

International evidence to support the reform of Early Childhood Education and Care in Brazil in 2024

In Brief

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This document aims to support policy dialogue in Brazil on the reform of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in 2024, looking into the following areas:

1. **Why ECEC matters for stronger social and economic outcomes in Brazil:** Brazil has demonstrated economic resilience in the context of the pandemic, but its potential for further growth remains untapped. With changing demographics and rising inequality, Brazil must address the challenge of revitalising its economy. This requires Brazil to adopt a comprehensive strategy to increase productivity, labour market participation and fiscal responsibility across government sectors while addressing gender disparities and social inequalities. Enhancing social policies and improving education quality and equity is key to this. A strategic investment in early childhood education and care (ECEC) can support achieving these goals.
2. **How some OECD education systems are supporting access to and quality of ECEC:** Over recent decades, research innovations and social changes have converged to make policy attention to ECEC widespread. Policy makers worldwide recognise the range of advantages of ECEC, and in this context, major trends have consisted of expanding enrolment in and strengthening the quality of ECEC. Furthermore, as countries are concerned about early life poverty and aim to level the playing field among children from the early years while early years policies are fragmented in many countries, efforts aim to better co-ordinate ECEC policies with other social and family policies. These major trends shape OECD countries' early years policies, although they have led to various approaches depending on countries' institutional, cultural and

historical contexts. The policy directions developed in this section can inform Brazil's ECEC policies for the future.

3. **Which policy directions taken by some OECD countries can inform Brazil's efforts to strengthen access and quality of ECEC?** Brazil's ECEC policies are strongly anchored in legal frameworks and have been guided by the well-established role of the State to guarantee education for children from zero to five years old. As a result, Brazil has a comprehensive ECEC system and several of the main pillars for ensuring equity and quality of ECEC are already in place. These include emphasising universal access, compulsory education at age 4, and a curriculum framework for the early years.

The major question for Brazil is how to strengthen its ECEC policies to ensure that they deliver better social and economic outcomes. With rising inequalities, increasingly diverse populations, remaining gaps in labour market participation and increased attention to well-being in most OECD countries, this question is at the core of their policy agendas. This document highlights some policy directions from OECD countries to inform Brazil's future ECEC policies. At a high-level, the following policy directions have been identified:

- **Ensuring equal access to ECEC.** While Brazil's enrolment in ECEC is high in the years just before entry into primary education, it remains low for children under age 3, with gaps in participation in ECEC according to socio-economic background and location. OECD countries have increased public expenditure on ECEC to alleviate direct barriers relating to high family costs, lack of places, and distance to ECEC settings. Efforts also aim to address the indirect barriers to ECEC participation, such as those relating to a lack of trust or awareness regarding the programmes' availability and their benefits as well as preference to maintain children at home, for instance through an outreach network of professionals.
- **Strengthening the quality of ECEC.** While data on the quality of ECEC in Brazil is lacking, there are signals of differences in quality within the country regarding teachers' qualifications and infrastructure and risks of low quality in some instances. Research underscores the importance of process quality. OECD countries aim to support process quality by implementing a research-based curriculum framework, attracting and retaining a high-quality ECEC workforce, and developing a quality assurance and improvement system.
- **Developing a co-ordinated and holistic approach to support children and their families in the early years.** Ensuring the long-lasting effects of ECEC investment requires a co-ordinated approach involving parents, other social and health institutions as well as primary schools. As Brazil is advanced in these various policies separately, there is potential to strengthen linkages to reinforce outcomes, a direction taken by several OECD countries.
- **Strengthening the governance and infrastructure of early years policies.** As in many other OECD countries, the organisation of ECEC policies is complicated with multiple layers of responsibilities and a plurality of actors. Strengthening the governance of early years policies can help achieve more cost-effective outcomes.
- **Developing data at individual and system levels for the early years.** Data is needed at the level of children, families and ECEC settings to better adjust services to meet needs, as well as at a system level to monitor the effect of policies and steer the system towards improvement.

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Background

In August 2023, Brazil established the Working Group on Early Childhood of the Council for Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Presidency of the Republic. This group brings together actors from different social and economic sectors of Brazil, including representatives from government instances, civil society, academies, and international organisations. In 2024, this Working Group will come together to discuss a possible recommendation for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) for Brazil.

This background document was prepared by the OECD Secretariat to help inform these discussions. It analyses why ECEC matters for stronger social and economic outcomes in Brazil, making the case for strengthening ECEC, and setting out the main features of an ECEC that can lead to better outcomes based on international evidence. It also looks into how some OECD education systems are supporting access to and quality of ECEC, with a bird's eye view on policy efforts of potential relevance to Brazil and taking an intersectoral perspective. Finally, it points towards high-level policy directions taken by some OECD countries that can inform Brazil's efforts to strengthen access and quality of ECEC.

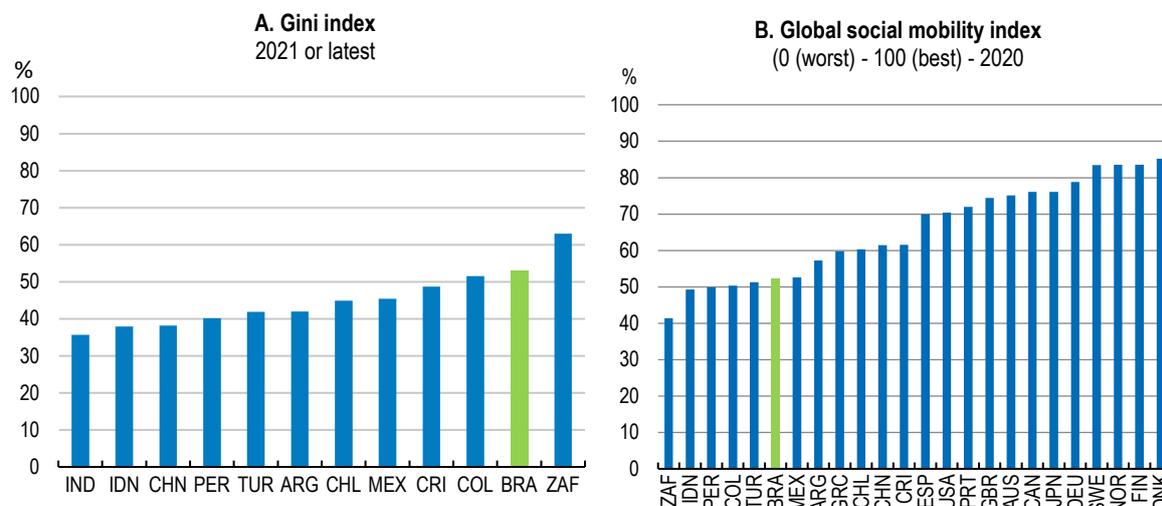
1. Why ECEC matters for stronger social and economic outcomes in Brazil

Brazil has shown economic resilience in the context of the pandemic, but rapid population ageing will reverse the boost to growth from demographics while inequalities have increased. Increasing women labour market participation and employment as well as revitalising productivity are the main directions for further growth and can help mitigate inequalities. ECEC policies together with social and tax policies can help achieving these goals in Brazil by supporting women labour market participation and thereby unlocking untapped potential to growth while boosting household incomes. Over the longer-term, ECEC together with education policies at further levels can ensure all children develop foundational competencies and support productivity growth (OECD, 2023^[1]).

The Brazilian economy has shown signs of resilience despite global distress, yet social inequalities remain among the highest in the world

In 2021, Brazil's economy rebounded after a deep recession triggered by the pandemic in 2020, but more recent data suggests this growth is tempering, as found by the 2023 OECD Economic Survey of Brazil. A growth in population and labour force had respectively driven Brazil's economic growth even as productivity declined. As the country transitions to rapid population ageing and productivity lags behind other emerging economies, effectively renewing this growth requires gains in labour market participation and productivity. Similarly, Brazil will need to ensure that this economic growth raises living standards for all Brazilians and combats poverty and inequality. Despite the initial growth of a new middle class in the 2000s and declining inequality over the last decades, income disparities have resurged, particularly at the extremes of income distribution, coupled with comparatively low social mobility (OECD, 2023^[1]) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Income inequality and social mobility in Brazil and other countries



Note: The global social mobility index is a composite indicator of 51 measures covering health, education, technology access, fair work opportunities, social protection, and inclusive institutions.

Source: OECD (2023^[1]), *OECD Economic Surveys: Brazil 2023*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a2d6acac-en>.

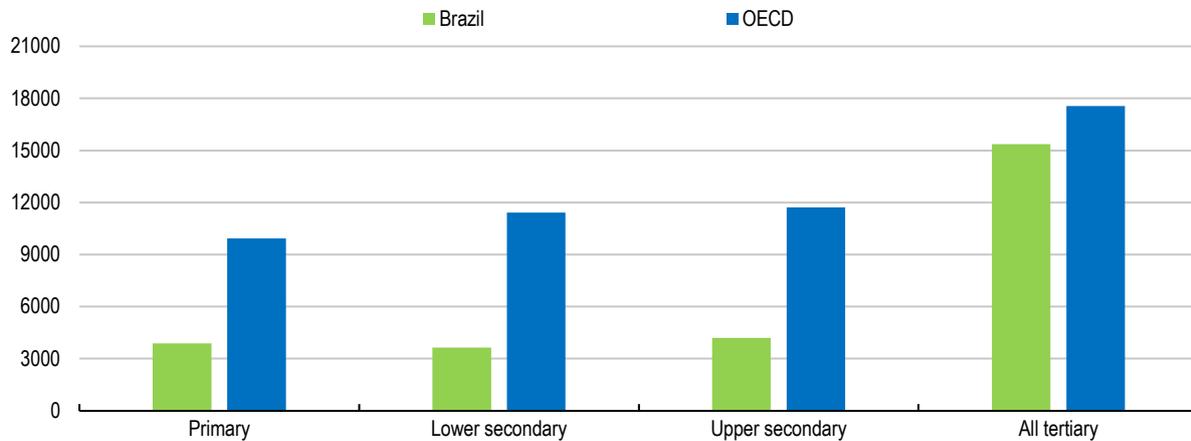
Social policies, such as the *Bolsa Família* programme, have played a crucial role in reducing poverty and inequality. However, persistent gender disparities in labour market participation and earnings are ongoing challenges for Brazil. As reported in the Economic Survey for Brazil in 2023, women in Brazil had 20% lower labour market participation and employment rates and earned 34% less on average than men, even when qualifications were considered. Barriers to their participation include insufficient childcare services, requiring targeted policy interventions (OECD, 2023^[1]).

To achieve sustained growth and mitigate inequalities, over the short term, Brazil must build on currently potentially available labour resources, especially through increased female labour force participation. Expanding access to early childhood education and care (ECEC), from birth to entry in primary education, is crucial, considering that only one-third of Brazilian children under three have access to daycare, contributing to women leaving the workforce and perpetuating societal inequalities (OECD, 2023^[1]).

Investing in ECEC is a strategic move for the mid- to longer term for Brazil to level the playing field among children from an early age and raise performance as they progress through their education pathways. Brazil’s public education spending is comparatively high but is oriented towards non-compulsory education levels (Figure 2). Despite this high public education spending, outcomes remain suboptimal, showing the need for Brazil to better target it towards quality and equity in education.

Figure 2. Brazil's education expenditure per student by education level

Total expenditure on educational institutions per full-time equivalent student in USD PPP, direct expenditure, 2019



Source: OECD Education at a Glance database; OECD (2023^[1]), *OECD Economic Surveys: Brazil 2023*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a2d6acac-en>.

Strengthening access and quality of education in Brazil throughout people's lives will benefit its society and economy

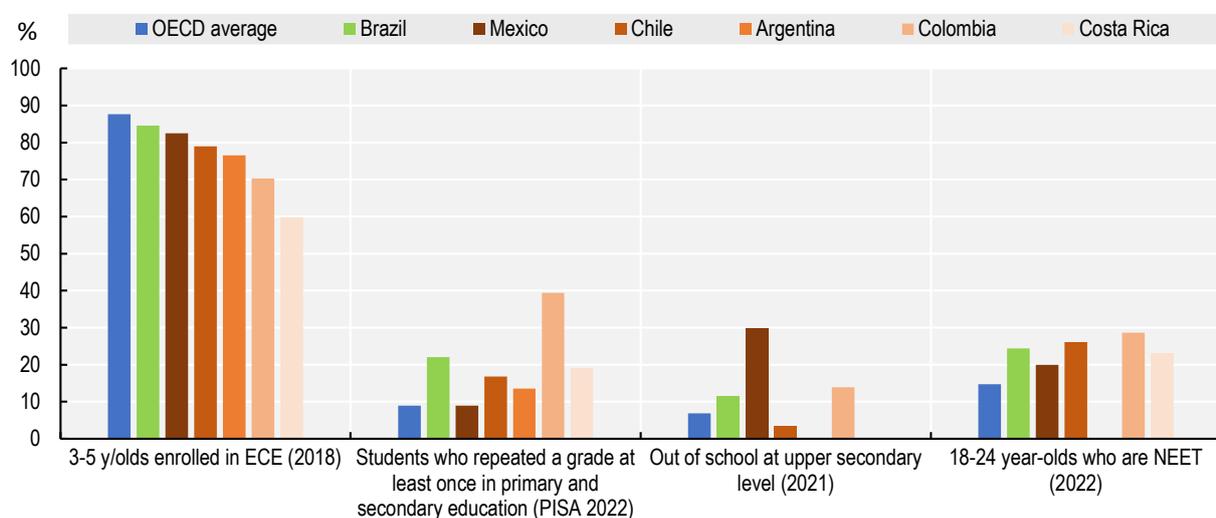
Brazil faces the challenge of providing its population with opportunities for improved lives. Achieving this involves ensuring that people's education and training pathways offer them opportunities to stay engaged with education and training as they grow older while facilitating transitions towards the labour market.

Evidence collected by the OECD points to some important achievements for Brazil regarding access to and equity in education. Yet more needs to be done to ensure all people can effectively benefit from them. According to OECD data, 85% of 3-5 year-olds in Brazil were enrolled in ECEC in 2018, which was the highest enrolment rate in the region for countries with available data, and very close to the OECD average of 88%. (Figure 3). Compulsory education in Brazil covers ages 4 to 17, which is slightly longer than most OECD countries (OECD, 2021^[2]).

However, data also shows that the quality and equity of the education system can be improved. Brazil faces comparatively high-grade repetition. In PISA 2022, 22% of 15-year-old students reported having repeated a grade at least once in primary and secondary education, compared to only 9% at OECD average. In Latin America, Brazil's share of grade repetition was also among the highest for countries with available data, only behind Colombia. Disparities in grade repetition among advantaged and disadvantaged 15-year-olds in Brazil were also higher compared to the OECD (with 17% and 11%, respectively) (OECD, 2023^[3]).

Ensuring that young people are in education, training or employment is also an important challenge for Brazil and other countries in the region. In 2021, 11% of upper-secondary level students were out of school in Brazil, compared to the OECD average of 7. Furthermore, broadly one-quarter (24%) of 18-24 year-olds in Brazil were not in education, employment or training (NEET) in 2022. This share was comparable to other Latin American countries and well above the OECD average of 15%.

Figure 3. Brazil's key education trajectories compared to the OECD average and other Latin American countries



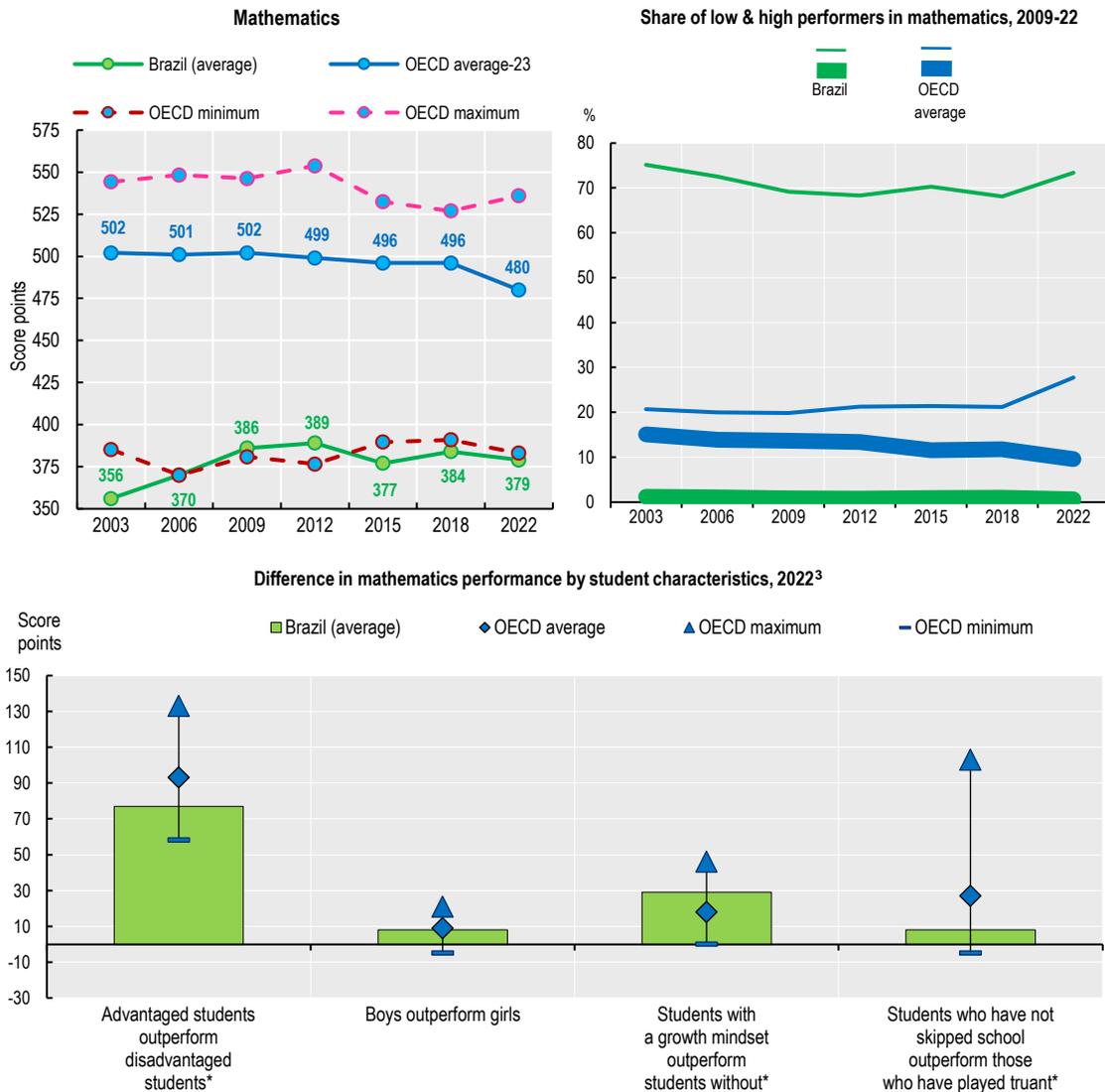
Source: OECD (2023^[4]), *Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-en>; OECD (2023^[5]), *PISA 2022 Results (Volume II): Learning During – and From – Disruption*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a97db61c-en>.

Brazil's performance across PISA cycles also shows ongoing challenges and some important achievements. In PISA 2022, Brazil scored 379 points in mathematics, well below the OECD average of 480 points. Almost three-quarters of Brazil's 15-year-olds scored below the baseline level 2 (73%), which was well above the OECD average of 31% of students (Figure 4).

At the same time, Brazil was able to maintain its improvements in mathematics from earlier cycles in PISA 2022 despite the context of the pandemic. Brazil also narrowed its gender gap in mathematics since PISA 2012, becoming more favourable to girls. Similarly, students' variation in mathematics performance based on their socio-economic status was similar to the OECD average in 2022, with a gap in performance between advantaged and disadvantaged students in Brazil that has remained mostly unchanged in mathematics since 2012.

Brazil's lower average performance in PISA, however, indicates its overall challenge of increasing performance for all students (OECD, 2023^[3]).

Figure 4. Highlights of Brazil's performance in mathematics across PISA cycles



Note: "minimum"/ "maximum" refer to OECD countries with the lowest/highest values.

Source: OECD (2023^[3]) *PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en>; OECD (2023^[5]), *PISA 2022 Results (Volume II): Learning During – and From – Disruption*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a97db61c-en>.

Early years policies matter in helping all students benefit from education and training opportunities later on in their educational pathways. Brazil has made progress in expanding access to ECEC. The role of ECEC was established through the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional-LDB) that in 1996, added early education as part of the basic education programme and, through its 2005 amendment, made early education compulsory for ages 4 and 5. The National Programme for Restructuring and Acquisition of Equipment for the Public School Network for ECEC (Proinfância, 2007) and Kind Brazil (Brasil Carinhoso, 2012, now discontinued) supported the expansion of ECEC. Since 2017, implementation has been ongoing for the National Common Curricular Base (Base Nacional Comum Curricular, BNCC) for ECEC to lower secondary (ages 0-14), although with delays due to the pandemic (OECD, 2021^[2]), Brazil now has a well-developed policy framework around providing ECEC to all children. From 2012 to 2019, the percentage of children aged 4-5 enrolled in ECEC increased from 85.9% to 94.1%, and the percentage of children aged 0-3 increased from 25.7% to 37.0%. However,

it is important to note that these rates are not uniformly distributed across Brazil's regions or states, reflecting demographic and socio-economic differences in access.

In a similar vein, as done by other South American countries over the past decade, Brazil has undertaken important efforts to implement more cross-sectorial approaches for ECEC while expanding its provision, although with some ongoing challenges. The highly diverse contexts in which these systems need to operate may exacerbate issues of administrative or conceptual *fragmentation*, with services under the authority of different levels and administration services. Brazil has also faced the risk of exacerbated *segmentation*, which refers to the creation and maintenance of separate systems that offer differential benefits to different population groups (Guevara and Cardini, 2021^[6]).

Addressing these and other issues is worth the investment and effort for Brazil, given the potential that ECEC has to help provide stronger foundations upon which students will be able to build their learning later on.

And starting strong, by investing in quality ECEC for all, can bring multiple benefits

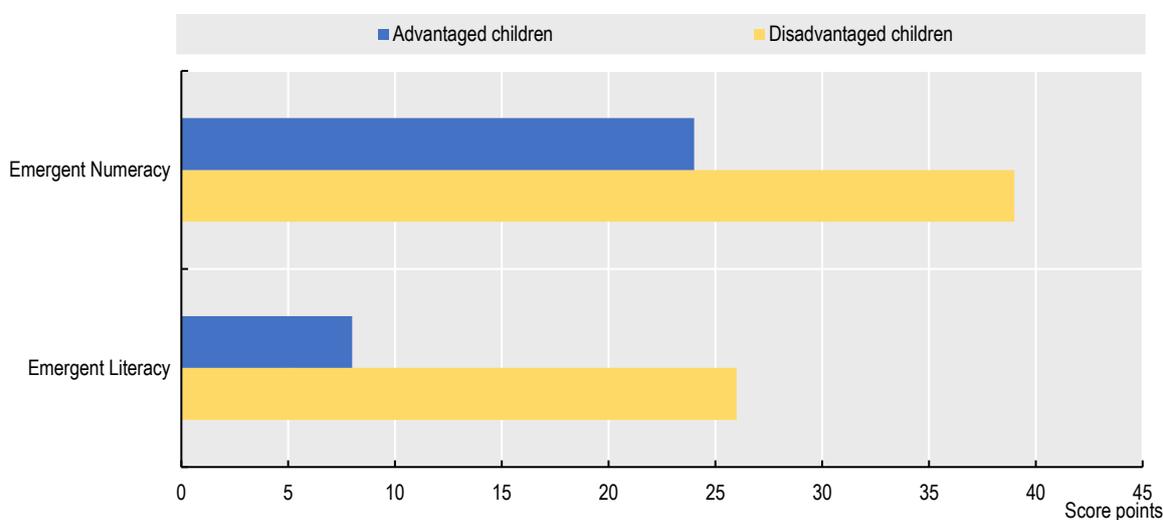
There is a near consensus that quality ECEC has a profound and long-lasting impact on children's futures and contributes to economic and social outcomes. For this reason, this phase is often called "the window of opportunity". The consensus can be inferred from the rise in the universal provision of ECEC in countries worldwide (OECD, 2021^[7]), and the significant investment that accompanies extending ECEC to all children while ensuring quality for these programmes.

A wide range of countries with very different levels of economic development have shown benefits from quality ECEC. Quality ECEC is associated with higher primary school completion rates, lower grade repetition and dropout rates, and higher learning outcomes throughout primary and secondary schooling. Beyond these individual benefits, well-designed and quality ECEC programmes can benefit children from low socio-economic backgrounds, level the playing field among children and help reduce social inequalities over the longer run (Duncan et al., 2023^[8]). However, ensuring that the positive effects last might require a sustained policy effort throughout education systems and a combination with other social policies (Bailey, Jenkins and Alvarez-Vargas, 2020^[9]) (Heckman and Landersø, 2022^[10]). By increasing parental workforce participation, particularly for women, ECEC policies can raise household incomes and lower poverty, which also benefits children as the quality of the home environment is central to their development, well-being and learning, particularly in the early years. As a result, these programmes can help reduce the achievement gaps between socio-economic classes, gender, and rural and urban populations (UNICEF, 2019^[11]). Finally, quality ECEC programmes benefit societies' overall health and well-being through improved health and nutrition awareness.

One example of the potential of quality ECEC to level the playing field between socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged children comes from an OECD study conducted in three countries (United Kingdom, United States and Estonia) – the *International Early Learning and Childhood Well-being Study (IELS)*. The study found that attending ECEC was linked to stronger cognitive development, both emergent literacy and emergent numeracy, for 5-year-olds. Furthermore, socio-economically disadvantaged children benefitted even more from ECEC, as their participation in ECEC was associated with larger gains in emergent literacy and numeracy compared to their peers (Figure 5). Disadvantaged children participating in ECEC also had positive gains across all measured domains, including socio-emotional skills (OECD, 2022^[12]). The IELS is just one illustration suggesting that ECEC can significantly support equity. However, the benefits of ECEC are only gained from quality ECEC (OECD, 2020^[13]).

Figure 5. Score point difference between children who did and who did not attend ECEC

According to the International Early Learning and Childhood Well-being Study, 2018



Note: For three participating countries United Kingdom, United States and Estonia.

Source: (OECD, 2020) OECD International Early Learning Survey 2018 database <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/early-learning-and-child-well-being-study/early-learning-and-child-well-being-3990407f-en.htm>

The benefits and importance of ECEC programmes are recognised worldwide and reflected in policies regarding increasing participation in ECEC programmes.

2. How some OECD education systems are supporting access to and quality of ECEC and how Brazil compares

In recent decades, research evidence of ECEC's impact and social changes have led to widespread attention to ECEC in policymaking. Policy makers worldwide acknowledge the range of benefits of ECEC, resulting in major trends focused on expanding enrolment in and strengthening the quality of ECEC. Furthermore, countries are working to address early life poverty and striving to level the playing field among children from the early years. As such, with early years policies remaining fragmented or segmented in many countries, efforts aim to better co-ordinate ECEC policies with other social and family policies. These major trends shape OECD countries' early years policies, although they have led to various approaches depending on countries' institutional, cultural and historical contexts. The policy trends and directions outlined here can inform Brazil's ECEC policies for the future.

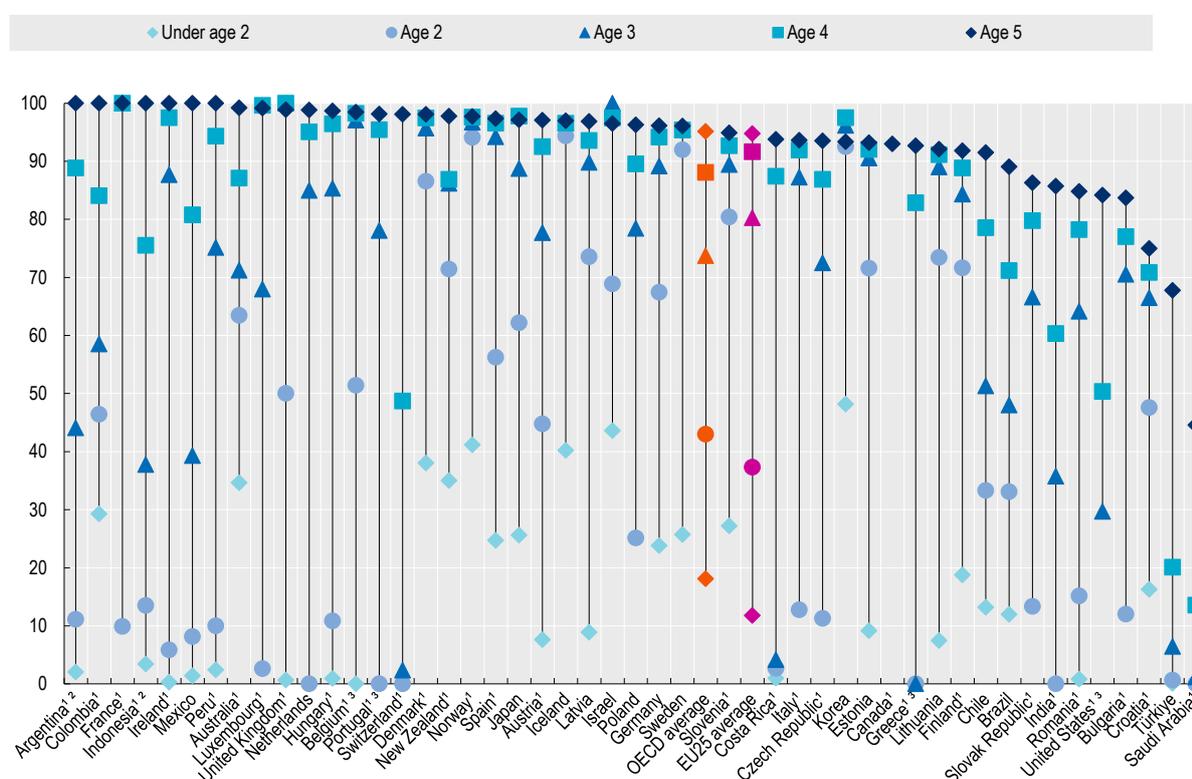
Enrolment in ECEC has expanded

Enrolment has increased, especially for children above 3, but remains relatively low for the youngest children

According to data from the OECD's *Education at a Glance 2023* (OECD, 2023^[4]), OECD countries have achieved a leap in the enrolment rates of children between ages two and three of approximately 30%; in Brazil, the leap is between ages three and four, reflecting the beginning of compulsory education. Apart from age 3, enrolment rates in Brazil are fairly close to, but below, the OECD average (Figure 6 and Table 1).

Figure 6. Enrolment rates of young children by age

Education programmes meeting ISCED criteria and other registered ECEC services outside the scope of ISCED, in per cent, 2021



Note: Countries are ranked in descending order of enrolment rates of 5-year-olds. Countries may have ECEC programmes on which enrolment statistics are not collected. For more information on which ECEC programmes are available in countries, see Annex 3 and the Education GPS (OECD, 2022). 1. Excludes other registered ECEC services. 2. Year of reference differs from 2021: 2020 for Argentina; 2018 for Indonesia. 3. Excludes ISCED 01 programmes.

Source: OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2023), Table B2.1. For more information see Source section and Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/d7f76adc-en>).

Table 1. Enrolment rates of young children by age for the OECD average and Brazil

2021

	OECD Average	Brazil
Under age 2	18%	12%
Age 2	43%	33%
Age 3	74%	48%
Age 4	88%	71%
Age 5	95%	89%

Source: OECD. 2023. *Education at a Glance 2023*. <https://stat.link/2iq98c>.

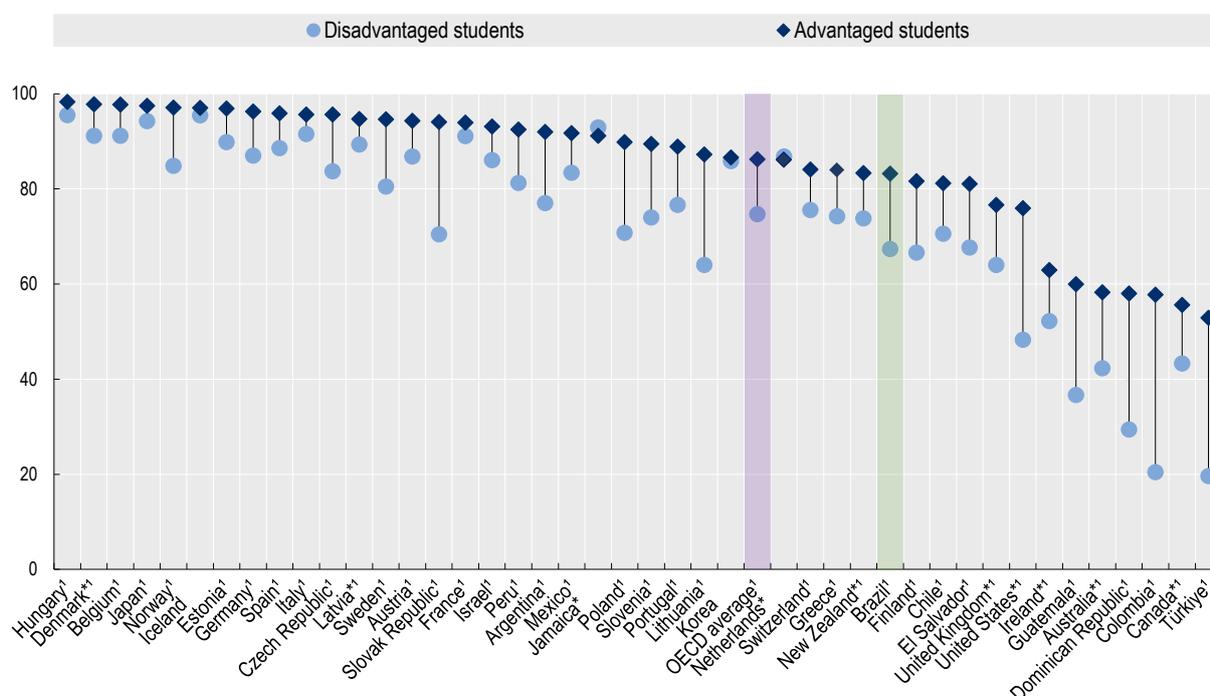
However, gaps in enrolment according to socio-economic background remain

ECEC is a powerful policy tool to help all children gain strong foundations for learning and well-being. Much of the policy attention on ECEC in recent years stems from an interest in breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty by engaging more parents in the labour force and helping all young children develop a sense of connection and belonging, a love of learning and abilities that will support them to engage in their education (OECD, 2021^[7]).

Data from PISA 2022 indicate that gaps in ECEC participation persist based on students' socio-economic background in all participating countries. These findings provide valuable insight into the links between students' socio-economic background and participation in ECEC in a comparable manner across countries. Still, students participating in PISA in 2022 attended ECEC settings more than a decade ago. At this time, 83% of students from socio-economically advantaged backgrounds attended ECEC for at least two years in Brazil, whereas this was the case for 67% of their less advantaged peers. This gap is higher than the OECD average (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Prior attendance of 15-year-old students at pre-primary school, by national quarter of socio-economic status

Percentage of advantaged and disadvantaged students who had attended at least two years of pre-primary school, 2022



* Caution is required when interpreting estimates because one or more PISA sampling standards were not met (see Reader's Guide, Annexes A2 and A4).

1. Statistically significant differences between advantaged and disadvantaged students ($p < 0.05$). A socio-economically advantaged (disadvantaged) student is a student in the top (bottom) quarter of socio-economic profile is measured by the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) in his or her own country/economy.

Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the percentage of disadvantaged students who attended at least two years of pre-primary education.

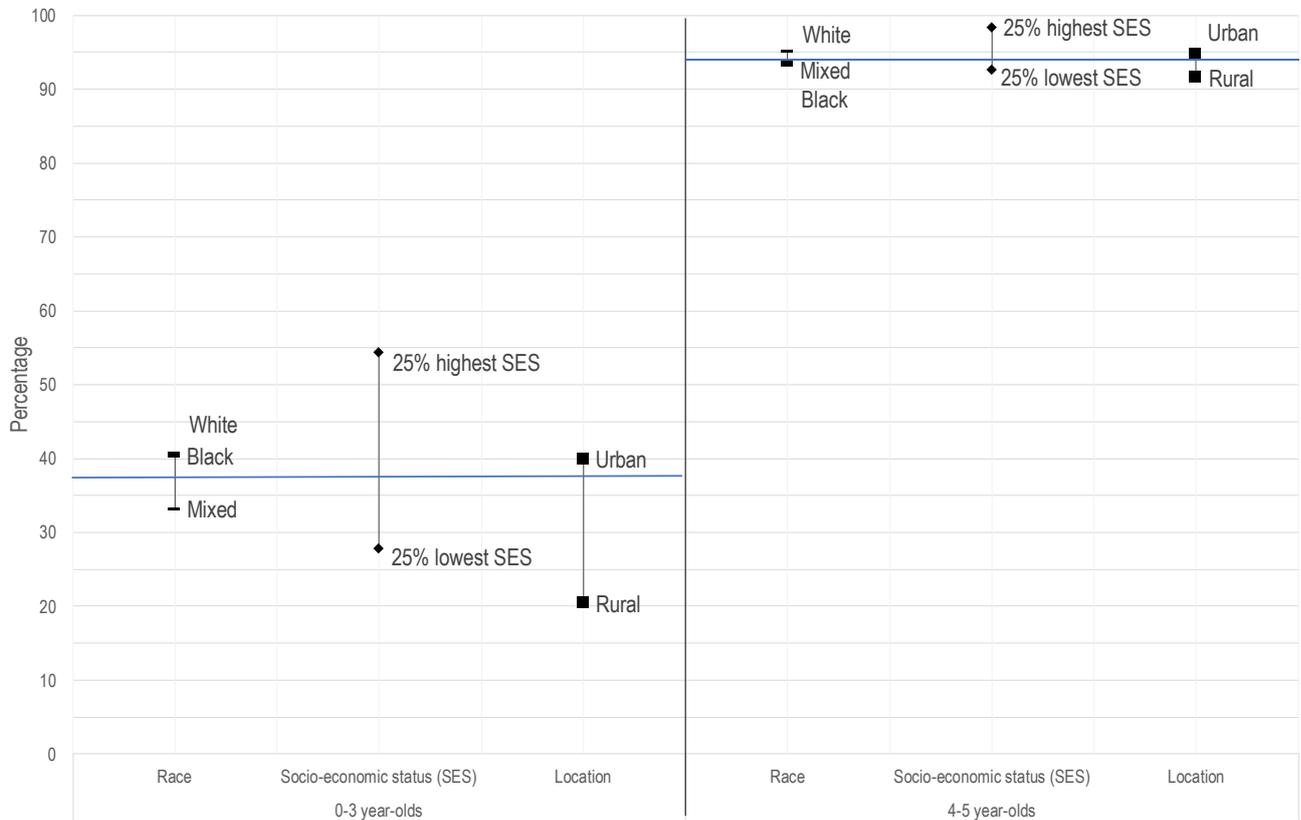
Source: OECD (2023^[14]), PISA 2022 Database, <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/> (accessed on 29 March 2024).

National data indicate that there is little difference in participation rates between children with the least and most advantaged backgrounds for children at ages four and five. Among 4-5 year-olds, the participation rate in early childhood education differs by 5.7 percentage points between the bottom 25% and the top 25% of the population. Nor does there appear to be a difference in access according to sex or race for this age group (Raikes, Alvarenga Lima and Abuchaim, 2023^[15]). However, socio-economic advantage appears to contribute to whether the youngest children in Brazil (i.e., those younger than the compulsory starting age of four) participate in early childhood education (Figure 8). This disparity indicates barriers to access specific to families with lower socio-economic status. It is also closely linked to geographical inequalities. Children in urban areas generally have better access than those from rural regions. Likewise, children in the poorest states or municipalities lack access to quality ECEC programmes, leading to unequal opportunities for early development.

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Figure 8. Percentage of children enrolled in ECEC in Brazil across race, socio-economic status and location

0-3 and 4-5 year-olds, 2019



Source: Adapted from Anuário Brasileiro da Educação Básica 2021 (https://todospelaeducacao.org.br/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Anuario_21final.pdf)

Furthermore, the overall national participation rate for children from birth to three years of age does not meet the target set in the National Education Plan of 50% of children from birth to three years having access to ECEC by 2024 (Raikes, Alvarenga Lima and Abuchaim, 2023^[15]). The length of the gap to this target suggests that there are still barriers to access for all families, regardless of socio-economic status.

Expanding enrolment in ECEC involves addressing structural and direct barriers to participation

In many countries, the cost associated with attending ECEC is among the main reasons hindering the access of children from socio-economically disadvantaged families. Universal free access to at least one year of ECEC is now common across OECD countries. However, it is typically targeted to pre-primary education, potentially limiting the available public resources to support the learning, development and well-being of children under the age of 3, as is the case in Brazil (OECD, 2017^[16]). Strategies to equitably increase participation in ECEC include increasing the provision of free ECEC for at least some hours for targeted population groups. This strategy is common in several OECD European countries (e.g. Ireland, Luxembourg).

At pre-primary education level, lack of enrolment spaces and the distance to preschool are key reasons in Brazil for not attending (Raikes, Alvarenga Lima and Abuchaim, 2023^[15]). While pre-primary enrolment is high across all regions, differences in access between states within the same region are large. Some of the poorest areas might face difficulties in financing enough spaces and developing new facilities. These inequalities exist for access to pre-primary education but are even stronger for the youngest children. These disparities in access to ECEC compound early inequities for the most at-risk children because of their family and community background have the least access to ECEC services. Options to address regional inequalities are discussed later in this brief. For the youngest children, some countries (e.g. Canada [Toronto], Norway) have developed flexible opportunities for parents and families to explore ECEC, sometimes using existing facilities (e.g. public libraries) with the involvement of some ECEC staff.

Expanding enrolment in ECEC also involves addressing indirect barriers

In fact, the most common reason for children not to attend preschool in Brazil is because the caregiver chooses not to send them. Lack of trust in ECEC provision or lack of awareness of its potential benefits are important indirect barriers to children's enrolment. Strengthening the quality of ECEC, as discussed in the next section, is important to demonstrate the benefits of ECEC and, in doing so, convince parents to enrol their children in the system. In particular, a focus on training ECEC staff on employing inclusive pedagogical approaches, adapting practices to the specific needs and interests of children, and acknowledging their identities, beliefs and socio-economic circumstances can better support the learning of most vulnerable children but also reassure parents that ECEC is not disconnected from the home environment. In Australia, considering the cultural background of all children is well recognised as a priority area in the early years' curriculum framework.

Some OECD countries face challenges similar to Brazil, where parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds, often parents with a migrant background, do not enrol their children in ECEC, even if this is free (e.g. Finland). As a first step, the central government can work with local governments to develop a common set of messages to be used by all public officials, programmes and campaigns when presenting ECEC programmes to the wider community. Health and social workers have likely built positive and trusting relationships with parents and are well-placed to work closely with ECEC stakeholders, for instance, to ensure that guidance around administrative procedures is accurate or to guarantee ECEC placements. In Belgium (Flanders), the Child and Family programme ("Kind en Gezin") established by the Flemish Child Family Agency, has developed an outreach network made up of different professionals – including nurses, social workers, psycho-pedagogues and volunteers – either directly employed or affiliated through partnerships (OECD, 2022^[17]). These professionals help raise parental awareness of the importance of vaccination, health and development screenings, participation in ECEC and other social programmes. Professionals also offer parents practical advice on how to access basic public services. Outreach is carried out through universal and regular home and hospital visits, and tele-/virtual consultations.

Overall, policies need to address the multiple barriers to broad participation in ECEC

Countries need a comprehensive approach to tackle inequalities in participation in ECEC. Policy directions include moving to a universal free system and lowering the age of compulsory education to signal the value of ECEC. However, this approach is costly and, therefore, often restricted to pre-primary education at the age of 3 (e.g. France). Adopting comprehensive programmes aiming to achieve broader participation while strengthening quality (e.g. "Right to Learn" programme in Finland) with mechanisms and policies targeted to children from disadvantaged background could be a policy direction for Brazil. This type of approach tends to concentrate the efforts on the children who need it the most while keeping universality in the approach and thereby raising overall quality.

Countries aim to strengthen the quality of ECEC provision

Policy makers want to better understand the successes of public investments in the early years and also identify areas for improvement. Research consistently underscores the importance of ensuring ECEC is of high quality to support children’s development and well-being and to realise the numerous benefits of focusing on this period of the life course.

A strong focus is put on the quality of the interactions that children experience in ECEC settings

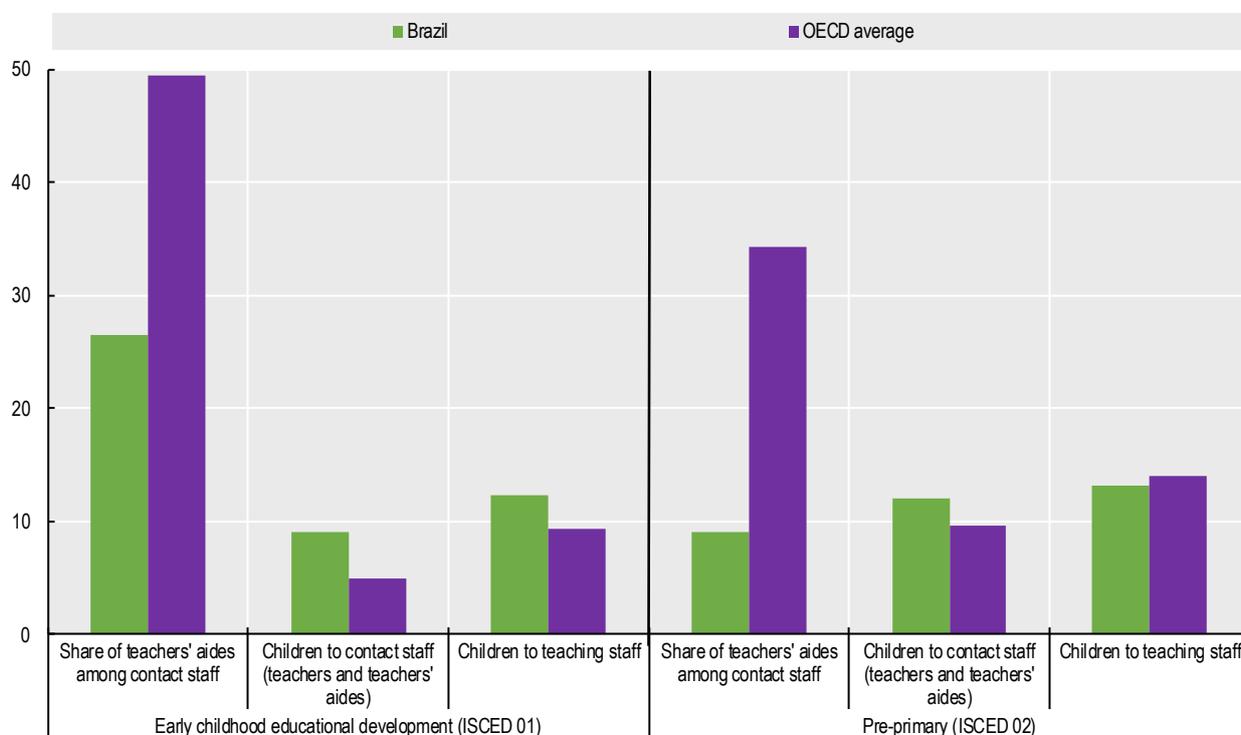
Converging research findings from multiple countries suggest some core aspects of quality (Edwards, 2021^[18]; OECD, 2018^[19]; Melhuish et al., 2015^[20]). Specifically, children’s daily interactions through their ECEC settings, including with other children, staff and teachers, space and materials, their families and the wider community, reflect the quality of ECEC they experience. Together, these interactions are known as *process quality*.

Aspects of ECEC quality that are traditional targets of policy, such as child-staff ratios, group sizes, the physical size of settings, curriculum frameworks and minimum staff qualifications, create conditions to support good process quality (Burchinal, 2018^[21]; OECD, 2018^[19]; Pianta, Downer and Hamre, 2016^[22]). However, these aspects of ECEC quality, often known as structural quality, are not, on their own, sufficient to ensure high process quality and promote children’s development, learning and well-being. Factors that shape children’s interactions in their ECEC settings include staff’s capacity to adapt to individual children’s needs and interests, engagement in different types of activities throughout the day, continuity of staff members throughout the day and year, and characteristics of children themselves, such as temperament, that matter for how individual children experience the same classroom or playgroup. Supporting quality in ECEC thereby requires a comprehensive policy approach with a particular focus on features that can promote rich experiences for children within ECEC settings.

Child-staff ratios generally attract much policy attention as fewer children per staff are often associated to more responsive, warm and positive staff-child relations. These ratios are generally smaller for settings for children under age 3 than for pre-primary education, which is the case in Brazil but only to a limited extent. Regulations in Brazil authorise a slightly larger number of children per contact staff and teaching staff than the average in OECD countries. However, the child-teacher ratio is slightly below the OECD average for pre-primary education (Figure 9). While countries generally recognise the importance of small child-staff ratios to create better conditions for children, lowering these ratios can be difficult in contexts of low funding and difficulty in attracting staff in the sector.

Figure 9. Ratio of children to staff in full-time equivalents

In percent, 2021



Note: Countries may have ECEC programmes on which enrolment statistics are not collected. For more information on which ECEC programmes are available in countries, see Annex 3 and the Education GPS (OECD, 2022).

Source: OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2023), Table B2.2. For more information see Source section and Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/d7f76adc-en>).

Early years curriculum frameworks can support process quality through several mechanisms, including their content, routines, activities, resources and encouragement of interactions and therefore also attract a lot of policy attention. Curriculum frameworks define common goals for ECEC and can incorporate new trends shaping children's lives as well as new knowledge about children's development and learning, thereby helping to achieve both equity and quality. Several OECD countries have revised their curriculum frameworks or expanded their coverage to ECEC settings for the youngest children to reach these goals. In Brazil, the National Common Curricular Base introduced in 2017 sets the core content and education modalities for the entire country. It defines the learning rights and goals for early childhood, fundamental, and high school education (Raikes, Alvarenga Lima and Abuchaim, 2023^[23]).

As is the case in Brazil, curriculum frameworks for the early years in OECD countries often set broad goals and principles that are relevant and adaptable to the wide age and developmental ranges covered by ECEC. However, such high-level frameworks can be difficult to implement, and their impact can be difficult to assess. Several countries have made efforts to support the implementation of the curriculum framework. For instance, Ireland supports the implementation of the child-centred and play-based curriculum (Aistear) through both initial qualification programmes and continuing professional development (including through mentoring and coaching) (OECD, 2021^[24]). In Sweden, professional development activities proposed to ECEC professionals to support the implementation of curriculum revisions included a blended learning course on the theme of teaching in preschool and an online course on the theme of identity, gender

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equality, and digitalisation in preschool (OECD, 2021^[25]). These country examples point to policy directions that might be pursued in Brazil to strengthen the implementation of the introduced curriculum framework across the whole country.

Attracting, training and retaining the workforce is a key challenge in many countries

The ECEC workforce is essential to young children's immediate daily interactions in their ECEC settings. However, most OECD countries face challenges in attracting and retaining a high-quality workforce. These challenges are growing, especially for the part of the sector serving children under age 3 that is expanding in many countries. Main policy levers to build a high-quality ECEC workforce include initial education, continuing professional development, attention to leadership and working conditions.

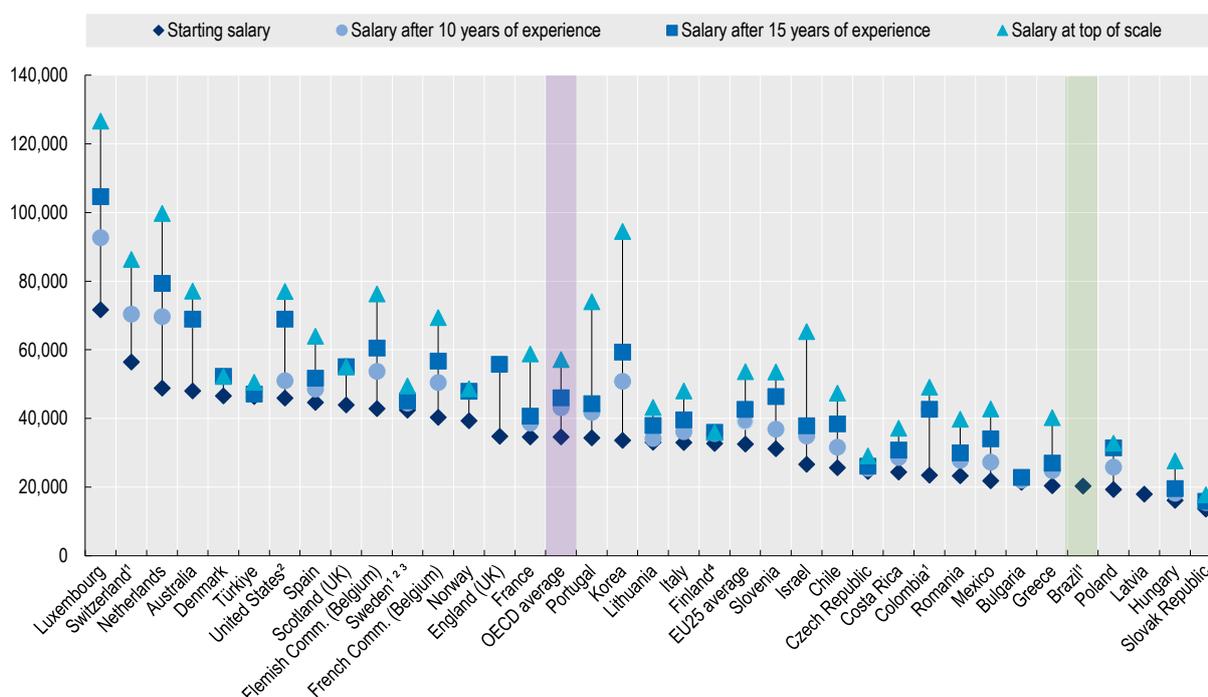
Enhancing initial educational requirements and continuing professional development are the two main policy directions to ensure that ECEC staff, including leaders, have the skills and knowledge to provide rich learning experiences to children that are adapted to their needs. The relative emphasis placed on initial education requirements versus continuing professional development can be balanced depending on countries contexts and history. A relatively stronger emphasis on continuing professional development may complement and compensate for a more limited focus on initial education requirements and vice versa.

Strengthening continuing professional development is an area for consideration for Brazil, where staff do not have a consistent knowledge base about child development, curriculum and pedagogical methodologies and responsibilities are split across multiple levels of governments and providers (Raikes, Alvarenga Lima and Abuchaim, 2023^[23]). This has been a major focus in Luxembourg, where multiple agencies provide continuing professional development through training, mentoring and coaching, as is the case in Brazil (OECD, 2022^[26]). The general principles or mechanisms adopted in Luxembourg have consisted in having a designated body within the government to provide accreditation to courses of training and providing additional financial support for participation in continuing professional development. Luxembourg also supports the professional development of leaders through coaching, mentoring and a diverse offer of training courses. Leaders of ECEC settings have indeed an essential role to play in providing the conditions for staff to develop high-quality practices and addressing sources of stress for staff in their work.

Relatively low salaries and weak working conditions (long hours, multiples tasks to address) are key barriers to attract and retain candidates in the ECEC sector. Some OECD countries experience vicious circles in which staff shortages create additional burden to current staff, deteriorating their working conditions, and generating stress and absenteeism. This in turn leads to even larger staff shortages (OECD, 2020^[27]). In Brazil, teachers' salaries are relatively low, which can create barriers for qualified staff to enter or stay in the profession (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Pre-primary teachers' statutory salaries, based on the most prevalent qualifications at different points in teachers' careers

Annual teachers' salaries, in public institutions, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for private consumption, 2022



1. Year of reference differs from 2022: 2021 for Colombia and Sweden, and 2020 for Brazil.

2. Actual base salaries.

3. Excludes the social security contributions and pension-scheme contributions paid by the employees.

4. Data on pre-primary teachers include the salaries of kindergarten teachers, who are the majority.

Countries are ranked in descending order of pre-primary teachers starting salaries.

Source: OECD (2023), Figure B2.4 (<https://stat.link/1wgjsf>) and Table D3.1. For more information see Source section and Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/d7f76adc-en>).

Policies to upskill the ECEC workforce should go hand in hand with improved working conditions. A sense of professionalisation of the ECEC workforce lies in part on members of the workforce having clarity about the expectations for their specific roles within ECEC and about what further they need to do transition to more senior professional roles (OECD, 2022^[28]). In Ireland, as part of its First 5 Strategy aiming to improve the overall ECEC system, the government launched in 2021 the Workforce Development Plan for the ECEC profession that aims to raise qualification levels, create professional development pathways, and promote careers in the sector (Government of Ireland, 2021^[29]). The plan is accompanied by a new core funding stream to improve pay and conditions. This comprehensive approach that includes funding incentives for a more qualified and better-paid workforce can inform policies in countries with a private ECEC sector or with decentralised ECEC decisions, as is the case in Brazil.

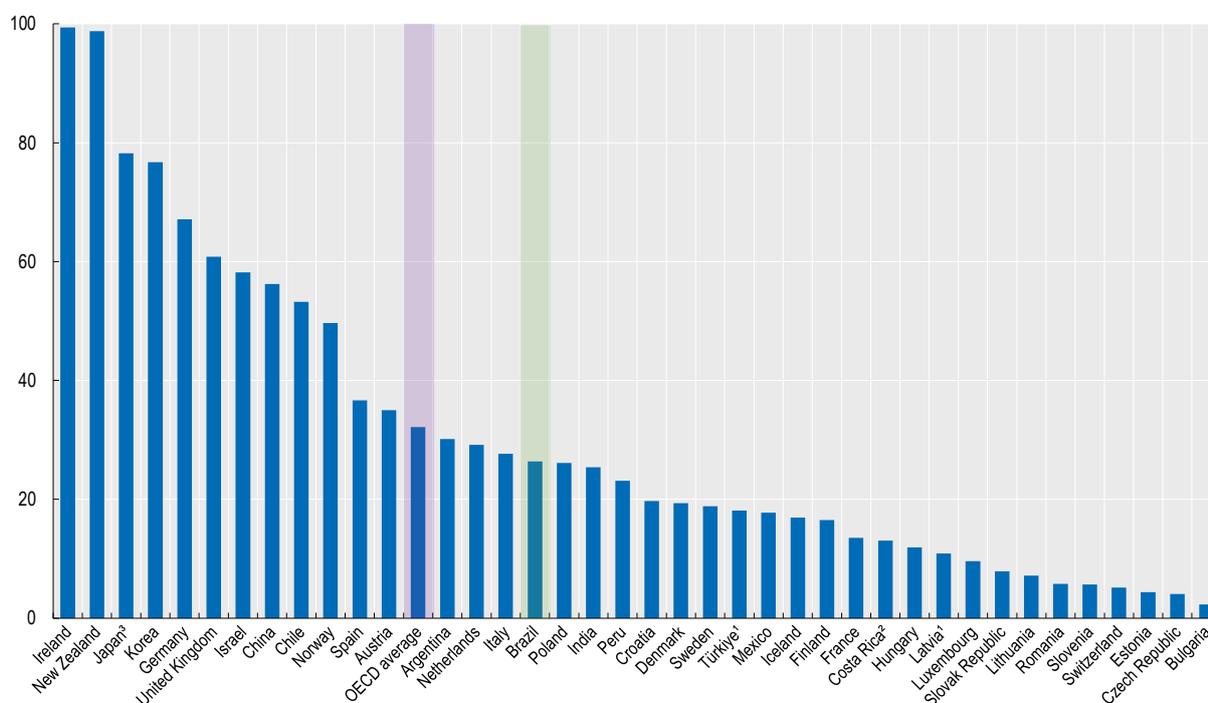
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Quality monitoring has expanded and mechanisms to steer the system towards quality improvement have developed

Quality policies and practices aim to satisfy the need for public accountability while also providing feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of individual services and the sector as a whole to inform further actions for improvement. Involvement of multiple layers of government, complexity in ECEC provision with multiple types of settings and providers as well as the large role of the private sector in several OECD countries make quality monitoring complicated (Figure 11). Strengthening the quality assurance policies of Brazil's ECEC sector is a key area for policy consideration and can be informed by policy developments in OECD countries.

Figure 11. Percentage of children enrolled in private institutions

Government-dependent and independent private institutions, 2020



Notes: All ECEC (ISCED 0). The percentage of children enrolled in private institutions for 2020 is available on OECD.stat. See Definitions and Methodology sections for more information.

1. Expenditure on all children aged 3 to 5 excludes expenditure and enrolment in ISCED 01 programmes.

2. Year of reference differs from 2020: 2021 for Costa Rica and 2019 for Greece.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of children enrolled in private institutions (government-dependent and independent private institutions).

Source: OECD (2023), Table B2.3. For more information see Source section and Education at a Glance 2023 Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes (<https://doi.org/10.1787/d7f76adc-en>).

OECD countries' governments have developed quality assurance policies in two major directions (OECD, 2022^[30]). The first consists in expanding the scope of these policies to an increasingly broad range of ECEC provisions. Typically, quality assurance policies start with early years provision close to primary schools (commonly around the 3–5-year-old age range) and are then extended to ECEC settings for children under age 3. Further extension aims to include home-based provision. Countries have often made public funding (e.g. direct public funding to settings or subsidy schemes for families) conditional to

registration and inspection (e.g. France, Ireland, Luxembourg). As well as increasing the scope of quality policies, countries have also incrementally increased the breadth of their focus, starting with a focus that was primarily on aspects of safety and structural quality, then moving to a wider focus that increasingly seeks to address process quality dimensions (e.g. implementation of the curriculum framework) in more depth as well. In practice, this means increasing attention to the educational, developmental and well-being components of ECEC provision. For instance, Ireland established an education-focused inspection programme which includes direct observation of practice by inspectors with appropriate pedagogical expertise (OECD, 2021^[24]). The programme was first introduced for pre-primary education settings and then extended to those for children under age 3.

To steer the sector towards stronger quality, ECEC providers must have access to practical support and guidance in their improvement efforts. For instance, Luxembourg established in 2017 a team of 32 regional officers to provide this kind of external improvement support for ECEC providers in the non-formal sector, with each officer providing support for around 40 providers (OECD, 2022^[26]). While there is a positive trend towards inspection teams building a strong element of professional dialogue into their practice (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Staring, F., Maxwell, B., 2018^[31]), it is important that the independence of inspectors' evaluations is not compromised by being too closely involved in the ongoing management of the setting's development.

To develop a culture of continuous improvement across the sector, several countries promote self-evaluation practices. In Scotland (United Kingdom), both the Care Inspectorate and the Education Inspectorate (Education Scotland) publish widely-used self-evaluation handbooks for providers, accompanied by a range of web-based advice, resources and practice exemplars designed to support the self-evaluation process (Care Inspectorate, 2019^[32]; Education Scotland, 2016^[33]). In Finland, where the government relies on regional bodies and municipalities to ensure the quality of ECEC provision in their areas, it has placed a statutory duty on providers to self-evaluate their practice and has provided training and tools through its national quality agency, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre.

Finally, the gathering and analysis of data and evidence from across the sector are playing an increasing role in the development of quality assurance approaches in education more generally (OECD, 2013^[34]), and the important role they can play in the ECEC sector has been specifically highlighted (OECD, 2018^[35]). Recent research has also identified the effective use of data to drive improvement as a key building block in a study of six high-quality ECEC systems (Kagan et al., 2019^[36]). These systems (Australia, Hong Kong [China], England, Finland, Korea and Singapore) systematically gather and analyse data on their ECEC provision, using it to understand strengths and weaknesses in the system, informing future policy and providing evidence for the evaluation of policy impacts, innovations and changes in strategy.

Securing funding and developing a coordinated approach to reach long-lasting effects

While ECEC policies have a range of short-term effects on children and families, attention has been put on their long-lasting effects. The returns of ECEC investment will be reaped over a longer period of time than those of interventions later in life, which provides a strong argument for investing in ECEC. There is growing attention among OECD countries to mechanisms that support long-lasting effects of ECEC investment.

Securing funding is central to ECEC equity and quality

Sustained and secured funding is critical for the quality and growth of ECEC programmes and therefore for achieving long-term effects. Appropriate funding helps recruit qualified staff to support children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, as well as ensure their ongoing professional development and their retention. Investment in early childhood facilities and materials can also finance the development

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of child-centred environments for well-being and learning. Moreover, where the cost of ECEC is not sufficiently subsidised by the government, parents' ability to pay will greatly influence participation in ECEC, and there is a risk that children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds will be excluded from ECEC. Public expenditure should therefore account for a large share of total expenditure. In 2020, OECD countries average total expenditure amounted of 0.9% of GDP and private expenditure accounted for 15% of total expenditure (OECD, 2023^[4]). On average, OECD countries total expenditure on primary education amounted to 1.5% of GDP. In 2016, the Brazilian government spent about 0.7% of its GDP on early childhood education, in line with the OECD average at that time (Raikes, Alvarenga Lima and Abuchaim, 2023^[23]).

In some countries with ECEC responsibilities at the local level as in Brazil, there has been growing attention on ensuring that relatively poor municipalities have sufficient funding for ECEC. Municipalities within a country face different socio-economic and demographic circumstances and different needs for ECEC provision. However, as municipalities have different priorities, resources and capacity, those with the greatest needs for enough places in quality ECEC have not been necessarily those that have invested more in ECEC (OECD, 2022^[17]). OECD countries have developed several mechanisms to address this issue such as mechanisms to equalise resources across municipalities (e.g. France), additional grants from the central government to municipalities (e.g. Finland) or revision of funding formula for central government transfers to account for the share of disadvantaged families in municipalities (e.g. England [United Kingdom]).

Engaging parents can support the quality of ECEC and of the home environments

ECEC learning and well-being environments do not operate in isolation. Parental partnership is critical in enhancing the knowledge of ECEC staff about the children they work with and ensuring high-quality learning for children at home. Research has shown that parental engagement is associated with children's later academic success, socio-emotional development and adaptation in society (OECD, 2011^[37]; Sylva et al., 2004^[38]). These effects can be strong for children and families of diverse cultural or socio-economic backgrounds or dual/second-language learners. ECEC staff and leadership may have clear strategies and goals for creating a welcoming atmosphere for parents and children. Still, they may fail to engage parents and guardians of children from ethnic minorities (Crozier and Davies, 2007^[39]).

Programmes targeting families alone, such as those aiming to encourage parents to read books to their offspring at home, have some positive outcomes on parental practices, particularly for families from low socio-economic background, but the effects seem to be limited in size (Duncan et al., 2023^[8]). Programmes that combined both ECEC quality and parental engagement such as those in the United States (Head Start, the Perry Preschool and the Chicago Parent Centers), suggest that parental engagement matters. It therefore seems important that these programmes do not operate in silo and attempt to complement each other's. Better combining family programmes targeting children's development and ECEC policies can be an effective way to help change parental behaviours and ensure long-lasting effects of ECEC policies, especially for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Colombia's programme Zero to Forever, for example, promotes a holistic approach, seeking parental engagement and co-ordination of different services (OECD, 2021^[25]).

Curriculum frameworks can play a key role in recognising the importance of the engagement of parents and communities in ECEC and in specifying their roles. Professional development is also needed to ensure that ECEC staff can perform this role. In Ireland, the guidelines accompanying the curriculum incites staff to organise information sessions for parents, including on curriculum content, and to invite parents to spend time in the setting and join in with activities (OECD, 2020^[40]). It also suggests ways in which ECEC staff can support continuity with the home-learning environment, for example, by informing parents about topics that interest their children; asking about their interests at home; and lending storybooks and tapes for children to take home. The curriculum also includes a set of guidelines for parents, with specific

suggestions for them to spend time together with children at home, such as reading to children and enjoying books, playing, singing songs and telling stories; having conversations and encouraging children to ask questions.

Better coordinating ECEC with other services and moving towards a whole of government approach would benefit children and families

Co-operation between ECEC centres, primary schools and wider social services can contribute to more adequately responding to children's overall development needs and those of their families. Many OECD countries have developed integrated or co-ordinated services for them. Co-ordination can occur at different levels of the ECEC system (e.g. national oversight, quality assurance, local programmes) and often requires governments to re-organise themselves.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to holistically supporting young children's well-being, development and learning, and countries follow very different approaches. In France, the "First 1,000 Days" programme aims to set good conditions for the development of young children and fight inequalities through several priorities: offering special care for families with special needs, providing reliable and accessible information, giving more time to parents to develop a positive relationship with their baby and improving ECEC services. The programme builds on several tools to co-ordinate services such as a website, early childhood hubs managed by municipalities and gathering several actors and calls for tenders to steer co-operation among main actors on a specific project. In 2021, Iceland adopted a "Prosperity Act" to develop co-operation and integration of services in the interest of children. The approach builds on creating new roles (a coordinator and a support team) to facilitate co-ordination between services and liaise with families or children. Through Chile's National Board of School Aid and Scholarships (JUNAEB), learners from ECEC to higher education and adulthood can benefit from free meals and food subsidies (OECD, 2021^[25]).

Some countries have developed whole of government child agencies. In Israel, the Early Childhood Council brings together representatives from different government departments and ECEC experts from different fields to develop a comprehensive national approach to the care of children aged 0-6 (OECD, 2021^[25]). In Japan, the Children and Family Agency was launched in 2023.

Another policy direction is to ensure strong co-ordination between ECEC and primary education. The transition into primary school is a major milestone in the life of any young child and their family. Evidence shows that some of the benefits of investment in ECEC can fade out in the early years of schooling if transitions are not well-managed, for instance, if there is a redundancy in the content of learning or if the quality of the interactions between teachers and children is not sustained after pre-primary education. Policies aiming to facilitate these transitions include: i) developing a national strategy or guidelines on transitions, ii) establishing pedagogical continuity across the transition years, iii) equipping pre-primary and primary staff and leaders with knowledge and skills of transitions and encouraging exchanges among them and iv) addressing differences in the perspective and status of pre-primary and primary teachers. For instance, New South Wales (Australia) introduced the Transition to School Statement in 2014 to improve communication between early childhood services, families and schools. The statement records a child's strengths, interests and learning per the Early Years Learning Framework. It aims to help school teachers prepare for children entering kindergarten by planning appropriate and individualised learning and teaching programmes.

3. Which policy directions taken by some OECD countries can inform Brazil's efforts to strengthen access and quality of ECEC?

Brazil's ECEC policies are strongly anchored in legal frameworks and have been guided by the well-established role of the State to guarantee education for children from zero to five years old. As a result, Brazil has a comprehensive ECEC system and several of the main pillars for ensuring equity and quality of ECEC are already in place. These include emphasising universal access, compulsory education at age 4, and a curriculum framework for the early years. The major question for Brazil is how to strengthen its ECEC policies to ensure that they deliver better social and economic outcomes. With rising inequalities, increasingly diverse populations, remaining gaps in labour market participation and increased attention to well-being in most OECD countries, this question is at the core of their policy agendas. This document highlights some policy directions from OECD countries to inform Brazil's future ECEC policies. At a high level, the following policy directions have been identified:

1. **Ensuring equal access to ECEC.** While Brazil's enrolment in ECEC is high in the years just before entry into primary education, it remains low for children under age 3, with gaps in participation according to socio-economic background and location. OECD countries have increased public expenditure on ECEC to alleviate direct barriers relating to high family costs, lack of places, and distance to ECEC settings. Efforts also aim to address the indirect barriers to ECEC participation, such as those relating to a lack of trust or awareness regarding the programmes' availability and their benefits as well as preferences to maintain children at home, for instance through an outreach network of professionals.
2. **Strengthening the quality of ECEC.** While data on the quality of ECEC in Brazil is lacking, there are signals of differences in quality within the country regarding teachers' qualifications and infrastructure and risks of low quality in some instances. Research underscores the importance of process quality. OECD countries aim to support process quality by implementing a research-based curriculum framework, attracting and retaining a high-quality ECEC workforce, and developing a quality assurance and improvement system.
3. **Developing a co-ordinated and holistic approach to support children and their families in the early years.** Ensuring the long-lasting effects of ECEC investment requires a co-ordinated approach involving parents, other social and health institutions as well as primary schools. As Brazil is advanced in these various policies separately, there is potential to strengthen linkages to reinforce outcomes, a direction taken by several OECD countries.
4. **Strengthening the governance and infrastructure of early years policies.** As in many other OECD countries, the organisation of ECEC policies is complicated with multiple layers of responsibilities and a plurality of actors. Strengthening the governance of early years policies can help achieve more cost-effective outcomes.
5. **Developing data at individual and system levels for the early years.** Data is needed at the level of children, families and ECEC settings to better adjust services to needs and at a system level to monitor the effect of policies and steer the system towards improvement.

About this work

This document was prepared by Stéphanie Jamet, Diana Toledo Figueroa and Cláudia Tamassia based on previous international evidence collected by the OECD on the topics of early childhood education and care and the education policy context of Brazil. Providing an overview of relevant international evidence available, it is meant to inform discussions for strengthening of early childhood education and care in Brazil.

The OECD can support Brazil's policy agenda through more in-depth work considering Brazil's priorities, challenges and context:

- Brazil's participation in the second cycle of the *OECD International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study*, with results expected in 2026, will provide comparative data for benchmarking and monitoring the system's performance during a key period in children's lives.
- Brazil is also invited to meetings of the *OECD ECEC Network*. The ECEC Network assists the OECD Education Policy Committee in supporting Members and Partners in developing effective policies and practices in early childhood education and care to promote better social, cultural, educational and economic outcomes for children.
- Finally, the *Education Policy Outlook* can continue supporting Brazil's efforts to improve the quality and equity of its education system. Key areas of collaboration with the EPO include analysis and international benchmarking of education reforms, advice, and policy dialogue spanning from ECEC to higher education and adult learning.

This document was prepared with the financial support from the Itaú Social Foundation.

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