

# A minority of countries offer free early childhood education, researchers report

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Numerous studies from countries around the globe have shown that education before primary school is associated with success in school. Despite this, few governments make pre-primary education available on a tuition-free basis for two or more years, according to a new study from the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health's WORLD Policy Analysis Center (WORLD).

"We know from previous research that [early childhood education](#) especially benefits children from [low-income families](#)," said study co-author Alison Earle, a senior research analyst at the WORLD Policy Analysis Center. "We also know that one of the greatest barriers to enrollment in pre-[primary education](#) is the tuition. Making pre-primary education available at no cost is a critical element in efforts to reduce educational and economic inequalities."

For this study, researchers at WORLD reviewed data about pre-primary education policies from 166 countries for which such information was available as of 2015. The researchers reported that 45 percent of the countries provide at least one year of tuition-free pre-primary education. Just 27 percent of the countries offer two or more years. Only 19 percent provide tuition-free pre-primary education and make it compulsory.

The researchers also looked at whether making pre-primary education free is associated with higher enrollment rates. To do this, the team analyzed data from the 124 countries for which pre-primary enrollment data were available. They found that countries offering one year of

tuition-free pre-primary education had an average of 16 percent higher pre-primary enrollment rates as compared with countries without tuition-free pre-primary education.

The availability of tuition-free pre-primary education varies by income level, according to the study. Nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of high-income countries make tuition-free pre-primary education available for at least one year as compared with 45 percent of [middle-income countries](#) and just 15 percent of low-income countries. Availability also varies by region. In the Americas, for example, 75 percent of countries make tuition-free pre-primary education available while 70 percent of European and Central Asian countries do. In contrast, 25 percent of countries in the Middle East and North Africa, 19 percent in East Asia and the Pacific, 17 percent in South Asia and 14 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa offer it.

WORLD researchers hope their data and analysis model will be used by policymakers to assess how much progress is being made in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4.2. The goal calls for countries to ensure that, by 2030, "all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education."

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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