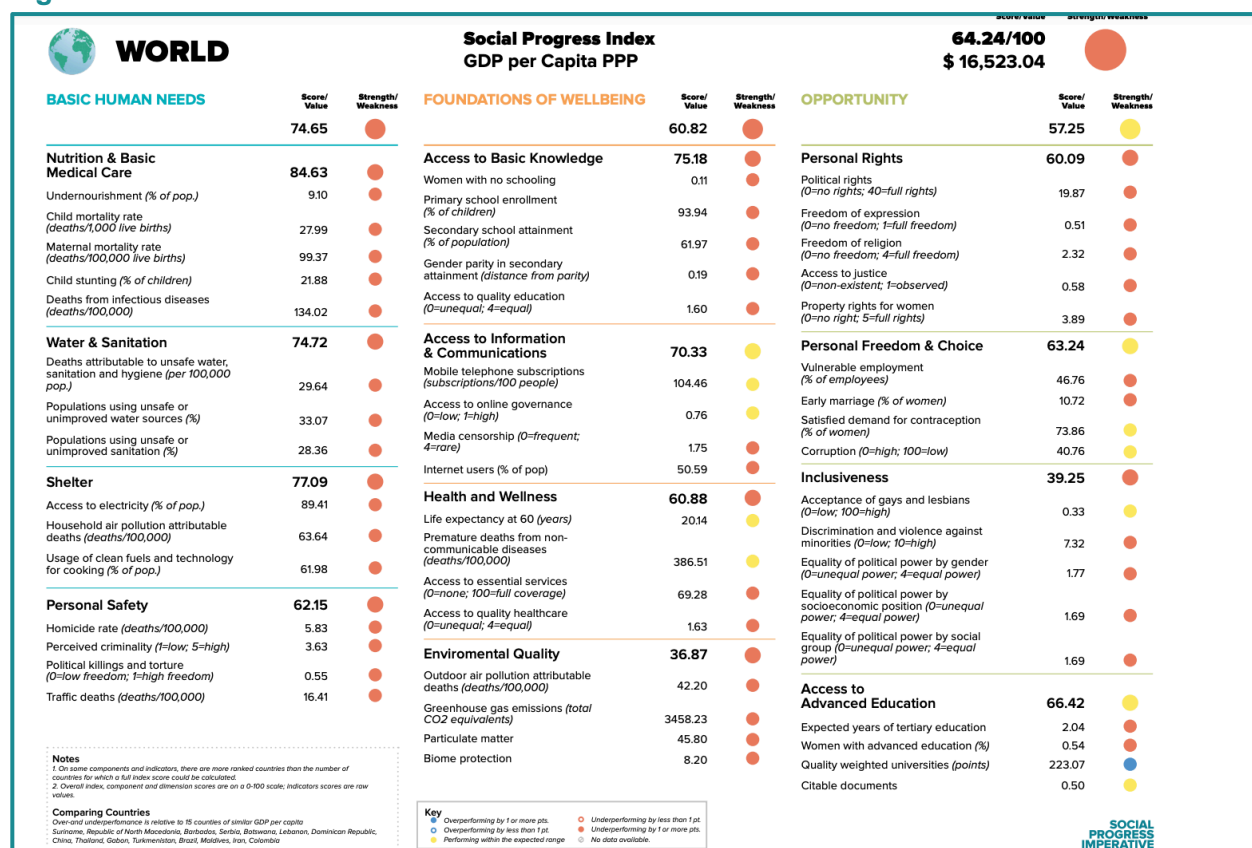


## Benchmarking Countries

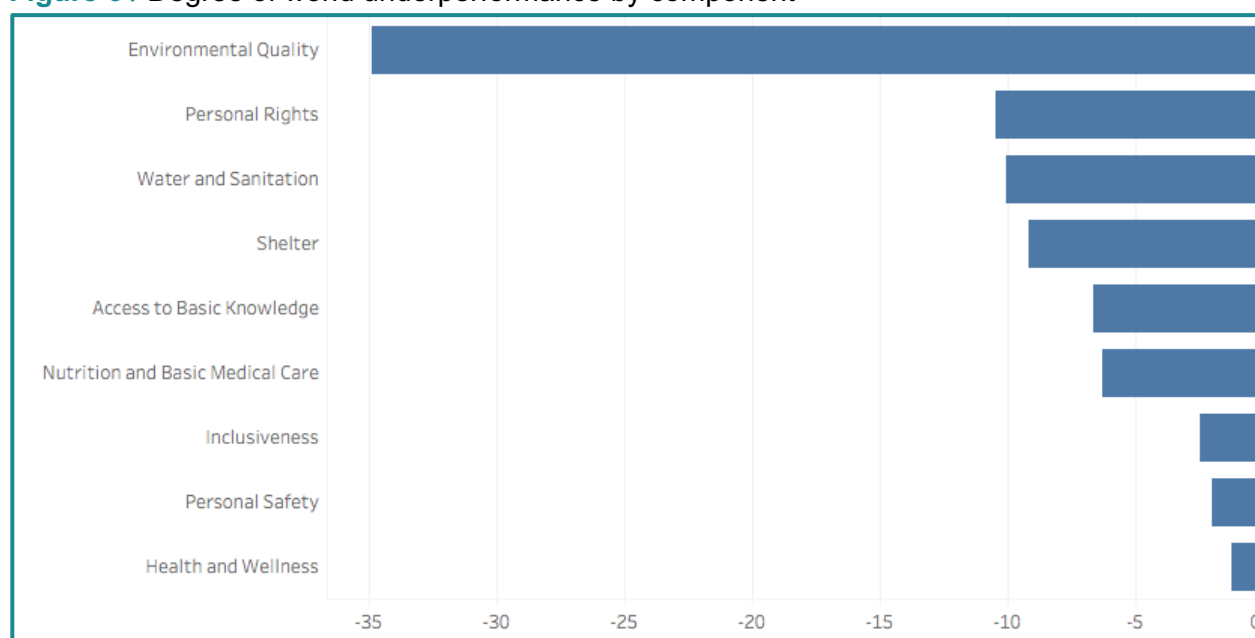
We can assess a country's performance relative to its level of GDP per capita using the social progress "scorecard". This compares the performance of a country on aggregate social progress, as well on the dimensions, components, and indicators of the Social Progress Index, to the performances of 15 other countries with similar GDPs per capita. By revealing where each country is using its resources more or less efficiently than countries of similar income, the scorecard can point to either successes or specific priority areas for actions and investments, respectively.

The world scorecard compares the population-weighted world average Social Progress Index scores to the median score of the 15 countries with GDPs per capita closest to that of the world. It shows that the world as a whole is underperforming on many aspects of social progress relative to the economic resources, measured in GDP per capita, that are available. We also produce full scorecards for all 163 ranked countries.

Figure 5 / 2020 World Scorecard



**Figure 6 / Degree of world underperformance by component**



We also see (Figure 6) that the degree of world underperformance varies widely. Notably, the world's absolute performance on Environmental Quality is lowest among the twelve components. It is also, by a significant margin, the component on which the world most underperforms relative to its income. Coupled with the lack of progress on this component (see below), this represents a troubling situation for future environmental sustainability.

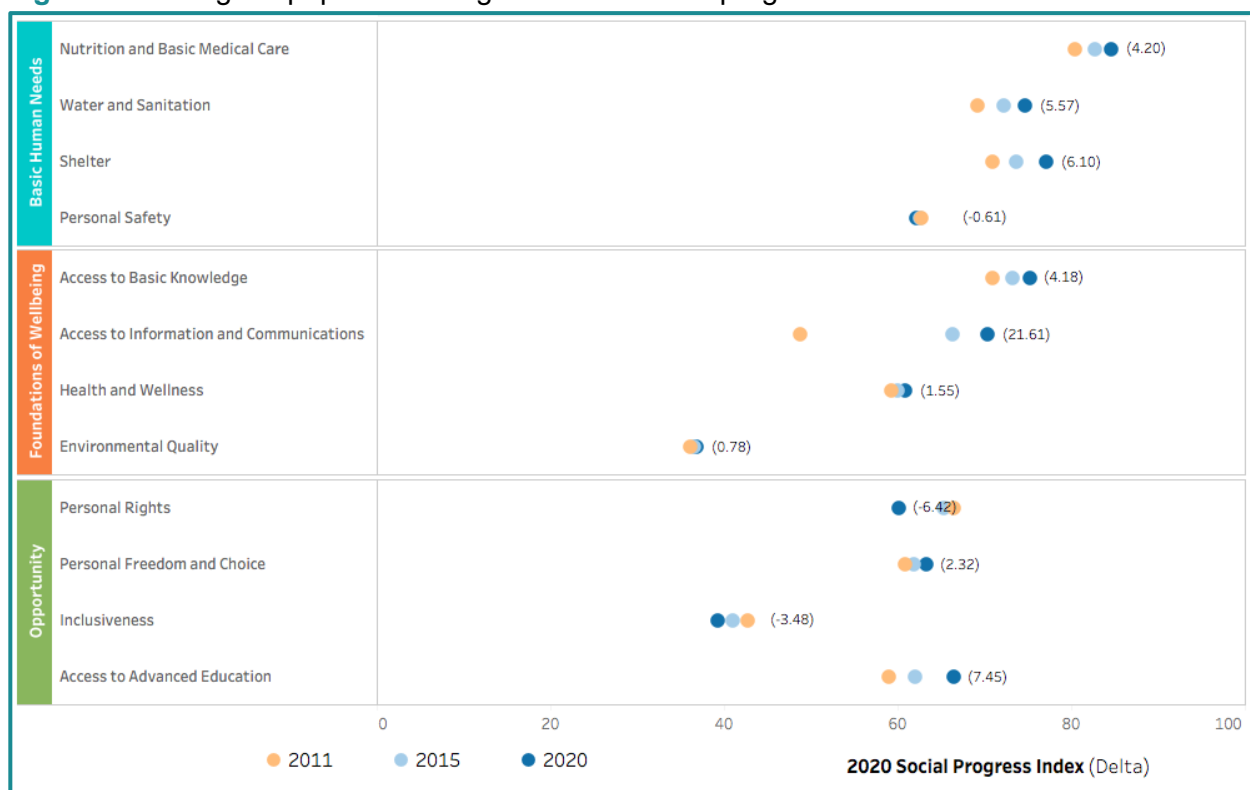
### Changes in Social Progress 2011-2020

In 2020 we are able to measure changes in social progress over ten years. To do so, we utilize the 2020 index framework, then apply that methodology across countries and years back to 2011.<sup>2</sup> We can measure the evolution of aggregate social progress and also identify the relative movement of each component and dimension of the index. This dynamic analysis is a first and critical step towards not simply measuring social progress for a country but also identifying what is driving social progress improvement.

The world is getting better in terms of social progress. The population-weighted world score on the Social Progress Index rose from 60.63 in 2011 to 64.24 in 2020—a 3.61 point increase.

<sup>2</sup> As such, our analysis accounts for retroactive data revisions from sources as well as minor changes in the Social Progress Index methodology. Accordingly, the figures cited here may differ from the SPI scores and rankings that were reported in the context of earlier annual reports. Full datasets from 2011-2020 are available on the Social Progress Imperative website: [www.socialprogress.org](http://www.socialprogress.org).

**Figure 7 /** Change in population-weighted world social progress 2011-2020



However, the gains in social progress are not evenly distributed across the components of the framework. Since 2011 the world score has improved on eight components: Access to Information and Communications (+21.61 point change), Access to Advanced Education (+7.45), Shelter (6.10), Water and Sanitation (+5.57), Access to Basic Knowledge (+4.18), Nutrition and Basic Medical Care (+4.20), Personal Freedom and Choice (+2.32), and Health and Wellness (+1.55).

The world is declining on Personal Rights (-6.42), Inclusiveness (-3.48) and stagnating on Personal Safety (-0.61) and Environmental Quality (value). The world score on Personal Rights has declined by 4.17 points since 2011.

We find that 155/163 countries—95% of those measured—improved on social progress 2011-20. Yet these gains in social progress are also unevenly distributed among countries.

**Figure 8 / Significant improvers and decliners on social progress 2011-2020**

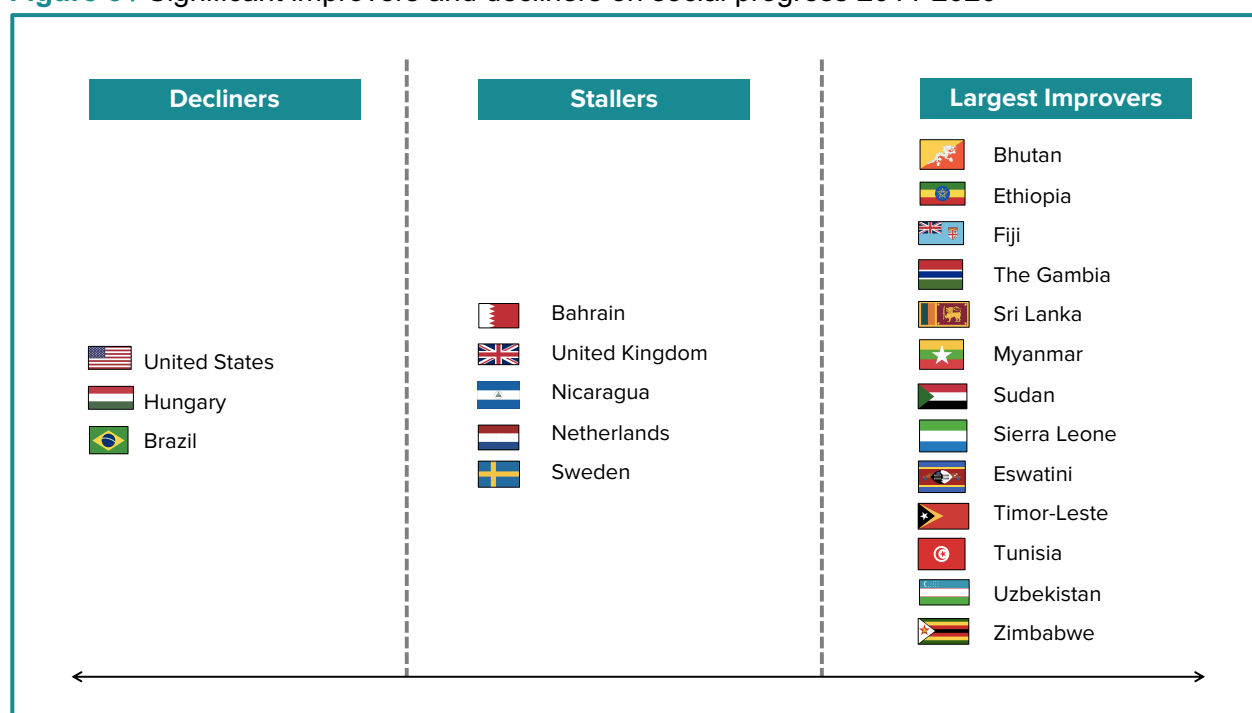
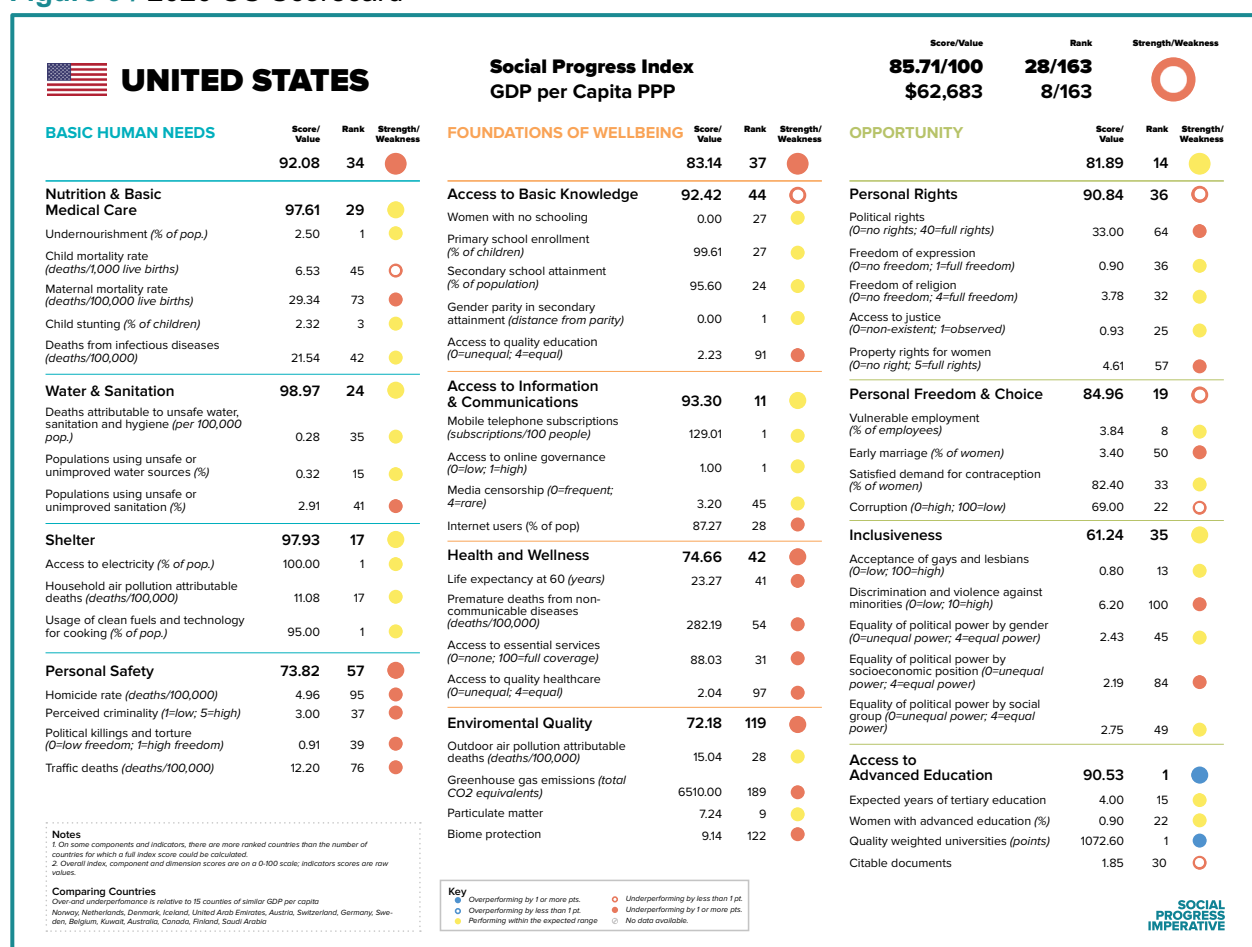


Figure 8 shows that the most improved countries since 2011 have been low and lower middle-income, including The Gambia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Eswatini and Sierra Leone. Richer countries, which overall show stronger performance on the Social Progress Index, have tended to improve more slowly. Only three countries register a decline: the US, Hungary, and Brazil.

## SPOTLIGHT: UNITED STATES AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

Since the first Social Progress Index in 2014, the United States has consistently shown under-performance relative to its GDP per capita. This is exceptional among leading economies. That trend continues in 2020 (see Figure 9 below). The US ranks 28<sup>th</sup> in the world on social progress, below Greece and Singapore and the lowest of the G7. On Access to Basic Knowledge, the US performs worse than Cuba and Uzbekistan, while on Health and Wellness the US score is comparable to Albania's. On Personal Safety, the US ranks below Senegal and Sri Lanka.

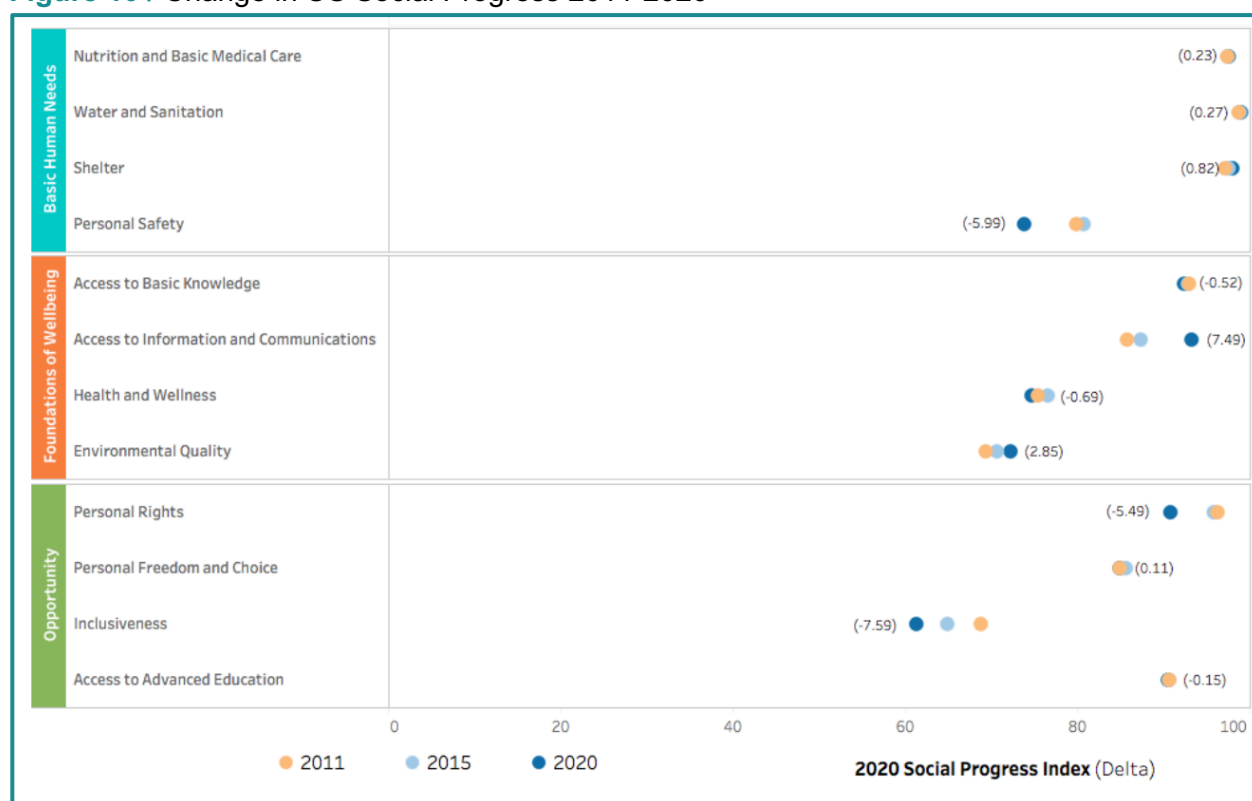
Figure 9 / 2020 US Scorecard



The United States is also an outlier amongst its peers as one of only three countries that has seen a decline in social progress since 2011 (see Figure 10). The most significant deterioration has been in Inclusiveness (-7.59), Personal Safety (-5.99), and Personal Rights (-5.49). There has also been a decline in Health and Wellness (-0.69).



**Figure 10 /** Change in US Social Progress 2011-2020



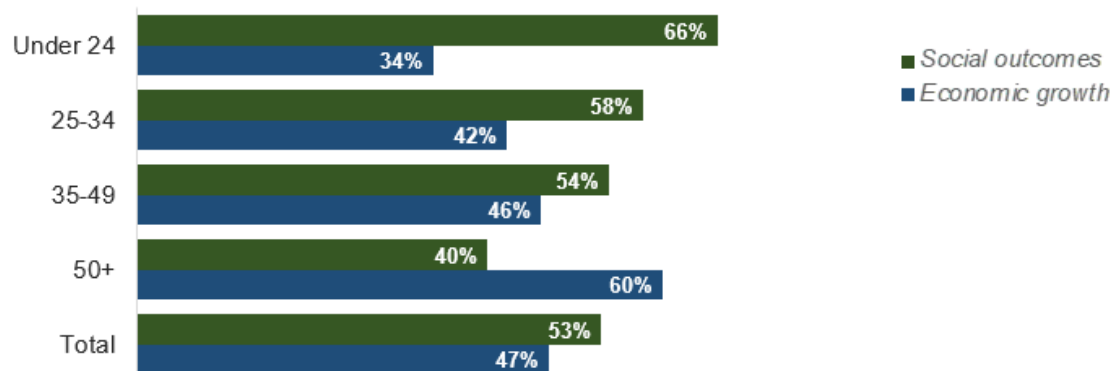
## SPOTLIGHT: PRIORITIZING SOCIAL PROGRESS

A new Ipsos survey in partnership with the Social Progress Imperative and supported by Skoll Foundation indicates that a majority across countries hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic want social progress – rather than economic growth – to be at the fore as the crisis continues and once it ends. Conducted among a random sample of over 10,000 adults from 13 countries, the survey finds that seven in ten are prioritizing the health and well-being of the population over GDP, and more than half want improved social outcomes to remain a priority even after the pandemic is over.

Though young people are least likely to suffer severe cases of the virus and most likely to experience negative consequences as a result of the pandemic's economic impact, the survey found that the youngest respondents were the most likely to report prioritizing social progress. Two in three respondents under 24 (66%) wanted their country to focus on improving social outcomes, compared with just two in five (40%) of those over 50, who are most at risk.

**Figure 11 /** Public priorities for the post-Covid world, by age cohort

*Imagining when the Covid-19 pandemic is over...which should your country prioritize more?*



## FROM INDEX TO ACTION TO IMPACT

The Social Progress Imperative publishes the annual Social Progress Index in order to build a common language and data platform that supports benchmarking, collaboration and change. Throughout the world, the Social Progress Imperative has catalyzed the formation of local action networks that bring together government, businesses, academia, and civil society organizations committed to using the Social Progress Index as a tool to assess strengths and weaknesses, spur constructive dialogue, catalyze change, and improve people's lives.

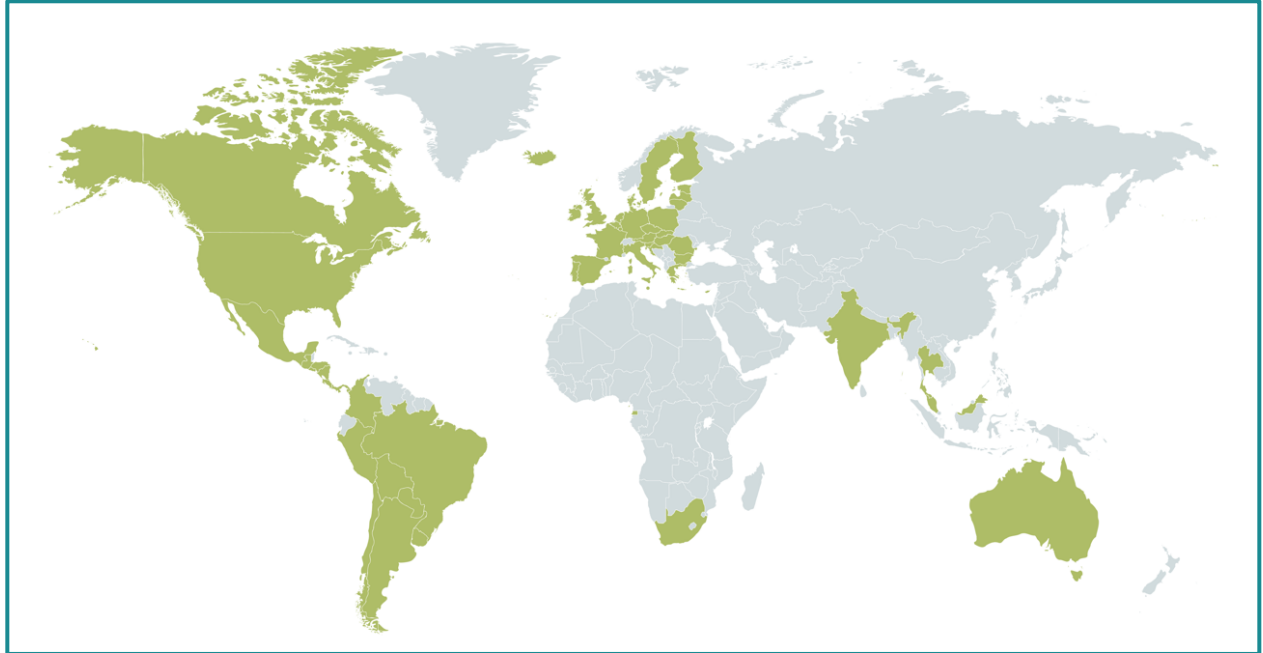
Our network of partners and champions now extends more than 50 countries around the world and includes leading institutions from all sectors of society, including INCAE Business School, Fundación Avina, and the Institute for Competitiveness, India.

The index has gained significant traction across Latin America. In Paraguay, the central government has officially adopted the index as part of the National Development Plan, doubling its budget for nutrition programs as a result of the priorities highlighted by the data. In Brazil, multinational corporations like Coca-Cola, Natura and Fiat-Chrysler are using customized indexes to ensure their supply chains are socially and environmentally sustainable. In cities from Bogota to Medellín to Rio de Janeiro, local indexes are guiding urban policy and framing political debates. And in Costa Rica, the index was applied to measure the effects of the tourism industry on local communities—the first application to assess the social impact of a major economic sector.

We are also making progress in Europe, North America, Africa and Australia. In Europe we are working with DG Regio of the European Commission which has integrated the Index into Cohesion Policy. In North America, we are working with communities as diverse as the cities of San Jose, California and Jackson, Mississippi, as well as San Mateo County, California, and ATB Bank in the Province of Alberta, Canada, to leverage hyper-localized SPI data for policy development and investment decision-making. Over the past year, countrywide Social Progress Indexes have been released in South Africa (in partnership with IQ Business) and Australia (in

partnership with the Centre for Social Impact). Both represent major milestones for the Social Progress Index as it continues to be applied to successfully inform decision makers across the world.

### Figure 11 / Map of the Social Progress Network



Our network continues to expand globally, providing more and more change-makers around the world with the data and insight they need to change lives. To learn more about the Social Progress Index and the ways in which it is driving impact around the world, visit [www.socialprogress.org](http://www.socialprogress.org).

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