



INFORMAL COMMISSION EXPERT GROUP ‘WORKING GROUP ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE’

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. BACKGROUND

The Commission’s Communication of 30 September 2020 on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025¹ (hereafter ‘EEA Communication’) and the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)² (hereafter ‘Council Resolution’) call for maintaining the format of working groups as part of the “tried and tested working arrangements” in the context of the new cycle of European cooperation in education and training. In particular, the Council Resolution stresses that the mutual learning initiatives should have “clear mandates, time schedules and planned outputs to be proposed by the Commission in cooperation with Member States”.

The overall **objective** of the new working groups shall be to **promote mutual learning on policy reform of national education systems** with a view to **effectively contributing to the achievement of the European Education Area by 2025**, and as relevant, the **Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) through tangible outputs**.

By continuing the work done under the previous strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), the new working groups shall be established as informal Commission expert groups, in compliance with the horizontal rules³. Through their respective roles and specific tasks, the expert groups will provide the Commission with advice and expertise in the policy areas that they cover, and they will be part of a governance structure that will coordinate the work and steer the development of the strategic framework, within the overarching objective of achieving and further developing the European Education Area (EEA).

As part of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), their overall work shall reflect the vision, milestones and specific initiatives set forth in the EEA Communication and the priority areas, issues and actions of the Council Resolution, with each working group addressing concrete policy issues and actions, in line with their specific objectives detailed in annexes to their Terms of Reference.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1601687240311&uri=CELEX:52020DC0625>

² [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226(01))

³ C(2016) 3301 final

One of these groups will be covering issues of early childhood education and care.

The group shall support Member States to implement the 2019 Council Recommendation for high-quality ECEC systems and its main component, the EU Quality framework for ECEC. It will mainly support peer learning on the measure, monitoring and evaluation of quality, and will follow-up on the ET2020 working group which focussed on inclusion, staff professionalisation and the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in the early childhood education and care sector.

The group shall start its activities in September 2021 and end the first working cycle by the end of 2025.

2. SUBJECT MATTER

The group of experts on Early Childhood Education and Care ('the group') is set up.

3. TASKS

The group's tasks shall be:

1. to assist Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) in the preparation of policy initiatives in the field of education and training in relation to early childhood education and care.
2. to establish cooperation/coordination between the Commission and Member States or stakeholders on questions relating to the policies in the field of education and training in relation to early childhood education and care.
3. to bring about an exchange of experience and good practice in the field of education and training in relation to early childhood education and care.

Priority areas from the Council Resolution to be addressed: 1. Quality, equity, inclusion
3. Teachers and Trainers.

The specific objectives are further detailed in the annex.

4. MEMBERSHIP

1. Members shall be organisations, Member States' authorities, other public entities including public entities from acceding and candidate countries, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, Union bodies, offices or agencies and international organisations (Type C, D and E Members).
2. Member States' authorities, organisations and other public entities shall nominate their representatives and shall be responsible for ensuring that their representatives provide a high level of expertise. DG EAC may refuse the nomination by an organisation of a representative if it considers this nomination inappropriate in the light of the requirements specified in the call for applications. In such case, the organisation concerned shall be asked to appoint another representative.
3. Organisations who are members who are no longer capable of contributing effectively to the expert group's deliberations, who, in the opinion of DG EAC do not comply with the conditions set out in Article 339 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the

European Union or who resign, shall no longer be invited to participate in any meetings of the group and may be replaced for the remainder of their term of office.

5. SELECTION PROCESS

1. The selection of organisations as group's members (Type C) shall be carried out via a public call for applications, to be published on the Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities ('the Register of expert groups'). In addition, the call for applications may be published through other means, including on dedicated websites. The call for applications shall clearly outline the selection criteria, including the required expertise and the interests to be represented in relation to the work to be performed. The minimum deadline for applications shall be four weeks.
2. Registration in the Transparency Register is required in order for organisations to be appointed.
3. The members of the group shall be appointed by the the Director-General of DG EAC from applicants with competence in the areas referred to in point 3 and who have responded to the call for applications.
4. Members shall be appointed for until 31 December 2025. They shall remain in office until replaced/until the end of their term of office. Their term of office may be renewed.
5. DG EAC shall establish a reserve list of suitable candidates that may be used to appoint members' replacements. DG EAC shall ask applicants for their consent before including their names on the reserve list.

6. CHAIR

The group shall be chaired by a representative of DG EAC.

7. OPERATION

1. The group shall act at the request of DG EAC, in compliance with the horizontal rules⁴.
2. Meetings of the group shall, in principle, be held on Commission premises or virtually, depending on the circumstances.
3. DG EAC shall provide secretarial services. Commission officials from other departments with an interest in the proceedings may attend meetings of the group and its sub-groups.
4. In agreement with DG EAC, the group may, by simple majority of its members, decide that deliberations shall be public.
5. Minutes on the discussion on each point on the agenda and on the opinions delivered by the group shall be meaningful and complete. Minutes shall be drafted by the secretariat under the responsibility of the Chair.
6. The group shall adopt its opinions, recommendations or reports by consensus.

⁴ C(2016) 3301, Article 13.1.

8. SUB-GROUPS

1. DG EAC may set up sub-groups for the purpose of examining specific questions on the basis of terms of reference defined by DG EAC. Sub-groups shall operate in compliance with the horizontal rules and shall report to the group. They shall be dissolved as soon as their mandate is fulfilled.
2. The members of sub-groups that are not members of the group shall be selected via a public call for applications, in compliance with point 5 and the horizontal rules⁵.

9. INVITED EXPERTS

DG EAC may invite experts with specific expertise with respect to a subject matter on the agenda to take part in the work of the group or sub-groups on an *ad hoc* basis.

10. OBSERVERS

1. Organisations and public entities other than Member States' authorities may be granted an observer status, in compliance with the horizontal rules, by direct invitation.
2. Organisations and public entities appointed as observers shall nominate their representatives.
3. Observers' representatives may be permitted by the Chair to take part in the discussions of the group and sub-groups and provide expertise. However, they shall not participate in the formulation of recommendations or advice of the group and sub-groups.

11. RULES OF PROCEDURE

On a proposal by and in agreement with DG EAC the group shall adopt its rules of procedure by simple majority of its members, on the basis of the standard rules of procedure for expert groups, in compliance with the horizontal rules⁶. Sub-groups shall operate in compliance with the group's rules of procedure.

12. PROFESSIONAL SECRECY AND HANDLING OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

The members of the group and their representatives, as well as invited experts and observers, are subject to the obligation of professional secrecy, which by virtue of the Treaties and the rules implementing them applies to all members of the institutions and their staff, as well as to the Commission's rules on security regarding the protection of Union classified information, laid down in Commission Decisions (EU, Euratom) 2015/443⁷ and 2015/444⁸. Should they fail to respect these obligations, the Commission may take all appropriate measures.

⁵ C(2016), Articles 10 and 14.2.

⁶ See Article 17 of the horizontal rules.

⁷ Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/443 of 13 March 2015 on Security in the Commission (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 41).

⁸ Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/444 of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53).

13. TRANSPARENCY

1. The group and its sub-groups shall be registered in the Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities ('the Register of expert groups').
2. As regards the group and sub-groups composition, the following data shall be published on the Register of expert groups:
 - (a) the name of Member States' authorities;
 - (b) the name of other public entities, including the name of third countries' authorities;
 - (c) the name of member organisations; the interest represented shall be disclosed;
 - (d) the name of observers.
3. All relevant documents, including the agendas, the minutes and the participants' submissions, shall be made available on the Register of expert groups. In particular, DG EAC shall publish the agenda and other relevant background documents in due time ahead of the meeting, followed by timely publication of minutes. Exceptions to publication shall only be possible where it is deemed that disclosure of a document would undermine the protection of a public or private interest as defined in Article 4 of Regulation (EC) N° 1049/2001⁹.

14. MEETING EXPENSES

1. Participants in the activities of the group and sub-groups shall not be remunerated for the services they offer.
2. Travel and subsistence expenses incurred by participants in the activities of the group and sub-groups shall be reimbursed by the Commission. Reimbursement shall be made in accordance with the provisions in force within the Commission and within the limits of the available appropriations allocated to the Commission departments under the annual procedure for the allocation of resources.

ANNEX:

- Description of specific objectives.

Done in Brussels, on 23 July 2021.

⁹ These exceptions are intended to protect public security, military affairs, international relations, financial, monetary or economic policy, privacy and integrity of the individual, commercial interests, court proceedings and legal advice, inspections/investigations/audits and the institution's decision-making process.

Achieving the European Education Area by 2025

Annex: Working Group on Early Education and Childhood Care 2021-2025

**Strategic framework for European cooperation in
education and training towards the European
Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)**



Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care

Title	Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)
Duration of mandate	2021-2025 ¹⁰
Coordinating Unit(s)	EAC B2 – Schools and multilingualism
Chair (Head of Unit level) ¹¹	Michael Teutsch
Coordinating official(s)	Géraldine Libreau

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

The Working Group will support Member States to implement the 2019 Council Recommendation for high-quality ECEC systems and its main component, the EU Quality framework for ECEC. It will mainly support peer learning on the measure, monitoring and evaluation of quality, and will follow-up on the ET2020 working group which focussed on inclusion, staff professionalisation and the management of the Covid-19 pandemic in the ECEC sector.

Priority areas to be addressed:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1. Quality, equity, inclusion and success in education and training
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Lifelong learning and mobility
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3. Teachers and Trainers
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Higher education
<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Green and digital transitions

MAIN "CONCRETE ISSUE(S) and ACTION(S)" ADDRESSED (as established in Annex III of the Resolution):

Priority area 1 - Quality, equity, inclusion and success in education and training

ix) implementing the European quality framework for high quality early childhood education and care systems

Priority area 3 - Teachers and Trainers

¹⁰ The Working Groups will run until 2025, throughout the first cycle of the strategic framework, their specific objectives can be reviewed and updated, if needed to reflect emerging policy needs, including during the stocktaking exercise foreseen in 2022 as part of the European Education Area Progress Report. Concrete outputs to support Member States in their national reforms and contribute to the achievement of the European Education Area will be further defined in the work plan of respective Working Groups.

¹¹ For some of the specific outputs and peer learning events identified below, Member State representatives may volunteer/be invited to take the lead, if appropriate.

vii) supporting the promotion of excellence in teaching at all levels of education and training, through effective organisation of learning and structural incentives, by promoting appropriate support mechanism, infrastructure and teaching materials and research-based teacher education, as well as exploring new ways to assess the quality of teacher training.

Contribution to other “concrete issues and actions”:

Concrete issues and actions 1.7, 1.8, 1.11, 1.15, 3.1, 3.2, 3.5, 3.8, 3.10, 3.11, 3.12. (see Annex)

Contribution to implementation and follow-up of other major EU policy initiatives

- European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan
- EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021-24)
- European Child Guarantee

Contribution to implementation of major EU funding initiatives

The activities of the Working Group will contribute to the implementation of EU funds (notably the European Social Fund+, Recovery and Resilience Facility, Horizon Europe and Erasmus+) within the framework of adopted programmes/plans, in particular by providing guidance and inspiration for cooperation projects under Erasmus+ and further measures and reforms (under the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the European Social Fund Plus).

Affiliations and joint activities with other bodies of governance (EEA and related areas):

Name of entity	Subject of cooperation/ Planned joint activities/ reporting
Governance structure, including, inter alia, the Council, the Education Committee and other relevant governance bodies, to be agreed by the end of 2021	Regular and timely reporting on the overall progress of the Working Groups and valorisation of results. Additionally, punctual reporting and dissemination is ensured for relevant outputs
Informal meetings of the Directors-General for Schools	Periodic reporting, in accordance with future governance mechanism
Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks	Identification of evidence and data gaps, development and maintenance of indicators and targets for measuring performance and progress

EXPECTED TANGIBLE OUTPUTS:

Common tools and approaches (e.g. toolkits, guidelines, frameworks):

Guidelines on monitoring and evaluation of quality in early childhood education and care

Peer learning and exchange of good practice (e.g. reports, collections of good practice,

fiches, etc.):

Tbc after consultation of Working Group members

Contribution to implementation and follow-up of actions announced in the EEA Communication:

- Implementation of the 2019 Council recommendation on high quality ECEC systems

RECURRENT ACTIVITIES:

Support to Member States by raising awareness and examining how common challenges are tackled in different countries in order to advance educational reforms.

Support to Member States facing issues identified in CSRs

If relevant and on request of Working Group members provide support to clusters of Member States in response to issues identified in CSRs, by having such Member States benefit from the practical experience and good practices of other Member States.

Support to Member States implementing EU (RRF/Structural Funds) funded reforms in education and training

If relevant and on request of Working Group members, provide support to clusters of Member States in implementing EU funded reforms, by having such Member States benefit from the practical experience and good practices of other Member States.

Support to Member States for Covid-19 recovery

If relevant and on request of Working Group members, provide support to clusters of Member States in response to issues identified for Covid-19 recovery, for instance by organising peer learning on topics of common concern.

Support to the incubation and follow-up of Erasmus+ KA3 policy experimentation

If relevant, provide support to the incubation and follow-up of Erasmus+ KA3 policy experimentation. This activity depends on the priorities set out in the Annual Erasmus+ Work Programme.

INDICATIVE ROADMAP (2021-2022):

On the basis of this roadmap, the Working Group will draw up a work plan for 2021-2022.

<u>PHASE</u>	<u>MAIN THEMES/ACTIVITIES</u>	<u>DELIVERABLES</u>
<u>Phase 1: September – December 2021</u>	Quality assurance in ECEC: identifying main questions and state of play	Working Group's work programme, incl. Key questions State of play note
	Informal exchanges on recent findings and reforms on the topic of: Staff professionalisation, Inclusion, Management of Covid-19 pandemic in ECEC	If relevant: ad-hoc news in the School Education Gateway
<u>Phase 2: January - June 2022</u>	Quality assurance in ECEC: exchanges of good practices to support peer learning	Policy report
	Informal exchanges on recent findings and reforms on the topic of: Staff professionalisation, Inclusion, Management of Covid-19 pandemic in ECEC	If relevant: ad-hoc news in the School Education Gateway
<u>Phase 3: July - December 2022</u>	Quality assurance in ECEC: drafting guidelines for monitoring and evaluating quality in ECEC	Guidelines for monitoring and evaluating quality in ECEC
	Informal exchanges on recent findings and reforms on the topic of: Staff professionalisation, Inclusion, Management of Covid-19 pandemic in ECEC	If relevant: ad-hoc news in the School Education gateway

EVIDENCE BASE**Relevant EU-level target(s):**

- Participation in early childhood education and care (96% of children between the age of 3 and compulsory primary education should participate in ECEC)

Coherence with other EU indicator frameworks, dashboards and targets:

- Barcelona objectives on the development of childcare facilities for young children (to be revised in 2021) and the Social Scoreboard of the European Pillar of Social Rights

Relevant indicator frameworks, data collections or reports:

- Eurydice Key Data report on Early Childhood Education and Care,
- Eurydice structural indicators,
- OECD Starting Strong collection
- Monitoring the quality of early childhood education and care -
Complementing the 2014 ECEC quality framework proposal with indicators
: recommendations from ECEC experts

Important data gaps: One of the topics for discussion in the group will be to identify which data are necessary to monitor quality in early childhood education and care, and how to collect and use them. An example of the type of such data is the socio-economic background of children participating in ECEC, as a useful tool to monitor access to ECEC, a key component of the EU Quality Framework.

DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

- Dissemination of results through the EEA portal
- Ad-hoc news in the School Education Gateway throughout the mandate
- Progress Report (2022), mid-term event (2023)