

**Public support for early childhood education and care services helps achieve a range of policy goals.** Public investment in ECEC simultaneously enhances child development and helps children acquire the necessary skills to support their future lives, while it also supports parents in their daily quest to balance work and family commitments. As women traditionally engage most in care work, such supports particularly facilitate female labour force participation and are thus crucial to achieving greater gender equality in employment participation.

**The percentage of pre-school children participating in ECEC programmes varies across countries** (Figure 5.6, Panel A). In 2013 at over 90% of 3- to 5-year-olds, Thailand, New Zealand and Japan had the highest participation rates. By contrast, participation was below 10% in Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Tajikistan and Myanmar with less than 10%. Not all low-income countries have low participation rates as for example in Nepal and Sri Lanka where over 80% of children age 3-5 attend pre-school – which is above the OECD average.

**ECEC-attendance trends differ across countries** (Figure 5.6, Panel B). Enrolment rates decreased over the 2005-13 period in many countries, with the largest declines – at over 20 percentage points – recorded for Viet Nam, Papua New Guinea, Mongolia and India. With the rapid increase of public investment in early childhood programmes, enrolment rates increased markedly in the Republic of Korea and Nepal.

**Higher rates of early childhood education and care are associated with lower rates of child mortality** (Figure 5.7). It is likely that this relationship is observed because richer countries invest more publicly and privately in young children, and this investment shows up both in lower under-five mortality and in higher early childhood education participation.

### Definition and measurement

The data on early childhood education and care (ECEC) participation were taken from UNESCO, the *OECD Family Database* and *OECD Education at a Glance*. There are a number of caveats attached to the data especially for non-OECD countries. In many of the Asia/Pacific countries, pre-primary education expanded slowly, often starting in affluent and urban areas, and often by means of privately provided services. Across the globe, private centres are unlikely to report detailed information to a central agency unless they have strong (financial) incentives to do so. Similarly, information flows between local and central governments may be limited in detail so that administrative data do not give a complete overview of participation in ECEC programmes, which for example affects recording of ECEC participation in federal OECD countries, such as Canada or Switzerland. Data for the Asia/Pacific region were taken from UNESCO and cover a variety of sources and years and in many cases concern slightly different age groups, see UNESCO 2006 for a detailed discussion of the issues. In all, the data are only broadly comparable between countries.

The data are likely to underestimate cross-national diversity in ECEC participation as it does not reflect on the number of hours per day that children attend ECEC services.

The child mortality rate (or under-five mortality rate – U5MR) is the probability – expressed as a rate per 1 000 live births, of a child born in a specified year dying before reaching the age of five when subject to current age-specific mortality rates (see “Infant and child mortality” in Chapter 7).

### Further reading

UNESCO (2006), *Strong Foundations, Early Childhood Care and Education*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris.

### Figure notes

Figure 5.6.A: 2011 for Nepal; 2010 for Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Myanmar; 2008 for Thailand; 2005 for Pakistan and 2004 for Macau (China).

Figure 5.6.B: Mid-2000s data: 2006 data for Myanmar; 2004 for Tonga and Fiji; 2003 for China; 2002 for Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea; 2001 for Samoa; no data for Macau (China) and Sri Lanka.

Figure 5.6. **Early childhood education levels and trends**  
Early childhood education participation between 3 and 6 years, 2005-13

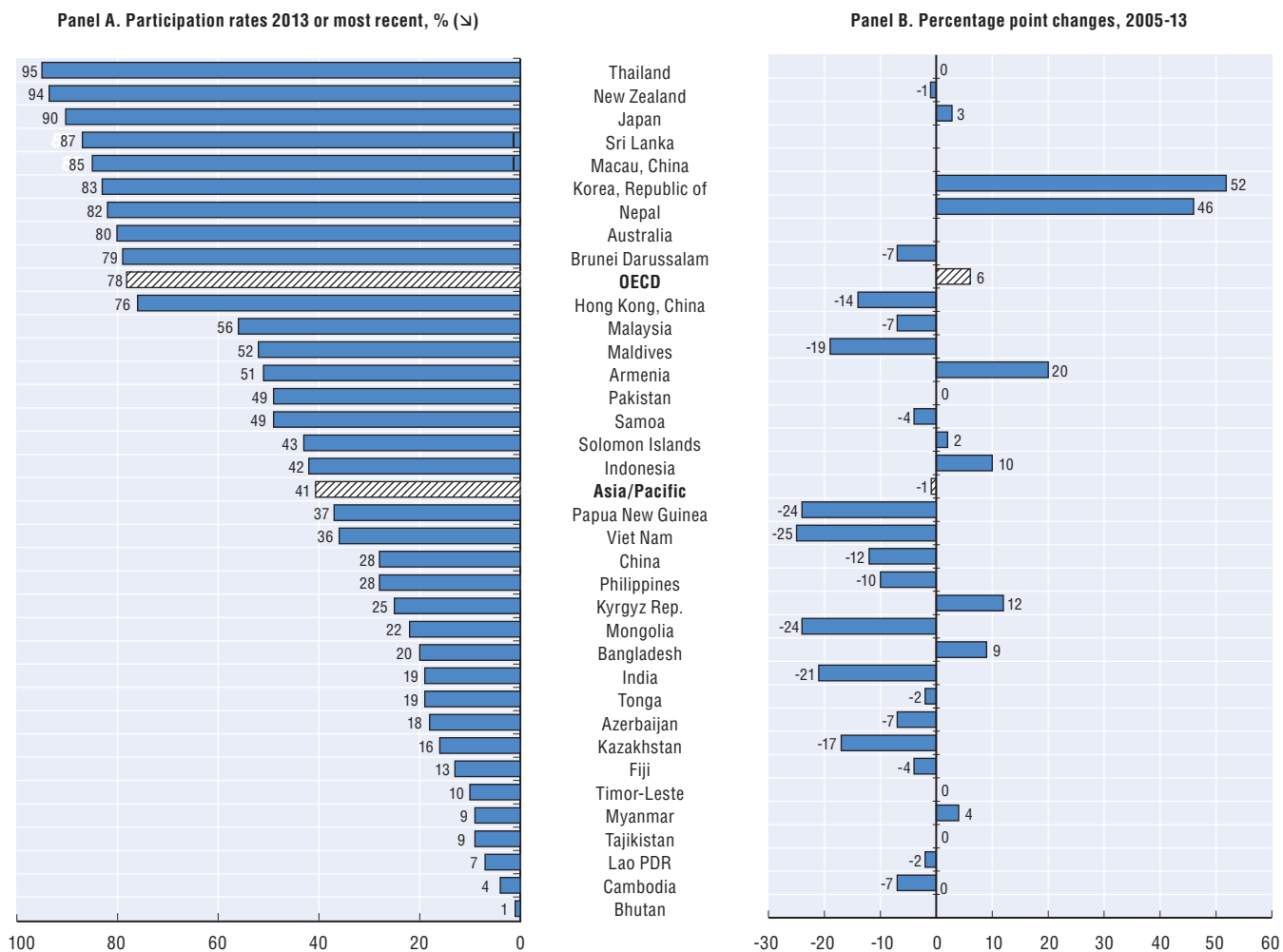
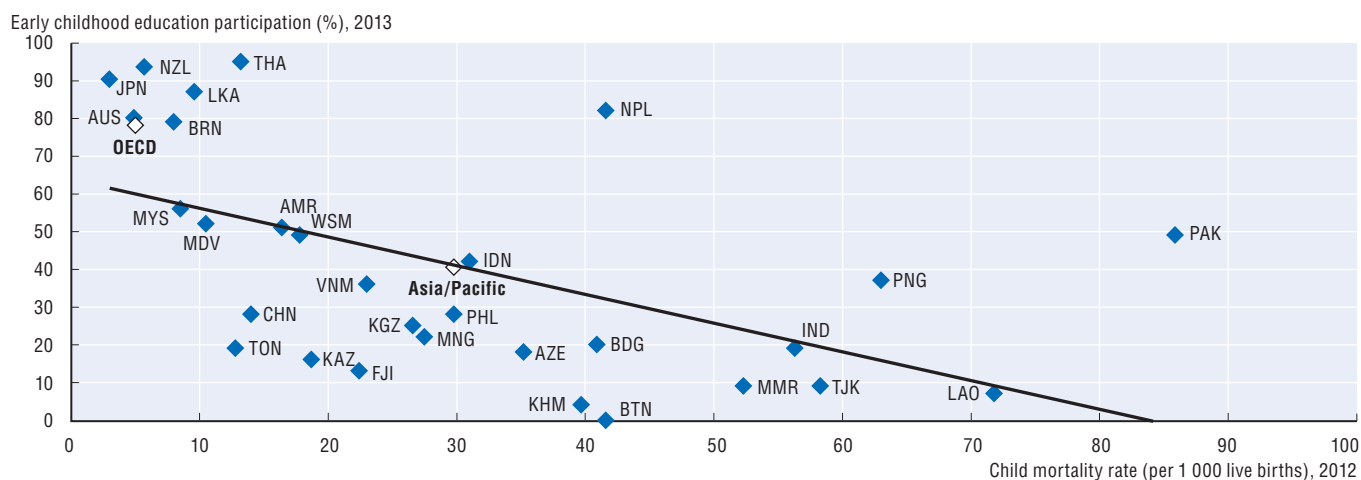
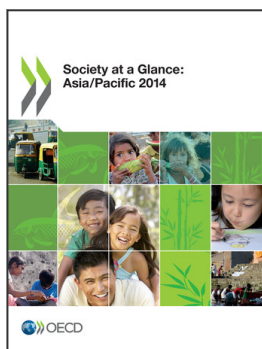


Figure 5.7. **High early childhood education participation is associated with low rates of child mortality**



Source: UNESCO, enrolment ratios by ISCED levels, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/ReportFolders/ReportFolders.aspx>; Child mortality: OECD Health Data 2013, from UNICEF Child Info ([www.childinfo.org/mortality\\_imrcountrydata.php](http://www.childinfo.org/mortality_imrcountrydata.php)).

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