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Who uses childcare? Background brief on inequalities in the use of formal early childhood education and care (ECEC) among very young children [1]

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Abstract

On average across the OECD, one-in-three children under age three use formal ECEC. In some countries, like Denmark and Iceland, this is around six-in-ten or more. Childcare costs can be prohibitively high. In some countries, the costs of centre-based care for two children can amount to more than one-fifth of the disposable income of a low-earning couple. Such high costs can act as a barrier to the use of ECEC and discourage parental employment. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately likely to miss out on formal ECEC. In France and Ireland, for instance, children from high-income families are over four times more likely to use formal ECEC than children from low-income families. Providing all children with access to affordable formal ECEC is key. To encourage equal use, countries should ensure that out-of-pocket childcare costs are kept to a minimum, especially for low-income families, and that high-quality, reasonably-priced services are open to all children, regardless of background.

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