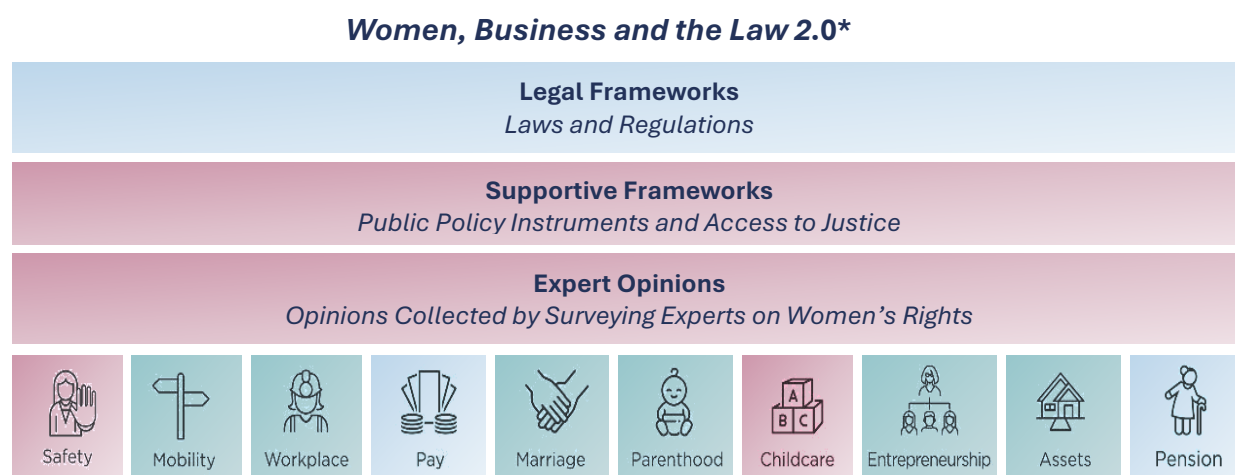


TOWARD AVAILABILITY, PUBLIC FINANCE, AND QUALITY OF CHILDCARE SERVICES IN EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC

A widely recognized priority for the achievement of women's economic inclusion is access to affordable and quality childcare services. *Women, Business and the Law 2.0* presents a new indicator on Childcare that provides a comprehensive picture of laws governing the provision of childcare services in formally registered center-based settings for children below 3 years of age, policy instruments designed to support the implementation of these laws, and how these laws are realized in practice, according to experts' perceptions. To this aim, three measures of progress are introduced: (1) legal frameworks, (2) supportive frameworks, and (3) expert opinions (figure 1).

FIGURE 1: WOMEN, BUSINESS AND THE LAW NEW MEASURES OF PROGRESS ACROSS TEN INDICATORS, INCLUDING CHILDCARE, GO BEYOND LAWS



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Note: See the data notes for detailed methodology, including the construction of the three indexes per indicator at: <https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/sites/wbl/documents/2024/WBL2024-Data-Notes.pdf>

The Childcare *legal frameworks* indicator analyzes laws that govern availability, support through public finance to parents and nonstate providers (private centers and employers), and quality of childcare services. The Childcare *supportive frameworks* indicator analyzes key instruments designed to support the implementation of these laws. These instruments include policies and practices that help parents make informed decisions about childcare, including access to publicly available registries or databases of childcare providers, financial support application procedures, and monitoring of high-quality services through publicly available quality reports.



The Childcare *expert opinions* indicator captures experts' responses to the question on the extent to which families (and women specifically as primary caregivers) have access to affordable and quality childcare services in practice in a particular economy.

The Childcare legal and supportive frameworks indicator scores are calculated as the simple average of the answers to four binary questions (see table 1) and scaling the result to the highest possible score of 100. The Childcare expert opinions indicator is obtained by calculating the individual responses to the question on the extent to which women have access to affordable and quality childcare services in practice. Response options fall along a five-point scale (0–4) in which 0 indicates an absence of access for almost all women in practice, and 4 indicates the existence of access for almost all women in practice. The experts' responses are aggregated into the question score at the economy level, taking the median value of all responses given. The Childcare expert opinions indicator is then equal to the question score and scaled to 100.

TABLE 1: COMPOSITION OF THE THREE CHILDCARE INDICATORS

Childcare legal frameworks	Childcare supportive frameworks	Childcare expert opinions
1. Does the law establish the provision of center-based childcare services?*	1. Is there a publicly available registry or database of childcare providers?	In practice, do women have access to affordable and quality childcare services?
2. Does the law establish any form of support for families for childcare services?	2. Is there a clearly outlined application procedure to request financial support from the government for childcare services by parents?	
3. Does the law establish any form of support for nonstate childcare providers?	3. Is there a clearly outlined application procedure to request financial support from the government for childcare services by nonstate childcare providers?	
4. Does the law establish quality standards for the provision of center-based childcare services?	4. Has the government published any reports on the quality of childcare services?	

Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.





Note: See Annex for more detailed questions for which data are collected. Details on the scoring methodology are available at: <https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/sites/wbl/documents/2024/WBL2024-Data-Notes.pdf>.

*Center-based childcare services are early childhood care and education services offered to children aged 0-2 years (including 2 years and 11 months) on a regular basis at formally registered nurseries, day cares, crèches, or preschools. Services provided in the child's own or caregiver's home, within family, foster care, voluntary organizations, private individuals (nannies, au pairs, babysitters), and other informal arrangements, including community-based services and services provided at religious or philanthropic schools, are not considered in the WBL Childcare indicators. This exclusion does not reflect the full diversity of childcare options in practice.



The new childcare data serve a steppingstone toward facilitating and informing policy dialogue around key demand- and supply- side avenues that limit or enable formal provision of childcare services, their affordability by means of public finance, and quality. Even when available, the provision of formal childcare services does not always guarantee their uptake because supply- and demand-side constraints, including high costs, low quality, and social and cultural norms, limit potential benefits (figure 2).

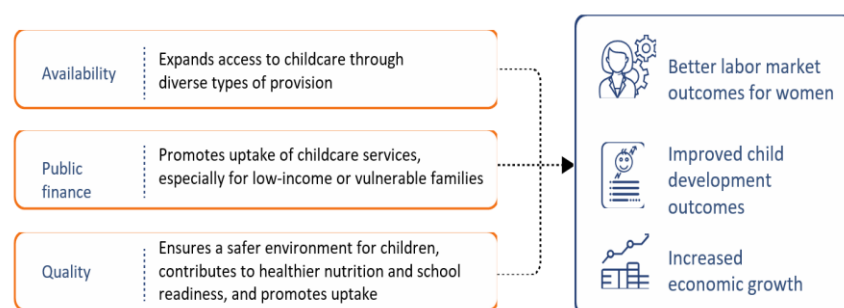
FIGURE 2: KEY CONSTRAINTS IN THE CHILDCARE MARKET

Key constraint	Costs 	Diverse options 	Quality 	Social and cultural norms 
Supply side (provider)	High operational costs and tight margins make providers financially vulnerable.	High property costs, safety concerns, and barriers to entry may limit ability to open centers in convenient locations.	Quality is often poor due to an undertrained and unsupported childcare and early learning workforce, a lack of guidance on quality standards, and a lack of financing.	Inattention among policy makers to women's unpaid caregiving labor discourages the prioritization of support for childcare services.
Demand side (consumer)	High costs are a barrier for many families, especially low-income families.	Inconvenient location of services and operating hours limit uptake.	Two factors limit uptake: (a) lack of parental trust that children will be in a safe environment that provides quality service and (b) lack of parental understanding of what good quality looks like.	Cultural and social norms that discourage having children cared for outside of the family limit uptake.

Source: Devercelli and Beaton-Day 2020; Muller and Jaen 2020.

The enactment of legal and policy frameworks to make childcare available, more affordable through public finance, and of decent quality is a priority because it has the potential to achieve better market outcomes for women, children, and the economy in general (figure 3).

FIGURE 3: THE KEY PILLARS OF CHILDCARE



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.



The new data presents a framework that shows a range of options that governments may support to meet the needs of working mothers and families. Although specific best practice frameworks have yet to be established, longstanding international frameworks advocate for the right of working parents to access childcare services, allowing partial outsourcing of their care responsibilities while enabling work-life balance (figure 4).

FIGURE 4: INTERNATIONAL LAW HAS LONG RECOGNIZED THE NEED FOR ACCESS TO CHILDCARE AND CALLED FOR MAKING FACILITIES MORE READILY AVAILABLE



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

CHILDCARE PROVISION IN EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC

Women, Business and the Law measures the progress in childcare legal and policy achievements in 190 economies worldwide, including 25 economies in East Asia and Pacific (table 2). East Asia and Pacific is a diverse region, where the average annual Gross National Income (GNI) per capita varies from as low as US\$1,499 in Timor-Leste to over US\$47,000 in Hong Kong SAR, China, while female labor force participation rate varies from as low as 39 percent in Fiji, to over 82 percent in Solomon Islands.¹

An economy's level of income may not always be reflective of the reality that women face when it comes to participation in formal and paid employment. However, an increase in access to childcare services stemming from the enactment of childcare laws and improving regulatory environment, as measured by *Women, Business and the Law*, results in an average 1.0 percentage point increase in women's labor force participation, and this effect grows over time, reaching as much as 2.2 percentage points within five years of implementation (Anukriti et al. 2023). Enabling the provision of childcare services could be a viable option for women seeking to maintain earnings during the first stage of their child's

¹ World Development Indicators (2023), GNI per capita, (constant 2015 US\$).



life and improve maternal labor market opportunities. This is particularly acute in economies where women receive fewer adequate care leave cash benefits, or the length of paid leave does not meet the International Labour Organization's (ILO) minimum standard of 14 weeks and ends earlier than when services become available.

TABLE 2: ECONOMY COVERAGE AND KEY INDICATORS

Economy Coverage	Income Group	Main Business City	Labor force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate)	Paid Leave for Mothers (weeks)*	Paid Leave for Fathers (days)
Brunei Darussalam	HI	Bandar Seri Begawan	53.5	13	0
Cambodia	LMI	Phnom Penh	74	12.9	0
China	UMI	Shanghai	60	23.6	21
Fiji	UMI	Suva	39.6	14	1
Hong Kong SAR, China	HI	Hong Kong	52.4	14	7
Indonesia	UMI	Jakarta	52.5	12.9	2
Kiribati	LMI	Tarawa	..	12	0
Lao PDR	LMI	Vientiane	61.4	15	3
Malaysia	UMI	Kuala Lumpur	51.6	14	7
Marshall Islands	UMI	Majuro	..	0	0
Micronesia, Fed. Sts.	LMI	Palikir	..	0	0
Mongolia	LMI	Ulaanbaatar	53.6	173.6	14
Myanmar	LMI	Yangon	41.1	14	21
Palau	UMI	Koror	..	0	0
Papua New Guinea	LMI	Port Moresby	50.6	0	0
Philippines	LMI	Quezon City	50.4	15	7
Samoa	LMI	Apia	31.1	4	7
Singapore	HI	Singapore	62	16	14
Solomon Islands	LMI	Honiara	82.4	12	0
Taiwan, China	HI	Taipei	..	33.7	187
Thailand	UMI	Bangkok	59.3	13	0
Timor-Lester	LMI	Dili	61	12	7
Tonga	UMI	Nuku'alofa	42	0	0
Vanuatu	LMI	Port Vila	54	12	0



Viet Nam	LMI	Ho Chi Minh City	69.5	25.7	5
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Sources: Women, Business and the Law 2024 and World Development Indicators 2023.

Note: HI = High income, LMI = Lower-middle income, UMI= Upper-middle income, NC=Not classified.

“..”=no data available.

*Paid leave for mothers includes pre- and post-natal maternity leave. The Women, Business and the Law methodology also assumes that mothers take all post-maternity parental leave unless the portion is explicitly reserved for fathers.

CHILDCARE LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

The Childcare legal frameworks indicator reflects on laws governing the four aspects of the childcare market: (1) the establishment of center-based childcare options available to parents, (2) the support through public finance for families, and (3) nonstate childcare providers, and (4) the quality of childcare services. Table 3 provides more details on each of the four scored questions underpinning the Childcare legal frameworks indicator.

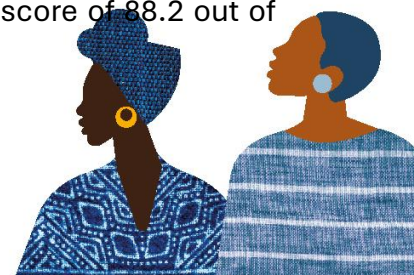
TABLE 3. MEASURES OF PROGRESS ON LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Pillar	Scored question	Underlying questions
A score of 1 is assigned if the law establishes...		
Availability	1. Does the law establish the provision of center-based childcare services?	Childcare services by at least one of the following: -Government -Private centers -Employers (not conditional on the number of female employees)
Public Finance	2. Does the law establish any form of support for families for childcare services?	At least one of the following forms of support for families: -Financial support from the government -Direct tax benefits -Universal childcare services
	3. Does the law establish any form of support for nonstate childcare providers?	At least one of the following types of government support for private childcare centers or employers: -Financial support -Direct tax benefits
Quality	4. Does the law establish quality standards for center-based childcare services?	Requirements on all three quality parameters: - <i>Structural</i> quality (caregiver-to-child ratio or maximum group size) - <i>Educator/caregiver</i> quality (a minimum level of specialized education or professional training) - <i>Quality assurance</i> (periodic inspections or reporting by childcare centers)

Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

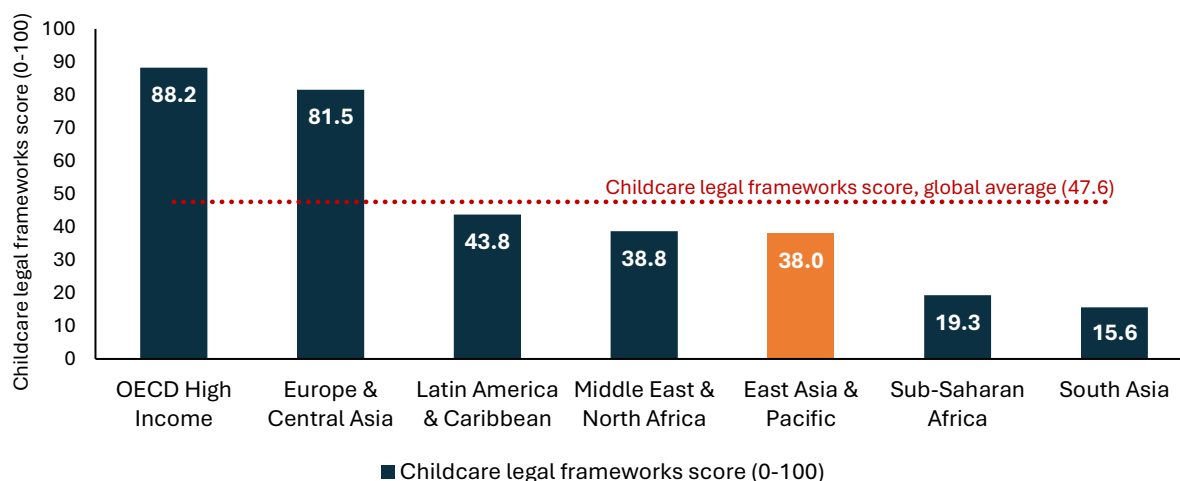
Note: See the Annex for more detailed results for each question. Details on the scoring methodology are available at: <https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/sites/wbl/documents/2024/WBL2024-Data-Notes.pdf>

Globally, the Childcare legal frameworks indicator reveals large differences in scores among regions. OECD high-income economies lead, with an average score of 88.2 out of



100. They are followed by Europe and Central Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, with average scores of 81.5 and 43.8, respectively (figure 5). East Asia and Pacific alongside the Middle East and North Africa region falls behind the global average score by nearly 10 points, which indicates significant gaps in the enabling regulatory environment needed to access affordable and quality childcare services.

FIGURE 5: CHILDCARE LEGAL FRAMEWORKS SCORE (0-100), BY REGION



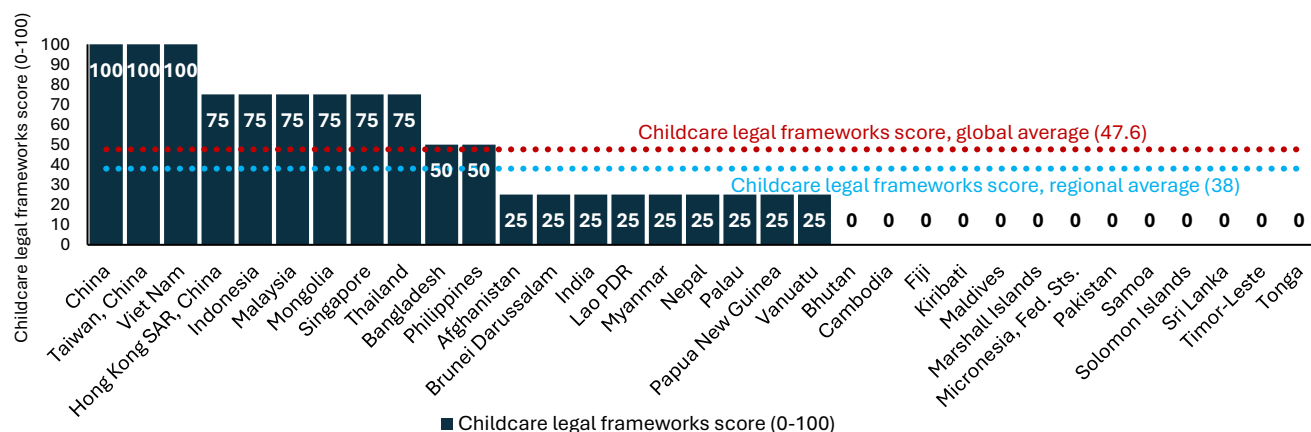
Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Note: The Childcare legal frameworks score is calculated as the simple average of the answers to the four binary questions in table 3 and scaling the result to 100.

Notably, the differences within the region of East Asia and Pacific are considerable, even among the economies at similar levels of economic development. The economies with the highest score of 100 include the following: China; Taiwan, China; and Viet Nam. Conversely, 13 economies score zero, including Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Pakistan, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Tonga. Meanwhile, 17 economies range in score between 25 and 75 points (figure 6).



FIGURE 6: CHILDCARE LEGAL FRAMEWORKS SCORE (0-100) IN EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC, BY ECONOMY



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Note: The Childcare legal frameworks score is calculated as the simple average of the answers to the four binary questions in table 3 and scaling the result to 100.

Availability

In East Asia and Pacific, laws govern the provision of formal childcare services in center-based facilities (public, private, or employer-provided, not conditional on the number of female employees) for children below 3 years of age in 16 out of 25 examined economies (table 4). In more than half of these economies, according to the law, these services become available at the child's birth. In Singapore, these services become available when the child is at least 2 months, in Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam – 3 months, in Myanmar – 6 months, and in Mongolia – 2 years.

The law establishes both public and private childcare services in eight economies. Similarly, in seven economies, services are available at private centers only. In four economies, the law requires employers to provide or support childcare services for their employees. While in Taiwan, China and Viet Nam the obligation applies regardless of an employee's gender, in Cambodia and Myanmar it is triggered only when an employer has a minimum of 100 female employees, which may discourage the hiring of women.



TABLE 4: LEGISLATION ON THE PROVISION OF CENTER-BASED CHILDCARE SERVICES IN EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC, BY THE TYPE OF PROVISION

Economy	Earliest age of entitlement to childcare services	Public Provision*	Private Provision*	Employer-provided or supported
Brunei Darussalam	at birth	ND	✓	ND
Cambodia	1.5 years	ND	ND	✓
China	at birth	✓	✓	ND
Fiji	ND	ND	ND	ND
Hong Kong SAR, China	at birth	ND	✓	ND
Indonesia	at birth	✓	✓	ND
Kiribati	ND	ND	ND	ND
Lao PDR	3 months	✓	✓	ND
Malaysia	at birth	ND	✓	ND
Marshall Islands	ND	ND	ND	ND
Micronesia, Fed. Sts.	ND	ND	ND	ND
Mongolia	2 years	✓	✓	ND
Myanmar	6 months	ND	✓	✓
Palau	at birth	ND	✓	ND
Papua New Guinea	at birth	ND	✓	ND
Philippines	at birth	✓	✓	ND
Samoa	ND	ND	ND	ND
Singapore	2 months	ND	✓	ND
Solomon Islands	ND	ND	ND	ND
Taiwan, China	at birth	✓	✓	✓
Thailand	at birth	✓	✓	ND
Timor-Leste	ND	ND	ND	ND
Tonga	ND	ND	ND	ND
Vanuatu	at birth	ND	✓	ND
Viet Nam	3 months	✓	✓	✓

Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Note: The orange check mark ✓ means that, according to national legislation, childcare services are provided by employers, but the provision is conditional on the number of female employees. **ND** means that the law governing the provision of childcare services is not detected.

* Public provision denotes services offered at center-based facilities operated and funded by the government, including nurseries, day cares, crèches, or formal preschools. Private provision denotes privately-run childcare



centers, including nurseries, day cares, crèches, or formal preschools, that can be non-profit or for-profit entities and are not operated and funded by the government.

No laws govern the provision of childcare services of any form for children below 3 years of age across the Pacific Islands (except for Vanuatu), including Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, and Tonga. In Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Tonga, the absence of such laws is further compounded by the fact that there is no paid maternity leave available, while in the rest of the Pacific Islands, the length of paid maternity leave does not meet the ILO's standard (except for Fiji) of 14 weeks or 98 *calendar* days (refer to table 2 for details). In these circumstances, the early provision of childcare services becomes an urgent necessity for women striving to work and join the labor market sooner, but also to provide key developmental opportunities for children (Curimjee et al. 2022).

Public finance

Even when formal childcare is available, the high cost is a central concern that poses challenges for both parents and providers. To reduce the cost burden for families and childcare providers, governments can provide direct financial transfers (such as subsidies, allowances, one-time grants, reimbursements, fee reductions or exemptions, vouchers) or tax support (credits, deductions, or exemptions). The Childcare legal frameworks indicator examines whether the law establishes some form of financial or tax support for families and nonstate childcare providers (employers or private centers).

Seven economies in the region provide some form of support for families for childcare services: China; Hong Kong SAR, China; Malaysia; Singapore; Taiwan, China; Thailand; Viet Nam. Five economies that provide financial support (Hong Kong SAR, China; Malaysia; Singapore; Taiwan, China; Viet Nam) do so through means-tested subsidies or fee remissions, typically targeted at low-income families. In Malaysia, Singapore, and Taiwan, China governments provide both subsidies and tax benefits. Families in China and Thailand can also claim deductions for childcare expenses. Table 5 provides more details on public finance cost support measures available for families in selected economies in East Asia.



TABLE 5: EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC FINANCE COST SUPPORT FOR CHILDCARE SERVICES FOR FAMILIES

Measure	Economy	Policy Example
Subsidies and grants	Hong Kong SAR, China	Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency administers the Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (CFRS) for children aged 0-2 and 2-3. Three levels of fee remission are available depending on parents' "social needs" test. To receive assistance, children must receive whole-day care services in the childcare centers (i.e. day crèches or day nurseries) registered with the Social Welfare Department (SWD) (Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency).
	Malaysia	A childcare fee subsidy program aims to help low-income families with the cost of childcare at registered TASKAs (childcare centers) for children aged 2-4 years. The subsidy is a maximum of RM180 per month per child, payable directly to the TASKA. To be eligible, families must have a monthly household income of RM7,000 or less. This subsidy is administered by the Federal Social Welfare Department.
Allowances	Viet Nam	Parents of children in both junior (3-36 months) and senior (3-6 years) kindergartens in industrial zones may receive monthly financial allowance, typically managed by the provincial People's Committees and considered by the provincial People's Council based on local budget capacity (Government's Decree No. 105/2020/ND-CP).
Fee exemptions	Viet Nam	Fee exemptions or reductions are available to poor households with children in preschool education aged 3 months to 6 years (Decree No. 81/2021/ND-CP).
Tax benefits	China	According to the State Council's Notice on Establishing Care for Infants and Young Children Under 3 Years Old, special additional personal income tax deductions at a fixed amount are available for childcare expenses for infants and young children under 3 years old, per infant per month. Parents can choose to have one of them deduct 100%, or to have both parties deduct 50% of the standard amount (Circular of the State Council No. 8 of 19 March 2022).
	Malaysia	Income Tax Act in Malaysia offers parents an annual personal tax deduction for childcare fees paid to registered centers (Income Tax Act No. 47 of 1967, Sec. 46).

Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.



Lowering costs for nonstate childcare providers through operational start-up grants, subsidies, public-private partnerships, or tax incentives are among policy tools that governments can use to increase the supply of childcare services. Nonstate childcare providers (private centers or employers) in eight out of 25 examined economies in East Asia and Pacific receive some form of financial or tax support from the government. Private childcare centers receive direct financial support in the following economies: China; Indonesia; Malaysia; Mongolia; Singapore; Taiwan, China; and Viet Nam. For example, in Mongolia, private centers receive financial assistance from the state budget based on the normative cost per child to cover standard expenses, such as food, and to increase the supply of services and additional admissions in locations with low access to state-owned centers (outside the capital city of Ulaanbaatar).

Similarly to private childcare centers, employers in Singapore, Taiwan, China and Viet Nam, are also incentivized to provide childcare services for their employees through subsidies (Taiwan, China; Viet Nam) or operational grants (Singapore) (table 6). Tax incentives are also granted to employers in Malaysia and Viet Nam. Government support for employers is particularly essential in economies where employers are obligated by law to provide or support childcare services for their employees. In Cambodia and Myanmar, despite such legal obligation on employers, the latter face disincentives to do so to avoid additional costs. Firstly, the provision of childcare services is conditional on the number of female employees (a minimum of 100 female workers) disincentivizing employers to hire women in the first place. Secondly, employers do not receive any support from the government for the provision of childcare services for their employees. Table 6 provides more details on public finance cost support measures available for nonstate childcare providers in selected economies in East Asia.

TABLE 6: EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC FINANCE SUPPORT FOR NONSTATE CHILDCARE PROVIDERS

Economy	Type of support
Indonesia	<i>Operational assistance funds</i> are available for PAUD (childcare) centers on a yearly basis, known as "Bantuan Operasional PAUD" and the Operational Assistance Funds for Educational Units. To access the funds PAUD providers must meet a set of requirements related to the quality of the services.
Singapore	<i>Infrastructure Support Grant</i> is available to support nonpublic operators intending to set up new childcare centers in areas of demand. To access the grant, centers must be in areas with unmet childcare demand and keep fees for Singapore citizen children within a pre-established fee cap (Early Childhood Development Agency).



Viet Nam	<i>Preferential rent exemption or reduction</i> for facilities are available for employers who invest in the construction of kindergarten centers (which includes coverage of children below 3 years of age) (Decree No. 145/2020/ND-CP, Art. 81).
Taiwan, China	<i>Subsidies</i> are available for employers under the Regulations on Subsidy and Standards for Establishing Breastfeeding Rooms, Childcare Facilities, and Measures. Subsidies include up to NT\$20,000 for breastfeeding rooms, NT\$3,000,000 for childcare facilities, and NT\$600,000 per year for employing or entrusting childcare providers. Employers may also receive subsidies for employees who use employer-subsidized childcare services.
Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.	

In 16 out of 25 examined economies in the region, governments do not provide any form of financial or tax support to parents or nonstate childcare providers. These legislative gaps contribute to limited formal childcare provision on the supply side, but also to the expectation that families, particularly mothers, would bear the brunt of care. This further reinforces social norms around women's traditional role as primary caregivers.

Quality

Quality can be a determining factor in a parent's decision to use formal childcare services. Quality childcare improves children's development outcomes, including school readiness, healthy nutrition and educational achievements, in the short- and mid-term (Devercelli and Beaton-Day, 2020). It also leads to more promising employment prospects and higher earnings in the long term.

The Childcare legal frameworks indicator measures whether the law establishes quality standards for providing childcare services in center-based settings. These standards would, at minimum, include requirements on the structural quality (caregiver-to-child ratio or maximum group size), minimum educational or professional training requirements for caregivers or educators, and quality assurance mechanisms in the form of periodic inspections by specialized bodies or periodic reporting by childcare providers.² All three minimum quality standards are provided by law in seven economies of the region (China;

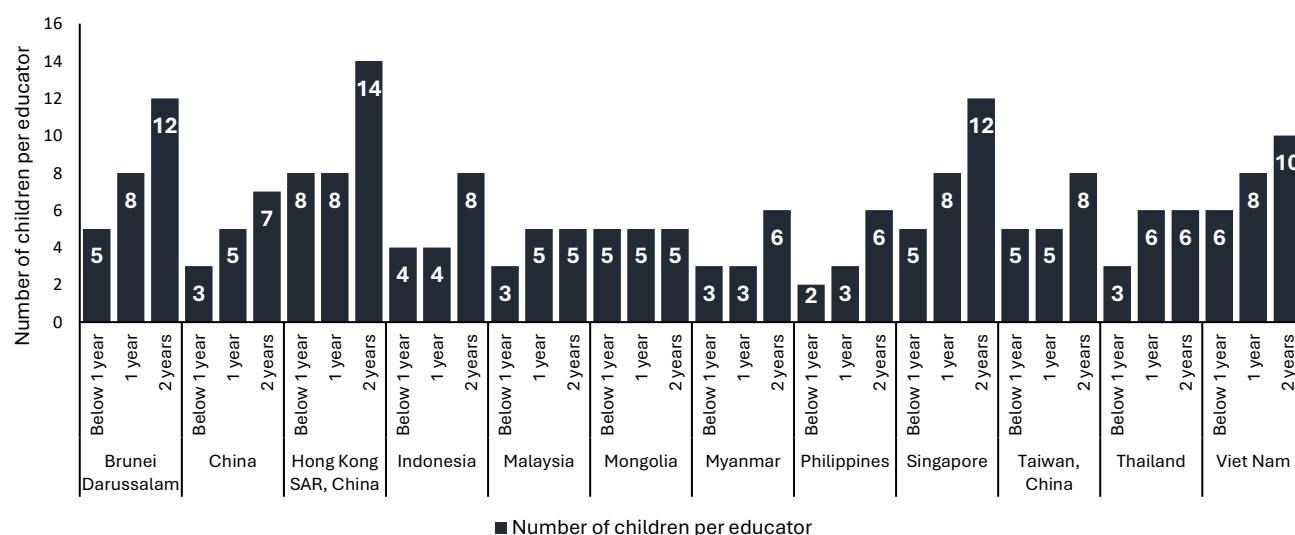
² *Women, Business and the Law* breaks down the concept of quality into three main categories following the approach outlined in Devercelli and Beaton-Day (2020): structural, process, and system quality. Under *structural* quality, standards on educator-to-child ratios and group sizes are examined. For *process* quality, requirements specifying a minimum level of specialized education or professional training for educators or main caregivers are examined. Lastly, *system* quality refers to the overall system in which childcare is delivered. For this purpose, the selected measures aimed at improving the system include quality assurance interventions: periodic inspections of childcare providers by authorized bodies or periodic reporting requirements by childcare providers.



Hong Kong SAR, China; Indonesia; Mongolia; Philippines; Taiwan, China; and Viet Nam). In comparison, in the remaining 18 economies, the gaps in quality must be tackled.

Caregiver-to-child ratios and group sizes are important structural quality aspects. With lower caregiver-to-child ratios (typically 1:10 or 1:15, as recommended by international institutions) and smaller group sizes, children can receive individual attention, and teachers can more effectively cater to diverse learning needs (ILO 2014). Twelve economies establish standards on caregiver-to-child ratios: Brunei Darussalam; China; Hong Kong SAR, China; Indonesia; Malaysia; Mongolia; Myanmar; Philippines; Singapore; Taiwan, China; Thailand; and Viet Nam (figure 7).

FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER EDUCATOR IN CHILDCARE CENTERS, BY AGE AND ECONOMY



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Philippines has the lowest ratio for children below 1 year of age (1:2), followed by China, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand, where the corresponding ratio is 1:3. In contrast, Hong Kong SAR, China and Viet Nam have the highest mandated ratios for the same age (1:8 and 1:6, respectively), followed by Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, and Taiwan, China (1:5, respectively). For children at 2 years of age, the lowest ratios are in Malaysia and Mongolia (1:5, respectively), followed by Myanmar and Philippines (1:6), while the highest ratio is established in Hong Kong SAR, China (1:14).



The following economies also set standards on maximum number of children per group: China; Indonesia; Mongolia; Taiwan, China; Viet Nam. The size typically ranges between 15 and 20 children per group depending on the age. Viet Nam also allows 25 children per group for ages 25 to 36 months. Thirteen out of 25 economies in the region do not mandate any of the two structural parameters measured.

Trained educators are key contributors to children's physical and mental health, safety, and cognitive development in care facilities. In eleven out of 25 examined economies, the law establishes some form of a minimum specialized education or professional training for educators or caregivers: China; Hong Kong SAR, China; Indonesia; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Mongolia; Myanmar; Philippines; Taiwan, China; Thailand; and Viet Nam. The levels of required education or training vary among economies (table 7). For example, in China, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Taiwan, China, Thailand, and Viet Nam, children must be attended by educators with a teaching, pedagogical, or other type of early childhood education tertiary degree. In Hong Kong SAR, China, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, and Philippines, some form of specialized vocational training and certification is sufficient.

TABLE 7: MINIMUM QUALIFICATION AND TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR EDUCATORS OR CAREGIVERS

Economy	Teacher degree	Certification in Early Childhood Education and Care
China	✓	
Hong Kong SAR, China		✓
Indonesia	✓	
Lao PDR	✓	
Malaysia		✓
Mongolia		✓
Myanmar		✓
Philippines		✓
Taiwan, China	✓	
Thailand	✓	
Viet Nam	✓	

Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.
Note: In Malaysia and Mongolia, there is also a citizenship requirement for childcare educators.



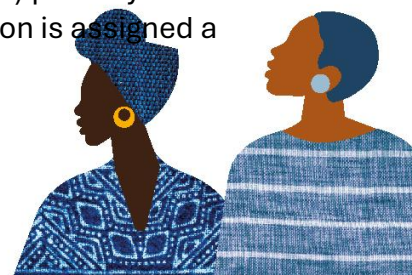
Governments can monitor compliance with quality standards by establishing quality assurance mechanisms through mandatory periodic inspections of physical facilities or reporting of data and information by childcare providers. Quality assurance processes allow governments to generate registries or reports on the quality of services offered that, if made publicly available, can help parents make better informed decisions about childcare providers.

In East Asia and Pacific, 9 out of 25 economies establish some form of quality assurance. Three economies mandate periodic physical inspections of childcare facilities: Hong Kong SAR, China; Papua New Guinea; and the Philippines. For example, in Hong Kong SAR, China inspections occur at intervals not exceeding three years, while in Papua New Guinea, inspections occur annually. In the Philippines, the Department of Social Welfare and Development annually conducts inspections based on its internal assessment guidelines.

Seven out of 25 economies also have legislation requiring childcare providers to periodically report operational information to authorized bodies: China; Indonesia; Mongolia; Philippines; Taiwan, China; Vanuatu; and Viet Nam. For example, in China, childcare centers must furnish information on their annual work plans to the Health Department at the end of each calendar year. In Mongolia, childcare centers must submit enrollment records alongside the attendance register containing the child's last name, first name, and registration number. In Philippines, childcare providers shall submit an annual report to the Department of Social Welfare to summarize their operations, including on the funds received, resources, and the number of children admitted. In Taiwan, China providers submit a reference to their business plan, budget, and working personnel every fiscal year. In Vanuatu, the operators of daycare institutions must present a report on the administration of the institution to the General Director within two months after the end of each year.

CHILDCARE SUPPORTIVE FRAMEWORKS

The Childcare supportive frameworks indicator examines the presence of policy mechanisms that help implement childcare laws, as measured by the Childcare legal frameworks indicator. The Childcare supportive frameworks indicator answers the four questions around the following aspects: (1) the availability of publicly available registries or databases of childcare providers; (2) clearly outlined application procedures for parents to request financial support; (3) clearly outlined application procedures for nonstate childcare providers (private centers or employers) to request financial support; (4) publicly available reports on the quality of childcare services (table 8). Each binary question is assigned a



score of 1 in case of a positive answer. The Childcare supportive frameworks score is then obtained by calculating the simple average of the answers to the four binary questions from table 8 and scaling the result to 100.

TABLE 8: MEASURES OF PROGRESS ON SUPPORTIVE FRAMEWORKS

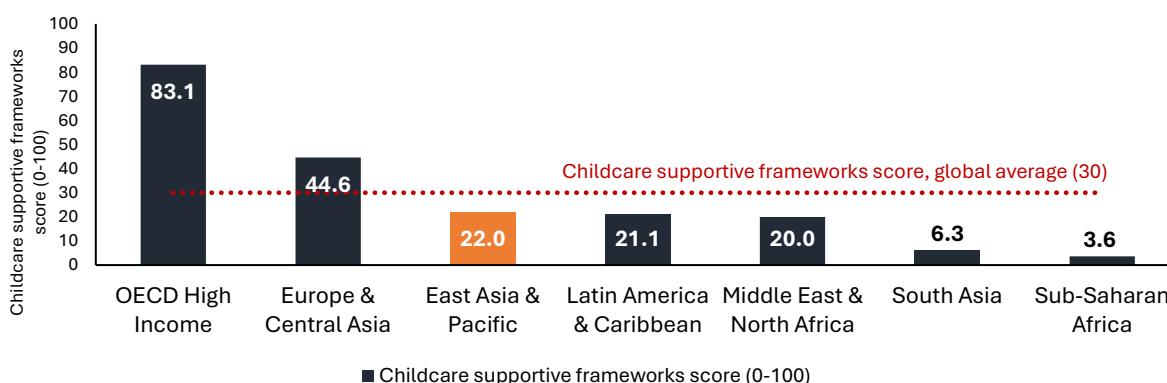
Pillar	Scored question
Availability	1. Is there a publicly available registry or database of childcare providers?
Public	2. Is there a clearly outlined application procedure to request financial support from the government for childcare services by parents?
Finance	3. Is there a clearly outlined application procedure to request financial support from the government for childcare services by nonstate childcare providers?
Quality	4. Has the government published any reports on the quality of childcare services?

Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Note: See the Annex for more detailed results for each question. Details on the scoring methodology are available at: <https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/sites/wbl/documents/2024/WBL2024-Data-Notes.pdf>

Globally, the Childcare supportive frameworks indicator reveals significant differences in scores among regions. OECD high-income economies lead, with an average score of 83.1 out of 100. They are followed by Europe and Central Asia (44.6) and East Asia and Pacific (22.0). East Asia and Pacific scores 22 out of 100, which is eight points lower than the global average of 30, indicating a substantial gap in available policy instruments supporting the implementation of childcare laws (figure 8). Notably, nearly no childcare supportive policy frameworks are detected in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, as measured by *Women, Business and the Law*.

FIGURE 8: CHILDCARE SUPPORTIVE FRAMEWORKS SCORE (0-100), BY REGION



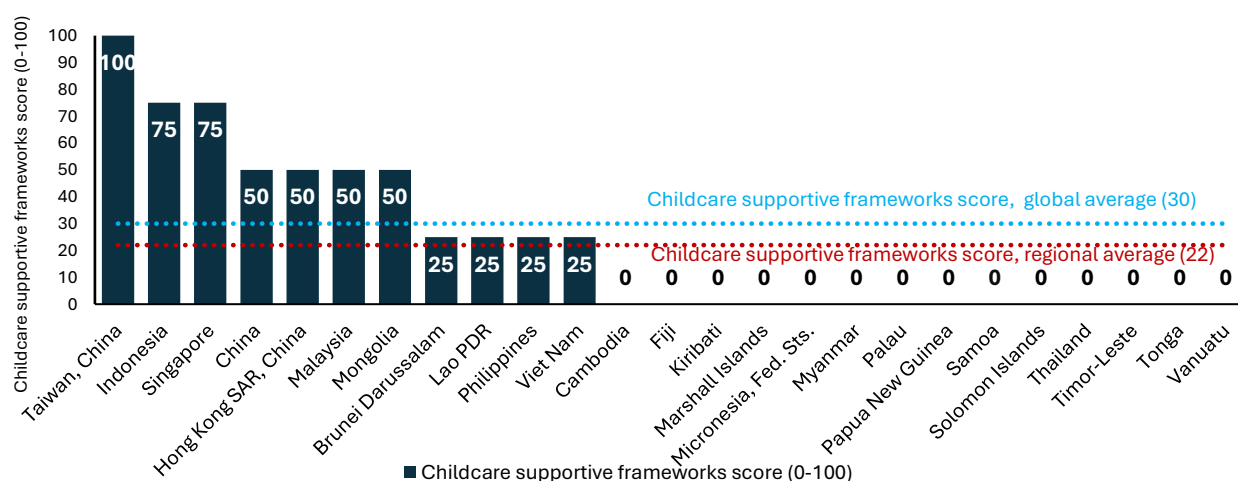
Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Note: The Childcare supportive frameworks score is calculated as the simple average of the answers to the four binary questions in table 8 and scaling the result to 100.



The Childcare supportive frameworks indicator reveals large gaps within East Asia and Pacific. Taiwan, China gets the highest score of 100, followed by Indonesia and Singapore with a score of 75. China, Hong Kong SAR, China, Malaysia and Mongolia receive a score of 50, while Brunei Darussalam, Lao People ´s Democratic Republic, Philippines and Viet Nam score 25. Fourteen economies get a score of 0, indicating the absence of the minimum policy instruments necessary to support proper implementation, as measured by *Women, Business and the Law* (figure 9).

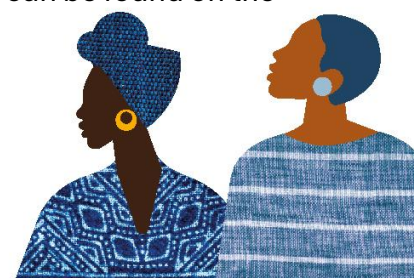
FIGURE 9: CHILDCARE SUPPORTIVE FRAMEWORKS SCORE (0-100) IN EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC, BY ECONOMY



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

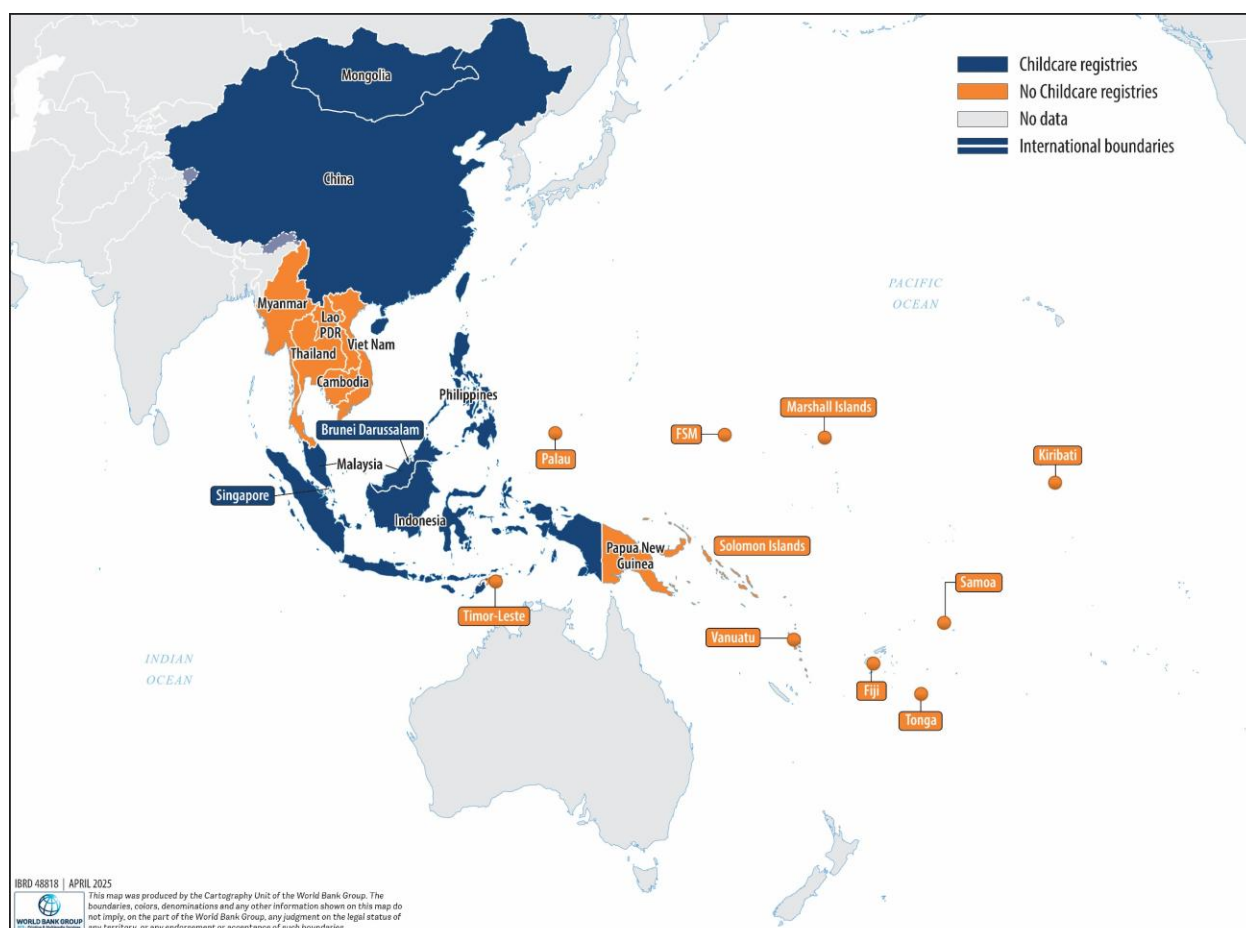
Note: The Childcare supportive frameworks score is calculated as the simple average of the answers to the four binary questions in table 8 and scaling the result to 100.

Accurate, accessible information is fundamental for parents assessing available childcare options. Publicly accessible registries of childcare providers can help parents make informed decisions about their childcare choices. Through registries, parents can retrieve details about available childcare providers, including their location, contact information, types of services provided, and other relevant records. In East Asia and Pacific, nine out of 25 economies have published such registries on official government websites (map 1). For example, Social Welfare Department of Hong Kong SAR, China provides downloadable Excels with the list of childcare centers. The excels contain information about the name of a center, address, the type of service, the age of a child, the total capacity and approved monthly fees. In Brunei Darussalam, a list of licensed childcare centers can be found on the



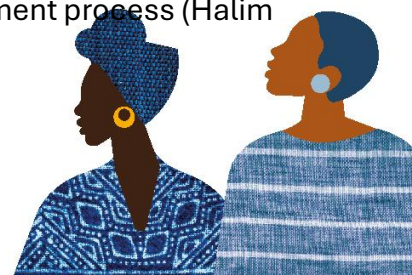
official website of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, with the information available on the name of a center, address, and license period. In Philippines, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) as a major accrediting entity of childcare services publishes a list of centers that includes contact information, address, and accreditation status.

MAP 1: CHILDCARE REGISTRIES IN EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Clearly defined application procedures and guidelines are paramount for families and nonstate childcare providers seeking financial support. In the absence of streamlined procedures, parents face information asymmetries that are typically more pronounced among low-income households who may drop out of the benefit enrollment process (Halim



et al. 2021). The process of applying for childcare support shall also not be complicated, confusing, invasive, or frustrating for families (Child Care Technical Assistance Network 2023).

In five economies where the government provides financial support for families (Hong Kong SAR, China; Malaysia; Singapore; Taiwan, China; and Viet Nam), there are also clearly outlined application procedures on how to access this support, including the eligibility criteria and the necessary list of documents that must be submitted to the processing body. Similarly, Malaysia and Viet Nam are the only two economies among the seven that legally establish the availability of financial support for private childcare centers, but there is no clearly outlined application process to retrieve the benefit. In addition, in Viet Nam, no information on the application procedure could be located for employers.

Robust quality assurance mechanisms are also essential for creating safe, stimulating environments for children. Publicly available reports benchmarking the quality of childcare services based on information that governments collect by means of physical inspections or direct reporting by childcare providers demonstrate their commitment to proactive monitoring and high standards for childcare services. Quality reports relying on solid data collection and monitoring systems allow for benchmarking of the strengths and weaknesses of an individual service provider to inform actions for further improvement (OECD 2022).

In Indonesia, the Directorate of Early Childhood Education of the Ministry of Education publishes annual reports that provide quality assessment of early childhood education and development services (PAUD) around a set of broad areas: (1) the availability of equitable and quality PAUD services; 2) developmental achievements; 3) quality learning; 4) governance of the Directorate of Early Childhood Education. For example, some activity performance indicators highlight PAUD centers that receive coaching to improve the quality of learning or use educational tools to support the process quality learning, provide integrative holistic services, or implement new paradigm learning.

In Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Ministry of Education publishes sector performance reports of a broad nature that highlight indicators on the access to crèches, the number of crèches and how this number has grown overtime. The reports also outline specific improvements in the quality of childcare, including increased availability of learning equipment and toys, but also outline the issues and items for action, including the necessity to develop comprehensive quality standards. In Taiwan, China, the government publishes annual reports available at a provider level (including address, name, a person in charge) that outline detailed violations, illegal acts, and fines. The rest of East Asia and Pacific have



yet to publish these assessment reports for better implementation and enforcement of quality standards.

CHILDCARE EXPERT OPINIONS

In practice, do women have access to affordable and quality childcare services?

An analysis of the actual state of legal implementation is critical to understanding gender gaps and deriving reform recommendations for which outcome indicators are an effective measuring tool. Experts' responses on how well existing laws, or a lack thereof, operate in practice can showcase the effectiveness of implementation of childcare laws and help unpack the underlying factors that may prevent parents from enrolling children in care facilities, being it high cost or low quality among others.

In 20 economies in East Asia and Pacific, *Women, Business and the Law* surveyed 134 expert lawyers in the field of labor and employment on their perceptions of the outcome of the law for women when it comes to accessing affordable and quality childcare services in practice. The respondents are asked their opinion about the extent to which women have access to affordable and quality childcare services in practice. Response options fall along a five-point scale (0–4), where 0 indicates the absence of access for almost all women in practice, and 4 indicates the existence of access for almost all women in practice. The Annex provides more details on the distribution of expert opinions by economy in East Asia and Pacific.

Globally, the Childcare expert opinions indicator reveals large differences in perceptions among regions. In OECD high-income economies and Europe and Central Asia, experts perceive that more than 50 percent of women have access to affordable and quality childcare services in practice. In East Asia and Pacific, on average, experts believe that 34.4 percent of women have access to affordable and quality childcare services in practice. These perceptions are 7 points lower than experts' perceptions globally (figure 10).

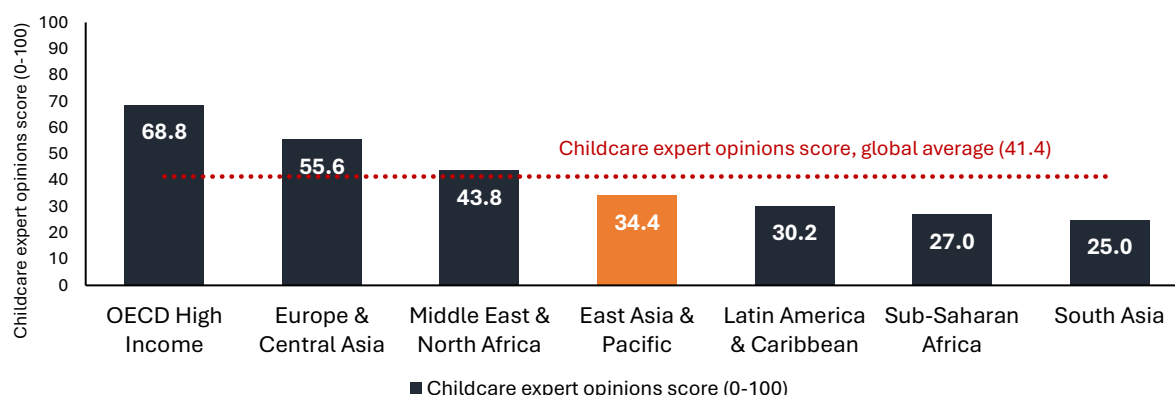
Within East Asia and Pacific, experts diverge on their perceptions. For example, experts are more optimistic in Brunei Darussalam, Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Singapore, where they perceive that 75 percent of women have access to affordable and quality childcare services (figure 11).

In eight economies (Cambodia; Fiji; Indonesia; the Federated States of Micronesia; Mongolia; Philippines; Samoa; Thailand), experts perceive that only a quarter of all women



have access affordable and quality childcare. Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste are the only two economies where experts consider that there is no access to services at all in practice. This finding suggests that childcare has not gained the same policy attention and support within the region.

FIGURE 10: CHILDCARE EXPERT OPINIONS SCORE (0-100), BY REGION

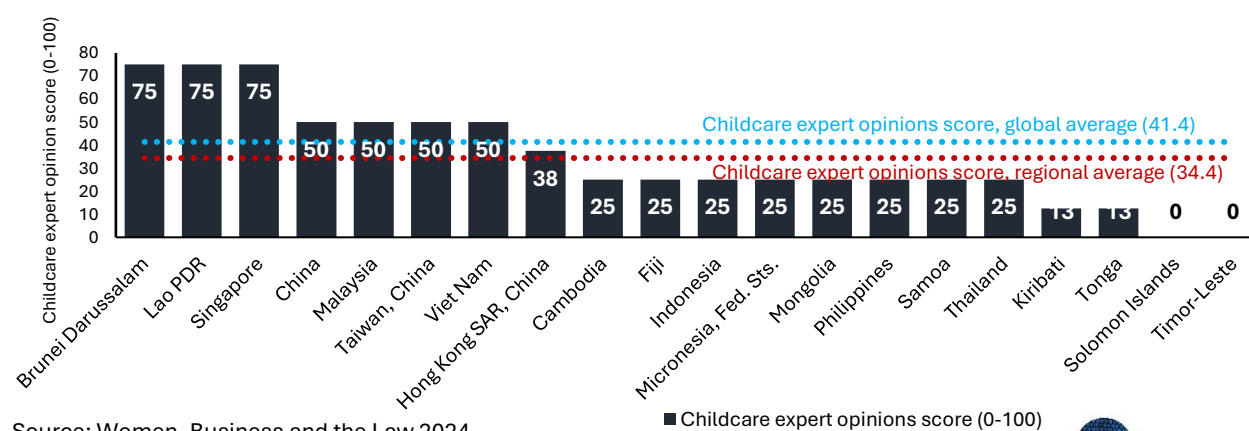


Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Note: The Childcare expert opinions score is obtained by calculating the individual responses to the question on the extent to which women have access to affordable and quality childcare services in practice. The experts' responses are aggregated into the question score at the economy level, taking the median value of all responses given to that question. The childcare expert opinions score is then equal to the question score and scaled to 100. More details on calculations and the scoring methodology are available at:

<https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/sites/wbl/documents/2024/WBL2024-Data-Notes.pdf>

FIGURE 11: CHILDCARE EXPERT OPINIONS SCORE (0-100) IN EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC, BY ECONOMY



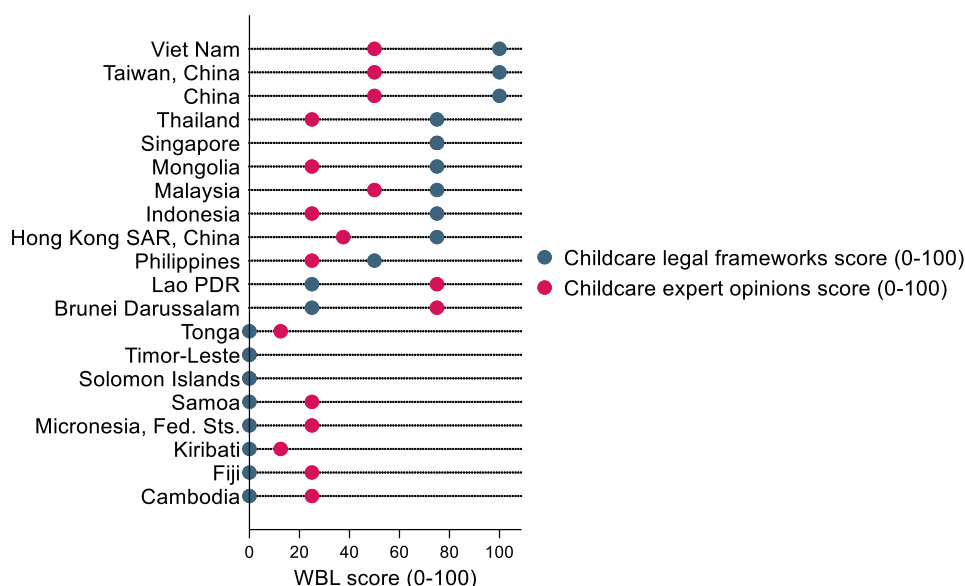
Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.



Childcare expert opinions and legal frameworks do not always align directly. Within East Asia and Pacific, in nearly half of the economies covered, the average scores for expert opinions are typically lower than the legal frameworks scores (figure 12). This suggests a less favorable view of women’s ability to access affordable and quality childcare in practice than what laws alone indicate but also sheds some light on weak implementation of laws.

There are exceptions (Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; Fiji; the Federated States of Micronesia; Kiribati; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Tonga; Samoa), where expert opinions scores are higher than the legal frameworks scores, indicating a more favorable view of women’s ability to access affordable and quality childcare in practice than what the laws alone suggest. In Singapore, expert opinions align with the legal frameworks scores underscoring that the laws typically realize women’s rights in practice. This could indicate that as the laws improve and are properly implemented, the perceptions of experts may also improve. In Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste, both scores align and remain zero.

FIGURE 12: EXPERTS’ ASSESSMENT OF WOMEN’S ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE AND QUALITY CHILDCARE IN PRACTICE DO NOT ALIGN WITH WHAT THE LAWS SUGGEST



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Note: The economies are sorted by the legal frameworks score average, from highest to lowest. The sample size is restricted to 20 economies for which expert opinions data is available. Marshall Islands, Myanmar, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu are excluded from the graph due to the missing expert opinions data. Higher expert opinions scores (compared to the legal frameworks scores) may also suggest that experts may have considered other forms of childcare in answering this question, while the Women, Business and the Law methodology focuses on center-based facilities.

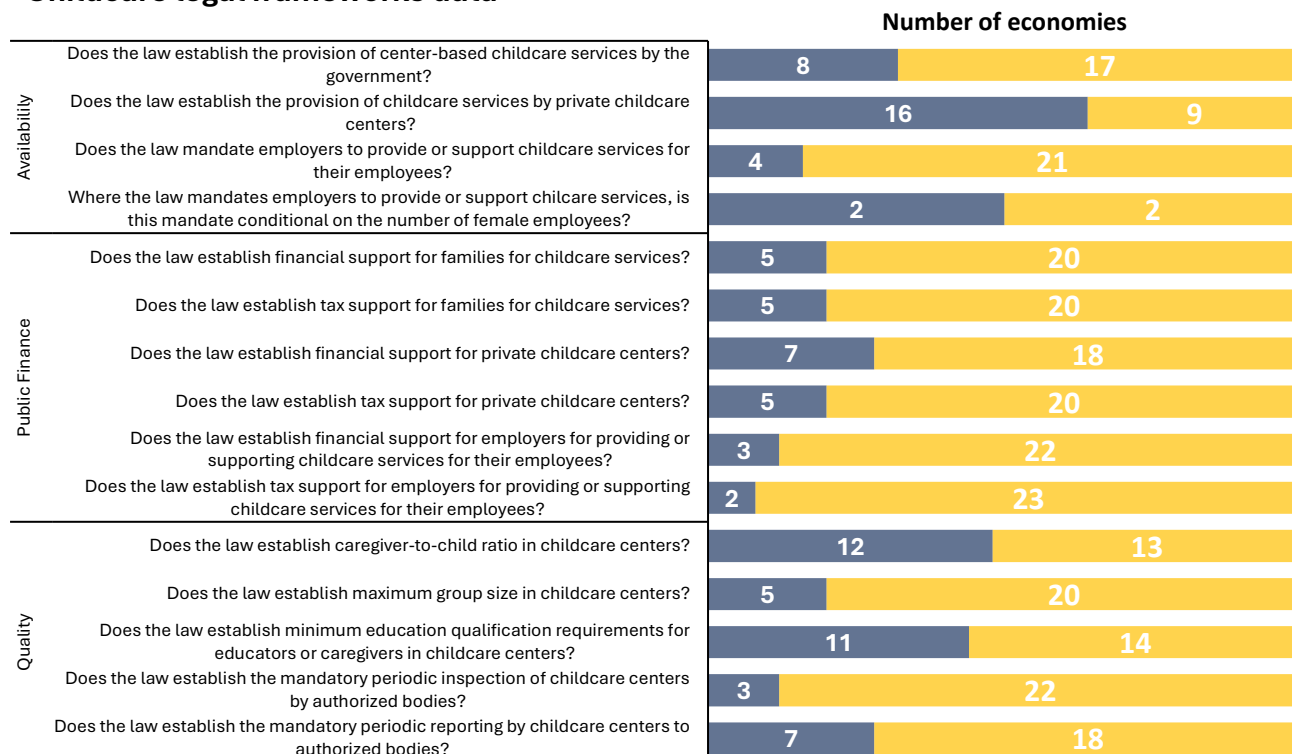


The data collected on opinions may reflect existing social norms as well as substantial differences in the institutional capacity of the states to address childcare provision (Bonoli and Reber, 2009). Further exploration of the reasons behind the differences between the expert opinions and the legal frameworks scores could consider unique regional dynamics, social and cultural norms, or economy-specific advancements contributing to this discrepancy. Future research will explore the link between laws and social norms.



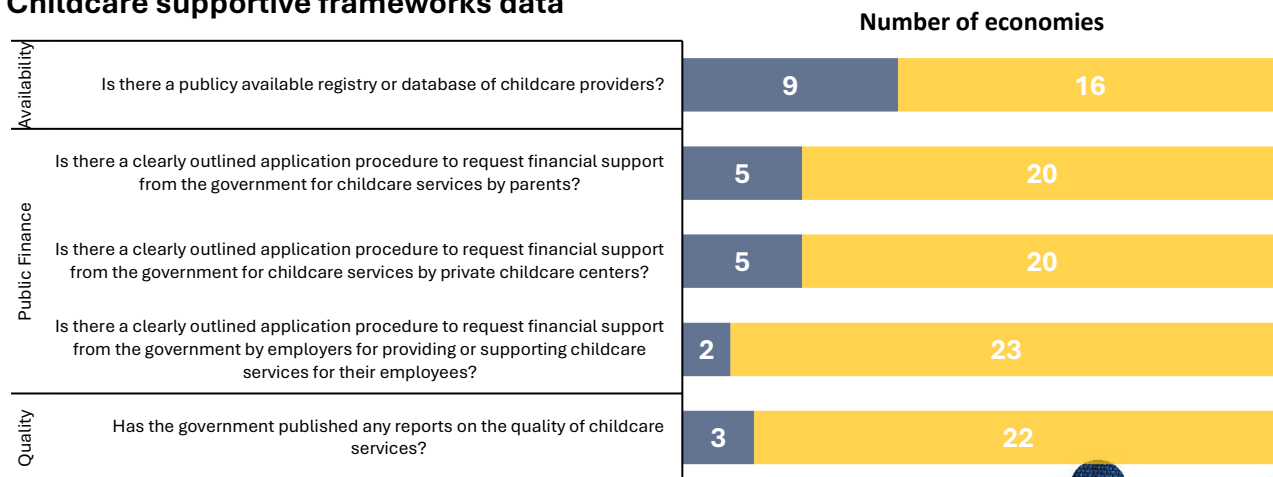
ANNEX: REGIONAL TRENDS BY DATA POINT

Childcare legal frameworks data



■ Yes ■ No

Childcare supportive frameworks data

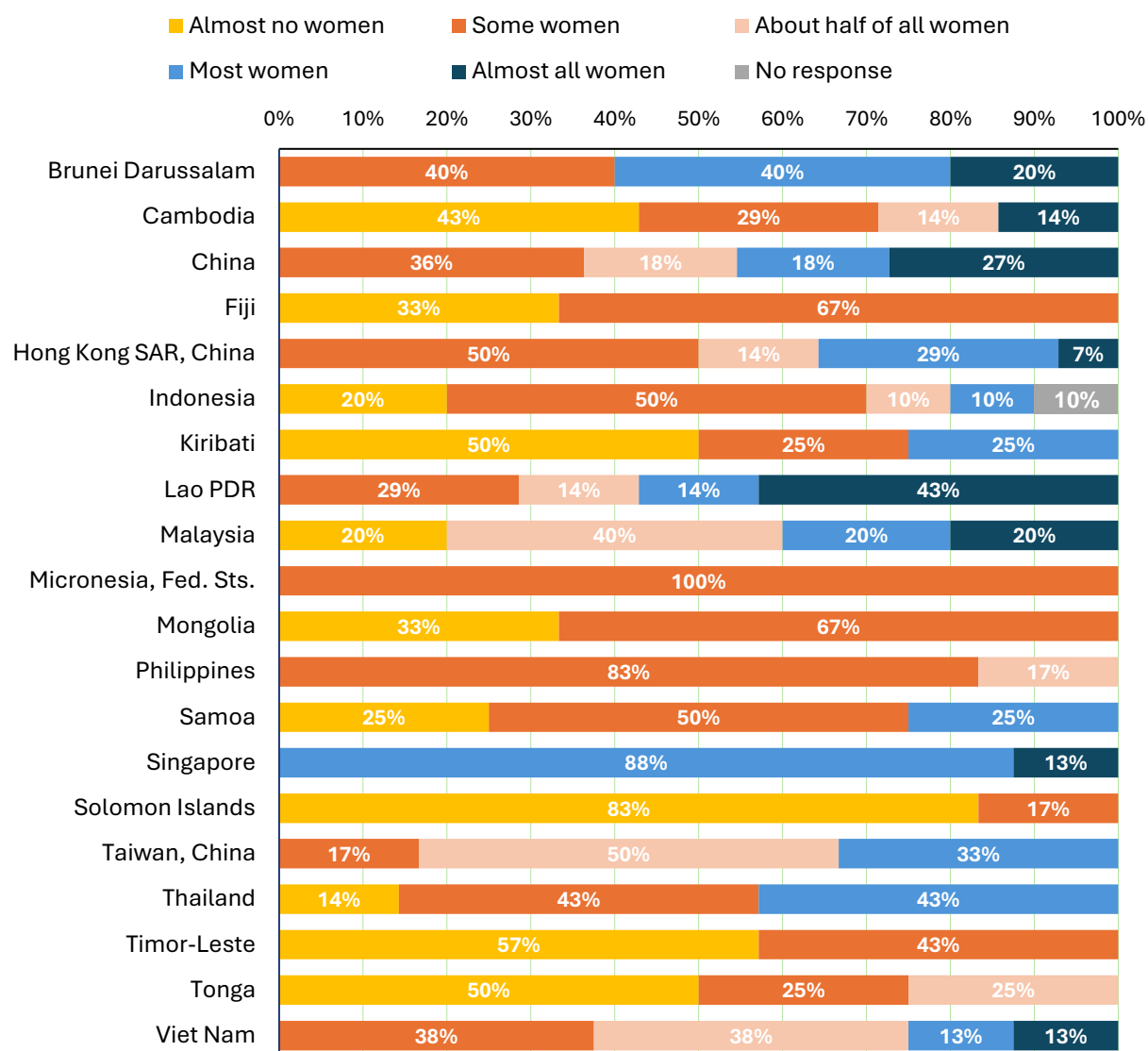


■ Yes ■ No



Distribution of expert opinion responses

In practice, do women have access to affordable and quality childcare services?



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.



DATA COLLECTION IN EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC

Data were collected in 25 economies in East Asia and Pacific: Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Fiji; Hong Kong SAR, China; Indonesia; Kiribati; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Marshall Islands; the Federated States of Micronesia; Mongolia; Myanmar; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Samoa; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Taiwan, China; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Vanuatu; Viet Nam. The data is current as of October 1, 2023.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document aims to improve the understanding of the legal and supportive policy instruments around the availability, public finance, and quality of childcare services for children below 3 years of age in East Asia and Pacific. It also seeks to build law awareness and identify areas for reforms and other regulatory interventions. Support for the Women, Business and the Law childcare regional profiles series is provided by the World Bank's Invest in Childcare Initiative. The team is grateful for peer-review provided by Amanda Devercelli, Frances Mary Beaton-Day, Melissa Diane Kelly, Emma Ward Richardson Cameron, and Rana Yacoub.

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