How does UNITED STATES compare on child well-being?

On many measures, and compared to other OECD countries, the United States could do more to promote child well-being. Children in the United States enjoy some of the highest average levels of disposable income in the OECD, but high income inequality also means that child relative income poverty rates are very high – around 20% of children in the U.S. live in relative income poverty, compared to just over 13%, on average across OECD countries.

Infant health outcomes are poor. The infant mortality rates is higher in the U.S. than in most other OECD countries (5.8 deaths per 1000 live births, compared to an OECD average of 3.9), as to a slightly lesser extent is the rate of low-weight births (8.1%, versus an OECD average of 6.5%). However, teenagers in the U.S. are comparatively likely to get regular exercise – 62% of 15-year-olds regularly engage in intense exercise outside of school, compared to 52% on average and as few as 36-37% in countries like France and Korea.

Teenagers in the United States are comparatively less likely to live in homes with educational resources like a desk and quiet place to study or books to help with their school work, and a relatively high number also report feeling anxious about school tests even when well-prepared. Average performance on the OECD’s PISA tests is moderate. However, teenagers in the U.S. are aspirational – more 15-year-olds say they expect to complete a university degree in the U.S. than in any other OECD country (76%).

Overall, self-reported life satisfaction among U.S. teenagers is close to average. About 36% of 15-year-olds report high life satisfaction (34% on average across the OECD), and 12% low life satisfaction (equal to the OECD average). As in most other OECD countries, 15-year-old boys report significantly higher life satisfaction than girls.

The Child Well-Being Data Portal (CWBDP) gathers data on child well-being and the settings in which children grow up. It provides information on children’s home and family environment, their health and safety, their education and school life, their activities and their life satisfaction, and also links to information on public policies for children. Information covers children from 0 to 17 years of age, although some information is available only for specific ages. Where possible, information is provided for different age groups, from early childhood to adolescence. The data portal also provides a unique source of information on disparities in child well-being by gender, family status, household income level, and parental background.

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