

The children left behind: A league table of inequality in child well-being in the world's rich countries ^[1]

Innocenti Report Card 9

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AVAILABILITY

Full report in pdf (see pg. 27 for child care section) ^[2]

More materials, including summaries, videos, press releases ^[3]

Excerpt from the press release:

A landmark report by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Report Card 9: The Children Left Behind, has found that children in many rich nations suffer greater inequality than children in other industrialized nations. Canada performs at a mediocre level overall, but lags far behind in equality of children's material well-being which includes family income and other basic resources and conditions necessary for child development -- placing 17th of 24 countries.

Report Card 9: The Children Left Behind ranks, for the first time, 24 OECD countries in terms of equality in children's health, education and material well-being. The report looks at a particular aspect of disparity - bottom-end inequality - and asks how far behind affluent nations allow their most disadvantaged children to fall.

The approach of The Children Left Behind is to measure the gap between the average child (what a country may consider 'normal') and the child near the bottom. As such, the report examines how far children are falling behind in three dimensions of their lives - material well-being, educational achievement and physical health - and means we can measure and compare, for the first time, the differences in performance both within and between countries.

Excerpt from the child care section of the Report Card:

Within the developed world, trends in the way in which young children are being brought up may now offer a unique opportunity to put this message into practice. Today's generation of children is becoming the first in which a majority are spending a significant part of early childhood in some form of out-of-home care (the subject of Report Card 8xlv). In theory, this offers a large scale opportunity to take early action against the different dimensions of disadvantage that threaten to become established in the lives of very young children. Public demand for high-quality child care already exists, and OECD governments are already responding by investing in free or subsidized early childhood services on an increasing scale.

....

In practice, there is a danger that the child care transition will contribute to a widening rather than a narrowing of bottom-end inequality. It is more educated parents and higher-income homes that tend to be most aware of, and more capable of affording, child care of the right quality. And it is the poorer and less educated homes where the pressures for the earliest possible return to work are felt most acutely and where resources for high quality child care are least likely to be available. Without specific policies to address this issue -- and to ensure the availability and affordability of high quality early childhood services for all children -- this opportunity will therefore be lost; 'double disadvantage' will become the norm, and the child care transition will likely become a new and powerful driver of still greater inequality in children's well-being.

The costs of taking advantage of this chance to reduce inequalities in children's well-being on a significant scale are obviously substantial. The costs of not taking the opportunity will undoubtedly be even higher. No one who has worked with disadvantaged or at-risk children can be in any doubt that, as James Heckman and many others have argued, attempting to compensate for disadvantage after the event is more difficult, more costly, and less likely to be successful. Children need to be supported and protected from avoidable 'falling behind' at all stages of their development, but the point of greatest leverage is the point at which the process begins.

Related link: Innocenti Report Card 8: The child care transition (2008) ^[4]

Region: International ^[5]

Tags: poverty ^[6]

children's rights ^[7]

international organizations ^[8]

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Links

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