

Report Card 11 – Child well-being in rich countries: a comparative overview

Key Findings - PART ONE: overall rank of child well-being in 29 of the world's advanced economies (per Dimension and Indicator)

The league table of child well-being ranks 29 developed countries according to the overall well-being of their children. Each country's overall rank is based on its average ranking for the five dimensions of child well-being considered in Report Card 11. In total, 26 internationally comparable indicators have been included in the overview.

- » The Netherlands retains its position as the clear leader and is the only country ranked among the top five countries in all dimensions of child well-being.
- » Overall, there does not appear to be a strong relationship between per capita GDP and overall child well-being. The Czech Republic is ranked higher than Austria, Slovenia higher than Canada, and Portugal higher than the United States.
- » Four Nordic countries – Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – sit just below the Netherlands at the top of the child well-being table.
- » The bottom four places in the table are occupied by three of the poorest countries in the survey, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania, and by one of the richest, the United States.
- » Four southern European countries –Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain – are placed in the bottom half of the table.
- » There are signs that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are beginning to close the gap with the more established industrial economies.

Dimension 1: Material well-Being

The league table of children's material well-being shows each country's performance in relation to the average for the 29 developed countries under review. The table is scaled to show each country's distance above or below that average. The length of each bar shows each country's distance above or below the average for the group as a whole. The unit of measurement is the 'standard deviation' – a measure of the spread of scores in relation to the average.

Indicator/Figure 1.1a Relative child poverty rates

- » Finland is the only country with a relative child poverty rate of less than 5% and heads the league table by a clear margin of more than two percentage points.
- » The countries in the top half of the league table all have relative child poverty rates of less than 10%.

» Four southern European countries - Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain - have child poverty rates higher than 15% (along with Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and the United States).

Indicator/Figure 1.1b Child poverty gaps (distance between the national poverty line and median incomes of households below the poverty line)

» Hungary and Luxembourg have the smallest child poverty gaps.

» Denmark is an exception among Nordic countries in having a high child poverty gap (almost 30%). Only a small proportion of Danish children (6.3%) fall below the country's relative poverty line; but those who do fall further below than in most other countries.

» Several countries have allowed the child poverty gap to widen to more than 30%. They are Bulgaria, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the United States.

Indicator/Figure 1.2a Child deprivation rates

» The five Nordic countries and the Netherlands claim the smallest proportion of children who are materially deprived.

» Ireland and Luxembourg are the only other countries with child deprivation rates below 5% (although the United Kingdom comes close at 5.5%).

» France and Italy have child deprivation rates higher than 10%.

» Four countries have child deprivation rates of more than 25% - Hungary, Latvia, Portugal and Romania.

Indicator/Figure 1.2b Percentage of children reporting low family affluence

» The Netherlands and the Nordic countries, along with Luxembourg and Switzerland, have the smallest percentage of children reporting low family affluence.

» Low family affluence rates are most severe in eight Central and Eastern European countries - the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

Dimension 2: Health and safety

The league table of children's health and safety shows each country's performance in relation to the average for the 29 developed countries under review. The table is scaled to show each country's distance above or below that average.

Indicator/Figure 2.1a Infant mortality rates

» Three Nordic countries - Finland, Iceland and Sweden - plus Luxembourg and Slovenia - head the table with infant mortality rates of fewer than 2.5 deaths per 1,000 births.

» 26 out of 35 countries have reduced infant mortality to 5 or fewer per 1,000 births.

» The only developed countries with infant mortality rates higher than 6 per 1,000 births are Latvia, Romania, Slovakia and the United States.

Indicator/Figure 2.1b Low birthweight

- » Five European countries – Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Ireland and Sweden – have succeeded in reducing the incidence of low birthweight below 5%.
- » Only in Greece, Hungary, Portugal and the United States does the low birthweight rate exceed 8%.

Indicator/Figure 2.2 Immunization rates

- » Greece and Hungary head the table with 99% immunization coverage.
- » Three of the richest countries in the OECD – Austria, Canada, and Denmark – are the only countries in which the immunization rate falls below 90%.

Indicator/Figure 2.3 Child and youth mortality rates (aged 1 to 19)

- » Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland head the table with child death rates below 15 per 100,000.
- » Central and Eastern European countries occupy the bottom third of the table – along with Belgium and Greece.

Dimension 3: Educational well-being

The league table of children's educational well-being shows each country's performance in relation to the average for the 29 developed countries under review. The table is scaled to show each country's distance above or below that average.

Indicator/Figure 3.1a Preschool enrolment rates

- » Early childhood education is virtually universal in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Spain.
- » Preschool enrolment rates exceed 90% in half of the 32 countries listed.

Indicator/Figure 3.1b Participation in further education

- » Five countries enroll 90% or more of their young people in further education – Belgium, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia.
- » Seven of the wealthiest OECD countries fall into the bottom third of the further education league table – Austria, Canada, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- » The further education enrolment rate exceeds 80% in all of the more populous developed countries except the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom is the only developed country in which the further education participation rate falls below 75%; this may be the result of an emphasis on academic qualifications combined with a diverse system of vocational qualifications which have not yet succeeded in achieving either 'parity of esteem' or an established value in employment markets.

Indicator/Figure 3.1c NEET rate (% aged 15 to 19 not in education, employment or training)

- » At the top of the table, Denmark, Norway and Slovenia have NEET rates below 3%.
- » At the foot of the table, Ireland, Italy and Spain have NEET rates of more than 10%.

Indicator/Figure 3.2 Educational achievement (average score in reading, maths and science literacy at age 15)

- » Finland is a remarkable outlier – registering a score almost 20 points clear of the second placed country.
- » Canada and the Netherlands take second and third places.
- » Three of Europe’s wealthiest countries, Austria, Luxembourg and Sweden, find themselves in the bottom half of the educational achievement table, as do all four countries of southern Europe.
- » Romania is also an outlier, registering a score more than 40 points below the next lowest country in the table.
- » Australia, Japan and New Zealand would all have been placed among the top five had it been possible to include them in the main league table (countries are excluded from the Report Card’s ranking tables if they have data for fewer than 75% of the indicators used).

Dimension 4: Behaviour and risks

The league table of children's behaviours and risks shows each country's record in relation to the average for the countries under review. The table is scaled to show each country’s distance above or below that average.

Indicator/Figure 4.1a Overweight

- » Childhood obesity levels are more than 10% in all countries except Denmark, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.
- » Only Canada, Greece and the United States have childhood obesity levels higher than 20%.

Indicator/Figure 4.1b Eating breakfast

- » More than 50% of children eat breakfast every day in all 29 countries except Romania and Slovenia. Only in the Netherlands and Portugal does the percentage of children who eat breakfast every day exceed 80%.

Indicator/Figure 4.1c Eating fruit

- » The only countries in which fewer than 30% of children eat fruit every day are Finland and Sweden – plus the three Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Indicator/Figure 4.1d Exercise

- » Ireland and the United States are the only countries in which more than 25% of children report exercising for at least an hour a day.

» Italy is the only country in which fewer than 10% of children report exercising for an hour a day.

Indicator/Figure 4.2a Teenage births

» The Netherlands, Slovenia and Switzerland have the lowest rates of teenage births (below 5 per 1,000).

» Romania, the United Kingdom and the United States have the highest rates of teenage births (above 29 per 1,000).

Indicator/Figure 4.2b Smoking

» Canada, Iceland, Norway, Portugal and the United States are the only countries in which the smoking rate for young people is below 5%.

» The highest smoking rates are found in seven Central and Eastern European countries where more than 10% of young people report smoking cigarettes at least once a week. The seven countries are Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia.

Indicator/Figure 4.2c Alcohol

» Alcohol abuse (% of children aged 11, 13 and 15 who report having been drunk at least twice) by young people is lowest in the United States.

» Alcohol abuse by young people is 10% or less in only eight countries – France, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United States.

» In the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania, more than 20% of young people report having been drunk on at least two occasions.

Indicator/Figure 4.2d Cannabis

» Only in Norway does the rate of cannabis use by young people fall below 5%.

» Canada's young people have the highest rate of cannabis use (28%).

» The young people of six countries record cannabis use rates of 20% or more. They are Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Spain, Switzerland and the United States.

Indicator/Figure 4.3a Fighting

» Germany is a clear leader in having the lowest percentage of children who report being involved in fighting.

» Three Nordic countries – Denmark, Iceland and Sweden – have low levels of both bullying and fighting.

» Only in Spain does the proportion of young people involved in fighting exceed 50% (with Greece close behind at 49%).

Indicator/Figure 4.3a Being bullied

» Only in Lithuania does the proportion of young people who report being bullied exceed 50%.

Dimension 5: Housing and environment

The league table of children's housing and environment shows each country's performance in relation to the average for the 29 developed countries under review. The table is scaled to show each country's distance above or below that average.

Indicator/Figure 5.1a Rooms per person

- » In 17 of 26 countries, the average home has more rooms than people.
- » Of the nine countries with fewer rooms than people, eight are in Central and Eastern Europe.

Indicator/Figure 5.1b Multiple housing problems

- » Denmark, Iceland and Norway head the table with fewer than 1% of households reporting multiple housing problems.
- » The rate of multiple housing problems rises to more than 20% in Latvia and to almost 40% in Romania.
- » Belgium and Luxembourg are the only two countries in western Europe in which more than 5% of households with children report multiple housing problems.

Indicator/Figure 5.2a Homicide rates.

- » Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the United States are the only countries in which the homicide rate rises above 4 per 100,000. Almost all other countries fall into the range of 0 to 2.5 per 100,000.
- » The homicide rate is more than fifteen times higher in the worst performing country, Lithuania, than in the best performer, Iceland.

Indicator/Figure 5.2b Air pollution

- » The lowest levels of air pollution are found in Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, and the United States (all below 20 parts per million). The good result for the United States is influenced by legislation on air pollution (1997, revised in 2006) which enforced stricter limits than in most European countries.
- » The highest levels of pollution are found in Greece, Italy, Latvia, Poland and Romania (all higher than 30 parts per million).

Key Findings - PART TWO: Children's voices

This section looks at what children say about their own well-being and consists of two tables: 'Children's relationships with parents and peers' and 'The league table of children's life satisfaction.'

The first assesses well-being according to the quality of close relationships in the child's life (mothers, fathers, peers).

The second presents an overview of children's subjective well-being in 29 developed countries and shows the proportion of children aged 11, 13 and 15 who answered '6 or more' when asked to rate their overall life satisfaction on a scale of 0 to 10 (where '0'

represents 'the worst possible life for me' and '10' represents 'the best possible life for me').

- » Measured by the average rating for the three relationships, the Netherlands again heads the rankings.
- » Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands and Sweden are the only countries ranked in the top group for all three relationships.
- » Canada, France and the United States are the only countries ranked in the bottom group for all three relationships.
- » In every country, children found it more difficult to talk to their fathers than to their mothers – and the gap between the two measures is, on average, 16 percentage points. Only in Iceland does the difference narrow to less than 10 percentage points.
- » Over 85% of children in the developed nations have a high level of overall life satisfaction; even in the countries at the bottom of the league, more than 75% of children placed themselves above the mid-point of the life satisfaction ladder.
- » The Netherlands heads the league table of children's subjective well-being with 95% of its children reporting a high level of life satisfaction.
- » In the top five countries – Finland, Greece, Iceland, the Netherlands and Spain – approximately 90% of children reported a high level of life satisfaction in 2009/2010.
- » Only in Poland and Romania does the 'high life satisfaction' rate fall below 80%.
- » Children in Canada, Germany, Portugal and the United States find themselves in the bottom third of the *Children's Life Satisfaction League Table* – along with Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

Key Findings - PART THREE: the 10 year record

This section looks at each country's progress in educational achievement, teenage birth rates, childhood obesity levels, the prevalence of bullying, and the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs.

- » Finland and the Netherlands lead the child well-being tables in both 2001/2002 and 2009/2010.
- » Austria, Greece, Hungary the United Kingdom and the United States are ranked in the bottom third of the table for both 2001/2002 and 2009/2010 (though the United Kingdom rose four places).
- » Over the decade, Portugal climbed from the bottom third to a mid-table position.
- » Overall, there is a rise in further education enrolment rates in 14 out of 21 countries, with particularly significant increases in Canada, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal and the United States.
- » Finland is the outstanding performer in both 2003 and 2009 when it comes to educational achievement.
- » The percentage of overweight children rose in 17 of the 21 countries over the decade.

- » The sharpest rise in the percentage of overweight children was seen in Poland, where it doubled.
- » Only Belgium, France, Spain and the United Kingdom saw a fall in the percentage of overweight children.
- » The United States had the highest proportion of children overweight at both the beginning and end of the decade, reaching almost 30% by 2009/2010.
- » Births to teenagers declined in 18 out of 21 countries between 2003 and 2009.
- » Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and United States all recorded falls in teenage fertility rates of 10 points or more.
- » The exceptions to the falling trend in teenage fertility rates were Belgium, Spain and the United Kingdom. This finding is particularly significant for the United Kingdom because its teenage fertility rate at the beginning of the decade was already the highest in Europe.
- » The percentage of children and young people who smoke cigarettes has fallen in all 21 countries for which comparable data are available (with the exception of Greece and Sweden where rates were low at the beginning of the decade and have remained stable).
- » Germany, Norway, Portugal and the United Kingdom more than halved the proportion of children and young people who smoke cigarettes, recording the biggest fall over the decade.
- » More than three-quarters of the 21 countries also saw declines in alcohol use by young people – as measured by the proportion of 11-, 13- and 15-yearolds who report having been drunk on at least two occasions.
- » 17 out of 20 countries reported a fall in cannabis use over the decade.
- » Germany and the United Kingdom have more than halved cannabis use among young people over the decade – respectively from 19% to 9% and 34% to 17%.
- » The proportion of children and young people who report being involved in fighting fell in 17 of the 20 countries for which data are available.
- » The percentage of children who report being bullied fell in 16 out of 21 countries.
- » Five countries – Belgium, Finland, Greece, Hungary and Ireland – saw a rise in the bullying rate over the decade.