

Graphic detail | A setback

Which countries have the best, and worst, living standards?

A ranking of 193 countries shows that human development is stalling almost everywhere

May 6th 2025

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The Human Development Index (HDI), produced by the UN, tracks progress in life expectancy, education and income. After GDP it is one of the most widely used measures of development. The global score fell in 2020 and 2021—the first declines since the index began in 1990. It recovered somewhat in 2022. The latest report, released on May 6th, shows that the pace of improvement in 2023 was the slowest on record (see chart).

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Rich countries, unsurprisingly, do best. Ninety-seven per cent of them have fully recovered or exceeded their pre-pandemic scores, says Achim Steiner of the United Nations Development Programme. That is true of less than 60% of poor countries.