



# GROWING UP *in* NORTH AMERICA:

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



## SHARED UNDERSTANDINGS

**WHAT HAPPENS TO CHILDREN AFFECTS US ALL.** If our children do not thrive, our societies will not thrive. Decision-makers, both public and private, must take children's well-being into account as they undertake social and economic development. **ALL CHILDREN MUST BE INCLUDED IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS.** All children must be prepared for the future. Some groups of children and families are not doing as well as others in the new knowledge-based, global economy. Disparities that thwart the healthy development of children in the present and limit the life chances of children in the future must be addressed. **CHILDREN EXPERIENCE CHANGE IN AND THROUGH MULTIPLE CONTEXTS.** Children are affected by all the environments in which they live. The family is the first circle around the child. Beyond the family, the community has a role to play in child development. The circles widen to regional, national, and international contexts. **CHILDREN ARE ENTITLED TO BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS.** Children's rights are economic, social, and cultural, as well as civil and political. Children have a right to participate, and to express their perceptions and aspirations. Children are entitled to the protection of society from exploitation and abuse. They also must be able to count on society to ensure their healthy development, beyond mere survival. **KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHILD WELL-BEING MUST LEAD TO ACTION.** Monitoring and reporting on measures of child well-being across North America can help us better understand the diverse experiences of childhood in different contexts. But monitoring is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to highlight our successes and challenges. Both can help to drive change.

## PROJECT PARTNERS

[The Annie E. Casey Foundation](http://www.aecf.org) is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. For more information, visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

[The Canadian Council on Social Development](http://www.ccsd.ca) is one of Canada's key authoritative voices promoting better social and economic security for all Canadians. A national, self-supporting, membership-based organization, the CCSD's main product is information and its main activity is research, focusing on issues such as child and family well-being, economic security, employment, poverty, and government social policies. For more information, visit [www.ccsd.ca](http://www.ccsd.ca).

[Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en México](http://www.derechosinfancia.org.mx) (The Children's Rights Network in Mexico) is the union of 58 Mexican civil organizations and networks, which develops programs to offer support to Mexican children in vulnerable situations. To realize its mission for children and adolescents to know, exercise, and enjoy their rights, the Network promotes a social and cultural movement in favor of children's rights, advocates for equitable legal frameworks and public policies, and strengthens the capacity of Mexican civil organizations dedicated to children. For more information, visit [www.derechosinfancia.org.mx](http://www.derechosinfancia.org.mx).

Researchers at the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago worked with the project team in the development of the indicator model and coordinated the initial data collection. Chapin Hall is a policy research center dedicated to bringing sound information, rigorous analysis, innovative ideas, and an independent, multi-disciplinary perspective to bear on the policies and programs affecting children. Chapin Hall's work addresses the needs of all children, but devotes special attention to children facing significant problems, including abuse, neglect, poverty, and mental illness. For more information, visit [www.chapinhall.org](http://www.chapinhall.org).

## GROWING UP IN NORTH AMERICA



The Children in North America Project aims to highlight the conditions and well-being of children and youth in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. Through a series of indicator reports, the project hopes to build a better understanding of how our children are faring and the opportunities and challenges they face looking to the future.

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There are roughly 120 million children in North America—73 million in the United States, more than 39 million in Mexico, and about 7 million in Canada. They account for over one-quarter of the 426 million people who live on this continent.

## Executive Summary: Growing Up in North America

There are roughly 120 million children in North America—73 million in the United States, more than 39 million in Mexico, and about 7 million in Canada. They account for over one-quarter of the 426 million people who live on this continent.

If they were any other group, they would be a powerful political force. Their leaders would be on the national stage and they would have organizations that reached across borders to make common cause on major issues of concern.

But because children don't have access to political influence, they must rely on adults to listen to them, to encourage and support their participation in issues that affect them, to advocate for them, and to act in their best interests by passing laws to protect them and by putting policies and programs in place to help them reach their full potential.

When we do—when we get it right for kids—we do more than support children's healthy and happy development. We help to make our societies stronger.

Concern about the well-being of children and families and an understanding of supporting children as a social as well as a parental responsibility brought together organizations in three countries to partner in developing a unique view of children growing up in North America.

The premise of the *Children in North America Project* lies in the kind of world we live in today, an increasingly interdependent, complex, and connected world. It is a small world where school children living in a desert state or a prairie province know all about a *tsunami* because of images of wreckage from a giant wave half a world away.

As the globe shrinks, so too does North America. The continent that is shared by three nations, each with its own proud history, is becoming more economically, socially, and culturally integrated—through trade, investment, communications, human migration, education, travel, and cultural exchange.

Children in the three nations are increasingly being exposed to similar consumer goods, media messages, and social trends. Moreover, for some children, increased economic ties imply drastic changes to their immediate surroundings and prospects—whether it is a child living in an American family without work because the local employer moved its operations to Mexico or a child living without a father in a Mexican town because many working-age men have left to seek jobs in the United States or Canada.

The sheer scale of migration from Mexico to the United States and, to a lesser extent, to Canada is changing the face of the region and the lives of countless children. The Mexican-born population in the United States more than doubled between 1990 and 2000, going to over 9 million people, according to U.S. Census data. Remittances from Mexicans working in the United States to families back home amounted to over 16 billion U.S. dollars in 2004 (as estimated by the Central Bank of Mexico), roughly 1.5 percent of the country's GDP. Added together, the sums that migrants send back home surpass Mexico's revenues from tourism, foreign aid, and foreign direct investment.

The *Children in North America Project* is exploring these new realities. It is building a new knowledge base about children across the continent. That knowledge base includes measures of child well-being and the local, national, and tri-national contexts or environments in which families live.

These data tell the story of a diverse population of children characterized by profound differences in their well-being and security—both within countries and across the region.

Through this project, we hope to build a better understanding of how our children are faring and the opportunities and challenges that they face looking to the future. Our goal is to inspire and mobilize action to make the lives of all children in North America better, to ensure that no child is left behind.



## Children in a Changing World

Globalization, with the growth of global markets and the increasing speed of worldwide communications, is changing the landscape of childhood across the world. As part of such change, North America is also becoming more economically, socially, and culturally integrated.

Growth in regional commerce, investment, and migration influences children's lives and their prospects by altering their economic circumstances, family structures, and communities.

In addition, these increased economic ties—together with tourism and technological improvements in communication—have led to greater interaction between people of the three nations and a wider opportunity for the exchange of ideas and values. From music to food, to television and the Internet, children in the three countries now are exposed to cultural influences from the other countries in a way not previously experienced.

Periods of major societal change, such as we are experiencing now, can make the outcomes of children's developmental transitions less certain.<sup>1</sup> Because children's lives are embedded in families, what happens to their parents is crucial to their well-being and their life chances.

Greater regional economic integration, for example, can affect both the demand for and the provision of social services, impacting the economic security of families. Increased foreign competition has led to downsizing in some economic sectors (such as manufacturing in the United States, agriculture in Mexico, and the forest product industry in Canada), increasing the need for programs such as unemployment insurance. At the same time, national governments worry about the level of corporate taxation and fear the possibility of businesses relocating elsewhere.

Migration also has very direct effects on the lives of children in both sending and receiving communities. It brings changes in family structures with separation from some relatives and greater closeness to others. Even when nuclear families stay together, migration can, in some cases, lead to role reversal when children learn the new language faster than their parents and become their translators and guides in the new environment.



The consequences for children of increased migration extend beyond the immediate families involved. Some communities, particularly in the traditional Mexican migrant-sending areas, are greatly impacted by large-scale migration. Some towns are left bereft of young men; this has led to changes in productive activities, gender status, and gender roles among other things. The inflow of funds from migrants also has an impact on migrant-sending communities. A large share of families in migrant-sending regions depends on the inflow of funds from migrants for their survival and prosperity.

Within this changing context, the lives of children are affected differently, between nations and within them. There are teens living in middle-income families in Mexico City who wear the same trendy outfits as their counterparts in Montreal or New York. But there are also indigenous Mexican children in Chiapas or Nayarit and Canadian children in Aboriginal communities who still follow traditional practices and speak their ancestors' languages.

It is against this backdrop of economic, social, and cultural transformation that the *Children in North America Project* is examining children's well-being across the continent.

#### A CROSS-BORDER PARTNERSHIP

Representatives from the Canadian Council on Social Development, Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en México (Children's Rights Network in Mexico), and the Annie E. Casey Foundation have come together to create the *Children in North America Project* based on our shared interest in the well-being of all children.

The partners met at an international learning exchange on data-based advocacy convened in 2002 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We recognized that Canada, Mexico, and the United States share common bonds and challenges in assuring the well-being of our children, not just because of geography, but also because of increasing economic, social, and cultural interaction.

Knowing that data can be a powerful tool to raise awareness and lead to action that benefits children and strengthens families, we began to explore ways to work together. With help from



the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, we began to develop the first-ever tri-national project on child well-being.

All three nations monitor child and youth well-being in a variety of ways, but most of the work that is being done has a national focus. This project widens the lens.

Our goal is to create a social and economic portrait of North America's children, highlighting different dimensions of child well-being against the backdrop of the changing environments in which children and families are living. Drawing on a variety of national and international sources, the project seeks:

- to document how children are faring in each country and across North America;
- to develop a baseline against which to measure and monitor their well-being over time; and
- to build capacity in and across the three nations to continue the important work of measuring and monitoring the well-being of children.

There are enormous differences in the opportunities children have both within and across countries. These differences have important implications both for their current well-being and the extent to which they are equipped or prepared for the future. Our objective is to create awareness of the continent's children, the groups that are prospering and those that are struggling to carve out a place in the world.

We hope that this work will inspire researchers and others to delve deeper than we are able to do in this report, thus stimulating further research that explores the healthy development of children and the implications of increased social and economic interaction among Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

Most important, we hope that those who are concerned about children and families will use the reports that grow out of this ongoing project as a basis for policymaking, advocacy, and action. By calling attention to child well-being in the context of growing continental integration



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and by providing a readily accessible and credible source of information, we hope that our reports can help place children—and particularly those who are disadvantaged—at the center of economic and political debates in North America. We need to put children on the North American agenda.

### BEGINNING THE STORY

*Growing Up in North America* is the introduction to our report series on North American children. In this report, we present a basic demographic profile of children in the region and introduce three different dimensions of child well-being—health and safety, economic security, and capacity and citizenship—all of which will be explored in greater detail in subsequent indicator reports. The project also will produce a number of background papers focusing on such topics as children and economic integration and childhood and human migration.

An outline of our ecological indicator model, the indicator selection process, the data sources used for the project, and some of the cross-national challenges we faced is provided in a short background brief posted on the project's website: [www.childreninnorthamerica.org](http://www.childreninnorthamerica.org).



It is projected that there will be 119.6 million children under age 18 in 2020 in North America. Including the 18- to 24-year-old age group raises the total to 165.7 million young people in 2020—almost the same as today.

## The Children of North America

Who are the children of North America? How many are there? What types of families do they live in? What languages do North American children speak? Are they from varied ethnic and racial backgrounds? How many come from other countries? How many migrate between the countries within North America? Understanding the varied backgrounds and experiences of North American children is the first step in addressing the larger question of how they are faring.

### NUMBER OF NORTH AMERICAN CHILDREN

Children make up a large, though slightly declining, share of the North American population. Over one-quarter of the region's population are children under age 18, roughly 120 million children in total. While the proportion of children has been falling in each country, North America will still have a rather young population, especially in Mexico, 14 years from now.

Looking forward, it is projected that there will be 119.6 million children under age 18 in 2020 in North America. Including the 18- to 24-year-old age group raises the total to 165.7 million young people in 2020—almost the same as today as a result of steady population growth in the United States.

The starting point is different in each country. Mexico has by far the highest proportion of children in its population. Canada has the lowest proportion. In both countries, the number of children, as well as their share of the population, is declining—quite dramatically in Mexico. By 2020, the 0 to 17 age group in Mexico will make up over one-quarter of Mexico's population, down from over one-third in 2003, while in Canada, children will be less than one-fifth. The United States looks somewhat different in that the total number of children is growing now and is expected to continue growing. Young people's share of the population is declining, but only slightly.

TOTAL CHILD AND YOUTH POPULATION (MILLIONS), THREE NATIONS,  
VARIOUS YEARS

COUNTRY	AGE GROUP	2000	2003	2020
CANADA	0–17	7.1	7.0	6.4
	18–24	2.9	3.1	2.8
	total population	30.7	31.6	35.2
USA	0–17	72.3	73.0	80.3
	18–24	27.1	28.9	29.4
	total population	281.4	290.8	335.8
MEXICO	0–17	38.7	39.2	32.9
	18–24	12.9	14.2	13.9
	total population	97.5	104.2	120.6
NORTH AMERICA	0–17	118.1	119.3	119.6
	18–24	43.2	46.2	46.1
	total population	409.6	426.6	491.6

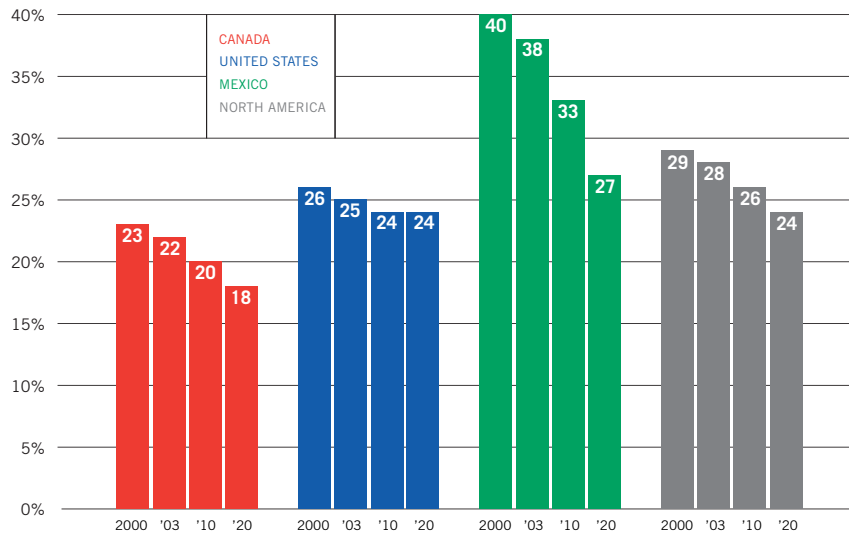
*Numbers may not total correctly due to rounding.*

Source: National population data.

A declining proportion of children in a population suggests that there are some issues to be considered. For example, there will be a smaller segment of the population that will enter the workforce, raise the next generation, pay the taxes, and support the elderly in the future. Ensuring that each child gets the best chance to realize his or her potential to become a contributing citizen becomes even more important as the ratio of youth to the older population narrows.

Although single-parent households have been on the rise for the past several decades across North America, the trend has leveled over the 1990s in the United States and Canada. The rate continues to rise in Mexico however.

CHILD POPULATION (0–17 YEARS) AS PROPORTION OF TOTAL POPULATION, THREE NATIONS, VARIOUS YEARS



Source: National census data for Canada, United States, and Mexico.

## TYPES OF FAMILIES

Most children live in two-parent families, although single-parent households are increasingly common.<sup>2</sup> Children are growing up in a variety of household types, just as they did in the past. Today, with relatively high rates of divorce and remarriage in the United States and Canada, new family types are emerging. This raises a host of questions about the stability of households; the resources at their disposal; and children's relationship with caregivers, siblings, and relatives—all of which are key to children's well-being.

Although single-parent households have been on the rise for the past several decades across North America, the trend has leveled over the 1990s in the United States and Canada. The rate continues to rise in Mexico however. According to the Luxembourg Income Study, in 1992, 13 percent of Mexican households with children were headed by a single parent; by 2000, 17 percent of households were of this type.<sup>3</sup>



As in the United States and Canada, two-parent families were the most common in Mexico. Many households include extended family members; this is an important facet of family life for many, many children. As well, a significant number of families with children— 14 percent of all families—are comprised of cohabiting partners or what are called “free-union” spouses.<sup>4</sup>

In Canada, one in five households with children (19 percent) were headed by a single parent in 2000. This proportion has been relatively stable, increasing slightly through the 1990s. There also has been a small increase in the proportion of cohabiting couples, a trend that is evident in national-level data. About three in ten Canadian babies are born to mothers who are not legally married.

The types of families that children live in were relatively stable in the United States between 1991 and 2000 according to the Luxembourg Income Study. Couple households with children were the most common (at 75 percent in 2000), including a small proportion of cohabiting couples (at 5 percent of all families). The proportion of households headed by a single parent was stable over this period at about 25 percent. However, according to national data sources, the proportion of children living in single-parent households has grown over the past several decades.

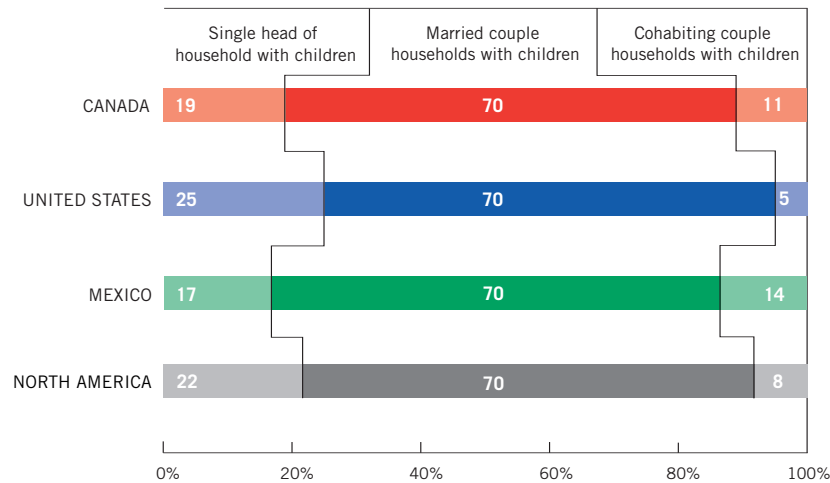
These data also raise questions about what they mask. There is a very high proportion of two-parent families in Mexico. But many Mexican families have transnational arrangements; some may not have lived together for a long time as one or both parents have moved elsewhere to work—to other parts of Mexico or the United States for instance. There is ongoing concern about the well-being of children as their families are restructured as a result of migration—both in Mexico and elsewhere. The fluidity of family forms is an important indicator to monitor.



In 2000, 39 percent of U.S. children were children of color. Of these children, the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group is children of Hispanic origins, increasing from 12 percent to 17 percent of children from 1990 to 2000.



HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN (0-17) BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE, 2000



Source: Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Micro database, (2000); harmonization of original surveys conducted by the Luxembourg Income Study, Asbl. Luxembourg, periodic updating.

## WHERE CHILDREN LIVE

Most children live in urban areas. The nations of North America are becoming increasingly urbanized. Although the definitions of urban and rural areas are not directly comparable across countries, they all face similar issues.

What is interesting about the places where children are growing up is what city life or rural life may mean for children. Cities are increasingly where the jobs are, which makes a difference to family income. Rural areas tend to be poorer and have fewer services. Mexican economic data, for example, show a marked difference between incomes in the more urbanized and industrialized northern areas and those in the more rural central and southern parts of the country.

In 2001, one-third of all Canadians lived in its three largest metropolitan areas: Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. Children in Canada live overwhelmingly in urban centers,

particularly large cities. In 2001, 76 percent of young people under age 18 lived in urban centers in the country, up from 74 percent in 1996.

In Mexico, in 2000, almost 71 percent of children under 18 lived in urban areas, while 29 percent were rural-dwellers. However, the proportion of children in rural areas is higher than the proportion of children in urban areas. Children made up 46 percent of the rural population and 38 percent of the urban population, respectively. This is due to the fact that the fertility rate is higher in rural areas.

In the United States, most children under 18 live in metropolitan areas, which is where major growth in the child population occurred between 1990 and 2000. In 2000, 83 percent lived in metropolitan areas and 17 percent lived in non-metropolitan areas.<sup>5</sup>

## THE DIVERSITY OF CHILDREN

The children of North America are racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse. What diversity means for today's children depends a lot on where they live and on their family circumstances. For example, in the United States, the share of the Hispanic population is growing quickly, making this group a more potent political force and changing the demographic profile of some states. In Mexico, there has been considerable effort to enhance and preserve the diversity and richness of indigenous cultures and languages. In Canada, which is an officially bilingual and multicultural nation, visible minorities<sup>6</sup> are becoming the majority in the large cities. In diverse societies, a challenge is for people to understand, respect, and accept each other. Learning to live well together is important to the health and prosperity of each nation.

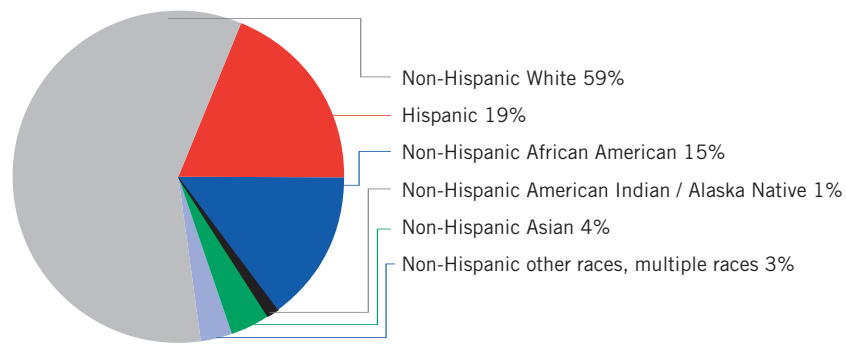
The growing reality of diversity in North America is undisputed. Yet, each country approaches the definition of diversity in different ways.<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this report, we have pulled together the data from national sources to illustrate the changing face of children in North America.

In 2000, 39 percent of U.S. children were children of color.<sup>8</sup> Of these children, the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group is children of Hispanic origins, increasing from 12 percent to 17 percent of children from 1990 to 2000.

In the same period, the proportion of white non-Hispanic children declined from 69 percent to 61 percent. The proportion of African-American and American Indian/Alaska Native children has remained stable at around 15 percent and 1 percent, respectively.

The chart below presents the ethno-racial composition of American children in 2004.

AMERICAN CHILDREN (0–17 YEARS) BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN, 2004



Source: KIDS COUNT (2005), Census data online.

Note: Race and Hispanic origin are reported separately by the U.S. Census Bureau.

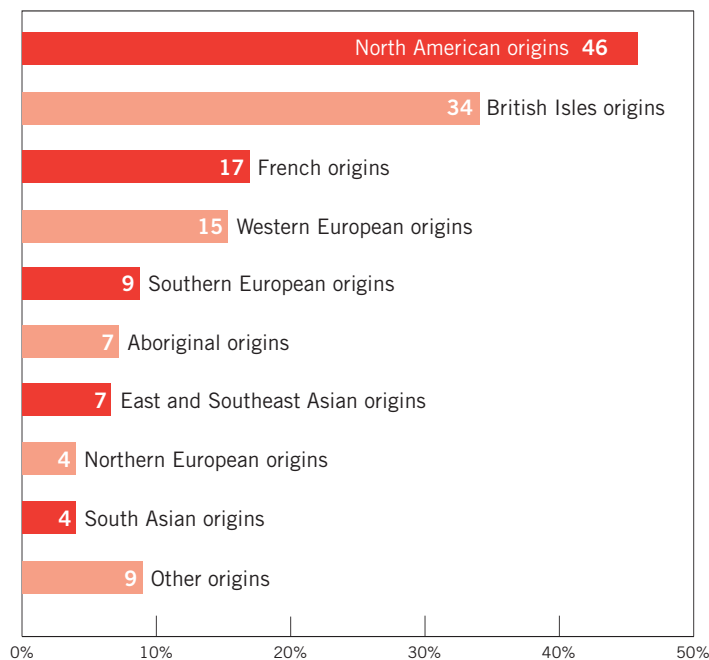
By 2020, Hispanic children are expected to account for nearly one-quarter (24 percent) of all U.S. children. White non-Hispanic children are expected to make up 53 percent of the child population in 2020.

As the number of Hispanic children has grown, so too has the number of children speaking Spanish at home. In 2003, 13 percent of children age 5 to 17 years spoke Spanish in the home, up from 12 percent in 2000. Overall, there has been an increase in the proportion of children speaking languages other than English in the home (from 18 percent in 2000 to 19 percent in 2003), change driven largely by the increase in the number of Spanish-speaking children.<sup>9</sup>

Canada is also ethnically diverse. There were over 200 different ethnic origins reported in the 2001 Census.<sup>10</sup> In 2001, the most frequent ethnic origin reported for children and youth under age 25 was Canadian, reported by 4.2 million in total. The next most common was British Isles origins (3.2 million), and, then, European (2.9 million) and French (1.6 million). Over one million children and youth under age 25 reported Asian origins—the majority of these being East and Southeast Asian. One in 14 children (210,000) reported Aboriginal ancestry.<sup>11</sup>

In 2001, 16 percent of children and youth under age 25 belonged to visible minority groups, up from 11 percent in 1991. South Asian, Chinese, and Black children and youth represent

CANADIAN CHILDREN (0–19 YEARS) BY ETHNIC ORIGIN, 2000





the largest proportion of visible minority groups, accounting for 23 percent, 22 percent, and 19 percent of all visible minority children and youth under age 25.<sup>12</sup>

Canada is linguistically diverse as well. French and English are Canada's two official languages, but a growing number of children speak other languages in the home. In 2001, two-thirds of children under age 20 (66 percent) reported that English was their mother tongue. For one in five (20 percent), French was their mother tongue.<sup>13</sup> And, as noted above, the proportion of children who speak a non-official language has been growing as a result of immigration. In 2001, 12 percent of children reported having a mother tongue other than English or French, up from 11 percent in 1996.

The United States and Canada are countries of immigrants. Children sit in classrooms populated with peers from around the world. While immigration is the primary source of diversity in the United States and Canada, the majority of children in Mexico come from the rich and varied cultures that make up the Mexican mosaic.

In Mexico, diversity is captured by connection to indigenous roots rather than by measures of race and ethnicity, which are used in the United States and Canada. The best measure available is the proportion of children living in households where an indigenous language is spoken. In 2000, for instance, 23 percent of Mexican children under age 18 lived in families where at least one member of the family spoke an indigenous language. That is a decline from 1990, when the rate was 28 percent. Seven percent of children age 5 to 19 speak an indigenous language. Among Mexicans who speak an indigenous language, 83 percent also speak Spanish.



MEXICAN INDIGENOUS POPULATION (5 YEARS AND OLDER)  
BY LANGUAGE SPOKEN IN THE HOME, 2000

LANGUAGE	NUMBER	PROPORTION OF INDIGENOUS POPULATION
Náhuatl	1,448,936	24%
Maya	800,291	13%
Zapoteco	452,887	8%
Mixteco	446,236	7%
Tzotzil	297,561	5%
Otomí	291,722	5%
Tzeltal	284,826	5%
Totonaca	240,034	4%
Other indigenous languages spoken in Mexico	1,782,054	29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,044,547</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: 2000: XII General Census of Population and Housing, National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI), Mexico.

Cultural and racial diversity is a hallmark of youth in North America today. Coming to terms with different cultures is important to the health and prosperity of each country. Children are well placed to navigate this changing environment—characterized by increased social and economic interaction—to take advantage of the best of all worlds.



More than 5 million children living in immigrant families in the United States claimed Mexico as their country of origin. The next two largest source countries were a fraction of the Mexican migration—the Philippines (540,000) and China (445,000).

**FIRST NATIONS' CHILDREN OF NORTH AMERICA** Children of Aboriginal, Indigenous, and American Indian/Alaska Native families are the children of North America's First Nations. Over the past 500 years, the indigenous peoples of North America have suffered from the loss of land and culture and the breakdown of many tribal systems and communities as a result of European contact. This legacy is reflected in lower levels of well-being among indigenous children, those who live both on and off of traditional lands, compared to non-indigenous children. The indigenous population in Mexico is the largest of the three countries, but the indigenous population has been growing in the United States and Canada.

Mexico has 62 indigenous languages, with a number of variants, which are the product of original cultures. As noted earlier, 23 percent of children under age 18 lived in families where at least one member of the family spoke an indigenous language.

In the United States, 1.4 million children under the age of 18 were identified on the 2000 Census as American Indian/Alaska Native either alone or in combination with some other race. They represent about 2 percent of all children in the country.

Aboriginal children in Canada are identified as North American Indian (First Nations), Métis, or Inuit.<sup>14</sup> In 2001, 5 percent of all Canadian children under age 20 were of Aboriginal identity, up from 4 percent in 1996. Aboriginal Canadians are a young population. In 2001, 43 percent of the Aboriginal population was under age 19. By comparison, the population share of all children was roughly one-quarter in 2001.

## MIGRATION AND CHILDREN

Migration is part of the experience of thousands of North American children every year. In 2000, according to the United Nations, there were 175 million international migrants in the world—people living outside of the country in which they were born. Their numbers have been growing. Between 1990 and 2000, the total number of migrants grew by 14 percent. Two-thirds of this increase (roughly 13 million of a total of 21 million migrants) was recorded in North America.

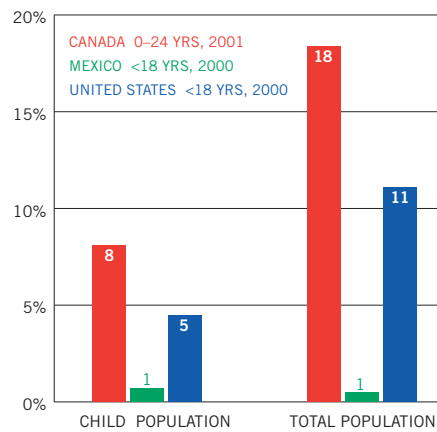
The United States and Canada are mainly receiving countries for migrants. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in 2001, Canada had the fifth largest proportion of foreign-born people to total population in the world, while the United States was eighth.

By contrast, Mexico had one of the lowest percentages of foreign-born residents. From 1970 to 1995, Mexico ranked first with a net number of emigrants of 6 million. It ranked third from 2000 to 2005 (behind China and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) for its annual net loss of population, an estimated 400,000 residents per year.

Many of the migrants traveling to and from Canada, the United States, and Mexico are children. Children accounted for one in ten of the foreign-born population and one in 20 (5 percent) of all U.S. children under age 18 in 2000—a total of 3.2 million. In the decade since 1990, the number of foreign-born children in the United States grew by over 50 percent. In 2003, about one in every four newcomers to the United States was a child under age 20.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, fully 13.5 million children, or 19 percent of all children, lived in immigrant families where at least one of the parents was foreign born in 2000.

Among children living in immigrant families, more than 5 million claimed Mexico as their country of origin. The next two largest source countries were a fraction of the Mexican migration—the Philippines (540,000) and China (445,000).<sup>16</sup>

FOREIGN BORN AS PROPORTION OF  
TOTAL POPULATION, THREE NATIONS



Source: National Censuses, Canada, United States, and Mexico.

As noted earlier, Mexico is a culturally diverse society, but very few children are foreign born. In 2000, among children under 18, only 1 percent were foreign born. Seven in ten (70 percent) of foreign-born children were from the United States, the majority of whom were born to Mexican parents living or working in the United States, and only 1 percent from Canada.

In Canada, successive waves of immigration have changed the face of the population.<sup>17</sup> In 2001, 18 percent of Canadians were immigrants, up from about 16 percent in 1991. One in 12 children and youth under age 25 (nearly 800,000) were foreign born, according to the 2001 Census. It is estimated that 20 percent of Canadians under age 18 are immigrants or the children of immigrant parents.<sup>18</sup>



In 2001, 18 percent of Canadians were immigrants, up from about 16 percent in 1991. One in 12 children and youth under age 25 (nearly 800,000) were foreign born.

The largest group of immigrants to Canada comes from Asian countries. In 2001, 51 percent of immigrant children and youth under age 25 came from Asia; 21 percent from Europe; just 8 percent from the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America; and 7 percent from Africa. Only 5 percent came from the United States.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to those who migrate officially, there is an undocumented<sup>20</sup> flow of immigrants. In 2000, some 6 million Mexicans were estimated to be unauthorized residents in the United States and an estimated 47,000 Canadians were in the United States without authorization. An estimated 29 percent of foreign-born people living in the United States in 2004 were undocumented migrants,<sup>21</sup> compared to an estimated 8 percent in Canada.<sup>22</sup> One out of every six undocumented immigrants in the United States were children under the age of 18—a total of 1.7 million.

The scale of movement is significant—millions of children and their families move all over North America for business, tourism, work and study, and family and cultural ties. Today's children and young people are highly mobile. They have families that stretch across local, state, and international borders. The challenges and opportunities associated with migration for children and their families are key issues for Canada, Mexico, and the United States—and the region.

The very security of the migration process is an enormous concern. Oftentimes, families are separated during the migration period if a parent or parents migrate in advance of their children. And the migration process has become more dangerous—particularly for young Mexicans—in an environment of heightened security concerns and growth in the risk of exploitation and the trafficking of young people.



In 1970, the infant mortality rate among children born in Mexico was 79.3 per 1,000 live births. In the United States, it was 20.0 per 1,000 per live births and 18.8 per 1,000 live births in Canada.



## Monitoring Child Well-Being in North America

Global affairs have always played a role in children's experience, but the "reach" of forces outside national borders has become longer and is more likely to affect the day-to-day lives of children and families than in the past.

Global forces may influence corporate decisions about where to locate a manufacturing plant that provides jobs for families with children or government decisions about how much to tax and spend relative to competing jurisdictions, which can affect health, social, and educational services for children. They may influence decisions about environmental regulations that affect the air children breathe and the water children drink. They may influence family decisions about where to live and where to work, and even whether or when to have children. They may influence how families experience a sense of community and shape children's sense of their identity.

These examples illustrate why monitoring child well-being should pay attention to the broader environments in which children and youth are growing up—in this case, the North American context—as well as their local and national contexts.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the North American context is not homogeneous. Each of the three nations is very different. Each has its own history, its own cultural and linguistic mosaic, its own political systems of government, and its own public policy trajectories. The North American overview that is displayed in the table on the right illustrates a few of the differences—in sheer size and wealth, for example.

Briefly stated, the three nations are starting from different points and the measures of child well-being will necessarily reflect different concerns and priorities. Taking the diversity of children's experience into account—both within and across countries—is critical. Trends need to be examined in terms of progress within nations. At the same time, each country shares common goals and aspirations for their children. Creating a regional portrait of children helps

STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF CANADA, THE UNITED STATES, AND MEXICO

	UNITED STATES	CANADA	MEXICO
GDP (at market exchange rates)	\$9,190 billion	\$624 billion	\$475 billion
Per capita GDP (in PPP exchange rates)	\$33,900	\$25,400	\$8,100
Labor force	139 million	16 million	38 million
Share of employment in agriculture, forestry, fishing	3%	4%	19%
Life expectancy at birth			
Women	79 years	81 years	77 years
Men	74 years	76 years	70 years
Infant mortality per 1,000 births	8	6	16
Share of workforce age 25–64 with secondary education or higher	86%	80%	21%

PPP: Purchasing Power Parities    GDP: Gross Domestic Product  
 Source: OECD in Figures 2000. GDP per capita data are for 1999. Other data are typically for 1998 or 1997.

us to move the yardstick forward for all children. There are things that each nation can learn from the others on measures where there is common ground: Who is doing well, who is not, and why?

The *Children in North America Project* is exploring three broad domains: health and safety, economic security, and capacity and citizenship. The three domains are introduced next. The indicators highlighted in the text were chosen to show why these domains are important for children’s well-being and strong families, especially in the current North American context. The following discussion serves as an introduction to the more detailed and nuanced portrait of children that will be developed in each of the following reports in the *Growing Up in North America* series.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

**GROWING UP IN NORTH AMERICA: HEALTH AND SAFETY OF CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES, MEXICO, AND CANADA** This report will address how children are faring on a range of health and well-being measures, including physical, mental, and reproductive health. It will also examine the environments within which children and youth are growing up, including topics such as access to health services and exposure to environmental toxins. The report will include the perceptions of children and youth about their health and safety on matters such as drinking and drugs, and violence and safety at home and in school.

Much has been achieved over the past decades. On average, children and youth across North America are healthier and better educated. Some are less impoverished. But like the economic well-being data, the indicators for health and safety show a mixed picture—with both positive and negative trends—and serious disparities among groups of children persist. Within nations, not all children have the same opportunity to be healthy and safe.

Infant mortality, for example, is a basic indicator of the well-being of a population and it has continued to decline in all three nations. Mexico's infant mortality rate is the highest, and has improved dramatically over the past 30 years according to the OECD. In 1970, the infant mortality rate among children born in Mexico was 79.3 per 1,000 live births. In the United States, it was 20.0 per 1,000 live births and 18.8 per 1,000 live births in Canada. By 2002, Mexico's infant mortality was 21.4 per 1,000 live births. Infant mortality improved in Canada and the United States as well.

But even within this good news story, there are disparities. There are regional differences in infant mortality in Mexico. Infant mortality in the poorest southern states such as Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero is above 25 per 1,000 live births, while the infant mortality rates in Mexico City and the state of Nuevo León in the north are below 15.

INFANT MORTALITY, DEATHS PER 1,000 LIVE BIRTHS,  
THREE NATIONS, VARIOUS YEARS

	CANADA	MEXICO	UNITED STATES
1970	18.8	79.3	20.0
1980	10.4	50.9	12.6
1990	6.8	36.1	9.2
2000	5.3	23.3	6.9
2002	5.4	21.4	7.0

Source: OECD Health Data 2005, October 2005.

Disparities exist in Canada and the United States as well, between different income and ethno-racial groups. In the United States, for example, African-American and American Indian babies are still much more likely to die in their first year of life than non-Hispanic white, Asian, or Hispanic infants.

There are also measures that show a deterioration in child health. One of the most disturbing trends of the past decades has been the increase in the prevalence of respiratory illness. “Asthma has been epidemic in large portions of North America for the past 15 to 30 years, affecting all ages, races and ethnic groups—but none more than children.”<sup>23</sup> The increase in the prevalence of asthma represents a tremendous burden for millions of children.<sup>24,25</sup> While this is a generalized trend, along the U.S.-Mexico border—where large industrial plants have been established and there is evidence of poor air quality and inadequate water and sanitation facilities—economic integration has been identified as one factor behind rising asthma rates. The growing prevalence of asthma along the border has prompted the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) to take up the issue of children and the prevalence of respiratory illness.<sup>26</sup>

In the United States, rates of asthma among children under age 18 were 3 percent in 1981 and 6 percent in 2003. In 2003, 13 percent of all American children had been diagnosed with



asthma at some point in their lives. These rates are even higher for children of color and poor children in the United States.<sup>27</sup>

In Canada, the risk of asthma increased sharply from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s. Since the mid-1990s, the rate has been relatively stable for teens. Roughly one in eight Canadian children age 12 to 19 have had asthma diagnosed by a health professional. According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, however, rates have increased slightly for younger children over this same time period, especially for boys.<sup>28</sup>

Respiratory illness is also a significant health concern among Mexican children.<sup>29</sup> The highest rates of asthma appear for children age one to four years. In 1998, 54 new cases per 10,000 children were reported; in 2002, 63 new cases per 10,000 were reported. In the 5 to 14 age group, rates have grown slightly from 28 to 32 new cases per 10,000 children over this period.<sup>30</sup>

Health outcomes are tied to a host of factors, including quality of physical surroundings (water, air, housing), household resources, and safety of the built environment. Access to health care is also important. In this regard, Canada's public health care system has played a critical role in reducing health disparities. Canadians have universal access to publicly funded health care services, including physician and hospital services. In the United States, the mix of employer-based private insurance and public insurance for the poor (Medicaid) and for people age 65 and over (Medicare) provides very uneven access, especially among working-age households.

In 2003, about 16 percent of all Americans and 11 percent of children under age 18 did not have any health insurance. Children who are not covered by health insurance are less likely to have a regular source of health care and are less likely to have used prescription medicines than those with insurance. They tend to receive late or no care, which results in higher levels of hospitalization for avoidable health problems. Once in a hospital, they receive fewer services and are more likely to die than insured patients. "Being born into an uninsured household increases the probability of death before age 1 by about 50%."<sup>31</sup>

There are clear differences in access to insurance among children by income and by race. Hispanic children, for example, are the least likely to be covered by health insurance (public



and private). In 2003, 79 percent of Hispanic children had coverage, compared with 93 percent of white non-Hispanic children; 88 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander children; and 86 percent of African-American children.

Access to health care is a critical issue for Mexico as well. In 2000, one-third of children under age 14 did not have access to private or public health insurance according to the 2000 Census. In total, over 55 million Mexicans did not have access to publicly sponsored health care services (Seguridad Social), including 20.3 million children from birth to 14 years old. These children are forced to rely on fee-for-service public clinics (servicios a población abierta) if they are available in their areas and can afford the fees.

In particular, indigenous language speakers are less likely to have access to health services. In 2000, 83 percent of indigenous language speakers did not have any health coverage compared to 56 percent of the rest of population. Access to health care is most problematic in rural areas. Rural residents must often travel great distances to access health services. Health care is beyond the means of many poor Mexican families and their children.

Unequal access to health care has a powerful effect on health inequalities and life prospects. The improvements in child well-being are tempered by the continuing struggle to secure the necessary supports for healthy child and youth development.

## ECONOMIC SECURITY

**GROWING UP IN NORTH AMERICA: ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES, MEXICO, AND CANADA** This report will focus on the economic well-being and security of children across the region. In particular, it will document the growth of economic inequality and depth of poverty among families with children in recent years and the consequences for children and their families. To this end, the report will highlight the income and employment status of families, macro-economic climate, and labor market developments.



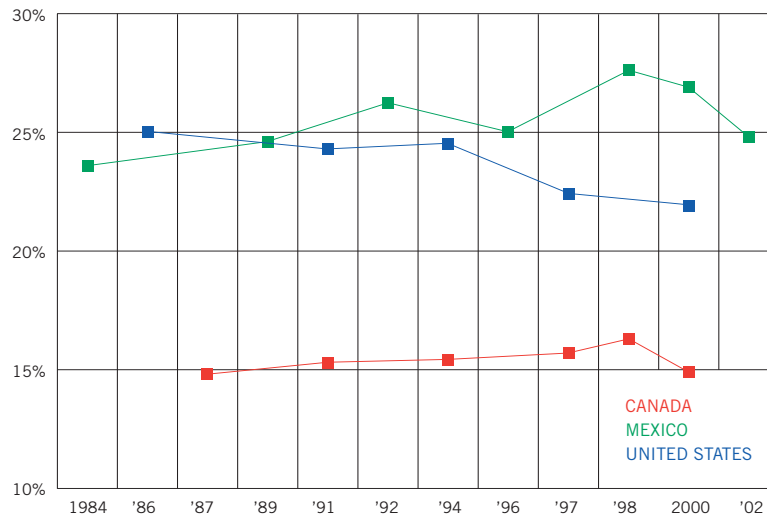
The U.S. child poverty rate declined by two percentage points in the 1990s. Canada's rate barely moved, showing a decline by half a percent. Mexico's child poverty rate rose by two percentage points over this period.

A family's economic circumstances are clearly linked to the current and future well-being of children as measured by a host of indicators—physical survival, adequate housing, and nourishing food being the most obvious. Economic inequality and poverty are the result of a complex interplay between labor market conditions, government policy, family efforts, and broader social forces. The rise and fall of inequality in a given society is sometimes difficult to predict. Yet, the impact of gross disparities between the rich and poor—within and between countries—can be dire for children. As UNICEF states in its 2005 report: “Children living in poverty experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to achieve their full potential or to participate as full and equal members of society.”<sup>32</sup>

The consequence of unequal impacts, of winners and losers, in the new economic order is of critical concern in North America where there are already high levels of economic inequality and child poverty rates compared to other OECD countries, particularly in the United States and Mexico. And while Canada's aggregate poverty level looks better in comparison, there are serious issues to be tackled, including the depth of poverty among single-parent families and rising poverty among recent immigrant families, to name two examples.

Mexico and the United States had the worst record in the 1990s of 24 OECD nations studied in UNICEF's *Child Poverty in Rich Countries 2005* report. In 2000, the Mexican child poverty rate was 27 percent<sup>33</sup> and the U.S. rate was 22 percent. Using the same measure—children living in families whose income is less than 50 percent of the national median income—Canada's child poverty rate was 15 percent. The nations with the best record (four Scandinavian countries) had poverty rates below 5 percent.

CHILD POVERTY, THREE NATIONS, VARIOUS YEARS



Source: Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), Key Figures, accessed at [www.lisproject.org/keyfigures](http://www.lisproject.org/keyfigures) on August 20, 2005.

\*Percent of children living below 50 percent of national median adjusted disposable income.

The good news is that the U.S. child poverty rate declined in the 1990s. Using the same measure (50 percent of the national median income), the rate dropped by two percentage points in the United States. Canada's rate barely moved, showing a decline by half a percent. Mexico's child poverty rate rose by two percentage points over this period.

Looking at these comparative data, it is important to keep in mind that they do not compare the living standards of children in each of the three countries. While the level and depth of poverty in the United States and Canada curtails the life chances of millions of children—and there are pockets of acute poverty—it is important to keep in mind the scale of the challenge of child poverty in Mexico. Many Mexican children go without the basics of life, living in inadequate housing without running water, sanitation, and electricity.<sup>34</sup> Many leave school early to augment their families' income. There are children as young as six years of age working in agricultural fields of the Mexicali, Sinaloa, and Ensenada Valleys.



To wit, the median equivalent income of poor households with children under 18 in Mexico in 1998 was 7,400 pesos (roughly \$940 U.S.). By comparison, the median income of poor children in Canada was \$9,900 (\$6,900 U.S.) in 2000. In the same year, the median income of poor children in the United States was \$8,700 U.S.<sup>35</sup>

There are important differences in the life chances of children within each country as well. National averages obscure deep inequalities rooted in disparities based on wealth, gender, region, ethnic and racial identity, and other factors.

Perhaps nowhere are the ties that bind children across the continent more pronounced than in the economic domain. Economic restructuring in the wake of growing regionalization directly affects the lives of children in locations where industries close and others spring up. Growing integration has brought economic stress and uncertainty for some communities, families, and children, while others enjoy new opportunities and increased incomes.

At the same time, economic integration is only one facet of economic development in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. In each of the three countries, wage and income inequalities continue to persist, rooted in skill polarization and the rise of more insecure forms of employment across the region. In 2002, for instance, about one in five full-time workers in Canada and the United States (22 percent and 24 percent, respectively) were low paid—defined as earning less than two-thirds of the median earnings—compared to just one in 20 workers (6 percent) in Sweden, and only one in six in Germany (16 percent). There is a very polarized pattern of employment in North America, where highly skilled professional employment coexists with a sizable pool of low-end, routine service jobs that offer poor working conditions. And in Mexico there is also a very large informal sector where millions work outside the protection of the law for scant wages.

Tracking the economic well-being of children and families then is key to challenging economic inequalities that threaten the well-being of children today and curtail their hopes for the future.



The median equivalent income of poor households with children under 18 in Mexico in 1998 was 7,400 pesos (roughly \$940 U.S.). By comparison, the median income of poor children in Canada was \$9,900 (\$6,900 U.S.) in 2000. In the same year, the median income of poor children in the United States was \$8,700 U.S.

## CAPACITY AND CITIZENSHIP

**GROWING UP IN NORTH AMERICA: CAPACITIES AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES, MEXICO, AND CANADA** This report will address the question of how well we are preparing children and youth for the future in terms of their educational attainment, skill sets, and level of civic awareness and engagement. It also will look at such key issues as computer and Internet access, participation in extracurricular activities, and engagement in paid labor. In addition, we will include the opinions of children and youth on topics such as the integrity of political systems, knowledge of children's rights, and the quality of their educational experiences.

It is an important principle that our societies must value children and monitor their current well-being. But there is also no question that we must care about the adults they will become. Children depend on society to prepare them for the future. Education is a key area of children's capacity development that will be explored in the third indicator report, along with such issues as their engagement in community and cultural activities and their awareness and perceptions of the world around them.

The advent of the knowledge economy has raised the ante on educational attainment and skills development. Today, higher levels of education are required to get a good job at a good income. That was one of the challenges identified for the adjustment of displaced American workers in the wake of North American trade liberalization. There were a number of factors that affected whether displaced workers got new jobs at comparable levels of pay to the jobs that were lost, but how much education they had was clearly a factor.

Without broadly based, equitable access to lifelong learning, many will be left behind, consigned to precarious and marginal jobs that provide low levels of employment security, low pay, limited career prospects, and a high risk of poverty. This is especially true of young people who leave school early.



The level of educational attainment in Mexico has improved in recent years. Among 25- to 34-year-olds, 10 percent had completed high school—upper secondary school—and/or had some post-secondary training in 2002. Eleven percent had attained a college or university degree.

Among the nations of North America, Mexico faces a major hurdle in increasing the education levels of its population. In 2002, the proportion of the population age 25 to 64 with less than a high school education—that is, a primary school or lower secondary education<sup>36</sup>—was 17 percent in Canada and 13 percent in the United States. But in Mexico, 87 percent of the age group fell into this category. The average school attainment for Mexicans age 25 to 64 years was 8.7 years in 2003.<sup>37</sup> Household income is clearly a factor, and the poorer states in Mexico have lower levels of educational attainment than the wealthier states.

Mexico has made strides. Among 25- to 34-year-olds, 10 percent had completed high school—upper secondary school<sup>38</sup>—and/or had some post-secondary training in 2002. Eleven percent had attained a college or university degree. Indeed, enrollment in colleges and universities increased by 46 percent between 1995 and 2002, albeit from a very low base.

The education of the current adult population is important for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the affect of parental education on children's school achievement. Throughout North America, the future of individuals with low levels of education is bleak; those who do not complete high school face considerable and increasing penalties in the labor market. Indeed, across the OECD, the gap between better-educated individuals and those with lower education levels is growing.

TRENDS IN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (25–34 YEARS),  
THREE NATIONS, VARIOUS YEARS

	CANADA	UNITED STATES	MEXICO
<b>1991</b>			
Below secondary	20%	14%	na
Upper secondary / post secondary, non-tertiary	48%	56%	na
Tertiary	32%	30%	na
<b>1998</b>			
Below secondary	13%	12%	82%
Upper secondary / post secondary, non-tertiary	41%	52%	9%
Tertiary	45%	36%	9%
<b>2002</b>			
Below secondary	11%	13%	79%
Upper secondary / post secondary, non-tertiary	38%	48%	10%
Tertiary	51%	39%	11%

Source: OECD, Education at a Glance 2004, Table A3.4b.

The labor market is different in the United States and Canada, but considerable challenges remain in ensuring that young people are prepared for the future, particularly for historically disadvantaged groups. The focus in these countries is to increase the numbers completing high school and going on to colleges or universities. The ante for economic success continues to climb.

Educational attainment is a key determinant of a child's future prospects. But it is not the only important aspect of the development of capacity and citizenship. Children develop and engage in the world in many different ways and environments. They may be active in sports and in local community organizations. Youth, in particular, may be engaged in political activities to make the views of the younger generation known to governments and the larger society. These topics, including the theme of citizenship among young people, will be explored in greater depth in the forthcoming report.



**WORLD VALUES SURVEY** The World Values Survey 2000<sup>39</sup> is one source that tells us something about the different ways in which the youth of Canada, the United States, and Mexico are developing. This study interviewed young people age 15 and older (to age 29). The following paragraphs are illustrative of the range of interests and experiences of young people across the region.

Young people are engaged in a variety of activities, including community-based activities—helping others and pursuing their own interests. In 2000, almost one-quarter (24 percent) of youth in the United States reported that they spent time with their friends “weekly” at clubs or in voluntary service activities in their communities. Over half reported that they attended community clubs at least “once or twice a month.” This figure was 38 percent for Canada and 30 percent for Mexican youth.

The data hint at what young people think of important topics as well like service to others, democracy, and human rights. A majority of Mexican youth reported that “service to others” was “very important” in their lives (57 percent), compared to 42 percent of American youth and 37 percent of Canadian youth.

Mexican youth were not very satisfied with the way in which democracy was developing in their country. Only 38 percent said they were “very satisfied” or “rather satisfied,” whereas 64 percent of Canadian and 63 percent of American youth were satisfied.

Asked how much respect there is for individual human rights in their countries, 80 percent of Canadian youth said there was “a lot” or “some” respect for human rights. Among American youth, 70 percent reported that there was “a lot” or “some” respect for individual human rights, while less than half (44 percent) of Mexican youth reported the same.

Forming an identity—a sense of oneself as a human being in the context of family, friends, community, and culture—is a critical part of development, particularly through the teenage years. Growing up in the North American region is changing the boundaries of childhood and expectations for the future. Charting the opinions and activities of youth provides a window on the future—where social and economic development is headed. Children are the true global citizens.



## LOOKING FORWARD

Thus, while the era of globalization has been marked by dramatic advances in technology, trade, and investment—and an impressive increase in prosperity—the gains in human development have been less impressive. Growth in inequality continues to threaten the life chances of millions of children. Significant numbers of children and families are being left behind while others enjoy a life increasingly distant from those in low- and middle-income households.

The 2005 Human Development Report makes the point that for most of the past 40 years human capabilities have been gradually converging. From a low base, developing countries as a group have been catching up with rich countries in such areas as life expectancy, child mortality, and literacy. However, a worrying aspect of development today is that the overall rate of convergence is slowing.

In our own region, while Mexico has made tremendous gains, large gaps remain between Mexico and Canada and the United States. Moreover, the gaps in the life chances between different children within each of the countries persist. Deep child development disparities continue between rich people and poor people, males and females, rural and urban areas, and different regions and groups. These inequalities seldom exist in isolation. They create mutually reinforcing structures of disadvantage that follow people throughout their lives and are transmitted across generations.

Working toward improved child outcomes will require new directions in public policy. There is no single blueprint for achieving improved outcomes. However, we do know that a narrow focus on trade liberalization or migration in and of itself does not lift all boats. “Indicators of export growth, ratios of trade to Gross National Income and import liberalization are not proxies for human development.”<sup>40</sup> Greater interaction between the peoples of North America holds out tremendous opportunity, but more attention needs to be paid to who is able to take advantage of these opportunities.

Focusing on child outcomes provides a basis for considering the scale of the challenge in North America. It is a moment for shared leadership to break with the past, and build a stronger, more inclusive future.



**THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX** The international Human Development Index (HDI) was created to call attention to outcomes for people as a counterbalance to the usual measures of economic growth. It includes indicators from all three of the domains being explored by this project on children growing up in North America. The indicators are life expectancy at birth; a combined measure of adult literacy rates and primary, secondary, and tertiary education enrollment; and standard of living (as measured by GDP per capita [PPP U.S.\$]).

In 2003, Canada had the highest ranking in North America—fifth out of 177 countries included in the 2004 Human Development Report, down from fourth place in 2002. The United States was tenth highest (down from the eighth spot in 2002) and Mexico ranked 53rd, maintaining its standing. Mexico still hasn't reached the HDI score that Canada and the United States achieved in 1975. But between 1995 and 2000, Mexico progressed from a medium-level HDI classification to a high one. Its HDI grew 18 percent between 1975 and 2003. Over that period, the HDI in the United States and Canada increased at about half that rate.

The HDI provides a useful benchmark of progress over time. The three nations have made improvements, but there is still a long way to go to ensure that all the children of North America have the opportunities they deserve to reach their full potential.



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

## Putting Children on the North American Agenda

How well our societies manage the major social and economic changes that affect children and families will help to determine our collective future. Will there be a healthy, well-educated and skilled workforce to drive the economy in the decades to come? Who will solve the environmental challenges that threaten the earth? Broker the peace treaties? Nurture the next generation?

### TODAY'S CHILDREN

Today's children depend on their families, their communities, and their local and national institutions to support their present well-being and their prospects for the future. Today's children also depend on nations working together to create what the United Nations has called "a world fit for children" in which nations commit to protecting the rights and well-being of all children.

Calling attention to children's well-being against a backdrop of major economic and social change in North America is the purpose of the *Children in North America Project*.

This report and those that follow will provide a unique window on the lives of children growing up in North America. But monitoring alone is not enough. Data are only powerful if they are used by those who care about children and families to stimulate action.

The intent of this project is to furnish advocates, policymakers, researchers, and others with information and knowledge that they can use to raise concerns and galvanize action in Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

There is an opportunity for civil society organizations, researchers, and others working on behalf of children and families in the three countries to join forces to advocate for action to ensure that all of our children are prepared for the future.



In the context of increased social, economic, and cultural integration in North America, it is important that the interests of children be on the North American agenda.

If this project achieves its vision of putting children on the North American agenda, it will be giving life to the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which challenges all nations to ensure that children have “first call” on the concerns and capacities of societies in good times and bad.



## Acknowledgments

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## Endnotes

- 1 Child development involves a dynamic interaction between the individual child growing through ages and stages of change and the diverse factors in the child's environment that influence the transitions from birth and infancy through adolescence and young adulthood. Thompson, Ross, A. (2005), *Changing Societies, Changing Childhood: Studying the Impact of Globalization on Child and Youth Development*, unpublished manuscript.
- 2 Each country measures family structure differently. Consequently, we have elected to use the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), a collection of household income surveys. These surveys provide standardized demographic, income, and expenditure information on three different levels: household, person, and child for many countries, including the United States, Canada, and Mexico.
- 3 These data are based on an analysis of households with children by presence/non-presence of (married/common law) couples. In this analysis, single-parent families are defined as non-couple households with children present. We break this down by sex of head.
- 4 In Mexico, the number of "free union" couples has been growing according to national data sources.
- 5 We equate urban and rural with the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) definition of metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties. Metropolitan counties contain a city with more than 50,000 people and/or commuting patterns that indicate interdependence with the "core" city. Non-metropolitan counties are outside the boundaries of metro areas and are further subdivided into two types: micropolitan areas, centered on urban clusters of 10,000 or more persons (but less than 50,000), and all remaining "noncore" counties.
- 6 "Visible minorities" is a term used in Canada and defined in the federal *Employment Equity Act* to identify people, "other than Aboriginal peoples who are non-Caucasian in race and non-white in colour." This group includes individuals who identify their ethnic or racial ancestry as: Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, or other.
- 7 In the United States, data are collected on the racial and ethnic composition of the population; while in Canada, the Census focuses on ethnic diversity. The Mexican Census does not collect information on the racial and ethnic identity of its population. Rather, it collects information on the language spoken in the home to identify indigenous peoples.
- 8 Children of color include all those other than white, non-Hispanic children.

- 9 In 2003, about 13 percent of children age 5 to 17 years (7 million) spoke Spanish at home, 3 percent (1.4 million) spoke other Indo-European languages at home, and 2 percent (1.1 million) spoke Asian or Pacific Island languages at home. Only 1 percent (300,000) spoke another language at home.
- 10 Ethnic origin, as defined in the Census, refers to the ethnic or cultural group(s) to which the respondent's ancestors belong. Ethnic origin pertains to ancestral roots or background of the population and should not be confused with citizenship or nationality. Respondents are able to identify one or more ethnic groups on the Census form. Data in the text are the sum of single and multiple responses for each ethnic origin.
- 11 Close to 100,000 children and youth (92,390) reported that they were American and 18,385 reported being Mexican.
- 12 It is projected that by the year 2017, one in every five people in Canada, or between 19 percent and 23 percent of the nation's population, could be a member of a visible minority.
- 13 Mother tongue refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the individual at the time of the Census. Chinese was the third most common mother tongue among this age group. The next top languages in 2001 were Aboriginal languages, Spanish, and Punjabi.
- 14 Aboriginal identity refers to those persons who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group (i.e., North American Indian, Métis, or Inuit). Also included are individuals who did not report an Aboriginal identity, but did report themselves as a Registered or Treaty Indian, and/or having Band or First Nation membership.
- 15 In the United States, 11 percent of the population (a total of 31.1 million) was foreign born, up from about 8 percent in 1990. The foreign-born population increased by 57 percent from 19.8 million in 1990 to 31.1 million in 2000, compared with an increase of 9 percent of the native-born population.
- 16 Looking specifically at foreign-born children, almost 40 percent, or about 1.3 million children under age 18, were born in Mexico. Only 2 percent were born in Canada.
- 17 Foreign-born population (also known as the immigrant population) is defined in the 2001 Census as persons who are now, or who were once, landed immigrants to Canada. This group does not include non-permanent residents. This group also excludes persons born outside of Canada who are Canadian citizens by birth.

- 18 It is projected that by 2016, 25 percent of Canadians under 18 will be immigrants or the children of immigrant parents.
- 19 Child immigrants born in the United States and in Mexico number 38,815 and 11,425, respectively. Numbers should not be confused with immigrants or young people who claim American or Mexican as their ethnic origin.
- 20 The use of undocumented or unauthorized instead of illegal is based on a perspective of human rights as they constitute an international symbolic order, a political-cultural framework, and an institutional set of norms and rules for the global system that orients and constrains states. The illegal status carries a criminal behavior and delinquency, we point out that migrants have social, cultural, economic, civic, and even some political rights in all the countries and that the legal migration and citizenship status is of minor importance with respect to guaranteeing their rights.
- 21 The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that there were 10.3 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States in March 2004, 57 percent of whom were from Mexico.
- 22 Most of Canada's undocumented immigrants are refugee claimants whose applications have been rejected or visitors who overstay their visas. The total is estimated at 200,000.
- 23 Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) of North America, *Making the Environment Healthier for Our Kids: An Overview of Environmental Challenges to the Health of North America's Children*, Montreal, April 2002: 26.
- 24 CEC, *Children's Health and the Environment in North America: A First Report on Available Indicators and Measures*, Public Review Draft, September 2005.
- 25 The task of diagnosing asthma in children is difficult; the definition may vary between countries. As well, different countries use different techniques for tracking prevalence. Thus, these data should be interpreted with caution and direct comparisons avoided.
- 26 The Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) is an international organization created by Canada, Mexico, and the United States under the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC). The CEC was established to address regional environmental concerns, help prevent potential trade and environmental conflicts, and promote the effective enforcement of environmental law. The NAAEC complements the environmental provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

- 27 Definition in the United States: "For all years, children were categorized as having asthma if the child ever had asthma (1981, 1988), or if they had ever been told by a health professional they had asthma (1998–2001), and if the child had an asthma attack in the past year. Because of these slight differences, data for 1998 and later years are not strictly comparable to previous years." Estimates are based on a response from a parent or adult household member.
- 28 In 2000, 13 percent of children age 0 to 11 had been diagnosed with asthma by a health professional, an increase from 11 percent in 1994.
- 29 In Mexico, we have information on the rate of asthma among children under age 14 (measured by the number of new cases per 10,000 children) and the leading causes of hospitalization.
- 30 Respiratory illness was the second highest cause of hospitalization among children under age 1 in 2001, accounting for 13 percent of hospital admissions. It was the most frequent cause for children age 1 to 4, accounting for one-third (33 percent) of hospital admissions.
- 31 United Nations Development Program, "Inequality and Health in the United States," *Human Development Report 2005*, New York: UNDP, September 2005: 58.
- 32 UNICEF (2004), *The State of the World's Children Report, 2005*, New York: 18.
- 33 More recent data for Mexico show a decline in child poverty, from 27 percent in 2000 to 25 percent in 2002.
- 34 According to the United Nations Development Program, 26 percent of all Mexicans lived on \$2 U.S. per day; 10 percent lived on less than \$1 U.S. per day. One dollar a day and \$2 a day are measures of low income, defined using 1985 international prices, adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP). Purchasing power parity is a rate of exchange that accounts for price differences across countries, allowing international comparisons of real output and incomes. At the PPP U.S.\$ rate, PPP \$1 has the same purchasing power in the domestic economy as \$1 has in the United States.
- 35 These data reveal the problems related to relying on income measures of poverty. They do not assess a family's access to resources or wealth. Nor do they take into account differences in expenditures (the need for warm housing and clothing in northern climates) or availability of common goods such as health care and public education.

- 36 Below secondary education includes "pre-primary education," "primary education" (starting at age 5 or 6, lasting on average four to six years), and "lower secondary education" (lasting on average three years, continuing the basic programs of the primary level).
- 37 OECD, *Education at a Glance 2004*, Paris, Table A1.4. The comparable figures for the United States and Canada were 13.8 years and 13.1 years, respectively. The Ministry of Education in Mexico reported a lower figure for 2003: 7.9 years.
- 38 "Upper secondary education" corresponds to the final stage of secondary education in most OECD countries and lasts anywhere from between two to five years.
- 39 *Human Beliefs and Values, a Cross-Cultural Sourcebook Based on the 1999-2002 World Values Surveys*, edited by Inglehart, Ronald, Miguel Basáñez, Jaime Diez-Medrano, Loek Halman, and Ruud Luykx, Siglo XXI Editores. Mexico.
- 40 United Nations Development Program (2004), *Human Development Report 2004*, New York: UNDP, [http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/pdf/hdr04\\_complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/pdf/hdr04_complete.pdf). See p. 9.

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The statistical information presented in this report was primarily compiled from a wide range of statistical surveys, national Censuses, and special studies, listed by section below. Other sources were provided through direct communication with various researchers and statistical agencies in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. A complete listing of data sources is available in the full version of this report, posted on the project website. A selected list of our main sources is presented below.

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