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ENHANCING CHILD WELL-BEING TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVE GROWTH

(Note by the Secretary-General)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY^{1 2}

The OECD is uniquely placed to develop a child well-being strategy as part of its Inclusive Growth initiative and use the newly established Centre for Opportunity and Equality (COPE) as a platform for policy dialogue on child well-being policies. Child outcomes and policies have been analysed for many years in different OECD Committees, providing assessments of the challenges facing children and well-tested policy recommendations. However, to make full use of the OECD's comparative advantage in the area of child policy analysis, a comprehensive strategic approach that cuts across the different areas determining child well-being (e.g. education, health and social policy) is now needed.

Children are paying a high price for the large and often rising inequalities in different dimensions of well-being in OECD countries and emerging economies. Across the OECD, one child in seven lives in relative income poverty – and this is one in three for children from migrant families – and child poverty has increased in two-thirds of OECD countries since the Great Recession. Poor children are also more likely to fare badly in a range of well-being dimensions compared with other children: for example, they are more likely to report poor health and/or be obese; they are less likely to do well at school; and they are more likely to experience bullying or have difficulty talking to their parents. In many emerging and developing economies, despite considerable progress, the challenges facing children are even greater than in OECD countries, with children all too often exposed to extreme poverty, insufficient education, high levels of pollution and extreme environmental degradation, with many coerced into the informal labour market.

Poverty and increasing inequalities in income and other dimensions of child well-being curtail future prospects of societies. High levels of income inequality reduce the capacity of the poorest 40% of the population to invest in the education and skills of their children: in 2012, one in six young adults (aged 25-34) attained a lower level of education than their parents. To promote strong and inclusive growth, policy should focus on investing in children and responding to the needs of families in order to enhance child well-being in all its dimensions, including the development of skills and capabilities.

OECD evidence suggests that public policy should invest in the range of policy areas that affect child well-being, including education, health and family policies. Disparate approaches that focus on a single aspect of child well-being are unlikely to be effective if they do not address other barriers to child

¹ The development of a comprehensive approach to child well-being is an initiative of the Office of the Secretary General as a key –and currently missing – contribution to the Inclusive Growth Initiative. The OECD Secretary-General identified child well-being as an important policy challenge in his 2016 Strategic Orientations. Following from this, experts from the Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, the Directorate of Education and Skills, and the Directorate of Statistics developed this paper for consideration of the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee, the Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy and Education Policy Committee and to inform the discussions of Council and MCM.

² The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

development. For public investment in children to be most effective, it should take place in a cross-cutting manner. Integrated strategies are instrumental in helping children fulfil their potential and ensuring that equal opportunities are provided for all.

Timing of investment in children is also critical. Support for children's educational, health and material well-being is one of the most cost-effective policy interventions, provided it starts early and is sustained throughout childhood. Successful early-life interventions are critical to the development of a range of cognitive (e.g. language and numerical skills) and social (e.g. self-confidence and self-control, pro-social behaviour) skills, with long-lasting effects on employment, income, educational attainment and health.

In most OECD countries, social spending devoted to children is lower than that for the retired population. At the same time, many countries do not have a child-centred policy addressing children's diverse needs from the early years of life, while they face important changes in the composition of child population and in their family background. Greater investment and more integrated policies are needed in light of these challenges, and to cope with the rising inequalities across children.

Building on the existing OECD child well-being framework, this scoping paper discusses child well-being outcomes and inequalities in its different dimensions, including conditions in which families with children live (e.g. material and living conditions) and child-centred aspects of well-being (such as health, education and subjective well-being). It identifies key policy challenges and how future OECD work can assist countries in addressing them, including by improving the evidence base on the drivers of child well-being; identifying the factors and policies that work across the range of well-being dimensions; and emphasising the role of early childhood interventions in an Inclusive Growth strategy.

ENHANCING CHILD WELL-BEING TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVE GROWTH

1. A child strategy is needed to ensure Inclusive Growth

1. Successfully promoting Inclusive Growth requires policies that can improve living standards and generate a better sharing of increased prosperity among all social groups (OECD, 2015a). There is clear evidence that inequalities develop early in life, and that childhood experiences are important determinants of later outcomes. Policy interventions early in life, when problems originate, are more powerful to prevent disadvantage during the life-cycle and more cost-effective than postponing policy action until later. Therefore, enhancing child well-being is crucial to promote strong and inclusive growth and improving the future prospects of our societies. This is also recognised in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which explicitly mention infants and children as target groups for poverty reduction, food security, health, education and gender equality. Child well-being must therefore be an integral element of any policy strategy to promote inclusive growth.

2. Child well-being cuts across a range of dimensions which interact, including material, physical, and educational factors; and is strongly affected by living arrangements and the composition of families with children. Children from poorer families are more likely to report poor health (18%) than those from affluent families (11%)³, and show a rate of obesity that, at 4%, is twice the level among children from richer families. Around 1 in 8 children from more affluent families have difficulty talking to their parents, as compared to more than 1 in 6 among children from poorer households. In addition, 1 in 10 children in OECD countries report having been bullied at least twice in the past two months, but this rises to 1 in 8 among those from poorer families.

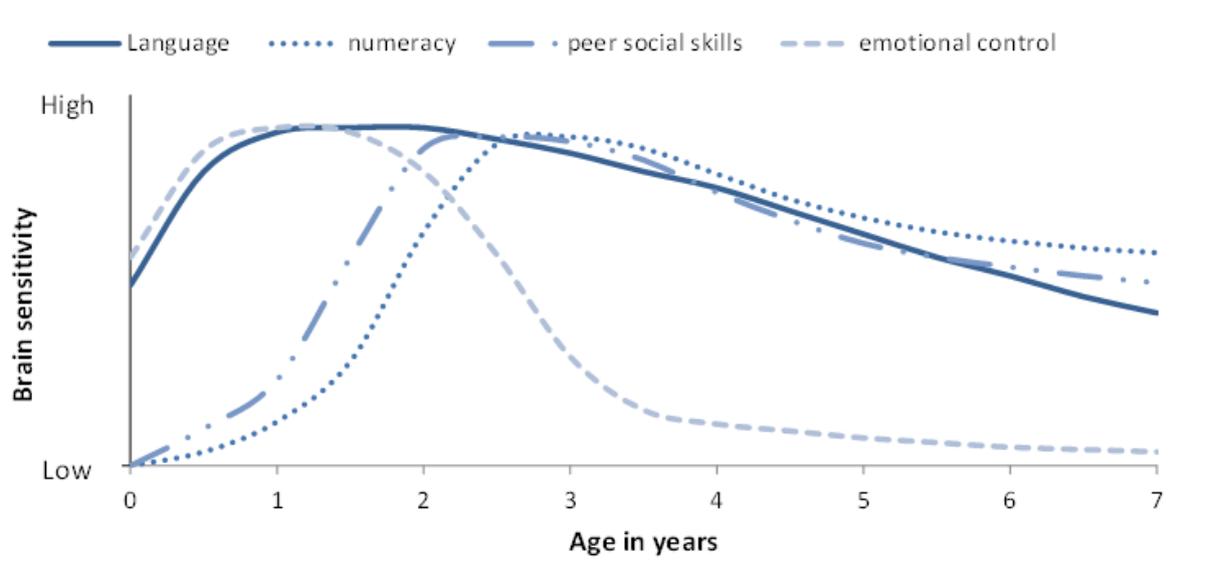
3. The OECD flagship study, *In It Together* (OECD, 2015b), showed that high income inequality reduces the capacity of the poorest 40% of the population to invest in their own skills and education and in those of their children. In 2012 one in six young adults (aged 25-34) attained a lower level of education than their parents (OECD, 2014a), curtailing social mobility. Combating child poverty and reducing the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage are needed to lower overall inequality and increase inequality of opportunity.

4. Policies to support children's educational, health and material well-being must start in early childhood and be sustained throughout childhood (OECD, 2009 and 2011a). The pay-offs from investing early in children are enormous: United States research suggests that each dollar invested in children at age 4 yields a net return ranging from 7 to 12 USD per person (Heckman et al., 2010), and that these benefits are especially large for children from a disadvantaged background. OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data show that 15-years old students who attended pre-primary education for at least a year are likely to have higher maths scores than those who did not, the gap being equivalent to almost one year of formal schooling after accounting for students' socio-economic status (OECD, 2013a).

³ Family Affluence is defined as a four-item measure of family wealth that includes: car possession, the availability of a bedroom for each child, holiday or travel over the last 12 months, and the number of computers owned by the family. The scale has been developed in the World Health Organization (WHO) Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study.

5. The effects of these early interventions at childhood are also long-lasting. A five-year-old's level of self-regulation, oral language and communication, numeracy, fine motor skills, locus of control and social skills are predictive of their later outcomes in terms of employment, income, educational attainment and health (Schoon et al., forthcoming). The brain develops rapidly in the earliest years of life, and its capacity to adapt and develop slows with age (Figure 1). Early life-interventions are also critical to build social and non-cognitive skills (e.g. personality traits, self-confidence and self-control, pro-social behaviour), which are even more important skills in the new world of work (Kautz et al., 2014).

Figure 1. Sensitive periods in early brain development



Reading note: Many brain functions become less malleable over time. Language acquisition, numeracy, social skills development and emotional control have their peak sensitivity levels in the first 4 years of life.

Source: Adapted from *Council for Early Childhood Development*, (2010), in Naudeau S. et al. (2011).

6. Many OECD countries have put in place policies to support families with children with the objective of raising their living standards and helping parents reconcile work and family commitments. Overall, investments in early childhood are much lower than expenditures covering late childhood. Education policies have evolved to help a growing number of children enter Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)⁴ facilities and pursue education opportunities beyond compulsory schooling years. Medical progress has made earlier detection of health issues easier and leads to more effective interventions. However, policies are often developed in silos with no or limited consideration of how family, educational, social and health issues interact (OECD, 2015c).

7. The benefits of integrated services of children and families are multiple. From the perspective of children and families, they have the potential to improve access to services and to address the multiple underlying issues of children simultaneously (OECD, 2015c). For providers, service integration can reduce the cost burden of delivering support and care, as duplication of services are reduced thanks to better sharing of information and of human and material resources.

⁴ Early childhood education and care includes all arrangements providing care and education for children under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or programme content (OECD, 2001).

8. Investment in childhood programmes benefits not only enrolled children and their families, but the whole society in the long-run, by expanding the skilled workforce and increasing their productivity and earnings. Less child poverty means that society reaps the benefits of a better educated and healthier population, with lower needs of future public transfers and support as well as a greater capacity of people to make a full use of their potential. Expanding policies towards children thus offers a win-win opportunity for children, their parents and society as a whole. An efficient and cost-effective strategy requires that the investments made across childhood to be higher, more equitable and comprehensive.

9. With the knowledge available today about what matters for child development it is now possible to develop more effective child-centred policies in to an effective “OECD child strategy”. This strategic approach identifies policies to improve childhood opportunities from an early stage thus building a solid base for social inclusion and mobility to enable all of society to reap the benefits of economic growth.

1.1 The OECD is uniquely placed to develop an effective child strategy

10. The OECD is uniquely placed to develop a child well-being strategy as part of its Inclusive Growth initiative and use the newly established Centre for Opportunity and Equality (COPE) as a platform for policy dialogue on child well-being policies. The *OECD Framework for Inclusive Growth* is an analytical tool that helps policy makers **measure** the different types of outcomes for different social groups, **identify** the synergies, trade-offs and unintended consequences of policy actions, and **consider** the impacts of policies on different social groups, including specific target groups like children. Moreover, child outcomes and policies have been analysed for many years in different OECD Committees providing insights and analyses of the challenges facing children and well-tested policy recommendations. What has been lacking so far is a **comprehensive strategy** that cuts across the different dimensions of child well-being and draws attention from top levels of government.

11. **Family and child policies** have been central in OECD work on social policies. In 1998 the *Meeting of the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee at Ministerial level on Social Policy* chaired by the Honourable Donna E. Shalala, Secretary of Health and Human Services of the United States, recognised the crucial role of “*early childhood development in establishing a sound basis for further learning, with potentially substantial benefits especially for children from disadvantaged families*”, and called for more work on family-friendly social and employment policies. In 2005, Social Affairs Ministers called on the OECD to “*identify which interventions alleviate and will contribute to the eventual eradication of child poverty, break the cycle of inter-generational deprivation, and develop the capacity of children to make successful transitions through the life course. The OECD should look at the potential role of policy in supporting families*”. Child-centred work has been further expanded with the publication of *Doing Better for Children* in 2009 and the development of the *OECD Family database* and its *Child Well-being Module*.

12. The OECD has a proven track record in **measurement and analysis of child well-being and child development** across a range of policy dimensions. Data on early childhood education and care have been collected and published in *Education at a Glance* since 1997 and a special chapter covering this issue was released in the same series in 2012. Other examples are the *Starting Strong* (since 2001) and *Babies and Bosses* (since 2002) series and the 2011 volume *Doing Better for Families*. The *OECD Better Life Initiative*, launched in 2011, led to the inclusion of a dedicated chapter on child well-being (*How is Life for Children?*) in OECD (2015d) *How's Life? 2015*. Programmes such as *PISA* and *Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)* have been providing internationally comparable data to promote better understanding on how to improve child learning and well-being. Through its new *Longitudinal Study of Social and Emotional Skills in Cities (LSEC)* and *Child well-being and learning study*, the OECD will strengthen the evidence base on social and emotional skills and well-being of children. The on-going work of *Education 2030*, *PISA 2018 Global Competence* assessment and *Education for Social Progress* are also

contributing to better understand the skills that children should acquire to contribute to the development of an open-minded society.

13. The OECD has also been working on **health issues affecting children and youth**, in particular obesity and mental health issues. The analysis in *Obesity and the Economics of Prevention - Fit not fat* (OECD, 2010a) shows that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to suffer from obesity and develop long-term conditions such as diabetes that will affect their health, employment and income prospects as adults. Another area where early intervention is crucial is mental health. OECD analysis on mental health and work shows more than one-half of all mental illnesses have their onset in childhood and adolescence. Policies targeted at young people thus have a key role to play in ensuring good educational outcomes and successful labour market transitions for children with mental health problems (*Fit mind, fit job: From evidence to practice in mental health and work*: OECD 2015e). The OECD series “Investing in Youth” and its focus on disadvantaged youth confirm the importance of early identification of, and response to, problems in schools to help young people reconnect with education, training and employment.

14. However, disparate approaches that focus on a single aspect of child well-being are unlikely to be effective if they do not address other barriers to child development (OECD, 2009; OECD, 2015c). Policy needs to ensure integrated service delivery, which both prevents the development of disadvantage and provides multi-faceted support to the multiple needs of children (OECD, 2015c). Evidence also shows that, to build more inclusive societies and more dynamic economies, it is necessary to ensure the right policy interventions at early stages in people’s lives. Integrated strategies are instrumental in helping children fulfil their potential and ensuring that equal opportunities are provided for all.

15. The OECD should now bring together this large body of analysis of economic, social, educational and health determinants of children’s well-being as part of the OECD Inclusive Growth initiative. In doing so, the OECD can rely on its excellent and long-standing cooperation with other actors in the field, such as the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the Health Behaviour of School Children (HBSC) survey, Children’s Worlds and other international and civil society organisations (OECD, 2015f). These organisations provide data that are useful to analyse the multiple dimensions of child well-being as well as country-specific information on institutional contexts, while in some cases also helping to extend coverage to non-Members.

16. The strengths of an OECD-agenda consist in placing child well-being in a life-cycle perspective, stressing the importance of early childhood experiences for health, education and employment outcomes later in life; and addressing these challenges in a comprehensive ways. By analysing the determinants of child well-being, identifying the most important intervention points for policies, and following children along the life-cycle into youth and working-age a comprehensive policy agenda for child well-being and inclusive growth can be designed. The emerging results of the OECD’s horizontal project **Preventing Ageing Unequally** confirm that the foundations of inequalities at older ages, including differences in life expectancy and life-time incomes, are laid early. As such an OECD-strategy on child well-being is a logical follow-up to the horizontal project on ageing and inequality which comes to term at the end of 2016.

17. Building on this rich experience, the OECD child strategy seeks to develop a more comprehensive and co-ordinated approach towards enhancing child well-being based on its existing framework for the analysis of Child well-being (Annex 1) to provide better policy guidance and — as with ongoing Gender, Ageing and Youth work — to firmly embed Child well-being in the Inclusive Growth narrative. This scoping paper stresses the wide-ranging experience accumulated by the OECD in this field, and the leading role that the OECD will have to advance this agenda. Section 2 discusses main issues regarding child well-being and its different dimensions. Section 3 identifies key policy challenges to be

addressed in order to enhance child well-being and promote Inclusive Growth. Section 4 outlines future work options to advance the child well-being agenda.

2. Key issues

18. Children’s lives have changed substantially over the past decades. Changes in family relations due to divorce, separations and re-partnering, as well as changing labour market conditions of parents, have widened the diversity of family settings in which children grow up (Abela and Walker, 2013; Amato et al., 2015; Pailhé et al., 2014). This diversity affects the material living conditions of children and their exposure to poverty; it also creates new challenges for parents to combine work and family, to raise their children and meet their needs (sub-section 2.1). The school environment has also changed dramatically over the past decades. While a growing number of children attend care and education services before compulsory school, and many more children enter school today than in the past, not all children benefit from these educational services, and disparities in educational outcomes are widening (2.2). Health-related risks are growing from the very early years of life, and inequalities in subjective well-being are large (2.3). Overall, available evidence suggests that the gap in child outcomes between families of different socio-economic status has increased over time, so that “destinies” of children are increasingly diverging (Bernardi et al., 2014; Amato et al., 2015; Putnam, 2015).

19. For the purpose of illustrating the most important child well-being issues, children are defined in this paper as the group aged 0-17, unless stated otherwise.

2.1. Child poverty and income inequalities

2.1.1. Children are more exposed to poverty than the rest of the population

20. Children are paying a high price for the widespread rise in income inequalities observed across OECD countries (OECD, 2015b): nearly one child in seven across the OECD lives in relative income-poverty, a higher rate than for the total population (Figure 2). Moreover, child poverty⁵ has increased in more than two-thirds of OECD countries since the onset of the Great Recession. Children in migrant families are particularly vulnerable: in 2012, more than one-third of the children living in a migrant household were poor, compared to less than one-fifth for children in native-born households (OECD/EU, 2015).

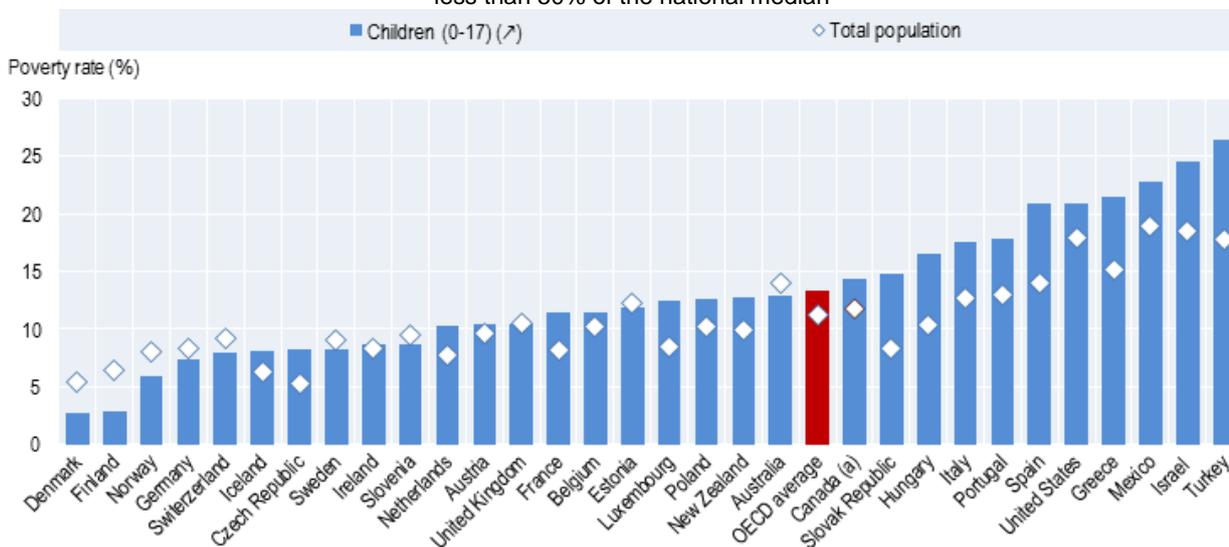
21. Combatting child poverty is also a big challenge for many emerging and developing countries.⁶ Whilst substantial progress has been made in reducing poverty globally, many children are being left behind: almost half of all people living in extreme poverty — i.e. those struggling to survive on under USD 1.9 a day — are children. While the use of different definitions makes it difficult to compare children’s exposure to poverty among low, medium and high income countries, 58% of all children in South Africa are estimated to live below the national poverty lines (GCECP, 2015). This situation implies that it will be a challenge to meet Goal 1 of the SDGs, which includes a target of halving the proportion of children living in poverty according to national definitions by 2030.

⁵ The term ‘child poverty’ is used for ease of language but denotes the proportion of children who live in poor households – poverty not being a characteristic attributable to children.

⁶ This paper focuses on income poverty and neglects broader measures of material deprivation (such as those developed by, for example, Eurostat http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Material_deprivation_statistics_-_early_results) due to the availability of comparable figures for all OECD countries.

Figure 2. Income poverty rates among children (2012)

Share (%) of children (0-17) who live in households with an equivalised disposable income (post-tax and transfers) of less than 50% of the national median



Notes; Data for Canada refer to 2011. Household income is equivalised in such a way that the needs of a household of four members are considered as twice as large as those of a person living alone.

Source: [OECD Income Distribution Database](#)

22. Children growing up in poverty or social exclusion are less likely than their better-off peers to do well at school, enjoy good health, report satisfaction with their life and realise their full potential upon reaching adult age. By contrast, children from more affluent families tend to develop better skills in reading and problem-solving, are less likely to drop out of school without a diploma, and are more likely to complete tertiary education.⁷ Evidence also suggests that the gap in child-outcomes between poorer and richer households in the United States has widened over time, mainly as a result of growing investment of time and resources by richer parents in the education and *extra-curricular* activities of their children (Putnam, 2015). A striking example of the divide between poor and affluent children is the development of a large “vocab gap” already at a very young age: children growing up in poor neighbourhoods and/or from lower-income families in the United States may hear up to 30 million fewer words than their affluent counterparts by age three (Fernald et al, 2013). There is also growing evidence that child poverty damages brain development and reduces learning outcomes later on in life.

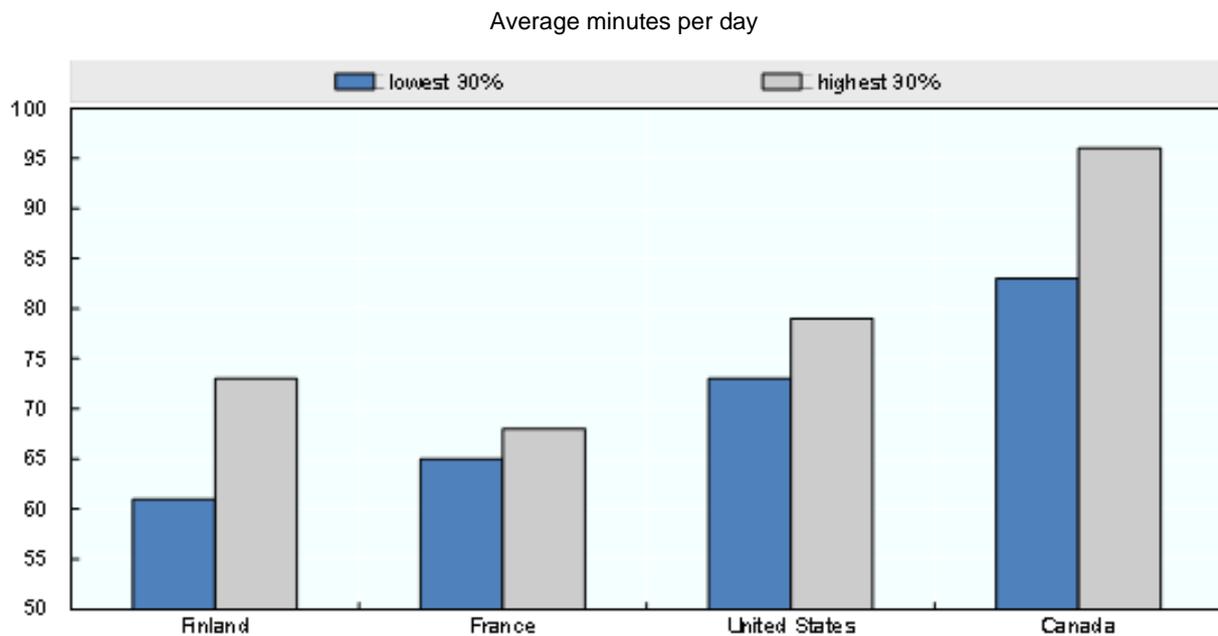
23. Parental joblessness is a major determinant of children’s poverty risk. In 2012, one in ten children lived in a jobless household on average across the OECD, which disproportionally increases child poverty risks (Figure A1).

⁷ Socio-economically advantaged children can be raised by “helicopter parents” who hover overhead and pay “too much” attention to their child's or children's experiences and problems, particularly at educational institutions. Some studies suggest that overprotective, overbearing or over-controlling parents can cause long-term mental health problems for their offspring, limit a child’s independence and leave them less able to regulate their own behaviour (Stafford et al., 2015).

2.1.2. *Grappling with money and time crunches*

24. Many parents struggle to strike a good balance between work and family responsibilities, and not all can afford good quality care. Juggling work and family commitments often leads to stress and financial strain that weigh heavily on children. Making it easier for parents to reconcile their work and family life is key to reducing child poverty and enhancing child well-being, as it shapes parental ability to provide income, care and education to their children. Many parents in low-income families work long hours to make ends meet, and have too little time to engage in high-quality parenting activities (Figure 3), while they cannot afford to purchase high quality ECEC services.

Figure 3. Time spend by parents in educational and recreational activities¹, by household income group



1) Educational and recreational childcare include activities such as helping children with their homework, reading and playing games with them, and any childcare activity that is not directly meant to meet the basic needs of children (e.g. feeding, or providing medical care). The list of activities included differs by country, depending on the level of detail of each TUS.

Source: National Time Use Surveys.

2.1.3. *Fathers underinvest in time with children*

25. Work-life balance issues concern both fathers and mothers, and not just those in paid employment but also those at home rearing children. There is a large body of evidence that children benefit from closer involvement of fathers in childcare and education. Where fathers participate more in childcare and family life, children enjoy higher cognitive and emotional outcomes and physical health. And fathers who engage more with their children tend to report greater life satisfaction and better physical and mental health than those who care for and interact less with their children (Cabrera and Tamis-LeMonda, 2013).

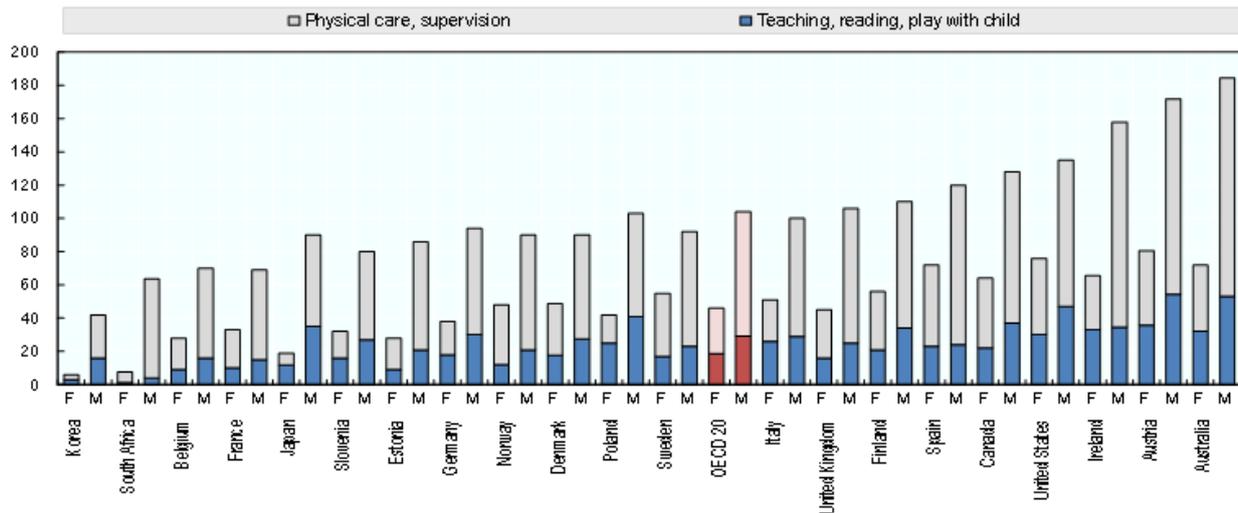
26. In many countries, fathers are more involved in parenting activities today than they were a few decades ago (Gauthier et al., 2004). However, fathers continue to spend far less time on childcare than mothers do (Figure 4), especially during the child's early years. Policies fostering father's involvement are important for different reasons, including promoting father's participation in educational and care activities as children grow up, and encouraging fathers to maintain a close relationship with their children when parents separate. Fathers who care for children early tend to stay more involved as children grow up.

Therefore policy interventions when children are very young are potentially the most effective. However, despite some progress, only about one third of OECD countries provide fathers-specific paid leave entitlements to care for a young child for 2 months or more (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Parental time with children

Daily minutes, 2013 or latest available year

F stands for fathers and M for mothers



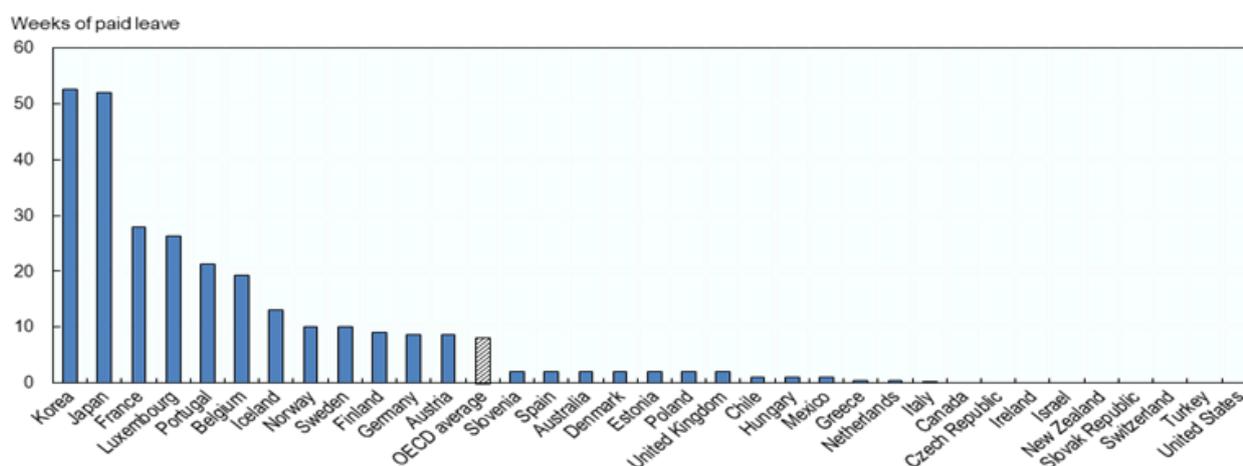
Note: Data refer to the amount of time spent on childcare that respondents report themselves in their time-use diaries as a primary activity (i.e. excluding time spent with children while performing a different primary activity). Basic childcare includes childcare and child supervision, as well as time spent in transporting children (although in the case Ireland and Korea time spent transporting children is not included). Data refer to care for children under the age of 18 (except for Australia and Canada, where data refer to children aged 15 years and below). Data refer to 1999-2000 for Estonia; 2000 for South Africa; 2000-01 for Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, United Kingdom; 2001 for Denmark; 2001-02 for Germany; 2003-4 for Poland; 2005 for Belgium and Ireland; 2006 for Japan; 2008-09 for Australia, Italy; 2009 for Korea; 2009-10 for Finland, France and Spain; 2010 for Canada; and 2013 for the United States.

Data comparability issues affect the interpretation of the data. For instance, most countries categorize parental time on basis of the same activity list regardless of the age of the child. However, the activity list used in Korea varies with the age of the child: Korean parents can record their times under 'teaching, visiting schools and other activities' with their school-age children but 'reading and playing' are only listed for pre-school children. School-aged children spend relatively long hours at school while their parents work for comparatively long hours, so that their time spent with parents is lower than in most other OECD countries.

Source: How's Life 2015 - Measuring Well-being - © OECD 2015

Figure 5. Paid leave for fathers

Weeks of paid paternity and paid parental leave that can be taken only by the father, 2015



Note: Information refers to statutory entitlements in place as of April 2015, and includes paid paternity leave, 'father quotas' or periods of paid parental leave that can be used only by the father (or 'other' parent) and cannot be transferred to the mother (or 'first' parent), and any weeks of paid sharable leave that must be taken by the father (or 'other' parent) in order for the family to qualify for 'bonus' weeks of paid leave. For more detail, see the OECD Family Database.

Note regarding Canada: Since January 1, 2006, in Canada the province of Quebec has been responsible for providing maternity, paternity, parental and adoption benefits to residents of Quebec through the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP). In Quebec, fathers are entitled to 3 or 5 weeks of dedicated, paid paternity leave and benefits, in addition to weeks of shareable parental leave.

Source: [OECD Family Database](#)

27. However, even where paid leave for fathers is available, take-up rates are often low, especially among low-income fathers. Fathers usually take a few days off work right after the birth of a baby, but in many countries they account for less than 20% of those taking paid parental leave later, with take-up rates highest in Nordic countries and Portugal (Figure A2). The most generous leave entitlements exist in Japan and Korea (Figure 5): a full year of paid leave is reserved just for the father but few men take advantage of it. These same countries have some of the lowest parental time spent with children (Figure 4). So leave entitlements are only one aspect of policy to consider. Men are less likely than women to take paid parental leave (Figure 4, panel B). Traditional gender norms and cultural traditions still prevent fathers from taking leave: in all but six OECD countries, at least 50% of people surveyed by the International Social Survey Programme believe that paid leave should be taken 'entirely' or 'mostly' by the mother, and this is above 80% in the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic and Turkey.

2.1.4. *Children's living arrangements are diversifying*

28. The majority of children still grow up in couple-families; but living arrangements of children and families have been changing over the past decades due to changing partnership relations and evolving labour market behaviour of family members. In OECD countries, almost 1 in 6 children live today with parents who are not married, and this has increased substantially since 2005 (when it was 1 in 10); also, 1 in 6 children live in households with a sole parent, and about 9 in 100 adolescents aged 11-15 live in a stepfamily.

29. At the same time a growing number of children experience changes in the family setting during their childhood, as a consequence of separations and possible re-partnering of parents. Re-partnering clearly allows for a pooling of resources and such "reconstituted" households bring with them new dynamics between step-parents, step-children and step-siblings.

30. Moreover, the rise in female labour force participation has profoundly modified family life; only a minority of children nowadays receive personal care on a full-time basis by their mother throughout their childhood, as used to be the case; when this is the case, among some better-off families, it becomes an important source of inequalities among children.

31. Many parents rely on a combination of formal and informal childcare solutions to reconcile their work and family lives and these arrangements can be rather complex. The increasingly diverse family settings in which children grow up affect the economic and material living conditions of children as well as the quality of parent-child relationships and children's subjective well-being (Bernardi et al., 2014; Amato et al., 2015).

32. In emerging economies, parental migration, later childbirth and adult mortality mean that a sizeable number of children are growing up solely with grandparents or other siblings. For example, around a quarter of the child population in the People's Republic of China and 12% of children in Indonesia live without their parents who have migrated to urban areas. The school performance of these children is relatively low and they frequently report poorer psychological, social and emotional development than those children who live with their parents (Jia and Tian, 2010).

2.2. *Large disparities in educational outcomes*

33. Children experience a critical "development window" in the first few years of their lives. Their early learning development during this period has significant impacts on their later well-being, life chances and success. Children who do not make sufficient progress in the first few years of their childhood face huge barriers in catching up sufficiently to achieve success at school (Naudeau et al, 2011). If a child has not developed early emotional, social and cognitive skills by around the age of seven years, it is both difficult and costly to address these development gaps thereafter. And although each child is unique, the basic patterns, or principles, of growth and development are universal, predictable, and orderly (European Commission, 2014).

34. A study of longitudinal research has found significant effects of early learning on a range of outcomes in later adulthood. Children with strong early learning were much more likely to have better education outcomes, employment, income, socio-economic status, physical and mental health, well-being, civic engagement and be less likely to participate in crime (Schoon, forthcoming).

35. The types of early learning that support children most to grow into healthy, sound citizens are a combination of emotional, social and cognitive skills. These early skills as a package support on-going skill development and success, although some skills are more predictive of particular outcomes than others. Early self-regulation is predictive of a wide range of outcomes, during later childhood, adolescence and in adulthood. Children's early abilities in controlling their impulses and maintaining their attention affects their success in education, employment, socio-economic status, health and their overall sense of well-being. Children with very poor self-regulation struggle to control their impulses and to live healthy, lawful lives.

36. Similarly, children's ability to understand others and express themselves has effects across all domains as they move through childhood into adulthood. While language is a cognitive skill, the ability to communicate with others affects children's emotional and social well-being, later manifesting in labour market and health outcomes. Other areas of children's early learning that are important includes early numeracy, particularly predictive of health outcomes, and children's physical development. The development of fine motor skills, for example, correlates strongly to later educational achievement (Schoon, forthcoming).

37. The largest determinant of a child's early learning is the quality of his/her home learning environment. The engagement families have with their young children is more influential than parents' income levels or their employment status. An influential study on children's early development noted that "it is what parent do that matters, rather than who they are" (Sylva et al., 2004). Children's home environments can be improved by parenting and/or outreach programmes and by engagement between families and early childhood education providers.

38. Both early childhood education and care (ECEC) and early schooling can accelerate the learning children have had at home. For disadvantaged children, ECEC can mitigate the negative effects of a poor start. However, not all ECEC is effective for all children. Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) are those that are tailored to children's needs and contexts. DAP are pedagogical practices and activities that are selected to match the individual needs of children. Such tailored approaches impact particularly on children's emotional development and their attitudes and motivation for learning (Anders, forthcoming).

2.2.1. *Disadvantaged families underuse ECEC services, but get greater returns*

39. Access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)⁸ is key to foster child cognitive and non-cognitive development, and helps parents get a better balance of work and family life. Great progress has been made in the development of such programmes in many OECD countries. In 2012, about one in three children below the age of four, and more than four in five of the three-to-five year olds were enrolled in formal childcare services on average across the OECD.

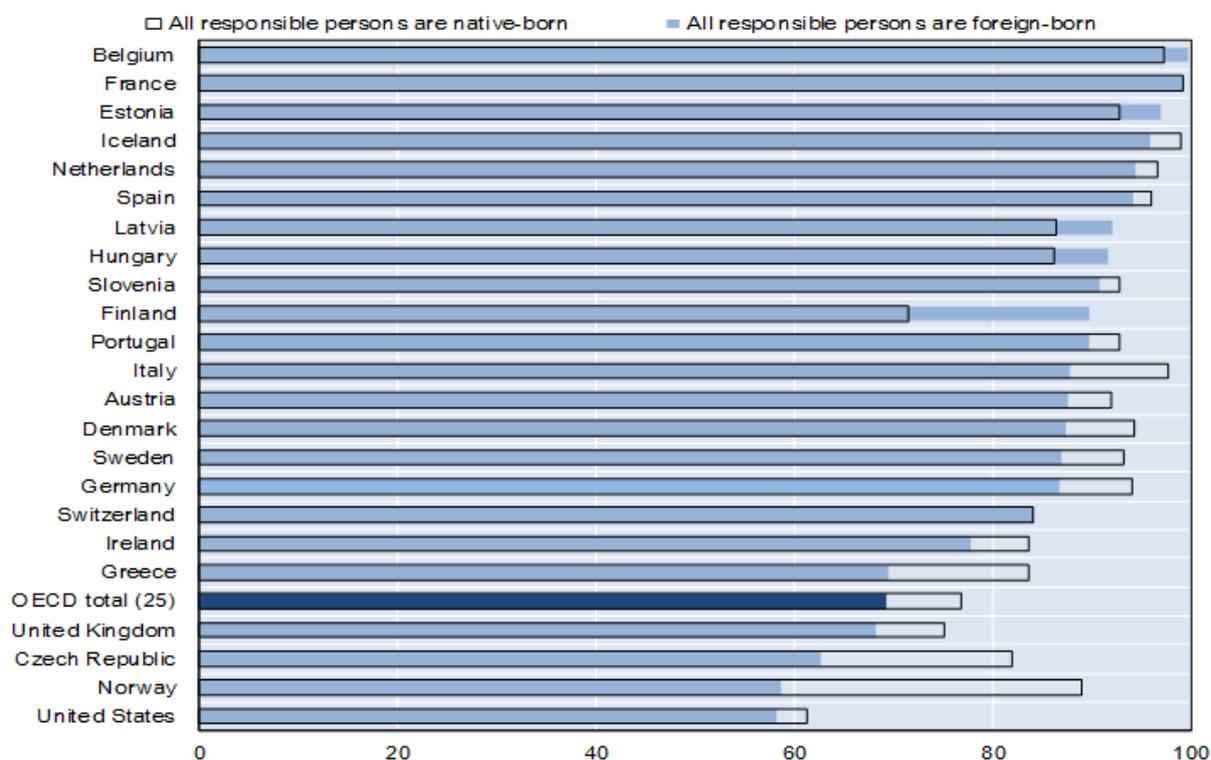
40. Childcare facilities are underused by low income and/or migrant families, however. For instance, an average of 69% of 3 to 6 years old children born abroad were enrolled in pre-primary education in 2012 – an attendance rate that was 7 percentage points lower than among their native-born peers (Figure 6).⁹ Yet, the benefits in reading skills at age 15 from attending preschool for at least one year is high for foreign-born children, and significantly higher than for their native-born peers in most OECD countries (OECD/EU, 2015).

⁸ Early childhood education and care includes all arrangements providing care and education for children under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or programme content (OECD, 2001).

⁹ In most countries, children with native parents are more likely to attend preschool than those with foreign-born parents, except in cases for which the obstacles for children of immigrants to attend preschool are weaker because one parent speaks a host-country language or is an expatriate from another OECD country.

Figure 6. Early childhood education attendance rates, 2012

Percentages, children aged 3 to 5 (not including 6 years olds)



Notes: The definition of a responsible person varies with the source. The EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU SILC) identifies one or two persons “responsible for the household”. It considers that they are the person(s) owning or renting the accommodation or the person(s) to whom the accommodation is provided if it is provided free. If more than two persons share the responsibility, only the oldest two are registered; and the United States Current Population Survey: The term “householder” refers to the person (or one of the persons) in whose name the housing unit is owned or rented (maintained) or, if there is no such person, any adult member, excluding roomers, boarders, or paid employees.

Early childhood education programmes encompass such pre-primary education provision as preschool, kindergarten, and day care. The data cover children aged three to less than six years old. Figures may include children already attending primary school, depending on the age at which compulsory schooling starts in some countries. Immigrant children considered here are those 3-6 year-olds living in households where all responsible persons were born abroad. Children who are considered to be native-born children are those where all responsible persons in the household were born in the host country. For more information on children and adults living in migrant households, see (OECD, 2015).

Sources: European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) 2012. United States: American Community Survey (ACS) 2012, in OECD/EU (2015) - © OECD 2015.

2.2.2. *Not all learning environments are conducive to effective learning and well-being*

41. The quality of learning environments is essential for children’s learning and development not only during the early years but all throughout formal schooling. For the early years, evidence suggests (OECD 2012) that better interactions between staff and children is associated with higher children’s developmental outcomes, while low quality ECEC services may harm children’s development instead of fostering it. ECEC services are increasingly monitored and evaluated to enhance their quality, but high quality services are not yet provided to all children (OECD, 2015g).

42. The quality of school environment also matters at older ages (Box 1). OECD PISA results show that 15 years-old students who are in a school characterised by good teacher-student relationships, high

expectations and classrooms conducive to learning perform better than those who are in other schools (OECD, 2013a).

Box 1. Childhood in the 21st Century: Understanding the impact of change

What is the nature of modern childhood? Older, better educated parents are increasingly advocating for their children and playing an active role in their education. Safer environments have helped reduce child mortality across all of the OECD. New technologies help parents monitor their children's well-being, and in case of a problem help is just a phone call – or WhatsApp message – away. On a number of measures, modern children's lives have clearly improved: better health care, public safety, and support for their physical and mental well-being. At the same time, however, there are signs that the modern world has created new stresses for children. Children in the 21st century are more likely to be sole children, with fewer opportunities to interact with siblings. Children and adolescents are pushed to do more by "helicopter parents", who hover over their children to protect them from potential harm. In some countries, children are reporting higher levels of stress and less sleep. Child obesity is increasing across the OECD, bringing with it a host of potential physical, social and psychological challenges. New technologies help parents stay connected to their children but also mean that new cyber risks (for example, cyber-bullying) can follow them from the school yard into their homes.

The Childhood in the 21st century project intends to examine these issues in the context of education. It will address questions such as: How does the transformed nature of childhood in the 21st century affect the role of education? How can teachers and schools work together with parents and communities to protect and guide children while still allowing them to be children, and learn by making mistakes? And what do these impacts imply for school planning, infrastructure, teaching and learning at each stage of the education system?

2.2.3. Poor school performance of children is difficult to overcome

43. Poor performance at school can have long-lasting consequences, limiting future prospects both for individuals and society as a whole. PISA 2012 shows that more than one in four 15-year-old students in OECD countries has not attained a baseline level of proficiency¹⁰ in at least one of the three core subjects assessed by PISA: reading, mathematics and science. In the 64 countries and territories that participated in PISA 2012, almost 13 million 15-year-old students are in this situation (OECD, 2016a). Understanding the main risk factors of low performance (socio-economic status, attendance to preschool programmes, immigrant background and family structure) and designing specific educational policies that address special needs and facilitate access to quality education for these disadvantaged groups can help reduce the number of low-performing students (OECD, 2015h).

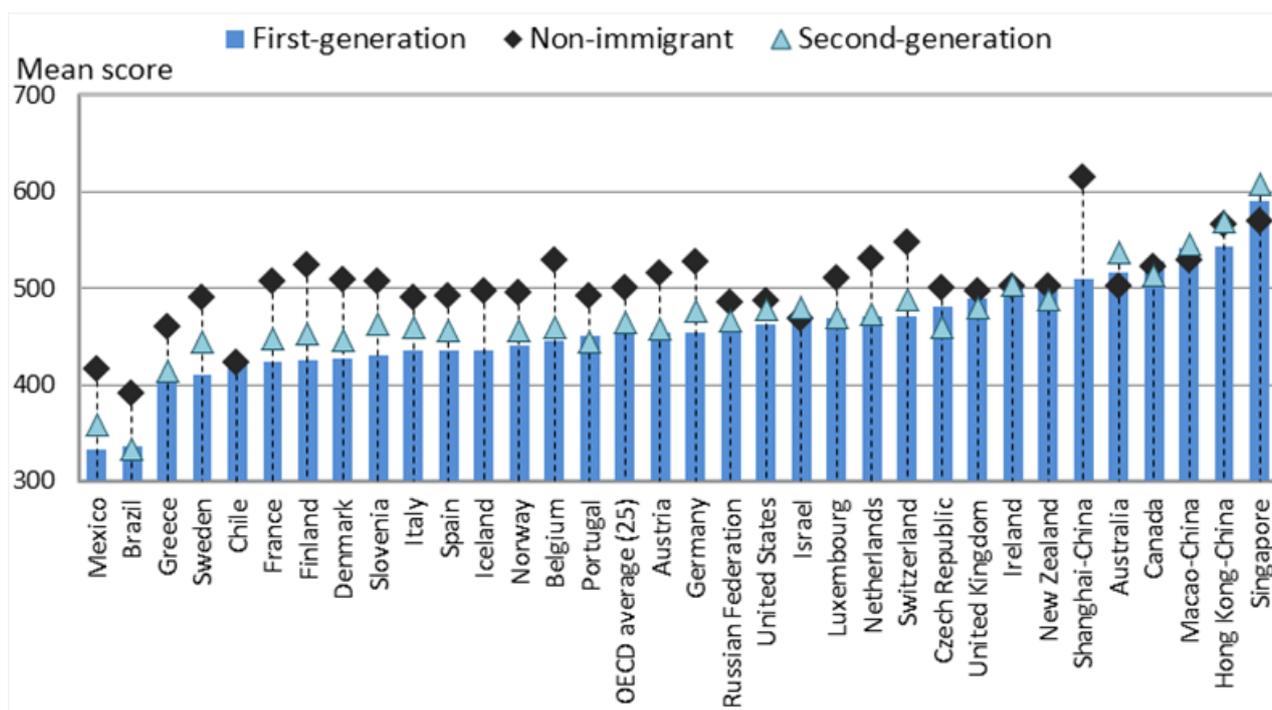
2.2.4. Students born abroad face more challenges than their native peers

44. The population of students born abroad in OECD countries has been growing significantly over the past decades, a trend that is set to accelerate further in the near future. Moreover, the current humanitarian crisis due to higher inflows of refugees into Europe is unprecedented in terms of the number of people involved. Particular challenges arise for the children of refugees, many of whom did not get much schooling due to the conflict in their origin countries, and who often suffer from psychological and even physical trauma. Helping migrant children to successfully integrate at school and into their host communities is then key for children's future and the prospects of the host country (OECD, 2015i; OECD/EU, 2015). The way education systems respond to immigration is crucial: PISA results indicate

¹⁰ The 'baseline level of proficiency' is defined here as students who fail to reach Level 2 in reading as measured by the PISA test; at this level, they lack the essential skills needed to participate effectively and productively in society. Among students who fail to reach the baseline level of performance in mathematics, reading or science, they can, at best, only handle the simplest and most obvious tasks, most can be expected not to continue with education beyond compulsory schooling, and therefore risk facing difficulties using mathematics, reading and science concepts throughout their lives. The average OECD country has 19% of its students below Level 2.

that, in most countries and territories, first-generation immigrant students perform worse than native students (Figure 7). Additionally, in most of OECD countries, students born in the country in which they took the PISA test, but whose parents are foreign-born (i.e. the second generations), perform somewhere between children who migrated (first-generations) and those who did not or who have at least one parent born in the host country (native students), suggesting that schools do not suffice to fill family background gaps.

Figure 7. Students' performance in mathematics by immigrant status



Countries are ordered from left to right by ascending order of native-student's performance in mathematics.

Note: OECD average compares only countries with valid data on first- and second-generation immigrant students. 40 PISA score points correspond to approximately one year of schooling.

Source: OECD, PISA 2012 Database.

2.3. Growing health-related risks for children

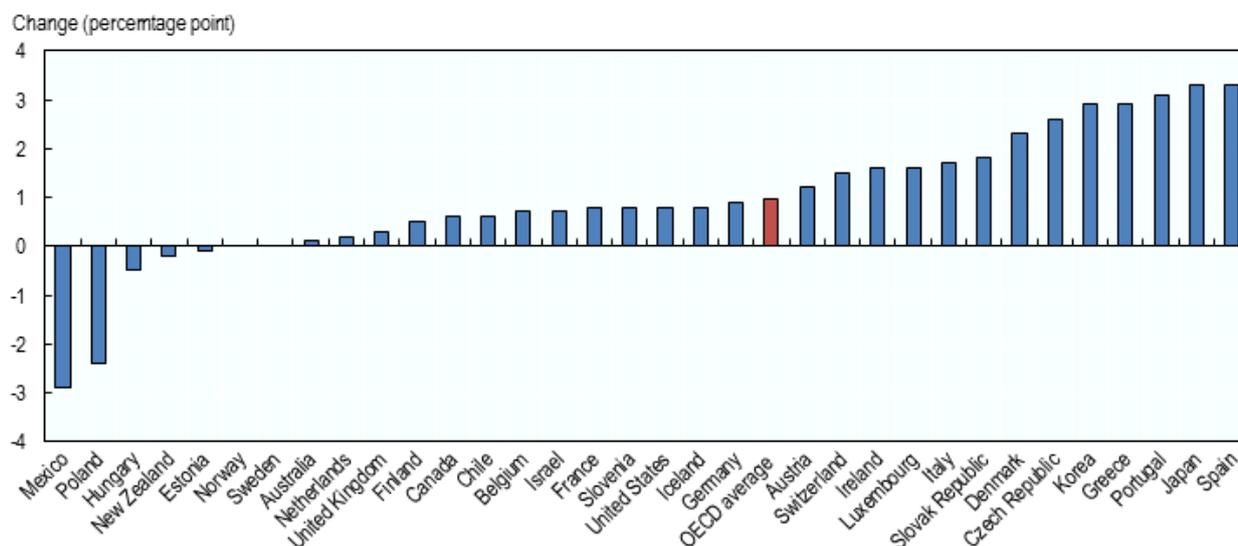
45. Research has shown that child health and emotional development enhance child well-being as well as the lifelong development of cognitive skills, capabilities and adult well-being (Hertzman, 2001; Conti et al., 2010; OECD, 2014a; Layard et al., 2015). As with economic and educational outcomes, health and other non-material aspects of child well-being are also unequally distributed (OECD, 2015d).

2.3.1. An increased prevalence of low child birth-weight

46. Social inequalities in health appear from the earliest moments in life, as shown by the large differences in prematurity and low birth-weight (i.e. a baby who weighs less than 2.5 kg at birth), which vary substantially *within* countries according to the parents' socio-economic status (Kramer et al., 2000; Panico et al., 2015). While variations in the prevalence of low-birth-weight infants are also large across countries, there is evidence of a common trend across OECD countries towards an increased prevalence of low birth-weight (Figure 8), which raises concerns about how these children will develop in the future.

Figure 8. Increased prevalence of low birth-weight in most OECD countries

Percentage point change in the number of live births weighing less than 2500 grams as a proportion (%) of total live births between 1990 and 2013



Source: [OECD Family Database](#)

47. The reasons for this increase are diverse and include: (i) advances in health care that permit the survival of premature babies with low weight much more frequently than before; (ii) an increase in the number of multiple births, partly as a result of the rise in fertility treatments; (iii) the increased age of mothers at childbirth; and (iv) an increase in smoking among young women from the 1970s onwards, as for example in Japan (Ohmi, et al, 2001), France and the United Kingdom (Panico et al., 2015). Maternal employment also increases the risk of low birth-weight, especially when it involves long working hours or bad working conditions (Peoples-Sheps et al., 1991; Casas et al., 2015).

48. Almost one baby in five is born with a low birth-weight in India, which is about three times more frequent than the OECD average. The low quality of health and nutrition environment is such that 43 out of 1000 infants die before their first birthday, which is about 10 times the OECD average (OECD, 2016b).

3.3.2. A growing proportion of adolescents reporting poor health

49. There is also evidence that the proportion of children who report very poor health has increased in many OECD countries since the early 2000s: the relative gap between children reporting lower health conditions and the average response among all children widened by 2 percentage points or more in 25 OECD countries (UNICEF, 2016).

2.3.3. Increase in risky behaviour among adolescents

50. An alarming trend in many OECD countries is also the earlier initiation into drinking and drunkenness of children and adolescents (OECD, 2015j). The proportion of 15-year-olds children who have not yet drunk alcohol by that age fell from 44% to 30% (in the case of boys) and from 50% to 31% (among girls) during the 2000s, on average, across OECD countries. Similarly, the proportion of children who had experienced drunkenness by age 15 increased from 30% to 43% (boys) and from 26% to 41% (girls) in the same period.

2.3.4. Social inequalities in health and well-being affect children

51. Children from poorer families are more likely to report fair or poor health status than those from affluent families, and in many countries this gap is more marked for girls than for boys (Currie, 2014; WHO, 2016). On average, children from poorer families also have more difficult relationships with peers, feel more pressure in school, find fewer of their classmates to be kind and helpful, are less happy with their school-life and are more often bullied than children from more affluent families. Children from poorer families also find it more difficult to talk to their parents. Overall, children of affluent families are much more likely to report high life satisfaction, especially for girls (Currie, 2014; WHO, 2016, UNICEF, 2016).

2.3.5. The quality of local environment: a key determinant of children' health and social outcomes

52. The environment where children grow up is also a crucial determinant of their well-being. Poor air quality environment increases the risk that children could develop chronic diseases such as asthma, wheeze etc. (OECD, 2010a; Anderson et al., 2013). Recent evidence also suggests that prenatal exposure to air pollution contributes to slower brain processing speed, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder symptoms at age 7 to 9 (Peterson et al., 2015).

53. Other dimensions of the neighbourhood where children live are key for later outcomes, especially for boys (Autor et al., 2015; Chetty et al., 2016). Recent United States evidence shows that low-income boys who grow up in high-poverty, high-minority areas have lower employment rates than girls. These areas also have higher rates of crime.

54. Religious radicalisation of children has also become an important concern. OECD work on social cohesion showed that schools, families and communities are key levers to promote civic and social engagement of children (OECD, 2010b). PISA 2012 results also show that school environment can influence the development of 'soft' skills — such as a sense of belonging to school and the community, perseverance and resilience — that children need in order to be equipped with to cope with the emerging challenges of religious fundamentalism.

2.3.6. Challenges facing children in emerging and developing economies

55. In emerging economies and developing countries, the continued promotion of education and health is essential, as is action on child labour. Despite significant improvement in access to primary education, major challenges persist in these countries in terms of access to post-primary schooling, the quality of education, and skills matching. School drop outs, and the share of children neither in school or in employment is a real problem in such countries. Equal opportunities for all children, irrespective of gender or socio-economic background, would facilitate human capital and skills development, ultimately advancing both individual and societal outcomes. With respect to health, the risks associated with specific health and developmental needs of children (e.g. malnutrition, early pregnancy, HIV, tobacco use, alcohol abuse, and violence) can be compounded by external factors, such as poverty, lack of access to health information and services, and unsafe environments. Programmes that promote healthy practices at a young age and take steps to prevent health risks among children are critical to the social and health infrastructure of emerging and developing countries. In terms of child labour, considerable efforts are required to enforce existing international conventions (i.e. ILO Conventions Nos. 182 and 138.) and to ensure that responsibility for preventing child labour is shared across international supply chains.

2.3.7. Refugee children

56. Refugee children are another particularly vulnerable group and face special integration challenges. Many suffer from lack of schooling, as well as from traumata and other health issues. Many of these children have arrived as unaccompanied minors (UAM) without their parents, and the number of new

UAM registered as asylum seekers in Europe has reached more than 85 000 in 2015, a historical high. This group of UAM often faces specific issues due to the fact that most arrive just before or after the age at which schooling is no longer compulsory – between 14 and 17 years old – but have little or no formal education. Many do not wish to pursue further education but to take up employment quickly, generally of the low-skilled kind. Their lack of basic qualifications and the frequently unstable, low-skilled jobs in which they end up puts them at a particular risk of eventually finding themselves not in employment, education or training (NEET). These minors need tailored education and training programmes – and often also mental and physical health support – to help them overcome multifaceted obstacles. To this end, substantial, long-term commitment is required from local hosting and integration systems (OECD, 2016c).

3. Which policies are needed to improve child well-being?

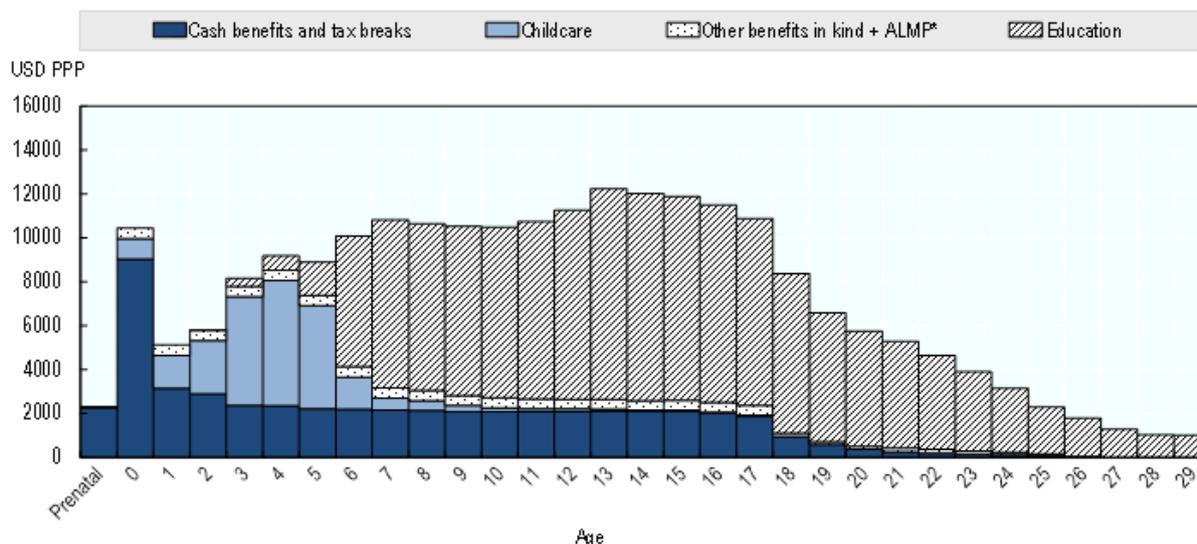
57. In most OECD countries, social spending for children is much lower compared to that for the retired population. At the same time, many countries do not have a child-centred policy addressing children's diverse needs from the early years of life, while they face important changes in the composition of child population and in their family background. Greater investment and more integrated policies are needed in light of the above-mentioned issues, and to cope with the rising inequalities across children.

3.1. *Optimise investment flows across childhood*

58. Efficient policies require children's disadvantages to be tackled as early as possible, and thus need intervention programs to be set for children from early childhood on. The profiles of public spending by age of the beneficiaries observed in the OECD countries clearly show that public investment in children often only starts when children enter pre-school, and is highest on a per capita basis during the compulsory schooling years (Figure 9). Few governments, as for instance Nordic countries or France, spend more during the early years of childhood than in later years, while spending levels for children below school age are fairly low in the United States. Governments should consider their investment flows over childhood to maximise their returns (U.S. CEAA, 2014; Duncan and Magnuson, 2013; OECD 2013b). In particular, policy needs to become more effective in raising ECEC participation rates among children in low-income and/or migrant families in high quality provision. In this perspective, more efficient public spending is needed to ensure that subsidies and incentives affect those who stand to benefit the most. This requires a better understanding of funding mechanisms and approaches to monitoring and developing ECEC quality for all children (OECD, 2015g).

Figure 9. OECD average public spending on children by child age

Public expenditure by age of the child and type and area of expenditure, OECD average, in USD (PPP) per capita, 2011



*ALMP refers to Active Labour Market Programmes (which can benefit youth and unemployed parents and their families).

Reading note: The average public spending per child is calculated for each year of life as the sum of spending per capita on cash benefits and tax breaks, on childcare services, other in kind benefits, and from preschool age on education. This total per child is especially low over the first and second years of life.

Source: OECD Social Expenditure Database and OECD Education Database

3.2. *Improve the work-life balance of parents*

59. Despite recent progress in many areas, policy can do more to help parents with their work/family balance in OECD countries and emerging economies. In this perspective, the support that working parents receive to balance work and family should be *comprehensive*, in the sense that entitlements to leave work for family reasons, flexible working arrangements and ECEC services should meet their needs and those of the children in time and in kind, while governments often also provide financial support through child (tax) allowances of in-work benefits for working families. Programmes should also ensure that parents are *continuously* supported as children grow up, with no gaps over specific periods of children’s life (OECD, 2007; 2011a).

60. Flexible working arrangements can help pregnant mothers and their as yet unborn children, for instance, by enabling women to reduce their time spent in transportation or take the necessary rest during to ensure child and mother’s health (Russell et al., 2011). Likewise, flexible working arrangements can help parents meet care needs of older children (Gray and Kaye, 2007). There is evidence to suggest there are linkages between work-family conflict, parents’ inability to eat dinner with their children, and childhood obesity. Children who regularly eat dinner with their families consume more fruits and vegetables each day than children who do not (Saint-Amour et al., 2007). More generally, teleworking and other flexible workplace practices can reduce parent’s work-related stress which can negatively affect the mental health of children (Gray and Kaye, 2007; US CEA, 2014b).

61. Children could also benefit from a more equal sharing of paid and childcare work among parents. In this perspective, policy should make further progress in incentivising fathers to engage more in parenting activities, and father’s leave policies can be an important lever. Not surprisingly, the evidence

suggests that fathers' use of parental leave is highest when leave is not just paid, but well-paid —perhaps around half or more of previous earnings. The father quotas in Iceland and Sweden are associated with benefits above 60% of last earnings. Similarly, a 2007 policy reform in Germany introduced well-paid bonus months for partners; as a result, the share of children whose father took leave increased by over 50% from 2008 to 2013, reaching 32% of fathers.

62. Work-life conflict for parents do not stop once children enter primary school, and care for children outside school-hours often receives too little policy attention. A focus on developing a greater supply of out-of-school hours (OSH) leisure activities is an important avenue for policy development in many countries.

3.3. *Adapt policy support to changes in family settings*

63. Public policy has to adapt to the diversification of family settings and the growing complexity of family living arrangements in which children grow up. For example, many children grow up with non-married parents and do not benefit from legal protection and welfare support that children from married parents may enjoy. Cross-country variations are large, however (Sanchez Gassen and Perelli-Harris, 2015). Some countries require the cohabiting parent to register their unions if they and their children want to benefit from the same legal protections as those who are married, while other countries provide equivalent legal protections to cohabiting and married couples in some areas but not in others. In yet other countries, cohabiting parents cannot obtain the same legal protections as married couples can.¹¹ Justice systems should also take into account the specific needs of children. This entails creating a justice system that guarantees respect for and the effective implementation of all children's rights. The Council of Europe has created standards and guidelines in the field of child-friendly justice (COE, 2016).

64. In many countries, parents who separate are also increasingly likely to share the physical custody of their children to maintain fathers' involvement in the education and care of children. In such cases, children frequently commute between the two parental homes on a more or less regular basis, and this induces costs for the two parents since each of them should have a home with enough space, furniture, etc. Compared to divorce settlements with one custodial parent, shared custody also often reduces alimony payments from one parent to the other. These two factors (higher costs and lower transfers between parents) may reduce children's living standards and increase poverty risks. However, many social welfare systems are often not geared towards these issues since policy may not split – or only partially split – tax/benefit support between separated parents.

3.4. *Give every child the opportunity to succeed in school by investing in a diverse set of skills*

65. Education policies that give equal opportunities to all youths in early, primary and secondary education would provide greater opportunities for all to succeed in and out of school. High quality learning environments, including successful transitions within the education system, are one of many approaches that can help ensure continuity in learning, especially among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. A dual emphasis on quality and equity can promote better outcomes; reduce inequalities; and increase social mobility over time.

¹¹ Similarly, the marital status of parents can also influence the eligibility to means-tested benefits or to special tax treatment. For instance, provisions in the federal tax code in the United States treat married couples as one tax unit and cohabiting couples as two tax units, with the effect that some married couples owe more tax than they would if they were unmarried while other married couples pay less than they would if they had remained single and then reap a “marriage” bonus (Maag and Acs, 2015).

66. Education systems should better take into account the fact that a diverse set of cognitive, social and emotional skills drive children's lifetime success. Policies designed to enhance social and emotional skills (e.g. self-regulation, locus of control and perseverance) can be an effective approach to improving labour market performance, promoting healthy life-styles, reducing violence, fostering tolerance and respect, and enhancing well-being. Social and emotional learning (SEL) programmes targeted to disadvantaged children are one of the most cost-effective means to reduce inequalities in education, labour market and social outcomes (OECD, 2015i). For instance, promoting strong relationships between educators (e.g. parents, teachers and mentors) and children, providing real-life examples and practical experience in curricular activities, and emphasising hands on learning in extracurricular activities have proved effective in enhancing children's sense of responsibility, capacity to work in teams and self-confidence. Among adolescents, mentoring is particularly important, while hands-on workplace experiences can instil skills like team-work, self-efficacy and motivation.

3.5. *Integrate and cascade service delivery for vulnerable children*

67. Several, interrelated factors contribute to what makes a child vulnerable, such as persistent financial insecurity, poor home environment, low parental support, school failure, bad relations with peers, health problems, etc. Children have complex needs which require multiple interventions. However, at present, a frequent situation is that distinct policy interventions address different dimensions of child well-being, e.g. raise education levels, improve health or reduce exposure to poverty. But approaches that focus on a single aspect of child well-being are unlikely to be effective if they do not address other barriers to child development (OECD, 2009; OECD, 2015c). Policy needs to ensure *integrated* service delivery, which both prevents the development of disadvantage and provides multi-faceted support to the multiple needs of children (OECD, 2015c). Evidence also shows that, to build more inclusive societies and more dynamic economies, it is necessary to ensure the right policy interventions at early stages in people's lives. Only integrated strategies will help children to fulfil their potential and societies to provide equal opportunities for all.

68. In its simplest form, the delivery of "integrated services" refers to joined-up social services for the benefit of service users and to improve the efficiency in delivery by providers. Examples of such programs for children include, among others, the *Communities for Children* in Australia; *Early Start* in New Zealand; the *Every Child Matters* and *Sure Start* programmes in the United Kingdom; and the *Aboriginal Head Start* and *Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve* programmes in Canada. Better parenting practices and parents feeling more effective in their roles are highlighted in several evaluations of these types of programmes (OECD, 2015c). Improvements in children's early receptive vocabulary and verbal activity are also emphasised. In Sweden, family centres play an important role in integrating immigrants and their children to the society (Abrahamson et al., 2009).

69. Many countries have also developed "home visit programmes" to evaluate the needs of families and ensure the best co-ordination of service delivery. The available evidence suggests that high quality home visiting programmes can improve child health, increase children's school readiness, and enhance parents' abilities to support their children's overall development (Olds et al., 2004; LeCroy and Krysik, 2011). Moreover, by helping parents enrol in educational and training programmes and pursue employment aspirations, home visiting programmes can help counteract the negative consequences of economic insecurity. Better employment prospects and better fitting services can reduce parental stress and thus curtail the effect of prolonged and elevated stress reactions may have on child development. High-quality home visiting programmes can generate a substantial return on investment. For example, a 2005 study by the RAND Corporation evaluated the cost-effectiveness of two evidence-based home visiting programmes for which cost/benefit data were available and found savings ranging from USD 1.80 to USD 5.70 per dollar invested (Karoly et al., 2005).

70. The benefit of early interventions to protect children and prevent the development of adverse outcomes calls for the delivery of children's services in a "cascading service" manner (OECD, 2009). The "cascading service" model offers a universal entry point but it adjusts the delivery of services in response to the risks observed for children at an early stage. For instance, many countries provide universal post-natal care services which can be used to detect problems children may face in early childhood and adjust the policy response. Such a model, however, requires a high degree of coordination between services which usually deal with different aspects of family and social life (OECD, 2009; 2011b).

3.6. *Child labour*

71. The OECD seeks to support a common understanding of due diligence for enterprises operating at each stage in the supply chain in relation to matters covered by the *Decision of the Council on the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises*, the main OECD instrument for promoting responsible business practices. The Guidelines set out strong expectations that businesses use due diligence to assess the impact of their operations on the entire spectrum of internationally recognised human and labour rights (OECD, 2000, amended in 2011). This includes the effective abolition of child labour, and an expectation to take immediate and effective measures – as a matter of urgency – to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

72. The OECD has established an informal working group on the worst forms of child labour in mining to help enterprises assess and develop actions to mitigate these risks as they implement the *Recommendation of the Council on Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas* (2011, amended in 2012).

73. The OECD, in consultation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), is completing a draft "Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment and Footwear Sector", which will include a chapter on supply chain due diligence standards in relation to child labour and forced labour. In partnership with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the OECD has also developed *Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains*, which tackles several risks including child labour, a widespread phenomenon in plantation agriculture in weak governance zones.

4. The way forward: Outlining future OECD work

74. Building on existing OECD work in measurement and analysis of child well-being, the OECD would further develop the evidence base for future policy development. Because of the multi-dimensional nature of child well-being, more effective policies require a multifaceted approach. In this perspective, future work aims to:

- ***Redefine the growth narrative to stress the importance of childhood experiences for the well-being of people throughout their life, and for promoting equality of opportunities.*** This will require providing a new set of evidence-based recommendations on how well-being can be fostered from early ages to reap long-term benefits for economies and societies. It will involve:
 - considering **child well-being in its many dimensions**, and exploring the **linkages between the well-being conditions** of families where children live, including family living arrangements and household income, and **child-centred well-being factors** such as educational and social outcomes, and subjective perceptions of the quality of children’s life. The interaction between health and housing issues and child well-being also needs further analysis.
 - analysing the mechanisms at play in the **transmission of economic and/or social disadvantages from parents to children**, including the impact of parental socio-economic background on childhood health and educational outcomes, intergenerational mobility, and at the role of family structure on employment outcomes of young adults. These features impact people beyond their childhood: the Statistics Directorate is already partnering with an international consortium of researchers to examine the impact of child experiences on **subjective well-being** later in life, based on longitudinal data that follows people since birth and over their life.
- ***Identify emerging policy challenges and reinforce capacity to understand and address them:*** this includes analysing the drivers of child poverty, well-being and relevant inequalities, including the role of family living arrangements and of socio-demographic developments, in Members and non-Members; and providing recommendations on how policy can adjust to these new family and child realities. This requires, in particular, building knowledge bases for the assessment of policy gaps and the shaping of policy development in the following areas:
 - ✓ *Develop comparative information on how child benefit, tax regimes, child maintenance systems and social services treat cohabiting and non-cohabiting parents, step-parents or children moving between households on a regular basis.* For example, should family allowances be split between separated parents? Do cohabiting parents have access to the same rights regarding tax and benefit support for children? Do children of non-married parents get the same protection as those of married parents if one parent dies or if parents separate?
 - ✓ *Assess how labour market and social policies such as paid child-related leave, ECEC supports and out-of-school-hours policies can be better designed to help both fathers and mothers to better reconcile work and family life.*
 - ✓ *Evaluate the role of parent-child relationships in child development and how policy programmes that help both children and parents can enhance the quality of parenting and the involvement of both parents (especially fathers) in the education and care of children.*

- ✓ *Monitor children's exposure to poor home and/or local environment* (such as exposure to home overcrowding, poor environmental conditions, resources to study, local population composition, service delivery, etc.), and inform policies about the changes in families environment to be prioritised.
- ✓ *Build a repository of national best practices in child well-being policies.*
- ***Empower children with better education, skills and more informed choice***: by providing in-depth research on how cognitive and non-cognitive skills can be fostered in early childhood through a number of family policies, preschool and/or school-based interventions. This requires analysis of:
 - ✓ Policies to support quality of early learning and well-being environments, as well as to support children smooth transition from ECEC to primary schooling. Future work on ECEC services will look at the characteristics of ECEC staff and centres, in-service and pre-service training, pedagogical practices and beliefs about learning; their effects on child development; and the extent to which formal care can compensate the adverse effect of a disadvantaged family background.
 - ✓ The quality of school learning environment, including supportive teachers, access to afterschool opportunities, and how the involvement of parents and communities is associated with students' performance at school.
 - ✓ The drivers of low performance in school, including socio-economic status, attendance of preschool, immigrant background, family structure, attitudes and behaviours, school learning environments.
- Building on the existing OECD Family Database and its Child well-being module, ***improve the evidence base on child well-being***. Child well-being indicators disaggregated by socio-economic status will be further developed to monitor the evolution of inequalities across children and to improve the measurement of children's and adolescents' learning, sense of happiness, social connectedness and their perceived quality of life. This could be done through innovative in-house tools, and by engaging National Statistical Offices and other data producers in a process to develop guidance in new fields (e.g. common breakdowns to capture the variety of family settings in which children grow and develop). The OECD could take an active role to design a framework ensuring the cross-national comparability of the definitions used to categorize family situation and to compare child outcomes.

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ANNEX 1: THE OECD FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF CHILD WELL-BEING

The framework developed in OECD (2009) – *Doing Better for Children* — and refined in OECD (2015b) – *How is Life for Children* – is well-adapted to develop a comprehensive agenda on child well-being. In this framework, child well-being is defined in terms of a number of life dimensions that matter to children, now and in the future. This is in line with national approaches to measuring child well-being, as for instance in the United Kingdom.¹² This framework emphasises the importance of looking at children’s lives in a multidimensional way, and is consistent with the approach to measuring the well-being of other groups in societies that has been developed in the context of the OECD’s *Better Life Initiative* (e.g., OECD 2013b and 2015d).

In practice, child well-being is operationalised along 10 dimensions organised in two broad groups (OECD, 2015b; Table 1):

- ***The well-being conditions of families where children live***, which relate to the income and earnings of households with children, housing conditions and the quality of the environment where these families live; and
- ***Child-centred well-being factors***, which include their own health-status, their educational and social outcomes, as well as their own subjective perceptions of the quality of their life.

These various dimensions of child well-being, and the indicators that can be used to assess outcomes in each of them, are detailed in Table 1.

¹²

See

www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/measuringnationalwellbeing/2015-10-20

Table A.1. Dimensions and indicators of child well-being

Well-being conditions of families where children live¹	
Income and Wealth	Disposable income of households with children Child income poverty
Jobs and earnings	Children in workless households Children with a long-term unemployed parent
Housing conditions	Average rooms per child Children in homes that lack basic facilities
Environmental quality	Children in homes with poor environmental conditions
Child-centred well-being dimensions	
Health status	Infant mortality Low birth weight Self-reported health status Overweight and obesity Adolescent suicide rates Teenage birth rates
Education and skills	PISA mean reading score PISA creative problem solving score Youth neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET)
Civic and social engagement	Volunteering activities Civic participation
Family and school environment	Teenagers who find it easy to talk to their parents Students reporting having kind and helpful classmates Students feeling a lot of pressure from schoolwork Students liking school PISA sense of belonging index Time children spend with their parents
Personal security	Child homicide rates Bullying
Subjective well-being	Life satisfaction

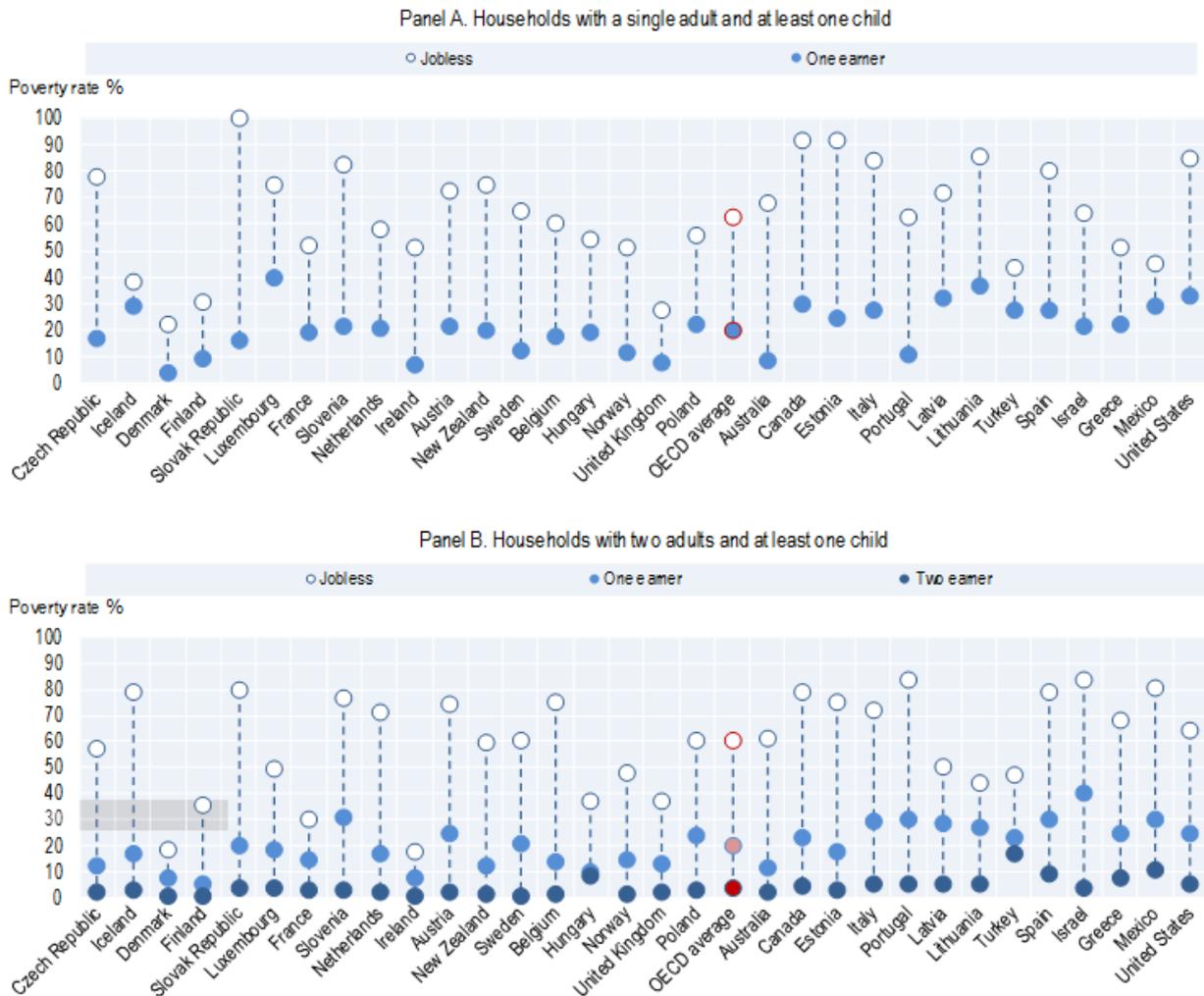
Notes: ¹ These dimensions refer to the living conditions of families where children live, which by nature are indirect measures for describing life circumstances of children.

Source: OECD (2015b), *How is Life for Children? Measuring Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

The different dimensions of child well-being illustrate the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach towards understanding and enhancing child well-being. The factors that are important for child well-being and development include: household income; parental nurture and care; housing conditions; environmental quality; personal security; subjective well-being; and more. While each of these aspects affects children's current well-being and future life chances, many children face disadvantages in many of these areas, calling for comprehensive policy responses that combine access to medical care, learning resources at home, quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) and compulsory formal education.

Figure A.1. Poverty rates in households with children, by household type and household employment status

Proportion (%) of households with children and a working age head with an equivalised post-tax and transfer income of less than 50% of the national annual median equivalised household income, 2012.

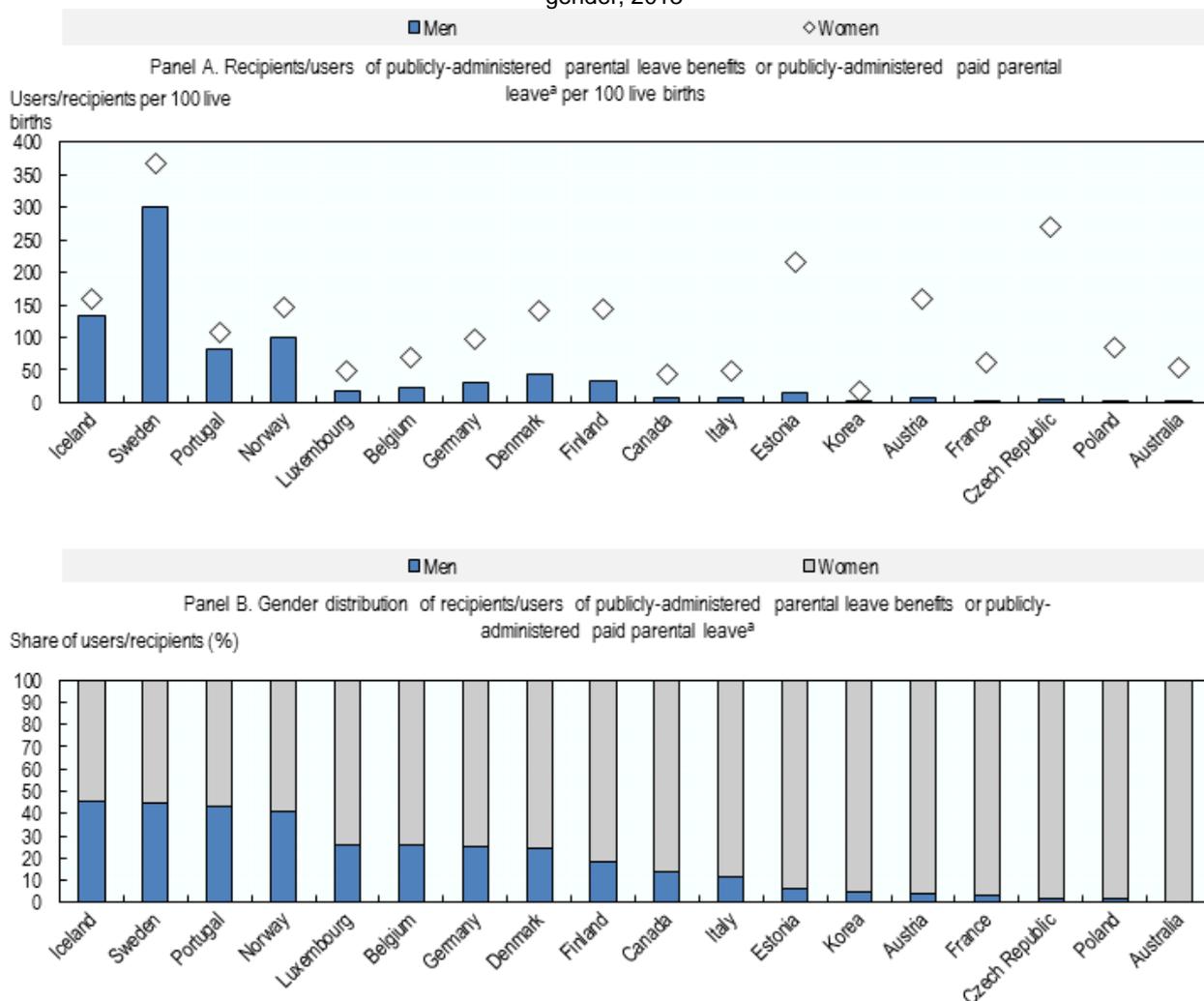


Countries are ranked in ascending order according to the poverty rate in all households.

Source: [OECD Income Distribution Database](#)

Figure A.2. Fathers are less likely than mothers to take paid parental leave

Recipients/users of publicly-administered parental leave benefits or publicly-administered paid parental leave,^a by gender, 2013



Note: Data refer to recipients/users of publicly-administered parental leave benefits or publicly-administered paid parental leave, and do not include users of maternity or paternity leave unless the country in question does not make a distinction between the different leaves (e.g. Iceland, Portugal). Data for Belgium, Italy and Korea refer to users of national statutory paid parental leave (or equivalent). Data for Australia, Austria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland and Sweden refer to recipients of national statutory parental leave benefits (or equivalent). For Australia, data refer to recipients of 'Parental Leave Pay' only. For Austria, data refer to recipients of 'Kinderbetreuungsgeld' (childcare allowance). For Denmark, data refer to recipients of benefits for the 32 week 'common leave' period only. For Finland, data refer to the male share of recipients of the parental allowance only, and do not include recipients of the paternity allowance (either that available during or after the parental leave period). For France, data refer to recipients of CLCA (Complément de libre choix d'activité). For Germany, data refer to recipients of 'Elterngeld' (parental allowance) for those with children born in the given year. For Iceland, data refer to recipients of any benefits in relation to maternity/paternity (i.e. benefits paid during either the mother or father-quota or during the sharable period of parental leave). For Portugal, data refer to recipients of benefits for 'Initial Parental Leave' only. In all cases data refer only to those using statutory schemes and do not include individual's using only employer-provided parental leave or parental leave pay.

Source: [OECD Family Database](#).