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Launch of the
Innocenti Report Card no. 6
EMBARGO: 10:00 GMT, 1 March 2005

The Innocenti Report Card *Child Poverty in Rich Nations 2005* calls attention to the fact that the proportion of children living in poverty has risen in a majority of the world's developed economies since early 1990s. This report asks what is driving poverty rates upwards and why some OECD countries are doing a much better job than others in protecting children at risk.

Brief Guide to 'Best Practices' In Defining and Monitoring Child Poverty

As many more governments are likely to engage with this issue at policy level in the years immediately ahead, the following 'six principles' draw on OECD experience so far to offer a brief guide to 'best practice' in defining and monitoring child poverty.

1. Avoid unnecessary complexity

For the purposes of public advocacy and consensus building, the more complex the indicator the less useful it tends to be. The first principle of measurement must therefore be to avoid unnecessary complexity.

2. Measure material deprivation

Measuring family income in a specific year may not always be a reliable guide to the economic resources available to the child. The longer a family stays poor, and the lower the level of past savings and future expectations, the harder it will be to sustain expenditures on essential goods and services. Direct measures of material deprivation are therefore also needed.

3. Base poverty lines on social norms

Whether based on income or on direct measures of deprivation, poverty is a relative concept and the child poverty rate should be defined as the proportion of children whose access to economic resources falls so far below the norm for their societies that they cannot afford the things those around them consider to be normal.

4. Establish a regular monitoring system

Tracking progress over time is necessary to fuel advocacy, inform policy, and sharpen accountability. Poverty indicators therefore need to be regularly updated, and data requirements and collection systems need to be designed with an eye to their sustainability over time.

Updating of the national poverty picture should also be timely enough to guide policy-making.

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5. Establish a ‘backstop’ poverty line and set credible targets

It is further recommended that incoming governments publish the child poverty rate prevailing at the time of taking office — and make a commitment that under no circumstances will this rate be allowed to increase. Care is needed in the use of such an indicator. It represents a minimum test for governments, and reducing the ‘backstop’ poverty rate should not be proclaimed as a significant achievement; failure to reduce child poverty, so defined, would mean either a) that poor children were not sharing, even proportionately, in economic progress or b) that the most vulnerable were not being afforded any special protection from the effects of economic downturn.

6. Build public support for poverty reduction

This ‘ratchet’ approach to reducing child poverty requires long-term political commitment and leadership. In effect this means that the commitment must be able to survive changes in government. This in turn requires the building of public consensus behind the long-term goal of reducing child poverty.

Note to Editors

The *Innocenti Report Card* series is produced by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence.

This publication is the sixth in the series designed to monitor the performance of the industrialized countries in promoting the realization of the human rights of their children. It is also the first in a series of *Innocenti* reports on *Child Poverty in Rich Countries*.

Embargoed media materials in English, French, and Italian and downloadable copies of the report are available from the IRC Newsroom: <http://www.unicef-irc.org/presscentre/indexNewsroom.html>

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