

Starting strong VIII: Reducing inequalities by investing in early childhood education and care ^[1]

Author: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

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Excerpt

Executive summary

Even as a child takes their first breath, the opportunity to develop and learn is profoundly influenced by the context in which they are born. The barriers some children face – socio-economic disadvantage, unstable homes, limited access to education and care – can set the stage for a lifelong journey marked by diminished growth and potential. These issues can lead to gaps in learning that become increasingly difficult to bridge as children grow older.

Part of the problem is that vulnerable children are missing out on vital Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Data show persistent socio-economic gaps in ECEC participation, especially for children aged 0 to 2. In eight out of 28 countries surveyed by the OECD, these gaps have widened for children aged 3 to 5. And despite relatively stable overall ECEC quality in OECD countries, disadvantaged children often receive lower-quality services.

Unlike interventions aimed at addressing inequalities later in life, ECEC is a cost-effective way to close achievement gaps before they widen. Targeted, evidence-based early years policies can reduce the need for expensive remedial education and social services in the future.

This OECD report *Reducing Inequalities by Investing in Early Childhood Education and Care* presents a new policy roadmap to improve equity and inclusion in the sector, and provide lasting benefits for economies and societies.

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