**Poverty in Canada has 'child's face,' UN report says**

**Failure to reduce number of children living in poverty 'robbing the next generation'**

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Canadians should be doing much more for children growing up in poverty, according to a new UNICEF report that finds Canada lags many other advanced countries.

The report by the United Nations child advocacy agency ranks Canada 18th out of 35 industrialized countries when child-poverty rates are compared with overall poverty rates.

In addition, Canada is in the bottom third — at 13.3 per cent — when it comes to the percentage of kids in poverty — a slight improvement over the past five years.

"The face of poverty in Canada is a child's face," UNICEF Canada's executive director David Morley said Tuesday. "This is unacceptable."

The report takes its poverty line to be half the median individual income for the relevant country.

It also uses a "deprivation index," which looks at the percentage of children in advanced countries who lack items such as three meals a day, an Internet connection, some new clothes or proper fitting shoes.

Overall, the report ranks Iceland best, with just five per cent of its children growing up deprived. Romania is at the bottom of the list.

Other countries that do better than Canada include Scandinavian countries, Japan and Australia.

Kim Snow, an associate professor in child and youth care at Ryerson University, called it "quite sad" to see the results.

Snow said the problem is particularly acute for aboriginal children.

"Our child poverty is no better evident than on our reserves," Snow said.

"We're really robbing the next generation due to the social impacts of living in poverty."

**Focus on government policies**

The report suggests that child poverty in the industrialized world has much to do with government policies.

While Canada does better than the United States when it comes to using taxes and transfers to help kids, it falls behind countries in Scandinavia and even Ireland.

"It is clearly time for Canada to make children a priority when planning budgets and spending our nation's resources, even in tough economic times," Morley said.

Among ways governments could help improve the situation, UNICEF suggests, is to increase child benefits and tax credits.

Canada invests $40.4 billion in elderly benefits — about triple the amount invested in children — with the result that the rate of low income among the elderly is half that for children, the report says.

It also urges Canada to establish a national strategy aimed at reducing poverty — particularly for children.

"There have been calls for this for years but we need to address it and take it seriously," Snow pointed out.

"We don't seem to actually embrace a strategy on a national level to set targets and systematically reduce them."

Canada has no official definition of poverty, UNICEF notes, making it difficult to come to grips with the situation or help remedy the problem.

As the report states, it has been more than 20 years since the federal government announced plans to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000.

"Yet Canada's child poverty rate is higher today than when that target was first announced," the report states.

"In part this is because the commitment was not backed by a compelling political and public consensus or by any firm agreement on how child poverty should be defined and monitored."

In the House of Commons, New Democrat Jean Crowder urged the Harper government to do more to help impoverished children.

"Will the government live up to its responsibilities under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and act now to end child and family poverty?" Crowder asked.