**MEDIA KEY MESSAGES**

**INNOCENTI REPORT CARD 13: FAIRNESS FOR CHILDREN**

**KEY MESSAGES**

1. Report Card 13 *Fairness for Children: A league table of inequality in child well-being in rich countries* provides a detailed analysis of inequality in 41 high-income countries.
2. The report focuses on gaps between children at the bottom and those in the middle. It aims to highlight how far children are falling behind in the dimensions of income, education, health, and life satisfaction.
3. The new figures reveal rich countries are failing the bottom 10 per cent of children as inequality among children grows.
   1. Incomes in households below the median have grown more slowly than those above it, fuelling increases in poverty and deprivation among children.

* 1. Inequality gaps in educational achievement have narrowed, yet inequality in health among children has widened across EU and OECD countries.
  2. Whilst inequality in life satisfaction remains relatively stable, migrant children suffer the poorest life satisfaction.

1. UNICEF is urging governments across the EU and OECD to tackle inequality by prioritising the needs of the most disadvantaged children.

**Overall inequality**

* A comparison of overall league tables suggests that Canada, France, Iceland, and Sweden have seen their comparative positions decline in recent years.
* France and Canada, previously towards the middle of the overall table, now rank in the bottom third; whilst Iceland and Sweden, previously towards the top of the overall league table, now sit marginally above the bottom third.
* Denmark is at the top of the overall league table. It was comparatively low bottom-end inequality in each of the four domains of child well-being. Israel and Turkey rank at the bottom of the overall league table.
* Some of the richest countries in the world are placed in the bottom third of the overall league table including Canada (26th), France (28th) and Italy (32nd).

**Income inequality**

* The report identifies that income inequality has increased in the majority of rich countries with 19 out of 37 countries seeing an increase in the relative child income gap of at least 1 percentage point between 2008 and 2013.
* The largest increases in income inequality – of at least 5 percentage points – occurred in four southern European countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) and three Eastern European countries (Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia).
* Scandinavian countries, with the exception of mid-ranking Sweden, have the smallest relative income gaps.
* Two of the world’s wealthiest countries, Japan and the United States, were positioned in the bottom third of the league table for income inequality. In Japan the household income of a child at the 10th percentile is 60.17 per cent lower than that of a child in the middle of the income distribution, and 58.85 per cent in the United States.

**Educational achievement inequality**

* Inequality in educational achievement narrowed in the majority of countries between 2006 and 2012, with the exception of Finland and Sweden which saw bottom-end inequality increase alongside a worrying fall in median test scores. The largest improvements were made in Chile, the Czech Republic, Germany and Mexico.
* Finland and Sweden saw a notable increase in the proportion of 15 year olds who failed to achieve proficiency level 2 in maths, reading and science, suggesting that there is a growing group of very disadvantaged children in these two countries.
* Whilst some countries are moving upward, others demonstrate a worrying regressive trend in terms of their support for children at the ‘bottom’.
* The evidence presented in the report shows that large relative educational achievement gaps are not inevitable. Strong all-round performance seen in countries such as Denmark, Estonia and Poland shows that there is no need to sacrifice a rise in overall educational achievement in order to reduce relative achievement gaps or absolute educational disadvantage.

**Health**

* Inequality in children’s health increased in the majority of countries.
* Data from the 2013/2014 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) study highlighted in the health league tables in the report show that the average relative gap in children’s self-reported health symptoms is 29 per cent across the 35 countries examined.
* The smallest health gaps are found in Austria (23.6 per cent), Germany (24.8 per cent), and Switzerland (25 per cent). The largest inequalities in children’s health are found in Israel where the relative health gap is 38.9 per cent, and Turkey, 34.5 per cent.
* More than half of children in Turkey and around a third of children in Bulgaria, France, Israel, Malta and Romania report one or more health symptom a day.
* Adolescent girls are persistently more likely to fall behind in health. In 10 countries the gender gap has increased since 2002 including in Canada, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. These differences are likely to endure into adulthood.

**Life satisfaction**

* The life satisfaction scores are based on children’s own ratings of their life satisfaction on the scale of 0 (“worst possible life for you”) to 10 (“best possible life for you”).
* The ‘average’ child reports life satisfaction of 8 out of 10 in almost all countries, but children at the lower end of the life satisfaction distribution fall far behind their peers – typically between 2.5 and 3 points out of 10 lower than the median.
* Children at the bottom fall furthest behind in Turkey, where the relative life satisfaction gap is 36 per cent. Over 15 per cent of children in Turkey rate their life satisfaction as 4 out of 10 or below. The smallest relative gap (24 per cent) is found in the Netherlands.
* In Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and the United States, either first- or second- generation migrant children reported lower life satisfaction than non-immigrant children.
* At ages 13 and 15 girls are more likely than boys in all countries to have fallen behind in life satisfaction. At age 13, the largest gender gaps are in Malta and Sweden.

**Conclusions**

* Evidence suggests that reducing bottom-end inequality is an effective way of improving child well-being outcomes for all.
* Countries with lower bottom-end inequality in child well-being have fewer children living in poverty, fewer children with very low educational achievement, fewer children reporting frequent health complaints, and fewer children reporting very low life satisfaction.
* In all countries, bottom-end inequality has persisted over time, and progress in reducing gaps has often been limited, meaning children in the bottom 10 per cent are not only being denied the best possible start in life, but that their opportunities to flourish in adult life are often being harmed, too.
* Childhood is a formative and fleeting stage of life. Taking children’s rights seriously means acting with urgency to address the disadvantages faced by those children who are falling furthest behind.

**Principles and recommendations**

Analysis in the report suggests the following principles and recommendations for governments to consider in strengthening child well-being:

* Protect the incomes of households with the poorest children.
* Focus on improving the educational achievements of disadvantaged learners.
* Promote and support healthy lifestyles for all children.
* Take data on subjective well-being seriously.
* Place equity at the heart of child well-being agendas.
* Children’s voices should be built into data-collection processes.

**BACKGROUND QUESTIONS  
  
I. REPORT CARD 13**

**What is Report Card 13 about?**

Report Card 13 *Fairness for Children: A league table of inequality in child well-being in rich countries* provides a detailed analysis of inequality in 41 high-income countries.   
  
The report is the latest edition of the Innocenti Report Card series which assesses child well-being in EU and OECD countries. Produced by the UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, the report focuses on gaps between children at the bottom and those at the median (the middle of the distribution). By ranking countries against each other, the report aims to highlight how far children are falling behind in the dimensions of income, education, health, and life satisfaction.

**Why does UNICEF’s Report Card 13 focus on high-income countries?**

In keeping with UNICEF's global mandate to advocate for the rights of all children, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, the Innocenti Report Card Series focuses on the well-being of children in developed countries. Report Card 13 covers 41 countries in the European Union and/or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The selection of countries has been driven by the availability of comparable sources of data as well as common frameworks for monitoring child well-being.

**What is the purpose of ranking countries in league tables?**

Although monitoring at the national level remains crucial to immediately address possible gaps and failings, international rankings – as presented in this report – can highlight strengths and weaknesses in individual countries and demonstrate what is achievable. Comparative data demonstrate that child well-being is, by and large, shaped by policies. Findings from these data can indicate to politicians, press and public how their country’s performance in protecting children compares with the record of other nations at a similar level of development. Using this means of international comparison it is possible to show and prove that the problems we are looking at are not inevitable but policy susceptible – and that some countries are clearly doing much better than others.

**II. THE METHODOLOGY**

**How has UNICEF measured inequality among children?**

Report Card 13 measures inequality in four dimensions - income, education, health and life satisfaction by using three different measures focusing on the gap between the median and the bottom 10 per cent, known as ‘bottom-end inequality’. By measuring bottom-end inequality, we are able to identify how far behind the most disadvantaged children are being left to fall behind.

**Why does Report Card 13 focus on “bottom-end inequality”?**

Report Card 13 uses three different measures focusing on the gap between the median and the bottom 10 per cent, known as ‘bottom-end inequality’. By measuring bottom-end inequality, we are able to identify how far behind the most disadvantaged children are being left to fall behind.

**Why does UNICEF measure multiple dimensions of child well-being?**

UNICEF and many other development organizations now recognize that the best way to measure child poverty is with a multi-dimensional approach taking into consideration income, health, education and other dimensions of well-being. It is quite possible for children to live in homes with a moderate or even high level of income and still be deprived of critically important essential goods and services.

**How is “bottom-end inequality” measured over-all?**

Report Card 13 measures inequality in four dimensions - income, education, health and life satisfaction, by using three different measures focusing on the gap between the median and the bottom of the distribution.

**How is income inequality measured?**

Income inequality is determined by measuring the difference between the household income of the child at the 50th percentile (the median – i.e. poorer than 50 per cent of children) and that of the child at the 10th percentile (i.e. poorer than 90 per cent of children), as a percentage of the median.

**How is education inequality measured?**

Education achievement is measured through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test score in maths, science and reading. Education inequality among children is determined by measuring the absolute difference in test scores between the median and the 10th percentile. Overall ranking of countries is based on average z-scores across three subjects.

**How is health inequality measured?**

Health scores are based on a summary measure of eight different self-reported recent symptoms (e.g. headaches, nausea) on a scale from 0 to 32. Health inequality is determined by measuring the difference between the median score and the average score for all children below the median (i.e. in the lower half of the distribution), as a percentage of the median.

**How is life satisfaction inequality measured?**

Children have rated their life satisfaction on a scale of 0 to 10. Life satisfaction inequality is determined by measuring the difference between the median score and the average score for all children below the median (i.e. in the lower half of the distribution), as a percentage of the median.

**Inequality is almost always measured in terms of income. Aren’t the differences in other domains related to performance, ability and other individual characteristics?**

Report Card 13 challenges and extends the debate on inequality among children by broadening its scope to other important aspects of child well-being such as education, health and life-satisfaction. Given the links and various pathways between these domains and income it is crucial to analyze the extent to which some children fall behind from what’s considered typical in their society in a multidimensional way.

**How does “bottom-end” inequality in children’s education and health differ from ‘social gradients’?**

Although Report Card 13 recognises the importance of socio-economic gradients in child outcomes – differences in health or educational outcomes based on family socio-economic status – it emphasises the independent value of a distributional (spread) measure as it recognises the danger of leaving some children too far behind national standards.

**III: THE FINDINGS**

**What does the report show in terms of income inequality?**

The report shows that income inequality has increased in the majority of rich countries with 19 out of 37 countries seeing an increase in the relative child income gap of at least 1 percentage point between 2008 and 2013. A relative income gap refers to the difference between groups in terms of the share of total income.

Income inequality is determined by measuring the difference between the household income of the child at the 50th percentile (the median – i.e. poorer than 50 per cent of children) and that of the child at the 10th percentile (i.e. poorer than 90 per cent of children), as a percentage of the median.

**Which countries stand out in terms of income inequality?**

The largest increases in income inequality – of at least 5 percentage points – occurred in four southern European countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) and three Eastern European countries (Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia). Scandinavian countries, with the exception of mid-ranking Sweden, have the smallest relative income gaps.

Two of the world’s wealthiest countries, Japan and the United States, were positioned in the bottom third of the league table for income inequality. In Japan the household income of a child at the 10th percentile is 60.17 per cent lower than that of a child in the middle of the income distribution, and 58.85 per cent lower in the United States.

**What does the report show in terms of education inequality?**

Inequality in reading narrowed in the majority of countries between 2006 and 2012, with the exception of Finland and Sweden which saw bottom-end inequality increase alongside a worrying fall in median test scores. The largest improvements were made in Chile, the Czech Republic, Germany and Mexico.

Finland and Sweden saw a notable increase in the proportion of 15-year-olds who failed to achieve proficiency level 2 in maths, reading and science, suggesting that there is a growing group of very disadvantaged children in these two countries.

Whilst some countries are improving, others demonstrate a worrying regressive trend in terms of their support for children at the ‘bottom’.

The evidence presented in the report shows that large relative educational achievement gaps are not inevitable. Strong all-round performance seen in countries such as Estonia, Ireland, Poland and Latvia shows that there is no need to sacrifice a rise in overall educational achievement in order to reduce relative achievement gaps or absolute educational disadvantage.

**What does the report show in terms of health inequality?**

Inequality in children’s health increased in the majority of countries.

Data from the 2013/2014 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) study highlighted in the health league tables in the report show that the average relative gap in children’s self-reported health symptoms is 29 per cent across the 35 countries examined.

The smallest health gaps are found in Austria (23.6 per cent), Germany (24.8 per cent), and Switzerland (25 per cent). The largest inequalities in children’s health are found in Israel where the relative health gap is 38.9 per cent, and Turkey, 34.5 per cent.

More than half of children in Turkey and around a third of children in Bulgaria, France, Israel, Malta and Romania report one or more health symptom a day.

Adolescent girls are persistently more likely to fall behind in health. In 2002, the gender gap has increased in 10 countries including in Canada, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. These differences are likely to endure into adulthood.

**What does the report show in terms of life satisfaction inequality?**

The life satisfaction scores are based on children’s own ratings of their life satisfaction on the scale of 0 (“worst possible life for you”) to 10 (“best possible life for you”).

The ‘average’ child reports life satisfaction of 8 out of 10 in almost all countries, but children at the lower end of the life satisfaction distribution fall far behind their peers – typically between 2.5 and 3 points out of 10 lower than the median.

Children at the bottom fall furthest behind in Turkey, where the relative life satisfaction gap is 36 per cent. Over 15 per cent of children in Turkey rate their life satisfaction as 4 out of 10 or below. The smallest relative gap (24 per cent) is found in the Netherlands.

In Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and the United States, either first- or second- generation migrant children reported lower life satisfaction than non-immigrant children.

At ages 13 and 15 girls are more likely than boys in all countries to have fallen behind in life satisfaction. At age 13, the largest gender gaps are in Malta and Sweden.

**Which countries stand out overall?**

A comparison of overall league tables suggests that Canada, France, Iceland, and Sweden have seen their comparative positions decline in recent years.

France and Canada, previously towards the middle of the overall table, now rank in the bottom third; whilst Iceland and Sweden, previously towards the top of the overall league table, now sit marginally above the bottom third.

Denmark is at the top of the overall league table. It was comparatively low bottom-end inequality in each of the four domains of child well-being. Israel and Turkey rank at the bottom of the overall league table.

Some of the richest countries in the world are placed in the bottom third of the overall league table including Canada (26th), France (28th) and Italy (32nd).

**Why have some countries that usually appear near the top of Report Card league tables fallen quite far down – for example Sweden – in several Report Card 13 rankings?**

Report Card 13 focuses on bottom-end inequality and its measures reveal how far behind the most disadvantaged children are allowed to fall. It helps to deconstruct and disclose what is often hidden in the average measures. Most of the previous Report Card rankings focus on the average, hence a change in the measure used will result in a change in the rankings. International comparisons of bottom-end inequality set each nation’s performance in child well-being not against an abstract concept of equality but against the practical benchmark of what other nations at similar levels of economic development have already achieved. Different geographical and historical circumstances may help to explain different degrees of inequality. In the case of income, an increase in inequality, as it is the case in many countries, is a combined effect of unequal growth rates along the distribution, changes in the demographic profile and social transfers.

**Some EU countries that have the widest inequality gaps have been receiving large numbers of migrants and refugees. Is the country’s poor performance due to the influx of migrants?**

No. The data used in the analysis do not reflect the recent influx of migrants as the latest data used relate to 2014.

However, we know from the report that whilst inequality in life satisfaction remains relatively stable, migrant children suffer the poorest life satisfaction.

UNICEF is urging governments across the EU and OECD to tackle inequality by prioritising the needs of the most disadvantaged children.

**The report references a study in several high income countries which suggests that schools with higher proportion of immigrant children have more incidents of violence and bullying (box on immigration, p 35). How does UNICEF explain this outcome?**

The box refers to the schools with a higher proportion of migrant children, not migrant children themselves. The text in question references higher levels of violence *and bullying* which encompasses conditions where migrant children may be either recipients and/or initiators of maltreatment. In addition, it is fair to assume that migrant children may be predominantly attending schools in disadvantaged communities where there is a background climate of lower socio economic status, more frequency of low work intensity homes, higher stress levels, etc.

**IV. THE RESEARCH/SOURCES**

**Who produced background research for Report Card 13?**

Report Card 13 draws on research findings from 11 background papers produced by the Social and Economic Policy team within the UNICEF Office of Research, Innocenti in collaboration with the Health Behaviour in School-Age Children (HBSC) network. Preliminary and final findings were presented to the Report Card Advisory Board (see page 47). All 11 working papers are available at [www.unicef-irc.org](http://www.unicef-irc.org). They have all been peer reviewed by external experts.

**What are the main data sources used in Report Card 13?**

The calculations of income inequality among children are based on micro-data from the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) 2013 for European Union countries and Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. For the remaining 9 countries included in the analysis the income data come from nationally representative household income surveys. Analysis of inequality in educational achievement is based on OECD Programme of International Students’ Assessment (PISA) 2012 date set. Health and life satisfaction data are sourced from the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) 2013/2014 survey. Detailed description of the data sources is on page 44 of Report Card 13.

**How did UNICEF decide to use the four separate League Tables on income inequality, education inequality, health inequality and life satisfaction inequality instead of one overall League Table?**

The presentation of the league tables separately in each domain provides transparency and clarity for international comparisons. Moreover, separate League Tables enabled to put the bottom-end inequality indicators in the context of appropriate measures of absolute disadvantage. But keeping with the tradition of the Report Card series, one overall League Table summarising all four domains is also provided (League Table 5).

**V: ARGUMENT**

**Why is reducing bottom-end inequality for all important?**

Evidence suggests that reducing bottom-end inequality is an effective way of improving child well-being outcomes for all.

Countries with lower bottom-end inequality in child well-being have fewer children living in poverty, fewer children with very low educational achievement, fewer children reporting frequent health complaints, and fewer children reporting very low life satisfaction.

In all countries, bottom-end inequality has persisted over time, and progress in reducing gaps has often been limited, meaning children in the bottom 10 per cent are not only being denied the best possible start in life, but that their opportunities to flourish in adult life are often being harmed, too.

**VI: ACTION**

**What policy changes would UNICEF like to see in developed countries to address child inequality?**

Analysis in the report suggests the following principles and recommendations for governments to consider in strengthening child well-being:

* Protect the incomes of households with the poorest children.
* Focus on improving the educational achievements of disadvantaged learners.
* Promote and support healthy lifestyles for all children.
* Take data on subjective well-being seriously.
* Place equity at the heart of child well-being agendas.
* Children’s voices should be built into data-collection processes.

Further details can be found below:

* Protect the incomes of households with **the poorest children**. Boosting employment opportunities for parents, implementing progressive taxation and effective service provision all have a role to play. However, it is evident that large income gaps tend to go hand in hand with less-extensive social transfer systems.
* Focus on **inclusive education**, which improves the educational achievements of students who fall far behind including socially disadvantaged learners. The Convention on the Rights of the Child requires recognition not just of the right to education, but also “achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity”. This means preventing children from falling far behind in their educational achievement. Evidence from the PISA surveys shows that there is no inevitable trade-off between reducing achievement gaps and overall outcomes, and so this agenda can be both fair and effective.
* Promote and **support healthy lifestyles** for all children. Promoting healthy lifestyles at an early age is likely to pay short- and long-term dividends, but the fact that such large relative child health gaps exist in many countries is a cause for concern. This is particularly so for inequalities in physical activity, given that these seem more tightly bound to inequalities in income. This would suggest that there is particular scope for governments to do more to open up opportunities for less-affluent children to participate in physical activity in and out of school. Evidence from the EU-SILC shows that low income is a barrier to participation in extra-curricular activities in European schools.
* **Take subjective well-being seriously**. Data gathered over a period of more than 10 years for the HBSC survey show stable patterns of inequality in children’s life satisfaction. While this stability confirms that subjective well-being data reveal meaningful information about children’s lives in rich countries, the fact that some countries have had persistently large gaps is a cause for concern. Moreover, the findings that children with low life satisfaction are more likely to be exposed to risky health behaviours and outcomes underlines the fact that subjective well-being also matters for health and education.
* **Place equity at the heart of child well-being** agendas. The leave-no-one-behind principle should form the foundation of future social strategies. The evidence presented in this Report Card suggests that to improve overall child well-being the most disadvantaged must not be ignored.

**What is UNICEF calling for?**

UNICEF urges governments to review their economic policies on all children, and address any imbalances identified; revitalise political commitment to tackle child inequality; tackle the structural causes of poverty; and focus on the most disadvantaged children to reduce the damaging levels of inequality found in the majority of countries in this report.