

Innocenti report card 8: The child care transition ^[1]

A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries

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Excerpts

This report card advances the idea of an internationally applicable set of minimum standards by which the rights of young children might be protected as the transition to child care gathers momentum.

The 10 benchmarks suggested, drawn up in consultation with government officials and academic experts from OECD countries in Asia, Europe, and North America, with additional input from both UNICEF and the World Bank, represent a first attempt towards evaluating and comparing early childhood services in the 25 countries in which data have been collected. The resulting benchmarks table (pg. 2) shows which of those countries are currently meeting suggested standards and which are not.

Overall, Sweden tops the table by meeting all 10 benchmarks, followed closely by Iceland which meets 9, and Denmark, Finland, France, and Norway which meet 8. Only three countries &em; Australia, Canada, and Ireland &em; meet fewer than 3.

...

A great change is coming over childhood in the world's richest countries. Today's rising generation is the first in which a majority are spending a large part of early childhood in some form of out-of-home child care.... This great change in childhood is being driven by economic pressures on governments: more women in the workforce boosts GDP, increases income from taxes and reduces welfare costs.

At the same time, research is demonstrating that loving, stable, secure, and stimulating relationships with caregivers in the earliest months and years of life are critical for every aspect of a child's development.

This report will argue that it is the coming together of these two different developments that now confront public and policymakers in OECD countries with urgent questions. Whether the child care transition will represent an advance or a setback &em; for today's children and tomorrow's world &em; will depend on the response.

No challenge makes a more legitimate claim on societies' ingenuities and resources than the task of using what is now known about early childhood development to ensure that all children have the best possible start in life and the best possible chance to become all they are capable of.

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