Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care

Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission.

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Contents

Background and policy context for European cooperation in ECEC:
- **working method**
- **structure of the report**
- **measuring quality in ECEC**

The Quality Statements

Developing quality:
- **accessibility**
- **workforce**
- **curriculum**
- **monitoring and evaluation**
- **governance and funding**

Annex – key concepts

1. Background and policy context

Learning and education do not begin with compulsory schooling – they start from birth. The early years from birth to compulsory school age are the most formative in children's lives and set the foundations for children's lifelong development and patterns for their lives. In this context, high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC)[1] is an essential foundation for all children's successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and later employability. Improving the quality and effectiveness of ECEC systems across the EU is essential to securing smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth.[2] Good quality and accessible ECEC systems are equally important for empowering all individuals to have successful lives. Consequently the availability of high quality, affordable early childhood education and care for young children continues to be an important priority for Member States and for the European Union.

The European Commission has emphasised – based on an analysis of the latest cross-national evidence and discussions with high-level experts - that *access to universally available, high-quality inclusive ECEC services is beneficial for all. It not only helps children to unlock their potential but can also contribute to engaging parents and other family members with related measures to improve employment, job-related training, parent education, and leisure-time activities[3].*

Increasing access to ECEC has been one of Europe's priorities since 1992 following the publication of the Council Recommendations on Childcare (92/241/EEC)[4]. Later publications e.g. in 2002 the Barcelona European Council agreed that *Member States should remove disincentives to female labour force participation, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities and in line with national patterns of provision, to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between three years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under three years of age[5]*. Increasing access to high quality ECEC is also the focus of the European benchmark that calls for the participation of at least 95% of children between the age of 4 and compulsory school age by 2020[6], *addressing child poverty and preventing early school leaving, two of the headline targets of the EU2020 Strategy[7].*

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[1] ECEC see definition in the annex at the end of the document.

[2] Europe 2020 Strategy and its follow-up: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

[3] Communication from the European Commission. Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow, Brussels, 17.2.2011 COM(2011) 66 final; Council Conclusions on early childhood education and care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow 2011/C 175/03

[4] In January 1996 the European Commission's Network on Childcare published Proposals for a Ten Year Action Programme. These "40 quality targets" have been re-published at http://www.childcarecanada.org/publications/other-publications/04/10/quality-early-learning-and-child-care-services-papers-european

[5] http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/71025.pdf It is worth noting that the Barcelona target makes no reference to quality.

[6] Eurostat reported (June 2013) *that 93.2% of four year-olds were in pre-primary or primary education across the whole of the EU-27 in 2010. Participation rates of four year-olds in pre-primary or primary education were generally high — national averages of over 95% in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland,*

This European benchmark which is part of the Education and Training 2020 Strategy[8] calls for greater access for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. It also calls for the quality of provision and support for ECEC teachers to be strengthened. In Europe, Member States have been developing policies which increase the availability and improve the quality of provision. In 2011, in response to requests from Member States, the European Commission launched a process of cooperation to address the two-fold challenge of providing access to child care and education for all, and raising the quality of ECEC provision.[9] This process included the establishment in 2012 of a Thematic Working Group as part of the Education and Training 2020 work programme[10].

2. Working method

Within the Open Method of Coordination the Thematic Working Group has used the peer learning methodology[11] to develop proposals for improving the quality of ECEC within a European context. Its focus has been to identify and review key policy actions which have led to improvements in ECEC quality and access. The Group, which was comprised of ECEC experts and policy makers from across Europe, has reviewed the existing evidence from policy and practice in Member States, as well as cross-national research findings. By putting the child at the centre of its reflections the Group has highlighted five areas where action has led to clear improvements in the quality of provision. These are: access; workforce; the curriculum; evaluation and monitoring; and governance and funding. Within these five areas, there are ten

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Spain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom; as well as in Iceland and Norway. By contrast, three countries reported that fewer than 70% of four year-olds were enrolled. (http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Education_statistics_at_regional_level)

[7] Communication from the Commission to the European parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2013 European Semester: country-specific recommendations. Moving Europe beyond the crisis, Brussels, 29.5.2013 COM(2013) 350 final

[8] Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), OJ C 119 28/05/2009; 'at least 95% of children between the age of four and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education. See http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index_en.htm

[9] Communication from the European Commission. Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow, Brussels, 17.2.2011 COM(2011) 66 final; Council Conclusions on early childhood education and care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow 2011/C 175/03

[10] See more information on ECEC within the Education and Training Work Programme 2020 on: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/early-childhood_en.htm

[11] The open method of coordination provides a framework for cooperation between Member States and is used in areas which are within the competence of the Member States. The peer learning methodology provides a useful framework for cooperation; organised through Thematic Working Groups of experts nominated by Member States and stakeholder organisations. They exchange and synthesise their policy experiences, analyse and compare policy options, draw on research about successful policies and make recommendations for good policy practice. These are offered as guidance for national policy makers and practitioners. http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/index_en.htm

broad actions which can be used by Member States to improve further the quality of ECEC provision and support all children, their families and the community.

The sum of these actions is this proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework which should be seen as a first practical step to support policy makers and encourage all Member States to go further in their development of excellence in all ECEC settings for the benefit of individual children and society. It could also provide a stimulus for self-reflection at the system-level. These actions when adapted to the local context and taken together can provide a new impetus to ensuring the universal availability of high quality ECEC provision from birth to the start of compulsory primary schooling.

The challenge facing the Group has been to identify which particular measures and actions have led to significant improvements in the quality of ECEC and thus led to better outcomes at both the system level and within individual ECEC settings. This challenge is reflected in the OECD's literature review on monitoring quality in ECEC.[12] This review examined the links between monitoring processes and quality, and concluded that there was limited evidence which could be used to identify the specific measures which have had the greatest impact on quality and in turn have led to better outcomes. However the research shows there is a significant relationship between high quality ECEC (including ways in which this can be measured) and outcomes for children[13] – in this environment the Group's focus has been to consider which measures (e.g. the introduction of quality standards, benchmarks, targets etc.) have helped Member States to address and promote measurable improvements for children, families, local communities and society.

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[12] The literature review on monitoring quality in ECEC, (OECD, ECEC Network, 2013) considered mainly literature published in English.

[13] For this analysis the Group defined "outputs" as what the children can be expected to demonstrate at the end of their time in ECEC. By definition, outputs were short term and some of them could be measured once children leave the ECEC provider. They differed from "outcomes" which were the longer term benefits that accrue to society, families and individuals from their ECEC experiences.

3. The proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework

This proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework sets out the European policy context alongside the working method of the Group – this is followed by a short discussion of the Group's interpretation of quality in an ECEC context. After a description of the main statements in the Framework, the second section contains a summary of research, the main outcomes of the Working Group's discussions (in red boxes) and a number of case studies (in blue boxes) that highlight the evidence which underpins the statements. The third section of the document clarifies the definitions of the key concepts used in the Framework. In autumn 2014 a fourth section will be developed – this will analyse progress according to the Framework[14] in the ECEC systems represented by members of the Working Group.

3.1. Measuring quality in ECEC

ECEC quality is a complex concept and measures to achieve, improve and further develop quality are inter-dependent and should not be considered in isolation. Although there is no internationally agreed concept of quality in ECEC services, measures have been identified which help to produce and assure high quality. These include measures which affect the structure of ECEC provision, the quality of the processes used in ECEC settings and the outcomes from ECEC provision. Each can be seen independently as well as contributing to a balanced approach to improving the quality of ECEC provision based on:

- ✓ structural quality[15] which looks at how the ECEC system is designed and organised – it often includes rules associated with the accreditation and approval of individual ECEC settings; requirements about the number of professionally trained staff; the design of the curriculum; regulations associated with the financing of ECEC provision; the ratio of staff to children in any setting; arrangements to ensure all children are treated fairly and in accordance with their individual needs; and the physical requirements which need to be in place to meet the health and safety requirements of providing care and education for young children;

- ✓ process quality which looks at practice within an ECEC setting[16] – it often includes the role of play within the curriculum; relationships between ECEC providers and children's families; relationships and interactions between staff and children, and among children; the extent to which care and education is provided in an integrated way; the involvement of parents in the work of the ECEC setting and the day-to-day pedagogic practice of staff within an ECEC context;

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[14] As well as use the latest findings of the latest Eurydice publication, *Key data on ECEC*, 2014

[15] Structural quality consists of "inputs to process-characteristics which create the framework for the processes that children experience". These characteristics are not only part of ECEC provision; they are part of the environment that surrounds ECEC settings *e.g.* the community. They are often aspects of ECEC that can be regulated, though they may contain variables which cannot be regulated (Litjens and Taguma, 2010). Quoted in Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Norway 2013, OECD

[16] Process quality consists of what children actually experience in their programmes – i.e. what happens within an ECEC setting. These experiences are thought to have an influence on children's well-being and development (Litjens and Taguma, 2010). Quoted in Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Norway 2013, OECD

✓ outcome quality which looks at the benefits for children, families, communities and society. Where these benefits relate to children's outcomes they often include measures of children's emotional, moral, mental and physical development; children's social skills and preparation for further learning and adult life; children's health and their school readiness.

Analysis by the Group identified that quality was based on an image of each child – a view of how children should learn and grow up in society. There was a broad consensus on the importance of a shared image of a child and childhood as these influence the design and provision of ECEC services and help Member States to judge the quality of ECEC provision. There was agreement that children are capable, adventurous and active learners, who benefit from a combination of learning, care and play. Children are seen as active participants in their own learning and central to the education and care process. Children are not solely recipients of education they have an active role in framing their own learning. This image included a clear agreement that children were unique and they had different emotional, physical, social and cognitive needs which should be recognised.

In all Member States the following transversal issues are fundamental to the development and maintenance of high quality ECEC and underpin each statement in this proposal:

- <u>a clear image and voice of the child and childhood should be valued</u>
  Each child is unique and a competent and active learner whose potential needs to be encouraged and supported. Each child is a curious, capable and intelligent individual. The child is a co-creator of knowledge who needs and wants interaction with other children and adults. As citizens of Europe children have their own rights which include early education and care[17]. *Childhood is a time to be, to seek and to make meaning of the world. The early childhood years are not solely preparation for the future but also about the present.*[18] ECEC services need to be child-centred, acknowledge children's views and actively involve children in everyday decisions in the ECEC setting. Services should offer a nurturing and caring environment and provide a social, cultural and physical space with a range of possibilities for children to develop their present and future potential. ECEC is designed to offer a holistic approach based on the fundamental assumption that education and care are inseparable.

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[17] Children in Europe Policy Paper (2008). Young children and their services: Developing a European Approach (p. 5-6). http://www.grandirabruxelles.be/Publications/Europe/policydocEN.pdf.
Kickbusch, I. (2012), Learning for Well-being: A Policy Priority for Children and Youth in Europe. A process for change, with the collaboration of Jean Gordon & Linda O'Toole, drafted on behalf of the Learning for Well-being Consortium of Foundations in Europe, (published by Universal Education Foundation): p.37ff.
http://www.eiesp.org/hosting/a/admin/files/L4WB%20A%20Policy%20Priority%20for%20Children%20%26%20Youth%20in%20Europe.pdf J. Qvortrup/ Bardy, M. Sgritta, G.B.H. Wintersberger (Hrsg.). Childhood Matters. Social Theory, Practice and Politics. Aldershot: Avebury, Ashgate.
[18] Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace (2009). Belonging, Being and Becoming. The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, p.7.

- parents are the most important partners and their participation is essential

  The family is the first and most important place for children to grow and develop, and parents (and guardians) are responsible for each child's well-being, health and development. Families are characterised by great social, socio-economic, cultural and religious diversity – and this diversity should be respected as a fundamental element of European societies[19]. Within a context that is set by the national, regional or local regulations, the family should be fully involved in all aspects of education and care for their child. To make this involvement a reality, ECEC services should be designed in partnership with families and be based on trust and mutual respect. These partnerships can support families by developing services that respond to the needs of parents and allow for a balance between time for family and work. ECEC services can complement the family and offer support as well as additional opportunities to parents and children.

- a shared understanding of quality

  Research has shown that high quality ECEC services are crucial in promoting children's development and learning and, in the long term, enhancing their educational chances.[20] This proposed Quality Framework shares the underlying assumptions of quality set out by the European Commission's Network on Childcare. In 1996 this Network produced 40 targets to be achieved by all Member States over a 10 year period. These targets have not been adopted by the European Commission. The Network also emphasised that the targets were not the last word on quality and that *quality is a relative concept based on values and beliefs, and defining quality should be a dynamic, continuous and democratic process. A balance needs to be found between defining certain common objectives, applying them to all services, and supporting diversity between individual services.[21]*

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[19] Young children and their services: developing a European approach. A Children in Europe policy paper. (2008), p. 6.
[20] Ibid: p.5.
[21] EC Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile the Employment and Family Responsibility of Men and Women (1996). Quality Targets in Services for Young Children. Proposal for a Ten Year Action Programme, p.11

3. 2. The Quality Statements

This proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework focuses on the transversal issues and comprises ten broad action statements, each of which is an invitation to Member States to strengthen the quality of ECEC. High quality ECEC is based on high expectations, and requires:

Access to ECEC

> **1. provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children.**
> The potential benefits of high quality universal provision are particularly significant for children from disadvantaged and/or marginalised groups. ECEC provision should be made available from birth to the age at which children start compulsory primary school. To respond to parental circumstances and encourage all families to use ECEC services, provision needs to offer flexibility in relation to opening hours and the content of the programme.
>
> **2. provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity.**
> Successful inclusion in ECEC is based on: a collaborative approach to promoting the benefits of ECEC which involves local organisations and community groups; approaches which respect and value the beliefs, needs and culture of parents; an assurance that all children and families are welcome in an ECEC setting/centre; a pro-active approach to encouraging all parents to use ECEC services; a recognition that staff should be trained to help parents and families to value ECEC services and to assure them that their beliefs and cultures will be respected - this training can be supported by parenting programmes which promote ECEC; by close cooperation between the staff in ECEC centres, health and social services, local authorities and the school sector.

The ECEC workforce

> **3. well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role**
> Recognising the ECEC workforce as professionals is key. Professional development has a huge impact on the quality of staff pedagogy and children's outcomes. Developing common education and training programmes for all staff working in an ECEC context (e.g. preschool teachers, assistants, educators, family day carers etc.) helps to create a shared agenda and understanding of quality.
>
> *4.* **supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.**
> Good working conditions benefit staff and contribute to their retention. Policy measures affect the structural quality of ECEC provision including locally-determined arrangements on the size of a group; children to adult ratios; working hours, and wage levels which can help to make employment in an ECEC context an attractive option. Good working conditions can also reduce the constant and detrimental staff turnover in ECEC.

Curriculum

5. a curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way.

Children's education and care as well as their cognitive, social, emotional, physical and language development are important. The curriculum should set common goals, values and approaches which reflect society's expectation about the role and responsibilities of ECEC settings in encouraging children's development towards their full potential. All children are active and capable learners whose diverse competences are supported by the curriculum. At the same time the implementation of the curriculum needs to be planned within an open framework which acknowledges and addresses the diverse interests and needs of children in a holistic manner. A well-balanced combination of education and care can promote children's well-being, positive self-image, physical development and their social and cognitive development. Children's experiences and their active participation are valued, and the significance of learning through play is understood and supported.

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

A curriculum is an important instrument to stimulate the creation of a shared understanding and trust between children; and between children, parents and ECEC staff in order to encourage development and learning. At a system or national level a curriculum can guide the work of all ECEC settings and contexts – and at a local or setting level, it can describe the practices and priorities in the context of each centre. An essential factor in developing a collaborative approach to the curriculum is the ability of individual staff to analyse their own practice, identify what has been effective and, in partnership with their colleagues, develop new approaches based on evidence. The quality of ECEC is enhanced when staff discuss the implementation of the curriculum within the context of their centre/setting and take account of the needs of the children, their parents and the team. The curriculum can enhance this approach by promoting children's learning through experimentation and innovation; and encouraging cooperation with parents on how ECEC provision contributes to supporting children's development and learning.

Monitoring and evaluation

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

Systematic monitoring of ECEC allows for the generation of appropriate information and feedback at the relevant local, regional or national level. This information should support open exchange, coherent planning, review, evaluation and the development of ECEC in the pursuit of high quality at all levels in the system. Monitoring and evaluation is more effective when the information collected at a provider level is aligned with the information collected at a municipal, regional and system level.

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

Monitoring and evaluation processes are conducted to support children, families and communities. All stakeholders, including ECEC staff, should be engaged and empowered during the implementation of any monitoring and evaluation process. While monitoring can focus on the quality of structures, processes or outcomes; a focus on the interest of the child and staff engagement strengthens the importance of looking at the quality of the processes used in ECEC settings.

Achieving these statements is easier if the following governance arrangements are in place:

1. **Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.**

Given the cross-sectoral nature of ECEC provision government, stakeholders and social partners need to work together to secure the success of ECEC services. Legislation, regulation and guidance can be used to create clear expectations about the importance of collaborative working which supports high quality outcomes for children, families and local communities.

2. **Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders.[22]**

Structural or legislative arrangements support access to ECEC by giving families the right to access affordable ECEC provision. Approaches which support progress towards the universal availability of ECEC recognise that providing additional funds to support access for disadvantaged groups can be an effective strategy for increasing access especially for children from migrant, disadvantaged or low-income families. Monitoring the uptake of ECEC ensures that funding is used effectively. In order to make progress towards universal entitlement to provision measures to emphasise the attractiveness and value of ECEC services need to be in place.

A European Benchmark

The Group proposes that there should be a European benchmark on the quality of ECEC provision at a European level. The benchmark on quality would operate alongside the Education and Training 2020 benchmark on the quantity of ECEC provision.[23]

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[22] The representatives of the Netherlands to the Group stress the importance of accessibility and freedom of choice for parents for ECEC provision. Universal entitlement and progress towards this goal are not supported as they do not match the Netherlands' ECEC system. In the Netherlands the ECEC system combines a demand-driven structure for children aged 0 - 4 and supply-side arrangements for all children aged four and up and for children aged 2.5 - 4 from disadvantaged backgrounds. This combined system has led to a 90% participation rate for 3 year old children.

[23] The existing benchmark on quantity states that ' by 2020 at least 95% of children between the age of four and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education. See http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/framework_en.htm

This new benchmark on quality would be "by 2020 at least 90% of ECEC provision is of good quality or better as measured by the national or regional criteria" which are based on the main statements in this proposal.

In addition, the benchmark could be also complemented by indicators supporting each statement. There could be a list of 3-4 indicators for each statement from which countries could choose 1-2 and/or tailor-make them according to their national contexts.

These proposed statements look at the whole age range from birth to compulsory school age. Consequently in the longer term the benchmark on quantity will need to be revised as it currently only looks at participation of the age group from four to compulsory school age.

4. Developing quality

Despite the challenges in obtaining accurate estimates of the long term impact of ECEC policies, there is a growing body of research in this area. In particular, recent studies from EU Member States have tried to illustrate the long-term effect of early childhood education and care policies in the context of publicly funded large-scale or universal provision. For example, evidence of the positive effects of ECEC expansion reforms which have increased the accessibility of provision have been found in several EU countries such as Denmark[24], France[25], Norway[26] and Germany[27]. In these studies, the benefits of ECEC attendance are mainly related to children's educational attainment and the evidence emphasises that such gains are even more salient for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Studies that investigate the long-term effects of ECEC on children's cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes exist for a number of EU countries, including the UK, France, Germany, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Italy. Most longitudinal studies highlight that attendance of high quality ECEC programmes has long-lasting effects on children's cognitive development and school achievement[28]. By promoting children's overall development, ECEC enhances children's

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[24] Bingley, P. and Westergaard-Nielsen, N. (2012) Intergenerational transmission and day care in Denmark, in J. Ermisch, M. Jantti and T. Smeeding (eds.), *Inequality from Childhood to Adulthood: A Cross-National Perspective on the Transmission of Advantage*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

[25] Dumas, C. and Lefranc, A. (2012) Early schooling and later outcomes: Evidence from pre-school extension in France, in J. Ermisch, M. Jantti and T. Smeeding (eds), *Inequality from Childhood to Adulthood: A Cross-National Perspective on the Transmission of Advantage*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

[26] Havnes, T. and Mogstad, M. (2011) No Child Left Behind: Subsidized Child Care and Children's Long-Run Outcomes. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 3(2): 97–129.

[27] Felfe, C. and Lalive, R. (2011) *How Does Early Childcare Affect Child Development? Learning from the Children of German Unification.* CESifo Area Conference on Economics of Education: Center for Economics Studies.

[28] Andersson, B. E. (1992) Effects of day care on cognitive and socio-emotional competence in thirteen-year-old Swedish school children. *Child Development*, 63, 20–36.

Broberg, A. G., Wessels, H., Lamb, M. E. and Hwang, C.P. (1997) Effects of day care on the development of cognitive abilities in eight-year-olds: a longitudinal study. *Developmental Psychology*, 33, 62-69.

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project. Effective Pre-School Education*. London: DfES / Institute of Education: University of London.

Melhuish, E., Quinn, L., Hanna, K., Sylva, K., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2006) *The Effective Pre-School Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) Project. Summary report.* Belfast: Department of Education, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and Social Steering Group.

Sammons, P., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., Barreau, S. and Grabbe, Y. (2007) *The Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 3-11 Project (EPPE 3-11). Influences on Children's Development and Progress in Key Stage 2: Social/ behavioural outcomes in Year 5.* London: DfES / Institute of Education, University of London.

Brilli, Y., Del Boca, D., Pronzato, C. (2011) *Exploring the Impacts of Public Childcare on Mothers and Children in Italy: Does Rationing Play a Role?* Bonn: IZA (Institute for the Study of Labour).

Spiess, C.K., Büchel, F. and Wagner, G.G. (2003) Children's school placement in Germany: Does kindergarten attendance matter? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly,* 18, 255-270.

fundamental cognitive abilities (verbal abilities and logical reasoning) which facilitate further acquisition of domain-specific skills related to language and mathematics. If certain conditions are provided – such as an early start, high quality services and effective primary school education – the positive effects of ECEC attendance can potentially persist until the teenage years.

In addition, most longitudinal studies highlight that attending ECEC programmes has long-lasting effects on children's non-cognitive development[29]. These findings confirm that early experiences of socialisation with peers in formal settings promote social behaviour, self-regulation and autonomy. If early socialisation experiences are carried out in settings providing high quality care and education, the beneficial effects on children's social and emotional development might persist until they are teenagers, although other factors – such as quality of the home learning environment and further school experiences – play important roles.

In addition, studies which include vulnerable children report that high quality ECEC benefits especially the most disadvantaged children, whose gains in cognitive and socio-emotional development are higher than for 'average' children[30]. It appears that vulnerable children benefit most from ECEC when it is provided in contexts with a social mix[31]. Most studies on the effects

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[29] Andersson, B. E. (1992) Effects of day care on cognitive and socio-emotional competence in thirteen-year-old Swedish school children. *Child Development*, 63, 20–36.
Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project. Effective Pre-School Education.* London: DfES / Institute of Education: University of London.
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Del Boca, D. and Pasqua, S. 2010. *Esiti scolastici e comportamentali, famiglia e servizi per l'infanzia.* [Cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, family and childcare services].Torino: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli.
Felfe, C. and Lalive, R. (2011) *How Does Early Childcare Affect Child Development? Learning from the Children of German Unification.* CESifo Area Conference on Economics of Education: Center for Economics Studies.
[30] Brilli, Y., Del Boca, D., Pronzato, C. (2011) *Exploring the Impacts of Public Childcare on Mothers and Children in Italy: Does Rationing Play a Role?* Bonn: IZA (Institute for the Study of Labour).
Felfe, C. and Lalive, R. (2011) *How Does Early Childcare Affect Child Development? Learning from the Children of German Unification.* CESifo Area Conference on Economics of Education: Center for Economics Studies.
[31] Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project. Effective Pre-School Education.* London: DfES / Institute of Education: University of London.
van Tuijl, C., & Leseman, P. P. M. (2007) Increases in the verbal and fluid cognitive abilities of disadvantaged children attending preschool in the Netherlands. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22 (2), 188–203.

of targeted programmes which specifically address disadvantaged children show that ECEC attendance does not have the expected significant impact on children's cognitive acquisitions[32]. However some recent research suggests that targeted support in certain circumstances might have a small to medium size positive effect on domains such as children's language and attention.[33]

This may suggest that quality in the European context is less the result of specific programmes which are oriented towards cognitive development – instead, quality is more likely to be achieved through more generic ECEC services. The evidence broadly suggests that - in order to obtain the beneficial effects associated with attending ECEC services - an institutional structure within which high quality education and care is made available and affordable is required.

The research findings analysed in international reviews[34] converge to say that high quality ECEC provides a solid foundation for children's future educational achievements and social development. However the processes involved in the definition of what constitutes quality may differ according to the broader socio-cultural and political contexts in which ECEC services operate. It should be noted that the rationales underpinning ECEC policy reforms differ greatly across countries[35].

Members of the Working Group reviewed the ways in which quality is measured in ECEC; and considered the work of Eurydice, OECD, the European Childcare Network and other organisations. The evidence from research and recent policy developments highlights the value of focusing on a small number of topics where progress can make a significant difference to the

de Haan, A., Elbers, E., Hoofs, H. and Leseman P. (2013) Targeted versus mixed preschools and kindergartens: effects of class composition and teacher-managed activities on disadvantaged children's emergent academic skills. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice*, 24:2, 177-194.

[32] Veen, A., Roeleveld, J. en Leseman, P. (2000). *Evaluatie van Kaleidoscoop en Piramide. Eindrapportage.* Amsterdam:SCOKohnstamm Instituut.
Goede,D. de & Reezigt, G.J. (2001). Implementatie en effecten van de Voorschool in Amsterdam. Groningen: GION.
Veen, A., Derriks, M. & Roeleveld, J. (2002) *Een jaar later. Vervolgonderzo ek evaluatie van Kaleidoscoop en Piramide.* Amsterdam: SCOKohnstamm Instituut.

[33] Slot, P.L., Mulder, H., Verhagen, J., Boom, J., & Leseman, P.P.M. (under review). Quality and curriculum of early childhood education and care predict growth of two-year-olds' vocabulary and attention skills over one year. *Developmental Psychology*.

[34] Burger, K. (2010). How does early childhood care and education affect cognitive development? An international review of the effects of early interventions for children from different social backgrounds. *Early childhood research quarterly*, *25*(2), 140-165.
Lazzari A**.** and Vandenbroeck M. 2012. Literature Review of the Participation of Disadvantaged Children and Families in ECEC Services in Europe. In Bennett, J., Gordon, J. & Edelmann J. (2012) *ECEC in promoting educational attainment including social development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and in fostering social inclusion.* European Commission: DG EAC.

[35] NESSE. 2009. *Early childhood education and care. Key lessons from research for policymakers.* Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/news1697_en.htm

quality of provision. The policy areas where change could lead to improved quality are access; workforce; curriculum; monitoring and evaluation; and governance and funding[36]. High quality ECEC occurs when the structural conditions; learning and care processes; and outcomes are aligned and each aspect of quality leads to high expectations for ECEC. Each of these quality factors can support improvement but improvements are more likely when all of these factors are aligned around the needs of children. In this context this proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework recognises the importance of responding to what society wants for their young children; and the need to ensure care, development and learning are fully integrated into high quality ECEC[37].

4.1 Features of ECEC provision associated with quality: a summary of the evidence

As highlighted in the NESSE 'Early Matter' symposium conclusions[38] quality is crucial: evidence shows that ECEC services can enhance children's subsequent school performance if they are of a high quality but may impair it if they are of a low quality. Poor quality ECEC may do more harm than good and increase inequalities. The fact that ECEC provision which is not of sufficient quality might offer very few benefits to children, families and society – and that poor quality provision could actually have a negative impact – makes it necessary to deepen insights on the characteristics of ECEC provision that are associated with good quality, especially considering that such aspects are particularly important to those children who are living in conditions of socio-economic disadvantage[39].

A number of international reports concur to say that a series of criteria for structural quality need to be fulfilled to support quality provision[40]. They include:

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[36] Working Group Report of 2nd Meeting, 4-5 June 2012.

[37] Based on the Report of 2nd Meeting, 4-5 June 2012 and the Analysis of the Homework on the Image of the Child.

[38] Early Matters: Symposium Conclusions, 2009.
http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/symposia/symposia10-08/ecec_symposium_conclusions.pdf/view

[39] See, for example, Lazzari, A. and Vandenbroeck, M. (2013). The impact of Early Childhood Education and Care on cognitive development. A review of European studies. In: *Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years. Investigating the development of young children from migrant and low-income families*,1-12. Lesemann, P. (2009). The impact of high quality Education and Care on the development of young children. Review of literature. In: Eurydice (Ed.). *Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities*, Brussels, 17-49. Sylva, K.; Melhuish, E.; Sammons, P.; Siraj-Blatchford, I.; Taggart, B. (2011). Pre-school quality and educational outcomes at age 11: Low quality has little benefit. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 9 (2), 109-124.

[40] European Commission Network on Childcare (1996) *Proposals for a Ten Year Action Programme.* Retrieved from: www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/Qualitypaperthree.pdf
OECD (2006). *Starting Strong II, Early Childhood Education and Care.* Paris: OECD.
Bennett, J. (2008) *Early childhood services in the OECD countries: Review of the literature and current policy in the early childhood field.* Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. Retrieved from: www.unicef-irc.org/publications/502
Children in Europe (2008) *Young children and their services: developing a European approach - A Children in Europe Policy paper.* Retrieved from : www.childrenineurope.org/docs/eng_discpaper.pdf
www.grandirabruxelles.be/Publications/Europe/policydocEN.pdf

- an entitlement to ECEC provision which should be universal rather than targeted;
- workforce qualifications (at least half the staff should hold a bachelors' level degree) and working conditions which ensure low turn-over rates (ideally the same status and pay as compulsory school teachers);
- adult-child ratios and group sizes that are appropriate for the age and composition of the group of children;
- curriculum guidelines which combine a broad national framework with a range of local arrangements;
- quality monitoring systems that are implemented at the local/regional/central government level (and use appropriate tools);
- governance mechanisms which are part of a coherent system of integrated public policies and which ensure that adequate funding is provided for ECEC services especially in deprived areas.

A recent literature review of studies on good practices carried out within EU Member States[41] identified several factors associated with ECEC process quality that are contributing to the achievement of long lasting positive effects on children's cognitive and non-cognitive development. The summary of research findings identified the following as important:

- a pedagogical approach that combines education and care for nurturing the holistic development of children's potential;
- staff whose initial and continuing professional development opportunities support reflection and innovative practice; accompanied by a strong leadership and an ethos that is shared by all members of staff in an ECEC centre or setting;
- the way in which adults respond to the needs of young children, promote their emotional well-being and encourage them to engage actively in their learning;
- educational practices and learning strategies which respond to the needs of young children and sustain their curiosity rather than focusing on formalised learning which does not meet children's developmental potential;
- a curriculum that combines staff-initiated and child-initiated activities in order to sustain children's active engagement in the learning process. This includes encouraging children to make their own decisions about their learning, organising group interactions, providing a variety of resources which respond to children's interests, and valuing play as a way in which children understand their world and develop their knowledge with adult support;
- a curriculum that is designed by children, parents, professionals and local communities whose voices, opinions and perspectives are valued for promoting diversity and furthering democratic values;
- centres' policies which are committed to reaching out and including children from different social, ethnic or cultural backgrounds;

UNICEF (2013) A Framework and Tool Box for Monitoring and Improving Quality (unpublished draft)
[41] Lazzari A. and Vandenbroeck M. (2012). Literature Review of the Participation of Disadvantaged Children and Families in ECEC Services in Europe. In Bennett, J., Gordon, J. & Edelmann J. (2012) *ECEC in promoting educational attainment including social development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and in fostering social inclusion.* European Commission: DG EAC.

- a strong commitment to working with parents – including the involvement of parents in making decisions about the education and care of their children which can promote higher levels of parental engagement in their children's learning at home. Where there is cultural diversity, particular attention needs to be given to the development of parental partnerships in order to encourage and promote children's participation in ECEC;
- partnerships with parents and stakeholders which include the use of accurate and clear documentation of children's activities, learning and socialising experiences;
- public policies that are designed in consultation with stakeholders and strive for the recognition of ECEC as a right for all children.

It is important to acknowledge and recognise that there are different stakeholder perspectives on how to achieve high quality – these include the views of researchers and professionals, parents, children and staff.[42] The analysis and reflections of the Working Group focused on the lessons from evidence and research. However this perspective has been complemented by considering the views of parents, staff and children.

4.2. Access to services – a summary of the evidence

A generalised and equitable access to ECEC has been recognised as an essential feature of good quality provision which contributes to reducing the attainment gap[43]. Research shows that the beneficial effects of ECEC attendance are stronger for children in poverty and from minority ethnic groups when there is a context of universal provision[44]. Despite the consensus among researchers and policy makers at an international level[45] it is well documented that children from minority ethnic groups and low-income families are less likely to be enrolled in ECEC.

A recent survey carried out by Eurofound[46] shows the main obstacles which are reported as hindering ECEC attendance are cost (59% of respondents) and availability of provision (58% of respondents), followed by organisational arrangements such as access-distance and opening hours of facilities (41% of respondents). These patterns are confirmed by the findings of

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[42] Ceglowski, D., & Bacigalupa, C. (2002). Four perspectives on child care quality. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *30*(2), 87-92.

[43] Havnes, T. and Mogstad, M. (2011) No Child Left Behind: Subsidized Child Care and Children's Long-Run Outcomes. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 3(2): 97–129.

Felfe, C. and Lalive, R. (2011) *How Does Early Childcare Affect Child Development? Learning from the Children of German Unification.* CESifo Area Conference on Economics of Education: Center for Economics Studies.

Del Boca, D. (2010) *Child poverty and child well-being in the European Union: policy overview and policy impact analysis. A case study: Italy.* Budapest & Brussels: TARKI-Applica.

[44] Eurydice (2009) *Tackling social and cultural inequalities through early childhood education and care in Europe.* Brussels: EACEA.

[45] European Commission (2011) *Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow.* Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/schooleducation/doc/childhoodcom_en.pdf

[46] Eurofound (2012) *Third European Quality of Life Survey - Quality of life in Europe: Impacts of the crisis.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

research carried out in EU Member States which highlights the following as main obstacles to ECEC participation:

- the cost of provision is a barrier in most countries and is specifically salient to those countries in which ECEC provision is largely marketised, such as Ireland and the UK[47]. The cost of ECEC is more significant in low-income households. In France, for example, 64% of households in the top income quintile use childcare services compared with 15% of households in the bottom quintile. The situation is similar in other countries where the childcare participation rate is significant, such as Belgium, Finland and Ireland, but also in countries where the childcare rate is lower. Conversely, in Denmark the childcare rate is very high among households in the bottom quintile[48];

- the availability of ECEC provision which tends to be unequally distributed in urban and rural areas, in affluent and poor neighbourhoods, and across regions. This situation seems to be particularly exacerbated for 0-3 provision in the context of split systems[49];

- the inflexibility of ECEC facilities in relation to opening hours[50] and bureaucratic enrolment procedures (e.g. waiting lists, monolingual information leaflets and forms which need to be completed etc.) are a major deterrent to ECEC participation especially for minority ethnic families or marginalised groups[51]

- the presence of rationing criteria that, in situations where there is a lack of provision, might give priority to children whose parents are in employment or to those who subscribe early to waiting lists[52].

Research findings also highlight that – along with such structural conditions – less visible barriers might act as a deterrent to ECEC participation, especially for children and families from a disadvantaged background .These barriers are:

- the un-intended benefits generated by social distribution mechanisms within family policies (this includes the criteria for distributing public subsidies to ECEC providers, for establishing income-related enrolment fees and tax-deductions) that, especially in liberal and residual welfare states, favour the more advantaged families at the expense of low-income families[53];

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[47]Noailly, J., Visser, S., & Grout, P. (2007). *The impact of market forces on the provision of childcare: Insights from the 2005 Childcare Act in the Netherlands*. CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis.

[48] EU-SILC, 2010.

[49] Bennett, J. and Moss P. 2011. *Working for inclusion: how early childhood education and care and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens.* Retrieved from: http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi/

[50] Wall, K. and Josè S. J. (2004) Managing work and care: a difficult challenge for immigrant families. *Social Policy and Administration, 38*(6), 591-62.

[51] OSCE (2010) *Mapping of participation of Roma and Sinti children in early education processes within the OSCE region.* Retrieved from: www.osce.org/odihr/73874

[52] Vandenbroeck, M., De Visscher S., van Nuffel, K. and Ferla J. (2008) Mothers' search for infant child care: the dynamic relationship between availability and desirability in a continental European welfare state. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 23*(2), 245-258.

[53] Ghysels, J. & Van Lanker, W. (2011) The unequal benefits of activation: an analysis of the social distribution of family policies among families with young children. *Journal of European Social Policies*, 21, 472-85.

- the lack of trust in professional education and care that is generated when ECEC provision does not match families' goals and values in relation, for example, to cultural childrearing practices and bilingual development[54].

The research findings from EU Member States have important implications for developing the accessibility criteria in this proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework. These should address the barriers that are preventing families and children from participating in ECEC both in relation to structural conditions (availability, affordability and delivery of provision) and in relation to those socio-cultural aspects that are directly linked to the pedagogical approaches and educational practices in the services.

Many Member States acknowledge the difficulties they face in guaranteeing access to all children, particularly to children under three years of age. In many situations their first challenge is to provide enough places in line with the rules, regulations or legislation. Their second challenge is one of ensuring equal and fair access. Both challenges are magnified in the current financial and economic environment and in a context where parental demand for ECEC provision is rising. With the exception of those systems that offer universal ECEC provision, the evidence is not clear about the best response to these two challenges – how to increase the capacity for all children alongside providing for children from disadvantaged families. Where there are policy responses in place to improve access, it is difficult to monitor and measure their effectiveness and impact.

Improvements in access and quality have taken place as a result of structural input and process changes in recent years. However the extent of this improvement is rarely measured as there are few benchmarks or targets which can be quantified using reliable, valid and accurate instruments.[55]

Statements and evidence

Statement 1 - provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children.

The 2012 literature review on the participation of Disadvantaged Children and Families in ECEC Services in Europe[56] explored the role of early childhood education and care in addressing and promoting social inclusion, especially for children from disadvantaged groups. It included an

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Hynes, B. O. D. and Hayes, N. (2011) Who benefits from early childcare subsidy design in Ireland? *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice,* 19(3): 277-288. 2011.

[54] Leseman, P. 2002. Early childhood education and care for children from low income and minority backgrounds. Paper presented to OECD, Oslo, June 2002. Retrieved from:
www.oecd.org/dataoecd/48/15/1960663.pdf

[55] Taken from the Analysis on Access and Quality to support the Peer Learning Activity in Romania, 18-20 March 2013

[56] Lazzari A. and Vandenbroeck M. (2012). Literature Review of the Participation of Disadvantaged Children and Families in ECEC Services in Europe. In Bennett, J., Gordon, J. & Edelmann J. (2012) *ECEC in promoting educational attainment including social development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and in fostering social inclusion.* European Commission: DG EAC.

overview of existing studies from Member States and an investigation of barriers and good practices for working with disadvantaged communities and/or children from marginalised groups. The review states that, despite recurring obstacles as set out above, there are many practices around Europe that have begun to overcome these difficulties and noted significant progress in the enrolment of children from minority ethnic and poor families[57]. Based on this analysis the review identified five crucial criteria for increasing the participation of children and families from disadvantaged groups to ECEC provision.

Availability: as families living in poverty are often less mobile than more affluent families, it is crucial that high quality services are to be found in those neighborhoods where poor families and minority ethnic families reside[58]. This is not to say that ECEC provision should be targeted towards families "at risk". On the contrary, research shows that policies based on a (children's) rights perspective tend to be more effective than policies based on a needs (or risk) framework[59]. However, in case of shortages, policy makers might decide to prioritise investment in poorer areas as in the case of Integrated Children's Centres in the U.K.

Affordability: in situations where public funding is available, provision is usually free or parents' fees are determined according to income in order that ECEC services are more affordable especially for low-income families. In systems where children's entitlement to a place is not guaranteed, access to publicly subsidised ECEC provision might be restricted and families may encounter additional 'costs' such as giving up their privacy or experience negative social and psychological consequences of an intervention e.g. being labelled as "in need"[60]. For this reason, structural provision addressing the overall population - either free from costs or based on income-related fees – tends to have a higher equalising potential than those arrangements where entitlement is targeted towards the poor.

Accessibility: as language barriers, knowledge of bureaucratic procedures, waiting lists, or priorities set by the management may implicitly exclude children from poor and migrant families, ECEC access policies should be carefully planned – especially at the local level. This planning starts from an analysis of the barriers that prevent children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds accessing ECEC provision. It might also entail reaching out to families whose presence tends to be less visible in the local community in order to strengthen trust between marginalised groups and ECEC centres[61].

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[57] For additional information on networks working on these issues in practices across Europe, see for instance www.decet.org and www.issa.org as well as reports from the Roma Education Initiative that can be retrieved from www.osi.hu/esp/rei/.

[58] Biedinger, N., Becker, B., and Rohling, I. (2008) Early ethnic educational inequality: the influence of duration of preschool attendance and social composition. *European Sociological Review*, 24 (2), 243–256.

[59] Bennett, J. and Moss P. 2011. *Working for inclusion: how early childhood education and care and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens.* Retrieved from: http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi/

[60] Roose, R. & De Bie, M. (2003) From participative research to participative practice. A study in youth care. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 13*, 475–485.

[61] Broadhead, P., Meleady, C. & Delgato M.A. (2008) *Children, families and communities. Creating and sustaining integrated services.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Usefulness: as unequal enrollment is a result of the reciprocal relationships between policies, characteristics of families and services, ECEC provision need to be perceived as useful by potential users. This means that families should experience ECEC services as supportive and attuned to their demands. Firstly, this refers to practical issues, such as opening hours, which recognise that migrant families are more often employed in low-skilled, low-paid, jobs with irregular hours. Second, it means that the ways in which ECEC settings are run must make sense to different parents and local communities. For this reason, the management of ECEC centres should include democratic decision-making structures that allow the differing needs of families to be expressed and to be taken systematically into account in order to tailor ECEC provision to the demands of local communities. ECEC centres that – starting from these premises – develop policy-making capacity and actively participate in local consultation processes (policy advocacy) are found to be the most effective in engaging with disadvantaged communities[62].

Comprehensibility: the extent to which the meaning of ECEC provision is matched with the meanings that parents attribute to the education and care of young children in such services. This implies that the values, beliefs and educational practices of the provision need to be negotiated with families and local communities. Services that involve parents and local migrant communities in democratic decision-making processes and that are committed to the recruitment and training of personnel from minority groups are found to be more successful in fostering participation of children from diverse backgrounds to ECEC[63]. In this sense, there is evidence to suggest that the provision of integrated services combining care and education, early childhood and family support programmes, special needs and mainstream provision within the framework of inter-agency collaboration might be the most effective in answering the demands of local communities in contexts of diversity[64].

Member States have a number of approaches to managing the relationship between the demand and supply of ECEC places. Given how long it takes to increase the number of high quality places, there are situations where the available supply does not meet the demand from

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[62] OSI (2006) *Roma Educational Initiative. Final report prepared for the Education Support Program of the Open Society Institute.* OSI: Budapest.

[62] Zylicz, P. O. (2010) '*Where There Are No Pre-schools (WTANP): an educational program fostering self-efficacy in Polish rural areas.*' In Tuna, A. and Hayden J. *Early Childhood programs as the doorway to social cohesion.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing: ISSA.

[63] De Graaff, F. & Van Kuelen, A. (2008) *Making the road as we go. Parents and professionals as partners managing diversity in early childhood education.* The Hague: Bernard Van Leer. Retrieved from: www.bernardvanleer.org

Peeters, J. (2010) The role of ECEC services and professionals in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion in Early Childhood education and care services in the EU Countries. *Proceedings of the ChildONE Europe Seminar*. Retrieved from: www.childoneurope.org/issues/publications/ECEC_Report_rev.pdf

[64] Eurydice (2009) *Tackling social and cultural inequalities through early childhood education and care in Europe.* Brussels: EACEA.

Whalley, M. and Pen Green Centre Team (2007) *Involving parents in their children's learning*. London: Sage.

parents and families. In some situations this shortage has a disproportionately large impact on disadvantaged groups.

Some Member States aspire to offer a place to everyone who wants one, rather than offering a legal right to a place. This reflects the reality of being unable to guarantee provision. As the shortage of places appears to have a larger impact on disadvantaged families and children, authorities had designed rules and regulations (some of which are based on parental contributions, 'price' or affordability criteria, others are based on targeted measures alongside universal measures, such as a certain number of free hours of access a day) to minimise or mitigate the unintended consequences of these shortages. The existence of these rules can imply that authorities recognise shortages are unlikely to be eliminated quickly and that arrangements need to be established and monitored to ensure there is more equal access to limited provision.[65]

Lithuania

From 2011–2013 Lithuania introduced a national level programme to develop pre-school and pre-primary education. Its objectives were to improve access to ECEC for children from birth to six, particularly those living in rural areas; decrease the social exclusion of children; and reduce disparities in the level of ECEC provision between municipalities. To accomplish these objectives, the ECEC financial arrangements were revised and a new model – called the pre-schooler's basket - was introduced. The pre-schooler's basket aimed to improve access to ECEC and offered funding to municipal and private kindergartens for four hours of education per day (20 hours per week). If the ECEC providers offered education which lasted longer than the funded hours, the additional costs would need to be covered by the municipality or the private ECEC setting. Parents' costs were limited to paying for their children's meals when they were in the ECEC setting.

There were changes to secondary legislation (e.g. changes in the expectations associated with hygiene, simplification of the requirements for using buildings as ECEC settings etc.) which facilitated the introduction of pre-school education programmes in traditional education establishments and the introduction of multi-functional centres in rural areas. These centres encouraged cultural awareness, and provided health care services and pre-school education.

From 2011 to 2014 there was a ten per cent increase in enrolment in the pre-school programme. The programme led to the establishment of 70 private pre-schools and 40 multi-functional centres in rural areas. Pre-school education programmes became available to a higher number of children in Lithuania's 60 municipalities and there was greater coordination between the services of specialists working for the different sectors (health, education, care etc.) which were used by families and children. The implementation of this programme was supported by the

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[65] Taken from the Analysis on Access and Quality to support the Peer Learning Activity in Romania, 18-20 March 2013

Ministry of Education and Science through the development of educational materials, and the provision of consultancy and advice services.

Belgium

The Flemish Community of Belgium has operated a system where parental income is used as the basis for providing parents of babies and children under three[66] with access to ECEC in the public sector. The government subsidises this scheme and this enables the public ECEC settings to set parental fees based on parents' income. In 2009 the scheme was expanded to include babies and toddlers using ECEC facilities in the private sector. This subsidy scheme is accompanied by an official priority system which requires ECEC settings to allocate 20% of their places to children from single-parent or low-income families (this includes children of parents who are unemployed, who participate in labour market inclusion programmes, have a non-Belgian origin etc.). Although there has been a new decree on childcare for babies and toddlers in April 2014, the subsidy scheme and the priority system are the main legislative measures to improve access.

Between 2011 and 2012 the number of public sector settings where 20% of the places have been taken by children living in single-parent and/or low-income families increased from 43% to 45%. The percentage of children belonging to a priority group who have accessed a publicly subsidised independent setting has increased from 13.7% in 2011 to 14.9% in 2012.

The success of the introduction of the priority scheme for the public sector in 2008 was helped by the introduction of a transition year. This provided an opportunity for the ECEC settings to adapt their admission policy to ensure it was in line with the new legislation.

Statement 2 – provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity.

As confirmed by the research findings summarised in the literature review on the participation of Disadvantaged Children and Families in ECEC Services in Europe (2012)[67] more needs to be done in order to meet the needs of children and families whose circumstances prevent them from gaining access to the benefits of high quality provision. The review stressed that the advantages of ECEC must be clear to parents in order for them to develop a positive understanding of the practices and approaches used in settings. At the same time the values, goals and child-rearing beliefs of minority ethnic families should be recognised, respected and valued in mainstream ECEC provision through adopting pedagogical approaches which intentionally promote socio-cultural diversity in society. A mono-cultural arrangement of ECEC

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[66] This example is from the Flemish care sector. The education sector is free and children from 2.5 can participate in nursery schooling which is part of the education sector.
[67] Lazzari A. and Vandenbroeck M. 2013. Literature Review of the Participation of Disadvantaged Children and Families in ECEC Services in Europe. In Bennett, J., Gordon, J. & Edelmann J. (2013) *ECEC in promoting educational attainment including social development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and in fostering social inclusion.* European Commission: DG EAC.

services that do not recognise or practise diversity generally fails to gain the trust of minority ethnic groups and in the worst case generates segregation and reinforces discrimination[68]. In this regard the evidence emerging from the analysis of good practice developed across EU Member States suggest that these obstacles may be overcome by involving parents and local migrant communities in democratic decision-making processes associated with the management of ECEC services and by recruiting personnel from minority ethnic groups[69]. In this way, the basis for a dialogue that 'de-culturalises' social inclusion and 're-culturalises' outcomes can be established[70] and truly inclusive practice can be elaborated in a co-constructive way. In order to provide a substantial contribution to the educational opportunities and life chances of disadvantaged children – and therefore to social inclusion – ECEC needs to be available, affordable and accessible; and lead to desirable outcomes for the realisation of shared aspirations. By analysing the conditions that guarantee the successful implementation of good practice, this literature review has drawn a framework for inclusive practice that provides insight into how to translate such principles into everyday practices within ECEC institutions. These insights include:

- the child, as a citizen with rights, needs to be placed at the core of any educational initiative. Inclusive practices are grounded on an ethical commitment to social justice and respect for diversity that become concrete through the expression of values such as citizenship, democracy and social solidarity[71];
- children's identities need to be nurtured by feelings of belonging that are developed through meaningful relationships with adults and peers and through the interaction with a welcoming environment that values their languages and cultural backgrounds[72]. This requires the ECEC setting to develop a set of practices with children's families in order to create a smooth transition from the home environment to the ECEC setting;
- in order to be responsive, educational practices need to be co-constructed with children and their families. Parental involvement needs to be based on an equal partnership with ECEC providers and include:
  - a. democratic decision-making structures (e.g. parental committee) for the management of ECEC services;
  - b. staff with an open-minded disposition towards challenging traditional practices. Parents may have differing needs to taken into account - ECEC services should be committed to negotiating their practice and values in a context where contrasting values and beliefs emerge.

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[68] OSI, REF and UNICEF (2012) *The Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI) Overview Report*. Geneva. Retrieved from: www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/roma-early-childhood-inclusion-overview-report
[69] Bennett, J. and Moss P. 2011. *Working for inclusion: how early childhood education and care and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens.* Retrieved from: http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi/
[70] Vandenbroeck, M. (2007) 'De-culturalising social inclusion and re-culturalising outcomes.' In *Promoting social inclusion and respect for diversity in the early years.* Bernard Van Leer Foundation. Retrieved from: www.bernardvanleer.org/Promoting_social_inclusion_and_respect_for_diversity_in_the_early_years
[71] Broadhead, P., Meleady, C. & Delgato M.A. (2008) *Children, families and communities. Creating and sustaining integrated services.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.
[72] Brooker, L. and Woodhead, M. (Ed.) (2008) *Developing positive identities.* Milton Keynes: The Open University. Retrieved from: http://www.ecdgroup.com/docs/lib_005464256.pdf

Studies carried out in England[73], Northern Ireland[74] and Germany[75] highlight that better quality and consequently better gains for children and families are found in ECEC settings that foster high levels of parental participation through the organisation of specific initiatives (e.g. outreach and multi-agency work) and parental involvement in pedagogic decision-making;

- out-reach work is an important way of making ECEC services useful and desirable. As children from disadvantaged families are under-represented in ECEC services, out-reach activities are the first step toward building bridges of trust between marginalised groups and ECEC services. Linking this work to the activities of locally established voluntary organisations with well-developed and high-trust relationship with marginalised groups can be effective[76];

- practice-based and participatory research projects should be regularly implemented in order to sustain innovation in ECEC services in relation to local needs. Evidence from longitudinal studies show that successful inclusive ECEC programmes are grounded in practice-based research that – by exploring the needs and potentialities of local contexts within an ecological framework – supports responsive practices as well as promoting the ongoing development of staff[77]. Involving parents and professionals in participatory research projects in which meaning and value are negotiated - and new pedagogical knowledge is constructed and shared – is highlighted as a key success factor of inclusive practice as it encourages educational experimentation and generates sustainable change within ECEC settings[78].

The policy and practices adopted by Member States highlight the importance of collaboration: the need for ECEC practitioners and policy teams to work with partner organisations and parents in order to support improved access. Only services that pursue a strong partnership with parents by engaging them in democratic decision-making make a real difference to the life chances of vulnerable children and their families.

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[73] Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project. Effective Pre-School Education.* London: DfES / Institute of Education: University of London.

[74] Melhuish, E., Quinn, L., Hanna, K., Sylva, K., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2006) *The Effective Pre-School Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) Project. Summary report.* Belfast: Department of Education, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and Social Steering Group.

[75] Wertfein, M., Spies-Kofler, A., & Becker-Stoll, F. (2009) Quality curriculum for under-threes: the impact of structural standards. *Early Years*, *29*(1), 19-31.

[76] OSI (2006) *Roma Educational Initiative. Final report prepared for the Education Support Program of the Open Society Institute.* OSI: Budapest.

[77] Vandenbroeck, M., Geens, N., & Berten, H. (2014) The impact of policy measures and coaching on the availability and accessibility of early child care: a longitudinal study. *International Journal of Social Welfare,* 23 (1), 69-79.

Oliveira-Formosinho, J., & Araújo, S. B. (2011) Early education for diversity: Starting from birth. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *19*(2), 223-235.

[78] Whalley and Pen Green Centre Team (2007) *Involving parents in their children's learning*. London: Sage.

Policy makers, managers and practitioners in every system are aware of the need to encourage the use of ECEC services. Even when there are free universal services, it is widely acknowledged that you need to do more than 'open the doors.' To ensure services are used, a pro-active approach which supports parents and offers encouragement, incentives and information is required. These need to be provided by people who are trusted by the communities seeking to access the services. When there are shortages of places, it is hard to balance the aspiration of equal access with persuading families who are most likely to benefit to take up ECEC services. However despite these tensions, there are a range of initiatives that involve parents, the community and other stakeholders in encouraging participation. The quality of ECEC provision and attendance (not just enrolment) are strengthened through collaboration and outreach work, and children's experiences are improved through such approaches.[79]

Portugal

Portugal created the Programme Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária (Priority Intervention in Areas of Educational Need) for schools in deprived areas which work with disadvantaged and/or marginalised groups. These schools operate under special arrangements, receive more funds and employ additional technical staff (e.g. teachers, psychologists, mediators, tutors).

The aims of this pedagogic innovation are:

• to improve the children's educational and learning environments to prevent absenteeism and early school leaving. This is achieved through multiple and diverse educational provision which supports the integration of various learning phases including pre-school education;
• to create the conditions which support connections between school and an active life;
• to coordinate educational policies and children's experiences in schools in the same geographical area and the community. This includes improving the management of resources and the joint development of educational, cultural, sport and free time activities. These developments can lead to a restructuring of the school network.

Within this programme two schools created the Project "Salas de Vidro" (Glass Rooms) for pre-school education. The schools organised a range of children's activities which took place in the school and in the neighbourhood. The children's families were encouraged to participate or observe the activities.

The project started five years ago and has been developed in two neighbourhoods with many Roma children and families. The focus group includes 17 children, a 25% increase from its inception. The project is evaluated every year and now 100% of children and mothers regularly participate in the activities. The project is open to children aged from 3 to 6 years old, but there are now children under 3 years old and some women who are expecting their first child. The evaluation has identified that success is based on the creation and development of a

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[79] Based on the thematic working group's analysis of access issues.

multidisciplinary team; a transparent approach; establishing trust and confidence in the school; the additional resources and the expectation that each school is accountable and has to demonstrate it has met the pre-defined goals in order to receive the funds.

Romania

Since 2001 the Ministry of National Education has managed a community based programme (summer kindergarten) for children from disadvantaged groups, especially Roma. This summer programme is designed for children who could not access the regular kindergarten services and were due to start school in the autumn. The programme last six weeks (45 days) and uses an adapted curriculum to help children to engage at the same level with their colleagues who have completed a kindergarten course lasting one, two or three years. The programme includes a social component which is supported by the local community.

In the summer kindergartens the ECEC teachers work with school mediators. These school mediators, whose authority is recognised by the community, help children to get ready to enter primary school. The school mediator's role includes bringing children to school, supporting their integration and performance, supporting the ECEC teachers, and promoting the value of education in the community. The school mediator often works as part of a Local Community Support Group. The programme began in one community with 20 children and now operates nationally. More than 900 school mediators have been trained and more than 500 of them work in the education system which includes ECEC services. Since the summer kindergartens started, the enrolment of Roma preschool children has increased progressively (25 children in 2001, 4,800 children in 2008 and 8,400 children in 2011) and it has increased Roma children's participation in ordinary kindergartens (11,493 in 2004, 21,463 in 2009 and 22,166 in 2013). Where the school mediators work, the primary school drop-out rate has fallen by 50 per cent. Other initiatives, such as the second chance programme, have also been developed alongside the summer kindergartens - these provide further support to children from disadvantaged groups including Roma.

4.3 The ECEC workforce – a summary of the evidence

Eurofound's forthcoming report analyses the existing research on the relationships between training, working conditions, interactions between staff and children, and outcomes for children. Their conclusions shed some light on the impact that adequate working conditions and training opportunities have on the quality of service and on the interactions between staff and children. This is all the more important as the experiences, training and qualification of staff working in ECEC services are very diverse across Member States.[80]

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[80] Urban, M, Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A. and Van Laere, K. (2011) *CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care.* European Commission: DG Education and Culture. Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2011/core_en.pdf
Key data on ECEC, Eurydice (2014)

It has been widely demonstrated in international research that staff working conditions and professional development are essential components of ECEC quality[81] and that such quality components are linked to children's cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes. Recent research conducted within the OECD quality project stresses that there is strong evidence to suggest that better educated staff are more likely to provide high-quality pedagogy and stimulating learning environments, which in turn, foster children's development leading to better learning outcomes[82]. In this sense, the professional competence of staff proved to be one of the most salient indicators of ECEC quality especially in ensuring higher process quality. In this sense, effective educators nurture children's development by creating rich and stimulating early learning environments, by intentionally sustaining shared thinking and logical reasoning in social interactions, by valuing children's initiatives for extending their learning opportunities[83]. In turn, significant positive relationships between ECEC quality and children's educational achievement have been found in international research findings[84].

Research also shows that the ongoing professionalisation of staff is a key element in guaranteeing children's positive outcomes. However it seems clear that it is not staff professional development per se that has an impact, but rather that the effects depend on the content and delivery mode of the training[85]. Research shows that professionalisation initiatives that actively involve practitioners in designing the content of the training – by addressing issues that arise out of their everyday practices – and activities that support them throughout the process of reflecting and collectively re-devising practices might be the most successful[86].

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[81] OECD (2012a) *Research brief: working conditions matter.* Retrieved from: www.oecd.org/edu/school/49322250.pdf
OECD (2012b) *Research brief: Qualifications, education and professional development matters.* Retrieved from: www.oecd.org/education/school/49322232.pdf
Urban, M, Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A. and Van Laere, K. (2011) *CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care.* European Commission: DG Education and Culture. Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2011/core_en.pdf

[82] Litjens, I. and Taguma, M. (2010) *Literature overview for the 7th meeting of the OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care.* OECD: Paris.

[83] Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project. Effective Pre-School Education.* London: DfES / Institute of Education: University of London.
Pramling, N. and Pramling Samuelsson, I. (2011). Education Encounters: Nordic studies in early childhood didactics. Dordrecht: Springer.

[84] Pešikan A. and Ivić, I. (2009) *Education against poverty: Analysis of effects of Preschool Preparatory Programmes introduction in Serbia.* Belgrade: Ministry of Education of Republic of Serbia.
Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project. Effective Pre-School Education.* London: DfES / Institute of Education: University of London.

[85] Fukkink, R. G., & Lont, A. (2007) Does training matter? Meta-analysis and review of caregiver training studies. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 22* (3), 294-311.

[86] Bleach, J. (2013) Using action research to support quality early years practice. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21 (3), 370–379.
Peeters J. and Vandenbroeck, M. (2010)'Childcare practitioners and the process of professionalization.' In Miller, L. and Cable, C. (2010) *Professionalization, Leadership and Management in the Early Years.* London: Sage.

Evidence from the CoRe study also points out that ECEC quality requires not only a competent practitioner but also a competent system that sustains and contributes to the ongoing professionalisation of staff in relation to changing societal needs[87]. Along this line, it has been demonstrated that short term in-service training courses, which are often based on acquiring specific knowledge or techniques, have a very limited impact on the improvement of pedagogical practice[88].

Similarly, international research on the impact of staff working conditions[89] shows a clear link between the staff to child ratio, group size, wages and ECEC quality. These, have a positive impact on children's outcomes. At the same time, research findings stress the complex interplay between working conditions and this makes it difficult to disentangle the effects of each particular characteristic[90]. As reported in comparative studies and reviews[91], no-single component of structural quality associated with working conditions has – on its own – a significant impact on ECEC quality. It is the combination of several components – related to staff working conditions – that produces ECEC quality. And a different balance is needed in different countries. It is therefore argued that, in planning for ECEC quality improvements, many structural characteristics need to be considered simultaneously; with an understanding of how each structural characteristic has an impact on quality within each national system.

Building on this body of research and in consultation with national stakeholder representatives, the International Labour Organisation recently released policy guidance on the 'Promotion of

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Vujicic, L. (2008) 'Research and Improvement of One's own Practice – Way to Development of Teachers'/preschool teachers' Practical Competence.' In Žogla, I. (2008) *Teacher of the 21st century: Quality Education for Quality Teaching.* Riga: University of Latvia Press.

[87] Urban, M, Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A. and Van Laere, K. (2011) *CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care.* European Commission: DG Education and Culture. Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2011/core_en.pdf

Lazzari, A., Picchio, M., and Musatti, T. (2013). Sustaining ECEC quality through continuing professional development: systemic approaches to practitioners' professionalisation in the Italian context. *Early Years: an International journal of research and development. Special issue: 'Continuing professional development and the early years workforce'*, 33 (2), 133-145.

[88] Pianta, R. C., Mashburn, A. J., Downer, J. T., Hamre, B. K., & Justice, L. (2008) Effects of web-mediated professional development resources on teacher-child interaction in pre-kindergarten classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 23*(4), 431-451.

[89] OECD (2012a) *Research brief: working conditions matter.* Retrieved from: www.oecd.org/edu/school/49322250.pdf

[90] OECD (2012a) *Research brief: working conditions matter.* Retrieved from: www.oecd.org/edu/school/49322250.pdf

[91] Munton, T., Mooney, A., Moss, P., Petrie, P., Clark, A., Woolner, J., et al. (2002). *Research on ratios, group size and staff qualifications and training in early years and childcare settings.* TCRU: University of London. Commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills.

Cryer, D., Tietze, W., Burchinal, M., Leal, T., & Palacios, J. (1999). Predicting process quality from structural quality in preschool programs: A cross-country comparison. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *14*(3), 339-361.

decent working conditions for early childhood education personnel' (2014)[92]. This recognises the crucial role of the early childhood workforce in achieving high quality ECEC provision for all; and underlines that a greater focus should be placed on improving the professional development, status and working conditions of personnel. As emphasised in the research overview carried out by Bennett and Moss (2011)[93] within the Working for Inclusion project, the workforce is central to ECEC provision as it accounts for the greater part of the total cost of early childhood services and is the major factor in determining children's experiences and their outcomes. For these reasons how ECEC staff are recruited, trained and treated is critical for the quality of early childhood services and for the inclusion of all children.

> The focus on the workforce; its initial and on-going training; the working conditions of staff; and the leadership arrangements is central to high quality ECEC provision. Within this focus the influence of pedagogic leadership and the need to integrate theory and practice is paramount. When staff are well trained, well led and work in ECEC settings which support their professional development, higher quality can be expected. However there is a need to identify which conditions have the greatest influence on quality and whether changes to training, leadership or conditions of employment make the most significant differences to children and the outcomes of ECEC. Across Member States there is a wide range of emerging practice in relation to staff training, development and leadership but some things are common: the combination of theory and practice during initial training; an increasing recognition that continuing professional development is more effective when it is based on identified training needs; leadership is improved when it extends beyond administrative duties and combines pedagogic responsibility with administrative duties; and there is a relentless focus on the learning and caring needs of children.

Statements and evidence

Statement 3: well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role.

There is a broad consensus among researchers, practitioners and policymakers that the quality of ECEC and ultimately the outcomes for children and families depends on well educated, experienced and competent staff. The quality and relevance of staff training has a direct effect on practitioners and an indirect effect on children.

There is substantial evidence that staff qualifications matter: higher levels of initial preparation and specialised training are associated with better ECEC quality as well as better developmental

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[92] ILO (2014) *Policy guidelines on the promotion of decent working conditions for early childhood education personnel.* Geneva. Retrieved from: www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/codes-of-practice-and-guidelines/WCMS_236528/lang--en/index.htm

[93] Bennett, J. and Moss P. 2011. *Working for inclusion: how early childhood education and care and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens.* Retrieved from: http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi/

outcomes for children[94]. It is well documented that ECEC staff with more formal education as well as specialised early childhood training provide more stimulating, warm and supportive interactions with children which in turn support children's overall development and learning. However, research also shows that staff qualifications by themselves are not sufficient to predict the quality of ECEC provision: the content of the training and the methodologies adopted for delivery play a crucial role. In this sense it is the integration of a range of training methodologies – lectures, small-group project work, supervised practice in an ECEC setting and a collective analysis of practices – that produces the right interplay between theory and practice as these enhance the reflective competence of staff and have been found to be a major factor in successful initial training and education[95].

Research findings also indicate that teacher quality is very complex[96] and that increasing the quantity of initial education of staff is not a sufficient condition for improving quality or for optimising the benefits of ECEC on children's outcomes. Ongoing professional development -- provided it is of sufficient length and intensity - may be as important as pre-service qualifications in enhancing staff competence. On-going training can lead to the acquisition of new knowledge, the continuous improvement of educational practice and the deepening of pedagogical understanding[97]. For these reasons, continuing professional development opportunities need to be tailored to meet staff needs; should be available to all ECEC personnel – including assistants and auxiliary staff; and their attendance should be seen as a requirement to stay and grow in the profession[98]. Newly recruited ECEC staff benefit from mentoring and supervision during their induction. All team members should have the opportunity to join regular in-house professional development (including practice-based research projects) and be able to access pedagogical support programmes (e.g. counselling, collaboration with other social and educational agencies at a local level). Furthermore, opportunities for staff to gain more diversified professional experience, work in an inter-professional and collaborative way and explore flexible career

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[94] Fukkink, R. G., & Lont, A. (2007) Does training matter? Meta-analysis and review of caregiver training studies. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly,22* (3),294-311.
Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project. Effective Pre-School Education.* London: DfES / Institute of Education: University of London.

[95] Nigris, E. (2004). La formazione degli insegnanti: percorsi, strumenti, valutazione. Roma: Carrocci Editore.
Favre, D. (2004). Quelques réflexions de formateur sur l'analyse des pratiques professionnelles en secteur petite enfance. . In D. Fablet (Ed.), *Professionnel(le)s de la petite enfance et analyse de pratiques.* Paris: L' Harmattan, 17-38.
Gulløv, E. &Højlund, S. (2003). *Feltarbejdeblandtbørn. Metodologiogetik i etnografiskbørneforskning.* København: Gyldendal.

[96] Early, D., Maxwell, K., Burchinal, M., Bender, R., Ebanks, C., Henry, G., et al. (2007). Teachers' education, classroom quality, and young children's academic skills: results from seven studies of preschool programs. *Child Development, 78*(2), 558-580.

[97] Urban, M, Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A. and Van Laere, K. (2011) *CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care.* European Commission: DG Education and Culture. Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2011/core_en.pdf

[98] OECD (2012b) *Research brief: Qualifications, education and professional development matters.* Retrieved from: www.oecd.org/education/school/49322232.pdf

pathways should be fully deployed in a way that favours the inclusion of staff from disadvantaged groups[99].

The development of competent practice is not the sole responsibility of individual practitioners – it is better understood as a joint effort that involves teams, training centres, local administrative institutions, and non-governmental bodies. ECEC governance systems which include coherent policies that sustain the on-going professionalisation of staff should be put in place at local, regional and national level. A meta-analysis of case studies describing successful continuing professional development (CPD) initiatives carried out in EU Member States revealed that effective initiatives are embedded in a coherent pedagogical framework which helps practitioners to reflect on their everyday work. Effective initiatives also help practitioners to develop and use transformative practices that respond to the needs of children and families in local communities[100]. ECEC staff professionalisation could take different forms, encompassing:

- the exchange of good practices among centres (documenting, networking and disseminating);
- participatory action-research and peer learning opportunities (communities of practices);
- pedagogic guidance provided by specialised staff (pedagogical coordinators, advisors, etc.);
- training provision for ECEC centre coordinators/managers/directors.

To conclude, international reports concur that it is important to adapt training to meet the needs of staff who are working with children from low-income families and minority ethnic backgrounds[101]. Increasing the recruitment of staff from diverse backgrounds and, when required, helping them to progressively upgrade their qualifications (to secondary and tertiary levels) significantly benefits children, and particularly those from poor and migrant families. In many situations the creation of inclusive training programmes which facilitate access from underrepresented groups to professional qualifications at the tertiary level remains a challenge. The CoRe Study[102] findings show that successful strategies to meet this challenge include the creation of various qualifying pathways, the need to focus on the recognition of prior learning for

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[99] Vonta, T., Balič, F., Jager,J., Rutar, S. (2010) Inter-professional collaboration in pre-school and primary school contexts. Unpublished case study from Slovenia prepared for the CoRe project. CoRe Research Documents can be retrieved at: www.vbjk.be/en/node/3559

[100] Urban, M, Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A. and Van Laere, K. (2011) *CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care.* European Commission: DG Education and Culture. For additional information see the link: http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2011/core_en.pdf

[101] Bennett, J. and Moss P. 2011. *Working for inclusion: how early childhood education and care and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens.* Retrieved from: http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi/ ILO (2014) *Policy guidelines on the promotion of decent working conditions for early childhood education personnel*. Geneva. Retrieved from: www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/codes-of-practice-and-guidelines/WCMS_236528/lang--en/index.htm

[102] Urban, M, Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A. and Van Laere, K. (2011) *CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care.* European Commission: DG Education and Culture. For additional information see the link: http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2011/core_en.pdf

experienced untrained practitioners, and the provision of additional support courses for students from a minority ethnic background[103].

Developing high expectations requires all staff to be trained for their role and responsibilities. This includes training to work in multi-disciplinary teams, to work with parents and members of the community, and to recognise their own competences and skills through a process of reflection and discussion. However expectations are not solely related to training, leadership is critical to supporting improvement, promoting the value of self-reflection and encouraging staff to continue to develop and strengthen their own practice.

France

France has high expectations about the formal qualifications of the diverse range of staff who work with young children. In 2013 the reform of the initial training of primary school teachers was designed to find a new balance and relationship between practice and theory in the higher education colleges which focus on teaching (ESPE - école supérieure du professorat et de l'éducation). This reform covered teachers who will work in nursery schools (école maternelle for children over the age of three and in some disadvantaged areas from the age of two, to the start of secondary school) and therefore the reform covered some aspects of ECEC.

Most of the staff working in crèches (for children under the age of three) are expected to have formal qualifications at a high level. However, traditionally these qualifications have had a focus on healthcare and training and have emphasised children's health and physical development.

The French system is a split system and because of the wide range of ECEC practitioners, it is essential for staff to collaborate. Recently designed guidelines highlight how partnerships between ECEC provision and nursery schools can be strengthened. In Grenoble the Director of the National Education service and the ECEC local authorities have set up an experimental in-service training programme which focuses on bringing together ECEC practitioners to ensure there are connections between the different professions (e.g. auxiliaires de puériculture, éducatrices de jeunes enfants, ATSEM, enseignants d'école maternelle). This training programme[104] has been piloted in Grenoble – it is based on the practitioners' needs and helps them to improve the quality of their reflective practice. This is a new project which has provided some early indications of success.
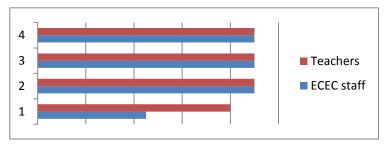
The pilot brought together 25 professionals including pre-primary school teachers from nursery schools, ECEC staff and 100 children from disadvantaged areas. The teachers and ECEC staff have been questioned on the value of the training, and have been asked to comment on whether:

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[103] CoRe unpublished case studies from France, Denmark, England, Belgium (Flanders). For additional information: www.vbjk.be/en/node/3559
[104] http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid72693/loi-d-orientation-et-de-programmation-pour-la-refondation-de-l-ecole-de-la-republique.htmltml

1: it is a good way to get to know each other's role and objectives;
2: it helps them to coordinate their actions in support of the children;
3: it is a good way to understand the continuum in taking care of the children;
4: it's useful for their job.
The following table, marked in 20% bands, shows the extent to which the participants agreed with the four statements.

As part of the training, the participants were also invited to comment on which aspects were most helpful. The following were identified:

- the mutual observation of each other's practice has been appreciated by teachers and ECEC staff;
- the links between ECEC staff and pre-primary school teachers have been reinforced[105], and they have found it easier to work together with parents;
- children's separation from their parents has become easier and their social adaptation has been facilitated. The organisation of the children's time at school is much better accepted by parents and children (including the after-school activities).

The success of the pilot project is due to:

- recent changes in the French policy framework[106] encouraging partnership between the pre-primary schools and the ECEC services;
- the need of ECEC staff and pre-primary school teachers to work together;
- the commitment of ECEC staff and pre-primary school teachers in disadvantaged areas;
- the pilot project has worked within a set of clear and strong guidelines which helps the meetings and training sessions to be well structured and productive.

Italy

In Italy responsibility for ECEC services is shared between the central and local authorities. Local authorities often employ regional coordinators who organise the services and provide pedagogic guidance. There are no national guidelines on the role of these coordinators and consequently their responsibilities vary from a mainly pedagogic to a mainly administrative role. The qualifications required to become an ECEC regional coordinator vary significantly and only some of them hold a degree. In order to harmonise their initial training, which at present is not mandatory, the Università di Roma Tre set up a masters' degree course for future coordinators.

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[105] http://eduscol.education.fr/cid66998/eduscol-the-portal-for-education-players.html
[106] (NOR : MENE1242368C circulaire n° 2012-202 du 18-12-2012 MEN - DGESCO A1-1)

This aimed to provide potential coordinators with the range of pedagogic and organisational competences which would be useful in a wide range of contexts.

There have now been eight cohorts of students and 100% of them have completed the masters' degree. The evaluation identified that 98.7% of candidates judged the masters' degree as very satisfying or satisfying and 97.5% would recommend it to potential coordinators. The evaluation identified that the reflective approach was valued and 80% of teachers were rated "good or very good" in relation to their pedagogic competence. The degree aims to provide a transformative learning experience which enables potential coordinators to become lifelong learners with the skills and competences needed to work in a versatile and reflective environment.

The candidates and organisers see the masters' degree as a success as it represents a pioneering model in the field of ECEC provision. So far there has been no follow-up evaluation on the impact this type of training has had on the effectiveness of the ECEC coordinators or the impact better trained staff have on the quality of the ECEC services.

Statement 4: supportive working conditions including professional leadership which create opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

Good working conditions can reduce the constant and detrimental staff turnover in ECEC. It is well documented in international research that staff working conditions associated with the adult-child ratio, group size and wages matter[107].

Research evidence is consistent with the view that the staff: child ratio can have a significant impact on the quality of care that children receive[108]. In this regard, research findings indicate that higher staff ratios (more staff per group of children) are more likely to facilitate positive and responsive interactions among adult and children – both on an individual and a group basis. The impact on children's development has been extensively demonstrated[109]. However the findings also reveal that the influence of the staff: child ratio on quality is linked to other elements of the care environment including staff education and training, staff salaries and group size.

In relation to group size, the research evidence is consistent with the view that this is one of several factors, including the adult: child ratio, that has some small but significant impact on the quality of interactions between staff and children – as well as on the quality of learning support

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[107] OECD (2012a) *Research brief: working conditions matter.* Retrieved from: www.oecd.org/edu/school/49322250.pdf

[108] Munton, T., Mooney, A., Moss, P., Petrie, P., Clark, A., Woolner, J., et al. (2002). *Research on ratios, group size and staff qualifications and training in early years and childcare settings.* TCRU: University of London. Commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills.

[109] Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project. Effective Pre-School Education.* London: DfES / Institute of Education: University of London.
Pramling, N. and Pramling Samuelsson, I. (2011). Education Encounters: Nordic studies in early childhood didactics. Dordrecht: Springer.

provided to them [110] This has a positive effect on children's outcomes. However the research findings for the staff: child ratio stress that it is difficult to identify the unique influence of group size on staff child interactions and children's outcomes.

Because of these complex and multiple influences, it is impossible to draw precise conclusions from research concerning an optimum staff: child ratio or class-size[111]. Research suggests that choices in different countries should be made in the context of local ECEC philosophies and notions of good practices. These choices can take account of the idea that a favourable group size and a reasonable ratio provide better conditions for sustaining social interactions and promoting children's learning.

Although research from many countries supports the view that ECEC quality requires fair working conditions for staff, the poor pay of many workers – especially those employed in services for younger children within split systems – is well documented. As reported in the *Starting Strong II* report, 'figures from various countries reveal a wide pay gap between childcare staff and teachers, with childcare staff in most countries being poorly trained and paid around minimum wage levels'[112]. In this sense it is argued that the ECEC workforce might not be part of the possible solution to reduce the educational attainment gap and social inequalities[113]. Instead it may become part of the problem – by reproducing inequalities and segregation – if remedial action is not taken especially in relation to 'childcare workers'[114]. In this regard the conclusions of the *Working for Inclusion* project warn that a poorly educated and poorly paid early year workforce is not only detrimental of ECEC quality but it is also unsustainable[115]. This is evidenced by the rapid decrease in the supply of childcare workers in those countries where the profession is poorly remunerated.

> Finding opportunities for ECEC staff to develop their skills makes an important contribution to the quality of provision. However, staff training and development, good leadership and a supportive working environment are not the only factors which support high quality. It is also important to create working conditions where staff are valued; where there is sufficient time for preparation, team meetings and reflection; and the adult: child ratio enables individual children to receive the attention they deserve. Good working conditions create well-motivated individuals

[110] Blatchford, P., Moriarty, V., Edmonds, S., & Martin, C. (2002). Relationships between class size and teaching: A multimethod analysis of English infant schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, *39*(1), 101-132.

[111] Munton, T., Mooney, A., Moss, P., Petrie, P., Clark, A., Woolner, J., et al. (2002). *Research on ratios, group size and staff qualifications and training in early years and childcare settings.* TCRU: University of London. Commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills.

[112] OECD. (2006) *Starting Strong II,* p. 15.

[113] Eurydice (2009) *Tackling social and cultural inequalities through early childhood education and care in Europe.* Brussels: EACEA.

[114] Data from the *Working for Inclusion* project (Bennett and Moss, 2011) show that in some ECEC systems – especially in market-driven, for-profit provision – wage levels of childcare workers are so low that many of them could be numbered among what is called 'working poor'.

[115] Bennett, J. and Moss P. 2011. *Working for inclusion: how early childhood education and care and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens.* Retrieved from: http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi/

who have the time and resources they need to support children, and to work with their parents and members of the community.

Norway

In 2003 the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training established a mentoring project to support newly qualified kindergarten (for children aged from birth to compulsory school age) teachers.[116] Teacher education was expected to provide students with the best possible opportunity to become good professionals, but there was a strong recognition that certain aspects of the professional role are best learnt through experience and within the context of professional practice. The 2006 evaluation[117] identified positive results from the project and this led to an agreement to give all newly qualified kindergarten teachers the opportunity to receive mentoring. The evaluation identified that there was also a need for to develop a team of qualified mentors, and this led to the creation of a nationally-available study programme (30 ECTS). Since 2011/12 newly graduated kindergarten teachers are offered mentoring during their first year of employment in kindergartens.

A 2014 survey[118] showed that:
- 67 per cent of newly qualified kindergarten teachers received mentoring (2012: 63 per cent);
- eight out of ten kindergartens offer mentoring (2012: six out of ten);
- those taking on the mentoring role in kindergartens are usually an educational supervisor or centre leader. In addition some municipalities use external mentors who are competent individuals who are employed elsewhere in the municipality;
- mentoring is organised in different ways in line with local needs and possibilities;
- a majority (58 per cent) of the centre leaders said that they have set aside time in their working week for both mentors and newly graduated staff;
- the content of the mentoring programmes vary. The most frequent used themes are educational leadership, parental cooperation and collaboration.

To ensure a successful programme there is a need to understand the importance of guidance for graduates. Organisation is important, as is the need to be clear about the shared responsibility of mentors and graduates, and the need to develop a joint understanding of each person's role and responsibilities. Programmes work best when there is systematic feedback and evaluation is

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[116] In the 1990s a national programme for pedagogical mentoring had been established. However this was not directed specifically towards newly qualified kindergarten teachers.

[117] Dahl T, Buland T, Finne H og, Havn V (2006), Hjelp til praksisspranget Evaluering av veiledning av nyutdannede lærere
http://www.sintef.no/upload/Teknologi_og_samfunn/GSU/Sluttrapport%20med%20vedlegg,%20Veiledning%20av%20nyutdannede.pdf

[118] Veiledningsordning for nytilsatte nyutdannede lærere og barnehagelærere. Resultater fra kartleggingen 2014
http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/KD/Vedlegg/Rapporter/Barnehager_veiledningsordningen_kartlegging.pdf

used to make improvements and further development. The mentors must be qualified and time needs to be assigned to mentoring in individuals' work plans[119].

Estonia

In Estonia the criteria for the internal evaluation of ECEC provision have been set through regulation from the Minister of Education and Research. These criteria cover:

- leadership and management;
- personnel management;
- cooperation with interest groups and stakeholders;
- resource management;
- the education process and the children's results;
- statistics for the preschool institution (covering children aged from 18 months to 7 years), including children to adult ratios, the size of group and the wage level of the teachers.

Advisory activities which support internal evaluation are organised and coordinated by the Ministry. This advice provides support to the managers/leaders of the preschool institutions. Recent amendments to the Preschool Childcare Institutions Act (covering children aged from 18 months to 7 years) set out the adult: children ratio in kindergarten groups. This includes a maximum of 1:8 in the nursery groups and 1:12 in the kindergarten groups. Teachers have 35 working hours in their working week of which five hours are assigned to preparation and reflection with their team.

A European Social Fund programme (EDUKO) programme was launched in 2009 to help to make teachers' professional preparation more open, more flexible and more focused on practice. As part of the EDUKO project three studies were produced which were highly influential in designing the professional training. These studies ("Professionalism of preschool teachers in Estonia, Finland, Sweden and Hungary"[120] and "Leadership influence to the professionalism of preschool teachers in Estonia, Sweden and Finland"[121]) analysed the views and opinions of preschool teachers and principals about the professionalism of preschool teachers who work in a cross-cultural context. The results from these studies have been used to prepare professional standards for preschool teachers in Estonia. These standards are now used as the basis for teachers' and principals´ initial and in-service training, and to plan their careers.

4.4 Curriculum – a summary of the evidence

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[119] http://www.udir.no/Utvikling/Veiledning-av-nyutdannede-larere/

[120] Peterson, T., Veisson, M., Hujala, E., Härkönen, U., Sandberg, A., Johansson, I., Kovacsne Bakosi, E. (2016). Professionalism of Preschool Teachers in Estonia, Sweden, Finland and Hungary. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 24(3), 0000 [in press]

[121] Peterson, T., Veisson, M., Hujala, E., Sandberg, A.Johansson, I. (2014). The Influence of Leadership on the Professionalism of Preschool Teachers in Estonia, Sweden and Finland. In A. Liimets ja M. Veisson (eds.). Teachers and Youth in Educational Reality (119 - 142).Peter Lang Verlag

There is a consensus among researchers and policy makers that the development of ECEC curricula can be regarded as a powerful tool to improve the pedagogical quality of services attended by young children from birth to compulsory school age[122]. In fact the presence of an explicit curriculum which provides clear purposes, goals and approaches for the education and care of young children within a coherent framework[123] can significantly support the role of practitioners in creating effective learning environments that successfully nurture children's cognitive and socio-emotional development, thereby maximising their gains from ECEC attendance.

Across Europe, there are many similarities in relation to the design and implementation of each ECEC curriculum,[124] although the cultural values and wider understanding of childhood differ in each country, region and programme. Despite a large degree of consensus on the broad developmental domains that are addressed in early childhood education and care – which cover emotional, personal and social development, language and communication, knowledge and understanding of the surrounding world, creative expression and physical development and movement – significant differences exist on the space that is given to academic learning[125]. In some countries literacy and numeracy take a dominant position and, despite the broadening of the scope of the curriculum, children's early learning experiences tend be predominantly focused toward preparation for compulsory schooling (school readiness). By contrast, curricula in other countries tend to be reluctant to introduce formalised learning experiences in the early years. A broader holistic approach promoting children's cognitive and non-cognitive development – through experiential learning, play and social interactions – is understood as more appropriate for fulfilling children's learning potential. In this context research evidence shows that putting academic learning at the forefront does not pay-off[126]. In fact, according to the findings of the Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (EPPI) study in relation to effective pedagogy[127], sustained shared thinking between the child and a responsive adult is an essential prerequisite for children's learning. Within this study effective pedagogical practices are acknowledged as those that encompass: a mutual involvement on the part of the child and the adult; a joint process of constructing knowledge, meaning and understanding; and learning instruction and support, which is understood as demonstrating, explaining, and asking questions, particularly

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[122] Rayna, S., & Laevers, F. (2011). Understanding children from 0 to 3 years of age and its implications for education. What's new on the babies' side? Origins and evolutions. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *19*(2), 161-172.
Oberhumer, P. 2005. International Perspectives on Early Childhood Curricula. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(1), 27-38.
UNICEF (2012) Draft document of 'A framework and tool box for monitoring and improving quality'.

[123] Bertrand, 2007 quoted in OECD (2012), *Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care,* OECD.

[124] Professor Paul Leseman's presentation at the meeting of the thematic working group on ECEC (18-9-2013, Brussels) Utrecht University.

[125] Laevers, F. (2005) The curriculum as means to raise the quality of early childhood education. Implications for policy, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 13:1, 17-29.

[126] OCED (2004) *Curricula and Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education and Care. Five Curriculum Outlines.* Paris: OECD Directorate for Education.

[127] Siraj-Blatchford, I., Muttock, S., Sylva, K., Gilden, R., & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years. Research Report No. 356.* London: Department of Education and Skills.

open-ended questions which further stimulate the child´s thinking and learning. This implies that the instructive elements of ECEC practices can only be effective if they support the active process of co-construction, but not if they are acted out as practices of knowledge transmission[128].

Findings from research conclude that ECEC curricula can be powerful instruments to make the ECEC system more effective in its overall mission but, at the same time, they 'can also engender processes that move away from this main goal because they go against the principles of good practice'[129]. Therefore, in order to be effective, the elaboration of ECEC curricula should not solely rely on knowledge about children's development but take account of shared notions of good practice that are shaped in the context of local pedagogies of childhood.

By drawing on the findings of existing research, it is possible to find a convergence toward certain features of ECEC curricula that are regarded as good practice across different contexts[130]. Such features include:

- a curriculum based on a statement of principles and values that recognise the rights of the child as a competent human being (UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, 1989) and respect for parents as the first educators of the child;
- a curriculum with a broad pedagogical framework that sets out the principles for sustaining children's development through educational and care practices that are responsive to children's interests, needs and potentialities. Such a framework might provide pedagogues and educators with general guidance on how children's learning processes could be supported - e.g. through adult interaction and involvement; group management; enriched learning environments; theme or project methodology – in order to achieve curricular goals;
- a curriculum which states explicit goals that address the holistic development of children across broad developmental domains - emotional, personal and social development, language and communication, knowledge and understanding of the surrounding world, creative expression and physical development and movement – and strives for an appropriate balance between learning and well-being. Given the high inter-personal and intra-personal variations within which children's development occurs in early childhood,

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[128] Oberhumer, P. 2005. International Perspectives on Early Childhood Curricula. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(1), 27-38.

[129] Laevers, F. (2005) The curriculum as means to raise the quality of early childhood education. Implications for policy, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 13:1, 17-29.

[130] Bennett, J. (2013) *Early childhood curriculum for children from low-income and immigrant backgrounds.* Paper presented at the second meeting of the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years held in New York, 10-12 July 2013.

Pramling, I, Sheridan, S. and Williams, P. (2006) Five preschool curricula - Comparative perspective. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 38 (1), 11-30.

Laevers, F. (2005) The curriculum as means to raise the quality of early childhood education. Implications for policy, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 13:1, 17-29.

Oberhumer, P. 2005. International Perspectives on Early Childhood Curricula. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(1), 27-38.

the formulation of broad learning goals would seem more appropriate than the age-specific sequential learning standards;

- a curriculum with a strong focus on communication, interaction and dialogue as key factors that sustain children's learning and well-being through meaning-making and belonging;

- a curriculum that encourages staff to work collegially and to continually assess their practice in order to improve. It is widely acknowledged in research that practitioners develop a better understanding of how children learn and develop by being reflective; and that just having knowledge of child development does not suffice for shaping effective practices. Therefore regular reflection on practice through observation and the documentation of children's learning experiences allows staff to face new challenges by being responsive to the needs and potentialities of all children. Practitioners' collegial work can set the basis for constantly co-constructing, de-constructing and re-constructing educational practices through dialogue with children and by involving parents as equal partners in pedagogic decision-making;

- a curriculum that includes cooperation with parents and promotes agreed democratic values within a framework of socio-cultural diversity[131].

Member States take different approaches to developing the ECEC curriculum. Some curricula are locally determined, some are regional and some are at system level. In addition some focus more on care and others focus more on education. Increasingly the ECEC curriculum is not being defined in a narrow way, instead there is a high level set of values or principles which provide a framework for the curriculum and these frameworks encourage staff to reflect on their practice. This can be more effective than detailed content. There is a need to find curriculum activities that stretch and challenge all children. These activities should be relevant to the lives of the children.

The curriculum framework or guidelines should allow each ECEC setting (which range from family day care, to nurseries and kindergartens) to develop a curriculum that takes account of the diversity and resources in the local environment, and the socio-cultural backgrounds of children and their parents. In each context, the curriculum should respond to the needs of the children and be developed through discussions with children, parents, members of the local community and ECEC staff.

Statements and evidence

Statement 5 – a curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way.

The pedagogic approach to ECEC acknowledges that care, education and socialisation form an inseparable whole[132].

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[131] Prott, R. & Preissing, C. (2006) *Bridging Diversity: an early childhood curriculum* [Berliner Bildungsprogramm]. Berlin: Verlag das Netz.

Care is not just about looking after young children – it includes a recognition that caring activities provide opportunities for children's learning and development as they involve intensive communication between children and staff. Care also helps to strengthen children's motivation and engagement in learning processes by creating a positive emotional climate where children feel confident. Developing caring relationships means fostering interactions which are responsive, reciprocal, respectful, positive and encouraging – and supportive of children's overall development and well-being[133]. The impact of the quality of adult-child interactions – as well as peer interactions – on children's cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes has been extensively demonstrated in research[134]. Research shows that the positive effects of social interactions on children's learning processes are maximised in contexts of diversity and social mix. Here new cognitive challenges are constantly created and positive identities can be nurtured in a context which enhances children's meaningful participation in the life of the setting.

At the same time, education in the early years needs to extend beyond the formalised learning traditionally adopted in the context of compulsory schooling. Research show that traditional sequential and subject specific approaches are not effective in promoting children's learning in the early years whereas a holistic approach that sustains children's overall development across several domains is more effective as it is supportive of children's learning strategies[135]. As stated by Bennett (2013): 'The cognitive development of young children does not match a traditional subject approach. Rather, it is focused on meaning-making – his/her place in the family; the roles and work of significant adults; forging a personal identity; how to communicate needs and desires; how to interact successfully and make friends; how things work; the change of the season and other remarkable events in the child's environment.'[136]

By acknowledging that children's learning can be better sustained by nurturing their sense of identity and belonging as well as by empowering them in developing an understanding of their surrounding world, curricular guidelines can provide information on how practitioners can create rich learning environments that offer diversified opportunities for children's play, exploration and social interaction. Creating effective learning environments entails the diversification of learning

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[132] Kaga, Y., Bennett, J., & Moss, P. (2010). *Caring and learning together: A cross-national study on the integration of early childhood care and education within education.* UNESCO.

[133] Laevers, F. (2005) The curriculum as means to raise the quality of early childhood education. Implications for policy, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 13:1, 17-29.

[134] Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project. Effective Pre-School Education.* London: DfES / Institute of Education: University of London.
Kutnick, P., Brighi, A., Avgitidou, S., Genta, M. L., Hännikäinen, M., Karlsson-Lohmander, et al. (2007) The role and practice of interpersonal relationships in European early education settings: sites for enhancing social inclusion, personal growth and learning? *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 15:3, 379-406.

[135] van Kuyk, J. (2006) 'Holistic or sequential approach to curriculum: what works best for young children?' In van Kuyk (ed.) *The quality of early childhood education.* Arnhem: CITO.

[136] Bennett, J. (2013) *Early childhood curriculum for children from low-income and immigrant backgrounds.* Paper presented at the second meeting of the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years held in New York, 10-12 July 2013, 11.

experiences as well as the use of many symbolic languages for conceptualisation and expression: both of these aspects have proven to be crucial in sustaining the meaningful development of children's cognitive processes in the early years[137].

Furthermore, children's self-confidence improves and their feelings of belonging grow when their contributions are valued and their views have an impact on the everyday life of the ECEC setting. Each ECEC curriculum should therefore acknowledge the importance of, and provide opportunities for, children to make sense of and assign meaning to the surrounding world. For this reason children's play should be put at the centre of any educational initiative aimed at enhancing children's learning[138].

Research findings highlight that young children's learning processes are highly dependent on the social environment, stable and trusting interaction with other children and adults, as well as free and unconditional space and time for play and free expression.[139] Play in an educational and caring context is a part of children's life where they are able to make autonomous choices.

Typically a curriculum which enables children to learn through play will encourage them to be fully engaged, highly motivated and proactive in communicative exchanges[140]. Play sustains children's interests; encourages them to make decisions, solve problems and develop independence. Children learn to exercise choice and take increasing responsibility for their own learning. This enables them to feel successful, develop their confidence, and make age-appropriate contributions to the decisions and activities of the ECEC setting[141]. And most importantly, when children's learning initiatives are accompanied by adults who are able to design opportunities for progression, play can become a powerful tool for promoting the general foundations of formalised learning. Research shows that play supports the development of meta-cognitive abilities that are associated with long-term gains from ECEC (such as verbal abilities and logical reasoning); and mature symbolic play has the potential to affect specific literacy and numeracy skills[142]. This is also confirmed by the findings of international literature reviews which

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[137] Mantovani, S. (2007) Early Childhood Education in Italy. In R. S. New, and M. Cochran *Early Childhood Education: An International Encyclopedia.* Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 1110 – 1115.

[138] Pramling, N. & Pramling Samuelsson, I. Eds. 2011. *Educational encounters: Nordic studies in early childhood didactics*, Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

[139] Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2009) Conceptualising progression in the pedagogy of play and sustained shared thinking in early childhood education: a Vygotskian perspective. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 26 (2). p. 77-89; Vygotsky, L. (2004). Imagination & creativity in childhood. *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology* 42, (1), p. 4-84. Wood, E. (2013). Play, Learning and the Early Childhood Curriculum. 3rd edition, Sage: London

[140] Monaco, C. and Pontecorvo, C. (2010) The interaction between young toddlers: constructing and organising participation frameworks. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *18*(3), 341-371.

[141] Jensen, J. J. (2011). Understandings of Danish pedagogical practices. In Cameron, C. & Moss, P. (eds.) Social Pedagogy and Working with Children and Young People, p. 141 -1 57. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

[142] Bodrova, E. (2008) Make-believe play versus academic skills: a Vygotskian approach to today's dilemma of early childhood education, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 16:3, 357-

highlight how children's developmental potential is optimised in contexts where learning is nurtured through a reciprocal and well-balanced interaction between children-initiated activities and adult-led educational initiatives[143].

To conclude, ECEC curricula should be based on a coherent framework which allows for progression and continuity in children's learning from birth to (at least) the start of compulsory schooling. The transition to school needs particular attention and should be organised collaboratively in order for the views of children, ECEC staff, teachers and parents to be considered and valued[144].

Early childhood education lays the foundation for children's lifelong learning, balanced growth and development, well-being and health. ECEC provides care, education and instruction and effective practice is based on knowledge about children's growth, development and learning. This knowledge arises from studying a wide range of academic disciplines, research and pedagogic methods.

The curriculum recognises the importance of children`s care and education, as well as their cognitive, social, emotional and physical development in ECEC services. Alongside the learning, there is a need to provide a safe environment which ensures the best possible conditions for growth and development. A curriculum which has a good combination of care and education can promote the child`s positive self-image, basic skills and the development of thinking. The curriculum needs to help the child to understand their experiences, become involved through play, and encourage their active participation. A curriculum which is based on a pedagogical approach where care, education and socialisation together form an inseparable whole is one which is more likely to lead to high expectations[145] and children's achievement.

Germany

A particular strength of Germany's ECEC provision is the use of social pedagogy alongside the inclusion of three concepts: an understanding of Erziehung (socialisation); Bildung (education); and Betreung (care). These are all seen as inseparable features of early childhood services. These dimensions of education take account of children's need for exploring and making sense of the world around them. They also help to meet children's cognitive, emotional, social and practical learning needs. The socialisation dimension of ECEC addresses the desire to help children develop orientation, values and agency in a social world. One main aim of this dimension is to further develop children's social behaviour. The care dimension places a

369. Van Oers, B. (2010) Emergent mathematical thinking in the context of play. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, *74*(1), 23-37.

[143] Burger, K. (2014) Effective early childhood care and education: Successful approaches and didactic strategies for fostering child development, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, DOI: 10.1080/1350293X.2014.882076

[144] Moss, P. (eds) (2013) *Early childhood and compulsory school education: Reconceptualising the relationship.* London: Routledge.

[145] 'High expectation as defined in the glossary in the annexe to this proposal

particular emphasis on children's physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. Reliable and authentic relations with ECEC staff are considered to be crucial for children's exploration and learning as well as their socialisation. All three dimensions are seen as providing a unified and holistic approach to supporting children in an ECEC setting. This approach is set out in Federal Law.

The "triad" of socialisation, education and care underpins the curricula which have been adopted in all 16 Federal States. A set of shared understandings of the curricula have been established in the 'Common Framework for Early Education in Childcare Centres' in 2004. These understandings include a co-constructivist approach to children' learning and a vision of inclusive pedagogy. The Framework sets out the general goals of ECEC, pedagogic guidelines and core areas of learning. It avoids a narrow disciplinary (school-like) approach by defining broader areas of learning e.g. language and communication; sciences; aesthetic education and media; motor education and health; natural and cultural environments; and values and religious education. The Framework and curricula of the Federal States cover children from birth to compulsory school age and partly beyond. The monitoring of the effects of the curricula is not systematic; however the development of different curricula has reinforced a discussion on the content and pedagogic practice in ECEC settings. These discussions and reflections have led to improvements in quality.

Slovenia

A significant reform of the education system took place in 1995 - - the main vehicle of this reform was the development of the National Curriculum Council (NCC). Its tasks include the design and preparation of the pre-school curriculum (for children between 11 months and 6 years); the syllabi of basic and upper secondary schools; changes to the adult education; the appointment of commissions to look at the individual parts of the education system; etc. The appointed commission for pre-school education (who were experts from universities, educational advisers from different institutions, such as the National Education Institute and the Educational Research Institute, and representatives from kindergartens) prepared a draft of the curriculum which took account of the NCC's principles and methodology. All Slovenian preschool teachers were invited to participate in the verification of the curriculum via surveys and meetings of 'study groups' where they were able to discuss the draft curriculum. The conclusions of the discussions were recorded and sent to the authors of the draft curriculum. The members of the curricular commission prepared an analysis of how the preschool teachers' comments were integrated into the draft. This analysis was disseminated to the preschool teachers and included in the documents which were submitted alongside the final version of the curriculum proposals. Finally, the national curriculum was adopted in 1999 by the Council of Experts for General Education (a consultation body set up by government).

The changes to the national curriculum were implemented two years after they were adopted by the Council of Experts for General Education. There was an intensive programme of in-service training for preschool teachers – this included workshops, conferences and preschool teachers' study groups. Kindergartens (pre-schools) were responsible for implementing the new curriculum – they were assisted by educational advisers from the National Education Institute. Each kindergarten was required to appoint a special team in charge of the introduction and

implementation process. The implementation of the new curriculum introduced a systematic process to monitoring and evaluating the changes. The ongoing monitoring is now the responsibility of the national institutions.

The successful introduction of the curriculum reform was based on transparency and ensuring the participation of all interested parties. This enabled the development of coherent and consistent solutions on how to ensure a public dialogue and how to train teachers for the introduction of a new curriculum.

The national Preschool Curriculum (for children aged from 11 months to 6 years) is based on a developmental approach. This includes high quality planning; and the implementation and evaluation of a learning process that considers individual children's traits and development more important than achieving prescribed results. The national curriculum is an open and flexible document. It includes principles, guidelines, objectives and areas of activities which are designed separately for the different age-groups. The activities include: locomotion, language, nature, society, arts and mathematics. Interdisciplinary learning based on ethics, health care, safety and education are also included in all areas of activity.[146]

Statement 6 - a curriculum which requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice.

This statement underlines the importance of the ECEC curriculum in addressing and encouraging the holistic development of children by providing an open framework which is both experimental and educational[147]. This implies that the curriculum has to leave space for practitioners to work with children's interests, their experiences and questions in order to place the child at the centre of the curriculum as the protagonist of his/her own learning. At the same time a curriculum might also address domain-specific learning content such as support for literacy and language, numeracy, and socio-emotional and motor development. The key role for staff is to develop educational and didactic strategies that connect children's interests and initiatives with these aspects of learning in order to foster knowledge co-construction. In other words, the educator needs to enter authentically the children's world and transform their interests and questions into shared meaning and understanding.[148] In this sense any curriculum – in order to make the difference in children's learning and socialising experiences – needs to be elaborated through a participatory process and be accompanied by pedagogical experimentation and practice-based research[149]. An ongoing process of practice innovation that is responsive to

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[146] The Development of Education. National Report. Published by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2001.

[147] Bennett, J. (2013) *Early childhood curriculum for children from low-income and immigrant backgrounds.* Paper presented at the second meeting of the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years held in New York, 10-12 July 2013.

[148] Idem.

[149] Pirard, F. (2011) From the curriculum framework to its dissemination: the accompaniment of educational practices in care facilities for children under three years. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *19*(2), 255-268.

children's learning needs and potential is not only crucial for the successful implementation of the curriculum but also for the quality of children's learning experiences in ECEC services. This calls for well-educated and reflective practitioners who work collegially with professional colleagues and use methodological tools – such as observation and documentation[150] – to constantly improve their practice. These considerations are consistent with research findings which show that time for preparation and planning (non-contact time), joint work (co-presence) and possibilities for professional development have a significant impact on the quality of ECEC processes[151].

The findings of the CoRe Study (2011)[152] emphasise that practitioners' reflective competences need to be supported at all levels in the ECEC system. At the level of ECEC institutions this requires:
- time and space for collegial practices and joint work;
- co-constructing pedagogical knowledge through documentation and the collective evaluation of educational practices;
- designing a variety of ongoing professional development devices that are tailored to practitioners' needs (pedagogical guidance, coaching, peer-learning opportunities, in-house professional development courses, networking with other services for exchanging good practices etc.);
- engaging in action-research projects and developing systematic collaboration with research/training centres at the local level;
- developing policy-making capacity and engaging in local policy-making consultation in order to nurture the development of a local culture of childhood within the community[153].

Alongside reflection by staff, the curriculum should foster dialogue and cooperation with parents. The research shows the participation and involvement of parents have a strong influence on the quality in ECEC settings, especially in contexts that are increasingly characterised by socio-cultural diversity.[154] Hence staff should encourage parents to express their views on daily educational practices and take into account their perspectives in the creation and adjustment of

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Bleach, J. (2013) Using action research to support quality early years practice, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21(3), 370-379.

[150] Picchio, M., Giovannini, D., Mayer, S., & Musatti, T. (2012) Documentation and analysis of children's experience: An ongoing collegial activity for early childhood professionals. *Early Years*, *32*(2), 159-170. Molina, P., Marotta, M., & Bulgarelli, D. (2014) Observation-project: a professional tool for caregivers. Two experiences in Italian day-care settings, European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, DOI: 10.1080/1350293X.2014.895559

[151] Wertfein, M., Spies-Kofler, A., & Becker-Stoll, F. (2009) Quality curriculum for under-threes: the impact of structural standards, Early Years: An International Research Journal, 29:1, 19-31. Pugnaghi A. (2014) Valutare la relazione educativa nella scuola dell'infanzia: una ricerca in provincia di Modena. [Evaluating the quality of educational relationship in pre-school. A research carried out in Modena province] *Orientamenti Pedagogici*. Trento: Erickson.

[152] Urban, M, Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A. and Van Laere, K. (2011) *CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care.* European Commission: DG Education and Culture. Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2011/core_en.pdf

[153] Idem.

[154] OECD (2013). Starting Strong III, 218.

educational projects[155]. It is particular important in this regard to develop practices that systematically involve parents in their children's learning, such as documenting children's experiences within the settings or involving parents in participatory research projects that generate a shared understanding of children's development[156]. Such initiatives, by combining staff reflection with parents' engagement in educational decision-making processes, support the co-construction of the curriculum and therefore create the conditions for sharing those understandings and practices which ensure successful implementation over time. And, most importantly, the involvement of parents in decision-making processes regarding the curriculum gives an explicit expression to the values of democracy and participation which stand at the core of the social function of ECEC services and are necessary conditions for inclusiveness.

To conclude, research shows that long-term investment in reflective professionals, as well as in participatory practices that involve parents in the life of ECEC services, create a dynamic environment where participants learn from each other[157]. This enables each team of professionals to find the best solution in their context by analysing the situation on the basis of shared knowledge and understanding of the curriculum's educational goals as well as the local context. This empowers participants to move beyond benchmarks, preventing the curriculum from being reduced to a fixed and narrow paradigm[158]. Practitioners can also transform the curriculum and use it as a tool for pedagogical experimentation[159] and continual innovation of practice in order to improve the quality of ECEC provision at a local level.

Children have the right to receive the support they need from many sources. Alongside pedagogues and others who work in an ECEC context, children benefit from the expertise of staff from the health, social care and education sectors. Consequently ECEC curricula should encourage ECEC practitioners to liaise with other services in order to support children's holistic development and well-being and to respond to particular needs. Curricula should offer a framework for interdisciplinary teams to cooperate in a child-centred way and provide flexibility which allows institutions to respond to the needs of individual children. Cooperation with other agencies and services is important to foster children's overall well-being and this should form a significant part of the educational programme of early childhood centres.[160] In a number of

[155] Pirard, F. (2011) From the curriculum framework to its dissemination: the accompaniment of educational practices in care facilities for children under three years. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *19*(2), 255-268.

[156] Rinaldi, C. (2006) *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning*. London: Routledge.

Whalley and Pen Green Centre Team (2007) *Involving parents in their children's learning*. London: Sage.

[157] Rayna, S., M.M. Rubio, and H. Scheu. (2010) *Parents-professionnels: la coéducation en questions.* Toulouse: Editions Érès.

[158] Jensen, A. S., Broström, S., & Hansen, O. H. (2010) Critical perspectives on Danish early childhood education and care: between the technical and the political. *Early Years*, *30*(3), 243-254.

[159] Pirard, F. (2011) From the curriculum framework to its dissemination: the accompaniment of educational practices in care facilities for children under three years. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *19*(2), 255-268.

[160] Learning for Well-being Consortium of Foundations in Europe: Learning for Well-being. A policy priority for children and youth in Europe. 2012

countries a networking approach provides comprehensive support which is considered particularly important for vulnerable families and for children with special needs[161].

Ireland

Aistear[162] is Ireland's national curriculum framework for children aged from birth to six years. The Irish word for journey, Aistear sets out broad goals for children's learning and development. Guided by these and 12 principles of early learning and development, the framework gives practical information and ideas to help practitioners (and parents) provide children with experiences that are fun, motivating and challenging and that contribute towards better outcomes for them.

Using an action research approach, the Aistear in Action initiative[163] supported practitioners in using Aistear to develop an exciting and engaging curriculum based on children's interests and their inquiries about the world around them. Data was gathered from practitioners, children and parents during the two-year initiative. The key findings are documented in a final report at: http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Early_Childhood_Education/Aistear_Toolkit/AIA_Report.pdf.

The Aistear in Action initiative identified the following changes in local curriculum practice arising from the introduction of the curriculum framework:
• a richer, more democratic, challenging and interesting play-based curriculum supporting children's development of dispositions, skills, attitudes, values, knowledge and understanding;
• higher quality interactions between practitioners and children;
• greater emphasis on observation, documentation and professional dialogue;
• more authentic partnership with parents.

The evaluation identified the following lessons for the development of national policy:
• Aistear is a lever for change and quality improvement: the Aistear in Action initiative highlighted what is possible in curriculum development when practitioners are supported in engaging with Aistear;
• a multi-stranded mentoring model enabling curriculum change. The use of cluster meetings, training/continuing professional development seminars and on-site visits proved critical in supporting and facilitating practitioners' work with Aistear;

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[161] Bennett, J. (2013) *Early childhood curriculum for children from low-income and immigrant backgrounds.* Paper presented at the second meeting of the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years held in New York, 10-12 July 2013.

[162] The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is a statutory agency which advises the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education and for primary and post-primary schools.

[163] The *Aistear in Action* initiative involved collaboration between the NCCA and Early Childhood Ireland, a membership-based national voluntary childcare organisation whose members provide day care and pre-school services.

- the importance of creating a coherent system. There is a need for greater alignment between the curriculum framework and the external inspection system;
- system level challenges. The absence of paid non-contact time for curriculum planning and collaborative work with colleagues emerged as a system level challenge in innovative and engaging curriculum work.

Greece

From 2007-2008 Greece introduced a new project to support the transition of infants from pre-school (accessible from age 4 and compulsory for those aged between 5 and 6) to school. The project was implemented as part of a framework on 'Education and Initial Vocational Training' and it was co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund) and national sources. The transition from pre-school to school education was seen as a phase in young children's lives where there were significant changes and developmental demands that required intensified and accelerated learning and that needed to be socially regulated. Transition from pre-school to schools needed to be jointly developed and the communication and involvement of all the participants was seen as critical in establishing a common understanding of what would be best for young children.

The main aims of the project were to:

- strengthen the quality of the all-day kindergartens by further improving their pedagogical effectiveness, and their connections to primary schools;
- develop a better understanding and more effective communication between pre-school and primary teachers in relation to the pedagogic approaches in kindergartens and schools.

The project involved 487 kindergartens throughout Greece and involved supervisory teams who acted as preschool consultants. During the application of the project, the preschool consultants encouraged collaborative activities between the nursery, young children, the children's parents and the preschool teachers and teachers of elementary school.

The pre-school teachers, with the support of the pre-school consultants, organised special transition activities which focused on children's needs. They sought to support children in order to reduce anxiety and strengthen their resilience around a period of change. As part of these activities, they:

- discussed the transfer to the primary schools with children and collected their opinions on what it would be like. The children's comments included ideas about what a primary school would be like e.g. "This is a big school", "There are many teachers and classrooms", "Children there don't play, they only read and write", "There is a school Principal", "There is a school canteen", etc.;
- invited school pupils in kindergarten to talk with children about the primary school curriculum;
- visited the primary school to explore the environment and the curriculum;
- organised meetings for parents to discuss the parents' role and expectations, what it means for children and how to ensure a smooth transition;;

- informed primary school teachers about the kindergarten children's portfolios.

It was important for kindergarten and school teachers to listen to the children's perspectives and concerns, and involve children, families and all staff in the co-construction of experiences that support children during the critical period. The Ministry of Education organised the project's evaluation which included collecting the views of teachers, parents, young children, the preschool consultants and the Directors of Primary Education. The evaluation showed that the project:

- contributed positively to the improvement of educational and pedagogical effectiveness of the full-day kindergarten;
- helped young children to develop a positive attitude towards the world of school;
- enhanced the socialisation of children;
- increased young children's interest in school through the project's activities;
- was valued by the participants and the vast majority of them wanted the project to continue.

4.5 Monitoring and evaluation – a summary of the evidence

Monitoring and evaluation processes are important components of enhancing quality in ECEC systems – by pointing to the strengths and weaknesses of ECEC provision they can act as catalysts for change to support stakeholders and policy makers in undertaking initiatives that respond to the needs of children, parents and local communities. There is a consensus among researchers and policy-makers that by linking systematically data collection, research and ongoing assessment these processes can be powerful tools for promoting the continuous improvement of ECEC provision and for supporting children's development[164]. The OECD literature review on monitoring quality in ECEC[165] notes the procedures undertaken by countries for monitoring and evaluating quality can address four dimensions of ECEC provision:

1. service quality: mainly for accountability purposes with procedures focusing primarily on monitoring compliance with regulations and standards (e.g. through inspections or surveys);
2. staff quality: mainly for internal accountability purposes and directed to the improvement of staff practices and skills (e.g. through observations, peer-review and self-evaluation);
3. curriculum implementation: mainly to evaluate the usefulness of a curriculum, analysing the need for change and adaptation, as well as for defining the professional development needs of staff;
4. child development and outcomes: this refers to both formative and summative assessment (the latter is rarely used as formal testing is not considered appropriate for this age group). Informal formative assessment practices that are more commonly used in ECEC look at children's development and progress and give an account of their

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[164] OECD (2012) *Quality toolbox: executive summary.* Retrieved from:
www.oecd.org/edu/school/startingstrongiii-aqualitytoolboxforearlychildhoodeducationandcare.htm#1
[165] Taguma, M. and Litjens, I. (2013) *Literature Review on Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).* OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care: Directorate for Education and Skills.

learning and socialising experiences (through observations, documentation, portfolios or narrative accounts).

Despite the support provided by the research literature for the idea of monitoring and evaluation practices as a critical factor for high-quality ECEC services, the implementation of monitoring and evaluation practices does not have a positive impact per se[166].

Research shows that procedures and tools for monitoring and evaluation need to be designed coherently with intended specific aim and purpose: e.g.

- accountability for the audit of public funds;
- improvement purposes: to identify weaknesses and strengths of ECEC systems and elaborate appropriate strategies to address them in consultation with stakeholders;
- identifying staff learning needs: in order to tailor the provision of continuing professional development to the needs of children and families within local communities ;
- support to policy-makers: to provide information for administrators which helps them to make informed choices and to adapt/re-direct their interventions responsively and effectively;
- to inform the public: results from monitoring and evaluation procedures might for example be used by parents and stakeholders for policy advocacy.

A consensus has emerged from the research on the importance of involving families, practitioners and other stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation. The involvement of relevant stakeholders in monitoring the service or staff quality, or even curriculum implementation, can contribute to greater parental engagement[167] and generate a sense of 'ownership'. This might contribute to improving the quality of ECEC as well as lead to the elaboration of policies and practices that are responsive to local needs. Quality evaluation and monitoring procedures therefore need to be designed within participatory and consultative processes[168], as different perspectives exists on what high quality provision might mean and on how improvements could be achieved[169]. In this regard Sheridan (2009)[170] argues that ECEC quality should be understood within a 'sustainable dynamism' that goes beyond the traditional dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity. This implies that the procedures undertaken for the evaluation and improvement of ECEC quality should be 'dynamic, cultural, and contextual sensitive'[171] in order to enable the negotiation of multiple perspectives among all the participants.

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[166] Idem.

[167] OECD (2012) *Quality toolbox: executive summary.* Retrieved from:
www.oecd.org/edu/school/startingstrongiii-aqualitytoolboxforearlychildhoodeducationandcare.htm#1

[168] Bondioli, A. and Ghedini, P.O. (2000) *La qualità negoziata: gli indicatori per i nidi della Regione Emilia-Romagna* [The negotiated quality: indicators for 0-3 services in Emilia-Romagna Region]. Bergamo: Edizioni Junior.

[169]Dahlberg, G., Moss, P. and Pence, A. (2007) *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Languages of evaluation.* London: Routledge.

[170] Sheridan, S. (2009) Discerning pedagogical quality in preschool. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *53*(3), 245-261.

[171] Idem.

The research also highlights that ongoing evaluation which is linked to professional development can have a beneficial impact on practitioners' practices and on children's outcomes[172]. In this context several studies indicate that staff self-evaluation can be an effective tool for professional development as it enhances practitioners' reflectivity and collegial work[173]. Along the same line, research findings seem to indicate that curriculum monitoring initiatives are particularly beneficial when combined with staff training or coaching support. However research findings indicate that when monitoring and evaluating procedures are implemented within a framework of managerial accountability that does not take into account practitioner's perspectives, they might actually turn out to have adverse effects on the quality of education and care in ECEC services[174].

In relation to the monitoring of child development, research from the OECD literature review unequivocally points out that the formal assessment of child outcomes which aim to define school readiness – and with the purpose of postponing or denying kindergarten entry to school – have negative impacts on children's cognitive as well as socio-emotional development[175]. The literature indicates that the use of non-formal monitoring procedures such as ongoing observation, documentation of children's learning and socialising experiences, as well as narrative assessment of children competences (e.g. portfolios) can have a positive impact on children's outcomes. These practices contribute to deepening practitioners' understanding of children's learning processes in the everyday life of ECEC setting.

Taken together, monitoring and evaluation create a way to recognise the achievement of quality in ECEC. Reflection on practice is an accepted professional requirement for ECEC practitioners and therefore should not be seen as an imposition from an external agent or an optional accessory of any project or programme. In the context of this proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework, monitoring and evaluation form part of an ongoing dialogue and are part of the process of reflecting on developments and progress. In general, monitoring is integral to evaluation. During an evaluation, information from previous monitoring processes is used to understand the ways in which the issue at the heart of the evaluation has developed and stimulated change. As monitoring and evaluation in ECEC is concerned with the lives and experiences of children and families, it should be governed by ethical principles – such as transparency and usefulness – and guided by a child-centred approach as well as by shared values of equity, justice, gender equality and respect for diversity.

Statements and evidence

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

[173] Sheridan, S. (2001). Quality evaluation and quality enhancement in preschool: A model of competence development. *Early Child Development and Care*, *166*(1), 7-27.

[174] Ahrenkiel, A., Schmidt, C., Nielsen, B. S., Sommer, F., & Warring, N. (2013) Unnoticed Professional Competence in Day Care Work. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, *3*(2), 79-96.

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

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

The evaluation of policies that enhance quality requires the regular availability of information on what is effective, in which context and for whom. Consequently systematic monitoring and evaluation of ECEC systems allow for the generation of policy-relevant information that supports decision-making processes at local, regional and national level. A necessary condition for this is that the monitoring practices used at different levels are aligned[176]. In this sense unitary ECEC systems are found to be more effective in terms of the organisation of services and quality assurance, whereas split systems tend to weaken the provision of high quality ECEC, because governance processes are more complicated due to the fragmentation of administrative responsibilities[177].

Monitoring and evaluation processes should be the results of ongoing consultation among stakeholders with responsibility for the development of high-quality ECEC provision. Within such a framework, the evaluation and monitoring of ECEC provision takes place through a reciprocal process which combines top-down and bottom-up initiatives. This helps to ensure quality improvement and innovation which is sustainable over time. In this context, monitoring and evaluation processes that take place at different governance levels might entail diversified procedures.

Research from the Working for Inclusion project[178] highlights that appropriate quality monitoring and improvement of ECEC systems might be hindered by the lack of statistical information which tends to be patchy within and across EU Member States. Systematic and reliable data collection is needed to address the following issues which are crucial to developing high-quality and equitable ECEC systems:

- accessibility: which groups are accessing ECEC services, in what ways are they doing this and how – if at all – this is changing;
- workforce: socio-demographic profile of the workforce, education (initial and continuing) and qualifications, pay, working hours and work conditions, recruitment and retention;
- funding for the entire ECEC phase: expenditure (both private and public) enabling an assessment of the share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) allocated to ECEC and also how total costs are met (e.g. what proportion of expenditure comes from government, parents, employers or others? What proportion of household income is spent by different groups of families?)

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

[177] PPMI. (forthcoming) *Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in preventing early school leaving (ESL).* European Commission: DG Education and Culture.

[178] Bennett, J. and Moss P. 2011. *Working for inclusion: how early childhood education and care and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens.* Retrieved from: http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi/

Monitoring and evaluation can cover many aspects of ECEC. It is important to ensure that activities relate to the quality of provision in order to lead to improvement. Checking the performance of ECEC settings is important but it is not the same as focusing on system and provider-level improvement. In this context monitoring and evaluation can easily be focused on structural questions e.g. are the rules for accreditation and re-accreditation rules being met, are the regulations for organisations that provide ECEC services being met, and are the requirements for inspection which determine the organisations that are eligible to receive state/local/national funding being met. Monitoring for quality also includes a focus on the processes and outcomes of ECEC i.e. are the pedagogy, the curriculum and the staff/children relationships enabling children to make progress. The availability of relevant, timely and accurate data and information can help the managers and leaders of ECEC services to make the right decisions on how best to improve the quality of ECEC provision.

The Netherlands

In the Netherlands the Education Inspectorate assesses the quality of the early childhood education programmes. The inspectorate assesses the programme, the pedagogic climate, the education provision, the staff-child interactions, parental involvement and the quality of care at the level of the ECEC institution (these cover children aged from 2.5 to 4 and 4-6, partly pre-school and partly school). They also evaluate the local authority's responsibilities for ECEC - such as the coordination between the pre-school and the primary school. Each aspect of the inspection is rated on a 1 – 4 scale. This gives an additional insight into the strengths and areas for improvements for each ECEC setting and for each local authority.

The inspection reports, both at the level of the ECEC setting and the local authority, are made public. The reports are used for quality improvement by ECEC institutions and local authorities. For instance, in agreement with the national government, the municipalities use the inspection reports to define areas where improvements are most needed and to determine whether progress has been made.

Internal evaluation and monitoring are important aspects of quality improvement in ECEC settings e.g. video monitoring systems (covering provision for children 0-12, including 0-4 day care facilities and out-of-school care) help to evaluate and improve the interactions of pedagogues and children. Videos of interactions with children are analysed and discussed by the ECEC centre's team professional team. The evaluation of this approach shows that these discussions lead to positive results in relation to the interactive capabilities of pedagogues and their pedagogical sensitivity.

In both these situations success is based on staff reflection on the monitoring and evaluation data and the translation of these reflections into approaches which improve ECEC quality.

Denmark

Since 2007, the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) has monitored the research published on children from birth to six years of age in early childhood care settings in Scandinavia.[179] All the research published in Norway, Sweden or Denmark is recorded and assessed by a qualified panel of researchers. High quality research is assembled in the Nordic Base of Early Childhood Education and Care (nb-ecec.org). The database is updated annually and is targeted at teachers, students, researchers, educational managers and politicians.

Each year, EVA draws on the research base and publishes a magazine for professionals in the early childhood sector. The purpose of the magazine, called *Bakspejlet[180]*, is to inform and inspire everyday practice based on new and relevant knowledge and research.[181] The magazine includes short, easy-to-read articles on research results, and articles showing how individual professionals have made good use of research in their work with children. It also includes ways to make the research knowledge more easily available for everyday use.

Qualitative studies among professionals on their perception of the short articles show that they are very satisfied with the way knowledge is mediated through using the format of a research magazine. They especially find the ideas for supporting dialogue on research topics very useful in their professional meetings as they help to establish a research context and evidence base for more theoretical discussions.

The magazine's success is based on integrating knowledge and research with easy-to-read short articles. These recognise and respect the pedagogic impact of ECEC in children's life. The magazine has helped to inform pedagogues and professionals in the municipal administrations – this dual focus is seen as a key part of its success.

Statement 8 – monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child

To support the development of high quality ECEC it is essential that monitoring and evaluation processes operate within clearly defined ethical guidelines which ensure the rights of all stakeholders including children, families and staff are respected and protected. There should be opportunities for everyone concerned with the development of quality in ECEC to contribute to – and benefit from – monitoring and evaluation practices. In this sense monitoring and evaluation processes should foster active engagement and cooperation among all stakeholders rather than pursuing the assessment of the performance of the service through a competitive environment. Research indicates that the dissemination and publication of monitoring results assessing settings' performance not only raises political and ethical concerns, but potentially shows many negative side-effects. Findings from research in the Netherlands, France and England point out

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[179] This monitoring has through the years been financed in cooperation between The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, The Swedish National Agency for Education and the Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research. The latter has been responsible for carrying out the mapping and review of the research.

[180] http://www.eva.dk/dagtilbud/bakspejlet

[181] In 2014 Norway, inspired by the Danish magazine, published a similar magazine called VETUVA ('DoYouKnowWhat').

that the publication of performance data has little influence in informing parents' choice[182] and the undesirable side-effects might include social stratification. It is to be expected that middle-class parents will make most use of published data and show the greatest mobility. It is also likely that they will make most demands for more streaming or tracking in schools[183]. Thus the publication of performance data should be handled with care.

The research shows that the involvement of relevant stakeholders in monitoring and evaluating processes can make quality improvement and innovation of pedagogical practices sustainable over time. In this context stakeholders' inputs can point to the need for improvement as well as give a better view on societal and parental expectations regarding ECEC[184].

This implies that all those involved in monitoring and evaluation processes – including local administrators, researchers, practitioners and families – should actively participate in negotiating the aim and purpose as well as designing the procedures for gathering and disseminating information. In this way parents and professionals are encouraged to express their views and opinions – which are valued as relevant contributions to the quality of ECEC practices and policies – and feel empowered to use the results of monitoring and evaluation processes for policy advocacy[185]. Particularly important in this respect are monitoring tools and participatory evaluation procedures that allow opportunities to listen to children's voices as well as be explicit about their learning and socialising experiences within ECEC settings. In this sense child-centred participatory action-research methodologies[186] as well as documentation and narrative practices can give a meaningful account of children's everyday life in ECEC settings[187]. These can be considered as powerful tools for bringing children's perspectives to the core of ECEC quality improvement.

Every Member State has a system in place to monitor the quality of ECEC provision – though there are few benchmarks or targets. Monitoring includes checks against the rules relating to accreditation and approval, the need for self-assessment and the obligation to participate in an external inspection regime. Despite the range of approaches being used to monitor quality, the need to place the interests of the child at the centre of the process is fundamental. Any measure of the outcomes of the ECEC system, and the performance of individual ECEC settings, must protect the needs of individual children. Comments and reports on the performance of a setting,

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[182] de Wolf, I. F. & Janssens F. J. G. (2007) Effects and side effects of inspections and accountability in education: an overview of empirical studies, Oxford Review of Education, 33 (3), 379-396.

[183] Karsten, S., Visscher, A., & De Jong, T. (2001). Another Side to the Coin: the unintended effects of the publication of school performance data in England and France. *Comparative Education*, *37*(2), 231-242.

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

[185] McKinnon, E. (2014) *Using Evidence for Advocacy and Resistance in Early Years Education.* London: Routledge.

[186] Einarsdóttir, J. (2007). Research with children: Methodological and ethical challenges. *European early childhood education research journal*, *15*(2), 197-211.

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

a municipality's arrangements or even the system have to protect the identity of individuals. In this context of measuring and reporting on the effectiveness of ECEC, there could be comments and information on the curriculum, the leadership, the staff/children relationships, the pedagogy, the involvement of parents and stakeholders etc.

Italy

The National Research Council of Italy has designed a system of participatory evaluation of ECEC to measure quality – this system has been implemented by several regional and local authorities. In this system the two main responsibilities of governing agencies: controlling the quality of ECEC provision and promoting its improvement, are integrated in an overall evaluation process. This process includes the production and analysis of documentation on children's and parents' daily experiences in each ECEC service. All the stakeholders participate in the evaluation process and discuss the quality of ECEC service from their perspective as professionals, parents, or managers. These discussions aim at verifying whether the children's and parents' experiences in the service are congruent with the educational goals and objectives of the local ECEC provision as defined in formal Acts. A service *Dossier* keeps a detailed record of the whole evaluation process.

The system has been used by Umbria Region (1999-2002) in centres for children and parents (eight ECEC services); the Municipality of Rome (2004-2009) in all subsidised provision (127 ECEC services); the Municipality of Pistoia (2006-2009) in municipal provision (ten ECEC services); the Municipality of Parma (2010-2014) in municipal provision (ten ECEC services). The procedures have been adapted to meet the needs of the ECEC provision and its local organisation.

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 quality, and to plan innovative policies which helped to improve a single ECEC service or the whole ECEC system in the local area.

Using pedagogical documentation is a common practice in Italian ECEC services for recording children's learning processes, promoting parents' participation, and supporting professionals' reflective competences. The use of documentation in the evaluation system was found to be essential for supporting the participation of stakeholders as it guaranteed a common basis for discussions on specific issues as well as making judgements transparent and useful for everybody.

Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic the quality of ECEC provision (for children aged between 3 to 6 years) is monitored through the setting's self-evaluation and through external evaluation by the Czech School Inspectorate. The self-evaluation process is a compulsory requirement and has to be completed on a regular basis in line with an agreed format; each setting is inspected every six

years. The inspection is based on an agreed methodology which includes an evaluation of the ECEC setting's conditions; the progress being made by the children; the setting's own progress; and the outcomes achieved by children. The inspection is able to monitor whether the ECEC setting has met its educational goals which are set out in the curriculum; the quality of the pedagogic processes used in the setting; and what progress has been made since the previous external evaluation.

The inspection framework and criteria are in the public domain, and managers/leaders of the ECEC settings are able to use them for their internal self-evaluations. The internal changes arising from self-evaluation help the ECEC setting prepare for inspection as well as make improvements on an on-going basis. The inspection reports are published – including the positive and negative comments on the quality of provision – and they provide useful information to staff, managers/leaders, parents and other stakeholders. Each report includes recommendations for improvement.

As part of the inspection process, data is collected to support the creation and use of a database for the inspectorate. This data is used, on an annual basis, to publish a report on the effectiveness of the ECEC system.

4.6   Governance and funding – a summary of the evidence

It is well documented that high quality and accessible ECEC services can make the difference in the life of young children and their families. There is an abundant body of research from many EU Member States showing that ECEC provision can play a crucial role in reducing the attainment gap and fostering social cohesion. In these regards, ECEC can make a significant contribution toward the achievement of policy goals that stand at the core of the EU 2020 strategy's priorities[188].

However research also shows that high quality ECEC provision – in order to make the difference – needs to be available for very young children as the first few years in a child's life are the most formative in terms of creating foundations for lifelong habits and patterns. High quality ECEC is also part of a comprehensive system of coherent public policies that link ECEC to other services concerned with the welfare of young children and their families[189]. These connections between ECEC and other services are particularly important for children from low-income families or disadvantaged background as the potential benefits of ECEC attendance have an even stronger impact than for their more advantaged peers[190]. In fact, while acknowledging that ECEC can undertake an important role in 'levelling the playing field', the research also stresses that socio-

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[188] Europe 2020 Strategy and its follow-up: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm
[189] Eurydice (2009) *Tackling social and cultural inequalities through early childhood education and care in Europe.* Brussels: EACEA.
[190] Lazzari A**.** and Vandenbroeck M. 2013. Literature Review of the Participation of Disadvantaged Children and Families in ECEC Services in Europe. In Bennett, J., Gordon, J. & Edelmann J. (2013) *ECEC in promoting educational attainment including social development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and in fostering social inclusion.* European Commission: DG EAC.

economic and socio-cultural factors weigh heavily on children's outcomes[191]. In this sense, the impact of broader socio-economic factors associated with welfare policies should not be underestimated. The effects of family background on children's educational attainment tend to be more limited in countries where universally accessible childcare is provided and socio-economic status differences in the population are less marked. UNICEF has concluded that ECEC provision, in order to succeed in improving the life chances of children and their families, needs to be closely linked to labour, health and social policies which promote a more equal redistribution of resources by targeting extra-funding toward disadvantaged neighborhoods[192].

> Governance and funding which values and recognises the importance of ECEC can take the quality of the service much further. Increasingly across Member States, clearer rules and expectations on the quality of the ECEC structures, the ECEC processes and the outcomes from ECEC provision are being embedded in regulations. These changes reflect the growing recognition of the importance of high quality ECEC, and an acknowledgement that funding which is invested in this sector reduces subsequent expenditure, improves the life chances and opportunities for children, and strengthens society's shared values.

Statements and evidence

Statement 9: **Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.**

Research in EU Member States concludes that it is necessary to rethink traditional structures and the remits of services from the perspective of the child and the family in order to bring together traditionally divided notions of child (care) and (early) education[193]. Activities to bring together education and care should not be limited to pedagogic approaches in ECEC settings but should extend beyond the walls of institutions and organisations that are responsible for children's education and well-being in the community. At a local level this implies the creation of participatory alliances among stakeholders[194] which might take the form of inter-agency cooperation (e.g. among ECEC centres and social/health services), inter-professional partnerships (e.g. among ECEC institutions and schools), and networking among stakeholders (e.g. involving NGOs as well as local authorities). For such initiatives to be effective they need to

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[191] Bennett, J. (2013) *Early childhood curriculum for children from low-income and immigrant backgrounds.* Paper presented at the second meeting of the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years held in New York, 10-12 July 2013.

[192] Bennett, J. 2008. *Early childhood services in the OECD countries: Review of the literature and current policy in the early childhood field.* Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. Retrieved from: www.unicef-irc.org/publications/502

[193] Bennett, J. and Moss P. 2011. *Working for inclusion: how early childhood education and care and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens.* Retrieved from: http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi/

[194] Oberhuemer, P. (2005). Conceptualising the early childhood pedagogue: Policy approaches and issues of professionalism. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *13*(1), 5-16.

be sustained by a coherent policy framework that proactively fosters inter-institutional collaboration through coordination and long-term investment in local initiatives[195].

However, activities to bring together education and care should extend beyond the level of local administrations in order to embrace a regional and national policy perspective. Research shows that when ECEC governance is not integrated (meaning that responsibility for ECEC regulation and funding rests with different departments both at the central and regional government level) or is only partially integrated (as in the majority of EU Member States) children aged under three experience a lower standard of care; higher costs to parents; less equal access to all families; and more poorly educated and paid workforce.

As a contrast fully integrated systems seem to offer more coherence across ECEC policy (e.g. regulation and funding, curriculum, workforce education/training and working conditions, monitoring and evaluation systems) as well as more resources allocated to younger children and their families[196].

Unitary systems – by providing a more coherent framework for governance and funding across the ECEC sector - lead to better quality and more equitable ECEC provision and result in greater financial efficiency[197].

Sharing responsibilities between central government and local authorities improves how local needs are considered. However the decentralisation of governance might increase the risk of accentuating differences in ECEC access and quality between regions[198]. A recent report prepared by the DG Justice for the European Parliament said: 'A systemic and more integrated approach to ECEC services at local, regional and national level involving all the relevant stakeholders — including families — is required, together with close cross-sectoral collaboration between different policy sectors, such as education, culture, social affairs, employment, health and justice'[199].

All Member States ensure that key stakeholders are involved in the design and delivery of ECEC services. In some contexts there are formal arrangements which guarantee stakeholders and partner organisations are consulted and their views valued and incorporated in ECEC arrangements. In other situations the liaison is more ad-hoc and dependant on projects or decisions of managers/leaders of individual ECEC settings. High quality provision is more likely to occur when the stakeholders are routinely and systematically consulted on the design and

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[195] Lazzari, A. (2012). The Public Good. Historical and Political Roots of Municipal Preschools in Emilia Romagna. *European Journal of Education*, *47*(4), 556-568.

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

[197] DG Justice of the European Commission (2013) *Barcelona objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth.* Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, p.16.

[198] OE CD (2006) *Starting Strong II.* Paris: OECD.

[199] Idem.

implementation of ECEC provision. Moreover this context gives more room to sustain and increase the scale of existing good practice.

The Netherlands

In the Netherlands any fine tuning of the framework of national quality standards is undertaken by representatives of parents, child-care entrepreneurs and non-profit ECEC organisations. Any adjustment of the quality standards is through a social dialogue as part of a 'covenant' which informs the national debate. The covenant is a 'gentlemen's' agreement' and the outcomes of the discussions are presented to the National Government. The public administration accepts the outcomes of social dialogue by putting them into regulations. It is rare for the national government to introduce regulations which have not been discussed by the covenant. From 2005-2011 the National Government took on board all the items discussed by the covenant.

The regulations based on the covenant form the basis of the framework for the Inspectorate which presents a yearly overview of ECEC and local authorities' compliance of the quality standards in ECEC. Until now, every four years there is a quality research exercise (NCKO) which is completed by Amsterdam University/Kohnstamm Institute.[200] This measures the quality of provision in daycare centres. The Netherlands' system which starts with the covenant and includes the maintenance of the Inspection Framework was independently evaluated in 2011.[201]

The effectiveness of this approach to ECEC policy is measured by considering the overall quality in daycare centres. This is undertaken as part of the NCKO research which evaluates the whole system. The NCKO research has shown that almost all daycare centres have average quality. The research has also identified where further attention is needed e.g. in some areas of the quality of the ECEC processes such as staff-child interactions.

The independent evaluation/study of the covenant policy identifies that the decisions made by the government and the daycare sector have led to the inclusion of conditions for quality in the regulations. The regulations would not prescribe how to organise the quality of ECEC processes. This agreement provides ECEC settings with freedom, within the legal system, to apply their own pedagogic policy. On the other hand, the independent evaluation notes that the average quality of ECEC processes is the only area for attention in the evaluation study.

Despite the challenges created by this approach to ECEC policy, the covenant system is seen as being more successful than a government led 'top down' policy. The covenant approach works because it ensures that all the ECEC partners remain in dialogue and find collective solutions based on their experiences.

Ireland

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[200] Fukkink, R. cs, UvA Kohnstamm Institute, R.U Nijmegen (2013) Pedagogische kwaliteit van de kinderopvang voor 0-4 jarigen in de Nederlandse kinderdagverblijven in 2012
[201] B&A Consulting (2011) Regels, toezicht en handhaving in de kinderopvang

Youngballymun is complex community change initiative (CCI)[202] set up in 2007 to build the capacity of practitioners, organisations and systems. It is based on the implementation of four locally designed child-centred prevention and early intervention service strategies. Collectively they provide an integrated and comprehensive response to tackle the root causes of poor learning and well-being outcomes for children in the community. Ready, Steady, Grow is youngballymun's area-based infant mental health strategy which is aimed at building the infant mental health capacity of parents, practitioners and the service community to foster secure attachment, infant and toddler health and development[203].

Ready, Steady, Grow has been evaluated[204]. The first part of the evaluation explored the extent to which Ready, Steady, Grow builds capacity, enables collaboration with other services and facilitates and promotes early identification and referral practices. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders were used to inform the research design of the survey which was administered twice to a wider number of service providers.

The second part of the evaluation looked at the Parent-Children Psychological Support Programme. The evaluation identified a number of key factors that contributed to building successful community collaboration:
- the prevalence of process leadership;
- engaging stakeholders in an open, transparent and credible process with participator decision-making;
- effective communication (e.g. youngballymun communicated its message about the importance of infant mental health);
- a history of collaboration which provided an opportunity to build upon pre-existing relationships;
- common goals which were shared between organisations, and a shared vision across the organisations;
- opportunities to meet (at shared training events, multidisciplinary team meetings etc.);
- having sufficient resources to collaborate;
- physical proximity of the ECEC services.

Statement 10: Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders.

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[202] Several characteristics set CCIs apart from conventional service-delivery programmes. They take a comprehensive view of community problems, engage all sectors of the community, use long-term strategies recognising that systems change takes time, focus on building collaborative working relationships, and encourage participatory decision-making.

[203] The centre piece of this work is the Parent Children Psychological Support Programme a universal centre-based baby development clinic.

[204] The report of the final evaluation can be found at:
http://www.youngballymun.org/the_results/research_findings/

The increasing need to address issues such as social exclusion and low educational achievement across EU Member States shows that the economic argument for providing a more equitable access to high quality ECEC provision is compelling. Research shows that when publicly subsidised ECEC provision is scarce, it is those children and families who would benefit most that end up being excluded[205].

It has been extensively demonstrated that in ECEC systems where provision is largely marketised, un-equal access and social stratification in attendance are widespread phenomena[206] due to several factors:

- private-for-profit provision tend to be more available in more affluent areas;
- publicly subsidised provision is rationed and bureaucratic procedures as well as unequal access to information about enrollment (including language barriers) are preventing marginalised groups from taking up ECEC places even though they might be entitled to provision;
- private-for-profit arrangements in poor neighborhoods tend to offer lower quality provision and consequently it might exacerbate inequalities among children from disadvantaged background and their more affluent peers;
- benefits and measures aimed at increasing ECEC attendance of children from low-income families might unintendedly have adverse effects on their participation.

For these reasons, there is an increasing consensus[207] among researchers and policy-makers that developing and implementing public policies that progressively move towards universal provision of publicly subsidised ECEC is both a priority and a necessity, if the goal of reducing the attainment gap is to be met. This consensus extends to direct public financing as this offers more efficient management by the public authorities, economies of scale, better quality at national level, more efficient training of teaching staff and fairer access than the system of paying benefits to parents[208].

In times of austerity, national governments find it difficult to provide universal entitlement to publicly funded provision. However this issue is of the utmost importance, assuming effective monitoring strategies which track progresses and identify implementation gaps are in place. The

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[205] DG Justice of the European Commission (2013) *Barcelona objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth.* Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, p.12.

[206] Lloyd, E., & Penn, H. (Eds.). (2012). *Childcare Markets: Can They Deliver an Equitable Service?* The Policy Press.

[207] This can be deduced by the fact that findings from research studies carried out in European MS (e.g. Lazzari and Vandenbroeck, 2012 for an overview) AND statements from important policy documents produced at European level (DG Justice, 2013; EC Communication on ECEC, 2011) seem to point in the same direction.

[208] DG Justice of the European Commission (2013) *Barcelona objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth.* Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

research demonstrates that in countries where ECEC subsidies have been reduced to save on public expenditure, the overall quality of ECEC provision has inevitably been lowered[209].

Increasing the number of places coupled with giving children the right to a place can help progress towards universal entitlement. Research shows that policies based on children's rights rather than their needs are more effective.[210] Legal entitlement does not necessarily imply that the service is free, only that the provision is publicly subsidised and affordable.

Germany

In Germany Federal Legislation enacted in December 2008 (Kinderförderungsgesetz - KiFöG) included the provision of an enforceable right to a place in centre-based ECEC or family day care setting for 1 to 2 year old children. The legislation extended the legal entitlement, which already existed for children from the age of 3 to school age, to the younger age group. After a transitional phase the entitlement began in August 2013. The Federal Government provided financial support to the 16 Federal States to press ahead with the expansion of places. In 2008-2014 the Federal Government spent 5.4 billion EUR on the expansion of ECEC for children under the age of three. From 2014 onwards it will contribute 845 million EUR per annum to the operational costs of ECEC services. The Federal budget is supplemented by the Länder who use their funds to expand ECEC provision.

This legal measure triggered a significant expansion in ECEC services. This expansion for children aged from 0-3 is monitored by yearly reports from the Federal Government to the German Bundestag (Parliament). Between 2008 and 2014 the percentage of children aged from birth to three who were enrolled in ECEC increased from 12.1 to 27.4 in Western Germany and from 41.9 to 54.0 per cent in Eastern Germany.

The success of the policy has been achieved by combining an enforceable right to an ECEC place; targeted financial investments by the Federal Government, Federal States and municipalities; and careful monitoring of progress. In addition to monitoring the number of children in ECEC service, regular surveys on the demand for ECEC places from parents are proving to be an effective stimulus for extending provision for children under the age of three.

Luxembourg

A key characteristic of Luxembourg is its multinational population. In 2010 47.7 per cent of children below the age of twelve held a different citizenship than that of Luxembourg. ECEC provision has been expanded through three pieces of legislation – in 1998 (the introduction of the éducation précoce), in 2005 (the introduction of a new model for out of school care in

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[209] Akgunduz, Y. E., Jongen, E., Leseman, P., & Plantenga, J. (2013). *Cutting from the future? Impact of a subsidy reduction on child care quality in the Netherlands* (No. 13-18).
[210] See discussion on statement 1 earlier in the document.

municipalities: maison relais pour enfants) and in 2009 (the introduction of the childcare service voucher: chèque-service accueil).

Compulsory school starts at the age of four with two years of pre-school education. These two years are part of the school system and they are free to parents: attendance is 100 per cent. The Luxembourg education system also offers an optional year for three to four year olds (the éducation précoce) and about 78% of children participate. As the éducation précoce is also part of the formal education system, there are no costs for parents.

Day care facilities for children are open all year round and parents contribute to the cost of this ECEC provision. The government aims to make all day facilities free of charge in order to ensure that all children have access, regardless of their parents' social and economic situation. The 2009 legislation on childcare service vouchers (chèque-service accueil) led to many more parents choosing this system and the offer of ECEC places has doubled between 2009 and 2013.

<u>Annex</u>

<u>Key concepts</u>

A competent ECEC system
Competence in the ECEC context should be understood as a characteristic of the entire system. A competent system includes competent individuals; collaboration between individuals and teams in an ECEC setting, and between institutions (ECEC settings, nurseries, pre-schools, schools, pre-primary settings, support services for children and families etc.); as well as effective governance arrangements at a policy level.

Access
A family is considered to have 'access' to early childhood education and care when a place is available or can be made available in a quality ECEC setting where neither distance nor cost presents a barrier to attendance.

Accessibility
Accessibility refers to problems parents experience in gaining access to ECEC services. These can be caused by explicit or implicit barriers, such as parents' inadequate knowledge of procedures or the value of ECEC, physical barriers for children with disabilities, waiting lists, a lack of choice for parents, language barriers etc.

Child-centred pedagogy including the interest of the child
A child centred approach is one which builds on children's needs, interests and experiences. These include cognitive, social, emotional and physical needs. A child centred approach is one that uses a pedagogy which promotes children's holistic development and enables adults to guide and support their development.

Comprehensive service
A comprehensive service is one that extends beyond the provision of ECEC and includes a cooperative approach with other services to focus on all other aspects of children's development such as their general health and well-being, child protection and support for them and their parents in their home and community environments.

Children from groups who are at risk of disadvantage
Children can be at risk of disadvantage because of their individual circumstances or because they, or their families belong to a group which is disadvantaged in society. These children may include those with disabilities, with mental health problems, in alternative care, at risk of neglect/abuse, undocumented child migrants/asylum seekers, those whose families live in poverty or are socially disadvantaged, those whose families have a migrant and/or second language background, those whose families have limited access to services, Roma and traveller children

Curriculum
An ECEC curriculum (which includes those aspects which are implicit rather than explicit) covers developmental care, formative interactions, children's learning experiences and supportive

assessment. This is sometimes set out in formal documentation, which advances all young children's personal and social development, their learning and prepares them for life and citizenship in their society.

Curriculum Framework
A curriculum framework (which can be a national, regional or local arrangement) expresses a set of values, principles, guidelines or standards which guides the content of and approach to children's care and learning.

ECEC
ECEC refers to any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age - regardless of the setting, funding, opening hours or programme content - and includes centre and family day-care; privately and publicly funded provision; pre-school and pre-primary provision.

Evaluation
The systematic assessment of the effectiveness of the design, implementation or results of an on-going or completed ECEC project, programme or policy.

Governance
Governance is the allocation of responsibility within and across levels of government and between public and non-public providers, and includes mechanisms to coordinate these responsibilities.

High expectations
High expectations occur when the ECEC system, and staff within the system, are child-centred and focus on what individual children can do; what they can learn; and what they can achieve with support. This helps to create an environment where children are actively encouraged to reach their full potential and their success and achievement is recognised and seen as an important part of the learning and caring environment.

Holistic approach
A holistic approach to ECEC is child-centred and means paying attention simultaneously to all aspects of a child's development, well-being and learning needs including those which relate to social, emotional, physical, linguistic and cognitive development.

Integrated systems
Integration refers to a coordinated policy for children where related care and education services or systems work together. In this context other services such as social welfare, schools, the family, employment and health services can also collaborate to support children in an ECEC context. When all ECEC services for children are integrated, this is usually described as comprehensive provision. Collaboration includes a close working relationship for those with administrative responsibility for providing ECEC services at a national, regional and/or local level.

Legal entitlement

A legal entitlement exists when every child has the enforceable right to benefit from ECEC provision.

Monitoring

In an ECEC context monitoring refers to the continuous and systematic collection of quantitative and qualitative data which supports a regular review of the quality of the ECEC system. It is based on pre-agreed quality standards, benchmarks or indicators which are established and modified through use.

Outcomes

Outcomes are the actual or intended short-term and long-term changes arising from the provision of ECEC services that will benefit children, their families, communities and society. These changes are measurable and the benefits for children typically include:
- the acquisition of cognitive skills and competences;
- the acquisition of non-cognitive skills and competences;
- the successful transition to school;
- participation in society and preparation for later life and citizenship.

Play including free play

Spontaneous and unstructured play is child-led and child-initiated activity. It offers children opportunities to explore and reflect on their interests and issues that are relevant to and meaningful in their lives. The role of staff is to encourage children's play through creating the right environment and using play as a pedagogic approach to learning.

Professional leadership

Professional leadership in an ECEC context requires skills, behaviours and competences related to supporting children's care and education, pedagogy, engagement with parents, the local community, staff management and organisation. As with other leadership roles in the education sector, ECEC leaders need to establish a culture and purpose which ensures high quality provision is available to all children, and staff and parents are involved and supported.

Professional role

A professional role is one which is regulated and requires individuals to develop and reflect on their own practice and with parents and children, create a learning environment which is constantly renewed and improved. Those fulfilling these roles will have appropriate qualifications and will be expected to take responsibility for the provision of high quality ECEC services in line with the available resources and the requirements and expectations of their system.

School-readiness

Where a Member State uses this concept, school readiness implies that a child possesses the motivation, and the cognitive and socio-emotional abilities that are required to learn and succeed in school.

Split system

ECEC provision is offered in separate settings for different age groups, often under different administrative structures. The age ranges vary between countries but usually covers 0/1 to 2/3 years and from 3/4 years up to start of primary schooling (usually 5/6 years).

Unitary system
Provision for all children from birth to primary school is organised in a single phase and delivered in settings catering for the whole age range. The age range is usually defined in the national or system context. Unitary systems are usually governed by one Ministry.

Workforce
The workforce refers to all staff members working directly with children in any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to primary school age. The workforce includes leaders and managers, and other professionals working in ECEC settings.