

Definitions and measurement

Childcare enrolment among 0-2 year-olds includes enrolment in formal arrangements such as childcare centres, registered child minders, as well as care provided by someone who is not a family member. Enrolment rates for 3-5-year-olds refer to those enrolled in formal pre-school services, and in some countries for 4- and 5-year-olds in primary schools.

Data on childcare participation of the 0-2 year-olds comes from various sources, limiting comparability, including *OECD Babies and Bosses reviews*, the *OECD Education database*, the Eurydice database, NOSOSCO reviews and National Statistical Offices. Enrolment for 3-5-year-olds is presented using data of the *OECD Education database*. This information is based upon actual numbers of students participating in formal pre-school programmes and a percentage is calculated by using population data as a denominator.

On average across the OECD one in five children under the age of three is enrolled in formal childcare (SS3.1). While enrolment rates of very young children are less than 10% in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Mexico and Poland, around 40% or more of children in this age group use childcare facilities in the Nordic countries. Participation rates are especially high in Denmark (62%) and Iceland (59%). This country variation reflects variation in public provision of childcare, in parental leave systems, in other incentives for women to work, and in culture and family structures. The enrolment figures do not reflect time in care. The amount of hours young children spend in formal care probably also varies considerably across countries. These differences may be important because intensity of childcare plays an important role in both children's developmental outcomes (hours can be either too much or too little) and in maternal labour market engagement.

Cross-country comparisons are, however, fraught because of data issues. It is possible that formal childcare is under-reported in countries where a significant proportion of childcare is provided

privately in centres or by non-family carers in the home (e.g. Australia, Canada, Ireland, Mexico and the United States) or in countries where early childhood education and care is delivered and financed by local government (e.g. Canada, Mexico, Switzerland and the United States). This under-reporting may lead to an underestimation of enrolment rates. Additionally, in some countries young children may be enrolled in several part-time programmes, leading to double counting issues, and consequently to an overestimation of enrolment rates.

On average across the OECD more than 70% of children aged 3-5 are enrolled in pre-school (SS3.2). The proportion is much higher than childcare participation for younger children. In half of OECD countries, at least 80% of children in this age group were enrolled in pre-school programmes in 2006. Enrolment rates are practically universal in France, Belgium, Italy and Spain. On the other hand, few in Turkey, Poland and Korea participate, reflecting considerable reliance on family care.

More children attend pre-school than in the past. Between 2000 and 2005, average pre-school enrolment rates of children aged 3-5 years increased by 4 percentage points, from 69% to 73%. Countries with large rises include Germany, Mexico and Norway.

The Nordic countries, France and Belgium spend the highest proportion of their net national income on childcare (SS3.3). At the lower end are Switzerland, Korea, Canada and Greece. The variation observed in spending across countries reflects differences in population shares of young children, in enrolment rates, and in spending per child between countries.

Further reading

OECD (various issues), *Babies and Bosses*, OECD, Paris. (www.oecd.org/els/social/family).

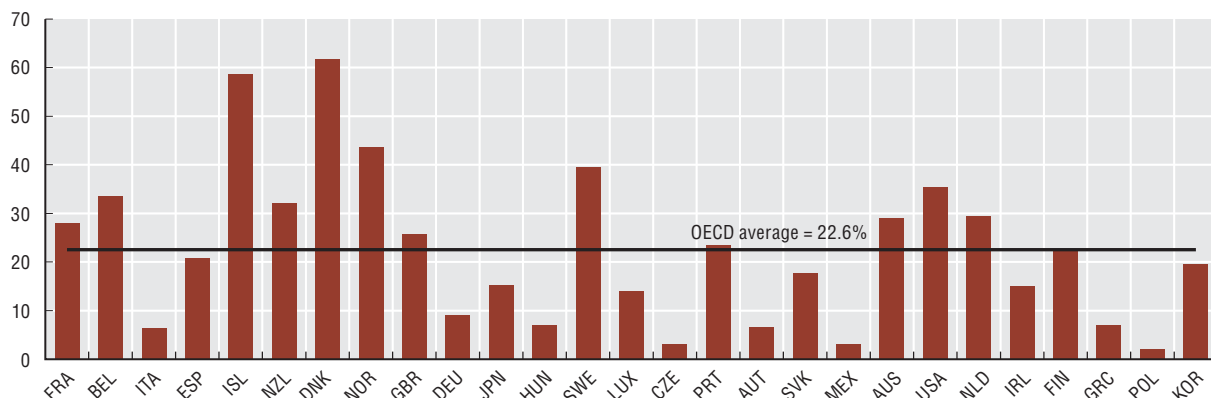
OECD (2008), *Education at a Glance*, OECD, Paris.

Figure note

Figure SS3.1: Countries are ranked in descending order of 3- to 5-year old enrolment rates. No data for Switzerland and Turkey; 2000 for Ireland and Italy; 2001 for Germany and Poland; 2002 for France; 2003 for Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, Mexico, Norway and the Slovak Republic; 2005 for Australia, Denmark, Korea and the United States; 2004 for other countries.

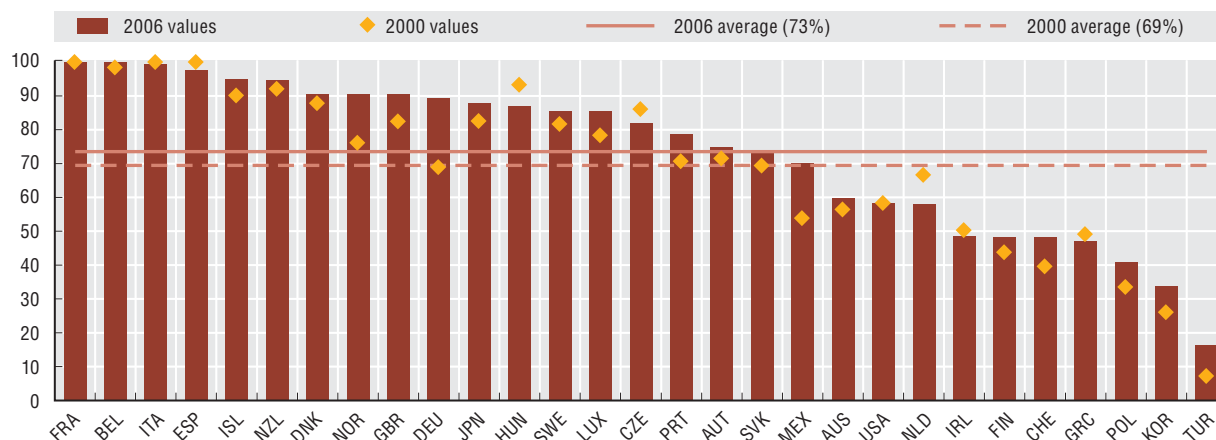
SS3.1. Enrolment in formal childcare varies widely across countries

Average enrolment rate of children aged under 3 in formal childcare, 2005 or latest year available, percentage



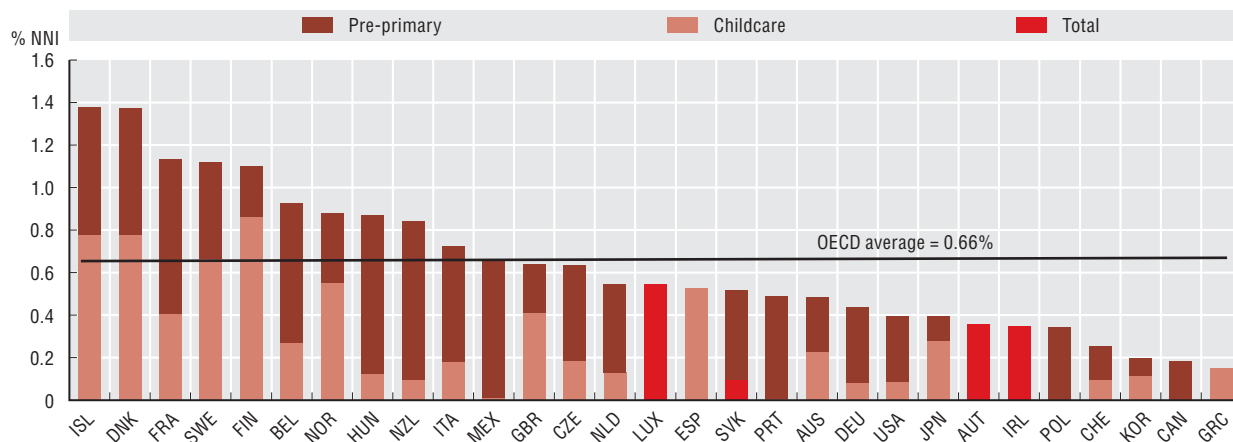
SS3.2. A majority of pre-school children aged 3-5 are in childcare

Average enrolment rate of children aged 3- to 5-years of age in pre-school educational programmes, percentage, 2000 and 2005



SS3.3. Nordic countries spend significantly more on childcare programmes

Public spending on childcare including pre-primary education, percentage of NNI, 2005



Source: OECD Family database (www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/550177446630>