

Spain's Quality Framework for Early Childhood Intervention Services

Summary

Spain has adopted a quality framework with concrete lines of actions, setting out standards for universally available, publicly funded, timely early childhood intervention (ECI) services for children under the age of 6. The ECI model is family-centred, aimed at providing support in the child's natural environment (e.g. home and school).

It uses comprehensive developmental assessment and sets waiting time targets for intervention after identification of

developmental risk.

Key actions include: putting in place regional teams, services and financing systems, collaboration between ECI professionals and families, implementing prevention strategies addressing the biopsychosocial factors needed for healthy development, and an evaluation system to continually improve quality.



Target audience

- Policy makers, grassroots organisations, early years professionals, autonomous local governments



Delivery settings

- National framework implemented by local government



Objectives

Implement high quality, effective, timely and free early care, by 2030. Provide ECI at a maximum of 45 days from identification of early risk. Agreement that 0 to 6 years is a crucial stage for the foundations of children's development. Promote healthy development through a family-centred approach ensuring all children experience an optimal environment for development.' (State Strategy for the Rights of Children and Adolescents 2023-2030)



Costs

- €41.8 m



Professionals involved

- Policy makers
- early years providers
- healthcare professionals
- education professionals



Leading organization:

- Early Intervention Technical Group, coordinated by Ministries of Social Rights, Health, Education and Youth and Children



Countries

Spain

How can this practice be implemented?

- Hold inter-sectoral dialogue between ministries, regional governments to secure buy-in and create a shared understanding of ECI.
- Engage and collaborate with grassroots organisations involved in delivering existing ECI services.
- Establish coordinating structures (e.g technical groups) with clear roles across ministries involved.
- Identify key targets based on European frameworks and commitments.
- Translate targets into concrete measures and quality standards.
- Create financing mechanisms aligned with implementation timeframe.
- Monitor performance indicators towards achieving targets

Implementation Highlights

Implementation involves achieving consensus amongst multiple stakeholders from the start of the process, building in accountability through a national roadmap, identifying financing mechanisms, and embedded evaluation.



Further information:

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Impact

The quality framework is currently being implemented as part of a wider agenda to implement the European Child Guarantee by 2030, with evaluation ongoing. Initial feedback suggest ECI services are becoming more equitably distributed regionally, with more joined up transition between ECI and education. Initial evidence suggests waiting times for early intervention and numbers of children on waitlists have reduced significantly.



What makes this a good practice?

Impact: does it work?

Effectiveness and efficiency

The quality framework is an agreed set of standards translating commitments into action for improving ECI services. It garners the buy-in of cross-governmental stakeholders through establishing a technical group and sets a target to achieve these quality standards by 2030. Funds have been allocated to support local governments in implementation. Initial evidence suggests that waiting times for intervention and waiting lists have reduced, but embedded evaluation will provide evidence of effectiveness in future.

Reach: who can benefit?

Equity and access

The quality framework includes a focus on wider biopsychosocial factors affecting children's development. ECI services are implemented as a universal, public and free right, which addresses barriers to access.

Transferability and scalability

Each local government can introduce their own quality improvement process, based on regional need, to meet the quality standards. The same standards that could be prioritised by other countries seeking to improve ECI services. It was developed to achieve commitment to an EU framework, the European Child Guarantee.

Integration: keeping it going and working across sectors

Sustainability

Funds are allocated through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), distributed regionally based on need.

Intersectorality

It involves multiple governmental ministries, with leadership from an intersectoral ECI National Technical Group.

References and additional tools to favour translation

1. La Moncloa. First state agreement to improve early care and reduce waiting times approved. 2025. Accessed June 22, 2026. <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/gobierno/news/paginas/2025/20250131-early-care.aspx>
2. Ministry of Social Rights, Consumer Affairs and 2030 Agenda. Agreement establishing the "State Consensus for the Improvement of Early Intervention. Deployment of the Roadmap: objectives, measures and general quality standards. Official State Gazette. 2025. Accessed June 22, 2026.
3. Ministry of Social Rights, Consumer Affairs and 2030 Agenda. State Strategy for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (2023-2030). 2023. Accessed June 22, 2026. <https://www.juventudeinfancia.gob.es/en/childhood/planes-estrategicos/estrategia-estatal-derechos-infancia-adolescencia>
4. Ministry of Social Rights, Consumer Affairs and 2030 Agenda. CHILDREN WITH RIGHTS
5. National Action Plan to Implement the European Child Guarantee (2022-2030). 2022. Accessed June 22, 2026. <https://www.gov.ie/en/departments-of-children-disability-and-equality/publications/strategy-2019-2028/>