

Methodological notes: thematic tables

Measurement of the current situation of countries and the rate of change

The **situation** a country is in, according to each indicator, is given by the latest available value for that indicator.

Each country is assigned a value from 1 to 4 (1 indicates the worst situation and 4 indicates the best situation) according to the distribution of values on each indicator,¹ and an average of these values is then given for all the indicators in that area. In this way a self-referential ranking is obtained, independent of distance from goals or from specific conceptually defined levels.

This ranking was only applied to those countries with information available for at least half the indicators that make up each overall thematic area.

To avoid giving a false impression that the data are exact values, the average values were rescaled² to create four country categories:

<i>Countries in better situation</i>	
<i>Countries above average</i>	
<i>Countries below average</i>	
<i>Countries in worse situation</i>	

Countries for which sufficient information to be included in the ranking is lacking (*Countries with insufficient data to summarize the area*) are also shown.

Recent evolution

For each country, evolution in each indicator is evaluated between 1990 (or the closest year for which information is available) and the most recent year for which information is available.

In order to assess the evolution of each indicator, two aspects were taken into account: initial³ and final levels, and the rate of change of progress or regression.

The **rate of change** for each country is obtained by considering the variation in the values of the indicator over the time period within which the measurements were made. The ratio between the variation in the indicator and the time period reflects the rate of change for the item in question.

In the case of information from a specific period (e.g. 1990-1994) rather than a specific year, the criterion adopted was to use the data for the middle of the interval (e.g. 1992) as a means of calculating the rate of change.

The values for this rate of change have also been rescaled in sections (using a reference scale of 1 to 5), and in the tables these appear in a column to the right of the current indicator value. A series of symbols are used to illustrate changes in order to make the information easier to read (numerical values are not used because they would tend to give the impression that the information is exact, which in this case it is not).

The categories defined in this rescaling are as follows:

	<i>Significant progress</i>
	<i>Slight progress</i>
	<i>Stagnant</i>
	<i>Regression</i>
	<i>Major regression</i>

Significant progress applies to those countries which are progressing at rates above the average for all countries making progress.

Slight progress applies to those countries which are progressing at rates below the average for all countries making progress.

Stagnant refers to those countries where no changes (or quantitatively insignificant changes) have been recorded over the period in question.

Regression applies to those countries which are regressing at rates below the average for all countries regressing (i.e. they are regressing more slowly).

Major regression applies to those countries which are regressing at rates above the average for all countries regressing (i.e. they are regressing more rapidly).

In addition, an average of progress and regression of the indicators is built for each dimension for which information on recent evolution is available. The average appears in the column "Recent evolution" of the area, and values are also rescaled to obtain the aforementioned five categories.⁴ ■

1 For this, the variable was normalized (by subtracting the mean and dividing by the standard deviation) and then the mean positive values and the mean negative values for the normalized indicator were calculated. The four categories were established according to the values above and below the mean positive values for the normalized indicator, and the values above and below the mean negative values for the normalized indicator.

2 The possible range for the average of the area was divided into four groups as follows: group 1 (between 4 and 3.26); group 2 (between 3.25 and 2.6); group 3 (between 2.5 and 1.76); group 4 (between 1.75 and 1).

3 See initial values in the complete version of the tables at: www.socialwatch.org/statistics2008

4 The five groups were divided as follows: major regression (1 to 1.8), regression (1.81 to 2.59), stagnant (2.6 to 3.39), slight progress (3.4 to 4.19), significant progress (4.2 to 5).