



OMEP-Policy Forum: Financing Early Childhood Care and Education—Justice for Early Childhood

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Introduction

In September 2015, 193 nation states made a commitment to eradicate poverty, address climate change and build peaceful and inclusive societies by 2030. Governments began to implement the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), integrated within *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations 2015). SDG 4 proposes: *Ensure an inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all* (p. 21). To make this commitment possible, specific targets have been identified. Target 4.2 states that by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. To this end, nation states must comply with *implementation strategies* that include, for example, the creation of learning environments, building and adapting facilities that respond to the needs of children which are safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective (Target 4.a); as well as ensuring an increase in the supply of qualified teachers, especially in developing countries (Target 4.c).

These goals impose the need to have funding to make them possible. The United Nations publicly affirms that there are more than enough savings in the world to finance the new agenda. To achieve the objectives, it is essential to guide the investments that support sustainable development and assist countries most in need. With these affirmations, the United Nations recognizes that there are great inequalities between countries and within countries.

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Funding Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

ECCE is not exempt from this funding problem, since it presents many inequities in access and in the quality of services and programs. According to data from UNESCO (2016), 67% of children between the ages of 5 and 6 are enrolled in pre-primary education, although there are appreciable differences in quality. Children from 3 to 4 years of age belonging to the richest families, in low- and middle-income countries, are almost six times more likely to receive education than the poorest children. Meanwhile, children under 3 years of age are invisible in studies and public policies of ECCE.

The *Global Education Monitoring Report 2016* (UNICEF 2016) raised the difficulty in comparing the rates of participation in pre-primary education across countries because the age groups and the initial starting ages are not homogeneous. This can lead to erroneous conclusions about access to ECCE. It also observes that relatively few countries offer compulsory and/or free pre-primary education. Of 207 countries and territories, preschool education was mandatory in only 50 countries and free only in 38 countries. Also, preschool education operates in diverse forms: non-government services are common; many are not registered; and not all programs are purely educational. Finally, it is remarkable that there is weak political will and a seeming lack of government capacity to expand the availability of pre-primary education that is currently offered.

In the report on the *State of the World's Children 2016*, UNICEF (2016) argues that:

Efforts to protect and expand the right to education – starting from early childhood have been under way for decades. In many cases, they have led to great success. But school enrolment figures indicate that the pace of progress is in jeopardy. Since 2011, the global number of children who do not attend school has increased. In most countries, less than half of children attend early childhood education programmes. (p. 43)

Education in Early Childhood as a Personal and Social Right

Education in early childhood is a personal and social right, whose realization is essential for the integral development of human beings, fulfillment of all other rights and the construction of full citizenship. Since the *Convention of the Rights of the Child* (1989) was ratified, states are legally required to protect, promote or restore these citizenship rights. Insufficient investment in many countries has led to social injustice, discrimination in access to education, poor educational quality on offer and poor policy sustainability. This has serious consequences for the present and future lives of children. Exclusion of access to education is ethically and legally unacceptable.

Therefore, states must address and analyze three key and interdependent components in the construction of public policies of ECCE: inclusion, quality and investment (Rozengardt 2017). Inclusion means guaranteeing and extending rights

to those who do not have them, and considering the participation of children as citizens, as well as their families. Quality refers to the guarantee of certain key conditions in programs and institutions related to: opportunities for interactions of children with each other and with adults; the quality of the learning/living environment—spaces, infrastructure, equipment and toys; the training and working conditions of the educators and caregivers; the quality of the relationships with families and communities; and intersectoral articulation of ECCE policies with other social policies. Investment implies the allocation of the necessary resources, knowing that without financial resources it is not possible to manage a sustainable public policy. These three components discussed by Rozengardt (2017) are strongly related, since there cannot be quality without sufficient investment, nor inclusion without quality for all, in the provisions of ECCE.

UNESCO (2017) stated that the lack of fair and sufficient financing has been the main reason why the *Education for All* (EFA) 2015 goals were not achieved worldwide. The same should not happen with SDG Goal 4 in the *2030 Framework for Action for Education* (UN 2015). We emphasize the importance of having adequate financing to achieve this goal and the responsibility of governments of all countries to meet this goal. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in General Comment No. 19 (UNCRC 2016) also claims that states must fulfill their obligations to realize the rights of the child, in accordance with “the budget principles of effectiveness, efficiency, equity, transparency, and sustainability,” in meeting the *principle of the best interests of the child* (pp. 13–14).

For this reason, OMEP (2017), in the Declaration of the 69th OMEP World Assembly and Conference, at Opatija in Croatia, called for greater investment in ECCE and requested that governments comply with the financial commitments related to the development and sustainability of ECCE.

ECCE as a Basic Pillar for Sustainable Development, Peace, Equity and Democracy

ECCE is one basic pillar for sustainable development, peace, equity and democracy. This is why public investment in ECCE is considered to be one of the most important indicators of every government’s care for future generations, as well as for social cohesion, justice and equity in contemporary society. Based on these widely accepted arguments, we strongly recommend that every government should:

- State explicitly not only its vision for improving ECCE but also how it will provide funding to realize this policy vision; and
- Provide detailed references to public funding on ECCE that should be stated clearly in national or regional budgets.

Finally, it should be noted that the debate over the financing of ECCE is not limited to technical or sectorial issues in the educational arena. It is a political debate that poses questions regarding the sustainability of our democracies, our states and the future of humanity. There is no doubt that, to ensure the necessary financial resources for all children in their early childhood, we must work for justice in all

fields. This is how, Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), affirms this commitment: “... broadening the tax base and improving the design of the tax system, strengthening tax administration and eliminating channels of tax avoidance and evasion are key tasks for improving the financing of sustainable development and inclusive growth in the countries.” (p. 2)

Once the resources have been obtained and secured, it will be the responsibility of all societies to enforce the promises and commitments assumed in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations 2015).

Hannah Arendt (1958/1998) reminds us in *The Human Condition* that the Greeks referred to children as the new ones, those who need to be cared for and educated. It is the responsibility of the adults who have brought them into the world, to be in charge of early childhood and ensure a fair and equitable world to receive them.

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