

Rich countries let poorest children fall behind ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Canadian children suffer greater income inequality than most developed nations, says a new UNICEF report being released Friday.

The report, which for the first time ranks 24 countries in the Organization for Economic and Co-operative Development (OECD) in terms of equality in children's health, education and material well-being, shows children in many rich nations are being left behind.

"Falling behind is a critical issue not only for millions of individual children today, but for the economic and social future of their nations tomorrow," the report argues.

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Canada ranks average overall, but scores a dismal 17th place in the area of children's material well-being, which includes family income and housing, the report found. Since all data were collected before the 2008 recession, child inequality has likely grown across the OECD, it warns.

Overall, the report found United States, Italy and Greece had the lowest child equality scores. It means those countries allow their most vulnerable children to fall much further behind than countries like Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Switzerland, which ranked the highest.

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Canada can reduce inequality by taking some practical and affordable steps, he said.

These include establishing a national Children's Commissioner to ensure a baseline of support for children across the country; annual reports on the state of the country's children; a children's budget to provide a clear account of public expenditures on children; a national child poverty reduction strategy; assessing all policy decisions for their affect on children; and closing the gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal children.

Children pay the heaviest cost of inequality, the report says. But taxpayers also pay through increased strain on health and hospital services, on remedial schooling, on welfare and the justice system, it warns.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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