



International Network for School Social Work

<http://internationalnetwork-schoolsocialwork.htmlplanet.com>

Contact mhuxtable@olympus.net

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Editor: Marion Huxtable

Child well-being in rich countries: A comparative overview

UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti www.unicef-irc.org

http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc11_eng.pdf

This 2013 update of UNICEF's overview of child well-being in the world's most advanced economies shows wide-spread improvement in most indicators, including infant mortality, material well-being and risk behaviors such as smoking. It updates and refines the original study of 2007 and provides a detailed look at 26 internationally comparable indicators. The five main dimensions of children's lives that were considered are material well-being, health and safety, education, behaviors and risks, and housing and environment. It also includes a study of children's own reports of their well-being and relationships. The 56 pages of detailed data, charts and discussion are available in English, French, Spanish and Italian.

The chart on page 2 shows a ranking of child well-being in 29 countries. (Countries not listed were excluded for lack of internationally comparable data.)

Some Results

- The Netherlands retains its position as the clear leader and is the only country ranked among the top five countries in all dimensions of child well-being.
- Four Nordic countries – Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – sit just below the Netherlands at the top of the child well-being table.
- Four southern European countries – Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain – are placed in the bottom half of the table.
- The bottom four places in the table are occupied by three of the poorest countries in the survey, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania, and by one of the richest, the United States.

What children say

Part 2 of this report looks at the issue of children's subjective well-being. Children's own assessments can provide a guide to one of the most critical of all factors in assessing well-being – the quality of the relationships with peers and parents. The Netherlands and the Nordic countries perform strongly on both subjective and objective measures.

The table ranks 29 developed countries according to the overall well-being of their children. Each country's overall rank is based on its average ranking for five dimensions of child well-being.

Country	Overall well-being: Average rank in all 5 domains	Education (rank)	Material well-being (rank)	Health and safety (rank)	Behaviors and risks (rank)	Housing & Environment (rank)
Netherlands	2.4	1	1	5	1	4
Norway	4.6	6	3	7	4	3
Iceland	5	10	4	1	3	7
Finland	5.4	4	2	3	12	6
Sweden	6.2	11	5	2	5	8
Germany	9	3	11	12	6	13
Luxembourg	9.2	22	6	4	9	5
Switzerland	9.6	16	9	11	11	1
Belgium	11.2	2	13	13	14	14
Ireland	11.6	17	17	15	7	2
Denmark	11.8	7	12	23	2	15
Slovenia	12	5	8	6	21	20
France	12.8	15	10	10	13	16
Czech Republic	15.2	12	16	8	22	18
Portugal	15.6	18	21	14	8	17
United Kingdom	15.8	24	14	16	15	10
Canada	16.6	14	15	27	16	11
Austria	17	23	7	26	17	12
Spain	17.6	26	24	9	20	9
Hungary	18.4	8	18	20	24	22
Poland	18.8	9	22	18	19	26
Italy	19.2	25	23	17	10	21
Estonia	20.8	13	19	22	26	24
Slovakia	20.8	21	25	21	18	19
Greece	23.4	28	20	19	25	25
United States	24.8	27	26	25	23	23
Lithuania	25.2	19	27	24	29	27
Latvia	26.4	20	28	28	28	28
Romania	28.6	29	29	29	27	29

What does this mean for school social workers?

Both the objective information about different aspects of children's well-being and the subjective assessments given by children provide guidance for school social workers about where their work is most needed. For example, school social workers in the United States focus their efforts in every domain since the US ranks in the bottom third in all five domains, whereas school social workers in Finland might focus more on behaviors and risk, such as alcohol abuse. Children in most countries report that they can talk easily to their mothers and they all find it harder to talk to their fathers. That suggests a project for school social workers.

Regarding early childhood, the study states "There is a long way to go before any nation can say that it has adequate information about the early years development of all its children", and "Canada and Australia have become the first countries to put in place systems for the regular monitoring of children's developmental progress in the years before schooling begins". Here is another project for school social work involvement.

You can see the rankings in the first (2007) overview in the Innocenti Report Card Number 7 at: http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc7_eng.pdf