

Better child-well-being policies with better data:
New OECD Child Well-being Dashboard and updated Data Portal

Good policies need good data, and policies aimed at improving the well-being of children are no exception. Developing policies that promote children's wellbeing requires sound information on multiple areas of their lives, including their material living standards, their health, their social lives and their education and learning. Data on the settings and environments in which children grow up – their families, their schools, their communities and their local areas – are important too, given growing evidence on the importance of these environments as drivers of well-being.

The good news is that data on children's well-being have come a long way in recent decades. At the international level, the growth of large-scale child-centred data collections have helped push forward what we know and understand about many aspects of children's lives. At the national level, in many countries, a growing number of country-specific surveys and datasets have helped do something similar.

But the growth of information on children and their lives raises new challenges: how to make sense of the range of information that is now available, and how to monitor how children are actually doing across the many areas that matter for their well-being? With this in mind, the OECD has recently released two data-focused resources – an updated OECD Child Well-being Data Portal, and a new OECD Child Well-being Dashboard – that aim to help countries better understand how they are performing on child well-being.

The OECD Child Well-being Data Portal is the OECD's hub for comparative data on child well-being. It is structured based on the OECD Child Well-being Measurement Framework, and it builds on the latest available data from OECD databases and a range of leading international child surveys and data collection programmes. The updated Data Portal contains over 200 comparative measures on child wellbeing outcomes and drivers of well-being stemming from children's environments. Data are available where possible for all OECD Members and Partners, OECD Accession countries, and EU Member states.

Complementing the Data Portal, the new OECD Child Well-being Dashboard is a tool for policy makers and the public to monitor countries' efforts to promote child wellbeing. The Dashboard uses a selection of key indicators from Data Portal, to provide a broad picture of how countries are performing on child well-being, both in comparison to other OECD countries and for different groups of children within a country.

The Dashboard contains 20 key internationally comparable indicators on children's well-being outcomes across four core areas – material well-being; physical health; cognitive and educational well-being; and social and emotional well-being. It also contains contextual indicators on key drivers of child well-being and child relevant public policies. Wherever possible, to help countries monitor well-being inequalities across groups of children, data are provided both for all children and disaggregated by key

demographic and socio-economic characteristics, including gender, migrant status, and household income or socio-economic status.

Indicators for the Dashboard have been selected based on their importance both for children's well-being now and for their development, skills and well-being outcomes in later life. While the Dashboard looks to cover the wellbeing of children of all ages, limitations in data availability mean that most indicators focus on those in the middle of their childhood and adolescence.

The indicators used in the paper illustrate a stark reality for children growing up in disadvantaged households. Across well-being areas, children from disadvantaged backgrounds consistently experience poorer outcomes than children from more advantaged backgrounds. For example, disadvantaged children are more likely to experience poor health outcomes, and they are overrepresented among overweight and obese children and those reporting poorer self-rated health. They also experience worse educational outcomes, and are far less likely to perform well on international student assessments, such as OECD PISA. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds more often report poorer social and emotional outcomes, including weaker perceived support from family, lower self-belief, and lower life satisfaction. While some of these inequalities are well known and well documented (e.g. those in child health and education), others are less well-known (e.g. gaps in self-belief) and highlight the widespread and pervasive impact of disadvantage.

The Dashboard's contextual indicators help to illustrate how these well-being inequalities are rooted in the poorer conditions that disadvantaged children often experience at home, in school, with friends and in the community. For example, the data show how disadvantaged children are more likely to miss out on important family activities and experience poorer quality relationships with parents. On average across OECD countries, 36% of disadvantaged 11-15 year-olds report finding it difficult to talk to their parents, compared to 28% among the most advantaged. They show how, at school, disadvantaged children frequently experience poorer quality learning environments, are more likely to experience bullying, and more often feel like they do not belong. On average across the OECD, as many as one in three 15-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds report not feeling like they belong at school. The data also show how disadvantaged children more often grow up in poorer quality local areas, placing limits on their opportunities to build friendships and participate in community life. For example, on average across European OECD countries, 11% of low-income children live in areas where there are problems with crime and violence – more than 50% higher than the rate for high-income children.

Improving child data is crucial if countries are to design policies that address childhood disadvantage and promote child well-being in all its dimensions.