



## European Education Area Strategic Framework

### **Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)**

Making early childhood education and care more inclusive through monitoring & evaluation of quality - SUMMARY



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# **Making Early Childhood Education and Care more inclusive through monitoring and evaluation of quality**

## **SUMMARY**

The whole report is available in English at  
<https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EAC/ECEC+Documents>

This is the summary of the fourth report of the Working Group (WG)<sup>1</sup> on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), which was established in 2021 as part of a new generation of WGs under the Commission's Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (EEA communication, 30 September 2020)<sup>2</sup>, as well as the Council Resolution on a Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training towards the European Education Area and Beyond (Resolution, 18 February 2021)<sup>3</sup>.

**The European WG on ECEC supports member states in implementing the 2019 Council Recommendation for High-Quality ECEC systems and the European Quality Framework for ECEC.**<sup>4</sup> From January 2022 to December 2023, the WG explored the **topic of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of quality** – one of the pillars of the European Quality Framework – and has published three reports<sup>5</sup>:

1. *Monitoring and evaluating quality in ECEC: Purposes, Values and Principles*
2. *Improving the governance of monitoring and evaluation of quality in ECEC*
3. *Involving children, parents, staff and other stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation of quality in ECEC.*

**This report is the last of this series and is based on the recognition that there are numerous policies, projects and practices across Europe which aim to support the participation of vulnerable children in ECEC, and that it is important to monitor their implementation and efficiency.**

## *Background*

Provision of high quality ECEC has clearly been established as a powerful lever to support children's development and well-being, their social inclusion and school success. This is why the European Union and its Member States have agreed several commitments underlying that all children, including the most vulnerable ones, should have access to quality ECEC (e.g., the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Education Area Strategic Framework, the Care Strategy or the Child Guarantee).

A survey of the WG members however showed that in most countries, further work was needed to collect more information on:

- whether inclusive legislation is effective in increasing ECEC attendance among vulnerable groups;
- the actual attendance of specific groups of children in ECEC.

## *Evaluating the visibility and efficiency of inclusive policies*

Increasing visibility of inclusive policies and measures is an essential pre-requisite to increase access to ECEC. The WG therefore discussed **whether these policies and measures are sufficiently well-known by families** who benefit from them, which most countries are able to do.

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<sup>1</sup> Members list: [Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities \(europa.eu\)](#);

<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0625&from=EN>

<sup>3</sup> Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48584/st06289-re01-en21.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(01)&from=EN)

<sup>5</sup> WG reports: [ECEC - EACGroups - EC Public Wiki \(europa.eu\)](#)

On the other hand, **evaluating the efficiency of these inclusive policies to facilitate participation in ECEC of children from vulnerable backgrounds is more difficult.** Some WG members were however able to share some of the indicators and tools they use, e.g., for monitoring closely the use of fee-reduction schemes based on families' socioeconomic status. To support the evaluation of the efficiency of inclusive policies, the WG first agreed on some **basic principles**:

- M&E systems should assess whether policies are being well implemented, but also identify gaps and shortcomings with the view to address them;
- empirical data should be used to make evidence-informed policy decisions;
- policymakers should be held accountable for acting on the results of M&E processes.

The WG also recalls some **pitfalls** which must be avoided, e.g., not including all stakeholders in M&E processes, and **suggests some approaches** which can be useful for a successful evaluation of inclusive policies. It first recalls that when designing M&E processes, attention must be paid to the values that support the ECEC system (inclusive, equitable, consistent...), and suggests to:

- collect data on the inclusiveness of ECEC settings
- ensure that the M&E processes consider the views and experiences of all children.

#### *Which data and information should be collected, and how?*

The WG identified a number of **characteristics of an efficient M&E system which enables the evaluation of an ECEC system's inclusiveness**:

- Information to be collected should inform the evaluation of both structural and process quality, it should combine quantitative and qualitative data, and it should recognise and address ethical and sensitive issues;
- Multi-professional teams and a whole range of resources (methodological, legal, technical, financial) need to be available to support the M&E system;
- Clear and detailed definitions of target groups to be included in ECEC must be agreed and understood by all stakeholders; a range of definitions used by WG members is annexed to the report to illustrate the diversity of approaches;
- Many sources of information can be used to provide information and data to improve quality and inclusiveness of ECEC systems; some of the sources support the evaluation of structural quality, others contribute more to the evaluation of process quality and some contribute to both;
- A system is in place to ensure quality and reliability of data and an adequate coordination of services / tools which collect data;
- It is essential to build and maintain trust between the individuals / organisations providing the data and those collecting and using it;
- There must be a clear understanding by all parties of why the data is being collected and how it is going to be used;
- All the stakeholders who organise, deliver or benefit from ECEC should be heard at some stage of the M&E process. A methodology should also be in place to listen to families who do not use ECEC services.

**Collecting personal data is a challenging but useful operation to support evaluation of the ECEC system's inclusiveness.** It helps determining whether policies to increase the inclusiveness of ECEC systems and services are actually working, and helps identifying

weaknesses at local, regional and national level and redesign ECEC systems. Challenges related to legal, administrative, ethical issues therefore need to be addressed. Examples of how countries collect and use personal data can be found in annex of the report.

**The existence and implementation of an inclusive curriculum (or pedagogical framework) is a helpful tool to support inclusiveness of ECEC systems.** The WG therefore agreed that it is important to:

- evaluate the inclusive dimension of the ECEC curriculum;
- consider whether it includes or is completed by concrete guidance to implement it;
- evaluate whether implementation of the curriculum supports efficiently provision of quality education and care to *all* children.

As **ECEC staff are essential to deliver quality ECEC**, the WG suggests it is useful for national and local policymakers as well as ECEC providers, employers, leaders, training services to:

- assess the inclusive dimension of initial and continuing education offered to ECEC staff, to equip them with the competences and attitudes to work with children with various abilities and profiles;
- assess the extent to which all ECEC staff have the opportunity to acquire the relevant competences;
- follow-up these assessment results with relevant measures, e.g., development of new training modules

As **staff:child ratio is usually associated with a higher quality of education and care which support the inclusion of vulnerable children**, the WG pointed the need to develop M&E systems which:

- ensure that appropriate staff:child ratio regulations are in place and that they are suitable to support inclusion of all children, including vulnerable children;
- control that staff:child ratio regulations are respected.

Finally, the WG discussed the **actual engagement of vulnerable children in the activities of the ECEC setting, beyond their simple enrolment or attendance**. This aspect is challenging to monitor and evaluate at national level, but some countries provide guidance to ECEC settings to ensure full engagement of all children, regardless of their abilities or profiles. The WG therefore concluded that:

- all countries should make sure that their guiding documents for provision and evaluation of ECEC include recommendations and tools which consider the active engagement of vulnerable children in ECEC activities;
- these should be accompanied by staff training to ensure the adequate use and follow-up of such tools.

### *Effective use of data collected to improve accessibility and inclusiveness of ECEC*

The report closes with some examples and a reminder that **M&E processes should not only provide relevant information on the quality of practice enacted in individual settings, but also on the systemic conditions within which each ECEC settings are working, to identify and address shortcomings in existing policies and governance arrangements.**



