


Investments in childcare for gender equality in Asia and the Pacific ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

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Attachment	Size
 Investments in childcare for gender equality in Asia and the Pacific.pdf ^[4]	3.27 MB

Excerpts

This is a study on the public provision of childcare across 48 countries of Asia and the Pacific through the lens of accessibility, affordability, quality, and decent work for childcare workers. Based on its findings, the study offers recommendations for increased investments in the childcare sector to enable better socio-economic outcomes for women and children, job generation, and decent work for childcare workers, as well as to support a transformative recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that advances gender equality and sustainable development.

Across Asia and the Pacific, the labour of caring for children between 0 and 6 years old falls disproportionately on women in their capacity as mothers (ADB and UN Women 2018). This gendered division of childcare affects women’s ability to participate in social, economic and political domains of public life, impeding progress towards gender equality and especially women’s economic empowerment through labour force participation.

While the family, and particularly mothers, remain the primary actors in the provision of early childcare, each country’s childcare sector comprises a mix of services provided by the State, the private sector, and community-based and religious organizations or the social and solidarity economy. The labour force in the childcare sector is also dominated by women, especially those affected by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and socio-economic disadvantage. Jobs in this sector are often marked by poor and precarious working conditions, including low pay, low prospects for career progression, and a lack of social and economic protections (McDonald et al. 2018).

Thus, investments in the childcare sector have emerged as a key policy priority for governments not only to ensure holistic child development, but also to support women’s economic participation – both in terms of freeing up women’s time for economic engagement, as well as to generate jobs in the care economy and enhance the working conditions of workers in the highly feminized childcare sector (ILO 2018).

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The assessment of the childcare sector in Asia and the Pacific is conducted against four key principles – accessibility, affordability, quality, and decent work conditions for childcare workers (AAQDW), identified from the literature (ADB and UN Women 2018; COFACE 2018; ILO 2018; Women’s Budget Group 2020; World Bank 2022a).

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Key indicators under each of these principles were applied to each country context to evaluate the outcomes of, and gaps in, current investments in the childcare sector.

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The study’s policy recommendations aim to support policymakers to realize the multifaceted benefits of investment in the childcare sector. These benefits include:

- freeing up the time that mothers and other unpaid care providers spend on childcare;
- generating employment and ensuring decent jobs for women and men by recognizing early childhood care as a skilled and valued profession;
- promoting gender equality and achieving sustainable development; and

- developing children's essential cognitive and social capacities, and supporting child welfare (Devercelli and Beaton-Day 2020, 12), even though outcomes for children are not a key focus of this study.

The recommendations are not intended as a mandatory set of directives. Instead, they are a toolkit of several options across each of the four pillars of childcare provision – accessibility, affordability, quality, and decent work – which can be adapted appropriately to national contexts.

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affordability ^[7]

quality ^[8]

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