



Save the Children
Australia

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**A Mother's Day Report Card:
The Best – And Worst – Countries to Be a Mother**

Expanded Index Now Includes 18 Additional Industrialised Countries

*Sweden tops list, Niger ranks last,
Australia ranked 5th, up from 7th last year*

Save the Children, the world's largest independent child rights organisation, today released its eighth annual *Mothers' Index* that ranks the best – and worst – places to be a mother and a child, and compares the well-being of mothers and children in 140 countries.

Sweden, Iceland and Norway top the rankings this year. Niger ranks last among countries surveyed. The top-10 countries, in general, attain very high scores for mothers' and children's health, educational and economic status. The 10 bottom-ranked countries – nine from sub-Saharan Africa – are a reverse image of the top 10, performing poorly on all indicators. Australia is placed 5th, one behind New Zealand in 4th position.

Conditions for mothers and their children in countries at the bottom of the *Index* are grim. On average, 1 in 13 mothers will die in her lifetime from pregnancy-related causes. Nearly 1 in 5 children do not reach their fifth birthday, and more than 1 in 3 children suffer from malnutrition. About 50 percent of the population lacks access to safe water, and only 3 girls for every 4 boys are enrolled in primary school.

2007 Mothers' Index Rankings			
Top 10 Best places to be a mother		Bottom 10 Worst places to be a mother	
RANK	Country	RANK	Country
1	Sweden	131	Djibouti
2	Iceland	132	Burkina Faso
3	Norway	133	Ethiopia
4	New Zealand	134	Eritrea
5	Australia	135	Angola
6	Denmark	136	Guinea-Bissau
7	Finland	137	Chad
8	Belgium	138	Yemen
9	Spain	138	Sierra Leone
10	Germany	140	Niger

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“If 75 years of field experience has taught us anything, it is that the quality of children’s lives depends on the health, security and well-being of their mothers,” said Margaret Douglas, Chief Executive of Save the Children Australia. “By providing mothers access to education, economic opportunities, and maternal and child health care, we ensure that mothers and their children will have the best chance to survive and thrive,” she said.

The gap in availability of maternal and child health services is especially striking when comparing Sweden, at the top of the list, and Niger, at the bottom. Skilled health personnel are present at virtually every birth in Sweden, while only 16 percent of births are attended in Niger. A typical Swedish woman has almost 17 years of formal education and will live to be 83. Meanwhile, 72 percent of Swedish women use some modern method of contraception, and only 1 in 150 will lose a child die before he or she has a fifth birthday. In Niger, a typical woman has less than three years of education and the life expectancy of a girl born today is only 45. Only 4 percent of women use modern contraception, and 1 child in 4 never sees a fifth birthday. At this rate, every mother is likely to suffer the loss of two children.

Zeroing in on the children’s well-being portion of the *Mothers’ Index*, Italy finishes first and Afghanistan ties with Niger for last. While nearly every Italian child – girl and boy alike – enjoys good health and education, children in Afghanistan face a 1 in 4 risk of dying before age 5. In Afghanistan and Niger, 40 percent of children are malnourished. In Niger, less than 50 percent of children are enrolled in primary school, and only one Afghan girl for every two boys is in school. More than half of all children in both countries lack access to safe water.

“Investing in the health of mothers everywhere is not just the right thing to do – it is the smart thing to do,” urged Ms Douglas. “When we take care of mothers by ensuring that they have the basic tools they need to improve the quality of life for themselves and their children, we also improve prospects for generations to come. When mothers thrive, their children grow up healthy and, ultimately, all of society benefits,” she added.

COUNTRY COMPARISONS:

The *Mothers’ Index* presents individual country comparisons for poor countries that are especially startling when one considers the human suffering behind the statistics:

- Over the course of her lifetime, 1 woman in 7 will die in pregnancy or childbirth in Angola, Malawi and Niger; the risk is 1 in 6 in Afghanistan and Sierra Leone.
- A girl born in Angola, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sierra Leon, Zambia and Zimbabwe on average will live 45 years. Life expectancy for women is only 35 in Lesotho, 33 in Botswana, and for a girl born in Swaziland, only 30 years due to the sheer proportions of children who die before age five and the additional scourge of AIDS which is killing many women in their prime.
- 1 child in 4 does not reach his or her fifth birthday in Afghanistan, Angola, Niger and Sierra Leone.

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- Fewer than 15 percent of births are attended by skilled health personnel in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Chad, Ethiopia and Nepal.
- In Djibouti and Niger, a typical female has less than 3.5 years of schooling and fewer than half of all children are enrolled in primary school.
- More than 60 percent of the population of Afghanistan and Papua New Guinea lack access to safe drinking water, and more than 70 percent lack access to safe water in Ethiopia and Somalia.

NOTE: The *Mothers' Index* was restructured for 2007 and is based on improved indicators to rank countries more precisely relative to their level of development. As a result of these changes, Save the Children is now able to calculate rankings for 18 additional industrialised countries, including Italy, Spain and France.

KEY INDICATORS:

The status of mothers was compared in 140 countries based on the following indicators of women's and children's well-being:

- Lifetime risk of maternal mortality
- Percentage of women using modern contraception
- Skilled attendant at delivery
- Female life expectancy
- Expected number of years of formal schooling for females
- Ratio of estimated female-to-male earned income
- Maternity leave benefits
- Participation of women in national government
- Under-5 mortality rate
- Percentage of children under age 5 moderately or severely underweight
- School enrollment ratios
- Ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary school
- Percentage of population with access to safe water.

For more information, contact Save the Children Australia at + 61 3 9938 2000

Save the Children is the leading independent organisation creating lasting change for children in need in Australia and around the world. For more information, visit www.savethechildren.org.au. Save the Children Australia is a member of the International Save the Children Alliance, a global network of 27 independent Save the Children organisations working to ensure the well-being and protection of children in more than 100 countries.

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