

Canada's Falling Ranking in the Human Development Index, 1990-2022: A True Decline or a Statistical Artifact?

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Canada has historically been placed among the best in the world on the Human Development Index (HDI) since the release of the first Human Development Report (HDR) by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1990. Between the 1992 and 2000 HDRs, Canada held the top global ranking at the time of the HDR release, except in 1993, when it ranked second. However, this strong HDI performance began to decline from the 2001 HDR onward. In fact, between the 2000 and 2023/2024 HDRs, Canada's ranking dropped from 1st to 18th. Of the three core HDI dimensions (Life expectancy, Education and Income), the largest decline in Canada's rankings belonged to the Education index that fell from 1st in 2000 to 22nd in 2022 as were reported in the HDRs at the time of release. This sharp relative decline was despite the increase in the absolute value of the components of the Education indicator, namely, Mean Years of Schooling and Expected Years of Schooling in this period. However, Canada's ranking in Expected Years of Schooling dropped by a staggering 30 places, from 16th in 2000 to 46th in 2022. This paper seeks to identify the underlying factors contributing to this decline in expected years of schooling and other HDI components. Specifically, we analyze trends in key HDI dimensions for Canada over time and assess whether the drop in ranking reflects an absolute or relative deterioration in these dimensions. Additionally, we account for methodological changes in HDI calculations and rankings since 1990. Finally, we compare these developments with estimates derived from national data sources.