

The Nova Scotia Child Poverty Report Card 2004

1989–2002

November 2004



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The contents and opinions expressed in this paper belong to the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the CCPA.

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DATA SOURCES

Much of the information presented in this report is drawn from three key sources:

1. Statistics Canada, Income Trends in Canada 1980–2002, 13F0022XCB, 2004.
2. Data provided by Campaign 2000 from the 2001 Census, Statistics Canada.
3. Data provided by Canadian Council on Social Development using Statistics Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, masterfile (through Campaign 2002).

Figures, tables and related calculations have been prepared by the authors. The sources used by the authors to produce figures and tables are noted in the listings of Figures and Tables. Unless otherwise stated, the Low-Income Cutoff (LICO) used in this report is the before-tax (base) LICO. Tables detailing Before and After LICO levels are included in the Appendix to this report.

Since 1989 the before-tax LICO has been used as a measure of poverty to allow progress on the promise to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000 to be consistently tracked. The before-tax (base) LICO is widely accepted as a fair and relative measure that identifies those substantially worse off than average and more likely to encounter greater difficulty in achieving healthy outcomes. Low Income Cutoffs differ based on family size, location (urban versus rural) and population size. A table giving Low-Income Cutoffs is included in the Appendix to this report. For a full discussion on Poverty Measures see: Defining and Re-Defining Poverty: A CCSD Perspective, Canadian Council on Social Development, Ottawa. 2001.

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INTRODUCTION

The Nova Scotia Child Poverty Report Card 2004 provides information on Canada's promise to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000. It seeks to update knowledge based on 2002 data and focuses on Nova Scotia in relation to Canada and the Atlantic Provinces. Information available for 2003 has also been included where available.

The period examined by the report (1989–2002) is first marked by several years of recession (poverty rates reached record highs); then by years of economic growth (poverty rates declined but not as steeply as they had climbed). It is also marked by the introduction in 1998 of the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) along with the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS). These tax benefits were touted as a way for the federal, provincial and territorial governments to share responsibility for reducing child poverty. But they were initiated without benchmarks for the eradication of poverty and no guarantees that children and families living in low-income circumstances would receive the income supports or services they needed.

This report shows that little has changed for the better. Rates and the numbers of children living in poverty remain high – in many instances higher than when the 1989 promise was made. This year's report examines many different measures of child and family poverty – often with rankings across provinces showing a patchwork of results. What is abundantly clear is that too little progress has been made on too few measures.

The issue of significantly reducing child poverty is not insurmountable. Even when recession and higher unemployment hit in the early 1990s, every Nordic country held its child poverty rate at around 5%. So, there are policies and practices that work in other wealthy nations that could offer valuable lessons for us.¹ The United Nations holds that even when child poverty was as high as it was in 1995, Canada could have ended the severe income shortfalls experienced by poor children and their families by allocating less than 0.5% of the Gross National Product to this goal.

The federal government and its provincial/territorial partners need to explain why a higher priority isn't being placed on protecting vulnerable children. Our nation has played a key role in recognizing the specific needs and rights of all children, at home and abroad. Through four international covenants spanning from 1924 to 1990 Canada has clearly agreed to address the needs and protect the rights of its children, most notably those in straightened circumstances.² The lack of translation of such agreements into practical and timely solutions at home has been the focus of severe reprimands issued by the United Nations to the governments of Canada.

This report card shows that performance in Nova Scotia on reducing child poverty is even poorer than in other Atlantic Provinces and a number of specific recommendations are made. It also suggests that officials here may want to look to New Brunswick to discover how our economic neighbour is achieving better outcomes on several measures of child and family poverty than we are.

Importantly, this year's report card provides evidence that federal tax benefits are indeed clawed back in Nova Scotia and other Atlantic Provinces. It calls for an end to this practice and reinstatement of the provincial amounts withdrawn.

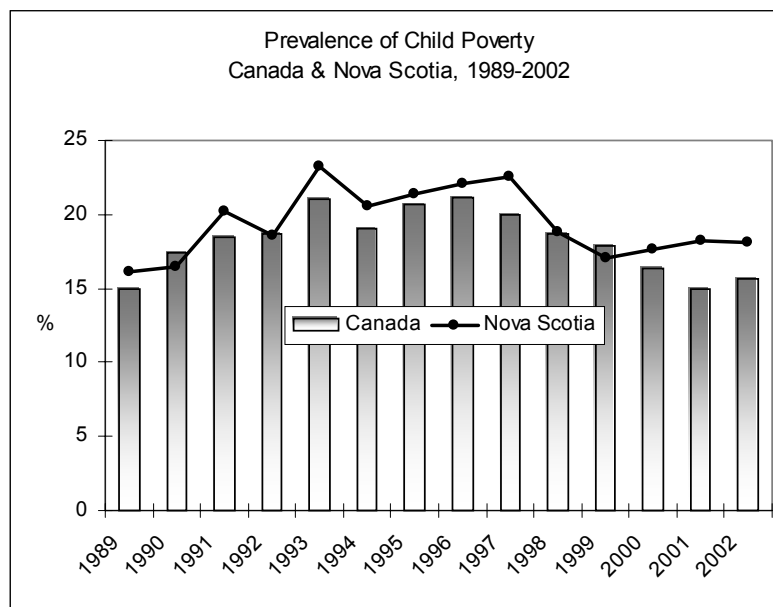
Speedy progress for Nova Scotia children in the years immediately ahead will depend on a commitment to strategically drafted and agreed upon federal and provincial plans. These must be completed with more diligence than those currently in place with clear benchmarks and tracking mechanisms. It is time for governments to describe how child poverty will be ended and to tell the children and families affected when they can expect significant results.

THE RECORD 1989–2002

Figure 1 displays the prevalence of child poverty in Canada and Nova Scotia during the period 1989–2002. In the years following the government's 1989 promise to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000, Canada experienced a recession that included high unemployment. In the absence of interventions to protect children, poverty rates reached the highest levels recorded in the last two decades. As the economy recovered, rates did begin to decline (1996–2001), but not as steeply as the economic growth would have suggested.

In 2002, for the first time in seven years and despite a strong economy and years of federal surpluses, the average child poverty rate for Canada increased from 14.9% in 1989 to 15.6%. The Nova Scotia rate began increasing earlier, in 1999.

Figure 1



In 2002, approximately 1 in 6 Canadian children and 1 in 5 Nova Scotia children experienced poverty. Ironically, neither Canada nor Nova Scotia has ever experienced a rate of child poverty lower than the rate in 1989 when Canada's parliament promised to

eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. It is particularly notable that the 2002 rates are higher than the 1989 rates and that greater numbers of Canadian children are living below the low-income cutoff.

The overall increases between 1989 and 2002 in the prevalence and numbers of children experiencing poverty in Canada and the Atlantic Provinces are shown in Table 1. In 2002, over one million Canadian children were living in families whose income was less than the LICO. However, the number of children in 2002 is still the same as it was in 1989 in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, whereas numbers have declined significantly in New Brunswick and in Newfoundland and Labrador. The sizeable reduction in New Brunswick's rate corresponds with fewer children living in poverty. On the other hand, the increased rate yet lower numbers for Newfoundland and Labrador may indicate demographic changes in the province (fewer children in the overall population) resulting from relocation of young families seeking better opportunities elsewhere.

Table 1

NUMBER & PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY: CANADA & ATLANTIC PROVINCES, 1989 & 2002				
	1989		2002	
	Number	%	Number	%
Canada	990,000	14.9	1,065,000	15.6
Nova Scotia	36,000	16.1	36,000	18.1
New Brunswick	33,000	17.6	23,000	14.3
Prince Edward Island	4,000	12.6	4,000	11.4
Newfoundland & Labrador	33,000	19.6	24,000	21.9

Table 2 records the increases or decreases in child poverty rates for Canada and the 10 provinces over this 14-year period 1989–2002.

Table 2

Change in the Prevalence of Child Poverty: Canada & All Provinces, 1989 & 2002								
1989			2002			% Change 1989-2002		
Province	%	Ranking	Province	%	Ranking	Province	%	
ON	11.4	Best	PE	11.4	Best	AB	-28.9	Greatest Decrease
PE	12.6		AB	13.3		NB	-18.8	Decrease
BC	14.2		ON	13.6		SK	-13.0	Decrease
QB	15.9		NB	14.3		PE	-9.5	Decrease
NS	16.1	5th Best	QB	16.0		MB	-3.3	Decrease
NB	17.6		NS	18.1	5th Worst	QB	0.6	Increase
AB	18.7		SK	18.7		NF	11.7	Increase
NF	19.6		BC	19.6		NS	12.4	Increase
SK	21.5		MB	20.8		ON	19.3	Increase
MB	21.5	Worst	NF	21.9	Worst	BC	38.0	Greatest Increase
CN	14.9		CN	15.6		CN	4.7	Increase

Child poverty rates decreased in five provinces and increased in five. But decreases in some provinces do not offset increases in others; the net effect of changes for the 1989 – 2002 period is a 4.7% increase in Canada's child poverty rate from 14.9% (1989) to

15.6% (2002). Nova Scotia contributed to this net increase: its rate increased by 12.4% (from 16.1% in 1989 to 18.1% in 2002). Newfoundland and Labrador also contributed to the net increase. In sharp contrast, New Brunswick children experienced an 18.8% decrease in child poverty with a drop from 17.6% in 1989 to 14.3% in 2002. Lows and highs across provinces remain virtually unchanged between 1989, when the range was 11.4%–21.5%, and 2002, when the range was 11.4%–21.9%.

Figure 2 ranks Canada and the Atlantic Provinces with regard to decreases or increases in child poverty rates between 1989 and 2002 and shows how Nova Scotia’s performance was the poorest in the Atlantic Region. Even though Newfoundland and Labrador’s rates of poverty were higher, Nova Scotia’s increased more during the period.

Figure 2

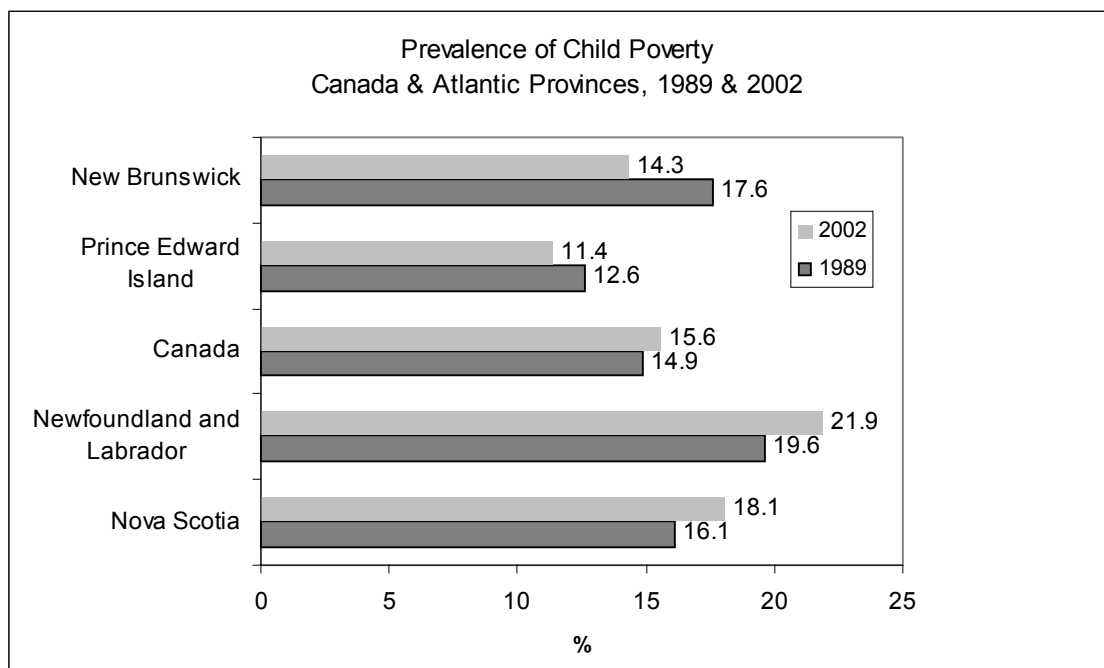
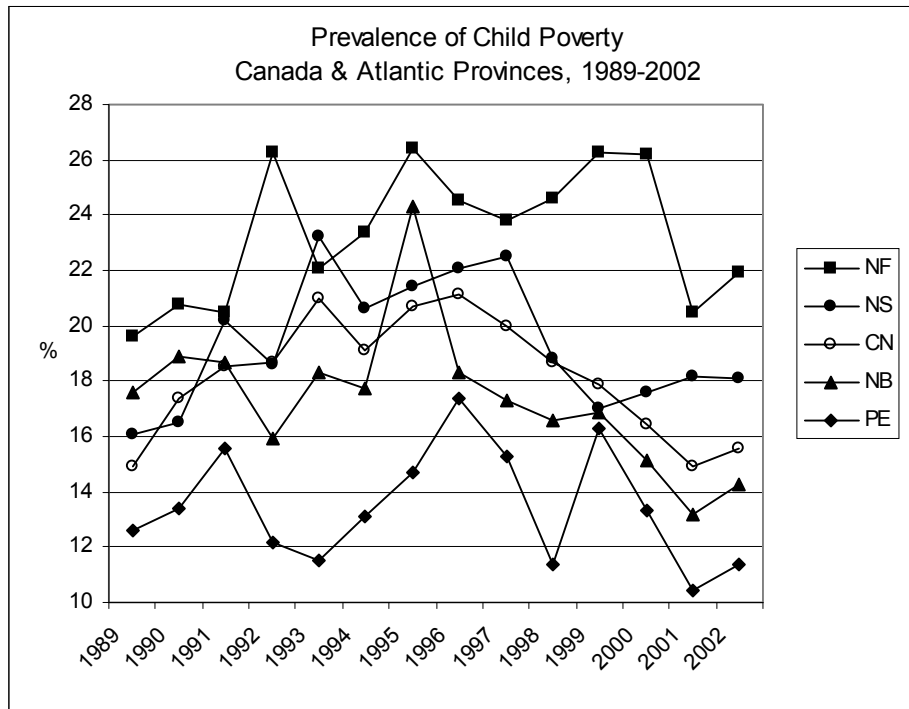


Figure 3 allows a year-by-year comparison of the prevalence of child poverty in Canada and the Atlantic Provinces. It demonstrates a strong tendency for rates in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland to remain above the national average while rates for New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island tend to be below. This figure also shows that Nova Scotia’s rate was moving in the opposite direction to that of other Atlantic Provinces for the years 1999, 2000 and 2001.

While the national average and rates in all other provinces dropped across these three years, the Nova Scotia rate increased. As noted earlier, national and provincial rates of child poverty have tended toward a progressive, if not steady, decline from the mid-nineties until 2001. In 2002, there was a turn for the worse when the majority of provinces (7 in 10) and the national average experienced increases (see Table 3).

Figure 3



Quebec and Alberta were stark exceptions to the 2001–2002 trends to increase: rates for these two provinces continued to decline steadily. Nova Scotia was the other exception: while its rate showed increases between 1999 and 2001, there was a marginal decrease between 2001 and 2002 (from 18.2% in 2001 to 18.1% in 2002).

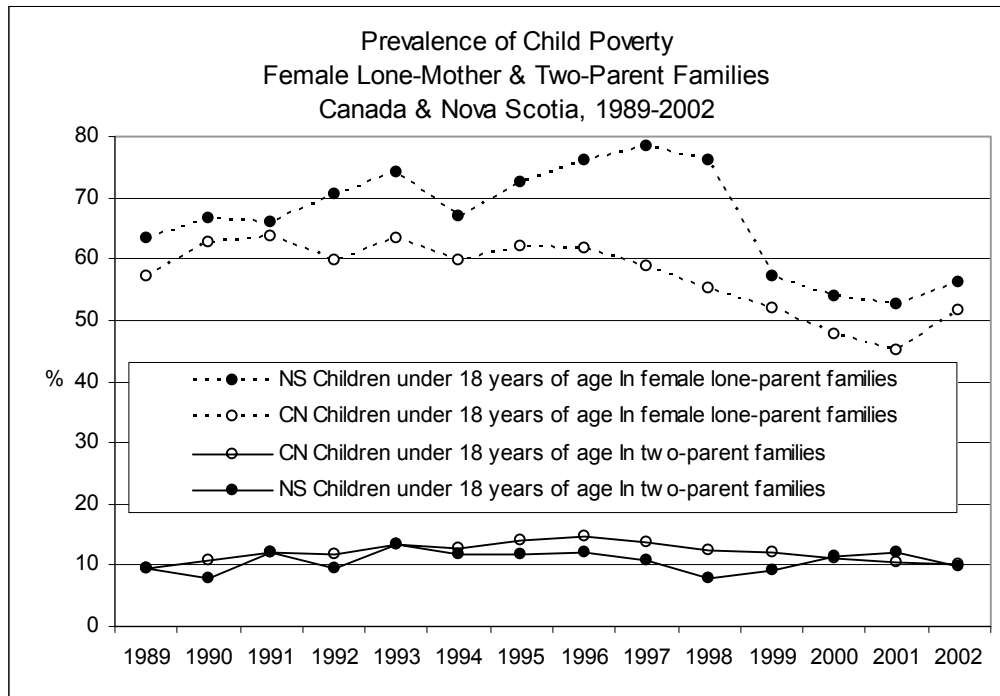
Table 3

Change in the Prevalence of Child Poverty: Canada & All Provinces, 2001–2002				
	2001 (%)	2002 (%)	Difference	% Change
QB	17.4	16.0	-1.4	-8.0
AB	13.8	13.3	-0.5	-3.6
NS	18.2	18.1	-0.1	-0.5
MB	20.3	20.8	0.5	2.5
CN	14.9	15.6	0.7	4.7
PE	10.4	11.4	1.0	9.6
NB	13.2	14.3	1.1	8.3
NF	20.5	21.9	1.4	6.8
ON	12.2	13.6	1.4	11.5
SK	16.6	18.7	2.1	12.7
BC	17.0	19.6	2.6	15.3

FEMALE LONE-PARENT FAMILIES AT GREATEST RISK

Figure 4 charts the large differences in child poverty between children living within families headed by lone mothers and those living with two parents. It shows that the children most vulnerable to poverty live with lone-parent mothers.

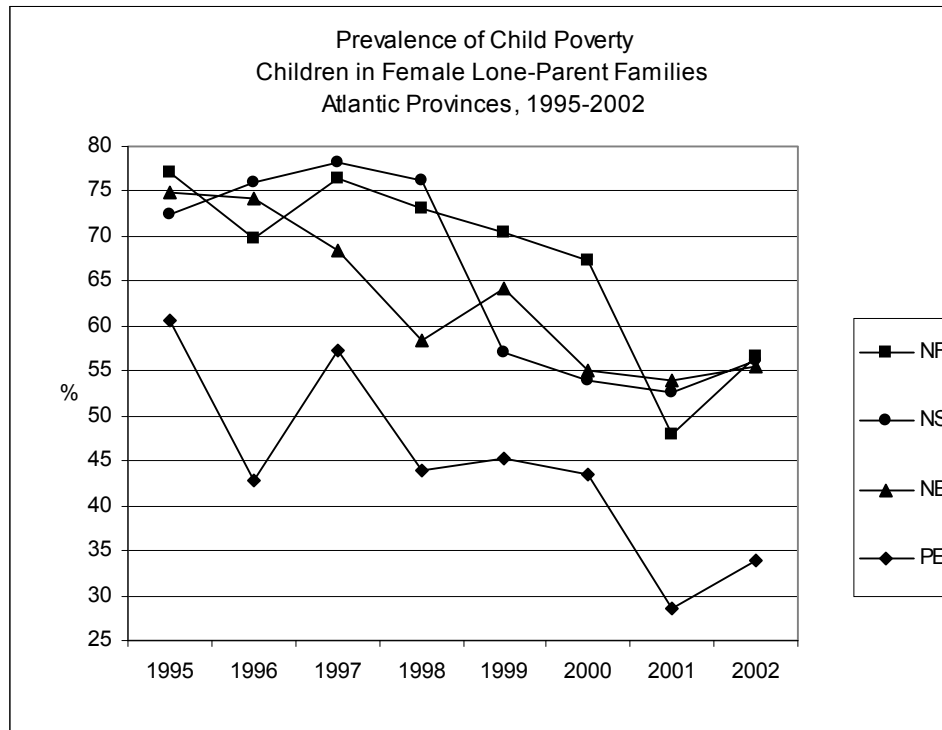
Figure 4



Nova Scotia children living in a family headed by a female lone parent were less likely to be poor in 2002 (56.1%) than their counterparts were in 1989 (63.3%). Even so, children living in a female lone-parent family remain much more vulnerable than children in two-parent families, as they are 5.7 times more likely to experience poverty (56.1% versus 9.9%). Figure 4 also demonstrates that the rate of poverty for Nova Scotia children in female lone-parent families is consistently above the national average for this group of children, whereas rates for children in two-parent families are more consistent with the national average, particularly over the most recent years.

Figure 5 shows sizeable decreases in poverty rates for children in female lone-parent families across the Atlantic Provinces in the late 90s and up to 2001. However, in 2002 we see increases for all Atlantic Provinces. The 2002 rates for New Brunswick (55.6%), Newfoundland (56.7%) and Nova Scotia (56.1%) clustered, whereas the rate for Prince Edward Island (33.9%) was dramatically lower.

Figure 5



INCREASED PREVALENCE OF POVERTY EXPERIENCED BY FIRST NATIONS, VISIBLE MINORITY, IMMIGRANT AND PHYSICALLY DISABLED CHILDREN

Table 4 uses the 2001 Census to rank poverty rates across different groups of Nova Scotia children and also provides a national comparison group.⁴ Next only to children in female lone-parent families, children who have recently immigrated to Nova Scotia are most likely to live below the low-income cutoff.

Table 4

Prevalence of Child Poverty by Group Identification: Nova Scotia & Canada 2001			
	Nova Scotia Increased likelihood relative to all children living below LICO	Nova Scotia Rate %	Canada Rate %
New Immigrants	2.54	50.3	49.0
Visible minority population	2.12	42.0	33.6
Immigrants	2.05	40.5	40.4
Aboriginal identity population	1.94	38.4	40.0
Disabled	1.59	31.5	27.7
All Children		19.8	18.4

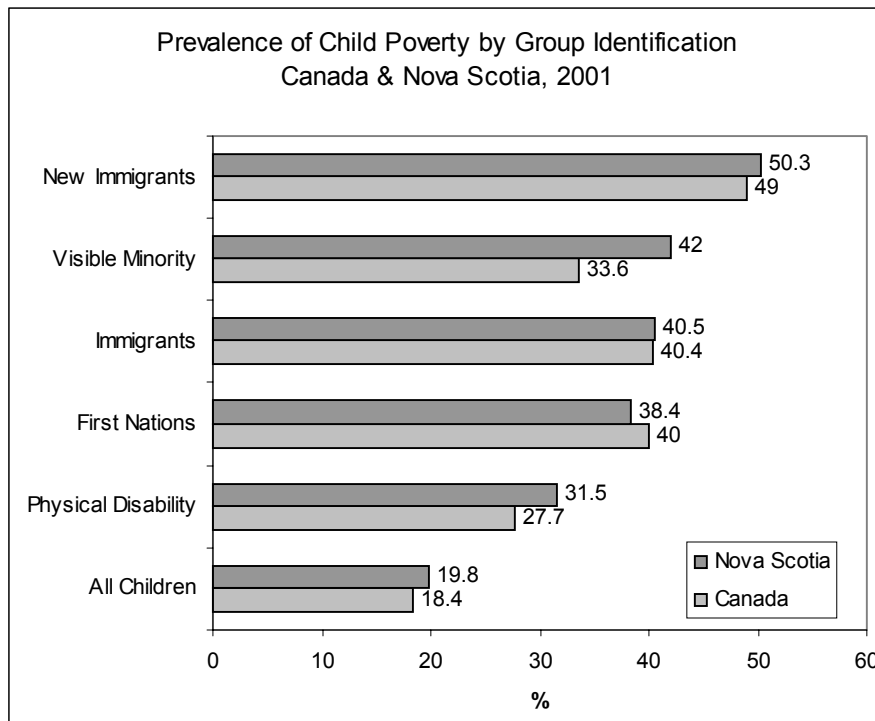
Over 50% of new immigrant children experience poverty – being new immigrants more than doubles the likelihood they will experience poverty. With child poverty rates of 42% and 40.5% respectively, the likelihood is double or greater for both visible minority and immigrant children, while aboriginal children fare only slightly better (38.4%).

Perhaps the most devastating form of discrimination for racialized/visible minority families are barriers that restrict their employment and/or earnings and therefore the ability to provide adequately for family members. When Campaign 2000 examined average earnings reported in the 2001 Census it found visible minority workers averaged \$27,149 in employment earnings in 2000 – \$4,600 (on average) less than for non-visible minority workers.⁵

Children with disabilities (i.e., where daily activities are limited) also experience an elevated rate of poverty (31.5%).⁶ Often, the specialized care required by children with disabilities presents insurmountable barriers to parental participation in the workforce and increases dependency on social transfers which are set well below the low-income cutoff levels.

Figure 6 demonstrates the ranking of Nova Scotia children by group identification with regard to the prevalence of child poverty. It also provides comparisons between Nova Scotia and national averages. With the sole exception of First Nations children, Nova Scotia rates are higher than national averages.

Figure 6



DURATION OF CHILD POVERTY

Table 5 provides information on the length of time children experienced poverty for the 6-year period of 1996–2001. It shows that 20.6% (1 in 5) Canadian children experience poverty for shorter periods of time (1–3 years), while fewer (12.6% - approximately 1 in 8) experience poverty for a period of four, five, or even 6 years. In the Atlantic

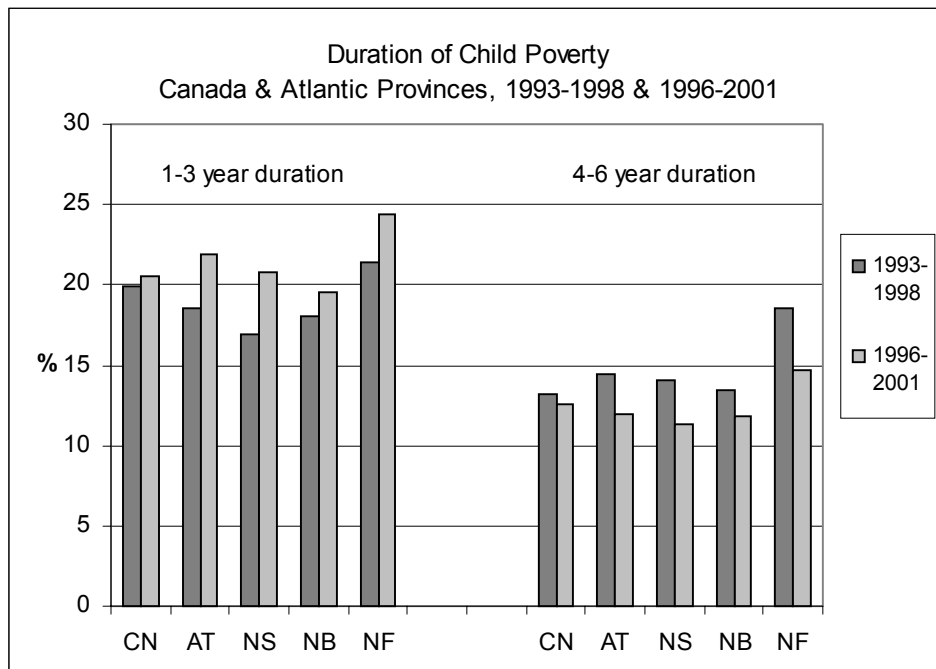
provinces, the children of Newfoundland and Labrador are most likely (1 in 7) to experience longer periods of poverty, while children in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick experience similar rates of exposure (1 in 8–9), and Prince Edward Island children are those least likely to spend longer periods living in poverty (1 in 14).⁷

Table 5

Duration of Child Poverty, Canada and Atlantic Provinces, 1996–2001		
	1-3 years (%)	4-6 years (%)
Canada	20.6	12.6
Atlantic Provinces	21.9	12.0
Newfoundland and Labrador	24.4	14.7
Prince Edward Island	29.6	6.9
Nova Scotia	20.8	11.3
New Brunswick	19.6	11.8

Figure 7 charts the persistence of child poverty during two overlapping periods to examine changes in duration over time. The 1996–2001 period shows greater rates of child poverty for shorter periods and lesser rates for longer periods. This effect could be attributed to two possible changes: progress in reducing the length of time during which children are exposed to the impacts of poverty; or children escaping poverty but returning, perhaps over and over again, after short periods of relief.

Figure 7

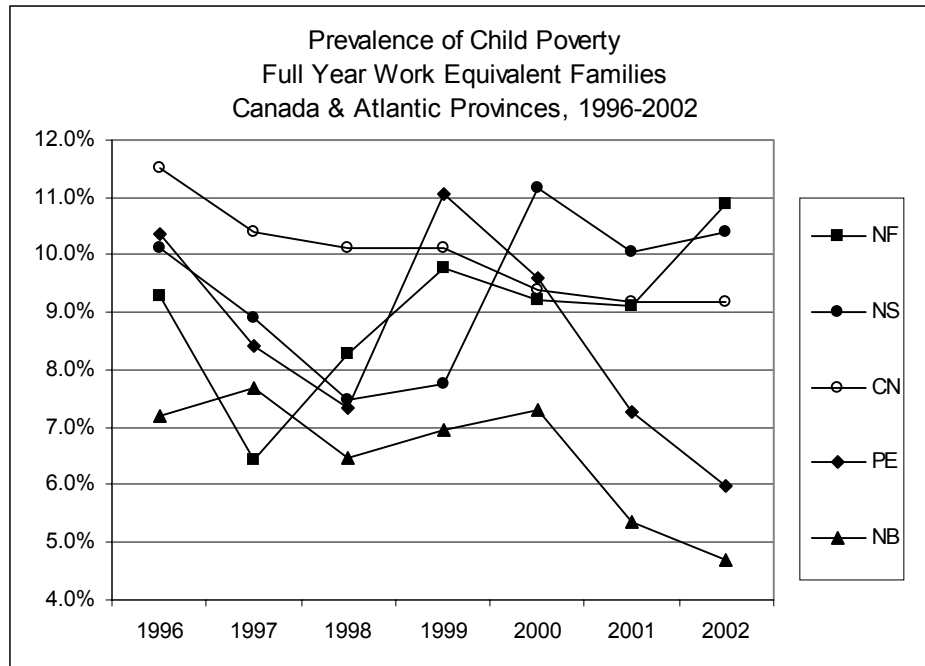


IMPACT OF WORK

Participation in the labour market is often described as the best pathway from poverty to prosperity. However, many parents do not earn enough income through full time employment to guarantee freedom from poverty for their children.⁸

Figure 8 charts the rates of child poverty among “full year work equivalent” families during a period of economic growth in Canada.⁹

Figure 8

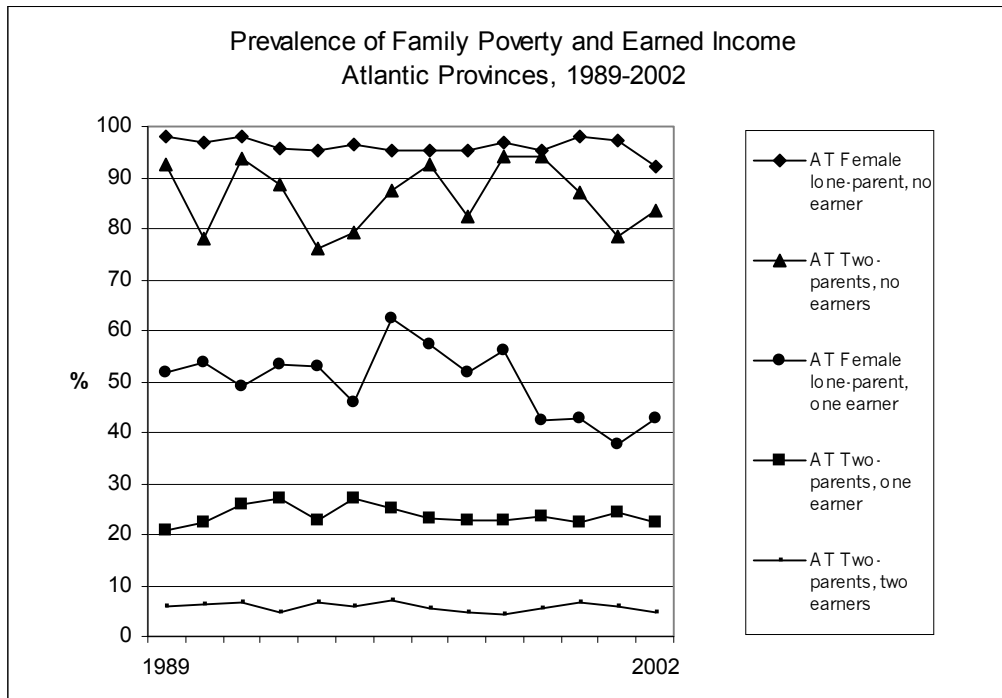


This chart indicates that the labour markets in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island may be more capable of delivering jobs and/or wages that allow parents to raise family incomes above the low income cutoff levels. It may also be that incentives and supports for families leaving social assistance, who can find only low-wage jobs, are more generous and/or more effective in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. It is noteworthy that Nova Scotia’s economy is described as having similar strengths to New Brunswick; however, children in Nova Scotia are not afforded the same degree of protection from poverty when parents are working as are children in New Brunswick.

Many reports have provided analyses related to the ability of men versus women to earn adequate income. The 2003 Labour Force Survey showed the average hourly wage of women in the bottom income quartile was \$7.94 for 2002 compared to \$9.96 for men.¹⁰

Figure 9 demonstrates the potential effect of inequity on women’s earnings and the subsequent impact for female lone parents in the Atlantic Provinces.¹¹ While families with two working parents provide the best protection from poverty, perhaps the impact of low-wage employment is most salient when we consider that even where both parents work, escape from family poverty is not assured.

Figure 9



In 2002 the Canadian rate of family poverty for families with two earners was 6%, the Atlantic rate was 4.7%, and the Nova Scotia rate was 4.6%. In 2002 the rate of poverty among Nova Scotia families headed by a female lone parent who is an earner was almost double the rate for two-parent families with one earner (42.2% versus 19.7%).

In 2003 only a small proportion (5%) of all Canadians who had minimum wage jobs were heads of households, but nearly all these households had at least one child aged under 18 years. Also, the majority (60%) of Canadians working for a minimum wage, hold part-time jobs, and women versus men are more likely than men to have part-time jobs and to earn the minimum wage.¹² Minimum wage rates in the Atlantic Provinces currently are \$6 per hour in Newfoundland and Labrador, \$6.20 in New Brunswick and \$6.50 in both Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island (Nova Scotia does allow a rate of \$6.05 to be paid to inexperienced workers for the first three months of employment). All other provinces and territories have higher minimum wage rates with the exception of Alberta where the rate is \$5.90 (see Appendix for table detailing minimum wage rates across Canada).

Minimum wage levels are often discounted by governments and the business sector as relatively unimportant (because the minimum wage is earned by relatively few workers). However, a strong argument can be made that the minimum wage works as a benchmark for wages.¹³ If the minimum wage increases other wages follow, especially low wages. On the other hand, a low minimum wage allows other wages to stagnate. It is therefore important that increases to minimum wage levels be recognized as a key tool for child poverty reduction strategies.

GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS

Table 6 indicates that government transfers play a significant role in protecting children from poverty.¹⁴ For the Atlantic Provinces, government transfers reduce child poverty rates by just 37.6% in Nova Scotia but by a massive 63.5% in Prince Edward Island.

Table 6

Impact of Government Transfers on Prevalence and Number of Children Living in Poverty, Canada and the Atlantic Provinces, 2002				
Geography	Proportion (%) of Children Below LICO		Reduction in child poverty rates as a result of Government Transfers	Number of Low-Income Children Protected from Poverty by Government Transfers
	Without Government Transfers	With Government Transfers		
Canada	23.9%	15.6%	34.7%	570,100
Nova Scotia	29.0%	18.1%	37.6%	21,500
New Brunswick	27.0%	14.3%	47.0%	20,000
PEI	31.2%	11.4%	63.5%	6,400
Newfoundland	42.2%	21.9%	48.1%	22,100

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE LEVELS

Figure 10 demonstrates changes in family income from all sources of federal and provincial government benefits for the period spanning 1989 - 2002. These rates are expressed as a percentage of the LICO.

For progress to be made in reducing child poverty rates it would be necessary to set transfer levels at 100% or more of LICO levels. Figure 10 does not show the steady closing of the gap between government transfer levels and the LICO that was hoped for when governments set out to eliminate child poverty. Families with children in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island saw improvements in social transfers. In contrast, decreases were experienced by families in Nova Scotia as well as in Newfoundland and Labrador. However, all families, even those with increases, remain at levels well below LICO, levels that create substantial income shortfalls.

Figure 10

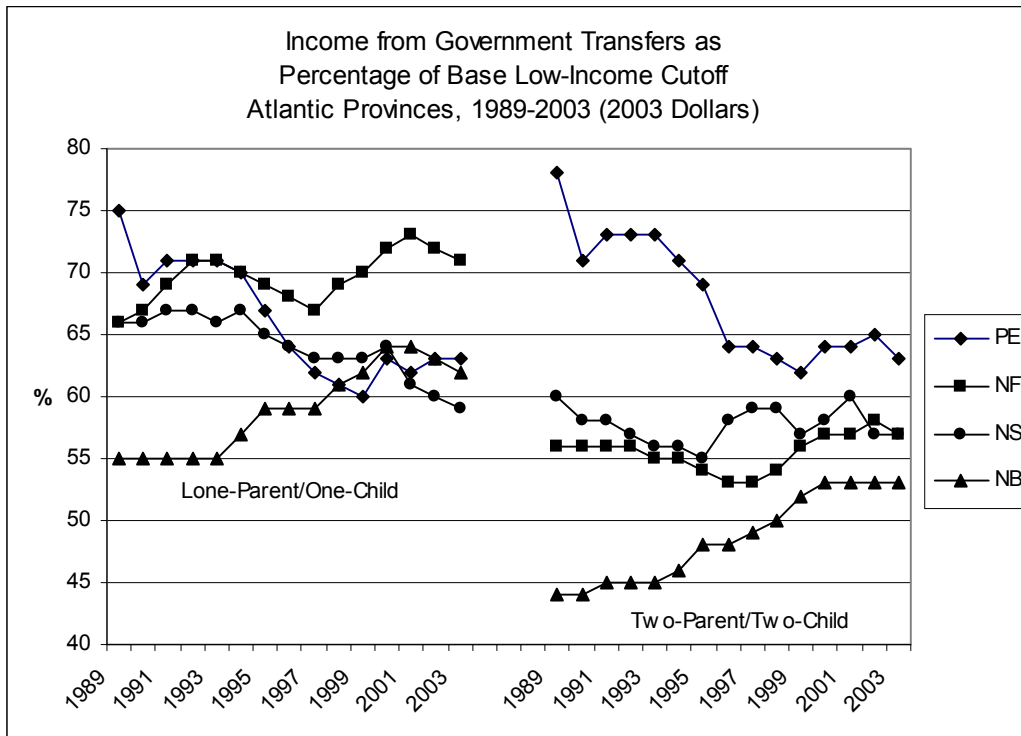


Figure 10, along with Table 7 below, shows that regardless of family type, the range of federal/provincial transfers across the Atlantic Provinces is narrowing – perhaps toward a more “standard” rate.¹⁵ Nevertheless, sizeable differences between provinces still exist. For example, on average, lone-parent/one-child families in Newfoundland and Labrador received \$1,824 more than their counterparts in Nova Scotia, and two-parent/two-child families in Prince Edward Island received \$3,139 more than their counterparts in New Brunswick.

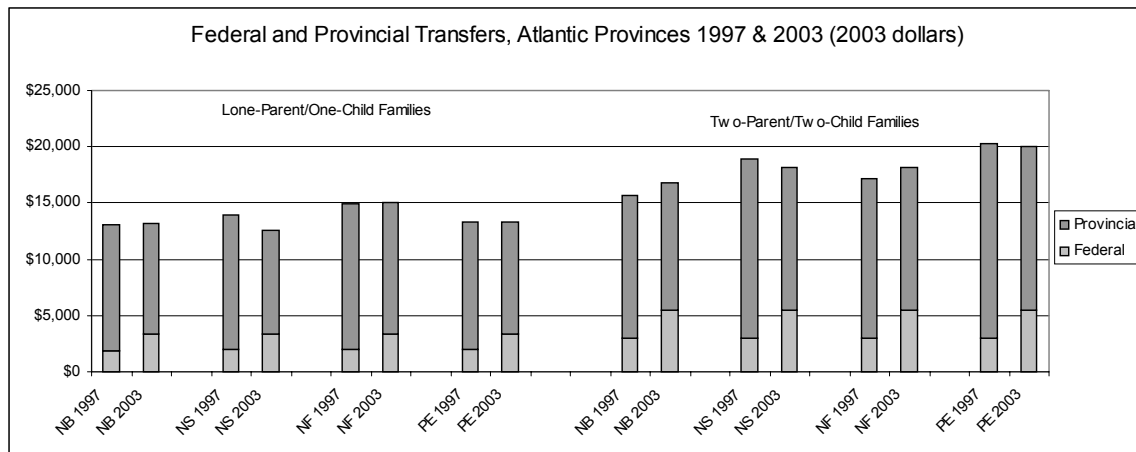
Table 7

Income from Social Transfers 1989 & 2003, Atlantic Provinces (2003 Dollars)				
	Lone-Parent/One Child Family		Two-Parent/Two-Child Family	
	1989	2003	1989	2003
NB	\$12,113	\$13,232	\$14,243	\$16,852
NF	\$14,672	\$15,056	\$17,988	\$18,162
NS	\$14,564	\$12,515	\$19,354	\$18,134
PE	\$14,787	\$13,330	\$22,495	\$19,991

The lack of real progress in more recent years with regard to decreasing the gap between the LICO level and government transfers is particularly disturbing. The National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) started in 1998 with the goal of assisting families experiencing economic hardship.¹⁷ All Atlantic governments maintain that they do not “claw back” this supplement where families are in receipt of provincial welfare payments.

Figure 11 shows provincial and federal transfers for the years 1997 (the year prior to the NCBS) and the year 2003 (the sixth year in which the supplement was in effect). In all instances the amount allocated to families by provincial governments decreased as federal amounts increased.

Figure 11



On average, lone-parent/one-child families in receipt of social assistance received \$12,007 from the province of Nova Scotia in 1997. By 2003 Nova Scotia had reduced its share of government transfers to such families by 23.3% to \$9,205 – a loss of \$2,802 in provincial transfers. The current combined value of the Basic Canada Child Tax Benefit and the National Child Benefit Supplement for families with one child is \$2,719. Yet, the Nova Scotia government claims it discontinued clawing back the federal supplement in 2001.

The provincial reduction in government transfers experienced by two-parent/two-child families between 1997 and 2003 in Nova Scotia was also harsh. In 1997 they received \$15,909 from the province. By 2003 the reduction in provincial transfers relative to transfers in 1997 was 20.7%, dropping the payment to two-parent/two-child families to \$12,610 – a loss of \$3,299 in provincial transfers. The current combined value of federal transfer for families with two children is \$5,222 – so 63% of the transfer is being “clawed back” by the province of Nova Scotia.

While some Atlantic families who depend on government transfers for family income have seen small net gains when federal and provincial transfers are added, both types of Nova Scotia families receive less income from government transfers than they did before 1998 when the federal government committed to increase income support to low-income families. Astoundingly, levels of provincial payments fell across the Atlantic Provinces for both family types, undermining the potential of child tax credits to increase family income.

INCOME SHORTFALLS AMONG FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Child poverty rates inform us about the *likelihood* of children being poor. The degree of poverty can be examined through the size of the income gap experienced by families with children. The “low income gap” measures the shortfall between family income and the low income cutoff for that family. In other words, an “income gap” is the additional income a family would need to break through its low income cutoff (low income cutoffs are specific to family size and the community in which the family lives).

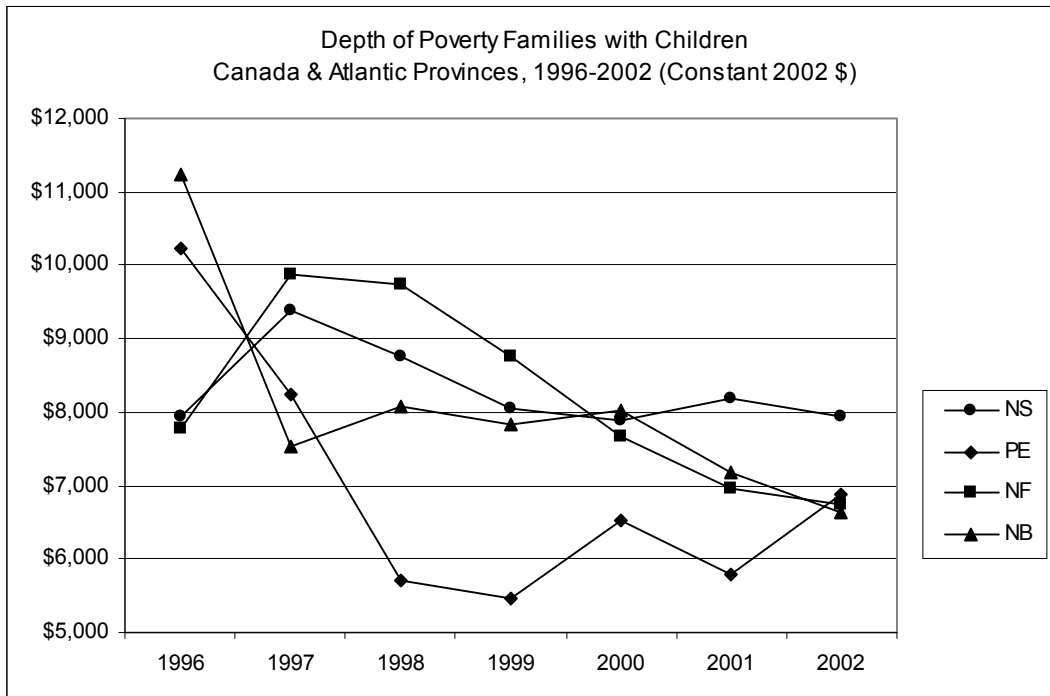
The average income gap for two types of families is shown in Table 8. In 2002, the average shortfall per year for Nova Scotia female lone-parent families was \$7,300 (\$608 per month): For two-parent families this shortfall was \$6,900 (\$575 per month).

Table 8

Average Income Gaps 1989, 2001 & 2002: Two-parent & Female Lone-Parent Families Canada & Nova Scotia			
	1989	2001	2002
Nova Scotia two-parent families	\$7,100	\$8,700	\$6,900
Canada two-parent families	\$9,600	\$9,700	\$9,000
Nova Scotia female lone-parent families	\$7,800	\$6,300	\$7,300
<i>Canada female lone-parent families</i>	<i>\$9,500</i>	<i>\$8,600</i>	<i>\$8,800</i>

Figure 12 provides some encouraging information. While previous data reported here demonstrate the overall rate of child poverty has not declined since 1989, this chart shows sizeable decreases for three of the four Atlantic Provinces in the average depth of poverty experienced by families with children during this time of relatively good economic growth.

Figure 12



However, Table 9 gives details of the changes and highlights that Nova Scotia was the only Atlantic Province where families did not experience a substantial decrease in the depth of poverty. Relative to other Atlantic Provinces, the average depth of poverty for families with children in Nova Scotia is 18% greater.

Table 9

	1996	2002	\$ Change	% Change
New Brunswick	\$11,227	\$6,642	Reduction...\$4,585	-40.8
Prince Edward Island	\$10,223	\$6,868	Reduction...\$3,355	-32.8
Newfoundland & Labrador	\$7,776	\$6,731	Reduction...\$1,045	-13.4
Nova Scotia	\$7,929	\$7,943	Increase.... \$14	0.2

CLOSING THE GAP

In financial terms, eliminating child poverty in Nova Scotia is far from insurmountable. Table 10 estimates the costs of raising the income of all Nova Scotia families with children to the LICO level at approximately \$121 Million (2002). It would be important to set levels marginally above this level to provide a safety zone for families. A 10% margin would place of cost of raising income to a sufficient level at \$133 Million.

Table 10

Average Income Gap for Two-parent & Lone-Parent Families, Nova Scotia, 2002			
	Income Gap	Number of Families	Aggregate Gap
Lone-parent families	\$7,300	9,000	\$65,700,000
Two-parent families	\$6,900	8,000	\$55,200,000
	Totals	17,000	\$120,900,000

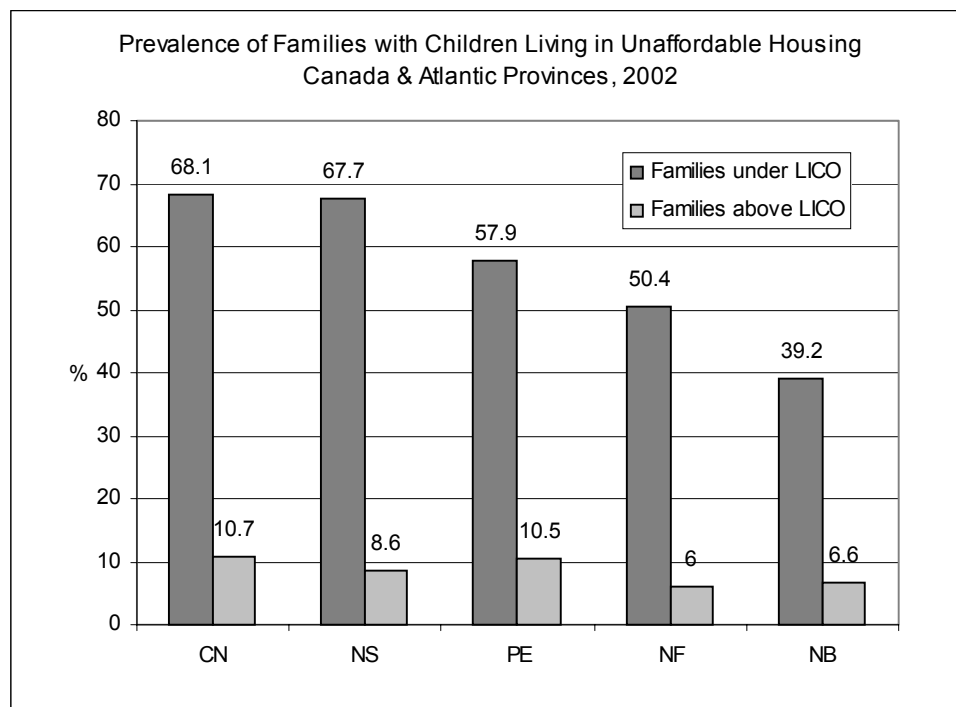
In 2000, the United Nations estimated the cost of eliminating child poverty as a percentage of Gross National Product for 15 industrialized nations.¹⁸ Estimates ranged from 0.07% of GNP (Sweden) to 0.66% (United States of America). The estimate for Canada, based on the year 1995, was 0.46% of GNP. Importantly, the authors of the UN report argue that a greater percentage should be transferred to families to move them well away from the poverty zone.

THE STRUGGLE TO PROVIDE SHELTER AND FOOD

Figure 13 provides a comparison across the Atlantic Provinces with regard to the accessibility of affordable housing for families with children.¹⁹ A much higher percentage of those families with incomes below LICO levels spend an inordinate amount of their family income on shelter costs than families with incomes above LICO.

On this important measure of family well-being, Nova Scotia families living in low-income circumstances are the most disadvantaged in Atlantic Canada. In Nova Scotia, 67.7% of families have unaffordable housing compared with 39.2% in New Brunswick where affordable housing is most accessible.

Figure 13



After-tax Low Income Cutoffs for a family of four in Nova Scotia range from \$1,671 to \$2,146/month. For these families 30% of income would be \$501 to \$644/month. It is therefore likely that families are paying well in excess of 30% of their income on shelter. For families living in poverty, this percentage would climb steeply – given the sizeable income gaps (\$7,300/year for lone-parent families and \$6,900/year for two-parent families) experienced at current depths of poverty (See Table 10).

Between June and October 2002, the Nova Scotia Nutrition Council conducted food-costing research in every region of the province.²⁰ Researchers found that: “on average it costs \$572.90/month to feed a reference family of four a nutritious diet in Nova Scotia.”²¹

With rents in excess of \$501- \$644/month, and the costs of nutritional food set at \$572.90/month, for the reference family described in the Nova Scotia Nutrition Council about \$597–\$929/month would be left for other costs (if family income equaled the low-income cutoff). Other common costs include childcare, clothing, transportation, insurance, home and personal hygiene items, non-insured health-related costs, recreational activities, etc.

However, we have seen that almost 1 in 5 Nova Scotia children live well below the low-income cutoff with income gaps for their families averaging about \$7,000/year before taxes (\$583/month). These economic conditions severely limit a parent’s ability to cover the fundamental costs of providing shelter and food – and explain why parents in ever greater numbers are becoming dependent on food banks and the services of other charities for survival.

RANKED RESULTS FOR THE ATLANTIC PROVINCES

Statistics included for this 2004 report card include many measures for all four Atlantic Provinces and allow us to estimate how well Nova Scotia has done relative to other provinces in protecting its children and families from the impact of poverty. Table 11 summarizes performance on 15 key measures (for numeric results see Appendix A).

Table 11

Comparative Performance on Key Measures of Child/Family Poverty, Atlantic Provinces				
	Placement			
	Best	→	→	Worst
Child Poverty Rate (%) All Children (2002)	PE	NB	NS	NF
% Change in Child Poverty Rate 1989–2002	NB	PE	NF	NS
% Change in Child Poverty Rate 1995–2002	NB	PE	NF	NS
Child Poverty Rate (%) Female Lone-Parent/One-Child Families (2002)	PE	NB	NS	NF
Child Poverty Rate (%) New Immigrant Children (2001)	NB	NF	NS	PE
Child Poverty Rate (%) Immigrant Children (2001)	NB	NF	PE	NS
Child Poverty Rate (%) Visible Minority Children (2001)	NF	NB	PE	NS
Child Poverty Rate (%) First Nations Children (2001)	NF	NB	NS	PE
Child Poverty Rate (%) Physically Disabled Children (2001)	PE	NB	NS	NF
Prevalence (%) Children Experiencing Poverty for more than three	NS	NB	PE	NF

years (1996–2001)				
Child Poverty Rate (%) Among Full Year Labour Force Attached Families (2002)	NB	PE	NS	NF
Level of Provincial Transfers Lone-Parent/One Child (2002)	NF	PE	NB	NS
Level of Provincial Transfers Two-Parent/Two-Child (2002)	PE	NF	NS	NB
Depth of Poverty (2002)	NB	NF	PE	NS
Prevalence (%) of Families with Children in Unaffordable Housing (2002)	NB	NF	PE	NS

New Brunswick performs best on 7, Prince Edward Island on 4, Newfoundland and Labrador on 3 and Nova Scotia on 1 of these measures. Nova Scotia performs worst on 7 measures, Newfoundland and Labrador on 5, Prince Edward Island on 2 and New Brunswick on 1.

When a score of 3 points is assigned for first placement, 2 points for second, 1 point for third and zero points for placing last, New Brunswick scores best with 34 points, Prince Edward Island has 25, Newfoundland and Labrador has 21, and Nova Scotia scores worst with only 10 points.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Even in circumstances where parents work at least 49 of 52 weeks in a year, and the economy is strong (2002), the Nova Scotia child poverty rate remained as high as 9.2% (almost 1 in 10). We must therefore acknowledge that current labour standards and/or practices are limited in their ability to reduce child poverty. Conversely, such limits underscore the essential role of governments with regard to intervening and regulating on behalf of lower-income families.

Recommendation One

When the marketplace fails to raise the income of working families above the LICO, labour standards need to be adjusted through government regulations; and/or government transfers need to be increased to fill the income gaps created by low-wage employment. Adjustments to the earnings of low-wage workers, that are equivalent to the minimum wage level rising to \$10 per hour, are needed.

It is also clear that joint management between federal and provincial ministers is not building a stronger safety net for children whose families turn to governments for help during times of economic hardship. For example, if the Atlantic Provinces had maintained provincial government transfers to families at 1997 levels (the year prior to the introduction of the renewed CCTB/NCBS), families dependent on government transfers would now receive fairer incomes, and the intended benefit of the child tax credits would be more fully realized.

In effect, because the federal and provincial governments have had neither benchmarks nor a clear plan to increase overall income to low-income families, provinces could, and did, systematically reduce transfers to these families between 1997 and 2002. Families

in real need have been robbed of the supplement's true potential to reduce the depth and prevalence of child poverty as years advance. One thing that could have happened as a contingent to initiating the NCBS was agreement between levels of government that there would be "no claw back" by one level of government when increases were made by another. Also, both clarity and commitment could be enhanced if responsibility for income support were assigned to only one level of government and responsibility for other forms of support were assigned to the other.

Recommendation Two

Assign specific roles and responsibilities to federal and provincial levels of government within a framework that prioritizes income support to families. Ensure that measurable benchmarks are included for tracking the progress of low-income families towards income levels above the LICO, regardless of whether families are dependent on government transfers or not. Ensure compliance to national goals and standards by applying penalties to provinces that take actions that undermine the national goal of eliminating child poverty (e.g., the clawback of federal transfer payments).

Across Atlantic Canada we see that children within particular groups have much greater levels of exposure to poverty. In Nova Scotia, the likelihood of experiencing poverty is especially high for children in female lone-parent families but also much higher for immigrant, first nations, visible minority and disabled children than for other children not belonging to these populations. Special attention must be given to the specific issues facing these children, their families and their communities of support to address the increased risks they face.

Recommendation Three

Assign responsibility and resources to organizations and communities experienced and committed to serving families and children from these vulnerable populations. Assess how resources can be applied in an effective strategy aimed at overcoming specific barriers to eliminating child poverty for these populations.

Recommendation Four

For families with disabled children, ensure that family income is boosted to a level above the low-income cutoff and that costs related to the child's disability are adequately covered by special supplementary funds.

We noted earlier that Nova Scotia's performance on 14 out of 15 key measures of child poverty was worse than New Brunswick's, and that New Brunswick's performance was considerably stronger than that of all Atlantic Provinces and three times better than in Nova Scotia. Clearly, time would be well spent by Nova Scotia officials on a close examination of New Brunswick's actions and policies related to the reduction of child poverty.

A comparison between New Brunswick's and Nova Scotia's strategies with regard to moving families from welfare roles into the workforce may be especially useful, since workforce participation in New Brunswick provides greater protection from child poverty than in any other Atlantic Province and outperforms the Canadian average.

In 2000, the Nova Scotia government passed the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act (Bill 62). This act refashioned how welfare programs were to be delivered and made fundamental, ideological changes regarding how incomes would flow to families with children. Bill 62 threw the weight of provincial legislation behind the need for social assistance recipients to participate in the workforce to the maximum extent possible and overthrew previous models where eligibility for social assistance was based on need and circumstances.

While this change was widely opposed by organizations and advocates of families and children, government officials raised expectations that their actions would in fact lead to reductions in child poverty rates. Now, four years post the act's implementation, the government of Nova Scotia needs to report fully on the impact of these legislated changes on the rate of child poverty. We need to know the effects of having compelled parents to enter low-wage employment. Data surrounding this initiative specific to the prevalence, duration and depth of child poverty would allow an examination of this strategy and identify whether the changes enacted by Bill 62 need to be adjusted or even abandoned.

Our enquiries should seek to determine whether Bill 62 is improving the quality of life for children by providing significant protection from poverty for the long term. Earlier we reported that the length of time during which children in Nova Scotia experienced poverty was reduced between 1996 and 2001, with a smaller percentage of children experiencing poverty for periods of 4–6 years. Since government fully implemented policies to maximize the number of parents entering employment and leaving welfare in 2001, this could explain the decreases in the duration of child poverty for this period. It would be informative to know how sustainable employment is for families compelled by policy, rather than work-readiness, to enter the workforce.

Given the statistics reported for 2002, it is legitimate to ask whether changes in social assistance policies move children in and out of poverty without much impact on the depth of poverty or if the transition from welfare to work holds the promise of eliminating child poverty by substantially decreasing the rates and depths of poverty.

Recommendation Five

Nova Scotia must commit to a full examination of its performance on measures related to the elimination of child poverty with an emphasis on: uncovering reasons for better performance on the reduction of child poverty by New Brunswick; reviewing the impact on child poverty of specific policies and practices legislated under the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act; and changing policies and programs to comply with best practices.

Appendix

Before-tax Low-Income Cutoffs (LICOs), 2002 Statistics Canada, Low-income cutoffs from 1992 to 2001 and low-income measures from 1991 to 2000, 75F0002MIE, 2002					
Size of family unit	Urban Areas (Population Size)				
	Rural	Less than 30,000*	30,000-99,999	100,000-499,999	500,000+
1 person	\$13,311	\$15,267	\$16,407	\$16,521	\$19,261
2 persons	\$16,639	\$19,083	\$20,508	\$20,651	\$24,077
3 persons	\$20,694	\$23,732	\$25,505	\$25,684	\$29,944
4 persons	\$25,050	\$28,729	\$30,875	\$31,090	\$36,247
5 persons	\$28,002	\$32,113	\$34,512	\$34,754	\$40,518
6 persons	\$30,954	\$35,498	\$38,150	\$38,418	\$44,789
7 or more persons	\$33,907	\$38,882	\$41,788	\$42,082	\$49,060

*Includes cities with a population between 15,000 and 30,000 and small urban areas (under 15,000).

After-tax Low-Income Cutoffs (LICOs), 2002 Statistics Canada, Low-income cutoffs from 1992 to 2001 and low-income measures from 1991 to 2000, 75F0002MIE, 2002					
Size of family unit	Urban Areas (Population Size)				
	Rural	Less than 30,000*	30,000-99,999	100,000-499,999	500,000+
1 person	\$10,429	\$12,055	\$13,192	\$13,399	\$15,907
2 persons	\$12,726	\$14,710	\$16,097	\$16,349	\$19,410
3 persons	\$16,096	\$18,604	\$20,360	\$20,679	\$24,550
4 persons	\$20,047	\$23,172	\$25,358	\$25,755	\$30,576
5 persons	\$22,407	\$25,898	\$28,341	\$28,786	\$34,174
6 persons	\$24,766	\$28,624	\$31,324	\$31,817	\$37,773
7 or more persons	\$27,126	\$31,351	\$34,308	\$34,848	\$41,372

*Includes cities with a population between 15,000 and 30,000 and small urban areas (under 15,000).

Minimum Wage Rates Across Canada, November 2004 Canadian Restaurant & Food Services Association			
Province	General	Inexperienced workers	Tipped Employees
Alberta	\$5.90		
British Columbia	\$8.00		
Manitoba	\$7.00		
New Brunswick	\$6.20		
Newfoundland	\$6.00		
Nova Scotia	\$6.50	\$6.05	
Ontario	\$7.15	\$6.70	\$6.20
P.E.I.	\$6.50		
Quebec	\$7.45		\$6.70
Saskatchewan	\$6.65		
N.W.T.	\$8.25		
Yukon	\$7.20		

Numeric Values to Accompany Table 11 (Comparative Performance on Key Measures of Child/Family Poverty, Atlantic Provinces).				
	NB	NS	NF	PE
Child Poverty Rate (%) All Children (2002)	14.3	18.1	21.9	11.4
% Change Child Poverty Rate 1989–2002	-18.8	12.4	11.7	-9.5
% Change Child Poverty Rate 1995–2002	-41.2	-15.4	-17.0	-22.4
Child Poverty Rate (%) Female Lone-Parent/One-Child Families (2002)	55.6	56.1	56.7	33.9
Child Poverty Rate (%) New Immigrant Children (2001)	24.7	50.3	33.8	52.4
Child Poverty Rate (%) Immigrant Children (2001)	19.6	40.5	28.8	40.0
Child Poverty Rate (%) Visible Minority Children (2001)	26.8	42.0	24.0	32.1
Child Poverty Rate (%) First Nations Children (2001)	33.0	38.4	27.9	48.6
Child Poverty Rate (%) Physically Disabled Children (2001)	27.2	31.5	36.4	26.6
Prevalence (%) Children Experiencing Poverty for more than three years (1996–2001)	11.8	11.3	14.7	12.6
Child Poverty Rate (%) Among Full Year Labour Force Attached Families (2002)	4.7	10.4	10.9	6.0
Level of Provincial Transfers Lone-Parent/One Child (2002)	\$9,922	\$9,205	\$11,746	\$10,020
Level of Provincial Transfers Two-Parent/Two-Child (2002)	\$11,328	\$12,610	\$12,638	\$14,468
Depth of Poverty (2002)	\$6,642	\$7,943	\$6,731	\$6,868
Prevalence (%) of Families with Children in Unaffordable Housing (2002)	39.2	67.7	50.4	57.9

¹ League Table of Child Poverty in Rich Nations. Report Card No.1A. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Italy, 2000.

² The 1924 Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child was the first United Nations statement to document the need to extend particular care to children. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights granted all women and children, regardless of family status equal social protection. The international emphasis on ending child poverty was begun in 1959 with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child. In 1990, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child promoted social progress and better standards of life for children and focused on the right of the child to be fully prepared to live an individual life in society. It also recognized that children living in exceptionally difficult conditions needed special consideration.

⁴ Readers should note that rates from the 2001 Census are derived from different data sets than rates from the Income Trends data used in this report. Therefore, rates from Table 4 and Figure 6 are not equivalent to 2001 reported at other points in this report.

⁵ Reported by Campaign 2000 from Statistics Canada, *2001 Census*, 97F0019XCB01057.

⁶ Statistics Canada developed new disability questions for the 2001 Census. Survey questions focused on the ability of children to participate fully at home/school and the degree to which daily activities were limited.

⁷ The data surrounding the duration of poverty needs to be read with caution as it does not differ between those who recycle into poverty. For example, a child who is poor for 2-years, escapes poverty for a year, then subsequently enters poverty for another 2-years will have experienced four years of poverty in this time frame but will not be counted as a child who experienced 4-years of poverty but as a child who experienced 1-3 years).

⁸ The 2001 Census shows families in the bottom 10% of the income scale (families with incomes below \$18,990) experienced only very small gains during the 1990s (on average an \$81 increase in income, up less than 0.1% in 1991, to \$10,346 in 2001). The average increases for middle income families was also extremely small. The only large gains were made among those on the upper rungs of the income scale – i.e., those who already enjoy the greatest levels of economic security.

⁹ Full Year Work Equivalent Families are those where the combined total weeks worked by all adults is 49 weeks or more.

¹⁰ Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 71M0001XCB, Ottawa, 2003. Note. The bottom income quartile refers to those included in the bottom 25% of earners.

¹¹ Figure 9 gives data for the Atlantic Region versus Nova Scotia or other individual Atlantic Provinces because data for some provinces/years was not reliable. Where data for Nova Scotia are given, it is derived from Statistics Canada Income Trends in Canada 1980–2002 (Base LICO tabulations), 13F0022XCB, 2004.

¹² Sussman & Tabi, Minimum Wage Earners in Statistics Canada, Perspectives on Labour & Income, Volume 5, Number 3, 2004.

¹³ Workman & Jacobs, Undermining Wages in Nova Scotia: The Minimum Wage from 1976–2002. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Nova Scotia Office (2002).

¹⁴ The income charted is basic federal/provincial social assistance, federal/provincial child tax benefits (e.g., the National Child Benefit) and provincial tax credits.

¹⁵ Income is expressed in constant dollars, i.e., the income data for more previous years has been calculated (at Statistics Canada) to reflect increases or decreases in the cost of living over the intervening period. For example, here the 1989 values are revised upwards by the change in the Consumer Price Index between 1989 and 2003.

¹⁷ For families with net incomes for 2003 below \$22,615 the Basic Child Tax Benefit for the July 2004–June 2005 period is \$1,208. The National Child Benefit Supplement adds an additional \$1,511 for a total Canada Child Tax Benefit of \$2,719. Payments for additional children are approximately equal to the amount for the first child. Monthly payments are mailed directly to custodial mothers.

¹⁸ League Table of Child Poverty in Rich Nations. Report Card No.1A. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Italy, 2000.

¹⁹ Housing is considered unaffordable if shelter costs are greater than 30% of total income. Annual costs of shelter included for the household are as follows: for owners, mortgage payments, property taxes, condominium fees (if applicable), and payments for electricity, fuel and water; for renters, rent plus payments for electricity, fuel and water not already included in the rent.

²⁰ Building Food Security in Nova Scotia: Using a Participatory Process to Collect Evidence and Enhance the Capacity of Community Groups to Impact Policy, Nova Scotia Nutrition Council, 2003.

²¹ The reference family was a mother, a father, a girl aged 7 years and a boy aged 14 years.