

UNICEF Office of Research

PRESS RELEASE

Tens of millions of children living in poverty in the world's richest countries

Brussels 29 May – As debates rage on austerity measures and social spending cuts, a new report reveals the extent of child poverty and child deprivation in the world's advanced economies. Some 13 million children in the European Union (plus Norway and Iceland) lack basic items necessary for their development. Meanwhile, 30 million children – across 35 countries with developed economies – live in poverty.

Report Card 10, from UNICEF's Office of Research, looks at child poverty and child deprivation across the industrialized world, comparing and ranking countries' performance. This international comparison, says the Report, proves that child poverty in these countries is not inevitable, but policy susceptible – and that some countries are doing much better than others at protecting their most vulnerable children.

"The data reinforces that far too many children continue to go without the basics in countries that have the means to provide," said Gordon Alexander, Director of UNICEF's Office of Research. "The report also shows that some countries performed well – when looking at what is largely pre crisis data – due to the social protection systems that were in place. The risk is that in the current crisis we won't see the consequences of poor decisions until much later."

Report Card 10 examines child poverty and child deprivation in two entirely different ways. By examining these two different types of child poverty, *Report Card 10* brings together the very latest available data on child poverty and child deprivation across all of the world's advanced industrial economies.

The first measure is a Child Deprivation Index, taken from data European Union's *Statistics on Income and Living Conditions* from 29 European countries that includes for the first time a section on children. *Report Card 10* defines a child as "deprived" if he or she lacks two or more of a list of 14 basic items, such as three meals a day, a quiet place to do homework, educational books at home, or an Internet connection. The highest rates of deprivation are found in countries that include Romania, Bulgaria and Portugal (with more than 70%, 50% and 27% respectively), though

even some richer countries, such as France and Italy, have deprivation rates above 10%. The Nordic countries have the least deprivation among children, all with rates below 3%.

The second measure scrutinized in *Report Card 10* looks at relative poverty, examining the percentage of children living below their national “poverty line” – defined as 50 per cent of median disposable household income.

In doing so UNICEF’s Office of Research tries to estimate what percentage of children are falling significantly behind what can be considered normal for their own societies.

The Nordic countries and the Netherlands have the lowest rates of relative child poverty, at around seven per cent. Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom have rates of between 10 and 15 per cent, while more than 20 per cent of children in Romania and the United States live in relative poverty.

Particularly striking in *Report Card 10* are the comparisons between countries with similar economies, demonstrating that government policy can have a significant impact on the lives of children. For example, Denmark and Sweden have much lower rates of child deprivation than Belgium or Germany, yet all four countries have roughly similar levels of economic development and *per capita* income.

“The report makes clear that some governments are doing much better at tackling child deprivation than others,” said Mr Alexander. “The best performers show it is possible to address poverty within the current fiscal space. On the flip side, failure to protect children from today’s economic crisis is one of the most costly mistakes a society can make.”

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