European Education Area Strategic Framework

Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Involving children, parents, staff and stakeholders in monitoring & evaluation of quality in ECEC

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Executive Summary

This report is situated in the context of the Early Childhood Education and Care Working Group's (WG) thematic focus on the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of quality in ECEC. Under this topic, the WG has been discussing 3 key areas, the 3rd of which is the benefits of and best practices for engaging children, parents, staff, and other stakeholders in M&E processes. This report summarises the WG's discussions and conclusions on this issue.

The report opens with an exploration of why it is important to involve children, parents, staff, and stakeholders in the M&E of ECEC. From a value-based perspective, the involvement of stakeholders in the M&E of ECEC promotes democratic participation in decision-making processes. It also ensures that ECEC is evaluated in relation to the needs of local contexts by considering local perspectives. By sending the meta-message that the M&E process is non-hierarchical and values the perspectives of beneficiaries, service-providers, and the wider community around ECEC, participatory M&E can become a more positive and collaborative process in which all stakeholders are considered to be partners dedicated to quality improvement. The inclusion of stakeholders in M&E is also aligned with the values determined by the Working Group, namely that ECEC should be democratic & participatory, accountable & transparent, impactful & supportive, holistic & inclusive, and contextualized & responsive. There are also significant 'rights-based' arguments for taking a participatory approach to M&E. For example, children's rights to participation are explicitly enshrined in several international guidelines: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the 2019 Council Recommendation on High-Quality ECEC, the European Quality Framework for ECEC, the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, and the EU Child Guarantee. The UNCRC and the European Quality Framework for ECEC also recognise that the views of parents need to be considered in matters concerning their child. As ECEC staff play a decisive role in establishing the quality of an ECEC setting, they should therefore also be given the opportunity to provide their insights into the factors that may be driving the quality levels of ECEC. Responsibility for improving ECEC should be shared by all concerned stakeholders and in particular those stakeholders who will be most affected by the process. Additionally, there are a range of practical benefits for consulting children, parents, staff and other community-level stakeholders in the evaluation of quality of an ECEC setting. For example, this process can provide a "full picture" of the quality of ECEC. Moreover, it promotes the generation of more valid, complete, accurate M&E results, as well as a larger evidence base from which to draw conclusions about. Staff, children, parents and other stakeholders can provide valuable insights into factors which may not be immediately visible by an external evaluator's single visit to ECEC setting. Each stakeholders group can provide unique insights on ECEC based on their position with regards to ECEC services: parents and children can provide a service-user perspective, staff have an overview of everyday practices in ECEC settings, and community stakeholders have a holistic perspective of the broader relevance of ECEC. Additionally, involving staff also supports their empowerment and professional development in striving for the ongoing improvement of their practices.

The second chapter of the report addresses the current situation of participatory M&E in ECEC, and the methods for involving different stakeholders in the M&E of ECEC across Europe.

A mapping of the situation shows that the consultation of **children's and parents' views** on ECEC is formally recommended or required across a range of countries.

In some countries, considering **children's** views is explicitly required, in others it is enshrined in legislation, and in some contexts, it is only a recommendation. With regards to the methods of involving children in the M&E of ECEC, it is important to recognise the Lundy model, which emphasises that the four key dimensions for meaningful and effective participation are space, voice, audience, and influence. At the EU and International level, several resources have been developed to provide guidance on good practice for involving children in research: in the Better Regulation Guidelines by the EU, by UNICEF, by the OECD, by Save the Children, and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. The tools identified to involve children in M&E can be divided into the following three categories: those that gather staff's perceptions of children's views; those that gather external inspector's perceptions of children's views; and those that gather children's views directly from the children themselves.

Parents are generally consulted more frequently than children in the M&E of ECEC, and guidelines specifying how to engage parents in ECEC evaluations are available in several countries. The extent to which parents' views are consulted also varies depending on whether the ECEC setting is targeted at children aged 0-3 and children aged 3-6 (parents of the 3-6 age bracket are consulted in more countries). There are various ways of including parents, families, and primary caregivers of children in evaluating the quality of education and care of ECEC. One approach is through including parents in the councils or governing bodies of ECEC centres, where they can provide input into the M&E approaches of the individual setting. Other methods include carrying out interviews, surveys or focus groups. In some countries, questionnaires are designed at the top-level to support ECEC settings in involving parents in their internal evaluation, and there are also examples of collecting parents' opinions as part of the procedures set for the external evaluation of ECEC settings.

Staff are involved in the M&E of ECEC commonly through internal evaluation procedures. Not all European countries have regulations or recommendations on the internal evaluation of ECEC settings. In the countries where internal evaluations for ECEC settings do exist, there are categorizations of countries according to how "loose", "moderate" or "strong" their internal evaluations standards for ECEC are. Internal evaluation processes may include self-evaluation reports, annual activity reports, development plans or pedagogical plans. Self-evaluation tools allow ECEC staff to share their views without the surveillance of external evaluators. There are various self-evaluation toolkits for staff, aimed at prompting critical reflection, enabling staff to review their service quality. In some cases, self-evaluations involve questionnaires filled out by staff, and sometimes this can be followed by collaborative reflective discussions. Some countries consult ECEC staff through interviews with inspectors as part of external evaluation processes. Another approach of involving ECEC staff in M&E is to rely on their unique position in being able to facilitate participatory research with children. Finally, ECEC staff are also involved in research towards national policy development in ECEC, which is a step beyond the M&E of the individual ECEC settings that internal evaluations focus on.

The category of **other community stakeholders** and the extent to which they are currently involved in the M&E of quality ECEC is difficult to be mapped systematically across Europe, mainly because the variety of stakeholders that this category encompasses is so large, and because their involvement varies according to local contexts. There are models for involving local community stakeholders in the M&E of ECEC, based on participatory research practices, but it is acknowledged that it is difficult to make conclusive remarks about the methods used to involve other stakeholders. This is because they are a heterogeneous group who have very varying relationships to ECEC centres, and secondly, involving other stakeholders in the M&E of ECEC is not as extensively researched as involving children, families, and staff. It is however

important to develop ways to involve all relevant stakeholders to ensure a holistic approach to quality development in ECEC.

The third chapter of the report addresses the key challenges in involving all different groups of stakeholders in the M&E of ECEC. These challenges revolve primarily around 1) research ethics and safeguarding (privacy), 2) identifying appropriate tools, 3) ensuring research quality, relevance, and coordination, 4) ensuring that all the actors – including those who tend to be marginalized – are given voice and agency, and 5) ensuring that M&E results do not lead to comparisons and competition or communicate unintentional messages. However, there are challenges that are unique to consulting each group.

For example, due to the very young age of **children** who are engaged in ECEC, there are challenges involved in collecting valid and reliable data on their perspectives. More specifically, there are issues with regards to the language limitations and the child-accessibility of the concepts being covered; the power relationship between the children and the adults collecting data to gather their views ; the ability to maintain children's interest in the task; and the extensive skills required to conduct research with children.

With regards to participatory M&E with **parents**, there are difficulties in designing research tools that provide easy participation in M&E, challenges in including the most difficult-to-reach families (including those with diverse native language or digital literacy competences), and aligning the data collected from parents with the broader purpose of M&E. As the purpose of involving parents in M&E is to gather their subjective perceptions of how their child is experiencing ECEC, it is important that the data collected from parents through a survey or consultation are feeding into staff reflection on how to improve everyday pedagogical practice, rather than being considered as objective quality markers. In this perspective, it is crucial to formulate questions that can be meaningfully answered by parents in relation to their experience in ECEC, and that can be used by staff or decision-makers for quality improvement purposes.

The main challenges related to including **staff** involve creating a supportive and safe M&E environment, creating time and providing adequate training for staff to participate in M&E, the need to overcome negative or fearful perceptions associated with M&E, and dealing with the inconsistencies in results between internal evaluation and external evaluations. Another difficulty is that critical opinions that are expressed by staff during M&E may not always be protected or productively acted upon. Finally, providing staff with too many M&E responsibilities, in addition to their existing workload, can lead them to feel over-worked.

The main challenge in engaging **other stakeholders** in M&E of ECEC lies in the sheer range and diversity of views that may be consulted beyond the ECEC setting, and the associated diversity in methods required to consult them. The specific constellation of additional stakeholders that is best-placed to comment on the quality of ECEC services is likely to be highly context-dependent and specific to each ECEC setting, meaning that identifying and recruiting the most relevant individuals to include in the M&E process is likely to be the first substantial challenge for evaluators. Furthermore, once these stakeholders are identified, they will each need to be engaged in appropriate ways. There is also a need to maintain an emphasis on gathering only necessary and useful data, rather than gathering data for the sake of data.

The fourth chapter of this report addresses approaches to overcoming these aforementioned challenges and presents 27 examples of inspiring practices from across Europe towards a participatory M&E of ECEC quality.

There are several approaches and tools that can be used to gather **children's** perspectives on the quality of ECEC settings. The Mosaic Approach, for example, has been successfully adopted by the Danish Evaluation Institute to support pedagogues in the process of embedding young children's views in quality improvement processes. There are also creative approaches to playfully including children in M&E, with examples identified in the research project Children as Actors in Quality Development in KiTas, the ERiK children's survey, and using children's drawings as data collection tools. Multi-method participatory action-research could also be considered a successful strategy to engage young children in policy consultation processes, as it is shown in the project commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) for the revision of Aistear curriculum in Ireland.

To offer **parents** with opportunities to provide honest feedback without fear of jeopardising their relationships with ECEC staff members, focus groups can be used so that parents can build upon each other's views, or anonymised surveys can be employed. Also, face-to-face interviews can be conducted with external evaluators or researchers. Parents are motivated to participate in evaluation processes when they understand the meaning of it; when they know that their opinion will be considered; when data analysis results are presented to them, and they are invited to discuss how the identified problems can be solved; when surveys are conducted online (with a frequency of at most twice a year); when the questionnaires are short, and all questions are in the reader-friendly language. Examples presented include several parent and family surveys that succeed in creating engagement for parents, that are developed from the bottom up, that provide opportunities for parent-staff dialogue, and that are designed to be inclusive of as many families as possible.

Inspiring practices to overcome the challenges of including **staff** in M&E include the Finnish VALSSI evaluation tools with questions to enhance self-reflection, the MeMoQ used in the Flemish Community of Belgium to gather staff perceptions and measure process quality in daycare services (attended by children under three) , the INVALSI Self-Evaluation Report piloted in Italian preschools (attended by children aged 3 to 6), and self-evaluations through video data. The self-assessment tools and accompanying MOOCS (on how to use the tools meaningfully) developed within the PARTICIPA project – as well as the self-evaluation toolkit developed within the SEQUENCES project – are providing inspiring examples derived from cross-national research projects funded under the Erasmus+ programme. Another inspiring example is the KUMBA quality system approach developed in Norway, which shows how to integrate and triangulate internal evaluation, external evaluation, and children's perspectives. Other inspiring cases include the use of pedagogical documentation to co-create understandings of ECEC quality and involving staff in policy reforms about ECEC.

Finally, as for innovative approaches to including **other stakeholders**, this report considers the concept of co-production as a working practice between experts, and finally the Primokiz example, which is a model of cross-sectoral collaboration among different stakeholders, ensuring that data and expertise is collected from all sectors providing and benefitting from ECEC.

This leads to the final chapter on policy pointers, where a comprehensive overview of guidelines to meaningfully involve children, families, staff and other stakeholders in M&E processes is provided. Such overview is not to be intended as a check-list of actions to be accomplished, but rather as a set of issues that should be considered by policy-makers in the process of designing M&E of ECEC according to a participatory perspective.

Principles for implementing participatory and inclusive M&E processes of ECEC quality across all stakeholder groups:

➢ The child's best interests are at the center of M&E initiatives

➢ The purposes, values, and principles of research are coherently aligned in guiding M&E processes to ensure ethical research;

➢ Adequate safeguarding and privacy measures are implemented to ensure that participants provide informed consent, and are aware of the purpose of the research and the ways in which their responses and personal data will be used;

➢ A balanced sampling approach is taken to ensure that as wide a spectrum as possible of stakeholder views are represented (including views from marginalized communities or societally disadvantaged groups);

➢ Flexible data collection processes and tools are considered to be as inclusive as possible and accommodate the schedules of a wide range of participants;

➢ The data collected from different stakeholder groups are triangulated and aligned to produce a coherent interpretation of results;

➢ The results of M&E initiatives are communicated back to the participants, so that they can see what they have informed, and understand the purpose of their participation;

➢ The publication of M&E results is handled with care to ensure that M&E results do not lead to comparisons and competition or communicate unintentional messages.

Principles to meaningfully involve children in M&E for quality ECEC:

➢ Children should be asked questions on topics that they can influence, and the questions must be asked on issues that are actionable;

➢ Children's participation should not be limited to M&E processes, but should be embedded in the planning and evaluation of daily activities;

➢ There is an atmosphere of trust and reciprocity between adults and children: children feel free to express their views and feel confident that their views will be considered;

➢ With a view to ensure equal participation to all children, the tools adopted for gathering children's views are age appropriate, culturally sensitive, and diversified in relation to children's language and abilities (both verbal and non-verbal);

➢ There are M&E tools that capture children's views as directly as possible, complementing other data collection tools;

➢ ECEC staff perceived that involving children in M&E is worthwhile from a pedagogical point of view and have the necessary competences to engage children in participatory processes through everyday practice. This can be achieved through in-service training and CPD, coaching and guidance by pedagogical leadership, and adequate working conditions for staff to make children's participation in evaluation and planning processes sustainable over time;

➢ ECEC settings are provided with a certain degree of autonomy, and support, to decide how children's involvement in evaluation processes is pursued, while ensuring that children's opinions and concerns are responsively and consistently acknowledged and addressed;

➢ Statistics about children's participation in M&E are disaggregated to show which children are – or are not – participating in M&E (e.g. children with special education needs or disability)

Principles to meaningfully involve parents and families in M&E for quality ECEC:
➢ Parents and families are consulted about questions and topics that they can answer about ECEC;
➢ Positive relationships based on trust are established between parents and staff/evaluators;
➢ Parents and families are informed about the aims and purposes of ECEC, of M&E, and about the processes and benefits of evaluations;
➢ Inclusive data collection processes are designed to ensure that the voices of parents in all their diversity (including disadvantaged, with migrant background, and also those who do not use ECEC) are heard- the language used to communicate with parents and families is clear and accessible;
➢ Participation of parents in M&E processes is encouraged by taking into consideration time scheduling and data collection formats that can facilitate their realistic involvement;
➢ The evaluation tools for gathering the perspectives of families are designed for parents to provide honest feedback without the fear of jeopardising their relationships with ECEC staff members;
➢ Staff are aware of the importance of involving families in M&E or decision-making processes on a regular basis, and reciprocal dialogue with parents is embedded in their daily practice.

Principles to meaningfully involve staff in M&E for quality ECEC:
➢ There is sufficient information and training provided so that centres' leaders and staff are aware of the purpose and benefits of M&E;
➢ There is sufficient support and training to ensure staff can participate effectively in M&E processes, use the results that are produced, and enact changes following the evaluation- through pre-service and in-service staff training, coaching, etc;
➢ ECEC centres' leaders play a crucial role in ensuring that a culture of evaluation and quality development is embedded into the daily practices of pedagogical staff, and in sustaining staff collective reflection and improvement of their practices following evaluations' results;
➢ A safe environment is created whereby staff opinions (including critical opinions) are appreciated and protected;
➢ Time is provided to staff allowing them meaningful space and capacity to participate in M&E: there is a follow up after staff voices are heard, and a clear communication about "what happens next";
➢ Non-pedagogical staff who do not directly work with children (e.g. auxiliary staff, cleaning or kitchen staff) are also included in some M&E initiatives, to provide a holistic view of the ECEC setting.

Principles to meaningfully involve other stakeholders in M&E for quality ECEC:
➢ The involvement of stakeholders is done through a well-managed participatory process, based upon a consensus between all actors involved on the purposes of the M&E activities;
➢ There is a clear understanding on which stakeholders will be involved and why, guided by principles such as the best interests of the child, the purpose of the evaluation, and expertise in ECEC or the specificities of early childhood;
➢ All relevant stakeholders are consulted and heard, with the understanding that the responsibility for the final decisions lies with policy-makers;
➢ There is a strategy in place to ensure that even the most marginalised actors are involved meaningfully;
➢ Stakeholders are aware of their role and added value, and there are clear rules of engagement, such as trust and confidentiality;
➢ Stakeholders are given reasonable deadlines to provide their contributions.

Introduction and context

Under the current mandate of the Early Childhood Education and Care Working Group (ECEC WG), the main thematic focus is on the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of quality in ECEC, with emphases on three topic areas:

- Topic 1: the purposes, values and principles that should underpin the design of M&E processes;
- Topic 2: the best ways to coordinate and streamline M&E processes across centre and system levels; and
- Topic 3: the benefits of, and best practices for, engaging children, parents, staff, and other stakeholders in M&E processes.

The WG concluded its discussions on Topic 1 with the publication of the 1st ECEC WG report, titled 'Monitoring and evaluating quality in ECEC: purposes, values and principles' (hereafter the 1st ECEC WG report), in 2022. This report provides an overview of a wide range of purposes that M&E of quality in ECEC can strive to, as well as an exploration of the WG's views on the values and principles that should guide M&E processes. The report highlights that there should be a proportionate emphasis on quality control (to ensure that ECEC provision adheres to mandatory quality standards) as much as quality improvement (supporting continuous reflection and developments towards better quality in ECEC). It is also acknowledged that M&E can function to foster democratic participation of children and parents in their ECEC provision by directly consulting them on their views and experiences, and benefit advocacy by creating evidence that stakeholders, researchers, parents may use to hold policymakers and ECEC providers accountable.

The report discusses that in fact, if the primary aim is to ensure the highest possible quality of ECEC services for all children, M&E systems should be designed and implemented by engaging all relevant stakeholders – such as public and private providers, trade unions, advocacy groups representatives, as well as professionals, children and families – in the process of defining what quality is and how it could be improved. In turn, fostering the democratic participation of children, families, professionals and community stakeholders in decision-making processes will ensure that quality of ECEC provision is evaluated, and constantly improved, in relation to the needs of local contexts where settings are placed, rather than assessed according to predefined outcomes to be achieved.

The WG's conclusions and recommendations from Topic 2 on coordinating and streamlining M&E processes across centre and system levels has recently been published, in a report on Improving the governance of monitoring and evaluation of quality in ECEC (henceforth referred to as 2nd WG report). The report discusses how we can ensure that M&E processes and results are effectively and efficiently used to improve ECEC provision across all levels of the system and horizontally across split systems, and how to coordinate M&E processes and tools across all levels of the system. It presents the benefits of investing in coordinated approaches to the M&E of quality in ECEC provision. This includes:

- enabling a shared vision of quality pedagogy and ensuring that this shared vision of quality permeates across all types of ECEC provision;
- enabling authorities at higher levels to be aware of, and responsive to, needs identified at the more granular level (especially at high-need districts or centres);

- creating feedback loops in which individual-level findings can be aggregated and converted into changes at higher levels of policy-making, while new policy changes or approaches at higher levels of the ECEC system can feed into the practices of individual ECEC centres.

The 2nd WG report discusses the challenges in coordinating M&E functions, processes and tools, such as aligning M&E processes in complex governance arrangements according to which ECEC provision is regulated, funded and managed. This can lead to a fragmented data architecture which has a negative impact on the usability of data for developing comprehensive quality improvement initiatives. There can also be the challenge of inconsistencies in data collection, and gaps between quality assurance and improvement mechanisms due to a lack of coordination across bodies responsible for M&E. Aligning external and internal evaluation processes and tools for quality enhancement is another challenge, since for example, data collected only through self-evaluation processes raises the issue of reliability. Moreover, in contexts of multi-layered and decentralised governance where coordinating M&E efforts across levels succeeds in striking a balance among all the tensions reported above, M&E is a substantial task with potentially high costs.

The 2nd WG report highlights strategies to overcome these challenges, such as establishing a shared pedagogical vision and understanding which is agreed upon by all the actors who are in involved in the processes of M&E of ECEC. To ensure that the data collection has a clear purpose, it may be helpful to consult the end-users – such as ECEC providers, local administrators and policy-makers – during the design of M&E approaches, to understand which data would be most useful for them. Moreover, for the staff working in ECEC settings to trust external evaluators, it is essential to give them a clear and transparent understanding of why the data is being collected and how it is going to be used. Data should only be collected if it can be analysed for the benefit of users; it should be collected systematically over time, and from multiple sources (including children, parents and professionals) in a complementary way. Additionally, designing M&E systems which foster a democratic culture of quality improvement based on dialogue and open discussion can counteract the risk that evaluation activities are perceived as a merely bureaucratic accomplishment.

The 2nd WG report observes that M&E systems can significantly contribute to ensuring the improvement of ECEC policies and practices only if a culture of quality development is shared – and constantly nurtured – by all the actors who are involved in M&E processes. All the actors involved in M&E processes need to have a clear sense of purpose and a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. However, building capacity to improve the quality of ECEC provision requires investment in human resources, methodological support for self- and external evaluation, in-service training and continuing professional development, and coordination platforms or networks for peer-learning.

It is within the context of these two previous reports that summarising the work of the Working Group since 2021 that this current report is situated. The WG has been concentrating on Topic 3 over spring and summer 2023, discussing the benefits and methods to involve children, families, staff and other stakeholders in M&E of quality in ECEC. The WG has covered this topic across several online meetings, and a Peer Learning Activity in Lithuania on "*How to involve stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation processes to increase inclusiveness of ECEC systems?*".

This report will first address why the topic of involving different stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation of ECEC is relevant and beneficial. It will do this by drawing on the values that the Working

Group agreed should inform M&E, as well as providing rights-based arguments based on international frameworks that mandate participatory inclusive approaches to research in ECEC. There will also be an explanation of the practical reasons in explaining why it is beneficial to involve children, parents, staff, and stakeholders in M&E – namely, because the inputs of these different stakeholders support the creation of a "full picture" of ECEC quality, and because of the unique insights that each stakeholder group can provide based on their specific position with regards to the ECEC system.

The second chapter will look into the current situation of how these different stakeholders are currently involved in the M&E of ECEC across Europe. This will firstly involve a mapping of the different requirements or guidelines to involve these stakeholders and how this differs between the age ranges of ECEC. The other sub-section of this chapter will present the various methods currently used around Europe to include different stakeholders in the M&E of ECEC. This chapter, as with all the subsequent chapters will break down how each stakeholder group (children, parents, staff, and other stakeholders) is included in participatory M&E; the tools, approaches, and contexts within which they are involved in M&E of ECEC. It should be noted that this report also includes families and primary care-givers in the category of parents, in order to remain inclusive of all variations of primary care and support structures that children in ECEC may be situated in.

The third chapter will examine the challenges in working towards participatory M&E of ECEC quality. There will be a discussion of the nuanced and critical considerations that need to be taken into account to ensure that participation remains truly inclusive, safe, and relevant to data collection. There will firstly be an overview of general challenges in participatory M&E, before investigating the specific challenges of including children, families, staff, and other stakeholders. The fourth chapter follows directly from this and will address approaches to overcoming these challenges, by drawing on 28 examples of inspiring practices across Europe.

On inspiring practices to involve children in M&E, this involves participatory research initiatives with children, creative approaches to playfully include children in evaluation processes, and approaches to overcoming the challenge of engaging young children in policy consultation processes. To include families in M&E of ECEC, there are good practices related to parent and family surveys – ones that succeed in creating engagement, examples of how surveys are triangulated with other sources of data, parent surveys developed from the bottom up and that provide opportunities for parent-staff dialogue, surveys that are designed to be inclusive to as many families as possible, and examples of parent survey questionnaires to provide inspiration on what types of questions can be asked.

On including staff in M&E, there are case studies examining various staff self-assessment tools, conducting focus group discussions with staff, an initiative on using pedagogical documentation to guide M&E, and a model of involving staff in policy reform consultations on ECEC quality. When it comes to the elusive category of how to involve other stakeholders in M&E, there are examples of the principles used in conducting external evaluation with a range of ECEC stakeholders that have been researched, a model of the approach of co-production in education, and an inspiring practice of cross-sectoral collaboration in M&E of ECEC.

The last chapter ties all of this together by providing policy recommendations and suggestions of ways forward in terms of implementing an inclusive M&E of ECEC quality.

1. Why is it important to involve children, parents, staff and stakeholders in M&E of ECEC?

1.1 Value based reasons

As explained in the 1st ECEC WG report on purposes, values and principles of M&E, a fundamental purpose of the monitoring and evaluation of ECEC is to ensure the best interest of children and the highest possible quality of ECEC services for all children, both by improving ECEC policies at the system level and by improving ECEC practices at the centre level. To achieve this, it is suggested **that M&E consider the views of an as wide a spectrum as possible of relevant stakeholders** including public and private providers, trade unions, advocacy groups, the children who attend ECEC settings, their families, the staff and more. As stated in the European Quality Framework in the 2019 Council Recommendation on high-quality ECEC systems, monitoring and evaluation processes have the potential to foster the involvement and cooperation of all stakeholders: "**everyone concerned with the development of quality can contribute to – and benefit from – monitoring and evaluation practices**" (Statement 8.2)[1].

The involvement of children and parents in M&E is valuable for gaining a 'service-user perspective' on an ECEC setting and ensuring that the views of main target beneficiaries are heard and taken into account. Furthermore, ECEC **staff are important informants not only due to their insights into the everyday practices of an ECEC setting** and the feedback they can provide on the structural quality of a setting, but also because process quality (the quality of the daily interactions that children experience with each other, staff, teachers, materials and activities) hinges on the professionalism and wellbeing of ECEC staff. Additionally, due to their perspectives on the unique situations of children and families in their local contexts and their ECEC expertise from an outsider perspective, other **community stakeholders such as social service workers, university researchers, NGOs, trade unions, and more, can provide valuable insight on the holistic relevance or efficiency** of ECEC settings and systems.

Fostering the democratic participation of children, families, professionals and community stakeholders in decision-making processes will ensure that the quality of ECEC provision is evaluated – and constantly improved- in relation to the needs of local contexts where settings are placed, rather than assessed according to predefined outcomes to be achieved. This **ensures that ECEC provision remains contextualized and responsive, adaptive to the needs of the communities, settings, children and families they serve**, while at the same time recognizing the importance of ensuring consistency in quality.

Democratic participation in quality improvement of children's education also supports **the development of agency and cooperative competences**, as children, families, staff, and relevant stakeholders practice engaging in constructive dialogue together. Indeed, consulting children ensures that they are viewed as 'co-creators of knowledge' and are recognised as having agency. Consulting parents sends the message that they are partners in the education and care of their children, and that their views are valued and respected. Similarly, listening to staff perspectives demonstrates that their work and roles are valued and recognised as being central to ECEC quality. Overall, inclusive monitoring & evaluation also **allows for accountability for the quality of ECEC**, as the different actors involved can prove that data collected is acted upon.

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[1] Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems
https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019H0605%2801%29

By sending the meta-message that the perspectives of beneficiaries (i.e. children and parents), professionals (i.e. staff) and service providers are valued, **participatory M&E has the opportunity to establish a more positive and collaborative M&E process in which all stakeholders – including external inspectors or evaluators – are considered to be partners dedicated to quality improvement**, in addition to quality control. As emphasised in the [1st ECEC WG report on purposes, values and principles](#), such an approach is better-placed to increase the sense of purpose and motivation among staff, while also encouraging families to feel a shared ownership over the ECEC setting.

All these principles for M&E that are mentioned above (democratic & participatory, accountable & transparent, impactful & supportive, holistic & inclusive, contextualized & responsive) were outlined in detail in the **1st ECEC WG report** and are considered by the ECEC WG to be **essential principles of a well-rounded approach to monitoring and evaluation.** Starting from the assumption that ECEC quality cannot be defined as a universally valid and fixed concept, it is acknowledged that quality is produced practically on a daily basis. This implies that quality development processes must be experimental, participatory-democratic and discursive.

The WG principles that are related to the topic of involving stakeholders in M&E are summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Guiding principles to design processes for M&E of quality in ECEC

Guiding principles	Definition	Suggestions for their integration in M&E processes
Democratic & Participatory	M&E is a **collaborative process which values the inputs and perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders** including ECEC providers, ECEC staff, parents, and children.	• **Avoid relying exclusively on objective measures through external evaluations**; • Include **self-evaluation approaches**, allowing ECEC service providers to be actively engaged in M&E processes while valuing perceptions of staff, parents and children.
Accountable & Transparent	A key priority of M&E is to ensure clear roles and responsibilities of all actors involved, as well as to **prove that data are acted upon (accountable)**. Ensuring that evaluation processes are 'readable' for all actors involved, including families, **increases their awareness and agency, thus nurturing a shared culture** of ECEC quality (transparency)	• Establish a **shared and well-defined understanding of ECEC quality** among all stakeholders from ECEC providers to families • Develop a set of indicators and benchmarks through which ECEC quality can be monitored and progression in quality improvement can be tracked.
Impactful & Supportive	M&E processes should **support ECEC professionals to systematically document, reflect upon and review their practices from a quality enhancement perspective**. M&E approaches that are appreciative of staff professionalism can contribute significantly to **enhancing their competences and sense of purpose**, with positive effects on their professional well-being.	• Produce M&E results that are relevant and useable for the stakeholders involved in decision-making around ECEC services, and **encourage staff self-reflection** on their everyday practice. • Operationally link the M&E results to targeted funding and/or support mechanisms to enhance quality of ECEC provision through **continuing professional development and coaching initiatives**
Holistic & Inclusive	M&E gives equal priority to the **full spectrum of children's wellbeing, including not only their educational development but also their wellbeing and social relationships**. ECEC should emphasise children's all-round development while also	• Evaluate the quality of M&E according to an appropriately **broad and multidimensional understanding of what 'quality' is**, taking a holistic view of children's needs and potentialities, learning, growth and development.

		• Use M&E tools that take into account the views and experiences of all children and families in a meaningful way.
Contextualised & Responsive	ECEC provision should **be adaptive to the needs of the individual communities, settings children and families they serve;** practices may therefore vary while still being aligned with quality requirements at system level.	• **Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach** and enable M&E processes to accommodate variation in pedagogical practices and approaches.

Source: 1st WG Report "*Monitoring and evaluating quality in ECEC: Purposes, Values and Principles*" (2022)

1.2 Rights-based reasons

There are also significant **'rights-based' arguments** for taking a participatory approach to M&E. **Children's right to participation is explicitly enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**, which specifies that "Children must have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child"[2]. Child participation in M&E is also explicitly acknowledged and recommended in multiple European Council Recommendations, including the **2019 Council Recommendation on High-Quality ECEC,** where Member States are urged to promote transparent and coherent monitoring of ECEC "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"**[3]. The **European Quality Framework** adds that "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"[4]. The European Commission's **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child** also calls for Member States to "establish, improve and provide adequate resources for new and existing mechanisms of child participation at local, regional and national level".[5]

Child participation is also a cross-cutting dimension of the **EU Child Guarantee**, with the European Council urging Member States in their recommendation of 14 June 2021 to "**ensure the participation of regional, local and other relevant authorities, children and relevant stakeholders representing civil society, non-governmental organisations, educational establishments and bodies"**[6]. The Council of Europe has also developed a **Child Participation Assessment Tool** to help Member States quantify their successfulness to date in meeting key indicators of child participation[7]. Incorporating children's direct feedback and perspectives into the M&E of quality in ECEC is therefore a critical way to ensure that the M&E process acknowledges and fulfils the child's right to participate in decision-making that affects them, remaining consistent with higher-level aspirations to fulfil children's rights across the EU.

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[2] Convention on the rights of the child (1989) Treaty no. 27531. United Nations Treaty Series, 1577,
[3] Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019H0605%2801%29&qid=1638446515934
[4] Ibid, p.10
[5] EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child; https://commission.europa.eu/document/86b296ab-95ee-4139-aad3-d7016e096195_en
[6] Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee - https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2021.223.01.0014.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2021%3A223%3ATOC
[7] CHILD PARTICIPATION ASSESSMENT TOOL: https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806482d9

A similar rights-based argument can be made for including the views of parents. According to article 18 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, parents have "the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child", and should maintain "the best interests of the child" as their "basic concern"[8]. Furthermore, article 27 stresses that parents have the "primary responsibility" for providing "a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development".[9] Given that parents are ultimately held to the highest responsibility for all matters concerning their children, it can therefore be argued that they, too, should have a right to share their views on, and have a degree of influence over, the ECEC services that their children receive. This is also highlighted in the **European Quality Framework for ECEC (Statement 2.1): "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"[10].

Finally, it can also be argued that **staff have the right to share their views on the quality of ECEC services in their particular setting**, as well as the quality of the ECEC policies that influence their daily working experiences. As ECEC staff play a decisive role in establishing the quality of an ECEC setting, ECEC staff are themselves often the primary object of assessment in M&E processes. They should therefore be given the opportunity to provide their insights into the structural or other factors that may be driving the quality levels observed by ECEC evaluators.

Overall, as explained in the policy paper on Democratic, Participatory and Transparent evaluation by Children in Europe, ensuring a participatory approach to M&E of quality in ECEC is an effective way to elevate the process to an "ethical and political act" which takes the form of "democratic participation in community life"[11]. Responsibility for improving ECEC is therefore **shared by all concerned stakeholders and in particular those stakeholders who will be most affected by the process, rather than being "devolv[ed] solely to experts in education or management"**[12].

1.3 Practical reasons

In addition to the ethical, values-based and rights-based arguments for ensuring that M&E of ECEC is participatory, there are also a range of practical benefits for consulting children, parents, staff and other community-level stakeholders in assessments of the quality of an ECEC setting. Consulting stakeholders can ensure that the findings of M&E processes are **enriched by a complete range of relevant perspectives, providing a "full picture" of the quality of ECEC**. Moreover, it promotes the generation of more valid,

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[8] UNHCR Convention on the Rights of the Child : https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child#:~:text=Article%2018,-1.&text=States%20Parties%20shall%20use%20their,and%20development%20of%20the%20child.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(01)&rid=4 p.8
[11] Young children and their services: developing a European approach A Children in Europe Policy pape: rhttps://vbjk.be/storage/files/281c9d0b-273d-42dd-9402-a7b9e93a6f12/cie-policy-paper-principle-7-evaluation-participatory-democratic-and-transparent.pdf
[12] Musatti, T. 'Principle 7 – Evaluation: Participatory, Democratic and Transparent' (Dossier) in the 2017 publication Young children and their services: developing a European approach. A Children in Europe Policy paper. Pg 3

complete, accurate M&E results, as well as **a larger evidence base** from which to draw conclusions about – not only about the current quality level of an ECEC setting, but also about the ways in which quality can/should be improved in that specific setting.

Involving staff also supports their empowerment and professional development in striving for the ongoing improvement of their practices by critically engaging with the lived experiences of children and families in ECEC settings.

Staff, children, parents and other stakeholders can also provide valuable insights into **factors which may not be immediately visible by an external evaluator's single visit to ECEC setting**, including:

- The unique needs of the children, parents, and communities who are engaged with the ECEC setting;
- The extent to which the processes and pedagogical practices are meeting those unique needs;
- The structural, material, logistic or other constraints which may prevent the ECEC setting from fully meeting those needs;
- The local context of the setting.

Participatory M&E can in this way identify novel and highly targeted opportunities for quality improvement, which may not emerge as naturally from external M&E approaches which rely solely on external inspectors.

It is also important to recognise that **children can be valuable informants about the quality of an ECEC** centre even from an early age as they have essential knowledge of their own daily lives and can describe things that they like and dislike[13].

Similarly, **parents are often best-placed to identify their children's unique needs, and by extension, the ways in which ECEC settings may be contributing in meeting those needs.** However, for this to happen parents must have the possibility to participate- both formally (i.e. through individual/collective meetings with ECEC professionals) and informally (i.e. during the settling in period, or during daily welcoming routines)- in the everyday life of ECEC settings. In this sense, for parents to be able to 'judge' to which extent the ECEC setting is addressing their children's unique needs, their involvement needs to be proactively and intentionally supported by staff[14].

As ECEC staff are the primary determinants of an ECEC setting's environment and pedagogical practices, the process quality of each ECEC setting inevitably hinges on their competencies, professionalism and wellbeing. **Their daily insights into the practices of the ECEC setting, and the challenges under which it functions, make ECEC staff ideally-placed to comment on why the process quality of an ECEC setting may be lagging behind, and what may be needed to better enable them to deliver adequate quality.** As the experiences of children and parents in ECEC settings are influenced by a plurality of elements, practitioners are called to constantly reflect on their daily interactions with children and parents through observation and documentation processes, which make visible their agency and voice in the educational

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[13] Clark, A. and Moss, P. (2001). *Listening to young children: the Mosaic approach.* London: National Children's Bureau for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
[14] Picchio, M., Di Giandomenico, I., & Musatti, T. (2014). The use of documentation in a participatory system of evaluation. Early Years, 34(2), 133-145.

process and sustain the ongoing quality improvement of enacted pedagogical practices.[15] Moreover, ECEC staff are likely to have unrivalled insights into the structural challenges which may be inhibiting quality, and their views of the quality of an ECEC centre (and the reasons for such quality ratings) are therefore essential, particularly for identifying key leverage points for quality improvement.

Community stakeholders such as social workers, healthcare providers, NGOs, local authorities, universities, trade unions, social partners, teacher and vocational training institutes, primary schools, youth welfare officers, or even the media and journalists can **illuminate issues or processes that may not be visible to the direct participants in an ECEC setting (children, families, staff).** They may also be able to **support or add more details on certain topics concerning the direct recipients of ECEC**, be it identifying larger patterns affecting ECEC aged children with special education needs or disability , why certain (vulnerable) families may not be participating in ECEC, enablers or barriers for staff to improve the quality of their practice, and more. The OECD's Starting Strong VI report in this way underlines that family engagement, and in particular community engagement, is a key quality target for improving child development in ECEC.[16]

2. How are different stakeholders involved in the M&E of ECEC across Europe?

This section is divided into two sub-sections. Firstly, there is a mapping of the current situation of involving different stakeholder groups in the M&E of ECEC, and then there is an overview of the methods used to involve different stakeholders in M&E of ECEC across Europe.

2.1 A mapping of the current situation of involving stakeholders in M&E of ECEC

Drawing on the 2019 Eurydice Key Data on ECEC report, this section provides an overview of the extent and way in which children, parents and families, staff, and other stakeholders are involved in the M&E of ECEC across Europe.

2.1.1 Children

Participatory M&E which considers the views of children is a priority not only at EU level and internationally, but also for several countries at national level. At the Member State level, the consultation of children's and parents' views on ECEC is **formally recommended or required** across a range of countries (see Table 2 below). In some countries consideration of children's views is **explicitly required in the curricular framework or guidelines for the ECEC centres** more generally; whereas in others consultation with children is **recommended in the guidelines for conducting monitoring and evaluation** of ECEC. In Finland, both aspects are simultaneously present, as the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre strongly recommends the involvement of children in M&E of ECEC and defines child participation in an educational setting as the "possibilit[y] of influencing decision-making and bringing about changes" and engaging in "activities in which the child is able to consciously exert an influence in their social environment"[17].

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[15] Pirard, F., & Barbier, J. M. (2012). Accompaniment and quality in childcare services: the emergence of a culture of professionalization. Early Years, 32(2), 171-182.
[16] OECD (2021), Starting Strong VI: Supporting Meaningful Interactions in Early Childhood Education and Care. Starting Strong, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/f47a06ae-en.
[17] Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC). (2022)

Table 2: Requirements on consulting children and parents in M&E of ECEC

Specific requirement	Relevant countries
ECEC Curricular guidelines require the views of children to be taken into account	Finland[18], Italy[19] [20], Sweden[21], (Slovenia)[22], Turkey (3-6)[23]
Framework or Guidelines for conducting M&E of ECEC requires children's views to be taken into account	Albania (3-6)[24]; Finland[25]; Lichtenstein (4-5); Portugal (3-6)[26]; Romania (3-6); Spain[27]; Malta (3-5)
Legislation on ECEC and/or its M&E explicitly **requires** the views of children to be taken into account	Denmark[28]; Finland; Iceland[29]; Norway[30]

In Spain, three Autonomous Communities – Andalucía for the second cycle of ECEC, Cataluña and Comunidad Valenciana for the whole phase – **have introduced regulations to involve children in the evaluation of ECEC settings**. For example, in Comunidad Valenciana (Decree 39/2008, 4 April, article 19), the settings (for internal evaluation) and the education Inspectorate (for external evaluation) must each create instruments by which children's views can be gathered.

In Sweden, according to the Curriculum for the Pre-school, one of the tasks of the municipality is to continually evaluate and monitor pre-schools. **Children are to be included in the evaluation and**

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[18] https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/national-core-curriculum-ecec-nutshell
[19] For ages 0-6 https://www.istruzione.it/sistema-integrato-06/linee-pedagogiche.html
[20] For ages 0-3 https://www.istruzione.it/sistema-integrato-06/orientamenti-nazionali.html
[21] Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition: https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/key-data-early-childhood-education-and-care-europe-2019-edition
[22] A revision of the kindergarten curriculum in Slovenia is currently being prepared, based on the Outlines for the revision of the kindergarten curriculum (https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/slovenia/ongoing-reforms-and-policy-developments), which emphasise the image of the competent child, participatory pedagogical models, foresee an active role of children in the process of learning and ensure the participation of children in the process of planning, implementation, evaluation and reflection.
[23] In Turkey, among the principles of the Preschool Education Program, it is stated that active participation of the child and the family in the education process should be ensured. The Preschool Education Program itself is a child-centred one and highlights that the child should be given opportunities to participate in decision making processes: "Teachers need to allow as many opportunities as possible for children to plan, implement, organize, question, research, discuss and produce in the learning process. In order for the child to gain positive attitudes towards school, learning and research it is important to develop a positive self-perception, to feel valued, to interact with peers and teachers. In addition, the child should be given freedom to participate actively in activities, to choose the activities and materials to play in educational environments." https://tegm.meb.gov.tr/dosya/okuloncesi/ooproram.pdf
[24] Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition
[25] https://karvi.fi/en/publication/varhaiskasvatuksen-laadun-arvioinnin-perusteet-ja-suositukset-10/
[26] https://www.igec.mec.pt/
[27] Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition
[28] In Denmark, legislation on M&E of ECEC quality requires the views of children to be taken into account as part of evaluation processes of pedagogical practices, but not in relation ECEC system quality monitoring. The monitoring methods are up to the municipalities, but it is a requirement by law that children's voices and perspectives are heard in the pedagogical practice in ECEC (and it is required by law to monitor and evaluate the latter).
[29] Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition
[30] This follows from the Kindergarten Act section 3 and was first introduced in the legislation from 2006.

monitoring process and they must be allowed to influence it. In Norway, according to the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (UDIR, 2017), **children shall be able to actively participate in planning and assessing the kindergarten's activities on a regular basis.** In Norway, all children **have a say** in what is happening in the kindergarten. It should be noted that although there are no top-level regulations or recommendations on taking children's views into account in the evaluation of the kindergarten in Slovenia, this practice is **recommended in an optional internal evaluation tool** developed by the National School for Leadership.

In some countries, considering children's views is required by the top-level guidelines or frameworks specifically for the *external evaluation* of ECEC settings. For example, in Malta, the external evaluation of **settings for older children (over the age of 3) should include focus groups and interviews with learners** as well as **informal discussions during lesson observations.** In Portugal, the inspection handbook for pre-school settings (jardins de infância) includes a section covering the topics on which **inspectors should seek the views of children**. These include their preferred activities, their freedom to choose play activities and their interactions with education staff. In Romania, some indicators of the framework used for the external evaluation of ECEC settings for older children (National Specific Quality Standards for Pre-school Education) require the evaluator to **pay attention to the opinion of pre-school children.**

2.1.2 Parents and families

Parents are generally consulted more frequently than children in the M&E of ECEC, and guidelines specifying how to engage parents in ECEC evaluations are available in several MS[31]. **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[32]. As demonstrated by Eurydice Key Data on ECEC from 2019 (see Table 3 below), the extent to which parents' views are consulted also varies depending on whether the ECEC setting is targeted at children aged 0-3 and children aged 3-6. Parents are consulted systematically in ECEC M&E processes across a wide range of countries, however **more frequently for ages 3-6 than 0-3**.

Table 3: Countries where parent views are consulted

ECEC age range	Countries where parent views are consulted
0-3	Belgium (Flemish Community, French Community); Denmark; Germany; Estonia; Spain; Croatia; Lithuania; the Netherlands; Slovenia; Finland; Sweden; Iceland; Montenegro; Norway
3-6	Belgium (Flemish, French and German regions); Bulgaria; Denmark; Estonia; Spain; Croatia; Lithuania; Hungary; Malta; Netherlands; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Slovenia; Finland; Sweden; Albania; Bosnia & Herzegovina; Switzerland; Iceland; Lichtenstein; Montenegro; Norway; Germany; Turkey

In a number of countries, the views of parents are expressed **through their representatives on a formal body at the setting level** which has the right to participate in the internal evaluation process. This applies to the whole ECEC age range in Estonia, Spain (some Autonomous Communities), Lithuania, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro. This is also the case in nine systems in settings for older children (3-

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[31] Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition, p. 129.
[32] Ibid.

6) in Belgium (French and German-speaking Communities), Bulgaria, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Albania and some cantons in Switzerland. The ways in which parents participate in the internal evaluation process as members of this formal body vary between countries, ranging from discussing and approving evaluation reports to contributing to the development of the internal evaluation process.

For example, in Belgium (German-speaking Community), parents are part of the pedagogical council which checks whether and to **what degree the structures, methods and results of the Kindergarten are consistent with the objectives stated in the Kindergarten plan**. Similarly, in Spain, the School Board, which includes parents, evaluates the overall running of the school as well as school achievements in relation to the school development plan and annual general programme. In Lithuania, the council of the ECEC setting determines **the scope as well as the methods used for internal evaluation, and analyses its results.** In Turkey, there is a self-evaluation system called Standards for Pre-primary and Primary Education Institutions and this system supports taking into account parents' view through online questionnaires. The data gathered are automatically being analyzed and the school principal, the district management, the provincial management and the Ministry can access to the results. Besides, there are school-family councils that directly has the right to take part in the decisions taken at the school level.

In Belgium (Flemish and French Communities, 0-3 provision) and Liechtenstein, top-level guidelines require or recommend **parental involvement in the internal evaluation of settings**, without specifying the ways in which this is to be achieved. In Belgium (Flemish Community, 0-3 and 3-6 provision), **inspectors are expected to check whether parents have had the opportunity to contribute to the internal evaluation** of settings.

Several Nordic countries delegate the responsibility for involving parents to the local level. In Denmark, Sweden and Iceland, the **regulations state that parents must have the opportunity to evaluate their child's ECEC setting**, leaving it to the local authorities or the settings to decide how this should be done. In Finland, ECEC providers have a statutory duty to **ensure that children and their parents have an opportunity to participate in the planning and evaluation of their ECEC setting**. In Denmark, according to the "Act on ECEC", parents must be involved in the development, evaluation and follow up of the setting's curriculum. In Finland, the national core curriculum makes several references to parent participation in evaluation: **they should be involved in the development and evaluation of, for instance, the municipality's curriculum, the operational culture and the activities of the ECEC setting.** In Sweden, according to the Curriculum for the Pre-school, the head of the pre-school is responsible for providing the child's guardian with opportunities to participate in the work on quality. In Norway, The Framework Plan states that: 'Kindergartens are pedagogical organisations that must be planned and evaluated. **The children and their parents are entitled to participate in these processes'**[33].

The Eurydice 2019 report found that among the 30 education systems providing recommendations on **the involvement of parents on the governing board of their children's setting,** the most common areas in which they have some influence are teaching, learning, and budget allocation within the setting. Parents' representatives are rarely consulted on admission matters, or on staff issues[34]. Parents are considered as having influence over an area **if they have a voting role on the governing body and if this body itself has a consultative or a decision-making role in the area**. In many countries, parents on the governing board can
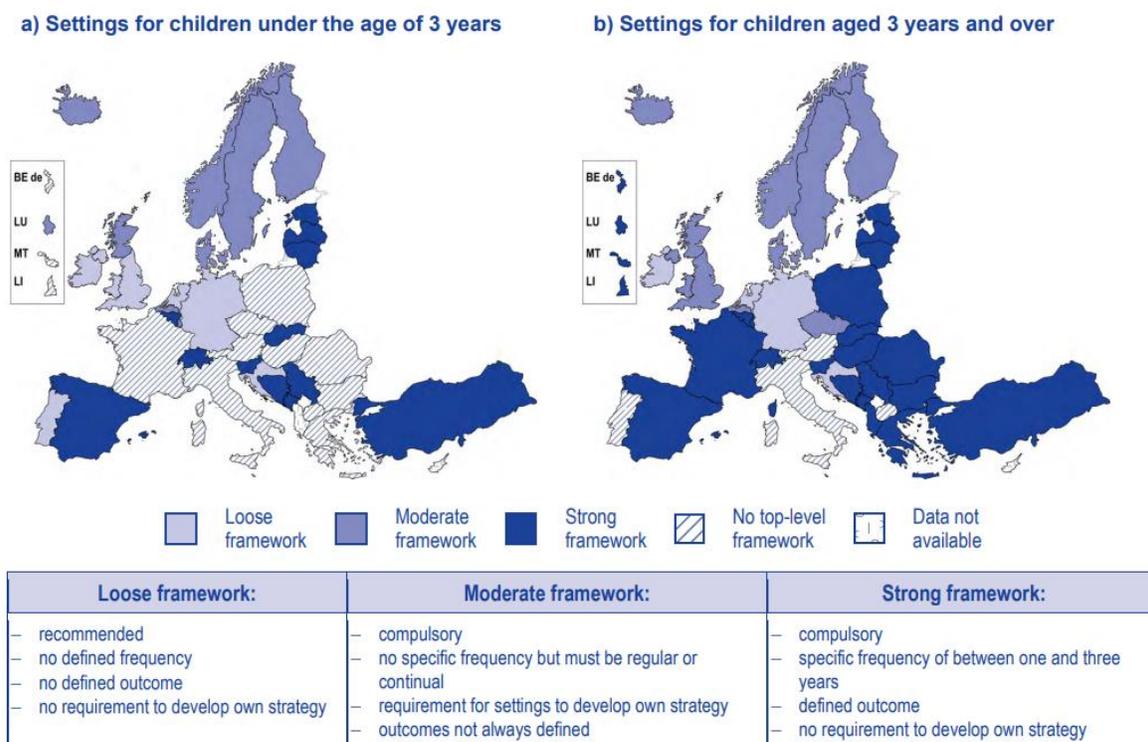
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[33] Norway Framework Plan, UDIR 2017, p. 37
[34] Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition

also get involved with establishing monitoring plans for children's development, well-being and learning (BG, DK, EE, ES, IT, CY, LV, LT, PL, PT, RO, SK, SE, IS, ME, MK, NO)[35]. Please see the figure below:

Figure 1: Parents' areas of influence as members of the governing body of a centre-based ECEC setting, 2018/19

Source: Eurydice Key Data on ECEC 2019 Report

2.1.3 Staff

Alongside evaluation by external bodies, **internal evaluation performed by staff members** of the setting is another component of quality assurance and improvement. The internal evaluation of settings is a quality control process which seeks to evaluate or monitor the performance of the setting, report on overall quality, and suggest ways to improve practice or provision. **Evaluation outcomes may include, for example, a self-evaluation report an annual activity report, a development plan or a revised pedagogical plan**. These are performed primarily by the ECEC setting's own staff. Depending on countries, the framework for the internal evaluation of ECEC settings may refer to top level educational guidelines or other regulations and recommendations.

Not all European countries have regulations or recommendations on the internal evaluation of ECEC settings. This applies particularly to the settings for younger children in countries with separate settings for the two age groups: Belgium (German speaking Community), Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, France, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania and Liechtenstein. Moreover, there are no top-level recommendations or requirements for settings to carry out any internal evaluation during the whole ECEC phase in Italy, Austria and North Macedonia. In Austria, arrangements for the internal evaluation of settings are up to each Land. According to Eurydice's 2019 report, there is no definite correlation between regulations on internal evaluations and improvements in the quality of the setting[36]. For instance, a strongly regulated internal evaluation can translate into an over-formalised process which consists in the simple approval of a report by the members of a governing body and will have little effect on improving the quality of the setting[37].

In the countries where internal evaluations for ECEC settings do exist, Eurydice (2019) employs a categorization of countries according to how "loose", "moderate" or "strong" their internal evaluations

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition
[37] Ibid.

standards for ECEC are. These categories are based on the degrees of how strongly internal evaluations are required, their frequency, and their stated expected outcomes. This is illustrated in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Top-level framework for the internal evaluation of ECEC settings, 2018/19

Loose framework:	Moderate framework:	Strong framework:
– recommended – no defined frequency – no defined outcome – no requirement to develop own strategy	– compulsory – no specific frequency but must be regular or continual – requirement for settings to develop own strategy – outcomes not always defined	– compulsory – specific frequency of between one and three years – defined outcome – no requirement to develop own strategy

Source: Eurydice Key Data in ECEC Report, 2019

As can be seen, in some education systems (i.e. Germany, Ireland, Croatia, the Netherlands for the whole ECEC phase, and Portugal for settings for younger children) a framework for the internal evaluation of ECEC settings exists but can be considered as rather 'loose'. In these education systems, **internal evaluation is not compulsory but is recommended**. In these cases, ECEC settings have a certain degree of autonomy in how they carry out this task as there is no defined frequency or expected outcome. In two of these countries, the situation differs slightly, as in Ireland and Croatia self-evaluation tools are offered to ECEC settings. In Croatia, since 2012/13, the National Centre for the External Evaluation of Education publishes an annual call for ECEC settings that want to carry out self-evaluation according to the systematic process set down in the Handbook for the Self-evaluation of Early Childhood and Pre-school Education Institutions. The process includes a self-evaluation report and the implementation of a development plan produced with the support of the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education[38].

In the majority of education systems, the top-level framework for internal evaluation can be considered as 'strong'. **Internal evaluation is compulsory and has to be carried out at regular intervals**, ranging from annually to every three years. Top-level authorities define the main output of internal evaluation, which can be the production of a self-evaluation report, an annual activity report, a development plan or a

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[38] Ibid.

revision of the setting's pedagogical plan. In Slovenia, self-evaluation is a strict obligation enacted by the Law (ZOFVI, Article No. 49: OFEA_npb_170605), whereby the head teacher (principal of the kindergarten) is held responsible for ensuring and improving quality of ECEC by drawing on self-evaluation report and annual development plans. In Portugal, Law no. 31/2002 establishes the educational evaluation system, targeting public and private preschools, primary and secondary schools: in line with Article 6, self-evaluation is mandatory, and it is carried out permanently with the support of the educational authorities, on the basis of pre-defined criteria[39]. In Lithuania, the head of an educational institution must provide an annual activity report for the municipal council[40]. In Poland, the pre-school head prepares a new supervision plan which is presented to the teachers' council at the beginning of each school year. This plan takes into consideration the results of the previous plan and the priorities established by the Ministry of Education[41].

In Latvia, every two years, education institutions must send their internal evaluation report to their founder (local government), which will evaluate the institution on this basis[42]. In Belgium (French Community), in order to renew their quality certificate, ECEC settings for younger children need to **evaluate the implementation of their improvement plan** every three years and, together with the daycare settings' coordinator from the Birth and Childhood Office, revise their education and care plan and produce a new plan for improving quality[43]. In France, pre-primary school staff **must self-evaluate their school plan** and revise it accordingly. In Luxembourg, pre-primary schools (providing 24ducation précoce et préscolaire) regularly assess the quality of teaching and learning in various areas with respect to the objectives set in the school development plan. On this basis, an extensive evaluation of the school development plan is made every three years in preparation for the new version[44]. In Malta, an internal evaluation of the kindergarten is carried out annually and leads to a new development plan[45].

A small group of countries fall into the 'moderate' category, where **internal evaluation is compulsory but settings are responsible for developing their own strategy**. Usually, top-level regulations put the emphasis on the need to carry out regular or continual internal evaluation, but do not define the exact intervals. T**he outcomes or use made of the internal evaluation results is left to the ECEC settings to determine** in Belgium (Flemish Community, 0-3 provision), Czechia, Denmark, Norway and Sweden[46]. In Finland the main results of these evaluations must be published. In Iceland and Norway, the findings and improvements to be made must be stated in reports or development plans. In Luxembourg, the results of

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[39] As stated in the Law N.º 31/2002 (Art. 6), the following criteria are guiding self-evaluation:
a) Degree of implementation of the school development plan and the way education, teaching and learning of children are provided, taking into account their specific characteristics;
b) Execution level of attainment of activities that provide climate and educational environments that bring about the affective and emotional conditions of school experience, leading to interaction, social integration, learning and development of the personality of the children;
c) Culture of collaboration between members of the educational community.
Source: https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/lei/31-2002-405486
[40] Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

the internal evaluation of settings for younger children must be used to revise the setting's pedagogical plan[47].

In Czechia, the nursery school evaluates its work systematically, comprehensively and regularly, according to a pre-prepared plan. The evaluation tools, methods and techniques are chosen by each nursery school and described in the school's curriculum documents[48]. In Denmark, according to the Act on ECEC", **the head of an ECEC setting is responsible for establishing a culture of evaluation in** the setting with the purpose of developing and improving the pedagogical learning environment. They must also carry out an evaluation at least every second year and the evaluation must be published.[49]. In Norway, all kindergartens must evaluate, on a regular basis, their pedagogical practices in the light of their own plans, the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan. In its annual plan, each kindergarten must explain how it will evaluate its own pedagogical practices[50].

2.1.4 Other stakeholders

The category of other community stakeholders and the extent to which they are currently involved in the M&E of quality ECEC is difficult to be mapped systematically across Europe, mainly because the variety of stakeholders that this category encompasses is so large and because their involvement varies according to local contexts. As such, it was not possible to find accurate and comparable data concerning the involvement of other stakeholders in the M&E of ECEC quality.

However, during the Peer Learning Activity in Lithuania, Working Group members discussed and identified which other stakeholders could be involved in monitoring and evaluating quality in ECEC. The following institutions and representatives were identified as relevant actors, either at national or local level, or both:

- Other ministries beyond than those in charge of ECEC (e.g. social affairs, health...)
- Social services, child protection services, health institutions involved in children's assessment (e.g. for health problems or disabilities)
- National agencies (for education, for evaluation, for curriculum, etc.)
- Local authorities and local politicians
- ECEC employers
- Universities and researchers
- Civil society, including NGOS and representatives of staff and parents
- Teacher training institutions and vocational training institutions
- Cultural institutions (e.g., when it comes to language learning)
- Primary schools
- Trade unions and social partners
- Youth welfare officers
- Other stakeholders could be taken into account on an ad-hoc basis, such as the general public or the media / journalists, who might take the role of whistle-blower pointing to a deficit of quality

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition

In looking at the composition of the governing bodies and councils that influence ECEC settings, the Eurydice 2019 report illustrated that in countries such as Slovenia, the councils of public kindergartens have representatives from the municipality in addition to staff and parent representatives. The role of these representatives is to adopt the development plan and the kindergarten's annual self-evaluation report, and to report on the implementation of the annual work plan. They discuss reports on educational issues and school inspections, and matters submitted by the assembly of pre-school teachers, the parent council as well as representatives of workers' unions[51].

Moreover, in Finland, Sweden, Iceland, and Norway, according to regulations, curricular or framework requirements on ECEC, municipalities are involved in monitoring and evaluation. In Finland, according the Act on ECEC (section 24)[52] "the organisers[53] and producers of early childhood education and care shall evaluate the early childhood education and care they provide and participate in external evaluations of their activities. The key findings of evaluations shall be published." In Sweden, according to the Curriculum for the Pre-school, one of the tasks of the municipality is to continuously evaluate and monitor pre-schools, since the principal organiser of a pre-school – the municipality or operator of an independent pre-school – is responsible for its quality and results[54]. In Iceland, according to Regulation no. 893/2009, educational committees in municipalities are responsible for evaluating and monitoring ECEC in their district[55]. In Norway, according to the Kindergarten Act, municipalities must provide guidance and ensure ECEC settings are run according to the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan[56].

2.2 Methods to involve different stakeholders in M&E of ECEC

There are a variety of tools for evaluating the pedagogical quality of ECEC provision. These include the observation of educational activities, conversations with staff, questionnaires for staff, questionnaires for parents, self-evaluation or self-reflection forms for staff, focus group discussions, guidelines for assessing children's wellbeing and involvement in activities, guidelines for collective data using children's drawings and conversations with children to incorporate children's opinions, and many more. These methods will be critically explored throughout this section, according to each stakeholder group.

It should be noted that there should not be a false dichotomy drawn between 'participatory' versus external evaluation: both internal and external evaluation approaches can be participatory as long as they involve a consultation of the views of staff, children, parents, and other stakeholders.

2.2.1 Children

In terms of approaches to involve children in monitoring and evaluation of the settings they attend, it is essential to firstly consider the Lundy model of child participation. The Lundy model explains the different levels of involving children, and the ways in which involvement can be meaningful. In this way, it points us towards methods of meaningfully engaging children in the M&E of quality ECEC.

Professor Laura Lundy of Queen's University Belfast long recognised that efforts to adhere to hear children's voices were at risk of being symbolic, rather than having a tangible impact on children's ability

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[51] Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition
[52] https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2018/en20180540.pdf
[53] The organisers of ECEC are mainly municipalities.
[54] Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

to influence issues of concern to them. Indeed, research has demonstrated that children's right to *participation* is generally one of the least promoted, and tends to be overlooked in favour of children's rights to *provision* (such as education and healthcare) and to *protection* (for example from abuse or neglect).[57] This imbalance can also be attributed to uncertainties among staff, policymakers and other stakeholders around how to effectively encourage and facilitate child participation. Professor Lundy's 2006 paper, titled '"Voice" is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', assessed key barriers that may prevent the implementation of children's right to participation from being 'meaningful and effective', and put forward a new four-part model for effective participation[58] termed the 'Lundy Model' of child participation.

The four-part Lundy Model emphasises the **four key dimensions of space, voice, audience, and influence, all of which are considered essential ingredients for meaningful and effective participation** (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3: The Lundy Model of child participation
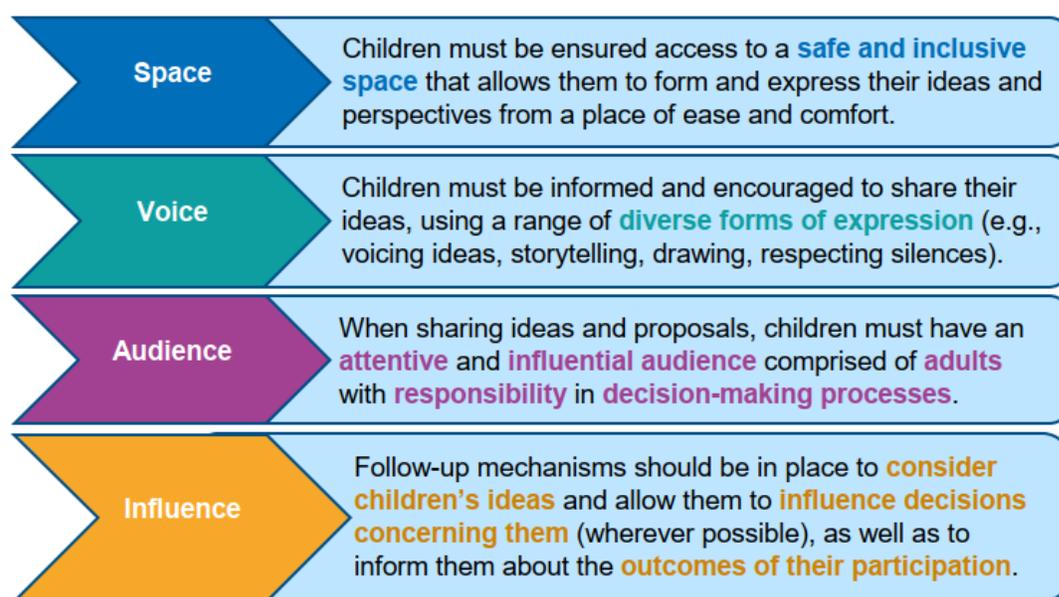
Since its inception in 2006, the **Lundy Model has gained international recognition as a best-practice approach for developing methods, initiatives and mechanisms to facilitate child participation**. The Model is now officially recommended by the European Commission[59] and has also been utilised by the Council of Europe[60]. Furthermore, it served as the basis for the Irish National Framework for Children and Young

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[57] Habashi, J., Wright, L., & Hathcoat, J. D. (2012). Patterns of human development indicators across constitutional analysis of children's rights to protection, provision, and participation. Social Indicators Research, 105(1), 63-73. doi:10.1007/s11205-010-9763-8

[58] Lundy, L. (2006). ''Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. British Educational Research Journal, 33(6): 927-942

[59] European Commission (n. d.). The Lundy model of child participation: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/lundy_model_of_participation.pdf

[60] https://www.qub.ac.uk/Research/case-studies/childrens-participation-lundy-model.html

People's Participation in Decision-Making.[61] The Finnish VALSSI approach also incorporates evaluation principles that builds on and incorporates the Lundy model.

Lundy's model stresses the importance of the second aspect of Article 12 – that children's views not only should be heard but be given due weight and consideration – and calls for **'participation with purpose'**[62]. The monitoring and evaluation of ECEC therefore constitutes a prime opportunity for children to engage in meaningful participation: not only is the M&E of ECEC highly relevant to children due to its examination of the quality of the services they receive as beneficiaries (matters concerning them), but it tends to involve, by default, designated time for evaluative activities (space), the attention and consideration of adults in key positions of influence (audience), and follow-up activities through which the outcomes of the evaluations will be used to drive improvements in quality (influence). The monitoring and evaluation of ECEC quality can therefore be considered a privileged context for the implementation of children's right to participation.[63]

A range of tools for gathering children's views have been identified at EU level and within individual Member States. At the EU and International level, several resources have been developed to provide guidance on best-practice approaches for involving children in research (see Table 5 below). The specificity of these resources varies, with some focusing exclusively on child participation in M&E and others placing a broader focus on child participation overall. Furthermore, most of these resources (with the exception of the OECD publication on Quality assurance and improvement in the early education and care sector) cover children in general and do not specifically target those of ECEC age.

Table 5: EU and international approaches for involving children in M&E, research and consultation processes

EU or International Organisation	Resource description
Better Evaluation	*Monitoring and Evaluating with Children – a Short Guide*[64] This guide emphasises the importance of involving children in the monitoring and evaluation of programmes targeting them. An overview of the benefits and challenges/constraints of conducting research with children are also provided, as well as key guidance on critical issues in research with children such as: • At which stages can we involve children? • What techniques can be used? • How can we be sure that the children are safe at all times? A step-by-step guide to the procedures for consulting children is also presented, from the point of inviting the children to participate and planning the investigation to analysing the results.

[61] Tusla Child and Family Agency (2015). Toward the development of a Participation Strategy for Children and Young People. National Guidance & Local Implementation. Child and Family Agency. Available at https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/toward_the_development_of_a_participation_strategy_0.pdf

[62] https://childfriendlygovernance.org/blog/laura-lundy?fbclid=IwAR2KJfMAvy26c5v4JZ1iSiqm0_XXBWxFGglJr3l-pGaLT23obb0GqHKDPTw

[63] Sheridan, S. (2007). Dimensions of pedagogical quality in preschool. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 15(2), 197-217. doi:10.1080/09669760701289151

[64] https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/monitoring.pdf

UNICEF	*Guidance on Child and Adolescent Participation as part of Phase III of the preparatory action for a European Child Guarantee Version 1.0*[65] This guide provides a rights-based perspective on the importance of ensuring child and adolescent participation overall, as a key priority in fulfilling the European Child Guarantee. Section 1 provides an overview of the concept of child participation and focuses on different frameworks for child and adolescent participation (including an overview of the Lundy Model), whereas Section 2 provides guidance on how to engage children in the design, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and services. Section 5 focuses on child participation on monitoring and/or evaluation activities in particular.
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)	*Quality assurance and improvement in the early education and care sector*[66]. In this policy brief, the inclusion of children in the M&E of quality in ECEC is covered under Policy consideration 8: Engage service users in the quality process. Rather than proposing specific tools or methods, the policy brief makes a higher-level case for the establishment of arrangements to gather the views of children at the level of policy as well as within individual ECEC settings
Save The Children	*Tools for monitoring and evaluating children's participation*[67] This booklet provides a step-by-step guide to monitoring and evaluating children's participation using participatory research methods. It introduces some core M&E tools such as interviews, focus group discussions, observation, surveys, and stories of most significant change. It also introduces participatory tools, many of which have been specifically adapted. However, this guide focuses specifically on the M&E of child participation, rather than the M&E of quality or other outcomes in a programme targeting children.
European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education	*Voices into Action: Promoting learner and family participation in educational decision-making*[68]. The aim of this document is to provide step-by-step guidance on engaging children and their families in decisions concerning their education, with a specific focus on achieving inclusive education. The document puts forward the 'Voices into Action Framework', which was developed with the Lundy Model of child participation as a basis but places additional emphasis on including children from a wide range of backgrounds and employing a wide range of participatory approaches so as to ensure that all children can participate. Section 5, on 'Putting the Framework into Action', provides country examples from Malta, Iceland and Norway from which common lessons are drawn.

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[65] https://www.unicef.org/eca/documents/guidance-child-and-adolescent-participation
[66] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/quality-assurance-and-improvement-in-the-early-education-and-care -sector_774688bf-en
[67] https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/toolkit-monitoring-and-evaluating-childrens-participation-tools-monitoring-and-evaluating/
[68] https://www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/VIA-synthesis

At the level of individual countries, a range of tools have been developed to gather children's perspectives on the quality of their ECEC settings specifically. Due to the challenges involved in conducting research directly with children, countries often opt for data collection tools that use adult stakeholders such as ECEC staff, inspectors or other external evaluators as mediators of children's views.

A systematic literature review commissioned by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) identified six categories of different methods that can be used with ECEC children (multimethod research and mosaic approach; visual methods; observation and ethnography; children as agents and explorers; language-based methods; creative and play-based methods)[69]. **The most prominent of these was the mosaic approach and multimethod research** (where methods are combined and where each method creates a tile to provide a bigger picture). Many times throughout the research, it was found that **children enjoy engaging in interviews while walking somewhere or taking pictures or drawing pictures**. The second largest category of participatory methods was indeed using **visual methods, such as taking pictures, drawing pictures, or shooting videos. Observation and ethnographic methods were generally used with the younger children**. As it is challenging to use participatory methods with younger children who are not yet verbal, the most common approach with them is to use observation[70]. There are therefore questions on how to increase children's participation when adults are observing them.

The remaining, less frequently used, participatory methods are in working with children as agents, where children are collecting data and discussing results. Another method is in using language based, such as individual and group interviews, group stories, and finally, creative and play based methods, where children can express themselves through play.

The "Achtung Kinderperspektiven!" (Attention children's perspective!) project funded by the Bertelsmann Stiftung also researched methods for gathering children's perspectives in ECEC. They found that children want to develop their voice as unique individuals, and they want to be seen and acknowledged for who they are. Children want ECEC centers to be a place they know well, where they can contribute, help make decisions and complain: they want to get involved, have a say, help decide, be visible through their work, feel their complaints are heard and considered[71]. In their relationships with pedagogues, this research project found that children want to feel safe and appreciated, and have their rights respected[72]. Children want ECEC centers to be connected to the surrounding social environment and be a place where their family is welcome.

There are different wants of conducting participatory research with children as illustrated in the diagram below:

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[69] https://karvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/FINEEC_Guidelines-and-recommendations_web.pdf
[70] FINEEC research
[71] https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/unsere-projekte/fruehkindliche-bildung/projektnachrichten/achtung-kinderperspektiven-mit-kindern-kita-qualitaet-entwickeln
[72] Ibid.

Methods of participatory research and practice research with children

- Group discussion
- Participant observation
- video-based observation
- Improvement walk

- Social space exploration
- Complaint wall
- Crazy, beautiful day
- Picture book viewing
- Children paint their kindergarten
- Pair painting interview
- Kindergarten tour by children
- Children photograph their kindergarten

Source: Nentwig-Gesemann,I./Walther,B./Bakels,E./Munk,L.M. (2020) :Achtung Kinderperspektiven! Mit Kindern KiTa-Qualität entwickeln. Methodenschatz II :Erhebung, Auswertungund Dokumentation.

This mix of methods ensures that all children have the opportunity to express themselves. It is crucial to recognise that not all tools should require verbal interaction or expression, to accommodate the developmental capabilities of younger children, as well as children with special education needs or disability.

The tools identified so far can be divided into the following three categories:

1. Those that gather staff's perceptions of children's views;

2. Those that gather external inspector's perceptions of children's views;

3. Those that gather children's views directly from the children themselves.

Examples of the different types of available tools are explored in detail in Chapter 4.

Although using staff, parents and inspectors as adult mediators of children's views can help to sidestep some of the challenges of consulting perspectives from the especially young demographic of ECEC-aged children, the Better Evaluation knowledge platform cautions against this approach, emphasising in its short guide to M&E with children that: "[c]hildren's views of the success and failure of an activity may not be the same as those of the adults involved" ; " many adults who speak on behalf of children are not sufficiently well informed of their views, [instead providing] their own point of view"[73]. For children's participation in M&E to be a reality, it is therefore important to use tools (whether these are qualitative and 'in-person' or quantitative and digitalised) that capture children's views as directly as possible.

2.2.2 Parents and families

There are various ways of including parents, families, and primary caregivers of children in evaluating the quality of education and care of ECEC. One approach is through **including parents in the councils or**

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[73] https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/monitoring.pdf, pg. 5

governing bodies of ECEC centres, whereby they can provide input into the M&E approaches of the individual setting. It should be noted that this type of involvement includes a select representative group of parents who wish to take on the responsibility of being on the council or governing body of the ECEC setting; it doesn't involve *all* parents, although their views should ideally be represented through the group of parents on the council or board. In Denmark, it is required by law that the parental council - in municipal, self-governing and out-sourced day care centres - are involved in internal evaluations. In Slovenia representatives of parents – together with staff and learners - form the expert bodies of kindergartens, which can conduct critical evaluation of educational activities by individual classes or by kindergarten entirely. In the scope of annual planning, the councils of kindergartens evaluate once a year the realisation of the annual work plan: the assembly of head-teacher, council of parent and school council examine once a year the kindergarten report, assess the results and effects of the programme and form opinions on the report, as well as propose changes. In this way, it is possible to make reasonable association between development and evaluation processes at the institution.

Some of the typical approaches on involving parents in evaluating the quality of education and care in their child's ECEC setting or understanding their views on the ECEC system in general includes carrying out **interviews, surveys or focus groups**. Such methods **are recommended**, for instance in Spain, for the whole ECEC phase, or in Hungary, Malta, Poland and Portugal for older children[74].

In a few countries, **questionnaires** have been **designed at the top-level** to support ECEC settings in involving parents' in their **internal evaluation**. In Estonia and Norway, top-level authorities themselves regularly administer questionnaires to parents and make data available to kindergarten owners and ECEC settings on their individual results, in order to support the internal quality assurance process[75]. In Croatia, the self- evaluation process set up by the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education involves representatives of parents in a group established for this purpose, providing opportunities to parents to complete questionnaires[76].

Parents' opinions can also be collected as part of the **procedures set for the external evaluation of ECEC settings**. Standardised **questionnaires** are administered to parents in Montenegro and the United Kingdom (Scotland) over the whole ECEC phase, as well as in Malta, Portugal and Albania in the last years of ECEC[77]. In the Netherlands, **parents are involved in the inspections of settings** for younger children carried out by the Municipal Health Service through a consultation with the parents' committee[78]. In Romania, some indicators of the framework used by the inspectorate to evaluate the ECEC settings for older children (National Specific Quality Standards for Preschool Education) focus on parents' opinions.

It should be noted that parents' involvement in the M&E of ECEC, similar to children's involvement, is generally bound to evaluating individual ECEC settings, typically the one their children attend, rather than collecting broader views on the ECEC system nation-wide. There are exceptions to this, such as where surveys are carried out to map the current situation of ECEC provision, as in the case of Estonia, the Belgian(Flemish) 2018 childcare survey, Eurofound, and the KiBS survey in Germany. More specifically, in the Estonian parent survey and in the family survey developed for consulting parents with children under-

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[74] Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

3 years attending daycare provision in Belgium (Flemish community) , the aim was to feed into national policy-making about ECEC, helping understand if there are sufficient ECEC places and how to meet future needs.

Through surveys and questionnaires parents are consulted on a variety of topics. Typically, the primary questions concern **cooperation and communication with parents, safety issues, perceptions on the quality of children's learning and care, the attentiveness of staff towards children, the facilities and environment of the ECEC setting, practicalities such as the convenience of opening hours, and overall satisfaction**[79]. Other areas are also addressed, such as child well-being (Malta and Norway), adapting to children's needs or supporting transitions (Norway), outdoor activities (Portugal and Norway) and staff (Croatia)[80]. Some parent surveys feature questions about the norms and values in the ECEC centre, such as gender equality and peer-to-peer interaction (Estonia[81] and Sweden[82]), and assess the extent to which parents perceive they are involved in ECEC activities or decision-making in their child's learning (Portugal[83], KiBS survey in Germany[84]).

It can be widely said that parental surveys ask parents about their feelings, experiences, and perceptions, providing a subjective glimpse into parent opinion, rather than asking them quantitative questions on measurable results or hard data (e.g. "how satisfied are you with group size in your child's ECEC centre?" rather than "what is the group size in your child's ECEC centre?"). Most often parental surveys use closed questions or rating scales to assess parents' satisfaction levels, rather than open-ended questions. Only in few surveys are parents asked for how things can be improved (i.e. Estonian parent survey). There may be several reasons for this: in the case of Norway, it is to protect the anonymity of parents by preventing the revealing of personal characteristics through open-ended answers. In other cases, it may be due to practical reasons of processing large amounts of surveys (logistically and financially), or even as a method to avoid survey fatigue and make it easier for parents to fill in the surveys. Another reason that closed questions with closed answers (rating scales, multiple choice options) might be preferable is that they are easier to translate and process across language diversity.

Most parental surveys are conducted online, reaching out to parents via an online link or email, although there are surveys that reach out via postal mail (such as the Belgian Flemish Families survey). It should be noted that the inclusivity and accessibility of parental surveys depends largely on the clarity of the language, as well as the availability of different languages for the diverse linguistic backgrounds of parents.

Another approach to including parents in M&E processes is documenting parents' experiences in ECEC by using narrative and visual tools, as for example the "service dossier" developed by the CNR-ISTC research team on Quality of social and educational contexts in Italy[85]. By documenting parents' views and

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

[81] https://centar.ee/en/tehtud-tood/preschool-education-and-childcare-in-estonia-in-2020

[82] https://www.skolinspektionen.se/globalassets/02-beslut-rapporter-stat/granskningsrapporter/regeringsrapporter/redovisning-av-regeringsuppdrag/2018/forskolans-kvalitet-och-maluppfyllelse-slutrapport-feb-2018.pdf

[83] https://www.igec.mec.pt/content_01.asp?BtreeID=03/01&treeID=03/01/03/00&auxID=&newsID=2762#content

[84] https://www.dji.de/en/about-us/projects/projekte/entwicklung-von-rahmenbedingungen-in-der-kindertagesbetreuung-erik/hintergrund-von-erik/kinder-1.html

[85] Picchio, M., Di Giandomenico, I., & Musatti, T. (2014). The use of documentation in a participatory system of evaluation. Early Years, 34(2), 133-145.

collective discussions on their children's experiences in ECEC, the service dossier can serve as a tool to verify whether children and parent experiences in early childhood centres are congruent with the educational goals pursued by ECEC policies at municipal level. To this end, the service Dossier – adopted by 0-3 services in several municipalities of norther-central Italy – can contribute to keep a detailed record of the whole participatory evaluation process, by connecting quality improvement of pedagogical practices to the daily experiences of children and families in ECEC.

Below is a table summarizing the tools and methods mentioned above that are used to involve parents and families in M&E of ECEC.

Table 7: Summary of tools and methods used to involve parents, families and care-givers in the M&E of ECEC

Tool or method used	Country / context
Parent representation and involvement in council or governing body of ECEC settings	Estonia, Spain (some Autonomous Communities), Lithuania, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, Belgium (French and German-speaking Communities), Bulgaria, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Albania and some cantons in Switzerland, Netherlands (see Eurydice 2019 Key Data Report), Turkey[86]
Parent surveys (telephone / online / face-to-face)	Estonia, Norway, Croatia, Montenegro, United Kingdom (Scotland), Malta, Portugal and Albania, Belgium (Flemish Community, 0-3 provision), Germany (KiBS survey), Sweden, Eurofound
Questionnaires to parents for internal evaluations	Estonia, Norway, Finland, Croatia, Turkey
Questionnaires to parents for external evaluations	Montenegro, United Kingdom (Scotland), Malta, Portugal, Albania, Sweden
Focus groups	Spain, Hungary, Malta, Poland and Portugal
Parents consulted or involved during external evaluations	Netherlands, Romania
Parents consulted via dialogue during internal evaluations (by staff)	Denmark, Norway, Finland
Documenting parent experiences	Italy (0-3 provision, municipal level)

2.2.3 Staff

One of the most common methods of involving staff in monitoring & evaluation of ECEC is through self-evaluation during internal evaluation processes. Many countries mandate internal and self-evaluation procedures in ECEC centres which provide ECEC staff with formalised opportunities to share their views on the services they provide.[87] The prevalence of self-evaluation approaches across EU MS is well-aligned with the 2019 Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC, which explicitly calls for Member States to include **self-evaluation tools and questionnaires** as part of transparent and coherent monitoring and

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[86] In Turkey there are school-family councils that directly have the right to take part in the decisions taken at the school level.

[87] European Education Area Strategic Framework: Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care. (2022). Monitoring and evaluating quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): background note: https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&groupID=3811

evaluation processes.[88] Self-evaluation tools allow **ECEC staff to share their views without the surveillance of external evaluators**, which may otherwise have a negative influence on the openness of their responses.

The 2019 Council Recommendation suggests that tools such as the Inclusive Early Childhood Education Self-Reflection Tool developed by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education should be promoted and used more widely to involve staff in M&E[89]. This tool was developed within a 2-year project (2015-2017), which set out to identify, analyse and subsequently promote the main characteristics of high quality inclusive early childhood education for all children from the age of 3 to the start of primary education. As 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 was designed to enable 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.

There are variations of similar self-evaluation toolkits for staff that will explored in further depth in section 4.3. Most of these tools are accompanied by guidelines or trainings on how staff can best critically reflect on their practice by focusing on specific quality areas, and therefore identify areas for development (e.g. the self-assessment tool and MOOC developed within the PARTICIPA Erasmus+ project; Finland's digital VALSSI-system and national evaluation tools; MeMoQ self-evaluation tool in childcare settings for babies and toddlers developed in the Flemish Community of Belgium).

In Slovenia, the National school of leadership in education and other public research institutes provide Head Teachers and education staff with support in the process of self-evaluation, and promote the development of self-evaluation skills and capacities of kindergartens and schools[90], namely through

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[88] Council Recommendation of 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems, p.9

[89] https://www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/inclusive-early-childhood-education-environment-self-reflection-tool

[90] The publication "Quality in kindergartens" (*Kakovost v vrtcih,* 2002) lay down the foundations for evaluation and quality development in ECEC: it contains questionnaires and rating scales for professionals, managers, and parents. Questionnaires and rating scales on assessment of the quality in the kindergarten are published in the book Quality in kindergartens (Kakovost v vrtcu: https://knjigarna.ff.uni-lj.si/izpis_ena.asp?katera=401): they were prepared on the basis of the current curriculum - which is now in the process of renewal - and practices in Slovenian kindergartens. They cover different levels and areas of quality: 1) *Questionnaire for professional staff* - covers all levels of quality levels, mainly indirect (e.g. professional development and employee satisfaction, cooperation between different kindergartens and other institutions) and process (e.g. implementation of the curriculum); 2) *Questionnaire for management staff* - covers structural and indirect level of quality 3. *Questionnaire for parents* - covers all quality areas and levels, mainly the cooperation between parents and kindergarten 4. *Rating scale* for professional staff comparison *of the actually and desirable work in the kindergarten* 5. *Rating scale: Process quality*. The last two are mainly focused on the process quality and designed for the self-evaluation of professional staff 6. *Scale of social interaction between the preschool teacher and the children* (author J.J. Arnett, adapted by Marjanovic, Bajc, Fekonja) 7. *Rating scale on the inclusion and well-being of the preschool children* (author F. Laevers, adapted by Marjanovic, Fekonja) 8. *Instructions for partially structured interview with the child* intended to obtain a view of the children as participants in early childhood education in kindergarten on the environment, staff, activities, social relationships and the rules that they perceive in the group/classroom.

Kindergartens have to follow the following steps: problem definition and definition of areas of self-evaluation, choice of tools and data collection, data processing, analysis, interpretation of data, preparation of a quality assurance plan.

training and network of educational institutions. Public research institutes complement their support to raise common awareness about quality in education.

Some countries **consult ECEC staff through interviews with inspectors as part of external evaluation processes**. For example, in Ireland external inspectors arrange meetings with management and pedagogical leaders during inspections, observing staff practices and reviewing documentation, engaging in professional dialogue with early years educators. Inspector visits are usually scheduled in advance to arrange for meetings with various ECEC staff at the beginning of the inspection process. Staff are also involved in the follow-up of inspections, whereby draft findings are communicated to management, lead educators, and early years educators, providing them with opportunities for clarification and discussions about how settings can develop through implementing the actions advised[91]. **Another approach of involving ECEC staff in M&E is to rely on their unique position in being able to facilitate participatory research with children**. This is because in terms of consulting children and involving them in research, ECEC staff may be able to provide better information than external evaluators due to their familiarity with the children, which is an important factor to keep in mind when consulting feedback directly from children. For example, whereas an external evaluator may interpret a child on their own as being 'isolated', an ECEC staff member may interpret the same child as being in their comfort zone due to knowing that they need time alone to recharge.

ECEC staff can also be involved in consultation towards national policy development in ECEC, which is a step beyond the M&E of the individual ECEC settings that internal evaluations focus on. For example, in Ireland, policy consultation processes are often designed to promote the involvement of stakeholders including educators in policy development. Stakeholders may be invited to participate in open consultations, policy advisory groups, multi-stakeholder events such as briefings and conferences, questionnaires and surveys, as well as focus groups.

2.2.4   Other stakeholders

Community members beyond the immediate day-to-day life of the ECEC setting may also have valuable insights to share on the extent to which ECEC settings and/or policies are adequately meeting the unique needs of their service-users, particularly when such needs are context-specific. However, it is difficult to make conclusive remarks about the methods used to involve other stakeholders since, firstly, they are a very heterogeneous group who have very varying relationships to ECEC centres, and secondly, involving other stakeholders in the M&E of ECEC is not as extensively researched as involving children, families, and staff.

To effectively address the question of how best to involve other stakeholders in M&E processes, it will first be necessary to define the scope of monitoring - either at national, local or setting level - then developing a mapping of who these 'other stakeholders' may be, what special knowledge and added value they have the potential to contribute to the M&E process, and how they can most effectively and meaningfully be involved in the M&E process.

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[91] Ireland presentation from PLA

In Germany, the ERiK project[92] developed a monitoring model inspired by the EU funded study CoRe on "Competent ECEC Systems"[93], including the different stakeholders and levels who are responsible for quality. These stakeholders are each covered by a special survey under the ERiK Monitoring approach. The figure below shows how this operates:

Figure 4: ERiK monitoring model of different stakeholders in ECEC
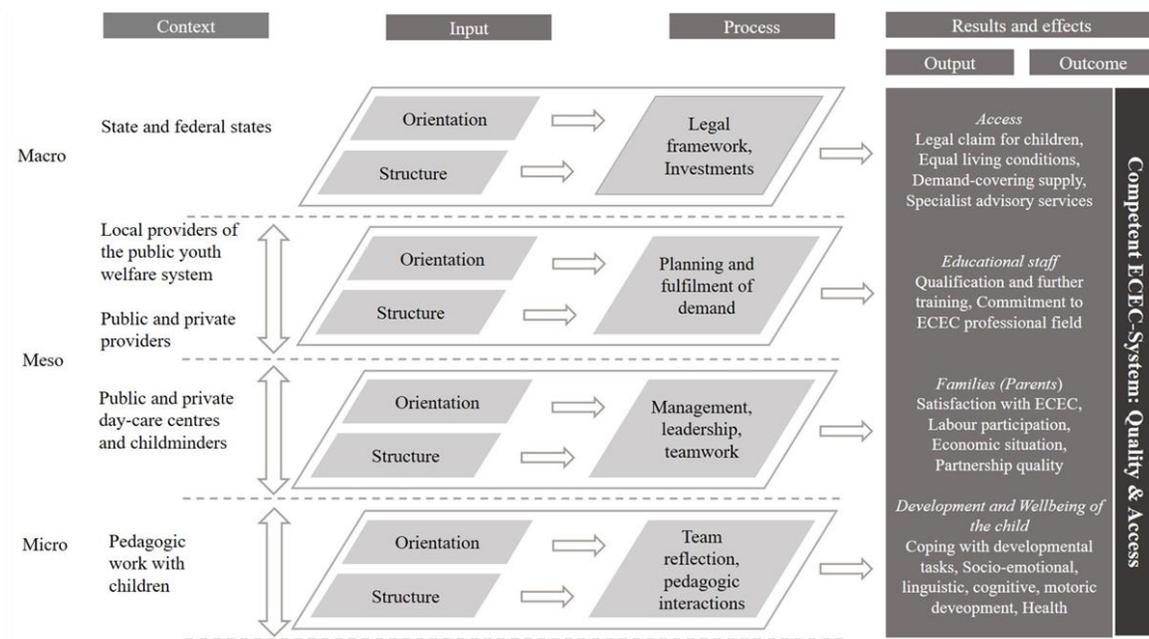
Source: Riedel et al. (2021) in: ERiK Forschungsbericht I. Konzeption und Befunde des indikatorengestützten Monitorings zum KiQuTG

This model is based on the understanding that monitoring ECEC quality cannot be restricted to the level of ECEC settings (the micro-level in the model), since the overall quality of the ECEC system equally depends on the actions of other relevant actors on different system levels (meso- and macro-) at which policy and framework conditions of the ECEC system are shaped. The contributions of the actors on the micro-, meso- and macro-level and the quality and consistency of their interactions shape the overall quality of the ECEC system.

To conceptualize a monitoring that supports the development of the ECEC system as a whole towards higher quality and competence, actors on the meso- and macro- level are included in the German monitoring approach. Besides parental and child surveys, there are regular (bi-annual) representative

[92] Riedel, B./Klinkhammer, N./Kuger, S. (2021): Grundlagen des Monitorings: Qualitätskonzept und Indikatorenmodell. In: Klinkhammer, N./Kalicki, B./Kuger, S./Meinter-Teubner, Ch./Riedel, B./ Schacht, D./Rauschenbach, Th. (eds.): ERiK Forschungsbericht I. Konzeption und Befunde des indikatorengestützten Monitorings zum KiQuTG. Bielefeld: wbv MediaGmbH&Co.KG, pp. 27-41.

[93] Urban, M., Vandenbroeck, M., Van Laere, K., Lazzari, A., & Peeters, J. (2012). Towards competent systems in early childhood education and care. Implications for policy and practice. *European Journal of Education*, 47(4), 508-526. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ejed.12010

surveys of ECEC staff, ECEC centre leaders, ECEC providers, childminders and local Youth Welfare Offices, addressing their different tasks and responsibilities within the ECEC system and the cooperation among them. The Länder (states) also are obliged to describe their policies towards quality development under the "Act on Good Early Childhood Education and Care" and the following "KiTa Quality Act"[94].

Consequently, given the various perspectives on quality in the context of monitoring, quality is not only considered as a derived construct but as a "multi-perspective and discursive construct created by ongoing negotiation and design processes at all levels of the ECEC system.

3. What are the key challenges in involving these different stakeholders in M&E of ECEC?

While there are many benefits of involving children, parents, staff and other stakeholders in a participatory M&E process, these are counterbalanced by the significant and distinctive challenges involved in conducting research with each of these groups. **These challenges revolve primarily around 1) research ethics and safeguarding, 2) identifying appropriate tools, 3) ensuring research quality, relevance, and coordination, 4) ensuring that all the actors – including those who tend to be marginalized – are given voice and agency , and 5) ensuring that M&E results do not lead to comparisons and competition or communicate unintentional messages.**

Ethical considerations feature heavily in any decision to conduct research with individuals. For participants to provide informed consent, they need to be adequately informed about the purposes of the research and the ways in which their responses and personal data will be used. This is a particularly challenging issue in research with children, as they are by definition below the age of consent and permission can typically only be provided on their behalf by parents. In this light, it is important to ensure that relevant data are collected in relation to the intended purposes of M&E, and that purposes, values and principles are coherently aligned in guiding M&E processes as ethical practice.

Moreover, with a large amount of decentralized and dispersed stakeholders conducting and participating in M&E, there also arises the challenge of **ensuring that data collected remains private and safe**. This relates also to the challenge of protecting whistleblowers and those who express critical views; if their data and their rights to criticism are not protected, these actors can become very exposed and potentially face negative consequences to their participation in M&E.

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[94]In German legislation, quality development in day-care centres and in child day care is understood as a task for society as a whole. Since 2019, the Federal Government has therefore been supporting the Länder with additional funds for quality development measures in child day care in order to further develop quality nationwide and to make a contribution to creating equal living conditions for growing up in the Federal territory. With the Act on the Further Development of Quality and Participation in Child Day Care (Gesetz zur Weiterentwicklung der Qualität und zur Teilhabe in der Kindertagesbetreuung), the so-called Good Child Day Care Act (Gute-KiTa-Gesetz), the Federal Government provided about Euro 5.5 billion for this purpose until 2022. With the Second Act on the Further Development of Quality and Participation in Child Day Care (Zweites Gesetz zur Weiterentwicklung der Qualität und zur Teilhabe in der Kindertagesbetreuung), the so-called Day-Care Centre Quality Act (KiTa-Qualitätsgesetz), the Federal Government is providing the Länder with a total of an additional Euro 4 billion for 2023 and 2024.
Source: https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/germany/early-childhood-education-and-care

Furthermore, the **best available tools** to collect data from each of these groups may vary dramatically depending on key participant characteristics such as their age, education levels and availability. For example, written surveys can only be used with participants from the point of literacy, and are therefore largely out of scope for most ECEC-aged children. In contrast, face-to-face methods such as interviews or focus groups may be possible for parents, but less feasible if they have limited availability due to work and childcare responsibilities. Moreover, M&E processes may result in fatigue among implementers and participants if tools are not clear and efficient: lengthy surveys or interviews may disengage participants, possible provoking their withdrawal or incompletion of the task, and dissuading them from future involvement.

Another important question when engaging with children, parents, and other stakeholders in M&E is **how to triangulate results, in particular when perceptions of quality differ** between children, parents, staff, other stakeholders and external evaluators. Indeed when M&E becomes decentralized and is based on the inputs of various stakeholders, while there might be a larger evidence base of data, this evidence base might be patchy if data collection is not carried out consistently. The 2nd WG report discusses the **challenges in coordinating M&E functions, processes and tools, such as aligning M&E processes in complex governance arrangements** according to which ECEC provision is regulated, funded and managed. All of this co-ordination can lead to a **fragmented data architecture** which has a negative impact on the usability of data for developing comprehensive quality improvement initiatives. There can also be the challenge of **inconsistencies in data collection**, and gaps between quality assurance and improvement mechanisms due to a lack of coordination across bodies responsible for M&E. **Aligning external and internal evaluation processes and tools for quality enhancement is another challenge**, since for example, data collected only through self-evaluation processes raises the issue of reliability. There is therefore a need to ensure that insights collected from various stakeholders is converted into interpretable data that is useable at different levels of the system. Moreover, in contexts of multi-layered and decentralised governance where coordinating M&E efforts across levels succeeds in striking a balance among all the tensions reported above, **M&E can be a substantial task with potentially high costs**.

Next, there are **challenges to ensuring that all the actors - including those who tend to be marginalized – are given voice and agency in M&E processes**. When consulting children, parents, and staff, for instance, a balanced sampling approach is recommended to **ensure that as wide a spectrum as possible of stakeholder views are represented**. In the case of children, this would require including children of a variety of ages and levels of ability and, importantly, children with special educational needs or disabilities as well as children falling within other categories of disadvantage. In terms of sourcing other stakeholders for consultation, a primary challenge would be to identify and recruit those 'community-level' stakeholders (e.g. social workers, community centres, workers from NGOs or charities supporting local families) who would be best-informed to provide valid and useful contributions to the M&E process.

Additionally, the publication of M&E results should be handled with care in order to ensure that the benefits of publication outweigh the risks. While there are benefits to publishing M&E results for individual ECEC centres, such as facilitating transparency and accountability of service providers to children, parents and the general public – making visible 'good practice' examples – there are also risks. If the publication of M&E results is not handled with caution, might lead to increases in competitiveness between ECEC centres: this, in turn, might disincentivise collaboration and exchange of good practice among centres. In cases where the assessment of children's educational outcomes is used as a marker of ECEC quality, providers might be incentivised to increase selectivity of access, thus contributing social

stratification in attendance (where better-advantaged and more data-literate parents select higher-performing centres, resulting in a concentration of disadvantaged children in lower-performing centres and the perpetuation of educational inequality).

M&E processes may also unintentionally make strong statements about what does and does not matter in ECEC quality, **as well as whose voices matter,** as a result of the decisions made about what to measure and who to consult in M&E activities. For instance, an M&E process that does not consider the perspective of parents and children, or uses tools which are not adequately tailored to encompass a plurality of voices- including those of children and families experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, special educational needs and/or disabilities- may imply that their views are not important. To avoid these pitfalls, it is suggested that ECEC quality be monitored and evaluated from as flexible and holistic a perspective as possible, for example by designing tools and processes in collaboration with stakeholders from a range of backgrounds[95].

As the challenges of, and best methods for, consulting these stakeholders are unique to each particular group, the following sections of this input paper look at children (3.1), parents and families (3.2), staff (3.3), and other stakeholders (3.4) in turn.

3.1 Children

Due to the very young age of children who are typically engaged in ECEC, there are a unique range of challenges involved in collecting valid and reliable data on their perspectives. These primarily concern **1) language limitations and the child-accessibility of the concepts being covered, 2) the power relationship between the children and the adults collecting data to gather their views , 3) the ability to maintain children's interest in the research task, and 4) the extensive skills required to conduct research with children.**

In terms of language and comprehension, Adler et al. (2019) emphasise that knowledge levels and communication styles can vary dramatically across ages, and that research approaches must be closely tailored to children's levels of development and comprehension. Focus groups and interviews are valuable in that they mitigate the challenges posed by low or non-existent literacy levels, however the questions and prompts should be phrased in simple language. In particular, young children may struggle to understand excessively vague or general questions. It some cases, children may also struggle to verbally describe the answer they want to provide (in which case it might be more suitable to 'act it out' via role-play[96]).

Another important note to keep in mind when conducting research with children is that **the validity of their responses may be affected by the power dynamic between the children and the adults gathering their views** . Focus groups have been underlined as a preferable approach to interviews due to the advantage of having children 'outnumber' the adults, and the opportunities that this may create for them to build off of each other's responses. However, moderators of focus groups are also advised to adhere to

[95] 1st WG report p.13

[96] Adler, K., Salantera¨, S. & M. Zumstein-Shaha. (2019). 'Focus Group Interviews in Child, Youth, and Parent Research: an Integrative Literature Review. *The International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18. pp. 1-15

a range of verbal and non-verbal best practices to maximise the children's sense of security and associated honesty[97]:

- Using ice-breakers to ensure that each child in a group has the opportunity to speak early on in the session, thus encouraging them to speak up at later points in the research exercise;
- Using prompts such as 'what does everyone else think?', 'tell me more', or 'do others have different thoughts'? to encourage inputs from shyer individuals;
- Avoiding overly-positive expressions such as 'terrific!', 'great!', or 'cool!', as this may discourage children from sharing any inputs that could be perceived as less impressive;
- Avoiding repeating the same question more than once, as it may lead children to believe that their initial response was incorrect.

Finally, maintaining a child's interest and engagement in the proposed task is essential for ensuring that they continue to provide valid responses. Therefore, it is recommended that conversation-based research be kept as short, simple, and playful as possible, and that methods beyond the conversational approaches of interviews and focus groups are also used involving seeing, touching, and moving around (these may include, for example, asking children to draw pictures or sculpt using playdough)[98].

The methods for consulting children can appear to be very research-intensive, therefore it is important to ensure that data is collated and synthesised from them in a way that is informative and useable in M&E processes. For example, if **staff or researchers are not trained in specific participatory methods** such as using children's drawings or paintings, there might be the risk that adults collecting data attempt to psychologically interpret child drawings, which can lead down unnecessary and potentially harmful avenues, instead of using drawings as a starting point for a dialogue to find out more about what children think as experts on their own lives in ECEC.

There are also challenges in providing children with decision-making opportunities, and how to balance the democratic agency provided to children with the pedagogic decision-making of staff. In other words, how to manage the empowerment that participatory research provides children, and how to ensure that children don't develop a low frustration threshold when their suggestions are not implemented. There are challenges in delicately establishing a co-design and co-production approach with children; this once again lends itself to the specific skills needed by staff to use participatory and inclusive methods to explore children's views.

A final challenge is ensuring that all dimensions of the Lundy model are present in participatory research with children. Studies have found that – in carrying out research with children – teachers tend to focus mostly on providing social spaces for children to participate. However, there was a very limited percentage of teachers returning the results of monitoring and evaluation to children[99].

3.2 Parents and families

There are a variety of challenges in ensuring the inclusive involvement of all parents, families, and primary caregivers in the M&E of ECEC. This hinges on the **difficulties of designing research tools that provide easy**

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[97] Ibid.
[98] Adler, K., Salantera¨, S. & M. Zumstein-Shaha. (2019). 'Focus Group Interviews in Child, Youth, and Parent Research: an Integrative Literature Review. *The International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18. pp. 1-15
[99] https://child-participation.eu/

participation in M&E, challenges in including the most quiet or difficult-to-reach families, and aligning the data collected from parents with the broader purpose of M&E.

As emphasised under Policy Consideration 8 in the OECD policy brief on Quality Assurance and Improvement in the Early Education and Care Sector, the 'relatively brief and sometimes unannounced nature of inspections and monitoring visits' mean that in many contexts, there are sometimes no obvious 'windows of opportunity' to consult parents systematically in routine ECEC M&E processes.[100] As a result, care needs to be taken to design M&E tools that are considerate of the **time and format needed to provide parents with the opportunities to get involved in routine M&E**. Moreover, parents must be consulted about questions and **topics that they can answer about ECEC quality**: many parents cannot know exactly what is happening in an ECEC setting and may therefore struggle to provide information on pedagogical quality dimensions that they are not aware of or cannot see. There also needs to be a balance between online and face-to-face consultations, as participation rates can be lower with face-to-face research. Adler and colleagues (2019) emphasise that in-person research methods such as focus groups may be more challenging for parents to participate in if they have sick children to care for, or if they have to balance work and parenting responsibilities and are not typically available during the opening hours of the ECEC centre.[101]

Another challenge is on **aligning the data collected from parents with the broader purpose of the M&E** . As the purpose of involving parents in M&E is to gather their subjective perceptions of how their child is experiencing ECEC, it is important that the data collected from parents through a survey or consultation are feeding into staff reflection on how to improve everyday pedagogical practice, rather than being considered as objective quality markers. In this perspective, it is crucial to formulate questions that can be meaningfully answered by parents in relation to their experience in ECEC, and that can be used by staff or decision-makers for quality improvement purposes. Similarly, if the purpose of a M&E intervention is to start a dialogue with parents by involving them in how to improve the quality of practices in the ECEC centre, the data collection tool needs to be framed in this light when communicated to parents, and staff needs to be competent in conducting constructive research with parents.

As highlighted by Working Group discussions, there are a range of challenges when it comes to this stakeholder group because **parents and families are not a homogenous group, and they have a variety of conflicting views and expectations for ECEC**. Often louder voices overshadow the quieter ones, and so it is important to **design M&E tools that include and hear everyone**. Sometimes this might require creative solutions such as creating a welcoming participatory environment prior to monitoring and evaluation initiatives. Caution should also be taken to ensure that the **language used to consult with parents is clear, accessible, and meaningful**. Moreover, special consideration should be paid on the extent to which parents are offered opportunities to **provide honest feedback without the threat of jeopardising their relationships with ECEC staff members**.

Moreover, while digital outreach via online surveys may be a more cost-efficient, greener, and less administrative approach to reaching out to large numbers of parents, it raises the issue of **digital accessibility,** and how parents who do not have digital skills can be equally included in such consultations.

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[100] Maxwell, B. (2022). 'Quality Assurance and Improvement in the Early Education and Care Sector'. OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 55. Accessible at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/774688bf-en.pdf?expires=1677686928&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=0002F99D718985878841C2AAC1B36B2E
[101] Adler et. al. (2019)

Moreover, in terms of commenting on ECEC quality, younger parents can feel lost because they are exposed to information about pedagogy from various angles (parenting manuals and especially social media), so it can be difficult for them to know what they should be assessing when we speak about quality in ECEC. In this light, a significant challenge to conducting participatory M&E with parents and families is on ensuring that *all* families are involved, including parents who are not using the ECEC system, to ensure that a holistic perspective can be obtained. Especially including difficult-to-reach and vulnerable families, and families who are not enrolled in ECEC requires that special consideration is taken on how to reach them, and that questions are relevant to their situation.

3.3 Staff

The main challenges related to including staff involve **creating a supportive and safe M&E environment**, **creating time and providing adequate training for staff to participate in M&E**, **the need to overcome negative or fearful perceptions associated with M&E, and dealing with the inconsistencies in results between internal evaluation and external evaluations.**

A key challenge in seeking staff perceptions of ECEC quality is to ensure that the research processes allow them to share their full and transparent views on ECEC quality in a safe and supportive environment. As stressed in the 1st ECEC WG report on Purposes, Values, and Principles, ensuring a balance in emphasis between quality control and quality improvement is important for protecting staff's morale and ownership of the M&E process and encouraging honesty.[102] Additionally, in some countries, external evaluations were associated with stress, anxiety, and fear for staff. Indeed, in some countries there can be a deep cultural resistance to evaluation because of its associations with top-down control. An **over-emphasis on quality control and punitive approaches is likely to prevent honest self-appraisals of the quality of an ECEC setting**. Instead, self-evaluations should be framed not as a controlling exercise but rather as a routine element of continuous professional development and improvement; through such framing, self-evaluation exercises can improve staffs' reflectivity, motivation and collegial work.[103] [104] As discussed under Topic 2 of the WG, linking M&E practices to ongoing professional development and coaching initiatives is one way to clearly signal an emphasis on quality improvement over control, and may have a positive impact on sustaining the quality of ECEC provision.[105] [106]

Another difficulty is **that critical opinions that are expressed by staff during M&E may not always be protected or productively acted upon**. For example, a survey conducted in Finland by an affiliate union of EPSU[107]- The Finnish Union of Practical Nurses, SuPer[108]- revealed that, out of 1100 affiliated members

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[102] European Education Area Strategic Framework: Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care. (2022). Monitoring and Evaluating Quality in ECEC: Purposes, Values and Principles: https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&groupID=3811 , p.7

[103] Sheridan, S., Williams, P. and Sandberg, A. (2013) Systematic quality-work in preschool. International Journal of Early Childhood, 45 (1), 123–150.

[104] Picchio, M., Di Giandomenico, I., & Musatti, T. (2014) The use of documentation in a participatory system of evaluation. Early Years, 34(2), 133-145.

[105] Eurofound (2015) Early childhood care: Working conditions, training and quality of services: A systematic review. Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working conditions

[106] Taguma, M. and Litjens, I. (2013) Literature Review on Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care. OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care: Directorate for Education and Skills.

[107] European Federation of Public Service Union: https://www.epsu.org/

[108] https://www.superliitto.fi/site/assets/files/4691/superin_varhaiskasvatuksen_selvitys_2022.pdf

responding to the survey, 48% of them felt that there was "no use" in whistleblowing, as it led to no improvements in quality. Moreover, 10% of survey respondents said that they had some negative counter measures when they voiced their concerns. The survey results also showed that practical nurses employed in ECEC suffer from a lack of time to carry out M&E and that **– in a context of insufficient training and resources provided to practical nurses to take part to such tasks –** M&E activities are perceived more as a bureaucratic burden than as something useful in their everyday work with the children[109]. Indeed, **providing staff with too many M&E responsibilities in addition to their existing workload can lead them to feel over-worked.**.

Moreover, one of the challenges with self-evaluations by staff is that the ratings from self-evaluations can be higher than ratings from external evaluations[110]. For example, in Lithuania, findings from a pilot project of implementing a system of internal evaluations revealed that self-evaluations tend to show a rosier picture than external evaluations. It is therefore important that results from internal and external evaluations are meaningfully combined in order to sustain staff's critical reflection on everyday practice and foster their ongoing improvement by providing external support (i.e. pedagogical guidance, coaching,…).

3.4 Other stakeholders

The main challenge in engaging other stakeholders in M&E of ECEC lies in the sheer range and diversity of views that may be consulted beyond the ECEC setting, and the associated diversity in methods required to consult them. The specific constellation of additional stakeholders that is best-placed to comment on the quality of ECEC services is likely to be highly context-dependent and specific to each ECEC setting, meaning that **identifying and recruiting the most relevant individuals to include in the M&E process is likely to be a first substantial challenge for evaluators**. Furthermore, once these stakeholders are identified, **they will each need to be engaged in appropriate ways**. It is therefore likely that tailored approaches will be necessary for each group. This tailoring is likely to require extra time and effort in research design processes and is therefore also likely to be costly.

Different stakeholders will also have varying interests and positions with regards to ECEC, that will be need to be considered in context when analysing inputs they have provided. For example, there may be challenges around involving primary school teachers in the M&E of ECEC due to their inclination to tell ECEC staff what they should do and how they should act in order to make the reception of children in primary schools easier for them.

There is also a need to maintain an emphasis on gathering only necessary and useful data, rather than gathering data for the sake of data – particularly when considering who to consult under the category of 'other stakeholders'. There is therefore a tension between ensuring that the democratic and participatory dimensions of M&E is intentionally sustained to improve ECEC quality and the risk that the processes of data collection are perceived as an exercise in itself by involved stakeholders.

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[109] ECEC WG Lithuania PLA report on "How to involve stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation processes to increase inclusiveness of ECEC systems"
[110] Ibid.

4. Overcoming the challenges & inspiring practices towards an inclusive M&E of ECEC

This section will explore ways of overcoming the challenges expressed in the above chapter through describing inspiring practices from across Europe. As each stakeholder group is participating in M&E through different approaches, this chapter will also be divided into innovative approaches towards achieving inclusive M&E with children, parents/families, staff, and finally other stakeholders.

Before addressing the specifics of each stakeholder group, it is important to note an overarching approach to conducting inclusive M&E: the assessment or evaluation process must always put the child's best interests at the center (Council Recommendation of 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems)[111]. M&E needs to be geared towards creating a culture of quality where evaluation is a tool to achieve this goal. Indeed, the aim is to move away from quality assurance intended solely as control mechanism and towards a more open and trust-based approach.

4.1 Children

Creative approaches to playfully involve children in M&E

Creative, multi-sensory and active approaches to research with children have the potential to shed light on the things that children like or dislike the most about their ECEC setting, in an environment that is less likely to feel interrogative and put them 'on the spot'. The following examples therefore align well with Adler and colleagues' (2019) recommendations above.

> **Children as Actors in Quality Development in KiTas[112] – Bertelsmann Stiftung (Germany)[113]**
>
> This project is the result of research conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Institute for Democratic Development and Social Integration, involving 200 children aged 4-6 from 13 German Kindergartens.[114] The project provides a range of creative methods for engaging children in the research and extracting their perspectives on their ECEC settings across the 23 quality dimensions they have established. Some examples of these methods include:
>
> - Conducting video-supported group discussions at an age-appropriate level, where both the verbal and non-verbal expressions of children can be recorded and analysed;
> - Encouraging children to create a drawing or painting of their KiTa and explain their artwork to other children as well as to the researchers;
> - Asking children to provide a guided tour of the KiTa to the researchers and explain what they are exhibiting to them;
> - Allowing children to take photographs of their KiTa while unsupervised and talk through their choices of what to photograph;

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[111] https://www.value-ecec.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf
[112] Kindertagesstätte or KiTas are a form of ECEC in Germany
[113] https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/unsere-projekte/fruehkindliche-bildung/publikationen
[114] https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/unsere-projekte/fruehkindliche-bildung/projektnachrichten/kinder-als-akteure-der-qualitaetsentwicklung-in-kitas

- Creating a 'wall of complaints' in which children are encouraged, in a group setting, to share things they do not like about the KiTa;
- Prompting the children to describe a 'really crazy, beautiful day' at the KiTa in which they are allowed to have what they wish for.

The report can be found online in German at [this](#) link

The ERiK children's survey – German Youth Institute (Germany)

The ERiK children's survey was developed by the German Youth Institute (Deutsches Jugendinstitut) as a key part of the monitoring approach for the implementation of the 'Good Childcare Act' (Gute KiTa Gesetz), which was established at a national level in Germany in 2019. The survey was conducted in 2022 targeting roughly 490 children aged 4 years and above, to assess their perspectives on the environment in their ECEC settings (i.e. the rooms, the food, their relationships with pedagogical staff, and whether they are given opportunities to participate in and influence decisions around their day care centre). The interviewer used an interactive playing schedule that displayed several areas of the Kita.

Following a 'warm-up' phase in which children were familiarised with the researchers, they were interviewed on a one-to-one basis using **a child-friendly and play-based method**. Furthermore, pictographic scales were used to help children provide more specific and 'nuanced' responses to questions – for example, 'smiley scales' were used to help children quantify their responses to questions about the extent to which they liked or disliked specific aspects of daily life in the Kita (e.g. 'how much do you like being in the playground?'). This method was designed specifically for the survey, and *a detailed interview topic guide for the children (in English) is available on the German Youth Institute's website.*[115]

Using children's drawings as data collection tools (Lithuania)

In 2022, a system of evaluation was created in Lithuania which features various approaches for collecting data on the state of ECEC. One of those approaches is to use children's drawings as data collection tools for evaluations. The aim is crucially not to analyse children's drawings but rather to use the drawings as prompts to ask questions to children about what have illustrated.

Teachers **are provided with conversation guidelines which support them in the process of conducting data collection using children's drawings. These include:**

- Introducing the concept of "ECEC spaces" to children by explaining that their Kindergarten or ECEC centre is made up of many spaces where children can go, play, sleep, etc.
- Next, in a group format, ask children to think of a place where they like to be in their Kindergarten – they can be alone or with specific people. Proceed to ask them to draw

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[115] https://www.dji.de/en/about-us/projects/projekte/entwicklung-von-rahmenbedingungen-in-der-kindertagesbetreuung-erik/hintergrund-von-erik/kinder-1.html

themselves while they are in this favourite space. When children finish the drawing, ask children to bring it over so that the teacher can ask about what they have drawn.

- Next, with one child at a child, preferably in an isolated room (to promote concentration, to avoid group answers influences their views, and to improve audio quality of the recording if being recorded), ask about:
    o What is illustrated in the drawing (all relevant elements of the drawing must be clear);
    o Who the people are in the drawing, and what they are doing;
    o Why they like being in this space;
    o What is missing in this space to make it even more pleasant and beautiful?
    o If there is anything else that they would like to express about their Kindergarten.

Through this method teachers can receive very useful information about what children like, the places, toys, and interactions that they enjoy, etc. This information is then useful to review the ECEC's pedagogical work and develop a practice or space that is more responsive to the interests and motivation of the children that attend the space.

Overcoming the challenges of working with children under the age of 3

Professionals Seeking Children's Perspectives / The Mosaic Approach – Danish Evaluation Institute (Denmark)

This pilot project[116] is the result of research conducted by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) – in collaboration with one of the authors of the Mosaic approach (Alison Clark, UCL- Thomas Coram Research Unit) – to explore the possibilities and challenges related to seeking children's perspectives by adapting the multi-method Mosaic approach to the context of working with children aged 1.8 to 5 years old in Danish ECEC. As stated by the researchers coordinating the project, the subject of the study arose as a reaction to the academic discussion of challenges related to researchers positioned as 'outsiders' entering daycare settings making attempts to understand nuances of children's experiences (Schwartz, Detlefsen & Clark, 2015).

The view of the child embedded in the Mosaic approach can be summarized as:
- Young children as 'experts in their own lives';
- Young children as skillful communicators;
- Young children as active participants;
- Young children as meaning makers, researchers and explorers[117]

The emphasis is on **approaching encounters with children not as opportunities to extract the 'truth' but rather as opportunities for co-construction of meaning**. The focus of the project was on supporting ECEC professionals in adapting – and adopting – the Mosaic approach in Danish daycare settings.

The study has drawn attention to the importance of, and possibilities in, including **children under three years old in participatory decision-making processes**. The examples connected to such opportunities refer to: 1) the emerging of new understanding where even very young children can have a say; 2) the display of photographs, drawings and maps made as part of the visual, participatory tools in the Mosaic

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[116] https://www.eva.dk/sites/eva/files/2018-11/Professionals%20seeking%20childrens%20perspectives.pdf
[117] see Clark and Moss, 2011: p.4-12.

approach as a way to increase children's sense of their viewpoints being valued within the everyday life of the setting; 3) the increase agency of some of the least 'visible' young children to reposition themselves within a group and for ECEC professionals to reposition themselves in relation to understandings about daily life in the kindergarten.

A strong emphasis has emerged about the key role of ethics in engaging with these issues, as the participatory endeavour to engage children and practitioners in evaluation processes can be **realised only if ECEC professional are supported in increasing their awareness on the importance of explore children's perspectives together in an ethical way.** This includes several layers of engagement, such as:

- 'a sensitive systematic exploration with a child, tuning into different modes of communication and expression';
- opening up discussions with wider groups of children, cognisant that such dialogue requires time and a continuous awareness from the pedagogue that findings are uncertain and in flux, demanding the adult to keep the investigation alive and open ended'.[118]

The researchers warn against the risk of singling out individual components of the Mosaic approach without investing in staff professional development and support, as this could lead to the risk of using participatory methods as a 'quick fix' for adults who are curious about children's experiences to determine and make decisions on a superficial level.

Details of the project are currently only available in research report format, at [this]() *link.*

Tools that make it easier to collect data on children's views within M&E processes

The Wellbeing Monitor (Norway)[119]

While methods for consulting children's views directly may be too research-intensive and ECEC staff may need significant training and capacity-building in order to use them, **the KUMBA quality system** approach which includes **the Wellbeing Monitor** in Norway is a promising tool. It is being observed that while ECEC staff are sometimes nervous the first time they use the tool, it is equipped with clear instructions on how to use it, and staff have become more comfortable using the tool over time.

The ECEC Wellbeing Monitor was developed in Norway in 2014 by Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter and Monica Seland,[120] with the aim of being used with children aged 4-6 in all Norwegian ECEC centres. The tool is designed as a **child-friendly interview topic guide** and is delivered in the format of a relaxed conversation between the child and a member of staff in the ECEC centre. **The tool is electronic and provides ECEC staff with a systematic approach to recording children's responses**, thus producing results which can be compared across different time points.[121]

The monitor includes 50 questions about how children experience their daily life in ECEC, their relationships with staff, their experiences of friendship and play, how they perceive the physical

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[118] https://www.eva.dk/sites/eva/files/2018-11/Professionals%20seeking%20childrens%20perspectives.pdf
[119] https://barnehagetrivsel.no/
[120] https://ellenbeatehansensandseter.com/fou-prosjekter/the-ecec-well-being-monitor/
[121] https://dmmh.no/dmmh-kompetanse/ressurser-for-barnehager/trivselsmonitor-2

environment, what kinds of activities they participate in, whether they feel seen, listened to, and included in decision-making within the ECEC setting. The tool is designed to give preschools a clear indication of the things they are doing well and which are positively received by children, as well as the areas where there is scope for improvement. It is accessible and free to use for all ECEC institutions in Norway.

Most questions in the tool have four alternatives of answers, sometimes three. A sample of questions asked to children are the following:

- *Do you think it's nice / cozy when you eat together in ECEC? (Yes, often / Sometimes / Almost never / No, never)*
- *Do you have some good friends in the ECEC? (Non, none / Just a few / Yes, many / Yes, everyone)*
- *Do you have someone to play with in the ECEC? (Yes, often / Sometimes / Almost never / No, never)*
- *Are the staff / adults nearby and can help you when you play? (Yes, often / Sometimes / Almost never / No, never)*
- *Do the other children help you if you need it? (Yes, often / Sometimes / Almost never / No, never)*

ECEC institutions can generate easily understandable results/overviews (in graphs and diagrams) on their own situation regarding children's well-being and participation based on the results. ECEC institutions repeating the monitor every year also have the chance to generate longitudinal data and results.

Research on the Wellbeing Monitor[122] reveals that children are valuable and trustworthy informants, since most children understand the conversation technique quite quickly and most children provide clear and nuanced responses, giving detailed answers, stories, explanations, and examples. Analyses also a show high consistency in each child's answers (reliability), and a good and even distribution of answers. In addition, most children expressed that they like to be interviewed and they expressed that they value the opportunity to have an individual conversation with an adult that is interested in their personal views and experiences.

ECEC teachers have provided feedback that they find this tool very interesting and useful because it gives children the opportunity to tell their views and be listened to. They can access statistics that clearly reveal what they do not focus enough on. They also get indications that help discover if some children experience bullying, which can then be dealt with immediately. Staff also report that it is a beneficial to have a structured opportunity to sit down with each child and have time to talk with them about how they feel and experience various situations in the ECEC daily life.

While it is possible to visit the [webpage of the Wellbeing Monitor online](#), it is currently not possible for users outside of Norway to register and access the tool.

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[122] https://dmmh.no/media/dokumenter/forskning/barns-trivsel-i-oslobarnehagen-rapport.pdf

The Preschool Thermometer – Danish Center for Educational Environment (Denmark)

The 'Preschool Thermometer' is a digital survey tool that was developed to give Danish day care facilities and administrations valid insights into the children's own perspectives of the ECEC environment. The survey is open access and free for all ECEC settings to use.[123]

The survey is designed to be delivered via a tablet and children are guided through the survey by an animated superhero monkey who asks them questions about the physical, psychological and aesthetic conditions of their day care centres. **This approach has the significant advantage of removing adults from the research process, and thus avoiding the potential bias that adults may introduce into children's responses through the uneven power dynamic**. The questions are binary (yes/no) in nature to allow children as much independence as possible in completing the survey.

The questions asked by the monkey include the following:

1. Are you happy to go to kindergarten?

2. Do you have good friends in kindergarten?

3. Are there children in kindergarten who tease you and make you get upset?

4. Have you been involved in teasing some of the other children in the kindergarten?

5. Do you help decide what you do in kindergarten?

6. Can you decide who you want to play with in kindergarten?

7. Do you have a stomach-ache when you are in kindergarten?

8. Do you like the adults in the kindergarten?

9. Do the adults comfort you when you are sad?

10. Do the adults in the kindergarten listen when you tell them something?

11. Do you get scolded by the adults in the kindergarten?

12. Do the adults in the nursery play with you and the other children?

13. Are there places inside the kindergarten where you like to play?

14. Are there places outside where you like to play?

15. Do you think there are fun toys in the kindergarten?

16. Are there places in the kindergarten where you can relax?

17. Are there places in the kindergarten where you can play wildly?

18. Does the nursery smell bad?

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[123] https://dcum.dk/dagtilbudstermometeret

19. Is there noise in the kindergarten?

20. Are the toilets in the kindergarten dirty?

While it is possible to visit the [webpage of the Preschool Thermometer](#) online, it is currently not possible for users outside of Denmark to register and access the tool.

Based on the Lundy model and the principles according to which participatory research with children should take place, emphasis should be given to the 4th dimension of the Lundy model, which is influence: children should be asked questions on topics that they can influence, and the questions must be asked on issues that are actionable.

A consultation with babies, toddlers and young children to inform the updating of Aistear - the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework in Ireland

The curriculum framework for children from birth to six-years in Ireland, Aistear (meaning 'journey' in the Irish Language), was published in 2009 by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)[124]. First 5 (2019)[125], Ireland's first national strategy for young children commits to reviewing Aistear. NCCA began a public consultation in 2021 to inform this, including consultation with babies, toddlers and young children. A consortium comprising Maynooth University, Early Childhood Ireland and Stranmillis University College won a public tender to undertake this[126].

There is growing critique of such consultation processes as tokenistic, particularly when engaging with the youngest children. However, partnership with practising educators who know children well, and with whom children are comfortable, supports research where babies, toddlers and young children feel at ease to express their views. Through familiarity with children, educators can identify the (often subtle and nonverbal) ways they communicate. Therefore, this project employed Participant Action Research (PAR) with early childhood educators as 'co-researchers'. The role of co-researcher educators was conceptualised as interpreters of the 'hundred languages of children'; it was important that they were viewed as interpreters of children's voices rather than direct informants to ensure that focus was always on children's, rather than adults' perspectives. A suite of methodological instruments was used including:
- Observations
- Learning stories
- Photography (by adults and children)
- Video
- Children's drawings
- Other arts-based methods (e.g. puppets)

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[124] National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2009). *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.* Dublin: NCCA. https://ncca.ie/en/resources/aistear-the-early-childhood-curriculum-framework/

[125] Government of Ireland (2019). *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, 2019-2028*. Available at: https://first5.gov.ie/

[126] O'Toole, L., Walsh, G., Kerins, L., Doherty, A., Forde, D., Kelleher, F., Matson, S., McCartney, S., Stafford, P., Stokes, T. and Mooney, E. (2023). *A consultation with babies, toddlers and young children to inform the updating of Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Dublin: NCCA. Available at: https://ncca.ie/media/6220/consultationreport.pdf

> - Child conferencing and more.
> The consultation was innovative and ground-breaking in its commissioning, design and implementation. It realises children's participation rights from birth to have their voices heard and responded to in matters affecting them. It can potentially inform implementation of the EU Quality Framework for ECEC by showcasing participatory, child-centred methodology and a toolbox of appropriate methods, to enable children's participation in monitoring and evaluation processes at multiple levels.
> This consultation showed that babies, toddlers and young children have important information to tell us about their lives, experiences and learning. Not only has it provided babies, toddlers and young children with 'space' to have their 'voice' heard, NCCA has also provided the children with 'audience' by acting upon their views ('influence') in updating Aistear.
> The findings from this consultation are being used to directly impact curricular change in Ireland and the learnings gleaned from affording the youngest children from birth the opportunity to participate in a review of national policy have much to contribute to future collaborations both nationally and internationally.

Another issue to bear in mind to help with the challenge of fostering children's democratic participation, as highlighted by the **Achtung Kinderperspektiven! (Attention children's perspective!)** research, is that often adults can approach participation like an individual exercise, focusing on individual rights, losing the idea that participation is a collective concern. If collective participation is encouraged, children can learn to respect the views of others, and in this way the frustration that children can feel when they don't have their way can be diminished. The Achtung Kinderperspektiven! project observed that there needs to be more attention on participation as a collective, in dealing with the interests of others. The research report shows that children don't want to make decisions alone, they want to be heard, they want to participate in decision-making, they want to discuss with adults, and feel that their opinions are taken seriously[127].

When referring to the principle of inclusion in relation to evaluation processes, we also need to be mindful of barriers to participation, which might prevent children who don't speak the native language to have the same possibilities as their native speaker peers to express their opinions.

Moreover, an approach to assessing the inclusiveness of M&E with children is to disaggregate statistics about which children are participating in research. For example, the number of children with disabilities participating can be disaggregated in data, and there can be specific indicators to measure their participation in ECEC and levels of inclusion. The reason for data disaggregation is as follows: if we have disaggregated data of how many children with disabilities were consulted, we get a better idea of how inclusive the practice is. If 90% of children were consulted, and if the 10% of non-consulted children were disabled, then it is difficult to label this research as truly inclusive.

4.2 Parents and families

To offer parents with opportunities to provide honest feedback without fear of jeopardising their relationships with ECEC staff members, focus groups can be used so that parents can build upon each other's views without being placed overly 'on the spot', or anonymised surveys can be employed. Also, face-to-face interviews can be conducted with external evaluators or researchers.

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[127] Nentwig-Gesemann,I./Walther,B./Bakels,E./Munk,L.M. (2020) Achtung Kinderperspektiven! Mit Kindern KiTa-Qualität entwickeln. Methodenschatz II :Erhebung, Auswertungund Dokumentation

The researchers who developed Lithuania's 2022 evaluation approach for M&E explained that parents are motivated to participate in evaluation processes when they understand the meaning of it; when they know that their opinion will be considered; when data analysis results are presented to them, and they are invited to discuss how the identified problems can be solved; when surveys are conducted online (with a frequency of at most twice a year); and when the questionnaire is short, and all questions are in the reader-friendly language (no specific pedagogical terms)[128].

In this light, the parental survey examples below provide inspiration on practices that are engaging for parents and families to participate in, inclusive, and generate easy-to-use results.

Triangulating parent and family surveys with other sources of data

Estonian parent survey

There was recently a study conducted in Estonia on mapping the use, accessibility and flexibility of ECEC (concerning children aged 0-7) as well as the needs of parents in this regard, to present a prognosis for ECEC needs in Estonia until 2030[129].

The main research questions in the research study were:
- What is the need for childcare?
- What is childcare availability like?
- How much does it cost to offer childcare to local governments and to use it to parents, and what are the bases and differences in the formation of the fee?
- What is the compliance of childcare conditions with the needs and wishes of parents and children? What are the flexible time options and support for special needs?
- How satisfied are parents with childcare options and what are their suggestions for improving childcare options and arrangements?
- Is the number of teachers and specialists sufficient?

The survey collected data on different ECEC provisions (private vs public and other provisions), child age groups (0-1.4 years old, 1.5-7 years old, 4-7 years old), education level of parents (primary, basic, secondary or vocational education), if parent's children have special education needs or disability , and the urban or rural living setting of parents.

The parent survey gathered responses about 4,583 children from 3,444 parents of preschool children aged 0–7. Parents could answer the questionnaire in an online format both in Estonian and Russian. These selected **parents were sent an invitation to the survey via e-mail, along with an individual link to the questionnaire.** In the survey invitation, they indicated that there will be 2 weeks to respond. After the first week, a reminder was sent to all those who had not filled in the questionnaire. By the end of the second week, a second reminder was sent, extending the survey response time by one week to all those who had not completed the questionnaire.

The parental survey, alongside other data collection methods such as local government survey and data from registries, was used to broadly map the childcare situation in Estonia, dealing with different

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[128] R. Sabaliauskienė, A. Brandišauskienė, M. Brėdikytė, J. Česnavičienė, G. Rugevičiūtė, 2023, as expressed in the ECEC WG Lithuania PLA report on "How to involve stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation processes to increase inclusiveness of ECEC systems"

[129] https://centar.ee/en/tehtud-tood/preschool-education-and-childcare-in-estonia-in-2020

aspects of childcare. More specifically, the survey was used to understand if there are sufficient childcare places, and if childcare meets the needs of parents and children. This research helped inform suggestions on how to improve ECEC in Estonia, with propositions and recommendations.

KiBS survey in Germany

KiBS (Kinderbetreuungsstudie) is an annual parental survey commissioned by the Federal Family Ministry and based on a representative sample of parents on national and state levels. It encompasses interviews with approximately 33,000 parents of children from infancy to the end of primary school. **The parental survey complements a number of biannual institutional "ERiK" surveys in which data and the perspectives of ECEC staff and centre leaders, family day carers, ECEC provider organisations and local youth welfare agencies are collected**. In this way, a comprehensive picture of quality in child day care facilities and in family day care is drawn, into which the views of all actors involved are incorporated. [130]

The KiBS survey asks parents highly structured questions across a range of dimensions including parents' satisfaction with structural quality indicators (such as group sizes, the number of staff, the costs, the premises, the opening hours, the open-mindedness of staff towards other cultures and the individual support services available). Parents are also asked about their perceptions of the quality of their relationship with the ECEC staff. Due to the sampling approach, **this survey also includes parents whose children do not attend ECEC. They are asked for the reasons why, their particular needs, and which aspects might encourage them to use ECEC**.

Parents of children –theoretically from zero to the end of primary school, de facto from the age of three months to ten years- are selected randomly from the local population register of 400 randomly selected municipalities and subsequently invited to participate. **Parents are invited to answer either in a telephone interview or an online questionnaire. They may also request a written questionnaire via postal mail.**

The results of the parental survey are used in conjunction with official youth welfare statistics and with the institutional "ERiK" surveys to develop an indicator-based multi-perspective monitoring that observes the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Germany at the national level, as well as providing a comparison between ECEC quality in Germany's sixteen federal states. In addition, the monitoring system intends to record changes in ECEC quality over time, and considers the perspectives of all involved stakeholders.[131]

Parent surveys providing opportunities for parent-staff dialogue

Norwegian parent survey[132]

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[130] https://www.dji.de/en/about-us/projects/projekte/entwicklung-von-rahmenbedingungen-in-der-kindertagesbetreuung-erik/hintergrund-von-erik/kinder-1.html

[131] Monitoring reports on the KiQuTG of the Federal Government for 2022: https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/publikationen/monitoringbericht-gute-kita-2156104

[132] https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/brukerundersokelser/foreldreundersokelsen-i-barnehage/

In Norway, parents have a right to participate in the development of quality ECEC, as based on the Norwegian Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan for Kindergartens. Kindergartens in Norway are for children aged 0-5[133], so these parental surveys concerns parents of children until school age (turning six) . The parent survey is free for kindergartens to use; a link to the digital survey is sent directly to parents attending each participating setting to ensure anonymity of data collected.

This survey was developed from the bottom up: regional conferences were conducted, where staff and kindergarten owners were invited, and they had workshops asking about the kind of support that is needed. They were also asked if a survey would be a good idea. **They urged that the survey should not be used to compare kindergartens. It was therefore emphasised, through collaboration with the media and journalists, that the findings of these surveys represent parent opinion rather than reflecting the quality of the ECEC setting.** The developers of the survey were also careful not to ask questions to parents on things they couldn't see or comment on, and rather on things that they could have an opinion about.

It was pointed out that the survey cannot collect personal information from parents, and is therefore anonymised, and does not allow for open-ended answers. There are also a limited number of questions, to avoid survey fatigue. To increase update of the survey, they send two reminders, and teachers also make the survey into a fun contest. They also regularly ask parents if they have the link and how they can be supported in filling it out. Crucially, the results of the survey are considered to be useful to improve quality of ECEC practices enacted in each setting only if they are used as a starting point to inform parent meetings and furthering the pedagogical dialogue with them.

There is also emerging interest in evaluating the survey and its effectiveness, to ensure that all parents find it easy to answer the questions.

Approaches that are designed to be inclusive to as many families as possible

Belgian (Flemish Community) family survey for parents of children under-3

In 2018, the government agency Opgroeien and HIVA, the Policy Research Centre for Welfare, Public Health and Family conducted a survey of 6,594 families with children between 3 months and 3 years old in the Flemish region (a representative sample, thus including vulnerable families) to get insights into several question areas[134]. These included:
- How many families with children between 3 months and 3 years old make use of childcare/ how many do not use childcare?
- If children use childcare: is this formal or informal childcare (grandparents, friends,…) or a combination of both?
- What is the profile of the users and non-users?
- Why do parents make use of childcare for their child and why do they use centre-based or home-based childcare?
- Is there still a need for formal childcare and how big is this need?

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[133] https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/families-and-children/kindergarden/early-childhood-education-and-care-polic/id491283/#:~:text=Kindergartens%20in%20Norway%20are%20for,the%20year%20they%20turn%20six.
[134]https://cdn.nimbu.io/s/5s8z9pq/channelentries/kiwrc9e/files/2019_09%20Rapport_25%20SWVG%20EF24_Gebruik%20en%20behoefte%20aan%20kinderopvang.pdf?ifmt82w

A combination of methods was used: online surveys, interviews by telephone, and face-to-face consultations. **These last two methods were included in addition to the online survey to increase the participation of vulnerable families and families not speaking Flemish or without an email. The questionnaire was available in different languages (Flemish, French, English, Turkish, Arabic).**

The results of this survey were used to feed into policy development and adjustments specifically with regards to childcare (for example, on how many places remain to be created by the Flemish government to be able to fulfill every need for formal childcare). Since these surveys have been ongoing since 2004, they also provide a view of the evolutions in the use of formal and informal child-care.

EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey

With regards to involving parents and families who are not yet in the ECEC system because it does not correspond to their needs or to their understanding of quality, the EU-SILC survey provides answers.

This survey drew data from the EU's Labour Force Survey and its module on 'Reconciliation between work and family life' which provides data on the main reasons for not using ECEC services either for one's own or one's partner's children. It asked about the ages, gender, and income of respondents, and probed whether any of the following were reasons for not using professional ECEC:

- Cost
- No service accessible or vacant
- Other service-related reasons
- Arranged alone or with partner
- Informal support
- Other

It also asked about the ways in which ECEC was not meeting parents' needs:

- Financial reasons
- Distance
- No need
- No places available
- Opening hours not suitable
- Quality of the available services not satisfactory
- Other

The findings indicated that one of the main reasons for not enrolling children in ECEC was largely because there was no perceived need for it (67.8% of respondents), and next because of financial reasons (16.2% of total respondents). [135]

This survey and findings provide valuable information in order to understand how ECEC can welcome these parents and caregivers who are currently not participating in ECEC, and how the inclusiveness of ECEC systems can be improved.

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[135] https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20015en.pdf

Examples of parent survey questionnaires to provide inspiration on what types of questions are asked

Portuguese parent survey

In Portugal, the Inspectorate of Education and Science (IGEC), in the scope of the activity External Evaluation of Schools (Avaliação Externa das Escolas - AEE), applies satisfaction surveys to School Clusters when preparing for the process. There are six types of questionnaires aimed at students in the lower primary education (Year 4) as well as students in the upper primary, lower secondary and secondary education, teachers (including preschool teachers), non-teaching staff and *parents of preschool children (ages 3-6)*, lower primary, upper primary, lower secondary and secondary education students.

The reports on these questionnaires are attached to the External Evaluation of Schools (Avaliação Externa das Escolas) school reports and are available on the Inspectorate of Education and Science IGEC website[136].

Survey for parents of preschool children (3 to 6 years old)
"Using the scale I strongly agree – I agree – I strongly disagree – I do not know, please answer the questionnaire by indicating your degree of agreement with each of the statements. There are no correct or wrong answers, what matters is your opinion. The answers are anonymous"

01. I am familiar with the educational project of the School Group/Education Institution.
02. I participated in the preparation of the educational project of the School Grouping/Education Institution.
03. The educator informs parents about the intentionality of their educational action.
04. I am encouraged by the educator to participate in the planning of the activities to be carried out.
05. I am involved by the educator in activities in my child's learning process.
06. I am involved in the development of strategies for the inclusion of my child.
07. The activities carried out promote the development of my child's curiosity and autonomy.
08. My child is offered diverse learning environments in addition to the activity room.
09. The educator shares with me, on a regular basis, progress in my child's learning.
10. I am satisfied with the progress of my child's learning.
11. Projects are developed that link different areas of knowledge (natural and social sciences, mathematics, artistic languages, etc.).
12. The educator maximises my child's gifts to encourage more learning.
13. Some of my child's work is displayed or presented.
14. The environment of the ECEC centre promotes the well-being of my child.
15. The ECEC centre promotes respect for the characteristics and interests of each child.
16. I am familiar with the rules of operation in the ECEC centre.

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[136] https://www.igec.mec.pt/content_01.asp?BtreeID=03/01&treeID=03/01/03/00&auxID=&newsID=2762#content

17. The heads of the ECEC centre promote its proper functioning.	
18. I participate in the self-assessment of the School Grouping/Education Institution.	
19. I am satisfied with my child attending this ECEC centre	

Sweden's parent survey

Parental surveys are common at the municipal level in Sweden and their results are often used in the municipalities' systematic quality work. There is no regular national parental survey in Sweden. However, the Swedish school inspectorate conducted a survey during its three-year review of Swedish preschools in 2015-2017. The questionnaire to parents provides an overview of how parents experience their preschool for their child (aged 1-5)[137]. The survey results are used, among other things, as one of several documents in the regular supervision of the municipalities' management and development of their preschools. The School Inspectorate makes an overall assessment of how the municipality provides the pre-schools with the conditions to be able to meet the requirements of pedagogical laws and curricula.

Questions asked to parents:

Broad theme	Specific Questions[138]
Information and communication	I feel that I receive continuous information about my child's life at the preschool
	I feel that the preschool takes into account the information I provide about my child (e.g. about the child's well-being, family situation or development).
	I feel that I received clear information about how my child is doing at school during the development interview.
Norms and values	I feel that the preschool staff work hard to ensure that the children develop respect for each other
	I feel that it is clear that abusive treatment is not accepted at the preschool.
	I feel that girls and boys are given the same conditions at preschool.
Safety, needs, and care	I feel that preschool gives my child a good balance of activity and rest
	I feel that my child's emotional needs (such as the need for comfort, closeness and confirmation) are met at the preschool.
	I feel that my child enjoys school.
Child development and pedagogy	I feel that the activities at school arouse my child's curiosity.
	I feel that the preschool offers my child a stimulating environment.
	I feel that my child learns a lot at preschool.
Support and attention	I feel that my child receives sufficient support at Preschool
	I feel that there are enough staff at the preschool.
	I feel that the preschool has problems with staffing (e.g. high staff turnover, difficult to get substitutes)
Child participation and involvement	I feel that the children get to be involved in deciding how it should be at preschool.
	I feel that the children are "seen and heard" by the preschool staff.
	I feel that the children are allowed to express themselves at preschool (e.g. to convey opinions, thoughts, interests)

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[137] https://www.skolinspektionen.se/globalassets/02-beslut-rapporter-stat/granskningsrapporter/regeringsrapporter/redovisning-av-regeringsuppdrag/2018/forskolans-kvalitet-och-maluppfyllelse-slutrapport-feb-2018.pdf, p. 62
[138] Ibid.

4.3 Staff

This section presents inspiring approaches and practical tools on how staff can effectively participate in M&E, mainly via internal evaluation but also through other consultative processes.

Staff self-assessment tools

PARTICIPA Project[139]

The aim of the PARTICIPA project is to strengthen ECEC professionals' knowledge, attitudes, and capacity- through self-assessment tools and online training developed within the project - to support children's participation rights. The self-assessment tool for educators that they developed is adapted to three different staff categories: teachers, assistants, and ECEC coordinators. There is also a MOOC[140] that features modules around the Lundy model: there are modules on supporting children's participation through space, voice, audience, and influence.

The self-assessment tool focuses on the dimensions of children's participation (space, voice, audience, and influence), while also supporting reflection on pedagogical intentionality, shared vision/culture, professionalization and team collaboration, advocacy, supporting staff voices, monitoring children's participation, and the extent to which an inclusive approach is embedded into ECEC practices. Intentionality is a core component, because the "I" factor urges educators to reflect on their own roles and responsibilities. Crucially, the project points out that if staff voices are not valued, it is difficult to value the voices of children. Therefore, coordinators are urged to reflect about the extent to which they value the voices of staff.

The potential challenges they have identified in the effectiveness of the self-assessment tool are associated with:

- gaps between perceptions and practices;
- regular use;
- ensuring supportive, empowering environments for positive and constructive team-based reflection;
- specificities in roles/responsibilities across countries.

Qualitative evidence, based on educator reports, suggests that the self-assessment is necessary but not sufficient to support knowledge, attitudes, and competence development towards promoting children's participation. Educators considered that the MOOC complemented the self-assessment, providing resources and inspiration for improving practices; nevertheless, it was not considered sufficient to produce significant changes in relation to increasing children's participation in practice.

The project found that it is essential to **support professionals and teams to use the self-assessment tools and MOOC in ways that are meaningful to them to produce transformation in educational practices.** This might include **pedagogical coaching and mentoring initiatives.**

The PARTICIPA project's self-assessment tool is available online in English, Polish, Portuguese, Greek, and Dutch.

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[139] https://child-participation.eu/

[140] The MOOC addressed how to work with children between the ages of 3-5, and sometimes from age 2. To work with younger children, there is a need for targeted attention.

Digital VALSSI-system and national evaluation tools

According to the Act on ECEC, Finnish ECEC providers must self-evaluate the quality of their pedagogical practices, take part in external evaluations, publish their key findings, and ensure that children and guardians (parents) have a possibility to influence the planning and evaluation of ECEC. ECEC providers are given a high degree of autonomy in regard to the methods and tools to be used in M&E processes as the model of enhancement-led evaluation adopted in Finland is **based on trust**. Finland gave up the inspectorate system decades ago, and instead started investing in initial education of staff and in building up and training ECEC professionals to self-evaluate and take responsibility for the quality of their work, sharing the responsibility for the quality of ECEC with the providers. Trust is a key-element of self-evaluation. However, it has been observed that self-evaluation as a method stops working if it is used for controlling purposes. If the data gained in a self-evaluation process is used against its original purpose, participants do not answer honestly.

At the beginning of August 2023, the national quality evaluation system for ECEC called VALSSI, was opened to all municipal organisers and private sector providers. VALSSI is maintained by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre FINEEC, and it is free-of-charge. The system offers more than 30 evidence-based and versatile tools for evaluating both the structures supporting ECEC services as well as the core pedagogical processes. To support the enhancement-led use of VALSSI, FINEEC has designed and launched a specific evaluation process. While the use of VALSSI system and evaluation tools takes place on a voluntary basis, it is strongly recommended that ECEC providers use these tools and, once they are compiled, each municipal level actor or private service provider can download its own self-evaluation report in a digital form. Crucially, evaluations carried out with VALSSI-system are not designed for ranking purposes.

Children do not use Valssi. Instead, staff must ensure children's participation in M&E process. Some challenging questions to enhance the self-reflection of staff include:
- How do we ensure that all children in the group can get their voices heard in matters that concern them?
- Which different methods do we use to find out about children's views? How do these methods support and complement each other?
- How do we make sure that the methods are versatile, and pleasant to the children?
- How do we enable the participation of children's guardians in planning and evaluating the activities?
- How can we ensure that all children have the same possibilities and opportunities?

With VALSSI, evaluation data can be easily collected across the entire organisation. The self-evaluations generally feature a questionnaire filled out by staff-members. As research suggests, lower pedagogical knowledge might lead to higher ratings in self-evaluations. Therefore, strong pedagogical leadership is required in terms of what kind of support is offered to staff to better reflect on themselves and their pedagogical activities. To overcome some challenges related to self-evaluation, the data collection is followed by collaborative reflective discussions among staff. Staff discuss the strengths and development areas of their pedagogical activities, participate in a development workshop, and the head of a centre prepares a summary based on this joint discussion. The important point to note is that evaluation action plans are based not only on the data that staff provide, but also on this dialogic reflection process, which is what leads to effective development. Through reflective discussions, staff teams come to an agreement on the monitoring work they should carry out. In this way, the evaluation

data itself becomes secondary compared to everything that happens afterwards: the data is only as good as what is discussed. This philosophy is based on the understanding that in order to create change we have to acknowledge our development areas and we need to acknowledge the problems. Once the evaluation process has been completed, VALSSI is used to compile the evaluation results of the entire organisation to be published and shared with guardians, stakeholders and decision-makers. FINEEC publishes national summaries based on the Valssi-data. In the future, the cumulation of ECEC evaluation data will decrease the need and pressure for additional data collections nationwide.

The VALSSI system and system was opened to all users in the beginning of August 2023; the evaluation tools are available in Finnish and Swedish[141].

SEQUENCES – Erasmus+

At European level, the Erasmus+ project SEQUENCES[142] has developed a toolkit for self and external evaluation of ECEC provision, along with guidelines for implementation and a training package, by examining quality in relation to the key domains of the European Quality Framework.

The toolkit was developed through a multi-stakeholder approach, by sharing existing quality frameworks and quality assurance practices in each participating country, thus ensuring transnational validity and coherency with the local/regional or national system where available.
The training module was targeted to the needs of ECEC practitioners – primarily educators and managers/directors – but designed in order to impact also on their representatives and trainers, as well as parents and families. For this purpose, the content of the training module included basic concepts and background references to quality assurance in education, methodologies and techniques to put quality assurance into practice and to do so by involving all the relevant stakeholders. The module was designed according to a practical format allowing teams to familiarise themselves with the tools with the support of guidelines and ad-hoc training materials.

The SEQUENCES toolkit, training curriculum, and multi-stakeholder guidelines are available online to download in English, Hungarian, Romanian, Serbian, and Italian.

MeMoQ self-evaluation tool in childcare settings for babies and toddlers (Belgium – Flemish Community)

At the level of Member States, examples of structured self-evaluation tools include the Flemish-Belgian MeMoQ (Measuring and Monitoring Quality) self-evaluation tool in childcare settings for babies and toddlers)[143]..

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[141] https://karvi.fi/en/early-childhood-education/valssi-national-quality-evaluation-system-for-ecec/
[142] https://sequences-project.eu/
[143] van Nieuwenhuyzen, C. (2017) 'The road to monitoring Quality in Childcare settings for babies and toddlers in Flanders.' In: Klinkhammer, N., Schäfer, B., Harring, D., Gwinner, A. (Eds.) Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Approaches and experiences from selected countries. Munich: German Youth Institute.

On 1 April 2014, the **new Flemish Parliament Act** on Childcare for Babies and Toddlers took effect in Flanders. The purpose of this Parliament Act was to erase the different quality requirements, that existed between the different childcare settings and providers. In the pursuit of quality in a uniform way in all childcare setting for babies and toddlers, the **MeMoQ-project** (Measuring and Monitoring the process or pedagogical Quality) was commissioned to the university of Ghent (under the supervision of prof. Michel Vandenbroek) and the university of Leuven (under the supervision of prof. Ferre Laevers). This project ran from 2013 to the end of 2016.

The *MeMoQ self-evaluation tool* was one of the 4 "products" developed during the MeMoQ-project. These 4 products were consecutively developed and are all intertwined. The project started with the development of a pedagogical framework or a description of what good, pedagogical quality entails. Subsequently this common definition of pedagogical quality was operationalized in 6 intertwined dimensions: Dimension 1 (well-being) and Dimension 2 (involvement) deal with the experiences of children. Dimension 3 (emotional support) and Dimension 4 (educational support) revolve around the interactions between adults and children and between children themselves. Dimension 5 is about the playful environment (materials, game zones and activities) and how the day is organized. Dimension 6 is about dealing with parents and respect for society diversity.

The MeMoQ self-evaluation tool features those six dimensions which together measure the process quality in the ECEC-setting[144]. As mentioned above, process quality consists of all the direct experiences that children gain in interaction with their environment, their interactions with other children and adults, the play environment and the contacts between the ECEC setting and their parents. Since the self-evaluation tool is a work tool for pedagogical coaches and core practitioners in childcare settings, it was developed together with and tested by them. It was tested in more than 120 units. Based on the results of these tests, the self-evaluation tool was optimized.

The self-evaluation tool is the mirror image of the tool used by the Care Inspectorate which allows a dialogue between core practitioners, pedagogical coaches and inspectors using the same words and definitions.

Rapporto di AutoValutazione – INVALSI (Italy)

Another example is the self-evaluation report – *Rapporto di AutoValutazione (RAV)* – developed by INVALSI (the Italian evaluation institute for the evaluation of the national education system) to facilitate the reflection of schools through a self-analysis journey from objectives to results. The report also includes a specific tool focused on self-evaluation of preschools (attended by children aged 3 to 6) called *RAV infanzia*[145]. The development of such tool fits into the quality initiatives of the National Assessment System (*Sistema Nazionale di Valutazione*) and the Integrated Early Childhood Education System, established by Law 107/2015. By understanding quality as a feature of each pre-school and of the entire early childhood education system, the *RAV infanzia* concretely places at the center of the self-evaluation process three fundamental dimensions: children's holistic development, well-being and learning. The diagram below summarizes the vision of quality proposed in the *RAV Infanzia*, at the center of which are positive effects for children in terms of development, well-being and learning.

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[144] https://www.vlaanderen.be/publicaties/zelfevaluatie-instrument-memoq-kinderopvang
[145] https://www.invalsi.it/infanzia/img/Mappa_indicatori_RAV_infanzia_2019.pdf

The self-evaluation tool *Rav Infanzia* was piloted within a 2-year national project (2018-2020) involving 1,828 schools on a voluntary basis. The findings of the pilot point out that *RAV Infanzia* is perceived by preschool teachers as a useful tool to facilitate reflection on their practice and to support the design of improvement initiatives at collegial level.[146] However, it is also pointed out that the **transformative potential of the tool in terms of sustaining quality improvement processes in preschools is mediated by the possibility – granted to teachers' teams – to avail of ad-hoc pedagogical support or training provided at institutional level.**

Manuals and guidelines for staff evaluations in Lithuania

In Lithuania, there has been efforts to support teachers' changes in attitudes towards evaluation by writing manuals and guidelines. Through self-evaluations, staff can start working on how to improve, and support is provided in helping them work towards this. **It has been observed that video data (of teaching watching their practices) has been one of the most effective way to support staff in analysing and revising their practice.** Changing practices can take time, but when the whole community is involved and supportive, including parents, progress has been observed.

Assessment systems that are designed to support the triangulation of internal evaluation, external evaluation, and children's perspectives

Quality Development through Participation in ECEC Institutions in Norway (KUMBA)

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[146] https://www.invalsi.it/infanzia/docs/Rapporto_RAV_Infanzia_def.pdf

This research project, from 2021-2024, is aimed at developing a research-based, validated quality assessment system, KUMBA, targeted towards monitoring and improving the process quality of Norwegian ECECs.

This system will be an easy-to-use, context-sensitive tool for ECECs, and will ensure both the demands from the national Framework Plan for the content and tasks of kindergartens (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017), the professional's judgment of the educational and relational environment, and children's experiences of quality. There will be a new assessment system that will include assessment of the educational and relational environment from:

- Internal ECEC teachers
- External ECEC teachers (from a collaborating ECEC)
- 4-6-year-old children (using a new modified version of the Well-being Monitor mentioned above)

The project is based on the premise that analysing children's answers in relation to the staff's and the external assessors' ratings, will make a crucial and novel contribution to ECEC quality assessment work.

The KUMBA quality system aims to triangulate evidence from children's perspectives, external evaluations, and internal evaluations by ECEC staff in order to develop a well-rounded understanding of ECEC quality. If the quality assessment system developed through this project displays high validity, usefulness, and an improvement of the quality of ECECs, the system will be scaled-up and made available free of charge for all public and private Norwegian ECEC institutions.

Focus group discussions with staff

Focus groups during evaluations in Lithuania

In Lithuania's recently (2022) piloted evaluation system, focus group discussions with staff and other relevant stakeholders are part of the process. The main goal is to collect evidence about the quality of ECEC activities, which would be based on real situations that happened at the setting and not on opinions, understandings, or intentions. The focus group typically involves a small group of 6-10 participants, involving representatives of the school administration, teachers, parents, as well as representatives from the local community. The moderator of the discussion asks open-ended questions that encourage providing specific examples of the ECEC setting's activities. **The evaluation depends on the quality of questions that the teachers are asked:** participants are asked to reflect upon every day practices, and how certain activities are implemented and why.

Pedagogical documentation to co-create understandings of ECEC quality

The use of pedagogical documentation as a participatory method of evaluation – Italy

The ISTC-CNR research group QUSEC (Quality of social and educational contexts) designed a system of evaluation of ECEC services where pedagogical documentation is the core of participatory evaluation activities involving both parents and professionals in the process of co-creating meanings in relation to

children's everyday experiences in the settings.[147] The system was inspired by the approach elaborated by European experts over a long period of time[148] and piloted in a number of Italian sites within the framework of different projects of quality evaluation of ECEC services.

In the context of municipal ECEC provision in Italy, pedagogical documentation is widely used to make children's learning processes visible through a variety of expressive means: children's artifacts, pictures of children's interactions and involvement in the daily life of the settings, recording and transcripts of their words, narratives from professionals and parents[149]. As a method to collect data feeding into evaluation processes, pedagogical documentation draws attention to the specific role played by:

- ECEC professionals, who are committed to documenting practices so that they may be subject to reflection and discussion by a wider audience (i.e. parents, community stakeholders, municipal managers);
- parents, who are systematically engaged in the process of co-constructing narratives about their children's and their own experiences of participation in the daily life of the centre

Within the pilot project, the ISTC-CNR research team developed a tool – called 'service Dossier' – encompassing several components:
- the pedagogical project of the ECEC centre;
- the pedagogical documentation of children's and parents' experiences;
- The analysis of such documentation, which was co-constructed by involving all stakeholders (professionals, parents and municipal managers) in collective discussions.

These discussions aimed at verifying whether the children's and parents' experiences in the centre were congruent with the educational goals and objectives of the local ECEC provision as defined in local policy Acts: in this sense, the service Dossier keeps a detailed record of the whole evaluation process.

In the system of participatory evaluation developed within the project, pedagogical documentation was conceived not only as a tool enabling involved stakeholders to base their interpretations and judgements on real, concrete practices, but also as a way to make the evaluation process transparent for everybody. Thus, using pedagogical documentation to collect data feeding into evaluation processes contributed to improve the quality of ECEC services by enhancing practitioners' reflectivity at team level, while at the same time fostering parents' participation and sustaining transformative practices in ongoing dialogue with children.

In all the sites, the evaluation system was found to be useful for the governance of ECEC provision. It allowed local authorities opportunities to verify each service's compliance with structural requirements, to identify the weaknesses and strengths of the service in terms of process quality, and to plan

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[147] Picchio, M., Di Giandomenico, I., & Musatti, T. (2014). The use of documentation in a participatory system of evaluation. Early Years, 34(2), 133-145.

[148] European Commission Childcare Network (1991) Quality in Services for Young Children: A Discussion Paper. Brussels: European Commission, Equal Opportunities Unit. European Commission Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile the Employment and Family Responsibilities of Men and Women (1996) Quality Targets in Services for Young Children: Proposals for a Ten -Year Action Programme. Brussels: European Commission, Equal Opportunities Unit.

[149] European Education Area Strategic Framework: Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care. (2022). Monitoring and evaluating quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): Background Note.

innovative policies which helped to improve a single ECEC service or the whole ECEC system in the local area[150]. However, research findings pointed out that certain conditions are needed in order to successfully implement such tool – the ECEC service Dossier – within participatory evaluation processes:

- activities of documentation and evaluation have to following certain guidelines, defining clear roles and tasks for each person involved in the process;
- the participation of professionals in these activities has to be sustainable and compatible with their working schedule, so that documentation and evaluation are embedded in everyday professional practice;
- parents' involvement in the evaluation has to be compatible with their organization of daily life in terms of schedule and personal engagement
- pedagogical coordinators/leaders should take up the role of scheduling no-contact time for professionals to take part to the documentation and evaluation activities connected to the Dossier construction, and for organising the participation of all the actors to be involved (parents, municipal managers)[151].

Involving staff in policy reform consultations

Involving stakeholders in regulatory reform in Ireland

Ireland is in the process of introducing regulations for home-based ECEC and child-minding through the National Action Plan for Childminding (2021-2028). In the development of this Action Plan, there was consultation with children, parents, and childminders. It should be noted that these reforms are a sensitive issue for childminders, as there may be fears of external inspectors and about the state getting involved in regulation of activities in the childminder's home.

The Draft Action Plan was preceded by a 2018 Working Group report, which was led by stakeholder groups and involved consultation with more than 3,600 parents and more than 350 childminders, and was also informed by two consultations with children. Then in 2019, the Irish Government carried out a public consultation on the Draft Action Plan. This second consultation process involved: an online survey, 32 focus groups of childminders (one in every local authority district), where a total of 205 childminders took part, and an Open Policy Debate with 55 stakeholder participants.

With childminders, focus group meetings took place in the evenings, to make it more accommodating to the schedules of their work.

The involvement of stakeholders is continuing through a Steering Group which includes representatives of childminders, parents and other key stakeholders. There are four Advisory Groups to support the Steering Group during the preparatory phase of developing regulations, and **childminders and Childminding Ireland (a representative body) are in every Advisory Group**. Further consultation is planned for autumn 2023 on draft regulations, to include multiple focus groups of childminders.

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[150] EU Quality Framework for ECEC, principle 7 – box with Italy example (p.57)
[151] Picchio, M., Di Giandomenico, I., & Musatti, T. (2014). The use of documentation in a participatory system of evaluation. *Early Years*, 34(2), 133-145.

> One of the biggest priorities has been keeping childminders in the process, given understandable anxieties about introducing regulation to the childminding sector. It has been recognised that **it was very important to put in place support workers (child minding development officers) who are engaging with childminders at the local level in supportive ways before the start of discussions on regulations**. Ireland has observed that in order to introduce regulations in this field, it needs to be done in a slow and supportive approach. The National Action Plan therefore commits to a transition period for the introduction of regulations.

It should be noted that it is important to also include staff who are low-qualified, and those who are not working directly with children such as the cleaners and kitchen workers. This would provide a better and more holistic view of all the work that goes on in the ECEC settings, as opposed to talking only to qualified preschool teachers.

4.4 Other stakeholders

Since the involvement of other stakeholders can be categorised as external M&E practices, we can look to inspiring or successful external evaluation practices to provide orientation on how to include other stakeholders in the M&E of quality ECEC.

Principles for conducting external evaluation with a range of ECEC stakeholders

> ### Practices for quality external evaluation in Lithuania
>
> Researchers at the National Agency for Education in Lithuania identified that factors determining the quality of external evaluation of school performance included:
> - External evaluation being based on a common understanding of quality between all interested parties
> - External evaluation being recognized as a valuable process that provides effective support to the ECEC community
> - Adequate training of external evaluators, improvement of their competences, in order to achieve a deep understanding of the specifics of ECEC
> - Ensuring the evaluation process is ethical, that evaluators communicate respectfully with the community of the evaluated school, and confidentiality of all school data is protected
> - Evaluators objectively assess the school's activities, understanding that the school's activities must best meet the child's interests
> - All decisions made are based on valid data analysis, based on evidence, and the general consensus of the evaluation participants
> - The assessment takes into account the specific social, economic, cultural, technological and pedagogical context of the school, the age of the children
> - All evaluators participate in the preparation of the report, presenting the results of their observation and formulating recommendations for improving the school's performance
> - The proposed recommendations are optimal for the community in order to see opportunities in the difficulties experienced, the implementation of which will improve the quality of the school's activities
> - The recommendations presented in the methodology are unanimously followed

The approach of co-production

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EMBRACE Erasmus+ project

The EMBRACE project[152] centres around how to include children with disabilities in ECEC through the approach of co-production. Co-production is an inclusive working practice between experts by experience, support organisations, public authorities, families and other stakeholders, which can be implemented along the line of the 'nothing about us, without us' principle. As the stakeholders are empowered through the involvement in design, development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation processes, it increases the efficacy of ECEC initiatives by creating more inclusive communities.

The actors included in the co-production of education include:
- The users (all learners with or without disabilities, families)
- Practitioners (support service providers, teachers, board school representatives, headmasters, teacher trainers, school administrators, inspectors)
- Organisations (Disabled People Organisations, Civil Society Organisations, Teachers Trade Unions, local charities)
- Members of the Wider Community
- Business owners
- Local residents
- Governmental Decision-makers (civil servants, administrations in education, law-makers, policy-makers).

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Cross-sectoral collaboration

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Primokiz approach - International Step by Step Association (ISSA)

One of the key elements of the Primokiz approach[153] is the involvement of different local stakeholders (including local authorities) to improve ECEC quality. This is achieved through **consultations during key stages of research**, **the development of needs-based, data-informed and locally relevant strategies, dialogue, and the validation of priorities**. Cross-sectoral collaboration of different stakeholders involves bringing everyone together under the leadership of local authorities, to ensure that data and expertise is collected from all sectors providing ECEC.

The key steps in the Primokiz process include:
- getting the buy-in from the local authorities;
- setting up local cross-sectoral teams led by the local government;
- carrying out a locally-led situation and needs analysis that brings together specialists and practitioners across early childhood sectors, local government representatives, families, and members of the community and integrating existing and new, relevant data.
- based on the analyzed needs, deciding jointly on short-medium-long term priorities for improving services across-sectors
- developing a cross-sectoral early childhood strategy/action plan reflecting the jointly decided priorities

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[152] https://project-embrace.eu/
[153] https://www.issa.nl/primokiz?ct=t(EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_9_13_2022_STD_Primokiz)

- approving, funding, and implementing the action plan that promotes local partnerships and stakeholders' involvement
- monitoring the implementation of the plan.

5. Policy pointers

One of the main aims of the Working Group's focus on the benefits and methods to involve children, families, staff and other stakeholders in M&E of quality in ECEC is to develop pointers for policy-makers on best practices going forwards. This chapter does precisely this.

It is not necessary for *all* of the principles listed below to be present to ensure the inclusion of stakeholders in M&E of ECEC: however, all the conditions listed are considered to be important for inclusive and participatory M&E of ECEC. **The aim of this chapter is not to provide policy-decision-makers with a check-list of actions to be accomplished, but rather create awareness of important issues to be considered when designing M&E of ECEC according to a participatory perspective.** In this way, this report highlights ingredients that policy-makers need to be aware of in order to set priorities and draw action-plans.

Principles for implementing participatory and inclusive M&E processes of ECEC quality across all stakeholder groups:
- ➢ The child's best interests are at the center of M&E initiatives
- ➢ The purposes, values, and principles of research are coherently aligned in guiding M&E processes to ensure ethical research;
- ➢ Adequate safeguarding and privacy measures are implemented to ensure that participants provide informed consent, and are aware of the purpose of the research and the ways in which their responses and personal data will be used;
- ➢ A balanced sampling approach is taken to ensure that as wide a spectrum as possible of stakeholder views are represented (including views from marginalized communities or societally disadvantaged groups);
- ➢ Flexible data collection processes and tools are considered to be as inclusive as possible and accommodate the schedules of a wide range of participants;
- ➢ The data collected from different stakeholder groups are triangulated and aligned to produce a coherent interpretation of results;
- ➢ The results of M&E initiatives are communicated back to the participants, so that they can see what they have informed, and understand the purpose of their participation;
- ➢ The publication of M&E results is handled with care to ensure that M&E results do not lead to comparisons and competition or communicate unintentional messages.

Principles to meaningfully involve children in M&E for quality ECEC:
- ➢ Children should be asked questions on topics that they can influence, and the questions must be asked on issues that are actionable;
- ➢ Children's participation should not be limited to M&E processes, but should be embedded in the planning and evaluation of daily activities;

- There is an atmosphere of trust and reciprocity between adults and children: children feel free to express their views and feel confident that their views will be considered;
- With a view to ensure equal participation to all children, the tools adopted for gathering children's views are age appropriate, culturally sensitive, and diversified in relation to children's language and abilities (both verbal and non-verbal);
- There are M&E tools that capture children's views as directly as possible, complementing other data collection tools;
- ECEC staff perceived that involving children in M&E is worthwhile from a pedagogical point of view and have the necessary competences to engage children in participatory processes through everyday practice. This can be achieved through in-service training and CPD, coaching and guidance by pedagogical leadership, and adequate working conditions for staff to make children's participation in evaluation and planning processes sustainable over time;
- ECEC settings are provided with a certain degree of autonomy, and support, to decide how children's involvement in evaluation processes is pursued, while ensuring that children's opinions and concerns are responsively and consistently acknowledged and addressed;
- Statistics about children's participation in M&E are disaggregated to show which children are – or are not – participating in M&E (e.g. children with special education needs or disability)

Principles to meaningfully involve parents and families in M&E for quality ECEC:
- Parents and families are consulted about questions and topics that they can answer about ECEC;
- Positive relationships based on trust are established between parents and staff/evaluators;
- Parents and families are informed about the aims and purposes of ECEC, of M&E, and about the processes and benefits of evaluations;
- Inclusive data collection processes are designed to ensure that the voices of parents in all their diversity (including disadvantaged, with migrant background, and also those who do not use ECEC) are heard- the language used to communicate with parents and families is clear and accessible;
- Participation of parents in M&E processes is encouraged by taking into consideration time scheduling and data collection formats that can facilitate their realistic involvement;
- The evaluation tools for gathering the perspectives of families are designed for parents to provide honest feedback without the fear of jeopardising their relationships with ECEC staff members;
- Staff are aware of the importance of involving families in M&E or decision-making processes on a regular basis, and reciprocal dialogue with parents is embedded in their daily practice.

Principles to meaningfully involve staff in M&E for quality ECEC:
- There is sufficient information and training provided so that centres' leaders and staff are aware of the purpose and benefits of M&E;
- There is sufficient support and training to ensure staff can participate effectively in M&E processes, use the results that are produced, and enact changes following the evaluation- through pre-service and in-service staff training, coaching, etc;
- ECEC centres' leaders play a crucial role in ensuring that a culture of evaluation and quality development is embedded into the daily practices of pedagogical staff, and in sustaining staff collective reflection and improvement of their practices following evaluations' results;
- A safe environment is created whereby staff opinions (including critical opinions) are appreciated and protected;

- ➢ Time is provided to staff allowing them meaningful space and capacity to participate in M&E: there is a follow up after staff voices are heard, and a clear communication about "what happens next";
- ➢ Non-pedagogical staff who do not directly work with children (e.g. auxiliary staff, cleaning or kitchen staff) are also included in some M&E initiatives, to provide a holistic view of the ECEC setting.

Principles to meaningfully involve other stakeholders in M&E for quality ECEC:
- ➢ The involvement of stakeholders is done through a well-managed participatory process, based upon a consensus between all actors involved on the purposes of the M&E activities;
- ➢ There is a clear understanding on which stakeholders will be involved and why, guided by principles such as the best interests of the child, the purpose of the evaluation, and expertise in ECEC or the specificities of early childhood;
- ➢ All relevant stakeholders are consulted and heard, with the understanding that the responsibility for the final decisions lies with policy-makers;
- ➢ There is a strategy in place to ensure that even the most marginalised actors are involved meaningfully;
- ➢ Stakeholders are aware of their role and added value, and there are clear rules of engagement, such as trust and confidentiality;
- ➢ Stakeholders are given reasonable deadlines to provide their contributions.

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