



Brussels, 22.5.2018  
SWD(2018) 173 final

**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**  
*Accompanying the document*

**Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**  
**on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems**

{COM(2018) 271 final}

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## 1. Introduction

*Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality<sup>1</sup>.*

Learning and education start from birth and the first years of life are the most formative as they set the foundations for children's lifelong development and patterns for their lives. High quality early childhood education and care<sup>2</sup> is an essential foundation for all children's successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and later employability. Research shows that high quality early childhood education and care benefits children's cognitive, language and social development.

Ensuring access to affordable and good quality early childhood education and care systems across the EU is enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights and an essential element of securing smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth<sup>3</sup>. Good quality and accessible early childhood education and care systems are equally important for empowering all individuals to have successful lives. They are important to remove obstacles to employment, especially for women and are especially beneficial in improving the labour market opportunities of single parents and women in low-income households.

Investing in early childhood education is therefore one of those rare policies that is both socially fair – as it increases equality of opportunity and social mobility – and economically efficient, as it fosters skills and productivity. But all these benefits are conditional on the quality of the education provided. Consequently the availability of high quality, affordable early childhood education and care for young children is an important priority for Member States and for the European Union.

Starting from this understanding, the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care provides a framework to understand and promote quality in these services. The aim is to inspire and support Member States wishing to extend their early childhood education and care services, improve the quality of their system and, in case it is decided so at the appropriate level, to set up their own quality frameworks.

This Staff Working document assembles the relevant evidence to back up statements made in the proposal. It looks at the current situation in the European Union, at preparatory technical work carried out with Member States' experts in the context of the ET2020 cooperation, the input gathered from stakeholder consultations, and provides recent evidence on all 10 quality statements highlighted in the proposal.

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<sup>1</sup> Council (2017) Interinstitutional proclamation endorsing the European Pillar of Social Rights <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13129-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Early childhood education and care 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.

<sup>3</sup> Commission Communication on Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and its follow-up 03/2010, [COM\(2010\) 2020 final](#)

## 2. State of play

### 2.1. Access and participation

Increasing access and participation in early childhood education and care has received considerable policy attention during the last two decades.

- It is one of the European benchmarks agreed in the Education and Training 2020 Strategy<sup>4</sup>. The benchmark calls for the participation of at least 95% of children between the age of four and compulsory school age by 2020.
- 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<sup>5</sup>. The Barcelona targets are regularly monitored by the European Commission, including in the context of the European Semester and most recently in its report adopted in parallel to this Staff Working Document<sup>6</sup>.

Recent data show that the benchmark for early education and care participation by the age group above four years of age has been practically met, with the EU reaching 94.8% (see graph below)<sup>7</sup>. The data however also show that children from migration or minority background and with less educated, disadvantaged parents attend early childhood education and care services less frequently than native children or those with more highly educated parents<sup>8</sup>.

In addition, while the Barcelona objective for the participation of the 0-3 year olds has overall been reached, many countries are still far from reaching the objective. More details on the Barcelona targets and their implementation is published in the Commission's report on the development of childcare facilities for young children with a view to enhance female labour market participation, work-life balance of working parents and sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe adopted in parallel to this Staff Working Document<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> 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; [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index_en.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Presidency Conclusions, Barcelona European Council 15 and 16 March 2002, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/71025.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/71025.pdf)

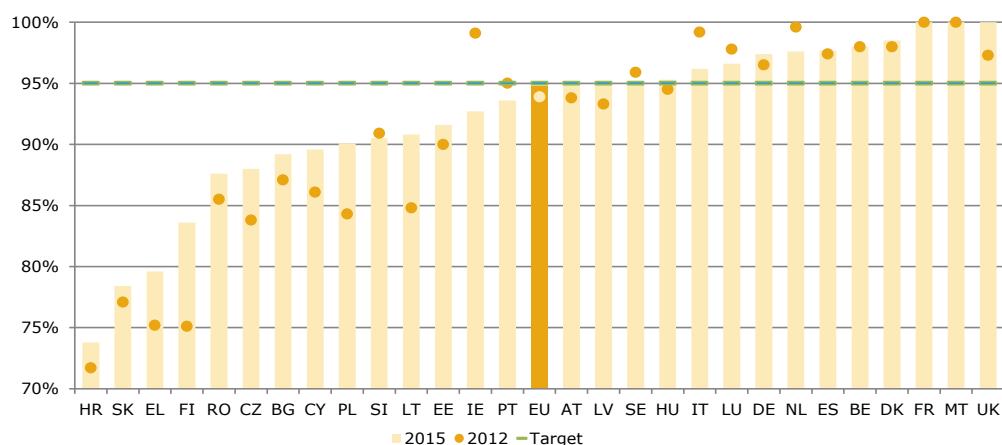
<sup>6</sup> Report from the Commission on the development of childcare facilities for young children with a view to increase female labour participation, strike a work-life balance for working parents and bring about sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe (the "Barcelona objectives"), COM(2018) 273 final; <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2018/EN/COM-2018-273-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>

<sup>7</sup> European Commission (2017), Education and Training Monitor, Figure 26 on page 56 from the full report [https://ec.europa.eu/education/content/summary\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/content/summary_en)

<sup>8</sup> OECD/European Union (2015). Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In. The attendance rate of 3-6 year-old immigrant children in early childhood education and care programmes was 7 p.p. lower than among their native-born peers in 2012

<sup>9</sup> Report from the Commission on the development of childcare facilities for young children with a view to increase female labour participation, strike a work-life balance for working parents and bring about sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe (the "Barcelona objectives"), COM(2018) 273 final; <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2018/EN/COM-2018-273-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>

## Participation in early childhood education and care of children between 4 and the age of starting ISCED 1, 2012-2015



Source: European Commission (2017), Education and Training Monitor ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2017\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2017_en.pdf))

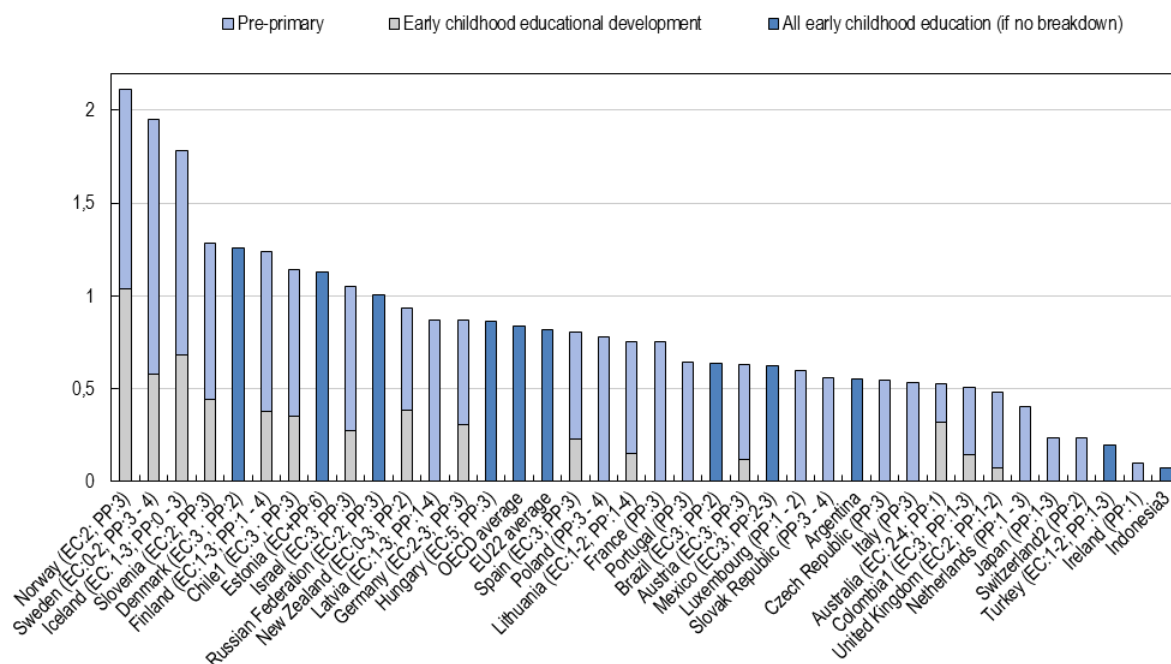
## Participation in early childhood education and care (2015)

	Children in early childhood as % of corresponding age population			Children between 4 years and the starting age of compulsory education as % of the corresponding age group		
	3 years	4 years	5 years	Total	Boys	Girls
<b>EU</b>	<b>88,2</b>	<b>93,9</b>	<b>96,1</b>	<b>94,8</b>	<b>94,8</b>	<b>94,8</b>
Belgium	97,8	98,1	98,0	98,0	97,9	98,1
Bulgaria	71,3	80,8	93,2	89,2	89,2	89,1
Czech Republic	77,3	85,3	90,7	88,0	88,2	87,8
Denmark	97,0	98,0	98,9	98,5	97,7	99,3
Germany	93,3	96,7	98,1	97,4	97,2	97,6
Estonia	86,9	90,6	92,1	91,6	91,5	91,7
Ireland	38,3	89,4	96,1	92,7	92,5	93,0
Greece	24,4	62,0	96,4	79,6	:	:
Spain	94,9	97,4	97,9	97,7	97,5	97,8
France	99,5	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Croatia	55,7	59,6	80,9	73,8	74,8	72,7
Italy	92,1	95,8	96,7	96,2	97,0	95,4
Cyprus	64,1	84,7	94,6	89,6	89,5	89,7
Latvia	86,6	91,6	96,5	95,0	94,6	95,4
Lithuania	77,0	85,7	93,3	90,8	90,5	91,1
Luxembourg	65,8	94,8	98,6	96,6	96,9	96,4
Hungary	81,2	95,1	95,4	95,3	95,5	95,0
Malta	96,9	100,0		100,0	100,0	100,0
Netherlands	82,7	96,0	99,2	97,6	97,4	97,9
Austria	75,0	92,7	97,1	95,0	93,3	96,7
Poland	65,2	79,4	95,3	90,1	90,0	90,2
Portugal	78,7	90,3	96,9	93,6	94,2	92,9
Romania	77,8	86,3	88,8	87,6	87,6	87,5
Slovenia	82,8	89,3	91,8	90,5	90,8	90,3
Slovakia	60,3	75,6	81,2	78,4	78,4	78,5
Finland	68,4	74,5	88,2	83,6	83,6	83,6
Sweden	91,4	92,9	96,0	95,0	94,9	95,0
United	100,0	100,0		100,0	100,0	100,0

Equitable access to early childhood education and care is an essential feature of good quality provision<sup>10</sup>. Research shows that the beneficial effects of early childhood education and care attendance are stronger for children in poverty and from minority ethnic groups when there is a context of universal provision<sup>11</sup>.

In OECD countries, expenditure on early childhood education accounts for an average of 0.8% of GDP, of which 0.6% is allocated to pre-primary education<sup>12</sup>.

### Expenditure on early childhood educational institutions (2014) as a percentage of GDP, by category



Source: OECD Education at a Glance 2017

## 2.2. Legal framework for providing early childhood education and care services

In the European Union, there are significant differences regarding the age from which children have a guarantee to a place in early childhood education and care, the hours of entitlement and whether or not parents are expected to co-finance. Legal entitlement to early childhood education and care refers to a statutory duty on early childhood education and care providers to secure publicly subsidised service provision for all children living in a catchment area whose parents, regardless of their employment, socio-economic or family status, require

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> Universal provision means that there is an established right to an early childhood education and care place for all children; Eurydice (2009) *Tackling social and cultural inequalities through early childhood education and care in Europe*. Brussels: EACEA.

<sup>12</sup> OECD, Starting Strong V, Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education 2017

a place for their child. Public authorities commit themselves to guarantee a place in settings for all children even if attending early childhood education and care is not compulsory.

### Legal framework of early childhood education and care

	1. Starting age of universal legal entitlement to ECEC	2. Starting age of compulsory ECEC	3. Starting age of compulsory primary education
Belgium fr	2y 6mths		6
Belgium de	3		6
Belgium nl	2y 6mths		6
Bulgaria		5	7
Czech Republic	5		6
Denmark	6 mths		6
Germany	1		6
Estonia	1y 6mths		7
Ireland			6
Greece		5	6
Spain	3		6
France	3		6
Croatia		6	7
Italy			6
Cyprus		4y 8mths	5y 8mths
Latvia	1y 6mths	5	7
Lithuania		6	7
Luxembourg	3	4	6
Hungary		3	6
Malta	2y 9mths		5
Netherlands	*	5	6
Austria		5	6
Poland	4	6	7
Portugal	4		6
Romania			6
Slovenia	11 mths		6
Slovakia			6
Finland	9 mths	6	7
Sweden	1		7
United Kingdom-ENG	3		5
United Kingdom-WLS	3		5
United Kingdom-NIR			4
United Kingdom-SCT	3		5

Source: Eurydice (2017) Structural indicators

When there is no provision of legal entitlement, data<sup>13</sup> show that around half of national central-level steering documents do not address the allocation of places in early childhood education and care. This means that places are allocated on the basis of selection criteria defined either by local authorities or directly by heads of settings. In other countries, some central level criteria for the allocation of places are defined. However, this matter is usually

<sup>13</sup> European Commission; Eurydice (2014) Key data on Early childhood education and care <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/5785249/EC-01-14-484-EN.PDF/cbdf1804-a139-43a9-b8f1-ca5223eea2a1>

addressed through recommendations rather than regulations, which means that local authorities or heads of settings have significant autonomy when taking decisions.

In the education systems, where the allocation criteria are defined at central level, they usually make reference to parents' employment status, family status or socio-economic status e.g.:

- With regard to employment status, most countries give priority to working parents, but some also refer to parents who are actively seeking employment or to parents who are in education or training. Priority is sometimes given to parents working in specific professions, including the armed services and government officers in internal affairs or border authorities;
- when taking family status into account, countries often give priority to orphans, children from single-parent families, large families as well as to siblings of children already in the setting.
- criteria might give priority to children with disabilities, special needs or health problems, or from certain ethnic groups
- specific categories of parents are also given preference in some countries, including war veterans or victims of conflicts political refugees, parents who are victims of domestic violence or teenage parents who need to work or continue their studies
- often heads of settings are required to take into account the order in which applications arrive (i.e. the priority should be given to earlier applications).

Across Europe there are imbalances between the supply and demand of places in early childhood education and care. The 2014 report from Eurostat and Eurydice comments that in almost all countries, the demand for places is higher than supply, especially for younger children.

In approximately half of the European education systems, the entire period of ISCED 0 is provided free of charge. Typically, in countries where early childhood education and care is provided free of charge, there is also a legal entitlement to a place, or a statutory duty on services providers to secure publicly subsidised early childhood education and care provision for all children living in a catchment area. Where there is no legal entitlement or attendance is not compulsory, there is often a shortage of free places.

### **2.3. Quality in early childhood education and care**

In recent years, and in parallel to the efforts to increase access and participation, increasing attention has been given to the quality of early childhood education and care<sup>14</sup>. Empirical evidence has shown that in order for children to benefit from early childhood education and care, the provision has to be of high quality. This is highlighted for example in the conclusions from the NESSE 'Early Matters' symposium<sup>15</sup> which note that early childhood education and care 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. Low-quality early

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<sup>14</sup> OECD (2018), *Engaging Young People*, p.13 (forthcoming)

<sup>15</sup> See also: Early Matters (2009), Symposium Conclusions, [http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/symposia/symposia10-08/ecec\\_symposium\\_conclusions.pdf/](http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/symposia/symposia10-08/ecec_symposium_conclusions.pdf/)



childhood education and care may be associated with having no effect or even with detrimental effects on children's development and learning in the long term

An EENEE report from 2017<sup>16</sup> notes four policy levers that policy-makers can pull: personnel, organisation, curriculum and funding. For early childhood education and care, the issues of access and quality are both crucial and highly complex. Currently there is often not only unequal access to early childhood education and care in general, but also even more unequal access to high quality services, which reinforces inequalities.

This is the background against which in 2011 the EU Member States and the European Commission launched cooperation to address the two-fold challenge of strengthening access to childcare and education, and raising the quality of early childhood education and care provision. This included the establishment in 2012 of a Thematic Working Group as part of the Education and Training 2020 work programme. This group developed proposals for improving the quality of early childhood education and care which became a topic of growing interest. Their work led to the publication of a first proposal to establish a Quality Framework for early childhood education and care. This Quality Framework was based on five dimensions: access; workforce; curriculum; monitoring and evaluation; and governance and funding. It aimed to support policy makers and encourage all Member States to go further in their development of excellence in all settings for the benefit of individual children and society.

Quality in early childhood education and care is a complex concept and measures to achieve, improve and further develop quality are inter-dependent and cannot be considered in isolation. Although there is no internationally agreed concept of quality in early childhood education and care services, measures have been identified which help to produce and assure high quality. These include measures which affect the structure of service provision, the quality of the processes used in settings and the outcomes from early childhood education and care provision.

- *Structural quality*<sup>17</sup> looks at how the system is designed and organised – it often includes rules associated with the accreditation and approval of individual settings; requirements about the number of professionally trained staff; the design of the curriculum; regulations associated with the financing of early childhood education and care 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* looks at practice within a setting<sup>18</sup> – it often includes the role of play within the curriculum; relationships between early childhood education and care providers and children's families; relationships 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 setting and the day-to-day pedagogic practice of staff within an early childhood education and care context;

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<sup>16</sup> Benefits of Early Childhood Education and Care and the conditions for obtaining them. 2018. [Economics of Education \(EENEE\)](https://www.eenee.de/dms/EENEE/Analytical_Reports/EENEE_AR32.pdf), Concluding remarks, p. 66. [http://www.eenee.de/dms/EENEE/Analytical\\_Reports/EENEE\\_AR32.pdf](http://www.eenee.de/dms/EENEE/Analytical_Reports/EENEE_AR32.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> OECD (2013), *Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Norway*, (Litjens, Taguma and Makowiecki 2010).

<sup>18</sup> OECD, *Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Norway 2013*.

- *Outcome quality* 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.

### **Early childhood development and early learning**

Development of competences is an incremental process, and building a strong foundation in the early years is a pre-condition for higher level skill acquisitions. While learning and physical well-being are connected at all ages, physical development in the first six years of life is critical for competences. "Just as a weak foundation compromises the quality and strength of a house, adverse experiences early in life can impair brain architecture, with negative effects lasting into adulthood"<sup>19</sup>. In order to be able to develop a strong brain architecture children need good nutrition, a stimulating environment, secure attachment and warm responsive relationships. Also as part of physical development gross and fine motor skills as well as visual motor and spatial skills are important prerequisites for skill acquisition and school readiness.

Looking at learning processes the importance of early years is two-fold. Firstly, a range of pre-academic knowledge and skills - such as early numeracy, literacy and science – is necessary for children to develop and be successful in school. Secondly, and with equal importance, there is a range of social, emotional and cognitive skills that children need as enablers of lifelong learning, health and well-being.

Different studies have demonstrated that early literacy and numeracy skills<sup>20</sup> and basic knowledge about natural and social science<sup>21</sup> have great influence on future competence development. Early verbal abilities of very young children also impact on their later numeracy skills and mathematical performance<sup>22</sup>. Early literacy skills (children's early oral and phonological awareness and processing skills as well as letter print knowledge) have been found to play a crucial role in reading development and also in mathematical achievement. At school entry there are large differences in the level of numeracy skills among children. These differences tend to increase during school years<sup>23</sup>, suggesting that early numeracy practices before school entry are likely to improve children's later mathematical attainment.

Early cognitive and non-cognitive skills have also been identified as both having an impact on later competence as well as having a long reach into adulthood and influence health,

<sup>19</sup> [Center of the Developing Child, Harvard university](#) (2017)

<sup>20</sup> Soto-Calvo E.; et al. (2016) Technical Report: The Influence of Early Literacy Competences on Later Mathematical Attainment, Joint Research Centre, <http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC102210/Ibna28010enn.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Morgan P.L.; et al. (2016) Science Achievement Gaps Begin Very Early, Persist and Are Largely Explained by Modifiable Factors, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3102/0013189X16633182>

<sup>22</sup> LeFevre, J.-A.; et al. (2010) Pathways to mathematics: Longitudinal predictors of performance. *Child development*, 81(6), 1753-1767, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01508.x/abstract;jsessionid=072267593ECBC458B8903124528D4DB0.f04t02>

<sup>23</sup> Aunola, K.; et al. (2007) Developmental dynamics of math performance from preschool to grade 2, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228779904\\_Developmental\\_Dynamics\\_of\\_Math\\_Performance\\_From\\_Preschool\\_to\\_Grade\\_2](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228779904_Developmental_Dynamics_of_Math_Performance_From_Preschool_to_Grade_2)

employability, earnings and life-satisfaction<sup>24</sup>. Most important early socio-emotional competences include self-awareness, self-regulation<sup>25</sup>, emotional stability, pro-social behaviour and empathy. The importance of early self-regulatory skill has seen increased focus in the applied research given the implications of these skills for early school success.

Furthermore education from the earliest stages has an essential role to play in learning to live together in heterogeneous societies. Before children can understand abstract social concepts (democracy, responsibility, rule of law, human rights), they need to experience real life personal situations in which these concepts come into play, and practice the requisite social skills<sup>26</sup>. Therefore in order to develop civic competence early social leaning need to take place. Later in life these social skills also play crucial role in the development of entrepreneurial competence and intentions<sup>27</sup>.

Language is a fundamental aspect and plays a key role in early childhood development and early learning. Research-based evidence shows that participation in early childhood education and care is crucial to support children's language development and later readiness for schooling. There is a need to focus on strengthening the overall language competences (in both first language and other or foreign languages)<sup>28</sup>. Literacy engagement is one of the major variables predicting strong academic development of students; in this respect starting early has important implications for inclusion and exposure to literature is crucial to create an affective bond between children and books at an early stage<sup>29</sup>.

Parents' socio-economic and educational background is the strongest influencing factor for children's' competence development in the early years. The second most influential factor is the quality of any form of non-parental care children receive. In fact "going to a high quality early childhood education and care setting was especially important when starting school and remained so beyond the age of 16. It influences both attainment and progress in early school careers and set children on particularly beneficial learning trajectories"<sup>30</sup>. This is true for all children<sup>31</sup> and especially if they came from more disadvantaged backgrounds. In short participation in early childhood education and care can compensate, to a degree, for inequalities in family background.

It is necessary to support the development of different skill sets to enable children reach their full potential. The results of policies that simultaneously develop multiple skills are likely to be greater than policies concentrating on single skills only<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Carneiro P., Crawford C. and Goodman A. (2007) The Impact of Early Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills on Later Outcomes, [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/19375/1/The\\_Impact\\_of\\_Early\\_Cognitive\\_and\\_Non-Cognitive\\_Skills\\_on\\_Later\\_Outcomes.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/19375/1/The_Impact_of_Early_Cognitive_and_Non-Cognitive_Skills_on_Later_Outcomes.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Referring to constructs such as self-control, delay of gratification, good conduct and conscientiousness

<sup>26</sup> Kemple K.M. (2016) Social Studies, Social Competence and Citizenship in Early Childhood Education, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10643-016-0812-z>

<sup>27</sup> Schoon, I.; Duckworth K. (2012), "Who Becomes an Entrepreneur? Early Life Experiences as Predictors of Entrepreneurship", *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 48, No. 6, pp. 1719-1726, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22746220>

<sup>28</sup> Siraj-Blatchford, I., Clarke, P. (2000) - Supporting Identity, Diversity And Language In The Early Years, McGraw-Hill Education ;

<sup>29</sup> Great Start in Life Conference (2016), Inclusion and languages in the early years – challenges and opportunities for educators, Jim Cummins <https://ec.europa.eu/education/great-start-in-life#video-gallery>

<sup>30</sup> Sylva, K.; et al. (2004). The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education [EPPE] Project (Project Final Report), <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3155&context=sspapers>

<sup>31</sup> Melhuish E.; et al. (2016) CARE Project: A review of research on the effects of Early Childhood Education and Care upon child development

<sup>32</sup> Benefits of Early Childhood Education and Care and the conditions for obtaining them. 2018. *Economics of Education (EENEE)*. [http://www.eenee.de/dms/EENEE/Analytical\\_Reports/EENEE\\_AR32.pdf](http://www.eenee.de/dms/EENEE/Analytical_Reports/EENEE_AR32.pdf)

### 3. Benefits of early childhood education and care

Benefits of participating in high quality early childhood education and care are wide ranging. This chapter set out to summarise the main benefits of participation in early childhood education and care.

Two recent reports give full account of these positive impacts that include individual and public benefits<sup>33</sup>. They conclude that high quality early childhood education and care can lay the foundations for later success in life in terms of education, well-being, employability, and social integration. This is even more valid for children from disadvantaged backgrounds<sup>34</sup>. Research conclusions show that high quality early childhood education and care benefits children's cognitive, language and social development for both the age group of under three year olds and for those between four and the school entry age.

#### 3.1. Benefits for children

A wide range of background factors at child level (gender, low birth weights, genetics etc.), family level (parental qualifications, income, socio-economic situation etc.) and the home learning environment influences to a great extent the educational outcomes for children. At the same time children's experiences in their early years have a profound impact on their social-emotional and cognitive development in their childhood and throughout their life. Children develop not in isolation but through relationships within the family, neighbourhood, community, and society.

The effect of attending a high quality early childhood education and care on a child's literacy and numeracy skills at age 11 can equal or surpass that of other factors, including primary school quality and early developmental problems. In addition, they are long-lasting: a significant relation between earlier entry into education and mathematic results remains after ten years<sup>35</sup>.

#### **UK Study on Educational outcomes for different age groups**

Findings in a UK study showed that children who attended pre-school, compared to those who did not, had better attainment in language, pre-reading and early number concepts after controlling for the influence of background characteristics. The graph below shows the advantage in terms of months of development of longer duration and higher quality on literacy at school entry. It shows that children who attended high quality pre-school for 2-3

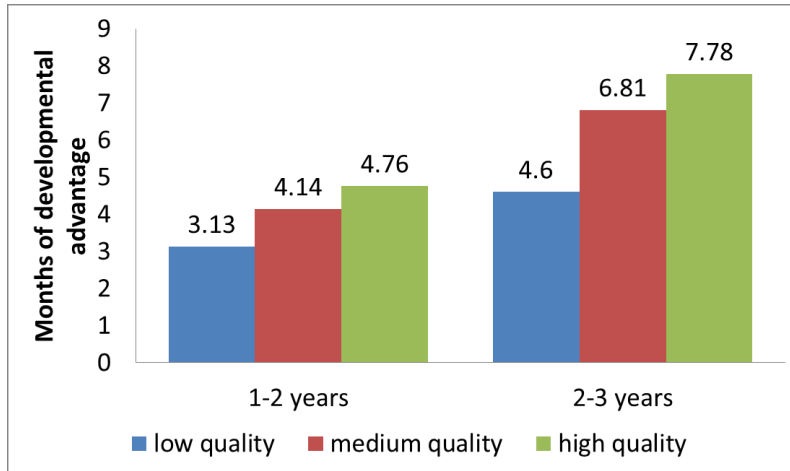
<sup>33</sup> The CARE project was a collaborative project funded by the European Union to address issues related to the quality, inclusiveness, and individual, social, and economic benefits of early childhood education and care in Europe; Melhuish, E.; et al.; (2015), A review of research on the effects of Early Childhood Education and Care upon child development, CARE Project Report, [http://ecec-care.org/fileadmin/careproject/Publications/reports/new\\_version\\_CARE\\_WP4\\_D4\\_1\\_Review\\_on\\_the\\_effects\\_of\\_ECEC.pdf](http://ecec-care.org/fileadmin/careproject/Publications/reports/new_version_CARE_WP4_D4_1_Review_on_the_effects_of_ECEC.pdf); Vandenbroeck M.; et al.; (2018) Benefits of early childhood education and care and the conditions for obtaining them, EENEE Report, <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/14194adc-fc04-11e7-b8f5-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

<sup>34</sup> Heckman, J.J.; (2006). Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children. *Science*, 312(5782), 1900-1902

<sup>35</sup> Sammons P. et al. (2008) Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 3–11 Project (EPPE 3–11), Summary Report: Influences on Children's Attainment and Progress in Key Stage 2: Cognitive Outcomes in Year 5, [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research/pdf/Summary\\_Report\\_2007\\_Influences\\_on\\_childrens\\_attainment\\_and\\_progress\\_in\\_Key\\_Stage\\_2.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research/pdf/Summary_Report_2007_Influences_on_childrens_attainment_and_progress_in_Key_Stage_2.pdf)

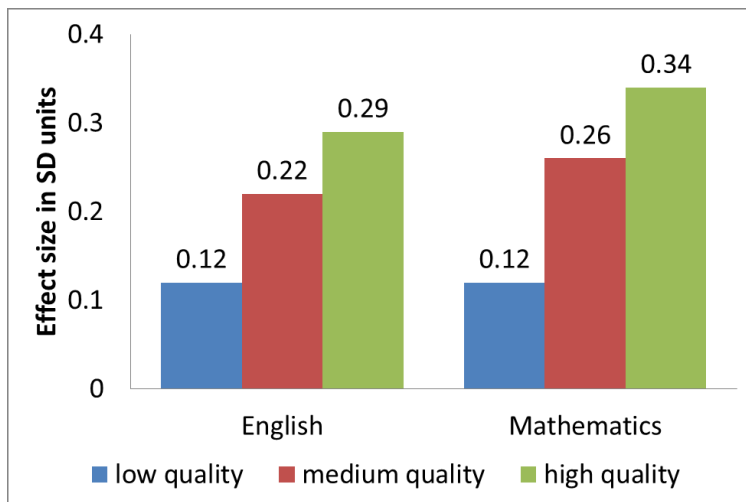
years were nearly 8 months ahead in their literacy development compared to children who had not attended pre-school.

**Development advantage (in months) for duration and quality of pre-school on literacy at school entry (home as comparison)**



The beneficial effects of pre-school remained relevant at age 11. However, these effects were largely carried by settings of medium or high quality. As the graph below shows, the benefits of both medium and high quality pre-school persisted at age 11 for attainment in reading/English and maths. In addition, attending a more effective pre-school (one that promoted early number concepts) had particular benefits for later attainment in maths. The effect of attending high quality early childhood education and care on a child’s literacy and numeracy skills at age 11 can equal or surpass that of other factors, including primary school quality and early developmental problems<sup>36</sup>.

**Influence of pre-school quality on academic outcomes age 11**

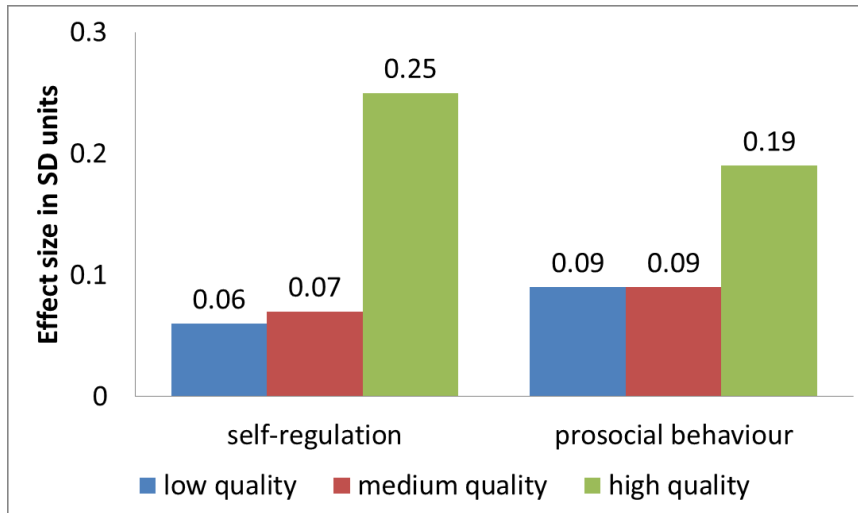


At age 14, students who attended a pre-school that was highly effective in promoting pre-reading skills had better outcomes for English. For maths, all pre-school effectiveness groups had better grade results than the no pre-school group. Attendance at a high medium effective pre-school predicted better outcomes in science compared to the no pre-school group. Higher

<sup>36</sup> Sammons P. et al. (2008) Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 3–11 Project (EPPE 3–11), Summary Report: Influences on Children’s Attainment and Progress in Key Stage 2: Cognitive Outcomes in Year 5

pre-school quality also predicted better self-regulation, pro-social, hyperactivity and anti-social behaviour at age 1) as seen in the graph below.

### Influence of the quality of pre-school on positive social behaviours at age 14



At the end of secondary school (age 16) pre-school quality still predicted academic attainment with high quality being associated with better total final test scores and English and maths grades. Students who had attended high quality pre-schools were more likely to achieve excellent final test results.

The OECD's PISA survey suggests that 15-year-old students who attended early childhood education for less than one year are 3.1 times more likely than students who attended for one year or more to perform below the baseline level of proficiency in science (this decreases to 2.3 times after accounting for socio-economic status. A 2011 OECD report<sup>37</sup> also found that literacy at age 15 was strongly associated with participation in early childhood education and care in countries where a large proportion of the population attends early childhood education and care, where it is for a longer duration, and where there were measures to maintain its quality<sup>38</sup>.

Also a summary of the existing research evidence<sup>39</sup> from multiple countries confirms that good-quality early childhood education and care helps children's successful completion of compulsory education. The early cognitive abilities, which include early literacy, language and numeracy, form the foundations for further development of relevant competences at school and help avoid early competence gaps that would require early remedial action during the compulsory schooling. Similarly, pro-social behaviour, self-regulation and favourable learning dispositions are a huge asset which young children might be able to take from the early childhood education and care institution to school and which form the basis for

<sup>37</sup> OECD (2011) Investing in High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care, <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/48980282.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Leak J.; et al. (2010). 'Is Timing Everything? How Early Childhood Education Program Impacts Vary by Starting Age, Program Duration and Time Since the End of the Program

<sup>39</sup> European Commission (2014) Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in preventing early school leaving (ESL), <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7548dd37-c626-4e2d-bd70-625edf707adc/language-en>

avoiding non-cognitive characteristics that are associated with underachievement and early school leaving.

### 3.2. Social and labour market outcomes

Besides educational outcomes, potential labour market outcomes, for those who participated in early childhood education and care, have received much attention in research. There are numerous studies showing that those who participated in early childhood education and care have more favourable labour market outcomes than those who did not<sup>40</sup>. Examples include labour market participation, earnings, productivity, employability and employment opportunities<sup>41</sup>. Early childhood education and care can foster individual productivity, especially that of children in poverty or other adverse circumstances<sup>42</sup>.

Several studies for the US and EU have detected significant and lasting effects of participation in early childhood education and care on both educational attainment and wages. Dumas and Lefranc (2010)<sup>43</sup>, for example, start from a policy change in France in the 1960s, which increased participation in early childhood education and care from 35 to 90%. They show that an additional year of early childhood education and care attendance raises average earnings by 3% and lowered the dropout rate by 2%.

In part, the above results can be explained through improved education: because individuals who attended early childhood education and care generally have higher educational attainment than those who did not, they also have better chances in the labour market. While the literature has clearly demonstrated a positive relationship between participation in early childhood education and care and labour market outcomes later in life, the quantification of these effects is not straightforward.

With regard to the situation of parents, the lack of (full-time) formal care services for children can lead working parents, in particular women, to reduce their working hours or drop out of the labour market<sup>44</sup>. The accessibility of these services in terms of physical distance and opening hours can present obstacles to female employment. Poor quality of services has a strong impact on female participation in the labour market as well. Almost one third of parents not using childcare services due to their low quality. Affordability can also be a major barrier to the use of these services; 53% of mothers who declare that they do not work or that they work part-time for reasons linked to formal childcare services consider the costs to be an obstacle.

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<sup>40</sup> Karoly L.A.; et al. (2005), *Early Childhood Interventions: Proven Results, Future Promise*, RAND Corporation; and Barnett, W.S.; (2011). *Effectiveness of Early Educational Intervention*. Science, 333, 975-978.

<sup>41</sup> Shomos, A. (2010). *Links between literacy and numeracy skills and labour market outcomes*. Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper; and Van Belle, J.; (2016). *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and its long-term effects on educational and labour market outcomes*, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1600/RR1667/RAND\\_RR1667.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1600/RR1667/RAND_RR1667.pdf), RAND Corporation

<sup>42</sup> Heckman, J.J. and Masterov, D.V; (2004). *The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children*, Working Paper No. 5, Invest in Kids Working Group Committee for Economic Development, October 4 2004, [http://jenni.uchicago.edu/Invest/FILES/dugger\\_2004-12-02\\_dvm.pdf](http://jenni.uchicago.edu/Invest/FILES/dugger_2004-12-02_dvm.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Dumas, A. and Lefranc, A. (2010). *Early schooling and later outcomes: Evidence from pre-school extension in France*. Thema Working Paper 2010-07, Université de Cergy Pontoise, <https://thema.u-cergy.fr/IMG/documents/2010-07.pdf>

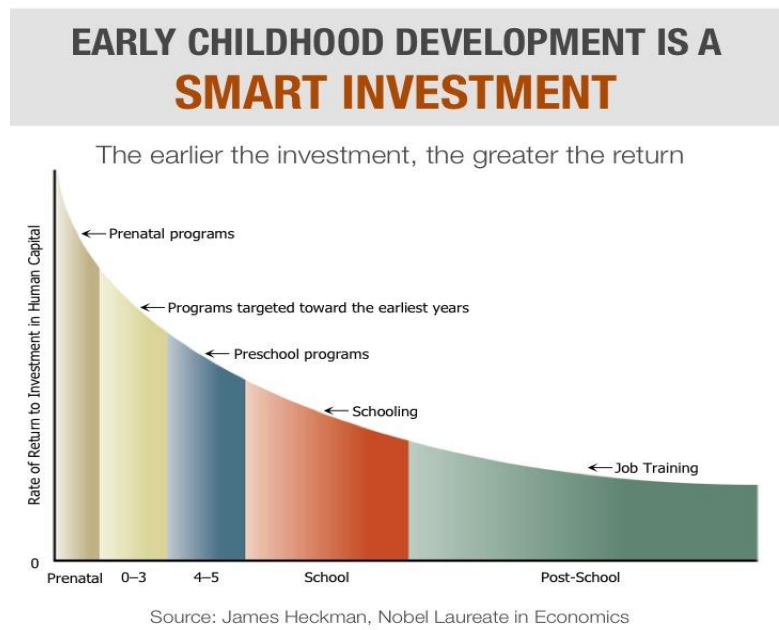
<sup>44</sup> OECD (2012) *Closing the Gender Gap*. European Commission (2015), *Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2015*, chapter III.2.

Improving the provision of affordable, accessible and quality (full-time) early childhood education and care can therefore also have a direct positive impact on parents', and especially mothers', participation in the labour market. Childcare services for young children are a way for parents to enter and/or remain in the labour market only if they are financially accessible<sup>45</sup>.

The economic benefits of early childhood education and care generally take the form of reduced spending or increased revenues in specific policy domains, such as social security or taxation<sup>46</sup>. With regard to education, public expenditure on education is likely to decrease because fewer students repeat grades, are enrolled in special education, need additional lessons or training, or drop out of high school altogether<sup>47</sup>. As for health, there are positive effects of early childhood education and care in relation to government spending and revenues<sup>48</sup> because improved health and overall well-being are associated with reductions in expenditure on health-related programmes.

Spending on early childhood education and care is generally lower than that on other education levels, despite the evidence on its importance for future learning and growth and the finding that returns on investment are higher than those for other education levels. The economic benefits from investing in early childhood education and care (compared to other stages of education) can be summarised in the following graph<sup>49</sup>.

**Investments in early education have the highest rate of return<sup>50</sup>**



<sup>45</sup> D. Del Boca, D. Vuri, (2005) The mismatch between employment and child care in Italy: the impact of rationing <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00148-006-0126-3>

<sup>46</sup> Early Childhood Interventions: Proven Results, Future Promise, RAND Corporation; and Barnett, W.S. (2011) Effectiveness of Early Educational Intervention,

<sup>47</sup> Van Huizen, T.; Dumhs, L. and Plantenga, J. (2016). A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Universal Preschool Education Evidence from a Spanish Reform.

<sup>48</sup> Karoly, L.A., et al. (2005). Early childhood intervention,

<sup>49</sup> Benefits of early childhood education and care and the conditions for obtaining them, EENNEE Report 2018,

<sup>50</sup> The Heckman curve - <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/the-heckman-curve/>



### 3.3. Female labour market participation and gender equality

In 2016, the employment rate of women in the EU was 65.3% as compared to 76.9% for men (20-64 age group)<sup>51</sup>. At the current rate of change, female labour market participation will only reach 75%, the current employment rate of men, by the year 2038<sup>52</sup>.

Gender gaps in the labour market are most acute for parents and people with other caring responsibilities. The gender employment gap has been shown to widen substantially after having children. Data suggest that the younger the child, the lower the probability of staying in or joining the labour market. On average in 2016, the employment rate of women with one child under 6 is 7.5 percentage points (pp) less than women without young children, and in several countries this difference is over 15 pp. Mothers tend to be less represented in the labour market than non-mothers across all educational levels and household types.

The employment gap is particularly high for low-skilled women and single parents<sup>53</sup>. As noted by the OECD<sup>54</sup>, the availability of early childhood services plays a key role in the increased labour force participation rates among women. This in turn has public benefits in terms of higher contributions to society and to economic growth. But having a good access to such services is not sufficient. The number of early childhood education and care hours per week available to young children is paramount to increasing the full-time participation of mothers in the labour market. For that reason, many OECD countries have recently increased the number of free hours of early childhood education and care entitlements, or shifted from half-day to full-day kindergartens. However, here again, wide variations among countries still exist. Countries with both high levels of participation in early childhood education and care and greater intensity of participation (in hours per week), such as Nordic countries, are in general those in which most mothers work full-time.

An *Education indicators in Focus* brief recently published by OECD highlights that the availability, intensity, reliability and affordability of early childhood education and care play an important role in engaging women full time in the labour market and points out to the persistence of wide variations across countries. In addition, it underlines that the barrier of costs prevents poor families and lone parents, mostly mothers, from accessing paid work. It concludes that provision and accessibility of free early childhood education and care services need to be increased, especially for children under the age of 3<sup>55</sup>.

In many EU Member States there is lack of places especially for children under three. The high cost of the available private nurseries and kindergartens is a major obstacle for women. Furthermore close to one third of Europeans claim that they do not use early childhood education and care services due to their (perceived) low quality. Investing in high quality early childhood education and care services can be considered a major enabler for women with young children to participate in the labour market. The most recent information on

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<sup>51</sup> Based on the Labour Force Survey data for 2016

<sup>52</sup> European Commission (2014) Report on Progress on equality between women and men in 2013.

<sup>53</sup> European Commission (2016) The efficiency and effectiveness of social protection systems over the life course, chapter 3.2. in Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2015

<sup>54</sup> OECD, Education and Skills today, [http://oecdeducationtoday.blogspot.co.uk/2018/03/womens-employment-early-childhood-education.html?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Feed:+EducationtodayBlog+\(educationtoday+blog\)](http://oecdeducationtoday.blogspot.co.uk/2018/03/womens-employment-early-childhood-education.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed:+EducationtodayBlog+(educationtoday+blog))

<sup>55</sup> Education Indicators in Focus February 2018 Education Indicators in Focus February 2018 #59, [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/how-does-access-to-early-childhood-education-services-affect-the-participation-of-women-in-the-labour-market\\_232211ca-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/how-does-access-to-early-childhood-education-services-affect-the-participation-of-women-in-the-labour-market_232211ca-en)

women's participation in the labour force in Member States is set out in the European Commission's 2018 Barcelona Report<sup>56</sup>.

The OECD<sup>57</sup> notes that the benefits of early childhood education and care services to better learning are now widely acknowledged, a widespread and accessible provision for these services also helps support gender equality in the workforce. In particular, the availability, intensity, reliability and affordability of early childhood education and care play an important role in engaging women full time in the labour market. While early childhood education and care has experienced a surge of policy attention over the last decades, wide variations still exist across countries and its costs remains a barrier to accessing paid work for poor families and lone parents, mostly mothers.

By addressing women's underrepresentation in the labour market, increasing the provision of early childhood education and care could have positive impacts on companies, the economy and society as a whole. Indeed, the current situation in terms of female employment strongly impedes companies' turn-over as it exacerbates skills shortages<sup>58</sup> and leads to costly staff turnover as women drop out of the labour market to take care of their children<sup>59</sup>. Moreover, women's underrepresentation in the labour market leads to their underrepresentation in decision-making positions. This in turn has costs for businesses, as it can lead to sub-optimal decision-making with negative economic consequences<sup>60</sup>.

Addressing the gender employment gap would also translate into decreased pressure on public finances due to higher available labour supply, increased tax-revenue and increase social transfers in order to address women and child poverty. In 2013, the cost of gender inequality in the labour market amounted to an estimated €370 billion euros, equivalent to 2.8% of EU-GDP<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> European Commission (2018), Report on equality between women and men in the EU, [http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/document.cfm?doc\\_id=50074](http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/document.cfm?doc_id=50074).

<sup>57</sup> OECD (2018), "How does access to early childhood education services affect the participation of women in the labour market?", *Education Indicators in Focus*, No. 59, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/232211ca-en>

<sup>58</sup> Such as for doctors, nurses, midwives and teachers, see Cedefop (2016)

<sup>59</sup> Australian Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2013) The business case for gender equality

<sup>60</sup> See Impact Assessment On Costs And Benefits Of Improving The Gender Balance In The Boards Of Companies Listed On Stock Exchanges, SWD(2012) 348 final, p. 44.

<sup>61</sup> Eurofound (2016) The Gender Employment Gap: Challenges and Solutions

#### 4. Social inclusion and early childhood education and care provision

Early childhood education and care contributes to social inclusion and social cohesion in several ways. It brings together children and parents of different backgrounds in a familiar environment. It has been demonstrated that having young children is a matter that can connect people from diverse origins and socio-economic statuses<sup>62</sup>. In a context of increased diversity, academics and policy-makers have pointed to the role of the educational system in general, and to early childhood education and care in particular, on supporting social inclusion and cohesion<sup>63</sup>.

High quality early childhood education and care services have to take account of questions of access, affordability and availability of the services. However 'availability and affordability do not necessarily make provision accessible, as multiple obstacles may exclude children from poor and immigrant families, for example, language barriers, knowledge of bureaucratic procedures, waiting lists, or priorities set by management'<sup>64</sup>.

The work carried out to date in the context of EU cooperation on early childhood education and care has used the following definition of at-risk children: 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.

##### 4.1. Breaking the cycle of disadvantage, preventing early skills gap

In their 2014 review of the literature Vandebroek and Lazzari comment that all studies which focus on sub-samples of vulnerable children report that high quality early childhood education and care benefits especially children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds whose gains in cognitive and socio-emotional development are higher than for middle-class children. The research further suggest that a universal service providing good quality programmes for all, in which special attention is given to disadvantaged children, is preferred over separate provision focussed exclusively on targeted populations. In addition, children from disadvantaged backgrounds gain most when early childhood education and care services are closely linked to employment, health and social policies that promote a more equal redistribution of resources across a population.

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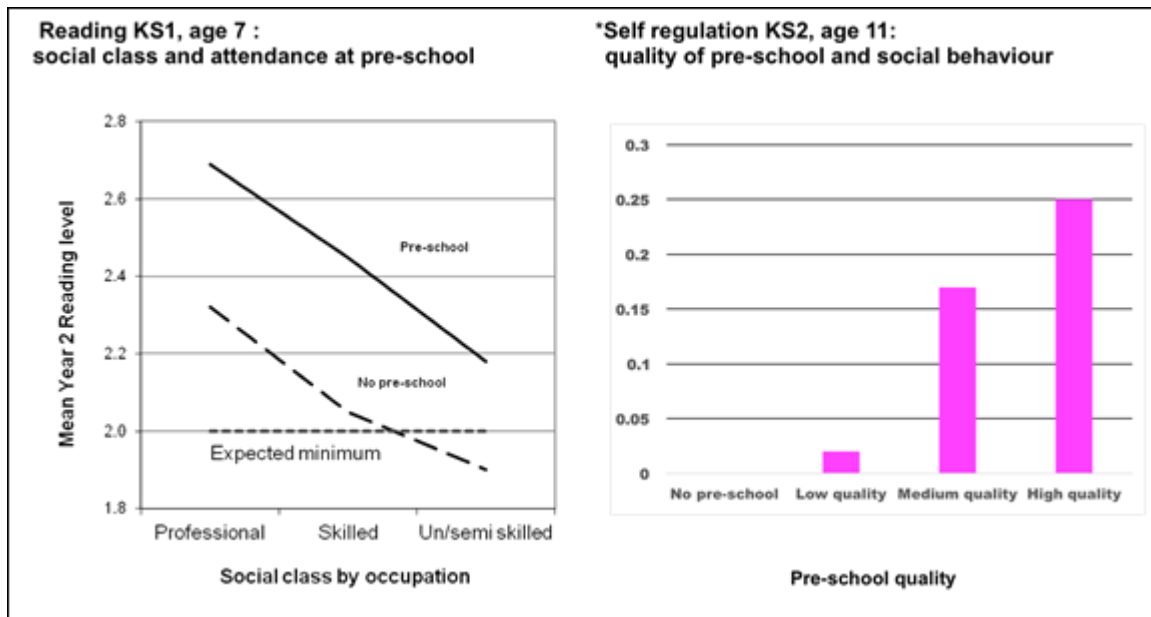
<sup>62</sup> Geens, N. and Vandebroek, M. (2013). Early childhood education and care as a space for social support in urban contexts of diversity. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21(3), 407-419.

<sup>63</sup> European Commission (2015). Draft 2015 joint report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). New priorities for European cooperation in education and training

<sup>64</sup> Lazzari, A. and Vandebroek, M., Literature Review of the Participation of Disadvantaged Children and Families in ECEC Services in Europe compiled for the study: 'Early childhood education and care (ECEC) in promoting educational attainment including social development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and in fostering social inclusion' - European Commission Directorate – General for Education and Culture (2012), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236347330\\_Literature\\_Review\\_of\\_the\\_Participation\\_of\\_Disadvantaged\\_Children\\_and\\_Families\\_in\\_ECEC\\_Services\\_in\\_Europe\\_compiled\\_for\\_the\\_study\\_%27Early\\_childhood\\_education\\_and\\_care\\_ECEC\\_in\\_promoting\\_educational\\_attainment%27](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236347330_Literature_Review_of_the_Participation_of_Disadvantaged_Children_and_Families_in_ECEC_Services_in_Europe_compiled_for_the_study_%27Early_childhood_education_and_care_ECEC_in_promoting_educational_attainment%27)

The graph below highlights research from the UK<sup>65</sup> on the links between children’s reading ability at age 7 (the end of Key Stage 1) and children’s ability to regulate themselves at the age of 11 (the end of Key Stage 2). This research shows how children’s abilities are affected by the quality of early childhood education and care and children’s abilities as well as the impact of social class.

### Sustainable benefits of participation of disadvantaged children in early childhood education and care



Source: UK, Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education Project 1997-2004

Among children of comparable background, those who attended preschool in their current OECD host country score better in reading<sup>66</sup>. A recent study confirmed that a longer time spent in preschool is associated with better German language skills for Turkish-origin children with low levels of German at home<sup>67</sup>. However, immigrant students and students with less educated parents attend early childhood education and care less frequently than native students or those with higher educated parents: the attendance rate of 3-6 year-old immigrant children in early childhood education and care programmes was 7 p.p. lower than among their native-born peers in 2012<sup>68</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> UK, Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education Project 1997-2004

<sup>66</sup> OECD/European Union (2015). Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In. <http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/Indicators-of-Immigrant-Integration-2015.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> Klein, O. Becker, B. (2017). Preschools as language learning environments for children of immigrants. Differential effects by familial language use across different preschool contexts, *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 48, pp. 20-31, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0276562417300203>

<sup>68</sup> OECD/European Union, Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In, <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/8115051e.pdf?expires=1520869047&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=C9B92951817DE51B559DC91B174A523A>

The Inclusive Early Childhood Education Literature Review<sup>69</sup> finds that promoting inclusive early childhood education and care programmes can enhance the development of children with disabilities and foster inclusive and non-discriminatory attitudes among children from the start. Early childhood education and care programmes which are ‘responsive to individual needs and respectful of diversity benefit all children and contribute to building the foundations of an inclusive society’. Research also suggests that the best performing education systems do not segregate young children according to ability but “embrace the diversity in students’ capacities, interests and social backgrounds with individualised approaches to learning”<sup>70</sup>.

#### 4.2. Special education needs and disabilities

The UN Sustainable Development Goals cover all children including those with special needs and disabilities. The SDG include the statement that:

*By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education* (UN, 2015, Goal 4.2).

The Inclusive Early Childhood Education Literature Review<sup>71</sup> also comments on the critical need to support early childhood education and care for children with special needs. Early childhood services are particularly important, as they can contribute to children’s health and social and cognitive development. Early childhood education and care services make an important contribution for at-risk children and their families, as they allow for early screening and identification of special needs. The literature review also notes that according to OECD data only one quarter of children with special educational needs are included in mainstream early education settings.

#### 4.3. Migrants, minorities and refugees

Immigrant students and students with less educated parents attend early childhood education and care less frequently than native students or those with higher educated parents: the attendance rate of 3-6 year-old immigrant children in early childhood education and care programmes was 7 percentage points lower than among their native-born peers in 2012<sup>72</sup>.

A recent OECD study<sup>73</sup> underlines that, on average across OECD countries with available data, immigrant students are 12 percentage points less likely than native students to have participated in pre-primary programmes (13 percentage points less likely across EU countries only). Attendance at pre-primary education can be a mediating factor between immigrant background and academic resilience. According to this report, the gap in participation in pre-

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<sup>69</sup> European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2017) Inclusive Early Childhood Education, Literature Review: <https://www.european-agency.org/publications/reviews/iece-literature-review>

<sup>70</sup> Eurochild, ECEC for children from disadvantaged backgrounds: findings from a European literature review and two case studies, (2012), see: [http://eurochild.org/policy/library-details/article/ecec-for-children-from-disadvantaged-backgrounds-findings-from-a-european-literature-review-and-two/?tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=b92846a9ed159ff72e2c7795527e23](http://eurochild.org/policy/library-details/article/ecec-for-children-from-disadvantaged-backgrounds-findings-from-a-european-literature-review-and-two/?tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=b92846a9ed159ff72e2c7795527e23)

<sup>71</sup> Inclusive Early Childhood Education, Literature Review

<sup>72</sup> OECD/European Union, Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In,

<sup>73</sup> OECD (2018), *The resilience of students with an immigrant background: Factors that shape well-being*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264292093-en>

primary education between native and immigrant students explains part of the gap in academic performance between the two groups. On average, the difference between native and immigrant students in the percentage of students who attained baseline academic proficiency decreases by one percentage point after accounting for participation in pre-primary education.

The research from Vandebroek and Lazzari<sup>74</sup> has also emphasised that immigrant families and families living in poverty often have smaller informal networks and less access to information about early childhood education and care and enrolment procedures. In addition, language and cultural barriers may prevent them from fulfilling the bureaucratic procedures necessary to enrol their children. A striking example in this regard are Roma communities, where lack of trust toward authorities and public services combined with discrimination and hostility encountered in educational environments tend to undermine children's participation in early childhood education and care (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe 2010).

The 2015 report<sup>75</sup> from the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive early years notes the extent to which societies in Europe have been changing from monocultural entities to multidiverse communities with many different languages, cultures and religions. The report also comments that early childhood education and care has yet to find 'clear cut answers' to this emerging complexity. Other work<sup>76</sup> from the Transatlantic Forum has highlighted that there are differential rates of access to high quality non-maternal care and preschools among children from ethnic minority and low-income families have been well-documented in several European countries.

In 2012 EU commissioned review of the literature<sup>77</sup> on child poverty and disadvantage identifies there is a consensus across the literature that the main barriers to participation in early childhood education and care services are:

- low socio-economic status including a low level of parental education, low family income or parental unemployment;
- living in poor neighbourhoods/rural areas/marginalised settlements;
- ethnic minority background, influenced by the length of time parents have been residing in the host country and their ability to master the host country language;
- on the supply side, other factors hinder participation in early childhood education and care services, in particular: desirability by excluded groups, based on whether they understand these services and their evaluation of the usefulness of these services for their children.

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<sup>74</sup> Michel Vandebroek & Arianna Lazzari (2014) Accessibility of early childhood education and care: a state of affairs

<sup>75</sup> Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years, Report number 6

<sup>76</sup> Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years, Report number 1

<sup>77</sup> Accessibility of early childhood education and care: a state of affairs, European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 22:3, 327-335

## 5. The results of the ET2020 working group

Between 2012 and 2014, a group of experts worked on ways of strengthening access to early childhood education and care and raising the quality of service provision. This ET 2020 Thematic Working Group comprised national experts from ministries in more than 20 countries as well as representatives from international and European Agencies (e.g. OECD and Eurydice). The group developed a proposal for a quality framework on early childhood education and care<sup>78</sup> that was discussed and agreed in an international conference on early childhood education and care organised under the auspices of the Greek Presidency in 2014. The current proposal for a Council Recommendation is to a large extent based on this preparatory work.

### 5.1. The three principles in the Quality Framework

The Quality Framework is based on three key principles which are regarded as fundamental to the development and maintenance of high quality early childhood education and care:

- *Early childhood education and care services need to be child-centred, acknowledge children's views and actively involve children in everyday decisions in the setting*

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<sup>79</sup>. Early childhood education and care services need to be child-centred, acknowledge children's views and actively involve children in everyday decisions in the 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. Early childhood education and care is designed to offer a holistic approach based on the fundamental assumption that education and care are inseparable.

A central aspect of many monitoring and evaluation systems is the need to collect information from the perspective of the child. These models<sup>80</sup> emphasise the well-being and involvement of children in the quality assurance process i.e. how children feel and how involved they are in the early childhood education and care activities. A range of approaches can be used including semi-structured interviews which record the children's perspectives on quality. This can include their views on the early childhood education and care environment; the professionals; the children's relationships with their peers; and the rules which are applied

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<sup>78</sup> Proposal for a European quality framework on early childhood education and care, [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf)

<sup>79</sup> Children in Europe Policy Paper (2008). Young children and their services: Developing a European Approach (p. 5-6). <http://www.grandirabruelles.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.

<sup>80</sup> Monitoring quality in ECEC – approaches and experiences from selected countries. N. Klinkhammer, B Schafer, Dana Harring and A Gwinner (Eds), 2017, The German Youth Institute. [https://www.dji.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/.../Monitoring\\_Sammelband\\_E\\_final.pdf](https://www.dji.de/fileadmin/user_upload/.../Monitoring_Sammelband_E_final.pdf)

in the setting. Children are given the status of independent participants and their views are taken seriously when the quality of provision is assessed.

Thus, a recent study examines the challenges and opportunities linked to involving young children's perspectives as part of quality monitoring in a decentralized context imposing a legal requirement in this respect on municipalities and settings<sup>81</sup>. The focus was on pedagogical work with children's perspectives, to examine how a broader understanding of the concept (covering not only children's opinions but also their daily experiences at the setting) could contribute to improve quality. Within the framework of a project drawing on the Mosaic approach<sup>82</sup>, children were invited to express themselves (through various methods) and were involved in various ways (whatever their age, maturity or language skills). In this particular instance, context sensitivity has emerged as an important aspect to succeed in taking account of children's views; but it has been shown that the systematic inclusion of children's perspectives offers great potential for increasing professional learning outcomes for staff and for inspiring crucial quality improvement in settings (and even potential for increased parental involvement in some cases).

- *parents' participation as partners of early childhood education and care services is essential*

The family is usually the first and most important place for children to grow and develop, and parents (or primary caregivers) 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<sup>83</sup>. 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, early childhood education and care 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. Early childhood education and care services can complement the family and offer support as well as additional opportunities to parents and children.

- *a shared understanding of high quality services is needed*

High quality early childhood education and care services are crucial in promoting children's development and learning and, in the long term, enhancing their educational chances<sup>84</sup>. The 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. The Network also emphasised 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*

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<sup>81</sup> Klinkhammer N. et al., Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care, (2017), chapter 7, [https://www.dji.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/bibs2017/Monitoring\\_Sammelband\\_E\\_final.pdf](https://www.dji.de/fileadmin/user_upload/bibs2017/Monitoring_Sammelband_E_final.pdf)

<sup>82</sup> Clark, A., Moss, P. (2011) Listening to Young Children, the Mosaic Approach

<sup>83</sup> Young children and their services: developing a European approach. A children in Europe policy paper. (2008), p. 6. [http://www.childrenineurope.org/docs/eng\\_discpaper.pdf](http://www.childrenineurope.org/docs/eng_discpaper.pdf)

<sup>84</sup> Young children and their services: developing a European approach. A children in Europe policy paper. (2008): p.5. [http://www.childrenineurope.org/docs/eng\\_discpaper.pdf](http://www.childrenineurope.org/docs/eng_discpaper.pdf)



certain common objectives, applying them to all services, and supporting diversity between individual services<sup>85</sup>.

## 5.2. The importance of play<sup>86</sup>

The Quality Framework is also based on a shared view of how should children learn and grow up in society. This acknowledges that children are willing, adventurous and active learners, who benefit from a combination of learning, care and play. Children are 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. Children have different emotional, physical, social and cognitive needs and these should be recognised in the design and implementation of early childhood education and care provision.

Children's education and care as well as their cognitive, social, emotional, physical and language development are important. 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. Also the significance of learning through play is understood and supported. Throughout the Quality Framework there is an underlying assumption that early childhood education and care programmes (sometimes based on a curriculum or set of educational guidelines) are delivered through play which is seen as spontaneous and unstructured. It is a 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 a pedagogic approach to learning.

This emphasis on play can be seen in the early childhood education and care curriculum (or set of guidelines) when children are encouraged to learn through play<sup>87</sup>. 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 early childhood education and care setting<sup>88</sup>. Most importantly, when children's learning initiatives are accompanied by adults who are able to design opportunities for progression, play becomes 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 early childhood education and care (such as verbal abilities and logical reasoning); and

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<sup>85</sup> European Commission 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, <http://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/Qualitypaperthree.pdf>

<sup>86</sup> The Quality Framework defined play as '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 a pedagogic approach to learning'

<sup>87</sup> 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.

<sup>88</sup> 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.

mature symbolic play has the potential to affect specific literacy and numeracy skills<sup>89</sup>. This is also confirmed by the findings of international literature reviews highlighting 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<sup>90</sup>.

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 setting. Each early childhood education and care curriculum (or set of education guidelines) 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 at the centre of any education and care programme aimed at enhancing children's learning<sup>91</sup>.

Young children's learning processes are highly dependent on their social environment, the presence of stable and trusting interaction with other children and adults, as well as free and unconditional space and time for play and free expression<sup>92</sup>. Play in an educational and caring context is a part of children's life where they are able to make autonomous choices.

### **5.3. Ten statements to define quality**

The proposed recommendation invites Member States to improve access to high quality early childhood education and care systems in line with the statements set out in the 'Quality framework for early childhood education and care' presented in the Annex to the Recommendation. This annex is largely based on the quality framework developed by experts in 2014. The following presents the content the Quality Framework's ten statements. These statements underline that high quality early childhood education and care is based on high expectations which require:

#### **Access to early childhood education and care**

##### **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. Early childhood education and care

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<sup>89</sup> 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, 357-369.

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

<sup>90</sup> 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

<sup>91</sup> Pramling, N. & Pramling Samuelsson, I. Eds. 2011. *Educational encounters: Nordic studies in early childhood didactics*, Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

<sup>92</sup> 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; <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2223&context=sspapers> Vygotsky, L. (2004). Imagination & creativity in childhood. *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology* 42, (1), p. 4-84. [http://lchc.ucsd.edu/MCA/Mail/xmcamail.2007\\_07.dir/att-0503/Vygotsky\\_Imag\\_Creat\\_in\\_Childhood.pdf](http://lchc.ucsd.edu/MCA/Mail/xmcamail.2007_07.dir/att-0503/Vygotsky_Imag_Creat_in_Childhood.pdf) Wood, E. (2013). *Play, Learning and the Early Childhood Curriculum*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Sage: London

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 early childhood education and care, 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 early childhood education and care is based on: a collaborative approach to promoting the benefits of early childhood education and care 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 the setting/centre; a pro-active approach to encouraging all parents to use early childhood education and care services a recognition that staff should be trained to help parents and families to value these services and to assure them that their beliefs and cultures will be respected - this training can be supported by parenting programmes which promote early childhood education and care; by close cooperation between the staff in early childhood education and care centres, health and social services, local authorities and the school sector.

### **The early childhood education and care workforce**

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

Recognising the early childhood education and care 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 early childhood education and care 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 early childhood education and care 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 early childhood education and care context an attractive option. Good working conditions can also reduce the constant and detrimental staff turnover in the sector.

### **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 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 early childhood education and care staff in order to encourage development and learning. At a system or national level a curriculum can guide the work of all early childhood education and care settings and contexts – and at a local or setting level, it can describe to day-to day activities of the 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 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 early childhood education and care 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 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 early childhood education and care 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 early childhood education and care 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, the focus on the interest of the child and staff engagement strengthens the need to look at the quality of the processes used in settings.

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

**9. Stakeholders in the early childhood education and care 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 early childhood education and care provision government, stakeholders and social partners need to work together to secure the success of 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.

**10. Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded early childhood education and care, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders<sup>93</sup>.**

Structural or legislative arrangements support access to early childhood education and care by giving families the right to access affordable service provision. Approaches which support progress towards the universal availability of early childhood education and care 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 early childhood education and care ensures that funding is used effectively. In order to make progress towards universal entitlement to provision measures to emphasise the attractiveness and value of these services need to be in place.

**5.4. Impact of the 2014 Proposal for a Quality Framework**

In 2017 the Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training (NESET II) published a report<sup>94</sup> on the state of national early childhood education and care quality frameworks (or equivalent strategic policy documents) governing quality in Member States. The report shows that the following policy measures, for example, have been used in recent years to improve quality:

- inclusiveness of services and pedagogical approaches (with specific reference to the criteria of availability, affordability, usefulness, comprehensibility and desirability)<sup>95</sup>;
- improvement of pedagogical practices in a way that is respectful of children’s holistic development and learning strategies, while simultaneously being responsive to the diversity of children’s needs and potentialities (with specific reference to pedagogical guidelines, curricula)<sup>96</sup>;

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<sup>93</sup> 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' early childhood education and care system. In the Netherlands the 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.

<sup>94</sup> NESET II ad hoc question No. 4/2017, The current state of national ECEC quality frameworks, or equivalent strategic policy documents, governing ECEC quality in EU Member States, <http://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/AHQ4.pdf>

<sup>95</sup> See in particular current policy developments in Belgium Flanders (from birth to age three, and from the age of three to six), Finland, France (from birth to the age of three), Ireland, Italy, Romania (from birth to age three), Slovakia (from birth to age six), Scotland, and Portugal (from birth to age three).

<sup>96</sup> See in particular current policy developments in Finland, France (from birth to age three), Scotland, Slovakia, Romania (from birth to age three), Ireland, and Italy.

- professionalisation of the early-years' workforce (with specific reference to professional preparation, continuing professional development and ongoing support, and working conditions)<sup>97</sup>;
- processes and tools for monitoring and evaluating curriculum implementation, and for sustaining ongoing improvements within a participatory perspective<sup>98</sup>;
- governance and funding strategies/schemes that allow for better coordination of initiatives across different ministries and departments (especially in split systems), that better align with local authorities, that increase cross-sectoral cooperation, and that raise stakeholders' involvement<sup>99</sup>.

In addition to the different initiatives, the report also shows how the Quality Framework was shared in many countries by local stakeholders engaged in policy advocacy, research and training initiatives. In these countries, the Framework contributed to policy consultation processes that sustained existing reform pathways. The report concludes that the Quality Framework has played an important role in several Member States<sup>100</sup> in triggering reforms or sustaining existing reforms, by guiding both policy consultation and advocacy processes. Nevertheless, in most cases the reforms in Member States were not based on, or implemented with, comprehensive national or regional early childhood education and care quality frameworks. Available evidence points to a broad array of initiatives and measures that have been put in place (or are currently under development). These have been part of a more or less formalised strategy to improve the accessibility and quality of early childhood education and care provision, but often have not been covering all the five dimensions of quality. This experience shows that the 2014 technical work provides a very good basis, but would benefit from being scaled up through a political initiative.

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<sup>97</sup> Belgium Flanders (from birth to age three), France (from birth to age three), Portugal (from birth to age three, and ages three to six), Lithuania (from birth to age six), and Italy.

<sup>98</sup> See in particular current policy developments in Belgium Flanders (from birth to age three), Finland, Ireland, Scotland, and Germany.

<sup>99</sup> See in particular current policy developments in Scotland, Romania (from birth to age three), Portugal, Italy, Ireland, and Germany.

<sup>100</sup> The full text of the EU Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care has been translated into French, German, Italian and Portuguese, and in parts (summary of key principles and action statements or extracts for the purpose of informing policy debates and consultation processes at national level) into Dutch, Danish, Slovenian and Romanian, *The current state...*, p. 7-8.

## 6. Results from the stakeholder consultation

Following the work of the Thematic Working Group, the Commission organised the Great Start in Life conference<sup>101</sup> which brought together experts in early childhood education and care and primary education in December 2016 to discuss challenges and further implementation. The Commission also organised meetings with a small group of early childhood education and care academic and policy experts from Member States and international organisations.

Their discussions led to the development of a draft set of options to assess the state of play in relation to the quality statements and offer options to develop quality<sup>102</sup>. The list is an ‘toolbox’ from which users are invited to focus, in accordance with their legislation and practice, on those indicators or quality factors they consider most relevant to their particular systems and context. It can be used at national, regional or local level and is intended to encourage self-assessment and reflection on the quality in early childhood education and care provision and to offer support in assessing the performance of their early childhood education and care systems (for more information see chapter 8).

The need to improve the provision of early childhood education and care was also highlighted in the stakeholder consultations on the Work-Life Balance initiative. In the public consultation held in preparation of the initiative, organisations responded that the highest priority in order to improve work-life balance and female labour market participation is the availability of childcare<sup>103</sup>. In their dedicated two-stage consultation, social partners also insisted on the importance of early childhood education and care. In their respective responses BusinessEurope stated that “childcare facilities are actually an essential precondition to progress on work-life balance”<sup>104</sup> and ETUC underlined that “family-related leave and flexible working arrangements should be combined with the availability, affordability, accessibility and quality of early childhood education”<sup>105</sup>.

On 31 January 2018, DG Education and Culture organised a consultation meeting for early childhood education and care stakeholders. The one-day meeting was attended by 50 participants and provided an opportunity to discuss the quality framework, the draft quality factors, and first ideas for a Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems. Participants represented a wide range of civil society organisations as well as representatives from Member States. They were covering organisations working in the field of education and lifelong learning; child protection and child rights, parent and family associations, social inequalities networks, special educational and disabilities agencies and teacher unions.

The discussion focused on whether:

- the Commission’s analysis of the current situation in early childhood education and care was correct;
- the Commission services' first ideas were appropriate and likely to be effective in supporting reflection on the quality of early childhood education and care systems.

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<sup>101</sup> A Great Start in Life conference [https://ec.europa.eu/education/great-start-in-life\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/great-start-in-life_en).

<sup>102</sup> See Section 8

<sup>103</sup> European Commission, Report on the public consultation: “Working Carers in the EU”, October 2016

<sup>104</sup> BusinessEurope, Addressing the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers – BusinessEurope’s response to second stage social partners’ consultation, 30.09.2016

<sup>105</sup> ETUC Position on the Second Stage Consultation of the social partners at European Level under Article 154 TFEU on possible action addressing the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregiver, 28.09.2016

Overall, the stakeholders welcomed the work which had led to the production of the Quality Framework and many stakeholders agreed with the intention to further develop the work through a proposed Council Recommendation. It was though remarked that the Quality Framework sets out a minimum standard and that Member States could be encouraged and supported to go further in developing high quality. Stakeholders asked for clear links to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals<sup>106</sup> and the European Semester<sup>107</sup> process.

The list of indicators or quality factors in relation to the proposed Recommendation was presented to participants, highlighting that the purpose was to support system-level reflection and policy development and that the proposed list was not intended to facilitate international comparisons. On this basis, there was consensus amongst stakeholders that such quality factors appeared to be useful as one way for those with responsibility for the early childhood education and care system(s) to evaluate the quality of provision.

There were a number of detailed comments and recommendation such as

- strengthen the voice and perspective of the child;
- be explicit about those groups which are included in a general term 'disadvantaged'. This could include children with disabilities, children with a migrant or ethnic background, children from economically vulnerable families etc.;
- make an explicit reference to inclusivity e.g. a clearer way of measuring the provision for children with special educational needs;
- highlight the value of learning through play;
- highlight the importance of parents;
- highlight the benefits of early childhood education and care – these are not only to be seen in relation to preparedness for compulsory schooling and lifelong learning;
- clarify that the list of quality factors refers to accredited provision.

On the main dimensions of the quality framework, stakeholders made the following comments:

### *Access*

Throughout the discussion in the stakeholder meeting there was a strong desire to ensure that any recommendation would made explicit references to priority groups e.g. those with linguistic diversity; children from migrant or asylum backgrounds; children with special needs; children living in rural areas or more deprived city neighbourhoods etc. Access is also enhanced when there is a strong role for parents, and parents are empowered to work with early childhood education and care and other staff.

To support improvements in access stakeholders highlighted the importance of organising services around the needs of each child. Integrating services (particularly those concerned with health and social services) can support the different needs of children.

There was agreement that the focus should be on all children. There was a strong view that it was important to be specific about which individual groups of children were covered by references to 'disadvantaged groups'. The stakeholders' experiences highlighted the need for

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<sup>106</sup> United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, 17 Goals to Transform our World, <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

<sup>107</sup> The European Semester 2018, [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/content/news/european\\_semester\\_2018.html](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/content/news/european_semester_2018.html)



specific groups of children (or families) to be named or referenced in order to ensure they are not forgotten.

Some stakeholders raised the importance of the urban/rural divide on the availability and quality of early childhood education and care – this is a particular issue in some Central European Member States. There are infrastructure issues in rural areas which lead to significant barriers to early childhood education and care access and the recruitment and training of staff. These differences can also be seen in different parts of some cities;

In addition, there is a need for childcare provision which supports a diverse range of provision and be flexible enough to reflect the real lives of the families who rely on these facilities locally and address their needs (including emergency childcare, drop-in, part-time babysitting services, out-of-hours childcare, employer supported childcare etc.)

### ***Workforce***

The stakeholders highlighted the importance of qualifications as a key determinant of quality and the group welcomed the strong emphasis on the workforce, their qualifications and professional development. There was one request to including a reference to these level of these qualifications e.g. EQF Level 6. In addition the value of including early childhood education and care assistants in the draft proposal was emphasised.

A number of issues were raised in relation to the workforce. These included comments on:

- the value of facilitating ongoing professional development which includes time for reflection, speaking to parents and access to research;
- the prevalence of high staff turnover rates and a tendency (in some systems) to rely on staff with relatively low qualifications;
- the low status of early childhood education and care compared to other roles with children and young people;
- the differences in pay between staff working in the early childhood education and care and the primary school sector.

### ***Curriculum***

There was discussion on whether to use the term ‘curriculum’ to describe the education and care provision in early childhood education and care. For some ‘curriculum’ was felt to suggest something which lacked flexibility, playfulness and overemphasised education rather than care. For other stakeholders a ‘curriculum’ could be flexible and had the advantage of being a well-known and widely used term.

There was a request to ensure that any Recommendation should acknowledge the connections and the balance between education and care. For a few stakeholders it was also important to include connections to other services and sectors which are potentially involved in a child’s life e.g. health care, social work etc.

Stakeholders raised the question of school readiness and the extent to which early childhood education and care should focus on preparing children for the next stage of their education. There was agreement that early childhood education and care needs to prepare children for school but it is equally important for early childhood education and care to be strengthened in its own right, focus on the needs of children, and include age-specific objectives and goals.

Various stakeholders commented that the Quality Framework should have a greater emphasis on play based learning as this is how young children develop best.

### ***Evaluation and Monitoring***

The stakeholders noted the importance of ensuring there are systems in place to monitor the outputs of the quality assurance process – this helps to judge the success of particular quality assurance methods. However, there was a range of opinions on the relative importance of focusing on outputs or outcomes; and some stakeholders wanted a greater focus on the quality assurance of the input to early childhood education and care. Despite different priorities, there was agreement on the need for independent and long term evaluations of the quality assurance processes;

### ***Governance and Funding***

The stakeholders underlined the importance of investing in the sector, particularly as there has been a period of low investment following the 2008 financial crisis. They pointed out to the need to reconcile the tension between the affordability of high quality early childhood education and care provision and the rights of all children.

## 7. Evidence supporting the five dimensions of the Quality Framework

### 7.1. Access

Generalised and equitable access to early childhood education and care is an essential feature of good quality provision which contributes to reducing the attainment gap<sup>108</sup>. Research shows that the beneficial effects of early childhood education and care attendance are stronger for children in poverty and from minority ethnic groups when there is a context of universal provision<sup>109</sup>. Despite the consensus among researchers and policy makers at an international level<sup>110</sup> it is well documented that children from minority ethnic groups and low-income families are less likely to be enrolled in early childhood education and care. It is important for access to take account of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union<sup>111</sup> to ensure all children are able to use early childhood education and care services. Eurydice<sup>112</sup> has reported that that most Member States have committed themselves to providing a place for all children either by establishing a legal entitlement to early childhood education and care or by making attendance compulsory for at least the pre-primary year.

Eurofound<sup>113</sup> identified that the main obstacles which hinder attendance are cost (59% of respondents) and availability of provision (58% of respondents), followed by organisational arrangements such as access, distance and the opening hours of facilities (41% of respondents). These obstacles have been confirmed in research in Member States e.g.

- the cost of provision is a barrier in most countries and is specifically salient to those countries in which early childhood education and care provision is largely marketised, such as Ireland, the UK and the Netherlands<sup>114</sup>. It is to be noted the cost 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

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<sup>108</sup> 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.  
[http://www.tarki.hu/en/research/childpoverty/report/child\\_poverty\\_final%20report\\_jan2010.pdf](http://www.tarki.hu/en/research/childpoverty/report/child_poverty_final%20report_jan2010.pdf)

<sup>109</sup> Eurydice (2009) Tackling social and cultural inequalities through early childhood education and care in Europe. Brussels: EACEA. <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about/eurydice/documents/098EN.pdf>

<sup>110</sup> European Commission (2011) Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow,

<sup>111</sup> Charter Of Fundamental Rights Of The European Union,  
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf) : Article 21 states that any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.

<sup>112</sup> European Commission; Eurydice (2014) Key data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe  
<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/5785249/EC-01-14-484-EN.PDF/cbdf1804-a139-43a9-b8f1-ca5223eea2a1>

<sup>113</sup> Eurofound (2012) Third European Quality of Life Survey - Quality of life in Europe: Impacts of the crisis. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

<sup>114</sup> 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.

countries where the childcare rate is lower. Conversely, in Denmark the childcare rate is very high among households in the bottom quintile<sup>115</sup>;

- the availability of early childhood education and care 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<sup>116</sup>;
- the inflexibility of early childhood education and care facilities in relation to opening hours<sup>117</sup> and bureaucratic enrolment procedures (e.g. waiting lists, monolingual information leaflets and forms to be filled out etc.) which are a major deterrent to participation especially for minority ethnic families or marginalised groups<sup>118</sup>;
- 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<sup>119</sup>.

The research also highlights that – along with structural conditions – less visible barriers might act as a deterrent to participation, especially for children and families with a disadvantaged background. These barriers are:

- the unintended benefits generated by social distribution mechanisms within family policies (this includes the criteria for distributing public subsidies to early childhood education and care 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<sup>120</sup>;
- the lack of trust in professional education and care that is generated when early childhood education and care provision does not match families’ goals and values in relation, for example, to cultural childrearing practices and bilingual development<sup>121</sup>.

Research from Member States<sup>122</sup> (as set out above) emphasises the need to address the barriers that prevent families and children from participating in early childhood education and care. These barriers include structural conditions (availability, affordability and delivery of

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<sup>115</sup> EU-SILC, 2010.

<sup>116</sup> Bennett, J. and Moss P. 2011. Working for inclusion: how early childhood education and care and its workforce can help Europe’s youngest citizens. <https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/FINALWFIA4Reportv1.3.pdf>

<sup>117</sup> Wall, K. and José S. J. (2004) Managing work and care: a difficult challenge for immigrant families. *Social Policy and Administration*, 38(6), 591-62.

<sup>118</sup> OSCE (2010) Mapping of participation of Roma and Sinti children in early education processes within the OSCE region. <https://www.osce.org/odihr/73874>

<sup>119</sup> 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.

<sup>120</sup> 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; 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.

<sup>121</sup> Leseman, P. (2002). Early childhood education and care for children from low income and minority backgrounds. Paper presented to OECD, Oslo, June 2002. [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/48/15/1960663.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/48/15/1960663.pdf)

<sup>122</sup> See for example Michel Vandenbroeck & Arianna Lazzari (2014) Accessibility of early childhood education and care: a state of affairs, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 22:3, 327-335, DOI: [10.1080/1350293X.2014.912895](https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2014.912895)

provision) and socio-cultural aspects that are directly linked to the pedagogical approaches and educational practices in the services.

The recent increase in refugees and asylum seekers across Europe has led many countries to struggle to address their basic reception needs and provide effective integration services. Young children comprise a substantial share of these arrivals, and many have experienced significant trauma and stress that pose serious risks to their cognitive, psychosocial, and physical development. Early childhood education and care can provide an important means by which receiving countries can mitigate many of the risks these young children face, thereby boosting their education and career trajectories and supporting longer-term integration success. In addition, the promotion of EU fundamental values such as gender equality is crucial to ensure solid and sustainable integration in Europe. Since parents engage with these services on behalf of their children, such programmes provide an important opportunity to reach out to and promote the successful integration of refugee parents and families more generally<sup>123</sup>.

## 7.2. Workforce

Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies agree that staff qualifications matter and that higher teacher qualifications are related to improvements in supporting children's development, including those related to supervision and the scheduling of activities, organization and arrangement of the room, providing varied social experiences for children, and creating a warm and friendly environment for interactions<sup>124</sup>. Higher levels of preparation correlate positively with better childcare quality as well as with better developmental outcomes for children<sup>125</sup>. The 2006 Starting Strong report from the OECD<sup>126</sup> also concludes that: 'Research from many countries supports the view that quality in the early-childhood field requires adequate training and fair working conditions. Research shows the link between strong training and support of staff and the quality of services. In particular, staff who have more formal education and more specialised early-childhood training provide more stimulating, warm and supportive interactions with children' (OECD, 2006, p. 158).

There is broad consensus in literature around the required level of qualification for the core professional. 'Teachers with at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood or child

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<sup>123</sup> Park, Maki, Caitlin Katsiaticas, and Margie McHugh. 2018. Responding to Early Childhood Education and Care Needs of Young Children of Refugees and Asylum Seekers: A Comparison of Policies and Practices in Nine Receiving Countries. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

<sup>124</sup> Manning, M., et al.(2017). *The relationship between teacher qualification and the quality of the early childhood care and learning environment*. Campbell Systematic Reviews, quoted in: Mitter, R. & Putcha, V. (2018). *Strengthening and Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce: Training and Professional Development*. Washington, D.C.: Results for Development,

<sup>125</sup> Clarke-Stewart, K.; et al;. (2002). Do regular features of child-care homes affect children's development? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 17(1), 52-86.; and Early, D., ; 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.; and Fukkink, R. G., & Lont, A. (2007). Does training matter? A meta-analysis and review of caregiver training studies. [Review]. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22(3), 294-311.

<sup>126</sup> OECD (2006). Starting Strong II, Early Childhood Education and Care. Paris. [https://www.unicef.org/lac/spbarbados/Implementation/ECD/StartingStrongII\\_OECD\\_2006.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/lac/spbarbados/Implementation/ECD/StartingStrongII_OECD_2006.pdf) Peeters, J. (2008a). The Construction of a new Profession. A European perspective on professionalism in ECEC.

development, or both, provided more appropriate care giving, were more sensitive and were less detached than teachers with vocational training or less<sup>127</sup>.

In academic literature, the correlations between staff qualifications and children's developmental outcomes – mostly cognitive – have also been measured. There is a consensus in these studies that the level of qualification positively correlates with the outcomes in children: better 'pre-academic skills', including language development<sup>128</sup>.

Despite the consensus on the importance of initial training, there is little research on the content and format of this initial training. Interesting studies in this domain have been carried out within several Italian Universities in the context of the introduction of a 4-year compulsory degree for the primary and pre-primary teaching<sup>129</sup>. These highlight the central role played by specific activities – such as practicum and workshops – for the development of the competences of future teachers and educators. The strength of the workshops, in particular, has been identified as bridging theory (university lectures) and practice (practicum experience in nursery schools) by promoting an alternative approach to the construction of knowledge through the active involvement of students in project work activities. More recent work by the International Step by Step Association (ISSA)<sup>130</sup> has suggested that it is the quality of the training programme (rather than the qualification) which may be a more critical factor in a teacher's ability to influence children's development and learning in a positive way.

The relationship between quality and staff qualification depends on the interaction of multiple factors<sup>131</sup>, such as:

- the content of training programmes (curriculum design);
- the delivery of training programmes (the strategies that are used to combine theory and practice);
- the contextual conditions provided by the settings where training interventions take place (e.g. availability of non-contact time, team work, or supervision).

Fundamental aspects of effective initial training are: investing in reflective competences, co-reflecting on practice in-group, with the support of pedagogical guidance, balancing theory and practice and appropriate planning of content<sup>132</sup>. Staff qualifications and training can only deliver positive effects if the content was well adjusted and when working conditions (e.g. adult: child ratio and group size) allow professionals to make use of their competences<sup>133</sup>. Recent work by NESET<sup>134</sup> has highlighted the professionalisation of staff as one of the key

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<sup>127</sup> Cassidy, D. J.; et al. (1995). The effect of education on child-care teachers beliefs and classroom quality - year one evaluation of the teach early-childhood associate degree scholarship program. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 10(2), 171-183.

<sup>128</sup> Clarke-Stewart, K.; et al;. (2002). Do regular features of child-care homes affect children's development? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 17(1), 52-86.;

<sup>129</sup> Torre, E.; Ricchiardi, P.; & Coggi, C.; (2007). *Le competenze dell'insegnante: strumenti e percorsi di autovalutazione*. Trento: Erickson.

<sup>130</sup> Training and Professional Development – executive summary, 2018. <https://issa.nl/node/388>

<sup>131</sup> Vandenbroeck, M ; Urban, M. Peeters, J.; (2016) *Pathways towards professionalism in ECEC*. London: Routledge.

<sup>132</sup> Lazzari, A.; Peeters, J.; Vandenbroeck, M.; (2013). *The early years workforce: A review of European research and good practices on working with children from poor and migrant families*

<sup>133</sup> Eurofound (2015) *Working conditions, training of early childhood care workers and quality of services – A systematic review*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef1469en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1469en.pdf)

<sup>134</sup> Sharmahd N., Peeters J., Van Laere K., Vonta T., De Kimpe C., Brajković S., Contini L., Giovannini D.,; *Transforming European ECEC services and primary schools into professional learning communities:*

issues requiring further work in early childhood education and care. It calls for strong support of practitioners/teachers and emphasises the need to enhance their training by ensuring that both initial education and continuous professional development are well established and combine subject matter, socio-pedagogy and practice. Investing in reflexivity is recognised as a fundamental part of this approach, especially when it means co-reflecting on practice in-group, with the support of pedagogical guidance. Co-reflection is also seen as a way to empower educational staff in dealing with the growing diversity of children and families and in highlighting the importance of taking into account diverse backgrounds and experiences when it comes to recruiting educational staff, since the different backgrounds among the staff would support negotiation.

Eurofound<sup>135</sup> has analysed 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 (including continuous professional development interventions lasting over a year, integrated into practice, such as pedagogical guidance and coaching in reflection groups)<sup>136</sup>, 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 early childhood education and care services are very diverse across Member States<sup>137</sup>.

It has been widely demonstrated in international research that staff working conditions and professional development are essential components of quality<sup>138</sup> 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<sup>139</sup>.

The professional competence of staff proved to be one of the most salient indicators of 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<sup>140</sup>. In turn, significant

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*drivers, barriers and ways forward*, NESET II report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017.

<sup>135</sup> Eurofound (2015), *Sixth European Survey on Working Conditions*, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-working-conditions-surveys/sixth-european-working-conditions-survey-2015>

<sup>136</sup> Mitter, R. & Putcha, V. (2018). *Strengthening and Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce*

<sup>137</sup> Urban, M., Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A. and Van Laere, K. (2011) CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care;. European Commission; Eurydice (2014) Key data on ECEC <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/5785249/EC-01-14-484-EN.PDF/cbdf1804-a139-43a9-b8f1-ca5223eea2a1>

<sup>138</sup> OECD (2012a) Research brief: working conditions matter. [www.oecd.org/edu/school/49322250.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/49322250.pdf)  
OECD (2012b) Research brief: Qualifications, education and professional development matters. [www.oecd.org/education/school/49322232.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/education/school/49322232.pdf); CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care,

<sup>139</sup> Litjens, I. and Taguma, M. (2010) Literature overview for the 7th meeting of the OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care. OECD: Paris.

<sup>140</sup> 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. <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8543/7/SSU-SF-2004-01.pdf> ;

positive relationships between early childhood education and care quality and children's educational achievement have been found in international research findings<sup>141</sup>.

Research also shows that the ongoing professionalisation of staff is a key element in guaranteeing children's positive outcomes although 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<sup>142</sup>. 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<sup>143</sup>. Evidence<sup>144</sup> has shown that long-term CPD interventions integrated into practice, such as pedagogical guidance and coaching in reflection groups, proved to be effective not only in countries with a well-established system of early childhood education and care provision and a high level of qualification requirements for the practitioners, but also in countries with poorly subsidised early childhood education and care systems and low qualification requirements. CPD initiatives based on the active engagement of practitioners and on peer exchanges within a shared scientific framework, proved to be the most effective.

Moreover, access to training and professional development is often limited for staff working with the youngest children. Those working with children in the 0 – 3 age group, and those working as care-givers or teacher-assistants, typically receive less training than core early childhood educators<sup>145</sup>.

In this respect, investing in the professionalization of childcare assistants is a key element for quality improvement in early childhood education and care. Assistants remain largely invisible workers in research, even though they sometimes form a high share of the workforce in childcare. With little or no initial qualifications, assistants should be offered real opportunities to qualify and develop professionally, including job mobility opportunities, and be given more (paid non-contact) time for reflecting together on pedagogical practice as a team as well as for continuous in-service training. Otherwise, the risk is a division between care (considered as a set of merely technical tasks) and education (restricted to cognitive development). Such an approach would fail to recognize both the educational value of caring

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Pramling, N. and Pramling Samuelsson, I. (2011). *Education Encounters: Nordic studies in early childhood didactics*. Dordrecht: Springer.

<sup>141</sup> 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. <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8543/7/SSU-SF-2004-01.pdf>

<sup>142</sup> 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.

<sup>143</sup> 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; 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.

<sup>144</sup> Peleman B.; et al.; (2017) *Continuous professional development and ECEC quality: Findings from a European systematic literature review*

<sup>145</sup> Mitter, R. & Putcha, V. (2018). *Strengthening and Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce*



and the caring role of education and reinforce the hierarchical division between education and care<sup>146</sup>.

Other research evidence points out that 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<sup>147</sup>. 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<sup>148</sup>.

Similarly, international research on the impact of staff working conditions shows a clear link between the staff to child ratio, group size, wages and early childhood education and care 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<sup>149</sup>. As reported in comparative studies and reviews<sup>150</sup>, no-single component of structural quality associated with working conditions has – on its own – a significant impact on quality. It is the combination of several components – related to staff working conditions – that produces quality. And a different balance is needed in different countries. It is therefore argued that, in planning for 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 has released policy guidelines on the 'Promotion of decent working conditions for early childhood education personnel' (2014)<sup>151</sup>. This recognises the crucial role of the early childhood workforce in achieving high quality early childhood education and care 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

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<sup>146</sup> Professionalisation of Childcare Assistants in ECEC Pathways towards Qualification (2016) Neset II, [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jan\\_Peeters/publication/308919431\\_Professionalisation\\_of\\_Childcare\\_Assistants\\_in\\_Early\\_Chilhood\\_Education\\_and\\_Care\\_Pathways\\_towards\\_Qualification\\_NESSET\\_II\\_Analytical\\_Report/links/57f79c4008ae886b89834722/Professionalisation-of-Childcare-Assistants-in-Early-Chilhood-Education-and-Care-Pathways-towards-Qualification-NESSET-II-Analytical-Report.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jan_Peeters/publication/308919431_Professionalisation_of_Childcare_Assistants_in_Early_Chilhood_Education_and_Care_Pathways_towards_Qualification_NESSET_II_Analytical_Report/links/57f79c4008ae886b89834722/Professionalisation-of-Childcare-Assistants-in-Early-Chilhood-Education-and-Care-Pathways-towards-Qualification-NESSET-II-Analytical-Report.pdf)

<sup>147</sup> CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care; 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.

<sup>148</sup> 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.

<sup>149</sup> OECD (2012a) Research brief: working conditions matter,

<sup>150</sup> 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.

<sup>151</sup> ILO (2014) Policy guidelines on the promotion of decent working conditions for early childhood education personnel. Geneva. [www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/codes-of-practice-and-guidelines/WCMS\\_236528/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/codes-of-practice-and-guidelines/WCMS_236528/lang--en/index.htm)

(2011)<sup>152</sup> within the Working for Inclusion project, the workforce is central to early childhood education and care 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 staff are recruited, trained and treated is critical for the quality of early childhood services and for the inclusion of all children.

### 7.3. Curriculum

There is a consensus among researchers and policy makers that the development of early childhood education and care 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<sup>153</sup>. 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<sup>154</sup> can significantly support the role of practitioners in creating effective learning environments that successfully nurture children's cognitive and socio-emotional development, therefore maximising their gains from early childhood education and care attendance.

Across Europe there are many similarities in relation to the design and implementation of each early childhood education and care curriculum<sup>155</sup>, although the cultural values and wider understanding of childhood differ in each country state, region and programme. Despite a large 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<sup>156</sup>.

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 to 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<sup>157</sup>. In fact, according to the findings of the EPPI study in relation to effective

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<sup>152</sup> Working for inclusion: how early childhood education and care and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens

<sup>153</sup> 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'.

<sup>154</sup> Bertrand, 2007 quoted in OECD (2012), *Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care*, OECD.

<sup>155</sup> Paul Leseman's presentation at the meeting of the thematic working group on ECEC (18-9-2013, Brussels) Utrecht University.

<sup>156</sup> 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.

<sup>157</sup> OECD (2004) *Starting Strong, Curricula and Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Five Curriculum Outlines. Paris: OECD Directorate for Education.  
<http://www.oecd.org/education/school/31672150.pdf>

pedagogy<sup>158</sup>, 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 open-ended questions which further stimulate the child's thinking and learning. This implies that the instructive elements of early childhood education and care 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<sup>159</sup>.

Findings from research conclude that early childhood education and care curricula can be powerful instruments to make the system more effective in its overall mission but, at the same time, 'it can also engender processes that move away from this main goal because they go against the principles of good practice'<sup>160</sup>. Therefore, in order to be effective, the elaboration of early childhood education and care 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 from research, it is possible to identify a convergence toward certain features of curricula that are commonly regarded as good practice across different contexts<sup>161</sup>. 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 on the Rights of the Child, 1989<sup>162</sup>) 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;

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<sup>158</sup> 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 <http://www.327matters.org/docs/rr356.pdf>

<sup>159</sup> Oberhumer, P. 2005. International Perspectives on Early Childhood Curricula. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(1), 27-38 <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.453.641&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

<sup>160</sup> 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.

<sup>161</sup> 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. The curriculum as means to raise the quality of early childhood education; Oberhumer, P. *International Perspectives on Early Childhood Curricula*,

<sup>162</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was ratified by the EU in 2010 and 27 of its Member States and is part of EU law. The CRPD outlines in Article 24 the right to inclusive education to all children with disabilities. See the General comment on Article 24 CRPD, issued by the UN CRPD Committee: [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD/C/GC/4&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD/C/GC/4&Lang=en)

- 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, 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<sup>163</sup>.

#### 7.4. Evaluation and Monitoring

Monitoring and evaluation processes are important components of enhancing quality in early childhood education and care systems – by pointing to the strengths and weaknesses of service 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 driving continuous improvement of service provision and support children’s development<sup>164</sup>. According to the OECD literature review on monitoring quality in early childhood education and care<sup>165</sup>, the procedures undertaken by countries for monitoring and evaluating quality can address four dimensions of service provision:

1. service quality: mainly for accountability purposes with the procedures focusing primarily on monitoring compliance with regulations and standards (e.g. through inspections or surveys);

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<sup>163</sup> Protz, R. & Preissing, C. (2006) Bridging Diversity: an early childhood curriculum [Beliner Bildungsprogramm]. Berlin: Verlag das Netz.

<sup>164</sup> Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care, OECD

<sup>165</sup> 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.

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 changes 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 early childhood education and care look at children's development and progress and give an account of their 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 services, the implementation of monitoring and evaluation practices does not have a positive impact per se<sup>166</sup>. Research shows that procedures and tools for monitoring and evaluation need to be designed coherently with the intended aim and purposes of specific monitoring and evaluation initiatives that might entail: e.g.

- accountability purposes for the audit of public funds;
- improvement purposes: to identify weaknesses and strengths of early childhood education and care 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 the 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. The involvement of relevant stakeholders in monitoring the service or staff quality, or even curriculum implementation, can contribute to greater parental engagement<sup>167</sup> and generate a sense of 'ownership'. This might contribute to improving the quality of early childhood education and care 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<sup>168</sup>, as different perspectives exist on what high quality provision might mean and on how

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<sup>166</sup> Literature Review on Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

<sup>167</sup> OECD (2012) Starting Strong III, A Quality toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care: executive summary. [www.oecd.org/edu/school/startingstrongiii-aqualitytoolboxforearlychildhoodeducationandcare.htm#1](http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/startingstrongiii-aqualitytoolboxforearlychildhoodeducationandcare.htm#1)

<sup>168</sup> 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.

improvement could be achieved<sup>169</sup>. In this regard Sheridan (2009)<sup>170</sup> argues that 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 early childhood education and care quality should be ‘dynamic, cultural, and contextual sensitive’ in order to enable the negotiation of multiple perspectives among all the participants.

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<sup>171</sup>. 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<sup>172</sup>. 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 early childhood services<sup>173</sup>.

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<sup>174</sup>. 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 the setting.

More recent work<sup>175</sup> on the value of monitoring and evaluation in early childhood education and care concludes by commenting that

- successful evaluation and monitoring is more than the implementation of formal structures and procedures, though it needs reliable framework conditions;
- sustainable evaluation and monitoring relies on the use of the knowledge gained and the will/resources to change;
- the core of evaluation and monitoring is transparency and discourse on what is high quality in early childhood education and care.

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

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

<sup>171</sup> Literature Review on Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

<sup>172</sup> Sheridan, S. (2001). Quality evaluation and quality enhancement in preschool: A model of competence development. *Early Child Development and Care*, 166(1), 7-27.

<sup>173</sup> 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.

<sup>174</sup> Literature Review on Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

<sup>175</sup> Presentation from Nicole Klinkhammer, International Centre for ECEC German Youth Institute, Munich Brussels, 6-3-18 (not published)

Quality factors can be used to support the work on monitoring and evaluation. This issue was considered by an expert group which sought to identify, among many potential measures of quality, indicators that complement the 2014 early childhood education and care quality framework, reduce the level of complexity and ambiguity, and are useful to Member States as one way to support improvements in the quality of service provision. This group selected indicators which could operate at the system level though some may be useful in individual settings. The selection took into account:

- the need to provide statements relevant to each of the ten statements in the Quality Framework;
- the need to suggest quality factors which were relevant for a majority of Member States;
- the value of encouraging self-reflection in order to improve the quality of early childhood education and care; the importance of promoting understanding of the key ideas and objectives in each of the ten statements; an agreement to focus on the quality of the processes which are used in early childhood education and care.

The quality factors support the evaluation, self-reflection and improvement of the quality of early childhood education and care systems in accordance with the context of each Member States' national legislation and conditions of early childhood education and care practice. They have the potential to serve as a 'toolbox' from which various users are invited to choose those they consider most relevant to their particular system(s) and context. The factors which have been selected are most appropriate for centre-based provision. However it is for policy officials in individual Member States to decide whether a quality factor could be useful in measuring and recording the quality of other forms of early childhood education and care. Each can be applied to provision which is organised in the private, public or voluntary sector, for children from birth to the start of compulsory schooling. In some systems, especially those where there is a split in responsibility for policy<sup>176</sup>, it may be easier to create two measures : one which covers provision for children aged from birth to three; and one for children aged from three to the start of compulsory schooling.

## **7.5. Governance and Funding**

The Quality Framework notes that 'governance and funding which values and recognises the importance of early childhood education and care can take the quality of the service much further. Increasingly across Member States, clearer rules and expectations on the quality of the structures, processes and outcomes from early childhood education and care provision are being embedded in regulations. These changes reflect the growing recognition of the importance of high quality early childhood education and care, and an acknowledgement that funding which is invested in this sector reduces subsequent expenditure, improves the life

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<sup>176</sup> The Quality Framework defines split and unitary systems as follows: 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. Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission (2014) Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care, p. 71, [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf)

chances and opportunities for children, and strengthens society's shared values.' In this context the OECD comments<sup>177</sup> that 'in the light of budgetary constraints, policy makers need to spend smarter and require the latest knowledge base of the quality dimensions that are the most important for ensuring children's healthy development and early learning.'

Research shows that when governance is not integrated (meaning that responsibility for early childhood education and care 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 early childhood education and care 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<sup>178</sup>.

Unitary systems – by providing a more coherent framework for governance and funding across the early childhood education and care sector - lead to better quality and more equitable service provision and result in greater financial efficiency<sup>179</sup>.

The EU's 2017 Education Monitor notes that as costs and accessibility are both barriers to early childhood education and care, in OECD countries where this is free, attendance rates are higher than 90% and the gaps between migrant and native-born children are negligible.

The proportion of children enrolled in private early childhood education programmes is considerably greater than the private enrolment shares at primary and secondary levels. On average, 55% of children in early childhood educational development programmes attend private institutions, compared to 33% for pre-primary programmes

High quality early childhood education and care is also part of a comprehensive system of coherent public policies that link early childhood education and care to other services concerned with the welfare of young children and their families<sup>180</sup>. These connections between early childhood education and care and other services are particularly important for children from low-income families or disadvantaged background as the potential benefits of early childhood education and care attendance have an even stronger impact than for their more advantaged peers<sup>181</sup>. In fact, while acknowledging that early childhood education and care can have an important role in 'levelling the playing field', the research also stresses that socio-economic and socio-cultural factors weigh heavily on children's outcomes<sup>182</sup>. In this sense, the impact of broader socio-economic factors associated with welfare policies should

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<sup>177</sup> OECD (2018) *Engaging Young People*, 2018, p.13 (not yet published)

<sup>178</sup> 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.

<sup>179</sup> 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.

<sup>180</sup> Eurydice (2009) *Tackling social and cultural inequalities through early childhood education and care in Europe*

<sup>181</sup> Lazzari A. and Vandebroek 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.

<sup>182</sup> Bennett, J. (2013) *Early childhood curriculum for children from low-income and immigrant backgrounds*



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 early childhood education and care 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<sup>183</sup>.

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<sup>183</sup> 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. [www.unicef-irc.org/publications/502](http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/502)

## 8. Optional factors for complementing the Quality Framework

### 8.1. Introduction to the optional set of quality factors

The European Commission worked with European early childhood education and care experts, under the quality strand of Working Groups Schools, to identify an optional set of indicators to complement the Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Framework<sup>184</sup>. The experts met in 2017 September and December and identified a list of 22 items which can be used as indicators or quality factors of the effectiveness of the early childhood education and care system in each Member State and its capacity to support and promote the quality of provision and practice.

In the process of defining this optional list, the experts gave due consideration to:

- The OECD's work to prepare Starting Strong VI, the Education at a Glance 2018 Annual Report and the TALIS Starting Strong Survey;
- Eurydice's work on the second edition of Key Data on early childhood education and care (2019), work on the Education and Training Monitor;
- The Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European early childhood education and care project (CARE) which produced a framework for defining, implementing, and assessing accessibility, quality and wellbeing in this field;
- The 2017 report from the Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training (NESET II) on the current state of national ECEC quality frameworks (or equivalent strategic policy documents) governing ECEC quality in Member States.

This optional set is meant to encourage self-reflection and self-evaluation as critical processes in the development of high quality early childhood education and care system(s); guide those who are responsible for selecting and using it for evaluating progress in the establishment and delivery of high quality early childhood education and care.

Furthermore this set aims at supporting assessment in order to improve the performance of the early childhood education and care systems. The experts sought to identify, among many potential measures of quality, tools that are useful to Member States to support improvements in the quality of early childhood education and care provision. The items have been selected to operate at the system level though some may be useful in individual settings. The selection took into account:

- The need to provide statements relevant to each of the ten statements in the Quality Framework;
- The need to bring forward suggestions that were relevant for a majority of EU Member States;
- The value of encouraging self-reflection which goes beyond in order to improve the quality of early childhood education and care; the importance of promoting understanding of the key ideas and objectives in each of the ten statements;
- An agreement to focus on the quality of the processes used in the sector.

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<sup>184</sup> European Commission (2018) Monitoring the Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care – Complementing the 2014 ECEC Quality Framework proposal with indicators, Recommendations from experts

The quality factors support the evaluation, self-reflection and improvement of the quality of early childhood education and care systems in accordance with the context of each Member States' national legislation and conditions of practice in the sector. They have the potential to serve as a 'toolbox' from which various users are invited to choose those they consider most relevant to their particular system(s) and context. The items selected are most appropriate for centre-based provision. However it is for policy officials in individual Member States to decide whether any could be useful in measuring and recording the quality of other forms of early childhood settings.

Each quality factor can be applied to provision for children from birth to the start of compulsory schooling. In some systems, especially those where there is a split in responsibility for policy, it may be easier to create two measures for each: one which covers provision for children aged from birth to three; and one for children aged from three to the start of compulsory schooling. Each can be applied to provision which is organised in the private, public or voluntary sectors.

One purpose was to provide an opportunity to collect and disseminate data at the national, regional or municipal level. To support the use of each item, the experts identified guiding questions. These are designed to encourage self-reflection and assist users in assessing the performance of their systems. These questions will be particularly helpful when it is difficult or impossible to collect valid and reliable data.

The following quality factors cover the five dimensions and the ten statements in the Quality Framework.

## **8.2. The optional set of quality factors and guiding questions**

The following list of quality factors is optional and to be used at national, regional or local level: it is intended to encourage self-assessment and reflection on the quality in early childhood education and care provision and to offer support in monitoring and measuring the performance of early childhood education and care systems. This list can be used as a 'toolbox' from which various users can choose, in accordance with their legislation and practice, those items they consider most relevant to their particular systems and context.

### Quality statement 1 - provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children

- Factor 1 - The percentage of children who have publicly funded subsidised access to ECEC.

To support this it is worth considering whether:

- ✓ the legislation pays special attention to disadvantaged children;
- ✓ the legislation addresses all known barriers to children's participation in ECEC;
- ✓ there are reductions or free provision for children from disadvantaged and/or marginalised families;
- ✓ every family which is entitled to publicly funded subsidised ECEC can find a place for their child/children;
- ✓ the size of the public subsidy is significant.

- Factor 2 - For parents who earn the average national income, the percentage of their disposable income which is required to pay for ECEC services for one child who attends an ECEC setting for at least 30 hours per week.

To support this it is worth considering the extent to which the arrangements differ between:

- ✓ children under three years of age and children aged over three;
- ✓ single parent families and other families;
- ✓ families living in an urban and rural environment.

Quality Statement 2 - provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity

- Factor 3 - A system-level policy to encourage disadvantaged families to use ECEC services.

As it is likely to lead to the answer ‘yes’, users of this report may wish to consider the following guiding questions:

- ✓ is there an agreed definition of disadvantaged families?
- ✓ does the policy apply to all groups of children from disadvantaged families?
- ✓ is the policy to encourage the use of ECEC services well-known?
- ✓ has the policy led to an increase in the number of disadvantaged families using ECEC services?
- ✓ does the policy include outreach services or other activities to encourage participation?
- ✓ is there training for staff in ECEC providers to enable them to promote their services to disadvantaged families?

- Factor 4 - The percentage of children who attend ECEC regularly.

To support this it is worth considering the extent to which attendance differs between:

- ✓ children who are under and over three years of age;
- ✓ children from single parent and other families;
- ✓ children from families living in an urban and rural environment;
- ✓ boys and girls;
- ✓ children from disadvantaged and/or marginalised families, and other families.

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

- Factor 5 - The percentage of staff working directly with children who have completed professional education relevant to their role in an ECEC setting.

To support this, it is worth considering:

- ✓ staff who work with children under and over the age of three;
- ✓ ECEC assistants and staff with more pedagogic responsibilities;
- ✓ the breadth of the definition of staff working directly with children;
- ✓ the balance between initial and continuing education/training;
- ✓ whether professional development is as important as qualifications.

- Factor 6 - The percentage of staff who receive formal support for at least their first six months at work.

As this is difficult to measure, the following guiding questions may help:

- ✓ is there support for all new staff?
- ✓ are there different arrangements for different groups of staff?
- ✓ is support linked to a probationary period of employment?

- Factor 7 - The percentage of ECEC leaders working in an ECEC setting who have completed leadership training or have a recognised, relevant leadership qualification.

To support this , where there is a system based on qualifications, it is worth considering:

- ✓ what is the European Qualification Framework level of the ECEC leadership qualification(s)?
- ✓ how long would it normally take to complete a ECEC leadership qualification?
- ✓ is there one, or many, qualifications which could be taken by ECEC leaders?
- ✓ how are ECEC leaders supported (both professionally and financially) to complete a qualification?

To support this , where there is a system based on training, it is worth considering:

- ✓ how is an ECEC leader supported during the training?
- ✓ what is the normal amount of time/week which is allocated to leadership training?
- ✓ is training mainly ‘on-the-job’ or ‘off-the-job’?
- ✓ does the training include assessment of the leaders’ skills and competences?

- Factor 8 - The percentage of qualified ECEC staff working directly with children who have received at least three months’ relevant work experience as part of their initial training programme.

To support this it is worth considering if:

- ✓ the work experience is relevant to the individual’s future ECEC role;
- ✓ the trainee receives support during their work experience;
- ✓ the work experience is assessed;

- ✓ staff in the ECEC setting receive guidance and training on how to support trainees during their work experience.

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

- Factor 9 - The average salary of ECEC staff employed in the public sector (with similar qualifications to primary school teachers) as a percentage of the average salary of a primary school teacher.

To support this it is worth considering whether:

- ✓ primary school teachers and ECEC staff have similar terms and conditions of employment, security of employment and progression opportunities;
- ✓ the initial qualifications of ECEC staff (covered by this pointer) and primary school teachers are similar; the entry requirements for their initial training programmes are similar; and whether they have similar responsibilities when they are employed.

- Factor 10a - The average ratio of children to all staff working directly with children
- Factor 10b - The average ratio of children to professionally trained staff working directly with children.

To support this it is worth considering:

- ✓ the definition of ‘working directly with children’;
- ✓ the arrangements for children under and over three years of age;
- ✓ whether there are rules on the size of each group of children;
- ✓ whether different ratios are used to support children from disadvantaged or marginalised families, or children with special needs.

- Factor 11 - The percentage of time assigned to staff for preparation and reflection i.e. when they are not working directly with children.

To support this it is worth considering:

- ✓ whether this data is best collected through a sampling approach;
- ✓ how staff use non-contact time to support their work with children;
- ✓ which members of staff are included;
- ✓ whether there are different arrangements for staff who work with children under and over the age of three.

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

- Factor 12 – There is an official, approved or mandatory curriculum framework for ECEC.

To support this it is worth considering if there are different arrangements for:

- ✓ children under and over the age of three;
- ✓ settings in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

- Factor 13 - The percentage of settings whose work with children is based on an ECEC curriculum framework.

To support this it is worth considering if the data shows different arrangements are in place for:

- ✓ children under and over the age of three;
- ✓ settings in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

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

- Factor 14 – The curriculum or other guiding documents requires staff to use feedback from children, parents and colleagues to systematically improve their practice.

To support this it is worth considering if there are different arrangements for the curriculum which is offered:

- ✓ to children under and over the age of three;
- ✓ in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

- Factor 15 - The percentage of primary schools which are required to use a curriculum which builds on children's experiences of learning in ECEC.

To support this it is worth considering if there are different expectations for:

- ✓ schools in the private and public sectors;
- ✓ pre-primary and primary schools;
- ✓ children who have not used ECEC services.

Quality 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.

- Factor 16 - Information on the quality of the ECEC system is used as the basis for improvement.

To support this it is worth considering if there are different arrangements for ECEC provision which is offered to children under and over the age of three. It is also worth considering:

- ✓ to what extent is the collection of data based on self-evaluation (or self-assessment);
  - ✓ whether the data collected at the provider/setting level can easily be collated at the system level to support improvements;
  - ✓ whether there is system-level guidance to ECEC provider/settings on what data should be collected to support improvements in quality at the system level;
  - ✓ whether the quality assurance system is based on using data to improve the quality of provision?
  - ✓ how quickly data is used to strengthen the quality of ECEC provision.
- Factor 17 – Information on the quality of the ECEC system is publicly available.

To support this it is worth considering the type of information that is publicly available. Is information available:

- ✓ on the quality of ECEC provision at the system level?
- ✓ on the outcomes achieved by the ECEC system?
- ✓ on an annual basis?
- ✓ in a form that can be easily understood by members of the public?
- ✓ in an easily-accessible on-line format?
- ✓ with no charges to access the information?

#### Quality Statement 8 - monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child

- Factor 18 - The percentage of ECEC settings with monitoring systems which include a focus on the best interests of the child.

To support this it is worth considering:

- ✓ the frequency of the monitoring which is required;
- ✓ whether monitoring is based on an internal or external process;
- ✓ who is required to be involved in the monitoring;
- ✓ how the views of children are taken into account in the monitoring process.

- Factor 19 - The percentage of ECEC settings which use administrative and pedagogic data to improve the quality of their provision.

To support this it is worth considering:

- ✓ whether improvements in quality are undertaken on an annual basis;
- ✓ whether the outcomes of the improvements are monitored and evaluated;
- ✓ who is required to ensure that the improvements are effective;



- ✓ how the improvements benefit children.

Quality 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.

- Factor 20 - A formal set of arrangements enables parents and partner organisations to work with ECEC settings.

To support this it is worth considering:

- ✓ whether the formal set of arrangements are published and easily accessible for parents, staff, partner organisations and other stakeholders;
- ✓ how often the arrangements are updated;
- ✓ whether the arrangements cover ECEC providers who work with children aged from birth to three, and from three to pre-primary or primary school age;
- ✓ whether a narrow or broad definition of stakeholders is used
- ✓ the frequency of the collaboration;
- ✓ whether collaboration covers the design, delivery and monitoring of ECEC;
- ✓ whether data on collaboration is collected from each ECEC setting;
- ✓ how data on collaboration is collated to provide a system-level response.

Quality Statement 10 - 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.

- Factor 21 – The age at which there is publicly funded subsidised ECEC provision for all children (at least 15 hours per week).

To support this it is worth considering if:

- ✓ there is access in each part of the country e.g. in rural and urban areas;
- ✓ parents have a choice about which ECEC service to use.

- Factor 22 – The percentage of gross domestic product spent on ECEC.

To support this it is worth considering whether the:

- ✓ percentage of total public funds increases each year or over a longer period;
- ✓ availability of public funds is affected by changes in:
  - the number of children in the ECEC age range;
  - the staff/children ratios (Pointer 10)
  - the training/qualifications expected from ECEC staff (Pointers 5,6 and 7)