

Mexico

Population: 101 m. **Fertility rate:** 2.27. **GDP per capita:** USD 9 370. **Children under 6 years:** 12.4 million, of whom about 1.5 million children come from indigenous language groups. The 3- to 6-year-olds number is 8.6 million.

Female labour force participation: 42.8% of women (15-64) participate, 27.6% of whom are in part-time employment (male part-time is 8.1%), but up to 50% of the eligible working population are reported to be engaged in the informal sector, often in conjunction with a formal job (Mexico Country Note, 2004).

Labour force participation rate of women with child(ren) under 6 years: The participation rate is calculated at about 50% in urban centres, but difficult to calculate because of the size of the informal sector.

Maternity and parental leave: Maternity leave only exists – fully paid 6 weeks leave before birth and 6 weeks after. Paid leave is available only to women working in the formal sector and enrolled in social security.

Average duration of parental leave: 12 weeks.

Compulsory school age: Compulsory primary schooling traditionally began at 6 years, but the Law of Obligatory Pre-schooling of November 2002 makes it obligatory for parents to send their children to a pre-school from the age of 3 years by 2009, and for each State to provide the necessary places.

Social expenditure: 11.8% of GDP. According to some estimates, 40%-60% of the population lives below the poverty line. 1 million families are reached by the *Oportunidades* anti-poverty programme. There are no educational subsidies for child care or pre-school programmes.

Child poverty rate: According to UNICEF figures, 27.7% after taxes and transfers (OECD average is 11.2%).

Funding of pre-primary educational services (ISCED Level 0): 0.61% of GDP (0.52% public and 0.08% private), that is, 9.7% of education budget but with 11.7% of education enrolments.

Unit cost per child (in USD converted using PPP): USD 1 643 (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005).

Funding of services for children under 3: Missing. **Average ECEC costs to parents:** Missing.

Legal entitlement to a free service: 3 years from 2009, when obligatory pre-school for 3-year olds is scheduled.

Major service types and daily duration: Initial education (*educación inicial* or child care with an educational purpose) for children 0-3 years is divided into two approaches: centre-based, direct attention focused on the children themselves; and indirect attention programmes focused on parents and families. Pre-school education for children 3-6 years (*educación preescolar*): now becoming obligatory from age 3, operates 3-4 hours daily during the

school year. Out-of-school provision (OSP) for children 6-12 years is rarely addressed as the emphasis is on expanding pre-school education.

Designation and professional qualifications of key staff: The multi-disciplinary nature and different auspices of initial education across Mexico, and its emphasis on protection, mean that workers come from diverse backgrounds in health, nutrition, psychology and other fields as well as from education. Centres frequently have certified doctors, nutritionists and psychologists. However, the great majority of people in charge of providing direct attention to children under 3 of age do not have professional training and their level of education varies from incomplete primary to university education and professional studies. Recently a specific course for training educators at this level has been set up in several States. This important initiative seems to have been welcomed as filling a gap but raises a question about the wisdom of separating training for educators in initial education and pre-school education.

In *educación preescolar*, the lead professionals are docents or teachers, who receive tertiary-level training in the 200 normal (teacher training) colleges across the country. This training delivers a university degree or *licenciatura* in child development and learning.

Rate of access to regulated services: Children 0-3 years: less than 3%; children 3-6 years: 69.3%.

Child-staff ratios: There is no official regulation governing child-staff ratios. For planning purposes, the Ministry of Education recommends a ratio of 25:1, and the overall ratio (dividing the number of children by the number of teachers) is 22:1. However, numbers well above 30 or even 40 children per educator can be observed in urban classrooms.

Auspices

For a country as large and diverse as Mexico, it is not possible to speak of one ECEC system. At present there are several sub-systems operating, with relatively loose coordination, under the auspices of different ministries, notably, Education (SEP) and Social Development (SEDESOL); under different social security institutes (IMSS and ISSSTE); and under other national auspices, e.g. the National System for Integral Family Development (DIF), the National Council for Educational Promotion (CONAFE), as well as private organisations. These sub-systems are distinguished by different historical origins and purposes, different target populations and age groups, as well as by their forms of organisation, norms and content. The situation is further diversified by the federal nature of the Mexican State with its 32 distinct administrative entities. A concentration of early childhood services is now being operated under the Law of Obligatory Pre-schooling (2002), which will make *educación preescolar* (pre-school education for 3- to 6-year-olds) obligatory by 2009, and place it under the auspices of the federal and state ministries of education.

Context

Governance: Mexico has a federal system of government. The country is divided into 32 “Federal Entities” or states, which in turn are divided into 2 443 municipalities incorporating a number of local governments (towns and agencies). The President of Mexico is elected every six years for one term only. The cabinet is made up of 20 heads of ministries (called Secretariats). Most Secretariats and programmes, including education and health, are decentralised. However, although administration is decentralised, power and policy is still

concentrated at the centre and relationships tend to be hierarchical. The legal capacity accorded to States to raise their own revenues is very weak, limiting their independence. Most revenues accrue to the national government, which then redistributes funds to the States and municipalities according to a complex set of rules and processes of negotiation.

Cultural diversity: According to estimates by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía y Informática* (INEGI), about 8% of the population (8 381 752 people) is classified as “indigenous” distributed among 64 ethnic groups. Of these, about 1.5 million are children under 6 years who live in families where an indigenous language is spoken. This extraordinarily rich cultural diversity sets a policy challenge for Mexico as the risks of dilution or even extinction of some indigenous cultures are real. The economic and educational circumstances in these families are very different from the national average, with literacy and income levels among indigenous groups much lower, while infant mortality rates are significantly higher.

Labour force rates: In 2004, the labour participation rate for women aged 15-64 was 42.8%, increasing from 35.7% in 1990. Of those, 27.6% work part-time, while 8.1% of men work part-time (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005). However, some estimates place 50% of the labour force in the informal sector. In particular, women have to take part time, low paying jobs in the informal sector in order to balance their work and parenting roles, given the widespread scarcity of child care options. This means that many women do not enjoy the right to social protection and the child care benefits that accrue to workers in the formal sector. In Mexico, distribution of wealth is extremely uneven, and current estimates by the government indicate that 40% of the population (over 40 million people) live below the poverty line. The high levels of poverty mean that many families cannot afford the expenses for clothing and materials, let alone the fees and materials that are usually associated with participation in a child care or an early education programme.

Parental leave: Only maternity leave exists, and this leave is available only to women working in formal employment and enrolled in social security. Leave is fully paid 6 weeks before birth and 6 weeks after. The average duration of parental leave is 12 weeks but most Mexican mothers do not have the possibility of accessing remunerated leave.

Educational context

Education in Mexico, according to the Constitution (Article 3), is free and secular. Today, full responsibility for the organisation of basic education, adult education, rural community education, technical education and some other programmes has been decentralised to the States. Despite this decentralisation of administrative responsibility, the central government maintains normative, planning, evaluative and programming functions. Accordingly, although the federal system produces variation, as States and municipalities experiment with their own organisational and supervisory and training models or make adjustments to national programmes, the federal government retains control. The general guidelines for the system continue to be set out from the centre in a national programme created by each new government as it enters office for its six-year period. The educational programme of the present administration has placed increasing emphasis on improving the quality of education and on moderating inequities in the system.

Obligatory “basic education” in Mexico includes pre-school, primary school and lower secondary school, covering the period from age 3 to age 15. The Law of Obligatory Pre-schooling, November, 2002, backed strongly by the National Teacher’s Union (SNTE), not

only makes it obligatory for the State to provide pre-school education services for children 3 to 6 years of age when that is demanded, but also makes it obligatory for parents to see that their children attend a public or private pre-school. At the moment, private schooling accounts for about 10% of the basic education enrolment. The law sets a schedule for attaining universal enrolment: for children age 5 that should occur at the beginning of the 2004-05 school year, for age 4, in 2005-06, and for age 3, in the 2008-09 school year. It also states that pre-school teachers should have a professional preparation. Services for 0- to 3-year-olds are considered to be education but are not part of the basic education cycle.

Access and provision

Children from 0-3 years

Educación inicial, or child care with an educational purpose, caters for about 3% of children 0-3 years, mostly in the Federal District and other large administrative centres. Programmes are generally divided into programmes of *direct* (centre-based services for young children) or *indirect* attention (targeted at parents and families). Programmes of direct attention reach the fewest children (about 30% of the total), and then, in majority, the children of women holding a recognised job, often within the state sector. Small programmes organised by DIF and SEDESOL attempt to address the needs of children of working women without social security.

Most direct attention programmes are delivered by formal government CENDIs (Centres of Integrated Development), attached to the Mexican Institute for Social Security (IMSS), the Institute for the Social Security and Services of State Workers (ISSSTE), the Ministry of Education (SEP), universities, unions and other bodies. In CENDIs, care is provided for children from 45 days up to 4 years of age. CENDIs are generally well-regulated, with good resources and favourable child-staff ratios. In general, they use a curriculum elaborated by SEP, but as they are located predominantly within and staffed from the health and social security sectors, they tend to pursue a health/protective approach, although today with a growing emphasis on child development.

To a lesser degree, some smaller, more community-based centres for initial education (CEIs) have emerged, generally as activities of community-based organisations seeking community development. Such initiatives are essentially non-governmental and non-profit in origin and operation. Some are linked to political interest groups and in recent years, some few have grown out of the women's movement. It is not known how many children attend these centres, but a survey of the Federal District (Mexico Country Note, 2004) suggests that as many as a third of all services for children from 0-4 years in the District may be provided by social, community and private arrangements, *e.g.* more than 2 000 children are enrolled in community centres affiliated with COPOME, a network of community-based centres operated by *madres educadoras*. In principle, these centres are supervised by the local SEP district authority and receive some materials, but are expected to fund and manage themselves.

70% of enrolments in *educación inicial* occur in programmes of indirect attention, that is, programmes addressed to parents and families. Again, the largest of these programmes are governmental, *e.g.* the CONAFE-PRODEI programme (CONAFE is the National Council for Educational Promotion and PRODEI is the Programme of Non-formal Initial Education); the programme run by the National Institute for Adult Education (INEA); programmes embedded in the formal, direct attention programmes mentioned above, generally under

the form of giving talks to parents; the publication of materials for parents by the Teachers' Union; and many others. There is little evidence of research on the impact of these different strategies.

Children 3-6 years

Educación preescolar or pre-school education for children 3-6 years is a governmental responsibility in Mexico. With the Law of Obligatory Pre-schooling of 2002, pre-school education is now part of obligatory basic education covering children from 3-15 years. Only about 10% of pre-schools are private. Responsibility for pre-schools resides in the Public Education Secretariat (SEP), and more particularly, between 1948 and 1992, was placed in the Office of Pre-school Education (*Dirección General de Educación Preescolar*). The sub-secretariat for basic education within SEP is responsible for pre-school education. It has charge of national currícula and programmes, as well as of the training and professional development of the teaching corps at all levels.

Three types of pre-school exist: general, indigenous and community pre-schools. Most children (88.1%) are enrolled in the general pre-school programme in both urban and rural areas. The indigenous pre-school programme, administered by a special division within the SEP, accounts for another 8.4% of children. Community pre-schools, offered by CONAFE to children in rural communities with less than 500 people, enrol the remaining 3.5%. As indicated in the previous section, children of pre-school age can also be found in initial education programmes administered by the National System for Integral Family Development (DIF), by the social security institutions (IMSS, ISSSTE), SEDESOL and others.

In general, pre-schools operate along age cohort lines, and open for 3 or 4 hours daily, five days a week. Some pre-schools offer a morning and an afternoon session. A special subset of pre-schools are labelled "mixed pre-schools" (*jardines mixtos*) because they combine a regular pre-school session with care during a day-long programme. This pre-school model is not very extensive, limited mostly to the Federal District, with a few centres in other large cities.

A spurt of enrolments in pre-school took place during the period from 1975 to 1985, and then slowed from 1988 to the present growth rate of about 2% per year. The official statistics indicate:

- Although over 81% of children are enrolled at 5 years, only slightly over half the children (55%) of the total 3- to 6-year-old population is currently enrolled. Enrolment ratios are essentially the same for girls and boys.
- There is a relatively wide disparity among States in their enrolment ratios (65% to 113% for age 5; 2% to 53% for age 3). There is a tendency for the poorest States to have the lowest ratios although there are exceptions to this.
- Participation by the private sector in providing services is relatively low (10.2%), and has grown only slowly in recent years. It varies by State, reaching 30.4% in the Federal District and 24.5% in Nuevo Leon as contrasted with 2% in Oaxaca and 2.2% in Chiapas.
- The main responsibility for administering (but not funding) government-run pre-school programmes is at the state level (about 80%).
- The gap between present coverage and universal coverage of 3- to 6-year-olds, as required by the mandatory pre-school education law, is considerable. At present, 2 884 000 children are not enrolled. To include them would require the creation of new places for over 450 000 children per year for the next six years.

Rates of provision

0-3 years: In 2002-03, according to official statistics, a total of 682 996 children under 4 years of age were enrolled in direct and indirect initial education programmes, representing about 8% of the total. Programmes of direct attention enrolled 195 931 children or less than 3% of the age group with the remainder indirectly attended through non-formal parental education programmes.

3-6 years: Over 55% of 6.5 million children are currently enrolled (that is, 3.6 million children), with over 81% of children in pre-schools or primary school by the age of 5 years, predominantly in the general pre-school programme.

Children with diverse learning needs and disabilities: The General Education Law mandates the inclusion of children with special needs into regular classrooms. Data about the actual inclusion of these children is scarce. In present circumstances, the appropriate inclusion of these children is extremely challenged, as group sizes and child-staff ratios are high. As in all countries, far greater numbers of children are found in the category of children with additional learning needs, namely, children from low-income families, ethnic and bilingual children.

Children from low-income families: The growth rates in pre-school education over the last decade are generally higher for children in rural areas than in urban areas and for indigenous than for non-indigenous children. Although it is not possible to show with hard data, it is probable that growth rates in recent years are also higher for low-income than higher income populations. However, enrolments in rural areas and for indigenous groups are still considerably lower than for urban middle class and non-indigenous populations. The migration of low-income parents to agro-industrial areas, mainly in Northern States, has led to prolonged parental (usually paternal) absences and/or to uprooting of children, with attendant discontinuities in their participation in ECEC programmes. Special programmes for children of migrant workers have been established at migration destination.

Ethnic and bilingual children: About 8% of the population (8 381 752 people) is classified as “indigenous”, distributed among 64 ethnic groups. Of these, 1 233 455 are children under 5 who live in families where an indigenous language is spoken. The economic and educational circumstances in these families are much poorer than the national average. The indigenous pre-school programme is administered by a special division within the SEP, and a new programme of inter-cultural education is also exploring ways to attend better to these groups. A variety of other programmes also exist for particular populations including indigenous children, those in small rural communities, children of migrant workers, children of women working in the informal sector, mothers in prisons, etc., but outreach is small compared to the number of children and families concerned. The National System for Integral Family Development (DIF), the social security institutions (IMSS, ISSSTE), SEDESOL and others administer these programmes.

Quality

Licensing and regulatory regimes: As noted above, diverse licensing and regulatory regimes exist in the different sub-systems of early childhood in Mexico, particularly in initial education (0-3 years). Under IMSS regulations, and given the multi-disciplinary nature of initial education, public formal centres employ staff from diverse backgrounds in health, nutrition, psychology and other fields as well as from education. These formal centres (generally catering

for public employees), frequently have certified doctors, nutritionists and psychologists, which is not the case in the community services. Overall, “the great majority of people in charge of providing direct attention to children under 3 of age do not have professional training and their level of education varies from incomplete primary to university education and professional studies” (ISSSTE comment on the country report, p. 8). Some have attended a school for child care assistants but in many cases they begin without any formal qualification.

In pre-school education, although differences in licensing and standards exist between sub-systems and States, the situation is more standardised, given the strong role of the federal State in the public education system.

Funding: The Mexican economy follows a neo-liberal model in which the State increasingly sets norms, provides incentives for investment and ensures a minimal safety-net for the most indigent groups. Governmental expenditure is relatively low and priority given to the reduction of a large internal public debt. Where education is concerned, Mexico spends almost double on education (pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education) than OECD countries relative to total public expenditure, but in percentage terms of GDP, educational expenditure is just over average. Expenditure on pre-primary educational institutions as a percentage of GDP is more than 0.5%. Over 80% of this expenditure comes from public sources and almost 19% from parental contributions. Of the total expenditure on education, almost 10% is allocated to pre-primary whereas 11.7% of the children/students are enrolled at this level of education (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005). With the Law of Obligatory Pre-schooling, enrolments in pre-primary are likely to grow exponentially, requiring much stronger investment from the State.

Training requirements: The 200 normal schools that provide training are evenly split between public and private institutions, and produce each year about 8 500 educators with a *licenciatura* in child development and learning. The new obligatory pre-school law calls for professional teachers in all pre-schools. This has reinforced a move to accredit teachers on the basis of experience as well as course work. A system of incorporation is being developed to certify teachers and caregivers on the basis of their experience (Agreement No. 286 of the SEP). Two proposals have been made, one emphasising examinations and one emphasising experience with observation of practice.

With regard to professional education, teachers who have been accepted into the *Carrera Magistral*, or teaching career, can take courses that are considered part of the career line and make them eligible for pay raises. Teachers also take courses that may or may not have a salary implication. In recent years, a general upgrading workshop (*Taller General de Actualización*) has been introduced in which all teachers are required to participate during three days prior to the beginning the school year.

Work conditions: Salaries for those involved in ECEC in Mexico are modest. In order to increase their earnings, some teachers work a double shift. Others take a second job outside education. Benefits are often limited unless staff are part of a union as is the case, for instance, with workers in the conventional centres of IMSS. Access to a professional career line is limited. It would appear that promotion in a teaching career line is not, at present, a competitive process related to merit. It is said that positions of director, supervisor or administrator in an educational authority are often influenced by political or union considerations.

Child-staff ratios: Ratios of 30 or more children per teacher are common, particularly in urban areas or in situations when a teacher is recognised as being effective. In some cases high ratios occur simply because there are too few teachers. The Teachers' Union does not accept child assistants in the classrooms.

Curriculum and pedagogy: The curriculum of reference for the last decade has been *Programa de Educación Preescolar (PEP92)*. In the opinion of teachers, this programme lacked clear orientations to allow the development of pedagogical work. In 2003, a new curriculum for pre-school was formulated – *Programa de Educación Preescolar 2004* – based on extensive consultation with teachers and directors of pre-schools. It was piloted during 2004-05 in a broad selection of pre-schools (general, indigenous and CONAFE). Six areas of development are chosen for pre-school children – Personal and social development; Language and communication; Mathematical thinking; Investigation and knowledge of the world; Artistic expression and appreciation; Health and physical development – with a series of competences to be achieved and their indicators defined in each area.

Monitoring, evaluation and research: The OECD PISA results show that learning achievement in the Mexican lower secondary education system is low. It may be inferred that this is also the case for pre-school education. Despite the significant investment in the field – which must be increased in coming years – outcomes for young children remain weak as numbers of children per trained teacher are high, and resources and materials seem scarce. Teacher education may also be in question as many teachers in pre-school classrooms still use an instructional approach. Greater attention to continuing teacher education, accompaniment and support may also be necessary. Until such issues are addressed, and full-day services become the norm, the system is unlikely to radically improve quality or meet the needs and aspirations of the upcoming generation of children.

Parent and community involvement: There are several governmental parental education programmes currently operating as well as some non-governmental initiatives. In general, however, parental involvement is restricted to helping with school maintenance, paying special assessments or providing information.

OECD policy issues

Among the issues for policy attention identified in 2003 by the OECD review team for Mexico were:

- *Purpose and concept of early childhood education and care:* The OECD review team recommended setting common goals for young children in both initial education and the pre-school, and defining clearly the basic competences thought to be necessary, for instance: to foster and maintain health; to relate well and empathetically to others; to learn how to learn; to participate socially in a democratic manner; to live in a plural society and celebrate differences; to understand and protect the environment; and to develop human potential through the mastery of diverse languages (linguistic, idiomatic, aesthetic, scientific, mathematic, physical, etc.). This work of definition should be based on broad consultation in which ministries, early childhood experts, teachers and parents are involved together.
- *Organisation and management:* Improve decentralisation processes while strengthening ECEC expertise both at central and state administrative levels. ECEC is a large and important sector in Mexican education, and pre-school administrative units, both at

central and state levels, need reinforcement and stability. The organisation of regular ECEC consultations between SEP and the States could help to build greater coordination across the sub-systems.

- *Access and enrolment*: A number of challenges exist: to provide improved access for children under 3 of age, especially children of women working in the informal sector. Another major challenge will be to maintain the schedule set by the Law of Obligatory Pre-schooling, while improving quality. And thirdly, to moderate inequities in access across different social groups, and between states and regions.
- *Financing and funding*: To increase the level of financing and to streamline different funding channels, with particular attention to assisting low-income families.
- *Educational process and curricular reform*: Reduce the number of service types and establish common norms; safeguard the specificity of ECEC pedagogy (at present, the child-staff ratios incite an instructional model unsuitable for young children); provide training and support to teachers to move curricular innovations into action in the classrooms.
- *Training and working conditions of staff*: Strengthen initial and in-service training; integrate educators without formal qualifications who are representative of their communities, while maintaining quality standards; rethink supervision and accompaniment; establish a professional career line; promote early childhood professional associations and broaden choices of labour union affiliation.
- *Information – monitoring, evaluation and research*: Strengthen information and monitoring systems; continue research initiatives linked to policy and programme priorities; support practitioner research; and increase the availability and use of information.