



INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) COUNTRY QUESTIONNAIRE – ITALY

1. ACCESS, PROCEDURES AND PARTICIPATION

Key principles

1.1 Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children.

1.2 Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity.

The early childhood school is a fundamental inclusive setting for children of different ages with different needs. It therefore welcomes children with special educational needs, through the implementation of specific activities and educational interventions. Various individuals are involved, including the head teacher, special project teacher, curricular teachers, support teachers, the entire school staff and educators or assistants provided by local authorities or other entities, if needed.

Guiding questions	Country response
<p><i>Legislation and policy at national level</i></p> <p>1. Is there a national policy and legislation that gives the right to all children, without exception, from at least 3 years onwards, to attend mainstream Early Childhood Education (ECE)?</p> <p>2. Is there support available to enable every child to attend ECE?</p> <p>3. Is there a period of compulsory ECE before school starts?</p> <p>4. Are arrangements in place for transition</p>	<p>1. Yes, in Italy there is excellent legislation for entitlement, which has been in place since 1971.</p> <p>The Italian system covers nurseries (children aged 0–3), early childhood education (children aged 3–6) and so-called ‘spring sections’ (children aged 2–3). There are national standards set by law for the early childhood education curriculum, which must be taken into account by schools when planning their activities, depending on their autonomy. By law, early childhood education does not cover special or separate classes for children with disabilities.</p> <p>2. There is economic support for low-income families in public school programmes (free lunch, materials, etc.).</p> <p>3. No, it is not, however, the state encourages families to send their children to pre-school from 3 to 5 years of age.</p> <p>4. The law requires a process starting with a diagnostic approach. Family physicians observe the child at a local ‘Tsmree’ centre (centre for Mental Health Protection in developmental ages). Early diagnosis is crucial because schools can ‘translate’ the medical approach into an</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
<p>from home to ECE and from ECE to primary education for all children?</p> <p>5. Is inclusion stated as a goal of ECE provision? Is there a policy making ECE accessible to all children?</p> <p>6. Is there a policy that obliges mainstream publicly funded ECE to make adaptations so that all children can attend and participate? Please describe</p>	<p>educational approach, shaping an educational path that will turn into a vertical curriculum from ECE to primary school and later to lower and upper-secondary school.</p> <p>Transition from home to ECE and from ECE to primary education is well planned by the schools involved. When 3-year-olds enter school for the first time they attend gradually (e.g. one hour a day, two hours a day) until they are ready to attend regularly.</p> <p>Different initiatives to facilitate the transition from ECE to primary school are planned by different schools (for example, older learners guiding younger ones to become familiar with the new setting; teachers from both schools exchanging information about the learners and planning activities together, etc.) with the aim of making the transition as smooth as possible and to allow for educational continuity between the schools.</p> <p>Inclusion is stated as a goal in several different regulations (L.170/2010; <i>Direttiva ministeriale</i> 27/12/2012; <i>circolare ministeriale</i> n.8 del 6/3/2013; <i>nota</i> 27/6/2013 for children with special needs).</p> <p>There is a policy to make ECE accessible to all children. The Ministry of Education regulates the state schools for children from 3 to 5. In the larger cities, the school districts organise pre-compulsory schools for this age group, as well as for ages 0 to 3. There are also private schools for both age groups. Some of these schools are accredited by the Ministry (<i>scuole parificate</i>). In state schools and local schools, families pay only for lunch. In private or accredited schools families pay fees.</p>
<p><i>Practice at national level</i></p> <p>1. What percentage of children attend mainstream ECE provision at ages</p>	<p>1. 620,927 learners attend pre-primary education in the public system, of which 22,319 have a disability.</p> <p>2. The main factor preventing access is the limited number of public schools in relation to the demand. While it is true that low-income families are put at the top of the list, spaces are often still not available and these families cannot afford a private or accredited programme.</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3 years• 4 years• 5 years (if not primary)• 6 years (if not primary)? <p>2. What are the main factors preventing some children from accessing mainstream ECE?</p> <p>3. Are there children who attend special ECE settings? Please provide data if available.</p> <p>4. Describe arrangements for inter-service collaboration to enable children's attendance and participation?</p> <p>5. What proportion of children is formally identified as having additional needs at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3 years• 4 years• 5 years• 6 years	<p>3. SEN children generally attend mainstream classes. There are also children who attend Montessori schools or typical schools in Reggio Emilia (the 'Reggio children') that follow a creative curriculum.</p> <p>4. Schools play a crucial role in early SEN detection; systematic observations allow suspect cases to be detected. The link to the family and the collaboration between school and parents are very important.</p> <p>In the largest cities (Rome, Milan, Florence, etc.). the Local School District collaborates with institutions and runs nursery and pre-primary schools. It recruits its own educators and teachers and provides for their professional development.</p> <p>5. 1.4%.</p>



2. WORKFORCE

Key principles

2.1. Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role.

2.2. Supportive working conditions including professional leadership that creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

The highest qualified figure in inclusive education is the support teacher who has specific professional expertise regarding the childhood sector. The support teacher collaborates with the curricular teacher and other staff. The support teacher is appointed by MIUR (Ministry of Education, University and Research).

There is also the so-called AEC, the educational and cultural assistant, who has a specific role facilitating autonomy and communication in the educational programme. AECs are appointed by the Local Authority (in pre-primary schools, by the Municipality). Assistants for sensory impairments are appointed by the former Provinces.

All staff co-operate actively with the curricular and support teachers.

The head teacher co-ordinates teamwork through staff meetings with the special project teachers, the support teachers and the curricular teachers, thus promoting the inclusive process.

Guiding questions	Country response
<p>Legislation and policy</p> <p>1. What level of qualification is required to work in ECE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for teachers? • for other staff? <p>2. What regulation is there for staff-child ratios in ECE?</p> <p>3. What provision is there for additional staffing to support children with diverse</p>	<p>Teachers should be graduates in the Science of Primary Education, although there are some teachers without a degree. These teachers have a diploma for teaching in nursery schools and pre-primary schools earned prior to 1998 when the regulations requiring specific degrees changed.</p> <p>Support teachers are graduates in the Science of Primary Education, with a specialisation or master's degree in special education, developmental psychopathology, neuropsychiatry, psychology for disability and rehabilitation or special learning methods and teaching.</p> <p>Other staff do not need a degree except for the head teacher and the financial director.</p> <p>Autonomy and communication assistants are a significant</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
<p>and additional needs?</p> <p>4. Does the initial training of staff include understanding and supporting children with diverse and additional needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• for teachers?• for other staff? <p>5. Does initial training include preparation for working in partnership with families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• for teachers?• for other staff? <p>6. Is there a policy for in-service training? Does it cover inclusive education skills?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• for teachers?• for other staff?	<p>aspect of inclusive education. The assistants are operators – educators, mediators, etc. – who facilitate the communication of disabled children with those who interact with them. Assistants stimulate skills development (in the different dimensions of autonomy and basic social communication between the child with disabilities and the class group) to strengthen peer relationships, support participation in school activities and participate in the teaching/educational planning.</p> <p>Usually assistants have a master’s degree, but there are differences throughout Italy (local authorities have their own competences in the field) and as such, a national framework is needed.</p> <p>In pre-primary schools, there is a child-teacher ratio of 25:1. If children remain in the school for eight hours per day, the ratio is 25:2. The ratio is different for classes with children with disabilities, where there is an extra specialist teacher for a certain number of hours per day.</p> <p>In nursery schools, the child-educator ratio is 6–8:1.</p> <p>The university curriculum includes disciplines and training to deal with children with diverse and additional needs. In addition, teachers may attend a certification course after graduation to become a specialist teacher. Some other staff members may be trained specifically to deal with children with diverse and additional needs.</p> <p>Training does not include preparation for working with families.</p> <p>Other additional staff (AEC, school staff, assistants) collaborate actively with the school staff and are widely involved in the Workgroups for Inclusion in elaborating IEPs (Individual Education Plans).</p> <p>Collaboration with the families on educational choices and the inclusive path is most important. This is accomplished through specific meetings with the head teacher and the staff, teachers, caregivers and other school staff.</p> <p>Law 107/2015 delegates the reform on initial teacher</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
	<p>training to the government by introducing a unitary and co-ordinated system that includes both teachers' initial training and the procedures for access to the profession, entrusted to universities and to educational state institutions.</p> <p>There is a policy for teachers to participate in in-service training which covers inclusive education skills.</p>
<p><i>Practice at national level</i></p> <p>1. What proportion of staff has the required qualification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for teachers? • for other staff? <p>2. Please describe any proposed changes to the required qualifications.</p> <p>3. Describe the role of leaders of ECE settings in ensuring inclusive practice?</p> <p>4. Provide any data on staff–child ratio.</p> <p>5. Please describe the range of specialist support that is available and how it is organised?</p> <p>6. How do regular and support staff collaborate in IECE settings?</p> <p>7. Describe the role of</p>	<p>There are 95,050 teachers in pre-primary education, of which 10,985 are support teachers.</p> <p>The head teacher co-ordinates teamwork through staff meetings with the special project teachers, support teachers and curricular teachers, thus promoting the inclusive process. The head teacher is responsible for the relationship between school and external entities and chairs the operational working group meetings aimed at setting up, developing and testing educational interventions for inclusive practice.</p> <p>The role of head teachers or local co-ordinators involves encouraging teachers and educators to do training courses and higher degrees (master's degrees) on inclusive practice.</p> <p>Specialist teacher-child ratio is 1:2, plus any curricular teachers and special assistants which are provided by local authorities according to each learner's particular need.</p> <p>Specialist support is organised on the basis of the number of specialist teachers present in each school and according to the needs of each child. A GLHI (Disability Work Group) or GLI (Inclusion Work Group) committee in the school makes decisions regarding support.</p> <p>Teaching and support staff meet regularly to decide on content and practice in inclusive education.</p> <p>Support assistants are present in the ECE setting only if the children are not autonomous.</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
support assistants in the ECE setting?	



3. CURRICULUM

Key principles

3.1. A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches that enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way.

3.2. A curriculum that requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice.

Each school prepares the curriculum within the POF (academic plan), taking into account the learner’s expected profile at the end of the first cycle of education, skills development targets and specific learning objectives for each discipline. Each SEN learner has an IEP (Individual Education Plan) drafted by curricular and support teachers, which describes educational and developmental goals suitable for the transition to primary school and the development of the full potential of each child in an holistic way.

3.2 The curriculum and POF are drafted in a shared process involving the intersection council, the GLHO (Operational Working Group), the child’s family, local authorities and specialists.

Guiding questions	Country response
<p><i>Legislation and policy</i></p> <p>1. Is there a national ECE curriculum for <i>all</i> children?</p> <p>2. Does it include skills and competences to be achieved by children?</p> <p>3. Describe how the curriculum facilitates inclusion?</p> <p>4. Is the use of new technologies included in the curriculum?</p> <p>5. Is the curriculum adaptable to meet the needs of all children?</p> <p>6. How are parents</p>	<p>The ECE curriculum is derived from various school reforms. Law 30/2000 brought pre-primary education within the national education system.</p> <p>The curriculum is based on the interaction between the child and a plurality of symbolic-cultural systems, promoting education as multi-dimensional.</p> <p>The National Curriculum Guidelines inform the curriculum in all schools. It includes the skills and competences to be achieved by all children. The curriculum suggests how to develop educational activities in order to facilitate the development of each child and their inclusion in the ECE setting.</p> <p>Through experience the child develops skills in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Themselves and the other; – The body and movement; – Image, colour and sound;



Guiding questions	Country response
<p>involved in the adaptation of the curriculum to individual children?</p> <p>7. Is there awareness of the impact of labelling on children's participation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Discourse and words;– Knowledge of the world. <p>Inclusion is facilitated in the curriculum through game and activities centre around Puer Ludens. Through play, children acquire specific knowledge aimed at their development. Pre-primary school is a suitable environment for children with special educational needs, where everything is tailored to their abilities and potential.</p> <p>New technologies are available for teachers to use according to the curriculum. ICT is viewed by the curriculum as a facilitator for communication.</p> <p>The curriculum is flexible and therefore adaptable to the children's needs, according to their individual education plan.</p> <p>Parents are involved in school activities through the GLHO (Operational Working Group), intersection councils and GLI (Inclusion Work Group).</p> <p>Teachers meet parents periodically to listen to their ideas regarding possible enrichment of the curriculum. Both teachers and parents are aware of the impact of labelling on learning and participation.</p> <p>In ECE, children with special needs are less identifiable, so teachers provide adaptations to allow them to participate according to their abilities.</p>
<p><i>Practice at national level</i></p> <p>1. Is there assessment of the learning and development of children from age 3 years?</p> <p>2. What arrangements are there for the</p>	<p>1. There is no official assessment, but teachers use a grid to observe how the process of learning is progressing.</p> <p>Assessment precedes, accompanies and follows curricular paths. It has a main formative value, accompanying learning processes and stimulating continuous improvement.</p> <p>2. Teachers can use certain screening tools to measure a child's functioning. These are not psychological tests requiring the presence of a certified professional.</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
<p>screening of children's functioning?</p> <p>3. Is children's engagement and participation in ECE activities monitored?</p> <p>4. How do ECE settings reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of all children?</p> <p>5. How do staff adapt (prepare and present) the curriculum and the learning activities to make them accessible to all children?</p> <p>6. How are parents involved in this process?</p> <p>7. How are children themselves involved in this process?</p> <p>8. How is ICT used to overcome barriers to participation and learning?</p> <p>9. What provisions are there for meeting children's additional needs?</p> <p>10. How is the environment adapted to the needs of all children?</p>	<p>Educational assessment is based on the evaluation of skills and competences acquired by the learner which are set in their IEP according to their abilities and potential.</p> <p>3. Teachers monitor children's participation in all ECE activities. The IEP is a tool for monitoring participation.</p> <p>4. The Ministerial Directive on children with SEN and subsequent circulars affirm the importance of school inclusiveness. According to these regulations, disabilities, learning disorders or difficulties and socio-economic and linguistic disadvantages are all classed as SEN.</p> <p>Teachers encourage all children to express and talk about their diverse backgrounds and cultures through storytelling, games and other activities.</p> <p>5. In pre-primary school, teachers teaching the same age group can meet periodically to discuss the best methodologies to present the curriculum contents and didactic activities. These activities can be personalised according to different learning styles and/or individualised for children with disabilities and special educational needs.</p> <p>6. Parents are kept informed as to how teachers are achieving the goals set out in the curriculum. Sometimes parents are encouraged to take part in certain activities (e.g. performing for children, talking about their jobs, arranging school parties).</p> <p>7. It is necessary to ensure that children and families receive prompt and transparent information about the criteria and the results of the assessments carried out at different stages of their school career, in order to promote the participation and the educational co-responsibility in the different roles and functions.</p> <p>8. ICT is used according to the child's needs (e.g. software for communication, for specific visual or hearing impairment, or for speech and language disorders).</p> <p>9. Basically, there is an amount of flexibility in adapting the setting, timetable, materials and activities to meet</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
	<p>additional needs. There is also the opportunity to use technological means for children with serious disabilities.</p> <p>The school can be supported by the CTS (territorial support centres) and the CTI (local centres for inclusion) which provide assistance and advice, upon request.</p> <p>10. The ECE atmosphere is cosy and structured to be suitable for children. Classrooms are planned for support activities and computer activities, as well as gyms for psychomotor activities.</p> <p>Pre-primary schools are required by law to have their classrooms and facilities on the ground floor. Furniture inside the classrooms can be easily moved according to the needs of the children.</p>



4. EVALUATION AND MONITORING

Key principles

4.1. Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice.

4.2. Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child.

Over several years, the inclusive activities of Italian schools were monitored and evaluated by special committees of the Ministry of Education. This monitoring process, together with dialogue between local, regional and national authorities and the Ministry of Education, enabled schools to develop an inclusion model which is in constant evolution. The collection of data and information allows interventions to be adjusted through flexibility in the provision, according to each child's needs. The responsibility of self-assessment lies with the institutions. It has the aim of introducing a critical approach towards the educational provision and organisation of the school.

Guiding questions	Country response
<p><i>Legislation and policy</i></p> <p>1. What standards are in place for ensuring the quality of ECE at national level?</p> <p>2. Describe the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of ECE provision?</p> <p>3. How is the participation of all children reflected in the national quality standards for ECE?</p> <p>4. How does national policy identify and address inequalities in participation in ECE?</p>	<p>In the <i>Indicazioni nazionali per il curriculum</i> guidelines, standards are set in developmental stages and pre-primary teachers must use those standards as a point of reference.</p> <p>Teachers prepare grids for the different experience domains. The results they achieve with their didactical commitment form the basis for self-evaluation within each school. Parents can be given a feedback questionnaire to fill out.</p> <p>Schools monitor their activities through the RAV (Self-Assessment Report).</p> <p>The participation of all children, including children with SEN, is ensured by law, particularly by L.104/92, the Ministerial Directive 2012 and subsequent circulars, which reiterate full inclusion in schools.</p> <p>The Ministry provides data about attendance and participation of children in state schools and in schools belonging to the public ECE system.</p> <p>The Ministry and local authorities receive requests for</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
5. How does research inform policy and practice in ECE?	<p>enrolment in pre-primary school every year, and as such they can identify areas where there are inequalities in participation in ECE and plan how to increase the numbers of classrooms or of specialist teachers.</p> <p>Results of research into ECE are published by universities and/or the Ministry.</p>
<p><i>Practice at national level</i></p> <p>1. How do staff monitor and evaluate the participation and learning of all children?</p> <p>2. How are parents involved in this process?</p> <p>3. How are children themselves involved in this process?</p>	<p>1. Staff register daily participation and teachers prepare grids on different learning areas.</p> <p>Staff monitor the children’s achievements in the medium and long term through regular structured tests.</p> <p>2. Schools independently choose how to inform parents of the results of teachers’ observations. There are periodical parent-teacher meetings.</p> <p>Parents are also involved through regular meetings and systematic interviews with teachers in intersections and class councils.</p> <p>3. Children actively participate in their learning activities, which are carried out mainly through play, tutored learning, co-operative learning and work in open classes and parallel classes. This varies from school to school. Most schools encourage children to choose what they consider their best work and prepare a portfolio.</p>



5. GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING

Key principles

5.1. Stakeholders in the ECE system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.

5.2. Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECE, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders.

The majority of stakeholders in the ECE system have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities and want to collaborate with partner organisations.

Law 107/2015 (School Reform Act) requires the enhancement of the school community and its professional development through interactive collaboration and planning with families and the local community as a whole (local entities, authorities, associations, NGOs, etc.).

Legislation, regulation and funding support progress towards legal entitlement and stakeholders know the level and quality of this progress.

Guiding questions	Country response
<p><i>Legislation and policy</i></p> <p>1. Under which ministry(ies) / department(s) are ECE provisions regulated and funded?</p> <p>2. How is intersectorial (health, social and education) collaboration promoted among all stakeholders in ECE?</p> <p>3. How is free or affordable provision guaranteed to all children age 3 years and over?</p> <p>4. What additional</p>	<p>1. ECE provisions are regulated and funded by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of the Economy for financial provisions.</p> <p>2. Collaboration between sectors is promoted through specific programme agreements. This collaboration is reflected in the children’s curriculum and, in the case of a child with SEN, in the IEP.</p> <p>State pre-primary schools and kindergartens are present all over the country and children attend without paying fees. The only fee requested is for the school lunch programme, which is low. Families with financial difficulties or with children with disabilities do not pay lunch fees.</p> <p>There is also a system of private schools which, by respecting certain conditions, receive financial support from the state to enable parents to afford to let their children attend these schools.</p> <p>In state schools, children with additional needs can find</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
<p>economic measures are available for children with additional needs and their families to access mainstream ECE?</p> <p>5. How is additional funding allocated?</p>	<p>specialist teachers for special needs.</p> <p>Additional funding is allocated to schools in poor socio-economic areas.</p> <p>A grant is provided to families of learners with a certificate of severe disability, according to L.104 / 92 art. 3, for rehabilitation programmes or speech or psychomotor therapy.</p>
<p><i>Practice at national level</i></p> <p>1. How far does the standard of ECE provision vary across regions and localities?</p> <p>2. How effective is collaboration between the ECE and health, social and other relevant agencies for children and families?</p> <p>3. What proportion of children (3 years to primary education) make use of additional funding?</p> <p>4. How well does additional funding support inclusive education?</p>	<p>Differences across regions and localities can exist, as local authorities are responsible for economic support for ECE services according to their budget. This is because there is still no common ECE throughout the country.</p> <p>2. Collaboration between the various bodies is effective when the individual child's path is successfully implemented through a shared curriculum and the PDV (Life Project) throughout the various educational segments: from ECE to primary school, lower-secondary, upper-secondary and, in some cases, up to university and job placement.</p> <p>Collaboration between the ECE and health, social and other relevant agencies is increasing. In certain regions, collaboration has already achieved a high level of implementation.</p> <p>Inclusive education can be extended and empowered thanks to additional funding.</p> <p>MIUR, through its regional offices (USR), identifies the support needed by each learner (and, therefore, by each school) and appoints support teachers accordingly.</p>



FURTHER COMMENTS

Law 107/2015 delegates the reform on inclusive education to the government through:

- the redefinition of support teachers' initial training;
- the identification of ESL in education, health and social provision, taking into account different institutional competences;
- the provision of indicators for self-evaluation and evaluation of school inclusion;
- the revision of criteria and procedures relating to certification, which should be aimed at identifying requests for competences;
- the reorganisation of regional workgroups for inclusion;
- the provision of compulsory initial and in-service training and for school leaders and teachers on pedagogics, didactics and organisation for inclusive education;
- the identification of the in-service training requirements regarding school inclusiveness for the administrative, technical and auxiliary staff, according to their specific expertise.

Moreover, Law 107/2015 delegates the establishment of the integrated education system from birth to six years to the government, composed of local educational services for children, nursery schools and pre-primary schools and aimed at:

- the definition of the essential levels of provision through:
 - the wide spread of the service;
 - common regulations on initial and in-service training (initial training should be at university level);
 - common structural, organisational and qualitative standards with reference also to the National Curriculum Guidelines.
- the definition of the functions and tasks of the regions and local authorities;
- the approval and funding of a national action plan for promotion of the integrated education system.