

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 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, Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom, more than 90% of 3-year-olds are enrolled in early childhood education.
- More than three-quarters of 4-year-olds (84%) are enrolled in early childhood education and primary education in OECD countries; the figure is 89% for OECD countries that are part of the European Union.

Significance

Early childhood education plays a key role in cognitive and emotional development. Enrolling pupils in early childhood education can also mitigate social inequalities and promote better student outcomes overall. 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 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that, in most countries, pupils who have attended pre-primary education programmes tend to perform better at age 15 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, except Mexico, over the past 40 years.

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

Publicly funded pre-primary education tends to be more strongly developed in European countries than elsewhere in the OECD. Private expenditure varies widely between countries, ranging from 5% or less in Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg and Sweden, to 25% or more in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Colombia, 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 among OECD countries, the level of public expenditure on public pre-primary institutions, at USD 6 460 per pupil, is around twice the level of public spending on private pre-primary institutions (USD 3 618).

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-teaching staff (e.g. teachers' aides) ranges from more than 20 pupils per teacher in Chile, France, Indonesia, 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 71% in 2012 on average for OECD countries, and from 79% of 4-year-olds in 2005 to 84% in 2012. In Australia, Brazil and Poland, enrolment rates of 4-year-olds increased by 20 percentage points or more during this period.

Definitions

Early childhood education, or pre-primary education (ISCED 0), 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 2014* (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

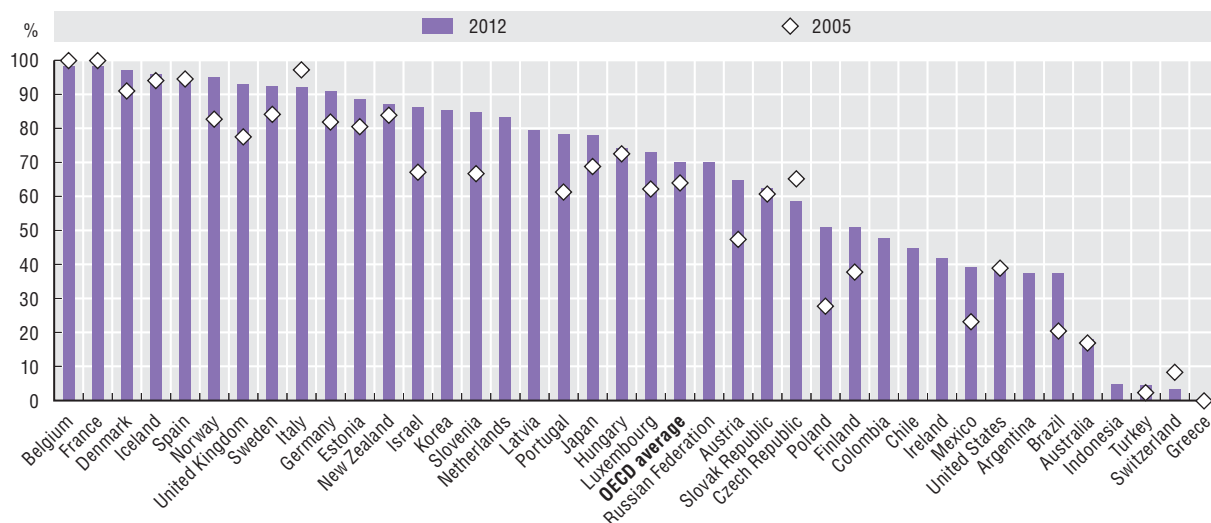
OECD (2011), *Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264123564-en>.

1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

What is the role of early childhood education?

Figure 1.5. **Enrolment rates in education at age 3 (2005, 2012)**

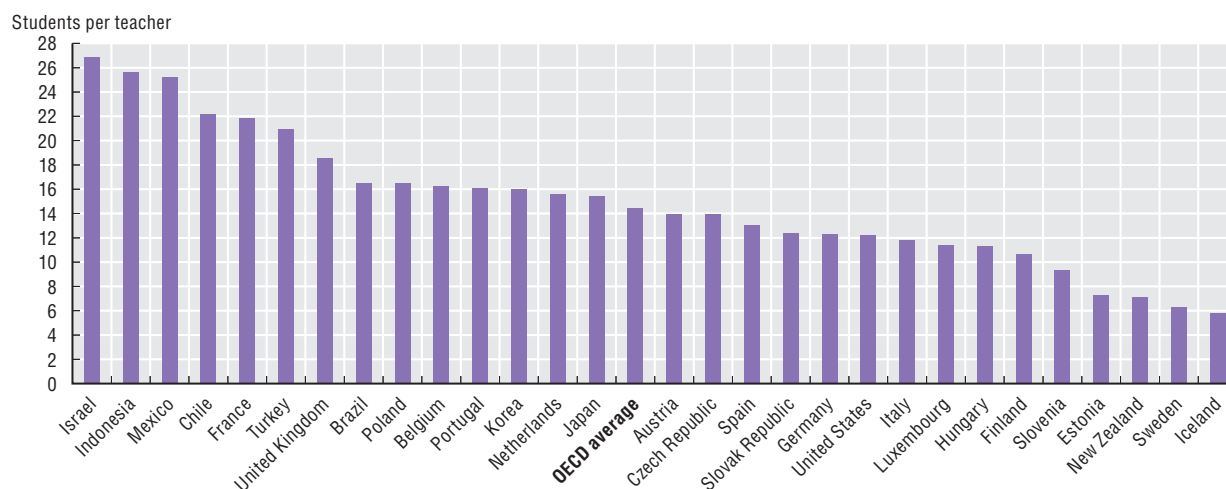
This figure compares the 2005 and 2012 enrolment rates (full-time and part-time) of 3-year-olds in public and private institutions.



Source: OECD (2014), Education at a Glance 2014, Chart C2.1 available at <http://dx.doi.org/0.1787/888933118409>.

Figure 1.6. **Ratio of students to teaching staff in early childhood education, 2012**

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



Source: OECD (2014), Education at a Glance 2014, Chart C2.4 available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933118466>.



From:
Education at a Glance 2014
Highlights

Access the complete publication at:
https://doi.org/10.1787/eag_highlights-2014-en

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2014), "What is the role of early childhood education?", in *Education at a Glance 2014: Highlights*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/eag_highlights-2014-6-en

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.