

Methodology and data management

While the use of electronic media has clearly speeded up access to information,¹ many of the problems that Social Watch signalled in previous years continue to make it difficult to carry out comparative analysis on the evolution of the indicators.² This year we have maintained the same criteria as were adopted in previous editions regarding the selection of data sources. That is, our first choice continues to be the most recent source provided by any of the international institutions that are generally recognized as providing reliable data, even if some changes appear surprising and could be interpreted in different ways, or be seen to result from a variety of causes.

In those cases in which the most recent data were not available from these institutions, we chose “secondary” sources from among the alternatives on offer whose data for previous years most closely and consistently matched the data published by the acknowledged authority on the subject.

If several alternative sources were available, we chose whichever best-known source was regarded as being (or based its information on)³ the best authority on the topic in question.

If none of the above criteria could be applied, we chose the source offering data from the largest number of countries.

In those cases in which the data related to a period (for instance, 1990-1994) rather than to a single year, we followed the recommendation that the data be assigned to the year falling in the middle of the period (which in the above example would be 1992) in order to allow us to calculate the rate of variation.

Measuring countries’ present situation and the rate of change

In each of the thematic areas the information is displayed in relation to the chosen indicators. Each indicator covers three columns: the first shows the country’s initial situation,⁴ the second column shows the latest available data and the third and last column (titled “progress or regression”) shows the rate of change.⁵

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

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

Each country is assigned a value from 1 to 4 (1 indicates worst situation and 4 indicates best situation) according to the distribution of values for each indicator⁶ and the value for all the indicators for that area is then given by the average of these values for each country.⁷ In this way a self-referential ranking is obtained, independent of the distance from the goals or from specific conceptually defined levels.

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

To avoid giving a false impression of accuracy, the average values were rescaled⁸ to create four country categories:

Countries in better situation
Countries above average
Countries below average
Countries in worse situation

A fifth group is also presented showing information for those countries which lack sufficient data to be included in the ranking (*Countries with insufficient data to summarize the area*).

Within each group the countries are listed in alphabetical order.

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 are made. The quotient between the variation in the indicator and the time period reflects the rate of change for the item in question.

The values for this rate of change have also been rescaled in sections (using a reference scale from 1 to 5), which are presented in the tables in the column titled “Progress or regression”. A series of symbols are used to illustrate the changes in order to make the information easier to read and to avoid the false impression of accuracy given by a numerical value.

The categories defined in this rescaling are as follows:

→ Significant progress
→ Slight progress
|| Stagnant
← Slight regression
← Significant regression

“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.

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

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

1 The question of the accessibility of information is another issue altogether. Most international institutions’ large databases can only be accessed by paying high-cost subscriptions.

2 These problems include, for example, the fact that the dates for which information is available often do not coincide, and the significant differences in the figures provided by different sources for the same year.

3 Large databases can be consulted that refer to the original source from which the information was taken.

4 Initial situation was 1995 or the closest possible year for gender tables (in order to take into account the Beijing commitments), and 1990 or the closest possible year for the other thematic areas.

5 In some tables two extra columns appear displaying the date of the information selected.

6 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.

7 In the case of the table showing morbidity and mortality rates the child immunization ranking was included as another indicator in the calculations of the average value for the area. The immunization table is presented separately and ordered according to the average value of its indicators.

8 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).