

Nearly 350 million children lack quality childcare in the world ^[1]

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Source: World Bank

Format: Press release

Publication Date: 4 Mar 2021

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

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EXCERPTS

WASHINGTON, March 4, 2021— More than 40 percent of all children below primary-school age – or nearly 350 million – need childcare but do not have access, according to a new World Bank report launched today. As a result, too many children are spending time in unsafe and unstimulating environments. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the inadequacies in childcare provision and the vulnerability of the sector across the world.

The new report, *Better Jobs and Brighter Futures: Investing in Childcare to Build Human Capital*, highlights how investments in childcare can increase women's employment and productivity, create new jobs, improve child outcomes, drive economic growth, and support a more resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic. It notes that the struggles so many parents have experienced during the pandemic to balance childcare and work responsibilities may also generate policy momentum to address the issue.

Investing in quality, affordable childcare is key to unlocking pathways out of poverty, helping everyone achieve their potential, and increasing equity – all of which are cornerstones of a country's economic growth and productivity.

"The first five years of a child's life are a period of rapid brain development. Providing children with a safe and stimulating environment during this time has huge returns and makes subsequent education investments much more effective," said Jaime Saavedra, World Bank's Global Director for Education. "But 40 percent of children in low- and middle-income countries need childcare and do not have access. We need to urgently expand investments in childcare."

In order to maximize both female labor force participation and child development, governments play a crucial role. They can help ensure that quality childcare is available, affordable, and meets the needs of all families, particularly the most vulnerable. Expanding the childcare economy and building the childcare workforce also can create up to 43 million new jobs while facilitating more people—particularly women—to be able to seek or return to employment.

"Without quality childcare, parents—and in particular women—face an enormous hurdle. The lack of access can keep women from returning to work after childbirth, limit the quality or quantity of employment and earning opportunities, which can result in substantial negative impacts on family welfare," said Caren Grown, World Bank's Global Director for Gender. "The World Bank is supporting countries as they take action to develop childcare solutions that can increase women's labor force participation, improve child development and human capital outcomes, and reduce inequalities."

The report highlights five key policy goals that governments can take to accelerate progress towards quality, affordable childcare for all families that need it:

1. Expand access to childcare by promoting different types of provision – to meet diverse family needs (this may include center and home-based care options, providing flexible funding for families, and covering extended working hours, among others).
2. Prioritize childcare coverage for the most vulnerable families and ensure low-cost and free options are available.
3. Allocate sufficient financing to make childcare affordable for families and ensure quality.
4. Define clear, workable institutional arrangements and build system coherence – and ensure alignment across different parts of government.
5. Ensure that children are in safe and stimulating environments through a robust quality assurance system and a supported and capable workforce.

The report comes on the heels of the World Bank's *Women, Business and Law 2021* report, which found that women around the world continue to face laws and regulations that restrict their economic opportunity as the pandemic is creating new challenges for their health, safety, and economic security.

Region: International ^[4]

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