

Key findings of [*Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe*](#)

1. Governance and organization

Integration of ECEC services across age groups has been considered last years as an important way that leads to high quality ECEC. According to the report, European countries are increasingly integrating their ECEC policies and regulations. Still, in the majority of countries center-based ECEC is provided in two separate types of setting according to children's ages, with the Ministry of Education being, in most countries, responsible for center-based ECEC provision for children aged 3 and over. Despite that fragmentation, top-level authorities seldom recommend measures to ease the transition between childcare- and education-type settings.

2. Access

Currently, in Europe, there are two approaches to ensuring universal access to ECEC. Some countries provide a legal entitlement to an ECEC place, while others make ECEC attendance compulsory. Yet, the results indicate that only in few countries, a place is guaranteed from an early age and most countries have a childcare gap and face discrepancies between demand for ECEC places and supply. In terms of participation, although the EU benchmark has been achieved for children aged 4 and over, only 34 % of children under age 3 attend center-based ECEC. Most parents have to pay for ECEC in the earliest years, whereas for older children in order to ensure access, the provision of ECEC free of charge has to be accompanied by a place guarantee.

3. Staff

The analysis highlights a division between staff categories, staff working with different age groups and between childcare and education sectors. More precisely, only one third of European education systems require that at least one of the team members caring for a group of children, regardless of age, is highly educated. In another third of the education systems, a high qualification level is considered essential for staff working with older children, but not for staff working with younger children. Turning to continuous professional development (CPD), only a quarter of the education systems makes CPD mandatory for core practitioners working with younger children, specifying its minimum duration over a defined period of time. A few more, but still less than half of the education systems, require CPD for core practitioners working with older children (3 to 5/6).

4. Educational guidelines

In around a third of all European countries (10) educational guidelines apply only to settings for children aged 3 and over, whereas in a majority of countries ECEC settings must draw up their own pedagogical plan. Across Europe, guidelines emphasize on similar core areas for learning and development. Turning to transitions, a variety of measures is used to ensure a smooth transition between ECEC and primary education. Finally, as support measures are concerned, the report highlights that: the most common form of language support in ECEC is speech therapy; a minority of countries provide teaching in home languages in ECEC; and only a quarter of European countries offer home learning guidance.

5. Evaluation and Monitoring

According to the report, the external evaluation of ECEC settings for older children often addresses both structural and process quality. In contrast, almost half of countries have either no provisions for the external evaluation of settings for children under age 3 or they evaluate only the structural quality. In addition, the report revealed that no participatory methods are implemented during evaluation, since children's voices are rarely heard.