

## **Case study report: Spain**

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## Introduction

Country background information	Data
Population: Number of inhabitants Birth rate Number of children population (preschool children <6) Number of young people under 18 Share of immigrants	46,704,308 (demo_pjan, Eurostat 2013) 9.7 (tps00112, Eurostat 2012) 1,921,055(demo_pjan, Eurostat 2012) <sup>280</sup> 8,367,727 (Eurostat 2012, demo_pjan) <sup>281</sup> 14.19% (tps00178, Eurostat 2012)
Labour force participation of women (15 years and over) with young children (at least one children younger than 6 years)	58.9% (lfst_hheredch, Eurostat 2012)
Length and payment of maternity and parental leave	<p><b>Maternity leave:</b> Sixteen weeks: six weeks are obligatory and must be taken following the birth, while the remaining ten weeks can be taken before or after birth. By consolidating an entitlement to reduced working hours, mothers can in practice extend maternity leave by two to four weeks (<i>permiso de lactancia</i>, originally to support breastfeeding) receiving 100% of earnings up to a ceiling of €3.230 a month. A flat-rate benefit (€532.51 per month or €17.75 per day) is paid for 42 days to all employed women who do not meet eligibility requirements. Financed by social insurance contributions from employers and employees. As a general rule, employers pay 23.6% of gross earnings and employees pay 4.7% to cover common contingencies which include pensions, sickness and leaves (<i>contingencias comunes</i>). An additional contribution is paid to cover unemployment.</p> <p><b>Parental leave:</b> Each parent is entitled to take leave until three years after childbirth. Leave is an individual right. During the first year, return to the same job position is protected; after the first year, job protection is restricted to a job of the same category. No payment.<sup>282</sup></p>
Social expenditure as % of GDP Child poverty rate: Total (under 18 years old) For children less than 6 years old	25.19% of GDP (spr_exp_sum, Eurostat 2010) 33.8% (ilc_peps01, Eurostat 2012) 27.4% (ilc_peps01, Eurostat 2012)
Education expenditure as % of GDP: Total ISCED 0 ISCED 1 ISCED 2-4	4.97 % of GDP(educ_figdp, Eurostat 2010) 0.70 % of GDP(educ_figdp, Eurostat 2010) 1.27% of GDP(educ_figdp, Eurostat 2010) 1.84% of GDP(educ_figdp, Eurostat 2010)
Employment rate of people with low qualifications Early leavers from education and training by sex and employment status (employed early school leavers)	ISCED 0-2 16.8% (lfsa_ergaed, Eurostat 2012) 9.3% (edat_lfse_14, Eurostat 2012)

<sup>280</sup> Counted by PPMI team based on Eurostat data

<sup>281</sup> Counted by PPMI team based on Eurostat data

<sup>282</sup> International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2012 edited by Peter Moss, Institute of Education University of London

Education system design	Data
Access to formal education regardless of legal status	Yes
Catchment area requirement	In certain non-university education levels and regions.
Age of first ability tracking	16
(De-)centralisation of the education system	Curriculum Framework is established centrally and it is developed by regions. Educational institutions prepare their own plans based on it. Teachers select books from the list prepared by Pedagogical Coordination Commission; or the Commission must approve books suggested by teachers. Although the basic framework and legislation is established by the Central Government, employment (both volumes and some employment conditions) are largely regulated by regions.

## Inputs and process

### Quality of governance

#### **ECEC governance quality:**

**Law:** The 2006 Organic Act on Education (LOE) establishes Pre-Primary Education; the just passed Organic Law on the Improvement of the Quality of Education (hereafter, LOMCE), passed in December 2013 introduces some minor changes.

**Responsible ministry:** Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport. The whole level is managed and funded by Autonomous Communities (regional governments) and combines public and publicly funded private education centres. In the first cycle (0-3 years old), local authorities (municipalities and counties) has also some participation –more in management than in funding- that tends to be transferred to regional authorities. The Central Government has also subsidized the expansion of the first cycle level since the mid2000s up to the crisis.

**Type of ECEC system:** Unitary, although the first cycle had certain components of welfare.

**Autonomy of ECEC institutions:** The Spanish Central Government is responsible for establishing the core curricula, corresponding to the basic aspects of the curriculum (objectives, in terms of skills, methodological principles, contents and assessment criteria), and the minimum requirements of schools and to control the academic and professional certificates valid throughout the national territory. Regional Government develops the curricula in detail (setting the official curricula) and each school must adapt the curriculum to its own socio-economic and cultural context, establish general methodological criteria and adopt any appropriate decisions regarding the assessment process. The curricula can even be tailored to every child. Schools can enjoy autonomy in most of the features excepting teachers' hiring. Teacher recruitment (volume and working conditions) is in hands of regional authorities taking into account a basic framework set by Central Government. Teachers at public centres are civil servants that had to pass public examinations. Teacher recruitment in publicly-funded private schools should be made through open calls, but they can require that candidates agrees with centres' thinking (for instance, to be religious in some private schools). Teachers of religion are selected by the bishopric on a completely discretionary basis.

**Monitoring of ECEC quality:** There are formal monitoring systems/procedures of ECEC services, established by both Central and Regional Governments and involving both internal and external evaluations. Education inspectors at the regional level mean the main instrument of evaluation, while internal self-assessment is in progress. There are significant levels of development of these procedures across regions.

### **Data collection**

The National Statistics Institute and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (whose acronym, in Spanish is MECI), in cooperation with Autonomous Communities, offer through its website a relevant volume of information, combining administrative data with information obtained from population estimates and household surveys. Firstly, regarding inputs, there is available statistical information on children enrolment in pre-primary education (by sex, age, type of centre, province, foreign-born status, the existence of special educational needs and the activity status of their

parents), educational infrastructure of authorized schools (number of centres, human resources, group size, teacher-student ratio, ancillary services like transport or canteen, opening hours, average number of hours, computer-student and teacher-student ratio, internet access at the school) and spending (not very detailed, basically volume and scholarships). This information is available on an annual basis. The desirable level of disaggregation is not available in many cases. For instance, figures of pre-primary (both cycles 0-3 and 3-6) and primary education are aggregated within the same category. Regarding outputs, available statistics are limited to the average number of years of pre-primary education and age of entry, which can be even considered as inputs. Most of this information can be easily accessed through summary reports like Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (2012, 2013a and 2013b). Regions also offer their own information with different levels of detail and quality and it is almost always less detailed and systematic than the national indicators commented above. In addition, an agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport has carried out a pilot evaluation study in 2007 (Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport, 2008). Unfortunately, apart from being bit outdated, this evaluation only focuses on the last grade of pre-primary education, when children are roughly 5 years old and includes both public and private centres. Nevertheless, since 75% of centres surveyed are public and at this educational level there are many private schools that are publicly funded, the study provides valuable insights on the performance of pre-primary education not available elsewhere. Finally, there is some additional summary information on pre-primary education in Spain in Eurostat and mainly in OECD databases, although most of it can be derived from the previous primary sources.

Apart from this publicly available information, public authorities collect an impressive amount of information on the functioning of the pre-primary education system (both cycles) as part of the internal and external evaluations. These processes comprises virtually all aspects of education (inputs, procedures and outputs) and the participation of all agents (schools, staff, families) but authorities and, as a rule, neither public administrations nor schools disseminate it, create systematic databases or make it available for academic researchers. Overall, the procedures of evaluation are quite similar in pre-primary, primary and secondary education, though the tools and actors are modelled by the particularities of each level. For instance, in pre-primary education, there are not standardized tests and the children cannot participate in the evaluation process as in other higher levels.

### ***Governance structure***

Prior to discuss the main features of the monitoring procedures, it is convenient to outline the main elements that shape the governance of pre-primary education in Spain. It is worth mentioning, in order to avoid confusions, that most features of the governance systems are shared with primary school, not only in the obvious case when primary is also taught at the same centre (more details on the type of centres teaching pre-primary education are presented in the subsection devoted to access quality. As mentioned in the chart, several levels of government participate in the governance of this level of education. Firstly, the Central State sets the minimum requirements of the schools, establishes the general programme of Education, sets the core curricula and controls the academic and professional certificates valid throughout the national territory. Secondly, Autonomous Communities assumes the regulations developed by the State rules and for the non-basic elements or aspects of system and the executive and administrative competences for managing the Education System in its own territory. In the case of pre-primary education, it is common to find cases

where regions delegate the exercise of their functions to the municipalities in aspects having a direct impact on them. For instance, they allow for the existence and creation of local schools of first-cycle pre-primary education. In addition, there are programs of cooperation between the different levels of government and affecting to different areas, particularly, to training actions or plans of compensatory education. Educational centres represent the last level of governance. Schools have autonomy for preparing, enacting and executing a school development plan and a management plan, as well as the rules for organising and running the school, within the framework established by the State and Regional regulation. Particularly, the responsibility of the governance of pre-primary education at the school level lies on two collegial bodies, the School Board and the Teachers' Assembly, and the Leadership Team, composed by the School Head (the principal), the Head Teacher and the Secretary.

The School Board is the governing body of the institution in both pre-primary schools and in centres that include pre-primary and other higher levels (typically, primary and the first two years of mandatory secondary education). It requires the participation of all the education community, comprising the Leadership Team, a representative of the school management and services staff, a regional minister or representative of the City Council and teachers', parents' and students' representatives. The representatives are democratically elected and, usually, parents' and teachers' representatives mean at least 1/3 of the total components of the School Board. Obviously, the participation of students is very limited (it depends on the region and school, but, as a rule, at most, only students in the last courses of primary school, in those centres with primary and pre-primary education, can participate with a tiny role).

The School Board passes and evaluates the school development plan, the management plan, the school organisation and running rules; it participates in the process of appointment of the Leadership Team; it decides upon admissions (based on the regulations); it evaluates the general running of the centre and prepare reports and formulate proposals for quality improvement; it promotes gender equality, peaceful coexistence in the centre and the maintenance of school infrastructure; determines the ways of collaborating with local authorities and other institutions and it analyses the academic performance and the results of both internal and external evaluations. Some of the competences related to the approval of the Yearly General Programme (schools' organization and running necessary for each school year, including the teaching programme, the rules and all the agreed and approved action plans) and those concerning admission decisions and guidelines for collaborating with other organisms will be transferred to the School Head. According to Eurydice, the Teachers' Assembly has the following functions: it formulates proposals to the Leadership Team and the School Board for drawing up the school projects and the Yearly General Programme; it passes and assesses the definition of the curriculum and all the educational aspects of the school projects and the Yearly General Programme; it establishes criteria regarding students' guidance, tutorship, evaluation and retake; it promotes initiatives in the field of pedagogic experimentation and research and in the training of the teachers of the school; it chooses their representatives in the School Board, be informed of the list of candidates for the post of School Head and participate in the selection; it analyses and assess the general running of the school, the evolution of the academic performance and the results of the internal and external evaluations in which the school takes part; it informs about the rules for the organisation and running of the school; it suggests measures and initiatives favouring coexistence and it know the resolution of disciplinary conflicts and the imposition of sanctions, as well as ensure that they comply with the regulations in force. In addition, there are several teaching coordination bodies that operate in pre-primary

and primary schools: teams of each education cycle (led by a coordinator), class teachers and the Pedagogical Commission. The latter body is usually composed by the School Head, the Head Teacher, the coordinators for each cycle, the person responsible for counselling of the school and in some Autonomous Communities and the support teacher (if available). It establishes the general guidelines for preparing and checking the curricular projects, formulates the proposals related to counselling, the tutorial action plan and teachers training, sets the criteria and procedures for curricular adaptations and promotes the evaluation of all the activities and projects carried out in the school.

Leadership Teams, composed (as mentioned) by the School Head, the Head Teacher and the Secretary, constitutes the leadership management team of the centre. The School Head is the most important figure of this team and his competences are represent the school, represent the Education Authority within the school and communicate to such authorities the ideas, aspirations and needs of the educational community; supervise and coordinate the activities of the school without detriment to the powers of the Teachers' Assembly and the School Board; be responsible for the pedagogical supervision, promote educational innovation and encourage plans in order to attain the goals of the school development plan; ensure that legislation and other regulations in force are observed; serve as the head to the school staff; foster coexistence, guarantee mediation in conflict resolution and impose the appropriate disciplinary measures against students according to regulations; encourage collaboration with families, institutions and organisations facilitating relations between the school and the environment, promote a school atmosphere which favours study and the implementation of other actions creating a favourable environment for pupils' acquisition of knowledge and values; promote internal evaluations and collaborate in external evaluations and in the evaluation of the teaching staff; call and preside over the academic events and meetings of the School Board and the Teachers' Assembly and implement the agreements reached by such bodies; contract works, services and supplies, as well as authorising expenses in accordance with the school budget, order payments and endorse the official school certifications and documents, as laid down by the Education Authorities and formulate proposals to the Education Authority as regards the appointment and dismissal of members of the management team, subsequent to notification to both the Teachers' Assembly and the School Board. In addition, LOMCE 2013 gives the School Head competences in admissions, the approval of the school development plan, guidelines for collaboration with other institutions and organisms and the approval of the obtaining of complementary resources for educational actions oriented to improve quality. The Head Teacher is the person responsible for all academic-educational matters in the school. Regarding pre-primary education, they are the responsible persons for encouraging the correct coexistence in the educational institution and guaranteeing the procedure of correction and for coordinating and ensuring the implementation of academic, guidance and supplementary activities for teachers and students. The School Secretary is in charge of economic administration and management. He/she has to establish the economic regime, coordinate and manage the administration and services staff, draw up the budget draft and/or project, act as secretary of the mixed-membership bodies, look after the archives of the educational institution, issue the certificates and ensure the maintenance of materials. The appointment of these two positions (Head Teacher and Secretary) lies on the following process: the School Head, having previously consulted the Teachers' Assembly and the School Council, drafts a proposal for the appointment to the Education Authorities of the rest of the members of the leadership team. The process of selection and appointment of the School Head, (term is used for managing person in kindergarten also), is far more complex. At public centres, the regional

authorities organises the selection processes, which consist in public merits competitions for positions of principals in schools where there is a vacant (in among civil servant teachers of any of the types of provision offered by the institution.<sup>283</sup> Applicants have to fulfil certain requirements (certain years of experience as teachers, being an active teacher in a school and other similar ones) and to submit a Leadership Project with objectives and main lines of action and assessment of the applicant. Each candidate submits their application for their preferred schools. For each position, a committee composed by members of Education Authorities and each school (some teachers and some non-teacher members of the Board Council that are democratically appointed) is created. The committee select the candidate applying a scale of objective merits established by regional authorities. Preference is given to candidates teaching at the school and in their absence, others are considered. The appointment is for four years, at the end of which a commission formed by education inspectors and school heads evaluates the performance of the head under scrutiny according to public criteria and a public scale of merits and heavily drawing on the reports written by the Education Inspection along the mandate. School Heads can renovate their position for several mandates (for instance, in Castile and León, 16 consecutive years at the same school are allowed). Apart from obvious reasons (disability, serious noncompliance, etc.), Education Authorities can remove the School Heads upon reasoned petition from the School Board. The legislation just enacted in December 2013 (LOMCE) considerably reduces the participation of the School Board in the process of appointment of the School Head at the expense of educational authorities. This regulation will be progressively implemented and there is still no data whether it is implemented accordingly everywhere. According to the primary education teacher interviewed for this study, the aim of this change is to ensure a larger political control of Leadership Teams and schools.

In the case of publicly-funded private schools, there are some differences. The governing bodies required by the law are the School Head, the School Board and the Teachers' Assembly. In this case, the School Head is appointed by consensus of the owner and the School Board. The competences of these bodies are similar to the ones that have in public centres, although the School Board is also involved in appointing and dismissing teachers and it is empowered to apply to the Education Authority for permission to establish complementary payments from parents to run extracurricular education activities. In addition, the publicly-funded private centres must make their school projects public.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

With relation to evaluation, there are mechanisms of both internal and external evaluation applicable to both public and publicly-funded schools.

Firstly, regarding external evaluation there are different tools.<sup>284</sup> The main actor here is Education Inspectorate. In this respect, the High Education Inspectorate, dependent of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (Central Government), is in charge of monitoring the basics of planning, curricula, rights and duties. Civil servants are teachers with long professional experience that passed specific public examinations. The most relevant role in external evaluation corresponds to the regional supervising

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<sup>283</sup> Some time ago, school head were elected by the their schools for a certain period; when such period for which the candidate was elected under the previous system expires, the vacant is called for applications.

<sup>284</sup> The views expressed in the report on the role of the Education Inspectorate is exclusively responsibility of the first authors, José-Ignacio Antón. They should not be attributed to the second author (María Luisa García).

authorities, the Education Inspectorate of each Autonomous Community. In addition to monitor the same core elements as the High Education Inspectorate, they supervise different features of the teaching staff, management teams, centres and students. In each region there is provincial office of education inspectors and, in turn, each province is subdivided in different educational areas that are assigned to specific inspectors. In this way, each supervisor has to monitor the functioning of certain centres. The way of implementing external evaluations differs across regions but, as a rule, they comprise all aspects of the education process (inputs, processes and outputs), interactions with all relevant actors (management teams, teaching staff and families) and a wide range of quantitative and qualitative techniques adapted to suit educational levels, including ECEC (direct observation, surveys, documentary analysis, analysis of academic results). Overall, the main objective of this external evaluation is to assess whether the education regulation is being followed in all areas (from infrastructure to teachers' training and families' participation), being, thus, an assessment of procedures to a large extent. At the same time, the inspectorate try to address the possible problems and special needs of the centres, provide advice and solve eventual conflicts in the centres. As mentioned, there are differences across regions, but some core features are common. Particularly, there are some highly frequent actions of monitoring and other wider and systematic procedures that are multiannual. For example, in the case of the region of Castile and León (where the focus groups and interviews were scheduled), there are regular visits to the schools on roughly a bimonthly basis, where the inspector mainly interacts and dialogues with the management teams of the assigned schools (Interview with an education inspector of Castile and León). Furthermore, each year, the Education Inspectorate randomly selects several schools that are subject to a very exhaustive and systematic scrutiny.

Unfortunately, the practical performance of the Education Inspectorate is far from which the law says in some aspects. The most important issue has to do with the fact that roughly 1/3 of total inspectors in the country have not passed the public exams required for the position as civil servants but are which is called accidental inspectors (Peña, 2013). Basically, the requirements for being an accidental inspector are the following: being a teacher civil servant at any educational level (apart from higher education), to have a long university degree, to be working in the region and to have certain years of experience. Paradoxically, there is no training period for accidental inspectors, which exists in the case of civil servant inspectors.

A similar procedure seems to have been implemented in Madrid (Álvarez, 2011). Accidental inspector positions are temporary. The existence of this position is only partly associated to the delay in public examinations and law changes, since there are very significant differences across regions. For instance, accidental inspectors represent more than 60% of total staff in 2013 in regions like Castile and León and Catalonia and less than 15% in Extremadura, Galicia and Castile-La Mancha. According to the Association of Education Inspectors, the percentage of accidental inspectors should not be above 10% according to these reasons (Association of Education Inspectors, 2009). According to the president of the association (Capellán, 2013), which includes 7 out of 10 inspectors, the procedures of appointment and selection of accidental inspectors are usually "*little orthodox*" and the prevalence of accidental inspectors contributes to "*a de-professionalization of the inspectorate*" and can jeopardize the "*political independence of inspectors*", which is the aim of the civil servant status. In the region where the field work was conducted, accidental inspectors accounted for 62.18% of total inspectors and they were selected on a yearly basis through simplified competitive procedures. For instance, in Castile and León, the process includes an interview that means 40% of the overall score, which is

a very high weight compared to other merits (professional trajectory, 20%; having passed some parts of public competitive examinations, 6.7%; having been part of a management team or having been educational coordinators; 20%; scientific and didactic formation and other merits, 13.3%). The selection committee was formed by the provincial head inspector (designated by the political authorities among the inspectors in the province) and two other inspectors selected by the head inspector.<sup>285</sup> According to some of the interviewees, who were asked specifically on this issue granting them total anonymity, unfortunately, accidental inspectors tend to be completely dependent on the political authorities, being far from their theoretical and entirely socially desired independence.<sup>286</sup> When asked, a mother belonging to a parents' association, a pre-primary education teacher and a primary education teacher, severely questioned the work of inspectors, pointing out the political nature of the selection of many of them, the generalisations made by inspectors from some punctual bad practises of some teachers and stating that they rarely enter the classrooms in pre-primary education.

In some regions, there are also external evaluations of management teams and teachers, not compulsory so far. Often, the procedure consists in an overall evaluation of the centre are considered that voluntarily decides to enter the process. Nevertheless, some elements of assessment associated to the performance of each teacher or member of the management team can be also included. The process is tailored to the specificities of pre-primary education when needed. A good mark can mean monetary and non-monetary rewards for the teaching and managing staff. The latter usually consists in the consideration of the positive evaluation as a merit for transfers to other schools, getting licenses or becoming a principal.

The last tie of external monitoring is based on the works carried out by the National Institute of Education Evaluation, part of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, which carries out research works of evaluation of the Spanish educational system, within which pre-primary education has a relevant role. An example is the pilot study of evaluation of the pre-primary system carried out in 2007 (Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport, 2008), basically a process evaluation that should have put the bases for further evaluations, because no evaluation design has been established in

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<sup>286</sup> This fact severely affected the use of the testimonies of inspectors collected in this study, which had to be confronted with other sources of information. For instance, they tended to blame public school teachers (*"their lack of flexibility"*, *"excessive stability that prevents motivation"*, etc.) about most of the problems of public education. Surprisingly, they constantly defended the regional government and never found any problem in infrastructure or availability of resources, severely affected by the crisis and highlighted by other agents. As an example, when in focus group 1, when asked about where to put additional resources in education (as a way of start the discussion and get the participation of all the agents), all the participants excepting the inspector spontaneously pointed out the high group sizes and student-teacher ratio in pre-primary education. Several national surveys of pre-primary education teachers from 2007 to 2013 showed that student-teacher ratios represented one of the most important concerns of pre-primary education teachers and that this group overwhelmingly think that the ratios were too high (Sánchez, 2009, and interviews and focus groups). Surprisingly, the inspector in focus group 1 neglected this issue (even taking into account that the ratios has been raised because of austerity measures) and said that there is no need of more resources in education, that everything is *"a problem of flexibility"*. When asked both in both the focus groups conducted in this study (particularly in group 1), the inspectors constantly interrupted other speakers and even sometimes their attitudes prevented them from expressing their views. After doing some research in the process of recruiting accidental inspectors and asking other interviewees some questions about the functioning of the inspectorate, we arrive to the very sad conclusion that, because of the nature of the process of appointment, most of accidental inspectors are completely biased and aligned to the regional government. This fact means a relevant perversion of the objectives of external evaluation and demanded much additional work from the researchers in order to ensure an accurate and balanced picture of pre-primary education.

advance. In some regions, like the Basque Country or Navarre, there are similar agencies with a similar role but a smaller geographical scope. Sometimes they assume some of the tasks of the Education Inspectorate.

In the second place, there are also some instruments of internal evaluation (carried out by the own centres) and that, according to the law, regional authorities should encourage. In this respect, there are, again, very important differences across regions, being Catalonia, Canarias, Andalusia, Castile and León, and Castile-La Mancha the pioneer Autonomous Communities in this area. Most of regions base the self-assessment process in a variable list of items and dimensions comprising inputs, processes and results to be addressed (sometimes even providing questionnaires). While in some regions self-assessment is compulsory, it is a voluntary procedures in others, which often provides some incentives consisting in more autonomy or resources to those centres that carry out the task in a successful way. In all cases, the main actors in these processes of internal evaluation are the School Board (formed by the Leadership Team and representatives of teachers, administrative staff and parents) and the Teachers' Assembly (formed by the teaching staff of each centre), with a leading role for the management team. At minimum, self-evaluation is part of a summary annual report (Annual General Report) elaborated by each school centre. In the case of Castile and León, regional authorities foster a voluntary model of self-assessment based on the European Foundation for Quality Management. According to the interviewed education inspector, a person with a remarkable experience and expertise in high-level positions of the inspectorate, the added value of self-assessment exercises is very variable. In most cases, its usefulness is more associated to "*the intrinsic value of reflecting about education*" than to the strict content of the exercises. Overall, her view about these processes was very sceptical.

Finally, it is worth making two remarks. Firstly, in contrast to the practices in primary and secondary education, there is no regional or national standardized test at the pre-primary level of education. Secondly, the new educational act (*Organic Act for the Improvement on the Quality of Education*, LOMCE), passed in December 2013, is supposed to reinforce the evaluation dimension of the Spanish educational system. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that the act must be developed by the Central Government itself and the Autonomous Communities.

### ***Autonomy of institutions***

Regarding the autonomy of the school centres that involve pre-primary education, according to Eurydice, as any other non-university educational institutions, they can assume a very important degree of self-organization, although it is not mandatory. They have autonomy for preparing, passing and executing a school development plan and a management plan, as well as the rules for organising and running the school, within the framework established by the Central State and Regional regulations. The Education Authorities thus promote so that their economic, material and human resources can take into account the working and organisation plans, once they have been duly evaluated and assessed. In addition, always within the regulations of higher-level administrations, educational institutions can include experimentation, working plans, and forms of organisation or extension of the timetable. Particularly, they might assume competences in terms of pedagogical and curricular organization, organizational management and management of resources. The resources received from Education Authorities can rise in order to fund specific projects –usually funded on a competitive basis– or if the population of the centre has specific needs. To have an idea of the scope of this autonomy, it is worth mentioning that, for instance, these

centres can acquire goods and contract works, services and supplies and formulate the academic and professional qualification requirements regarding certain school positions. Public schools cannot decide who fire and hire or how to remunerate their staff, as teachers are civil servants (of whom wage and working conditions are shaped by national and regional regulations). It is also worth mentioning that teachers of Religion (part of the curriculum of the second cycle of primary education on a voluntary basis) are selected by each bishopric on a complete discretionary basis.<sup>287</sup> According to the interview with the education inspector and the testimonies of education inspectors in focus groups 1 and 2, in practice, not all the allowed autonomy is truly used. They suggested that, in many cases, many teachers actually follow the curricula developed by editorial houses, without tailoring the stuff too much to the actual educational needs of children. However, the scope of this practise is not clear since one of the interviewed pre-primary education teacher, who had been School Head, strongly disagreed with such statement, pointing out that such behaviour is anecdotic according to her experience. Public schools cannot either set their own criteria for admission and they should follow the ones established by public administrations (central, regional and, if applicable, local ones), which, overall, apart from the age of the children, tend to favouring proximity, low incomes, large families, presence of brothers or sisters at the school and similar ones. Publicly-funded private schools enjoy more autonomy, as they can hire and fire staff (although hiring should be made through open calls) and, which is more important, can establish additional admission criteria (for instance, to be religious in some private schools). There is evidence that many schools take advantage of the latter feature in order to cream the children (Fernández and Muñiz, 2012), which might have negative consequences on equity. The just approved LOMCE, the new national act, aims to enhance the publicity of all the features of schools at all levels, in order to promote more and more autonomy. The elements to be publicised go from the results of students to the school development plan.

A last dimension to comment on here has to do with the availability of resources at pre-primary schools. At this respect, the qualitative evidence is mixed, while educators tend to complain about both human and material resources available at schools, education inspectors consider that they are more than adequate. According to the evaluation of the Ministry of Education, Social and Sport (2008), while management teams are overall satisfied with infrastructures (table 1), they are much less satisfied with human resources and specialist for attending children with special needs (as reported in the section on structural quality).

**Table 1: Adequacy of the infrastructure to the needs of pre-primary education according to management teams (% , 2007)**

	Yes	No	Does not know/does not answer
Furniture	91.2	7.0	1.8
Multimedia stuff	85.4	10.4	4.2
Library	83.3	11.1	5.6
Foreign language stuff	77.8	13.9	8.3
Music stuff	76.0	14.0	10.0

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

<sup>287</sup> Each bishopric selects the persons who teach the subject using their own criteria with no intervention of schools and there is no pr-requisite in terms of minimum qualification or possession of any academic degree.

## Structural quality

ECEC structural quality:

**Staff qualification requirement:** In the first cycle (0-3 years old), the requirement is a Bachelor in Pre-Primary Education (4 years) or a professional training degree (2 years); in the second cycle (3-6 years old), the requirement is a Bachelor in Pre-Primary Education.

**In-service staff training:** Continuing professional development is both a right and a duty of all teachers. They can voluntarily enroll in training activities which involve the regular updating of their scientific, educational and professional expertise;

**Wages:** Pre-primary and primary teachers basic wages are the same (€2,261 per month).

**Staff turnover rate:** There is no available data on this issue. According to a primary education teacher interviewed in this study, turnover is much higher in rural areas and villages, since people usually want to move to the biggest towns as soon as possible. According to the pilot evaluation carried out by the Ministry (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2008), 44.7% of pre-primary education teachers has a tenure below 5 years. It is also worth mentioning that 63.8% are civil servant with a final destination; 2.1%, civil servants with a provisional destination; 8.5%, interims and 19.1% have an indefinite contract (6.4% did not answer or did not know).

**Staff gender balance:** 5.38 of % ECEC educators/ carers are males (educ\_pers1d, 2011);

**Child-staff ratios and group size:** For children under 1 year of age, most of the Autonomous Communities establish a maximum of 8 children per unit; for children between 1 and 2 years of age, the number of pupils ranges between 12 and 14; and for children between 2 and 3 years of age, ratios vary between 16 and 20 children per unit. Actual data for 2011: average: 19.1.; first cycle: 13.4.; second cycle: 21.7.

The discussion on the structural quality of pre-primary education in Spain is structured around three elements, human resources, infrastructure and pedagogic factors, and is carried out taking into account the eventual differences between the first and the second cycle of pre-primary school. At this respect, the qualitative evidence is mixed, while educators tend to complain about both human and material resources available at schools, education inspectors consider that they are more than adequate. According to the evaluation of the Ministry of Education, Social and Sport (2008), while management teams are overall satisfied with infrastructures (table 1), they are much less satisfied with human resources and specialist for attending children with special needs (as reported in the section on structural quality).

### **(A) Human resources**

#### *Initial training*

The first issue to assess in this area is the qualification and pedagogic training of teachers and carers in pre-primary education. In this respect, overall, the professional staff in pre-primary education accomplish with the educational background demanded by the law. This applies not only to public and publicly-funded private centres but also to other private centres, which should accomplish with the same regulations in this issue in order to received authorisation to start their activities. Precisely, one of the most important works of the Education Inspectorate –and we have not found any

evidence suggesting other things in the field work- is to monitor the compliance of regulations. As stated in the chart, carers/teachers must have a Bachelor in Pre-Primary Education, although there is also the possibility of having a professional training degree in this field (2 years) in order to teach in the first cycle. Overall, there is no evidence that the regulation in this respect is not being complied by centres.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that there are many centres taking care of children below 3 years old that are not considered pre-primary education centres officially and do not comply with the regulations. Because of that, they are called play centres, nursery schools or similar names and might not comply with the regulations (infrastructure, human resources, curriculum) established for proper schools. They are basically where parents can drop their children off while they are at work. Anecdotally, there can be also some public centres of this kind in rural areas and small villages run by local authorities, but it is not the rule at all. On the contrary, according to the interviewed inspector, municipalities usually ask Education Authorities for advice when establishing pre-primary education centres. Although, overall, the formal requirements for being a pre-primary school teacher are fulfilled, there are reasons for concern about whether the academic background and preparation required from the staff is enough to deliver a high-quality pre-primary education. The World Association of Early Childhood Educators (WAECE, and whose Spanish acronym is AMEI) has carried out five opinion surveys of pre-primary educators in 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013 and several conclusions arise from their findings (Sánchez, 2009, WAECE, 2011, 2012 and 2013). Firstly, in the first wave, in 2007, of a qualitative nature and based on an open question, training and formation of educators was considered the sixth most relevant problem in pre-primary education. They highlighted that initial training is very theoretical and not adjusted to educational practise (Sánchez, 2009). A pre-primary school teacher interviewed in this study expressed the same view: training tends to be far from the reality of classrooms and she added that there is a lack of good methodological training (like methods of teaching of literacy of numeracy). This problem can be even more relevant in professionals with only a professional training degree according to the interviews carried out in our study. Although their opinion can have some obvious biases, in 2007, pre-primary teachers considered quite paradoxical that a lower academic degree is required to teach in the first cycle than in the second one (it is possible to teach in the first cycle with a two-years professional training degree), as they considered that to work with younger children demanded more rather than less formation. A university expert in education who was interviewed in this study –free of such potential corporative bias- sustained exactly the same. In the second place, teachers valued the adequacy of initial formation in 2009, 2011 and 2012. In 2009, 42% of pre-primary educators thought that initial formation is inadequate. 39% of this group thought that it was bad or very bad in 2011 (20% thought that it was good and 39%, that it was acceptable) and 46% in 2012 (with 8% stating that it was good and 42% that it was acceptable) (Sánchez, 2009, WAECE, 2011 and 2012). An education inspector interviewed in this study pointed out several elements that could improve the current system of training: more formation in psychology of adulthood (very useful to deal with parents, essential at this stage) and in plastic techniques, more development of teachers' creativity (sometimes they use the book proposed by a publishing house without any adaptation to the work environment) and practises in schools that could be considered as good models (now, this does not happen). The inspector, the pre-primary teacher and the expert stated that, comparatively, formation was better in pre-primary teachers than in primary teaching staff and that the former are usually more motivated.

A last feature of the initial formation and training that we should discuss here has to do with the effectiveness and quality of induction and mentoring programmes. When a person passes a public examination and gets a position as teacher (civil servant), he/she spends a one-year internship period, during which the trainee enrol in courses organised by the centres for teaching training and innovation (they might receive different names depending on the region) and teach normally in a school. Also, during this internship, trainees have a tutor, who is a teacher at the centre, which theoretically supervise and evaluate them. Nevertheless, both a teacher of primary education and a teacher of pre-primary education interviewed in this study pointed out that, although an education inspector can enter the classroom at the end of the course and ask trainees some questions, the internship period is basically a formality that does not add anything to the training received at the university. Tutors, although available for questions from trainees and might provide them with some informal advice, usually do not truly supervise them and they limit their work to complete some forms in a quite routine way. In this respect, our testimonies highlighted the uselessness of the internship period and mentorships as designed. Paradoxically, interim teachers –who temporarily work as teachers in a position that has to be filled through a public examination to be called- do not have to have spent any time as trainees. This is truly illogical as long as many teachers work for first time as interims.

#### *Professional development*

Regarding **continuous on-the-job training**, the first feature to comment on is their regulation and nature. In this respect, we closely follow Eurydice. Teachers can voluntarily enrol in training activities which involve the regular updating of their scientific, educational and professional expertise. The Education Authorities are responsible for planning, organising and recognising continuing professional development within their jurisdiction providing teachers with a wide range of activities. The Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECD) through the Spanish Institute for Education Technologies and Teachers Training annually determines the priority guidelines of in-service teachers training programmes. It also offers in-service training programmes at State level and establishes the relevant agreements with other institutions to this end. In their turn, the Autonomous Communities are also free to establish their own priority guidelines, taking into account the training needs of the teaching staff within their jurisdiction. This implies that both the content of the training and the institutions in charge of its provision differ from one Autonomous Community to another. All Autonomous Communities have a network of institutions which provide teacher training activities. Although they have different names, the most widespread is Teachers and Resource Centres. Their tasks and powers are related to the organisation and development of the training plan within their area of action, the promotion of inter institutional working teams supporting the dissemination of knowledge, the provision of resources to the teaching staff to contribute to the development of their teaching activity and the improvement of educational innovation. These institutions are responsible for a variable number of primary and secondary educational establishments to which they provide support in relation to professional development and resources or guidance to carry out innovation or improvement initiatives. In all the Autonomous Communities there are also other institutions involved in the continuing professional development of teachers, such as university departments, institutes of education, professional associations, unions or educational reform movements. Continuous professional development can be implemented through in-person or on-line courses, seminars and working groups or training projects in educational institutions. Teachers can take part in these activities out of their teaching hours, during the hours spent in the school or during working hours if

they are carried out outside the educational institution. To take part in some of these activities, teachers may have to comply with several admission requirements usually related to their university qualifications or teaching experience in certain educational levels.

Several surveys of the WAECE also suggest that there is some dissatisfaction of teachers with continuous formation and that the contents of it can be of a limited applicability and quite far from the reality of classrooms. In 2009, 41% considered that it was bad, 32% that it was good and 27% that it was of an intermediate quality. In 2011, 23% considered it bad or very bad (34%, good or very good and 41%, acceptable) and, in 2012, 47% (15%, good or very good and 35%, acceptable) (Sánchez, 2009, WAECE, 2011 and 2012). The study of Pineda *et al.* (2008) studies the quality of teacher on-the-job training for teachers of 0-6 years-old children education. The methodology consists in a cross-section survey carried out in schools of 4 Spanish regions (Andalusia, Aragon, Catalonia and Navarra), complemented by in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The main conclusion of this work is that, overall, training courses for teachers of children between 0 and 6 years old work quite well. 2/3 of teachers receive this type of training each year and the teachers' satisfaction with different dimensions of training is quite high, particularly, in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired by participants, applicability, innovation and improvement of job skills (an average score around 3.5 out of 5 in each attribute).<sup>288</sup> The participants seem to be much less satisfied in terms of the influence of training on job promotion and stability or the chances of getting closer relationships with colleagues. It is worth mentioning that training is much less frequent, mainly because the offer is much more limited, in the case of 0-3-years-old child education. This is partly related to the fact that this type of education is not universal or widespread and has been traditionally provided by private centres. The qualitative work carried out by the authors also suggests that this training does not have as much influence as it would be desirable on the professional practise of participants and the culture of evaluation of these actions is poor. One of the main problems of continuous training is that it is not always tailored to the needs of teachers. This factor was also highlighted by one the pre-primary education teachers interviewed in this study. She also pointed out that more diversity in the offer would be beneficial, since the menu of courses seems to be shaped more by fashions than by needs (for instance, too much emphasis on ICTs and too low relevance of methodological tools). In this respect, she even said that she self-funded some of the courses in which she had enrolled.

### *Specialised staff*

The last element of human resources covered here deals with the availability of **specialised staff** (other than teachers). In this respect, there is several professional staff that complements teachers' work: teachers specialised in therapeutic pedagogy (PT teachers), teachers specialised in audition and language (AL teachers) and counsellors, learning support assistants, physiotherapists, special education teachers and counsellors. In some regions there are early interventions teams that integrate several professionals with specialised training. PT and AL teachers and counsellors are people with specialised formation and a Bachelor degree, while physiotherapists and special education teachers require a specific higher education degree. Learning

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<sup>288</sup> An inspector of the focus group 1 highlighted the low participation of teachers in this type of training. This view –not sustained by data– should be considered as anecdotal in the light of the evidence presented by Pineda *et al.* (2008).

support assistants must have completed upper secondary education and are responsible of caring children with special needs. Overall, the organisation of this staff widely varies across Autonomous Communities and the cycle of pre-primary education. The first cycle of pre-primary education is taught at centres with no other levels, while the second cycle can be taught at schools jointly with the first cycle and at schools with other levels of mandatory education (primary and the first two course of secondary). In this respect, the availability of the mentioned staff depends on the type of centre rather than the level of education. Whereas in some regions some of the professionals are integrated at schools and centres, in others they belong to larger teams that assist several centres. Furthermore, pre-primary education centres (with only the first and, sometimes, the second cycle of pre-primary education) has much less resources of this type than those schools teaching primary education and the second cycle of pre-primary education. Finally, the last general feature has to do with special education, targeted at children with special needs. This type of education often is implemented at primary and secondary education levels, but, exceptionally, interventions might start at the second cycle of pre-primary education. Special education can be taught at regular centres or, if integration is not feasible at a minimum level at a regular school, at special education centres.

In the region of Castile and León, which can be considered as quite representative, the model of attention to special needs is based on teams. In this respect, the regional authorities establish the minimum ratios of the above mentioned staff to children with special needs (Table 2). This means that the professionals assist different centres in many cases. Inspectors that participated in the focus groups did not find absolutely any problems with the availability of these types of human resources, but, as mentioned, we think that their views can be extremely unreliable. In this respect, one of the teachers of pre-primary education that we interviewed considered that there is not a truly system of early intervention at the pre-primary level of education. She pointed out that they have many difficulties in getting attention from PT and AL teachers and other professionals like counsellors, as they privilege intervention at later ages. As a rule, these professionals do not usually treat children below 5 years old. This feature is negative in her opinion, since intervention should be earlier, as early as possible. Theoretically, teachers are trained to detect the problems. Parents can talk to them in order to ask for the intervention. Professionals evaluate the cases and decide whether treatment is necessary but system do not consider the presence of these professionals as important as in other levels. One of the reasons is that at these ages, many people say that it is not convenient to separate children from the rest of the class group. The representative of an NGO in focus group 2 also complained about the lack of access to these specialists by children with problems in pre-primary school. Although there are some scholarships with this purpose and, at some centres teaching primary, children in pre-primary can receive treatment from the professionals usually thought for pupils in primary education, he also claimed that there is a problem in access. One conclusion that could be drawn is that the availability of these types of resources is substantially lower in pre-primary than in primary education and even lower in the first cycle. Although we could not compile information from all regions, it is quite possible that the landscape is quite similar as long as the ruling parties have been the same in many Autonomous Communities. However, from the testimonies gathered, we are not in condition of offering the exact figures that would be desirable to reach. Below, we reproduce the ratios of the mentioned specialists in the region of Castile and León established by the regional authorities:

**Table 2: Proportion of professionals to children with special needs in public centres of pre-primary, primary and secondary education in Castile and León**

Type of professional	Ratio of children to professionals
Teachers specialised in therapeutic pedagogy	8-11
Teachers specialised in audition and language	15-25
Physiotherapists (relative to children with physical disabilities)	15-20
Learning support assistants (relative to children with physical disabilities)	15-20
Learning support assistants (relative to children with pervasive developmental disorder)	15-20

Source: Authors' elaboration from Regional Ministry of Education of the Castile and León (2010).

The pilot study of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (2008), centred on the last grade of pre-primary education, show that 25.5 and 16.6% of teachers surveyed do not have teachers specialised in pedagogic therapy and audition and language, respectively, acting the group. Furthermore, 17 and 14.9% report not being accessing to any support teacher or counsellor. According to this source, management teams also report that the available specialised staff is far below their needs (Table 3).

**Table 3: Management teams' opinion about how available resources fit their needs in pre-primary education in Spain (2007)**

	Nothing	Little	Quite much	Very much	Does not know/does not answer
Teachers	3.4	13.8	46.6	31	5.2
Subject teachers (music, religion, foreign language, etc.)	5.2	22.4	41.4	22.4	8.6
Other specialists	18.2	27.6	25.9	13.8	15.5
Assistants	44.8	20.7	10.3	3.4	20.7

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

### **(B) Curriculum**

As mentioned in the previous section (inputs and process), the Central State establishes the basic features of the curriculum, the regional authorities develop it and the schools and the teachers are responsible of tailoring and adapting them to the needs of children.

The national curriculum, established by the Ministry of Education and Science (2008), sets the development goals of pre-primary education:

- Knowledge of the body (the own body and others' ones), its possibilities of action and learning to respect differences;
- To observe and explore family, natural and social environments. To know and value their characteristics and to actively and gradually participate in social and cultural activities in such environments;
- To progressively acquire autonomy in day-to-day activities;
- To develop affective abilities;

- To relate to other persons and progressively acquire elementary patterns of coexistence, social relationships and peaceful conflict resolution;
- To develop communication skills in different languages and ways of expression;
- To begin in logical-mathematical skills, literacy skills and skills in physical motion, gesture, and rhythm.

There are three main areas: knowledge of oneself and personal autonomy, knowledge of the environment and languages: communication and representation. In the first cycle, the priorities are acquisition of elementary health and well-being habits, improvement of motor and manipulative skills, establishment of emotional links with others and progressive regulation of the expression of sentiments and emotions. In the second cycle, children start the knowledge of literacy (depending on the characteristics and experiences of each child) and begin in basic numerical skills, information and communication technologies and plastic and musical expression. In this second period, children are introduced to the oral use of a foreign language (English) in communication activities linked to routines and daily activities. Each of the three areas mentioned above contains several specific goals and its content breaks into several blocks by each pre-primary education cycle. Then, each region develops the national curriculum, specifying in more detail the contents of each area. Although each area of the national curriculum specifies several blocks regions can structure the contents of each area in sub-areas that do not necessarily correspond to the blocks of the national curriculum but that logically cover all the goals and objectives outlined by them. For instance, the national curriculum of pre-primary education in the area of knowledge of oneself and personal autonomy includes two blocks, while the development in Castile and León implies that the area breaks into four sub-areas (Regional Ministry of Education of Castile and León, 2008a).

The detailed list of development goals and expected outcomes for children cannot be presented here because of the limitations of space, but they are available in the mentioned regulations. Nevertheless, below we try to summarise the main goals of each area and the criteria of evaluation, which can be identified as the expected outcomes. The interested reader can find more details on contents in the national and regional laws. Although the contents are obviously different in the first and the second cycles, the goals and criteria of evaluation are established for the whole pre-primary education period.

#### Area 1. Knowledge of oneself and personal autonomy

##### Goals of the area

- To recognise oneself as a person different from others and to create an accurate and positive image of oneself, developing sentiments of self-esteem and personal autonomy;
- To progress in the control of body, developing the sensorial perception and adjusting the tone, equilibrium and coordination of body motion to contextual characteristics;
- To know and represent the body of oneself, some of its elements and functions, discovering its possibilities of action and expression;
- To identify needs, sentiments, emotions and preferences and to be progressively able to express them and communicate them to others, gradually identifying and respecting others'.

- To carry out daily activities and simple tasks on more and more autonomous way, raising self-confidence and ability of initiative;
- To progress in the acquisition of habits and attitudes linked to emotional well-being, enjoying daily situations of equilibrium and quietness adequately;
- To adjust the own behaviour to the needs and requirements of others, developing attitudes and habits of respect, help and collaboration, avoiding behaviours of submission or dominance;
- Developing strategies for satisfying basic needs of affection, playing, food, motion, exploration, health and safety in a more and more autonomous way.

#### Criteria of evaluation

- To show a progressive -sectorial and global- control of the own body, demonstrating a knowledge more and more accurate of the own body, confidence in the own possibilities and respect to others;
- To demonstrate an improvement of motor and manipulative skills and participation in games, regulating expression of feelings and emotions progressively;
- To show certain degree of autonomy in the acquisition of elementary habits of personal care, health and safety and to consolidate them progressively. To progress in the autonomous execution of routine activities for satisfying basic needs, demonstrating interest and initiative.

#### Area 2. Knowledge of the environment

##### Goals of the area

- To actively observe and explore the own physical, natural and social environment, to develop a sense of belonging to such environment, demonstrating interest in its knowledge, and to get along with conviction and autonomy;
- To relate to other people in more and more equilibrated and satisfying way, progressively interiorising basic patterns of social behaviour and adjusting the own behaviour to such patterns;
- To identify and to get close to the knowledge of different social groups near the own personal experience, of some characteristics of their members, cultural productions, values and lifestyles, generating attitudes of confidence, respect and appreciation;
- To look into the physical environment, manipulating some of its elements, identifying their characteristics and developing the ability of transforming them;
- To represent the attributes of elements and collections and to establish relationships of aggregation, classification, order and quantification, beginning in mathematical skills;
- To show interest in the natural environment, to observe and recognise animals, plants, elements and phenomena of nature, to experiment, to talk about them and to develop attitudes of curiosity;
- To know and value the basic component of the natural environment and some of its relationships, changes and transformations, developing attitudes of care, respect and responsibility in its preservation.

### Criteria of evaluation

- To show curiosity and interest in the discovering of the environment and progressively identify elements of the immediate environment and acting on them, to group, classify and order elements and collections by obvious similarities and differences, to discriminate and compare some magnitudes and to quantify collections using numerical series;
- To show interest in the natural environment, to identify and to progressively name some of its components, to establish relationships of interdependency, to show attitudes of care and respect of nature and to participate in activities oriented to its preservation;
- To identify and to know the most significant social groups of the environment, some characteristics of their organisations and the main community services that they offer. To be able to put some examples of their characteristics and cultural productions and to value their importance.

### Area 3. Languages: communication and representation

#### Goals of the area

- To progressively appropriate the different languages in order to express needs, preferences, feelings and representations of reality;
- To experiment and to express using body, plastic musical and technological language in order to represent situations, life experiences, needs and elements of the environment and to create aesthetic effects, showing interest and enjoyment;
- To use language as an instrument of communication, representation, learning and enjoyment, and to value oral language as a way of regulating personal behaviour and coexistence;
- To understand communicative intentions and messages of other children and adults, getting familiar with the norms that rule communicative exchange and adopting an attitude favouring communication in the own and foreign languages.
- To get close to productions of cultural traditions. To understand, recite, narrate and recreate some literary texts, demonstrating attitudes of valuation of, enjoyment with and interest in them;
- To develop curiosity and creativity, interacting with plastic, audio-visual, technological, theatrical, musical and dance productions using different techniques;
- To begin in the social uses of oral and written literacy, exploring its functioning and valuing them as instruments of communication, information and enjoyment;
- To begin in the oral use of a foreign language (English) with a communicative aim in activities related to day-to-day situations in the classroom and showing interest in and enjoyment with participation in such exchanges;
- To begin in the use of technological instruments, valuing their potential as tools favouring communication, expression and as a source of information and diversification of knowledge.

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## Criteria of evaluation

- To participate in communicative situations through proto-conversations, or turn systems and social interaction games;
- To use oral language in the most convenient way in order to communicate with children and adults, depending on communicative intentions, and understand oral messages, demonstrating an attentive and respectful attitude of listening;
- To show interest in written texts proposed in the classroom and in the immediate environment, beginning in the use, understanding of their goals and knowledge of some characteristics of written code. To show interest and participation in situations of reading and writing proposed in the classroom;
- To express and communicate oneself using means, stuff and techniques associated to the different artistic, technological and audio-visual languages, demonstrating interest in exploring their possibilities, in enjoying their realizations and in sharing with others aesthetic and communicate experiences.

In the national curriculum there are some references to primary education. Particularly, it highlights the need of coordination between pre-primary and primary education teachers, the responsibility of which lies on the centres and mentions that some elements related to the third area (languages: communication and representation), particularly, those linked to written literacy. In fact, the second cycle of pre-primary education (3-6 years old), virtually universal, is seen as a preparation for primary education and in most cases this cycle is taught in schools also teaching primary education. Regional developments of the curriculum of the second cycle of pre-primary education also contain references to the relevance of this stage for primary education. For instance, in Castile and León, the law explicitly says that the educational practice at this level should provide children with *“competences, skills, habits and attitudes required for the later incorporation to primary education”* (Regional Ministry of Education of Castile and León, 2008b). Although the minimum requirements for school readiness might be not explicitly stated in the curriculum, there are many elements (from universalization of the second cycle to the detailed structure of the curriculum) that clearly suggest that pre-primary education is indeed considered as an educational level previous to mandatory school (opposite to a view of it as an aid policy).

Centres teaching pre-primary education can adapt the curriculum in order to tailor it to the specific needs and problems of children. According to inspectors participating in the interviews and focus groups, centres rarely carry out curriculum individualisations and pointed out that it is current practise to follow the proposals and books of publishing houses, which not take into account the characteristics of centres and children. A pre-primary education teacher interviewed in the study, who had been a School Head, strongly disagreed with such statement and said that the absence of diversification is not a rule at all. Nevertheless, curricular adaptations in pre-primary education are quite singular because children are below 6 years old and these sorts of interventions are limited to children that start to show severe developmental problems (for instance, symptoms of autism). In table 4, based on Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008), we show the percentage of second-cycle pre-primary education teachers who reporting having had any experience of curriculum adaptation during the last school year. The results of the survey indicate that this type of intervention is not marginal at all (as the inspector seemed to suggest).

**Table 4: Teachers that have carried out several types of interventions in their classroom during the last academic year (% , 2007)**

	Yes	No	Does not know/does not answer
Adaptation of access to the curriculum	23.4	14.9	61.7
Significant adaptation of the elements of the curriculum	38.3	2.1	59.6
Remedial interventions	44.7	2.1	53.2
Attention in the classroom by other professionals	36.2	8.5	55.3
Specific programs	23.4	10.6	66

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

Both the national curriculum and their particularizations at the regional level emphasize the relevance of collaboration between families and pre-primary education teachers and centres. Focusing on the national curriculum, it considers that families are extremely important in the achievement of the goals of pre-primary education. In addition, one of the objectives of pre-primary education is precisely to know the family environment. The law foresees a narrow collaboration of pre-primary education teachers and families as an important element affecting quality of this level of education, highlighting that the coordination between teachers and parents is particularly important. In this respect, the law even points out the potential large role of information and communication technologies.<sup>289</sup> In fact, apart from direct observation of children by teachers, the most relevant tool of evaluation is interviews between teachers and parents (Ministry of Education and Science, 2008). The regional governments set in more detail the specific channels of participation and collaboration among centres, teachers and parents. As a rule, regions only establish some minimum requirements and centres and teachers have a large autonomy in terms of tailoring the participation of families. For instance, in Castile and León, whereas the law is not particularly specific regarding the first cycle of pre-primary education (Regional Ministry of Education of Castile and León, 2008c), in the case of the second cycle, it foresees, as a minimum, a quarterly written communication from teacher to parents informing about the evolution of children, two yearly meetings with all parents –one at the beginning and one at the end of the academic course- and a yearly individual interview of teacher with a parent. Furthermore, the regional law states that tutors must have as many meetings and interviews as requested by parents (Regional Ministry of Education of Castile and León, 2008b). In practise, obviously, participation depends on the specific centres and even on teachers. Overall, both the participants in focus group 1 and a teacher of the second cycle of pre-primary education interviewed in the study said that parental participation is low and more formal than real. More details on these issues are provided in the section on process quality.

The last feature to address in this section is pedagogical aspects of the curriculum. In this respect, not only the curriculum –summarised above- clearly establishes an active role for children, but also, according to our interviews to pre-primary education teachers, that is indeed what happened in classrooms. The curriculum is also extraordinarily clear regarding play, considering it as a “privileged instrument of educational intervention” (Ministry of Education and Science, 2008). It has a very

<sup>289</sup> In this respect, for instance, a first cycle pre-primary education teacher participating in focus group 1 explained that she used the email in order to have a fluid communication with parents about their children.

important place in all the three areas of the national curriculum and, thus, in regional developments as well. In fact, the word “play” appears 68 times in the national curriculum (with 21 pages). Not only is a learning tool in all areas and blocks but also defines block or a sub-area by itself (“play and motion”). The curriculum proposes and describes many types of games for each block of each pre-primary education cycle. Although most of play is guided or supported by teachers (it comprises role playing, too), there is also room for free play. As pre-primary education goes from 0 to 6 years old, there are obviously very relevant differences among children in terms of development. These differences clearly determine the kinds of games practised by each child. For instance, heuristic play is central in children between 1 and 2 years old, whereas symbolic play has a larger and larger role since the end of the first cycle.

Table 5 shows the distribution of the time in an ordinary day according to pre-primary education teachers of children in the last grade of this level, pointing out that play has a relevant place in daily activities, even in the last course.

**Table 5: Activities in the classroom in an ordinary day according to pre-primary education teachers (2007)**

	Never	Few times	Quite many times	Many times	Does not know/does not answer
Globalized (all areas of the curriculum)	0.0	4.3	46.8	46.8	2.1
Sectorial (by content: crafts, mathematics, language)	6.4	38.3	38.3	6.4	10.6
Workshops	6.4	53.2	29.8	6.4	4.3
Corners	0.0	23.4	46.8	23.4	6.4
Assemblies	0.0	0.0	19.1	78.7	2.1
Rest	2.1	12.8	34.0	44.7	6.4
Play	0.0	8.5	40.4	48.9	2.1
Others	0.0	4.3	8.5	4.3	83.0

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

Note: Corners are small groups of children centred on a certain activity or task, aiming to foster autonomy, organization and responsibility. Children rotate across the different corners. Assemblies are one of the most important and most used tools in pre-primary education in Spain. Assemblies are the first event each day. Children sat in the floor (usually on a carpet around the teacher), the teacher take roll, children say the date, they tell all what happens at home and share experiences, they often sing and recite, the teacher can tell a tale, etc. The aim of the assembly is to encourage good habits, respect others’ turn to speak, etc.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that, according to the surveys carried out by the WAECE, pre-primary education teachers think that the curriculum is not realistic and is too cognitive and little ludic; children play less than teachers think they should. According to this source, the main problem is that the second cycle of pre-primary is completely dependent on the primary level of education. Although the curriculum do not state it, it is assumed that children have to be able to read and write at the beginning of primary school and, as a consequence, to achieve full literacy skills become a goal that displaces other more ludic activities in the second cycle of pre-primary education. Most of the participants in our two focus groups agreed with it, claiming that pre-primary education is becoming more and more a preparatory level for primary education. In this respect, it is possible that the bad results of Spain in PISA might have influenced the adoption of this approach (Martínez, 2009).

## Access quality

ECEC access quality:

**Compulsory nature of ECEC:** ECEC attendance is not compulsory; basic education is compulsory and it lasts from 6 to 16 years;

**ECEC choice:** Parents or guardians may apply to any school, public or publicly-funded private, for a place for their children. The only admission requirement is the year of birth. If there are more applicants than places, there are criteria of admission established by Education Authorities. Private centres not receiving public funding can set their own criteria.

**Participation rate:** ECEC services are used by 30.7% of children aged less than 3 years (2011-2012); from 3 years old, coverage is practically universal (95.2% at 3 years old).

**Funding of pre-school services:** 0.70% of GDP (educ\_figdp, Eurostat 2010)

**Cost to parents:** The first cycle of pre-primary education (0-3 years of age) is not free, although the public sector promoted a gradual increase in the number of total or partly publicly-funded school places in collaboration with regional education authorities since 2006 up to the beginning of the crisis. Second cycle of pre-primary education (3-6) is free and the existence of enough places is ensured by Education Authorities.

First of all, although in other parts of the report (and previous documents) we have referred to it, it is relevant to remind that, in Spain, pre-primary education can be taught at the following places:

- First cycle: public centres that only teach the first cycle, private centres with both cycles and sometimes even more levels (in most cases, they are not publicly funded places);
- Second cycle: public centres that also teach primary education and sometimes even the first two years of secondary education, private centres that has only pre-primary education, private centres with primary and sometimes lower and upper secondary education. Most of the places at private centres at this level are publicly funded.

In addition, we can find nurseries and other centres, which do not officially teach pre-primary education, offering only child care. Therefore, the number of centres is not very illustrative. Regarding the distribution of students, according to the last available data –academic year 2012-2013, there were 1,900,173 children enrolled in pre-primary education at authorised centres (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2013a). 77% of them attended to the second cycle of pre-primary education, while 23% attended the first one. Regarding their distribution across schools, in the first cycle, 52.6% were enrolled in public centres, 16.9%, in publicly-funded private centres and 30.5%, in private centres (without public funding). In the second cycle of pre-primary education, 68.9% of children went to public centres, 26.7%, to publicly-funded private ones and only 4.4% to purely private centres.

When assessing the access quality of ECEC services, it is important to keep in mind the relevant differences between the first and second cycles of pre-primary education. The second cycle comprises from 3 to 6 years old and the public sector ensures the availability of free-of-charge places in public or private centres. Usually, families are free to choose their preferred centre among several alternatives in their geographical area. When there are fewer places than applicants, there is a prioritization of

admissions based on criteria established by the Education Authorities. The Central State set the basics and, then, the regions develop the criteria. In some regions, centres themselves can establish some complementary criteria, but their weight is tiny.

Until 2008, the first cycle of pre-primary education was viewed as care rather than education and received much less support than the free-of-charge second cycle. Until then, there were some centres established by local and regional governments, with obvious differences depending on the geographical area. Since 2008 to 2012, there was very important impulse of this level of education. In 2008, as a part of a wider anti-cyclical package against the economic crisis, the Central Government launched a plan of creation of public centres of pre-primary education (*Plan Educa3*) financed on a 50/50 basis by the Central and Regional Governments. In 2012, the Central Government paralyzed the programme because of fiscal reasons. Overall, as mentioned, the first cycle had been seen merely as care and that perception started to change with the 2008 initiative (Sánchez, 2009). In 2008, under the new framework, the curriculum and requisites of centres of the first cycle started to be regulated with a similar rigour and detail as the second cycle. Nevertheless, the supply is short according to all agents that participated in the qualitative part of the study. In the case of the first cycle of pre-primary education, access is not free of charge and attending either public or publicly-funded private centres involves a fee. Overall, although the specific criteria are set by regional or local authorities responsible of the centres, the structure of these fees depends on the social and demographic characteristics of families. As there are the supply of places is shorter than the number of applications, there are criteria for admission based on the mentioned household characteristics. Again, although there might be differences across the Spanish geography, the overall trend is the prioritization of disadvantaged families and, to some extent, also those where both parents work and cannot take care of their children. Therefore, to some degree, at least partially, the system has a very relevant means-tested element.

As mentioned above, in the case of the second cycle (3-6 years old), access is guaranteed by Education Authorities. Nevertheless, that does not mean that coverage is 100%, since it is not mandatory. In this respect, for instance, according to the last available data from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (academic course 2011-2012), at the 3, 4 and 5 years old, the net coverage is 95.2%, 97% and 97%, respectively. However, one should have in mind that this information might be not totally accurate, because it is based on administrative data of enrolled children and projected population at different ages. Data desegregated by specific groups e.g. for Roma is not available.

In the case of the first cycle, unfortunately, there is no statistics. Felgueroso (2012) possible to get reliable reports that attendance of children under 3 years old to any type of centre increases with the mother's educational attainment and household income. However, data are based on the Spanish Survey of Living Conditions (SLC, the Spanish version of the European Union Statistics on Living Conditions, EU-SILC), which does not allow determining whether the centre is public, private or publicly-funded private. Therefore, in the Spanish case, strikingly, it is impossible to know who access to subsidized ECEC below 3 years old. The higher coverage among families with high income and schooling level might be related to out-of-pocket expenses on private centres (partly subsidised in some regions) or very dependent on the labour market situation of parents. The figure does not necessarily reflect inequality in the access to subsidised ECEC.

On the contrary, since the access to the second cycle is universal and authorities ensures a place for any child, data from the SLC are interesting in order to assess who is not attending this level of education. In table 6, we present the percentage of children at the age of attending the second cycle of pre-primary education who were actually attending it in 2010 based on the SLC 2011. The results are particularly worrying. Unsurprisingly, the coverage (90.8%) is lower than the figure provided by administrative data. Nevertheless, the percentage of children not attending the second cycle of this level of education is not randomly distributed. Whereas there is no relevant different by area of residence, immigrant children, those living in households whose head has a low educational level and those in households placed in the 40% poorest families. This figures suggest that those children which, by other reasons (disadvantaged socio-economic background) are more likely to end being dropouts show the lowest attendance rate to the free-of-charge second cycle of pre-primary education. The reasons behind these data are far from clear, given the precariousness of Spanish sources of information. Nevertheless, several elements can be cited. Regarding immigrant children, information problems can play a certain role, particularly, if they have just arrived to the country.<sup>290</sup> Following this line of arguments, a NGO representative participating in the focus group 1 argued that in some disadvantaged families there is no consciousness of the relevance of education. However, there can be some barriers to universal enrolment affecting children from low economic backgrounds. In this respect, a NGO representative in the focus group 2 explained that there is barely any scholarship for school equipment and supplies at the pre-primary education, so some disadvantaged families might not afford to purchase them and this can prevent enrolment. Actually, after such a review of different sources of information, overall, such scholarships are not frequent at all, being only some isolated palliative initiatives from certain municipalities and schools.

As mentioned above, overall, the criteria for determining access to the first cycle of pre-primary education often give priority to low incomes. Furthermore, at this level there is no other aid that can foster attendance among children from disadvantaged backgrounds, like travel grants. It is also worth mentioning that there are many initiatives that foster enrolment of immigrant children (several actions of integration and information campaigns among immigrants encouraging them to take their children to pre-primary education) or kids from disadvantaged households, but they focus on mandatory levels of education. For instance, several minimum income programs (like those operating in Madrid and Castile and León) set as a requisite the school attendance of children at legal mandatory education age (6 years old).

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<sup>290</sup> In this respect, the well-known book of Banerjee and Duflo (2011) highlights the relevance of informing families about educational returns.

**Table 6: Percentage of children at age of attending the second cycle of pre-primary education who actually attended in 2010 in Spain**

Characteristics	Percentage (%)
Average	90.8%
By migrant status	-
Household head born in Spain	94.5%
Household head born abroad	70.6%
By area of residence	-
Densely populated areas	91.2%
Intermediate populated areas	89.1%
Thinly populated areas	91.4%
By level of education of the household head	-
Elementary	77.4%
Basic	92.3%
Medium	90.4%
High	96.3%
By quintile of net disposable income	-
1 <sup>st</sup> quintile	85.9%
2 <sup>nd</sup> quintile	83.6%
3 <sup>rd</sup> quintile	95.9%
4 <sup>th</sup> quintile	93.4%
5 <sup>th</sup> quintile	96.4%

Source: Authors' analysis from Spanish SLC (2011).

The most detailed data of financing of early child and educational care correspond to 2010 and are presented in table 7 and based on the OECD Statistics Database. Surprisingly, there is a higher level of detail in the OECD database than in national sources.

**Table 7: Indicators of financing of pre-primary education in Spain in 2010**

Variable	Value
Total public spending	-
Public spending on pre-primary education as % of the GDP	0.70
Public spending on pre-primary education as % of total public education spending	14.05
Public spending on pre-primary education as % of total public spending	1.53
Public spending on pre-primary education per student	-
Public spending on pre-primary education per student (current €)	4,017
Public spending on pre-primary education per student in a public centre (current €)	5,315
Public spending on pre-primary education per student in a publicly-funded private centre (current €)	2,155
Composition of public spending on pre-primary education by transaction type (% of total spending)	-
Direct expenditures for public institutions (%)	85.0
Direct expenditures for private institutions (%)	13.3
Scholarships and financial aid to households and students (%)	1.8

Source: Authors' analysis from OECD Statistics Database.

Regarding expenditures of families in pre-primary education, again, the distinction between both cycles is relevant. Since there are differences between regions and it is not possible to cover all of them here, we consider Madrid –the Autonomous Region that includes the capital of Spain- as a reference, mainly because of reasons of data availability. We point out the relevant expenditures for the median family, and on a monthly basis. The rates of some core and complementary services can vary –be lower- depending on family income. In the first cycle, families face the costs of tuition fees (€180 per month), textbooks and other stuff (€220 per year) and canteen (€96 per month).<sup>291</sup> This figure means that for a representative Spanish family with children between 0 and 3 years old, the cost per child of attending a public centre in Madrid amounts to €294 per month, which means roughly between 9 and 13% of the median net disposable income of this kind of household with and without canteen services, respectively. The cost of private education (without any kind of public funding) is not very higher, particularly if one keeps in mind that some regions (like Madrid and Castile and León) offers some vouchers of around €100. In the case of the second

<sup>291</sup> Information about fees and the cost of canteen comes from legislation of Madrid; the cost of textbooks and other stuff correspond to the average expenditure per student in public centres during the course 2011-2012 reported by families in the *Household Expenditure in Education* carried out by the National Statistics Institute; per capita family income is computed by the authors from the SLC 2011.

cycle of pre-primary education, families have to pay for complementary services like the canteen (€96 per month) and textbooks and other stuff (€404 per year).<sup>292</sup> This means between 1.6 and 6.3% of family income, depending if we consider or not canteen services.

A final note on access quality has to do with the overall existence of programmes that allow parents to leave children at pre-primary centres longer (basically, earlier, as the so-called *Early Risers* programme that operates at some regions) at an additional cost. Although the academic course consists in 9 months, in most regions there are special schedules at some pre-primary schools that allow parents to leave their children there if they work. In the table 8, we present some information on the availability of these kinds of services in Spanish school centres with the last grade of pre-primary education.

**Table 8: Availability of some ancillary services according to management teams in pre-primary education in Spain (2007)**

	Yes	No	Does not know/does not answer
Morning welcome classroom for early bird students	53.4	43.1	3.4
Afternoon welcome classroom for early bird students	10.0	90.0	0.0
Opening in holidays	23.1	76.9	0.0
Canteen	76.4	23.6	0.0
Transport	50.0	50.0	0.0
Extra-school activities	87.0	12.0	0.0

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

<sup>292</sup> As mentioned above, there can be small grants from local councils or informal aid received by families from NGOs or other associations, which can make that average expenditure in textbooks and other stuff is undervalued in the mentioned survey. However, the cost of these items in publicly funded private schools are probably higher than if child attend a public centre (uniforms, complementary quasi-mandatory activities, etc.), so we have picked up the average total spending, as the true value should be at some point between both estimates.

## Process quality

ECEC process quality:

**Parental engagement:** Parents can participate in educational activities, preparation of curriculum. Apart from informal feedback, minimums are usually regulated by Autonomous Communities and education centres regulates the details. At least, there is an initial meeting or interview at the beginning of the academic course and a group meeting per quarter;

**Cooperation between stakeholders:** There are community assistance initiatives or services in areas which have centres with a large number of children at risk. These are intended as guidance services which will assume a teacher support role, monitor the progress of children and work with parents; Teachers can exchange info through organization of smooth transition activities for children. The main tool are the so-called plans of transition, which are designed by the schools, mainly by teachers, and include welcome activities for entrants, activities of coordination between levels and even, when possible, joint activities involving pupils of pre-primary and primary education and visits with pre-primary education children to primary education classes.

In this section, we deal with three different issues. Firstly, we analyse the parental, NGOs' and other associations' engagement in pre-primary education. In the second place, we comment on the interactions between pre-primary education teachers and children. Finally, we comment on the obstacles and problems surrounding the transition process from pre-primary to primary education in Spain.

### ***Parental involvement***

In practise, there are mainly two channels of participation of parents and families in pre-primary education. The first one consists in participating in the activities designed by teachers and centres with that aim, from informal contacts, meetings and interviews to ludic and educative activities requiring families' participation (special events before Christmas, parenting schools, request to parents for participation in activities like story telling or description of their jobs, etc.). The second one is through participation in the government of the school through parents' associations and the School Board. Regarding the first type of participation, the findings of interviews and focus groups are the following. Firstly, the degree of parents' involvement depends a lot on teachers. While some of them –probably most of them- favour it, and organize many activities aiming this objective, others do not consider it relevant. In addition, the degree of parents' participation seems to depend also on factors like customs of each geographical area. There is financial aid devoted to parents' associations and during the last decade, there have been several plans for encouraging the participation of parents' in the education process (State School Board, 2013). Drawing from interviews and focus groups, we can outline several channels of direct participation:

- Meetings, written communications and personal interviews between parents and teachers (for which the regional governments and centres usually establish a minimum number);
- Informal contacts when parents pick their children up at school (this do not happen so often at higher levels);

- Ludic, social and educative activities that requires families' participation (special events before Christmas, parenting schools, request to parents for participation in activities like story telling or description of their jobs, etc.).

As mentioned above, the actual involvement and engagement depends not only on specific parents but also on specific teachers and management teams and participation is low, although wider than at compulsory levels (and higher at the first than at the second cycle of pre-primary education), and more formal than real.<sup>293</sup>

The second channel of participation consists in the channels linked to school governance. Notwithstanding their membership of parents' associations, parents can be elected for the School Board, the main governing institution of school centres. There are some data on participation of families from a pilot evaluation study carried out in 2007 (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2008) Firstly, tables 9-11 show the participation from the perspective of management teams.

**Table 9: Average participation of families in the following activities according to management teams in pre-primary education (% , 2007)**

Activity	Average participation of centres (%)
Attendance to informative meetings on the school centre and the educational system	70.0%
Attendance to informative meetings on the class group or course of their children	78.9%
Interviews between teachers and parents	78.5%
Parents' association	47.3%
Parenting schools	27.8%

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

**Table 10: Participation of the families in some issues according to management teams in pre-primary education (% , 2007)**

	Yes	No	Does not know/Does not answer
Parents' associations	91.4	8.6	0.0
Parenting schools	32.8	54.4	13.8

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

<sup>293</sup> For instance, a pre-primary education teacher that participates in a focus group mentioned that some teachers do not want parents to enter their classrooms. In this line, the inspector interviewed in the study suggested that, while she thought that it was extremely important the coordination between families and teachers (for instance, not fostering opposite sorts of behaviours), overall, she was not very favourable to foster families' participation at school beyond that element.

**Table 11: Management teams' opinion about the adequacy of participation of families in the school life in pre-primary education (% , 2007)**

Valuation	Percentage (%)
Null	2.0%
Little	14.0%
Quite much	68.0%
Very much	16.0%

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

Secondly, tables 12 and 13 show the perspective from pre-primary education teachers on the participation of children's families, showing that their overall assessment is positive.

**Table 12: Frequency of participation of families in different activities according to pre-primary education teachers (% , 2007)**

	Never	Few times	Quite many times	Many times	Does not know/does not answer
Extra-school activities	14.9	27.7	31.9	17	8.5
Workshops	19.1	38.3	21.3	12.8	8.5
Materials provided for activities in the classroom	0.1	17	55.3	25.5	2.1

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

**Table 13: Satisfaction of teachers with the relationships with families (%)**

	Percentage (%)
Very low	0.0%
Low	0.0%
High	63.8%
Very high	34.0%
Does not know/does not answer	2.1%

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

Finally, we show some indicators of the participation of families according to parents' views (tables 14-17).

**Table 14: Frequency of participation of families at the school by different channels in pre-primary education (% , 2007)**

	Never	Few times	Often	Always	Does not know/does not answer
Attendance to informative meetings on the school centre and the educational system	5.6	18.1	25.0	48.4	3.0
Attendance to informative meetings on the class group or course of their children	1.6	8.2	16.6	70.6	2.9
Attendance to individual interviews with teachers for dealing with specific situations	2.2	13.9	13.9	66.7	3.2
Participation in activities in the classroom	42.8	24.7	13.2	14.4	4.8
Participation in extra-school activities	40.2	25.6	13.5	16.7	3.9

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

**Table 15: No. of interviews that the parent had during the academic course (% , 2007)**

	Percentage (%)
Zero	0.3%
One	17.9%
Two	32.1%
Three	21.1%
Four or more	18.1%
Does not know/does not answer	10.5%

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

**Table 16: Satisfaction of parents with children enrolled in pre-primary education with participation in the centre's life (% , 2007)**

	Percentage (%)
Not satisfied	1.4%
Low satisfied	12.5%
Quite satisfied	51.3%
Very satisfied	31.2%
Does not know/does not answer	3.7%

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

**Table 17: Participation of parents of 5-years-old children in parents' associations**

	Percentage (%)
No	36.2%
Yes, but they only pay the fee and do not really participate.	48.6%
Yes and they are active members.	8.5%
Yes, and they are in the board.	6.1%
Does not know/does not answer	0.7%

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

As mentioned, although there are several actions, as in the case of other dimensions of policies targeted at disadvantaged groups, most of interventions requiring more parental engagement are concentrated in higher levels of education (particularly, primary and secondary levels). Nevertheless, there are several actions that can be cited:

- Information campaigns targeted at immigrant parents encouraging them to enrol their children in pre-primary education;
- Usually, regional actions aimed to help students with special needs require a closer collaboration and engagement from parents. For instance, they have to give their agreement to assessment of children's special needs and eventual compensatory interventions. For instance, in the case of disabilities, specialist at schools try to provide parents (particularly, those without a high educational level) with parameters and guidelines for properly caring their children;
- Often, regions and schools try to prioritize attention (meetings, interviews, parenting schools, etc.) to families in social disadvantage, attempting to make communication more fluid;
- Again, although it is difficult to be systematic here, governments and schools and even parental associations try to foster the participation of disadvantaged families in extra-school activities, even subsidising them;
- According to the NGO representative in focus group 1, some NGOs offering children and families some support when the school resources are enough, require a strong collaboration from parents, which he considered a key factor. For instance, they often try to get parents fully compromised with the progress of their children at school.

### ***Teacher-child interactions***

In the second place, we deal with the quality of interactions between teachers and children in pre-primary education. First of all, according to the survey of the Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008), 66 and 31.9% of teachers report to be very satisfied and satisfied with the relationships with their class groups, respectively. In tables 18-24, we present some of the main features of the interactions between 5-years-old children and educators. According to the information displayed in table 18,

team-working is a very frequent strategy for organising work in the last grade of pre-primary education.

**Table 18: Type of work at classrooms according to teachers (% , 2007)**

	Never	Few times	Quite many times	Many times	Does not know/does not answer
Individual activities or works	0.0	2.1	74.5	21.3	2.1
Activities or works in large teams	0.0	8.5	72.3	17.0	2.1
Activities or works in small teams	0.0	10.6	80.9	6.4	2.1

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

Teacher views on class environment, according to the same source, seem quite positive in all the considered dimensions (table 19), particularly in what has to do with children's feeling of safety, their ability to communicate each other and spontaneity.

**Table 19: Class environment according to teachers (% , 2007)**

	Never	Few times	Quite many times	Many times	Does not know/does not answer
Good environment. Children feel safe.	0.0	0.0	31.9	66.0	2.1
Children communicate to each other (they express experiences, feelings, needs).	0.0	0.0	23.4	74.5	2.1
Children show attitudes of collaboration, comradeship and solidarity with other children)	0.0	0.0	66.0	29.8	2.1
Children intervene with spontaneity when they need.	0.0	0.0	25.5	72.3	2.1
Children behave in an autonomous way.	0.0	0.0	51.1	46.8	2.1
Children know and assume the rules of coexistence of the classroom.	0.0	6.4	59.6	31.9	2.1

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

Tables 20 and 21 present the frequency of use of different motivation strategies and tools for fostering autonomy and coexistence, respectively. Although it is difficult for us to make judgments about it, it seems that they know well the variety of procedures to be used for different objectives.

**Table 20: Use of different motivation strategies according to teachers (% , 2007)**

	Never	Few times	Quite many times	Many times	Does not know / does not answer
Spontaneous children's initiatives	0.0	12.8	66.0	19.1	2.1
Children's previous knowledge	0.0	2.1	48.9	46.8	2.1
Teacher's proposals	0.0	6.4	76.6	14.9	2.1
Proposals from editorial houses	0.0	12.8	27.7	57.4	2.1
Others	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.3	95.7

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

**Table 21: Use of strategies for fostering autonomy and coexistence used by teachers (% , 2007)**

	Never	Few times	Quite many times	Many times	Does not know / does not answer
Establishment of routines and rhythms for promoting autonomy	0.0	2.1	23.4	72.3	2.1
Fostering children's initiatives and interests	0.0	2.1	46.8	48.9	2.1
Existence of an space for dialogue and reflection	0.0	0.0	46.8	51.1	2.1
Fostering the use of strategies of conflict resolution through dialogue	0.0	2.1	57.4	38.3	2.1
Basic rules of coexistence have been agreed	0.0	6.4	46.8	42.6	2.1

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

Regarding elements used in evaluation, teachers seem to use a wide variety of instruments as well. Particularly, their favourite ones are valuation of children's productions and conversations, and it seems that the evaluation criteria are often adjusted to groups' characteristics (table 22). It is worth mentioning that audio-visual techniques play a minor role.

**Table 22: Elements used in children evaluation (% , 2007)**

	Nothing	Little	Quite much	Much	Does not know/does not answer
Registering observations	2.1	12.8	44.7	38.3	2.1
Children's productions	0.0	2.1	40.4	53.2	4.3
Activities of systematic evaluation at certain moments	4.3	23.4	42.6	25.5	4.3
Children's conversations	0	4.3	40.4	53.2	2.1
Audiovisual techniques	23.4	46.8	21.3	4.3	4.3
Play situations	0	8.5	59.6	29.8	2.1
Evaluation criteria adjusted to group characteristics	0	27.7	57.4	27.7	6.4
Information from other teachers (Music, English, etc.)	2.1	8.5	51.1	14.9	4.3
Reflection about the practical application of the initial programme	4.3	4.3	72.3	19.1	4.3

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

The relevance of the different possible objectives for teachers is addressed in table 23, which shows that redirecting learning process and inform parents are the main possible uses of evaluation results.

**Table 23: Importance of the possible objectives of evaluation of learning according to teachers (% , 2007)**

	Nothing	Little	Quite much	Much	Does not know/does not answer
Redirecting learning processes	0.0	2.1	34.0	61.7	2.1
Communication to parents	0.0	0.0	42.6	55.3	2.1
Including it in individualised evaluations	0.0	8.5	48.9	40.4	2.1
Filling up administrative forms	0.0	23.4	42.6	31.9	2.1

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

Regarding children with special needs (already commented in the section devoted to structural quality, table 4), there are many teachers that do not answered the survey, but it seems that, apart from make children being evaluated and eventually treated by other professionals, individualised attention is the most widely used approach for attending them in the classroom.

**Table 24: Measures of attention of children with special needs (% , 2007)**

	Never	Few times	Quite many times	Many times	Does not know/does not answer
Individualised attention	0.0	0.0	27.7	19.1	53.2
Tutorisation by another schoolmate in certain activities	6.4	25.5	12.8	2.1	53.2
Inclusion in a small group	0.0	6.4	31.9	6.4	55.3

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

As mentioned above, the education inspector interviewed pointed out that there is a lack of good training in psychology of adulthood among teachers, which would be very useful to deal with parents, who sometimes are not sincere and whose views and actions are essential for children at pre-primary school. Also, teachers themselves seem to claim for more attention to the socio-emotional development of children (Sánchez, 2009) and reduced ratios allowing for a more individualised evaluation (WAECE, 2012).

### **Managing transition**

Thirdly, in the last place, we comment on the obstacles and problems surrounding the transition process from pre-primary to primary education in Spain. According to both our literature review and qualitative evidence collected through interviews and discussion groups, transition from pre-primary to primary education might involve relevant problems for children. Begging with the evidence presented in the literature, we can highlight the following facts:

- Argos, Ezquerria and Castro (2011a), which is based on surveys of intern teachers in Cantabria (a Spanish region), reveals practical absence of coordination between ISCED 0 and ISCED 1;
- Argos, Ezquerria and Castro (2011b) carries out an study based on meetings with children in 2 schools with ISCED 0 in Cantabria (a Spanish region) and suggest that one of the main worrying of children when finishing ISCED 0 is to share the same group as their friends at ISCED 1;
- Castro, Ezquerria and Argos (2012), based on a case study of 2 schools in Cantabria with ISCED 0 that includes interviews with parents, children and teachers, make two remarks on the main difficulties of transition from ISCED 0 to ISCED 1. Firstly, according to teachers, there is some unfavourable discontinuity between level of the requirements in ISCED 0 (Pre-School Education) and ISCED 1 (Primary Education). In the former level, there is more flexibility and more room for playing, with some children experiencing anxiety and tiredness in their first steps in ISCED 1. For instance, homework starts to be common in Spain at ISCED 1. Secondly, there are scarce interventions aiming to ease the transition between ISCED 0 and ISCED 1. Children at ISCED 0 seem to be very worried about continuing sharing group with their friends at the next level of education. Some schools try to take into account this worrying in the formation of the groups at ISCED 1 at the same school centre;
- A survey of the World Association of Early Childhood Educators (WAECE, 2011) of teachers at ISCED 0 in Spain in 2011, indicates that 73% of the teachers at this level consider a problem that ISCED 0 is completely

subordinated to the educational requirements of ISCED 1 and 61% considers that the coordination between ISCED 0 and ISCED 1 is bad or very bad;

- According to the survey carried out by the Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008) among management teams in school centres with the second cycle of pre-primary education, 41.4% points out that there is little coordination between pre-primary education and primary education teachers, with 43.1% stating that there is quite coordination and 10.3% saying that there is very much.

The qualitative evidence collected in interviews and discussion groups overwhelmingly suggests that there are many problems in this transition, although there are even more from primary to secondary school (when usually means changing school centres). The obstacles usually refer to substantial changes in the learning methodology, as play is almost completely and suddenly removed. The primary education teacher interviewed here, for instance, points out that usually the new teachers who arrived at the school begin their activity in the first course of primary, which is completely inadvisable and, naturally, hinders coordination. As, often, tenure length is the criterion according to which educators choose the courses they teach, paradoxically, less experienced and tenured teachers are assigned to the first course of primary education, which is intrinsically problematic because of the transition problems. Nevertheless, many schools design interventions in order to ease the transition. For instance, there are welcome activities for both children and their parents, visits of children enrolled in pre-primary education to classrooms of primary level, meetings between pre-primary and primary education teachers in order to discuss about methodologies and attempts to reduce the disruption between both levels (for instance, reducing the play time progressively in primary education).

Finally, we can mention that in the evaluation carried out by the Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008), management teams reported also the existence of such problems (see table 25).

**Table 25: Management teams' assessment of coordination in pre-primary education in their centres (% , 2007)**

	Null	Little	Quite much	Very much	Does not know/does not answer
Coordination among pre-primary education teachers	0.0	6.9	50	43.1	0
Coordination between pre-primary education teachers and other professionals	0.0	10.3	63.8	24.1	0
Coordination between pre-primary education teachers and primary education teachers	2.0	41.4	43.1	10.3	3.2

Source: Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (2008).

## Overall assessment of ECEC quality

In this section, we provide a critical summary and assessment of the main features of pre-primary education in Spain, main features of which are presented in table 26.

**Table 26: Summary of the main features of the Spanish pre-primary education system**

Dimension	Strengths	Weaknesses
Governance quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There are processes of internal and external evaluation.</li> <li>▪ Governance is exerted by all the educational community.</li> <li>▪ Overall, there is a wide autonomy in academic issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self-evaluation is often non-mandatory.</li> <li>▪ In some regions and cases, education inspectors selected by political criteria.</li> <li>▪ The new law reduces the participation of the school community in favour of the government.</li> <li>▪ Publicly-funded private centres try to cream the admitted students, which might generate certain segregation across schools and geographical areas.</li> </ul>
Structural quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No evidence of staff underqualified.</li> <li>▪ Very organised and structured curriculum, consistent with a view of this level as true education.</li> <li>▪ Overall, there is a wide autonomy in academic issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Initial training should be more practical-oriented.</li> <li>▪ Continuous on-the-job training system should be improved, responding more to teachers' needs and demands.</li> <li>▪ Curriculum is sometimes too ambitious, displacing play in favour of reading and other activities.</li> <li>▪ Human resources seem short.</li> </ul>
Access quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Spain is a leader country in enrollment rates in Europe.</li> <li>▪ The 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle of pre-primary is free and access to everything is guaranteed.</li> <li>▪ In the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle, low-income families are given priority.</li> <li>▪ Availability of ancillary services and programs for leaving children longer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ As it is not compulsory, some disadvantaged groups do not attend any cycle. Grants do not cover some items (for instance, textbooks and other stuff).</li> <li>▪ Not enough subsidized places in the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle.</li> <li>▪ Differences across regions.</li> </ul>
Process quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Parental engagement is higher than in any other level.</li> <li>▪ There are several ways of interaction between the school and parents.</li> <li>▪ Initiatives to smooth the transition to primary education.</li> <li>▪ Overall, management teams, teachers and parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sometimes families' participation is more formal than real.</li> <li>▪ Transitions to primary continue being a problem.</li> <li>▪ Involvement and views on participation among both families and teachers differs very much (within and between each group).</li> </ul>

In order to close this first epigraph, it is also worth mentioning that many of the weaknesses are likely to be exacerbated by the cuts in social spending carried out in Spain with the crisis.

### Short-term impact of ECEC

Because of its voluntary nature and the consideration as care rather than education until very recently, information on the impact of pre-primary education is more limited than for other educational levels. This particularly applies to the effects of participation in pre-primary education in the very short term –for instance, at the beginning of primary school- is scant. As mentioned, at 5 years old, participation in pre-primary education is almost universal. Regarding enrolment in primary education, there are no data, as it is assumed that every child attend primary education, which is mandatory. Conversely to other higher levels, there is no data on repetition in pre-primary school. According to one of the teachers interviewed, repetition is possible, but it is rare. It basically consists in delaying one year the enrolment in primary education. For instance, she pointed out that in her current class group (which means a meagre 5% of total children), only one child would stay in pre-primary school a year more than usual because he showed some symptoms of autism. Before discussing the literature, it is worth mentioning that, as part of growing efforts of evaluating performance of the educational system, both central and regional governments carry out on a regular basis standardised test. The national-wide tests evaluate competences in language, maths, knowledge of and interaction with the physical world and civil and social behaviour. Mean is normalised to 500 in order to be equivalent to the average regional scores and standard deviation, to 100. The average scores by region of the last evaluation of this sort (in 2009) are presented in table 27.

Overall, the literature tends to support a positive effect of participation in pre-primary education on educational outcomes in the short term. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the quality of the studies is not the highest, as, unfortunately, there is no experimental evidence and the fact that pre-primary education is almost universal since 3 years old makes difficult to determine the impact of the second cycle of pre-primary education. The evidence is basically limited to outcomes in primary education. The evidence is summarized below:

- The study of Gutiérrez-Domènech and Adserá (2009) uses a survey of around 1,000 children between 6 and 12 years old in Catalonia in 2005 that measures the outcomes of 2 composite indicators of cognitive abilities (global knowledge and Catalan –the regional language-knowledge) and 2 composite indicators of non-cognitive abilities (school abilities and social behaviour). They do not find any effect of attending pre-primary education when controlling for observable characteristics of families and children;
- Anghel and Cabrales (2011) the scores of students at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade of primary education (the last course, when children are around 12-13 years old) in the region of Madrid in a standardized test carried out by regional educational authorities. Data include 4 years, from 2006 to 2009. They consider the scores of the students in a standardised exam that measures skills in dictation, mathematics, reading, general knowledge and language. Focusing on the effect of starting kindergarten with less than 3 years old versus starting between 3 and 5 years old, these authors find that starting between 3 and 5 years old implies;

- No effect on skills in the section of dictations;
- -0.057 standard deviations in mathematics;
- -0.037 standard deviations in reading;
- -0.047 standard deviations in general knowledge;
- -0.026 standard deviations in language;
- Hidalgo-Hidalgo and García-Pérez (2013) evaluates the effect of attending pre-primary education on the scores obtained by Spanish children in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2011 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2011 and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2011 in Spain, which are carried out at the 4th course of Primary Education (at 10 years old). They find that attending 3 or more years increase reading scores in 16 points with respect to those who do not attend pre-primary school;
- There is an evaluation of primary education in 2003 carried out by the Spanish Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education and Science, 2005). It is based on the results obtained by students in the 6<sup>th</sup> course of primary school (12 years old) in 2003 in a wide sample of educational centres across the country. In principle, the databases are not intended to be longitudinal but only cross-sectional. It reports a strong correlation between the age of starting school and the results in the tests of Knowledge of the Environment, Spanish Language and Literature and Mathematics. Results are normalized, with average equal to 250 and standard deviation equal to 50. Particularly, the results are above the average (253-255) for all who started before 3, roughly on average (248-250) for those who began at 3 and significantly below the average for those started at 4 (240-242) and 5 (220-224). Unfortunately, neither tests of statistical significance nor multivariate analysis have been carried out;
- There are several studies of the Basque Institute for Research and Evaluation in Education (whose Spanish acronym is IVEI) based on the scores of standardised tests carried out by the regional government in all centres at the 4<sup>th</sup> course of Primary Education in 2009 and 2010. The tests measure competency in linguistic communication (in Basque and Spanish), mathematical competency, social and citizenship competency (only since 2010 on) and competency in information treatment and digital competency (only in 2009) (Basque Institute for Research and Evaluation in Education, 2010b and 2011b). Measurement started in 2009 and scores are standardized using such results as a reference, being 250 the average and 50 the standard deviation. They find that the earlier the children start pre-school, the highest the score in all the tests of competency. Unfortunately, no multivariate analysis has been carried out.

From the findings of our qualitative work, we can highlight that all the participants in both discussion groups and interviews agreed on the very relevant role of pre-primary education of child development. Particularly, they emphasized the positive effects on socialization and the acquisition of routines and habits. Regarding transition to primary, although, theoretically, pre-primary education is not compulsory, in practical terms, it is absolutely essential for children. For instance, although it is not specified in the curriculum that children should be able to read at the end of pre-primary school, at the beginning of the primary level, as knowledge and teaching it is largely based on

textbooks, in practice, it is absolutely essential to have attended the second cycle of pre-primary school in order to be successful later.

**Table 27: Average scores in standardized test in the General Diagnostic Evaluation 2009 of Primary Education in Spain**

Region	Language	Maths	Knowledge of and interaction with the physical world	Social and civic competences
Andalusia	498	488	500	494
Aragon	529	523	533	530
Asturias	534	525	542	533
Balearic Islands	471	489	457	478
Canary Islands	473	463	477	489
Cantabria	521	525	528	516
Castile and Leon	532	525	540	533
Castile-La Mancha	511	501	510	512
Catalonia	502	500	482	503
Valencian Community	491	483	450	465
Extremadura	493	495	507	506
Galicia	489	499	518	506
Madrid	529	521	530	532
Murcia	498	494	509	504
Navarre	528	537	522	519
Basque Country	494	501	n.a.	n.a.
Rioja	530	541	543	536
Ceuta	457	459	459	459
Melilla	419	430	425	423
Regional average	500	500	500	500
Spain	504	499	498	502

Source: Authors' analysis from Ministry of Education (2010).

Note: the results for the Basque Country are not comparable because of differences in the implementation of the test.

### Long-term impact of ECEC

The long-term evidence on the impact of pre-primary education in Spain is basically limited to the effect on skills and educational outcomes at secondary school. As in the case of primary education, the overall assessment of the literature for Spain points to a positive effect of pre-primary education. The findings of our survey can be summarized as follows:

- The most compelling evidence comes from the work of Rodríguez-Planas (2012), who exploiting the widening of pre-primary education up to 3 years old, which took place at a different rhythm across regions, identifies the causal effect of pre-primary education on educational and skills outcomes at 15 years old. Basically, she finds that such policy caused a rise in reading and math skills (measured by Programme for

International Student Assessment tests 2006 and 2009) of 0.4-0.5 standard deviations and roughly 0.1 standard deviations, respectively. In addition, it reduces the probability of repeating a grade in around 10 percent points in both primary and secondary education. The effect is higher among females and children from disadvantaged families.

- The Spanish Ministry of Education has carried out an evaluation of mandatory secondary education in 2000, based on the scores obtained by students in the last course of this cycle (at 14 years old) in standardized tests of competency in Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Geography and History, Spanish Language and Literature and Mathematics at secondary education (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2003). The results point out that the best results in the 4 areas of interest are for those pupils who started school at 2 years old (253-255); students who started at 3 or 4 years old show scores slightly above the average and the worst results are observed for those who began at 1 (242-246) and 5 (241-246). Unfortunately, neither tests of statistical significance nor multivariate analysis have been carried out.
- There are 2 studies of the the Basque Institute for Research and Evaluation in Education evaluating the performance of students in standardised tests carried out by the regional government in all centres at the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of Secondary Education (2010a and 2010b). They find that the age of starting to attend school is significantly correlated with the age of starting school: the earlier the children start pre-school, the highest the score in all the tests of competency. Unfortunately, no multivariate analysis has been carried out.
- Apart from the study of Rodríguez-Planas (2012), which has specific features commented in detail above, there is wide set of studies that have used data from the PISA and most of them suggest a positive effect of pre-school education on students' skills. Firstly, based on PISA 2003, Marchesi and Martínez Arias (2006) finds that pre-school education raises Math scores by almost 23 points in private schools, but not in public schools when they control for other personal, family and school characteristics. Using the same data and similar techniques, Calero *et al.* (2007 and 2008) points out that 1 year or more of pre-school education raises math scores by 6 points when compared to students with no pre-school education. They do not carry out a separate analysis for public and private schools. Calero *et al.* (2007) also assess the effect of the years of pre-school education using quantile regressions, but no statistically significant effect is reported. Remarkably, the work of Fernández and Rodríguez (2008), using logistic regression and only individual level variables of PISA 2003, finds that to those that having attended pre-school education for 2 or more years does not reduce the probability of repeating course. Based on PISA 2009 data and using multilevel techniques, Choi and Calero (2011) finds that not attending pre-school, compared to attending more than 1 year, increases the probability of being in the level 1 or below by 50-75% in math, by 25-50% in sciences and by 50-75% in reading. To attend less than 1 year increases such probability only in the case of reading (by 75-100%). Calero *et al.* (2012), using similar multilevel techniques and the same data, from PISA 2009, concludes that not attending pre-primary school or attending less than 1 year increases the probability of being in the level 1 in reading or below 1.6 and 1.7 times, respectively, more than pupils with more than 1 year of pre-school education. Choi

and Calero (2012), based on the same database and using multilevel techniques, point out that not attending pre-primary education at all (versus attending pre-primary education) decreases reading scores by 23 points in reading and math and by roughly 15 points in sciences. Cordero, Manchón and Simancas (2012), using similar procedures, find that attending pre-primary education raises scores in reading by roughly 10 points. Simancas, Pedraja and Santín (2012), using data from PISA 2009 and a similar methodology as Fernández and Rodríguez (2008), find that those not attending pre-school or attending 1 year or less have around 1.5 times more likely to repeat a grade.

There are many **factors besides pre-primary education** that can explain why children are not successful in education. In this respect, firstly, there is very wide evidence for Spain that the most relevant factors affecting the probability of early school leaving or educational failure are those related with the **socio-economic background of students and families**. This finding is widely supported by available evidence from household surveys (Peraita and Pastor, 2000, Petronlogo and San Segundo, 2002, San Segundo and Petronglo, 2004, Calero, 2006, Calero et al., 2007, Calero, 2008, Waisgrais and Calero, 2008, Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2009, Casquero and Navarro, 2010, Fernández-Macías et al., 2013). Also, results from standardized tests like PISA, TIMSS or PIRLS suggest the strong influence of the family background on educational achievement, measured through the scores of students in the different tests (Marchesi and Martínez, 2006, Calero and Escadíbul, 2007, Calero et al., 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2012, Martín et al., 2008, Zinovyeva, Felgueroso and Vázquez, 2008, Choi and Calero, 2011 and 2012, Cordero, Manchón and Simancas, 2012). Particularly, regarding the socio-economic background of students and families, several findings could be stated:

- Girls seem to perform better in the different measures;
- The lower the self-assessed economic class, the lower is the educational outcome;
- The lower the household income, the lower is the educational outcome;
- The lower parental education, the lower is the educational outcome;
- The lower the occupational level of parents, the lower is the educational outcome;
- The lower the cultural equipment (books, reading habits, etc.) and households' investments in children (for instance, because of the absence of a parent), the lower the educational outcome;
- Immigrants perform much worse on average, but the gap is mainly explained by family background and time of residence in Spain. Nevertheless, after controlling by these compositional factors, the gap is almost negligible. Second-generation immigrants clearly obtain better results than first-generation ones.

Secondly, some authors have clearly identified that **favourable conditions for less skilled workers** since the middle 1990s up to the current crisis, particularly, low unemployment rates for unskilled young workers and relatively high wages in the construction sector (where a housing bubble was leading to higher and higher prices) have contributed to early school leaving (Petrongolo and San Segundo, 2002, San Segundo and Petrongolo, 2004, Aparicio, 2010, Lacuesta, Puente and Villanueva, 2012).

In the third place, two studies point out that minimum wages might have somewhat influence on early school leaving: the **higher minimum wages** the higher the incentives for leaving education (Caparros and Navarro, 2001, Antón and Muñoz de Bustillo, 2011).

In the fourth place, regarding the **education system** itself, there are several factors (different from attending pre-primary education) that can be highlighted (Calero and Escardíbul, 2007, Calero et al., 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2012, Choi and Calero, 2011 and 2012, Martín et al., 2008, Mora, Escardíbul and Espasa, 2010, Mora and Oreopoulos, 2011, Anghel, Cabrales and Carro, 2012, Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2012):

- Although there are exceptions, most of studies points out that the type of school (public, publicly funded private and private school) has barely any influence on educational achievement once students, class groups and school characteristics and resources;
- The variance of educational outcomes within schools is much larger than between schools;
- There are no short-cut conclusions on the effects of class and school size, school autonomy, sex and ethnic composition of class groups and most of school resources;
- Memorization-based learning seems to have a negative effect, while disciplinary environment and own and peers' expectations seem to have a positive one;
- At best, teaching a subject in English does seem to have a negative effect on children whose fathers have less than upper secondary education and no effect on the rest of students.

There are plenty of **instruments allowed by the national and regional laws to help disadvantaged students**, but, unfortunately, none has been subject to a rigorous evaluation. Among these policies, it is possible to highlight the following ones (Spanish Youth Institute, 2007): curriculum adaptations, educational support and remedial education, curriculum diversification, programmes of basic professional training, educational counselling and psycho-pedagogical interventions, maximum student-teacher ratios. It is worth mentioning, because of its scope, the Plan for Reinforcement, Support and Guidance (the Spanish acronym is PROA). The PROA is an ambitious intervention, designed at a national level and implemented by some regions at some schools on a voluntary basis. This intervention was targeted at disadvantaged students at primary and secondary education, aiming to reducing early school leaving. The PROA has 2 lines of action, mentoring and reinforcement and support. There is a preliminary evaluation carried out by the Ministry of Education (Manzaneras and Ulla, 2012) since 2005-2006 to 2010-2011. Although it is not an impact evaluation (as the authors themselves acknowledge), satisfaction of students, families and teachers is high and the perception by these agents is fairly positive. Apart from that, there are many programmes of remedial education, interventions targeted at children with special needs and initiatives focused on immigrant aiming to promote integration and Spanish language learning. The diversity of programmes is wide. In addition, several NGOs (Red Cross, Caritas, Young Men's Christian Association, etc.) have displayed many programmes centred on children from disadvantaged families for which school-based interventions are not enough. The participants in both interviews concluded that earlier the intervention, the better the results (as suggested in contemporary academic literature). Most of them suggested that intervention at earlier ages should

be reinforced, although in primary is still possible to fix some problems and “*get small miracles*”.

The final comments of this section are devoted to **retention policies**, that is, grade repetition, which is a tool widely used in Spain. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (2013b), students age-adequacy rates in compulsory education ages are far below 100%: in the academic year 2011-2012, 93.8% at 8 years old, 89.1% at 10 years old, 83.9% at 12 years old and 69.6% at 14 years old. The use of this tool is controversial. For instance, in our qualitative work (interviews and focus groups), there was no agreement on the appropriateness of this approach. While some people fiercely opposed to retention policies, other considered that they could be useful if carefully used at the first courses of primary education. Below we summarize the available evidence on the effects of repetition in Spain:

- According to the survey of Marchesi and Pérez (2004) of roughly 2,000 teachers at primary and secondary education, the share of this professionals who thinks that retention is not enough to deal with the situation of students with learning difficulties is 78.2% (81.7% among primary school teachers and 75.1% among those teaching at secondary education);
- There is a study of the Basque Institute for Research and Evaluation in Education (Basque Institute for Research and Evaluation in Education, 2009), which analyse the effects of retention based on data from the PISA 2006, TIMSS 2003 and 2007 and ad-hoc surveys in educational centres where the TIMSS was implemented in the Basque Country (an Spanish region). Whether a certain student must repeat is decided by all the teachers of each group at an evaluation workshop. In 76% of the cases, the opinion of the psychological counsellor at the school is also taken into account and, occasionally, the opinion of the family (38%) and the student (20%). Their conclusions suggest that repeaters systematically achieve lower scores in these standardised tests and obtain worse academic results than non-repeaters. Only around 30% of those who repeat pass the 4 main subjects they follow. These facts are interpreted as evidence against repetition. The research exercise does not control for observable characteristics or try to disentangle causal effects of retention in a reasonable way. Strikingly (on the basis of the negative effects of repetition reported by international literature), 85.7% of the deputy head teachers consider that repetition is useful and 57% say that students who repeat improve their academic achievement. Repeaters’ opinion is not so good. It is worth mentioning that roughly 2/3 of both repeaters and deputy heads consider the automatic promotion jointly with external or preferably internal (individual attention in the classroom) academic counselling and support would have been a better alternative than repetition. It could also be mentioned that it is worrying that only 20% of schools have accessed studies on the benefits and disadvantages of repetition.

A recent work of García-Pérez, Hidalgo-Hidalgo and Robles (2014) suggests the existent of negative effect of repetition in primary and secondary education on math scores in PISA 2009 (54 points on the score of repeaters), with the effect being larger for those who repeated in primary. They modelled the endogeneity of the probability of repetition using the quarter of birth as instrumental variable. In our opinion, this

strategy is unconvincing, as many studies show the influence of this variable on educational outcomes.

## Conclusions

Overall, taking into account the performance and figures of the country in other dimensions of social and economic life (and even regarding educational policy), we can safely say that the system of ECEC in Spain is in good shape, particularly everything related to in-kind services provided or subsidised by the State. Although family and other social benefits linked to this issue are not generous compared to many of the members of the European Union, the coverage of pre-primary school is remarkable. Particularly, the second cycle of pre-primary education, from 3 to 6 years old (the age at which compulsory education starts), is free of charge and virtually universal. Nevertheless, overall, school equipment and supplies are not free and this might mean an economic barrier for certain socially disadvantaged families.

There are several issues that can be highlighted in order to conclude this report:

- Regarding governance quality, both external and self-evaluation might be considerably improved and the possible trade-offs between school choice (associated to publicly-funded private schools) and segregation should be addressed and balanced. Furthermore, the recent changes reducing the role of school community in the appointment of management teams is likely to be in the wrong direction;
- In relation with structural quality, on the one side, it is worthy to mention that the curriculum is well-designed and organised and there is barely under-qualified staff. On the other side, human resources (teachers and specialists) can be often seen as too short. Some more practical oriented training would be an advance, too;
- Based on the scope and enrolment figures, the mark that Spain gets in access should be excellent. Nevertheless, there are some issues that we should mention. Apart from a short supply of ECEC services for children under 3 years old, there are some economic barriers that remain to be removed, like the absence of grants for textbooks and other school stuff at the first grades of pre-primary education;
- With respect to process quality, the main challenge is to find tools for smoothing the transition from pre-primary to primary school. Also, to improve the quantity and quality of families' participation should be encouraged;
- The findings on the effects of pre-primary on educational outcomes and other measures are overall positive. Although most of the works have some methodological problems, the impact reported in this literature is in line with the available international evidence. We personally support devoting efforts and resources at the European Union Level to the design of more and better evaluations of early-age interventions. It is better and cheaper to invest in this issue (ex-ante), than to fund studies based on non-convincing and non-experimental evidence.

Although there are many features of the system that are susceptible to be improved, the main message from this report is that it is very unlikely that the extension and coverage of pre-primary education in Spain is behind the high percentage of young

people not completing lower and upper secondary education. No one should draw conclusions linking the current situation in pre-primary education to the current figures of early school leaving because the people who determines the current figures of early school leaving was exposed to pre-primary education roughly 20 years ago and pre-primary education has been continuously evolving during such period. Therefore, any interpretation and association between the high numbers of early school leaving and eventual quality problems in pre-primary education should be extremely cautious. In fact, Spain is a leader in terms of pre-primary education and, at the same time, the figures of early school leaving are terribly high. One of the reasons behind the magnitude of this negative phenomenon in Spain –which we think international readers should keep in mind- is that, probably, learning requirements levels for mandatory secondary education in Spain are much higher than in other countries. This position is defended by one of the most prominent experts in the topic in Spain, the sociologist Julio Carabaña (Carabaña, 2010) and was pointed out by one of the experts in the study (with no mention to Carabaña). This author always mentions a quite illustrative example: if one looks at the PISA results, Spain scores similarly as other countries as Sweden with levels of early school leaving much lower than Spain. Therefore, if the educational outcomes measured through standardised tests are similar, the difference in the percentage of students obtaining the degree should be related to the level of demand.

## List of sources

### List of Interviews

No.	Position	Institution/ Organisation	Mode of interview	Date of interview
1.	Education (pre-primary and compulsory education) expert, university Full Professor	Faculty of Education, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Salamanca.	Face-to-face	29/11/2013
2.	Education policy officer, just-retired education inspector.	Provincial Education Inspectorate, Salamanca, Salamanca.	Face-to-face	03/12/2013
3.	Compulsory education expert, university Associate Professor.	Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Salamanca.	Face-to-face	16/12/2013
4.	Mother and member of a parents' association.	Member of a parents' association, Salamanca, Salamanca.	Face-to-face	17/12/2013
5.	ECEC educator, practitioner, pre-primary education teacher (2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle).	Public pre-primary and primary education centre, Salamanca, Salamanca.	Face-to-face	18/12/2013
6.	ECEC expert, practitioner, primary education teacher.	Public pre-primary and primary education centre, Salamanca, Salamanca.	Face-to-face	19/12/2013

## Composition of focus groups

### Focus group 1

Date: 11/12/2013, 5-7 pm.

Place: Meeting room, Europe Building, Faculty of Education, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain.

No.	Position	Institution/ Organisation
1.	Pre-primary education teacher (1 <sup>st</sup> cycle)	Private pre-primary school, Carbajosa de la Sagrada, Salamanca.
2.	Pre-primary education teacher (2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle)	Public pre-primary and primary school, Peñaranda de Bracamonte, Salamanca.
3.	ECEC expert, university Associate Professor.	Faculty of Education, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Salamanca.
4.	Local policy officer, education inspector.	Provincial Education Inspectorate, Salamanca, Salamanca.
5.	Local director of a NGO specialized in education.	Young Men's Christian Association, Salamanca, Salamanca.
6.	Mother and member of parents' association.	Parents' association, Salamanca, Salamanca.

### Focus group 2

Date: 11/12/2013, 7-9 pm.

Place: Meeting room, Europe Building, Faculty of Education, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain.

No.	Position	Institution/ Organisation
1.	Pre-primary education teacher (1 <sup>st</sup> cycle)	Publicly funded pre-primary and primary education centre, Salamanca.
2.	Pre-primary education teacher (2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle)	Public pre-primary and primary education centre, Barco de Avila, Ávila.
4.	Local policy officer, education inspector.	Provincial Education Inspectorate, Salamanca.
5.	NGO practitioner specialized in education.	Red Cross, Salamanca, Salamanca.
6.	NGO practitioner specialized in education.	Spanish Caritas, Salamanca, Salamanca.

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