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Worlds Apart:

Canadian Companion to UNICEF Report Card 16

UNICEF REPORT CARD 16
Canadian Companion

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This Canadian Companion distils and interprets data for UNICEF Report Card 16, *Worlds of Influence: Understanding what shapes child well-being in rich countries*. The UNICEF Report Card series monitors and compares economically advanced countries' performance in securing children's rights and advancing their well-being.

Visit **unicef.ca/irc16** for these reports, infographics and background papers. Data sources and full references are cited in the UNICEF Report Card: UNICEF Innocenti, 'Worlds of Influence: Understanding what shapes child well-being in rich countries', *Innocenti Report Card 16*, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2020.

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Recovering childhood isn't good enough. It's time to do better

A message from President and CEO David Morley

Since 2000, UNICEF Report Cards have measured the state of children and youth in wealthy countries with a range of indicators of life under age 18. Report Card 16 tells Canada how our children stood among their peers in other rich countries, with the most recent data available, just before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, Canada ranks 30th in child well-being among 38 of the world's richest countries. The Report Card tells us that Canada's children are worlds apart from each other due to wide inequalities, and worlds apart from the happiest, healthiest children in rich countries. If the Report Card ranking was a school grade, it would not be posted on the fridge. If Canada's Olympic Hockey Teams finished in 30th place, many Canadians would be disenchanted, to say the least. Children's well-being is not a game or a competition, but Canada has earned its ranking based on its performance.

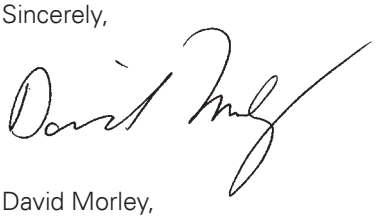
Report Card 16 shows us that despite an overall trend of rising economic wealth in Canada, many aspects of children's lives are not improving. In fact, Canada is among a handful of rich countries with the best conditions for growing up, but the poorest outcomes for children. That is because Canada's public policies are not translating our national wealth into the best possible outcomes. Canada spends less to support good childhoods than most of our peer countries. Incremental advancements in public policies sustain wide gaps between children in many aspects of life and yield incremental advances for children overall.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened concerns about children's health, development, material security, education, safety, relationships and happiness raised in this Report Card. Report Card 16 exposes weaknesses in the policies, services and supportive environments children rely on, including child care and income support. Based on UNICEF's global expertise in responding to crises and hearing directly from Canada's young people, many aspects of their lives measured in this Report Card are at risk of temporary or longer-term deterioration.

After twenty years of UNICEF Report Cards, we know that we must act boldly to get better results and Report Card 16 provides the bold solutions needed to improve childhood. It is a matter of priorities: if governments want to improve the well-being of children in Canada, they have the means to do it. UNICEF Canada challenges Canada's federal parliament, legislatures and local councils across the country to make this Report Card a baseline and make the urgent decisions that will lift the children and youth of Canada up. We know what we must do: reduce income inequality, start stronger in the early years, spread fairness for all children through equalizing policies and be accountable for our results. We must listen more to what children tell us about their needs, fears and hopes, including Indigenous children, Black children, children with disabilities and gender-diverse young people. This generation must not sacrifice more of their childhood than they already have due to insufficient and unequal investment in them, the pandemic's impacts or the post-pandemic fiscal contraction, though they will surely pay the debt.

I am hopeful that Canada will help children do more than simply recover from the pandemic; that we will build a society where children can truly flourish. Children and youth have a great deal to teach us about the things that matter most; about caring, fairness and resilience. Let the end of the pandemic be the start of something better for them.

Sincerely,



David Morley,
President and Chief Executive Officer
UNICEF Canada

One Youth is a campaign to elevate the rights and well-being of children and youth in Canada.
Please join us @OneYouthCanada.

Uprising

Messages from young people

IN EVERY POLICY INDICATOR, CANADA RANKS IN THE MIDDLE OF ITS PEERS.

You want to lead youth. Can you follow us?

Throughout the world, student movements have always been strong. Whether fighting for civil rights in America or international anti-apartheid struggles, youth have paved the way for politicians. Not because we have more experience with the world and its ways. Not because we have a more nuanced approach to the world and its injustices. Because youth start movements. We haven't been beaten down by failures of generations past; we haven't been broken by false promises. We march against what is wrong, regardless of the background noise telling us it is futile. But we cannot do this alone. We bring the fire and the passion, but we would be nothing without focus, and that is what we need from you. We need your voice to join us, and to direct our passion towards a more positive future so that we can all reap its benefits.

ABRAM, AGE 16

CANADA RANKS 28TH OF 36 COUNTRIES IN SPENDING ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH.

You say we should plan for our future. We are fighting for one.

Being young right now is hard. It feels like we're constantly being reminded that nobody cares about our futures: not our government, not the generations that came before us and definitely not our political system. We're fighting tooth and nail to get a chance at a future; we've spent our school days on strike and weekends at picket lines instead of parties. We've lost our childhoods, and we're so, so tired of losing. So when are things going to change? When youth unemployment hits critical mass? When none of us can afford a home? When the last tree dies and the last of our land is drilled for oil? We're tired of waiting: we need policy change now, and we need you to help us.

RAYNE, AGE 18

26% OF YOUNG PEOPLE DON'T FEEL SUPPORTED BY THEIR FAMILY AND HAVE DIFFICULTY MAKING FRIENDS.

You put food on the table. All I really want is to share the meal!

Coming out of the dependency of childhood, we all take different paths of self-discovery. Some of us walk a crowded path. Some of us walk alone. In a technologically connected world, but isolated further by COVID-19, our devices seem to be a refuge. We try to ease our isolation through filtered social media feeds where we see successful people doing unrealistic things, standards we cannot live up to. Our disconnectedness increases; we turn away from every real human connection we come across. We retreat into our silence. Can you share this silence with me? Can you share your light in my darkness? Can you share a meal with me?

ALEXIS, AGE 15

Executive summary

Six questions and answers about the state of children and youth in Canada

1 Where does Canada stand?

Overall, Canada ranks 30th among 38 rich countries in the well-being of children and youth under age 18.

OVERALL

MENTAL HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND SURVIVAL

EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

- Canada ranks highest in children's academic achievement and exposure to air pollution, the only two indicators in which Canada is in the top third.
- Canada falls below average in more than half the measures of child well-being.
- Canada ranks lowest in child survival (including teen suicide and child mortality), health (including immunization and unhealthy weight) and children's overall life satisfaction.
- The widest gaps between Canada and the best-performing countries exist not only where Canada ranks low in the league table, but they also persist in the areas where Canada has been making the most progress: bringing down rates of child poverty and youth exclusion from school and work (NEET).

UNICEF Report Card 16 and COVID-19

UNICEF Report Card 16 provides the most recent, available data about the state of children and youth in rich countries just before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and reviews the possible impacts of the pandemic on their lives.

2 What makes a good childhood?

MENTAL WELL-BEING AND HAPPINESS

A striking number of children in Canada are unhappy:

- Almost 1 in 4 children has low life satisfaction. — 28th
- Canada has one of the highest rates of adolescent suicide. — 35th

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Canada is falling behind in fundamental aspects of child health:

- 87% of children are immunized against measles, below the 95% threshold for protection. — 33rd
- Almost 1 in 3 children is overweight or obese. — 29th

EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT

Many young people in Canada get good grades, but school is not a place of support and inclusion:

- Almost 1 in 3 young people does not have basic reading and math skills by age 15. — 13th
- 26% of young people have difficulty making friends. — 23rd

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Children view good relationships as crucial to their well-being, but many experience stress and violence instead:

- 26% of children say they have low support from their families. — 27th
- 20% of young people are frequently bullied. — 23rd

RESOURCES TO MEET NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO DREAM

Canada has abundant national wealth and environmental resources, but we do not protect children from poverty or ensure every child has clean air to breathe and safe water to drink:

- Almost 1 in 5 children lives in poverty, though the rate for Black children can reach as high as 1 in 3 in some regions, and the rate for Status First Nations children can reach above 1 in 2. — 26th
- Canada has better air and water quality than most countries. — AIR 4th, WATER 18th

3 Is Canada making progress?

UNICEF Report Cards are not directly comparable, but Canada is not making progress relative to other rich countries. There is mixed progress for children in Canada in recent years:

- Canada has been making the most progress in reducing child poverty and the number of young people excluded from education, employment and training, on average, though there are wide disparities.
- Canada has been making little to no progress in reducing child mortality, obesity and bullying, on average.
- Canada has been falling backward in children's sense of well-being and the quality of their close relationships.

5 How will the COVID-19 pandemic change childhood?

Children and youth are not the most infected by COVID-19 but are the most affected by its control measures.

Most of the indicators of child and youth well-being measured in this Report Card are likely to deteriorate as a result, and already wide gaps between children may widen. However, children's experiences of the pandemic to date are varied, and there are many paradoxes. Early indications of positive impacts suggest that for some children, the pandemic restrictions alleviated the academic and social pressure that negatively affects many aspects of their well-being. For some, the quality of family relationships may improve. Overall, bullying may decline, at least temporarily. Only time will reveal the net impacts and the disparities for different groups of children and youth.

Governments should be monitoring indicators of child and youth well-being during pandemic surveillance and in a "well-being" budget dashboard. UNICEF Report Cards and the *Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being*, UNICEF Canada's database of 125 indicators of childhood, will track the magnitude and duration of pandemic impacts on child and youth well-being. The outcome is not predetermined: it depends on what we do now to help this generation recover and reclaim their future.

4 Why is Canada stuck in the middle?

Canada's public policies are not bold enough to turn our higher wealth into higher child well-being.

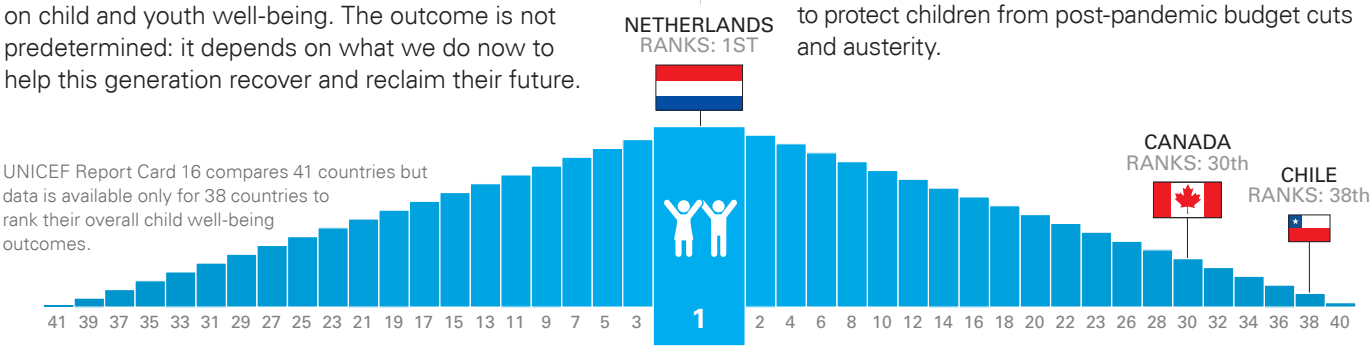
- Canada is not using its greater wealth for greater childhoods: Canada ranks 23rd in the conditions for good childhood but 30th in children's outcomes.
- Canada is one of only a handful of countries (including Australia, New Zealand and Malta) that have better economic, environmental and social conditions but worse child well-being.
- Canada's governments spend less on families and children than most wealthy countries (ranking 28th of 36 countries).
- Incremental policy measures achieve incremental progress: in every indicator of public policy, Canada ranks in the middle or at the bottom among rich countries – so it is no surprise that this is also true for children's outcomes.

6 What will it take to move up the podium?

BE BOLD: Invest more in more equalizing public policies that support families and children, including income benefits, early child care and education, school nutrition, parental leave and the *Spirit Bear Plan* for First Nations children.

LISTEN TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH: Start a pan-Canadian dialogue to understand their lives, worries and aspirations; involve them in decision-making; and co-design solutions with them. A National Commissioner for Children and Youth and a lower voting age are mechanisms to support their participation.

BE ACCOUNTABLE: Parliament and legislatures should set a baseline to measure progress for children, and ensure they are given priority consideration in decisions through child impact assessment; a "children's budget" that defines how spending is allocated for children; and a commitment to protect children from post-pandemic budget cuts and austerity.



UNICEF Report Card 16 compares 41 countries but data is available only for 38 countries to rank their overall child well-being outcomes.

SUMMARY OF CANADIAN INDICATORS OF CHILDREN'S OUTCOMES, CONDITIONS AND POLICIES

Child outcomes, conditions and policies	Indicator	Canada rank	Canada value	Top value	Average value	Canada change in value	Likely direction of COVID-19 impacts
Environment	Air pollution	4	6.4 PM2.5 µ	5.9 PM2.5 µ	13.7	(-)2.0	
Skills	Academic proficiency	13	68%	79%	62%	(-)1.0	
Economy	National income	15	$47,590	$72,200	$42,925		
Relationships	Belonging at school	15	-0.11	0.47	0		
Society	Social support	17	93%	98%	91%	(-) 1.0	
Environment	Water supply quality	18	98.9%	100%	96.0%	(+) 0.4	
Education	Early child education	19	97%	100%	94.7%		
Education	Exclusion from school and work	20	5.9%	1.5%	6.3	(-) 2.3	
Health	Low birthweight	21	6.5%	3.8%	6.7%	(+) 0.3	
Skills	Social skills	23	74%	83%	76%	(-) 4.0	
Relationships	Bullying	23	20%	9%	19%		
Social	Parental leave	24	26.6 weeks FPE	97.1 weeks FPE	35.9		
Social	Child poverty	26	21.0%	10.4%	19.9%	(-) 1.2	
Economy	Unemployment	26	6.1%	2.4%	6.0%	(+) 0.1	
Relationships	Family support	27	26%	6%	14%		
Budget	Spending on children and families	28	1.68% GDP	3.68% GDP	2.38		
Mental well-being	Life satisfaction	28	77%	90%	79%	(-) 4.0	
Physical health	Child mortality	28	0.98 per 1,000	0.36 per 1,000	1.0	(-) 0.05	
Physical health	Overweight/obesity	29	32%	14%	29%	(+) 1.0	
Health	Immunization	33	87%	99%	91%		
Society	Violence (homicide)	33	1.8 per 100,000	0.2 per 100,000	2.0	(+)0.2	
Mental well-being	Teen suicide	35	9.0 per 100,000	1.4 per 100,000	6.5		

INDICATOR CATEGORY	CANADA RANKING	VALUE OVER TIME
OUTCOMES	TOP THIRD	ABOVE AVERAGE VALUE/BETTER OVER TIME
POLICIES	MIDDLE THIRD	SAME AS AVERAGE VALUE/STABLE OVER TIME
CONTEXT	BOTTOM THIRD	BELOW AVERAGE VALUE/WORSE OVER TIME
SECONDARY OUTCOMES (RELATIONSHIPS)		DATA NOT AVAILABLE

NOTES:

- Data from 2018 do not reflect introduction of two weeks of dedicated paternal/secondary parent leave in 2019
- Differences between countries and over time may not be statistically significant
- Trend data is not available for all indicators
- Refer to UNICEF Report Card 16 for data sources

Two decades of monitoring childhood in rich countries

UNICEF released the first Report Card on the state of children and youth in high-income countries twenty years ago. The UNICEF Report Card series has helped answer these questions:

1. **How well are children in the world's richest countries experiencing their childhoods?**
2. **Are childhoods getting better?**
3. **What will help countries with similar resources achieve similar, great outcomes for every child?**

Some UNICEF Report Cards have focused on a single dimension of children's lives, such as poverty, physical abuse and education. Others have measured gaps between children in areas of their lives such as health and happiness. Some, like the current Report Card, have measured the overall state of children, bringing together many aspects of children's material, physical, educational, social and mental well-being in a multidimensional index (i.e., Report Card 7 in 2007; Report Card 11 in 2013; and Report Card 14 in 2017).

UNICEF Report Card 16 measures the overall state of children and youth under age 18 and the societal conditions that shape their childhoods. It draws on the most current data from 41 rich countries, including Canada, to see how well countries are turning their wealth into child well-being. This gives Canadians a clearer understanding of how our children stand in fundamental indicators of their lives, what is getting better or worse, how this compares to other rich countries, and what it will take to join the best-performing countries at the top of UNICEF league tables.

What have we learned in twenty years of measuring and monitoring child and youth well-being? The goalposts have shifted as UNICEF has evolved its approach, available data have changed, and more countries have joined the ranks of the affluent. The rankings in the Report Card series are not directly comparable. Nevertheless, no matter how we add up the numbers, Canada's performance has been consistent over the past two decades. **Adding up the gains in some aspects of child well-being and the declines in others, we are stuck in the middle among our peers.**

We would love to tell a different story.

UNICEF Report Card 16 provides new insight into why Canada is stuck in the middle and how we can make progress for children. Despite incremental advances, Canada is not providing sufficiently robust and equitable policies and programs to assure every child's right to a childhood. If we want to make progress, Canada needs bolder policies to build on the incremental advances underway. Bolder policies are not only possible but also urgent in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which may weigh most heavily on areas of life where children and youth were already falling behind: mental and physical health, supportive relationships and material security. The pandemic is likely to further distance the most vulnerable children and youth from good health, education, material security, supportive relationships and happiness.

The next chapter in the story of children and youth in Canada depends on what we do now.

The status of children and youth in UNICEF Report Card 16 should be the baseline for Canada's governments, at all levels, to help children rise up, not just recover. At the top of the UNICEF league tables are the goalposts set by our peer countries. **We can reach them if our public policies for children are bold, equitable and accountable.**

> *The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to fall most heavily on the areas of life where children were already falling farthest behind.*

Spotlight: One decade to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

The UN Secretary-General calls 2020-2030 the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Canada adopted these Global Goals, which include targets for children. Many of the indicators in Report Card 16 tell us how Canada stands in relation to these targets at the start of the Decade for Action. Targets where Canada has been doing relatively well compared to peer countries include the academic achievement and inclusion of older adolescents in education, employment and training. Canada also ranks higher in air and water quality.

Canada is farthest from the Sustainable Development Goals' targets for child survival and health: falling behind in immunization, obesity and child mortality, including suicide and homicide. The COVID-19 pandemic puts a strain on reaching many of these targets.

Figure 1: Report Card indicators related to targets for the Sustainable Development Goals

Indicator	Canada rank	Canada value	SDG target
Air pollution			
Mean level of fine particulate matter (PM2.5μ)	**4**	6.4 PM2.5 μ	3.9 By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination; 11.6 By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management; 11.6.2 Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g. PM2.5 and PM10) in cities (population weighted)
Academic proficiency			
Percentage of children proficient in mathematics and reading at age 15	**13**	68%	4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes; 4.1.1 Percentage of children/young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics
Water supply quality			
Percentage of population with safely managed water	**18**	98.9%	6.1 By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all; 6.1.1 Percentage of population using safely managed drinking water services
Early childhood education and care			
Percentage of children attending early childhood education and care one year before school	**19**	97%	4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education; 4.2.2 Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age)
Exclusion from school and work			
Percentage of 15-19 year-olds out of school, employment or training (NEET)	**20**	5.9%	8.6 By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training; 8.6.1 Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training
Parental leave			
Weeks of parental leave available to mothers and reserved for fathers (in full-pay equivalents)	**24**	26.6	5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

Figure 1: continued:

Indicator	Canada rank	Canada value	SDG target
Child poverty			
Percentage of children in households below 60% of median income	**26**	21.0%	10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status; 1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions
Unemployment			
Unemployment rate (percentage of active population)	**26**	6.1%	8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value; 8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex, age group and persons with disabilities
Spending on children and families			
Public expenditure on children and families as a percentage of GDP	**28**	1.68%	1.a.2 Spending on essential services (education, health and social protection) as a percentage of total government spending
Child mortality			
Mortality rate per 1,000 children age 5-14	**28**	0.98	3.2 By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births; 3.4 By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being
Overweight/obesity			
Percentage of 5-19 year-olds overweight or obese	**29**	32%	2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons
Immunization			
Percentage of children who received the second dose of the measles vaccine	**32**	87%	3.8 Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential healthcare services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all; 3.b.1 Proportion of the population with access to affordable medicines and vaccines on a sustainable basis
Violence (homicide)			
Homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants	**33**	1.8	16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere; 16.1.1 Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by age group and sex
Teen suicide			
Suicide rate per 100,000 age 15-19	**35**	9.0	3.4.2 Suicide mortality rate

INDICATOR CATEGORY	CANADA RANKING
OUTCOMES	TOP THIRD
POLICIES	MIDDLE THIRD
CONTEXT	BOTTOM THIRD

A framework of child well-being

Child well-being is a state that we measure in UNICEF Report Cards based on how societies meet some of the fundamental rights and needs of young people from birth to age 18 (such as health and education) and on children's points of view (including whether they are happy and how they feel about their relationships). Both perspectives are critical because improvement in some so-called "objective" measures over the past twenty years has not led to an improvement in children's "subjective" well-being, including their mental health and happiness. Together, these perspectives illuminate the need for a wide lens and different approaches to improve child well-being.

Using a multi-level framework (Figure 2), the indicators and league tables in Report Card 16 measure children's outcomes that are shaped by societal conditions. The approach reminds us that child well-being is not simply the result of their individual characteristics (such as resilience and effort) or their family characteristics (such as the marital status, employment or mental health of their parents). More than that, child well-being is profoundly influenced by how well public policies channel the economic, environmental and social conditions of childhood.[i] This framework is not the only one used in Canada: there are Indigenous ways of knowing embedded in frameworks such as the Medicine Wheel and Tipi Teachings[ii].

Comparing child well-being across countries and over time

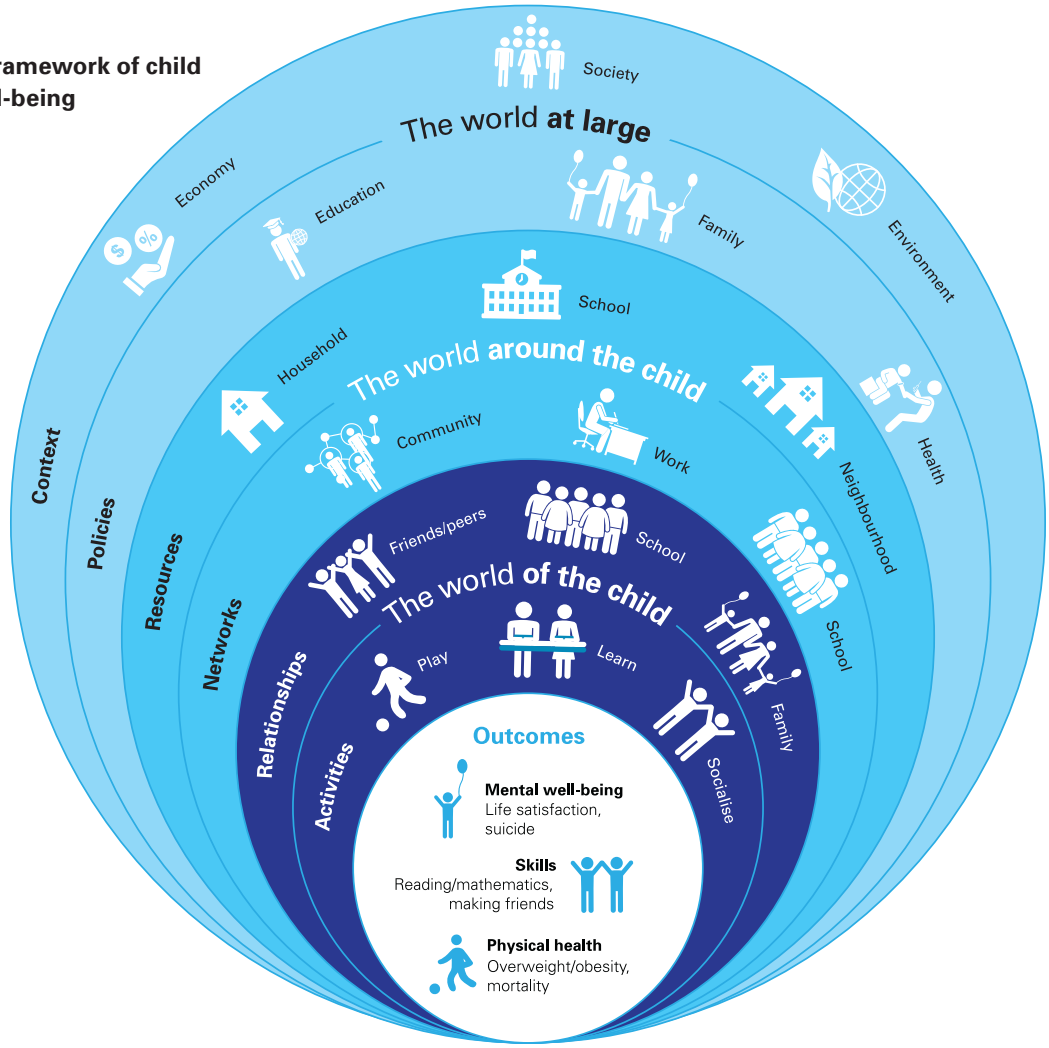
We can measure aspects of child and youth well-being in "absolute" terms (for instance, what is the infant mortality rate in Canada?). We can measure an absolute change in aspects of children's well-being (for instance, is infant mortality falling in Canada?). We can also measure childhood in "relative terms," with rankings (for instance, is infant mortality higher in Canada than in other countries; is it falling faster than in other countries?). Both absolute and relative measures in this Report Card tell us important things about our greatest challenges: what is getting better or worse for children, how good is our progress and how high should we aim?

We compare the world's wealthiest nations in child well-being because countries with similar resources and capacities should achieve similar results for children. The top-performing countries set the bar for what is achievable, and help us understand how to get there. Comparing countries reveals that differences in child well-being exist mainly because their policies are different. Therefore, **better public policies will achieve better outcomes for children.**

Spotlight: About the data in the Report Card

The data used to populate the indicators in UNICEF Report Card 16 are drawn from the most recent, high-quality, administrative datasets and international surveys available and comparable in the countries in the report. Most are collected around every three to four years by or with the support of governments. UNICEF Canada is grateful to the Canadian research team for the WHO Health Behaviours in School-Aged Children Survey and to Statistics Canada for their support. Discussion of data parameters and gaps, the rationale behind the inclusion and construction of each indicator and details of the construction of the league tables can be found in UNICEF Report Card 16 and background working papers.

Figure 2:
A multi-level framework of child and youth well-being



Spotlight: Using national averages to benchmark child well-being

UNICEF Report Cards use national averages to compare the overall state of children in rich countries. National averages help reveal patterns that may not be visible in smaller areas (such as provinces, territories or communities) and smaller sets of data. They are also necessary for international comparison. National averages can mask inequities between children in a country. However, they tell us how many children are deprived of things like adequate nutrition and how many are excluded from policies and programs like immunization and poverty reduction. National averages can be used to reveal inequities in other ways, such as benchmarking the state of children at provincial, territorial and local levels, and comparing how groups of children (e.g., by gender, race and immigration status) are doing relative to the national average where the data permits.

Many of the indicators in Report Card 16 are available for benchmarking and comparison from the original sources of data for Canada. However, disaggregated data for smaller areas and certain groups of children such as Black children and children with disabilities are not available for all indicators. Data about First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples are also subject to sovereignty over collection, possession, ownership and use of that data. It is not always possible or desirable to present data about Indigenous children in comparison to non-Indigenous children. It is beyond the UNICEF Report Card's scope to provide within-country comparisons, but this Canadian Companion refers to complementary data to illustrate some of the inequalities experienced by children and youth in Canada.

Child well-being: Does Canada get the ranking it chooses?

If all rich countries achieved the same good outcomes for children, they would be clustered together at the top of the UNICEF league table. Relative to other rich countries, Canada is a middle performer in overall child and youth well-being, with room for improvement. Canada ranks higher in children's academic performance and ranks lower in children's survival and physical health, mental and happiness and supportive relationships.

Figure 3: League table of child well-being outcomes

		Well-being dimensions:		
Overall rank	**Country**	**Mental**	**Physical**	**Learning/ skills**
1	Netherlands	1	9	3
2	Denmark	5	4	7
3	Norway	11	8	1
4	Switzerland	13	3	12
5	Finland	12	6	9
6	Spain	3	23	4
7	France	7	18	5
8	Belgium	17	7	8
9	Slovenia	23	11	2
10	Sweden	22	5	14
11	Croatia	10	25	10
12	Ireland	26	17	6
13	Luxembourg	19	2	28
14	Germany	16	10	21
15	Hungary	15	21	13
16	Austria	21	12	17
17	Portugal	6	26	20
18	Cyprus	2	29	24
19	Italy	9	31	15
20	Japan	37	1	27
21	Republic of Korea	34	13	11
22	Czechia	24	14	22
23	Estonia	33	15	16
24	Iceland	20	16	34
25	Romania	4	34	30
26	Slovakia	14	27	36
27	United Kingdom	29	19	26
28	Latvia	25	24	29
29	Greece	8	35	31
30	**Canada**	**31**	**30**	**18**
31	Poland	30	22	25
32	Australia	35	28	19
33	Lithuania	36	20	33
34	Malta	28	32	35
35	New Zealand	38	33	23
36	United States	32	38	32
37	Bulgaria	18	37	37
38	Chile	27	36	38

Note: A light blue background indicates a place in the top third of the ranking, medium blue denotes the middle third, and dark blue the bottom third. The z-score was calculated for each component in a dimension of well-being (mental, physical and learning/skills), then the average of the z-scores within each dimension was calculated to arrive at a country's ranking for each dimension. Overall rankings are based on the mean ranking across all three dimensions.

Measuring outcomes

There are many possible indicators of the state of children and youth to measure their needs and rights, and what young people, parents and societies care about and expect for their children. However, data for international comparison is limited. With the best available data, UNICEF Report Card 16 measures fundamental indicators of children's status and additional indicators that explain these outcomes. Three dimensions frame these outcomes:

1. ***Mental well-being*** focuses on how children feel and what they tell us about their sense of well-being. Mental well-being is not only the absence of mental health problems but also a broader sense of positive functioning.[iii] The indicators include both positive and negative aspects of a child's state of mind: life satisfaction (a child's overall assessment of their well-being, considered a proxy for "happiness") and the prevalence of suicide. Indicators of mental well-being are particularly limited for international comparison, but these partial indicators raise important questions about the social and material conditions of childhood that influence children's mental well-being.
2. ***Physical health*** includes measures of survival (the child mortality rate across ages 5 to 14) and health status (the prevalence of overweight children). Despite substantial reduction in child mortality in high-income countries over the last century, it remains a sensitive indicator of certain social conditions (e.g., extreme poverty and exclusion). The percentage of overweight children is similarly influenced by societal conditions, including poverty and the quality and availability of nutritious food. It is an indicator not only of children's current health status but also influences their mental health, exposure to bullying and other aspects of life. It is a strong marker of future risk including diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, cancer, gallbladder disease and shorter life expectancy.[iv]
3. ***Learning and skills*** are captured by indicators of the extent of basic-level proficiency in math and reading, and from a social skill perspective, children's perceived ability to make friends easily at school. These indicators are sensitive to children's experiences of social inclusion and social support.

Figure 4: Indicators in the league table of child well-being outcomes

Dimensions	Components	Indicators
Mental health and happiness	• Life satisfaction[1] • Teen suicide	• % with high life satisfaction at age 15 • Suicide rate per 100,000 age 15-19
Physical health and survival	• Child mortality • Overweight/ obesity	• Mortality rate (all causes) per 1,000 age 5-14 • % overweight or obese age 5-19
Education and skills development	• Academic proficiency • Social skills	• % proficient in mathematics and reading at age 15 • % who make friends easily at school at age 15

How does Canada stand? Trailing the pack in outcomes of child well-being

The headline rankings of child well-being in Figure 3 tell a familiar story. The Nordic countries are at or near the top ten: the Netherlands ranks highest in the league table of outcomes, followed by Denmark and Norway. These countries, along with Switzerland and Finland, are in the top third of rankings in all three dimensions of child and youth well-being.

Another familiar story is Canada's rank around the middle of its peers: 30th of 38 countries. Canada's peers on the ladder include Australia (32), New Zealand (35) and the United States (36). These countries also trail farthest behind in the overall level of happiness (life satisfaction) of children.

There is another consistent pattern, in Canada's ranking among the top third countries in student achievement. As UNICEF has found in previous Report Cards, Canada's education systems tend to outperform their international peers, despite Canada's less extensive early child development and social policies that drag on educational achievement and equity. However, Canada slides back to the bottom in children's ability to cultivate positive relationships at school. Even in the environment where many find success, some children are unhappy and their mental health is at risk.

1 The overall ranking for Canada excludes life satisfaction due to a lack of data for the indicator used in the league table.

For better or worse? Canada's progress for children

Canada is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. The national expectation should be that, along with high national wealth, the children of Canada share in the dividends and enjoy one of the highest levels of well-being. Along with overall steady economic growth, there should be steady improvement or sustainment in children's survival, material security, health and healthy relationships. In most of the outcomes measured in Report Card 16, Canada has made little or no progress in recent years:

- There has been a substantial slide in children's sense of well-being, a trend across many high-income countries.
- Children's ease in making friends has declined.
- The suicide rate has risen over the past decade.
- Bullying has increased, while the direction of change varies across countries.
- Measles immunization has fallen, as it has in most countries.
- The obesity rate has climbed over the past three decades and seems to have stabilized, as it has in most countries.
- Academic proficiency has remained relatively consistent, as it has in most countries, with no sign of recent improvement.
- Following decades of declining child mortality, there has been little progress in recent years, though it has fallen at different rates across countries.
- Low birthweight is not declining, though it has fallen in many countries.
- Participation in early child education increased, as it has in most countries.
- Child poverty has declined on average, while the direction of change varies across countries.
- NEET has declined on average, while the direction of change varies across countries.
- Air pollution has decreased, as it has in most countries.

It is possible to make progress. Despite the persistence of Nordic countries at the top and Canada in the middle, the UNICEF league table rankings are not static. While the Report Card rankings are not directly comparable over time, there is a pattern of some countries rising up (Denmark, Ireland and Spain) and others falling down (France and Iceland).

A closer look at the state of children and youth in Canada

A closer look at indicators of well-being gives us a fuller picture of the state of children and youth in Canada relative to other rich countries.

1. MENTAL HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

Fewer children are happy

LIFE SATISFACTION

Canada ranks:
28th (77%)

Top performer:
Netherlands (90%)

Country average: 79%

The way children feel about their lives matters. We start with a focus on it because life satisfaction is more than just a measure of mental well-being. It is an important measure of children's overall well-being -- a proxy for the questions: *How is your life? Are you happy?*

To measure life satisfaction, children are asked to consider where they stand on what is known as the Cantril ladder, with 10 as the best possible life and 0 the worst possible life. Answering this question, young people tell us about their cognitive satisfaction with the context of life, including material security, their general emotional states such as sadness and their psychological well-being, including having a sense of control and purpose in life.

Shouldn't childhood be the happiest time of life? Most children in high-income countries report being at least somewhat happy, with about three-quarters rating themselves at least 5 out of 10 in terms of their best possible life (Figure 5). About 77% of children and youth in Canada report at least a moderate level of life satisfaction, ranking 28th. Although variation in life satisfaction across countries is quite small, the rankings in life satisfaction mirror the overall rankings in child well-being, with Canada, the US and the UK behind many others, including top-performing countries like the Netherlands, Finland and Norway. Measuring life satisfaction in another way, the mean level among young people, Canada ranked 41st in another study comparing rich countries.[v]

There has been a general slide in children's life satisfaction over the past two decades, with a growing number of countries falling below 80%. Even the Netherlands, a perennial top performer in life satisfaction at around 95% between 2000 and 2010, experienced a drop to 90% in 2018. In Canada, there has been a slide in children's sense of well-being from 81% of children feeling at least a modest level of life satisfaction in 2014 to 77% in 2018. Canada is one of 13 out of 35 countries that experienced a decrease in mean life satisfaction since 2002.[vi] Overall, the life satisfaction gap between the top performing and the lagging countries is growing. Other studies report that life satisfaction in Canada is much lower among older children than younger; among girls than boys (with a widening gender

Spotlight: U-Report Canada

unicef CANADA | U-Report CANADA VOICE MATTERS

We asked young U-Reporters for their perspectives on the findings in UNICEF Report Card 16. Look for this icon to see what young people in Canada had to say.

U-Report is a polling platform developed by UNICEF for youth ages 13 to 24. It is a unique way to get a quick, real-time pulse check of young people's views about issues they care about; to understand how different groups of youth are affected by decisions, policies, services and events; and to involve youth in decisions that affect them. There are more than 600 U-Reporters in Canada, and they reside in every province and territory.

Visit *www.ureportcanada.ca* for more information and to sign up for U-Report Canada.

gap); and among children than adults.[vii] There is also a significant equity gap in Canada. For a girl age 15 from a family in the bottom 20% income quintile, the mean score is 6.5 on the Cantril ladder compared to 7.5 for a girl from a family in the top 20% income quintile.[viii]

TEEN SUICIDE

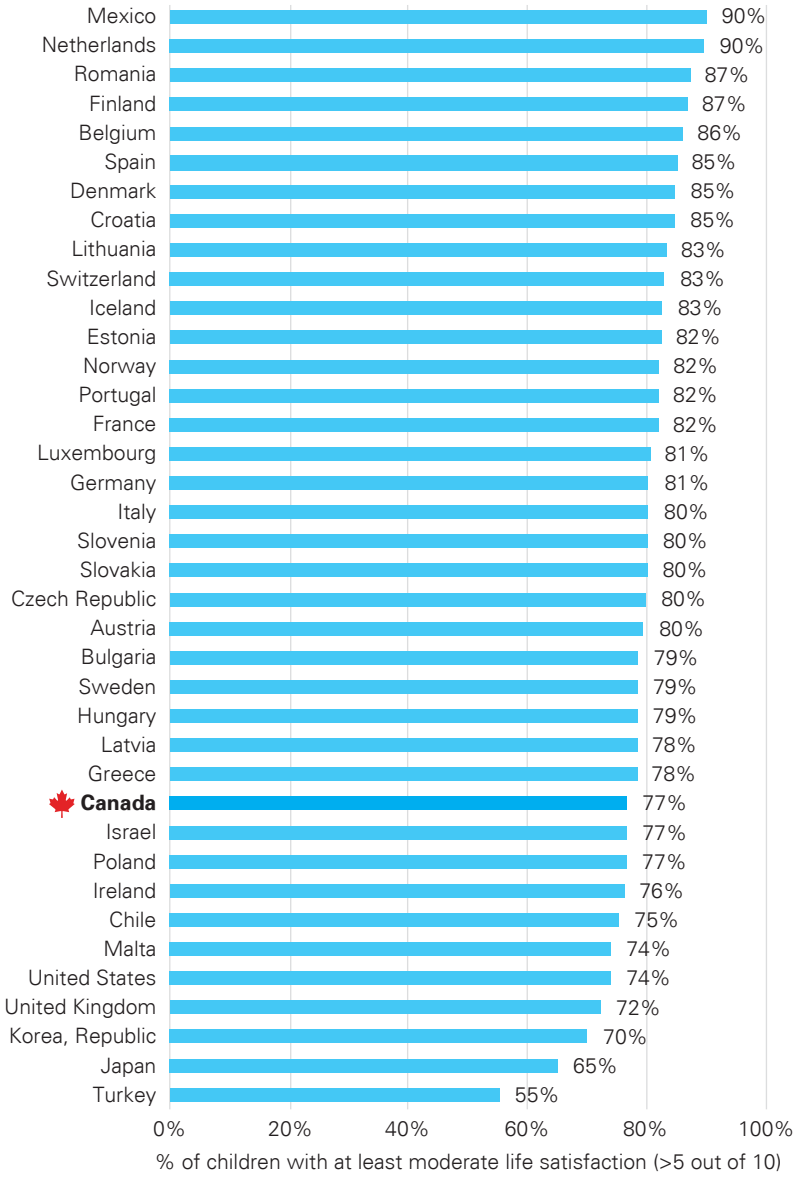
Canada ranks:
35th (9.0 per 100,000)

Top performer:
Greece (1.4 per 100,000)

Country average: 6.5 per 100,000

There is a lack of robust, comparable data on mental health among children globally. The suicide rate among adolescents aged 15 to 19 years is one of the only available indicators, despite its limitations. This indicator is also important because suicide is one of the most common causes of death for adolescents aged 15 to 19. Suicide rates in this age group were lowest in the Mediterranean region (Figure 6). Canada's ranking for adolescent suicide is similar to its ranking for life satisfaction: Canada ranks 35th with a rate of 9.0 in 100,000 adolescents aged 15 to 19 dying by suicide. The rate of suicide is more than 30 times higher among Inuit young people[ix], and also higher among First Nations and gender-diverse young people.

Figure 5: Children with at least a moderate level of life satisfaction at age 15



Note: % of children scoring more than five out of ten on Cantril's ladder for satisfaction with life as a whole. No data available for Australia, Cyprus and New Zealand.

Source: PISA 2018 and HBSC 2017/18. Where data were available from both sources, the mean was taken for each country. Where data was only available from one source an adjustment based on average ratio of mean scores across the two surveys in the countries in the chart that had data in both surveys.

Over the last two decades in Canada, mental health professionals, educators and others working with children and youth have been calling attention to an increase in depression and anxiety disorders. Investigating the prevalence of mental health disorders between 1983 and 2014, the Ontario Child Health Study observed a significant increase in depression and anxiety among young people aged 12 to 16.[x] At the same time, the rate of suicide has been fairly consistent in Canada, rising slightly over the past decade, while hospital admissions for suicide ideation

have risen substantially as young people seek help.

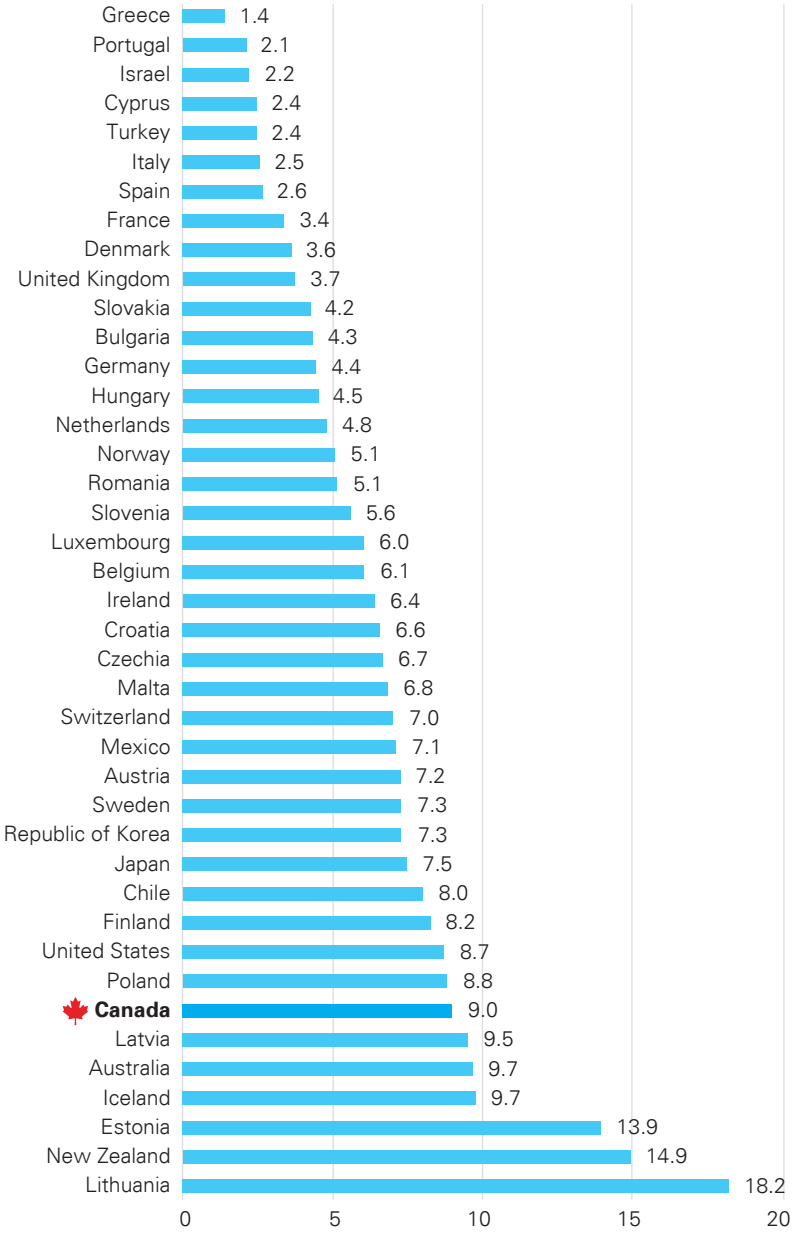
While Canadian reports find that about 1 in 5 young people experience a mental illness, there is a wider prevalence of more generalized mental distress. In Canada, 32% of children (aged 11 to 15) experience two or more psychological symptoms of distress every week, such as headaches, trouble sleeping or stomach aches. Young people in close to two-thirds of wealthy countries, including Canada, are experiencing higher rates of mental distress since 2002.[xi] Elevated school pressure is one factor that explains some of the increase. There is also a link between higher national income inequality, lower family income and higher rates of psychosomatic symptoms. There is a substantial gender gap, with 23% of boys reporting psychological distress compared to 42% of girls.[xii]

Many questions can be asked about the potential effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's mental health. Social isolation and limited opportunity for physical contact with others are significant risks for poor mental health and psychological distress. Pandemic studies to date provide mixed evidence of short-term impacts. There is empirical evidence to suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the number of children and youth experiencing mental health challenges while disrupting their access to supportive people, places and routines to manage their mental health. Young people (15-24 years-old) have reported more anxiety (27%) compared to adults (19%) and seniors (10%).[xiii] Again, a gender gap has been visible, with 72% of girls saying they feel sad compared

U-REPORT: More Anxiety and Stress in Childhood

The pandemic has had a serious, immediate impact on the mental health of young people. Three quarters (76%) of U-Reporters have experienced increased stress/anxiety, and a majority (69%) said their mental health has been negatively affected.

Figure 6: Suicide rate per 100,000 adolescents age 15 to 19



Note: Figures are three-year averages for 2013–2015, except that: (1) data were only available for two of these three years in Greece, New Zealand and Slovakia; and (2) five-year averages are used for the following six countries that had fewer than 100,000 people in this age group – Cyprus, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Malta and Slovenia.

Source: World Health Organization Mortality Database.

to 55% of boys. Conversely, some research identifies positive mental well-being for some young people, with rates of substance abuse down and improved relations with family members.[xiv]

What do the rates and rankings of children's life satisfaction and mental health tell us? Often, happiness is perceived to be a personality trait, and mental health is framed as a highly individual biochemical or mental condition. A reductionist approach fails to adequately explain the variations between countries and the trend of sliding life satisfaction and rising mental health needs. What does? Many of the indicators reviewed in this report influence mental well-being.

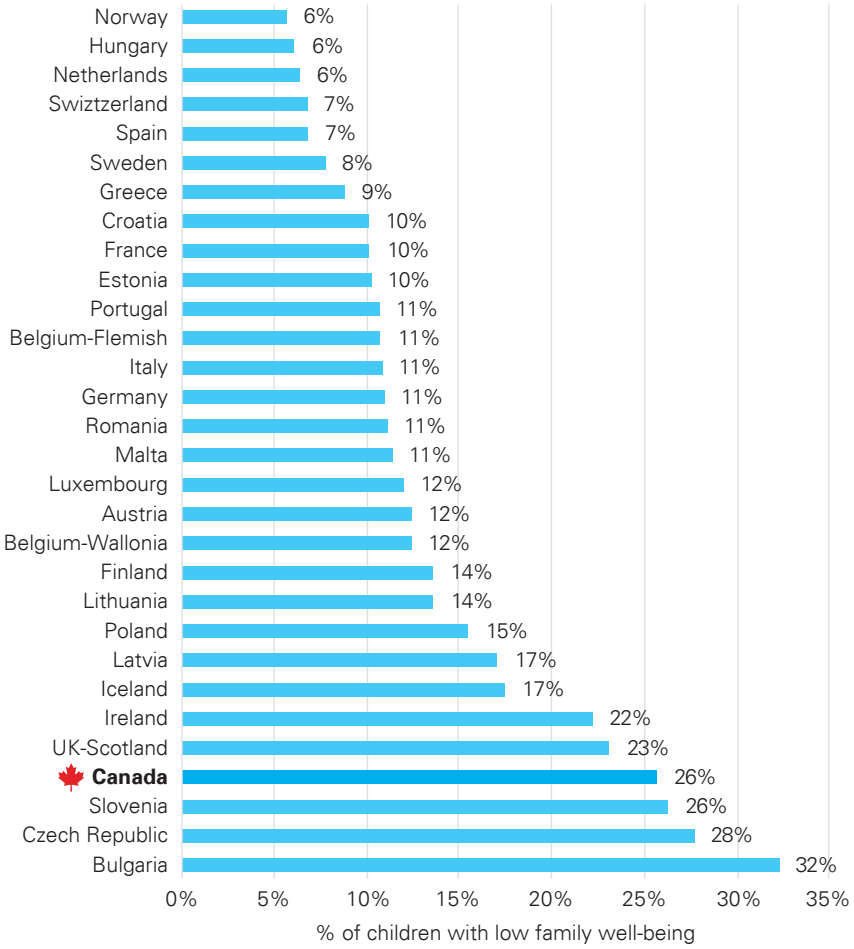
FAMILY SUPPORT

Canada ranks:
27th (26%)

Top performer:
Norway (6%)

Country average: 14%

Figure 7: Children who don't feel supported by their family



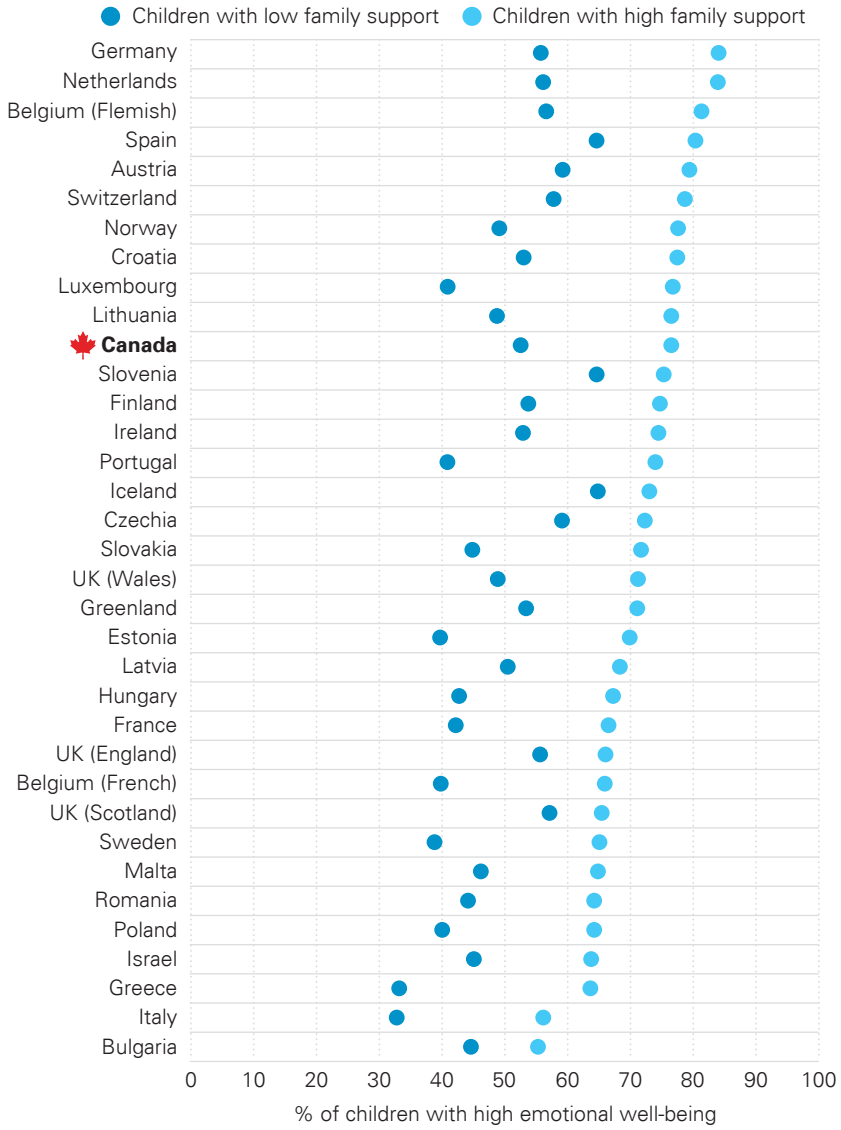
Notes: Excludes Denmark (no data), Slovakia, UK-Wales and UK-England (over 10% missing data). Data is weighted equally by age group and gender. An index was created from the mean response to 4 statement-based questions – (a) My family really tries to help me; (b) I get the emotional help and support I need from my family; (c) I can talk about my problems with my family; (d) My family is willing to help me make decisions. Children were asked to indicate how much they agreed with each statement. The percentages are of children who scored below the midpoint on this index – i.e. were more likely, on average, to disagree than agree.

Source: HBSC 2017/18

When children are asked what matters to their well-being, good quality relationships are often a priority.[xv] While low life satisfaction among young people can trigger wide-ranging problems, including school dropout, substance abuse, aggression and difficult relationships[xvi]; [xvii]; [xviii], it is in turn influenced by the relationships children have with parents, teachers and peers. A study in the UK showed that compared to children with average to high life satisfaction, those with low life satisfaction were about eight times more likely to report a family conflict, six times more likely to feel that they could not express their opinions, five times more likely to be bullied and more than twice as likely not to look forward to going to school. Only 64% of children with low life satisfaction felt they had people who supported them, compared to 93% of other children. Moreover, 24% of children with low life satisfaction said that they did not feel safe at home, compared with only about 1% of other children.

Children who have less supportive families tend to have poorer emotional health. There is a strong link between the quality of family relationships and the frequency of psychological distress,

Figure 8: The gap between children with low and high levels of family support



Notes: Excludes Denmark (no data), Slovakia, UK-Wales and UK-England (over 10% missing data). Data is weighted equally by age group and gender. An index was created from the mean response to 4 statement-based questions – (a) My family really tries to help me; (b) I get the emotional help and support I need from my family; (c) I can talk about my problems with my family; (d) My family is willing to help me make decisions. Children were asked to indicate how much they agreed with each statement. The percentages are of children who scored below the midpoint on this index – i.e. were more likely, on average, to disagree than agree. The indicator of emotional well-being is discussed in Section 3.

Source: HBSC 2017/18.

U-REPORT: Family Relations Under Lockdown

We asked young people about their relationships with family during the pandemic:

- Just over 40% of U-Reporters were very or extremely concerned about the level of stress in their family. One third said their families have been arguing more. On the other hand, many U-Reporters said that spending more time with their family has been a silver lining of the pandemic: 43% said their families have been supporting each other well.
- The majority of U-Reporters (84%) were not concerned about violence in the home, but 16% were at least somewhat concerned, and among them 7% were very or extremely concerned. About one in ten have experienced bullying from siblings or other children or youth in their home.

including feeling low, irritable or in a bad temper, feeling nervous and having difficulties sleeping. In some countries, the rate of children with mental distress is almost double that of those with better parental support.[xix]

In the lives of Canadian children, relationships with family, friends and school compare unfavourably with many other countries. Rankings in relevant indicators typically fall in the middle or at the bottom of the league tables, along with life satisfaction. Children in Canada have relatively low perceived family support, ranking 27th of 30 countries (Figure 7). In Canada, 26% of children do not feel supported by their family, compared to only 6% in Norway and the Netherlands and 14% in Finland. About half of children report high family support in Grade 6,

but this drops to 41% by Grade 10.[xx] Also, the gap between low and high family support for children is larger in Canada than in most countries (Figure 8). Another recent study found that in Canada, 78% of children feel free to express themselves, and 74% feel that their families listen to them,[xxi] which mirrors the 26% who do not feel supported by family. Furthermore, only 69% of girls reported it was easy or very easy to talk to their mother (78% of boys), a slide from 74% in 2014.[2] Talking with fathers was even less positive, with only 51% of girls and 66% of boys reporting ease in communication. Family relationships have a significant equity gap: 84% of girls from the upper-income quintile report high communication ease with their mothers compared to just 70% of girls in the lower quintile. Materially insecure families tend to have more difficult relationships, but they are not confined to the bottom of the income gradient. Countries with wider income inequality tend to have weaker levels of perceived family support.

In the absence of longer-term trend data, it is not possible to consider how closely the Canadian trend of declining positive family relationships echoes findings in the US where, despite a trend of increasing time spent with parents, children report declining satisfaction with the parent-child relationship.[xxii] The impact of COVID-19 "stay at home" measures, which confined many children and youth at home or in a particular household, remains to be seen. Surveys of Canadian parents found between a quarter and a third reported at least moderate impacts of pandemic-related financial stress on their mental health. There are indications such as a spike in child helpline calls and child advocacy investigations, and evidence from other crises, that children are more likely to experience domestic violence during the pandemic. Among young U-Reporters in Canada, 16% reported concern about family violence. On the other hand, almost one-third reported better communication with family members. A pandemic study also found evidence of children feeling closer to their families.[3] As lockdown measures ease the additional risk to children may decline, but, without systemic changes, children who were already at risk of domestic violence will remain at risk and victims of violence will need ongoing support. The positive impacts on family relationships for some young people may persist if all members can sustain a more positive life balance, but these effects are likely to be unequal. Happy families may become happier and vulnerable families more vulnerable.

BULLYING

Canada ranks:
23rd (20%)

Top performer:
Netherlands (9%)

Country average: 19%

As children grow up, peer relationships become increasingly important for their well-being. *The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-Being* observed that the majority of children 11 to 15 years-old report a high level of support from their friends, although close to 1 in 3 does not. Girls are more likely (72.9%) than boys (58.5%) to report strong friendship support, yet girls are more likely to feel lonely (29.7%) or left out (18.2 %), suggesting that their expectations and the quality of those relationships matters.

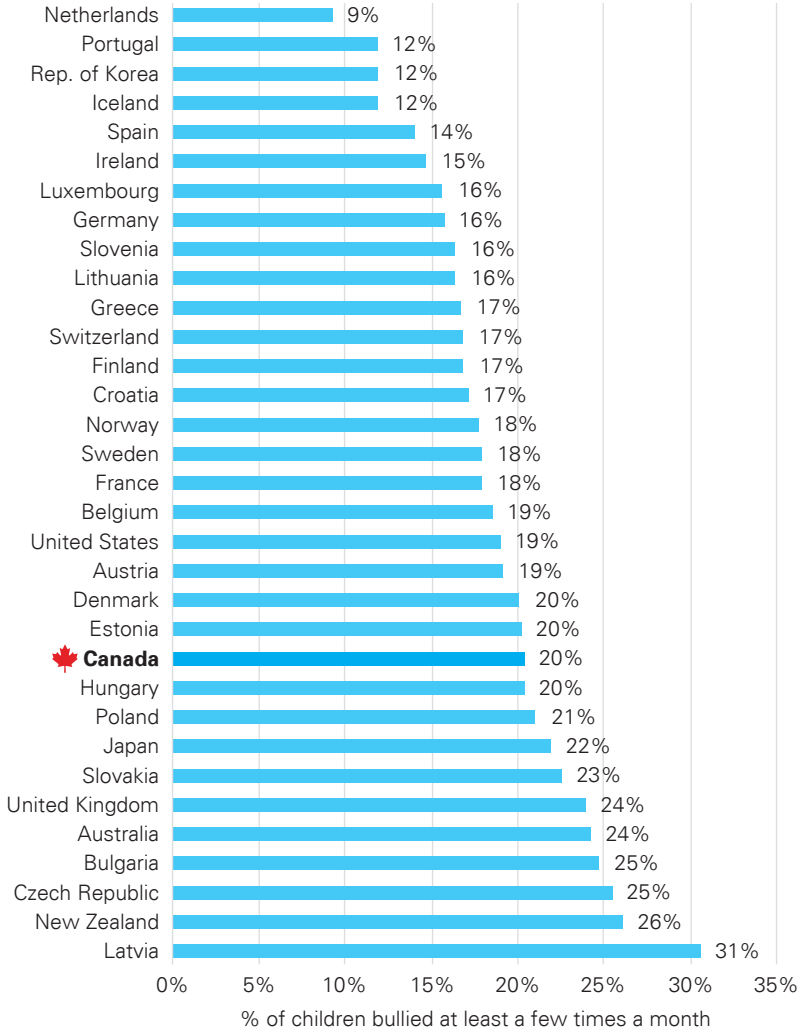
If friendships can be a positive factor, bullying erodes life satisfaction. Bradshaw (2015) suggests that bullying explains as much difference in life satisfaction as all other individual and family characteristics combined.[xxiii] In all countries in this study, children who had been frequently bullied had lower life satisfaction than children who had not. In fact, the impact of bullying extends beyond the children being bullied: it also affects other young people's life satisfaction.[xxiv]

The relatively low rate of life satisfaction among children in Canada may be related to the relatively high rate of

2 Inchley J, Currie D, Budisavljevic S, Torsheim T, Jåstad A, Cosma A et al., editors. (2020). Spotlight on adolescent health and well-being. Findings from the 2017/2018 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey in Europe and Canada. International report. Volume 2. Key data. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.

3 Cribb, R. (2020). Youth mental health deteriorating under pandemic stresses, new CAMH study reveals, The Toronto Star, Downloaded at https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/05/28/youth-mental-health-deteriorating-under-pandemic-stresses-new-camh-study-reveals.html

Figure 9: Children who are often bullied



Notes: Excludes Chile, Mexico and Turkey due to more than 20% of children aged 15 not being included in the survey; and Cyprus, Israel, Italy, Malta and Romania where the bullying questions were not asked.

Source: PISA 2015

bullying in Canada, at 20% or 1 in 5 children, which ranks 23rd of 33 countries (Figure 9). In contrast, the rate of bullying in the Netherlands is less than half that, at 9%. A high rate of bullying in Canada may also be related to children's reported difficulties making friends at age 15.

Despite higher public awareness of bullying and a range of new programs and measures intended to address it, the rate of frequent bullying continues to rise. For girls aged 15 years, reports of being bullied at least twice in the past couple of months increased between 2014 and 2018 from 11% to 14%. For boys, the increase was from 10% to 13%. This compared to the Netherlands, where the rate for girls decreased from 7% to 4%, and from 5% to 4% for boys.[xxv]

U-REPORT: Bullying and Social Isolation

We asked young people about their social relationships and experiences of bullying during the lockdown:

- Just over 85% of U-Reports said they're concerned about keeping up relationships with peers and family members.
- U-Reporters stressed the importance of staying connected with friends and family virtually; but for many, not being able to see friends in person is the most difficult restriction of the lockdown.
- A large majority of U-Reporters (93%) said they have not experienced online bullying since the lockdown began, and 17% say they're experiencing less bullying in general than before.

There are indications that the school closures during the COVD-19 pandemic may have created a reprieve from bullying. U-Reporters in Canada reported a drop in experiences of bullying, despite an increase in online engagement. However, one of their top concerns during the pandemic's lockdown phase was the loss of face-to-face time with peers. As much as virtual engagement is a prominent mechanism for peer relationships, it is not a full substitute for face-to-face connections for many young people. The longer-term impacts of an interruption in both positive and negative peer relationships remain to be seen.

Having enough time and space to play outside is linked to children's life satisfaction.[4] International free play movements have arisen not only to improve children's physical activity, but because free, unsupervised, outdoor play and mobility have many positive impacts on children's mental and physical health, learning, safety and development – and they are declining. Growing concern about children's freedom "just to be kids" is rivalled by rising concern about the amount of screen time among children and youth. However, there is some evidence that children who engage in a lot of screen time also play outside a lot. As well, the link between screen time and mental well-being appears to be weak or modest, emphasizing the need for moderation in use rather than exclusion (and considering the type of device and the timing of use).[xxvi] [xxvii] The highest mental well-being was observed within a range of 30 minutes to 3 hours a day of screen time. On the other hand, a much smaller group who did not use any technology, or experienced "problem use", had lower well-being.

Canada is not included in international comparative data sets on free play and screen usage, but the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being reports that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic about three-quarters of adolescents walked or cycled to visit friends, and 80% spent four or more hours per week in outdoor, free play – a baseline to monitor.[xxviii] The WHO reports that about 7% of Canadian young people experience problematic screen use at age 15,[xxix]consistent with the rate of young people who participate in other, frequent risk behaviours such as drug and alcohol use, as reported in the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being.

During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, empirical evidence and polls of children and youth suggest that children's outdoor play was severely curtailed, but time for indoor free play and leisure increased. At the same time, screen time increased and was used for a variety of positive activities, including education, social support and leisure, while there were indications of a heightened risk of online exploitation. The net impacts on child and youth well-being remain to be seen, but we can expect cleavages between children who were already in situations of low family resources and social support and those with more resources and support.

2. PHYSICAL HEALTH AND SURVIVAL

Social inclusion is the new antidote to child deaths

CHILD MORTALITY

Canada ranks:
28th (0.98 per 1,000)

Top performer:
Luxembourg (0.36 per 1,000)

Country average: 1.0 per 1,000

In the 21st century, infant and child mortality rates in high-income countries are less sentinel indicators of child well-being than in low- and middle-income countries. In low-income regions such as West and Central Africa, the rate of child death is 23 per 1,000. By comparison, the highest rate of child mortality among high-income countries is in Mexico at 2.47 per 1,000. While most prosperous countries have been highly successful in reducing infant and child mortality through improved water and sanitation, public health and health care, there continue to be important variations. Canada's rate of 0.98 child deaths per 1,000 births is superior to the US, which is near the bottom of the UNICEF league table at 1.34 per 1,000. However, Canada trails behind Nordic countries such as Denmark (0.50), Finland (0.60) and Norway (0.63), which achieve close to half of Canada's rate. Luxembourg, the top-performer, has one-third of Canada's rate. Canada sits in the middle of the rankings – much as it does in relation to overall child well-being.

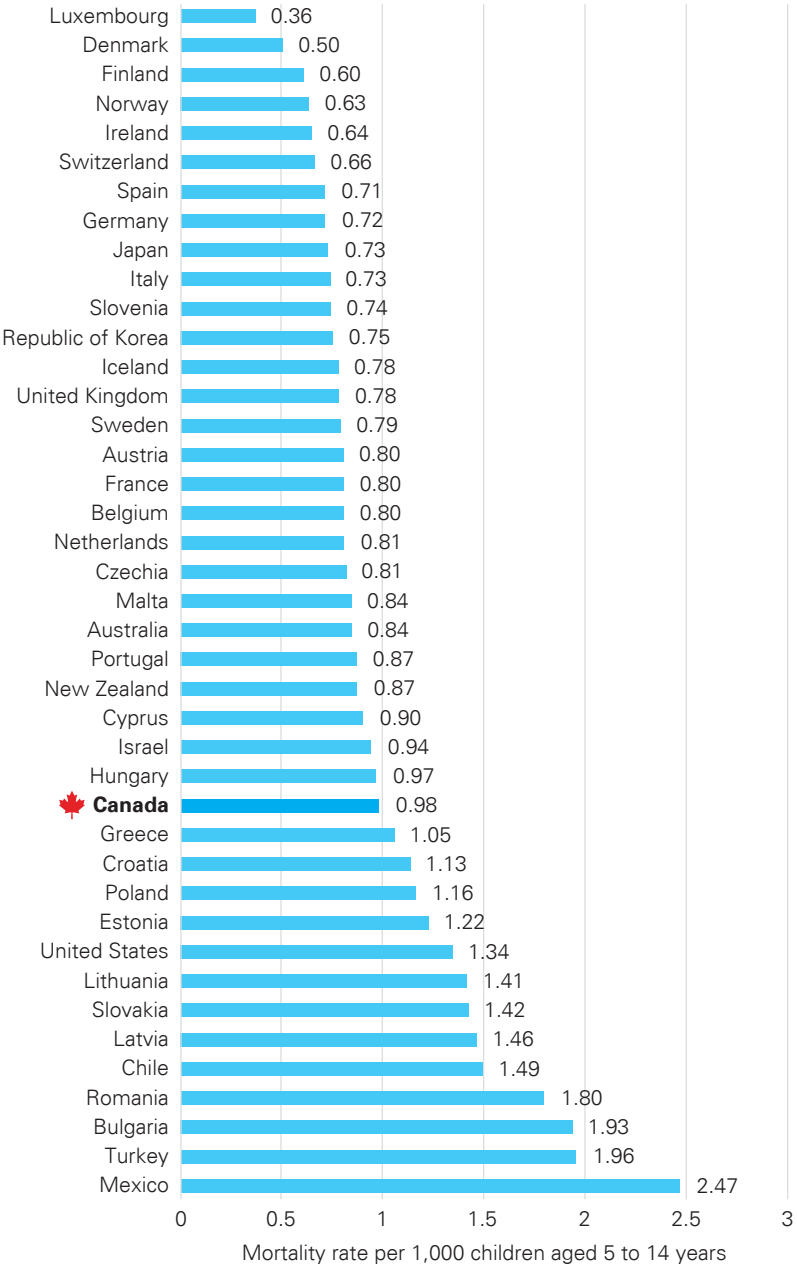
Therefore, child mortality in a country like Canada is not an irrelevant matter, but its context has changed. Child mortality is sensitive not only to health policies and systems but to material conditions. The pattern of child mortality generally tracks the pattern of national income inequality and child poverty. Countries with more robust, universal

4 Correlations ranged from 0.15 in Belgium to 0.30 in Poland.

social protection policies such as child-focused income benefits tend to have lower rates of income inequality, child poverty and child and infant death. More social equality and effective social protection policies appear to protect children from mortality.

In Canada, child mortality is an important marker of extreme poverty and continuing social exclusion experienced by First Nations and Black populations. For instance, infant mortality is 3.9 times higher in areas with a higher concentration of Inuit people and 2.3 times higher in areas with more First Nations people.[xxx] For children ages 10-14, suicide/intentional self-harm is the leading cause of death (20.8%), followed by accidents (18.9%).[xxxi] Accidents are the second leading cause of death for 5-9 year-olds (23.8%), after malignant neoplasms. Relative to other wealthy countries, Canada has a high rate of injury requiring hospital admittance and a higher rate of suicide. The incidences of suicide and accidents are not evenly distributed among children. For example, Indigenous children suffer from unintentional injuries at a rate of about 4 times that of non-Indigenous children. Black children are disproportionately victims of gun injuries.

Figure 10: Mortality rate per 1,000 children age 5 to 14



Source: UN IGME project.

As child deaths have fallen, obesity has risen

OVERWEIGHT/OBESITY

Canada ranks:
29th (32%)

Top performer:
Japan (14%)

Country average: 29%

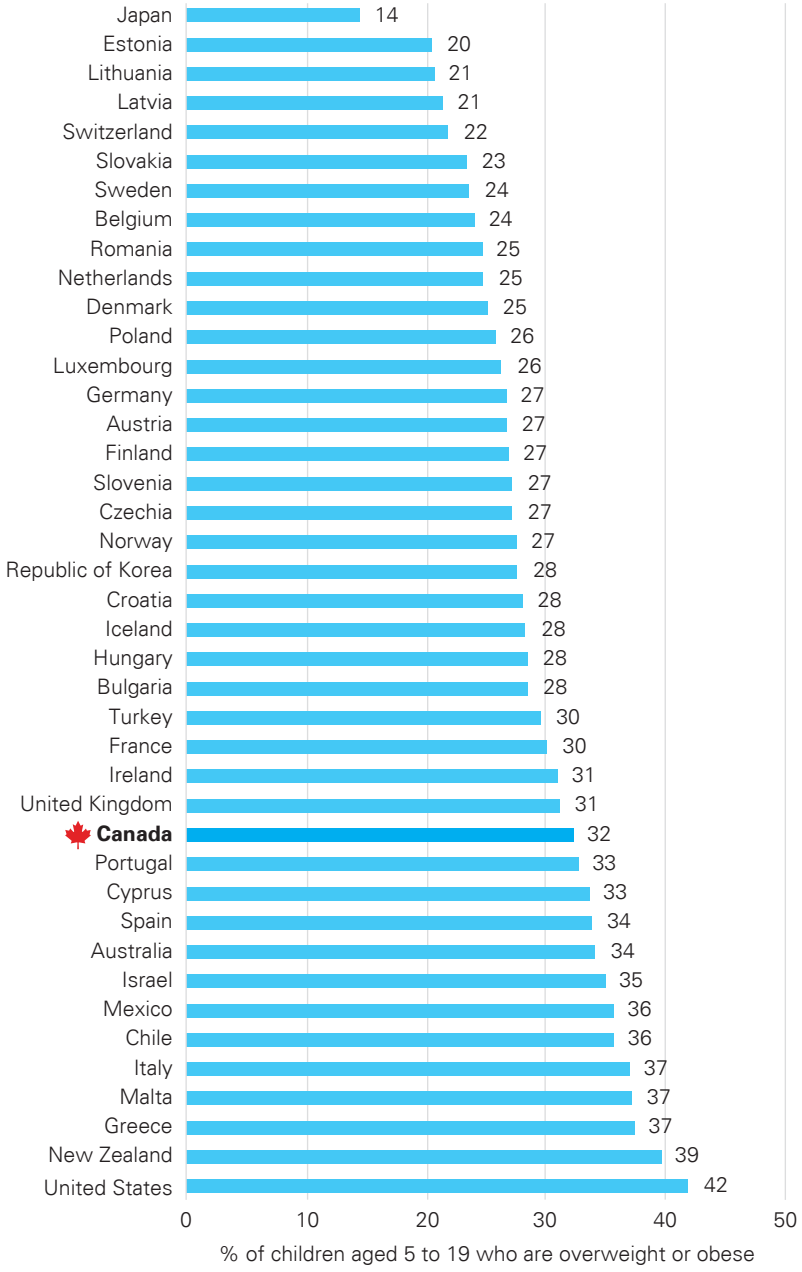
Reducing social and economic inequality is not only the new antidote to the child death rate and a condition for higher life satisfaction; it is key to turning the tide against the rise in childhood obesity. Canada has a high childhood obesity rate of 32% or 1 in 3 children (Figure 11). There is a considerable gap between Canada and top performers such as Japan (14%), where the rate is less than half of Canada's, and Estonia (20%).

On a positive note, while the rate of overweight or obese children tripled over the past thirty years in Canada, there are signs that the rate of increase is at least stabilizing.[xxxii] [xxxiii] There are indications of a similar plateau in many other countries.[xxxiv] Less optimistically, children with low socio-economic status and in northern/remote areas of Canada remain at a higher risk of being overweight.[xxxv] Obesity is a serious problem for both mental and physical health. It takes a social and emotional toll by lowering self-esteem and limiting participation in social life. It contributes to lifelong illnesses, including diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, cancer and shorter life expectancy.

In many countries, there have been significant public health efforts to encourage more physical activity and healthy food consumption, and it would appear they are having a positive effect on obesity for some. However, the differences in rates of overweight children between Canada and better performing countries are not solely explained by lifestyle behaviours. Canadian children are reported to be too sedentary – with only about 1 in 4 reporting at least the recommended one hour of vigorous activity daily -- yet their activity level is ranked 6th of 45 high-income countries.[xxxvi] Although only 14% of Canadian girls report 60 minutes of vigorous daily activity, this compares to 9% of Swedish and 7% of English girls. For Canadian boys, the rate is 28% compared to that of Sweden (13%) and England (15%). Yet, these countries have lower rates of overweight children than Canada. A similar discrepancy is visible in healthy eating patterns. Canadian children rank 3rd out of 45 countries for the rate of daily fruit and vegetables consumption, more than counties such as the Netherlands (39th), Sweden (44th) and Finland (45th). [xxxvii] Canadian children also report eating sweets less often (ranking 7th) and consuming fewer sugary drinks daily (ranking 4th).

Unhealthy eating and insufficient physical activity contribute to the

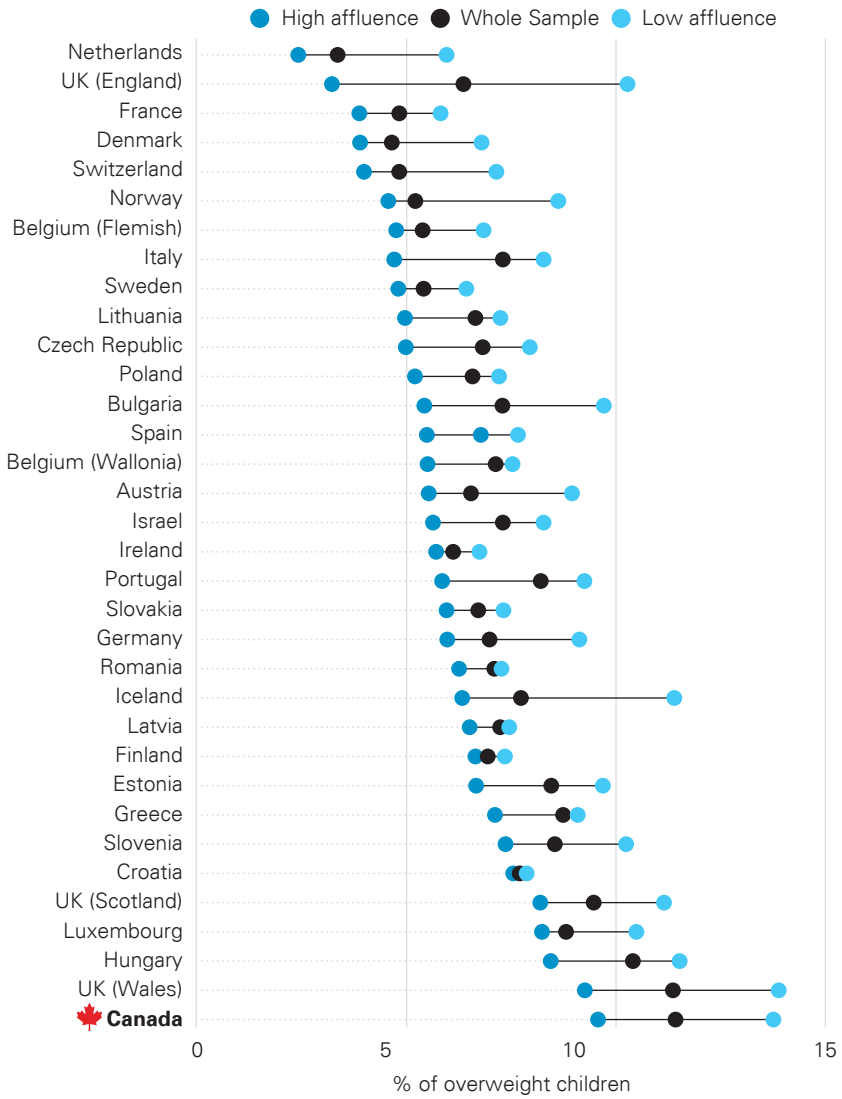
Figure 11: Children who are overweight or obese age 5 to 19



Note: Being overweight is defined as having a body mass index (BMI) over 25, while obesity is a BMI of over 30.

Source: United Nations Children's Fund, The State of the World's Children 2019. Children, Food and Nutrition: Growing well in a changing world, UNICEF, New York, 2019.

Figure 12: Rate of obesity among children of higher and lower family affluence



Notes: The Family Affluence Scale is based on six items: number of family cars, a child having their own bedroom, number of computers in the home, number of bathrooms, number of holidays in past year, and presence of a dishwasher. In the chart, low family affluence is defined as children who lack at least score less than six out of 13, meaning that they completely lack at least one of the six items. Body Mass Index (BMI) is based on children's height and weight and overweight is defined as a BMI above 25.

Source: HBSC 2017/18.

prevalence of overweight children, but a focus on lifestyle behaviours does not appear to be sufficient explanation. A clue to other possible contributing factors is the variation of overweight rates by socio-economic status. Children in less affluent families have a higher risk of overweight and obesity in almost all countries (Figure 12). However, the size of the obesity gap between high- and low-affluence families varies by country and, in particular, the gaps are wider in the UK (England), UK (Wales), Bulgaria and Canada. Children living in low-income homes tend to have less food security and less access to nutritious foods. However, the rate of obesity among children in high-affluence families is also higher in Canada than in any other rich country studied. The different food systems in rich countries may also play a role in different rates of childhood obesity. One study found a rise in calorie consumption in Canada associated with the North American Free Trade Agreement, which fostered a rise in the supply of food containing unhealthy ingredients such as high-fructose corn syrup.[xxxviii] According to the WHO and other studies, the marketing of unhealthy food and drink is also a contributing factor

During the COVID-19 pandemic, early reports suggest that income was lost, school meals were disrupted, food insecurity increased, unhealthy snacking increased and children's physical activity was curtailed. A spike in childhood obesity and a wider socio-economic gap in unhealthy weight between children could be the result.

3. EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Canada's children do not give life a top grade, but get them at school

ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY (READING AND MATH)

Canada ranks:
13th (68%)

Top performer:
Estonia (79%)

Country average: 62%

Over twenty years of reporting on child well-being in rich countries, Canada has typically fallen into the middle or bottom of the pack on most measures, particularly children's health, material security, protection from violence and life satisfaction. The exception to this pattern is in educational achievement and equity. When measured with standardized testing in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Canada's systems of education rank highly in mean scores and in the relative equity of scores for students of low socio-economic status and immigrant students.[xxxix] Canada stands near the top of the UNICEF league table, ranking 13th in the proportion of children who are still in school and have reached a minimum level of proficiency in both reading and mathematics at age 15 (Figure 13).

Despite Canada's relatively high rank in educational achievement and inclusion, there is cause for concern in Canada and, indeed, in all countries. Basic academic proficiency indicates how many children are prepared to successfully participate in the modern economy, where the requirement for academic skills is accelerating. Canada's score of 68% of students with basic reading and math skills means that 32%, or 1 in 3 children, fall below the minimum level of proficiency. Children from less affluent families and communities, particularly First Nations, Inuit and Black children, are disproportionately being left behind. Many countries have failed to make advances in recent years, with academic scores either stagnating or declining and stubborn equity gaps. The reasons for the trend are not clear, but the future trajectory is a concern in a global economy where superior academic, social and emotional skills – not just basic proficiency – will be a requirement.

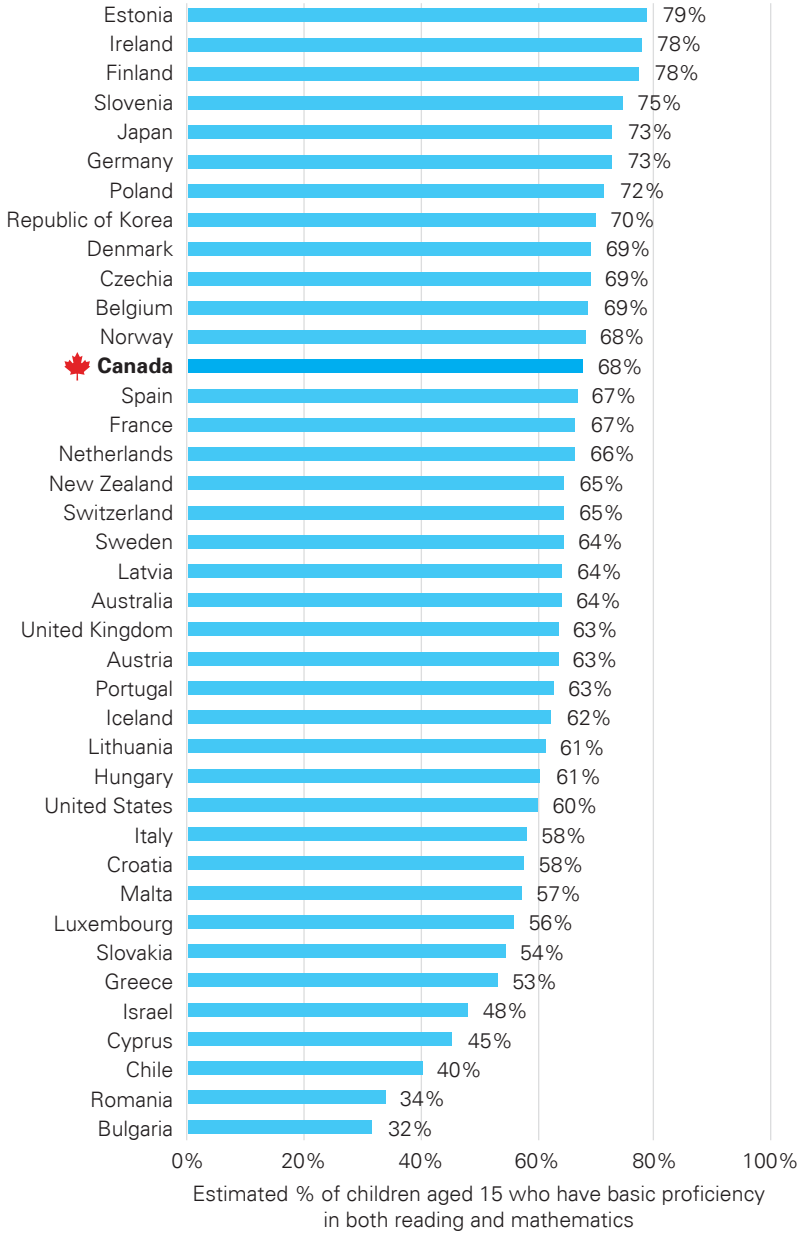
The disruption in education during the COVID-19 pandemic has been widespread. However, it is very likely to disproportionately affect young people who were already at risk of disengagement from school, potentially lowering the rate of young people achieving basic proficiency and high school completion for years to come. For how many and for how long will depend on the duration of educational disruption and the effectiveness of well-rounded school recovery strategies reaching those at risk or disengaged. The emergency reliance on online learning highlights a long-recognized equity gap – children of low-income families often lack access to high-speed internet, equipment and support at home. There is also an urban-rural gap in broadband access. Children with disabilities and special learning needs are also less able to participate in virtual education without special support.

U-REPORT: School Engagement During Lockdown

We asked U-Reporters how they were feeling about doing school online during the pandemic. Here's what they said:

- Many U-Reporters said they feel worse about school than they did before the pandemic (40%). Some said they miss school very much (26%).
- More U-Reporters say they find it hard to do the work assigned by their teachers (42%) than say they find it easy (26%). The challenges of doing school online include trying to find motivation, staying focused and getting enough support from teachers and peers.

Figure 13: Children with at least basic proficiency in reading and mathematics at age 15-0.25



Note: The percentage of children meeting or exceeding basic proficiency in both reading and maths tests multiplied by the coverage index 3 of the PISA survey.

Source: PISA 2018, except for Spain, figures from PISA 2015 as 2018 data was not available.

Reading and writing can be hard, but relationships may be harder

SOCIAL SKILLS

Canada ranks:
23rd (74%)

Top performer:
Romania (83%)

Country average: 76%

BELONGING AT SCHOOL

Canada ranks:
29th (-0.11)

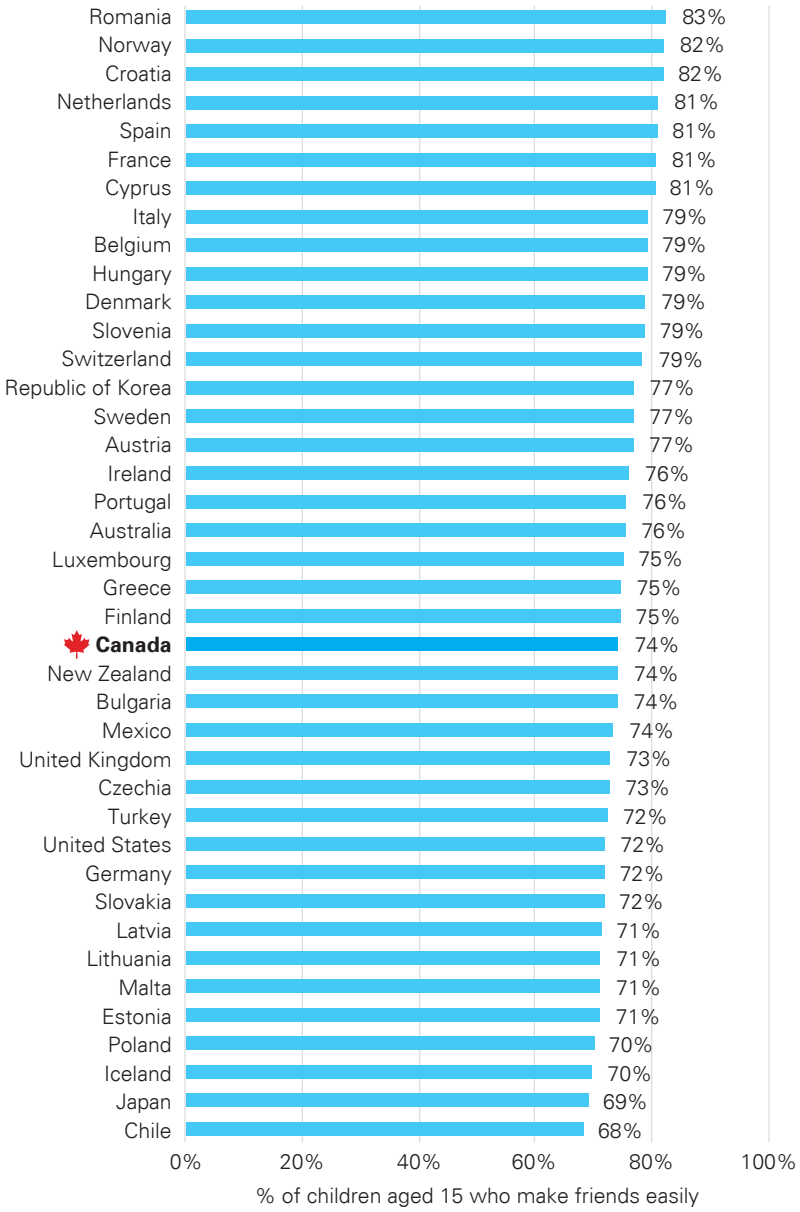
Top performer:
Spain (0.47)

Children in Canada get better grades than many of their peers in rich countries, but they have more difficult relationships at school. Many Canadian children, close to 1 in 4, say that they do not feel confident in their skills to make friends easily. As reported above, Canada's rate of bullying is relatively high, so it is not surprising that Figure 14 shows that children have a relatively low feeling of support at school. In another study, Canada ranked 37th of 45 countries based on the rate of 15 year-olds who report high classmate support: 35% of girls and 47% of boys.[xl] Only 17% of girls and 18% of boys report liking school a lot, ranking in the middle at 22nd of 45 countries.

Why do Canadian young people have more difficult relationships than their

peers in countries like Norway and the Netherlands? While Canada's schools tend to offer high-performing learning environments, they are also high-pressure environments and seem to be less successful in fostering children's sense of belonging and well-being (Figure 15). In 2018, 68% of Canadian girls and 48% of boys reported feeling pressured by schoolwork, a statistically significant increase from 2014 (55% and 43%, respectively).[xli] In Canada, there is a distinctive pattern of two student groupings: 1) Not pressured, not highly satisfied, and 2) Pressured, not highly satisfied. The former reflects a group of youth who are likely disengaged, while the latter appears to represent a group experiencing high competitive pressure.[xlii] There is a gender difference, with boys far more likely to fall within the disengaged (37.8% compared to 25.1% of girls), and girls to fall within the competitive pressure group (57% compared to 44.2% of boys). Overall, Canada has one of the most competitive, high-pressure school environments based on students' perception of their school experience (ranking 6th of 22 European and North American countries). On the other hand, Norway appears to create school environments that support belonging, making friends and educational achievement.

Figure 14: Children who make friends easily at age 15



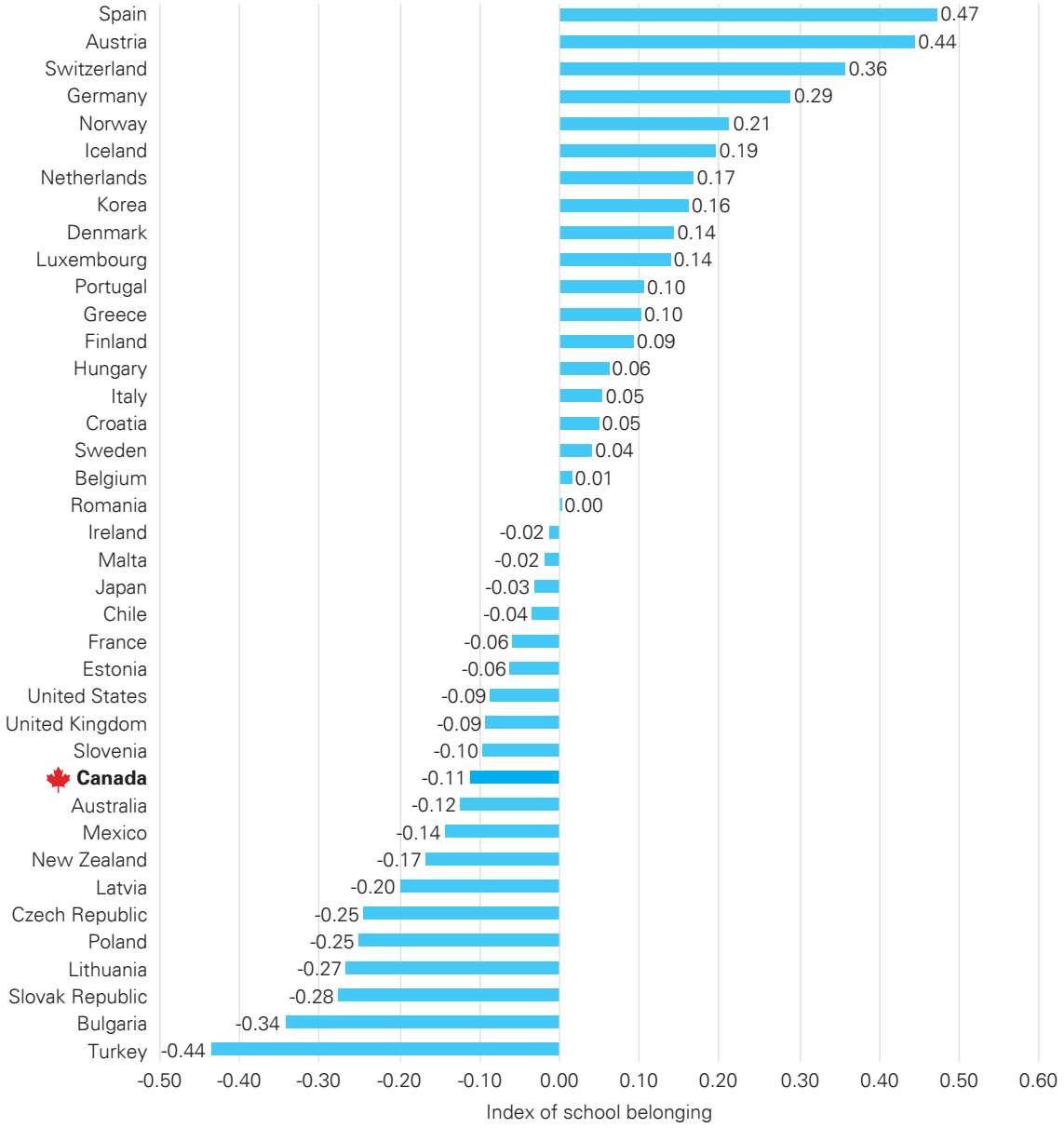
Note: The percentage of children aged 15 who agreed or strongly agreed that they made friends easily at school.

Source: PISA 2018, except for Cyprus, figures from PISA 2015 as 2018 data was not available; and Israel no data available.

For many children in Canada, a combination of low school support and increasing pressure to achieve at school is a recipe for lower mental well-being. Research consistently finds that when children feel supported by the school community, they are more likely to be engaged at school have a higher sense of life satisfaction. A positive school climate is a protective factor, reducing the risk of violence, substance abuse and dropping out.

As students return to school during the COVID-19 pandemic era, it is uncertain how physical distancing measures such as smaller class sizes, staggered time in classrooms, and other adjustments will affect their ability to develop positive relationships at school. It is also unclear how much emphasis will be placed on recovering academic content versus fostering mental, physical and social recovery. If schools place greater

Figure 15: Index of children's school belonging at age 15



Notes: Excludes Chile, Mexico and Turkey due to more than 20% of children aged 15 not being included in the survey; and Israel where these questions were not asked.

Source: PISA 2015

importance on supporting student well-being, including mental and physical health, nutrition, recreation and social development balanced with academic recovery and advancement, the overall well-being of students in the wake of the pandemic might improve.

Why do some countries have higher child well-being?

Children's experiences of childhood are rooted in the societies in which they live.

Over the last century, economic development has pushed high-income countries to unprecedented levels of wealth. In parallel with economic growth over this period, a massive decline in infant and child mortality, an increase in educational attainment and better physical health have signalled a significant shift in well-being. Yet, the "modernity paradox"[xliii] suggests that while many risks to well-being have diminished, other threats have emerged. Evidence in UNICEF Report Cards shows that improvements in many indicators of child well-being are no longer keeping pace with rising national wealth and other economic progress indicators, and some are in decline.[xliv] A declining rate of life satisfaction and higher rates of mental distress among children reflects the "modernity paradox." Why, within conditions of relative affluence, are so many children experiencing poor mental health and unhappiness? The following indicators of the conditions in which children are growing up and the public policies they rely on suggest that public policy can be a powerful intermediary between children's conditions and outcomes.

1. THE CONDITIONS OF CHILDHOOD

The context of childhood constitutes the economic, social and environmental factors that shape child well-being, directly or indirectly. Most of us recognize that a sustainable environment, healthy economy and strong social fabric contribute to a good life and constitute a well-being foundation for current and future generations. A key question is explored in Report Card 16: to what extent are children benefitting from a country's economic, social and environmental conditions?

In general, countries in UNICEF Report Card 16 that rank highly in child well-being also rank highly in the conditions that influence child well-being, but there are exceptions. In the league table of societal conditions shaping childhood (Figure 16), only Norway ranks in the top third for all six dimensions. However, there is a visible cluster of other Nordic countries -- Iceland, Finland and Denmark -- performing well on almost all dimensions. Canada's overall ranking in the conditions for childhood, at 23rd, is somewhat better than its ranking in children's outcomes at 30th. Canada ranks higher in environmental (5th), economic (19th) and social conditions (23rd) than it does in children's overall well-being. In fact, Canada is one of a handful of countries with better conditions for growing up, yet lower child well-being (see Figure 18). They include Australia, New Zealand, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Malta and Israel. Some countries with a weaker economic, social and environmental context (including France, Spain, Italy, Hungary and Cyprus) manage to achieve better outcomes for children. The discussion about the conditions of childhood and the power of public policies that follows helps explain why.

Higher national income does not always equal better children's outcomes

In high-income countries, the dramatic rise in Gross National Income (GNI), a measure of national wealth, was paralleled for a time by improvements in child survival, health, development and protection. However, in the last two decades, the relationship between rising national wealth and child and youth well-being in the richest countries has become looser. Although countries with similar resources should be able to achieve relatively similar results for children, UNICEF Report Card 16 finds only a moderate relationship between

Figure 16: League table of country conditions (policies and context) to support child well-being

		POLICIES			CONTEXT		
Rank		Social	Education	Health	Economy	Society	Environment
1	Norway	6	9	8	1	2	7
2	Iceland	10	19	1	6	1	4
3	Finland	5	12	5	22	3	2
4	Germany	9	6	19	7	25	16
5	Denmark	12	16	12	9	4	17
6	Sweden	18	17	2	15	22	3
7	Luxembourg	23	1	24	2	15	11
8	Ireland	26	14	10	5	6	9
9	Netherlands	21	3	23	8	10	15
10	Slovenia	3	11	15	25	11	26
11	Switzerland	30	8	26	3	8	22
12	Estonia	1	33	11	27	18	14
13	Poland	8	5	13	23	26	33
14	Austria	13	13	33	10	21	20
15	Lithuania	15	2	9	30	30	30
16	Latvia	11	4	4	36	31	25
17	Japan	7	23	34	11	29	18
18	Australia	28	32	18	13	7	8
19	Czechia	4	22	36	14	13	28
20	New Zealand	37	20	22	21	5	1
21	Malta	32	15	21	20	12	23
22	Portugal	22	7	27	29	27	13
23	**Canada**	**27**	**25**	**29**	**19**	**23**	**5**
24	Belgium	29	10	32	17	20	19
25	Republic of Korea	17	21	6	16	38	38
26	Hungary	2	34	17	24	32	36
27	United Kingdom	35	24	30	12	9	10
28	Slovakia	16	38	14	31	19	29
29	United States	41	30	28	4	33	6
30	Croatia	20	27	7	37	36	37
31	Israel	39	26	20	18	28	34
32	France	25	18	39	28	24	21
33	Spain	36	31	25	40	17	12
34	Italy	34	35	31	33	16	31
35	Bulgaria	19	39	37	34	14	32
36	Chile	33	37	16	38	34	35
37	Cyprus	24	28	38	35	37	27
38	Romania	14	40	40	26	39	39
39	Greece	31	29	41	41	40	24
40	Mexico	38	36	3	32	41	40
41	Turkey	40	41	35	39	35	41

national income and children's outcomes (Figure 19). Each third of the league table, from top to bottom, contains a mixture of countries with contrasting income levels. For example, Croatia ranks above Germany, while in the bottom third of the rankings, Lithuania fares better than the United States. In 2020, factors beyond the wealth of a nation influence child well-being.

Income inequality is toxic to children

High national income is a critical, but not sufficient, condition for children to thrive and flourish. A recent WHO-UNICEF-Lancet report found little difference between high-income countries in the child survival index, although small differences in fundamental indicators such as infant mortality are important.[xlv] The greatest variations among rich countries are in indicators of child "thriving and flourishing." When countries reach a certain level of economic wealth, how it is shared matters more. The overall level of income inequality seems to play a more important role than the national income level in shaping childhood outcomes.[xlvi] Emerging evidence links income inequality to a wide variety of health and social problems, including among children.[xlvii xlviii xlix] More equal societies tend to report higher overall child well-being (Figure 20) and fewer health

Note: A light blue background indicates a place in the top third of the ranking, medium blue denotes the middle third, and dark blue the bottom third. The z-score was calculated for each component in a sector of policy and context, then the average of the z-scores within each sector was calculated to arrive at a country's ranking for each dimension. Overall rankings are based on the mean ranking across all sectors.

Figure 17: Indicators in the league table of conditions for child well-being

PUBLIC POLICY INFLUENCING CHILD WELL-BEING		
Sectors	**Components**	**Indicators**
Social	• Parental leave • Child poverty	• Weeks of maternity/parental and paternity/secondary caregiver leave (in full-pay equivalents) • % of children in households below 60% of median income
Education	• Early child education • Exclusion from school and work (NEET)	• % of children attending early child education one year before school • % of 15-19 year-olds out of school, employment or training
Health	• Immunization • Low birthweight	• % of children who received the second dose of measles vaccine • % of new-borns weighing less than 2500 grams
Budget allocation	• Spending on children and families	• Public expenditure as a % of GDP
THE COUNTRY CONTEXT OF CHILD WELL-BEING		
Context	**Components**	**Indicators**
Economy	• National income • Employment	• Gross National Income per capita (in international dollars) • Unemployment rate (% of active population)
Society	• Social support • Violence (homicide)	• % of adults who have someone to count on • Homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants
Environment	• Air pollution • Water supply quality	• Mean level of fine particulate matter • % of population using safe water

and social problems, such as mental illness, bullying and teenage pregnancy.[i]

Just as the level of national income does not adequately explain children's level of well-being, the level of family income is very important but not a sufficient determinant. More than simply being free from poverty in childhood, a growing consideration is the impact of broader income inequality on societal fairness and cooperation or, alternatively, hierarchy and competition. From the earliest years, children at the bottom of the income ladder perceive less opportunity and experience lower expectations than others. Yet, emerging evidence suggests that the effects of wider income inequality pose a risk to all children. Heightened social competition and anxiety affect children regardless of where they sit on the socio-economic ladder. [ii] [iii]

Evidence illustrates an association

Figure 18: Child well-being outcomes and conditions for child well-being

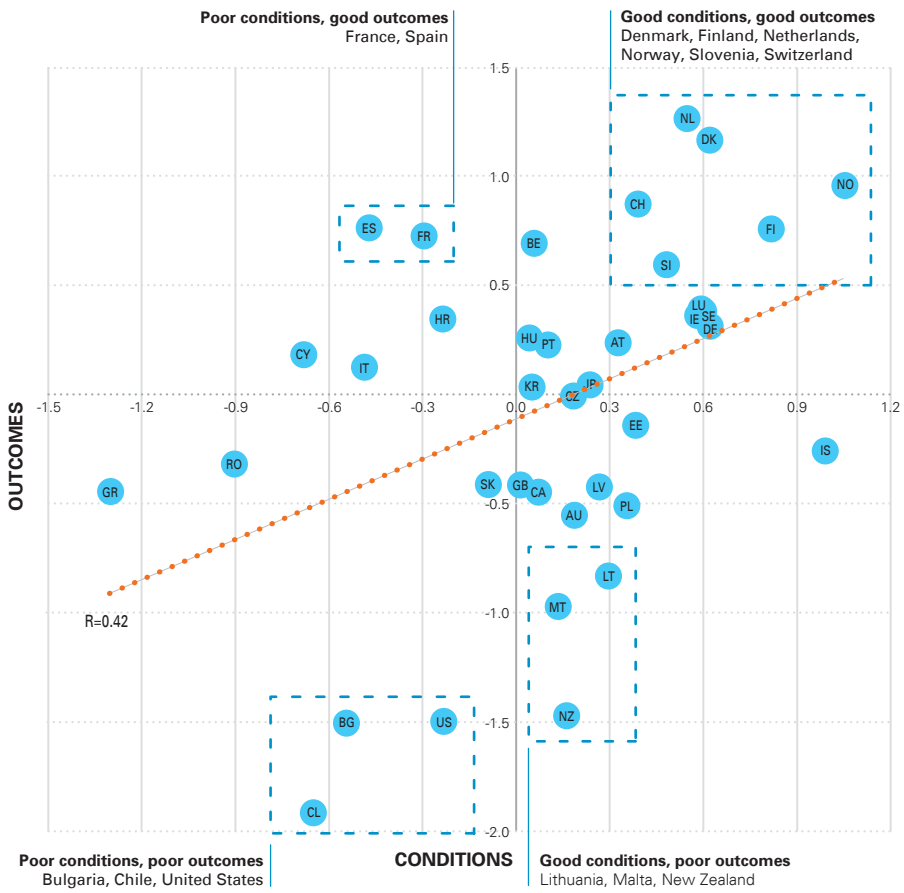
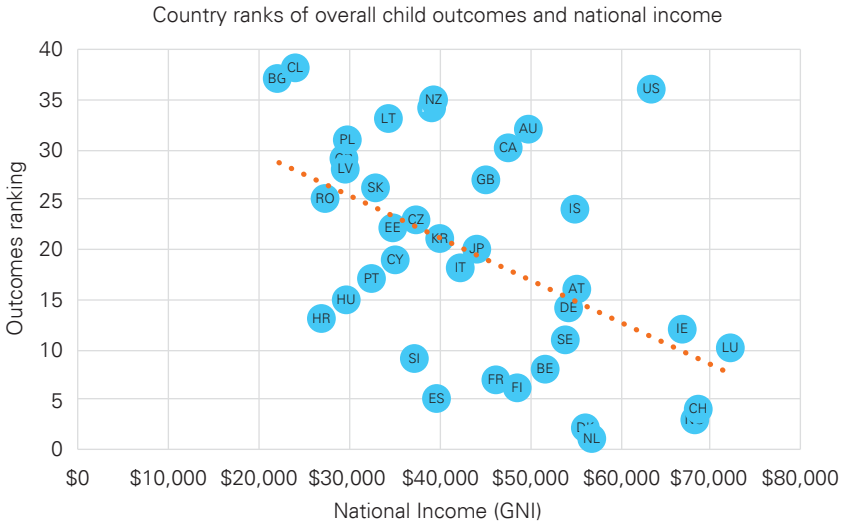


Figure 19: No strong relationship between a country's level of national income and children's outcomes



between higher income inequality and greater rates of stress and anxiety among young people stemming from more difficult relationships with family and friends. [liii] It is associated with more violence and bullying – also signals of difficult relationships. One study of 37 countries found that rates of school bullying among teenagers were greater when income inequality was higher.[liv] Another found higher rates of fighting. A socially stratified, highly competitive society creates more anxiety among parents and puts a good deal of pressure on children to succeed at school and fill their time with skill-advancing activities. It erodes time for freedom and play. It has long been recognized that income inequality is predictive of lower-income youth becoming disengaged from school and social and cultural group activities. In contrast, the rate of participation among more affluent teenagers has been escalating – in some cases to a level that contributes to anxiety and other negative impacts.[lv]

Figure 20: Countries with lower income inequality tend to have better child outcomes

Does wider income inequality help explain falling life satisfaction and mental health among children? Young people in countries with higher income inequality are more likely to report lower satisfaction with life.[lvi] Studies in the US have observed a significant relationship between rising inequality, increasing loneliness and general loss of trust in others.[lvii] [lviii] The wider the level of income inequality, the greater likelihood a society will experience higher rates of mental health problems.[lix] The life satisfaction slide among children and youth over the past twenty years may be the "canary in the coalmine" of wider income inequality and other societal changes.

Even when employment is rising, so is economic insecurity

UNEMPLOYMENT

Canada ranks:
26th (6.1%)

Top performer:
Japan (2.4%)

Country average: 6.0%

Household employment shapes children's material security, family relationships and many aspects of children's well-being. Children can experience both deprivation and anxiety when parents endure unemployment,

Spotlight: Infant mortality relates more strongly to inequality than to income

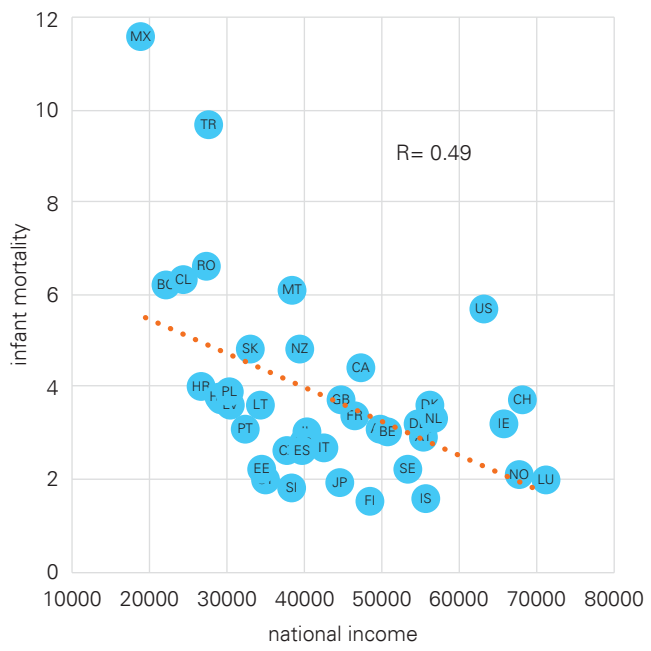
The Gini index measures the distribution of income across society. The higher the Gini coefficient (on a scale from zero to one), the higher the level of income inequality. Addressing income inequality, and poverty at the bottom end of the income distribution, is necessary to lift children's well-being. It does not come at the cost of national economic progress: more equitable societies tend to have higher national wealth as well as higher child well-being.

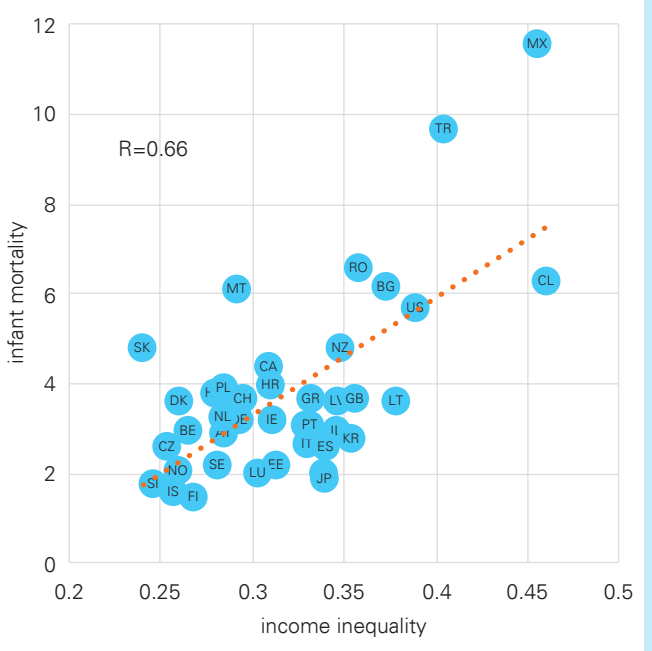
Child mortality is a sensitive indicator of inequality. Infant mortality reflects the social determinants of health, including social policies, at least as much as the quality of the health system for prenatal and neonatal care. The child mortality rate in high-income countries is also influenced by social determinants of health as well as other factors contributing to accidents and suicide.

All countries in this Report Card have made impressive progress in systematically reducing infant mortality. Fifty years ago, the average was 25 deaths per thousand live births. It declined to 16 in 1978, then to 13 by 1988, 8 in 1998, 5 in 2008 and 3.8 in 2018. Today, the relatively small differences between wealthy countries reflect less the basic standards of public health and more the impacts of poverty and discrimination. Infant mortality is more strongly linked to income inequality than national wealth (Figure 21), and it is still a significant problem: in high-income countries, infant mortality in 2018 was 30 times higher than child mortality. To bring this rate down, governments can reduce income inequality and provide better access to culturally appropriate policies and programs for Indigenous children.

Income inequality matters more than national wealth for infant mortality

Figure 21: Infant mortality in relation to national income and income inequality



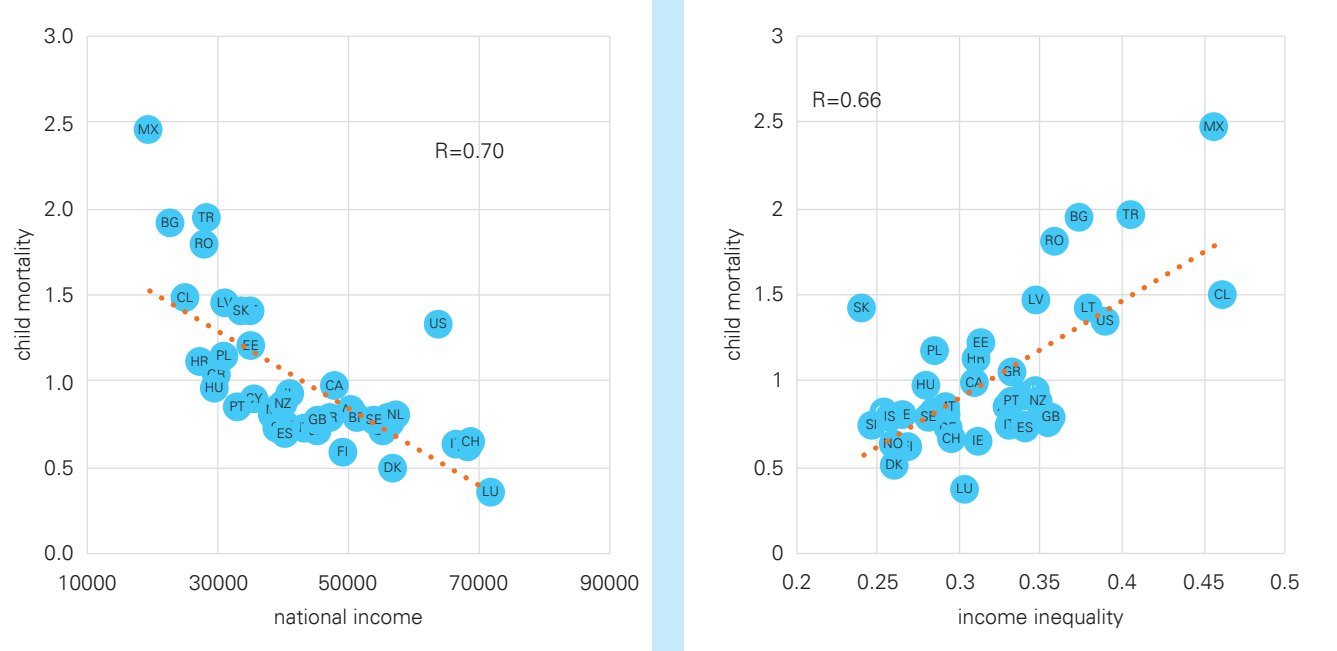


Notes: National income measured as GNI per capita based on purchasing power parity (PPP) in current international dollars in for 2018 (Cyprus for 2017). Infant deaths reported per 1,000 live births in 2018. Income inequality measured as Gini in 2017. The results hold also when using log GNI (R=0.57).

Sources: Infant Mortality, GNI, (WDI, 2018 and before (Cyprus for 2017)); GINI Index, (OECD, 2017).

Income inequality and national wealth relate equally strongly to child mortality

Figure 22: Child mortality in relation to national income and income inequality



Notes: National income measured as GNI per capita in international dollars in for 2018 (Cyprus for 2017). Income inequality measured as Gini in 2017. Child mortality covers all death causes in the age range 1-19 and is reported per 100 000 in 2018. The results hold also when using log GNI (R2=0.50).

Sources: World Bank, 2018 (only Cyprus for 2017)

irregular income or income loss. The financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the Great Recession had a tremendous impact on children in many high-income countries.[lx] Growing unemployment in most countries was exacerbated by austerity policies. The net result was a drop in children's material security (including food security) and their participation in employment at the end of formal schooling. For most countries, the impact of the crisis on employment had receded over the past ten years (Figure 23). Since the Great Recession, Canada's unemployment trend has been a slow decline for all ages, with Canada remaining a middle performer on this measure. The Canadian recovery in employment is less visible in Figure 23 because Canada's worst unemployment period was in 2009 (8.3%) rather than in 2007. However, the drop in unemployment to 5.8% was a marked improvement, until the COVID-19 pandemic almost tripled it during the lockdown phase. During this time, various surveys found that close to one in three Canadians reported a moderate or major impact on their ability to meet essential needs and financial obligations and worry over the loss of income[lxi]. Employment has not been shared equitably: the unemployment rate for some groups, including First Nations, was more than twice the national rate before the pandemic. The pandemic control measures have created the most job losses among low-income earners, with disproportionate impacts on women, though the impacts are widespread. It remains uncertain how quickly employment will rebound, the quality of available work and for whom as the pandemic wanes.

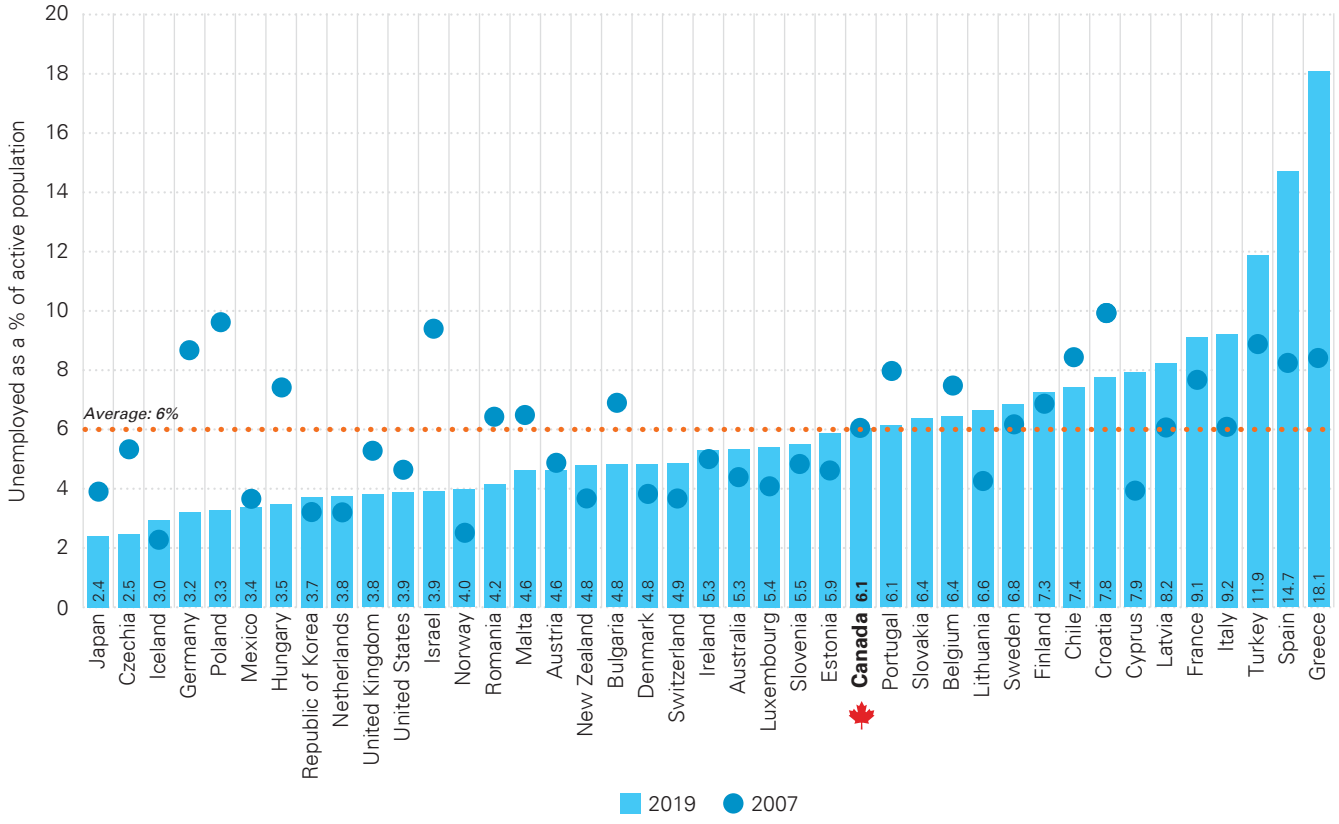
Economic anxiety did not evaporate after the Great Recession and may help explain the continuing slide in children's mental well-being. As the children of the recession enter adulthood,

they and younger children will also bear the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic insecurity affects children and youth in many ways. Income instability and economic shocks during the development years of childhood have been linked to poor child well-being outcomes. [lxii] [lxiii] While longer-term poverty appears to have the most significant negative impact on child well-being, short-term economic shocks also negatively affect development and well-being. No less important than the employment rate is the availability and stability of full-time, predictable work with sufficient and fair pay. Labour market conditions and perceptions of security or opportunity shape a child's life satisfaction, educational engagement and aspirations, directly and through family and social expectations.

Labour market change, with the growth of precarious employment including the so-called "gig economy," is a structural shift that predated but is further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the unemployment rate is no longer a sufficient indicator of economic conditions. Many Canadian reports have called attention to a significant, consistent decline in job quality over the last several decades.[lxiv] The US Private Sector Job Quality Index has measured a similar trend.[lxv] The risk to stable employment is not confined to low-skill jobs or gig economy activities. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has identified high levels of precarious employment among highly trained professionals in education, health care and finance/administration.[lxvi] Canada's Parliament has also examined the risks and trends and concluded that precarious employment is growing, and young people are the most vulnerable.[lxvii] Although about 20% of Canadians participate in the precarious labour market employment, a recent study found that within the 18 to 34 year age cohort, over 40% participated in the gig economy over the last five years.[lxviii]

To compound the likely impact of these trends on the anxiety and hopes of the young, over the last four

Figure 23: Unemployment rate (2007-2019)



Notes: Unemployment, total (% of total labor force), modelled ILO estimate. Unemployment refers to the share of the labor force (aged 15-64) that is without work but available for and seeking employment. Data retrieved in December 2019. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?end=2019&start=2019&view=bar

Source: World Development Indicators 2019.

decades, there has been a growing gap between labour productivity gains and remuneration, with an increasing share going to the top earners and owners of capital.[lxix] Between 1961 and the late 1970s, labour productivity gains and employment remuneration tended to move together, indicating a fair distribution of improved economic activity between low, middle- and high-income earners as well as shareholders. However, by the 1980s, the gap between productivity gains and wage increases grew. The net result is a stagnation in wages for the many, despite some modest gains of late for families with children, against a backdrop of wider inequality. With relatively stagnant wages for the average worker and accelerating costs of living such as post-secondary education, housing and child care, young people find themselves not only in deeper debt but at higher risk of income volatility and financial shocks. It is no surprise that this cohort and the young people growing up behind them report higher levels of stress and lack of confidence in the financial future.[lxx]

The degree to which the children of today experience economic insecurity in a 'time of plenty' requires more exploration. The severity and duration of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to deepen insecurity. Without full recovery and improvements to labour market conditions or compensatory social protection policies, children may face a future of more competitive and precarious employment, in turn shaping their well-being.

Social support is more than close relationships

SOCIAL SUPPORT

Canada ranks:
17th (93%)

Top performer:
Iceland (98%)

Country average: 91%

The social context of childhood is complex and difficult to measure.[lxxi] It includes the quality of personal relationships as well as broader social inclusion and cohesion. Social support, the percentage of people who feel they have someone to count on, is more than just a measure of the quality of personal relationships. In a society with greater social cohesion and trust, the likelihood of having at least one close friend, neighbour or some other supportive individual is enhanced among adults and children alike. Social support as a measure of children's context, then, is a structural indicator of social cohesion. This is why there are national differences people's abilities to form supportive relationships, with a familiar pattern across high-income countries (Figure 24). The differences are narrow: almost all countries have rates of social support at 90% and above. The Nordic countries, as for other indicators, tend to cluster near the top. Iceland leads the pack at 98%, followed by Finland and Norway at 96%. A middle cluster around 93% includes Canada.

The general trend has been a decline in social support over the past decade. Research has found a link between a rise in income inequality and a decline in social trust and cohesion in some countries. However, the relationship between rising income inequality and dipping social support is not clear, given the small differences in levels of social support compared to larger differences in income inequality across rich countries. Low levels of social support reported in more traditionally socially connected countries such as Greece (which may be a result of prolonged economic austerity and political turmoil) and Mexico (where high levels of violence may have depressed social support) may be cautionary tales. On the other hand, social support has risen in several Eastern European countries where the economic situation has improved along with many child well-being indicators. The COVID-19 pandemic has prevented many people from accessing social support through face-to-face engagements, but time will tell if virtual connections and public messaging encouraging a collective effort to respond to the pandemic altered Canadians' sense of social support. At the same time, wider recognition of the prevalence of anti-Black and Indigenous racism in Canada will hopefully lead to better social inclusion and cohesion for the next generation of children.

Homicide as a marker of a violent society for children

VIOLENCE (HOMICIDE)

Canada ranks:
33rd (1.8 per 100,000)

Top performer:
Japan (0.2 per 100,000)

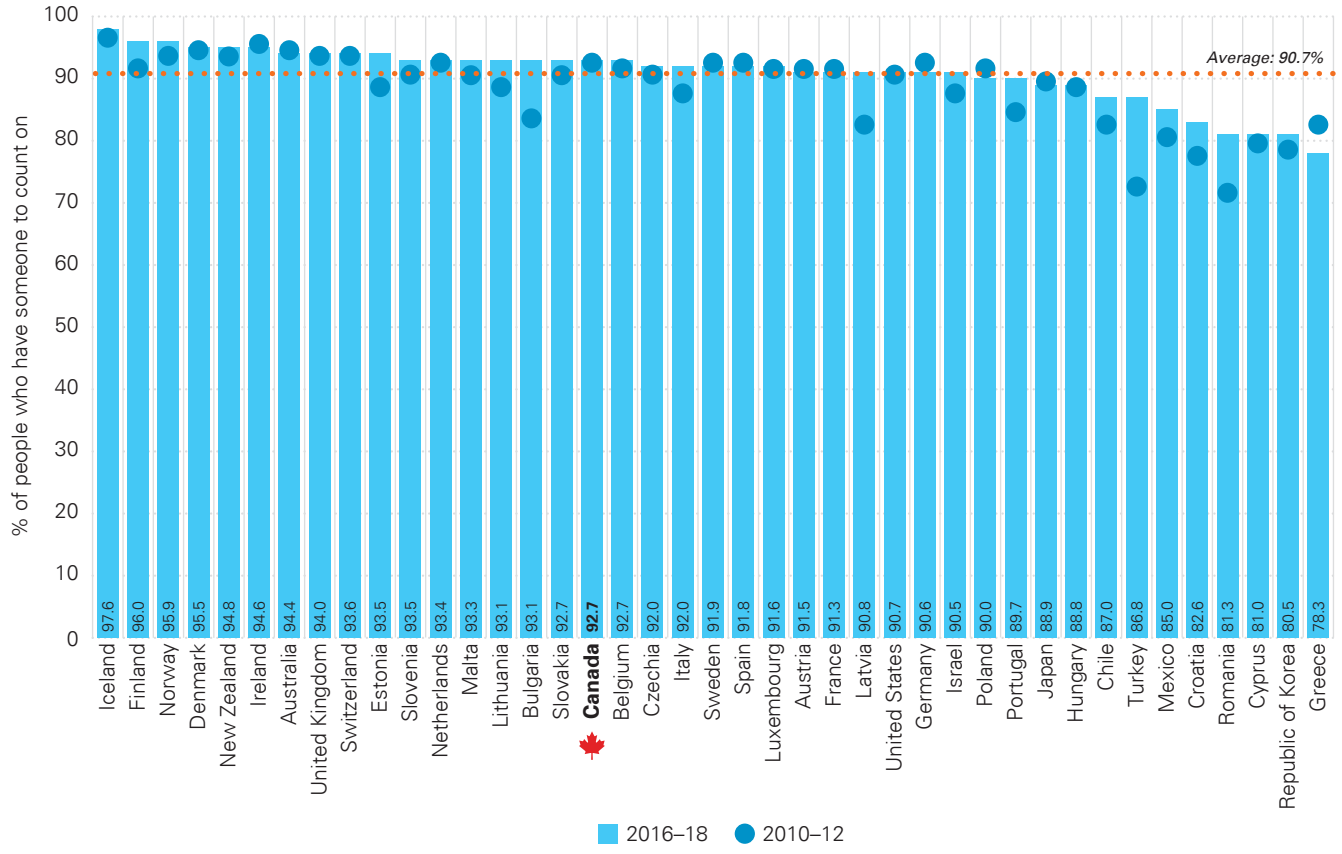
Country average: 2.0 per 100,000

In UNICEF Report Card 16, the homicide rate is not merely a measure of interpersonal violence – it is a proxy measure of social cohesion. The underlying assumption is that high levels of social stratification, lack of social cohesion and other social challenges foster environments conducive to many forms of violence, including the most extreme form. Although homicide is less frequent than other forms of violence such as child abuse, bullying and fighting, countries that have higher levels of homicide tend to have higher levels of these other types of violence. As well, many more people are affected by homicide than its direct victims.

There is a large difference in the homicide rate between the highest, Mexico at 24.8 per 100,000 inhabitants, to the next, the US at 5.3 (Figure 25). After a small cluster with higher homicide rates in the range around 4 per 100,000, there is another gap to the range around 2 per 100,000. Canada falls within this tier, ranked at 33rd overall. Violent social fracture is experienced less in Canada than in our North American neighbours but is considerably higher than the top-performing countries of Japan at 0.2 per 100,000 and Norway at about 0.5.

In the rate of child homicide, last measured in UNICEF Report Card 14 in 2017, Canada's rate was similarly far better than Mexico (5.98 per 100,000 children) and the US (2.66 per 100,000), yet Canada ranked close to the bottom at 0.90 per 100,000. This compared to lower rates of child homicide at 0.19 in Japan and 0.13 in the United Kingdom. Indigenous and Black children are disproportionate victims of violence

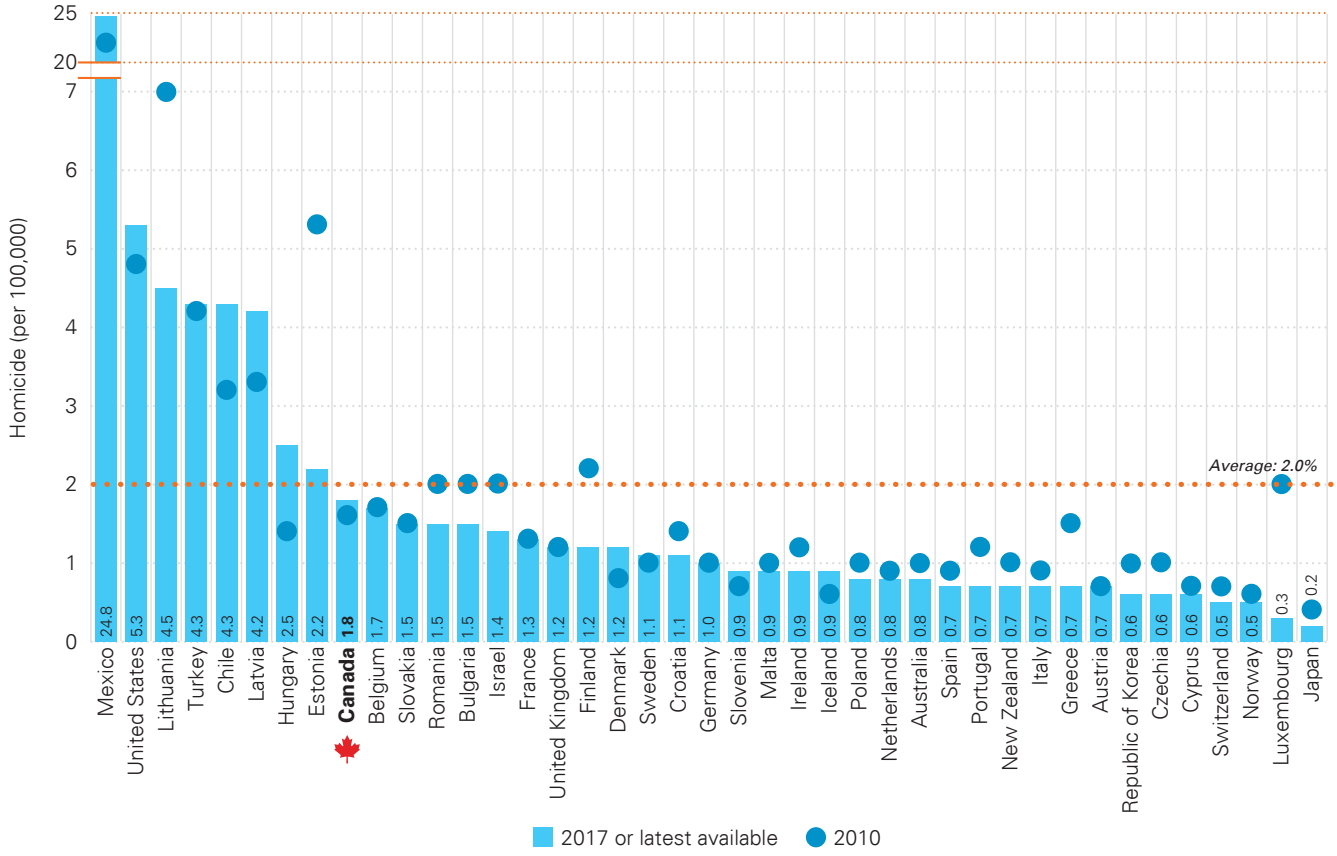
Figure 24: People who have someone to count on in times of trouble



Note: 3- year averages are calculated to minimise survey bias and anomalies for 2016-2018 and 2010-2012.

Source: World Happiness Report based on the Gallup World Poll.

Figure 25: Intentional homicide per 100,000 inhabitants



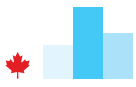
Source: World Bank, 2017 (Austria and Italy for 2016, Israel, Malta for 2015 and Turkey for 2012).

in Canada. Experiences of childhood violence are associated with higher rates of mental illness, suicide and obesity.

The quality of children's environment affects their well-being today and is an indicator of how we will care for future generations

AIR POLLUTION

Canada ranks:
4th (6.4 PM2.5µ)

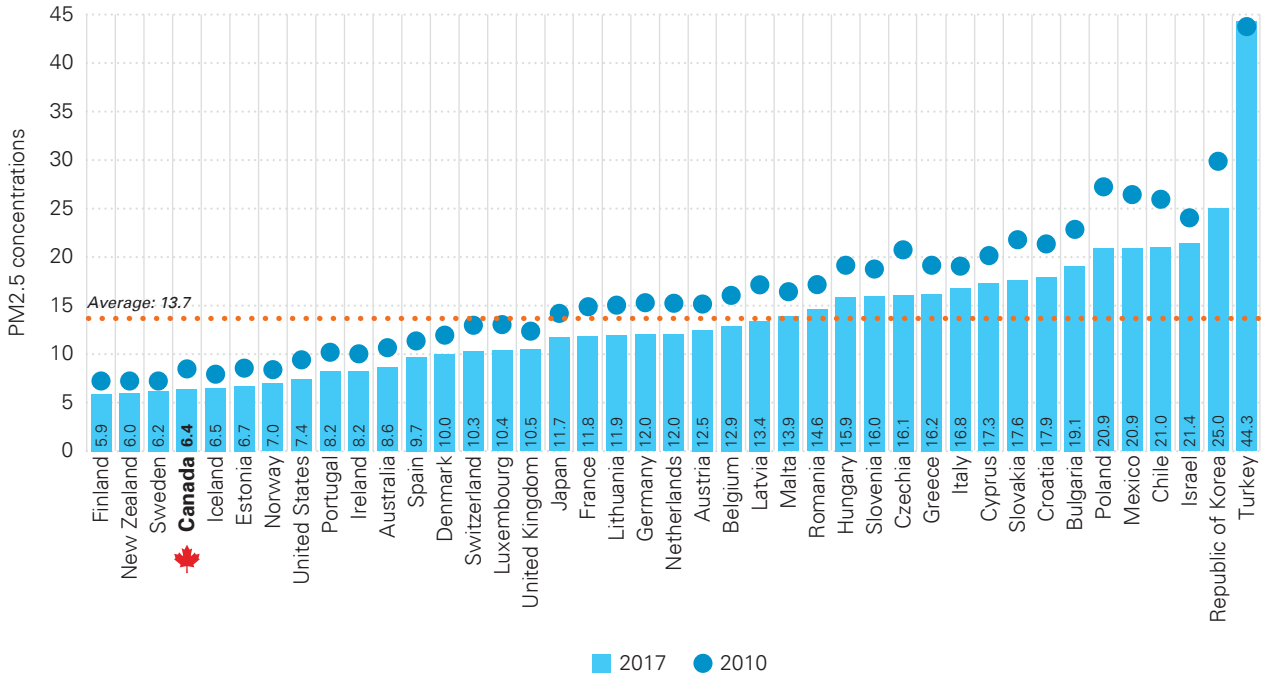


Top performer:
Finland (5.9 PM2.5µ)

Country average: 13.7 PM2.5µ

The scientific consensus is that reducing global carbon emissions is essential to human life around the globe. Unsustainable environmental practices erode children's current and future well-being. In 2020, the WHO-UNICEF-Lancet looked at the future well-being of children based on environmental sustainability.[lxxii] More than half of the 180 countries measured had excess carbon emissions, with high-income countries at the bottom of the ranking. Canada ranked 170th out of 180, compared to the US at 173, Norway at 156 and Denmark at 135. Canada emits about 15.64 metric tonnes of CO2 per capita compared to Denmark at 6.03. Conversely, countries like Jamaica and Indonesia produce

Figure 26: Annual mean PM2.5µ concentration of fine particulate air pollution (per cubic metre)



Note: Population-weighted exposure to ambient PM2.5 pollution.

Source: World Development Indicators, 2017 and Brauer, M. et al. 2017, for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017 and Brauer et al. (2016). 'Ambient Air Pollution Exposure Estimation for the Global Burden of Disease 2013', Environmental Science and Technology, vol. 50, no. 1. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.PM25.MC.M3

only 2.69 and 1.84 CO2 per capita. Therefore, from the global perspective, environmental responsibility is not shared equally, with a division between the countries who reap the economic benefits of excess carbon emissions today and those who will bear the greatest risks to the future well-being of children. UNICEF Report Card 16 measures two vital environmental factors for children today and tomorrow: clean air and water.

Air pollution harms everyone but takes the highest toll on children. The risk of air pollution is not shared equally within rich countries, with children bearing a higher risk than adults, even before they are born. Toxic air inhaled by a pregnant woman can lead to faster cell aging of the fetus. Children are also more vulnerable to air pollution than adults are because they have smaller lung capacity and an underdeveloped immune system. They are also shorter and closer to the ground where pollution typically accumulates.[5] High exposure can lead to long-term health problems, such as asthma. Some of this damage can be reversed if action is taken before the age of 18 and the lungs are mature.[lxxiii] Exposure levels vary between children and adults, but they also vary between urban and rural areas, and within urban areas there is often higher exposure in racialized and low-income neighbourhoods.[lxxiv] [lxxv]

While Canada ranks 4th at 6.4 PM2.5µ (fine, particulate pollutants) per cubic metre of air[6] for the general population (Figure 26), the ranking drops to the middle of the pack when weighted by the proportion of the child population (age 0-19) living in urban areas [lxxvi] In that global comparison, Canada does better at 9.7 than Korea (24.8) and Israel (23.5), but falls considerably behind Norway (4.3) and even less favourably than the US (8.8) and UK (8.9). The dip in air pollution during the

5 When children are born, they tend to have only a fifth of the adult lung mass. Before they reach their teenage years, they breathe faster, inhale more air and tend to spend more time outdoors. Then, when the toxic air is inhaled, the ability to fight it is compromised by an undeveloped immune system. This means that the same amount of pollution is more likely to cause health problems among children than among healthy adults. Further, in places where air pollution stems primarily from vehicles, it tends to accumulate close to the ground meaning that the lower the human height, the higher the exposure.

6 PM2.5µ is a measure of the concentration of particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 microns or less. The risk level is due to the fine nature of these pollutant particles that can penetrate the lungs and enter the blood stream. According to the WHO, the 'safe' level of air quality of PM2.5µ is 10 micrograms or below.

COVID-19 pandemic lockdown noted in many Canadian cities is a welcome reminder that it is possible to improve environmental conditions quickly if more sustainable practices are adopted.

WATER SUPPLY QUALITY

Canada ranks:

18th (98.9%)

Top performers:

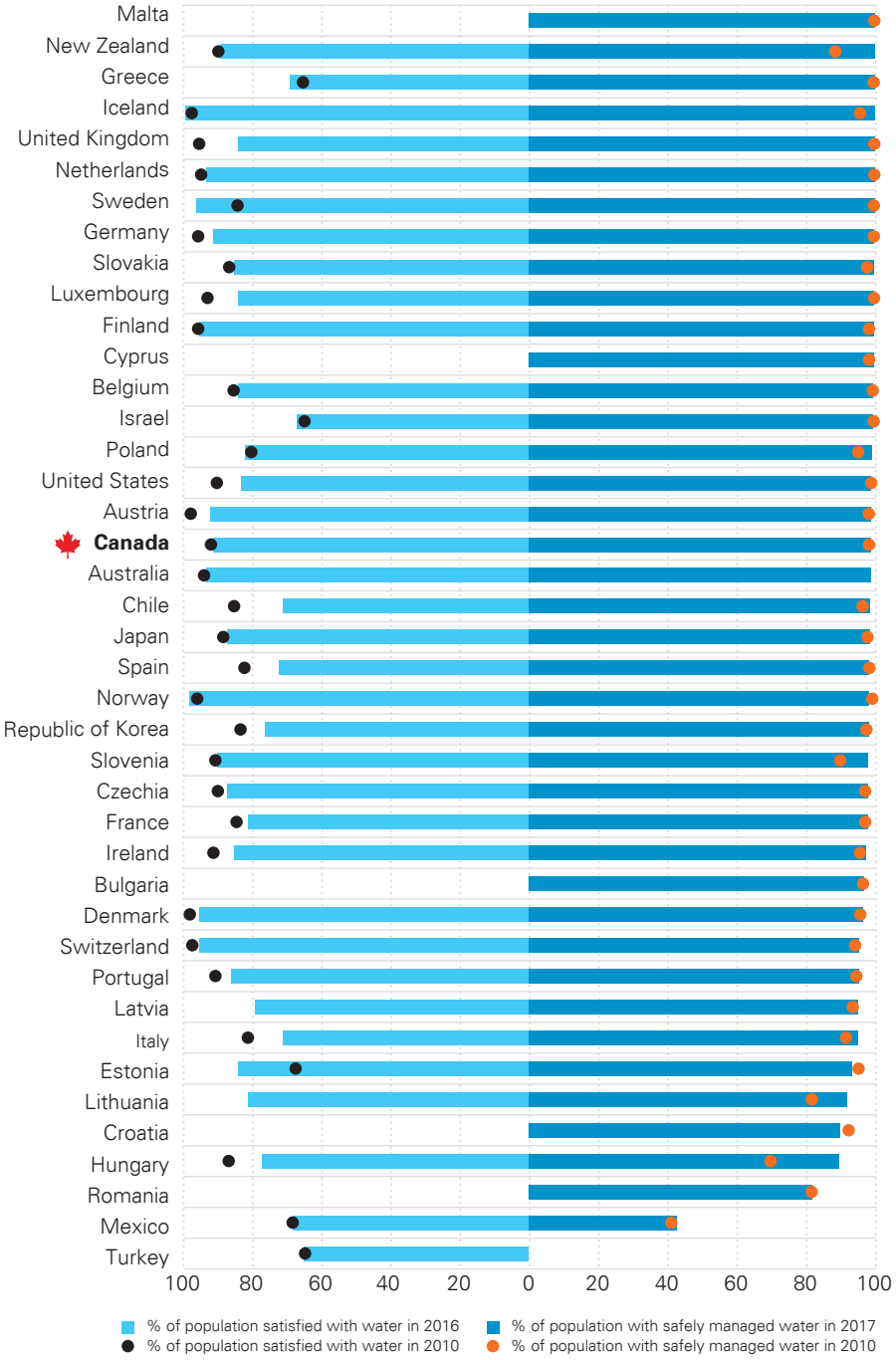
Malta, New Zealand, Greece and Iceland (100%)

Country average: 96%

No less essential to child well-being than air quality is the quality of water. Poor water supply quality hampers health – both mental and physical. It can also be a financial and time burden and increase plastic waste if bottled water is used. Safely managed water comes from a protected communal water source that is available when needed and free from contamination.[lxxvii] Clean water is a human right, and wealthy countries should ensure that all citizens have access to it.

UNICEF Report Card 16 includes two measures of water quality: 1) the proportion of households with safely managed water; and, 2) the proportion of people satisfied with water quality in the place they live. In 11 of the 41 countries, 5% or more households do not have safely managed water. Only Iceland, Greece, New Zealand and Malta have universal access to safely managed water (100%), followed closely by the UK, the Netherlands and Sweden

Figure 27: Population with safely managed water compared to those satisfied with their water quality



Notes: Countries ranked by safely-managed water in 2017 (2016 in Australia). No water safety data for Turkey. Water satisfaction numbers based on proportion of population aged 15 and over who answered "satisfied" to the question: "In the city or area where you live, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of water?" No water satisfaction data available for Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Romania and Malta.

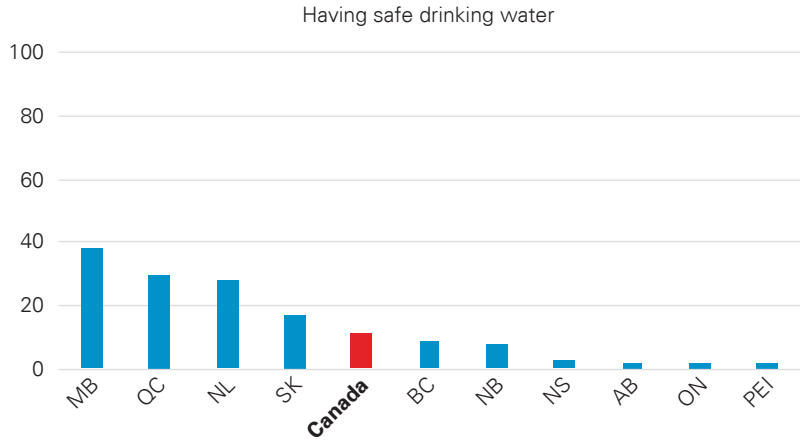
Sources: Safely managed water: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (washdata.org), 2017 (2016 for Australia). Water satisfaction: the OECD Better Life Index based on 3-year average from the Gallup Poll 2014-2016.

(Figure 27). Canada again ranks in the middle of the pack at 98.9%.

When asked whether they are satisfied with the quality of water in the place where they live, there is less universal agreement. Only 84% of people across rich countries are satisfied, ranging from 65% in Turkey to 99% in Iceland. Most Canadians, 91%, are satisfied with the quality of their water.

Similar to air quality, access to safe water is not shared equally. While urban areas in Canada tend to enjoy relatively clean and safe water due to consistent water treatment facilities and stringent public health standards, for smaller communities, access to safe water can be less reliable.[lxxviii] Variation is also visible by geography, with provinces and territories with higher Indigenous populations having less access to safe drinking water.

Figure 28: Percentage of dwellings with children informed of a boil advisory (Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being, 2019)



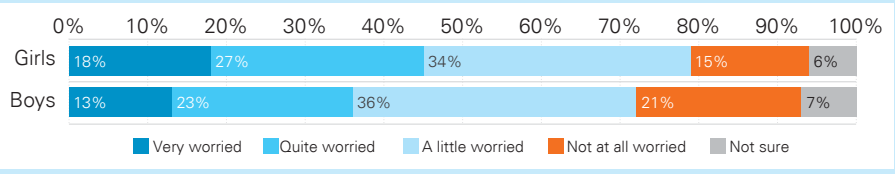
Notes:

- Based on Statistics Canada Household and the Environment Survey (2015), reported in the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being Baseline Report (2019)
- Data for Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut are not available

Spotlight: The environment and the future of child well-being

It is hardly surprising that children are increasingly speaking out about the environment. They are growing up in the climate crisis and will have to deal with it for the rest of their lives. What children think about the future relates to their current well-being. For example, children who worry about the environment tend to have lower life satisfaction. Research on children's feelings about climate change is a new field, and representative data are available only for a limited number of countries. In the UK, young people worry more about the environment than about the economy, Brexit, digital security or homelessness. Only crime merited the same degree of concern (Figure 29). Similarly, young U-Reporters in Canada rate climate change at the top of their concerns (Figure 30).

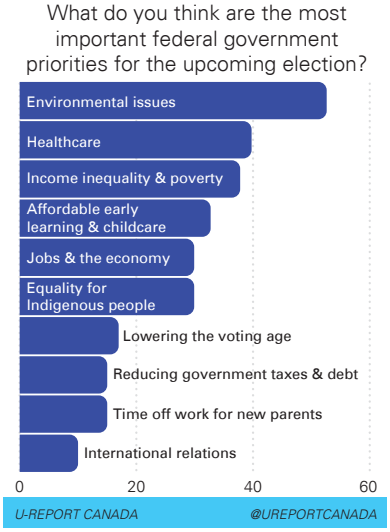
Figure 29: Attitudes of boys and girls in the UK towards environmental issues



Notes: responses of 10 to 17 year-olds from the UK. Equally weighted by age and gender.

Source: The Children's Society 2019.

Figure 30: Canadian U-Reporter perceptions of the climate future (January 2020)



2. THE POWER OF PUBLIC POLICIES

The league table measuring the contexts in which children in rich countries grow up calls attention to the relationship between societal conditions, public policies and child well-being (Figure 16). In 1999, a UK white paper described policy-making as the process by which governments translate their political vision and wealth into outcomes. Public policy is a key mechanism to shift the wealth of a country - its economic, social and environmental conditions - into the well-being of children. There is suggestive evidence in this Report Card that countries with weaker public policies generally have poorer child well-being.

UNICEF Report Card 16 compares high-income countries' performance according to the major policies that shape childhood, particularly social protection (income), health and education policies. Some countries appear to have higher levels of child and youth well-being because they make children a priority in their budgets and provide inclusive public policies, no matter how much national wealth they have. **In virtually every public policy indicator in the UNICEF league table, Canada ranks in the middle of the pack – so it is not surprising that overall child well-being is similarly situated.** Canada ranks 25th in policy indicators related to education followed by 27th in social policy and 29th in health care.

The disconnect between child well-being conditions and outcomes in Canada seems to reflect limitations in public policy. Some of Canada's public policies are not sufficient or inclusive enough to meet children's needs, fulfil their rights and address the negative impacts of wide inequality. For instance, immunization leaves too many children out. Canada's fairly low ranking in education policy indicators is a departure from Canada's usual top ranking in educational achievement. It is weighted down by children's exclusion from early child education and care (ECEC) at the start of formal schooling and the exclusion of some adolescents near the end (NEET). Parental leave and income benefits to reduce child poverty are not available to all who need them, with a sufficient level of income protection and special measures to reduce inequalities among children. Although many of these policies have improved in various ways in recent years, the advancement is too incremental, too unequally distributed or too recent to show up in markedly better child outcomes.

Income inequality is the failure of public policy to share economic wealth. Canada's moderate level of income inequality appears to be associated with a moderate level of overall child well-being (Figure 20). Reducing income inequality and improving social protection policies help reduce child poverty, improve low birthweight, protect against obesity, reduce household stress and have many other positive impacts on child well-being. For instance, low birthweight reflects not only the availability, quality and accessibility of neo-natal primary care but also the quality of social conditions such as food security and social support.[lxxix]

Report Card 16 suggests that in Canada, public policies fail to share wealth on the one hand while failing to equalize the resulting uneven conditions for growing up on the other. While income inequality impedes some of the positive impacts of child-focused policies, including education and health care, its impacts can be softened by more inclusive approaches to child-focused policies. Canada can improve children's lives by curbing income inequality and improving the inclusiveness of public policies for children and youth.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed weaknesses in some policy areas such as child care and social protection and disrupted others including education and health care. Canada was making progress in participation in early child care and education and the reduction of "NEET" youth until the pandemic. On the other hand, immunization and low birthweight showed little improvement. All of these policy indicators may be negatively affected by the pandemic, depending on net income changes, the speed of service resumption and the adoption of new measures such as outreach to youth disengaged from school and to catch-up immunizations. Protecting and reimagining children's policies will be vital to help them recover from the pandemic's many impacts.

Low birthweight: are children getting a healthy start to life?

LOW BIRTHWEIGHT

Canada ranks:
21st (6.5%)

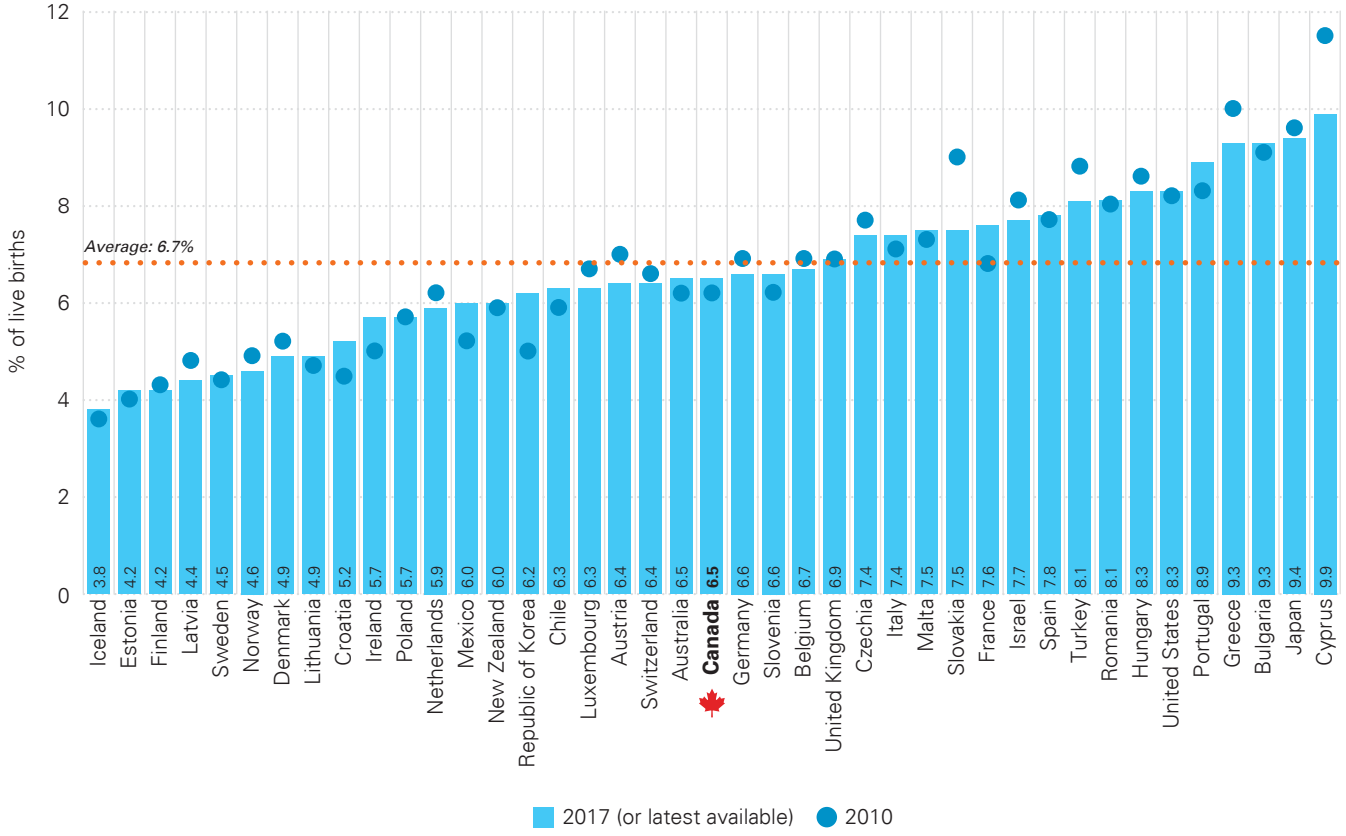
Top performer:
Iceland (3.8%)

Country average: 6.7%

Low birthweight is among the first physical indications of child well-being. Birthweight often signals the pre-natal past – the health, age, nutrition and socio-economic status of the mother – and potentially signals the child's future well-being. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has called it the single most important predictor of an infant's chances of survival and growth.[lxxx] Low birthweight is associated with increased risk for many health and development problems in childhood that can persist into adulthood.[lxxxi] Low birthweight is also an indicator of the quality of the health system, particularly primary health care, and a marker of effective social policy. In one comprehensive study of high-income countries, there was a 10% decline in the incidence of low birthweight in countries with more universal social protection contributing to lower poverty and income inequality.[lxxxii]

The average percentage of live births that are underweight across the 41 rich countries has remained stable for the last decade at around 6.5% (Figure 31). Canada sits at an average of 6.5%, earning a middle ranking of 21st. There are substantial differences among countries, ranging from 4% in Iceland to 11% in Cyprus. The pattern adheres closely to the pattern of overall child well-being rankings. Clustered at the top are countries with low income inequality like Norway, Denmark,

Figure 31: Number of live births weighing less than 2500 grams as a proportion of total live births



Notes: 2017 or the latest year (2016 for Sweden, Chile, Australia, Belgium, France; 2015 for Romania, 2013 for Germany). Turkey starting year is 2012, Cyprus starting year is 2007.

Source: Data are retrieved from OECD Health Database (https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=HEALTH_STAT, accessed on 7 Jan 2020) with the exception of Bulgaria, Cyprus, Romania, Croatia downloaded from WHO (https://gateway.euro.who.int/en/indicators/hfa_600-7100-of-live-births-weighing-2500-g-or-more/ , accessed on 7 Jan 2020).

Finland and Sweden. Although many individual factors influence the incidence of low birthweight, the league table rankings suggest that national context explains as much if not more of the national variations. It is concerning that Canada's rate of low birthweight is not improving as it has been in many other countries.

Immunization: too many children left out

IMMUNIZATION

Canada ranks:
33rd (87%)

Top performers:
Hungary, Korea and Mexico (99%)

Country average: 91%

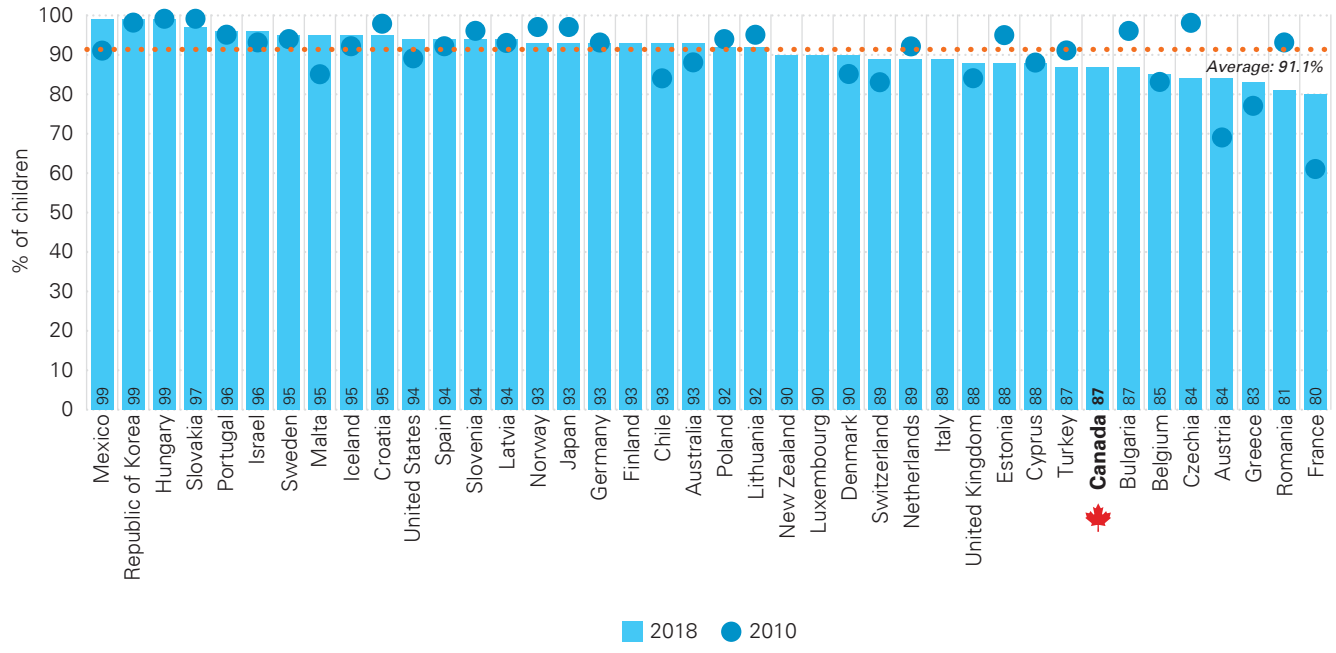
Immunization rates have long been regarded as indicators of the effectiveness and universality of preventive health services for children. With the rise of the anti-vaccine movement, they have also become a measure of public health responsiveness.

In some rich countries, where measles epidemics were distant memories, gains in immunization rates have been lost – putting children at risk again.

Measles immunization ranges from 80% in France to 99% in Hungary, Korea and Mexico. The variation may appear small, but the differences matter, given 95% is the required rate for population ("herd") immunity. The measles immunization rate has dropped over the past decade in 13 of 35 high-income countries (Figure 32). Some of the world's rich countries, including the UK, the Czech Republic and Greece, have recently lost their measles-elimination status.[lxxxiii]

At 87%, Canada's measles immunization rate places Canadian children well below the herd immunity threshold of 95%. Ranked 33rd of 40

Figure 32: Children who received the second dose of the measles vaccine



Notes: Percentage of children who received the second dose of measles vaccine (MCV2) as per administered in the national schedule. No 2018 data for the second dose for Ireland.https://www.who.int/immunization/monitoring_surveillance/data/en/

Source: WHO/UNICEF estimates for 2018

countries positions Canada below the country average of 91% and far behind our peer countries, including the US. As reported in the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being, only 75.8% of children have had all the recommended doses of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccines.[lxxxiv] Canada's child immunization rates need a booster: through a renewed commitment to public health surveillance and promotion. During the COVID-19 pandemic, empirical evidence suggests that routine immunizations have been delayed or foregone for a substantial number of children. There is some speculation this may contribute to sustained losses and possible spread of infection as restrictions ease.[7]

Parental leave: security, relationships and health from the start

PARENTAL LEAVE

Canada ranks:
24th (26.6 weeks)

Top performer:
Romania (97.1 weeks)

Country average: 35.9 weeks

Family-focused policies matter for children, their families and their societies. Policies including paid parental leave and high-quality early child education and care have many benefits for children and help parents reconcile their child care, employment and other responsibilities. Maternity leave allows mothers to recover from pregnancy and childbirth and to bond with their children. It reduces the risk of low birthweight and facilitates breastfeeding, which has many long-term benefits for children's nutrition, health and development.[lxxxv] A well-paid, protected leave from work of sufficient duration also helps female employees maintain earnings and attachment to the labour market, and helps to lift children out of poverty during a critical period. If taken up, leave reserved for fathers/second parents can promote the equitable distribution of care in the home and help all parents bond with their children.

There are wide variations among rich countries in statutory parental leave entitlements, ranging from none in the US to more than one year in several countries (Figure 33). On average, the duration of leave reserved for second parents is 10%. Canada's middle position in the league table is consistent with UNICEF's recent exploration of family-friendly policies in high-income countries.[lxxxvi] Although Canada has been advancing paid leave policies, if we estimate the impact of the addition in 2019 of two weeks of leave reserved for fathers/second parents (all other countries remaining static), Canada only moves from 24th to 22nd in the comparative ranking. This is mainly because, while Canada affords relatively generous leave time, the rate of remuneration is relatively low at only 55% of earnings up to $562 per week (outside of Quebec and excluding a low-income supplement). The UNICEF league table does not measure inclusion – some countries have more universal provisions for parental leave than Canada, which excludes one-third of mothers because they do not qualify for benefits under Employment Insurance. Many of these are younger mothers and those in precarious jobs. Some parents cannot afford to take up leave time because of the low rate of remuneration, which further creates an equity divide in a policy that should be inclusive and spread fairness for children. During the pandemic, some new mothers have experienced a policy fault line – losing employment hours due to the lockdown with the result that they do not qualify for Employment Insurance or temporary crisis income benefits.

Early child education and care: is it fair?

EARLY CHILD EDUCATION AND CARE

Canada ranks:
19th (97%)

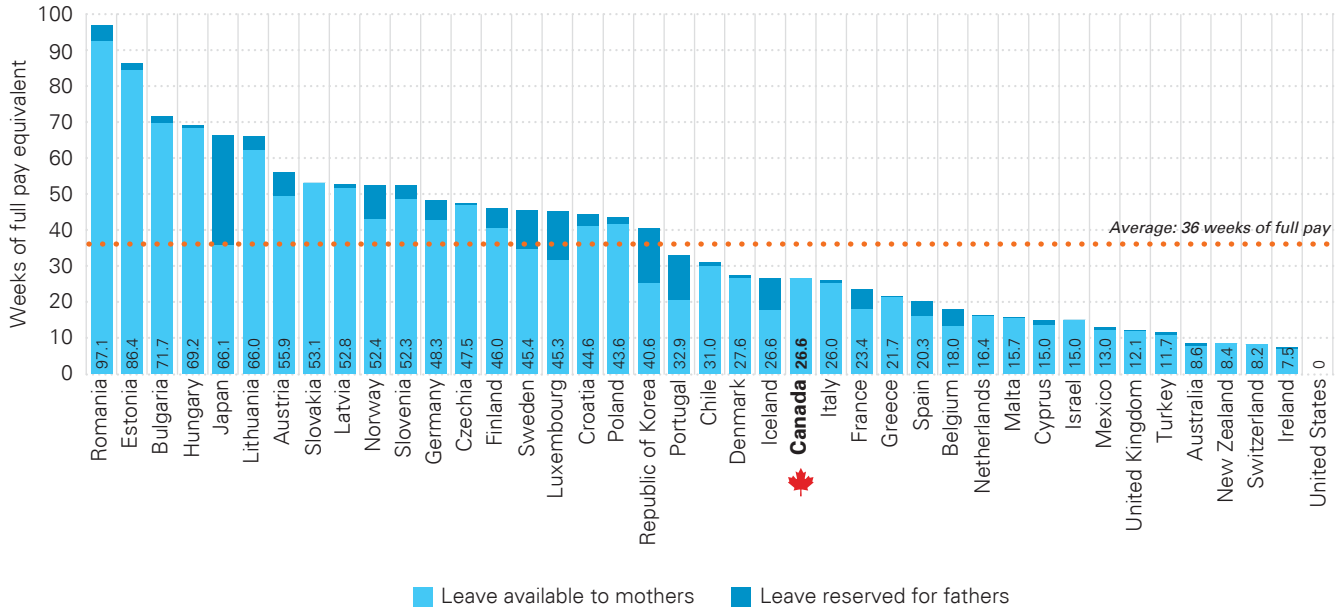
Top performer:
Austria (100%)

Country average: 95%

After parental leave, most children participate in early child education and care, but some infants also require ECEC because parental leave is not a viable option. ECEC is one of the most important ways in which fairness in child development and opportunity can be nourished. Over the last thirty years, a growing body of research from neurology, sociology, education and economics has pointed to the critical importance of the first five years in shaping a child's potential. High-quality ECEC can foster children's socialization

7 Globe and Mail (20 May 2020): https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-doctors-across-canada-seeing-a-drop-in-number-of-routine-child/

Figure 33: Weeks of leave available to mothers and reserved for fathers/second parents in full-pay equivalents



and skill development,[lxxxvii] improve later educational achievement and help parents reconcile their private and professional roles while helping close gaps for disadvantaged children.[lxxxviii] [lxxxix]

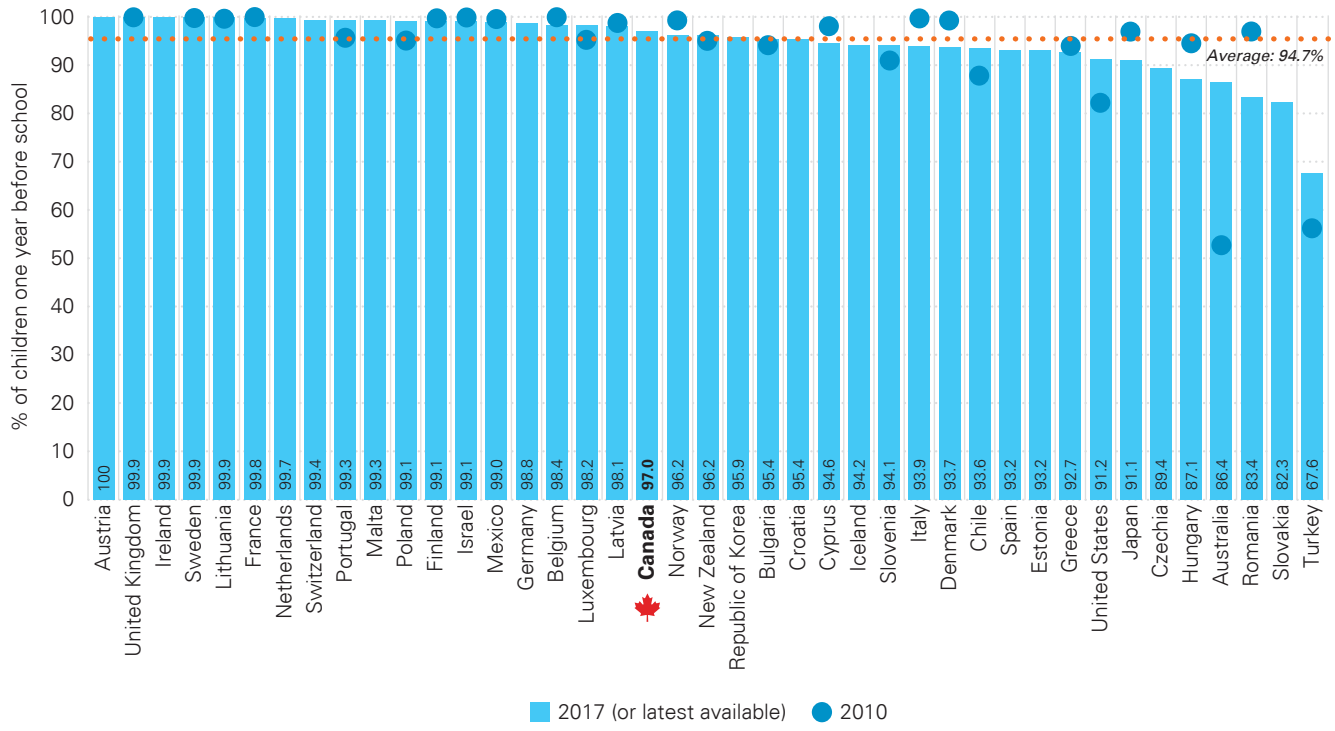
Spurred by advances in research, most countries are building the 'front-end' of their education systems. Nordic countries like Sweden and Norway have long valued and fostered ECEC as a core policy, not just to support children and families but as an economic instrument to enable full participation in the labour market. In 2020, even more traditionally-oriented countries such as Germany have been shifting their policy approaches to build accessible, publicly-funded ECEC to support families participating in the labour market.

Children in most high-income countries are engaged in organized learning one year before starting school (for example, kindergarten). Yet, Figure 34 shows that in 17 countries, more than 5% of children are not in preschool. Children are more likely to be excluded if they live in low-income families, have a disability or are newcomers. Although ranking in the middle, Canada includes 97% of children in preschool the year before formal education begins (there is little difference between the top and middle rates in the league table).

The real story for Canada is our rank in organized ECEC enrolment for 0 to 5 year-olds, at 33rd of 35 OECD countries.[xc] Well below the OECD average of 70%, at 53% enrolment, Canada has a large gap. The exclusion of almost half the country's children is mainly due to the lack of a universal, publicly-supported approach, limited by the availability and affordability of spaces. Despite improvements in recent years, the spread of public ECEC is mixed and inconsistent across Canada. The enrolment rate for ages 2 to 4 ranges from just 34% in Newfoundland to 73% in Quebec.[xci] Ontario has made substantial progress with the implementation of full-day junior kindergarten, though a significant gap remains for those under age 4. On the other hand, the introduction of universal ECEC in Quebec over a decade ago has the majority of children participating, though there remain concerns about how quality services are distributed. More recently, the federal government has joined as a partner to the provinces and territories, providing funding and pledging to create a secretariat for collaboration. To date, the combined investments of governments still fall well short of most wealthy countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic placed an enormous strain on the viability of Canada's already uneven ECEC provision, exposing the importance of a universal, publicly supported approach. A survey of child care providers in May 2020 found that 72% of child care centres in Canada were shut down by COVID-19 control measures; 70% of the child care centres laid off their

Figure 34: Children with experience of organized learning one year before starting school



Source: UNESCO and UN Stata (data for 2017) apart from Canada, Croatia, Bulgaria Cyprus, Japan (2015 data from Innocenti Report Card 15).

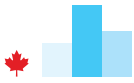
workforce; 36% indicated they were uncertain they would re-open and most had concerns about longer-term viability.[8] The disruption to children's development and to the system itself may take months or years for recovery.

If Canada's education system is to continue to function as an effective leveller of opportunity and social mobility, improving universal, high-quality policies and programs for early child development is a critical driver. A robust system of child care and education throughout the early years would significantly reduce gaps in development between children at school entry.

Engagement in school and work at the end of childhood: are we losing young people to no hope and few skills?

EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOL AND WORK

Canada ranks:
20th (5.9%)



Top performer:
Luxembourg (1.5%)

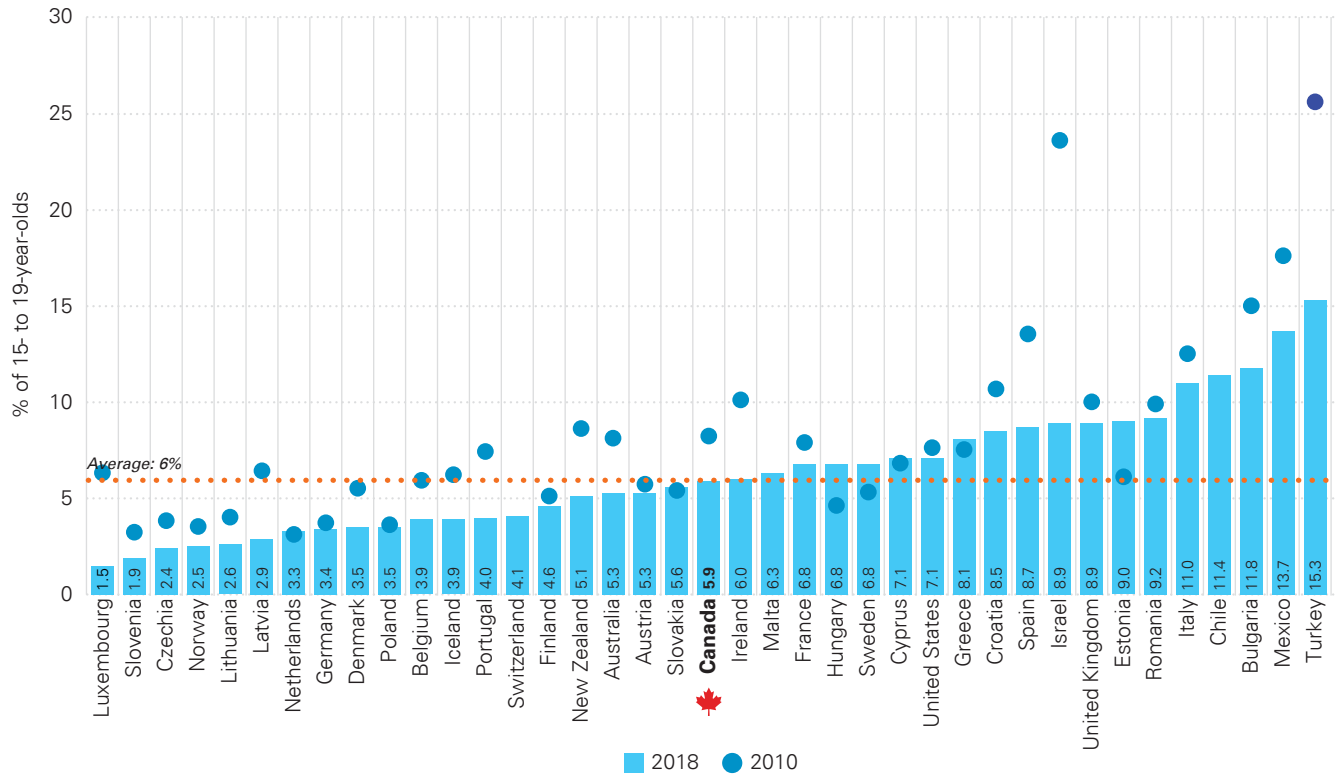
Country average: 6.3%

"NEET" refers to a state where some young people aged 15 to 19 are not in employment, education or training – at a stage of life where these are essential preconditions for a positive transition to adulthood and participation in the adult labour force. NEET is a standardized, reliably comparable global indicator of social inclusion. It is sensitive to changing economic conditions.

Up to half of young people have NEET status at some point in their life.[xcii] For the vast majority, the period is quite brief and may be a developmental phase of exploration and reflection bridging high school and post-secondary education or work. However, not all NEET youth are teenagers experiencing a "gap year." A considerable number have low educational achievement, "outsiders"

8 Martha Friendly, Barry Forer and Rachel Vickerson (4 June2020). Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, Ottawa: Canadian Child Care Federation, Ottawa: Child Care Now: https://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/The%20pandemic%20experience%20has%20created%20uncertain%20future%20for%20Canadian%20child%20care%20services_Highlight%20of%20a%20national%20survey_FINAL_CRRU.pdf

Figure 35: 15 to 19 year-olds excluded from education, employment and training



Notes: 2018 or the latest year possible (2015 for Chile, 2014 for Japan).

Source: Eurostat 2018 for Bulgaria, Malta, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania. OECD Family Database 2018 for remaining counties.

who are more likely to work in temporary or atypical employment.[xciii] A small number are teen parents. NEET youth in these conditions also typically experience lower levels of happiness.[xciv]

Teenagers who are disengaged from both education and the labour market might face a more difficult transition to adulthood. Many NEET youth run the risk of uncoupling from the economy and withdrawing from wider social participation. The longer an individual remains disconnected from or peripheral to the labour market, the more difficult the future possibilities to become an engaged participant.

The NEET rate was a particular concern in many rich countries as youth unemployment soared during the Great Recession. The NEET rate has fallen in most of these countries since, including Canada (Figure 35). Canada's NEET rate improved from about 8% in 2010 to 6% just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This positioned Canada in the middle of the league table, behind high performers like Norway at about 3%, half Canada's rate. While the post-recession trend has been an increase in young people's participation in further education, the prevalence of under-employed youth remains a structural, post-recession hangover. The variation in NEET between countries also raises questions about how well compulsory education systems meet the learning needs and inclusion of all students. With pandemic strains on both education systems and youth employment, the NEET rate may rise once again to previously unseen heights.

Child poverty: getting better for some without catching up

CHILD POVERTY

Canada ranks:
26th (21%)

Top performer:
Iceland (10.4%)

Country average: 19.9%

High-income countries effectively "choose" their level of child poverty through the income redistribution and other equalizing policies they enact. [xcv] The poverty level is not 'natural' and is quite sensitive to social protection measures, including cash and tax benefits.[xcvi xcvii xcviii xcix c ci] Furthermore, a voluminous repertoire of studies concludes taxes, transfers and public services can powerfully shape the well-being of children, depending on their design.[cii ciii civ cv cvi] The material resources available to children in their households affect many aspects of their well-being, including cognitive development, physical health, ability to form positive relationships, educational achievement and life satisfaction. Living in poverty has consequences for all of the outcomes at the heart of the core league table in UNICEF Report Card 16. Impacts vary in relation to how often and how long children are exposed to poverty, their age and the type of outcome: cognitive development is most affected for younger children, while behavioural outcomes are more relevant to adolescents.[cvii cviii] The link between income and mental health is less clear, though there is emerging evidence that a decline in children's mental health has occurred alongside a rise in overall income inequality while bottom-end poverty has remained quite stable.

Over the last six years, the number of children living in poverty in Canada has fallen from about one million to about 566,000 children based on the uniquely Canadian Market Basket Measure (the newly adopted federal poverty line).[9] The extent of the reduction in child poverty is a matter of dispute, as some experts contest the use of the Market Basket Measure, arguing it represents a narrow and subjective accounting of the resources required to thrive and flourish in society, particularly for children.[cix] However, there is a consensus that there has been a generational reduction in child poverty in Canada and that much of the improvement can be attributed to the introduction of the Canada Child Benefit in 2016.[cx] The reform of this child-focused federal income benefit increased the income of many families with children, with the greatest benefit to low-income families, particularly those led by single mothers. Some provinces have also increased their child-focused income benefits. However, the overall child poverty rate did not change from 2017 to 2018.

Improvement in the rate of child poverty is also evident, although less substantial, in international comparison. Using the standardized international measure of poverty as 60% of the national median income, the average percentage of children living in poverty has decreased in Canada from 23.9% (2008) to 22.2% (2014) to 21.0% (2018) (Figure 36). Canada is among the roughly half of rich countries in which child poverty has fallen since the Great Recession. However, the poverty rate for children in some areas of the country, particularly for First Nations children living on reserve, remains above 50%. For Black children in some regions, the child poverty rate reaches above 30%.[10] Despite an overall improvement in the prevalence of child poverty in recent years, Canada has not moved far up the league table, ranking 26th out of 41. Canada's rate of child poverty is still slightly higher than the average poverty rate of 19.9%. Top performers, including Iceland (10.4%), Denmark (11.0%) and Finland (11.1%), achieve half the rate of child poverty of Canada.

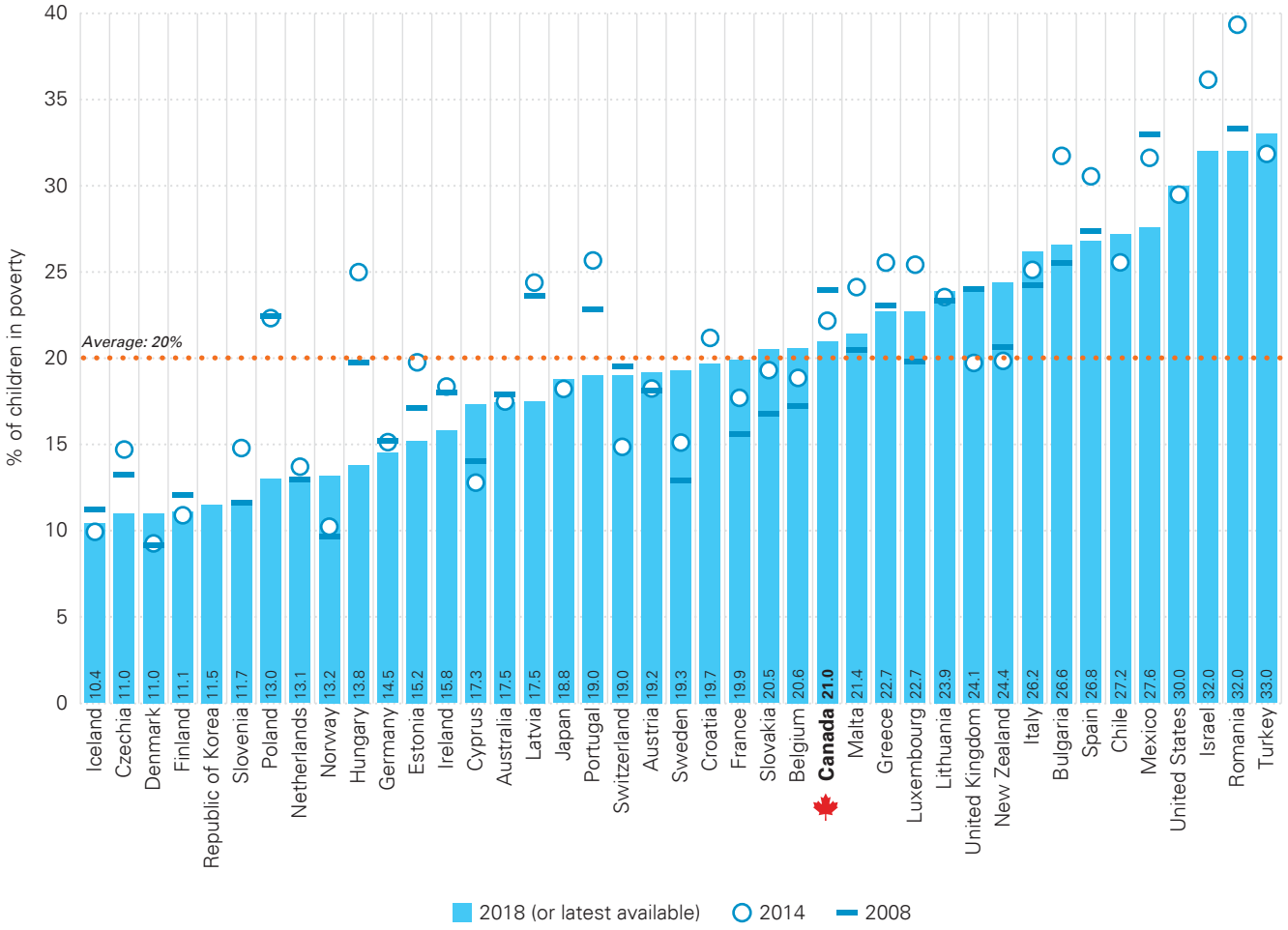
Just before the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly half of the children below the poverty line were close to it: in 2018, 21.0% of children lived in households with less than 60% of the national median income, but only 11.9% of children in Canada lived in households with less than 50% of the median income.[cxi] However, the pandemic's economic disruption is likely to push many of these children deeper into poverty, particularly if temporary income support measures contract too early and too far. Statistics Canada reported that 19.2% of households with children suffered food insecurity in May, 2020, compared to 12.2% of households with no children[cxii]. With further improvement to income benefits for these children and special

9 Canada's official, federal poverty line uses a a Market Basket Measure (MBM). The MBM constructs poverty thresholds based the estimated cost of a basket of food, clothing, shelter, transportation and other items for regions across the country. The findings are not comparable with standard international poverty measurement (based on the Low Income Measure or LIM), though Canada's federal and provincial governments also measure poverty using the LIM.

10 Campaign 2000, 6 June 2020, : https://campaign2000.ca/fst-c2000-joint-statement-on-anti-black-racism/

measures for the children who are deepest in poverty, Canada can join the best performing countries and help children recover from the pandemic.

Figure 36: Children living in households with income below 60% of the median



Notes: % of children living in households with post-tax post-transfer income adjusted for family size and composition below 60% of national median. Equivalence scale: first adult in a household counted as 1, each other household member aged 14 years or more counts as 0.5 person, each household member aged 13 years or less counts as 0.3 person. Data for 2018 apart from New Zealand, Chile, Canada, Turkey (2017), US, Israel, Iceland, Australia (2016), Japan (2015).

Sources: EU-SILC, HILDA wave 17(Australia), ENIGH, Household Economic Survey (New Zealand) estimates taken from Perry, B (2017), Canadian Income Survey (estimates from L. Wollf and D. Fox), Survey of Living Conditions (Japan) estimates taken from A. Abe, Luxemburg Income Study (Israel, Mexico, Chile, US), combined data of Household Income and Expenditure Survey and Farm Household Economy Survey (Korea), courtesy of Statistics Korea and the Korean Committee for UNICEF.

Spending on children: powering or impoverishing public policies for children?

SPENDING ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Canada ranks:
28th (1.68%)

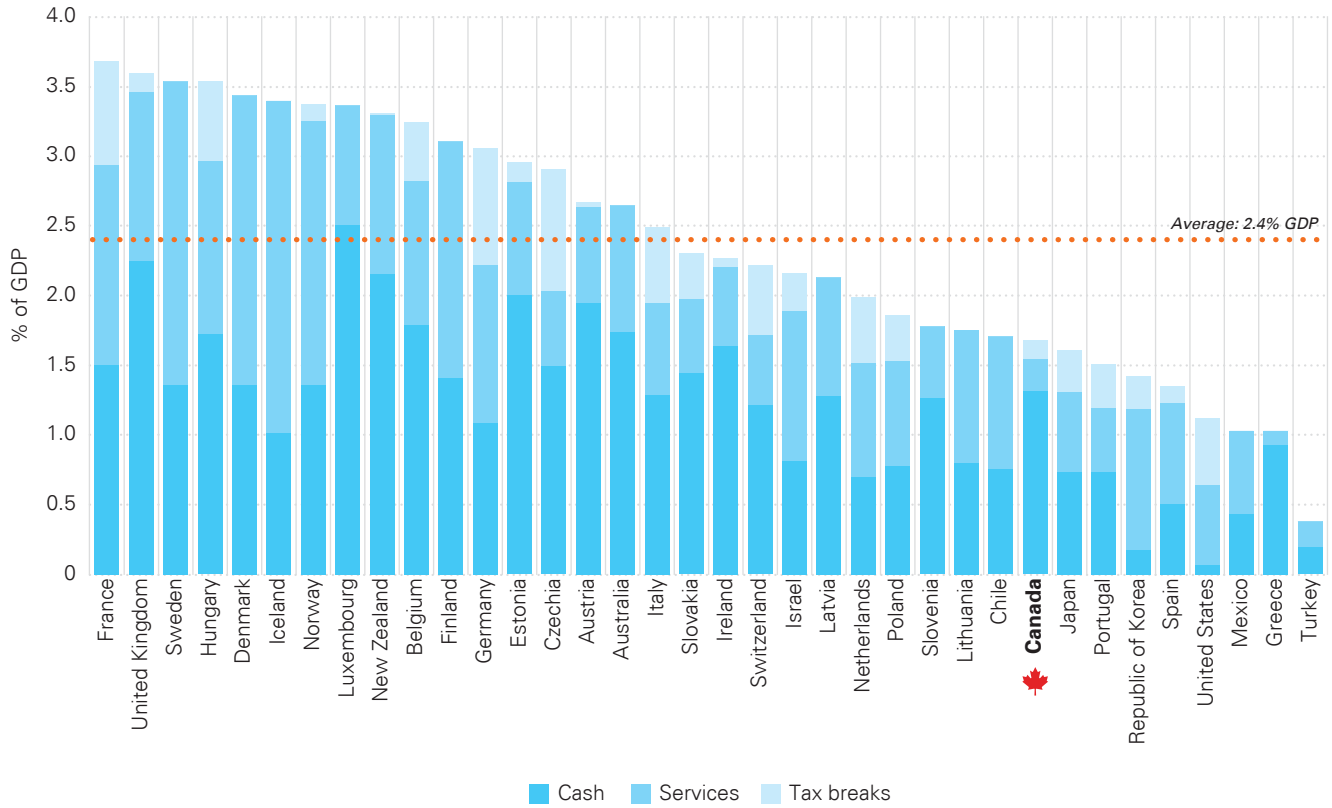
Top performer:
France (3.68-%)

Country average: 2.38%

The evidence that the three pillars of "family-friendly" policy – income transfers, parental leave and early child education and care – boost child well-being is strong. International comparison suggests they work better when they are universal (including all children who need them) and equitable (providing special measures for some). Some of these policies are discussed above, but how do they work together as a policy system around children and youth? Child-focused income benefits are not only associated with lower child poverty rates; they can also reduce inequality in many aspects of life if designed progressively.[cxiii] [cxiv] [cxv] One recent Canadian study found solid evidence that child benefits generated improved educational and mental health outcomes among children living in low-income households.[cxvi] A study in Manitoba found that a prenatal income supplement for mothers reduced the risk of infant mortality, low birthweight and other negative birth outcomes.[cxvii] Parental leave also reduces rates of infant and child mortality.[cxviii] [cxix] Quality early child education and care is positively associated with improvements in early cognitive development, educational attainment and achievement – particularly for children in low-income environments.[cxx] [cxxi] [cxxii] [cxxiii] [cxxiv]

A comparative study of the impacts of child-focused policies found that adequate social protection (cash transfer/tax benefits) together with high levels of universal paid parental leave and public early child education and care predicted the best outcomes, in terms of lower infant and child mortality and children staying in school longer.[cxxv] This is a common approach to child policy in countries like Norway and Finland. Less impressive, but still positive outcomes were observed in policy packages

Figure 37: Public spending on cash, services and tax-breaks for families (as a percentage of GDP)



Source: OECD Social Expenditure Database, 2015.

Figure 38: Countries that spend more of their wealth on children tend to have better child outcomes

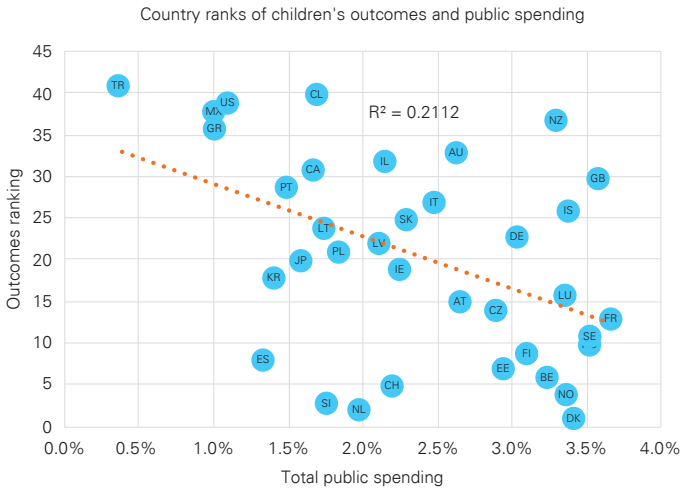
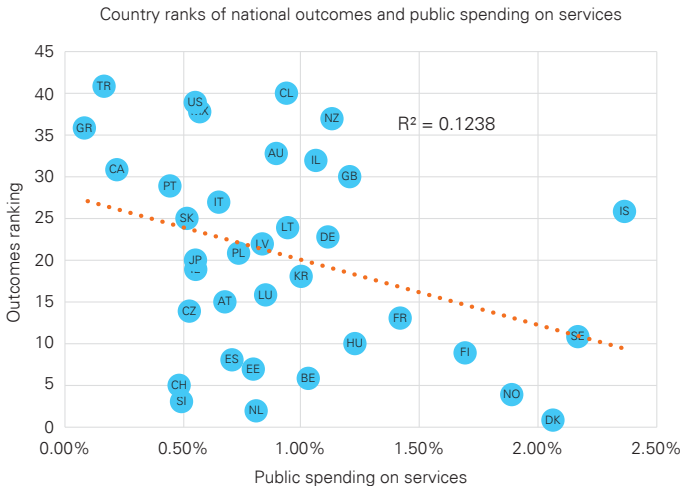


Figure 39: Countries that spend more on public services for children tend to have better child outcomes



incorporating higher cash transfer and tax benefits, but less available and accessible public early child education and care, in countries like Germany. Highly negative and weak outcomes were most visible among countries that rely more on a market-based approach to the funding and delivery of child policies: low cash transfers and tax benefits, low or modest parental leave benefits and scarce public early child care and education. Canada and the US were the 'model' countries for the market-based approach, although Canadian policies were more accessible, available and generous than US policies.

One key indicator of the robustness of child-focused policies is spending on children and families (Figure 37). Canada compares poorly with other rich countries, both in terms of total public spending and the relative emphasis on cash, tax breaks and public services for children and families. The average spending rate among rich countries is 2.38% of GDP, and Canada falls far behind at 1.68%. By contrast, France spends 3.68% of GDP. While the effectiveness of public spending is an important consideration (more is not always better), the pattern of country rankings in spending aligns quite closely with the rankings in overall child well-being. It suggests that countries that spend at least 3% of GDP on children and families tend to achieve better outcomes for children (Figure 38).

As Figure 37 highlights, Canada spends significantly less on public services than almost all the other countries in the table (1.32% of GDP on cash transfers, 0.23% on public services and 0.13% on tax breaks). This is problematic because the research shows that quality public services can contribute to good outcomes for children in ways that giving families cash transfers and tax breaks cannot. Canada's market-based approach is evident in the paucity of spending on public services for children such as early child education and care (0.23% of GDP) compared to top-performing countries like Sweden (2.18%), Denmark (2.08%), Norway (1.90%) and Finland (1.70%). Public investment in the universal provision of these services for children tends to achieve higher quality and yield better child outcomes (Figure 39). Even in spending on cash transfers for children, Canada is a middle performer, ranking 13th of 23 rich countries in 2015 (1.32% sits squarely between the median and average percentage of GDP spent by these countries).[cxxvi] Canada also ranks in the middle, 18th of 35 rich countries, in the rate of average annual spending growth over the past two decades.[cxxvii] Yet, the dialogue in Canada about policy priorities tends to pit advancements in income benefits for children against improvements in public services, including ECEC. Canada's total spending and the profile of spending suggests this is a false dichotomy. It is possible to do both, as our peer countries demonstrate.

What have we learned from twenty years of UNICEF report cards?

Turning numbers into actions

For twenty years, UNICEF Report Cards have measured child well-being in high-income countries. No matter how we measure it, Canada places around the middle of UNICEF league tables of overall child well-being compared to our peers. While we have not made progress overall relative to other countries, the lack of progress over time in real terms – in children's rates of unhealthy weight, immunization, mental health, bullying, happiness and other important aspects of life – during a period of economic growth is a growing concern.

Report Card 16 helps us understand why. Despite a high level of national wealth and relatively good environmental and social conditions for growing up, many of Canada's public policies are significantly less extensive and inclusive compared to countries with similar or even weaker conditions. In every public policy indicator, Canada sits in the middle of the pack. In recent years, incremental improvements in income benefits for children have nudged the rate of child poverty downward. Canada's governments have been making slow but steady progress in increasing children's access to early child care and education. Parental leave has also incrementally improved with options for longer time and father/secondary parent participation. Nevertheless, these potentially powerful policies still exclude too many children. While there has been progress to ensure First Nations, Inuit and Métis children have equitable access to critical public services; flawed funding formulas persist that sustain wide gaps in child survival, health, protection, education and mental health. Equalizing policies are vital to countering the profound impacts of wider income inequality and economic anxiety on children and boosting their well-being in many ways.

The Nordic countries have sustained their high rankings in UNICEF league tables because they maintain some of the best income supports, child care arrangements and parental leave policies in the world, and have strong family-friendly cultures. Children's overall well-being is both higher and more equitable. Canada's family-friendly policies still fall too far below peer countries' standards and lag behind changes in Canadian society.

The future of childhood

Two decades of UNICEF Report cards have tallied the state of children up to the COVID-19 pandemic. Along the way, UNICEF Report Card 12 measured some of the impacts on children of the Great Recession provoked by the financial crisis a decade ago. UNICEF Report Card 16 signals recovery in rates of child poverty and NEET, but the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new shocks to children in just a few months that may last a lifetime. Even if they do not contract the virus, children and youth are more vulnerable to the control measures that disrupt their development and distance them from the services they need. Canada's governments provided temporary policy measures to soften some of the impacts. How these policies will mitigate the impacts of the measures used to control the coronavirus remains to be seen. The magnitude and duration of the net impacts on children's policies and services reviewed in this Report Card – and by extension on children themselves - will not be evident for some time. We can expect impacts on three key dimensions:

1. **Amplification:** current child well-being status improves or declines, and inequities are further widened or narrowed;

2. **Acceleration/Deceleration:** current trends in child well-being (negative or positive) change at a faster pace;

3. **Generation**: new risks and benefits to child well-being are created.

Prior experience with complex crises and empirical evidence as the pandemic has unfolded suggest that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to impede progress in virtually every indicator of child and youth well-being in this Report Card and widen the gaps between children, with a few possible exceptions. While many children will rebound with consistent support from sensitive and responsive caregivers, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed weaknesses in some child-focused policies and systems such as early child care and youth employment, and may further weaken them without improvements. It has disrupted those that were functioning relatively well, including education and health care. Before the pandemic, there was already a recognized 'generational squeeze' in which children's share of social spending was disproportionately small.[11] There will be new demands on the education system to help young people reconnect and restore their well-being. There may be new requirements for mental health services for children, already in short supply. The debt payments for pandemic mitigation policies must not claw back investment in child and youth policies and services.[12] As the impact of the pandemic recedes, the children of Canada will still be vulnerable to shocks related to climate change, economic crises and future pandemics. The time is now to take bold steps not only to advance children's recovery but to surpass Canada's current standing in child well-being.

IMPROVING CHILD WELL-BEING IS A CHOICE:

1. **Maintaining and defending the status quo;**
2. **'Muddling through'[cxxviii] with slow incremental changes or,**
3. **Being bold.**

Two decades of UNICEF Report Cards provide firm evidence that muddling through leads to middling outcomes for children. Stronger public policies are the key to translate good conditions into great outcomes for children in Canada. It is time to catch up and rise up to the top.

Spotlight: Measure what counts

Over ten years ago, an international commission led by Nobel Prize-winning economists Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen delivered the report, Mis-measuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn't Add Up. It critiqued the reliance on measures of national income (including Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross National Income (GNI)) as proxy measures of well-being. The fracture between GDP and well-being has widened since then. The Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW), a project housed at the University of Waterloo, found that between 1994 and 2014, GDP in Canada grew by more than 38%, but the CIW, a measure of the overall well-being of Canadians, rose only 9%. After the 2008 financial crisis, the economy recovered, but overall well-being has flattened, and the well-being gap between people in Canada has widened.

Many new approaches are emerging to take a wider lens and measure how successful a society is in establishing the conditions for a high quality of life and happiness.

While sustaining economic measures, the focus is shifting from economic growth and material conditions as an end to economic activity as the means to an end: well-being for all. The OECD's Better Life Index is a response to the call to measure well-being. Several iterations of this Index show that national income cannot adequately explain differences between countries in adults' well-being. However, the differences between adult and child well-being are visible in UNICEF Report Cards and the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being. A mandate of the Government of Canada is to incorporate well-being measurements into government decision-making and budgeting. As lead indicators of social well-being, the state of children and youth should be a critical component. The *Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being* and UNICEF Report Cards point to indicators that should form part of the budget framework.

11 Kershaw, P. (2020). A "health in all policies" review of Canadian public finance, Canadian Journal of Public Health, 111, 8-20.

12 Innocenti report 2020, public spending table

THREE WAYS TO RISE UP:

1. BE BOLD

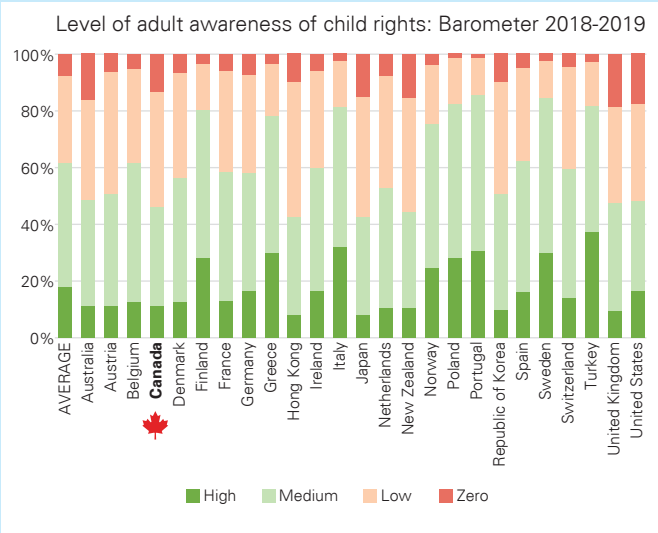
The bold agenda, shared by all levels of government, would achieve the following policies by the end of the current parliament and legislatures:

- **Income inequality:** Lift the household income of every child above 60% of the median income, with child-focused income benefits available to every child in need without exception.
- **Early Child Education and Care:** Ensure every child under age 6 has access to high-quality, publicly-supported child care and education according to national standards, reaching at least 70% enrolment (the OECD average).
- **Parental leave:** Provide at least 12 flexible months of leave for every child under age 3, remunerated at a minimum of 75% of the wage of the highest-earning parent/caregiver (to a maximum) after taxes and transfers.
- **Healthy food:** Ensure every child gets a healthy meal at school and protect them from commercial advertising of unhealthy food, drink and other products.
- **Spirit Bear Plan:** Permanently end shortfalls in funding public services for First Nations children living on reserves and in the Territories. Their outcomes should equal or surpass the national average.

Spotlight: Children's rights are universal, but their well-being is not

Children's human rights are a fundamental building block for child well-being. Canada pledged in 1989 to respect, protect and fulfil these rights in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Many of the recommendations in this report are obligations that Canada has in fulfilment of the Convention. Is Canada fulfilling its duty to inform Canadians, including young people, about these rights? The 2019 UNICEF Barometer Survey results suggest the answer is "no." Do countries with higher levels of child and youth well-being in Report Card 16 also tend to have higher levels of adult awareness of their rights? The Barometer Survey results suggest the answer is "yes." Countries in the top half of the Report Card league table of child outcomes also tend to have the highest adult awareness of children's universal, human rights (exceptions are Turkey and Poland, which also have high awareness). The countries with the lowest levels of adult awareness of children's rights have distinct patterns: the English-speaking countries of UK, US, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, and the Asian countries of Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan. **Canada ranks 21st of 25 high-income countries in the level of awareness of children's rights.**

Figure 40: UNICEF Barometer Study: adult awareness of child rights in rich countries



2. LISTEN TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH

It is time for a pan-Canadian dialogue on the well-being of children. Beyond adult worries about children's health risks and educational achievement, let's ask young people what would lift up their sense of well-being. Children perceive well-being differently than adults – the importance of good quality relationships, social inclusion, environmental protection and the other things that matter to them but are difficult to measure, including their autonomy and freedom. The voices of those furthest from opportunity must be included - children are not a homogenous group. Children and youth have shown over recent months that they intend to be included in discussions that will shape their futures. For adults and policy-makers, it is time to listen, learn and act. A National Commissioner for Children and Youth and a lower voting age will help us do that.

3. BE ACCOUNTABLE

Accountability mechanisms are essential to make listening to children and considering their best interests a regular part of decision-making and monitoring results:

- **A baseline for the 43rd Parliament and provincial and territorial legislatures:** evaluate yourselves by how much you help improve the outcomes measured in this Report Card. Use the *Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-Being* as a roadmap for pandemic impact surveillance.
- **Child Impact Assessments:** for budgets, policies and legislation at all levels of government, including the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat Expectations for child-oriented analysis.[13] A policy tool based on the framework of the Convention on the Rights of Children could be integrated with emerging policy development practices, including Gender-Based Analysis Plus.[14]
- **A budget for children:** a well-being framework based on the *Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being* to guide budget priorities and track outcomes – indicators of child and youth well-being are the lead indicators of societal well-being in Canada with long-term impacts. These indicators must measure equity gaps where racialized and vulnerable populations have different outcomes. Budgets at all levels of government should also publish what they spend on children relative to other priorities, and be explicitly governed by the principle of non-retrogression - with children the last in line for budget cuts and first in line for new spending.
- **Lower the voting age:** make governments more accountable to the rights and priorities of the youngest citizens.

13 This might be similar to the current Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat Expectations for Gender-Based Analysis Plus in Treasury Board Submissions.

14 In 2013, New Brunswick became the first province in Canada to implement mandatory Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA) on all cabinet policy and legislative decisions.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1: Summary of Canadian indicators and rankings

Rankings by indicator: child outcomes, policies and context

Outcome	Indicator	Canada rank	Canada value
Skills	Academic proficiency	13	68%
Skills	Social skills	23	74%
Mental well-being	Life satisfaction	28	77%
Physical health	Child mortality	28	0.98
Physical health	Overweight/obesity	29	32%
Mental well-being	Teen suicide	35	9.0

Policy	Indicator	Canada rank	Canada value
Education	Early childhood education and care	19	97.0%
Education	Exclusion from school and work (NEET)	20	5.9%
Health	Low birthweight	21	6.5%
Social	Parental leave	24	26.6
Social	Child poverty	26	21.0%
Budget allocation	Spending on families and children	28	1.68%
Health	Immunization	33	87%

Context	Indicator	Canada rank	Canada value
Environment	Air pollution	4	6.4
Economy	National income	15	$47,590
Society	Social support	17	93%
Environment	Water supply quality	18	98.9%
Economy	Unemployment	26	6.1%
Society	Violence (homicide)	33	1.8

Overall rankings: child outcomes, policies and context

Outcome	Indicator	Canada rank
Skills	• Academic proficiency • Social skills	18
Physical health	• Child mortality • Overweight/obesity	30
Mental well-being	• Life satisfaction • Teen suicide	31
OVERALL		30

Policy	Indicator	Canada rank
Education	• Early childhood education and care • Exclusion from school and work (NEET)	25
Social	• Parental leave • Child poverty	27
Health	• Immunization • Low birthweight	29
OVERALL		23

Context	Indicator	Canada rank
Environment	• Air pollution • Water supply quality	5
Economy	• National income • Unemployment	19
Society	• Social support • Violence (homicide)	23
OVERALL		23

NOTES:

- Data from 2018 do not reflect introduction of two weeks of dedicated paternal/secondary parent leave in 2019
- Refer to UNICEF Report Card 16 for data sources

INDICATOR CATEGORY	CANADA RANKING
OUTCOMES	TOP THIRD
POLICIES	MIDDLE THIRD
CONTEXT	BOTTOM THIRD

APPENDIX 2: Indicators by size of the Canadian "Possibility Gaps" (largest to smallest)

The "Possibility Gap" is a theoretical measure based on the size of the difference between Canada and the best-performing country in each indicator. The larger the gap, the more room for improvement. When we measure the "Possibility Gaps" and rank them from largest to smallest, the pattern is similar to the UNICEF rankings. However, there are some indicators that draw more attention. The widest gaps between Canada and the best performing countries exist not only in teen suicide, child mortality and overweight, where Canada ranks low in the league table, but also in the rates of child poverty and youth exclusion from school and work (NEET). This suggests there is a lot of ground to cover for Canada to achieve better outcomes.

Rank	Indicator
1	Violence
2	Teen suicide
3	Exclusion from school and work (NEET)
4	Child mortality
5	Unemployment
6	Overweight/obesity
7	Child poverty
8	Parental leave
9	Low birthweight
10	National income
11	Academic proficiency
12	Immunization
13	Social skills
14	Air pollution
15	Social support
16	Early childhood education
17	Water supply quality

APPENDIX 3: Report card indicators related to the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being

Report Card indicator	Indicator definition	Value	Source
Parental leave	Weeks of parental leave available to mothers and reserved for fathers (in full-pay equivalents)	26.6	OECD Family Database, 2018.
Child poverty	Percentage of children in households below 60% of median income	21%	EU-SILC, HILDA wave 17(Australia), ENIGH, Household Economic Survey (New Zealand) estimates taken from Perry, B (2017), Canadian Income Survey (estimates from L. Wollf and D. Fox), Survey of Living Conditions (Japan) estimates taken from A. Abe, Luxemburg Income Study (Israel, Mexico, Chile, US), combined data of Household Income and Expenditure Survey and Farm Household Economy Survey (Korea), courtesy of Statistics Korea and the Korean Committee for UNICEF.
Early childhood education and care	Percentage of children attending early childhood education and care one year before school	97%	UNESCO and UN Stata (data for 2017) apart from Canada, Croatia, Bulgaria Cyprus, Japan (2015 data from Innocenti Report Card 15).
Exclusion from school and work (NEET)	Percentage of 15-19 year-olds out of school, employment or training	5.9%	OECD Family Database, 2018
Immunization	Percentage of children who received the second dose of measles vaccine	87%	WHO/UNICEF estimates for 2018
Low birthweight	Percentage of new-borns weighing less than 2500 grams	6.5%	OECD Health Database, accessed on 7 Jan 2020
National income	Gross National Income per capita (in international dollars)	$47,490	World Bank
Unemployment	Unemployment rate (percentage of active population)	6.1%	World Development Indicators, 2019
Social support	Percentage of adults who have someone to count on	93%	World Happiness Report based on the Gallup World Poll
Violence (homicide)	Homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants	1.8	World Bank, 2017
Air pollution	Mean level of fine particulate matter (PM2.5μ)	6.4	World Development Indicators, 2017 and Brauer, M. et al. 2017, for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017 and Brauer et al. (2016). 'Ambient Air Pollution Exposure Estimation for the Global Burden of Disease 2013', Environmental Science and Technology, vol. 50, no. 1.
Water supply quality	Percentage of population with safely managed water	99%	Safely managed water: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (washdata.org), 2017. Water satisfaction: the OECD Better Life Index based on 3-year average from the Gallup Poll 2014-2016
Spending on children and families	Public expenditure on children and families as a percentage of GDP	1.68%	OECD Social Expenditure Database, 2015
Life satisfaction	Percentage of children with high life satisfaction at age 15	77%	PISA 2018 and HBSC 2017/18. Where data were available from both sources, the mean was taken for each country. Where data was only available from one source an adjustment based on average ratio of mean scores across the two surveys in the countries in the chart that had data in both surveys
Teen suicide	Suicide rate per 100,000 age 15-19	8.9	World Health Organization Mortality Database
Child mortality	Mortality rate per 1,000 children age 5-14	0.98	UN IGME project
Overweight/obesity	Percentage of 5-19 year-olds overweight or obese	32%	State of the World's Children, 2019
Academic proficiency	Percentage of children proficient in mathematics and reading at age 15	68%	PISA 2018
Social skills	Percentage of children who make friends easily at school at age 15	74%	PISA 2018
Belonging at school	Index of children's school belonging at age 15	-0.11%	PISA 2018
Bullying	Percentage of children bullied at least a few times a month at age 15	20%	HBSC 2017/18
Family support	Percentage of children who do not feel supported by their family	26%	HBSC 2017/18

APPENDIX 3 CONTINUED

Report card indicators related to the Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being

Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being Indicator	Indicator definition	Value	Source
Parental leave	Weeks of paid leave available to mothers, expressed in full-rate equivalent (FRE) weeks	27.4	OECD, Family Database Table PF2.1
Living in poverty	Percentage of children under 18 living in a household with income lower than 60% of the median (LIM)	20%	Statistics Canada, Canadian income Survey (CIS) (custom request)
Participating in preschool	Percentage of children participating in organized learning one year before official age to enter primary school	97%	Statistics Canada, Elementary-Secondary Education Survey (ESES)
Disengaged from learning and employment	Percentage of 15 to 19 year-olds not in employment, education or training (NEET)	6.3%	Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (LFS)
Getting vaccinated	Percentage of 2 year-olds receiving at least one dose of measles vaccination	90.2%	Statistics Canada, Childhood National Immunization Coverage Survey (CNICS)
Having low birthweight	Percentage of babies born Small-for-Gestational Age (SGA), of live singleton births with gestational ages from 22 to 43 weeks	9.1%	Statistics Canada, Table 13-10-0746-01 (Vital Statistics - Birth Database)
Having parents with insecure work	Percentage of adults with children under 18, with some form of nonstandard employment	28.2%	Labour Force Survey (LFS)
Homicide	Number of deaths of 0- to 19-year-olds by intentional assault, per 100,000 population	0.7%	Statistics Canada, Canadian Vital Statistics, Birth and Death Databases and Appendix II of the publication 'Mortality Summary List of Causes' (catalogue number 84F0209XIE)
Having polluted air	Annual average PM2.5µ concentrations in urban areas, weighted by proportion of child population (0–19) living in urban areas	9.7	Brauer et al. (2016). 'Ambient Air Pollution Exposure Estimation for the Global Burden of Disease 2013', Environmental Science and Technology, vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 79–88; UNDP (2017). 'Urban and Rural Population by Age and Sex, 1980–2015'. Available at: nin.tl/UNDP2017.
Having clean water sources	Percentage of designated monitoring sites (rivers) in southern Canada with water quality identified as fair, good or excellent	83%	Government of Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada
Public spending on family benefits/ services	Percentage of GDP spent on family benefits	2%	OECD Family Database, 2015
Feeling satisfied with life	Percentage of 11 to 15 year-olds who report high life satisfaction	55%	Health Behaviours in School-aged Children Survey (HBSC)
Suicide	Suicide rate of 15- to 19-year-olds per 100,000 population	9.0	Statistics Canada, Vital Statistics, Birth and Death Databases and Appendix II of the publication 'Mortality Summary List of Causes' (catalogue number 84F0209XIE)
Infant death	Number of infant deaths during a given year per 1,000 live births	4.5	Statistics Canada, Table 13-10-0713-01, Vital Statistics - Birth Database
Obesity	Percentage of 5 to 17 year-olds who are obese	10.6%	Statistics Canada, Table 13-10-0373-01, Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS)
Achieving in high school	Percentage of 15 year-olds achieving baseline competency in reading, mathematics and science	80.8%	OECD, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)
Feeling supported by my friends	Percentage of 11-15 year-olds in the high friend support group, based on the Friend Support Scale	65.9%	HBSC, 2014/15
Feeling positive about school	Percentage of 11- to 15-year-olds who rate their school high on the School Climate Scale	46.9%	HBSC, 2014/15
Bullying	Percentage of 11- to 15-year-olds who report experiencing bullying at least two to three times in the past couple of months	27.0%	HBSC, 2014/15
Feeling supported by my family	Percentage of 11- to 15-year-olds in the high family support group, based on the Family Support Scale	57.3%	HBSC, 2014/15

NOTES:

- Some indicators may appear to be the same but have different values when comparing the Report Card and the Index. Differences result from different indicator constructs, data calculation methodologies (e.g., age cohort) and/or data sources or years.

APPENDIX 4: International abbreviations (ISO) for countries and regions in the Report Card

International Abbreviation	*Country or Region*
AT	Austria
AU	Australia
BE	Belgium
BE-VLG	Flanders (Belgium)
BE-WAL	Wallonia (Belgium)
BG	Bulgaria
CA	Canada
CH	Switzerland
CL	Chile
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
ES	Spain

International Abbreviation	*Country or Region*
FI	Finland
FR	France
GR	Greece
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IL	Israel
IS	Iceland
IT	Italy
JP	Japan
KR	Republic of Korea
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
MT	Malta

International Abbreviation	*Country or Region*
MX	Mexico
NL	Netherlands
NO	Norway
NZ	New Zealand
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
TR	Turkey
GB	United Kingdom
GB-ENG	England (UK)
GB-NIR	Northern Ireland (UK)
US	United States

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