

Towards adoption of the Child Wellbeing Index: application in two selected countries

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Abstract

The Child Wellbeing Index (CWI), developed by Van der Gaag and Dunkelberg since 2003 on behalf of the of the Gaslini Foundation and, later, of the MedChild Institute, is an index that resembles the Human Development Index (HDI).

CWI measures the average achievement in a given country in three basic dimensions of child welfare: a long and healthy childhood, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. Unlike the HDI, the CWI is constructed using child-specific indicators, with one the exception: In the absence of a child-specific indicator of economic welfare, GDP per capita was used as a proxy for children's economic welfare. In 2005 the CWI index was revised and it was proposed to substitute GDP per capita with child poverty rates.

The paper to be presented on the CWI in Rabat is a first attempt to show that comparative child poverty rates can be calculated for a few Mediterranean countries using existing databases. This paper also shows to the reader that the selection of a child poverty measure is important as it has an effect not only on the number of children classified as poor but also on their demographic characteristics. It shows that a comparison between different welfare measures cannot be done unless there is a common approach. Different measures of child poverty rates makes extremely difficult to do comparative analysis on child poverty across countries.

The paper refers to the study of Rainwater and Smeeding (2003) and follows their methodology to provide data on two Mediterranean countries: Albania and Morocco. These two were selected as they both are countries, one in the Eastern European part of the Mediterranean and the other in North Africa, for which there is available data that can be readily analyzed to look at child poverty as examples of what could be done in other countries.

The child poverty rates for Albania have been calculated using equivalent household income. In the case of Morocco, in the absence of income data, a consumption-based welfare measure was constructed. The dataset for Albania, which includes both income and consumption data, was used to illustrate how one can move from income based welfare measures to consumption based measures. In that transition, it was also demonstrated how the location of the poverty lines changes, and what the socio-economic consequences are of using alternative welfare measures.

Any country or institution that is serious about monitoring children's welfare, and that is serious about the use of any composite measure on children's welfare - either the CWI or any other child wellbeing index – first needs to know how many of their children live in poverty. Child poverty rates can be used as a baseline to monitor a country's (or region's) progress on child welfare, since poverty is a one catch-all measure that captures the overall level of welfare of children and, more importantly, that correlates strongly with other non-material measures of child deprivations.