



NACIONES UNIDAS
UNITED NATIONS

CEPAL
ECLAC



Reflexiones sobre la trayectoria europea

Considerations about the European route

MIHAELA IONESCU

Directora de International Step by Step
Association

RECÍPROCAMENTE

NAPOLI - 25/26 NOVIEMBRE 2014





***A European glance at the Early Childhood Education
and Care (ECEC) systems as platforms for social
cohesion***

***Dr. Mihaela Ionescu
Program Director
ISSA (International Step by Step Association)***

***Conference - EUROsociAL Programme
Naples, 25-26 November 2014***



Some demographic data:

- Around six per cent of the European population is under 6 years of age
- In Europe, one in four children in the 0-5 age group is at risk of poverty or social exclusion
- One in ten households with children under 6 is jobless
- Most countries have more than five per cent of children born abroad or registered as foreign citizens
- One in ten households with children below the age of 6 are single-parent households

ECEC systems needs to answer to very specific needs of children and families!



Provision of services:

- In most European countries, ECEC is split into two separate phases according to age (0-3, 3-6)
- Some regulated home-based provision exists in most European countries but it is widespread only in a few
- In half of European countries childcare leave, which is adequately compensated, lasts less than forty weeks
- In most European countries, children are guaranteed a place in ECEC only one or two years before primary education
- Allocation of ECEC places is often subject to local autonomy
- In most countries, several levels of authority share the responsibility for the accreditation and evaluation of settings; settings for older children are often subject to more thorough evaluation than those for younger age groups
- A shortage of ECEC places for younger children exists in most European countries



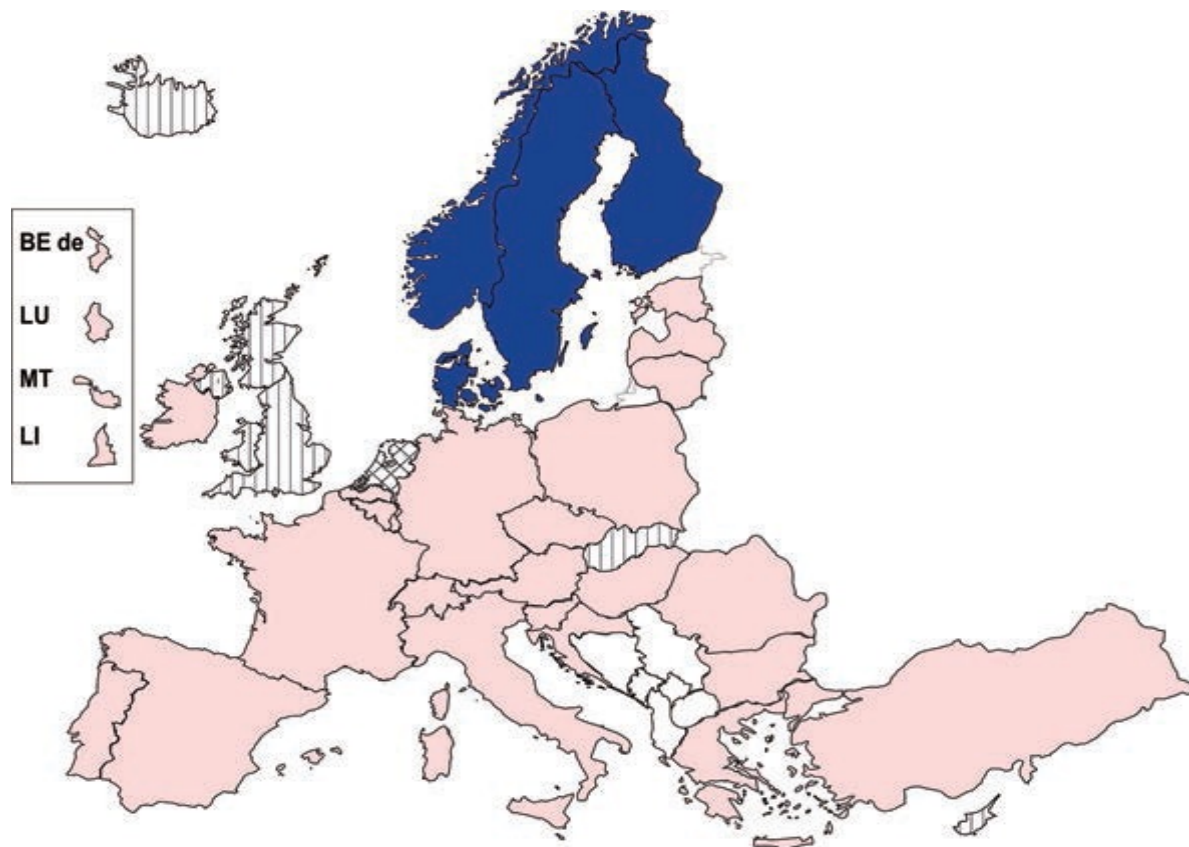
Demand and supply of places in publicly subsidised centre-based ECEC settings, 2012/13

 Demand is higher than supply

 Supply meets demand

 No monitoring data at central level

 No data available





Attendance

- 93 per cent of children attend ECEC before starting compulsory education
- ECEC attendance is at its peak when children are 4 years old
- ECEC participation among children under 3 is very low
- Students attending ECEC for more than one year achieve better results; children who spend longer periods of time in ECEC read better when in primary education
- ECEC participation has a stronger effect on disadvantaged children's reading scores
- Disadvantaged children have lower ECEC participation rates

Those most in need do not attend the ECEC services.



Financing

- Public sector provision predominates in ECEC, especially during the pre-primary (ISCED 0) phase
- Local authorities often finance ECEC for younger children while they share costs with the central level for older children
- In most European countries public expenditure on provision at ISCED 0 as a percentage of GDP has increased
- Education at ISCED 0 is free of charge in half of all European countries
- ECEC fees for younger children are the lowest in Eastern European and Nordic countries
- Family income is usually the basis for fee reductions
- Tax relief is the most common form of financial support to help parents with ECEC costs
- Cash-for-childcare schemes are available in only a few countries



Although growing attention is paid to ECEC, the systems are still not enough ready to cater the diversity of needs and employ enough participatory policies answering to the dynamics of the today's societies facing social exclusion, polarization, and weakening of public support.





Co-existing approaches in ECEC field

- Focusing on the economic, social and educational advantages within a **human capital paradigm** that is becoming increasingly dominant in shaping political orientations towards public investment in the ECEC sector – **children as profitable assets**
- Focusing on child's rights – **children as citizens (now) with rights** to be fulfilled by the society where families and communities are partners in decision making processes, thus services becoming more responsive to children's and families' needs, and being an expression of democratic values and practices



What approaches are to be promoted for ensuring child's rights?

- **ECEC as the foundation of learning democracy** and where democratic values are enacted: children's voice, parents' voice, dialogue and participation in decision making processes.
- **ECEC as a factor of social cohesion** - Enacting democratic practices in ECEC institutions means building participatory alliances that contribute to create networks of social solidarity within local communities (Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2009; Broadhead, Meleady, & Delgado 2008; Oberhuemer, 2005)
- **ECC institutions as *public fora*** in which change can be generated by involving all those who have an interest in education — parents, practitioners, citizens and local administrators — and in policy-advocacy (DECET & ISSA, 2011; Children in Europe, 2008)



Critical aspects: Accessibility

Accessibility of ECEC for children from ethnic minority and low-income families has become an issue of growing political concern

(Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. 2009. *Tackling social and cultural inequalities through early childhood education and care in Europe*. Brussels: EACEA Eurydice).



Critical aspects: Accessibility

- Provision of **generalised and equitable access to high quality** ECEC is advocated in order to reduce early school leaving and counter the risk of poverty and social exclusion

(Council of the European Union. 2011. *Council conclusions on early childhood education and care.*

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st09/st09424.en11.pdf>)

- Children from ethnic minority and low-income families are less often enrolled in non-maternal care and preschools, and that – when enrolled – these children are more often to be found in provisions of **poorer quality than their more affluent peers.**

(Lazzari, A., & Vandebroek, M. (2012). Literature Review of the Participation of Disadvantaged Children and families in ECEC Services in Europe. In J. Bennett (Ed.), *Early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children from disadvantaged backgrounds: Findings from a European literature review and two case studies.* Brussels: European Commission)



Criteria for equalizing accessibility of ECEC services

- *Availability*

Policies based on a children's rights perspective to education and care tend to be more effective than policies based on a needs (or risk) framework

- *Affordability*

Structural provisions addressing the overall population - either free of costs or according to income-related fees – tend to have a higher equalising potential than those in which entitlement is targeted to the poor.



Criteria for equalizing accessibility of ECEC services

- *Accessibility*

Outreach to families whose presence tends to be less visible in the local community in order to build trust between marginalised groups and ECEC centres

- *Usefulness*

Democratic decision-making structures that allow the differing needs of families to be expressed and to be taken systematically into account in order to tailor ECEC provision to the demands of local communities



Criteria for equalizing accessibility of ECEC services

- *Comprehensibility*

Research suggests that the provision of integrated services combining care and education, early childhood and family support programmes, special needs and mainstream provision within the framework of inter-agency collaboration might be most effective in answering the demands of local communities in contexts of diversity

A recent survey carried out by Eurofound⁴⁵ shows the main obstacles which are reported as hindering ECEC attendance are **cost** (59% of respondents) and **availability of provision** (58% of respondents), followed by **organisational arrangements** such as access-distance and opening hours of facilities (41% of respondents).



What is needed?

Universal entitlements to publicly funded ECEC provision within integrated systems that combine care and education— along with a flexible allocation of funds that target additional resources toward children and families experiencing disadvantage – may contribute to overcoming the social stratification in the use of early childhood services with the greatest benefit for disadvantaged groups.

(Accessibility of Early Childhood Education and Care for children from ethnic minority and low-income families. Obstacles and strategies for increasing participation of under-represented groups in ECEC services, Arianna Lazzari, Michel Vandenbroeck)



Critical aspects:

Access is of little merit without quality!

European Quality Framework for ECEC services

Underlying principles:

- a clear image and voice of the child and childhood should be valued
- parents are the most important partners and their participation is essential
- a shared understanding of quality



European Quality Framework for ECEC services

Developing quality:

- **accessibility**
- **workforce**
- **curriculum**
- **monitoring and evaluation**
- **governance and funding**



European Quality Framework for ECEC services

- “Provision needs to offer flexibility in relation to opening hours and the content of the programme.”
- “Structural or legislative arrangements support access to ECEC by giving families the right to access affordable ECEC provision. Approaches which support progress towards the universal availability of ECEC recognise **that providing additional funds to support access for disadvantaged groups can be an effective strategy for increasing access** especially for children from migrant, disadvantaged or low-income families”.



Critical aspects: Workforce

- Preparation
 - Recruitment, deployment and retention
 - Professional and career development
 - Employment terms and conditions
 - Learning and teaching conditions
 - Social security and protection
- Social dialogue and inter-sectoral coordination

(Policy Guidelines on the promotion of decent work for early childhood education personnel – International Labour Organization, GENEVA, 2014)



Critical aspects: Workforce

The CareWork in Europe project (Cameron & Moss, 2007) has shown that it is imperative to overcome the notion that care work is ‘what women naturally do’ and address the gender gap in the ECEC workforce.

(Towards Competent Systems in Early Childhood Education and Care. Implications for Policy and Practice, Mathias Urban, Michel Vandebroek, Katrien Van Laere, Arianna Lazzari & Jan Peeters, European Journal of Education, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2012)



Marketization of ECEC

- The extent of marketisation is not documented. It has gone furthest in Ireland, UK, and the Netherlands, where governments have determined that a market in private providers is the best way to stimulate supply and meet an agenda of individual responsibility, parent choice and competition.
- Under neoliberal pressures, it seems likely that both privatisation and marketisation will spread across Europe, unless a strong resistance is mounted based on renewing a public education inscribed with the values of democracy and collaboration (Peter Moss, *Children in Europe*, 2014)



ECEC as a platform for social cohesion

- ECEC has to be seen as a public good, therefore as a public service
- Access to ECEC services has to be accompanied by quality frameworks
- Child's rights should guide the policies regarding ECEC and those that impact children's lives (employment, infrastructure, diversity of services, comprehensiveness, etc.)



Thank you!

www.issa.nl

mionescu@issa.nl

