



New CSLS Report Highlights Major Disparities in Human Development Across Canada's Regions

October 23, 2025

OTTAWA — October 2025 — A new study from the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS) reveals that, although Canada as a nation ranks relatively well by global standards in the Human Development Index (HDI), substantial regional disparities persist across the country.

According to the report's new estimates, Ontario, Quebec and Alberta lead Canadian jurisdictions with HDI scores that would place them 15th to 17th globally — comparable to those in the United Kingdom or Singapore. Conversely, Nunavut is the lowest-ranked Canadian jurisdiction, corresponding to 70th place globally, at a level of development similar to lower-middle-income countries in Eastern Europe, such as Belarus and Albania.

As such, while these results highlight some success stories in Canada, they also identify persistent challenges among some Northern Territories.

“What immediately jumps out is that human development scores in Canada aren't close to being evenly distributed across the country. These vast development gaps are critically important for economic opportunity and ultimately social cohesion,” said Alisaleh Shariati, Economist at CSLS and author of the report. “By looking beyond GDP metrics to include additional indicators on health and education, we gain a clearer picture of where Canada is doing well and where we're falling behind.”

The regional disparities uncovered in human development metrics highlight the need for targeted policy efforts. Northern and Atlantic provinces — particularly Indigenous and remote communities in these areas — face systemic barriers to improving education and health outcomes despite gains in income (after adjusting for purchasing power differences across jurisdictions).

Key Findings

- **Overall HDI gains but declining global ranking:** Canada's HDI score continues to rise but gains since 2015 have been modest. In fact, Canada's international ranking in HDI has fallen significantly in recent decades, from 3rd in 1990 to 16th in 2023.
- **Top-tier outcomes in some provinces:** Ontario, Quebec and Alberta are performing relatively well overall compared with global comparators.
- **Lagging regions still face significant gaps:** Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and the Atlantic provinces consistently fall behind in human development measures due to shorter life expectancies and lower incomes (which are purchasing power parity-adjusted).



- **Educational and longevity constraints:** Gains in education have been broadly shared, but weaker life expectancy and income growth have restricted overall convergence across the country.

Read the full report here: <https://csls.ca/reports/csls2025-03.pdf>

About the Report

This report by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS) develops internationally comparable Human Development Index estimates for all Canadian provinces and territories, using a CSLS methodology that is aligned with the United Nations Human Development Report. This report highlights where progress in Canada is leading and lagging, providing insights for policymakers seeking inclusive development and regional equity.

Importantly, this report incorporates Statistics Canada's latest provincial and territorial purchasing power parity estimates, along with inflation trends, to account for purchasing power disparities across Canadian jurisdictions. To our knowledge, this is the first study of its kind to capture sub-national price variation within a well-being context in Canada.

About the CSLS

The Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS) is Canada's leading think tank focused on productivity, living standards, and economic well-being. Founded in 1995, we provide rigorous, evidence-based research to inform policy and support a more prosperous and equitable society.

Media Contact

Alisaleh Shariati, Economist
Centre for the Study of Living Standards
Tel: 226-234-6747
Email: Ali.Shariati@csls.ca