



Curriculum and Quality Analysis and Impact Review  
of European Early Childhood Education and Care



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**CARE**

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Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)**

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CARE Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European Early Childhood Education and Care:  
Overview of European ECEC curricula and curriculum template

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## Executive Summary

This report considers the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) curriculum throughout Europe. It explores the *official curriculum*, specified by national or regional governments, along with the *implemented curriculum* that is provided ‘on the ground’ by staff to enhance children’s development. The official curriculum documents at national or regional level are often called ‘steering documents’. Moreover, the implemented curriculum is sometimes called the ‘experienced’ or the ‘realised’ curriculum, i.e., what the staff realise in their daily practice and what the children experience day by day.

The CARE project has studied European curriculum in three ways:

- (1) by developing a template according to which the 11 partners in the CARE Consortium described the curriculum in their own countries;
- (2) by analysing the responses of our partners across 11 countries to the CARE curriculum template, with the aim of identifying commonalities and differences in the broadly representative sample that comprises the CARE consortium;
- (3) by considering information from the templates in light of selected research literature on effectiveness - NOT through a formal literature review which is the task of another Work Package in the CARE project (Melhuish et al., forthcoming) - but by comparing the template findings with widely cited, key studies.

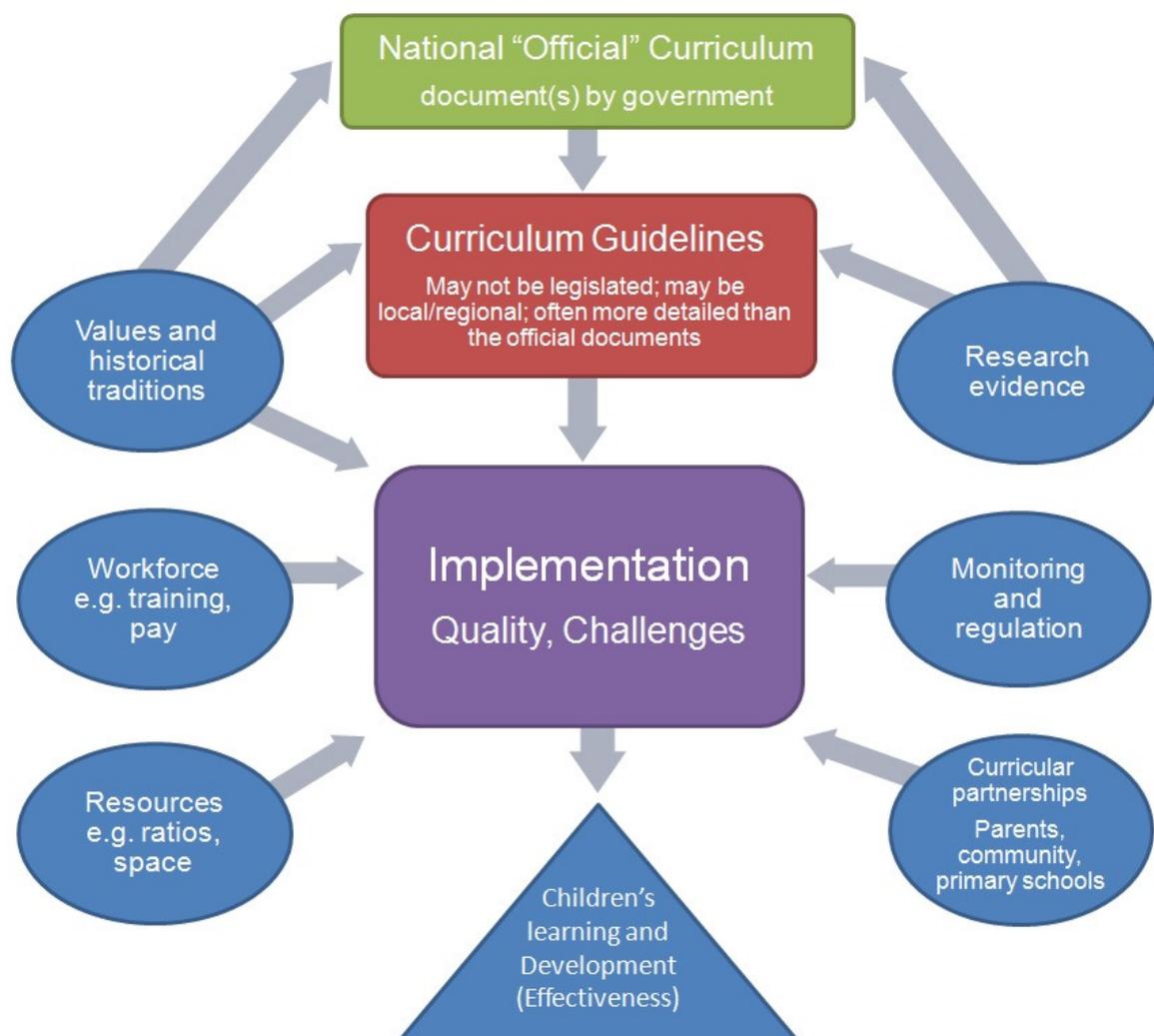
The analytic template originated as a series of questions at a curriculum conference held in Oxford (March 2014). This template was further refined as members of the CARE consortium provided information about ECEC in their home countries. The conclusions and recommendations presented in this report are based on analysis of the completed country templates (i.e. the survey of countries represented in the CARE Consortium), but also on recent EU reports and selected international literature.

Figure 1 shows that National/Regional Official Curriculum Framework Documents, coupled with less formal Curriculum Guidelines, have direct impact on curriculum implementation in ECEC settings. The Guidelines often make explicit reference to pedagogy, i.e., the means by which the curriculum should be offered to the children or how the curriculum should be experienced by them. However, implementation is also shaped by what we call ‘enabling’ or ‘constraining’ influences, such as training of the workforce or governmental regulation and monitoring. Figure 1 summarises these enabling or constraining factors and their influence on implementation of ECEC curriculum. Study of the official documents alone therefore fails to provide an accurate representation of what is on offer to children in ECEC settings. This ‘offer’ is adapted according to the circumstances of each ECEC environment, such as the training of the staff, the physical resources available, the daily routines and the conversational style of practitioners.

Figure 1 illustrates a direct link between Curriculum Implementation and children’s learning and development. Implementation can be seen to be ‘effective’ when the aims of the curriculum are achieved through children developing in positive ways that are in keeping with the aspirations of educators, families and society. The country templates that are analysed in this report include information on the enabling and constraining

influences, as well as the official ‘steering’ documents. Few country reports addressed the effects of curriculum implementation at a national level, although the EPPSE study conducted by Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj and Taggart (2014) established the effects of the Early Years Foundation Stage on a large, broadly representative sample of children in England. There are several other studies that assess the effects of features of the national curriculum on smaller samples (e.g. Slot, Mulder, Verhagen, Boom & Leseman, in press), or on specific regions in a country (Anders, Grosse, Rossbach, Ebert & Weinert, 2013; Anders *et al.*, 2012; BIKS, Lerkkanen *et al.*, 2012).

Fig. 1: National curriculum, and enabling/constraining influences on its implementation



In keeping with the European Working Group report (2014), this report distinguishes between official steering documents which are usually devised at a national level (in green), and informal curriculum guidelines which supplement and expand official steering documents (in red). Ten of the 11 countries in our sample have a national ECEC steering document, and many also have less formal guidelines (non-statutory) which are often more detailed and devised at a regional or local level.

Moreover, while approximately half of the countries have one official steering document that defines ECEC provision from birth to school entry, there are many other countries with curriculum documents addressing ECEC provision for children above and below the age of 3 years separately. In this case, official curriculum steering documents are often only devised at a national level for the older age group. The official steering documents of the vast majority of countries in our sample is the responsibility of just one ministry, most commonly but not always, the Ministry of Education. In fact, there has been a growing trend for ECEC to be under the aegis of the Ministry of Education. This makes good sense since the years between birth and school entry are increasingly viewed as an important foundational phase in life-long education.

Analysis of the template fields revealed two main ways to organise the content of the curriculum: according to (1) *developmental domains* in children such as language or identity, or (2) the *kinds of experiences* children should have to support their development, such as play or interactions with early years practitioners. Although some countries in our sample lean heavily in one of these directions, all of them include some mention of both approaches. The documents of every country in the CARE sample include aims to enhance *social, cognitive, linguistic, and personal* development in children. Some countries added other domains to the commonly agreed ones, such as *citizenship, the creative arts or a healthy body*. Just as there is agreement on developmental domains that ECED should enhance, agreement was also found amongst the countries that young children should benefit most from experiences centred on *play and caring relationships expressed in social interactions*. The latter was just as important for children over three as under.

The curricular principles shared across Europe and based on common intellectual traditions can be summarised as:

- Holistic pedagogical philosophy
- Child-centeredness
- The child as a unique human being
- Inclusion and equality

Thus, at the global level there is widespread agreement about the content of the curriculum, although there are differences in the relative balance of its components. The Italians appear to place more emphasis on creative arts, the English on the sounds of spoken language and their links to reading, and the Norwegians on ‘the child’s voice’. Yet, these three aspects of practice can be found across most of Europe, in differing degrees of emphasis.

Will there be a common European ECEC curriculum? Replies to the template survey suggest that European ECEC curricula are the consequence of different cultural, political and historical traditions. Moreover, they all have a strong values base, and these vary across countries. Finally, the primary and secondary curricula are quite different across European countries and this has an impact on ECEC. From analysis of the template survey, it has become clear that one commonly agreed curriculum across Europe is unlikely in the immediate future; national traditions are too strong and national identity is at stake.

The survey also showed agreement in relation to pedagogy and this may have its roots in the great European philosophers of Early Childhood. The template survey found that almost all countries shared ‘theoretical’ or

'philosophical' antecedents as regards to pedagogy. The two theorists cited most often in the survey were Froebel and Montessori, one northern and one southern. There were other theorists cited by many of the survey respondents, including the European psychologists Piaget and Vygotsky. Thus the main pedagogical traditions are widely shared across Europe, and are different, for example, from the theoretical traditions in the U.S. which include Behaviourism.

Because of shared philosophical and pedagogical traditions, broad agreement was found in the survey concerning those pedagogical principles in good quality practice in ECEC. These are described in Themes 5-8 of the report and summarised below:

- Focus on pedagogical interactions with emphasis on relationships and social interaction
- Enabling learning through exploration, project based activities, play and narratives
- A balanced approach where adults guide, support and facilitate, and ensure that experiences in all areas of development are offered, while giving enough room for the child's choice and interests
- Focus on observation as a means to reflect on children's development
- Environment that is stimulating, and gives children enough space and time
- Focus on co-operation and partnerships with parents
- Importance of institutional bodies which support and guide pedagogical practices

The CARE survey showed that most countries steer away from 'learning objectives' and concentrate more on 'learning experiences'. However, the last decade has witnessed new pressures, often from government, for a curriculum that makes explicit its aims for providing a sound foundation for learning in school. Some researchers (See Theme 5, Section 4) argue that a pedagogy oriented towards cognitive objectives may be more beneficial for promoting the child's readiness to learn at school. However, it remains unclear if a more academic or more comprehensive approach produces the largest (long-term) benefits for children. A cautious conclusion is that both are necessary as suggested by EPPSE, the largest study in Europe on the effects of ECEC (Sylva *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, the benefits of a more learning oriented curriculum may vary with the demand of the primary education system.

'Many European countries strive towards overcoming the strong dichotomy between an academic approach and a holistic approach. This may be a good way forward but has inbuilt tensions. More research is needed to clarify the benefits of the academic, comprehensive, or combined approaches across different country specific ECEC contexts' (pp40-41). Many countries in the survey favoured a 'balanced' approach and that is what is recommended here; several countries made explicit reference to 'balance': i.e., more comprehensive ('whole child') for the younger child and more academic (the 'learning child') for those nearing school entry. This compromise is not novel, but it is sensible and something on which agreement may be reached. Much more research is needed to unravel the benefits (and disbenefits) of structured, academic learning in ECEC. (See recommendation 6.)

There remains the thorny issue of 'quality' in implementation. Structural aspects of high quality, such as low ratios, good professional development, well-resourced space and exciting/aesthetically pleasing equipment, are

agreed by all of the respondents in the survey. Ratios in particular were cited as constraining the capacity of staff to fulfill the requirements laid down in curriculum documents and there is very wide variation in ratios across Europe. Staff training was also cited as vital for implementing high quality provision. Process quality was considered as well, although disagreement was found about whether the observational scales of the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (revised edition, ECERS-R; Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 2005) or the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, LeParo & Hamre, 2008) are a more valid way to measure process quality. Case studies of quality which are also part of Work Package 2 will deal with observed quality in the practice of six countries (forthcoming from WP 2). Quality is so important that its study merits a separate report altogether based on new, empirical work.

With so much agreement on curricular goals and pedagogy, where are the strong differences? Why does the visitor feel that the Dutch pre-school centre s/he observes is different from an Italian or Norwegian one? It is in implementation that stark differences are found. No matter how committed an early years practitioner is to treating each child as a 'unique human being', s/he cannot do this well with a group of 22 children (ratio), in a small room (resources), and with no assistant (staffing). No matter how committed to helping children understand their environment, an 18-year-old practitioner with little science education cannot give an adequate answer to a child's question about floating and sinking objects in a pool of water. The implementation of the curriculum is sharply constrained by a host of factors, including workforce training, ratios, and budgets – to name but a few constraining or enabling influences. This report describes the official steering documents in 11 countries in the sample; it also considers the implemented curriculum in these countries, but here we can only make inferences because we do not have rigorous research to describe practice across entire countries. However, the CARE survey made very clear that official documents tell but a fraction of the story; other factors determine the realisation of the official steering documents and many of these are sharply influenced by resources, especially staffing and salaries.

In order to understand the implemented curriculum across Europe, the template asked for information about 'enabling/constraining' factors which are coloured blue in Fig. 1. A full understanding of the implemented curriculum requires all the enabling/constraining fields in the template and the survey enquired about many of them. For example, every country is now committed to an inclusive curriculum but replies to the survey indicated that successful implementation of an inclusive approach demands expertise and time. The government can set targets which require that ECEC provision responds to the needs and rights of diverse populations, but under-qualified staff working with high ratios cannot deliver such ambitious aims. Greater public funding is necessary in order to attend to the organisation and management of inclusive ECEC settings: specialised staff have to be trained, allocated and supported; premises need to be adapted to the diverse needs of children; culturally appropriate educational materials (*e.g.*, books, music) and language support have to be made available; outreach to parents and communities and strong partnerships have to be ensured; co-operative agreements with community, health and social service agencies have to be put into place; group sizes, staff ratios, and rooms have to be organised more flexibly to cater for specialised sessions; and services have to be flexible in terms of setting, hours, and programme options to meet the diverse needs of children and parents.

Curricular partnerships are another ‘enabling influence’ and there is widespread agreement in steering documents about the vital role of parents as partners in the child’s education. Their views need to be taken into account in planning provision, but there is no argument about this. What leads to disparate practice across Europe is the fact that parental partnerships take time, as inclusion does, and limited resources often constrain the best intentions of ECEC staff. So once more, good intentions (and national mandates) are often constrained by financial resources.

Finally, how can monitoring and /or regulation support or hinder the implementation of curriculum? The report documents several examples of local monitoring, some including parents, and means by which it can improve practice. Some countries, such as England, have well established national regulatory bodies that inspect the quality of practice to (1) inform government about quality, and (2) provide feedback to ECEC settings about their strengths and limitations. Other ways to monitor the curriculum include national surveys of parents on the internet and /or interview research on the views of parents and other stakeholders.

Several countries reported increasing pressures from government to demonstrate the effectiveness of ECEC in enhancing children’s development, especially children from disadvantaged backgrounds, often of migration status. Some pressures for testing children to demonstrate the effects of early education were reported in the survey, but this kind of testing was hotly contested as being inappropriate for very young children.

A list of 14 recommendations follows. We have kept the list short in order to focus on those we consider to be the most important ones that arose from our survey of CARE partners. These recommendations are based on the CARE template survey (as shared and discussed amongst the partners), but also on recent documents from the European Union, especially the recent reports from the European Commission working group (2014) and Eurydice and Eurostart (2014) on ECEC in Europe. Whereas the CARE survey provided firm evidence about national steering documents, the evidence on enabling factors was more suggestive because of gaps and limitations in the research base.

#### Part 1: Recommendations about national steering documents

1. Europe should aim at agreement on concepts and terminology to facilitate discussion amongst countries about the aims of the curriculum and effective ways to support policy developments and everyday practice. (This recommendation accepts curricular differences across Europe but supports informed discussion as the basis for reform guided by research and policy dialogues.)
2. National/regional steering documents for the ECEC curriculum should be created and reviewed by a wide range of stakeholders including professionals (practitioners, teacher educators, and researchers), parents, community leaders, and government officials.
3. There needs to be concerted efforts to describe high quality practices considered in the context of research (Realising national aims rests on high quality practices).
4. The acquisition of social skills and personal identity is equally important for life-long learning as is the development of cognitive skills and communication.

5. Successful implementation of the curriculum requires articulation of a broad range of pedagogical strategies that include *play, exploration, and interactions/dialogue between adults and peers*.
6. Recent policy documents and research point to the role of adults in guiding children's learning. While avoiding didactic instruction, adults should use modelling, questioning and conversation-extension to support the child's cognitive development.
7. Countries without a curriculum framework for younger children (0-3) should consider the benefits of a guidance framework for the youngest children in harmony with the curriculum for older ones.
8. Documentation of children's learning and development is a central component of curriculum implementation; it can support professional development and planning for individual needs (Testing is widely criticised, except for research or assessment of children with special needs).
9. National steering documents should support the involvement of parents in decisions concerning the wellbeing and learning of children.

#### Part 2: Recommendations about enabling or constraining influences on the implemented curriculum

10. Monitoring at a national and local level should emphasise its formative and supportive role in addition to any regulatory requirements to improve quality.
11. Successful implementation of the ECEC curriculum depends on high quality professional training and development, especially with regard to pedagogical practices across the age range.
12. Pay and status of the ECEC workforce must be sufficient to attract high quality staff.
13. Curriculum must be sensitive to all sections of society and formal means should be in place for all groups to contribute to curricular decisions.
14. Two kinds of research are needed: (1) studies on the relative strength of the enabling/constraining factors that lead to high quality implementation of the curriculum (e.g., ratios, qualifications, and professional development); (2) research on the effects on children and families of discrete elements of the curriculum (e.g. focus on academic skills, use of documentation, and types of outdoor activities).

This report aims to stimulate discussion and to articulate choices for individual countries to make.

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## **B A C K G R O U N D : C O N T E X T F O R E U R O P E A N C O - O P E R A T I O N I N E C E C A N D P R O J E C T A I M S**

As part of the European Union's Europe 2020 Strategy ([http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm)), the need for all young people to have the opportunity to develop their talents to the fullest extent is strongly emphasised as a means to secure Europe's economic growth, competitiveness and current standards of living. The key role of high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) in reaching this goal is emphasised. The European Union therefore wants all young children to be able to access and benefit from high quality education and care (see also European Commission Working Group, 2014).

Early learning and development has an important role as a solid foundation for children's wellbeing, and their learning and development in later years. Potential benefits can increase children's life chances, and extend to the wider community and society in increasing equity of educational outcomes, social integration, and employability. Preparing children for a successful life, and addressing the 'whole child', thus thinking about wellbeing, learning and development in social, emotional, personal and cognitive areas is a major task. New challenges arise from the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of today's society. In order to support parents and strive towards equal opportunities in a society, ECEC systems which are universally available, of high quality, and inclusive are essential. Importantly, ECEC which helps to reach such high targets cannot be achieved without significant public spending. Yet, if ECEC systems work towards reaching their goals, other costs for the society in terms of lost talents or public spending on social, health and justice systems can be reduced.

In 2011, the European Commission launched a process of co-operation to address the two-fold challenge of providing access to child care and education for all, and raising the quality of ECEC provision. A Thematic Working Group, comprised of ECEC experts and policy makers from across Europe, was established. Its aim was to define key principles of 'a quality framework which should be seen as a first practical step to support policy makers and encourage all member states to go further in their development of excellence in all ECEC settings for the benefit of individual children and society' (European Commission Working Group, 2014, 5). The group has highlighted broad actions in five areas where action has led to clear improvements in the quality of provision. Curriculum has been identified as one of those five areas.

Our interdisciplinary research team on the '[CARE Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European Early Childhood Education and Care](#)' aims to further develop the European knowledge base on ECEC and construct a framework, based on the competencies and skills that young children need to develop in current societies. It aims to identify strategies and policy measures that support access to high quality provisions, and are likely to enhance the impact of ECEC (CARE 2013a, 6). One of the main overarching objectives of this project is to further examine the interaction between those curriculum, pedagogy and quality characteristics which contribute most to child development, learning and wellbeing (CARE 2013b).

This report considers the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) curriculum throughout Europe. It explores the *official curriculum*, specified by national or regional governments, along with the *implemented curriculum* that is provided ‘on the ground’ by staff to enhance children’s development. The official curriculum documents at national or regional level are often called ‘steering documents’. Moreover, the implemented curriculum is sometimes called the ‘experienced’ or the ‘realised’ curriculum, i.e., what the staff realise in their daily practice and what the children experience day by day.

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The analytic template originated as a series of questions at a curriculum conference in Oxford (March 2014); it was further refined as members of the CARE consortium provided information about ECEC in their home countries using the fields of the template. The conclusions and recommendations are based on analysis of the completed country templates (i.e. the survey of countries represented in the CARE Consortium) but also on recent EU reports and selected international literature.

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Fig. 1: National curriculum, and enabling/constraining influences on its implementation



In keeping with the European Working Group report (2014), we distinguish between official steering documents which are usually devised at a national level (in green), and informal curriculum guidelines which supplement and expand official steering documents (in red). Ten of the 11 countries in our sample have a national ECEC steering document, and many also have less formal guidelines (non-statutory) which are often devised at a regional or local level and tend to be more detailed.

Moreover, while approximately half of the countries have one official steering document that addresses ECEC provision from birth to school entry, there are many other countries with curriculum documents addressing ECEC provision for children above and below the age of 3 years separately. In this case, official curriculum steering documents are often only devised at national level for the older age group. The official steering documents of the vast majority of countries in the sample is the responsibility of just one ministry, usually but not always, the Ministry of Education. In fact, there has been a growing trend for ECEC to be under the aegis of the Ministry of Education. This makes good sense since the years between birth and school entry are increasingly viewed as an important foundational phase in life-long education.

In order to understand the implemented curriculum across Europe, the template asked for information about ‘enabling/constraining’ factors which are coloured blue in Fig. 1. A full understanding of the implemented curriculum requires all the enabling/constraining fields in the template, because the steering documents alone fail to provide an accurate picture. An example will illustrate the point: Every country is now committed to an inclusive curriculum, but successful implementation of an inclusive approach demands expertise and time. The government needs to set targets, and develop and support strategies which ensure that ECEC provision responds to the needs and rights of diverse populations. Greater public funding is necessary in order to attend to the organisation and management of inclusive ECEC settings: specialised staff have to be trained, allocated and supported; premises need to be adapted to the diverse needs of children; culturally appropriate educational materials (*e.g.*, books, music) and language support have to be made available; outreach to parents and communities and strong partnerships have to be ensured; co-operative agreements with community, health and social service agencies have to be put into place; group sizes, staff ratios, and rooms have to be organised more flexibly to cater for specialised sessions; and services have to be flexible in terms of setting, hours, and programme options to meet the diverse needs of children and parents.

In order to gain better knowledge about what challenges European countries are currently facing, and to better understand what different countries can learn from each other, reliable information on ECEC in European countries is essential. Part of the WP2 objective was to gain deeper knowledge of intended curricula across Europe. Information on different curricular approaches across Europe was collected from curriculum experts in 11 countries (*e.g.* Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Portugal). In order to identify differences and commonalities in European ECEC curricula, comparative analysis was conducted, and a template for identifying and classifying European approaches to curriculum and pedagogy was devised (CARE 2013b). In this report, we present and discuss curricular approaches across ten identified themes. These themes are the main fields for comparison and contrast across countries.

*Theme 1:* Type of curriculum framework, its legal or conventional basis

*Theme 2:* Goals and content

*Theme 3:* Theoretical models and pedagogical principles

*Theme 4:* Quality and its relation to the curriculum

*Theme 5:* Pedagogical interactions

*Theme 6:* Pedagogical framing – underpinning activities and resources which guide and support pedagogical practices

*Theme 7:* Curricular partnerships

*Theme 8:* Institutional framing – institutional bodies which support and guide pedagogical practices

*Theme 9:* Evidence from research/monitoring

*Theme 10:* Challenges

As part of the conclusion, areas for action are identified across these ten themes (recommendations appear in the Conclusion section). In the absence of large scale research on the implemented curriculum across a country, we

had to make inferences about implementation through responses to questions in the survey about ‘challenges’ or to questions about professional development or ratios. Therefore, our recommendations related to the official curriculum are based on published documents, whereas the recommendations on the implemented curriculum have been made on inferences drawn from the country templates and from ‘expert opinion’ rather than rigorous and national research.

*Links between the curriculum study and the case studies in WP2*

Part of the WP2 objective is also to gain more knowledge about the curriculum experienced by children and staff (D 2.2, CARE 2013b). Case studies of ECEC settings in seven European countries (e.g. England, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Portugal) are being carried out in order to identify good practices when curriculum goals are implemented through high quality pedagogy.

Findings from WP2 will be used to construct a comprehensive culture-sensitive European quality framework to inform practice, teacher education and policy (D 2.4, CARE 2013b). The CARE partner country survey showed that there are many differences in the curricular frameworks across Europe, and that these differences have come about because of different historical, political and cultural traditions. However, greater similarities are to be found in the pedagogical principles, which are based on the central role of play and caring relationships in children’s development. Despite many shared curricular and pedagogical principles, the implemented curriculum in the CARE survey revealed large variations across the countries in terms of the enabling and constraining factors, especially those requiring major national investment. Steering documents on their own will not deliver effective early childhood provision of the quality that will give all children a better start in life.

## C O U N T R I E S ' C U R R I C U L U M ' S N A P S H O T S '

**Before turning to the themes which guide the report, a 'thumbnail sketch' will be presented of the curriculum in each of the 11 countries in the sample. Informants were experts in research and policy in their own country - but also internationally. Snapshots were created in response to the question: 'What lies at the heart of the ECEC curriculum in your country?'**

### **DENMARK (Bente Jensen & Simon Rolls)**

Curricula in *Denmark* are primarily locally defined, often at the level of the individual day care facility. Since 2004, all day care facilities have been required by law to compile an educational curriculum. The legislation includes broad guidelines for this process respecting the tradition for professional autonomy among ECEC professionals and an approach based on the competences and needs of the individual child. Curricula must include a description of targets for children's learning within six themes: the child's all-round individual development, social competences, linguistic development, body and movement, nature and natural phenomena, and cultural expressions and values. Relevant pedagogical methods and activities must be outlined in order to achieve these targets, as well as a description of evaluation procedures. The huge variation in the content and form of local educational curricula is currently at odds with the growing tendency towards standardised quality parameters and testing within education.

### **ENGLAND (Kathy Sylva, Katharina Ereky-Stevens & Ana-Maria Aricescu)**

At the heart of the national curriculum for the Foundation Stage (birth-to-five plus age range) are the 'developmental domains' which the curriculum aims to foster, along with the ways to support development in children. Pedagogy is based on warm and caring relationships, play and exploration, and extended dialogue between adults and children, the kind which fosters critical thinking. Thus, at the heart of the curriculum are the domains of child development around which the curriculum revolves. Development in these areas provides the basis of smooth entry into school. In 2008, two previous early years curricula which considered children under the age of three, and three-to-five year-olds separately (Birth to Three Matters, and the Curricular Guidance for the Foundation Stage) were brought together. This was an imaginative integration, combining zero-to-three with three-to-five plus within one document, while recognising children's developmental progression at different ages. The current framework (2012) is divided into three '*prime*' areas which begin at birth, and four '*specific*' areas which have their roots in the toddler period, but which become fully differentiated around the age of three. The prime areas are: *communication and language, personal/social/emotional development, and physical development*. The prime areas are nurtured from birth through to school entry. The specific areas beginning at two years are: *literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, and expressive art and design*.

### **ESTONIA (Aino Ugaste)**

In the last twenty years great changes have taken place in the curriculum of *Estonian* early childhood education. The changes in the curriculum are primarily connected with the child-centred approach and the emerging of the teacher's new role. In the Estonian National Curriculum of the Preschool Child Care Institutions (2008), the

general aim of schooling and education has been given which is the holistic and consistent development of children, based on co-operation between families and pre-school institutions. At the heart of the curriculum is the child-centred approach which emphasises respect of children's individuality and development potential, an environment which promotes children's development and socialisation and also children's security and provides opportunities to succeed. A child is seen as an active 'do-er' who participates in the planning of the activities, in choice-making and in analysing what has been done. It is pointed out in the curriculum that the child is an active participant, and is happy about action and also about the success of the others. The children's learning is given as a life-long process, and the children learn by imitating, watching, playing, experimenting and communicating.

**FINLAND (Maritta Hännikäinen, Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen, Anna-Maiija Poikkeus, Pirjo-Liisa Poikonen & Jenni Salminen)**

In the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC in *Finland* the guiding principle for educators is the holistic view that care, education [upbringing] and teaching form an integrated whole. The guidelines underline the important role of the educators in setting the goals for ECEC, instead of directly determining goals with respect to children's outcomes. Emphasis is on social relationships, participation and children's voice. Value is given to children's own activities, such as play and exploration. Educators are seen to possess a central role in organising the educational environment as well as in providing children with meaningful experiences, together with children's parents. The existence of continuity between Guidelines on ECEC (broader content orientations) and the Core Curricula for Pre-primary (content areas) and Basic Education (school subjects) can be considered as a central way of guaranteeing a smooth transition from one educational level to another and perceiving learning as a life-long process. However, a more explicit philosophical, theoretical, and pedagogical ground should be established for the document, and more attention should be paid in improving its terminology and structure by way of utilising theoretical and scientific literature in particular.

**GERMANY (Yvonne Anders)**

ECEC services in *Germany* are not located within the public education system, but within the child and youth welfare sector. This socio-pedagogical tradition is still apparent in the curricular frameworks. The Federal Government has a stimulatory role and may introduce legislation which is then transformed into independent laws at the regional level. Thus, each federal state (Bundesland) has its own curriculum. Different curricula differ markedly in terms of length, emphasis of different educational areas, links to primary school and control of implementation. But some core ideas are shared. The aim of pre-school is to strengthen basic competencies, skills and personal resources. A holistic educational approach is shared. The curricular frameworks describe broad educational areas but no qualification levels. The strong role of the situational approach in German pre-school pedagogy is apparent. The child is seen as an active and competent individual. Education takes place in a social context. Any pedagogical interaction should draw on children's questions and interests, play-based approaches are underlined. The role of the pre-school teacher is to expand and deepen children's interests, to provide attachment and autonomy and to promote opportunities for children's self-production and world-approbation. The level of control of implementation is low with variation between federal states.

### **GREECE (Konstantinos Petrogiannies, Efthymia Penderi & Konstantina Rentzou)**

The *Greek* ECEC system, either within the private or public sector, is typical of a “divisional system” (split model). The public sector’s infant/child centres are funded centrally by the Ministry of Interior and are under the auspices of local authorities (since 2001); the private sector’s infant/child centres are licensed by the prefectural authorities and are under the auspices of municipalities, whereas the monitoring of good operation has recently passed to the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity. They register children aged between two months to five years. The explicit focus on care services is reflected in the absence of any official curricular framework, or pedagogical regulations. The only official centrally legislated document (“Basic Regulations of Operation”) outlines primarily safety and hygiene standards as well as the operation procedures that should be met with only one article (#14) to refer briefly to the activities with the children. The daily activities are decided and scheduled in centre level. Decentralisation and lack of inspection mechanisms are among the factors that contribute to large local differences in operation standards and services. In addition, in-service training is almost non-existent with rare exceptions depending on the municipality. The second section includes pre-primary schools/kindergartens that are supervised centrally by the Ministry of Education and register children aged four-to-six years, focusing on whole child development with a sheer educational orientation. A national curriculum was introduced in 2003, based on a child-centred perspective and interdisciplinary and cross-thematic teaching approaches. Since 2006, with the compulsory attendance of at least one year of kindergarten (five-to-six year-olds), there has been a continuous attempt to improve the programs and teachers’ work. The most characteristic is a new national curriculum in 2011 that introduced ‘differentiated’ pedagogy, personal and social development as a new subject, formative assessment and inclusion among its basic principles. Emphasis is placed on play, the role of the teachers in organising challenging learning contexts, the child as active agent in the learning process, the “opening” to the community-especially to children’s families, and on successful transitions. Lack of systematic in-service training, limited monitoring and inspection are some critical factors that restrict a successful implementation of the curricular mandates in the classroom. Internal evaluation processes (scheduled for 2015), based on specific quality indicators that could promote further the advancement of educational work and children’s developmental outcomes, have been temporarily postponed by the new government and a new plan is under discussion.

### **ITALY (Susanna Montovani & Giulia Pastori)**

The concept of curriculum in the Italian ECEC discourse has been addressed only in relation to the three-to-six *scuola dell’infanzia*. *Scuola dell’infanzia* has the general goals of enhancing the children’s sense of identity, their autonomy, their citizenship and their competences. Over the years, there has been a shift from the refusal of the concept of curriculum and an idea of *scuola materna* founded on play, social relationships, attention to spaces and their aesthetics (*space as third educator*) and the school as a place to live rather than a place to learn characterised by global and open guidelines, to a greater focus on the opportunities offered to children called *fields of experience*. The tension between the holistic tradition and new/old concerns about outcomes and new interpretations of inclusion are in the air and raise questions and contradictions.

For children zero-to-three (*Nido*) curriculum has never been part of the discourse and no National Guidelines exist. The focus is on the integration of education and care, transitions and continuity, significant relationships with educators, peer relationships, beginning of autonomy, sense of self, play and creativity. The ideas of a

constructive social child, of continuity of relationships within the peer groups and with educators (children stay with the same group and educators through the years in each service), of team work of adults and project work of/with children, of parents' and community participation, of conviviality, the attention to space and environment, to relaxed timing and to documentation are common to the whole zero-to-six approach and discourse. Indirect teaching through the preparation of the environment and scaffolding interactions is the widely shared style, a further common feature in ECEC as well as the local variation as an added value: *nidi* and *scuole* are considered an expression of the community.

#### **NETHERLANDS (Paul Leseman & Pauline Slot)**

The Dutch ECEC curriculum has a predominantly social-emotional orientation, focused on providing emotional security and warm teacher-child relationships, while fostering autonomy and social competence within a structured and predictable, 'quiet' environment. Dutch ECEC is reluctant to demand cognitive effort and early learning, and is less oriented on fostering pre-academic skills so as to avoid schoolification. The balance between a social-emotional and educational orientation differs between subsystems and grades. Towards the end of ECEC, shortly before transition to grade one (grade three in the Dutch system), emphasis on academic content increases. In targeted programs, emphasis on pre-academic content is stronger, but still less than in countries with an educational as opposed to care orientation in ECEC. Free play is really free (unguided) play and in all subsystems, and at all ages, relatively dominant. The curriculum reflects the European social-pedagogy tradition (Fröbel), but has been influenced by (family-based) models of attachment in the past decades, especially in day care, and by the early academics tradition in the educationally oriented pre-schools and kindergartens. Dutch ECEC can be characterised as *moderately child-centred*, as relatively dominant free activities are complemented by teacher-led activities such as circle time and joint snack- and mealtime sessions, and by educational activities which seldom take the form of teacher-controlled instruction.

#### **NORWAY (Kari Jacobsen and Thomas Moser)**

The *Norwegian* 'Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens' is a legally binding regulation laid down by the Ministry of Education and Research 1 March 2006 (with amendments 2011) pursuant to stipulations of Section 2 Content of the 2005 Kindergarten Act. It is a broad, overall framework. All ECEC institutions in Norway, public and private, are obliged to obey the Framework Plan. The Framework Plan reflects the strong pedagogical identity of kindergartens in Norway. They are neither homes, nor schools, even if both home and school have been used as paradigms by e.g. politicians or other people not acquainted with the sector. In former days, staff might be mentioned as 'Aunts', which reflect the view of familiar relations. At the heart of the Framework Plan is the holistic view of children and childhood. Childhood is a phase of intrinsic value, and the children are entitled to express their views on everything that affects them, and their views must be taken into account. The kindergartens' programmes must be built on a holistic pedagogical philosophy, with care, play, learning and formation ('Bildung') at the core of the activities. Children's wellbeing is of high value. The Framework Plan emphasises that children learn through all their experiences, in play and interaction with other children and with a competent staff who see and understand their needs and interests and support the parents in bringing up the children to be active participants in a democratic society. 'There is no education without care,

and no care without education’. The Framework Plan has no demands on outputs or goals to be attained for children; it is ‘input-based’.

**POLAND (Malgorzata Karwowska-Struczyk & Olga Wyslowska)**

National Legal regulation concerning zero-to-three year old children is very general, and is the bases for internal status of every setting (internal document regulating work of the setting). The document outlines the areas of work of settings, which are primarily care then upbringing and education. Some practitioners consider this limited guidance as an advantage. They argue the needs of children zero-to-three years old and their families are so different that a uniform National Curriculum Framework could inhibit caregiver’s sensitiveness and attention in terms of new challenges. The National Curriculum Framework for children three-to-five years old constitutes a base for individual curricula elaborated by teachers. In the heart of the National Curriculum Framework is an aim to prepare children for primary schools in the areas: intellectual, social, emotions, physical, and academic. Every group of developmental goals starts with the statement: ‘Child completing pre-school education and starting primary school should ...’. In our opinion it encourages teachers to use expository methods, and puts children in the position of the recipients of teachers’ actions. Because of lack of research on the National Curriculum Framework implementation, it is very hard to judge how it influences the pedagogical work of the settings as well as children’s outcomes.

**PORTUGAL (Cecília Aguiar, Joana Cadima, Maria Clara Barata)**

The Portuguese Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education are based on a constructivist and integrated approach to learning and development, viewing the child as subject and not object of the educational process and, therefore, as an active agent in the construction of his/her development and learning. They were designed to serve as a common reference for all pre-school teachers, across curricula, supporting reflexive professional standpoints. At their core, pedagogical principles, values, and processes are more emphasised than prescription of child outcomes. The use of an intentional pedagogy and provision of meaningful activities that follow children’s interests, within play, are equally valued, with explicit references to power-sharing between the teacher and children. Overall, the curriculum guidelines provide a framework for teachers to reflect about their work, identifying core content areas, while highlighting their connectedness, and identifying important developmental, relational, and contextual factors that influence learning and teaching.

## ***T H E M E 1 : T Y P E O F C U R R I C U L U M F R A M E W O R K***

Recently the term ‘steering documents’ has been used to encompass the variety of forms of documents that intend to steer (or guide) ECEC providers (Eurydice, 2014). Steering documents may be incorporated into legislation in a number of ways, for example as part of child care and education acts or laws, as care and education plans and/or standards, or published as a reference framework. Currently, all European countries have issued curricula steering documents for at least one stage of early years, covering the education and care component of provision (Eurydice, 2014). Together, these sets of steering documents contribute to establishing a basic curriculum framework in which ECEC staff are required to develop their practice. The term ‘curriculum framework’ has recently been defined as ‘a set of values, principles, guidelines or standards which guides the objectives, content and pedagogical approach to children’s care and learning’ (European Commission Working Group, 2014).

Where local centres and communities are allowed to develop their own curricula in order to meet the needs and rights of social groups and local populations, a general value-based national framework is used to provide guidance (OECD, 2012a; UNESCO, 2004). Curriculum guidelines which combine a broad national framework with a range of local arrangements are mentioned as one of the aspects of structural quality which need to be fulfilled to support quality provision (European Commission Working Group, 2014).

### **Summary – Curriculum frameworks for ECEC provision across 11 European countries:**

All countries issue official guidelines for ECEC providers, with huge variation between these documents. ECEC steering documents are found at national, regional, and local levels. Some have statutory (legal) force while others exist as agreed guidelines for action. Depending on how formal or binding steering documents are, they allow for varying degrees of flexibility in the way in which they are applied in the ECEC settings. Even on a national level, there is often more than one steering document applicable to ECEC in a country (see Table 1). On a higher level (national, regional), steering documents often consist of a set of general guidelines for ECEC, and these serve as a basis for producing steering documents at a lower (regional, local) level or within ECEC settings. On a national level, the responsible body for steering documents is typically the Ministry of Education, with only few exceptions (e.g. Denmark, Germany). For children under-three in ECEC, approximately 50 per cent of the countries do not have a standard curriculum framework on a national level, and the responsible bodies for steering documents vary between countries.

Some countries specify a unitary curriculum framework which covers the entire age-range of children at pre-school stage (e.g. Denmark, England, Estonia, Germany, Norway), others specify different frameworks for different age groups (split system), e.g. pre-school and pre-primary school (e.g. Finland, the Netherlands), or under-threes and over-threes. Countries with a split system between over- and under-threes have usually only established a standard curriculum framework for the older age group (e.g. Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal). In

those countries, settings are required to draw up their own education and care plan for the younger age group. For example in *Greece*, in ECEC settings for under 5 year-olds, there is an absence of any nationally or locally based pedagogical/educational or curricular framework. Implementation is based on a 'daily activity schedule' and the 'Basic Regulations of Operation' mandates basic structural, operational and management procedures. In *the Netherlands*, there is no explicit national curriculum for the 0-4 group. However, recently, extensive guidelines (pedagogical framework) were developed for this age group in daycare. These guidelines are strongly connected to daily practice, however, they have no official status and it is unknown how many settings actually use these guidelines and to what extent. The situation is different for settings that accommodate the 2-4 age group, where a specific curriculum programme is chosen from a set of accredited programmes. In *Portugal*, the Ministry of Education has recently put together a comprehensive working group with the purpose of proposing pedagogical guidelines for settings that target children up to the age of three. In *Italy*, for children aged 0-3 (*Nido*), curriculum has never been part of the discourse and no National Guidelines exist. Early childhood pedagogy is grounded on local experiences and conceptions of the child or childhood. In *Poland*, there are no specific legislated regulations for ECEC provision for under threes in terms of a curriculum, and individual settings develop an internal document.

Steering documents can apply to centre-based care only, or they can apply to home-based care, or other community-based activities. Curriculum guidelines in our sample which address both centre-based *as well as* home-based care and education can be found in *Denmark, England, Finland and Germany*.

Steering documents vary considerably in their length and therefore in content and detail. In our sample, we had documents with fewer than ten pages and other documents with several hundred pages. In many European countries, requirements to develop local steering documents exist (see also Theme 8 – devising local ECEC plans). National curriculum guidelines provide the basis for:

- ECEC plans drawn by local municipalities (e.g. Finland)
- unit-specific ECEC plans drawn by ECEC settings (e.g. Denmark, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway)
- individual ECEC plans drawn for each child (e.g. Finland).

Not all countries in our sample require settings to draw up those plans in a written format (e.g. Greece, Portugal). However, unit-specific education and care plans are common in Europe. Such documents outline for example, proposed pedagogical activities, the education and support provided for children, or specific guidelines for co-operation with parents or the community and schools. *Italy* has a strong tradition to view local communities as the context for developing curriculum, because a curriculum has to allow for the development of the individual child, and thus has to start in the community where a child grows up. In *Germany*, the different regions (16 federal states) design their own curriculum frameworks which are in line with broad curriculum guidelines offered by the national documents. Those regional steering documents are legislated, cover the entire pre-school age range, and in comparison to other European curriculum documents they are extensive and detailed. For the purpose of this review, we chose to describe curriculum frameworks in 4 federal states that differ markedly with regard to central characteristics of ECEC. Two of those are located in the Western part of Germany (Baden-

Württemberg, Hessen), and two in the Eastern part (Berlin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern). The four examples were chosen to present the variety of frameworks in Germany, they are not representative for all of Germany. For those with a special interest in curriculum for children under three, an appendix comparing the national documents in three countries in the CARE survey is included here. It is called '*Curricula up to age three – what do national steering documents tell us about the younger children in early childhood education settings?*' (Maritta Hännikäinen. See page 102.)

Table 1 summarises the official steering documents for 11 countries in the survey of CARE partners, providing information on the title of the document, number of pages, and the age to which it refers.

Table 1: National Curriculum Frameworks across countries

**Colour code:** Acts and Decrees; legislated Curriculum Guidelines; not legislated Curriculum Guidelines;

N/A (local documents, other)

Age	0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7
<b>Country</b>							
<b>Denmark</b>	Daycare Act						
<b>England</b>	Childcare Act						
	Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (29 pages)						
<b>Estonia</b>	Preschool Child Care Institutions Act			Preschool Child Care Institutions Act			
	Republic of Estonia Education Act						
	National Curriculum of the Preschool Child Care Institution						
<b>Finland</b>	The Act and Decree on children's day care (up to school age seven), and the Act and Decree on Basic Education (from age six on) <sup>1</sup>						
	National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (39 pages)						
							National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education <sup>2</sup> (54 pages)
<b>Germany</b>	The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the federal states						
Examples of curriculum frameworks in four federal states of Germany:							
Baden-Württemberg	Orientation Plan for Care and Education (Baden-Württemberg) (47 pages)						
Hessen	Education/Learning right from the start. Curriculum framework for children aged zero-to-ten (149 pages)						➔
Berlin	Berlin Curriculum-Plan for the pre-school-aged children in centre-based care and education (133 pages) <sup>3</sup>						
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	Conception of Education for zero-to-ten year old children (296 pages)						➔
<b>Greece</b>	Model Regulation for the Operation of Municipal and Community Crèches and Nurseries" [or "Model Regulations" or "Basic Regulations of Operation"] (Joint Ministerial Decision 16065 - FEK 497/B'/22.04.2002) (30 pages)						
						Cross-thematic Unified Curriculum for Kindergarten (2003)(30 pages)	
						Kindergarten	

		Curriculum (2011) (299 pages)	
<b>Italy</b>		National Guidelines for the Curriculum of pre-primary education and first school course/cycle (8 pages)	
<b>Netherlands</b>	Day Care Act in 2005	Primary Education Act	
		Accredited Education Programs	
	Pedagogical Framework	Intermediate Goals	
<b>Norway</b>	Act no. 64 of June 2005 relating to Kindergartens (the Kindergarten Act)		
	Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (61 pages, or 34 in English)		
<b>Poland</b>	Childcare up to the age of three Act	School Education Act	
		Regulation Act concerning <b>National Curriculum Framework</b> (6 pages)	
<b>Portugal</b>		Framework-Law for Pre-school Education	
	Guidelines under preparation <sup>4</sup>	Curriculum guidelines for pre-school education (98 pages)	
		Set of Booklets (not legislated) to operationalise the Curriculum guidelines	

<sup>1</sup>Act on ECEC under preparation: workforce appointed for 2012-2014

<sup>2</sup>The national core curriculum is under reform. Completion – End of 2014. New local curricula August 2016.

<sup>3</sup>Since September 2014 – Berlin Curriculum-Programme for centre-based and home-based care and education

<sup>4</sup>National pedagogical guidelines for under-threes in centre-based early care and education to be made available in 2015

***Compulsory pre-primary education:***

England age five (if child turns five between September and March); Greece age five; the Netherlands: age five; Poland age five. In England, the last year of the ECEC curriculum takes place in school. This was intended to ensure overlap between the pre-primary and the primary curriculum. Teachers in these classrooms are trained in the same institutions as primary teachers which further ensures continuity.

## ***T H E M E 2 : G O A L S A N D C O N T E N T***

### ***BROAD ECEC GOALS WITH REGARDS TO CHILDREN AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING***

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There is an agreement in Europe that a curriculum framework should make explicit the common purpose, goals or objectives of ECEC provision for all children. It should provide a direction for children's learning, thereby maximizing gains from ECEC attendance (European Commission Working Group, 2014). Due to different visions of stakeholders on what the curriculum should include and aim to achieve, defining common goals and content is a challenge in many countries. Policy makers, researchers, ECEC professionals and parents each have their own cultural values and ideas about early development – all considering that different areas of learning are important (OECD, 2012c). Whilst needing to reflect the society's expectation about the role and responsibilities of ECEC settings, curricula need to embrace a philosophy that focuses on the needs, interests, and choices of the individual child (OECD, 2004). However, it is widely recognised that the common aims of ECEC curriculum must be broad, contribute to the child's overall development and wellbeing, and include a focus on values and norms.

Curriculum reports which compare different countries agree that significant differences exist on the space that is given to academic learning. In some countries or at certain stages, there is a strong focus towards school preparation, yet others focus instead on the intrinsic value of childhood, and the child 'being', rather than the child 'becoming'. Today, there is a notion that curricula frameworks need to move beyond a dichotomy between academic models (with cognitive aims for school preparation) and comprehensive models (which aim at holistic development and wellbeing). It is argued that high-quality ECEC settings are related to curriculum practice in which cognitive *and* social development are viewed as complementary and of equal importance (e.g. Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2011; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).

#### **Summary – broad goals of ECEC provision with regard to children and their development across 11 European countries:**

Despite country-level differences in their emphasis, there is general agreement that ECEC provision has to address children's wellbeing and promote a space that is safe and secure and fosters a happy childhood. Some countries put a stronger emphasis than others on the message that *a safe, secure and happy childhood is important in its own right* (e.g. Finland, Italy, Norway, Portugal).

In terms of children's development, all countries emphasise the importance of holistic development while describing broad goals which refer to development in certain areas. Different areas are emphasised across countries. Generally, the focus is on non-cognitive development, particularly social-, emotional-, and personal development and physical development and health. Where cognitive development is mentioned, documents refer

to the *aim to foster all-round learning and development* (including cognitive, language, physical, emotional, social, creative and moral development). Language and communication skills are addressed in all documents. The development of artistic skills is highlighted by some countries. A number of countries mention the development of basic competencies and knowledge about the world.

Alongside children's development and learning, several countries identify broad objectives which refer to *children's identity and belonging, to intercultural skills and cultural diversity, or to moral and/or religious values*.

More than half of the countries refer to aims which relate to children's *preparation for learning in school*, especially where steering documents for pre-primary systems are described. Some countries refer to this goal in a very general way – naming 'school readiness' (e.g. England, the Netherlands pre-primary ECEC, Poland), others more specifically in referring to learning dispositions (e.g. Denmark, Finland pre-primary ECEC, Germany – Baden Württemberg/Hessen, Greece) or pre-academic skill development (e.g. Netherland pre-primary ECEC). *Germany-Hessen* and *Norway* emphasise the aspect of *life-long learning*.

Some countries specifically list goals which relate to *success in life* (e.g. Denmark, England, Germany – Berlin/Hessen, Greece). For example in *Greece*, the curriculum framework states that the kindergarten should establish a positive social context that helps children develop adaptive and competent behaviours that may promote successful adjustment in different contexts, life circumstances and future roles. *Germany-Hessen* refers to the development of resilience. Approximately half of the countries list goals which relate to conditions that *promote equal opportunities in a society*.

To conclude, the countries in our survey do not limit their definitions of goals to one main area, but list broad ECEC goals in a number of areas, including wellbeing and happiness, the development of academic skills and knowledge, and of school readiness. Yet, there are differences in emphasis, and there is a tension between goals in different areas. Whilst in some countries there is a stronger view on the importance of developing academic skills that will enable children to participate in society on equal terms regardless of social background (e.g. England), others consider it less necessary or against their principles to introduce a paradigm of 'school readiness' into ECEC curricula frameworks (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Norway). Where the emphasis is on wellbeing and that a safe, secure and happy childhood is important in its own right, children's free development, the practice of democracy, and the child as active participant with his/her own voice are placed at the heart of the curriculum.

## ***DOMAINS OF CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT OR LEARNING***

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Across the 11 countries in our survey, there is a large degree of consensus on the broad developmental domains or learning areas that need to be addressed, including personal and social development, language and communication, knowledge and understanding of the surrounding world, creative expression, physical

development and movement, and ethical, religious and philosophical orientation and responsibility. In all curriculum frameworks reviewed for this study it is explicitly stated that all areas of learning should be integrated in a holistic way. ECEC settings are encouraged to work on all the different aspects of child development and learning.

Some countries list domains like subject areas similar to those which could be listed in a school curriculum, others avoid the use of such terms and emphasise the non-formal character of early ECEC (e.g. Denmark, Germany – Baden Württemberg, Italy). The countries with the strongest emphasis on non-academic domains are *Italy* and *Denmark*. Not all countries list social, emotional or personal development as domains/areas of learning (e.g. Finland, Norway, Portugal), even though all countries refer very strongly to goals within these domains. There is also a strong socio-emotional orientation with emphasis on social relationships throughout the documents.

Some countries list domains of experience/learning, even though they do not refer to developmental goals in these areas (e.g. Finland, Norway, Portugal). Here, the list of domains is not intended as academic subjects to be taught to children in order for them to reach developmental goals. Rather, it is there to emphasise the picture of children as complex human beings, who have competencies, interests and needs in all these areas.

Where there is a split system, there are usually no areas of learning that are defined or specifically listed for the younger age-group (e.g. Estonia, Italy, Poland, Portugal). In *England*, the prime areas of development (communication and language; physical development; personal-, social-, and emotional development) are emphasised during the early years, while the specific areas of learning (literacy, mathematics, understanding of the world, expressive arts and design) become more important as children grow.

<b>Personal and social development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identity</li> <li>• self-regulation</li> <li>• Personal empowerment social skills</li> <li>• social interaction</li> </ul>	<b>Language/Literacy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• development of language skills-literacy (reading, writing)</li> </ul>	<b>ICT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• familiarization</li> <li>• communication and collaboration</li> <li>• experimenting, discovering and solving problems</li> <li>• society and culture</li> </ul>	<b>Environment and education for sustainable development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• waste disposal management</li> <li>• management of water resources</li> </ul>
<b>Science and Environment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• living organisms</li> <li>• objects and materials</li> <li>• concepts and phenomena</li> <li>• planet earth and space</li> </ul>	<b>Creation and Expression</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fine arts</li> <li>• music</li> <li>• audiovisual expression</li> <li>• drama</li> </ul>	<b>Maths/Numeracy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• numbers and arithmetic</li> <li>• algebra</li> <li>• space, geometry, measurements</li> <li>• statistics, probability</li> </ul>	<b>Physical education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• motor skills</li> <li>• physical activity, creativity, critical thinking, responsibility</li> <li>• self-expression, social interaction</li> <li>• respect to diversity and co-operation</li> </ul>

Fig. 2: Greece – Eight learning areas of the Cross-Thematic Kindergarten Curriculum (age four-to-six) (2011)

### ***LINKING THE DOMAINS OF LEARNING OR DEVELOPMENT TO GUIDELINES FOR THE PROVISION OF CERTAIN ACTIVITIES***

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Not all countries specify that, in carrying out activities, ECEC staff should focus strongly on taking account of different content orientations. In some countries, this relates to the fact that curriculum documents do not emphasise the importance of separate areas of learning, but instead focus on learning as interrelated and holistic. ECEC staff are encouraged to integrate several content areas in the same activities. Thus, where there is a reference to different types of activities, these are not clearly linked to particular areas of learning. Activities are often embedded in certain 'topics' and carried out through project work (e.g. Italy, Portugal).

In other curriculum documents, there is no specific guidance for the provision of activities, but a clear message that it is the task of the ECEC institution, manager, or practitioner to plan activities which take account of the different content orientations (e.g. Denmark, Finland). In some countries, individual ECEC institutions are responsible for the development of an activity plan, which usually links to the learning areas (Estonia). This is motivated by the view that broader developmental goals can be realised through activities which refer to the content of each learning area. In *Denmark* for example, the Daycare Act requires that educational curricula (put together by day care managers) outline relevant pedagogical methods and activities for achieving learning outcomes relevant to specific children within each of the six themes.

In some countries, there are references to how staff members should work to support learning in those areas of development which are listed in the curriculum document (e.g. England, Germany – Berlin/Baden Württemberg/Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Norway). The curriculum framework in *Baden-Württemberg* for example, defines developmental goals within six areas of learning and development. The emphasis is on formulating questions for practitioners to facilitate reflective practice and self-evaluation. These goals address the opportunities children could be given to experience those situations, activities, relationships, or environments which are thought to enable learning and development in each field.

In *Norway*, for each area of learning, there are some statements of how staff should work towards the stated developmental goals. These lists include references to the provision of activities, e.g.

*'Communication and language'*: staff must facilitate meaningful experiences, and create time and space for the use of non-verbal and verbal language in everyday activities, play and more formal situations; allow children to encounter symbols such as letters and numbers in everyday situations, and support children's initiative in terms of counting, sorting, reading, playing, writing and dictating texts;

*'Art, culture and creativity'*: staff must motivate children to express themselves, and allow them to find their own models of expression; ensure that children experience local, national and international artistic and cultural expressions, and that they get possibilities to meet artists.

In *England*, the EYFS Framework also lists areas of learning as areas of experience in which programmes/practitioners are required to offer activities. The description of the areas of experience or the activities however relies mainly on a more detailed specification of sub-sets of learning areas/areas of development within each content area. E.g.:

- *Communication and language development* involves giving children opportunities to experience a rich language environment; to develop their confidence and skills in expressing themselves; and to speak and listen in a range of situations.
- *Personal, social and emotional development* involves helping children to develop a positive sense of themselves, and others; to form positive relationships and develop respect for others; to develop social skills and learn how to manage their feelings; to understand appropriate behaviour in groups; and to have confidence in their own abilities.

*Germany – Berlin* lists seven areas of learning. Developmental aims are defined for all areas of learning, and specified into those which relate to children themselves; to children in the group with others; and to children participating in and exploring the world. Within each learning area, and in relation to the aims, examples of pedagogical practices and activities are provided (examples of practice relate to: daily routines; materials and play; project work with children; environment and equipment).

Table 2: Germany-Berlin – Activities listed for the learning area ‘basic mathematical competencies’

<b>Learning area: Basic mathematical competencies</b>	<i>Aims relating to the children themselves</i>	<i>Aims relating to children in the group with others</i>	<i>Aims relating to children participating in and exploring the world</i>
<i>Daily routines</i>	e.g. to talk about the calendar – dates, important events	e.g. play games which relate to numbers or shapes	e.g. talk about the times in the day, days of the week
<i>Materials and play</i>	e.g. to provide materials to stack or fill	e.g. to provide a ‘shop’ for pretend game	e.g. making a mosaic
<i>Project work with children</i>	e.g. ‘I find out about myself’ – measure and document one’s size, weight, length of hair etc.	e.g. ‘We find out about our nursery’ – measure rooms and equipment in the nursery, count the children per group etc.	e.g. make a collection of things found outdoors, name them and classify them
<i>Environment and equipment</i>	e.g. to provide rulers, scales, boxes, shapes etc.	e.g. to provide a calendar with birthdays on the wall, coins and a till for the shop etc.	e.g. make room for collections, display of children’s work

## ***GOALS RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCIES WITHIN THE AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT***

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Across the countries included in our study, there are significant country-level differences and system-level differences in terms of the definition of competencies within the broad areas of development.

- National steering documents may require that local curriculum documents include objectives or targets for each of the learning themes. However, in many countries, no national ‘learning outcomes’ are set, nor developmental goals prescribed by *national* steering documents throughout the pre-school period, or at least until the pre-primary period (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Portugal, Germany).
- Where there is a split system, often no list of competencies within the broad areas of development are defined by steering documents for the *younger age group* (e.g. Italy, Poland, and to some extent the Netherlands although there is increasing policy pressure to use standard norm-referenced assessment of language, literacy and mathematics to ‘prove’ effectiveness).
- For the pre-primary period, steering documents state developmental goals within each area of development, and generally these goals are closely aligned with the goals stated for the primary school curriculum (e.g. Finland, Greece, the Netherlands, Poland). Competencies and skills on children’s pre-academic and general cognitive skills are emphasised.
- Where more room is given to academic learning and school preparation, steering documents sometimes specify skills to be attained by children at a certain stage of ECEC, or by the end of ECEC, prior to their entry to primary education (e.g. England, Estonia).

*Italy*, with a steering document for the over-threes, traditionally represents targets to strive towards, but not goals to be achieved or assessed. However, the current national steering document from 2012 details competence goals for each field of experience, and ends with a description of the profile of competence achieved by the end of the three years. This detailing of competences has led to criticism, pointing out ambivalences and risks ‘schoolifying’ pre-primary school.

In *Portugal*, the guidelines briefly mention the conditions favourable to children’s success in basic education, at the behavioural, attitudinal, and competence/skill level (specifically skills that are needed for formal learning of reading, writing, and mathematics).

In *the Netherlands*, there is no uniform or general curriculum for the pre-primary period (kindergarten), but since pre-primary education and care is part of the primary school system, the goals of primary education also hold. The goals of primary education concern the contents and levels of knowledge and skills that should be reached by the majority of students in several subject areas (reading, writing, mathematics), as well as general attitudinal and metacognitive competences (being sociable, co-operable, positive work attitude and citizenship). Based on these goals, the national steering document for pre-primary care and education defines so called *intermediate goals* in the areas of emergent literacy and mathematics, focussing on the precursor skills that can and should be acquired in pre-school and kindergarten. These intermediate goals do not have the same status and statutory power as the official core goals of the Primary Education Act, but are seen as helpful for teachers.

In *Poland*, the pre-primary ‘Core Curriculum’ is outcome oriented – at the end of pre-school children are expected to have certain knowledge and skills, including academic as well as personal/social development. The document specifies these detailed skills and knowledge characteristics for each of the domains of learning named (for example: counting objects, being interested in reading and writing, naming the national symbol and flag, knowing the polish hymn).

Steering documents in *England*, some federal states of *Germany*, *Denmark*, and *Norway* have standard curriculum documents *across* the whole pre-school period, and specify a range of goals referring to skills/competencies for each area of development. In general, there is a tendency to define more complex competencies in each area of development, rather than listing specific skills. While in Germany and Norway, developmental goals are rather broad, and not understood as testable learning targets, in England, the lists are defined as ‘learning goals’ - describing those competencies children should have attained prior to school entry.

For example, from the learning area ‘Communication, language and text’ in *Norway*: Through work on communications, language and texts, kindergartens shall help to ensure that children

- listen, observe and respond to mutual interaction with children and adults
- develop their understanding of concepts, and use a varied vocabulary
- use their language to express feelings, wishes and experiences, to solve conflicts and to create positive relationships through play and other social interaction
- develop a positive relationship with texts and pictures as sources of aesthetic pleasure, knowledge and conversations, and as inspiration for fantasies and creativity
- listen to sounds and rhythms in the language and become familiar with symbols such as numbers and letters
- become familiar with books, songs, pictures, the media, etc.

Or from the learning area ‘Personal, social and emotional development’ in *England*:

- self-confidence and self-awareness: children are confident to try new activities, and say why they like some activities more than others. They are confident to speak in a familiar group, will talk about their ideas, and will choose the resources they need for their chosen activities. They say when they do or don’t need help.
- managing feelings and behaviour: children talk about how they and others show feelings, talk about their own and others’ behaviour, and its consequences, and know that some behaviour is unacceptable. They work as part of a group or class, and understand and follow the rules. They adjust their behaviour to different situations, and take changes of routine in their stride.
- making relationships: children play co-operatively, taking turns with others. They take account of one another’s ideas about how to organise their activity. They show sensitivity to others’ needs and feelings, and form positive relationships with adults and other children.

In *Germany-Hessen*, developmental goals are listed which relate to each of the learning areas, as well as goals which relate to multi-cultural education, gender identity, socio-economically disadvantaged children, or those with special needs. The curriculum framework of *Berlin* devotes one chapter of its document to curricular aims which are formulated in order to provide direction and guidance to pedagogical practice. Those aims are based on values, the norm of the society, and those competencies children are thought to need in order to participate in the world around them. Formulated aims are grouped into four categories: knowledge about the self and self-competencies; knowledge about others and social competencies; knowledge about the world and competencies to explore and participate; knowledge and competencies which support life-long learning.

The framework also lists seven areas of learning; developmental aims are defined for each of the four groups of aims within each of the leaning areas. Within each learning area there is also a third dimension – aims are categorised into those which relate to children themselves; to children in the group with others; and to children participating in and exploring the world.

Table 3: Germany-Berlin – Aims relating to communication and language

<b>Learning area: Communication, language, literacy, and media</b>	<i>Aims relating to the children themselves</i>	<i>Aims relating to children in the group with others</i>	<i>Aims relating to children participating in and exploring the world</i>
<i>Within 'knowledge about the self and self- competencies'</i>	e.g. to express ones needs, interests and feelings	e.g. to let others know about ones wishes and feelings with others	e.g. to develop thoughts and ideas and inspire others
<i>Within 'knowledge about others and social competencies'</i>	e.g. to communicate with others, to listen, and react verbally, with questions, and actions	e.g. to be empathetic, understand others' perspectives	e.g. to plan activities with others and carry them out
<i>Within 'knowledge about the world and competencies to explore and participate'</i>	e.g. to be aware, understand, and reproduce language used by others	e.g. to understand verbal and non-verbal conventions	e.g. to share ones knowledge about the world with others
<i>Within 'knowledge and competencies which support life-long learning'</i>	e.g. to ask about meanings of words or sentences	e.g. to ask about others' ideas one does not grasp	e.g. to use different sources to find out information

### ***LINKS TO THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM***

In their early years, children go through several transition phases such as when they start attending an ECEC provision, when they change ECEC settings/systems, and when they go from ECEC to primary education. These changes affect the continuity of children's relationships and every-day experiences, thus impacting on their learning and behaviour. The structure of a common standard curriculum framework for the early years aims to ensure continuity across ECEC systems. A common curriculum framework might be best suited to ensure continuity of learning between ECEC and primary education. Such a common framework is rare in Europe.

In our sample we found a common framework from early years well into school age only for two of the *German* federal states reviewed (Hessen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern). In *Italy*, the national guidelines cover a curriculum from age three-to-14, but *Scuola dell'infanzia* is defined as a specific context, different from school. In *Greece*, since 2003 the pre-school curriculum (age four-to-six) has been part of a three-volume national Cross-thematic Curriculum Framework Syllabus Design for all grades and subject areas of compulsory education (up to three years of high school).

Some European countries have strong links between their ECEC and primary curriculum, with similar learning areas across both frameworks (e.g. Denmark, England, Finland, Norway). Countries with a pre-primary system

focus on readiness for school and put particular emphasis on learning in areas that link to the primary school system (e.g. Estonia, Poland). Other countries emphasise that they share common principles of learning (Portugal, Estonia), or that the same stakeholders were involved in the development of their pre-school *and* primary school guidelines.

In *Norway*, the Ministry of Education and Research (2011) has established the guidelines ‘Fra eldst til yngst – Samarbeid og sammenheng mellom barnehage og skole’ (From eldest to youngest. Co-operation and coherence between kindergarten and school). In *England*, three of the seven areas of development are the same as the primary curriculum: Literacy (called English in the primary curriculum), Mathematics, Understanding the World (Science (called Science)).

In *the Netherlands*, links between early years and primary curricula depend on the system of provision, and day care (zero-to-four) is still quite separate from the education system. Pre-schools (two-to-four) on the other hand are seen as part of the education system, with the specific function to prevent early educational disadvantages. Goals and curriculum choices, such as the use of a particular education programme, are related to the main objectives of primary education. For the four-to-six year-olds, the 18 core goals stated in the Primary Education Act apply to the primary age curriculum to which the kindergarten curriculum is also related, although it is not an explicit curriculum.

In *Germany - Baden-Württemberg*, the chapters on the six areas of learning and development each include a separate section that explains in which way learning in this field can support and help transition to and learning in school. Furthermore, it is explained in which way the curriculum and learning in school can continue and follow on from the ECEC curriculum and learning in early years.

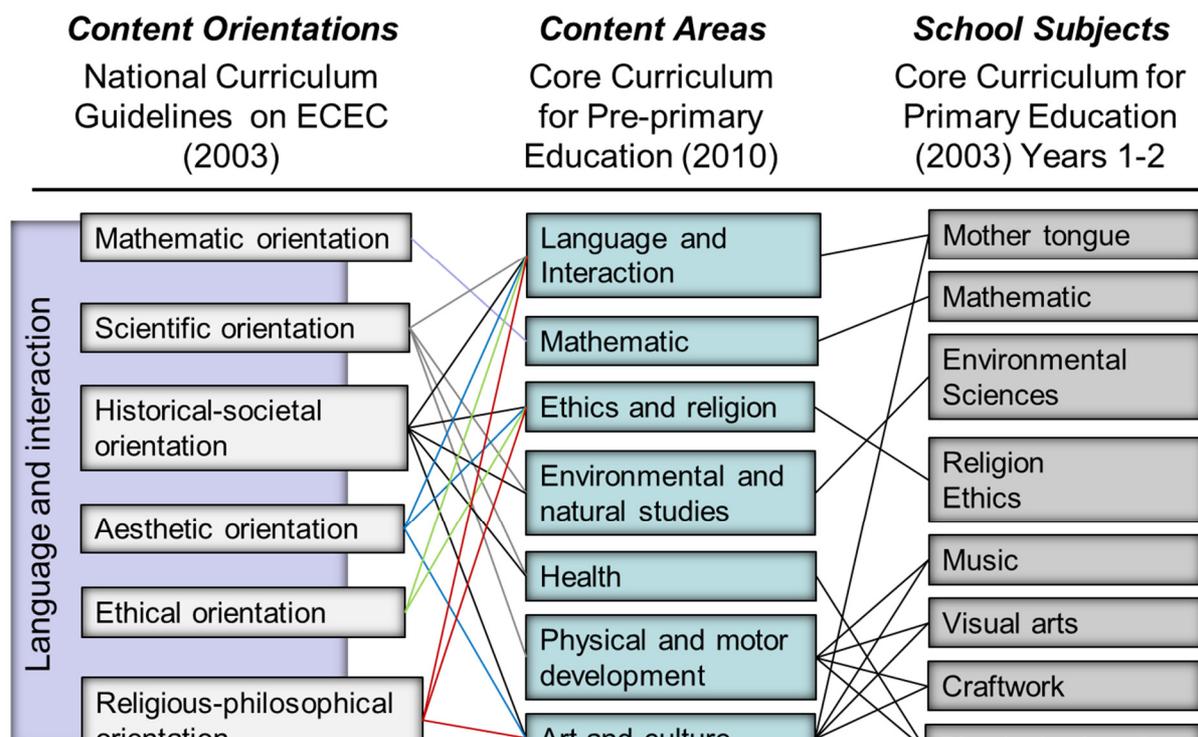


Fig. 3: Finland – Links between Content Areas: Curriculum ECEC – Curriculum Primary School

### T H E M E 3 : T H E O R E T I C A L M O D E L S A N D P E D A G O G I C A L P R I N C I P L E S

Across the countries in our sample, steering documents are eclectic and implicitly influenced by a number of pedagogical and psychological theories. With only very few exceptions (for example, some documents in the federal states of Germany – e.g. Baden-Württemberg; Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), steering documents do not explicitly refer to theoretical models of child development and learning. However, countries report names of theorists or theories which are related to the views of children described in their steering documents. Commonly named are Froebel, Montessori, Vygotsky, Piaget, Steiner, Bronfenbrenner, Bowlby, and Malaguzzi. In addition, mentioned by only one or two countries in our survey are: Bruner, Isaacs, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Humboldt, Freinet, Bandura, Freire, Winnicott, Dewey, Aporti, Ciari, Petersen, Parkhurst, Dolto, Doise, Schmidt, Rosa and Teresa Agazzi, Pizzigoni, Lezine, Pikler, or Wallon. Thus, while there is commonality, there is also significant variability in the theorists mentioned in the survey. In addition, countries list theoretical models (which are mostly expressed indirectly in curriculum steering documents) such as relational approaches, constructivist theories, socio-cultural theories, attachment theories, experiential learning theory, social learning theory, or a situational approach.

Generally, countries' steering documents do not name specific philosophical or pedagogical traditions. ECEC practitioners are encouraged to develop their own curriculum, based on an eclectic approach, and within the principles of their national curriculum framework. In most countries, only a small minority of ECEC settings are based on a unique curricular/pedagogical approach, for example Steiner (Waldorf), Montessori, or Reggio Emilia.

Two examples of our case studies are presented below.

1. When describing the philosophical or pedagogical traditions underpinning the curriculum, *Italy* refers to 'bottom up – top down' processes.

Early childhood pedagogies and a 'culture of childhood', grounded on renewed conceptions of the child/childhood and on local experiences, have both crucially contributed to the establishment of a pre-primary school system, followed by the definition of state curriculum/guidelines. Since 1969, guidelines were not called 'curriculum' nor programme. The idea of a curriculum framework has been accepted with ambivalence in ECEC, and in a sense many of those involved as coordinators, administrators, researchers and theorists consider the ecology of ECEC experiences too dense and rich to be defined merely in curricular terms, and to be deducted or derived from theories. Educational experiences were in most cases first practiced and only then diffused from the *bottom up*, and the need for theoretical justification and a systematic formalisation developed later progressively. A way to conceptualise this process/point of view could be "*bottom up experiences which meet theories*".

It is important to consider the influence played by theories and experiences and the intertwining/encounter of those:

- main influences/traditions can be traced in Montessori, Rosa and Teresa Agazzi, Pizzigoni. More broadly, as in many European countries, Decroly, Freinet (and in Italy Bruno Ciari), Ferrante Aporti, Freiderich Froebel and Johann Pestalozzi; and in developmental theories of reference such as Piaget, Vygotskij (translated into Italian directly from Russian in the early sixties, known and familiar in Italy

for his contributions on play and creativity), Henry Wallon, Irene Lézine and the Cresas group, Pikler and the Loczy experience, Bronfenbrenner; and for zero-to-three Winnicott, Bowlby, Dolto...;

- **municipal experiences** promoted by local administrations, civic movements and Church initiatives, especially in the North and Center of *Italy*, after World War II and strongly from the late sixties (Reggio Emilia with Loris Malaguzzi, Bologna, Pistoia, Milano, Trento....), often documented through journals (*Bambini, Infanzia, Vita dell'infanzia*, etc.)
- since the early Seventies, an **intensive networking** between schools, cities, professionals, journals characterised by a mixture of professional and 'academic' contributions (De Bartolomeis, Bertolini, Frabboni, Mantovani, Becchi...), through nets like the Gruppo Nazionale Nidi-Infanzia, founded by Malaguzzi (first president), Susanna Mantovani, Tullia Musatti, Carlina Rinaldi, Annalia Galardini, Patrizia Ghedini and many other professionals or researchers engaged in different local experiences; or like Federazione Italiana Scuola Materna (Federation of Catholic schools, nowadays mainly run by cooperatives).

All this said, over the years (1969-2012) a progressive shift from a purely holistic model to a holistic curriculum can be traced.' (Mantovani, & Pastori, 2014, 5)

2. *The Netherlands* reports that there is no *single* general philosophical or pedagogical tradition that underpins the curriculum of day care:

There is no single general philosophical or pedagogical tradition that underpins the curriculum of day care, although the European social pedagogy tradition has certainly left its mark (Bennett, 2005). Occasionally, day care centres present themselves as based on the Reggio Emilia approach or the Waldorf (Steiner) approach or some other concept, but they concern a very small minority. Practices in day care have been strongly influenced by, first, a medical-hygiene approach, emphasising safety and health measures, and, second, in a later stage when the day care sector was rapidly expanding, by guidelines and approaches derived from attachment theory, emphasising emotionally secure relationships, teacher sensitivity and support for children's autonomy development. From the perspective of day care professionals, the view of the child as actively involved in his or her own development prevail. Professionals, in interviews, often express ideas about development as mainly maturational, emphasise the uniqueness of the child, underscore the importance of free choice and initiative, and the importance of social relations along with strong personal autonomy development (Huijbregts et al., 2009; Van Schaik et al., in press). They also express the importance of regularity (day schedules), structuring and limiting the setting, authoritative caregiving, and time to rest and relax. They mostly see supporting social-emotional development as the main task of day care, in addition to providing safe care, and they rank the role of day care in language and cognitive development rather low. These views and ideas are strongly in line with general cultural beliefs on child development and child rearing in (mainstream) Dutch society, and reflect that for a long time, day care was not regarded as a separate institution of child development and socialisation, but merely as an extension of the family. Recent developments, including the introduction of the OKE Act and the debates preceding this act, have however had strong influence on the ideas of professionals and the daily practices, showing a clear shift towards a stronger emphasis on educational (including academic) goals, especially in centres with a mixed population (Leseman & Slot, 2013). Many day care centres in inner city areas serving educationally disadvantaged children are nowadays adopting parts of the education programmes that were developed for pre-schools.

The play group curriculum, due to its origins in the initiatives of parents in inner city areas to create possibilities for safe playing in a group, is even less articulated. Play and social interaction used to be the main components of the implemented curriculum, but in later years, preparation for kindergarten and primary school became increasingly important as the target populations shifted from professional middle class to lower class and immigrants. Whereas the professional class shifted from pre-school use to day care use (as a consequence of the remarkable rise in female labour participation), playgroups increasingly came to serve the other social groups and were gradually transformed into pre-schools with an educational focus. With the introduction of special education programmes and national and local policies to strengthen the educational quality (see above), this transformation was completed. Nowadays, the vast majority of former play groups are pre-schools.

The Kindergarten curriculum was initially mostly based on ideas developed by Fröbel, as these ideas were appropriated and adapted by several influential Dutch pedagogues since the end of the nineteenth century. After

the Second World War, the kindergarten curriculum was also influenced by reform movements: Montessori, Jenaplan (Petersen), Waldorf (Steiner) and Dalton (Parkhurst), but only a small minority (8%) of kindergartens and primary schools are currently explicitly based on one of these approaches. Moreover, reform approaches have been adapted to the Dutch context. Since the merging of kindergartens with primary schools in 1985, the emphasis on academic content and teacher-managed instruction has become stronger, especially in the second kindergarten year, towards the transition to grade three (grade one in other school systems). In virtually all kindergartens, the six year-olds are frequently practicing in literacy and mathematics in the final half year. To summarise, currently the kindergarten curriculum can be best characterised as eclectic child-centred. (Leseman, & Slot, 2015)

Across all countries in our sample, we find a shared understanding of the child as unique, active and competent. The cultural values and wider understanding of childhood differ across the countries in our sample, and between regions or settings. Yet, in relation to a shared image of the child, steering documents in our sample reflect a broad consensus of those pedagogical principles which underpin good quality early childhood practice. These can be broadly listed as:

- Holistic pedagogical philosophy
- Child-centeredness
- Emphasis on the child as a unique human being
- Inclusion and equality

While in the following sections, these principles are discussed separately, we want to emphasise that none of them stand alone – they are inter-related and the way one principle is viewed or one approach is implemented, impacts on the other principles and practices.

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### ***HOLISTIC PEDAGOGICAL PHILOSOPHY***

International reports on early years curricula stress the importance of a holistic view of child development and learning (European Commission Working Group, 2014; OECD, 2012d; UNESCO *et al.*, 2012). Across the steering documents in our sample, there is a strong general consensus that child development and learning should be viewed and addressed in a holistic way. Importantly, a holistic approach to education encompasses a wide range of philosophical orientations and pedagogical practices. For example, it encompasses the view that:

- Children’s learning is multi-dimensional. Learning in all dimensions is interconnected. Development happens simultaneously across dimensions, and progress in one area affects progress in another. Thus, the child is viewed as a ‘whole’, including physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as cognitive aspects of learning. Education and care have to be integrated.
- The holistic vision includes a sense of the whole person, who is connected to his or her surrounding context and environment. Learning is seen as a social activity, and emphasis is put on relationships and community participation, with respect for connections between children, families, and communities, and with the natural world (e.g. Miller, 2004; DEEWR, 2009).

- Furthermore, holistic education aims for the fullest possible human development (Forbes, 2003). It emphasises the nature of the child, and respects and values the ‘inner life’, often referred to as the ‘spiritual’ aspects or the ‘creative spirit’ of the human personality. This holistic view of the human being is ‘fundamentally different from the view that is dominant in modern technological culture’ (Miller, 2006), and facilitates a more spiritual and less materialistic worldview.
- Other basic principles of holistic education include a strong respect for the individual personhood of every learner, the view that education is a matter of experience, that learning is experiential, that early years practitioners are facilitators of learning, and that education has to take place in an atmosphere of freedom, should be based on democratic values, and should be an appreciation for the magnificent diversity of human experience (Mahmoudi et al., 2012).

The idea of holistic education is rooted in various historical critiques of modernism, as far back as Rousseau, Dewey, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Emerson, and Alcott in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and of Steiner, Montessori, Malaguzzi, and Krishnamurti in the twentieth century (Forbes, 2003; Miller, 2006). There is not one method of implementing the holistic approach to education and the general principles of holistic education are practiced in distinctive ways and with different emphasis in different countries, regions, or settings. Holistic strategies can be described as activities or actions which ensure children’s health and development in all areas, including happiness, safety and security, personal and emotional health and development, social, cognitive and communication/expressive development, and the development of creativity and values. In terms of curriculum design, such strategies might include (see also DEEWR, 2009; Miller, 2006; UNESCO 2002):

- adopting a unified curriculum for care and early education;
- designing broad curriculum frameworks which do not have a single focus, but reflect expectations for children’s knowledge and behaviour across all developmental domains;
- focus less on the traditional milestones of academic development, and more on the complete physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing of a child;
- focus on relationships, co-operation and partnerships;
- addressing the child’s multiple rights;
- recognising and welcoming diversity;
- strong connections with nature;
- aligning the curriculum with broader assessment practices

In terms of teaching and learning processes, such strategies might include:

- focus on experiential learning;
- focus on emergent learning;
- freedom of choice at every stage of the learning process;
- focus on relationships, co-operation and partnerships;
- adding value to any activity directed towards young children and their families, not just ‘intentional teaching’;
- teaching focused on questioning and enquiring;

- respect for children's inner life with calm environments that enable reflection and time to ask 'deeper questions'

Across our sample, steering documents are rarely specific in how they view this holistic approach to education, and which elements they would like to see implemented in what way. However, most documents refer to a number of the strategies listed above. And whilst some of the curricula frameworks reviewed are more comprehensive and thus 'stronger' in their holistic approach, even those curricula frameworks with a relatively academic approach, as in *England*, also encompass a broad holistic view on education.

Three examples of our case studies are presented below.

*Norway's* national curriculum (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2006) specifies a holistic concept of learning. 'Kindergartens' programmes shall be built on a holistic pedagogical philosophy, with care, play and learning being at the core of activities'. The educational strategy has to, according to the framework, contribute to children's development of social interaction skills, language and communication skills in the broadest sense and the learning process includes play as having content in itself and as an independent educational method. The mutual values of responsibility, egalitarianism, freedom of mind and tolerance are explicitly mentioned in the national curriculum and so is children's participation, meaning that adults have to listen to children's views and use these in the planning. Concerning social inequality and the responsibility of the pre-school, words like 'children with disabilities', and 'children with special needs' are used, and the pre-school should also create an 'inclusive environment', paying attention to 'children's age, level of functioning, gender, and social, ethnic and cultural background'. (Jensen, 2009, 12)

The *Danish* legislation is based on a broad concept of learning, and on a free and creative development of the child in a social context. The national curriculum is designed to enhance the possibilities for children's learning and their development of competences through experiences, play and educational activities, thus improving children's concentration, exploration and experience (Danish Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs, Denmark, 2007). This text also stands above specific learning standards, but six learning plan themes form the basis of the most important objective (chapter 2, section 8); that children acquire competences and the desire to learn. The broad holistic learning concept can be found throughout the Danish legislation, but it differs from the other countries' legislations by addressing the issue of social inequality most explicitly (Jensen, 2009).

The overarching principles of the *English* curriculum (Department for Education, 2012) relate to a number of statements central to the holistic approach to education:

- Every child is a unique child, constantly learning, and learning in different ways and at different rates.
- Children learn through positive relationships and in enabling environments in which experiences respond to their individual needs and where there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents.
- All areas of learning are important and interconnected.

There is a strong recognition of different ways in which children learn with specification of effective teaching and learning characteristics (playing and exploring, active learning, creating and thinking critically). A holistic view of teaching and learning guides the English Curriculum, yet in contrast to the Nordic approach, here the learning goals are defined within all learning areas, and assessment requirements of children's progress and achievements are specified.

So far, it remains relatively unclear whether a more academic or more comprehensive (holistic) approach produces the largest long-term benefits for children. Many European countries seem to strive towards overcoming the strong dichotomy between an academic approach and a holistic approach. This may be a good way forward, but has inbuilt tensions. More research is needed to clarify the benefits of the academic, comprehensive, or combined approaches across different country specific ECEC contexts. Furthermore, tensions in implementing a mixed approach have to be illuminated further. For example, planning or assessing with a focus on a particular outcome or component of learning may be unacceptable within a holistic approach for some, while for others this may be feasible, as long as children's learning is viewed as integrated and connected.

Furthermore, differences in the implementation of a holistic approach in early years curricula frameworks are partly due to a main element of the holistic approach itself, which is that it is responsive to each historical and social context, and each child's individual needs and learning styles. As a result, the implementation of a holistic approach into daily practices is a challenging task, which may seem overwhelming to individual practitioners (Miller, 2006).

### ***CHILD-CENTREDNESS***

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Across the steering documents analysed for this report, we found recommendations which specifically addressed or are strongly related to the broad principle of child-centred education. In terms of its implementation, a child-centred approach to education broadly means that educational and care practices are responsive to each child's unique needs, abilities, and interests – these inform the activities and support that is on offer to young children. In line with this principle, steering documents in European countries recommend that every child's individual needs and capabilities should be at the centre of planning and decision making in all early years settings.

Basing a curriculum on the principle of child-centered education is not a simple task. First, in the field of early childhood education there is strong divergence of views among professionals and practitioners on the issue of what a young child needs, and what his/her interests are. Second, the principle of child-centeredness relates to many other principles of early childhood education and has implications in many ways.

In practice, understanding each child's unique needs and interests depends on each practitioner's sensitivity in terms of their ability to emphasise with the children, and 'see the world through their eyes'. Practitioners have to make judgments about which learning experiences are most relevant to children's interests and needs. Continuous assessment has to ensure that practices are best suited to children's needs. The key method of monitoring and collecting information on children's development and learning progress is continuous observation of children as they engage in daily activities and as they interact with other children in the group and with staff.

Understanding and responding to each child's interests and needs means taking into account the children's age, level of functioning/development, gender, and their wider social, ethnic and cultural background. (For analysis of the way children's age is taken into account in five countries, see Hännikäinen in the Appendix, p102.) Here,

the child-centred approach to education is in accordance with socio-cultural theories which see children as attached to specific contexts and cultures. This has implications for the importance and purpose of partnerships with parents and communities: in order to understand each child in its wider context, staff must communicate and co-operate closely with the child's family as well as the community environment.

Understanding the individual child as a subject also means respecting their agency and empowering children to make their own choices and decisions about their learning. This child focussed approach is in accordance with human rights principles that privilege the uniqueness of each person.

For the development of standard steering documents, this focus on the individual child can create tensions. In many ways, sensitivity to each unique child and its context limits possibilities to prescribe pre-determined programmes for children. This raises the question of how specific pedagogical guidelines should be in national steering documents, and how much freedom has to be given to settings, ECEC staff and children (OECD, 2004). For some, the principle of a child-centred approach may mean that content cannot be predicted or formulated in advance in curricula documents. On the other hand, a curriculum which is solely based on each child's interest may be criticised for being 'too arbitrary', and would make planning, preparation, evaluation and assessment very difficult.

The past decade saw the emergence of a global trend towards formulating frameworks/curricula which define general common goals, and thus provide a general structure and educational direction, while at the same time emphasising the importance of respect for the individual child as a subject. The OECD (2004) recommended that *'all curricula should give centres, teachers and children the largest possible freedom, but still retain the direction of overall common goals. A crucial competence for teachers is the ability to simultaneously meet each child and his or her experiences, while directing the child towards the objectives of learning. The quality of ECEC, as we know, depends on the staff's skills, attitudes and willingness to carefully guide and challenge the child's experience and meaning-making. Yet children must be given the largest possible freedom to grow and learn.'*

Respecting the individual child as a subject while affirming the existence of general common goals creates tensions. Across the countries in our sample, there seems to be a relatively common way of resolving this issue. Steering documents lay out learning areas that should be addressed, and emphasise that in offering children learning opportunities across these areas, practitioners have to take account of children's individual ways of learning, and their interests and needs. This way, a curriculum framework can provide direction, while giving room for children's different learning styles and strategies, and much emphasis is put on children's personal ways of learning and expressing themselves, e.g. play, arts and music, movement, exploration and critical thinking.

In the *English* national curriculum for example, the dilemma between a child's interests and learning goals is resolved as follows. Practitioners are instructed to promote activities/experiences which i) are in tune with children's individual needs, interests, and stage of development; ii) are appropriate to the ways in which children learn; iii) cover the learning areas specified by the English curriculum framework (Department for Education, 2012):

The individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child shape experiences and activities:

- Practitioners (in particular the key person) must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development.
- On-going formative assessment through observation is at the heart of effective early years practice. In their interactions with children, practitioners should respond to their own day-to-day observations about children's progress and observations that parents and carers share.

The ways in which children's learning shapes activities:

In planning and guiding children's activities, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice. Three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:

- playing and exploring - children investigate and experience things, and 'have a go'
- active learning - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements
- creating and thinking critically - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things

The areas of learning and development that shape activities and experiences:

The English national curriculum specifies learning and development requirements which include a list of the seven areas of learning and development which must shape activities and experiences (educational programmes) for children in all early years settings (e.g. giving children opportunities to experience a rich language environment; providing opportunities for young children to be active and interactive, to develop their co-ordination, control, and movement; encouraging children to link sounds and letters; and providing opportunities to explore, observe and find out about people, places, technology and the environment).

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### ***EMPHASIS ON THE CHILD AS A UNIQUE HUMAN BEING***

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UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has led to many new interpretations of ECEC policy and practice. The treaty sets out in detail that every child needs to have a safe, happy and fulfilled childhood regardless of their sex, religion, social origin, and where and to whom they were born. The Convention states the right of children to have an education that enables them to develop their potential in a rich learning environment (Article 28 and 29). The Convention's articles on the participation rights (Articles 12 and 13) set out children's rights to express their views, to be listened to, and to be autonomous.

The relevance of the Convention, and particularly Articles 12 and 13 for very young children, has been pointed out by a number of researchers in early childhood. In line with the Convention on participation, there is now a substantial sociological and historical literature about childhood and its interpretation. Children at all ages are seen as social actors in their own right, as people with agency who make decisions about their own lives in the here and now. Over the past decades, a global trend towards formulating curricula frameworks which embrace a philosophy that focuses on the individual child has emerged. This focus is in accordance with human rights principles that privilege the uniqueness of each person (OECD, 2004).

Steering documents in our sample rarely refer explicitly to international agreements on children's rights and entitlements, nonetheless, across countries, the documents' principles and guidelines are consistent with these.

Documents explicitly refer to:

- non-discrimination and equal treatment in education and care (e.g. inclusive education, acceptance of difference, multi-cultural education);
- the child's right to a secure life and full development (e.g. safeguarding growth and development, emotional security, positive relationships);
- the best interests of the child (e.g. respect for the child's identity, personal values and interests);
- the views of the child (e.g. democratic participation, autonomy, the right to express opinion and to be listened to, emphasis on the child's choice and decision-making).

Yet, again we find differences in emphasis. For example, the *English* national curriculum framework (Department for Education, 2012) fully supports the child's right to health, safety, and good quality education, which promotes their future success, but does not further elaborate on the importance of experience in the here and now, or on participatory processes. Explicit reference to processes of participation or the right to be listened to can only be found in additional guidance materials (e.g. the EFYS Handbook on Assessment, Standards & Testing Agency, 2013). In other countries (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Norway, or Portugal), national steering documents strongly emphasise and elaborate on the importance of democratic participation, autonomy and the child's rights to participate, express opinion, and be listened to. All steering documents emphasise the child's right to a secure, safe and happy childhood in an environment which safeguards the development of their potentials.

## ***INCLUSION AND EQUALITY***

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Equal access and equality of opportunity to all children regardless of their socio-economic, cultural or linguistic background, or their educational needs is one of the main principles of ECEC provision; it has been included in the European policy agenda. Despite this, it is well documented that across nations, children from minority groups and low-income families are less likely to be enrolled in ECEC (European Commission Working Group, 2014; Eurydice, 2009; OECD 2006), and public support for children with special needs has been found to be irregular, under-funded and non-inclusive. Yet, children from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds, and those with additional learning needs have increased risks of poor outcomes, and it has been pointed out that they have the need (or the right) to different and/or additional support (OECD, 2006).

In all countries in this review, there was a policy of full inclusion of children with special needs within mainstream early years provision wherever possible. All European countries have adopted some measures to provide certain groups of children with additional support tailored to their specific needs. Most European countries identify those groups of children using socio-economic, linguistic, cultural or geographic criteria, and some combine this targeted approach with an individual approach. There are three main ways in which additional support is provided: specific measures to support children's development and learning (especially

language development), the provision of additional or specialised staff, and the establishment of special organisational and/or funding arrangements (for more information, see Eurydice, 2014).

Some countries put a specific emphasis on providing an environment that has space for children's own cultural/linguistic heritage. Most countries offer additional support for children from different linguistic backgrounds, and some countries offer education in the minority language. For example, *Norway* has a special obligation to safeguard the interests of Sámi children and families. The municipality is responsible for ensuring that kindergartens for Sámi children in Sámi districts are based on their own language and culture. In other municipalities, steps shall be taken to secure and develop their language and their culture.

The *Finnish* law dictates that day care settings should offer education in at least the three official languages (Finnish, Swedish and Sámi). In *Italy*, the National Curriculum Guidelines refer to a separate document titled 'The Italian way to intercultural education and the integration of non-Italian students in Italy' (*La via italiana per l'educazione interculturale e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri*, 2007). Those Italian regions with bilingual population offer intercultural- multilingual curricula. In *Estonia*, the national curriculum specifies that ECEC settings have to support families with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds by valuing the language and culture of their children.

Many European countries have introduced specific programmes and initiatives targeting children with additional needs. For children from low socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds, most countries provide (to different degrees) comprehensive ECEC services in peer neighbourhoods, with differentiated pedagogy, improved staff resources and outreach to families and communities (OECD, 2001). All countries in our sample emphasise the importance of close co-operation between ECEC staff and parents, the local community, and other professionals or services in order to ensure that the differing values and needs of families are being taken into account, and that ECEC provision meets the diverse needs of children and parents.

Adapting to the individual backgrounds and needs of *all* children requires responsive pedagogical approaches and curricula (e.g. more intensive team planning, individualised education plans). Yet, steering documents in our sample do not give specific guidelines on specific measures that have to be in place to support those groups of children. Often, only broad references to the rights and entitlements of *all* children in ECEC can be found, with an emphasis on respect and recognition of diversity. Individual settings have to ensure that all children and their individual needs and diverse backgrounds are recognised and respected.

Special training for ECEC staff to provide additional support is usually part of their initial education or obtained later through professional development courses. Steering documents rarely mention specific staff competencies with regards to the task of inclusive education and equality.

Two examples in our survey stood out, because in their national curriculum framework, issues of diversity and equality were more fully addressed and were more specific than in other countries – those are *Finland*, and *Greece*:

Regarding the **inclusion of minority groups**, the *Finnish* day care act prescribes that day care centres should offer education in at least the three official languages (Finnish, Swedish and Sámi). The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education use the term “children with different language and culture backgrounds” when referring to Sámi and Roma children, children using sign language, and children with an immigrant background. Children belonging to cultural minorities should be provided with opportunities to grow up in a multicultural society as members of both their own cultural communities and Finnish society. Partnership between staff, parents and cultural communities is emphasised, but the primary responsibility for retaining and developing the child’s own language and culture rests within the family. High staff competences are, however, needed for partnership:

*“Implementing ECEC activities requires that staff should have a good cultural understanding to be able to discuss with parents the varying needs of children coming from different families and for parents’ educational goals to be taken into account on equal terms in the spirit of reciprocity.”*

Children with different language and culture backgrounds receive ECEC within mainstream services:

- Sámi children: ECEC in groups of Sámi-speaking children (as a general rule)
- Roma children: ECEC co-operation with representatives of the Roma culture
- Children using sign language: sign language groups or mixed groups
- Children with immigrant background: partnership between ECEC staff and parents

The National Core Curriculum for pre-primary education notes that there are specific objectives for the education of *immigrant children* which will be pursued within the limits of local resources. Instruction will support the development of the Finnish/Swedish language and, where possible, also the development of the child’s own native language and the opportunity to grow into two cultures. The objective is for children to become aware of the cultural heritage of their own ethnic group and learn to appreciate it.

#### Inclusion of children with special needs

According to the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC, children are entitled to receive sufficient and immediate support in physical, cognitive, emotional or social areas of development as soon as the need becomes apparent. The goal is to provide support within the context of general ECEC services so that the child remains in the group with other children and his/her social interactions within the group are supported. The child’s individual ECEC plan outlines assessments of the child’s need for support, and arrangements for providing support. Provision of support includes *intensified co-operation* between the parents and the ECEC staff. The support received by children should be flexible, and it should change in line with support needs. Continuing support is ensured as the child moves to pre-primary education and from pre-primary to basic education.

The National Core Curriculum for pre-primary education mandates a three tier system of support

- (1) Every child has a right to high-quality **general support** for growth and learning
- (2) **Intensified support** based on a pedagogical assessment is provided when general support is not sufficient. Its goal is to prevent problems from escalating, diversifying and accumulating. Intensified support is based on a learning plan and it may include; support given by a special needs teacher or a special kindergarten teacher, the child’s individual guidance, and flexible group arrangements in addition to co-operation with parents.
- (3) **Special support** decisions are based on reasons such as disability, illness, a functional impairment, or risk factors related to the growth environment. The education provider should hear the guardian or legal representative before making a decision on special support. An individual educational plan which outlines educational contents, pedagogical methods and other necessary support measures will be drawn.

**Inclusive practice:** Support is organised so as to enable children to participate in group activities as fully as possible. Support is provided through various flexible arrangements, such as team teaching or working in small groups and individually. Children with special needs may begin a pre-primary class one year earlier than normal. Inclusive day-care and pre-primary settings may have aids for the entire group or aids for some individual children. Special education kindergarten teachers visit the centres and inclusive groups regularly to consult the staff members. Parental involvement is seen as crucial for enhancing the development of children with any risks.

In *Greece*, for ECEC 0-3 the only part of the Basic Regulation of Operation for I/CCCs to which reference is made to the inclusion of minority groups, is their aim to eliminate the differences that may arise from cultural, economic and educational background of their parents. No other special reference is made to such groups of children.

Over-threes: The term “inclusion” is used in the New Kindergarten Curriculum (2011) to refer to the provision of high quality programs that are based on the following principles:

- respect and recognition of diversity;
- promotion of equity, social justice and active participation for all the children;
- providing a safe/secure kindergarten environment without discrimination;
- family support.

Diversity is conceptualised in the Kindergarten Curriculum (Pedagogical Institute, 2011), not in the narrow sense of ethnicity, but as a personal attribute related to children’s personal characteristics such as gender, age, personality/temperament, abilities and skills, learning style, ways of expression and communication as well as the features of social and cultural background. Thus, every classroom is a polymorphic social place as every child has unique characteristics and may also belong to different groups. It is particularly stressed that this polymorphism should not be treated as a barrier or an incidental/circumstantial event. Diversity is seen as an asset in the educational processes taking into consideration the basic principles that underlie the “differentiated pedagogy”. In this way, all children’s development and learning is promoted along with those from different sociocultural groups or with disabilities/special educational needs.

Inclusion is promoted when the teacher:

- acts as model to promote diversity recognition and respect;
- gives children equal opportunities to use their strengths and experiences in the educational process;
- uses continuous and systematic assessment to record children’s profile, set realistic goals and redesign programs and activities according to children’s progress;
- organises and implements differentiated teaching practices to cover all children’s learning needs;
- promotes group work and collaboration;
- develops partnerships with parents;
- collaborates with social/community services and other professionals.

For children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, teachers should:

- show interest in their cultural and linguistic capital.
- familiarise the children with different cultures and ethnic/cultural differences using arts, literature, music and drama play.
- co-operate with parents and use the family culture in educational practice.

#### Inclusion of children with special needs

Under-threes: In 2002 a new form of centre was introduced, one that offers “integrated care” accommodating children with disabilities aged between two and a half-to- six and a half years for a certain period during the day. They are limited in number around the country and their future is now uncertain due to a gradual decrease in European Community funds and the country’s limited economic resources.

Among the special provisions introduced for these centres are:

- special building facilities;
- psychological help for children;
- counselling for parents and families.

Over-threes: Especially for children with disabilities/special educational needs, teachers should:

- ensure classroom accessibility and make all the necessary arrangements;
- support children’s active participation in the educational process by facilitating communication with children of typical development and organising the learning environment properly (for example, giving clear and precise instructions, modelling use of materials, “thinking loudly”, etc.);
- support children of typical development to accept those with disabilities/special educational needs by:
  - a) giving information without overemphasising diversity and disability,
  - b) focusing on common interests and similarities and,
  - c) giving children with disabilities/special educational needs the chance to have a leading role in some activities (Petrogiannis, Penderi, & Rentzou, 2014).

## **T H E M E 4 : Q U A L I T Y A N D I T S R E L A T I O N T O T H E C U R R I C U L U M**

Views on quality of ECEC vary within countries or regions, according to the broader socio-cultural and political contexts in which the services operate. Quality assessment is also dependant on the perspectives of the different stakeholders, including earlyyears practitioners, parents, researchers, and children. A recent analysis by the European Commission Working Group (2014) concluded that the quality of a service is based on the way in which the assessors perceive how children should learn and grow up in society. The group emphasises the importance of a common concept of the child and childhood among European countries, as this can ‘influence the design and provision of ECEC services and help Member States to judge the quality of ECEC provision’. Based on our analysis of curricula frameworks in 11 European countries, we found broad agreement in Europe on the conceptual views of the child and childhood.

The European working group on ECEC (European Commission Working Group, 2014) also argue that – in order to make improvements in ECEC – it is likely that a variety of factors need to be aligned according to the children’s needs, and the societal demands for their up-bringing. These factors include; raising qualifications, work conditions and support; providing a clear curriculum framework, reducing group sizes or ratios; ensuring parent and community involvement; creating links between systems and thus ensuring continuity, and so on. These areas can be addressed by policy in order to improve ECEC quality, and have the ability to affect the specific pedagogical approaches taken in a group/setting.

Researchers distinguish two kinds of quality: (1) structural quality which includes ratios, space, staff qualifications and physical resources; and (2) process quality which includes relationships and pedagogical support for learning and development. In terms of quality evaluation and assurance, we found that within our review countries, a number of aspects are in focus, from compliance with health and safety regulations, to structural aspects of the setting; participation of parents or the community; the process quality of interactions and learning activities; children’s participation and monitoring of wellbeing, and their developmental progress (see also Theme 8). The details and relative importance of these factors do however vary between countries and systems. *Greece* for example, places a relatively strong emphasis on structural characteristics – most particularly for the under-threes. *Denmark, Italy* and *Portugal* mention that quality is associated with aesthetics, with special regard to the environment. Despite a general consensus on the importance of structural indicators for ECEC quality, there is large variation across Europe for all the aforementioned aspects, especially with regard to staff-child ratios, or the educational levels of ECEC staff.

When questioned, it became apparent that some countries in our review failed to make explicit links between the notion of quality and the national curriculum framework. *Italy* for example, reports that the debate on ECEC-curriculum in connection to process quality is relatively ‘silent’. Access, costs, and basic structural standards represent the key issues of the current debate. ECEC quality in terms of the experiences and educational opportunities that are offered to children has recently lacked discussion in *Italy* on a national level. On the other

hand, Italy establishes a link between the quality of ECEC and the standard curriculum guidelines, in that these guidelines constitute a pedagogical frame that specifies criteria and aims which should be met to ensure good quality in all provisions. In this sense, there is a link between the notion of quality and the curricular frameworks in all countries. *Norway* reports on this very clearly, and argues that clear connections are apparent in a number of chapters in their framework document, including the purpose or content of kindergartens, children's rights to participation, staff qualification, or other demands described in the framework plan (for example Chapter 1 on 'the purpose, values and tasks of kindergartens' and chapter 4 on 'planning, documentation and assessment').

Some countries report that the link between quality and the curriculum is nested in the ensurance of children's wellbeing and development, and indicators of such are often emphasised. For example in *Finland*, curriculum guidelines provide an outline of what ECEC should aim for, with particular focus on the promotion of personal wellbeing, social development, and the development of autonomy. Achievement of certain objectives such as these, become important at the end of pre-school in Finland. In contrast, other countries such as *Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Greece* and *the Netherlands*, focus instead on the achievement of developmental outcomes in the cognitive domain, or those which support later success in school. There remains a priority however across all countries to monitor children's learning and development in these areas through ongoing observation (see Theme 6). For example in *England*, ECEC quality is viewed in relation to the routine assessment of children's learning, and ECEC settings undergo regular inspection, the results of which are then published on-line for parents and the community to see. Despite this, formal tests of child assessment are rare, and this is the case across all countries in our report.

*The Netherlands* report that their curricular framework implicitly presents socialisation goals, but that their basic concern is for the process quality of interaction and the learning activities provided in ECEC. This is inclusive of emotional support, promotion of autonomy, and the stimulation of cognitive competence or peer interactions. When questioned as to whether there are any guidelines in official steering documents regarding quality domains such as emotional and instructional support or classroom organisation, some countries reported no central guidelines on these quality aspects (e.g. *Denmark, Estonia*). This may be explained by the fact that standard guidelines need to allow for enough flexibility to ensure that communities, settings, and ECEC practitioners can adapt to local and cultural circumstances. A lack of these central guidelines for *Germany* can also be explained as a result of the domain 'instructional support' not being considered an aspect of quality for ECEC provision, because instruction is not accepted as an appropriate teaching style for ECEC in this country.

Other countries reported that their standard guidelines refer to the importance of positive relationships or interactions only briefly, or in a very general way (e.g. *England, Germany, Italy, Greece*). In *Finland, Norway, Greece* and *Portugal*, those dimensions of classroom quality as identified in the CLASS quality observation instrument (Pianta et al., 2008) are not utilised directly in official steering documents, but the statements included in the documents clearly reflect these dimensions. In *England*, it has been reported that the use of the Environment Rating Scales fully support the EYFS, and align well with the guidelines of the national curriculum framework. A document showing how the scales can be mapped with the EYFS has been put together (<http://www.ecersuk.org/11.html>). *The Netherlands* report that such a consensus on the core dimensions of

process quality is based on aspects captured by observational measures such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta et al., 2008) or the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (revised edition, ECERS-R; Harms et al., 2005), with an emphasis on emotional support.

To summarise, when questioned about the links between quality and curriculum, the countries in our survey reported on child wellbeing and development, structural characteristics, and to some extent, elements of process quality. The role given to specific developmental outcomes varies between these countries, with some differences in terms of emphasis on cognitive development. One way of resolving some of these differences might be to consider, but not be dominated by, the skills and dispositions needed for confident and successful learning in primary school.

#### **Example Finland: Guidelines/regulations regarding emotional and instructional support or classroom organisation?**

The dimensions of classroom quality as identified in the CLASS are not utilised directly in the Finnish National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC. The following points are raised from the curricula which reflect these dimensions.

##### **Emotional support:**

- *Educators need to be committed, sensitive and able to react to the child's feelings and needs.*
- *... Children have a feeling of togetherness and inclusion. Educators foster the continuity of the child's friendships, and care and education relationships.*
- *The educator listens to children, gives them opportunities to make initiatives, explore, draw conclusions, and express their thoughts.*

##### **Instructional support:**

- *The educator guides children's observations, describes and explains events. Children are offered models for learning language and concepts, and they are spoken to in a way which ensures understanding. Through daily routines and interactions, and play children learn situation-specific language.*
- *The environment should be stimulating and activating and allow the child to observe both spoken and written language, and should provide possibilities to learn through exploration and inquiry.*

##### **Classroom organisation:**

- *Planning of spaces can be used as a means to promote interactions in peer groups and between children and educators. A well-designed ECEC environment promotes activities in small groups where everyone has an opportunity to take part in discussions and interactions.*
- *...Everyday situations form a basis for a well-defined but flexible daily rhythm.*
- *Teaching is embedded in the different phases of the child's day.*
- *Teachers' utilise different modalities (i.e. play, movement, exploration and self-expression through different forms of art) into purposeful and goal oriented activities.*

#### **Example Portugal: Guidelines/regulations regarding emotional and instructional support or classroom organisation?**

The curriculum includes global guidelines for educational intervention. In relation to emotional support, these guidelines include the acknowledgment that (a) personal and social development is based on providing a securing relational context, in which the child is valued and listened to, contributing to his/her wellbeing and self-esteem; (b) the individualised relationship that the teacher establishes with each child facilitates its integration in the group as well as relationships with other children; (c) shared-power between the teacher and children is needed in order to allow for personal and social development (including autonomy).

Related to classroom organisation, the educational intervention guidelines include explicit references to the organisation of the group, time, and space. They include references to ensuring that rules are explicit and understood, recommending that children participate in their elaboration as well as references to supporting children's autonomy, giving them responsibilities and providing choices. Regarding time, they explicitly mention the value of both routines and flexibility.

Finally, regarding instructional support, there are explicit references to provision of problem solving opportunities, performing experiments/use of the scientific method to test hypothesis (concept development); provision of a communication atmosphere where the teachers' own language constitutes a model for children's learning; etc.

Previous analyses indicated that all CLASS dimensions (except negative climate) could be aligned with contents from the Portuguese curriculum guidelines for pre-school education (Fialho, Correia & Aguiar, 2013).

## **T H E M E 5 : P E D A G O G I C A L I N T E R A C T I O N S**

### ***EMPHASIS ON RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS***

Today, pedagogy for young children focuses strongly on relationships and emphasises the emotional aspects of interactional quality. Children are viewed as learning their best within positive relationships with their parents, families, peers and their early childhood practitioners. This is also reflected by the curriculum framework reports sent to us by the countries in our sample, which emphasise notions such as:

- continuity, familiarity;
- availability/proximity, closeness;
- sensitivity;
- warmth, affection, pleasure, love;
- emotional security, trust and connectedness

There is strong research evidence to show that almost all children, not only those from less stimulating home environments, can benefit from ECEC if they enjoy positive relationships and interactions with their educators (see also CARE study D4.1, Review of research on impact of ECEC). There is a general consensus between countries, that young children, particularly those who participate in ECEC, require predictable activities and routine levels of care that should be provided within a balanced curriculum (Dalli et al., 2011; Melhuish 2004a). However, research so far provides little evidence of how to best combine the emotional aspects of quality with other elements of interactional quality. For example, the combination of play-based activities and routines, use of narrative and story-book reading, and informal conversations – both within child-caregiver interactions, as well as peer relationship interactions. This leads to the question; how can early years curricula frameworks provide clear guidelines on high quality pedagogical practices, whilst ensuring healthy all-round development for children?

Continuity and stability of care were mentioned by most countries as aspects of good quality education for young children. In *Italy* for example, the concepts ‘Relazioni’ (interpersonal and social relationships), and ‘Continuity’ (relational stability of the context) are key to the pedagogical approach taken in ECEC. The acknowledgement of the importance of stability in caregiving arrangements, and the continuity of caregivers for infants and toddlers is based on the views that; young children need to form bonds of attachment and trust, and that interactions with children have to be based on the caregiver understanding of the individual child and its idiosyncracics (Melhuish, 2004a; Trevarthen et al., 2003). Despite this, stability in ECEC settings is rare, often constricted by staff retention, staff turnover, and changes in ECEC arrangements. As a result, more needs to be known about how to support children from all backgrounds in adapting to change in their ECEC environment.

One of the ways in which continuity is facilitated within early-years settings is by implementing a key person or primary caregiver approach, in which individual children are paired with a specific practitioner. A child’s key person will usually be responsible for their day-to-day care and is the person with whom they have a special relationship; the aim is to allow the development of meaningful and lasting relationships. Although the key person approach has a basis in developmental theory, and some basis in research, relatively little is yet known about how it should best be implemented (Dalli & Kibble, 2010; Dalli & Rockel, 2012; Elfer & Dearnley, 2007; Evangelou *et al.*, 2009). This is an important area for future attention.

Emphasis on close relationships in ECEC coincides with a strong individualistic viewpoint. Such a dyadic approach to relationships in group settings, with interactions between the practitioner and the individual child at the centre, is not without criticism (Ahnert, Pinquart & Alm 2006; Van Schaik, Leseman & Huijbregts, 2014). There is critique that this undervalues the dynamic of groups and the way in which relationships and interactions between groups of peers can be supportive of young children’s development. Broadly speaking, an individualistic approach is reflected in many of the curricular frameworks in our study, but there is slight variation, with some countries explicitly mentioning issues such as positive interactions between peers, positive classroom climate, or children’s friendships (e.g. Finland, the Netherlands).

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### ***THE ROLE OF THE ADULT TO GUIDE, SUPPORT AND FACILITATE***

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The general emphasis on the importance of positive relationships and social interactions in our review is closely linked to the way in which one views the roles of adults in ECEC settings. To summarise, across all countries in our sample, European curricula outline the roles of the adult:

- to provide warmth and closeness, sensitivity and sympathy;
- to know, understand and react to the child’s individual ways of communicating, needs and feelings;
- to promote and to guide educational activities/experiences which are in tune with educational goals for all children;

- to promote and guide educational activities and experiences which meet children’s individual needs, interest, and stage of development, and are appropriate to the ways in which children learn;
- to promote the ways in which children learn by facilitating children’s play, exploration, discovery and dialogue;
- to give children time and room for initiatives;
- to meet children with trust and respect;
- to listen to children, continuously observe children and interpret their experiences and discoveries;
- to communicate with parents, children, and other staff

This is in line with previous international reviews of ECEC curricula (OECD, 2004; UNESCO, 2004; Bertram & Pascal, 2002) which concluded that across Europe, there is consensus on the role of the adult to guide, support, scaffold and facilitate the child. This is based on an understanding of the child as an individual, and the ways in which to respect the needs and interests of the children, whilst allowing for a high degree of initiative, by leaving them room to explore, and try things that are suited to their different learning styles and strategies.

This level of agreement across the role of adults in ECEC settings is encouraging; however, the role described and given to the early years practitioner is most complex and challenging. This leads to the question of how to best implement these principles in practice. It also directly leads to the question of what kind of practitioner is needed to best fulfil these roles – which skills and knowledge do practitioners in ECEC have to bring with them, and how can they be best supported in their professional work.

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### ***EMPHASIS ON ENABLING LEARNING THROUGH EXPLORATION, PROJECT BASED ACTIVITIES, PLAY AND NARRATIVES***

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While standard curricular guidelines can provide some information on how early years practitioners can offer diversified opportunities for children’s active learning, such guidelines have to be broad in order to leave enough room for individual settings and ECEC practitioners to be able to adapt their own curriculum to individual and local circumstances.

**Across the documents in our sample, there is general agreement that experiences and learning activities in ECEC have to relate to children’s real life experience.** In many cases, steering documents suggest project-based learning activities that encourage children to explore phenomena in their environment over an extended period of time. Activities include observation, asking relevant participants’ and experts’ questions, collecting artefacts, and presenting their observations, ideas, memories, and newfound understanding of the phenomenon in a variety of ways. Through project work, children are encouraged to make their own decisions and choices (in co-operation with their peers) about the work to be undertaken.

Lilian Katz (1998) points to several features of the project based approach from her observation in the Reggio Emilia pre-school. She argues that the ‘unpacking’ of everyday objects and events can be deeply meaningful and interesting to young children, and the familiarity of the topic enables them to actively contribute to the project

from their own knowledge. She also highlights another strength of this approach, namely that it can encourage children's activities across all learning areas, adding content to relationships and interactions between children, and between adults and children. A good number of the curricula frameworks in our study stress the importance of offering activities across all learning areas, yet there is very little guidance regarding the contents of relationships and interactions. This seems striking, considering that there is such strong agreement between countries on the essential role of communication, interaction and dialogue as key factors in children's learning and wellbeing.

One way to improve quality in ECEC is to examine the content of adult-child relationships and interactions, with particular attention to what extent these interactions are based on what the children are learning, planning, and thinking about their work, play, and each other. It is apparent however, that adult-interactions are often based on rules and routines (Katz, 1998) rather than exploration or problem-solving, and there are in fact large differences between classrooms in terms of the amount of adult-managed academic activities that take place - with some ECEC practitioners hardly providing any academic content (Connor et al., 2006; Early et al., 2005; de Haan, Elbers, & Leseman, 2014).

It has been argued that defining and working towards educational goals also adds content to the ECEC curriculum. Within our sample, there is wide variation between the countries' curricula documents in terms of their emphasis on the definition of goals for learning. On the other hand, all documents agree on the fact that early years practitioners have to offer activities which are in tune with children's interests and needs. There is an in-built tension between meeting each child's interest while also providing a general direction to children's learning. The project based approach may be a particularly fruitful way of bridging this divide. Yet, it has to be noted that the project based approach as described above was implemented by centres in Reggio Emilia which were well funded and particularly well supported by their communities.

#### **Example of a Reggio Emilia project, 'What happens at the supermarket'**

*'First, the children made several visits to the market, including one when it was closed! In this way they were able to get a close look at various features of it, to sketch many of the objects and elements that impressed them, and to run up and down the aisles undisturbed by shoppers, noting anything of interest about the facility, including how their voices sounded in such a large interior space. Detailed drawings of the supermarket, the rows of baskets, the counters, shoppers with or without baskets, with or without children under foot, the cashiers, and so forth are captured in remarkable detail in the drawing of the supermarket scene. ... The children also shopped at the supermarket, giving due attention to preparing the shopping list, paying for their purchases, receiving change, and then using the items for cooking upon their return to the school. Some of the children interviewed the manager and put a barrage of questions about what is being involved in being the boss ... The children also submitted their 'wish list' to the manager reflecting what they thought should be added to the facility ... In addition many children developed their own designs of packages of cereals, crackers, ... The children also constructed a market in the classroom and enjoyed the dramatic play greatly enriched by their close observation of the objects, people, and events they observed at the market.'* (Katz, 1998, 21)

**Across the analysed documents, we found a strong emphasis on the message that, in order for children's learning and development to be most effective, activities should follow children's individual ways of learning, and encourage play, exploration, and self-expression.** Through enabling children to learn in this way, the curriculum is seen to effectively encourage active learning, and processes which involve decision-making, problem-solving, and independence. While there is a strong message that play, exploration, and self-

expression are central to young children's learning, curricula documents refer to these concepts in a very general 'taken for granted' way, with little reflection on what they actually encompass. This signifies the challenge of raising questions as to what these concepts truly mean in the context of young children's learning.

For example, the positive value of play and the need to create conditions for learning through play is a consistent theme when considering young children's learning (Stephen, 2006; European Commission Working Group, 2014). This theme is also strongly reflected in the documents analysed in this study, and is based on a general assumption that play is a particularly important avenue to stimulate children's enquiry and experimentation, and thus a fruitful way to enhance language development, personal/social /emotional development and motor skills. There is however, little differentiation between the different types of play (e.g. imaginative, physical and exploratory play) and the way in which these different types serve different developmental purposes.

Much of children's play in ECEC happens in a self-initiated way, yet, there is an important role for adult-facilitated play (Evangelou, Sylva & Kyriacou; Wild & Glenny, 2009), and it has been argued that play should not only be seen as an opportunity for children to learn, but also for adults to teach and contribute to children's learning (Bennett, Wood & Pascal, 1997). Thus, every curriculum framework ought to deal with play and learning, and make explicit its view on the relation between them (OECD, 2004, 2012a); a recommendation we can fully support on the basis of the documents analysed for this study.

Some recent research evidence suggests that playful, child-centred approaches which incorporate some degree of adult 'scaffolding' (extend children's thinking), are more effective teaching strategies for achieving academic outcomes with young children than those involving either direct instruction, or free play with no active adult guidance (e.g. Alfieri, Brooks, Aldrich & Tenenbaum, 2010; Chien *et al.*, 2010; Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Newcombe & Golinkoff, 2013). Recent research based on the tradition of emergent literacy and numeracy, has shown that child-following, playful and authentic activities in literacy and numeracy grant children initiative, and can be used to effectively introduce children into academic subjects, without decreasing the social-emotional quality (e.g. Bodrova, 2008; Bus, Leseman & Neuman, 2012; van Oers, 2012).

The challenge for everyday practice is therefore in identifying how to best support the type of play which extends children's thinking, whilst not dichotomising between child-initiated play with no adult-involvement, and instruction with specific aims and a top-down mode.

**Across all countries, there is agreement that talk and narrative, play an essential role in children's learning** – their social and emotional development, as well as their development of language, literacy, and cognitive and mathematical development. Talk and narrative can take place in many contexts – play and project-work are only some examples. Storytelling, or the use of familiar songs or rhymes are other possibilities. Conversations can stem from stories and fictional scenarios, as well as real-life contexts and experiences. One important issue is that communication has to be rich, both between adults and children as well as between children. It should give children the opportunity to reflect on experiences, to hypothesise about alternative

outcomes and consequences, and to guide discourse around their scientific enquiry (Evangelou *et al.*, 2009; Mathers *et al.*, 2014).

Research has shown that sustained shared thinking is an important element of effective classroom pedagogy (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). This study demonstrated that within effective English ECEC settings, adults offered opportunities for dialogue and use of complex language, and children were encouraged to problem solve. Adult-child interactions involved sustained shared thinking as well as open-ended questions to extend thinking. These strategies require knowledgeable educators, and time and space to reflect, question, and explain even the most complex issues. Despite this, it is also apparent that opportunities for extended interactions in early years settings can be few and far between (Ahnert, Rickert & Lamb, 2000; Datler *et al.*, 2012; Winton & Bussey, 2005), making it hard to achieve such effective methods in ECEC.

### ***A BALANCED APPROACH TO PEDAGOGY***

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In line with previous curriculum reports (Eurydice, 2014; OECD, 2012a), most countries in our sample recommend a balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities, as well as between group, and individual activities. While some documents emphasise the importance of free activities more than others, there is a general emphasis that both – adult-organised, and child-led activities are important for children’s learning. In terms of instructional grouping, we identified in our sample some emphasis on the message that, activities in small groups should be promoted so that all children can take part in discussions and interactions. Some countries also point to the importance of interactive peer-group situations where children learn together and from each other.

This signifies an ongoing challenge for early years practitioners in everyday practice to achieve an appropriate balance between adult and child-led activities. Some countries explicitly state that the right balance depends on children’s stage of development, with a gradual shift towards more adult-guided activities as children become older. Research on actual classroom activities and their associations with child outcomes is sparse (de Haan, Elbers & Leseman, 2014), leaving much room for debate of “where along the continuum of ‘child-centred’ to ‘teacher-directed’ it is best to define the role of the teacher for optimising children’s [development]” (Winsler & Carlton, 2003, p. 156).

There is a lack of conclusive evidence regarding this debate, and the research findings which exist on the issue draw a complicated picture. Some studies have shown that free play, meal time and routine comprise a large amount of a typical pre-school day, possibly taking up to about a third of the time (Chien *et al.*, 2010; Fuligni *et al.*, 2012). This is disconcerting in the light of findings that during meal and routine time, children experience the least effective instructional interactions (Fuligni *et al.*, 2012), and that children in those settings with the highest amount of free choice time (as compared to time in instruction or scaffolded learning) made the smallest gains in a number of language, literacy, and mathematics outcomes (Chien *et al.*, 2010). Children in settings that are rated highly for personal care and routine practices are also found to be less co-operative, sociable, or confident (Mathers & Sylva, 2007).

Academic activities, particularly those with the educator being in lead, are positively associated with growth in emergent school skills (Justine, Mashburn, Pence & Wiggins, 2008; Klibanoff *et al.*, 2006), especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Bus *et al.*, 2012; deHann *et al.*, 2014). However, there is a large range in terms of the time that educators spend on academic activities, even if they work within the same system or with the same pedagogical approach (Connor, Morrison & Slominski, 2006; Early *et al.*, 2005; deHaan *et al.*, 2014).

Research findings on the effects of the use of direct instruction on child outcomes have been mixed (e.g. Camilli, Vargas, Ryan & Barnett, 2010; Hart *et al.*, 1998; Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003; Singer & Singer, 2005), perhaps a result of the fact that adult-managed activities are carried out in whole-group settings (deHaan *et al.*, 2014). It has been argued that whole group settings limit the interaction opportunities and only allow for one child at a time to contribute actively to the ongoing activity, thus leaving more children passively listening or watching (de Hann *et al.*, 2014). Meanwhile, free-play time has the potential to offer ample opportunities for early years practitioners to get involved in supporting rich, one-to-one conversational interactions, through extending children's ideas and interests, and providing exposure to advanced linguistic models (Cabel *et al.*, 2013).

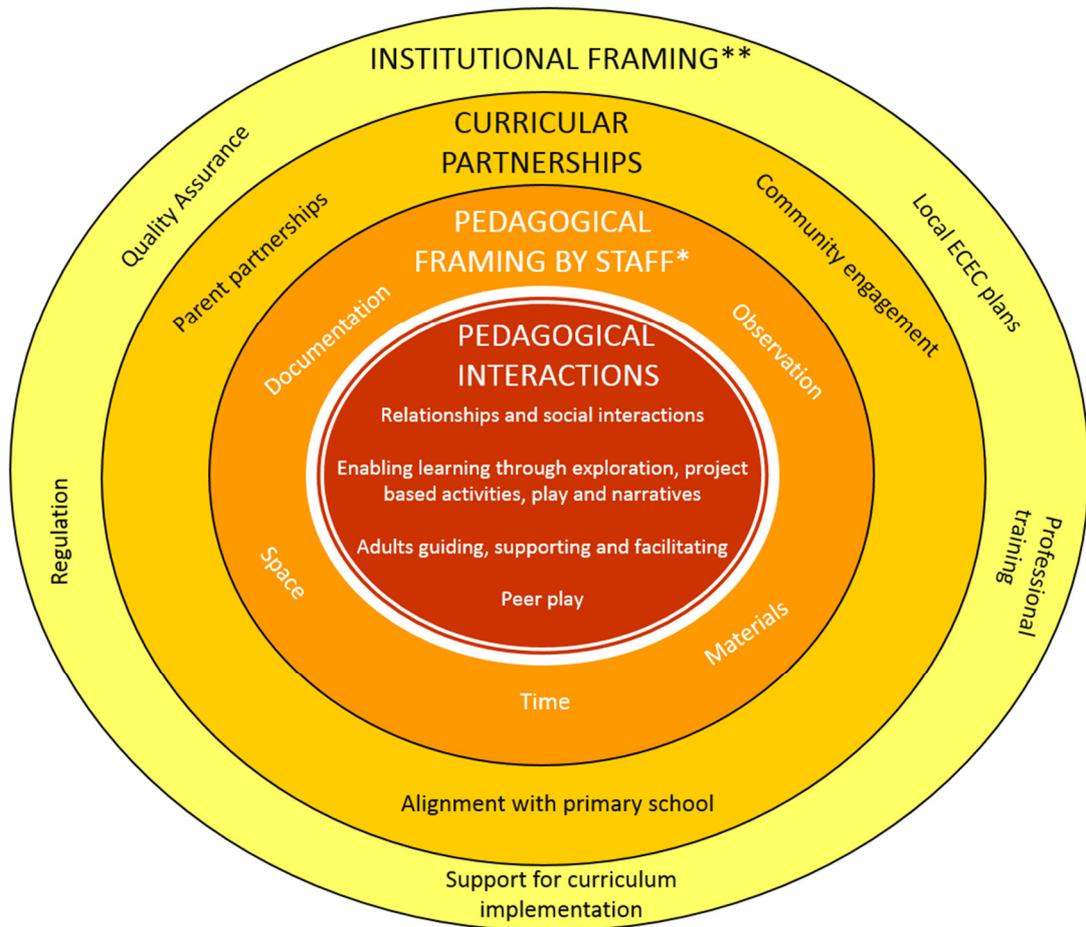
Following such results, it has been concluded that a well balanced approach between adult-managed activities particularly in small group settings (rather than whole groups), and child-managed educational and play activities may be the best pedagogical practice for ECEC (deHaan *et al.*, 2014; Fuligni *et al.*, 2012).

### ***PEDAGOGICAL PROCESSES AT DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONAL LEVELS***

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The cultural values and wider understanding of childhood differ in each country, region and programme, and so do views on ECEC quality. Yet, our analysis carried out for the CARE study found common views of children and their learning across all countries, although always at the global level. Furthermore, curricula frameworks across the different countries in our sample reflected a broad consensus in the understanding of those pedagogical approaches and interactions which underpin good quality early childhood education practice. The following themes (Theme 6-8) describe practical and institutional support of pedagogical interactions discussed in this chapter. While they are discussed separately for the purpose of this report, and grouped under separate themes, we want to emphasise that none of them stand on their own – they are inter-related and the way one principle is viewed or one approach is implemented, impacts on the other principles and practices.

Figure 3 presents a pedagogical model which describes pedagogical practice at the child level, e.g. face to face interactions with children, at the setting level, e.g., planning for activities and assessing childrens' learning, and at the institutional level, e.g., professional training for staff. It shows clearly that pedagogy is more than a list of activities with children; it is a scholarly discipline that focuses on the means by which adults within society inculcate the young into the practices and values of their society.



\*underpinning activities and resources which guide and support pedagogical practices  
\*\*institutional bodies which guide and support pedagogical practices

Fig.4: Pedagogical model, adapted from Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden and Bell (2002)

## ***T H E M E 6 : P E D A G O G I C A L F R A M I N G B Y S T A F F – U N D E R P I N N I N G A C T I V I T E S A N D R E S O U R C E S W H I C H G U I D E A N D S U P P O R T P E D A G O G I C A L P R A C T I C E S***

### ***OBSERVATION AND DOCUMENTATION***

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Throughout Europe, continuous observation of children's learning is crucial to the role of the practitioner in early years practices. On the basis of this reviews country reports, we found that continuous observation serves a number of purposes: i) to guide practitioners' preparation and planning in tune with children's interests and needs, ii) to help continuous reflection and evaluation of practice, iii) to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching, and to document the development of children in certain areas.

Across all countries in our sample, ongoing daily observation of children's activities and interactions with their peers and educators is systematically encouraged for children of all ages. Observation focuses on children's interests, experiences or questions, and enables practitioners to place the child at the centre of the curriculum. Observation is usually carried out for the individual child, but can also be carried out in relation to whole groups.

There is agreement across all countries that the purpose of ongoing observation is to guide practitioners' planning and preparation which builds on children's interests and needs. In a good number of countries, the goal of observation is also to establish and document the child's level of development. For example, in *Estonia*, the National Curriculum demands that the individual pre-school institution develops a curriculum which lists the developmental targets for six-to-seven year-old children. These are skills documented across four areas (play, cognitive and learning, social, and self- management skills) which are expected from six-to-seven year-old children. At the end of pre-school, children receive a 'readiness for school-card', which describes the developmental progress of a child, and an educators council then utilises this to decide which methods will be used for assessing the individuals learning and development.

Formative assessment is common, but other methods can be used as well. The curriculum framework in *Germany - Baden-Württemberg* advises settings to carry out formative day-to-day observations of children, as well as more systematic assessments of children's development and learning. Individual settings have autonomy to choose their assessment tools. Assessments are intended to guide pedagogic interactions and planning, to help self-evaluation, and to facilitate co-operation. Child portfolios are created in order to capture multiple perspectives on the child's development and learning, including those from the children themselves, their educators, and their parents.

Some countries note increasing pressure to report on children's achievement of specific learning objectives as outlined by their steering documents. In *Denmark*, one main feature of quality assurance lies in judging through evaluation and documentation to what extent applied pedagogical methods and activities, as well as child

environment, result in achieving the learning objectives that are outlined in educational curricula. The new Day-Care Act introduces regulations regarding language assessments for three year-olds and language stimulation programmes. *The Netherlands* sees an increasing (policy) pressure to use standard norm-referenced assessments of language, literacy, and mathematics to ‘prove’ effectiveness. This relates to national policy, and is called the ‘result oriented approach’. In *England* the government has recently abolished an observational rating scale at the end of the Foundation Stage in favour of quantitative assessment in the first year of school. Many ECCE staff oppose this move, which seems to be influenced by “downward” pressure from the primary school.

Other countries specifically report that documentation of achievements is not the aim of formative observations (Finland, Italy, Norway). These countries emphasise the role of observation and documentation in supporting educators’ reflective practice, and children’s self assessment is becoming an increasingly important method in helping practitioners reflect on children’s experiences and development. In *Finland*, observation of children’s development is slightly more structured for children over the age of six, but even here, the focus is on growth and learning and not on the achievement of objects. The curriculum steering document in *Germany (Berlin)*, emphasises that continuous observation and documentation of children’s learning helps to evaluate the processes taking place in the all areas of learning. While the document defines broad aims for all these areas, observation is not carried out in order to assess if children perform as expected for their age, but to establish whether they develop well enough according to their own potential. In *Greece*, formative assessment features in the kindergarten curriculum, with an emphasis on continuous and systematic observation of children. This is to record the strength, needs and interests of individuals, to enable planning of learning environments, and to find ways of incorporating children’s pre-existing knowledge into new learning activities. Thus in many countries, observation serves dual purposes; firstly to plan for future activities that will interest the children, but also to assess the developmental strengths of individual children. It is the latter that enables caregivers to plan actively with individual progression in mind – not just interest.

#### **Example England:**

In **planning** and guiding children’s activities, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice.

Practitioners (in particular the key person) must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development.

**On-going formative assessment is at the heart of effective early years practice:** Assessment plays an important part in helping parents, carers and practitioners to recognise children’s progress, understand their needs, and to plan activities and support. Ongoing assessment (also known as formative assessment) is an integral part of the learning and development process. It involves practitioners **observing children** to understand their level of achievement, interests and learning styles, and to then shape learning experiences for each child reflecting those observations. In their interactions with children, practitioners should respond to their own day-to-day observations about children’s progress, and observations that parents and carers share.

Assessment is part of every-day practice; in addition to two assessment ‘reports’:

**Progress check at age two;** aim: to identify strengths, and areas where the child’s progress is less than expected. The EYFS defines 17 learning goals (across seven areas learning and development: communication and language, physical development, personal, social and emotional development, literacy, mathematics,

understanding the world, expressive arts and design). These define the specific skills and competencies, and the knowledge and understanding that all young children should have gained (and are assessed on) by the end of the Reception year/age five. Competencies in all of these goals are summarised in assessment report at the end of the EYFS called the '**Early Years Foundation stage Profile**'. This aims to provide a well-rounded picture of the child's knowledge, understanding and abilities; to indicate whether children are meeting expected levels of development, exceeding them or not yet reaching expected levels, and to provide a picture of their readiness for year one.

Some countries emphasise that ECEC staff should co-operate closely with parents in order to share their observations of children's learning and development, but also to include the perspectives of the parents' on their child's learning and development in their documentation (e.g. England, Finland, Germany – Baden-Württemberg, Italy). Active involvement of parents in children's assessments enables the parent to feel well connected and informed about what happens in the ECEC setting. It helps them to better their understanding and to value the learning processes taking place in the ECEC setting, but also the home, where this understanding might then aid their stimulation of the child's learning.

Most countries recommend the keeping of written records of early years practitioners' observations. While in some countries, written records are created throughout all ages and stages of ECEC, this practice is more common for the older age-groups. The method of collecting and presenting written records of observations can be decided on a local level, for ECEC systems, or by individual institutions. The use of portfolios or diaries are examples of the possible methods. In some countries, ECEC practitioners document learning processes and children's achievements at the end of ECEC. Some countries recommend that documentation is shared at the end of ECEC with the primary school teacher in order to facilitate transition (e.g. England, Estonia).

In other countries, written documentation of children's learning will also be shared with the children themselves. This element is central to the ECEC curriculum in *Italy*.

In *Italy*, 'documentazione' (the act of observing, listening, recording and sharing) underpins much of Italian practice. Such records, and the conversations that flow from them, provide children and caring adults with a 'visible memory' of what they have done, often together. It gives educators insight into what children understand or do not understand, and is the basis for shared planning of activities for future development. Documenting and the sharing of records with the children takes place in an 'intersubjective space'. This space is one in which participants create a common understanding and share their responses and ideas. On this basis, children move forward in their ideas and their skills. Adults and children use documentation to 'propose' new plans or 'provoke' new ideas.

The Italian tradition gives the paramount role to document in a way that can be reflected back to children in terms of what they have done and what they have learned. In Reggio Emilia, visual representations, such as paintings, drawing, clay work, etc. are seen as a way for children to communicate their ideas, feelings, understandings, imaginings and observations. These representations then serve as a basis for hypotheses, observations, and fresh representations. They are not decorative products to be taken home. Rather, they are used as resources for further exploration and deepening knowledge of the topic. Educators in Reggio Emilia refer to these graphic representations as 'graphic languages', with children 'reading' their own and each other's drawings. Educators transcribe the recorded comments and the discussions of the children at work; with this documentation, the drawings are 'read' and 're-read' by the teaching staff as a basis for planning next steps in the

exploration of the topic (Katz, 1998). In this sense, documenting is a stimulus to new learning and not 'just' a static record of it.

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### ***IMPORTANCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT: MATERIALS, SPACE AND TIME***

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Across our sample, many curriculum documents explicitly refer to aspects of the environment as important factors of children's educational experience in ECEC. Countries mention that the environment has to be safe, yet stimulating and challenging, it has to provide freedom as well as security. Spaces and materials have to be rich and aesthetical – they mirror the value of childhood (with particular emphasis on aesthetics in Italy). Time is an important factor; there has to be time for activities, timing should be relaxed, and a predictable structure with thought out routines is seen to be important. In *Italy*, the concepts of space and time are given particular importance and are often referred to as 'third teachers' (Malaguzzi). The positive value of outdoor environments in providing the ideal context to encourage young children to explore, experiment, move and be active is particularly emphasised, especially by the Nordic countries.

An emphasis on the environment is in line with recent reviews on ECEC which emphasise that environments need to be calm, quiet, and not overstimulated. They need to be rich in things to explore, facilitating a range of activities, and allow children the right amount of time to appreciate and respond to a range of experiences (see also CARE review D4.1). Importantly, aspects of the environment are not just directly related to child outcomes, they have an effect on the quality of interactions that adults can offer to children. It has been argued, that whatever the material, facilities and specialist equipment, it is the guided interaction on the part of adults that enhances development (Evangelou *et al.*, 2009). Appropriate environments for children have to match each stage of development, thus, planning and organising space and time is essential to the provision of good quality care, and early years practitioners have to be knowledgeable and skilled in how to best make use of the time and space available to them (Mathers *et al.*, 2014).

## ***T H E M E 7 : C U R R I C U L A R P A R T N E R S H I P S***

### ***P A R E N T P A R T N E R S H I P S A N D C O M M U N I T Y E N G A G E M E N T***

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National and international reports on ECEC curricula all strongly recommend that ECEC provisions ensure strategies which facilitate the participation and involvement of parents and communities (European Commission Working Group, 2014; Eurydice, 2014; Mathers *et al.*, 2004; OECD, 2006; Taguma *et al.*, 2012). The aims of a regular two-way communication between parents, ECEC staff and community members/services as described in the existing literature are:

- *Taking account of diverse perspectives of parents/families in the planning and implementation of the curriculum.* This includes the aim of encouraging parents to express their views on the activities and practices taking place, and their own goals and aspirations for their children's development. It should help to create conditions for mutual trust, and sharing of goals.
- *Enhancing the continuity of children's experiences across different environments;* thus supporting adaptation to care, and children's engagement in early learning.
- *Supporting both parents' and practitioners' knowledge of children's learning and development.* This should help to promote the self-esteem of both caregivers and parents. Moreover, it helps to make ECEC services more responsive to children's and parent's needs, complementing the family and offering support and additional opportunities to parents and children.
- *Recognising and responding to signs of family stress or other difficulties in supporting children's development;* this includes helping to enhance the home learning environment in inspiring parents to offer children learning activities in the home, or providing parents with resources or tips on learning activities. Certain groups such as low-income and vulnerable families may particularly benefit from support in providing good care for their children.
- *Creating a continuum of services:* Young children's lives are nested in a wider environment than the home and ECEC settings alone – they are also part of their neighbourhood and community. All services within this community have to collaborate in order to best support children and families. This includes the provision of expanded services and referrals, as well as space for partnerships and the participation of parents (Taguma *et al.*, 2012). It has been argued that such an inter-agency approach, which combines care and education, early childhood and family support programmes, might be most effective in answering the demands of local communities in the context of diversity (European Commission Working Group, 2014; Eurydice, 2009; Taguma *et al.*, 2012).

- *Expressing values of democracy and participation:* Finally, parent and community participation are crucial to ECEC services in themselves, as they emphasise values of democracy and participation (European Commission Working Group, 2014).

In the light of an increasing emphasis on the importance of parent and community engagement with ECEC providers, international reports recommend national, regional, or local regulations that require the involvement of families in all aspects of education; a curriculum that requires ECEC staff to collaborate with parents and communities; working conditions and leadership which create opportunities for co-operation; and special training to help ECEC staff to develop the skills needed to promote family and community involvement (European Commission Working Group, 2014; Taguma *et al.*, 2012).

Strategies used by ECEC providers to facilitate parental and community engagement differ from country to country, and include formal and informal mechanisms. Across the European countries in our survey, parental involvement is part of the statutory requirements of early years provision. While in some countries, the responsibility for the development of co-operation with families rests within each ECEC setting (e.g. Finland, Portugal), other countries recommend the types of support that settings should provide to parents (e.g. Greece, Poland). There is general agreement that informal measures by themselves are not sufficient, and that systematic practices have to be developed to support parental engagement. For example, exchange between parents and early years practitioners during drop-off and pick-up times is important but needs to be supplemented by information sessions and focused parent-educator meetings.

During such meetings, parents and practitioners share information on the child's development and learning. Settings are required to hold development conversations between ECEC staff and parents at least once a term or once a year (e.g. England, Estonia, Germany – Berlin, Greece). In other countries, the role of parents in their child's development and learning receives considerably more attention, and meetings take place more regularly. In *Finland* and *Germany - Berlin*, individual ECEC plans are drawn for each child in co-operation with parents, and the implementation of these plans is regularly assessed. In some instances, parents also get guidance on home learning. Effective strategies to facilitate this exchange include the sharing of documentation of children's observed experiences; including photos, videos, diaries, or reviews (e.g. Germany – Berlin). Other strategies involve the co-operation of parents in participatory research projects that generate a shared understanding of their child's development (Mathers *et al.*, 2014).

In most countries, parents have the option to participate in the ECEC setting by establishing or joining a parent association which organises school and fundraising events, or comments in school policies. Whilst volunteering and participating through these associations contributes to a better understanding and respect for the curriculum and ECEC staff, impacts on children's achievement are yet to be found (Taguma *et al.*, 2012). In some countries or ECEC systems, parent representatives are part of a governing council or board (see also Eurydice, 2014). This board or committee may have an important role to play in the monitoring or planning of educational curricula (e.g. Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany - Hessen, Poland).

Parental involvement and educational partnerships with parents (including home visits) are also part of the education programmes devised for disadvantaged children. In most countries, home visits involving ECEC staff are predominantly intended to support disadvantaged families, or families with children with special needs. Research on home visits shows that they can be effective in benefitting both families and children. Importantly, programmes which combine centre-based intervention with home visiting have been reported to have greater benefits than those programmes relying on home visits alone (e.g. Bornstein & Bradley, 2003 ; Brookes-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Brookes-Gunn, Klebanov & Liaw, 1995).

Special programmes which involve community services such as health or social support are often developed for disadvantaged families, and in many countries, settings are encouraged to create links with the community in this way. In *Norway*, the curriculum framework attends to the issue of collaboration with external stakeholders in a separate chapter. In *England*, such co-operation is one of the evaluation criteria stipulated in the frameworks for inspection. Community representatives can also be compulsory members of governing bodies (e.g. Estonia and Italy).

Although there is a growing body of research that points to the importance of communication between parents, the community and ECEC staff, there is no strong evidence as to which particular strategy works best. Implementing successful parent-caregiver communication requires investing determined effort into building mutual respect, understanding and trust between families and early years practitioners. It is particularly difficult to ensure equitable representation and participation across families from diverse backgrounds (OECD, 2006). Some challenges of actively engaging parents include cultural, attitudinal and linguistic barriers. Even where parents and caregivers value communication and regularly communicate with each other, observational studies have questioned the extent to which intended communication actually takes place (Vincent & Ball, 2006). Although curricular documents tell us that parental involvement in curriculum is a 'good thing', in practice educators and caregivers do not know how much of their time should be spent in working with parents, or working with their children. Which has the largest impact on children's development? No one knows the answer to this important question.

In some countries, the challenge of increasing participation from parents has led to new policies which address this issue. In *the Netherlands* for example, funding is made available to the municipalities and school boards to set-up projects to increase parental involvement. No specific guidelines are provided however, and municipalities and schools often differ in their approach.

**Example Finland:**

**Partnership with parents.** The National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC curriculum state that ECEC partnership combines the knowledge and experiences of parents and ECEC staff, both of which are important influences in the child's life. Staff have the primary responsibility of fostering the *partnership approach* from the very beginning, and for taking into consideration each family's specific needs. The partnership approach also aims to enhance co-operation between parents. Staff are responsible for drafting *unit-specific* ECEC curricula. Parents are provided the opportunity to influence its content and participate in its evaluation. An *individual* ECEC plan is drawn for each child in collaboration with the parents, and the implementation of the plan is assessed regularly.

In the National Curriculum for Pre-primary Education, the partnership approach is not expressed explicitly. In spite of different terminology in the curricula (partnership with parents cf. co-operation with homes) the core goal is identical: co-operation to support children's positive growth, development and learning in a holistic way. Responsibility for the development of co-operation with homes rests with each pre-primary education provider. The diversity, individual needs and linguistic and cultural backgrounds of families are to be taken into account in co-operation with home. It is important to provide guardians with opportunities to participate in setting objectives for, and planning and evaluating educational work within pre-primary education in co-operation with teachers and children. Co-operation carried out with guardians in other forms of early childhood education and care is continued during the pre-primary stage, while also creating a foundation for interaction among guardians and subsequent co-operation between home and school.

**Partnership with other stakeholders - Networking.** Co-operation takes place, in accordance with the National Policy definition on Early Childhood Education and Care, with the entire network providing services for children and families. Key partners include educational, social, and health authorities, agencies in the areas of culture and sports, private service providers, parishes, and teachers' unions (Association of Kindergarten Teachers in Finland; Trade Union for Teachers). Local and unit-specific ECEC curricula specify principles and practices for network-based co-operation, its goals and realisation. Co-operation with educational authorities primarily consists of the creation and development of co-operative forms and structures that ensure continuity in the child's education and learning. One of the central goals of network-based co-operation is to ensure early intervention in at risk situations.

### Example Italy:

#### **Partecipazione**

Pedagogical tradition of ECEC services (especially zero-to-three) and official guidelines acknowledge families as having an active role as chief partners in the design of the service.

Home-school relationships and parental involvement have been conceptualised in Italian early childhood education as '*partecipazione*' (Bove, 2007), a term that implies parents, teachers, children and other members of community as taking an active part in the life, culture and decisions concerning children and the educational services.

In 1974, a law introduced a more specific but also bureaucratic form of parent engagement in school life, as representative members of the school board were elected by parents.

Forms of parental involvement include:

- participation on the elected board which participates in decisions about access, waiting lists, expenditure etc.
- daily communication between parents and teachers during drop-off and pick up time (most infant-toddler centres have special places where parents can sit with their children or among themselves when arriving and before leaving)
- practices and rituals for gradually transitioning the child and his/her parents into the centre (*inserimento/ambientamento*)
- regular interviews and group meetings to share ideas on educational life with children and school projects
- informal meetings on special occasions (Christmas, Carnival, end of the year, open days etc.)

Current tensions and increased fragmentation:

- the spontaneous participation that was at the origin of many early educational services has faded (except for municipal services and in cities where civic and political engagement is still strong)
- forms and practices of partnership need a reconceptualisation;
- parents feeling as more of clients/users demonstrates that participation could be considered as control rather than mutual responsibility
- a growing pressure for early performances

## ***TRANSITIONS AND CONTINUITY BETWEEN DIFFERENT SYSTEMS OR SETTINGS***

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One of the main principles of ECEC is that the learning experiences of young children have to be meaningful to them, they have to take account of their individual needs, and have to be attached to their previous knowledge. This relates to the importance of providing young children with continuity and supporting their transitions in times of change. In their early years, children go through several transition phases such as when they start attending an ECEC provision, when they change ECEC settings/systems, and when they go from ECEC to primary education. This can affect children's learning. While change can offer opportunities for learning, it can also have negative impacts, especially where the values and expectations in different settings/systems are in conflict with each other (Bertram & Pascal, 2002).

Continuity between types of settings and different sector providers implies that children should experience a broadly similar curriculum in whatever sector or setting they are located (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). There needs to be links between different systems and settings/sectors, in order to ensure that children can easily transfer from one system to another.

A standard curriculum framework for early years aims to ensure continuity across ECEC systems. A common curriculum framework might be best suited to facilitate continuity of learning between ECEC and primary education. Such a common framework is rare in Europe, however, some European countries have strong links between their ECEC and primary curriculum, with similar learning areas across both frameworks (see Chapter 2, links to primary schools). There is a general trend across Europe towards developing a common framework across all age groups from birth to school entry. While in some countries standard curriculum guidelines cover all systems of ECEC provision (e.g. England, Denmark, Finland, Germany), in other countries they only apply to centre-based care (e.g. Estonia, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal); guidelines vary depending on the type of centre-based provision (e.g. the Netherlands). In *the Netherlands*, day care (age zero-to-four) is still seen as quite separate from the pre-school and pre-primary system (age two-to-six) – but harmonisation between these systems is growing.

Contact and collaboration between different ECEC systems/settings, and between settings and parents are crucial in order to support effective transitions and to help children manage discontinuities between environments. Some countries have guidelines for dealing with transitions during the early years. In *Finland* for example, central guidelines state that each local curriculum should describe ways of ensuring continuity and co-operation between different ECEC systems and settings. Several countries have established measures to support the transition process from the family environment to care provided in an ECEC setting. It is common for parents to settle children into their new learning environment in staying with the child for the first visits (even the first weeks), and to slowly increase the time a child spends on his/her own. Emphasis on communication between the parent and the child's key-person in the new environment is also very common. The aspect of continuity is particularly emphasised in *Italy* where, during pre-school (age zero-to-six), children stay with the same group of children and early years practitioners for three years (age three-to-six), thus ensuring relational stability, and an emphasis on

family-school connections. 'Accoglienza' – the term 'welcoming' defines characteristics of Italian ECEC services – open and welcome to families, with time for transitions with children and families when first entering care. In *Germany – Berlin/Hessen/Mecklenburg-Vorpommern*, co-operation between ECEC staff and parents during transition times is also emphasised. Parents and children are given time to attend the setting together and work closely with the staff during settling in times, until the child has developed secure relationships with new caregivers. In *Hessen*, strategies to facilitate transitions are developed on an individual basis through co-constructive processes, involving ECEC staff, parents and children. Aims relating to the management of transition processes are defined for children, parents and early years practitioners.

Most European countries have implemented measures to help children and families in their transition to primary school. In some countries, written records of children's learning and development at the end of their pre-primary years are shared with the primary school teachers (e.g. England, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Poland). Other common activities supporting the transition from ECEC to primary education include collaboration with parents, children's visits to their primary school the term before starting school, or collaboration between staff on both levels (e.g. England, Greece, Italy, Norway, Portugal). In order to facilitate the transition to school, some European countries provide pre-primary and primary education on the same premises (e.g. England). In other countries, curriculum guidelines specify that the ECEC systems have to collaborate with schools in order to create a coherent transition to primary school (e.g. Denmark, Germany Mecklenburg-Vorpommern/Baden-Württemberg, Norway). In *Norway*, national guidelines for the co-operation and coherence between kindergarten and school are in place (Fra eldst til yngst – Samarbeid og sammenheng mellom barnehage og skole). In *Germany – Berlin*, early years practitioners are instructed to aim towards children's development of understanding, competencies, and skills which will help their transition and their learning in school (e.g. curiosity, enjoyment of learning, coping with insecurity, knowing one's own strengths and being able to reflect on their learning and language development). Similarly, in *Germany - Baden-Württemberg* the curriculum framework lays out for each learning area, the way in which learning in this field can provide support and aid the transition to primary school. Furthermore, the way in which the curriculum and children's learning in school can continue and follow on from the ECEC curriculum and learning in the early years is explained. Teachers in school are obliged to know the ECEC curriculum and continue to support the child's individual learning path. Through co-operation between ECEC staff and school teachers, local plans for the transition to school are developed. These local plans are established on the basis of ECEC and school curriculum plans, and are intended to provide connections and thus support continuity. In *Germany - Mecklenburg-Vorpommern*, plans for transitions from ECEC to school are formulated through co-operation between ECEC settings and primary schools. Six months after the start of the primary stage, ECEC settings and schools evaluate together whether children's transitions were managed appropriately, and in what way improvements can be made in the future.

## ***T H E M E 8 : I N S T I T U T I O N A L F R A M I N G – I N S T I T U T I O N A L B O D I E S W H I C H S U P P O R T A N D G U I D E P E D A G O G I C A L P R A C T I C E S***

### ***SUPPORT FOR IMPLEMENTATION***

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In order to achieve good quality ECEC provision, a curriculum framework has to offer guidance and stipulate regulations. At the same time, it needs to allow for enough flexibility to ensure individual communities, settings or ECEC practitioners the freedom for creativity to meet each child's individual needs, and adapt to local and cultural circumstances. Across the European countries in our sample, individual settings have much autonomy and are expected to formulate their own curriculum or learning plan guided by their national framework (for more information, see section below; Devising local ECEC plans). As well as describing the settings' values and pedagogical principles, local curricula outline methods and activities for providing experiences or achieving learning outcomes.

Early years practitioners' effective implementation of educational and developmental curricula is a crucial feature of quality. It is a challenging task, and in order for curricular to be produced and delivered in a reliable manner, sufficient training and support has to be made available. This will then have effect on children's learning (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal & Thornburg, 2009). The kind of support needed is dependent on individual staff characteristics and contexts.

#### *Training about the curriculum – Pre-service training*

Across all countries in our review, pre-service training of ECEC staff includes modules of curriculum, including content, values, goals and implementation of standard curriculum frameworks, as well as the views, principles and methods which underlie the implicit curriculum in ECEC. Across– and sometimes within countries – different institutions provide initial training. In some countries (e.g. Finland, Germany, and Italy - for the over-threes), these institutions are located in the public sector (e.g. universities, vocational schools). In others, a number of private institutions also offer pre-service training (e.g. Italy - for the under-threes, and Portugal). While the teaching of the curriculum framework is standard across institutions, individual institutions have much autonomy in designing their courses and great variability is found across and within countries. Systematic evidence on how the curriculum is currently taught is lacking.

#### *Training about the curriculum – In-service training and professional development*

In terms of in-service training of curriculum/curriculum implementation, there seems to be a lack of guidance and support for staff. In some countries, no organised in-service training scheme is provided, at least for the younger age groups (e.g. Greece - under-threes). In others, participation in in-service training is the responsibility of the individual ECEC practitioner or the head of the setting, and there is no obligation to take part (e.g. Poland, Portugal). Often, the key role of ensuring sufficient knowledge of curriculum issues is the

responsibility of the head of the setting (e.g. Italy). In *Greece* research has reported that often, the curriculum is not implemented in a way that aligns with the national curriculum framework (e.g. Kavallari, Kakana & Christidou, 2012; Sofou & Tsafos, 2010); it is argued that this may be due to the lack of necessary in-service training.

While in some countries government funding is available for in-service training (e.g. Denmark, Germany), this funding is commonly organised at a regional level and is the main responsibility of municipal authorities. Delivery of in-service training therefore varies between and within countries. There are considerable differences in how municipalities in countries plan, and carry out in-service training, ranging from expert advice carried out in-house, to modules taught by public or private institutions.

**Example: the Netherlands:**

All officially accredited education programmes provide additional training and coaching to teachers and centre heads. Training focuses on general processes and quality aspects (teacher sensitivity, positive relationships, child-centredness), and specific implementation of educational activities, including the scheduling of themes and activities through the year. All accredited programmes provide manuals with an introduction to the themes, the concepts, vocabulary and/or mathematical principles at stake, detailed examples of how ‘lessons’ and activities can be carried out in both whole and small group settings, (suggestions for) play and discovery centres, materials, picture books, and theme-related songs and stories.

Day care centres, pre-schools and kindergartens also organise their own internal professional development, but differ strongly in this respect. It is not systematic in all centres, nor required by statutory regulations. Recurrent themes are children’s play, language stimulation, fostering emotional development, self-regulation and executive functions. In the past years, the national government funded a large-scale professional development programme for pre-school and day care teachers working with disadvantaged children, called in Dutch ‘VVersterk’ (‘Strengthen Preschool Education’).

*Providing practical support materials:*

To support the implementation of a curriculum framework, many countries in Europe make additional, non-statutory guidance materials available to ECEC staff and parents. The intention behind these documents is to help the implementation of the curriculum in target areas, and to promote reflection and discussion between staff on the curriculum framework and the realisation of goals in local contexts. Across our sample, almost all countries reported the availability of such guidance materials.

Often, guidance materials are published in the format of ‘booklets’ or websites which offer advice on issues of implementation, and address pedagogical principles, or areas of learning and development, e.g. pedagogy for the youngest children, inclusion, parent partnerships, language stimulation, gender equality etc. Often, these guidance materials are issued by the governmental bodies, mostly the Ministry of Education (e.g. Estonia, Norway, Portugal). Other national agencies (e.g. in England and Finland) or municipalities (e.g. in Denmark and Finland) can also have responsibilities in devising these materials. *Poland* offers sets of materials (called packages) to ECEC staff. They are prepared by experienced educators or academics and published by educational publishing houses. In *Greece*, pre-school for five year-olds was made compulsory in 2006; since then there has been a continuous effort by the Greek authorities to improve the pedagogical and educational work of ECEC staff. A ‘Kindergarten Teachers’ Guide’ was released in 2006 as a guiding curricular document that aimed to support ECEC staff in their effort to apply the Cross-Thematic Curriculum. For the implementation

of the new Curriculum (2011), a ‘Kindergarten teachers’ companion guide’ was published. In *the Netherlands*, a curriculum guidance document for day care providers (age zero-to-four) called ‘Pedagogical Framework’ has been developed by researchers and stakeholders for Dutch day care. It is an extensive document with both theoretical grounding and ample examples of implementation in practice. It is strongly connected to daily practice and developed through interaction within the field. Yet, it is unknown if and to what extent this document is used by practitioners in the field. Providers of pre-schools or playgroups (age two-to-four) and pre-primary schools (age four-to-six) have a free choice in the use of education programmes, but receiving subsidy is conditional upon the use of an officially accredited comprehensive education programme. In 2000, there was a main turning point, in which three specially designed education programmes, developed with support of the national Ministry, became available for the field. In the years thereafter, several other programmes were added. Currently, the most used education programmes in order of uptake are Piramide (combining elements of Montessori and Vygotsky, within a rather structured approach), Puk/Ko Totaal (eclectic, communicative language-focus, also mathematical activities), Startblokken (Vygotskian, experiential learning), and Kaleidoscoop (Dutch High/Scope, Piagetian, experiential). Although most of these education programmes have a clear theoretical-empirical basis (required for accreditation), all approaches are to some extent eclectic and adapted to national policy priorities.

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### ***DEVISING LOCAL ECEC PLANS***

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It is relatively common across Europe that municipalities and providers are required to devise local ECEC plans on the basis of the standard curriculum framework. In *Finland*, for example, national curriculum guidelines provide the basis for; ECEC curricula drawn locally by the municipalities, unit-specific curricula drawn by each ECEC setting, and individual ECEC plans drawn for each child. Staff are responsible for drafting unit-specific curricular in consultation with parents and children. In *Norway*, ECEC settings are required to draw up an annual plan. Individual kindergartens can also decide whether plans should be constructed for shorter periods. Kindergartens may also require a long-term plan, in order to ensure progression and continuity in the learning and experiences of children throughout their stay at the kindergarten. The kindergarten’s plans should be seen in the context of municipal planning in the kindergarten sector and of children’s home backgrounds (Framework Plan, 44f).

In *the Netherlands*, day care settings (for the zero-to-four group) are required to develop a ‘pedagogical-education-plan’ (Pedagogisch Beleidsplan) which specifies the view of the child, the pedagogical concept and a curriculum plan. In *Poland*, local settings for children aged zero-to-three are required to write a very general local curriculum, and it is common practice to produce an internal document, more specifically – a monthly plan of action (‘Charter of the Entity’ – Statut). Providers of pre-primary care and education (age three to five/six) are required to develop a local curriculum plan (individual for every ECEC practitioner): designed by the practitioners, approved by the head of the setting, and supervised by superintendents. In *Estonia*, local settings are required to compile a development plan, drawn up in co-operation with the governing board and a council of ECEC practitioners. A development plan determines main guidelines for the establishment of a childcare institution and an action plan for three years.

In *Germany*, broad national guidelines (basic national principles for early childhood practice, defined in the agreement of the Standing Conference) are transformed into legislation at the level of the federal states (Bundesländer). Steering documents in each federal state are then further used as a basis for ECEC plans by local municipalities.

### **Example Finland:**

*National Curriculum Guidelines – Local ECEC curricula (Municipality) – unit-specific ECEC curricula (ECEC setting in a given municipality) – child’s individual ECEC plan (drawn for each child in a given care centre, in co-operation with parents)*

Each municipality and each day care setting are required to draw their own local ECEC plan. National guidelines provide the basis for local and unit-specific ECEC curricula, and further individual plans. Both local and unit-specific autonomy are allowed and encouraged.

Local ECEC curricula form an integral part of quality management at municipality and unit levels where the aim is continuous evaluation and development of activities. In addition to educational and administrative staff, parents, children and collaboration partners can also participate in evaluation.

Staff are responsible for drafting *unit-specific* ECEC curricula. Parents are provided the opportunity to influence its content and participate in its evaluation. An *individual* ECEC plan is drawn for each child in collaboration with the parents, and the implementation of the plan is assessed regularly.

For example, the unit-specific curriculum of one day care centre in Jyväskylä states that evaluation is important in quality assurance. The unit-specific curriculum introduces concrete ways for evaluation: In the exemplary local ECEC curricula of Jyväskylä, it is stated that the quality of ECEC consists of regularly **assessing the processes of leading, planning, evaluating and developing the activities**.

It introduces concrete ways for evaluation:

- With children: *We listen and write down children’s thoughts, feelings and ideas. We ask the children: ‘How did you think that?’, ‘Where did you start?’, ‘What was difficult/easy?’, ‘What made you succeed?’*
- With parents: *Discussions on child’s individual ECEC plan, parents’ evenings*
- Among staff: *Discussions in staff meetings: “How are we doing?”. Asking feedback from students or trainees visiting the day care centre.*

### **Example Denmark:**

In *Denmark*, day care managers are responsible for preparing (compiling and publishing) an educational curriculum for their setting (facility). A written curriculum has to be prepared for children aged zero-to-two, and for children aged three-to-six. The educational curriculum must allow for the play, learning and development of children in day care facilities. The composition of the group of children must be taken into consideration when preparing the educational curriculum (see Day care Act, §8). The educational curriculum has to:

- describe relevant pedagogical methods and activities to be undertaken to achieve the targets, as well as how the curriculum is evaluated
- specify which pedagogical methods, activities and possible targets are to be established and implemented for children with special needs
- Describe how working towards a good environment for children becomes integral to pedagogical work

Local curricula are often compiled separately for two age groups (zero-to-two; three-to-school). In age-integrated facilities for children aged zero-to-six, a single curriculum may be compiled as long as it considers the two age groups (e.g. stipulating different, age-appropriate learning activities and objectives). However, the six themes and overall objectives apply to both age groups. The municipal council has to approve the local curriculum. Settings are required to revise the curriculum if there are any significant changes at the facility or if the evaluation, or the subsequent municipal authorities review of the evaluation, require revisions.

Some municipalities have written guidelines to be used by all day care facilities in compiling educational curricula (for example electing to prioritise certain themes), while other municipalities leave it to the individual

facility to determine the form and content of curricula. In the Danish Evaluation Institute's report published in 2012, the results of a questionnaire study show that nine out of a total of 98 municipalities have compiled a set, common curriculum to be used by all day care facilities, 29 produced a compulsory template, 14 an optional template, 26 produced a set of guidelines stipulating certain requirements, 15 made guidelines, but with no requirements stipulated, and 14 had neither a template nor guidelines.

## ***REGULATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE***

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Across Europe there is a movement towards greater accountability and desirability of improving and assuring the quality of its early years services (see also Bertram & Pascal, 2002), and in all the review countries the importance of establishing quality in ECEC was acknowledged. Yet, countries differ in their rigour in terms of the approach they take to regulation, and quality evaluation and assurance.

In all reviewed countries, regulations for ECEC generally provide a basic minimum of standards regarding issues such as premises, adult/child ratios or group sizes, qualifications, or health and safety. Consistently, these issues are subject to regulations, but the specifics vary between countries. For example, there is variation in terms of the number of children per adult, depending on the country, children's ages, or types of setting (for more information, see the recent Eurydice report on ECEC in Europe, 2014). The same is true for regulations on staff qualification. Across most of the reviewed countries, standards and regulations are enforced in two ways: accreditation for new settings, and evaluation of existing settings, which is nearly always carried out by authorities outside the setting (external evaluation). The decision as to which aspects of ECEC provision require evaluation usually lies at central level. Responsibilities for accreditation and evaluation are usually shared between authorities on different levels, including central, regional and local authorities.

It has been argued that the procedures and tools used for monitoring and evaluating ECEC need to be designed coherently with the intended aim and purpose (e.g. accountability; improvement purpose; identify staff needs; support policy makers; inform the public) (European Commission Working Group, 2014). We found wide variation between countries in terms of the aspects covered by quality evaluation, and the tools used to assure quality. Commonly used tools for external evaluation include inspection, surveys, checklists, and observations, and for internal evaluations, self-assessment and rating scales (see also Eurydice, 2014; OECD, 2012e). Often, the use of both internal and external evaluation methods is reported. Commonly, evaluations address the settings compliance with regulations, staff performance, service quality, and child development (see also Theme 6 – assessment and documentation). Also addressed are parent satisfaction (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Norway), working conditions (e.g. Denmark, Finland), ECEC management (e.g. England), and curriculum implementation (see also Theme 8 – Devising local ECEC plans).

Most of the reviewed countries carry out inspections in their ECEC provision. While there is great variation in terms of the aspects which are addressed by inspection, it usually goes beyond ensuring that the basic regulations are fulfilled. Areas of good practice and those of improvement are often highlighted in a report which is

publically available. Inspection is usually carried out by an independent inspection team (see also Bertram and Pascal, 2002).

In our reviewed countries, highly developed and comprehensive external quality assurance systems were found, particularly in *England*. The English system for regulation is part of a national inspection authority which also inspects schools for older children and even the training of educators in universities. ECEC settings are assessed on their ability to meet the (emotional/social/cognitive) needs of children, to contribute to children's wellbeing, and their effectiveness in leadership and management, especially related to parents. Settings are visited once every four years, and a poor inspection report leads to a three-monthly inspection cycle until improvement is seen. Inspection reports are published on the internet for parents and others interested in early education. In *Portugal*, the Framework-Law for Preschool Education (Lei n.º 5/97, February 10<sup>th</sup>) specifies that the General-Inspectorate of Education is mandated to control the pedagogical and technical functioning of pre-school settings. Reports recently made available by the Inspectorate, include results from the inspection of dimensions included in the curriculum guidelines, such as the diversity and quality of materials and equipment, children's participation in planning and assessment, and the use of active and scientific methods for enhancing learning activities in the content area of knowledge about the world.

In *the Netherlands*, quality assurance happens at different levels, depending on the age group and system. The provision for younger children (zero-to-four; day care centres and pre-schools) is monitored annually by the municipal or regional health authority. The local ECEC plan, and whether regulations around health and safety and structural characteristics are met faces evaluation. Quality assessment of day care focuses on emotional aspects. In addition, there is national monitoring of educational quality. ECEC provision for older children (four-to-six; kindergarten) and those day care and pre-school provisions which target disadvantaged groups, are monitored by the Inspectorate of Primary Education. Aspects of the environment and provision and training of staff, ECEC plans, the use of regular evaluation of effectiveness, the use of observation or test-based child development monitoring systems, as well as the quality of teaching and adult-child interaction are inspected. This includes a focus on adult sensitivity, instruction quality, emotional climate, and effective use of time. Finally, monitoring is also carried out by an independent organisation commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (Netherlands Consortium for Day Care Quality). Here, monitoring focuses strongly on emotional quality.

In most of the reviewed countries, quality assurance is the responsibility of municipalities and local settings. In *Denmark*, the individual ECEC providers are responsible for compiling educational curricula, and these must be approved by municipal authorities. The management of the ECEC setting is responsible for bi-annual evaluation of the educational curriculum, and evaluations are reviewed at least every second year by the municipal authority. In *Finland*, quality assurance also happens at the local level; municipalities determine how to provide ECEC and how to assess quality. The educational system relies on the *proficiency of educators* and other personnel. Similarly, there is no inspection on a national level in *Norway*, but municipalities are responsible for quality assurance.

*Greece* and *Italy* reported decentralisation of monitoring, with a lack of official inspection mechanisms. In these countries, ECEC providers for zero-to-threes can be inspected, but there is a lack of availability of specific procedures and tools, and their role and function depends on the relationship established with services and their management. In Italy, local administrations that run and organise ECEC (zero-to-six or zero-to-three) services, commonly regulate, monitor and inspect quality and 'curriculum' through documentation, observation, standard evaluation, and customer satisfaction's questionnaires. A central role is played by school coordinators as mediators between national guidelines and local implementations. In Italy, ECEC for over-threes (scuola dell'infanzia) is also inspected on a national level by the National Institution for School Evaluation (INVALSI). In Greece, provisions for four-to-six year-olds are inspected by pre-school advisors. In both cases there is not enough transparency on how quality monitoring is carried out.

*Poland* reported that there are no common procedures of evaluating the ECEC curriculum on national, regional or municipality level. However, some external evaluation takes place in kindergartens and pre-schools (providing for over-threes), either on a regional level by superintendents, or by external agencies representing municipalities (here evaluation procedures vary between institution). Evaluation by educational superintendents is a form of inspection; evaluation procedures are uniform across the country, and results are made public. The level of compliance within the curriculum framework is assessed, addressing issues such as the establishment of an ECEC plan, the organisation of activities, curricular partnerships, the management of the setting, and child wellbeing and development.

It has been argued that monitoring and evaluation has to enable the negotiation of multiple perspectives among all personnel. Thus, monitoring and evaluation processes should foster active engagement and co-operation among all stakeholders, including children, families and staff (European Commission Working Group, 2014; Network on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2013). Only some of our review countries reported on their internal quality assurance, which usually included ECEC managers, practitioners, and parents, and sometimes involved children as well.

In *Italy*, national guidelines recommend ECEC providers to carry out self-evaluation. In *Denmark* individual settings are required to self-monitor curriculum implementation and the pedagogy underpinning it. The day care manager is responsible for documenting whether the chosen pedagogical methods and activities, and children's environment will lead to the achievement of the established targets. The municipality has the responsibility of evaluating the self-monitoring on a bi-annual basis, and the tools used for this vary across municipalities. Parents also contribute to self-monitoring, and the municipality pays close attention to the views of parents as well as staff.

In *Finland*, individual level assessments of quality take place through discussions between parents and ECEC staff, sometimes involving children. Parents may also take part in the curriculum development of their child's day care setting (unit-specific curriculum). Furthermore, staff in the day care settings are considered to play a central role in assessing and implementing the unit-specific and local ECEC curricula and thus the quality more broadly. In *Greece*, internal self-evaluation is carried out in ECEC settings for four-to-six year-olds. There are a

number of quality indicators that guide assessment and evaluation inside a provision, e.g. space and environment, staffing, leadership, teaching and learning indicators, indicators in the domain of relationships, as well as child outcomes. In *Germany - Baden-Württemberg/Hessen* the curriculum framework emphasises the importance of internal evaluation which includes ECEC staff, management, and parents. Evaluations are documented, and documentations are up-dated regularly, as they serve as a basis for improvement and learning. ECEC practitioners are required to carry out regular self-assessment – the framework formulates questions for educators to facilitate reflective practice in all areas of learning and development.

In *Poland*, self-assessment for under-threes mostly takes place through observation of children’s wellbeing, feedback from parents and specialists (e.g. psychologists), and information provided by their caregivers about their work. In kindergartens and pre-schools (over-threes), head teachers (sometimes in co-operation with an experienced educator or representative of supervising institution) evaluate ECEC plans prepared by early years practitioners. Practitioners produce a written report of their curriculum implementation, and each child’s learning and development. Conclusions of internal evaluation can be taken into account in the next monthly plan, or influence modifications of the current plan.

#### **Example Greece:**

In Greek childcare centres (for children up to the age of five), there is a lack of inspection mechanisms which renders their transparency and accountability questionable, even concerning infrastructure and issues of safety and hygiene conditions. For day care centres, to gain official approval, the day care centres must be inspected by a committee consisting of representatives from the prefectural authority and a ‘social advisor’ by the Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity (formerly by the social welfare authorities), but implementation of quality criteria is questionable, which also holds true for the composition of these committees. The only evaluation procedures that exist for municipal day care centres are related to safety and hygiene standards and they are performed by the prefectural authorities.

Greek pre-primary/kindergarten (age four-to-six) advisors monitor in a way that, if curriculum principles and practices are applied, but there is a large number of kindergarten teachers under their responsibility, insufficient accountability and even misinterpretations or misunderstandings of the curricular documents may add to the puzzle of drawbacks and problems concerning curricular regulation implementation.

Internal, self-evaluation processes that refer to the educational work, have been put into practice this year, after a pilot period with the participation of approximately 150 school units. The purpose of these evaluation processes is described, according to the relevant Law 2986/2002 (A’ 24/13-2-2002) as the improvement and quality upgrade of all the dimensions and factors of the educational process. The educational work is divided in three categories: i. school data, ii. educational processes and iii. educational outcomes.

There is a number of quality indicators that guide assessment and evaluation of the educational work in each school unit, which have both qualitative and quantitative expressions:

- A. For the category ‘School data’ quality indicators refer to one domain ‘Tools and Resources’ and concern: i. the school space/environment, infrastructure and financial resources and ii. school personnel.
- B. For the category ‘Educational processes’ there are four domains with corresponding quality indicators. The ‘leadership/administration’ domain has three indicators: i. organisation and co-ordination of school life, ii. management of resources and iii. support and management of personnel. The ‘teaching and learning’ domain, includes two indicators: i. development and implementation of teaching practices and ii. development and implementation of pedagogical practices and students’ evaluation. The ‘climate and relationships’ domain includes the following two indicators: i. relationships between teachers and students and among students and ii. relationships with parents and other social and educational agencies. The ‘programs, interventions and improvement activities’ domain has two indicators: i. educational programs, innovations and

- interventions and ii. development and application of projects concerning improvement of the educational work.
- C. For the 'Outcomes' category there are two domains. The first concerns the 'educational outcomes' and has three quality indicators: i. attendance and dropout, ii. student achievements and progress and iii. student personal and social development. The second refers to the 'school outcomes' and the quality indicator proposed describes the achievement of school goals.

### ***REGULATIONS ON CHILD/STAFF RATIOS***

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The child/staff ratio is one of the key elements for ensuring quality in ECEC provision, and there is considerable evidence suggesting that the adult-child ratios provide conditions, which can promote higher quality interactions between children and adults. On this topic we have gone beyond the 11 countries in the CARE survey and report on ratios as described by the European Commission (2009:9). The variation across Europe on ratios is very great and because of this we have widened our 'analytic net' to include more countries.

According to Eurydice (2014), most European countries have regulations for the maximum number of preschool children that one adult can be responsible for. The maximum number of children per adult is subject to control in Belgium, Ireland, Lithuania, Romania, England, Greece, Luxembourg, Austria, Slovenia, Norway, Denmark, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal and Finland. In all these countries, there are different regulations for the maximum number of children per adult in ECEC. These regulations are often dependent on the age of the children, their special needs, and on the group-size. For one-year-old children, England has the lowest ratio with a maximum of 3:1, and Lithuania has the highest ratio at 10:1. For five-year-old children, the lowest ratio is Finland with 7:1, and the highest ratio is found in Cyprus and Greece where both countries have ratios of 25:1.

Czech Republic, Croatia, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Spain, Turkey, Latvia, and the Netherlands have not yet quantified rules for the maximum number of children each staff member can be responsible for in ECEC. Other countries only have regulations for children between ages 3 and 6; Flemish speaking Belgium, Hungary, Poland and France. One country, Slovakia, has ratio regulations that cover one-year-old children, and Switzerland only has regulations for children that are four and five years old. Liechtenstein and Italy have variable regulations (for more information, see the recent Eurydice report on ECEC in Europe 2014). The great disparities on ratio, including countries outside the care survey, are mentioned here because the implemented curriculum is both enabled and constrained by the numbers of staff and children in any one room.

## ***T H E M E 9 : E V I D E N C E F R O M R E S E A R C H / M O N I T O R I N G***

Many countries are specific about which kinds of experiences ECEC staff should offer to children. However, few have conducted national research on whether these experiences actually benefit children's development. Norway for example, states that staff should be conscious of their position as role models for children, should facilitate meaningful experiences, and promote trust. This list is difficult to verify through concrete behaviours, yet few would deny its attractiveness. Furthermore, goals for early education should not be limited to those that can be easily measured. *Norway* is currently mounting a large longitudinal study of children to explore the effects of such high aspirations for their development. The stakes are higher for ECEC in terms of demonstrating value or effectiveness because it is, in most instances, non-statutory and governments want to see value for investment in early education. The English EPPSE study (Sylva *et al.*, 2014) demonstrated a significant monetary return to government on its investment in free ECEC for children between 3 years and school entry.

There are on-going large scale studies funded by government in *Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland* and *Portugal* on the effects of ECEC attendance and also of the quality of provision. In the Netherlands there is research on the effects of different curricular models for children 2-4 and on ECEC at other ages as well (see report from CARE Work Package 4 (Melhuish *et al.*, forthcoming). Such large scale studies at national level are increasingly important as governments wish to demonstrate the effects of investment in ECEC. Economists are now contributing to research in several countries which calculate the likely financial returns of investment in ECEC, with cost effectiveness models, e.g. the EPPSE study in England (Sylva *et al.*, 2014) and the NEPS (Blossfeld, Rossbach & von Maurice, 2011) study in Germany.

Few countries in the CARE survey have carried out national research to evaluate the effectiveness of specific *features* of their curriculum, a difficult task in the absence of a counter-factual control group. However in *Greece* and *Italy*, evidence on the curriculum is gathered through formative and authentic assessment procedures such as observation or portfolios of children's experiences. These methods do not rely on a control group nor on psychometric assessments.

In *Finland*, the Ministry of Education and Culture found a novel way to investigate their ECEC provision. Through an on-line national survey of parents, evidence was sought on how well ECEC settings met their expectations and wishes. Parents were even asked which improvements they thought should be implemented. Such parental surveys are an imaginative way to collect evidence on effectiveness, at least in the view of families. In addition to asking for parental views, researchers in *Finland* asked children to make photographs of aspects of life in their ECEC settings that they really enjoyed. Again, this is an innovative way to study how the curriculum is experienced by children.

## ***T H E M E 1 0 : C H A L L E N G E S***

The survey had a specific field for ‘challenges to the curriculum’. It drew forth a surprising commonality of challenges. Most countries spoke of economic cuts and decreases in funding in the social and educational sectors as the main challenge. There was mention of increases in group size (Finland) and in reductions in funds for professional development of staff (England). Importantly, some countries are also struggling with high ratios (Greece), and with lack of highly qualified ECEC staff (Norway). Despite wide variation in expenditure, no country reported that current levels of funding were sufficient to assure good quality or effective ‘delivery’ of the curriculum. Country responses on the curriculum template made it painfully clear that implementation is heavily influenced by financial resources, especially those related to ratios, salaries, and workforce training.

After ‘funding’, in order of priority amongst challenges was ‘the pressure for a more academic’ curriculum, closely linked to school subjects’ (Greece, but other countries as well). The workforce in *Denmark* is resisting these pressures, and remains committed to a holistic approach focused on social development led by ‘social pedagogues’ instead of ‘educators’. But Denmark is exceptional in its focus on social pedagogy; other countries are moving towards a balanced approach which includes, but is not dominated by, an emphasis on children’s learning and ‘school readiness’. Countries such as *Germany* fear a pressure being exerted downwards from the primary education system, pressures that favour a more academic curriculum that is at odds with the traditional one. *Italy* is just beginning to see calls for the dominant and holistic curriculum to adapt to new challenges such as immigrant families asking for English, numeracy and literacy to be taught to their children. Respondents from *the Netherlands* spoke of the ‘tension between hard and soft skills’, yet remained positive about reconciling them. So the second most important challenge is not about resources but curriculum balance.

In line with new calls from government and (some) parents for a more academic curriculum, some countries such as *the Netherlands* are experiencing calls for formal testing of children. In *Norway*, many staff believe the move towards formal testing comes from the desire to prove the effectiveness of investment in ECEC. Whatever the motive, most ECEC professionals oppose formal tests for preschool children, except in the case of those with special needs.

The view taken here is that a well-trained, highly professional workforce could implement a curriculum with high expectations for language and cognitive development that was integrated within a holistic model of development. Such integration of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ skills would require favourable ratios, excellent university-led training and – above all – a boost in the professional status and pay of ECEC staff. Such a well-trained and professional workforce would be able to make local decisions about testing, using tests only when appropriate as in the case of children with special needs or with special language requirements due to migration background.

After challenges within the curriculum related to holistic or academic goals, the next most common challenge was inadequate staff training and supervision. One country mentioned the challenge of developing a ‘new concept for preschool teacher’s professionalism’ (Estonia). Other countries said that there was a need for

sustained professional development to support the workforce in developing the knowledge and skills to implement the curriculum effectively (Finland, Norway).

The final group of challenges, although mentioned by just a few, was the (a) lack of a fully integrated education and care system that included children from birth to school entry (Norway, Italy) and (b) lack of resources and training for children with special educational needs (Denmark and Estonia). One of the recommendations in this report is the need for a curriculum for children younger than age 3, a curriculum which harmonises with that for older children but at the same time is sensitive to the characteristics of babies and toddlers. (See the Appendix by Hännikäinen, who found that most curricula for the youngest children, centred more on their safety and care rather than their learning and development.)

## C O N C L U S I O N   A N D   R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

Why is curriculum necessary? The European Working Group on ECEC (2014) proposed an explicit curriculum for each country with clear purposes, goals and approaches for education and care within a coherent framework. The goal of such a curriculum was to support practitioners in creating effective learning environments. But is the goal a single curriculum for Europe or many? European ECEC curricula are the consequence of different cultural, political and historical traditions. They also have a strong values base, which means that research can inform curricular decisions but there will inevitably be variation reflecting national values as well as traditions. After reviewing the curricula of 11 partner countries in the CARE project, it became clear that a single European ECEC curriculum would not be accepted by countries with such different historical, cultural and political differences. The goal, at least for the short term, is a commonly agreed terminology and intellectual framework to facilitate discussion and common projects, including research enquiry. Cross national discussions will be aided by the theoretical background shared by all European countries and described in Theme 3; it is based on the educators Froebel and Montessori, and the psychologists Piaget and Vygotsky. Although a single curriculum in early childhood is not the goal, there will be more commonalities than differences because of this common intellectual history.

In keeping with the European Working Group report (2014), we distinguish between official steering documents which are usually devised at a national level, and informal curriculum guidelines which supplement and expand official steering documents. Ten countries in our sample of 11 had a national ECEC steering document, and many also had less formal guidelines (non-statutory) which were often devised at regional or local level and tended to be more detailed.

Moreover, while approximately half of the countries had one official steering document that addresses ECEC provision from birth to school entry, there are many other countries with curriculum documents addressing ECEC provision for children above and below the age of 3 years separately. In this case, official curriculum steering documents are often only devised at national level for the older age group. The official steering documents of the vast majority of countries in the sample was the responsibility of just one ministry, usually but not always, the Ministry of Education. In fact, there has been a growing trend for ECEC to be under the aegis of the Ministry of Education. This makes good sense since the years between birth and school entry are increasingly viewed as an important foundational phase in life-long education.

Analysis of the template fields revealed two main ways to organise the content of the curriculum: according to (1) *developmental domains* in children such as language or identity, or according to (2) the *kinds of experiences* children should have to support their development, such as play or interactions with early years practitioners. Although some countries lean heavily in one of these directions, all of them include some mention of both approaches. The documents of every country in the CARE sample include aims to enhance *social, cognitive, linguistic, and personal* development in children. Some countries added other domains to the commonly agreed ones, such as *citizenship, the creative arts* or *a healthy body*. Just as there is agreement on developmental

domains that ECED should enhance, agreement was also found amongst the countries that young children should benefit most from experiences centred on *play* and *caring relationships expressed in social interactions*. The latter was just as important for children over three as under.

The curricular principles shared across Europe and based on common intellectual traditions can be summarised as:

- Holistic pedagogical philosophy
- Child-centeredness
- The child as a unique human being
- Inclusion and equality

Thus, at the global level there is widespread agreement about the content of the curriculum, although there are differences in the relative balance of its components. The Italians appear to place more emphasis on creative arts, the English on the sounds of spoken language and their links to reading, and the Norwegians on ‘the child’s voice’. Yet these three aspects of practice can be found across most of Europe, in differing degrees of emphasis.

Agreement is also found in regard to pedagogy. We have suggested a model of pedagogy (See Themes 5 and 6) which situates face-to-face pedagogical interactions within the context of professional tasks at setting level (such as planning, assessing) and institutional supports (such as in-service training, workforce remuneration). It is especially with regard to pedagogy that the developmental sciences can contribute. An important part of the CARE Work Package 2 is to describe effective pedagogy for children across the age range. Because of shared philosophical and pedagogical traditions, broad agreement was found in the survey concerning the global aspects of pedagogy. These were summarised in Themes 3-6 and derive from the writings of Froebel and Montessori, who lead a long list of philosophers, psychologists, educationalists and sociologists identified in the survey as espousing a broad and balanced curriculum that is a far cry from ‘school subjects’ or formal instruction.

Broad agreement was found in the survey concerning those pedagogical principles in good quality practice in ECEC:

- Focus on pedagogical interactions with emphasis on relationships and social interaction
- Enabling learning through exploration, project based activities, play and narratives
- A balanced approach where adults guide, support and facilitate, and ensure that experiences in all areas of development are offered, while giving enough room for the child’s choice and interests
- Focus on observation as a means to reflect on children’s development
- Environment that is stimulating, and gives children enough space and time
- Focus on co-operation and partnerships
- Importance of institutional bodies which support and guide pedagogical practices

On the basis of the CARE survey we concluded ‘so far, it remains relatively unclear if a more academic or more comprehensive (‘whole child’) approach produces the largest (long-term) benefits for children. Many European countries seem to strive towards overcoming the strong dichotomy between an academic approach and a holistic approach.’ This balance may be a good way forward but has inbuilt tensions. More research is needed to clarify

the benefits of the academic, comprehensive, or combined approaches across different country specific ECEC contexts.’ Many countries in the survey favoured a ‘balanced’ approach and that is what is recommended here; several countries made explicit reference to ‘balance’: i.e., more comprehensive (‘whole child’) for the younger child and more academic (the ‘learning child’) for those nearing school entry. This compromise is not novel, but it is sensible and something on which agreement may be reached. Much more research is needed to unravel the benefits (and disbenefits) of structured, academic learning in ECEC (See recommendation 6).

With so much agreement on curricular goals and pedagogy, where are the strong differences? Why does the visitor feel that the Dutch pre-school centre s/he observes is different from an Italian or Norwegian one? It is in implementation that stark differences are found. No matter how committed a practitioner is to treating each child as a ‘unique human being’ s/he cannot do this well with a group of 22 children (ratio), in a small room (resources), and with no assistant (staffing). No matter how committed to helping children understand their environment, an 18-year-old practitioner with little science education cannot give an adequate answer to a child’s question about floating and sinking objects in a pool of water. The implementation of the curriculum is sharply constrained by a host of factors, including workforce training, ratios, and budgets – to name but a few constraining or enabling influences. The CARE survey made very clear that official documents tell but a fraction of the story; other factors determine the realisation of the official steering documents and many of these are sharply influenced by resources, especially staffing and salaries.

In order to understand the implemented curriculum across Europe, the template asked for information about ‘enabling/constraining’ factors which are coloured blue in Fig. 1 in the Background section of this report. A full understanding of the implemented curriculum requires all the enabling/constraining fields in the template because the steering documents cannot provide an accurate picture on their own. An example will illustrate the point: Every country is now committed to an inclusive curriculum, but successful implementation of an inclusive approach demands expertise and staff time. Governments need to set targets, and develop and support strategies which ensure that ECEC provision responds to the needs and rights of diverse populations. Greater public funding is necessary in order to attend to the organisation and management of inclusive ECEC settings: specialised staff have to be trained, allocated and supported; premises need to be adapted to the diverse needs of children; culturally appropriate educational materials (e.g., books, music) and language support have to be made available; outreach to parents and communities and strong partnerships have to be ensured; co-operative agreements with community health and social service agencies have to be put into place; group sizes, staff ratios, and rooms have to be organised more flexibly to cater for specialised sessions, and services have to be flexible in terms of setting, hours, and programme options to meet the diverse needs of children and parents. The Inclusive Curriculum will look very different in countries with high vs. low expenditure on ECEC. Low ratios will allow more time for staff to ‘include’ children with special educational needs in all aspects of the curriculum, while staff in larger groups will struggle to provide extra support. It is impossible to implement a detailed and progressive Inclusive Curriculum when resources are so constrained that staff time and expertise are both lacking.

Historical traditions are slow to change. Although there are many (textual) similarities between the Early Years Foundation Stage in England and the ECEC curriculum framework in Bavaria, in practice these are very

different. Differences can be ascribed to decades of training in both countries, which conceptualised the key role of the adult in Bavaria to promote social development while the key role of the adult in England was to foster the cognitive skills which would enable the child to succeed in school. Cultural traditions are difficult to change in a single generation, but the general movement is towards balance between social and intellectual goals.

Some recent research evidence suggests that playful, child-centred approaches, which incorporate some degree of adult scaffolding are more effective teaching strategies for achieving academic outcomes with young children than those involving either direct instruction, or free playing with the absence of active adult guidance (e.g. Alfieri, Brooks, Aldrich & Tenenbaum, 2010; Chien *et al.*, 2010; Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Newcombe & Golinkoff, 2013). Moreover, the influential EPPSE study in England (Sylva *et al.*, 2010) found that the more academic aspects of pedagogical quality were better predictors of children's learning at age 11 than a more global, 'child centred' pedagogy.

There remains the thorny issue of 'quality'. Structural aspects of high quality - such as low ratios, good professional development, well-resourced space and exciting/aesthetically pleasing equipment – are agreed by all of the respondents in the CARE survey. Process quality is another matter, with disagreement about whether the observational scales of the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (revised edition, ECERS-R; Harms *et al.*, 2005) or the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta *et al.*, 2008) are a more valid way to measure quality, or indeed whether **any** observational scale can come close to assessing so complex a construct. Case studies of quality which are also part of Work Package 2 will deal with observed quality in the practice of six countries (forthcoming from WP 2). The survey revealed disagreement about quality implementation, with some differing views presented in this report.

The CARE curriculum model makes very clear that the enabling/constraining influences of ratios and qualifications have profound impact on implementation, and no amount of 'progressive' or 'enlightened' words in curriculum documents can deliver high quality in the face of poor staffing ratios or training. One of the areas of practice on which resources have a profound impact is inclusion, which requires recognising and respecting individual needs and entitlements. Such high quality practices require access to specialised training and to the low ratios which give extra time to children with 'extra' needs.

Curricular partnerships are another 'enabling influence' and there is widespread agreement about the vital role of parents as partners in the child's education. Several European policy reports state firmly that the views of parents need to be taken into account in planning provision. What leads to disparate practice across Europe is the fact that parental partnerships take time, as inclusion does, and limited resources (especially ratios) can constrain the best intentions of staff. Additionally, there may be cultural differences between parents about the privacy of the family and the household, and again it takes time to recognise these.

Finally, how can monitoring and /or regulation support the implementation of curriculum? The report documents several examples of local monitoring, including parents and young children themselves, and how it can improve practice. Other countries, such as England, have well established regulatory bodies that inspect the quality of

practice to (1) inform government about quality, and (2) provide feedback to ECEC settings about their strengths and limitations. For many other countries, it is the local or regional government which inspects quality and compliance. Although practice regarding regulation varies widely, the survey found strong agreement that a major goal of regulation was to support staff, not just 'regulate' them.

There are several large scale studies funded by government in Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Portugal on the effects on children of ECEC attendance and also of the quality of provision. In the Netherlands, there is research on the effects of different curricular models for children aged 2-4 and on ECEC at other ages as well. Such large scale studies at national level are increasingly important as governments wish to demonstrate the effects of investment in ECEC. Economists are now contributing to research in several countries which calculate the likely financial returns of investment in ECEC, with cost effectiveness models, e.g. the EPPSE study in England (Sylva *et al*, 2014) and the NEPS (Blossfeld, Rossbach & von Maurice, 2011) study in Germany.

A list of 14 recommendations follows. We have kept the list short in order to focus on those we consider to be the most important ones that arose from our survey of CARE partners. These recommendations are based on the CARE template survey (as shared and discussed amongst the partners) but also on recent documents from the European Union, especially the recent reports from the European Commission working group (2014) and Eurydice and Eurostart (2014) on ECEC in Europe. Whereas the CARE survey provided firm evidence about national steering documents, the evidence on the implemented curriculum and enabling factors was more suggestive because of gaps and limitations in the research base.

#### Part 1: Recommendations about national steering documents

1. Europe should aim at agreement on concepts and terminology to facilitate discussion amongst countries about the aims of the curriculum and effective ways to support policy developments and everyday practice. (This recommendation accepts curricular differences across Europe but supports informed discussion as the basis for reform guided by research and dialogues.)
2. National/regional steering documents for the ECEC curriculum should be created and reviewed by a wide range of stakeholders including professionals (practitioners, teacher educators, and researchers), parents, community leaders, and government officials.
3. There needs to be concerted efforts to describe high quality practices considered in the context of research. (Realising national aims rests on high quality practices.)
4. The acquisition of social skills and personal identity is equally important for life-long learning as is the development of cognitive skills and communication.
5. Successful implementation of the curriculum requires articulation of a broad range of pedagogical strategies that include *play, exploration, and interactions/dialogue between adults and peers*.
6. Recent policy documents and research point to the role of adults in guiding children's learning. While avoiding didactic instruction, adults should use modelling, questioning and conversation-extension – all to support the child's cognitive development.

7. Countries without a curriculum framework for younger children (0-3) should consider the benefits of a guidance framework for the youngest children in harmony with the curriculum for older ones.
8. Documentation of children's learning and development is a central component of curriculum implementation; it can support professional development and planning for individual needs. (Testing is widely criticised, except for research or assessment of children with special needs.)
9. National steering documents should support the involvement of parents in decisions concerning the wellbeing and learning of children.

Part 2: Recommendations about enabling or constraining influences on the implemented curriculum

10. Monitoring at national and local level should emphasise its formative and supportive role in addition to any regulatory requirements to improve quality.
11. Successful implementation of the ECEC curriculum depends on high quality professional training and development, especially with regard to pedagogical practices across the age range.
12. Pay and status of the ECEC workforce must be sufficient to attract high quality staff.
13. Curriculum must be sensitive to all sections of society and formal means should be in place for all groups to contribute to curricular decisions.
14. Two kinds of research are needed: (1) studies on the relative strength of the enabling/constraining factors that lead to high quality implementation of the curriculum (e.g., ratios, qualifications, professional development); (2) research on the effects on children and families of discrete elements of the curriculum (e.g. focus on academic skills, use of documentation, and types of outdoor activities).

This report aims to stimulate discussion and to articulate choices for individual countries to make.

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## A P P E N D I C E S

### ***CURRICULA UP TO AGE THREE – WHAT DO NATIONAL STEERING DOCUMENTS TELL US ABOUT THE YOUNGER CHILDREN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SETTINGS?***

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Basically all European countries have national steering documents for arranging, regulating and monitoring Early Childhood Education and Care. Most countries issue official frameworks, guidelines and educational plans to be used by providers and education staff. However, in some cases, these steering documents consist solely of acts and decrees. In approximately half of the countries, the steering documents concern settings for children from birth to school age, and in the other half the guidelines cover children over three years of age. In a few countries there are separate documents for children up to age three (European Commission/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014).

In the 11 CARE partner countries, there are five national documents (or sets of steering documents; hereafter ‘steering document’ or simply ‘document’) which steer, regulate and monitor ECEC to cover children from birth to school age (e.g. Denmark, England, Finland, Norway, Germany), and only three that concern children from three to school age (e.g. Greece, Italy, Portugal). However, in *the Netherlands*, besides the national curriculum guidelines for children aged four to six, there is also the Child Care Act (2005) and the OKE Act (Ontwikkelingskansen door Kwaliteit en Educatie Wet, 2010) which regulate centre-based child-care for younger children, together with a non-statutory pedagogical framework. *Poland* also has a specific act (2011) regulating the ECEC of children up to age three. There is currently no up-to-date information on about the situation in Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia).

This descriptive and comparative review of national steering documents pertaining to children up to age three is based on *five cases* only. The reason for this is practical: for the content analysis and comparison, the documents have to be obtainable in English. Four of the documents which fulfil this criterion are from the CARE partner countries (e.g. Denmark, England, Finland, Norway). The fifth, from a Baltic country (e.g. Estonia), has been included as it is available in English.

#### **Documents steering, regulating and monitoring ECEC**

In this review, the term ‘national steering document’ refers to acts and decrees on ECEC, as well as to national curriculum frameworks and guidelines. The form taken by ECEC national steering documents varies across the five countries. In *Denmark*, the only national document regulating ECEC is the Day-Care Facilities Act (2007). In *Estonia* and *Finland*, some ECEC-related matters are stipulated in separate legislation (the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act 1999 in Estonia, and the Act and Decree on Children’s Day Care 1973 in Finland), while the central steering documents are the National Curriculum for Pre-school Child Institutions in Estonia (2008) and the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education in Finland (2004, orig. in Finnish 2003, revised 2005). In *Norway*, the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2006, amended 2011) is explicitly built upon paragraphs contained in the Kindergarten Act (2005), which are used as starting points in individual sections of the curriculum. England has three steering documents: the Statutory Framework

for the Early Years Foundation Stage, EYFS (2014), which sets the standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to age five, and two non-statutory guides for practitioners, one designed to aid understanding of child development during the early years, and the other to help implementation of the statutory requirements of the EYFS. However, when comparing the national documents with one another, only the first-mentioned statutory framework will be used. In *Denmark*, according to the Day-Care Facilities Act, local councils are responsible for day care, and under an obligation to establish and publish their individual objectives and frameworks for day care. In *Estonia*, *Finland* and *Norway*, the national curriculum frameworks and guidelines serve as the basis for mandatory (in Finland recommended only), local (municipal) and/or unit-specific educational plans, and in the case of Finland, for individual ECEC plans for every child as well.

### **Age coverage in the national steering documents**

In all five countries (e.g. Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Norway), the provision of ECEC for children up to school age takes place as a unitary system, meaning that it is organised as a single phase and is delivered in settings that cover all children until the start of primary school. Hence, in every country one or more national steering documents (act or decree, curriculum framework or curriculum guidelines) apply to all children throughout the entire ECEC phase, and thus include children under the age of three. In principle, one ministry (the ministry of education in England, Estonia, Finland, Norway, and the ministry of social welfare in Denmark) is responsible for the overall governance, regulation and funding of ECEC. However, it is possible that another official body is responsible for the curriculum; for example, the Department of Education (DfE) of the UK Government in England.

### **Adult/child ratio, group size, composition and qualifications of staff**

One of the most important requirements contained in the steering documents concerns staff. These requirements differ from country to country. For instance, *Estonia* specifies both adult/child ratios and group size, while *England*, *Finland* and *Norway* lay down only the staff/child ratio. In *Denmark*, neither the adult/child ratio nor group size is regulated nationally, and is instead left to the local councils to decide.

In all five countries, age is decisive in respect of both the above-mentioned requirements. In four countries, these apply up to the age of three, and in the other (e.g. Estonia) four. In *England*, the adult/child ratio is set at 1:3/4 for children under the age of three and 1:13 for older children, whereas in *Finland* the corresponding ratios are 1:4 and 1:7, in *Estonia*, 1:8 and 1:12 (under certain circumstances the number of children may be increased by 2 or 4), and in *Norway* 1:9 and 1:18. However, the ratios in Norway cannot be compared with those in the other countries, as Norwegian statistics do not take auxiliary staff into account.

In *Estonia*, according to the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act, pre-school child care institutions can, where possible, divide children into five groups with differing adult/child ratios:

- crèche groups for children under three years of age;
- pre-school groups for children between three and five years of age;
- pre-school groups for children between five and six years of age;
- pre-school groups for children between six and seven years of age;
- mixed groups for children between two and seven years of age.

A crèche group of children under one year of age may not contain more than five children, otherwise the limit on the crèche-group size is 14. In pre-school and mixed groups, the upper limit is 20 and 18, respectively.

The requirements for the composition and qualifications of staff regarding children up to age three are similar in all countries, except in *England*, where the staff comprise *care staff* (with upper secondary level education as the minimum qualification) and *auxiliary staff or assistants* (not qualified or with a minimum qualification at the lower secondary level). Only in the final year before starting school (pre-primary year), are classrooms to have *educational staff* with a tertiary level qualification. In the other countries, staff comprise *educational staff* with a tertiary level qualification, and *care staff or auxiliary staff/assistants* with upper secondary education (including for the younger age group). In *Norway*, no formal qualification is required of auxiliary staff/assistants (see also European Commission/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014).

In *England*, the minimum qualifications are set out in detail, separately for children aged under two and for children aged two.

For children *aged under two* (adult/child ratio 1:3)

- at least one member of staff must hold a full and relevant level 3 (upper secondary) qualification, and must be suitably experienced in working with children under two;
- at least half of all other staff must hold a full and relevant level 2 (lower secondary) qualification;
- at least half of all staff must have received training that specifically addresses the care of babies;
- where there is an under two-year-olds' room, the member of staff in charge of that room must, in the judgement of the provider, have suitable experience of working with under-tuos.

For children *aged two* (adult/child ratio 1:4)

- at least one member of staff must hold a full and relevant level 3 (upper secondary) qualification;
- at least half of all other staff must hold a full and relevant level 2 (lower secondary) qualification.

*Finland* has also set a minimum qualification for staff which applies to the whole ECEC setting, irrespective of the child's age. One-third of the entire staff must have at least a tertiary level education (pre-school teacher education, BA degree), and the remainder must have at least an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education).

Continuous professional development is a professional duty in *Finland*, and in *Estonia* it is either a professional duty or necessary for promotion. In *England*, it is a professional duty or optional, depending on the type of ECEC provided. In *Denmark* and *Norway*, continuous professional development is optional (see also European Commission/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014).

### References to age in the steering documents

Children's age - with the focus on children up to three years of age - is discussed in roughly four ways in the documents: 1) age in general 2) the developing, gradually growing child 3) the young/younger child, and 4) the precise age given in years (cf. Rutanen 2011).

#### *Age in general*

Some references to age in general (i.e. not precise ages in years) occur in every steering document. These references are typically connected with the purpose of the steering document, the general responsibilities of the authorities, the aims and values of ECEC, the tasks and functions of ECEC settings, concepts of ECEC and learning, the different learning areas and activities of the children, and the guidance and advice given to educators with regard to these activities. In particular, the Finnish and Norwegian documents have many references to age in general, whereas such references are rare in the other countries, especially in *Denmark* and *England*.

In *Denmark*, a reference to the age in general concerns the purposes of the Day-Care Facilities Act, one of which is “to create coherence and continuity between facilities [i.e. ECEC/day-care settings] and make transitions between facilities coherent and *age-appropriately* challenging for the children.”

The Preschool Child Care Institutions Act in Estonia introduces the main function of a pre-school institution [i.e. ECEC/pre-school setting] as follows: “Taking into account *the age*, sex and individual needs and characteristics of each child, the main function of a pre-school institution is to: 1) create possibilities and conditions for the formation of a healthy personality who is socially and mentally alert, self-confident and considerate of others and who values the environment; 2) maintain and strengthen the health of the child and to promote his or her emotional, moral, social, mental and physical development.” The curriculum framework in *Norway* declares that “For the kindergartens it is a primary task to provide care and closeness and to ensure that the children are met with sensitivity, empathy and interaction in accordance with *their age* and individual abilities. The kindergartens must make room for children’s practice of empathy and care in their everyday lives”, and further, “Ethical guidance and instruction provided by the kindergartens must take *the children’s age groups* and the various cultural, religious and belief-related backgrounds of their homes into account.”

Play is one of the contexts discussed in relation to age in general. The curriculum framework in *Norway* emphasises that “Play has many forms of expression, and can lead to understanding and friendship *across ages* and linguistic and cultural barriers”, while the curriculum guidelines in *Finland* state that “Very young children play in interaction with adults or older children. *At an early age*, children also start to actively explore their object environment, which prepares them to a transition to imaginary play (...) Depending on children’s *age*, playing skills, type of play and other situational factor, educators’ role varies from participation to outside observation.”

Besides play, there are also a few references to other child activities that are often linked to communication, such as exploration, as pointed out in the curriculum guidelines in *Finland*: “*At different ages*, children’s own inner worlds, interactions with other children and adults, and their immediate environment inspire them to spontaneous exploration”, and “*At an early age*, children need an educator who is regularly nearby and knows their individual way of communicating. The educator reacts empathetically when the child initiates contact, thus encouraging the child to interact.”

In the curriculum frameworks and guidelines in *England*, *Finland* and *Norway*, some references to age in general are made in relation to safety and the physical environment. The curriculum framework in *England* refers to safety by stating that “providers must ensure that their premises, including overall floor space and outdoor spaces, are fit for purpose and suitable for *the age of children* cared for and the activities provided on the premises.” In Finland, the document states that “*Children’s age* and developmental stage and the necessary arrangements in terms of time, space and equipment are important considerations when playing in in- and outdoor spaces”, and in Norway it says that “The arrangement of the physical environment must take into account that *children of different ages*, and with different levels of ability, will use the same spaces.” In *Denmark*, the steering document also refers to the environment: “The child environment shall be assessed from a child’s perspective and the children’s experience of the child environment shall be included according to *the children’s age* and maturity.”

The examples of different activities and their contexts presented above also point to the role of educators in promoting and supporting children’s learning and development. The curriculum framework in *Norway* reminds us that the educator’s work in diverse learning areas must be “appropriate to *the ages* and interests of the children, and to the composition of the group of children and other circumstances.” Moreover, the educational

content “must be communicated in a way that allows different children to participate in different ways, in line with their own interests, skills and development levels.”

On the issue of planning and implementing education in *Estonia*, the curriculum framework states that “a teacher shall take into account the level of development, *the age* and the interests of a child.” The curriculum guidelines in *Finland* also underline that “The educator community needs to have didactic knowledge about children of *different ages* and different developmental stages.”

In relation to age in general, the steering documents in both *Finland* and *Norway* define the concept of ECEC. According to curriculum guidelines in Finland, ECEC “is a whole comprising the intertwining dimensions of care, education and teaching. These dimensions receive a different emphasis according to *the age of the child* and the situation.” What this ‘whole’ regarding children under age three means, remains unanswered. The curriculum framework in Norway approaches the notion of ECEC from the viewpoint of a holistic pedagogical philosophy, using the concept of formation (*Bildung*), which “is more than learning, more than care, more than upbringing, and more than socialisation”, but at the same time includes all of them. However, the document fails to outline precisely how this formation is brought into being by educators at different ages. However, it announces later that “The care, upbringing, play and education that children experience at *a young age* shape their attitudes, values and confidence in themselves and in other people, and their motivation for learning later in life.”

The curriculum framework in *Norway* discusses environment, social competence, children’s participation and collaboration, and inclusiveness with respect to age in general: “Kindergartens shall provide pre-school children with an environment that offers both challenges appropriate to the age and level of function of the children, and protection from physical and psychological harm.” On the issue of social competence, the document states that “From *a young age*, children can show that they care about one another, solve conflicts and see each other’s perspectives. They can show consideration and care. They do this both through physical and verbal actions. They must learn to co-operate on positive forms of interaction.” Children’s participation is mentioned at several points, such as “They shall have the right to participate in accordance with *their age* and abilities”, “The degree of participation and how the right to participation is put into practice will depend on *the age* and level of function of the child”, and “Staff are responsible for ensuring that all children, regardless of their level of functioning, *age*, gender and family background, feel that they and everyone else in the group are important to the community.”

### ***The developing, gradually growing child***

In *Finland* and *Norway*, besides referring to age in general, the steering documents also refer to age in terms of the development of children over time. In *England* and *Estonia*, the documents also refer to younger children in this way. In Finland, children are described as being interested in their environment, building a picture of the world and their position within it. Young children learn situation-specific language through daily routines, but “*While growing up*, children make links between language and actions when playing, which gives a greater emphasis to their own experiences, especially play, in the learning of language.” Through the different ECEC content orientations, (i.e. mathematical, natural scientific, historical-societal, aesthetic, ethical and religious-philosophical orientations), the children “*start to acquire* tools and capabilities by means of which they *are able to gradually increase* their ability to examine, understand and experience a wide range of phenomena in the world around them.” For instance, through the natural sciences orientation they *gradually gain insight* into natural phenomena, and through aesthetic orientation the values, attitudes and views *start to develop*. Educators should be aware of the level and stage of each child’s growth and development to achieve a developmental

balance in the ECEC through different activities. Thus, the educators' role changes along with the child's growth and development.

According to the curriculum framework in *Norway*, "children gain fundamental and relevant knowledge and insights through every day events that occur in social interaction, play and structured activities. Through learning processes, children become familiar with and *increasingly understand* the physical and social world around them, at the same time as recreating and changing the cultures to which they belong." Thus, as in *Finland*, the curriculum framework in Norway emphasises that all children must be offered a rich, stimulating and challenging pedagogical environment. For individual learning areas, a developmental viewpoint is visible, as, for example, in the learning area regarding the body, movement and health: "kindergartens shall help to ensure that children (...) *continue to develop* their body control, gross motor skills and fine motor skills, sense of rhythm and motor sensitivity." Personal and social development is connected to good care, which "enhances the ability of children to develop self-confidence, confidence in others, good relationships, and to *gradually* take greater responsibility for themselves and the group."

The curriculum framework in *England* refers to the developing child by stating that "Practitioners must respond to each *child's emerging needs and interests*, guiding their development through warm, positive interaction. *As children grow older*, and *as their development allows*, it is expected that the balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults, to help children prepare for more formal learning, ready for Year 1." The curriculum framework in *Estonia* mentions that "*While the child grows and develops* the content of teaching shall, as a rule, be based on the principle - from closer to further, from single to general." In *Denmark*, the steering document does not contain clear references to the developing, growing child.

### ***References to young /youngest children***

A third way of indicating that the recommendation concerns children under age three is to refer to *younger children*. Most such references involve descriptions of, and guidelines on specific learning areas, children's activities and how they communicate, and the role of educators in supporting children's learning, development and wellbeing. However, references to younger children only occur in the steering documents of *Finland* and *Norway*, and to a lesser extent (two cases) that of *England*.

In *England*, the curriculum framework defines seven areas of learning and development, but states that "Practitioners working with *the youngest children* are expected to focus strongly on the three prime areas [communication and language; physical development; and personal, social and emotional development], which are the basis for successful learning in the other four specific areas [literacy; mathematics; understanding the world; and expressive arts and design]. The three prime areas reflect the key skills and capacities that all children need to develop and learn effectively, and become ready for school. It is expected that the balance will shift towards a more equal focus on all areas of learning *as children grow* in confidence and ability within the three prime areas."

In relation to learning areas and children's activities, the steering documents of *Finland* and *Norway* both contain descriptions of language and communication, which they also refer to in a similar manner: "Initially, *young children* express themselves holistically by means of facial expressions, gestures and movements", whereas older children also use spoken language, as mentioned in the document of Finland. Young children learn situation-specific language through daily routines, but literature is also considered an important medium for learning language: "Different types of literature belong to the world of even *the youngest children*. Literature offers children a wide range of insight into the world around them and the richness of language, and provides practice in listening skills." In Norway, the document links young children's typical way of communication with their participation: "*The youngest children* express their views through body positions, mimicry and other forms of emotional expression", and the document also emphasises that "Interaction through body language and play involving sounds is important to the way in which *young children* approach other people."

Statements about play referring to younger children occur in *Finland* and *Norway* only.

According to the curriculum framework in *Norway*, “The games that small children play are closely related to their particular sense of humour. For *the youngest children*, humour is primarily based on the body, and is developed through interaction between children. Children play on the basis of their curiosity, abilities and circumstances.” Moreover, “Play also involves the transfer of traditions of children’s culture from older to younger children.” The curriculum guidelines in *Finland* note that “*Very young children* play in interaction with adults or older children”, as mentioned in the previous section, but they also start to “actively explore their object environment, which prepares them for a transition to imaginary play.”

In addition to young children’s ways of communication and play, the curriculum framework in *Norway* describes the nature of young children from the viewpoints of physical development and health: “During *the early years of childhood*, children acquire fundamental motor skills, body control, physical characteristics, habits and insights into how they can protect their health and quality of life. Children are physically active, and they express themselves a lot through their bodies. Through physical activity, children learn about the world and about themselves.” The arrangements of indoor and outdoor spaces, as mentioned in the document must also be considered. On the question of children’s health, a unique issue is found in the curriculum framework in *England*: “Paediatric first aid training must be relevant for workers caring for *young children* and where relevant, babies.”

A specific topic relating to younger children that is brought up in the curriculum guidelines in *Finland* deals with the concept and practice of ECEC, i.e. that of care, education [upbringing] and teaching: “*The younger the child* is, the greater the extent to which interactions between the child and the educators take place in care situations. These situations also involve education, teaching and guidance, being important for both the child’s general well-being and learning (...) *the younger the child* is, the more he needs to be cared for by adults.”

### ***References to the precise age given in years***

Besides the regulations on the adult/child ratio, group size, composition and qualifications of staff that are laid down respecting children up to age three, the national steering documents also include a number of other rules and regulations that apply to the provision of ECEC to younger children at specific ages. These concern the duties or responsibilities of ECEC authorities, admission criteria for ECEC and guarantees of its availability, the premises used and various health issues, contents of curricula, language stimulation and language assessment (in Denmark), and progress checks on children’s development (in England).

#### Admission, guaranteed availability of day care

In *Denmark*, the Day-Care Facilities Act stipulates that the local council shall offer parents guaranteed day-care availability, whether in local authority or privately run day-care centres or in private homes: “Guaranteed day-care availability implies that the local council shall offer places in an age-appropriate day-care facility *to all children older than 26 weeks* and until they reach school age.” Also in *Finland*, according to the Children’s Day Care Act, *all children* have guaranteed access (so called “subjective right”) to day care, either in a day care centre or in family day care after the parental leave period. This right is unconditional until the child starts primary school. In *Estonia*, the situation is similar: “A rural municipality or city government shall *provide all children from eighteen months to seven years of age* whose residence is in the administrative territory of the given rural municipality or city and whose parents so wish with the opportunity to attend a pre-school institution

in the catchment area.” Children in *Norway* also have guaranteed access to kindergarten, as stipulated in the Kindergarten Act: “The municipality must offer a place in a kindergarten to *children under school age* domiciled in the municipality”, and, more specifically: “Children who reach *the age of one* no later than by the end of August in the year a kindergarten place has been sought, are, upon application, entitled to a place in a kindergarten from August in accordance with this act with regulations.” In England, guaranteed access to ECEC is limited: for three and four-year-olds it is 15 hours per week (free provision), and this is currently being extended to the most disadvantaged children from the age of two. An extension of the free entitlement to more hours is currently under discussion.

#### Health and safety regulations

All the EU countries have health and safety regulations pertaining to children, in ECEC, including younger ones (see European Commission/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014). However, in the steering documents analysed here, health and safety regulations that apply specifically to children up to age three are rare, and found only in the curriculum framework in *England*. Here, such regulations cover premises, catering (food and drink) and hygiene. Regarding premises, the document refers to registered provision, stipulating that providers must meet the following indoor space requirements: *children under two years* should have 3.5 m<sup>2</sup> per child, and *two year- olds* 2.5 m<sup>2</sup> per child. Moreover, “there should be a separate *baby room* for children under *the age of two*. However, providers must ensure that children in a baby room have contact with older children and are moved into the older age group when appropriate.” In the area of catering and hygiene, the regulations go into some detail: “Where children are provided with meals, snacks and drinks, they must be healthy, balanced and nutritious. (...) There must be suitable facilities for the hygienic preparation of food for children, if necessary including suitable sterilisation equipment for *babies’* food.” On hygiene, the document declares that “Providers must ensure there are suitable hygienic changing facilities for changing any *children who are in nappies* and providers should ensure that an adequate supply of clean bedding, towels, spare clothes and any other necessary items is always available.”

#### Educational contents of the curricula

All five countries specify analogous learning/content areas covering children up to school age, including younger children. These learning/content areas, although expressed in slightly different ways in each document, all refer to the following:

- personal, emotional and social domain;
- language and communication;
- physical development, movement and health;
- artistic expression, aesthetics, culture and creativity;
- understanding of the world, society and community;
- nature and natural phenomena, environment and technology;
- literacy and mathematics, logical reasoning, spaces and shapes.

*Finland* and *Norway* add ethics, religion and philosophy to these areas.

The curriculum framework in *Estonia*, the learning areas mentioned above (ethics, religion and philosophy excluded), are called ‘subject fields’ (me and the environment; language and speech; Estonian as a second language; mathematics; art; music; and movement). These subject fields are, however, presented in the section “Objectives and content of schooling and education in different subject fields and expected results of development of 6-7-year-old children”. It remains unclear if these subject areas also apply to children under age six.

In *Denmark*, the Day-Care Facilities Act states that “All day-care facilities shall prepare a written pedagogical curriculum for *children aged 0-2 years* and *children aged 3 to school age*. The pedagogical curriculum shall provide room for play, learning and development of children in day-care facilities. On preparation of the pedagogical curriculum, the composition of the group of children shall be taken into consideration.” However, no age-specific recommendations on curriculum content are presented.

In the national steering documents of *Finland*, *Denmark* and *England*, ages two and three are considered important with respect to the issue of language. The curriculum guidelines in Finland refer to the age of three as the limit for language immersion (activities arranged in a language other than Finnish or Swedish, or using an alternative pedagogy): “(...) monolingual children should not participate in total language immersion until starting from the *age of three* when their mother tongue skills are good enough.”

In the Day-Care Facilities Act in Denmark, the reference to language at age three concerns language assessment: “The local council is responsible for ensuring that *all children aged three* in the local authority are offered a language assessment test and shall offer language supporting activities and other assistance as required.” As this regulation also applies to children who are not in day-care, the act stipulates further: “In connection with the language assessment service to all families with *children aged three*, the local council shall make families that do not use day-care facilities aware of the possibility of having a place in a day-care facility.”

As part of a more comprehensive progress check, assessment of language is also a subject in the curriculum framework in *England*. The document states: “When a child is *aged between two and three*, practitioners must review their progress, and provide parents and/or carers with a short written summary of their child’s development in the prime areas [i.e. communication and language; physical development; and personal, social and emotional development].” This assessment also requires collaboration between educators and parents: “Practitioners must discuss with parents and/or carers how the summary of development can be used to support learning at home. Practitioners must agree with parents and/or carers when will be the most useful point to provide a summary.”

### **An example: “Early years outcomes” and “Development matters” in England**

The national steering documents of the five countries offer basic grounds, guidance, recommendation, advice and even strict regulations to authorities on how to arrange ECEC for younger children in different settings (central, local, individual). For instance, the documents (with the exception of England) refer to the task or responsibility of the authorities and individual providers to write local or unit-specific curricula/plans to guide pedagogical practice in ECEC settings. Educators in *England* are provided with two exceptionally distinct non-statutory guides, stipulated in the national curriculum framework, to help them understand and evaluate child development and to implement the statutory requirements regarding the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). These two documents, which strongly focus on the assessment of children’s progress in the areas of learning and development, are briefly introduced below as an example of the means by which learning contents introduced in a curriculum framework are extended, deepened and clarified in pedagogical practice in specific groups for children from birth to three years.

“*Early years outcomes*” is a guide for practitioners and inspectors to help inform their understanding of child development through the early years. The EYFS requires early years practitioners *to review children’s progress and share a summary with parents* at two points: 1) between the ages of 24 and 36 months via a progress check, and 2) at the end of reception via the EYFS profile. Keeping these requirements in mind, the guide also prepares educators to carry out the task.

The guide is directed to child-minders, nurseries and others, such as the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). It can be used "as a guide to making best-fit judgments about whether a child is showing typical development for their age, may be at risk of delay or is ahead for their age."

The themes dealt with in the guide are the seven areas of learning and development that, according to the national curriculum framework, must shape educational programmes in early years settings: communication and language; physical development; personal, social and emotional development; literacy; mathematics; understanding the world; and expressive arts and design.

The guide contains tables that set out what the practitioner should observe in a child, if they are developing typically for their age. The tables are presented in six overlapping age groups, the youngest being from birth to 11 months, and the oldest 40 to 60+ months.

Regarding, for example, the theme 'Making relationships' in the area of Personal, social and emotional development in the age group 16 to 26 months, the guide states that "the child plays alongside others; uses a familiar adult as a secure base from which to explore independently in new environments, e.g. ventures away to play and interacts with others, but returns for a cuddle or reassurance if becomes anxious; plays cooperatively with a familiar adult, e.g. rolling a ball back and forth." Overlapping this, in the age group 22 to 36 months, the child "is interested in other's play and starting to join in" and "seeks out others to share experiences."

Thus, in the guide the behaviour of children is described in detail, with illuminative examples. The guide also introduces general learning goals for different areas of learning and development. In the area of Personal, social and emotional development, the goal is stated as follows: "Children play co-operatively, taking turns with others. They take account of one another's ideas about how to organise their activity. They show sensitivity to others' needs and feelings, and form positive relationships with adults and other children." Descriptions such as the above indicate what children should achieve before they start year one in primary school.

*"Development matters"*, the non-statutory guidance material, sets out to help practitioners support children's learning and development by closely matching what they provide with the child's existing needs. The document is linked to "Early years outcomes", and deals with the same seven areas of learning and development. The guide emphasises that three areas (Personal, social and emotional development; Communication and language; and Physical development) are prime areas that are "fundamental, work together, and move to support development in the other four areas."

In regards to, for example, the theme 'Making relationships' in the area of Personal, social and emotional development at the age of 16 to 26 months, the practitioner is advised to "Involve all children in welcoming and caring for one another", "give your full attention when young children look to you for a response", "enable children to explore by providing a secure base for them" and "help young children to understand the feelings of others by labelling emotions such as sadness or happiness." Further, at the age of 22 to 36 months he or she is for example, advised to "Ensure that children have opportunities to join in", "Help them to recognise and understand the rules for being together with others, such as waiting for a turn."

In addition to giving advice on how to address the young children in ECEC, advice is also given on what educators should do to enable developmentally appropriate environments. In the age group of 16 to 26 months, regarding 'Making relationships', the practitioners should, for example "Make time for children to be with their key person, individually and in their key group", "Ensure there are opportunities for the child to play alongside others and play cooperative games with a familiar adult", and "Provide matching items to encourage adult and child to mimic each other in a cooperative game, e.g. two identical musical instruments." In the age group 22 to 36 months, he or she should, e.g. "Create areas in which children can sit and chat with friends, such as a snug

den and cosy spaces” and “Provide resources that promote co-operation between two children such as a big ball to roll or throw to each other.”

To summarise, the adult should be acquainted with the typical development, skills and competences of the child in each of the seven learning areas presented in the guiding material. Further, the adult should observe what each unique child is learning, and based on these observations, support each child in accordance to the examples, suggestions and advice given in the material. It is stated that every child is individual in their learning, and that children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships. Positive relationships are conceived as educational activities, and connected to expectations of what the adult should do and what kind of environment he or she should provide in order to enhance the child’s learning. Positive relationships contribute to the child’s learning and development, which in turn will be assessed and finally documented (in the prime areas) in the form of a written summary.

### **Concluding remarks**

So, what knowledge of young children can be gained through the analysis of the five national steering documents? In short, the documents build a picture of children whose age should be taken into account in every respect in ECEC, together with their developmental stage, individual needs, interests, abilities, gender and family background. Their health and safety must be ensured indoors and outdoors, in care situations and various activities. Younger children learn in close interaction and relationship with their educators. They communicate holistically, by their body positions, facial expressions, gestures and movements. They are eager to explore their surroundings, and they express themselves in play and learn context specifically through daily routines.

Educators must have knowledge and understanding of children’s development in order to enhance children’s learning by teaching, upbringing and care, and by so doing contribute to their wellbeing. The role of the educator changes along with the child’s growth and development. The younger the children are, the more caring interactions they need. Children are seen as social actors from the very beginning, but as they develop and grow, they gradually begin to need the educator less and orient more and more towards joint activities with their peers. Thus, along with age, their physical and social worlds expand with the help of experienced and competent educators.

The total number of pages in the five national steering documents is 156. The total length of the excerpts referring explicitly to children up to three years of age, however short or long they were, hardly extends to ten pages. Thus, while children under-three are rarely addressed specifically in the steering documents analysed here, they all cover the ages from birth to school age, and many of the issues that concern older children concern younger children as well. All children need care, appropriate guidance and highly qualified educators, who are warm, supportive and sensitive. They need the possibilities to experience a variety of activities while it also has to be ensured that time and space is available for when young children need to relax or nap. However, the question arises as to what issues pertaining to younger children in ECEC should be considered central in the curricula, and even elaborated on.

For instance, three important themes, partly linked to each other, are poorly explicated in the documents, particularly regarding children up to age three: the very beginning of the child’s attendance in ECEC, transitions within the same setting and transitions from one setting to another, and the role of parents in ECEC. Some references are, however, made to these issues, although not age specifically. These references dictate that key persons are to be assigned to children when they start attending a setting (e.g. England), that staff have a duty to employ act in partnership with parents regarding, for example, the child’s individual ECEC plan at the start of the care relationship (e.g. Finland), and that a health assessment must be made before the child starts attending kindergarten (e.g. Norway). References to other transitions are conspicuously absent; it is only in *England* that “providers must ensure that children in a baby room (...) are moved into the older age group when appropriate.”

On the role of parents, co-operation between educators and parents is also required in regard to language assessment (e.g. Denmark) and progress checks (e.g. England).

Research on children's development unambiguously demonstrates that the first three years are the most decisive for a child's growth, learning and wellbeing. Yet, unlike in the countries analysed in this review, in most European countries the minimum qualifications required of staff are higher for those educating older children, i.e. children from the age of three to school age. Thus, the educators of children up to age three often have no wide-ranging knowledge of young children's development, or of the factors underlying how they act and learn. Accordingly, educators are unsure of how to implement their pedagogical work with these children. The existing national steering documents do not help educators in this respect, which entails the need for a stronger focus on younger children in the ECEC curricula. For instance, most of the national documents analysed here instruct local authorities or individual settings to develop local and/or unit-specific curricula without providing the necessary tools to do so. Offering elementary research-based guidance in the national document would help them to accomplish this task.

The nature and spirit of the documents vary. Three of them seem to be written in a rather authoritative and formal manner (e.g. Denmark, England, Estonia), whereas those in *Finland* and *Norway* are more informal in approach and written in a narrative style. The document used in Norway has a strong emphasis on children's rights, agency and participation, which powerfully highlights the current view of child as an active subject. In general, all the steering documents examined here reflect developmental psychological approaches in education, children's learning and childhood in general. Multi-disciplinary viewpoints are scarce and utilizing knowledge based on neurosciences is noticeably absent.

This review offers one approach to analysing, comparing and understanding the contents of written ECEC curricula in five European countries. It is clear that the review has several shortcomings. First, it was only possible to include the national curriculum frameworks, guidelines and legislation on ECEC in the descriptions, which results in a restricted, possibly even unfair picture, of the state of affairs in these countries. In each country, as in *England*, additional manuals and instruction booklets are available to guide educational practices.

Second, alongside ECEC legislation (acts and decrees) and curricula, issues related to the ECEC of younger children may also be regulated by other acts and decrees, for example those on social services or child protection. Materials of this kind could not be taken into account here.

Third, although the review aims to present a faithful description of the documents by using direct citations as much as possible, it cannot fully avoid subjective interpretations. For instance, the steering documents often use the term "young children", which might refer to all the children in ECEC, say, up to age five or six, or only to children up to age three. Thus, interpretations of what might be meant are based on the context in which the term is used, and thus open to misunderstanding.

All in all, in light of the limitations and shortcomings presented above, this review can only act as a supplement to the template and description of the eleven curricula on ECEC presented in this report. However, this review could also be taken as a pilot for more detailed and comprehensive curricula analyses in the future.

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## **KEY CONCEPTS/TERMINOLOGY**

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**Accreditation of ECEC settings** is a process of assessing whether settings intending to provide ECEC comply with the regulations in force, i.e. a certain set of rules and minimum standards (Eurydice, 2014).

**Community engagement:** refers to the connections between ECEC providers and the community, including people or institutions in the neighbourhood, or other providers of services for ECEC (Taguma et al, 2012).

**Curriculum:** A national ECEC curriculum describes the aspirations of a country for services that will enhance children's development and support families and communities. An 'implemented' ECEC curriculum (which includes those aspects which are implicit rather than explicit) covers developmental care, formative interactions, children's learning experiences and supportive assessment. This is often set out in formal documentation, which describes the ECEC provision that advances all young children's personal and social development, their learning and prepares them for life and citizenship in their society (European Commission Working Group, 2014).

**Curriculum framework:** A set of steering documents contributes to establishing a basic curriculum framework in which ECEC staff are required to develop their practice. A curriculum framework has recently been defined as 'a set of values, principles, guidelines or standards which guides the objectives, content and pedagogical approach to children's care and learning' (European Commission Working Group, 2014, 69). It can be a national, regional or local arrangement.

**Steering documents:** all forms of documents which intend to steer or guide the provision of ECEC. Steering documents can contain regulations (laws, rules or orders prescribed by public authorities to govern settings) or or guidelines and recommendations (official documents which advocate particular procedures, methods or strategies but are not mandatory). They can include any or all of the following educational guidelines: learning content, objectives and outcomes, attainment targets as well as guidelines on pedagogical approaches, learning activities, and assessment methods. Steering documents may be incorporated into legislation in a number of ways, for example as part of child care and education acts or laws, as care and education plans and/or standards, or published as a reference framework (see also Eurydice, 2014).

**Early childhood education and care (ECEC):** provision for children from birth through to primary education that falls within a national regulatory framework, i.e. it has to comply with a set of rules, minimum standards and/or undergo accreditation procedures (Eurydice, 2014).

**ECEC setting:** a centre- or home-based education and care provider for children from birth through to primary education that falls within a national regulatory framework, i.e. it has to comply with a set of rules, minimum standards and/or undergo accreditation procedures. It includes centre- and home-based care, privately and publicly funded provision, and pre-school and pre-primary provision. Where we present a particular country in more detail (for example in the text boxes), we kept the terminology (e.g. pre-school centre) used in that country.

**Home-based ECEC setting/provision:** publicly regulated provision of ECEC delivered in a provider's home, mostly by individual childminders.

**Centre-based ECEC setting/provision:** publicly regulated provision of ECEC delivered outside the home.

**ECEC staff or ECEC/early years practitioners:** those who work in ECEC settings and have regular, direct contact with children. Their duties involve education and care. Often, within the same country, a number of different types of early years practitioners are involved with the everyday care and education of children. In addition, staff performing similar roles may also have different types of job titles.

Usually a few staff members work in a team with a group of children. Often, different team members have different levels of training and perform different roles. We refer to ECEC staff/practitioners, including education staff (teachers/educators who often have a higher level of education - a tertiary qualification in education) and care staff with lower level training (upper secondary), as well as assistants (who may not have any qualification in early years). We include staff in centre-based ECEC settings as well as those in home-based ECEC settings (often referred to as childminders) (see also Eurydice, 2014). Where we present a particular country in more detail (for example in the text boxes), we kept the terminology (e.g. educator, teacher) used in that country.

**ECEC Quality:** structural or process aspects of ECEC 'delivery' that lead to the achievement of curricular goals.

**External evaluation of ECEC settings:** A quality control process carried out by individuals or teams from outside an educational/care setting which seeks to evaluate and monitor the performance of settings, report on the quality of provision and suggest ways to improve practice (Eurydice, 2014).

**Monitoring:** In an ECEC context monitoring refers to the continuous and systematic collection of quantitative and qualitative data which supports a regular review of the quality of the ECEC system. It is based on pre-agreed quality standards, benchmarks or indicators which are established and modified through use settings (European Commission working group, 2014).

**Parent partnerships:** refer to the engagement that parents have with providers of care and education for their children (Taguma et al, 2012).

**Pedagogy:** The term 'pedagogy' has often been defined quite broadly in continental Europe. At times, this results in accounts where the use of the terms pedagogy and curriculum appear indistinguishable. However, pedagogy can also be defined and understood as analytically distinct and complementary to the term curriculum. Whereas curriculum may be understood as denoting all of the knowledge, skills and values that children are ment to learn in educational establishments, pedagogy can be defined as the practice (or the art, the science or the craft) of teaching (see also Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, & Bell, 2002). Here the term pedagogy

refers to all intentional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place, including interactive processes between educators and learners, as well as the provision of a rich learning environment.

**Split ECEC system:** provision is delivered in separate settings for younger and older children (usually for under and over 3 years of age). An official national steering document is normally only established for older children. The requirements for staff qualifications also usually differ depending on the type of provision. Moreover, conditions of access may vary greatly; with a legal entitlement usually applying to older children and not to younger children (see Eurydice, 2014).

**Workforce:** The workforce refers to all staff members working directly with children in any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to primary school age. The workforce includes leaders and managers, and other professionals working in ECEC settings (European Commission working group, 2014).

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**TEMPLATE FOR COMPARISON: PRESENTATION OF TWO COUNTRIES (NORWAY, ENGLAND)**

**1: What kind of Document is the curriculum in each country?**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Type of Curriculum</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>ECEC System</u>	<u>Name of document (Year)</u>	<u>Responsible body</u>	<u>Length</u>
<b>Norway</b>	Childcare and Education Act	(0)1-5	Centre-based early care and education  <i>Barnehage</i>	Act no. 64 of June 2005 relating to Kindergartens (the Kindergarten Act)	Ministry  The Ministry of Education and Research	11p (in English)
	National Curriculum Framework	(0)1-5	Centre-based early care and education  <i>Barnehage</i>	Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2005)  <i>Rammeplan for barnehagens innhold og oppgaver</i>	Ministry  The Ministry of Education and Research	61p (or 34p in English)

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Requirement to develop steering documents locally or choose particular curricular programs?</u>	<u>National steering document under development?</u>
<b>Norway</b>	Childcare and Education Act+ National Curriculum Framework  (0) 1-5  Centre-based early care and education	'Kindergartens shall draw up and annual plan. Individual kindergartens should decide whether plans should also be drawn for shorter periods. Individual kindergartens should decide whether plans should also be drawn up for shorter periods. Kindergartens may also require a long-term plan, in order to ensure progression and continuity in the learning and experiences of children throughout their stay at the kindergarten. ... The kindergarten's plans should be seen in the context of municipal planning of the kindergarten sector and of children's home backgrounds.' (Framework Plan, 44f)	

<u>Country</u>	<u>Type of Curriculum</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>ECEC System</u>	<u>Name of document (Year)</u>	<u>Responsible body</u>	<u>Length</u>
<b>England</b>	Childcare and Education Act	0-5	Centre-based and home-based early care and education	Childcare Act (2006)		79p
	National Curriculum Framework	0-5	Centre-based and home-based early care and education  Centre-based pre-primary care and education ( <i>compulsory if child turns 5 between September and March</i> )	Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (2012)	Ministry  Department for Education	29p

<u>Country</u>	<u>Type of Curriculum</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>ECEC System</u>	<u>Requirement to develop steering documents locally or choose particular curricular programs?</u>	<u>National steering document under development?</u>
<b>England</b>	Childcare and Education Act + National Curriculum Framework	0-5	Centre-based and home-based early care and education  Centre-based pre-primary care and education ( <i>compulsory if child turns 5 before April</i> )	No. There are two national non-statutory guidance materials available for practitioners and inspectors: - to help inform understanding of child development throughout the years and - to support practitioners in implementing the statutory requirements of the EYFS  1) Early Years Outcomes (2013): Department for Education, 34p  2) Development Matters in the Foundation Stage (2012):	No.

				early Education, 47p	
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**2: Goals and Content*****What are the broad ECEC goals with regards to the children (their development and learning) and provision of experiences?***

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering document</u>	<u>Broad ECEC goals referring to children's development, learning and experience (immediate and/or long term)</u>
<b>Norway</b>	<p>Childcare and Education Act + national Curriculum Framework</p> <p>(0)1-5</p> <p>Centre-based early care and education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Childhood is a phase of intrinsic value</li> <li>- Kindergartens shall contribute to wellbeing and joy in play and learning</li> <li>- <b>No demands on outputs or goals</b> to be attained for children; 'input-based'.</li> </ul> <p>While no specific skills or outputs are defined, the <b>aims relating to kindergarten provision of care/education are specified. They relate to children's experiences and their learning in a broad sense.</b></p> <p><u>Act 64 of June 2005/Kindergarten Act</u>, p1: Section 1 – Purpose: Kindergartens shall ....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- safeguard children's need for care and play</li> <li>- promote learning and formation as a basis for an all-round development</li> <li>- promote learning and formation as a basis for a well-rounded development</li> <li>- promote basic values such as community spirit, care and shared responsibilities</li> <li>- teach the children the values that are based on a Christian and humanist heritage and tradition</li> <li>- prepare the children for life-long learning and active participation in a democratic society</li> </ul> <p>Section 2 Content of kindergartens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- help to ensure that all children experience joy and ability to cope in a social and cultural community</li> <li>- nurture children's curiosity, creativity and desire to learn</li> <li>- impart values and culture;</li> <li>- have a health-promoting and preventative function</li> <li>- contribute to even out social inequalities</li> <li>- The children shall be able to develop their creative zest, sense of wonder and need to investigate. They shall learn to take care of themselves, each other and nature. The children shall develop basic knowledge and skills.</li> </ul> <p><u>Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens:</u> From the 'Mission statement</p> <p>The Framework Plan deepens out the Act's sections on purpose and content. Emphasis on developing attitudes of compassion and</p>

		<p>solidarity with others; developing the ability to continue to explore and be curious about their own surroundings and to see themselves as a valuable member of a larger fellowship. Also emphasis on collaboration with the children's homes.</p> <p>Section: 'Learning'</p>
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<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Broad ECEC goals referring to children's development, learning and experience (immediate and/or long term)</u>
<b>England</b>	<p>National Curriculum Framework</p> <p>0-5</p> <p>Centre-based and home-based early care and education</p>	<p>The EYFS curriculum aims to promote child health, safety, development and learning, as well as school readiness and the right foundation for their future progress through school and life (EYFS Framework, 2).</p> <p>Emphasis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- promote all-round learning and development of all children;</li> <li>- promote school readiness;</li> <li>- promote a place which enables children to fulfil their potentials.</li> </ul> <p>In addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- message that a safe, secure, happy childhood = important in its own right;</li> <li>- aim to provide a place for children to enjoy learning;</li> <li>- aim to provide a place for children to grow in confidence.</li> <li>- Keeping children healthy, safe and secure.</li> </ul>

**Which domains of children’s development and learning or experience are addressed? Is there an emphasis on certain domains, for certain age groups? Are the domains of experience linked to areas of development and learning?**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering documents</u>	<u>Domains of children’s development/learning and/or experience?</u> <u>Emphasis on certain domains?</u>
<b>England</b>	<p>National Curriculum Framework</p> <p>Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (2012)</p> <p>0-5</p> <p>Centre-based and home-based early care and education</p>	<p><b>Seven Areas of Learning and Development:</b></p> <p>Three <i>prime</i> areas- crucial for igniting children’s curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communication and language;</li> <li>• physical development;</li> <li>• personal, social and emotional development</li> </ul> <p>Four <i>specific</i> areas, through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• literacy;</li> <li>• mathematics;</li> <li>• understanding the world</li> <li>• and expressive arts and design</li> </ul> <p>Areas of learning are also listed as areas of experience in which programmes/practitioners have to offer activities.</p> <p>‘Educational programmes must involve the following activities and experiences for children’:</p> <p>E.g.</p> <p>Communication and Language development involves giving children opportunities to experience a rich environment, ...</p> <p>Physical development involves providing opportunities for young children to be active and interactive, ...</p> <p>Personal, social and emotional development involves helping children to develop a positive sense of themselves, and others, ...</p> <p>Literacy development involves encouraging children to link sounds and letters and to begin to read and write ....</p>

***Are the domains of learning/development/experience linked to guidelines for the provision of certain activities carried out by the practitioner?***

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Guidelines for the provision of certain activities which are linked to the areas of experience/learning/development?</u>
<b>Norway</b>	<p>Childcare and Education Act + National Curriculum Framework</p> <p>Act no. 64 of June 2005 relating to Kindergartens (the Kindergarten Act) (2005)</p> <p>Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2005)</p> <p>(0)1-5</p> <p>Centre-based early care and education</p> <p><i>Barnehave</i></p>	<p>View that broader developmental goals can be realised through activities which refer to the content of each learning area. For each area of development a range of goals referring to more specific skills/competencies are specified (see next section). Possibly the list of those more specific skills/competencies can be read as a list of activity areas.</p> <p>In addition, for each area of learning, a list has been put together to specify how staff has to work towards the stated developmental goals. This lists include references to the provision of activities, e.g. from:</p> <p>‘Communication and Language’: staff must facilitate meaningful experiences, and create time and space for the use of non-verbal and verbal language in everyday activities, play and more formal situations; allow children to encounter symbols such as letters and numbers in everyday situations, and support children's initiative in terms of counting, sorting, reading, playing at writing and dictating texts;</p> <p>‘Art, culture and creativity’: staff must motivate children to express themselves, and allow them to find their own models of expression; ensure that children experience local, national and international artistic and cultural expressions, and that they get possibilities to meet artists.</p>

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Guidelines for the provision of certain activities which are linked to the areas of experience/learning/development?</u>
<b>England</b>	<p>National Curriculum Framework Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage</p>	<p>Areas of learning are also listed as areas of experience in which programmes/practitioners have to offer activities. The description of the areas of experience or the activities however relies mainly on a more detailed specification of sub-sets of learning areas/areas of development within each content area.</p> <p>‘Educational programmes must involve the following activities and experiences for children.’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Communication and language</b> development involves giving children opportunities to experience a rich language environment; to</li> </ul>

	<p>(EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (2012) 0-5 Centre-based and home-based early care and education Centre-based pre-primary care and education <i>(compulsory if child turns 5 between September and March)</i></p>	<p>develop their confidence and skills in expressing themselves; and to speak and listen in a range of situations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Physical development</b> involves providing opportunities for young children to be active and interactive; and to develop their co-ordination, control, and movement. Children must also be helped to understand the importance of physical activity, and to make healthy choices in relation to food.</li> <li>• <b>Personal, social and emotional development</b> involves helping children to develop a positive sense of themselves, and others; to form positive relationships and develop respect for others; to develop social skills and learn how to manage their feelings; to understand appropriate behaviour in groups; and to have confidence in their own abilities.</li> <li>• <b>Literacy</b> development involves encouraging children to link sounds and letters and to begin to read and write. Children must be given access to a wide range of reading materials (books, poems, and other written materials) to ignite their interest.</li> <li>• <b>Mathematics</b> involves providing children with opportunities to develop and improve their skills in counting, understanding and using numbers, calculating simple addition and subtraction problems; and to describe shapes, spaces, and measures.</li> <li>• <b>Understanding the world</b> involves guiding children to make sense of their physical world and their community through opportunities to explore, observe and find out about people, places, technology and the environment.</li> <li>• <b>Expressive arts and design</b> involves enabling children to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials, as well as providing opportunities and encouragement for sharing their thoughts, ideas and feelings through a variety of activities in art, music, movement, dance, role-play, and design and technology.</li> </ul>
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***In terms of child learning, are key objectives for each area of development/experience stated? Are goals mentioned which relate to the development of more specific skills? Are those skills complex competencies, or narrow skills?***

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Key objectives areas of children's development/learning/experience mentioned? Goals which relate to the development of more specific skills (complex competencies or narrow skills?)</u>
<b>Norway</b>	<p>National Curriculum Framework (0)1-5 Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2006)  Centre-based early care</p>	<p>For each area of development a range of goals referring to more specific skills/competencies are specified. Kindergartens are required to ensure development of those skills/competencies. Importantly, lists within each area of development do not define specific outcomes which have to be reached, but refer to more complex competencies. E.g. from two learning areas: <b>(1) 'Communication, language and text':</b> <u>Through work on communications, language and texts, kindergartens shall help to ensure that children</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listen, observe and respond to mutual interaction with children and adults</li> <li>• develop their understanding of concepts, and use a varied vocabulary</li> <li>• use their language to express feelings, wishes and experiences, to solve conflicts and to create positive relationships through</li> </ul>

	<p>and education</p> <p><i>Barnehage</i></p>	<p>play and other social interaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop a positive relationship with texts and pictures as sources of aesthetic pleasure, knowledge and conversations, and as inspiration for fantasies and creativity</li> <li>• listen to sounds and rhythms in the language and become familiar with symbols such as numbers and letters</li> <li>• become familiar with books, songs, pictures, the media, etc.</li> </ul> <p><u>In order to work towards these goals, staff must</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be conscious of their position as role models for how to listen and respond constructively, and how to use body language, speech and text</li> <li>• promote trust between children, and between children and adults, so that children enjoy communicating and feel confident using different types of language and texts in their everyday lives</li> <li>• facilitate meaningful experiences, and create time and space for the use of non-verbal and verbal language in everyday activities, play and in more formal situations</li> <li>• create an environment that stimulates all children to use language well, and that encourages listening, conversation and play involving sounds, rhymes, rhythms and fantasies with the aid of language and song</li> <li>• understand the importance of children's mother tongues</li> <li>• encourage children with bi- and multilingual backgrounds to use their languages, whilst helping them to gain experiences that build up their conceptual understanding and vocabulary in Norwegian</li> <li>• support children who have various communication difficulties, who do not use language much or who are late developers in terms of language</li> <li>• allow children to encounter symbols such as letters and numbers in everyday situations, and support children's initiative in terms of counting, sorting, reading, playing at writing and dictating texts</li> <li>• create an environment in which children and adults every day experience excitement and joy through reading aloud, telling stories, singing and conversation, and being conscious of the ethical, aesthetic and cultural values that they are communicating.</li> </ul> <p><b>(2) 'Body, movement and health':</b></p> <p><u>Through work on the body, movement and health, kindergartens shall help to ensure that children</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop a positive self-image through physical achievements</li> <li>• have positive experiences of varied and all-round movements and challenges</li> <li>• continue to develop their body control, gross motor skills and fine motor skills, sense of rhythm and motor sensitivity</li> <li>• have positive experiences of outdoor activities and being outdoors in different seasons</li> <li>• develop a love of using nature for exploration and physical challenges, and gain an understanding of how one can use the environment and countryside whilst also looking after it</li> <li>• develop an understanding and respect for their own and other people's bodies, and for the fact that everyone is different</li> </ul>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learn about the human body and begin to understand the importance of good habits and healthy eating.</li> </ul> <p>In order to work towards these goals, staff must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organise everyday activities in such a way that there is a planned alternation between periods of rest, activity and mealtimes, to help children to develop good habits, attitudes and knowledge regarding diet, hygiene, activity and rest</li> <li>• ensure good planning, flexible preparation and flexible use of the physical environment, as well as assessing how the local neighbourhood can supplement the kindergarten's premises at different times of year</li> <li>• ensure that the body and movement culture at the kindergarten reflects the diversity of the children's cultural backgrounds, and take into account cultural differences in terms of attitudes towards the body</li> <li>• facilitate and provide inspiration for safe and challenging physical games and activities for everyone, regardless of gender and physical, psychological and social circumstances</li> <li>• understand and provide encouragement for children's sensory motor and physical games, to inspire all children to seek out physical challenges and to try out their physical potential</li> <li>• support children's ideas for games, and suggest play and games in which the children are physically active and experience joy through a sense of achievement and community</li> <li>• facilitate physical play and activity that breaks with traditional gender roles, allowing girls and boys to participate in all forms of activity on an equal footing</li> <li>• look after the health and safety of children, and be capable of giving first aid.</li> </ul>
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<i>Country</i>	<i>Steering Document</i>	<i>Key objectives areas of children's development/learning/experience mentioned? Goals which relate to the development of more specific skills (complex competencies or narrow skills?)</i>
<b>England</b>	National Curriculum Framework Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (2012) 0-5 Centre-based and home-based early care and	<p>Areas of learning are also listed as areas of experience in which programmes/practitioners have to offer activities. The description of the areas of experience or the activities however relies mainly on a more detailed specification of sub-sets of learning areas/areas of development within each content area.</p> <p>'Educational programmes must involve the following activities and experiences for children.'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Communication and language</b> development involves giving children opportunities to experience a rich language environment; to develop their confidence and skills in expressing themselves; and to speak and listen in a range of situations.</li> <li>• <b>Physical development</b> involves providing opportunities for young children to be active and interactive; and to develop their co-ordination, control, and movement. Children must also be helped to understand the importance of physical activity, and to make healthy choices in relation to food.</li> <li>• <b>Personal, social and emotional development</b> involves helping children to develop a positive sense of themselves, and others; to form positive relationships and develop respect for others; to develop social skills and learn how to manage their feelings; to</li> </ul>

	<p>education Centre-based pre-primary care and education (<i>compulsory if child turns 5 between September and March</i>)</p>	<p>understand appropriate behaviour in groups; and to have confidence in their own abilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Literacy</b> development involves encouraging children to link sounds and letters and to begin to read and write. Children must be given access to a wide range of reading materials (books, poems, and other written materials) to ignite their interest.</li> <li>• <b>Mathematics</b> involves providing children with opportunities to develop and improve their skills in counting, understanding and using numbers, calculating simple addition and subtraction problems; and to describe shapes, spaces, and measures.</li> <li>• <b>Understanding the world</b> involves guiding children to make sense of their physical world and their community through opportunities to explore, observe and find out about people, places, technology and the environment.</li> <li>• <b>Expressive arts and design</b> involves enabling children to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials, as well as providing opportunities and encouragement for sharing their thoughts, ideas and feelings through a variety of activities in art, music, movement, dance, role-play, and design and technology.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, the EYFS defines learning goals for each area of learning and development (17 learning goals in total). These define the specific skills and competencies, and the knowledge and understanding that all young children should have gained by the end of the Reception year.</p> <p><b>The prime areas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Communication and language</i></b></li> </ul> <p><b>Listening and attention:</b> children listen attentively in a range of situations. They listen to stories, accurately anticipating key events and respond to what they hear with relevant comments, questions or actions. They give their attention to what others say and respond appropriately, while engaged in another activity.</p> <p><b>Understanding:</b> children follow instructions involving several ideas or actions. They answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions about their experiences and in response to stories or events.</p> <p><b>Speaking:</b> children express themselves effectively, showing awareness of listeners’ needs. They use past, present and future forms accurately when talking about events that have happened or are to happen in the future. They develop their own narratives and explanations by connecting ideas or events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Physical development</i></b></li> </ul> <p><b>Moving and handling:</b> children show good control and co-ordination in large and small movements. They move confidently in a range of ways, safely negotiating space. They handle equipment and tools effectively, including pencils for writing.</p> <p><b>Health and self-care:</b> children know the importance for good health of physical exercise, and a healthy diet, and talk about ways to keep healthy and safe. They manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs successfully, including dressing and going to the toilet independently.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Personal, social and emotional development</i></b></li> </ul> <p><b>Self-confidence and self-awareness:</b> children are confident to try new activities, and say why they like some activities more than others. They are confident to speak in a familiar group, will talk about their ideas, and will choose the resources they need for their chosen activities. They say when they do or don’t need help.</p> <p><b>Managing feelings and behaviour:</b> children talk about how they and others show feelings, talk about their own and others’</p>
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		<p>behaviour, and its consequences, and know that some behaviour is unacceptable. They work as part of a group or class, and understand and follow the rules. They adjust their behaviour to different situations, and take changes of routine in their stride.</p> <p><b>Making relationships:</b> children play co-operatively, taking turns with others. They take account of one another's ideas about how to organise their activity. They show sensitivity to others' needs and feelings, and form positive relationships with adults and other children.</p> <p><b>The specific areas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Literacy</i></b></li> </ul> <p><b>Reading:</b> children read and understand simple sentences. They use phonic knowledge to decode regular words and read them aloud accurately. They also read some common irregular words. They demonstrate <b>Writing:</b> children use their phonic knowledge to write words in ways which match their spoken sounds. They also write some irregular common words. They write simple sentences which can be read by themselves and others. Some words are spelt correctly and others are phonetically plausible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Mathematics</i></b></li> </ul> <p><b>Numbers:</b> children count reliably with numbers from 1 to 20, place them in order and say which number is one more or one less than a given number. Using quantities and objects, they add and subtract two single-digit numbers and count on or back to find the answer. They solve problems, including doubling, halving and sharing.</p> <p><b>Shape, space and measures:</b> children use everyday language to talk about size, weight, capacity, position, distance, time and money to compare quantities and objects and to solve problems. They recognise, create and describe patterns. They explore characteristics of everyday objects and shapes and use mathematical language to describe them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Understanding the world</i></b></li> </ul> <p><b>People and communities:</b> children talk about past and present events in their own lives and in the lives of family members. They know that other children don't always enjoy the same things, and are sensitive to this. They know about similarities and differences between themselves and others, and among families, communities and traditions.</p> <p><b>The world:</b> children know about similarities and differences in relation to places, objects, materials and living things. They talk about the features of their own immediate environment and how environments might vary from one another. They make observations of animals and plants and explain why some things occur, and talk about changes.</p> <p><b>Technology:</b> children recognise that a range of technology is used in places such as homes and schools. They select and use technology for particular purposes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Expressive arts and design</i></b></li> </ul> <p><b>Exploring and using media and materials:</b> children sing songs, make music and dance, and experiment with ways of changing them. They safely use and explore a variety of materials, tools and techniques, experimenting with colour, design, texture, form and function.</p> <p><b>Being imaginative:</b> children use what they have learnt about media and materials in original ways, thinking about uses and purposes. They represent their own ideas, thoughts and feelings through design and technology, art, music, dance, role-play and stories.</p>
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### 3: Theoretical models, pedagogical approaches

**Which theoretical models, or pedagogical approaches underlie early years education and care curricula across Europe?  
Are they made explicit?**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Views of the children and their learning</u>	<u>Theoretical models</u>	<u>Specific curricular/ pedagogical approaches</u>
<b>Norway</b>	National Curriculum Framework Act no. 64 of June 2005 relating to Kindergartens (2005)  (0)1-5 Centre-based early care and education  <i>Barnehage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Holistic, none split approach</li> <li>▪ Unique child</li> <li>▪ Active child</li> <li>▪ Children's right to express their views on the day-to-day activities</li> <li>▪ Learning in a holistic way</li> <li>▪ -'There is no education without care, and no care without education'</li> <li>▪ Learning is shaped by context and community</li> <li>▪ Learning through play and interaction with other children and with competent staff</li> <li>▪ Learning as a life-long process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Political document</li> <li>▪ Eclectic, implicitly influenced by a number of pedagogical theories:</li> <li>▪ Froebel</li> <li>▪ Bruner</li> <li>▪ Freire</li> <li>▪ Montessori</li> <li>▪ and psychological theories:</li> <li>▪ Piaget</li> <li>▪ Bronfenbrenner</li> <li>▪ Vygotsky</li> </ul>	<b><i>A smaller number of institutions is based on:</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Montessori</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Steiner</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Outdoor/nature kindergartens</b></li> </ul>

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Views of the children and their learning</u>	<u>Theoretical models</u>	<u>Specific curricular/ pedagogical approaches</u>
<b>England</b>	National Curriculum Framework Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unique child</li> <li>▪ Competent learner who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured;</li> <li>▪ Children learn to be strong and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ influences of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, Dewey, Piaget, Issacs</li> <li>▪ also influences of:</li> </ul>	Influences of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Montessori</b></li> <li>▪ <b>High Scope</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Experiential education</b></li> </ul>

	<p>for children from birth to five (2012)</p> <p>0-5 Centre-based and home-based early care and education Centre-based pre-primary care and education <i>(compulsory if child turns 5 between September and March)</i></p>	<p>independent through positive relationships;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning;</li> <li>▪ children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important and inter-connected</li> <li>▪ Effective learning is characterised by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Playing and exploring</li> <li>▪ Active learning</li> <li>▪ Creating and thinking critically</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interactions tradition/Bronfenbrenner</li> <li>▪ Socio-cultural perspective/ Vygotski</li> <li>▪ Attachment Theory/Bowlby</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b><i>Te Whariki</i></b></li> <li>▪ <b><i>Developmentally appropriate practice</i></b></li> <li>▪ <b><i>Reggio Emilia</i></b></li> </ul>
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## 4: Pedagogical principles or values

What are the pedagogical principles/Principles of providing care and education

<i>Country</i>	<i>Steering Document</i>	<i>Principles of teaching/pedagogical principles</i>
<b>Norway</b>	<p>Childcare and Education Act+ National Curriculum Framework</p> <p>Act no. 64 of June 2005 relating to Kindergartens (the Kindergarten Act) + Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2005)</p> <p>(1) 1-5</p> <p>Centre-based early care and education</p>	<p>Kindergartens' programs shall be built on a <b>holistic pedagogical philosophy</b>, with care, play and learning being at the core of activities.</p> <p>Core element: <b>intrinsic value of childhood</b>.</p> <p><b>Emphasis on the voice of the children, and participation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Kindergarten Act Sections 1 and 3 who give the children the right to participate in accordance with their age and abilities, have the right to express their views on the day-to-day activities of the kindergarten and regularly be given the opportunity to take active part in planning and assessing the activities.</li> <li>- The Framework Plan emphasises that children might express their views through e.g. body language and aesthetic expressions, and that children's right to participation requires time and space for listening and talking and responsible adults who taken the whole group into consideration.</li> <li>- Children are entitled to express their views on everything that affects them, and their views must be taken into account.</li> <li>- Kindergartens shall provide room for children's own cultural creativity.</li> <li>- Children have the right to participate in accordance with their age and abilities.</li> <li>- Kindergartens must allow for children's initiative and imagination.</li> </ul> <p>The <b>unique</b> child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Children are entitled to care and shall be treated with care.</li> <li>- Competent staff sees and understands children's needs and interests.</li> <li>- Taking account of children's age, level of functioning, gender, and social, ethnic and cultural background (including the language and culture of Sámi children)</li> <li>- Care and activities provided must be adapted to each individual child and to the relevant group of children.</li> <li>- Kindergartens shall offer challenges based on children's interests, knowledge and skills.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The kindergarten shall meet the children with trust and respect.</li> </ul> <p><b>Relationships and Interactions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is highly important that the children experience warmth and love in the kindergartens.</li> <li>- One of the kindergarten's most important duties is to provide care and closeness for the children.</li> <li>- Mutual processes of interaction between children and adults in play and learning in the kindergartens, and being considerate of each other, are essential elements in the formation of children.</li> <li>- Children are entitled to care and closeness. For the kindergartens it is a primary task to provide care and closeness and to ensure that the children are met with sensitivity, empathy and interaction in accordance with their age and individual abilities.</li> <li>- Interaction with other people is crucial to children's development and learning.</li> <li>- Learning shall take place in the daily interaction with other people and the surroundings, and must be closely interlinked with care, play and formation.</li> </ul> <p>Kindergartens have to have <b>physical environments</b> that promote the development of all children. Kindergarten as a safe and challenging place. Children learn through experiences, in <b>play and interaction</b> with other children and with a competent staff.</p> <p>Kindergartens shall provide children with opportunities for play, <b>self-expression</b>, practice of empathy and <b>meaningful</b> experiences and activities.</p> <p>Kindergarten shall be based on fundamental <b>values</b> in the Christian and humanist heritage and tradition, such as respect for human dignity and nature, on intellectual freedom, charity, forgiveness, equality and solidarity, values that appear in different religions and belief and are rooted in human rights.</p> <p>Importance of <b>continuity</b> and unity in the provision of care and education.</p> <p>Reflections around their own values and behaviour must form part of educators' discussions on pedagogy and practice.</p>
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<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Principles of teaching/pedagogical principles</u>
<b>England</b>	<p>National Curriculum Framework</p> <p>Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (2012)</p> <p>0-5</p> <p>Centre-based and home-based early care and education</p> <p>Centre-based pre-primary care and education <i>(compulsory if child turns 5 between September and March)</i></p>	<p><b>Overarching principles which should shape practice in early years settings</b> (3 of 4 Principles, EYFS Framework, 3):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Every child is a <b>unique child</b>, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.</li> <li>- Children learn to be strong and independent through <b>positive relationships</b>.</li> <li>- Children learn and develop well in <b>enabling environments</b>, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs.</li> </ul> <p><b>Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.</b> The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities.</p> <p>Practitioners promote activities/experiences which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- are in tune with children’s individual needs, interests, and stage of development</li> <li>- are appropriate to the ways in which children learn</li> <li>- cover the learning areas specified by the EYFS</li> </ul> <p><b>The individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child shape experiences and activities:</b></p> <p>Practitioners (in particular the key person) must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development.</p> <p>On-going formative assessment through observation is at the heart of effective early years practice. In their interactions with children, practitioners should respond to their own day-to-day observations about children’s progress, and observations that parents and carers share.</p> <p><b>The ways in which children learn shape activities:</b></p> <p>In planning and guiding children’s activities, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice. Three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- playing and exploring - children investigate and experience things, and ‘have</li> </ul>

		<p>a go'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- active learning - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements;</li> <li>- creating and thinking critically - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things</li> </ul> <p><b>The areas of learning and development shape activities and experiences:</b></p> <p>The EYFS specifies requirements for learning and development and for safeguarding children and promoting their welfare. The EYFS specifies learning and development requirements which include a list of the seven areas of learning and development which must shape activities and experiences (educational programmes) for children in all early years settings (e.g. giving children opportunities to experience a rich language environment; providing opportunities for young children to be active and interactive, and to develop their co-ordination, control, and movement; encouraging children to link sounds and letters; providing opportunities to explore, observe and find out about people, places, technology and the environment; providing opportunities and encouragement for sharing their thoughts, ideas and feelings through a variety of activities in art, music, movement, dance, role-play, and design and technology – see also Section 2 on Goals and Content). Practitioners working with the youngest children are expected to focus strongly on the three prime areas, which are the basis for successful learning in the other four specific areas.</p> <p><b>Balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities, play and warm interactions:</b></p> <p>Each area of learning and development must be implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity. <b>Play</b> is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, to think about problems, and relate to others. Children learn by leading their own play, and by taking part in play which is guided by adults. There is an ongoing judgement to be made by practitioners about the balance between activities led by children, and activities led or guided by adults. Practitioners must respond to each child's emerging needs and interests, guiding their development through <b>warm, positive interaction</b>. As children grow older, and as their development allows, it is expected that the balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults, to help children prepare for more formal learning, ready for year one.</p>
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**What is the role of observation and documentation of children and their learning? Are there requirements for assessments of children's learning?**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Principles of teaching/pedagogical principles</u>
<b>Norway</b>	National Curriculum Framework Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2005)  (0)1-5 Centre-based early care and education  <i>Barnehage</i>	The document includes a Chapter ' <b>Planning, documentation and assessment</b> ' Kindergartens are pedagogical centres that shall be planned, documented and assessed. All kindergartens have to draw up an <b>annual plan</b> . Individual kindergartens should decide whether plans should also be drawn up for shorter periods. The following principles apply: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plan must be flexible and leave room for spontaneity and children's participation</li> <li>- Leadership: responsibility of implementation</li> <li>- Participation of children, parents, staff and owners should be encouraged</li> <li>- Planning must be based on an understanding of the development and learning of children, individually and in groups, on observations, documentation, reflection, systematic assessment and conversations with children and parents.</li> </ul> <b>Documentation</b> as a basis for reflection and learning: An understanding of the work of staff and of children's activities at the kindergarten provides an important basis for the development of the kindergarten. Documentation is seen as a means of finding out about different perceptions and of encouraging critical and reflective practice. Documentation linked to individual children can be used in co-operation with external welfare services and in connection with transition to school if the parents' consent. <b>No assessment of children's achievement:</b> The Framework Plan has no demands on outputs or goals to be attained for children; not the individual children, but the work of the kindergarten is assessed.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Principles of teaching/pedagogical principles</u>
<b>England</b>	National Curriculum Framework  Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and	In <b>planning</b> and guiding children's activities, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice. Practitioners (in particular the key person) must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development.  <b>On-going formative assessment is at the heart of effective early years practice:</b> Assessment plays an

	<p>care for children from birth to five (2012)</p> <p>0-5</p> <p>Centre- based and home-based early care and education</p> <p>Centre-based pre-primary care and education <i>(compulsory if child turns 5 between September and March)</i></p>	<p>important part in helping parents, carers and practitioners to recognise children’s progress, understand their needs, and to plan activities and support. Ongoing assessment (also known as formative assessment) is an integral part of the learning and development process. It involves practitioners <b>observing children</b> to understand their level of achievement, interests and learning styles, and to then shape learning experiences for each child reflecting those observations. In their interactions with children, practitioners should respond to their own day-to-day observations about children’s progress, and observations that parents and carers share.</p> <p>Assessment is part of every-day practice; in addition – two assessment ‘reports’: <b>Progress check at age 2</b>; aim: to identify strengths, and areas where the child’s progress is less than expected</p> <p>The EYFS defines 17 learning goals (across seven areas learning and development: communication and language, physical development, personal, social and emotional development, literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, expressive arts and design). These define the specific skills and competencies, and the knowledge and understanding that all young children should have gained (and are assessed on) by the end of the Reception year/age 5. Competencies in all of those goals are summarised in assessment report at the end of the EYFS called the ‘<b>Early Years Foundation stage Profile</b>’ which aims to provide a well-rounded picture of the child’s knowledge, understanding and abilities; to indicate whether children are meeting expected levels of development, exceeding them or not yet reaching expected levels; to provide a picture of their readiness for year one.</p>
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*Children’s rights, multi-cultural education, inclusion and equality, and partnerships with parents*

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Children’s rights</u> <u>Importance of multi-cultural education</u> <u>Inclusion and provision for children with special needs</u> <u>Collaboration and partnerships with parents and other stakeholders</u>
<b>Norway</b>	<p>National Curriculum Framework</p> <p>Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2005)</p>	<p><b>Recognition of: children’s rights</b></p> <p>The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is implemented, e.g. in the Kindergarten Act Sections 1 and 3 who give the children the right to participate in accordance with their age and abilities, have the right to express their views on the day-to-day activities of the kindergarten and regularly be given the opportunity to take active part in planning and assessing the activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Framework Plan emphasises that children might express their views through e.g. body</li> </ul>

	<p>(0)1-5</p> <p>Centre-based early care and education</p>	<p>language and aesthetic expressions, and that children's right to participation requires time and space for listening and talking and responsible adults who taken the whole group into consideration.</p> <p>Many of the principles relate closely to the rights of the child: e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kindergartens shall provide room for children's own cultural creativity.</li> <li>- Kindergartens must allow for children's initiative and imagination.</li> <li>- Children are entitled to care and shall be treated with care.</li> <li>- The kindergarten shall meet the children with trust and respect.</li> <li>- It is highly important that the children experience warmth and love in the kindergartens.</li> </ul> <p><b>importance of multi-cultural education</b></p> <p>All children from the age of approximately one year of age have a legal right to a place in kindergarten, and there are children from minority groups or immigrant groups in most kindergartens. The Framework Plan requires kindergartens to be inclusive communities with space for individual children. Kindergartens shall provide an environment in which different individuals and different cultural expressions meet with respect for their differences.</p> <p>Norway has a special obligation to safeguard the interest of Sámi children and parents, this relates to the ILO's Convention no. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal People. The municipality is responsible for ensuring that kindergartens for Sámi children in Sámi districts are based on the Sámi language and culture. In other municipalities steps shall be taken to secure and develop their language and their culture.</p> <p>A number of principles relate to the importance of multi-cultural education: e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kindergartens shall provide room for children's own cultural creativity.</li> <li>- Kindergarten shall be based on fundamental values in the Christian and humanist heritage and tradition, such as respect for human dignity and nature, on intellectual freedom, charity, forgiveness, equality and solidarity, values that appear in different religions and belief and are rooted in human rights.</li> <li>- Kindergarten shall promote democracy and equity and <b>counteract all forms of discrimination</b>. They are an inclusive community with space for individual children.</li> </ul> <p><b>inclusion and provision for children with special needs</b></p> <p>Inclusive practice has been common for, and has been legislated since the first Act on Child Day Care in 1975. Children with disabilities shall be entitled to priority for admission to a kindergarten. The Framework Plan demands the kindergarten to have a particular responsibility for preventing potential problems and for discovering children with special needs. It might be appropriate to design a special programme for these children. This may involve adjusting social, pedagogical and/or physical aspects of the kindergarten. Parents and any support services involved with the child are important partners.</p>
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		<p>A number of principles refer to the provision for children with special needs: e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Children have the right to participate in accordance with their age and abilities.</li> <li>- Kindergarten shall promote democracy and equity and <b>counteract all forms of discrimination</b>. They are an inclusive community with space for individual children.</li> </ul> <p>The document includes a chapter ‘an inclusive community with space for individual children’: Message that children are not a uniform group, content of kindergartens have to be designed so that it feels relevant to the individual children and the group. Content of kindergartens must be communicated in a way that allows different children to participate in different ways, in line with their own interests, skills and development levels.</p> <p>Staff are responsible for ensuring that all children, regardless of their level of functioning, age, gender and family background, feel that they and everyone else in the group are important to the community. Emphasis is not only on support that meets individual needs, but the task to help children to enjoy a meaningful life together with other children and adults.</p> <p>Curriculum includes a chapter ‘Kindergartens for Sámi children’: Sámi children need to be helped to retain and develop their language and culture regardless of where in Norway they live.</p> <p>Kindergartens are described as ‘cultural arenas’, where room is given for children’s own cultural creativity and the aim is for children to experience joy and ability to cope in a social and cultural community. Principle of being conscious of one owns cultural heritage whilst participating in the culture of others; children as actors who recreate and renew culture through interaction with one another.</p> <p>3 paragraph of the Kindergarten Act:  The Kindergartens shall meet the children with trust and respect, and acknowledge the intrinsic value of childhood. They shall contribute to wellbeing and joy in play and learning, and shall be a challenging and safe place for community life and friendship. The Kindergarten shall promote democracy and equality and counteract all forms of discrimination. (Kindergarten Act, Section 1, Purpose)  Kindergartens shall take account of children’s age, level of functioning, gender, and social, ethnic and cultural background, including the language and culture of Sámi children. (Kindergarten Act, Section 2, Content of kindergartens)</p> <p>The municipality is responsible for ensuring that kindergartens for Sámi children in Sámi districts are based on the Sámi language and culture. In other municipalities steps shall be taken to enable Sámi children to secure and develop their language and their culture. (Kindergarten Act, Section 8, Responsibility of the municipality)</p> <p><b>collaboration and partnerships in education</b></p> <p>The 2006 Framework Plan shall be adapted to differing ways of running kindergartens, and to local conditions and regulatory environments. It is desirable that the municipal authorities and private owners</p>
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		<p>collaborate on preparing the guidelines for local adaptations.</p> <p>The Kindergarten Act and the Framework state that kindergartens must work in collaboration and close understanding with the children's homes. These collaborations have to be characterised by understanding (mutual respect, openness and trust and recognition of each other's responsibilities and tasks in relation to the child).</p> <p>Chapter '<u>Collaboration with the homes of the children</u>': Purpose ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- joint responsibility for the wellbeing and development of children</li> <li>- not only to share information about the child in order to get a better understanding of the child's ways of learning and development</li> <li>- also to ensure that parents feel confident that their children are being noticed and respected, and that they are participating in a social environment that benefits them.</li> <li>- to support the parents in bringing up the children to be active participants in a democratic society</li> <li>- to invite parents' participation: as meeting places for children and their parents, and in promoting cultural values.</li> </ul> <p>Collaboration with <u>external stakeholders</u>, like primary school, child welfare service, mother and child health clinics, pedagogical-psychological counselling service and other partners are specified in Chapter 5 Collaboration. They are named and described, and collaborations are suggested as and when necessary.</p> <p>Involvement with the <u>local community</u></p>
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<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Children's rights</u> <u>Importance of multi-cultural education</u> <u>Inclusion and provision for children with special needs</u> <u>Collaboration and partnerships with parents and other stakeholders</u>
<b>England</b>	<p>National Curriculum Framework</p> <p>Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (2012)</p> <p>0-5</p> <p>Centre-based and home-based early care and education</p> <p>Centre-based pre-primary care and education (<i>compulsory if child turns 5 between September and March</i>)</p>	<p><b>Recognition of:</b></p> <p><b>children's rights :</b> The UK signed the UN Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The EYFS fully supports the child's right to health, safety, and good quality education, which promotes their future success. This fully responds to the UN Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 28 and 29. While the EYFS states that 'a secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right', the EYFS does not further elaborate on the importance of experience in the here and now, or on participatory processes (see UN Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 12 and 13). However, additional national guidance materials for the assessment of children explicitly refer to processes of participation and the right to be listened to. E.g.: - All children have a right to be listened to and valued in the setting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Practitioners should involve children fully in their own assessment by encouraging them to communicate about and review their own learning.</li> <li>- Children require rich opportunities to initiate ideas and activities.</li> </ul> <p><b>importance of multi-cultural education</b></p> <p>One of the 4 main aims of the EYFS is to provide equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported.</p> <p>References only with regards to children's language: 'For children whose home language is not English, providers must take reasonable steps to provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in play and learning, supporting their language development at home. Providers must also ensure that children have sufficient opportunities to learn and reach a good standard in English language during the EYFS, ensuring children are ready to benefit from the opportunities available to them when they begin Year 1.'</p> <p>The EYFS guidance 'Handbook on assessment' has a section on 'inclusion' with guidelines for inclusive practice with children whose first language is not English or of those from minority background. Principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- understanding that language is central to our sense of identity and belonging to a community</li> <li>- linguistic diversity is a strength that is recognised and valued</li> <li>- development of home language is valued, and so is the use of the home language in the setting</li> <li>- importance of collaboration with parents</li> <li>- environment must reflect their cultural and linguistic heritage</li> <li>- children must have opportunities to engage in activities and first hand experiences that do not depend solely on English for success</li> </ul> <p><b>inclusion and provision for children with special needs:</b> The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities. One of the 4 overarching principles: Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.</p>

		<p>EYFS Framework - Section 'Equal opportunities': Policy and procedures to promote equal opportunities  <i>Additional guidance material: EYFS Profile Handbook</i> - Chapter 'Inclusion'/section 'Children with special educational needs and disability' (physical, emotional, sensory and learning needs). Emphasis on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relationships with other professionals</li> <li>- Observational assessments using adapted equipment to enable practitioners to know children at their most capable</li> <li>- 'Emerging' outcome for not reaching the expected level of development at the end of EYFS</li> </ul> <p><i>Inclusion Development Programme; Development matters</i> (guidance for practitioners when summarising a child's development at the emerging level)</p> <p><b>collaboration and partnerships in education</b></p> <p>One of the four EYFS stated aims is <b>to provide partnership working between practitioners and with parents and/or carers.</b></p> <p>One of its overarching principles is that children learn and develop well in enabling environments where <b>there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.</b></p> <p>The EYFS instructs all practitioners that <b>all assessments have to take account of the perspective of the parent or carer:</b> parents and practitioners share their observations to recognise children's progress, understand their needs, and to plan activities and support</p> <p>Emphasis on partnerships with parents particularly for the support of children with special educational need or disability, children whose home language is not English. Little mentioning of other stakeholder involvement.</p>
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**Continuity of ECEC systems and links to primary school**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Continuity of ECEC systems and links to primary school</u>
<b>Norway</b>	<p>National Curriculum Framework</p> <p>Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2005)</p> <p>(0)1-5</p> <p>Centre-based early care and education</p> <p><i>Barnehage</i></p>	<p>Importance of continuity and unity in the provision of care and education. The learning areas of the Framework Plan are to a great extent the same as children will meet as subjects at school.</p> <p><u>Chapter 'Collaborations' section 'primary schools'</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Framework plan requires that kindergarten shall, in collaboration with schools, facilitate the transition from kindergarten to year one and to any after-school groups. This shall be done in close collaboration with the children's homes. Plans for the children's' transition must be specified in the kindergarten's annual plan.</li> <li>- Children must be able to leave their kindergartens properly. They should look forward to starting school and know that there is a connection between their kindergarten and their school.</li> <li>- If the kindergarten is to provide the school with information about an individual child, parents must consent. Parents must be given access to, and be able to influence, the exchange of information. Such collaboration must focus both on what children can do and are capable of, and where they need special assistance.</li> <li>- Close co-operation between kindergartens and schools is particularly important for children who need special care or special learning environments.</li> </ul> <p>The Ministry of Education and Research (2011) has established the guidelines 'Fra eldst til yngst – Samarbeid og sammenheng mellom barnehage og skole' (From eldest to youngest. Co-operation and coherence between kindergarten and school).</p>

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Continuity of ECEC systems and links to primary school</u>
<b>England</b>	<p>National Curriculum Framework</p> <p>Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (2012)</p> <p>0-5</p> <p>Centre-based and home-based early care and education</p> <p>Centre-based pre-primary care and education <i>(compulsory if child turns 5 between September and March)</i></p>	<p><b>Transition Process:</b> EYFS Profile at age 5 is shared with year one teachers in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform a dialogue between Reception and year one teachers about each child's stage of development and learning needs.</li> <li>• Assist with the planning of activities in year one.</li> </ul> <p>Guidance Materials available to help underpinning the development of shared understanding between EYFS and year one colleagues about individual children and to support the transition process.</p> <p>Where children have an outcome of emerging for an ELG within the EYFS Profile, teachers are advised to consider additional information alongside EYFS Profile outcomes (e.g. other professionals working with the child should be invited to contribute to transition conversations), to ensure that conversations between EYFS and year one staff are meaningful, and lead to successful transition for the child.</p> <p>Final year of the Early Years Foundation Stage (age 5) reception classrooms are part of the primary school, and usually in the same building with year one/two (often sharing the same garden, lunch-time, and play-time). This supports transition to school.</p> <p>Transition between ECEC 0-4 and the final ECEC year (reception): supported by a common curriculum framework, induction visits and parent evenings.</p> <p><b>Links to the Key Stage 1 curriculum:</b> Core Subjects: English, mathematics, science, Foundation Subjects: Design and technology, history, geography, art and design, Music, Physical education (PE), Information and communication technology (ICT) Some links between EYFS specific learning areas and KS1 core subjects - otherwise no clear links;</p>

		KS1 curriculum contains no guidance for teachers in how to match the curriculum to the individual needs and previous experiences of the children;
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**5: Quality:**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Link between notions of quality and curriculum</u>
<b>Norway</b>	National Curriculum Framework Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2005) (0)1-5 Centre-based early care and education  Barnehage	Quality associated with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose (Section 1)</li> <li>• Content of kindergartens (Section 2)</li> <li>• Children's right to participation (Sections 1 and 3)</li> <li>• Staff's education (Sections 17 and 18)</li> </ul>

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Link between notions of quality and curriculum</u>
<b>England</b>	Childcare and Education Act Childcare Act (2006) 0-5 Centre-based and home-based early care and education	Quality associated with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positive relationships</li> <li>• staff: child ratios/group sizes</li> <li>• health and safety regulations</li> <li>• premises, space and equipment</li> <li>• staff support (1:1 or in groups)</li> <li>• planning and implementing learning activities</li> <li>• assessment procedures</li> <li>• regular inspection, reports published on-line</li> </ul>

**6: Implementation**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Guidance on implementation</u>
<p><b>Norway</b></p>	<p>National Curriculum Framework Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2005)</p> <p><b>(0)1-5</b></p> <p>Centre-based early care and education</p>	<p><b>Key Features</b></p> <p>The framework plan is a comprehensive document, which offers much detail to social mandate and values of kindergartens, and the view of the children, and how these elements relate to the more concrete tasks and ways of working of kindergartens/staff.</p> <p>While being relatively specific in describing the core elements of good practice, the current Framework Plan does not give instructions of methods, there are great differences according to what staff emphasise in their pedagogical work (Lekhal et. al. 2013). As the implementation takes place in each kindergarten, there must be differences. At the same time it might be that new topics or learning areas are given priority, at least for a while.</p> <p><b>Teaching of the curriculum</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Staff’s professional and personal competence is the most important resource in the kindergarten and a prerequisite to ensure that the kindergarten is a good arena for care, play, learning and social cohesion.</li> <li>- In 2012 the Ministry established a new Framework for Bachelor degree in Early Childhood Education and Care. The previous pre-school teacher education is revised and renamed kindergarten teacher education starting last autumn.</li> <li>- The new kindergarten teacher education shall be research based and must at the same time have a vocational and practical orientation based on the kindergarten teacher’s area of work and on current legislation and curriculum for such activities.</li> <li>- A new national strategy for raising the competence in the sector 2014 – 2020 was launched by the Ministry of Education and Research in August 2013. It aims to design a systematic plan for raising the formal competence of all staff by acknowledging the starting point of each position.</li> </ul> <p><b>Guidance in how to implement pedagogical principles? Local curriculum/ECEC plan?</b></p> <p>The framework plan is a comprehensive document, which offers much detail to social mandate and values of kindergartens, and the view of the children, and how these elements relate to the more concrete tasks and ways of working of kindergartens/staff.</p> <p>Specific guidance in how to implement the curriculum: where describing the learning areas of the curriculum the document offers relatively specific guidance in how to support learning in each learning area. For each</p>

		<p>learning areas, goals are defined, and a bullet-point list describes what staff must to in order to work towards these goals.</p> <p>e.g.</p> <p>‘Communication and Language’: staff must facilitate meaningful experiences, and create time and space for the use of non-verbal and verbal language in everyday activities, play and more formal situations; allow children to encounter symbols such as letters and numbers in everyday situations, and support children’s initiative in terms of counting, sorting, reading, playing at writing and dictating texts;</p> <p>‘Art, culture and creativity’: staff must motivate children to express themselves, and allow them to find their own models of expression; ensure that children experience local, national and international artistic and cultural expressions, and that they get possibilities to meet artists.</p> <p>While being relatively specific in describing the core elements of good practice, the document gives room for adaptation at local level.</p> <p>The Framework plan defines that ‘the framework plan shall be adapted do differing ways of running kindergartens, and to local conditions and regulatory environments. It is desirable that the municipal authorities and private owners collaborate on preparing guidelines for local adaptations’ (p5). For example, different kindergartens might want to, within the legal framework, to give their kindergarten a specific pedagogical profile, e.g. outdoor kindergartens, specific faiths or view of life, culture, athletics etc.</p> <p><b>Additional guidance materials for implementation</b></p>
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<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Guidance on implementation</u>
<b>England</b>	<p>National Curriculum Framework Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (2012)</p> <p>0-5</p> <p>Centre-based and home-based early care and education</p> <p>Centre-based pre-primary care and education</p> <p><i>(compulsory if child turns 5</i></p>	<p><b>Key Features</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offering experiences and activities for children in all the EYFS learning areas;</li> <li>- Sensitive to gender, culture and individual interests;</li> <li>- Observation led planning and assessment; Documentation of children’s activities;</li> <li>- Reflecting on the ways in which children learn (play, exploration, creativity);</li> <li>- Partnerships with parents.</li> </ul> <p><b>Guidance in how to implement pedagogical principles? Local curriculum/ECEC plan?</b></p> <p>EYFS Framework Plan specifies requirements for learning and development and for safeguarding children and promoting welfare. It does not give instructions on methods. It does not require local municipalities or individual settings to prepare their own written curriculum. However, local governments are responsible for the delivery of the EYFS (see teaching of the curriculum) and for supporting centres which inspection found</p>

	<p><i>between September and March)</i></p>	<p>inadequate.</p> <p><b>Teaching of the curriculum</b></p> <p><u>Pre-service:</u> Practitioners delivering the EYFS and included in the ratio of qualified staff - required to hold 'full and relevant' qualifications as defined by government. Qualifications include modules on curriculum aims, content and implementation.</p> <p><u>In-service:</u></p> <p><i>Local authorities:</i> advice and guidance about training and development; moderation visits and training sessions for practitioners.</p> <p><i>Other advisory support:</i> Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, PACEY, (standard-setting organization to promote best practice; webinar courses for EYFS; book: EYFS and You), National Day Nurseries Association, NDNA: the national charity and membership association for nurseries, Early Education 'the British Association for Early Childhood Education'.</p> <p><b>Additional guidance materials for implementation</b></p> <p>Practical support materials refer to the EYFS principles and learning areas and provide examples of effective practice. E.g. Development Matters describes how positive relationships and enabling environments should look like and what practitioners can do and provide to support all characteristics of children's learning across all areas of development.</p> <p>E.g. 'Positive Relationships – what adults could do' – e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Give feedback and help children to review their own progress and learning.</i></li> <li>• <i>Support children to feel good about their own success.</i></li> <li>• <i>Enable children to explore by providing a secure base for them.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Practical support materials published by the Department for Children, Schools, and Families:</i> ensure all practitioners meet EYFS requirements and entitlements are met for all children; draw on the experience and expertise of early years practitioners; refer to the EYFS principles and provide examples of effective practice.</p> <p>E.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>'Learning, playing and interacting. Good practice in the EYFS.'</i></li> <li>- <i>'Inclusion development programme. Supporting children on the autism spectrum: guidance for practitioners in the EYFS.'</i></li> <li>- <i>'Mark making matters. Young children making meaning in all areas of learning and development.'</i></li> <li>- <i>'Every child a talker: Guidance for early language lead practitioners.'</i></li> </ul>
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**7: Regulations on Structural Elements, monitoring and support of curriculum implementation**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Regulations on structural elements</u>		<u>Monitoring and support of curriculum implementation</u>
<b>Norway</b>	National Curriculum Framework  Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2005) (0) 1-5  Centre-based early care and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Staff-child ratios:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-school teachers: 1:14-18 (&gt;3 years)</li> <li>1:7-9 (&lt; 3 years)</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <b>Group size:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The children might be divided into groups of different kinds, e.g. age groups or groups with children of different ages.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <b>Health and safety: Yes/No?</b></li> <li>- Demands on physical environments that promote the development of all children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Qualifications:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedagogical leaders must be trained pre-school teachers</li> <li>• Kindergarten teachers: 3 years Bachelor degree in Early Childhood Education and Care</li> <li>• Less than 1/3 of the staff is qualified as Kindergarten teacher</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <b>In-service:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New national strategy for raising competence was launched by the Ministry of Education and Research (2014 – 2020), aiming to design a systematic plan for raising the formal competence of all staff by acknowledging the starting point of each position.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No inspectorate</li> <li>- The municipalities provide guidance and ensure that kindergartens are operated in accordance with current rules.</li> <li>- The county governor, operating at regional level, shall supervise that the municipality carries out the responsibilities imposed on it as the local authority for kindergartens.</li> </ul>

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Regulations on structural elements</u>		<u>Monitoring and support of curriculum implementation</u>
<p><b>England</b></p>	<p>National Curriculum Framework Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (2012) 0-5</p> <p>Centre-based and home-based early care and education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Staff-child ratios:</b></li> <li>• 0-2 year-olds: <b>1:3</b></li> <li>• 2-3 year-olds: <b>1:4</b></li> <li>• 3-5 year-olds: depending on practitioner qualification <b>between 1:8 and 1:13</b></li> <li>• 4-5+ year-olds (and level 6 staff working with children) 1:30, but in practice there is always an assistant teacher</li> </ul> <p>- <b>Group size:</b> depending on setting and practitioner qualification maximum of 6 (for childminders in own homes) and 30 children (teachers)</p> <p>- <b>Health and safety:</b> regulations in place and regular inspection</p> <p>- <b>Caregiver stability:</b> assignment of a key</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Qualifications:</b></li> <li>- <u>ECEC group care:</u> at least one practitioner at level 3 and 50% of practitioners at level 2</li> <li>- <u>reception classrooms in school:</u> one practitioner at level 6 (BA qualified teacher)- usually supplemented by an assistant teacher</li> <li>- <b>Pre-service:</b> Practitioners delivering the EYFS and included in the ratio of qualified staff are required to hold 'full and relevant' qualifications as defined by government</li> <li>- <b>In-service:</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Local authorities provide:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advice and guidance about training and development;</li> <li>• moderation visits to 25% of the early years settings.</li> <li>• moderation training sessions for practitioners</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ <b>Other advisory support of childcare training and quality improvement:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>PACEY</b>, Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (standard-setting organization)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inspects the quality of the delivery of the EYFS and how well providers are meeting the welfare, learning and development requirements</li> <li>• inspects registered settings at least once every four years.</li> <li>• checks the completion of the EYFS profile for children in the final year of EYFS.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Four-point grading scale for quality and standards (overall grade), meeting the needs of children, provider's contribution to children's wellbeing, effectiveness of leadership and management. The grades are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grade 1: outstanding</li> <li>• Grade 2: good</li> <li>• Grade 3: requires improvement</li> <li>• Grade 4: inadequate.</li> </ul> <p><i>'Inadequate' provisions:</i> monitored at three-monthly intervals; further enforcement action if no improvement; re-inspected within six months - if still inadequate, may cancel registration.</p> <p><i>'Requires improvement' provision:</i> monitored within 6 months and re-inspected within 12 months; if judged as 'requires improvement' at two consecutive inspections and is still not 'good' at its third inspection is likely to be judged inadequate.</p>

		person is mandatory	<p>to promote best practice; webinar courses for EYFS; book: <b>EYFS and You</b>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>NDNA- National Day Nurseries Association:</b> the national charity and membership association for nurseries</li> <li>• <b>Early Education 'the British Association for Early Childhood Education'</b></li> </ul>	
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### 8: Evidence

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Evidence supporting the value or effectiveness of the curriculum</u>
<b>Norway</b>	<p><i>National Curriculum Framework</i></p> <p><i>Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2005)</i> (0) 1-5</p> <p><i>Centre-based early care and education</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff is satisfied with the Framework plan as a steering document. <b>(Oestrem et al., 2009)</b></li> <li>• A clear trend is that 'everyone count more', e.g. children's voices and interests count more, measurable skills are more mapped, numbers and counting have a more illustrious place through the learning area 'numbers, spaces and shapes'. <b>(Oestrem et al., 2009)</b></li> <li>• Children's language development has highest priority. Children's learning seemed to be more emphasised. Parents' expectations have not changed. They look at play, friendship and care as the most important in kindergartens. <b>(Oestrem et al., 2009)</b></li> <li>• <b>Bratterud et al. (2012)</b> found that most children experience to be seen and recognised by the adults, and that the adults are aware of the children's meanings and that parents and staff are of the same opinions. But some children experience that the pedagogical staff is not easily available and don't contribute to interaction with the children. These results are supported by <b>Baustad's (2012)</b> systematic, qualitative study, which used ITERS-R for examining the quality of care for infants and toddlers in Norwegian ECEC centres.</li> <li>• The project "Children's right to participation in a relational perspective – focus on the youngest children in</li> </ul>

		<p>kindergarten” (<b>Bae, 2012</b>) reviews and discusses what participation means in practice in kindergarten. On basis of the experiences from field studies one is questioning whether participation has been reduced to an issue of individual choices and self-determination instead of a holistic and relational perspective.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ongoing quantitative Norwegian Mother and Child Cohort Study (<b>MoBA; Lekhal et al. 2013</b>) covers some aspects concerning outcomes of ECEC services. The study (<b>MoBa</b>) (<b>Vartun et. al 2012, Lekhal et. al 2013, Zachrisson et al. 2013</b>) confirms the significant variations between kindergartens when it comes to how often they organize structured activities. There are also relatively great variations concerning play and creative activities, but still, most kindergartens seem to give high priority to the pedagogical content offered.</li> <li>• Recently two longitudinal studies concerning various outcomes of ECEC services has been initiated in Norway and results can be expected continually: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>The Stavanger Project</b> – The Learning Child; A multidisciplinary, longitudinal study (2007–2018), 1364 participants at baseline, assessment points of time: 2½, 4½, 7½ and 9½ year-olds; in co-operation between the University of 7 Stavanger and the municipality of Stavanger. Aims: (a) Generate knowledge about children’s development within and between fundamental developmental domains in pre-school and early school age. (b) Identify early developmental factors or combination of factors that may enhance or inhibit the acquisition of reading, writing and arithmetical skills. (c) Generate information valuable for early identification of children that might struggle with the acquisition of reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. (d) Contribute to increased competency for the professionals working with the children.</li> <li>2. <b>Better Provision of Norway`s children in Early Childhood Education and Care:</b> The aim of this study is to gain better understanding of the relations between educational and psychological processes and structural variables, with focus on the staff-child and child-child relations, both for mainstream and marginalised children. 1600 children will participate in this study.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>
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<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Evidence supporting the value or effectiveness of the curriculum</u>
<b>England</b>	National Curriculum Framework	<b>Achievement in the early years is rising.</b> In 2010, 30 000 children achieved a good level of development at age 5

	<p>Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (2012)</p> <p>0-5</p> <p>Centre-based and home-based early care and education Centre-based pre-primary care and education <i>(compulsory if child turns 5 between September and March)</i></p>	<p>compared to 2009. (DFE report)</p> <p><b>Improvement in early years provision since 2008.</b> 74% of provision is good or better compared with 65% three years ago. (OFSTED report, 2012)</p> <p><b>Evidence that achievement lasts.</b> Association between level of development at age 5 and KS1 results.</p>
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**9: Challenges**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Challenges for the curriculum</u>
<p><b>Norway</b></p>	<p>National Curriculum Framework Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2005) (0)1-5 Centre-based early care and education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Documentation</b> of the kindergarten’s work should be used as a basis for reflection and learning.</li> <li>• The new government is now working on a new Section in the Kindergarten Act to make clear the content and frames for the kindergartens’ work with documentation and assessment.</li> <li>• Norway is in constant <b>need of kindergarten teachers</b>. It is a great challenge to recruit and retain kindergarten teachers.</li> <li>• The <b>role and position of children and staff</b> (as part of the discussion of children’s’ rights and participation): Who’s in charge, when, how long and about what: the staff or the children?</li> <li>• An ongoing <b>discussion of purpose, content and methods</b> in Kindergarten: Children as beings versus becomings (school preparation versus here and now); Formal versus informal pedagogical processes; The position and formulation of learning goals in the Framework Plan and the annual plan and the use of pedagogical/learning “programs”.</li> <li>• <b>Equality</b> – choice of kindergartens regarding ordinary and “concept” Kindergartens, challenges of a “liberal market”.</li> <li>• A <b>lack of academically educated Kindergarten teachers</b> and recruitment challenges.</li> <li>• Only less than one third of the staff is <b>qualified</b> as Kindergarten teachers</li> </ul>

<u>Country</u>	<u>Steering Document</u>	<u>Challenges for the curriculum</u>
<b>England</b>	<p>National Curriculum Framework Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (2012)</p> <p>0-5</p> <p>Centre-based and home-based early care and education Centre-based pre-primary care and education <i>(compulsory if child turns 5 between September and March)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Concerns about funding and staffing:</b> Providing accessible, and affordable ECEC for everyone while at the same time providing a working environment which facilitates practising the pedagogy guided in the curriculum. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Quality of ECEC varies across settings and areas, with the poorest provision of ECEC in disadvantaged areas.</li> <li>○ Pay and contractual conditions for pre-school staff are low; difficult to recruit talented individuals to the profession.</li> <li>○ Low ratios make childcare expensive for parents, especially under-threes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Concerns about monitoring and evaluating the effective implementation of the curriculum:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Concerns about the central regulation by OFSTED as the sole arbiter of quality in the early years.</li> <li>○ Concerns about how OFSTED and the sector can work together to ensure necessary improvements.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Concerns about the interface and link with the primary curriculum (KS1):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Concerns about current government focus on 'school readiness'; some staff think curriculum if overly academic, large debate on this issue.</li> <li>○ Steep socio-economic gradient on student performance in school years. Can ECEC narrow the equity gap?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>