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Toolkit for inclusive early childhood education and care

Providing high quality education
and care to *all* young children

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Toolkit for inclusive early childhood education and care (ECEC)

*Providing high quality education and care to
all young children*

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Executive summary

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is the first step on the lifelong learning ladder. It provides young children with professional support to grow, learn and flourish. While it benefits all children, it is even more crucial to children who may face additional needs or difficulties due to individual or family circumstances, e.g. children living in poverty or precarious conditions, children with disabilities or special learning needs, or children from a migrant background or from a minority ethnic community. All children must therefore be able to benefit from high quality ECEC, independently from their individual or family circumstances. It helps them develop to the best of their abilities and supports their well-being.

High quality and inclusion – which are inseparable – are achieved when the following dimensions are adequately implemented:

- ECEC services are available, accessible and affordable;
- well-qualified staff are available in sufficient number, benefit from quality initial education and training and continuing professional development, are offered attractive career opportunities and working conditions;
- provision of ECEC is framed by a pedagogical framework which respects the abilities and interests of every child, supports their well-being and helps them flourish;
- governance of the national and local ECEC systems is organised efficiently to respond to the needs of all children and families, and is supported by an adequate legislative and financial framework;
- monitoring and evaluation measures are in place, to ensure that provision of ECEC is efficient, of high quality and inclusive.

The European Union 2019 Council Recommendation for High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems offers a Quality framework for ECEC to support Member States to work towards achieving higher quality and more inclusive ECEC systems. The 2020 Communication from the European Commission on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 announced the release of a European toolkit for inclusion in ECEC, drawing on exchange of best practice and the input of experts and stakeholders.

The Toolkit for inclusion in ECEC recalls political commitments made e.g. in the European Pillar of Social Rights, policy recommendations which have been adopted by EU Member States as well as research findings. They all converge towards the need and will to develop more inclusive ECEC systems and settings.

To ensure equity for all children in accessing and benefitting from ECEC, the toolkit includes a set of practical solutions and measures to inspire ECEC policy makers at the national, regional or local level, as well as ECEC practitioners. It includes examples of good practice in ECEC settings and identifies useful ideas and resources to inspire leaders and staff across Europe to progress towards practice that is more inclusive. The toolkit aims to inspire decision-makers to use the examples of good practice to create appropriate conditions that can benefit all children and families.

The Toolkit first explores how decision-makers can foster inclusive systems and settings through a range of policy measures which benefit all children, regardless of their individual or family circumstances. It considers a range of aspects:

- the benefit of designing global strategies, at the national and/or local level;
- the need to monitor and evaluate inclusiveness in ECEC;
- the impact of efficient governance and cooperation between decision-makers;
- the need to improve availability and affordability of participation in ECEC;
- the benefits of tiered systems;
- the potential of adjusting the staff: child ratio;
- the benefit of working closely with ECEC settings and supporting them;
- the importance of supporting early intervention;
- the need to train ECEC staff adequately;
- the importance of designing pedagogical guidelines which support inclusion.

The Toolkit also looks at practices which benefit all children and families. It considers in particular:

- the benefit for ECEC staff and institutions to work with other services that support the interests of children and families;
- the need to work in close cooperation with families;
- strategies to facilitate transitions – between home and ECEC institution, between ECEC institutions, or between ECEC and primary school.

Finally, the Toolkit recognises that some children may benefit from more targeted policies or measures, to make sure the ECEC systems and settings answer their specific needs. It therefore explores the needs and possible answers of various groups of children and families:

- children with disabilities and/or additional learning needs;
- children with a migrant background, including refugee children;
- Roma children;
- children in very specific situations, such as children living with their mothers in prison, or children with lasting health problems. It also considers the specific situation of all young children during periods of lockdown, and how to ensure provision of quality ECEC to all of them during such periods.

Introduction

The principle of access to high quality ECEC by all children and families is clearly affirmed...

Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.

European Pillar of Social Rights, principle 1¹

Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality. Children have the right to protection from poverty. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities.

European Pillar of Social Rights, principle 11

The Council of the European Union recommends that Member States [...]:

- **Improve access to high-quality ECEC systems [...]**
- **Work towards ensuring that early childhood education and care services are accessible, affordable and inclusive [...]**
- **Enhance the development of early years' curricula in order to follow children's interest, nurture their well-being and meet the unique needs and potential of each individual child, including those with special needs or in a vulnerable or disadvantaged situation".**

Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems²

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

United Nations – Sustainable Development Goal 4.2³

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

² Council Recommendation (EU) (2019/C 189/02) on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems.

³ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

The Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems includes extensive reference to inclusion and notes that education and care from the earliest stages have an essential role to play in learning to live together in heterogeneous societies. These services strengthen social cohesion and inclusion in several ways. They serve as meeting places for families and contribute to the development of children’s language competences, both in the language of the service and the home language(s). Through social-emotional learning, early childhood education and care experiences can enable children to learn how to be empathic, learn about their rights, equality, tolerance and diversity. ECEC provision needs to be equally distributed across urban and rural areas, affluent and poor neighbourhoods and regions, in order to widen access for disadvantaged groups. Availability and affordability of high-quality services in neighbourhoods where poor families, minorities or migrant or refugee families reside, is reported to have the biggest impact on supporting equity and social inclusion.

The Council Recommendation is completed by the EU quality framework for Early Childhood Education and Care which provides a number of quality statements, many of which help achieving more inclusive ECEC policies and practices (see Annex 1).



Research tells us how important it is for children with a disadvantage to participate in ECEC

European research⁴ emphasises the importance of access to, and inclusion in, high quality ECEC provision. Access and inclusion are often described as universal rights for all children including those who have additional needs or whose families have recently moved from another country. This research and the underpinning evidence for promoting inclusion and the value of high quality ECEC is widely accepted in the ECEC profession. However this acceptance by the profession does not mean that every system-wide policy contributes to greater inclusion.

For high quality ECEC to be inclusive it needs to be available, affordable and accessible to all families. Increasing inclusion requires a range of system-wide strategies (e.g. there needs to be agreement on the definition of high quality ECEC; which children are from disadvantaged families; policies on funding ECEC provision and financial support for families; arrangements for children from birth to the age of three as well as those aged from three to the start of pre-primary/primary education; an ECEC curriculum framework which values inclusion; and initial training and education programmes which highlight the importance of inclusion). The full benefits of high quality ECEC can only be realised if there is a focus on all children. The challenge for many ECEC systems is to decide how to adapt to meet the needs of diverse families - rather than requiring families to adapt to meet the needs of the system. In an environment where system-wide policies emphasise the importance of including all children it is important that success is monitored and data is used to inform policy developments.

In addition to the system-wide strategies, there are many changes which can be made at the setting level to encourage and support inclusive approaches e.g. more flexible and extensive opening hours, training on inclusion for centre-based staff, a higher number of core practitioners, cooperation with other services for children (e.g. health services), cooperation with

⁴Based on the following European reports:

European Commission, *Monitoring the Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care – Complementing the 2014 ECEC Quality Framework proposal with indicators - Recommendations from ECEC experts*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Structural Indicators for Monitoring Education and Training Systems in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016

OECD, *Starting Strong IV - Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and care*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2015

OECD, *Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care*, Starting Strong, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2017.

Slot, P., Romijn, B. & Wyslowska, O., *Inventory and analysis of professional development and models related to inclusiveness*, ISOTIS, 2017

Peeters, J.; Sharmahd, N.; Budginaitė I., 'Professionalisation of Childcare Assistants in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): Pathways towards Qualification', NESET II report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016. doi: 10.2766/898530

Early childhood care: working conditions, training and quality of services – A systematic review, Eurofound, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2015

Guerin, B., *Breaking the cycle of disadvantage - Early Childhood interventions and progression to higher education in Europe*, Rand Corporation, 2014

local communities and parents who can be a valuable resource for ECEC settings, welcoming families into the setting, seeing parents as resources for success creating long-lasting collaborative arrangements with parents which support their child(ren)'s development, promoting the value of local ECEC services etc.

Findings from the CARE study (Curriculum and Quality Analysis and Impact review of European ECEC⁵) and the ISOTIS project⁶ (Inclusive Education and Social Support to Tackle Inequality in Society) concluded that:

- ECEC settings provide a major social infrastructure to support inclusion, equity and social mobility – the personal relation with ECEC professionals is a major buffer against adversity and (public) discrimination;
- intercultural competences, intercultural practices and the social engagement of professionals are critical to establishing partnerships with parents and raising ECEC use;
- macro-level factors conducive to increased access and uptake of ECEC are: unitary – integrated – systems, early entitlement, sufficient public investment, targeted treatment to obtain equal outcomes, high quality (indicated by teachers' salaries and levels of training);
- decentralisation, bottom-up planning, collaboration between public and private providers, socially engaged 'missionary' organisations enhance outreach, quality and effectiveness of ECEC.

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education's 2015-2017 project⁷ on Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE) set out to identify, analyse and subsequently promote the main characteristics of high quality inclusive early childhood education for all children from three years of age to the start of primary education. The project recommendations included the following advice to policy makers:

For those seeking to ensure that children's active participation and learning becomes a main goal of provision:

- support local providers to reach out pro-actively to children and families and listen to their voices;
- create the conditions for settings to secure not only children's attendance, but also their engagement once they are there.

For those seeking to ensure that children's active participation and learning becomes a main goal and process of provisions:

- ensure that a holistic national curriculum sets as its primary goal and standard that all children are enabled to belong, be engaged and learn, both independently and with peers;

⁵ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/613318>

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/projects-activities/isotis-inclusive-education-social-support-tackle-inequalities-society_en

⁷ <https://www.european-agency.org/projects/iece>

- ensure that assessment of children also accounts for the level of child participation in learning and social activities and of social interaction with adults and peers and for any support needed for this to take place.

For those seeking to ensure that settings have the capacity to welcome and involve all children:

- ensure that initial and continuous education for teachers and support staff allow them to develop the competences necessary for welcoming and engaging all children in daily activities;
- ensure that practitioners are prepared to understand the cultural backgrounds of children and families as a factor for enabling their active participation.

For those seeking to ensure that settings have the capacity to welcome and involve all children:

- create the conditions for leaders of settings to adopt an inclusive approach, to have the competence to create a welcoming, caring ethos and to enable collaborative responsibility for the benefit of each child's engagement;
- prioritise the development and use of tools for improving the inclusiveness of the physical and social environment.

For those seeking to ensure that settings have the capacity to meet all children's additional needs:

- ensure that the local community provides the expertise and resources to ensure that every child is able to attend, be part of the peer group and participate actively in the learning and social activities;
- promote collaboration among all sectors and disciplines, together with practitioners, families and local communities, to enhance the quality of all children's belongingness, engagement and learning.

For those seeking to ensure that quality assurance is based on ensuring a quality service to children:

- ensure that statistical information collection includes an account of the number of children who are denied entitlement to quality ECEC and of the types of barriers that prevent them from accessing it;
- ensure that service evaluations account for how far all children have opportunities for active participation, independent, self-initiated and social play and other activities;
- ensure the development of inclusion quality indicators for early childhood education.

For those seeking to ensure that policy-making impacts on the quality of practice:

- collaborate among themselves and with service providers to guarantee the quality and inclusiveness of services through a shared understanding of inclusive quality issues.

Other research⁸ on the importance of inclusion identified that the following strategies can help to make ECEC systems more accessible and inclusive for all children:

- ensuring the legislation pays special attention to disadvantaged children;
- including targeted (additional) support for children at risk;
- creating specific inclusion strategies for children under three years of age and for children aged over three;
- legislation which addresses all known barriers to children's participation;
- opening hours which meet the needs of all parents;
- ECEC systems which are administered under the responsibility of one ministry (or agency) are associated with better quality and inclusiveness;
- staff training and education focuses on inclusive education;
- legal entitlement to ECEC;
- providing language support to children in ECEC settings (mother tongue teaching);
- strengthening collaboration between parents and settings;
- building partnerships between ECEC centres and institutions such as non-governmental organisations or social services improves outreach to children in a vulnerable situation;
- joint activities for children with special needs and other children remove the stigma that can be associated with additional needs.

The research also highlights financial strategies which support greater inclusion:

- reductions in the costs (or offer free provision) to children from disadvantaged and/or marginalised families;

⁸ European Commission, *Monitoring the Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care – Complementing the 2014 ECEC Quality Framework proposal with indicators - Recommendations from ECEC experts*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Structural Indicators for Monitoring Education and Training Systems in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016

OECD, *Starting Strong IV - Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and care*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2015

OECD, *Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care*, Starting Strong, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2017.

Slot, P., Romijn, B. & Wysłowska, O., *Inventory and analysis of professional development and models related to inclusiveness*, ISOTIS, 2017

Peeters, J.; Sharmahd, N.; Budginaitė I., 'Professionalisation of Childcare Assistants in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): Pathways towards Qualification', NESET II report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016. doi: 10.2766/898530

Early childhood care: working conditions, training and quality of services – A systematic review, Eurofound, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2015

Guerin, B., *Breaking the cycle of disadvantage - Early Childhood interventions and progression to higher education in Europe*, Rand Corporation, 2014

- every family which is entitled to publicly funded subsidised ECEC is able to find a place for their child/children;
- the size of the public subsidy is significant and sufficient to ensure that provision is affordable to all families wishing to use the service;
- involving local authorities is essential in implementing the changes (from a financial and from a policy leverage perspective).

Based on an initiative from the European Parliament, the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen announced her intention to create a Child Guarantee that 'will help ensure that every child in Europe at risk of poverty or social exclusion has access to the most basic of rights like healthcare and education'. The Commission's work to analyse the feasibility of such a scheme includes the production of a feasibility report⁹. This analysis includes examples of how EU funds have been used to address children in the most vulnerable situations e.g.:

- the training and financing of Roma assistants in ECEC in Slovenia with positive results in school attendance and parental engagement;¹⁰
- in Luxembourg funds have contributed to better training of staff;¹¹
- in Poland funds have led to increasing in the number of formal care places in nurseries/children's clubs (for children aged 0-3) and in kindergartens/centres of pre-school education (children from age 3 to school age).¹²

This feasibility report noted that these programmes needed to:

- be properly planned and designed, tailored to local and individual needs and be located close to the children targeted;
- involve parents, include awareness-raising campaigns and develop relations based on trust;
- involve trained staff used to working with disadvantaged children and preferably from the same community as the disadvantaged children concerned and pay them decent wages;
- ensure close cooperation between all those involved and elicit the support of local politicians;
- avoid stigmatisation of the children concerned and their families;
- be built on hard experience and a well-conducted ex ante impact assessment and involve ex-post impact evaluations as a requirement, which could be made a precondition of EU funding;

⁹ Frazer, H., Guio, A-C. and Marlier, E. (eds) (2020). *Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee: Final Report, Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG)*, Brussels: European Commission.

¹⁰ Stropnik, N. (2019). *Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee: Country Report – Slovenia*

¹¹ Vandenbroeck, M. (2019). *Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee: Policy Area Report on Early Childhood Education and Care*

¹² Brozaitis et al. 2018. (2018). *Fighting Child Poverty: the Role of EU Funding (European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs) IPOL_STU(2018)626059*.

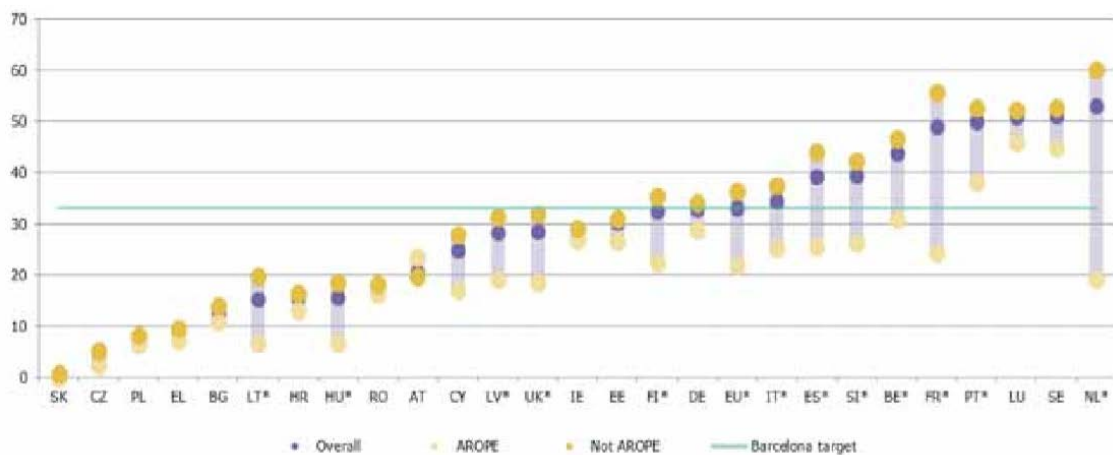
- allow a wide range of measures to be eligible for support in order to enable the most appropriate approach to be implemented.

Yet...

Despite widespread agreement on the benefits of increasing social inclusion, there are many issues and barriers which need to be overcome. The 2019¹³ Education and Training Monitor notes that attendance of children from the age of 4 in ECEC has expanded, and is, by now, almost universal. There are also high rates of participation in early childhood education by children from the age of three. Yet the 90% participation rate for the general population decreases to 77.8% in the group of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion have participation rates in education and formal childcare that are 11 percentage points lower than their peers from non-disadvantaged families for the group aged three or more; and the gap is even greater for children aged from birth to two¹⁴. The participation in formal ECEC varies significantly for children below the age of three (figure 1) and above the age of three (figure 2).

Figure 1 – Participation in formal childcare or education of children below 3 years of age, by socio-economic backgrounds (2016), % over the population below 3 years of age

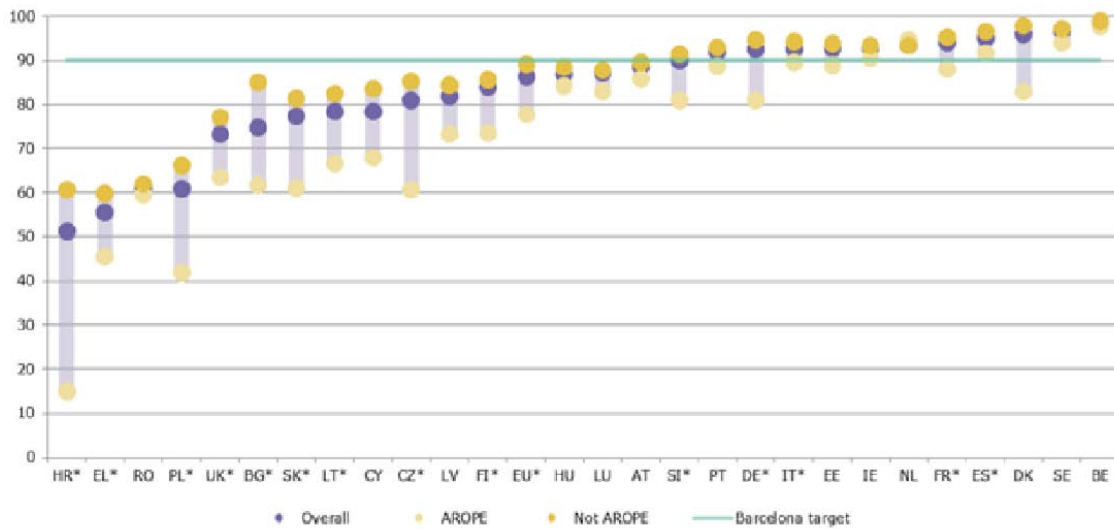


Source: European Commission, DG JRC calculations based on Eurostat data: 2016 EU-SILC microdata

Figure 2 – Participation in formal childcare or education of children between 3 and minimum mandatory school age, by socioeconomic background (2016), % over the population aged 3 to minimum mandatory school age

¹³ Page 5 of the executive summary - <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/2019-education-and-training-monitor-summary.pdf>

¹⁴ Page 47 - <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/volume-1-2019-education-and-training-monitor.pdf>



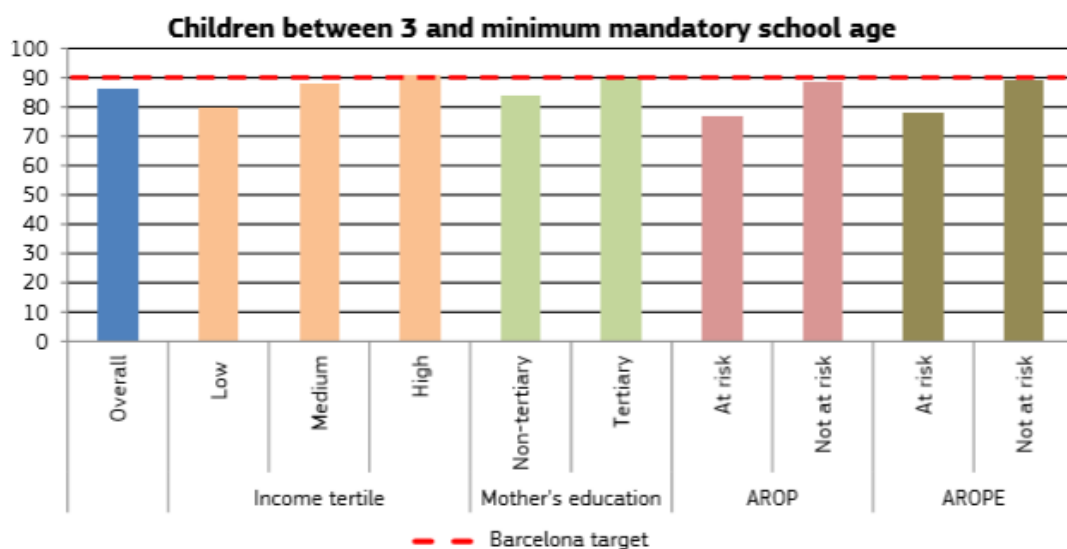
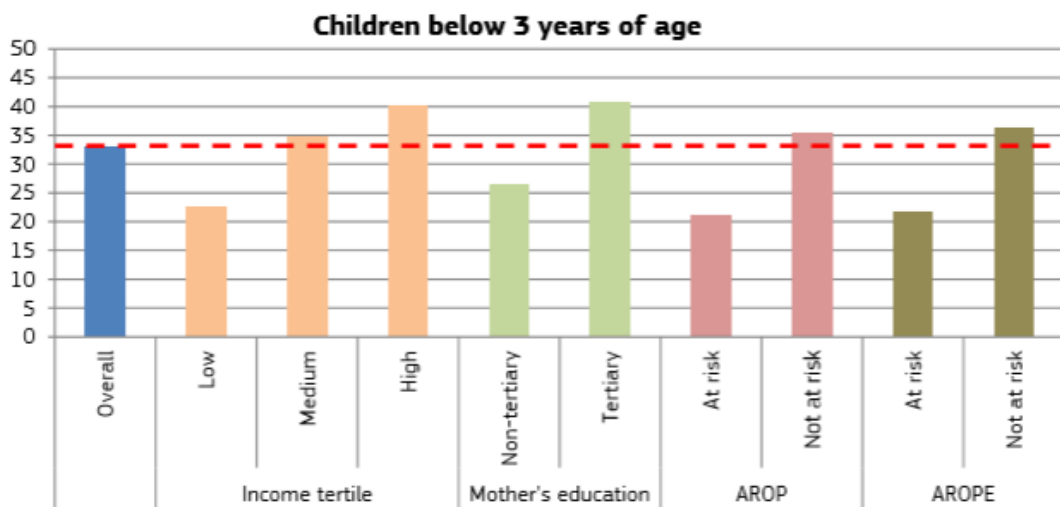
Source: European Commission, DG JRC calculations based on Eurostat data: 2016 EU-SILC microdata

The 2019 report from the Joint Research Centre (JRC)¹⁵ on ECEC participation by socio-economic background used data from the EU Survey on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) to assess different categorisations of socio-economic disadvantage, based on household income; maternal education; and whether or not the child lives in a household, which is at risk of poverty (AROP) or at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE). Irrespective of which categorisation is used, the report shows considerably lower ECEC attendance rates for children from a lower socio-economic background when compared to those from a higher one. This suggests that the attempt to focus on particular subgroups of children is well justified. Looking at different groups of children, the report summarised how participation changes based on income, mother's education, poverty, risk of exclusion or poverty. Figure 3 highlights these differences for children aged under and over three years of age.

Figure 3 – Participation in formal childcare or education, by socio-economic background (2016) – EU (% over the population of the corresponding age group)

¹⁵

https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC117663/jrc117663_jrc117663_a_note_on_early_childhood_education_and_care_participation_by_socio-economic_background_fi.pdf



Source: JRC calculations on 2016 EU-SILC microdata. EU includes the 27 current EU countries for which data is available (MT is missing because no age variable is available in the dataset). The red line represents the Barcelona target

Very few European countries guarantee universal access to free early childhood education for children from the earliest years. Eurydice¹⁶ notes that fees for ECEC are charged for children aged under the age of three in all but five of the European countries analysed. Merely eight countries guarantee a place in ECEC for all young children. Latvia is the only European country that guarantees a free public ECEC place from as early as 1-and-a-half.

In the context of the Covid-19 crisis, the European Commission underlined in its Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025¹⁷ that it is essential to monitor the risks incurred by the ECEC sector, which might hinder the development of quality systems. In particular, it is important that ECEC services remain available, in spite

¹⁶ Page 61. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019.

¹⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area_en

of financial difficulties, and that qualified staff is retained and keeps being recruited. It is also important to make sure that investment in the sector keeps increasing, and that the educational impact of these services is not overshadowed by the importance of the childcare dimension which has been evidenced by the crisis. Finally, due attention will need to be paid to the processes needed to ensure learning continuity with very young children, for whom digital learning is not an easy or desirable option, if / when ECEC services need to close for long periods.

Reader's guide

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit aims to inspire anyone involved in organising, funding and delivering ECEC, to give more chances to all children to access high quality ECEC. It is primarily aimed at national policy-makers who set the regulatory arrangements for ECEC systems and can support local authorities and ECEC providers to build inclusive ECEC systems and settings, but it can also be useful to social partners, trade unions and ECEC practitioners.

The toolkit looks at successful or promising national strategies which can be replicated in other countries, but it also looks at successful or promising local practices, developed by local authorities or specific ECEC settings. It describes the strategies and practices and whenever possible, it shares resources for other decision-makers and practitioners to use and possibly scale them up.

Who prepared it?

To support Member States to implement the Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems and the European Quality Framework, a European Commission working group operated from November 2018 to December 2020 to identify practices and ideas which support efficient (national) reforms in the field of inclusion in ECEC and the professionalisation of staff. It brought together representatives from:

- Ministries in charge of organising ECEC in their respective countries, from 35 European countries¹⁸
- European associations with expertise in the field¹⁹
- International and European Agencies²⁰

Methodology

In relation to inclusion, the working group explored the following three key questions:

1. What are the best strategies to make ECEC systems more accessible and inclusive for all children?
2. Are there specific strategies best adapted to the needs of:
 - a. children from low socio-economic background,
 - b. children with special needs,
 - c. children with a migrant or from ethnic minority background?

¹⁸ Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom

¹⁹ Alliance for Childhood, International Step by Step Association (ISSA), Eurochild, Eurocities, European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), European Public Service Union (EPSU), European Association of Service Providers for People with Disabilities (EASPD), European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE);

²⁰ OECD, Eurofound and Eurydice

3. How to measure the inclusiveness of ECEC systems?

The group started by looking at **research findings** as well as policy recommendations stemming out from research in this field – which are referenced throughout this toolkit – to take stock of knowledge, facts and figures related to inclusion in ECEC. It also looked at European political commitments made through the Council Recommendation for high-quality ECEC and its annex, the European Quality Framework for ECEC that provides a set of statements which, if achieved, demonstrate quality in ECEC.

The second phase was to look at **strategies and practices** presented by members of the group to illustrate a range of ways to strengthen inclusion in the ECEC sector. They may include legislation, policy strategies, practices, experimentations, etc. The group also looked at ad-hoc practices in some cities or in specific ECEC settings and took stock of additional case studies developed in other contexts.

Finally, this report includes **resources** which can be used by ECEC staff to reflect on their professional practices and make them more inclusive. A number of them have been created by ECEC staff and institutions thanks to Erasmus+ funding.

UNIVERSAL POLICY MEASURES WHICH BENEFIT ALL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Providing ECEC for all children is an important policy priority for most systems. The benefits of ECEC participation are felt by children, their families and society. Finding new ways to increase participation are required in many situations. Through encouragement, persuasion and demonstrating the benefits of participation, all children can be supported to participate in ECEC. This not only benefits the children and families who are reached by such new initiatives, it benefits the other children in the ECEC settings as they learn to co-operate with, play with, and befriend a wider group of their peers.

This chapter will explore how decision-makers can foster inclusive systems and settings through a range of policy measures, for the benefit of all children, regardless of their individual or family circumstances. It will consider a range of aspects:

- the benefit of designing global strategies, at national and/or local level;
- the need to monitor and evaluate inclusiveness in ECEC;
- the need to improve availability, accessibility and affordability of ECEC;
- the impact of efficient governance and cooperation between decision-makers;
- the benefits of tiered systems;
- the potential of adjusting staff: child ratio;
- the benefit of working closely with ECEC settings and supporting them;
- the importance of supporting early intervention;
- the need to train ECEC staff adequately;
- the importance of designing pedagogical guidelines which support inclusion.

This chapter will also consider more controversial debates, e.g. on the impact of lowering the age of compulsory education.

Designing global strategies

By definition, inclusive means everyone. Ensuring everyone (or every child in this context) can access ECEC requires a strategy that embraces all families. Universal high quality provision is best developed within a strategic approach that respects the individual needs of each child rather than the development of ad-hoc and setting-based arrangements.

Different avenues can be explored by national policy-makers:

- developing legislation to frame the inclusion debate in ECEC, so that the approach to inclusion is not left to individual settings or communities;
- creating obligations for ECEC settings to support inclusiveness, while leaving them a great freedom in relation to the measures to be adopted e.g. guarantee that there is enough space for the children and staff, avoid work overload, protect vulnerable groups, foster professional autonomy and judgement, etc.

For policy makers there can be a tension between encouraging local solutions, and the need to offer families more consistency and assurance about what is on offer. Finding the right balance between setting-based innovation and these assurances is an ongoing dilemma.

Country / project examples

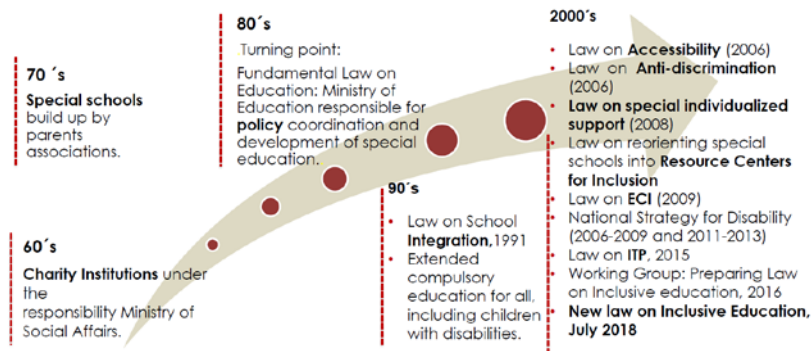
Portugal

Portugal's approach to including all children in the education system begins in the pre-school environment. Following an extensive consultation Portugal developed and implemented new curricula with essential aspects of learning, and a new policy on inclusion. The legislation includes:

- moving from a model of identifying impairment to one based on including/integrating all children;
- the assumption that everyone has the capacity to learn and 'all' means every child;
- guidance which focuses on the need to differentiate and provide ECEC based on individual needs;
- the creation of school-based multidisciplinary teams to ensure inclusion is the responsibility of all staff and not just the special needs teachers;
- the development and support for multi-disciplinary teams in the community/locality. The focus of these teams' work is on supporting each child;
- the development of 'early intervention teams' who work with families whose children have additional needs.

The new legislation recognises that some children find transition from ECEC to primary school particularly difficult. This means there is a need to help year one teachers and pre-school teachers better understand what has been accomplished in ECEC settings and what children can expect when they progress to school. Portugal's progress towards a more inclusive approach can be summarised as follows:

Portuguese Journey...



The 2018 legislation on inclusive education was a continuation of the process which began in 2008 when the former special schools became resources centres to support inclusive education in ECEC settings. As a result of the 2018 legislation most children and students attend mainstream schools and only a small proportion of children enrol in special education institutions (1%). The legislation is consistent with, and motivated by, the rights of children and people with disabilities. It is designed on the basis of universal provision and a multi-level approach to enable children to access the curriculum. This approach is based on a flexible curriculum, systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of teachers' interventions, dialogue between teachers and parents or caregivers, and measures to support learning. These support measures are organised to offer different levels of intervention and respond to the educational needs of each child. They are designed to enable children to acquire a common base of competences which values their potential and interests.

Malta

In Malta, the ECEC system has to respond to an increasing number of recently arrived migrants; the integration of children's services; and the provision of support to children with individual learning needs. In recent years, child poverty has been falling as a result of job creation schemes, targeted measures and initiatives to make the employment of parents more attractive and easier.

Malta aims to create strong relationships between ECEC and other policies - for example:

- the National Curriculum Framework (2012) and the Learning Outcomes Framework (2015) emphasises learning outcomes which enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way;
- the use of socially just pedagogies in the early years - and ensuring the significance of learning through play is understood and supported;
- continuing professional development for kindergarten educators and other stakeholders;
- the creation of a seamless approach to children from birth to the age of seven.
- concrete measures such as the provision of free ECEC for a number of vulnerable families.

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| <p>Romania</p> | <p>Romania has a range of policies to address social inclusion for children with special education needs; children from the Roma community; children from rural and disadvantaged communities; and children from vulnerable groups. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • from 2015-18 a UNICEF project to support social inclusion through the creation of integrated services within the community of Bacău county; • from 2018-2020 a European Social Fund initiative to develop high quality and inclusive ECEC; • from 2018-21 an internationally-funded initiative to develop ECEC policy and integrated services at the community level in 22 counties. |
| <p>Denmark</p> | <p>The national policy is based on equal access to ECEC for all families. The policy subsidises families with lower incomes and offers flexibility to strengthen cooperation and trust in society. Denmark's national universal welfare system provides children with a basic right to ECEC from the day they are six months old. This policy is based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • equal access to ECEC provision which is: available everywhere; open every day except for national holidays and weekends; open for up to 50 hours per week (children spend an average 37 hours per week in ECEC); flexible and has arrangements for families working unusual hours and weekends; • financial circumstances of each family: nationally, approximately 1.4% of the gross domestic product is spent on ECEC; parents pay a maximum of 25% of the operating costs; there are subsidies for parents with lower income and siblings. <p>As a result of this policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% of children aged from one to two are in ECEC • 97% of children aged from three to five are in ECEC. |
| <p>Finland</p> | <p>The 2020-2022 Right to Learn development program²¹ aims to secure an equal start for learning by improving quality and equality in ECEC and comprehensive school education. It includes legislative and financial changes and promotes practices and methods that strengthen equality.</p> <p>The objective of the programme is to find ways for more children to participate in ECEC. By enhancing pre-primary and early primary education, it will improve the early learning of basic skills and provide better support for such learning. Specific goals for ECEC are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating equal conditions for learning paths • promoting learning support • creating a more flexible start for learning • improving the quality of ECEC |
| <p>Estonia</p> | <p>The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 and Educational Development Plan 2035 set out the government's intent to provide all people in Estonia with learning opportunities that are tailored to their needs and capabilities throughout their whole</p> |

²¹ <https://minedu.fi/en/qualityprogramme>

lifespan, to maximize opportunities for dignified self-actualization within society. The strategies state that local governments are responsible for ensuring access to high quality ECEC. Estonia ensures a universal access, high quality and system integration in ECEC, there is no childcare gap and every child has a legal guarantee to a subsidised place in ECEC from 1,5-years.

The general policy goals include supporting children with special needs, safeguarding vulnerable children, reducing inequality and social disadvantage and supporting children when home and national language differ and raising ECEC staff awareness for values oriented learning. Estonian ECEC institutions place emphasis on teaching values, including supporting children's well-being and safety, preventing bullying and developing tolerance, caring, honesty and courage in children. Estonian government support implementation of values programs for ECEC institutions (The Centre for Ethics of the University of Tartu Values Program, The Danish branch of "Save the Children" and the Estonian Union for Child Welfare program "Bully-Free Kindergarten"), which provide in-service trainings for kindergarten teams and parents.

The Preschool Child Care Act was updated in 2018. Changes included policies to support children with special needs, such as their admission to an integration group and ensure that the number of teachers who work in an ECEC institution and comply with the qualifications requirements is sufficient. Teachers are responsible for observing children's development in ECEC institutions and adjusting the learning and teaching to the child's special needs when necessary. Moreover, the evaluation and support of a child's development shall be based on the principles provided in the national curriculum of ECEC institutions. Children attending ECEC institutions have guaranteed access to speech therapists and special education teachers, who receive state support. According to the 2019/2020 data from the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS), such support systems are made available to nearly 19% of children attending ECEC. Local governments and ECEC institutions also use the services provided by regional counselling centres (speech therapists, special education teachers, psychological and social-pedagogical counselling).

The Netherlands

Under the Youth Act, local authorities support children, adolescents (up to age 18, which may be extended in some cases to age 23) and their parents in dealing with developmental, parenting and psychological problems and disorders. Local authorities are also responsible for implementing child protection measures and youth rehabilitation. By shifting the responsibility for these various duties to the local authority, it is easier now than in the past to provide integrated care to young people. This also encourages the local authorities to develop preventive youth and family policy.

The Dutch government stimulates the use of childcare for children from age zero to three years by granting working parents income-related subsidies. The level of the subsidies varies between 33,3% and 96% of total costs²². A number of measures also support participation in ECEC of children from vulnerable families:

- Parents who do not apply for the income related government subsidy, but who are not able to support their children for reasons of medical or social origin, may

²² <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/kinderopvangtoeslag/bedragen-kinderopvangtoeslag-2020>.

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| | <p>approach the local government to receive a compensation. The local government decides which parents apply for the compensation and how they are served best.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children of non-working parents are allowed to use facilities for childcare. Parents can apply for a local government subsidy. • In addition to child care, pre-school education is offered to disadvantaged children from the age of two and a half to four years old. The local governments receive money to offer pre-school education for free. In most cases local governments ask for a small contribution in addition. Local government decides which children suit the definition of 'disadvantaged'. <p>At the age of four, children have the right to go to school which is free-of-charge. From five year onwards school is compulsory.</p> |
| <p>Slovenia</p> | <p>Slovenia is creating conditions for inclusion with several approaches.</p> <p>Preschool education (ISCED 01 and ISCED 02) in Slovenia is not compulsory. However, the public authorities provide legal basis and resources to facilitate the enrolment of all preschool children in kindergartens, as it is the parents' legal right to decide to enrol their child in the preschool education programme at a public or private kindergarten. Public kindergartens shall enrol and admit children into programmes by application and availability of places throughout the year. The municipality/local community is responsible to ensure the enrolment of preschool children in the catchment area. The parents whose child was not admitted in the public kindergarten and has been placed on the waiting list can enrol their child in a home-based setting or a private kindergarten. In such case, the municipalities co-finance the costs.</p> <p>The Decree on Criteria for setting up a Public Network of Pre-school institutions states that when establishing a public network of kindergartens, the founder has to take into account that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the public network shall be organized in such a way as to enable parents and children to access and select programmes of ECEC that are in accordance with their interests and needs, including the right to choose a full-day or half-day programme, or in remote and demographically deprived areas, the right to choose a shorter programme, • the public network of pre-primary education classes in the institutions for children with special educational needs (SEN) shall provide ECEC to children in need, • the public network of kindergartens in hospitals shall provide ECEC for children who are on treatment in a hospital, • parents have the right to choose programmes in kindergartens that perform a public service, irrespective of the municipality of their permanent residence. <p>Policy is based on equal access to ECEC provision, along the following principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECEC is available everywhere; open every working day except for national holidays; for up to 55 hours per week (children spend an average 45 hours per week in ECEC); |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECEC is flexible and has arrangements for working families (as Slovenia has one of the highest number of women working in EU); • equal access is based on the financial circumstances of each family (there are 9 classes of family income); • nationally, approximately 0,81 % of the gross domestic product is spent on pre-school education; • parents pay a maximum of 77% of the operating costs (so every parent gets at least 23% or more subsidies); • there are subsidies for parents with lower income and siblings; • if parents are in the first class of financial family income they benefit from totally free of charge daily programmes; • there are totally free of charge shorter programmes in duration of 240 – hours for all 5 year old children who were not enrolled in kindergarten before. <p>At the time of writing this report, the Slovenian Parliament is discussing an amendment to the Kindergarten Act, to reintroduce free access to kindergarten for siblings of children already attending that kindergarten. This measure was valid until 2012, when due to the economic crisis, the law (ZUJF) determined that the parents had to pay for the second child 30% of the payment determined by the decision of the social services and the remaining share (70%) was covered by the state budget. A third child from the same family who is in kindergarten with the eldest one at the same time can access for free. Newly, however, the law extends the right to free kindergarten to families with three or more children, so that the third and each subsequent child is entitled to free kindergarten, regardless of whether another child is in kindergarten or not.</p> |
| Norway | <p>In 2019 the Norwegian Government presented a White Paper on "Early intervention and inclusive education"²³. The two main objectives in this White paper is that all children and youth must get adequate support when they need it (Early intervention), and that all children and youth should have a well-adapted and inclusive pedagogical program.</p> <p>In short, the White Paper aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a broad scope, while the efforts for children and pupils with special educational needs has special attention; • provide a clear and holistic description of what early intervention and inclusive education in kindergartens and schools means; • bring the expertise closer to the children and pupils to ensure good quality help to those who need it when they need it, in an inclusive environment. |

²³ <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/meld.-st.-6-20192020/id2677025/>

How to monitor and evaluate inclusiveness in ECEC?

Understanding monitoring and evaluation in ECEC

Monitoring and evaluation refer to the process of collecting data and making judgements about systems, programmes, materials, procedures and processes. Such monitoring and evaluation can both provide accountability about investment in ECEC services and serve to improve policy design and the implementation of standards. It can also be an important tool for informing parents about the level of quality of the services being offered.

Monitoring often involves evaluating services against the standards which have been set for quality structures, processes or outcomes. Such evaluation can be quantitative and/or qualitative and can involve interviews, observations, standardised testing and service quality ratings, depending on its purpose. The OECD's Starting Strong III²⁴ identified seven common targets of evaluation exercises:

- child development;
- staff performance;
- service quality;
- regulation compliance;
- curriculum implementation;
- parents' satisfaction;
- workforce supply and working conditions.

The 2019 Eurydice report Key Data on ECEC²⁵ includes a detailed overview of evaluation and monitoring systems across Europe. Some of the key findings include:

- Compliance with structural norms and standards together with the evaluation of learning processes and daily interactions in the setting are essential parts of quality assurance;
- All European countries have mechanisms to ensure the external evaluation of ECEC settings;
- Only a minority of countries evaluate both structural and process quality;
- Only a third of European education systems have established evaluation systems which check that settings for younger children not only comply with standards but also support the learning process;

²⁴ OECD (2012) – Starting Strong III - A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care

²⁵ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019.

- Thirty education systems have guidelines for involving parents in the evaluation of ECEC settings. In contrast, only fifteen education systems have guidelines that refer to children's participation in the process.

The 2019 Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems however recalls that *Member States should promote transparent and coherent monitoring and evaluation of ECEC services at the appropriate levels with a view to policy development and implementation. Effective approaches could include:*

- *using self-evaluation tools, questionnaires and observation guidelines as part of quality management at system and service level;*
- *using adequate and age-appropriate methods to foster children's participation and listen to their views, concerns and ideas and take the children's perspective into account in the assessment process;*
- *implementing existing tools to improve the inclusiveness of ECEC provision.*

The European Quality Framework for ECEC also includes two quality statements on monitoring and evaluation. These are invitations to Member States to establish:

- *monitoring and evaluating that produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice;*
- *monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child.*

Alongside the use of the two quality statements in the European Quality Framework for ECEC, monitoring and evaluation can be strengthened through the use of quantitative indicators of success, the establishment of targets, and an external perspective on the quality of ECEC provision. In 2018 the European Commission published *Monitoring the quality of early childhood education and care*, which completes the 2014 ECEC quality framework proposal with indicators²⁶. This report identifies 22 indicators which can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the ECEC system in each Member State and its capacity to support and promote the quality of ECEC provision and practice. This report focuses on these indicators. It is advisory and is intended to:

- encourage self-reflection and self-evaluation as critical processes in the development of high quality ECEC system(s);
- guide those who are responsible for selecting and using indicators for evaluating progress in the establishment and delivery of high quality ECEC;
- support monitoring and measurement in order to improve the performance of the ECEC system(s).

²⁶ European Commission, *Monitoring the Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care – Complementing the 2014 ECEC Quality Framework proposal with indicators - Recommendations from ECEC experts*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018

Monitoring and evaluation of inclusiveness

Across Europe there are numerous policies, projects and practices which aim to increase inclusion in ECEC. It is important to monitor their effectiveness in relation to the extent to which they meet their goals.

These monitoring processes require agreement on what will be measured, how the data to support this measurement will be collected, who will collect and interpret the data, and how the data will be used to improve the policy/project's effectiveness. This monitoring may be accompanied (or be part of) an evaluation of the policy/project, or it may be a separate iterative activity.

Central to the monitoring work will be an agreement on whether to use targets, indicators or benchmarks as the basis for measuring success. When this type of quantitative approach is used, it is important that the measures of success are agreed before the policy/project starts. Success can be seen as being based on inputs, structure or outputs from the ECEC system e.g. success could be about:

- increasing the number of trained core practitioners (an input measure),
- making it easier for parents to discuss their children's development with ECEC staff (a process measure),
- or increasing the number of children who are confident when using their home language and the language(s) of the ECEC setting (an output measure).

The selection of the measure(s) of success will vary depending on the policy/project. Other possible indicators include:

- the percentage of children who have publicly funded subsidised access to ECEC;
- for parents who earn the average national income, the percentage of their disposable income which is required to pay for ECEC services for one child who attends an ECEC setting for at least 30 hours per week;
- whether a system-level policy is in place to encourage disadvantaged families to use ECEC services;
- the percentage of children who attend ECEC regularly;
- the percentage of children who are guaranteed a place in an ECEC setting;
- the percentage of ECEC setting with access of appropriate educational guidelines;
- the percentage of ECEC setting with access to language support measures and support measures for parents;
- the number of professionally-trained ECEC staff.

For many policies/projects these will be too generic and will need to be enhanced with more specific measures e.g. increase by five per cent each year the number of ECEC setting which have published their goals, or increase by five per cent each year the number of ECEC settings whose provision is judged through an independent process to be at least good.

Country / project examples

Finland

The evaluation of ECEC sector in Finland has been a statutory task since 2015. Various organisations work together to produce information which informs the evaluation and development of the service. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC)²⁷ is creating a national evaluation system for ECEC. The work began with the production of quality indicators i.e. “desired quality descriptions” which form the basis for the system²⁸. Some of the indicators provide guidelines on how inclusiveness should be met:

At the national level

- The national steering system safeguards every child’s right to ECEC. High-quality services implementing the principle of inclusiveness are available and accessible to all children;
- The national steering system sets policies for, and safeguards the provision of, support for individuals’ development and learning, ensuring that each child receives the support they need.

At the local level

- ECEC organisers must ensure the availability and accessibility to all children of high-quality ECEC services in which the principle of inclusiveness is implemented;
- Local ECEC services have been organised to safeguard the provision of support for development and learning, ensuring that each child receives the support they need. The support needed by a child is provided in the child’s usual learning environment.

At the level of pedagogic activities

- The leader of the ECEC centre checks every day that a sufficient number of staff (as required by law and considering the number of children) are present. This is to ensure that the children’s safety and the permanence of interactive relationships can be guaranteed and the objectives set for ECEC are reached;
- ECEC staff ensure all children can participate in all activities, regardless of their background and individual characteristics.

Czechia

Support measures for children with special educational needs are financed from the state budget, individually for each child. Individual kindergartens report yearly to the Ministry of Education which support measures, for how much and in what amount they provided. In addition, the Ministry has data on the special educational needs of children and on the numbers of individual diagnoses represented in children in kindergartens. From all these data it is possible to monitor the inclusiveness of pre-school education.

Data on the economic demands for support measures to children in kindergartens are increasingly becoming available.

²⁷ <https://karvi.fi/en/early-childhood-education/>

²⁸ https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2020/03/Quality-indicators-for-ECEC_summary-2019.pdf

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| | Every year, the Ministry of Education prepares an analysis of inclusive education in schools, including in kindergartens. |
| Spain | The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training publishes annual statistics ²⁹ by educational level (including <i>Educación Infantil</i> 0-6) with data on students with specific need for educational support (number, educational level, type of center, type of need, geographical distribution, etc.). |
| Lithuania | The national Pupil's Register collects information about all the children who are in institutional education, including early childhood education. It includes information about children with special needs (and the level of needs), children who receive compulsory ECEC by the municipalities Children Welfare Commission, usually because of socio-economic reasons, and the migrant background children (children who are foreigners or Lithuanians returned from abroad). Information on children from low economic background is available from other sources (Ministry of Social Security and Labor). |
| Belgium (NL) | <p>Monitoring is included in the legislation with regard to the subsidies granted to the childcare settings. The regulations determine the conditions to obtain the subsidy and one of the conditions for all settings that receive it is the mandatory yearly reporting on the number of children concerned.</p> <p><i>Children with additional needs:</i> settings can apply for an additional subsidy if they welcome a child who has been “diagnosed or recognized” (by way of a doctor’s certificate) as a child with additional needs. Based on the number of applications, the government knows how many children with additional needs are participating (or have been participating) in ECEC (specifically childcare settings for children under three in a specific year).</p> <p><i>Children from disadvantaged or vulnerable families:</i> the subsidy scheme for the formal care of babies and toddlers has three levels and starts from Level 0. Each level implies additional tasks/conditions. The higher the level the more subsidies one may receive, but also the more conditions one must fulfil:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In settings which receive no subsidies (Level 0) or only a basic subsidy (Level 1), families pay a fee which is not related to their income. • In settings which receive an income related fee subsidy (Level 2) or a plus subsidy (Level 3) on top of the basic subsidy, families can pay an income related fee and settings are obliged to observe a number of priority rules. • Settings which receive an income related fee subsidy (Level 2) must grant absolute priority to children from families where childcare is absolutely necessary in the context of a work situation (retaining work, looking for work or following vocational training to that end), as well as to children from single-parent families and low-income families and to foster children. • Settings which receive a plus subsidy (Level 3) must adopt proactive admissions policy to give a childcare place to vulnerable families, aligning the activities with vulnerable families and building and disseminating expertise on how to deal with |

²⁹ <http://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/servicios-al-ciudadano/estadisticas/no-universitaria/alumnado/necesidades-apoyo/2017-18.html>

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| | <p>vulnerable families in a respectful manner. Childcare settings at level 3 must also make efforts to recruit workers from vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Settings receiving an income related subsidy or a plus subsidy (this is +/- 75% of the total number of the available places in Flanders) have to report yearly how many of the children attending the setting regularly are children from families targeted by the priority rules.</p> |
| <p>Italy</p> | <p>In Italy the new Law about Inclusion (legislative decree n. 66/2017) provides that monitoring the quality of school inclusion is an important part of the school evaluation process. It is done through RAV (Self-evaluation report), a tool provided by INVALSI (the Italian evaluation institute for the evaluation of the national education system), to facilitate the reflection of schools through a self-analysis about processes and outcomes.</p> <p>INVALSI defined some indicators for assessing the quality of school inclusion with regards to all different situations of children in need (children with disabilities, migrant children, disadvantaged children and so on)³⁰.</p> <p>The indicators are defined on the basis of the criteria reported in the legislative decree:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) level of inclusiveness of each school as embodied in the Plan for school inclusion; b) numbers of personalised and individualised courses offered by the school, according to the specific student needs; c) level of involvement of families, local community, experts, etc... in implementing the inclusion process; d) implementation and enhancing the professional skills and competences of school staff, including specific training activities; e) use of shared tools and criteria for the evaluation of students' learning outcomes, also through the recognition of the different communication methods; f) level of accessibility and usability of resources, equipment, structures and spaces in the school. <p>The RAV has a specific section on strategies adopted by the school for the promotion of inclusion processes and respect for diversity, as well as the adaptation of processes to student needs. The area is divided into two sub-areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion: recognition of the value of diversity through actions for the inclusion of children in needs (with disabilities, migrant children, disadvantaged children and so on), • Improvement: ways to adapt the teaching processes to the training needs of each student. |

³⁰ Indicators for RAV Infanzia:

https://www.invalsi.it/infanzia/img/Mappa_indicatori_RAV_infanzia_2019.pdf

| Resources | |
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| <p>A self-assessment tool to review inclusiveness of early childhood education</p> | <p>The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education developed a Self-Reflection Tool³¹ as part of the Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE) project. The project aimed to identify, analyse and subsequently promote the main characteristics of quality IECE for all children. To that end, a need was detected for a tool that all professionals and staff could use to reflect on their setting's inclusiveness, focusing on the social, learning and physical environment. The Self-Reflection Tool enables practitioners to review their service's quality in terms of the inclusiveness of the physical, social and other learning environments it offers to children and families.</p> <p>It is available in all EU languages as well as Icelandic, Norwegian, Serbian, Suomi and Russian.</p> |
| <p>SEQUENCES toolkit to assess quality</p> | <p>The SEQUENCES project responds to the need to improve the quality of private and public ECEC services through adequate evaluation of quality, by directly involving providers and relevant stakeholders. The project examined quality in relation to the key domains of the European Quality Framework for ECEC; it offers a toolkit for the self and external evaluation of ECEC provision, along with guidelines for implementation and a training package³².</p> |

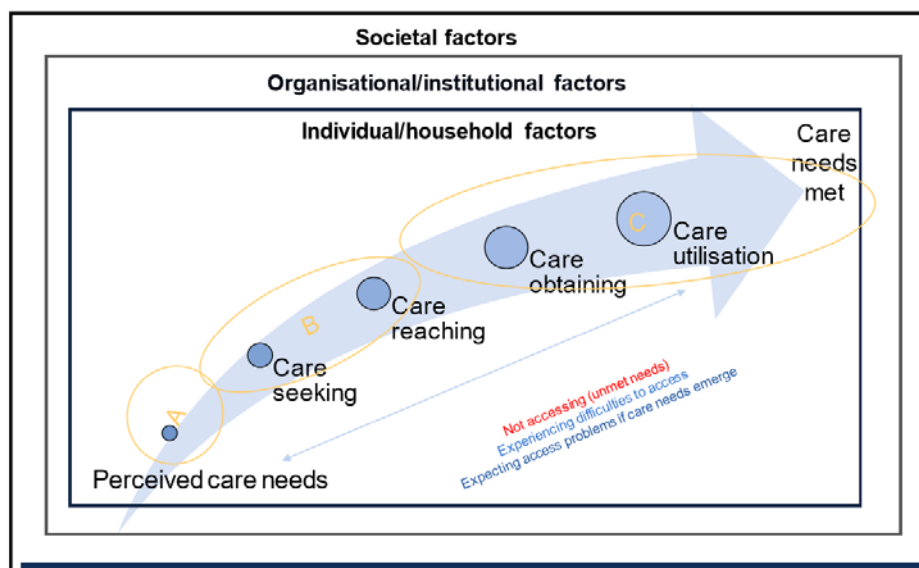
³¹ <https://www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/inclusive-early-childhood-education-environment-self-reflection-tool>

³² <https://sequences-project.eu/downloads/>

Improving the availability, accessibility and affordability of ECEC settings

Ensuring good access to care services – and ECEC is no exception – is a complex process and requires consideration of a range of steps (from identifying the needs of families to meeting these needs). This journey is influenced by a number of factors (see figure 4).

Figure 4 - Factors influencing achievement of fulfilling the needs for care



Source: Eurofound³³

As detailed above, access to high quality ECEC is particularly important for children who face difficulties early in their life, due to individual or family circumstances. The Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee³⁴ notes that the ‘evidence suggests a paradox in ECEC for children from a disadvantaged economic background. While it is more effective in providing opportunities, it is less used by families suffering low income or economic fragility’. There is also ‘evidence of the specific difficulties facing children living in single-adult households in relation to access to ECEC’.

Provision of high quality ECEC helps to ensure that all children get a great start in life and also ensures that parents are not placed in a vulnerable or precarious position on the labour market due to their caring responsibilities.

The European Pillar of Social Rights³⁵, principle 9 on work-life balance, states that ‘parents and people with caring responsibilities have the right to suitable leave, flexible working arrangements and access to care services.’

³³ Eurofound (2020), *Access to care services: Early childhood education and care, healthcare and long-term care*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

³⁴ Fresno, J-M, Meyer S. and Bain, S., *Target Group Discussion Paper on Children living in Precarious Family Situations*, Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels: European Commission, 2019.

³⁵ European Pillar of Social Rights, 2017.

The European work-life balance directive³⁶ notes the considerable challenge for many parents and workers with caring responsibilities, in particular the prevalence of extended working hours and changing work schedules have a negative impact on women's employment. A major factor contributing to the under representation of women in the labour market is the difficulty of balancing work and family obligations. When they have children, women are likely to work fewer hours in paid employment and spend more time fulfilling unpaid caring responsibilities. The Directive invites Member States to consider that men and women are only likely to equally take up family-related leave if other measures are in place e.g. the provision of accessible and affordable childcare services, which are crucial for the purpose of allowing parents to enter, remain in, or return to the labour market.

While the provision of ECEC services alongside good family leave arrangements can reduce the risk of poverty for children and their families³⁷, in many situations the scarcity of ECEC is a common reason for mothers to reduce their paid work. Removing economic disincentives can also encourage second earners, the majority of whom are women, to participate fully in the labour market. **The provision of high quality ECEC should be part of a system-wide approach to supporting family policies.** Coordination between family leave and childcare is essential.

In most European countries there is a childcare gap i.e. the amount of time a child is not covered either by parental leave or a guaranteed place in ECEC³⁸. Eurydice notes that 'a great majority of European countries have a gap of between one and five years, when parents are no longer eligible for childcare leave and yet their child has no guaranteed right to a place in ECEC.'



Source: Eurydice

COFACE Families Europe argues that parents want effective ECEC which combine accessibility, affordability and quality³⁹ in order to meet the needs of all families.

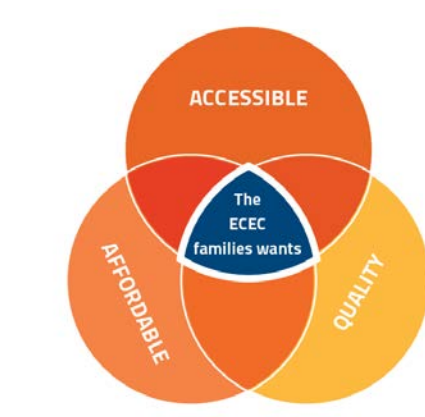
³⁶ DIRECTIVE (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers.

³⁷ COFACE ECEC position (2014) <http://www.coface-eu.org/resources/position-papers/>

³⁸ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019.

³⁹ An EU deal for childcare, COFACE, 2018.

- to be **accessible** there is a need to consider geographic access and access for all children, including those with a disability;
- to be **affordable**, the price parents pay should be low enough to provide an incentive to use the service;
- the **quality** of the service is essential. Parents will not enrol children in poor quality services.



Recognising the children's and families' unmet needs, the 2019 Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems invites Member States to:

- *work towards ensuring that ECEC services are accessible, affordable and inclusive. Consideration could be given to: [...] analysing and addressing the barriers that families might encounter when accessing and using ECEC services, such as costs, poverty-related barriers, ...*
- *aim at ensuring adequate funding and a legal framework for the provision of ECEC services. Consideration could be given to: ... scaling up investment in ECEC with a focus on availability, quality and affordability, including making use, where appropriate, of the funding opportunities offered by the European structural and investment funds.*

This chapter explores obstacles relating to the availability, accessibility and affordability of ECEC services, and the measures used across Europe to address these obstacles.

Improving availability

As ECEC meets a number of needs, both on behalf of children and families, there may be a high demand for places in crèches and kindergartens. However, in a number of countries, this demand is not being met, or it is not being met for children of all ages, even in countries where there is a right to attend ECEC⁴⁰.

It is therefore important that national, regional and local authorities invest in the creation of ECEC infrastructures, alongside the recruitment of well-qualified and well-trained staff to ensure the provision of high quality ECEC to all children and families who wish to use the service.

Country / project examples

Estonia

Based on the Estonian Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2020 and with the help of the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), 47 million EUR were invested during 2014-2020, and this enabled local governments to create around 3,200 new ECEC places. Since 2016, local governments have created around 1,000 new ECEC places in the urban areas of Tallinn, Tartu, and

⁴⁰ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019.

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| | <p>Pärnu. In addition, local governments cooperate with the private sector to provide new subsidised places of ECEC for children under the age of three.</p> |
| <p>Slovakia</p> | <p>The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic provided 15 million Euros to expand and maintain the capacity of kindergartens for all preschool children in 2015. Kindergarten providers have been able to draw on European Union funds to expand and maintain the existing places in kindergartens.</p> <p>Following the introduction of compulsory pre-primary education in 2021, as well as ensuring a sufficient number of places in kindergartens for all children from the age of three, the providers will be able to draw on EU funds. This will lead to 100% enrolment of children who are one year from starting their compulsory schooling. It will also create the preconditions for achieving the government's goal of a legal entitlement to a place in a kindergarten for all children from the age of three.</p> |
| <p>Italy</p> | <p>To facilitate access to the ECEC system, improve the coverage of educational services at the national level and move towards universal attendance of pre-primary school, Italy has adopted a number of measures. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the national multi annual action plan for the progressive and step-by-step extension of an integrated system. It sets out a three-year allocation of resources to consolidate, broaden and improve the quality of an integrated system identifying the different kinds of measures that can be included in the regional planning; • a National Fund has identified the regional measures which can be included in the integrated system and municipalities are funded for three kinds of measures (buildings, staff training, fee reduction). This National fund which started with 209 million Euro in 2017 has been progressively increased to 264 million Euro for 2020 and beyond. The National Fund is distributed using criteria which have been defined through a State-Regions Conference Agreement. The aim is to take account of: * areas where there is a high percentage of the population aged from 0-6 years old (this takes account of the presence of state schools); * the need to sustain services which already exist; * the need to help areas where there is a lack of services (especially in Southern Italy in relation to settings for 0-3 years old); • an allocation of 160 million Euro to ECEC settings (0-6 years) which are managed by private organisations and municipalities to compensate for the loss of fees during the closure time due to the Coronavirus lockdown; • 150 million Euro to local governments to finance the construction of new early childhood education centres (Poli per l'infanzia) which can offer places for both 0-3 and 3-6 year olds in the same building. Converting preschools into Poli per l'infanzia is considered as one way to increase the offer of places to the 0-3 age range as there are areas where schools have empty rooms due to the decrease in the number of children who are enrolled. <p>Other measures are likely to be implemented as part of the European Recovery Fund.</p> <p>After completing the first three-year action plan (2017-2019) some improvements in terms of accessibility are visible, as shown by ISTAT in its recent report on</p> |

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| | nurseries ⁴¹ . This shows that, despite persistent regional gaps, the availability of places for children up to 2 years of age has increased from 24.7% in 2017/2018 to 25.5% in 2018/2019, with a greater increase (5.6%) in Southern Italy. |
| Germany | <p>With the Gute-KiTa-Gesetz (Act on Good Early Childhood Education and Care) the Federal Government intends to improve the quality of children's day-care throughout Germany and reduce the financial burden on parents by reducing or even abolishing childcare fees. To this end, the Federal Government will invest 5.5 billion Euros from 2018-2022.</p> <p>As part of the current investment programme, the Federal Government is providing 1.126 billion Euros from 2017 to 2021. This allows for the creation of an additional 100,000 day care places for children up to school age⁴².</p> |

Improving accessibility

Even when ECEC infrastructures and services are in place, families can still face a number of obstacles especially when they experience specific difficulties (e.g. living in poverty, low literacy levels, poor knowledge of the national language etc.). National and local decision-makers, and to some extent ECEC settings, may want to consider a range of measures to improve the accessibility of ECEC:

- expanding children's right to participate in ECEC e.g. through universal legal entitlement;
- giving priorities to children and/or families in disadvantaged situations;
- extending opening hours;
- removing physical obstacles, such as those facing families who live a long distance from an ECEC setting, or families which include a child or parent with disabilities;
- improving information to parents on their rights to access ECEC;
- removing administrative obstacles facing families who wish to access ECEC services and any potential financial support.

Expanding the right to access ECEC

A number of European countries offer children and families the right to access ECEC. This can be organised in the form of a legal entitlement or a universal legal entitlement, as defined by Eurydice⁴³:

- **A legal entitlement** to ECEC refers to a statutory duty on ECEC providers to secure publicly subsidised ECEC provision for all children from a certain age living in a catchment area, whose parents, regardless of their employment, socio-economic or family status, request a place for their child. A legal entitlement is a right of a child and his/her family.

⁴¹ https://www.istat.it/it/files//2020/10/REPORT_ASILI-NIDO-2018-19.pdf

⁴² <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/meta/en/youth/children-and-youth/112106>

⁴³ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019.

In countries with a legal entitlement, children may attend ECEC, but families may choose other options.

- **A universal legal entitlement** to ECEC exists when every child of a certain age has an enforceable right to benefit from ECEC provision. An enforceable right means that public authorities must guarantee a place for each child of that age whose parents request it, regardless of their employment, socio-economic or family status. It does not necessarily imply that provision is free, only that it is publicly subsidised and affordable. Moreover, the legal entitlement does not necessarily entail a duty to provide a first choice of setting, but the needs of families usually must be taken into account.

Targeted legal entitlement may also apply to some groups of children (e.g. disadvantaged learners, children of parents who are in employment, those from certain minority groups, etc.).

The European Quality framework for ECEC notes that:

- *universal legal entitlement to ECEC services provides a solid basis for reaching out to all children. Population data and parents surveys on the demand for ECEC places can serve as a basis for estimating further needs and adjusting capacity;*
- *improvements in the quality of service provision for all children might be better achieved by progressively building up universal legal entitlement. This includes promoting participation in ECEC from an early age. It can be useful to evaluate whether market based ECEC services create unequal access or lower quality for disadvantaged children and, if necessary, make plans for remedy actions.*

There is a tendency across Europe towards increasing the right to access ECEC; however there are significant differences in the age at which children qualify for a guaranteed ECEC place. Eurydice⁴⁴ notes that:

- *only eight European countries (Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and Norway) guarantee a place in ECEC for each child soon after birth, often immediately after the end of childcare leave. The duty to provide these places usually falls on local government;*
- *a place in publicly subsidised ECEC is guaranteed from the age of three or a little earlier in another eight countries (Belgium, Czechia, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Scotland)). In most of these countries, children are entitled to ECEC free of charge;*
- *around a quarter of European education systems provide guaranteed places from age four, five or six for the last one or two years of ECEC. Often, this provision is explicitly directed at preparation for school with a specific programme to smooth the transition to school education. In almost all of these countries, ECEC attendance is compulsory; only Portugal and Liechtenstein provide a legal entitlement from age four for the last two years of ECEC without making attendance compulsory.*

⁴⁴ Page 8. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016. Structural Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2016. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

The Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee also warns that in some countries, despite a legal entitlement ‘there is an insufficient number of public formal childcare places, leading to long waiting lists and limited access for children from work-poor families’. It also notes that the introduction of a legal entitlement may lead to a rapid extension of provision, resulting in a loss of quality.

Giving priority to vulnerable families

While some countries give priority access to ECEC to vulnerable families, others may give priority to families where one or both parents work. This approach supports reconciliation between family and professional lives, but decision-makers may want to consider whether it reinforces inequalities.

| Country / project examples | |
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| Cyprus | The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth has reviewed the criteria used to allocate vacant kindergarten places to children aged from three to four years and eight months. Priority in the public kindergartens is now given to children at risk from socio-economic deprivation, children from single-parent families, and families with four or more children and above. |
| Italy | Individual ECEC settings set their own priority criteria for access. Generally, single-parents families as well as families with financial difficulties are given priority in relation to access. |
| Belgium (NL) | <p>Childcare settings which receive an income related fee subsidy from the Government have to grant absolute priority to children from families where childcare is absolutely necessary in the context of a work situation (retaining work, looking for work or following vocational training to that end), as well as to children from single-parent families and low-income families and to foster children.</p> <p>Childcare settings can receive a plus subsidy on top of the income related subsidy. These settings have to implement a proactive admission policy to offer a place to vulnerable families, aligning the activities with the vulnerable families’ needs and building and disseminating expertise on how to deal with vulnerable families in a respectful manner. Furthermore these childcare settings must also try to recruit workers from vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Advantage for settings: the revenues from the financial contributions of the families are offset against the income related fee subsidy. As a result, the care for children from low-income families does not have any negative financial consequences for the settings’ operating budget. It promotes the sustainability of child care services.</p> <p>Advantage for families: families pay an income related fee per child per day with a minimum of 5,24 euro and a maximum of 29,09 euro (2019 – amount is indexed every year). Families who cannot pay the minimum fee can ask for a reduced fee from the public centre for social welfare. However this fee cannot be lower than 1,65 euro (2019 – amount is indexed every year).</p> |

Extending opening hours

Most European countries guarantee that ECEC settings will be open between 20 and 29 ECEC hours a week. Weekly opening hours are often aligned with those of primary schools and reflect the educational focus of the provision. Entitlement to opening hours that cover parents' full-time working week are available only in a handful of countries (the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Slovenia and Norway)⁴⁵. However, families need ECEC services to be flexible enough to meet their needs. For many people their working life is not from 9-5 on weekdays - employment can be based on longer hours, flexible hours, weekend or evening working etc.

The Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems therefore invites Member States to consider that:

- *inflexible opening hours can be a barrier to accessing ECEC services;*
- *greater flexibility in opening hours and other arrangements can enable participation especially for children of working mothers, single-parent families and from minority or disadvantaged groups.*

Research from Finland⁴⁶ has looked at the impact of flexible, scheduled ECEC as an institutional childcare service for families where both parents, or a single parent, work non-standard hours. The reports from the research note that ECEC provision in many countries offers extended hours day care, but only Finland has a publicly provided, law-based system guaranteeing ECEC during non-standard as well as standard hours. Based on parental survey data, the report shows that single-parent families and parents with fewer qualifications were over-represented among the families which used flexibly scheduled ECEC. The unpredictability of working-life creates a demand or need for flexible ECEC services. Flexible provision supports children to develop a daily and weekly rhythm - but this has implications for the administration and pedagogy in an ECEC setting as well as the organisation of provision to meet children's needs.

The Finnish research has investigated the challenges managers face in meeting the tensions stemming from non-standard working hours and services which operate 24/7. A study⁴⁷, based on survey data from 20 directors of ECEC centres offering flexibly scheduled ECEC services identified that managing in 24/7 workplaces raised issues of fairness and social responsibility. Managers were faced with constantly varying service demands, leading to changes and unpredictability in employees' working times. Alongside the need to meet the organisations' goals, ECEC service directors needed to consider the well-being of parents and children. The key management issues included:

- finding ways to enhance predictability within an unpredictable context;
- discussing the most common ethical problems associated with opening a centre 24/7;
- developing the skills needed to manage diversity.

⁴⁵ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019.

⁴⁶ Rönkä, A., Turja, L., Malinen, K., Tammelin, M., & Kekkonen, M. (2019). Flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care: experiences of Finnish parents and educators. *Early Years*, 39 (4), 376-391

⁴⁷ Rönkä, A., Ekonen, M., Tammelin, M., & Turja, L. (2018). Management in the 24/7-society raises concerns of fairness and social responsibility. *Social Responsibility Journal*, 14 (3), 670-684.

| Country / project examples | |
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| Slovenia | Each kindergarten decides their opening hours in a meeting with parents' representatives at the beginning of the year. |
| Italy | State pre-primary schools distinguish between full time classes (40 hours per week) and part time classes (25 hours per week). Full time classes make up the majority of provision (in State schools they represent 88% of the total) and are called "normal time sections" (sezioni a tempo normale). In these situations a daily meal is provided for every child. Schools can extend their opening hours up to 50 hours per week based on requests from families but this is uncommon. |
| Sweden | According to the Education Act, municipalities should strive to offer care to children according to their needs outside the normal opening hours of preschools and out of school centres (e.g. during the evenings, nights and at weekends). The Government has introduced a state grant to encourage municipalities to increase the proportion of this type of care. |

| Resources | |
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| Delivering extended and flexible hours in school nurseries toolkit | The British organisation Coram Family and Childcare worked with the Department for Education to develop a free toolkit ⁴⁸ that helps school nurseries extend their provision of early education hours to cover the full day. The toolkit includes a guide to setting up or extending early years provision in schools, preparing a business planning template, creating a marketing strategy and much more. |

Removing physical obstacles

Physical accessibility to high-quality provision can be hindered in many ways, e.g. inadequacy of infrastructure for children or parents with disabilities, or long travelling times for families living in rural or remote areas who might face discouraging distances to access ECEC infrastructures.

The following examples show how European funding can be used by local / regional decision-makers to improve access to ECEC, in particular in rural areas.

| Country / project examples | |
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| Ireland | In 2019, Universal Design Guidelines for Early Learning and Care Settings were published by the Irish Government, following a collaboration with the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design at the National Disability Authority, Early Childhood |

⁴⁸ <https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/delivering-extended-and-flexible-hours-school-nurseries-toolkit>

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| | <p>Ireland, and TrinityHaus architects. The Guidelines set out key considerations and guidance to help ensure that early learning and care settings are accessible, understandable and easy-to-use for all children, staff, families and visitors.</p> <p>The Guidelines are equally useful for small, medium and large settings, and are flexible enough to support retrofit or minor work to existing settings, or to guide major redevelopments or new-build projects.</p> <p>The Universal Design process places a strong focus on a participatory design approach to help meet the needs of all users of a setting. A self-audit tool is available to enable services to begin the process of assessing the improvements they may want to make.</p> <p>An implementation initiative to support widespread use of the Universal Design Guidelines is planned to begin in 2021.</p> |
| Poland | <p>A local kindergarten in the city of Żory closed due to technical issues. The city had a large kindergarten-age population and many children had to be placed on a reserve list, while forecasts predicted continued population growth. To ensure that every child could attend kindergarten, the city of Żory built a brand new, architecturally stunning school with the support of EU funding. As a new building, the kindergarten was designed to be accessible to children with disabilities and is eco-friendly⁴⁹.</p> |
| Croatia | <p>The only kindergarten of the rural municipality of Dugopolje was overpopulated and did not include any programme for the younger children. A new kindergarten has been built with financial support from the European programme for regional development⁵⁰ with a capacity of hosting 160 children, two rooms for the kids of nursery age from 6-12 months and three rooms for the kids age from 1-3 years.</p> |
| Estonia | <p>In the Metsküla community, when the local kindergarten closed, a cultural association in a little Estonian village used European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development support to set up childcare services. The funding allowed to restore an abandoned manor house in the village, formerly a school and enabled the kindergarten to gradually welcome up to 20 children. This new facility has also helped restore a better work-life balance for young parents by reducing the time needed to bring children to the kindergarten and allowing some parents to start working again⁵¹.</p> <p>The municipality of Pärnu has also used the European Regional Development Fund support to build a brand new kindergarten, for the first time in 35 years, which even includes a swimming-pool⁵².</p> |
| Slovakia | <p>The kindergarten in the village of Nižný Hrušov, in the Prešov region of eastern Slovakia, has been renovated with the help of the European Regional Development</p> |

⁴⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/europe/new-school-means-more-children-can-attend-kindergarten-in-zory-poland.

⁵⁰ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/2_kindergarten-dugopolje-marija-cipcic.pdf.

⁵¹ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/enrd_publications/projects-brochure_08_youth_en_web.pdf.

⁵² https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/09/17-09-2020-kindergarten-with-swimming-pool-built-in-estonia.

Fund. The project expanded the school's capacity from 31 to 42 children, creating 11 more places for children between the ages of three and five. The project answered the pressing need for quality pre-school education and day care services, both in the village and the surrounding region⁵³.

Improving information and removing administrative barriers

The Feasibility study for a Child Guarantee⁵⁴ highlights that families may not use ECEC because of:

- a lack of information on the benefits to their children of using ECEC services; the Feasibility Study notes that *in many countries leaving the youngest children (age 0-3) in the care of 'strangers' encounters entrenched resistance, specifically amongst disadvantaged groups. This is challenged through communications programmes. High-quality provision can also generate trust amongst parents, who will then spread the word to their peers.*
- a lack of information on children's and families' rights or entitlement to financial support. It suggests *there is a need for more outreach and information to parents of vulnerable backgrounds who may be less familiar with ECEC institutions, rules, and regulations. It also recalls that administrative barriers arising from online application procedures or the need to navigate diverse funding schemes may be a significant obstacles for some parents.*

Integrated ways of working which bring together all the services which support children and families may be helpful to overcome these obstacles (see section below).

Improving affordability of ECEC

The European Pillar of Social Rights⁵⁵ states that 'children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality'. However, high quality ECEC is expensive - and offering fully-inclusive provision for all children increases the cost of provision. In Europe, most families have to pay fees for ECEC for the youngest group of children. The availability of ECEC free of charge increases noticeably at the age of three or a little earlier, and this trend continues with each year of age, becoming almost universal across Europe during the last year before compulsory primary education⁵⁶.

⁵³ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/Slovakia/kindergarten-in-nizny-hrusov-slovakia-renovated-and-expanded.

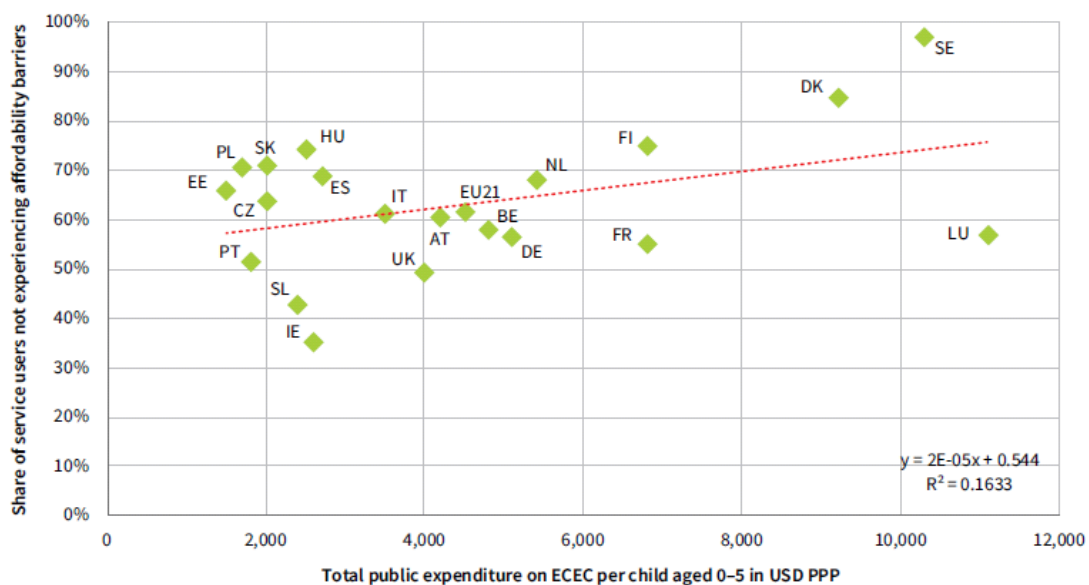
⁵⁴ Frazer, H., Guio, A-C. and Marlier, E. (eds) (2020). Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee: Final Report, Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels: European Commission.

⁵⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights_en

⁵⁶ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019.

Cost remains the main barrier to the use of ECEC services. The European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) 2011⁵⁷ and the EU statistics on living conditions (EU-SILC)⁵⁸ 2016 surveys identify cost as a more important source of difficulty in making use of services than a lack of places, distance or opening hours. **In the EU, cost makes access to ECEC services difficult for 39% of users of formal childcare services**, according to the EQLS 2016. The EU-SILC 2016 module on access to services shows that 31% of households found it difficult to afford formal childcare services⁵⁹. Overall, there is a positive relationship between the share of users reporting in the EQLS 2016 that they have no difficulties in accessing services due to cost and the rate of use (or take-up) at the national level: in other words, the proportion of users of formal childcare is higher in countries where fewer users are burdened by cost. The EQLS 2016 data show there is a medium positive association between total public expenditure on ECEC per child aged from 0–5 and the extent to which cost makes access difficult (see Figure 5)⁶⁰.

Figure 5 – Affordability of ECEC and total expenditure on ECEC per child aged 0-5



Notes: Total public expenditure on ECEC per child aged 0–5 (OECD). PPP = purchasing power parity. Percentage of service users for whom cost did not make it difficult to use childcare services.

Sources: EQLS 2016 (Q 82), OECD Social Expenditure Database (2013 and latest year available, data available in 21 Member States)

The Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee notes that ‘in all countries, funding mechanisms to make ECEC affordable have been reinforced, often based on a proportionate universalism which ensures and guarantees access for all whilst compensating those in a weaker financial position’. Such measures can include providing free access to ECEC or financial support to families and/or ECEC settings.

⁵⁷ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-quality-of-life-surveys>

⁵⁸ <https://www.eui.eu/Research/Library/ResearchGuides/Economics/Statistics/DataPortal/EU-SILC>

⁵⁹ The data from the EU-SILC 2016 ad hoc module are based on children usually cared for by formal arrangements other than by the family in a usual week. The data from the EQLS represent respondents availing of formal childcare facilities or after-school care for their youngest child over the previous 12 months.

⁶⁰ Eurofound (2019), *Challenges and prospects in the EU: Quality of life and public services*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Free access to ECEC

A number of countries have introduced free access to ECEC. These measures may benefit specific age groups, specific disadvantaged groups or be more general.

| Country / project examples | |
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| Finland | <p>The Finnish Government launched a one-year experiment to provide free ECEC from August 2018 to July 2019 - this experiment has been extended twice. The plan was to provide free ECEC for 20 hours a week for five year-olds. The goal was to raise the enrolment rate, increase the participation of five year-old children and their siblings in ECEC, and promote their guardians' employment. The experiment also aimed to develop the pedagogy and counselling services in ECEC settings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in the first period 19 municipalities (approximately 12,640 children) participated in the experiment; • in the second period (August 2019 – July 2020) 26 municipalities and approximately 18,281 children participated, i.e. around 31% of the age group; • the third period (August 2020 – July 2021) includes 26 municipalities (with approximately 17,332 children). <p>The state subsidy compensates for approximately 79% of the ECEC settings' loss of client fees. In the first period of the experiment the compensation was 20% and during the second period it was 40%.</p> <p>The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) evaluated⁶¹ the achievements of the experiment's objectives, showing that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the enrolment rate of five year old children increased in the municipalities which joined the experiment, compared to the reference municipalities; • the participation of families with a low average income increased more significantly; • the participation in ECEC of children aged four also increased; • there was no statistically significant increase in the participation of children below the age of four. <p>The main type of free ECEC was through provision in a municipal ECEC centre. However, the range of settings and groups attended by the five year olds varied.</p> |
| Malta | <p>Malta has a free childcare scheme as part of its general strategy to increase inclusion in ECEC. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • free provision for children aged from three months to three years whose parents/single parents are working or in education; • free provision for children whose parent/s are not in employment or education due to severe illness; • a free care service for parents working during the night. |

⁶¹ First period : https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2019/09/KARVI_1619.pdf; Second period: https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2020/09/KARVI_1420.pdf

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| Italy | Families who can present a low-income certificate have free access to services. |
| Ireland | Free childcare is available through the National Childcare Scheme for families in a number of vulnerable groups, including homeless families; families where there are child welfare concerns; refugees and asylum seekers; and teenage parents. |
| Slovenia | <p>Several measures aim to support as many vulnerable groups of children (or those at risk) as possible. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subsidising all parents' payment of kindergarten fees for the first child. The size of the subsidy depends on the income of the parents. If the parents are in the lowest income group (out of nine income groups), they are exempt from any payments. All other parents pay fees up to a maximum of 77% of the programme's costs; • an Amendment to the Kindergartens Act to reintroduce free access to kindergartens for children whose sibling(s) already attend the same kindergarten. |
| Portugal | Preschool attendance is free of charge for all children aged from three to six years of age. They each receive 25 hours/week of 'teaching' time. The Portuguese State ensures preschool education is available to all children aged from four to five. A preschool network enables every 4- and 5-year-old child to enrol and ensures their attendance is free. The 25 hours 'teaching' time is fully funded by the Ministry of Education in public and private not-for-profit kindergartens. Any additional activities (above the 25 hours/week) are co-funded by families. This co-funding is based on the income of each family. |
| Norway | In August 2015, the government introduced a national scheme with a right to attend kindergarten 20 hours per week free of charge. The scheme applies to all children aged two to five from low-income families, regardless of language background. From August 2019 the scheme also included children from the age of 1 in asylum centres. The aim is to avoid economic obstacles for participation in kindergarten. Target groups are families with a yearly income less than 548 500 NOK (54 850 EUR). However, many of the families in the target group do not use free core hours. Research points to the need for more information to the target groups and an easier way to apply for a place. |

Financial support to families

To support families with financial difficulties, the European Quality Framework for ECEC suggests that provision can 'include an adaptation of the requested fees for ECEC to allow low-income households' access'.

Besides fee reductions, a range of financial support measures can be introduced to support disadvantaged families, such as maximum fees or vouchers. However, the impact and conditions for success of any scheme needs to be evaluated carefully. The Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee notes for example that 'some countries offer tax refunds on day-care services on top of any waivers or subsidies offered; however, payment of these can sometimes be up to a year after the expense, which does little to alleviate the costs for low-income families at the time of payment'.

| Country / project examples | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-------------|
| Ireland | <p>The National Childcare Scheme was launched in 2019. It provides financial support to help families with the cost of childcare in regulated services (both centre-based and home-based). It comprises two types of subsidy: a universal subsidy for children aged from six months to three years; and an income-related subsidy for children from six months to 14 years of age.</p> <p>The level of subsidy is determined by the family's total income, with the highest levels of subsidy given to families with income below the relative income poverty line. The assessment of family income is automated on the basis of tax and welfare data in order to simplify the application process. Support with the application process is available for parents with access or literacy difficulties.</p> <p>The National Childcare Scheme replaced all the previous targeted subsidy schemes, which had varied eligibility criteria, with a single scheme. It represents a move away from the receipt of a social welfare payment or employment status as a basis for support, and moved towards family income. To further reduce the risk of parents choosing to be unemployed, more hours of income-related subsidy are available for families where parents are in employment or training.</p> | | |
| Portugal | <p>The Ministry of Education subsidizes families, particularly those who are financially deprived, when their children attend a private (for profit) kindergarten. A contract is signed between the Ministry of Education and the kindergarten and this specifies the terms of the support for each family.</p> | | |
| Denmark | <p>In Denmark, since 2000, the Act on Day Care⁶² obliges municipalities to ensure ECEC provision for all children between the ages of 26 weeks and the start of primary school. Municipalities receive financial sanctions if they fail to comply and therefore all municipalities meet the requirements. Parents may have to meet up to 25% of a setting's estimated gross operating expenditure. A sliding fee scale is applied and the fee reduction/discount can be up to 100% e.g. for those parents who have low incomes.</p> | | |
| Italy | <p>The Italian State Budget Law provides incentives for families in order to overcome barriers associated with access to ECEC services.</p> | | |
| Sweden | <p>A maximum fee was introduced in 2002 to ensure preschool provision was accessible and affordable to all children. The maximum fee system is voluntary for municipalities but they all use the system. Municipalities which use the fee system are entitled to a government grant to compensate for the loss of income.</p> <p>From the autumn term when a child reaches the age of three and up to the time when school starts, children have an annual right to 525 hours free of charge (this reduces the fee even more). The share of the cost of a place met by parents is about 7% for of the pre-school's cost.</p> <p>Monthly preschool or family day care fees for children aged from one to five:</p> <table border="0" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Fee cap</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Highest fee</td> </tr> </table> | Fee cap | Highest fee |
| Fee cap | Highest fee | | |

⁶² <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=124871&exp=1>

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|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| | Child 1 | 3% | SEK 1478 (approximately 145 Euro) |
| | Child 2 | 2% | SEK 986 (approximately 97 Euro) |
| | Child 3 | 1% | SEK 493 (approximately 48 Euro) |
| | There are no fees for a fourth child. In 2020 the highest fees are paid by those whose earnings exceed SEK 49 280 (4850 Euros) per month. The earnings limits are adjusted each year. | | |
| Luxembourg | In Luxembourg (since October 2017) children aged from one to four may benefit from 20 hours of free child-care in the non-formal education sector (<i>service d'éducation et d'accueil</i>). This complements the free pre-school services (<i>éducation précoce et éducation préscolaire</i>) which are offered from the age of three. The free 20-hours programme is administered through a voucher system ⁶³ . | | |
| Switzerland | <p>Bern was the first of 26 cantons to introduce childcare vouchers. Parents living in a participating municipality are entitled to a childcare voucher if certain criteria are met: they must have a need for childcare (due to a job, ongoing training or illness of the parents/siblings) and the amount of the voucher depends on the parents' income and assets. For economically weak families, the voucher almost completely covers the usual costs of childcare. In order to provide incentives for well-qualified people to return to work after starting a family, families with above-average earnings also receive a voucher, although the amount is lower as income increases. The amount of the voucher is also linked to the extent of the work activity or the extent of the need.</p> <p>Almost every day care centre or day family organisation in Bern accepts the vouchers. To be admitted to the system, an institution has (amongst other things) to offer day care as well for children with special needs and is not allowed to charge different rates whether parents get vouchers or not (no cross-financing). All parents who place children with special needs in a childcare facility receive a fixed amount in addition to any voucher amount. This contribution can be used by the childcare facilities to cover the additional costs of childcare.</p> <p>For children up to the age of 12 months, the voucher is higher by 50% compared to a voucher for the older kids. This higher amount reflects the higher time expenditure and the associated costs for the care of infants.</p> <p>Parents who wish to apply for a voucher can do so via a standard web application, which is also used for billing. The vouchers can be redeemed throughout the canton, giving parents flexibility in choosing a suitable childcare facility. At the same time, the system provides incentives to create a supply that meets demand (in terms of quantity and quality). In order to avoid a downward levelling, the canton sets uniform approval and supervision criteria for all childcare facilities (irrespective of whether they accept vouchers or not).</p> <p>Experience to date shows that the system gives many parents access to childcare that they could not afford without financial support. In addition, many children are</p> | | |

⁶³ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019.

also reached who would not have the opportunity to learn the school language without childcare outside the family.

Financial support to ECEC settings

An alternative or additional strategy for national policy-makers involves support to ECEC settings located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, or private initiatives which complement the public offer.

Country / project examples

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| Cyprus | The government provides a subsidy to cover some of the expenses for community kindergartens which operate in situations where the public kindergarten classes do not meet the needs of all the children aged from three to four years and eight months. Parents cover the remaining expense of operating these schools. The attendance fees for community schools are much lower than those of the private schools. |
| Slovenia | Public kindergartens are funded by local municipalities in line with the needs of local population. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport provides kindergartens with funds for higher operating costs of development departments ("razvojni oddelki") in the amount of the difference between the average price of development group programs and the average price of regular group programmes in kindergarten because they are much smaller (they consist of max. 6 children) and specially educated pre-school teacher and pre-school assistant. |

Other financial measures

Even though access to ECEC is free for all children in the three (or a little earlier) to six age range in many countries, additional support can provide the right conditions to encourage and support families to access provision. Lithuania for instance can provide support to families wishing to buy educational materials. Lithuania and Belgium (French-speaking) also offer free meals to some children in need.

Ensuring efficient governance and cooperation at all levels

Creating an effective governance system, with clear and sustained leadership at the national or regional level is critical in implementing policies and practices which strengthen integration, promote social inclusion and provide support across the full age of ECEC provision.

The ECEC sector is organised in different ways in individual European countries. Eurydice highlights two important aspects of ECEC governance: the organisation of ECEC settings and the ministerial responsibility⁶⁴.

For centre based provision, Eurydice considers ECEC according to whether there are different settings for older and younger children, and whether education and care is organised in one phase for the entire ECEC age range. In Europe, ECEC provision may be organised in:

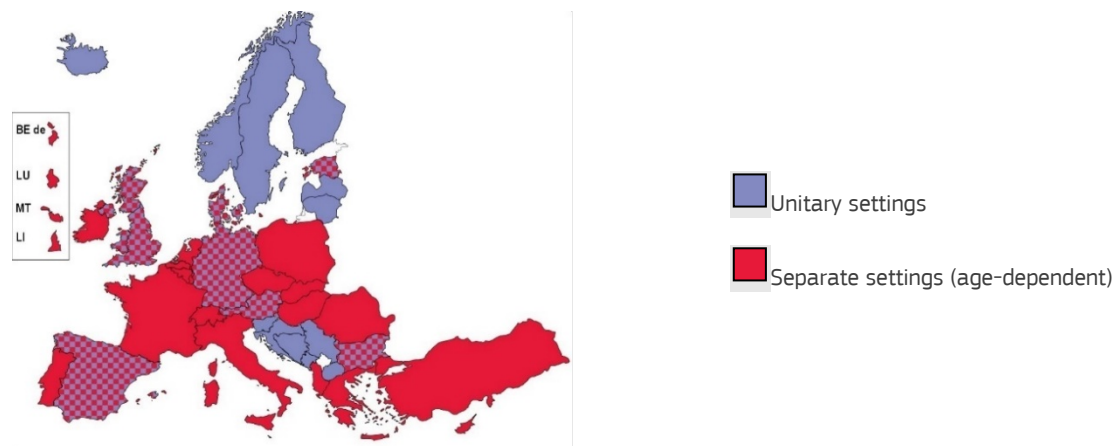
- separate settings: there are separate settings for younger and older children with a transition usually around the age of 3. In a typical split system, children starting centre-based provision at an early age begin in a childcare-type setting (e.g. a nursery) before moving to an education-type setting (e.g. kindergarten or a pre-primary school). The division reflects a split between 'childcare' services and 'early education' provision in some form of non-school setting that follows similar regulations to primary education and may even be based on the same site as the primary school.
- unitary settings: the whole of ECEC provision is delivered in a single setting – children stay in the same setting until they reach primary school age (or, in a few education systems, until they start a pre-primary class). These unitary settings usually provide programmes with a defined educational component. The provision is typically designed with a holistic approach to support children's early cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and to introduce young children to organised instruction outside of the family context.

In most European countries, centre-based ECEC is provided in two separate types of setting according to children's ages (see Figure 6). Less than a third of the European countries analysed have only unitary settings. The unitary setting structure is mainly adopted in the Nordic countries as well as in several Baltic and Balkan countries⁶⁵. In a quarter of European countries, both separate and unitary settings are available.

Figure 6 - Organisation of ECEC settings in Europe, 2018/19

⁶⁴ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/key-data-early-childhood-education-and-care-europe-%E2%80%93-2019-edition_en Page 33

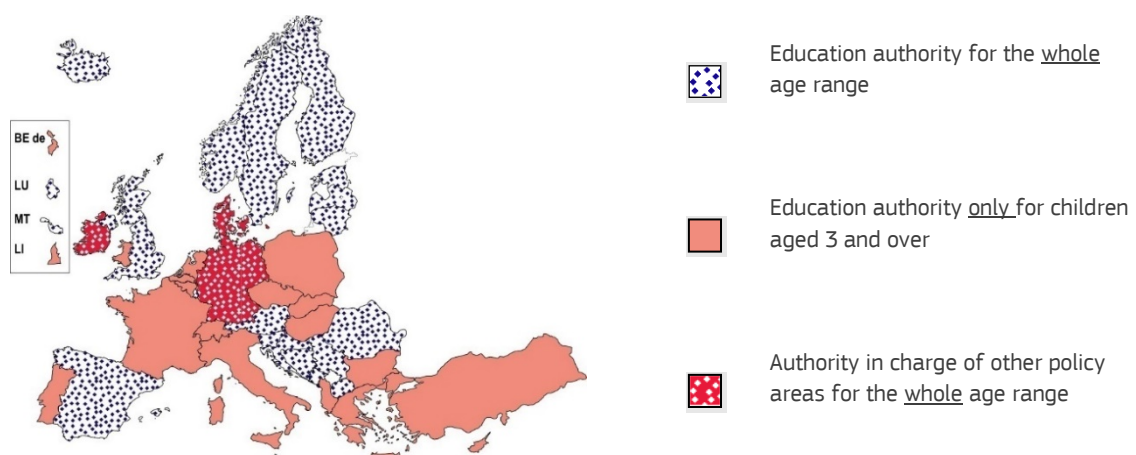
⁶⁵ In Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway and Serbia



Source: Eurydice. Note: Malta and Portugal: The Figure shows the situation in the public sector. In the private sector, unitary settings also exist.

The second way Eurydice categorises ECEC is in relation to the ministry/national authority with responsibility for the governance and policy of centre-based provision. The organisation of ECEC provision and the rules that apply largely depend on the nature of its governance. Consigning the responsibility for the entire ECEC phase to a single ministry or top-level authority may help promote coherent policies and ensure better quality services⁶⁶. Eurydice⁶⁷ notes that the single authority model has been adopted in more than half of European education systems (see Figure 7). In the rest, the authority responsible for education is responsible for ECEC provision for children aged three and over while a different authority – generally the one in charge of social affairs – is responsible for provision for younger children.

Figure 7 - Authorities responsible for governing centre-based ECEC provision, 2018/19



Source: Eurydice⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Kaga, Y., Bennett, J., and Moss, P., 2010. *Caring and learning together: A cross-national study on the integration of early childhood care and education within education*. Paris: UNESCO.

⁶⁷ Page 37. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019

⁶⁸ In cases where different authorities have responsibility for different aspects of provision, the Figure shows the education authority as being responsible, unless its role is extremely limited. The transition

Decisions on whether one or two ministries/national authorities take responsibility for the full ECEC age range are made at the national or regional level. Increasingly there is a trend towards more systems becoming unitary rather than a different governance arrangement for children below and above the age of three. The Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC noted that ‘the integration or coordination of services in charge of different regulations on ECEC can have a positive effect on the quality of the system’⁶⁹.

There are two emerging trends in developing greater cohesion between separate governance arrangements at the national/regional level:

- one trend is the assignment of all responsibility to one ministry. For instance, in Luxembourg and Malta, the responsibility for services for younger children was recently transferred to the Ministry of Education in order to ensure greater policy coherence (in 2012 and 2017 respectively). Italy is also in the process of bringing ECEC under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, although the regions are still the main regulators of provision for under-3s.
- the second trend is for much closer liaison between different ministries when there is a split system. In France for instance, there is an enormous amount of joint working between the Ministry of Solidarities and health and the Ministry of Education.

between two different types of setting usually takes place at the age of 3. It may happen at an earlier age (2-and-a-half in Belgium – French and Flemish Communities) or at the age of 4 (Greece, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Liechtenstein). Germany, Spain and Switzerland: The Figure represents the most common situation across regions. Italy: For children under the age of 3, the situation varies between regions. The Ministry of Education, University and Research plays a limited role (mainly educational aspects).

⁶⁹ [Council Recommendation \(EU\) \(2019/C 189/02\) on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems.](#)

Exploring the benefits of tiered systems

Developing strategies for all children to access ECEC means addressing the needs of children who are at risk of exclusion. This leads policy makers to consider a range of approaches to encourage and enable as many children as possible to benefit from mainstream ECEC provision⁷⁰. These approaches may differ for children whose families suffer from social or economic disadvantage, and for those children whose ability to benefit from ECEC may be affected by a learning or physical disability. For this latter group of children, policy makers are reluctant to introduce a ‘one size fits all’ model for supporting inclusion. As the barriers faced by these children vary widely, it is helpful to use a flexible model which can adapt and respond to individuals’ needs. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusion comments that it is essential to attend to each child’s progress, rather than to merely focus on the attainment of standards of competence. This allows all children – whatever their level of achievement – to be valued equally as active participants and learners with their peer group and to get the support they need to progress⁷¹.

Flexibility, within a system-wide strategy of seeking to include as many children as possible in mainstream ECEC, has led to the creation of tiered models of support i.e. the support is either tailored to the needs of the individual child or designed to support the ECEC setting which is working with an individual child. In the former type of provision, the level of support is reliant on an assessment of the medical or learning needs of the child; in the latter approach, the level of support is based on an assessment of the ECEC centre’s needs in relation to the child. It is important to organise support (through a tiered model) to meet the needs of individual children. There are significant advantages in working with mainstream ECEC settings and the children’s families to ensure the available support enables the individual child to play and learn with and alongside other children. Avoiding diagnostic processes helps to avoid stigmatising individual children and emphasises the benefits of all children playing and learning together.

Across Europe there are many examples of each of these approaches. The following examples illustrate how some Member States use a tiered approach to address the needs of children with physical or learning disabilities, which can be expanded to answer other individual needs.

Country / project examples

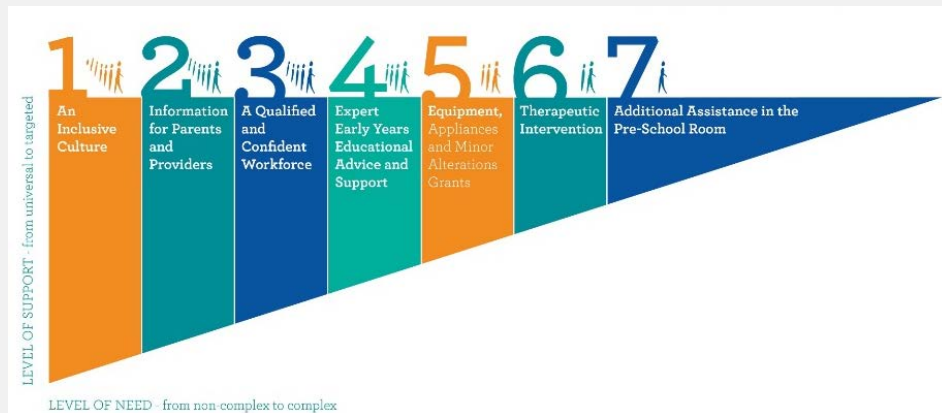
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| Ireland: Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) | Ireland’s Access and Inclusion Model (AIM ⁷²) is a national programme which was introduced in 2016 to support the inclusion and meaningful participation of children with disabilities within the universal, free pre-school programme in mainstream pre-school settings. The free pre-school programme was introduced as a one-year programme in 2010 and has been extended to two years. AIM operates within a national system which is based on private ECEC providers (either for-profit or non-profit) operating within a market context. |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

⁷⁰ The Education Monitor 2019 records that 95.4% of children aged four and above benefit from ECEC. <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/volume-1-2019-education-and-training-monitor.pdf>

⁷¹ <https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/IECE-Summary-ENElectronic.pdf>

⁷² www.aim.gov.ie

The AIM model for support is based on seven levels - and the level of support provided varies at each level in response to children's and ECEC settings' needs:



The additional support which is offered by the Irish government to ECEC settings includes:

- funding staff training on inclusion practices;
- financial incentives for the promotion and coordination of an inclusive culture in settings (e.g. funding inclusion coordinator posts, extra assistance, free equipment);
- support for a strong inter-agency approach (with health services).

The initial findings on the impact of AIM have been very positive - the percentage of settings with a child with a disability has increased and the percentage of children who receive the highest level of support has grown from 1% in 2017 to 4% in 2020. Further work to evaluate the initiative will look at a range of perspectives e.g. from the children, families, ECEC staff and managers, and in relation to children when they enter the school system.

Some challenges in implementing AIM have also been identified:

- up to one third of ECEC settings are still not engaged in the process;
- the number of applications for the highest level of support is already three times higher than initially expected, and this growth might continue;
- some children continue to attend specialist/segregated setting;
- the cost of this measure is higher than initially forecast.

The Irish government is planning to start an evaluation by the end of 2020 and following completion of the evaluation will consider extending the scheme to other target groups or other age groups.

Finland

In Finland there are three levels of support:

- General support is the first response to a child's need for support. This usually means individual support measures to improve the situation as early as possible. This is provided as the need arises, and no specific assessments or decisions are required;

- Intensified support to a child who needs regular support or several forms of support simultaneously. It is provided on the basis of a pedagogic assessment in accordance with a learning plan which has been formulated for him or her;
- Special support is provided to children who cannot adequately achieve the goals set for their growth, development or learning. The child's capabilities may have been weakened by, for example, a disability or serious illness.

This system of support is used in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools where it is a right for children aged six and above. It is sometimes used in ECEC but it is not a right in these settings. This tiered approach to support has not been formally evaluated but surveys on the availability of support show that it is mainly the lowest level of support which is being provided. The survey on the support arrangements highlighted the need to help ECEC settings be able to better predict what support the children will receive.

An example of Finland's approach can be seen in the Liinalampi Day-Care Centre, Jyväskylä project⁷³. As part of the ECEC setting's approach to strengthen inclusion, they identified three main themes which could enhance the inclusiveness of Jyväskylä City and the Liinalampi Day-Care Centre's ECEC provision. These included:

- using the national three-levels of support model;
- a focus on the human resources side of inclusion;
- promoting a team approach among qualified staff.

⁷³ Inclusive early childhood education - Case Study Visit Report: Liinalampi Day-Care Centre, Jyväskylä, Finland, 18–20 April 2016

Modify child/staff ratio regulations

An inclusive policy which welcomes all children in ECEC, regardless of their individual and family circumstances can change the interactions between staff and children. When everyone is able to participate, staff will find themselves working with children from diverse communities and backgrounds; children with different home languages; children whose families have experience of poverty or social exclusion; children with additional or special needs etc. This requires staff to use the full range of their competences to ensure all children are valued and included in all activities. The demands on staff need to be addressed - and this can mean changes to the child/staff ratios; the support of ECEC assistants and other staff; the employment of additional core practitioners etc.

It is important to consider whether there are staffing implications associated with increasingly inclusive approach to provision and to consider quality statements made in the EU quality framework:

- *staff is the most significant factor for children's well-being, learning and developmental outcomes;*
- *adult-child ratios and group sizes are most adequate if designed in an appropriate manner for the age and composition of the group of children.*

The research body on the link between child/staff ratio and the inclusive dimension of ECEC is scarce and more research would be needed to elaborate on this topic. However, Eurofound reviewed studies assessing the impact of working conditions on children's learning outcomes and experiences, including staff-child interactions. Only five studies were considered robust enough to be considered⁷⁴; these studies confirm that child-to-staff ratio and class size influence the quality of interaction between staff and children and the practice of staff⁷⁵.

Country / project examples

Slovenia

Slovenia has high normative standards if children with special education needs (SEN) are included in a regular kindergarten: the group size consists of a pre-school teacher (especially educated for children with special needs) and a pre-school teacher assistant per max. 6 children.

In the period from 1 September 2019 until the implementation of norms for the implementation of programs for preschool children, in accordance with the Act on Integrated Early Treatment of Preschool Children with Special Needs, the expert group for early treatment determines the maximum scope on the basis of an individual family assistance plan or multidisciplinary team suggestion for the additional professional assistance to the child in the current school year in kindergarten.

Additional professional assistance may be provided in a condensed form or unevenly, with the total amount not exceeding 120 hours in an individual year or in a proportional share if the child is granted additional professional assistance during

⁷⁴ Palmerus, 1996; Sundell, 2000; Blatchford et al, 2002; Sandstrom, 2012; Hayes et al, 2013

⁷⁵ Eurofound (2019), *Challenges and prospects in the EU: Quality of life and public services*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

the school year. Until the establishment of the working place (post) of educator for early treatment, additional professional assistance is provided by the pre-school teacher.

The expert group for early treatment also determines the scope of physical assistance to the child during his/her stay in the kindergarten and taking into account the needs of the child also the manner and scope of involvement of a sign language expert or an expert in adapted communication and work with the deafblind, up to 15 hours per week.

The expert group for early treatment may reduce the number of children in the kindergarten group due to the inclusion of children with special needs.

Working with and supporting ECEC settings

Improving access to ECEC is best achieved when administrators, decision makers and ECEC settings work in partnership. Not only does this facilitate the sharing of good practice and innovation, it enables those with a policy responsibility to benefit from local knowledge and recent experience of day-to-day practice. Combining local understanding of the needs of families, children and communities, with the organisational skills of administrators, helps to strengthen inclusion in any ECEC service. In many ECEC systems, individual providers are able to access additional support from national or regional organisations. This provision of external support provides expertise and guidance on issues that cannot always be addressed easily in an individual setting.

Country / project examples

Portugal: involving ECEC settings in defining children's needs

In Portugal the TEIP (Priority Intervention Education Areas) programme enables clusters of schools, which include ECEC settings, primary and secondary schools, to identify their own needs. By analysing each school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the ECEC setting managers are able to develop their strategy to strengthen inclusion in line with the legislation. These inclusion strategies are monitored and the evaluation of the actions taken by each school cluster helps to improve the policy's implementation.

One TEIP project involves supporting people in disadvantaged situations and aims to improve learning outcomes and the quality of education in order to prevent early school leaving and absenteeism, reduce indiscipline and strengthen relations between school, families and community. The project covers 137 school clusters in social and economically disadvantaged areas. Settings in these challenging contexts define their own improvement plan based on knowledge of the local contexts. This helps to improve transition between the different levels of education, especially from preschool to lower primary. As part of this project the ECEC system is becoming more inclusive to all children, especially those from vulnerable areas and ethnic minorities like the Roma families.

Belgium (NL): providing external support and expertise to ECEC settings

In the Flemish community of Belgium, ECEC settings can receive external support to strengthen inclusion. This support is provided by centres for inclusive childcare. For five years 16 childcare centres have been designated as centres of excellence and invited to promote inclusive childcare, share their expertise in their region, raise parents' and stakeholders' awareness of inclusive childcare, support other childcare settings' development of their inclusive childcare provision and develop a network of relevant partners. Each centre receives a subsidy to enable them to provide inclusive childcare in a proactive way and to employ an inclusion coach (1/2 full-time equivalent member of staff) to put these tasks into practice.

For 20 years the City of Ghent has funded more than 40 "bridging professionals" to work in 50 schools. This professional network is part of a system which builds links between families and schools in order to support vulnerable families⁷⁶.

⁷⁶ Vandekerckhove, A., Hulpia, H., Huttova, J., Peeters, J., Dumitru, D., Ivan, C., Rezmues, S., Volen, E., and Makarevičienė, A. (2019). 'The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefitting vulnerable groups

**Ireland: the
Better Start
initiative**

Better Start national early years support service is a Government initiative established in 2014 that provides advice, mentoring and training to practitioners.

One division within Better Start (the Quality Development Service) provides mentoring and training to practitioners to promote the quality of provision, including implementation of the national quality (Sólta) and curriculum (Aistear) frameworks.

Another division provides advice and support to ECEC services on inclusive practice to support children with disabilities, including site visits and advice by telephone, as well as carrying out needs assessments to determine the provision of supports through the Access and Inclusion Model (see above).

A third division, newly established, coordinates delivery of a range of training programmes, including a number of training programmes to support inclusive practice.

An evaluation of Better Start is beginning at the end of 2020.

Supporting early intervention

An ECEC system that takes an inclusive, universal approach as its starting-point helps to ensure that children's differences and difficulties are identified and supported earlier. This makes it easier and more cost-effective to introduce or strengthen preventive actions, and organise adequate support for children with special/additional needs and their families. It also provides more time and more opportunities to involve all relevant services in the design of solutions e.g. educational, social or health services as well as parents. The core of early intervention is to secure every child the right to well-being, learning and development equally with other children. The early identification of individual children's needs, in line with their parents' wishes, helps to ensure that ECEC provision is more accessible and inclusive. A central aspect of developing and implementing an ECEC system which responds to the early identification of children's needs is the appropriateness of the initial and continuing training of staff. Well qualified ECEC practitioners need to be equipped to recognise the developmental needs, interests and potential of young children and be able to detect potential development and learning problems in order that they can more actively support individual children.

Country / project examples

Slovenia

In Slovenia, the Act Regulating the Integrated Early Treatment of Preschool Children with Special Needs was adopted in 2017 and became effective on January 2019. The Act provides for the creation of a system of early childhood interventions for children with special needs from birth until entry to primary school, as well as support for their families. It foresees improved procedures for placing pre-school children in kindergartens that implement the adapted programme of school education and provides a basis for co-ordination between different structures.

It changed the system of providing assistance to children who have deficits, obstacles or disorders, or to children with risk factors for this. With the new law, children receive help as soon as possible, and parents get all the necessary information in one place. Children can be identified within the family, in the health system within the implementation of preventive health care at the primary level or examinations within this framework and other treatments in kindergarten, educational institution, social welfare institution or within the services of social work centres. Developmental clinics will be gradually transformed into early treatment centres, where the child will be treated by various experts and the most appropriate forms of help will be proposed.

Other relevant policies include the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act of 2011; the supplement to the instructions to the curriculum for pre-school day care centres and additional professional staff for children with special needs or long-term illness, updated in 2016; and the rules on additional professional and physical assistance for children with special needs of 2013⁷⁷.

Denmark

Aarhus Municipality implemented the project 'A safe start in life' from 2014 to 2017. The goal was to develop an extended cooperation between health visitors and pedagogues in nurseries (0-3 year) to the benefit of parents with new born children

⁷⁷ Hunt, Paula (2019). "Target Group Discussion Paper on Children with Disabilities", Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels: European Commission.

who were insecure in this new situation but not severely at risk. The health visitors were professional nurses providing a service to parents during the first year after birth. These professionals had a close cooperation with parents and often discovered needs for support e.g. with breastfeeding, getting the child to sleep, activities to stimulate the child, etc. Parents were offered to visit a nursery and meet the pedagogues and the pedagogues also visited the families to give support, guidance and solutions to everyday tasks with the new born child. The parents were therefore introduced to the facilities of a nursery, which later facilitated a good transition when the child went to the nursery – in Denmark typically at the age of 10-12 months. Similar local projects are developed around the country and are praised by parents, health visitors and pedagogues.

| Resources | |
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| <p>Recommended practices in early childhood intervention: a guidebook for professionals</p> | <p>This Guidebook⁷⁸ has been developed within the Portuguese project Im² (Intervening More, Intervening Better), by the National Association of Early Intervention, with the support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. It aims to be a useful tool for professionals who, both on the field and at other levels of the system, seek to respond to the multiple and complex challenges inherent to early childhood intervention (ECI) practice.</p> <p>The Guide presents a global vision of ECI and a range of recommended practices; it also emphasises the importance of professional development to support quality intervention practices.</p> |

⁷⁸ <https://indd.adobe.com/view/ce456704-8e75-46a4-a7e6-700b024ed409>.

Training and supporting ECEC staff to support inclusion of all children in ECEC

The training and education of ECEC staff is central to the quality of provision. Training which enables staff to be inclusive and use inclusive pedagogic approaches will make children and their families feel more welcome and will ensure that every single child's individual need for well-being, learning and development is supported. In many ways, the promotion of inclusive practice is one aspect of putting children at the centre of provision and organising services to meet their needs. This child-centred approach is summarised in the Council Recommendation as follows: *ECEC services need to be child-centred; children learn best in environments that are based on children's participation and interest in learning.*

Training and education can support staff in creating a welcoming environment that values children's languages, culture and home backgrounds, and contributes to the development of their sense of belonging.

Staff training and education is typically divided into three stages: initial preparation; induction and continuing professional development (CPD). During this journey of increasing professionalism, training and education moves from more general/theoretical knowledge through practical/work specific activities before finally becoming focused on an individual's more immediate learning needs.

- Typically the initial training and education programmes introduce trainees to the ideas of social inclusion and look at a range of strategies to support the inclusion of all children.
- Induction usually builds on this knowledge to consider the practical activities, policies and values which underpin the ECEC setting's practice. In this stage of training and education the focus is on understanding expectations of the new member of staff.
- During the third stage of education and training, the focus is on identifying an individual's strengths and weaknesses and responding to their developmental and learning needs.

With this type of three stage model, it is important to recognise that not everything can be covered in any one stage of education and training, and some topics are best addressed in induction (e.g. how to organise home visits or family liaison in your employer's setting) or in CPD (e.g. how to work with an autistic child who has recently joined the ECEC setting).

At the system level, this three stage process needs to be supported by structures and national, regional or local arrangements e.g.

- an agreed set of competences which need to be demonstrated by ECEC practitioners during their initial education and training programmes;
- a requirement for all newly appointed ECEC practitioners to complete a mandatory induction period;
- a requirement for all ECEC staff to allocate an agreed number of days/hours per year for CPD.

As part of these arrangements, given the importance of providing ECEC for all children, it would not be unusual to see social inclusion as a prominent activity.

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education's literature review⁷⁹ into inclusive ECEC notes that in most European education and training systems, initial education incorporates specific training to prepare educators for working with children with additional needs. In some countries, specific additional training is compulsory for all ECEC staff. This specific training can consist of continuous professional development and be recommended, but this is more often only available for staff working with older children (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014).

The European Quality Framework for ECEC highlights the importance of staff training as it invites Member States to ensure that the sector has **well-qualified staff with initial and continuing training that enable them to fulfil their professional role**⁸⁰. This invitation is an encouragement to

- Develop *state-of-the-art initial education programmes which are designed with practitioners and provide a good balance between theory and practice. Such programmes can benefit from training staff to work with linguistically and culturally diverse groups, from minority, migrant and low-income families.*
- Recognise that *staff that are equipped to follow the developmental needs, interests and potential of young children and able to detect potential development and learning problems can more actively support child development and learning. Regular, tailor-made and continued professional development opportunities benefit all staff members, including assistants and auxiliary staff.*
- Include *knowledge on child protection systems, and more generally on the rights of the child* in the different training programmes.

The working group's development of core competences⁸¹ set out a series of expectations for all staff. All ECEC staff can be expected to:

- promote each child's development, well-being and learning;
- work with the local community and within the ECEC system;
- work as part of a team;
- keep children safe;
- support children's transition into and from ECEC settings;
- be aware of the impact their practice has on children for whom they have responsibility;
- recognise the different cultural and social backgrounds of children;

⁷⁹ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017. *Inclusive Early Childhood Education: Literature Review*. (F. Bellour, P. Bartolo and M. Kyriazopoulou, eds.). Odense, Denmark

⁸⁰ Council Recommendation (EU) (2019/C 189/02) on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems.

⁸¹ European Commission (2020) - Early Childhood Education and Care – How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff

- work with all families including those who may have different values and attitudes; and treat all children and families with respect.

Identifying what it means to be a competent ECEC professional in relation to inclusion is helpful and can consist of:

- developing competences, e.g. in relation to self-reflection as this supports individuals who wish to think about their own views on inclusion;
- identifying personal training needs;
- increasing knowledge of child development;
- fostering inclusive attitudes, the development of an open minded approach towards parents and children, the ability to adapt to new ideas and situations; supporting self-awareness which enables staff to put themselves in the position of the parent/child and have a better understanding of their needs;
- developing intercultural competences and awareness of different family arrangements.

A number of professional practices also support inclusion in ECEC:

- teamwork and cooperation;
- recognising the importance of supervision, which requires specific skills from ECEC setting leaders;
- recognising the role of assistants in facilitating inclusion.

At the system or setting level, a number of issues can be considered to increase inclusiveness through education and training of ECEC staff:

- recognising the importance of raising the attractiveness of the profession and the value of recruiting a more diverse staff team and staff from a wide range of backgrounds;
- creating recruitment schemes and training pathways which are attractive to staff from minority ethnic groups;
- considering the relevance (or not) of making training in inclusion compulsory through initial training and CPD;
- exploring the possibility of including socially excluded target groups in the design and/or delivery of training modules;
- recognising that developing staff competences for inclusion requires in-practice training, supervision, group training and a focus on early age intervention; and includes discussion of the services provided by the health, social security and education sectors;

There are many examples of national and regional ECEC systems which support training relating to inclusion and encouraging staff to have a more inclusive professional practice.

Country / project examples

Ireland

The Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) training programme is one of the central strands in the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), which was introduced in 2016 to support the participation of children with disabilities in the universal pre-school

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| | <p>programme. Each year LINC trains up to 900 practitioners to be Inclusion Coordinators in their settings. An Inclusion Coordinator leads inclusive practice and pedagogy in their setting.</p> <p>The LINC programme is free of charge to selected participants, and more than 60% of settings now have an Inclusion Coordinator, incentivised by an additional payment to service providers.</p> <p>LINC is a one-year, part-time training programme, delivered in a blended format, combining online training with face-to-face training on several weekends over the year (during Covid-19 it is being delivered wholly online). LINC has received a very positive evaluation and multiple awards. From 2021, it will also include regular continuing professional development (CPD) for qualified Inclusion Coordinators who completed the LINC programme in previous years.</p> <p>LINC is complemented by a range of other training programmes within AIM, including introductory training in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.</p> |
| <p>Ireland</p> | <p>The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training is a universal training initiative within the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).</p> <p>The main objective of the EDI training is to foster awareness among ECEC practitioners regarding the equality, diversity and inclusion of young children and to encourage and support those working in the sector to advocate for the inclusion of all children and their families within the ECEC setting.</p> <p>The EDI training programme is based on the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for ECEC⁸², and encompasses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding Diversity, Equality and Inclusion; • Developing an anti-bias approach in early years; • The physical environment and its role in inclusive practice; • Using the National Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines and developing a service Inclusion Charter. <p>Each training course is 15 hours in duration: one full day and three short sessions. Participants have to attend all four sessions in full to receive certification. To date, practitioners from two-thirds of Irish ECEC services have participated in the EDI training.</p> |
| <p>Bulgaria</p> | <p>One of the activities of the project "Active inclusion in pre-school education" ensures training for teachers to implement a screening test to identify early learning disabilities. Early identification and provision of general and additional support to children, screened to have a need of such, by appointing additional pedagogical staff are other activities aimed at active inclusion. The project implementation will be accompanied by activities for building the skills of non-pedagogical specialists to work and motivate parents for the benefits of preschool education.</p> |

⁸² <https://aim.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Diversity-Equality-and-Inclusion-Charter-and-Guidelines-for-Early-Childhood-Care-Education.pdf>.

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| North Macedonia | North Macedonia's partnership work with UNICEF and the UN Social Inclusion group to train ECEC staff. This includes considering whether to develop core competences for all staff or establishing specialist competences which would be acquired by only some staff. |
| Germany | The Early Start (Frühstart) programme ⁸³ focuses on day care centres in multicultural and disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The programme primarily aims to support day care centres' pedagogic staff by providing them with high quality educational opportunities at the centres where they work. Early Start embraces diversity, helps children and parents develop their German language skills, promotes the participation of parents and encourages networking between the centres and their neighbourhoods, as well as facilitating team training and consultation. |
| Denmark | <p>With the strengthened pedagogical curriculum, it was underlined that all children should be included within the children's community. This value is central to the pedagogical thinking in Denmark and in the pedagogical training programmes. All ECEC institutions in Denmark are now to provide in their local pedagogical curriculum how they adapt to the needs of children in vulnerable positions. When the strengthened pedagogical curriculum was adapted in 2018, several courses were developed for pedagogical staff, leaders and childminders, aiming at increasing the knowledge of and delivery of the curriculum.</p> <p>With the 1,000 days programme, a better start to life, an addition of four courses were developed. These courses specifically aimed at improving the skills of ECEC staff who work with children from socio-economically disadvantaged and minority ethnic background.</p> |
| Belgium (NL) | <p>The project Kleine Kinderen, Grote Kansen (Little Children, Big Opportunities) is a collaboration between the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, the King Baudouin Foundation, and Flemish teacher education programmes aiming to better equip students in teacher training institutes in dealing with poverty, diversity and social equity in pre-primary and primary education. The project has developed a conceptual framework which describes good quality ECEC and demonstrates a clear understanding of child poverty and how to work with children and families in poverty.</p> <p>The project website⁸⁴ offers ECEC educators a repository of resources on fighting deprivation and a lack of opportunities at a young age and on how to deal with diversity. In addition, the project produced a video which follows one ECEC teacher for a year. Five, one-hour clips from this video are used for training purposes for reflection and analysis. Each clip shows what the practitioner did, describes what could be done, shows the practitioner re-doing the same activity after receiving training and support, and the practitioner's reflection and analysis of the new approach. A new edition of this video is being prepared.</p> |

⁸³ [Early Start, European Platform for Investing in Children \(EPIC\)](#).

⁸⁴ www.grotekansen.be

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| <p>Norway</p> | <p>In the White Paper “Early intervention and inclusive education”⁸⁵ the government planned to develop a strategy to strengthen the competence of teachers and support staff in supporting students with special needs. The White Paper explicitly states that targeted support needs to be close to the child, namely at the kindergarten, school or municipality level.</p> <p>Inclusive education will be added as an additional focus of the existing decentralised scheme of competence development. The competence development for inclusive education and special needs will target four areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • broad collective competence development through the regional and decentralised scheme • formal further education • web-based support • network building and competence development for the university network. |
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| Resources | |
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| <p>Portuguese guide for teachers and parents</p> | <p>The Portuguese Ministry of Education provides teachers and parents with a Practice Support Handbook “Towards Inclusive Education”⁸⁶. The handbook is designed to support professionals in the implementation of the new legal regime for inclusive education, as well as to support parents and guide their participation in their children’s educational process.</p> |
| <p>ISSA’s Embracing Diversity training package</p> | <p>The Embracing Diversity is a two-folded training package⁸⁷ developed and rolled out by ISSA in more than 20 countries, starting in 2004. It promotes the values of anti-discrimination, anti-bias, and respect for diversity in classrooms, in communities, at the workplace, and in society. It guides participants through a process of personal transformation, which helps them to become agents of change towards inclusive and social cohesive societies.</p> <p>The program focuses on empowering adults working with diverse groups to recognize their own attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in relation to marginalized groups, to raise their awareness and knowledge about issues of discrimination, and to help them take responsibility and build the capacity for change on personal, professional and institutional levels.</p> <p>The program includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Diversity: Creating Equitable Societies through Personal Transformation - Training program for adults - during the training, participants get theoretical overview and knowledge about most relevant concepts related to diversity, interculturalism, equity and social justice and they also build critical consciousness through naming reality, giving voice to those who are usually silenced and by building alliances. The program targets three levels for |

⁸⁵ <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/meld.-st.-6-20192020/id2677025/>

⁸⁶ Para uma Educação Inclusiva – Manual de Apoio à Prática.

⁸⁷ https://www.issa.nl/embracing_diversity

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| | <p>influencing awareness and action: psychological level (challenging personal and societal attitudes, developing empathy for self and others, a positive self-image, self-respect and a healthy respect of others), educational level (knowledge and information concerning otherness and mechanisms that create and perpetuate prejudice, discrimination and oppression) and concrete action level (moving from reflection to action and empowering individuals and groups to take responsible actions towards change). The program consists of well-elaborated theoretical part, guidelines for facilitation and reflection, and 25 training sessions. Additional materials and resources listed can serve for adaptation of the program to meet the needs of diverse participants and specificity of different contexts. It can be adapted for teachers, parents, school administrators, local education authorities, school or community mediators, medical staff, social workers, police officers, local government officials, journalists, and other community members who interact with diverse populations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education for Diversity Toolkit: Program for adults working with and for children is a result of different programs and specific activities developed by ISSA and its members over the past 15 years. The backbone of the toolkit is ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy which focuses on process quality and educators as agents of change and their power and ability (with more or less support to enrich the lives of children, families and communities and thus of society in general). The program is organized around three areas, Hearts, Heads and Hands aiming to nurture each child's self and social (group) identities, help children to engage in comfortable, empathetic interactions with diversity, strike a balance between people's similarities and differences, help children to think critically about the world and inequalities that exist, and to stand up for themselves and others. The focus is on developing an understanding and respect for diversity that creates a climate in educational institutions in which every child can thrive. The entire toolkit recognizes the knowledge that exists in communities and seeks ways to erase the resistant boundaries that can exist between educational institutions and some of the communities that they serve. The toolkit contains numerous tips, theoretical and conceptual explanations, more than 50 activities for children and 14 workshop sessions for educators. Sessions for educators can easily be combined with the sessions from Embracing diversity, creating equitable societies through personal transformation – Program for adults. The Toolkit also unpacks the individual and system competences needed for education for diversity and the whole pre/school approach, including a more democratic continuous professional development approach such as the Professional Learning Communities. |
| <p>Making sense of good practice</p> | <p>This manual (available in English, Dutch and French)⁸⁸ has been prepared by the Belgian Centre for Innovation in the Early Years; it explains how an ECEC organisation can embrace diversity, based on six principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone feels that he/she belongs. • Everyone is empowered to develop the diverse aspects of his/her identity. • Everyone can learn from each other across cultural and other boundaries. |

⁸⁸ <https://vbjk.be/en/publication/making-sense-of-good-practice>.

- Everyone can participate as active citizen.
- Everyone can actively address bias through open communication and willingness to grow.
- Everyone works together to challenge institutional forms of prejudice and discrimination.

Defining curriculum / pedagogical guidelines supportive of inclusion

The curriculum is a central aspect of the Council Recommendation for high quality ECEC systems as it defines children's experiences in the ECEC sector and is one of the five dimensions of the European Quality Framework. It is therefore important that the curriculum is inclusive and appropriate for all children. The Council Recommendation invites Member states to *enhance the development of early years' curricula in order to follow children's interests, nurture their well-being and meet the unique needs and potential of each individual child, including those with special needs or in a vulnerable or disadvantaged situation. Approaches supporting holistic learning and children's development could include:*

- *ensuring a balance in the provision of social-emotional and cognitive development, acknowledging the importance of play, contact with nature, the role of music, arts and physical activity;*
- *promoting participation, initiative, autonomy, problem-solving and creativity and encouraging learning dispositions to reason, investigate and collaborate;*
- *fostering empathy, compassion, mutual respect and awareness in relation to equality and diversity;*
- *offering opportunities for early language exposure and learning through playful activities; and considering, where possible, tailored multilingual early childhood programmes, which also take into account the specific needs of bi/multilingual children.*

Developing and implementing an inclusive curriculum begins during the initial training and education of staff. It is based on children's rights and interests. Once an inclusive curriculum is in place, the pedagogy and practice of staff will be based on children's individual needs and potential. In many situations an inclusive curriculum leads to the development and use of differentiated pedagogic approaches in order to respond to the individuals' needs and preferences for learning.

Eurydice notes that all European countries have issued official ECEC curricula or some form of educational guidelines. However, in around a third of all European countries, curriculum applies only to settings for children aged 3 and over⁸⁹. While developing the inclusiveness of national curricula, it would therefore be useful to make sure it benefits all children, regardless of their age category.

⁸⁹ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019.

Country / project examples

Portugal

An updated edition of curriculum guidelines was published in 2016, based on:

- a general framework which includes principles to support the Curriculum Guidelines, purposeful teaching and advice on how to develop the curriculum, advice on the design of the educational environment
- a set of learning areas, namely personal and social development, expression and communication – including physical education, art education, oral language and literacy, mathematics, knowledge of the world, educational continuity and transition.

The curriculum guidelines are based on four principles:

- recognise development and learning as a closely intertwined process;
- acknowledge the child as subject and agent of his/her educational process;
- require staff to respond to all children;
- require a holistic approach to the construction of learning.

The guidelines require each teacher to develop the curriculum by considering the children they work with each year. Their curriculum development should be based on an ongoing quality assurance cycle which includes observing, recording, documenting, planning, acting and assessing. This assessment and planning should consider the educational environment, the learning process, the teacher's self-evaluation of their provision for each child, and their assessment of each child's development.

The Guidelines consider inclusion as a cross-curriculum issue. Inclusion is addressed in the General Framework and included in two of the foundation principles. In addition, one of the learning areas (Personal and Social Development) has explicit requirements to respect differences and enhance inclusion within teaching and learning.

Slovakia

The new national curriculum for kindergartens⁹⁰ (for children 3-6) was approved in March 2015 when the inclusion principles and criteria were established. National curriculum implementation was reinforced by one-year piloting in 306 kindergartens which cooperated with the National Institute for Education. During the piloting period, the Institute provided training for leaders and teachers on the new curricular areas, designing school curriculum, planning and evaluation. Kindergartens provided a feedback on the new curriculum, on the training they had received and on their own experience with the new curriculum. Cooperation and feedback of engaged kindergartens helped to revise the document and update it. An updated version of curriculum with toolkits and examples of good practice was introduced to all kindergartens (almost 3000) in 2016.

Among the general goals, curriculum aims to:

⁹⁰ Štátny vzdelávací program pre predprimárne vzdelávanie v materských školách.
https://www.statpedu.sk/files/articles/nove_dokumenty/statny-vzdelavaci-program/svp_materske_skoly_2016-17780_27322_1-10a0_6jul2016.pdf

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enforce and protect the rights of the child in cooperation with the family, provider and other stakeholders, respecting the needs of the child and creating conditions for the well-being of all children, • ensure accessibility and equity in education, • ensure the availability of counselling and other services for all children, gain the parents' trust to an institutional setting and to a coordinated effort to ensure the well-being and needs of children. <p>The curriculum sets up basic inclusion principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • education for all, • universal learning outcomes, • diversity, adaptability and differentiation of entry conditions and identification of progress in education, • adaptation of the process and progress to the local community and its needs, • integration of preschool activities within local activities, • intensive professional development of teachers. <p>The national curriculum explicitly requires:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • integration of educational areas (holistic approach), • to design school curricula reflecting local conditions, social and cultural background of children and their specific educational needs, • to ensure a balance between child spontaneous play and teacher-led activities, • to create sufficient space for individual needs and interests of children, • to provide opportunities for children to experience that there are people with disabilities and people with cultural diversity living among us (explicitly covered by an educational area), • evaluation processes, part of which are evaluation questions. |
| Ireland | <p>Aistear and Play continuing professional development programme began in 2019, providing training in the Aistear national curriculum framework. It forms part of the National Síolta Aistear Initiative, which is a collaboration between two Government Departments, the Better Start quality development service, and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.</p> <p>Aistear & Play is delivered by Better Start early years specialists and supports staff in applying Aistear and the Síolta national quality framework in their practice for children from birth to 6 years. It consists of five workshops, two on-site support visits with an early years mentor, and practice tasks for practitioners following the workshops. The aims of the programme are to support practitioners' understanding and implementation of Aistear and Síolta, to improve the quality of provision, and to further curriculum development skills.</p> <p>Participation can be on a whole-team basis.</p> |
| Cyprus | <p>A new curriculum (for the age group of 3 to 6 years old), was introduced in 2016. One of the primary goals is to address each child as a person with a different</p> |



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| | <p>biography, a specific learning profile, level of readiness, educational preferences and interests, which undoubtedly leads to the use of diversified teaching strategies, at both organisational and pedagogical levels.</p> <p>The new curriculum focuses on four developmental areas: 1) Personal and Social Understanding, 2) Emotional Empowerment, 3) Mobile Competences and 4) Mental Strengthening. The subject areas are connected and interact with one another to ensure a broad understanding of learning. It focuses on a learning environment which not only adopts planned structured activities but also spontaneous activities, especially during play. Kindergarten teachers must be able to carefully formulate a pedagogical content based on the different activities taking place. Activities are based on subjects of a broader interest.</p> <p>The Pedagogical Institute provided training for leaders and teaching staff by introducing forms of organizing learning through: play, free play, structured play, learning stations, structured activities with all children and in-depth study. The new curriculum gives special emphasis to cultural, linguistic and religious pluralism. Teachers and children should work in a climate of acceptance of their differences, develop respect and avoid stereotypes. The mother tongue of each child is important because it is the way s/he perceives the world. It is also part of his/her identity. Learning a language other than mother tongue is a natural process for these ages. A democratic school that respects and promotes the child's autonomy offers opportunities to connect experiential situations of children's life with tradition and culture.</p> |
| Slovenia | <p>In order to apply national Kindergarten Curriculum's goals and principles in practice also for children with special educational needs (SEN) and other children, several supplementary documents were adopted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guidelines to the Kindergarten Curriculum in programmes with adapted implementation and additional expert care for children with special needs, 2003• Kindergarten Curriculum and adapted programmes for pre-school children, 2006• Supplement to the Guidelines for the Kindergartens' Curriculum with adapted implementation and additional professional assistance for SEN children for long-term sick children (2016)• Annex to the Kindergarten Curriculum in ethnically mixed areas, 2002• Annex to the Kindergarten Curriculum for work with Roma children, 2002 |
| Norway | <p>The Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017)⁹¹ is a regulation to the Kindergarten Act⁹², and sets out supplementary provisions on the content and tasks of kindergartens for children aged 0 – 6. The Framework Plan states that the kindergarten shall take a holistic approach to children's development. Play, care, learning and formative development shall be seen in context. Meeting every child's need for care, security, belongingness and respect and enabling the children to participate and contribute to the community are important values that shall be reflected in kindergarten. Helping to assure that all kindergarten children can enjoy</p> |

⁹¹ <https://www.udir.no/in-english/framework-plan-for-kindergartens/>

⁹² <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2005-06-17-64?q=Barnehageloven>

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| | <p>a good childhood with well-being, friendships, and play is essential. Kindergartens shall make allowances for the children's differing abilities, perspectives and experiences and help to ensure that the children develop a positive relationship with themselves and confidence in their own abilities. Kindergartens shall promote democracy and be inclusive communities in which everyone is allowed to express themselves, be heard and participate. Kindergartens shall adapt their general pedagogical practices to suit the children's needs and circumstances, including children in need of additional support for shorter or longer periods. Kindergartens shall ensure that children receiving special needs support are included in the group and in mainstream activities.</p> <p>The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training provides material on different subjects to support the implementation of the Framework Plan, among them arrangements for children in need of special adjustments.⁹³</p> |
| Milan (Italy) | <p>The City of Milan provides professional support (which has included some e-learning) for the implementation of the city's <i>Pedagogic Guidelines for 0-6 childcare services</i>. These guidelines, based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, put the child at the centre of provision and recognise that childcare services are educational contexts where children's rights are achieved by favouring inclusion and dialogue; by supporting children with disabilities; by compensating for disadvantaged cultural backgrounds; and by enhancing the provision of resources. In practical terms this means promoting the rights of all children in the educational services by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accepting each child's situation is the one that they experience; • listening to and understanding the point of view of girls and boys and promoting their participation, by identifying the appropriate forms of participation according to their age; • dedicating educational and pedagogical attention to the integrity of each individual child; • interpreting children's differences as "normal" (e.g. children with special educational needs, disabilities, development difficulties, learning difficulties); • designing and undertaking every intervention in the best interest of the children. |
| Denmark | <p>In 2018, a strengthened pedagogical curriculum was developed in Denmark.</p> |

| Resources | |
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| Inventory and analysis of promising curriculum, pedagogy, | <p>The research project ISOTIS published this inventory⁹⁴ to identify, describe, and critically analyse promising interventions within the classroom and school microsystems aiming to promote educational equality and belongingness for immigrant, Roma, and low-income children. Interventions include curriculum, pedagogy, and school social climate approaches in early childhood and primary</p> |

⁹³ <https://www.udir.no/laring-og-trivsel/sarskilte-behov/>

⁹⁴ <https://www.isotis.org/en/publications/inventory-and-analysis-of-promising-curriculum-pedagogy-and-social-climate-interventions-tackling-inequalities>.

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| and social climate interventions tackling inequalities | <p>education in eight European countries (Czech Republic, United Kingdom, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Portugal).</p> <p>The report provides a brief overview of existing evidence on social and educational inequalities and a theoretical framework for designing and implementing coherent multicultural policies within the school system.</p> <p>The project also published case studies and a short literature review of main trends and challenges in curriculum approaches, educational practices and social climate interventions aiming to tackle social inequalities.</p> |
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Does lowering the age of compulsory education lead to more inclusion?

The 2019 Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems recommends that Member States consider ‘supporting child development in a consistent way starting as early as possible by using ECEC services’. The attached EU quality framework for ECEC notes that ‘improvement of quality in service provision for all children might be better achieved by progressively building up universal legal entitlement. This includes promoting participation in ECEC from an early age’.

Some countries have chosen to lower the age of compulsory participation in education, with the objective to better reach socially excluded groups and better prepare children for primary school. Recent changes include:

| Country / project examples | |
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| Greece | <p>Recent legislation has made pre-primary education compulsory for all children aged from four to six (previously it had been compulsory for five to six year old children). This ECEC provision is free of charge in the public pre-primary schools. This policy began in 2018-2019 and its national implementation will take place over a three year period. The policy was introduced in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • address social needs and a long-standing request from the education community and parents; • reach the European target of 95% participation in ECEC of children between the age of four and the age of compulsory primary education; • address the unequal opportunities offered to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. <p>The policy, funded by the Ministry, is being developed through dialogue with all the ECEC stakeholders.</p> |
| Slovakia | <p>Slovakia prepares for the introduction of one year compulsory pre-primary education for all five year-olds. ECEC settings will be obliged to accept all children for whom pre-primary education is compulsory from September 2021. This policy, based on legislation, will succeed if:</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is cooperation between ECEC providers, parents, primary schools and educational counselling services; • care, education and meals are freely available to children for whom education is compulsory; • the municipalities receive higher subsidies for ECEC provision. |
| France | Since September 2019, participation in ECEC is compulsory from the age of 3. |
| Belgium | Since September 2020, the starting age of compulsory education has gone down from 6 to 5 years, including one year of ECEC. |

On the other hand, Cyprus has chosen to raise the age of compulsory education. Since 2004 pre-primary education had been compulsory and free in public kindergartens for children aged between 4 years and 8 months and 5 years and 8 months. In 2018 the Ministry increased the compulsory age range in kindergartens to 6 years old. This decision was based on:

- the Ministry's research, which showed a correlation between the age that children joined a primary school and their development and achievement of learning outcomes;
- the experience of teachers and parents indicated that some children at the age of 5 years and 8 months were developmentally and emotionally less able to effectively cope with the primary school curriculum;
- the learning readiness of children of this age, as well as their physical and cognitive development, varied considerably.

It should be noted that the idea of compulsory ECEC is controversial and may not always serve the purpose of improving inclusion. Countries which choose to adopt such measures may need to consider the following issues:

- It is important to understand why attendance is not as high as expected. It may for instance be due to a problem of quality. Forcing parents to send their children to a system they do not trust might be detrimental to the relationship with families and their support to their child's participation in ECEC;
- It is important to recognise that compulsory ECEC can conflict with some cultures' and communities' views about how to raise children;
- Compulsory ECEC may support greater inclusion but alternative approaches are possible. Greater inclusion is not solely the responsibility of one or two ministries - many other government departments can develop policies which support greater inclusion.

If participation in ECEC becomes compulsory:

- Careful planning and budgeting must prepare for the transition, as compulsory ECEC requires greater capacity from the system e.g. an increase in the number of staff and more physical space in ECEC settings. It may also have an impact on the number of available ECEC spaces for younger children if the settings are required to take more children of an older age.

- It is important that these changes do not have an impact on the quality of education and care offered to children.
- Accompanying measures must be in place to support participation of the most disadvantaged groups (e.g. support to appropriate clothing, transport, free meals, extra school cost, etc.)
- It is important for these policies to be monitored and their impact measured.

As a conclusion, more evidence on which approach produces better outcomes would be useful.

PRACTICES THAT BENEFIT ALL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

As described in the previous chapter, national and local decision makers can adopt *policy* strategies and take a range of policy measures to improve inclusiveness of the systems.

This chapter will explore how ECEC settings, staff and in general stakeholders involved in providing ECEC can also adopt inclusive *practices and measures* for the benefit of all children and families. It considers in particular:

- the benefit for ECEC staff and institutions to work with other services that serve the interests of children and families;
- the need to work in close cooperation with families;
- strategies to facilitate transitions – between home and ECEC institution, between ECEC institutions, or between ECEC and primary school.

Supporting integrated approaches – working with other services

Many children, and their families, depend on the services of different local or national government organisations or agencies e.g. ECEC settings, the education sector, the health sector, family support services, children’s social workers, the justice system, the police etc. How these services are organised and coordinated significantly affects the quality of provision which is offered to individual children and their families. Services which are integrated and organised around the needs of children are more likely to coordinate the provision of support and help vulnerable and disadvantaged children to succeed. A close link to labour, health and social policies is also an asset as it can promote a more efficient redistribution of resources by targeting extra funding towards disadvantaged groups and neighbourhoods.

The Council Recommendation on High-Quality ECEC Systems recommends that Member States *aim at ensuring adequate funding and a legal framework for the provision of early childhood education and care services. Consideration could be given to promoting better cooperation among services or further integration of them for families and children, most importantly with social and health services as well as schools, at national, regional and local levels.*

The EU Quality Framework for ECEC refers to the idea that *stakeholders are expected to have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations. This will help to ensure that ECEC provision will benefit from close collaboration with all services working for children, including social and health services, schools and local stakeholders. Such inter-agency alliances have shown to be more effective if governed by a coherent policy framework that can pro-actively foster collaboration and long-term investment in local communities. It should also strengthen stakeholders’ involvement, which has been shown as crucial to design and implement early childhood education and care provision.*

This emphasis on integrated services has been considered by the report "The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefiting vulnerable groups such as Roma"⁹⁵ which comments that *the needs of vulnerable children and families are multi-faceted and cannot be addressed by ECEC services alone. To improve the holistic development and well-being of children and families a wide range of policies, services, and actions must be involved. Only multi-dimensional, aligned and integrated responses and interventions in early years can address the complex needs, especially for the families in vulnerable situations, such as living in poverty, being of Roma origin, or coming from a migration or asylum-seeking context.*

⁹⁵ Page 89. Vandekerckhove, A., Hulpia, H., Huttova, J., Peeters, J., Dumitru, D., Ivan, C., Rezmuvcs, S., Volen, E., and Makarevičienė, A. (2019). 'The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefiting vulnerable groups such as Roma', NESET report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

This report highlights four pre-requisites for successful integrated working:

- a shared vision, starting from the needs of children and families in the community;
- an effective and efficient ECEC system which is characterised by strong leadership and reflective staff;
- supportive policy and funding;
- family and community involvement.

The report concludes by noting that efforts to support children and families must involve a wide range of policies and actions; no single intervention or service on its own can hope to achieve sustainable improvements. There is a growing recognition among researchers, policy makers and practitioners that policies and services need to become better integrated to effectively address poverty and promote social inclusion.

Integrating or coordinating services and/or regulatory arrangements relating to ECEC has a positive effect on the quality of the system. ECEC provision should be designed to ensure there is close cooperation with other services which support children and their families. Organising young children’s services around the needs of the child is more likely to lead to an increase in the quality of ECEC. As part of any strategy to strengthen integrated working it can be helpful to:

- **create, at the national / regional level, the conditions which enable local arrangements to succeed;**
- **ensure that the financial incentives and expectations for ECEC providers support integrated working;**
- **include integrated working in professional and leadership training.**

To support the development of integrated work, a number of inspirational experiences are presented below.

The INTESYS (Strengthening integration within early childhood systems) project⁹⁶ focused on integration between:

- different services: care, education, health, family/social services, cultural; public and private organisations;
- age-related services: transition between (home and) services for the young children (birth to three through primary school) - vertical;
- different levels of public governance (local, regional and national) – horizontal and vertical.

Pilot experiences in various countries have been documented and give an illustration of the challenges and benefits to set up a system of integrated working.

⁹⁶ <http://www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/intesys>

Country / project examples

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| <p>INTESYS in Belgium (NL)</p> | <p>In the Belgian pilot of the INTESYS project⁹⁷ the focus was on building on what is already happening in the area of integrated work. More specifically, setting-up collaborations among different services, that support children and families in general, and the more vulnerable groups in particular. Within the context of the decree on preventive family support, the Belgian pilot set up a dual trajectory with the Brussels ‘Huis van het Kind’ that considered these two levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on the regional level, a partnership of organisations within one NGO, reflection on the developing partnership was the key element. The pilot provided support by way of organising focus groups among the members. These focus groups served as a sounding board and critical friend for the (key players in the) NGO and documenting the current needs, challenges, difficulties, building blocks and key elements to move forward within this network. • on the local level, the pilot offered support in strengthening the local ‘antenna’s’ of the Huis van het Kind, tailor-made as much as possible to the needs of the different local networks and in dialogue with the process facilitator, the coordinator and the chairmen. As the local networks work at different paces, a common support was agreed, which resulted in several inspirational sessions on issues chosen by the involved partners. |
| <p>INTESYS in Italy</p> | <p>The Italian pilot INTESYS project⁹⁸ began with a mapping activity based on interviews and focus groups of existing ECEC services in order to provide an up-to-date framework of the existing level of integration among different services and different professionals. The second step has been the settlement of the Local Steering Committee (LSC), including representatives of public and private institutions from different systems as well as parents and caregivers, and the planning of periodic LSC meetings. The core activities of the pilot is the “shared journey” toward integration that includes training but also field activities. It is composed of: a) two round tables, one at the beginning of the “shared journey” and one at the end, addressed to LSC members and representatives of local, regional and national authorities and public services managers; b) 8 meetings from April 2017 to March 2018 of which 5 meetings aimed at reaching a shared understanding of integration principles and values and 3 meetings more experimental, piloting integration in the three locations identified together with the LSC: a kindergarten with children aged 0-3, a pre-primary school with children aged 3-6 and paediatric ambulatory.</p> |
| <p>INTESYS in Portugal</p> | <p>In the pilot INTESYS project in Portugal⁹⁹ there were six contextualised journeys of integration undertaken in the Lisbon Municipality, developed with a participatory approach. The focus of the Portuguese pilot was the integration of services across sectors (care, education, health, family/social services, cultural, integration of migrants) and the main goals were: * To promote the integration of ECEC services in Lisbon in a systemic way, with a focus on inclusion and response to children and families in situations of vulnerability; * To promote holistic and child and family-centred approaches to ECEC services; * To test the toolkit for the creation and</p> |

⁹⁷ [Erasmus+ project INTESYS - Integrated services - Pilot in Belgium - BE 2018](#)

⁹⁸ [Erasmus+ project INTESYS - Integrated services - Pilot in Italy - IT - 2018](#)

⁹⁹ [Erasmus+ project INTESYS - Integrated services - pilot in Portugal - PT - 2018](#)

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| | <p>management of Integrated ECEC Services; * To contribute to the creation of quality benchmarks in ECEC. Addressing these broad goals, each service of the local partners group designed particular and more tailored focus and goals addressing their specific contexts and needs. The most particular characteristic of the pilot in Portugal was the implementation strategy with the design of the Local Partners Group (LPG), including ECEC services from all providers (public, private non- and for-profit) as well as a social service and a health service (temporarily), which worked as a Community of Practice (CoP) in a participatory approach. The work developed by the Local Steering Committee and the LPG-CoP promoted various opportunities for joint action between sectors and services.</p> |
| <p>INTESYS in Slovenia</p> | <p>In the Slovenian INTESYS project¹⁰⁰ the general goals were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to promote ECEC systems which are responsive to and inclusive of vulnerable children and their families due to better integration of services and a more holistic and child and family-centred approach; • improve educational attainment of children from vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized groups who have benefited from more holistic, integrated and responsive ECEC services and systems. <p>In two pilot sites in Slovenia the focus was on establishing Local Action Teams (LAT), consisting of representatives of various sectors and services in local communities, which are in contact with Romani population. LATs were following specific goals in both pilots related to increasing the enrolment rate and attendance of Romani children in preschool programs (Preschool Kekec Grosuplje) and making transition from preschool to primary school for the Romani children smoother (Preschool Mavrica Trebnje). We can conclude that in reaching the first general goal, we have certainly achieved a big step forward (at least in one of the pilots). The second goal is very complex. It requires a changed understanding of professionals' role in order to truly involve Roma families in the planning of meaningful programs, for implementing an outreach approach; and it particularly requires a constant reflection of the role of a professional. At the same time, in order to achieve this goal, a competent, supportive and integrated system must be developed in the local environment. In our pilots, we made the first steps towards creating such a system, but in order to achieve the improved educational attainment, more time and joint efforts are required.</p> |

The report on "The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefiting vulnerable groups such as Roma"¹⁰¹ also highlights examples of integrated working.

Country / project examples

¹⁰⁰ Erasmus+ project INTESYS - Integrated services - pilot in Slovenia - SI - 2018

¹⁰¹ Page 89. Vandekerckhove, A., Hulpia, H., Huttova, J., Peeters, J., Dumitru, D., Ivan, C., Rezmues, S., Volen, E., and Makarevičienė, A. (2019). 'The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefitting vulnerable groups such as Roma', NESET report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

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| <p>Belgium (NL)</p> | <p>Over the years, both schools and Ghent city council became more aware of the challenges presented by poverty and migration. As a result, the 'bridging professionals' project was developed in 1997. Today, more than 40 bridging professionals are active in around 50 schools. These bridging professionals enable stronger links to be made between school and home life, but also between schools and other services that support vulnerable families.</p> <p>A publication reviewing 20 years of bridging professionals provides the following description: 'a bridging professional is appointed to a school with an explicit mandate to support and improve cooperation and communication between (vulnerable) families, the school and the neighbourhood. They work within the school but have no classes assigned to them, in order to have all the necessary time and space to engage in connecting all involved parties.' Bridging professionals are appointed as members of a school team, not as outsiders. Their main task is to build bridges between schools, families and the neighbourhood, and to carry out their work according to three pillars: working with parents, working with the school team, and working with the children. The last of these pillars has, however, been less well developed. The main focus of the bridging professionals is on working with parents. Their task can be described as 'linking, supporting and strengthening' on both sides: families (parents) and school teams.</p> |
| <p>United Kingdom (N. Ireland)</p> | <p>The Newry Early Years centre¹⁰² is part of the national Sure Start programme which provides integrated services through centres which support families, in particular vulnerable ones. The case study provides insights on the role and possibilities of such centres and insists on the need for a strong leadership which is about coordination, inspiration and motivation, and the importance of continuous professional development.</p> |

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education's project¹⁰³ on Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE) also includes examples of how ECEC settings have addressed integrated working.

| Country / project examples | |
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| <p>The Netherlands</p> | <p>In one example in the Netherlands¹⁰⁴ where a setting is not able to provide inclusive education for children with severe physical disabilities, the staff have worked with youth health care services to identify priority children who will attend the kindergarten four times a week (minimum ten hours). These children have special needs or parents with low education levels. In Utrecht, it was estimated that there are 1,575 such children. Some 900 children whose parents have high education levels also attend the setting. Many children's additional needs are not initially evident and are diagnosed during their time in the setting. All of the children are</p> |

¹⁰² Vandekerckhove, A., Hulpia, H., Huttova, J., Peeters, J., Dumitru, D., Ivan, C., Rezmues, S., Volen, E., and Makarevičienė, A. (2019). 'The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefitting vulnerable groups such as Roma', NESET report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Case 1 - Early Years children and family centre, Newry, Northern Ireland

¹⁰³ <https://www.european-agency.org/projects/iece>

¹⁰⁴ Inclusive early childhood education - example of inclusive practice - Spelenderwijs Utrecht - NL - 2018

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| | observed and there is a specialist who supports the tutors. Staff at the setting work together with colleagues from the youth and health care services, who also provide an expert advice to the tutors. Neighbourhood support teams (http://www.buurtteamsutrecht.nl/) can support families with special needs. |
| Portugal | The Agrupamento de Escolas de Frazão ¹⁰⁵ has experienced significant transformation over a short time, as the local council and school leaders were determined to ensure that all the children in the local community had the opportunity to succeed in school and in life, despite the difficult prevailing socio-economic situation and unemployment rate. The main highlight of this inclusive provision was found to be the creation of shared responsibility and collaborative engagement among all stakeholders in the attempt to reach out to all children and families in the local community. |

| Resources | |
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| INTESYS toolkit to support integrated ECEC systems | This toolkit ¹⁰⁶ includes a reference framework for integration in ECEC systems consisting of three building blocks which can be used in the process: values and principles, key factors and quality practices. These three building blocks indicate the most important elements to be considered when working towards more and better integration in early childhood systems, across sectors, services, and levels of governance. The toolkit proposes a journey for integration following a cyclical process of change. Each phase is accompanied by guiding questions, envisaged outcomes, general recommendations, tips, lessons learnt from the pilots conducted in the four countries and attuned tools to each phase of the process. The toolkit aims to guide various actors towards higher level of integration, while keeping in mind that the entire early childhood system (from macro policy to financing and front line quality delivery with qualified practitioners) has to work primarily for the benefit of every young child and their family. |
| ISOTIS resources to support integrated work | ISOTIS (Inclusive Education and Social Support to tackle inequalities in society) project supports the idea to promote inter-agency work as a driver to supporting children and families. It offers a literature review, cases studies and inspirational interviews of service providers and coordinators on interagency coordination for children and families ¹⁰⁷ . |

¹⁰⁵ Inclusive early childhood education - Agrupamento de Escolas de Frazão, Porto - PT - March 2016

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.issa.nl/node/382>

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.isotis.org/en/publications#inter-agency-coordination-of-services-for-children-and-families>.

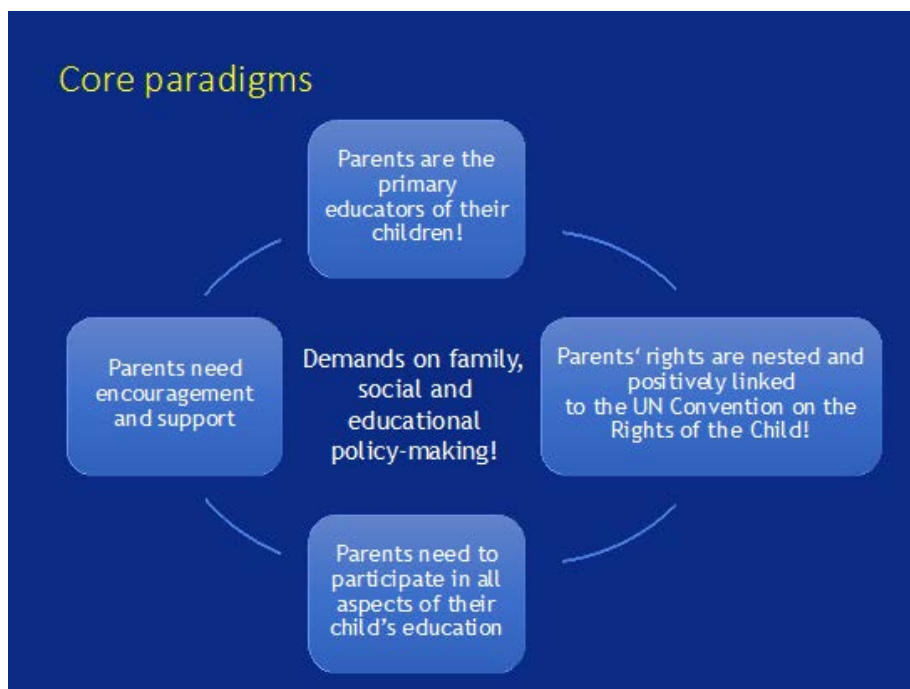
Working with families

Parents and families look to ECEC providers (and ECEC systems) to provide a range of services which they can rely on. For families, ECEC providers need to have the ability and capacity to bring together different services which affect various aspects of their children's lives such as family, work, care, leisure and education.

There is little debate about the strategic importance of getting parents (and families) more involved in the work and play of ECEC settings. The challenges are often associated with implementing the system-wide policy or strategic intentions. Parents and families want their voices to be heard and their diversity recognised; they want to be involved in discussing the curriculum and pedagogy; they want to celebrate and record their children's successes; and they want to discuss their child(ren)'s progress with professionally-trained staff.

The European Parents Association (EPA)¹⁰⁸ promotes the active participation of parents and the recognition of their central place as those with the primary responsibility for the education of their children. From the EPA's perspective, figure 8 summarises the main principles (paradigms) which underpin parental and family involvement in ECEC, and set out what they expect from ECEC providers.

Figure 8 – Principles for parental and family involvement in ECEC



The Council Recommendation on High-Quality ECEC Systems outlines that, *within a context that is set by the national, regional or local regulations, families should be involved in all aspects of education and care for their children. Family is the first and most important place for children to grow and develop, and parents and guardians are responsible for each child's well-being, health and development. ECEC services are an ideal opportunity to create an integrated approach because they lead to a first personal contact with the parents.[...] To make parents'*

¹⁰⁸ <https://euparents.eu/>

involvement a reality, ECEC services should be designed in partnership with families and be based on trust and mutual respect.

Throughout the European Quality Framework for ECEC there are clear references to the importance of involving parents and families in ECEC services e.g. in relation to:

- *provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity. ECEC settings can actively encourage participation by involving parents, families and carers in decision-making processes (e.g. in parental committees). Reaching out to families - especially to single-parent and disadvantaged or minority or migrant families - with targeted initiatives allows them to express their needs and enables services to take these into account when tailoring provision to the demands of local communities;*
- *a curriculum that requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice. This quality statement notes that a curriculum can:*
 - a) help to better involve parents, stakeholders and staff and to ensure that it responds more adequately to the needs, interests and the children's potential;*
 - b) define roles and processes for staff to collaborate regularly with parents as well as with colleagues in other children's services (including health, social care and education sectors).*

Eurydice notes that most European countries emphasise the importance of partnership with parents and encourage settings to include specific measures in their planning. Moreover, many countries recommend the types of support that settings should provide to parents. The most common form of support is through information sessions and parent-staff meetings, which should form the basis of a regular dialogue between families and ECEC practitioners¹⁰⁹.

The working group who prepared this toolkit also agreed a set of competences required from ECEC staff; one of the categories of competences relates to working with families (figure 9). For this competence the following statements of action are suitable for all those who work with children (aged from birth to the compulsory primary school age) and are covered by the ECEC regulations in individual Member States.

Figure 9 – Competences to work with families and the local community

| ECEC assistants (where applicable) | ECEC core practitioners | ECEC leaders (e.g. administrative and/or pedagogic head of ECEC centres) |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop effective relationships with families and the local community • treat all families with respect and according to their needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure the ECEC setting's approach to working with parents and the local community is implemented effectively | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support individual children and their families whose experiences make it more difficult for them to succeed in an ECEC setting |

¹⁰⁹ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure parents are regularly involved in their children's ECEC activities • work with families to support their parenting skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish and monitor the ECEC setting's policy for working with families and the local community • establish and maintain good working relationships with families and the local community |
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Alongside policy and strategy decisions which strengthen parents' voices in the provision of ECEC, there is a wide range of practical measures which have been shown to be successful in different contexts. These approaches can be used by ECEC settings to encourage and increase parental involvement, and include:

- informing parents about the ECEC offer and welcoming them into the ECEC setting by creating an open environment;
- selecting activities that appeal to families and invite them to join in;
- developing inter-generational activities which include grandparents;
- developing parent to parent support activities;
- creating specialist roles to support outreach work with parents/community;
- allocating space to work with parents e.g. using one room for parents to play with their child(ren), meet other parents, talk to ECEC staff;
- providing feedback to parents on the specific needs of their child(ren);
- producing and sharing the ECEC setting's weekly schedule with parents to encourage greater involvement from parents and awareness of the setting's plans;
- increasing the opening hours and provide more flexibility to families, while respecting the children's developmental and health needs;
- involving parents in decision making and consultation on changes to provision;
- working with other agencies to develop inter-agency working which support families;
- when students are based in ECEC settings, ensuring inclusion is part of their training;
- ensuring all the information on the ECEC setting's provision and operational arrangements is on an IT platform as this supports parents who have less opportunity to visit the setting.

Country / project examples

Germany: setting up a system to

Family Centres¹¹⁰ are day care institutions which offer children and their families an assortment of support mechanisms beyond simple education, advice and child care. This programme is funded by the state of North Rhine – Westphalia and

¹¹⁰ [European Platform for Investing in Children \(EPIC\) - Family Centers North Rhine-Westphalia \(DE\)](#).

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| <p>support families</p> | <p>provides 12,000 Euros per programme to each institution which meets the requirements to be certified as a Family Centre. The Family Centre certificate covers 112 items in four performance areas and four structural areas. The performance areas considered by the certification process are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consulting and support for families; • family building and relationships; • child care; • compatibility of family and work. <p>The four structural areas are social awareness, cooperation and organisation, communication, and performance development and self-evaluation. In order to qualify for the certificate and the funding, an institution has to score reasonably well on the vast majority of these requirements. The programme, which is still in operation, has increased in scale since it began in 2006/7 with 151 pilot institutions.</p> |
| <p>Portugal: resourcing to ensure liaison with and inclusion of families</p> | <p>The Obra Social Paulo VI¹¹¹ is a private Institution of Social Solidarity in Lisbon, with a crèche (0-3 year-olds) and kindergarten (3-6 year-olds). Its educational provision includes four nursery rooms and seven kindergarten classrooms. It is a religious institution (Christian) belonging to the Dorothea Sisters but it is open to families and children with different religions and cultures. Its mission is to educate children and their families through an innovative educational offer which focuses on individual children and their families. It promotes a holistic approach to education and uses project-based methodology focused on the interests of the child and their individual learning development.</p> <p>The Centro Infantil Olivais Sul¹¹² is a private Institution of Social Solidarity in Lisbon. The setting has six nursery rooms (0-3 year-olds) and four kindergarten rooms (3-6 year-olds). The institution uses a participatory pedagogical perspective (Pedagogia-na-Participação), which was developed by the Childhood Association (Associação Criança) through support by the Aga Khan Foundation Portugal. This ECEC setting has a lot of space which makes it easy to accommodate parents who visit whenever they want. As with all ECEC teaching staff (who are supported by assistants) in Portugal, each teacher has a master's degree and has been able to complete their continuing professional development in the setting. As with Obra Social Paulo VI, the parents' contribution to the cost of provision is based on the number of siblings and parental income.</p> |
| <p>Slovenia: non profit center for parents and children with additional educational</p> | <p>Family centre "Mala ulica" ("Little Street") is the first family centre in Slovenia (Ljubljana), established in January 2013. The architects were well aware of children needs and requirements; the place is equipped attractively, with many small and hidden spaces (e.g. children's flat with kitchen and bathroom, labyrinth etc.), library, slide, special space for babies etc. The Family centre is an important meeting point for young families. They host more than 28,000 visitors yearly, they are open every day, including weekends and public holidays.</p> |

¹¹¹ <http://www.obrasocialpaulovi.pt/>

¹¹² <https://www.centro-olivais.com/>

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| <p>programmes for parents</p> | <p>The main aim of the Family centre is to offer an inclusive, safe and creative place indoors and outdoors, where children can play with their parents or peers, attend creative workshops, puppet shows or storytelling sessions. It is as well an important place for parents, especially mothers, for whom they have morning programme, e.g. post-birth gym for mothers with babies, baby-signs workshop, discussions with psychologist, baby-massage workshop etc. The informal gatherings, exchanging experiences and simply meeting other mothers is probably even more important than the official programme – the maternity leave in Slovenia lasts 12 months and mothers often feel all alone with their babies, while fathers/partners are at work.</p> <p>Since 2014 numerous health organisations, social centres and other non-governmental organisations (as well as above mentioned Family centre) offer “The Incredible Years®” programme, a series of interlocking, evidence-based programs for parents and children, supported by over 30 years of research. The goal is the early detection of behaviour problems – so the main aim is to prevent and treat young children’s behaviour problems and promote their social, emotional and academic competence. The programme is running all over Slovenia and also offers training to pre-school teachers.</p> |
| <p>Toy for inclusion: introducing families to ECEC</p> | <p>The TOY for Inclusion¹¹³ project piloted an innovative approach to inclusive non-formal ECEC in eight countries (Belgium, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Netherlands and Turkey). Its focus was on young children, such as those from migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds, who were least likely to have access to formal ECEC services and were more likely to experience problems with the transition from home to school. The project rejects the assumption that some children and families are harder to reach than others. The project’s approach is one that seeks to make services easier to reach by promoting integrated working, flexible solutions and contextualised responses to the specific needs of young children and their families. The centres are called Play Hubs and have been designed and run by Local Action Teams with representatives from Roma and non-Roma communities, school and preschool teachers and local authorities. The Play Hubs are resource and meeting centres which connect existing services and organisations, and provide new learning and play opportunities for young children. In the TOY for Inclusion approach, relationships between Roma and non-Roma young children and their families are developed and interactions take place in a safe space which enables all generations to be supported.</p> |

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| <p>ISOTIS: Inclusive education and social support to</p> | <p>The ISOTIS project aims to combat early arising and persisting educational inequalities by generating evidence-based, contextualized and concrete recommendations and tools. The project proposes collaborative online tools and apps for parents and professionals working with culturally and linguistically diverse families. Its results also include:</p> |

¹¹³ <https://www.reyn.eu/toy4inclusion/>

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| <p>tackle inequalities in society</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Resources, experiences and support needs of families in disadvantaged communities</i>¹¹⁴: results from 3948 structural and 244 in-depth interviews with parents with a Romani, Turkish, North-African, and native low-income background, and the results from a qualitative study with 331 children ranging from 3 to 14 years. • <i>Case studies of promising parent- and family-focused support programmes</i>¹¹⁵: findings of five case studies of promising or successful parenting support programmes in England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Portugal. The overall goal was to obtain in-depth knowledge of the success factors of parent- and family-focused (home-based) approaches to improving the quality of family environments. The study was designed to shed light on how promising or already proven-to-be successful programmes overcome existing challenges and ensure high outreach and process quality. • <i>Inventory and analysis of promising and evidence-based parent- and family focused support programs</i>¹¹⁶: focuses on promising and evidence-based parent- and family focused support services and programmes in several European countries (Czech Republic, United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Portugal). The inventory describes the social context indicators on family support and educational inequalities in each country. It presents country profiles, describing child and family services, and how country policies deal with equality issues, monitoring of services, and language support. The inventory also presents an analysis of a selected group of evidence-based and promising family support services and programmes, highlighting existing challenges and the programmes' potential to overcome them. Finally, the inventory concludes with recommendations for potentially effective interventions in services and programmes design, implementation and evaluation. |
| <p>Play hubs for inclusion: a toolkit for inclusion</p> | <p>The <i>TOY for Inclusion</i>¹¹⁷ project created centres, called Play Hubs, which are resource and meeting centres that connect existing services and organisations, and provide new learning and play opportunities for young children. Two of its main resources are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The “<i>What works guide</i>” documents the promising practices of the Play Hubs and is designed for practitioners and local authorities. It can assist them in the implementation of community-based ECEC services for Romani and other children to improve social cohesion. The Guide is available in Croatian, Dutch, English, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian and Slovenian. • The “<i>Toy for inclusion toolkit</i>” provides the necessary information to enable trainers and practitioners of different sectors to set-up and run play spaces for children, families and communities. The toolkit pays particular attention to social |

¹¹⁴ <https://www.isotis.org/en/publications/resources-experiences-and-support-needs-of-families-in-disadvantaged-communities/>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.isotis.org/en/publications/case-studies-of-promising-parent-and-family-focused-support-programmes>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.isotis.org/en/publications/inventory-and-analysis-of-promising-and-evidence-based-parent-and-family-focused-support-programs>

¹¹⁷ <https://www.reyn.eu/toy4inclusion/>

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| | integration, intercultural and intergenerational dialogue, and social inclusion in the context of ECEC. |
| A toolbox for working with families | The project <i>“Enhancing Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care through participation (EQuaP)”</i> ¹¹⁸ focuses on improving teachers’ competencies and creating collaboration between schools, teachers, families and communities. It offers a toolbox to promote family participation approaches in ECEC, available in Dutch, English, French, Greek, Italian, Latvian, Slovenian, Swedish and Portuguese. |
| Engaging fathers in ECEC | The Erasmus+ project <i>“Let’s Fathers, Come Preschools!”</i> ¹¹⁹ aims to get fathers more involved in their children’s education and to increase the visibility of father involvement in early childhood education. The project provided a Father Involvement Guidebook (with information about the importance of father involvement) and a Father Involvement Handbook (which includes different activities that can be used to involve fathers into early childhood education programmes). Both guides are available in Dutch, English, Swedish and Turkish. |
| Guides to work with rainbow families | <p>The Spanish federation for LGBT rights published a guide for teachers to help increase respect for diversity in family models and help welcoming all families, including LGBT families. It targets all educational levels, including pre-primary schools. Beyond educational resources for children, it also offers ideas and resources to teachers, e.g. about using an inclusive language when communicating with families¹²⁰.</p> <p>Rainbow Families Greece also published a Guide for preschool educators and teachers, with the objective to create a more inclusive environment in the classroom. The publication can be shared by rainbow parents with their children’s teachers, to help discuss relevant issues with them and challenge dominant assumptions. On the other hand, members of the association also use it when informing groups of professionals¹²¹.</p> |

¹¹⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-project-details/#project/2014-1-IT02-KA201-004091>

¹¹⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-project-details/#project/2016-1-TR01-KA203-034905>

¹²⁰ <https://felgtb.com/descargas/familias/Lasfamiliasenlasaulas.pdf>

¹²¹ <http://rainbowfamiliesgreece.com/publishingEng.html>

Facilitating transitions

For children (and their families) the transition from home to ECEC, and from an ECEC setting to pre-primary/primary school can be difficult. The move into an institutional environment needs to be managed and considered, as successful transition helps children to integrate into an ECEC setting and reduce any concerns about moving from an ECEC to a school environment.

These transitions are particularly important for disadvantaged children. Creating a smooth transition requires collaboration between the home and ECEC settings and schools. The Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems recommends that Member States *enhance the development of early years' curricula in order to follow children's interests, nurture their wellbeing and meet the unique needs and potential of each individual child, including those with special needs or in a vulnerable or disadvantaged situation*. The recommendation notes that *this can be achieved by adopting approaches which support holistic learning and children's development by promoting further integration of ECEC in the education continuum and supporting collaboration between ECEC and primary school staff, parents and counselling services for a smooth transition for children to primary school*.

Within the 'access' dimension of the European Quality Framework there are two quality statements which comment on the issue of transition:

- *Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity. ECEC settings can develop good practices in families for a smooth transition from the home environment to the setting, as well as foster high levels of parental participation by organising specific initiatives.*
- *A curriculum that requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice. Whenever possible, the curriculum can provide guidelines for ECEC staff to liaise with school staff on children's transition to the primary and/or pre-primary schools.*

Work by an expert group (2017–2018) considered indicators and how to measure these quality statements¹²². One of the suggested indicators (Indicator 15 - the percentage of primary schools which are required to use a curriculum which builds on children's experiences of learning in ECEC) sought to measure the ease with which children move from ECEC settings to their primary school. Transition from ECEC to primary school has to be managed carefully to ensure continuity and progression in children's learning and development. The report notes that this is best achieved when children's early experiences in their primary school align with their experiences in ECEC. One way to achieve a smooth transition is by requiring schools to use a curriculum which builds on the experiences, pedagogy and child-centred learning environment used in ECEC settings.

¹²² European Commission, *Monitoring the Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care – Complementing the 2014 ECEC Quality Framework proposal with indicators - Recommendations from ECEC experts*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018

Research¹²³ also notes that transitions between subsystems are a risk for underprivileged children and therefore may contribute to inequality in later school outcomes (Rimantas et al., 2014). In 2017, the OECD¹²⁴ advocated for the integration of services and in the case of split systems, looking very carefully at transitions between subsystems.

Eurydice details how national systems facilitate transitions from pre-primary to primary school:

- Aligning the top-level educational guidelines for ECEC and primary education is a measure that can help pave the way for a smoother transition between the two levels of education. A majority of countries report that educational guidelines for ECEC and primary education issued at the top-level have been aligned.
- Transition can also be easier for children who have already spent part of their ECEC phase on the same site as the primary school. In the majority of education systems, some children spend their last year of ECEC on the same site as the primary school while others stay in the ECEC setting. In eight education systems, all children are on the school site for their last year of ECEC ; in 12 others, children only move to the site of the primary school at the start of primary education.
- In a majority of education systems, the educational guidelines recommend that settings establish continuity and cooperation between ECEC and primary education.
- The need for collaboration between staff from ECEC settings and primary school teachers during the transition to primary education is emphasised in the top-level educational guidelines of 18 education systems.
- The visits of ECEC children to primary schools are recommended in 13 education systems. The development of projects involving children of both education levels is encouraged in nine education systems.
- Passing on information about a child's achievements during ECEC to the primary school is the second most common transition measure. It is emphasised by 17 education systems, with some of them giving specific instructions on the type and format of the child-focused information to be provided to the next teacher.
- Eleven education systems mention that ECEC settings should organise meetings to allow parents to familiarise themselves with the learning environment of the primary school.
- In addition to recommending measures to ECEC settings, some countries also underline the responsibilities of local level authorities in establishing effective strategies and practices to ensure a smooth transition from ECEC to primary education.
- In five countries, the top-level educational guidelines state the importance of ECEC settings in promoting a smooth transition to primary education, without mentioning any specific type of measure.

Country / project examples

¹²³ e.g. OECD, *Starting Strong IV - Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and care*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2015 and Balduzzi, L., Lazzari, A., Van Laere, K., Boudry, C., Režek, M., Mlinar, M., McKinnon, E. (2019). *Literature Review on Transitions across Early Childhood and Compulsory School Settings in Europe*. Ljubljana: ERI.

¹²⁴ OECD, *Starting Strong IV - Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and care*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2015

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| Slovenia | <p>Slovenia is at the moment part of INTRANS project (2020 – 2023). Members from the Ministry of Education are working in cooperation with Pedagogical Institute (who is in charge of running the project), which promotes inclusive transitional education by working on three levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy and governance - The project will facilitate awareness, knowledge development and exchange for national and international policy makers in order for them to develop a shared vision on warm and inclusive transitions and corresponding policy measurements. • In-Service training of ECEC/primary school staff - InTrans supports in-service trainers with vision, knowledge, examples of good practices and tools to invest in the creation of warm and inclusive transitions with ECEC/primary school staff. • Pre-service training of future ECEC and primary school staff - Through exchanges and debates, the project wants to raise awareness amongst pre-service training institutions about the importance of investing in warm and inclusive transitions. The project's overall goal is to ensure that all children and families (especially the most vulnerable ones) benefit from warm and inclusive transitional practice in ECEC and school, by supporting professionals through action at the policy advocacy and training levels. This concerns working on pedagogical continuity, continuity with home environment and neighborhood, professional continuity and structural continuity. |
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| A guide to accompany transitions | The French-speaking Belgian Centre for continuing education and research in ECEC published a booklet for ECEC staff who work more particularly with children around the age of 2½, a common age for transitions between settings in Belgium. The aim of this booklet is to support professional practices and attitudes as well as institutional arrangements aimed at supporting children and their parents on this journey. It contains theoretical references and highlights practices and support systems, in a very concrete way ¹²⁵ . |
| Discovering kindergarten | The project aimed to improve the socialisation and integration of young children within the education system and promote the creation of new methodologies for early years education. The result is a handbook, "Discovering Kindergarten. Big book of experiences" ¹²⁶ which described the learning gained during the project and offers ideas to facilitate children's beginnings in the kindergarten. |
| PREDICT: a tool for assessing children's | The "Good start to school project" aimed to increase ECEC teachers' competences to evaluate and address adequately children's level of skills and maturity prior to entering into primary school, thus ensuring a smooth transition. An additional focus was placed on parent involvement in the process. The results ¹²⁷ , which are available in English, Hungarian, Czech and Slovak include: |

¹²⁵ <http://www.fraje.be/fascicule-transition-accompagner-lenfant-dans-son-entree-a-lecole/>

¹²⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplu-project-details/#project/2015-1-LT01-KA219-013459>

¹²⁷ <http://www.goodstarttoschool.eu/en/outputs-project>

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| <p>progress in kindergarten</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PREDICT – the diagnostic and evaluation tool is intended for the continuous recording and evaluation of the education progress of the child in kindergarten. It exists as a pdf and as an Excel sheet, to allow for simple visualization of the measured results, and for a clear and easy-to-follow presentation of the results for the individual child, • Methodology for teachers: introduces PREDICT, including instructions on how to work with this tool, diagnostic methods, examples from practice. • Methodology for parents: introduces how kindergarten teachers work with children on their social-emotional development using the PREDICT tool, and how beneficial good-quality communication between the kindergarten and the parents is for the development of the child. |
| <p>START project</p> | <p>This Erasmus+ project focussed on transition periods and offers well-documented and inspirational case studies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Aalst (Belgium)¹²⁸, a collaboration was developed between a childcare centre, a pre- and primary school and a poverty advocacy group to enable well-being and participation of poor children and families in transition; • In Vignola (Italy)¹²⁹: a collaboration between pre- and primary school staff worked on re-thinking educational continuity for children and families; • In OŠ Tišina (Slovenia), the project explored possibilities to develop new ways of soft transition for Romani children from home to preschool and later in primary school, as well as training on importance of partnership with parents in ensuring soft transitions among different educational environment. |

¹²⁸ Van Laere, K., Boudry, C. (2019). Enabling Well-being and Participation of Children and Families Living in Poverty during Transition Periods across Home, Childcare and Kindergarten. Case Study Belgium. Ghent: VBJK.

¹²⁹ Balduzzi, L., Lazzari, A. (2019). Rethinking educational continuity through participatory action-research and professional development pathways. Case Study Italy. Bologna: UNIBO.

WORKING WITH SPECIFIC GROUPS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Inclusive policies, practices and measures benefit all children, whether they are at a disadvantage or not. Some children may however benefit from more targeted policies or measures, to make sure the ECEC systems and settings answer their specific needs.

This chapter explores the needs and possible answers of various groups of children and families:

- Children with disabilities and/or additional learning needs;
- Children with a migrant background, including refugee children;
- Roma children;
- Children in very specific situations, such as children during lockdown periods, children living with their mothers in prison, or children with great health problems.

Children with disabilities and/or additional learning needs

Difficulties met by children with disabilities and their families

In the context of the European Commission' Feasibility study for a Child Guarantee, the Target group discussion paper on children with disabilities¹³⁰ notes that ECEC is important for all children, but of critical importance to children with disabilities since:

- it provides the necessary services and structures to identify and address developmental delays and disabilities;
- it supports children who have been identified as being at risk or with a developmental delay and disability to access the services needed, in health, education, and social protection.

Data on the number of children with disabilities is only available for the age range 0-15, making it difficult to estimate how many children with disabilities could participate in ECEC. Research however shows that this group of children participates less in ECEC than their peers. The French High Council for family, childhood and ageing estimated in 2018 that:

- between 60,000 and 70,000 children under the age of seven benefit from the disabled child education allowance (AEEH), a personalized schooling project (PPS) or follow-up by the centers for early medico-social action (CAMSP). But there was in fact a need for early support for 30,000 to 40,000 additional children;
- 54% of children with disabilities were cared for by their parents only, vs 32% of non-disabled children;
- children over four were more likely to attend than younger children; over 30% of three years old with disabilities were not participating in ECEC. This raised the question as how to include these children in kindergarten as of September 2019, when schooling became compulsory from that age¹³¹.

The Target group discussion paper on children with disabilities for the Feasibility study for a Child Guarantee, points that children with disabilities and their families may face a range of difficulties in access to ECEC:

¹³⁰ Hunt, Paula (2019). "Target Group Discussion Paper on Children with Disabilities", Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels: European Commission.

¹³¹ http://www.hcfea.fr/IMG/pdf/Rapport_inclusion_handicap-petite_enfance_VF.pdf

Specific barriers for children with disabilities and their families to access ECEC

- lack of political will and vision for social inclusion;
- lack of understanding of what constitutes inclusive policy and programming;
- lack of coordination across policies; gaps between policies and practice;
- inadequacy or lack of community-based services that can provide support to children with disabilities and their families from early identification and intervention and throughout the life cycle;
- separate / special ECEC institutions or classes can still be in place despite normative frameworks for inclusive education that make separate settings unlawful;
- integration in mainstream services may be insufficient;
- lack of places for all children with disabilities, national priorities given to children with disabilities but not (fully) implemented by local authorities;
- accessible environments or specialised support may not be available; ECEC settings not adapted to children's special needs.

Policies to include and support children with disabilities in ECEC

The Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC recognises that participation can be an effective instrument for achieving educational equity for children in disadvantaged situations including those children with additional needs arising from disabilities. This recommendation invites especially Member States to:

- *analyse and address the barriers that families might encounter when accessing and using ECEC services, e.g. barriers related to inadequate provisions for children with special needs;*
- *provide inclusive ECEC services for all children, including children with diverse backgrounds and special educational needs, including disabilities, avoiding segregation and incentivising their participation, regardless of the labour market status of their parents or carers;*
- *strengthen preventive actions, early identification of difficulties and adequate provisions for children with special needs and their families, involving all relevant actors, e.g. educational, social or health services as well as parents;*
- *equip staff with the competences to respond to the individual needs of children from different backgrounds and with special educational needs, including disabilities, and prepare staff to manage diverse groups;*
- *enhance the development of ECEC curricula in order to follow children's interests, nurture their well-being and meet the unique needs and potential of each individual child, including those with special needs or in a vulnerable or disadvantaged situation.*

In its summary report of the Inclusive Early Childhood Education project, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education's includes two specific recommendations¹³² for policy makers to develop more inclusive ECEC settings in order that children's additional needs can be met:

- *ensure that the local community provides the expertise and resources which ensure that every child is able to attend, be part of the peer group and participate actively in the learning and social activities;*
- *promote collaboration among all sectors and disciplines, together with practitioners, families and local communities, to enhance the quality of all children's belongingness, engagement and learning.*

There are in fact many ways to support more inclusive ECEC provision. Some of the approaches which are already being used include:

- a legal framework which supports inclusion;
- a wide definition for "special needs" as every child has their own particular or specific needs. Provision should create opportunities for all children who are covered by additional support measures;
- ensuring each child has the right to receive the specific ECEC provision they need. This requires ECEC policies to focus on individual children's needs;
- ensuring all children have the right to ECEC and the capacity to learn;
- ensuring ECEC for children with additional needs is available, flexible, responsive to diverse needs, provided locally by multidisciplinary teams, based on collaboration with parents, and affordable to parents;
- providing a wide range of approaches with different levels of support depending on the needs of each child;
- agreement that support measures should be applied, whenever possible, through mainstream settings as these are more inclusive;
- ECEC policies which strengthen implementation at the local level as this is more effective and more likely to improve inclusion;
- agreement on the importance of collaboration between the different stakeholders and professionals in order to create inclusive and effective ECEC provision.

It is important to note that measures for children aged 0-3 and 3-6 may vary a lot.

Examples below show how national policy-makers can influence the ECEC system to become more responsive to the needs of children with disabilities.

¹³² European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017. *Inclusive Early Childhood Education: New Insights and Tools – Final Summary Report*. (M. Kyriazopoulou, P. Bartolo, E. Björck-Åkesson, C. Giné and F. Bellour, eds.). Odense, Denmark.

| Country /project examples | |
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| Malta | <p>The Maltese legislation includes an Equal Opportunities Act which is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol. The national strategy is one which aims to include the majority of children (aged from 2 years 9 months – 7 years) with additional educational needs in mainstream settings. These settings are supported by a resource centre for children with profound and multiple learning disabilities, a Child Development Advisory Unit, National Support for Student Services and Teaching, and psycho-social teams with Learning Support Educators. The National Curriculum Framework (2012) and the Learning Outcomes Framework (2015) aim to create a seamless transition in early years from birth to seven years of age.</p> |
| Luxembourg | <p>The national policy on the inclusion of children with additional needs has developed over 25 years. There have been two phases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • from 1994 children with additional needs have been legally entitled to attend public school; • from 2009 children with additional needs have been legally entitled to attend public school AND receive an education which respects their needs and talents - only 1% of children attend a special school. <p>In 2017 the policy was extended to give children the support they need as quickly as possible – if possible within their school – by reorganising care and education at different levels (local, regional, national). The support at the school level (local level) is coordinated by specialist teachers who are assigned to one or more schools and they provide advice and guidance to teachers and educators as well as class assistance if required. If additional assistance is needed, there are multi-professional support teams at the regional level, and eight specialist centres at the national level which focus on the specific needs of children.</p> |
| Croatia | <p>To strengthen the inclusion of children with additional needs, kindergartens have to include children with disabilities under the Pre-School Education Act of 1997. These children are included in regular programmes or in educational groups who follow a special programme in a special institution. Work programmes for children with disabilities can be offered to those aged between six months of age and school starting age. These programmes, co-funded from the state budget, are worth about 12 million Euro p.a. The local government-funded kindergartens employ staff to assist children with disabilities. The expert staff are required to have the appropriate type and level of education required for the work (e.g. these experts can be an educator, teacher, expert associate with an education and rehabilitation profile, a pedagogue or a psychologist). As a rule, these people are employed as "third-party educators" in an educational group which includes children with disabilities, and can be employed for an indefinite period of time. The tasks of these experts are determined by the kindergarten team according to the needs and abilities of each child with disabilities - the provision is based on an individualised programme for each child. The Education and Teacher Training Agency provides training to ECEC staff on how to include children with disabilities in kindergartens. A kindergarten can apply and be designated as a centre of excellence in any area of provision or programme area, including working with children with disabilities.</p> |

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| <p>Poland</p> | <p>Since 2010, the Ministry of National Education (MEN) has clarified the legislative and organisational framework for inclusive education. Work is now taking place to prepare new legislation on inclusive education from 2020 onwards in order to ensure a practical implementation of the policy priorities in ECEC settings. MEN's work is supported by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. This support helps MEN to analyse the system's strengths and areas for development in relation to the current policy framework for special needs and inclusive education. The goal of this analysis is to provide evidence-based recommendations that can be used to improve the quality of inclusive education in Poland and inform the upcoming legislation.</p> |
| <p>Portugal</p> | <p>In Portugal most children attend mainstream schools and only a small proportion enrol in special education institutions (1%). Most students attend public establishments of the Ministry of Education network and about 13% of children go to private establishments. Although access to mainstream schools is ensured for all students, the Portuguese system has felt the need to improve children's participation and achievement. The 2018 legislation on inclusive education is consistent with, and motivated by, the rights of children and people with disabilities. This legislation aims to strengthen inclusion. It is part of a process which began in 2008 when the former special schools became resources centres with the aim to support inclusive education in ECEC settings. This 2008 change arose because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the special schools were separate from the ECEC centres and a parallel set of provision was being developed; • the expertise in the special schools could be better deployed to support mainstream settings. <p>Building on the success of these resource centres' support to mainstream ECEC settings, the 2018 legislation outlined three intervention levels of measures to support learning and inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • universal measures to promote participation and improve the learning of all children; • selective measures which meet the needs of ECEC settings if the universal measures were not successful or sufficient; • additional measures which support settings with persistent and severe challenges to strengthen inclusion. <p>These measures focus on ECEC teachers and provide them with advice and the expertise of special needs teachers; multidisciplinary teams; learning support centres; local early intervention teams and school health teams.</p> |
| <p>Turkey</p> | <p>Turkey launched a project that aims to increase children with disabilities' access (aged from three to seven) to early childhood education and grade 1 education via high quality and inclusive provision. The project targeted 1,180 children (180 of whom were children with disabilities), 1,180 families/caregivers and 1,000 educational staff from 90 pilot schools. The final beneficiaries included children (with and without disabilities), teachers, school administrators, school counsellors, families, caregivers, the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Labour,</p> |

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| | <p>Social Services and Family, relevant government officials and civil society organisations. This project aimed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve the cognitive, emotional and social development of all children participating in inclusive education; • raise families and caregivers' awareness of inclusive education rights, opportunities, and the importance of school-family collaboration; • increase the awareness of decision makers, families and caregivers of children without disabilities of the rights of children with disabilities to quality inclusive education; • equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to enable them to provide quality inclusive education to all children aged from three to seven. |
| <p>Italy</p> | <p>Italian schools do not provide special classes for children with disabilities or additional need¹³³. The policy is based on promoting inclusion in kindergartens and schools. Kindergartens aim to be inclusive in their activities and provide support to all children through the deployment of a collaborative teaching team (class teacher, specialist teacher, and all the school's staff). This helps to encourage child participation and individual development.</p> <p>The provision for inclusion is based on national standards that define how disability/additional needs are identified. This allows the kindergartens to make the necessary provision for all children who have a special or additional educational needs. The kindergarten prepares an individual education plan (IEP) based on the curriculum. The ECEC setting, following the production of a certificate which identifies children who need specific care and interventions (issued by the National Social Security Institute) is entitled to additional support staff to work with the children with additional needs.</p> <p>The head of the setting co-ordinates the staff who support the child or children with additional needs. The additional support staff (who could include specialist teachers) work with and supervise classes where there are children with learning difficulties and other special needs. The specialist teachers develop materials and activities which promote the development of the children's personality. The IEP is used to monitor each child's physical and cognitive development, identifies targeted intervention which help the child to address weaknesses, and provide each child with a holistic experience of the curriculum.</p> <p>New models of IEP are being established at national level, based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health¹³⁴. It emphasizes even more the central role of the child with disabilities and the cooperation among teachers (not only support teachers), school, local health authorities, social health assistants in close connection with the family. The plan is annual and is adapted according to the evolution of conditions of functioning.</p> |

¹³³ [Inclusive early childhood education – Example of IECE provision: Italy \(2 of 2\)](#)

¹³⁴ <https://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/>

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| <p>Estonia</p> | <p>In 2016, the Social Welfare Act was amended to improve the accessibility of childcare places for children with disabilities¹³⁵. The objective of childcare service is to support the ability of a person raising a child to cope or work or to reduce the care burden arising from the special needs of the child. The service is wholly or partially financed from the state or local authority budget. In the case of children with a severe or profound disability, a local authority shall assess the need for childcare service separately for each child. Upon submission of a request, a local authority shall advise the recipient of the service in choosing the provider of childcare service. A local authority shall prepare in co-operation with the person receiving the service and the service provider an administrative act or an administrative contract for the provision of the service which shall set out the activities arising from the need for childcare service and the essential conditions concerning the provision of the service which are at least the time and place of provision of the service. A local authority may, by administrative contract, authorise legal persons in private law, sole proprietors or agencies of other local authorities to provide childcare service.</p> |
| <p>Slovenia</p> | <p>The Act Regulating the Integrated Early Treatment of Preschool Children with Special Needs was adopted in 2017 and became effective on January 2019. The Act provides for the creation of a system of early childhood interventions for children with special needs, from birth until entry to basic schools, as well as support for their families; introduced improved procedures for placing pre-school children in kindergartens that implement the adapted programme of school education; and provides a basis for co-ordination between different structures.</p> <p>In September 2019, the Ministry of education, science and sport started funding classes of adapted programme for pre-school children with special educational needs within kindergartens. The aim is to improve the network of the ‘developmental classes’, with adapted curriculum and norms on organising classes (classes of no more than 6 children). The annual funding is €2 million.</p> <p>In September 2019, the new rules for organisation and reimbursement of travel cost for children with special educational needs and youth came into operation. Children legally entitled to early treatment are now in equal position with children in adapted programmes at educational institutions for children and youth with special educational needs.</p> <p>Other relevant policies are: the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act of 2011; the supplement to the instructions to the curriculum for pre-school day care centres and additional professional staff for children with special needs or long-term illness, updated in 2016; and the rules on additional professional and physical assistance for children with special needs of 2013¹³⁶.</p> |
| <p>Cyprus</p> | <p>In Cyprus, younger children aged 3 to 4 years and 8 months take up vacant places in public kindergartens and pay low fees (a symbolic amount). The selection of younger children is made according to the Law regarding Primary Education and by</p> |

¹³⁵ Hunt, Paula (2019). “Target Group Discussion Paper on Children with Disabilities”, Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels: European Commission.

¹³⁶ Hunt, Paula (2019). “Target Group Discussion Paper on Children with Disabilities”, Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels: European Commission.

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| | the committee concerned with the selection of children according to criteria and procedures set by a circular issued by the Director of Primary Education. Irrespective of age, priority is given to children with special educational needs. |
| France | <p>The Government created on January 1, 2019 the “disability inclusion bonus”, an additional financial assistance to all establishments for young children (crèche, day-care centres, multi-reception establishment, etc.) caring for at least one child benefiting from the disabled child education allowance (“AEEH”).</p> <p>This bonus is capped at € 1,300 per place and applies to all places in the structure from the first disabled child received. Its amount increases according to the percentage of children with disabilities received and is meant to cover extra costs such as staff training or the purchase of special pedagogical material or furniture.</p> <p>In 2019, the “disability inclusion bonus” benefited to about a quarter of the places in crèches, for a total budget of €7 million.</p> <p>However, recognising that very young children may not yet benefit from the AEEH allowance, the government extended the criteria for awarding this bonus, as of 1 January 2020, so that it takes more situations into account¹³⁷.</p> |
| Sweden | According to the Education Act, Chapter 8 article 7, children with physical or mental disabilities, or who are in need of special support to support their development for other reasons should be offered preschool from the age of 1. According to the same chapter, article 16, they have the right to 15 hours a week free of charge. |
| The Netherlands | The Dutch government supports children with extra needs (with a disability or development delay), with the purpose to integrate them into regular day care and/or pre-school services whenever possible. In addition there are rules for local governments to provide extra care for these children. There are also specialised (medical) day care centres in the Netherlands for children who cannot be cared for in a regular day care/pre-school services due to their more severe disability. |

More specific national policies can also be developed, such as the French and Slovenian approaches to care for children with autism.

| Country /project examples | |
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| France | <p>A four-year national strategy¹³⁸ was adopted in 2018 to support children and adults with autism and their families. The strategy comprises several measures directed to young children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early intervention, included training ECEC staff to identify possible difficulties and advise families on how to consult relevant health specialists; |

¹³⁷ <https://solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/actualites/presse/communiqués-de-presse/article/bonus-inclusion-handicap-des-conditions-etendues-pour-la-garde-des-enfants-en>

¹³⁸ <https://handicap.gouv.fr/autisme-et-troubles-du-neuro-developpement/la-strategie-2018-2022/>

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a three-fold increase of the number of Pre-primary Autism Teaching Units (UEAM)¹³⁹ to encourage the participation of children with autism; • the creation of specialised teaching positions for staff who can advise mainstream teachers on how to welcome children with autism in their classroom. <p>The plan also includes a range of measures to support parents, including financial assistance.</p> |
| Slovenia | <p>The Professional centre for autism pilot project includes a focus on pre-school education. The centre emphasises working with children with special needs who can be included in customised pre-school programmes or in a pre-school programme with customised implementation and additional professional assistance. Most children with disabilities are included in the latter arrangement.</p> <p>Decisions on children's need (made by the Commission of National Education), lead to children receiving the right to two hours of direct professional assistance each week to support their development, help children to overcome obstacles and up to an hour of counselling. Some children are entitled to a temporary or permanent companion.</p> <p>The Slovenian educational system does not yet have systematic professional support for education professionals who work with children with special needs. There is a Network of Professional Institutions for the Support of Children with Disabilities and their Families (partly co-financed by the European Social Fund), which is working to develop pilot support models. The "Professional Centre for Autism" is one of the ten pilot centres in this network. Their mission is to develop a model of support for children on the autistic spectrum disorder across the entire education system.</p> |

Inclusive practices to work with children with disabilities and their families

The 2017 literature review¹⁴⁰ from the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education notes that children with disabilities, and particularly those with severe disabilities, benefit from pre-primary inclusive practices. These benefits can be seen in areas such as language and social competencies, and problem behaviour. However, inclusive ECEC practice is not the reality for all children with disabilities, and many children are placed in special provision, particularly those with severe disabilities. The literature review notes that those children placed in a special setting at a very young age normally stay there for their entire education.

Scholars have identified the strategies which can effectively be used by ECEC staff to support inclusive ECEC practice.

¹³⁹ Inclusive early childhood education. Example of IECE provision: France.

¹⁴⁰ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017. *Inclusive Early Childhood Education: Literature Review*. (F. Bellour, P. Bartolo and M. Kyriazopoulou, eds.). Odense, Denmark

The research describes strategies for children with additional needs which are useful in inclusive settings:

- support children’s full participation in activities;
- the development and support of ‘buddies’ for children who have additional needs;
- reinforcing desirable behaviour. Three of the most suitable strategies for supporting positive, adaptive behaviour among young children are praise, planned ignoring and the use of classroom rules;
- adaptation of planned activities to respond to children with additional needs;
- assistive technology which enables all children to participate in learning and play;
- using pictograms can increase the language growth of young children.

This section presents some inclusive practices experimented across Europe as well as resources which can help other ECEC staff and settings to enhance inclusion of children with disabilities. Such practices include:

- setting up a vision for local ECEC settings;
- using specific pedagogies, adapted curricula, individual learning plans in a mainstream setting;
- involving specialised teachers;
- working with associations, volunteers, health practitioners.

Country / project examples

Italy: inclusive curricula

In Italy school inclusion is one of the most important principles and children in need always have a priority to access ECEC provision. 2012 National Guidelines for pre-primary school and the first cycle (3-14 years old) take into great account children’s rights and an inclusive approach.

Children are at the center of the educational action and all aspects are considered: cognitive, affective, relational, bodily, aesthetic, ethical, spiritual, religious. In this perspective, teachers have to think and implement their educational and didactic projects not for abstract individuals, but for each child who live here and now.

The main principle of National guidelines is “a school for each and every one”. Every child is unique and the pre-primary school have to help ones to develop his own identity, autonomy, competences offering occasions to experiment the first forms of citizenship, as well.

Pedagogical Guidelines for ECEC will be published in 2021, underlining the value of respect and acceptance of diversity in all dimensions and the role of ECEC in reducing cultural, social and relational disadvantages. Welcoming children with disabilities or special educational needs in ECEC services in priority means recognizing their right to education.

The inclusion of children with disabilities or special needs in mainstream settings requires special attention:

- to recognise their particular commitment in dealing with the new context and supporting them in facing it.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to encourage learning and socializing experience within the group of peers in a safe, welcoming and stimulating environment. <p>The presence in the group of children with diversity is an important educational experience of solidarity for all children.</p> |
| <p>Portugal: teamwork to include a child with autism</p> | <p>The Agrupamento de Escolas (School Cluster) Nuno Gonçalves¹⁴¹ in Lisbon is a public institution in the central and eastern city area. The cluster includes a kindergarten (3-6 year-olds), four primary schools (6-10 year-olds), one primary and lower secondary school (10-15 year-olds) and one upper secondary school (15-18 year-olds). By working together, the School Cluster has focused on improving quality and students' learning; developing respect for others and active citizenship; and encouraging creativity, entrepreneurship and lifelong learning.</p> <p>The staff in the ECEC setting works with a very mixed group of children, and uses their two extra members of staff to support children with autism. One of these extra members of staff is a trained special needs pre-school teacher who works side-by-side with the mainstream teacher to plan and implement the curriculum so that two children with autism can participate as much as possible in the setting's activities. The other extra member of staff works as an ECEC assistant. As expected, the cluster complies with the national policy of integrating children with additional needs into the 'class'.</p> |
| <p>Cyprus: assessment of special needs</p> | <p>The Cyprus Ministry appoints a Special Team to assess children with special educational needs and evaluate any individual help needed. Special teaching staff is appointed (e.g. specialist teachers, speech therapists, psychologists etc.) to provide additional support to these children, in cooperation with the class teacher, during school hours.</p> |
| <p>Italy: support teachers</p> | <p>The qualified figure in inclusive education is the support teacher who has specific professional expertise regarding the pre-primary sector. The support teacher cooperates with the curricular teacher and other staff. Support teachers are graduates in the Science of Primary Education, with an additional specialisation or master's degree in special education, developmental psychopathology, neuropsychiatry, psychology for disability and special learning methods and teaching. There is also the so-called AEC, the educational and cultural assistant, who has a specific role facilitating autonomy and communication in the individual plan. AECs are appointed by the Local Authority.</p> |
| <p>France: working with health practitioners</p> | <p>In Paris, the association Envoludia manages several day-care centres, including three which have a medical approach, and can cater for both children with or without disabilities. Le Chalet is one of them: it welcomes 30 children aged 1 to 5, including 11 children with disabilities, eight of which have cerebral palsy. Some of the activities bring all children together; and children with disabilities receive the care and treatments they need in the day care centre itself, thanks to the medical staff attached to the centre (physiotherapists, speech therapists and occupational therapists). These medical staff also work along the ECEC staff, share their knowledge and expertise, and can participate in some of the activities, such as physical activities. A therapeutical coordinator ensures a coherent approach between</p> |

¹⁴¹ <http://aenunogoncalves.com/>

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| | <p>the educational team, the medical staff and other persons who intervene or work in the day care centre¹⁴².</p> |
| <p>Slovenia: specialized departments for preschool children with autism in Ljubljana kindergartens</p> | <p>The Municipality of Ljubljana, has opened specialized departments for pre-school children with autism in three of its kindergartens (children with autism may also be enrolled in regular groups). From 2018, one kindergarten accepts one group of children with high-functioning autism - children with reduced adaptive skills with normative cognitive development. Two kindergartens, however, opened departments in 2020 and accept children with low-functioning autism, i.e. children with reduced adaptive skills while lagging behind in other fundamental developmental areas. The creation of these specialised departments for children with autism took place under the expert guidance of the Autism Department of the Pediatric Clinic in Ljubljana. All three departments offer an intensive educational programme, the primary focus of which is special treatment for children with autism. Professionals work with children according to an individualised program in order to optimally develop the child's skills of independence, socialisation, communication and flexibility of thinking.</p> <p>Specialised departments are located among the regular departments of kindergartens. Children in these smaller classes (up to 6 children) acquire knowledge and skills in their group and consolidate them daily with peers from regular classes. Special pedagogical staff accompanies children throughout the daily routine. The transition of children between kindergarten programmes is planned and takes place with the support of three professionals - an additional professional in the department as above standard.</p> <p>After two years of operation of the specialised department, children can feel the positive effects of practice in the development of appropriate and diverse socialisation skills for quality interaction in various social situations, both in the home and kindergarten environment. With the perceived development of skills that help children to successfully integrate into a group of peers and into the wider society, children will be more able to attend an appropriate school program. Vertical cooperation between the kindergarten and primary schools has been established, from the transfer of specific knowledge about the child to the counselling and education of teachers and students.</p> <p>In all three kindergartens that implement a specialised program for children with autism, modern pedagogical approaches for working with children with autism are being developed and striving for strong inter-ministerial cooperation between ECEC and health.</p> |

In many ECEC systems, it is difficult for some children to benefit from mainstream provision and they may have a better experience in a more specialist setting. However national systems are increasingly looking at ways to reduce the number of children in specialist settings as the vast majority of children will be able to succeed in mainstream ECEC. Examples below show how ECEC settings and systems can support the transition from segregation to inclusion.

¹⁴² https://www.lemonde.fr/sciences/article/2019/04/08/handicap-un-accueil-modele-pour-les-petits_5447505_1650684.html; <https://www.envoludia.org/petite-enfance/>

Country / project examples

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| Croatia | The SUVAG Polyclinic's Education Department ¹⁴³ includes a kindergarten and primary school which provide educational programmes for children with difficulties in speech or complex rehabilitation. The aim of the programmes offered by the centre is to prepare children for successful educational and social inclusion or inclusion in mainstream education when the child is psychologically and physically ready. The kindergarten programme was approved by the Republic of Croatia's Ministry of Science, Education and Sports in 2005. The programme aims are based on the national curriculum for pre-primary education and the kindergarten's own curriculum. |
| Cyprus | A number of public kindergartens have a special unit which provides intensive special education to a small number of children. Each class in this unit (with up to eight learners) maintains contact with and works with a specific mainstream class in the school. Officially, the mainstream class is the children's registered class where the children belong. The children have different autistic spectrum disorders and moderate general learning disabilities. The aim is for the children to spend less time in the special unit with their specialist teachers. Through co-operation the specialist and mainstream staff co-plan and co-teach in order that no child is left out. The use of the special unit is intermittent and most of the teaching staff and children are gradually transferred to their mainstream classrooms. |
| France | <p>In 2020, the association Ebullescence launched a network of inclusive nursery schools to cater for the special needs of children (18 months to 6 years old) with neurodevelopmental disorders (cerebral palsy, autism, motor or language disorder). It aims to help families who have difficulties finding a place in traditional settings, and wants to support these children as early as possible, so that inclusion in mainstream nursery or nursery school is easier. The goal is to teach the little ones to manage their communication and their emotions. The layout of the nurseries will be specific, with four playing rooms, an art therapy room, a psychomotricity room and a Snoezelen space, for about twenty children. The pedagogy put in place will above all focus on the overall development of the child.</p> <p>The project also plans that professionals will come together much more than in a traditional crèche team, with meetings being an essential part of daily work, and close relationships with parents being key¹⁴⁴.</p> |

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| Resources | |
| Understanding special needs and offering | The project Early inclusion through learning from each other ¹⁴⁵ aimed to foster inclusion in ECEC and youth work by diffusing information packs on disability, creating an online community of practice, and an online resource of informal learning. The main outputs are: |

¹⁴³ Inclusive early childhood education. Example of IECE provision: Croatia.

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.lesprosdelaPetiteenfance.fr/initiatives/handicap/les-bulletins-un-projet-de-creeches-qui-preparent-linclusion>

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.early-inclusion.eu/>

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| adequate activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a series of briefing packs on key areas of disadvantage for ECEC professionals; • a searchable online resource of methods and activities for parents, teachers and professionals to do with pre-school children of different ages and with different needs/area of disadvantage. |
| Physical activity to promote wellbeing of children with disabilities | <p>The Young Athletic Program¹⁴⁶ is an innovative sports play programme which includes active games, songs and other play activities that help children develop motor, social and cognitive skills. While the programme can be delivered to children with and without disabilities, this project aimed to support its delivery to enhance provision for children with disabilities. Numerous results are available, among which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a curriculum, with 8-week detailed lessons; • a guide for teachers. |
| Bilingual literacy for deaf and hard of hearing children | <p>The Sign First¹⁴⁷ project aims at achieving the bilingual literacy development of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children (aged 4-7) so they can be educated in an effective inclusive school environment. It offers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a teaching curriculum and educational materials for teaching European Sign Languages to deaf students as a first language; • sign language assessment instruments. |
| Integrate children with special educational needs with the Welcome Idea App | <p>The WELCOME project¹⁴⁸ aimed to enhance the integration of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in ECEC settings by developing new tools to improve teachers' competences. The tools, including a teaching methodology and accompanying app, bring together educational research with examples of effective teaching practices to inspire teachers in their work with SEN children. The Welcome Idea App also provides educational diagnostics to evaluate a child's current state in individual development areas.</p> |
| Practice guidelines for the inclusion of children with disabilities | <p>The Canadian College of Early Childhood Educators prepared this manual¹⁴⁹ to help ECEC staff to work with children with disabilities and their families. The guidelines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe inclusion, special needs and disability; • Provide practical approaches to support children and families; • Highlight the role of the child, family, community and other professionals; • Outline the physical, social and attitudinal barriers and support to inclusion; • Offer reflective questions and scenarios to support practice and collaborative dialogue. |

¹⁴⁶ <https://resources.specialolympics.org/sports-essentials/young-athletes>

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.sign1st.eu/en/>

¹⁴⁸ <https://welcome-idea.eu/#/home>

¹⁴⁹ https://www.college-ece.ca/en/Documents/Practice_Guideline_Inclusion.pdf

**Social
innovations in
early childhood
interventions**

This research¹⁵⁰ presents eight case studies for early intervention; it documents challenges, solutions and enablers found in seven countries to support children with disabilities and their families. Each case study is documented in such a way that it can be replicated in other contexts / countries.

¹⁵⁰ Zero Project Analysis. Social Innovations in Early Childhood Intervention. Eight European case studies ready to be scaled up. EASPD, 2016.

Children with a migrant background

Many children living in the European Union (EU) have parents and families with a migrant background - either from another Member State or from outside the EU. It is difficult to collect information on the number of children pertaining to this group and to find data on their participation to ECEC, but research shows that this group is in general less likely to participate in ECEC than other children¹⁵¹.

The situations of these children vary greatly across Europe. Some countries have enormous experience of migration and have well established practices for responding with linguistic and cultural diversity. For example, the United Kingdom has anti-discrimination measures and linguistic diversity provisions that are far ahead of most EU Member States¹⁵².

Families from a migrant background often face significant barriers when they try to engage with the ECEC system. Besides the lack of places and cost of participation in ECEC, which affect many other groups, specific obstacles have been identified which may prevent a full access to ECEC by children with a migrant background. It must be noted that the situation may vary considerably depending on the age range considered (0-3 vs 3-6)¹⁵³.

Barriers for children with a migrant background and their families to access ECEC

- lack of information about legal rights and available financial support;
- language barriers, causing communication problems between ECEC staff and parents;
- a lack of culture-sensitive provision (e.g. religious prescriptions relating to food);
- lack of intercultural skills of ECEC staff;
- immigrants' own cultural values preventing them from bringing their children to ECEC;
- provision of home care allowance, which may deter families, and in particular migrant women from sending their children to an ECEC centre.

The Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems considers the experiences and opportunities for children whose families have a migrant background. The recommendation notes that *ECEC has an essential role to play in learning to live together in heterogeneous societies and notes that ECEC services can strengthen social cohesion and inclusion in several ways. They can serve as meeting places for families and contribute to developing language*

¹⁵¹ Bircan, T., Van Lancker, A., Nicaise, I. (2019). "Target Group Discussion Paper on Children with a Migrant Background (including Refugee Children)", Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels: European Commission.

¹⁵² Herzog-Punzenberger, B., (2016). Successful integration of migrant children in EU Member States: examples of good practice. NESET II ad hoc question 1/2016.

¹⁵³ Bircan, T., Van Lancker, A., Nicaise, I. (2019). "Target Group Discussion Paper on Children with a Migrant Background (including Refugee Children)", Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels: European Commission.

competences of the children, both in the language of the service and the first language¹⁵⁴. Participation in ECEC can also be an effective tool to achieve educational equity for children in a disadvantaged situation, including migrant and refugee children.

The recommendation therefore invites Member States to:

- *analyse and address the barriers that families might encounter when accessing and using ECEC services, e.g. cultural and linguistic barriers, discrimination as well as a lack of information;*
- *support all children to learn the language of education while also taking into account and respecting their first language;*
- *consider, where possible, tailored multilingual early childhood programmes, which also take into account the specific needs of bi/multilingual children;*
- *organise provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity. This could include:*
 - *reaching out to families with targeted initiatives that allow them to express their needs and enables services to take these into account when tailoring provision to the demands of local communities;*
 - *the recruitment of staff from marginalised, migrant or minority groups can be encouraged as it has proven to be of advantage if the composition of staff in ECEC settings reflects diversity in the community;*
 - *creating a welcoming environment for children that values their languages, culture and home backgrounds, hence contributing to the development of their sense of belonging.*
- *provide staff with initial and continuing training that prepares them to work with linguistically and culturally diverse groups;*
- *use a curriculum which promotes diversity, equality, and linguistic awareness. It can nurture the development of both the mother tongue and language of education of children with a migrant background*

In addition, the working group who prepared this toolkit considers that it is important to:

- recognise that there are important enablers which encourage the greater involvement of children from migrant communities - these include free and available provision as well as provision which is based on individual needs;
- ensure that policies which include children from migrant communities involve parents to build trust and demonstrate a collaborative approach;
- establish the value of ECEC in some communities.

¹⁵⁴ First language: language variety (-ies) acquired in early childhood (approximately before the age of two or three years) in which the human language faculty was first acquired. This term is preferred to mother tongue, which is often inaccurate as the first language is not necessarily that of the mother alone.

The discussion paper on children with a migrant background prepared by the Feasibility study for a European Child Guarantee proposes further avenues to be explored by policy-makers to increase access of this specific group of children to ECEC¹⁵⁵:

- *adopt a vision based on the rights of the child and a child protection perspective, and review legislations and funding systems to ensure that children with a migrant background can have access to ECEC, regardless of their status;*
- *develop intercultural communication activities (e.g. intercultural mediation services);*
- *avoid segregation and consider positive discrimination.*

The European New Pact on Migration and Asylum adopted in September 2020 highlights that:

- the European Commission has identified the needs of children as a priority, which will be taken fully into account in broader initiatives to promote the rights and interests of children, such as the Strategy on the Rights of the Child, in line both with international law on rights of refugees and children and with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The reform of EU rules on asylum and return is an opportunity to strengthen safeguards and protection standards under EU law for migrant children. The new rules will ensure that the best interests of the child are the primary consideration in all decisions concerning migrant children and that the right for the child to be heard is respected.
- Children should have prompt and non-discriminatory access to education, and early access to integration services¹⁵⁶.

Further to this, the European Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027¹⁵⁷ aims at reducing the barriers that hinder migrants' participation in European society and at *increasing the participation of migrant children and children with a migrant background in ECEC while ensuring that such programmes are equipped to serve culturally and linguistically diverse children can have a strong positive effect on their future educational attainment, including in learning the host country language, and on the integration of their parents and families at large.*

There are many examples across Europe of policies and initiatives to support participation of children with a migrant background in ECEC.

Country / project examples

Denmark

Denmark promotes inclusive ECEC to families from a minority ethnic background and families with lower social and economic status. The national policies include:

- support for language learning and (if required) the assessment of language competences for children between the ages of two and three both in and outside of ECEC;

¹⁵⁵ Bircan, T., Van Lancker, A., Nicaise, I. (2019). "Target Group Discussion Paper on Children with a Migrant Background (including Refugee Children)", Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG), Brussels: European Commission.

¹⁵⁶ Communication from the Commission on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum. COM/2020/609 final

¹⁵⁷ Communication from the Commission. Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027. SWD(2020) 290 final.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a mandatory programme of 25 hours of ECEC for one-year olds in vulnerable housing areas who are not already in ECEC. This programme also includes targeted activities to support pedagogic staff to work with parents; • additional training for pedagogic staff to work with disadvantaged children and their parents. This additional training focuses on 1) communication and language, 2) culture and democratic traditions, 3) gaining trust and cooperation from parents. <p>The nation-wide quality of all aspects of Denmark’s ECEC provision will be evaluated in 2021-2013.</p> |
| <p>Slovenia</p> | <p>The national strategy to include children from a migrant or minority ethnic background is based on the legislation which requires preschool education providers to meet the principles of equal opportunity for children and parents, take account of differences among children, and recognise the right to choose and the right to be different. In this context there have been four significant national initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the inclusion of migrant children in education (2008-2011); • the development of interculturalism as a new form of coexistence (2013-2015); • the development of teaching materials in Slovene as a foreign language (2014-2015); • strengthening the social and civic competences of professionals (2016-2021). <p>These initiatives have contributed to the development of interculturalism, and improved the professional skills of the educational staff in order to integrate children from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds into the Slovenian system.</p> <p>The current programme (strengthening the social and civic competences of professionals), announced in 2018, is based on work with migrant children in pre-school, primary and secondary education. It focuses on three aspects of integration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social inclusion and developing a sense of belonging; • learning the Slovenian language; • creating supportive networks in ECEC settings and local communities. <p>The early evaluations show that most teachers have a positive attitude toward inclusive practice and interculturalism. Teachers who have been involved in the programme activities feel more competent and have fewer negative attitudes toward inclusive ECEC practice and interculturalism. However 25% of teachers report that they do not feel competent to offer more personalised and individualised teaching.</p> |
| <p>Malta</p> | <p>With a recent increase in children from migrant families in recent years, Malta’s Migrant Learners’ Unit runs induction course for five to seven year-olds who are non-Maltese and non-English speakers.</p> |
| <p>Germany</p> | <p>The German FEAD (‘Europäischer Hilfsfonds für die am stärksten benachteiligten Personen in Deutschland’, or EHAP (European support fund for the most deprived in Germany)) has a total budget of EUR 93 million, of which EUR 79 million is from the EU (2014-2020). One of its funding area is about improving access to parental</p> |

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| | <p>support for parents of migrant children of pre-school age, and improving access by the children themselves to early education and social inclusion opportunities.</p> <p>A major challenge is ensuring that children who are close to school age get a place in a kindergarten so that they can learn at least rudimentary German before starting school. Referral to a kindergarten is also one of the most common results. In the first three years of the programme, two thirds of the funds were used to support families. FEAD support in practice takes the form of funding the salaries of counsellors/outreach workers in existing or new beneficiaries (public bodies or non-profit organisations) to support the integration of disadvantaged newly arrived EU citizens and homeless people.</p> <p>These are mainly social workers with language skills in Bulgarian, Romanian and/or Turkish. The FEAD also funds co-operation between the partner organisations and the regular assistance system and training courses, for example in respect of intercultural competencies and non-discrimination, for the municipalities and other stakeholders¹⁵⁸.</p> |
| <p>Belgium (NL)</p> | <p>With the support of the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the Flemish government launched a pilot experience (2017-2018) to improve the enrolment and attendance rates in preschool education by toddlers of third-country nationals (a group that does not participate, or participates irregularly, in pre-school education). The programme focused in particular on parental involvement as a lever to increase the enrolment and attendance of this group of children, and built on the principle that problems in the further educational careers of these children can be reduced by investing in high-quality pre-school services and smooth transitions. With an overall budget of EUR 2 million, seven 'living labs' were set up in cities with a high proportion of non-EU citizens and relatively high child poverty rates. They developed and implemented locally based experimental measures, through network-based co-operation between pre-school services, organisations that served the same target group, and (mostly) local authorities. A learning network was established to supervise the living labs, which offered theory-based and methodological support (in a participatory manner) during the preparation, execution and evaluation of the programme.</p> <p>Each living lab drew up an action plan tailored to local needs, with innovative experiments, mostly in and for schools; new tools; and innovative ways of improving the professional skills of school teams (e.g. guiding parents to the pre-school service they preferred; the creation of a warm welcome; and daily meetings and communications between school staff/teachers, parents and children).</p> <p>The main impact of the programme was found to be on the quality of relations between all stakeholders (within and across groups of stakeholders): parents and school staff/teachers developed stronger and more reciprocal bonds with each other; parents strengthened their mutual networks; and schools learned how to work together with other organisations to improve the guidance they gave to parents and children in the target group, and to become more accessible to them. A key factor behind these results was the way the programme led to the development of structural co-operation between local welfare organisations and schools. This co-</p> |

¹⁵⁸ Feasibility study for a Child Guarantee. Case studies on the effectiveness of funding programmes – Key findings and study reports.

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| | <p>operation triggered a process – combining improved support, greater professionalisation and joint activities in schools – that made it possible to offer a warm welcome to the target group. A second key driver appeared to be the continuous efforts of the living labs to engage parents to tell their story, and to participate in and reflect on the experimental activities. Living labs with a local government authority in a steering role also had more capacity to leverage extra resources. For these living labs, local authorities decided to free up existing staff resources to sustain the programme¹⁵⁹.</p> |
| <p>Portugal</p> | <p>The Ministry of Education carries out educational policies to ensure the inclusion of children and young people of migrant background in the educational system.</p> <p>The educational strategy outlined at the national level seeks to ensure that the students who do not speak Portuguese as a mother tongue have equal opportunities within the school system by creating equitable conditions of access both to the curriculum and to educational success, regardless of their language, culture, social status, origin and age. It does this through the support for Portuguese language learning, as the language of schooling, and through the offer of Portuguese as a second language (PL2) (Português Língua Não Materna -PLNM) subject, in primary and secondary education.</p> <p>Pre-school education being the first stage of primary education, PL2 learning should start as early as possible, e.g. in kindergarten. Indeed, Portuguese language learning is a main factor for the integration and promotion of school success for children whose mother tongue is not Portuguese; therefore, one should create an environment which both promotes the establishment of significant affective relationships with children and adults and facilitates communication. In this vein, migrant children and their families feel welcomed, respected, and valued in their languages, knowledge and cultures and acquire a progressive mastery of oral competences in Portuguese.</p> |
| <p>Finland</p> | <p>In the city of Vantaa, Finnish teaching for immigrant parents who are caring for their children at home is organised in Kotva groups ('Kotva' is an abbreviation of the word kotivanhemmat, or stay-at-home parents). This model was developed by the project "Vantaan osaava vanhempi" (Capable Parent in Vantaa), as part of the national trial project Participative Integration in Finland in 2011 – 2013 and was mainstreamed in Vantaa after the project's conclusion.</p> <p>The purpose is to offer immigrant parents caring for their children at home the possibility of studying Finnish once a week (for two hours) to help them cope with everyday situations, such as food shopping. While the parent is studying, safe and professional child care/early integration activities are provided for the child by ECEC staff. Safe guidance that supports children's development is realised as the Finnish lessons take place at open ECEC centres and open playgrounds with staff. A teacher from the Adult Education Institute comes to teach the parents in the ECEC facilities, where the children can be offered an existing, high-quality learning environment.</p> |

¹⁵⁹ Feasibility study for a Child Guarantee – Case studies on the effectiveness of funding programmes – Key findings and study reports

| Resources | |
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| Inclusive education in pre-school | <p>The INEDU project¹⁶⁰ aimed to foster inclusive education for children with migrant and disadvantaged backgrounds, and use ECEC as a tool for integration and socialisation of families. Its activities focused on collaboration between policymakers, preschool educators and families. The outcomes include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A handbook for policy makers on inclusive education policies in pre-schools; • A handbook for pre-school teachers with best practices and tools. |
| Supporting social and emotional competences of preschool children from disadvantaged or culturally different environments | <p>The project¹⁶¹ developed a methodology for integration of children with a migrant background in the school environment. It also developed a training programme for pre-school teachers, in English, Czech and Slovak, and a good practice guide.</p> |
| Building bridges – Bridging the gaps | <p>‘Building bridges – bridging the gaps - Supporting wellbeing, learning, development and integration of young refugee and migrant children’ is a guidebook¹⁶² which aims to assist and inform the work of kindergarten teachers engaged in kindergartens in refugee camps on the Aegean islands, but can also be of help in various kindergarten settings.</p> <p>The Guidebook hints on how to support kindergarten teachers, addresses topics such as creating safe, well-structured, child-friendly, and stimulating environments in camps; providing psychosocial support to children and families and dealing with trauma; supporting children who do not speak language of instruction. In the Guidebook, each of the topics includes a set of suggested hands-on activities alongside with theoretical explanations of the rationale behind them.</p> |

Refugee children

In Europe, the arrival of large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in recent years has challenged the ability of governments and service providers to both meet initial reception needs and provide effective long-term integration services. Young children make up a significant

¹⁶⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-project-details/#project/580452-EPP-1-2016-1-PL-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN>

¹⁶¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-project-details/#project/2014-1-CZ01-KA201-001988>

¹⁶² <https://www.issa.nl/content/new-guidebook-and-toolkit-support-teachers-working-refugee-and-migrant-children>

share of these newcomers. As a result, there is a pressing need for ECEC programmes which are equipped to serve culturally and linguistically diverse learners and their families, including by supporting the cognitive, emotional and social development of children who have experienced trauma, both soon after their initial reception and throughout their integration process¹⁶³. Research however shows that:

- During the asylum proceedings, there is hardly any pedagogical offer available in reception centres nor are there clear policies to guarantee accessible, useful and meaningful ECEC. While there is ample evidence of the possible benefits of high quality ECEC, especially for vulnerable groups, these children often do not attend any ECEC provision.
- There is almost a complete lack of specific policy or attention to this group of young children and their families. In research as well, the very youngest refugee children have not been a topic of attention as such¹⁶⁴.
- In some cases, asylum-seekers, refugees or recent migrants may not be covered by the national legislation on access to ECEC or financial support¹⁶⁵.
- There may also be a lack of clarity regarding which actor is responsible for young refugee and asylum-seeker children, resulting in a lack of accountability for their wellbeing and a coherent answer to their needs. In addition, as many of these children are below the compulsory school age, gaps in services and obstacles to participation may be invisible at the policy level¹⁶⁶.
- Finally, the majority of ECEC staff are not equipped or experienced to support adequately children who have faced trauma, such as most refugee children have.

The 2019 Council Recommendation for high-quality ECEC systems recognises that refugee children, due to their vulnerable situation, need enforced support. Poverty, physical and emotional stressors, traumas and missing language skills can hinder their future educational prospects and successful integration into a new society. It emphasises that participation in ECEC can help to mitigate these risk factors.

The Migration Policy Institute¹⁶⁷ recommends that:

¹⁶³ Chiara Bove & Nima Sharmahd (2020) Beyond invisibility. Welcoming children and families with migrant and refugee background in ECEC settings, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 28:1, 1-9.

¹⁶⁴ Ankie Vandekerckhove & Jeroen Aarssen (2020) High time to put the invisible children on the agenda: supporting refugee families and children through quality ECEC, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 28:1, 104-114

¹⁶⁵ Bircan, T., Van Lancker, A., Nicaise, I. (2019). "Target Group Discussion Paper on Children with a Migrant Background (including Refugee Children)", *Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG)*, Brussels: European Commission.

¹⁶⁶ Park, Maki, Caitlin Katsiaficas, and Margie McHugh. 2018. *Responding to the ECEC Needs of Children of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Europe and North America*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute

¹⁶⁷ Park, Maki, Caitlin Katsiaficas, and Margie McHugh. 2018. *Responding to the ECEC Needs of Children of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Europe and North America*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

- countries should identify the obstacles that refugee (and migrant) families encounter and render them less likely to enrol their children in ECEC as opposed to native families;
- refugee (and migrant) children should attend ECEC settings alongside their native peers, in mixed classrooms;
- countries should recognise that refugee (and migrant) families may not have previous experience with formal ECEC services, and may lack awareness of ECEC options. To ensure inclusiveness it is important to raise awareness among these populations and find strategies to overcome their potential doubts regarding the benefits of ECEC.

The examples below illustrate how some countries or cities answer the specific needs of refugee children and families.

| Country / project examples | |
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| Greece: ECEC provision within refugee centres | <p>Since 2016, the Greek government runs a programme to ensure access to education for refugee and migrant children, with the support of the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). One of the main measures is a special education programme for the establishment and operation of ‘Reception/Preparatory Classes for the Education of Refugees’ (DYEP). It aims to help refugee and migrant children (aged 4-15) who live in refugee accommodation centres to facilitate their integration into the educational system in a way that should gradually allow them to join mainstream classes in Greek schools. For children aged 4-5, the programme offers pre-primary classes during morning hours, within refugee accommodation centres, operating as branches of the nearest pre-primary public school. Children attending pre-primary DYEP classes follow the official education programme for all pre-primary schools.</p> <p>The funding covers, in particular, the recruitment of teachers and other educational staff, the production of educational material, the supply and installation of pre-fabricated school units within accommodation centres, and dissemination activities¹⁶⁸.</p> |
| Berlin (Germany): supporting staff to work with refugee children and organising pre-school play groups | <p>Since 2015, the Senate of Berlin has been funding pre-school playgroups and activities for young children of refugee families, to introduce them and their parents to the Berlin ECEC system. They are not run by ECEC professionals but staff with pedagogical and intercultural knowledge in a "familial" way. These centres help gain trust, explain the ECEC system and support integration of the whole family¹⁶⁹.</p> <p>In autumn 2016, the Senate of Berlin also launched the project “Model day care centres for the integration and inclusion of children from families with refugee experience in Berlin” (“integration kitas”). Eight day care centres with experience of working with refugee families were chosen to build knowledge and</p> |

¹⁶⁸ Feasibility study for a Child Guarantee. Case studies on the effectiveness of funding programmes – Key findings and study reports.

¹⁶⁹ Vandekerckhove, A., Hulpia, H., Huttova, J., Peeters, J., Dumitru, D., Ivan, C., Rezmuves, S., Volen, E., and Makarevičienė, A. (2019). ‘The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefitting vulnerable groups such as Roma’, NESET report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

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| | <p>professional expertise which could then be shared with other day care centres across the city¹⁷⁰.</p> |
| Germany: the Kita-entry programme | <p>The federal programme “Building bridges in early education” was launched in 2017 to facilitate access of disadvantaged families to ECEC. It experiments a range of activities, from promotion campaigns to staff professional development and has a large focus on refugee children¹⁷¹.</p> |
| Turkey: supporting teachers working with refugee children | <p>Turkey is hosting a very large number of people with different needs including significant numbers of children under temporary protection due to recent migration. The Ministry launched a project to improve teachers and leaders’ skills in order to enable them to meet the requirements of the legislation which require education institutions to be responsible for the provision of education to anyone regardless of their language, race, gender, disability and religion. The education for Syrian children was guaranteed and standardised in the “Education for Foreigners” paper published on September 23, 2014 by the Ministry of National Education. This training included the strengthening of staff capacities to provide education to all children with the primary focus on disadvantaged ones (children with special needs, children under temporary protection in Turkey etc.) and to provide all children a high quality inclusive education. The following ten modules were prepared in line with the needs of teachers and children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduction to inclusive education: theory and conceptual framework • inclusive teaching and assessment • inclusive learning environments (physical and psychosocial aspects) • school, family and community partnership • working with children with special needs • teaching Turkish as a second language • working with children exposed to violence • working with children under temporary protection • working with children who are immigrants or affected by terrorism • working with children affected by natural disasters. <p>In order to increase the quality and effectiveness of the guidance and special education services provided to the Syrians under Temporary Protection, Turkey has produced a "Manual for Guidance Services to Individuals under Temporary Protection" and a "Manual for Special Education Services to Individuals under Temporary Protection". These manuals have been distributed to special education teachers to support their activities with Syrian students. The manuals have been translated into Arabic and distributed to Syrian teachers working in Turkey.</p> |
| Belgium (NL): cooperation | <p>Kind en Gezin, the public ECEC agency, has a collaborative agreement with Fedasil (Belgium’s Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) and the Red Cross, which manages reception centres in the country. This partnership ensures</p> |

¹⁷⁰ <http://www.integration-kitas.de/>

¹⁷¹ <https://kita-einstieg.fruehe-chancen.de/>

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| with Asylum agency | that refugee and asylum-seeker parents of young children can access many of the services Kind en Gezin provides, including prenatal, postnatal, and preventative health care; parenting support; home visits; and consultations ¹⁷² . |
| Slovenia: free access to special programmes | Refugee children who are not included in regular kindergartens can attend 240-hour kindergarten programme organized by kindergartens close to Refugee centres. The program is completely free of charge for parents, and allows children to improve their knowledge and skills in activities in the areas defined by the Kindergarten Curriculum (society, nature, art, mathematics, language, movement) and achieve the child's empowerment to easier enrolment in primary school. |
| The Netherlands: working with refugees centres | <p>In the Netherlands 2/3 of the municipalities that have shelters to newcomers in their communities offer early childhood education to young children. Half of them do it in the shelter itself, the other half offers it at the regular centres for day care.</p> <p>A new indicator was developed to allocate budgets to local authorities for their policies on disadvantaged children, supports these municipalities in a better way than before.</p> <p>Municipalities are assisted by the general government and stakeholders to extend their offer of early childhood education to the very young newcomers. The ambition is to reach 80% of the children involved.</p> |
| Norway: free access to ECEC | Children staying in asylum centres may enter ECEC if places are available in the municipality where the centre is located. A government grant has for several years financed full time places in ECEC for all children in asylum centres aged one to five, regardless of the status of their asylum application. |

| Resources | |
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| Quality ECEC for young refugee children | <p>The project "Multilingual early childhood education and care for young refugee children"¹⁷³ offers a list of quality indicators based on the European Quality Framework for ECEC, adapted to the care and education of young refugee children and liaising with their families.</p> <p>It also shares a training package for ECEC staff in the form of scenarios involving refugee children in preschool centres, along with a number of reflective questions for these professionals.</p> |
| Expanding effective | This workshop report from the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years ¹⁷⁴ explores promising practices and strategies deployed in ECEC programs and |

¹⁷² Park, Maki, Caitlin Katsiaficas, and Margie McHugh. 2018. *Responding to the ECEC Needs of Children of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Europe and North America*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

¹⁷³ <https://sardes.nl/myref>

¹⁷⁴ <https://www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/transatlantic-forum-on-inclusive-early-years/tfey-refugee-children-berlin>

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| ECEC services for young refugee children | systems in the EU, US, and Canada to effectively and holistically serve young refugee children and their families. |
| Young Refugee Children in Greek Early Childhood Day Care Centres | <p>This Toolkit for early childhood educators¹⁷⁵ supports nurseries to attract refugee and migrant parents and families to enroll their children in responsive and quality nursery services and to strengthen social cohesion in the neighborhoods / communities where they are located. The Toolkit contains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • methodological and theoretical guidelines to support nursery teachers in their work; • access to a hands-on set of 24 activity cards with examples of activities for children under 4 years of age; • link to download children’s songs from Syria, Afghanistan, Congo, and Iran. |

Multilingualism

As noted above, the Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems notes that ECEC can contribute to developing language competences of the children, both in the language of the service and the first language¹⁷⁶. The Council Recommendation also invites Member States to work towards ensuring that ECEC services support all children to learn the language of education while also taking into account and respecting their first language.

The 2019 Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages¹⁷⁷ encourages:

- early language learning, bi-lingual pre-schools and primary schools, especially in border regions and multilingual countries and regions;
- validation of the individual linguistic competences of all learners;
- language awareness - admitting that every teacher or educator is a language teacher and preparing for linguistic diversity;
- well-educated and confident ECEC staff, open to, and happy to respond to linguistic diversity and backgrounds.

In addition, the working group which prepared this toolkit noted the importance of:

- recognising that teachers often feel they do not have the competence to respond to children’s linguistic needs;

¹⁷⁵ <https://www.issa.nl/content/new-guidebook-and-toolkit-support-teachers-working-refugee-and-migrant-children>

¹⁷⁶ First language: language variety (-ies) acquired in early childhood (approximately before the age of two or three years) in which the human language faculty was first acquired. This term is preferred to mother tongue, which is often inaccurate as the first language is not necessarily that of the mother alone.

¹⁷⁷ Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages (2019/C 189/03).

- offering language learning as part of the pre-service training and professional development of ECEC staff;
- the creation of multi-lingual spaces in ECEC setting;
- assessing young children’s language through models which focus on what is known rather than deficiencies;
- supporting children’s ability to identify as citizens of the country. For this to be a success children need to both learn the language and operate/live with the culture associated with the language;
- seeing children’s cultural and language differences as a benefit not a disadvantage, always taking into account and respecting individual language repertoires;
- responding to the particular challenges of including communities who feel excluded. In these situations employing staff from these communities is an effective strategy;
- considering the whole range of factors that enable policies on greater multilingualism and multiculturalism to succeed e.g. teacher training, listening to teachers when identifying their training needs, the value of peer learning, involving parents and families etc.

Eurydice also recalls that UNESCO promotes the teaching of home language, i.e. measures to improve children’s skills in their home language where it is not the main language used in the ECEC and school context. This could cover support for regional or minority languages or languages spoken by children from migrant backgrounds. This recommendation is based on three considerations:

- Proficiency in the home language is considered to have a positive impact on the learner’s cognitive skills in general, including on their ability to learn and to master the language of instruction;
- It helps these children build a multicultural identity, and consequently facilitate their integration. Home language competency may also be seen as a way to recognise the diversity of linguistic capital and the value of cultural heritage;
- It fosters plurilingualism among all learners.

Eurydice also notes that:

- In Spain, Portugal and Switzerland, home language teaching exists, but it is limited. It is provided in the languages for which there is an agreement with the countries of origin or with the immigrant communities;
- In few European education systems, the top-level regulations and recommendations advocate home language teaching for all children from migrant backgrounds, irrespective of their origin. In addition, a few countries provide home language teaching in the languages for which there is an agreement with the countries of origin or with the immigrant communities¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁸ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019.

Country / project examples

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| <p>Luxembourg</p> | <p>The national policy seeks to develop children’s multilingual competences from a very early age. With three official languages - Luxembourgish, French and German - language learning is an essential part of the Government’s equal opportunities policy as a large number of children do not speak the languages of schooling at home. The multilingual education in non-formal ECEC settings (<i>crèches</i>) seeks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable young children to benefit – irrespective of their parents’ income – from the provision of quality education which attaches particular importance to the development of language skills; • encourage children to live their languages and get into contact with the official languages from a very early age in order that children become familiar with them before starting school. <p>The non-formal ECEC system offers 20 hours of free attendance for 46 weeks per year and the language focus is on Luxembourgish, French and the home languages of the children. ECEC provision is offered by well qualified and trained professionals who speak the languages fluently. Coherence and continuity in language acquisition are important and the approach continues in the preschools (non-compulsory <i>éducation précoce</i> and compulsory <i>éducation préscolaire</i>) with a focus on developing core competences in Luxembourgish as well as an early playful and natural contact with French. Professionals actively rely on the home languages of the children as they are considered as a valuable resource for development and learning. The curriculum for preschool and primary school is multilingual, based on a set of core competences which are developed over eight to nine years (from the beginning of preschool to the end of primary school). These core competences are the same for all three languages (LUX, DE, FR).</p> |
| <p>Estonia</p> | <p>A national project supports bilingual teams in kindergartens. It is based on government support for the appointment of a ‘Professional Estonian speaking teacher in every Russian speaking preschool group’. The project began in September 2018 and involved 53 new Estonian teachers being trained to work with 53 groups of Russian speaking children in 21 pre-schools in Tallinn and Eastern Estonia. In 2019 there was training for staff in a further 30 pre-schools and in 2020 the project covers a further 50 pre-schools. This project is needed because the Estonian Education Information System has reported that in 2018/2019 10,721 children participated in ECEC groups which used the Russian language. The project supports co-teaching and team work between ECEC staff and, in most situations, ECEC activities are organised in two sub-groups, one in Estonian and the other in Russian. The children learn the Estonian and Russian languages throughout the day. The monitoring of the project has shown that most participants have noticed the increased interest of children in the Estonian language and culture, the increase in children’s vocabulary, and the children’s courage to communicate and play in Estonian.</p> |
| <p>Bulgaria</p> | <p>There is a need to make ECEC more attractive to all families as the percentage of children aged from three to six years enrolled in pre-primary education is falling (from 83.6% in 2013 to 78.4% in 2017). The system faces two sets of challenges:</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at the system level there is a lack of ECEC capacity in cities, the fees are expensive for parents, and some regions have a large number of vulnerable groups; • an increasing number of children are looked after by family members, there is an increasing level of unemployment and an increase in the number of families in poverty. <p>These challenges are being addressed through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the introduction of two years of compulsory pre-schooling before the first year of primary school; • guaranteeing additional support and lessons in the Bulgarian language for children with a different mother tongue; • improving the management and inspection of ECEC settings; • developing standards in partnership with stakeholders to guarantee the quality of pre-school education. |
| Switzerland | <p>The Family literacy project ‘Schenk mir eine Geschichte’ (Give Me a Story as a Present¹⁷⁹) is for children aged from 2-5 and their parents especially those from literacy-poor backgrounds. There are reading sessions in the languages that are relevant to the heritage languages of these families. The activities are in places where parents meet e.g. in libraries, migrant organisations, neighbourhood organisations. They last for 90 minutes and include story-telling, reading children’s books, singing songs or rhymes, drawing and playing.</p> |
| Slovenia | <p>Slovenia provides bilingual settings in the areas inhabited by Italian and Hungarian minorities. In the area where the Italian minority lives, ECEC is provided either in settings where the language of instruction is Slovenian and children learn Italian as a second language, or vice a versa. In the areas inhabited by the Hungarian minority, teaching is provided in both Slovenian and Hungarian. The educational authorities have issued a Supplement to the Curriculum for working in ethnically mixed areas. Bilingual settings are entitled to receive extra funds for specific continuing professional development. Moreover, these settings may benefit from such advantages as smaller group sizes, extra staff or a higher level of education among staff.</p> |
| Germany | <p>The federal programme "Sprach-KiTas" (Language Daycare Centres) is targeted at child day care centres that have a higher-than-average proportion of children with special language development needs. The programme finances 7.000 specialists who support day care providers in speech and language tuition for children and who provide assistance to families¹⁸⁰.</p> |
| Sweden | <p>According to the Education Act and the Curriculum the preschool should provide each child with the conditions to develop both the Swedish language and their mother tongue, if the child has a mother tongue other than Swedish.</p> |

¹⁷⁹ <https://www.sikjm.ch/literale-foerderung/projekte/schenk-mir-eine-geschichte/>

¹⁸⁰ <https://sprach-kitas.fruehe-chancen.de/>

In 2019 the Government introduced a state grant for improved language development in the preschool. The purpose is to strengthen the language development in Swedish, especially for children who have another daily language than Swedish at home. The grant can be used for measures to 1. raise the participation in preschool, 2. special language development activities and 3. in-service training for preschool staff about methods for language development.

A commission has also been appointed in October 2019 to investigate how preschool with focus on language development in Swedish can be introduced. The target group is newly arrived children and it should take place in the ordinary preschools 15 hours a week. The commission also investigates how to promote higher participation in preschool for newly arrived children aged 3 – 5, children with another mother tongue than Swedish and children from socioeconomically exposed groups. The commission shall propose measures for the staff in preschool to have the competence for their task concerning language development.

| Resources | |
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| <p>ILLEY - Inspiring language learning in the early years</p> | <p>Led by the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe, ILLEY is a website¹⁸¹ which provides resources and strategies to develop the linguistic and intercultural competences of teachers and other educators and of children aged 3-12. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • guiding principles for early language learning, • inspiring stories about language learning in different contexts, • resources and practical examples for inspiring language learning, • reading recommendations on the benefits of learning languages for young children, • a quiz and FAQs. |
| <p>Open education resources for bilingual education in kindergartens</p> | <p>The POLYGLOT project developed a methodology and tools for educators and parents, on how to use Open Education Resources (OER) for bilingual education in preschool¹⁸². This aims to help teachers to integrate children with migrant backgrounds who are bilingual. The project combined the classroom activities with e-courses for parents and teachers. Results are available in English, German, Italian, Bulgarian, Spanish, Turkish and Greek and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An introduction to web-based OER for bilingual education; • Guidelines on the use of OER for bilingual education in kindergartens; • Practical guides for educators and parents. |

¹⁸¹ www.ecml.at/inspiringearlylearning

¹⁸² <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplu-project-details/#project/2014-1-AT01-KA201-000977>

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| Multilingualism, Identity and Diversity in the Early Years | <p>This workshop report from the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years¹⁸³ offers a range of experts' points of view as well as policy recommendations to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the advantages and disadvantages of current models of education, such as bilingual education and second language immersion, in multilingual settings through both practical and theoretical lenses of culture, identity and integration; • Analyse the competencies, policies and resources necessary to effectively support second language learners in their early years; • Explore new strategies that are successfully addressing current social realities in the context of the “super diversity”, as opposed to bi-culturalism, experienced in many urban schools across the EU and the US through the training of caretakers, teachers, administrators and leaders and the creation of a receptive and inclusive school or program culture; • Learn about the reframing of the issue of language minority learners from a strengths rather than a deficit approach both in classroom practice and in the public discourse, and identify opportunities and strategies to build support for improved services for children from migrant and low-income backgrounds. |
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Ensuring diversity of staff

Promoting an inclusive approach to the appointment of ECEC staff is much more likely to create teams from a wide section of the community. The provision is enhanced when staff are from communities and backgrounds which are similar to the parents/children. To reach out to new markets requires greater flexibility and different ways of promoting ECEC as a career. The Council Recommendation noted the value of recruiting and retaining staff from across the local community - this includes all roles within an ECEC setting including core practitioners, ECEC leaders, ECEC assistants and other staff.

| Country / project examples | |
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| Belgium (NL) | <p>Ghent is a growing city with a very diverse population and with nearly 25% of children born in poverty. It has looked at new approaches to recruiting staff for its 78 ECEC centres which operate a split system. The city runs the risk of a permanent staff shortage (it currently has a 10% vacancy rate) and needs to find new ways to bring staff into the sector. The sector is not well paid and those who succeed in the recruitment process need to start working and earn an income as soon as possible. The city found there were significant delays between confirming someone was suitable for employment and the start of work. This was leading to some candidates taking other roles outside the sector.</p> <p>Ghent has addressed this by offering immediate, temporary contracts so employees can start work as soon as possible. In addition the traditional examination (as part of the recruitment process) put off those candidates who had been less successful</p> |

¹⁸³ <https://www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/transatlantic-forum-on-inclusive-early-years/tfey-6-dc>

in their own schooling. The six month temporary contracts (which could be extended to 18 months) provide opportunities for new staff to be trained, to develop the relevant competences and prepare for the formal examination which is part of the selection process. Those who succeed in the examination are then offered a permanent contract. This new approach, which began in June 2018, has been monitored and lessons are being learnt. In the first intake in September 2019 74 candidates out of 92 applicants were successful. So far 26 of these applicants have passed the examination and been offered permanent role.

A Brussels based initiative (BAOBAB) seeks to recruit and train staff from minority ethnic groups to become child workers/kindergarten teachers. The project focuses on potential candidates who live in Brussels, have completed secondary education, have a sufficient knowledge of the Dutch language and speak a second language. BAOBAB is a four year programme which is based on candidates working in a pre-primary school for three days/week. During their working week they are involved in co-teaching with a mentor and receive guidance, advice and mentoring. They also study for a BA in pre-primary education for two days/week, receive job coaching, receive a salary for their work and have their costs of training refunded.

Roma children

ECEC is an important determinant of future life opportunities. The World Bank¹⁸⁴ explored the gaps in ECEC experienced by Roma children between the ages of three and six in Eastern Europe, and looks at measures to close those gaps. The report notes that many Roma children lack a strong early learning and care support mechanism at home. The vast majority of Roma children grow up in poverty and many regularly go hungry. Their parents have minimal levels of education. This creates multiple disadvantages from malnutrition to limited early learning stimulation. Providing Roma children with an equal start in life compared with their non-Roma peers is essential to break the cycle of intergenerational transmission of poverty.

The 2019 Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems notes that ECEC participation ‘can be an effective tool to achieve educational equity for children in disadvantaged situations, such as some migrant or minority groups (for example Roma)’; it also highlights that such participation can help to meet the commitments made in the 2013 Council Recommendation of effective Roma integration measures in the Member States¹⁸⁵.

The EU’s strategic framework for cooperation in education and training – Education and Training 2020 (ET2020) set a benchmark to ensure that at least 95 % of children aged between four and the starting age of primary education participate in ECEC¹⁸⁶. The second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II) shows some progress but, of the nine countries surveyed, only Spain (95%) and Hungary (91%) have ECEC participation rates for Roma children that come close to the ET2020 target (Figure 10). Elsewhere, with the exception of Bulgaria (66%), less than half of the children between the age of four and the starting age for primary education participate in ECEC. Compared to the 2011 Roma survey¹⁸⁷, the EU-MIDIS II results suggest an increase in participation rates in all countries, except Portugal and Romania. However, these rates fall short of the EU benchmark for 2020 on ECEC, and are far below the general population rates.

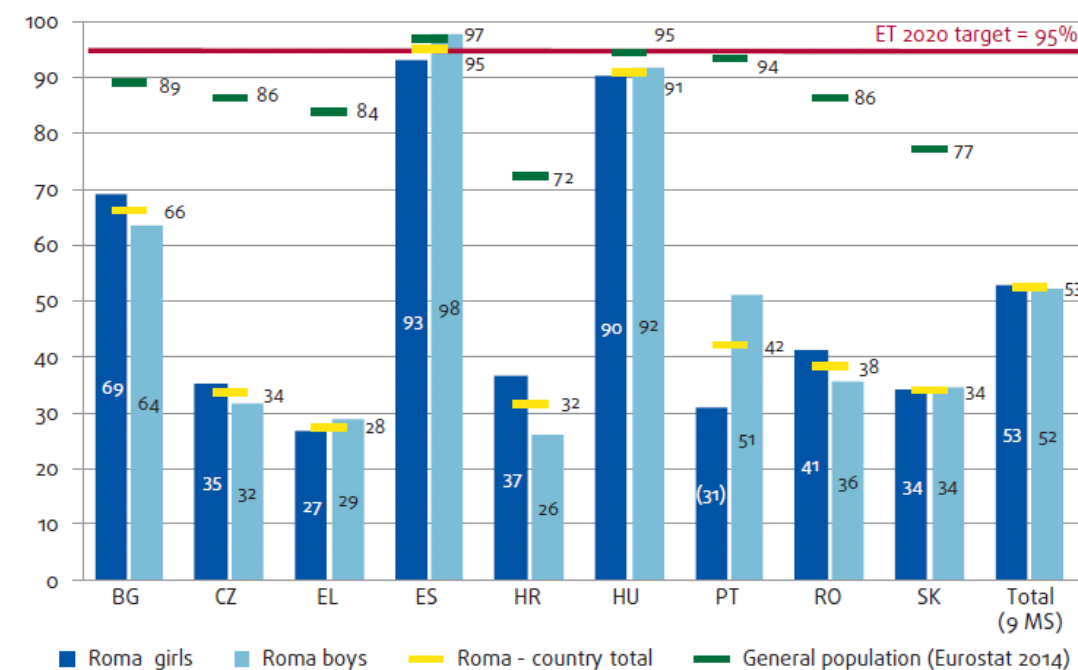
¹⁸⁴ [Toward an equal start : closing the early learning gap for Roma children in Eastern Europe \(English\)](#). Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group.

¹⁸⁵ [Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States \(2013/C 378/01\)](#).

¹⁸⁶ Eurostat (2016). [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(2018\) Source: Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma – Selected findings – EU-MIDIS II](#). The survey was based on face-to-face interviews with 25,515 respondents with different ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds across all 28 EU Member States.

¹⁸⁷ [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Roma Pilot Survey 2011 - Survey information](#).

Figure 10 – Children aged between 4 years and the (country-specific) starting age of compulsory education who participate in early childhood education, by EU Member State (%)



Source: FRA, EU-MIDIS II 2016, Roma; Eurostat 2014, General population

The EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030¹⁸⁸ foresees a series of targets. One of them aims at cutting the gap in participation in ECEC by at least half, to ensure that by 2030 at least 70% of Roma children aged 3 and above participate in pre-school (vs. 42% currently of Roma children and 92.2% of the general population). This strategy is completed by Guidelines for planning and implementing national Roma strategic frameworks which recommend that these national frameworks should:

- mobilise relevant expertise at all levels of governance to formulate child protection measures; allocate adequate resources to ECEC and education (e.g. scholarships, mentorships, after-school support), nutrition, personal development and work with families;
- encourage participation in ECEC;

In 2014, the Council of Europe and UNESCO offered guidelines to national policy-makers on inclusive ECEC for Roma children. Most importantly, they point out the importance of defining a national agenda for young Roma children.

¹⁸⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/new-eu-roma-strategic-framework-equality-inclusion-and-participation-full-package_en.

Principles to design an agenda for young Roma children

- Adopting a universal and inclusive approach, with a focus on holistic development. Specific goals should nonetheless be set for Roma children, taking into account specific barriers and difficulties met by these children and their families
- Aim at increasing participation of Roma children in mainstream quality affordable ECEC
- Cooperation with relevant stakeholders
- Designing an inclusive curriculum for early years

A report on “The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefiting vulnerable groups such as Roma”¹⁸⁹ includes recommendations on community involvement which would support children from the Roma community. This report recognises the value of promoting quality and universal accessibility, but notes that ECEC systems and services need to ensure that the diversity of the needs and the strengths of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups among the population are taken into account.

In relation to community involvement, the report recommends that:

- policy-makers at national and regional/local levels provide the resources required at community level to develop and support community-based integrated working;
- policy-makers at municipal and local levels engage communities in planning and designing services to ensure that interventions are adapted to community needs and circumstances. Outreach programmes should be put in place to connect services with communities;
- ECEC providers and practitioners develop innovative and flexible outreach strategies to engage with vulnerable children and families.

Active community participation is always essential in order for services to become more responsive to community-specific needs. This is particularly important for vulnerable and excluded groups such as Roma, as it helps to develop mutual trust between families and service providers. Community engagement and participation can help services to respond more effectively to children’s needs, with greater understanding of their strengths and difficulties.

Outreach workers such as community mediators and health visitors play a significant role in bridging the gap between education, health and social services, and marginalised communities, particularly the Roma community and Roma parents. By building mutual trust and tapping into community resources, outreach workers can facilitate an approach that is better tailored to the needs of specific communities.

¹⁸⁹ Vandekerckhove, A., Hulpia, H., Huttova, J., Peeters, J., Dumitru, D., Ivan, C., Rezmues, S., Volen, E., and Makarevičienė, A. (2019). ‘The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefitting vulnerable groups such as Roma’, NESET report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

Country / project examples

Portugal: national strategy

Portugal developed a National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities (ENICC)¹⁹⁰. To monitor the impact of the actions developed, a survey of school clusters was launched recently, which results are published in the “Perfil Escolar das Comunidades Ciganas – 2018/2019” (School profile of Roma Community – 2018/2019)¹⁹¹. According to this report, in the school year 2018/2019, 48,1% of the Roma girls and 51,9% of the Roma boys who attended the first year of primary education (1.º ano do 1.º ciclo do Ensino Básico) have attended preschool teaching. It also shows that both boys (52%) and girls (48%) attend kindergarten (3 – 6 years old).

Within the scope of the ENICC, the Directorate General for Education (DGE) produced a Guide for schools “Promover a inclusão e o sucesso educativo das comunidades ciganas” (Promoting the inclusion and educational success of Roma communities)¹⁹² and is preparing an online educational guide with tools for preschool teachers to work with Roma children. A training course entitled “The inclusivity and the interculturality as critical dimensions of the education of Roma children and young people” has been organised by the DGE and accredited by “Conselho Científico-Pedagógico da Formação Contínua” (scientific board for teachers’ continuous professional development).

Slovenia: national strategy

The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports supports inclusion of Roma children in the pre-school education system as early as possible, by encouraging children to enrol in kindergartens at least two years before entering primary school. This is done with general financial incentives, in cooperation with Roma kindergarten assistants, and with further payment of higher costs for kindergartens in which Roma children are enrolled. More favourable norms apply in departments where Roma children are also included, with a smaller number of children per professional staff, additional funding for the costs of materials and services, and specific training of professionals. However, due to the lack of accurate data on the inclusion of Roma children (due to personal data protection law), it is difficult to measure achievement of the 70% inclusion in accordance with the recommendations.

North Macedonia: fostering participation in pre- schools

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) in collaboration with the Roma Educational Fund Budapest, the public municipal institutions, the kindergartens and the local self-governance, have implemented the project “Inclusion of Roma children in the public preschool institutions”. The goal of the project is to improve school preparedness and contribute to the early childhood development (ECD) of Roma children aged three to six by improving the access to quality services of the main ECD institutions and strengthening the skills and the knowledge of the Roma parents of the importance of the pre-school education. The project has been implemented in 19 municipalities, 20 state locations. In September 2016, 506 Roma children were enrolled in any of the preschool institutions and compared with the academic 2017/18 the total number of Roma children engaged in the pre-

¹⁹⁰ National Roma Communities Integration Strategy. Resolution of the Council of ministers n° 154/2018.

¹⁹¹ <https://www.dgeec.mec.pt/np4/97/>

¹⁹² Promover a inclusão e o sucesso educativo das comunidades ciganas

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| | <p>school institutions/kindergartens is 531. In 2018 this project became a public policy and has been fully overtaken financially by the MLSP. This measure is being implementing in almost all municipalities in the Republic of North Macedonia.</p> |
| <p>Hungary: Sure Start Children's Houses</p> | <p>Based on the British model, the Hungarian government set up a network of "Sure Start Children's Houses"¹⁹³, to fight children's poverty and exclusion and ensure access to early development and day care for children before they start pre-primary education (compulsory from the age of three). The programme, originally funded by the EU, has been supported financially by the national government since 2013 and the programme has become part of the Hungarian Child Protection Law. These 'houses' work mainly with Roma families, offering play groups, community programmes and parenting support. They are financially and strategically supported by the local government which sees them as a key tool to integrate Roma families.</p> |
| <p>Italy: ZeroSei</p> | <p>The ZeroSei programme in Turin is dedicated for community building with a special focus on ECEC. It is implemented in six municipalities in the outskirts of Turin, where a number of Roma communities have settled in the past few years. It covers 32 extracurricular activities for all children aged 0-6 and their families. The activities are planned by groups of private and public organisations through a participatory approach e.g. in the 'Oltre I campi/Beyond Camps' project, activities (creative, music and theatre labs, parties in public gardens, book reading, intercultural interventions, events to promote children's well-being) involve all children living in each of the six municipalities. Specific attention is given to Roma children and their families, in order to strengthen their access to ECEC and reduce conflict among the communities.</p> |
| <p>Bulgaria: a local level policy priority</p> | <p>Seventy per cent of the children attending ECEC centres in the municipality of Tundzha in Bulgaria¹⁹⁴ are Roma. To support their participation, the municipality provides free public transport and a range of free services for children and parents. The kindergartens create connections with families and provide additional services (e.g. social, health and legal services). A network of educational mediators helps the kindergartens to reach out to families and support children's transition between home/ECEC/school. Participation in ECEC and education has been one of the municipality's first priorities and local political support has been crucial to the centres' success.</p> |

¹⁹³ Vandekerckhove, A., Hulpia, H., Huttova, J., Peeters, J., Dumitru, D., Ivan, C., Rezmues, S., Volen, E., and Makarevičienė, A. (2019). 'The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefitting vulnerable groups such as Roma', NESET report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union - Case 4 - Sure start Children's house - the case of Porcsalma - Hungary - April 2019; Feasibility study for a Child Guarantee. Case studies on the effectiveness of funding programmes – Key findings and study reports.

¹⁹⁴ Vandekerckhove, A., Hulpia, H., Huttova, J., Peeters, J., Dumitru, D., Ivan, C., Rezmues, S., Volen, E., and Makarevičienė, A. (2019). 'The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefitting vulnerable groups such as Roma', NESET report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union - Case 5 - Municipal kindergarten network, Tundzha municipality- BG - April 2019

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| <p>Romania: “Ready set go!”</p> | <p>A project¹⁹⁵ (funded by a Norwegian donor, local NGOs and the World Bank) in 11 municipalities in Romania has focused on Roma children aged from 3-6. The project sought to create new kindergarten places (including the development of infrastructure and the recruitment and training of staff) and included a strong evaluation component. The evaluation has proven the value of ECEC and these results have been used as an argument to convince municipalities to fund the initiative and the maintenance of the buildings. Working with community mediators who have built trust with families was a key success factor in enhancing the Roma community’s participation in ECEC.</p> |
| <p>Slovakia, Romania and Hungary: “A Good Start”</p> | <p>To close the educational outcomes gap between Roma and non-Roma children, the ‘A Good Start’ project¹⁹⁶ increased access to high quality ECEC services for young Roma children in Slovakia, Romania and Hungary. This project was based on four policy measures: increasing parental awareness of the benefits of ECEC; providing additional (financial) support; making preschools more inclusive for Roma children and parents; and by supporting home parenting. The project was completed under the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and was led by the Roma Education Fund and the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Regional Policy in collaboration with other organisations.</p> |
| <p>Portugal: the Glass Rooms initiative</p> | <p>The Portuguese school group of Coruche developed a specific initiative to encourage Roma families to send their children to the school¹⁹⁷. Supported through the national programme “Priority Intervention Educational Areas” (TEIP), this initiative involved a multidisciplinary team (a kindergarten teacher, a social worker and a social educator), working with local NGOs and institutions. Together they developed a better understanding of the circumstances of the Roma families in the neighbourhood and gained trust from the families through various activities. Excellent results have been achieved – in 2013-2014, 100 % of children and families participated. The programme has been evaluated as very innovative and promising¹⁹⁸.</p> |
| <p>Slovenia: ‘Together for knowledge’ initiative</p> | <p>Acknowledging education and lifelong learning as the only possible way to break the cycle of poverty and social exclusion, the project “Together for knowledge - implementing activities of knowledge acquisition support mechanisms for members of the Roma community” (2016 – 2021) aims at facilitating better integration of Roma children and their parents into the national education system of Slovenia. The project is implemented by the Centre for School and Outdoor Education and co-financed by the European Social Fund and the Ministry of the Republic of Slovenia for Education, Science and Sport.</p> <p>The project combines 4 basic interdependent project activities, also recognized as knowledge acquisition support mechanisms. The first two mechanisms focus on</p> |

¹⁹⁵ Vandekerckhove, A., Hulpia, H., Huttova, J., Peeters, J., Dumitru, D., Ivan, C., Rezmues, S., Volen, E., and Makarevičienė, A. (2019). ‘The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefitting vulnerable groups such as Roma’, NESET report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union - Case 6 - "Ready Set Go!" project - Romania - April 2019

¹⁹⁶ European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC) - A Good Start (AGS) – 2012

¹⁹⁷ https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/files/esl/downloads/10_PT_Salas_de_Vidro.pdf

¹⁹⁸ Nata, G., Cadima, J. Parent- and Family-Focused Support in Portugal: Context and Analysis of Services/Programmes from an Equity Perspective. Child Adolesc Soc Work J 36, 269–283 (2019).

enabling the Roma children to integrate more easily in the school system and educational processes:

- the introduction of Roma assistants into primary schools (with greater percentage of Roma children), whose primary task is to act as a link between Roma children, their parents, school representatives and nearby Roma communities;
- special preschool programmes (including special preparatory kindergarten in Roma settlement) intended to better prepare preschool children for their transition into primary school.

The other two activities emphasise the importance of real world learning, obtaining general knowledge and broadening horizons as a way to look beyond the fences of their enclosed communities.

- the educational activities in multipurpose centres in Roma settlements are structured and designed to greatly improve basic knowledge of language (Slovenian and Romani), mathematics and science – recognized as main areas in which these children have the greatest deficit in school – and to learn about everyday topics through different creative activities that reflect their interests and motivations;
- project outdoor activities focus mainly on researching and learning about the world outside their immediate environment, even if only in a nearby forest or town. These outdoor programmes focus mostly on environmental themes and incorporate the use of modern information and communication technologies.

| Resources | |
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| <p>Khetaun (Total): with key steps towards the inclusion of Roma children in quality preschool programmes</p> | <p>This project¹⁹⁹ aimed at including more Romani children in ECEC programmes, by raising awareness of professionals and families about the importance of education and ensuring social justice in ECEC. A range of training modules are available in English and for some of them in Latvian, Slovene, Czech or Slovak:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Advocacy, informing and awareness-raising about the importance of preschool education and ensuring social justice in education and training” • “Building trust and connecting preschool with different actors within local community” • “Activities for children who are not enrolled in preschools and their parents” • “Programs for empowering Romani families with regards to childcare and encouraging child development” <p>The project also offers pedagogical material in Romani, targeted at children and/or parents, and shares recommendations to national policy-makers.</p> |
| <p>START – Facilitating</p> | <p>The START project²⁰⁰ explored ways to facilitate participation in ECEC of Romani children, especially by easing transitions between home and ECEC or school</p> |

¹⁹⁹ <http://khetaun.pei.si/project-results/>

²⁰⁰ <http://start.pei.si/results/>

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| <p>transitions for Romani children and families in Slovenia</p> | <p>environments and by working with families. The case study is a source of inspiration as it details and evaluates a range of activities over a 2-year period.</p> |
| <p>Building opportunities in early childhood from the start</p> | <p>The project produced a Teacher’s guide to good practices in inclusive early childhood services²⁰¹ which intends to support professionals and para-professionals who are committed to creating better life outcomes for vulnerable Roma children and to helping them reach their full potentials. The guide consists of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical sections with results and explanations from different studies and research • Reflection sections where readers are encouraged to think through and reflect on their own practice or examples from another practice; these reflections can also be used during trainings or when working with parents • Tips and ideas on how to put the values of inclusive, high-quality education into practice • Examples of good education practice |
| <p>Inclusion from the start</p> | <p>The Guidelines on inclusive early childhood care and education for Roma children report²⁰² are the fruit of a joint collaboration between the Council of Europe and UNESCO. The Guidelines provide guidance on four key themes pertinent to the care, development and early education of young Roma children. The themes selected are: (1) a national ECEC agenda for Roma children; (2) curriculum and pedagogy; (3) initial education, professional development and support for early childhood practitioners; and (4) transition from home or early childhood programmes to primary education.</p> |
| <p>Supporting early years practitioners working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families</p> | <p>This Early Years Outreach Practice guide²⁰³ was created in the context of the British programme “Sure Start Children Centres”. It provides a basis for reflection on outreach work in order to support the consistent monitoring of the intention, reasons, quality and effectiveness of what practitioners do. It is hoped that the document will also serve those practitioners in aspects of their work focused on capacity-building in, and training provided to, mainstream early years services.</p> |

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<https://www.issa.nl/sites/default/files/pdf/Publications/quality/AGS%20Good%20Practice%20Guide.pdf>.

²⁰² <https://www.reyn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Inclusion-from-the-start.pdf>.

²⁰³ https://www.reyn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2007ey_outreach_practice.pdf.

Reaching out the hard-to-reach children

All children have the right to access high quality ECEC, including children who live in unusual or particularly difficult situations. Even though it can be difficult to provide access to high quality ECEC to these children, it is important to raise awareness of their needs and on the possible solutions to support them. This chapter identifies interesting initiatives which can inspire policy-makers to reflect on the situations, needs and possible solutions to support these children.

Children in lockdown

When the Covid-19 crisis hit Europe in 2020, a great number of countries established a lockdown period, during which many ECEC settings were closed for all children and families, or only opened to provide childcare services to parents who had to keep working.

In this context, the vast majority of children became “hard-to-reach” children. While the impact of these lockdown periods still needs to be evaluated, it is already certain that providing professional care and learning to children who were normally spending several days a week in ECEC settings became incredibly difficult. A number of strategies have been set up at national, local or setting levels to liaise with families and help children to keep learning. These are just three examples of many creative solutions which have been found across Europe.

| Country / project examples | |
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| The Netherlands: a range of measures | <p>In the Netherlands stakeholders have been asked to develop initiatives for vulnerable children to reduce deprivation. Municipalities, childcare-providers, libraries or other stakeholders can give parents digital picture books or provide them with information about educational games and/or websites.</p> <p>The Dutch government allocated € 7 million to provide extra support to all children in early childhood education who need it. Childcare centres were able to provide extra hours of early childhood education during the summer or fall.</p> <p>Research institute LEARN! has been asked by NRO – the Netherlands Initiative for Education Research – and the Ministry of Education to map out the progress and results of the activities that schools (including ECEC) are undertaking to catch up for learning losses. The study will run until the end of 2022.</p> |
| Denmark: outreach to vulnerable children during the COVID-19 lockdown | <p>In Denmark an extra attention was given to reach children and families in vulnerable positions during the COVID-19 lockdown. Although public ECEC facilities were shut down for a month, certain groups of children were exempt from lockdown and municipalities still offered child care to these groups. These amongst others included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with special socioemotional, pedagogical or treatment needs, including those whose needs are related to problems at home; • Children who are receiving language stimulation or are part of mandatory learning programmes in accordance with the Act on Day Care (Dagtilbudsloven). |

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| | <p>Municipalities were also mandated to offer emergency child care to children with special needs, including those whose needs are related to problems at home as well as to families without any other childcare solutions or working in critical jobs.</p> <p>The emergency care was set up in accordance with health recommendations from the Danish government. During the COVID-19 lockdown and the first phases of the reopening, the municipalities were encouraged by law to keep a special focus on identifying children and their families in vulnerable positions – making sure that they were able to access emergency care if needed, and to keep continuous dialogue with the families. When schools and ECEC opened up again, the municipalities were encouraged to make sure that the families felt safe to bring their children back to ECEC.</p> <p>It was central to the Danish Minister of Children and Education that children in vulnerable positions were offered emergency care if in need. It was important to keep the “link” between ECEC and the families, and it was feared that children would miss out on too much if they were not in ECEC for a longer time. The municipalities were therefore extra attentive to reach children and families in vulnerable positions.</p> <p>Outreach was conducted mainly by ECEC staff. Whether by phone, video calls, emails, visits etc. was agreed between the ECEC, the child and the family. In order to keep the link between ECEC pedagogues and their families, one ECEC institution communicated with the families and children through a YouTube animation film. Hereby they managed to communicate good advice on how to structure the day. In another municipality they used the local zoo as an alternative physical setting for ECEC because they needed more space.</p> |
| <p>Italy: pedagogical guidelines to keep distance educational contacts (LEAD- Legami Educativi A Distanza)</p> | <p>During the lockdown period, schools activated distance learning and the Ministry supported them through the expertise of the territorial teams and the network of digital animators of the National Plan for digital schools.</p> <p>A dedicated web page with online platforms and multimedia material, instruments and tools has been made available to schools which could choose material content, cooperate and exchange best practices and twinning arrangements, attend training webinars, etc.</p> <p>The Government has provided 85 million Euros to support distance learning with digital device for students, platforms, instruments and tools for schools, training for teachers.</p> <p>RAI, the Italian public service broadcasting proposed a series of "online lessons". Rai Scuola (Rai for schools) and Rai Cultura (Rai for culture) provided teachers with content about different subjects: history, science, art, literature etc. RaiPlay, which is a streaming platform, added three special sections dedicated to edutainment: Children, Teen and Learning. The section for children offers programs, cartoons, documentaries and TV series with different opportunities of activities: English learning, storytelling, coding, art and creativity etc²⁰⁴.</p> <p>The main challenge of distance learning was in the ECEC sector where learning requires care, relationship and playing activities. Teachers and educators, however, have been making an extraordinary effort keeping in touch with children and their family, giving them a feeling of normality, as much as possible, in different ways.</p> |

²⁰⁴ <https://www.raisplay.it/bambini/>

Pedagogical guidelines were published to keep distance educational contacts (LEAD - Legami Educativi A Distanza) with younger children and their families during ECEC settings closure²⁰⁵. This document presents best practices implemented by ECEC settings to reconnect and strengthen the educational link with children and families during the interruption of the services and supports staff in providing a new way of educating, stimulating professional awareness and a positive attitude. Pedagogical guidelines on LEAD focus on:

- designing new relationship contexts in order to offer children new opportunities for growth, by setting up learning experiences in a virtual environment;
- renegotiating relationships and roles with the family as educational partners in planning activities, in cooperating, in balancing children's space of autonomy and parents intervention;
- promoting children's achievements even in long-distance relationships;
- keeping on direct experience, exploration, discovery and play at the centre of activities that can also be carried out at a distance;
- talking with the children about what was happening, filling the experiences with meaning, giving them hope and trust.

Children in jail

Most European countries adopted national frameworks to allow detained mothers to keep their young child with them in prison, some of them up to the age of six. The European association Children of prisoners recalls that the Council of Europe Recommendation concerning children with imprisoned parents (article 37) states that *arrangements and facilities for the care of infants who are in prison with a parent, including living and sleeping accommodation, shall be child-friendly and shall: [...] Ensure that infants are able to freely access open-air areas in the prison, and can access the outside world with appropriate accompaniment and attend nursery schools*²⁰⁶.

In some countries the policy is to keep children out of prison and living with another family member. It is only when this is impossible to arrange that children stay with a parent (usually a mother) in prison²⁰⁷. The Belgian Observatory of Prisons notes that on the one hand, it allows the creation or maintenance of the attachment bond between parent and child. On the other, the confinement, inadequate space, the lack of visual, olfactory and auditory stimuli can influence child development.

For those children in prison, there may be policies to encourage 'mother and baby' units and the creation of 'living in a house' environments in open prisons and more traditional styles of prison. However, in some countries, although legislation or policy measures may have been adopted, they are not always sufficiently known or effectively implemented. Measures which are foreseen may also prove controversial or difficult to enforce, e.g. when mothers have to

²⁰⁵ <https://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/-/orientamenti-pedagogici-sui-led>

²⁰⁶ https://childrenofprisoners.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/IGD_2019.pdf.

²⁰⁷ European legal and policy framework on immigration detention of children – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017.

entrust volunteers to bring their children to external crèches, without having the chance to meet the ECEC staff in charge of their children²⁰⁸.

In the interest of the child, it is therefore advisable that such legislations also foresee measures to ensure an adequate emotional, social and cognitive development of children and facilitate their participation in early childhood education and care supervised by experienced professionals.

Country / project examples

France

In 2018, the Fleury-Mérogis prison opened a wing reserved to pregnant women and young mothers that includes a ten-place micro-crèche, with the objective to provide babies with an environment adapted to their development in the same conditions as outside²⁰⁹. The children can enjoy walks in the park, musical awakening sessions, meetings with other nurseries, which facilitates the transition they undergo when they leave jail and their mothers when they turn 18 months – as prescribed by the French law. The ECEC staff consists of an external educator and 3 childcare assistants, who received a short training on the prison environment; they are supervised and supported by the early childhood coordinator of the municipality where the jail is located.

The crèche is open from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm and also supports the mothers to work, study or attend interviews to prepare their reintegration, while they previously had to leave their baby to the care of fellow inmates to do any of these activities. The ECEC staff moreover supports parenting skills of these young mothers with advice.

The usual rules have been adjusted to adapt to the prison context: for example, for security reasons, diapers are provided by the prison administration.

The initiative is mainly funded by the public body in charge of family allowances, but also by the jail and local partners, including the municipality. A financial contribution of 36 cents an hour is requested from mothers.

A year after the opening of the crèche, the structure has an occupancy rate of 41% and mothers as well as the jail administration recognise its very positive impact, both on children and mothers.

Italy

The social cooperative Stripes opened the BIOBAB crèche²¹⁰, in the prison of Bollate, near Milan. It is used by 24 children of detainees, guards and local residents, which proves to be a very successful social experiment. Focussing on providing a high quality living and educational environment, the setting managed to attract prison staff and families from the areas, in spite of preliminary reluctance to bring their children to a prison.

²⁰⁸ De Brie, Priscilla. *Un enfant auprès de sa mère en prison : une solution à quelles conditions ? Analyse des conditions d'accueil des enfants de moins de trois ans accompagnant leur mère en établissement pénitentiaire*. Faculté de droit et de criminologie, Université catholique de Louvain, 2019. Prom. : Derèse, Marie-Noëlle.

²⁰⁹ <https://www.lagazettedescommunes.com/651128/la-creche-en-prison-fruit-de-lalliance-entre-ville-departement-caf-et-service-penitentiaire/>.

²¹⁰ <https://www.biobab.it/>.

Children with lasting health problems

Very young children can be affected by long-lasting health problems, independently from disabilities. They can be permanent or temporary and may result in the child not being able to attend regular ECEC provision, as s/he needs to stay at home or in hospital for long periods.

However, children who suffer of serious diseases or have a weak health (e.g. children born premature) should also be able to benefit from professional ECEC. It is therefore useful for national / local decision-makers to review difficulties encountered by these children and families and adopt measures to ensure that children receive the care, education and support that they need. These can range from allowing ECEC staff to give medicines to children to arranging pre-primary lessons in hospitals.

| Country / project examples | |
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| Belgium | <p>The Brussels region created the Hospichild website²¹¹ to share all information related to children in hospitals. One of the aspects is schooling, and includes reference to the importance of educational continuity for hospitalised children, schooling obligation and pedagogical resources. It also refers to schools and NGOs who work with children in hospital, covering all educational levels, including pre-primary school.</p> <p>The Escale School²¹² at the Saint-Luc University Clinics is one of them. Their goals are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the student to remain an actor and partner of his/her schooling; • Offer each student an adapted educational objective; • Continue school learning in connection with the school of origin; • Maintain the student's social bond; • Promote creativity, expression, communication; • Prepare for home schooling and / or return to school. <p>Similar initiatives can be found in Flanders concerning hospital schools. In Flanders, there is also the system of TOAH (tijdelijk onderwijs aan huis = temporary education at home) for pre-primary education. In this system, a teacher comes to the house for 4 hours a week when a child is absent for at least 21 calendar days due to illness or in case of chronic illness, 9 half schooldays. The teacher comes to the house as long as the child is sick. Starting from the age of 5 years old, there is also a system of synchronized e-learning, organized by Bednet vzw.</p> |
| Slovenia | <p>Pre-school teachers in ECEC (for children from one to six years) are working in hospitals in all major cities (in ten different cities and in the capital Ljubljana on 16 different hospitals' locations).</p> <p>The onset of the humanisation of children's hospital treatment is the hospital work concept based on aligning the ECEC objectives of the kindergarten curriculum and the specific adjustments of ECEC approaches to sick children.</p> |

²¹¹ <https://www.hospichild.be/scolarite/>

²¹² <https://www.saintluc.be/hospitalisation/ecole-escale.php>



In 2016 the Supplement to the Guidelines for the Kindergartens' Curriculum with adapted implementation and additional professional assistance for special education needs (SEN) children was adopted for long-term sick children. This document is for preschool staff who work with children who may need help, support and tailored implementation of the preschool program due to the consequences of illness and treatment.

The efficiency and quality of the ECEC provision in a hospital kindergarten depends, among other things, on the ability of the pre-school teacher to adapt to the specific working conditions. This includes taking into account the rhythm of the hospital's daily routine, specific components of hospital life (difficult / easier diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, operative days, death, days of child's admission, large age interval of children, quarantines, time changes of medical personnel) in terms of space, time and content individual needs, also taking into account age and developmental structure. All these needs and requirements of adaptation require the pre-school teacher to constantly improvise and to find creative mental and organisational solutions.

When designing educational activities, hospital pre-school teachers follow the principles and goals of the kindergarten National Curriculum, within the context of the principles and specificities arising from working in hospital departments. The work of pre-school teachers in hospital wards is also very specific as the sick children are "excluded" from the family and their immediate environment for a short or long time and are involved in a hospital environment in which the primary activity is treatment with diagnostic and therapeutic procedures that should be addressed.

In addition to the curriculum documents, the pre-school teacher in the hospital wards must also consider the documents defining the exercise of the rights of sick children in the hospital (humanization of hospitalization).

Sweden

Hospital Play Therapy is an integral part of the treatment of children in hospitals. Children who are in hospitals need to have the same opportunity for stimulation and development as their healthy peers. According to Chapter 24 article 16 in the Education Act, if a child is cared for in hospital or in another institution, the entity responsible for the institution shall ensure that the child is given an opportunity to take part in education equivalent to what is offered in preschool. Children have also the right to receive comprehensive information regarding treatment according to article 19, section 763 of the Health and Medical Care Act of 1982.

Play/Child Specialists generally have a Bachelor as preschool teachers (core practitioners), often with additional certification in Special Education. Hospital Play Therapy facilities are usually located in the paediatric wards. The programme seeks to achieve the following goals:

- Promote normal, healthy growth and development by providing therapeutic play and creative arts opportunities;
- Enable children to work through the stressful experience of hospitalisation, resolving anxiety and regaining strength;
- Emphasize the importance of play therapy as a Free Area, a place of security;
- In cooperation with medical staff, provide support to parents and siblings;

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide and encourage a suitable environment for children and adolescents in hospital; • Play and creativity are important. <p>Hospitalized children are in a new and unfamiliar environment, surrounded by strangers. This may be a frightening and difficult experience. Children express their feelings and needs individually. Through their play and creative activities they are able to work through their experiences and receive help in understanding and handling their reality. Hospital Play Therapy is a place of security within the hospital environment, a safe haven where children and their families can play, create and relax. The play specialist is attentive to the way each child or adolescent expresses themselves, and supports them in their communications.</p> |
| <p>Italy</p> | <p>In Italy a specific project targets children (from pre-primary to secondary level) who are not able to attend school because of their illness, with two measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hospital schools for hospitalized children • home education (“istruzione domiciliare” which is different from home schooling) for sick children enrolled in a school. <p>Hospital schools promote the right to education and an approach to education for sick children based on respect, understanding and deep awareness of the physical and psychological condition of these younger patients. The presence of teachers alongside the traditional hospital staff mainly aim at reassuring, through a personalized relationship, supporting and guiding on an educational level. Hospital schools teachers play an important role in the connection between hospital schools and families and they are a link between the moment of therapy and the learning ones. The teaching staff must therefore possess specific interpersonal skills. Besides, the teachers’ intervention is aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for hospitalized children, enabling them, where possible, to continue the development of skills and competences in order to facilitate their reintegration into the previous school contexts.</p> <p>The Home Education scheme (istruzione domiciliare) aims to guarantee the right to education for those children affected by serious illnesses and unable to attend school for health reasons for a long period. The Home Education is activated, on the family demand, by the school according to a special project which includes the number of teachers involved, the subject areas to be prioritized, the scheduled lesson hours. The project must be established on the basis of the child’s specific education and care needs. It is also desirable to contemplate the use of technologies and, if possible, effective distance learning. The home education service therefore presents a process that requires careful organizational and administrative planning by each educational institution. In general, the home education is carried out by the teachers of the belonging class during hours outside of the regular working time. It can also be entrusted to other teachers of the same school or to teachers of neighboring schools, and hospital teachers may be involved. Best practices are available online²¹³.</p> |

²¹³ <https://scuolainospedale.miur.gov.it/sio/>.

| Resources | |
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| Children’s rights in hospital: assessment checklists | The World Health Organisation shares a number of checklists ²¹⁴ to allow hospitals to assess their progress in the fulfilment of children’s rights in hospital, but also to what they should aspire. The checklist related to “play and learning” indicates that hospitals should aim at ensuring that “children of all ages have opportunities to play and leisure in accordance to their age and preferences (i.e. both younger children and adolescents)”. |

²¹⁴ https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/342769/Check-list-Child-rights-in-hospital_layoutOPE.pdf.

Annex 1 – European Quality Framework for early childhood education and care

ACCESS to quality early childhood education and care services for all children contributes to their healthy development and educational success, helps reducing social inequalities and narrows the competence gap between children with different socio-economic backgrounds. Equitable access is also essential to ensure that parents, especially women, have flexibility to (re)integrate in the labour market.

Quality Statements:

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

Universal legal entitlement to early childhood education and care services provides a solid basis for reaching out to all children. Population data and parents surveys on the demand for early childhood education and care places can serve as a basis for estimating further needs and adjusting capacity.

Provision can address barriers that may prevent families and children from participating. This may include an adaptation of the requested fees for early childhood education and care to allow also low-income households' access. There is also evidence that flexibility in opening hours and other arrangements can enable participation especially for children of working mothers, single-parent families and from minority or disadvantaged groups.

Provision that is equally distributed across urban and rural areas, affluent and poor neighbourhoods, and regions can widen access for disadvantaged groups in society. Availability and affordability of high-quality services in neighbourhoods where poor families, minorities or migrant or refugee families reside is reported to have the biggest impact on supporting equity and social inclusion.

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

Early childhood education and care settings can actively encourage participation by involving parents, families and carers in decision-making processes (e.g. in parental committees). Reaching out to families - especially to single-parent and disadvantaged or minority or migrant families - with targeted initiatives allows them to express their needs and enables services to take these into account when tailoring provision to the demands of local communities.

Recruitment of staff from marginalised, migrant or minority groups can be encouraged as it has proven to be of advantage if the composition of staff in early childhood education and care settings reflects diversity in the community.

Creating a welcoming environment for children that values their languages, culture and home backgrounds contributes to the development of their sense of belonging. Appropriate continuous professional development also prepares staff to welcome and support bilingual children.

Early childhood education and care settings can develop good practices in families for a smooth transition from the home environment to the setting, as well as foster high levels of parental participation by organising specific initiatives.

STAFF is the most significant factor for children's well-being, learning and developmental outcomes. Therefore staff working conditions and professional development are seen as essential components of quality.

Quality statements:

3. Well-qualified staff with initial and continuing training that enable them to fulfil their professional role.

Effective early childhood education and care systems consider raising the professional status of staff, which is widely acknowledged as one of the key factors of quality, by raising qualification levels, offering attractive professional status and flexible career prospects and alternative pathways for assistants. This can be supported by aiming for a pedagogical staff that is composed of highly qualified professionals holding a full professional qualification specialised in early childhood education, in addition to assistant staff.

State-of-the-art initial education programmes are designed together with practitioners and provide a good balance between theory and practice. It is also an asset if education programmes prepare staff for working collectively and for enhancing reflective competences. Such programmes can benefit from training staff to work with linguistically and culturally diverse groups, from minority, migrant and low-income families.

Staff that are equipped to follow the developmental needs, interests and potential of young children and able to detect potential development and learning problems can more actively support child development and learning. Regular, tailor-made and continued professional development opportunities benefit all staff members, including assistants and auxiliary staff.

Regarding the necessary elements of child development and psychology, competences for staff should, in line with the different structures of training in the Member States, include knowledge on child protection systems, and more generally on the rights of the child.

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

Early childhood education and care systems that aim at improved working conditions, including more adequate wage levels, can make employment in early childhood education and care a more attractive option for better-qualified staff, looking for proper careers.

Adult-child ratios and group sizes are most adequate if designed in an appropriate manner for the age and composition of the group of children, as younger children require more attention and care.

Professional learning communities, where they exist within and across settings, have shown a positive impact through assigning time and space for staff collegial practices and joint work.

Offering mentoring and supervision to newly recruited staff during their induction can help them to quickly fulfil their professional roles.

CURRICULUM is a powerful tool to improve well-being, development and learning of children. A broad pedagogical framework sets out the principles for sustaining children's development and learning through educational and care practices that meet children's interests, needs and potentialities.

Quality statements:

5. A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential addressing their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development and their well-being.

Child-centred pedagogical approaches can better sustain children's overall development, provide support for their learning strategies and promote their cognitive and non-cognitive development by building more systematically on experiential learning, play and social interactions.

There is strong evidence that an explicit curriculum is an asset as it can provide a coherent framework for care, education and socialisation as integral parts of early childhood education and care provision. Ideally, such a framework defines pedagogical goals enabling educators to personalise their approach to the individual needs of children and can provide guidelines for a high-quality learning environment. It gives due consideration to including availability of books and other print material to help literacy development of children.

By promoting diversity, equality, and linguistic awareness an effective curriculum framework fosters integration of migrants and refugees. It can nurture the development of both their mother tongue and language of education.

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

A curriculum can help to better involve parents, stakeholders and staff and to ensure that it responds more adequately to the needs, interests and the children's potential.

A curriculum can define roles and processes for staff to collaborate regularly with parents as well as with colleagues in other children's services (including health, social care and education sectors).

Whenever possible, the curriculum can provide guidelines for early childhood education and care staff to liaise with school staff on children's transition to the primary and/or pre-primary schools.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION sustain quality. By pointing to strengths and weaknesses, its processes can be important components of enhancing quality in early childhood education systems. They can provide support to stakeholders and policy makers in undertaking initiatives that respond to the needs of children, parents and local communities.

Quality statements:

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

Transparent information on service and staff or on curriculum implementation at the appropriate – national, regional and local – level can help to improve quality.

Regular information feedback can make the process of policy evaluation easier, also by allowing to analyse the use of public funds and of what is effective and in which context.

To identify staff learning needs and to make the right decisions on how best to improve service quality and professional development, it is beneficial that early childhood education leaders collect relevant data in a timely manner.

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

In order to protect the rights of the child, robust child protection/child safeguarding policies should be embedded within the early childhood education and care system to help protect children from all forms of violence. Effective child protection policies cover four broad areas: (1) policy, (2) people, (3) procedures, and (4) accountability. More information on these areas can be found in 'Child safeguarding standards and how to implement them' issued by Keeping Children Safe.

Monitoring and evaluation processes can foster active engagement and cooperation among all stakeholders. Everyone concerned with the development of quality can contribute to – and benefit from – monitoring and evaluation practices.

Available evidence indicates that a mix of monitoring methods (e.g. observation, documentation, narrative assessment of children competences and learning) can provide useful information and give account of children's experiences and development, including helping a smooth transition to primary school.

Monitoring tools and participatory evaluation procedures can be created to allow children to be heard and be explicit about their learning and socialising experiences within settings.

GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING are crucial to enable early childhood education and care provision to play its role in the personal development and learning of children and in reducing the attainment gap and fostering social cohesion. Quality results from comprehensive and coherent public policies that link early childhood education and care to other services concerned with the welfare of young children and their families.

Quality statements:

9. Stakeholders have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.

Early childhood education and care provision benefits from close collaboration with all services working for children, including social and health services, schools and local stakeholders. Such inter-agency alliances have shown to be more effective if governed by a coherent policy framework that can pro-actively foster collaboration and long-term investment in local communities.

Stakeholders' involvement has been shown as crucial to design and implement early childhood education and care provision.

The integration or coordination of services in charge of different regulations on early childhood education and care can have a positive effect on the quality of the system.

- 10.** Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal entitlement to high-quality affordable early childhood education and care, and progress is regularly reported to relevant stakeholders.

Improvement of quality in service provision for all children might be better achieved by progressively building up universal legal entitlement. This includes promoting participation in early childhood education and care from an early age. It can be useful to evaluate whether market based early childhood education and care services create unequal access or lower quality for disadvantaged children and, if necessary, make plans for remedy actions.

A close link to labour, health and social policies would clearly be an asset as it can promote a more efficient redistribution of resources by targeting extra funding towards disadvantaged groups and neighbourhoods.

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