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Best and Worst Places to be a Mom

By Sarah Lorge Butler | May 3, 2011 | **0** Comments

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Today Save the Children released their 2011 State of the World's Mothers report. Norway again tops the list as the best place to be a mom, with Australia the runner-up, and Iceland third. The bottom three countries? Guinea-Bissau, Niger, and Afghanistan. If you're an American woman contemplating motherhood, you're in a mediocre place, as the U.S. slipped from 28th to 31st this year.

In the bottom tier of countries, crushing poverty and lack of access to food and basic healthcare lead to soaring rates of maternal mortality — death of a mother related to complications during pregnancy or childbirth — and mortality of children under age 5. Save the Children focuses on the plight of women and children in the developing world. In Afghanistan, for instance, only 14% of births are attended by skilled health personnel. (If more American mommies knew that, perhaps we'd think twice before lobbing playgroup insults at each other depending on whether we selected to have an epidural or attempt natural childbirth.)

But the media here at home, and I'm no exception, can't help but focus on how this report showcases the United States' failures compared to other developed countries. Our counterparts in Europe, Japan and Australia take far better care of their women and children than the U.S. does. Our rates of maternal mortality are the highest of any industrialized nation. We're pretty woeful at keeping the little ones alive, too, trailing Canada, the United Kingdom and France — yep, those countries with national healthcare. If you're a kid there, you've got a better chance of surviving to see your fifth birthday.

What also drags down the American score is maternity leave benefits. The U.S. has no comprehensive national policy. The Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 provides 12 weeks of unpaid leave to workers in companies with 50 or more employees — which excludes huge numbers of women who work for small businesses — and it's "extremely meager in international terms," says Janet Gornick, Ph.D., a professor of political science and sociology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Norway gives 46 weeks off, with at least 80% pay. In France, you get 16 weeks at full pay. Those four months would at least get a

mom through to the point where Junior might be starting to sleep for chunks of the night and she can think about something other than nursing and whether she'll get a shower that day.

Bottom line, Moms: This Mother's Day, let's hope your family is looking out for you. Because your country could be doing a whole lot better.

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