
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MOTHERS' INDEX

Why doesn't the United States do better in the rankings?

The United States ranked 31st this year based on several factors:

- One of the key indicators used to calculate well-being for mothers is lifetime risk of maternal mortality. The United States' rate for maternal mortality is 1 in 2,100 – the highest of any industrialized nation. In fact, only three Tier I developed countries – Albania, the Russian Federation and Moldova – performed worse than the United States on this indicator. A woman in the U.S. is more than 7 times as likely as a woman in Italy or Ireland to die from pregnancy-related causes and her risk of maternal death is 15-fold that of a woman in Greece.
- Similarly, the United States does not do as well as most other developed countries with regard to under-5 mortality. The U.S. under-5 mortality rate is 8 per 1,000 births. This is on par with rates in Latvia. Forty countries performed better than the U.S. on this indicator. At this rate, a child in the U.S. is more than twice as likely as a child in Finland, Greece, Iceland, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia, Singapore or Sweden to die before reaching age 5.
- Only 58 percent of children in the United States are enrolled in preschool – making it the fifth lowest country in the developed world on this indicator.
- The United States has the least generous maternity leave policy – both in terms of duration and percent of wages paid – of any wealthy nation.
- The United States is also lagging behind with regard to the political status of women. Only 17 percent of congressional seats are held by women, compared to 45 percent in Sweden and 43 percent in Iceland.

Why is Norway number one?

Norway generally performed as well as or better than other countries in the rankings on all indicators. It has the highest ratio of female-to-male earned income, the highest contraceptive prevalence rate, one of the lowest under-5 mortality rates and one of the most generous maternity leave policies in the developed world.

Why is Afghanistan last?

Afghanistan has the highest lifetime risk of maternal mortality and the lowest female life expectancy in the world. It also places second to last on skilled attendance at birth, under-5 mortality and gender disparity in primary education. Performance on most other indicators also places Afghanistan among the lowest-ranking countries in the world.

Why are some countries not included in the Mothers' Index?

Rankings were based on a country's performance with respect to a defined set of indicators related primarily to health, nutrition, education, economic and political status. There were 164 countries for which published information regarding performance on these indicators existed. All 164 were included in the study. The only basis for excluding countries was insufficient or unavailable data or national populations below 250,000.

What should be done to bridge the divide between countries that meet the needs of their mothers and those that don't?

- Governments and international agencies need to increase funding to improve education levels for women and girls, provide access to maternal and child health care and advance women's economic opportunities.
- The international community also needs to improve current research and conduct new studies that focus specifically on mothers' and children's well-being.
- In the United States and other industrialized nations, governments and communities need to work together to improve education and health care for disadvantaged mothers and children.