

PF3.3: Informal childcare arrangements

Definitions and methodology

This indicator presents information on the use of informal childcare arrangements through two main measures:

- i. *The proportion (%) of children using informal childcare arrangements during a typical week, by age group.* Data are presented for three age groups – 0- to 2-year-olds, 3- to 5-year-olds, and 6- to 12-year-olds – and also by income level and by the education level of mother:
 - *The proportion (%) of children using informal childcare arrangements during a typical week, by age group and equivalised disposable income tertile.* ‘Equivalised disposable income’ refers to the disposable (post-tax-and-transfer) income of the household in which the child lives, equivalised using the square root scale, to account for the effect of family size on the household’s standard of living. The income tertiles are calculated based on the distribution by equivalised disposable income of children aged less than or equal to 12.
 - *Proportion (%) of children using informal childcare arrangements during a typical week, by age group and mother’s education level.* Mother’s education level is measured by whether or not the reported mother of the child has attained tertiary education (highest level of education attained at ISCED 2011 levels 5-8). The education level of the female household head is used if there is no mother in the household, and then of the father (or male household head) if there is no mother or female head in the household.
- ii. *Average hours of informal childcare per week among those using at least one hour of informal childcare during a typical week, by age group,* with data again presented for three child age groups – 0- to 2-year-olds, 3- to 5-year-olds, and 6- to 12-year-olds.

Definitions of what does and does not count as ‘informal’ care differ across countries. Most of the information presented here is based on data provided by Eurostat’s EU-SILC survey, with informal care defined as care provided by grandparents or other relatives, friends, or neighbours for which the provider did *not* receive payment. However, data for other countries (Australia, Korea and the United States) that use slightly different definitions are presented separately in Table PF3.3.A at the end of the document (see the notes to Table PF3.3.A and *comparability and data issues* for more detail).

Key findings

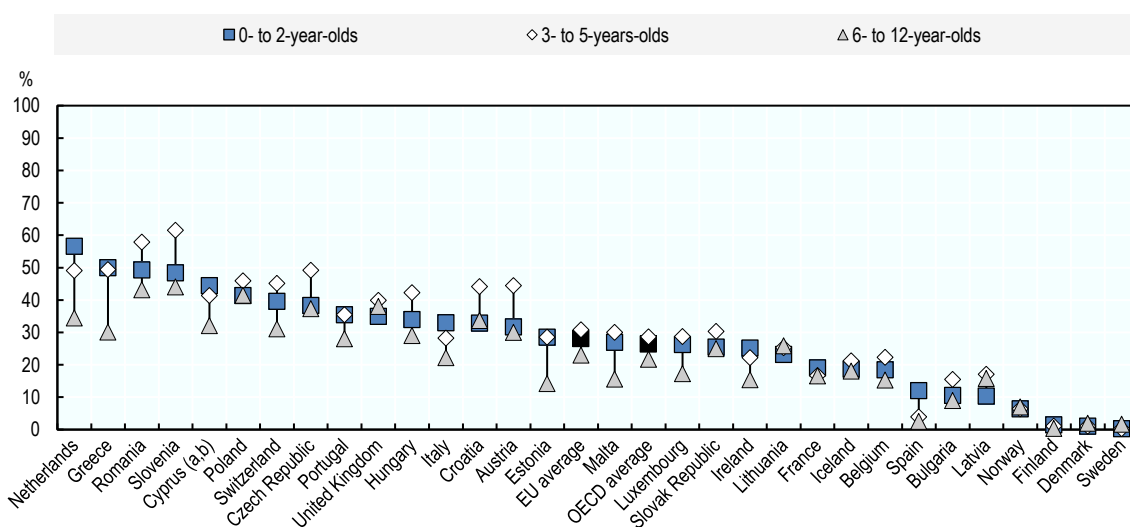
The proportion of children using informal care varies widely across OECD countries (Chart PF3.3.A). Among 0- to 2-year-olds, rates of informal care vary from as high as around 57% in the Netherlands to below 2% in Denmark, Finland and Sweden. For 3- to 5-year-olds, rates range from 62% in Slovenia to 0.3% in Sweden, and among 6- to 12-year olds from 44% in Slovenia to 0.3% in Finland. Across all three age groups, rates of informal care are – with the partial exception of Iceland – generally lowest in the Nordic countries. This reflects the comprehensive nature of formal ECEC systems in these countries, and in particular the effects of the Nordic childcare ‘guarantees’, which provide all children with a legal entitlement to a place in formal childcare from a very young age, should their parents wish.

Other relevant indicators: PF3.1: Public spending on childcare and early education; PF3.2: Enrolment in day-care and pre-schools; PF3.4: Childcare support; PF4.1: Typology of childcare and early education services; PF4.2: Quality of childcare and early education services; and, PF4.3: Out-of-school-hours care.
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Differences across age groups in the use of informal care vary between countries (Chart PF3.3.A). In many OECD countries, informal care rates increase as children move from the 0- to 2-year-old age group to the 3- to 5-year old age group, reflecting the increase in the likelihood of employment among mothers with a youngest child aged 3 to 5 (see [LMF1.2](#)). Informal care rates then often fall as children move into the 6- to 12-year-old age group, by which point they are attending compulsory school in almost all OECD countries. Still, on average across OECD countries with available data, about 22% of 6- to 12-year-olds continue to use informal care. The incompatibility of school hours with working hours as well as a lack of out-of-school-hours care services ([PF4.3](#)) is associated with the use of informal care by older children.

Chart PF3.3.A. Use of informal childcare by child's age

Proportion (%) of children using informal childcare arrangements during a typical week, by age group, 2017



Note: Data for Malta and Switzerland refer to 2014, and for Iceland to 2015. 'Informal' childcare here refers to unpaid care, usually provided by a grandparent of the child or by other relatives, friends or neighbours. It excludes any care that is paid for regardless of who is providing the paid-for care.

a.) Footnote by Turkey: The information in this document with reference to « Cyprus » relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the "Cyprus issue";

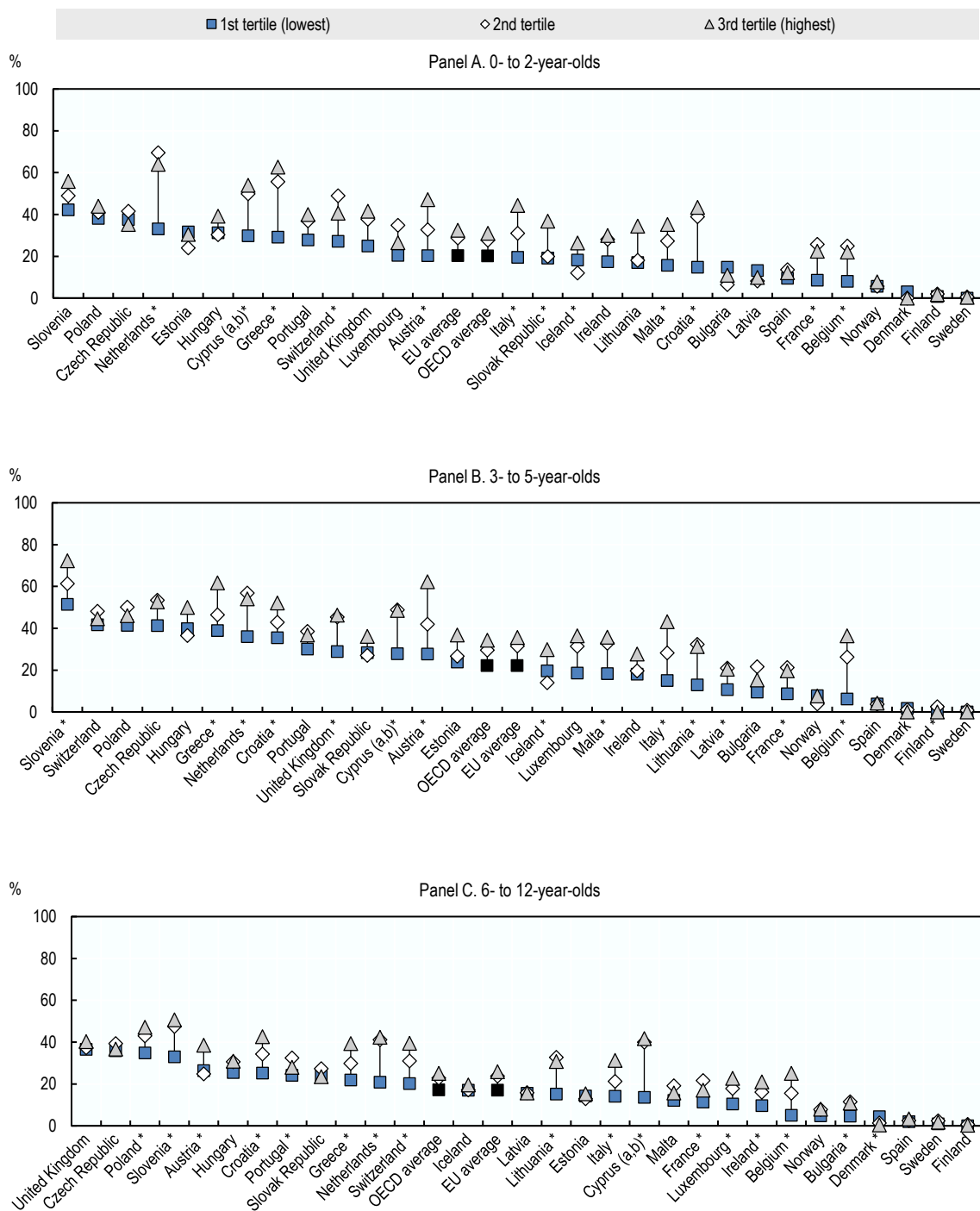
b.) Footnote by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Commission: The Republic of Cyprus is recognized by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Sources: [for all countries](#), [EU SILC](#)

In many OECD countries, children are more likely to use informal care when they come from relatively advantaged socio-economic backgrounds. For example, in many OECD countries, the use of informal care increases with household income (Chart PF3.3.B) and also, in some countries, with mother's education (Chart PF3.3.C). For very young children (0- to 2-year-olds), differences across socio-economic groups in informal care tend to be largest in Austria, the Netherlands, and some southern European countries, especially Greece and Italy. For slightly older children (3- to 5-year-olds), the largest gaps are in Austria, Belgium, and Italy.

Chart PF3.3.B. Use of informal childcare, by child's age and equivalised disposable income tertile

Proportion (%) of children using informal childcare arrangements during a typical week, by age group and equivalised disposable income tertile, 2017



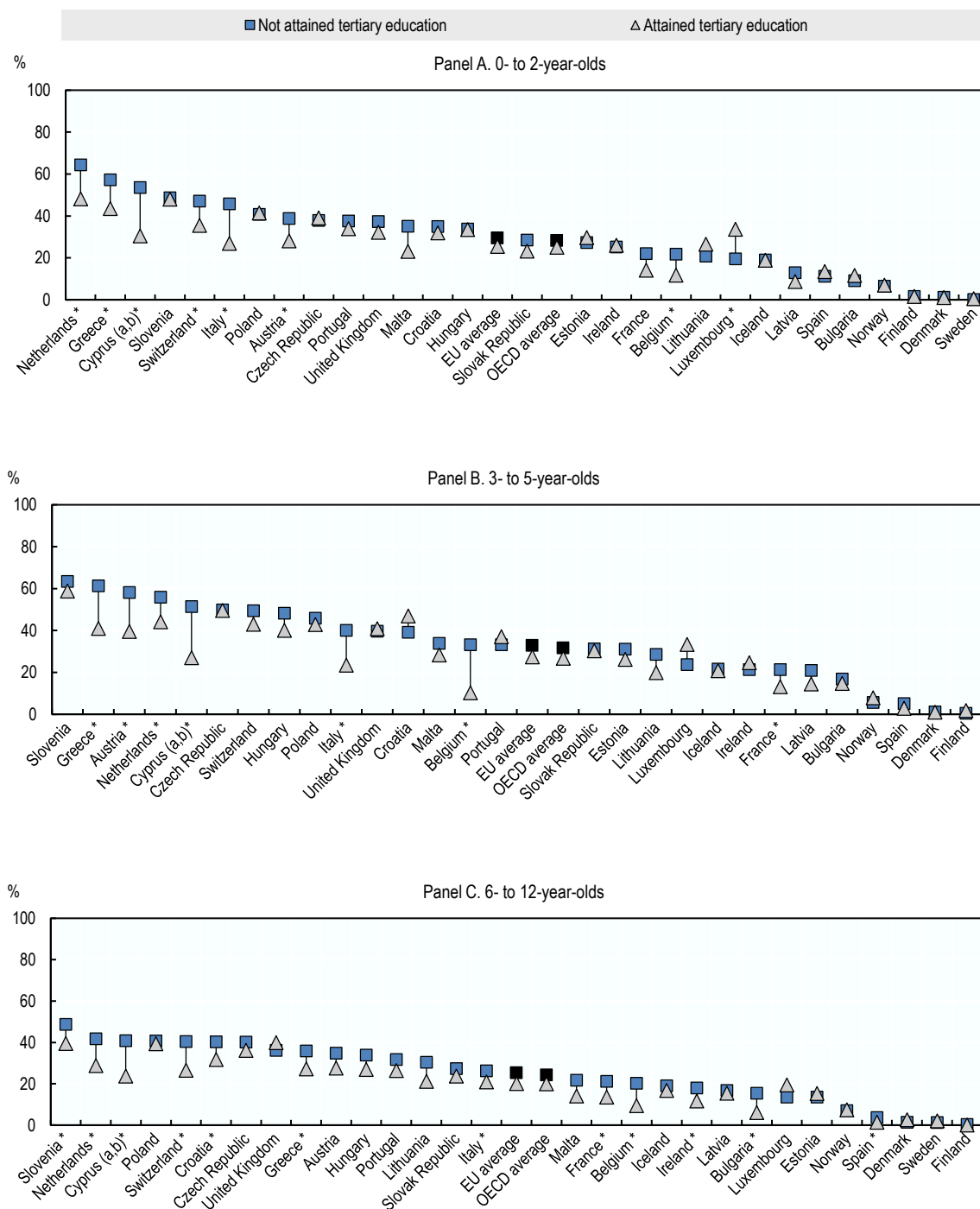
Note: Data for Malta and Switzerland refer to 2014, and for Iceland to 2015. 'Informal' childcare here refers to unpaid care, usually provided by a grandparent of the child or by other relatives, friends or neighbours. Equivalised disposable income tertiles are calculated using the disposable (post-tax-and-transfer) income of the household in which the child lives – equivalised using the square root scale, to account for the effect of family size on the household's standard of living – and are based on the equivalised disposable incomes of children aged less than or equal to 12. It excludes any care that is paid for regardless of who is providing the paid-for care. In countries marked with an *, differences in usage rates across groups are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

a. See note a to Chart PF3.3.A

b. See note b to Chart PF3.3.A

Sources: for all countries, EU SILC

Chart PF3.3.C. Use of informal childcare, by child's age and mother's education level
 Proportion (%) of children using informal childcare arrangements during a typical week, by age group and mother's education level, 2017



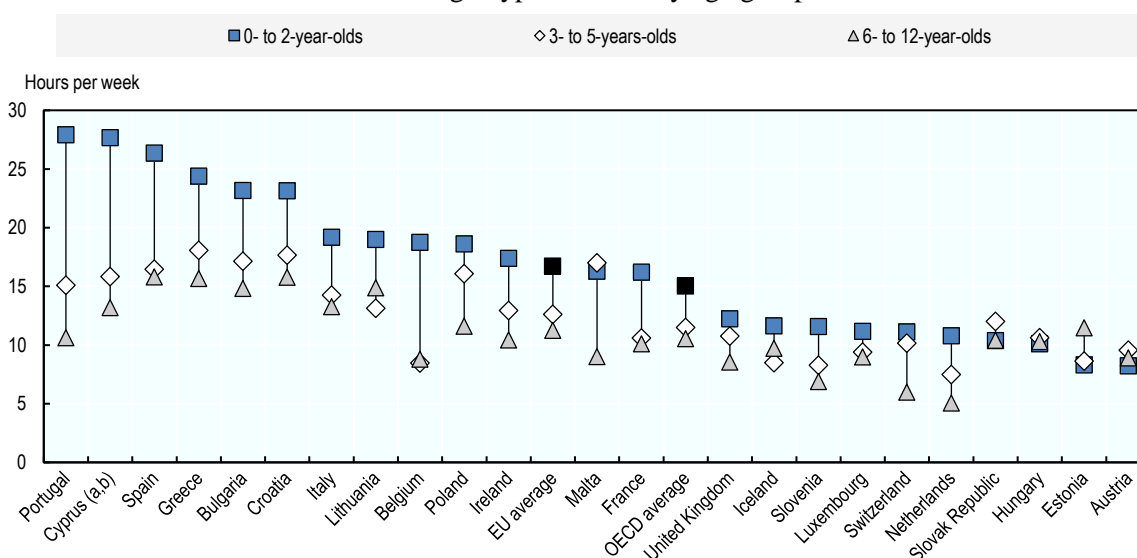
Note: Data for Malta and Switzerland refer to 2014, and for Iceland to 2015. 'Informal' childcare here refers to unpaid care, usually provided by a grandparent of the child or by other relatives, friends or neighbours. It excludes any care that is paid for regardless of who is providing the paid-for care. Mother's education level based on whether or not the reported mother of the child has attained tertiary education (highest level of education attained at ISCED 2011 levels 5-8). The education level of the female household head is used if there is no mother in the household, and then of the father (or male household head) if there is no mother or female head in the household. In countries marked with an *, differences in usage rates across groups are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

a. See note a to Chart PF3.3.A

b. See note b to Chart PF3.3.A
 Sources: [for all countries, EU SILC](#)

Informal care tends to be used for around 10-20 hours per week, on average across children who use any informal care, though rates vary considerably across countries and age groups (Chart PF3.3.D). Among 0- to 2-year-olds, for example, average weekly hours range from about 26-28 hours in Portugal and Spain to below 10 in Austria, the Czech Republic and Estonia. For 3- to 5-year-olds, average hours range from just under 20 hours per week in Greece to seven hours per week in the Netherlands. Among 6- to 12-year-olds, average hours stretch from almost 16 in Greece and Spain to six or lower in the Netherlands and Switzerland. In most countries, weekly hours in informal care tend to be longest for 0- to 2-year-olds. This is particularly the case in Portugal, where average weekly hours for 0- to 2-year-olds (28 hours per week) are 13 hours longer than the average for 3 to 5-year-olds (15 hours per week) and 18 hours longer than average hours for 6- to 12-year-olds (11 hours per week).

Chart PF3.3.D. Average hours of informal childcare by child's age
 Average hours of informal childcare per week among those using at least one hour of informal childcare during a typical week, by age group, 2017



Note: Data for Malta and Switzerland refer to 2014, for Iceland to 2015, and for Bulgaria and Spain to 2016. 'Informal' childcare here refers to unpaid care, usually provided by a grandparent of the child or by other relatives, friends or neighbours. It excludes any care that is paid for regardless of who is providing the paid-for care.

a. See note a to Chart PF3.3.A
 b. See note b to Chart PF3.3.A
 Sources: [for all countries, EU SILC](#)

Comparability and data issues

The figures presented above come from EU-SILC, which gathers information on childcare according to the following activities: day-care centres (organised by a structure), “professional” child-minders (a person for whom looking after the child represents a job of work or paid activity), informal care (unpaid care by grandparents, other relatives, friends and neighbours) and pre-school for children aged 2-to-6 (or who still have not started compulsory school). Note that under this definition, a grandparent who receives payment for child-minding is classified as a professional child-minder. The question asked to identify informal providers is: “During a *usual week* how many hours is <child> cared for by grandparents, other members of the household (excluding parents/ guardians or partners) other relatives, friends or neighbours where there is no payment for child-minding?”

Data for other countries (e.g. Australia, Korea and the United States) are available but differences in the methods used when collecting data make direct comparisons challenging. The main issues involved include discrepancies in the type of provider (e.g., relative versus non-relative) and

whether the provider can or cannot receive payment (paid or unpaid). For example, some data are available for Australia from the Childhood Education and Care Survey. This source defines informal care as paid or unpaid care provided by grandparents, other relatives, a non-resident parent, or other person (friends, neighbours, nannies or babysitters). It is possible to remove from the data children cared for by non-resident parents to increase comparability with EU-SILC, but the fact that the survey does not differentiate between paid and unpaid informal care means full and direct comparisons are difficult. Similarly, for the United States some data are available from the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation. Here, childcare providers are classified into two broad groups: relatives (mothers, fathers, grandparents, and siblings and other relatives) and non-relatives, with the latter including both organised care facilities and other any provider so long as they are not a relative of the child. Again, no distinction is made between paid and unpaid care regardless of whether the provider is a relative or non-relative. Lastly, for Korea some information is available from the National Childcare Survey 2009. In this source, informal childcare includes – similar to EU-SILC – care provided by grandparents, other relatives, friends and neighbours, but again does not differentiate between care that is paid for and care that is unpaid.

Table PF3.3.A presents data on informal childcare use in Australia, Korea and the United States. Data for Australia include children cared for by grandparents or other relatives (paid or unpaid) only, for the United States children cared for by grandparents or siblings or other relatives (paid or unpaid) only, and for Korea children cared for by grandparents, other relatives, friends or neighbours, paid or unpaid.

Generally, based on the definitions above, informal childcare use in these countries is similar to many European countries (Table PF3.3.A). For example, in Australia just over 30% of 0- to 2-year-olds use informal care, while in Korea the figure is 28%. In the United States, it is just under 36%. For comparison, the cross-country OECD average rate for 0- to 2-year-olds shown in Chart PF3.3.A is 26%. Similarly, for 6- to 12-year-olds, the rate in Australia is 26% and in the United States 27%, while the OECD average in Chart PF3.3.A is a 22%. Because data for these countries include both paid and unpaid care it is expected that informal childcare usage rates should, all else equal, be a little higher than those based on EU-SILC. Nonetheless, the information in Table PF3.3.A suggests that informal childcare use in these countries is not wildly different to informal childcare use in many European countries.

Table PF3.3.A. Use of informal childcare in other countries
 Proportion (%) of children using informal childcare arrangements, by age group, latest available

	Proportion (%) using informal childcare		
	0 to 2	3 to 5	6 to 12
Australia	30.74	27.61	25.75
Korea	27.70	23.60	14.80
United States	35.98	29.14	27.49

Note: Data for Australia refer to 2017, for Korea to 2009, and for the United States to 2011. For Australia, data refer to children cared for by grandparents or other relatives, paid or unpaid. For Korea, data refer to children cared for by grandparents, other relatives, friends or neighbours, paid or unpaid. For the United States, the age groups are 0-2, 3-4 and 5-11. Data cover children living with their mother only, and refer to children cared for by grandparents or siblings or other relatives, paid or unpaid.

Sources:

[For Australia, Australian Childhood Education and Care Survey](#)

[for Korea, National Childcare Survey 2009](#)

[for the United States, Laughlin, L. \(2013\). "Who's minding the kids? Child care arrangements: Spring 2011". Current Population Reports, P70-135. Washington, DC: US Census Bureau](#)

Sources and further reading: *OECD Babies and Bosses* (various issues); *Early Childhood and Education in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities* (2009); *OECD, Education at a Glance 2019*; *OECD Starting Strong* (various issues); OECD (2011) *Doing Better for Families*. OECD (2012) *Closing the Gender Gap*.