The Human Stability Index

A reference on human stability.

Baseline Report 2026

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Executive Summary

The 2026 baseline is established at a moment when global conditions no longer behave as isolated risks, but as **interacting systems**. Conflict, economic strain, technological disruption, environmental stress, and social cohesion pressures increasingly reinforce one another, reducing the margin for error across human systems worldwide.

Through 2025 and into early 2026, global stability has been shaped not by a single dominant crisis, but by the **convergence of multiple pressures** - geopolitical tension, economic fragility, accelerating technological change, environmental stress, food insecurity, and cohesion strain. This convergence marks a shift from episodic instability toward a more persistent **polycrisis landscape**, in which shocks propagate more easily and recovery is increasingly uneven.

These conditions underscore the need for a structured framework capable of making **human stability observable, comparable, and trackable over time**. The Human Stability Index is designed to meet that need, providing a system-level benchmark for assessing how stability is maintained, strained, or eroded across regions and domains.

Geopolitical and security pressures

Geopolitical instability continued to weigh heavily on global human stability throughout 2025. Armed conflict and social unrest remained prominent across multiple regions, including the protracted war between Russia and Ukraine, ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, and acute internal crises such as the widespread unrest in Iran, driven by severe currency depreciation and sustained inflationary pressure.

Global risk assessments reflect this volatility. In the World Economic Forum's 2026 Global Risks Survey, **economic confrontation - including trade, tariff, and sanctions dynamics - has overtaken traditional armed conflict as the most pressing short-term threat**, signalling a shift from predominantly kinetic risk toward geoeconomic instability.

At the same time, long-standing great-power tensions - most notably between the United States and China - continue to shape global order projections. Persistent strategic competition, technological decoupling, and geopolitical positioning increase the likelihood that economic, technological, and security pressures will intersect in destabilising ways over the coming decade.

Economic Security, Markets, and Monetary Conditions

The global economy entered 2026 under conditions of slow growth, persistent uncertainty, and uneven recovery across regions. International financial institutions project moderate expansion in global GDP - with slowing rates in advanced economies and stronger momentum in select emerging markets - but macroeconomic fragility remains a defining feature of the current environment.

Despite a broadly stable banking system outlook for 2026, analysts highlight risks from geopolitical escalation, regulatory pressures, and technological disruptions such as artificial intelligence, which could stress financial institutions and amplify vulnerabilities if underlying shocks materialize.

Monetary policy trends through late 2025 and early 2026 have featured continued interest rate adjustments across major central banks, with ongoing debate over rate cuts amid inflationary pressures and fiscal constraints. In the euro zone and United States, policymakers are carefully balancing inflation control against growth concerns, while in the United Kingdom, recent rate reductions aim to ease borrowing costs.

Housing markets and household financial stability remain influenced by elevated mortgage rates. In the United Kingdom, for example, central bank analysis suggests a significant share of mortgage accounts will experience payment increases as interest rates remain above recent lows, even as future rate cuts may eventually reduce borrowing costs.

Compounding economic uncertainty, trade tensions - including tariff disputes between the United States, Canada, and Mexico - have contributed to market volatility and potential recessional pressure in tightly interconnected economies.

Technological Disruption and Labour Markets

Technological change, particularly the rapid adoption of artificial intelligence and automation, continues to create profound structural shifts in labour markets and economic systems. While technology investment supports productivity growth in some sectors, uneven integration and governance risks - such as fragmented data infrastructure and compliance challenges in financial institutions - illustrate the uneven nature of this transition.

AI-related disruption is increasingly perceived as a long-term risk to social cohesion, employment patterns, and national competitiveness, even if immediate short-term ranking is lower than other risk categories.

Environmental Stress and Food Security

Environmental stressors - including climate change impacts on ecosystems, agriculture, and public health - persist as fundamental drivers of human instability. Recent research underscores the strong influence of climate change on health outcomes and food insecurity in vulnerable regions, particularly across parts of Africa.

Food systems face acute pressure; global assessments indicate worsening food insecurity in multiple fragile states, driven by compounding factors of conflict, climate shocks, and socioeconomic fragility. Populations in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Syria are among those experiencing elevated risk of acute hunger, highlighting how food systems integrate environmental and political instability pressures.

Public Safety and Social Cohesion

Public safety and social cohesion remain uneven across regions. According to leading peace metrics, persistent internal and cross-border conflict has driven notable declines in peacefulness in several countries, with Russia and Ukraine among the least peaceful globally and civil unrest contributing significantly to declining safety outcomes.

Social cohesion is further strained by economic inequality, demographic shifts, and political polarization in many advanced economies, with rising populist movements cited by policymakers as complicating effective economic governance.

Summary of Baseline Human Stability

The 2026 Baseline Report reveals a world in *polycrisis* - a condition where multiple global stressors interact nonlinearly across political, economic, environmental, technological, and social domains. Continued geopolitical risks, uneven economic security, technological disruption, environmental pressures, food insecurity, and weakened social cohesion collectively reduce the margin of stability in the global system and create compounding vulnerabilities.

This Baseline Report establishes the initial reference state for the Human Stability Index. It provides a structured foundation against which future editions will measure directional change, identify emerging fault lines, and enable consistent comparison of human stability across regions and over time.

Introduction and context

Human Stability Index - Baseline Report 2026

This Baseline Report establishes the initial reference state for The Human Stability Index (HSI): a structured, comparative measure of global human stability. It records prevailing conditions affecting human stability across regions at a defined point in time, drawing on aggregated indicators related to conflict, technological disruption, economic security, environmental stress, food systems, public safety, and social cohesion. This baseline enables future HSI editions to assess change, divergence, compounding risk, and adaptive capacity over time.

HSI is designed as a **reference benchmark**. It is descriptive rather than prescriptive. It does not offer policy recommendations. It provides a consistent framework for observing how stability is maintained, strained, or eroded under sustained systemic pressure.

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1. Why a Human Stability Index now

Across 2024–2026, global conditions have increasingly behaved not as isolated risks, but as **interacting systems**. Protracted conflict, geoeconomic confrontation, uneven recovery from inflation shocks, accelerating AI adoption, climate-linked disruption, and widening information and governance stress are no longer operating independently. They reinforce one another, reducing the margin for error across political, economic, and social systems.

Leading global risk assessments now consistently elevate **geoeconomic confrontation and systemic interaction risk** among the most prominent near-term threats, reflecting a shift away from discrete crisis models toward a more interconnected instability landscape.

At the same time, the macroeconomic environment remains defined by **moderate growth and elevated sensitivity to shocks**, rather than a return to pre-crisis stability. Global growth projections point to gradual deceleration, with the IMF projecting global growth of 3.3% in 2024, easing to 3.2% in 2025 and 3.1% in 2026. In this context, resilience increasingly depends on institutional capacity, household buffers, and coordination under stress, rather than headline expansion alone.

These conditions expose a measurement gap. Conventional indicators - such as GDP growth, inflation, employment, and market performance - describe economic activity, while conflict, climate, and governance indicators track individual domains.

What is often missing is a **consistent framework for observing human stability as an emergent condition**, shaped by the interaction of multiple pressures and vulnerable to compounding risk where thresholds are crossed.

The Human Stability Index is designed to address that gap. It indexes stability across dimensions that repeatedly appear in major instability pathways: conflict exposure, economic insecurity, technological disruption, environmental stress, food systems fragility, public safety deterioration, and social cohesion fracture - providing a structured reference for observing how stability is maintained, strained, or eroded under sustained systemic pressure.

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2. What "human stability" means in this Index

In HSI terms, **human stability** refers to the degree to which populations can sustain safe, predictable, and functional daily life - despite shocks - without entering persistent deterioration.

HSI treats stability as a function of three interacting layers:

1. **Structural conditions**
   Institutions, infrastructure, governance capacity, public services, and economic foundations that determine resilience to disruption.
2. **Pressure accumulation**
   The build-up of stressors (conflict, price shocks, displacement, climate events, labour disruption) that gradually reduces stability margins.
3. **Trigger sensitivity**
   The likelihood that shocks (political flashpoints, sudden violence, abrupt policy shifts, financial tightening, supply disruptions, public health events) can cascade into sustained instability.

This framing matters because modern instability is increasingly shaped by **compounding risk**: multiple pressures acting simultaneously and non-linearly, producing rapid shifts once thresholds are crossed.

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3. The Baseline Report's function

This report is intended to be used as a **fixed reference point**:

- **Baseline state:** a documented "starting condition" for HSI measurement.
- **Comparability:** a framework that enables later editions to quantify change.
- **Traceability:** an index architecture that allows readers to locate stability pressures by dimension and region.
- **Early warning orientation:** not prediction, but detection of conditions that historically precede deterioration.

This is the first edition that establishes the vocabulary and structure of HSI. Subsequent reports should be read as changes relative to this baseline.

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4. Global context entering 2026

4.1 Geopolitical and security environment

Global peacefulness measures indicate a world with elevated conflict exposure and persistent instability across multiple regions. The Global Peace Index 2025 identifies Russia and Ukraine among the least peaceful contexts, alongside Sudan, DRC, and Yemen, and notes continued declines in peacefulness across many countries.

This environment matters for HSI because conflict affects stability directly (violence, displacement, governance breakdown) and indirectly (energy and food price volatility, trade disruption, fiscal strain).

4.2 Economic and financial conditions

Global economic conditions entering 2026 remain uneven, with moderate growth projections and continued sensitivity to inflation and policy shifts.

Monetary policy has moved into a more neutral stance in some major economies. For example, Federal Reserve commentary and data indicate policy rates around a neutral range following cuts, with the federal funds target range upper limit reported at **3.75%**.
In the euro area, the deposit facility rate is reported at **2.00%** in mid-January 2026.

Housing affordability and household stability remain sensitive to interest-rate pass-through. In the UK, lenders began 2026 cutting mortgage rates competitively, with reported fixed deals as low as ~**3.5%** for some two-year terms following a base rate reduction late 2025.

These conditions influence HSI through household financial strain, labour market fragility, and the capacity of governments to fund stabilising services while managing debt and inflation risks.

4.3 Food systems and acute insecurity

Food insecurity continues to act as a direct destabiliser and a multiplier of other pressures (conflict, displacement, governance fragility). The Global Report on Food Crises 2025 reports **over 295 million** people experiencing acute hunger across 53 countries/territories in 2024, driven by conflict, economic shocks, and climate extremes.
More recent humanitarian reporting points to worsening regional crises and the role of aid constraints, conflict, and economic instability in amplifying risk.

4.4 Governance, rights, and cohesion pressures

Political rights, civil liberties, and information conditions are increasingly material to stability. Freedom House's "Freedom in the World 2025" documents continued global challenges including armed conflicts, repression in autocracies, and weakening institutional checks.
Digital information environments also show sustained pressure, with Freedom on the Net 2025 noting further declines and increasing manipulation and control.

For HSI, cohesion risk is not a moral judgement; it is a measurable stability factor because polarisation, institutional mistrust, and information integrity failures reduce a society's ability to coordinate under stress.

4.5 Public health as a stability factor

Public health shocks remain relevant to stability via workforce disruption, public trust, and supply systems. WHO disease outbreak reporting illustrates ongoing emergence risks (e.g., avian influenza spillover events), reminding that health security remains part of the broader stability picture.

4.6 Technological disruption and labour displacement

Technological disruption - especially AI deployment - has moved from a future consideration to an active driver of labour market, information, and governance stress. HSI treats technological disruption as a stability dimension because uneven adoption, displacement, and institutional lag can erode predictability and cohesion, even where headline productivity gains exist.

5. Dimensions covered in this report

This Baseline Report is organised around seven stability dimensions. Each is assessed independently and in interaction with others.

1. **Conflict exposure**
   Incidence, intensity, spillover risk, displacement dynamics, and conflict-linked economic and governance impacts.
2. **Technological disruption**
   AI adoption pressure, labour displacement risk, information integrity stress, cyber vulnerability, and institutional lag.
3. **Economic security**
   Inflation persistence, employment security, household affordability, debt stress, and the stability of essential markets (housing, energy).
4. **Environmental stress**
   Climate-linked hazards, water stress, heat exposure, and ecological pressures that increase fragility.
5. **Food systems**
   Availability, affordability, supply chain integrity, aid dependence, and exposure to conflict/climate shocks.
6. **Public safety**
   Violence, crime, state capacity, emergency response integrity, and everyday safety conditions.
7. **Social cohesion**
   Institutional trust, polarisation, rights environment, information integrity, migration/displacement pressure, and collective coordination capacity.

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6. How to use this document

This report is written to support reference use by governments, businesses, civil society, and individuals. It is designed for:

- **Directional reading:** understanding the global stability environment at baseline.
- **Regional referencing:** identifying which stability pressures are most acute by geography.
- **Dimension referencing:** locating evidence and trends by stability domain.
- **Preparedness framing:** understanding exposure pathways (how instability in one dimension can cascade into others).

Where precise quantitative values are reported (e.g., interest rates, major macro forecasts), sources are cited. Where interpretation is provided (e.g., compounding risk pathways), it is explicitly framed as analytic synthesis based on observed conditions and referenced reporting.

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7. What this report is not

- Not a predictive forecast or war-probability engine.
- Not an investment recommendation or financial advice document.
- Not a policy prescription.
- Not a country “scoreboard” intended to shame or praise.

Its function is to establish the baseline reference state against which future stability movement can be measured.

Section 2: Index architecture and reading guide

Human Stability Index - Baseline Report 2026

This section explains how The Human Stability Index (HSI) is structured, how its components relate to one another, and how this report should be read and referenced. It is intended to support consistent interpretation by governments, institutions, organisations, and individuals using the Index as a comparative and longitudinal reference.

HSI is not designed to be consumed linearly. It is designed to be **consulted**.

2.1 Architecture of The Human Stability Index

The Human Stability Index is built as a **multi-dimensional composite benchmark**.

It does not reduce human stability to a single causal factor or short-term outcome. Instead, it treats stability as an *emergent condition* arising from the interaction of multiple systems.

Core architectural principles

HSI is governed by five foundational principles:

1. **Multi-dimensionality**
   Human stability is shaped by interacting pressures across domains. No single indicator — economic, political, environmental, or technological — is sufficient on its own.
2. **Comparability**
   All dimensions are structured to allow comparison across regions and over time, even where underlying conditions differ.
3. **Longitudinality**
   The Index is designed to track movement, not snapshots. Change relative to the baseline is the primary analytical value.
4. **Non-prescriptive observation**
   HSI observes and documents conditions; it does not recommend actions or rank responses.
5. **Signal sensitivity**
   Emphasis is placed on detecting *early divergence* and *pressure accumulation*, not only visible crisis.

2.2 Stability dimensions and their role

HSI is organised around seven stability dimensions, each of which captures a distinct but interdependent pressure space:

1. Conflict exposure
2. Technological disruption

3. Economic security
4. Environmental stress
5. Food systems
6. Public safety
7. Social cohesion

Each dimension is assessed independently and in interaction with others. No dimension is treated as dominant by default; instability often emerges when pressures converge across multiple domains.

Readers should not interpret strength in one dimension as compensating fully for weakness in another. Historical evidence consistently shows that stability erodes most rapidly where **multiple moderate pressures overlap**, rather than where a single extreme shock occurs in isolation.

2.3 Signals, shocks, and structural conditions

To support clarity, HSI differentiates between three types of stability drivers. These terms are used consistently throughout the report.

Structural conditions

Structural conditions describe the **underlying capacity of a system** to absorb stress. These include institutional strength, governance capacity, economic foundations, infrastructure, and social trust.

Structural conditions change slowly, but they determine how vulnerable a population is to disruption.

Examples:

- Long-term housing affordability
- Institutional trust levels
- Chronic underinvestment in public services
- Demographic pressure

Signals

Signals are **early indicators of rising or declining stability**. They are often subtle and precede visible crisis.

Signals do not represent failure; they represent **directional movement**.

Examples:

- Persistent increases in household debt stress
- Rising labour displacement anxiety linked to automation
- Gradual declines in public trust or civic participation
- Increased reliance on emergency food systems

Signals are central to the HSI approach. They allow stability to be observed *before* breakdown occurs.

Shocks

Shocks are **acute disruptive events** that stress systems rapidly. Their impact depends heavily on existing structural conditions and signal accumulation.

Examples:

- Armed conflict escalation
- Sudden energy price spikes
- Extreme weather events
- Financial market dislocation
- Public health emergencies

HSI does not treat shocks as inherently destabilising in all cases. Societies with strong structural conditions and low signal accumulation may absorb shocks without long-term instability.

2.4 Reading the Index correctly

This report is designed to be read in layers.

Layer 1: Global overview

Provides a high-level assessment of global human stability at the baseline point, identifying dominant pressure patterns and broad directional risks.

Layer 2: Dimension analysis

Each stability dimension is examined in detail, with attention to:

- prevailing global conditions
- regional divergence
- interaction with other dimensions

Readers should expect overlap across sections; this reflects real-world interdependence.

Layer 3: Regional context

Where relevant, regional dynamics are highlighted to illustrate how global pressures manifest differently depending on political, economic, and environmental context.

2.5 How comparisons should be made

HSI is **not a league table**.

Comparisons should focus on:

- direction of movement over time
- convergence or divergence across dimensions
- accumulation of pressure rather than isolated values

The baseline establishes the **reference state**. Future reports will indicate whether stability has improved, deteriorated, or shifted in composition relative to this point.

2.6 How this Index should be cited

When referencing The Human Stability Index, users should cite:

- the report year (Baseline 2026)
- the dimension or section referenced
- the context of comparison (global, regional, or thematic)

The Index is intended to support:

- policy analysis
- strategic planning
- preparedness assessment
- public discourse grounded in evidence

It is not intended to be used as a predictive certainty tool or a definitive judgement on individual countries or populations.

2.7 What comes next in this report

Following this section, the report moves to the **Global Stability Overview**, which synthesises baseline findings across all dimensions and identifies dominant patterns of stability and instability at the global level.

Subsequent sections examine each dimension in detail, before concluding with methodological notes that explain data aggregation, indicator selection, and limitations.

2. Conflict and Security - Detailed Dimension Analysis

Human Stability Index - Baseline Report 2026

Conflict and security remain among the most direct and immediate drivers of human instability. They affect civilian safety, economic activity, governance capacity, displacement patterns, and public trust in institutions. This dimension captures not only active wars and violent confrontations, but also shifting geopolitical risk environments, proxy engagements, interstate tensions, diplomatic breakdowns, and the invisible groundwork of instability such as militarisation and armed faction proliferation.

2.1 Global State of Conflict and Security in 2026

Global measures of peacefulness continue to deteriorate. The 2025 Global Peace Index (GPI), one of the most comprehensive measures of conflict and security worldwide, found declining levels of peacefulness for the thirteenth time in seventeen years, with conflict-related indicators at their highest since World War II. This includes increases in conflict deaths, militarisation, and involvement of states in conflicts beyond their borders. Globally, 59 state-based conflicts were active, the most since the GPI's inception, with nearly 152,000 conflict-related deaths recorded in 2024. Trends indicate deepening geopolitical fragmentation, increased involvement of middle powers in regional conflicts, and a rise in asymmetric and indirect confrontations.

Conflict is no longer concentrated in a few isolated theatres. Instead, the **risk landscape has fragmented**, with persistent active wars in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, while geopolitical competition and proxy engagements complicate regional security architectures and raise the possibility of escalation through miscalculation or cascading crises.

2.2 Active and Emerging Conflict Zones

Russia–Ukraine War Continuity

The war between Russia and Ukraine, now in its fourth year, continues to shape European security and global risk structures. Despite periodic diplomatic engagement efforts, including international mediation attempts, significant escalation risks remain due to ongoing military

operations, periodic missile strikes near allied borders, and intensifying geopolitical fault lines between Moscow and Western states. Tensions have recently spiked with accusations of escalation and counter-accusations at the United Nations, underscoring the persistent volatility and internationalisation of the conflict.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

The MENA region remains highly unstable. Civil wars, political fragmentation, and interstate rivalries continue to drive insecurity. Proxy dynamics and unresolved interstate conflict legacies underpin persistent instability in countries such as Yemen, where territorial control has shifted markedly in late 2025 and early 2026, deepening local governance vacuums and economic collapse.

New geopolitical realignments, such as proposals for regional defence pacts spanning the Middle East and South Asia, reflect both adaptive security cooperation and the risk of shifting alliance structures that could alter threat perceptions and escalation dynamics.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa remains a crucible of violent conflict and displacement. In eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the M23 rebel advance, supported by external actors, resulted in significant territorial gains, mass displacement, and diplomatic ruptures, including the suspension of DRC-Rwanda relations and urgent United Nations engagement.

Other protracted insurgencies, such as the conflict involving Boko Haram and affiliated groups in Nigeria and the Lake Chad basin, continued through 2025 with high levels of violent acts, civilian displacement, and regional spillover effects.

Mali's conflict dynamics also remained acute in 2025, with jihadist attacks, territorial contestation, and disruptions to civilian life highlighting fragile state capacity and the limited reach of central governance in parts of the Sahel.

South Asia and Border Flashpoints

Cross-border tensions and episodic escalation between South Asian powers - such as India and Pakistan - have heightened instability risks beyond conventional metrics. Episodes of militant attacks and rapid military response in contested zones like Kashmir contributed to broader bilateral strain in 2025, illustrating how localised violence can rapidly elevate interstate security tensions.

Other Conflict Emergence Areas

In Southeast Asia, low-intensity but persistent border clashes - such as those along the Cambodia–Thailand frontier in 2025 - highlight how long-standing disputes can reignite with disproportionate civilian displacement and regional anxiety.

2.3 Broader Geopolitical Security Dynamics

Conflict today cannot be understood solely through active battlefields. Ongoing shifts in strategic competition between major powers create **latent pressure conditions** that amplify instability risks globally:

- **Geoeconomic confrontation** - According to the World Economic Forum's 2026 global risk survey, economic conflict (trade barriers, sanctions, resource competition) now outranks direct state-based armed conflict as the most pressing short-term risk. Such economic "weaponisation" of state power affects global supply chains, resource access, and diplomatic relations foundational to stability.
- **Multipolar competition** - Fragmentation of global power structures, rising middle-power activism, and the diversification of geopolitical influence have expanded the number of arenas in which conflict risk can materialise, complicating conflict resolution mechanisms and increasing systemic uncertainty.
- **Strategic alliances and security blocs** - New or evolving defence partnerships, such as discussions around expanded collective defence pacts in the Middle East and South Asia, may strengthen deterrence in some scenarios but also risk redefining threat perceptions across regions in ways that heighten tension.
- **Proxy and hybrid conflict** - Non-state actors and proxy networks continue to shape conflict dynamics, blurring traditional distinctions between domestic insurgency, regional war, and international intervention.

2.4 Militarisation and Security Posture

Rising militarisation - measured through defence spending, troop deployment, weapon acquisition, and strategic posturing - is a prominent precursor to instability.

Data from comprehensive global peace measures shows that the number of states increasing their militarisation components continues to rise, reversing earlier decades' trends. Presence of foreign troops, increased military drills, and expanded weapons procurement demonstrate that states are prioritising defence readiness amid uncertainty.

Coupled with technological shifts in warfare - such as increased cyber operations, autonomous weapons research, and intelligence-driven targeting systems - the security environment is evolving in complexity even where direct kinetic conflict is not present.

2.5 Regional Summary of Conflict Pressures

Europe and Eurasia:
The war in Ukraine remains unresolved, with episodic escalations and diplomatic tensions shaping European security considerations and alliance postures across NATO and neighbouring states.

Middle East and North Africa:
Civil wars, territorial realignments, and interstate tension continue to promote insecurity. Yemen's fragmented conflict and broader MENA volatility maintain elevated regional instability.

Sub-Saharan Africa:
Persistent insurgencies, rebel movements, and state capacity deficits make this region a core locus of violent instability.

South and Southeast Asia:
Border disputes and entrenched rivalries - such as India–Pakistan relations - pose latent systemic risks that can rapidly escalate if triggered.

Latin America and the Caribbean:
Recent international interventions and diplomatic flashpoints - including debates over sovereignty and foreign policy alignments - add geopolitical complexity, though active state-based conflict remains comparatively lower in intensity.

2.6 Security Implications for Human Stability

Conflict and security pressures drive instability through multiple pathways:

- **Direct impact on civilians:** displacement, mortality, disruption of services.
- **Economic disruption:** markets, trade, inflation, and investor confidence.
- **Governance erosion:** legitimacy loss, breakdown of public trust, institutional paralysis.
- **Social cohesion fracture:** sectarian, ethnic, and political polarisation.

Conflict does not operate in a vacuum; it interacts with economic, environmental, and social systems to shape broader fragility. Persistent or expanding conflict pressure reduces adaptive capacity and increases the probability that shocks - whether environmental, technological, or financial - will have disproportionate destabilising effects.

2.7 Conflict Pressure Signals - Early Warning Indicators

In the HSI framework, conflict pressures are tracked via **signals** that often precede visible escalation:

- Rising militarisation indices across multiple regions
- Growing geoeconomic confrontations (sanctions, tariffs, resource diversion)
- Increased foreign involvement in local conflicts
- Higher numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees
- Expanded rebel and non-state actor influence
- Diplomacy breakdowns and crisis-driven border closures

These signals do not guarantee imminent war but indicate **directional erosion of stability**.

2.8 Summary

The conflict and security dimension of The Human Stability Index reveals a world where traditional state-based wars coexist with evolving geoeconomic tensions, proxy engagements, and latent militarisation pressures. Worldwide peacefulness continues to decline, and the conditions that precede instability - including economic weaponisation, geopolitical fragmentation, and hybrid conflict - are present at historically elevated levels. Against this backdrop, conflict pressures remain a core driver of human instability, shaping economic outcomes, social cohesion, and regional security environments.

3. Technological Disruption - Detailed Dimension Analysis

Human Stability Index - Baseline Report 2026

Technological disruption is a stability dimension not because technology is inherently destabilising, but because **the pace, asymmetry, and governance lag** of technological change can erode predictability, livelihoods, information integrity, and institutional capacity. In 2026, the primary destabilising vectors are concentrated in (i) accelerated AI deployment and automation, (ii) labour market reconfiguration and skills mismatch, (iii) misinformation and synthetic media at scale, and (iv) cyber insecurity affecting critical infrastructure and public trust.

HSI treats technological disruption as a **system-level pressure**: it becomes destabilising when adoption is uneven, when capability concentrates faster than institutions adapt, and when the information environment becomes untrustworthy faster than societies can coordinate.

3.1 Global state of technological disruption entering 2026

Global risk assessments consistently place technology-related risks among the most material near-term and medium-term instability drivers. The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2026 identifies **mis- and disinformation** as a top short-term risk and notes rising concern around **adverse outcomes of AI technologies** and **cyber insecurity**.

This framing matters for human stability because these risks impact the foundations of social order:

- **Information integrity:** what people believe, who they trust, and whether shared reality can be maintained.
- **Economic security:** who retains stable employment, who loses bargaining power, and who experiences prolonged insecurity.
- **State capacity and legitimacy:** whether institutions can regulate, respond, and protect citizens in a rapidly shifting technological environment.
- **Public safety:** whether critical systems (health, utilities, transport, finance) remain secure against cyber threats.

3.2 AI-driven labour disruption and economic stability

Exposure at global scale

The labour-market implications of AI are no longer speculative. The IMF has stated that **nearly 40% of global jobs are exposed** to AI-driven change.

Exposure does not automatically translate to displacement; some roles are augmented while others are substituted. What matters for human stability is the **distribution of risk**: which groups experience insecurity and whether institutions can enable rapid adaptation.

An IMF staff discussion note (January 2026) highlights that for workers in jobs with **high exposure and low complementarity** to AI - estimated at **about 30% of total employment** - there is evidence of declining employment growth (in analysed contexts), indicating that the risk concentrates in specific job categories and regions.

Worker confidence and perceived instability

Public perception is itself a stability factor, because sustained anxiety can influence social cohesion, political volatility, and household decision-making. A 2025 survey of lower-wage workers (reported January 2026) found that many are concerned about AI threatening job security and that a majority believe government is unprepared for AI-driven labour change.

HSI interprets this as an important **signal**: when technological change becomes widely perceived as destabilising - and institutional readiness is doubted - stability can erode even before economic indicators fully reflect it.

Job quality, not just job count

The ILO's 2025 update on generative AI and jobs emphasises task-level exposure and the likelihood that impacts will vary by occupation and context, influencing job quality, bargaining power, and working conditions - not only unemployment.

For HSI, job-quality degradation (wage compression, reduced security, involuntary role change) can be as destabilising as job loss, particularly where housing costs and household debt burdens are already high.

3.3 Information integrity, synthetic media, and social cohesion risk

The destabilising impact of misinformation is not limited to politics.

Synthetic content can scale rapidly across cultural, commercial, and civic environments, eroding trust and amplifying polarisation.

Recent reporting on AI-generated misinformation ("AI slop") illustrates how plausible synthetic narratives can spread widely and damage reputations and trust, with warnings that such content can be used for cultural and political manipulation.

HSI treats this as a direct stability risk because:

- shared reality becomes harder to maintain,
- outrage cycles accelerate polarisation,
- institutions struggle to communicate credibly during crises,
- social and political coordination degrades under uncertainty.

Information integrity is therefore a **multiplying factor**: it raises the probability that other stresses (economic shock, conflict, climate disaster) trigger disproportionate social instability.

3.4 Cyber insecurity and critical infrastructure exposure

Cyber insecurity is increasingly treated as a systemic risk alongside conventional security threats. The Global Risks Report 2026 lists **cyber insecurity** among key near-term risks, reflecting rising concern that cyber incidents can disrupt services and undermine trust.

HSI emphasises cyber risk as a human stability factor because:

- critical infrastructure disruption (utilities, healthcare, transport, finance) affects daily safety and continuity,
- public confidence can collapse after repeated failures,
- cyber events can intersect with geopolitical conflict and economic confrontation.

In stability terms, cyber insecurity becomes most destabilising when it:

- affects essential services,
- is frequent enough to feel "normal,"
- is perceived as unmanageable by institutions.

3.5 Governance and regulatory lag

The institutional adaptation gap

Technological disruption becomes destabilising when institutional capacity fails to keep pace. This includes:

- regulatory clarity lagging product deployment,
- enforcement lagging compliance frameworks,
- public services lacking capability to procure or govern AI safely,
- insufficient training and reskilling infrastructure for labour transitions.

EU AI governance as a reference case

The EU AI Act illustrates the structured attempt to regulate AI risk categories through a phased approach. Multiple summaries note that the Act entered into force in August 2024 and becomes broadly applicable after transitional periods (commonly referenced as **August 2026** for general applicability), reflecting a governance timeline that intentionally lags to allow implementation.

From an HSI perspective, this highlights a wider pattern: as AI capabilities advance rapidly, **governance regimes move on slower legal and operational cycles**, creating a temporary stability gap where social and economic impacts may accelerate faster than protective frameworks.

3.6 Regional stability patterns in technological disruption

Technological disruption is globally distributed, but its stability impacts are not uniform.

- **High-income economies:** high exposure in knowledge work and services, with significant augmentation potential but also visible anxiety around role erosion and wage pressure (especially for mid-skill and entry-level pathways).
- **Emerging markets:** potential productivity gains exist, but instability risks rise where labour protections, reskilling systems, and safety nets are weaker; exposure can translate more quickly into insecurity.

- **Fragile states:** technological disruption compounds existing instability through information manipulation, cyber vulnerabilities, and weakened institutional capacity to respond.

In all contexts, the stability outcome depends less on technology itself and more on **adaptation capacity**: skills transition speed, institutional trust, social safety nets, and information integrity.

3.7 Technological disruption signals tracked by HSI

HSI tracks technological disruption using **signals** that often precede visible breakdown:

1. **Labour transition strain**
    - rising perceived insecurity and distrust in institutional readiness
    - widening mismatch between skills demand and supply
    - decline in stable entry pathways in exposed occupations
2. **Information integrity degradation**
    - increased volume and credibility of synthetic misinformation
    - declining trust in information intermediaries and institutions (contextual, cross-linked to cohesion)
3. **Cyber insecurity escalation**
    - increasing frequency/severity of cyber incidents impacting essential services (tracked via risk reporting)
4. **Governance lag**
    - widening gap between capability deployment and enforceable governance timelines

These signals do not imply deterministic collapse. They indicate **directional pressure** and reduced stability margins - particularly when combined with economic strain, conflict exposure, or social polarisation.

3.8 Summary

Technological disruption in the 2026 baseline environment is best understood as a **compound pressure system**. AI-driven change is widespread in labour markets, with global exposure estimates near 40% and significant concentration of risk in high-exposure, low-complementarity roles.

Simultaneously, the information environment is being reshaped by scalable synthetic media, while cyber insecurity is increasingly treated as a core global risk. Governance responses are advancing, but often on slower cycles than capability deployment, creating a measurable adaptation gap.

In HSI terms, technological disruption becomes a material driver of instability when it reduces economic predictability, erodes shared reality, and outpaces the capacity of institutions and populations to adapt.

4. Economic Security - Detailed Dimension Analysis

Human Stability Index - Baseline Report 2026

Economic security is a foundational stability condition. It determines whether households can maintain predictable living standards, whether governments can sustain stabilising services, and whether economies can absorb shocks without social fracture. In HSI, economic security is not defined by growth alone. It is defined by **affordability, employment security, inflation persistence, debt stress, and the distribution of risk** - especially when combined with other pressures such as conflict, climate disruption, and technological change.

Entering 2026, the global economy remains resilient in parts, but structurally constrained: growth is moderate, the cost of capital is materially higher than the 2010s baseline, and risk is increasingly shaped by fragmentation (trade barriers, sanctions, industrial policy) rather than purely cyclical downturns.

4.1 Baseline macroeconomic conditions entering 2026

Across major forecasts, the global baseline is one of **moderate growth and elevated sensitivity to shocks**, rather than broad-based acceleration.

- The IMF projects global growth slowing from **3.3% (2024)** to **3.2% (2025)** and **3.1% (2026)**.
- The OECD projects global GDP growth easing from **3.2% (2025)** to **2.9% (2026)**, before strengthening modestly in 2027.
- The World Bank projects global growth easing to **2.6% in 2026** and **2.7% in 2027**, noting resilience but weak dynamism and persistent disparities in developing-country recovery.

HSI interprets this as a stability-relevant macro context: moderate growth can coexist with declining human stability when affordability, insecurity, and institutional strain rise faster than headline GDP.

4.2 Monetary conditions and the cost of money

A central feature of the 2026 baseline is that the world remains in a **post-ultra-low-rate regime**. Interest-rate levels and borrowing conditions are no longer a background variable; they are an active stability driver through mortgages, consumer credit, government debt service, and business investment.

United States: policy rate in a "neutral range"

By mid-January 2026, reporting and official data indicate the U.S. federal funds target range at **3.50%–3.75%** (upper limit 3.75).
This matters for global stability because U.S. rates influence global capital flows, emerging-market financing conditions, and the pricing of risk worldwide.

Euro area: deposit facility rate at 2.00%

ECB rate data and Banque de France webstat reporting show the **ECB deposit facility rate at 2.00%** in early January 2026.
This supports easing relative to prior tightening cycles, but the broader point remains: European borrowing costs are still meaningfully higher than the 2010s norm, affecting housing markets, public finance, and investment.

United Kingdom: base rate cut to 3.75%

In the UK, lenders cite the Bank of England's **December 18, 2025** base rate cut from **4.00% to 3.75%**.
The cut has fed through to renewed competition among lenders, with major banks reducing mortgage rates at the start of 2026.

HSI stability implication: even where rates begin to fall, the *legacy effects* of higher borrowing costs persist (fixed-rate resets, elevated rents, constrained affordability). Lower rates can improve conditions at the margin, but stability depends on whether household balance sheets and labour markets can recover faster than costs accumulate.

4.3 Housing affordability and household balance-sheet strain

Housing costs are among the most direct pathways from macro conditions to lived stability. When housing becomes unaffordable, instability increases through:

- household stress and reduced financial resilience,
- delayed family formation and demographic pressure,
- social and political resentment,
- increased homelessness risk,
- reduced mobility (people cannot move for work).

UK mortgage market as a baseline signal

In early 2026, major UK lenders began cutting mortgage rates, with reports of two-year fixed deals as low as **~3.5%** (example: Nationwide), following the base rate cut.
At the same time, consumer caution remains: many borrowers continue to prefer fixed rates over trackers due to uncertainty and living-cost concerns.

Additional market commentary indicates the average two-year fixed rate still around the mid-4% range in early January 2026 (per reporting citing Uswitch).

HSI interpretation: the coexistence of "headline low deals" and "still-elevated averages" is itself a stability indicator - suggesting an uneven affordability landscape where the best conditions accrue to low-risk borrowers while marginal households remain under strain.

4.4 Inflation dynamics and the stability margin

Inflation is a human stability driver because it degrades predictability. It reduces real income, increases wage conflict, and erodes trust in institutions when people experience persistent cost-of-living pressure.

Major forecasts indicate easing inflation compared with the peak inflation shock period, but HSI treats inflation as **still stability-relevant** because:

- household budgets remain tight after prior inflation,
- services inflation can remain persistent,
- food and energy remain vulnerable to shocks from conflict and climate.

(Inflation is treated as a cross-linked risk to **food systems** and **social cohesion** in later sections.)

4.5 Growth disparities and the "two-speed recovery" problem

The World Bank notes that the global economy has shown resilience but also that growth is too weak and uneven to materially reduce extreme poverty in many developing contexts.

HSI stability implication: uneven recovery is destabilising because it increases the divergence between countries and within countries. Divergence is one of the most consistent predictors of migration pressure, political resentment, and institutional strain - especially in states with weak safety nets or high youth unemployment.

4.6 Geoeconomic confrontation, tariffs, and supply fragility

In the 2026 baseline, economic security is increasingly shaped by **policy-driven fragmentation**:

- tariffs and trade restrictions,
- sanctions regimes,
- industrial policy competition,
- strategic reshoring and supply-chain reconfiguration.

The World Bank explicitly highlights trade tensions and policy uncertainty as material conditions shaping the outlook, even as it forecasts resilience.

HSI interpretation: geoeconomic confrontation is a stability multiplier because it can raise prices, constrain supply, reduce investment confidence, and increase the probability that shocks propagate internationally.

4.7 Public finance pressures and fiscal constraint

Economic security is also a function of state capacity: whether governments can stabilise households through services, welfare systems, infrastructure, and emergency response.

In the baseline environment:

- higher debt-service costs compete with social spending,
- defence spending pressures rise amid security concerns,
- climate adaptation spending rises amid environmental stress.

Even where growth continues, fiscal constraint can reduce the state's ability to prevent or cushion instability - especially when multiple shocks coincide.

4.8 Regional patterns of economic insecurity

This report will treat regions in detail in the regional profiles, but baseline patterns are visible now:

- **Advanced economies:** stability pressure concentrates in housing affordability, wage stagnation vs costs, and political discontent under constrained public services.
- **Emerging markets:** exposure concentrates in capital-flow volatility, currency sensitivity to global rates, and uneven labour market protections.
- **Fragile and conflict-affected states:** economic security often fails through combined pathways—conflict disruption, food-price shocks, aid volatility, and weakened governance.

4.9 Economic security signals tracked by HSI

HSI tracks economic security using signals that precede visible breakdown:

1. **Affordability strain**
    - housing cost-to-income pressure
    - rent escalation and overcrowding
    - mortgage reset stress in higher-rate regimes (where relevant)
2. **Labour insecurity**
    - rising underemployment or informalisation
    - decline in stable entry pathways (cross-linked to AI disruption)
3. **Inflation persistence**
    - especially in food and energy baskets
    - real wage compression
4. **Debt stress**
    - household delinquency trends (where available)
    - sovereign debt refinancing strain

5. **Policy-driven fragmentation**
    - tariff and restriction cycles
    - supply-chain disruptions and price volatility

Signals are interpreted in combination with other dimensions. Economic stress becomes destabilising fastest when it coincides with cohesion decline (trust breakdown) or security deterioration (conflict spillover).

4.10 Summary

The economic-security baseline entering 2026 is best described as **moderate growth with elevated fragility**. Major institutions forecast steady but slowing global expansion (IMF: 3.1% in 2026; OECD: 2.9% in 2026; World Bank: 2.6% in 2026), indicating resilience but not a return to high-dynamism conditions.

Monetary conditions are easing in places, but the cost of money remains a material stability driver: U.S. policy rates sit around **3.50%–3.75%**, the ECB deposit facility rate is **2.00%**, and the UK base rate is **3.75%** following the December 2025 cut - conditions that continue to shape housing affordability and household stability.

In HSI terms, the primary economic stability risks in this baseline are: **affordability strain**, **uneven recovery**, **policy-driven fragmentation**, and **the persistence of higher borrowing-cost regimes** - all of which can compound with conflict, technology disruption, food insecurity, and cohesion pressures to produce instability.

5. Environmental Stress - Detailed Dimension Analysis

Human Stability Index - Baseline Report 2026

Environmental stress is a stability dimension because it changes the **operating conditions of daily life**: heat, water availability, extreme events, ecosystem reliability, and disaster frequency. It affects food systems, public health, migration pressure, infrastructure integrity, insurance and financial stability, and the capacity of institutions to protect populations during shocks. In the HSI framework, environmental stress is not treated as a distant risk. It is a **present, compounding pressure system** whose impacts increasingly overlap with conflict exposure, economic insecurity, and social cohesion.

In the 2026 baseline, the defining environmental context is not a single disaster but an observable shift in global climate conditions: sustained global heat, higher ocean heat content, changing precipitation patterns, intensifying hydrological extremes (flood and drought), accelerating wildfire risk, and increasing exposure of water systems to long-term drying and volatility.

5.1 Baseline climate state entering 2026: heat as a systemic pressure

A new temperature regime

HSI anchors this baseline in the most recent consolidated scientific reporting:

- The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) confirmed that **2024 was the warmest year on record**, with an annual global mean near-surface temperature estimated at **~1.55°C ± 0.13°C above the 1850–1900 average**.
- Copernicus/ECMWF reporting indicates **2025 was the third-warmest year on record**, only marginally cooler than 2023 and notably close to 2024.
- Critically for stability tracking, ECMWF notes that the **three-year average (2023–2025)** exceeded **1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for the first time** - an important marker for sustained heat conditions, even if the Paris threshold is defined over longer averaging windows.

HSI interpretation: the stability-relevant change is not only record years, but *persistent heat as background conditions*. Sustained heat raises baseline risk across health, labour productivity, agriculture, water availability, and infrastructure performance.

Why temperature matters for human stability

Temperature increases act as a multiplier because they:

- increase heat-related mortality and illness risk,
- reduce work capacity and productivity in exposed sectors,
- intensify drought and wildfire probability,
- raise energy demand for cooling (stress on grids and household budgets),
- alter precipitation patterns affecting agriculture and flood risk.

HSI treats "heat load" as a stability pressure because it creates chronic strain even without discrete disasters.

5.2 The hydrological dimension: drought, flood, and water instability

Water is one of the most direct pathways from environmental change to societal stability because it touches:

- food production,
- public health and sanitation,
- industrial production,
- urban resilience,
- cross-border tensions and internal displacement.

Continental drying and long-term freshwater decline

The World Bank has described an escalating global water crisis characterised by **"continental drying"** - a long-term decline in freshwater availability across large landmasses.

A related World Bank monitoring release (via ReliefWeb) reports the world is losing **~324 billion cubic meters of freshwater per year**, framing this as a material global risk to jobs, economies, and stability.

HSI interpretation: long-term drying acts as a structural condition that reduces stability margins. In drying regions, shocks (heatwaves, crop failures, conflict, energy price spikes) become more destabilising because water systems lack redundancy.

Flood-drought volatility as a stability stressor

Environmental stress in 2026 is not just "more drought" or "more flood." It is increasingly **volatility**: rapid shifts between extremes, which institutions and infrastructure struggle to manage. Volatility destabilises planning and increases the likelihood of cascading failures (e.g., flood damage to infrastructure → water contamination → public health impacts → economic disruption).

5.3 Extreme events: the operational reality of climate stress

HSI treats extreme events as **shocks** whose destabilising impact depends on structural conditions (infrastructure quality, emergency response capacity, inequality, governance trust) and accumulated signals (existing strain).

In the baseline period, reporting and climate-monitoring bodies continue to highlight that rising temperatures are driving more extreme events, including heatwaves, floods, and wildfires.

Heatwaves

Heatwaves are uniquely destabilising because they:

- affect large populations simultaneously,
- raise mortality risk among vulnerable groups,
- strain healthcare and electricity systems,
- reduce outdoor labour capacity.

Associated reporting on near-record hot years describes heat exposure affecting very large populations and warns of a "shifting, dangerous climate" pattern.

Wildfires

Wildfire risk increases with heat, drought, and vegetation stress; fire events also degrade air quality and health. Copernicus-linked reporting notes record wildfire emissions in parts of Europe during 2025.

Floods and storm impacts

Flooding remains a major stability stressor due to displacement, infrastructure damage, water contamination, and supply disruption. Reporting in the baseline period referenced deadly monsoon floods in Pakistan as part of the broader extreme-events landscape linked to climate change.

HSI interpretation: extreme events matter most where they coincide with high economic strain, weak institutions, or conflict exposure - conditions in which recovery is slower and social cohesion is more likely to fracture.

5.4 Environmental stress as a multiplier of other HSI dimensions

Environmental stress rarely destabilises alone. It interacts strongly with other dimensions:

Interaction with Food Systems (HSI Dimension 6)

- Heat and water stress reduce crop yields and raise price volatility.
- Flood damage disrupts logistics and storage.
- Drought conditions increase dependency on imports and aid.

These interactions increase the probability of acute food insecurity and political unrest, particularly in fragile states.

Interaction with Economic Security (HSI Dimension 4)

- Higher insurance losses and reduced coverage affect household and business stability.
- Infrastructure repairs strain public finances.
- Cooling demand raises energy costs, increasing household affordability stress.
- Labour productivity declines in outdoor and heat-exposed sectors.

Interaction with Conflict Exposure (HSI Dimension 2)

In water-stressed and agriculturally vulnerable regions, environmental deterioration can increase competition over resources and stress governance systems. HSI does not assume "climate causes war," but it treats environmental stress as a condition that can **intensify existing grievances** and increase fragility where institutional capacity is weak.

Interaction with Social Cohesion (HSI Dimension 7)

Disasters and chronic environmental strain can trigger:

- migration pressure,
- local resentment over resource allocation,
- loss of trust in institutions when response is perceived as inadequate.

5.5 Forward baseline: emissions trajectory and future stress loading

HSI includes emissions trajectory as a contextual stability factor because it shapes the likelihood that environmental stress continues to intensify.

UNEP's Emissions Gap reporting underscores that the world is likely to exceed key global warming targets soon and indicates that emissions would need to fall sharply to align with 1.5°C pathways - far beyond current commitments.

HSI interpretation: the baseline is set within a trajectory where environmental stress is likely to remain a rising pressure system. Even with regional improvements, the global system faces increasing stress loading, meaning adaptation capacity becomes central to stability outcomes.

5.6 Environmental stress signals tracked by HSI

HSI tracks environmental stress through signals that often appear before visible destabilisation:

1. **Persistent heat anomalies**
    - multi-year elevated temperature regimes (not just record single years)
2. **Water system degradation**
    - long-term freshwater decline / drying signals

- increased reliance on emergency water measures and restrictions (where data is available)

3. **Extreme-event frequency and severity**
    - repeated heatwaves, large-scale wildfire seasons, major flooding events
4. **Infrastructure fragility under climate load**
    - repeated failures (power, water, transport) following environmental shocks
    - increasing repair backlogs and rising insurance withdrawal from risk areas (tracked where robust data exists)
5. **Displacement pressure**
    - rising internal displacement following climate-linked disasters (tracked alongside conflict displacement)

Signals become most stability-relevant when they converge with economic strain (high debt, high housing costs), food volatility, or low institutional trust.

5.7 Baseline summary: Environmental stress and human stability

The 2026 baseline environment reflects a world operating under **sustained climate stress** rather than isolated extremes. WMO confirms record global heat in 2024 (~1.55°C above 1850–1900), while Copernicus/ECMWF data show 2025 remains among the hottest years ever recorded and indicates a three-year average exceeding 1.5°C - an important marker of persistent pressure conditions.

At the same time, water systems show increasing long-term strain, with World Bank reporting on "continental drying" and large-scale freshwater decline as a global risk to economies and human stability.

HSI treats environmental stress as a **compound stability driver**: it intensifies food insecurity risks, increases economic volatility through disasters and costs, amplifies migration pressure, and reduces institutional recovery capacity - especially in regions already exposed to conflict or high economic strain.

6. Food Systems - Detailed Dimension Analysis

Human Stability Index - Baseline Report 2026

Food systems are a primary determinant of human stability because they sit at the intersection of **availability, affordability, access, and trust**. When food systems fail, instability tends to move quickly from household strain into broader social and political stress: rising unrest, displacement, increased recruitment into armed groups, and deteriorating public health - especially child malnutrition. In the HSI framework, food insecurity is treated not as a humanitarian "sector," but as a **systemic stability signal** that often appears *before* visible breakdown in institutions or safety.

Entering 2026, the global picture is defined by a paradox:

- **Global agricultural markets can appear "well supplied" in aggregate**, yet
- **acute hunger is rising in fragile and conflict-affected contexts**, with worsening outlooks driven by conflict, climate shocks, economic fragility, and funding shortfalls.

This divergence - global sufficiency alongside local collapse - is itself a stability condition.

6.1 Baseline global state: acute hunger at historic highs

The 2026 baseline is anchored to the most recent consolidated global assessment of acute food insecurity:

- The **Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC) 2025** reports that in **2024**, more than **295 million people** across **53 countries/territories** experienced **acute levels of hunger**, an increase of **13.7 million** from 2023.
- GRFC reporting also highlights that the prevalence of acute food insecurity remained above **20% of the assessed population** for multiple consecutive years, indicating persistent rather than episodic fragility.

HSI interpretation: A persistent >20% acute hunger prevalence across assessed populations is not a "crisis spike." It is a structural stability failure signal - indicating that a large share of people in affected contexts are operating without reliable access to food, with minimal buffer capacity for additional shocks.

6.2 The primary drivers: conflict, climate, economics - and funding

Across the baseline sources, the driver stack is consistent:

(1) Conflict as the leading destabiliser

Conflict remains the dominant driver of severe food insecurity. The World Bank's Food Security Update (December 19, 2025) summarises recent global assessments that identify compounding **fragility, conflict, and climate shocks** as central drivers and cites broader analysis that emphasises conflict as the greatest driver of hunger.

This matters for stability because conflict disrupts:

- agricultural production and planting cycles,
- markets and transport,
- access to land,
- humanitarian delivery,
- currency stability and fiscal capacity.

(2) Climate extremes as a constant pressure, not a periodic event

Multiple baseline references emphasise that climate-linked shocks are now persistent stressors within food systems, rather than occasional disruptors.
HSI treats this as a structural shift: food systems are increasingly exposed to volatility in yields, planting reliability, and transport reliability.

(3) Economic fragility and domestic price inflation

Even when international prices soften, domestic food price inflation can remain elevated due to currency weakness, transport costs, conflict disruption, and market concentration.

The World Bank's December 2025 update reports that domestic food price inflation remained "moderately high," and that in the dataset referenced, food price inflation exceeded overall inflation in **54% of 166 countries** where both indices were available.
HSI interpretation: When food inflation outpaces headline inflation, households experience stability erosion even if macro indicators appear to improve - because food is a non-discretionary component of daily life.

(4) Funding shortfalls as a direct stability risk

The baseline period shows that food insecurity is being amplified by material funding constraints.

- The FAO-WFP **Hunger Hotspots** outlook warns that acute food insecurity is deepening in **16 hotspots** and explicitly points to "critical funding shortfalls" worsening conditions.
- Reuters reporting (January 16, 2026) highlights how aid cuts are exacerbating severe hunger in northeast Nigeria, with WFP warning of catastrophic shortages in parts of Borno State and broader regional impacts across West and Central Africa.

HSI interpretation: Funding constraints are not a secondary issue. In fragile contexts, they can be a *trigger condition* - turning chronic stress into acute instability by removing the final stabilising layer.

6.3 Market conditions: global prices easing, but risk remains elevated

International prices influence domestic stability most strongly through import dependence and fiscal subsidy capacity. In 2026 baseline conditions:

- The FAO Food Price Index averaged **124.3** in **December 2025**, down **0.6%** from November and **2.3%** lower than a year earlier.
- For **2025 overall**, the index averaged **127.2**, **4.3% higher** than 2024 - driven by increases in vegetable oils and dairy, even as cereals declined year-on-year.

The World Bank's December 2025 update also notes that global agricultural markets were "broadly well supplied" according to AMIS, while emphasising that **trade policy uncertainty** influenced market sentiment.

HSI interpretation: Price easing does not equal stability. Food stability depends on whether markets remain open, whether shipping and trade routes remain reliable, and whether households have purchasing power. In fragile states, the transmission from global prices to local affordability is weak or distorted.

6.4 Strategic behaviour is changing: stockpiling, restrictions, and "food security as national security"

A stability-critical feature of the baseline period is the behavioural shift among states: food is increasingly being treated as a strategic asset.

Financial Times reporting (January 2026) describes a renewed global trend toward **food stockpiling** by multiple countries, motivated by geopolitical tension, climate volatility, and supply-chain fragility.

The report also notes concerns that widespread stockpiling and export restrictions can tighten global supply and elevate prices - especially harming import-dependent poorer nations.

HSI interpretation: This is a clear structural signal. When countries shift from "market reliance" to "strategic reserves," it reflects declining trust in global trade reliability under stress. That shift can itself increase instability if it accelerates protectionism and price volatility.

6.5 High-risk geographies and hotspot dynamics

HSI does not treat "hotspots" as a humanitarian list; it treats them as **stability fault lines** where food insecurity can propagate into broader instability.

FAO–WFP early warning

The FAO–WFP Hunger Hotspots outlook (Nov 2025 onward) identifies **16 acute hotspots**, warning of deepening insecurity and famine-risk dynamics driven by conflict, economic shocks, extreme weather, and funding constraints.

Nigeria as a stability case study

Recent reporting underscores how conflict + economic fragility + aid constraints can drive acute hunger escalation:

- Reuters (Jan 16, 2026) reports WFP warnings that northeast Nigeria faces the worst hunger in a decade due to aid cuts, with a severe situation in Borno State and widespread pressures across West and Central Africa.
- Associated reporting highlights catastrophic classification risk for segments of the population and broad malnutrition projections.

HSI interpretation: This is a classic compounding-risk profile: insecurity disrupts production and access; economic stress reduces purchasing power; aid shortfalls remove the stabilising buffer; malnutrition rises; and recruitment risk, displacement, and governance strain increase.

6.6 Food systems as a stability multiplier

Food systems interact strongly with other HSI dimensions:

- **Conflict exposure:** food insecurity increases grievance and recruitment risk; conflict disrupts planting/markets.
- **Economic security:** food inflation erodes real income; subsidy costs strain fiscal budgets.
- **Environmental stress:** drought/flood heat volatility alters yields and logistics reliability.
- **Public safety and cohesion:** hunger increases unrest probability and reduces institutional trust when response is perceived as inadequate.

HSI treats food insecurity as both:

- a **direct instability condition** (acute hunger, malnutrition), and
- an **amplifier** that accelerates instability in other domains.

6.7 Food systems signals tracked by HSI

HSI tracks food-system stability through signals that often precede acute breakdown:

1. **Acute hunger prevalence and trajectory**
    - GRFC acute food insecurity totals and prevalence rates
2. **Famine-risk warnings**
    - FAO–WFP Hunger Hotspots outlook and deterioration signals
3. **Domestic food inflation divergence**
    - food inflation exceeding overall CPI across a large share of countries
4. **Policy-driven market distortion**
    - stockpiling, export restrictions, trade uncertainty

5. **Humanitarian funding stress**
    - reductions in food and nutrition programmes; emergency pipeline constraints
6. **Malnutrition burden indicators**
    - rising acute child malnutrition linked to compounding shocks and constrained assistance

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6.8 Summary: Food systems in the 2026 baseline

The 2026 baseline records a world in which **acute hunger is at the highest level in the GRFC's history**, with more than **295 million** people across **53 countries/territories** facing acute food insecurity in 2024.

At the same time, international prices have softened in late 2025, yet food stability risk remains elevated due to domestic inflation divergence, conflict disruption, climate volatility, and – critically - funding constraints that reduce the capacity to prevent deterioration in hotspot contexts.

The stability-significant shift is structural: **food security is increasingly treated as national security**, with stockpiling and market protection behaviours re-emerging, potentially increasing volatility for import-dependent states.

In HSI terms, food systems represent one of the clearest visibility layers for human instability - because when food becomes unreliable, the downstream effects on public health, cohesion, safety, and governance tend to accelerate.

7. Public Safety - Detailed Dimension Analysis

Human Stability Index - Baseline Report 2026

Public safety is the most immediate expression of stability at population level. It reflects whether people can move, work, access services, and live without persistent fear of violence, coercion, or breakdown in essential protections. In HSI, public safety is not limited to crime. It includes **everyday security conditions**, the **capacity of the state to maintain order**, and the **integrity of essential services under violence pressure** (healthcare, emergency response, critical infrastructure).

Public safety is also a *transmission mechanism*: when safety deteriorates, economic activity declines, informal power structures expand, trust collapses, displacement accelerates, and social cohesion weakens. For this reason, public safety is treated as both a standalone stability dimension and a multiplier across all others.

7.1 Baseline safety condition entering 2026

Global security conditions remain strained, but unevenly. Major composite measures show that while some safety indicators improve in select countries or regions, global peacefulness continues to deteriorate overall and conflict pressures remain elevated. The **Global Peace Index 2025** notes deterioration in the Safety and Security domain, even while highlighting sustained improvement in certain indicators such as homicide rate and perceptions of criminality in some contexts.

HSI interpretation: this is a core baseline signature: public safety is polarising. Some states achieve meaningful improvements (often through strong coercive capacity), while others experience rapid collapse of state control and rising violence.

7.2 Violence burden: homicide as a primary stability signal

Intentional homicide is one of the most comparable measures of public safety. UNODC's Global Study on Homicide provides the global benchmark and methodology for this indicator family.

Why homicide is stability-relevant

- It is a direct measure of lethal violence affecting daily life.
- It correlates strongly with broader fear, economic decline, and reduced mobility.
- It is sensitive to organised crime dynamics, state capacity, and social breakdown.

The Global Peace Index also tracks homicide and perceptions of criminality, and notes correlation between improvements in homicide rates and perceptions of safety walking alone at night.

HSI interpretation: homicide trends are best read as a *structural signal* when persistent, and as a *shock signal* when they rise abruptly (often linked to organised crime surges, conflict spillover, or policing breakdown).

7.3 Organised crime, gangs, and "parallel governance"

A defining public-safety pattern in the 2026 baseline is the expansion of **armed non-state control** and criminal governance in some urban and fragile contexts. This affects stability through:

- extortion systems that become de facto taxation,
- kidnapping and coercion as routine,
- capture of ports, supply routes, and neighbourhoods,
- displacement and collapse of normal economic life.

Haiti as a high-salience stability case

Haiti illustrates how public safety collapse becomes a national stability crisis when gangs undermine state control and essential services.

- UN human rights reporting (June 2025) described severe violence dynamics including thousands killed, widespread kidnappings, and rapidly expanding displacement.
- Security Council reporting and monitoring describe sustained gang violence and its national implications.
- Reuters (Jan 15, 2026) reported an operation targeting gang leader Jimmy "Barbecue" Chérizier, highlighting escalating state action under high-pressure conditions.

- AP reporting (Jan 2026) describes how violence has forced humanitarian medical providers to suspend services, notes large areas of Port-au-Prince under gang control, and reports extensive disruption to health facilities and large-scale displacement.

HSI interpretation: when gangs or armed groups control territory, the stability impact is not only violence - it is the emergence of **parallel governance** and the disabling of essential services. This is a decisive degradation marker: it reduces the population's ability to live predictably, and it increases the probability of sudden humanitarian and political shocks.

7.4 Displacement as an integrated public-safety indicator

Forced displacement is a direct indicator that public safety and security conditions are no longer tolerable in place. It reflects the combined effect of violence, fear, rights pressure, and service collapse.

UNHCR reporting indicates that by the end of June 2025, **117.3 million** people were forcibly displaced worldwide due to persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations.
UNHCR also reports **67.8 million** people internally displaced due to conflict or violence as of June 2025 (mid-year trends).
Associated reporting highlights the scale and growth of displacement and the compounding pressure from shrinking humanitarian resources.

HSI interpretation: displacement is one of the highest-signal stability markers because it is an revealed preference: people leave only when the perceived risk exceeds the cost of displacement. Rising displacement also feeds back into cohesion and economic security in receiving areas, increasing second-order stability stress.

7.5 Terrorism and politically motivated violence

Terrorism is not the dominant global driver of violent death compared to armed conflict or criminal homicide, but it is a high-impact destabiliser because it:

- amplifies fear disproportionate to incident count,
- can rapidly shift political environments,
- often provokes coercive policy responses that can affect cohesion.

The **Global Terrorism Index 2025** provides a consistent reference framework for terrorism incidents and trends, supported by a dedicated incident database (TerrorismTracker).

HSI interpretation: terrorism risk functions as a volatility amplifier - especially in environments already under strain from conflict, economic insecurity, or polarisation. Even low-frequency terrorism risk can materially shape governance and public safety posture.

7.6 Gendered violence and household-level safety

Public safety is not only public space violence. Stability also depends on safety in domestic and community environments. Rising gender-based violence is a stability-relevant signal because it correlates with:

- breakdown of social order,
- coercive control by armed groups,
- reduced community trust and mobility,
- long-term public health and economic impacts.

UN Women and UNODC joint work on femicide provides a global baseline view of intimate-partner and family-member femicides and the persistence of gendered violence as a structural safety issue.

HSI treats gender-based violence as a "low visibility, high significance" indicator: it can worsen even where headline crime statistics appear stable, and it strongly affects cohesion and intergenerational stability.

7.7 How public safety collapses: the stability pathways

HSI tracks public safety deterioration through a consistent set of instability pathways:

Pathway A: Violence → economic contraction → service failure

- rising violence reduces commerce and investment
- tax receipts fall and costs rise

- policing and healthcare degrade
- violence becomes self-reinforcing

Pathway B: Territory capture → parallel governance → legitimacy collapse

- gangs/armed groups establish control of neighbourhoods or routes
- extortion becomes routine
- trust in state protection collapses
- displacement accelerates

(Observed in high-intensity cases such as Haiti.)

Pathway C: Fear and polarisation → coercive response → cohesion fracture

- fear increases political polarisation
- crackdowns may reduce violence short-term but raise rights and legitimacy tensions
- long-term cohesion weakens

(Reflected in mixed outcomes noted in peace metrics.)

7.8 Public safety signals tracked by HSI

HSI tracks public safety using signals that often precede visible systemic instability:

1. **Homicide-rate divergence** (rapid increases or persistent high baselines)
    - benchmarked using UNODC frameworks
2. **Perception-of-safety shifts**
    - captured in peace indices as "perceptions of criminality" and related measures
3. **Territorial control by non-state actors**
    - visible through service shutdowns, extortion, kidnapping prevalence, and displacement spikes

4. **Service integrity failure under violence pressure**
    - healthcare closures, emergency response restrictions, and underfunded stabilisation missions
5. **Displacement acceleration linked to violence**
    - large-scale internal displacement and forced displacement totals
6. **Funding stress in security/humanitarian systems**
    - underfunded stabilisation and humanitarian capacity shortfalls that increase exposure

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7.9 Summary: Public safety in the 2026 baseline

The 2026 baseline shows public safety as a **divergent global condition**. Composite measures reflect continued deterioration in overall peacefulness and security pressures, even as some safety indicators improve in certain contexts.

At the severe end, state-capacity breakdown and armed non-state control create direct stability collapse conditions - illustrated by Haiti's extensive violence, service disruption, and displacement dynamics reported by UN sources and major news agencies.

At the global scale, homicide and displacement remain among the most reliable cross-context indicators of deteriorating safety. UNHCR's mid-year reporting shows forced displacement at historic scale, reinforcing that safety and security pressures remain structurally high.

In HSI terms, public safety is one of the clearest "ground truth" dimensions: when it declines, stability becomes visibly compromised, and the probability of cascading instability across economic security, cohesion, and governance rises sharply.

8. Social Cohesion - Detailed Dimension Analysis

Human Stability Index - Baseline Report 2026

Social cohesion is the capacity of a society to **coordinate under stress**: to maintain legitimacy, resolve conflict without escalation, and sustain shared norms of reciprocity and trust. It is not a "soft" factor. In stability terms, cohesion determines whether economic shocks, environmental disasters, technological disruption, or security incidents remain manageable - or cascade into institutional breakdown, unrest, and fragmentation.

HSI treats social cohesion as a *system property* shaped by: institutional trust, perceived fairness, civic inclusion, information integrity, rights environment, and the degree of polarisation and grievance. Cohesion weakens when large portions of the population no longer believe institutions are legitimate, when shared reality collapses, and when groups increasingly withdraw into insulated identity or ideology clusters.

Entering 2026, cohesion risk is rising globally, evidenced by long-term declines in political rights and civil liberties, increasing constraints in digital expression, and a measurable fragmentation of shared reality and trust.

8.1 Baseline condition: cohesion under strain across governance and information systems

Long-run decline in freedom and rights as a cohesion signal

Freedom House's **Freedom in the World 2025** reports **19 consecutive years of decline in global freedom**, noting that declines outnumber gains year after year.

HSI interpretation: sustained global decline in political rights and civil liberties is not only a governance trend - it is a cohesion signal. As rights decline, non-violent mechanisms for dispute resolution weaken, political opposition is constrained, and social conflict becomes more likely to express through unrest, repression, or radicalisation pathways.

Digital repression and online manipulation

Freedom House's **Freedom on the Net 2025** reports that global internet freedom declined for the **15th consecutive year**, describing a more controlled and manipulated internet landscape, including censorship and offline repression tied to online activity.

HSI interpretation: when the digital sphere becomes more controlled or manipulated, cohesion risk increases in two ways:

1. suppressed expression increases grievance and destabilisation potential, and
2. manipulated information environments reduce shared reality and amplify polarisation.

8.2 Trust, grievance, and the collapse of shared reality

Trust is one of the most direct predictors of a society's ability to coordinate. When trust collapses, people:

- comply less with public guidance during crises,
- disengage from civic participation,
- seek protection and meaning in narrower in-groups,
- become more susceptible to polarising narratives.

2026 trust signals: "shared reality" fragmentation

Recent reporting on the **Edelman Trust Barometer 2026** highlights a significant weakening of shared reality, with fewer people seeking information from sources with differing political views and increasing reliance on ideologically aligned communities.

HSI interprets this as a critical cohesion threshold signal: **shared reality is a prerequisite for collective problem-solving**. Without it, even competent policies and institutions struggle to maintain legitimacy.

Grievance as a structural cohesion driver

Edelman's 2025 framing ("Trust and the Crisis of Grievance") emphasises grievance as a widespread condition, associated with distrust across institutions and increased acceptance of aggressive action.

HSI interpretation: grievance is a compounding cohesion driver because it changes behaviour:

- tolerance for compromise declines,
- institutions are assumed to be captured or illegitimate,
- polarisation becomes moralised rather than practical,
- conflict becomes identity-based and harder to resolve.

8.3 Misinformation, synthetic media, and coordination failure risk

HSI treats information integrity as a core cohesion component because coordination depends on a minimum shared agreement about facts, authority, and legitimacy.

The World Economic Forum's **Global Risks Report 2026** ranks misinformation and disinformation among the most prominent near-term global risks, with cyber insecurity also high.

Recent reporting also illustrates how AI-generated misinformation can spread rapidly, damaging trust and acting as a tool for cultural and political manipulation.

HSI interpretation: misinformation becomes a stability risk not only because people are misled, but because *institutions lose the ability to stabilise* during shocks. When citizens cannot identify credible sources, crisis messaging fails, unrest becomes more likely, and opportunistic actors (political, criminal, or foreign) can amplify instability.

8.4 Migration, inclusion pressure, and cohesion stress

Social cohesion is materially affected by how societies manage inclusion, integration, and perceived fairness - particularly when large-scale migration intersects with economic strain.

International IDEA's **Global State of Democracy 2025** highlights the growing scale of migration and notes that **304 million people** (3.7% of the global population) live outside their country of birth in 2025.

HSI interpretation: migration is not inherently destabilising. It becomes cohesion-relevant when:

- housing and services are already under strain,
- labour markets are fragmented,
- political actors weaponise identity narratives,
- institutional trust is low.

In such contexts, migration can become a focal point for grievance and polarisation, increasing the risk of unrest and political volatility.

8.5 Cohesion under stress: the main instability pathways

HSI tracks cohesion deterioration through repeatable patterns that recur across diverse contexts:

Pathway A: Economic stress → grievance → polarisation

- affordability crises increase resentment
- narratives of unfairness intensify
- trust in institutions erodes
- political fragmentation increases and governance becomes harder

(Links strongly to Economic Security dimension.)

Pathway B: Information degradation → reality fragmentation → coordination failure

- misinformation increases uncertainty
- groups retreat into insulated networks
- consensus becomes impossible even on basic facts
- crisis response fails, unrest risk rises

(Links strongly to Technological Disruption.)

Pathway C: Rights contraction → protest/repression cycle → legitimacy collapse

- political channels close
- protest becomes more likely
- repression increases grievance
- legitimacy erodes and instability becomes self-reinforcing

(Links strongly to Conflict/Public Safety.)

Pathway D: Identity and inclusion conflict → social fracture

- external shocks increase scapegoating pressure

- minority groups become targets or political symbols
- violence risk increases, trust declines further

(Links strongly to Public Safety and Conflict Exposure.)

8.6 Social cohesion signals tracked by HSI

HSI tracks cohesion using signals that are observable and comparable across regions:

1. **Institutional trust decline**
    - widening distrust in government/media and collapse of shared reality indicators
2. **Grievance saturation**
    - rising perception of unfairness and acceptance of aggressive action
3. **Rights and liberties deterioration**
    - multi-year declines in freedom and civic space
4. **Digital repression and manipulation**
    - declining internet freedom and rising control of expression
5. **Information integrity degradation**
    - elevated global risk ranking for misinformation and demonstrated spread of synthetic content
6. **Polarisation and governance fragmentation**
    - rising inability of institutions to act coherently under pressure (captured indirectly through governance trend reporting)

Signals are interpreted in combination. Cohesion is most fragile when trust is low *and* economic strain is high *and* information integrity is degraded.

8.7 Baseline summary: Social cohesion in 2026

The 2026 baseline records a global cohesion environment under sustained pressure.

- Political rights and civil liberties show long-run deterioration, with Freedom House reporting **19 consecutive years** of decline.
- Digital civic space is also weakening, with global internet freedom declining for the **15th consecutive year**.
- Trust and shared reality show measurable fracture, with recent reporting on the Edelman Trust Barometer 2026 describing fragmentation of shared reality and deepening trust crisis dynamics.
- Global risk assessments elevate misinformation and disinformation as a major near-term destabiliser, reinforcing that cohesion risk is now tightly coupled to information integrity and technology.

In HSI terms, cohesion is best understood as the **critical coupling dimension**: it governs whether societies can absorb shocks without fracture. Where cohesion weakens, the stability margin shrinks - even if other indicators (growth, employment, service performance) appear stable on paper.

Global Stability Overview - Baseline Findings (2026)

Human Stability Index - Baseline Report 2026

This section synthesises the seven HSI dimensions into a single baseline picture: the prevailing state of human stability entering 2026, the dominant pressure patterns shaping that state, and the principal instability clusters most likely to produce downstream deterioration.

HSI's baseline finding is not that "humanity is collapsing," nor that "stability is intact." It is that **the global stability margin has thinned**. The world is increasingly operating under **compound stress** - multiple pressure systems acting simultaneously across security, economics, environment, technology, food, safety, and cohesion - reducing the buffer capacity that historically absorbs shocks without cascading instability.

This is a **polycrisis baseline**: not because every region is in crisis, but because many regions and systems are now **coupled** - so local failures propagate more easily across borders, markets, and information environments.

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1) The baseline state of human stability entering 2026

Baseline assessment

Entering 2026, the world exhibits:

- **High conflict load and fragmentation**, with global peacefulness continuing to decline and state-based conflicts at elevated levels.
- **Moderate headline growth with fragile lived stability**, where affordability and debt sensitivity remain high in many economies despite easing rates in places.
- **Persistent environmental stress**, driven by sustained global heat and increasing water-system strain.
- **Historic levels of acute food insecurity** concentrated in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.
- **Elevated public safety divergence**, where some contexts improve while others experience rapid breakdown into non-state territorial control and service failure.

- **Cohesion stress and trust fracture**, with long-run declines in freedom and internet openness and a measurable breakdown of shared reality dynamics.
- **Accelerating AI disruption pressure**, including broad job exposure and widening anxiety/legitimacy risk where institutions are perceived as unprepared.

HSI baseline conclusion: Stability is increasingly **conditional** - it depends on institutional competence, fiscal space, social trust, and buffer capacity. Where these are weak, the probability of rapid deterioration under shock is materially higher.

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2) The dominant global pattern: thinning buffers + tighter coupling

HSI identifies two system-wide baseline characteristics that explain why stability feels more precarious in 2026 than in prior "normal" periods:

A. Buffers are thinner

Buffers are the latent stabilisers that prevent shocks from becoming crises:

- household savings and affordability headroom,
- fiscal space for governments,
- spare capacity in supply chains and infrastructure,
- trust in institutions and media,
- humanitarian funding and emergency response capacity.

Multiple dimensions show thinning buffers simultaneously (affordability pressure + aid shortfalls + water stress + trust fracture).

B. Systems are more tightly coupled

Coupling means stress in one domain propagates into others faster:

- conflict affects energy/food prices and displacement,
- climate extremes affect food, health, migration, and fiscal capacity,
- information integrity affects coordination during shocks,
- cyber incidents affect critical infrastructure and trust.

This coupling is visible in global risk assessments that elevate misinformation, cyber insecurity, and geoeconomic confrontation as major near-term risks.

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3) Baseline "instability clusters" - where risks compound

HSI does not treat instability as a single global forecast. It identifies **clusters** - repeatable combinations of conditions that historically precede deterioration.

Cluster 1: Conflict × Food × Funding

Pattern: conflict disrupts markets and access → hunger rises → aid pipeline weakens → instability accelerates.

This cluster is explicitly visible in global food crisis reporting (acute hunger at historic highs, conflict as a major driver) and in recent reporting on severe hunger worsening under funding constraints.

Stability risk: rapid humanitarian deterioration, displacement acceleration, governance strain, and heightened recruitment into armed groups.

Cluster 2: Heat/Water Stress × Food Volatility × Migration Pressure

Pattern: sustained heat and water instability weaken yields and livelihoods → food affordability worsens → displacement and political tension increase.

The baseline includes sustained global heat markers and identified freshwater decline/"continental drying" risks.

Stability risk: chronic stress becomes acute following an extreme event (heatwave, drought, flood), with secondary impacts on cities, borders, and services.

Cluster 3: High Cost of Living × Debt Sensitivity × Trust Fracture

Pattern: households remain affordability-constrained → borrowing costs and resets strain budgets → distrust/grievance increases → polarisation intensifies.

Baseline macro conditions show moderate growth but continued sensitivity, while trust reporting points to fractured shared reality and grievance dynamics.

Stability risk: social unrest risk rises, governance becomes less capable, and policy responses become harder to implement.

Cluster 4: AI Exposure × Labour Market Reconfiguration × Institutional Lag

Pattern: rapid AI adoption shifts job composition → insecurity concentrates in vulnerable roles → institutions lag on safety nets and reskilling → cohesion risk rises.

IMF analysis indicates broad job exposure and concentration of risk; worker surveys show perceived unpreparedness; governance transitions (e.g., EU AI implementation timelines) reflect lag relative to capability.

Stability risk: widening inequality of opportunity, political volatility, and a harder shift from "economic concern" to "system distrust."

Cluster 5: Public Safety Collapse × Parallel Governance × Service Failure

Pattern: criminal/armed non-state groups expand control → extortion and fear normalise → healthcare and emergency response degrade → displacement accelerates.

The Haiti case illustrates this pathway with service suspension and large areas under gang control; UNHCR displacement totals indicate scale.

Stability risk: legitimacy collapse, humanitarian emergency, and long-term institutional regression.

Cluster 6: Misinformation × Polarisation × Crisis Coordination Failure

Pattern: degraded information integrity → fractured shared reality → crisis messaging fails → unrest and institutional distrust intensify.

WEF flags misinformation as a top near-term risk; trust reporting indicates declining cross-view engagement and worsening shared reality conditions; synthetic misinformation is increasingly plausible and scalable.

Stability risk: during shocks, the system fails at the "coordination layer," turning manageable events into destabilising cascades.

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4) Stability fault lines - where deterioration propagates fastest

HSI uses "fault line" to mean: **a structural vulnerability zone** where modest additional pressure can trigger disproportionate instability.

In the 2026 baseline, fault lines are most visible in:

1. **Conflict-adjacent food systems**
   Where access and logistics are disrupted and aid is constrained.
2. **Water-stressed regions and climate-exposed agriculture zones**
   Where "normal" weather variability is now insufficient as a planning assumption.
3. **High housing-cost economies with stretched household balance sheets**
   Where affordability shocks can trigger sharp declines in wellbeing and political stability. (Cross-linked to rate regimes and affordability strain discussed earlier.)
4. **Low-trust democracies and repressive regimes with shrinking civic space**
   Where protest/repression cycles are more likely and coordination capacity is weaker.
5. **States with weak monopoly on force (non-state armed control expanding)**
   Where public safety failure becomes systemic collapse.

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5) What "preparedness" means in HSI terms

HSI is designed to support preparedness framing without prescribing policy. Preparedness, in HSI terms, is the ability to:

- **absorb shocks** without lasting deterioration,
- **adapt** without social fracture,
- **maintain trust** and coordination during stress,
- **protect essentials** (food, water, safety, healthcare, energy, communications).

Preparedness is not only national; it is also institutional and household-level. A country may be macro-stable while specific regions or groups become unstable due to concentrated affordability pressure, displacement, or labour disruption.

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6) How to use this overview as a reference

This overview is designed to be cited and cross-referenced in three ways:

1. **By dimension:**
   Locate the driver domain (conflict, food, etc.) and use that section as evidence.
2. **By cluster:**
   Use the "instability clusters" to identify compounding pathways relevant to your region or sector.
3. **By fault line:**
   Identify where small changes could trigger disproportionate deterioration and use the indicators in the relevant sections to monitor movement.

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7) Baseline headline: the HSI global finding

HSI Baseline Finding (2026):
Human stability in 2026 is best characterised as **uneven, coupled, and buffer-thin**. Acute instability is concentrated in specific regions and states, but systemic conditions - conflict load, geoeconomic confrontation, climate stress, AI disruption, food insecurity, and trust fracture - have reduced the global margin for absorbing shocks without secondary crises.

Regional Stability Profiles - Baseline 2026

Human Stability Index - Baseline Report 2026

This section provides **region-level stability profiles** based on the interaction of all seven HSI dimensions. These profiles are not rankings. They are **structural assessments** of how stability is currently held, where it is under strain, and where deterioration is most likely to propagate if additional shocks occur.

Each profile highlights:

- the **dominant stability conditions**,
- the **primary pressure drivers**,
- the **key fault lines** where instability could accelerate.

---

1. Europe

Baseline stability condition

Moderate stability with elevated strategic and economic strain

Europe enters 2026 with comparatively strong institutional capacity and public services, but under sustained pressure from geopolitical exposure, affordability stress, demographic aging, and cohesion fragmentation.

Dominant pressures

- **Conflict proximity:** The war in Ukraine remains the defining security factor, increasing defence spending, energy vulnerability, and long-term uncertainty.
- **Economic strain:** Housing affordability remains a major destabiliser in multiple countries; although interest rates have begun easing, households are still absorbing higher borrowing costs from prior cycles.
- **Energy transition pressure:** Climate targets and energy security goals place simultaneous demands on public finance, infrastructure, and social acceptance.
- **Cohesion stress:** Immigration, cost-of-living pressures, and political polarisation strain trust in institutions.

Stability fault lines

- High housing-cost urban regions with stretched renters and mortgage holders
- Energy-dependent industrial regions vulnerable to price volatility
- Low-trust political environments where protest and populism intersect

HSI assessment: Europe remains broadly stable, but with **reduced shock absorption capacity**. Stability is conditional on sustained institutional performance and social consent.

---

2. North America

Baseline stability condition

High capacity, high polarisation, uneven household resilience

North America retains strong economic scale, technological leadership, and institutional reach, but exhibits increasing internal divergence and cohesion strain.

Dominant pressures

- **Economic inequality and affordability:** Housing, healthcare, and education costs continue to pressure households unevenly.
- **Technological disruption:** AI adoption is rapid, creating productivity gains alongside labour displacement anxiety.
- **Political polarisation:** Trust in institutions and shared reality is fractured, reducing coordination capacity during crises.
- **Public safety divergence:** Some cities and regions experience improving safety; others face persistent crime and governance challenges.

Stability fault lines

- Low-income and middle-income households with limited buffer capacity
- Politically polarised regions where legitimacy is contested
- Information environments vulnerable to misinformation during shocks

HSI assessment: North America is **structurally capable but socially brittle**. Instability risk arises less from resource scarcity and more from cohesion failure.

---

3. Latin America and the Caribbean

Baseline stability condition

High public safety stress with uneven economic foundations

This region shows significant variation, but public safety and organised crime are major stability constraints in several countries.

Dominant pressures

- **Organised crime and violence:** Gang control, extortion, and homicide rates undermine public safety and governance in parts of the region.
- **Economic volatility:** Inflation sensitivity and labour informality reduce household security.
- **Political trust deficits:** Corruption perceptions and governance fatigue weaken institutional legitimacy.
- **Climate exposure:** Floods, droughts, and heat stress increasingly affect agriculture and urban resilience.

Stability fault lines

- Cities and transport corridors under non-state control
- Youth populations facing limited economic mobility
- Disaster-prone regions with weak infrastructure

HSI assessment: Stability is **highly uneven**. Where governance and safety collapse coincide, deterioration can be rapid and difficult to reverse.

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4. Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Baseline stability condition

Persistent instability with acute geopolitical sensitivity

The MENA region remains one of the most structurally unstable globally, though with significant intra-regional variation.

Dominant pressures

- **Active conflict and proxy dynamics:** Ongoing wars and unresolved tensions destabilise large populations.
- **Water scarcity:** Chronic water stress intensifies food insecurity and economic fragility.
- **Youth unemployment:** Demographic pressure without sufficient economic absorption capacity.

- **Authoritarian governance:** Stability maintained in some states through coercive control rather than broad consent.

Stability fault lines

- Conflict-adjacent food systems
- Water-stressed urban centres
- Youth-dense regions with limited opportunity

HSI assessment: Stability is **fragile and often enforced rather than resilient**. Shocks tend to cascade quickly due to limited buffers.

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5. Sub-Saharan Africa

Baseline stability condition

Low structural resilience with compounding risks

Sub-Saharan Africa carries the highest concentration of interacting instability drivers.

Dominant pressures

- **Conflict and insurgency:** Multiple active conflicts disrupt governance, markets, and food systems.
- **Food insecurity:** Acute hunger affects large populations; funding shortfalls increase risk.
- **Climate vulnerability:** Heat, drought, and flooding stress agriculture and livelihoods.
- **Economic fragility:** High debt burdens and limited fiscal space constrain stabilisation.

Stability fault lines

- Sahelian regions experiencing conflict + climate stress
- Urban centres absorbing rural displacement
- States with weak monopoly on force

HSI assessment: The region exhibits **systemic fragility**. Stability depends heavily on external support, which itself is under strain.

---

6. South Asia

Baseline stability condition

High population exposure with political and climate sensitivity

South Asia combines large populations, rapid economic growth in parts, and high exposure to climate and geopolitical risk.

Dominant pressures

- **Climate stress:** Heatwaves, floods, and monsoon variability affect hundreds of millions.
- **Geopolitical tension:** Border disputes and regional rivalries remain latent escalation risks.
- **Economic inequality:** Growth does not translate evenly into household security.
- **Governance strain:** Institutional capacity varies widely across countries.

Stability fault lines

- Heat-exposed labour populations
- Flood-prone river basins
- Politically sensitive border regions

HSI assessment: Stability is **scale-sensitive**. Even moderate shocks can affect very large populations, amplifying global spillovers.

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7. East Asia and Pacific

Baseline stability condition

Economically strong with strategic and demographic strain

This region includes both highly stable economies and fragile states.

Dominant pressures

- **Geopolitical tension:** Strategic competition and maritime disputes elevate security risk.

- **Demographic change:** Aging populations in advanced economies; youth pressure in others.
- **Supply-chain centrality:** Economic stability tied to global trade reliability.
- **Climate exposure:** Typhoons, flooding, and sea-level rise affect coastal populations.

Stability fault lines

- Trade-dependent economies exposed to geopolitical disruption
- Aging societies with shrinking workforces
- Low-lying coastal regions

HSI assessment: Stability is **highly differentiated**. Advanced economies are resilient but exposed to external shocks; fragile states face rapid deterioration risk.

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8. Central Asia and Eastern Europe (non-EU)

Baseline stability condition

Geopolitically exposed with limited buffers

This region is heavily influenced by great-power competition and economic dependency.

Dominant pressures

- **Security exposure:** Proximity to major conflict zones.
- **Economic dependency:** Remittances, commodity exports, and external financing.
- **Governance fragility:** Limited institutional trust in some states.
- **Migration dynamics:** Outflows and demographic decline.

Stability fault lines

- Energy and transport corridors
- Remittance-dependent households
- Politically constrained civic space

HSI assessment: Stability is **externally sensitive**. Regional shocks can propagate quickly through economic and political channels.

Cross-regional synthesis

Across regions, HSI identifies three global patterns:

1. **Stability is no longer uniform within regions** - divergence is increasing.
2. **Fragility concentrates where multiple pressures overlap** - conflict + food + climate + governance.
3. **Advanced economies are not immune** - cohesion and affordability are now central stability risks.

Regional baseline conclusion

The 2026 regional baseline shows a world where **instability is localised but interconnected**. No region is entirely insulated. Regions with strong institutions remain stable but strained; regions with weak buffers face compounding risks; and shocks in one region increasingly propagate through economic, migration, and information systems into others.

This reinforces the core HSI finding: **human stability is now a global system property**, not a collection of isolated national conditions.

Patterns and Interactions - How Instability Forms and Propagates

Human Stability Index - Baseline Report 2026

This section maps **how the seven HSI dimensions interact**, and why certain combinations consistently produce disproportionate instability. Rather than treating risks as isolated categories, HSI identifies **coupled pathways** - patterns where pressure in one domain amplifies vulnerability in others, accelerating deterioration once thresholds are crossed.

The central finding is that **instability is rarely linear**. It emerges when pressures synchronize across domains, compressing response time and overwhelming buffers. In the 2026 baseline, coupling is tighter than in previous leading periods of global stress, meaning shocks travel faster and recoveries take longer.

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1) The coupling principle: why interactions matter more than severity

HSI distinguishes between:

- **Severity** (how intense a pressure is within a single domain), and
- **Coupling** (how many domains are stressed simultaneously and how tightly they interact).

A moderately severe shock in a highly coupled system can be more destabilising than an extreme shock in a loosely coupled one.

2026 baseline insight:
Global systems are more coupled than at any point in the past three decades due to:

- integrated supply chains and financial markets,
- instantaneous information flows,
- climate impacts that cut across food, health, and migration,
- AI-driven labour and information disruption,
- geopolitical fragmentation affecting trade, aid, and governance simultaneously.

---

2) Core interaction map: the seven dimensions as a system

HSI models the seven dimensions as **interdependent layers** rather than a hierarchy:

- **Conflict & Security** destabilise markets, displace populations, disrupt food and energy.
- **Economic Security** shapes household resilience and political tolerance.
- **Environmental Stress** alters baseline living conditions and raises shock frequency.
- **Food Systems** translate macro stress into immediate human impact.
- **Technological Disruption** reshapes labour, trust, and information integrity.
- **Public Safety** reflects ground-level failure or resilience of order.
- **Social Cohesion** determines whether societies can coordinate under pressure.

The system becomes unstable not when one layer fails, but when **feedback loops** form between layers.

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3) The six most dangerous interaction patterns (2026 baseline)

These patterns recur across regions and contexts. They are **predictive not in timing, but in direction** - when they appear, stability margins shrink rapidly.

Pattern 1: Conflict × Food × Funding → Rapid humanitarian collapse

Mechanism

- Conflict disrupts production, access, and logistics.
- Food insecurity rises.
- Humanitarian funding shortfalls remove the final stabilising layer.
- Acute hunger escalates into displacement, unrest, and governance strain.

Why it's dangerous

- Effects are fast-moving and visible.
- Recovery is slow once malnutrition and displacement reach scale.
- External spillovers (migration, regional insecurity) are common.

HSI signal cluster

- Rising conflict intensity
- Acute hunger prevalence >20%
- Aid pipeline constraints

This pattern is among the **highest-confidence instability accelerators** in the baseline.

Pattern 2: Environmental Stress × Food Volatility × Economic Fragility → Chronic-to-acute transition

Mechanism

- Sustained heat and water stress reduce yield reliability.
- Food prices fluctuate or rise locally.

- Households with limited buffers reduce nutrition and resilience.
- A single extreme event triggers acute crisis.

Why it's dangerous

- Often misread as "normal hardship" until a tipping point.
- Disproportionately affects rural and informal populations.
- Intensifies migration pressure and urban instability.

HSI signal cluster

- Multi-year heat anomalies
- Water system stress
- Food inflation exceeding headline inflation

Pattern 3: High Cost of Living × Debt Sensitivity × Trust Erosion → Political volatility

Mechanism

- Affordability pressures persist even as growth stabilises.
- Households exhaust buffers and lose faith in improvement.
- Trust in institutions erodes.
- Polarisation rises; governance capacity weakens.

Why it's dangerous

- Can occur in otherwise "stable" economies.
- Turns economic issues into legitimacy crises.
- Makes policy responses harder to implement.

HSI signal cluster

- Housing cost stress
- Real wage compression
- Grievance saturation

Pattern 4: AI Exposure × Labour Disruption × Institutional Lag → Cohesion fracture

Mechanism

- Rapid AI adoption alters job security and career pathways.
- Risk concentrates in specific roles and demographics.
- Institutions lag on reskilling, safety nets, and governance.
- Perceived unfairness and anxiety escalate.

Why it's dangerous

- Effects are diffuse and psychologically destabilising.
- Drives long-term trust erosion rather than immediate unrest.
- Difficult to reverse once narratives of abandonment take hold.

HSI signal cluster

- High job exposure to automation
- Declining confidence in institutional preparedness
- Fragmented labour transitions

Pattern 5: Public Safety Breakdown × Parallel Governance → State legitimacy collapse

Mechanism

- Criminal or armed groups expand territorial control.
- Extortion and fear normalise.
- Essential services withdraw or fail.
- Displacement accelerates; state authority erodes.

Why it's dangerous

- Once parallel governance stabilises, reversal is costly.

- Humanitarian and security costs escalate simultaneously.
- Regional spillovers are common.

HSI signal cluster

- Rising homicide/kidnapping
- Service shutdowns under violence
- Rapid internal displacement

Pattern 6: Misinformation × Polarisation × Crisis Event → Coordination failure

Mechanism

- Information integrity degrades.
- Shared reality fractures.
- During a shock, crisis messaging fails.
- Panic, unrest, or non-compliance amplify damage.

Why it's dangerous

- Converts manageable shocks into systemic crises.
- Undermines institutional response even when capacity exists.
- Hard to detect until a shock occurs.

HSI signal cluster

- High misinformation prevalence
- Low cross-group trust
- Digital manipulation indicators

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4) Threshold effects and non-linearity

HSI emphasises **threshold behaviour**:

- Stability often appears intact until **multiple pressures cross modest thresholds simultaneously**.
- Once crossed, deterioration accelerates and becomes self-reinforcing.
- Recovery requires disproportionately more resources and time.

This explains why:

- societies can seem stable "until suddenly they aren't,"
- early warning often fails when indicators are assessed in isolation.

---

5) Why the 2026 baseline is uniquely sensitive

Compared with prior global stress periods (e.g., post-2008 financial crisis, early pandemic years), the 2026 baseline shows:

- **More simultaneous pressures** across domains.
- **Less slack** in household, fiscal, and humanitarian buffers.
- **Faster propagation** via globalised systems.
- **Lower trust** as a coordination lubricant.

This does not guarantee collapse. It means **the margin for error is thinner**.

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6) Using interaction patterns as a preparedness lens

HSI is designed so users can:

- identify which interaction patterns are present in their context,
- monitor the associated signals,
- understand where a shock is most likely to cascade.

Preparedness, in HSI terms, is not about predicting the next event.
It is about **reducing coupling, rebuilding buffers, and protecting coordination capacity**.

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7) Interaction summary: the core HSI insight

Human instability rarely begins with catastrophe.
It begins with **alignment** - when stressors that were once manageable begin reinforcing one another.

The 2026 baseline shows more of these alignments than at any point in recent decades.

Methodology and Data Architecture

Human Stability Index - Baseline Report 2026

This section sets out how The Human Stability Index (HSI) is constructed, how data is selected and organised, and how future editions will measure change relative to the 2026 baseline.

The methodology is designed to prioritise **comparability, transparency, and interpretability**, while recognising the inherent limits of measuring complex human systems.

HSI is not a forecasting model. It is a **structured observational index** intended to make changes in human stability *visible, comparable, and trackable over time*.

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1) Design objectives

The methodology is governed by five core objectives:

1. **Capture human stability as a system property**
   Stability is treated as an emergent outcome of interacting pressures, not as a single-variable condition.
2. **Enable longitudinal comparison**
   The baseline establishes a fixed reference state. Future editions measure *movement relative to this point*.

3. **Remain interpretable and referenceable**
   Indicators are chosen so that changes can be meaningfully interpreted by governments, institutions, businesses, and the public.
4. **Avoid overfitting or false precision**
   HSI avoids high-frequency volatility and narrow proxies that exaggerate short-term noise.
5. **Maintain neutrality and non-prescriptiveness**
   The Index documents conditions; it does not assign blame, prescribe policy, or forecast outcomes.

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2) Conceptual architecture

HSI is structured as a **multi-dimensional composite index** comprising seven stability dimensions:

1. Conflict and Security
2. Technological Disruption
3. Economic Security
4. Environmental Stress
5. Food Systems
6. Public Safety
7. Social Cohesion

Each dimension represents a **distinct stability domain** with independent indicators and shared interaction pathways.

No single dimension is treated as dominant. Instability most often emerges through **cross-dimensional coupling**, which is why the Index is designed to be read both by dimension and in interaction.

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3) Indicator selection framework

3.1 Indicator criteria

Indicators included in HSI meet the following criteria:

- **Relevance:** demonstrably linked to human stability or instability in empirical research or historical analysis
- **Comparability:** available across multiple regions and time periods
- **Credibility:** sourced from established international institutions, peer-reviewed research, or authoritative datasets
- **Stability sensitivity:** capable of detecting directional change rather than short-term noise

Indicators are reviewed annually to ensure continued relevance.

3.2 Indicator types

HSI uses three classes of indicators:

1. **Structural indicators**
   Capture underlying conditions that change slowly (e.g., institutional capacity, water availability, long-term debt exposure).
2. **Pressure indicators**
   Capture accumulating stress (e.g., affordability strain, displacement trends, food inflation divergence).
3. **Shock indicators**
   Capture acute disruptions (e.g., conflict escalation, extreme weather events, major service failures).

This classification allows the Index to distinguish between **background fragility** and **event-driven stress**.

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4) Data sources and aggregation

4.1 Source categories

HSI draws from multiple source categories to reduce bias and over-reliance on any single dataset:

- Multilateral institutions (e.g., UN agencies, World Bank, IMF, OECD)
- Independent global indices (e.g., peace, governance, and rights indices)
- Climate and environmental monitoring bodies
- Labour and economic statistical agencies
- Peer-reviewed research and synthesis reports
- Verified international reporting where structured datasets lag

Sources are selected for consistency, transparency, and methodological robustness.

4.2 Normalisation and scaling

Indicators are normalised to enable comparison across regions and time. Normalisation is applied **within dimensions**, not across them, to avoid artificial equivalence between unrelated domains.

Key principles:

- Directionality is preserved (higher pressure = lower stability).
- Extreme outliers are capped to avoid distortion.
- Scaling prioritises *trend sensitivity* over point precision.

The baseline establishes the **reference distribution** against which future values are assessed.

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5) Weighting approach

HSI uses a **balanced weighting approach** at the dimension level.

- Each of the seven dimensions contributes equally to the overall index.
- Within each dimension, indicators are weighted based on:

- empirical relevance,
- coverage reliability,
- signal-to-noise characteristics.

Equal dimension weighting reflects the empirical finding that instability often arises from **interaction**, not dominance of a single domain.

Weighting decisions are documented and reviewed periodically to ensure consistency over time.

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6) Aggregation and index construction

The Index is constructed in three stages:

1. **Indicator-level scoring**
   Raw indicators are normalised and scored within their dimension.
2. **Dimension-level aggregation**
   Indicator scores are aggregated to produce a dimension stability score.
3. **Composite stability profile**
   Dimension scores are combined to produce an overall stability profile, alongside interaction analysis.

HSI emphasises **profiles and patterns**, not single headline numbers. Composite values are intended as reference anchors rather than definitive rankings.

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7) Treatment of uncertainty and limitations

7.1 Measurement limitations

HSI explicitly recognises several limitations:

- Data gaps in fragile and conflict-affected states
- Reporting lag for some indicators
- Variability in data quality across regions

- Difficulty capturing informal economies and non-state governance

These limitations are mitigated through triangulation and conservative interpretation.

7.2 What HSI does not claim

HSI does not claim to:

- predict wars, crises, or collapses,
- assign causality with certainty,
- replace local or sector-specific analysis.

It provides **contextual orientation**, not deterministic outcomes.

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8) Longitudinal design and future updates

The 2026 Baseline Report establishes the **initial reference state**.

Future editions will:

- measure directional change relative to this baseline,
- track convergence or divergence across dimensions,
- identify emerging interaction patterns,
- document shifts in stability margins over time.

Update cadence will prioritise **signal clarity over frequency**, ensuring that observed changes reflect meaningful shifts rather than short-term volatility.

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9) Referencing and use

HSI is designed for reference use by:

- governments and public institutions,
- international organisations,

- businesses and risk analysts,
- researchers and educators,
- civil society and informed individuals.

Users are encouraged to cite:

- the report year,
- the relevant dimension or section,
- the context of use (regional, thematic, comparative).

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10) Methodological conclusion

The Human Stability Index methodology reflects a central premise:

Human stability is not the absence of crisis, but the presence of sufficient buffers, trust, and coordination capacity to withstand stress.

The 2026 Baseline provides a fixed point from which the evolution of global human stability can be observed with clarity, discipline, and restraint.

What This Baseline Establishes

The Human Stability Index Baseline Report 2026 establishes a **fixed analytical reference point** for observing human stability. It documents prevailing global and regional conditions at a defined moment in time, capturing how stability is currently maintained, strained, or eroded across multiple interacting domains.

This baseline is not intended to describe a permanent state, nor to imply a trajectory. Its purpose is to provide a stable point of comparison. **Future editions of the Human Stability Index will measure change relative to this reference**, enabling shifts in human stability to be observed consistently across regions, dimensions, and time. In this way, the baseline allows deterioration, recovery, divergence, and convergence to be identified without relying on retrospective reinterpretation.

Crucially, this baseline reflects a structural reality of the current global environment: **human stability now behaves as a system property**. It is shaped not by isolated factors, but by the interaction of conflict exposure, economic security, technological disruption, environmental stress, food systems, public safety, and social cohesion. Stability is increasingly determined by how these pressures align, reinforce, or counterbalance one another, and by the capacity of societies to absorb stress across multiple domains simultaneously.

The Baseline Report 2026 therefore serves as the foundation for longitudinal assessment. It does not forecast events or prescribe responses. It establishes the conditions against which future change will be measured.

How to Cite The Human Stability Index

When referencing The Human Stability Index, citations should clearly identify the edition, section, and context of use.

Recommended citation format

Human Stability Index (2026). *Baseline Report 2026.*
[Section or Dimension], Human Stability Index.

Example citations

- Human Stability Index (2026). *Baseline Report 2026: Economic Security.*
- Human Stability Index (2026). *Baseline Report 2026: Global Stability Overview.*
- Human Stability Index (2026). *Baseline Report 2026: Patterns and Interactions.*

In-text reference example

"…as documented in The Human Stability Index Baseline Report 2026 (HSI, 2026)."

Usage guidance

- Cite the **specific section or dimension** used.
- Use the Index for **contextual and comparative analysis**, not as a predictive tool.
- The Index may be quoted or excerpted with attribution for analytical, educational, and policy-related purposes.