

## **Main outcomes of CARE: a brief summary<sup>1</sup>**

A comparative overview of early childhood curricula across Europe and an evaluation of their effectiveness, showing a high degree of agreement across countries, an emphasis on academic skills and still limited articulation of new (21st century) skills like self-regulation, creativity and collaboration (D2.1, D6.2).

A review and several meta-analyses of research on the impact of ECEC on children's wellbeing and development and on effective strategies of professional development, showing stronger effects of particular configurations of quality indicators than of single indicators. Insight into the determinants of quality and child outcomes based on secondary analyses of major longitudinal ECEC evaluation studies in Europe, revealing among other things that targeted policy results in higher quality provision for disadvantaged children (D2.2, D3.3, D4.1, D4.2, D5.1).

An overview of the common and culturally varying aspects of curricula and their quality based on in-depth observations of ECEC practices across Europe, showing first of all high inter-observer agreement among observers of different cultural backgrounds regarding process quality in centers in different cultural contexts and, showing, secondly, how different configurations of structural quality (e.g., group size, children-to-staff ratio, pre-service education level of staff, implementation of in-service professional development) can produce equal process quality (D2.2, D2.3).

A critical cultural analysis of standard quality assessment instruments (based on focus group discussions of professionals of different countries viewing video clips made in different countries through the lens of standard instruments and their own frame of reference) and a proposal for extension and modification of such instruments, fitting European traditions and currently highly esteemed developmental goals better, with explicit attention to educators' facilitation of group processes, peer collaboration, inter-personal skills and group-belongingness (D2.3, D6.2, D6.3).

In-depth and comprehensive insight in models of continuous professional development and quality improvement based on in-depth case studies in Denmark, Italy and Poland, revealing the effects of dynamic factors (e.g., frequent feedback and regular team-based reflection sessions), the importance of time for reflection in the job contract, the critical role of pedagogical leaders, the importance of inter-organizational networking within the locality, and the facilitating role of collaboration with research institutes (D3.1, D3.2, D3.3).

Insight into what parents, professionals and policymakers across Europe consider important developmental and educational goals in early childhood: showing a strong common ground with some interesting cultural differences. Common is the relatively strong value parents and educators attach to new 21st century skills. Differences between countries occur in the value parents attach to pre-academic skills and the role of ECEC in preparing for school readiness. Differences also occur in the importance parents and teachers attach to fostering positive multicultural attitudes and to a ECEC center's policy of diversity and inclusion (D6.2).

A review of the governance and funding strategies that can increase access and inclusiveness of ECEC, and improve the costs-benefits ratio of ECEC, discussing critically the return on investments in universal vs. targeted systems with a tentative conclusion that targeted programs seem most cost-effective (D5.2, D5.3).

A review of quality monitoring and quality assurance systems in Europe and relations to ECEC effectiveness, revealing fragmented and inconsistent monitoring and quality assurance regimes, the

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<sup>1</sup> The numbered D's refer to reports that can be downloaded from <http://ecec-care.org>.

more so in split systems, with a predominant emphasis on characteristics that may not be strongest related to outcomes (D4.3).

A costs-benefits analysis of universal and targeted investments in ECEC in relation to employment of mothers and educational outcomes for children, revealing (1) weak relations between investments in ECEC and female employment and (2) (rather unexpectedly) benefits of investments in ECEC in terms of PISA reading scores for high SES children due to the fact that high SES groups tend to participate more in improved universal day care. A new costs-benefits analysis of ECEC in Spain, showing high returns on investment in universal expansion of the Spanish ECEC system (D5.2, D5.4).

Objective and subjective barriers to access and use of ECEC among disadvantaged groups, using both large quantitative data sets and small in-depth focus group interviews, revealing higher perceived accessibility in unitary systems compared to split systems and the existence of cultural barriers to access and use of ECEC that relate to neglect of cultural/religious food preferences in ECEC, lack of knowledge of and respect for other cultures and religions among ECEC staff, and the devaluation of the first language (use of which is often forbidden in ECEC) (D5.3).

A draft proposal (to be developed further) for new, culture-sensitive European indicators of quality and wellbeing in ECEC, based on the evidence collected in the CARE project, including initial ideas about comprehensive 'configurational' indicators of structural quality conditions, indicators of curriculum quality fitting the views of stakeholders on important developmental goals, and indicators addressing the importance of in-service professionalization (D6.1, D6.3).

An annotated video library (in the making) of good practices in European ECEC, based on the multiple case study, focusing on integrating pay and education and inclusive practice based in group-management (D2.3).