

# **CHILD POVERTY: SCOPE AND SOLUTIONS**

## **MATERIAL, EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL POVERTY IN THE G7 COUNTRIES**

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# Introduction

## Slide 1

# Child Poverty: Scope and Solutions

## **Material, Emotional, Social and Spiritual Poverty in the G7 Countries**

Children are our future and we are convinced that no plan or solution can lead to any kind of sustainable development without first ensuring the proper development and well-being of children worldwide. Yet despite their numbers – there are over 1.2 billion children in the world, accounting for over 35% of the world's population – and their undeniable importance for the future of our society, children are suffering and dying needlessly everywhere in the world. Therefore, it is important to remind all Summit and Global Forum participants that children are and must be the number one priority of the world community.

This presentation strives to promote greater awareness of the urgency of redressing the situation of children everywhere, including in the wealthiest nations. Child poverty knows no frontiers and takes many forms. In the world's richest countries, a shocking one in every six children, about 47 million children in all, live below the national poverty line (UN 2001). And this does not include the large number of children who suffer from emotional, psychological, social and spiritual poverty – which must be addressed as seriously as material poverty. That there is child poverty in industrialized nations is unacceptable and is not without consequences on worldwide efforts to eradicate poverty, owing to the political and economic power these countries wield and their overrepresentation in such intergovernmental organizations as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) - organizations that have seen their power and influence reinforced in the wake of globalization and increased economic integration.

The average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in the seven most industrialized countries (G7) - Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States - is 13 times higher than the average for developing countries and 64 times that of least developed countries. Obviously, there are no people living on less than \$1 or \$2 a day in these advanced economies. It does not mean, however, that there is no child poverty in the wealthiest nations of the world.

This presentation will explore the scope and dimensions of child poverty in G7 countries in the perspective that how governments from these countries tackle poverty issues at the national level will reflect and impact on the way they address or fail to address the issues of poverty at the international level, especially in terms of the extent and allocation of Official Development Assistance (ODA).

## **Slide 2**

# **Presentation Outline**

- **Scope of Child Poverty in G7 Countries**
  - **Income Poverty**
  - **Social, Emotional and Spiritual Poverty**
- **Commitment and Priorities of G7 Countries**
  - **National**
  - **International**
- **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The objectives of the presentation are to:

- Explore child poverty indicators in G7 countries and compare them with those countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that have low child poverty rates: Sweden and Norway;
- Consider how social policies affect child poverty rates using public social expenditures data from each country;
- Highlight the interrelationship between national policies, child poverty levels and international commitments;
- Identify and recommend potential interventions to improve child poverty eradication efforts in G7 countries as well as worldwide.

# Scope of Child Poverty

## Slide 3

### Presentation Outline

- **Scope of Child Poverty in G7 Countries**
  - **Income Poverty**

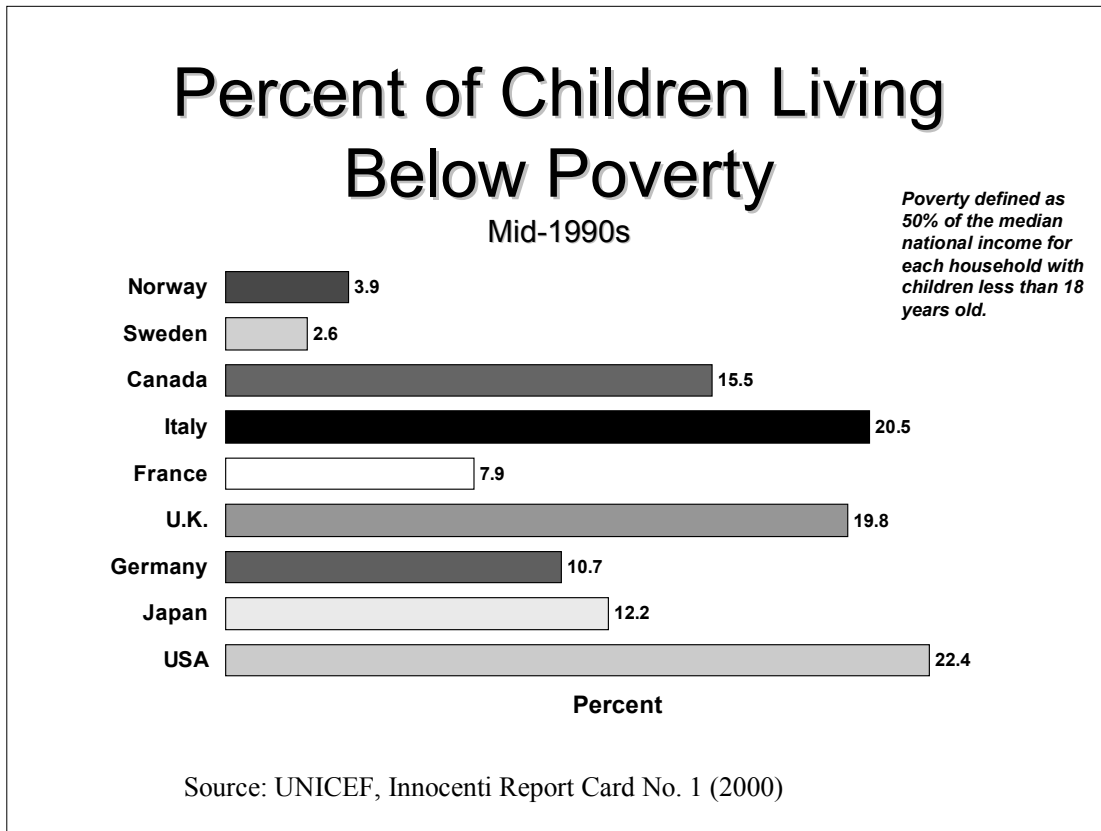
Unlike in poorer countries, most people living in G7 nations have the means to purchase or consume the fixed minimum basket of goods and services needed for survival. Therefore absolute poverty, the most commonly used definition of poverty in the study of poorer countries, cannot accurately capture the unequal distribution and access to resources that characterizes poverty in wealthier nations.

An alternative definition is found in Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which recognizes “the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development”. By this definition, poverty is relative and is measured by the typical income level required to enjoy the living standards that are customary or widely accepted in a given society. It focuses on inequality and social exclusion, and is therefore a much more accurate indicator of equality of opportunity, one of the most touted and appealing fundamental values of democratic societies.

## Income Poverty

We will first focus on income poverty. Child poverty rates are based on the most common relative poverty line, which is 50% of the median national income for each household with children less than 18 years old.

### Slide 4



This figure shows the percentage of children living below the relative poverty line in all G7 countries, Norway and Sweden. Countries are sorted by their Gross Domestic Product rank: US (1), Japan (2), Germany (3), U.K. (4), France (5), Italy (7), Canada (8), Sweden (19) and Norway (26). Child poverty rates vary between 2.6% and 22.4% in the 9 countries. G7 countries have very high poverty rates compared to Sweden and Norway, even though all of these countries are at similar levels of economic development. Canada, the U.K., Italy and especially the U.S. stand out as having surprisingly high levels of child poverty, from 6 times to 8 times that of Sweden, considering their superior national income levels. This indicates a strong incidence of income inequality within these societies.

**Slide 5**

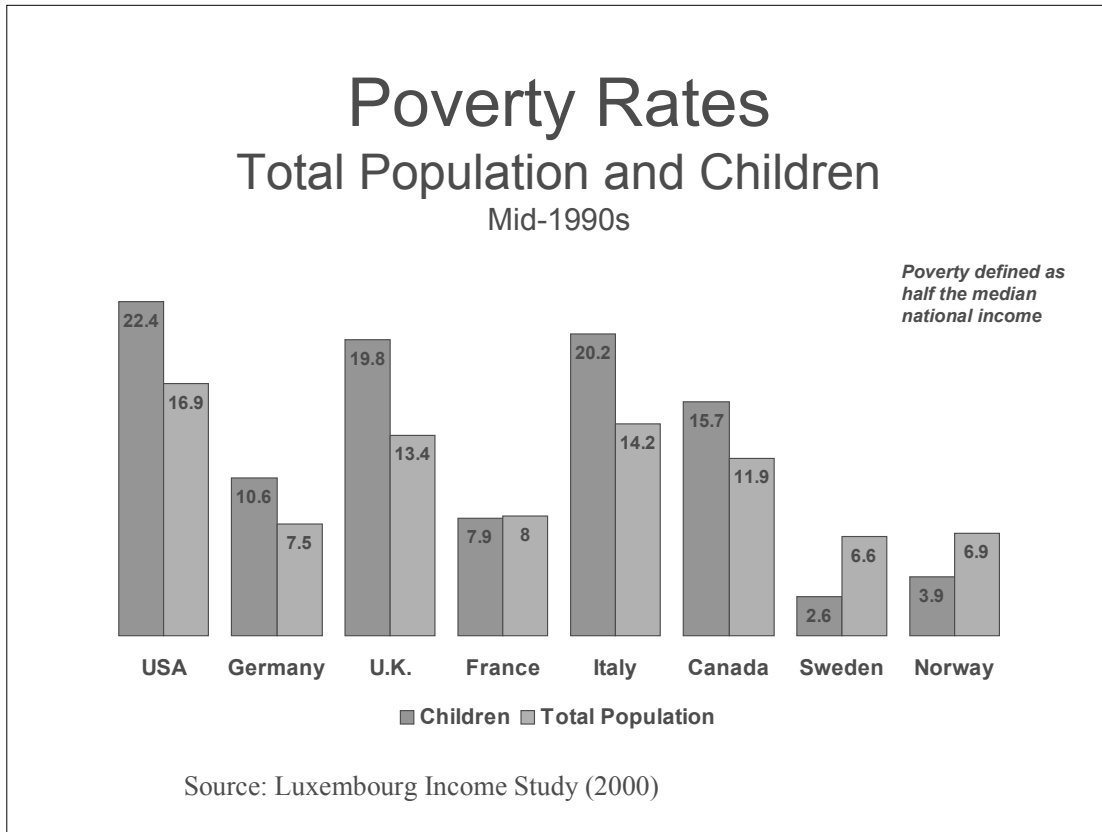
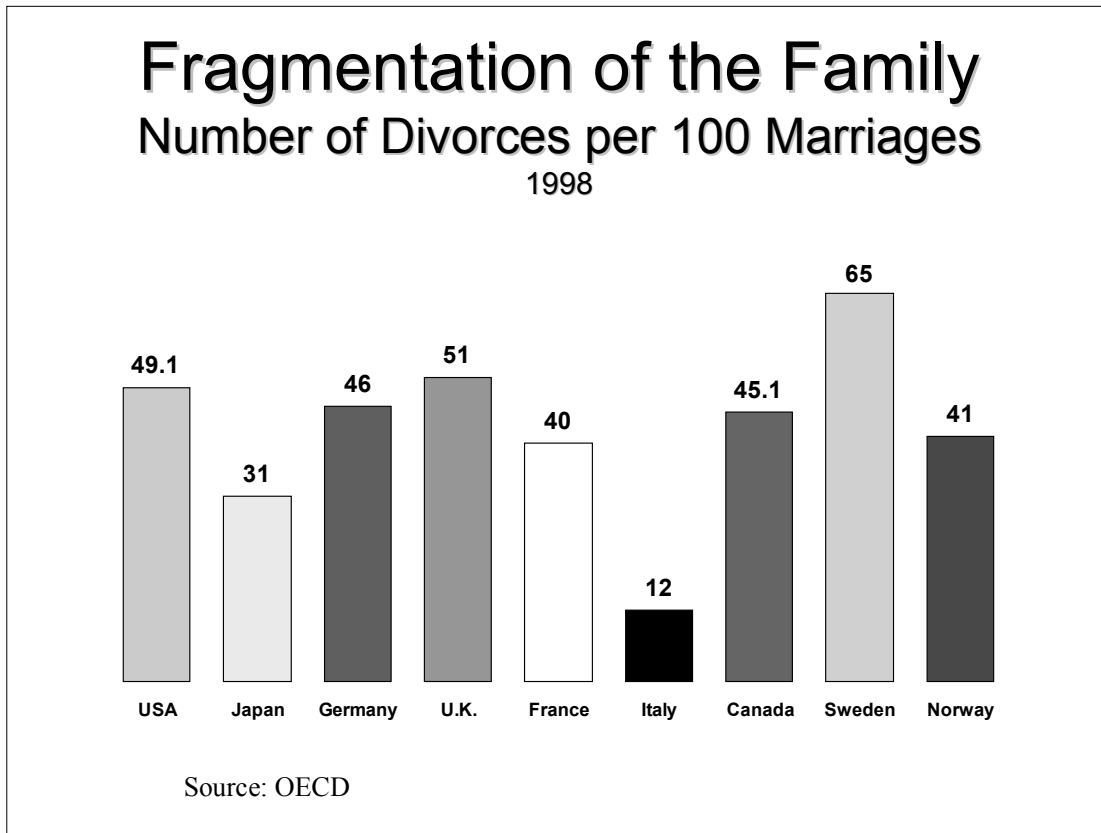


Figure 2 compares the overall relative poverty rate of the population with that of children, showing that except in Sweden, Norway and France, children suffer disproportionately from income poverty. What can account for this variation across nations? Children are dependent on their parents and their economic status is inextricably linked to their parents' living conditions. One possible explanation for the prevalence of poverty among children is the fragmentation of the family, which is a growing concern in most industrialized nations.

## Slide 6

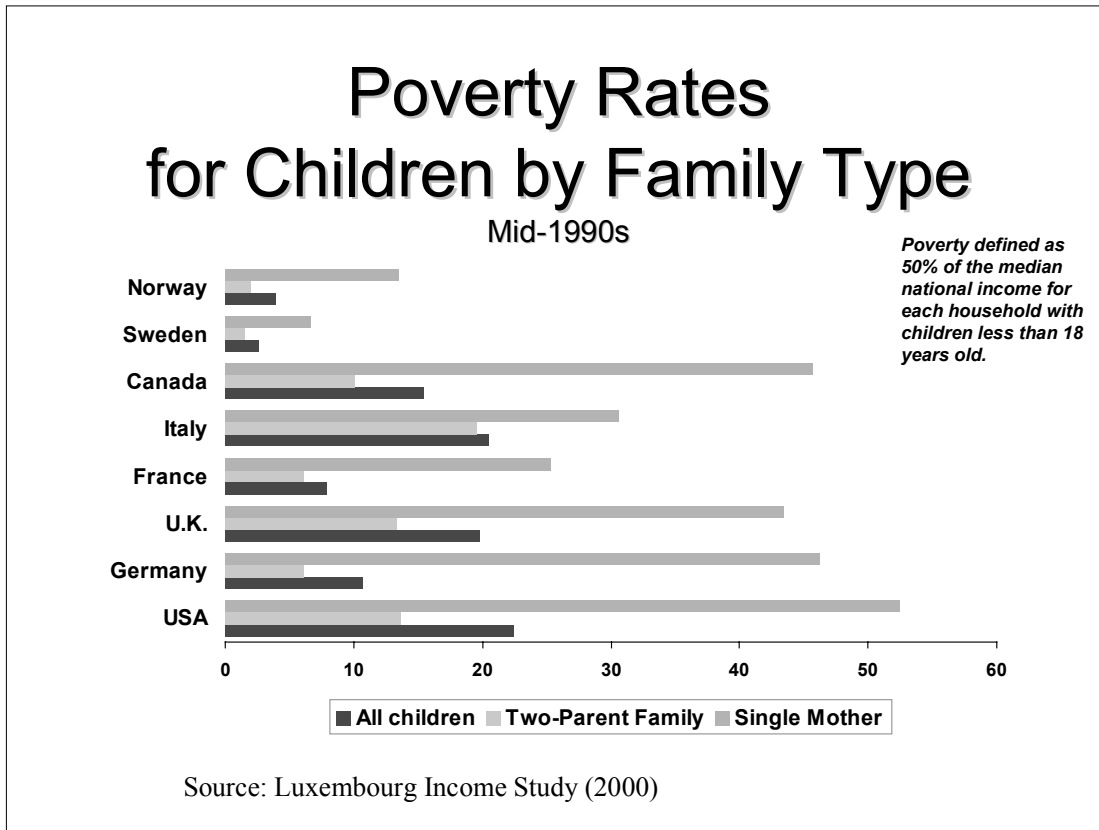


As this slide shows, fragmentation of the family is a widespread occurrence in the most industrialized countries of the world. The number of divorces per 100 marriages stands at 40 and over for all countries, except Italy and Japan, and peaks at 65 in the case Sweden. We can assume the number of separations among unmarried couples to be similar if not higher.

The family is an important source of stability, values and emotional and physical well-being for children. The impact of the disintegration of the family unit on children must not be underestimated. At the economic level, when separations or divorces occur, economies of scale are lost as two new households are set up and, often, only one parent (typically the mother) is left with the legal responsibility of the children. As important are the psychological and emotional effects of the separation process itself and its aftermath on children, as when parents use their children as hostages and pawns in the legal fight for child custody and support. Family laws in most industrialized nations totally fail to work in the best interests of children of separated or divorced parents; they fall short of protecting and upholding the rights of children to a decent standard of living and to an environment conducive to their well-being and proper development. Legal proceedings are essentially adversarial in nature, can drag on for years and can ultimately drain financial resources to such a point as to lower the disposable income needed for the basic needs of children below the threshold of poverty.

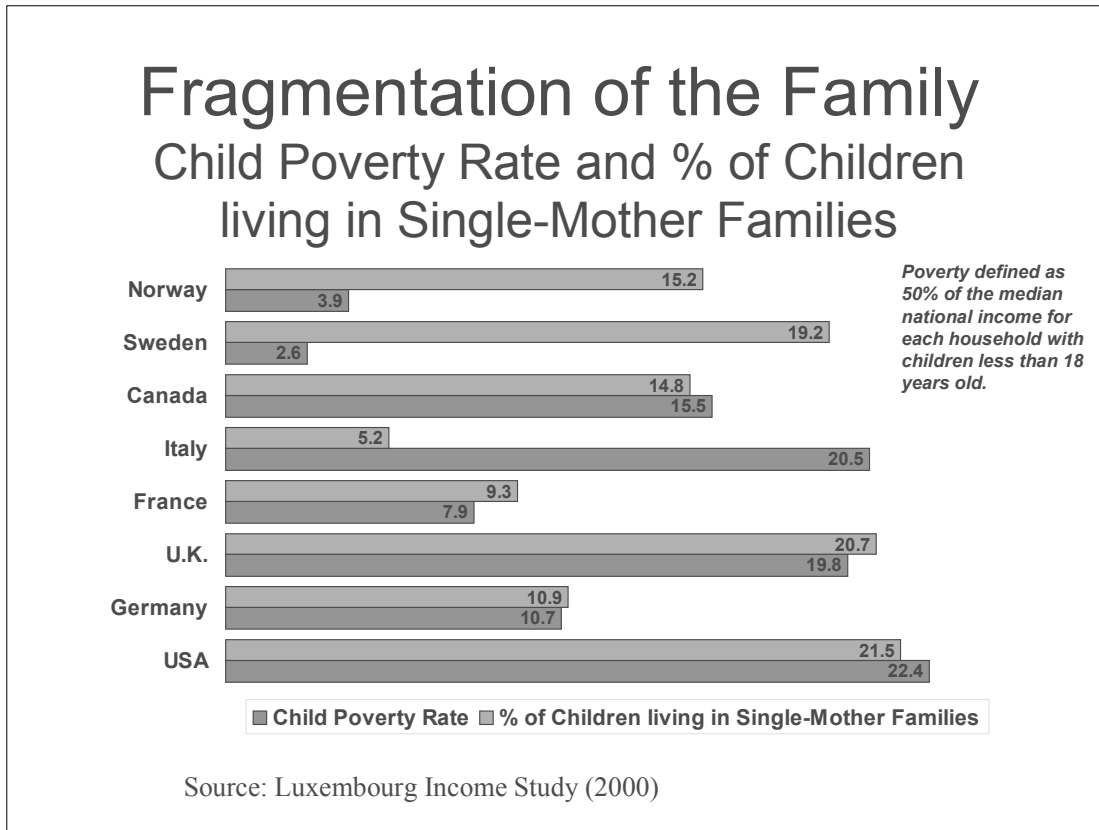
My personal ordeal is a case in point. I had to struggle for 16 years to regain contact with my son subsequent to my break up with the child's mother. The legal battle to right this injustice caused me intense emotional pain and drove me to poverty. This terrible experience, which is described in detail in my book *Please don't let me go, Papa!*, is what spurred me to establish the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights (OPCR) and to embark in a crusade for widespread change in an effort to see education and mediation routinely replace lawsuits in the resolution of family conflicts.

Slide 7



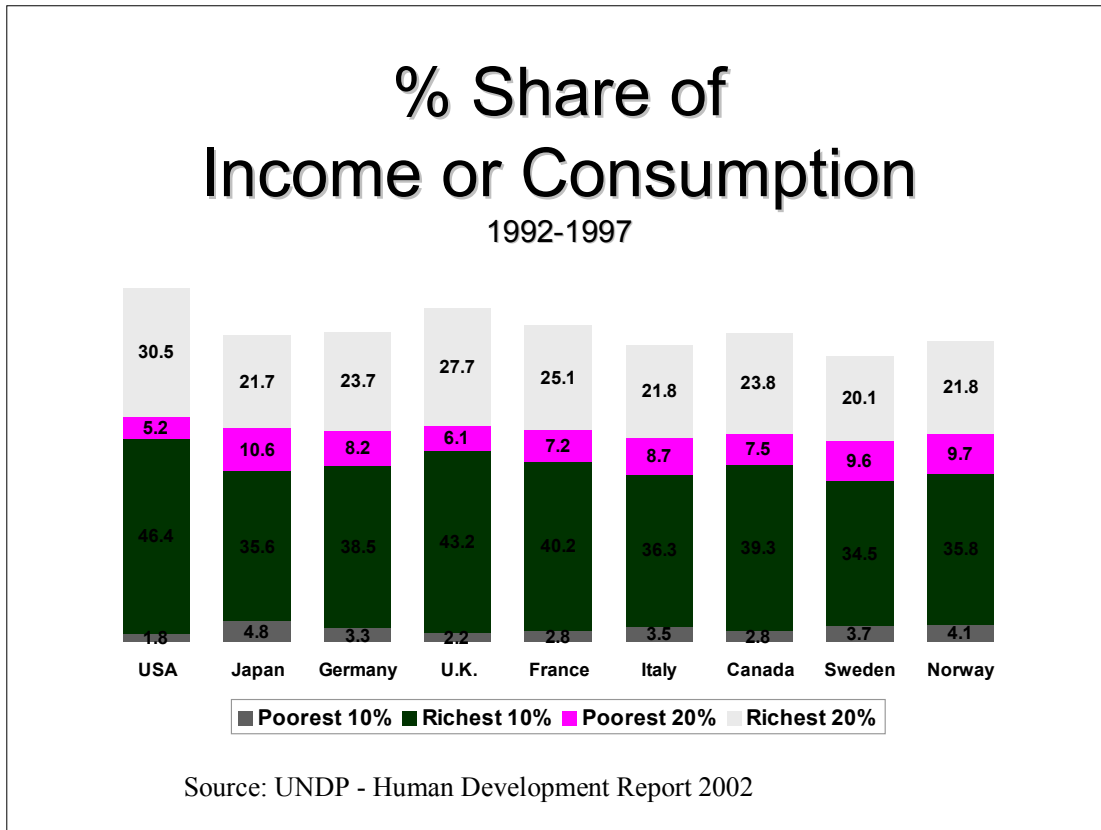
This slide shows the child poverty rate by type of household. The poverty rate of US single-mother children is the highest. At 52.5%, it exceeds by more than 6 percentage points the next highest rates, Germany (46.2%) and Canada (45.7%). As surmised, the poverty rate of children in living in single-mother families is approximately 2 to 3 times greater than that of children living in two-parent families in Italy and the U.K.; 4 to 5 times greater in the U.S., France, Canada and Sweden; and 7 times greater in Germany and Norway. The correlation between single-motherhood and child poverty is quite clear. But does it account for the extent and variations in child poverty rates between these countries?

**Slide 8**



The next slide shows the percentage of children living in single-mother families against the actual child poverty rate for each country. The proportion of single-mother families varies between 6.2% and 21.6% of families in all countries. The U.S., the U.K. and Canada have both high rates of single-mother families and child poverty. The most striking finding, however, is that Norway and Sweden have high rates of single-mother families but also the lowest rates of child poverty. This, even though the previous slide showed that the child poverty rates of single-mother families in both countries were 4 to 7 times greater than for two-parent families. It seems that the fragmentation of the family, in itself, is not at the core of the varying child poverty rates between G7 countries and Sweden and Norway. Perhaps then, a more accurate explanation lies in the analysis of fundamental inequalities within each country?

**Slide 9**



The following slide focuses on the unequal distribution of income between rich families and poor families within each country. It shows that while all nine countries have steadily increased their per capita GDP, most of the gain was captured by the richest people. The difference in the income or consumption share of the richest 10% of families compared to that of the poorest 10% is appalling, as the ratio ranges from 4 to 5 times the share in Japan, Sweden and Norway to an incredible 12 and 16 times the share in the U.K. and the U.S. respectively. Ratios are less dramatic when comparing the income or consumption share of the richest 20% to that of the poorest 20%, but remain extremely high for societies who pride themselves on their democratic values. Especially in the case of the U.S and the U.K. again, where the richest 20% of families have 9 and 7 times the income of the poorest 20%. Clearly, within-country inequalities in income are striking in all nine countries and mirror the inequalities between industrialized and developing countries. This is an important factor to consider for poverty reduction, since unequal distribution of income reduces the benefits of economic growth to poor people.

### Slide 10

# Presentation Outline

## ➤ **Scope of Child Poverty in G7 Countries**

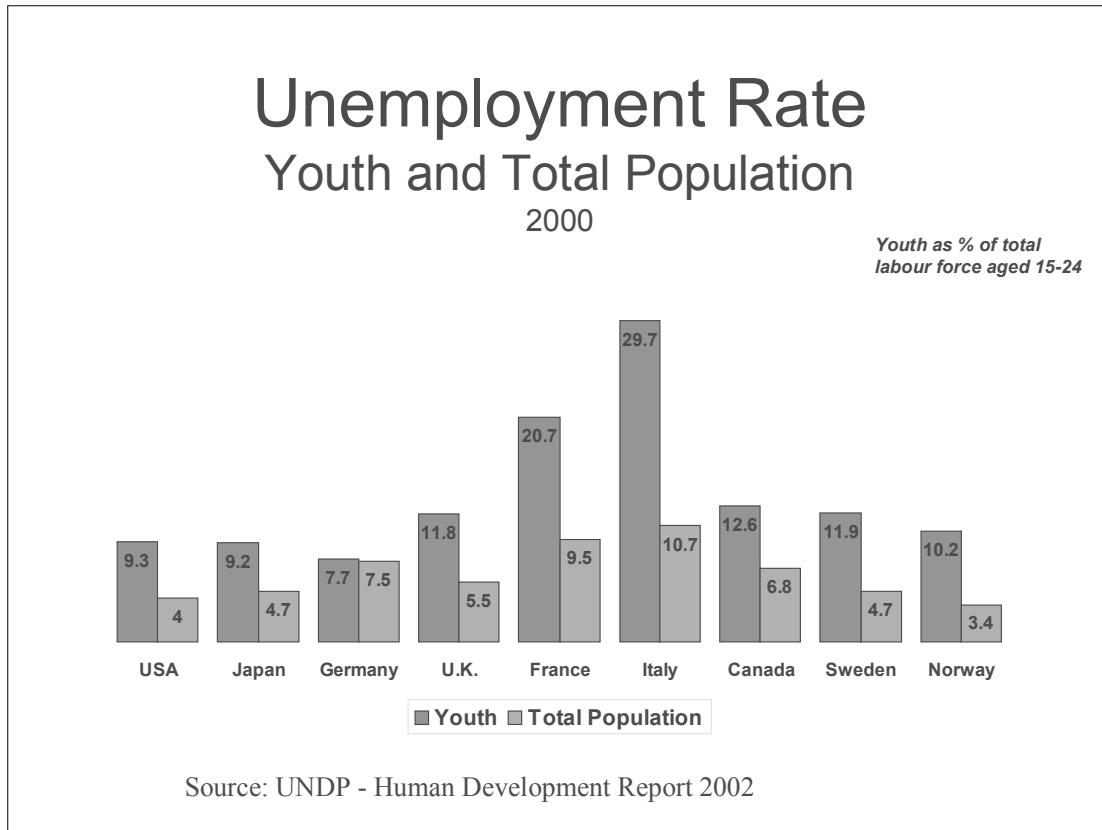
- Income Poverty
- **Social, Emotional and Spiritual Poverty**

In dealing with issues of poverty, one must not only deal with economic poverty but also with political poverty as well as with the culture of poverty and the psychology of poverty. Poverty means not only lacking money, but also lacking power. When one lives in a society where poverty and lack of power bars you from equal protection, equal access and equal participation to the economic and social life of your society, then one is truly poor. Children and adolescents can be and are in effect impoverished by lack of access to resources that are crucial to their development and social inclusion. This includes access to quality education, health services, employment, justice, credit and savings, affordable housing, early childhood care, quality time with parents and political representation, to name a few.

Unfortunately, attempts to document the overall extent of social, emotional and spiritual poverty among children are in their infancy and there is a crying lack of reliable data about children in some key areas in the wealthiest countries, such as child labor, trafficking and child abuse, for example. This in itself is already a reflection of the low status of children and the low political priority accorded to them. A deplorable state of affairs, which is compounded by the fact that children lack the political power to get governments to hear them and respond to their needs.

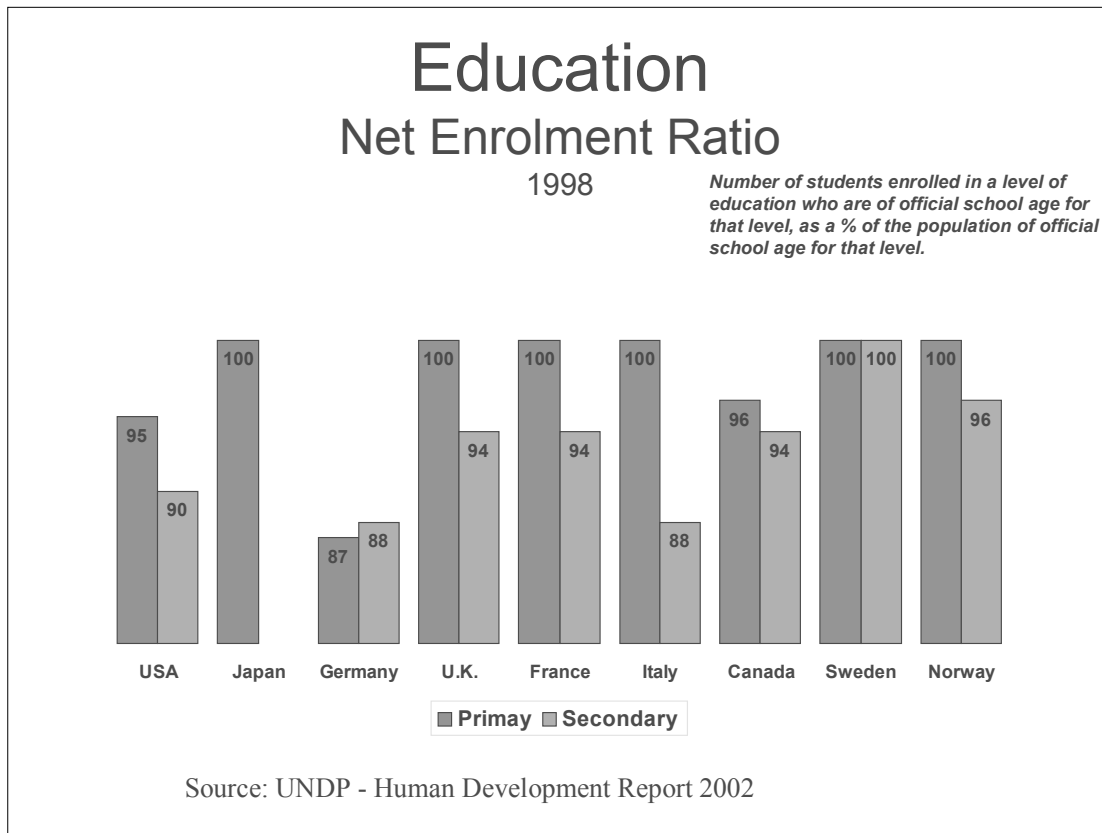
Nonetheless, there are some indicators that can help us measure the extent of social, emotional and spiritual poverty of children within the most industrialized countries of the world.

**Slide 11**



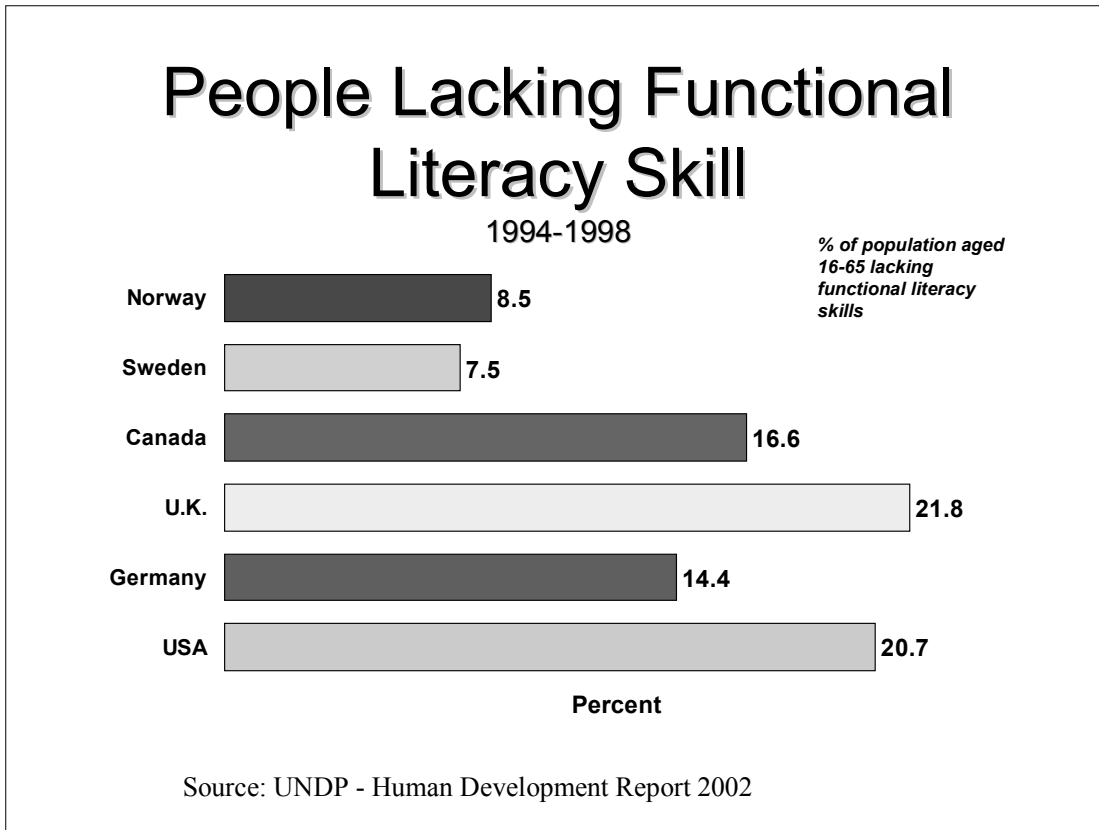
Employment directly impacts on the incidence and duration of poverty spells, emphasizing the importance of access to employment opportunities. The next slide shows that unemployment rates among youths aged 15 to 24 are almost twice as high as that among adults in all countries, with the exception of Germany. The high proportion of unemployed youths may be the result of inadequate labor policies, education and training and/or lack of services designed to facilitate the transition from school to work for adolescents. Lower labor force participation is one of many indicators of the human cost of poverty.

**Slide 12**



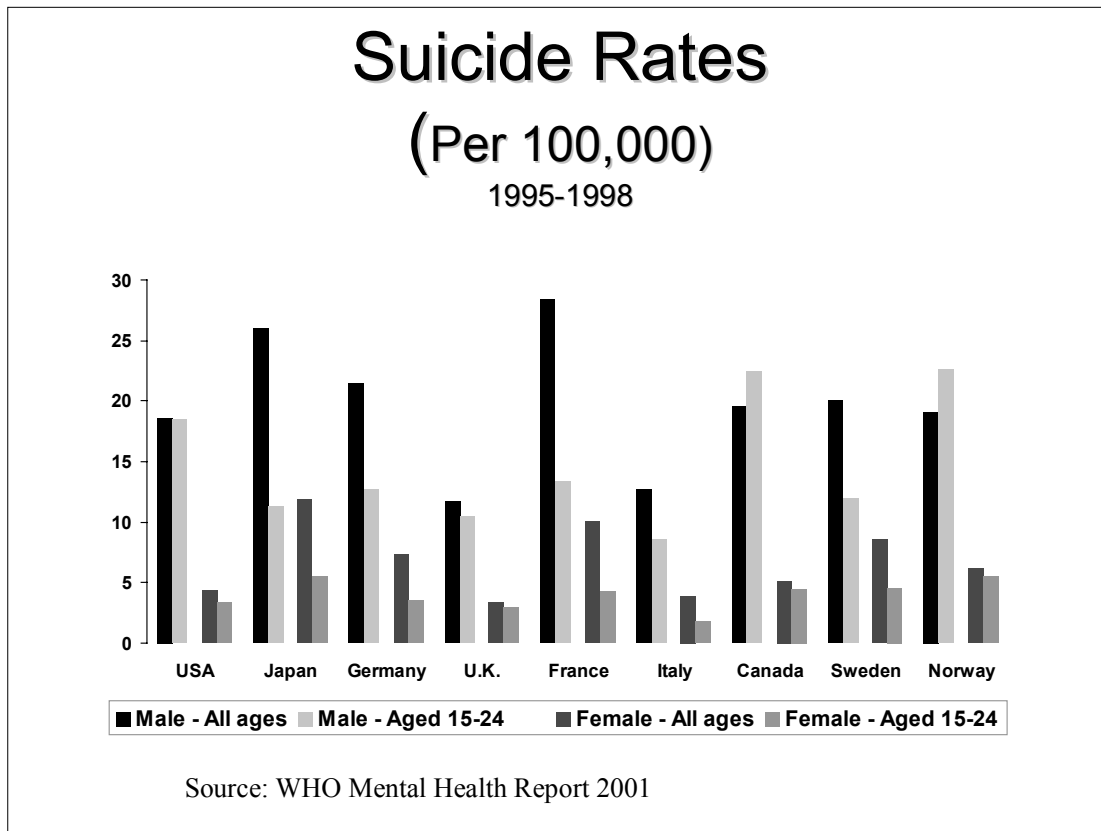
Access to basic education is crucial to ensure the cognitive development of children and their future opportunities in terms of employment, health and social well-being. The next slide shows the net enrolment ratio in primary and secondary school in each country, which is to say the number of students enrolled in a level of education who are of official school age for that level, as a percentage of the population of official school age for that level. Primary enrolments range from a low of 87% in Germany to 100% in all other countries except the U.S.A. and Canada, which have rates of 95% and 96% respectively. Only Sweden reaches 100% in secondary enrolments, all other countries having rates from 88% to 96%. This means that, with the exception of Sweden, a surprising number of children in the most industrialized countries do not attain the level of education required to enter a high-technology, knowledge-intensive labor force, will be more likely to earn lower wages and therefore be at risk of slipping into poverty. Furthermore, enrolment rates do not tell us anything about the proportion of children who actually complete school. Recent studies have estimated the percentage of children dropping out of school to be 15.1% in Canada in 1999 (PCERA 2000) and 11% in the U.S. in 2000 (Kids Count 2002). There were close to 16 million school dropouts aged 16-19 in the U.S. in 2000.

**Slide 13**



As well, enrolling children in primary and secondary school is only meaningful if the education received is of sufficient quality to ensure their integration into society as functional citizens and workers. The following slide shows the proportion of the adult population aged 16-65 who are functionally illiterate, defined as “the inability to understand and use common channels of communication and information in an every day context, from newspapers and books to pamphlets and instructions on medicine bottles.” (HDR 2002). In all nine countries, an incredible 8 to 22% of people are functionally illiterate, with Sweden and Norway doing relatively well at 7.5% and 8.5% respectively, while the U.K. and the U.S. have levels over 20%.

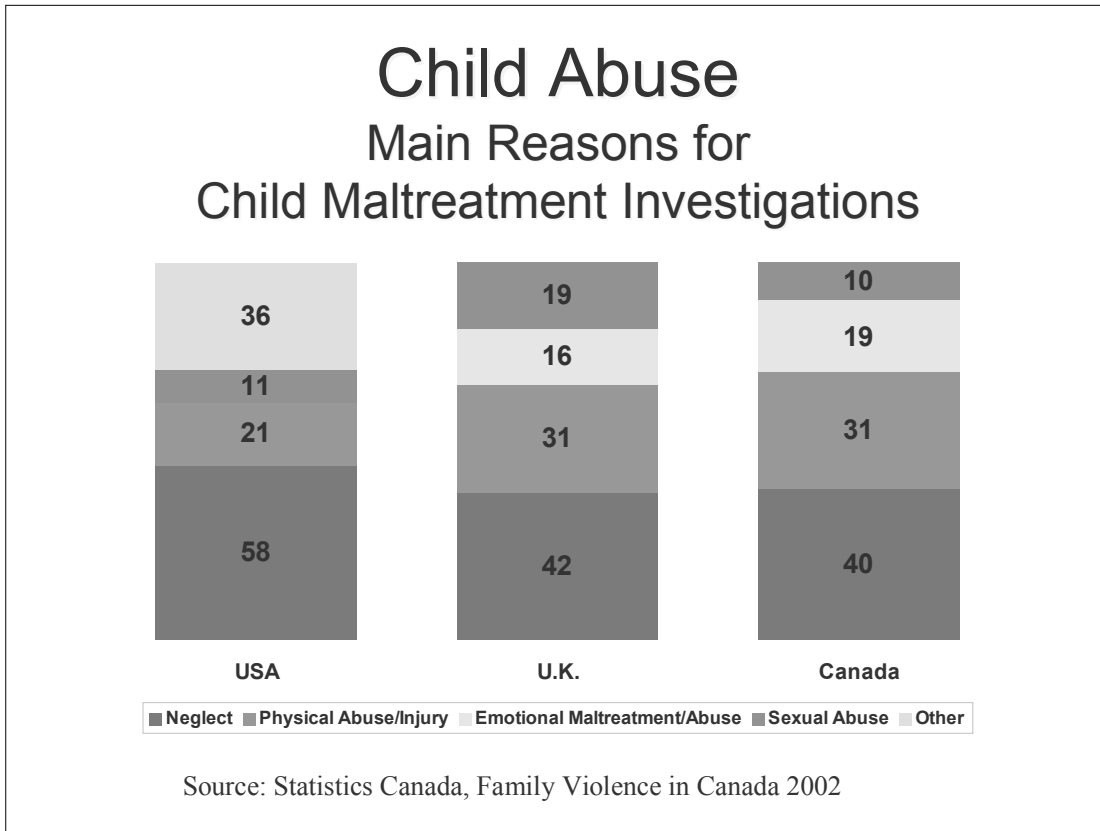
**Slide 14**



Suicide rates are another significant indicator of social exclusion and perceived well-being and sense of belonging among children and adolescents in a given society. As this slide shows, males of all ages are two to four times as likely to commit suicide than females, and young males aged 15 to 24 are particularly vulnerable in Canada, Norway and the U.S. where suicide rates for that age group are higher than for the general male population of the country. Suicide is frequently related to alcohol and substance abuse, which often stem from alienation, social exclusion and the breakdown of the family, and the inadequacy of state prevention and protection measures. The data would tend to indicate that support programs are either inadequate or insufficient to address the particular needs and behavioral changes boys experience during the high-risk period of adolescence. Again reflecting the low status of youths within our societies and their low priority on the political agenda.

Inadequate social support for adolescents at the critical juncture between school and work and the disintegration of the family are also related to the growth in juvenile crime, the increasing number of street children and the prevalence of child abuse. As already stated, cross-national data on the overall extent of violence by and to children is lacking. What evidence there is indicates however that levels of victimization among young people, including poverty and violent offences inside and outside the home, are high in many countries. For example, according to a 1996 Associated Press Series, more than 250,000 children, most younger than 15, work illegally in the U.S. In 2000, children and youth under 18 years of age made up 23% of the Canadian population and comprised 23% of sexual and physical assault reported to police. There are also within-country inequalities across regions, gender, race and socio-economic classes. In the U.S. and Canada, for example, there is an over-representation of indigenous and ethnic minorities in youth offending.

**Slide 15**



Child maltreatment is an international phenomenon. The present slide shows the main reasons for child maltreatment investigations in Canada, the U.K. and the U.S. in 1998 and 1999. Neglect, defined as a lack of parental attention leading to physical injury, accounts for over 40% of the investigations in all three countries followed by physical abuse/injury ranging from 20% to 31%. These figures are derived from police records and therefore grossly underestimate the incidence of violence against children, since most cases of child abuse are either not reported or misreported to police.

# Commitment and Priorities

National

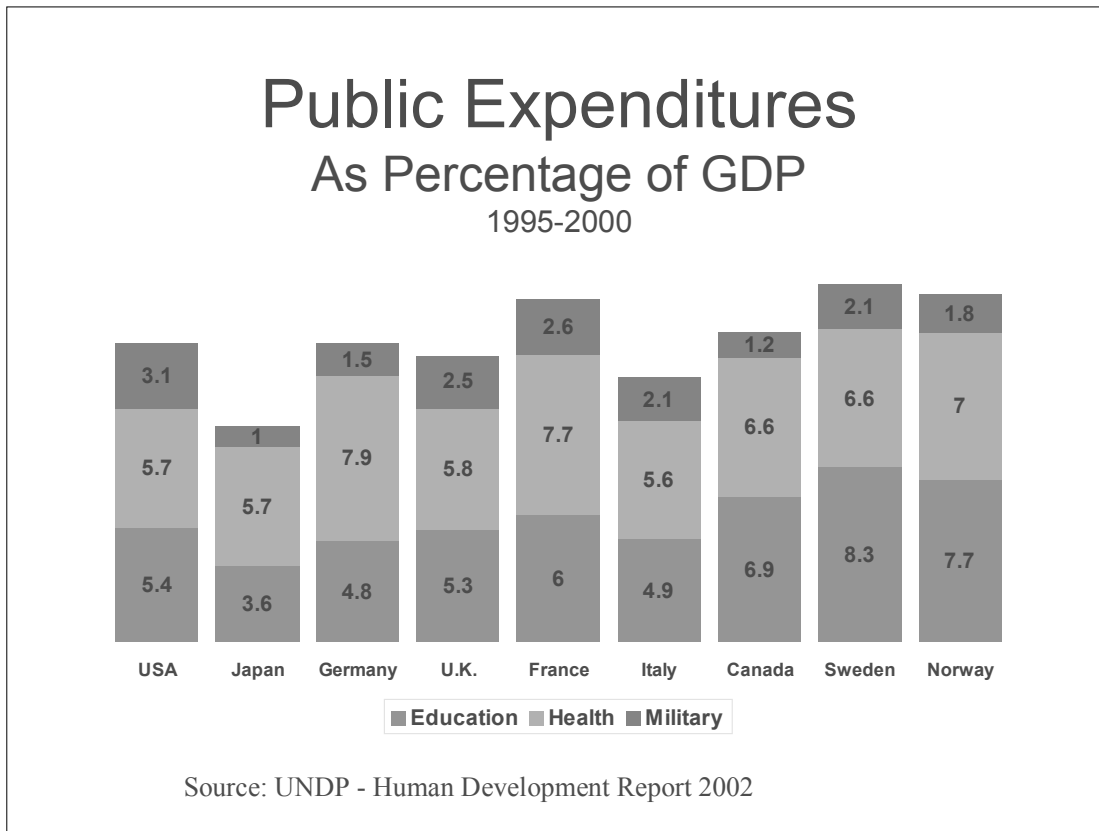
Slide 16

## Presentation Outline

- Scope of Child Poverty in G7 Countries
  - Income Poverty
  - Social, Emotional and Spiritual Poverty
- **Commitment and Priorities of G7 Countries**
  - **National**

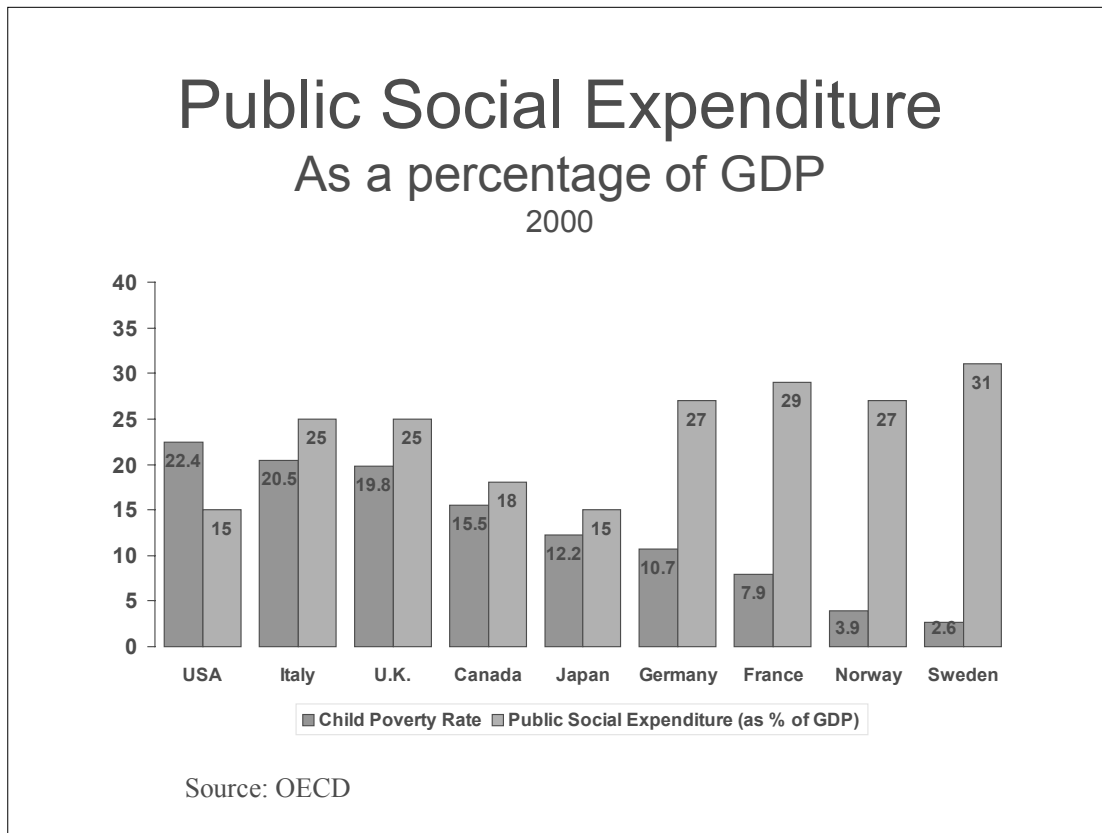
We will now look at the level of commitment of these nine countries in addressing poverty issues at the national level, as expressed by their public social expenditures, in an effort to understand the variation in child poverty rates between Norway and Sweden on one hand and the G7 countries on the other hand.

**Slide 17**



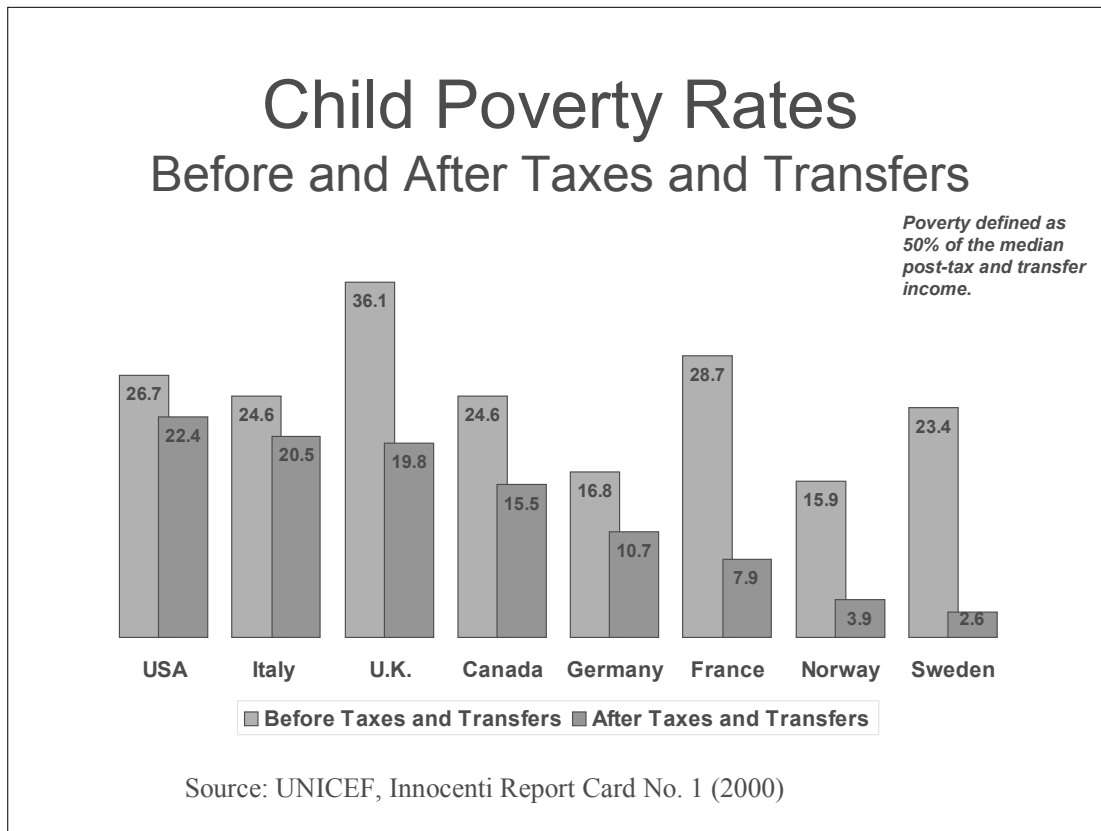
The following slide illustrates the priorities in public spending of each country, showing the share of public expenditures devoted to education, health and defence as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). We can see that the countries with the lowest child poverty rates, namely Sweden and Norway, are also those who invest a larger percentage of their GDP on education and health - over one percentage point more than France and Canada, and 4 percentage points more than the other countries. Sweden and Norway also spend more, as a percentage of their GDP, on education compared to other countries. That the child poverty rate of Canada is almost double that of France, with barely a 0.2% difference in total public expenditures on education and health, might indicate a more unequal distribution of health and services across the population, to expenditures that are less targeted to needy children, to a labor market characterized by low wages, or to a combination of these factors. Also noteworthy is the fact that levels of defence spending (as a percentage of GDP) are about 2 times the levels of spending allocated to Official Development Assistance in the case of Sweden and Norway, 3 to 8 times for Japan, Germany, the U.K., France and Canada, 16 times in the case of Italy and 31 times for the U.S.

**Slide 18**



The next slide compares total public social expenditures and child poverty rates for the nine countries. Included as public social expenditures are: old age cash benefits, disability cash benefits, occupational injury and disease, sickness benefits, services for the elderly and disabled people, survivors, family cash benefits, family services, active labor market programs, unemployment, health, housing benefits and other contingencies. The comparison is even more revealing on the relationship between the level of social commitment of governments, as expressed through total public spending on social services and programs, and child poverty rates. The graphic shows very clearly that countries that devote a high percentage of their GDP to public social expenditures have low child poverty rates. The fact that the U.K. and Italy have high levels of child poverty despite generous levels of social expenditure might, as before, indicate unequal access or distribution of social services and benefits, insufficient benefits to cross the poverty threshold, insufficiently targeted programs, high unemployment rates, low wages or any combination of these factors.

**Slide 19**



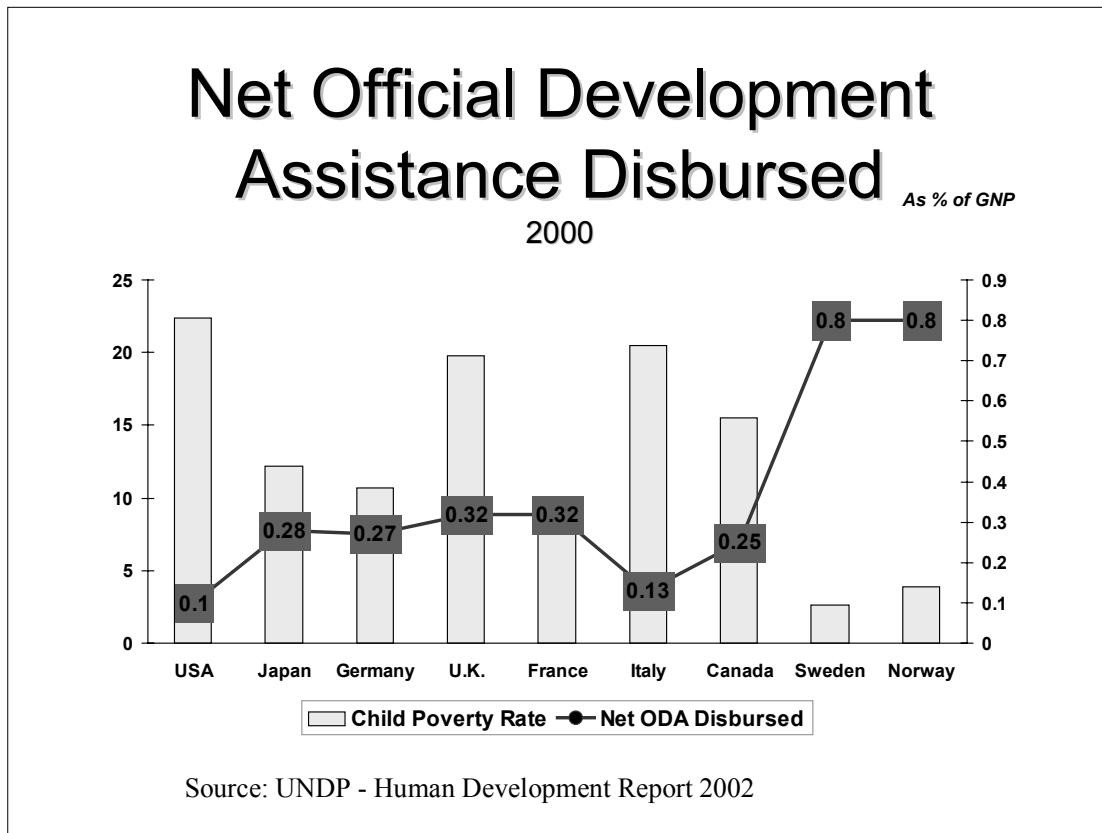
This slide tries to go further and shows the differences in child poverty rates before and after the taxes and transfers that are part of each country’s social policies. It attempts to provide an approximate measure of the extent to which these nine nations implement policies that are designed to protect their poorest children. According to the Innocenti Report Card of June 2000, where this table is found, state intervention reduces “market child poverty rates” by over 20 points in Sweden and France, by over 10 points in Norway and by over 9 points in the U.K. In Canada and Germany, the reduction exceeds 7 percentage points and 6 percentage points respectively. Only in the U.S. and Italy, do the tax and benefit policies mitigate child poverty rates by fewer than 5 percentage points. These results confirm that social policies in the U.S. and Italy are less generous and less targeted to poor children and other groups at risk than in the other countries. They also make it clear that well-focused state interventions, targeting poor families, can contribute markedly to reducing child poverty to low levels.

# Presentation Outline

- Scope of Child Poverty in G7 Countries
  - Income Poverty
  - Social, Emotional and Spiritual Poverty
- **Commitment and Priorities of G7 Countries**
  - National
  - **International**

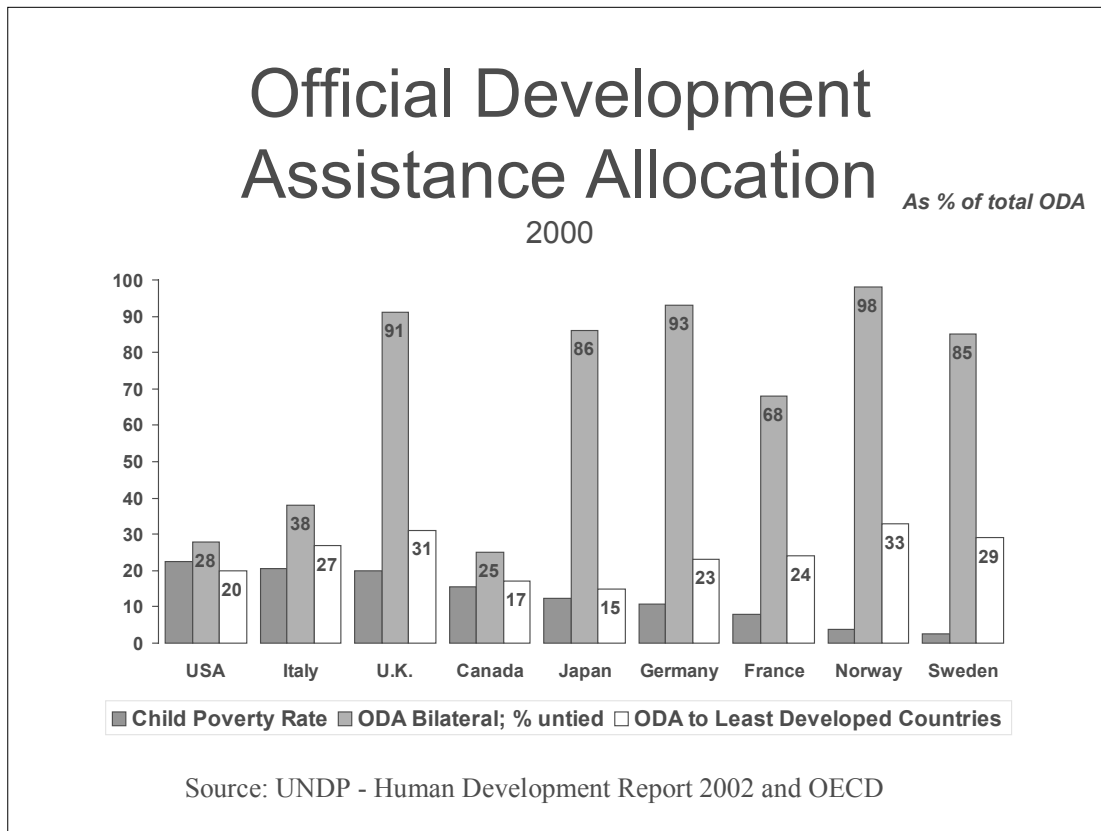
A cursory examination of national public spending on social services and programs has shown that the countries with the lowest public spending commitments tend to have the highest child poverty rates. Low social expenditures, whether in health, education or family support services, are also an indication of the low priority accorded to poverty and inequality issues at the national level. This is especially apparent in the case of the U.S. Does the way each country tackles or fails to address poverty issues at home find an echo at the international level, especially in terms of the extent and allocation of Official Development Assistance (ODA)?

**Slide 21**



As was to be expected, the two donor countries with the lowest levels of child poverty, Sweden and Norway, contribute the most aid when considered as a percentage of Gross National Product (GNP). In fact, both countries are among the few who have met or exceeded the aid target of 0.7% of GDP in 2000. By comparison, the two donor countries with the highest child poverty rates, the U.S. and Italy, contribute the least aid, barely reaching 0.1% and 0.13% of GDP respectively. Well short of their commitment to devote 0.7% of their GDP to development assistance.

**Slide 22**



The allocation of Official Development Assistance (ODA) is also quite revealing in this respect. This figure shows that all countries direct only a small portion of their development assistance to those countries that need aid the most. Norway, Sweden and the U.K., three of the four countries with the most generous and targeted social policies, also target a larger proportion of their aid budgets to least developed countries than the others. The proportion of ODA that is untied, which is to say that does not require the recipient country to buy services and goods from the donor country or to implement economic measures that impinge on national policies and priorities, is even more revealing. The percentage of bilateral ODA that is untied is well above 60% in all countries except for the U.S., Italy and Canada, where it ranges from 28% to 38%. Actually, among big donors, the U.S. has the worst record for spending its aid budget on itself – 70% of its aid is spent on U.S. goods and services.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Slide 23

### Presentation Outline

- Scope of Child Poverty in G7 Countries
  - Income Poverty
  - Social, Emotional and Spiritual Poverty
- Commitment and Priorities of G7 Countries
  - National
  - International
- **Conclusions and Recommendations**

What are the scope and dimensions of child poverty in G7 countries? What accounts for the variations in rates of child poverty across the nine nations examined? Is there a correlation between how governments of these countries tackle poverty issues at the national level and the extent and allocation of their international development assistance (ODA)? What conclusions can we draw as to the kind of interventions that are required to improve child poverty eradication efforts in G7 countries as well as worldwide?

This presentation, I hope, left no doubt to the fact that child poverty is a growing problem in the most industrialized countries of the world. Child poverty rates in G7 countries are much higher than their high income levels would suggest or warrant, especially when compared to that of Sweden and Norway. It has also pointed out the complex nature of poverty issues, highlighting the particular importance of such factors as the fragmentation of family life, high youth unemployment, increasing inequalities in wages and in the general distribution of income and resources, and especially levels of social expenditures in accounting for variations in relative child poverty rates between countries.

Going beyond income poverty, the presentation stressed the need to recognize that the emotional, psychological, social and spiritual poverty of children should be addressed as seriously as material poverty. Youths committing suicide or dropping out of school, child abuse and neglect, street children are all problems with a strong link to poverty, which carry huge costs for society both in the present and in the future. One fact that is readily apparent from the lack of reliable data and limited resources allocated to these issues is that none of the G7 countries, most notably their governments, is giving enough attention to the plight of their children and the recognition of their rights.

The most important conclusion we can draw from comparing child poverty levels in G7 countries with those of Sweden and Norway is that child poverty is not a problem of lack of resources but of want for a more equal distribution of available resources – in essence it is a question of political will, of the level of priority and commitment ascribed to reducing child poverty by governments. Sweden and Norway are not the wealthiest nations of the group, being ranked 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> respectively in terms of GDP, but devote a higher percentage of their GDP to social expenditures and their social policies are more tightly targeted towards the groups that are more at risk. Conversely, other countries can be said to suffer from higher within-country inequalities in terms of distribution of income and resources and from the absence of well-adjusted social policies, thereby limiting considerably the benefits of robust economic growth for the poorest segments of their populations. This is especially the case in the U.S., contradicting the well-established notion that the U.S. is the paragon of democracy and the land of equal opportunity for all.

The comparison clearly establishes a marked difference in attitude and priority towards poverty issues at the national level between the nine countries examined. A difference, which, not surprisingly is reflected at the international level. We have seen that all of these countries in effect reproduce, one might even say export, their inequalities and social priorities (or lack thereof) in the international area, through the extent and allocation of their Official Development Assistance and their capture of the most powerful international organizations such as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. This is an important finding which points to the need of changing first the attitude and behavior of donor countries towards social issues within their own countries, in particular poverty and children's rights, before we can hope for more extensive and better focused aid targeted at the poorer nations.

These conclusions now allow us to identify some key areas where interventions are needed to improve the level of priority and efficacy of policies aimed at reducing and eradicating child poverty within G7 countries and worldwide.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed as an adjunct to the guidelines already put forward in the Montreal Declaration on Children and Poverty that was drafted and adopted at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Child held in Montreal, Canada on May 23-25, 2002.

- There are huge gaps between the promises that were made and the actions that were taken by governments. The consequences are apparent across the whole range of children's rights, including health, education, protection, prevention and participation. Therefore, governments who have ratified international conventions and human rights instruments, the Convention on the Rights of the Child in particular, must be held responsible and made accountable for harmonizing their national laws in line with these instruments. In particular, family and criminal laws must be reformed or amended to work in the best interests of the children, emphasizing non-adversarial and non-judicial conflict resolution mechanisms such as mediation and prevention. A comprehensive approach to the problem, in the area of family law, would include:
  - The institution of courses at the elementary and secondary levels designed to educate and sensitize students about parental responsibilities, so that the next generation can adequately understand and assume its role as parents;
  - The creation of a system of family reconciliation that would be available at all times for couples and families in crisis;
  - The establishment of free, mandatory, and non-judicial family mediation services for all couples experiencing marital difficulties or going through divorce proceedings. These services should also be available to grandparents and other family members in crisis;
  - The elimination of all terms that create friction between parties, replacing for example the expression "legal custody" by "parental responsibilities";
  - The institution of a court specializing in family matters where judges would have an extensive background in family law as well as in psychosocial issues;
  - The creation of a formal complaints' office that would focus on sensitizing spouses to the importance of maintaining their respective obligations and responsibilities in addition to providing the legal framework to file complaints.
- Governments must make the well-being and harmonious development of children their first priority and work towards eradicating income poverty among children by reducing inequalities in access to resources and opportunities as well as by making state institutions more responsive to poor people's needs and rights. Particular attention should be given to support programs for families, such as sufficient child care spaces and more extensive systems of subsidized child care, to allow parents and members of the extended family to have more time with their children without being economically penalized. Investment in family policies and prevention must increase in order to decrease child poverty, especially in countries with a high proportion of single-parent households and/or unstable family arrangements. And governments must ensure that programs for families and children are protected at all times, especially in periods of economic downturn.
- Governments must recognize that the emotional, psychological, social and spiritual poverty of children should be addressed as seriously as material poverty. Suicide, dropping out of school, child abuse and neglect, etc. all carry huge costs for society both in financial and human terms. Every effort must be made in the areas of data collection and analysis about and for children regarding such poverty-related issues as child abuse and neglect, trafficking, mental health, juvenile offending, street

children, and the like, as a prerequisite to formulating efficient national plans of action to redress the situation.

- Governments, the media, NGOs and civil society organizations must work together to change social norms and behavior that perpetuate discrimination and inequality, to raise awareness of children's rights and promote the common interests between the poor and the non-poor. Governments must therefore adopt the kind of long term perspective that any form of sustainable development requires. They should seriously look at the costs of long term prevention versus short-term intervention and opt for preventive measures against poverty instead of the social safety nets and criminal justice systems currently in place, which are designed to correct rather than prevent problems stemming from poverty. Investments in education systems and the development of young children will save public funds in the long run through lower costs for health care, greater efficiency in the education system and fewer demands on social welfare and justice systems. And the earlier the better, as early childhood is the most opportune time to break the poverty cycle.
- Governments must generate public support for public action against poverty by creating a climate favorable to pro-poor actions and coalitions, facilitating the growth of poor people's associations, and increasing the political capacity of poor people.
- Governments of the world, corporations and international agencies must work together to ensure that the global target of 450 billion USD required to address the most pressing basic needs and eradicate poverty is met. Industrialized nations must respect their commitment to devote 0.7% of GDP to development assistance.
- International organizations must be made more democratic by increasing representation, transparency and accountability in decision-making. Developing countries have little power in decision making with the IMF, World Bank and WTO. Nearly half of the voting power in the World Bank and IMF rests in the hands of seven countries (US, Japan, France, UK, Saudi Arabia, Germany and the Russian Federation).
- The response capability of the United Nations must be increased by granting it sufficient autonomy, independence and power to respond quickly in case of defined emergencies before the situation becomes unmanageable. To this end, the elimination of the veto power is essential. The UN must be a real watchdog that does not solely rely on the goodwill of governments to provide the data on compliance with human rights instruments.
- The world community must establish a specialized and independent oversight entity, an International Rights Court or Agency for example, to ensure respect of commitments and penalize governments who do not comply with the requirements of human rights instruments that were ratified. This entity would play a key role in monitoring the application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in holding both governments and international actors such as the IMF, WTO, the World Bank and global corporations accountable and responsible for respect of children's rights, using public exposure of organizations and governments that profit from abuses of children's rights or breach international conventions. Governments would not be able to gain political capital solely by signing a convention, without ever planning on putting the said convention into full effect, as is the case right now. To be effective, this oversight entity would have to remain independent, especially at the budgetary level, and representative of all constituencies within the world community.
- Failing an appropriate response by decision-makers, all citizens of the world must use their power as parents, consumers, voters, workers, etc. to pressure governments, corporations, the media and global actors into making children their priority, complying with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, committing sufficient resources to social services and poverty eradication programs, and increasing representation, transparency and accountability.

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