



ACCESS AND EQUITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Evaluation of five countries in Latin America and the Caribbean

POLICY GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

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Access and Equity in Early Childhood Education. Evaluation of Five Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.
Panama City, January 2020

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Acronyms

ANEP	National Administration of Public Education (Uruguay) (<i>Asociación Nacional de Educación Pública</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
CAIF	Centers for Child and Family Care (Uruguay) (<i>Centros de Atención a la Infancia y la Familia</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
CASEN	National Socioeconomic Characterization Survey (Chile) (<i>Encuesta de Caracterización Socioeconómica Nacional</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
CEIP	Council for Early and Primary Education (Uruguay) (<i>Consejo de Educación Inicial y Primaria</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
ECC	Early Childhood Commission (Jamaica) (<i>Comisión para la Primera Infancia</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ENIA	National Strategy for Children and Adolescents (Uruguay) (<i>Estrategia Nacional para la Infancia y la Adolescencia</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
INAU	Uruguayan Institute for Children and Adolescents (<i>Instituto del Niño y Adolescente de Uruguay</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
INEGI	National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Mexico) (<i>Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
JUNJI	National Board of Kindergartens (Chile) (<i>Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean

MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MIDEPLAN	The Ministry for Social Development of Chile (MDS), previously Ministry for Planning and Cooperation (<i>Ministerio de Desarrollo Social de Chile (MDS), previously Ministerio de Planificación y Cooperación</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
MINEDU	Ministry of Education of Peru (<i>Ministerio de Educación de Perú</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
MINEDUC	Ministry of Education of Chile (<i>Ministerio de Educación de Chile</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPSC	National Parenting Support Commission
OCDE/DAC	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Development Assistance Committee
PELA	Strategic Learning Achievements Program (Peru) (<i>Programa Estratégico Logros de Aprendizaje</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
PESEM	Multi-Year Sectoral Strategic Plans (Peru) (<i>Plan Estratégico Sectorial Multianual</i> , in its Spanish Acronym)
RBB	Results-Based Budgeting Programs (Peru) (<i>Programas de Presupuesto Basado en Resultados</i> , in its Spanish acronym)
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WB	World Bank



Introduction

The purpose of this evaluation was to analyze the experience of five countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), in order to assess the elements and conditions that have contributed to increased coverage and quality of early childhood education of 3-6-year-old children, and that have also played a role in closing the equity gap in education in this same age group, particularly among the most vulnerable, i.e., children from poorer families, living in rural areas, from indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, and children with disabilities.

The five countries selected were Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Mexico, and Jamaica, given the significant progress they have experienced over the past years in expanding coverage of early childhood education. The analysis period was defined as 2007-2014, but it was extended in two cases: For Chile, the analysis focused on the year 2000 onward, in order to take a closer look at the years when the more significant increases in coverage took place. For Mexico, the assessment focused on the period starting in 2002 in order to cover previous decisions that may be related to relevant facts in this field.

This policy guidance document consists of three parts. The first part provides an overview of early childhood education in the region and describes the different elements that shape each country's context. The structural aspects of this evaluation -main and specific objectives, the evaluation model followed, and criteria used to guide the analysis- are also addressed in the first part. The second part of the document presents the main findings from two perspectives: a description of each of the five countries' specific cases, as well as a comparative analysis that combines UNICEF's Theory of Change with the analysis criteria, in order to focus on elements that are common and/or specific to each case. Finally, the third part of this report makes key recommendations based on the findings and lessons learned.

This evaluation seeks to provide significant evidence to enable other LAC countries to take sustained actions aimed at achieving significant increases in coverage and quality, and reducing inequities in access to early childhood education among 3-6-year-old children who belong to the most vulnerable populations, with the intention of achieving target 4.2 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



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1. Multi-country Evaluation on Early Childhood Education for Children Between 3 and 6 Years Old

1.1. Regional Panorama

LAC has made significant progress in universalizing access to one year of preprimary education, even though the region is strongly diverse and includes lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income countries.

Throughout the last decade, countries in the region have managed to increase access to preprimary education¹; average gross enrollment rates for this level increased from 67.1 per cent in 2008 to 69.9 per cent in 2012, and to 75.7 per cent in 2016, evidencing a progressive expansion of this indicator. The following countries have maintained high enrollment levels above this average level: Barbados (88.4 per cent), Brazil (95.7 per cent), Chile (82.4 per cent), Costa Rica (78.1 per cent), Cuba (102.4 per cent), Dominica (95.7 per cent), Peru (93.7 per cent), Suriname (89.7 per cent) and Uruguay (94.2 per cent).

Even though high enrollment rates are also prevalent in several countries such as Argentina (75.3 per cent),

Bolivia (73.7 per cent), Ecuador (73 per cent), Jamaica (71.9 per cent), Mexico (72.2 per cent) and Venezuela (70.9 per cent), other countries such as Belize (50.5 per cent), Guatemala (45.2 per cent), Honduras (39.3 per cent), Paraguay (43.8 per cent) and the Dominican Republic (48.6 per cent) have the lowest gross enrollment rates in LAC (UNICEF-UIS, 2016).

Despite this remarkable progress, significant disparities persist in many countries of the region, and they limit access to quality and inclusive early childhood education for all children, particularly the most vulnerable.

This is due to gaps related to disparities in family income and other factors such as geographic location, belonging to indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, disability, parents' educational level, prevailing cultural values and characteristics of the community context.

1 According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, 2011), which is the internationally agreed reference framework adopted by UNESCO member states, early childhood education corresponds to ISCED level 0. "ISCED level 0 refers to early childhood programmes that have an intentional education component. These programmes aim to develop socio-emotional skills necessary for participation in school and society. They also develop some of the skills needed for academic readiness and prepare children for entry into primary education". "[...] There are two categories of ISCED level 0 programmes: early childhood educational development and preprimary education. The former has educational content designed for younger children (in the age range of 0 to 2 years), whilst the latter is designed for children from age 3 years to the start of primary education". "Programmes classified at ISCED level 0 may be referred to in many ways, for example: early childhood education and development, play school, reception, preprimary, pre-school, or *educación inicial*. [...]".

Regional data shows that progress in the participation of children of preprimary age² in the education system is a necessary first step but is still largely insufficient to boost early childhood development. In this regard, the Early Childhood Development Index³ shows that only 6 of every 10 children between 3 and 4 years old attend early childhood education programs (UNICEF, 2016), and that children in the highest income quintile are 2.5 times more likely to access early childhood education programs, than their counterparts in the lowest income quintile.

Even though most countries have high gross enrollment rates, inequity in access to early childhood education mainly affects children from families in the lowest income quintile, children who live in rural areas, and particularly, those belonging to indigenous communities and children with some kind of disability.

Similarly, there are also gaps between age groups, as enrollment is concentrated in children older than 4, while in most countries, enrollment among 3-year-old children is dramatically low.

The assessment also evidenced the presence of barriers to access quality early childhood education, associated with a limited supply in rural and remote areas, and among children who speak a non-dominant language, including indigenous languages. This is also a reflection of the challenges that persist in terms of teacher training since in many countries, there aren't enough teachers trained in early childhood education, who can also work in rural contexts and teach in indigenous languages.

Regarding the demand side, despite extensive scientific evidence that shows that children who benefit from early childhood education are twice as likely to develop adequately during their early years (UNICEF, 2016), the demand in the region shows that families of 3-year-old children do not yet value the importance of stimulation and early learning in the cognitive, socio-emotional and physical development of their children, which have an influence on learning achievements, future school performance and lifelong learning.

1.2. The Context of the Countries Analyzed

For the reference period, the evaluation took into account significant differences in several indicators between the countries analyzed. For example, the demographic composition covers a wide extent, ranging from 2.7 million inhabitants in Jamaica, to 124.6 million inhabitants in Mexico⁴. Uruguay and Chile have the highest proportion of urban population per residence area, which is above the regional average, while in Jamaica, almost half of the population lives in rural areas⁵.

Concerning ethnic diversity, the highest proportion of indigenous populations are concentrated in Peru and Mexico, placing both countries above the regional average for this indicator. On the contrary, Chile reports only 5 per cent of indigenous population, while Jamaica and Uruguay do not report an indigenous population in their official records⁶.

Economic indicators in the countries assessed are very diverse. The per capita gross domestic product (GDP) ranges

2 This policy guidance document refers to preprimary as the year before the first grade (theoretical age is 5 years old); primary education, refers to grades 1st to 6th (theoretical age is 6 -11 years old); and lower secondary education as grades 7th to 9th (theoretical age is 12-14 years old).

3 The Early Childhood Development Index is estimated in countries in the region that apply Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) in their household surveys.

4 CEPALSTAT | Databases and Statistical Publications, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, <<http://estadisticas.cepal.org/>>, accessed March 2019.

5 Ibid.

6 World Bank, WB open data, <<https://data.worldbank.org/>>, accessed March 2019.

from US \$4,892 in Jamaica to US \$14,546 in Chile. Per capita GDP in Jamaica and Peru is well below the regional average⁷. With regard to poverty rates, even though all countries use different methodologies to measure this indicator, there are considerable differences in the number of people living in poverty in the different cases studied. For example, in Uruguay, about 10 per cent of the population is below the poverty line, while in Mexico, it amounts to 53 per cent⁸.

Economic inequality is a measure that allows comparing countries with each other. According to the Atkinson index, Chile has the highest income inequality among the five countries, followed by Mexico, while Uruguay exhibits the lowest income inequality between its inhabitants⁹.

Similarly, according to the Gini index, Chile maintains its position as the most unequal country, followed by Mexico, while Uruguay has the lowest Gini index¹⁰.

Finally, the female labor force participation rate in the region is 58 per cent. In Peru, Jamaica, and Uruguay, this indicator is above the LAC average, while in Chile and Mexico, it is below the average for the region. In Mexico, it is 10 percentage points below the regional average¹¹.

In summary, the countries considered in this evaluation differ in several aspects, and these differences are also reflected in the field of education in general, and early childhood education, in particular.

1.3. Evaluation Objective

Taking into account the experiences of Chile, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay, the objective of the multi-country evaluation was to describe and analyze the elements and conditions that have played a role in increasing the coverage of early childhood education and school readiness services for children between 3 and 6 years old, as well as in reducing equity gaps in access to early childhood education.

The following were the specific objectives:

- » Analyze the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of specific laws, policies, and strategies in each of the five countries.
- » Identify the factors related to the enabling environment, the supply, and the demand that allowed improving access, equity, and quality of early childhood education in these five countries.

- » Design recommendations to improve the regional performance of early childhood care and education.

Considering the challenges faced by the region in terms of equity, the analysis emphasizes measures that give priority to the most vulnerable population, which, as already mentioned, are children from more impoverished families, living in rural areas, with disabilities, and those belonging to indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.

Based on the findings of the documented experiences, this evaluation is expected to provide evidence on lessons learned and make recommendations that besides providing feedback for the participating countries, will also offer inputs to enable other States in the region to implement institutional adjustment processes and design educational policies and programs, in order to increase coverage and equitable access to quality early childhood education.

7 Source: ECLAC 2011 – 2014 data (depending on the country). Accessed at: <http://estadisticas.cepal.org/>

8 Ibid. Note: this information is not available for Jamaica.

9 United Nations Development Program, Human Development Index, according to CEPALSTAT | Databases and Statistical Publications, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, <<http://estadisticas.cepal.org/>>, accessed March 2019.

10 World Bank, WB open data, <<https://data.worldbank.org/>>, accessed March 2019.

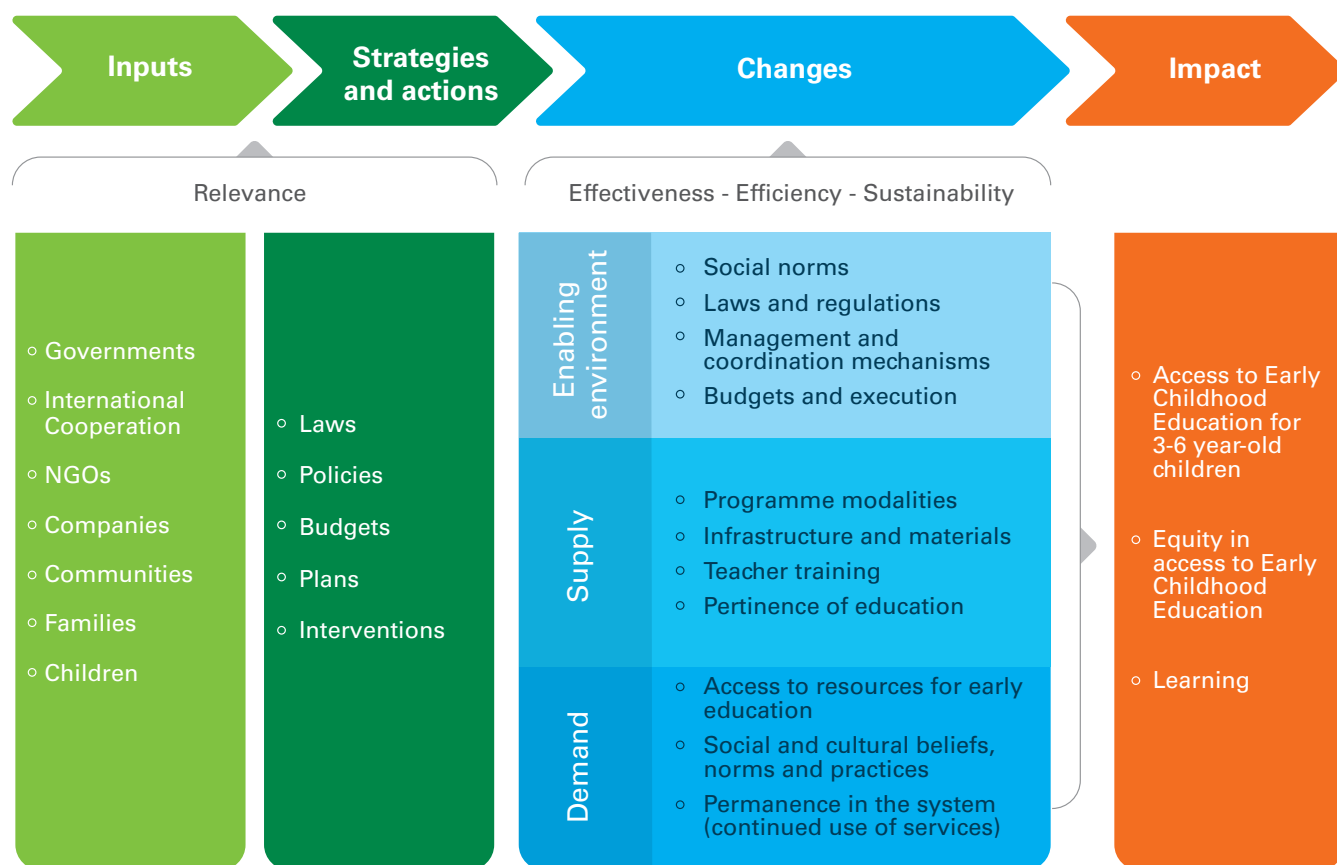
11 Ibid.

1.4. Evaluation Model

The evaluation model integrates the following five international criteria from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC):

relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact, taking into account the levels and social determinants set forth by UNICEF's Theory of Change.

Figure 1. Theory of Change

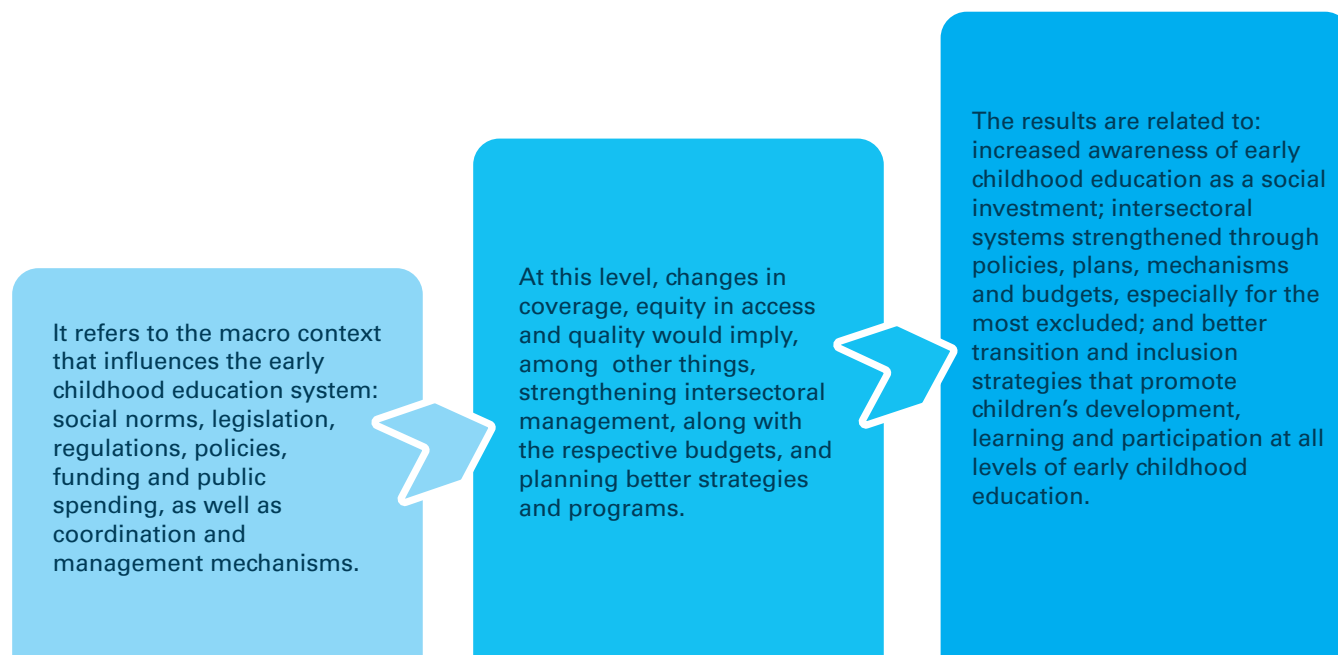


The idea is to describe and understand the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the strategies and actions (inputs) adopted by the main stakeholders involved (governments, international cooperation, non-governmental organizations, private sector, women's organizations, parents' associations, schools, communities, families, and children), who have helped to produce a change (in the environment, and at the supply and demand levels), which is described as an increase in coverage, quality

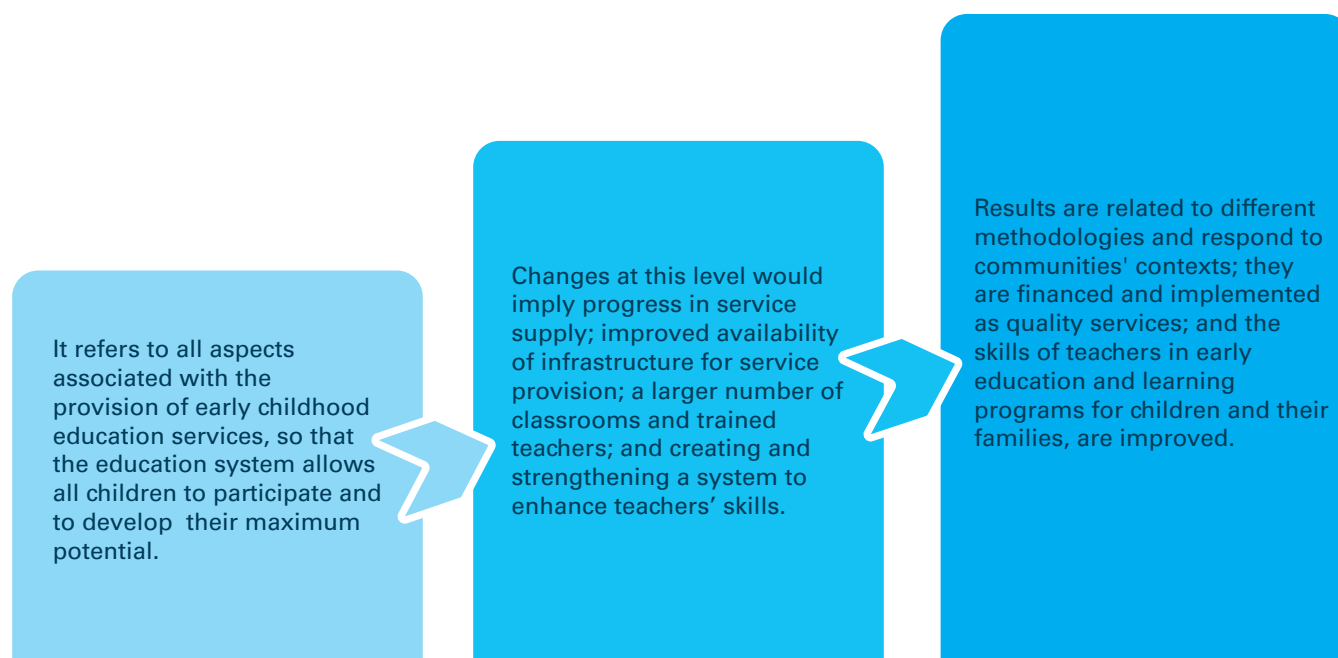
and equity in access to quality early childhood learning and education for children between 3 and 6 years old, especially those belonging to the most vulnerable populations.

Regarding early childhood education, the Theory of Change components are interconnected with the three levels or determinants of UNICEF's Monitoring Results for Equity System (MoRES), grouped into three categories: (i) enabling environment, (ii) supply, and (iii) demand.

i. Enabling environment or favorable context:

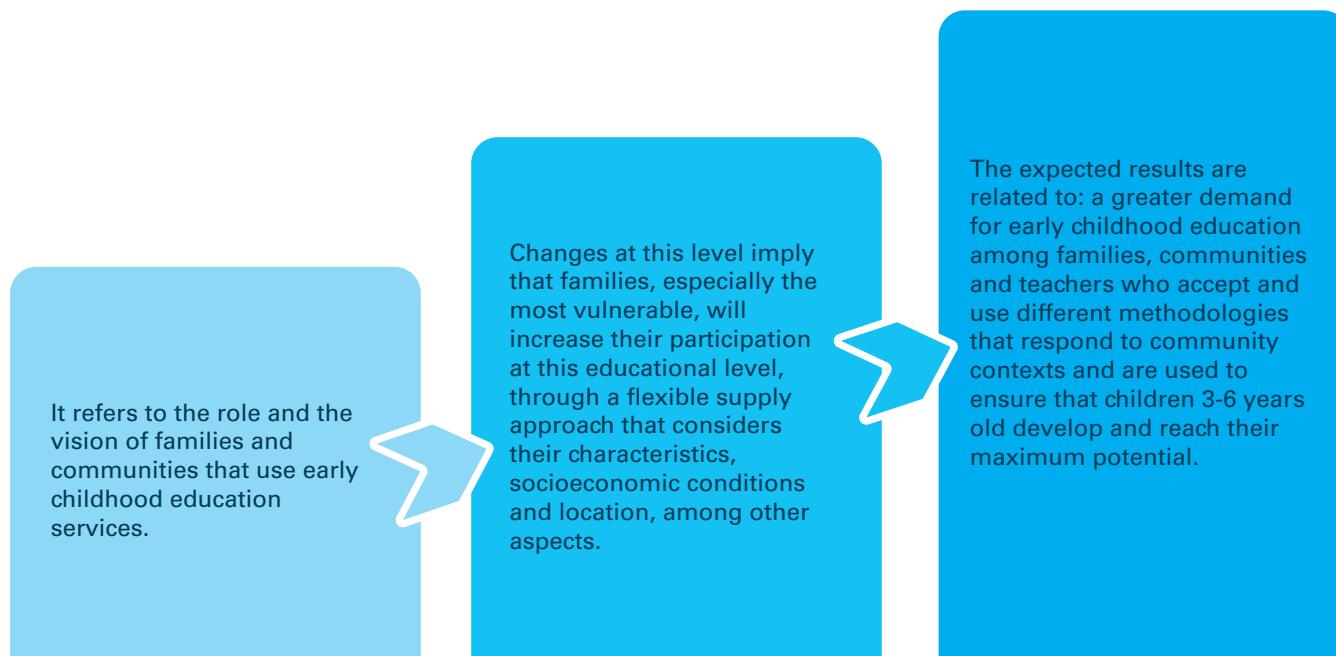


ii. Supply:





iii. Demand:



The underlying logic of the Theory of Change is based on the hypothesis that progress in coverage and equitable access to quality early childhood education can be achieved if relevant, effective, efficient, and sustainable changes are introduced in the context and in

supply and demand. These changes must be coordinated and should focus on achieving transformations in the system. The Theory of Change also identifies obstacles or limitations (bottlenecks) at each of the different levels of the system.

1.5. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation process analyzed the five OECD/DAC criteria¹²: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact. With regards to the latter, rather than assessing the impact of learning outcomes in children, the evaluation focused on assessing educational quality from a cross-cutting perspective, by approaching indicators on the transition to primary education, the quality of available teachers and the contextualized use of methodologies to respond to the specific characteristics of the most vulnerable 3-6 year-old child population.

The criteria and the main categories of questions used for the inquiry, are described below:

- » **Relevance:** This criterion assesses the extent to which the changes produced at the different levels were relevant for increasing coverage in quality early childhood education and reducing equity gaps while responding to the particular needs of the most vulnerable population groups.
- » **Effectiveness:** Evaluates the achievement of the objectives set in each country. In this case, it analyzes factors related to the context and to supply and demand, which were positively influenced by the decisions taken by the State with regards to the expected results. This criterion also addresses possible bottlenecks or difficulties that represent challenges.
- » **Efficiency:** Analyzes the relationship between the adequate use of existing resources and the achievement of objectives. This process also investigated cost-benefit evaluations carried out before or after the implementation of the strategies chosen by the countries, and whether there are any alternatives (model or pilot alternatives) to the strategies implemented.
- » **Sustainability:** This criterion addresses a country's real possibilities to sustain both the actions implemented and the results obtained over time. In this regard, the evaluation looked for evidence that could facilitate or hinder the sustainability of the measures at the different levels of the system.
- » **Impact:** This criterion seeks to establish the effects (or changes) that certain policies or programs may have on specific populations. In this regard, the study only considered the possible outcomes, or the results of the policies implemented in the five countries.

¹² OECD has a Development Assistance Committee that promotes cooperation and other policies to contribute to sustainable development, including economic growth in favor of the poor, poverty reduction, improvement of developing countries' living standards and a future when no country will depend on aid.



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2. Evaluation Findings

2.1. Multicountry Evaluation: Cases

The evaluation findings in each country are described below, and they seek to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact of the decisions taken by these States to achieve a sustainable

increase in the coverage of education, early learning and school readiness services for children between 3 and 6 years old, as well as advances in reducing equity gaps in access to this education level.

2.1.1. Chile

Between 2000 and 2006, the Presidential Goal to increase access to early childhood education by 120,000 places, proved to be a **relevant** measure for the country's needs during the period analyzed, which was embedded in the larger context of an educational reform initiated in the 90s in favor of the quality and equity of early childhood, basic and secondary education (Arellano, 2001).

The inclusion of scientific evidence regarding the profitability and effectiveness of investments in early childhood development is another element that favored the implementation of policy decisions; cost-benefit models and estimates from international literature (Shonkoff & Philips, 2000 and Heckman, 2000, 2008), were used in the Presidential Goal to justify the expansion in the offer of early childhood education services for the most vulnerable groups.

With the information collected, it can be determined that efforts to improve access to this educational level were **effective** since it increased by 11 per cent (CASEN, 2006), and the gaps between income quintiles were

reduced. However, greater efforts are required to close the significant access gap between urban and rural areas and considering that the Presidential Goal focused on increasing coverage, it is also necessary to focus on quality. This evaluation indicates that the results achieved are partial, and guaranteeing the right of all children to quality early childhood education remains a challenge.

Significant coordination efforts were observed between the Early Childhood Education Unit of the Ministry of Education, the National Board of Kindergartens (JUNJI) and the Integra Foundation, under the direction of the Ministry. This made it possible to achieve a unified vision of the system, as well as an effective division of competencies for the provision of early childhood education services.

On the other hand, the increase in public spending facilitated the goal's **efficiency**, since between 2000 and 2006 there was an increase in the percentage of spending in education that was allocated to early childhood education.

According to some evaluation participants - families and specialists - the increase in the **demand** for a service that was not previously covered by the education system, is a factor that contributed to achieving the goal. However, it was necessary to intensify media campaigns to transform families' perception - especially families of 3-year-old children, - highlighting the relationship between early childhood development and stronger future educational achievements. In the long term, this effort represented a real cultural transformation regarding the importance that families currently confer to early childhood education in Chile.

The lack of alternatives for early childhood education modalities that were offered in the formal education system is considered to have limited the achievement of the goal. This lack of alternatives evidenced this sector's scarce flexibility regarding families' needs.

Various local studies prove the hypothesis regarding the benefits of early childhood education. Among these studies, Cortazar (Cortazar, 2015) shows that children who attended public early childhood education programs between 2000 and 2003, obtained better results in mathematics and language, on average, than those who did not participate.

The evaluation also found that the Presidential Goal to increase coverage was **efficient** from the economic point of view, as it created new classrooms in previously existing schools, as part of an expansion strategy. Within the framework of the education reform, which this strategy was a part of, all schools in the country progressively incorporated the single shift, which meant

developing infrastructure capable of simultaneously providing services to students who had previously attended in two shifts (morning and afternoon shifts). New classrooms were created at a lower cost than would have been required under other conditions.

However, with these measures, the inclusion of early childhood education in the school system precipitated an "academic orientation"¹³ of teaching practices at this educational level. This situation resulted in the fragmentation of early childhood education, as part of the educational levels were under the responsibility of institutions such as JUNJI and Fundación Integra, but others were directly linked to the Chilean Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), which resulted in disparities in the type of technical support provided, hiring conditions and salaries, among others.

Finally, the coverage expansion policy has been **sustainable** over time, because investment funds were committed by this Ministry as a budget item that cannot be removed by future administrations. Another measure taken to protect sustainability throughout time refers to strengthening and unifying the institutions responsible for early childhood education through the creation of the Undersecretariat of Early Childhood Education. On the other hand, sustainability in the expansion of coverage, which allows the inclusion of the most vulnerable population, seems to be assured by guaranteeing access to children belonging to families from the first income quintile. Notwithstanding the significant progress achieved in Chile, the quality of education is a remaining challenge regarding equity in early childhood education.

13 In this context, the "academic orientation" of early childhood education is understood as the use of teaching methodologies typical of low and middle primary school levels, for example: standing in front of students while they sit on benches; school day largely dedicated to individual work based on printed material; and teaching focused on reading and writing, among others. These methodologies are considered to be oblivious to the needs of children during their early years, when activities focused on play and on physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development should prevail.

2.1.2. Jamaica

For decades, Jamaica has prioritized early childhood development. The Early Childhood Commission was created in 2003 to improve coordination between the different sectors involved. Although early childhood education is not fully subsidized nor compulsory, and there are disparities at the access level, when this evaluation was carried out, 98 per cent of children aged 3 to 5 attended some type of program for this educational level.

The Commission created the National Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Development 2008-2013, and the Standards for the Operation, Management, and Administration of Early Childhood Institutions. These instruments are considered **relevant** to improve and standardize the quality of early childhood centers as safe spaces for the provision of quality educational services. The National Strategic Plan was formulated based on a diagnosis and consultation process carried out with parents, teachers, health professionals, and other public and private stakeholders interested in early childhood development at the national and international levels. Among the National Strategic Plan's objectives was to regulate the operation of all Early Childhood Institutions in the country, in order to standardize the quality of service provision.

International and local research revealing the importance of promoting early childhood development had a positive influence on the contents of both policy instruments. The National Strategic Plan and the Standards include the rights approach and are aligned with the global principles for early childhood development. These instruments also include strategic guidelines that promote rights education, primarily aimed at preventing child abuse.

The National Strategic Plan and the Standards are considered **effective** instruments since they improved the conditions for the provision of quality early childhood education. Since the early stages of its implementation, there was an increase in the registration, monitoring, and oversight of Early Childhood Institutions, and most of them complied by sending the information required for the accreditation process and received at least one

inspection. The Early Childhood Commission mapped these centers to identify the resources, materials, and professionals available in the area.

However, during the period analyzed, it was evident that many of these educational centers could not immediately meet the standards. According to the participants, this was largely due to the lack of adequate infrastructure and teacher training, which limited the efficiency of the expected results. According to the World Bank report, at the end of the five years of the National Strategic Plan, only 48 per cent of Early Childhood Institutions had fully applied to register with the Commission, and of these, only 52 per cent had received permission to operate.

At least two factors that limited the **effectiveness** of the Standards and the National Strategic Plan were identified: (i) the lack of certified professionals at different levels of the Plan's implementation, from specialized teachers to people who could inspect and supervise the centers; and (ii) the policy's financial limitations. Although there is no information or documentation on the funding gap, people who were interviewed mentioned that this factor limits the capacity of Early Childhood Institutions to meet the required standards.

Concerning the **equity** approach, rather than targeting a vulnerable population, Jamaica privileged universal access. The shortage of specialized professionals and the lack of free widespread public provision can force families to look for paid alternatives, which translates into disparities in access based on their income quintiles. Although measures were taken to improve the **quality** of services and to provide support for children with disabilities and their families -through the design of a system that includes identification, early detection, and referral procedures-, in the opinion of the participants consulted, some of the plan's inclusion components still need to be improved.

The existence of the Commission as a recognized state organization, along with the implementation of the National Strategic Plan and the development of



a legal and regulatory framework, are institutional factors that contribute to the **sustainability** of the plan. In this evaluation, Jamaica was the only country that implemented the measures with resources from international cooperation and technical assistance from the World Bank. Even though there is a solid institutional base that supports the continuity of efforts, the lack of public funding creates a dependence on external resources and on the private sector, which could jeopardize the sustainability of this effort in the long term.

Anticipating future financial challenges, the Early Childhood Commission - in compliance with its legal mandate - led a process to mobilize additional resources for early childhood learning, in order to ensure greater funding. However, although the Commission's public budget is distributed among the different competent sectors, in the opinion of the interviewees, coordination among the different ministries in planning and managing budgetary reports could be improved.

Overall, despite financial constraints, Jamaica managed to move in the right direction in its provision of early childhood services, including education services. The advances include: (i) Registering all Early Childhood

Institutions providing services to children between 0-5 years old; (ii) Creating a monitoring system through school inspections; (iii) Introducing a national passport for child development, to access health examinations and monitor growth and development; (iv) Substantially increasing the number of educators with professional qualifications; (v) Delivering inputs to improve infrastructure, teaching and learning; (vi) A game-based and child-centered curriculum; and (vii) Developing a National Parenting Policy, together with creating the National Parenting Support Commission (NPSC), as an implementing entity.

The Standards for the Operation, Management and Administration of Early Childhood Institutions, which are backed by a legal regulatory framework, require mandatory registration of Early Childhood Institutions, the introduction of quality standards, as well as monitoring and support measures, among other fundamental actions. The expected results of the second version of the National Strategic Plan (2014-2018) continue to be associated with increasing quality and strengthening Early Childhood Institutions, by making adjustments based on the lessons learned during the first implementation cycle.

2.1.3. Mexico

For this country, the evaluation examined the constitutional reform of article 31, which sets forth the compulsory nature of early childhood education, which is also recorded in the National Development Plan for 2001-2006 and in the respective programs for its implementation.

The evaluation found that both the 2002 law -which regulates three years of compulsory early childhood education, the Preschool Education Program (the curricular framework used since 2004) and education programs, were **relevant** strategies to respond to the situation of early childhood in Mexico. This took place in the context of an education decentralization reform initiated in the 1990s, which transferred the administration of all basic education - including early education and learning - to each of the federal states.

With regard to the global principles of early childhood education, the need of several families to access educational programs for this level was also assessed. The evaluation also addressed the development of guidelines to promote quality in service provision, through a curriculum framework in the Preschool Educational Program.

Particular emphasis was placed on at-risk populations: indigenous communities, rural populations, marginalized groups, and population with disabilities. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), indigenous children of preschool age represented 1.26 per cent of the total population in the year 2000, but only 5 per cent attended the indigenous early childhood education modality (INEGI, 2004). Consequently, this law was aimed at reducing

profound urban-rural inequalities, encouraging joint work between federal and local authorities to provide early childhood and primary education services, aimed at marginalized and geographically isolated populations.

The evaluation found that the implementation of the law that establishes the compulsory nature of early childhood education was an **effective** measure, although universal access for children aged 3 to 5 is still a challenge, especially for the 3-year-old group.

Since 2004, the Preschool Education Program established a process to review plans, programs, and materials that involved training teachers and administrative staff. However, both the documentary review and the testimonies of key participants in the evaluation coincide that training provided to staff was insufficient for them to incorporate the new educational practices. One of the bottlenecks, which is also a pending challenge, relates to the central government's lack of supervision, in the context of an administrative political organization where federal entities are autonomous regarding the delivery of the service, the definition of curricular contents and the use of resources. This resulted in disparities between federal states in the provision of early childhood education services.

Another aspect analyzed was the professional development of teaching at this level, which was partially achieved. There are significant gaps regarding teacher training for the different modalities that are taught and, mainly, among those who serve the population at greatest risk. The most marginalized and rural communities not only lack sufficient professional teachers but also face challenges due to insufficient provision of adequate infrastructure. In this sense, although **equity** in access improved, quality differed among federal entities. Moreover, there is no information from all states that would allow a more detailed analysis of the factors that influenced these disparities in educational quality.

It is necessary to carry out a budget planning process from the beginning, in order to better determine the **efficiency** of the measures adopted –the Mandatory Education Law, the 2004 Preschool Education Program and education programs– with the objective of achieving universal preschool coverage. These measures affected the allocation of resources for teacher training and the

provision of materials and infrastructure, all of which are fundamental requirements to increase coverage and quality, especially at the level for 3-year-old children. The evaluation did not find evidence that cost-benefit analyses were performed.

The disparities in the allocation of resources between the different states, and between urban and rural municipalities, may have been due to the fact that spending increased based on enrollment, while spending per student remained stable, as did overall public spending in basic education. Spending was not prioritized in territories with the most vulnerable populations, where it should be allocated not only to infrastructure but also to dissemination programs to raise awareness among families of the importance of this education level.

In general, better supervision of the goals set in each of the states is required to ensure coherence with the national level and to achieve a better redistribution of resources in early childhood education.

In terms of **sustainability**, the aspects evaluated were considered adequate to maintain coverage, at least among children aged 4 and 5. However, the pending challenge is to achieve greater investment of resources, particularly in areas concentrating most of the vulnerable population and for 3-year-old children.

From the demand-side point of view, mothers who participated in the focus groups mentioned that they enrolled their children in preschool, mainly to enhance their development, to strengthen their primary school readiness, and to reinforce the values taught at home. Regarding their children's attendance to these education programs, participating mothers highlighted positive aspects such as increased socialization, overcoming shyness, and learning how to read before entering primary school.

In the Education Plan for 2030, Mexico's commitment to continue advancing in terms of early childhood education coverage and quality is evident. In this sense, integrating this level in compulsory primary education has supported the sustainability of the law. Early childhood education is included in all decisions pertaining to primary education, and this offers advantages regarding continuity in the system.

2.1.4. Peru

The evaluation analyzed the Results-Based Budgeting Programs (RBB), which in the education sector are referred to as Access, and the Strategic Learning Achievements Program (PELA, in Spanish). The PELA program was implemented in 2007 to reverse the national results that showed significant problems in quality regarding learning achievement. As part of this strategy, children's early entry to the school system was considered positive, as it promoted better results in the future. The Access program was subsequently developed to increase coverage of primary education among 3-10-year-old children. On the other hand, the Multi-Year Sectoral Strategic Plans (2007-2011 and 2012-2016 PESEM) were also evaluated. These are sectoral planning instruments, which include the expected results of the RBBs and define the coverage increase for the most vulnerable population, among other objectives.

In general terms, the evaluation considered that PELA and Access were a **relevant** response to increase coverage in early childhood education. Prior to the definition of these RBBs, the regulations included access to early childhood education as a national priority outlined in the 1993 Constitution, in the National Agreement (2002) and in the General Law on Education (2003). This suggests that there was a favorable context before the RBBs were created, thereby setting objectives, actions, and budgets for all the education levels in the country, including early education and learning.

The evaluation found that PELA and Access were effective in increasing the coverage of early childhood education and contributed to reducing the access gaps identified. The net attendance ratio for children 3 to 5 years old, increased from 61.6 per cent in 2006 to 80.9 per cent in 2015 (Escale-Ministry of Education, 2015). RBBs also contributed to improving access for rural communities and the most impoverished population. This is reflected in an increase of more than 23 percentage points in the coverage of early childhood education for children in the lowest income quintiles (46.6 per cent in 2007 and 69.9 per cent in 2014). Rural children's participation in these programs increased by more than 25 percentage points, from 52 per cent in 2007 to 77.5 per cent in 2014, with significant progress also between 2009-2010 and 2011 -2012 (Escale-Ministry of Education, 2015).

Regarding the enabling context, it is worth mentioning the importance of prior legal developments whereby education was established as a right and universal education as an objective. The existence of RBBs as instruments that guide management, with the power to specifically allocate public resources, was a factor that favored the **effectiveness** of the results expected from the PELA and Access programs. Another element worth highlighting is the possibility of implementing early childhood education according to the needs of the local context, by making decisions on the type of modality, jointly with authorities and communities, who value the opportunity to participate in these processes.

A significant obstacle identified was the lack of teachers specialized in early childhood education. This lack of human talent is part of the discussion regarding the quality of pre-service and in-service teacher training required by the country. On the other hand, a highly dispersed geography is a limiting factor for service provision for the rural population, as well as the relevance of the contents taught to indigenous children, considering their context. Ensuring relevant education contents for indigenous children is not always possible due to the lack of teachers who speak the community's own language. Geographical dispersion also limited the continuity of educational processes, as children who access early childhood education programs in their communities may then see their transition to first grade interrupted by the distant location of primary educational institutions. Another obstacle detected is related to the articulated management of RBBs, since the increase in coverage of early childhood education through these budgetary programs requires that the actions of the actors involved are complementary and are implemented during specific time periods, in a coordinated manner. This lack of articulation caused problems related to guaranteeing specific minimum infrastructure requirements or the availability of teachers to start school activities, or in situations when the people responsible for providing the service had not received the necessary instructions.

Although no efficacy evaluations were identified, depending on the cost analysis for the programs or modalities implemented, it was determined that there was a significant increase in public spending per student during the implementation of the RBB included in this evaluation. Public spending



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per student increased from a per capita annual disbursement of US \$270 in 2007 to US \$756 in 2014 (Escale-Ministry of Education, 2015). This information, along with the increase in coverage during this period, shows that resources were used **efficiently**.

On the other hand, it is possible to assert that the **sustainability** of the instruments evaluated is determined by the validation of RBBs as effective and efficient tools for managing results-based spending. The increase in coverage is also supported by a series of normative instruments¹⁴ that ensure the inclusion of the early childhood education budget in the National Budget Law.

The agreements between the Ministry of Education and local governments, which set commitments for both parties, is another element that promotes sustainability. In the opinion of some of the participants in the interviews

(scholars, early childhood education specialists and representatives from regional NGOs), encouraging communities and families' participation -through consultation processes regarding early childhood education modalities in their territories - not only helped increase families' awareness of the importance of early childhood development, thus increasing the demand for these programs, but also enabled reaching important commitments with local actors that affect the sustainability of measures to improve equity in access to quality early childhood education.

On the contrary, a possible discontinuous provision of the service in remote areas is considered a limiting aspect for sustainability, since greater access in rural areas may lead to the interruption of beneficiary children's transition to primary school because these schools are distant from the community where they reside.

14 The most relevant include the Constitution of 1993, the National Agreement (2002) and the General Law on Education (2003).

2.1.5. Uruguay

The following are the policy tools analyzed as part of the evaluation: (i) the Budget Law of the National Administration of Public Education (ANEP) for the periods 2005-2009 and 2010-2014, which increased the resources and defined new goals in early childhood education coverage, through the Council for Early and Primary Education (CEIP) and the Uruguayan Institute for Children and Adolescents (INAU); and (ii) the National Strategy for Children and Adolescents (ENIA) (2010-2015), which was aimed at increasing the coverage of early childhood education.

The evaluation found that the ANEP budget law was **relevant** to respond to the lack of coverage in early childhood education, particularly among children aged 3 and 4 and those in the lowest income quintiles. Along the same lines, ENIA considered the global principles of early childhood education and the importance of promoting both the development of the potential of children according to their age, as well as their future performance.

For both five-year periods, the instruments analyzed were favored by the decision to establish education as a human right to be guaranteed by the State. This is upheld in article 24 of the General Law on Education - in force since 2009 - which emphasizes that early childhood education must stimulate the emotional, social, motor and intellectual development of children 3-5 years old, while committing to providing comprehensive education services that promote inclusion. The ENIA seeks to build an equitable country that guarantees the full exercise of the rights of children and adolescents and their families, which includes gender equality and provides quality education at all levels.

The implementation of the ANEP and ENIA budget law is considered an effective instrument to increase coverage and reduce equity gaps in access to the education system. In the 2007-2014 period, the total coverage of children 3-5 years old increased by 11 per cent; 15 per cent among 3-year-old children, and 7 per cent among 4-year-old children (INEE, 2015 and 2016). These measures helped consolidate the universalization

of early childhood education in the 5-year-old age group, the quasi-universalization among 4-year-old children, and also helped achieve a significant increase in coverage for the 3-year-old age group.

This was attributed to the availability of necessary funds, together with legislative and policy adjustments related to coverage and the appointment of new institutional coordination mechanisms. The qualification criteria for teachers in early childhood education centers, primary schools, and in the Centers for Child and Family Care (CAIF) were also updated. However, the disparity of criteria to determine teachers' qualifications for these positions could have affected the quality of service provision.

With regard to matters that require improvements, the evaluation found that greater efforts are needed to raise awareness among families of the importance of education and early learning, especially in areas with vulnerable and at-risk populations. In this sense, the ANEP and INAU organized campaigns to promote early childhood education in communities where families still consider irrelevant for 3-year-old children to attend these type of educational programs because they are too young and because it is not a mandatory level. On the other hand, although access is free, a voluntary contribution is often required, and this affects equity in service access because it depends on the parents' economic capacity.

With regard to families' awareness, although the system is structured to facilitate the transition between levels, there are challenges in terms of children's permanence, especially among the lowest income quintiles, where assistance is 50 per cent among 4-year-old children and almost 60 per cent among 5-year-olds. Absenteeism diminishes the impact of learning and the degree of development that children can achieve at this educational level.

Despite the increased supply that seeks to improve enrollment among the most vulnerable population, there are still significant disparities, especially among

3- and 4-year-old children from the lowest income quintiles. Although enrollment among 4-year-olds is 90 per cent, the participation of children in the lowest income quintile is 17 percentage points below children in the highest income quintile (81 per cent versus 98 per cent). This situation is intensified among 3-year-olds in the lowest income quintile, whose participation is more than 38 percentage points below those in the highest income quintile (53.6 per cent versus 91.7 per cent) (MIDES, 2015).

Public spending accounts for 76 per cent of the total budget in education and private investment accounts for 24 per cent. Budget allocation to early childhood education as part of the national budget increased significantly. At the beginning of the period analyzed, Uruguay had proposed increasing spending in early childhood education from 2.88 per cent to 4 per cent of GDP, but at the end of the period the increase reached 5.3 per cent of GDP. Expenditure on early childhood education represented 10 per cent of total spending for the education sector (INEE, 2014).

Although the objectives of the second period analyzed (2010-2014) were aimed at improving the quality of early childhood education, only partial results were obtained. The evaluation identified the different efforts made in this field, including requiring that all staff working at this level needs to have some type of training and be certified; the curricular framework for delivering curricular contents in CAIF centers and ANEP establishments, together with an early childhood education inspection and supervision system in the Council for Early and Primary Education; and the indicators to improve certain aspects of quality that are considered as structural, such as the teacher-student ratio, group size and teacher qualifications.

In general, despite the fiscal effort and cost reduction, the **efficiency** of the measures was affected, since, in comparison to the projections made, fewer classrooms were built, fewer places were created for teachers and administrative staff, and the student-teacher ratio was not reduced¹⁵. Furthermore, in the instruments analyzed, no studies were found regarding the relationship between the costs of coverage increases and their impact on the quality of initial education in Uruguay. The stakeholders consulted recognize that currently, the priority is to improve the quality of learning and universalize the level for 3-year-old children.

While acknowledging that results in early childhood education are sustainable for children aged 4 and 5, and that the curricular framework, the relevance of the programs and teachers' qualifications have progressively improved, participants in the evaluation agreed on the need to prioritize quality work for all education levels, as well as early learning and universal coverage for 3-year-old children.

In the long term, the **sustainability** of results is based on the fact that resources are guaranteed by law and that the efforts on the supply side have played a role in increasing access to 4- and 5-year-old children. However, certain bottlenecks need to be addressed, such as: improving resource efficiency (planning spending, setting goals and verifying compliance); making sure that planning processes take into account the number of trained teachers required; improving structural aspects regarding quality and generating evidence on the measures taken in this sense for the universalization of education for 3-year-old children. With regard to access to education for 3-year-old children, the biggest obstacle stems from the most vulnerable families who are reluctant to send their children to preschool, as this helps to sustain the gap between the highest and the lowest income quintiles. This situation needs to be addressed in order to improve access results.

¹⁵ According to the OECD, the recommended teacher-student ratio is one teacher per 14 children (1:14 ration). The ENIA set out to improve this indicator, seeking to reduce it from 1:25 to 1:15. However, this had not taken place upon the completion of this evaluation.



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2.2. Comparative analysis of evaluation findings

After reviewing the experiences in each country, a comparative analysis of the results is provided below, in order to identify two types of findings: the factors that favor necessary changes to the system and the factors

that limit progress, and also, to single out good practices that can be considered and adapted to other contexts, in order to materialize this fundamental right of 3-6 year-old children in LAC.

2.2.1. Relevance

This criterion analyzed the coherence of decisions regarding legislation, policies, financing, and plans, as well as the respective strategies assumed by the countries to expand coverage and quality of early childhood education and reduce access gaps, especially

concerning their previous social, political, and economic context. Early education and learning were also included as a right, along with equity, gender and disability approach, in line with international standards in this field.

Factors that favor relevance

Enabling environment	<p>The influence of international scientific evidence. The countries analyzed were able to mobilize political will to increase public investment and initiatives in favor of early childhood education, based on the findings presented in 2007 regarding the relevance of early childhood development interventions.</p> <p>The impact of different initiatives and international agreements. The international initiatives and action frameworks signed by the countries motivated legislative and institutional reforms, as well as policies aimed at achieving the goals, as signatory countries.</p> <p>Regulatory frameworks that favored the measures. It was determined that the countries evaluated had made progress in the regulations, which facilitated the introduction of early childhood education measures. In Chile, the Presidential Goal (2000-2006) was part of an educational reform initiated in 1996; In Jamaica, care programs for children 3 years old and onward have been available since the 70s; in Mexico, the National Agreement for the Modernization of Basic Education was promoted as of 1992; In Peru, the General Law on Education (1972) emphasized early childhood education, and in 1993, the Constitution included it as a mandatory level; and in Uruguay, the budget law of ANEP (2005-2009 and 2010-2014) and ENIA (2010-2015) allowed increasing coverage and reducing equity gaps in access to the education system.</p> <p>Equity as a macro objective. The decisions taken in early childhood education were part of larger processes aimed at achieving advances in equity, thereby creating a positive environment to recognize the value of this educational level as a social lever to move forth in this direction. Processes such as the general education reform (Chile), the constitutional definition of education as a right (Uruguay) and, in some cases, mandatory measures for some early childhood education levels (Mexico) were identified.</p>
Supply	<p>Achieving social and political consensus regarding the most vulnerable. The decisions made were part of broad national agreements on education as the key to achieve equity. In Peru and Mexico, priority was given to disperse and indigenous rural populations, while in Chile and, to a lesser extent, in Uruguay, the emphasis was placed on reducing disparities regarding access for the population in the lowest income quintiles.</p> <p>Situation analysis as evidence to guide decisions. In all the countries assessed, the actions undertaken consistently responded to gaps in access to or quality of early childhood education services, by defining objectives directly aimed at overcoming existing barriers. The Jamaican case is noteworthy, as a diagnosis of the system was carried out, and the conditions of the youngest children were characterized.</p>
Demand	<p>Prioritizing the most vulnerable children. As part of the equity component, objectives in early childhood education that supported access of vulnerable 3-6-year-old children were defined for different contexts. However, some differences were observed between countries when targeting the most at-risk population in the interventions.</p> <p>For example, in Peru and Mexico, work was prioritized in the most disperse rural areas, with a high percentage of the indigenous population. In Chile and Uruguay, work with children from the lowest income quintiles was prioritized. Jamaica set out to promote equality (equal access and quality for all) and was the only country that established interventions for children with disabilities.</p> <p>Considering the opinions of children, families, and communities. Jamaica and Peru are examples of countries that took measures to consider families' opinions. In Jamaica, the plan was developed based on a consultation carried out with parents and early childhood professionals, as well as other local and international stakeholders involved with development issues. In Peru, in the framework of the Access program, consultations on the five care modalities took place, especially with rural communities.</p>

Factors that limit the relevance of measures adopted

Enabling Environment	<p>Rights and gender approaches. Even though the rights approach and the gender equity approach were part of the regulatory frameworks that support the policies evaluated, they were not sufficiently addressed in the specific instruments that contribute to the implementation of programs and strategies.</p> <p>In some cases, a tendency to introduce an “academic orientation” in early childhood education levels was identified, since some stakeholders in the system failed to assimilate the rights approach and the global principles of education throughout the implementation of activities. In order to ensure quality, pedagogical processes must be adapted to the characteristics of learning during the early years, while giving priority to positive interactions between teachers and children, as well as favoring children’s participation in free play. This will contribute to relevant learning, will stimulate early childhood development, and will ensure the proper transition to school.</p> <p>Regarding the gender approach, no specific intents to address children’s inequality in the school environment were observed. Nonetheless, countries such as Jamaica, Uruguay, and Mexico explicitly mention gender equity in their educational plans and programs.</p>
Supply	<p>The quality of early childhood education continues to be the main challenge. Despite critical efforts to create an enabling context that allows greater coverage in early education and learning and reduces access gaps, the quality of education at this level continues to be one of the main challenges in all countries. This entails the need to carry out adequate prioritization processes, consider the situation of the most vulnerable, train teachers, design and implement quality and inclusive programs, and analyze and constantly monitor the results identified.</p> <p>Measures to respond to children belonging to the most vulnerable population groups. Despite efforts to develop new and innovative mechanisms and increase the flexibility of early childhood education modalities, as can be seen in the different cases presented, the results achieved among lower-income populations residing in rural areas and indigenous communities, were partial.</p> <p>On the other hand, except in the case of Jamaica, children with disabilities were the least prioritized vulnerable population group in the design of programs and plans, as observed throughout this evaluation.</p> <p>Information and evidence generation. The evaluation also identified that countries need to produce more information and evidence on the situation of the most excluded so that sectoral reforms and the design of teaching modalities are more relevant to the different contexts and needs of children and their families.</p>
Demand	<p>Scarce involvement of children, families, and communities. In general, countries did not consider the voices of recipients. Except for Jamaica and Peru, as already mentioned, the evaluation did not observe any actions to promote families’ active participation and engagement, based on their vision and the conditions of the social and cultural context. This was considered as a limitation to achieving better results in enrollment, permanence, and equitable access to early childhood learning and development opportunities.</p>

2.2.2. Effectiveness

This criterion evaluated the extent to which the objectives set, and the decisions taken by countries with regard to the enabling environment and in relation to

supply and demand were effective in achieving the increase in coverage, quality, and equity of access to education and learning for children 3-6 years old.

Factors that favor effectiveness

Enabling Environment

Political will to increase public spending on early childhood education. The existence of a political and social agreement that prioritizes this level of education had a positive influence on attracting greater investments, and this was critical to making progress towards the proposed goals. All countries increased public spending on education in general and also increased public investment for early childhood education, except for Jamaica, where it decreased.*

Continuity of policies between governments. By raising early childhood education to a State Policy level, the goals in coverage, quality, and gap reduction transcended government changes, and progress was built on previous achievements. The Peruvian case is noteworthy: The Results-Based Budget explicitly included goals in quality early childhood education, and this encouraged the engagement of different government coalitions throughout the period analyzed.

Regulatory frameworks. The progressive consolidation of early childhood education in different normative bodies was considered as a factor favoring effectiveness. As can be seen in the description of the cases, early childhood education was considered as a right in the Constitution, in national education policies, and multisectoral plans for early childhood development. Consequently, early childhood education was further addressed in successive instruments, some of which led to its mandatory nature.

Intersectoral work. Overall, intersectoral coordination was identified as a relevant factor to improve the effectiveness of policy instruments and the actions of different actors that are co-responsible for this right, since it ensures the fulfillment of goals.

Institutional strengthening. All countries designated an entity to facilitate planning, intersectoral management, and articulation between various levels of government and stakeholders involved, establishing clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The main example was observed in Jamaica with the creation of the Early Childhood Commission.

Information and evidence to promote demand. In the cases analyzed, having reliable and quality information from the institutions that provide the services, as well as on the characteristics and conditions of the families and communities, contributed to the effectiveness of the policies and decisions adopted. The studies on supply and demand carried out in Peru are notable since they influenced the definition of educational modalities and the characterization of communities and geographical areas that required access to this type of educational program.

Communication campaigns to promote early childhood education. Communication campaigns aimed at communities and families were also identified. Besides promoting the rights of children, they also increased awareness of the importance of early education and learning.

(*) Jamaica lacks a national law and official mechanisms that guarantee a minimum level of public funding and sustained investments for early childhood education services (World Bank, 2013).

Diversification of supply. In Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay, the inclusion of other forms of early childhood education as part of the supply, enabled expanding coverage, adapting to the needs of the demand, and converting non-formal centers into early childhood education schools. This required hiring additional teachers for this educational level.

Availability of furniture and materials. The measures taken by the countries involved a significant investment in infrastructure and materials. Thus, for example, in Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay, preschool classrooms were included in primary schools. In Peru, investment in materials covered programs both in urban areas and in geographically dispersed areas.

Mechanisms for teacher evaluation, and support and monitoring systems at the local level. The creation of various mechanisms to evaluate, provide support, and monitor teacher performance and learning outcomes, was critical to increase the effectiveness of supply. The evaluation observed that most countries carried out inspection and monitoring processes by applying guidance protocols, and standardizing quality indicators; systematizing oversight procedures and providing pedagogical support for intercultural bilingual education; introduction of mandatory public tender systems for admissions to and promotion of the teaching career; and the implementation of educational quality evaluations in the form of specific studies and research lines in the educational field.

Capacity building of intermediate teams. The evaluation identified training processes carried out to strengthen mechanisms that enable increasing access, especially at the local level. The following are some of the initiatives identified: strengthening work with teaching and administrative staff to ensure their effective coordination with families and communities; designing technical guidelines for the preparation of school management manuals to improve planning and continuous improvement actions for learning; training teachers in the application of standards, along with pedagogical advisory processes and colleague work to support analysis and discussions on the teaching practice.

Creation of spaces for tertiary education. Support was provided to tertiary education and specialization processes, as a means to improve the effectiveness of educational services, by creating new positions related to early childhood education. This was also aimed at filling the shortage of teachers for 0-6-year-old children and increasing coverage. For example, teacher training was also promoted in private institutions in Chile in order to fill the new places that resulted from increased demand.

Work with families. In Jamaica, the promotion of parental participation and engagement as part of the introduction of quality standards, was an effective practice. Besides encouraging parents' engagement in the processes, this also involved a joint effort with families to strengthen parenting practices at home.

Families' increased recognition of the value of early childhood education. In the countries analyzed, there was growing recognition by communities and families of the importance of early education and learning for children. However, in some cases, families still prefer that their 3-year-old children remain at home because they do not perceive education at this age to be important and also because this educational level is not mandatory.

Families push the demand for services. While in Jamaica the families consulted agreed that early childhood education is an essential service that must be provided by the State, in Peru it was decided to carry out a consultation with families, in order to consider their views and to activate the demand for this service, by increasing awareness of its benefits for children.

Continuity of services. In some cases, it was observed that early childhood education classrooms were installed in primary education schools that were located near communities. This was done not only to expand coverage but also, to promote children's continuity in the education system as a means to "ensure" children's place in primary school, which in some cases was reinforced by activating demand, given its mandatory nature.

Financial access. In most of the countries participating in this evaluation, access to public early childhood education is free. In the case of Uruguay, Mexico, and Peru, families do not acknowledge a financial conflict to enroll their children and ensure that they attend these educational programs. However, families suggest that there are certain additional charges for some materials or fees at parent centers, but they do not identify these charges as an access barrier.

Factors that limit the effectiveness of the measures adopted

Even though this document has highlighted the measures and changes introduced that proved effective in increasing coverage and quality, and in closing gaps in access to early childhood education, the truth is that none of the countries studied have fully achieved the goals set. This, due to the persistence of certain bottlenecks that

create problems of inequity in access and hinder progress in this sense. Even when information regarding equity and quality is presented separately, these bottlenecks tend to intersect, because there are still significant disparities in access between children from the highest and the lowest income quintiles.

Equity gaps in access

Supply

The evaluation observed important equity gaps in access to early childhood education, determined by urban-rural area of residence; income quintile; age for educational level (3 years old, versus 4 and 5 years old); and for indigenous communities, due to lack of teachers who will go to remote locations and who speak the local language.

Chile. A significant reduction in gaps was evident in 2006. According to data from the Chile National Socioeconomic Characterization Survey (CASEN), 47 per cent of families with higher incomes enrolled their children in early education programs (MIDEPLAN, 2005), compared with 32 per cent of families with reduced incomes (MIDEPLAN, 2011). This reduced gap between socio-economic levels was maintained throughout time after the implementation of the Presidential Goal. In 2013, the participation of children in quintile I was 45.6 per cent, and that of children in quintile V was 49.5 per cent (CASEN, 2013).

Jamaica. The World Bank evaluation (2013) states that children from different socioeconomic groups still face unequal access to quality programs in Early Childhood Institutions. "Poor children do not have the same opportunities to early learning as children from the richest quintile. Children from the poorest quintile are proportionately less engaged in activities with adults than children from the richest quintiles. Children younger than three years old are less likely to be engaged in activities with adults than children aged 3 to 5 years old" (World Bank, 2013).

Peru. During the evaluation, there was an increase in access among the poorer population, and also, efforts focused on children in rural areas, especially in the most remote (scattered) areas where there is also a high percentage of indigenous population. Even though there is a significant difference in access in favor of non-poor children, which amounts to 6 percentage points, the enrollment of children 3-5 years old living in poverty and extreme poverty, was practically the same (80.3 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively) in 2015 (Escale-Ministry of Education of Peru, 2015).

Mexico. According to the documents analyzed (INEEd, 2016), when observing attendance rates among different socioeconomic groups, it is evident that children living in extreme poverty attend preschool to a lesser extent (50.6 per cent). This situation is a common denominator in the region since children from the most vulnerable sectors have lower early childhood education attendance rates than those from more privileged sectors.

Uruguay. There are still differences between income quintiles and different education levels. No gaps were identified among 5-year-old children, and higher participation rates were observed among 4-year-olds. However, there are significant differences between the most disadvantaged and the most opulent; a wide gap was observed between 3-year-old children from the first income quintile and children from the remaining high-income quintiles (authors' estimates based on the Uruguay 2015 Report).

Equity gaps in access

Supply

Insufficient teachers specializing in early childhood education and failures in staff distribution. Since the five countries studied experienced a significant expansion in coverage, they faced a generalized shortage of specialized teachers for this educational level. This situation was due to two interrelated factors. On the one hand, early childhood education is not perceived as a profession responsible for children's stimulation, education, and development during a crucial life stage, but rather as a care-based service. And on the other hand, teachers at this level have the lowest salaries in the sector, and this has an influence on working conditions and on their desire to pursue a career in this field.

Furthermore, many countries lowered the qualifications required to serve as an early childhood education teacher. For example, after completing training in pedagogy, Uruguay required teachers to get a master's degree in early education and learning. However, given the expansion of the Presidential Goal, the requirements were reduced to a tertiary or technical career, with two years of studies.

At the same time, the instatement of evaluation and public tender systems - as a measure to favor quality- caused that teachers with the best results and with greater opportunities to choose their work location, sought to remain in urban areas and in schools with better evaluations (Peru and Uruguay). Consequently, early childhood education in rural areas and geographically dispersed areas received less qualified teachers.

Although new careers were opened in Chile and Uruguay in order to professionalize the service and increase teaching staff, the quality of training was not controlled, and this led to the heterogeneity of teacher supply in tertiary education.

In Peru, it was found that the increase in the cut-off score required to pursue studies in this profession, which was designed as a measure to improve the quality of teachers, resulted in a significant decrease in enrollment and the consequent shortage of educators for this level. Due to its negative impact, this decision was subsequently reversed.

Problems with the diversification of the programs' modalities. Something similar happened with the offer of different types of early childhood education. While this diversification increased supply and boosted access, not all modalities had qualified teachers to ensure quality service. For example, in Peru, the services in the centers of the Non-Formal Early Education Programme (PRONOEI), aimed at a highly dispersed population, are provided by a promoter, usually from the same community, without pedagogical training. In Mexico, community education is provided by people without university-level studies, who receive training to perform this function after graduating from secondary school.

Equity gaps in access

Supply

Capacity building, availability of human teams, and regional budgets. Regarding the capacity development of the education sector, findings show that although there are training entities that can implement new management and control strategies for schools, this is still limited. For example, in Peru, regional governments lack enough human resources to provide oversight and support, or in some cases, the process is delayed. Although Jamaica and Uruguay installed inspection systems, Uruguay only managed to make two visits a year, and in Jamaica, only 26.71 per cent of Early Childhood Institutions received a second inspection.

The budgets were also insufficient to cover all activities required to increase in coverage. The participants consulted questioned the fact that budget allocation is mainly carried out in a centralized manner. Although in Peru the Results-Based Budgeting Programs imply a joint effort between the national level and the territories to define certain aspects of the budget, at the local level, it was noted that this process still lacks real participation from the regions with regards to decision-making. On the other hand, in Jamaica, Early Childhood Institutions are not autonomous in managing the resources required to reach the standards set, which adds to the lack of resource availability.

Demand

Need to promote early childhood education among families. There are several factors that prevent the effective participation of children in these programs, especially those targeting 3-year-old children belonging to the most vulnerable families. These include a lack of awareness of the importance of early childhood education, which affects the enrollment rate, and the difficulties faced by families in ensuring that once they are enrolled in these programs, their children attend the programs continuously. These factors translate into high non-attendance rates among different age groups.

Many times, children are enrolled out of need, but there is no awareness of the relevance of early education and learning for children's future development. For example, according to Uruguay's administrative records, attendance rates (of more than 140 days during the school year) among children aged 4 and 5 amounted to 62 per cent in 2012. However, once data is disaggregated by income quintile, a gap in continuous attendance is evident, as it amounts to 54.3 per cent among children in the lowest income quintile and to 73.1 per cent among children in the highest income quintile (INEEd, 2014).

Lack of real prioritization of children with disabilities in early childhood education. While most countries prioritized the most vulnerable populations, the evaluation showed that children with disabilities were not specifically targeted, as evidenced by the lack of inclusive education programs and strategies. In Jamaica, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay, both the specialists and the families interviewed agreed that, although children with disabilities are included in the early education and learning services offered, in practice, the installed capacity is insufficient to ensure equal access to children with disabilities vis-à-vis their peers without disabilities.

Equity gaps in access

As pointed out in section 1.5. Evaluation Criteria, rather than assessing the impact of learning outcomes in children, this evaluation sought to observe educational quality from a cross-cutting approach, by considering the quality of the supply of teachers and the contextualized use of methodologies to respond to the specific characteristics to the most vulnerable 3-6-year-old child population.

In the case of the most vulnerable and excluded populations, quality gaps can be especially damaging, since instead of enhancing children's development and learning, they can have negative impacts during this first and crucial stage of life.

The factors that limited the effectiveness of decisions to achieve equity in access are closely related to the quality of service provision; therefore, they are briefly mentioned.

Teachers and support:

- » Lack of teachers trained to work with young children, which is essential to ensure the quality of the process by encouraging interactions that lead to learning.
- » Need to comply with sectoral economic goals (using resources allocated to a teaching position), which sometimes involved hiring non-specialized teachers.
- » Lack of measures to achieve an adequate distribution of the supply of teachers, which implied that the best qualified educators chose to remain in urban areas.
- » Lack of adequate quality control in the expansion of tertiary education alternatives on early childhood education. This led to a heterogeneous supply of teachers in terms of the required competencies.
- » Insufficient and sometimes delayed in-service support systems, which is especially critical for those working in rural areas with greater geographic dispersion.

Teacher-student ratio and group size. Information on these issues was only found in Uruguay, Chile, and Jamaica, where the student-teacher ratio was found to be higher than that recommended by the OECD (one teacher per 14 children, 1:14 ratio). In Uruguay, according to ENIA, the registered student-teacher ratio is 1:25. Although the goal is to reduce it to 1:15, this has not been achieved, mainly because more teachers would be required. Something similar happened in Jamaica, where only one-third of Early Childhood Institutions reached the 1:10 ratio suggested by the standards and, by late 2015, the majority had 1:20 or higher ratios (Early Childhood Commission, 2015). In Chile, the regulations on early childhood education were also below international recommendations such as Decree 315, which sets the teacher-student ratio in kindergartens at 1:32.

2.2.3. Efficiency

The evaluation did not find sufficient and accurate information to determine the efficiency of the measures adopted in enabling the changes that each country set out to achieve. Additionally, there were no evaluations available to establish the cost-benefit of the interventions undertaken, nor

efficiency studies on investments made in favor of the programs and strategies evaluated. Therefore, the approximative analysis provided below is based on the information collected and an assessment of the use of existing resources, based on interviews and field visits.

Factors that favor efficiency

Enabling Environment	<p>Use and management of resources. It was observed that Uruguay, Chile, and Peru managed their resources appropriately, to the extent that these countries made progress in their coverage goals. In Uruguay, the significant increase in investment in early childhood education contributed to an increase in the number of classrooms, new kindergartens and CAIF centers, as well as new teaching positions and administrative staff. Although the available resources were partially executed, they led to increased coverage and less inequity in access, especially for children aged 4 and 5.</p> <p>Sources of financing. In all countries, the States were the primary funding source for the instruments evaluated, except in Jamaica, where the plan required funds from different donors and international co-operation programs, which financed a percentage of early childhood education interventions that were implemented with technical assistance from the World Bank.</p>
Supply	<p>Separate and unified management models. According to the literature consulted (Pardo and Adlerstein, 2016; Pacheco, Elacqua and Brunner, 2005), separate management model (which consists of maintaining early childhood education separate from primary schools) is more efficient than the unified model, where the two levels coexist. However, countries like Chile, Peru, and Uruguay moved closer to the unified management model, considering that it allows for more efficient use of resources allocated to expanding school infrastructure, together with the establishment of the complete school shift.</p> <p>Based on this logic, the expansion of coverage, including a classroom for early childhood education in primary schools, was considered as an alternative to ensure children's permanence in the education system. For example, in Peru, the conversion of PRONOEIs into schools increased demand because parents perceived them as an institution that besides providing care, were an educational space for their children. However, as mentioned, the evaluation found that this measure has negative effects when it introduces an academic orientation in early childhood education.</p> <p>More and better information. In Jamaica, for example, progress was made in the right direction by introducing a system for improvements in key quality aspects of service delivery. Progress made includes registering all Early Childhood Institutions, installing a monitoring system by means of visits to the centers, increasing the number of teachers with a professional degree, and delivering basic materials to improve infrastructure. However, this approach focuses on the efficiency in the use of resources, since there is no detailed analysis of cost-effectiveness associated with the results.</p> <p>Except for this case, the evaluation found that the rest of the countries lack information on the profitability of their interventions and have no processes to model or pilot the experiences before escalating the interventions.</p>

Factors that limit the efficiency of the measures taken

Use and management of resources. In Peru and Uruguay, there were problems in the execution of the available budget for some of the measures taken, and this affected the fulfillment of the goals set. Although the decentralization of some resources is notable in Peru, there are also obstacles in ensuring that teachers have the necessary competencies for the positions they were hired to fill.

Another factor that limits the efficient use of resources has to do with their timely availability. Both the materials or supplies to carry out activities in the classroom, as well as training for teachers and administrative staff, are important efforts for the system and, if they fail to arrive on time, this can affect the efficiency of the investment. For example, in Peru, it was observed that some community educational centers had excellent quality resources but were used only once a week when the community promoter was present.

In the case of Mexico, the federal nature of its political organization was a limiting factor for the efficient use of resources, since, in the opinion of the interviewees, during the distribution of resources, the administrative management capacity of some federal entities prevailed at the expense of others. Likewise, according to INEE (INEE 2000 to 2012), spending for vulnerable populations did not focus on children who may require greater pedagogical support, and funds appropriated for improvements in infrastructure, furniture and learning materials, among others, were insufficient. This mainly affected populations from rural areas.

Given that the evaluation identified several cases where there were difficulties associated with the budget projection and the capacity for efficiently managing investments, in general, it should be noted that efforts in the design of policies, setting goals and appropriating funds, should consider the comprehensive institutional design that covers the intermediate steps for the achievement of the defined goals.

Lack of studies on cost-efficiency and impact. There is little evidence regarding the impact of the interventions implemented, and no information was found regarding any previously evaluated pilot experiences. Likewise, overall, there are no studies that evidence that invested resources are paying off in terms of the effectiveness and efficiency of the interventions. This shortcoming can be partly attributed to insufficient resources allocated to carry out this type of evaluation, by favoring budget allocations for the implementation of actions.

Inefficient management of resources at the local level. Even though governments have given sub-national or local entities greater autonomy in the use of resources and this can be considered as a positive element, it is also a challenge when it comes to reducing disparities between regions, as was the case in Mexico. Greater autonomy levels among local entities require stronger coordination and support capacities at the central level to ensure that resources arrive on time, are well used, and meet necessary standards to achieve expected results in the territory and at the national level.

2.2.4. Sustainability

In the context of this evaluation, sustainability is understood as the political, technical, and financial capacity to ensure that actions undertaken will remain over time, as well as the possibility that the results obtained because of these actions will persist.

In general, the policy instruments, programs, and strategies analyzed were considered sustainable over time, and the results obtained in terms of coverage and equity in access tend to increase over time rather than decrease.

Factors that favor sustainability

Demand

Institutionality and budget. In this comparative review, the sustainability of the instruments analyzed is mainly associated with the creation of an enabling context for the development of early childhood education. In most countries, this enabling environment was reflected in the legislative reforms that raised early childhood education to a State Policy and in the creation of an institutionality backed by regulatory bodies. This circumstance caused policies to transcend changes in government, achieving continuity regarding political commitments, as well as investment and sectoral plans.

Furthermore, financing in countries such as Peru, Chile, and Uruguay was secured through national budget laws. Thus, for example, the plan regarding the CAIF centers in Uruguay was initially supported by the Inter-American Development Bank, and consequently, an allocation from the national budget was guaranteed in 2008. In Peru, the Results-Based Budgeting Programs, the planning and management mechanisms also used by other sectors, demonstrated effectiveness, and reported positive results in budget execution.

Enabling Environment

The above refers to a series of commitments that are linked to how public policies are designed and implemented in each context. Likewise, a close link was found in these countries between the entity that manages the finances and the institutions that are in charge of the State's social development.

Between 2006 and the period covered by this evaluation, important legislative changes took place in Chile, evidencing a shift in the vision regarding early childhood education, which has started to be treated similarly to the other levels of the education system. These types of laws are the result of achieving sustainable political and social changes regarding the relevance of early education and learning for the reduction of social inequities. Among them are the Quality Assurance Law, which includes the initial education system (2011), compulsory kindergarten (2013), the Undersecretariat of Early Childhood Education (2015), and the Operation Authorization Law (2015). Along with these advances, early childhood education teachers joined the teaching career, which translates into better salary conditions based on performance evaluations and years of experience (2016).

For its part, the presence of an institutional framework that supports the continuity of expected results in Jamaica is notable. However, reliance on international cooperation and the private sector to finance these efforts could threaten its future sustainability. However, as already mentioned, the Early Childhood Commission is working with partner agencies and the government on a strategy to receive public funding.

Service Continuity. The promotion of early childhood education as part of the primary education system is considered a favorable factor for maintaining access. On the one hand, because it facilitates an effective transition towards primary school, which is perceived by families as something positive and this can also contribute to increasing enrollment levels. In Mexico, for example, the integration of early education and learning into compulsory primary education enabled a continuous process in which this right is guaranteed as of the age of three.

For example, in Chile and Uruguay, the sustainability of access was promoted by including kindergartens in primary education institutions. In Peru, given the high geographical dispersion, the decision to open non-formal early childhood education centers near the communities was beneficial for access, but it can be a challenge if there is a discontinuity in the service when children transition to first grade and primary education schools are distant from the families' place of residence.

Incentives to demand and sustainability of learning. Society's increased awareness of the importance of early childhood education favors the sustainability of supply, in response to demands for better service. Among the countries studied, it was observed that families are more aware of the importance of education for children aged 4 and 5, which may be due to dissemination campaigns such as those carried out in Chile, Jamaica, and Uruguay.

In terms of the sustainability of learning achievements, on the one hand, it is necessary to guarantee the minimum conditions that ensure a play-centered education and the pedagogical interactions that are necessary for meaningful learning. Currently, all the countries evaluated have set goals in relation to the quality of the service through improvements in their curricular frameworks, the creation of quality standards, and the development and proper implementation of support and oversight processes.



Factors that limit the sustainability of the measures adopted

Enabling Environment	<p>Lack of internal funding. As mentioned with regard to the efficiency criterion, the lack of internal funding sources, as well as their institutionalization by means of a national budget law, can be a limiting factor for the sustainability of the actions undertaken. This point is especially important in the case of Jamaica.</p>
Supply	<p>Limited approach to conditions to ensure quality. Even when countries prioritized increasing coverage and reducing access gaps, all of them initiated actions to improve quality. This seems to be the priority in the future for countries that have achieved high coverage levels, since results decrease under circumstances where the quality of education systems is not assured.</p>
Demand	<p>Perception of families regarding early childhood education for children younger than 3 years old. Although the positive assessment of early education and learning has increased significantly for children aged 4 and 5, families do not yet perceive the importance of this educational level for their 3-year-old children (as was evidenced in Uruguay), and there is no consensus on the type of education service that should be provided.</p> <p>As a result of this perception, families would be more willing to allow children at this age to miss classes, with the consequent reduction in exposure to the program. This situation could affect their expected learning.</p>

Recommendations

1. Strengthen regulatory frameworks and policies with a long-term vision based on international standards and with a rights, gender and disability approach, in order to increase coverage, quality, and equity in access to early childhood education.
2. Plan the implementation of policies by stages, starting with a diagnosis of the needs of the most excluded populations and with families and communities' participation in designing, planning, implementing, and evaluating strategies and programs.
3. Ensure the participation of various relevant actors at national and subnational levels, promote intersectoral coordination, and allocate resources efficiently.
4. Define quality standards, curriculum, and pedagogical proposals that respond to the different stages of children's development, favoring game-based learning, and guaranteeing support for an adequate transition to primary school.
5. Ensure that adequate funds are appropriated in the education sector's budgets, in order to guarantee the quality in the provision of education services for the estimated demand.
6. Promote profitable models that guarantee coverage, quality and equity, and that can also be upscaled.
7. Extend the application of models that respond to the needs of different population groups within the policy framework of the national education sector.
8. Develop the capacity of management, executive, and supervisory teams to effectively manage early childhood education services.
9. Strengthen specialized and qualified teaching staff to enable them to perform in various contexts through work incentives and professional in-service training programs; and provide oversight and support to improve performance.
10. Create systems to identify children aged 3 to 6 who are out of school or at risk of dropping out, to ensure their integration, permanence, and transition to higher education levels.



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