

 **TODAY'S "SHORT TOPIC"**  
**CHILDREN IN POVERTY:**  
**UNICEF measurements**  
**lead to confusion**  
**and bad policies!**

By Stephen L. Bakke  July 5, 2015



*Here's what provoked me:*

*A letter was published which took the U.S. to task for having more severe child poverty than most other countries. The source of this accusation was a recent UNICEF report about worldwide child poverty. This most recent report commits the same sins as prior reports by giving false conclusions, or at least creating false interpretations of those conclusions by "low information" pundits. This one is easy to correct, if anyone is paying attention - which is sometimes the problem - many don't care!*

*Here's my response:*

**Children in Poverty: UNICEF measurements lead to confusion and bad policies!**

Galen Ballard asserts immense disgust with the U.S. in "Independence Day," June 3. The main disappointment is: "America now ranks next to last on a UNICEF measure of relative child poverty in developed nations." Let me add this to that comment: In fact, Lithuania, Romania, Croatia, Bulgaria, Chile, Hungary, Estonia, Poland, Austria, Korea, Slovenia, Czech Republic, and Slovenia ALL rank better than the United States regarding child poverty, according to UNICEF!

Really? Does that make sense? Notice the word RELATIVE in Ballard's assertion. If one looks at the ABSOLUTE level of income for the families of these "poverty children" you will find that those in the U.S. are at or near the top of income and quality of life, compared to poor children in more "highly rated" countries, like Croatia and Mexico.

Why? Because UNICEF isn't measuring poverty at all! It's measuring inequality! Under the UNICEF definition, poverty is defined as living below 60% of the median income for that country. Therefore, you can find examples where the average poor child in the U.S. has family income SEVERAL TIMES MORE than other countries rated "better" by UNICEF!

Whether inequality is a defining problem of our time is a separate argument. If we want to improve poverty, we have to realize that inequality is a different issue. To solve a problem, one must properly define it! If not properly defined, decades of expensive solutions will lead us nowhere. And, it prompts people like Ballard to bear false witness against the U.S.!