

# UNICEF Canada calls for measurable standards, guidelines, appropriate funding for child care, and solutions by 2009 <sup>[1]</sup>

UNICEF Canada press release

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**Source:** UNICEF Canada

**Format:** Press release

**Publication Date:** 11 Dec 2008

## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

Press release:

A new study released by UNICEF states that a far-reaching change is overtaking childhood in the world's richest countries, including in Canada. For the first time in the history of the industrialized world, a majority of the rising generation is now spending a significant part of childhood in out-of-home child care.

The Child Care Transition is the 8th annual report card produced by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy. According to the report card, this child care revolution offers enormous potential for children, society and the economy, if sufficient supportive policies and programmes are in place.

The report card states that these changes reflect new opportunities for women's employment outside the home. But in part, also, they reflect new necessities. And the poorer the family, the greater is the pressure to return to work as soon as possible after a birth & often to unskilled, low-paid jobs.

"High quality early childhood education and care has a huge potential to enhance children's cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social development," says Marta Santos Pais, Director of the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (IRC). "It can help boost educational achievement, limit the early establishment of disadvantage, promote inclusion, be an investment in good citizenship, and advance progress for women."

The UNICEF report card proposes 10 benchmarks to compare the early childhood policies of the 25 most affluent countries in the world, and these benchmarks should be regarded as a first step toward establishing a set of minimum standards to facilitate good early childhood outcomes. According to the report, Sweden meets all 10 benchmarks, Norway eight, Austria five, Italy and Japan four. Ireland and Canada meet only one benchmark.

## Equity and quality services required

Although there is progress in many parts of Canada, Nigel Fisher, President and CEO of UNICEF Canada states that "greater equity in the provision and monitoring of quality services would give all Canadian children the chance for the best possible start in life."

And, considering current evidence from neuroscience on how important the first months and years of care are to human development, and the evidence of what works in early childhood policy and programming across the industrialized world, "it is clear that underinvestment limits the potential to ensure that the childcare transition is good for our children," says Fisher.

In addition, investing in early child care and education is a key strategy to respond to current economic challenges, and promote economic stimulus and recovery. Early childhood care and education is an investment not only in the development of children, but economists agree that the social and economic benefits include a more competitive workforce, higher tax revenues, lower social programme costs down the road, and economic returns to the GDP in excess of the dollars invested.

"For all these reasons, UNICEF Canada strongly supports the recommendation of the Senate of Canada Standing Committee on Human Rights," reaffirms Fisher. "The federal government must take the lead in developing a coordinated approach to the establishment of measurable standards, guidelines and funding for child care, with solutions presented to the public by July 2009."

"Canada can ensure that this major social and economic transition & which is here to stay & has positive outcomes for the rising generation and that investment in these services achieves the intended results," he adds while recognizing that the federal government's pledge to extend parental leave benefits to the self-employed is a welcome step in that direction.

"This report clearly shows that quality child care and educational services with strong family supports, such as effective parental leave, are crucial to both our children's and our nation's potential," concludes the President and CEO of UNICEF Canada.

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