

2. Infant mortality

Definition and measurement

The infant mortality rate is the annual number of deaths of children under one year of age per 1 000 live births. Some international variation in infant mortality rates may be due to country variation in defining live children following birth. Most countries have no gestational age or weight limits for mortality registration. Minimal limits exist for Norway (to be counted as a death following a live birth, the gestational age must exceed 12 weeks) and in the Czech Republic, France, the Netherlands and Poland a minimum gestational age of 22 weeks and/or a weight threshold of 500 g is applied (EURO-PERISTAT Project 2008, Table 3.1, p. 40).

Household income and income inequality data are discussed in GE1 and EQ1.

The Gini coefficient is a measure of income inequality. Values range between 0 – perfect equality – and 1 – all income goes to one person.

One in 200 children born in the OECD died during infancy in 2008 on average (Panel A, HE2.1). Infant mortality rates in OECD countries in 2008 ranged from lows of 2.5 or fewer deaths per 1 000 live births in Luxembourg, Slovenia, Iceland and Sweden, to highs of 15 and 17 infant deaths in Mexico and Turkey respectively. Infant mortality rates were also relatively high in Chile, the United States and the Slovak Republic.

All OECD countries have achieved good progress in reducing infant mortality rates over the last 25 years (Panel B, HE2.1). The largest decline, by a considerable margin, was found in Turkey, followed by Mexico. High infant mortality countries, having greater scope for tried-and-true and low

intervention cost reductions, have improved their positions by more than those with low infant mortality, who are approaching irreducible minima. Consequently there has been strong convergence in infant mortality rates across the OECD in the last 25 years. Those countries with very low rates may find it increasingly difficult to reduce rates further.

As with overall life expectancy, there was a little relationship between household income growth and infant mortality (HE2.2) and income inequality changes and infant mortality (HE2.3) over a long period. Overall, countries were not obviously constrained either by median household income growth or by income inequality rises in achieving improvements in life chances for their youngest citizens. The lack of a relationship is robust to excluding both Mexico and Turkey, outliers where falls in infant mortality were especially large and household income growth was low. Again, as with the analysis in HE1, this analysis cautions against application of a simple private income-based explanation, either in terms of averages or inequality, to long duration changes in infant death rates.

Further reading

EURO-PERISTAT Project (2008), *European Perinatal Health Report*, www.europeristat.com/publications/european-perinatal-health-report.shtml.

OECD (2009), *Health at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

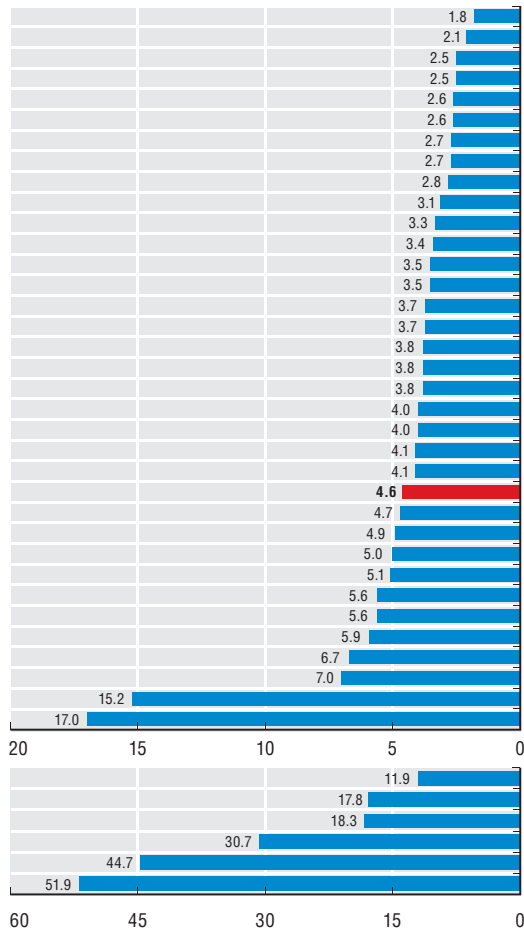
Figure note

Figure HE2.1: 2007 for Chile and Ireland, 2006 for Korea and the United States; 1980 for Chile and 1984 for Korea instead of 1983; and 1980 instead of 1983 for all six non-OECD members.

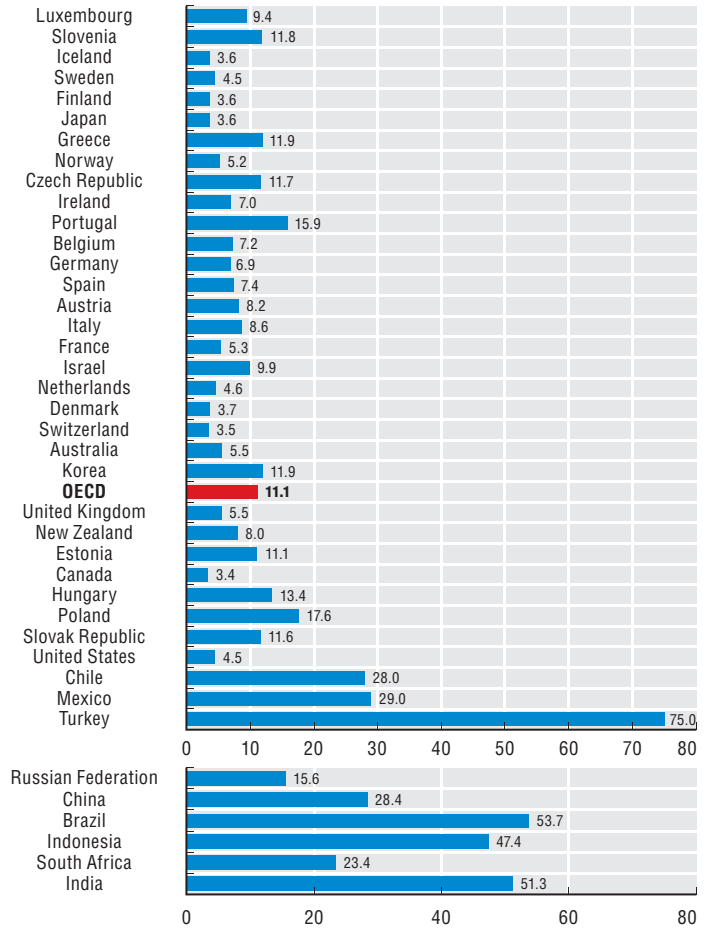
Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

HE2.1. Infant mortality has declined in OECD countries

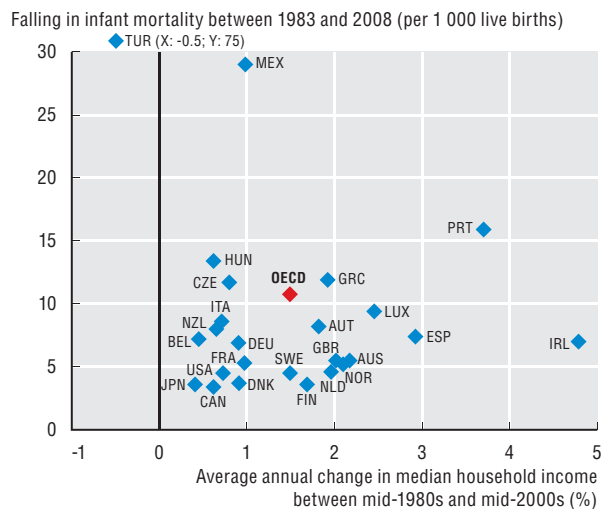
Panel A. Infant mortality rate per 1 000 live births, in 2008 or latest year (7)



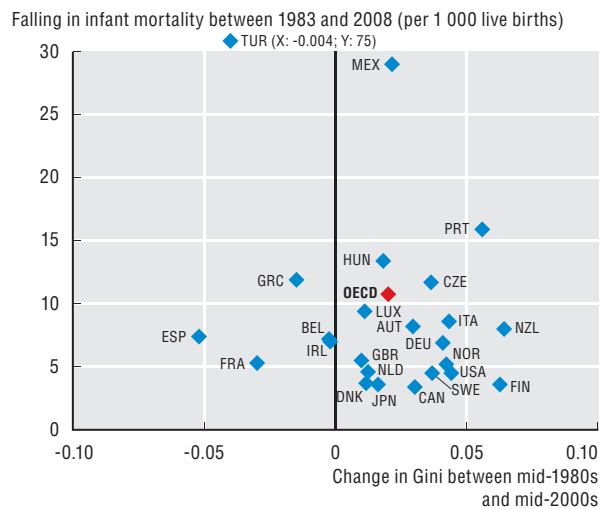
Panel B. Falling in infant mortality between 1983 and 2008 (per 1 000 live births)



HE2.2. No relationship between falling infant mortality and income growth



HE2.3. No relationship between falling infant mortality and income inequality changes



Source: OECD (2010), OECD Health Data 2010, OECD Publishing, Paris (www.oecd.org/health/healthdata), and OECD Income Distribution and Poverty Database (www.oecd.org/els/social/inequality). For non-OECD countries: UNICEF, Childinfo.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932381988>



From:
Society at a Glance 2011
OECD Social Indicators

Access the complete publication at:
https://doi.org/10.1787/soc_glance-2011-en

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2011), "Infant mortality", in *Society at a Glance 2011: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/soc_glance-2011-22-en

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.