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COMPARING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE FROM A RIGHTS- BASED APPROACH

*Comparando la Educación y Atención de la Primera
Infancia desde un enfoque basado en los derechos*

Ana Ancheta Arrabal*

ABSTRACT

This paper pretends to examine how the equal right to quality education and care in the phase of early childhood is developed in different policies, particularly within the processes for the inclusion of children in situations of social risk and exclusion in the European systems of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Extracted from the findings of the author's PhD, the following pages include some of the main characteristics, as well as the outcomes and the conclusions of the study, which are briefly described, comprising the structure of a comparison on the ECEC policies between three representative countries in Europe. The work attended to the previous studies on early childhood describing ECEC throughout western European societies, to analyse their impact in equity of opportunity considering ECEC as the long life learning base, and discussing its implications for the inter-generational exclusion, in searching policy recommendations to enhance ECEC and child well-being.

KEY WORDS: Early Childhood Education and Care, Rights-Based Approach, Equality.

* Universidad de Valencia (España).

RESUMEN

El presente artículo persigue revisar el modo en que el derecho equitativo a una atención y educación de calidad durante la primera infancia es desarrollado desde las distintas políticas, especialmente dentro de los procesos de inclusión de los niños en situación de riesgo y exclusión social en los sistemas europeos de educación y atención de la primera infancia (EAPI). Las siguientes páginas se extraen de los hallazgos de la tesis doctoral de la autora, incluyendo las principales características, así como se describen brevemente los resultados y conclusiones del estudio, conformando la estructura de una comparación de las políticas de EAPI en tres países representativos en Europa. El trabajo tiene en cuenta los estudios previos sobre la descripción de la EAPI en las sociedades europeas occidentales, para analizar su impacto en la igualdad de oportunidades considerando la EAPI como la base del aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida y debatiendo sus implicaciones en la exclusión intergeneracional, en la búsqueda de recomendaciones políticas para fomentar la EAPI y el bienestar infantil.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación y Atención de la Primera Infancia; Enfoque Basado en los Derechos Humanos; Equidad.

1. INTRODUCTION: A QUESTION OF RIGHTS

The understanding of ECEC as a right for every child has gained legitimacy in recent times. Both the historical overviews in the literature of the childcare and early childhood education systems trace their origins to the same starting point that recognized the need to support families in order to benefit from their ability to focus on their work knowing their children were receiving high quality care and/or education (LUC, 1998). Hence, it was due to the wider implications of that sought benefit to the community that the founders clearly saw in the importance of ECEC an essential element in developing an interventionist, compensatory and inclusive strategy for society, where this residual approach to funding meant that regulated child care emerged as a welfare — rather than a universal or educational — entitlement. The development of ECEC provision was shaped by the way societies had understood the Early Childhood itself, and, later on, by how this fact settled the basis for future debates on the State, family and institutions' role in the fulfilment of this and any other children rights to guarantee their optimal development and well-being, all which became influential in providing a widening base of professional knowledge.

To a great extent, the ECEC history reveals a system which emerged as diverse and uncoordinated, expanding rapidly when attempting to meet periods of need and crisis and

waning in other times, with little cohesive integration of services (UNESCO-OIE, 1961). Although there were always difficulties with the limited funding arrangements, the supply of regulated services grew throughout western countries — especially as mothers with young children entered the paid labour force in growing numbers —, and most of them developed and refined service delivery, regulation and funding in the 1970s and 1980s (MIALARET, 1976: 67). The expansion of pre-primary education has been likely to continue since the argument that early childhood education should be available to all children gained further legitimacy, and conceptions of the ECEC have shifted more emphasis to the child's needs and rights from the needs and rights of families as drivers of public policy, increasing public interest and investment over the past decades (EURYDICE, 1995). Moreover, the debate around the democratization of ECEC is an historical recurrent issue stated within the political agenda:

“The Early Childhood Education should not be converted in a new mean of social segregation, leaving children of poor families aside from children of rich families. Whether if we want that Early Childhood Education becomes an instrument against social injustice or that it prepares children to live in peace, it is an imperative to fight for the generalization of the Early Childhood Education (...)” (MIALARET, 1976: 251-253).

The treatment of ECEC as a right in its full sense has been only recognized very recently. Albeit the Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) deals with the child's right to education, when the Convention was written it did not specifically acknowledge this right in early childhood nor the inseparability of early childhood education and child care until its recent observation (CRC, 2005). Furthermore, whether the spurts of progress that have occurred have been motivated at all by the consideration of the Convention's Articles and processes, this has not been apparent, in the sense that ECEC as a children's right has not been addressed by governments at this level (FRIENDLY, 2001). On the political agenda, there has been increased interest in expanding institutions for children below school age during recent decades in many European countries, and a move towards full coverage of the three-to six-year-old age group in particular, and which is explained by the OECD (2006: 1) due to the immediate factors turning governmental attention to ECEC: “the wish to increase women's labour market participation; to reconcile work and family responsibilities on a basis more equitable for women; to confront the demographic challenges faced by OECD countries (in particular falling fertility rates and the general ageing of populations); and the need to address issues of child poverty and educational disadvantage”. This quotation reveals how early childhood and its place in society are closely intertwined with larger political issues, such as gender equality and the aim of increasing women's participation in the labour market, so forth is ECEC perceived as a tool to increase the fertility rates and to prevent further ageing of the European population (JENSEN AND QVORTRUP, 2004).

The definition of ‘early childhood education and care’ (ECEC) used in this work is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its General Comment 7 (2005)

as the reference for “Implementing child rights in early childhood”. The Comment is currently acknowledged at the European framework for education (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2011), and so it is assumed by the States parties which should review their obligations towards young children in the context of this definition¹ to evaluate whether these rights are being guaranteed. Lately, the purposes associated with the child have gravitated towards an emphasis on human development as it is interpreted in conceptions about prosperity in present societies (DICKENS, SAWHILL and TEBBS, 2006). The establishment of the ECEC as a key for the success of different aims on the global agendas — Millenium Development Goals (MDG), Education for All Framework (EFA), Lisbon Strategy in European Union (EU), amongst others — has contributed to the extension of ECEC programmes around the world. The recognition that ECEC services can contribute to these goals was the focus of a conference organised by the European Commission in October 2008 where early childhood education was one of the areas identified for improvement within the new framework. However, it was quickly realized that this required more effective policies and coordination in education and vocational training. To address this, in May 2009 the Council of Ministers adopted the Education & Training 2010 Work Programme (ET2020), an strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training that is established between the EU Member States and the European Commission, strengthening their political coordination. Hence, ECEC was identified as a priority theme for cooperation between Member States, in particular to promote generalised equitable access and reinforce the quality of provision and teacher support (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2008). Therefore, since the adoption of agendas like EFA, MGD or the Lisbon goals, it is increasingly explicit that education and training systems are expected to provide not only favourable growth prospects and contribute towards the transition to a knowledge-based economy and society but also towards combating social exclusion (SOUTO OTERO and MCCOSHAN, 2005: 26). The knowledge that the tremendous capacity and adaptability of young children provide an effective starting point for preventive interventions, as part of a broader social inclusion policy, has been largely recognised in the EU. In this line, the last strategic framework for a European cooperation in education and training recalls for a quality and inclusive ECEC (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2008: 4).

Nevertheless, within the established agendas, “there are important tasks to consider for ECEC policy making in support of children and families from vulnerable backgrounds” (LESEMAN, 2002: 12-14). Nowadays, the phenomenon of discrimination and social exclusion poses more complications to young children’s lives, and more concretely in the case of the EU, distinctive degrees of equity exist now among the vulnerable groups in

¹ “In its consideration of rights in early childhood, the Committee wishes to include all young children: at birth and throughout infancy; during the preschool years; as well as during the transition to school. Accordingly, the Committee proposes as an appropriate working definition of early childhood the period below the age of 8 years. (CRC, 2005: 2)”.

function of their status. It is acknowledged by EU Governments that the increasing benefits for the wealthier strata of people have been to the disadvantage of other groups who are excluded from participation (ATKINSON, 2002). These inequalities limit enormously the arduous work that is supposed to guarantee the child well-being and education and care for all children, conceptualizing the ECEC as an issue of children's rights in the EU and as part of the ratified rights of the CRC by States Parties. To this regard, different actions have been adopted in the European countries to provide with an answer for educative systems approaching the challenge during this phase of life cycle, thus nations with a variety of histories, cultures, fiscal capacities and political arrangements have set in motion public policy for high quality early learning and child care programs (MONTGOMERY *et al.*, 2003). The measures adopted are usually based on universal provision of ECEC accessible to all children, conforming differences that lie in the organisational processes and agents involved in the development of this provision; a diversity which also arises from countries different economic and social conditions, the extent of their social welfare system, the degree to which their ECEC provision has developed and also from the thinking behind the measures (EURYDICE, 2009:102-103). To the same extent, "considerable differences in the conceptualisation of diversity in early childhood education are to be observed both among and within European countries" (VANDENBROECK, 2007:22). Hence, the systemic perspective should be a reference basis in researching the building up of this diverse field, as the overview of the early childhood study moves further by focussing on the new multidisciplinary approaches (DAVID, 1998).

2. A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH FOR THE ECEC

Currently, the predominant EFA approach is consistent with a rights-based perspective of the childhood, as well as with recent international conventions on inclusive education for all children, regardless of their individual circumstances, both in the developing and developed contexts. In this view, the integration of vulnerable groups in the societies on a general level, and, especially within the education systems and social services, has converted itself in a matter of interest for those politicians. However, the successful integration and the equal inclusion of children in the ECEC provision are not always the subject of priority measures for the authorities concerned in the European countries. Widely, this situation is likely to constitute one of the first forms of discrimination and social exclusion that risks opportunities for young children, while the guarantee of their rights is getting vulnerable, demonstrating the necessary correspondence between the ECEC system and the rights during the early childhood. It is known that rights can be analysed, both in their effectiveness and in their violation, and ECEC is a good reference for analysing the various situations involving early childhood and also for setting

out guidelines of good practice². This vision widens the ECEC conception in the way that children are humans with legal rights and not just pupils in the teaching-learning process, frequently in need of attention and protection. To the same extent, ECEC settings become a register and, at the same time a good observatory on the spot which helps to find out about these rights and enable educational action, as far as it is possible. This analysis enables to outline the educational character and implications underlying the whole Convention from the rights-based perspective and the explicit mention that appears and indicates Government obligations in accordance with the governing principles of the CRC. These safeguards have been structured into 4-A scheme (requiring education to be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable) by Tomashevski (2006) and which are to some extent applicable for the ECEC right. These concerns regarding the rights have been arranged under different headings that constitute nowadays a rights-based approach which is founded upon three principles: first, the availability and access to ECEC (denial of the right to education), what will be accessibility to a free and universal ECEC to guarantee equality, inclusion and non-discrimination (access to education and groups exposed to discrimination, such as the disabled and ethnic and linguistic minorities); secondly, discipline in terms of acceptability, which could refer to the minimum quality standards in the content and the extent of the ECEC provision; and lastly, the inclusion of human rights in the programmes as being directly related to their adaptability to the higher interest of the child. The theoretical welfare regime theory is another starting point that has been used to shed light on how childhood is embedded in these different national systems. Hence, as it follows, the approach adopted here to analyse the impact of ECEC policies on the children's rights highlights the importance of specific national contexts in shaping that relationship, and, particularly, tries to disentangle the role of regulations and institutions.

When studying the type of the ECEC system several dimensions are studied from a rights-based perspective, such as the policies, measures and provisions made from the welfare and educative systems, which are seldom included in the analyses. European welfare states are diverse with respect to ECEC policies, with different origins, priorities and developments. Actually, few countries — the English-speaking countries, the Nordic countries, Spain, France and the Netherlands — mention procedures for evaluating government policies encouraging access or give their results (EURYDICE, 2009: 132-134). Thereby, the selection of countries in the study provide comparable numerical benchmarks, as well as qualitative indicators that add the comprehensive value to the assessment, in coherence with the above-mentioned systemic approach in the areas linked to the equity of ECEC.

² Hence the structure of the ECEC system and its levels of professionals are considered in tandem with the right to education and with the basic principles and rights of protection. This approach will also help ECEC professionals to detect the need to have access to learning initiatives in those spheres or some kind of trained professional in the educational field (DÁVILA and NAYA, 2007).

AVAILABILITY	ACCESIBILITY	ACCEPTABILITY	ADAPTABILITY
<p>Variable of Context: using indicators to observe defining aspects of social and economical realities for each country:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Dimensions on children well-being</i> (UNICEF-INNOCENTI RESEARCH CENTRE, 2007). - <i>Benchmarks on the League table of ECEC in the OECD countries</i> (UNICEF-INNOCENTI RESEARCH CENTRE, 2008) - <i>Poverty rates for children aged under 6 living in the poverty threshold in 2005</i> (EURYDICE, 2009). <p>Variable “Social and family benefits”: attending and comparing indicators referring to the type of welfare regime:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Social Public Expenditure by extension area of the social policy, in percent of GDP, en 2001</i> (OECD Social Expenditure Database 1980-2001, 2004) - <i>Social Indicators, 2006</i> (OECD, 2007). - <i>Total public expenditure on ECEC in relation with other social expenditures and economic, demographic and social indicators, and in percent of GDP disaggregated by sector</i> (care or/and education). - <i>Public approximate spending on the Early Childhood attending to the direct or no direct public spending on family benefits in cash, services and tax measures in percent of the GPD, 2005</i> (Personal creation from Social Expenditure Database (www.oecd.org/els/social/expenditure), OECD Family Policy Database (www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database), y European System Protection Statistics (ESSPROS) 2005). 	<p>Variable “Administration and managing of ECEC services”: through indicators concerning funding, costs, government and managing of the system and the legal and institutional ECEC framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Institutional and public responsible bodies and authorities to design, organize and implement the ECEC system</i> (EURYDICE, 2009). - <i>Structure and types of provision and services</i> (OCDE, 2009). - <i>Proportion of offered provision by the diverse sectors and funding trends, 2007</i> (Humblet & Moss, 2008: 7). <p>Variable “Services and measures to guarantee the right ECEC”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Proportion of employed mothers with a child under 3 on leave, and access rates for children aged under 3 in regulated ECEC services, 2005</i> (OECD, 2007). - <i>Economic activity rates by gender of parents/guardians caring for children (at least with one child between 0 and 2 years, at least one between 3 and 5 years, 6 to 11 years) 2005 and Childcare fees per two-year old attending accredited early-years care and education services, 2004</i> (Personal creation from OECD, 2007: 151, and EURYDICE, 2009: 58). - <i>Enrollment rates in ECEC for children aged under 6, 2004</i> (OECD Family and Education databases, 2007 and MEC, 2006). <p>Variable “Equity and inclusion of education within the ECEC system”: it compares problems, solutions and trends concerning inclusion of the services through the indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Enrollment rates in Pre-primary private and public institutions</i> (OECD, 2009). - <i>Enrollment rates in Pre-primary dependent and independent private institutions</i> (OECD, 2009). 	<p>Variable “Implementation, orientation and monitoring quality of ECEC services”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Evolution of enrollment rates (%) for children under 4 in Pre-primary and Primary education (1998-2008)</i> (EUROSTAT, 2009). - <i>Qualitative issues of the personal and professional in the main job place, 2007</i> (Personal creation from OECD, 2007: 167; OECD, 2005: 104; and Lohmann et al., 2009: 48). <p>Variable “Conditions from the ECEC teachers”: indicators related to the initial training and formation (duration, curriculum, etc.):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>General structure and regulation framework from the different models of initial training of ECEC teachers in the three countries</i> (EURYBASE, 2009 (www.eurydice.org/eurybase) and Carro, 2004). - <i>Curriculum from the initial training and formation in the three countries</i> (Extracted from the national regulations). 	<p>Variable “Measures to attend diversity and vulnerable groups”: it aims to compare the measures, aims, and coverage towards the universalization of ECEC and inclusion of all children trough qualitative indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Inclusive measures for children from vulnerable groups of society, 2007</i> (Personal creation extracted from EURYDICE, 2009:101-137). - <i>Measures and forms of support towards the integration for immigrant children in pre-primary and primary education</i> (Extracted from EURYDICE, 2004: 104).

*Source: made by the author

To the same extent, theoretical analysis of ECEC policy programmes generally supports the common division of countries into welfare regimes as originally formulated by Esping-Andersen (1990). Each of the countries compared, Sweden, Spain and United Kingdom, is therefore a unit of study, where social institutions and processes are assumed to vary systematically, and the explanations are found in the context of the respective society in order to study the right to ECEC by comparing the available cross-national data and national policies in these three different welfare systems. To understand the impact of changes in a particular country's welfare policies it is important to examine shifting policies and their effects within and across other nations (ESPING-ANDERSEN, 1993: 80). Exploring the roots of childcare itself and childcare facilities can help us to understand some of the differences in the conditions in which children grow up in different European welfare states today. This type of research offers significant advances by comparing national scores from different ECEC systems because it considers the contextual characteristics of welfare and wellbeing rather than only examining the ECEC characteristics alone. Such an analysis is important because it is precisely in the way welfare systems operate that the role of institutions is likely to manifest itself in a concrete way (ESPING-ANDERSEN, 1993).

3. COMPARING THE RIGHT TO ECEC BETWEEN EUROPEAN SYSTEMS

Comparative and historical perspectives, can help us to understand some of the differences in the conditions in which young children grow up in different European welfare states today. In this work an internationally comparative perspective has been adopted to include countries that represent diverse types of welfare regimes, so where education and childcare for young children are organized in different ways, and where the importance of inclusion and equality differ. To this respect, it becomes determinant the current need that countries have in developing indicators to assess ECEC more comprehensively and monitor the fulfilment of the rights and well-being of the youngest children. In measuring the improvement towards the education for all in the EU, the indicators, their analysis and their use have been much criticised. Agreeing on Bryden (2010), the greatest criticism of all must be the focus on the apparent measurable outcomes and their failure to deal with crucial unmeasurable outcomes of education. These now available, measurable, and apparently comparable indicators form the 'evidence base' that drive the policy reforms, crystallises the process of social stratification and exclusion that other policies are trying to remove (BRYDEN, 2010: 35). Furthermore, although national statistics for under-3s are available for some European countries, they do not have the same

degree of standardisation as the international databases compiled are not entirely comparable¹.

The right to education presupposes at least the fulfilment of two basic obligations: a free service and access to ECEC, so reference will be made to the availability and accessibility of provision. With regard to the compulsory aspect of education, in terms of the obligation States Parties, the non-fulfilment of this right mainly takes the form of exclusion, and the most common factors leading to exclusion from ECEC include affordability and shortfalls in provision (EURYDICE, 2009: 14). Most European countries have recognised the role of government in expanding access as a strategy to promote equality of educational opportunity prior to starting compulsory schooling. Hence, the problem of the volume of supply in the access for 5-year-olds is solved, but this is certainly not the case for the 0-3 age group, or even for 4-year-olds in some countries where the free provision is clearly a long way off. For instance, so far the issue of access to education in rural areas, where the lack of supply is particularly acute, has not featured prominently in the ET2020 (VASSILIOU, 2010: 34). Therefore, to observe accessibility it should be considered its different dimensions such as availability in all areas, affordability, length of operation, flexibility and availability for different age groups and for children with special needs (OECD, 2001).

Affordable access to ECEC is an important aspect when it comes to analysing the situation regarding the right to education, besides there is also a political choice between promoting this right of young children at home and encouraging participation in the available arrangements. The Nordic countries like Sweden, and Spain have adopted an integrated approach to ECEC which, amongst other measures, is realized through unitary settings, explicitly recognising that, from infancy, ECEC provision constitutes the first step on the education path. In this approach public authorities offer subsidised places from a very early age, often when parental leave ends, though this does not necessarily mean that demand for these places is fully met, as there is variation in need and demand of ECEC (EURYDICE, 2009: 75 and OECD, 2001: 129). Thus, Sweden implemented the right for all children from the child's first birthday, having universal guarantee to subsidised ECEC, but where there is no guaranteed place to subsidised ECEC those are allocated following different types of guidelines. Such as the *Children's Plan: One Year On* from United Kingdom (UK) have introduced free part-time places available to 2-year-old children belonging to designated target groups or in disadvantaged areas; though it should be

¹ There are complementary explanations for early education disadvantages among low income, ethnic minority and immigrant children related to the accumulation of socio-economic and psychological "risks" (LESEMAN, 2009: 18). However, poverty is also another important risk factor that can be more significant than any other for the people who will benefit most from the education system and, unfortunately, whose conditions of development have provided few advantages, finding themselves in less favourable conditions. If this negative spiral is to be broken, the importance of ECEC services in breaking the cycle of poverty and the intergenerational inheritance of poverty must be recognized (EUROCHILD, 2009: 11-12).

noticed that private and voluntary settings, as main form of provision, only receive state funding for children aged over 3 years to cover the same entitlement (OPSI, 2006). Moreover, in the UK, ECEC is seen as part of the range of services for children and families, which also include health services, parental outreach and family support, and, in addition, legislation was revised to focus on the educational dimension taking some recent initiatives to ensure that infants have the best start in life. From other common guidelines, families are asked about their work commitments because priority is also given to working parents, as it happens in Spain. In any case, parents are required to make a contribution to the costs of provision — where, mostly, public funding comes from local sources —, so inequality in terms of opportunities of access remains, albeit the tax deductions to assist families with ECEC costs (LOVELESS & BETTS, 2005). Tax rebates on fees paid for childcare services can appear combined with special regulations regarding staff ratios for groups that include children at risk, like these involve in Spain that the numbers of children in the class are reduced. In Sweden parental leave schemes for parents receiving ‘cash-for-care’ was re-introduced again in 2008 (HAAS *et al.*, 2008: 337), however it is important to note that this fact may hire external non-subsidised day care — as there is no obligation to take care of the children themselves. Whilst, these schemes have also disputable class consequences, in the way that “the cash benefit is of greater importance to low-income families as it represents a higher share of their total income (EURYDICE, 2009:84,120)”. Hence, a decisive factor deduced from the financing mechanisms to guarantee the right to ECEC is the type of provision, between public and private providers, as it is well-stated that substantial public investment is necessary for the development of an equitable and well-resourced system of quality ECEC (OCDE, 2001: 9). In trying to compare this issue between the three ECEC systems it was selected, amongst others, the evolution of pre-primary participation rates, and especially in both public and private subsystems as it is reflected in the annex tables 1 and 2². As can be concluded from the tables, even though the participation rates are high in the three countries, table 1, there is an evident increase in favour of the private sector in UK, with a clear growth of this type of supply over the years, while this trend in the other two countries is much less acute, table 2. To this respect, studies discuss which may be the best subsidising strategy regarding the regulation of the gap in the use of high quality provisions between high and low-income groups, as “many studies reveal that low-income families and those from ethnic minorities tend towards services and provision of inferior quality” (LESEMAN, 2009: 9).

In conclusion, in order to narrow the early education gap, policy measures to increase the participation in early education provisions should seek ways to decrease the costs for low income groups, while ensuring a common high level of quality of provisions

² Particularly, participation rates in settings for the under-3s usually cover different reference years, so they are frequently not illustrated and, consequently, national data must be relied upon. Furthermore, unfortunately, most of the databases used come from different sources, and so they cannot be crossed at the level of individuals nor even within the same database (EURYDICE, 2009: 51).

for all children (settling quality regulations and standards with the possibility of targeted interventions for those who need it most). Policies which encourage access to the available services by the most disadvantaged⁴ can be observed in some countries, even though all countries implement measures intended to prevent educational difficulties for children at risk and to benefit children who have developmental problems or educational difficulties (an increasing trend among the countries participating on the international assessments, such as the renowned PISA). From a rights-based perspective the development of these measures and programmes is an indispensable quality target (EC CHILDCARE NETWORK, 1996) to ensure the ECEC adaptability to the higher interest of the child and the inclusion of human rights. Moreover, most European countries also face difficult social challenges — for example, integrating immigrant or refugee populations, and particularly with respect to child development is one of the preoccupations of decision makers (EURYDICE, 2004: 3, 72), so it is the very acute and severe increase of child poverty among southern European countries — which are prompting the implementation of specific programmes in this area. Regarding these groups/individuals countries apply a variety of approaches not mutually exclusive and amongst which the establishment of geographic areas as priority zones stands up by taking special measures in both the 0-3 phase and the pre-primary phase. For instance, initiatives targeted at children from at risk groups constitute one of the major axes which underpin current policy developments related to ECEC provision in the UK. Spain has been also introducing community assistance initiatives or services in areas which have centres with a large number of children at risk, and where appointment of extra staff in mainstream settings which cater for all children but which also admit children with difficulties, were also implemented, such as the figure of the ‘intercultural mediator’.

Alongside the above-mentioned measures, the implementation of special programmes is being developed, broken down according to their curricula, their type or even when they are applied (for example, the year prior to the start of compulsory education). For example, according to Swedish law “Pre-schooling and welfare for schoolchildren shall be based on the needs of each child. Children who for physical, mental or other reasons need special support in their development shall be given the care their special needs demand” (SFS, 1997). This demonstrates a clear desire not to separate the ‘target groups’ from the rest of the population offering for all children educational settings whose qualified workforce is trained to deal with the full range of children’s individual needs; however, in this universal model, “uniformity is a cause for concern, where the risk of acting as an ‘equalizer’ can diminish children’ differences in bringing them into the system” (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE, 2008: 38). Nevertheless, such programmes are mainly dedicated to language acquisition (mother tongue but mostly for enhancement of the second language) at pre-primary level, being less common for younger children (0-3 years), although Sweden pays special attention to the language process for children of the entire 0/1-6 age group (EURYDICE, 2009: 103). The most common special

language training programmes are compensatory or in the provision of specialist support for older children (3-6 year-olds). In Spain, compensatory programmes, focused on language and other areas of the curriculum, were being implemented in schools with a significant number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, this support is received in the same class as other children in their group; mention should be also made to the introduction of a mobile *Support Service for Immigrant Pupils*, responsible for encouraging the integration of immigrant children who do not speak Spanish (CIDE, 2006: 40). Finally, there are still separate settings/sections for specific groups of children in particular circumstances, such as orphans or those separated from their family for some reason, measures which anyway reinforce segregation, resulting in an increased concentration of children with disadvantages on particular spheres, which may have an additional negative effect on children's development (FARRAN, 2000).

4. OPENING DISCUSSIONS LEADING TO CONCLUSIONS

From this brief analysis it is possible to formulate a question around the suitability of an ideal ECEC system to consider when States Parties' approaches to public support are most directly concerned with the right to ECEC and how they should fulfill its responsibility for ensuring that commitment to children's rights is met, with a clear role which needs to be stated for the governments in facilitating states' compliance to ECEC. Moreover, actually the democratization of ECEC is not only a matter of equal access rather also a question of how this access and the guarantee to this statutory right are being addressed by governments. In this sense, it is important not only knowing who is able to access to the ECEC systems, but it becomes rather crucial to identify who is finally neither accessing to the system nor in terms of equity. This open debate asks for exploring whether intervention targeted at groups — on the basis of defined social, economic or cultural criteria — can bring to a higher risk of exclusion, or support based on the individual needs of children identified during the course of their ECEC trajectories may reinforce social and ethnic segregation. A discussion that lays on the real risk of the existence of targeting measures which may prevent or enhance the recognition of the invisibility, and consequent discrimination and exclusion of certain groups of children from the ECEC systems. From the comparative welfare regime theory the importance of civil society — such as the influence of conservative parties and churches has been acknowledged to find the roots to this residual principle. In the case of the social democratic welfare regime, including those in Sweden, the universal principle was a cornerstone and it had a longer history of state intervention in and responsibility for childcare, while in the other two countries the right to provide care for younger children is still understood as the responsibility of parents, at least for children under the age of three years. Today, however, in all three welfare states, the state has become an important factor in constructing the new welfare architecture in the matter of childcare where the changes in the labour market play an important role (KORSVOLD, 2012). Being aware that conclusions founded in that debate can be very

controversial, it is important to emphasize that comparative research aims frequently to find that: controversy that starts up a new process of finding out a loyal representation of reality. In this way, the essence of this work tried to emphasize the demand for a greater comparative research study which is standing out to improve the quality and equity of the future ECEC policy measures and interventions.

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APPENDICES

Table 1. Participation Rates (%) 4 year olds in education (Preprimary and Primary) 1998-2008.

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
EU-27	79,7	80,6	82,7	84,5	86,3	84,6	84,5	85,6	86,8	88,6
Sweden	66,8	69,2	72,8	75,5	77,8	82,7	87,7	88,9	86,5	100,0
UK	95,3	96,8	100,0	99,0	100,0	95,3	92,9	91,8	90,9	90,7
Spain	99,8	99,0	99,0	100,0	100,0	99,5	100,0	99,3	97,1	98,4

Sources: EUROSTAT, Education Statistics, UOE data collection, 2009. (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=0&language=en&pcode=tps00053>)

Table 2. Enrolment Rates (%) in Pre-primary education in public (A) and private (B) institutions.

	1998		1999		2000		2001		2002		2003		2004		2005		2006	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B		
Sweden	89,78	10,22	90,07	9,93	88,26	11,74	87,91	12,09	86,60	13,40	86,06	13,94	85,89	14,11	85,83	14,17	88,0	12,0
UK	100	0	93,86	6,14	94,0	6,39	94,0	6,38	93,84	6,16	93,36	6,64	91,47	8,53	85,73	36,13	70,96	29,03
Spain	67,62	32,38	67,67	32,33	67,05	32,95	66,26	33,74	65,57	34,43	65,21	34,79	64,93	35,07	64,83	35,17	64,52	35,28

Source: made by the author from data base OECD.Stat, 2009.

PROFESIOGRAFÍA

Ana Ancheta Arrabal

Pedagoga Infantil vinculada desde 2005 al Departamento de Educación Comparada e Historia de la Educación de la Universidad de Valencia donde actualmente desarrolla las funciones propias con carácter docente e investigador como Profesora Ayudante Doctor. Maestra de Educación Infantil por la Universidad de Alicante en 2001, Licenciada en Pedagogía en 2004 por la Universidad de Valencia, logrando el primer premio de carrera universitaria en su promoción académica y el segundo premio nacional. Tras desarrollar una beca FPI en mencionado departamento se doctora con Mención Europea en “Estudios Políticos y Sociales de la Educación” por la Universidad de Valencia especializada en Educación y Atención de la Primera Infancia (EAPI) desde 2010, obteniendo el Premio Extraordinario de Doctorado de la Facultad de Filosofía y Ciencia de la Educación de la Universidad de Valencia en 2012 y el Premio Pedro Roselló a la mejor tesis doctoral de la Sociedad Española de Educación Comparada en su 5ª convocatoria en 2012. Actualmente colabora en diversas redes nacionales e internacionales centradas en el estudio e investigación de la primera infancia, especialmente en lo que respecta a sus derechos básicos, desarrollando diversas líneas como: las políticas de EAPI desde la perspectiva comparada e internacional; los indicadores para la evaluación educativa desde la perspectiva de la equidad; investigación y comparación de sistemas de EAPI; el diagnóstico e intervención educativa en la primera infancia y medidas para inclusión y la equidad, el derecho a la educación inclusiva; las expectativas para la Educación infantil, etc. **Datos de contacto:** Departamento de Educación Comparada e Historia de la Educación. Facultad de Filosofía y Ciencias de la Educación. Universidad de Valencia. Avenida Blasco Ibáñez, 30, 46010 Valencia (España). E-mail: Ana.Ancheta@uv.es.

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