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# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

key lessons from research for policy makers

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An independent report submitted to the European Commission  
by the NESSE networks of experts



Education and Culture DG



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## FOREWORD

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Investing in quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is crucial. It is at this stage that the foundations are laid for subsequent learning and achievements. Also, research shows that investing in quality ECEC provision contributes to breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Governments need to believe in ECEC- and to invest in it.

Since 2006, a series of European policy initiatives and events have highlighted the importance of quality ECEC provision. These include the 2006 Commission's Communication [\*Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems\*](#) and the October 2008 European Symposium [\*Early Matters: Improving Early Childhood Education and Care\*](#). These activities have encouraged Member States to support all forms of early childhood intervention and to improve quality. Improving pre-primary education is a priority topic in the Commission's updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training beyond 2010.

In this context of growing momentum, this new report reviews international evidence and enhances our perspectives on several aspects of this complex issue. It highlights key findings from international research and their implications for policy development and implementation. Its aim is to inform those responsible for policy development and implementation in all related fields and to support their work in the ongoing process of system reform with evidence from research.

A key message emerging from this report is that quality ECEC services can enhance children's subsequent school performance. A second lesson is that ECEC services, however good, are important but not sufficient on their own to redress the effects of child poverty and disadvantage and to change life chances; investments should be made in a spectrum of policies that affect young children's lives. A third message from the research reviewed here is that ECEC policy development and implementation is a complex issue and crosses traditional administrative barriers. It requires an integrated approach with cooperation and coordination across sectors and policy fields.

Brussels, June 2009

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'O. Quintin'.

Odile Quintin  
Director-General  
Directorate-General for Education and Culture



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report is a review of the international evidence about the social benefits of early childhood education and care (ECEC). It provides an analytic overview of the various rationales that drive the development of ECEC services. It summarizes existing knowledge from research and highlights policy lessons and measures that are shown to contribute to successful ECEC policy development and implementation. The most important findings are:

1. There are many competing, intersecting and overlapping arguments that drive the development of ECEC policy; not all of them are compatible.
2. The EU is a world leader in providing ECEC services, but more work needs to be done, in particular revising the Barcelona targets which view ECEC as an aspect of women's labour force participation rather than as a service in its own right combining both education and care. There is a need to adopt a wider approach.
3. In economic terms, investment in early childhood brings greater returns than investing in any other stage of education, although the size of the effect and its continuity into later schooling may vary considerably.
4. ECEC services can contribute to long-term economic well-being, although these claims may be exaggerated and cannot be considered in isolation from other societal factors.
5. Quality ECEC provides a solid foundation for more effective future learning, achievements and children's social development, although theoretical conceptions of the processes involved may differ. Quality ECEC benefits all children and socialises them for starting school, especially children from poor or migrant families.
6. ECEC services can enhance children's subsequent school performance and development only if they are of a high quality. Poor quality ECEC may do more harm than good, especially to children from poorer backgrounds.
7. Targeting ECEC services to poor and vulnerable children is problematic; it poses problems of boundary maintenance and stigmatization and may be more ineffective than suggested by the three USA studies that dominate this field. Inclusive, generalised provision is likely to be a more suitable option.
8. Private for-profit ECEC services are very variable but tend to offer the lowest quality services in all countries where they have been investigated. Private for-profit provision may exacerbate social stratification.

9. There is no unambiguous relationship between birth rates and provision of ECEC and other measures to reconcile work and family life, but there is a relationship between mother and child well-being and the provision of such services and benefits. Moves towards more supportive family policies have had a positive impact on both birth rates and women's emancipation.
10. Mothers' labour force participation may be enhanced by the provision of good ECEC services, but a comprehensive package of support to reconcile work and family life – including good parental leave and flexible working arrangements – encourages higher participation, as well as contributing to mother and child well-being.
11. ECEC services can support mothers, those living in vulnerable circumstances, and also working mothers, by recognizing the hours women work inside and outside the home, and by acknowledging their rights within services; their right to be informed, to comment, and to participate in key decisions concerning their child, that is as an aspect of civic participation.
12. Rather than provide care for the very youngest children, it may be better in the interests of the child as well as in the interests of the mother to offer mothers and fathers maternity/paternity leave to cover up to the first year of life.
13. Recent work on young children's rights issues leads to major changes in the ways in which ECEC services are conceptualised and delivered. A child rights approach focuses on and organizes effort on the experiences of children in the here and now and solicits their participation. Early intervention is not something that is done to young children in the hope of (re)shaping their future, but a collaborative venture with them.
14. Child poverty and vulnerability are multi-causal and impact severely on children's well-being and educational performance. Redistributive measures to lessen child poverty have been cost-effective in many countries, and such measures could be extended to all countries. ECEC services, however good, can only marginally compensate for family poverty and socio-economic disadvantage.
15. Definitions of quality and strategies for ensuring it vary considerably across countries. More work needs to be done on defining, measuring and comparing quality in ECEC.



16. The good training, good pay and good working conditions of staff and the support they are given are key factors for ensuring quality in ECEC provision. Other key elements for ECEC quality include: the content/curriculum, including issues of inclusiveness, respect for diversity and personalisation; the child/staff ratio, group size and premises; the involvement of parents and of the wider community; the governance structures necessary for regular programme monitoring and assessment, system accountability and quality assurance.
17. ECEC services are a complex issue and cross traditional administrative boundaries. Coordinated policy development is necessary and investments should be made on a whole spectrum of policies that affect young children's lives.
18. A systematic and integrated approach to early education and care is necessary to develop and improve services at a systemic level – a co-ordinated policy framework, the appointment of a lead ministry, the coordination of central and decentralized levels, a collaborative and participatory approach to reform, links across services and so on.
19. ECEC conceptualisations and practice need to be continuously revised and updated. A key challenge is to identify those mechanisms that can promote change.
20. Despite some robust findings from individual child development studies, there is no bedrock of unambiguous empirical data about young children which can inform ECEC policy development and implementation in Europe. Findings from the field of child development need to be carefully contextualized.

The review concludes that:

1. ECEC services, although already of a good standard in many countries, require more development, both in *levels* of provision and in *quality* of provision.
2. Any future EU-level measures to address the development of ECEC services should take a comprehensive approach which acknowledges that a range of inter-linked initiatives are needed.
3. The European Commission should revisit previous work on Quality Targets in ECEC services and consider how they may be updated and used.



## RÉSUMÉ

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Ce rapport examine les bénéfices sociaux de l'éducation et de l'accueil des jeunes enfants (en anglais: *ECEC – Early Childhood Education and Care*) à partir d'une étude des données internationales disponibles. Il présente une analyse globale des diverses logiques qui orientent le développement des services d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants. Il synthétise les connaissances issues des travaux de recherche et souligne les leçons et les mesures politiques que l'on présente comme contribuant efficacement au développement et à la mise en œuvre de stratégies d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants. Ses principaux résultats sont les suivants :

1. Il existe de nombreux arguments guidant le développement de politiques d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants. Ces arguments qui s'opposent, s'entrecroisent et se recoupent ne sont pas tous compatibles entre eux.
2. L'UE est un leader mondial en matière d'offre de services d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants mais bien des choses restent à faire, notamment la révision des objectifs de Barcelone qui considèrent l'éducation et l'accueil des jeunes enfants comme un aspect de la participation des femmes au monde du travail plutôt que comme un service en tant que tel, combinant éducation et accueil. Une approche plus large est nécessaire.
3. D'un point de vue économique, il est plus rentable d'investir dans la petite enfance que dans n'importe quelle autre étape de la scolarisation, même si la portée et la continuité de l'effet produit peuvent ensuite varier considérablement dans la scolarité ultérieure.
4. Les services d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants peuvent contribuer au bien-être économique à long terme, bien que cette affirmation soit quelque peu exagérée et à considérer en relation avec d'autres facteurs sociétaux.
5. Une éducation et un accueil préprimaires de qualité fournissent une base solide pour la réussite de l'apprentissage scolaire et du développement social de l'enfant, même si les concepts théoriques de ces processus peuvent différer. Une éducation préprimaire de qualité est bénéfique pour tous les enfants et leur permet de participer à l'étape de socialisation nécessaire à l'entrée à l'école, en particulier pour les enfants issus de milieux défavorisés ou de familles de migrants.

6. Les services d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants peuvent améliorer les performances scolaires de l'enfant ainsi que son développement futur à condition qu'ils soient de grande qualité. Des services de mauvaise qualité peuvent faire plus de mal que de bien, notamment envers les enfants issus des milieux les plus pauvres.
7. Cibler les services d'éducation préprimaire sur les enfants pauvres et vulnérables est problématique. Cette manière d'agir pose le problème du maintien des différences et de la stigmatisation et peut se révéler bien plus inefficace que ce que présument les trois études américaines qui dominent le sujet. Une approche inclusive et généralisée de l'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants est sans doute plus appropriée.
8. Les offres privées à but lucratif d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants sont très diverses. Mais elles ont toutefois tendance, dans les pays où elles ont été étudiées, à offrir des services de moindre qualité. Les services privés à but lucratif peuvent accentuer la stratification sociale.
9. La relation entre les taux de natalité et les mesures en faveur de l'éducation et de l'accueil des jeunes enfants ou d'autres mesures pour concilier travail et vie de famille n'est pas sans ambiguïté. Mais il existe un rapport entre le bien-être de la mère et de l'enfant et l'offre de tels services. Les évolutions vers des politiques de soutien familial plus développées ont eu un impact positif à la fois sur les taux de natalité et sur l'émancipation des femmes.
10. La participation des femmes au monde du travail peut être augmentée par la mise en place de services efficaces d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants. Mais la mise en place d'une vaste politique de soutien pour réconcilier vie de famille et vie professionnelle - garantissant des congés parentaux de qualité et une organisation flexible du temps de travail - pourrait encourager une plus grande participation et contribuer par là même au bien être de la mère et de l'enfant.
11. Les services d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants peuvent apporter un réel soutien aux mères, qu'elles soient en situation précaire ou en activité, en reconnaissant les heures de travail qu'elles effectuent à la maison ou en dehors et en reconnaissant leurs droits au sein même de ces services: leur droit d'être informées, de commenter et de participer aux principales décisions concernant leur enfant, ce qui constitue une forme de participation civique.
12. Plutôt que de fournir un service d'accueil pour les tout-petits, il peut être préférable pour l'enfant comme pour la mère d'offrir aux mères et aux pères un congé parental qui couvre la première année de vie de l'enfant.

13. Les travaux récents sur les questions des droits des jeunes enfants apportent d'importantes modifications dans la conception et la mise en place de mesures d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants. Une approche fondée sur les droits des enfants met l'accent sur leurs expériences dans le présent et sollicite leur participation active. L'intervention précoce envers les jeunes enfants n'a pas pour objectif de (re)façonner leur avenir mais correspond à un véritable cheminement avec eux.
14. La pauvreté et la vulnérabilité des enfants ont des causes multiples et ont un fort impact sur leur bien-être et leurs performances scolaires. Les mesures de redistribution pour lutter contre la pauvreté infantile ont été rentables dans de nombreux pays. De telles mesures pourraient être étendues à tous les pays. Cependant, même s'ils sont bons, les services d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants ne peuvent compenser la pauvreté des familles et les désavantages socio-économiques que de façon marginale.
15. Les définitions de la qualité et les stratégies pour la garantir varient considérablement d'un pays à l'autre. D'autres travaux doivent être menés sur la définition, l'évaluation et la comparaison en matière de qualité dans l'éducation et l'accueil des jeunes enfants.
16. La qualité des services d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants dépend fortement des niveaux de formation, de salaire et des conditions de travail des personnels ainsi que du soutien dont ils bénéficient. Parmi les autres éléments qui déterminent la qualité de ces services figurent: le contenu/curriculum, y compris en matière d'inclusion, de respect de la diversité et de la personne; le ratio enfant/personnel, la taille des groupes d'enfants et des locaux; la participation des parents et plus largement de la communauté; les structures de gouvernance nécessaires pour le contrôle et l'évaluation régulière des programmes, la responsabilisation du système et l'assurance qualité.
17. Les services d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants constituent une question complexe qui franchit les frontières administratives traditionnelles. Le développement d'une politique coordonnée est nécessaire et des investissements doivent être réalisés dans tous les programmes qui ont une incidence sur la vie des jeunes enfants.
18. Une approche systématique et intégrée de l'éducation et de l'accueil des jeunes enfants est nécessaire pour développer et améliorer les services à un niveau systémique: un cadre politique coordonné, la nomination d'un ministère spécifique, la coordination des niveaux centraux et décentralisés, une approche combinée et participative pour reformer, des liens entre les services et ainsi de suite.

19. Les conceptions et les pratiques en matière d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants doivent être constamment révisées et mises à jour. Un défi majeur est d'identifier les mécanismes qui peuvent favoriser le changement.
20. En dépit de quelques résultats solides provenant d'études sur le développement des enfants, il n'existe pas de fondement empirique incontestable sur les jeunes enfants qui puisse servir de base au développement et la mise en place d'une politique d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants en Europe. Les résultats des études dans le domaine du développement de l'enfant doivent être appréhendés dans leur contexte.

Le rapport aboutit aux conclusions suivantes :

1. Les services d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants, bien que déjà d'un bon niveau dans beaucoup de pays, mériteraient d'être développés, aussi bien en terme d'*échelle* qu'en terme de *qualité*.
2. Toute mesure communautaire future en matière de développement des services d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants devra adopter une approche globale qui reconnaît la nécessité d'une gamme d'initiatives reliées entre elles.
3. La Commission Européenne devrait reprendre les travaux précédents sur les Objectifs de Qualité de l'éducation et de l'accueil des jeunes enfants et considérer comment ils peuvent être mis à jour et utilisés.

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Bericht fasst internationale Erkenntnisse über die gesellschaftlichen Vorteile frühkindlicher Bildung und Betreuung zusammen. Er bietet einen analytischen Überblick über die verschiedenen Ansätze, die der Entwicklung frühkindlicher Bildungs- und Betreuungsmaßnahmen zugrunde liegen. Der Bericht fasst durchgeführte Forschungserkenntnisse zusammen und unterstreicht politische Erkenntnisse und Maßnahmen, die offensichtlich erfolgreich zur Entwicklung und Umsetzung einer Strategie zur frühkindlichen Bildung und Betreuung beitragen. Die wichtigsten Erkenntnisse sind:

1. Es gibt viele miteinander konkurrierende, sich überschneidende und überlappende Argumente, die die Entwicklung einer Politik zur frühkindlichen Bildung und Entwicklung antreiben. Nicht alle sind miteinander kompatibel.
2. Weltweit ist die EU führend im Bereich der Angebote zur frühkindlichen Bildung und Entwicklung, doch es gibt noch viel zu tun. Hierzu zählt insbesondere die Überprüfung der Barcelona Ziele, die die frühkindliche Bildung und Betreuung als einen Aspekt der Teilnahme der Frauen am Erwerbsleben ansehen und nicht als eigenständiges Angebot, das Bildung und Betreuung miteinander vereint. Hierzu ist ein breiterer Ansatz notwendig.
3. Wirtschaftlich gesehen sind Investitionen in die frühkindliche Bildung und Betreuung gewinnbringender als Investitionen in jede andere Entwicklungsphase, selbst wenn die Auswirkungen und die Kontinuität der Maßnahmen für die spätere schulische Ausbildung stark schwanken können.
4. Frühkindliche Bildungs- und Betreuungsmaßnahmen können zu einem langfristigen wirtschaftlichen Wohlergehen beitragen, auch wenn diese Annahme möglicherweise überzogen ist und nicht isoliert von anderen gesellschaftlichen Faktoren betrachtet werden darf.
5. Qualitativ hochwertige frühkindliche Bildung und Betreuung liefert eine solide Grundlage für ein effizienteres Lernverhalten in der Zukunft, die Leistung und die soziale Entwicklung der Kinder, selbst wenn theoretische Konzepte der eingebrachten Prozesse unterschiedlich sein können. Qualitativ hochwertige frühkindliche Bildung und Betreuung kommt allen Kindern zugute und schafft eine solide soziale Grundlage für den Schuleintritt, insbesondere für Kinder aus armen Verhältnissen oder Familien mit Migrationshintergrund.

6. Frühkindliche Bildungs- und Betreuungsmaßnahmen können die Leistung der Kinder in der Schule und ihre weitere Entwicklung nur verbessern, wenn sie qualitativ einen hohen Standard aufweisen. Qualitativ minderwertige Angebote können möglicherweise mehr Schaden anrichten als Nutzen, insbesondere für Kinder aus ärmeren Verhältnissen.
7. Frühkindliche Bildungs- und Betreuungsmaßnahmen rein auf arme und schutzbedürftige Kinder auszurichten, ist problematisch: Ein derartiges Vorgehen führt dazu, dass nichts gegen die Ausgrenzung und Stigmatisierung unternommen wird und die Maßnahmen somit noch ineffizienter sind als von den drei führenden Studien auf diesem Gebiet in den USA vermutet wird. Umfassende und allgemeine Angebote scheinen eine passendere Lösung zu sein.
8. Private, gewinnorientierte Angebote für die frühkindliche Bildung und Betreuung sind sehr unterschiedlich. Es zeigt sich aber, dass diese in allen Ländern, in denen Untersuchungen hierzu stattgefunden haben, die schlechteste Qualität aufweisen. Private, gewinnorientierte Einrichtungen könnten zu einer Verschärfung des gesellschaftlichen Klassensystems führen.
9. Es besteht kein eindeutiger Zusammenhang zwischen Geburtenrate und frühkindlichen Bildungs- und Betreuungsmaßnahmen sowie anderen Angeboten, die die Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf fördern. Doch es gibt einen Zusammenhang zwischen dem Wohl von Mutter und Kind und dem Angebot an derartigen Maßnahmen und Hilfen. Schritte hin zu einer familienfreundlicheren Politik haben positive Auswirkungen auf die Geburtenrate und die Selbständigkeit der Frau gehabt.
10. Die Teilnahme der Mütter am Erwerbsleben kann durch die Bereitstellung guter frühkindlicher Bildungs- und Betreuungsmaßnahmen erhöht werden. Weiter wird die Erwerbstätigkeit von Müttern aber durch ein umfangreiches Unterstützungsangebot, das darauf abzielt Arbeit und Familie miteinander zu vereinbaren - einschließlich Elternzeit und flexibler Arbeitszeiten - erhöht. Darüber hinaus trägt es zum Wohlergehen von Mutter und Kind bei.
11. Frühkindliche Bildungs- und Betreuungsmaßnahmen können Mütter, die sich in schwierigen Lebenssituationen befinden, sowie berufstätige Mütter unterstützen, indem sie die Arbeitsstunden berücksichtigen, die Mütter im Büro und Zuhause leisten und ihre Rechte hinsichtlich der frühkindlichen Bildungs- und Betreuungsmaßnahmen anerkennen: Ihr Recht, informiert zu werden, Stellung nehmen zu dürfen und in wichtige Entscheidungen, die ihr Kind betreffen, eingebunden zu werden, was einen Aspekt einer lebendigen Beteiligung darstellt.



12. Statt Betreuungsmaßnahmen für die Kleinsten anzubieten, kann es im Interesse des Kindes und der Mutter besser sein, Erziehungszeiten für Mütter und Väter zu ermöglichen, die das erste Lebensjahr des Kindes abdecken.
13. Jüngste Erkenntnisse über die Rechte kleiner Kinder führen zu bedeutenden Veränderungen in der Konzeption und Umsetzung frühkindlicher Bildungs- und Betreuungsmaßnahmen. Ein Ansatz mit dem Fokus auf den Rechten kleiner Kinder konzentriert seine Bemühungen auf die Erfahrungen von Kindern im Hier und Jetzt und bindet sie aktiv ein. Frühkindliche Maßnahmen zielen nicht darauf ab, die Zukunft der Kinder vorzugeben, sondern sie mit ihnen gemeinsam zu gestalten.
14. Kinderarmut und Schutzbedürftigkeit von Kindern haben viele Gründe und haben ernsthafte Auswirkungen auf das Wohlbefinden und die schulische Leistung der Kinder. Umverteilungsmaßnahmen zur Bekämpfung von Kinderarmut waren in vielen Ländern kosteneffizient. Diese Maßnahmen könnten auf alle Länder ausgeweitet werden. Frühkindliche Betreuungs- und Bildungsmaßnahmen, die in jedem Fall gut sind, können Armut und sozio-ökonomische Nachteile in den Familien nur minimal kompensieren.
15. Qualitätsdefinitionen und Strategien zur Gewährleistung dieser variieren in den einzelnen Ländern erheblich. An der Definition, der Bewertung und dem Vergleich der Qualität der frühkindlichen Betreuungs- und Bewertungsmaßnahmen muss weiter gearbeitet werden.
16. Eine gute Ausbildung und Bezahlung, ebenso wie gute Arbeitsbedingungen der Betreuer und Lehrer und die Unterstützung, die diese erhalten, sind Schlüsselfaktoren für die Gewährleistung der Qualität der frühkindlichen Betreuungs- und Bildungsmaßnahmen. Weitere Schlüsselfaktoren beinhalten: Inhalt/Curriculum, einschließlich Inklusion, Respektieren der Vielfalt und Persönlichkeit; das Verhältnis von Kindern pro Betreuer/Lehrer; Gruppengröße und Räumlichkeiten; die Einbeziehung der Eltern und der breiteren Öffentlichkeit, die Koordinationsstrukturen, die für eine regelmäßige Programmüberwachung und -bewertung notwendig sind; Systemverantwortung und Qualitätsgewährleistung.
17. Frühkindliche Betreuung und Bildung ist ein komplexes Thema, das traditionelle bürokratische Grenzen überschreitet. Ein koordiniertes politisches Handeln ist notwendig und es sollte in viele Programme investiert werden, die Einfluss auf das Leben kleiner Kinder haben.

18. Ein systematischer und einheitlicher Ansatz zur frühkindlichen Bildung und Betreuung ist notwendig, um Maßnahmen systematisch zu entwickeln und zu verbessern - aufeinander abgestimmtes politisches Handeln, die Ernennung eines verantwortlichen Ministeriums, die Koordination zentraler und dezentraler Einheiten, ein kollaborativer und auf Mitbestimmung ausgerichteter Ansatz für Reformen, Vernetzung der einzelnen Maßnahmen usw.
19. Konzeption und Umsetzung von frühkindlichen Bildungs- und Betreuungsmaßnahmen bedürfen einer regelmäßigen Überprüfung und Aktualisierung. Eine wichtige Herausforderung in diesem Zusammenhang ist die Identifizierung von den Mechanismen, die Veränderung vorantreiben können.
20. Trotz einiger solider Erkenntnisse aus einzelnen Studien über die Entwicklung von Kindern gibt es keinen eindeutigen empirischen Datenstock über kleine Kinder, die als Grundlage für die Entwicklung und Umsetzung einer Politik zur frühkindlichen Bildung und Betreuung in Europa herangezogen werden können. Erkenntnisse aus dem Bereich der kindlichen Entwicklung müssen umsichtig in den Gesamtzusammenhang gestellt werden.

Abschließend lässt sich zusammenfassen:

1. Frühkindliche Bildungs- und Betreuungsmaßnahmen müssen, selbst wenn sie bereits in vielen Ländern ein sehr gutes Niveau erreicht haben, noch weiter ausgebaut werden. Dieser Ausbau muss sowohl Umfang als auch Qualität betreffen.
2. Zukünftige Maßnahmen der Europäischen Union für die Entwicklung von Angeboten der frühkindlichen Bildung und Betreuung sollten einen ganzheitlichen Ansatz haben, der dem Bedürfnis Rechnung trägt, dass eine Reihe ineinander greifender Initiativen umgesetzt werden müssen.
3. Die Europäische Kommission sollte frühere Arbeiten über Qualitätsziele bei Angeboten der frühkindlichen Bildung und Entwicklung überprüfen und überlegen, wie diese aktualisiert und genutzt werden könnten.

## INTRODUCTION

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Investing in quality ECEC is crucial. It is at this stage that the foundations are laid for subsequent learning and achievements. Also, research shows that investing in quality ECEC provision contributes to breaking the cycle of disadvantage.

Within the EU, different realities can be observed across Member States in enrolment rates, supply, quality, resources, approach and governance of ECEC.

- Why do countries invest in early childhood? What rationales do they use to justify expenditure?
- How much difference is there between the ways countries approach ECEC? Does it matter?
- How to define, measure, monitor and improve quality in ECEC provision?
- What evidence is available about how services are delivered and how they impact on children? Does this vary very much?
- Is universal access better than targeted interventions?
- What is the role of the private for profit sector in service delivery?
- How is early education and care practice updated? At what level do changes happen and what mechanisms are in place to promote change?
- How to improve the essential sub-systems and governance structures necessary for regular programme monitoring and assessment, system accountability and quality assurance?
- Which kind of service and funding arrangement delivers the most high quality provision within or across countries?
- How to "scale up"?
- Should the Commission's 1996 *Quality Targets in Services for Young Children* be revised and what might be done to update it?
- How do ECEC services impact on the most vulnerable?
- To what extent can ECEC combat the effects of child poverty and disadvantage?

The research reviewed in this report engages with these and many other important questions around ECEC.

## Scope and structure of the report

This report offers an overview and an interpretation of the evidence about Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services. It aims to inform those responsible for policy development and implementation in related fields. It summarizes existing knowledge from international research on several important dimensions of ECEC and highlights policy lessons that can contribute to successful ECEC policy development and implementation.

This report is a review of a very large body of research in this field and it is partly a review of reviews. It reviews evidence from a variety of fields, including child development, family and social policy studies, gender studies, educational research and economics. Yet, it does not pretend to cover all aspects of this complex topic.

The report is written in a simplified, non-academic language accessible to non-specialists. It has been revised in the light of the discussions held at the October 2008 European Symposium *Early Matters-Improving Early Childhood Education and Care*<sup>1</sup> which brought together researchers, European and national policy-makers and advisers, European-level non-governmental organisations, practitioners, and international organisations working in this field. The report has been revised again to take advantage of the data made available in the 2009 Eurydice Report [Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities](#).

**Chapter 1** presents a brief overview of the issues and considers the range of information the report needs to take into account to provide a comprehensive analysis. The chapter then considers how a policy agenda might be constructed from the findings in these various areas.

**Chapter 2** presents ten common rationales that drive policy formulation on ECEC and considers the strengths and limitations of the evidence that underpins each of these rationales and the implementation strategies which are adopted. The chapter shows that these rationales are often overlapping and may also be contradictory.

**Chapter 3** explores existing models and practices in ECEC and considers how better ECEC services could be delivered. It discusses the nature of the research evidence that is available to inform policy as well as the key international reports and documents reviewing this topic. It refers to previous EU work in this area, namely the 1996 *Quality Targets in Services for Young Children*, and considers what might be done to update it.

**Chapter 4** summarises some key policy lessons and recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> Click [here](#) to see the symposium conclusions.

## CHAPTER 1. AN IMPORTANT BUT COMPLEX TOPIC – ISSUES IN SCOPING THIS REVIEW

Addressing ECEC is an important but complex topic that spans a number of policy arenas. The reasons behind this complexity include the emergence of new education discourses which emphasize equity and efficiency, shifting views of childhood and the family and macro-issues of poverty, employment, demography, migration and marketization. This chapter provides a brief overview of the issues and considers the range of information the report needs to take into account to provide a comprehensive analysis. It suggests that in order to do justice to the range of recent issues, it is necessary to take a broader approach than has previously been the case and move beyond micro-analysis of children's learning and development.

### **The growing global importance of ECEC – Why do countries invest in early childhood?**

ECEC plays a key role in most modern societies. Amongst the immediate factors turning governmental attention to ECEC issues are: the wish to increase women's labour market participation; to reconcile work and family responsibilities on a basis more equitable to women; to confront demographic changes ... (in particular falling fertility rates and the general ageing of populations); and the need to address issues of child poverty and educational disadvantage. Because economic prosperity depends on maintaining a high employment/population ratio, the wish to bring more women into the labour market has been a key driver of government interest in expanding ECEC services... Support for the view that early childhood education and care should be seen as a *public good* is growing and has received a strong impetus from the research of education economists (OECD, 2006:12).

**Europe is a global leader in ECEC.** European countries, including new Member States have been at the heart of developments in ECEC. European governments have not only been in the forefront of developing pre-school education from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, but they have also put into place family and childcare policies to help couples have children and assist parents to combine work and family responsibilities. Current European conceptualizations of ECEC, models of provision and levels of funding are admired world-wide. It is a particular irony that so much policy research on ECEC cites evidence from the USA, whilst distinguished North American commentators themselves look towards Europe as offering preferable models (Clawson and Gerstel, 2002; Zigler et al, 2006; Kammerman et al, 2003).

**The importance of contextualising findings about ECEC.** Education systems are idiosyncratic and deeply culturally rooted in a country's history (Cole, 1998; Alexander, 2000; Steiner-Khamsi, 2002 and 2004; Phillips 2004 and 2008; Cleghorn and Prochner, 2008). Values and political priorities inevitably shape perceptions of what is appropriate support for young children in the field of early education and care. It is naïve to suppose that educational ideas and procedures can simply be lifted from one country and deposited in another, in any field of education. On the contrary, educational borrowing and lending

are complex affairs and ideas always need to be grounded in particular locales, where they will inevitably be modified. This is especially so for ECEC, which has until relatively recently been seen as a contentious add-on to education, rather than an integral part of it; and even more so for childcare because it is intimately tied with cultural notions of women's roles and rights, as well as with views about the robustness of young children and what they might need.

ECEC has evolved in very different ways across Europe (Schweie and Willekens 2009) and the research evidence about the impact of certain kinds of provision also needs to be grounded in particular locales. There may be some very general findings about the quality of education and care but the findings from one type of system cannot be easily translated to another. This point about the parochialism of research is often overlooked, but is an important one.

A further difficulty with policy research is that evidence from small countries tends to be overlooked, especially if the policies and the values that inform them are unique, and if information about them is not readily available in English. Denmark and Hungary, for example, have developed particular patterns of ECEC services whose concerns (with social pedagogy and with age related services respectively) are not widely known or fully understood outside of their particular context, but nevertheless may have valuable lessons to offer.

**ECEC and Children's Rights.** Amongst other issues, a full discussion of ECEC has to be based on perceptions of the needs and interests of young children. Whilst this is most often viewed from a child development perspective, new fields of study have emerged giving a somewhat different picture of how children's interests are best described and served. Most research in the field of child development for example derives from a narrow population of children (mainly from North America and Europe) and may well not be easily generalizable beyond its original catchments (LeVine and New, 2008). There is a small body of evidence, mainly from anthropologists<sup>2</sup> which radically challenges or extends some of the standard assumptions of parenting and child development which underpin discussions about ECEC. This is of interest given Europe's immigrant population, but it also points to the need for an interdisciplinary approach to interpreting evidence about ECEC. A recent study on alloparenting (care other than by parents) draws on socio-biological, physiological, demographical and anthropological material to build up a complex picture of the impact of alternative care on young children's lives (Bentley 2009).

An additional perspective on the findings from child development is offered by the literature on child rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 2005/7) has issued a special comment on the rights of very young children. This focuses on securing children's well-being in the *here and now*, and emphasizes young

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<sup>2</sup> Cole, 1998; LeVine, 2003; LeVine and New, 2008; De Loach and Gottlieb, 2000; Gottlieb, 2004; Hewlett and Lamb, 2007.

children's agency; their participatory activities, and their rights to provision and protection, whatever long-term outcomes might or might not arise from an intervention. Children, from this perspective are not ciphers but citizens. There is now a considerable body of work in the field of legal studies, sociology and history, exploring how ideas about childhood, and how childhood and adulthood have been counterpoised against one another (James and Prout, 2005). The European Commission has issued a document as a basis for consultation *Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child* (2006) although it has not, as yet, focused on early childhood as a specific area of its policy on children's rights.

**Diversity, inclusion, migration.** ECEC may be important in addressing issues of social inclusion and inclusive citizenry, especially the poverty and marginalization of migrant/immigrant communities. Whilst the debate about immigrant/migrant communities mostly centres on efforts to integrate such communities into mainstream society, there is an alternative view which stresses the importance of an inclusive approach and which understands and addresses the hostility and the structural problems encountered by such communities (Brogere and Vandebroek, 2007; Gillborn, 2008; Lane 2008). Social inclusion and inclusive citizenry refer mainly to the poor and marginalized, and those children with physical disabilities are excluded from the debate, as for example in the 2009 Eurydice report. Whilst many countries aim to provide special and discrete services for children who have some kind of identifiable physical disability, many advocacy groups have argued that all education services, but especially those for young children, should take a more inclusive approach towards disability and that such a debate cannot be dismissed from more general discussion about poverty and marginalization (Children in Europe, 2008).

**Gender equity issues and reconciliation of work and family life.** Another example of changing and somewhat contradictory views concerns the needs and interests of mothers at home and in the workforce. Increasingly there is a focus on the specific role of *fathers and other carers* as well as the typical focus on mothers who are traditionally regarded as the primary carers. The word "parent", whilst attempting to be gender neutral, also obscures very real gender differences in the way men and women relate to and care for their young children, and act on their behalf (Craig, 2007; Paull, 2008; Page et al, 2008). Studies which focus on "parenting" support as a way of combating disadvantage may need to disaggregate the concept further, in order to take account of changing social realities in family life (Lamb, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000; Heymann, 2006).

Just as mothers increasingly work outside the home, and seek some kind of care arrangement for their young children, and in doing so raise questions about traditional mothering and fathering roles, conversely there is a debate about the gendering of the early years workforce. Until relatively recently there has been a widespread assumption that childcare is a "natural" activity of women –that is nursing, soothing and interacting with and guiding children and undertaking physical tasks such as changing nappies, feeding and cleaning. Since these caring tasks are "instinctive" mothers can be regarded

as semi- volunteers and need only be paid very little or in kind if they take on the task of looking after someone else's children. This kind of assumption for instance informed the playgroup movement in the Netherlands and the UK. This in turn raises the question about whether care should emulate mothering, especially for the youngest children, and whether the emphasis in institutional or out-of-home care should be on contingent responsive caring rather than on cognitive development. For example Rabe-Kleberg (2009) discusses the history of kindergarten training in Germany as an example of these tensions between teaching and mothering.

**Demographic changes and falling birth rates.** EU countries are concerned about rapidly changing demographic profiles. The February 2009 conference of the Czech EU Presidency *Parental Childcare and the Employment Policy: Collision or Complementarity* reviewed evidence about falling birth rates in European countries and the measures adopted in different countries to increase birth rates (including employment policy, social benefits and childcare packages). Whilst some limited evidence was advanced that offering incentives for mothers to stay at home with their children was a useful policy, it was also argued that more, rather than less childcare was correlated with higher birth rates. Finland and France were cited as examples of countries that have invested in childcare and education as part of a successful spectrum of measures to increase birth rates (Heran, 2009).

**Early childhood intervention alone cannot redress the effects of poverty and disadvantage.** Many of the studies of young children's education and care, and of the outcomes that arise from particular forms of intervention are carried out at a micro-level, and tend to take the wider socio-economic context for granted. But it is also well known that child poverty adversely affects educational success. The recent UNESCO (2009) Education for All Global Monitoring Report *Overcoming inequality: why governance matters* suggests that there is a clear correlation between societal inequality and education performance. Government spending on family and social benefits – through cash benefits or through investment in services - in turn is strongly correlated with a reduction in child poverty rates. The recent report on child poverty in rich countries by UNICEF-IRC suggests that governments in the countries with the lowest child poverty rates reduce "market poverty" (that is poverty that results from labour and market forces being left to themselves) by 80% or more whereas countries with high poverty rates reduce market poverty by only 10%. The UNICEF (2008) and OECD (2006) statistics suggest that countries have the potential to reduce child poverty rates to below 10% without a significant increase in overall social spending, through redistribution policies. Social commentators on child poverty and especially poverty in early childhood suggest that to suppose that early childhood education, however effective, can offer life-long inoculation against poverty, or can compensate for subsequent poor schooling is "magical thinking" (Brookes-Gunn, 2003).



**New trends in the marketization of ECEC services.** While the role of the market in ECEC is of little relevance in some countries, it is very pertinent in others. For-profit care is increasingly the main form of childcare in the UK, and in other English-speaking countries outside of Europe. In particular it has been argued that much of the research from the USA, which is widely cited in the child development literature, fails to take account of the context of marketization and the distortions this produces in access and equity (Sosinsky et al, 2007).

### *Constructing a cross-cutting policy agenda*

The evidence commonly cited about young children's social and emotional behaviour and what affects it focuses on the micro-level; on the outcomes for individual children as a result of a specific intervention. The issue of "scaling-up" -that is what conditions would be necessary to ensure that specific examples of proven good practice could be recognized, expanded and applied on a large scale in diverse contexts- is less frequently addressed. What kind of systems can ensure that "good quality" provision is recognized, monitored and extended, and conversely that "poor quality" provision is improved? How is early education and care practice updated? At what level do changes happen and what mechanisms are in place to promote change? Given the range of evidence from many different sources policy needs to draw on a breadth and depth of knowledge, at both a micro and at a macro level.

For all the reasons presented in this chapter (new education discourses which emphasize equity and efficiency, shifting views of childhood and the family and macro-issues of poverty, employment, demography, migration and marketization) addressing ECEC is likely to be complex and needs to span a number of policy arenas.

The complexities described above cut across traditional administrative ways of understanding and organizing education services in most European countries. Within the European Commission itself, such an agenda necessarily implies discussion and co-ordination across different departments (DGs). Within EU Member States, there are a range of models of delivery which could usefully be discussed and compared at an EU level, and a preliminary discussion of these is made available in the Eurydice (2009) report. Also, the European Commission's "Updated strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training" beyond 2010<sup>3</sup> provides a basis for future policy cooperation in this field, particularly through mutual learning.

The next chapter presents ten common policy rationales for investing in ECEC and considers the strengths and limitations of the evidence advanced to support each policy rationale and the implementation strategies which are adopted.

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<sup>3</sup> COM (2008) 865 final, 16/12/2008; endorsed by the [Conclusions of the European Council of 12 May 2009](#). This policy framework will guide the European Commission's Open Method of Coordination in education and training until 2020.

## CHAPTER 2. THE MAIN RATIONALES DRIVING ECEC POLICY - STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RELEVANT RESEARCH EVIDENCE

There are many competing, intersecting and overlapping arguments and perspectives involved in defining and providing a rationale for ECEC provision. Some of the most well-known rationales are set out in Table 1 below. Not all these perspectives are compatible; indeed, they may sit alongside one another without the contradictions being addressed. Further, it is a truism that policy development and implementation are rarely straight-forward or coherent, particularly when early education and care spans several policy areas (Levin, 2004; EC, 2007b). Each of these rationales, and the policy dilemmas that they give rise to, is considered in turn.

**Table 1: Rationales for ECEC provision**

Rationale	Research Perspective	Policy focus
Early education is a good investment in that it mitigates the expense of remedial action in primary and secondary schooling and results in subsequent adult productivity, and in the relative absence of anti-social behaviour.	Economics, human capital theory, long-term societal benefits: Draws on large-scale longitudinal aggregated data sets and cost-benefit studies of early childhood interventions.	Provide targeted early education for most vulnerable children
Early education (and care) is only a good investment if it is of high quality. Poor care may do more harm than good for the most vulnerable children.	Child development research that suggests good child-staff ratios, staff training and good programmes are essential aspects of quality	Provide targeted early education services with emphasis on defining and monitoring quality
Early education benefits all young children, enhances dispositions for learning and socializes them for starting school, especially children from poor or migrant families	Child development research about children's learning processes and teachers pedagogic practices	Provide universal early education as part of an education system, ensure access/support for the most vulnerable
Education and lifelong learning essential to competitive knowledge economy. Education promotes social mobility	Education research and comparative education data from OECD and other trans-national sources	Provide universal early education as part of education system
Women are essential contributors to a dynamic economy.	Economics, cost benefit studies of labour market participation, gender studies	Remove disincentives to women's participation by the provision of full-time childcare (Barcelona targets)
Working mothers contribute to tax revenues and lessen the need for social security payments; they make an important contribution to family	Welfare economics, emphasis on workplace participation of single parents and other parents who would otherwise be dependent on state benefits	Maternity, paternity and parental leave and provision of full-time childcare, work support schemes
Mothers need to be involved with their children; parents are a child's first educators.	Child development research which stresses critical early period and importance of family environment and mother-child attachments.	Home visiting schemes, parenting classes, mothers as volunteers
Child poverty impacts severely on children's educational performance, their sense of self-worth and their subsequent societal contributions.	Social welfare research on the impact of poverty on families	Redistribution of taxes and benefits and other social policies to mitigate child poverty; labour market legislation such as minimum wage
Children, including young children, are rights bearers and <i>all</i> children have a right to protection, provision and participation	Legal requirements of Human Rights/Child Rights legislation Legal/sociological studies investigating children's experiences and well-being in the here and now, and children's agency	Broad approach, including reduction of child poverty, health and welfare support; defining provision from children's perspective.
Low birth rates below level of replacement a societal problem	Demography, social welfare studies of population growth	Pro-natalist policies, child benefit, maternity and paternity leave, childcare

**RATIONALE 1:** *Early education is a good investment in that it mitigates the expense of remedial action in primary and secondary schooling and results in subsequent adult productivity, and in the relative absence of anti-social behaviour.*

This rationale is derived from human capital theory, which focuses on the economic productivity of individuals over time, and the conditions which enhance it. This issue is being dealt with in more detail by education economists, but it is worth making some comments here about the evidence about early childhood that is being used as a basis for these economic formulations.

Human capital theory has undoubtedly contributed to a rethinking of macro-economic policies for education, and in particular for early education. Human capital theory is about the economic productivity of individuals and the situations in which it might be maximized. Heckman, a leading theorist of human capital theory, argues that investment in early childhood brings greater returns than investment in any other stage of education (Heckman and Masterov, 2004). There is now a body of large scale aggregate studies of ECEC, especially in developing countries where early intervention is a relatively new phenomenon, and as a new introduction its impact can be more easily measured (Berlinski et al, 2007). These studies without exception demonstrate a relationship between early intervention and improved school performance, although the size of the effect and its continuity into later school life may vary.

Human capital theory has highlighted early childhood intervention as a particularly effective economic investment. A systematic review of longitudinal cost-benefit studies<sup>4</sup> of early interventions identified only three studies; Perry High Scope (Barnett, 1996); the Abecedarian (Ramsey et al 2001); and the Chicago Child-Parent Centres (Reynolds 2000). These interventions took place in the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's and were carried out in ghettoized areas in the USA. The populations investigated were overwhelmingly Black African and Hispanic. The Abecedarian study investigated a particularly deprived population. The first two were randomized controlled trials - although some queries have been raised about the randomization of the Perry study - and the third used a control group. Other than that, the evidence has come from large data sets such as the Millennium cohort study in the UK, retrospectively scrutinized. Each of the three intervention studies has spawned a series of publications over decades.

The three interventions differed from each other in their aims, the age ranges of the children, the length of time of the intervention, the role played by mothers, the outreach facilities available, and in various other ways. The cost-benefit calculations based on the studies follow broadly similar and acceptable economic procedures. These are, however, reliant on specific local school models for their costings (repeat years,

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<sup>4</sup> Where longitudinal was taken as 15 years or more, that is the progress of a child into adulthood.

nature of remedial assistance) and use USA databases to make other financial projections, for instance on juvenile offending rates and crime compensation.

Each study reported significant longitudinal outcomes for the intervention group. All three studies reported an improvement in school performance for the control group, with less repetition and remedial assistance rates. The Abecedarian study reported a marginally significant difference in the education rates of teenage mothers of participants, and a marginally significant difference in the type of employment of all mothers. The major finding was that the Perry High/Scope and the Chicago study reported a significant difference in juvenile crime rates between the intervention and control groups, although at the minimal level of significance. The Abecedarian intervention group showed no difference. Crime reduction in the intervention group forms the major part of the saving in the Perry High Scope and Chicago studies. However costs of crime in the USA are very high. The three strikes law means that levels of incarceration in the USA are particularly high. Victim compensation is also uniquely high in the USA because of the high incidence of gun-related crime in the USA (Aos et al, 2001). It is unlikely that savings of the order reported from early intervention in these two studies would accrue in any other country.

Each study made an overall estimate of the ratio of dollars spent to dollars saved, taking long-term projections of benefits into account. The Perry High Scope study claimed an overall ratio of \$7.16 dollars saved for every dollar spent; the Chicago Child Parent Centres study \$7.14 dollars saved per dollar spent, and the Abecedarian \$3.78 dollars saved for every dollar spent. The size of the effect varies considerably according to the instruments used, and the attribute being measured, and the figures are open to interpretation although unsurprisingly the most favourable figures are generally used as a basis for extrapolation (Penn et al, 2005; Penn and Lloyd, 2007).

There are considerable questions to be asked about the application of the findings beyond the communities in the USA where the investigations were undertaken. For example the possibility that racism may have distorted the results, and their subsequent interpretation, is only marginally addressed by the Abecedarian study (Campbell, 1995) and is not raised by the other studies. However, other authors, especially black authors writing about this period of American history, describe the racism as overwhelming (Heath, 1983 and 1990; Rosaldo, 1993). An article by Johnson *et al.* (2003)<sup>5</sup> suggested that research in child development has downplayed the importance of context and largely ignored or misunderstood the position of poor blacks and Hispanics in the USA. Perry and Albee (1994) also express concern with prevention programs which focus exclusively on micro-level interventions.

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<sup>5</sup> *Studying the Effects of Early Child Care Experiences on the Development of Children of Color in the United States: Towards a more Inclusive Research Agenda.*

The uses to which these three studies have been put, in advocating for targeted interventions for poor children, have been treated with some scepticism by some leading USA commentators. Brooks-Gunn (2003) commented in her evidence to a USA Senate committee, that early intervention is important *but not sufficient* on its own to change life chances. Zigler, a leading USA researcher remarks:

Are we sure there is no magic potion that will push poor children into the ranks of the middle class? Only if the potion contains health care, childcare, good housing, sufficient income for every family, child rearing environments free of drugs and violence, support for parents in all their roles, and equal education for all students in schools. Without these necessities, only magic will make that happen (2003: 12).

There is now a considerable and wide-ranging amount of data amassed by education economists and it is *indisputable* that quality early education produces some cognitive and emotional gains, which may be long-lasting, and to which economic value can be assigned. At the very least, these economic analyses have been influential in informing policy decisions. But the three particular studies discussed above have achieved iconic status. To make long-range predictions on the back of them is problematic, yet this kind of use is widespread. The World Bank has funded the development of an "early childhood calculator" to enable countries to calculate the profits of investment in programmes per 1000 children (<http://go.worldbank.org/KHC1NHO580>). The most recent report from the Rand Corporation (Kilburn and Karoly, 2008) *The Economics of Early Childhood Policy* again recycles the calculations from the three studies.

Some commentators, most notably the economist Gary Becker (2005), have argued that investment in early childhood interventions is only cost-effective for vulnerable children. He discounts all other arguments for state investment. For a majority of children state investment is not deemed necessary, since it is much more efficient to have better off families buy childcare services in a private competitive market than to spend tax revenue on preschool government-run programs for the children of these families. For those who would benefit from interventions, a demand led system (giving parents tax credits or vouchers) is better than supply side system (direct subsidy to the provider of services). The subsidies for poor families take the form of vouchers which poor families can spend on any approved private daycare. In his view the market will ensure a sufficient and adequate supply of provision for all types of demand.

This conservative economic analysis assumes that children from poor households may be more likely to incur crime and remedial costs as a result of adverse circumstances and/or inadequate parental care preventative interventions may lessen those costs. This echoes 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century social welfare approaches, targeting the poor, the basis on which many daycare systems were originally developed (Schweie and Willekens, 2009). However definitions of "poor and vulnerable" are problematic and overlap with race and class. For example the Perry High Scope intervention referred originally to its sample of children as "functionally retarded, culturally deprived, Negro, pre-school children" (Weikart, 1967:57), a description that has been modified over time to "low-income-children".

The OECD report *Starting Strong II* (2006) suggests that targeting vulnerable children may be more *ineffective* than suggested by the USA data. The OECD report cites the adage "a service for the poor is a poor service". This is for a number of reasons. Such provision is more likely to be located in poor areas, and to be poorly staffed and staff may have lower aspirations for children. Targeting is associated with stigmatization and may be unpopular with the very families for whom it is designed, so that take-up is low. The social segregation involved in targeting at a pre-school level is likely to continue into primary schooling, in so far as the targeted provision is attached to a primary school. The problems of boundary maintenance between the poor and non-poor and the administrative resources needed to decide on eligibility for scarce places may be inefficient. Targeted programmes for vulnerable children may only have short-term funding and be vulnerable to political trends. For example, the much vaunted multi-million pound *Sure Start* targeted early intervention programme in the UK has not lived up to its aim of reducing child poverty and improving child outcomes for these reasons. Boundary maintenance problems – locating target communities and deciding who was poor and eligible and who was not – were problematic; there was perceived stigmatization in some communities; and there was some evidence that standards of provision were low. Above all *Sure Start* was wildly overambitious in its claims to change lives and reduce poverty, and provided no theoretical justification of the processes by which changes in mothers and children's lives might be enacted (Rutter, 2006).

Two reviews by Leseman<sup>6</sup> suggest that although there are well-known basic criteria to ensure minimum quality including generous adult-child ratios, well trained adults and a stimulating cognitive environment (see below) the policy challenge is to

*(re)build (current)systems of ECEC to meet crucial design features" to provide quality ECEC services for all children that are "integrated and attractive and affordable to all families regardless of social class or minority status", yet sensitive to differing educational needs (2009:39)*

The policy focus of much of the economic work on ECEC is to suggest that targeted interventions are the most cost-effective in producing better outcomes. All governments must ration resources and prioritize, and if ECEC is a relatively ineffective measure in terms of outcomes, and/or has a low value in society, then targeting the children who can benefit most is a useful strategy. However identifying those children who are likely to benefit most may be problematic. More importantly, ECEC is likely to improve educational opportunities for all children and is a broadly redistributive measure. In systems such as that of the USA where provision is mainly in the hand of private entrepreneurs and voluntary groups and state investment and oversight are weak (OECD 2001) high quality targeted programmes may be a valid option, *if* high quality can be achieved and maintained. In a European context, where almost all

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<sup>6</sup> The first for OECD (2002) and the second incorporated in the Eurydice report (2009).

countries value ECEC and have already assumed responsibility for funding and regulating ECEC provision to a relatively high standard, an inclusive and sensitive approach for all children is likely to be a more suitable option.

Investment in early childhood appears to bring greater returns than investment in any other stage of education, although the size of the effect may vary considerably between countries. Quality early intervention improves subsequent school performance and children's social development. ECEC is important but not sufficient on its own to change life chances. Targeting vulnerable children is problematic and may be more ineffective than suggested by USA studies. Good ECEC benefits *all* children, not only those from poorer backgrounds.

The investment arguments, which derive from human capital theory, are heavily promoted worldwide as a rationale for supporting ECEC. Whilst economic arguments undoubtedly carry weight, there are some problems with the parochiality of the evidence from the USA. Extrapolations from this evidence cannot be made straightforwardly to cover a European context.

**RATIONALE 2:** *Early education (and care) is only a good investment if it is of high quality. Poor care may do more harm than good especially for the most vulnerable children.*

There is a consensus across a wide range of child development research in several countries that good quality ECEC provision produces good outcomes, and conversely poor provision leads to worrying outcomes, including negative and aggressive behaviour and poor language development. This is especially the case for very young children.

The NICDH<sup>7</sup> study in the USA collected a vast array of longitudinal information about demographic, family, and child care characteristics and children's behaviour and development during the first three years of life for a diverse sample of 1364 children and their families – although excluding the poorest communities. It concluded that the most important factors for ensuring quality are good adult-child ratios, well-trained staff, and good pedagogic programmes (NICDH Early Child Care Research Network 2005). The EPPE project in the UK, similarly large-scale, has highlighted the importance of good pedagogical practice for children's outcomes and highlighted the adverse impact of poor practices (Siraj-Blatchford et al 2002, 2004, 2008).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the USA has produced a booklet entitled *Developmentally Appropriate Practice-DAP* (Bredenkamp and Copplestone, 1997) which attempts to synthesize research findings from the field of child development into a series of guidelines for practitioners, and which has been widely used in the USA and beyond<sup>8</sup>. DAP has been criticized on a number of grounds, not least its strongly normative approach and its focus on micro-level factors to the exclusion of any systemic approach to delivery of services (Hatch et al, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, USA.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the World Bank uses it as a core text for its early child development site.

However, translating disaggregated findings from empirical research in the field of child development undertaken in a particular country with particular traditions of practice into general prescriptions for policy makers is not straightforward. Mooney et al. (2003) attempted to provide an international overview of the evidence about what constitutes high quality provision. The team was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families<sup>9</sup> in England to undertake an international survey of the evidence on quality. Drawing on evidence from 15 countries inside and outside of Europe, their conclusions were:

- Definitions of quality and what should be measured depend on cultural values and wider understandings of childhood
- Definitional issues and differences in government structures and welfare systems, policies and practices means it is difficult to make cross-national comparisons
- Measures used to assess quality may include structural issues (ratios, staff wages and conditions, space); process issues (activities and interactions taking place); and outcome measures (subsequent school performance, parental satisfaction)
- Quality control is highly centralized in some countries through setting and inspection of national standards but much more decentralized at local and institutional level in others
- In countries where there are high levels of private for-profit provision, standards and accreditation may be a useful means of quality assurance
- Staff-child ratios differ across countries, but cannot be directly compared because different pedagogical approaches also affect outcomes.
- Engaging parents (mothers and fathers) in services may be challenging because a majority of parents are in employment. There are significant differences in mother's employment rates across the countries investigated.

The contentious issue, then, is to arrive at a satisfactory and culturally relevant definition of "quality" and ways to monitor it. The Anglo-American literature stresses the importance of staff-child ratios and staff training, and good pedagogic programmes. In turn these are monitored and evaluated by standardized measuring instruments such as the early childhood environment rating scale, and by testing children on their subsequent education performance. These quality factors are deemed to operate whatever the auspices or the provider, in care or education, in public or private for profit or non-profit settings – a reflection of the more limited and fragmented services offered in Anglo-American countries. In other countries, auspices<sup>10</sup> may matter greatly. In those countries influenced by child rights debates (see below) these general criteria of quality are insufficient, and evaluation is regarded as a complex interactive process.

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<sup>9</sup> DCSC – previously Department for Education and Skills, DFES.

<sup>10</sup> The auspices refers to who provides the service – state/for-profit /non-profit/co-operative, etc.



Evidence has been emerging that services which are promoted through demand-side rather than supply-side funding, and which rely heavily on the market and private for-profit entrepreneurs (mainly English-speaking countries) have encountered problems in maintaining quality and/or in maintaining access for poor and vulnerable children. Studies in a number of countries suggest that for-profit care is usually of lower quality than either non-profit care or state provided care. Noailly et al (2007) suggest that the introduction of a free market and demand led subsidies in childcare in the Netherlands has led to a shift away from non-profit provision in poorer areas to for-profit provision in high-income urban areas. Cleveland et al (2007) using a reanalysis of large scale Canadian data sets estimate the difference in quality between for-profit and non-profit care to be between 7.5% to 22%. Using the NICDH data, Sosinsky et al (2007) examined the relationship between childcare quality, cost and type of provision, and concluded that for profit-care, especially corporate care, was likely to have more poorly trained staff, to pay them less, and to be rated lower for quality than non-profit provision. Sumsion (2006) points to ethical dilemmas raised by the expansion of corporate care in Australia. These dilemmas have been fore-grounded by the recent collapse of the ABC Nursery chain, whose market share was around 30% in Australia (70% in Queensland), and whose global empire of 3000 daycare nurseries and its many subsidiary firms stretched to the USA, UK and the Far East. The collapse means that the Australian Government has had to step in by providing funding of \$58 million in order to secure the continuity of childcare places until such time as the receivers can sell off the nurseries to local bidders. Around a quarter of the nurseries were originally deemed unviable by the receivers and faced immediate closure but some of these have now found buyers.

The UK presents a particular example of the reduction in quality and the increased social stratification as a result of a switch to demand-led subsidies and the reliance on market forces to create and maintain provision. Penn (2007b) traces the development of for profit private (and increasingly corporate) care in England. Services have become heavily privatized, and local authorities are required to exercise "childcare market management" and may only provide services directly as a last resort. Mathers et al (2007) and Mathers and Sylva (2007), in each case using a different data set, conclude that in the UK whilst the quality of the private sector is very variable, the poorest provision is to be found in the private sector, and the most reliable in the state sector; and that again, poor quality provision impacts adversely on vulnerable children. Vincent et al (2008) have shown how the use of private for profit nurseries has increased social stratification. England has a stringent monitoring and inspection system for ECEC, but in a privatized system this is still insufficient to ensure quality across a large section of the private sector. An Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) survey of 90,000 inspection visits to 84,000 providers (daycare, out-of-school clubs and childminders) over a three year period suggested that only two thirds of those inspected were good quality, falling to about half in deprived areas. 24,000 complaints were recorded (Ofsted 2008).

Quality issues in countries where services have been privatized have raised concerns but there are also issues of quality in mainstreamed state services. There is discussion in the OECD report (2006) of the *schoolification* of early education and care. Where ECEC services are regarded as a downward extension of the school system, rather than as a system specifically designed to meet the needs of young children, provision may be inappropriate – formalized teaching of large groups over-relying on didactic approaches, an over-emphasis on targets and testing, and rigid regimes taking place in unsuitable spaces. This criticism has been levelled for instance at both the French system (Plaisance and Rayna, 1997; Caille and Rosenwald, 2006; Brisset and Gosle, 2006), and the English system, where there is currently considerable opposition to the implementation of the new Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum, dubbed *the nappy curriculum* by the campaign group Open EYE, not least because of the 69 targets it sets for children 0-6 (Open Eye 2008).

There is also concern in a number of countries about the relevance of ECEC services for migrant families, and the extent to which services can be socially inclusive. It is a common finding across countries that ethnic minority children are less likely than other children to use existing ECEC services (OECD 2006). ECEC is used as a strategy for assimilating migrant families, for language teaching and for cultural assimilation. A fuller discussion of the research findings is available in the Eurydice 2009 report and in the EC (2008) report on education and migration. Here it is worth noting several additional points. First, immigrant communities differ considerably in background and outlook, and in many cases have better long-term education outcomes than indigenous communities. In the UK, for example, white working class boys have consistently poorer outcomes than most immigrant groups (Strand 2008). Secondly, many activists and researchers argue that racism and structural inequality are key issues for migrant families and need to be addressed as well as any changes in provision itself (Vandenbroek, 2007; Gillborn, 2008). Thirdly, it has been argued that because very young children are so very dependent on their families and ECEC services may provide their first experiences away from their families, issues of inclusion, diversity and respect should be paramount in the agenda of services (Brougere and Vandenbroeck 2007; Vandenbroeck, 2007). The Bernard van Leer Foundation supports the *Diversity in Early Childhood and Training European Network (DECET)*. Based in Belgium, and particularly active in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, DECET has produced a variety of resources and training materials to promote diversity. Its mission, shared by many other early childhood advocacy groups, is that inclusiveness and respect for diversity are essential ingredients of quality provision.

In Central and Eastern European countries health care was always an important aspect of crèche and kindergarten provision. In some countries, most notably France, Health ministries still control services for children under three. Child health screening and nutrition are regarded by the World Bank for example as part of the definition of "holistic ECEC services" and an integral aspect of quality. Conversely from a health point of view, monitoring and screening of young children is essential, and close links with ECEC services offer a means of achieving better coverage of child health.

The early intervention is likely to be successful only if it is of high quality. Definitions of quality and strategies for ensuring it vary considerably across countries. Much more work needs to be done on defining and comparing quality in ECEC, a question addressed further in the next chapter. The private for-profit care favoured in some countries presents particular problems of quality and access. Poor quality provision impacts adversely on vulnerable children. Inclusiveness and respect for diversity are essential ingredients of quality provision.

**RATIONALE 3:** *Early education benefits all young children and socializes them for starting school, especially children from poor and migrant families.*

There is more or less unanimous agreement in the child development literature that children's earliest experiences and learning form the basis for subsequent learning. "Skills beget skills", and infancy and early childhood are critical periods for learning. There is widespread agreement that early learning is extensive and important as a basis for subsequent dispositions for learning; for language, cognition, numeracy and emotion regulation, although theoretical conceptions of the processes involved may differ. The evidence from the field of child development has been very adequately reviewed by Leseman (2002, 2009), New and Cochran (2007), and many others, and it would be redundant to repeat it here.

Some commentators have felt it necessary to try to use neuro-scientific evidence to underpin arguments for ECEC services (Mustard 2006) and the argument has also been used by UNICEF-IRC in its 2008 report card on ECEC. The brain shows remarkable plasticity and adaptivity and grows extremely rapidly in the first few years. Some of the processes which take place during the first stages of growth, for example types of synaptic connection and neuronal circuits, have been outlined. However, whilst some advocates for ECEC services are keen to use what they describe as "scientific evidence", most neuroscientists point to the extreme complexity of the brain and caution against such extrapolation (Thompson and Nelson, 2001). Bennett and Hacker (2003) go still further and argue that the concept of "mind" cannot be mapped onto the brain. The processes of consciousness and learning require a different order of definition and explanation. In their view, correlations and comparisons are logically meaningless.

There is a widespread consensus that quality early education benefits *all* children, and extends and enhances the learning that is naturally taking place, especially in the domains of cognition and in emotional regulation. Most European countries have accepted this argument and offer an entitlement to nursery education for all children from aged 3 or 4 years.

However, the nature of the entitlement varies considerably across countries, by type of provision and number of hours of entitlement. Preschool and childcare are used interchangeably in the literature but in practice they may refer to many different kinds of arrangements. Nursery education is by definition located within an education system in which explicit (national) curricular goals are set, and in which the educational performance of the child is measured according to national expectations and standards. The staff usually have pay and working conditions which are negotiated with teacher unions (Educational International 2004-2008), and are nationally set in line with primary and secondary schools, and which preclude the more flexible arrangements that care services offer.

Countries may differ in their offer of nursery education in the following ways:

- The age nursery education begins and ends
- The hours per day it is available
- The years spent in nursery education before primary school
- The range of activities or social interactions that promote cognitive development
- The space in which it takes place
- The size of the group
- The adult-child ratios
- The training of teachers

The extreme variation in provision is outlined in Table 2, using four comparator countries. This comparison is indicative only and does not include information such as policies towards parents or children from immigrant families who do not speak the language of the host country or about new policies on child rights and participation. Eurostat figures on nursery education in all EU countries are available and published in the Eurydice 2009 report. However definition of preschool education of level ISCED-0 limit the data available and Table 2 below tries to capture some of the variation across countries. Even in the most comprehensive systems there is hybridity and continuous experimentation so that such information becomes quickly dated. The Finnish system, for example, is comprehensive and universal but also in the process of changing and there are many complications as the table (which was revised by the Finnish STAKES correspondent) demonstrates.

**Table 2: Comparison of Nursery Education in 4 selected EU countries**

	Types of service and service provider	Auspices	Take-up	Space	Staffing: training and % primary teacher salary	Child –adult ratio	Hours available	School start age	Continuity of care	Entitlement	Cost to parent
<b>Czech Republic</b>	Public: Kindergarten 3-5	Education	98%	Purpose built, generous inside and outside space	Kg: Specialized. 3 yrs tertiary pedagogy 75% salary	1:12	Full day 8-10 hrs	6	3 years	None, but places widely available	Free
<b>Finland</b>	Public day care centre +Pre-school education for children 6-7	Social Welfare Education	70% 97%	Purpose built, generous inside and outside space	1/3 of staff: Bachelor or Master of Education 3 yr tertiary pedagogy Bachelor or Master of Social Sciences 3yr tertiary (with pedagogical training) 81% salary (not sure) 2/3 of staff: secondary level in social welfare and health care	1:7	Full day 8-10 hrs  Pre-school ~4 hours daily (700 hours annually)	7	7 years	Entitlement to all ECEC services  -out-of-school services widely provided for 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> graders, and for all children with special needs	Fee paying as % of household income  Pre-school education free
<b>France</b>	Public : Ecoles Maternelles 2yr olds  Ecoles Maternelles 3-5 yr olds	Education	35%  99%	Mostly purpose built, some in converted primary school space	Specialized. Bac. plus 2 yrs Pedagogy	2:27 teacher plus helper	Full day 8 hrs	6	3-4 years	Entitlement	Free
<b>UK –England</b>	Public and private: Nursery classes, 3-4 yrs, increasingly with private providers  Reception Year in primary school at 4	Education	99%  100%	Mostly converted premises attached to primary schools, no mandatory outside space for private sector	Non-specialized. Degree any subject plus 1 yr teacher training ; Nursery nurse, 2 yrs secondary. New training being introduced 100% salary in public sector for teachers but not for non-teachers. Private sector v. variable	2:26 teacher plus nursery nurse (1:10 in non public education premises)	12.5 hrs p.wk, 33 wks pa  6 hrs 33 wks pa	5	1-2 years	Entitlement for all 3-4 year olds on pt basis	Free but part time.  Out of school care from private providers at commercial rates

Note: The figures given are approximations, adapted from OECD data. Direct comparisons are always difficult between highly specific systems.

The research literature is not clear about the relative effects of these organizational factors, not least because they are closely interlinked and they differ considerably between countries. Table 2 raises the point about the importance of local contexts and the need for more detailed comparative work. Comparative data is difficult to obtain, when systems are so different. In the broadest sense, early education confers benefits, but the devil is in the detail. This is a matter for policy as well as for research; the research can only comment of the efficacy on the policy once it has been enacted, and when there is a basis for comparison. Costing such diverse systems is especially difficult.

In all countries take-up of nursery education is very high and has increased in recent years as more provision has become available (Eurydice 2009 report, Table 2:11). It is a clearly popular service, not least because it is free and is seen as a downward continuation of the school system. Parents see it as being a valuable service for their children, and there is almost 100% take-up in those countries where it is offered, perhaps also because it is free.

Quality early education benefits all children, not only those from poorer backgrounds. "Skills beget skills" and quality ECEC is a basis for more effective future learning and achievements, although theoretical conceptions of the processes involved may differ.

**RATIONALE 4: *Education and lifelong learning are essential to a competitive knowledge economy. Education promotes social mobility.***

Across the EU there is concern about the competitiveness of the economy, and the role that education has to play in providing and updating individuals with the skills they need in order to be productive citizens, and in order to promote inclusiveness. Jenson (2007), whose work is also discussed in the next section, refers to the over-arching precepts of human capital theory, which has been the driver for recent EU reforms. Human capital theory essentially values *individual* economic productivity as a critical indicator in calculating economic competitiveness – as opposed for example to previous social welfarist approaches which emphasized the family as unit within the labour market. Children are viewed as potentially productive individuals, whose most important contribution lies in the future - hence the emphasis on preparing them for their productive future through appropriate education reforms. Conversely, it is important to avoid lack of productivity, and to ensure that children are not excluded from these ambitious futures, or take paths that undermine the future of others – such as crime. Social inclusion policies aim to ensure that all children are involved in the drive towards productivity.

Children have different endowments at birth; genetically, environmentally, and in their opportunities for family life and material support. If equity is considered as an important goal for education, that is providing all children with equal opportunities to benefit from their educational experiences, then early education is doubly important. As Esping-Andersen succinctly puts it:

If the race is already halfway run even before children begin school then we clearly need to examine what happens in the earliest years (2004:116).

An estimated 1 in 6 children has some kind of disability or problem that may temporarily or permanently disrupt their learning. These learning problems are spread right across the social spectrum, but poor families have the least resources to deal with them (Feinstein et al 2007). Social inclusion policies mean that services have to orientate themselves to deal with a very wide range of children's needs (OECD 2006). It may be that some types of service are particularly ill-suited to do this, for example in a for-profit market system. One of the disadvantages of the private sector is that children with special needs frequently require some kind of specialized support, which the private sector is unable to provide without it affecting profitability (See the next section for a fuller discussion of this point).

The question remains then about the conditions under which social mobility can be promoted. In some countries, despite significant recent investment in early years, social mobility appears to have decreased. The evidence strongly suggests that poverty and vulnerability are multi-causal. Education, including early education, may make an important contribution but cannot redress wider inequalities or produce social mobility per se. As the eminent American psychologist Kagan has famously commented, ECEC appears to offer a promise of change, and is over-emphasized as a solution to social mobility because the alternative of tackling redistribution and inequality through economic and social measures is much more challenging:

So many people believe in infant determinism (because) it ignores the power of social class membership. A child's social class is the best predictor of future vocation, academic accomplishments and mental health (1998:147).

This is not to deny the role ECEC might play in a variety of situations, but to highlight the need to avoid rhetoric and simple solutions.

Poverty and vulnerability are multi-causal. Early education may make an important contribution but cannot on its own redress wider socio-economic disadvantage or produce social mobility. However good, ECEC cannot offer life-long inoculation against poverty or compensate for subsequent poor schooling and family poverty and disadvantage.

**RATIONALE 5: *Women are essential contributors to a dynamic economy.***

In 2000, the Lisbon Summit stressed the need for the EU to retain a competitive edge and recognized the employment of women made an indispensable contribution to the economy. In this context, the Barcelona targets of 2002 stressed that

Member states should remove disincentives to female labour force participation and strive, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities, and in line with national patterns of provision, to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under three years of age.

The targets have been criticized by many social policy activists for regarding children as an impediment to women's working life, and regarding childcare as a kind of child parking, rather than as an important service for children alongside or co-terminus with early education. The *Eurochild* press release on the occasion of their seminar at the European Parliament in April 2008 ([www.Eurochild.org](http://www.Eurochild.org)) made the following points:

Since the agreement of the Barcelona targets, developments both within Member States and at a European level now point to the need for a wider approach to be taken to this policy area. In fact the Barcelona targets overlook many of the essential qualitative elements of a sound early childhood policy, for example:

- the need to regard young children as citizens with rights to protection, infant health care and early education and care services
- the need to adopt an inclusive concept of services in particular from pre-natal to 3 years
- the need to give attention to the training, pay and working conditions of staff, particularly in the childcare sector

Lister (2006) and Jenson (2007) have provided an overview of the gradual adoption of human capital theory over previous social welfare models, and have explored some of the implications for women and children of this shift. Jenson argues in relation to the EU that human capital theory in its emphasis on lifelong learning and on the economic contribution of successful and productive individuals by default ignores or downplays the particular conditions and circumstances of women and children - which are not the same as those of men. Structural issues are of less importance in human capital theory than is the encouragement of individual striving. But women have legitimate concerns – for example care for the very young and elderly- which may appear to be at odds with the demands of a competitive economy:

...as decades of feminist analyses and whole libraries of publications have shown, gender inequalities are NOT the result of women's inadequate preparation, education or lack of ambition. They are due to the systematic and structural blockages to equal opportunities, either through direct discrimination or through the working of indirect mechanisms (2007:149).



The series of consultations and publications arising out of the EU social agenda (2007b) have renewed interest in a tranche of measures for the reconciliation of work and family life including ECEC provision, maternity and paternity leave, and parental leave. In order to contribute/compete in the workforce, mothers must also have access to alternative care for their children. In most countries the majority of very young children (under three) with working mothers are cared for informally, even in countries like Finland where institutional based care is widely available and there is a high percentage of mothers in the workforce. Many mothers are heavily reliant on the assistance of their family, sharing care with husbands or partners or with grandparents or other family members, as an alternative or as a supplement to the institutional care that is available.

Eurostat figures (reproduced in the Eurydice report 2009) show the relationship between mothers' employment rates and access to ECEC (but relying on the ISCED-0 definition of early education). An indicative table for four European countries is presented below which gives some idea of the complexities of situation and the difficulties in making generalizations across the EU. Again the situation is rapidly changing as some countries are increasing their provision, whilst others – for instance the Czech Republic – are shutting down crèches and promoting instead benefits to mothers who stay at home.

As children reach three years, and are commonly deemed as able to benefit from education, the question is how care and education services are reconciled. In some countries it has been axiomatic that education services should also provide enough hours to cover mother's employment hours, or, in the case of Nordic countries vice versa, that care services should also be educationally orientated; either way in practice the division between "care" and "education" is minimized. However, maternalist traditions in countries have always regarded education and care as separate. Until relatively recently, education was provided as a discrete service, with its own specific education agenda, whereas care was seen as substitute care for women who cannot look after their children themselves either because they were incapable or because they were working (Schweie and Willekens, 2009).

Again the UK presents an example of an extreme position within Europe in this respect. There is a free offer of nursery education - up until very recently provided in the school sector - which is too part-time (2.5 hours per day) to cover working hours. Childcare is provided as a separate service. Stimulation of childcare is through demand-side funding (that is funding services, in so far as they are funded at all, through giving mothers money to spend on purchasing childcare through market mechanisms). The argument for supporting demand-led services (apart from a general view that the private sector is considerably more efficient in calculating costs than is the public sector) is that the rapid expansion and flexibility which is necessary to accommodate working mothers can only be achieved through market mechanisms, and competition between providers will provide some guarantee of quality; in addition, parents will choose the kind of care that most directly meets their diverse needs (Waldfogel, 2004; Penn, 2007b). In practice this policy has proved unsuccessful as private providers are unwilling to invest in poorer areas (Nicholson et al, 2008).

**Table 3. The spectrum of support for mothers and fathers.**

	Employment rate for mothers of children under 3	Maternity Leave	% of salary	Parental leave entitlement	% of salary	Supplemental leave	Daycare for young children	Cost
<b>Czech Republic</b>	14.2%	28 wks	69%	Up to age 4	Flat rate		Most crèches closed since transition. Only 67 remain,	Fee paying; Supply side funding
<b>Finland</b>	66.4%	18 wks	~66%	26 weeks	~66% of earned income (gross)	Paternity 1-3/5 weeks  Homecare leave until youngest child turns 3 (when not in municipal daycare)  Partial leave for 0-second grade primary, allowance under 3+first and second grade primary  Leave for sick children	Family daycare and daycare centres cover 38.9% children under 2, 65% 3 yr olds  (these are statistics 2006, including public and private)	Fee paying as % of household income,  Supply side funding
<b>France</b>	49.2%	16 weeks	84% with upper limit	Until age 3	E485pm flat rate, income tested	Paternity 14 days	Crèches and family daycare cover 36% of children under 2  Ecoles maternelles for 35% of children 2-3	Fee paying, with subsidies; supply side funding
<b>UK (England)</b>	55% of mothers of children under 5, 40% part-time	26 weeks plus further 28 weeks unpaid if employed for 26 weeks with same employer	6 weeks at 90%, 20 weeks at flat rate of £100 or 26% at 90% of wage, whichever is lower	13 weeks  18 weeks if disability	Unpaid	Paternity 1-2 weeks, £100 per week or 90% of wage, whichever is lower	Mainly private for-profit nurseries, diminishing number of childminders	Commercial costs, average £300+ pw in central London. Demand side funding. Tax credits to parents (mostly claimed by middle income parents; low take up by poorest families)

The indications are that mothers are more willing to work if they have flexible employment conditions, if they have adequate maternity, paternity and parental arrangements, and if they are satisfied with the childcare available to them – its affordability, availability and quality (Maurin and Roy, 2008; Brooker, 2001). There are countries where there is a considerable discrepancy between maternal employment at any age and provision of childcare, most notably Canada (OECD 2006). Even so, maternal employment significantly increased in the Canadian province of Quebec when the \$5 dollars a day care scheme was introduced – childcare with a ceiling for parents of \$5 (Lefebvre and Merrigan, 2005).

There is a considerable discussion about maternity leave in the literature. There is a broad consensus that rather than provide care for the very youngest children, it may be better in the interests of the child as well as in the interests of the mother to offer mothers and fathers maternity/paternity leave to cover up to the first year of life. Some countries offer considerably more than this, up to 3 years (OECD 2006). Whilst the need for maternity, paternity and parental leave has been widely discussed and is to an extent accepted within the EU, there has been less discussion about flexible working patterns and redistribution of time within the household (Craig 2007). This is discussed further in the section on mothers' involvement.

It has been assumed in the Barcelona targets that providing childcare per se would enable mothers to work. But a spectrum of support to reconcile work and family life is necessary. If childcare is provided, the quality of the childcare available (particularly for children less than three years of age) is likely to affect mothers' decisions. But also, from the children's point of view, the provision needs to be of good quality. Policy makers may consider there is a trade off between quantity and quality in the provision of childcare for young children (OECD 2003, 2004) but this is not entirely clear. Aggregate figures of mothers workforce participation on which such judgements are often based conceal substantial variation within and across countries and obscure the dilemmas expressed by mothers, and the problematic circumstances of children who attend poor quality childcare provision.

**Mothers are more likely to work if they have flexible employment conditions, good parental leave and good childcare. A spectrum of support to reconcile work and family life is necessary. Rather than provide care for the very youngest children, it may be better in the interests of the child as well as in the interests of the mother to offer mothers and fathers maternity/paternity leave to cover up to the first year of life.**

**RATIONALE 6:** *Working mothers contribute to tax revenues and lessen the need for social security payments; they make an important contribution to family income*

One reason for encouraging mothers into the labour market is that social security payments to single mothers and mothers in low income households are regarded as a drain on the national economy, but once in work, such mothers contribute instead to tax revenues. There is then a net benefit to the treasury. Another is that the poorest households tend to be workless households and encouraging mothers to work critically augments family income. Evidence from diverse countries suggests that governments have an interest in encouraging mothers to work, and in providing childcare to facilitate their entry into the workforce (Muller Kucera & Bauer, 2001; Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2003; Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2004).

As we have seen in the previous section, mothers are more likely to work if they have flexible employment conditions, good parental leave and good childcare. But the local job market is also likely to be a critical factor. Work is more difficult for mothers if they have to add travelling time to their working day, and they are more dependent on the local job market. Immigrant women may have particular difficulties in obtaining employment (Mozere, 1999).

The participation of mothers in the workforce differs considerably within and across countries; without the spectrum of support mothers are less likely to work. For example, the Sure Start programme in England had as one of its aims to encourage mothers back into work, in order to limit benefit payments and increase tax revenues by offering them life-skills training and support into work. Despite considerable government investment in the programme, it failed to change rates of mothers in the workforce significantly, although there was a slight rise in the numbers of single mothers who worked. The ratio of costs and benefits in individual households was not sufficient to entice women to work. Women, particularly unskilled or poorly skilled women, could not earn enough to replace their state benefits, and their employment conditions tended to be inflexible (Dean 2007). Childcare tax credits were not claimed by the poorest groups partly because of the bureaucratic difficulties of making claims (Brewer and Shepherd 2004). In addition, childcare in the UK is heavily privatized, of very variable quality, and very expensive.

Countries where the spectrum of support *is* available tend to have very high mothers' labour force participation rates, assuming that the job market is available – in Central and Eastern European countries the labour market for women shrank after the EU enlargement (OECD 2006). It is possible to use ECEC services, and in particular to extend nursery education to provide care and this makes an important difference to mother's ability to work. But it is not sufficient.

**Working mothers contribute to tax revenues and to family income. They are more dependent on the local job market. Mothers' labour force participation is enhanced by the provision of good ECEC services, but a comprehensive package of support to reconcile work and family life – including good parental leave and flexible working arrangements- encourages higher participation, as well as contributing to mother and child well-being.**

**RATIONALE 7: *Mothers need to be involved with their children; parents are a child's first educators***

Caring for others is a task which involves commitment and reciprocity (Finch 1993). Caring for children in particular is time consuming and physical. Time use studies on the impact of children on adult time suggest that mothers are overwhelmingly preoccupied by their young children; fathers much less so. Employed mothers typically work what is called "the double shift", and have to undertake their caring role alongside their paid work, frequently at personal cost such as the loss of leisure and the loss of sleep (Meda, 2001; Craig, 2007). The use of the word "parent" blurs this gender inequity in the distribution of childcare and household tasks.

Studies of mothering also suggest that mothers focus on the material and emotional welfare of their children, that they pursue a different "ethic of care" from that of teachers. Mothers' knowledge and relationship to their children is not scientific and generalized, but anecdotal, subjective, ad hoc, and continuous - developing and changing over time within a specific context. Mothers have intense and intimate relationships with, and knowledge of, their children, especially when they are very young. Teachers and professionals, on the other hand, tend to hold more abstract, norm-related knowledge and expectations of children, unrelated to context, and without expectations of reciprocity or continuity. One challenging study has provided evidence to suggest that this contextual knowledge is as likely, or more likely, to foster cognitive development as relationships with professionals. This is not to deny the positive impact of preschool, but to argue that it is most effective in the social domain (Tizard and Hughes, 2003).

Young children in turn are rapidly developing but dependent physically and emotionally on their mothers and other carers. Those commentators who have attempted to extrapolate from neuro-scientific studies of the brain argue that the mother's role is a key one in stimulating cognitive growth and developing the brain, although others are considerably more sceptical about the use of such studies in justifying particular approaches to parenting (Kagan, 1998; Bruer, 1999; Thompson and Nelson, 2001).

Countries with maternalist welfare traditions (i.e., holding beliefs about the "natural" role of women as mothers and the importance of mother-child attachments in early childhood) have encouraged mothers to stay at home with their young children and until relatively recently discouraged the use of alternative services except on a very part-time basis (Schweie and Willekens, 2009).

The evidence suggests that mothers from poor homes do worse in preparing their children for the specific requirements of school, irrespective of ethnicity or any other variables. A mother's educational level and social class is strongly correlated with child outcomes and the differences in the willingness or capabilities of families to take advantage of educational opportunities exacerbate social class differences and limit

actual equality of opportunity (Feinstein et al 2007, 2008). Ermisch (2008), an economist, has analysed the Millennium cohort data in the UK, and concluded that differences in cognitive ability and behavioural development at age three are correlated with parental income. The lower the parental income, the poorer the scores are on standard cognitive and behavioural tests. Using a production function framework, he argues that these differences can be partly explained by parenting styles<sup>11</sup>, low-income parents demonstrating less interest in cognitive-promoting activities like reading. Sylva et al (2007) reach a similar conclusion in their EPPE study, arguing that parental style is a more powerful determinant of subsequent child outcomes than any educational intervention, although early education interventions also do make a difference to outcomes.

The importance of the home environment, and in particular the vulnerability of children from dysfunctional homes, has led some countries to invest in home visiting and parental education programmes. If the role the mother plays is crucial in determining a child's initial progress and subsequent readiness for school, so it makes sense to focus on the home environment and home-school relationships in the early years. The literature on parental involvement however tends not to disaggregate gender, and makes assumptions about the availability of mother's time and willingness to engage in such programmes. In addition recent evidence suggests that home visiting and parent education do not significantly affect children's outcomes, although they may in some cases alter parental behaviour although there are many ongoing studies which may provide new information on this point (Waldfogel, 2004; Blok et al, 2005).

But it is also a global experience that families are more diverse. There are more parents choosing not to marry; more divorce, more single parents; more role reversals between men and women, with men choosing to stay at home, and women choosing to work; more older mothers, more mobility within and across countries, and so on (Bianchi et al, 2003; Heymann, 2006). So it is sensible to explore and make explicit the assumptions about family life that are being used as a basis for early childhood intervention.

As individual lives become more fragmented, ECEC services have a valuable role to play as a community service extending support to young children and to those bringing them up. As Leseman (2009) comments, first generation migrant families are likely to have fewer social networks, and to be more isolated. ECEC services can offer social support as well as educational intervention.

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<sup>11</sup> The study analyses parental style according to 6 key questions, including rules and rule enforcement, regularity, eating habits and time spent television watching.

"Parental involvement" often has a narrow meaning for professionals, who may hold a traditional, or unexplored, view of family life. From this perspective a parent's role (not disaggregated by gender) is to be a loyal supporter of the activities of the nursery or school, to fund-raise, join in school outings etc. An alternative view put forward in some services, most notably in the nurseries of Northern Italy, is that parents – men and women- are rightful partners in the joint enterprise of care and education (Moss, 2007; Bloomer and Cohen, 2008). The many experiments and projects across the EU to involve parents, detailed by various advocacy groups such as DECET, *Children in Europe* and *Eurochild* argue for ECEC provision to be seen as a "democratic space", a place where fruitful debate can take place about the wider implications of bringing up children in society in diverse communities.

Given the pressures mothers encounter, the challenge for ECEC services is how to support mothers, those living in vulnerable circumstances, but also working mothers, by recognizing the hours women work inside and outside the home, and by acknowledging their rights as parents. Both the UNICEF-IRC report (2008) and *Starting Strong II* (2006) argued that services should ideally recognize mothers' and fathers' rights within services; their right to be informed, to comment, and to participate in key decisions concerning their child.

ECEC services can support mothers, those living in vulnerable circumstances, and also working mothers, by recognizing the hours women work inside and outside the home, and by acknowledging their rights within services; their right to be informed, to comment, and to participate in key decisions concerning their child, that is as an aspect of civic participation.

**RATIONALE 8: Low birth rates below the level of replacement are a societal problem.**

Europe is facing falling birth rates in almost all member countries, whether or not there is a compensatory spectrum of care and parental leave packages, and flexible work options. The exceptions are amongst migrant groups, whose birth rates tend to be much higher.

Demographic forecasts raise concern about the capacity of some countries to ensure future labour supply and maintain present economic growth. Family patterns are changing, with educated women choosing to have families later or not at all. A combination of employment, family and ECEC measures to facilitate families in bringing up children undoubtedly supports women's labour force participation, although, as this review has been at pains to point out, the picture is a complex one. As table 3 indicates, there is not a direct relationship between various kinds of parental leave packages, daycare and maternal employment levels. This lack of a clear correlation between compensatory measures and birth rates has led commentators like Becker (2005) to claim that such compensatory packages are economically wasteful, even if mothers

strongly welcome them, since there is no obvious correlation with the availability of childcare provision and other measures to reconcile work and family life.

The falling birth rates have led some EU countries to reconsider their position about women with young children in the labour market. The February 2009 Czech presidency conference *Parental Childcare and the Employment Policy* brought together demographers, family policy experts, and advocacy organizations to reconsider the issue, particularly changes in policy which might encourage mothers to stay at home with young children. The global recession is also likely to throw into question policies concerned with the labour market.

Some academics, most notably Hakim (2009) claimed that the evidence about the willingness of mothers of young children to participate in the labour force has been grossly overestimated. Saraceno (2007, 2009) by contrast has analysed family trends in the enlarged European Union and has concluded that moves towards more supportive family policies have had a positive impact on both birth rates and women's emancipation.

Mothers (and fathers) appear to welcome flexible employment options whilst their children are very young. Such flexibility is also beneficial to the health and well-being of mothers and their children (WHO 2003). On the other hand, if flexibility of childcare means very disjointed experiences for children who may attend different childcare on different days, this may also have adverse effects. Continuity and stability of childcare may be important, especially for vulnerable children who may have difficulty in forming attachments. This is yet another policy area where circumstances are changing rapidly, and comparative data would be useful.

**There is no unambiguous relationship between birth rates and provision of ECEC and other measures to reconcile work and family life, but there is a relationship between mother and child well-being and the provision of such services and benefits. Moves towards more supportive family policies have had a positive impact on both birth rates and women's emancipation.**



**RATIONALE 9: *Children, including young children, are rights bearers and all children have a right to protection, provision and participation***

The approach enshrined in human capital theory views the child as a person in the making who can be shaped to meet society's needs by appropriate educational instruction and other developmental or corrective interventions; and deposited and guarded safely in ECEC arrangements if mothers are not available to care for them directly. This assumption that childcare is unproblematic also informs the Barcelona targets. By contrast, the child rights and child well-being arguments insist on the importance of addressing present conditions and concerns. As the French sociologist Luc Boltanski has powerfully commented (in a rather different context),

*To be concerned with the present is no small matter. For over the past, ever gone by, and over the future, still non-existent, the present has an overwhelming privilege: that of being real* (1999: 192).

In other words, children's daily experiences are vivid and deeply felt, and bad or mediocre experiences whilst possibly not harmful in the long run may lead to considerable unhappiness.

There are trends and traditions both within Europe and further afield which suggest the need for more innovation, and an open minded approach to education in general, and developments in ECEC services in particular. Chief amongst these is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Children are regarded as citizens, as people who have rights by virtue of being members of a community.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child meeting in 2005 issued a comprehensive comment elucidating the rights of young children. These include the following:

- *To engage in capacity building for young children, particularly through resource allocation and provisioning.*
- *To construct a positive agenda for all young children, giving, in particular, close attention to young children in need of protection, through multi-sectoral approaches and ensuring an adequate standard of living and social security*
- *To recognize that young children are holders of all the rights enshrined in the Convention including the right to education, education being defined broadly from infancy through to transition to school*
- *To construct high-quality developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant programmes which means defining and monitoring quality in local contexts rather than applying blanket definitions*
- *To understand central features of child-rearing and early child development, including amongst other aspects, the child's rights to rest, leisure and play.*

UNCRC has spawned a substantial legal literature (Freeman 1994, 2000, 2004, 2007). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has led to many new interpretations of policy and practice in ECEC services, not least the work being undertaken by international organizations. The UNESCO 2007 Monitoring Report on *Education for All* focused mainly on an interpretation of UNCRC in early years. UNICEF has developed benchmarks for ECEC services in rich countries in the light of UNCRC.

In addition there is now a substantial sociological literature about childhood and its interpretation. The Danish sociologist Jans Qvortrup and his colleagues (1994) have pioneered methodologies for statistical and social accounting, disaggregating and identifying the position of children in social and welfare analyses. Other sociologists (Mayall, 2008; Corsaro, 2005) have attempted to conceptualize the position of children as a social group holding certain attributes in common, much as sociologists have previously distinguished race, class and gender as separate social categories worthy of study. Others have explored the notion of competency (Alderson 2008). Children, even very young children, 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 within the constraints set by adults.

Historical studies have also contributed to a broader understanding of attributes of childhood. The work of Kelly (2007) and Kirschenbaum (2001), for example, has illustrated the particular histories of childhood under the Soviet regime and the distinctive kinds of ECEC services that are the legacy of ex-communist countries within the EU. Fass (2004, 2007) has provided challenging conceptualizations of the notion of "play" and its role in children's lives and explored understandings of what constitutes play and what constitutes work or learning in various historical periods or geographical spaces.

There is increasing interest in how conceptions of childhood in poor countries may differ from or overlap with those of children in rich countries. For instance, a major longitudinal study *Young Children's Lives* is currently being undertaken in Peru, India, Ethiopia and Vietnam tracking 15,000 children over a fifteen year period to explore the impact of poverty on their lives ([www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)) and the commonality of their experiences *as children*, including their experiences of ECEC (Vogler et al, 2008). A broader international understanding of the conditions under which children thrive and act will enhance more parochial understandings of children's capacities (LeVine and New, 2008).

The implication of these approaches for ECEC services and more broadly for young children's lives has been the subject of a report card by UNICEF/IRC (2008). A child rights approach offers challenges to current futuristic economic thinking in that it focuses on and organizes effort on the experiences of children in the here and now, and solicits their participation. Early intervention is not something that is done to young children in the hope of (re)shaping their future, but a collaborative venture with them. This point of view about services is most commonly elaborated in relation to ECEC services in Northern Italy, in particular the very highly regarded services of Reggio Emilia, where pedagogic practices are organized on the basis of "a pedagogy of well-being" (Edwards et al 1998; Hoyuelos,

2004; Mantovani, 2007; Moss, 2007). This approach emphasizes participatory processes at various levels, with children, with parents, with staff and with the wider community. It highlights the importance of the peer group. Unlike conventional assumptions of learning which privilege adult instruction and regard the child as an individual learner, a participatory approach views learning and emotional support as critically deriving through the peer relationships of children (Corsaro and Molinari, 2008).

From the perspective of children's rights, ECEC services need to be rethought. Brougere and Vandebroek (2007) have recently produced an overview of new developments in ECEC in Europe, stemming from a rights based perspective. Advocacy organizations also tend to espouse a child rights perspective. But greater attention is also necessary to the other circumstances of children's lives, most importantly their material well-being, and the ways in which their mothers and fathers can reconcile family and work.

**Children's Rights issues are leading to major re-conceptualizations of ECEC services. A child rights approach focuses on and organizes effort on the experiences of all children in the here and now and solicits their participation.**

**RATIONALE 10: *Child poverty impacts severely on children's educational performance, their sense of self-worth and their subsequent societal contribution***

There is a vast literature on child poverty. It is only possible to include a very brief discussion of child poverty in this review, and to note debates about criteria for the measurement of child poverty. Generally, it is accepted that child poverty adversely affects educational outcomes (discussed also in the above sections) and that poverty is a crucial aspect of child well-being – which as the debate on child rights indicates, is increasingly a topic of major concern. The criteria for measurement of child poverty have been much discussed, and to an extent the picture of poverty which emerges, and the relative position of countries in their attempts to combat child poverty, depends on the criteria used. The issue that concerns us here is the extent to which ECEC services are redistributive, and can combat child poverty.

UNICEF/ IRC (2007) has provided a review of child well-being across OECD countries. Whilst there is no single dimension of well-being which provides a reliable proxy for child well-being as a whole, there are some key indicators (in turn constructed from 40 separate indicators). These include material well-being (absolute and relative); health and safety; educational well-being; family and peer relationships; behaviour and risks; and subjective well-being. Child poverty is of pivotal concern. GDP per capita is of less importance than inequity. The well-being of children is affected by their and society's perception between their lives and the standard of living enjoyed from more affluent backgrounds. Inequity has also been a concern of the recent UNESCO Education for All

Global Monitoring Report (2009), of the OECD (2008) *Growing Unequal? Income Distribution and Poverty in OECD countries* and of Wilkinson and Pickett (2009).

Eurostat figures provide comparisons of child poverty on a number of indicators for EU countries. Bradshaw et al (2007) have pioneered child focused methods of estimating poverty. They argue for the following indicators of child poverty: material situation; housing; health; subjective well-being; education; children's relationships; civic participation and risk and safety. Bradshaw and Bennett (2007) provide a detailed study of the UK and how its performance on child poverty compares with other European countries. One of their conclusions is that in the UK public attitudes towards poverty tend to be hostile.

Public attitudes towards poverty have also been explored by Phipps (2001). She undertook a comparison between USA, Canada and Norway, extracting survey results on values and beliefs, redistributive policies and child outcomes. She concluded that in the USA and to a lesser extent Canada, there is a culturally entrenched public view that poverty is associated with laziness and lack of striving. Income inequality is not a major concern and wealthy individuals are seen as deserving of their income. By contrast, in Norway only a minority held such views. Neo-liberal attitudes minimize the importance of inherited assets and social capital, and emphasize individual effort. Esping-Andersen (2004) has attempted to provide an explicatory model according to the ways in which responsibility for social welfare is allocated between the state, the market and households. He categorizes three approaches; *residual* (liberal economy regimes); *social insurance* (conservative) and *universalist* (social democrat) welfare regimes. *Universalist* regimes have been able to significantly reduce child poverty through a spread of measures; whilst *liberal economy* regimes tolerate large degrees of inequality and child poverty.

In general, child poverty depresses expectations and aspirations. Poverty is not merely income poverty; it typically includes a cluster of adverse factors. Children in low income families are more likely to be living in poorly functioning families; more likely to be living in problem neighbourhoods where there is drug use and high unemployment rates; and more likely to encounter problems with disability –vision, hearing, sight or mobility. Parents from poor and vulnerable families are less likely to seek ECEC services, especially in privatized markets (Vincent et al, 2008), and children in poverty will have poorer educational outcomes than other children (Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

The *redistributive* role of ECEC services is discussed in the OECD report *Starting Strong*. Those countries with universal ECEC services tend to have lower rates of child poverty, but they also tend to be the countries where there are other redistributive measures in place, eg taxation, benefits etc. Targeted early intervention approaches may enable children to gain some respite from their adverse circumstances (a legitimate goal!) and *may* produce long-term gains for the small population of children who are targeted but in the short term their familial poverty continues, unless other redistributive actions are

also undertaken. It is very unlikely that the distribution of wealth and income in a society will be affected, if at all, by such targeting. Instead poverty and wealth are powerfully determined by wider political and socio-economic interests.

**Child poverty and disadvantage impact severely on children's well-being and educational outcomes. Whilst educational reforms, including reforms of ECEC, may have some effect, other redistributive measures are also necessary to improve outcomes.**

## CHAPTER 3. HOW TO IMPROVE ECEC SYSTEMS?

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Within the EU, different realities can be observed across Member States in enrolment rates, supply, quality, resources, approach and governance of ECEC. If early education and care for all children is a public good, what is the most effective and efficient way of delivering services? What ECEC systems are in place and how can they be improved?

### *Models of ECEC services.*

The EU has changed considerably in scope and size. The accession of Eastern European countries, for instance, and extensive migration and internal movement of people have led to many new European formulations. The global recession is likely to impact on education and ECEC services in as yet unforeseen ways, although there seems to have been a sea change away from competitive individualism, maximizing profit and marketization towards state intervention and a new emphasis on citizenship. There is a need to continuously update conceptualizations and delivery of ECEC services.

As suggested in chapter 2, proponents of ECEC tend to over-rely on the child development literature as offering scientific evidence of efficacy. Most of the research in this field that is commonly cited focuses on the micro-level and has been carried out within the USA, a country which has a high level of inequity (OECD, 2008; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), poor levels of government policy oversight, and where most ECEC provision is located in the private and voluntary sector (Sosinsky et al, 2007; OECD, 2001). It is therefore problematic to use this research evidence as a basis for addressing the issue of "scaling-up", that is in considering what conditions would be necessary to ensure that specific examples of proven good practice could be recognized, expanded and applied on a large scale. Despite some robust findings from individual child development studies, this review concludes that there is no bedrock of unambiguous empirical data about young children which can inform ECEC policy development and implementation in Europe. A few general conclusions can be highlighted at the micro-level, of which the most significant are:

- the importance of the levels of training and pay of ECEC practitioners
- the importance of good child-adult ratios, especially for younger children
- the advantage of centre-based provision over home-based parent support programmes for the most vulnerable children
- the importance of avoiding bad quality care
- the low quality and variability of much private for-profit provision.

But pan-European research points strongly to the importance of contextualizing findings (e.g. Mooney et al, 2003). Where contextual information is particularly important, comparative case studies which seek information at a macro as well as at a micro level may be better able to provide policy guidelines than decontextualised micro-findings drawn from the field of child development.

At a systemic level there are a number of models. Very crudely, these can be categorized as:

- *a universal* or part universal system whereby at a national level one ministry oversees all provision including funding, levels of provision, curriculum, training etc eg. Spain, Sweden, Finland, UK; and
- *a split system*, usually between over threes and under threes, where the responsibilities are split between ministries according to the age of the child.

Whichever model is in place, implementation may be carried out at a central or local level. Good ECEC systems need to ensure that they have mechanisms in place to ensure that “good quality” provision is defined and recognized, monitored and extended, and conversely that “poor quality” provision is identified and improved. ECEC practice also needs to be continuously revised and updated – as all education practice must be updated. A key challenge is to identify those mechanisms that can promote change.

The OECD report (2006) (based on a case study approach) argues that a systematic and integrated approach to early education and care is necessary to develop and improve services at a systemic level – a co-ordinated policy framework, the appointment of a lead ministry, the coordination of central and decentralized levels, a collaborative and participatory approach to reform, links across services and so on. The Eurydice report (2009) identifies how ECEC is currently managed in European countries and at what level policy decisions takes place and funding is allocated.

Even with a systemic approach and an integrated policy framework, the services on the ground have to be of a sufficient standard to achieve the policy aims and objectives. It is a commonplace of policy research that policy talk or discourse, policy implementation and actual practice are separate, and often contradictory, and do not automatically lead into one another. There are many instances in the field of education of the policy talk being grandiose whilst the implementation is botched and the practice remains unchanged (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004).

It was these kinds of considerations about the need to focus reform at a variety of levels that underpinned the original EU *Childcare Network* document *Quality Targets in Services for Young Children*. These targets are briefly set out below. They are acknowledged in the OECD 2006 report to be a useful starting point for services.

- The report was prepared within the framework of the Council Recommendation on Childcare, to "establish criteria for the definition of quality in childcare services" (1991).
- The report proposes 40 targets for assessing progress in achieving the Recommendation's objectives
- Services for young children comprise services providing care and education for children below compulsory school age, including collective settings (nurseries, kindergartens, nursery schools, family daycare etc).
- The targets apply to publicly funded services – private services that do not receive public funding and other support can only be expected to achieve certain limited standards.
- The targets are for attainment within a specified timeframe

- The targets are interdependent; they form a totality. Taking any of them in isolation may be meaningless and misleading
- Quality is a relative concept based on values and beliefs, and defining quality should be a dynamic, continuous and democratic process
- There can be no final and static view of quality. Countries which achieve, or have already achieved- most or all of the targets will want to go on developing their services

Targets for the Policy Framework	1. Governments should draw on professional and public opinion to provide a published and coherent statement of intent, at national and local level
	2. At national level one department should take responsibility for implementation
	3. Governments should draw up a programme and outline strategies for implementation
	4. Legislative frameworks should be created to make sure targets are fully met within specified time limits and reviewed regularly
	5. The Government department should set up an infrastructure with parallel structures at local level, for planning, monitoring and review, support, training, research and service development
	6. The planning and monitoring system should include measures of supply, demand and need covering all services for young children at national/regional and/or local level
Financial Targets to be incorporated in the policy framework	7. Public expenditure on services for young children should not be less than 1% of GDP
	8. A proportion of this budget should be allocated for infrastructure, including at least 5% on support services and continuous training
	9. There should be a capital spending programme for building and renovations linked to environment and health targets
	10. Where parents pay for publicly funded service, the charges should not exceed, and may well be less than 15% of net monthly household income
Targets for levels and types of service to be incorporated in the policy framework	11. Publicly funded services should offer full-time equivalent places for at least 90% of children aged 3-6 years, and 15% of children under 3
	12. Services should offer flexibility of hours and attendance
	13. There should be a range of services offering parents choices
	14. All services should positively assert the value of diversity of language, and make provision for both children and adults which acknowledges and supports ethnicity, religion, gender and disability, and challenges stereotypes
	15. All children with disabilities should have right of access to mainstream services, with appropriate assistance and specialist help
Education Targets	16. All collective services for young children 0-6, whether in the public or the private sector, should have coherent values and objectives and a stated and explicit educational philosophy (curriculum)
	17. The educational philosophy should be drawn up and developed by parents staff and other interested groups
	18. The educational philosophy should be broad and include and promote inter-alia: the child's autonomy and concept of self; convivial social relationships between children, and between children and adults; a zest for learning; linguistic and oral skills including linguistic diversity; mathematical, biological, scientific, technical and environmental concepts; musical expression and skills; drama, puppetry and mime; muscular coordination and bodily control; health, hygiene, food and nutrition; awareness of the local community
	19. The way in which the curriculum is put into practice should be explicit through a programme of organization, covering all pedagogic aspects of provision including deployment of staff and groupings of children
	20. The education and learning environment should reflect and value each child's family, home and cultural values



Targets for Staff Ratios	21. Staff ratios should reflect the objectives of the service and their wider context and be directly related to group size and group age; they should usually be more than but should not be less than: 1:4 for children under 12 months 1:6 for children aged 12-23 months 1:8 for children aged 24-35 months 1:15 for children aged 36-71 months
	22. At least one tenth of the working week should be non-contact time allocated to preparation and continuous training
	23. Adequate supply cover should always be available to maintain the ratios
	24. Administrative, domestic and janitorial work should be allocated staff time in addition to those hours spent with the children
Targets for Staff Employment	25. All qualified staff should be paid at not less than a nationally or locally agreed wage rate, which for staff who are fully trained should be comparable to that of teachers
	26. A minimum of 60% of staff working directly with children in collective services should have a basic training of 3 years at a post 18 level. Staff who are not trained to this level should be able to access training.
	27. All staff should have the right to continuous in-service training
	28. All staff should have the right to trade union affiliation
	29. 20% of staff in collective services should be men
Environmental and Health Targets	30. All services should meet national and local health and safety requirements
	31. The planning of the environment and its spatial organization, furnishings and equipment should reflect the curriculum and take account of the views of staff, parents and other interested parties
	32. There should normally be sufficient space, inside and outside, to enable children to play, sleep and use bathroom facilities, and to meet the needs of parents and staff, including direct access to external space of at least 6 square metres per child.
	33. Food preparation facilities should be available on the premises and nutritional and culturally appropriate food should be provided
Targets for Parents	34. Parents are collaborators and participants in early years services. As such they have a right to give and receive information and the right to express their views. The decision making processes should be fully participative, involving parents, all staff, and when possible, children
	35. Services should have formal or informal links with the local community
	36. Services should adopt employment procedures which emphasize the importance of recruiting employees who reflect the ethnic diversity of the local community
Performance Targets	37. Services should demonstrate how they are fulfilling their aims and how they have spent their budget, through an annual report or by other means
	38. In all services, children's progress should be regularly assessed
	39. The views of parents and the wider community should be an integral part of the assessment process
	40. Staff should regularly assess their performance, using both objective methods and self evaluation

These 40 targets were drawn up by the (then) 15 members of the European Childcare Network, who were representatives nominated by an Equal Opportunities Commission (or similar body) in their own country. The targets were discussed at specially convened seminars of practitioners, administrators and researchers at national and EU level. The EU Childcare Network first issued a discussion document about quality; and then provided a background discussion and examples for the 40 targets. In 1996 each target had already been achieved by one or more EU Member States, and there was some practical experience of implementation.

Although there are considerable difficulties in making comparisons between very diverse ECEC systems which are underpinned by different rationales and value systems, nevertheless a comparative approach offers countries an opportunity to learn from one another and broaden the range of the possible, as well as contributing to overall EU social and economic policies. Despite differences, there are also commonalities; most countries uphold standards concerning child-staff ratios, group size, premises, staff qualifications and curriculum. There is also increasing recognition of the need to allow individual settings to respond to the diversity of those families using the service.

Targeting, that is setting aspirational standards, is a useful approach in clarifying goals, although not without its difficulties. Performance in any but the simplest tasks has many dimensions. Focusing on a small number of these dimensions as targets directs attention on these at the expense of others of equal importance. However it is a widely used strategy, as for example in the Barcelona ECEC targets.

UNICEF-IRC (2008) has developed benchmarks (i.e., minimum standards below which services should not fall) for early childhood in rich countries. These targets are couched from a child-rights perspective that is from the point of view of *entitlement*. UNICEF necessarily takes a broad approach, but EU-level targets (or benchmarks) on ECEC services, as well as contributing to economic efficiency and equity within the EU, may also complement these wider international moves towards ensuring the very best deal for young children.

There have been many developments in practice since the EU targets were compiled. Practice initiatives most often arise through the concerns of practitioners themselves or by policy makers but are not necessarily rigorously researched. The information about them tends to be on an advocacy/dissemination level rather than on the basis of rigorously collected research evidence. Nevertheless they are indicative of trends towards reconceptualising ECEC.

Chief amongst these practice initiatives have been the articulation and highlighting of ECEC practice in Northern Italy, especially in Reggio Emilia, where individual nurseries have achieved internationally admired standards of artistic and creative endeavour, based on a view of the child as being "rich" in potential for creativity and "a co-creator of knowledge, identity, culture and values" (Children in Europe 2008). Other practice developments have focused on diversity, on finding ways to make nurseries inclusive in their approaches to migrant and other vulnerable children and their families, and shifting the discourse in order to regard them as equal partners in the enterprise of child-rearing rather than as problematic individuals in need of intervention to aid assimilation into mainstream society (Vandenbroek, 2007). Many countries have revised their curricula and introduced curricular frameworks that aim to cover 0-5. Training of teachers and childcare workers has also come under scrutiny, and new pedagogic models, especially those developed in Denmark, have been explored which emphasize caring as well as teaching skills (Petrie et al, 2006; Oberheumer, 2005). So

have training methods which explore the role of in-service training as a means of developing practice (Rosa Sensat, 2008). Techniques of measuring quality have also been developed, for instance extending the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale developed in the USA to make it more applicable to European provision as a means of assessing cognitive stimulation (Sylva et al 2003) and the work of Laevers in measuring child well-being and involvement (Laevers and Heyden 2004). There has been more work about the gendering of ECEC services and strategies for promoting mixed gender workforces (Jensen and Hansen 2003). There has also been an increase in the number of European wide organizations which seek to record and disseminate new practice initiatives (Children in Europe 2008). In Eastern Europe, there have been considerable attempts to revalue and redevelop the models of kindergartens inherited from the ex-Soviet Union (OECD 2006).

Given that there is an EU document outlining targets for ECEC services already in existence, it may be useful to update and revise these targets (or even to consider them as necessary benchmarks) to take account of developments within the EU since they were compiled. New areas for consideration would be the incorporation of ex-communist countries whose ECEC traditions have derived originally from Soviet thinking about the role and scope of ECEC services; immigration from non-EU countries; marginalized and vulnerable groups such as the Roma; the rise of the private for-profit sector and issues of child rights and child entitlements to services.

**There has been an over-reliance on the child development literature as offering scientific evidence of efficacy. There are some general findings about staff ratios, training and pay, and the importance of centre-based provision, but pan-European research points strongly to the importance of contextualizing findings. Both previous EU reports and the OECD have stressed the importance of well articulated policy frameworks and adequate financing of services, and good research and monitoring as a basis for future developments. A comparative approach offers countries an opportunity to learn from one another and broaden the range of the possible.**

## CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Different realities can be observed across countries in enrolment rates, supply, quality, resources, approach and governance of ECEC. The review notes the changes that have taken place in Europe across a range of domains, and briefly summarizes some of the changes in ECEC practice which have taken place.

This review of research has considered a range of arguments in favour of the development and extension of early education and care services. It has pointed out that the arguments are sometimes contradictory and overlapping, and tend to draw on different research traditions and use different kinds of data.

The first part of this review explored the rationales for developing ECEC services. It concluded that ECEC services must themselves be seen as part of a wider spectrum of measures to promote the learning of children *and* gender equity. Education *and* care services are equally necessary to fulfil these aims. In addition, considerations of children's well-being and child rights need to inform the planning and development of services, in order to provide efficient, effective and equitable services. Narrow definitions of early education as a targeted service aimed at enhancing the life-chances of children from low-income families are likely to be counter-productive in a number of ways, but particularly in so far as they divert attention from the wider societal conditions that produce and perpetuate disadvantage and inequality.

The second part of the review explored existing models and practices in ECEC and considered how better ECEC services could be delivered. It discussed the nature of the research evidence that is available to inform policy as well as the key international reports and documents reviewing this topic. There has been an over-reliance on the child development literature as offering scientific evidence of efficacy. There are some general findings about staff ratios, training and pay, and the importance of centre-based provision, but pan-European research points strongly to the importance of contextualizing findings. Previous EU reports and the OECD have stressed the importance of well articulated policy frameworks and adequate financing of services, and good research and monitoring as a basis for future developments. A comparative approach offers countries an opportunity to learn from one another and broaden the range of the possible.

The review concludes that:

1. There are many competing, intersecting and overlapping arguments that drive the development of ECEC policy; not all of them are compatible.
2. The EU is a world leader in providing ECEC services, but more work needs to be done, in particular **revising the Barcelona targets** which view ECEC as an aspect of women's labour force participation rather than as a service in its own right

combining both education and care. There is a need to adopt a broad social policy approach in developing ECEC services.

3. In economic terms, investment in early childhood brings greater returns than investing in any other stage of education, although the size of the effect may vary considerably. It is important to consider economic arguments for ECEC within specific country contexts; out of context they may be misleading.
4. ECEC services can contribute to long-term economic well-being. However, the arguments for long-term economic well-being as a result of ECEC interventions may be overstated and should not be regarded as an alternative to addressing inequality and poverty.
5. Quality ECEC benefits *all* children and provides a solid foundation for more effective future learning, achievements and children's social development, although theoretical conceptions of the processes involved may differ. Quality ECEC socialises children for starting school, especially children from poor or migrant families.
6. ECEC services can enhance children's subsequent school performance providing they are of a high quality but may impair subsequent school performance if they are of a low quality. Poor quality ECEC may do more harm than good and may increase inequalities.
7. Targeting ECEC services to poor and vulnerable children is problematic; it poses problems of boundary maintenance and stigmatization and may be more ineffective than suggested by the three USA studies that dominate this field. Inclusive, generalised provision is likely to be a more suitable option.
8. Private for-profit ECEC services are very variable but tend to offer the lowest quality services in all countries where they have been investigated. The use of private for-profit nurseries increases social stratification.
9. There is no unambiguous relationship between birth rates and provision of ECEC and other measures to reconcile work and family life, but there is a relationship between mother and child well-being and the provision of such services and benefits. Moves towards more supportive family policies have had a positive impact on both birth rates and women's emancipation.
10. Mothers' labour force participation is enhanced by the provision of good ECEC services, but a comprehensive package of support to reconcile work and family life – including good parental leave and flexible working arrangements- encourages higher participation, as well as contributing to mother and child well-being.

11. ECEC services can support mothers, those living in vulnerable circumstances, and also working mothers, by recognizing the hours women work inside and outside the home, and by acknowledging their rights within services; their right to be informed, to comment, and to participate in key decisions concerning their child, that is as an aspect of civic participation.
12. Rather than provide care for the very youngest children, it may be better in the interests of the child as well as in the interests of the mother to offer mothers and fathers maternity/paternity leave to cover up to the first year of life.
13. Children's Rights issues are leading to major re-conceptualizations of ECEC services. A child rights approach focuses on and organizes effort on the experiences of children in the here and now and solicits their participation. Early intervention is not something that is done to young children in the hope of (re)shaping their future, but a collaborative venture with them.
14. Child poverty and vulnerability are multi-causal and impact severely on children's well-being and educational performance. Redistributive measures to lessen child poverty have been cost-effective in many countries, and such measures could be extended to all countries. ECEC services, however good, can only marginally compensate for family poverty and socio-economic disadvantage.
15. Definitions of quality and strategies for ensuring it vary considerably across countries. More work needs to be done on defining, measuring and comparing quality in ECEC.
16. The good training, good pay and good working conditions of staff and the support they are given are key factors for ensuring quality in ECEC provision. Other key elements for ECEC quality include: the content/curriculum, including issues of inclusiveness, respect for diversity and personalisation; the child/staff ratio, group size and premises; the involvement of parents and of the wider community; the governance structures necessary for regular programme monitoring and assessment, system accountability and quality assurance.
17. ECEC services are a complex issue and cross traditional administrative boundaries. Coordinated policy development is necessary and investments should be made on a whole spectrum of policies that affect young children's lives.
18. A systematic and integrated approach to early education and care is necessary to develop and improve services at a systemic level – a co-ordinated policy framework, the appointment of a lead ministry, the coordination of central and decentralized levels, a collaborative and participatory approach to reform, links across services and so on.

19. ECEC conceptualisations and practice need to be regularly reviewed and updated. A key challenge is to identify those mechanisms that can promote change.
20. Despite some robust findings from individual child development studies, there is no bedrock of unambiguous empirical data about young children which can inform ECEC policy development and implementation in Europe. Findings from the field of child development need to be carefully contextualized.

The review recommends that:

1. ECEC services although already of a good standard in many countries require more development, both in *levels* of provision and in *quality* of provision.
2. Any future EU-level measures to address the development of ECEC services should take a comprehensive approach which acknowledges that a range of inter-linked initiatives are needed.
3. The European Commission should revisit previous work on Quality Targets in ECEC services and consider how they may be updated and used.

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