

THE MEASURE OF AMERICA

AMERICAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2008-2009

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THE UNITED STATES AND ITS PEER GROUP

Overall Report Findings

“Measure of America” is the first U.S. publication to examine in depth the differences between the United States and its peer group of industrialized nations using the global Human Development Index, which is calculated each year by the United Nations Development Programme.

The United States fell from its number two ranking in human development in the 1990 annual “Human Development Report” to number twelve in the 2007-2008 report. Although the U.S. made steady gains over that time period, other countries progressed more quickly, allowing them to overtake America in the global rankings.

Each of the eleven countries that ranks higher than the United States in human development has a lower per-capita income. But they rank higher on the health and knowledge indices. And each has achieved better outcomes in many areas, such as infant mortality and longevity, with less spending per capita.

The American Human Development Index is not directly comparable to the U.N.’s global Human Development Index. The modified American Human Development Index measures the same three basic dimensions as the standard global index, but it uses different indicators to better reflect the U.S. context and to take advantage of available data.

Health

The United States spends roughly \$5.2 billion every day on health care. But, despite spending more per capita than any nation in the world, Americans live shorter lives than citizens of Israel, Greece, Singapore, Costa Rica, Korea, and every Western European and Nordic country save one. Japanese citizens can expect to outlive Americans, on average, by more than four years.

The United States is ranked forty-second in global life expectancy.

The U.S. is ranked thirty-fourth in survival of infants to age one. If the U.S. infant mortality rate were equal to that of first-ranked Sweden, 21,500 more American babies would have lived to celebrate their first birthday in 2005.

The U.S. infant mortality rate is on par with that of Croatia, Cuba, Estonia, and Poland.

Education

America lags behind other affluent countries in math and science education, in the affordability of higher education, and in the number of graduates with the skills for high-tech jobs.

The United States spends the most on education for the combined primary and secondary education levels as well as on higher education than all of the other members of the Group of Eight (G-8) countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom).

Almost all three- and four-year-old children were enrolled in pre-school education in France and Italy. In Canada, Germany, Japan, Russia, and the United Kingdom, at least 75 percent were enrolled. In the United States, 53 percent were enrolled, and there is significant regional variation within the United States.

About 25 percent of the fifteen-year-old students in the United States scored at or below the lowest proficiency level on an international test of mathematics literacy, a higher proportion of students than in Germany, France, Japan, or Canada.

Income

The United States is ranked first among the world's richest countries in the percentage of children living in poverty. Fifteen percent of American children – 10.7 million girls and boys – live in families with monthly incomes of less than \$1,500 per month.

The United States is far behind other countries in its support to working families, particularly in terms of family leave, sick leave, and child care:

- One hundred sixty-three countries guarantee paid maternity leave. *The United States has no federally mandated paid maternity leave.*
- At least one hundred seven countries protect the right to breastfeed, with seventy-four offering paid breaks. *This right is not guaranteed in the United States.*
- One hundred thirty-seven countries mandate annual paid vacation. *U.S. firms are not required to provide annual paid vacation.*
- One hundred forty-five countries have paid sick leave for short- or long-term illness. *Sick leave is offered through the Family and Medical Leave Act, but it is unpaid and does not cover all workers.*

Other

The United States ranks first among the thirty countries of the OECDⁱ for the number of people in prison, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the total population. The United States has 5 percent of the world's people—but 24 percent of the world's prisoners.

The United States ranks fourth among the OECD countries for the percentage of our population who have been the victim of crime.

The United States ranks first among the OECD nations for its consumption of electricity and water as well as for its percentage of carbon dioxide emissions.

The United States ranks first among OECD nations for its expenditure on defense both per person and as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product. Among OECD countries, the United States has the greatest number of armed forces personnel.

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ⁱ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) includes: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States.

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