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Russia Lags Behind Neighbors in Reducing Inequality, Oxfam Index Says

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Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency

Russia has placed behind all of its Eastern European neighbors and Georgia in a global ranking of 157 countries committed to reducing poverty.

The global Oxfam aid agency rated countries' efforts to reduce inequality through policies on social spending, tax and labor rights. It said inequality reached crisis levels, with the richest 1 percent of the global population nabbing four-fifths of wealth created between mid-2016 and mid-2017, while the poorest half saw no increase.

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Russia placed 50th in the ranking, scoring low on labor rights, social spending and tax policy.

Russia's Baltic neighbor Estonia ranked 26th, while Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine ranked

41st, 42nd and 43rd.

Latvia and Georgia outranked Russia at 48th and 49th, with Georgia praised for boosting education spending by nearly 6 percent – more than any other country.

Denmark's track record on progressive taxation, social spending and worker protections earned it the top spot, but Oxfam warned that recent administrations had eroded good policies and inequality had risen. Nigeria, where 10 percent of children die before their fifth birthday, came bottom due to "shamefully low" social spending, poor tax collection and rising labor rights violations.

China, 81, ranked way ahead of India, 147, devoting more than twice as much of its budget to health and almost four times as much to welfare spending, the agency said.

Oxfam warned that world leaders risked failing on their pledge to reduce inequality by 2030 and urged them to develop plans to close the gap which should be funded by progressive taxation and clamping down on tax dodging.

"We see children dying from preventable diseases because of a lack of healthcare funding while rich corporations and individuals dodge billions of dollars in tax," Oxfam boss Winnie Byanyima said.

"Governments often tell us they are committed to fighting poverty and inequality – this index shows whether their actions live up to their promises," she added.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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