

Social Progress Index Time Series

FINDINGS



1990 to 2023

**SOCIAL
PROGRESS
IMPERATIVE**

The world advanced, but the route to progress is uneven



+12.7

points of global social progress since 1990

A sustained long-run gain across a much wider group of countries.



+11.0

points by which the gap between the highest- and lowest scoring regions narrowed, 1990–2023

Over the same period, the number of countries with low social progress (Index score below 40) fell from 47 to just 7.



–41%

change in the annual pace of global social progress

Average annual gains fell from 0.46 points in 1990–2010 to just 0.27 points in 2010–2023.



–2.0

points in Opportunity since its 2012 peak

Falling scores in Rights and Voice and Inclusive Society drove the reversal.

Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

A 34-year view of social progress across 196 countries

Coverage varies by country; all eight regions and global aggregates span 1990–2023.

171

countries

Complete Index scores for every year, 1990–2023

2

countries

Complete Index scores for shorter periods

22

countries

At least one component score, but no complete Index

1

country

Indicator-level coverage only

Geographical and temporal coverage

Eight global regions, the European Union, the African Union and the World have complete Index scores for 1990–2023. Their scores are calculated from population-weighted averages of the underlying indicators.

Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

The Index asks three basic questions about people’s lived experience

Fifty-two social and environmental outcome indicators form 12 components and three dimensions.

Basic Needs

Does a country provide for people’s most essential needs?

- Nutrition and Medical Care
- Water and Sanitation
- Housing
- Safety

Foundations of Wellbeing

Are the building blocks in place for people and communities to sustain wellbeing?

- Basic Education
- Information and Communications
- Health
- Environmental Quality

Opportunity

Does every person have the opportunity to reach their full potential?

- Rights and Voice
- Freedom and Choice
- Inclusive Society
- Advanced Education

Source: SPI indicator definitions and methodology framework.

It aggregates 52 social & environmental outcome indicators

BASIC NEEDS

Nutrition & Medical Care

- Nutritional deficiencies burden
- Infectious diseases burden
- Maternal mortality
- Diet low in fruits and vegetables
- Child mortality
- Child stunting

Water & Sanitation

- Unsafe water exposure
- Unsafe sanitation exposure
- Unsafe hygiene exposure
- Unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene burden

Housing

- Access to electricity
- Prevalence of cooking with coal/biomass
- Household air pollution burden

Safety

- Transport-related injuries
- Intimate partner violence exposure, female
- Interpersonal violence burden
- Political killings and torture by governments
- Political violence by non-state actors

FOUNDATIONS OF WELLBEING

Basic Education

- Population with no education
- Gender parity in secondary educational attainment
- Secondary educational attainment
- Equal access to quality education

Information & Communications

- Telephone subscriptions
- Internet users
- Female journalists
- Government censorship of the media

Health

- Non-communicable diseases burden
- Life expectancy at 65
- Access to essential health services
- Equal access to quality healthcare

Environmental Quality

- Particulate matter (PM2.5) pollution
- Outdoor air pollution burden
- Exposure to high temperature
- Lead exposure

OPPORTUNITY

Rights & Voice

- Political rights
- Freedom of discussion
- Women's rights and liberties
- Freedom of peaceful assembly
- Freedom of religion

Freedom & Choice

- Vulnerable employment
- Early marriage
- Satisfied demand for contraception
- Public sector corruption
- CSOs repression

Inclusive Society

- Equal access to public services
- Power distributed by sexual orientation
- Equal access to power
- Equal protection of rights across social groups

Advanced Education

- Advanced educational attainment
- Gender parity in advanced educational attainment
- Expected years of tertiary schooling
- Academic freedom

1

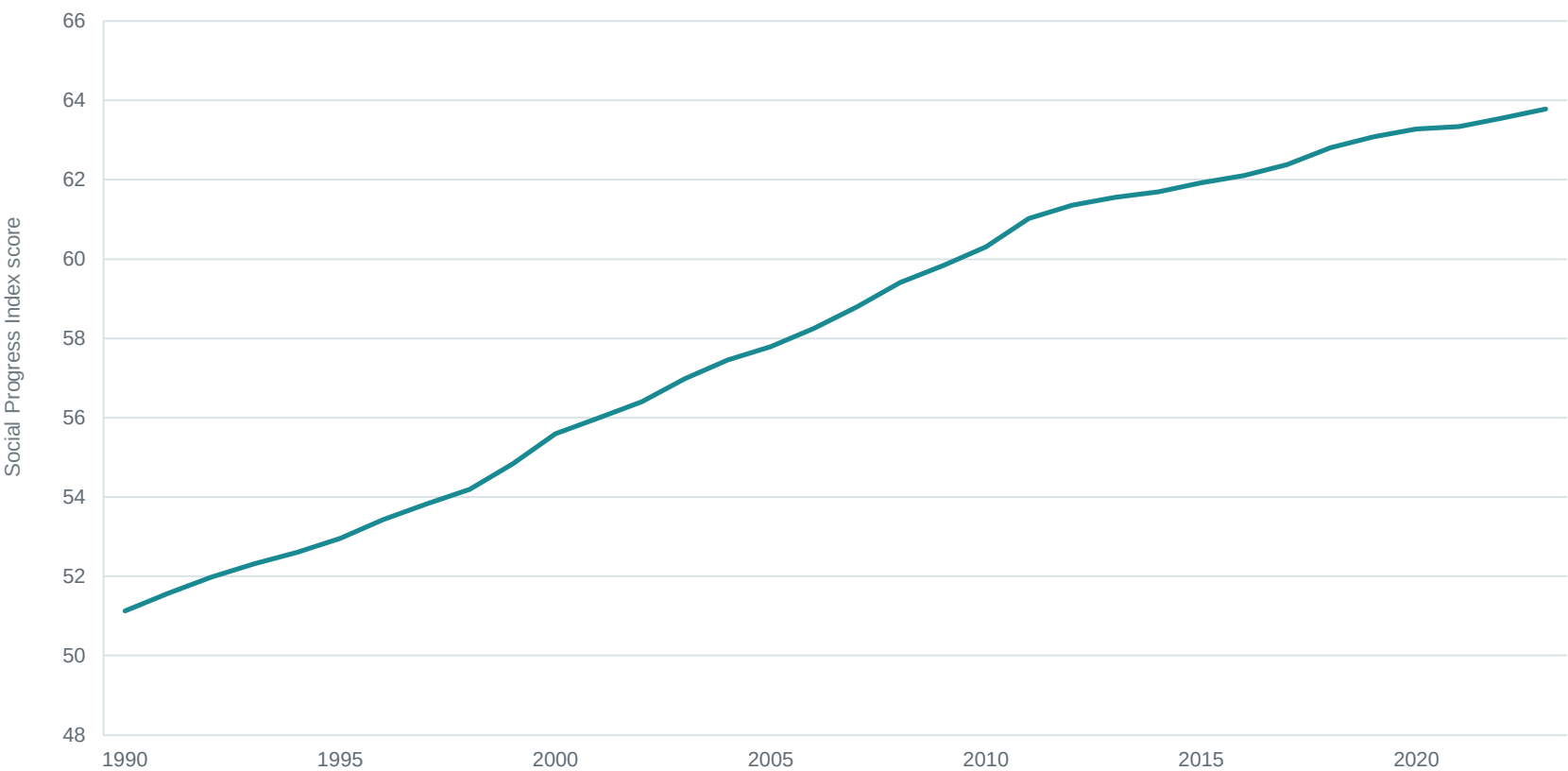
Global trends

Thirty-four years of progress – and a sharp loss of momentum

Where did progress slow? Which parts of social progress still offer a route forward?

World Social Progress Index score rose by 12.7 points between 1990 and 2023

The long-run direction is positive, even as gains have become harder to sustain.



51.1

World SPI in 1990

63.8

World SPI in 2023

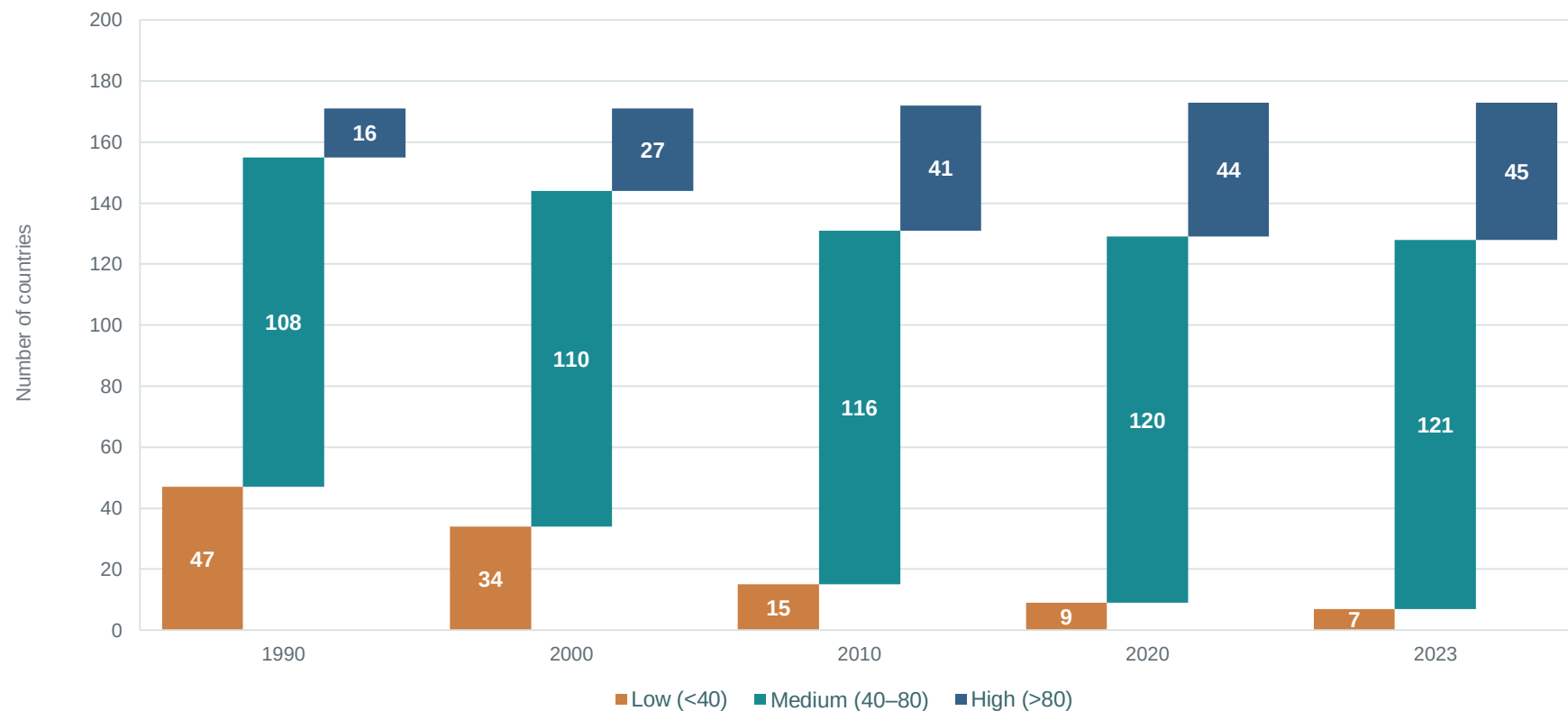
+12.7

points between 1990 and 2023

Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

Far fewer countries remain at very low levels of social progress

Country groups by Social Progress Index score: low social progress <40, medium social progress 40–80, high social progress >80.
The number of countries with complete scores varies by year: 171 in 1990 and 2000, 172 in 2010, and 173 in 2020 and 2023.



16 → 45

countries above score of 80

47 → 7

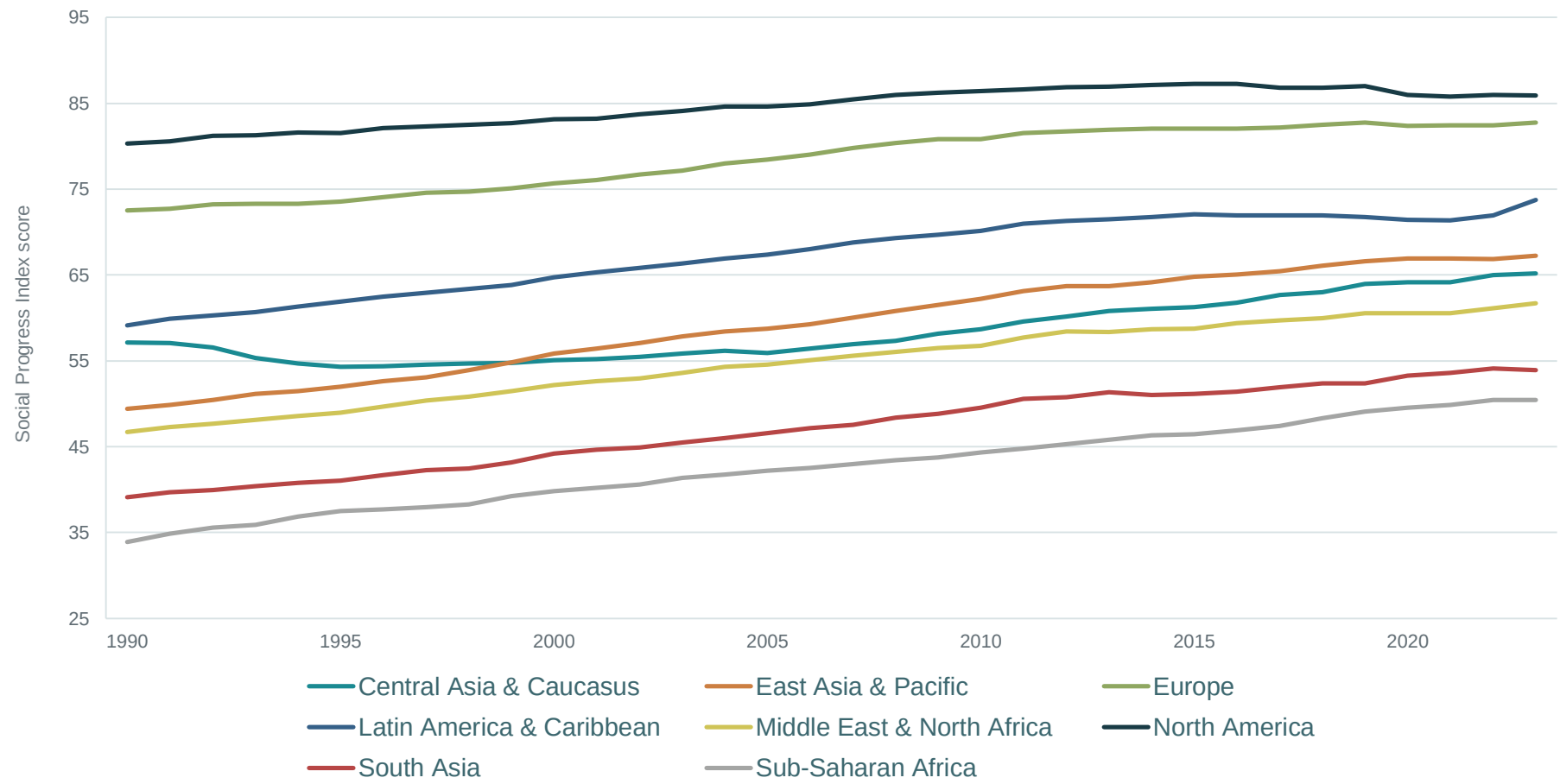
countries below score of 40

The middle group expanded as countries moved out of low social progress, while the high-progress group nearly tripled.

Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

Every region improved, but their trajectories remain distinct in pace and level

There are signs of regional and country convergence, but large gaps remain.



The distance between the strongest and weakest regions narrowed by 11 points (or by 24%), although the remaining gap is still substantial.

46.4

points gap between the strongest and weakest regions in 1990

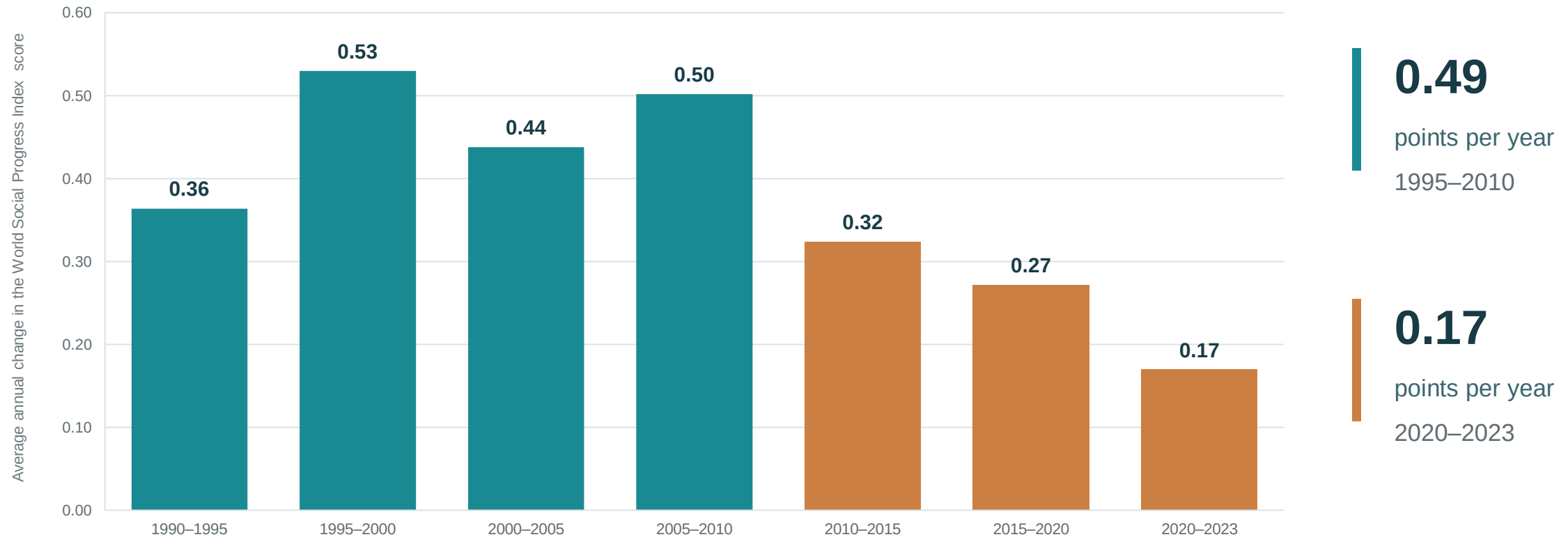
35.4

points gap between the strongest and weakest regions in 2023

Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

The pace of global progress has slowed sharply since 2010

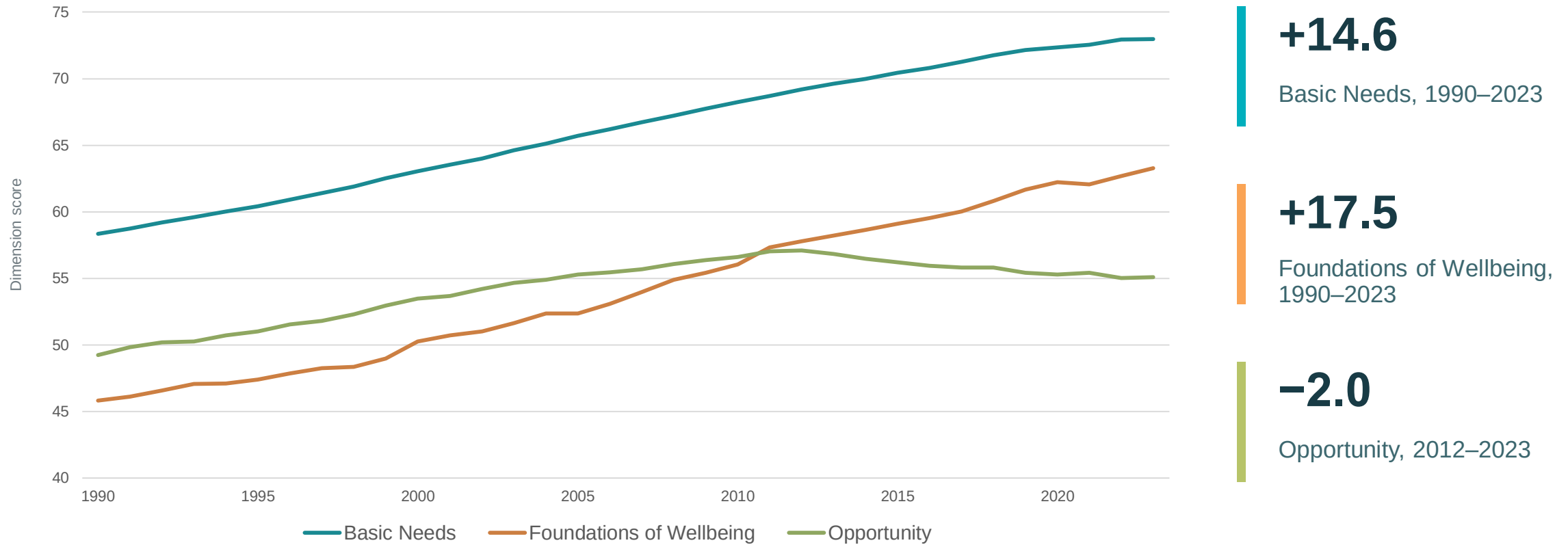
Average annual change in the World Social Progress Index score, by period.



Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

Opportunity is the break in the long-run story

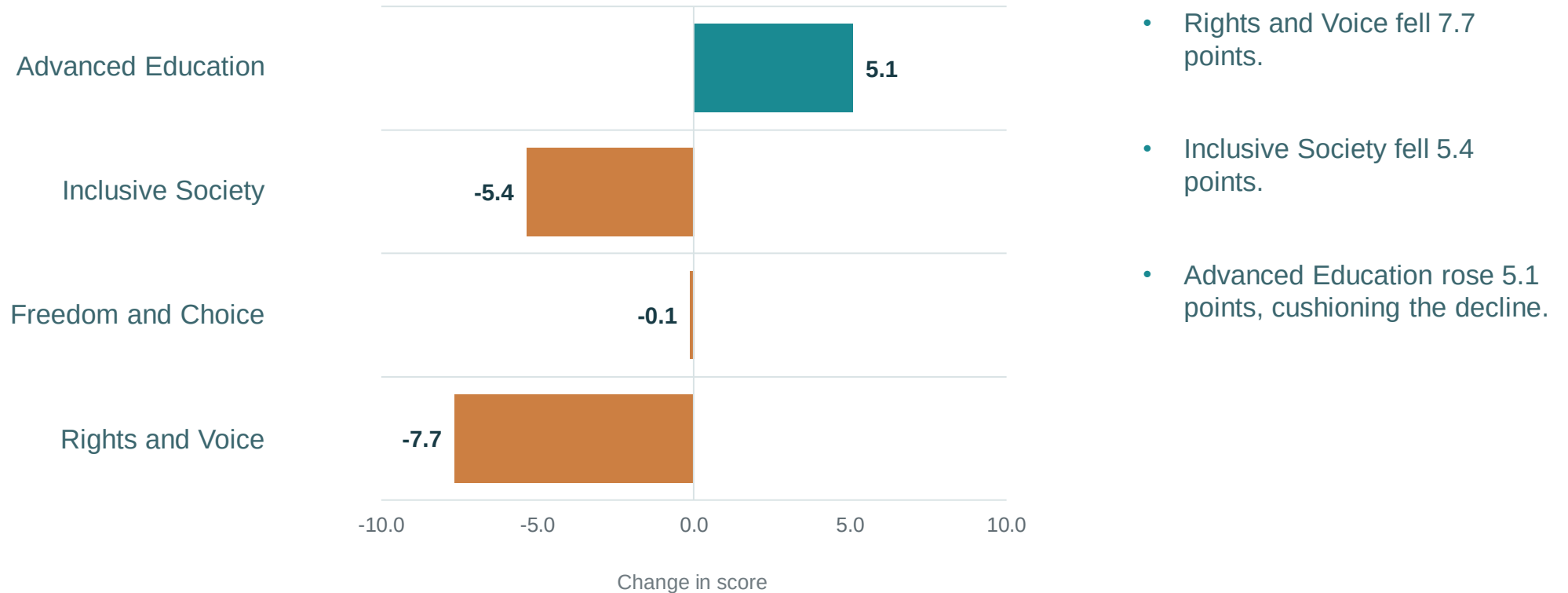
Basic Needs and Foundations of Wellbeing improved over the full period; Opportunity peaked in 2012 and then declined.



Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

Rights and inclusion drove the decline in Opportunity after 2012

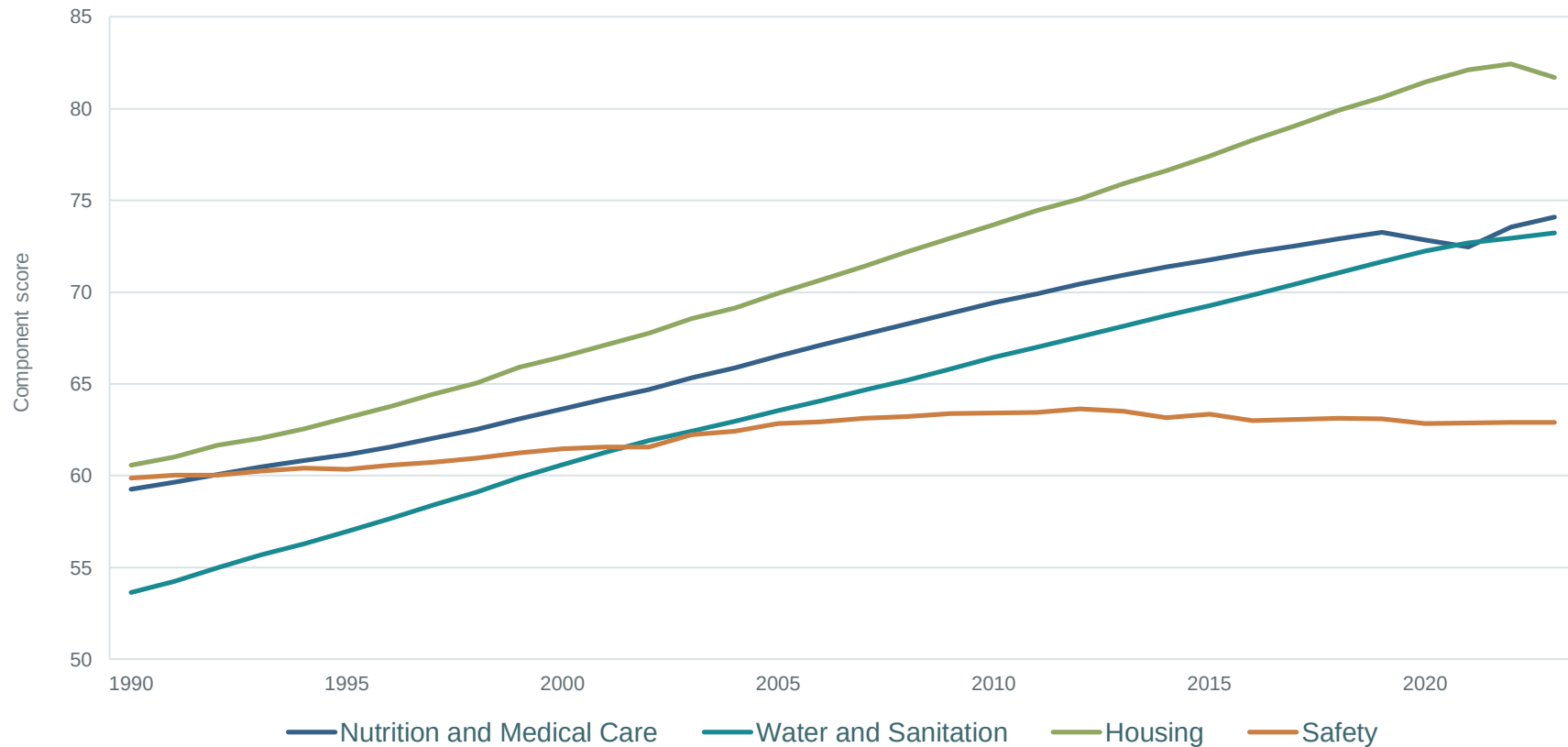
Change in World scores for the components of the Opportunity dimension, 2012–2023.



Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

Basic Needs improved strongly, but recent gains are modest

World scores for the components of the Basic Needs dimension, 1990–2023.

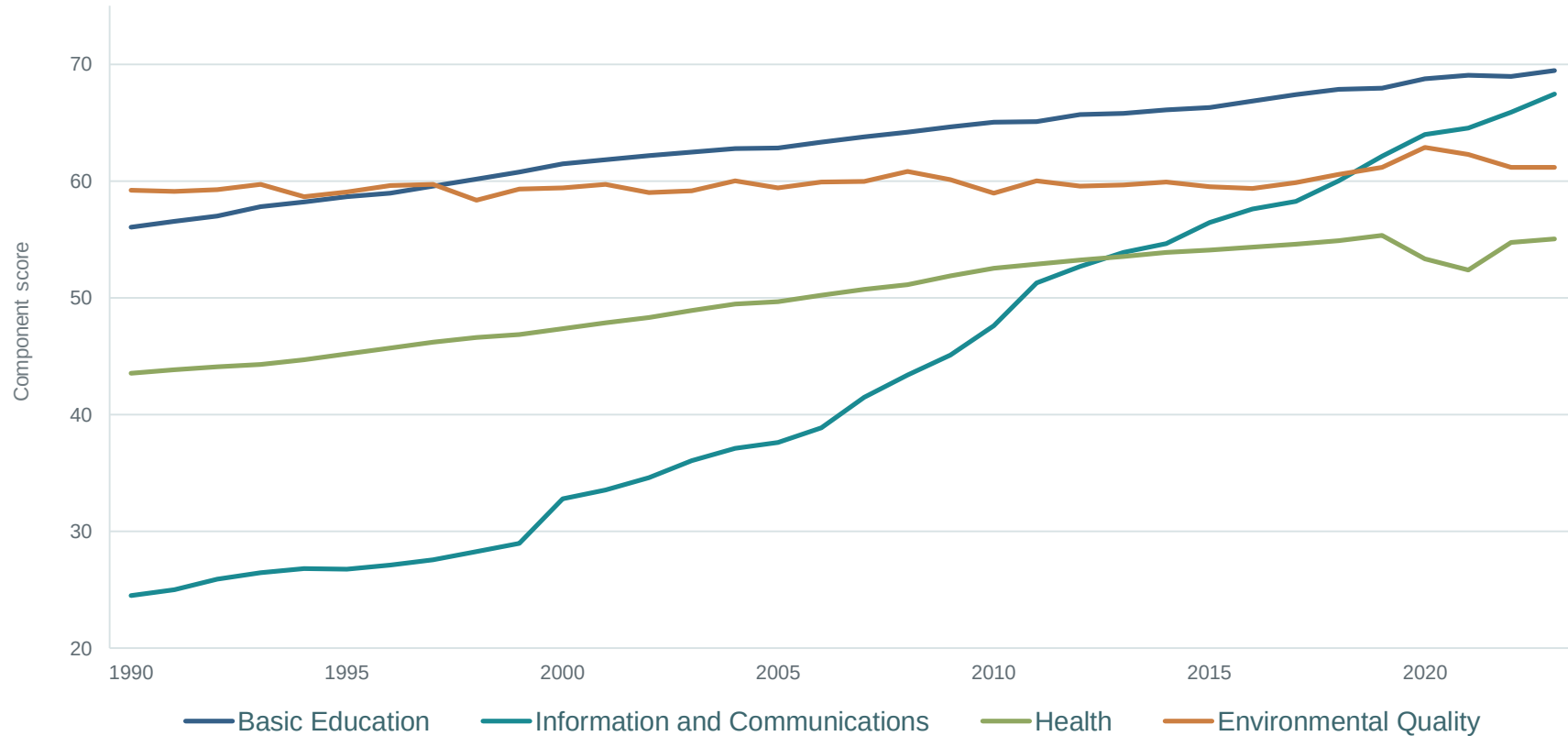


- Housing gained 21.1 points over the full period.
- Water and Sanitation gained 19.6 points.
- Safety improved only 3.0 points and is below its 2012 level.

Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

Connectivity transformed Foundations of Wellbeing

World scores for the components of the Foundations of Wellbeing dimension, 1990–2023.



- Information and Communications gained 43.0 points – by far the largest component improvement.
- Basic Education and Health improved over the full period, although Health declined from 2019 to 2021.
- Environmental Quality lost 1.7 points after 2020.

Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

In Opportunity, education did not offset erosion in rights and inclusion

World scores for the components of the Opportunity dimension, 1990–2023.

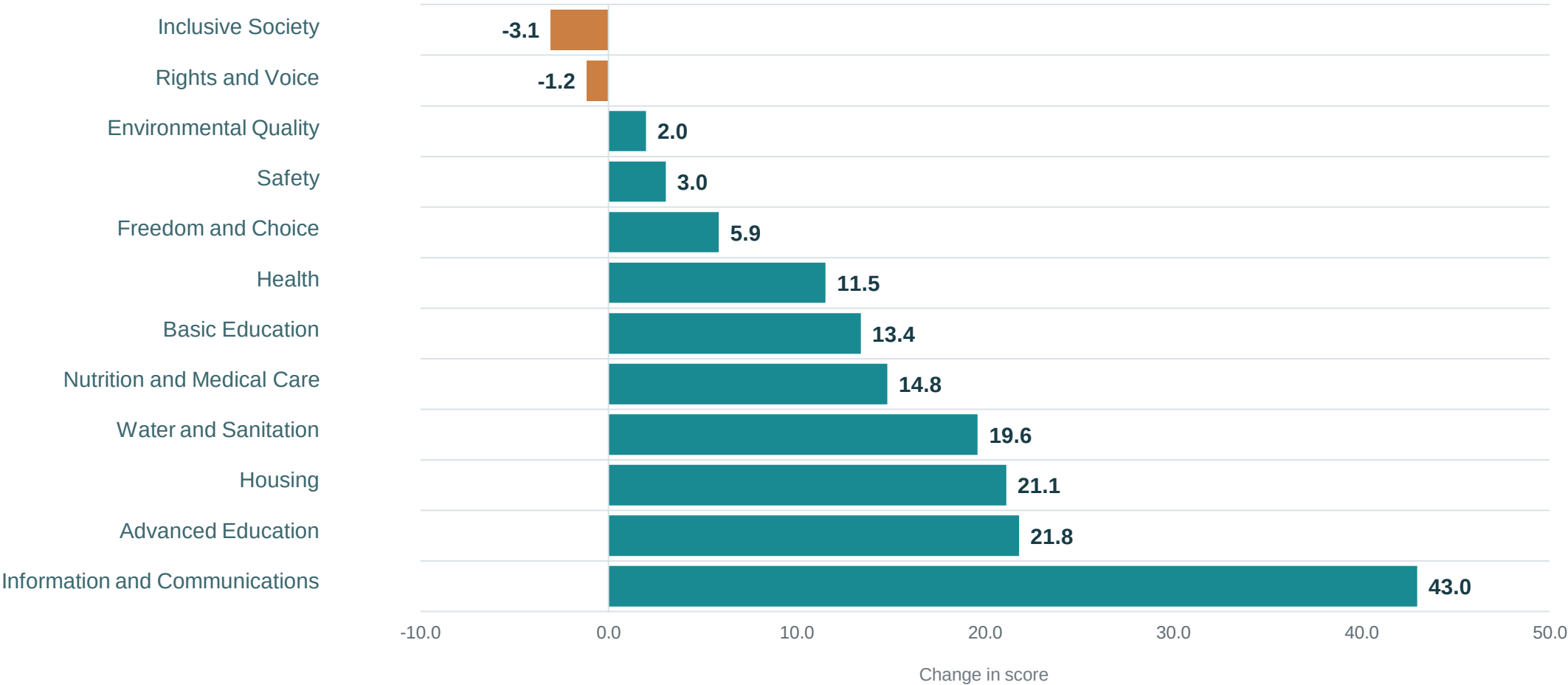


- Advanced Education gained 21.8 points since 1990.
- Rights and Voice peaked in 2005 and is now below its 1990 score.
- Inclusive Society is 3.1 points below 1990 and 5.4 points below 2012.

Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

Progress was highly uneven across the 12 components, 1990–2023

Change in World scores for the twelve components, 1990–2023.



Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

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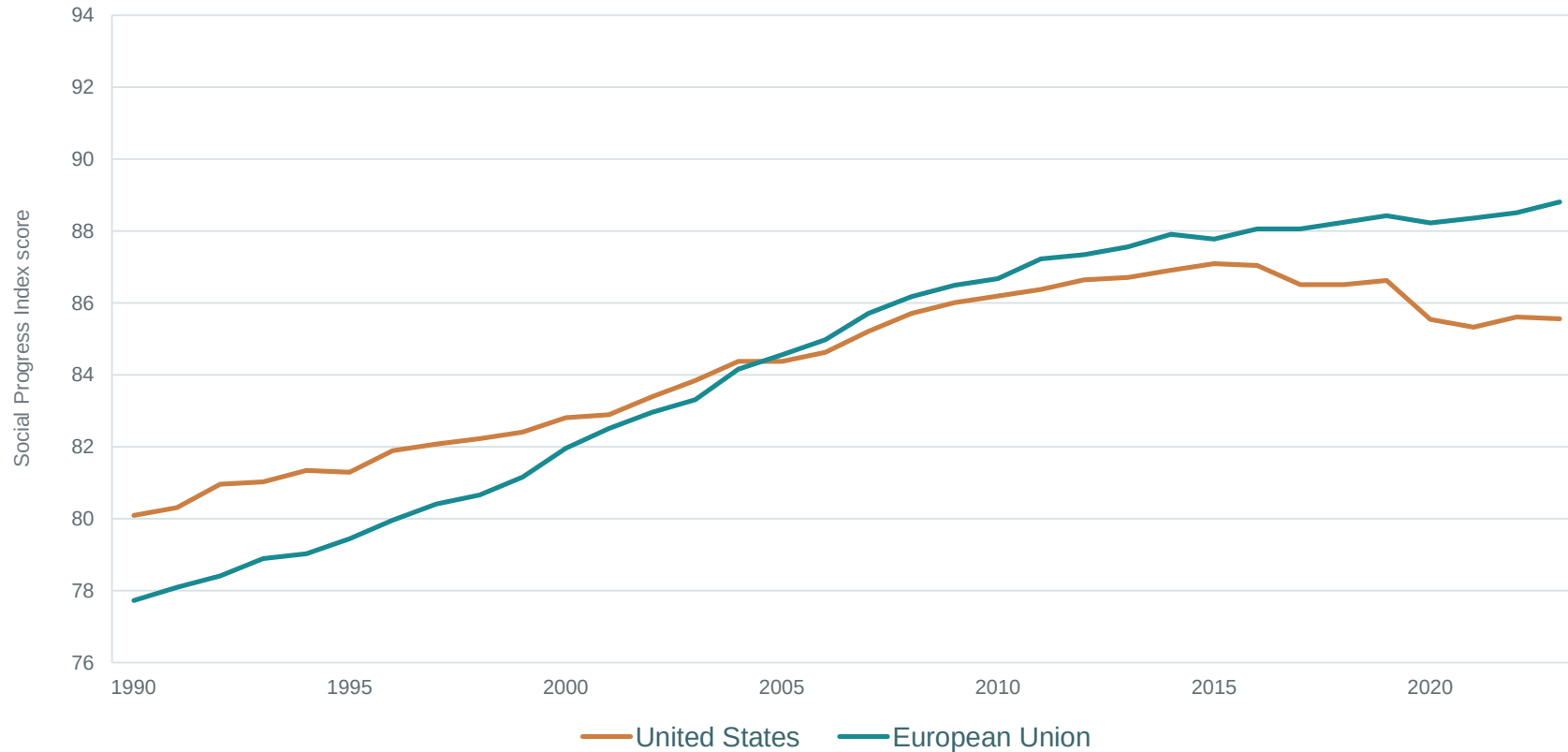
Country comparisons

National paths diverged, even inside familiar peer groups

The same global forces produced very different gains, reversals and areas of resilience.

The EU moved from behind the United States to a clear lead

Social Progress Index score, 1990–2023.



+5.5

US gain, 1990–2023

+11.1

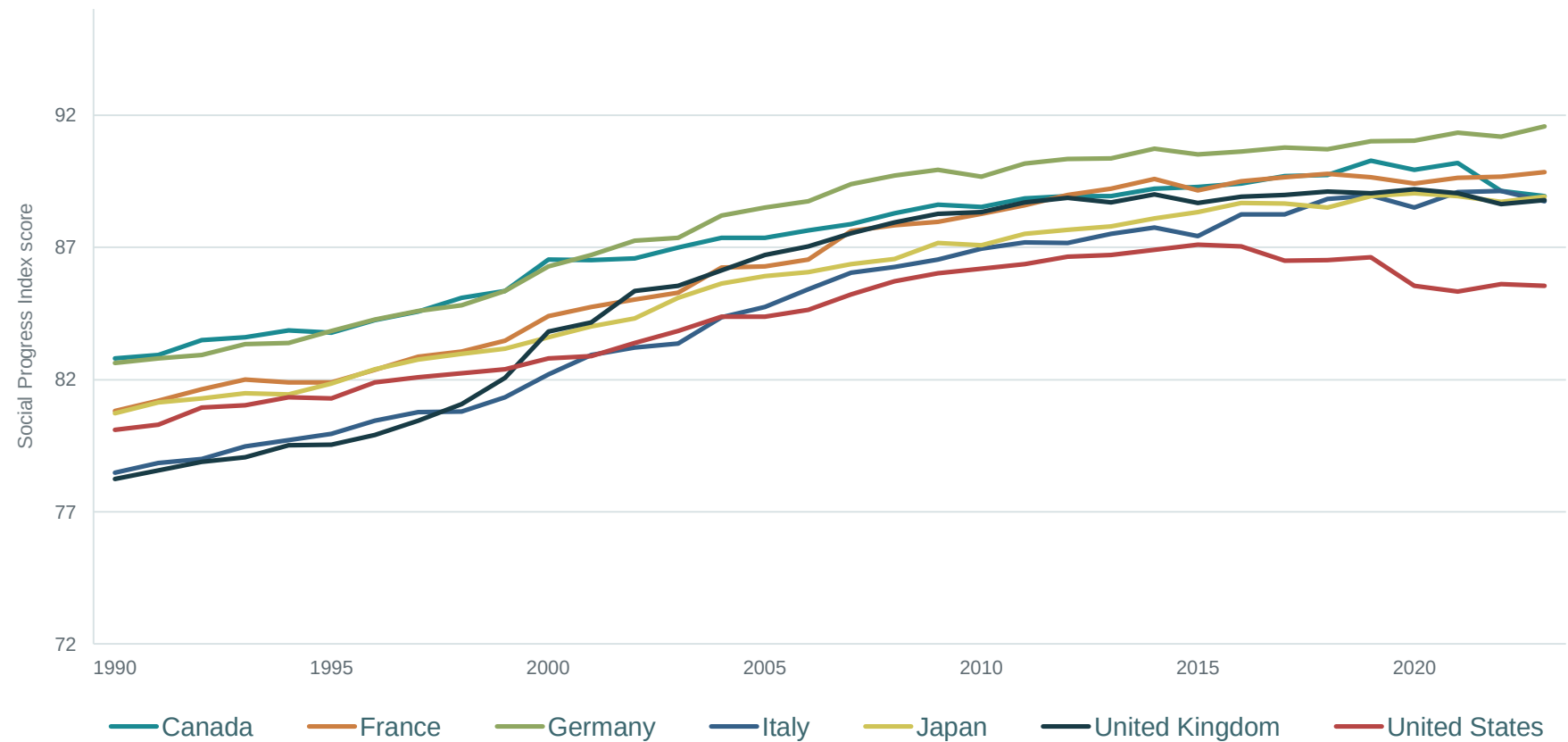
EU gain, 1990–2023

The EU–US gap moved from **–2.4 points** in 1990 to **+3.3 points** in 2023.

Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

G7 countries remained high-performing, but their gains differed

Social Progress Index score, 1990–2023.



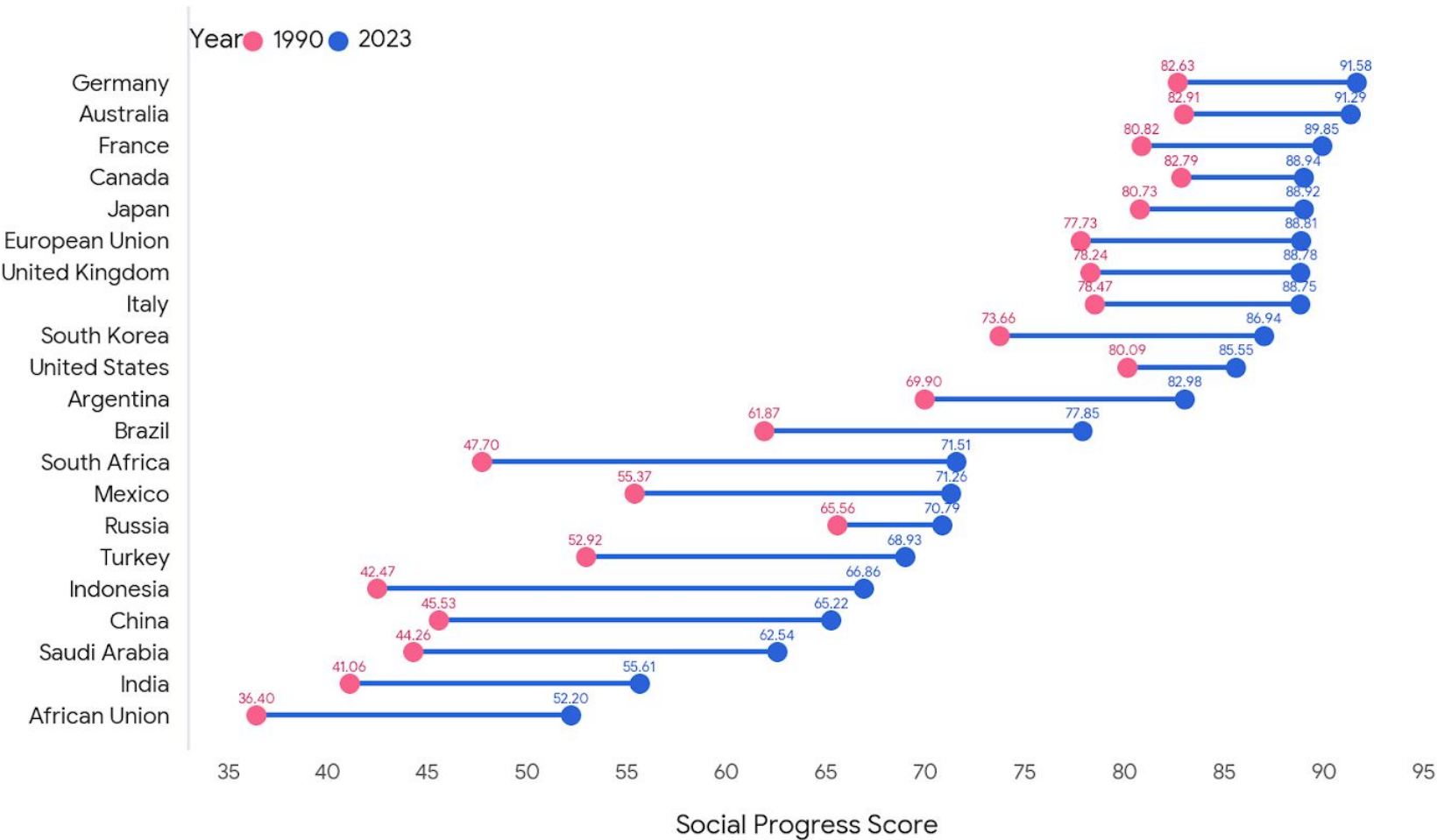
Full-period gains

United Kingdom	+10.5
Italy	+10.3
France	+9.0
Germany	+9.0
Japan	+8.2
Canada	+6.2
United States	+5.5

Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

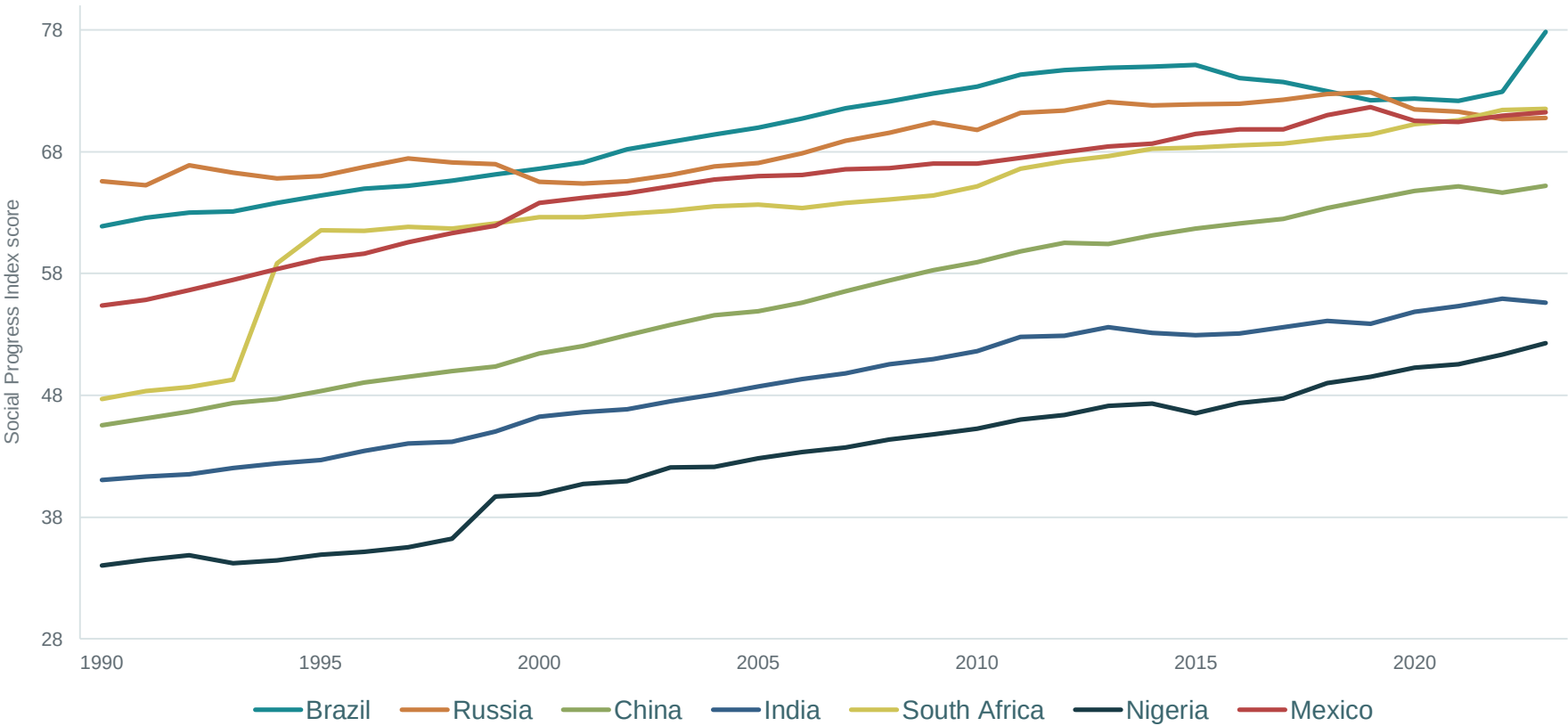
The G20 members improved, but wide disparities persisted

Improvements in Social Progress Index scores across G20 members, 1990–2023.



Major emerging markets followed sharply different paths

Social Progress Index scores for Brazil, Russia, China, India, South Africa, Nigeria and Mexico, 1990–2023.



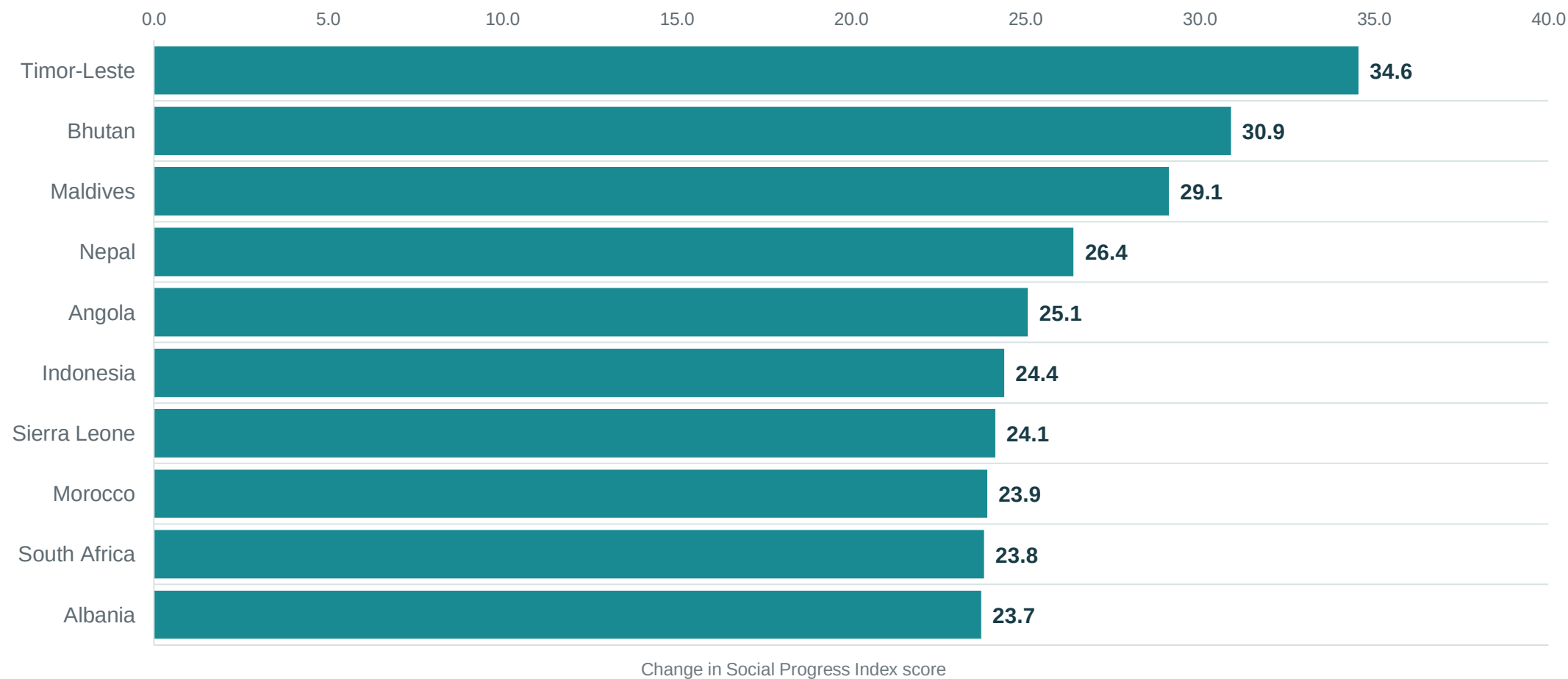
Full period gains

South Africa	+23.8
China	+19.7
Nigeria	+18.3
Brazil	+16.0
Mexico	+15.9
India	+14.6
Russia	+5.2

Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

The largest gains came from countries starting at low or middle levels

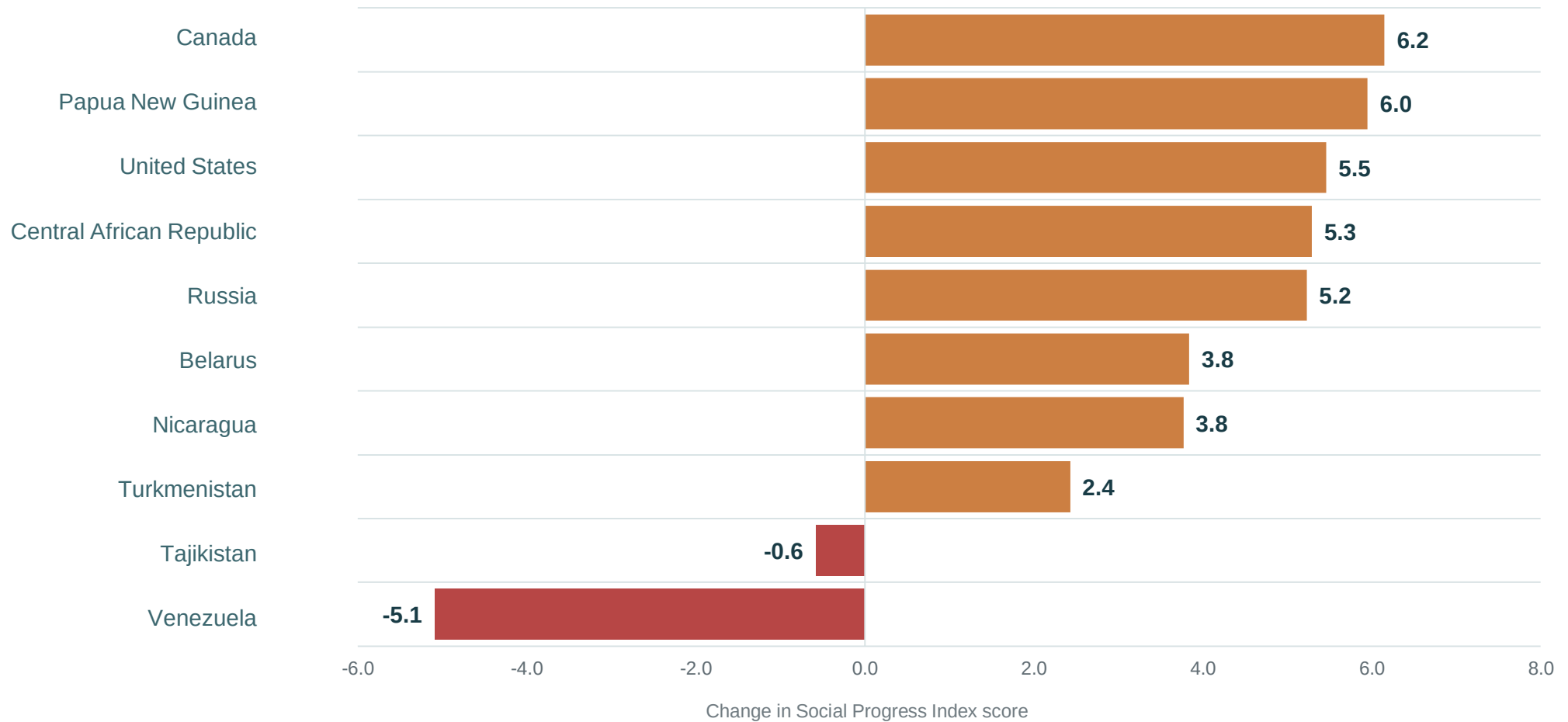
Ten most improved countries by Social Progress Index score, 1990–2023. Complete-coverage countries only.



Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

A small group made little progress — and Venezuela moved backwards

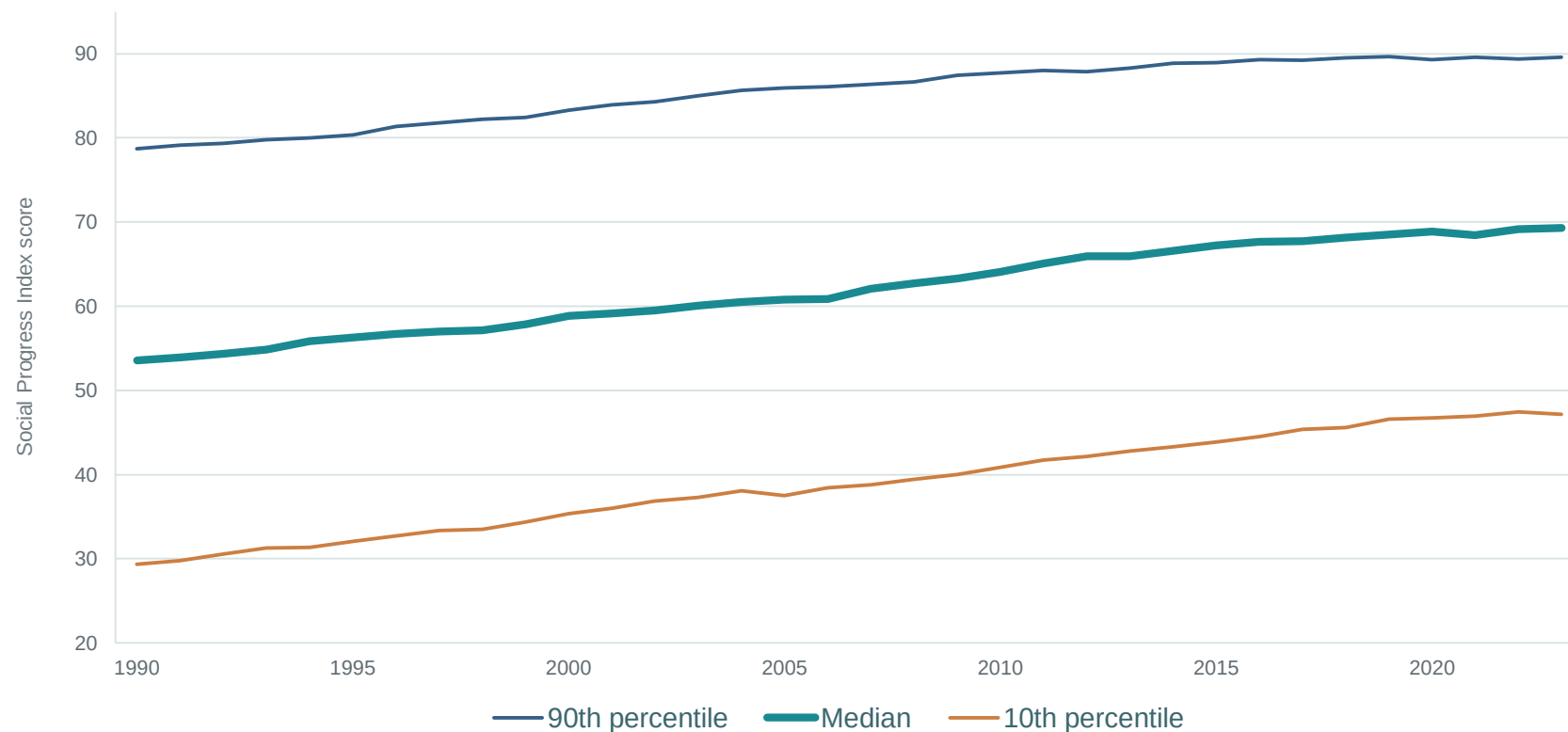
Ten least improved countries by Social Progress Index score, 1990–2023. Complete-coverage countries only.



Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).

Country scores show gradual convergence, but the gap remains wide

Distribution across the 171 countries with complete coverage, 1990–2023.



49.4

90th–10th percentile gap
in 1990

42.4

90th–10th percentile gap
in 2023

The bottom of the distribution rose faster, narrowing the 90th–10th percentile gap by 7.0 points.

Source: Social Progress Index Time Series 1990–2023 (Social Progress Imperative, 2026).