



# TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

## Transatlantic Forum for Inclusive Early Years - recommendations to support good and effective monitoring and evaluation of ECEC policy and provision for children from low-income and migrant families

This brief aims to present learnings from the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years (TFIEY)'s fourth meeting, [Evaluation of Early Childhood Programs and Assessment in the Early Years](#), providing recommendations to support better and more effective ECEC policy for children from low income and migrant families.

Designing and implementing appropriate monitoring and evaluation as well as quality assurance clearly depends on the type of provision in question, the desired policy vision and goals, and the means made available to achieve them<sup>1</sup>. Policies and provision in the countries represented in the fourth meeting of the TFIEY range from provision managed by local authorities with state or regional funding, or similar provision that is privately run (not-for-profit / for-profit). Similarly, programs may be major, large-scale programs covering a whole country and very large numbers of children, or small pilot and/or local programs. Some funding is public (most commonly for large-scale provision), while other programs are run through private means (including foundations). Generalizing about relevant quality assurance and evaluation across such wide variations is challenging<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, the purpose of the monitoring and evaluation may be quite different depending on whether it concerns monitoring quality in regular public sector provision, deciding whether to continue or expand programs,<sup>3</sup> or accreditation issues. Monitoring and evaluation must also take account of whether all provision for 0-6 year olds comes under one authority (e.g. ministry/government department) or several disparate jurisdictions depending on age-group or other criteria. For children under the age of 3 years, provision may also be divided between center-based and home-based care, which adds further considerations for monitoring and evaluating quality and outcomes. Drawing from the forum's discussions, this document attempts to provide broad recommendations for evaluating ECEC policies and programs meaningfully for low-income and migrant children across different contexts, taking into account diverse political and practical circumstances while at the same time recognizing the need for additional, intentional reflection and consideration in order to effectively serve diverse populations.

Six main areas are proposed for consideration:

- 1. In order to design and implement evaluations that can meaningfully inform ECEC policy as it relates to children from diverse backgrounds, the target population(s) must be fully identified and understood from the outset. Cultural and linguistic biases must be implicitly considered in the definition of quality and of desired child outcomes driving the evaluation. Moreover, the context in which the evaluation is being carried out must**

<sup>1</sup> See opening overview presentation by Michel Vandebroek: [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\\_Pictures\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/12\\_Report/2014TFIEY\\_MichelVandebroek.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures_documents_and_external_sites/12_Report/2014TFIEY_MichelVandebroek.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Ineke Litjens, OECD, *Literature review on Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)*. Revised and adapted version prepared for presentation and discussion at the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Trans-Atlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Year, June 30<sup>th</sup> - July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014. TFIEY presentation: [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\\_Pictures\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/12\\_Report/2014TFIEY\\_InekeLitjens.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures_documents_and_external_sites/12_Report/2014TFIEY_InekeLitjens.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See presentation by Steven Barnett on *Research and Use of Evaluation to Influence ECEC Policy*, [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\\_Pictures\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/12\\_Report/2014TFIEY\\_StevenBarnett\\_evaluation.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures_documents_and_external_sites/12_Report/2014TFIEY_StevenBarnett_evaluation.pdf)





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**be clearly understood in order to avoid a generalization of positive outcomes from one situation to another which may be irrelevant<sup>4</sup>.**

- In evaluating the effectiveness of programs for children from migrant and low-income backgrounds, evaluators must consider the baseline or benchmark to which these children are being compared. Are they being compared, for instance, to a “gold standard” based on white middle class children, to similar families not benefiting from the provision in question, or is an effort being made to consider the holistic development of each individual child?
  - It is important to bear in mind that the situations of families living in poverty change and families move in and out of the target group that may not remain stable for long periods which raises issues about looking at longer-term effects in an evolving system.
  - Therefore, arriving at a shared understanding of the definition of quality is a critical first step in designing a successful evaluation. From this it follows that being explicit about the vision, values and purposes as well as of the uses that will be made of the results will have an effect on the outcomes for all involved.
  - In addition, in designing monitoring and evaluation approaches, “child outcomes”, and how and by whom they are defined, must be clearly understood. This includes deciding on the key areas of focus and how to measure them. For instance, defining outcomes only in terms of “school readiness” with too narrow an academic definition should be avoided<sup>5</sup>. The impacts of ECEC provision on aspects such as the quality of relationships, children’s engagement in their learning process, the image and well-being of the child are all factors that influence the ways in which monitoring and evaluation approaches should be developed and undertaken.
2. **As much as possible, evaluations should be undertaken through a participatory approach, including family and staff at all levels.**
- In order to avoid making assumptions about the needs and desires of different stakeholders (including the professionals and the families), they must be involved from the initial decision to undertake monitoring and evaluation in order to agree on intentions and major questions. From there, they should also be involved in the design process, and through implementation and in understanding and discussing results to produce actionable feedback.
3. **Relevant decision-makers must also be included in dialogue throughout the process to ensure that the information obtained from monitoring and evaluation is relevant to existing policy opportunities and are put to use.**
- Including policy-makers in the design and implementation of evaluation requires translating its processes and outcomes into a “language” that is relevant and easily understood by diverse stakeholders. Arriving at a shared language is critical

<sup>4</sup> See Ruby Takanishi, *The Early Education Debates: Informing Policy and Practice in Early Education through Research*, 2014 AERA Distinguished Public Service Lecture,

[http://earlyed.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/profiles/attachments/AERA%20PRESENTATION%202014\\_0.pdf](http://earlyed.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/profiles/attachments/AERA%20PRESENTATION%202014_0.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, J. (2012), *Early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children from disadvantaged backgrounds: Findings from a European literature review and two case studies*, Study commissioned by the Directorate General for Education and Culture, European Commission. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/childhood\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/childhood_en.htm) See also Edward Melhuish, *Early Childhood Education and Care and Long-term Effects*, presentation to the first TFIEY (Ghent, January 2013) [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\) Pictures, documents and external sites/13\) Speech/Melhuish TFIEY %20PP.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05) Pictures, documents and external sites/13) Speech/Melhuish TFIEY %20PP.pdf)



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in ultimately translating the outcomes of an evaluation into actionable change, as those involved are more likely to view the process as an opportunity for growth and understanding rather than as a threat.

4. **Evaluations may be more valuable to policymakers if they focus not only on inputs and resulting outcomes, but also on processes and implementation.**
  - However there is an overriding formative purpose with a baseline intention to achieve improvements<sup>6</sup>.
  - Measuring real impact(s) is difficult and there may be a perception of short term impacts that are misleading or unexpected. By combining outcome and process research, we can better understand how and why a program works, and in what context, which is relevant for improving it.
  
5. **Policymakers should take account of the whole possible range of approaches and methodologies in designing evaluations for children of migrant and low-income families in order to gain as many perspectives as possible to respond to the questions posed.**
  - No single methodology for evaluation is the "right" one. It is therefore important to take account of the strengths of different approaches and their appropriateness in different contexts and depending on the purpose. With any process, there may be unintended outcomes that are important for understanding the action needed.
  - Peer evaluation and self-evaluation are methods that, in the right contexts, can provide valuable opportunities for professionals to reflect comprehensively on the purposes of evaluation, its vision and values, and the ways in which the results will have an effect on the outcomes for all involved.<sup>7</sup> With a strong potential for staff training, self-evaluation and peer evaluation encourage professionals to be reflective about their work and how to develop professionally as well as contributing to building quality<sup>8</sup>.
  - Taking a participatory approach includes being aware of critical issues such as who determines what constitutes "valuable" outcomes (for the target population), what counts as evidence, and from whom/with whom it should be gathered.
  - Statistics provide a source of questions for dialogue with all partners and stakeholders. Large-scale monitoring provides answers to some questions (e.g. how many children are reached?) and raises others (Who are the families? Is

<sup>6</sup> Urban, M., Vandenbroeck, M., Van Laere, K., Lazzari, A. & Peeters, J.(2011) Competence requirements in early childhood education and care. Final Report, <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/core-competence-requirements-in-early-childhood-education-and-care-pbNC3213399/>. This report based on a holistic understanding of ECEC with an equally holistic understanding of competence requirements to work in this field. The research concludes that for an ECEC system to be "competent" requires four dimensions: 1. Individual level; 2. Institutional and team level; 3. Inter-institutional level; and 4. Level of governance.

<sup>7</sup> Examples of successful implementation include Emilia Romagna (see Sandra Benedetti: [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\\_Pictures\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/12\\_Report/2014TFIEY\\_SandraBenedetti.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures_documents_and_external_sites/12_Report/2014TFIEY_SandraBenedetti.pdf)) and the pilot initiative in Croatia (see Sandra Antulić: [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\\_Pictures\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/12\\_Report/2014TFIEY\\_SandraAntulic.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures_documents_and_external_sites/12_Report/2014TFIEY_SandraAntulic.pdf))

<sup>8</sup> See Mihaela Ionescu, *Assessing the Quality of Practices in ECEC Services, ISSA's Approach and Tools*, presentation to the fourth TFIEY, (Amsterdam, 2014) [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\\_Pictures\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/12\\_Report/2014TFIEY\\_MihaelaIonescu.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures_documents_and_external_sites/12_Report/2014TFIEY_MihaelaIonescu.pdf)



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provision responding to their needs and desires for their children? Etc.)<sup>9</sup> Large-scale monitoring can start from a child-centered perspective<sup>10</sup>:

6. **The private sector and not-for-profit and philanthropic organizations can play an important role in the pursuit of a better understanding of “what works” in ECEC, particularly for migrant populations, by raising awareness and building knowledge in the context of circumstances that are challenging for policymakers.**
  - Issues of turnover, political roadblocks, and the difficulty of mobilizing around long-term returns, means that long-term research, for instance, may have to be pursued by other players. This is particularly true in systems where the public sector and private provision sit side by side, leading to funding issues.<sup>11</sup>

A deliberate and shared vision among all stakeholders of successful early childhood programming and a clearly defined understanding of the principal of inclusiveness together provide a critical starting point for the design of effective evaluation of systems. It should drive all aspects of successful monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, as was discussed in earlier meetings of the TFIEY, high-quality ECEC professionals are key to effective provision, and when they participate fully in the evaluation process, as with peer and self-evaluation approaches, they are given a critical opportunity to contribute to building quality. Furthermore, a deep understanding of context, with all its complexities, and specifically of the target groups in question is essential in order to avoid inappropriate generalizations and careless study designs that can, for instance, ignore the unique skills and strengths that migrant children may possess that would not be captured through traditional evaluation systems.

While evaluations alone are not sufficient to guide policy-making, and cannot provide a comprehensive picture of the usefulness or need for a specific program, policy or type of provision, monitoring and evaluation activities can provide valuable ongoing guidance to consistently improve ECEC programs and policies to better meet the needs of their beneficiaries when designed and used meaningfully with the needs and characteristics of all children and families taken into consideration.

Fourteen foundations from Europe and the USA have established the [Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years \(TFIEY\)](#) to bring together leading researchers, practitioners, civil society, business leaders and decision-makers from Europe and North America in a series of conferences to strengthen evidence-based policy-making in this field. The aim of the Forum is to exchange the newest research results, strategies, policies, innovations and best practices supporting the early childhood development of children from migrant and low-income families, and to understand and address the conditions of intergenerational vulnerability and poverty. Since January 2013, four conferences have taken place, each one focusing on a critical theme. The first three themes addressed by the forum were: access, curriculum & workforce development, and parent and family engagement. The fourth, which is discussed in this brief, focused on monitoring and evaluation, a major concern raised in all the previous discussions. The meeting took place in July, 2014, in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

<sup>9</sup> See the example of the Bertelsmann Stiftung: *A German example on how to promote equality by monitoring the ECEC system.* [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\) Pictures, documents and external sites/12\) Report/2014TFIEY\\_KathrinBockFamulla.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05) Pictures, documents and external sites/12) Report/2014TFIEY_KathrinBockFamulla.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> See Ferre Laevers, *From Assessment of Outcome to Assessment of Process. A paradigm shift that makes evaluation more effective.* [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\) Pictures, documents and external sites/12\) Report/2014TFIEY\\_FerreLaevers.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05) Pictures, documents and external sites/12) Report/2014TFIEY_FerreLaevers.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> See the Foundation for Child Development's [Young Scholar Program](#)