

GROWING UP *in* NORTH AMERICA:

Child Well-Being in Canada, the United States, and Mexico

FACT SHEET

Overview

Growing Up in North America: Child Well-Being in Canada, the United States & Mexico is a first-of-its-kind report that aims to highlight the conditions and well-being of children and youth in three countries that are part of an increasingly interconnected world. Through a series of indicator reports, the project hopes to analyze and present data from Canada, the United States, and Mexico to build a better understanding of how children are faring and the opportunities and challenges they face looking to the future.

The Children in North America Project explores three broad areas: health and safety, economic security, and capacity and citizenship. On average over the past several decades, children in North America are healthier and better educated. But the indicators for economics, health and safety show a mixed picture—with both positive and negative trends—and serious disparities among groups of children persist. Within nations, not all children have the same opportunity to thrive.

Demographics

There are roughly 120 million children in North America—73 million in the United States, more than 39 million in Mexico, and about 7 million in Canada. They account for over one-quarter of the 427 million people who live on this continent.

Looking forward, it is projected that there will be 120 million children under age 18 in 2020 in North America. Including the 18- to 24-year-old age group raises the total to 166 million young people in 2020—almost the same as today as a result of steady population growth in the United States.

Living Arrangements for Children in North America

- Most children live in a household with two parents.
- Single-parent households in the United States and Canada have leveled over the 1990s.
- Single-parent households in Mexico continue to rise.
- Most children live in urban areas, as the three countries become increasingly urbanized.

Diversity

- In 2000, 39 percent of U.S. children were children of color. Of this group, the fastest growing racial or ethnic group is children of Hispanic origins (12 percent in 1990, rising to 17 percent in 2000).
- Canada has over 200 different ethnic origins reported in the 2001 Census. Sixteen percent of children and youth under 25 belonged to visible minority groups, up from 11 percent in 1991.

Migration

- The United States and Canada are mainly receiving countries for migrants. In 2001, Canada had the fifth largest proportion of foreign-born people to total population in the world, while the United States was eighth. By contrast, Mexico had one of the lowest percentages of foreign-born residents.

Health

- Infant mortality has declined overall in all three nations.
- The rate of asthma in children has increased in all three countries.
- Canada's public health care system has played a critical role in reducing health disparities. Canadians have universal access to publicly funded health care services; in the U.S., 11 percent of children under age 18 did not have any health insurance in 2003; in Mexico, one third of Mexican children under age 14 did not have access to private or public health insurance in 2000.

Economics

- In the U.S., the child poverty rate declined by two percentage points in the 1990s, while Canada's rate barely moved, and Mexico's rate rose by two percentage points in this period.
- It is important to note that the data on poverty do not compare the living standards of children in each of the three countries. The median equivalent income of poor households with children under 18 in Mexico in 1998 was 7,400 pesos (roughly \$940 U.S.). By comparison, the median income of poor children in Canada was \$9,900 (\$6,900 U.S.) in 2000. In the same year, the median income of poor children in the United States was \$8,700.

Education

- Among the nations of North America, Mexico faces a major hurdle in increasing the education levels of its population.
- In 2002, the proportion of the population ages 25 to 64 with less than a high school education was less than 17 percent in Canada, 13 percent in the United States and 87 percent in Mexico.

Human Development Index

The International Human Development Index (HDI) includes indicators from all three of the domains being explored by this project on children growing up in North America. The indicators are: life expectancy at birth; a combined measure of adult literacy rates; primary, secondary, and tertiary education enrollment; and standard of living (as measured by GDP per capita).

In 2003, Canada had the highest ranking in North America – fifth out of 177 countries included in the 2004 Human Development Report, down from fourth place in 2002. The United States was tenth highest (down from the eighth spot in 2002), and Mexico ranked 53rd, maintaining its previous standing.

Mexico still has not reached the HDI score that Canada and the United States achieved in 1975. However, between 1995 and 2000, Mexico progressed from a medium-level HDI classification to a high one. Its HDI grew 18 percent between 1975 and 2003. Over that period, the HDI in the United States and Canada increased at about half that rate.

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Growing Up in North America: Child Well-Being in Canada, the United States & Mexico is a first-of-its kind report issued by the North America Project Partners – the Canadian Council on Social Development, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en México. The report is based on the premise that measuring and monitoring the well-being of children and analyzing sound data pave the way for providing decision makers with evidence on how youth have been profoundly affected by economic and social integration.

The report has been published in three languages and is available at www.childreninnorthamerica.org. A series of reports from the Children in North America Project Partners focusing on health, economic security, and civic engagement is scheduled for release over the next two years.

