

Childcare and working families: New opportunity or missing link? ^[1]

An evidence brief

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS from Introduction

Childcare is a key pillar of the Family-Friendly Policies initiative, which advocates for government and business support to families in providing nurturing care for young children. This brief argues for greater investment in affordable and quality childcare, highlighting its potential to secure a 'triple dividend' of young children's positive development, women's empowerment and economic growth.

Our starting point is a global crisis of care – which is leaving millions of children without adequate support and placing severe constraints on their caregivers, who are primarily mothers, grandmothers and girls. Several stylized facts underline these points.

Currently, millions of children lack access to quality care:

- In 76 low- and middle-income countries (LICs and MICs), just over one in five children under age 5 (some 45 million) lacked adult supervision for at least an hour in a given week.
- In 67 LICs and MICs, nearly 57 million children aged 3 to 5 (69 per cent) did not attend an early childhood education programme.
- In LICs and MICs, 43 per cent of children under age 5 – an estimated 250 million – risk suboptimal development due to poverty and stunting.

Care responsibilities often compromise women's economic empowerment:

- Across 37 countries, women took on 75 per cent of childcare.
- In 2018, global female labour force participation stood at 48 per cent, compared with 75 per cent for men. Latin America is the only region where women's participation has risen strongly since 1990.
- Across 89 countries, women in their prime reproductive years (25–34) are 22 per cent more likely than men to live in extreme poverty.

These statistics highlight the need for global action, as encapsulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, the action needed relates to the targets focused on ensuring that all young children access quality early childhood programming (4.2), valuing and supporting unpaid care work (5.4) and promoting decent work for all (8.5) – amid the overriding pledge that 'no one will be left behind' and efforts will aim 'to reach the furthest behind first'.

Given that inadequate care provision curtails the current and future productivity of caregivers and children, it follows that providing high-quality care could yield sizeable economic gains:

- Unpaid work undertaken by women is valued at up to \$10 trillion yearly (13 per cent of global gross domestic product, or GDP) – one implication is that between 2016 and 2025, gender parity in labour markets could boost global GDP by up to \$28 trillion.
- In member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), closing the gap in female labour force participation could raise GDP by 12 per cent by 2030.
- Across 73 LICs and MICs, increasing preschool enrolment to 50 per cent in a single year could grow a country's productivity by US\$33 billion across those children's lifetimes, with a benefit-to-cost ratio of between \$6.4 and \$17.6.

Related link:

Region: International ^[3]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/19/07/childcare-and-working-families-new-opportunity-or-missing-0> [2]
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