

Child poverty rate seen at highest since 1996 [CA] ^[1]

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Source: Globe and Mail

Format: Article

Publication Date: 24 Nov 2004

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Canada's child poverty rate has increased for the first time since 1996, with nearly 16 per cent of children across the country now living below the poverty line, a new report says.

Fifteen years after parliament made a unanimous all-party declaration to end child poverty, federal and provincial governments are still failing to take the actions necessary to reduce child poverty, the 2004 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada says.

Nearly one in six Canadian children - a total of 1,065,000 - are living in low-income homes, and a third of all Canadian children have been exposed to poverty for at least a year since 1996.

Child poverty rates among Aboriginals, immigrants and visible minorities were far worse — more than double the Canadian children's average.

"Despite continued economic growth and rising employment, the high rate of child and family poverty remains Canada's social deficit," said Laurel Rothman, National Coordinator of Campaign 2000, a coalition of more than 90 national, provincial and community organizations across the country, which produced the report.

Across Canada, 10 per cent of couples with children and more than 50 per cent of single mothers live an average of \$9,000 below the poverty line, the report says.

The situation is even worse in several provinces, led by British Columbia, where the average low-income couple lives \$10,000 below the poverty line, and the average low-income single mother lives \$10,400 below the poverty line. Manitoba and Ontario are also in worse shape than the national average.

A strong economy has also done nothing to close the gap between rich and poor: The top 10 per cent richest Canadian families have average incomes more than 11 times higher than the poorest 10 per cent. Regulated child-care programs serve only 12 per cent of all children up to the age of 12, the report says.

It urges the government to move "from an incoherent patchwork of early learning and child care services to a framework of universally accessible, publicly-funded programs that are affordable and widely available for all children."

Other suggestions made by Campaign 2000 in the report include:

- Increasing federal transfer payments to the provinces for social services- Consolidating child benefits into a single program and raising the maximum child benefit to \$4,900
- Ending provincial claw backs for social assistance programs
- Significantly expanding access to affordable housing -- specifically, the construction of 25,000 new affordable housing units every year for the next five years
- A renewed social safety net through the Canada Social Transfer- Restoring eligibility to Employment Insurance
- Raising the minimum wage to \$10 an hour- Addressing labour market barriers to excluded groups

"The solutions are well known," Rothman said. "Let's put the surpluses to work for Canada's children."

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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