

G.O.A.L.

The Five Pillars Index: 2026 Global Edition

Understanding the Systems Behind Human Flourishing

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Executive Summary

The Five Pillars Index: 2026 Global Edition evaluates 213 regions across five dimensions of human flourishing: Nutrition, Movement, Knowledge, Mindset, and Environment. Spanning every major continent, development model, and level of prosperity, the Index seeks to move beyond traditional measures of success by examining the conditions that most consistently support long-term human wellbeing.

The findings reveal a world that has made remarkable progress, yet remains deeply unequal in its capacity to convert that progress into flourishing. While rankings provide a useful benchmark, the most important insights emerge from the broader patterns visible across the dataset.

Five conclusions stand out.

First, human flourishing behaves as a system. The highest-performing regions are rarely defined by exceptional strengths in a single area. Instead, they consistently achieve strong outcomes across multiple pillars. Likewise, the weakest-performing regions seldom suffer from one isolated challenge; underperformance tends to emerge when weaknesses accumulate across several dimensions simultaneously.

Second, balance outperforms excellence. Across the Index, regions with fewer weaknesses generally outperform regions with a mixture of exceptional strengths and significant deficiencies. Long-term success appears to depend less on maximizing individual indicators and more on maintaining resilience across an interconnected system.

Third, knowledge has emerged as the defining divide of the modern world. While humanity has achieved substantial progress in health, infrastructure, and living standards, the largest gaps increasingly appear in the ability of societies to generate, access, apply, and transmit knowledge. No pillar exhibits greater separation between the world's strongest and weakest performers.

Fourth, there is no single pathway to flourishing. Finland, Switzerland, Singapore, Japan, and other high-performing regions differ substantially in geography, culture, governance, and development history. Yet despite these differences, they achieve comparable outcomes. The evidence suggests that flourishing is shaped less by any specific model and more by a society's ability to build effective systems within its own context.

Fifth, prosperity alone does not guarantee success. Wealth supports human flourishing, but it does not automatically create it. The strongest-performing regions are distinguished not by the resources they possess, but by their ability to convert those resources into healthy populations, capable institutions, resilient environments, and long-term wellbeing.

Across 213 regions, the Five Pillars Index ultimately points toward a simple conclusion: flourishing is neither accidental nor predetermined. While societies differ enormously in their circumstances, the foundations of long-term success are remarkably consistent. Regions that invest in human capability, strengthen resilience across multiple dimensions, and avoid persistent structural weaknesses consistently outperform those that pursue isolated gains. The challenge facing societies in the decades ahead is therefore not merely to grow, but to build the systems that allow people, communities, and places to thrive.

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How to Use This Report

The Five Pillars Index 2026 Global Edition is designed to serve multiple audiences, including policymakers, researchers, educators, organizations, and individuals interested in understanding the conditions that shape human flourishing across the world.

Readers may approach the report in different ways depending on their objective.

For a high-level overview, begin with the Executive Summary, followed by Chapters 1–4. Together, these sections provide an overview of global performance, major trends, and the structural patterns that emerge across the Index.

For pillar-specific analysis, Chapters 5–9 examine each of the Five Pillars individually: Nutrition, Movement, Knowledge, Mindset, and Environment. These chapters explore global performance, recurring strengths and weaknesses, and the key lessons associated with each pillar.

For broader interpretation, Chapter 10 introduces the Archetypes of Human Flourishing, grouping regions according to recurring development patterns rather than geography or rank. Chapters 11 and 12 then synthesize the report's most important lessons and implications.

For data and reference purposes, Appendix A contains the complete regional dataset used throughout the report, while the accompanying Reference Edition provides detailed regional profiles, methodology, scoring notes, and supporting technical material.

Three Levels of Interpretation

1. **Rankings** show where regions stand.
2. **Pillar Scores** explain the strengths and weaknesses that contribute to overall performance.
3. **Patterns and Archetypes** reveal the broader systems, trade-offs, and development pathways that shape outcomes over time.

Readers are encouraged to look beyond rankings alone. Regions with similar overall scores often achieve those outcomes through very different combinations of strengths, weaknesses, and structural characteristics.

The purpose of this report is not merely to compare regions, but to better understand the conditions, systems, and patterns most consistently associated with long-term human flourishing.

1. The Global State of Human Flourishing in 2026

The Five Pillars Index evaluates 213 regions across five dimensions of human flourishing: Nutrition, Movement, Knowledge, Mindset, and Environment. Together, these pillars provide a multidimensional framework for understanding how effectively societies create the conditions for long-term wellbeing, resilience, and human development.

The 2026 results reveal a world of significant contrasts. While some regions have achieved consistently strong outcomes across all five pillars, others continue to face structural challenges that limit human flourishing across multiple dimensions simultaneously.

The highest-performing regions demonstrate that strong outcomes are possible across diverse cultural, political, and geographic contexts. Northern European countries, advanced East Asian regions, and a small number of highly developed city-states and microstates occupy the upper end of the Index. Although these regions differ in many respects, they generally exhibit strong performance across multiple pillars rather than relying on a single area of excellence.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Index highlights a concentration of low-performing regions facing persistent challenges related to conflict, institutional fragility, poverty, infrastructure deficits, and limited access to essential services. These regions frequently exhibit weaknesses across several pillars simultaneously, making progress more difficult and less resilient over time.

The results also suggest that the five pillars are closely interconnected. Regions rarely achieve strong outcomes because of a single exceptional strength, nor do they struggle because of one isolated weakness. Instead, performance often reflects the interaction of multiple factors operating across the broader system.

The gap between the highest- and lowest-scoring regions remains substantial, demonstrating that opportunities for human flourishing are still distributed unevenly across the world. Yet the Index also reveals that geography alone does not fully determine outcomes. High-performing regions can be found across multiple continents, while variation within continents is often as significant as variation between them.

Ultimately, the 2026 Five Pillars Index presents a nuanced picture of the modern world. Humanity has made significant progress in many areas, yet large disparities remain. The challenge facing policymakers, institutions, and communities is not simply to improve

individual outcomes, but to strengthen the systems that support flourishing across all five pillars.

The chapters that follow examine these patterns in greater detail, beginning with the global rankings before exploring the broader structural characteristics that distinguish the world's highest- and lowest-performing regions.

2. The Global Ranking

The Five Pillars Index evaluates 213 regions across five dimensions of human flourishing: Nutrition, Movement, Knowledge, Mindset, and Environment.

The resulting ranking provides a comparative snapshot of how effectively different regions create the conditions that enable long-term wellbeing, resilience, and human development.

Scores in the 2026 edition range from 1.20 to 9.28, highlighting substantial variation in performance across the world. While some regions consistently achieve strong outcomes across all five pillars, others continue to face significant challenges that constrain overall performance.

The ranking should not be interpreted as a measure of economic wealth, political influence, or national power. Rather, it reflects the extent to which regions have developed systems and environments that support healthy, capable, and flourishing populations.

Together, the rankings provide a global reference point for understanding where human flourishing is strongest, where it remains under pressure, and where opportunities for future progress may exist.

The Rankings

The 2026 Global Ranking reveals a world characterized by substantial differences in human flourishing outcomes.

At the highest end of the ranking, a relatively small group of regions consistently achieve strong results across multiple pillars. At the opposite end, low-performing regions are frequently concentrated in areas facing persistent challenges related to conflict, institutional fragility, poverty, environmental pressures, or limited access to essential services.

Between these extremes lies the majority of the world's regions, each exhibiting a unique combination of strengths and weaknesses across the Five Pillars framework.

The complete ranking is presented and serves as the primary reference table for the remainder of this report.

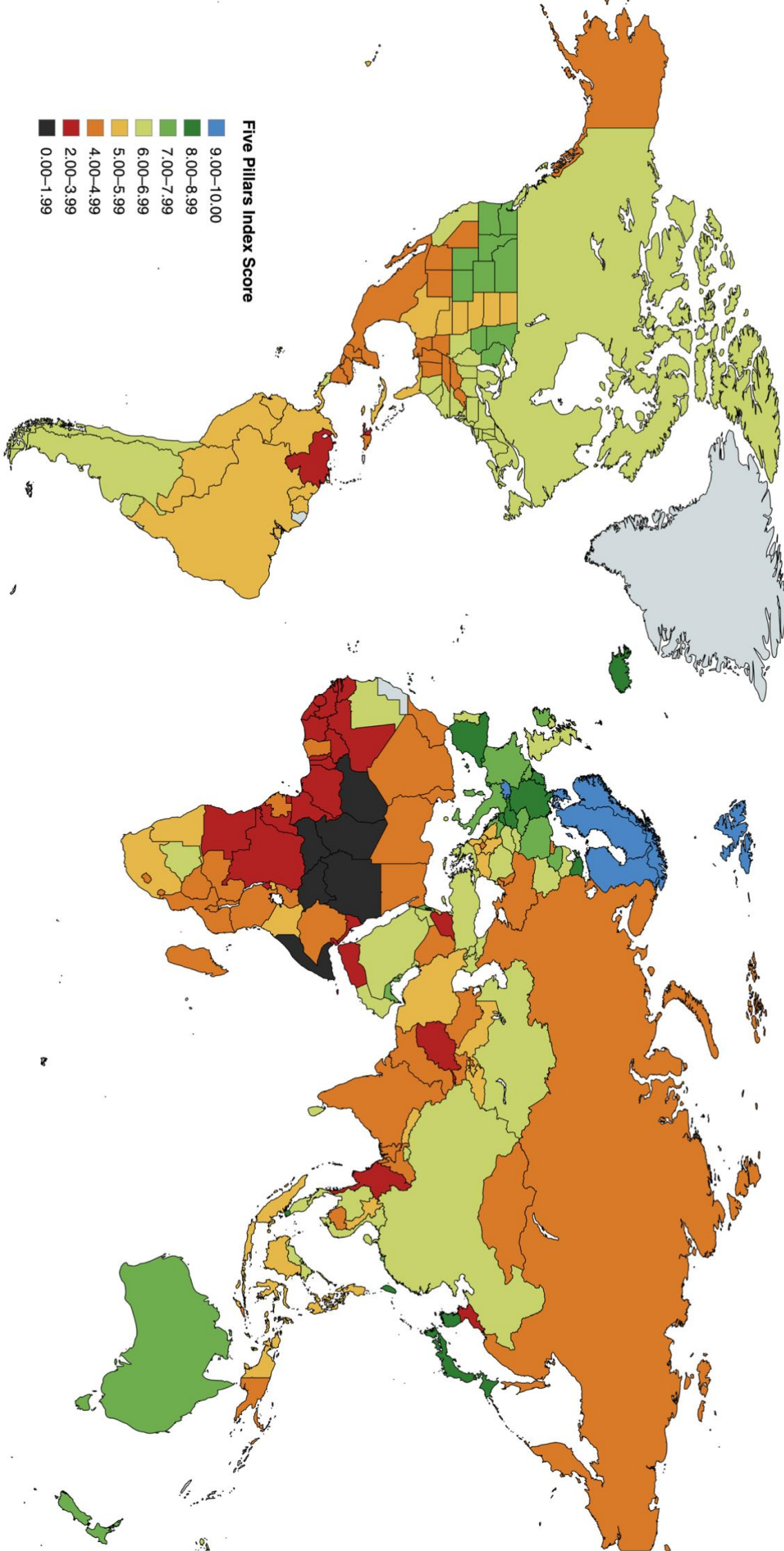
Index	Rank	Region	Score
1	1	Finland	9.28
2	1	Switzerland	9.28
3	3	Denmark	9.12
4	3	Sweden	9.12
5	3	Liechtenstein	9.12
6	6	Norway	9.04
7	7	Singapore	8.80
8	8	Netherlands	8.64
9	8	Austria	8.64
10	10	Japan	8.56
11	11	Estonia	8.32
12	11	Slovenia	8.32
13	13	South Korea	8.24
14	14	Spain	8.16
15	14	Taiwan	8.16
16	16	Andorra	8.08
17	16	Monaco	8.08
18	16	Luxembourg	8.08
19	16	Germany	8.08
20	16	Israel (Pre-Oct 2023 Baseline)	8.08
21	21	Iceland	8.00
22	21	San Marino	8.00
23	23	France	7.84
24	23	Hong Kong	7.84
25	25	Italy	7.76
26	25	Pearl River Delta (China)	7.76
27	27	Yangtze Delta Corridor (China)	7.68
28	28	Lithuania	7.60
29	28	Israel (Post-Oct 2023 Wartime Conditions)	7.60
30	30	Czechia	7.52
31	30	Macau	7.52
32	32	Upper Midwest (United States)	7.36
33	32	Ireland	7.36
34	32	Belgium	7.36
35	35	Qatar	7.28
36	36	Pacific Northwest (United States)	7.20
37	36	Seychelles	7.20
38	36	New Zealand	7.20
39	39	Mountain West (United States)	7.12
40	39	Australia	7.12
41	41	Poland	7.04
42	41	Croatia	7.04
43	41	United Arab Emirates	7.04
44	41	Bahrain	7.04
45	45	Uruguay	6.96
46	45	Portugal	6.96
47	45	Slovakia	6.96

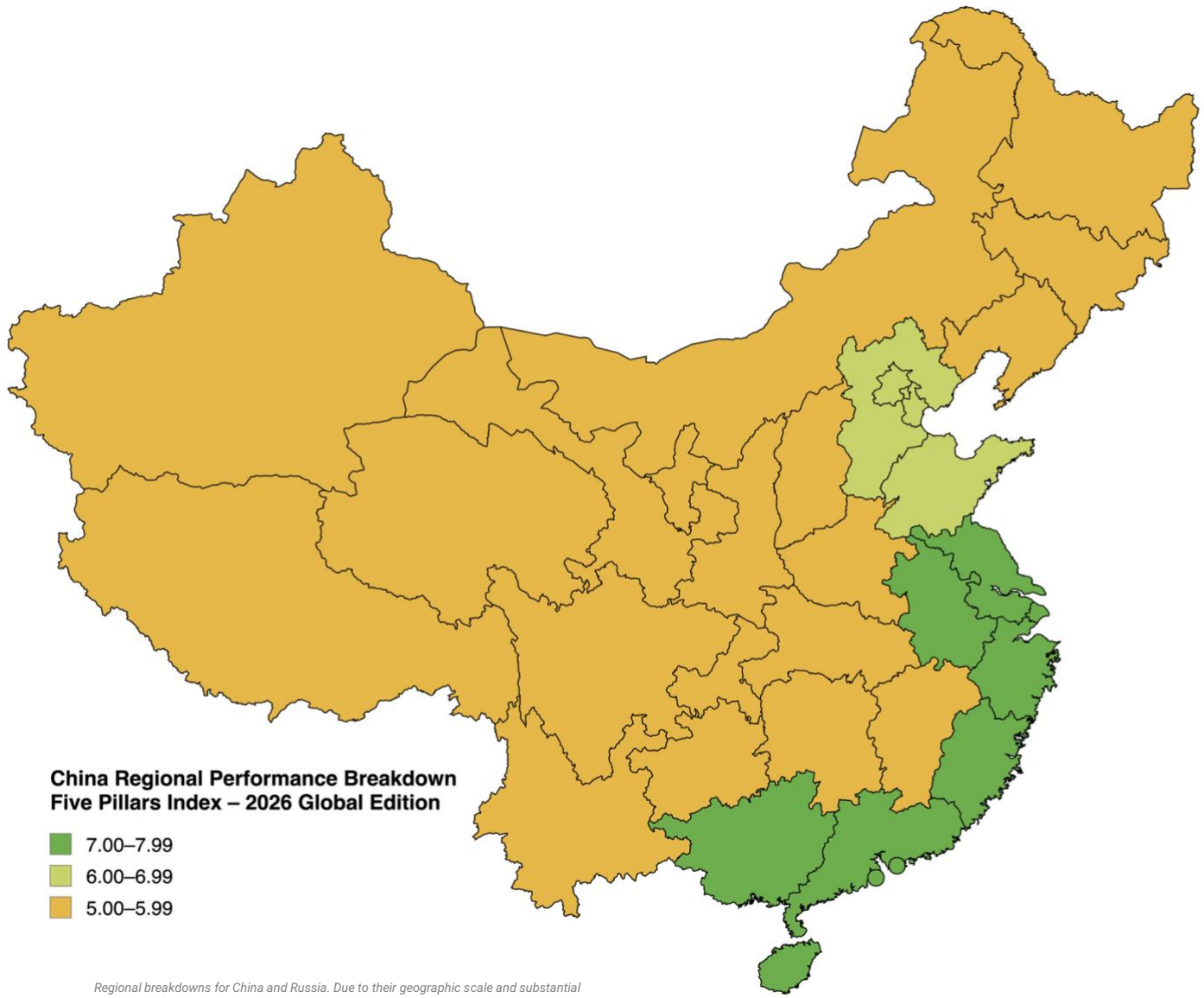
48	45	Mauritius	6.96
49	45	Brunei	6.96
50	45	Oman	6.96
51	51	United Kingdom	6.88
52	51	Latvia	6.88
53	51	Greece	6.88
54	51	Bhutan	6.88
55	55	Northeast Corridor (United States)	6.80
56	55	Hungary	6.80
57	55	Cyprus	6.80
58	58	Malaysia	6.72
59	58	Vietnam	6.72
60	58	Maldives	6.72
61	61	Mid-Atlantic / Capital Region (United States)	6.64
62	61	Georgia	6.64
63	63	Chile	6.56
64	63	Romania	6.56
65	63	Russia (Pre-2022 Baseline – European Russia)	6.56
66	63	Turkey	6.56
67	63	Armenia	6.56
68	63	Kuwait	6.56
69	69	Jing-Jin Political Core (China)	6.48
70	69	Thailand	6.48
71	69	Sri Lanka	6.48
72	72	Malta	6.40
73	72	Jordan	6.40
74	74	Barbados	6.32
75	74	Belarus	6.32
76	74	Azerbaijan	6.32
77	74	Saudi Arabia	6.32
78	78	Canada	6.24
79	78	Ukraine (Pre-2022 Baseline)	6.24
80	80	Great Lakes / Industrial Midwest (United States)	6.16
81	80	Southeast Growth Belt (United States)	6.16
82	80	Costa Rica	6.16
83	80	Argentina	6.16
84	80	Kazakhstan	6.16
85	80	Polynesian Pacific States	6.16
86	86	California (United States)	6.08
87	86	Botswana	6.08
88	86	Fiji	6.08
89	89	Cape Verde	6.00

90	90	Russia (Post-2022 Wartime Conditions – European Russia)	5.92
91	91	Montenegro	5.84
92	91	Namibia	5.84
93	91	Iran	5.84
94	94	Hawaii (United States)	5.76
95	94	Eastern Caribbean States	5.76
96	94	Brazil	5.76
97	94	South Africa	5.76
98	94	Indonesia	5.76
99	99	Peru	5.68
100	99	Central Inland Belt (China)	5.68
101	99	Philippines	5.68
102	99	Uzbekistan	5.68
103	99	Kyrgyzstan	5.68
104	104	Great Plains (United States)	5.60
105	104	Bolivia	5.60
106	104	Serbia	5.60
107	104	Albania	5.60
108	104	Lebanon	5.60
109	109	Florida (United States)	5.52
110	109	Colombia	5.52
111	109	Ecuador	5.52
112	109	Bulgaria	5.52
113	109	Laos	5.52
114	109	Nepal	5.52
115	115	Paraguay	5.44
116	115	Rwanda	5.44
117	117	Texas (United States)	5.36
118	117	Panama	5.36
119	117	Bahamas	5.36
120	117	Cuba	5.36
121	117	Suriname	5.36
122	117	Bosnia and Herzegovina	5.36
123	117	Melanesian Pacific States	5.36
124	124	Guyana	5.20
125	124	North Macedonia	5.20
126	126	Jamaica	5.12
127	126	Trinidad and Tobago	5.12
128	126	Western Siberia (Russia)	5.12
129	129	Kenya	5.04
130	129	Dongbei Rust Belt (China)	5.04

131	129	Palestine (Pre-Oct 2023 Baseline)	5.04
132	132	Dominican Republic	4.96
133	132	Micronesia Pacific States	4.96
134	134	Tanzania	4.88
135	134	India	4.88
136	134	Tajikistan	4.88
137	134	Papua New Guinea	4.88
138	138	Moldova	4.80
139	138	Eswatini	4.80
140	138	Western Frontier (China)	4.80
141	138	Cambodia	4.80
142	142	Alaska (United States)	4.72
143	142	Desert Southwest (United States)	4.72
144	142	Timor-Leste	4.72
145	142	Bangladesh	4.72
146	146	Appalachia (United States)	4.64
147	146	El Salvador	4.64
148	146	Zambia	4.64
149	146	Zimbabwe	4.64
150	146	São Tomé and Príncipe	4.64
151	151	Deep South (United States)	4.56
152	151	Mexico	4.56
153	151	Belize	4.56
154	151	Kosovo	4.56
155	151	Morocco	4.56
156	151	Tunisia	4.56
157	151	Ghana	4.56
158	151	Turkmenistan	4.56
159	159	Gabon	4.48
160	159	Pakistan	4.48
161	159	Iraq	4.48
162	162	Guatemala	4.32
163	162	Nicaragua	4.32
164	162	Ukraine (Post-2022 Wartime Conditions)	4.32
165	162	Uganda	4.32
166	162	Mozambique	4.32
167	162	Mongolia	4.32
168	168	Madagascar	4.24
169	168	Comoros	4.24
170	170	Algeria	4.16
171	171	Honduras	4.08
172	171	Malawi	4.08
173	173	Egypt	4.00
174	173	Ethiopia	4.00

175	173	Lesotho	4.00
176	176	Angola	3.84
177	176	Central Siberia (Russia)	3.84
178	176	Russian Far East	3.84
179	179	Venezuela	3.76
180	179	Cameroon	3.76
181	181	Senegal	3.68
182	182	Nigeria	3.60
183	182	Burundi	3.60
184	184	Benin	3.52
185	184	Republic of the Congo	3.52
186	186	Côte d'Ivoire	3.44
187	187	Myanmar	3.36
188	188	Gambia	3.28
189	189	Equatorial Guinea	3.20
190	189	Djibouti	3.20
191	191	Syria	3.12
192	192	Haiti	2.96
193	193	Togo	2.88
194	193	Eritrea	2.88
195	193	Afghanistan	2.88
196	196	Liberia	2.80
197	197	Mauritania	2.64
198	198	Libya	2.48
199	198	Guinea	2.48
200	200	North Korea	2.40
201	201	Democratic Republic of the Congo	2.32
202	202	Guinea-Bissau	2.24
203	203	Mali	2.16
204	203	Sierra Leone	2.16
205	203	Yemen	2.16
206	206	Burkina Faso	2.08
207	207	Sudan	1.84
208	207	Somalia	1.84
209	209	Niger	1.68
210	210	Palestine (Post-Oct 2023 Wartime Conditions)	1.44
211	211	Central African Republic	1.36
212	211	South Sudan	1.36
213	213	Chad	1.20





3. Global Performance Overview

Chapter 2 presented the rankings of all 213 regions included in the Five Pillars Index. While rankings reveal how individual regions perform, they provide only part of the picture.

When examined collectively, broader patterns begin to emerge. Certain parts of the world consistently outperform others. Some pillars display relatively small differences between regions, while others reveal substantial global divides. Likewise, regions with vastly different cultures, histories, and development pathways often achieve surprisingly similar outcomes.

This chapter shifts the focus from individual rankings to the global landscape as a whole. Rather than asking which regions rank highest or lowest, it explores how performance is distributed across the world, where strong and weak outcomes tend to cluster, how macro-regions compare, and which pillars appear to drive overall success.

The objective is not to explain why these patterns exist—that task is reserved for later chapters—but rather to establish a clear picture of the current state of global human flourishing.

Global data	Final Pillar Score
Average	5.53
Median	5.60
Highest	9.28
Lowest	1.20
Standard Deviation	1.81

A World of Uneven Performance

The Five Pillars Index reveals a world characterized by substantial variation in human flourishing. While a small number of regions achieve exceptionally high scores and a similarly small group struggle across multiple dimensions, the majority of regions occupy a broad middle ground between these extremes.

Across all 213 regions included in the Index, the average Final Pillar Score is 5.53, while the median score is 5.60. The close alignment between these values suggests that global performance is relatively balanced around the center of the distribution, with neither exceptionally high nor exceptionally low performers exerting a disproportionate influence on the overall average.

The gap between the highest- and lowest-performing regions remains substantial. Finland and Switzerland jointly achieve the highest Final Pillar Score at 9.28, while Chad records the lowest score at 1.20. This produces a global performance range of more than eight points on a

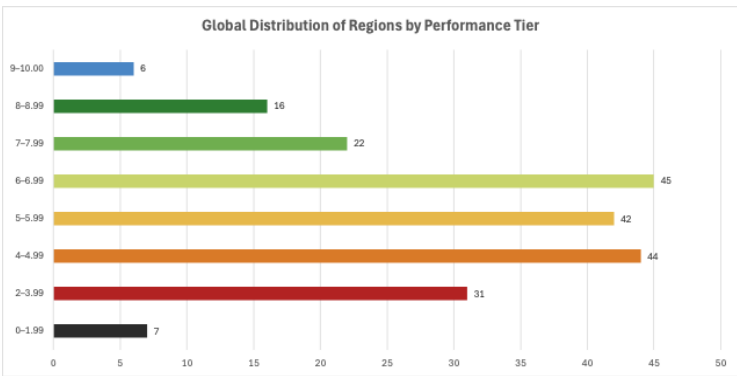
ten-point scale, illustrating the significant differences that continue to exist between the world’s strongest and weakest-performing regions.

The Index also records a global standard deviation of 1.81, indicating a meaningful degree of variation across the dataset. While many regions cluster around the middle of the rankings, substantial differences remain in overall performance, reflecting disparities in health systems, education, environmental quality, wellbeing, infrastructure, and broader societal conditions.

Importantly, the distribution of scores is not evenly spread across the full range. Instead, most regions fall within a broad middle tier, with relatively few regions achieving either world-leading or critically low scores. This pattern suggests that extreme success and extreme underperformance remain comparatively rare, while moderate performance represents the global norm.

The results also highlight an important characteristic of human flourishing: progress tends to be gradual. Few regions achieve elite performance across all five pillars, while relatively few experience severe deficits across every dimension. Most regions demonstrate a mixture of strengths and weaknesses, producing outcomes that cluster around the center of the rankings.

This broad middle should not be viewed as a sign of uniformity. Regions with similar overall scores often arrive there through very different combinations of pillar performance. Some benefit from strong environmental conditions but weaker knowledge outcomes, while others excel in education yet face challenges in wellbeing or movement. These differences become increasingly important in later chapters, where the structural patterns underlying global performance are explored in greater detail.



The Geographic Distribution of Performance

The global distribution of scores reveals that human flourishing is not randomly dispersed across the world. Instead, strong and weak performance tends to cluster geographically, creating distinct regional patterns that are visible across the rankings.

Although high- and low-performing regions can be found on every inhabited continent, clear concentrations emerge when examining the full dataset. These clusters suggest that geography, history, institutions, development pathways, and regional conditions continue to play an important role in shaping outcomes.

One of the most striking patterns is the concentration of high-performing regions across Europe. Northern, Western, and parts of Central Europe contain the largest cluster of elite-performing regions in the Index, including Finland, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, Liechtenstein, Norway, Austria, and the Netherlands. Many neighboring regions also perform strongly, creating a broad corridor of high performance extending across much of the continent.

This concentration is unique in both its scale and consistency. No other part of the world contains a comparable number of regions performing at such a high level across all five pillars.

A second concentration of strong performance emerges in East Asia. Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China's leading economic corridors all achieve scores significantly above the global average. While these regions differ substantially from Europe in culture, governance, and development history, they nonetheless occupy many of the highest positions in the rankings.

The presence of multiple world-leading regions in East Asia demonstrates that strong outcomes can emerge through different societal models and development pathways.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the largest concentration of lower-performing regions is found across parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Regions including Chad, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Niger, Sudan, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo consistently appear among the lowest performers in the Index.

While performance varies across the continent, this cluster represents the most significant concentration of structural challenges observed anywhere in the dataset.

Conflict-affected regions also display a clear geographic pattern. Palestine under post-October 2023 wartime conditions, Ukraine under post-2022 wartime conditions, Yemen, Syria, Libya, and several other conflict-affected regions consistently record lower scores than comparable regions operating under more stable conditions.

This pattern highlights the significant impact that instability and conflict can have across multiple pillars simultaneously.

The geographic distribution of performance also reveals substantial variation within continents and macro-

regions. Asia contains both some of the highest- and lowest-performing regions in the Index. Africa includes several environmental leaders alongside some of the world's weakest overall performers. Europe, while generally strong, still displays meaningful differences between regions.

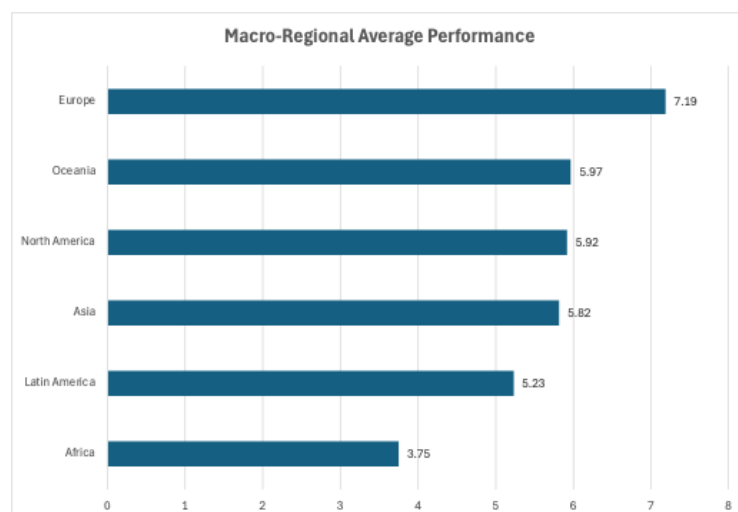
These variations suggest that geography alone does not determine outcomes. While regional clustering remains a powerful force, local institutions, governance, culture, infrastructure, and long-term development choices appear equally important in shaping performance.

Taken together, the geographic distribution of scores reveals a world characterized by both clustering and diversity. Strong and weak outcomes tend to emerge in identifiable geographic concentrations, yet substantial variation remains within every major region of the world. Understanding why these patterns emerge is one of the central questions explored in the following chapters.

Comparing the World's Macro-Regions

While individual regional rankings provide valuable insight into specific strengths and weaknesses, broader patterns become visible when regions are grouped into macro-regions. To better understand these patterns, all 213 regions in the Five Pillars Index were categorized into six macro-regions: Europe, Asia, North America, Latin America, Africa, and Oceania.

Examining performance at this level reveals substantial differences in average outcomes, overall consistency, and pillar-level strengths. At the same time, it highlights the diversity that exists within each macro-region.



Europe achieves the highest average Final Pillar Score of any macro-region, recording an average score of 7.19. The region performs strongly across all five pillars and contains the largest concentration of elite-performing regions in the Index. Unlike many other macro-regions, Europe combines both high performance and relatively

strong balance, avoiding major weaknesses in any single pillar.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Africa records the lowest average score at 3.75. While several regions perform notably above the continental average, the macro-region as a whole faces substantial challenges across multiple pillars, particularly Knowledge and Movement. Africa also contains many of the lowest-performing regions in the Index, contributing to its overall position.

Between these two extremes lies a competitive middle tier consisting of Oceania (5.97), North America (5.92), and Asia (5.82). Although their average scores are relatively close, the drivers behind their performance differ considerably.

Oceania benefits from strong environmental conditions and relatively consistent performance across its limited number of regions. North America performs particularly well in Knowledge and contains several highly ranked regions, though outcomes vary substantially across the continent. Asia displays the greatest internal diversity of any macro-region, combining world-leading performers such as Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan with some of the weakest-performing regions in the Index.

Latin America occupies a distinct position between the middle tier and Africa, recording an average score of 5.23. While the region generally avoids the severe deficits observed among the lowest-performing regions globally, it also contains relatively few elite performers. As a result, Latin America is characterized by moderate performance across most pillars, with fewer extremes than many other parts of the world.

Beyond the differences in average scores, the macro-regional comparison highlights an important finding: no macro-region dominates every pillar. Europe leads overall, Asia contains many of the world's strongest individual performers, Oceania excels in environmental performance and consistency, North America performs strongly in Knowledge, Latin America demonstrates relative balance, and Africa highlights the importance of continued progress in foundational development systems.

Macro-region	Nutrition	Movement	Knowledge	Mindset	Environment
Europe	7.4	7.2	7.5	6.3	7.5
Oceania	5.8	6.0	5.6	5.8	6.6
North America	6.0	5.5	6.4	5.4	6.2
Asia	6.3	5.3	5.9	5.3	6.3
Latin America	5.3	5.1	5.0	5.0	5.8
Africa	4.0	3.2	3.0	3.9	4.7

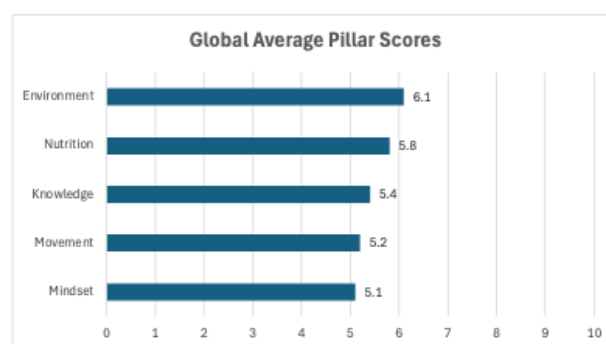
Taken together, these results demonstrate that human flourishing is distributed unevenly across the world. However, they also reveal that every macro-region possesses distinct strengths, challenges, and development pathways. Understanding these differences provides important context for interpreting both the

rankings and the deeper structural patterns explored throughout the remainder of the report.

Which Pillars Drive Global Performance?

While overall rankings provide a useful measure of human flourishing, they reveal only the final outcome. To better understand what drives performance, it is necessary to examine the five pillars individually.

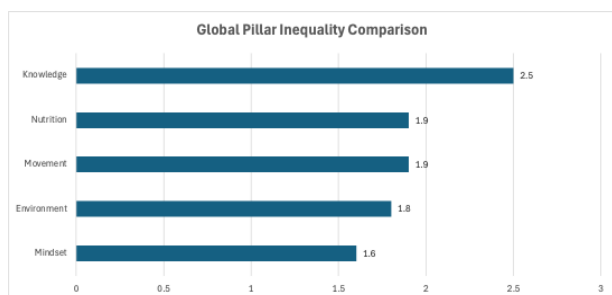
The pillar-level results reveal important differences in both average performance and global distribution. Some pillars perform relatively well across much of the world, while others display substantial variation between regions. Together, these patterns provide valuable insight into the strengths and weaknesses shaping human flourishing at a global scale.



Among the five pillars, Environment records the highest global average score at 6.1. Strong environmental outcomes are observed across a wide variety of regions, ranging from Nordic countries and East Asian city-states to island nations and environmentally rich developing regions. The results suggest that environmental strengths are more geographically diverse than many other dimensions of human flourishing.

Nutrition follows closely with a global average of 5.8. Nutritional performance tends to be relatively strong across much of the world, particularly when compared to other pillars. While significant challenges remain in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and conflict-affected regions, many regions achieve moderate to strong nutritional outcomes.

Knowledge records a global average of 5.4, placing it near the middle of the five pillars. However, this average conceals one of the most important findings in the entire Index. Knowledge displays the highest standard deviation of any pillar, indicating a far greater level of inequality between regions than observed elsewhere. Several regions achieve perfect Knowledge scores, while others remain close to zero. No other pillar exhibits such a large gap between global leaders and laggards.



Movement and Mindset emerge as the weakest-performing pillars globally, recording average scores of 1.9 and 1.6 respectively.

The Movement results suggest that physical activity remains a widespread challenge across both developed and developing regions. Unlike several other pillars, weak movement outcomes are not confined to low-income areas, indicating that urban design, transportation systems, and lifestyle factors may play an important role.

Mindset records the lowest global average score of any pillar. Although many regions perform reasonably well, comparatively few achieve truly exceptional outcomes. This finding suggests that wellbeing, resilience, trust, and psychological flourishing remain challenging to optimize, even in regions that perform strongly across other dimensions.

Taken together, the pillar results reveal that human flourishing is multidimensional. Strong performance in one pillar does not guarantee strength in another, and no pillar can fully explain overall outcomes on its own.

The results also highlight two contrasting realities. Environment and Nutrition represent relative global strengths, while Movement and Mindset remain persistent challenges. At the same time, Knowledge emerges as the pillar with the largest divide between the world's strongest and weakest performers.

These findings provide important context for the detailed pillar analyses presented in Chapters 5 through 9, where each dimension of human flourishing is examined individually.

4. Structural Patterns Across the Index

The previous chapters established the global landscape of human flourishing through the Five Pillars framework. They identified the world’s highest- and lowest-performing regions, examined geographic and macro-regional patterns, and explored the relative strengths and weaknesses of each pillar.

These findings answer an important question: what does the world look like in 2026?

However, rankings and averages alone cannot fully explain why certain regions consistently outperform others. Beneath the rankings lie recurring structural patterns that transcend geography, culture, and political systems. Some regions achieve exceptional outcomes despite limited natural advantages. Others struggle despite possessing significant resources. Certain weaknesses repeatedly appear together, while several of the world’s strongest performers share characteristics that are not immediately visible in the rankings themselves.

This chapter moves beyond description and begins examining the deeper patterns embedded within the dataset. Rather than focusing on individual regions or macro-regions, it investigates the structural dynamics that appear most consistently across the Index.

Several key questions guide the analysis:

- Why do some regions consistently achieve elite performance across multiple pillars?
- Which factors most clearly separate high-performing regions from low-performing ones?
- Are certain pillars more important than others in shaping overall outcomes?
- What recurring patterns emerge among regions facing persistent challenges?
- Can different societies achieve similar outcomes through different pathways?

By exploring these questions, the chapter seeks to identify the broader principles that help explain success, failure, and variation across the Five Pillars Index. Readers interested in pillar-level scores and detailed regional profiles may refer to Appendix A, which contains the complete dataset underlying the analyses presented throughout this report.

The findings presented here should not be interpreted as universal laws. Human flourishing remains a complex and multidimensional phenomenon influenced by history,

geography, culture, institutions, economics, and countless local factors. Nevertheless, recurring patterns do emerge. When viewed collectively, these patterns provide valuable insight into the characteristics most commonly associated with long-term success.

The sections that follow examine eight structural patterns organized into success patterns, systemic drivers, failure patterns, and a broader synthesis of how human flourishing emerges across different societies.

8 Structural Patterns		
1	Success Patterns	Balance Beats Excellence
2		Development Plateau
3		Wealth Is Not Enough
4	Systemic Drivers	Knowledge Divide
5		Mindset Bottleneck
6	Failure Patterns	Conflict & System Collapse
7		Fragility Cluster
8	Outcome	Multiple Roads to Flourishing

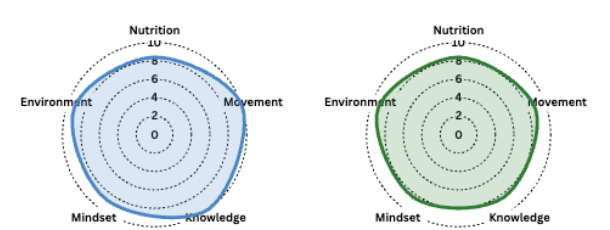
1. Balance Beats Excellence

One of the clearest patterns to emerge from the Five Pillars Index is that overall success is rarely driven by excellence in a single area. Instead, the highest-performing regions consistently demonstrate strong performance across all five pillars, avoiding the major weaknesses that often constrain other regions.

This finding challenges a common assumption that exceptional outcomes are primarily achieved through specialization. While many regions excel in individual pillars, relatively few translate that excellence into top-tier overall performance.

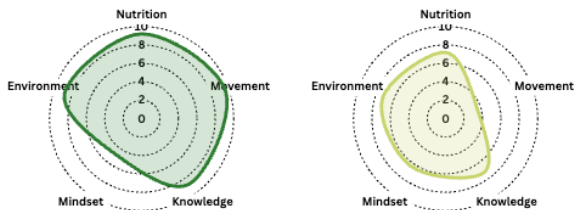
The world’s highest-performing regions provide compelling examples of this pattern. Finland, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, Liechtenstein, Norway, Austria, and the Netherlands all rank among the global leaders. Yet none of these regions dominates every pillar. Instead, they consistently perform well across Nutrition, Movement, Knowledge, Mindset, and Environment.

Their success is defined less by extraordinary strengths and more by the absence of major weaknesses.



(Switzerland left, Austria right)

In contrast, many regions achieve exceptional results in one or two pillars while remaining constrained by weaknesses elsewhere. Several regions record world-leading Nutrition scores but achieve only moderate overall rankings. Others perform strongly in Knowledge or Environment but are held back by weaker outcomes in Movement or Mindset.



(South Korea left, Saudi Arabia right)

The rankings suggest that pillar imbalances often limit overall performance, even when individual dimensions achieve outstanding results.

This pattern becomes particularly visible when examining the highest-ranking regions collectively. The gap between first and twentieth place is often smaller than the gap between a region's strongest and weakest pillar. In other words, elite performers tend to compress variation within their own profiles, maintaining relatively high standards across every dimension of human flourishing.

The implication is significant. Progress in a single pillar may improve outcomes, but sustained excellence appears to require broad-based development across multiple dimensions simultaneously.

The findings also suggest that human flourishing operates as an interconnected system. Improvements in education may support nutritional outcomes. Strong environmental conditions may reinforce wellbeing. Better movement outcomes may contribute to both physical and psychological health. Because the pillars influence one another, weaknesses in one area can limit progress elsewhere.

This interconnectedness helps explain why balanced regions consistently outperform highly specialized ones.

Ultimately, the rankings indicate that the path to long-term success is rarely defined by perfection in a single domain. The strongest-performing regions demonstrate that avoiding weakness may be more important than maximizing strength. In a world often focused on identifying leaders within individual categories, the Five Pillars Index suggests a different lesson: human flourishing rewards balance.

2. The Development Plateau

One of the most overlooked patterns in the Five Pillars Index is not found among the world's strongest or weakest performers, but among the large number of regions occupying the middle of the rankings. While substantial differences exist between individual regions, the global distribution reveals a striking concentration of scores clustered around the center of the scale.

This pattern suggests that achieving moderate levels of human flourishing is relatively common, while reaching truly elite performance remains considerably more difficult.

The pattern becomes visible when examining the overall distribution of scores. Although a small number of regions achieve scores above 8.0 and a similarly small group fall below 3.0, the majority of regions occupy a broad middle band between these extremes. This concentration is not accidental. It reflects the reality that many regions have successfully established the foundations of development while continuing to face challenges that prevent them from joining the world's highest-performing group.

The distinction between moderate and elite performance appears particularly significant. Improvements in areas such as nutrition, infrastructure, education, environmental quality, and institutional capacity can often generate substantial gains during earlier stages of development. However, progressing from good performance to exceptional performance appears to require a different set of conditions.

Many middle-ranking regions demonstrate strong outcomes in several pillars while remaining constrained by weaknesses elsewhere. Some perform well in Nutrition and Environment but lag in Knowledge. Others achieve strong educational outcomes while facing challenges related to Movement or Mindset. As a result, progress continues, but overall performance remains concentrated within the middle of the rankings.

This helps explain why relatively few regions achieve the highest scores observed in the Index. Elite performers rarely distinguish themselves through a single exceptional strength. Instead, they tend to eliminate weaknesses across multiple dimensions simultaneously, creating a level of balance that is difficult to replicate.

The development plateau also highlights an important reality of human flourishing: advancement is not linear. Early gains may be achieved through improvements in a limited number of areas, but long-term progress becomes increasingly dependent on strengthening the broader system. As performance rises, incremental improvements often require greater coordination across multiple pillars.

This pattern reinforces one of the central themes of the Index. The challenge facing most regions is not escaping

failure, but overcoming the barriers that separate moderate performance from sustained excellence.

Ultimately, the Five Pillars Index suggests that the world's greatest development challenge may not be reaching adequacy, but achieving excellence. While many regions have successfully built the foundations of human flourishing, comparatively few have managed to sustain the balanced, high-level performance required to join the world's leading group. The result is a global landscape in which moderate success is common, but elite flourishing remains relatively rare.

3. Wealth Is Not Enough

Economic development is one of the strongest predictors of human flourishing in the Five Pillars Index. Many of the world's highest-performing regions are also among its most prosperous, benefiting from strong infrastructure, advanced institutions, high levels of education, and access to resources that support long-term development.

Yet the rankings reveal an equally important pattern: wealth alone does not guarantee exceptional outcomes.

While economic resources often create favorable conditions for progress, they do not automatically translate into balanced performance across all five pillars. Some regions convert prosperity into broad-based flourishing, while others achieve only moderate overall results despite substantial financial advantages.

Wealthy Regions, Different Outcomes		
Region	Final Score	Observation
Monaco	8.08	Despite being one of the wealthiest regions in the world, Monaco does not achieve the highest overall score. Its results suggest that exceptional financial prosperity alone does not automatically produce elite outcomes across every dimension of human flourishing.
Switzerland	9.28	Switzerland demonstrates one of the strongest examples of prosperity being translated into balanced performance. Rather than relying on a single strength, it achieves consistently high outcomes across all five pillars, illustrating how wealth can support flourishing when combined with strong institutions, education, wellbeing, and environmental quality.
Singapore	8.8	Singapore achieves world-leading results through a very different development model than most European leaders. Its performance demonstrates that elite flourishing can emerge through multiple pathways, provided prosperity is effectively converted into broad-based societal outcomes.
Pearl River Delta (China)	7.76	As one of the world's most dynamic economic regions (Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and more), the Pearl River Delta achieves strong overall results. However, its profile remains less balanced than the highest-performing regions, suggesting that rapid economic development does not automatically eliminate weaknesses across every pillar.
United Arab Emirates	7.04	The UAE demonstrates that high levels of prosperity can coexist with noticeable variation between pillars. Strong performance in several areas is offset by weaker outcomes elsewhere, resulting in a score below many less affluent but more balanced regions.
Northeast Corridor (USA)	6.8	Home to some of the world's largest financial, technological, and educational centers (New York City, Boston, and more), the Northeast Corridor possesses extraordinary economic resources. Yet its overall performance remains well below the world's leading regions, highlighting the limits of economic strength as a standalone driver of flourishing.
The comparison reveals that wealth appears to be a powerful enabler of human flourishing, but not a guarantee of it. Some regions convert prosperity into balanced, high-level outcomes across all five pillars, while others achieve only moderate results despite exceptional economic advantages. The distinction suggests that long-term flourishing depends not only on the resources a society possesses, but on how effectively those resources are translated into broad-based human outcomes.		

This distinction becomes particularly visible when examining several resource-rich and high-income regions. Many achieve strong outcomes in areas such as Nutrition, infrastructure, public services, and education, yet continue to face challenges in other dimensions. In particular, Movement and Mindset often emerge as areas where performance does not fully reflect broader economic success.

The result is a group of regions that perform well overall but fall short of the balanced profiles observed among the world's highest-ranking performers.

The contrast with the top-performing regions is revealing. Countries such as Finland, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands are not distinguished solely by their prosperity. Rather, they consistently translate their resources into strong outcomes across Nutrition, Movement, Knowledge, Mindset, and Environment simultaneously.

Their success suggests that wealth functions most effectively when supported by broader social, institutional, cultural, and environmental strengths.

A similar pattern can be observed elsewhere in the rankings. Regions with comparable levels of economic development often achieve markedly different outcomes in wellbeing, physical activity, environmental performance, or overall balance. These differences indicate that factors beyond income play a significant role in shaping long-term flourishing.

The findings also challenge the assumption that development follows a purely economic pathway. Improvements in income and infrastructure can provide an important foundation, but they do not automatically generate trust, purpose, resilience, social cohesion, healthy lifestyles, or environmental quality. These dimensions often require distinct forms of investment and long-term development.

As a result, the transition from moderate performance to elite flourishing frequently involves challenges that cannot be solved through economic growth alone.

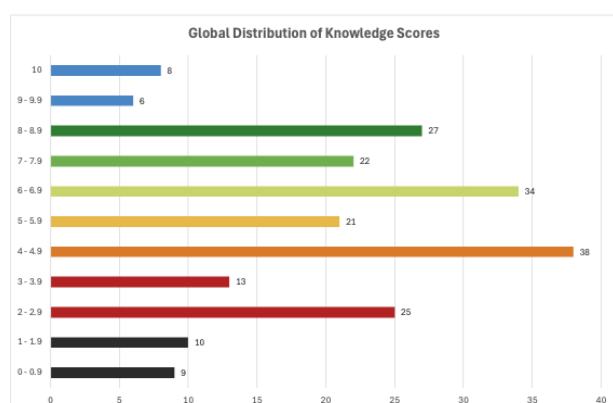
This pattern helps explain why relatively few regions achieve the highest scores in the Index. Many have successfully generated prosperity, but far fewer have translated that prosperity into consistently strong outcomes across every dimension of flourishing.

Ultimately, the Five Pillars Index suggests that wealth should be viewed as an enabler rather than a destination. Economic resources can support human flourishing, but they do not guarantee it. The regions that perform best are not simply those that possess the greatest wealth, but those that most effectively convert their resources into balanced, long-term outcomes.

4. The Knowledge Divide

Among the five pillars of the Index, no dimension displays a larger gap between global leaders and laggards than Knowledge. While several regions achieve perfect scores, others remain near the bottom of the scale, creating a divide that exceeds anything observed in Nutrition, Movement, Mindset, or Environment.

This disparity emerges as one of the most significant structural patterns in the entire dataset.



Knowledge records the highest standard deviation of any pillar at 2.47, indicating substantially greater variation between regions than observed elsewhere. The pillar also spans the full range of the scoring scale, from regions achieving perfect scores of 10.0 to others recording values near zero.

The result is a global divide that separates some of the world's most advanced knowledge ecosystems from regions where educational access, institutional capacity, and human capital development remain severely constrained.

The regions leading the Knowledge rankings are concentrated primarily in Northern and Western Europe, alongside a small number of exceptional performers in East Asia and elsewhere. Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, and Switzerland all achieve perfect Knowledge scores, while Estonia, Singapore, Taiwan, Germany, and several others closely follow.

These regions share a common emphasis on education, institutional effectiveness, research capacity, information access, and long-term investment in human capital.

At the opposite end of the rankings, a concentration of low-performing regions emerges across parts of the Sahel, Central Africa, and several conflict-affected states. Chad, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Niger, Somalia, Afghanistan, Yemen, and others consistently appear among the weakest performers.

The scale of this divide suggests that access to knowledge remains one of the most unevenly distributed resources in the world.

Importantly, the Knowledge divide extends beyond education alone. The strongest-performing regions generally benefit from robust institutions, stable governance, effective public administration, strong research ecosystems, and high levels of information accessibility. Conversely, many of the weakest performers face challenges across multiple dimensions of human capital development simultaneously.

As a result, Knowledge functions as both a pillar and an enabling condition. Regions that perform strongly in Knowledge often possess advantages that support progress across Nutrition, Movement, Mindset, and Environment.

This pattern helps explain why the Knowledge divide appears repeatedly throughout the Index. Many of the regions struggling most in overall performance also struggle in Knowledge, while many of the highest-performing regions consistently rank among the global leaders.

The findings suggest that educational and institutional development may represent one of the most powerful long-term drivers of human flourishing. While

improvements in individual pillars can generate meaningful progress, sustained advancement across multiple dimensions appears far more difficult when knowledge systems remain weak.

Ultimately, the Knowledge divide represents more than an educational gap. It reflects a broader separation between regions that have successfully built the institutions, capabilities, and human capital necessary to support long-term development and those that continue to face significant barriers to doing so. No other pillar reveals a larger disparity, and few appear more closely connected to long-term flourishing.

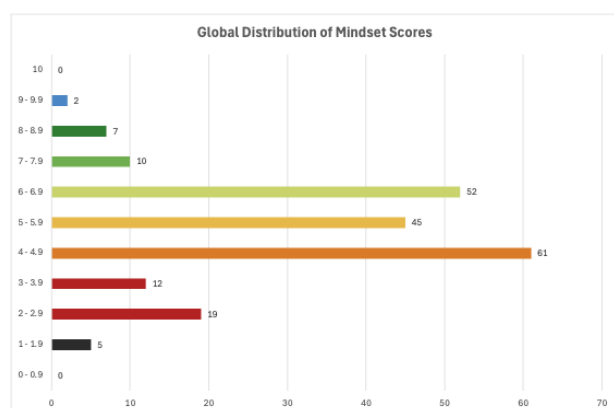
5. The Mindset Bottleneck

While the Five Pillars Index identifies substantial variation across all dimensions of human flourishing, one pattern appears with remarkable consistency: Mindset emerges as the weakest-performing pillar globally.

With a global average score of 5.1, Mindset records the lowest average of all five pillars. This finding suggests that psychological wellbeing, resilience, trust, life satisfaction, and broader measures of flourishing may be more difficult to optimize than many of the material conditions captured elsewhere in the Index.

Unlike Knowledge, where disparities between regions are pronounced, the Mindset challenge appears more universal. Regions from different continents, cultures, and development levels frequently achieve moderate rather than exceptional Mindset outcomes. Even among the world's strongest-performing regions, truly elite Mindset scores remain relatively rare.

This pattern suggests that psychological flourishing may face constraints that extend beyond economic development or institutional performance alone.



The contrast becomes particularly visible among several high-performing regions. Many regions that achieve exceptional scores in Nutrition, Knowledge, or Environment do not demonstrate the same degree of dominance in Mindset. While strong overall performers generally achieve good wellbeing outcomes, relatively

few manage to elevate Mindset to the same level as their strongest pillars.

In other words, progress in material conditions does not automatically translate into equivalent gains in psychological flourishing.

The findings also challenge a common assumption that prosperity alone creates wellbeing. Several affluent regions perform well in Mindset, but wealth by itself does not guarantee exceptional outcomes. Conversely, some regions outperform expectations despite more modest economic circumstances.

This suggests that factors such as trust, social cohesion, community strength, purpose, belonging, and institutional confidence may play a significant role in shaping long-term wellbeing.

A second pattern emerges when examining the highest-performing Mindset regions. Liechtenstein, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, and Iceland all perform exceptionally well. Despite their differences, these regions share several characteristics, including strong social trust, stable institutions, relatively high levels of security, and robust social systems.

The consistency of these factors suggests that psychological flourishing may depend as much on social and institutional environments as on material conditions.

Taken together, the results point toward a broader conclusion: wellbeing appears to function as a bottleneck within the human flourishing system. Improvements in education, nutrition, infrastructure, and environmental quality can contribute to better outcomes, but they do not automatically resolve challenges related to trust, resilience, purpose, or life satisfaction.

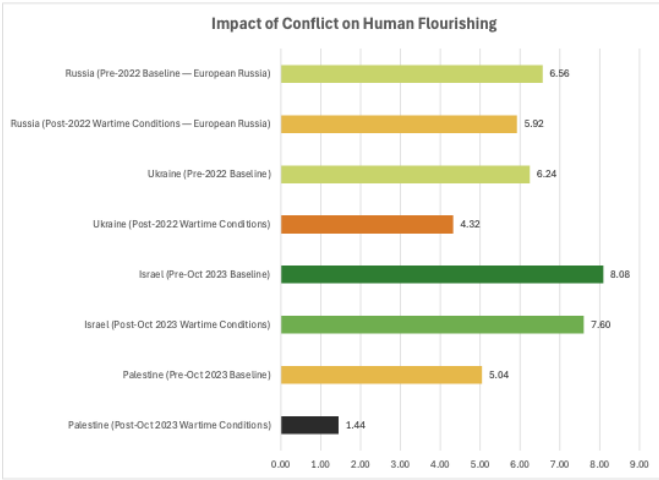
As societies become increasingly successful in addressing material needs, psychological wellbeing may become one of the defining development challenges of the twenty-first century.

Ultimately, the Mindset rankings suggest that flourishing cannot be measured solely through physical, economic, or institutional indicators. Human wellbeing possesses a distinct psychological dimension, and the difficulty of optimizing that dimension may explain why Mindset remains the weakest pillar across much of the world.

6. Conflict and System Collapse

One of the most striking patterns in the Five Pillars Index is the extent to which conflict affects multiple dimensions of human flourishing simultaneously. While many structural challenges tend to influence specific pillars, conflict frequently produces broad-based deterioration across the entire system.

This pattern appears consistently throughout the dataset and represents one of the clearest examples of how interconnected the five pillars truly are.



The wartime cases included in the Index illustrate the extent to which conflict can rapidly weaken human flourishing across multiple dimensions. Palestine records the largest decline, falling by 3.60 points following the outbreak of war in October 2023. Ukraine experiences a substantial decline of 1.92 points following the 2022 invasion, while Russia and Israel record more moderate reductions of 0.64 and 0.48 points respectively.

Although the magnitude of impact varies, the overall pattern remains consistent: conflict is associated with lower performance across the Five Pillars framework. The findings suggest that prolonged instability affects not only physical infrastructure and economic activity, but also the educational, environmental, institutional, and psychological foundations that support long-term flourishing.

Several regions experiencing active or recent conflict record substantially lower scores than would otherwise be expected. Palestine under post-October 2023 wartime conditions, Ukraine under post-2022 wartime conditions, Yemen, Syria, Sudan, Libya, and Afghanistan all demonstrate the widespread effects of prolonged instability.

Although the specific circumstances differ, the overall pattern remains remarkably consistent: conflict weakens multiple pillars simultaneously rather than affecting only a single dimension of human flourishing.

	Final Pillar Score	Sum Nutrition	Sum Movement	Sum Knowledge	Sum Mindset	Sum Environment
Russia (Pre-2022 Baseline — European Russia)	6.56	6.0	8.0	6.4	4.8	7.6
Russia (Post-2022 Wartime Conditions — European Russia)	5.92	5.6	8.0	5.2	3.6	7.2
Ukraine (Pre-2022 Baseline)	6.24	6.4	6.0	6.8	5.6	6.4
Ukraine (Post-2022 Wartime Conditions)	4.32	4.8	3.6	7.2	4.0	2.0
Israel (Pre-Oct 2023 Baseline)	8.08	8.4	8.0	9.2	7.2	7.6
Israel (Post-Oct 2023 Wartime Conditions)	7.60	8.4	8.0	8.8	6.0	6.8
Palestine (Pre-Oct 2023 Baseline)	5.04	5.6	5.2	5.6	4.0	4.8
Palestine (Post-Oct 2023 Wartime Conditions)	1.44	1.6	1.6	1.2	1.6	1.2

The pillar-level comparisons reveal that conflict rarely affects a single dimension of human flourishing in isolation. Across all four wartime cases, declines appear simultaneously across multiple pillars, although the magnitude varies considerably. The most severe deterioration is observed in Palestine, where every pillar records a substantial decline following the outbreak of war in October 2023. Ukraine similarly experiences broad-based losses, particularly in Environment, Movement, and Nutrition. Even in cases where overall declines are more moderate, such as Russia and Israel, noticeable reductions emerge across several pillars. Together, these findings support one of the central conclusions of the Index: conflict functions not merely as a localized shock, but as a systemic force capable of weakening multiple foundations of human flourishing at the same time.

The effects are particularly visible in Knowledge and Mindset. Educational systems are frequently disrupted by displacement, damaged infrastructure, interrupted schooling, and reduced institutional capacity. At the same time, conflict places extraordinary pressure on wellbeing, resilience, trust, and psychological health.

As a result, many conflict-affected regions experience significant declines in both human capital and wellbeing.

Environmental performance can also deteriorate rapidly during periods of instability. Damage to infrastructure, reduced environmental oversight, resource pressures, and disruptions to public services can weaken environmental outcomes even in regions that previously performed relatively well.

The wartime cases included in the Index illustrate how environmental conditions can decline far more quickly than is often assumed.

Nutrition and Movement are similarly affected. Food systems become less reliable, supply chains are disrupted, public services weaken, and opportunities for safe daily movement may decline. The cumulative effect is a broad reduction in overall flourishing rather than isolated weakness within a single pillar.

This helps explain why conflict-affected regions frequently appear near the bottom of multiple rankings simultaneously.

Perhaps the most important lesson from the data is that conflict does not simply reduce performance; it undermines the systems that support performance. Institutions, infrastructure, social trust, educational networks, healthcare systems, environmental stewardship, and economic activity can all be weakened at the same time.

When these systems deteriorate together, recovery becomes significantly more difficult. Improvements in one pillar may be constrained by weaknesses in several others, creating a cycle that can persist long after active conflict has ended.

The findings suggest that stability functions as a foundational prerequisite for long-term flourishing. While regions can overcome geographic disadvantages, resource constraints, and other structural challenges, sustained conflict consistently emerges as one of the strongest predictors of underperformance across the Index.

Ultimately, the pattern observed throughout the dataset is not merely one of conflict, but of system collapse. The regions most affected are rarely those experiencing isolated problems. Instead, they are regions where multiple pillars begin to weaken simultaneously, demonstrating how deeply interconnected the foundations of human flourishing truly are.

7. The Fragility Cluster

While conflict emerges as a major driver of underperformance, the Five Pillars Index reveals a broader and more persistent pattern. A relatively small group of regions appears repeatedly among the lowest performers across multiple pillars, creating what can best be described as a fragility cluster.

Rather than experiencing weakness in a single area, these regions often face challenges across Nutrition, Movement, Knowledge, Mindset, and Environment simultaneously.

The pattern is immediately visible when examining the bottom rankings of each pillar. Chad, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Niger, Somalia, Sudan, Guinea-Bissau, and several other regions consistently appear among the weakest performers. In many cases, the same regions rank near the bottom across four or even all five pillars.

This overlap suggests that underperformance is rarely isolated. Instead, weaknesses tend to accumulate and reinforce one another over time.

Region	Bottom-25 Appearances
Haiti	5
Mauritania	5
Guinea	5
Democratic Republic of the Congo	5
Guinea-Bissau	5
Mali	5
Sierra Leone	5
Burkina Faso	5
Somalia	5
Sudan	5
Niger	5
Palestine (Post-Oct 2023 Wartime Conditions)	5
Central African Republic	5
South Sudan	5
Chad	5
Equatorial Guinea	4
Syria	4
Afghanistan	4
Togo	4
Liberia	4
Libya	4
North Korea	4
Yemen	4
Nigeria	3
Eritrea	3

Fifteen regions appear among the Bottom 25 in all five pillars simultaneously. Rather than suffering from isolated weaknesses, these regions demonstrate persistent underperformance across multiple dimensions of human flourishing. The pattern suggests that fragility emerges when challenges accumulate and reinforce one another over time.

The fragility cluster extends beyond any single geographic factor. Although many of the affected regions are concentrated in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, the pattern is better explained by the presence of multiple structural challenges rather than geography alone. Weak institutions, limited educational capacity, food insecurity, poor infrastructure, environmental vulnerability, and instability frequently occur together.

As these pressures accumulate, progress becomes increasingly difficult.

The contrast with the world's strongest-performing regions is striking. Just as success tends to emerge through reinforcing strengths, failure often emerges through reinforcing weaknesses. Regions struggling with educational deficits frequently face nutritional challenges. Weak institutional capacity can affect environmental management. Poor wellbeing outcomes may be linked to broader social and economic pressures.

The result is a cycle in which weaknesses across different pillars interact and compound one another.

Importantly, the fragility cluster should not be interpreted as a permanent condition. Several regions throughout the world have demonstrated significant progress over relatively short periods of time. The existence of the cluster simply highlights the reality that development challenges rarely occur in isolation.

Regions facing difficulties across multiple pillars often require integrated approaches that address underlying structural conditions rather than isolated symptoms.

One of the clearest lessons from the Index is that flourishing and fragility are both systemic phenomena. Just as elite-performing regions rarely achieve success through a single strength, the world's weakest-performing regions rarely struggle because of a single weakness.

The fragility cluster demonstrates that long-term underperformance is most likely to emerge when multiple challenges overlap and reinforce one another over time.

Ultimately, the pattern observed throughout the dataset suggests that fragility is not defined by low scores alone. Rather, it is characterized by the simultaneous presence of weaknesses across multiple dimensions of human flourishing. Understanding this interconnected nature of underperformance is essential for understanding why some regions continue to face persistent development challenges while others are able to build long-term resilience.

8. Multiple Roads to Flourishing

One of the most important findings of the Five Pillars Index is that there is no single model of human flourishing. While the highest-performing regions share several common characteristics, they often differ substantially in culture, geography, governance, economic structure, demographics, and development history.

Despite these differences, many achieve remarkably similar overall outcomes.

This pattern is particularly visible among the world's highest-performing regions. Finland, Switzerland, Singapore, Japan, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Liechtenstein all rank among the global leaders. Yet these regions represent very different societal models.

Some are large nations, while others are microstates. Some are highly urbanized, while others combine urban and rural populations. Some emphasize market-driven approaches, while others rely more heavily on social systems and public institutions. Their histories, cultures, and demographic profiles also differ considerably.

What these regions share is not a specific model, but a common outcome: consistently strong performance across multiple pillars.

This distinction is important. The data suggests that flourishing is less dependent on following a particular blueprint and more dependent on achieving a balanced combination of favorable outcomes.

The findings also challenge simplistic explanations of success. Wealth alone does not guarantee exceptional performance. Geography does not predetermine outcomes. Population size is not decisive. Nor does any single political, economic, or cultural model consistently dominate the rankings.

Instead, successful regions appear to reach similar destinations through different pathways.

Singapore demonstrates how a highly urbanized city-state can achieve world-leading outcomes. Finland illustrates the strength of balanced social and institutional development. Japan combines exceptional nutritional and environmental performance with strong overall results. Switzerland performs consistently across all five pillars without relying on dominance in any single area.

This diversity becomes equally visible beyond the very top of the rankings. Throughout the dataset, regions with similar overall scores often arrive there through different combinations of strengths and weaknesses. Some benefit from strong environmental conditions, while others derive their advantage from knowledge systems, institutional quality, or social wellbeing.

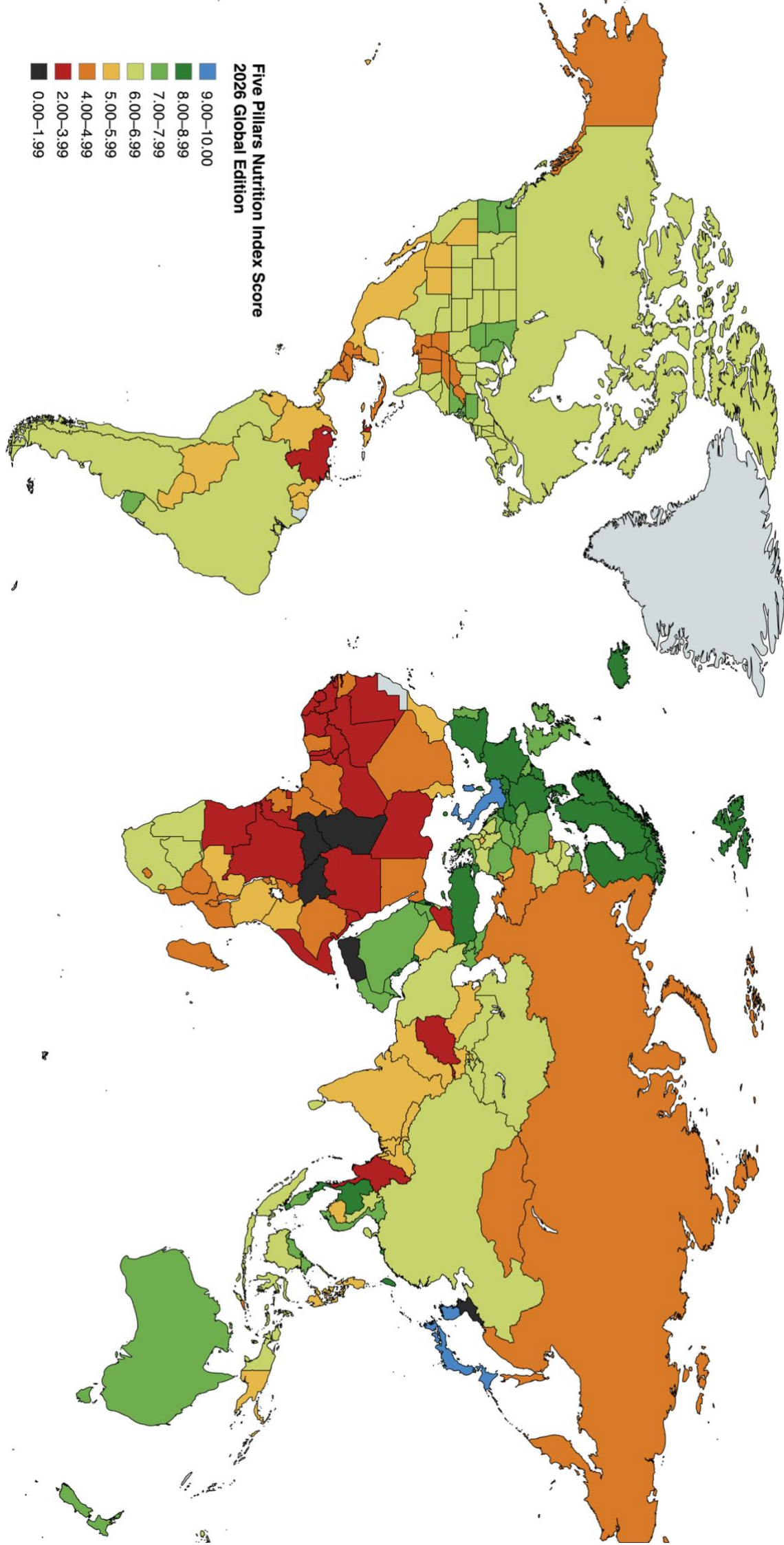
The implication is that human flourishing should be viewed as a multidimensional outcome rather than a predefined formula.

The Five Pillars framework reinforces this perspective. Because overall performance reflects the interaction of five distinct dimensions, regions are not required to maximize every pillar in exactly the same way. What matters most is whether the combined system produces consistently strong outcomes.

This helps explain why societies with very different characteristics can nevertheless achieve comparable levels of flourishing.

Ultimately, the rankings suggest that there is no universal blueprint for success. The world's strongest-performing regions demonstrate that flourishing can emerge through multiple pathways, shaped by different histories, institutions, cultures, and circumstances. While the routes may vary, the destination remains remarkably similar: strong, balanced performance across the dimensions that matter most for long-term human wellbeing.

5. Nutrition



Nutrition records a global average score of 5.8, making it the second-highest performing pillar in the 2026 Five Pillars Index. The global median score of 6.0 suggests that most regions achieve at least moderate nutritional outcomes, while a substantial number perform considerably above the global average.

The highest Nutrition score in the Index is 9.6, achieved by Japan, Italy, and San Marino, while the lowest score is 1.2, recorded by Chad, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. This creates a global performance range of 8.4 points, highlighting significant disparities in nutritional outcomes across regions.

Compared to several other pillars, Nutrition demonstrates relatively strong global performance. More than half of all assessed regions score 5.0 or higher, and a large concentration of regions falls within the 6.0–7.9 range. At the same time, a sizeable group of regions remains trapped in low-scoring categories, particularly in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and conflict-affected regions.

The pillar's standard deviation of 1.90 indicates meaningful variation between regions, though less extreme than observed in Knowledge. Overall, the results suggest that adequate nutrition is achievable across a wide variety of geographic, economic, and cultural contexts, but major inequalities persist between the world's highest- and lowest-performing regions.

Metric	Value
Average	5.8
Median	6.0
Highest	9.6
Lowest	1.2
Range	8.4
Standard Deviation	1.90

Where the World Performs Best

High-performing regions rarely appear randomly across the global landscape. Instead, excellence tends to cluster geographically, forming identifiable groups of regions that consistently achieve strong outcomes. The Nutrition rankings reveal several such clusters, highlighting how cultural traditions, economic development, food systems, and public health environments interact to shape nutritional performance.

The Mediterranean Advantage

The strongest nutritional cluster in the Index is found across Southern Europe and the Mediterranean. Italy and San Marino jointly achieve the highest Nutrition score globally, while Spain, France, Monaco, Andorra, Malta, and Cyprus all appear among the world's highest-performing regions.

This concentration suggests that the Mediterranean region continues to benefit from dietary traditions centered around fresh produce, seafood, legumes, olive oil, and relatively limited consumption of highly processed foods. While individual countries differ significantly in size, wealth, and governance, their shared nutritional success points toward the enduring importance of long-established food cultures.

East Asia's Nutrition Success Story

A second major concentration of high-performing regions can be found across East Asia. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, the Pearl River Delta, the Yangtze Delta Corridor, and Singapore all rank among the world's nutritional leaders.

Despite rapid urbanization and economic development, many of these regions have retained dietary patterns that emphasize fish, vegetables, rice, fermented foods, and portion control. The results suggest that modernization does not necessarily require abandoning nutritional quality. Instead, several East Asian regions demonstrate that economic growth and strong dietary outcomes can coexist.

The presence of both national and sub-national Chinese regions among the global leaders further highlights the importance of advanced urban food systems and strong access to diverse, high-quality food supplies.

Northern Europe's Consistent Performance

Northern and Western Europe form a third major cluster of nutritional excellence. Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway, Luxembourg, and Iceland all achieve scores well above the global average.

Unlike the Mediterranean cluster, which is often associated with specific dietary traditions, Northern Europe's success appears to be driven by a combination of strong public health systems, high food quality standards, effective consumer education, and broad access to nutritious food.

Although few of these regions occupy the very top positions globally, their collective presence demonstrates remarkable consistency across the wider region.

Excellence Is Concentrated, Not Universal

The geography of nutritional excellence reveals that high performance is heavily concentrated within a limited number of regional systems. Europe and East Asia dominate the global rankings, while large parts of Africa, Latin America, and South Asia remain absent from the highest-performing tier.

This concentration suggests that strong nutritional outcomes are rarely the product of a single policy or

intervention. Instead, they emerge from broader systems that combine food culture, public health, education, economic development, and long-term institutional stability. Understanding these clusters provides valuable insight into where the world performs best and why nutritional excellence continues to emerge in particular regions.

Elite Nutrition Performers

While many regions achieve strong nutritional outcomes, only three regions occupy the highest position in the Nutrition rankings: Japan, Italy, and San Marino. Each records a Nutrition score of 9.6, representing the strongest performance observed anywhere in the Index.

Although these regions differ significantly in geography, population size, and economic structure, their shared success provides valuable insight into the characteristics associated with nutritional excellence.

Distinct Paths to the Same Outcome

At first glance, Japan, Italy, and San Marino appear to have little in common. Japan is a highly urbanized East Asian nation of more than 120 million people. Italy is a large Southern European country shaped by centuries of Mediterranean culinary traditions. San Marino is one of the smallest sovereign states in the world.

Yet despite these differences, all three regions achieve identical Nutrition scores.

This finding highlights an important principle of the Index: there is no single pathway to nutritional excellence. Different societies can achieve exceptional outcomes through different combinations of culture, institutions, food systems, and consumer behavior.

The Power of Food Culture

One characteristic shared by all three elite performers is the presence of strong and deeply rooted food cultures. In each case, meals remain closely connected to long-standing dietary traditions rather than being dominated by highly processed convenience foods.

While specific ingredients differ substantially, all three regions emphasize dietary patterns centered around whole foods, balanced meals, and strong culinary identities. These traditions help shape consumer behavior and create environments where healthier choices are often integrated into daily life.

The results suggest that nutritional excellence is not solely a product of modern health policy. Cultural norms surrounding food may be equally important in determining long-term outcomes.

Prosperity Alone Is Not Enough

Another notable finding is that nutritional excellence cannot be explained by wealth alone. Many wealthy regions perform well in Nutrition, but relatively few reach the level achieved by Japan, Italy, and San Marino.

Several regions with comparable or even higher levels of income achieve lower nutritional outcomes, indicating that economic development is only one component of the equation. Access to food matters, but so do dietary choices, cultural preferences, education, and public health awareness.

This distinction helps explain why some affluent regions appear among the global leaders while others do not.

Excellence as a System

The world's strongest nutritional outcomes appear to emerge from systems rather than isolated interventions. Food culture, public health, education, affordability, accessibility, and consumer behavior reinforce one another over time, creating environments that support healthier dietary patterns across entire populations.

Japan, Italy, and San Marino demonstrate that nutritional excellence is rarely achieved through a single policy or program. Instead, it reflects the cumulative effect of multiple factors operating together over decades.

Their success provides a useful reminder that long-term nutritional outcomes are shaped not only by what people eat, but also by the broader systems that influence those choices.

The Nutrition Gap

While the world's highest-performing regions demonstrate what is possible, the lowest-performing regions reveal the barriers that continue to prevent nutritional progress. Examining these regions highlights a recurring pattern: severe nutritional deficits rarely occur in isolation. Instead, they tend to emerge alongside conflict, institutional fragility, poverty, and humanitarian crises.

The Nutrition rankings suggest that poor nutritional outcomes are often symptoms of broader systemic challenges rather than food-related issues alone.

The Food Insecurity Belt

The largest concentration of low-performing Nutrition regions stretches across parts of the Sahel and Central Africa. Chad, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Niger, Somalia, Sudan, Mali, and Burkina Faso all appear among the world's weakest-performing regions.

Although each faces unique challenges, these regions share several common characteristics, including chronic food insecurity, weak infrastructure, limited healthcare

capacity, and high levels of poverty. In many cases, nutritional challenges are compounded by environmental pressures, population growth, and limited access to basic services.

The concentration of low scores across this belt highlights how nutritional outcomes are shaped by broader development conditions rather than food availability alone.

Conflict and Humanitarian Crisis Regions

A second cluster emerges among regions affected by prolonged conflict and humanitarian emergencies. Yemen, Afghanistan, Libya, and Palestine under post-October 2023 wartime conditions all rank among the world's lowest performers.

Conflict disrupts agricultural production, damages supply chains, limits access to food markets, and places enormous pressure on public services. Even regions that previously achieved moderate nutritional outcomes can experience rapid deterioration when conflict becomes prolonged.

The presence of multiple conflict-affected regions among the lowest performers illustrates how quickly nutritional systems can weaken when stability is lost.

Fragile States and Weak Food Systems

Several low-performing regions are characterized not only by poverty or conflict, but also by long-term institutional fragility. Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Republic of the Congo all appear among the weakest performers.

These regions often face persistent challenges in governance, infrastructure, healthcare delivery, and economic development. As a result, food systems remain vulnerable to disruption and struggle to provide consistent nutritional outcomes across the population.

The rankings suggest that nutritional performance is closely linked to the strength and resilience of the institutions that support food production, distribution, and public health.

Nutrition Beyond Food

One of the clearest findings from the Nutrition rankings is that poor nutritional outcomes rarely stem from food shortages alone. The lowest-performing regions consistently face multiple overlapping challenges, including instability, weak governance, inadequate healthcare systems, economic hardship, and environmental pressures.

This pattern reinforces an important lesson: nutrition is ultimately a systems issue. While food availability remains essential, sustainable improvement depends on strengthening the broader conditions that support

human wellbeing.

A Reflection of Broader System Failure

The Nutrition Gap demonstrates that severe nutritional deficits are often indicators of deeper structural weaknesses. Regions that struggle most with nutrition frequently face challenges across multiple pillars simultaneously, creating reinforcing cycles that are difficult to break.

The findings suggest that improving nutritional outcomes requires more than food-focused interventions alone. Long-term progress depends on building stable institutions, resilient food systems, effective healthcare, and the broader foundations that allow populations to thrive.

Lessons from the Nutrition Rankings

The Nutrition rankings reveal a pillar that is generally stronger than many other dimensions of human flourishing, yet still characterized by substantial differences between regions. While nutritional excellence can be found across multiple continents and development models, the world's lowest-performing regions continue to face persistent challenges linked to instability, poverty, and weak institutions.

Several important lessons emerge from the global Nutrition landscape.

Lesson 1: Strong Nutrition Is Cultural as Much as Economic

One of the most striking findings from the rankings is that nutritional excellence cannot be explained by wealth alone. While many affluent regions perform well, the highest-performing regions are distinguished by strong food cultures, long-standing dietary traditions, and social norms that support healthy eating.

The success of regions such as Japan, Italy, and San Marino suggests that culture plays an important role in shaping nutritional outcomes. Economic development may improve access to food, but cultural habits often influence the quality of that food and how it is consumed.

Lesson 2: Food Security Alone Does Not Guarantee Nutritional Excellence

Access to sufficient food remains a critical foundation of nutrition, but the rankings demonstrate that food security alone is not enough. Several wealthy and food-secure regions achieve only moderate Nutrition scores, while others significantly outperform expectations.

This finding suggests that nutritional outcomes depend on a broader combination of factors, including dietary quality, public health awareness, education, affordability,

and consumer behavior. Having enough food is essential, but achieving nutritional excellence requires much more.

Lesson 3: Nutrition Reflects Entire Systems

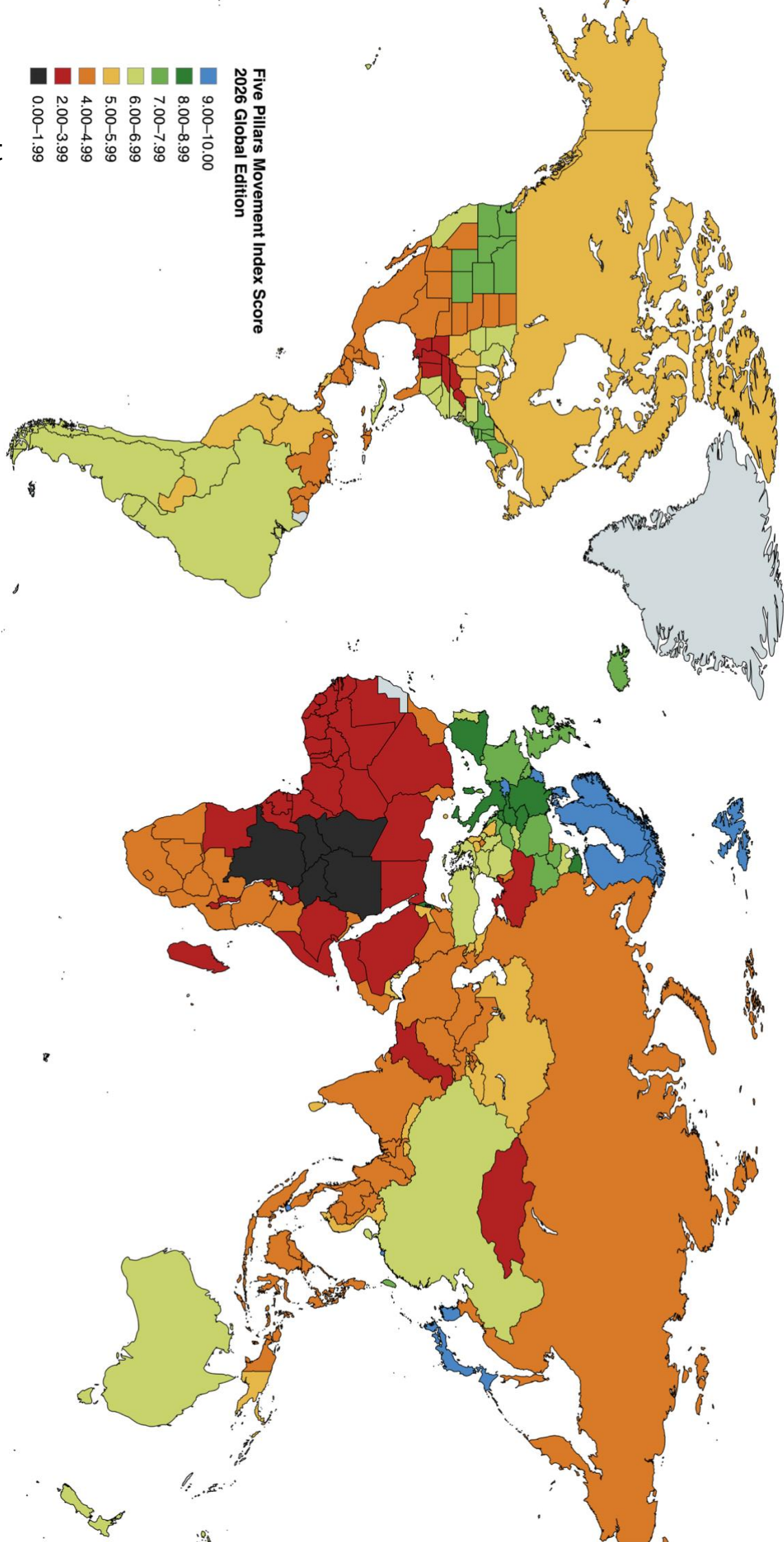
The strongest and weakest performers alike demonstrate that nutrition is ultimately a systems issue. Regions that perform well typically combine effective food systems, strong institutions, healthcare access, education, and cultural support for healthy eating. Conversely, regions with the weakest outcomes often face multiple overlapping challenges, including conflict, poverty, governance issues, and infrastructure deficits.

This broader perspective helps explain why nutritional progress can be difficult to achieve through isolated interventions alone. Sustainable improvement often depends on strengthening the wider systems that shape dietary outcomes.

Closing Reflection

The Nutrition rankings demonstrate that healthy populations are rarely created through food availability alone. Instead, nutritional excellence emerges when culture, education, healthcare, institutions, and food systems reinforce one another over time. While different regions may follow different pathways, the world's strongest performers show that lasting nutritional success is ultimately the product of strong and resilient systems.

6. Movement



Movement records a global average score of 5.2, placing it below Nutrition, Knowledge, and Environment. The median score of 4.8 further indicates that many regions struggle to achieve strong outcomes in physical activity, active transportation, and movement-supportive environments.

The highest Movement score in the Index is 10.0, achieved by Switzerland, while the lowest score is 1.6, recorded by several regions including Chad, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. This creates a global range of 8.4 points, reflecting substantial differences in how societies support and enable physical movement.

Unlike Nutrition, Movement exhibits a pronounced concentration of regions in the middle and lower score ranges. The largest score category globally is 4.0–4.9, suggesting that moderate movement outcomes are common, while truly elite performance remains relatively rare.

With a standard deviation of 1.94, Movement demonstrates considerable variation across regions. The results suggest that movement outcomes are strongly influenced by urban design, transportation systems, cultural norms, and daily lifestyle patterns. While some regions have successfully integrated movement into everyday life, many continue to face structural barriers that limit physical activity. Unlike several other pillars, movement often declines as daily life becomes more convenient, making it one of the few dimensions of flourishing that modern societies must actively design for.

Metric	Value
Average	5.2
Median	4.8
Highest	10.0
Lowest	1.6
Range	8.4
Standard Deviation	1.94

Where the World Performs Best

High performance in Movement is not evenly distributed across the globe. Instead, the rankings reveal a clear concentration of regions that have successfully integrated physical activity into everyday life through urban design, transportation systems, and cultural norms. The geography of movement excellence is dominated by two major clusters: Northern Europe and advanced East Asia.

Northern Europe’s Movement Advantage

The strongest concentration of high-performing regions

is found across Northern and Western Europe. Switzerland, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Austria, Slovenia, Liechtenstein, Germany, and Estonia all rank among the world’s leaders.

These regions share several characteristics, including walkable urban environments, extensive cycling infrastructure, high-quality public transportation networks, and strong recreational cultures. Rather than relying solely on individual exercise, movement is often embedded into daily routines through commuting, leisure activities, and urban design.

The Rise of Dense Urban Asia

A second major cluster emerges across East Asia. Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, the Pearl River Delta, and the Yangtze Delta Corridor all achieve exceptional Movement scores.

Despite their high population densities, these regions demonstrate that compact urban development can support active lifestyles when paired with effective transportation systems and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. In many cases, daily movement is integrated into normal routines rather than requiring dedicated exercise.

Infrastructure Shapes Outcomes

Unlike Nutrition, which is heavily influenced by food culture, Movement appears closely tied to the built environment. The highest-performing regions consistently provide residents with opportunities to walk, cycle, and use public transportation safely and efficiently.

The rankings suggest that movement-friendly environments are often created through decades of infrastructure investment and urban planning rather than short-term public health initiatives alone.

Excellence Follows Systems

The geography of movement excellence demonstrates that high performance is rarely accidental. Regions that consistently rank among the global leaders tend to combine supportive infrastructure, active transportation, strong public health systems, and cultural acceptance of daily movement. Together, these factors create environments where physical activity becomes a natural part of everyday life.

Elite Movement Performers

The Active Society Model

Among all 213 regions assessed in the Five Pillars Index, only one region achieves a perfect Movement score of 10.0: Switzerland. While many regions perform

exceptionally well, Switzerland stands alone at the summit of the Movement rankings.

Its position suggests that the conditions required for truly world-class movement outcomes are both rare and difficult to replicate.

Although Switzerland stands alone at the top of the rankings, several regions demonstrate remarkably similar characteristics. Finland, the Netherlands, Singapore, Hong Kong, and other leaders have developed environments in which movement is integrated into everyday life through transportation systems, urban design, and cultural norms.

Movement Embedded into Daily Life

One of the defining characteristics of Switzerland's success is the integration of movement into everyday routines. Physical activity is not confined to gyms or organized sports but is reinforced through commuting patterns, recreation, tourism, and daily mobility.

Walking, cycling, hiking, and public transportation all contribute to a system in which movement becomes a natural part of daily life.

Infrastructure as an Enabler

Elite movement outcomes rarely emerge without supportive infrastructure. Switzerland combines high-quality public transportation, walkable urban environments, and extensive access to outdoor recreation.

The result is a physical environment that encourages activity rather than discouraging it. This highlights an important lesson from the rankings: movement is often a design outcome as much as a behavioral one.

Beyond Exercise

Switzerland's performance suggests that movement should not be viewed solely through the lens of fitness. Regions that perform best tend to create environments where physical activity is integrated into normal life rather than requiring deliberate effort.

This distinction helps explain why many affluent regions achieve good movement outcomes while only a handful reach truly elite levels.

A Blueprint for Active Societies

Switzerland demonstrates that exceptional movement outcomes emerge when culture, infrastructure, geography, and public systems reinforce one another over long periods of time. Its success highlights the importance of designing societies where movement is built into everyday life rather than treated as a separate activity.

The Movement Gap

Movement deficits are often associated with low-income and fragile regions, but the rankings reveal a more complex picture. Unlike several other pillars, weak movement outcomes are not confined to the world's poorest regions. Instead, they emerge through a combination of conflict, inadequate infrastructure, urban design challenges, and increasingly sedentary lifestyles.

The Movement Gap highlights that physical activity is influenced not only by individual behavior, but also by the environments in which people live.

Infrastructure Deficit Regions

Many of the world's lowest-performing Movement regions are concentrated in fragile and low-capacity states, including Chad, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In these regions, limited transportation infrastructure, weak urban development, and restricted access to recreational spaces often reduce opportunities for regular physical activity.

Conflict and Instability

Conflict-affected regions such as Palestine under wartime conditions, Libya, and several fragile states also perform poorly in Movement.

Safety concerns, damaged infrastructure, displacement, and economic disruption can all reduce opportunities for active living and daily movement.

The Urban Inactivity Challenge

One of the most surprising findings in the Movement rankings is the presence of regions such as the Deep South, Egypt, Algeria, Nigeria, and parts of Siberia among the lowest performers.

Unlike many other pillars, movement deficits can emerge even where food, education, or economic development are not the primary constraints. Car dependency, inactive lifestyles, poor walkability, and limited active transportation infrastructure can all contribute to weak outcomes.

The Convenience Trap

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the Movement rankings is that weak performance is not confined to poor or fragile regions. Unlike Nutrition or Knowledge, movement deficits frequently emerge in societies that have successfully solved many other development challenges.

This pattern suggests that modern convenience may unintentionally reduce opportunities for physical activity. Cars replace walking, elevators replace stairs, digital

services reduce travel, and screen-based entertainment increasingly competes with active recreation. As societies become more efficient, movement is often removed from daily routines.

The result is a paradox. Many regions have successfully improved living standards while simultaneously creating environments that require less physical activity than ever before.

This helps explain why movement deficits appear across a diverse range of regions. The challenge is not simply a lack of infrastructure or economic development, but the gradual disappearance of movement from everyday life.

Movement as a Design Outcome

The Movement rankings suggest that physical activity is often shaped by systems rather than personal choice alone. Transportation networks, urban planning, safety, recreation, and daily routines all influence movement outcomes.

Regions that perform poorly frequently lack the environments necessary to support active living.

A Challenge Hidden in Plain Sight

The Movement Gap demonstrates that inactivity is not solely a public health challenge. It is also an infrastructure, planning, and systems challenge. Improving movement outcomes requires creating environments where physical activity becomes a natural part of daily life rather than an optional activity.

Archetype	Example Regions
Conflict & Fragility	Chad, South Sudan
Infrastructure Deficit	DRC, Sudan
Car Dependency	Deep South (USA)
Climate / Geography	Siberia
Urban Inactivity	Egypt

Lessons from the Movement Rankings

The Movement rankings reveal a pillar that remains underdeveloped across much of the world. While several regions achieve exceptional outcomes, many struggle to integrate physical activity into everyday life. The results suggest that movement is influenced less by individual motivation than by the environments and systems that shape daily behavior.

Several important lessons emerge from the global Movement landscape.

Lesson 1: Movement Is Largely a Design Outcome

The highest-performing regions consistently combine

walkable communities, active transportation systems, accessible public spaces, and movement-supportive infrastructure. In these environments, physical activity is often integrated into daily life rather than requiring deliberate effort.

This finding suggests that movement outcomes are heavily influenced by how societies are designed. People tend to move more when their environments make movement convenient, safe, and practical.

Lesson 2: Density Is Not the Enemy of Activity

Several of the world's strongest performers—including Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea—are among the most densely populated regions in the Index.

Their success challenges the assumption that density necessarily reduces movement. Instead, the rankings suggest that compact urban environments can support highly active lifestyles when paired with effective transportation systems and pedestrian-friendly design.

Lesson 3: Modern Lifestyles Naturally Reduce Movement

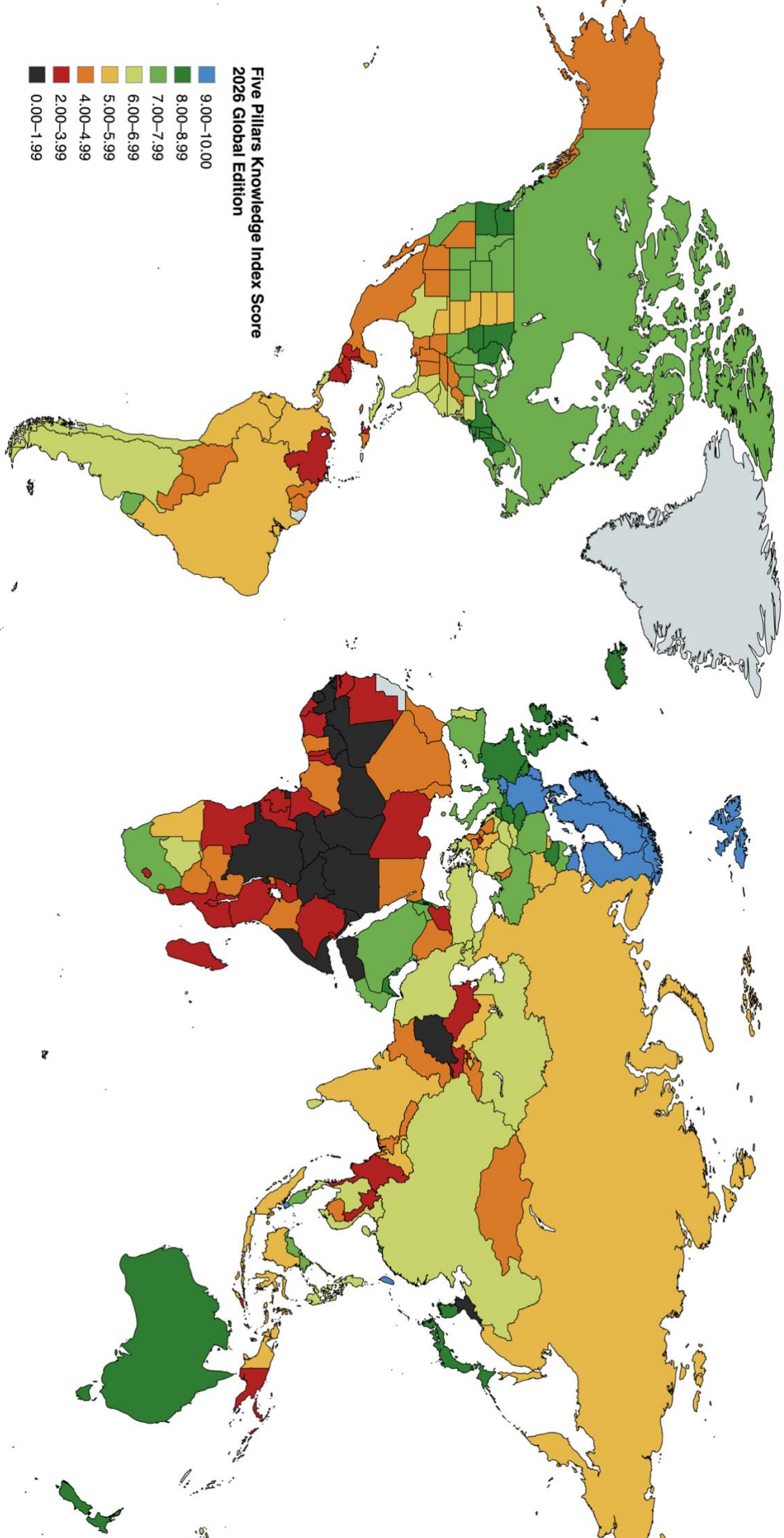
The rankings reveal that movement deficits are not limited to low-income or fragile regions. Several middle- and high-income regions also perform poorly, highlighting the role of sedentary lifestyles, car dependency, and inactive daily routines.

This suggests that movement requires active support. Without systems that encourage physical activity, inactivity often becomes the default outcome.

Closing Reflection

The Movement rankings demonstrate that active societies are rarely created by chance. The world's strongest performers show that movement flourishes when infrastructure, transportation, urban design, and culture work together to make physical activity a natural part of everyday life.

7. Knowledge



Knowledge records a global average score of 5.4 and a median score of 5.6, placing it near the middle of the five pillars. However, beneath these averages lies the largest disparity of any pillar in the Index.

The highest Knowledge score is 10.0, achieved by multiple regions including Finland, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands. At the opposite extreme, several regions record a score of 0.0, including Chad, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Niger. The resulting 10-point range represents the largest performance gap observed anywhere in the Index.

Knowledge also records the highest standard deviation of all five pillars at 2.47, confirming its status as the most unequal pillar globally. While many advanced economies achieve world-class educational and knowledge outcomes, numerous regions continue to face severe challenges in educational attainment, institutional capacity, information access, and human capital development.

The distribution of scores reveals a deeply divided world. High-performing regions cluster heavily in Europe and parts of Asia, while many of the lowest-performing regions are concentrated in fragile and low-income states. As a result, Knowledge emerges as one of the clearest differentiators between high- and low-performing regions throughout the Index.

Metric	Value
Average	5.4
Median	5.6
Highest	10.0
Lowest	0.0
Range	10.0
Standard Deviation	2.47

Where the World Performs Best

Knowledge excellence is more geographically concentrated than any other pillar in the Five Pillars Index. While high-performing regions exist across several continents, the rankings are overwhelmingly dominated by Northern and Western Europe, with a secondary cluster emerging in advanced Asian economies.

Northern Europe's Knowledge Core

The most powerful concentration of Knowledge performance is found across Northern and Western Europe. Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Estonia, Germany, Ireland, Iceland, Austria, Lithuania, and the United Kingdom all rank among the world's leaders.

This cluster reflects decades of investment in education, research, innovation, institutional quality, and human

capital development. Collectively, these regions form the strongest knowledge ecosystem observed anywhere in the Index.

Asia's Advanced Knowledge Economies

A second cluster emerges in East Asia. Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Macau, Japan, and the Yangtze Delta Corridor all achieve world-class scores.

These regions demonstrate how rapid economic development can be accompanied by substantial investments in education, technology, and knowledge-intensive industries. Although geographically smaller than the European cluster, their performance places them among the world's leading knowledge economies.

The Power of Institutions

Among all five pillars, Knowledge appears most strongly linked to institutional development. The highest-performing regions consistently combine strong educational systems, stable governance, advanced research capacity, and widespread access to information.

This relationship helps explain why Knowledge also records the largest global disparities. Regions that successfully build these systems often achieve exceptional outcomes, while those that struggle to develop them remain significantly behind.

Excellence Is Highly Concentrated

Unlike Environment or Nutrition, where high performance appears across a relatively broad range of regions, Knowledge excellence remains concentrated within a small number of advanced economies. This concentration highlights the importance of long-term investments in human capital and helps explain why Knowledge emerges as one of the defining characteristics of the world's highest-performing regions.

Elite Knowledge Performers

Knowledge is unique among the five pillars in that eight regions achieve the maximum score of 10.0: Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, and Switzerland.

Together, these regions represent the strongest concentration of knowledge performance observed anywhere in the Index and form the core of the world's leading knowledge ecosystem.

Human Capital at Scale

Despite differences in size and geography, all elite performers place exceptional emphasis on human capital development. Strong educational systems, high

literacy, advanced skills, and widespread access to information form the foundation of their success.

The rankings suggest that knowledge excellence is not achieved through isolated educational reforms but through sustained investment across entire generations.

Institutions Matter

A second shared characteristic is institutional strength. High-performing regions consistently demonstrate stable governance, strong public administration, effective educational systems, and robust research environments.

These institutions create the conditions necessary for knowledge generation, dissemination, and application throughout society.

Innovation Ecosystems

Many elite performers also function as major innovation hubs. Universities, research centers, technology sectors, and highly skilled workforces reinforce one another, creating self-sustaining knowledge ecosystems.

The result is a virtuous cycle in which knowledge production supports economic development, which in turn enables further investment in education and research.

The World's Knowledge Core

The elite Knowledge performers demonstrate that exceptional educational outcomes alone are insufficient. The highest levels of performance emerge when education, institutions, innovation, and human capital development operate as an integrated system. Together, these regions form the global core of knowledge excellence.

The Knowledge Gap

Knowledge records the largest disparities of any pillar in the Five Pillars Index. While several regions achieve perfect scores, others record values near zero. The resulting divide highlights one of the most significant structural inequalities observed anywhere in the Index.

The Knowledge Gap reveals where educational opportunity, institutional capacity, and human capital development remain most constrained.

The Educational Exclusion Belt

The lowest Knowledge scores are heavily concentrated across parts of the Sahel and Central Africa. Chad, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Niger, Somalia, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo all rank among the weakest performers.

These regions face persistent challenges in literacy, educational attainment, school access, and institutional capacity.

Conflict and Lost Generations

Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, and Palestine under wartime conditions illustrate how conflict can severely disrupt knowledge systems.

Education, research, and human capital development require stability and continuity. Prolonged conflict often interrupts these processes, creating generational setbacks that can persist long after fighting ends.

Persistent Institutional Weakness

Several low-performing regions have experienced decades of institutional fragility. Liberia, Guinea, Mali, Burundi, Equatorial Guinea, and Madagascar demonstrate how knowledge deficits can become self-reinforcing over time.

Weak institutions often limit educational investment, reduce opportunities for advancement, and constrain long-term human capital formation.

The World's Largest Development Divide

Knowledge exhibits the highest standard deviation of any pillar in the Index. No other pillar demonstrates such a large gap between global leaders and laggards.

This finding suggests that educational opportunity and knowledge development remain among the most unevenly distributed resources in the world.

Pillar	Std Dev
Knowledge	2.47
Movement	1.94
Nutrition	1.9
Environment	1.8
Mindset	1.56

A Defining Global Challenge

The Knowledge Gap may represent the most significant structural divide identified in the Five Pillars Index. Closing this gap would not only improve educational outcomes, but could also strengthen performance across multiple other pillars, including Nutrition, Mindset, and Environment.

Lessons from the Knowledge Rankings

The Knowledge rankings reveal the largest disparities observed anywhere in the Five Pillars Index. While some regions achieve world-class outcomes, others remain

near the bottom of the scale, creating a divide that exceeds any other pillar.

Several important lessons emerge from the global Knowledge landscape.

Lesson 1: Knowledge Is the World's Largest Development Divide

Knowledge records both the largest performance range and the highest standard deviation of any pillar in the Index. The gap between the strongest and weakest regions is greater than that observed in Nutrition, Movement, Mindset, or Environment.

This finding highlights the extent to which educational opportunity, institutional capacity, and human capital remain unevenly distributed across the world.

Lesson 2: Human Capital Compounds Over Generations

The world's strongest performers demonstrate that knowledge excellence is rarely achieved quickly. High-performing regions typically benefit from decades of investment in education, research, innovation, and institutional development.

Knowledge appears to operate as a compounding asset. Regions that build strong human capital systems often reinforce their advantage over time, while those that struggle can face persistent barriers to progress.

Lesson 3: Knowledge Supports Every Other Pillar

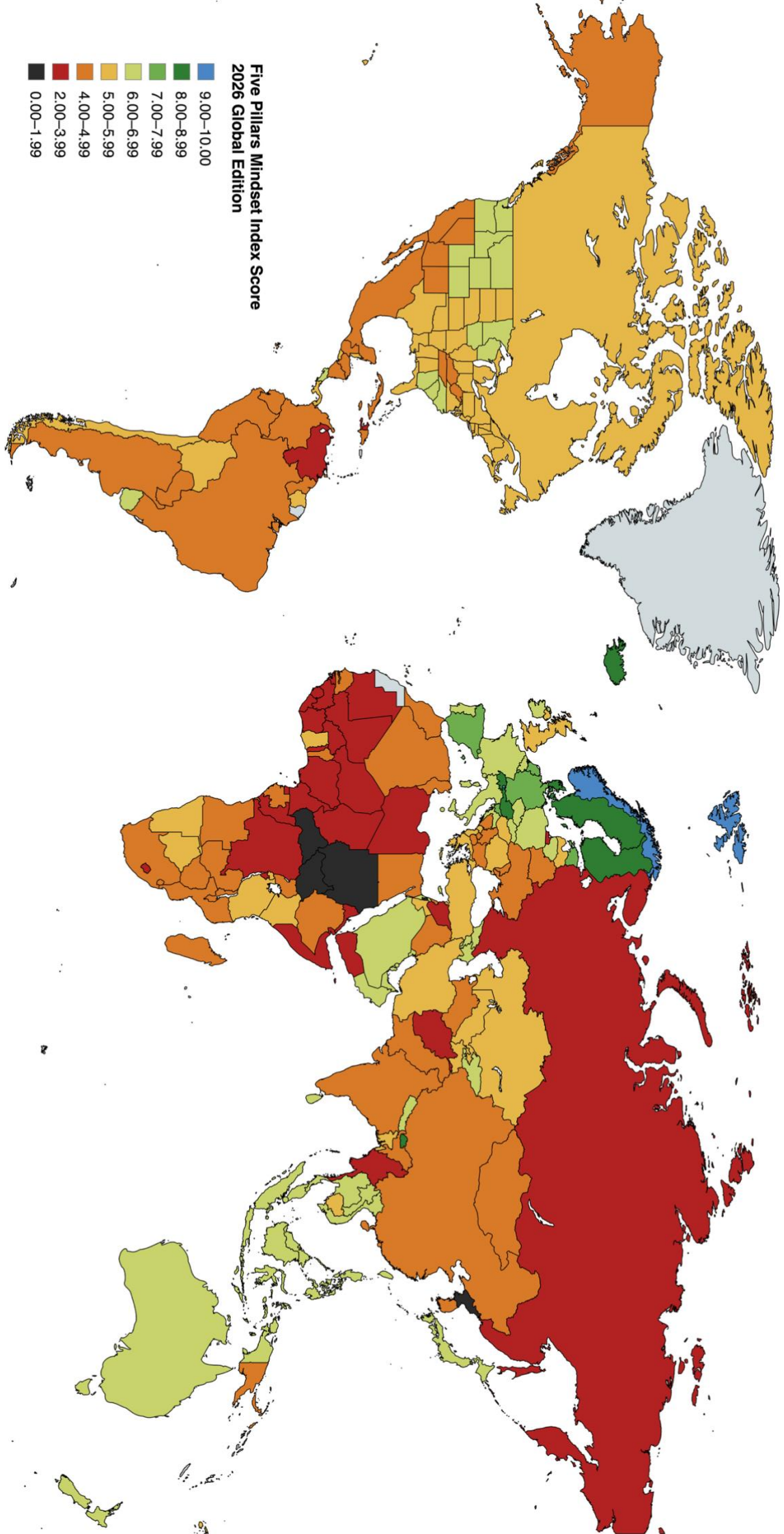
The rankings suggest that Knowledge functions as a foundational pillar. Education, information access, and institutional capacity influence outcomes across Nutrition, Movement, Mindset, and Environment.

Regions that perform strongly in Knowledge frequently perform well across multiple dimensions of human flourishing, highlighting its role as a force multiplier within the broader system.

Closing Reflection

The Knowledge rankings demonstrate that educational and institutional development remain among the most powerful drivers of long-term progress. Few investments appear to generate broader benefits across society than those that strengthen human capital and knowledge systems.

8. Mindset



Mindset records a global average score of 5.1, making it the lowest-scoring pillar among the five. The median score of 5.2 indicates that most regions cluster relatively close to the global average, with fewer extreme outliers than observed in Knowledge or Nutrition.

The highest Mindset score in the Index is 9.2, achieved by Liechtenstein and Norway, while the lowest score is 1.6, recorded by several conflict-affected and fragile regions. This creates a global range of 7.6 points, smaller than that of most other pillars.

Mindset also records the lowest standard deviation of any pillar at 1.56, suggesting that differences between regions are less pronounced than in other domains. While some regions clearly outperform others, the gap between global leaders and laggards is narrower than in Knowledge, Nutrition, or Movement.

These findings suggest that mindset-related factors—including wellbeing, social trust, life satisfaction, resilience, and psychological health—may be more evenly distributed across the world than many structural indicators. At the same time, substantial opportunities remain for improvement, as relatively few regions achieve truly exceptional scores.

Metric	Value
Average	5.1
Median	5.2
Highest	9.2
Lowest	1.6
Range	7.6
Standard Deviation	1.56

Where the World Performs Best

The geography of Mindset differs significantly from the other pillars. While Northern Europe remains strongly represented among the highest-performing regions, excellence is distributed more broadly across different cultures, economic systems, and geographic regions. This diversity suggests that psychological wellbeing, life satisfaction, resilience, and social trust are influenced by a wider range of factors than many structural indicators.

Northern Europe's Wellbeing Advantage

Northern Europe forms the strongest concentration of high-performing Mindset regions. Liechtenstein, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, Iceland, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg all rank among the global leaders.

These regions are frequently characterized by high levels of social trust, institutional stability, personal security, and quality of life. Together, these conditions appear to

create strong foundations for positive wellbeing outcomes.

A More Diverse Global Picture

Unlike Knowledge or Movement, Mindset excellence extends well beyond Europe. Bhutan, Seychelles, Mauritius, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, and the Philippines all appear among the highest-performing regions.

The diversity of this group suggests that strong wellbeing outcomes can emerge under very different social, cultural, and economic circumstances. Wealth alone does not appear sufficient to explain performance.

Beyond Economics

One of the most notable findings in the Mindset rankings is the limited overlap between economic success and psychological wellbeing. Several regions that perform exceptionally well in economic and knowledge-related measures do not achieve similarly dominant Mindset scores, while some less affluent regions perform surprisingly well.

This suggests that wellbeing, resilience, and life satisfaction may depend on factors that extend beyond material prosperity alone.

Excellence Across Many Contexts

The geography of Mindset excellence demonstrates that positive wellbeing outcomes can emerge in a variety of settings. While Northern Europe remains the dominant cluster, the broader distribution of top-performing regions indicates that there is no single pathway to achieving strong Mindset outcomes.

Elite Mindset Performers

Only two regions achieve the highest Mindset score in the Index: Liechtenstein and Norway. Both record a score of 9.2, placing them at the forefront of global performance in wellbeing, resilience, life satisfaction, and psychological health.

Their success provides insight into the conditions associated with exceptional mindset outcomes.

High Trust Societies

One of the most striking characteristics shared by both regions is exceptionally high levels of social trust. Trust in institutions, communities, and fellow citizens creates a foundation that supports social cohesion and psychological wellbeing.

The rankings suggest that trust functions as a powerful but often overlooked component of human flourishing.

Stability and Security

Both regions benefit from long-term political stability, economic security, and strong social support systems. These conditions reduce many of the chronic stressors that negatively affect wellbeing.

Although wealth contributes to this environment, the rankings indicate that prosperity alone does not fully explain elite performance.

Beyond Material Prosperity

Many affluent regions perform well in Mindset, yet relatively few achieve elite scores. This suggests that psychological wellbeing depends on factors extending beyond economic indicators.

Community, social cohesion, trust, purpose, and quality of life appear to play equally important roles.

Flourishing as a System

Liechtenstein and Norway demonstrate that strong mindset outcomes emerge from systems that support both material and psychological wellbeing. Their success highlights the importance of creating societies that nurture not only prosperity, but also resilience, belonging, and quality of life.

The Mindset Gap

Mindset deficits reveal the human consequences of instability, insecurity, conflict, and social disruption. Unlike many structural indicators, Mindset reflects how people experience the conditions around them, making it one of the most human-centered pillars in the Index.

The lowest-performing regions demonstrate how psychological wellbeing is closely connected to broader societal conditions.

Conflict and Psychological Stress

Several of the weakest-performing regions are affected by ongoing or recent conflict, including Palestine under wartime conditions, Syria, Yemen, and Libya.

Conflict undermines personal security, social cohesion, and long-term wellbeing, creating conditions that are often reflected in lower Mindset outcomes.

Fragility and Uncertainty

The Central African Republic, South Sudan, Chad, Sudan, and several other fragile states also rank among the lowest performers.

Persistent instability, weak institutions, economic insecurity, and limited public services can create environments that make long-term wellbeing difficult to sustain.

Isolation and Social Breakdown

North Korea and several highly isolated or institutionally constrained regions highlight another pathway to poor Mindset outcomes.

While the underlying causes differ from conflict-affected regions, limited freedom, weak social trust, and restricted opportunities may contribute to lower wellbeing.

Wellbeing Beyond Economics

One of the most important findings from the Mindset rankings is that wellbeing cannot be fully explained by income alone.

Security, trust, belonging, resilience, and social cohesion appear to play critical roles in shaping outcomes across both high- and low-performing regions.

The Human Dimension of Flourishing

The Mindset Gap demonstrates that human flourishing depends on more than material conditions. Regions that struggle most often face challenges that affect not only physical wellbeing, but also psychological wellbeing and quality of life.

Lessons from the Mindset Rankings

The Mindset rankings provide a unique perspective on human flourishing. Unlike many structural indicators, Mindset captures how people experience their lives, communities, and societies. The results reveal that wellbeing depends on more than economic prosperity alone.

Several important lessons emerge from the global Mindset landscape.

Lesson 1: Wealth Alone Does Not Create Wellbeing

Although many affluent regions perform well in Mindset, economic success alone does not guarantee exceptional outcomes. Several wealthy regions achieve only moderate scores, while some less affluent regions perform surprisingly well.

This finding suggests that wellbeing depends on factors extending beyond material prosperity.

Lesson 2: Trust Matters

Many of the highest-performing Mindset regions are characterized by strong social trust, institutional confidence, and community cohesion.

Trust appears to function as a powerful social asset, supporting resilience, stability, and life satisfaction. Regions with higher trust often achieve stronger wellbeing outcomes even when facing external challenges.

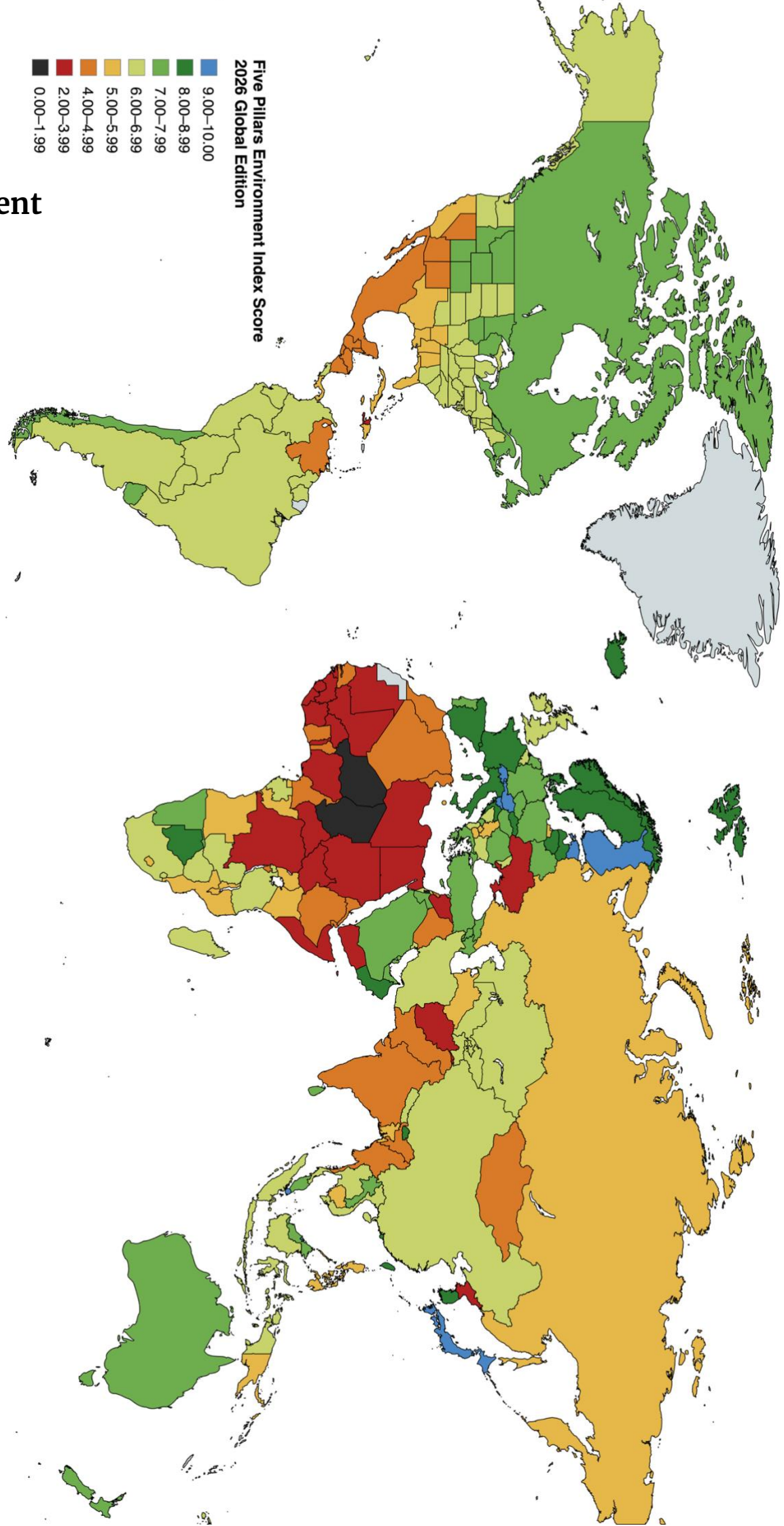
Lesson 3: Human Flourishing Has a Psychological Dimension

The rankings demonstrate that human flourishing cannot be fully understood through economic or physical indicators alone. Security, belonging, purpose, optimism, and social connection all contribute to overall wellbeing.

This broader perspective highlights the importance of considering psychological and social outcomes alongside more traditional development measures.

Closing Reflection

The Mindset rankings remind us that successful societies are not defined solely by what they produce, but also by how people experience life within them. Flourishing requires both material foundations and psychological wellbeing.



9. Environment

Environment records a global average score of 6.1 and a median score of 6.4, making it the strongest-performing pillar in the 2026 Five Pillars Index. Across much of the world, environmental conditions outperform outcomes in Nutrition, Movement, Knowledge, and Mindset.

The highest Environment score is 9.6, achieved by Singapore and Finland, while the lowest score is 1.2, recorded by Chad and Palestine under post-October 2023 wartime conditions. This produces a global range of 8.4 points.

Compared to the other pillars, Environment exhibits a relatively favorable distribution. A large proportion of regions score above 6.0, and relatively few regions occupy the lowest scoring categories. This suggests that many regions benefit from at least moderate environmental conditions, even when performance in other pillars remains limited.

The pillar’s standard deviation of 1.80 indicates meaningful variation between regions, though less than observed in Knowledge and Movement. Overall, the results highlight the important role environmental quality plays in supporting human flourishing while also demonstrating that strong environmental performance alone does not guarantee high overall outcomes.

Metric	Value
Average	6.1
Median	6.4
Highest	9.6
Lowest	1.2
Range	8.4
Standard Deviation	1.80

Where the World Performs Best

Environmental excellence is more geographically diverse than any other pillar in the Five Pillars Index. Unlike Knowledge, which is heavily concentrated in a small number of advanced economies, or Movement, which clusters around specific urban models, high-performing Environment regions can be found across multiple continents, climates, and development pathways.

The rankings suggest that strong environmental outcomes are not limited to a single geographic model. Instead, they emerge through a combination of environmental stewardship, resource management, urban planning, population density, and natural capital.

Europe’s Environmental Leadership

Europe contains the largest concentration of high-performing Environment regions. Finland, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia, Estonia, Norway, Sweden,

Denmark, Iceland, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, and Croatia all achieve scores well above the global average.

Despite differences in geography and economic structure, these regions share a common commitment to environmental management, conservation, public infrastructure, and long-term sustainability. The result is a broad environmental excellence corridor stretching across much of Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe.

East Asia’s High-Performance Urban Systems

A second major cluster emerges in East Asia. Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Pearl River Delta all rank among the world’s leading regions.

Many of these regions face significant challenges related to urban density and limited land availability. Their success demonstrates that strong environmental outcomes are achievable even in highly urbanized environments when supported by effective planning, infrastructure investment, pollution management, and resource efficiency.

Singapore’s position as a joint global leader further highlights the role of long-term environmental governance in shaping outcomes.

The Small-State and Island Advantage

One of the most distinctive features of the Environment rankings is the strong performance of smaller states and island regions. Seychelles, Mauritius, Brunei, Bhutan, San Marino, and Iceland all appear among the global leaders despite substantial differences in geography and culture.

Many of these regions benefit from abundant natural capital, lower population pressures, or environmental conditions that are easier to manage at smaller scales. Their presence suggests that size can sometimes provide advantages when environmental protection and resource management are effectively prioritized.

Environmental Excellence Beyond Wealth

Unlike Knowledge, where performance closely follows institutional and educational development, Environment displays a broader range of successful pathways. High-performing regions include wealthy financial centers, advanced industrial economies, island nations, and resource-rich states.

The appearance of regions such as Botswana, Bhutan, Seychelles, and Mauritius alongside Singapore, Switzerland, and Japan demonstrates that environmental success can emerge under very different economic circumstances.

This diversity suggests that environmental outcomes depend not only on wealth, but also on governance choices, population pressures, geography, and long-term

stewardship of natural resources.

Excellence Across Multiple Continents

The geography of environmental excellence differs markedly from the other pillars. High-performing regions are distributed across Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Oceania, creating the broadest global footprint of any pillar in the Index.

This wide distribution reinforces an important conclusion: while environmental challenges vary substantially between regions, strong outcomes are achievable under a wide variety of conditions. Environmental excellence is not confined to a single region of the world, but instead reflects the ability of societies to manage and protect the systems on which long-term human flourishing depends.

Elite Environment Performers

Only two regions achieve the highest Environment score in the Index: Singapore and Finland. Both record a score of 9.6, yet they arrive at this result through remarkably different pathways.

Singapore is one of the world's most densely populated urban environments, while Finland is characterized by vast natural landscapes and low population density. Their shared success demonstrates that environmental excellence can emerge under very different conditions.

Two Different Models

At first glance, Singapore and Finland appear to represent opposite ends of the environmental spectrum. One is a compact city-state; the other is a sparsely populated Nordic nation.

Yet both achieve world-leading outcomes, suggesting that environmental success depends less on geography itself and more on how environmental systems are managed.

Long-Term Stewardship

A defining characteristic shared by both regions is a commitment to long-term environmental management. Whether through conservation, resource efficiency, pollution control, or sustainable planning, both demonstrate a strategic approach to protecting environmental quality.

This reinforces the importance of governance and stewardship in shaping environmental outcomes.

Quality Over Circumstance

The rankings suggest that environmental outcomes are not predetermined by climate, geography, or natural resource abundance. Instead, successful regions actively manage the conditions under their control.

Singapore's performance demonstrates what can be achieved through planning and efficiency, while Finland illustrates the value of conservation and environmental protection.

Multiple Roads to Environmental Leadership

The world's leading Environment performers show that there is no single blueprint for environmental excellence. Different regions can achieve similar outcomes through very different approaches, provided they maintain a long-term commitment to protecting and managing the systems on which human flourishing depends.

The Environment Gap

Environmental underperformance emerges through multiple pathways. Unlike Nutrition or Knowledge, where low scores are often strongly linked to poverty or limited institutional capacity, environmental deficits can develop in regions facing very different circumstances.

The lowest-performing regions reveal the combined effects of conflict, weak governance, environmental vulnerability, and limited resilience. Together, these factors create environments where long-term environmental quality becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

Conflict and Environmental Degradation

One of the most striking patterns in the Environment rankings is the presence of conflict-affected regions among the world's weakest performers. Palestine under post-October 2023 wartime conditions records the lowest Environment score in the Index, while Ukraine under post-2022 wartime conditions also appears among the bottom-performing regions.

Conflict places extraordinary pressure on environmental systems. Infrastructure damage, resource disruption, pollution, displacement, and the diversion of public resources away from environmental management can all contribute to rapid deterioration.

The appearance of these regions highlights how quickly environmental performance can decline when stability is lost.

Environmental Fragility in Low-Capacity States

A second major cluster emerges across parts of the Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa. Chad, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Somalia, Sudan, and several neighboring regions all rank among the weakest performers.

These regions often face overlapping challenges including environmental degradation, water stress, resource pressures, limited infrastructure, and high exposure to climate-related risks. Combined with constrained institutional capacity, these pressures can make environmental management particularly difficult.

Governance and Stewardship Deficits

Several low-performing regions illustrate the importance of environmental governance. Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Togo, and other regions in the lower rankings demonstrate how environmental outcomes are influenced by the ability of institutions to manage natural resources, enforce regulations, and support long-term stewardship.

The rankings suggest that environmental performance depends not only on natural conditions, but also on the systems responsible for protecting them.

Vulnerability and Limited Resilience

Many of the lowest-performing regions share another characteristic: limited resilience to environmental shocks. Whether facing drought, resource scarcity, conflict, or economic instability, these regions often have fewer resources available to adapt and respond effectively.

As a result, environmental challenges can become self-reinforcing, further weakening development outcomes and increasing long-term vulnerability.

Environment Is Not Destiny

One of the most important findings from the Environment rankings is that geography alone does not determine environmental outcomes. Regions facing similar climatic or geographic conditions often achieve very different results.

The contrast between low-performing fragile states and high-performing environmental leaders demonstrates the importance of governance, stewardship, planning, and long-term investment. Environmental success is not solely a function of natural endowment; it is also a reflection of how effectively societies manage and protect the systems on which they depend.

The Fragility of Environmental Systems

The Environment Gap highlights an important reality: environmental performance is highly dependent on stability and stewardship. While strong outcomes can take decades to build, they can deteriorate rapidly when institutions weaken, conflict emerges, or environmental pressures exceed a region's capacity to respond.

The findings suggest that environmental resilience should be viewed not only as an ecological objective, but also as a foundational component of long-term human flourishing.

Lessons from the Environment Rankings

The Environment rankings reveal a pillar that is both globally important and surprisingly diverse. High-performing regions emerge across multiple continents

and development models, while environmental deficits appear through a variety of pathways.

Several important lessons emerge from the global Environment landscape.

Lesson 1: Environmental Success Has Multiple Pathways

The world's strongest performers include Nordic countries, dense East Asian city-states, island nations, and resource-rich regions. Their diversity demonstrates that there is no single model for achieving strong environmental outcomes.

Different societies can reach similar results through different combinations of stewardship, planning, conservation, and environmental management.

Lesson 2: Stewardship Matters More Than Geography

Regions facing similar geographic conditions often achieve very different results. The rankings suggest that governance, planning, and environmental management frequently play a larger role than geography alone.

Environmental outcomes are influenced not only by natural conditions, but also by how effectively societies manage and protect them.

Lesson 3: Environmental Systems Are Fragile

The presence of conflict-affected regions among the lowest performers demonstrates how quickly environmental conditions can deteriorate when stability is lost.

While strong environmental systems often take decades to build, they can be weakened rapidly by conflict, institutional breakdown, or unmanaged pressures. This highlights the importance of resilience alongside environmental quality itself.

Closing Reflection

The Environment rankings demonstrate that environmental quality is not a fixed asset but an ongoing responsibility. The world's strongest performers show that long-term stewardship, resilience, and environmental management are essential foundations of human flourishing.

10. Archetypes of Human Flourishing

Rankings provide a useful way of comparing regions, but they do not always capture the deeper similarities that exist between them. Two regions may achieve similar scores through very different combinations of strengths and weaknesses, while regions separated by geography, culture, and history may ultimately share remarkably similar development characteristics.

To better understand these recurring patterns, the Five Pillars Index groups regions into a series of archetypes. Rather than focusing on rank or geographic location, these archetypes identify common models of performance that appear throughout the dataset.

The purpose of this chapter is not to determine which archetype is superior. Instead, it seeks to illustrate the diverse pathways through which regions experience success, resilience, stagnation, fragility, or recovery. Some archetypes represent highly balanced systems, while others demonstrate the effects of resource dependence, institutional strength, rapid development, or prolonged instability.

Together, these archetypes provide a complementary perspective to the rankings. They highlight that human flourishing is not shaped by a single formula, but by a variety of recurring patterns that emerge across different societies and regions.

Flourishing Archetypes	Transitional Archetypes	Vulnerability Archetypes
Balanced Leaders	Stable Middle Performers	Fragile Systems
High-Pressure High Performers	Emerging Performers	Conflict-Affected Regions
Innovation Powerhouses	Resource-Rich Specialists	

Classification of recurring regional development models identified in the Five Pillars Index.

Archetype	Performance	Balance	Resilience
Balanced Leaders	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
High-Pressure High Performers	●●●●●	●●●●	●●●●
Innovation Powerhouses	●●●●	●●●	●●●●
Stable Middle Performers	●●●	●●●	●●●
Emerging Performers	●●●	●●●○	●●●
Resource-Rich Specialists	●●●●	●●●○	●●●
Fragile Systems	●	●	●
Conflict-Affected Regions	●	●	○

Archetype	Representative
Balanced Leaders	Switzerland
High-Pressure High Performers	Singapore
Innovation Powerhouses	Northeast Corridor
Stable Middle Performers	Portugal
Emerging Performers	Malaysia
Resource-Rich Specialists	UAE
Fragile Systems	Chad
Conflict-Affected Regions	Palestine (Post-2023)

This table identifies the representative region used to illustrate each archetype throughout the chapter. Rather than selecting the highest-ranked region in every category, the chosen examples were selected because they most clearly embody the defining characteristics of their respective archetypes. Together, they provide a diverse cross-section of the recurring development patterns observed throughout the Five Pillars Index, ranging from balanced and high-performing systems to emerging, fragile, and conflict-affected regions.

1. Balanced Leaders

Balanced Leaders represent the highest-performing archetype in the Five Pillars Index. These regions achieve consistently strong outcomes across Nutrition, Movement, Knowledge, Mindset, and Environment while avoiding the major weaknesses that constrain many other regions.

Unlike regions that excel primarily in one or two dimensions, Balanced Leaders demonstrate a high degree of consistency across the entire framework. Their success is not driven by exceptional performance in a single pillar, but by their ability to maintain strong outcomes across all five pillars simultaneously.

Typical Characteristics

- Strong performance across all five pillars
- Few significant weaknesses or bottlenecks
- High institutional quality and stability
- Strong educational and human capital systems
- High levels of resilience and long-term sustainability

Representative Regions

Finland, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Austria, Liechtenstein.

These regions consistently occupy the highest positions in the overall rankings and frequently appear among the leaders in multiple pillar-specific rankings. While their cultures, histories, and policy approaches differ, they share a common characteristic: balance.

Core Lesson

The strongest-performing regions are rarely those that dominate a single pillar. Instead, they are the regions that

consistently avoid weakness across the system as a whole.

2. High-Pressure High Performers

High-Pressure High Performers achieve exceptional overall outcomes while operating in highly competitive, densely populated, and fast-paced environments. Despite facing significant demographic, spatial, and economic pressures, these regions consistently rank among the strongest performers in the Index.

Their success demonstrates that high levels of human flourishing can emerge even under conditions that might traditionally be viewed as constraints.

Typical Characteristics

- Exceptional overall performance
- High population density and urbanization
- Strong educational and human capital systems
- Highly competitive economies
- Strong performance despite significant societal pressures

Representative Regions

Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan.

These regions frequently achieve world-leading results in areas such as Knowledge, Nutrition, Movement, and Environment. At the same time, they often face challenges related to demographic decline, work intensity, housing pressure, limited space, and broader social demands associated with highly developed urban societies.

Unlike the Balanced Leaders, their path to success is not defined primarily by equilibrium, but by their ability to maintain strong outcomes under sustained pressure.

Core Lesson

Human flourishing does not require ideal conditions. With strong institutions, effective systems, and long-term investment, even highly constrained environments can achieve exceptional outcomes.

3. Innovation Powerhouses

Innovation Powerhouses are regions whose success is driven by exceptional concentrations of human capital, research capability, innovation ecosystems, and economic complexity. While they may not always achieve the balance of the world's highest-ranked regions, they consistently perform as global leaders in knowledge

creation, technological advancement, and institutional sophistication.

Their competitive advantage lies in their ability to generate, attract, and leverage talent at scale.

Typical Characteristics

- Exceptional Knowledge performance
- Strong universities and research institutions
- High levels of innovation and economic complexity
- Advanced technology and business ecosystems
- Strong institutional and human capital foundations

Representative Regions

Northeast Corridor, California, Pacific Northwest, United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Israel (Pre-Oct 2023 Baseline), Yangtze Delta Corridor, Pearl River Delta.

These regions frequently rank among the strongest performers in the Knowledge pillar and often serve as global centers of science, technology, finance, advanced manufacturing, higher education, and innovation. Their influence frequently extends well beyond their geographic boundaries, shaping global markets, research networks, and technological development.

Unlike the Balanced Leaders, however, Innovation Powerhouses may exhibit greater variation across other pillars. Some face challenges related to affordability, Movement, wellbeing, environmental pressures, or social cohesion that prevent them from achieving the same degree of overall balance.

Core Lesson

Knowledge, innovation, and human capital can serve as powerful engines of long-term development, but sustained flourishing ultimately depends on translating these strengths into broad-based performance across multiple dimensions.

4. Resource-Rich Specialists

Resource-Rich Specialists are regions that have leveraged significant natural resource wealth to achieve strong outcomes in several dimensions of human flourishing. These regions often benefit from high levels of income, modern infrastructure, and substantial public investment, allowing them to perform well in areas such as Nutrition, Knowledge, and aspects of Environment.

However, their overall performance is frequently shaped by a smaller number of persistent weaknesses that

prevent them from reaching the level of the world's most balanced performers.

Typical Characteristics

- High levels of income and resource wealth
- Strong infrastructure and public investment
- Strong Nutrition and Knowledge outcomes
- Relatively high overall performance
- One or more persistent weaknesses, often in Movement or Mindset

Representative Regions

Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Brunei, Oman.

These regions consistently achieve strong results across several pillars and frequently outperform global averages by a significant margin. Their resource base has enabled rapid development, modern infrastructure, and substantial investments in education, healthcare, and quality of life.

At the same time, many continue to face challenges associated with lifestyle-related health outcomes, physical activity levels, demographic structures, environmental constraints, or broader questions of long-term sustainability and balance.

Core Lesson

Wealth can accelerate development and strengthen multiple pillars, but financial resources alone do not guarantee balanced human flourishing.

5. Stable Middle Performers

Stable Middle Performers represent the largest and most common archetype in the Five Pillars Index. These regions achieve consistently moderate to strong outcomes across most dimensions of human flourishing, avoiding both the severe challenges associated with lower-performing regions and the exceptional strengths characteristic of the global leaders.

While they rarely dominate individual rankings, they also rarely experience major structural weaknesses.

Typical Characteristics

- Moderate to strong performance across most pillars
- Few critical weaknesses
- Stable institutions and development foundations

- Relatively balanced pillar profiles
- Limited presence among both top and bottom rankings

Representative Regions

Portugal, Czechia, Croatia, Poland, Uruguay, Chile, Slovakia, Latvia, Hungary.

These regions often occupy the broad middle of the rankings, demonstrating that human flourishing does not require world-leading performance in every dimension. Many possess strong institutional foundations, reasonable levels of wellbeing, solid educational outcomes, and relatively stable social systems, even if they lack the exceptional strengths seen among the world's highest-performing regions.

Unlike Emerging Performers, their trajectory is generally characterized by stability rather than rapid transformation. Unlike Balanced Leaders, they typically possess one or two areas that prevent them from reaching elite status.

Core Lesson

Strong and stable outcomes do not always require exceptional performance. Consistent competence across multiple dimensions can produce durable and resilient levels of human flourishing.

6. Emerging Performers

Emerging Performers are regions that have established many of the foundations associated with long-term human flourishing but have not yet reached the performance levels of the world's leading regions. While their overall scores may remain moderate, they often demonstrate encouraging strengths across multiple pillars and possess clear potential for future advancement.

These regions represent some of the most promising development stories in the Index.

Typical Characteristics

- Strong upward development trajectory
- Improving educational and institutional capacity
- Growing economic complexity
- Increasing pillar balance
- Significant potential for future progress

Representative Regions

Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Mauritius, Botswana, Seychelles, Costa Rica, Panama.

Many of these regions have achieved substantial progress over recent decades, improving outcomes across education, healthcare, infrastructure, environmental management, and broader quality of life indicators. While they may still face challenges in one or more pillars, their overall profiles often suggest continued room for advancement.

Unlike Stable Middle Performers, Emerging Performers are characterized less by equilibrium and more by momentum. Their defining feature is not where they currently rank, but the strength of the foundations they are building.

Core Lesson

Long-term flourishing is rarely achieved overnight. The world's strongest performers were once emerging systems themselves, demonstrating the importance of sustained investment in human capital, institutions, and development capacity.

7. Fragile Systems

Fragile Systems represent the most structurally vulnerable archetype in the Five Pillars Index. These regions experience persistent challenges across multiple dimensions of human flourishing simultaneously, resulting in low overall performance and limited resilience to external shocks.

Rather than being constrained by a single weakness, Fragile Systems are characterized by the accumulation of challenges across several pillars.

Typical Characteristics

- Low performance across multiple pillars
- Weak institutional and educational capacity
- High levels of vulnerability to external shocks
- Persistent development challenges
- Reinforcing cycles of underperformance

Representative Regions

Chad, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Niger, Somalia, Sudan, Guinea-Bissau, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

These regions frequently appear among the lowest performers in multiple pillar rankings, particularly Nutrition, Knowledge, Movement, and Mindset. Challenges related to governance, infrastructure, human

capital development, food security, environmental pressures, and institutional capacity often occur simultaneously, creating conditions that are difficult to overcome through isolated interventions.

Unlike Conflict-Affected Regions, which are primarily shaped by active or recent instability, Fragile Systems are defined by persistent structural weaknesses that remain present even in the absence of large-scale conflict.

Core Lesson

Long-term underperformance rarely stems from a single problem. Fragility emerges when multiple weaknesses reinforce one another across the broader system.

8. Conflict-Affected Regions

Conflict-Affected Regions are regions whose performance is heavily influenced by active conflict, recent warfare, political instability, or severe security challenges. While their underlying development conditions may differ substantially, they share a common characteristic: the disruption of the systems that support human flourishing.

Unlike Fragile Systems, these regions are not necessarily defined by long-term structural weakness. Instead, their performance reflects the profound effects that instability can have on institutions, infrastructure, wellbeing, education, environmental management, and broader societal functioning.

Typical Characteristics

- Significant impact from active or recent conflict
- Disruption across multiple pillars simultaneously
- Reduced institutional effectiveness
- Elevated vulnerability and uncertainty
- Performance below underlying long-term potential

Representative Regions

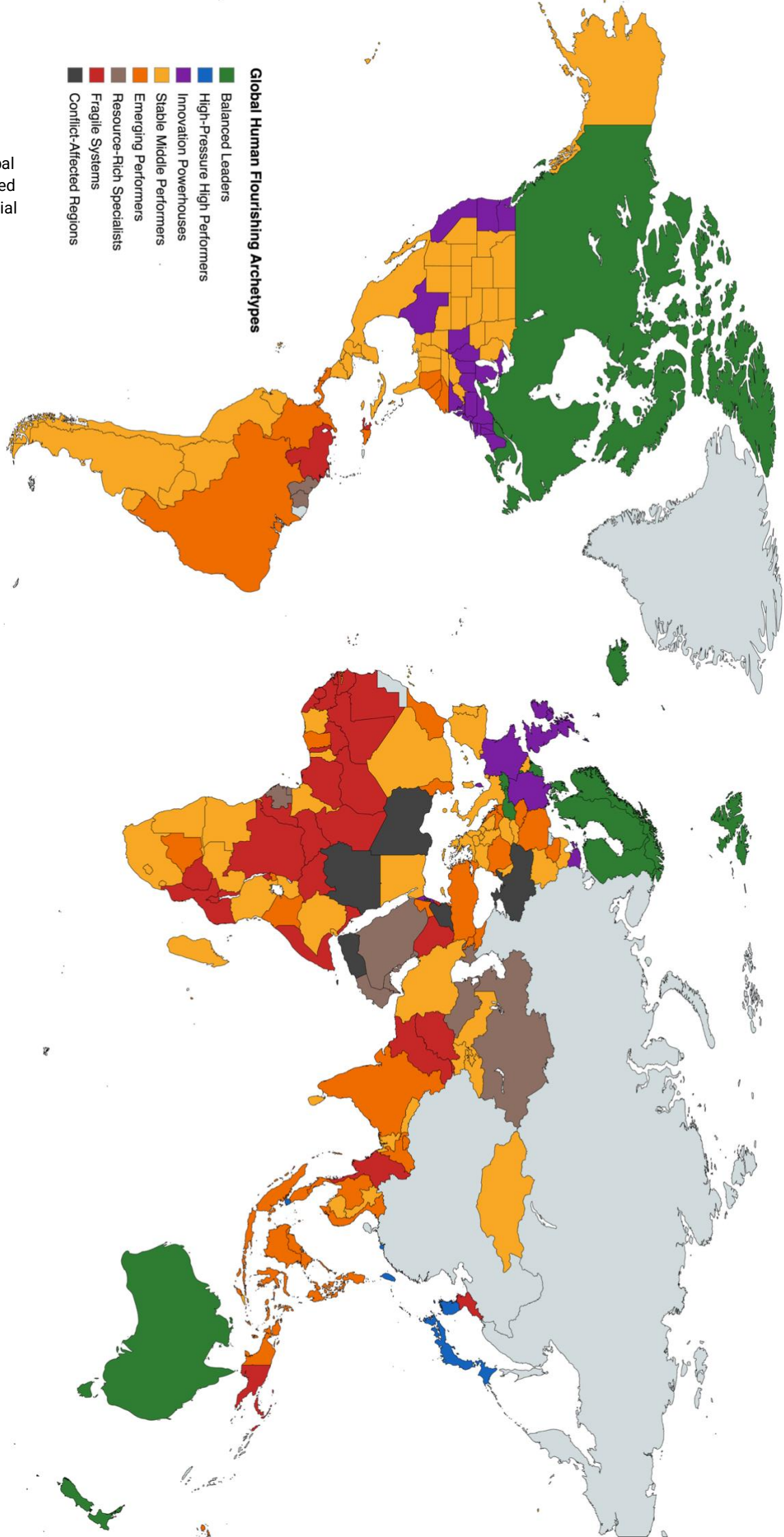
Ukraine (Post-2022 Wartime Conditions), Palestine (Post-October 2023 Wartime Conditions), Yemen, Syria, Libya, Sudan, Afghanistan.

These regions frequently record lower scores across several pillars as a result of instability, displacement, damaged infrastructure, interrupted education systems, weakened public services, and broader societal disruption. In many cases, the effects extend well beyond the immediate consequences of conflict, influencing long-term development trajectories and institutional capacity.

What distinguishes this archetype is that its defining characteristic is not permanent weakness, but disruption. Several Conflict-Affected Regions possess substantially stronger underlying foundations than their current scores suggest and may follow very different trajectories once stability is restored.

Core Lesson

Conflict rarely weakens a single dimension of human flourishing. Instead, it places pressure on entire systems, often producing declines across multiple pillars simultaneously.



Global Human Flourishing Archetypes

- Balanced Leaders
- High-Pressure High Performers
- Innovation Powerhouses
- Stable Middle Performers
- Emerging Performers
- Resource-Rich Specialists
- Fragile Systems
- Conflict-Affected Regions

Note: China and Russia are excluded from the global archetype map and analyzed separately due to substantial internal regional variation.



11. Key Lessons from the Index

The Five Pillars Index was developed to measure human flourishing across 213 regions through the lenses of Nutrition, Movement, Knowledge, Mindset, and Environment. The preceding chapters examined these dimensions individually, compared regions and macro-regions, identified recurring structural patterns, and explored the diverse pathways through which societies achieve success or experience persistent challenges.

Taken together, however, the findings point toward a smaller number of broader conclusions.

These conclusions are not specific to any single region, culture, or development model. Rather, they represent the most consistent lessons that emerge when the dataset is viewed as a whole. While individual rankings may change over time, the principles underlying them appear remarkably stable.

The six lessons presented in this chapter capture the central insights of the Index and provide a foundation for the strategic implications explored in the following chapter.

Lesson	Core Insight
1	Human Flourishing Is Systemic
2	Balance Outperforms Specialization
3	Human Capital Is the Great Divider
4	There Is No Single Model of Success
5	Development Is Easier Than Excellence
6	Wealth Is Not Enough

Although the findings presented throughout this report are diverse, they point toward a common conclusion. Human flourishing is neither accidental nor determined by any single factor. Rather, it emerges when balanced systems reinforce one another over time, allowing individuals, communities, and societies to convert resources and capabilities into long-term wellbeing. The six lessons that follow represent the clearest expressions of that broader pattern.

Lesson 1: Human Flourishing Is Systemic

Perhaps the most important finding of the Index is that human flourishing behaves as a system. Regions rarely succeed because of a single strength. Likewise, they rarely fail because of a single weakness. Instead, outcomes emerge through the interaction of multiple reinforcing factors operating simultaneously.

The world's strongest-performing regions consistently demonstrate strengths across several pillars at once. Strong educational systems support healthier

populations. Effective institutions reinforce environmental stewardship. High levels of trust strengthen resilience and wellbeing. Success compounds.

The opposite pattern is equally visible. Regions experiencing conflict, fragility, institutional weakness, or persistent poverty rarely struggle in only one dimension. Educational deficits, poor health outcomes, environmental pressures, and weakened wellbeing frequently reinforce one another, creating cycles that are difficult to break.

The implication is profound. Human flourishing cannot be understood through isolated indicators alone. The evidence suggests that lasting progress depends less on improving individual components and more on strengthening the broader systems through which those components interact.

In short, flourishing is not additive. It is systemic.

Lesson 2: Balance Outperforms Specialization

The highest-performing regions in the Index are not necessarily those that achieve the strongest individual pillar scores. Rather, they are the regions that consistently avoid major weaknesses.

Finland, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Austria, and several other global leaders differ substantially in geography, culture, and governance. Yet they share a common characteristic: balance.

None dominates every pillar. Instead, each performs well across Nutrition, Movement, Knowledge, Mindset, and Environment simultaneously.

This pattern appears repeatedly throughout the rankings. Regions with exceptional strengths in one or two dimensions often struggle to translate those advantages into elite overall performance when significant weaknesses remain elsewhere.

The findings suggest that flourishing rewards consistency more than specialization. Exceptional outcomes emerge not from maximizing a single strength, but from maintaining strong performance across the system as a whole.

The lesson is simple but powerful: avoiding weakness appears more important than pursuing perfection.

Region	Archetype	Final Score	Weakest Pillar	Weakest Pillar Score
Switzerland	Balanced Leader	9.28	Nutrition	8.4
Singapore	High-Pressure High Performer	8.8	Mindset	6.8
South Korea	High-Pressure High Performer	8.24	Mindset	4.8
United Arab Emirates	Resource-Rich Specialist	7.04	Movement	5.6
Saudi Arabia	Resource-Rich Specialist	6.32	Movement	3.6

Lesson 3: Human Capital Is the Great Divider

Among all five pillars, Knowledge stands apart. It records the largest performance range, the highest standard deviation, and the most pronounced divide between the world's strongest and weakest regions. No other pillar displays a gap of comparable magnitude.

The regions leading the Index consistently benefit from strong educational systems, institutional quality, research capacity, information access, and long-term investment in human capital. Conversely, many of the lowest-performing regions face persistent deficits across these same dimensions.

Importantly, Knowledge does not operate in isolation. Regions that perform strongly in Knowledge frequently perform well across multiple pillars. Education, information, institutional capacity, and human capital appear to strengthen outcomes far beyond the Knowledge pillar itself.

This suggests that human capital functions as a force multiplier within the flourishing system. It increases a region's ability to solve problems, adapt to change, improve institutions, and sustain long-term progress.

The largest divide identified by the Index is therefore not simply a gap in education. It is a gap in capability.

Lesson 4: There Is No Single Model of Success

One of the most striking findings of the Index is the diversity of societies that achieve exceptional outcomes.

*Finland and Singapore.
Switzerland and Japan.
Norway and South Korea.*

These regions differ substantially in geography, population size, economic structure, governance models, demographics, and cultural traditions. Yet many achieve remarkably similar levels of overall flourishing.

The data provides little support for the idea that success depends upon any single political, economic, or cultural blueprint. Instead, it suggests that multiple pathways can lead to similar outcomes.

What unites the world's strongest performers is not how they are organized, but what they achieve. Despite their differences, they consistently build strong human capital, maintain effective institutions, avoid major weaknesses, and create environments that support long-term wellbeing.

This finding challenges simplistic narratives about development and progress.

The evidence suggests that flourishing follows principles rather than formulas. Different societies may travel different roads, but many ultimately arrive at the same destination.

Lesson 5: Development Is Easier Than Excellence

The Index reveals a distinction that is often overlooked in discussions of development.

Progress and excellence are not the same challenge.

Across the dataset, many regions have successfully moved from low performance to moderate performance. Improvements in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and basic living conditions have enabled substantial gains across large parts of the world.

Far fewer regions have successfully moved from strong performance to truly elite levels of flourishing.

The rankings contain a broad middle tier of regions that have established many of the foundations associated with long-term success. However, only a small number achieve the balance, resilience, and consistency required to join the highest ranks.

This pattern suggests that the final stages of development may be the most difficult. Solving foundational challenges is demanding, but building a society that performs exceptionally across multiple dimensions simultaneously appears even more complex.

The lesson is not that progress is impossible. Rather, it is that excellence represents a fundamentally different challenge from development itself.

Thriving is harder than catching up.

Lesson 6: Wealth Is Not Enough

Economic prosperity matters.

Wealth improves access to healthcare, education, infrastructure, technology, and countless other resources that support human flourishing. Throughout the Index, affluent regions generally outperform poorer ones.

Yet wealth alone does not guarantee exceptional outcomes.

The rankings repeatedly demonstrate that some wealthy regions underperform in areas such as wellbeing, movement, balance, or long-term sustainability. At the same time, several less affluent regions achieve surprisingly strong outcomes in specific dimensions of flourishing.

This pattern reveals an important distinction. Wealth helps solve constraints, but it does not automatically create flourishing.

*Money can build infrastructure.
It cannot guarantee trust.*

*Money can improve access.
It cannot guarantee wellbeing.*

*Money can expand opportunities.
It cannot ensure balance.*

The strongest-performing regions are not simply rich. They are regions that successfully convert resources into resilient systems, healthy populations, strong institutions, and sustainable long-term outcomes. Prosperity is therefore best understood as an enabler rather than a destination.

Region	Archetype	Score
Switzerland	Balanced Leader	9.28
Singapore	High-Pressure High Performer	8.80
Monaco	Stable Middle / Outlier Microstate	8.08
Yangtze Delta Corridor	Innovation Powerhouse	7.68
Qatar	Resource-Rich Specialist	7.28
Northeast Corridor	Innovation Powerhouse	6.80
California	Innovation Powerhouse	6.08

This comparison highlights an important finding of the Index: wealth alone does not guarantee exceptional human flourishing. Despite all seven regions possessing substantial economic resources, their overall scores vary significantly. The differences suggest that long-term outcomes depend not only on prosperity, but also on how effectively regions convert wealth into strong institutions, human capital, wellbeing, environmental quality, and balanced development.

The rankings presented throughout this report describe where the world stands today. The question that remains is what these findings mean for the future.

The following chapter explores the strategic implications of the Index and examines how governments, cities, organizations, and societies can apply these lessons in practice.

Closing Synthesis

Across 213 regions, thousands of data points, and five dimensions of human flourishing, a remarkably consistent picture emerges.

The evidence suggests that flourishing is neither accidental nor determined by any single factor. It is shaped by systems, strengthened through balance, accelerated by human capital, and influenced by choices that extend far beyond wealth alone.

The world's strongest-performing regions differ substantially in culture, geography, and development pathways, yet they repeatedly arrive at similar outcomes. Conversely, regions facing persistent challenges often experience overlapping weaknesses that reinforce one another over time.

No universal blueprint for flourishing exists. However, the Index suggests that the principles associated with long-term success are surprisingly consistent. Regions that invest in people, strengthen institutions, maintain balance across multiple dimensions, and build resilient systems are far more likely to achieve enduring prosperity and wellbeing.

12. From Measurement to Action

The purpose of the Five Pillars Index is not merely to compare regions.

Rankings identify where regions stand today. Pillar scores reveal strengths and weaknesses. Structural patterns expose recurring relationships. Archetypes illustrate different pathways through which societies develop.

Yet the ultimate value of measurement lies in what it teaches.

Across 213 regions, spanning every major continent, development model, and level of prosperity, a number of consistent principles emerge. These principles do not constitute a universal blueprint for success, nor do they eliminate the importance of local context. They do, however, provide a framework for understanding the conditions most commonly associated with long-term human flourishing.

The findings suggest that flourishing is not primarily a question of geography, wealth, ideology, or circumstance. Rather, it is shaped by how societies build, maintain, and strengthen the systems that support human wellbeing over time.

The implications that follow represent the most important strategic insights to emerge from the Index.

Strategic Implication	
1	Human Flourishing Requires Systems Thinking
2	Balance Matters More Than Maximization
3	Human Capital Is the Ultimate Long-Term Investment
4	There Is No Universal Development Model
5	Resilience Is a Strategic Asset

1. Human Flourishing Requires Systems Thinking

Perhaps the most important finding of the Five Pillars Index is that human flourishing behaves as a system.

The strongest-performing regions rarely achieve success because of a single policy, institution, or advantage. Likewise, the weakest-performing regions rarely struggle because of a single problem.

Instead, outcomes emerge through the interaction of multiple forces operating simultaneously. Education influences health. Urban design shapes movement. Environmental quality affects wellbeing. Institutional capacity influences performance across nearly every pillar.

This interconnectedness explains why isolated interventions often produce limited results. Improvements in one area can be constrained by weaknesses elsewhere, while progress across multiple areas can reinforce itself over time.

The implication is straightforward but profound: lasting progress is most likely to emerge when societies address systems rather than symptoms.

The question is not simply how to improve individual outcomes, but how to strengthen the relationships between the conditions that produce those outcomes.

2. Balance Matters More Than Maximization

A second principle appears repeatedly throughout the Index: balance consistently outperforms specialization.

Many regions achieve exceptional results in individual pillars. Far fewer achieve exceptional results overall.

The world’s highest-performing regions are distinguished not by extraordinary dominance in a single domain, but by their ability to maintain strong performance across all five pillars simultaneously. Their success is defined as much by the absence of major weaknesses as by the presence of major strengths.

This finding challenges a common tendency to focus on maximizing individual indicators while overlooking broader system performance.

The strongest regions rarely optimize one dimension at the expense of another. Instead, they maintain a level of balance that allows strengths to reinforce one another while preventing weaknesses from becoming systemic constraints.

The implication is that sustainable progress often depends less on becoming exceptional in one area and more on avoiding vulnerability across many.

3. Human Capital Is the Ultimate Long-Term Investment

No pillar reveals a larger divide between the world’s strongest and weakest performers than Knowledge.

Across the Index, educational attainment, institutional quality, information access, and human capital repeatedly emerge as some of the strongest predictors of long-term success.

The significance of this finding extends far beyond education itself.

Human capital influences innovation, productivity, governance, resilience, public health, environmental stewardship, and societal adaptability. It strengthens a

society’s ability to solve problems, respond to change, and create opportunities for future generations.

Unlike many forms of capital, its value compounds.

Regions that successfully invest in human capability often generate advantages that extend across multiple pillars simultaneously. Conversely, regions that struggle to build human capital frequently encounter barriers across many dimensions of development.

The implication is that few investments possess a broader or more enduring impact than those that expand knowledge, capability, and institutional capacity.



4. There Is No Universal Development Model

One of the most striking findings of the Index is the diversity of its highest-performing regions.

Finland and Singapore. Switzerland and Japan. Norway and Hong Kong.

These regions differ dramatically in geography, culture, demographics, governance, population density, and economic structure. Yet many achieve remarkably similar outcomes.

This observation challenges the notion that flourishing can be reduced to a single formula.

The evidence suggests that successful societies do not converge around one model. Instead, they converge around a set of principles while expressing those principles in different ways.

Different societies build resilience differently. Different cultures approach wellbeing differently. Different economies create prosperity differently.

What matters is not whether regions follow the same path, but whether they succeed in strengthening the underlying conditions that support flourishing.

The implication is that development should be understood as adaptation rather than imitation.

The goal is not to copy the world’s strongest performers. It is to understand the principles behind their success and apply them in ways that fit local realities.

5. Resilience Is a Strategic Asset

The final principle emerges most clearly from the regions that experience disruption.

Throughout the Index, conflict, instability, institutional breakdown, environmental stress, and systemic shocks consistently weaken performance across multiple pillars simultaneously.

These findings reveal an important reality: achieving success and sustaining success are not the same challenge.

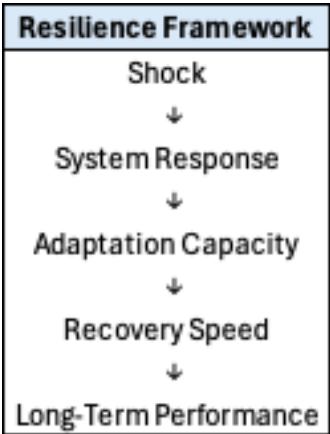
Many societies can generate progress during favorable conditions. Far fewer possess the resilience necessary to maintain progress when conditions deteriorate.

Resilience therefore should not be viewed as a secondary objective. It is one of the foundations upon which long-term flourishing depends.

A resilient society is capable of absorbing shocks without losing its core strengths. It can adapt to changing circumstances while preserving the institutions, relationships, and capabilities that support wellbeing.

In an era increasingly defined by demographic change, technological disruption, environmental uncertainty, and geopolitical complexity, this capacity may become more important than ever.

The implication is that flourishing should be measured not only by present performance, but also by the ability to sustain performance over time.



Beyond the Rankings

The Five Pillars Index began with a simple objective: to measure human flourishing across the world.

The findings reveal a world characterized by both extraordinary progress and persistent disparity. They show that flourishing is possible under many different conditions, yet also demonstrate that long-term success is rarely accidental.

Across different regions, cultures, and development pathways, the same broad principles appear repeatedly.

Strong societies tend to think systemically. They avoid critical weaknesses. They invest in human capability. They adapt principles rather than copy models. And they build the resilience necessary to navigate uncertainty.

*The specific paths vary.
The underlying principles do not.*

These principles do not provide a blueprint for the future. They provide something more useful: a lens through which future decisions can be evaluated.

The final chapter brings together the broader findings of the Index and reflects on what they reveal about the state of human flourishing in 2026.

Appendix A — Complete Regional Dataset

Appendix A contains the complete regional dataset used throughout the Five Pillars Index. Scores are reported on a 0–10 scale for each pillar and combined to produce the Final Pillar Score presented in the rankings. The appendix is intended as a reference resource and should be read alongside the analyses presented throughout the report.

	Final Pillar Score	Sum Nutrition	Sum Movement	Sum Knowledge	Sum Mindset	Sum Environment
Finland	9.28	8.4	9.6	10.0	8.8	9.6
Switzerland	9.28	8.4	10.0	10.0	8.8	9.2
Sweden	9.12	8.8	9.6	10.0	8.4	8.8
Liechtenstein	9.12	8.4	8.8	10.0	9.2	9.2
Denmark	9.12	8.8	9.6	10.0	8.8	8.4
Norway	9.04	8.0	9.2	10.0	9.2	8.8
Singapore	8.80	8.4	9.6	9.6	6.8	9.6
Austria	8.64	8.4	8.8	8.4	8.4	9.2
Netherlands	8.64	8.4	9.6	10.0	7.6	7.6
Japan	8.56	9.6	9.6	8.4	6.0	9.2
Estonia	8.32	7.6	8.0	9.6	7.2	9.2
Slovenia	8.32	8.0	8.8	8.0	7.6	9.2
South Korea	8.24	9.2	9.6	8.8	4.8	8.8
Spain	8.16	8.8	8.0	7.6	7.6	8.8
Taiwan	8.16	8.8	7.6	9.2	6.8	8.4
Monaco	8.08	8.4	8.4	9.2	6.8	7.6
Andorra	8.08	8.0	7.6	8.4	7.6	8.8
Israel (Pre-Oct 2023 Baseline)	8.08	8.4	8.0	9.2	7.2	7.6
Luxembourg	8.08	8.0	7.2	10.0	7.6	7.6
Germany	8.08	8.4	8.0	9.2	7.2	7.6
San Marino	8.00	9.6	7.2	7.6	7.2	8.4
Iceland	8.00	8.0	7.2	8.4	8.0	8.4
Hong Kong	7.84	8.4	9.6	8.8	4.4	8.0
France	7.84	8.8	7.6	8.0	6.8	8.0
Italy	7.76	9.6	8.0	7.2	6.0	8.0
Pearl River Delta	7.76	8.4	8.8	8.0	5.6	8.0
Yangtze Delta Corridor	7.68	8.4	8.8	8.4	5.6	7.2
Lithuania	7.60	6.8	7.6	8.4	6.4	8.8
Israel (Post-Oct 2023 Wartime Conditions)	7.60	8.4	8.0	8.8	6.0	6.8
Czechia	7.52	7.6	8.0	8.0	6.4	7.6
Macau	7.52	8.4	7.6	8.4	6.4	6.8
Belgium	7.36	7.6	7.6	8.0	6.8	6.8
Ireland	7.36	7.6	7.2	8.4	6.8	6.8

Upper Midwest	7.36	7.6	6.8	8.0	6.8	7.6
Qatar	7.28	8.0	5.6	8.4	6.8	7.6
Seychelles	7.20	6.8	5.6	7.6	7.2	8.8
Pacific Northwest	7.20	7.2	7.6	8.0	6.4	6.8
New Zealand	7.20	7.2	6.8	8.0	6.8	7.2
Mountain West	7.12	6.4	7.6	7.2	6.8	7.6
Australia	7.12	7.2	6.8	8.0	6.4	7.2
Croatia	7.04	7.2	7.2	6.8	6.0	8.0
Poland	7.04	7.2	7.2	7.2	6.4	7.2
United Arab Emirates	7.04	7.6	5.6	8.4	6.0	7.6
Bahrain	7.04	8.0	5.6	8.0	6.4	7.2
Mauritius	6.96	7.2	4.8	7.6	6.8	8.4
Slovakia	6.96	7.2	6.8	6.8	6.0	8.0
Uruguay	6.96	7.2	6.4	7.2	6.4	7.6
Portugal	6.96	7.6	6.4	6.8	6.8	7.2
Brunei	6.96	8.0	4.0	6.8	6.8	9.2
Oman	6.96	7.6	4.8	7.2	6.8	8.4
Latvia	6.88	6.8	6.4	7.6	5.6	8.0
Greece	6.88	7.6	6.8	6.8	5.6	7.6
United Kingdom	6.88	7.2	7.2	8.4	5.2	6.4
Bhutan	6.88	6.4	5.6	6.0	8.0	8.4
Cyprus	6.80	8.0	5.6	6.8	6.4	7.2
Hungary	6.80	7.2	7.2	6.8	5.6	7.2
Northeast Corridor	6.80	6.8	7.2	8.4	5.2	6.4
Maldives	6.72	6.0	6.4	7.6	6.4	7.2
Malaysia	6.72	7.2	4.8	7.2	6.8	7.6
Vietnam	6.72	7.6	5.6	6.4	6.8	7.2
Mid-Atlantic / Capital Region	6.64	7.2	6.4	8.0	5.2	6.4
Georgia	6.64	7.6	5.2	6.4	6.4	7.6
Chile	6.56	6.8	6.4	6.8	5.6	7.2
Russia (Pre-2022 Baseline — European Russia)	6.56	6.0	8.0	6.4	4.8	7.6
Romania	6.56	7.2	6.4	6.4	5.2	7.6
Kuwait	6.56	8.0	4.0	7.6	6.4	6.8
Armenia	6.56	7.6	5.2	6.8	6.0	7.2
Turkey	6.56	8.4	6.0	6.0	5.2	7.2
Jing-Jin Political Core	6.48	7.2	6.8	8.0	4.4	6.0
Sri Lanka	6.48	6.8	5.2	6.8	6.4	7.2
Thailand	6.48	8.0	4.8	6.0	6.8	6.8
Malta	6.40	8.0	5.2	7.2	6.4	5.2
Jordan	6.40	7.2	5.2	7.2	5.2	7.2
Belarus	6.32	6.8	7.2	5.6	4.4	7.6
Barbados	6.32	6.4	5.2	6.8	6.4	6.8
Azerbaijan	6.32	7.6	4.8	6.0	6.0	7.2
Saudi Arabia	6.32	7.2	3.6	7.2	6.4	7.2
Canada	6.24	6.0	5.6	7.2	5.2	7.2
Ukraine (Pre-2022 Baseline)	6.24	6.4	6.0	6.8	5.6	6.4
Argentina	6.16	6.8	6.0	6.4	4.8	6.8

Costa Rica	6.16	6.4	5.2	6.0	6.4	6.8
Kazakhstan	6.16	6.4	5.2	6.8	5.6	6.8
Great Lakes / Industrial Midwest	6.16	6.0	5.6	7.2	5.2	6.8
Polynesian Pacific States	6.16	5.6	6.0	5.6	6.4	7.2
Southeast Growth Belt	6.16	6.0	5.2	6.8	6.8	6.0
California	6.08	6.8	6.0	7.6	4.8	5.2
Botswana	6.08	6.0	4.4	6.4	5.6	8.0
Fiji	6.08	6.0	6.0	6.0	5.6	6.8
Cape Verde	6.00	6.0	4.8	5.6	6.0	7.6
Russia (Post-2022 Wartime Conditions – European Russia)	5.92	5.6	8.0	5.2	3.6	7.2
Namibia	5.84	6.0	4.4	5.6	5.6	7.6
Montenegro	5.84	6.0	6.0	4.8	5.2	7.2
Iran	5.84	6.8	4.8	6.0	5.2	6.4
Brazil	5.76	6.0	6.0	5.6	4.8	6.4
South Africa	5.76	6.4	4.4	7.2	4.4	6.4
Eastern Caribbean States	5.76	5.6	5.2	5.6	6.0	6.4
Hawaii	5.76	5.2	6.4	6.0	5.2	6.0
Indonesia	5.76	6.0	4.8	5.6	6.4	6.0
Peru	5.68	6.0	5.6	5.2	4.8	6.8
Central Inland Belt	5.68	6.0	5.6	5.2	4.8	6.8
Kyrgyzstan	5.68	6.0	5.2	4.8	6.0	6.4
Uzbekistan	5.68	6.4	4.8	5.2	5.6	6.4
Philippines	5.68	5.6	4.4	6.0	6.8	5.6
Bolivia	5.60	5.6	6.0	4.4	5.2	6.8
Albania	5.60	6.4	5.2	4.8	5.2	6.4
Lebanon	5.60	6.8	4.4	7.2	4.0	5.6
Serbia	5.60	6.0	6.4	5.6	4.4	5.6
Great Plains	5.60	6.4	4.0	5.6	5.6	6.4
Colombia	5.52	5.6	5.6	5.6	4.8	6.0
Ecuador	5.52	5.6	5.6	5.2	4.8	6.4
Bulgaria	5.52	6.0	6.0	5.2	4.0	6.4
Florida	5.52	6.0	4.4	6.0	5.6	5.6
Laos	5.52	6.0	4.8	3.6	6.0	7.2
Nepal	5.52	5.2	5.6	4.4	6.0	6.4
Paraguay	5.44	5.6	5.6	4.4	5.6	6.0
Rwanda	5.44	5.6	4.8	4.8	5.2	6.8
Suriname	5.36	5.2	4.8	4.8	5.2	6.8
Bahamas	5.36	5.2	4.0	5.6	5.6	6.4
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5.36	6.0	5.2	4.8	4.0	6.8
Panama	5.36	5.6	4.8	5.6	5.2	5.6
Cuba	5.36	4.4	6.0	6.0	4.8	5.6
Texas	5.36	6.0	4.4	6.0	5.2	5.2
Melanesian Pacific States	5.36	5.6	5.6	4.0	5.6	6.0

Guyana	5.20	5.2	4.8	4.8	4.8	6.4
North Macedonia	5.20	6.0	5.2	4.8	4.4	5.6
Trinidad and Tobago	5.12	5.6	4.4	6.0	4.4	5.2
Western Siberia	5.12	5.6	4.4	6.0	4.0	5.6
Jamaica	5.12	5.2	4.8	4.8	5.2	5.6
Dongbei Rust Belt	5.04	5.6	4.4	5.2	4.0	6.0
Kenya	5.04	5.2	4.4	4.8	5.2	5.6
Palestine (Pre-Oct 2023 Baseline)	5.04	5.6	5.2	5.6	4.0	4.8
Dominican Republic	4.96	5.2	4.8	4.8	4.8	5.2
Micronesian Pacific States	4.96	3.6	5.2	4.0	5.6	6.4
Papua New Guinea	4.88	5.6	5.6	3.6	4.4	5.2
India	4.88	5.6	4.0	5.2	4.8	4.8
Tanzania	4.88	5.6	4.4	2.8	5.2	6.4
Tajikistan	4.88	5.2	4.8	3.2	5.2	6.0
Moldova	4.80	5.2	4.4	4.4	4.0	6.0
Western Frontier	4.80	4.4	5.2	3.6	4.4	6.4
Eswatini	4.80	5.2	4.0	4.4	4.4	6.0
Cambodia	4.80	5.6	4.0	4.0	5.2	5.2
Desert Southwest	4.72	5.2	4.4	4.8	4.4	4.8
Alaska	4.72	4.0	5.2	4.4	4.0	6.0
Timor-Leste	4.72	4.4	4.8	2.4	6.0	6.0
Bangladesh	4.72	5.6	4.0	4.8	5.2	4.0
El Salvador	4.64	4.4	4.8	4.0	5.2	4.8
São Tomé and Príncipe	4.64	4.8	4.4	2.4	4.8	6.8
Appalachia	4.64	4.4	3.6	4.0	4.8	6.4
Zambia	4.64	5.2	4.4	2.8	4.8	6.0
Zimbabwe	4.64	4.8	4.4	4.0	4.0	6.0
Mexico	4.56	5.6	4.4	4.4	4.4	4.0
Belize	4.56	4.8	4.4	3.6	5.2	4.8
Kosovo	4.56	5.2	4.4	3.6	4.4	5.2
Morocco	4.56	5.2	4.0	4.8	4.0	4.8
Tunisia	4.56	5.2	4.0	4.8	4.0	4.8
Turkmenistan	4.56	5.6	4.0	2.8	4.8	5.6
Deep South	4.56	4.4	3.2	4.4	5.2	5.6
Ghana	4.56	4.8	3.2	4.8	5.2	4.8
Gabon	4.48	4.8	3.2	3.6	4.4	6.4
Iraq	4.48	5.6	4.0	4.4	4.0	4.4
Pakistan	4.48	5.2	3.6	4.4	4.4	4.8
Nicaragua	4.32	4.4	4.8	3.2	4.4	4.8
Guatemala	4.32	4.4	4.8	3.2	4.8	4.4
Mongolia	4.32	4.0	3.6	4.8	4.8	4.4
Mozambique	4.32	4.8	4.4	2.8	4.4	5.2
Uganda	4.32	4.8	3.6	3.2	4.8	5.2
Ukraine (Post-2022 Wartime Conditions)	4.32	4.8	3.6	7.2	4.0	2.0

Madagascar	4.24	4.8	3.6	2.0	4.8	6.0
Comoros	4.24	4.8	4.0	2.0	4.8	5.6
Algeria	4.16	4.8	3.2	4.4	4.4	4.0
Honduras	4.08	4.0	4.4	3.2	4.4	4.4
Malawi	4.08	4.8	3.6	2.4	4.4	5.2
Egypt	4.00	4.4	3.2	4.8	4.0	3.6
Lesotho	4.00	4.0	4.0	2.8	3.6	5.6
Ethiopia	4.00	4.8	3.6	2.4	4.4	4.8
Russian Far East	3.84	3.6	3.2	4.8	2.8	4.8
Central Siberia	3.84	4.0	3.2	4.8	2.8	4.4
Angola	3.84	3.6	3.6	2.8	4.0	5.2
Venezuela	3.76	3.6	4.4	3.6	2.8	4.4
Cameroon	3.76	4.8	3.2	3.2	3.6	4.0
Senegal	3.68	4.0	2.8	2.8	4.0	4.8
Nigeria	3.60	4.8	3.2	4.0	2.8	3.2
Burundi	3.60	4.8	3.6	1.6	3.6	4.4
Republic of the Congo	3.52	3.2	2.8	2.8	3.6	5.2
Benin	3.52	3.6	2.8	2.8	4.0	4.4
Côte d'Ivoire	3.44	3.6	2.8	2.8	3.6	4.4
Myanmar	3.36	3.6	4.0	2.4	2.8	4.0
Gambia	3.28	2.8	2.8	2.8	4.0	4.0
Equatorial Guinea	3.20	3.2	2.8	1.6	3.2	5.2
Djibouti	3.20	2.8	2.8	2.8	3.6	4.0
Syria	3.12	3.6	4.0	2.4	2.0	3.6
Haiti	2.96	2.8	4.0	2.0	2.8	3.2
Eritrea	2.88	2.8	4.0	0.8	2.8	4.0
Togo	2.88	2.8	2.0	2.4	3.6	3.6
Afghanistan	2.88	3.2	4.0	0.8	2.8	3.6
Liberia	2.80	2.8	2.4	2.0	3.6	3.2
Mauritania	2.64	2.4	2.4	2.0	3.2	3.2
Libya	2.48	2.8	2.0	2.8	2.0	2.8
Guinea	2.48	2.8	2.0	1.6	2.8	3.2
North Korea	2.40	1.6	4.4	1.2	1.6	3.2
Democratic Republic of the Congo	2.32	2.8	1.6	1.2	2.4	3.6
Guinea-Bissau	2.24	2.0	2.0	0.8	3.2	3.2
Sierra Leone	2.16	2.0	2.0	0.8	2.8	3.2
Mali	2.16	2.4	2.0	1.6	2.8	2.0
Yemen	2.16	1.6	3.6	1.2	2.0	2.4
Burkina Faso	2.08	2.4	2.0	1.2	2.8	2.0
Sudan	1.84	2.4	1.6	1.2	1.6	2.4
Somalia	1.84	2.0	2.4	0.4	2.4	2.0
Niger	1.68	2.0	2.0	0.0	2.8	1.6
Palestine (Post-Oct 2023 Wartime Conditions)	1.44	1.6	1.6	1.2	1.6	1.2
Central African Republic	1.36	1.2	1.6	0.0	1.6	2.4
South Sudan	1.36	1.2	1.6	0.0	1.6	2.4
Chad	1.20	1.2	1.6	0.0	2.0	1.2

Data Sources & References

The Five Pillars Index 2026 draws upon a broad range of international datasets, government statistics, academic research, and institutional publications. Data collection prioritized sources that provide strong methodological transparency, broad geographic coverage, and regular updates.

The assessment incorporates information from the following categories:

International Organizations

- World Health Organization (WHO)
- United Nations (UN)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- UNESCO
- UNICEF
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- World Bank
- International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Global Data Platforms

- Our World in Data
- World Bank Open Data
- OECD Data Explorer
- UN Data
- Global Burden of Disease Project
- Human Development Reports
- World Happiness Report

Government and Statistical Agencies

National statistical offices, census bureaus, ministries, public health institutions, and environmental agencies were consulted where appropriate to improve regional accuracy and provide additional context.

Academic and Institutional Sources

Peer-reviewed research, policy papers, think tank publications, and comparative studies were used to support indicator assessment, validate findings, and supplement areas where direct quantitative measures were limited.

Regional Assessments

For selected regions, additional local, regional, and country-specific sources were reviewed to capture conditions that may not be fully reflected in international datasets. Where appropriate, quantitative indicators were supplemented by comparative systems analysis and informed qualitative assessment.

A complete list of underlying metrics, scoring criteria, and methodological notes is provided in the accompanying Reference Edition.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used during the development of The Five Pillars Index 2026 as research, writing, editing, and productivity aids.

AI-assisted tools supported tasks such as language refinement, drafting, formatting, idea generation, structural review, consistency checking, and the synthesis of information from publicly available sources.

All core components of the Index—including the Five Pillars framework, methodology, metric selection, scoring system, regional assessments, analysis, interpretations, findings, and conclusions—were developed, reviewed, and approved by the author.

AI tools were used to support the research process, not to replace human judgment. Final responsibility for all content, assessments, interpretations, and conclusions contained within this publication rests solely with the author.

About G.O.A.L.

G.O.A.L. is an independent research platform exploring the systems that shape long-term human flourishing.

Its work focuses on the intersection of health, demographics, urbanization, technology, and societal resilience. Through research, frameworks, and strategic analysis, G.O.A.L. seeks to better understand the conditions that enable people, communities, and places to thrive.

Rather than focusing on individual sectors in isolation, G.O.A.L. adopts a systems-based perspective, examining how health, behavior, environments, institutions, and long-term societal trends interact to influence outcomes over time.

The Five Pillars Index forms part of a broader body of work dedicated to understanding and improving the foundations of human flourishing in the twenty-first century.

Website: www.global-goal.org

About the Author

Mika Kunne is the founder of G.O.A.L. and an independent researcher focused on human flourishing, demographic change, urban systems, and long-term societal resilience.

His work combines systems thinking, comparative analysis, and interdisciplinary research to explore complex challenges that exist at the intersection of health, behavior, communities, and the built environment.

Through G.O.A.L., he has authored multiple research publications examining topics including the Five Pillars of Health, demographic decline, urban development, and societal resilience.

The Five Pillars Index represents the most comprehensive application of the Five Pillars framework to date, encompassing 213 regions across the world.