

UNICEF REPORT CARD 13  
**FAIRNESS FOR CHILDREN**  
CANADA'S CHALLENGE

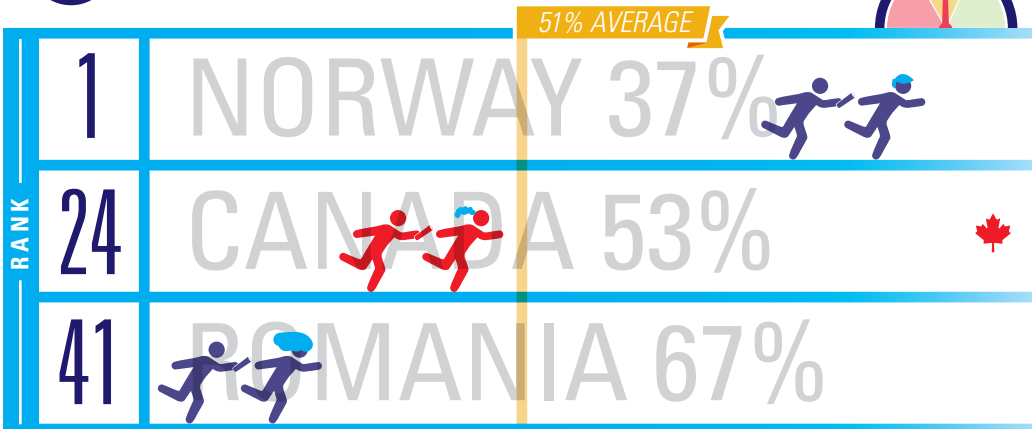
## THE RACE FROM THE BOTTOM

UNICEF Report Card 13, *Fairness for Children: A league table of inequality in child well-being in rich countries*, measures the depths of inequality in children's well-being across rich countries. The swirling debates about inequality in Canada have largely overlooked the impacts on children. How far behind does Canada allow some children to fall? How likely are they to stay there? We track the progress Canada is making for children and what it will take to accelerate children's well-being – fairly and for all. Many of the gaps between Canada's children are wider than in most rich countries, but in some aspects of child well-being Canada isn't very far from the best performing countries. In the international "olympics" of child well-being, there isn't much to celebrate – but the podium isn't out of reach.



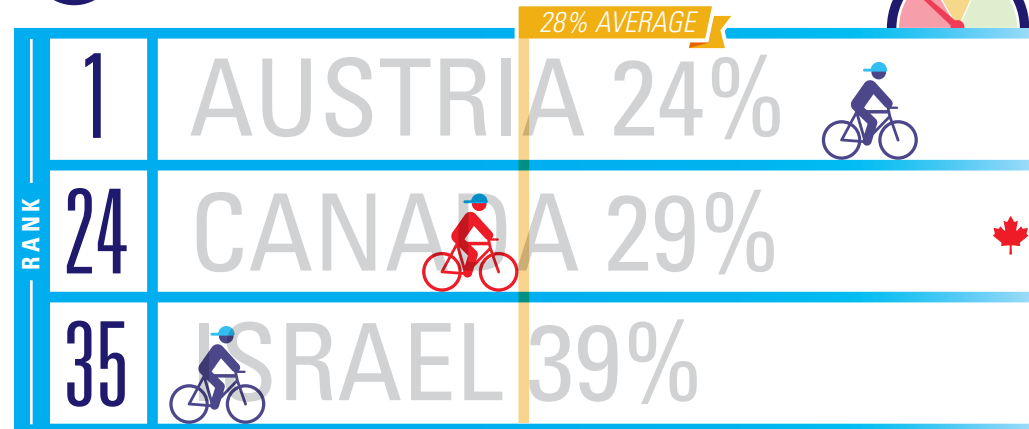
## COMPARING INEQUALITY ACROSS RICH COUNTRIES

### \$ INCOME



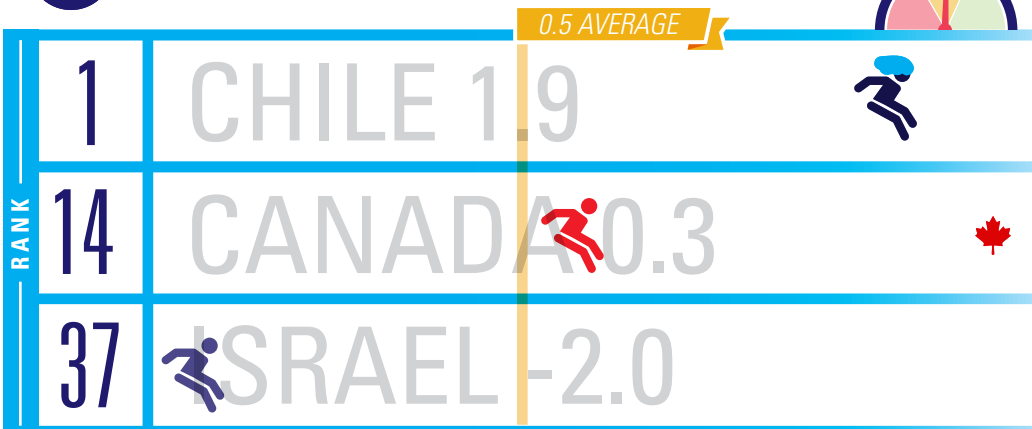
In Canada, the poorest children have family incomes 53 per cent lower than the average child.

### HEALTH



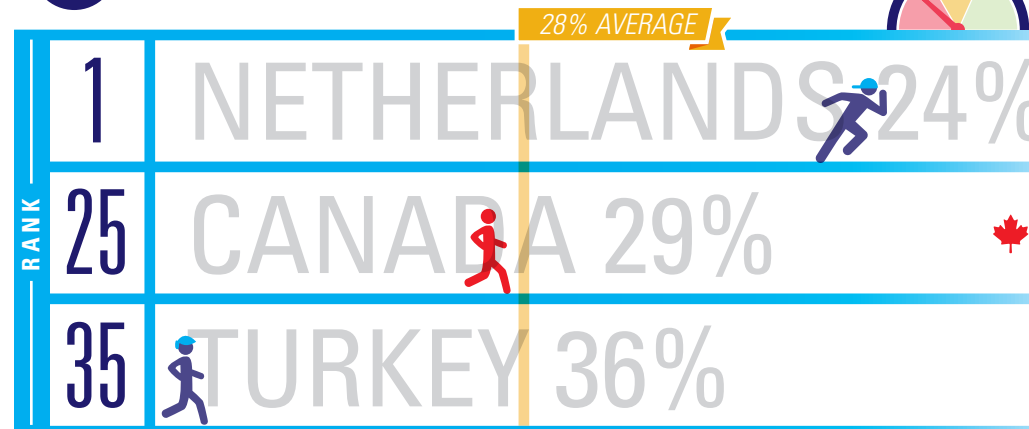
In Canada, the health score for children at the bottom of the distribution is 29 per cent lower than children at the middle.

### EDUCATION



In Canada, the children at the bottom have an educational achievement gap 0.3 points lower than the average child.

### LIFE SATISFACTION



In Canada, the life satisfaction rating of children at the bottom is 29 per cent lower than the rating of children in the middle.

## LEADER BOARD OF NATIONS

Canada ranks in the middle of UNICEF's Index of Child Well-being - a composite of national averages of key indicators including child poverty, health and education. In the UNICEF Index of Child Inequality, the focus shifts from national averages to the gaps between children at the bottom and children in the middle of their society. Ranking 26 of 35 wealthy countries, Canada is one of the most unequal societies for children. Canada is one of a handful of countries (including France, Iceland and Sweden) where equality has declined markedly in recent years.



UNICEF INDEX OF:

| Overall Child Well-being (Report Card 11) |                | Overall Child Inequality (Report Card 13) |                |
|---|----------------|---|----------------|
| Rank                                      | Country        | Rank                                      | Country        |
| 1   | Netherlands    | 1   | Denmark        |
| 2   | Norway         | 2   | Finland        |
| 3   | Iceland        | 2   | Norway         |
| 4   | Finland        | 2   | Switzerland    |
| 5   | Sweden         | 5   | Austria        |
| 6   | Germany        | 6   | Netherlands    |
| 7   | Luxembourg     | 7   | Ireland        |
| 8   | Switzerland    | 8   | Estonia        |
| 9   | Belgium        | 9   | Slovenia       |
| 10  | Ireland        | 10  | Latvia         |
| 11  | Denmark        | 11  | Czech Republic |
| 12  | Slovenia       | 12  | Croatia        |
| 13  | France         | 13  | Australia      |
| 14  | Czech Republic | 14  | Germany        |
| 15  | Portugal       | 14  | Greece         |
| 16  | United Kingdom | 14  | Hungary        |
| 17  | Canada         | 14  | United Kingdom |
| 18  | Austria        | 18  | United States  |
| 19  | Spain          | 19  | Portugal       |
| 20  | Hungary        | 20  | Iceland        |
| 21  | Poland         | 21  | Romania        |
| 22  | Italy          | 22  | Spain          |
| 23  | Estonia        | 23  | Sweden         |
| 23  | Slovakia       | 24  | Malta          |
| 25  | Greece         | 25  | Lithuania      |
| 26  | United States  | 26  | Canada         |
| 27  | Lithuania      | 27  | Poland         |
| 28  | Latvia         | 28  | France         |
| 29  | Romania        | 29  | Belgium        |
|   |                | 29  | Luxembourg     |
|   |                | 31  | Slovakia       |
|   |                | 32  | Italy          |
|   |                | 33  | Bulgaria       |
|   |                | 34  | Turkey         |
|   |                | 35  | Israel         |

The following countries do not appear in the Composite Index because data is not available: Republic of Korea, Chile, New Zealand, Japan, Cyprus, Mexico

## PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST

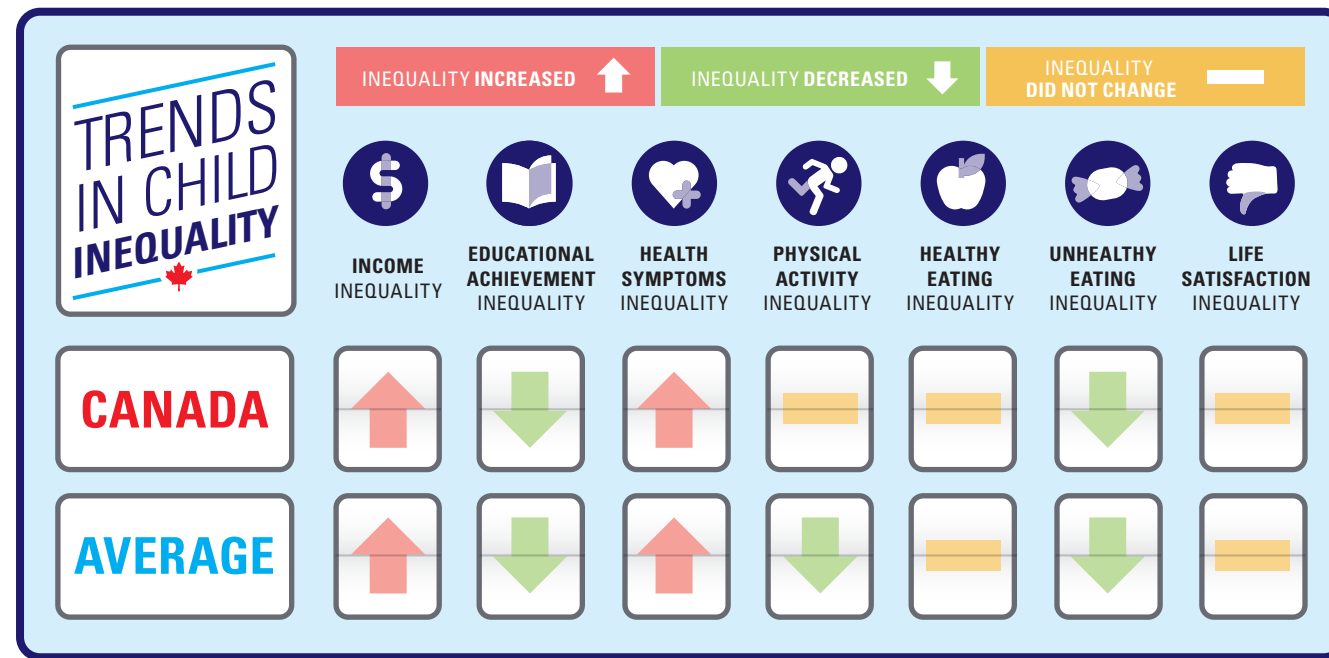


Equity for children begins with "equality of opportunity" – the basic idea that every child should have a fair start in life and fairly equal chances to develop their potential. The aim of equity-focused policies is to eliminate the unfair and avoidable circumstances that lead to great differences in children's survival, development and protection.

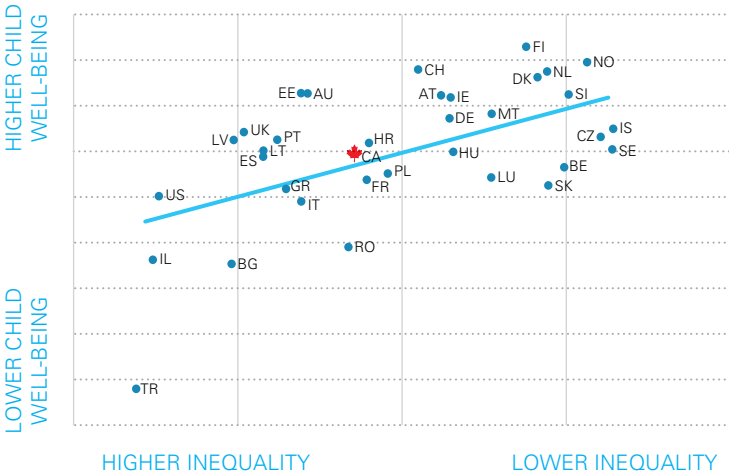
Read more at [unicef.ca/irc13](http://unicef.ca/irc13)

# TRENDS IN CHILD WELL-BEING INEQUALITY OVER THE PAST DECADE

While income inequality has risen in Canada, some countries with wider income inequality have narrower gaps in child well-being. This suggests that children's experience of inequality is magnified in Canada and we are failing to shield them from its effects. Progress in reducing the gaps has been variable. The area of most notable improvement is the reduction of unhealthy eating of sugar-added snacks and beverages, though this gap remains the widest among all the measures in the UNICEF Report Card.



## INCOME INEQUALITY AND CHILD WELL-BEING OUTCOMES



**COUNTRIES WITH GREATER OVERALL INCOME EQUALITY TEND TO LIMIT THE GAPS IN CHILD WELL-BEING AND MINIMIZE ADVERSE CHILD WELL-BEING OUTCOMES**

**COUNTRIES WITH WIDER BOTTOM-END income inequality ALSO TEND TO HAVE LOWER LEVELS OF OVERALL CHILD WELL-BEING**

**COUNTRIES WITH SMALLER GAPS IN CHILD WELL-BEING tend to have HIGHER LEVELS OF OVERALL CHILD WELL-BEING**

**SMALLER GAPS IN HEALTH, EDUCATION & LIFE SATISFACTION are associated with HIGHER OUTCOMES in these areas**

**MORE CHILDREN DO BETTER** in countries with LOWER LEVELS OF INEQUALITY

**WIDE INEQUALITY LIMITS THE POTENTIAL OF CHILDREN – not only those who FALL FARTHEST BEHIND**

## HOW CAN CANADA GET UNSTUCK?



Growing up people always said I had potential, that I'd be the one to get out, as if we were living in some sort of jail system. Why or how would I be the one to make it out? How can someone have hope to get out when this is all the life you know? So I became a runner. I ran from the things that hurt me and, honestly, who would want to stay in that life?

— Savanna, UNICEF Canada Youth Blogger

As in most affluent nations, the rate of growth in Canada's economy has exceeded the rate of improvement in overall child well-being over the past few decades. Where is the dividend for children in the country's economic progress? In Canada, the dividends have not been spread equitably. In fact, despite Canada's relative economic strength, we have larger and in some ways widening disparities in children's well-being. This suggests that growing the economy will not be enough to improve child well-being. To advance the well-being of children overall, we have to narrow the gaps. The fact that children do not fall as far behind in some countries as in others demonstrates that large gaps are not inevitable. Achieving greater equity and higher overall well-being for children are mutually reinforcing goals – not trade-offs. A focus on "evening the odds" and distributing "fairness" in affluent nations seems to produce healthier, happier children and prosperous societies.

- A fair start for all children
- Improve the incomes of households with children
- Pursue progressive universalism in children's programs and services
  - Start earlier to support child development
  - Improve the educational outcomes of all learners
  - Promote and support health for all children
  - Take subjective well-being seriously
- Improve monitoring and measurement of child well-being
- Address inequalities through child impact assessment of policies

## BOYS & GIRLS ARE DIFFERENTLY UNEQUAL IN CANADA

|              | 15-year-old boys fare worse than girls in maths, reading and science | Girls are far more likely to fall behind in health and the gap has been increasing | 15-year-old girls have a lower sense of life satisfaction than boys |
|--------------|--|--|---|
| <b>BOYS</b>  | -2 POINTS  |  |   |
| <b>GIRLS</b> |  | -14 POINTS   | -9 POINTS   |

The true measure of a nation's fairness is how well it attends to the well-being of its most disadvantaged children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and their own sense of well-being.

— UNICEF, 2007

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