

Cross-cutting Theme 3

Impact, Monitoring and governance.

Making the links across CARE

Impact – effects of ECEC on outcomes (4.1)

ECEC has a positive impact on children's developmental outcomes. However, the effects of ECEC are mediated by the quality of the provision.

Impact – effects of ECEC on outcomes (T4.1)

Research has evidenced that childcare is not unitary and that the quality or characteristics of experience matters. *High quality* childcare has been associated with benefits for children's development, and especially so for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is also evidence that indicates that low quality childcare can result in negative effects on children's developmental outcomes.

Impact – effects of ECEC on outcomes (T4.1)

- Summary of evidence for disadvantaged children

High quality ECEC can produce cognitive, language and social development benefits, which affect later educational, social and economic success. Studies into adulthood indicate that this educational success is followed by increased success in employment, social integration and sometime reduced criminality. However, low quality ECEC produces either no benefit or negative effects.

- Summary of evidence for general population

High quality ECEC benefits children's cognitive, language and social development in both the short-/long-term. Low quality childcare can produce a dual risk for children from low income families, leading to possible deficits in language or cognitive development.

Structural and process quality findings (T2.2)

Comparative analyses showed that several structural characteristics

(e.g. group size, child:staff ratio, staff qualification level, professional development opportunities)

are related to process (e.g. social, emotional and instructional aspects) and curriculum quality of ECEC in different countries across Europe.

Structural and process quality findings (T2.2)

- Staff qualifications and professional development opportunities were linked to higher process and curriculum quality (UK, Finland, Netherlands, Portugal).
- Unfavourable combinations of structural aspects (e.g. child:staff ratio, group size) led to the lowest process and curriculum quality (20%-50% of the classrooms in the five studies).
- Ultimately, the potential benefits of ECEC for children depend critically on the quality of the provision.

Effects of ECEC on academic outcomes (T4.2)

- Meta-analysis confirmed that the experiences of children attending ECEC are important and have an impact on development and academic outcomes.
- Global process quality was more strongly associated with literacy outcomes. Whereas, pre-academic promotion was more strongly related to mathematics outcomes.
- Structural quality – only variation in staff qualification, not in environmental arrangements, related to children’s outcomes. Therefore, staff qualification levels and professional development are fundamental to structural quality, improving process quality, and ultimately child outcomes.

Effects of ECEC on academic outcomes (T4.2)

- By extending and improving the quality of ECEC provision in Europe, academic benefits can be expected by all children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. These gains have been found to be persistent across different ages and points in the academic career.
- Early enrolment (+duration) in ECEC is linked to better outcomes. – important for accessibility
- The effect of hours per week varies with outcome,
- important for amount of ECEC provision

Monitoring – promoting quality in ECEC services (T4.3)

- Not all ECEC systems include compulsory evaluation or monitoring.
- A lack of a consistent quality framework for ECEC services across Europe.
- No common understanding across 11 CARE countries on monitoring. Some systems are regulated by external bodies, and some evaluated on internal and external basis.
- Self-evaluations are implemented in all CARE countries. Some systems do so by means of standardised self-assessment tools or widely used instruments.

Monitoring processes (T4.3)

- Countries with participatory ECEC systems considered quality assessment as *'dynamic and negotiable...determined by parents, childcare workers, children, and...management'*.
- Frequency of monitoring determined by the 'quality indicator' under evaluation. Largely, external evaluations conducted annually/biannually. Internal evaluations tended to be continuous and regular.
- CARE countries focused on: *'accountability, quality assurance, improvement of ECEC services and ensuring compliance with regulations...'*

Ensuring quality through monitoring (T4.3)

- Monitoring not always aligned with ECEC objectives. Particularly a problem for split ECEC systems.
- Sanctions in place for some countries including: *'...more frequent inspections, withdrawal of subsidies or even closure'*. However, no such consequence for other countries.

Professional development approaches (T3.2)

- Professional development (PD) is increasingly utilised for improving the quality of ECEC.
- Existing evidence on PD in Europe supports US studies, which also report the positive effect of professional development in pre-schools on a wide range of child outcomes.

Professional development approaches (T3.1)

Cross-country analysis on trends in European ECEC systems led to three recommendations:

1. Evidence-based longitudinal studies more adequately address the strengthening of ECEC staff competence with the aim of improving child outcomes;
2. Need for more focused studies on who the 'vulnerable' are across Europe and working with ECEC educators to globally enhance process quality;
3. Policy to better support the innovative practices by fostering greater interaction between policymakers, academics and ECEC staff and leaders.

Inclusiveness (T5.2)

For ECEC to affect outcomes accessibility is important for all sections of society.

Cost and availability of places

were the most important barriers to equal access to ECEC s, especially for 0-3.

People were under-informed on their rights, procedures and financial support available for low-income families in accessing ECEC.

Access is less problematic for 3-6-year-olds due to well established legal entitlements for free pre-schooling services in many countries, but some countries do not have a legal entitlement from 3 years.

- Parental leave linked to demand for ECEC in infancy. Where parental extended use of ECEC in infancy reduced. (T4.3)

Inclusiveness (T5.2)

Cultural barriers

Immigrant groups were affected by cultural barriers in terms of access and treatment in ECEC, due to cultural, linguistic and religious differences between families and ECEC providers.

Recommendations

Increase cultural sensitivity and multi-culturalism amongst ECEC staff, especially in Belgium, Italy, Finland, Germany and Portugal.

Cost-benefit (T5.4)

- LOGSE reform in Spain.

The results indicated that children are the main beneficiaries; depending on the tax rate, their share in total benefits ranges from approximately 50%-75%.

Parents have approximately 10% share, whereas the gains of the taxpayer can be estimated as between 10%-50% of the total benefits.

The expansion of high-quality pre-school for 3-year-olds may generate substantial returns in the long term.

However ECEC quality needs to be sufficient to generate improvements in cognitive and non-cognitive skills.

Socio-economic dimension of ECEC in Europe (T5.1)

- Demands for ECEC care has led to different institutional arrangements across European countries.
- Fundamental question from a policy perspective is how to set-up ECEC systems that will achieve policy objectives.
- Public and private systems may be different in terms of quality, accessibility and inclusiveness, which will affect employment and child development.
- Issue of targeted versus universal provision relevant here.

Stakeholders study (T6.2)

- In general, all developmental goals increase in importance with age.
- Increase in the importance of children's emotional regulation and personal learning attitudes were similar across countries.
- For all countries, the strongest increase was in the importance of children's pre-academic skills, followed by stimulating children's learning-related skills.
- The largest differences between countries were found for children's pre-academic 'hard' skills.

Stakeholders study (T6.2)

- Development goals are similar across countries, especially the ‘soft’ skills, which are deemed highly important in all countries for both 0-3-years and 3-6-years age groups.
- The differences that were most apparent between staff and parents related to pre-academic skills: with parents placing more importance than staff on ‘hard’ pre-academic skills as areas that should be fostered in ECEC. (see theme 1.1)

Stakeholders study (T6.2)

Intra-country variation

- There is a tendency that non-western minority parents give higher importance to pre-academic skills than majority parents. However non-western minority parents give less importance to soft skills .
- Parents (DE, NL, NO & FI) with lower education consider it to be more important to stimulate pre-academic skills in ECEC (both for <3 year and 3-6)-

We have differences – but what can we agree?

- Targeted versus universal provision
 - Different models of targeting
 - Enhanced targeted offer within universal offer
 - Nature of enhanced offer
 - Targeting of quality provision? Higher quality for disadvantaged?
 - Multi-agency working – going beyond ECEC

- Improving quality
 - Monitoring systems – do we need them? –if so, what form?
 - Focus on structural vs. process quality
 - Curriculum – e.g., cross-cutting theme 1
 - Professional development - pre-service training – in-service professional development
 - Balance of staff – training levels, diversity
 - Cost – ratios – group size – etc.
 - Quality in relation to age – 0-3 and 3-6 age groups
 - Balance of individual vs. group activities and experiences