

# Childcare Service Expansion in Chile and Mexico

*For Women or Children or Both?*

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## Acronyms

<b>CCT</b>	conditional cash transfer
<b>ECEC</b>	early childhood education and care
<b>ECLAC</b>	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>IMSS</b>	Instituto Mexicano de Seguridad Social ( <i>Mexican Institute for Social Security</i> )
<b>ISSSTE</b>	Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado ( <i>Institute for Social Security and Services for Public Employees</i> )
<b>JUNJI</b>	Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles ( <i>Nacional Council for Kindergartens</i> )
<b>MINEDUC</b>	Ministerio de Educación ( <i>Ministry of Education</i> )
<b>PAN</b>	Partido de Acción Nacional ( <i>National Action Party</i> )
<b>PRI</b>	Partido de la Revolución Institucionalizada ( <i>Institutional Revolutionary Party</i> )
<b>Sedesol</b>	Secretaria de Desarrollo Social ( <i>Ministry of Social Development</i> )
<b>SEP</b>	Secretaria de Educación Pública ( <i>Ministry of Public Education</i> )
<b>SERNAM</b>	Servicio Nacional de la Mujer ( <i>National Service for Women</i> )

## Summary/Résumé/Resumen

### **Summary**

Over the last few years, several middle-income countries, including Chile, Mexico and Uruguay, have increased the availability of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. This service expansion is qualitatively different from conditional cash transfer programmes which have mushroomed in the region. Feminist scholars have tended to view these programmes critically, fearing that stipends combined with care conditionalities reinforce traditional gender roles and add to the total workload of poor women, while doing little to improve women's long-term economic security. Childcare services, in contrast, are explicitly aimed at (or implicitly facilitate) the *commodification* of female labour and the *defamilialization* of care. The fact that recent developments in this area have received little scholarly attention so far leaves the (surely unintended) impression that Latin American social policy is unalterably stuck on a familialist track. In reality, however, national and regional trends are likely to be quite varied.

This paper looks at recent efforts to expand ECEC services for children up to three years in Chile and Mexico. Although concerns over low female labour force participation and child welfare have emerged on the political agendas of both countries, their approaches to service expansion differ significantly. Generally speaking, Mexico's Federal Daycare Programme for Working Mothers subsidizes community- and home-based daycare to facilitate the employment of low-income mothers without pursuing explicit educational aims. Poor women (rather than children) are the programme's target group.

While female employment has definitely been encouraged by the Chilean government and the expansion of childcare has been perceived as crucial for its achievement, it occupies a secondary place in the country's programme objectives. The crèche component of "Chile Crece Contigo" (Chile Grows With You) has instead been couched as a strategy to invest in the capabilities and equalize the opportunities of children from low-income families. The title echoes well-known narratives about the "social investment state". Children (rather than women) are the main beneficiaries of the programme and have, in fact, been granted the *right* to a crèche and a place in the kindergarten.

Through a comparison of both programmes, this paper shows that differences in policy design have important implications in terms of the opportunities the programmes are able to create for women and children from low-income families and the prospects for mitigating—or entrenching—existing gender and class inequalities. Since both programmes are fairly recent, a proper evaluation cannot be carried out in this paper. Rather, it is concerned with policy design, the assumptions underlying the programmes in terms of the organization of care, and their potential and limitations for reducing gender and social inequalities.

Finally, the authors venture some hypotheses as to why both countries may have chosen such different responses to address similar problems. They suggest that a combination of institutional legacies, overall frameworks for social policy and politics have made particular modes of ECEC service provision more attractive to governments and have shaped the ways in which similar objectives are translated into different policies.

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### **Résumé**

Au cours des dernières années, plusieurs pays à revenu intermédiaire, dont le Chili, le Mexique et l'Uruguay, ont étendu les services d'accueil et d'éducation de la petite enfance. Cette

expansion des services est qualitativement différente des programmes de transferts sociaux sous condition, qui se sont multipliés dans la région. Les intellectuelles féministes ont eu tendance à porter un regard critique sur ces programmes, craignant que les conditions auxquelles le versement d'allocations est soumis ne renforcent les rôles traditionnellement assignés aux hommes et aux femmes et n'alourdissent encore la charge de travail totale des femmes pauvres, sans guère améliorer leur sécurité économique à long terme. Les services de garderie, en revanche, visent explicitement (ou favorisent implicitement) la marchandisation du travail féminin et la défamilialisation de la garde des enfants. Le peu d'attention aux évolutions dans ce domaine l donne l'impression (certainement involontaire) que la politique sociale latino-américaine suit immuablement son cours familialiste, alors que les tendances nationales et régionales présentent probablement plus de variété.

Les auteurs s'intéressent aux efforts récents d'expansion des services d'accueil et d'éducation de la petite enfance (jusqu'à trois ans) au Chili et au Mexique. Bien que le faible taux d'activité des femmes et le bien-être des enfants préoccupent la classe politique des deux pays depuis peu, leur façon de concevoir l'expansion des services est assez différente. Dans les grandes lignes, le Programme fédéral mexicain de garderie pour les mères qui travaillent subventionne les services de garderie offerts par les communautés et les particuliers à domicile pour favoriser l'emploi des mères à faible revenu sans poursuivre explicitement des objectifs pédagogiques. Il cible les femmes pauvres (plutôt que les enfants).

Si le gouvernement chilien a résolument encouragé l'emploi des femmes et considère que l'expansion des services de garderie est cruciale pour la réalisation de cet objectif, elle n'occupe qu'une place secondaire dans les objectifs du programme "Chile Crece Contigo" (Le Chili grandit avec toi). La composante crèche de ce programme a au contraire été présentée comme une stratégie visant à investir dans les capacités et à égaliser les chances des enfants issus de familles économiquement faibles. Le titre fait écho à des discours bien connus sur l'Etat, investisseur social. Ce sont les enfants (plutôt que les femmes) qui sont les principaux bénéficiaires du programme et qui se sont vu accorder le *droit* à la crèche et une place dans un jardin d'enfants.

En comparant les deux programmes, les auteurs montrent que leurs différences de conception ont des effets importants sur les perspectives que les programmes peuvent ouvrir aux femmes et aux enfants des familles économiquement faibles et sur les chances d'atténuer ou de creuser ainsi les inégalités entre les sexes et entre les classes. Comme les deux programmes sont assez récents, les auteurs ne pouvaient procéder ici à une évaluation en bonne et due forme. Ils se sont intéressés plutôt à la conception des programmes, aux hypothèses sur lesquelles ils reposent quant à l'organisation de l'accueil, au pouvoir qu'ont ces programmes de réduire les inégalités entre les sexes et entre les couches sociales et aux limites qu'ils présentent en la matière.

Enfin, les auteurs avancent quelques hypothèses sur les raisons pour lesquelles les deux pays ont pu faire des choix aussi différents pour résoudre des problèmes semblables. Ils estiment que plusieurs facteurs conjugués—les institutions qui leur ont été léguées, le cadre général de la politique sociale et des considérations politiques—ont fait pencher les gouvernements vers telle ou telle prestation et opter pour des politiques différentes pour atteindre des objectifs semblables.

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## **Resumen**

En los últimos años, varios países de ingreso medio-alto, entre ellos Chile, México y el Uruguay, han incrementado la disponibilidad de los servicios de educación y cuidado en la primera infancia. Esta expansión de los servicios es cualitativamente diferente de los programas de transferencias condicionadas que se han multiplicado en la región. Los académicos feministas tienden a mirar estos programas con ojo crítico, pues temen que las transferencias aunadas a condicionalidades sobre el cuidado refuerzan las funciones tradicionales de género y aumentan la carga de trabajo de las mujeres pobres, y es poco lo que contribuyen a mejorar la seguridad económica de la mujer a largo plazo. En contraste con lo anterior, los servicios de cuidado infantil buscan de forma explícita (o facilitan de forma implícita) la comodificación del trabajo femenino y la desfamilización del cuidado. El hecho de que los recientes acontecimientos ocurridos en esta área hayan recibido hasta ahora tan poca atención a nivel académico da la impresión (seguramente no intencional) de que la política social en América Latina sigue atascada en el sendero inalterable del familialismo, aunque las tendencias nacionales y regionales probablemente sean más variadas.

En este documento se examinan los recientes esfuerzos que han desplegado Chile y México por ampliar los servicios de educación y cuidado para los niños pequeños (hasta tres años de edad). Aunque las agendas políticas de ambos países reflejan actualmente su interés y preocupación ante la baja participación de la mujer en el mercado laboral y el bienestar infantil, los criterios sobre la expansión de los servicios difieren considerablemente. En líneas generales, el Programa de Estancias Infantiles para Apoyar a Madres Trabajadores, instituido por el Gobierno Federal de México, subsidia la atención infantil en la comunidad o los hogares para facilitar el empleo de madres de bajos ingresos, pero no persigue ningún objetivo educativo. Las mujeres pobres (en lugar de los niños) conforman el grupo de beneficiarios del programa. Aunque el Gobierno de Chile ha sin duda fomentado el empleo femenino (en lo cual la expansión del cuidado infantil ha resultado de crucial valor), éste ocupa un segundo lugar entre los objetivos del programa. Por su parte, el componente de guarderías del programa “Chile Crece Contigo” ha sido formulado como una estrategia para invertir en las capacidades e igualar las oportunidades de los niños de familias de bajos ingresos. El nombre del programa recoge el bien conocido discurso sobre la inversión social estatal en las economías avanzadas. Los niños (en lugar de las mujeres) son los principales beneficiarios del programa; de hecho, se les ha otorgado el *derecho* a una cuna y un lugar en el jardín de infancia.

A partir de una comparación de los dos programas, este documento muestra que las diferencias en el diseño de las políticas tienen implicaciones importantes en cuanto a las oportunidades que los programas pueden generar para las mujeres y los niños de familias de bajos ingresos y las posibilidades de mitigar –o afianzar– las desigualdades de género y de clase existentes. Dado que ambos programas son bastante recientes, no es posible llevar a cabo una evaluación apropiada en este documento. El trabajo se ocupa más bien del diseño de la política correspondiente, los supuestos que sustentan los programas en relación con la organización del cuidado y su potencial y limitaciones para reducir las desigualdades sociales y de género.

Finalmente, los autores adelantan algunas hipótesis sobre las razones que llevaron a los dos países a responder de maneras tan diferentes a problemas similares. A su parecer, la combinación de elementos como el legado institucional, el marco general de las políticas sociales y la política han hecho que determinadas modalidades de servicios de educación y cuidado en la primera infancia resulten más atractivas que otras para los gobiernos y han definido la forma en que la búsqueda de objetivos similares desemboque en políticas tan distintas.

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## Introduction

While demands for public childcare support have been part and parcel of the struggle of women's movements' for gender equality since the early twentieth century, three developments have spurred recent state interest and activity in the area of childcare. Concerns about demographic change and declining birth rates, the quality of "human capital" as a factor of economic competitiveness and a desire to create new employment opportunities in the service sector have propelled childcare issues onto the agenda of a wide range of developed economies. They have triggered policy change in different areas, including parental leave, working time regulations, cash benefits, early childhood education and care services (Williams 2009). At the same time, social policies vis-à-vis women as a "massive untapped labour reserve" (Williams 2009:94) have been put forward as a means of reducing welfare dependency and poverty risk among low-income and/or single-earner families as well as increasing the sustainability of social security systems (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002). Women's care responsibilities have come to be recognized as an obstacle to achieving these goals.

These ideas have found their way into policy discourses and practices of the Global South where they have mixed with concerns specific to the development context, such as persistent poverty, inequality and development. As a result, children have acquired a somewhat iconic status on the welfare agenda, with the targeting poor children being perceived as an adequate measure to reduce the intergenerational transmission of poverty and overcome social exclusion. "Investing in women", on the other hand, has long been promoted by multilateral organizations as a strategy to foster efficiency, economic growth, self-reliance and poverty reduction (Jackson 1996; Razavi 1997).

In Latin America, the "rediscovery" of the social (Mkandawire 2004; Noël 2006) has been accompanied by a range of care-related policy innovations, including conditional cash transfer schemes, different modalities for expanding the availability of early childhood education and care services, and the introduction of child-rearing credits in pension schemes. Because women have traditionally carried the main responsibility for child-rearing and childcare, the dynamics of women's paid and unpaid work are central to these policies which, in turn, have important implications for the overall burden that falls back on women. The "conscious social engineering" (Orloff 2006:232), currently carried out by Latin American states in order to respond to economic, social, demographic and political change, thus actively (re)defines responsibilities for earning income and caregiving.

Feminist research has long interrogated the gender dimensions of "new" and "old" social policies, different entitlements for men and women, as well as the kind of family models and social norms that underpin access to welfare benefits. This is also true for the analysis of new social assistance measures. Indeed, much scholarly attention has focused on the gender implications of conditional cash transfers (CCTs) which have proliferated in the region, and in some countries, such as Brazil and Mexico, cover a significant share of the population.<sup>1</sup> Positive effects on child well-being notwithstanding, CCTs have been viewed critically by feminist scholars who fear that stipends combined with care conditionalities reinforce traditional gender roles and add to the total workload of poor women whose (paid and unpaid) input into household survival has diversified and intensified in many developing countries. A major critique of these programmes has been their failure to provide long-term strategies for women's economic security through job training and childcare provision (Molyneux 2007; Tabbush 2009). Childcare service expansion is qualitatively different from these programmes as it is explicitly aimed at (or implicitly facilitates) the *commodification* of female labour and the *de-familialization* of care. Over the past few years, several middle-income countries, including Chile, Mexico and Uruguay, have increased the availability of early childhood education and care services. The fact that these developments have received little scholarly attention so far leaves the (surely

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<sup>1</sup> Gender analyses of these programmes include: Serrano (2005, for Chile), Molyneux (2007), Escobar Latapi and Gonzalez de la Rocha (2008, for Mexico); Bradshaw (2008, for Mexico and Nicaragua) and Tabbush (2009, for Argentina).

unintended) impression that Latin American social policy is unalterably stuck on a familialist track, when national and regional trends are likely to be more varied and complex.

This paper looks at recent efforts to expand early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for young children (up to three years) in two countries: Chile and Mexico. Although concerns over low female labour force participation and child welfare have emerged on the political agendas of both countries, their approaches to service expansion differ significantly, indicating that while there may be some convergence around social investment ideas (Jenson 2008), their translation into policy practice is far from homogenous. Through a comparison of both programmes, this paper shows that differences in policy design have important implications in terms of the opportunities the programmes are able to create for women and children from low-income families and the prospects for mitigating—or entrenching—existing gender and class inequalities.

The pairing of Chile and Mexico offers strong parallels as well as contrasts. Table 1 provides an overview of key economic, social, demographic and spending indicators. While both countries depend to a large extent on exports, growth has been more stable and sustained in Chile, compared to Mexico whose economy has suffered from recurrent crises. Thus, the Chilean gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an average of five per cent during the 1990s. According to data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC 2008), poverty has declined steadily from almost 40 per cent in 1990 to under 14 per cent in 2006. Periods of economic downturn decelerated this trend, but did not reverse it. Meanwhile, the growth rate of the Mexican economy stagnated at an accumulated 1.3 per cent throughout the 1990s, while poverty rates fell more slowly from almost 50 per cent in 1989 to around 30 per cent in 2006. In the aftermath of the 1994 crisis, poverty rates rose dramatically, but then continued to decline.

Like many other Latin American countries, Chile and Mexico have undergone market reforms during the 1980s and 1990s, including trade liberalization, (partial or complete) privatization of social insurance, and increased private sector participation in social services (Teichman 2001). The reforms accentuated already high levels of social inequality. As has been repeatedly argued, poor women shouldered a disproportionate share of the burden of structural adjustment in many countries, making up both for a decline in male earnings and for the waning of public social services following fiscal retrenchment (Molyneux 2000).

Since their transition to democracy (albeit from very different forms of authoritarianism),<sup>2</sup> Chile and Mexico have tried to address “social deficits” by experimenting with new social programmes. Some, including the respective cash transfer schemes, Progresas/Oportunidades and Chile Solidario, have become influential blueprints in the region. Women and children have been central to these “new social policies”, both as beneficiaries and “conduits of policy” (Molyneux 2007:37). More recently, both countries have become active in expanding ECEC service coverage for children aged four years and younger. Given the pace at which cash transfer schemes proliferated in the region, it is not impossible that these two cases will spur at least a discussion on options for ECEC services expansion in the Latin America. The alternatives, embodied by the Chilean and Mexican programmes thus merit closer examination.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: section 1 sets the scene by providing evidence on how patterns of caregiving have been altered by transformations in demographic, household and employment structures. Section 2 provides an overview of the main developments in ECEC services in the two countries under study. Following a brief overview of policies since the mid-1990s, the paper provides a more detailed account of two recent programmes: the Federal Daycare Programme for Working Mothers in Mexico launched in 2007 and the ECEC service component of Chile Crece Contigo through which childcare is being extended in Chile since

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<sup>2</sup> This refers to the transition in Chile from a military dictatorship to electoral democracy, following the 1989 elections. In Mexico, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) lost its majority in Congress in 1997 for the first time since it came to power in the 1930s. The year 2000, when the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) won the Mexican presidency, marked the unequivocal end of what in 1990 the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa had called “the perfect dictatorship” (El País 1990).

2006. The paper also discusses the commonalities and differences in the design of both programmes, and highlights some of their likely implications for gender equality, equal access to quality care and the sustainability of childcare programmes. Since both programmes are fairly recent, a proper evaluation cannot be carried out in this paper. Rather, it will look at policy design, the assumptions underlying the programmes in terms of the organization of care, and their potential and limitations for reducing gender and social inequalities. The third section puts forward some hypotheses as to why both countries may have chosen such different responses to address similar problems. We suggest that a combination of institutional legacies, overall frameworks for social policy and politics have made particular modes of ECEC service provision more attractive to governments than others and have shaped the ways in which similar objectives are translated into different policies.

**Table 1: Selected demographic, economic and social indicators**

	Chile	Mexico
<b>Demographic indicators</b>		
Population (million), 2005	16.3	104.2
Fertility rate, 2000–2005	2.0	2.4
Estimated life expectancy, 2005–2010	78.5	76.1
Average household size, urban areas 2006	3.7	3.8
<b>Economic indicators</b>		
GDP per capita (US dollars), 2007	6127.0	7094.0
GDP growth (per cent), 1990–1999 average	4.9	1.3
GDP growth (per cent), 2007	4.0	2.0
<b>Labour market indicators</b>		
Economic activity rate (men), 2006	73.0	82.0
Economic activity rate (women), 2006	43.0	48.0
Unemployment rate, 2006	7.6	3.7
Men (per cent)	6.3	4.3
Women (per cent)	9.5	2.8
Share of the urban labor force employed in low productivity sectors, 2006	30.7	45.7
Men (per cent)	25.6	42.0
Women (per cent)	38.2	50.8
Informal labour as part of total urban employed labour force, 2001–2004 <sup>a</sup>	28.6	41.4
Social insurance pension coverage of labour force by public and private contributory systems, 2004 <sup>a</sup>	57.3	28.0
Women's labour market earnings as per cent of men's earnings, 2006	72.0	64.0
<b>Poverty and inequality</b>		
Poverty (per cent), 2006	13.7	31.7
Extreme poverty (per cent), 2006	3.2	8.7
Poverty (per cent) according to gender of head of household, 2006		
Male	12.3	32.1
Female	17.7	30.4
Gini coefficient, 2006	0.522	0.506
<b>Social spending</b>		
Public social spending per capita (US dollars), 2005/06	719.0	724.0
Public social spending as per cent of GDP, 2005/06	12.4	10.6
Public social spending as per cent of total public spending, 2005/06	66.4	59.0

**Note:** <sup>a</sup> Mesa-Lago 2008. All other indicators are from ECLAC (2008).

## 1. Changing Patterns of Care: Households, Employment and Women's Work in Chile and Mexico

State responses to childcare needs in many middle-income countries have at least partly been triggered by changes in employment, household and demographic structures which, in turn, have modified the parameters of caregiving over the past two to three decades. Across Latin America, women's entry into the workforce has intensified, family structures have been transformed, and demographic and sociocultural changes have created new demands for care. As a result, nuclear male-breadwinner families are an ever less common phenomenon: only one-fifth of households in the region followed this traditional model by the mid-2000s (Arriagada 2007). Chile and Mexico represent no exception to this trend. As has been argued for other middle-income countries (Filgueira et al. forthcoming), this scenario creates "new social risks", which the largely insurance- and assistance-based social policy regimes are no longer able to confront.<sup>3</sup>

In both countries, women's participation in the paid economy has picked up, reaching 43 and 48 per cent respectively in 2006, although it is still low compared to the OECD average of 57.5 per cent (OECD 2008). This is particularly true for Chile, which ranks behind most other countries in the region. In both countries, women's labour force participation lags far behind that of men. Women from lower-income households are less likely to participate in the labour force than women from higher-income households, while men's labour force participation shows less variation across income groups. In Mexico, 49 per cent of non-poor women participated in the labour market in 2002, while the participation rate among poor women was almost 15 percentage points lower (Colina 2008:21). In Chile, the gap between high- and low-income women was even larger: while 60 per cent of women from the highest income quintile participated in the labour market in 2006, this share dropped to 27 per cent in the case of women from the lowest income quintile (Mideplan 2006). Single mothers from the lowest income quintile are also much more likely to be unemployed than single mothers from the highest income group (10 versus 2 per cent in 2006) – and the rate has increased for the former and declined for the latter since 1990, thus widening the gap. These patterns partly explain the high poverty rates among female-headed households in Chile<sup>4</sup> as well as the government's emphasis on promoting employment and access to welfare services for single mothers in the years after the democratic transition (Badía Ibañez 2002).

The reasons for the low female labour force participation in Chile and Mexico are manifold and interrelated. From a welfare regime perspective, both countries have been classified as liberal, single-earner regimes with a high degree of private sector participation in social provision and targeted state interventions, where a significant proportion of women "specialize" in unpaid care work, as opposed to informal regimes where household survival strategies often require several earners (Martínez Franzoni 2005). In Chile, some have argued that the reasons for low participation rates are inherent to the labour market, including, for example, blatant employer discrimination against women, particularly mothers, and "male-modelled" working environments with little space for reduced or flexible working time (Schkolnik 2004). There is also evidence that the presence of preschool age children significantly reduces women's likelihood of participating in the labour market. In the absence of affordable and accessible childcare services, this is particularly problematic for women with low educational credentials and little work experience, whose potential labour market earnings are unlikely to compensate for the "opportunity costs" of alternative childcare arrangements. Social norms and the strength of the male-breadwinner ideal (even in the face of a changing reality) have also been shown to play a role (Contreras and Plaza 2008). Undurraga (2009) argues that besides structural and cultural factors, practical issues, such as transportation, play a role. According to her evidence

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<sup>3</sup> In many middle-income countries, including Mexico and Chile, these regimes have historically excluded, and continue to exclude, large parts of the population working in the informal or unpaid care economy.

<sup>4</sup> Poverty rates for female-headed households were 18 per cent in 2006, compared to the national average of 14 per cent (ECLAC 2008).

from cross-class interviews in Santiago, most women encounter barriers to paid work in Chile, but experience them differently according to social class.

In both Chile and Mexico, a significant proportion of the labour force is in informal employment, and women are overrepresented in precarious work. In Mexico, 42 per cent of male and 51 per cent of female workers were in the informal sector in 2006, showing a slight increase since the mid-1990s. In Chile, the informal sector continued to absorb one-quarter of male workers and almost 40 per cent of female workers in 2006, exhibiting a significantly larger gender gap than in Mexico (see table 1). This has important implications for welfare and care entitlements linked to employment, such as maternity leave, company-based childcare provision in Chile,<sup>5</sup> or childcare provision tied to social security as is the case in Mexico. Other forms of childcare service provision—such as those currently pursued by both countries—are thus of utmost importance for a large proportion of households.

The gender gap in earnings is still significant, with female labour market earnings reaching, respectively, 72 per cent and 64 per cent of male earnings in Chile and Mexico in 2006 (see table 1). In Chile, the gender earning gap is larger for professional women and for the higher-income groups. However, low returns to labour are a significant problem in low-income groups as well. In Mexico, 18.3 per cent of economically active women earn less than one minimum wage as opposed to 10.5 per cent of men (Colina 2008:21). Meanwhile in Chile the gender gap is even larger, with 21 per cent of female wage workers (*asalariados*) earning less than one minimum wage as compared to 9 per cent of male workers (Mideplan 2006). Even when controlling for education, skills and job characteristics, women earn almost 10 per cent less than men (INEGI 2007:341–344).<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, female earnings are the main source of income for a sizeable 28 per cent of households in both countries (Cepalstat 2005). Not surprisingly, the share of households where a woman is the main earner is particularly high among single-parent households (73 per cent and 72 per cent respectively). In keeping with the regional trend, the share of this type of household has increased in recent decades, with many of these households—87 per cent and 88 per cent respectively—headed by women. Women are also the main earners in many extended or composed households, both of which have become more common. The increase in this household form was most dramatic in the poorest income quintile in Chile (from 28.5 per cent in 1990 to 36.5 per cent of all households). In Chile and Mexico, 38 per cent and 35 per cent of these households have a woman as the main earner respectively (Cepalstat 2005).

Not surprisingly, female labour force participation is actually *desired* by both governments and forms an integral part of their strategies to fuel economic growth and reduce poverty. While growing attention to women's access to paid work is a welcome trend, there have been concerns about the ways in which this issue has been framed and addressed within approaches that see gender equality as instrumental for achieving other goals rather than being a goal in itself (Razavi 1999). From a gender perspective, we need to take a closer look at the policies and processes through which women's productive and reproductive roles and entitlements are currently being redefined.

While men have long ceased to be the sole breadwinners, women continue to be the main providers of unpaid care. Time use surveys show that women still carry out the bulk of unpaid care and housework and often put in longer hours than men when paid and unpaid care work is combined (Budlender 2009). It is now increasingly recognized that women's disproportional contribution to the unpaid care economy puts real constraints on the time available for other activities, including employment, but also political participation, leisure and rest. Mexico

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<sup>5</sup> Companies with more than 20 female employees are mandated to provide childcare services to their workers in Chile. However, this law is weakly enforced and little complied with. In addition, many informal workers are likely to be found in smaller enterprises with fewer women, which does not make them subject to this regulation. The law has recently been modified to include *single* fathers.

<sup>6</sup> In some occupations, such as industrial supervisory positions, the earnings gap is as large as 54 per cent (INEGI 2007:344).

incorporated a time use survey component in its household survey in 1996 and has conducted several time use surveys since. The latest survey on which this paper draws was carried out in 2002. There is no proper time use survey available for Chile yet, but an experimental survey was conducted for the Greater Santiago area in 2008. Both surveys show that women continue to put in the bulk of hours spent on unpaid work across different categories, including care for children and other household members, domestic work and unpaid work for other households or the community (INE 2008; INEGI 2007). This creates a time squeeze, particularly for women who are in paid employment. In Chile, for example, women who participate in the labour market spend only about an hour less on paid work than men per day, while they put in longer hours in all other activities.

In both countries, the survey data indicates that the time women dedicate to unpaid care work increases significantly with the presence of children. This is not only true for the time spent on the direct care of children—which in both countries doubles with the presence of a child<sup>7</sup>—but also for some of the domestic work associated with the care for other household members. The Mexican time use survey reveals that women in households with children under the age of 12 spend roughly one hour more on food preparation and one hour more on the cleaning of clothes and shoes than women in households with no children. In contrast, men spend *less* time on housework when children are present, compared to men in households with no children. However, they do spend more time on caring for children and other dependents. The increase of two and a half hours in time spent by men on person care is rather modest compared to the increase by seven hours in women’s person care time. Indeed, the gender gap in time spent on person care increases with the presence of young children (INEGI 2005:58).

In a nutshell, the transformation of household and family structures, the growth in female labour force participation and the increasing reliance of households on female earnings have put a squeeze on time available for unpaid childcare and increased the need for childcare services that support women in their quest to combine employment with childcare tasks that are still largely assigned to them. And, slowly but surely, governments have been responding.

## **2. Early Childhood Education and Care Services in Chile and Mexico**

States can support the de-familialization of childcare in a number of ways. Broadly speaking, they either provide services or finance the provision by non-state institutions. In most advanced welfare regimes, publicly funded childcare services are subject to (often strict) regulations aimed at guaranteeing minimum quality standards, affordability and equity in access. Arguably, direct provision of services warrants a higher level of state control over these variables than subsidizing third-party provision. A side-effect of public provision is the kind of employment it can create for childcare workers, most of whom are women. Evidence from Nordic countries shows, that public employment has a positive impact on care workers’ wages (Budig and Misra 2008). In addition, unionization rates are often higher in the public sector, contributing to increased bargaining power. This can translate into comparatively good wages and stable working conditions for public preschool teachers.<sup>8</sup>

However, direct public provision is not the norm. Subsidies to non-state institutions, including private for-profit, non-profit and faith-based providers, have become an increasingly common strategy to stimulate the development of childcare services. In many countries, subsidized providers exist alongside more or less developed systems of public childcare services and/or purely private (fee-based) facilities, as in Germany, Italy and the Republic of Korea. In other cases, such as the Netherlands, provision is left entirely to non-state institutions (Noailly and Visser 2009). The actual delivery of publicly funded childcare can also take a variety of

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<sup>7</sup> In the case of Chile, calculations were based on households with one or more children under the age of five; in the case of Mexico, on households with children under the age of 12.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Esquivel (forthcoming) on Argentina.

institutional forms, some of which are tied to the educational system—such as pre-primary schools—while others are more rooted in welfare services, including day nurseries or organized family daycare at the local level (Jenson and Sineau 2001).

Financial support to parents (rather than to service providers) to cover part of the costs incurred for the purchase of childcare services on the market has become a popular option in several European countries. Couched as measures to stimulate employment creation (albeit often low-skilled and low-paid personal service employment) and increase parental “choice” in the ways care and employment are combined (Williams 2009), parents are disbursed a financial compensation—through tax allowances or transfers—which they can use to pay for different forms of childcare. France provides a case in point. Spending on daycare in this country has decreased in recent years, while more resources have been allocated to flat-rate benefits for parents who stay at home, as well as for subsidies for registered (home-based) child-minders and tax-breaks for hiring nannies. It is argued that these changes are less favourable in terms of gender equality and equal access to quality care by lower-income households (Mahon 2002; Morel 2007).

The following subsections provide an overview of the main developments in ECEC services in Chile and Mexico, two middle-income countries that have recently launched programmes to increase the availability of services for children under four. After a brief overview of policies since the mid-1990s, this paper provides a more detailed account of these recent approaches: the Federal Daycare Programme for Working Mothers in Mexico launched in 2007 and the ECEC service component of Chile Crece Contigo through which childcare has been extended in Chile since 2006. Although the desire to promote child development and female labour force participation have been major concerns in both countries, Mexico and Chile have taken different routes for increasing the availability of early childhood education and care services. Along general lines, the Mexican programme kickstarts and subsidizes home- and community-based care provision with a training component for child-minders. Meanwhile the Chilean programme emphasizes the expansion of professional ECEC services provided in public institutions. The final subsection discusses the commonalities and differences between the two programmes and points to some of the implications for gender equality, equality of access to quality care and the sustainability of childcare programmes.

### ***Early childhood education and care services in Mexico***

The development of ECEC services in Mexico can be broadly divided into three periods in each of which a different institution entered the scene: (i) the Mexican Institute for Social Security (IMSS) from the mid-1970s,<sup>9</sup> focusing on daycare for children of working mothers covered by social security; (ii) the Ministry of Public Education from the early 2000s, when preschool education was made mandatory for all three- to five-year-olds; and (iii) the Ministry of Social Development (Sedesol) since 2007, when the most recent daycare programme was put in place to target children of working mothers without access to social security coverage. As with other poverty reduction programmes, the programme is targeted to low-income households.

Access to institutional childcare for children aged 43 days to four years was established as a right of working mothers in the formal sector by the 1973 Social Security Law (Ley de Seguridad Social), to be guaranteed by the IMSS. It is a contribution-based entitlement, financed by a 1 per cent across-the-board payroll deduction. Expansion of service provision, however, remained sluggish until the mid-1990s, when IMSS operated 487 centres nationwide. These centres offered daycare for less than 60,000 children, corresponding to around 5 per cent of the eligible population (Knaul and Parker 1996). Low coverage can partly be attributed to the fact that the institute has witnessed a continuous decline in revenue since the early 1980s and is struggling

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<sup>9</sup> Services for civil servants were provided by the Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado (ISSSTE).

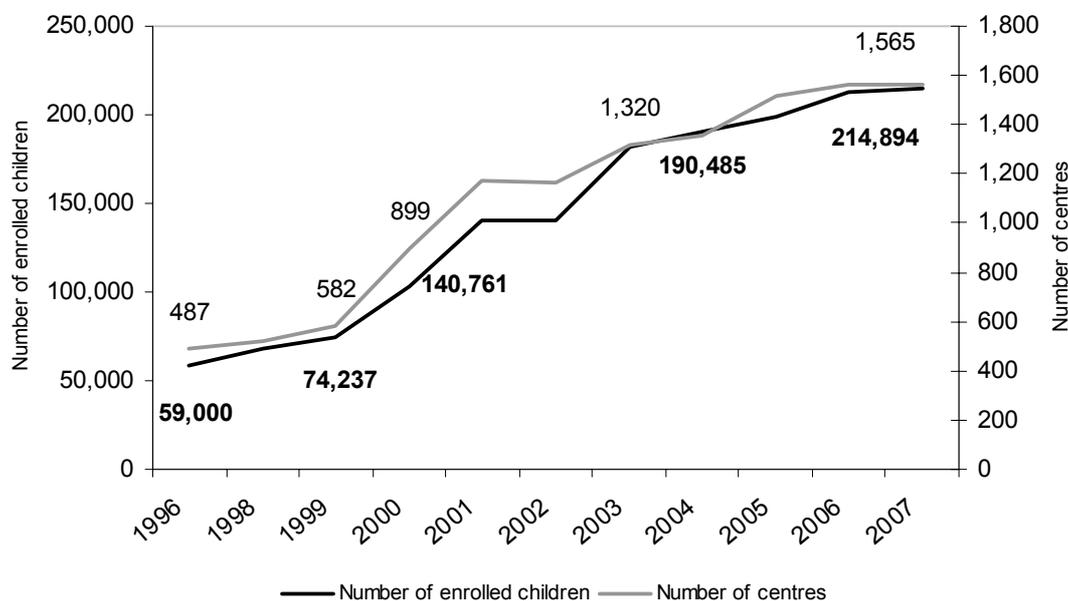
with a combination of falling real wages, increasing informalization of the labour force and declining government subsidies (Laurell 2003; Brachet-Márquez 2007).<sup>10</sup>

In 1997, IMSS decided to expand its services through agreements with employers, community organizations and individual families rather than through direct provision (*guarderías ordinarias*). These new providers would offer company-, neighbourhood- and home-based daycare services (*guarderías subrogadas*) funded and regulated by the IMSS. By 2007, only 8.6 per cent of the daycare centres were still run by the IMSS. The cost difference between the outsourced modality and the previous model was huge, falling from around 950,000 Mexican pesos<sup>11</sup> to 231,000 Mexican pesos per centre per month.<sup>12</sup>

Since then, coverage has picked up more rapidly (see figure 1). Within a decade, the number of centres tripled, and coverage rose to over 200,000 children—almost 20 per cent of the target group (children of formal sector workers aged 43 days to four years). However, the IMSS was a long way from fulfilling formal sector demand, and there have been doubts about quality standards due to underfunding (Leal 2006). Reservations about safety were tragically confirmed by a fire accident in an outsourced facility in Hermosillo, Sonora, in 2009, where the lack of proper emergency exits caused the death of 49 children (Aviles 2009). The tragedy drew public attention to the problems of standard-setting and enforcement. However, no major changes have occurred at the time of writing (January 2010). While it would be unfair to judge all outsourced daycare centres on the basis of this accident, it does point to the inadequate control and enforcement of safety and hygiene standards even where they exist.

Another issue is that the IMSS offers no alternative to parents working in the growing informal sector, a gap that the most recent programme is trying to address.

**Figure 1: Number of IMSS daycare centres and capacity, Mexico, 1996–2007**



In 2002, preschool education was made mandatory for all children aged three to five. This educational policy—tailored to the needs of children rather than those of their (working) parents, and independent of the latter’s employment status—has universal aspirations, and its

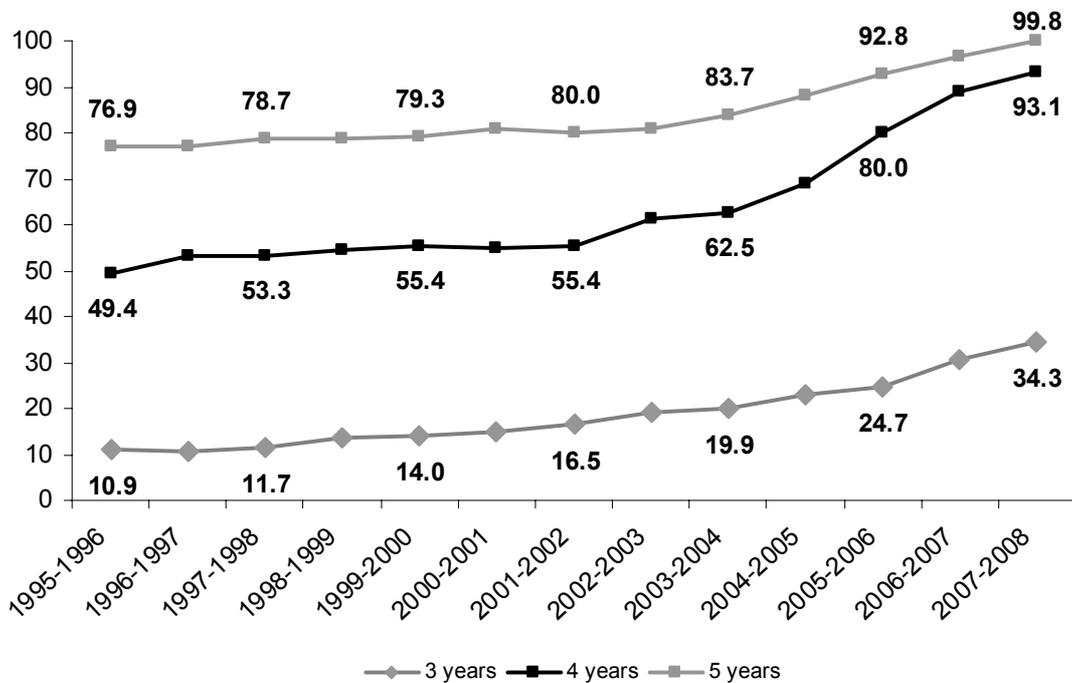
<sup>10</sup> Knaul and Parker (1996) argue that the slow growth of childcare centres was partly a result of resources being diverted to cover the costs of IMSS health services.

<sup>11</sup> \$ amounts refer to US dollars. \$1 = 13.06 Mexican pesos (Banco de México, December 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Communication with the National Coordinator of the IMSS Day Care Centers, 26 March 2009, information request no. 0064100671409.

achievements have been significant. Since the reform, overall preschool enrolment for this age group has risen from 3.5 to almost 5 million children, increasing total coverage from 50 to 80 per cent (see figure 2). By 2007–2008, universal coverage for four- and five-year-olds had been achieved, while coverage for three-year-olds had doubled from 15 to 34 per cent (Presidencia 2008).

**Figure 2: Evolution of preschool coverage (per cent) by age, 1995–2008**



Most preschools are public and run only half-day programmes, limiting the extent to which they can free working parents from their childcare responsibilities. A recent evaluation also shows huge differences in quality and student achievement across public preschools in rural and urban areas as well as private schools, with the latter (catering to 12 per cent of three- to five-year-olds) performing considerably better (INEE 2008).

A third childcare programme was introduced in 2007, focusing on women workers' access to childcare rather than early education. The Federal Daycare Programme for Working Mothers started operating shortly after Felipe Calderón assumed office as president in December 2006. It was designed to fill the gap left by IMSS activities by expanding childcare services for working mothers without access to social security-based services. It forms part of a larger national strategy to reduce poverty and inequality (Presidencia 2007), within which women's role as earners is seen as crucial.

The programme's specific contribution to these broader goals is the subsidized provision of daycare services for children from the age of one to three years and 11 months from low-income households (below six monthly minimum wages, corresponding to around 9,500 Mexican pesos<sup>13</sup>) who have no access to social security-based daycare provided by the IMSS. This is meant to allow participating mothers to work, study or look for a job. The objective is to offer daycare places to half a million children by 2012 (corresponding to 5 per cent of children in this age group, based on 2005 census data).

<sup>13</sup> In Mexico, daily minimum wages vary across regions. For the purposes of this paper, the daily minimum wage in Mexico City used as a parameter, was 52.6 Mexican pesos in 2008. The monthly income of a person who works 30 days per month earning one minimum wage per day would then be 1,578 pesos. Correspondingly, six monthly minimum wages would be 9,466 pesos.

Rather than expanding the role of public institutions in the provision of care, the programme creates a “quasi-market” for home-based daycare services through supply-side incentives and demand-side subsidies. Thus, Sedesol offers a lump sum of 35,000 Mexican pesos to individuals or civil society organizations interested in opening and running a daycare centre at their individual home or community centre, to help them adapt and furnish their facilities according to the requirements. To qualify for the grant, the potential service provider does not need any formal training or previous experience (except to have completed secondary education). However, candidates are required to pass a psychological test and participate in training courses regarding programme rules and the basics of childcare. By 2009, 3,446 caregivers had received a childcare certificate. After completing this process, potential providers are given a month to recruit “clients” to reach the minimum enrolment target of 10 children who fulfil the targeting requirements of the programme. Once the centre starts operating, it has to provide daycare services for at least one year, eight hours a day, five days a week. According to the rules and regulations, the person running the centre has to hire at least one assistant per eight children. All operational costs have to be covered by public subsidy plus a fee charged to parents.

In order to enrol their children and receive the state subsidy, parents have to fulfil a series of requirements. Thus, the mother of a child must be working, looking for a job or studying, her household income must be below the threshold of six minimum wages per month, and she must not have access to daycare services provided by IMSS. Apart from meeting the other criteria, fathers must be single in order to apply for the service and subsidy for their children. The subsidy is provided on a three-step scale<sup>14</sup> and decreases with rising household income. The maximum subsidy is 700 Mexican pesos per month per child.

The subsidy is paid directly to the daycare centre (rather than to the mother who enrolls her children) according to assistance tracked through an attendance sheet signed by parents. According to Sedesol (2008), the average daycare centre had enrolled 34 children at an average cost of 1,031 Mexican pesos per month per child (including the state subsidy).<sup>15</sup> For the average caregiver, this scenario resulted in an average monthly revenue of 34,680 Mexican pesos from which they have to deduct all operational costs, including the provision of two hot meals and a snack per day as well as the salary of one childcare assistant per eight children. The assistant’s salary, subject to the primary caregiver’s discretion, was an average of 2,050 Mexican pesos) per month in 2007.

For parents, the co-payment has means that they get daycare service at a lower cost, but not for free. According to Sedesol, the average co-payment is 355 Mexican pesos<sup>16</sup> (22.5 per cent of the monthly minimum wage), with individual amounts depending on the subsidy received by the household (which in turn depends on household income). The vast majority of enrolled children belong to the lowest income group (receiving the highest subsidy of 700 Mexican pesos). On an aggregate basis, this means that 65 per cent of the operational costs of the programme are borne by the state and 35 per cent by parents.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of quantity, the achievements were remarkable. Within one year, the programme stimulated the creation of over 5,000 daycare centres, reaching more than 200,000 children (Sedesol 2007). In 2008, another 3,000 daycare centres were created, and coverage rose to more than 244,000 children and around 222,000 mothers (Sedesol 2008). In two years, the programme had outnumbered the capacity of IMSS’s centres built up over a 30-year period. By 2008 it was

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<sup>14</sup> This was changed to two steps in 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Since exact information was hard to come by, the 1,031 Mexican pesos is an approximation which we calculated based on the following information: an average group made up of 34 children of whom 29 received the 700 Mexican pesos subsidy, three received the 600 Mexican pesos subsidy and two received the 450 Mexican pesos subsidy. Each pays an average co-payment of 355 Mexican pesos:  $[(700 \times 29) + (600 \times 3) + (450 \times 2) + (355 \times 34)] / 34 = 1,031$  Mexican pesos.

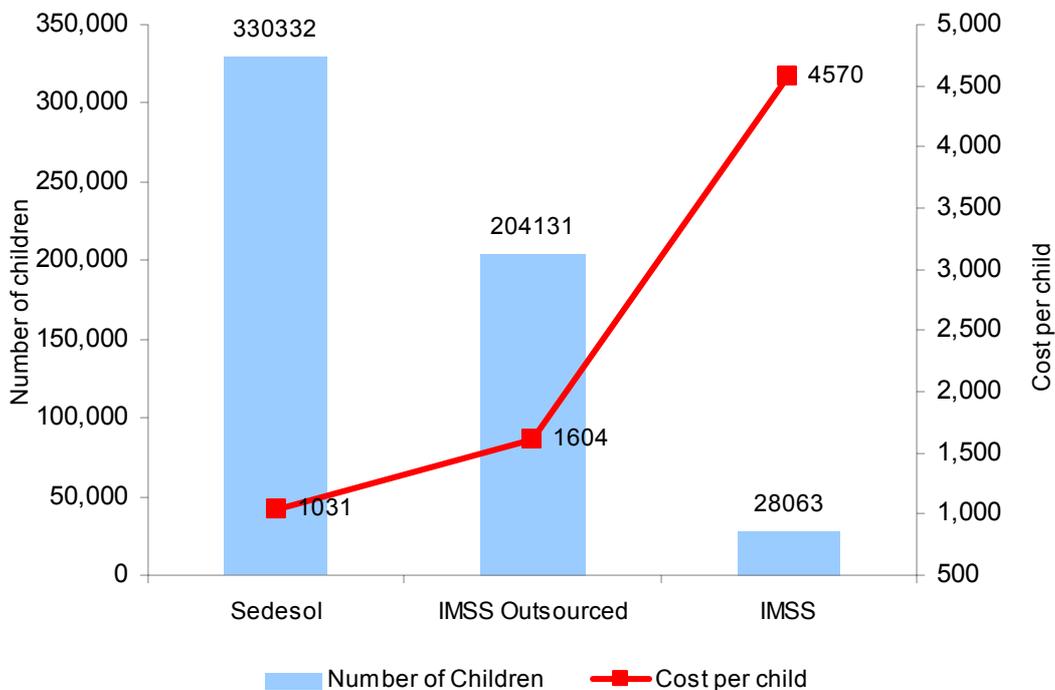
<sup>16</sup> Communication with Sedesol, 16 June 2009, information request no. 0002000081309.

<sup>17</sup> The distribution of operational costs between parents and the state has changed significantly since the start of the programme. While the state subsidy remained the same, the average co-payment charged by care centre operators increased significantly from 175 Mexican pesos in 2007 to 355 Mexican pesos in 2009. This led to a drop in the state share from 79 per cent to 65 per cent and to an increase in the average monthly revenue of the care-giver from 23,800 Mexican pesos to 34,680 Mexican pesos.

the single most important provider of childcare for children under the age of four, running 84 per cent of all centres and covering 56 per cent of enrolled children. Furthermore, the government claims to have created jobs for over 38,000 women through the programme, including as primary caregivers and their assistants. While the numbers are impressive, the quality of these jobs is questionable, since caregivers and their assistants are self-employed, and thus lack social security benefits (Milenio 2008).

The programme has also been criticized for providing a low-quality service to low-income families (Zaragoza 2007; Milenio 2008). Not only do Sedesol centres operate on a much lower budget than IMSS centres, quality standards are also poorer. Based on official data provided by the different institutions, we calculated that the Sedesol programme accounted for 26 per cent of the total annual budget for childcare services, covering more than half of the enrolled population, while the IMSS budget accounts for 74 per cent, covering around 41 per cent of the enrolled population.<sup>18</sup> The monthly costs per child at Sedesol centres was less than 25 per cent that of centres directly managed by IMSS and still almost 40 per cent lower than that of the centres IMSS had contracted out to other providers, as figure 3 shows.

**Figure 3: Number of children covered and costs per child per month for different childcare delivery mechanisms, Mexico, 2009**



While lower costs are not equivalent to lower quality, differences are extreme and likely to entail trade-offs in terms of staff, infrastructure, equipment, as well as care workers' working condition and wages (and therefore a downgrading of skills and qualifications).<sup>19</sup> Thus, child-staff ratios specified for centres run by IMSS or ISSSTE are significantly higher than those for Sedesol centres. Further, the IMSS requires a first degree in pedagogy, childcare, nutrition, early education or preschool education to qualify as a caregiver (IMSS 2009), while Sedesol merely asks for a completed secondary education. An interesting detail in this context is that a large number of primary caregivers actually seem to be quite well educated. In a survey carried out

<sup>18</sup> This figure does not consider the budget allocated by ISSSTE. If it did, IMSS would account for 66 per cent, ISSSTE for 12 per cent and Sedesol for 23 per cent of the total annual budget.

<sup>19</sup> See the annex for a set of comparative tables.

in 2007, almost 60 per cent of primary caregivers claimed to hold either university or technical degrees (GEA-ISA 2007).<sup>20</sup>

Calderón stressed in several speeches that the programme was intended to create jobs for unemployed *care* professionals (educators, teachers, social workers and so on). Considering the employment conditions outlined above, this casts serious doubts about the proper recognition and compensation of professional care work in the Mexican context. Instead, it points toward a strategy for saving labour costs and avoiding public sector unions which have important leverage over educational policies in the country.<sup>21</sup> After the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) won the presidency in 2000, and as a result of corporatist rule, the teachers' union became an important and independent political actor. It has practically co-governed the educational system through a strong presence in the related Congressional commissions, as well as among educational authorities at the federal and state levels (Santibañez 2008). It would thus be unsurprising if the PAN administration wanted to avoid the involvement of the Ministry of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública/SEP) and the teachers' union.

Despite these reservations, the programme implies a significant state commitment to defamilialization. While the budget allocated to the programme in 2009 (2,522 million Mexican pesos) was a fraction of the conditional cash scheme Oportunidades (24,460 million Mexican pesos), Estancias did rank among the larger social development programmes after Oportunidades, 70 y más (11,976 million Mexican pesos) and Habitat (2,745 million Mexican pesos).

### ***Early childhood education and care services in Chile***

The Chilean approach to ECEC services has been closely tied to the Ministry of Education (Mineduc) and educational goals seem to have a greater historical importance than in Mexico, even for the younger age groups. ECEC services are structured according to age groups: the crèche level is attended by children from the age of 84 days up to two years; the intermediate level is in charge of two- and three-year-olds; and the transitional level caters to four- and five-year-old children. While some services are targeted to “vulnerable” groups and executed by specialized institutions, most of them are overseen by Mineduc. In contrast to Mexico, the private sector plays a much larger role in education due to far-reaching reforms carried out under military rule (1973–1989). This subsection briefly describes the different modalities in the Chilean context in order to provide a background for the analysis of the recent expansion in services for children up to three years old rolled out under the Bachelet administration (2006–2010).

Since the mid-1990s, the transitional level (four- and five-year-olds) is considered part of the educational system. In contrast to Mexico, it is not mandatory for any age group. Though coverage has increased steadily since 1992, Chile has moved more slowly toward universal coverage for four- and five-year-olds than Mexico (see figure 4).

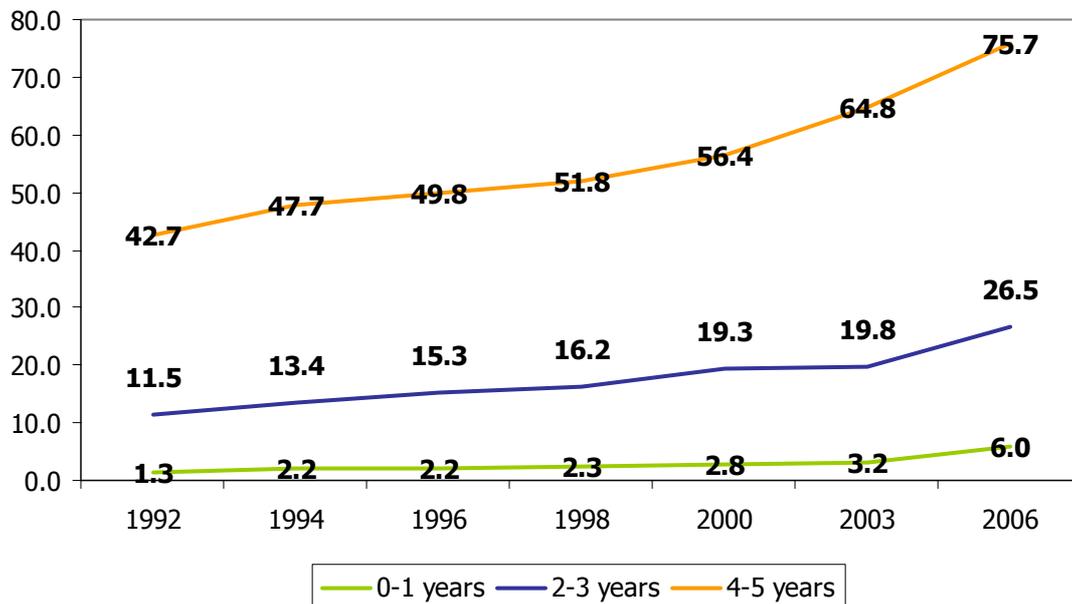
Services are provided by five main institutions, mirroring the primary and secondary educational system, which was municipalized and opened up to private sector participation under military rule. Truly public (municipal) schools account for 30 per cent of enrolment, subsidized private schools for another 36 per cent, while purely private schools cater to 12 per cent (see figure 5). The remaining 22 per cent is absorbed by two semi-public institutions (Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles/JUNJI and Fundación Integra) bound to Mineduc. As in the rest of the educational system, there is a clear segmentation along the lines of household income with respect to coverage and the type of institution children attend. While the richest quintile sends 94 per cent of children from this age group to preschool—half of whom are enrolled in private schools—coverage in the first quintile is 81 per cent and largely concentrated in public institutions (Mideplan 2006).

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<sup>20</sup> Because some public universities in Mexico also provide the last three years of high school education, university figures may capture some of these students (who are not university graduates in the common sense). We are grateful to an anonymous referee for pointing this out. In the survey we refer to, respondents were asked to choose between high school, technical or university degrees.

<sup>21</sup> Ornelas 2008; Aguayo and Serdán 2009; Andere 2009.

**Figure 4: Crèche and kindergarten coverage rates by age groups, Chile 1992–2006**



**Figure 5: Distribution of enrolment by institution (4–5 years), Chile, 2006**

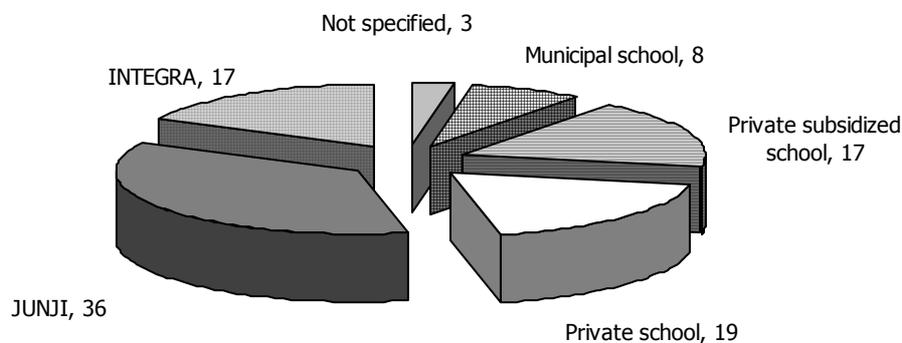
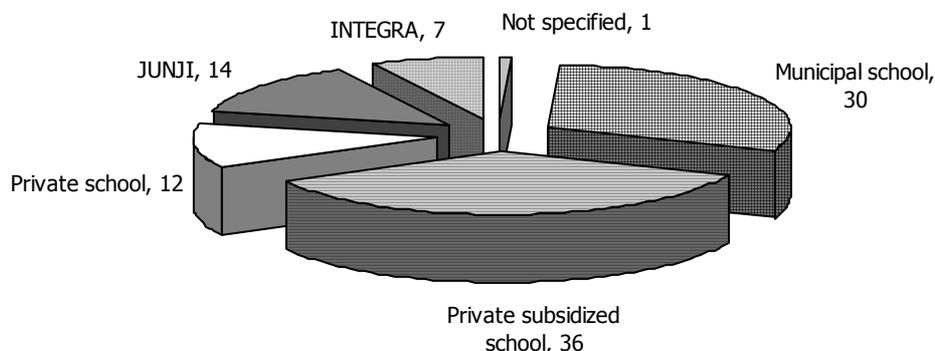


Figure 4 shows that coverage at the intermediate level (two- and three-year-olds) has been rather stagnant, and institutional childcare for infants at the crèche level (under the age of two) was practically insignificant until 2003. Since then there has been a notable increase in ECEC coverage, which also reached the lower age groups and the poorer income quintiles that have been historically underrepresented. The institutional setting for the crèche and intermediate levels (up to two years old and two- to three-year-olds) shows a stronger tendency toward public and purely private providers (see figure 6). The private subsidized variant is much less significant. Two institutions play a particularly important role: (i) centres run or accredited by JUNJI, a government body; and (ii) centres run by Fundación Integra, a private non-profit foundation that belongs to the presidency’s network of foundations. Both are linked to Mineduc through annual agreements. Their centres are free of charge for children from households belonging to the first two income quintiles. Together, they absorb more than half of the

enrolment in the younger age group. Purely private providers account for almost 20 per cent of enrolment.

**Figure 6: Distribution of enrolment by institution (0–3 years), Chile, 2006**



During the Lagos administration (2000–2006), the lack of childcare services formed part of a public debate over the country’s low female labour force participation rate, and the conflict between employment and family responsibility was seen as one of its major causes. The deficiencies in available childcare service regulations for working women—such as the obligation of employers to provide work-based crèches in companies with more than 20 female employees—were increasingly subject to criticism. The regulations applied to only a limited proportion of women who were formally employed in larger companies, were rarely complied with, weakly enforced and acted as a disincentive to female employment (Valenzuela 2000; Dirección del Trabajo 2003). The coverage of company-based childcare was and still is absolutely negligible in numbers.

In 2004, Lagos called on the national women’s machinery,<sup>22</sup> Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (SERNAM), to come up with proposals for childcare provision as a way of facilitating women’s participation in paid employment.<sup>23</sup> In response, SERNAM launched the so-called *comunicentros*. This pilot project was quite similar to a project carried out by the Mexican government two years later. As in the Mexican case, the project was based on the idea of taking advantage of, regulating and supporting already existing community-based efforts to organize childcare through a subsidy per child paid to an informal home-based caregiver. It was implemented in three municipalities, but seems to have vanished into thin air after the 2006 elections, as the new administration concentrated its efforts on scaling up the availability of institutional childcare services in public crèches and kindergartens linked to Mineduc. Whether this was due to a lack of success of the pilot project or political priority setting after the 2006 election is not clear. It seems, however, that the Ministries of Education and Finance pooled efforts to push for the expansion of formal institutional ECEC. Educational authorities had criticized the programme’s lack of attention to quality education, suggesting that it would have been preferable to direct these funds to increasing institutional coverage through JUNJI (Honorato Barrueto 2006).

Under the Bachelet administration (2006–2010) the expansion of ECEC services became a priority. Following the recommendations of the Presidential Advisory Board on Childhood

<sup>22</sup> According to the Beijing Platform for Action, a national women’s machinery “is the central policy coordinating unit inside the government. Its main function is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas” (United Nations, 1995:para 201).

<sup>23</sup> At this point in time, the Ministry of Education was only in charge of preschool education for four- and five-year-olds.

Protection, the government launched Chile Crece Contigo (Chile Grows with You) in October 2006. Two of its goals were (i) guaranteed access to crèches and kindergartens for all children up to three years old from the two poorest income quintiles and (ii) universal preschool coverage for four- and five-year-olds (Mideplan 2007). The policy was recently passed in Congress and now establishes free access to crèche and kindergarten services as a right for children (up to three years old) from low-income families.

JUNJI and the Fundación Integra act as implementing institutions, and almost all the new places at the crèche and intermediate level have been created by these two institutions. Modalities include centres run by both institutions as well as subsidies to centres run by municipalities and non-profit organizations. Subsidies to market providers—which dominate at the transitional, primary and secondary school levels—are not part of the expansion strategy. This can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid the type of structural constraints associated with the country's larger educational system, reshaped and buttressed under authoritarian rule and inherited by the democratic regime. This system is still highly segmented, with public schools absorbing more than half of the country's poorest students, while (high-quality and fee-based) private schools cater to the wealthiest segment. The type of school that children attend (private, subsidized or public) has an important impact on a set of variables, including test results for university entry, years of education, employment in manual versus non-manual work, and hourly salary. In secondary education, attending a private school yields students a substantial advantage in this respect (Helgø 2002).

A prominent and much criticized aspect of primary and secondary education is its financing mechanism according to which the central government has to allocate equal subsidies to public and private subsidized schools. This scheme has been claimed to be responsible for the financial deterioration of public municipal schools (Riesco 2007).<sup>24</sup> The fact that coverage of children under the age of four was extremely low before the reforms (see figure 4) has arguably increased the government's room for manoeuvre in shaping the institutional setting in which services would be provided. It is likely that the government used this leeway to strengthen the role of public institutions and avoid subsidies to market providers—in contrast to the larger educational system where powerful private sector interests have been a major obstacle to more far-reaching reforms.

According to official sources, the number of public crèches has increased significantly: from around 700 in March 2006 to more than 4,000 by the end of 2009 (Ortiz 2009). The number of available places for children up to one year old has more than quadrupled from around 14,000 in 2005 to 61,000 in 2008, and is estimated to reach 85,000 by March 2010. As to the intermediate level (two- to three-year-olds), JUNJI has nearly doubled the number of crèches since 2005 (Ortiz 2009).<sup>25</sup>

Although JUNJI's expansion has almost exclusively taken place through agreements and transfer of funds to third parties, mostly municipalities, more than three-quarters of the kindergartens and more than half of the crèches are still directly administered by the institution (JUNJI 2008). Similarly, Fundación Integra provides ECEC both through its own crèches and kindergartens and through agreements that delegate administration to non-profit providers, including community, faith-based and non-governmental organizations conditional on compliance with Integra's curricular standards. According to official sources, Integra had provided for around 74,000 children in 954 centres in 2006. A large majority of children (90 per cent) were enrolled in centres run by the foundation (Ministerio de Hacienda 2008). Despite a

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<sup>24</sup> Due to drastic cuts in the educational budget, the public school system deteriorated in the 1980s. With the return to democracy the public budget for education has increased consistently, but the funding modalities remained the same. As most of the new enrolments have been concentrated in private subsidized schools (due to the low quality of underfinanced public schools), they have received around 80 per cent of the newly allocated government funds between 1990 and 2003.

<sup>25</sup> The triennial household survey, CASEN, carried out toward the end of 2009, will shed further light on the increase in coverage across age groups. Unfortunately the survey was not available at the time of writing.

higher share of outsourcing, JUNJI services are said to have a higher degree of professionalization.

Contrasting sharply with the Mexican case, educators in public or accredited crèches and kindergartens are required to have a five-year university degree in early education. Support staff involved in the direct care of infants are required to have a technical degree in early education from an institution recognized by the Chilean state. The two institutions through which services are currently being expanded had employed around 16,000 workers in 2006–2007. JUNJI workers are public employees and their salaries are negotiated alongside salaries for other public sector workers. Around three-quarters are employed on a fixed-term basis, while the remaining staff have permanent posts. According to the Ministry of Finance, JUNJI had not resorted to using self-employed people in 2006 (Ministerio de Hacienda 2008). There have been concerns, however, regarding the modality under which JUNJI carries out the current expansion of crèches (that is, through agreements with municipalities). While staff in municipal crèches are considered public employees—and therefore entitled to the same kind of benefits—there have been complaints about their receiving significantly lower salaries than their colleagues in centres directly administered by JUNJI (Crónica Libre 2008).

While their employment status is likely to be better than that of self-employed caregivers in Mexico, the salaries of early childhood educators are among the lowest in the educational sector. Professional preschool educators who graduated in 2005 and 2006 earned an average 360,000 Chilean pesos<sup>26</sup> in their first year (around 20 per cent less than primary teachers). This is very low when compared to graduates from professional careers of similar duration, both care-related, such as nurses (732,000 Chilean pesos), and non-care related, such as accountants (700,000 Chilean pesos), construction engineers (622,000 Chilean pesos), chemical engineers (861,000 Chilean pesos), and industrial engineers (1,111,000 Chilean pesos). After five years, the average salary of preschool teachers who had graduated in 2000 and 2001 had increased by only 11 per cent, showing that neither higher education nor work experience are valued highly in this educational group.<sup>27</sup>

Regarding working conditions (and quality), there is evidence that crèches and kindergartens run by Integra and JUNJI are understaffed, and that this situation is more severe in Integra establishments. In 2006, less than two-thirds of JUNJI's centres and less than half of the centres run by Integra complied with the Mineduc staff coefficient (Ministerio de Hacienda 2008).<sup>28</sup> Turnover rates among staff are high among Integra workers (around 30 per cent), but relatively low at JUNJI (less than 3 per cent). High turnover rates are also likely to have a negative effect on childcare quality.

While the main rationale of the recent expansion has been on guaranteeing children from disadvantaged households a “fair start”, strategies did not completely lose sight of the gender and employment issue. Indeed, the majority of children attending JUNJI and Integra centres at the crèche and intermediate level are enrolled in full-day programmes (from 8:30 to 16:30), and there are efforts to offer extended schedules until 7:30 pm. Similar to the Mexican case, however, the availability of full-time programmes is much lower at the transitional level (particularly at private subsidized schools). While at the crèche and intermediate level, 68 and 54 per cent of enrolled children were in full-time care in 2006, this share dropped to 25 per cent for four- and five-year-olds.

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<sup>26</sup> \$1 = 506.43 Chilean pesos (Banco Central de Chile, December 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Futuro Laboral database ([www.futurolaboral.cl](http://www.futurolaboral.cl)). All salaries are gross salaries.

<sup>28</sup> The staff coefficient defines the maximum number of children per worker and is dependent on the age group in Chile (see table 6).

### *Similarities, differences and implications of policy design*

This section will discuss some of the similarities and differences between the most recent programmes in the Chile and Mexico. To facilitate the discussion, some of the key characteristics of the programmes have been summarized in table 2.

**Table 2: Overview of main programme characteristics**

	<b>Programa Guarderías y Estancias Infantiles, Mexico</b>	<b>Programa de Salas Cunas y Jardines Infantiles, Chile</b>
Executing body	Ministry of Social Development (Sedesol)	Ministry of Education (Mineduc)
Objectives	Reduce the poverty risk of households by enabling mothers with young children to work Create employment through the expansion of childcare services	Promote child development and equal opportunities for children from low-income / vulnerable families Enable parental employment
Main beneficiary	Mother (if a working father is the only caregiver, then he can be the beneficiary)	Child
Basis of entitlement	Targeted Households with a monthly income of less than six minimum wages (14 per cent of all households)	Targeted Lowest two income quintiles until 2010 Lowest three income quintiles as of 2011
Other conditions of access	Mother must be working or looking for work Mother must have no access to social security-based childcare services upon registration	Mother must be working, studying or looking for work for the child to have free access to crèche services (up to two years) and full-day kindergarten (two to three years); no further requirements for access to part-time kindergarten
Delivery mechanism	State subsidies to home-based provision	Public or semi-public institutions
Financing mechanism	State: General revenue (average 65 per cent) Households: Co-payments on sliding scales (average 35 per cent)	State: General revenue Free of charge for the first two (2010)/three (2011–) quintiles
Professionalization	Low (no specific qualifications for caregivers required)	High (caregivers are pre-school or early education teachers with university or technical degrees)
Quality (child-to-staff ratio as specified by programme rules)	1 primary caregiver per centre One assistant per eight children	Technical assistants Up to two years: 1:6 Two years: 1:12 Three years: 1:16  Professional educators Up to two years: 1:40 Two to three years: 1:48 children

**Source:** Authors' calculations based on official documents.

Generally speaking, Mexico's Federal Daycare Programme for Working Mothers subsidizes community- and home-based daycare to facilitate the employment of low-income mothers without pursuing explicit educational aims. Poor women (rather than children) are the programme's target group. While female employment activation has definitely been pursued by the Chilean government and the expansion of childcare has been perceived as crucial for its achievement, it occupies a secondary place in the programme objectives. Rather, the programme has been couched as a strategy to invest in the capabilities and equalize the opportunities of children from low-income families. Indeed, the title Chile Crece Contigo echoes

well-known narratives about the social investment state in the European context.<sup>29</sup> Children (rather than women) are the main beneficiaries of the programme and have, in fact, been granted the *right* to a crèche and kindergarten place (see below).

In Chile, service delivery is being developed in ways that combine educational objectives with working parents' needs through institutional care by ECEC professionals and working-time adjusted service hours. While overall Mexican ECEC policies have tried to address female labour force participation as well as children's access to early education, they have never pursued these goals in tandem. Indeed, none of the Mexican programmes consider early education (for children) and childcare services (for working mothers) together – instead, they are dealt with in different institutions and modalities of provision. While IMSS childcare services never pursued educational goals,<sup>30</sup> the absence of educational concerns is even stronger in the recent Sedesol programme which has lowered the standards and regulations vis-à-vis the IMSS centres. Overall, the differentiation between the provision of early education and care as well as the diversity of institutional arrangements within the (non-educational) care sector have brought about an extremely segmented system of public childcare services, where quality differs greatly from one institutional arrangement to another. In Chile, segmentation seems to be more pronounced across the public/private divide than among public programmes themselves.

The education/care divide also produces substantial discontinuities. In Mexico, some working mothers may have access to full-day childcare for children aged up to three years, but once the children enter preschool, half-day programmes are the norm. At the same time, childcare services have few educational components with the potential to prepare children for preschool and primary school. Efforts are made to move toward an integrated system that works for both children and working parents in Chile, but, as in Mexico, the preschool system is still dominated by half-day enrolment: only 25 per cent of enrolled four to five year-old children were in full-day programmes in 2006.<sup>31</sup>

What about the basis for entitlement? Research on developed welfare regimes suggests that universal provisioning is more likely to lead to redistributive and financially viable services of equal quality than targeting, because it fosters the “willingness to pay” through taxation and the “willingness to stay” in public schemes among wealthier segments (Korpi and Palme 1998). Hence, quality can be maintained at high levels. Neither of the two programmes offers a universal entitlement to ECEC services. Both follow a targeted logic based on household income. Yet, there are significant differences in the scope and legal enshrinement of benefits. The Chilean programme targets a much broader public (40 per cent of all households until 2010; 60 per cent of all households from 2011 onwards) compared to the Mexican programme which targets households with a monthly income of less than six minimum wages (approximately 14 per cent of all households). It thus remains largely residual and is less likely (and in fact does not intend) to attract middle-income sectors than the Chilean programme which already reaches out to middle-income groups. Whether the Chilean programme can move further toward universalization will depend on the extent to which financial backing, service quality, professionalism and – very importantly – political will can be maintained.<sup>32</sup>

Besides means-testing, the rules of the Mexican programme stipulate that the beneficiary mother must be working or looking for work and not have access to social security-based childcare services (such as IMSS/ISSSTE) upon registration. In Chile, the child's mother must be working, studying or looking for work for the child to have free access to full-day crèche services and kindergarten. No further requirements are established for access to part-time

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<sup>29</sup> Jenson and Saint-Martin 2003; Lister 2003; Williams 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Communication with the national coordinator of the IMSS Daycare Centres, 26 March 2009, information request no. 0064100671409.

<sup>31</sup> The share of full-day enrolment is much higher in centres run by Integra and JUNJI (60 per cent and 78 per cent respectively), while in private, municipal and subsidized centres, full-time enrolment oscillates between 10 and 20 per cent.

<sup>32</sup> This is particularly important, considering the upcoming national elections (December 2009) which may end up depriving Concertación of its majority for the first time since the return to democracy.

kindergarten (two to three years). Importantly though, while Chile *Crece Contigo* is not universal, it has been passed as a law which defines the right to a crèche and kindergarten place for the target group. No such move has been made in Mexico for children under the age of three. The Federal Daycare Programme for Working Mothers is a unilateral offer by the state which can be withdrawn any time and depends to a significant extent on the “market” response to public subsidies. Thus, the state does not decide or influence where childcare centres are established, but leaves this process up to the forces of demand and supply. The absence of a rights-based entitlement also differentiates the programme from the social security-based service provision through IMSS where access to childcare is – albeit stratified along the lines of labour market status – the right of working mothers.

As depicted in table 2, programme financing comes mainly out of general revenue. In contrast to the Chilean programme, however, the Mexican programme holds on to the co-responsibility component – a pet concept of the “New Poverty Agenda” according to which beneficiaries of social services should not be mere recipients of state handouts, but shoulder part of the costs to be paid in money or kind. As a result, parents, however poor, are expected to make some kind of co-payment for the childcare services they receive. In Chile, on the other hand, ECEC services are offered free of charge to parents and children belonging to lower-income households.

The different delivery mechanisms of ECEC services for children under four years old have important implications for the speed of expansion and its sustainability as well as for service quality. On the quantitative side, the Mexican programme has increased the availability of childcare places at an impressive speed, creating more than 200,000 within two years. This is a significant improvement and enables mothers to participate in paid employment. While childcare expansion has moved more slowly in Chile, it looks more promising with regard to sustainability. Not least, the construction of new crèches implies important investments in public infrastructure and more public employment. The Mexican programme, on the other hand, subsidizes the remodelling of private housing, tying the grant to the operation of a childcare centre for one year. After this year, the centre can – at least theoretically – be closed down.

While care quality is generally difficult to assess, the degree of professionalism in childcare is lower in the Mexican programme, which seems to be based on the assumption that childcare does not require any particular skills (other than the one provided through the programme). Chilean policies, on the contrary, are placing emphasis on professionalism – even for the very young – and caregivers in public institutions are required to have tertiary degrees in early education. This does not imply, however, that there are no problems in terms of care quality in the Chilean case. As we have seen, child-to-staff ratios set by Mineduc are rather low (see table 2) and not often complied with in practice. In fact, the overall ratio may be more favourable in the Mexican programme, where, according to the programme rules, there must be at least one assistant caregiver per eight children.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, children of very different ages (from one year to the age of four) need to be cared for by one person at the same time, so that specific activities suitable for each age group may become more difficult to organize.

In terms of the jobs being created through state-led defamilialization of childcare in both countries, the research finds that the Mexican programme creates employment opportunities for a large number of women. As “care entrepreneurs” running small childcare businesses, primary carers are largely self-employed and lack access to social protection. There have also been complaints about subsidies being too low to comply with programme rules and earn a decent wage at the same time (Zaragoza 2007; Levy 2008). The wages and working conditions of assistants that primary carers are required to employ per every eight children are even more dubious. Moreover, caregivers are not connected in any meaningful way to allow them to organize around their entitlements and the conditions under which childcare is provided. This seems particularly contradictory in a context where trade unions in the education (including preschool education) sector are comparatively strong and able to impose their demands. While

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<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, we have no data or evidence on compliance with this rule.

childcare and preschool teaching jobs are far from being adequately recognized and compensated in Chile, most caregivers are publicly employed and the prospects for collective bargaining are more favourable.<sup>34</sup> Important challenges remain in increasing the valuation of childcare work as well as in equalizing entitlements and pay across institutions involved in the new programme.

Both governments have engaged in powerful communication strategies to promote and foster support for their respective childcare programmes. In Mexico, the programme is mostly framed as helping (poor) women to engage in paid work without worrying about the whereabouts of their children or leaving them in potentially dangerous arrangements in order to earn a living. It extends the maternalist ideal to include paid work and appeals to working mothers' "heroism" which makes them worthy of public support. A recurrent theme in Calderón's speeches are working mothers as the "pillars of the Mexican household...who with their work and care pull their families through" and who need to be supported in their quest for "harmonizing their family and work activities, and of course to improve their life quality as women and also that of their children" (Calderón 2007a).<sup>35</sup> However, framing the daycare programme in a politically acceptable way can become quite a balancing act in the face of the strong conservative currents within PAN itself, as the following quote shows:

And one of the things that most hindered women to find work is the fact that they had to take care of their children, and it is good that children can be taken care of by their mothers. It is good that we can foster the value of the family, the affection of the mother, the affection of the father as well; but especially the bond between the mother and her children. But also, it is good that we can open spaces so that the mother can work. (Calderón 2009, authors' translation).

A second strand relates to the creation of employment by the programme. While this is not an explicit goal stated in the programme rules, the government has marketed the programme as the "biggest employment programme for women in Mexico" (Calderón 2009), claiming to have created thousands of jobs for (previously) unemployed women at the daycare centres.

While the expansion of ECEC services has featured prominently in Bachelet's speeches as one of the four transformations that her administration has been moving forward,<sup>36</sup> employment creation through care services has not been a major frame in the Chilean context. Rather the main frame of the programme has been the creation of "equal opportunities from the cradle" for children from lower-income families.<sup>37</sup> Although presidential discourses mention childcare services as a means of facilitating women's labour force participation, they essentially focus on its value as an educational policy, with institutional childcare continually presented as being "good" for children. The careful calibration of professional and maternal concern is well captured in the following extract of a Bachelet speech:

You have heard me say this many times and I have said that—*as a woman, as a mother, but also as a paediatrician*—I am convinced that initial education is fundamental, that all the efforts in primary, secondary and later, of course, tertiary education won't be enough if we arrive late. And one way to be on time is to start at the youngest age. Therefore, and because we fight against inequality from the cradle and we give mothers the opportunity to work, we will vigorously continue the crèche programme (Bachelet 2007:15, authors' translation, emphasis added).

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<sup>34</sup> Of course, this must be taken with a grain of salt in a context that is characterized by a severe overall disempowerment of trade unions whose bargaining position vis-à-vis employers has not been significantly strengthened since the return to democracy (see, for example, Taylor 2004).

<sup>35</sup> Note that these are constructed as responsibilities of women rather than men. It is the mothers and not the fathers "who pull their families through" and will therefore be entitled to services.

<sup>36</sup> The four transformations envisioned by her government were (i) a thorough reform of the pension system; (ii) an improvement in the quality of education (in which crèches and kindergartens were seen as playing a major role); (iii) the promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship for economic development; and (iv) an increase in the supply of housing and quality of life at the neighbourhood level (see, for example, Bachelet 2006).

<sup>37</sup> The fact that expanding public ECEC is certainly not enough to level the playing field in Chile is discussed elsewhere (see Staab forthcoming).

Despite their distinctive focus, both governments are struggling to find frames that reconcile offers of defamilialization with traditional views about women's duty as mothers and (primary) caregivers. While mothers' employment is being portrayed as crucial for their children and families in Mexico, the Chilean government has made an effort to liberate women from "the moral predicament between working and caring" (Kremer 2006:263) by stressing the benefits of institutional care and education for their children. The fact that enabling women to work in order to increase their economic security and autonomy is not a major frame in either case goes to show how difficult it is to move away from maternalist ideals in both countries where female labour force participation has historically been low, and conservative forces, including the Catholic Church, strongly influence gender and social norms. As to how far the programmes really promote the development and well-being of small children is doubtful in the Mexican case and remains to be seen in Chile. In neither case do the programmes challenge class segregation by providing an environment where children from different social backgrounds can mix.

### 3. Accounting for Different Developments: Some Hypotheses

Why have the two countries chosen such different routes to achieve a similar set of objectives? This paper suggests that a combination of institutional legacies, overall frameworks for social policy and politics have made particular modes of ECEC services provision more attractive to governments and have shaped the ways in which similar objectives are translated into different policies. The following are meant as hypotheses—rather than as waterproof research findings—which could guide research on the contemporary politics of (child)care, an area that has not so far received much scholarly attention in the developing world.

First, institutional legacies and blueprints within which the expansion of publicly funded childcare services takes place seem to matter as to whether educational goals (for young children) and care needs (of working parents) are addressed separately or together. Other than childcare services provided by IMSS, which were mainly a way of satisfying working mothers' need for daycare, the creation of JUNJI in 1970 was the product of both a growing interest in the early stimulation of children and the struggle of women activists from different party backgrounds for women workers' right to childcare (JUNJI 2005). From the very beginning, the institution was linked to Mineduc, and although it was moved to the Ministry of Domestic Affairs' Division for Social and Community Organizations during the military dictatorship, it was reintegrated into Mineduc upon the return to democracy. The mission of IMSS, in turn, was to address working mothers' needs for custody—and it is this model that serves as a blueprint for the new programme. Political calculations may have also played a role for keeping education and care separate. As seen earlier in the paper, the teachers' union has lent crucial support to the rapid expansion of preschooling since 2002 in Mexico. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Sedesol has been careful not to frame the programme as a first step on the educational ladder<sup>38</sup> in order to avoid the involvement of the teachers' union which holds important political leverage over the educational system and its policies.

At the same time, the Chilean programme shows that blueprints emanating from previous arrangements are not carved in stone. The fact that state-subsidized private delivery—a common strategy for childcare expansion in other countries such as Argentina and the Republic of Korea (Faur 2009; Peng 2009)—has not been considered in Chile may reflect the government's reluctance to replicate a model which in the broader educational arena has led to far-reaching segmentation and social inequality. Since services at the crèche and intermediate levels are basically being created from scratch, the government arguably has greater leverage over the shaping of institutions than at the transitional level, where coverage is more advanced and the subsidized private variant an already established fact.

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<sup>38</sup> Personal communication with programme manager, October 2008.

In terms of the overall approach to social policy, the Mexican daycare programme mirrors general trends in the country's social protection policies according to which sectoral ministries produce watered down versions of IMSS's social protection schemes for workers who are not covered by social security (Levy 2008, 2009). Since 2004, for example, the Ministry of Health (Secretaría de Salud) runs a voluntary health insurance scheme (Seguro Popular) for informal sector workers who are not covered by IMSS. The benefits offered by Seguro Popular are far less comprehensive than those offered by IMSS. With the conditional cash transfer scheme Oportunidades, the recent daycare programme shares the characteristic that benefits are not based on social rights, but provided as assistance measures that can be withdrawn at any time.

In Chile, the decision to go for publicly provided professionalized childcare rather than home- or community-based daycare fits in with the country's current social protection strategy which focuses on improving the quality of social services and on extending existing protection mechanisms to groups that have been excluded or disadvantaged (rather than creating parallel programmes as in the Mexican case). In the health sector, for example, Plan AUGE (launched in 2004) defined a number of health conditions to be universally covered by the public system regardless of age, gender, race, insurance status and income. The pension reform (approved in 2008) introduced a series of changes in order to improve coverage and efficiency of the existing system of individual accounts.

Far from taking place in a vacuum, decisions over change and continuity in institutional arrangements and social policy regimes are embedded in the political context of each country. Previous studies on gender politics in Latin America have shown that the potential of redistributive and gender-progressive policies depends to a significant extent on the political inclination of the ruling majority along the Left-Right as well as the secular-religious spectrum (Macaulay 2006; Huber et al. 2009). There are significant differences between Chile and Mexico across both dimensions. In Chile, the Concertación—a Centre-Left party coalition—ruled the country since 1990, and the first two presidents following the return to democracy came from the Christian-Democratic Party (PDC).<sup>39</sup> While it has been argued that the PDC's social conservatism has slowed (and, in some cases, impeded) the advancement in key women's rights issues<sup>40</sup> in the past (Baldez 2001; Blofield and Haas 2005), two consecutive presidents since 2000 were from the (historically secular) Socialist Party.<sup>41</sup> There seems to be some agreement that the Bachelet government has been particularly receptive to and proactive on gender issues. Women's rights and gender equality have been key themes during her mandate and "changes have been symbolic as well as material" (Rios Tobar 2007:28).<sup>42</sup>

The political context in Mexico is quite different. While the 2000 national elections ended over 70 years of one-party rule by the PRI, it was not a Centre-Left party coalition that emerged from this transition as in Chile, but a pro-Church, pro-business party (PAN) that very much adhered to the conservative Catholic doctrine with regard to women, sexuality and the family. Two early incidents illustrate PAN's unfortunate start on gender issues. First, while President Vicente Fox strengthened the independence and increased the resources of Mexican women's machinery, he appointed an avowedly anti-abortionist to head the institution instead of the candidates backed by feminist organizations.<sup>43</sup> Second, in a speech entitled "What Mexico expects of its women", delivered in March 2001, the Secretary of Labour depicted the "natural order" of a woman's position at the centre of the family and held that work outside the home undermined this sacred

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<sup>39</sup> Patricio Aylwin (1990–1994) and Eduardo Frei (1994–2000).

<sup>40</sup> This has been the case, in particular, with regard to legislation on abortion, divorce and domestic violence which has led feminist policy entrepreneurs to frame the legislation as "being good for the family" rather than women's inalienable rights (Haas 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Ricardo Lagos (2000–2006) and Michelle Bachelet (2006–2010).

<sup>42</sup> This is not only true in the area of family/work reconciliation. The adherence to gender parity in the nomination of her first cabinet, for example, was a way to make women visible in a male-dominated political system. In reproductive health, on the other hand, Bachelet insisted on the free distribution of emergency contraception in public health centres against fierce opposition by Right-wing members of parliament and the Catholic Church which tried very hard to sabotage the policy.

<sup>43</sup> Patricia Espinosa Torres, now Under-Secretary in the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

duty (Magally 2001).<sup>44</sup> With the new daycare programme, the government of Felipe Calderón (2006–) seems to have moved slightly closer to the reality of most working women. The discourse of the “necessary evil” of women’s work outside the home has been nuanced, and now appeals to cultural representations of the self-sacrificing “supermadre” who works, not for herself, but for her family, children and community.

As Franceschet and Macdonald (2004) show, the countries’ political trajectories, and democratic transitions in particular, have also shaped different types of women’s movements, with different demands and possibilities to liaise with the state in the policy-making process. In Chile, massive opposition to the military regime fostered cross-class alliances among organized women and with other political actors. The widely diffused transition slogan “democracy in the country and in the home” illustrates that the gender division of labour was an important part of the movements’ agenda. Although many of these cross-class linkages have faded today, the women’s movement gained political voice during the transition and part of its membership built strong links with parties through double militancy.

Similar cross-class unity and political alliance building was never achieved among organized women in Mexico (Franceschet and Macdonald 2004:8) where top-down corporatist rule either co-opted movements or marginalized them from the policy-making process, making it difficult to work with the state. The fact that corporatist rule was followed by a Centre-Right government with extremely conservative stances on gender issues, kept the scope for collaboration with the state limited. Feminist scholarship has long emphasized the drawbacks of women’s movements’ links with the state and political parties in Chile, pointing to feminists’ marginalization within parties, the loss of autonomy and linkages to their support base as well as the political fragmentation of movements.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to Mexico, however, these linkages have increased the footing and presence of feminist policy entrepreneurs within political parties, the legislature and the newly created national women’s machinery where they have spearheaded policy proposals for gender equality (Haas 2006). While in both countries, the recent childcare service expansion seems to be largely a top-down phenomenon, it is not impossible that these linkages have allowed Chilean feminists to use the window of opportunity opened by Bachelet’s social policy agenda to shape policy proposals for care more directly than their Mexican sisters.

Given the rather unfavourable conditions in Mexico, why would a conservative government launch a childcare services programme at all? Here too, political circumstances may have come into play. Indeed, the issue of childcare services had come up during the presidential elections, with several candidates promising measures to relieve working mothers from part of the double burden. Following the narrow election results, the Calderón government was under considerable legitimacy pressures to comply with campaign promises, one of which had been the expansion of childcare services. In this context the new government certainly also had an interest in the fast roll-out of the daycare programme and the rapid visibility of its results, which may have influenced policy choice, as professionalized institutional care would have not only been more costly, but probably also slower in increasing coverage.<sup>46</sup> The attempt to increase (poor) women’s labour force participation (and thereby the self-reliance of their households) through (relatively cheap) childcare provision may also reflect the desire to save public funds at a later stage, when household income defines the mothers’ eligibility for the conditional cash transfer *Oportunidades*.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The statement spurred a chorus of disapproval in the country.

<sup>45</sup> Chuchryk 1994; Baldez 2001; Matear 2001.

<sup>46</sup> Felipe Calderón—aware of the critics who have pointed to the limitations of the programme—frequently uses the quantity/quality dichotomy in his speeches, underlining that investments in public infrastructure would have led to inefficiency and that employing public servants would have slowed down the process of expansion due to union power, among others (see, for example, Calderón 2007b, 2008b, 2008a, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> *Oportunidades* is targeted to mothers/households with school-age children. We are grateful for this suggestion by an anonymous referee.

## Final Remarks

Over the last decade, early education and childcare policies have become more prominent on the policy agendas of several Latin American countries. As the cases of Chile and Mexico show, policy options are not restricted to cash transfers, but increasingly include a concern for preschool and childcare service provision. Both countries have significantly expanded the availability of early education and daycare facilities and places over the last few years. These are notable and laudable developments in a context where conservative views about women's roles still feature prominently in public opinion, particularly in the area of family and work outside of the home.<sup>48</sup>

However, despite the convergence around certain concerns over the promotion of child welfare and female employment, they can be translated into very different programmes, even within one policy area such as early childhood education and care services. This paper proposes a series of factors that may have shaped different policy designs—including institutional legacies, the overall dominant approach to social policy and the political context. This is an area where future research could make a fruitful contribution, exploring cross-country variations in the ways in which care concerns have entered the political arena and how different actors and institutions have played out in the design of specific programme choices.

In our view, programme design not only reflects the extent to which policy makers “care” about the needs of low-income women and their children, but also shapes the kind of opportunities that early childhood education and care services can create for them. In this sense, the integration of education and care into one system (as in the Chilean case) appear to be more promising. While free crèche and preschool places are targeted to children from lower-income families, they come closer to a unified system of public childcare. In Mexico, there is bureaucratic fragmentation between preschool education (Ministry of Education), insurance-based (IMSS/ISSTE) and targeted daycare (Sedesol), and risks entrenching existing inequalities, mainly along the lines of labour market status, and producing discontinuities across age groups.<sup>49</sup> As we have seen, the separation of (preschool) education and care into different programmes also produces a highly fragmented workforce: some workers are qualified and well-organized, while others have little formal training and few entitlements. Thus, Mexico seems to be moving away from the model of an integrated childcare workforce with a “core” profession through a diversification of service offers, while efforts are being made in Chile to integrate and unify the public system for early childhood education and care.

Despite these differences, the programmes share four features which in our view are more or less symptomatic of care-related policy making in the region. First, the commodification of care through ECEC services has not changed the fact that it is carried out by women. The low value accorded to what is still largely regarded “women's work” is evident in both cases. In Chile, where services are professionalized and preschool teachers organized to articulate their demands, salaries are nevertheless low compared to jobs requiring similar qualifications, and cross-institutional differences in pay and entitlements persist. In Mexico, childcare workers join the ranks of the self-employed without access to social security and protection. Although the highly decentralized and individualized mode of service provision is likely to hamper the employment prospects of workers, it would not be impossible to improve this situation within the modality of home-based daycare, for example, by creating links among childcare providers, promoting national organization and increasing workers' access to basic social rights.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> For Chile, a 2002 opinion poll revealed that 83 per cent of Chileans believed that preschool-aged children “suffer if their mother works” (cited in Franceschet 2006:202). The same poll showed that 66.7 per cent of Chileans believed that while it was acceptable for a woman to have a job, most women “want a home and children” (p.10).

<sup>49</sup> The latter is of course not restricted to the development context. As Kimberly Morgan shows, many Continental European countries face problems resulting from an institutional separation of preschool education and daycare. She argues that once preschool systems are installed as educational services “without care-giving vocation” (Morgan 2008:412), it can become difficult to adapt them to the needs of working parents (through extended schedules, for example) as teacher's unions and/or educational authorities may oppose such changes.

<sup>50</sup> The case of Flanders (Belgium) is illustrative. Here, the dominant policy since the 1970s has been to organize and subsidize home-based childminders. However, efforts are being made to professionalize these services, in terms of changing programme rules and

Second, the absence of men from policy debates around childcare is striking in both cases. Since it is hardly possible (nor particularly desirable) to commodify all unpaid care work, a large amount of it remains to be done even in cases where full-time quality ECEC services are available. There has been little improvement in public policies aimed at a more equal intra-household division of caring labour – at least formally by including fathers among those eligible for childcare services or parental leave. Maternity leave remains short and is still restricted to mothers. In Chile, fathers are entitled to four days of leave after childbirth since 2005 – a regulation that may have some symbolic value, but falls short of substantially changing gendered norms and practices in childrearing.

Third, there is little discussion about the kinds of jobs available to women from low-income (and often low educational) background – despite the fact that the extent to which recent policy innovations will increase women’s economic security critically depends on the kind of employment opportunities the countries’ growth models generate. This is indicative of post-Washington consensus frameworks, which have rehabilitated social policy, but fall short of recognizing the interrelated character of “the social” and “the economic”, and consequently ignore the need to integrate social and macroeconomic policy making into coherent strategies that take into account both production and social reproduction (Elson 2004). Thus, while the expansion of ECEC services certainly contributes to reducing women’s burdens of unpaid childcare, it does not in and of itself resolve gender inequalities. More and better policies are needed to improve women’s status and end discrimination in the labour market, including the promotion of women’s participation in stable and productive employment, the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, and investment in training opportunities (Mesa-Lago 2008).

Fourth, both programmes commit (at best) to the strengthening of “equal opportunities” for children and women from low-income households. In this sense, they reflect broader neoliberal priorities of “competitiveness at every level” (Cammack 2007:1), from the macroeconomic to the individual. This is deeply problematic in the face of the extreme social inequalities prevalent in both countries. The Chilean programme reflects the desire to make specific groups of children (from low-income backgrounds) “fit to compete” rather than to create an educational environment where children of different social classes can mix. At the same time, extending ECEC to these groups is certainly not enough to level the playing field, as long as the rest of the educational system remains unchanged. For however much a child may have been stimulated during its first years of life, he/she will still face a system of primary and secondary education where quality is dependent on the family’s income. This is apart from the obstacles he/she will face to access higher education because of high fees in both private and public universities. While Mexico’s cash transfer programme Oportunidades has similar ambitions of social investment at an early age, the country’s childcare service system seems to reproduce existing inequalities rather than mitigate them. Given the low cost and loosely regulated character of the recent childcare expansion in the country, the extent to which it is driven by a desire to encourage children’s development at all is – as has been shown – highly questionable.

Increasing policy attention to childcare services can provide an enormous opportunity for promoting children’s and women’s social and economic rights in highly unequal contexts. As this paper has shown, however, the devil is in the details of programme design. The extent to which childcare services can enhance gender equality and child development depends crucially on the state’s commitment to these goals, underpinned by sufficient financial resources and the effective regulation of quality.

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requirements as well as increased social rights for childminders, including access to pensions and unemployment benefits (Kremer 2006).

## Annexes

### Annex 1: Basic information on the main providers of care services, Mexico

	IMSS	IMSS outsourced	Sedesol	Total
Number of daycare centres	135	1,420	9,601	11,156
<i>Per cent of total</i>	<i>1.21</i>	<i>12.72</i>	<i>86.06</i>	<i>100</i>
Number of children taken care	28,063	204,131	330, 332	562, 526
<i>Per cent of total</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>100</i>
Annual budget (in millions of Mexican pesos/US thousands of dollars)	7,877 pesos (\$603.17)	—	2,722 pesos (\$208)	10,599 pesos (\$811.2)
<i>Per cent of total</i>	<i>74</i>	—	<i>26</i>	<i>100</i>
Average number of children per centre	208	144	34	128.6
Children's ages	45 days to 3 years	—	from 1 year up to 3 years 11 months	—

**Source:** Based on official documents and information requests to IMSS (no. 0064100671409), Sedesol's trimestral reports of the programme for daycare centres as well as information request no. 0002000081309.

**Annex 2: Required staff per daycare centre according to modality, Mexico**

	IMSS		IMSS outsourced		Sedesol
	12 positions		10 positions		2 positions
<i>Personnel at the daycare centre</i>	Director	Kitchen assistant	Director	Nutritional advisor	Person responsible for the care centre
	Educational area coordinator	Janitor	Coordinator of the area of health and healthy habits	Kitchen chef	1 assistant per 8 children
	Educator/teacher	Concierge/security	Educational area coordinator	Kitchen assistant	
	Coordinator of the area of health and healthy habits	Assistants to take care of the groups of children under 1 year and 6 months old	Educator/teacher	Janitor	
	Nutritional advisor	Assistants to take care of the group of children between 1 year and 7 months to 3 years 11 months	Teaching assistant	Concierge/security	
	Kitchen chef	Assistants to take care of the group of children between 4 years old and the oldest children in the institution			

**Source:** Based on official documents and information request to IMSS (No. 0064100671409), Sedesol's trimestral reports of the programme for daycare centres as well as information request No. 0002000081309.

**Annex 3: Staff-to-child ratio as specified by programme rules  
 for different modalities, Mexico**

	<b>IMSS</b>	<b>IMSS Outsourced</b>	<b>Sedesol</b>
Proportion of adults per children	1 Teaching assistant for every 4 children under 1 year 6 months	Not specified in the manuals	Besides the person responsible for the care centre, who should always be present, there must be 1 assistant for every 8 children
	1 Teaching assistant for every 12 children between the ages of 1 year 7 months up to 3 years 11 months		
	1 Teaching assistant for every 14 children older than 4 years		

**Source:** Based on official documents and information request to IMSS (No. 0064100671409), and Sedesol's trimestral reports of the programme for daycare centres, as well as information request No. 0002000081309.

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