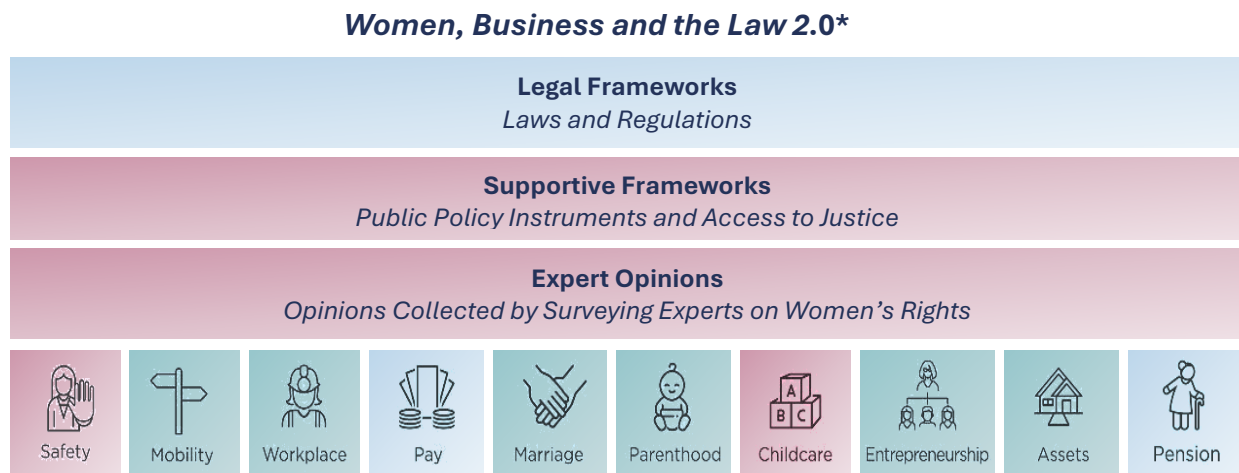


TOWARD AVAILABILITY, PUBLIC FINANCE, AND QUALITY OF CHILDCARE SERVICES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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 the 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).

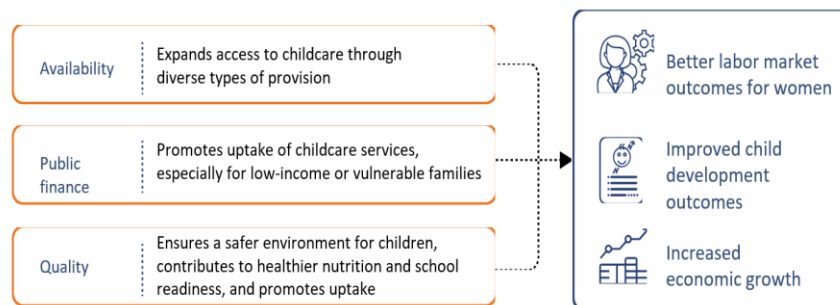
FIGURE 2: KEY CONSTRAINTS IN THE CHILDCARE MARKET

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 LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Women, Business and the Law measures the progress in childcare legal and policy achievements in 190 economies worldwide, including 32 economies in Latin America and the Caribbean (table 2). Latin America and the Caribbean is a diverse region, where the average Gross National Income (GNI) per capita varies from as low as US\$3,000 in Haiti to over US\$30,000 in Panama and The Bahamas, while female labor force participation rate varies from as low as 32 percent in Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States, to over 60 percent in Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and The Bahamas.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, PPP (constant 2021 international \$).



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	Female labor force participation rate (% of female population ages 15+)	Paid Leave for Mothers (weeks)*	Paid Leave for Fathers (calendar days)
Antigua and Barbuda	HI	Saint John's	-	14	0
Argentina	UMI	Buenos Aires	50.8	12.8	2
Bahamas, The	HI	Nassau	65.3	12	0
Barbados	HI	Bridgetown	58.5	12	0
Belize	UMI	Belize City	50.2	14	0
Bolivia	LMI	La Paz	59.9	12.8	3
Brazil	UMI	São Paulo	53.1	17.1	7
Colombia	UMI	Bogotá	51.4	18*	14
Costa Rica	UMI	San José	44.7	17.1	8
Dominica	UMI	Roseau	-	12	0
Dominican Republic	UMI	Santo Domingo	51.8	14	2
Ecuador	UMI	Quito	53.2	12	15
El Salvador	UMI	San Salvador	46.1	16	3
Grenada	UMI	Saint George's	-	12.8	0
Guatemala	UMI	Guatemala City	40.8	12	2
Guyana	HI	Georgetown	39.6	13	0
Haiti	LMI	Port-au-Prince	60.9	12	0
Honduras	LMI	Tegucigalpa	49.9	12	0
Jamaica	UMI	Kingston	61.4	8	0
Mexico	UMI	Mexico City	46.8	12	7
Nicaragua	LMI	Managua	49.4	12	7
Panama	HI	Panama City	50.3	14	3
Paraguay	UMI	Asunción	59.5	18	14



Peru	UMI	Lima	65.9	14	10
Puerto Rico (U.S.)	HI	San Juan	32.0	8	0
St. Kitts and Nevis	HI	Basseterre	-	13	0
St. Lucia	UMI	Castries	62.6	13	0
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	UMI	Kingstown	55.1	13	0
Suriname	UMI	Paramaribo	44.7	16	8
Trinidad and Tobago	HI	Port of Spain	45.9	14	0
Uruguay	HI	Montevideo	55.8	14	13
Venezuela, RB	NC	Caracas	39.3	26	14

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.

*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. In Colombia, the paid leave available for mothers is the sum of paid maternity leave days (12 weeks or 84 calendar days) and parental leave that follows (6 weeks or 42 days), with no days 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 forms of support for private childcare centers or employers: -Financial support from the government





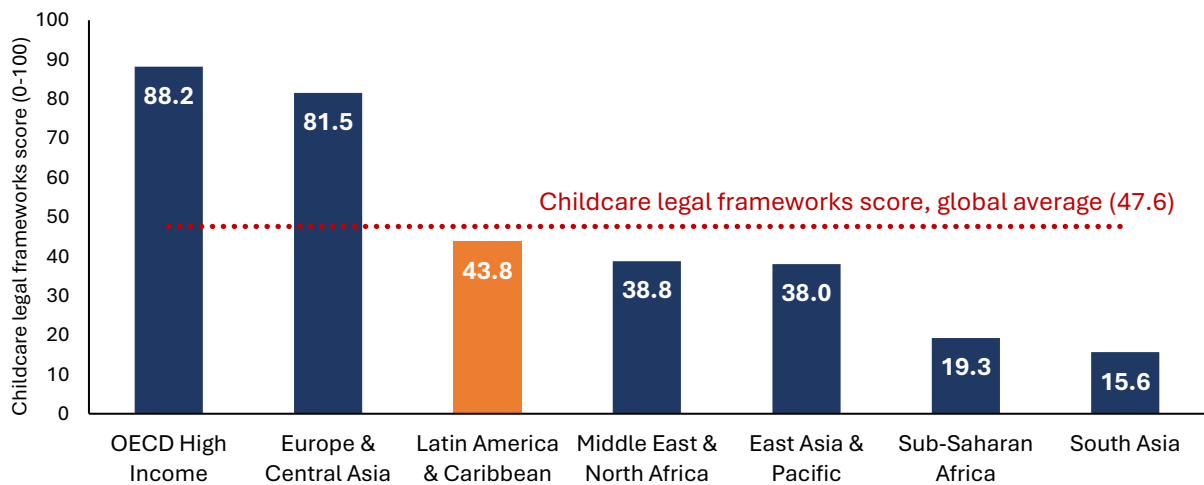
Quality	4. Does the law establish quality standards for center-based childcare services?	<p>-Direct tax benefits</p> <p>Requirements on all three quality parameters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -<i>Structural</i> quality (caregiver-to-child ratio or maximum group size) -<i>Educator/caregiver</i> quality (a minimum level of specialized education or professional training) -<i>Quality assurance</i> (periodic inspections or reporting by childcare centers)
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Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Note: See 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). Latin America and the Caribbean falls behind the global average score of 47.6 by nearly 4 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



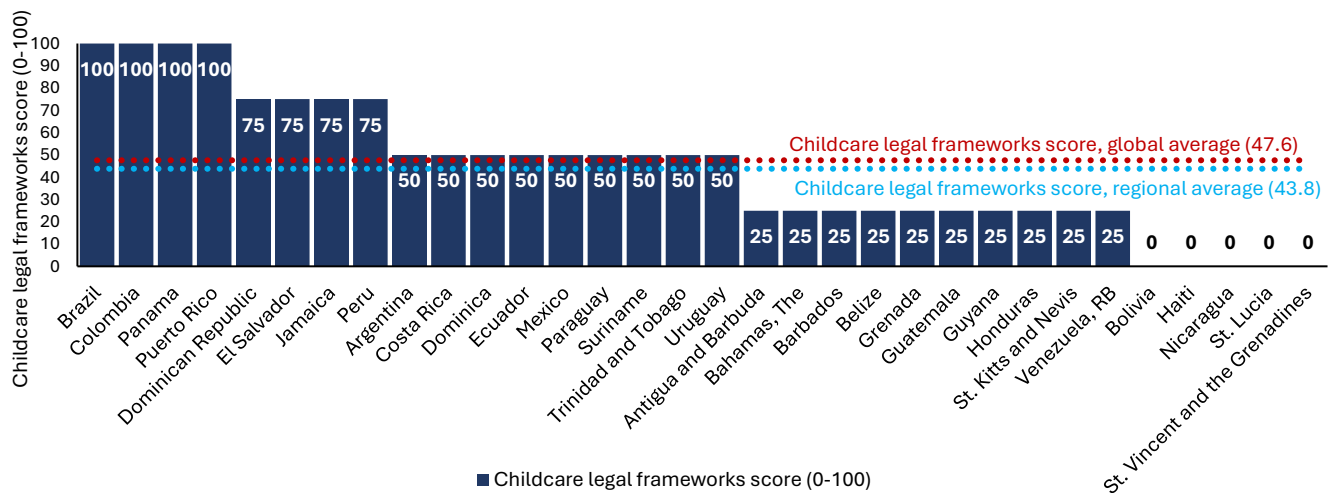
Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

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 Latin America and the Caribbean are considerable, even among the economies at similar levels of economic development. The economies with the highest score of 100 include Brazil, Colombia, Panama, and Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States. Fifteen economies in the region fall behind the regional (43.8) and the global (47.6) averages, indicating that not even half of the necessary minimum childcare legal frameworks are currently in place (figure 6). Most economies in the Caribbean, including Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Guyana, as well as Guatemala and Honduras in Central America score only 25 out of 100.

FIGURE 6: CHILDCARE LEGAL FRAMEWORKS SCORE (0-100) IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, 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 Latin America and the Caribbean, laws govern formal childcare services in center-based settings (public, private, or employer provided not conditional on the number of female employees) for children below 3 years of age in 25 out of the 32 examined economies (table 4). In more than half of these economies, the services become available at the birth of the child. In Argentina, Dominican Republic, and Ecuador, these services become available when the child is at least 45 days old; in Paraguay – 4 months; and in Suriname – 6 weeks.



Coincidentally, in Barbados, the so-called childcare policy gap² can emerge for women who take six weeks of paid maternity leave after giving birth, as the earliest age at which children below 3 years of age can be placed in care facilities occurs 48 days after such leave ends, hindering women’s opportunity to return to the labor market with no earlier options for outside childcare available.

The law establishes both public and private formal center-based childcare services in 15 economies. In nine economies in the region, the law regulates the provision of childcare services by private centers only: The Bahamas; Belize; Dominica; Grenada; Guyana; Jamaica; Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States; Suriname; Trinidad and Tobago. In these economies, the public provision of childcare services for children under 3 years old is either nonexistent or not guaranteed.

TABLE 4: LEGISLATION ON THE PROVISION OF CENTER-BASED CHILDCARE SERVICES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, BY THE TYPE OF PROVISION

Economy	Earliest age of entitlement to childcare services	Public Provision*	Private Provision*	Employer-provided or supported
Antigua and Barbuda	ND	ND	ND	ND
Argentina	45 days	✓	✓	✓
Bahamas, The	at birth	ND	✓	
Barbados	3 months	✓	✓	
Belize	at birth	ND	✓	
Bolivia	ND	ND	ND	✓
Brazil	at birth	✓	✓	✓
Colombia	at birth	✓	✓	
Costa Rica	at birth	✓	✓	
Dominica	at birth	ND	✓	
Dominican Republic	45 days	✓	✓	
Ecuador	45 days	✓	✓	✓
El Salvador	at birth	✓	✓	✓
Grenada	at birth	ND	✓	
Guatemala	at birth	✓	✓	✓

² ILO defines childcare policy gap as the time between childcare-related paid leave available to households (i.e. maternity, parental) and the right to early childhood education, pre-primary education services or official entrance age to primary education.



Guyana	at birth	ND	✓	
Haiti	at birth	ND	ND	ND
Honduras	at birth	ND	✓	✓
Jamaica	at birth	ND	✓	
Mexico	at birth	✓	✓	
Nicaragua	ND	ND	ND	ND
Panama	at birth	✓	✓	✓
Paraguay	4 months	✓	✓	✓
Peru	at birth	✓	✓	
Puerto Rico (U.S.)	at birth	ND	✓	
St. Kitts and Nevis	ND	ND	ND	ND
St. Lucia	ND	ND	ND	ND
St. Vincent and Grenadines	ND	ND	ND	ND
Suriname	6 weeks	ND	✓	
Trinidad and Tobago	at birth	ND	✓	
Uruguay	at birth	✓	✓	
Venezuela, RB	at birth	✓	✓	✓

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 formal center-based 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.

In 10 economies the law also mandates employers to provide or support childcare for their employees' children. In Bolivia, Brazil, Guatemala, Panama, and Paraguay, this requirement is based on the number of female employees, which can also discourage employers to hire women due to anticipated additional costs. Conversely, this mandate is not conditional on the number of female employees in Argentina, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, and República Bolivariana de Venezuela.

In addition, the provision of childcare services by employers can take various forms, namely, through the establishment of specialized on-site facilities in a company or within a consortium of companies, by subcontracting other childcare facilities or establishing and maintaining independent spaces outside the company's premises, or by providing reimbursements to employees for the incurred childcare expenses (table 5).



**TABLE 5: EXAMPLES ON HOW EMPLOYERS CAN SUPPORT THE PROVISION OF
CHILDCARE SERVICES IN VARIOUS FORMS**

	In company	Within a consortium of companies	Reimbursement of expenses	Subcontract services outside the company	Install and maintain an independent space
Argentina		✓	✓	✓	
Bolivia	✓				
Brazil			✓	✓	
Ecuador	✓	✓		✓	
El Salvador		✓		✓	✓
Guatemala	✓				
Honduras	✓				
Panama		✓			✓
Paraguay	✓				
Venezuela, RB	✓		✓		

Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

No laws govern the provision of center-based childcare services of any form for children below 3 years of age in Antigua and Barbuda, Haiti, Nicaragua, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. This is further compounded by the fact that the length of paid maternity leave in these economies (except for Antigua and Barbuda) does not meet the ILO’s standard 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 return to the labor market sooner, including mothers who do not receive any paid maternity leave at all.

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).



Twelve economies in the region provide some form of support for families for childcare services. Direct financial support is provided in 11 economies and can be conditional on the family’s income, the work status of parents, or the number of children within a family (table 6). For example, in Uruguay, the program *Beca de Inclusión Socio Educativa* (Socio-Educational Inclusion Program) supports families with scholarships for boys and girls from 0 to 2 years of age that belong to families who reside in territories with insufficient supply of childcare services. *Mais Crèche* and First Infancy Scholarship programs in the municipality of São Paulo in Brazil include monthly financial aid for children below 3 years of age from economically disadvantaged families, which may be used to access services. Similarly, in Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States, the *Early Head Start Program* targets children from low-income families by fostering their cognitive, social, and emotional development from birth to 4 years and 11 months. Tax incentives to parents are available in four out of 32 economies studied, including Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, and Panama.

TABLE 6: EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC FINANCE SUPPORT FOR CHILDCARE SERVICES FOR FAMILIES

Type of measure	Economy	Policy example
Grants and Subsidies	Costa Rica	The Mix Institute of Social Assistance promotes a grant to families to help with the total or partial payment for the childcare services chosen by families. This grant seeks to contribute to developing children up to 12 and minors with disabilities.
Free services/Fee exemptions	Mexico	Free childcare services are available through the Social Security Institute (IMSS) for parents who are employed and insured. The insurance for daycare is the mandatory social security regime in Mexico.
Allowances	Argentina	An annual school aid allowance is granted for early childhood education services for children from 45 days of age until 5 years of age.
Tax benefits	Ecuador	Individuals with an annual net income of less than USD 100,000.00 may deduct enrollment expenses and fees for childcare and development centers.

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 nine out of 32 examined economies in Latin America and the Caribbean receive financial or tax support from the government. Private



childcare centers receive direct financial transfers in Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, and Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States. For example, private centers in Panama and Paraguay benefit from direct subsidies from the government to ease operating costs (table 7). In Peru, the government grants tax incentives to private centers.

In El Salvador and Trinidad and Tobago, employers' expenses for providing or supporting childcare services for employees are also tax deductible.

TABLE 7: EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC FINANCE SUPPORT TO NONSTATE CHILDCARE PROVIDERS

Economy	Type of support
Jamaica	<i>Initial</i> Grant to newly established early childhood institutions with qualifying permits to assist with operational costs.
Panama	Comprehensive Early Childhood Care Centers (CAIPI) that accept children below 4 years of age are eligible for subsidies under the State Subsidies Program (MIDES Programa de Subsidios Estatales).
Paraguay	Privately managed initial educational institutions that provide services for children from 4 months to 3 years are eligible for state subsidies. Priority is given to centers that serve people in poverty and are in areas with no public services. Subsidies can be used to pay the salaries of educators.
Peru	Initial education establishments (public and private) that serve children from 0 to 2 years of age are not affected by direct or indirect taxes.
Puerto Rico (U.S.)	Administration for the Integral Care and Development of Children (ACUDEN) delegates funds to childcare providers through contractual agreements with care and development centers and/or networks of care homes to promote care and development environments that meet quality standards in service provision.
Trinidad and Tobago	Employers can be eligible for tax deductions for setting up childcare facilities for their employees.

Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Governments do not provide any form of support, financial or tax, to parents or nonstate childcare providers in 15 out of 32 examined economies, including 10 economies in the Caribbean (The Bahamas; Barbados; Belize; Dominica; Grenada; Guyana; Haiti; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; and Suriname) and five economies in Latin America (Bolivia; Guatemala; Honduras; Nicaragua; and República Bolivariana de Venezuela). These legislative gaps contribute to limited childcare provision with the expectation that families, and mothers in particular, will bear the brunt of care.



Quality

Quality can serve as 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 leads to more promising employment prospects and higher earnings in the long term.

The Childcare legal frameworks indicator measures whether the law establishes essential quality standards for the provision of childcare services in center-based settings. These standards would, at minimum, include requirements on either one of the two examined structural quality parameters (caregiver-to-child ratios or maximum group sizes), minimum educational or professional training requirements for educators or caregivers, and quality assurance mechanisms in the form of periodic inspections by specialized bodies or periodic reporting by childcare providers.³ In nearly a third of the region, all three minimum quality standards are provided by law (Brazil, Colombia, Dominica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Jamaica, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States, and Suriname), while in 22 economies, the gaps in minimum quality parameters have yet to be tackled.

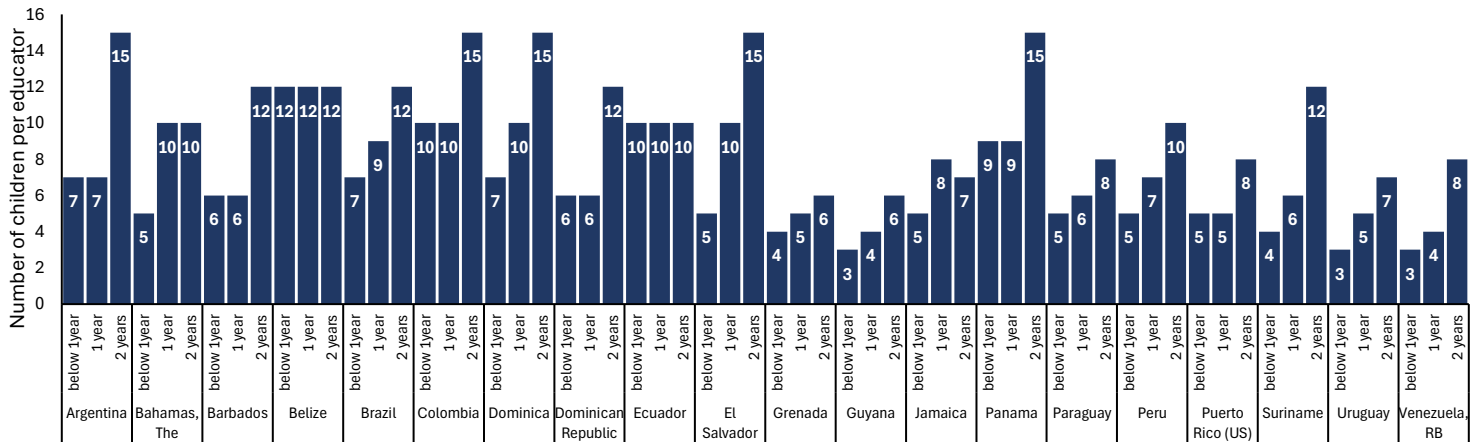
Caregiver-to-child ratios and group sizes are important structural quality aspects. With lower caregiver-to-child ratios (typically 1:10 or 1:15, as recommended by international institutions) and smaller group sizes, children can receive individual attention, and caregivers can more effectively cater to diverse learning needs (ILO 2014). In Latin America and the Caribbean, *Women, Business, and the Law* assesses regulations on ratios and group sizes for public and private center-based childcare services, where the law governs these types of services. Caregiver-to-child ratios are established in 20 economies (figure 7). Guyana, Uruguay and República Bolivariana de Venezuela have the lowest ratios for children below 1 year of age (1:3). In contrast, Ecuador and Panama have the highest mandated ratios for the same age (1:10 and 1:9, respectively). For children at 2 years of age, the lowest ratios are established in Grenada and Guyana (1:6, respectively) and Jamaica and Uruguay (1:7, respectively). In Grenada, Guyana, and Jamaica, these structural

³ *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.



requirements are applicable to private centers only, as the existing laws do not govern the provision of childcare by the government (refer to table 4 on the types of childcare provision).

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



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Dominican Republic, Guyana, Panama, Paraguay, and Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States, also mandate maximum group size for childcare centers. Twelve out of 32 economies in the region do not mandate any of the two structural parameters measured.

Trained educators are key contributors to the physical and mental health, safety, and cognitive development of children in care facilities. In the region, 14 out of 32 examined economies require some form of a minimum specialized education or professional training for educators or caregivers. Levels of required education or training vary among economies. For example, in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Panama, Peru, and República Bolivariana de Venezuela, children must be attended by care workers with a teaching, pedagogical, or other type of early childhood education tertiary degree. In The Bahamas, Dominica, Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States, and Suriname, the minimum qualification requirement is a training certification in Early Childhood Education and Care, officially recognized by the Government through the Ministry in charge of childcare services (table 8).



TABLE 8: MINIMUM QUALIFICATION AND TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR EDUCATORS

Economy	Teacher degree	Certification in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)
Argentina	✓	
Bahamas, The		✓
Brazil	✓	
Colombia	✓	
Dominica		✓
Dominican Republic	✓	
Ecuador	✓	
El Salvador	✓	
Jamaica	✓	
Panama	✓	
Peru	✓	
Puerto Rico (U.S.)		✓
Suriname		✓
Venezuela, RB	✓	

Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

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 also to generate registries or reports on the quality of services offered that (if made publicly available) can help parents make better-informed decisions about their childcare choices. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 13 out of 32 economies establish some form of quality assurance. In nine out of these 13 economies, physical inspections are mandatory, and their frequency can range from quarterly visits of facilities in Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States, and Suriname, to biannual – in Jamaica and Panama, and annual – in Colombia, Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, and Mexico.

To decrease the risk of noncompliance among providers, regular reporting by childcare centers is also a requirement in Panama, where government-subsidized comprehensive early childhood care centers (CAIPI) that serve children below 4 years of age must present to the regional and county directorates of social protection services monthly reports, in physical or digital form, outlining the activities carried out, the number of children enrolled by age and gender, as well as other administrative, pedagogical, and situational reports.



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 9). 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 9 and scaling the result to 100.

TABLE 9: MEASURES OF PROGRESS ON SUPPORTIVE FRAMEWORKS

Pillar	Scored question
Availability	1. Is there a publicly available registry or database of childcare providers?
Public Finance	2. Is there a clearly outlined application procedure to request financial support from the government for childcare services by parents?
Public 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?

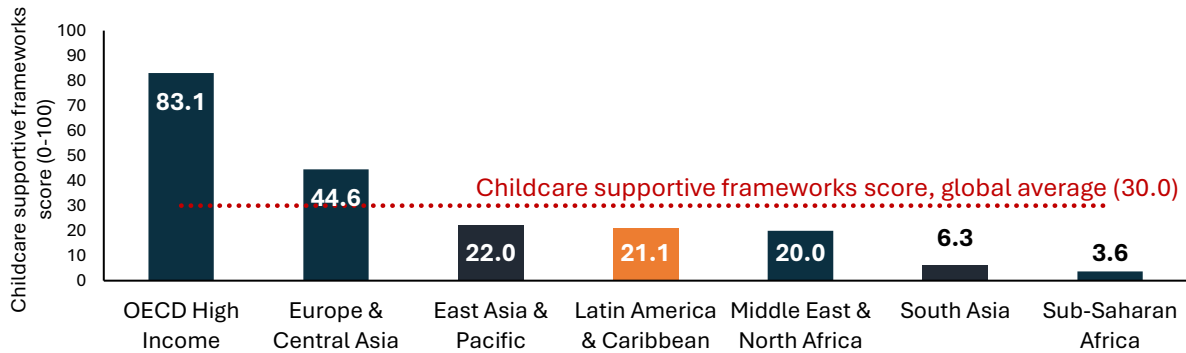
Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Note: See 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 large 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). Latin America and the Caribbean has the average score of 21.1 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

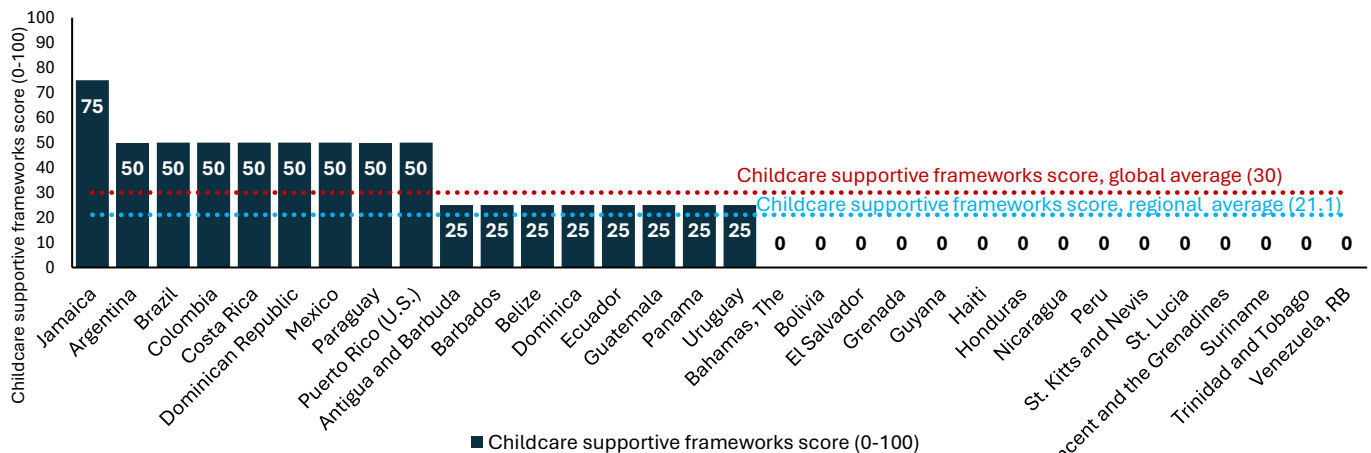


Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Note: The Childcare supportive frameworks score is calculated as the simple average of the answers to the four binary questions in table 9 and scaling the result to 100.

The Childcare supportive frameworks indicator reveals large gaps within Latin America and the Caribbean. Jamaica gets the highest score of 75 out of 100, while eight economies get a score of 50 (figure 9). Fifteen economies get a score of 0, indicating the absence of minimum policy instruments necessary to support proper implementation, as measured by *Women, Business and the Law*.

FIGURE 9: CHILDCARE SUPPORTIVE FRAMEWORKS SCORE (0-100) IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, 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 9 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 Latin America and the Caribbean, 15 out of 32 economies have put in place such registries (map 1).

For example, in Belize, the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous People's Affairs has published a list of available licensed daycare centers. The information contains the name, the contact details, the capacity and the operating status of centers. The Government of Ecuador also published the list of available providers servicing children aged 1 to 3 years, with the name of the provider, their contact information, and the hours of operation. In Costa Rica, the National Child Care and Development Network (Red Nacional de Cuido y Desarrollo Infantil, REDCUDI) has a search engine where parents can locate available childcare providers and check if the form of ownership of childcare providers (public, private, or community), their address, telephone, and email. Governments at the municipal level are responsible for publishing these registries in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico.

MAP 1: CHILDCARE REGISTRIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



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 also 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 eight out of 11 economies where the government provides some form of financial support to parents, 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. Ecuador, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Uruguay are among the economies where financial support for parents outlined by the law is not accompanied by equivalent implementing procedures.

Similarly, Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States, is the only economy among the four (in addition to Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay) that legally establishes the availability of financial support for private childcare centers, but there are no clearly outlined procedures on how this financial support is disbursed. In this case, the Administration for the Comprehensive Care and Development of Children (ACUDEN) delegates funds to eligible childcare providers that meet quality standards. How the disbursement of funds occurs is not yet clear, with the available information being limited only to the eligibility criteria.

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 Jamaica, the Early Childhood Commission published the Assessment Report of Early Childhood Institutions in March 2022 based on the analysis of inspection scores from early childhood centers. This report serves as a guide that gives an overview of all early childhood institutions in the economy based on their latest inspection score and illustrates the overall performance benchmarked against 12 major quality standards. The rest of Latin America and the Caribbean have yet to publish this type of 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?

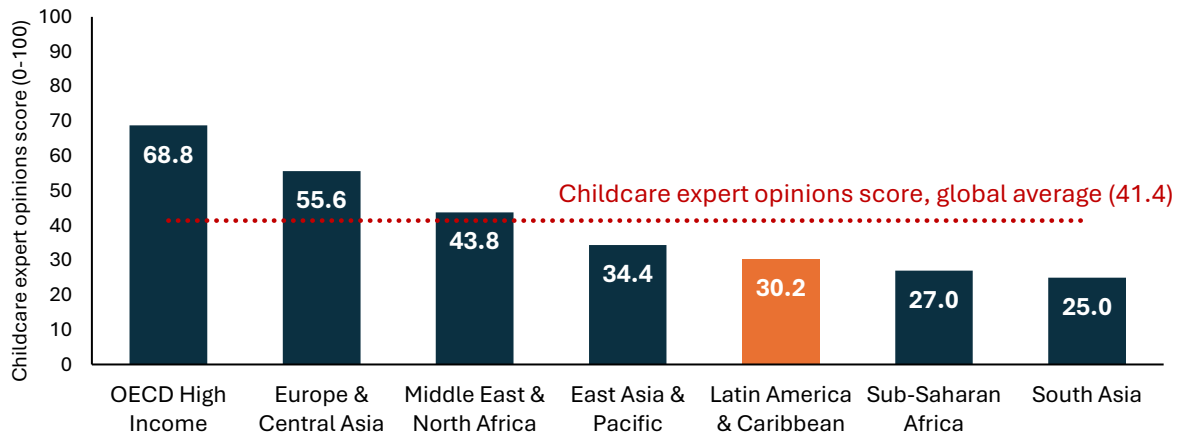
An analysis of the actual state of legal implementation is critical to understanding gender gaps and deriving reform recommendations for which outcome indicators are an effective measuring tool. Experts' responses on how well existing laws, or a lack thereof, operate in practice can showcase the effectiveness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

In 31 economies in Latin America and the Caribbean, *Women, Business and the Law* surveyed 241 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 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 Annex provides more details on the distribution of expert opinions by economy in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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 Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia, experts perceive that only 30 percent of women or fewer have such access. These perceptions are more than 10 points lower than experts' perceptions globally (figure 10).



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



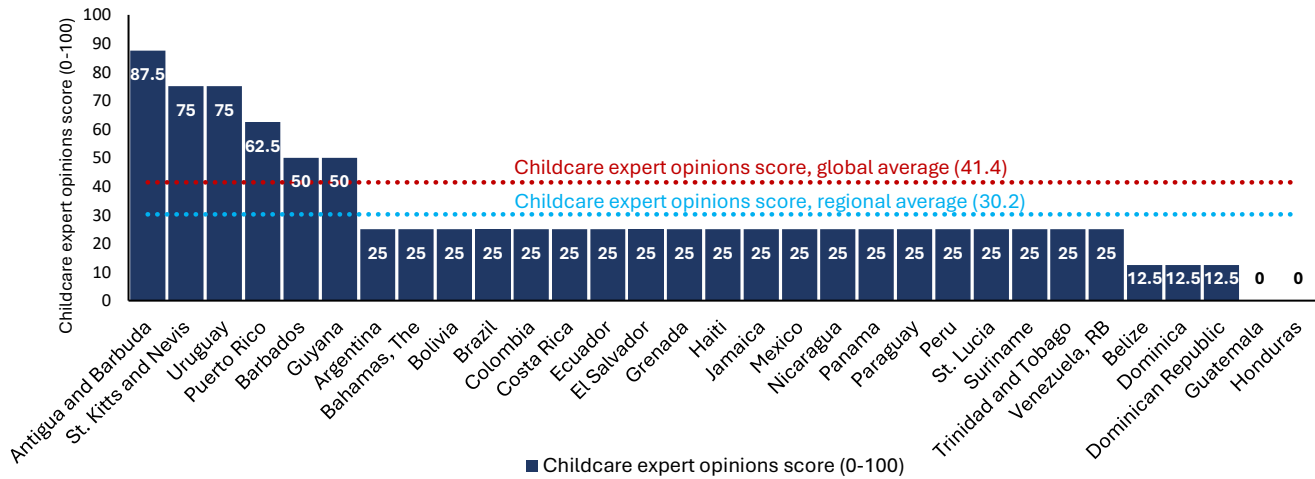
Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Note: 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 scoring methodology are available at: <https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/sites/wbl/documents/2024/WBL2024-Data-Notes.pdf>

Within Latin America and the Caribbean, experts diverge on their perceptions. For example, experts are more optimistic in Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Uruguay, where they perceive that 75 percent or more women have access to affordable and quality childcare services (figure 11). In Belize, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Honduras, perceptions of the same outcome are least optimistic, with experts perceiving that only about 12 percent or fewer women have access to affordable and quality childcare services. This finding suggests that a critical need for childcare remains inadequately addressed in practice, at least according to the collected perceptions.



FIGURE 11: CHILDCARE EXPERT OPINIONS SCORE (0-100) IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, BY ECONOMY



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

Note: 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 scoring methodology are available at:

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

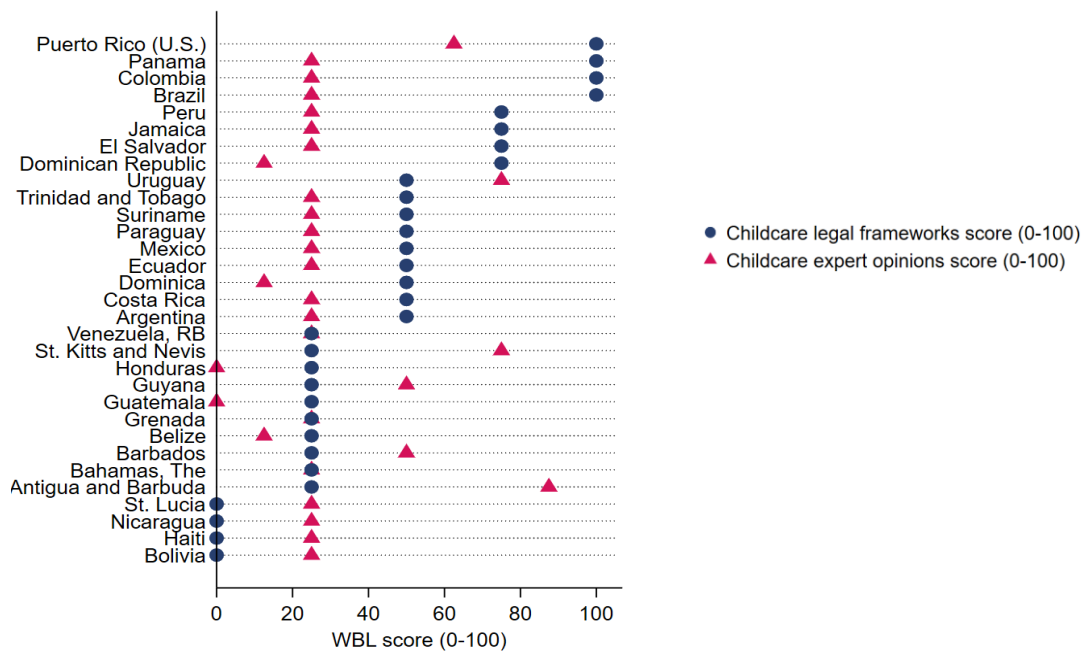
Childcare expert opinions and legal frameworks do not always align directly. Comparing the two measures at the economy level within the region reveals some interesting conclusions. The average scores for expert opinions are typically much lower than the legal frameworks scores (figure 12). This suggests not only 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 a few exceptions, including Uruguay and four economies in the Caribbean (Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, Saint Kitts and Nevis), where expert opinions scores are much 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 República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Grenada, and The Bahamas, expert opinions scores align with the legal frameworks scores underscoring that the laws typically realize women’s rights in practice. Nonetheless, despite this alignment both scores remain



low. This could indicate that as the laws improve and are properly implemented, the perceptions of experts may also improve.

FIGURE 12: EXPERTS’ ASSESSMENT OF WOMEN’S ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE AND QUALITY CHILDCARE SERVICES IN PRACTICE ARE LOWER ON AVERAGE THAN THE LEGAL FRAMEWORKS SUGGEST



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.

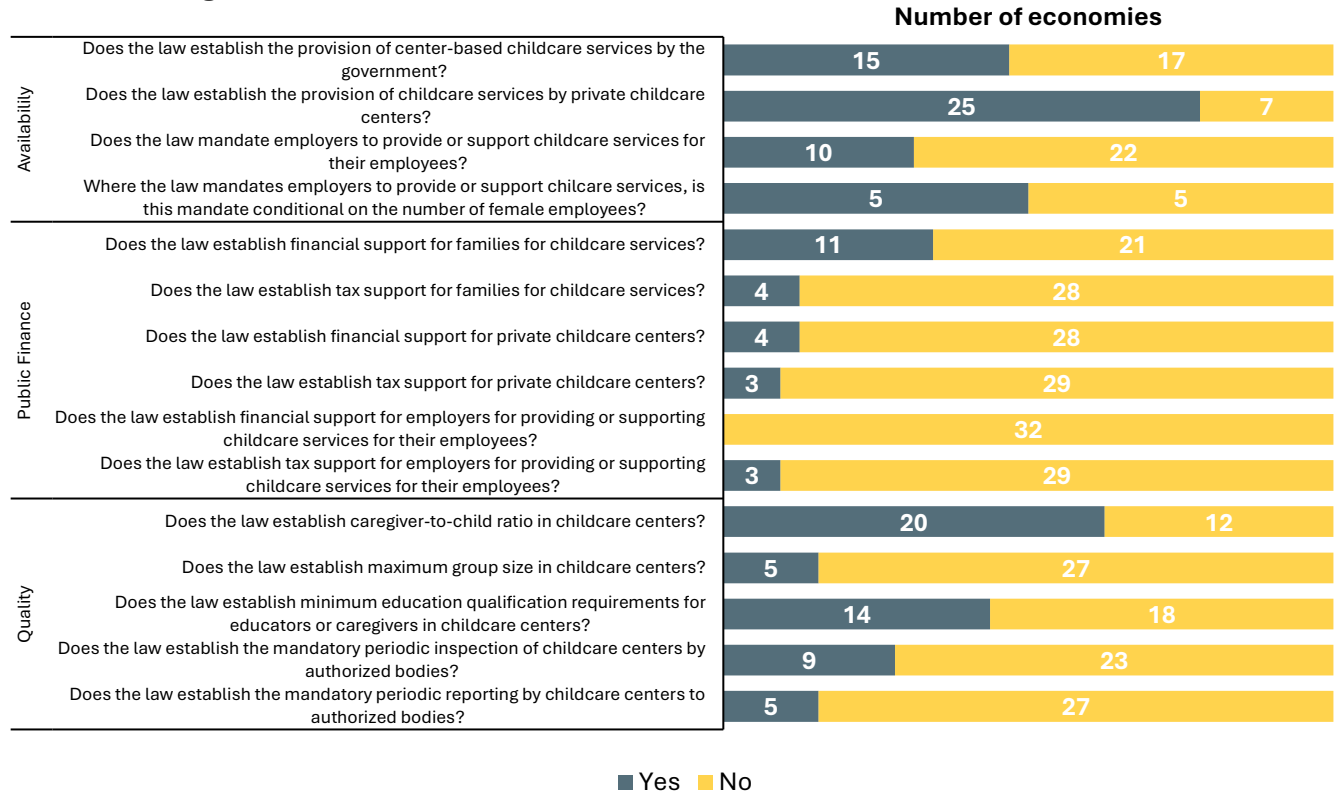
Note: Economies are sorted by the legal frameworks score average, from highest to lowest. The sample size is restricted to the 31 economies for which expert opinions data are available. St. Vincent and the Grenadines is excluded from the graph due to the missing expert opinions data. Higher expert opinions 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 the 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.

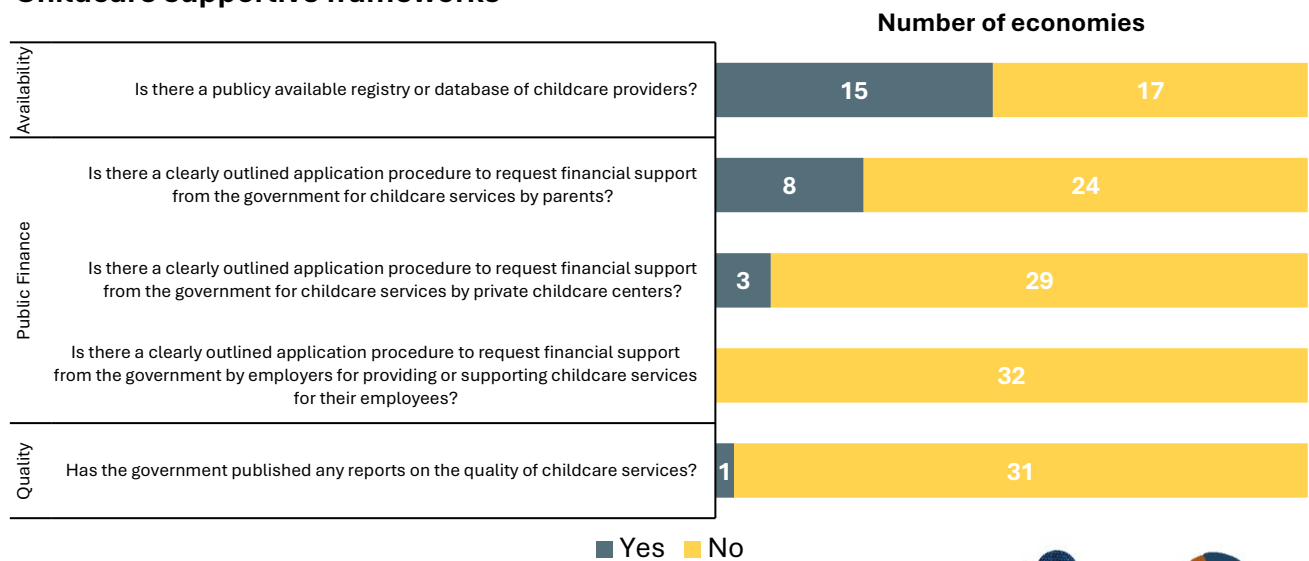


ANNEX: REGIONAL TRENDS BY DATA POINT

Childcare legal frameworks

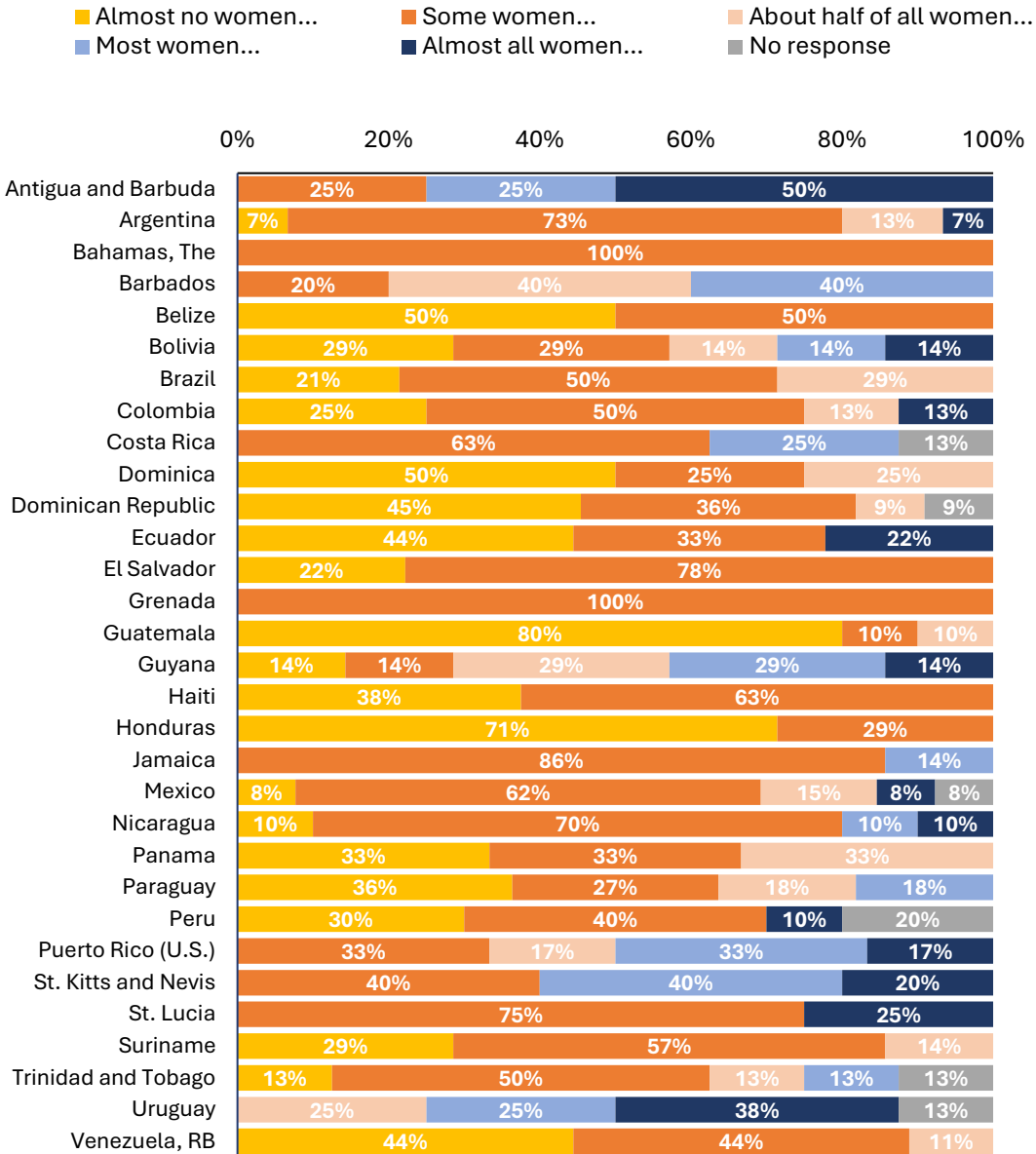


Childcare supportive frameworks



Distribution of expert opinion responses by economy

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



Source: Women, Business and the Law 2024.



DATA COLLECTION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Data was collected in 32 economies in Latin America and the Caribbean: Antigua and Barbuda; Argentina; Bahamas, The; Barbados; Belize; Bolivia; Brazil; Colombia; Costa Rica; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; El Salvador; Grenada; Guatemala; Guyana; Haiti; Honduras; Jamaica; Mexico; Nicaragua; Panama; Paraguay; Peru; Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Suriname; Trinidad and Tobago; Uruguay; and República Bolivariana de Venezuela. 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 Latin America and the Caribbean. 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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