Malaysia records largest ranking gain in 2026 Global Financial Inclusion Index from Principal®

A modernizing financial system and established digital ecosystem help drive Malaysia's rise to 15th and stronger financial inclusion

KUALA LUMPUR – NOVEMBER 5, 2026 – Malaysia recorded the largest ranking rise in financial inclusion of any market globally, climbing six places to 15th, according to the 2026 Global Financial Inclusion Index from Principal Financial Group® and the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr).

According to the Index, which ranks 42 markets based on the support provided by employers, the government, and the financial system, Malaysia's overall financial inclusion score rose 5.0 points year over year to 58.2, well above the global average of 52.0 out of 100.

The improvement was driven by developments in Malaysia's financial system. Malaysia rose six places to 13th for financial system support, with its score increasing 8.1 points to 59.5 versus a global average of 55.3 and a regional average for Southeast Asia of 45.6. The gains reflected higher volumes of real-time transactions, where it climbed seven places to 9th, as well as smaller rank gains in access to capital, access to credit, and business confidence.

Malaysia ranks fifth globally for employer support, up two places year over year, with a score of 72.6, considerably above the global average of 65.7 and the regional Southeast Asian average of 69.3. Malaysia's rising employer support score contrasts with other markets, as employer support declined globally in 35 of 42 markets assessed. It ranks 26th for government support, falling just one place year over year with a score of 53.6.

	Malaysia score	Global average	Southeast Asia average
Overall financial inclusion support	58.2	52.0	48.0
Government support	53.6	45.7	45.7
Financial system support	59.5	55.3	45.6
Employer support	72.6	65.7	69.3

Munirah Khairuddin, chief executive officer & head, Principal Asset Management Berhad (Group of Companies), said: "Malaysia is this year's biggest ranking riser for financial inclusion and shows how a modernizing financial sector can translate into better access to funding, higher business confidence, and an improving economy. Its efforts to digitize financial services have brought more people into the system and transformed access to financial information and products. The effect has ripples across the real economy: scores for the financial system as an enabler of SME growth and business confidence have risen, while, at a macro level, the labor market is strengthening and GDP growth has surged to multi-year highs."

Malaysia's established digital ecosystem is helping translate innovation into stronger financial inclusion

A key finding in past editions of the Index has been that the markets making the strongest progress in financial inclusion are also those that have invested most heavily in digital financial infrastructure, namely fintech.

Classification: Public

This year's research identifies potential fintech leaders of tomorrow by evaluating how markets are investing in fintech and digital financial infrastructure today, and how effectively governments are developing forward-looking fintech strategies. These factors help determine which markets are best positioned to expand financial inclusion in the future. The analysis assesses areas such as measurable targets, funding commitments, implementation plans, digital public infrastructure, and the integration of AI into financial services.

The Index classifies Malaysia as a 'Stable Incumbent' in its analysis of potential fintech leaders of tomorrow. This category includes markets with established digital financial infrastructure that are positioned to retain their prominence as digital financial centers of excellence.

"Malaysia's momentum shows how an established digital and fintech ecosystem can translate innovation into broader financial inclusion," said Munirah. "Sustaining that progress will depend on continuing to develop infrastructure and strategy around digital finance, while ensuring innovation is accompanied by the governance and consumer safeguards needed to broaden participation over the long term.

Initiatives including the Digital Economy Blueprint, Bank Negara Malaysia's Financial Sector Blueprint, and the Securities Commission's Capital Market Masterplans, have helped build a vibrant fintech ecosystem while broadening financial inclusion."

Key findings from the 2026 Global Financial Inclusion Index:

- **Global financial inclusion reached a record high in 2026,** with overall scores rising to 52 out of 100, the highest level since the index launched. Most markets improved after last year's plateau.
- **Digitalization accelerated financial inclusion gains,** with financial system support emerging as the strongest drive of progress. The financial system support score increased 4.4 points to 55.3, more than double the increase in government support.
- **Employer support declined for a second consecutive year,** falling 2.9 points to 65.7, with decreases across 83% of markets. Economic pressures have contributed to reductions in discretionary benefits while stronger government and financial system support may be reducing reliance on employers for financial guidance.
- **The perception gap is widening despite measurable progress.** While financial inclusion scores have reached record levels, consumer perceptions of financial inclusion have fallen to their lowest point on record, suggesting support systems are not keeping pace with rising expectations and cost-of-living pressures.

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Notes to editors

* "Global" encompasses the 42 markets contained within the Index

About the Global Financial Inclusion Index

The Global Financial Inclusion Index ranks 42 markets on three pillars of financial inclusion—government, financial system, and employer support—using data points across public and survey-based sources. These pillars represent the key stakeholders responsible for promoting financial inclusion across the population. The Index explores the challenges and opportunities surrounding increasing access to useful and affordable financial products and services that meet their needs—transactions, payments, savings, credit, and insurance, etc.

Classification: Public

The Index methodology was conducted in partnership with the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr). The methodology combines various data sources into one unified measure of financial inclusion at the market level.

About Principal Financial Group

Principal Financial Group® (Nasdaq: PFG) is a global financial company with over 19,000 employees[1] passionate about improving the wealth and well-being of people and businesses. In business for 147 years, we're helping 82 million customers[2] plan, insure, invest, and retire, while working to support the communities where we do business, and build an inclusive workforce. Principal® is proud to be recognized as one of the 2026 World's Most Ethical Companies[3] and named as a "Best Places to Work in Money Management[4]." Learn more about Principal and our commitment to building a better future at principal.com.

About Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr)

The Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr) is an independent economics consultancy with a reputation for sound business advice based on thorough and insightful research. Since 1992, Cebr has been at the forefront of business and public interest research, providing analysis, forecasts and strategic advice to major UK and multinational companies, financial institutions, government departments and agencies and trade bodies. For further information about Cebr please visit www.cebr.com.

The Global Financial Inclusion Index is a proprietary model output based upon certain assumptions that may change, are not guaranteed, and should not be relied upon as a significant basis for an investment decision.

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[1] As of June 2026
[2] As of June 2026
[3] Ethisphere, 2026
[4] Pensions & Investment, 2025