

# Report Card 11.

Child well-being in rich countries:  
a comparative overview.

**Ireland.**

*“A decade of progress but challenges remain”*



For every child  
Health, Education, Equality, Protection



IRELAND



**It is an honour for UNICEF Ireland to host the global launch of Report Card 11 in Dublin during the Irish Presidency of the EU. The recent EU Recommendation “Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage” has demonstrated what can be achieved by EU member states working together to end child poverty. It provides us with the strong equity focus and child-rights based approach needed to guide governments’ anti-poverty measures during a time of austerity.**

Since we have only one chance to get the right start in life, UNICEF firmly believes that governments must invest in children to allow each person fulfil their potential. This is particularly true for the most vulnerable children in our society who do not get an equal start in life. All children everywhere should have the right to survive and thrive.

It is in this spirit that we launch Report Card 11 which shows the huge progress made across 29 OECD countries for the first decade of the 2000s in children’s well-being. The ability to compare data across many industrialised countries allows us to conclude that child poverty is not inevitable, that it is policy susceptible and that some countries are leading the way in protecting children.

We should credit today’s young people with making smarter decisions when it comes to their health and ensure that governments continue to invest in children, particularly early in life when it can make the most difference. The cost to society when we fail to put child well-being first is huge in terms of increased strain on health and hospital services, remedial education, welfare and on the police and courts. It is up to each country included in the report to maintain and closely monitor the areas showing good results and, when the report says that we are failing children on an issue, to introduce new policy.

In Ireland it is vital we don’t forget the children behind the statistics who have always lived below the poverty line and continue to fall. We cannot leave our most vulnerable children behind. There are young people finishing school faced with an uncertain future who need more options for further education and training. The growing levels of bullying are a warning to our society to do more to tackle a problem which has devastating and long-lasting effects. When we asked young people what is the defining issue that, if dealt with, could improve life satisfaction for their generation, they told us that mental health services need to be accessible and strengthened.

UNICEF will continue to support industrialised countries’ efforts to combat poverty and promote the well-being of all children. This research shows that the right policy, regardless of the economic environment, can make lasting positive changes to children’s lives.

**Peter Power**  
Executive Director  
UNICEF Ireland



**Report Card 11 from UNICEF’s Office of Research is an opportunity to look at how children are faring in the world’s richest countries. By providing an overview of child well-being across 29 industrialised countries, it clearly shows that child poverty is not inevitable. Many countries are doing much better at protecting their most vulnerable children and there are valuable lessons to be learned. From these lessons, we can work to ensure that all children are provided with the opportunities and skills they need to grow up and develop to the best of their ability.**

For the first time, we have been able to track data across the first decade of the 2000s. By comparing data on child well-being across 29 countries, we are able to discover what policies are working for children. Child poverty is not an inevitability- we must accept that it is policy susceptible therefore our actions and responsibilities are to ensure that countries get it right. We must ask ourselves why are we not doing as well as other countries and what can we do to improve outcomes for children? This league table shows us what is possible.

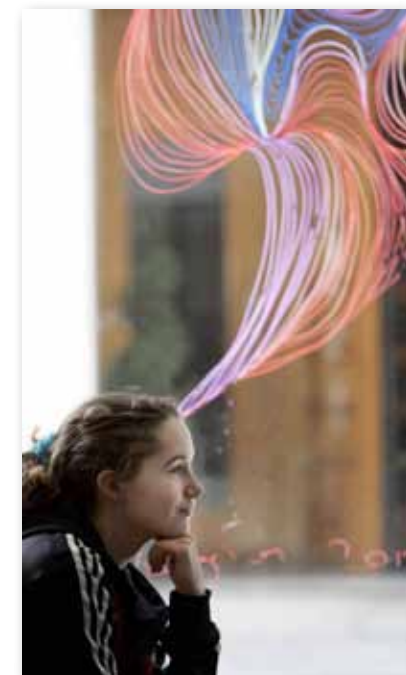
What emerges is a story largely of progress on most measures of children’s well-being but many challenges remain. We are now faced with the impact of three years of economic hardship which does not bode well for present or future generations of children.

Unfortunately this data lag is the entry price for such international comparisons and in many ways we need more data in order to design policies which are responsive to the realities of children’s lives. The table at the back shows Ireland in relation to the other 28 countries measured in Report Card 11. The rest of this document selects only the Irish data from the Report Card and is designed to complement the full Report which can be downloaded here <http://devinfo.unicef.org/innocentchildwellbeing>

The UNICEF Research Office has begun to look at areas which are more difficult to measure but no picture of a child’s life would be complete without. What do children have to say about their own lives? How is their relationship with their guardians and peers? How do they rate their own happiness? This additional information is a huge strength of Report Card 11 and in UNICEF Ireland we wanted to enhance this by bringing together a focus group of young people to ask them to consider whether the data actually reflected their experience of growing up in Ireland. You will hear from these remarkable young people throughout this summary and you can watch the video online at [www.unicef.ie](http://www.unicef.ie)

Inserting the voice of children and young people into these debates is critical to ensuring that we don’t misrepresent their views- in fact their views are vital in furthering our understanding of their lives. Only by developing our understanding of children’s lives, can we work to improve them.

**Nikita White**  
Advocacy Officer  
UNICEF Ireland





Part 1:  
MATERIAL WELL BEING



**8.5%**  
Relative child poverty rates

**34%**  
Child poverty gaps  
The gap between the poverty line and the median income of those below the line.

**5%**  
Child deprivation rates

**10%**  
Low family affluence

Ireland has a relatively low child poverty rate of 8.5% but those who do fall below the poverty line fall harder than in other countries, giving Ireland one of the largest child poverty gaps.

*“People my age are saying I’d love to get a job, I’d love have a job because my parents don’t have the money to be funding my social life”*  
Clara, 16

*“Now I’m in fourth year and there’s loads of trips. They cost a good bit of money and you kind of feel bad asking your parents”*  
Jennifer, 16

The number of children reporting low family affluence has halved since 2000 to 10%. It includes factors such as car ownership, holidays taken and computers in the household.

Part 2:  
HEALTH & SAFETY



**4.3**  
Infant mortality rates  
Deaths under 12 months per 1,000 live births.

**5%**  
Babies with low birthweight  
Below 2,500g.

**93%**  
Immunization rates

**18.09**  
Child & youth mortality rates  
Deaths per 100,000 aged 1-19.

Ireland has one of the lowest immunisation rates of all rich countries.

Part 3:  
EDUCATION



**85%**  
Preschool enrolment rates

**92%**  
Participates in further education

**11%**  
NEET  
Not in education, employment or training.

**496.9**  
Educational achievement by 15  
PISA score.



## Part 4: BEHAVIOURS & RISKS

**16%**  
Overweight

By BMI.

**72%**  
Eats breakfast every day

**37%**  
Eats fruit every day

**29%**  
Exercises daily  
At least one hour of moderate to vigorous activity.

**14**  
Teenage births

Per 100,000 girls aged 15 to 19.

**6%**  
Smokes  
At least once a week. Children aged 11, 13 and 15.

**13%**  
Cannabis Use

Children aged 11, 13 and 15.

**12%**  
Drinks  
Has been drunk at least twice. Children aged 11, 13 and 15.

**35%**  
Fighting

Has been involved in a physical fight at least once in the last year.

**28%**  
Being bullied

Since 2001 there has been a significant decline in children smoking and more modest declines in drinking and teenage pregnancies.

**“Bullying can last a lifetime”**  
Paige, 16

Ireland is one of only 5 countries to see an increase in bullying during the 2000s.

**“It used to be in the schoolyard but now with phones and computers it is brought into the home. You can’t really escape it”**  
Paige, 16

A rise in the number of children who are overweight puts Ireland ahead of the UK, Germany and France.

## Part 5: HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT

**1.45**  
Rooms per person

**3%**  
Multiple housing problems

**2**  
Homicide rates  
Annual number per 100,000.

**15**  
Air Pollution  
Annual PM10.

Ireland tops the housing league by offering children more space and reporting low numbers of housing problems.

**“I grew up in an area with a lot of anti-social behaviour and problems. I wanted to make sure I’d have better prospects. But now I feel kind of proud of where I’m from. The area has got a lot better”**  
Owen, 18





Part 6:

## CHILDREN'S LIFE SATISFACTION



# 87%

of children in Ireland are **satisfied** with their lives.

Ireland drops to **12<sup>th</sup>** place in overall **child well-being** when based on children's views.



Part 7:

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS AND PEERS



# 83%

of children find it easy to talk to their **mothers**.

# 68%

of children find it easy to talk to their **fathers**.

# 75%

of children find **classmates** kind and helpful.

**"As I got older, my friends became a big part of my life. I feel in a safe place"**

**Clara, 16**

**"My Mam plays a big part. She has been there from the start, she keeps our family together. She's my best friend"**

**Paige, 16**



**Ireland** is the 10<sup>th</sup> best place in the world to be a child

A league table of child well-being							
		Overall rank	Material well-being rank	Health and safety rank	Education rank	Behaviours and risks rank	Housing and environment rank
1	Netherlands	2.4	1	5	1	1	4
2	Norway	4.6	3	7	6	4	3
3	Iceland	5	4	1	10	3	7
4	Finland	5.4	2	3	4	12	6
5	Sweden	6.2	5	2	11	5	8
6	Germany	9	11	12	3	6	13
7	Luxembourg	9.2	6	4	22	9	5
8	Switzerland	9.6	9	11	16	11	1
9	Belgium	11.2	13	13	2	14	14
<b>10</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>
11	Denmark	11.8	12	23	7	2	15
12	Slovenia	12	8	6	5	21	20
13	France	12.8	10	10	15	13	16
14	Czech Republic	15.2	16	8	12	22	18
15	Portugal	15.6	21	14	18	8	17
16	United Kingdom	15.8	14	16	24	15	10
17	Canada	16.6	15	27	14	16	11
18	Austria	17	7	26	23	17	12
19	Spain	17.6	24	9	26	20	9
20	Hungary	18.4	18	20	8	24	22
21	Poland	18.8	22	18	9	19	26
22	Italy	19.2	23	17	25	10	21
23	Estonia	20.8	19	22	13	26	24
23	Slovakia	20.8	25	21	21	18	19
25	Greece	23.4	20	19	28	25	25
26	United States	24.8	26	25	27	23	23
27	Lithuania	25.2	27	24	19	29	27
28	Latvia	26.4	28	28	20	28	28
29	Romania	28.6	29	29	29	27	29

**UNICEF Ireland would like to thank all the young people quoted in these pages for their assistance with this project.**

**Visit [www.unicef.ie](http://www.unicef.ie) to find out more.**

Globally, Report Card 11 shows a decade of progress with the Netherlands retaining its position at number one, followed by four more Nordic countries - Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

**“People want better lives for themselves and their families”**  
**Paige, 16**



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