



# OH CANADA!

OUR KIDS DESERVE BETTER.

**UNICEF REPORT CARD 14**  
The Youth Perspective

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**YOUTH COMPANION TO UNICEF REPORT CARD 14***Oh Canada! Our kids deserve better*

Visit [unicef.ca/irc14](http://unicef.ca/irc14) for UNICEF Report Card 14, *Building our Future: Children and Sustainable Development Goals in Rich Countries*, infographics and background papers. Data sources and full references are cited in the Report Card.

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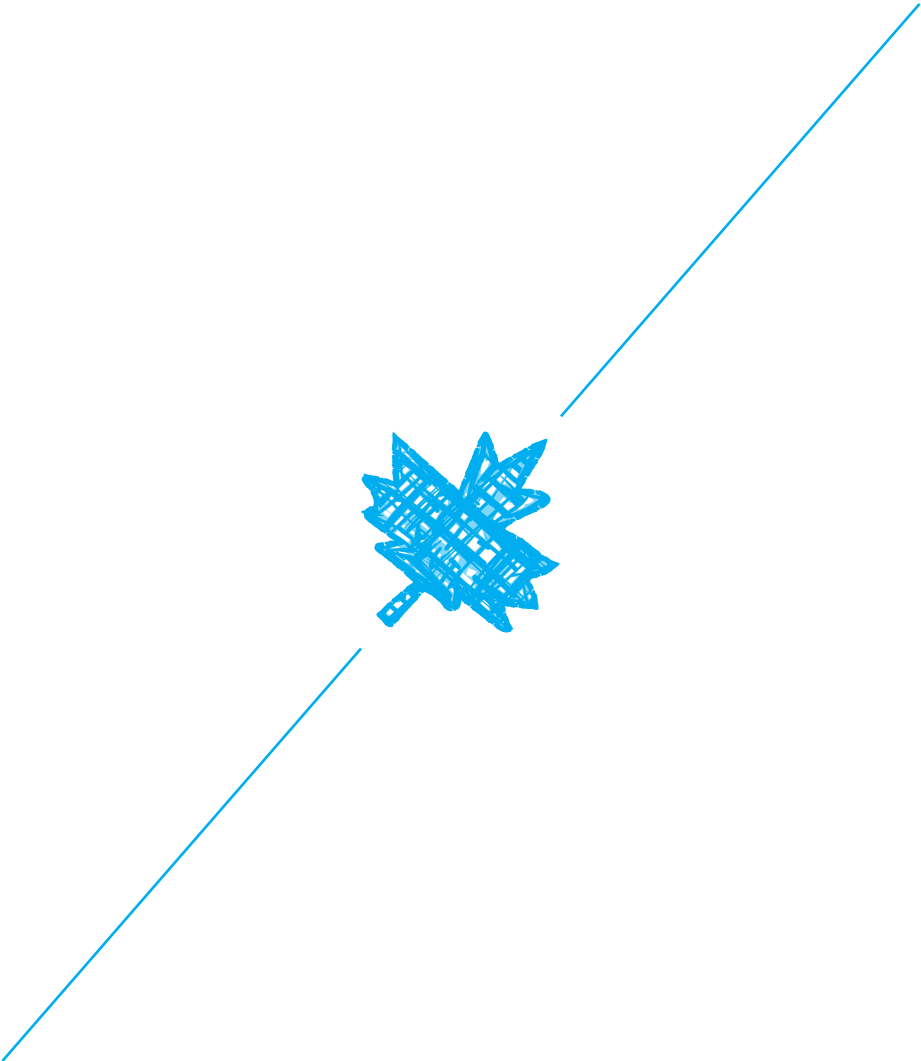
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# GROWING UP IN CANADA

*IN SEPTEMBER 2015, 193 COUNTRIES, INCLUDING CANADA, SET GOALS FOR THE WORLD CALLED THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs), OR GLOBAL GOALS.*

The SDGs aim to end extreme poverty and hunger, provide lifelong education for all, protect the planet and promote peaceful and inclusive societies by 2030. They include protecting children from violence, fighting climate change and reducing inequality. Putting the well-being of children and youth first and meeting their needs are necessary steps to achieve these goals.

UNICEF Report Card 14 ranks the world's 41 rich countries on how they are achieving the Sustainable Development Goals that focus on children and youth. This is because how kids are doing is connected to how our economy and our planet are doing. There are 27 indicators of child and youth well-being in Report Card 14, and Canada has data to report on 21<sup>1</sup> of these indicators.

Many think of Canada as a big, clean, safe and healthy nation. But the information in this Report Card suggests it is not so very clean, safe or healthy for its children and youth.

- Canada ranks 25th place out of 41 rich countries on the Index of Child and Youth Well-being and Sustainability.<sup>2</sup>
- Canada's middle ranking hasn't improved in years; we placed 17th in 2013 and 26th in 2016 on similar indexes measuring how Canada's kids are doing compared to other rich countries.
- In Canada, about half of the indicators have improved and half have worsened.<sup>3</sup>
- The Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) are at the top, as they usually are when we measure these indicators, but they are now joined by Germany and rising performers including Korea, Slovenia and Japan.

<sup>1</sup> We also include an indicator for breastfeeding toward the goal of improving nutrition, reporting on 21 indicators in total.

<sup>2</sup> Countries of the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

<sup>3</sup> Of the 21 indicators available for Canada, 7 indicators have improved; 8 have worsened, 2 have no change, and 4 have no time series data for comparison. The change in some indicators is very small in either direction.

## Well-being isn't one thing – it's a bunch of things...

Feeling healthy inside your body and mind

Feeling like you belong, you have friends and caring adults around you

Being able to learn and grow to become the person you want to become

Having a safe place to live, to sleep, and to hang out

Being involved in your community

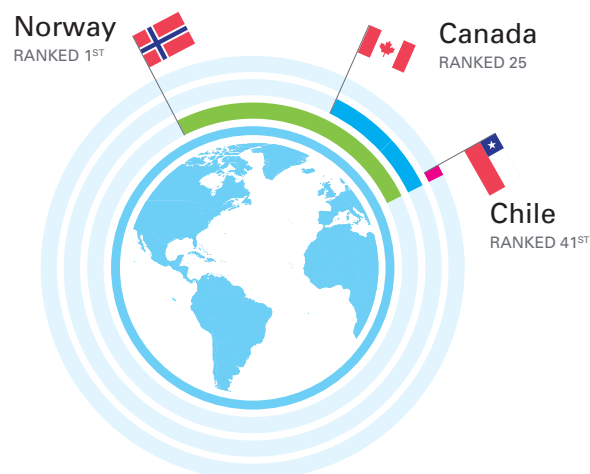
*"We were most surprised with our level of environmental awareness and basic learning proficiency."*

– WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, AGE 16

# CANADA RANKS

# 25<sup>TH</sup> | OUT OF 41 COUNTRIES

## on the UNICEF Index of Child and Youth Well-being and Sustainability



What can and should we be doing differently to improve the well-being of children and youth in Canada? Why isn't Canada one of the best places in the world to grow up?

### AT THE TOP

1	Norway
2	Germany
3	Denmark
4	Sweden
5	Finland
6	Iceland
7	Switzerland
8	Korea
9	Slovenia
10	Netherlands
11	Ireland
12	Japan
13	United Kingdom
14	Luxembourg

### IN THE MIDDLE

15	Austria
16	Spain
17	Estonia
18	Portugal
19	France
20	Czech Republic
21	Australia
22	Croatia
23	Poland
24	Italy
25	Canada
26	Belgium
27	Cyprus
28	Latvia

### AT THE BOTTOM

29	Malta
30	Slovakia
31	Greece
32	Hungary
33	Lithuania
34	New Zealand
35	Israel
36	Turkey
37	United States
38	Mexico
39	Romania
40	Bulgaria
41	Chile

# CANADA'S RANKING

## HOW CANADA RANKS BY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL (SDG)

### Global Goal 12:

Ensure sustainable production and consumption



**CANADA RANKS 6<sup>TH</sup>**

Indicator:



### Global Goal 4:

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all



**CANADA RANKS 8<sup>TH</sup>**

Indicators:



### Global Goal 8:

Promote full and productive employment and decent work for all



**CANADA RANKS 11<sup>TH</sup>**

Indicators:



### Global Goal 10:

Reduce inequality within and among countries



**CANADA RANKS 14<sup>TH</sup>**

Indicators:



### Global Goal 11:

Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable



**CANADA RANKS 19<sup>TH</sup>**

Indicator:



### Global Goal 3:

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being



**CANADA RANKS 29<sup>TH</sup>**

Indicators:



### Global Goal 1:

End poverty in all its forms everywhere



**CANADA RANKS 32<sup>ND</sup>**

Indicators:



### Global Goal 2:

End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition



**CANADA RANKS 37<sup>TH</sup>**

Indicators:



### Global Goal 16:

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies



**CANADA RANKS 37<sup>TH</sup>**

Indicators:



#### Indicators that have improved over time

- + Overall Income Inequality
- + Child Income Poverty
- + Neonatal Mortality
- + Teen Drunkenness
- + Teen Births
- + Teen Suicide
- + Child Homicide

#### Indicators that have worsened over time

- Income Advantage Gap
- Basic Learning Proficiency
- Excluded Youth (NEET)
- Bottom-end Income Inequality
- Air Pollution in Cities
- Unhealthy Weight
- Teen Mental Health
- Bullying

**Note:** the changes over time may not in all cases be statistically significant; any direction of improvement or decline is included.

**Indicator:** something that helps describe the state or level of something.

## HOW CANADA RANKS BY INDICATOR

### Basic Learning Proficiency

**(Basic Learning Skills):** Achieving basic learning skills and a minimum level of educational achievement in reading, math and science

 **RANKED 4<sup>TH</sup>**



### Children in Jobless Households

**(Parental Employment):** Growing up in a home where no adults work

 **RANKED 4<sup>TH</sup>**



### Awareness of Environmental Problems (Environmental Awareness)

Awareness of current environmental challenges: greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), nuclear waste, the consequences of clearing forests for other land use, air pollution, extinction of plants and animals, water shortage

 **RANKED 6<sup>TH</sup>**



### Income Advantage Gap:

How family income influences educational achievement. For example, wealthier kids tend to do better in school because of advantages related to having higher family income like more nutritious food, less moving and safer environments

 **RANKED 11<sup>TH</sup>**



### Teen Mental Health:

Number of teenagers reporting symptoms related to mental health (feeling low, irritability, nervousness and sleeping difficulties)

 **RANKED 14<sup>TH</sup>**



### Teen Drunkenness (Teen Drinking):

Number of young people who reported having been drunk in the previous 30 days

 **RANKED 17<sup>TH</sup>**



**Breastfeeding:** How many children are breastfed for six months

 **RANKED 18<sup>TH</sup>**



### Preschool Participation (Early Child Education):

How many children go to preschool (one year before starting primary school)

 **RANKED 19<sup>TH</sup>**



**Air Pollution in Cities:** Based on the safe level of air quality determined by the World Health Organization

 **RANKED 19<sup>TH</sup>**



**Excluded Youth (NEET):** Youth ages 15-19 not in education, employment or training

 **RANKED 20<sup>TH</sup>**



### Bottom-end Income Inequality (The Poorest 10 per cent):

The gap between the poorest children and children with "normal" (average) family incomes

 **RANKED 23<sup>RD</sup>**



### Teen Births (Teenage Pregnancy):

Number of teenagers ages 15-19 who give birth

 **RANKED 23<sup>RD</sup>**



**Child Income Poverty:** How many children live in poverty, with family income less than half of the average family income

 **RANKED 24<sup>TH</sup>**



### Overall Income Inequality:

The income gap between the richest and everybody else

 **RANKED 24<sup>TH</sup>**



**Children's Food Security:** Measured by food insecurity: the lack of access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food so kids can grow, develop and have a healthy and active lifestyle

 **RANKED 24<sup>TH</sup>**



**Bullying:** A pattern of emotional, psychological, physical violence

 **RANKED 27<sup>TH</sup>**



### Social Transfers for Children

**(Family Income Benefits):** The money governments give to families to help reduce poverty and to help pay for children's needs

 **RANKED 29<sup>TH</sup>**



**Unhealthy Weight:** How many children and youth are overweight or obese

 **RANKED 29<sup>TH</sup>**



**Neonatal Mortality:** The number of deaths (per 1,000) of infants in their first 4 weeks of life

 **RANKED 31<sup>ST</sup>**



**Teen Suicide:** The suicide rate for teenagers aged 15-19

 **RANKED 31<sup>ST</sup>**



**Child Homicide:** The number of children killed intentionally every year

 **RANKED 33<sup>RD</sup>**



For more information on where other countries rank, please refer to *Oh Canada! Our kids deserve better*, Canadian Companion, UNICEF Report Card 14. [unicef.ca/irc14](https://www.unicef.ca/irc14)

# BUSTING MYTHS

## MYTH 1: CANADA IS THE BEST PLACE IN THE WORLD TO GROW UP.

- Canada ranks 25th out of 41 rich countries on overall child and youth well-being.
- 22.2 per cent of Canadian children (one in five) live in poverty.
- Most governments invest more in children than Canada does.
- Canada ranks 31st out of 41 rich countries in the teen suicide rate.
- Canada ranks 37th of 41 rich countries in food security, meaning that people have enough nutritious food to eat.

## MYTH 2: CANADA HAS GREAT AIR QUALITY, EVEN MORE SO THAN THE UNITED STATES.

- Canada's urban (city and town) air pollution is just barely below the safe level. The World Health Organization safe level of air quality is below 10 micrograms of PM2.5 per cubic metre. Canada's average level is 9.7.
- Air quality has been improving over the past ten years in almost all rich countries except for Canada and Turkey. Air quality has not improved in Canada in the past 10 years.
- The United States has better urban air quality than Canada.
- Children are more vulnerable to the negative effects of air pollution because they breathe in more air per unit of body weight than adults.
- Air pollution can cause lung damage and permanent damage to children's brain tissue.

## MYTH 3: YOUNG PEOPLE RARELY THINK ABOUT SUICIDE.

- Canada ranks 31st out of 41 rich countries in the teen suicide rate.
- In high-income countries, suicide is generally the second leading cause of death among young people after accidents, accounting for 17.6 per cent of all deaths.
- 22 per cent of young people report experiencing two or more psychological symptoms more than once a week.
- Girls are more likely than boys to report symptoms related to their mental health.
- In Canada, unlike many countries, there has been little progress to reduce teen suicide.

## MYTH 4: YOUNG PEOPLE DON'T CARE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT.

- 70 per cent of youth in Canada are aware of environmental issues, a large number compared to other countries.
- Most young people in rich countries are aware of current environmental challenges.
- In rich countries, around 62 per cent of 15-year-olds are familiar with at least five of seven key issues:
  - greenhouse gases in the atmosphere
  - use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs)
  - nuclear waste
  - the consequences of clearing forests for other land use
  - air pollution water shortage
  - extinction of plants and animals





### **MYTH 5: CANADA IS A VERY SAFE COUNTRY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.**

- Canada ranks 33rd out of 41 rich countries in child homicide.
- Canada's child homicide rate is higher than average .
- Depending on the age of the child, parents/caregivers and peers are the main perpetrators.
- Children make up a large amount of the victims of homicide in Canada, 0.9 per 100,000 of a total 1.5 per 100,000 annually (closer to 7 per 100,000 among Indigenous females) .
- Child homicide is the fourth leading cause of death among young people aged 1-24, after accidents, suicide and cancer.

### **MYTH 6: CANADA IS ONE OF THE LEADING COUNTRIES IN BULLYING PREVENTION.**

- Canada ranks 27th out of 41 rich countries in bullying.
- At least 1 in 10 children in rich countries regularly and repeatedly experiences bullying.
- Canada has the fifth-highest rate at 15 per cent of bullying, well above the average.
- Many countries have brought bullying rates down, but they have remained fairly stable in Canada over the past 10 years.

### **MYTH 7: MOST CANADIAN CHILDREN EAT WELL EVERY DAY.**

- Canada ranks 37th of 41 rich countries in food security.
- Food insecurity is the lack of access to enough nutritious food to grow, develop and be healthy and active.
- There is higher food insecurity for children in low-income families and among northern Indigenous communities.
- Food banks across Canada have tracked a rise in food bank use in recent years, with many children relying on them compared to adults.
- Depriving children of adequate nutrition affects learning and social functioning and can affect a child's health for the rest of their life.
- No level of food insecurity among children is acceptable given the amount of food available in rich countries.

### **MYTH 8: CANADIANS ARE HEALTHY AND ACTIVE.**

- Canada ranks 29th of 41 rich countries when it comes to unhealthy weight of children.
- About 25 per cent of young people (one in four) are obese, above the average of 15 per cent.
- Obesity rates among children and youth in Canada have nearly tripled in the last 30 years .

**“We’re generally a very ‘happy’ country so we should be ranking at the top of most categories, right?”**

**– WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, AGE 16**



# YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES ON GETTING TO #1

We brought together a group of young people between the ages of 15-17 years old from diverse backgrounds, cultures, perspectives and experiences. We asked them what we could do to make Canada a better place in which to grow up.

## WHAT CAN WE DO TO MAKE THINGS WORSE?

First, we engaged in “upside-down” thinking to consider how we might make things worse. The young people thought that to make things worse, there were a couple things we could do. We could cut funding; not allocate the funds to the most challenging issues and to those who need them most; continue to be uninformed about how kids are doing; not engage in conversations about these challenges; and not make an effort to create change. We could also make things worse by increasing inequality, such as increasing the costs related to education.

## WHERE WE STAND RIGHT NOW

- 👍 UNICEF Report Card 14 reminds us that sustainable development will not come without the well-being of children and youth.
- 👍 Canada has made progress in the rates of newborn deaths, teenage births, drunkenness, and child homicide.
- 👍 It has maintained a high-performing, fair education system and advanced preschool participation.
- 👍 Young people show a high level of environmental awareness.

- 👎 Even where our indicators are improving, we are often far behind the best performing countries.
- 👎 The income gap between the richest and everybody else is wide, affecting children across the country and leaving those with the lowest family incomes farther behind.
- 👎 Too many young people are excluded from education and employment.
- 👎 Unhealthy weight, poor mental health and bullying continue with little progress.
- 👎 The rise in air pollution is a concern for child health and development.
- 👎 Never before have we recorded a decline in so many indicators of child and youth well-being in Canada – we usually make improvements in most indicators

“A lot of these are really surprising, but when I really think about it – I’m not surprised.”

– WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, AGE 15

We all need to work together to achieve the best outcomes for children and youth. We need to get together, get creative and try new things so we can improve child and youth well-being in Canada.

## SO HOW DO WE GET TO #1?

### 1. CREATE SAFE SPACES FOR YOUTH

Young people want access to free, safe spaces that promote and foster free speech, opportunities to have their voices heard and meaningfully contribute to change. Create programs where young people can talk and express themselves in a safe space in their community.



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## 2. SPEND MONEY WHERE PEOPLE NEED IT THE MOST

Here are some suggestions:

- More affordable childcare
- Put money into programs that work efficiently
- Make healthier foods less expensive
- More healthy cafeteria foods and breakfast programs
- More social programs in communities that lack them

## 3. ASK YOUNG PEOPLE WHAT THEY THINK!

Get young people involved in policy and see them as partners in decision-making. Some suggestions include hosting youth workshops, getting all MP's to have youth councils and integrating youth perspectives in policies.

## 4. TAKE MENTAL HEALTH SERIOUSLY

Integrate mental health into general health policies and educate young people on the spectrum of mental health. This will help young people understand mental health, where to go for support and how to help and decrease the teen suicide rate.

## 5. TAKE IT UPON YOURSELF TO BE A PART OF THE CHANGE

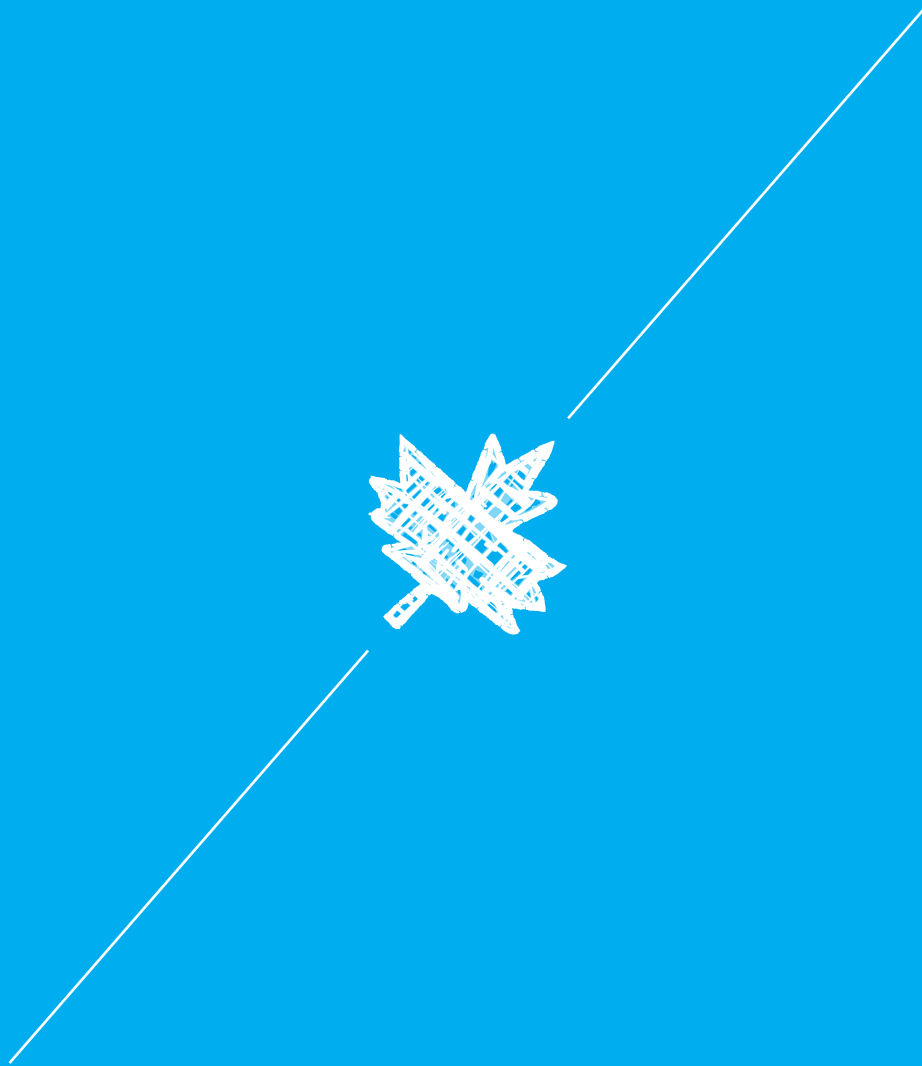
You can help by thinking critically about how to solve some of these problems, teaching empathy, not being a bystander and taking initiative to create change in your community or school. You could organize a school fundraiser to raise money for a cause, organize an event to raise awareness or start a club that promotes mental health in schools or in the community.

## 6. CHANGE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Young people want a more diverse, open-minded curriculum that teaches them relevant life skills, such as how to get a mortgage, how to use a credit card and how to file taxes. Young people want to know how to manage stress, how to help their friends, how to protect the environment and how to eat healthy.

## 7. RAISE AWARENESS

Be a part of the change by having more conversations about mental health, advocate for a better education system that will benefit young people across the country and use your social media to raise awareness about environmental issues.



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