

KEY FINDINGS

**Launch of the Report Card 7:
Child Poverty in Perspective :
An Overview of Child Well-Being in Rich Countries
EMBARGO: 10.00 GMT, 14 FEBRUARY 2007**

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Report Card 7 provides the first comprehensive assessment to date of the well-being of children and young people in the world's advanced economies.

It recognizes that no single dimension of child well-being stands as a reliable proxy for child well-being as a whole. It also stresses that no strong relationship exists between the per capita GDP and child well-being.

The Report, from the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy, measures and compares child well-being across more than 20 countries under six different headings – material well-being, health and safety, education, peer and family relationships, behaviours and risks, and young people's own subjective sense of their own well-being.

The research is a pioneering multi dimensional attempt to present child wellbeing in a comparative manner, and draws upon two main sources: the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the World Health Organization's survey of Health Behaviour in School-Age Children (HBSC). Both surveys cover a wider range of aspects than simply education and health.

The Report Card recognizes limitations in the availability of internationally comparable data, but, bringing together the best currently available data, the Innocenti study represents a significant contribution to measuring child well-being across rich nations.

Main findings

According to the Report Card small North-European countries dominate the top half of the table, with child well-being at its highest in the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Finland.

There is no strong or consistent relationship between per capita GDP and child well-being. The Czech Republic, for example, achieves a higher overall rank for child well-being than several much wealthier European countries. Also no country features in the top third of the rankings for all six dimensions of child well-being.

All countries have weaknesses to be addressed and no single dimension of well-being stands as a reliable proxy for child well-being as a whole and several OECD countries find themselves with widely differing rankings for different dimensions of child well-being.

Each chapter of the Report Card begins by setting out how the six different dimensions of child well-being have been assessed. Key findings for each dimension are listed below.

Children's material well-being

- The lowest rates of relative income poverty (under 5%) have been achieved in the four Nordic countries.

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- A total of nine countries – all in northern Europe – have brought relative child poverty rates below 10%.
- Relative child poverty remains above the 15% mark in the three Southern European countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy) and in three Anglophone countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ireland).

Children's health and safety

- European countries occupy the top half of the table, with the top five places claimed by the four small Nordic countries and the Netherlands.
- Approximately 3,500 children (under the age of 15) die every year in the OECD countries from maltreatment. Traffic accidents, drowning, falls, fires and poisoning carry this total to more than 20,000 child deaths each year
- The lack of common definitions and comparable data have, for the moment, ruled out the inclusion of two other important indicators - mental and emotional health and child abuse and neglect

Children's educational well-being

- Belgium and Canada head the league table of 'children's educational well-being'
- Four southern European countries – Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal– occupy the bottom four places.
- Norway and Denmark, usually outstanding performers in league tables of social indicators, are to be found in 18th and 19th places respectively.
- Poland ranks comfortably above the majority of OECD countries, including many of its larger and wealthier European neighbours
- School leavers who are neither in training nor employment are clearly at greater risk of exclusion or marginalization – a worrying result for countries at the foot of the table – including France and Italy

Children's relationships

- Relationships with family and friends matter a great deal to children in the here and now, and are also important to long-term emotional and psychological development.
- The use of data on the proportion of children living in single-parent families and stepfamilies as an indicator of wellbeing may seem unfair and insensitive. But at the statistical level there is evidence to associate growing up in single-parent families and stepfamilies with greater risk to well-being – including a greater risk of dropping out of school, of leaving home early, of poorer health, of low skills, and of low pay.
- Overall, approximately 80% of children in the countries under review are living with both parents. But the range is considerable – from more than 90% in Greece and Italy to less than 70% in the United Kingdom and 60% in the United States
- Almost two-thirds of children still regularly eat the main meal of the day with their families, with France and Italy maintaining the tradition more tenaciously.
- The percentage of children whose parents spend time 'just talking to them' several times a week ranges from approximately 90% in Hungary and Italy to less than 50% in Canada and Germany.
- The percentage of children who report that their peers are 'kind and helpful' varies from a high of 80% or more in Switzerland and Portugal to less than 50% in the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom.

Young people's behaviors and risks

- Fewer than 15% of young people report being drunk on two or more occasions. In the Netherlands, the figure rises to over a quarter and in the UK to almost a third.
- In 18 of the 21 countries surveyed, the proportion of those who have been involved in fighting in the previous 12 months is over one third, ranging from fewer than 30% in Finland and Germany to more than 45% in the Czech Republic and Hungary.

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- The prevalence of bullying varies more widely, with about 15% of children reporting being bullied in Sweden and the Czech Republic and more than 40% in Switzerland, Austria, and Portugal.
- The percentage of young people (aged 11, 13 and 15) who report smoking cigarettes at least once a week varies from 6% in Greece to 16% in Germany.
- The percentage of young people (aged 11, 13 and 15) who report having used cannabis varies even more widely from less than 5% in Greece and Sweden to more than 35% in the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Canada

Young people's subjective assessments of well-being

- Children's subjective sense of well-being appears to be markedly higher in the Netherlands, Spain, and Greece and markedly lower in Poland and the United Kingdom.
- Surveys of young people's own perception of their own health show that, in virtually all OECD countries for which data are available, girls report lower levels of health than boys and that this difference gradually increases with age.
- The percentage of young people (aged 11, 13 and 15) who report 'liking school a lot' varies from over 35% in Austria and Norway to less than 15% in Finland, the Czech Republic, and Italy.
- In the OECD countries as a whole, there is a slight trend towards decreasing life satisfaction between the ages of 11 and 15, particularly for girls

NOTE TO THE EDITORS

The Report Card series present 'league tables' on aspects of child wellbeing in the world's most advanced economies (countries that are members of the OECD) seeking to identify areas where societies could do better in supporting every child to be and become all that s/he can be – over and above generally universal access for every child to basic services in education, health, nutrition, shelter.

Embargoed media materials and copies of the Report Card in English, French, Spanish and Italian are available from the Centre's Innocenti Newsroom:

<http://www.unicef-icdc.org/presscentre/indexNewsroom.html>

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