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UNICEF's report set out 10 benchmarks that outline basic minimum standards for the care and protection of young children. The benchmarks and how NZ fared are as follows:

1. A minimum entitlement to paid parental leave

The minimum proposed standard is that, on the birth of a child, one parent be entitled to leave of at least a year (to include pre-natal leave) at 50 per cent of salary (subject to upper and lower limits). For parents who are unemployed or self-employed, the income entitlement should not be less than the minimum wage or the level of social assistance. At least two weeks parental leave should be specifically reserved for fathers.

New Zealand failed to meet this benchmark

2. A national plan with priority for disadvantaged children

All countries going through the child care transition should have undertaken extensive research and evolved a coherent national strategy to ensure that the benefits of early childhood education and care are fully available, especially to disadvantaged children (see discussion below). This dimension of early childhood services cannot currently be assessed and compared in a satisfactory way. Rather than omit such a critical factor, benchmark

2 records, as a proxy measure, whether governments have at least drawn up a national plan for the organization and financing of early childhood services.

New Zealand met this benchmark

3. A minimum level of child care provision for under threes

The minimum proposed is that subsidized and regulated child care services should be available for at least 25 per cent of children under the age of three.

New Zealand met this benchmark

4. A minimum level of access for four-year-olds

The minimum proposed is that at least 80 per cent of four-year-olds participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for a minimum of 15 hours per week.

New Zealand met this benchmark

5. A minimum level of training for all staff

The minimum proposed is that at least 80 per cent of staff having significant contact with young children, including neighbourhood and home-based child carers, should have relevant training. As a minimum, all staff should complete an induction course. A move towards pay and working conditions in line with the wider teaching or social care professions should also be envisaged.

New Zealand met this benchmark

6. A minimum proportion of staff with higher level education and training

The minimum proposed is that at least 50 per cent of staff in early education centres supported and accredited by governmental agencies should have a minimum of three years tertiary education with a recognized qualification in early childhood studies or a related field.

New Zealand met this benchmark

7. A minimum staff-to-children ratio

The minimum proposed is that the ratio of pre-school children (four-to-five year-olds) to trained staff (educators and assistants) should not be greater than 15 to 1, and that group size should not exceed 24.

New Zealand met this benchmark

8. A minimum level of public funding

The suggested minimum is that the level of public spending on early childhood education and care (for children aged 0 to 6 years) should not be less than 1 per cent of GDP.

New Zealand failed to meet this benchmark

These eight proposed benchmarks are supplemented by two further indicators designed to acknowledge and reflect wider social and economic factors critical to the efficacy of early childhood services.

9. A low level of child poverty

Specifically, a child poverty rate of less than 10 per cent. The definition of child poverty is that used by the OECD – the percentage of children growing up in families in which income, adjusted for family size, is less than 50 per cent of median income.

New Zealand failed to meet this benchmark

10. Universal outreach

To reinforce one of the central tenets of this report – that early childhood services should also be available to the children of disadvantaged

families – this last benchmark attempts to measure and compare demonstrated national commitment to that ideal. As no direct measure is currently possible, the suggested proxy measure is the extent to which basic child health services have been made available to the most marginalized and difficult-to-reach families. Specifically, the benchmark of 'universal outreach' is considered to have been met if a country has fulfilled at least two of the following three requirements: a) the rate of infant mortality is less than 4 per 1,000 live births b) the proportion of babies born with low birth weight (below 2,500 grams) is less than 6 per cent and c) the immunization rate for 12 to 23 month-olds (averaged over measles, polio and DPT3 vaccination) is higher than 95 per cent.

New Zealand failed to meet this benchmark