

first years
first priority



Early Childhood Development in

SPAIN

Country Profile 2021*



Spain has invested in policy areas impacting early childhood development (ECD). In 2021, under the General State Budget, a budget line has been earmarked for early childhood education and care (ECEC). As part of its pre-government agreement, the current government coalition pledged to “protect public services, especially education” and promote nursery schools from birth to three-years-old throughout its term in office. In addition, in June 2020, a Minimum Living Income (461,5 euros per month as a basic amount, which can be increased depending on the needs of the applicant) was introduced and now provides support, especially to the most vulnerable children and their families.

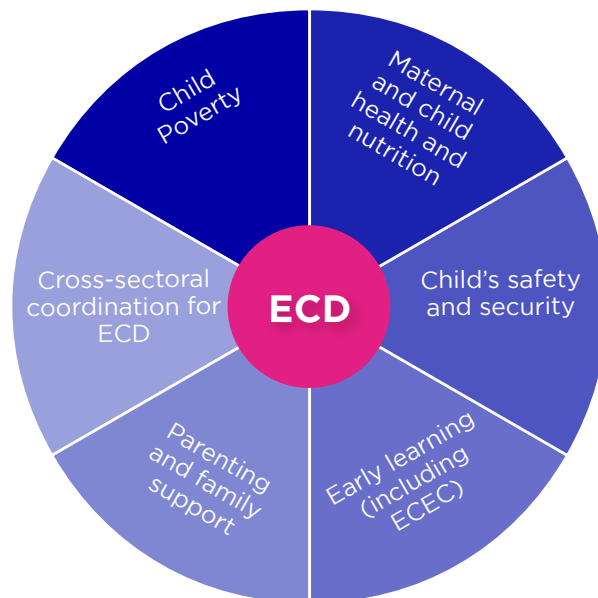
Earlier in 2021, in collaboration with more than 75 associations and private companies, the High Commissioner on Child Poverty launched the National Alliance for Zero Child Poverty, which encourages the participation and creation of alliances between all social actors to work towards a common vision: a Spain where all children and adolescents have the same opportunities for the future regardless of the conditions they were born into. In order to address the multiple dimensions of child poverty – education, nutrition, care, housing, and the digital divide – the Alliance invites actors to work together through effective strategies that take into account the needs of vulnerable children.

Country PRIORITIES

- Track data about poverty for families with young children, especially those from vulnerable groups.
- Reduce regional disparities by developing a strategic framework on ECD, with special attention to coordination mechanisms between the different authorities.
- Monitoring access to ECEC services for children under three years of age.

While promising steps have been made recently, access to basic ECD services in Education, Health, Nutrition, and/or Social and Child Protection for all children under six is not yet guaranteed. There is a lack of sufficient data across ECD policy areas, indicating that investment in ECD lacks a holistic approach. Significant challenges exist in Spain,

including the participation of children under three years of age in ECEC settings, of parenting support, especially for families in vulnerable situations, and the promotion of work-life balance. In addition, the administration of the education sector in Spain is decentralised, resulting in great differences in the opportunities and costs for ECEC services between regions, and in persistent, large regional disparities in key educational and social indicators.



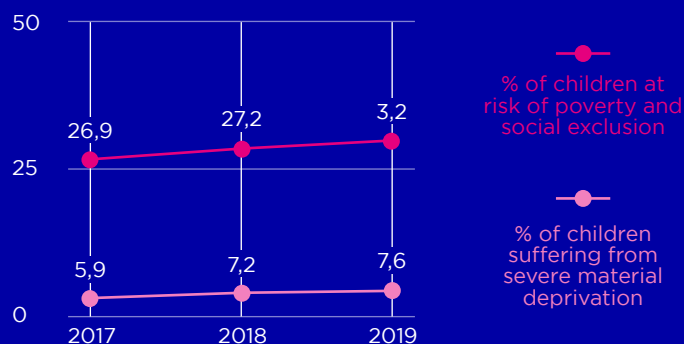
POLICY AREAS IMPACTING ECD →

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CHILD POVERTY

In Spain, there is a **lack of data on child poverty and social exclusion**. Data available over the last several years indicate that there has been an increase in both the percentage of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion and the percentage of children suffering from severe material deprivation.

Child poverty



Source: INE. Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida

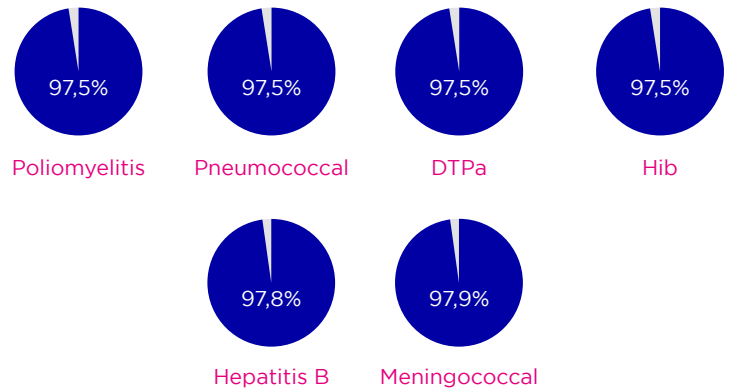


MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

In Spain, healthcare is guaranteed for all children from birth to six years. Additionally, there is 100% coverage for both antenatal care and access to a postnatal health check for newborns and mothers. Thus, the percentage of infants with low birth weight was 7,49 in 2019, whereas the percentage of children receiving vaccinations is high. Finally, in 2017, most children under four lived in households with very good or good general health.



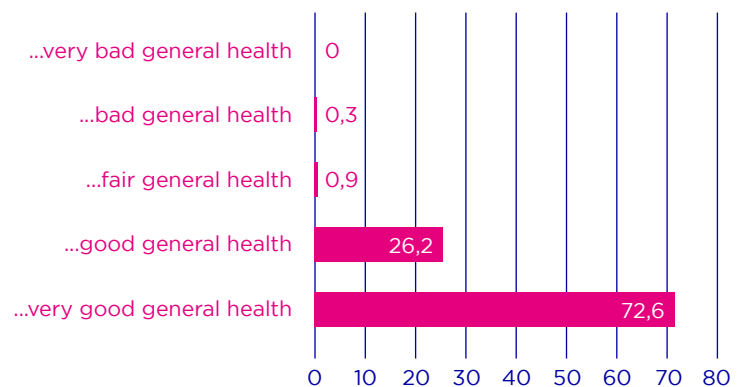
Percent of children under three receiving vaccinations



2017 data
Source: INE, observatorio de la infancia

Households' level of general health

% of children from zero to four who live in households with...

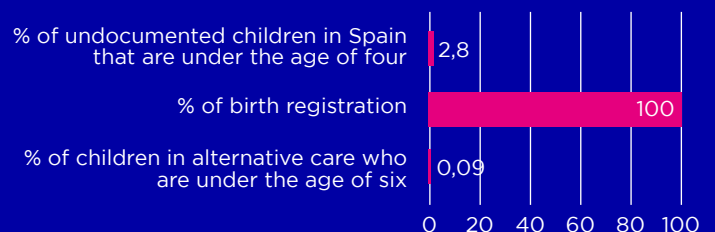


2019 data
*Source: Ministry of Health

CHILD SAFETY AND SECURITY

In the area of **child protection**, two new laws approved in 2015 reformed the legal framework governing the system of protection for children and adolescents. Although all children are registered at birth, there is insufficient data on other child safety and security indicators.

Child safety and security



2019 data
Source: INE, Save the Children

EARLY LEARNING

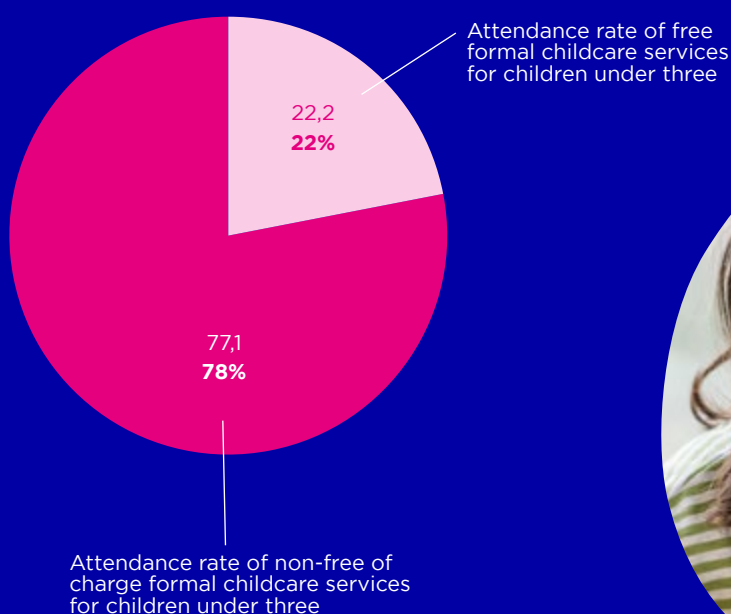
In Spain, the education sector is managed by regions. There is no universal access to ECEC for children under three years of age, whereas for children between three and six years old, there is access, but it is not compulsory. In the 2020-21 school year, 464.479 children up to three years of age were enrolled in authorised ECEC centres. Although the annual evolution shows an increase of the number of children under three enrolled (+0,4% in 2017, +0,4% in 2018 and +0,3 in 2019) the pandemic has shown a significant decrease of enrolled children (-0,9%) in the current school year.

In terms of staff qualification levels, there is a decentralized policy. Per region, different percentages of staff have a minimum of a Bachelor's level qualification for the entire ECEC birth to six age group, as well as the birth to three age group. Policies regarding the adult-to-child ratio and group size and the facilitation of access to ECEC for children from vulnerable families are also decentralised. This report provides an overview of the available policies per region.

The capacity of ECEC services to ensure the inclusion of children under six from historically marginalised groups

ECEC settings in Spain have doubled in recent years exceeding the EU average, but they are not equally accessible to all children. A lack of public spaces, high prices, insufficient aid and public support systems, complex bureaucratic processes, and a lack of inclusive or accessible schedules and models are barriers that prevent most disadvantaged children from accessing ECEC services. The great challenge that Spain has now is to expand equitable access and investment. It is not only a matter of rights, but also the most profitable and effective way to reduce educational and social inequalities.

Early learning



2016 data
Source: Save the Children

PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT

In Spain, family support mechanisms are available but limited. Currently, they support the most vulnerable, as they are provided to the families below the severe poverty threshold, thus leaving out the families living in moderate poverty.

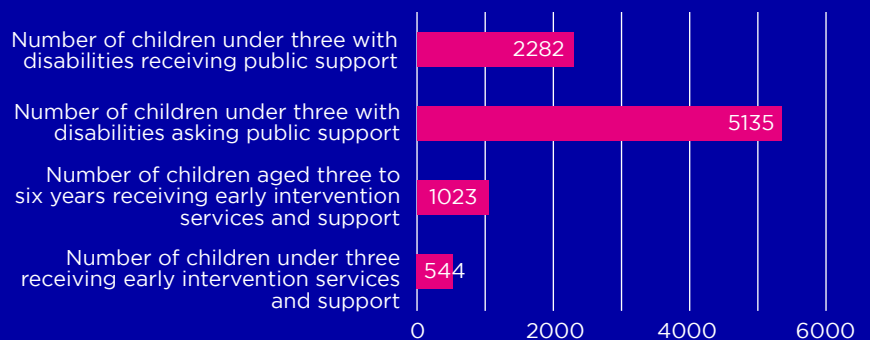
Types of policies available regulating work and family life balance

- Transfers and tax deductions
- Early Childhood Education and Care services
- Maternity and paternity leave
- Leave of absence
- Paid reductions
- Unpaid working hours reductions

Benefits available to parents with young children

- Childcare allowance
- Minimum Vital Income (July 2020)

Parenting and family support



2020 data
Source: *Institute for the Elderly and Social Services*

CROSS-SECTORAL COORDINATION

In Spain, there is **no explicitly stated multi-sectoral ECD national strategy** (or any other policy document) nor is there a coordinating body overseeing the ECD policies, funding, and spending in a cross-sectoral manner at the country level. However, **a good example of a coordinating body at the municipality level** is provided by the Hospitalet de Llobregat, a municipality in the Autonomous Community of Catalonia. For several years now, different professional childcare services for children under six years of age, such as the Municipal Social Services Centre, the Basic Health Area, public kindergartens, public nurseries and primary schools, among others, have been working together to support families in their roles of supporting children's development. The principles are underpinned by the framework of the Council



of Europe's recommendation (EU Recommendation 2006/19) on positive parenting and the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989). This coordination aims to promote communication, the proximity of services and the ability to tend to the diverse and changing needs of the population. This network organises workshops, produces reports and documentation on practices, and organises discussions with authorities and education professionals to improve services for children up to six years of age.

*The information provided in this Country Profile reflects the situation at the end of May 2021.



Country Profile Contributor

PLATAFORMA DE INFANCIA

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The views expressed by the authors do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

THE PARTNERSHIP

Eurochild is a network of almost 200 member organisations from 35 European countries working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. Eurochild influences policies to build internal capacities and facilitates mutual learning and exchange practice and research.

International Step by Step Association (ISSA) is an early childhood regional network founded in 1999, which through its programmes and services connects early childhood practice, research, and policy to improve the quality of early childhood systems in Europe and Central Asia. More than 90 ISSA Members from 43 countries implement programmes and cooperate to ensure quality and equitable early childhood services for young children, especially the most vulnerable.

European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) is Europe's leading NGO alliance advocating for better health. A member-led organisation made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups, EPHA works to improve health, strengthen the voice of public health and combat health inequalities across Europe.

Roma Education Fund (REF) was created in the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005. Its mission and the ultimate goal is to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. To achieve this goal, the organisation supports policies and programmes which ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems.

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National Coordinators: [Trust for Social Achievement \(Bulgaria\)](#), [Ensemble pour l'Éducation de la Petite Enfance \(France\)](#), [Central Union for Child Welfare \(Finland\)](#), [Family, Child, Youth Association \(Hungary\)](#), [Children's Rights Alliance \(Ireland\)](#), [Fundação Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso \(Portugal\)](#), [Step by Step Center for Education and Professional Development \(Romania\)](#), [Pomoc Deci \(Serbia\)](#), [Plataforma de Infancia \(Spain\)](#).

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