

1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

What is the role of early childhood education?

- Fifteen-year-olds who had at least one year of pre-primary education tend to perform better at school.
- Early childhood education has grown alongside the increase in women working in many OECD countries, but improving access without improving the quality of these services will not ensure good results.
- Education now begins for most children in OECD countries well before they are 5 years old. In Belgium, France, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Spain and Sweden, more than 90% of 3-year-olds are enrolled in early childhood education.
- More than three-quarters of 4-year-olds (82%) are enrolled in early childhood education across OECD countries; the figure is 86% for OECD countries that are part of the European Union.

Significance

Early childhood education plays a key role in the cognitive and emotional development of the young. Enrolling pupils in early childhood education can also mitigate social inequalities. As a result, ensuring the quality of early childhood education and care has become a policy priority in many countries.

As countries continue to expand their early childhood programmes, they need to consider parents' needs and expectations regarding accessibility, cost, programme and staff quality and accountability.

Findings

Results from the OECD's PISA assessment of students at age 15 show that in most countries pupils who have attended pre-primary education programmes tend to perform better than those who have not.

An increase in women working outside the home, and having children later in life, have gone hand in hand with an increase in early childhood education. The average age at which mothers have their first child has risen across all OECD countries over the past 40 years. In Germany and the United Kingdom the average age at first birth is 30 years. In contrast, Mexico has the lowest average age at just over 21 years.

Spending on pre-primary education accounts for an average of 0.6% of gross domestic product (GDP) in OECD countries, although there are significant differences between countries. While 0.1% or less of GDP is spent on pre-primary education in Australia and Turkey, 0.8% or more is spent in Denmark, Iceland, Israel, Luxembourg, the Russian Federation and Spain.

Publicly-funded pre-primary education tends to be more strongly developed in the European countries than elsewhere in the OECD. Private funding varies widely between countries, ranging from 5% or less in Belgium, Estonia, Luxembourg and Sweden, to 25% or more in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Japan, Korea, Spain and the United States.

Public spending on pre-primary education is mainly used to support public institutions, but it also funds private institutions. On average across OECD countries, the level of public expenditure on public pre-primary institutions, at USD 6 275 per pupil, is around twice the level of public spending on private pre-primary institutions (USD 3 494).

The ratio of pupils to teaching staff is also an important indicator of the resources devoted to pre-primary education. The pupil-teacher ratio excluding non-professional staff (e.g. teachers' aides) ranges from more than 20 pupils per teacher in Chile, China, France, Israel, Mexico and Turkey, to fewer than 10 in Estonia, Iceland, New Zealand, Slovenia and Sweden.

Trends

Enrolment in early childhood education programmes rose from 64% of 3-year-olds in 2005 to 70% in 2011 on average for OECD countries, and from 78% of 4-year-olds in 2005 to 84% in 2011. In Brazil, Mexico and Poland, enrolment rates of 4-year-olds increased by 20 percentage points during this period.

Definitions

Early childhood education, or pre-primary education, is defined as the initial stage of organised instruction, designed primarily to introduce very young children to a school-like environment.

Information on data for Israel:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

Going further

For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2013* (Indicator C2).

Areas covered include:

- Enrolment rates in pre-primary programmes
- Public and private spending on pre-primary education
- Influence of pre-primary education policies on Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results

Further reading from OECD

PISA Volume II.

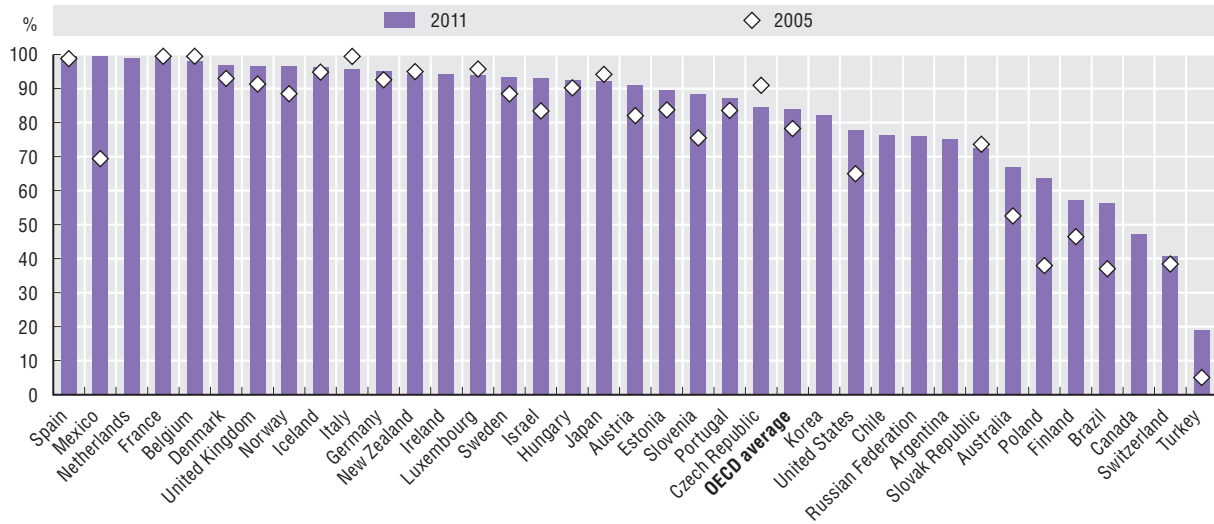
Starting Strong II and III: Early Childhood Education and Care, 2006, and 2011.

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Figure 1.5. **Enrolment rates at age 4 in education (2005, 2011)**

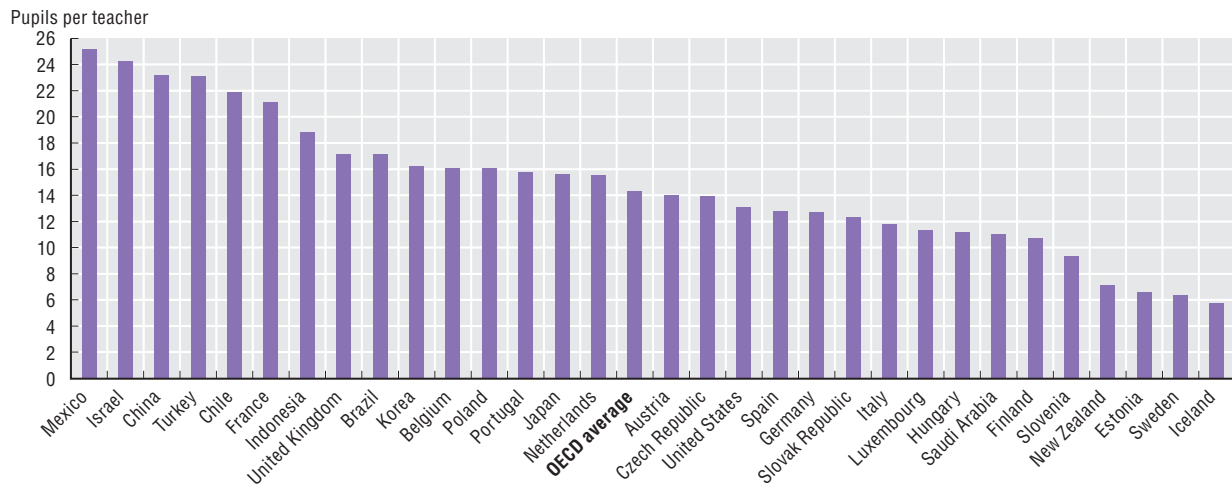
This figure compares the 2005 and 2011 enrolment rates of full-time and part-time pupils aged 4 in public and private institutions.



Source: OECD (2013), *Education at a glance 2013*. Chart C2.1 available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932847393>.

Figure 1.6. **Ratio of pupils to teaching staff in early childhood education, 2011**

This figure shows the number of pupils per teacher in early childhood education.



Note: The figures should be interpreted with some caution because the indicator compares the teacher/pupil ratios in countries with “education-only” and “integrated education and daycare” programmes. In some countries, the staff requirements in these two types of provision are very different.
Source: OECD (2013), *Education at a glance 2013*. Chart C2.4 available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932847450>.



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