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Country profile prepared for the
Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007
Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education

Panama

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes

Compiled by:
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PANAMA

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes

A. GENERAL INFORMATION, STATISTICS AND INDICATORS

Starting age of compulsory education (if applicable):

According to information provided by the Ministry of Education, education is compulsory for children aged four to 14.

1. ISCED 0 PROGRAMMES (USUALLY, PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION)

(ISCED = International Standard Classification of Education)

1.1. National definition of ISCED 0 programmes:

Early education.

1.2. Normative age group(s) covered by ISCED 0 programmes:

Children aged four to five.

1.3. ISCED 0 programmes: statistics and indicators (source: UIS. In general, the data refer to 2002-03. Please include the most recent data if available)

1.3.1. Enrolment:

	Percentage	Year
Gross enrolment ratio	62	2004-05
Net enrolment ratio	55.3	2004-05
Percentage of children entering primary education with previous preschool experience	84	2004-05

Source: Ministry of Education, December 2005.

1.3.2. Enrolment ratio by age group, 2002/03 (percentage, also including the first years of primary education when applicable):

Less than 3 years of age	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5	Age 6	Age 7
0.0	3.8	26.2	78.1	3.6	0.1
			2.0(*)	100(**)	100(**)

UIS estimate. (*) Enrolled in primary education. (**) Primary education enrolment ratio.

1.3.3. Teachers:

Total number of teachers	Of whom female (%)	Percentage of trained teachers (all)	Percentage of trained teachers (males)	Percentage of trained teachers (females)
4,227	95.5	57	1	56

Source: Ministry of Education, December 2005.

1.3.4. Funding:

	Percentage
Public current expenditure per pupil as percentage of the Gross National Product per capita	8.06 (1999)

Source: UIS.

1.3.5. Main source(s) of financing: *Data not available*

2. OTHER ECCE PROGRAMMES (Generally preceding ISCED 0 programmes)

2.1. National definition of other ECCE programmes:

Data not available

2.2. Normative age group(s) covered by other ECCE programmes:

Data not available

2.3. Estimated number of children covered by other ECCE programmes:

Data not available

B. BACKGROUND INFORMATION CONCERNING ECCE PROGRAMMES (INCLUDING ISCED 0)

3.1. Legislation concerning ECCE:

The legislative framework governing preschool education is set out in Chapter V of the National Constitution and in the Education Act, No. 47 of 1946, together with the additions and amendments contained in Law 34 of 6 July 1995.

This last piece of legislation provides that education shall be free and compulsory for children aged from four to five. It also specifies that early education shall be provided in specialized public or private establishments or in the framework of non-formal education projects that contribute to improvement and achievement of the social and personal aspects of children's lives, through specific measures designed for pupils not enrolled in formal education. The State shall also promote and provide guidelines for the expansion and development of early education, improve children's health and nutrition and promote the active involvement of parents in education.

3.2. Official body/bodies in charge of supervision or coordination:

Ministry of Education, through the National Early Education Department.

3.3. Other entities involved in the provision (e.g. municipalities, local governments) and main types of providers (e.g. public, private, mixed, community-based, etc.):

Ministry of Social Development, municipalities, Children's Orientation Centre, and the Church. Other sources of provision: community and private.

3.4. Type of personnel involved (teachers, assistants, other staff):

Teachers and teaching assistants.

3.5. Type of staff training (requirements):

Prospective preschool teachers must meet at least one of the following conditions, in order of preference:

- degree in education with a major in preschool education;
- preschool teaching diploma;
- primary teaching diploma with a preschool qualification.

Training is provided in universities and teacher training colleges. The latter have been categorized as non-university tertiary training institutes since 1999; previously, they belonged to the upper secondary level. In either institution, training lasts for three to four years.

3.6. Recent national policies and reforms:

Data not available

3.7. Efforts targeted at vulnerable or disadvantaged children:

- Early education family and community centres (CEFACEI) cater to children aged four to five in extremely poor isolated areas, including indigenous areas (non-formal).
- Early education at home, a parenting programme covering care and early stimulation of children under the age of six. This programme is conducted in vulnerable communities.

3.8. Special projects/programmes aiming at expanding or improving ECCE:

“The Amaya family and their knowing parrot” radio programme, which serves as support for CEFACEI centres and the early education programme at home.

The Teacher-Mother Programme (run by the Catholic Church) is for children aged four and five.

3.9. Information concerning the curriculum (if applicable) or the contents of ECCE programmes

3.9.1. Objectives and aims:

The macro-purpose of preschool education is to stimulate optimal growth and the development of physical, emotional and mental capacities and to provide educational and psychological experiences within an age-appropriate physical and social school environment, in which pupils can practise good habits and acquire basic skills and abilities for subsequent learning.

The general objectives of this education are:

- to promote equality of opportunities in formal and non-formal education, with an emphasis on the child population from birth to five years in the country's least advantaged areas;
- to develop self-management capacity within the local community, with a view to the organization and running of non-formal educational establishments;
- to provide all children under six with the benefits of learning and contribute to their integrated development from the time of pregnancy, with a particular emphasis on rural, marginal urban and indigenous populations, through formal and non-formal arrangements;
- to expand gradually the national coverage of early education for the population from birth through to the age of five;
- to ensure that educational establishments provide for children with special educational needs, in early education centres.

3.9.2. Learning areas and teaching-learning methods:

The early education syllabus is divided into three areas which revolve around a central focus formed, in turn, of criteria that are indispensable for human development.

- *Socio-emotional area:* this dimension develops according to each child's particular nature, since it encourages a process of socialization that starts with the perception of self and extends to self-assessment as a person and to the development of personal, social and national identity, while respecting the values of diversity inherent in the sociocultural and historic context.
- *Cognitive and linguistic area:* in this area children are viewed as having multiple capacities to rebuild and assimilate knowledge, though constant communication with their cultural environment, which is the product of all the material and spiritual goods produced by humanity.
- *Psychomotor area:* this dimension plays an important role at this stage of development, since it stimulates the basic motor and creative skills for the acquisition of knowledge and allows children to discover the properties of objects and their own capacities and to identify relationships between the two.

The early education curriculum is relevant, integrated and flexible and takes a constructivist approach (“creating meaningful learning”), using teaching styles appropriate to preschool psycho-evolutionary development and based on children’s natural stage of language acquisition, psychomotor and skills development, basic reading and writing skills, free expression, personal socialization and development of reasoning and mathematics.

The curriculum will be updated regularly to take account of changes in knowledge and in the social reality in Panama. The curriculum will be implemented on the basis of criteria designed to permit adaptation and adjustment according to the sociocultural and natural characteristics, needs and requirements of the community, region and country.

The methodologies focus on allowing pupils to develop their own learning abilities based on the principle of “learning to be, learning to understand, learning to do, learning to live together”. Programmes must be contextualized as appropriate for the particular environment, emphasizing active, individual and group strategies and procedures centred on resolving intellectual challenges and on situations in which children can build on previous learning to solve problems and practise what they have learned.

Content is construed as the cultural knowledge students must assimilate and internalize in order to build competences. In addition to knowledge, school teaches values, skills, habits, attitudes and procedures that help children to develop cognitive procedures and knowledge and, as well as how to know, to learn how to be and how to do, so that they can function in the real world.

3.9.3. Average number of hours per week and average amount of weeks per year:

Five days per week, 20 hours per week.

3.10. Any other relevant and pertinent information

The cycles or stages of early education are:

Infants 1: babies from birth up to two years of age.

Infants 2: children from two to four years of age.

Infants 3: preschoolers from four to five years of age, who are included as part of the first level of schooling but are under the technical and administrative responsibility of the National Early Education Department, which coordinates with the National First Level Department.

Children who have been unable to attend pre-primary or have attended only one year of preschool undergo intensive preparation when they enter the first grade of primary school. This circumstance, however, is an exception and does not release the State from its obligation to provide preschool education.

[*Main source:* Website of the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI), August 2005 <http://www.oei.es/>.]

C. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION REGARDING ECCE (TO BE COMPILED IN COLLABORATION WITH UNICEF OFFICES WHERE POSSIBLE)

4.1. Parenting programmes are usually addressed to parents and families of children less than six years of age. Please provide information about any parenting programmes in your country according to the table below:

Type of programme	Yes or No (note for each programme)	Please estimate the number of beneficiaries (if possible)
Parenting education through early learning centres and child care centres	Yes	7,000 parents
As component of health and nutrition programmes, such as information about child development included in health and nutrition visits	No	
Parent groups that meet to discuss issues of their young children, including health, nutritional status, and development	No	
As component of adolescent, livelihood or literacy programmes	No	
Media broadcast, such as <i>Sesame Street</i> , with media for and with children	Yes	10,000 radio listeners
Other (please specify)		

Are any of these programmes targeted specifically toward the vulnerable, poor, disadvantaged or excluded? If so, which ones? (Please provide/attach any additional and relevant information if available)

Yes, these programmes are conducted in the 222 parishes that are classified as extremely poor.

4.2. Is there a national-level system for monitoring children's development or school readiness prior to entering primary school?

Data not available

4.3. Is there a policy on early childhood (ECCE, ECD, etc.) that has been accepted? If not, is there one under development?

Yes, there are policies on childhood and on expanding the coverage of early education (Strategic Plan 2005-2009).

[Information revised by the Ministry of Education, December 2005.]