

SPAIN

Key Contextual Data

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Sources are outlined at the end of each section. Full details of all sources are to be found in the references section at the end of the key contextual data profile. Individual statistical data used in tables are indicated by an asterisk*, both in the table and in the sources.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

ECEC system type and auspices

Early childhood education and care in Spain is organised as an integrated system under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (*Ministro de Educación, Cultura y Deporte*, MECS). The Ministry regulates the system overall, and the education authorities in the Autonomous Communities are responsible for organising and managing ECEC provision. The municipalities (in cooperation with the Autonomous Communities authorities) are mostly responsible for regulated provision for children under 3 years of age.

Sources: Eurydice 2015.
Ancheta Arrabal, A. 2017.

General objectives and legislative framework

Early childhood education and care in Spain was first recognised in the 1990 Education Act as an integrated, non-compulsory stage of education in its own right. Key objectives include ensuring every child's right to education, maintaining equal access, and providing parents with freedom of choice in terms of the setting. The 2006 Education Act (*Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación*), which was amended in 2013 to accommodate the Improving Educational Quality Act (*Ley Orgánica 8/2013, de 9 de diciembre, para la mejora de la calidad educativa*), is the underpinning legal framework for the Spanish education system. Early childhood education is defined as the first stage in the education system and comprises two cycles, the first for children under 3 years of age and the second for children aged 3 to 6 years.

The goals and content as well as evaluation and organisation of the first cycle are regulated by the Autonomous Communities. The State is responsible for the second cycle and the Autonomous Communities adapt State regulations to the conditions in each region – or extend them in their capacity as the responsible body for education.

The overarching goals of early childhood education are to promote the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of each child in close cooperation with the children's families. Fostering a positive self-image and personal autonomy play an important part in the strategies implemented to reach these goals.

Source: Eurydice 2015.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory enrolment age

All children aged 3 to 6 years are entitled to a free place in ECEC provision for 25 hours weekly. Attendance is voluntary. As from 2008, some Autonomous Communities started to offer this provision to 2-year olds as part of a pilot initiative. Nowadays it has become quite common for 2-year olds to be admitted into pre-primary education settings if places are available.

Statutory primary school begins at age 6.

Source: European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, and Eurostat 2014.

Main types of provision

Early childhood centres for children up to compulsory school age may be free-standing or attached to a primary school. First-cycle ECEC provision is either exclusively for under 3-year olds (*centros incompletos de primer ciclo*) or part of an integrated early childhood centre for 0- to 6-year olds (*escuela de educación infantil unificada*). Second-cycle early childhood education for 3- to 6-year olds is provided either as part of an integrated centre or as a separate unit within a primary school (*colegio de educación infantil y primaria*).

In both cycles, service providers may be public, private-non-profit (subsidised) or private for-profit (non-subsidised).

In some Autonomous Communities the length of attendance for under 3-year olds is limited to eight hours per day. In general, these settings are available for 25 hours per week, but opening times may vary according to the service provider. Public provision, for example, is usually open each weekday for a total of 35 hours per week.

The opening times of second-cycle public and publicly-subsidised private settings are the same as those in primary schools, i.e. they are closed for up to three months during the summer. In private settings, particularly in those for under 3-year olds, opening times are mostly adapted to suit the needs of families.

Sources: European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, and Eurostat 2014.
Eurydice 2015.

Provider structures

The number of groups in early childhood centres for children below 6 years of age in 2014/15 totalled 99,279. Almost two thirds were offered by public providers.

Table 1

Spain: Number of groups and children in early childhood centres according to provider, 2014/2015*

Provider	Number of groups	Number of children
Public ECEC centres	63,047 (63.5%)	1,177,233 (64%)
Private ECEC centres	36,232 (36.5%)	662,775 (36%)
Total	99,279	1,840,008

First cycle: In 2013/14, a total of 9,296 ECEC centres provided exclusively for under 3-year olds. Almost half of these (46.4%; 4,310) were publicly-run, 14.4% (1,340) private/subsidised and 39.2% (3,646) private (see Table 2).

Second cycle: The proportion of publicly-run ECEC centres is much higher in second-cycle provision. Of a total of 14,274 centres, roughly three quarters (10,625; 74.4%) were publicly-run, over one fifth (3,073; 21.5%) private/subsidised and only 4% (576) privately-run**.

Table 2

Spain: Number of ECEC settings according to provider and cycle, 2013/2014**

	First cycle	Second cycle
Public ECEC centres	4,310	10,625
Private/subsidised ECEC centres	1,340	3,073
Private, non-subsidised ECEC centres	3,646	576
Total	9,296	14,274

Sources: **Eurydice 2015, 2016.
*INE 2017, 69.

Participation rates in regulated provision

In 2015, almost all children (96.7%) aged 3 to 6 years were enrolled in ECEC provision. The overall participation rate for under 6-year olds amounted to 66.9%. Just over one third (34%) of under 3-year olds are enrolled. *Table 3* shows the number of children in ECEC provision and the enrolment ratio disaggregated according to age.

Table 3

Spain: Number and enrolment in ECEC provision according to age groups, 2015*

Age group	Number	Enrolment ratio, in %
Under 2 years	193,278	22.7
2-year olds	250,587	55.4
0- to under 3-year olds	443,865	34.0⁺
3-year olds	448,378	94.8
4-year olds	466,494	97.4
5-year olds	477,802	97.6
3- to under 6-year olds	1,392,674	96.7⁺
0- to under 6-year olds	1,836,539	66.9⁺

* Own calculations based on Eurostat child population data from 2015.

Sources: *Eurostat 2017g, 2017h.

Financing and costs for parents

Public ECEC provision is funded by the State. The Ministry of Education is responsible for distributing funds to the Autonomous Communities for the provision of early childhood centres. The Communities have high funding autonomy and decide independently on how the budget should be used. For the building and upkeep of early childhood centres, the local authorities receive funds through tax revenues, as well as funding from the State and Community budgets.

Private centres which have a contract with the local education authority and fulfil certain criteria are also subsidised through the State budget.

Parental fees for the care of children below age 3 are decided by the service provider. However, they may not exceed a ceiling of 319€¹ per month (not including meals). No enrolment fees are required for 3- to 6-year olds in publicly-run and private/subsidised settings, which are free of charge apart from meals. However, the private/subsidised settings in particular are increasingly asking for (voluntary) donations for a variety of reasons, e.g. material resources, visits and excursions, which some families – particularly since the economic crisis – are finding it very difficult to meet, particularly since over the last decade 1 in 3 of children under 6 years of age live in relative poverty households.* The private for-profit settings can charge the fees they wish and also ask for additional donations.

¹ The amounts in Euro refer to the artificial common reference currency unit PPS (Purchase Power Standard) used in the European Union to express the volume of economic aggregates for the purpose of cross national comparisons. (European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice and Eurostat 2014, 156)

Sources: European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice 2015.
Eurydice 2016.
Pérez F. and E. Uriel 2016.
*Save the Children 2015, 20-21.

Staff-child ratios

Group size in the *first cycle* is not centrally regulated. However, most Autonomous Communities provide specifications. On average, one qualified member of staff is responsible for 8 children under 1 year of age, 12 to 14 1- to 2-year olds and 16 to 20 2- to 3-year olds.

The Ministry of Education and the local education authorities regulate group size in the *second cycle*. The maximum group size for children between 3 and 6 years of age is 25. At least one member of staff must have a relevant qualification at university level.

Sources: European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice 2015, 2016.
Eurydice 2016.

Curricular Frameworks

Following the 2006 Education Act, a core curriculum (objectives, content, evaluation criteria) was provided for the second cycle in 2007 by the State through the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport. The Autonomous Communities adapt this framework to match local conditions. Each EC centre has its own development plan which further adapts the core curricular requirements to local, centre-specific needs and also includes organisational aspects.

However, the ways in which the Autonomous Communities adapt the core curriculum differ widely. Some produce just one framework for both cycles, some for each cycle separately and others just for the second cycle.

In the core curriculum three broad areas of learning are highlighted: 1) self-knowledge and personal autonomy; building one's own identity; 2) knowledge about the environment; 3) language, communication and representation: expressing feelings and thoughts, interactions with others.

The following goals are emphasised: learning about one's own body and respecting differences; observing and exploring the (social) environment; acquiring autonomy; developing emotional competence; interacting with others and practising peaceful conflict solutions; developing communication skills, also in other languages; beginning the acquisition of logical-mathematical, reading and writing skills; developing expressive skills through gestures and rhythm/movement.

During the second year in the second cycle (5- to 6-year olds), the local education authorities are expected to ensure the introduction of a foreign language, reading, writing, basic numeracy, information and communication technologies, and visual and musical expression. Religious aspects of the curriculum are set out in documents provided by the religious communities. It is the responsibility of each EC centre to provide alternatives for children whose parents so wish.

Books and material resources used in the EC centres have to be approved by the local education authority.

Sources: European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice 2016.
Eurydice 2015.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

Children with special educational needs generally attend mainstream ECEC provision. They are enrolled in segregated provision only if their specific needs cannot be met in a regular setting.

The Royal Law-Decree which came into force in 2015 (*Real Decreto-ley 9/2015, de 10 de julio, de medidas urgentes para reducir la carga tributaria soportada por los contribuyentes del Impuesto sobre la Renta de las Personas Físicas y otras medidas de carácter económico*), focuses primarily on disadvantaged families and providing support through tax concessions.

The 2012-2020 National Strategy on the Social Inclusion of the Roma people (*Estrategia Nacional para la Inclusión Social de la Población Gitana en España*) shows that progress has been made regarding the participation of Roma children in EC centres and primary schools. However, enrolment rates are still significantly below those of Spanish children, although there are some signs of increasing participation.

Children with a background of migration

In 2016, 9.5% of the total population in Spain had a non-Spanish background, with well over half of these persons (56.2%) coming from non-EU countries. In the under-5s age group, 11.2% of children have a background of migration, with the greater majority (71.1%) coming from non-EU countries*.

In 2014/15, 149,984 children in early childhood centres (*educación infantil/ preescolar*) had a non-Spanish background. 43.9% of these children came from African countries, 26.2% from other EU states and 12.6% from Latin American countries**.

Sources: EPIC 2016.
*Eurostat 2017f.
**INE 2017, 91 (own calculation).

Monitoring – Evaluation – Research

The Ministry of Education provides a framework of reference criteria for the assessment of children which may be adapted by the Autonomous Communities. However, not all Autonomous Communities ensure that both cycles of the ECEC system are evaluated.

At the beginning of the child's settling-in period, each ECEC centre carries out an initial or baseline evaluation within the framework of its centre-specific development plan. This is followed up by regular assessments. At the end of the year, a concluding assessment is made, describing the competencies and skills which each child has acquired. The education authorities expect three formal evaluations to take place each year which inform families in a written report of their child's progress. The centre head usually conducts observations or interviews with the parents for these evaluations. Screening instruments are also used to identify possible developmental delays.

External evaluations of ECEC provision may be carried out by the Education Inspectorate, the inspection authorities of the Autonomous Communities, the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (affiliated to the Ministry of Education), and evaluation agencies in the Autonomous Communities.

Inspections conducted by Education Inspectorate officials aim to check compliance with legal requirements and to define the rights and duties of all those involved in the learning process. Both the general management of the centre and the educational programme are reviewed. The aims of these inspections and evaluations are to strengthen educational quality, enhance transparency and improve efficacy. They are usually carried out three times a year, depending on the resources of the Autonomous Community.

Some Autonomous Communities provide guidance on procedures of self-evaluation. These are generally conducted once a year.

In recent years, government-funded research on early childhood education in Spain has experienced a decline. This is partly due to the general economic constraints on the public Research and Development budget, and partly because these constraints have had a major impact on areas which had previously received little attention, such as the ECEC institutions. For this reason, research institutions or groups depend mainly on third-party funding, and the expansion and focus of research is based on private interests rather than public interest in early childhood education. Among current research topics are the following: digital technologies, action research, emotional education, innovation.

Sources: Eurydice 2015, 2017.
OECD 2015.

Parental leave arrangements

Maternity leave (*permiso y prestación por maternidad*) is granted for 16 weeks. Six of these are obligatory and must be taken after the birth. Providing social insurance contributions have been paid for at least 180 days over the previous seven years, earnings continue to be paid in full up to a ceiling of 3.751€ (2017) per month. Mothers who do not fulfil this requirement receive a monthly flat rate of 532€.

Fathers in employment are granted two fully paid **paternity days** (*permiso de paternidad*) to be taken at the time of the birth and, since January 2017, four weeks of **paternity leave** (*permiso por nacimiento*) to be taken in one piece before the end of the maternity leave period.

Parental leave (*excedencia por cuidado de hijos*) can be taken by both parents up to three years after birth. During the first year, returning to the same place of employment is guaranteed. Apart from social insurance contributions, this leave is unpaid. During the first nine months after birth, both mothers and fathers in employment can take one hour per day off without a reduction in salary.

In 2015, 62.2% of eligible mothers received a maternity benefit. However, as a result of austerity measures, there is an observable trend of a sinking proportion. The proportion of fathers making use of paternity leave is also sinking – over 16 percentage points (16.4%) between 2010 and 2014 – largely because of the sinking birth rate and growing unemployment. In 2015, 56.8% of eligible fathers made use of paternity leave.

In 2012, 10.4% of eligible mothers took up parental leave, but only 0.5% of fathers. Most mothers took it directly following maternity leave and for one year at the most (85%). Following the period of parental leave, all fathers returned to their job, but only 55% of mothers; 35% continued working, but part time.

Source: Meil, G., I. Lapuerta, and A. Escobedo 2017.

Historical highlights and shifts

1857	First early childhood institutions established in regions with more than 10,000 inhabitants
Early 20th century	Following a phase of expansion at the beginning of the century, a strong slump in provision during the Spanish Civil War

1960s	Increasing maternal employment leads to renewed expansion of early childhood institutions
1970	Education Act: introduction of preschool education for 4- to 5-year olds
As from 1975	Expansion of state-funded pre-primary education
1980 - 1990	Experimental plans for the new ECE settings that the 1990 Education Act then embraced
1990	Education Act: introduction of the basic right to education. Early childhood centres for under 3's and 3- to 6-year olds are integrated into the education system and organised in two cycles
1991	Transfer of competences on ECE from the National Government to the Autonomous Communities concerning the regulation of the curriculum.
2006	Education Act confirms the integrated approach towards early childhood education
2013	Education Act amendments, but not specifically relevant for ECEC regulation

Source: Ancheta Arrabal, A. 2011.

Current challenges for the system of Early Childhood Education and Care in Country

Country expert assessment by Ana Ancheta Arrabal

There is an urgent need for more institutional attention and public investment in the ECEC system. Governmental, fiscal and budgetary constraints are leading to an increasing reliance on private financing, mainly through families, but also through employers. This is particularly the case in terms of provision for the under 3-year olds. Access to ECEC services has become increasingly dependent on the alternatives offered by private providers. It is therefore crucial to address inequality of access among low-income families who may find it challenging, if not impossible, to pay the fees often required by private providers. Thus, public-private partnerships need to be regulated in terms of the costs for parents, since this is the only way to protect the rights of all young children in an equitable way*. The last decade has seen even larger disparities in terms of equity of access to high quality ECEC in the individual Autonomous Communities than were traditionally the case. Moreover, current efforts are not likely to ameliorate the lack of equitable access, thus reproducing the historical transmission of social exclusion. The differences in quality between ECEC institutions in Spain are also reproduced through the personnel who work in ECEC in terms of inequities in career regulations and working conditions (see the Workforce Profile for Spain in this publication).

In conclusion, we can say that the tension between quality and equity in ECEC is still significant and a main challenge to be solved in the diverse territories of Spain. This inequality undermines the principle anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to guarantee education for all children as one of the ratified rights**. Unfortunately there is no national programme in Spain to ensure access to pre-primary education for children from low-income families. The incomplete and under-developed societal dialogue surrounding ECEC, which mirrors the discourses at other levels of the education system, remains a further policy challenge in terms of the sector's further development.

Sources: **Ancheta Arrabal, A. 2011.
*Ancheta Arrabal, A. and J. Zhang 2016.

Demographic data

Total population

In 2016, the population in Spain totalled 46,445,828. This is a further indication of a steady increase in numbers over the past 20 years (1995 total: 39,343,100 and 2005 total: 43,296,338).

Children under 6 years of age

In 2016, children under age 3 accounted for 2.7% and children under 6 years of age for 5.8% of the total population. Since 2005 these percentage rates have been lower than the EU average, whereas in 1995 they were slightly above.

Table 4

Spain: Children under 6 years of age, 2016.

Age of children	Number of children
Under age 1	419,395
1-year olds	429,530
2-year olds	427,406
Under age 3 total	1,276,331
3-year olds	453,587
4-year olds	472,844
5-year olds	478,775
Total 3- to under 6-year olds	1,405,206
Total 0- to under 6-year olds	2,681,537

Table 5

Spain: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population compared with EU average, 1995 to 2016, in %[†]

Age	1995	Ø EU15 ²	2005	Ø EU25	2016	Ø EU28
Under 3-year olds	3.4	3.3	2.8	3.1	2.7	3.0
3- to under 6-year olds	3.6	3.5	2.9	3.1	3.0	3.1
0- to under 6-year olds	7.0	6.9	5.7	6.2	5.8	6.2

[†] own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Source: Eurostat 2017a.

Single households with children under age 6

In 2015, 77.4% of households with children under age 6 were couple households. Single parent households accounted for 2.7%, whereby these were almost exclusively single mother households (2.3%).

² The 1995 data are for the EU15 countries at the time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK); the 2005 data (EU25) also include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2014 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR.

Table 6

Spain: Households with children under age 6, 2015

Household type	Total households	Total households in per cent ⁺
Households – total	4,843,000	
Couple households	3,746,500	77.4
Other types of households	966,600	20.0
Single households, total	129,800	2.7
Single households, women	110,600	2.3
Single households, men	19,200	0.4

⁺Own calculations, ^{**} data computed

Source: Eurostat 2017e.

Employment rates of parents with children under age 6

In 2015, the employment rate of men (aged 15 to 64) in Spain was 62.9% and that of women 52.7%.

Of the women with children under 6 years of age, only 59% were employed in 2015, whereas 79% of men with children of the same age were in the labour market. Both employment rates, especially those of fathers in Spain, were below the EU28 average in 2015.

Table 7

Spain: Employment rates of parents with children under age 6 compared with other EU states, 2005-2015⁺

	Year	Mothers in per cent	Fathers in per cent
Spain	2005	55.1	90.5
	2010	56.6	77.5
	2015	59.0	79.0
European Union	EU15 – 2005	77.3	93.5
	EU27 – 2010	75.2	92.7
	EU28 – 2015	61.0	87.3
Highest rate of employment	2005	Slovenia – 76.8	Cyprus – 95.3
	2010	Slovenia – 76.7	Netherlands – 93.5
	2015	Sweden – 78.9	Malta/Czech Republic – 93.0
Lowest rate of employment	2005	Malta – 29.3	Bulgaria – 72.4
	2010	Hungary – 32.7	Latvia – 74.8
	2015	Hungary – 38.8	Bulgaria – 77.3

⁺own calculations

Sources: Eurostat 2017b.

Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010.

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion³

In 2015, 29% of children under age 6 in Spain were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This is above the EU28 average (=24.7%) for this age group. The proportion of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion within the overall population totalled 28.6%.

Source: Eurostat 2017d.

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³ ‘At risk of poverty or social exclusion’ refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity.

(<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdsc100&plugin=1>)

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