
State of the World's Mothers 2007: The Best and Worst Countries to be a Mother

Save the Children USA global humanitarian organization, has released its 8th Annual Mothers' Index that ranks the best - and worst - places to be a mother and a child and compares the well-being of mothers and children in 140 countries, more than in any previous year.

Sweden, Iceland and Norway top the rankings this year. Niger ranks last among countries surveyed. The top 10 countries, in general, attain very high scores for mothers' and children's health, educational and economic status. The 10 bottom-ranked countries - nine from sub-Saharan Africa - are a reverse image of the top 10, performing poorly on all indicators. The United States places 26th this year, tied with Hungary.

Conditions for mothers and their children in countries at the bottom of the Index are grim. On average, one in 13 mothers will die in her lifetime from pregnancy-related causes. Nearly one in five children dies before his or her fifth birthday, and more than one in three children suffers from malnutrition. About 50 per cent of the population lacks access to safe water, and only three girls for every four boys are enrolled in primary school.

The worst ten:

131. Djibouti
132. Burkina Faso
133. Ethiopia
134. Eritrea
135. Angola
136. Guinea-Bissau
137. Chad
138. Yemen
139. Sierra Leone
140. Niger

The best ten:

1. Sweden
2. Iceland
3. Norway
4. New Zealand
5. Australia
6. Denmark
7. Finland
8. Belgium
9. Spain
10. Germany

The clear finding is that the quality of children's lives depends on the health, security and well-being of their mothers. By providing mothers access to education, economic opportunities, and maternal and child health care, we ensure that mothers and their children will have the best chance to survive and thrive.

The gap in availability of maternal and child health services is especially striking when comparing Sweden, at the top of the list, and Niger, at the bottom. Skilled health personnel are present at virtually every birth in Sweden, while only 16 per cent of births are attended

in Niger. A typical Swedish woman has almost 17 years of formal education and will live to be 83. Meanwhile, 72 per cent of Swedish women use some modern method of contraception, and only one in 150 will lose a child before he or she has a fifth birthday. In Niger, a typical woman has less than three years of education and the life expectancy of a girl born today is only 45. Only four per cent of women use modern contraception, and one child in four never sees a fifth birthday. At this rate, every mother is likely to suffer the loss of two children.

Zeroing in on the children's well-being portion of the *Mothers' Index*, Italy finishes first and Afghanistan ties with Niger for last. While nearly every Italian child - girls and boys alike - enjoys good health and education, children in Afghanistan face a one in four risk of dying before age five. In Afghanistan and Niger, 40 per cent of children are malnourished. In Niger, less than 50 per cent of children are enrolled in primary school, and only one Afghan girl for every two boys is in school. More than half of all children in both countries lack access to safe water.

"Investing in the health of mothers everywhere is not just the right thing to do - it is the smart thing to do," urged MacCormack. "When we take care of mothers by ensuring that they have the basic tools they need to improve the quality of life for themselves and their children, we also improve prospects for generations to come. When mothers thrive, their children grow up healthy and, ultimately, all of society benefits," he added.

COUNTRY COMPARISONS:

The *Mothers' Index* presents individual country comparisons for poor countries that are especially startling when one considers the human suffering behind the statistics:

- Over the course of her lifetime, 1 woman in 7 will die in pregnancy or childbirth in Angola, Malawi and Niger; the risk is 1 in 6 in Afghanistan and Sierra Leone.
- A girl born in Angola, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Zambia and Zimbabwe on average will live 45 years. Life expectancy for women is only 35 in Lesotho, 33 in Botswana, and for a girl born in Swaziland, only 30 years due to the sheer proportions of children who die before age 5 and the additional scourge of AIDS which is killing many women in their prime.
- 1 child in 4 does not reach his or her fifth birthday in Afghanistan, Angola, Niger and Sierra Leone.

- Fewer than 15 per cent of births are attended by skilled health personnel in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Chad, Ethiopia and Nepal.

- In Djibuti and Niger, a typical female has less than 3.5 years of schooling and fewer than half of all children are enrolled in primary school.

- More than 60 per cent of the population of Afghanistan and Papua New Guinea lacks access to safe drinking water, and more than 70 per cent lack access to safe water in Ethiopia and Somalia.

Further information

State of the World's Mothers 2006: Saving the Lives of Mothers and Newborns (Save the Children USA, May 2006) http://www.savethechildren.org/publications/mothers/2006/SOWM_2006_final.pdf

THE NATIONAL YOUTH COMMISSION [NYC] INQUIRY

The National Youth Commission [NYC] inquiry is the first independent inquiry into youth homelessness since the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC] inquiry completed by Commissioner Brian Burdekin in 1989. With some 33,000 homeless young people in Australia without a safe place to call home each night, the current inquiry is examining why youth homelessness continues to be a major problem in Australia. It will gather evidence on the issue of youth homelessness and seek input from all stakeholders including service providers, government agencies, community organizations and homeless young people.

The members of the NYC are:

- Major David Eldridge from The Salvation Army (Chair of the NYC);
- Ms Narelle Clay AM, CEO of Southern Youth and Family Services in Wollongong;
- Associate Professor David MacKenzie from The Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology; and
- Father Wally Dethlefs who was one of the three Commissioners of the HREOC inquiry in 1989 ("The Burdekin Inquiry").

The inquiry is underway with first round hearings already held in Hobart, Townsville, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Geelong, Warrnambool and Wagga Wagga. If you missed the hearings, you can still participate by sending in a written submission (closing date: 15 June 2007) or by doing an on-line submission via the NYC website. Further information about the inquiry and ways to participate can be found on the NYC website:

www.nyc.net.au

The Netherlands has become the 17th European State to Ban Corporal Punishment by Parents and Carers

Source: CRINmail <http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=12712>

On 6 March 2007, a new law prohibiting all corporal punishment by parents and carers was passed in the Senate. The law amends the provisions in the Civil Code on parental authority so that article 1:247 now states (unofficial translation):

“(1) Parental authority includes the duty and the right of the parent to care for and raise his or her minor child. (2) Caring for and raising one’s child includes the care and the responsibility for the emotional and physical wellbeing of the child and for his or her safety as well as for the promotion of the development of his or her personality. In the care and upbringing of the child the parents will not use emotional or physical violence or any other humiliating treatment.”

Article 1:248 of the Code applies article 1:247 to all other persons acting in loco parentis.

The Cabinet agreed to proceed with prohibition in February 2005, following a government-commissioned study on the experiences of abolition in other European countries. Department of Justice press releases at the time the “Bill to contribute to the prevention of emotional and physical abuse of children or any other humiliating treatment of children in care and upbringing” was introduced to the Cabinet stressed that the primary purpose of the new law is “to set a standard”. It emphasised that the law would bring the Netherlands into compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and article 17 of the European Social Charter, and address the recommendations made to the Netherlands government by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the European Committee of Social Rights.

Now that the law has been passed, a government Communication Plan to inform parents and the general public about the ban is being prepared. The law is expected to come into force by the summer.

At least 16 countries in Europe have enacted bans on corporal punishment by parents and all other carers: Sweden (1979); Finland (1983); Norway (1987); Austria (1989); Cyprus (1994); Denmark (1997);