

Coverage and press releases concerning the UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 7  
Released 14 Feb 2007

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**From the NZ Herald: Simon Collins, Social Issues reporter**

[http://www.nzherald.co.nz/section/1/story.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10423987](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/section/1/story.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10423987)

## A great place for kids. Oh really?



How NZ compared with other OECD countries. Source: Unicef. Herald Graphic

[Email this story](#) Print this story 5:00AM Thursday February 15, 2007

By [Simon Collins](#)

"The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children - their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialisation, and their sense of being loved, valued and included in the families and societies into which they are born."

That is the opening credo in the Unicef Innocenti Research Centre's seventh set of international league tables, published overnight in Florence, Italy.

Its previous reports have placed New Zealand second-worst among developed countries in the gap between average achievers and the lowest 5 per cent of children in reading, maths and science, third-highest in teenage births, fourth-highest in the proportion of

children in homes earning less than half the median income, fifth-worst on child deaths by injury and sixth-worst on deaths from maltreatment.

Its latest report, assessing "child wellbeing" on six broad "dimensions", again places New Zealand in the bottom half of the list on two-thirds of the measures on which we are ranked.

And once again the other countries at the bottom are the United States and Britain, while the Netherlands and the Scandinavian nations show up as the best places in the world for children.

### **DIMENSION 1: MATERIAL WELLBEING**

On average, 95 per cent of the children in developed countries live in homes where at least one parent is in paid work.

New Zealand fell slightly below the average when these figures were gathered in 2000, with only 93 per cent of children living with a parent in paid work. Only six countries, including Australia and Britain, scored lower.

The consequent dependence on benefits, combined with relatively low benefit rates, helps to explain what is now New Zealand's seventh-worst placing in the proportion of children (15 per cent) living in homes earning less than half the median income in 2001. Britain and the US have the highest proportions in poverty.

New Zealand's rankings on both measures are likely to have improved since these figures were gathered because of a steep fall in unemployment and the Working For Families package. On the other two material measures on which local data are available, New Zealand performs slightly above average. Ninety-four per cent of 15-year-olds live in homes with at least 10 books, and 78 per cent in homes with at least six out of eight educational resources (desk, quiet place, computer, internet, educational software, calculator, dictionary, textbooks).

### **DIMENSION 2: HEALTH & SAFETY**

The number of babies dying before their first birthday has fallen dramatically in New Zealand from 7.6 per cent when the Plunket Society began in 1907 to just 0.6 in this report and 0.5 per cent last year.

But it has fallen even more dramatically elsewhere, so New Zealand has slipped from among the best in the world to fourth-worst among 25 members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Only 0.2 and 0.3 per cent of babies die in the best-performing nations, Iceland and Japan.

One of the Plunket nurses' primary tasks, getting babies vaccinated, has also slipped behind average. Only 82 per cent of Kiwi infants are now immunised against polio by the age of 2, compared with the OECD average of 94 per cent.

New Zealand scores even worse - worst in the developed world - on the number of children under 19 killed in accidents and injuries, including violence, murder and suicide. We lose 23.1 for every 100,000 children every year, compared with 22.9 in the second-worst nation, the US, 15.1 in Australia and an OECD average of 14.3.

### **DIMENSION 3: EDUCATIONAL WELLBEING**

New Zealand's highest ranking in the report - sixth - is for student achievement at age 15 in reading, maths and scientific literacy. Compared with OECD averages of 500 points, Kiwi 15-year-olds scored 522 for reading, 523 for maths and 521 for science.

However, we swung from near-top to absolute bottom on the proportion of young people who were still in full-time or part-time education aged 15 to 19 in 2003 - only 67 per cent against 82.1 per cent in Australia and an OECD average of 82.5.

Far more young people continued in education in this age group in central and northern Europe - 89 per cent in Germany, 90 in the Czech Republic and 94 per cent in top-ranking Belgium.

This may be partly a cultural difference, with higher education rated much more highly in those countries. It may also reflect New Zealand's buoyant labour market, which has sucked young people out of education into jobs in recent years.

But we seem to have about as many young people as elsewhere on the dole. Unicef cites an average of 6.9 per cent of 15 to 19-year-olds outside education or employment in 2003. No figure is given for New Zealand, but 6.7 per cent of our 15 to 19-year-olds were officially unemployed in September.

Slightly more of our 15-year-olds than average aspire to skilled work. Asked "what kind of job do you expect to have when you are about 30?", only 24.5 per cent of youngsters named jobs which did not need further training or qualifications. The OECD average was 27.5 per cent.

### **DIMENSION 4: RELATIONSHIPS**

New Zealand parents do not come well out of this survey. Asked "how often do your parents eat the main meal with you around a table?", only 64.4 per cent of Kiwi 15-year-olds answered "several times a week", compared with an OECD average of 79.4 per cent. Only Finnish youngsters eat with their parents less often.

Asked "how often do your parents spend time just talking to you?", only 51.9 per cent of Kiwi 15-year-olds said "several times a week". The average was 62.8 per cent.

The report also includes league tables on the proportion of children living in single-parent families and stepfamilies. No figures are given for New Zealand, but the OECD average proportion of children aged 11, 13 and 15 living in single-parent families is 12.7 per cent, with a highest rate of 20.8 per cent in the US.

New Zealand's 2006 census showed that single-parent families made up 30.2 per cent of all families with children, a slight drop from 31 per cent in 2001. But the numbers and ages of children in each family are not yet available.

## **DIMENSION 5: BEHAVIOURS & RISKS**

New Zealand's teenage birth rate has now passed Britain's, moving us up from third to second-highest among developed countries with 30 births for every 1000 young women aged 15 to 19 in 2003 - almost double the OECD average of 16.

Australia registered a near-average 18 teen births for every 1000 young women. Only the US was still above us with 46.

No figures are given for New Zealand on other indicators of risky behaviour - smoking, drinking, using cannabis, having sex and not using a condom. But a 2005 survey of our Year 10 students (aged around 14) found that only 9 per cent smoked, against an OECD average of 11 per cent of 11, 13 and 15-year-olds.

New Zealand is also left out of figures on eating habits, physical activity and obesity. But on the data available, Kiwi children may be more overweight than anywhere except the US - 23.1 per cent of our children aged 11 to 14 were overweight in 2002, compared with an OECD average of only 12.9 per cent of 13 and 15-year-olds in 2001. The US figure was 25.1 per cent.

## **DIMENSION 6: SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING**

New Zealand 15-year-olds are slightly less likely than average to agree with the statement, "I feel lonely" - only 6.6 per cent here against the OECD average of 7.4 per cent. Fewer than 11 per cent of 15-year-olds feel lonely in all OECD countries with the remarkable exception of Japan, where the figure is 29.8 per cent.

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: "announce@executive.govt.nz" <announce@executive.govt.nz>

To: admin@cpag.org.nz

Sent: Thursday, February 15, 2007 11:16:13 AM

Subject: Hon Steve Maharey: UNICEF report highlights how far we've come

### **UNICEF report highlights how far we've come**

The latest UNICEF report on child wellbeing is an important snapshot of young New Zealanders, and highlights many areas in which the government is actively working and making great progress.

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The latest UNICEF report on child wellbeing is an important snapshot of young New Zealanders, and highlights many areas in which the government is actively working and making great progress, says Cabinet Minister, Steve Maharey.

"The UNICEF report paints a fair picture of how things were in the late 90s and early this decade. When these figures are compared to more up to date statistics, we can clearly see how this Government has improved the lot of our children.

"The information in the UNICEF report pre-dates significant progress that has been made through the Working for Families package, and improvements in the areas of health, education, employment, poverty, household crowding and safety."

"For example, by the time the government's Working for Families package is fully implemented, New Zealand will be ranked in the top four OECD countries on the relative poverty indicator. However, the UNICEF report draws on 2001 data, which ranks New Zealand 18th out of 24 OECD countries.

"Also, some important New Zealand data was not actually included in the UNICEF report. A Children's nutrition survey carried out in 2002 found that 84 per cent of 11 to 14 year olds ate breakfast, which would have put New Zealand within the top three in this report."

"Other data that wasn't included was the number of 15-19 year olds not in education, training or employment. The latest 2006 figures indicate only 6 per cent were not, which would have ranked New Zealand 9th out of 23 OECD countries."

Steve Maharey says the UNICEF report is a valuable tool to help focus our energies on what the government is now doing, but it draws on pre-2002 data, which highlights the legacy of poverty inherited from the National party of the nineties.

"We have since made huge inroads into key areas of child wellbeing, in terms of Working for Families, education and health, which will be included in future studies. I am confident the next UNICEF report card will reflect this."

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**From:** Helen Leahy [mailto:Helen.Leahy@parliament.govt.nz]

**Sent:** Thursday, 15 February 2007 11:17 a.m.

**Subject:** Release: Our children matter - Maori Party

**He Taonga, He Mokopuna:**

**Call to restore the belief that our children are our taonga**

**Dr Pita Sharples and Tariana Turia, Co-leaders of the Maori Party**

## Thursday 15 February 2007

The Maori Party today has issued a passionate call to restore the belief that children are to be nurtured and cherished as precious taonga.

“It makes one cry to see a report which scores the nation badly across most indicators of child health and wellbeing” said Tariana Turia. *[Child Poverty in Perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries; UNICEF].*

“We now rank at the bottom of the heap of OECD countries for children who die from accident and injury; and in the bottom four for children living past their first year of life”.

“These are figures we would have thought belonged to the past” said Mrs Turia. “It is obvious from the plethora of research linking economic violence to family crises, that the depths of extreme poverty and severe hardship amongst families are placing us in the lower ranks of developed countries”.

“In te Ao Maori our children are precious and should be revered” says Mrs Turia. “For the good of Aotearoa, and the future strength of our peoples, we must all do that we can to ensure the well-being of our tamariki is an urgent priority in every home; in every caucus room; in every school”.

“The report also scores New Zealand the lowest of all 25 OECD nations in terms of the percentage of 15 to 19 year olds in fulltime or part-time education” said Dr Sharples.

“Although the Minister of Education is excusing these figures as out of date (the information was from 2003 data); reports released just this week show the particular urgency to address this system crisis for Maori education”.

“The Māori truancy rate has shown a dramatic increase to 7.1% for females; and 6.6% for males” said Dr Sharples. “If that is not bad enough, the education data also shows the gap between European rates has widened from a 3% gap in 2004 to 4% in 2006”.

“On top of figures released this week describing the appalling statistics for Maori school-leavers who exit school without even a level one NCEA qualification, it is evident that the failure of the schooling system to cater for Maori must be accorded urgency” said Dr Sharples. *[53% of Maori boys; 45% of Maori girls leave school without gaining Level one NCEA qualifications].*

“I was very sad to see on the qualitative scales, that as a nation we rank 17<sup>th</sup> out of 25 in terms of children whose parents spend time talking with them several times a week; and 24 out of 25 when it comes to sharing a kai together, several times a week” said Mrs Turia.

“This is an urgent call for action for every single person, every single family member, in Aotearoa” said Mrs Turia. “One can’t have any faith in a Government that consistently dismisses and denies any research which highlights their failings. We can either choose to dis-regard this report and indulge in a name and blame game; or we can commit to looking at our priorities and saying, yes, *our children matter*. The Maori Party says loudly and clearly – our tamariki matter”.

**CHILD WELLBEING REPORT SHOW NZ SCORING BADLY  
ON NEARLY EVERYTHING**

**Embargoed to 11pm, 14 February 2007**

The Public Health Association is calling for action on child wellbeing in the wake of a new report which shows children here are worse off than their counterparts in many other industrialised countries.

The 7<sup>th</sup> report on the wellbeing of children and young people in the world’s advanced economies shows New Zealand consistently scoring in the bottom third of countries on a number of measures including immunisation, spending time with our kids, teenage pregnancy, and having parents out of work.

The report by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre is worrying reading, with New Zealand lagging behind other economically poorer industrialised countries in some measures.

PHA Director Dr Gay Keating says it is therefore no surprise that we are in the bottom four for children surviving the first year of life, and the worst of all industrialised countries in keeping our children alive to adulthood.

“New Zealand ranks 24<sup>th</sup> out of 24 developed countries in the number of our children who die from accident and injury. We need a major rethink now to show that we value our children.

“This can be shown in a number of ways – government laws that shun physical punishment, a family-friendly culture from employers that includes flexible and child-friendly work hours, child-friendly environments in sports clubs, and a focus on effective parenting.

“We need early support for all parents of young children, which means funding effective parenting education and support systems universally – not just targeted to some segments of society. Intensive intervention services for families under pressure are essential, and these services should be available across the country.”

Dr Keating says it is crucial children’s health and wellbeing is prioritised now to prevent a knock-on effect in future generations. She says children who miss out now risk developing long-term physical and mental health issues.

“The health of our children is the responsibility of us all. Investing in our children now will reward us a thousand-fold in the future. If we ever needed a wake-up call, this report is it.”

*The Public Health Association of New Zealand is a non-party political voluntary association, which provides a major forum for the exchange of information and stimulation of debate about public health in New Zealand.*

## How New Zealand cares for its children

Thursday, 15 February 2007, 10:07 am

Press Release: Barnardos

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO0702/S00201.htm>

“The release of the latest UNICEF Innocenti report on the well-being of the children in rich countries is timely,” said Murray Edridge, Chief Executive of Barnardos New Zealand.

“It tells us how poorly our nation’s children fare in international comparisons. We should reflect on that fundamental point as Parliament prepares to debate the repeal of S.59 bill and as the country prepares to celebrate Children’s Day in March.”

“How should we respond to the conclusions of this report? Shall we engage in unseemly political point-scoring? Shall we blame the government and avoid personal and community responsibility? Or shall we take a good hard look at ourselves?”

“The children of this nation demand we do the latter. And if we have any sense of responsibility for the future of our society, that’s exactly what we will do.

Some of the questions the report raises include —

- Which measures are responsive to government policy? Which measures are more a reflection of public attitude?
- Why is there no New Zealand data reported for a number of the specific measures used

in the report?

- To what extent does the report reflect poorly on New Zealand family life?

“Perhaps the most important question of all, however is whether New Zealand society has the capacity and maturity to engage in constructive public discussion of the findings of the report,” concluded Murray Edridge.

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