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Relationship between the right to Early Childhood Education, provision expansion, and quality

Relação entre o direito à Educação Infantil, expansão da oferta e a qualidade pansion, and quality

Relación entre el derecho a la educación infantil, la expansión de la oferta y la calidad

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Abstract

The study analyses the relationship between the right to early childhood education, expansion of provision, and quality in municipalities in the Florianópolis Metropolitan Region, Santa Catarina, based on a comparison of the legal framework, data from the Demographic Census, the School Census, and the National Education Plan Monitoring. The methodology integrated qualitative and quantitative approaches, analyzing and interpreting data at the national and municipal levels based on

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legislation and academic research. The objective was to understand how public authorities organize access to and provision, considering the size of the networks and other challenges that affect the quality of service. The following was observed: an expansion in enrolment in the private network, which did not guarantee universal access to preschool; an expansion in provision, which was, however, insufficient and unequal in relation to the manifest demand, with the 0-3 age group being the most affected; the partialization and lack of full-time enrolment in some municipalities; and the majority of special education enrolments in the public network. Inequality in access, which is more prevalent for some populations, compromises social quality, employment, and income opportunities for families, and the quality of life and well-being of children, starting with infants. Overcoming this requires continuous, equitable, and intersectoral public policies.

Keywords: Right to education. Expansion and quality. Early childhood education. Public policies.

Resumo

O estudo analisa a relação entre o direito à Educação Infantil, a expansão da oferta e a qualidade nos municípios da Região Metropolitana de Florianópolis/SC, a partir do cotejamento do arcabouço legal, dos dados do Censo Demográfico, do Censo Escolar e do Monitoramento do Plano Nacional de Educação. A metodologia integrou abordagens qualitativas e quantitativas, analisando e interpretando dados em nível nacional e municipal com base na legislação e na produção acadêmica. O objetivo foi compreender como o poder público organiza o acesso e a oferta, considerando o porte das redes e demais desafios que influenciam na qualidade do atendimento. Constata-se: a expansão de matrículas na rede privada, o que não garantiu a universalização da pré-escola; a expansão da oferta, contudo, insuficiente e desigual para a demanda manifesta, sendo a faixa etária de 0 a 3 anos a mais afetada; a parcialização e a inexistência de matrículas de período integral em alguns municípios e; a maioria das matrículas da educação especial na rede pública. A desigualdade no acesso com maior recorrência para algumas populações compromete a qualidade social, as oportunidades de emprego e renda das famílias e a qualidade de vida e bem-estar das crianças, desde bebês. Sua superação requer políticas públicas contínuas, equitativas e intersetoriais.

Palavras-chave: *Direito à educação. Expansão e qualidade. Educação Infantil. Políticas públicas.*

Resumen

El estudio analiza la relación entre el derecho a la educación infantil, la expansión de la oferta y la calidad en los municipios de la región metropolitana de Florianópolis/SC, a partir de la comparación del marco legal, los datos del censo demográfico, del censo escolar y del seguimiento del Plan Nacional de Educación. La metodología integró enfoques cualitativos y cuantitativos, analizando e interpretando datos a nivel nacional y municipal con base en la legislación y en la producción académica. El objetivo fue comprender cómo el poder público organiza el acceso y la oferta, considerando el tamaño de las redes y otros desafíos que influyen en la calidad del servicio. Se constata: la expansión de las matrículas en la red privada, lo que no garantiza la universalización de la educación preescolar; la expansión de la oferta, sin embargo, insuficiente y desigual para la demanda manifiesta, siendo la franja etaria de 0 a 3 años la más afectada; la parcialización y la inexistencia de matrículas de período integral en algunos municipios y; la mayoría de las matrículas de educación especial en la red pública. La desigualdad en el acceso, más frecuente para algunas poblaciones, compromete la calidad social, las oportunidades de empleo y los ingresos de las familias, así como la calidad de vida y el bienestar de los niños desde la primera infancia. Para superarla se requieren políticas públicas continuas, equitativas e intersectoriales.

Palabras clave*: Derecho a la educación. Expansión y calidad. Educación infantil. Políticas públicas.*

1. Introduction

Data from *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE), collected by the *PNAD Contínua* [Continuous National Household Sample Survey], show a significant migration process in Brazil. This internal and international migration leads to population increase mainly in urban and metropolitan regions. Migration is largely motivated by the search for better life conditions and greater access to social, economic, and cultural services. This population dynamic broadens social demand and the challenges for public management in providing policies that ensure basic citizenship rights.

The Metropolitan region of Florianópolis [*Região Metropolitana de Florianópolis*- RMF], officially recognized as a metropolis in 2010, is composed of nine municipalities and has shown significant migration growth in recent years, from other regions of the country and abroad. This population intensification is connected to the search for employment and income opportunities, resulting in demographic densification, as well as asymmetries in the fields of rights and the increase of social inequalities.

Besides the differences related to population size, the 9 municipalities that compose the RMG present educational differences. Based on IBGE studies, the *PNAD Contínua*, and the School Census, this study describes and analyzes the municipalities' profiles and the educational variations in the provision and access to Early Childhood Education. Using Target 1 of the *Plano Nacional de Educação* (National Education Plan- PNE) 2014-2024 (Brasil, 2014) as a reference, we seek to investigate the implications regarding the right to Early Childhood Education, expansion, and the quality of provision in the municipalities of the region investigated. The discussion is supported by indexes and strategies for how educational policy is implemented locally.

The educational demands in the municipalities and the Federal District are concentrated in access and offer conditions of Early Childhood Education to ensure children's rights, as they guarantee the fulfillment of the Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1988) and the other laws derived from it, mainly those related to the educational policy and children's rights. Education is established as a subjective public right, that is, an inalienable asset, legally confirmed and that ensures the shareholder, in this case, the families, the right to demand its fulfillment from the government for all children, since they are babies, no matter if they were born in the country or not.

Considering the inalienable right to education, Rosemberg (2001, p.25) presents the concept of demand as a "felt/latent and expressed need". We can identify the expressed demand as the one "explicit or manifested" through the search for a service and a registration in a waiting list; the "latent or potential demand" is not expressed spontaneously and requires different mechanisms of active search and intersectoral data for its identification. In this sense, Coutinho and Moro (2023, p.271), when discussing the fulfillment of PNE's Target 1 (Brasil, 2014), point out the importance of efficient educational policies to continuously monitor the demand for enrollment as a weighted quality index based on PNE. Hence, the Plan aims to guide public policies and funding for Brazilian education.

The approval process of the current PNE 2026-2036 was marked by broad social participation and legislative debate, culminating in Law nº 15.388/2026 (Brasil, 2026). The Plan establishes 19 objectives, 73 targets, and 372 strategies focused on the expansion, equity, and quality of the offer. Within the established deadlines, states, municipalities, and the Federal District follow the same guideline when creating the State Education Plans [*Planos Estaduais de Educação*- PEEs] and the Municipal Education Plans [*Planos Municipais de Educação*- PMEs] in agreement with the National Plan.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate access to and the offer of Early Childhood Education to meet the demands of the population in the Metropolitan Region of Florianópolis (RMF) and the access asymmetries in Early Childhood Education that exist in these municipalities. This study methodology is based on the articulation between qualitative and quantitative approaches, through the comparison of information and its interpretation, grounded in the legal framework and academic productions. Thus, we seek to understand how access and provision are managed by the government, considering the size of the systems and the key challenges for the quality of the offer in Early Childhood Education.

In addition to this introduction, in the first section we present the context studied, based on data from the School Census, IBGE data, and PNE Monitoring, among others, from the RMF municipalities. In the other sections, we present: (ii) the Evolution of Early Childhood coverage through the comparison of national averages and the RMF and among the municipalities; and (iii) a discussion of results, final remarks, and references.

2. The context studied

The Metropolitan Region is composed of the Florianópolis conurbation and neighboring municipalities, creating a single continuous urban area. According to the IBGE (2024), around 1,17,811 people live in this area. The metropolitan center is composed of the following municipalities: Antônio Carlos, Águas Mornas, Biguaçu, Florianópolis, Governador Celso Ramos, Palhoça, São José, São Pedro de Alcântara, Santo Amaro da Imperatriz, and Florianópolis, the capital of Santa Catarina. Considered to have a high Municipal Human Development Index *[Índice de Desenvolvimento Humano Municipal*- IDHM] between 0.723 and 0.847[1], the region has a remarkable socioeconomic level in the national scenario, however, socioeconomic asymmetries are perceived by the population. Its natural beauty boosts tourism, and quality-of-life indicators stand out when compared to other Brazilian metropolitan regions. Theoretically, these characteristics justify the demographic explosion in the last 5 years, challenging public policies to offer basic social services, such as health, education, security, urban mobility, and others.

The 5th PNE Report (Inep, 2024) presents revealing national data: 40.3% of children between 0 and 3 years old in urban areas attend daycare, while in rural areas this number drops to 20.7%. As can be seen in Table 1, most RMF institutions are located in urban areas. The municipalities of Santo Amaro da Imperatriz with 15.8% and Biguaçu with 8.7% have the highest percentage of Early Childhood institutions in rural areas, followed by Palhoça with 3.8%. Florianópolis has a low percentage (1,5%) of rural institutions, which are nonexistent in the other municipalities. Social class is another category not available in the municipality's data table, mainly regarding daycare centers. Considering the national index, 28. 2% in the poorest quintile and 53.6% in the richest one have access to daycare.

Table 1 also presents the compilation of educational data on enrollments, initially in regular education, followed by enrollments in Early Childhood Education in the public and private systems, faculty, and the number of schools. The municipality of Antônio Carlos, for example, has, on average, 25% of all the enrollments offered for Early Childhood Education, the other municipalities have an average between 20% and 25%.

[1] IDHM, is measured by the *Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada* (IPEA) and the United National. It is considered high from 0.700 up, in a scale that reaches 1. The index is based on three components: population's longevity, education, and income.

Table 1 – Characteristics of the municipalities in the Metropolitan Region of Florianópolis based on the open data of the School Census (Inep, 2024)

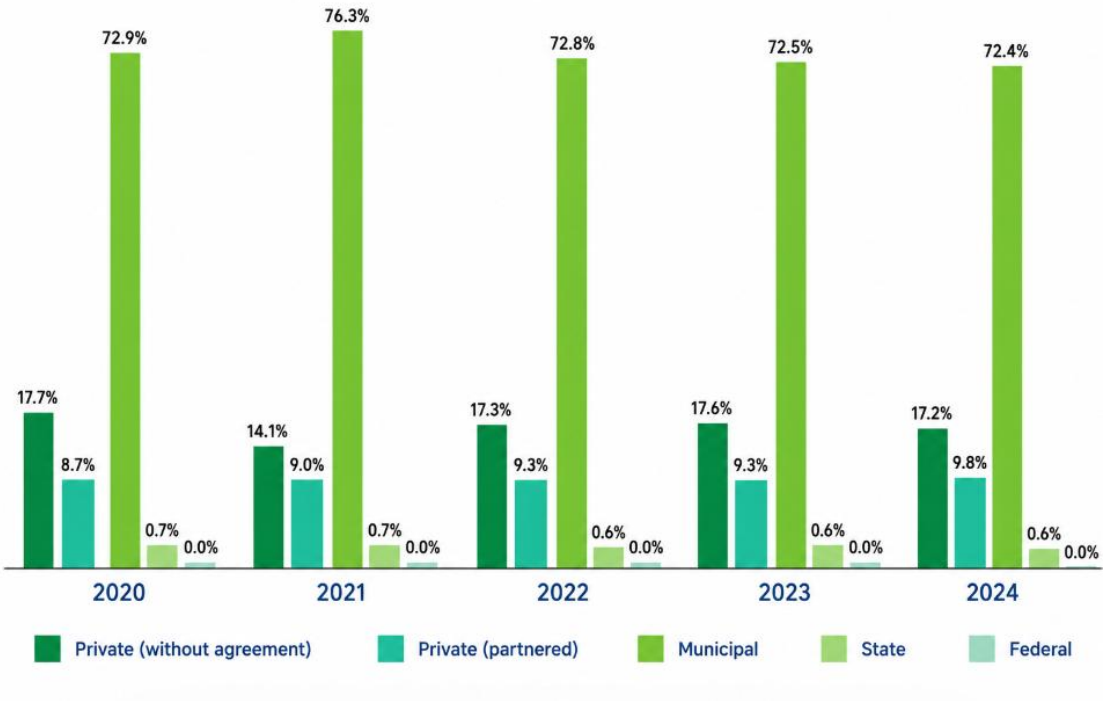
Municipality Population	Population	IDHM	Total of Enrollments		Enrollments for each phase of Early Child. Ed.%		Enrollments fulltime %		Early Child.Teachers			Enrollment in institutions %		Number of Schools		Schools Location/ Territory %	
			Regular Education	Early Child. Ed.	Daycare	Pre-School	Daycare	Pre-School	Total	% M	% F	Municipal	Private	Municipal	Private	Urban	Rural
Antonio Carlos	11,224	0.749	2,887	702	51.71	48.29	-	-	43	-	100	100	-	5 (100%)	-	100	-
Águas Mornas	6,743	0.723	1,390	359	47.08	52.92	10.7	6.3	23	-	100	100	-	2 (100%)	-	100	-
Biguaçu	76,773	0.739	15,845	3,322	42.36	57.64	29.6	10.9	283	7.8	92.2	84.3	15.7	17 (73.9%)	6 (26.1%)	91.3	8.7
Florianópolis	537,211	0.847	104,492	25,042	50.23	49.77	45	34.9	2,217	6.7	93.3	64.4	34.5	92 (46%)	108 (54%)	98.5	1.5
Governador Celso Ramos	16,915	0.747	3,691	931	49.84	50.16	21.1	22.7	87	6	94	100	-	8 (100%)	-	100	-
Palhoça	222,598	0.757	49,805	10,982	48.95	51.05	5.8	6	1,060	2.1	97.9	62	38	43 (55.1%)	35 (44.9%)	96.2	3.8
Santo Amaro da Imperatriz	27,272	0.781	6,230	1,630	55.4	44.6	25.6	8	162	0.6	99.4	92	8	16 (84.2%)	3 (15.8%)	84.2	15.8
São José	270,299	0.809	52,586	11,656	44.17	55.83	49	20.3	878	43	83.5	65.8	34.2	40 (46.5%)	46 (53.5%)	100	-
São Pedro de Alcântara	5,776	0.734	1,273	266	52.26	47.74	74.8	-	27	3.7	96.3	100	-	2 (100%)	-	100	-

Source: Created by the authors based on the School Census (Inep, 2024), IBGE/2022 Census https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/areas-de-atuacao/pesquisas-estatisticas-e-indicadores/censo-escolar/resultados, IBGE/2022. Available at: https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/sc/panorama Accessed June 23, 2025.

The largest part of Early Childhood Education (ECE) is offered by the public system. Only the smaller cities offer places exclusively in the municipal system[2]: Antônio Carlos, Águas Mornas, Governador Celso Ramos, and São Pedro de Alcântara. In the medium-sized cities (Palhoça and São José), as well as in Florianópolis (a large city), 35% of enrollments, on average, are in the private system. In Biguaçu and Santo Amaro da Imperatriz, the percentage is between 15.7% and 8%, respectively. In Florianópolis, 0.7% (165) of places are offered by the federal system. In Florianópolis and São José, the number of private institutions (108 and 46, respectively) surpasses the public ones (92 and 40, respectively), indicating an accelerated process of system privatization and increasing the likelihood of purchasing private places to meet the demand instead of constructing new buildings to offer public places. We can observe that the municipalities with larger populations are more prone to offer places in the private system.

Even though, according to IBGE, on average 88% of Brazilian municipalities are small and the largest part of Early Childhood Education continues to be offered by the public system, we can see an increase in public-private partnerships, as seen in Figure 1. Between 2020 and 2024, there was a 1.1% increase, and between 2023 and 2024, a 0.5% increase.

Figure 1 – Percentage of enrollments in Early Childhood Education, according to administration (private system separated between affiliated or not to the public system) – Brazil 2020-2024



Source: created by DEED/INEP, based on the Censo Escolar da Educação Básica (Inep 2024, p. 23).

According to the *Censo Escolar* [School Census] (Inep, 2024), municipal systems and private/affiliated have a higher participation in Early Childhood Education, with 72.4% and 27% of enrollments in 2024, respectively. Out of all enrollments in the private system, 36.3% are in partnership with the government.

[2] IBGE classifies as Small-sized I, municipalities with up to 20,000 people, there are 3,861 of them (69.32%); Small-sized II, those between 20,000 and 50,000 inhabitants: 1.052 municipalities (18.89%); Medium-sized, those with a population between 50,000 and 100,000: 338 (6.07%); and Large-sized, those with over 100,000 inhabitants (including the metropolises): 319 (5.73%).

Considering the arrangements each municipality adopts, public-private partnerships might have different funding rules, normally targeting communities with a lack of public education provision and a predominance of itinerant programs and projects at the expense of State policies. Cruz *et al.*'s (2021) study shows that many private Early Childhood Education institutions with partnerships with the government have structural frailties, lack of materials, and limited pedagogical interactions. Besides the precariousness of structural and human resources, in many cases, there is a lack of teachers' job and salary plans with limited or nonexistent continuous education, which deepens educational inequalities, compromising the right to good-quality education.

For this educational segment, municipalities are also responsible for managing the resources, according to the Law of Fiscal Responsibility [*Lei de Responsabilidade Fisca l*-LRF] nº 101/2000. Its implementation is justified by the balance of public money through mechanisms of fiscal austerity that limit the State's ability to increase social investments, mainly in education and health. LRF, articulated with fiscal adjustment policies and a spending cap, has been criticized for restricting the funding of social policies, subordinating the expansion of social rights to targets of budgetary balance and the payment of public debts and financial expenses.

In the educational field, these restrictions compromise the conditions for providing and enforcing the right to education. In this historical context, several studies, among them Pinto (2018), analyze 30 years of the constitutional bond of resources. Even though it represents a historical conquest, it is not enough to ensure minimum quality standards, demanding compatible funding with the real needs of education systems and the definition of an adequate cost per student to ensure a good-quality public education that is socially guided. According to the author, social quality refers to the democratization of access, permanence conditions with a physical structure that meets the minimal standards of school functioning, and teachers' valuing and continuous education (Pinto, 2018).

In turn, the impact of the austerity policy can be seen in inequality of access for certain populations, mainly for the age range between 0 and 3 years old. We can also perceive partial service even in urban areas, where many working families need full-time daycare. Thus, the state needs to increase the quantity and the duration of provision of education, care, and protection for children by offering full-time places.

At the RMF, most places are part-time, possibly driven by increased demand and the expansion of provision in a short period of time. Antonio Carlos does not offer full-time places. In São Pedro de Alcântara, full-time offer is provided only in daycare centers, encompassing approximately 75% of children; however, the total demand is only 139 places. In the largest municipalities of the region, São José (49%) and Florianópolis (45%), almost half of daycare enrollments are full-time, while the percentage for pre-school drops to 20.3% and 34.9%, respectively. In Biguaçu and Santo Amaro da Imperatriz, 29.6% and 25.6% of daycare enrollments are full-time. In Governador Celso Ramos there is an average of 22% full-time places for daycare and preschool. In the other municipalities, the percentage is under 10%. However, the same *Censo Escolar* (Inep, 2024) presents an increase in the number of full-time enrollments in Elementary and Secondary School to comply with the federal legislation, mainly for the age ranges that participate in the evaluations of *Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica* (Basic Education Assessment System-Saeb).

3. What do data say about the evolution of Early Childhood Education in the macro and microsystem?

The concept of systems, developed by Bronfenbrenner, deals with the relationships established between macro and microsystems. In this study, we refer to the macrosystem as the structures in Brazil or Brazilian regions, and the microsystem as the systems at the municipal level. Therefore, data and national and local educational policies are interconnected mainly in the offer of Early Childhood Education places, which affect the microsystems. Hence, we present data on access and the offer of places for daycare and preschool nationwide, per region, and, whenever available, at the municipal level related to the RMF.

According to the Report *5º Ciclo de Monitoramento das Metas do PNE* (Inep, 2024), in 2022, despite an average of 93%, preschool is still not universalized, which was the Plan's target. In the age range between 0 and 3 years old, the target was 50%, but the national average was 37.3%. According to the *Censo Escolar 2024*, the Brazilian South region reached 42.5% of daycare coverage. Santa Catarina stood out in the region, reaching 49.5%. Preschool reached 93.2% in the South region, and Santa Catarina was the state with the highest index of coverage, with 94.4% of the population being attended (Inep, 2024).

These data show the discrepancy in educational coverage between daycare and preschool, reflected in the segregation of enrollments and its relationship with mandatory nature. Nonetheless, there was an expansion of the offer, though insufficient and unequal when considering the manifested demand, especially affecting the age range between 0 and 3 years old.

Also based on the *Censo Escolar*, we analyzed the evolution of enrollments at RMF. We can notice an increase in Early Childhood Education enrollment in the last decade in all municipalities studied, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 – Evolution in Early Childhood Education enrollment in the municipalities of Região Metropolitana de Florianópolis/SC- Censo Escolar 2014-2024.

Municipality	2014	2016	2018	2020	2022	2024	% increase
Antonio Carlos	417	460	537	577	642	702	67.6%
Águas Mornas	172	257	280	274	309	359	108.7%
Biguaçu	2038	2707	2976	3512	3344	3322	63%
Florianópolis	20866	21876	22849	23675	24692	25042	20%
Governador Celso Ramos	492	773	844	942	993	931	89.2%
Palhoça	5566	5934	7120	8821	9596	10982	97.3%
Santo Amaro da Imperatriz	907	981	1274	1432	1657	1610	77.5%
São José	7015	8200	9803	10259	11491	11656	66.2%
São Pedro de Alcântara	153	180	207	239	224	266	73.9%

Source: created by the authors based on Censo Escolar 2014-2024 (Inep, 2024).

The number of enrollments increased sharply over the last decade, as shown in the last column of Table 2 for almost all municipalities. Only Florianópolis, the State capital and largest city, increased the number of enrollments by 20%. The other municipalities increased by more than 60%, while Palhoça, Governador Celso Ramos, and Águas Mornas almost doubled the number of enrollments.

Regarding the offer of enrollments between 0- and 3-year-old children in the Brazilian regions. Table 3 presents the quantitative evolution of enrollments per region and age range (0 to 1 year old; 2 to 3, and 4 to 5) in the last decade.

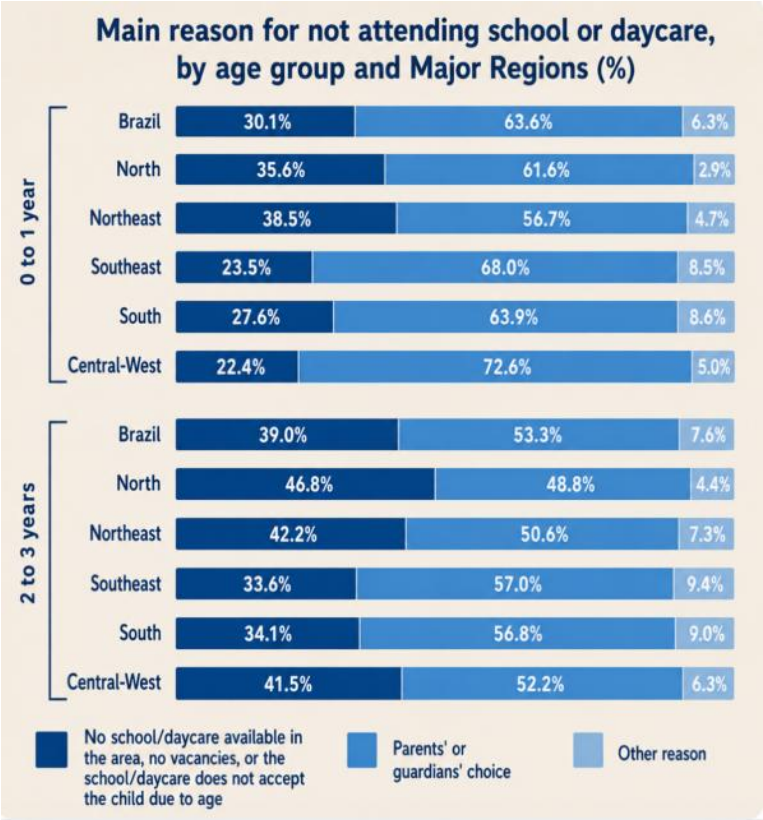
Table 3 – Percentage (%) of school enrollment rate per age range, Brazil and Regions (2016, 2022,and 2024)

Regions	School Enrollment Rate %								
	0 to 1 year old			2 to 3 years old			4 to 5 years old		
	2016	2022	2024	2016	2022	2024	2016	2022	2024
Brazil	11.3	14.5	17.4	49.1	54.4	58.5	90.0	91.5	93.4
North	1.8	3.4	4.8	27.6	33.4	37.4	83.9	82.6	88.0
Northeast	4.4	5.7	8.1	49.0	55.2	60.2	93.6	93.3	93.7
Southeast	15.7	21.8	25.0	55.5	60.9	63.0	90.6	93.1	94.6
South	21.3	24.6	27.0	53.3	61.3	63.0	88.3	89.7	93.2
Center West	10.9	11.8	14.2	38.3	45.8	47.7	87.4	89.6	91.4

Source: IBGE, PNAD Contínua 2016/2024.

The RMF municipalities are part of the South region, which has the highest access rates compared to the other Brazilian regions. However, we can see that the lower the age, the higher the deficit of places. For babies between 0 and 1 year old, for instance, there was a slight increase from 21.3% to 27% in the last decade. From 2 to 3 years old, the increase was 10 p.p. and 5 p.p. for the compulsory age range of 4 to 5 years old. There is an urgent need to monitor the manifested demanded for places in Early Childhood Education, mainly for the daycare age. According to data from *PNAD Contínua 2022*, as shown on Figure 2, the main reason for children not to attend daycare is that parents or guardians have not chosen this option, a number always above 50%.

Figure 2 – Percentage of the main reason for not attending Early Childhood Education per Brazilian region



Source: Adapted from IBGE, PNAD Contínua/2024.

Considering the data by region, we can see that more than 60% of families with babies aged 0 to 1 year have opted not to enroll their children in daycare. However, on average, 30% of them did not choose it because they had no access, while more than 40% of children from 2 to 3 years old had difficulties accessing it and, on average, 50% have opted not to express their interest in enrollment. Less than 10% indicated other reasons. The data presented show a nationwide deficit of places that reaches up to 30% of the population from 0 to 1 year old and increases to 39% in the age range from 2 to 3 years old.

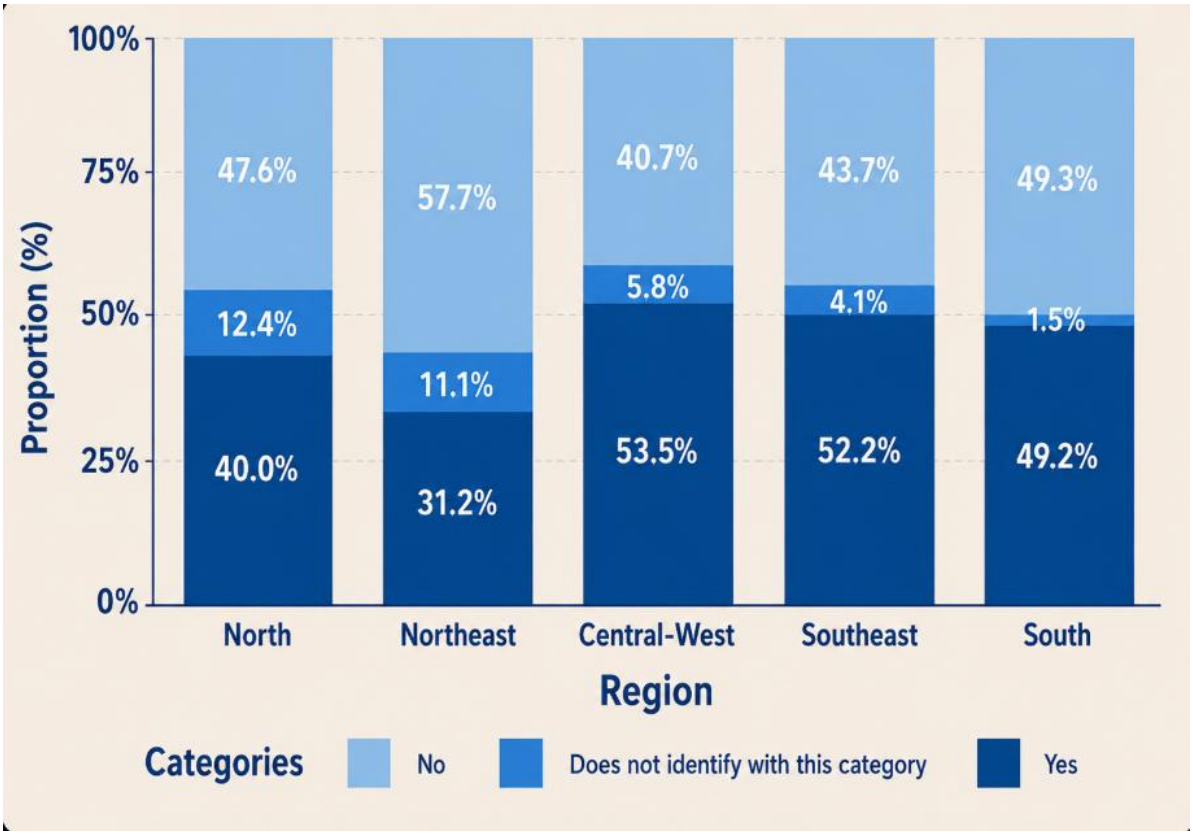
This data raises important questions. Considering that many families depend on formal work to survive, to what extent does the non-attendance at daycare result from a real choice of the families? Furthermore, we should question whether the decision not to enroll the children is related to an option of family care or related to the conditions for babies' access and permanence, which, according to guardians' opinions, do not meet their needs for well-being and security. For instance, distance, time spent on school transport, and available conditions, among others. In this context, we can observe that the largest gap in accessing the right to education is concentrated in this age range, highlighting the limits of public policies to attend to this population.

To better understand this issue, we turn to the study entitled "*Panorama do acesso à Educação Infantil no Brasil - 2024*" [Panorama of access to Early Childhood Education in Brazil- 2024] commissioned by the Ministry of Education (MEC) to the Cabinet of Articulation for the Effectiveness of Education Policies in Brazil (Gaepe-Brasil, 2024), collected by the MEC Integrated System of Monitoring, Execution, and Control (Simec). The study gathered data related to: i) Daycare Criteria for Admission and Management of Enrollments; ii) Preschool Admission and Management of Enrollments; iii) Institutional Collaboration; and iv) Information Collection about Children and Families. The study was implemented through online questionnaires filled out by the Education Secretaries of the municipal education system between June 18 and August 05, 2024, in compliance with Law nº 14.851/2024, which determines the survey and publication of the demand for places in daycare centers, as well as the planning to expand the offer. It found out that:

> The North Region has the highest percentage of municipalities that do not identify the waiting list for daycare (12.4%, 56 municipalities), followed by the Northeast (11.1%, 199 municipalities); ◦ North Region: 40% of municipalities have a waiting list and 47.6% do not; ◦ Northeast Region: 31.2% of municipalities have a waiting list and 57.7% do not; ◦ Highest percentage of municipalities that have a waiting list for attendance in daycare are at the Center West (53.5%), Southeast (52.2%), and South (49.2%) regions (Gaepe-Brasil, 2024, p.15).

According to this report, the presence of a waiting list is more recurrent in large municipalities than in smaller ones. Graph 1, taken from the study, portrays the data already mentioned regarding the demand manifested for places in daycare centers, as follows:

Graph 1 – Distribution of municipalities according to the presence of a waiting list in each Brazilian region



Souce: Adapted from Gaepe-Brasil, 2024, p. 14.

Based on the categories of PNAD Contínua/IBGE (2024), the data from Gaepe-Brasil (2024) has found that, among the reasons why babies and children do not attend daycare:

- Guardians' option (33%): perception that the children are too young for daycare and that early childhood should be experienced within the family for cultural or affective reasons; the non-mandatory nature for this age range; preference for fulltime places or specific institutions.
- Lack of places in the preferred unit (27%): lack of daycare centers to attend the demand; lack of places closes to the household or at the preferred units; inadequacy or lack of physical structure in existing daycare centers; overcrowding in the classes and school transport.
- Location and transport (20%): difficulty to reach the daycare center due to the distance between household and institution; logistic access issues, such as flooded roads or distant areas; prevalence of preference for units close to household or work; lack of adequate Transportation, mainly in rural areas.
- Documents and procedures (11%): not knowing about enrollment process; not paying attention to enrollment deadlines; missing the deadline due to address changes; incomplete or incorrect documents; records not updated.
- Specific population conditions (10%): high migration and enrollment turnover due to frequent address changes, guardians' lack of information on the importance of early childhood education (Gaepe-Brasil, 2024, our highlights).

Regarding Regarding the waiting list for preschool, the main reasons cited by municipalities were that guardians do not enroll their children or that they live in places that are difficult to reach, for example, in rural areas (Gaepe-Brasil, 2024, p.35). We consider the importance of this panorama as a commissioned study to map the macrosystem; Nonetheless, there are no municipal-level studies to support a contextual analysis. In the state of Santa Catarina, 52% of municipalities have no waiting list for childcare, 46% identify the number on the waiting list, but do not mention active-search strategies, and 2% do not identify these numbers (Gaepe-Brasil, 2024, p.16).

Hence, it was not possible to compare the RMF municipalities. The open data on waiting lists are not always available: in some municipalities, the websites are not updated; in others, the itinerant lists were released as a strategy to inform families, and a child can be on lists of 3 different institutions; that is, data could vary and were not compiled by categories. There are also waiting lists by regions/zones and not at the municipal level. Hence, we did not locate open data from PNAD Contínua for this age range in the Waiting list at the municipal level, and data can be made available only by hanging on the walls of the institutions, which makes this investigation impossible.

We consulted notices and ordinances about enrollments in all RMF municipalities, focusing on the criteria to access daycare in which, to be admitted, the child must have at least 4 months at the beginning of the school year. We noticed that the common access criteria required are: Child's birth certificate, CPF, or ID; Vaccination proof; Guardian's CPF; Work registration record and proof of income from all adults living in the child's household income per capita); Document of Bolsa Família Program or NIS (if it is the case); Proof of residence; Medical report (in the case of handicaps); Medical report or any document that proves any health problem and, if necessary, food restriction, allergy, diabetes, reflux, etc.

Another delineated factor is the zoning issue, that is, the address of the child's home or parents' work, mainly in the municipalities of Palhoça, Antônio Carlos, São José, and São Pedro de Alcântara. Florianópolis and Governador Celso Ramos have guidelines for migrant children and require the National Migration Record Document and/or the Protocol of Refugee Demand.

Pre-enrollment is done online or in person in most municipalities, except Águas Mornas, Santo Amaro da Imperatriz, and São Pedro de Alcântara. There is a priority for children that: a) are placed in family or institutional care services in Palhoça and Santo Amaro da Imperatriz; b) are in situations of rights threat or violation, in the terms of the Federal Law nº 8.069/1990, and that are being attended at CREAS [Social Services]. Palhoça also considers information related to the sum of expenses with housing and alimony (if it is the case).

At the macrosocial level (Brazil), besides the regional/age disparity of enrollments presented in Table 3, we can identify asymmetries in access for certain populations. The Report (Inep, 2024) presents data categorized byrace/color, sex, and territory, which can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4 – Percentage rate (%) of Early Childhood Education attendance in 2022 in Brazil per race/color, sex, and p.p. difference on the evolution in the decade

Age	Race/color		Sex		General Total		
	White	Black	M	F	2013	2022	Difference in decade
0 to 3 years old	39.6%	35.3%	37.0%	37.5%	27.9%	37.3%	9.4%
4 to 5 years old	93.4%	92.6%	93.1%	92.9%	87.9%	93%	5.1%

Source: Relatório do 5º ciclo de Monitoramento (Inep, 2024, pp 28-41).

We can notice that there was an increase in the percentage of enrollments from 0 to 3 years old in the last decade, however, this population still has the largest gap.

On table 5, we present the indicators in the percentage of Early Childhood Education Enrollment for RMF municipalities regarding race/color self-declaration:

Table 5- Percentage (%) of enrollment per race/color self-declared or not-declared- Censo Escolar 2024

Municipality	White	Black/Brown	Other	Total
Antonio Carlos	89.5	10.5	0.0	100
Águas Mornas	86.4	13.4	0.2	100
Biguaçu	74.7	24.9	0.4	100
Florianópolis	75.5	24.0	0.5	100
Governador Celso Ramos	92.5	7.3	0.2	100
Palhoça	81.6	18.1	0.3	100
Santo Amaro da Imperatriz	87.9	12.0	0.1	100
São José	73.2	26.3	0.5	100
São Pedro de Alcântara	95.2	4.8	0.0	100
Total average %	77.24	14.24	0.24	100

Source: Created by the authors based on the data from Censo Escolar (Inep,2024).

We can see that families who declare themselves as white are a majority, corresponding to 73% to 95% of all enrollments. Conversely, there is a low declaration of black/brown children in Early Childhood Education.

The School Census also provides data about the percentage of non-declared children. In the municipalities Biguaçu (21,7%), Palhoça (39,7%), São Pedro de Alcântara (38%), and in the capital (24,4%), while São José has 9.2% of non-declared children and the other RMF municipalities have less than 5%. Hypothetically, this information can be related to a non-identification with the categories mentioned or the lack of a group of ethnical-racial belonging in childhood (foreigners, yellow, Indigenous, among others). Inep data do not detail other races/ethnicities; however, there is an asymmetry of population self-declared as white in comparison to the others, showing the unequal access to Early Childhood Education that can reflect economic and social aspects, family employment, and income, and, consequently, children's and babies' life quality and well-being, among other aspects. In Table 6, we present the percentage of enrollments by gender.

Table 6 – Percentage (%) of enrollments regarding gender/sex in each RMF-2024 municipality

Municipality	% Daycare enrollments		% Preschool enrollments	
	M	F	M	F
Antonio Carlos	58.0	42.0	50.0	50.0

Municipality	% Daycare enrollments		% Preschool enrollments	
	M	F	M	F
Águas Mornas	55.9	44.1	49.3	50.7
Biguaçu	51.3	48.6	49.4	50.6
Florianópolis	51.0	49.0	51.2	49.8
Governador Celso Ramos	50.6	49.4	50.5	49.4
Palhoça	51.2	48.8	50.9	49.1
Santo Amaro da Imperatriz	50.4	49.6	54.5	45.5
São José	51.6	48.4	50.5	49.5
São Pedro de Alcântara	47.5	52.5	50.4	49.6

Source: Created by the authors based on the Censo Escolar (Inep, 2024).

Regarding Table 6, although boys predominate in most municipalities, among the other categories analyzed, this percentage is the most equitable. Only in the municipality of Antônio Carlos is the difference higher, reaching 16 p.p., and in Águas Mornas, 12 p.p. In the other municipalities, the difference is between 2 and 3 p.p.

Table 7 presents enrollment for special education in five municipalities of RMF. In the municipalities of Antônio Carlos, Águas Mornas, Governador Celso Ramos, and São Pedro de Alcântara, all Special Education enrollments are in the public system.

Table 7- Percentage (%) of Special Education enrollment for each RMF municipality- 2024

Municipality	% Daycare enrollment		% Preschool enrollment	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Biguaçu	97.2	2.8	95.5	4.5
Florianópolis	89.1	10.9	79.0	21.0
Palhoça	89.0	11.0	85.0	15.0
Santo Amaro da Imperatriz	97.0	3.0	93.8	6.2
São José	84.0	16.0	83.2	16.8

Source: Created by the authors based on the Censo Escolar (Inep, 2024).

Nonetheless, Florianópolis, Palhoça, and São José are different from other municipalities. A large city, Florianópolis has one of the largest offers of places for special education in private institutions (10.9% daycare and 21% preschool), followed by São José (16% and 16.8%) and Palhoça (11% and 15%). In Biguaçu, 2.8% of daycare and 4.5% of preschool enrollments in special education are in private institutions (Inep, 2024). In the municipalities of Antônio Carlos, Águas Mornas, Governador Celso Ramos, and São Pedro de Alcântara, public institutions (100%) offer all special education places. Generally, we can see that the special education enrollments are mostly concentrated in public institutions.

It is important to highlight that special education from an inclusive perspective requires investments in accessibility, pedagogical resources, and Specialized Education Services, a complementary service in the classroom to identify and remove barriers that hinder the participation and learning of children with handicaps, global developmental disorders (such as autism spectrum disorder- ASD), and high abilities. In this sense, ensuring educational quality requires the structural adequacy of spaces and the increase of professionals and continuous teacher education, to promote inclusive pedagogical and anti-ableist practices.

4. Result discussion

The data presented show a quantitative increase in enrollment in Early Childhood Education in the RMF municipalities, impacting system reconfiguration and demanding greater technical, pedagogical, and financial public management. We have seen that all RMF municipalities comply with the national legislation, because they have the Municipal Education Plan grounded in the law[3], and are elaborating new plans. Therefore, there is, theoretically, a ten-year plan with objectives and targets to be reached.

During the study, we also observed gaps regarding data availability at the municipal level (microsystem), the context in which Early Childhood Education is offered, and the institutional sphere responsible for this phase. This factor might limit the monitoring and the elaboration of public policies. We also perceived that most places offered for enrollment in the municipalities of the RMF are part-time. The population from 0 to 3 years old is the one with the highest deficit of offer of places, possibly due to the non-obligatory nature of enrollment, even though Brazilian laws dictate the obligation of governmental offer of places.

Data from PNE, PMEs, *Censo Escolar,* and *PNAD Contínua* are fundamental to monitor information about the application of resources in structural questions, materials, teacher education, among other factors that contribute to the quality of offer. We reaffirm the need for an active search to identify the manifested demand for Early Childhood Education per municipality, as well as equitable public policies, foreseen funding, accessibility conditions, and increasing the offer of places to guarantee the right to education.

Target 1 of the current PNE (Brasil, 2014) fomented municipalities' decision- making when building the political agenda to monitor quality through a biannual assessment, by monitoring provision, access, obligation, free education, funding, organization, and curriculum standardization. These aspects are essential for municipalities to organize their educational system with comprehensive access and an equitable offer for children between 0 and 5 years of age.

The *Censo Escolar*, basic for this study, has been an important mechanism to collect data to monitor the quality of the offer, contributing to the planning and management of education policies. However, some surveys are still missing, for example, disaggregated data by age range, those related to special education for those between 4 and 17 years old, among others. The study Gaepe-Brasil (2024) raises the importance of monitoring the waiting lists to implement public policies of access and offer because access is also a criterion of quality.

The reduced percentage of daycare enrollment implicitly informs us that access is focused on privileged subjects; on the other hand, according to the law, this is a subjective and inalienable right of all, but it has been denied to many children under the age of 3. The lack of places accentuates education inequalities, as well as impacts children's development, and the social development of mothers/women, regarding issues of gender, employment, and income. Ensuring quality demands adequate offer, inputs, and processes aligned with the *Critérios e Parâmetros Nacionais de Qualidade* [National Criteria and Parameters of Quality] (Brasil, 2018; 2024).

We have searched for accessibility data to meet the demand for Special Education in the *Relatório do Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica Saeb 2021* (Inep, 2024b), which were collected through sampled questionnaires filled by principals and teachers of Early Childhood Education institutions. Nationally, the Report points out that more than 60% of principals consider adequate the architectural accessibility at the main building entrance, as well as the access of disabled children to the external area used for recreational activities. However, we can perceive that accessibility is a crucial element for permanence, but it still has to advance to all institutions. Reaffirming the right of the person with a handicap — children, their families, and the educational community — to reach all institutional spaces. This report does not present detailed municipal information.

[3] Current PMEs : Antonio Carlos Law nº 1.485/2015, Águas Mornas Law nº 878/2015, Biguaçu Law nº 3.558/2015, Florianópolis Law nº 546/2016, Governador Celso Ramos Law nº 1.032/2015, Palhoça Law nº 4.324/2015, Santo Amaro da Imperatriz Law nº 2.461, from 2015 prorrogated by the Law 3.138/2025, São José Law nº 5487/2015, and São Pedro de Alcântara Law nº 983/2015. New PMEs are under elaboration.

5. Final remarks

This study's scope was based on national data from the 5 regions – macrosystems – , and the municipalities – microsystems – of the Florianópolis Metropolitan Region to analyze how the policies take place locally, using the *Censo Escolar* [School Census]. Nonetheless, there is a lack of disaggregated data per age range that focus only on Early Childhood Education.

Inep has advanced in the last years, as it has a consistent policy of robust, continuous, and updated data collection. However, much of this information is not openly available and is not disaggregated by municipality. The creation of public policies requires mapping aggregated data for a general view of conditions nationwide and per region, as well as disaggregated by municipality. Even so, the *Censo Escolar* establishes itself as an important tool to monitor the quality of provision, which, together with other forms of institutional evaluation, can provide reliable data regarding enrollment and permanence conditions. Considering the historical fight for the right to Early Childhood Education, we can perceive advancements in its expansion; however, this right is still not ensured to the whole population between 0 and 5 years old.

In this sense, access equity becomes essential, together with intersectoral policies to control the manifested demand, identifying territories, childhoods/groups of belonging with no access to Early Childhood Education. We specially need them when considering the permanence conditions in institutional spaces for the public of Special Education between 0 to 5 years old in the regular classes, and those who need Specialized Educational Service, as well as enrollment data per age range (0 to 1; 2 to 3 and; 4 to 5 years old), and, finally, the percentage of manifested demand attended per municipality and waiting list.

The Gaepe study (Brasil, 2024) shows the importance of updated monitoring of the manifested demand to create public policies for early childhood. Education inequalities impact access and quality; overcoming them requires State public policies that are continuous, equitable, and intersectoral.

RMF municipalities have a high IDHM when compared to other metropolitan regions and have a smaller dependence on federal resources to fund investments in Early Childhood Education. Nonetheless, we can see that in this Region there was no universalization of preschool, a low offer of fulltime enrollment in an urban context of working families, as well as the lack of information in the municipal level about the demand of 0 to 3 year old places and Special Education with no access to Early Childhood Education, which substantially interferes in the formulation of public policies for these populations. Furthermore, the offer of places in regular education for the target audience of special education mostly takes place in public institutions. Finally, the expansion of the school day for full-time is currently being induced by federal education policies.

Therefore, there are endless challenges in the RMF municipalities regarding access asymmetries. The municipalities' different technical, pedagogical, and financial capacities interfere in the formulation of public policies. Thus, funding and provision conditions are meaningful themes for other studies on the RMF, as well as the issue of proposals for institutional assessment and monitoring of Early Childhood Education in these municipalities.

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