



The current state of national ECEC quality frameworks, or equivalent strategic policy documents, governing ECEC quality in EU Member States

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Erasmus+

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

BUPL – Danish Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educators

DCYA – Department of Children and Youth Affairs

DG EAC – Directorate General for Education and Culture

DJI – German Youth Institute (*Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V.*)

ECEC – Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC TWG – Thematic Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care

ESF – European Social Fund

EU ECEC QF – European Quality Framework for ECEC

ISSA – International Step by Step Association

MIUR - Ministry of Education, University and Research

MS – Member States

OCEPE – *Orientações Curriculares para a Educação Pré-escolar* (Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education)

ONE – Office of Birth and Childhood (*Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance*)

OMEP – World Organisation for Early Childhood Education and Care (*Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Préscolaire*)

## INTRODUCTION

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This report provides an overview of the status of early childhood education and care (ECEC) quality frameworks — or equivalent strategic policy documents — that govern ECEC quality at national, regional or local level in EU Member States. The review was commissioned by the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) as an ad hoc question for the Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training (NESET II).

The *Proposal for key principles of a quality framework for early childhood education and care* (EU ECEC QF), developed by the ECEC Thematic Working Group (2012-2014) under the auspices of the European Commission, is the basis for this review. The document was developed through a process of policy cooperation with experts from 25 Member States (plus Norway and Turkey) and a parallel stakeholder group with Members from 55 European stakeholder organisations. The ongoing dialogue and consultation process — which engaged experts and key decision-makers in two working groups (ECEC-TWG and a stakeholder group) over a two-year period — built a broad consensus about what characterises high-quality ECEC.

This consensus was translated into ten principles across five areas<sup>1</sup> of implementation, to allow ECEC quality frameworks to embrace the diversity of ECEC systems, cultures, economies and policy approaches across Europe. Drawing on research findings throughout Europe, the working group also provided guidance and orientation in overcoming common challenges.

The framework proposal is an open, flexible tool that is built upon a strong core which contains clearly articulated values and principles that allow for multiple paths to achieving common goals and that scaffolds change and development regardless of the starting point. It promotes a common understanding of ECEC as a multidisciplinary field of practices drawing on theory related to e.g. education, health and family support. The framework creates a language of quality that promotes reflection and can be adapted to different national, regional and local contexts. The framework proposal carries the potential to be policy-driven but at the same time in line with a comprehensive view of quality of ECEC established by researchers (Milotay, 2016; pp. 124).

Several Member States have used the *Proposal for a quality framework on early childhood education and care* to support their national ECEC reforms. Before further work in this field is carried out at EU level, the DG EAC proposed the ad hoc question to which this report is a response, seeking to gain an updated and accurate picture of different quality frameworks and other equivalent documents developed or implemented at national, regional and local levels within Member States. The term 'equivalent documents' refers to any strategic policy document that steers the quality of ECEC provision in any aspect of the EU ECEC QF.

To that end — in line with the aims outlined by the request (AHQ4-2017), and adhering to the same methodology that was used during the policy coordination process which culminated in the Proposal (Thematic Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2014, pp. 6-7) — the following methods are used in this report:

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<sup>1</sup> The areas are *access, workforce, curriculum, evaluation and monitoring, governance, and funding*.

- A survey of experts who took part in the ECEC-TWG (2012-2014). They are knowledgeable about the relevant policy initiatives and developments that have been undertaken in their respective countries.
- Information provided by these experts was placed in the broader context of ECEC systems in EU Member States by drawing on updated information in the *Eurydice database on National Reforms in Early Childhood Education and Care*, complemented by information obtained from *National Information Sheets on ECEC Systems in Europe* (EACEA, 2016).
- The information was then analysed by focusing on trends and developments rather than on facts and figures. For this purpose, additional data sources were used, such as the *Eurydice's database*, the *Country Analysis of the Education and Training Monitor* (Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016), and updated country profiles displayed on the *EPIC platform*<sup>2</sup>.

The overview provided in this report is relatively comprehensive in terms of scope, breadth and depth, but it is not exhaustive; some gaps do exist. The specific shortcomings and limitations of the report are identified below, along with the strategies we adopted for addressing them:

- The timeframe of the assignment (the survey was launched in mid-June and remained open until mid-July, a holiday period) interfered with the responses of some experts. To accommodate this, additional experts were contacted. Preference was given to researchers who have specific expertise in ECEC and are familiar with the relevant work carried out by the European Commission.
- Some responses were incomplete or lacked accurate reference to policy initiatives undertaken in the countries examined. Therefore, the information provided by the experts was cross-checked for accuracy and completeness by drawing on Eurydice's country sheets '*National Reforms in Early Childhood Education and Care*'.
- In countries where governance of the ECEC sector is split between several Ministries, or where responsibilities for regulation, management and funding of ECEC are strongly decentralized, it was not always possible to construct an accurate overview of the initiatives undertaken at different levels. Given the short duration of the assignment and its timing (during the summer holiday period), these gaps could not be fully redressed by asking the experts for further clarification or by contacting additional experts.
- Not all of the EU-28 Member States could be covered. We were not able to retrieve information about QF-related policy initiatives from the German-speaking community of Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Luxemburg, England, Wales or Northern Ireland.
- Norway was also covered, since it participated in the processes that led to the development of the EU ECEC-QF.

In sum, this review examines the state of ECEC QFs, or equivalent strategic policy documents and initiatives, in 24 EU Member States and Norway.

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<sup>2</sup> The European Platform for Investing in Children was developed for initiative of the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion with the aim of supporting Member States in implementing the Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage' (2013/112/EU). It is a tool for monitoring activities triggered by the Recommendation, but also a platform for sharing policy-making initiatives that are supportive of children and families: in this perspective, it is also aimed at fostering cooperation and mutual learning in the field. <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1246&langId=en>.

Country profiles are available here: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1248&langId=en>.

The report is divided into four sections. The first section reports on countries that have translated or disseminated the content of the EU ECEC QF in their respective national languages. The second section describes the situation of those countries in which the EU ECEC QF has played a role in national reform processes and their implementation. The third section analyses the reform trends currently taking place in those countries where the EU ECEC QF have not played a role in national policy debates. Such reform trends are analysed cross-nationally in relation to: (i) the presence of comprehensive quality frameworks (either in place or under development); and (ii) the five areas of implementation of the EU ECEC QF principles and action statements. The fourth section provides an overview of grassroots initiatives in which the EU ECEC QF has been used as a catalyst for enhancing the quality of ECEC services at local/regional level.

## 1. COUNTRIES WHERE THE EU ECEC QF HAS BEEN TRANSLATED OR DISSEMINATED

Experts report that the full-text of the EU ECEC QF proposal has been translated into the following languages:

- French (free online resource published on the DG EAC repository, as well as the ONE website)<sup>3</sup>;
- German (free online resource published on the DJI website)<sup>4</sup>;
- Italian (*'Un Quadro Europeo per la Qualità dei servizi Educativi e di Cura per l'infanzia: proposta di principi chiave'* (2016), (a book, with an introduction);
- Portuguese (in press, and to be published on the website of the DG EAC repository)<sup>5</sup>.

The EU ECEC QF has been partially translated as a summary of key principles and action statements (pp. 7-12 of the printed version) into the following languages:

- Dutch (*'Het Europese Kwaliteitsraamwerk voor Opvang en Onderwijs voor Jonge Kinderen'*, Kinderen in Europa – Extra Nummer, 2015)<sup>6</sup>;

<sup>3</sup> Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework\\_fr.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_fr.pdf) and [www.one.be/professionnels/accueil-de-l-enfant-actualites/actualites-details/code-de-qualite-europeen-pour-l-accueil-et-l-education-des-jeunes-enfants/](http://www.one.be/professionnels/accueil-de-l-enfant-actualites/actualites-details/code-de-qualite-europeen-pour-l-accueil-et-l-education-des-jeunes-enfants/).

<sup>4</sup> Available at [www.fruehe-chancen.de/themen/kinderbetreuung-international/ecec-qualitaetsrahmen/](http://www.fruehe-chancen.de/themen/kinderbetreuung-international/ecec-qualitaetsrahmen/).

<sup>5</sup> 'The Quality Framework in Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe - 2014 report will be translated into Portuguese and published. This Portuguese version will be done in the scope of the work developed by Portugal as part of the Thematic Working Group on Childhood Education and Care for the European Commission, whose mission was to support the participating countries in developing effective and efficient policies for quality monitoring, identify and analyse good practice so as to establish benchmarks and create a Framework for Childhood Education and Care'. [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Portugal:National\\_Reforms\\_in\\_Early\\_Childhood\\_Education\\_and\\_Care](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Portugal:National_Reforms_in_Early_Childhood_Education_and_Care).

<sup>6</sup> The special edition of the journal was published on occasion of the conference *'Studiedag: Inspiratie uit Europa. Kinderopvang en kleuterschool in een Europees perspectief'* organised by VBJK for disseminating the EU ECEC QF to an audience of local policymakers, researchers and ECEC professionals (pedagogical coordinators, early years educators and preschool teachers). [https://vbjk.be/files/attachments/.736/KIE\\_Extra\\_Nummer\\_2015\\_Studiedag\\_Inspiratie\\_uit\\_Europa\\_Kinderopvang\\_en\\_kleuterschool\\_in\\_een\\_Europees\\_perspectief\\_Programma.pdf](https://vbjk.be/files/attachments/.736/KIE_Extra_Nummer_2015_Studiedag_Inspiratie_uit_Europa_Kinderopvang_en_kleuterschool_in_een_Europees_perspectief_Programma.pdf).



- Danish (dissemination materials produced by the National Union of Pedagogues (BUPL) for their members)<sup>7</sup>;
- Slovenian (a translation of the measures and a summary of the document was prepared for experts from the Ministry of Education, Science & Sport<sup>8</sup>, and the National Education Institute — Preschool Department)<sup>9</sup>;
- Romania (the country expert reported that only some parts of the document were translated, with the specific purpose of informing the policy debates and consultation processes taking place at national level).

Evidently, then, the EU ECEC QF has not been translated — in full or in part — in many Member States. It is noteworthy, however, that explicit references to the document have been found in policy reports, academic research, professional literature, and guidelines written in the national languages of eight out of the 24 countries examined. In addition, the document was disseminated and further discussed at national conferences and debates held in seven countries out of the 24. The fact that references to the EU ECEC QF have been found across the three domains of ECEC policy-making, research and practice might suggest that a strong consensus achieved by international experts at the EU level is likely to parallel an overarching consensus among ECEC stakeholders within Member States.

**Table 1.** Dissemination of the EU ECEC QF in EU Member States' policy documents, academic research, professional literature, guidelines and conferences.

| MS | Policy documents (background reports, discussion papers, situation analysis, etc.)   | Commissioned research reports, academic literature (books, articles)  | Published articles in practitioners' journals, guidelines and manuals  | Conferences and proceedings   |
|----|--|---|--|---|
| BE | <i>Eindrapport Onderzoek naar kleuterparticipatie</i> (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2016).  |   | VBJK-ISSA-MUTANT training package for ECEC pedagogical coaches/trainers; Practitioners' journal 'Flash Accueil' (26/2015).   | <i>Studiedag: Inspiratie uit Europa. Kinderopvang en kleuterschool in een Europees perspectief</i> (conference held at Kind & Gezin, Brussels, 2015).   |
| DE | Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe (2015) <i>Die europäischen Dimensionen in der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe – Relevanz und Potential europäischer Politik für die Kinder- und Jugendhilfe.</i> Discussion paper dealing with the relevance of European politics for the German Child and Youth Welfare sector: | Klinkhammer, N., Schäfer, B., Harring, D., Gwinner, A. (Eds.) (2017). <i>Qualitätsmonitoring in der frühkindlichen Bildung und Betreuung.</i> | DJI-Stellungnahme<br>Stellungnahme des Deutschen Jugendinstituts (2017).<br><i>Zum Anhörverfahren im Sozialpolitischen Ausschuss des Landtags Rheinland-Pfalz zum Antrag der Fraktionen der SPD, FDP und BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN „Kinder- und Jugendarmut in Rheinland - Pfalz wirksam begegnen“ sowie zum Antrag der Fraktion</i> | ICEC Conference on ECEC from an international perspective (2013): <a href="http://www.fruehe-chancen.de/themen/kinderbetreuung-international/icec-tagungen/icec-tagung-2013/">www.fruehe-chancen.de/themen/kinderbetreuung-international/icec-tagungen/icec-tagung-2013/</a><br>ICEC Conference on Quality in ECEC (2016): <a href="http://www.intern.dji.de/ueberuns/projekte/projekte/internationales-zentrum-">www.intern.dji.de/ueberuns/projekte/projekte/internationales-zentrum-</a> |

<sup>7</sup> Available at [www.bupl.dk/bupl/content.nsf/](http://www.bupl.dk/bupl/content.nsf/).

<sup>8</sup> The expert from Slovenia mentioned that various national and European documents were taken into account during the process of amending the Pre-school Act that began in November 2016 (<https://e-uprava.gov.si/drzava-indruzba/e-demokracija/predlogi-predpisov/predlog-predpisa.html?id=7728>).

<sup>9</sup> In addition, the EU ECEC QF was disseminated to the professional public through the *Eurydice Newsletter* and through the national practitioners' conference 'Quality and Equal Opportunities: key-steps in education and care' organized by the Educational Research Institute (Developmental Research Center for Pedagogical Initiatives Step by Step Slovenia) under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Slovenia ([www.pei.si/Sifranti/NewsPublic.aspx?id=101](http://www.pei.si/Sifranti/NewsPublic.aspx?id=101)).



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|    | <a href="http://www.agi.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2015/Diskussionspapier_Europaeische_Dimension_dt.pdf">www.agi.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2015/Diskussionspapier_Europaeische_Dimension_dt.pdf</a>   | DJI-Verlag München <sup>10</sup> .   | der CDU „Familien unterstützen – Kinder fördern“<br><a href="http://www.landtag.rlp.de/landtag/vorlagen/916-V-17.pdf">www.landtag.rlp.de/landtag/vorlagen/916-V-17.pdf</a>  | <a href="http://fruehkindliche-bildung-betreuung-und-erziehung-icec/icec-fachtagung-2016.html">fruehkindliche-bildung-betreuung-und-erziehung-icec/icec-fachtagung-2016.html</a>  |
| FI | Karila, K., Kosonen, T., Järvenkallas, S. (2017) <i>Varhaiskasvatuksen kehittämisen tiekartha vuosille [Roadmap 2017–2030]:</i> <a href="http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/80221/okm30.pdf">http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/80221/okm30.pdf</a><br>Report commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Culture.   | Karila, K. (2016) <i>Vaikuttava varhaiskasvatus: tilannekatsaus toukokuu [Significance of ECEC: report of the Finnish situation]</i> <a href="http://www.oph.fi/download/176638_vaikuttava_varhaiskasvatus.pdf">http://www.oph.fi/download/176638_vaikuttava_varhaiskasvatus.pdf</a><br>Commissioned by the National Agency for Education. |   |   |
| FR | Giampino report (2016) on <i>‘Développement du jeune enfant, Modes d’accueil, Formation des professionnels’</i> commissioned by the Ministry for Families, Children and Women’s Rights: <a href="http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/164000279.pdf">www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/164000279.pdf</a>   |  | Ministry for Families, Children and Women’s Rights (2017) <i>Cadre national pour l’accueil du jeune enfant [National Framework for Early Childhood Care]:</i> <a href="http://www.hcfea.fr/IMG/pdf/Cadre_national_pour_l_accueil_du_jeune_enfant.pdf">http://www.hcfea.fr/IMG/pdf/Cadre_national_pour_l_accueil_du_jeune_enfant.pdf</a> |   |
| EL |  | Mousena, E. & Kiprianos, P. (in press). ‘Quality and Identity Building in ECE’. In Spinthourakis, Karakatsani&Zorbas (eds), <i>Identity in times of Crisis, Globalization and Diversity: Research and Practice</i> . London: CiCea/CiCe Jean Monnet Network.   | Μουσένα, Ε., (2017) «Πολιτικές για την ποιότητα στην Προσχολική Αγωγή - Η Ευρωπαϊκή εμπειρία», Πρακτικά του 14ου Πανελληνίου Μετεκπαιδευτικού Συνδρίου του Πανελληνίου Συνδέσμου Βρεφονηπιαγωγών, Χαλκιδική 31/3/17 έως 2/4/2017 (υπό έκδοση).  | <i>Early childhood education and care: for more and better quality for all’</i> (Athens, 2014): conference jointly organised by the European Commission when the draft EU ECEC QF proposal was launched <a href="http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/sl1716/IGEMS/2014_June_ECEC_Conference.pdf">http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/sl1716/IGEMS/2014_June_ECEC_Conference.pdf</a>   |
| IE | Department for Children & Youth Affairs (2016) <i>Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter: Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education</i> . <a href="http://aim.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Diversity-Equality-and-Inclusion-Charter-and-Guidelines-for-Early-Childhood-Care-Education.pdf">http://aim.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Diversity-Equality-and-Inclusion-Charter-and-Guidelines-for-Early-Childhood-Care-Education.pdf</a> | SEQUENCES: Self and external Evaluation of Quality in EUrope to Nourish Childhood Education Services (Erasmus+ project)  |   | National Conference in Dublin <i>Transforming Vision into Future Practice’</i> (2015): <a href="http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Early-Childhood/Early-Years-Education-Forum/Early-Years-Education-Forum-Transforming-Vision-into-Future-Practice-Report.pdf">www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Early-Childhood/Early-Years-Education-Forum/Early-Years-Education-Forum-Transforming-Vision-into-Future-Practice-Report.pdf</a> |
| IT |  | Innocenti Institute (2015) <i>Rapporto di monitoraggio</i>   | Lazzari, A. (2016) <i>La qualificazione dei servizi per</i>   | <i>ECEC &amp; Early Language Learning</i> conference organised  |

<sup>10</sup> The publication provides insight into diverse systems of monitoring ECEC quality: contributions from Australia, Sweden, Slovenia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Germany illustrate different perspectives and approaches to monitoring quality. Moreover, it offers an overview of current developments and trends as well as experiences gathered in already established systems. A final chapter bundles key findings, discusses major challenges and highlights important lessons (publication available in English since July 2017).

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|    | <p>Technical report prepared by the Italian Ministry of Education and Research (MIUR) that informed the Law Decree 65/2017 on the integrated system of education and care services for children aged 0 to 6:<br/> <a href="http://www.tecnicadellascuola.it/images/01allegati/Deleghe107-2015/DDL380-RELA-SISTEMA0-6.pdf">www.tecnicadellascuola.it/images/01allegati/Deleghe107-2015/DDL380-RELA-SISTEMA0-6.pdf</a></p> | <p>del Piano di Sviluppo dei Servizi socio-educativi per la prima infanzia [<i>Monitoring report of the National Development Plan on ECEC services</i>]. Florence. Save the Children (2016) <i>IX Report on the state of play of children's rights in Italy</i>:<br/> <a href="https://www.savethechildren.it/cosa-facciamo/pubblicazioni/ix-rapporto-crc-i-diritti-dellinfanzia-e-delladolescenza-italia">https://www.savethechildren.it/cosa-facciamo/pubblicazioni/ix-rapporto-crc-i-diritti-dellinfanzia-e-delladolescenza-italia</a></p> | <p>l'infanzia in una prospettiva europea, «RIVISTA DELL'ISTRUZIONE», 1/2016, pp. 60 – 64.<br/> Lazzari, A. (2016) I servizi per l'infanzia oltre la crisi: un impegno politico e pedagogico [<i>ECEC services beyond the crisis: time for political and pedagogical commitment</i>]. Introduction to the Italian published version of EU ECEC QF, pp. 5 – 16.</p> | <p>by MIUR within the semester of Italian presidency of EU (Reggio Emilia, 2014):<br/> <a href="http://www.dgschool.it/reggio-emilia-programme.php">http://www.dgschool.it/reggio-emilia-programme.php</a></p> <p>Launch of the Italian translation of the EU ECEC QF (Rome, 2016):<br/> <a href="http://www.grupponidiinfanzia.it/quadro-europeo-per-la-qualita-dei-servizi-educativi-seminario-roma/">www.grupponidiinfanzia.it/quadro-europeo-per-la-qualita-dei-servizi-educativi-seminario-roma/</a></p> |
| LT |  |   |   | <p>'Quality Preschool and Pre-primary Education: what could we improve?' (Vilnius, 2015)<br/> <a href="https://www.smm.lt/uploads/documents/Seminarai/Konferencijos%20programa.pdf">https://www.smm.lt/uploads/documents/Seminarai/Konferencijos%20programa.pdf</a></p>   |
| NL |  |   |   | <p>'Quality in childcare' conference organised by the Dutch Bureau for quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (BKK) – Tilburg, 2015</p>  |
| SK |  | <p>VARGOVÁ, M. and LYNCH, Z. (2017) <i>Medzníky v osude materských škôl. Naša škola : odborný metodický časopis pre učiteľov materských škôl a 1. stupňa základných škôl</i>. Roč. 20, č. 7 (2016/17), s. 13-22. - Bratislava: Pamiko.</p>  | <p>LYNCH, Z. and HAJDÚKOVÁ, V. (2015) <i>Slovenské predprimárne vzdelávanie v prúde aktuálnych (európskych) trendov a princípov</i>. Predškolská výchova. Roč. 70, č. 1 (September-Október) (2015/16), s. 2-10. - Hliník nad Hronom: Reziliencia.</p>   |   |

## 2. COUNTRIES WHERE THE EU ECEC QF HAS PLAYED A ROLE IN SUSTAINING ECEC REFORM AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES

Aside from being referenced in policy documents, research reports, and literature for practitioners, the EU ECEC QF has played a role in influencing and sometimes shaping pedagogical and policy debates about improving the quality of ECEC systems and services in several countries.

In the **Flemish Community of Belgium**, which has a **split system**, the document became a **common point of reference for policy developments taking place in the 0 to 2,5/3 sector** (Ministry of Welfare, Health and Family) and **in the 2,5/3 to 6 sector** (Ministry of Education and Training). In more detail, the experts claim that the EU ECEC QF has played a role in:

- informing the report on *preschool participation*<sup>11</sup> commissioned by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, which set the background for the *Action-Plan* aimed to increase the participation in pre-primary education, launched in December 2016;
- providing inspiration for the content of the *Pedagogical Framework for Childcare for Babies and Toddlers* (Kind & Gezin, 2016)<sup>12</sup>, which was developed within the MemoQ project (commissioned by Kind & Gezin and jointly carried out by the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Ghent University & Research Centre for Experiential Education of Leuven University).

This pedagogical framework formulates a set of guidelines addressing the diverse interests and needs of children in a holistic way. It describes tasks, principles of childcare, ways to act pedagogically, and the conditions that are necessary to support the curriculum. The framework focuses on childcare from the perspectives of the child, parents (family) and society. Within the MemoQ project, the development of such a pedagogical framework was complemented by three new instruments to measure, monitor and improve quality (currently being finalised).

In this context, **a shared reflection on the principles of the EU ECEC QF could possibly open new avenues for cross-sectoral cooperation** (across the 0-3 and 3-6 sectors, and across their respectively responsible Ministries and Agencies), especially given the potential opportunities that the *Action-plan transition* might be offering (currently being developed by the Ministry of Education and Training).

In the **French Community of Belgium**, a comprehensive quality framework for **0-3 provision** has been in place since 2003 – *Code de Qualité de l'Accueil* (ONE, 2013)<sup>13</sup>. However, a major ECEC reform is still under development. According to the country expert from ONE, the main pillars of this reform are likely to evoke the quality statements stated in the EU ECEC QF<sup>14</sup>. The **ongoing reform builds on consultation processes that engage professional associations and relevant stakeholders, and which are guided by the EU ECEC QF on ECEC**.

In the **Czech Republic**, the content of the EU ECEC QF was informally discussed during **policy consultation processes** and in **local conferences** (OMEP, Universities Prague, Brno), with **specific reference to the preschool sector (ages three to six, under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport)**. Although it had no direct influence on national ECEC policies, the EU ECEC QF has guided the **advocacy work** of the

<sup>11</sup> Available at:

[http://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Eindrapport\\_Onderzoek\\_naar\\_kleuterparticipatie.pdf](http://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Eindrapport_Onderzoek_naar_kleuterparticipatie.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Available at: <https://www.kindengezin.be/img/pedagogische-raamwerk-engelseversie.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> The main pillars of such quality framework are: 'psycho-pedagogical principles, accessibility, workforce, activities and curriculum. Each setting is required to set its own pedagogical project, by taking into account the needs and opinions of the parents. On that basis — as well as on basis of evaluation — the settings receive a quality attestation that is reviewed every three years. Available at:

[www.one.be/fileadmin/user\\_upload/one\\_des/one\\_Jur/D\\_une\\_loi\\_a\\_l\\_autre/II\\_Accueil/F\\_Qualites/Arrete\\_17\\_decembre\\_2003\\_-\\_Code\\_de\\_qualite\\_de\\_l\\_accueil.pdf](http://www.one.be/fileadmin/user_upload/one_des/one_Jur/D_une_loi_a_l_autre/II_Accueil/F_Qualites/Arrete_17_decembre_2003_-_Code_de_qualite_de_l_accueil.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> The EU ECEC QF was presented and discussed in the conference '*Code de qualité européen pour l'accueil et l'éducation des jeunes enfants*' organised by ONE in October 2015: [www.one.be/professionnels/accueil-de-l-enfant-actualites/actualites-details/code-de-qualite-europeen-pour-l-accueil-et-l-education-des-jeunes-enfants/](http://www.one.be/professionnels/accueil-de-l-enfant-actualites/actualites-details/code-de-qualite-europeen-pour-l-accueil-et-l-education-des-jeunes-enfants/).

As reported in the conference press-release, the EU ECEC QF is expected to have a significant impact on the ECEC reform currently being developed.

Preschool Education Association and Pre-school Counselling Advisory Board in providing suggestions<sup>15</sup> for a *Quality Improvement Strategy for Preschool Education*. While the Czech Republic has no comprehensive quality framework in place to improve ECEC services at national, regional or provincial level, it does have a quality framework for external evaluation of pre-school institutional education<sup>16</sup>, which is also available for internal evaluation.

In **France**, the EU ECEC QF has **influenced the national consultation process on ECEC for under-three's**. The consultation involved over 120 experts from different fields and culminated in the *Giampino Report* (2016), commissioned by the Ministry for Families, Childhood and Equal Opportunities. The report outlined Recommendations on 'Early Childhood Development, Care Arrangements and Professional training'. The report advocates for:

- a holistic approach to care and learning that sustains the development of young children;
- the co-education of families and professionals, which overcomes barriers to social diversity;
- education and care practices based on the principles of personalization, continuity (e.g. in the transition from home to formal settings) and inclusion;
- initial training of early childhood professionals (including mandatory initial training for childminders) and strengthened continuing professional development opportunities for in-service professionals working in different types of care arrangements, facilitating the creation of a common base for knowledge and practices.

The 108 recommendations outlined by the report provide the basis for the development of the *Early Childhood Action Plan* launched by the Ministry in November 2016 (*Ministère des Familles, de l'Enfance et des Droits des femmes*, 2016). In order to establish a common professional identity for early childhood professionals, as part of the above-mentioned Action Plan, the Ministry released the National Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care at the end of January 2017 on the National Day of Early Childhood Professionals.

In **Germany**<sup>17</sup> — where the ECEC system is highly decentralised at the Länder level, with the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth being responsible for ECEC from ages 0 to 6 at national level — the EU ECEC QF has been disseminated and discussed in two major national conferences for policymakers and researchers (see table 1). The outputs of both conferences informed the development of a national initiative for improving the quality of the ECEC system at the federal level (*Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend*, 2013). The first step was undertaken in 2014, when the former German Minister of Family Affairs, together with the state representatives of the Youth and Family Affairs Ministers' Conference, agreed on a binding political process to improve the quality and financing of Germany's ECEC system. This process involved stakeholders from provider associations, trade unions, and experts from research and practice in a so-called 'expert dialogue'<sup>18</sup>. The second step was taken in 2016, when the interim report was presented to the public and spurred political

<sup>15</sup> In this respect, the following issues were identified by the country expert as key focus-points: 'access to ECEC – participation, strengthening social inclusion and embracing diversity – well-qualified workforce, monitoring and evaluation – systematic monitoring of ECEC.'

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.csicr.cz/cz/Dokumenty/Kriteria-hodnoceni/Kriteria-hodnoceni-podminek,-prubehu-a-vysledk-\(6\)](http://www.csicr.cz/cz/Dokumenty/Kriteria-hodnoceni/Kriteria-hodnoceni-podminek,-prubehu-a-vysledk-(6))

<sup>17</sup> In Germany, the ECEC system is highly decentralised at Länder level. Whereas the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth is responsible for ECEC (legal entitlement to publicly funded provision for children aged one to six) at national level, at Länder level it can be either the Ministry of Families Affairs or the Ministry of Education.

<sup>18</sup> Such goals and targets mainly focus on the dimensions of structural quality, i.e. improving the staff-child ratio, leadership in ECEC settings, or the qualification of ECEC staff. In nine 'fields of action' (*Handlungsfelder*), different areas and aspects of quality on the different levels of the ECEC systems are described. The definition of quality goals are derived from these descriptions.

debate. Subsequently, a declaration was made about greater financial support by the federal state for quality improvements in the future. One of the next steps will be to develop a joint strategy, at best within a legal framework, for all responsible stakeholders regarding the implementation and financing of the agreed upon quality goals and their monitoring. As reported by the country expert, it is assumed that this new policy initiative will contribute to the development of and quality assurance in the ECEC field within the next few years.

In **Greece**, the EU ECEC QF was launched at the conference organised by the European Commission '*Early childhood education and care: for more and better quality for all*', which took place in Athens in 2014 (see table 1). The conference was attended by senior officials from the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs and the Regional Education Offices, professors in higher education, pre-primary teachers, and nurseries pedagogues. The conference **triggered public debate on ECEC, and since then measures to improve ECEC service quality have been taken** along three lines:

- an **increase in the accessibility of nursery provision** by creating 1800 new facilities<sup>19</sup>,
- an attempt to **enrol all four-year-olds in pre-primary school**<sup>20</sup>,
- a **debate on the merits of integrated ECEC, instead of the split system that exists to date**.

In addition, a major public debate on the future of Greece's education system has been underway since the launch of the National Social Dialogue on Education (Ministerial Decision 11803/18-12-2015). It aims to develop a national Education Action Plan:

The final report of the dialogue was published in May 2016 and calls for a new national more social justice, equity and access to education for all disadvantaged groups. Based on the conclusions of the dialogue, the Standing Committee for Education of the Greek Parliament proposed the following changes [with specific reference to ECEC]: introducing a second compulsory year of pre-school education in addition to the existing one; hence compulsory early childhood education and care in Greece would cover ages 4-6 (Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016, p. 123).

In **Ireland**<sup>21</sup>, a National Conference was held in 2015 — *Early Years Education Forum: Transforming Vision into Practices* — to share and discuss the content of the EU ECEC QF with stakeholders in the ECEC sector

<sup>19</sup> In the context of a split system, the rules of operation of nursery provision are set up in compliance with the regulations specified by the Ministry of Interior and must then be approved by the relevant municipality. Under the Operational Programmes Human Resources Development 2007-2013 (Action: *Reconciliation of family and professional life*) and *Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning 2014–2020*, the provision of childcare services was increased for children under three years of age whose families fulfil certain socioeconomic criteria (European Commission, Greece country profile). In particular, for 2013-2014, the subsidised places in childcare structures offered by the programme were increased by 10,000 more than the previous period 2012-2013, enabled by a budget increase to ensure that all children who meet the family criteria were admitted to nurseries. For 2014-2015, the Ministry of Labour, recognizing the importance of this programme for Greek families, implemented the action under the frontloaded implementation of the new OP '*Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning 2014 – 2020*' (EPIC country profile, 2016). In addition, the working hours of pre-primary schools (ages four to six) have been extended in order to better serve parents by the Ministerial Decision 130272/D1/5-8-2016 (European Commission, 2017b).

<sup>20</sup> From age four, children can attend pre-primary school, which is compulsory for those aged between five and six. This type of provision falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture, Education and Religious Affairs [EACEA, 2016].

<sup>21</sup> Ireland operates a split system of governance; the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is primarily responsible for pre-primary education, and the Department of Education and Skills is responsible for primary education. One exception is the Early Start programme, which caters to just 2 % of children aged between three-years-two-months and four-years-seven-months [EACEA, 2016].



and pertaining to national policy development. The conference coincided with the first meeting of the **Early Years Advisory Group**<sup>22</sup>, hosted by the Ministry of Children and Youth. The EU ECEC QF played an important role in **advocating for policy measures that support and sustain the implementation of previously existing curriculum and quality frameworks**, such as *Aistear*<sup>23</sup> and *Síolta*<sup>24</sup>. In fact, as reported by country experts, the following initiatives — aimed at furthering quality improvement in ECCE subsidized provision<sup>25</sup> — were strongly advocated for in consultation processes by making explicit reference to the EU ECEC QF principles and action statements:

- **Early-years Education-focused Inspection (EYEI)** in Early-years Settings Participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (Department of Education and Skills, 2016);
- **Learner Fund Initiative** to assist staff in ECEC settings to become qualified or improve their qualifications (Early Childhood Ireland, 2017);
- **local initiatives** to sustain quality development through ongoing professional support delivered by the **City and County Childcare Committees**.

In addition, the EU ECEC QF is currently informing policy developments aimed at increasing the accessibility and affordability of ECEC provision: a very high-profile roll-out of the *Single Affordable Childcare Scheme* is underway in Ireland under the initiative of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA).

Furthermore, the EU ECEC QF was used as a basis for drafting the report *Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter: Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education* (DCYA, 2016). The document defines an 'Access and Inclusion Model' aimed to support and empower ECEC practitioners to explore, understand and develop inclusive practices for the benefit of children, their families and the wider society (see action-statement 2, which focuses on the principles of *comprehensibility* and *desirability*). In association with the Access and Inclusion Model, a 'Leadership for Inclusion' (LINC Programme)<sup>26</sup> training initiative has also been developed.

In **Italy**, the EU ECEC QF was widely disseminated at policymaking conferences (see table 1) and discussed in pedagogical debates involving academic researchers, practitioners' associations and local administrators<sup>27</sup>. At national level, the **vision outlined by EU ECEC QF guided the process of policy**

<sup>22</sup> The Ministry of Children and Youth Affairs hosts the Early Years Forum, which meets several times per year; it is made up of key stakeholders in ECEC, including practitioners. Working sub-groups of the forum examine different policy areas to make new recommendations. It is also worth noting that the EU ECEC QF has been widely referenced in the context of ECEC in Ireland, not only in policy documents (e.g. Department for Children & Youth Affairs, 2016) but also in the work carried out by NGOs such as *Start Strong* and *Pobal*, both of which are influential stakeholders in policy consultation processes.

<sup>23</sup> More information about Aistear is available at <http://www.ncca.ie/en/Practice-Guide/>

<sup>24</sup> Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. Available at <http://siolta.ie/about.php>

<sup>25</sup> The subsidised services provide a free universal preschool provision (over two years) to children aged three-plus for up to 15 hours per week: the extension in 2016, by the DCYA, of the Free Preschool Year (the ECCE scheme) from one to two years was also an access and affordability measure. The scheme is operated under the auspices of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs who have statutory responsibility for early years inspections.

<sup>26</sup> <http://lincprogramme.ie/>

<sup>27</sup> Annual conference of the advocacy group and professional association 'Gruppo Nazionale Nidi & Infanzia - GNNI' (Milano-Bicocca University, 2015) — <http://convegno06.org/le-commissioni/> — followed up by thematic working subgroups that (2016-2017) discussed the implications of EU ECEC QF's principles and action statements in light of current reforms to the integrated ECEC system of birth-to-aged-six services, with an eye on developing policy recommendations: [www.grupponidiiinfanzia.it/ciclo-di-seminari-sulle-caratteristiche-dei-servizi-e-delle-scuole/](http://www.grupponidiiinfanzia.it/ciclo-di-seminari-sulle-caratteristiche-dei-servizi-e-delle-scuole/). Launch of the Italian translation of the EU ECEC QF at the European Commission Office in Rome (Sept2016): the event was promoted by ZeroSeiUp (book publisher)

**advocacy** that lead to the formulation of the Law Decree 65/2017. It sets out the decrees for the implementation of the **National Reform on the Integrated System of ECEC** from birth to six years, and thus **overcomes the previously existing split system of governance** (Italian Government, 2015). The *Technical Report* prepared by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR, 2017), which set the background for the L.D. 65/2017 implementation decrees, made explicit reference to the EU ECEC QF. This attests to the contribution of the EU ECEC QF to the process of **affirming the educational value of 0-3 services and the need for a holistic approach that integrates care and learning across a continuum from birth to compulsory school age** (birth to age six). As reported by the country expert from MIUR, a coherent strategy for quality development of ECEC services at national level is not yet in place at the time of writing. Ad hoc measures might be undertaken within the (secondary-level) legislative acts aimed at guiding the implementation of the Law Decree 65/2017, with specific reference to **lifelong-learning and continuing professional development initiatives for ECEC staff (early years educators and preschool teachers)**.

According to the expert, it is likely that such measures will be prioritised in the Multiannual Action Plan that will be adopted by MIUR by the end of 2017, following the forthcoming Presidency Decree approval. Admittedly, the successful implementation of the reform can only be realised by generating awareness of the quality principles<sup>28</sup>, and by providing ongoing professional support to educators and teachers.

In **Lithuania**<sup>29</sup>, the EU ECEC QF was presented at the National Conference ‘*Quality Preschool and Pre-primary Education: what could we improve?*’ (Vilnius, 2015) for policymakers and researchers.<sup>30</sup> It has also been discussed at the local/municipal level and at NGO conferences. As reported by the country expert, the EU ECEC QF has been used to: (i) **plan projects funded by ESF**, with specific reference to the review of the pre-primary education internal evaluation system and the creation of an external evaluation system; and (ii) **inform the revision of the national preschool curriculum**<sup>31</sup>.

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and by GNNI (advocacy group of ECEC professionals) <http://zeroseiup.eu/un-quadro-europeo-per-la-qualita-dei-servizi-educativi-e-di-cura-per-linfanzia-proposta-di-principi-chiave/>. ECEC-SIG conference organised by the Italian Academic Society of Pedagogy (Valle d’Aosta University, 2015): <http://www.siped.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Programma-seminario-Pedagogia-dellinfanzia.pdf>

Presentation of EU ECEC QF key principles at the conference organized by Proteo-Fare-Sapere (professional association linked to the Teachers’ Union CIGL) in Rome where the promotor of the reform on the ECEC integrated system was attending: [www.flcgil.it/web-cronache/2015/04-10-convegno-nazionale-scuola-dell-infanzia-le-nostre-proposte-per-un-percorso-educativo-di-qualita/](http://www.flcgil.it/web-cronache/2015/04-10-convegno-nazionale-scuola-dell-infanzia-le-nostre-proposte-per-un-percorso-educativo-di-qualita/).

<sup>28</sup> These principles are: increasing the availability of from-birth to age-three services and their accessibility by adopting measures that are supportive of children’s attendance; striving for the inclusion of all children (see EU ECEC QF action-statements 1-2); improving the overall quality of preschool education; raising staff qualification at university level (BA) for early childhood educators; and undertaking local-level coordination initiatives (see EU ECEC QF action-statements 3-4).

<sup>29</sup> In Lithuania, ECEC falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science; local authorities co-fund and implement ECEC programmes [EACEA, 2016].

<sup>30</sup> The conference was targeted at all stakeholders involved in ECEC policy decision-making and implementation processes at different levels: heads of education departments from local governments, representatives from different sectors (education, social security, home affairs, finances, economy) as well as universities and colleges engaged in the training of educators, other relevant institutions, and representatives from the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Culture.

<sup>31</sup> EU ECEC QF principles were used for preparing the preschool children’s achievement description (from birth to age six) issued in 2014. ‘The general curriculum aims to guarantee alignment between the curricula for pre-school education, pre-primary education and primary education. It is expected that this revised general curriculum will help teachers, parents and educational institutions implementing the pre-primary education curriculum to adapt it for children of different needs and abilities in a more flexible way and help them prepare for successful learning at school’ [Eurydice - National ECEC Reform Sheet for Lithuania, 2016].



In **Portugal**, the EU ECEC QF has influenced the **processes of curriculum development** that have been underway for the last two years under the Ministry of Education and Science. The new *Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education* (ages three to six provision, falling under the Ministry of Education and Science) presents an **integrated and holistic approach** of different content areas, introduces the learning processes to be developed, and contains practical examples and reflection suggestions for practitioners<sup>32</sup>. The document emphasises **educational continuity with the first cycle of ECEC** (from birth to age three provision, falling under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security). A working group has been established to prepare pedagogical guidelines for *crèche* jointly with the Ministry (currently being drafted). The experts note that through the **coordinated publishing of the Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education (OCEPE) and the Creche Pedagogical Guidelines**, the Government will make an important step in promoting an **integrated approach to quality development of ECEC provision**. It will, they add, facilitate practitioners' pedagogical work across settings and improve children's transitions between home- *crèche* and -kindergarten. This is considered to be innovative, as it takes **an integrated view of childhood from birth to age six, ensuring pedagogical coherence and continuity** between these levels of education until the start of compulsory education (Eurydice-National ECEC Reform Sheet for Portugal, 2016).

In **Romania**<sup>33</sup>, the EU ECEC QF has been discussed mainly at UNICEF and World Bank conferences on ECEC, and during annual meetings with school inspectors for preschool education. Currently, there is no comprehensive quality framework in place, but an expert from the Ministry of Education reported that conditions are being set to develop a 0 to 3 system in a non-competitive project, in partnership with the National Authority for Child Protection and Adoptions and the Ministry of Health<sup>34</sup>. The project will begin at the end of 2017 and focus on the following aspects:

- **harmonising legislation for from birth to three-year-olds in order to improve cross-sectoral cooperation;**
- **elaborating a curriculum framework for ECEC from birth to six-year-olds;**
- **promoting in-service training for the different professionals working with children from birth to age three;**

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The following year, the pre-primary education curriculum was also updated: 'in 2015 the Description of the Achievements of Pre-school Children was prepared in order to renew and improve pre-school education and its curricula. The description should help educators, parents, and education aid specialists to understand what achievements children are expected to attain in their first six years. Pre-school education is evaluated from the perspective of children in this methodical tool. [...] The description is also accompanied by methodological recommendations that explain how the description can be used in daily pedagogical activities in pre-school institutions' [Eurydice - National ECEC Reform Sheet for Lithuania, 2016].

In addition, in order to improve transition from kindergarten to primary school, a piece of legislation, which came into force on 1 September 2016, mandates one-year compulsory pre-primary education from six years of age.

<sup>32</sup> 'Concurrent to the process of revision of the National Curriculum Guidelines (OCEPE, 2016), there was a study aiming to *listen to children's voices on ECEC curriculum*. A more comprehensive approach to curriculum design for the national education system (at all school levels) that listens to children's voices is ongoing (<http://www.dge.mec.pt/conferencia-curriculo-para-o-seculo-xxi-voz-dos-alunos>)' [quote from expert].

<sup>33</sup> In the context of a split system, the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research is entirely responsible for ECEC of children aged three and over, whereas for children under three, it shares responsibility with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly.

<sup>34</sup> The country expert reports that some parts of the EU ECEC QF were translated to support the work of designing the educational policy for from birth to three-year-olds.

- developing **parental support initiatives** (especially in disadvantaged areas) and **complementary community-based measures** in eight regions.

At the same time, the Ministry of Education, **in partnership with UNICEF Romania and the Step by Step Association**, is currently revising and updating the National Strategy on ECEC by taking into consideration the EU ECEC QF principles.

In **Slovakia**<sup>35</sup>, the EU ECEC QF has been discussed at several conferences and discussion forums organised by the Society for Preschool Education (*Spoločnosť pre predškolskú výchovu*)<sup>36</sup>. While a comprehensive quality framework is not yet in place, the country expert from the Ministry of Education reports that the process of preparing such a quality framework — the National Programme of Education named *Learning Slovakia* — is currently being finalised. In addition, the National Programme of Education *Learning Slovakia* will be explicitly focusing on the areas of implementation and action statements mentioned in the EU ECEC QF, namely:

- accessibility — initiatives to **increase the availability of from-birth to age-three settings** and to **create inclusive teams in ECEC settings, which will encourage participation among professionals and families**; more specifically, to increase the access of Roma children to pre-primary education by developing **strategies for inter-agency cooperation** with social-community centres (see statement 2 of EU ECEC QF);
- workforce professionalization — reassessing the **qualification requirements for teachers (at BA level) and for assistants**; the document also addresses the terms of **credit education and life-long learning** of professional staff (see statements 3-4 of EU ECEC QF);
- curriculum — the importance of creating a curriculum for the whole preschool period (from birth to compulsory schooling age) was not addressed in the document; *'this absence was strongly commented on by practitioners and experts, so it is expected the comments will be taken into account'* [quote from expert].

Several organisations and individuals participating in the consultation process commented on the document *Learning Slovakia*. The role played by the EU ECEC QF in this process can be best described by quoting directly the words of the country expert: *'the concept of EU ECEC QF helped us to see ECEC in a complex way. The examples of good practice were inspiring for our practitioners and other professionals.'*

In **Scotland (United Kingdom)**<sup>37</sup>, the work of the EU ECEC QF guided the Scottish Government's strategy *Blueprint for 2020 for the expansion of early learning and childcare (ELC) provision*, to be implemented and delivered by Local Authorities in the forthcoming year. The main pillars of the strategy are **increasing availability, flexibility, affordability of ELC provision**, and **improving its quality through a suitably skilled**

<sup>35</sup> In the context of a split system, preschool education for children aged three to six falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. Since January 2017, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family enacted new legal regulations that define the basic requirements for founding and running facilities for children up to three years of age; the new legal regulations have introduced an obligation to register for existing facilities that provide care for under-threes into the network of social services providers (Eurydice, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> The conferences were held in the cities of Šaľa (2015), Bratislava (2016) and Liptovský Mikuláš (2017). Further information is available at: <http://www.spv-zv.sk/products/uciace-sa-slovensko/>

<sup>37</sup> In Scotland, up to the age of five (when compulsory primary education begins), children can attend early years, family centres or nurseries, or they can be looked after by childminders. All ECEC settings have to consider the policies and guidance implemented through independent bodies responsible for regulating ECEC settings (Care Inspectorate and Scottish Social Services Council); these bodies are accountable to Ministers and through Ministers to the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Government also issues guidance to local authorities on the provision of free early learning and childcare.

**and qualified workforce** (Scottish Government, 2016, pp. 4-6). As part of this strategy, a *Quality Action Plan* — that will support local quality plans — is currently being developed (Scottish Government, 2016, p. 4) and is due for publication in October 2017. The expert reports that any such *Quality Action Plan* is likely to refer to EU ECEC QF principles, with specific reference to the following areas of implementation<sup>38</sup>:

- accessibility — expanding **free entitlement** to ECL from 600 hours to 1140 hours per year for children aged three and over, and extending entitlement to two-year-olds living in disadvantaged circumstances;
- **workforce professionalization** — *Skills Investment Plan* due to be published in October 2017, and *Learning and Development Pathway for Childminders* due for publication in September 2017 (detailing requirements for a mandatory minimum qualification for childminders);
- curriculum — building on the *Curriculum for Excellence - early level* (2007) and on the *Building the Ambition* (Scottish Government, 2014), which provide guidance for practitioners;
- monitoring and evaluation — a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation programme for strategy implementation will be developed;
- **governance and funding** — the *ELC Service Models Working Group* will report by March 2018, providing the operational details of the new *Funding Follows the Child model*, a national standard for becoming a partner provider and which gives guidance on implementing the Scottish Living Wage across all providers. Local Authorities will continue to agree on funded rates at local level, but they are expected to guarantee that these are set to ensure delivery of the national policy framework.

### 3. ECEC POLICY REFORM PROCESSES IN OTHER COUNTRIES

ECEC as a policy field is increasingly garnering attention, and several reforms or policy initiatives aimed at increasing the accessibility and quality of ECEC systems have been undertaken in several countries. As learned from survey responses and documentary sources (Directorate-General of Education and Culture, 2016), ECEC reform trends in EU Member States are broadly attributable to the following policy drivers:

- fostering equal educational opportunities and promoting inclusion (European Commission, 2011a; Council of European Union, 2011; European Commission, 2017; European Commission, 2016);
- realising children’s rights to provision and participation (European Commission, 2011b; Council of Europe, 2016);
- tackling disadvantage and improving children’s outcomes through prevention and early intervention, addressing demographic challenges through conciliation of family and work responsibilities, and reducing poverty and social exclusion (European Commission, 2013b).

The table below summarises the policy initiatives undertaken in those EU Member States where the EU ECEC QF has not been explicitly used. The first column indicates whether or not quality frameworks are in place or are under development. The remaining five columns correspond to five of the EU ECEC QF principles and action statements: an ‘x’ indicates that aspects of the ECEC policy initiatives in that particular country are akin to those of the EU ECEC QF.

<sup>38</sup> During the meetings of the *Quality Reference Group*, the EU ECEC QF was used to help identify especially important issues for the group’s working programme (quote from country expert).

**Table 2** – Countries where the EU ECEC QF did not play a role in national policy debates: cross-national analysis of ECEC reforms in relation to the five areas of implementation of EU ECEC QF’s principles and action-statements.

| MS               | QF | ACCESS | WORKFORCE | CURRICULUM | MONITORING AND EVALUATION | GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING |
|------------------|----|--------|-----------|------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| AT (1-6)         | ◐  | X      | X         | X          |                           | X                      |
| BG (4-6)         |    | X      | X         | X          |                           | X                      |
| DK (0-6)         | ●  | X      | X         | X          |                           |                        |
| ES (0-3) (3-6)   |    | X      |           | X          | X                         | X                      |
| FI (0-7)         |    | X      | X         | X          | X                         |                        |
| FR (3-6)         |    |        |           | X          |                           | X                      |
| HR (0-7)         |    |        |           | X          | X                         |                        |
| LV (1,5-7)       |    |        | X         |            |                           | X                      |
| MT (0-6)         |    | X      |           | X          |                           |                        |
| NL (0/2-4) (4-6) | ◐  |        |           |            |                           |                        |
| NO (1-6)         | ●  |        | X         | X          | X                         |                        |
| PL (0-3) (3-6)   |    | X      | X         | X          | X                         | X                      |
| SL (0-6)         |    | X      | X         |            | X                         |                        |
| SW (1-7)         |    |        | X         | X          |                           | X                      |

● A Comprehensive ECEC Quality Framework is currently in place

◐ Comprehensive ECEC Quality Framework currently under development

No comprehensive ECEC Quality Framework in place

### 3.1 Countries where comprehensive reforms are in place or under development: focus on quality frameworks

In **Bulgaria**<sup>39</sup>, the *National Program 'Development of the system of pre-primary education'* is currently under discussion (Ministry of Education, Bulgaria, 2017). **It is focused on the content of activities during the two years of compulsory pre-primary education (ages five to seven)**. Early language learning and preparation for primary school are both being emphasised<sup>40</sup>. In addition, the Government is running a National Strategy for the Development of Pedagogical Staff (2014-2020), which is intended to create conditions to better attract and retain trained staff in pre-primary and school education. However, the availability of and accessibility to quality ECEC are still the main challenges, especially due to the following:

- poor infrastructure and lack of kindergarten capacity (especially in towns);
- a lack of trained teachers;
- a need for better cooperation with parents and NGOs<sup>41</sup>.

In **Denmark**<sup>42</sup>, the Government passed the *Masterplan for Quality Development* of ECEC in spring 2017<sup>43</sup>. The framework is the result of a consultation process that involved ECEC stakeholders within the practice-based forum '*Kvalitetsforum for dagtilbud*', established by the Government in 2015<sup>44</sup>. The main pillars of the Masterplan are:

- a reinforced curriculum;
- enhanced professionalism and leadership of pedagogues to be achieved through in-service training;

<sup>39</sup> In the context of a split system, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the preschool education provision for children aged three to seven; the last two years of pre-primary education (ages five to seven) are compulsory. Children aged between three months and three years might attend centre-based settings such as a crèche. In addition to the separate settings for younger and older children, there are also unitary settings intended for children aged between ten months and seven years.

<sup>40</sup> The Eurydice database (ongoing reform country-sheet) further reports: '*Other main aim of the Programme is organizing of additional training of children in preparatory groups in state and municipal kindergartens and schools. The Director determines in accordance with pedagogical council the teachers entrusted with the implementation of activities under the national program. The designated teacher prepares a program for additional training, which specify the expected results.*'

<sup>41</sup> As noted in the country analysis of the Education and Training Monitor report (Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016), more efforts are needed to advance desegregation measures and promote intercultural education in contexts which are socially mixed. Although the educational integration of children from disadvantaged groups features prominently in several recently adopted legislative acts (e.g. Strategy for Educational Integration of Children from Ethnic Minorities 2015-2020), no funds have been allocated for the implementation of its Action Plan. It is therefore crucial to ensure consistency between the strategy's aims, the new educational standards, and the programs in the field of education funded by the ESF (Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016, pp. 31-32). On the other hand, after the adoption of the new law for preschool and school education in August 2016, the Ministry of Education and the Government have increased their efforts to improve the current situation.

<sup>42</sup> In the context of an integrated system, ECEC provision for children aged between 26 weeks and six years (compulsory school age) falls under the responsibility of the Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality.

<sup>43</sup> Danish version available online: <https://regeringen.dk/nyheder/udspil-dagtilbud>.

<sup>44</sup> The Danish country expert remarked that the '*BUPL has been involved in the making of the masterplan for ECEC, which formed the basis for the Government policy to be discussed in the Danish Parliament in autumn 2017.*' The EU ECEC QF partly guided the consultation process, '*but only indirectly in the discussions on quality issues, primarily raised by the Union (importance of creating a learning environment and improved staff-child ratio)*'. The expert reported that the Government's main references in the formation of the masterplan were the two OECD surveys Starting Strong and TALIS.

- increased flexibility of day-care service arrangements for families;
- improved transitions from ECEC to school.

In **The Netherlands**<sup>45</sup>, as reported by the country expert, the legislation regulating the childcare sector will change on 1 January 2018, with the aim of stimulating innovation, access and quality of provision.

In **Norway**<sup>46</sup>, between 2013 and 2017, the Directorate for Education and Training developed a system for improving Quality in Kindergartens (*Kvalitet i barnehagen* - KIB). Its aim is to provide updated information on quality for kindergarten staff and owners as part of a reflective practice to ensure and develop quality, according to regulations in the Kindergarten Act and the curriculum framework. The system includes a portal for parents and the public with indicators on quality, and tools for quality assessment and improvement<sup>47</sup>. The tools for reflection will be revised to align with the new curriculum framework (Framework Plan for Kindergarten) that will be implemented from 1 August.

In **Austria**<sup>48</sup>, as part of the reform package agreed upon by the Federal Government in November 2015, common standards and a quality framework will be developed jointly with the regions in due course (Education and Training Monitor, 2016, p. 9).

### 3.2 Countries where recent reforms have been implemented in relation to EU ECEC QF key-principles and action-statements

#### Access to services

Policy measures aimed at increasing the accessibility of provision in terms of its **availability, affordability and usefulness** (statement 1 EU ECEC QF, pp. 21-22) have been undertaken in **Austria, Finland, Malta, Norway, Poland, Spain and Slovenia**.<sup>49</sup> The rationales each country used to drive ECEC policy differed, and led to diverging strategies.

In **Austria** [a unitary system that is highly decentralized at regional level], an economic policy package (*Ausbau der Kinderbetreuungseinrichtungen*) was made available by the Federal Government — and co-

<sup>45</sup> In the Netherlands, until the age of four, children can attend full-day centre-based private provision or home-based care delivered by childminders; next to the private daycare sector, children between ages two and four can attend publicly funded playgroups (mostly half-day) or targeted programmes intended for children from a disadvantaged background. The last two years of pre-primary education, attended by children aged four to six, are offered in school settings.

<sup>46</sup> In their integrated system, the Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for children aged one (legal entitlement to publicly subsidized provision) to six years (compulsory school age).

<sup>47</sup> *Kvalitet i barnehagen* (KIB) <https://www.udir.no/kvalitet-og-kompetanse/kvalitet-i-barnehagen/>

<sup>48</sup> The ECEC system in Austria is highly decentralized at provincial level, meaning that ECEC services are organised in different shapes and forms, under different authorities, and with different regulations in all nine Länder. Whereas legislation, organisation and funding is a responsibility of the provincial government, at federal level, the Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Families and Youth are responsible for designing and co-financing ECEC policies.

<sup>49</sup> The experts from Slovenia stated that the EU ECEC QF — along with 'other EU documents, OECD reports and several international and national studies' — contributed, to a certain extent, to influencing policy development related to the amendment of the legislation. The expert further reported that 'a translation of the measures and a summary of the document were prepared for the experts from the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and the National Education Institute (the pre-school education department)'. However, as no explicit reference to the EU ECEC QF was found in official documents produced by governmental/non-governmental organisations at national, regional or local level (e.g. Law proposals, policy background/discussion papers, policy analysis and research reports, etc.), Slovenia was inserted in the fourth part of the report.



funded by Länder — in order to expand and upgrade childcare facilities between 2014 and 2017. These expansion efforts were focused on ‘childcare provision for children under three years of age, promoting qualified childminding offers and extending opening times during the year. In particular, full-day and flexible childcare arrangements have been supported to be compatible with full-time employment of parents’ (Eurydice, 2016). The main rationales driving the policy initiatives were the reconciliation of work and family life, and enhancing full-time employment opportunities for women.

In **Finland**<sup>50</sup>, the right to ECEC was decreased from full-time to 20 hours per week. This amendment to the ECEC Act came into force on 1 August 2016. However, a child retains the right to early education on a full-time basis if the parents or other guardians work or study full-time, or if this is in the child’s best interest in terms of his or her development, need for special support, or family circumstances. New legislation on client fees in ECEC came into force on 1 March 2017.<sup>51</sup>

In **Malta**<sup>52</sup>, the Government has launched two policy initiatives to increase the availability and affordability of ECEC provision. The *Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving* (June 2014) includes a number of measures to address the root causes, some beginning at an early age, of early school leaving (Eurydice, 2016). The ‘*Free Childcare for All*’ (April 2014) is instead a budgetary measure — announced by the Ministry for Finance and implemented by the Ministry for Education and Employment — aiming to provide more affordable early care to all children whose parents are in employment or education. Its primary aim is to increase the active participation of women in the labour market (Eurydice, 2016).

In **Norway**, starting from August 1<sup>st</sup> 2015, a new national scheme for free core time in day-care was introduced.

The scheme provides free of charge day-care to all four- and five-year-olds from low-income families, regardless of language background. Since August 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 the scheme expanded to include three-year-olds from families with low income. As of Autumn 2016, the right to day-care was expanded to include children who turn one year in September or October the same year as they apply for a space in day-care. Children have the right to attend day-care in the municipality where they reside (Eurydice, 2016).

In **Poland**<sup>53</sup>, since September 2015, local governments responsible for running pre-schools are required to guarantee places of care for all four-year-olds whose parents have applied. The legislation has been in place since June 2013, when — as part of a wider reform aimed at fostering the expansion of ECEC throughout the country — the School Education Act (Ministry of Education, 2013) was amended and placed this obligation on local authorities (Eurydice, 2017). As of September 2017, the legal entitlement

<sup>50</sup> In its integrated system, ECEC provision for children aged 9 months (legal entitlement) to 7 years (compulsory school age) falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

<sup>51</sup> The maximum fee remained EUR 290, but the fees for small low-income families were reduced. The sibling reduction was reformed and the fee for the second child can be, at maximum, 90 % of the first child’s fee (i.e. EUR 261, and for each additional child, EUR 58 per month. Single parent households with one or two children especially benefitted from these amendments.

<sup>52</sup> Children up to age three can attend home-based or centre-based settings, whereas from the age of two years and nine months to four years and nine months they are legally entitled to kindergarten provision (free in state and church establishments). All types of ECEC provision falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Employment.

<sup>53</sup> In its split system, ECEC provision for children under three is supervised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, while pre-primary education for children aged three to six (compulsory school age) falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education.



to a preschool place will be extended to four-year-olds, based on the strong evidence that early learning is crucial for later school success. In addition, in order to improve equal educational opportunities, since January 2016 there is an obligation to employ additional staff in public kindergartens where children with disability are enrolled (Eurydice, 2017). Moreover, in order to support higher numbers of children in kindergartens, the Government increased the subsidy per child for 2016 from PLN 1 305 to PLN 1 370. (Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016)<sup>54</sup>.

In **Slovenia**<sup>55</sup> [a unitary system, decentralized at the municipal level], the country expert reports that changes are being introduced in preschool legislation<sup>56</sup>. To encourage the participation of children in kindergartens in the year prior to compulsory school entry, the Government is planning to adopt a new amendment to the Preschool Act by the end of 2017. This amendment is expected to allow children who are not included in kindergarten to attend shorter programmes of 240 hours a year, which will be free of charge<sup>57</sup>.

In **Spain**<sup>58</sup>, as part of the State Budget approved for 2015, funding was allocated to pre-primary education in order to guarantee a free place for all children aged three to six enrolled in the second cycle of ECEC. The objective is 'ensuring equal access to quality education as well as early care of children with disabilities so that they can develop their full potential (Eurydice, 2016)'. In addition, in order to address the wide disparities between Autonomous Communities of from birth to two-year-olds' participation in

<sup>54</sup> Although the enrolment rate in early childhood education in Poland remains to be lower than other countries, over the past decade Poland has been catching up quickly. Between 2005 and 2015, the enrolment rates for three- and four-year-olds increased by 37 and 41 percentage points respectively.

<sup>55</sup> In the context of a unitary system, ECEC provision for children aged eleven months (legal entitlement to a publicly subsidized place) to six years (compulsory school age) falls under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

<sup>56</sup> In November 2016, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport started a public debate on the Act to amend the Pre-school Act (<https://e-uprava.gov.si/drzava-indruba/e-demokracija/predlogi-predpisov/predlog-predpisa.html?id=7728>). In particular, it aims to: make kindergarten fees more affordable for parents; reduce red tape for kindergartens; allow public kindergartens to pursue and organise their activities at corporate locations that provide pre-school care for their employees' children; and identify all providers whose activity may be classified as education and care of pre-school children, and compel these providers to register at the responsible ministry.

<sup>57</sup> In Slovenia, children are legally entitled to a publicly subsidised place from the age of eleven months to six years old (compulsory school entry). However, local authorities are not always able to satisfy the demand for places for younger children (European Commission, 2015).

<sup>58</sup> In Spain, pre-primary education is divided into two cycles — from birth to two-year olds, and three- to six-year olds — which can be provided either in separate settings or in combined settings for both cycles. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport defines the general framework for the entire ECEC, while the Departments of Education of the Autonomous Communities are responsible for running pre-primary education in their territories, and local authorities also play a large role in the first cycle of ECEC (from birth to two-year-olds).

ECEC (Save the Children, 2015), two funding plans were launched in 2013: the *National Strategic Plan for Childhood and Adolescence (2013-2016)*<sup>59</sup> and the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (2013-2016)*<sup>60</sup>.

Significant efforts undertaken by Member States to increase the accessibility of ECEC provision in terms of availability, affordability and usefulness — especially for families from disadvantaged groups — should be recognised. However, the data shows that issues related to *comprehensibility* and *desirability*<sup>61</sup> tend to be overlooked, and remain largely unexplored in the ECEC policy debate. Unequal access is a persistent and ubiquitous challenge for Member States (Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016), and the EU ECEC QF could be used to more precisely identify and analyse the unique barriers each country may have to the participation of disadvantaged groups. This could potentially support Member State's efforts to discover areas for improvement, and could provide them with guidance and support in designing tailor-made policies and initiatives that are more responsive to the needs of children, families and communities. Integrated measures — which focus on making ECEC provision more *comprehensible* and *desirable* for children and families from diverse socio-cultural groups — may in fact turn out to be more effective in increasing ECEC participation than adopting measures that solely focus on availability, affordability and usefulness of services (Bennett, Gordon, Edelmann, 2012).

### The ECEC workforce

Policy measures that aim to develop a well-qualified workforce, whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role (Statement 3, EU ECEC QF, pp. 31-35) or to promote supportive working conditions (Statement 4, EU ECEC QF, pp. 35-38), have recently been undertaken in **Austria, Latvia, Finland, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden**.

In **Austria**, as part of the reform package agreed upon by the Federal Government in November 2015, 'the initial training of ECEC staff will be part of the professional school system (*Berufsbildende Höhere Schulen*), which has been reclassified at the tertiary short cycle level in ISCED 2011. Improved pedagogical training will include how to deal with both four- to six-year-olds and under-one- to three-year-olds' (Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016). The reformed ECEC staff training was not, however, raised to bachelor or master level, as requested by Austria's social partners (Salzer, 2015).

<sup>59</sup> The main objective of the Plan, approved in April 2013, was to make as much progress as possible towards compliance with the rights of children and adolescents in Spain, but also in terms of their duties and responsibilities. Two out of the eight main objectives of the Plan are related to pre-primary education: Support for families (Objective 1): 'Optimise the provision of quality services in pre-primary schools for children aged 0-3 during parents' working hours, bringing both parameters closer to the guidelines of the European Union, supporting compliance with some minimum requirements regarding quality, training of staff and facilities, and promoting the exchange of experiences on reconciliation and the development of educational and recreational activities'; Quality education (Objective 2): 'Ensure the free nature of the second cycle of pre-primary education from the age of 3, as well as the early care of children with disabilities so that they can develop their full potential' (Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad, 2013).

<sup>60</sup> The Plan was drawn up by the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality in collaboration with different ministries, Autonomous Communities, local bodies and, in particular, the Social Action Third Sector. It was approved in December 2013 in order to respond to social needs, improve the effectiveness of the Spanish protection system, and support the most vulnerable people. In the field of education, the Plan proposed an assessment on the risk of social exclusion in the scale for admission into pre-primary schools offering the first cycle of the stage (from birth to three-year-olds) (Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad, 2014).

<sup>61</sup> See EU ECEC QF statement 2, pp. 24-26.

In **Latvia**<sup>62</sup>, new regulations on teachers' remuneration, introduced in September 2016, set new and progressively increasing (September 2017 and 2018) minimum salary levels for preschool education teachers. In addition, since the enactment of the *'childcare support and child-minders service'* reform in September 2013, childminders are required to attend 40 hours of training and may be entitled to receive Guidelines-based methodological support (*pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde*), to enable them to deliver the Preschool Education Programme (*pirmsskolas izglītības vadlīnijas*) according to such Guidelines (Eurydice, 2016; Eurydice, 2014/2015).

In **Finland**, the child-staff ratio in center-based settings was changed from 1:7 to 1:8 for children over three years old from 1 August 2016. As a positive measure, the number of ECEC teachers trained at university will be increased during the coming years; in total, about 4860 new ECEC teacher student places at universities between 2016 and 2021 will be government funded.

In **Norway**, a *National Strategy for Competence Development and Recruitment of kindergarten teachers* (2014-2020) was introduced in order to address the problem of unqualified kindergarten staff. It proposes measures to ensure that a higher percentage of this group is formally trained to teach kindergarten children. The strategy covers a time span of seven years, allowing for long-term planning and strategic thinking for kindergarten owners and staff<sup>63</sup>. It has four focus areas: pedagogical leadership, the kindergarten as a learning organization, formation and cultural diversity, good language learning environment for all children, and children in need of special support (Eurydice, 2016). The National Strategy was revised in August 2017 and has been extended to 2022.

In **Slovenia**, the Preschool Act is currently undergoing an amendment process that started in 2016; amendments are meant to allow additional flexibility to the provision of the public kindergartens network and to take *'into account modern concepts in the field of pre-school education, which dictate the renaming of the Preschool teacher assistant into Preschool teacher - assistant. This also includes some changes in his/her tasks (e.g. more independent implementation of certain activities of pre-school education)* (survey response from country expert).

In **Sweden**<sup>64</sup>, the *National School Development Programmes* — initiated by the Government in 2016 and implemented by *Skolverket* (Swedish National Agency for Education) — will include preschool staff. A certain number of professional development initiatives have been made available since 2017 (national

<sup>62</sup> Children aged one to five (legal entitlement to a place) to seven (compulsory school age) can attend either unitary settings or subsidized home-based provision. The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the register of providers and for providing methodological support (content), whereas the Ministry of Welfare supervises and controls providers' compliance with the regulations.

<sup>63</sup> The kindergarten owner is responsible for ensuring that employees are given the possibility to participate, but in order to succeed, more stakeholders need to be engaged and to collaborate. Regional networks have been established to develop measures locally. Kindergarten owners are encouraged to support assistants in taking a diploma for trade certificate as child and youth care workers, or to take kindergarten teacher education on a part-time basis. Another measure is the popular national leadership education for Heads in kindergartens. Associations of municipal and private owners as well as staff organisations and local and regional authorities are important stakeholders engaged in the implementation of the national strategy. The strategy also includes cooperation with universities and university colleges, as well as other relevant institutions that provide relevant education at different levels.

<sup>64</sup> In Sweden, the ECEC system consists of unitary centres — attended by children aged one (legal entitlement to a place) to six — and pre-primary classes attended by children aged six to seven (compulsory school age). All the above falls under the responsibility of the National Agency for Education.

funding is allocated for this purpose) in addition to the continuous professional development traditionally provided by regions and municipalities<sup>65</sup>.

In **Poland**, despite the fact that no professionalisation initiatives have been undertaken recently, the country expert reported that *'MA studies are the most popular educational path for pre-school education teachers. High quality pre-school education is guaranteed by well-prepared teaching staff at kindergartens: most frequently, they are university graduates holding a master's degree (84 % of teaching staff), and less often holding a bachelor's degree (about 12 %)'* (survey response from country expert). Moreover, kindergartens may employ specialists such as speech therapists, psychologists or school pedagogues, but they may also use the services of counselling and guidance centres, which operate at the district level. In addition, integration kindergartens and mainstream kindergartens with integration classes employ additional teachers trained in special education.

## Curriculum

Policy measures aimed at developing curricula and pedagogical guidelines (Statement 5, EU ECEC QF, pp. 41-45) — which might be combined with the specific purpose of sustaining practitioners' reflectivity (Statement 6, EU ECEC QF, pp. 45-50) — have recently been undertaken in **Austria, Croatia, Finland, France, Malta, Norway, Poland, Spain and Sweden**.

In **Austria**, under the first package of laws implementing the 2015 education reforms (adopted in June 2016), the transition programme *'Schulstart-Neu'* was introduced to link the last compulsory year of ECEC with the first two years of primary school. The programme aims to develop practices so that 'the last compulsory year of nursery school and the first two primary school years are understood as joint school-entry phase by:

- creating the prerequisites for passing on the necessary educational information from the nursery school to the primary school after pupils enrol for the latter; [...]
- further developing syllabuses in a way that they are more oriented to competence, with a clear focus on greater teaching of basic competences;
- providing compulsory intensive language courses for children needing language support so that the children can successfully complete the school-entry phase;
- involvement of parents in order to best promote the learning progress of pupils' (Eurydice, 2016).

The rationale for introducing these changes seems to be more oriented towards early screening and intervention (Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016, p. 9), rather than towards sustaining reflective processes that foster dialogue and collaboration between professionals, children and families to improve pedagogical practices.

In **Croatia**<sup>66</sup>, the *National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education* (covering services for children from six months to compulsory school age) was released after the first stage of the 'comprehensive curricular

<sup>65</sup> Preschool teachers have since 1977 been educated at tertiary level (bachelor's degree). Over the past few decades, following the transfer of preschool education from the Ministry of Social Health and Welfare to the Ministry of Education — as well as the implementation of the first National Curriculum for Preschool — a number of Government initiatives have offered high quality CPD to in-service preschool teachers.

<sup>66</sup> In its unitary system, ECEC provision for children aged six months to seven years is delivered in centre-based settings falling under the responsibility of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.

reform' — devoted to the development of curricular documents — was completed in February 2016. In 2015, the Government appointed an *Expert Group for Implementation of the Curricular Reform* with the task of overseeing the process of drafting new curricular documents and gathering public support for the reform by engaging in consultation with all relevant stakeholders (Education and Training Monitoring, 2016, pp. 42-43). As reported by the country expert, the *National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education* has a strong value-based component,

*arising from the commitment of the Croatian education policy to the comprehensive personal development of the child, to preserving and developing Croatian [...] heritage, European co-existence and to creating a society of knowledge and values that will encourage progress and sustainable development. These values are: knowledge, identity, humanity and tolerance, responsibility, autonomy, creativity'. The main pillars and principles of the National Curriculum are<sup>67</sup>: 'flexibility of the education process in kindergartens, cooperation and partnership with parents, ensuring continuity in education, lifelong learning and professional training of educators and other professionals, as well as enhancing educational practice (country expert from Croatia).*

In **Finland**, a new National Core Curriculum for ECEC was launched in October 2016 by the Finnish National Agency for Education. The Core Curriculum is based on the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. New local curricula and individual plans for each child participating in ECEC must be adopted from August 2017. The core curriculum covers ECEC from birth to six-year-olds.

In **France** (with specific reference to pre-primary education to which children are entitled from age three, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education), the curriculum for preschool was reformed in March 2015 and launched in September 2016 (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2015). As part of legislation enacted in July 2013 for restructuring schools, the new curriculum envisions a unique learning cycle for pre-primary school, and highlights its vital role as a first step to ensure every child's success by building the educational foundation on which children's future learning in school will be based (Eurydice, 2016). The main purpose of pre-primary school education is to 'make children want to go to school to learn and build their personality' by adapting educational methodologies to young children's learning strategies, diversifying activities in order to respond to children's specific ways of learning, and allowing children to live and learn together (Eurydice, 2016).

In **Malta**, the *National Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012) was the first document to have a distinct section for Early Years, and it identified five learning outcomes. The final version was launched in 2012 after a six-month consultation period. According to the country expert, the '*process of implementation has been rather slow, and despite a strategy for implementation being drawn up in 2014, there is currently no clear or explicit direction as to how this will be taken forward.*'<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> According to the country expert, the Curriculum also '*encourages and strengthens the development of eight core competences for lifelong learning, adopted by the Croatian education policy as part of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning.*'

<sup>68</sup> 'In September 2016, the Ministry for Education and Employment launched the first linguistic policy for the early years entitled 'A Language Policy for the Early Years in Malta and Gozo'. This language policy has been drawn up by the Language in Education Committee following the publication of a consultation document in October 2015 and a wide consultation with parents, teachers and the general public. The policy promotes the bilingual development in Maltese and English of young children (from birth to age seven) stemming from The National Curriculum Framework (2012), the National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo



With specific reference to the recent curriculum reform implemented in **Norway** (Ministry of Education and Science, FOR-2017-04-24-487), one of the country experts reports that *'due to the discussion — taking place in the sector and in parliament — about fears of schoolification of kindergartens (one- to five-year-olds), a renewed presentation of play is given in the recent Framework Plan'*<sup>69</sup>. In particular, the new curriculum framework states that each kindergarten shall take care of children's need for play, and highlights the role of staff in actively supporting children-initiated play and using them as opportunities to enhance socialization and learning (see translation in footnote)<sup>70</sup>. The revised Framework Plan clarifies staff responsibilities with respect to inclusion, diversity and children's experiences and well-being.

In **Poland**, the *Core Curriculum for Preschool Education* (ages three to seven)<sup>71</sup> was amended in June 2016 and implemented starting in the 2016/17 school year. A stronger emphasis has been put on the preparation of basic and social skills aiming at smoothing the transition from pre-school settings to school. In addition, from September 2017 all children in pre-school education settings learn foreign languages using other methods than schools do.

In **Spain**, the *Act on the Improvement of the Quality of Education*<sup>72</sup> was amended in 2013, asserting that 'from the 2014/15 school year — with specific reference to the second cycle of pre-primary education (ages three to six) — the Government is responsible for establishing:

- the objectives, skills and evaluation criteria of the core curriculum, which will represent 55 % of the school timetable in the Autonomous Communities with a co-official language and 65 % in the rest;
- the foundations for multilingual education' (Eurydice, 2016).

In **Sweden**, the *Curriculum for the Preschool* (*Löroplan för Förskolan Lpfö98*)<sup>73</sup> was revised in 2016 to improve the transition between the preschool, the preschool class and the leisure time centre. Currently, the document states that information about the content of a child's education shall be transferred from preschool to preschool class, and the responsibility for knowledge transfer has been clarified (Eurydice, 2017). According to one of the country experts, the curriculum is being revised again at the time of this review and the new version will be presented in March 2018. However, the overarching principles and values will not change: it is a value-based document, which specifies fundamental values (e.g. democracy)

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(2014) and the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024 and is intended to provide national guidelines for bilingual education' (Eurydice, 2016).

<sup>69</sup> Framework Plan for Kindergartens <https://www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/barnehage/rammeplan/framework-plan-for-kindergartens2017.pdf>, Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2017).

<sup>70</sup> 'Play must have a central place in the kindergarten, and the value of play "in itself" must be recognized. The kindergarten shall provide good conditions for play, friendship and the children's own culture. Play should be an arena for children's development and learning, and for social and linguistic interaction. The kindergarten will inspire and accommodate various types of play both indoor and outdoor. Kindergartens should contribute that all children experience joy, humor, excitement and commitment through play - alone and with others. The staff should: a) organize space, time and play material to inspire different types of play, b) help the children gain common experiences as a basis for play and facilitate the development of game themes, c) promote an inclusive environment where all children can participate in play and experience joy in play, d) observe, analyze, support, participate in and enrich the game on the children's premises, e) guide the children if the game causes unfortunate interaction patterns, f) be aware of and evaluate the own role and participation in the children's play, g) take initiative to play and actively help everyone get into play' (translation by country expert 2 from Norway).

<sup>71</sup> Announcement about the amendment: <http://www.dziennikustaw.gov.pl/DU/2017/356>.

<sup>72</sup> The act is available here: [www.boe.es/boe/dias/2013/12/10/pdfs/BOE-A-2013-12886.pdf](http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2013/12/10/pdfs/BOE-A-2013-12886.pdf).

<sup>73</sup> The document is available here: <https://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=2704>.

and overarching goals, but not the means to achieve such goals, and therefore it does not give detailed instructions to how to translate them into practice<sup>74</sup>.

### Monitoring and evaluation

Policy measures aimed at developing monitoring and evaluation procedures that produce information at the relevant level of governance, and which support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice (Statement 7, EU ECEC QF, pp. 53-55), have recently been undertaken in **Croatia, Finland, Poland, Slovenia and Spain**.

In **Croatia**, according to the country expert,

*ensuring the quality of early childhood and preschool education is the result of well-devised and continuous activity according to previously agreed criteria. The quality of the education process is monitored at two levels: through internal evaluation carried out by the kindergarten (self-assessment and self-evaluation) and continuous external evaluation. The National Centre for External Evaluation of Education has developed the materials for self-evaluation of quality and it assists kindergartens in using such materials. The authorities competent for external evaluation in Croatia are the Ministry of Science and Education, the Education and Teacher Training Agency, and the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education.*

In **Finland**, as part of new legislation to renew the function and role of the ECEC system (Early Childhood Education Act 2015/580), the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre began to develop a Framework for the evaluation of the Finnish ECEC system. At the same time, research has been commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Culture to provide a research-informed overview and to analyse the current situation (Karila, Kosonen & Järvenkallas, 2017). The recommendations of the Starting Strong IV Report on Monitoring Quality (OECD, 2015), as well as results of the research projects VakaVai<sup>75</sup>, CARE<sup>76</sup>, CHILDCARE<sup>77</sup>, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) started implementing in 2016 two key-projects for the construction of new national-level evaluation system:

- the *Evaluation of the New National Core Curriculum for ECEC*<sup>78</sup>, which focuses on the processes related to the implementation of the national core curriculum developed over a two-year consultation process and which entered into force on 1 August 2017;

<sup>74</sup> The curriculum formulates goals for the following areas: a) Norms and Values, b) Development and Learning, c) Influence of the Child, d) Preschool and Home, e) Co-operation between the Preschool class, the School and the Leisure Time Centre, f) Follow-Up, Evaluation and Development, and g) Responsibility of the Head of the Preschool.

With specific reference to the EU ECEC QF, one of the country experts from Sweden gave further comment: *'as far as we know, there is no official reference made to the EU Quality Framework, rather only to the latest OECD report, when it comes to the ongoing revision [re: Curriculum for Preschool]. However, as there is large degree of autonomy in Swedish society, it is not possible to know what is going on in all 290 different Municipalities across Sweden. We cannot say for sure that individual municipalities [which are responsible for ECEC provision through the organisation of preschools for one- to five- year-olds and preschool classes for six-year-olds] have not been translated or been influenced by the EUECEC QF. However, Swedish ECEC aligns well with and has applied the overarching EU ECEC QF principles'*.

<sup>75</sup> <https://vakavai.wordpress.com/>

<sup>76</sup> <http://ecec-care.org/>

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.jyu.fi/edupsy/fi/tutkimus/tutkimushankkeet/kotisivut/childcare>

<sup>78</sup> <https://karvi.fi/en/event/evaluation-national-core-curriculum-early-childhood-education/>



- *Supporting Early Childhood Education Providers in Quality Management*<sup>79</sup>, which aims to produce information and tools for evaluating early childhood education at different levels, thereby supporting early childhood education providers in their quality management.

In **Poland**, legislation requires that pre-school teachers are responsible for the continuous observation of individual children and for keeping records of their achievements. *'This is aimed at the recognition of children's needs and provides a basis for teachers' cooperation with counselling and healthcare specialists. The information gathered helps teachers in their daily work with children and in contacts with children's parents. Moreover, pre-school teachers prepare a diagnosis of each child at the end of pre-school education in the form of a written document for parents'* (country expert from Poland).

In **Slovenia**, the country expert reports that *'with the aim of raising and maintaining the quality of education, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is preparing a new National Framework for the Quality Assessment and Assurance in the Field of Education'*. The National Framework of Quality Assessment and Assurance in the Field of Education defines the management of QAA at the system-level and at the level of educational organisations. The purpose of the National Framework is to define a common concept of Quality Assessment and Assurance (QAA) on the level of educational institutions e.g. kindergartens, basic schools (catering to pupils aged 6 to 15 years), upper-secondary schools, and also — indirectly — evaluation on the level of the education system. Annual partial reports on the system evaluation will be published; a summary report on QAA procedures and quality preservation and improvement will be prepared every three years. These reports will inform further system changes to the QAA in education, and be studied by education policymakers. The National Framework of QAA in the Field of Education is expected to establish expert cores in addition to the implementation of a unified system of quality assurance. Educational institutions (e.g. kindergartens) will benefit from the knowledge of experts within the expert cores, which will be established to provide technical support and training in the implementation of self-evaluation. Parallel to the existing self-evaluation, various forms of external evaluation which are already in force will be preserved<sup>80</sup>.

In **Spain**, the country expert reports that — with the aim of improving the quality and effectiveness of the education and training systems — educational *inspection* and *evaluation* have been introduced by the Act

<sup>79</sup> <https://karvi.fi/en/event/supporting-early-childhood-education-providers-quality-management/>

<sup>80</sup> This national framework will be tested within the project *Establishment, updating and pilot testing of the QAA model in education*. Its basic purpose is to develop and test the model, to maintain quality where it has already been achieved, and to raise quality where it is low. The basic aims of the project are to: a) establish a uniform system of quality assessment and assurance; b) unify the understanding and approach to the self-evaluation of schools and kindergartens, taking into account sectoral specifics; c) strengthen the capacities to implement self-evaluation on the systemic, organizational and individual levels; d) develop and prepare the selected obligatory and optional referential frameworks and indicators for the implementation of improvements and the related self-evaluation of kindergartens and schools; e) establish expert cores in public institutions in order to support kindergartens and schools in QAA (at the present time there are no expert cores for quality in the Slovene education system); f) establish cooperation between the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and expert cores in order to provide a continuous (even after the completion of the programme) and effective operation of the QAA system; and g) establish a 'coordination-analytical centre' of QAA at the MESS (the Education Development Office), which will be responsible for the preparation of joint evaluation results of the education system. At the end of the project in August 2018, the model, adequately updated and tested, is expected to be implemented in all educational institutions. This will make an important contribution towards a better, more systematic and comprehensive planning of measures and development policies in the field of data- and proof-based education.

on the Improvement of the Quality of Education (2013 amendment) as two differentiated pathways. In particular, the document states that:

- *‘educational inspection* ensures compliance with the law, the guarantee of rights and duties of those participating in the teaching and learning processes, the improvement of the education system, and the quality and equity of education, whereas
- the purpose of the *evaluation of the education system* is to:
  - a) contribute to the improvement of the quality and equity of education,
  - b) steer educational policies,
  - c) increase the transparency and effectiveness of the education system,
  - d) offer information on the degree of compliance with the improvement objectives established by the education authorities,
  - e) provide information on the degree of achievement of the Spanish and European educational objectives, as well as on compliance with the educational commitments made concerning the demand of the Spanish society and the goals set in the context of the European Union.’<sup>81</sup>

Specific reference to monitoring and evaluation procedures designed by taking into primary account the best interest of the child (Statement 8, EU ECEC QF, pp. 56-58) is made only in the case of **Sweden**:

*Noteworthy is that —concerning ECEC quality — it is the preschool itself, the work that is going on in the preschool, that must be assessed and evaluated, not the performance of the children. The Swedish School Inspectorate — which is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the education system in Sweden — conducts regular inspections and identifies areas for improvement: there is a constant effort to safeguard high and even quality across the country [...]. In addition, a lot of work is going on locally to make sure that the work in the preschools aligns with the intentions and goals in the curriculum (country expert from Sweden).*

## Governance and funding

In **Poland**, recent policy initiatives have sought to promote a better alignment of governance by allowing ECEC system stakeholders to have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities. Among these is the collaboration with partner organisations (Statement 9, EU ECEC QF, pp. 59-62). As reported by the country expert, *‘aligning the goals for ECEC quality improvement through legislation and regulations is the purpose of the new Education Act (Prawo oświatowe)’*.

Legislation, regulation and/or funding initiatives to progress towards universal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC (Statement 10, EU ECEC QF, pp. 62-64) have been implemented in **Austria, France, Latvia, Poland, Spain and Sweden**. These mainly consisted of policy initiatives to direct additional resources — through funding programmes — towards increasing the participation of younger children (ages 0-3) in ECEC provision, with a particular focus on disadvantaged areas. In fewer cases, the purpose of such funding schemes combined a concern for equal access with a concern for increasing the quality of educational provision.

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<sup>81</sup> Country expert report for Spain.

In **Austria**, the programme ‘Extension of ECEC’ (*Ausbau der Kinderbetreuungseinrichtungen*) was launched in 2016 with a specific focus on funding childcare places for children under three years of age, in order to close regional gaps in childcare provision (Eurydice, 2016).<sup>82</sup>

In **France**, in line with the multi-year *Plan against Poverty and for Social Inclusion* approved in January 2013, ‘the Government has undertaken to create — until 2017 — around 275 000 childcare solutions for young children under 3 years old and intends to balance out regional inequalities by prioritising the provision of financial resources to the poorest areas (EPIC country profile, 2016)’. The reduction of social and regional inequalities is also set out in the *Act for the Refoundation of the School of the Republic* (July 2013) that defines a fundamental objective: to reduce the gaps existing in academic achievements between educational priority zones (EPZ) and other pupils in France to less than 10%<sup>83</sup>. The focus is on pre-primary education and envisions the implementation of innovative learning strategies (the “*more teachers than classrooms*” scheme) along with enhancing schooling for children under three years of age (the “*open schools*” scheme), particularly for educational priority zones and isolated rural areas. The goal is to welcome 30% of children under the age of three (EPIC country profile, 2016).

In **Latvia**<sup>84</sup> — where entitlement to free provision is in place for children aged one-and-a-half and older — the Government implemented the pilot project “*Childcare support and child-minders service*” (2013). Its aim is to provide financial support for parents who need childcare for their children, but are not benefiting from municipalities’ public provision (municipalities have the legal obligation to provide a place, but often have long waiting lists to register). The project aims to: a) increase the availability of free-of-charge ECEC through a combination of public subsidies (co-funding from the state, co-funding of municipalities, and cash transfer to the private service provider)<sup>85</sup>; and b) ensure the upskilling of childminders for delivering the preschool education programme within home-base provision by setting requirements, registration and supervision of all childcare services (Eurydice, 2016). Since January 2016, those municipalities which still do not provide enough public ECEC places will have to entirely cover the expenses for a child’s enrolment in a private setting (Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2015).

<sup>82</sup> Between 2011 and 2014, a total of EUR 55 million was made available, and the regional governments co-fund these efforts. Austria also adopted an economic policy package under which EUR 100 million annually will be invested to expand and upgrade childcare facilities in the period 2014 to 2017: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1248&langId=en&intPageId=3632>  
[https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:National\\_Reforms\\_in\\_Early\\_Childhood\\_Education\\_and\\_Care](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:National_Reforms_in_Early_Childhood_Education_and_Care).

<sup>83</sup> The 2014 ‘*Education Priority Zone*’ Plan targeting schools in disadvantaged areas should be implemented by 2017 and will be evaluated in 2018/2019. In 2016/2017, efforts will focus on further implementing the ‘*More teachers than classrooms*’ and ‘*Open schools*’ schemes introduced by the reform, increasing participation in early childhood education by children under three (Education and Training Monitor, pp. 101-102).

<sup>84</sup> It has a unitary ECEC system, but separates responsibilities for pedagogical content and methodological support (Ministry of Education) and supervision/control of providers in relation to compliance with regulation (Ministry of Welfare).

<sup>85</sup> As of January 2016, local governments will be responsible for the provision of financial support for parents who need ECEC support for their children aged one-and-a-half to four years, and who are not attending public (municipal) kindergartens. Proposed amendments to the Education Law will develop a funding methodology to be used by local governments to calculate and cover the costs of a child’s place in a private kindergarten, if the local government cannot provide for the child publicly funded place in a municipal ECEC institution. Local governments will also be responsible for covering costs in cases when ECEC is provided by a childminder (home-based provision) (Eurydice, 2016).

In **Poland**, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy launched the ‘*Maluch*’ (Toddler)<sup>86</sup> Programme in 2012, to encourage local governments to establish crèches, kids' clubs, day-cares, and to increase the availability and sustainability (operational costs) of childcare provision for children under three (Eurydice, 2016). Funds earmarked for the development of childcare within the *Maluch* programme steadily grew in the period 2011 to 2015, from PLN 15.2 million to PLN 151 million (or, approximately EUR 3.4 million to EUR 34 million). In the 2016 edition, PLN 151 million (around EUR 34 million) were allocated for public and non-public crèches, kids' clubs and day-cares. In addition, in order to support the higher number of children in kindergartens (aged three to six), the government increased the subsidy per child for the year 2016 from PLN 1 305 to PLN 1 370. Moreover, since January 2017, local governments have received a new type of financial support from the state budget for six-year-olds. It is three times higher than for other pre-primary education children, at PLN 4 300 per child. The School Education Act has also been amended by Parliament to limit the fee paid by parents for each hour of pre-primary education, beyond the minimum five free compulsory hours, to a maximum of Polish Złoty (PLN) 1 (USD 0.30), with earmarked grants to local governments from the state budget to cover additional costs.

In **Spain**, in order to address the wide disparities existing among Autonomous Communities in terms of children's access to 0-3 services, the Government launched two funding plans in 2013: the *National Strategic Plan for Childhood and Adolescence* (2013-2016), and the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* (2013-2016).<sup>87</sup> In addition, as part of the State Budget approved for 2015, funding was allocated to pre-primary education in order to guarantee a free place for all children aged three to six enrolled in the second cycle of ECEC (Eurydice, 2016).

In **Sweden**, initiatives such as the ‘*Cooperation for Better Schools*’ and the ‘*Funding for smaller group sizes in the preschool class*’ have been introduced in order to increase the quality and equality of the Swedish ECEC system. In particular, the initiative ‘*Cooperation for Better Schools*’ (*Samverkan för bästa skola*) was extended to 2017 in order to also include preschools and preschool classes: there will be a particular focus on preschools/preschool classes that operate in challenging conditions, and participation in the programme will be based on an assessment by the responsible authority (*Skolverket*) (Eurydice, 2017). Concerning the ‘*Funding for smaller group sizes in the preschool class*’, since the school year 2016/2017, preschool education providers can apply for a government grant to permit smaller groups of children. The intention is to raise the quality of preschool classes by reducing group sizes and by increasing the number of staff; particular focus will be on group sizes for the youngest children (Eurydice, 2017).

### Concluding remarks

The EU ECEC QF lists five implementation areas: access; workforce; curriculum; monitoring and evaluation; and governance and funding. On the basis of these, or at least in line with them, different approaches have been adopted by Member States in order to increase children's participation to ECEC services and to improve their quality. At the same time, however, there are many competing, intersecting

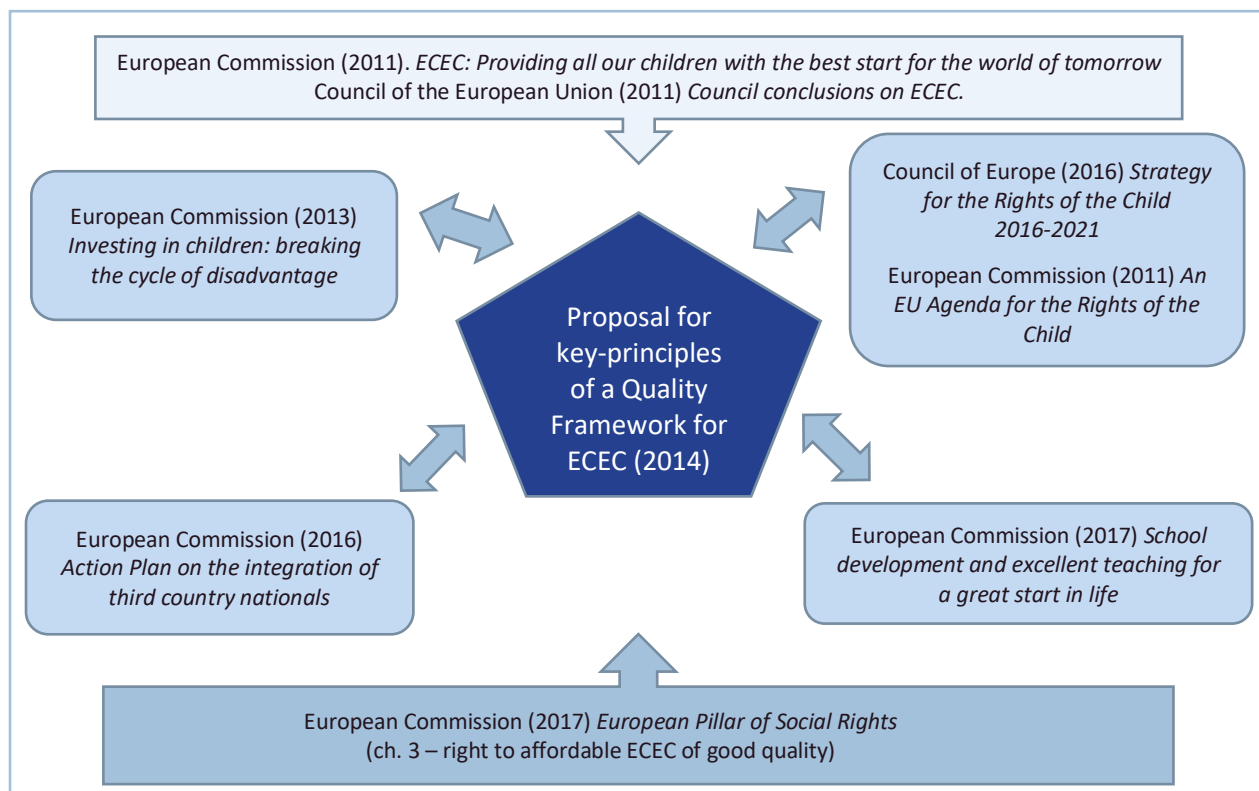
<sup>86</sup> The *Maluch* (Toddler) programme provides financial support for the creation of alternative forms of childcare for children up to the age of three and exceptionally up to the age of four. Forms of alternative childcare include clubs, day-care centres and nurseries. The Programme also seeks to increase the quality of care. The 2016 edition of the *Toddler Programme* covers three modules: the first is directed to the establishment and running of new care places (PLN 60 million), the second to the support of the existing places including the non-public ones (PLN 80 million) and the third one is addressed to higher education institutions (PLN 11 million). As a result of the *Maluch* Programme, an additional 9,000 new childcare places were created (EPIC country profile, 2016).

<sup>87</sup> See p.19 of this report for a description of the strategic objectives of the plans.

and overlapping arguments and perspectives involved in defining and providing a rationale for investing in the expansion and quality improvement of ECEC (see NESSE, 2009 for a comprehensive overview). Yet, as pointed out in a previous research review conducted by the NESSE Network for the European Commission DG EAC, ‘not all these perspectives are compatible: indeed they might sit along one another without the contradictions being addressed (NESSE, 2009, p. 26)’. Especially in contexts where the governance and provision of ‘childcare’ and ‘early education’ is split between different authorities, ECEC spans several policy areas, with the result that straightforward or coherent policy development and implementation may be rather difficult to achieve. In some contexts, services for younger children (from birth to age three) might be still framed mainly as services for working parents, and therefore the policy measures implemented in this sector might tend to focus more on increasing the availability and affordability of ‘childcare provision’ rather than focusing on nurturing children’s development, well-being and participation. Services for the older age group (children aged three to compulsory school age) might be conceived as ‘early education’ services, and therefore the policy initiatives undertaken for quality improvement might tend to be focused more on pre-academic learning and preparation for school, rather than on supporting the holistic development of children according to their natural learning strategies.

In this sense, enabling better coordination and integration of policy initiatives undertaken across the different policy domains of ECEC at EU level — *Education & Training, Social Investment Package, Strategy on the Right of the Child* — could very well have a positive impact on sustaining EU Member States’ processes of policy reform. Given its multi-disciplinary dimension and the wide consensus on which it is built, the EU ECEC QF could be adopted as a reference tool for creating common ground for discussion, confrontation and cross-fertilization across different sectors related to the education and welfare of young children. This may also help develop a shared vision for ECEC, which in turn would allow for greater coherency of policy measures in the fields of education, family support and welfare, both at EU level and within Member States.

**Table 3:** the EU ECEC QF in the context of other European policy initiatives that are (entirely or partly) related to the field of early childhood education and care



#### 4. GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES FOR ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF ECEC SERVICES: THE ROLE OF THE EU ECEC QF AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

As reported by country experts in the survey, top-down approaches— that attempt to raise the quality of ECEC provision at national level through the implementation of policy measures — are often complemented and interact with bottom-up approaches. The latter play an important role in nurturing the ongoing improvement of pedagogical practices in ECEC settings in a contextualised way, which takes into account and reflects upon the needs and aspirations of local, regional and even international communities.

Advocacy groups, professional associations, research and training networks, and NGOs often play a very active role in stimulating such initiatives, which are conceptualised and implemented as participatory endeavours involving stakeholders in policy consultation processes, in action-research projects and in peer-learning activities. More than in any other field of education, the field of early childhood education



and care seems to be marked by strong pedagogical traditions of grassroots experimentation and practice-based research.

action-research projects funded by the *Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance (ONE) with the support of Wallonie region* on the professionalization of practitioners working in childcare and after-school care services (Pirard et al. 2012; Pirard et al. 2015);

- research centre on ECEC jointly established by BUPL (*Danish Union of Pedagogues*) and *Roskilde University* supporting and funding practitioners' research;

Research and experimentation such as the above may steer policy decision-making processes; for example:

- in Finland, the findings of three major research projects *ChildCare*<sup>88</sup> (focusing on accessibility), *EU-CARE*<sup>89</sup> (Finnish case study focused on structural quality and curriculum) and *Vakavai*<sup>90</sup> (focusing on the evaluation of the effects of the new legislation with a particular attention given to children's subjective rights to participation) are considered to be important points of reference.<sup>91</sup>

Research and experimentation such as the above may also sustain the implementation of policy innovation processes according to local needs; examples can be found:

- in Ireland, within the research and quality development programmes carried out by not-for-profit organisations such as Pobal<sup>92</sup>, and stakeholders' associations such as Early Childhood Ireland<sup>93</sup>, in connection with local authorities (*County Childcare Committees*);
- in the German Länder of Rhineland-Palatinate, where against the background of quality recommendations for ECEC settings in the region, researchers and practitioners are using a 'discourse approach' to further develop the quality of work geared towards parents, families and local communities (*Qualitätsentwicklung im Diskurs* project)<sup>94</sup>.

It is worth noting that the EU ECEC QF was used a frame of reference and source of inspiration for the cross-national research project *Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE)*. Its aim was to identify, analyse and

<sup>88</sup> More information on the Childcare project: <https://www.jyu.fi/edupsy/fi/tutkimus/tutkimushankkeet/kotisivut/childcare>.

<sup>89</sup> More information on the Care project: <http://ecec-care.org/>.

<sup>90</sup> More information on the VakaVai project: <https://vakavai.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>91</sup> In addition, the Ministry of Education and Culture, in 2017 and for the first time, allocated dedicated funding of EUR 3.5 million for developmental projects for which municipalities can apply (e.g. experimentation with new curriculum). Other initiatives are funded by the National Board of Education (e.g. coordinating local networks and local projects through and online platform).

<sup>92</sup> More information on the Pobal programme: <https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/EarlyEducationandChildcare/Pages/CCCs.aspx>.

<sup>93</sup> More information on Early Childhood Ireland: <https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/>.

<sup>94</sup> The approach "*Qualitätsentwicklung im Diskurs*" (Quality development in discourse) evolved through a close-knit discourse between research and practice. This process was closely guided by an advisory council of the Land/federal state and by representatives of different ECEC stakeholders in Rhineland-Palatinate (e.g. ECEC providers and parents). The following aims are crucial to the approach. 1. Discourse: work within this approach aims to use discourse at all levels and in all phases of quality development, which results in a value-driven stance that offers guidance for pedagogical practice. 2. Practical approach: the basic principle of this approach consists in offering on-site support to the pedagogical teams for clarifying and analyzing the individual situation of parents, families and the social infrastructure. The insights gained are used to draw conclusions relevant to the work of the pedagogical team. 3. Compatibility: this approach is concerned with eight key areas of work geared towards parents, families and social infrastructure. These areas are based on the "*Bildungs- und Erziehungsempfehlungen*" (educational recommendations) for ECEC settings in Rhineland-Palatinate. The ECEC curricula of some other Länder/federal states also refer



promote the main characteristics of quality inclusive pre-primary education for all children from three years of age to the start of primary education (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2016).

Country experts generally pointed out that continuing professional development initiatives — carried out in the context of professional networks and learning communities — are also playing an important role in sustaining the ongoing improvement of ECEC settings' pedagogical quality at grassroots level by sustaining practitioners' reflectivity on their practice. As reported by the country experts:

- in France, tools promoting quality in ECEC have been developed by certain networks of non-profit organizations managing day care centres (from birth to age three);
- in the German Länder of Bavaria, a pilot initiative called 'Coaches for Pedagogical Quality (*Pädagogische Qualitätsbegleiter*)' was initiated to support educators in improving their professional practice<sup>95</sup>;
- in Greece, there are links between higher education institutions and in-service childcare workers for developing learning communities by implementing action research;
- in Poland, quality development initiatives are taken locally at municipal or pre-school level (e.g. NGOs activity);
- in Slovakia, the Society for Preschool Education (a professional association of kindergarten teachers) is very active in promoting inter-professional exchanges among different type of experts (psychologists, special pedagogues, researchers), and in engaging practitioners' in peer-learning activities.

Remarkably, in a few cases such grassroots initiatives have been linked to the dissemination and use of the EU ECEC QF to provoke reflection and to facilitate professionals' analysis of the challenges and opportunities in their own contexts; this also strengthens their role as agents of change in activating quality development processes that are responsive to local needs.

In Belgium/Flanders and in the Netherlands, the VBJK (*Centre for Innovation in the early years*)<sup>96</sup>, together with Bureau Mutant<sup>97</sup> and the ISSA (*International Step by Step Association*)<sup>98</sup>, developed the training package 'Five Steps to Quality' (ISSA, 2017) for supporting ECEC quality improvement at country and

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*to the form and content of these eight areas. Finally, the implementation of self-evaluation in ECEC settings is an important concern pursued throughout this approach; the ECEC experts take into account the individual conditions on-site, their own attitude and the attitude of the team. They make use of discourse and strengthen the quality of their work geared towards parents, families and the social infrastructure (country expert from Germany)'.*

<https://www.hs-koblenz.de/rmc/fachbereiche/sozialwissenschaften/institute-des-fachbereichs/institut-fuer-bildung-erziehung-und-betreuung-in-der-kindheit-rheinland-pfalz-ibeb/qualitaetsentwicklung-im-diskurs-qid/>

<sup>95</sup> *'The main focus of the coaching and consultation process is the quality of interaction within the ECEC setting. The coach for pedagogical quality takes the demands and issues that exist within the settings into account, and works constructively and fairly with the team and the leader of the setting to reflect on their practice and on developing strategies and competences to improve the interaction quality. The project has also been undergoing a formative evaluation, and so far, this approach seems to be successful (country expert report from Germany)'.*

The pilot project was carried out by the State Institute of Early Childhood Research (IFP), financed by the Bavarian State Ministry for Work, Social Affairs, Family and Integration: <http://www.ifp.bayern.de/english/index.php>.

Additional information can be retrieved here: <http://www.ifp.bayern.de/projekte/qualitaet/pqb.php>.

<sup>96</sup> <https://vbjk.be/en>.

<sup>97</sup> <http://www.mutant.nl/en/home.htm>.

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.issa.nl/>.

organisation level. The training focuses on raising awareness, and stimulating reflection and dialogue, on the five quality elements in the EU ECEC QF (accessibility, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, governance and funding). At the same time, it links these five quality elements to the particular guidelines and laws each service is under the local jurisdiction of. The training package was piloted with trainers who belong to the ISSA network, and it is currently used in several countries (in Bulgaria, Slovenia, Macedonia)<sup>99</sup>.

In Italy, CPD initiatives aimed to motivate reflection on the five principles of the EU ECEC QF, and to promote local experimentation, in light of recent policy reforms (DL65/2017 on the ECEC integrated system). The initiatives were carried out by joint programmes developed by *Bologna University (Department of Education)* and *Pavia University*. The initiatives joined with private-not-for-profit providers (*social cooperatives*), and municipalities and provinces (Biella, Trento), to train pedagogical coordinators; they also collaborated with the teachers' union (*Proteo Fare Sapere*) and private sector stakeholders (*Zeroseiup*) to train preschool teachers and pedagogical coordinators, with a specific focus on self-evaluation processes. The EU ECEC QF was analysed, discussed and used as a tool to promote bottom-up innovation in early-years services. For instance, Bologna University (Department of Education), with co-funding from the Emilia-Romagna Region (Department of childhood, youth and family policies), offered a postgraduate course for in-service pedagogical coordinators.<sup>100</sup> In addition, the advocacy group and professional association of early childhood educators and teachers '*Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia*' is currently implementing five thematic working seminars to discuss the EU ECEC QF's principles and action statements, and intend to develop policy recommendations to aid the ongoing reforms of the integrated ECEC system.

Finally, it is worth noting that the EU ECEC QF has been used as a frame of reference to inspire ECEC quality development initiatives beyond EU Member States. NGOs (UNICEF & VBJK, 2016), international

<sup>99</sup> The training kit can be downloaded in full-text from the ISSA website: <http://www.issa.nl/content/publications-issa-members> or, alternatively, from the European online platform for school education *School Education Gateway*: [http://files.eun.org/SEG/5%20Steps%20to%20Quality%20-%20Training%20Package\\_ECEC\\_%20final%20version.pdf](http://files.eun.org/SEG/5%20Steps%20to%20Quality%20-%20Training%20Package_ECEC_%20final%20version.pdf).

<sup>100</sup> Pedagogical coordinators play a crucial role in maintaining the qualifications of ECEC service providers within municipalities and private-not-for-profit organisations (social cooperatives) in the Emilia-Romagna Region (RER), Italy. The postgraduate course '*Il coordinatore pedagogico tra competenze gestionali e innovazione didattica*' — jointly designed by Bologna University and RER — uses the EU ECEC QF as a tool to sustain a participatory action-research pathways that foster the professionalisation of in-service pedagogical coordinators. This pathway was developed within the framework of participatory action-research for educational innovation (Lazzari&Balduzzi, 2014), which is a well-established methodological approach for carrying out research on early childhood services by involving relevant stakeholders (MacNaughton, 2001; Bove, 2009). In particular, the participation of pedagogical coordinators (n=18) took place in three phases: 1) collective analysis of local, national and European policy documents (focusing on the EU ECEC QF); 2) analysis of the social and educational needs specific to wherever the coordinated ECEC services are operating; and 3) development of an action plan for the innovation of ECEC services, which pedagogical coordinators are responsible for at local level. The pedagogical coordinators who participated in the course were also given an opportunity to design a project for the innovation of ECEC services as their final dissertation. Their projects showed that the EU ECEC QF could become a powerful tool for the 38 professionalization of coordinators, and for their empowerment in policy decision-making processes, by fostering collective reflectivity through analysing local needs and pedagogical peer-exchanges. In short, this is an example of how the EU ECEC QF could be successfully used to promote the innovation of ECEC services by using a bottom-up approach.

networks (ISSA, 2016)<sup>101</sup> and foundations (Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years, 2016)<sup>102</sup>, have all used it in this way. In the first case (UNICEF & VBJK, 2016), the document was used to analyse the situation of ECEC in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro (by identifying challenges and opportunities), and to make research-informed policy recommendations with local stakeholders (see box below).

**Box 1.** Quality of ECEC services in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro

The joint UNICEF and VBJK report (Jeeters, 2016) was developed as a response to the findings and recommendations of the 2014 Multi-Country Evaluation (MCE) on Increasing Access and Equity in Early Childhood Education. The MCE covered all UNICEF activities related to advancing the Early Learning and School Readiness (ELSR) efforts for children aged three to six, and covered the period from 2005 to 2012. The consultancy task described in the report responds in particular to one of the evaluation's recommendations to *ensure quality and to review the possible risks to quality arising from rapidly increasing access*.

The aim was to help participating countries define and plan context-relevant quality frameworks to monitor and improve the quality of ECE. After consultation with the UNICEF representatives of the four countries, they decided to choose the European Quality Framework for the following reasons:

- the four countries were all candidate member states for joining the EU, and therefore they were willing to focus on EU requirements for the ECEC field;
- the EU ECEC QF was recently published and was inspired by the other frameworks mentioned in the overview (OECD, 2012; EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2005; ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy, 2010);
- the EU ECEC QF was developed rigorously: it took over two years, with workshops in different EU countries by a large group of around 50 people coming from 25 different countries, consisting of researchers, stakeholders and policymakers;
- the EU ECEC QF is a comprehensive framework that includes all aspects of quality — from accessibility over workforce and curriculum, to mentoring and governance — while other quality frameworks may be more limited in scope and focused on fewer aspects of quality;
- the EU ECEC QF is a broad framework, which can be filled in by substantive quality criteria in different contexts;
- there is a link between this framework and important policy research that has been commissioned by DG E&C in the past (Urban et al., 2011; Rimantas et al., 2014) and that will be referred to in the reports.

<sup>101</sup> Development of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Practices in Services for Children under Three: <http://www.issa.nl/content/quality-framework-birth-three-services>

<sup>102</sup> The King Baudouin Foundation, together with partner foundations from Europe and the United States, have created the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years, bringing together leading scientists, practitioners, civil society members, business leaders and political decision-makers from Europe and North America. Forum participants explored policies and projects that support the early childhood development of children from migrant and low-income families. The aim was to exchange the latest research results, strategies, policies, innovations and best practices, and create opportunities to scale-up existing knowledge and evidence-based research. The recommendations derived from the Forum can be retrieved on the TFIEY website: <http://www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/transatlantic-forum-on-inclusive-early-years>

## CONCLUSIONS

**The EU ECEC QF acted as a catalyst of change** in countries where it **was disseminated and discussed** (with one exception: the Netherlands). In general, it played an important role in **triggering reforms** or in **sustaining existing reforms, by guiding both policy consultation and advocacy processes**.

In most cases, ECEC reforms in Member States were not necessarily formed or implemented with comprehensive ECEC quality frameworks in mind. Rather, country experts referred to a broad array of initiatives and measures that have been put in place (or are currently under development) — as part of a more or less formalized strategy — to improve the accessibility and quality of ECEC provision. These initiatives broadly address the following issues:

- inclusiveness of services and pedagogical approaches (with specific reference to the criteria of availability, affordability, usefulness, comprehensibility and desirability);<sup>103</sup>
- improvement of pedagogical practices in a way that is respectful of children’s holistic development and learning strategies, while simultaneously being responsive to the diversity of children’s needs and potentialities (with specific reference to pedagogical frameworks, guidelines and curricula);<sup>104</sup>
- professionalization of the early-years’ workforce (with specific reference to professional preparation, continuing professional development and ongoing support, and working conditions);<sup>105</sup>
- processes and tools for monitoring and evaluating curriculum implementation, and for sustaining ongoing improvements within a participatory perspective;<sup>106</sup>
- governance and funding strategies/schemes that allow for better coordination of initiatives across different ministries and departments (especially in split systems), that better align with local authorities, that increase cross-sectoral cooperation, and that raise stakeholders’ involvement.<sup>107</sup>

In addition, it should be noted that even in those countries where recent reforms were designed and implemented without reference to or guidance from the EU ECEC QF, these nevertheless mainly dealt with the same five areas which correspond to the EU ECEC QF principles. In the majority of the cases examined, these policy measures focused on:

- increasing the availability and affordability of ECEC provision (with particular attention toward tackling inequalities arising from geographically uneven distribution of services, or from vulnerable groups’ inability to access services);

<sup>103</sup> See in particular current policy developments in Belgium Flanders (from birth to age three, and ages three to six), Finland, France (from birth to age three), Ireland, Italy, Romania (from birth to age three), Slovakia (from birth to age six), Scotland, and Portugal (from birth to age three).

<sup>104</sup> See in particular current policy developments in Finland, France (from birth to age three), Scotland, Slovakia, Romania (from birth to age three), Ireland, and Italy.

<sup>105</sup> Belgium Flanders (from birth to age three), France (from birth to age three), Portugal (from birth to age three, and ages three to six), Lithuania (from birth to age six), and Italy.

<sup>106</sup> See in particular current policy developments in Belgium Flanders (from birth to age three), Finland, Ireland, Scotland, and Germany.

<sup>107</sup> See in particular current policy developments in Scotland, Romania (from birth to age three), Portugal, Italy, Ireland, and Germany.

- making the ECEC profession more attractive, by raising the initial qualification of ECEC professionals, by providing professional support to low-qualified staff (e.g. childminders and assistants), and by improving working conditions;
- designing and implementing pre-primary education curricula (especially for ages three to six), with greater attention paid to primary school transition;
- reducing the tension between central and local authorities (including the involvement of different stakeholders) in designing ECEC curricula.

‘Monitoring and evaluation’ and ‘governance and funding’ seem to be the two areas where the least action has been taken, although there are a few exceptions. It would be premature — based solely on the input from country experts — to speculate on the reasons why. A more in-depth investigation could be useful in revealing how new ways of monitoring and evaluating ECEC provision are emerging from various processes of curriculum implementation and innovation. It may also be helpful to study newly emerging governance arrangements and the subsidiarity funding dynamics which underlie policy measures to widen the access and affordability of ECEC provision.

**Certain patterns are clearly emerging and should be watched, given how instructive they may be for expanding the EC ECEC QF throughout the EU.**

It is interesting to note that, in countries and regions where the EU ECEC QF played a role in influencing ECEC policy reform processes, nowhere were its principles and action statements merely transferred or adopted to set policy objectives, nor to design straightforward measures to implement reforms.

Instead, the EU ECEC QF was often used as a tool by Member States to analyse the condition their ECEC was in; it helped them to identify needs, investigate resources, and examine their political options. Country experts highlighted that the EU ECEC QF was a very useful ‘methodological tool’, which alerted decision-makers to the most important aspects of ECEC reforms (‘policy pointers’):

*The concept of the EU ECEC QF helped us to see ECEC in a complex way (Slovakia country expert).*

*[The EU ECEC QF is] playing a role in the work underway to develop a Quality Action Plan. At the first meeting of the Quality Reference Group, we used the framework to help identify what we needed to focus on in our programme of meetings (UK/Scotland country expert).*

*Giving some international guidance [in developing policy recommendations], but with a look on the local context (Finland country expert).*

Secondly, the role played by the EU ECEC QF in informing, orienting and steering policy decision-making — and in supporting policy implementation — was always mediated by engaging with stakeholders. In this sense, the EU ECEC QF was used as a common frame of reference to facilitate dialogue on policy goals, rather than for setting pre-determined policy goals. In some cases, the EU ECEC QF was also used by stakeholders to advocate certain policies.

*The principles outlined in the EU ECEC QF contributed to the drafting of the 65/2017 Law Decree in its final version, which was released on 13th April 2017 and enacted on 31st May 2017. Now the Ministry of Education is proceeding with defining the operational regulations (atti normativi di rango secondario) for full implementation of the Decree (Italy country expert).*

*[The EU ECEC QF played a role in] supporting the Recommendations on qualification levels of ECEC practitioners and opportunities for training, and provided support for the introduction of funding for*

*up-skilling and concurrent introduction of a minimum qualification standard for ECEC work (informed by Statement 3,4, 5 and 6) (Ireland country expert).*

*The Belgian quality process is [being] supported by the EU ECEC QF framework (Belgium/French-speaking community country expert).*

*Together with UNICEF Romania and the Step by Step Association, we [Ministry of Education] are revising and updating the National Strategy on ECEC, taking into consideration the Quality framework for ECEC, developed in the TWG-EC (2012-2014) [Romania country expert].*

Third, the EU ECEC QF played an important role in sustaining transformative change at the level of practice; it inspired a vision of pedagogical innovation and continuing educational experimentation:

*The [EU ECEC QF] statements were inspiration for the content of the pedagogical framework [childcare for babies and toddler] (Belgium/Flanders country expert).*

*The Network of professionals follows the EU ECEC QF in their courses and professional development discussions. However, these are bottom-up initiatives (Latvia country expert).*

*The examples of good practice were inspiring for our practitioners and other professionals (Slovakia country experts).*

To conclude, the main strength of the EU ECEC QF is its multiple possibilities for use. The uses of the document are unfolding; it has already been used and is being adapted to several EU Member States, each with their own unique ECEC contexts. And perhaps its greatest impact is its demonstrable ability to increase the participation of stakeholders, as agents of change, within national, regional and local processes of policy consultation and advocacy.



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