



# TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

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

Workforce Preparation and Curriculum Innovations  
2nd Meeting: July 10th – 12th, 2013

## Synthesis Report

### Introduction

The first TFIEY meeting focused on the issue of (in)accessibility of ECEC<sup>1</sup>. This is of fundamental importance given the many benefits ECEC can have for all children, and especially for children with a background of migration and/or poverty. It was made very clear that these benefits depend on the condition of high quality of services. In turn, this quality will depend largely on the quality of the professionals working in ECEC and the work they do with children and parents. This leads us to the theme of the second meeting: *workforce preparation and curriculum innovations*. During this meeting - July 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> in New York, USA – a diverse group of researchers, policymakers, practitioners and philanthropists presented their experiences and expertise in a transatlantic dialogue. Among others, the following questions were explored:

- In response to demographic changes that are being experienced in cities and districts across the EU and US, what kinds of purposeful changes in instructional practice and workforce preparation and professionalization have been successful in addressing the challenges presented by increasing diversity in the young child population? Does this new demographic reality present a need for major changes in prenatal and early childhood education strategies, and how do these demands intersect with other ongoing calls for reform and improvement of early childhood systems?
- What types of innovative curricula have been successful in engaging children of migrants and children from low-income families, and what elements of these curricula may be applicable in diverse settings?
- What steps are local institutions, systems and different levels of government taking in order to better prepare professionals, teachers and care givers to work effectively and competently with children of immigrants and children experiencing poverty and their families through both pre-service and in-service training and professional development?
- What successful strategies have governments, cities and districts used to diversify their early childhood workforce and recruit from former migrant populations to reflect the changing demographics of their child populations?

This paper serves as a synthesis of the key issues and themes, brought forward in all presentations and discussions, and is not intended to report on all presentations in detail nor does it reflect the views or recommendations of the Forum as a whole or of its operating partners and funders. For those seeking additional information, a complete report and archive of the presentations and papers provided as inputs to the event can be found [here](#).

<sup>1</sup> For all information, background notes, presentations and video, see [www.inclusive-early-years.org](http://www.inclusive-early-years.org)





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## THE CURRICULUM DEBATE

The debate on the ECEC curriculum is an ongoing one at both sides of the Atlantic. What should ECEC be about? What should it 'teach' young children, especially those children who are already at risk of being or getting behind? Do we settle for delivering school-ready children who master the basic 3 R's ('reading, writing and arithmetic') or do we aim higher and look at ECEC services as democratic spaces where young children can safely experiment in getting to know themselves, the world, their peers and where they are respected and stimulated to grow, in the most broad sense of the word? The general feel during the Forum clearly tended to the latter (in some case going against policy tendencies). How such an open curriculum should then look like and how it could and should be implemented is yet another issue and a debate in itself.

- ***There is an increasing agreement on certain principles of early childhood curriculum design, while discussion does remain on the way this should or could be implemented.***

Children learn in many different ways. ECEC curricula need to be open and provide children with a variety of resources for play, self-expression, sharing experiences, meaning making, engaging with their peers and the world around them, rather than aim at pre-set goals. In a setting of responsive interaction to children's needs (diverse as they are), their sense of identity and belonging can be fostered. Bennett gives a more detailed description of the main principles of such an open curriculum, in which some of the essential characteristics are: aimed at the holistic development of the child with respect for and knowledge of his/her background, inclusive, equitable, democratic, experiential and educational. Stimulating the child's well-being, by being responsive, warm and supportive, is essential to better enable the child to also engage in the curricular learning. Alongside, there is also a clear warning: over accentuating the curriculum in terms of outcomes may make us lose sight of all the other in-school and out-of-school factors that heavily weigh on these outcomes.

Formal curricula as such have little impact on the development and learning outcome of children with a migrant and low-background compared to the significant impact of the family background and the level of the inter-relational and pedagogical skills of the practitioners in ECEC.

- ***Dealing with the increasingly diverse population, early years professionals do not only need to engage with children to support their holistic development; they also need to intentionally involve parents and local communities.***

With the systemic exclusion of Roma children as a strong illustration throughout his presentation, J. [Bennett](#)<sup>2</sup> looks at how curriculum characteristics can help to overcome exclusion and increase mutual understanding among different groups in population. (It should also be clear however, that measures on a wider societal level are necessary as well to get to a more equitable society in general, but this lies beyond the focus of the meeting). The ECEC curriculum should develop more beyond standard setting

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\\_Pictures\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/13\\_Speech/TFIEY\\_JohnBennett.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures_documents_and_external_sites/13_Speech/TFIEY_JohnBennett.pdf)



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(with the same targets for every child) and traditional learning targets; it should focus on the well-being of children and their holistic development as well.

Looking at the children with a background of migration and poverty, it should aim at respect for their different backgrounds and cultural identity, preferably in a setting of a socially mixed population. The curriculum should shape children's rights in their daily life and build on principles like non-discrimination, access, having all children involved, providing a safe and warm environment where they can be challenged.

Shifting the focus to oral language is recommended, particularly but not exclusively in the official tongue, with attention for the home languages of attending children.

A new look on methods of assessment and testing school-readiness should be developed for children with a migrant or low-income background, since the outcomes of these assessments largely depend on their family background and other out-of-school factors as well and merely accentuate the existing gap instead of bridging it.

Alongside new curriculum development, ECEC should also enjoy proper financing, recognize the value of staff diversity and engage in welcoming parents and the dialogue with them.

Bringing the immigrant parent's perspective into ECEC is also one of the main messages of Prof. [Tobin](#)<sup>3</sup>. ECEC shouldn't only be about socio-cultural assimilation of minority groups; it should also be about intercultural dialogue on education, on what children need, on what ECEC should offer. The search is for a delicate balance, a reconciliation of different norms and values, needs, expectations, ideas on learning. This can only happen when different perspectives are brought together in a setting of mutual respect and a willingness to meet on equal terms to discuss what high quality ECEC actually means. Including the perspective of parents and local communities is both necessary and full of tensions as parents and teachers do not always see eye to eye on this matter. Some (immigrant) parents may wish ECEC to focus on learning results and school readiness, and on helping their children to integrate, while respecting their own identity and cultural background; whereas teachers are keener on experiential and play-based learning.. And while introducing new cultural issues may be quite simple when it comes to food, dress and dance, it is quite more complicated when it touches on the more fundamental issues like gender roles, values and pedagogy. Creating mutual trust, understanding and respect is not so much a question of giving up one's beliefs and values, but rather to create the space and willingness to openly discuss these issues.

## - *Inspiring practices on both sides of the Atlantic*

As already introduced in the opening session, it was made clear that ECEC needs to move forward from the traditional school readiness and mere cognitive development goals. A stronger focus on the holistic development of young children and working on diversity were among the recurring issues.

The Tools of the Mind program (D. Leong), based on Vigotsky, works on improving children's social and self-regulating skills through 'make believe' play. As the focus in (US) preschools shifts increasingly to academic outcome, non-cognitive skills tend to remain less developed and there is less room for play.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\\_Pictures\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/13\\_Speech/TFIEY\\_JoeTobin.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures_documents_and_external_sites/13_Speech/TFIEY_JoeTobin.pdf)





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With Tools of the Mind, structured play has proven to be beneficial in the development of self-regulatory and socio-emotional skills of young children.

The [Berliner Curriculum](#) (C. Preissig)<sup>4</sup> is based on the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity and considers education as a holistic socio-educational concept. It is now used in over 2000 ECEC centres for children 0-6y. Children and their families, as well as the community around them, are at centre stage. Practitioners are not supposed to test the children but to enable them to develop at their own pace, to discover what they are good at (or not), what they enjoy (or not). The curriculum is constantly being (re)shaped in a process of negotiation with the team, the families and the children. With children with a different home language, 'deep' one-on-one dialogue (work on what the child finds interesting, what makes sense, use things like the family wall, welcome words in the home language) seems effective in getting more familiar with the majority language.

Organizational measures have been taken to make this possible: time for team meetings, for one-on-one parent-teacher communication, for family stories, for formal and informal participation, for training etc.

## WORKFORCE IN THE EARLY YEARS

[Vandenbroeck, Lazzari and Peeters](#) refer to EU documents and several studies to describe what competences ECEC staff need in the context of diversity. It is clear that these go quite far beyond the traditional competences of caring and teaching. To have more children from vulnerable groups take part in ECEC services, these need to open up and reach out to their families in a context of respectful dialogue. They need to get involved, not only with the children, but with the families as well as with the local communities to get them engaged in the decision-making process on all aspects of the ECEC services (management, quality, curriculum...)

Working with families with a migration or low-income background requires additional competencies and attitudes: welcoming diversity, respecting different family backgrounds, values and beliefs, outreach work, reflectiveness, commitment, responsiveness, ability to build relations of trust and mutual respect, teamwork, and cooperating with other organizations and structures. "Getting the structures right is essential, but so too is working on ethos and practice".<sup>5</sup>

- ***A combination of both initial training and continued professional development is vital in maintaining an effective workforce. In these different types of training, a reciprocal relationship between theory and practice is essential.***

Although there is ample evidence on the importance of staff formal qualifications, the ideal level – bachelor – is not reached in many countries (especially for the under 3 year olds). At the same time, there is also evidence that these qualifications as such, still can't fully predict the quality of ECEC. The [CoRe](#)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures,_documents_and_external_sites/13_Speech/TFIEY_ChristaPreissing.pdf)

[FRB/05\\_Pictures,\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/13\\_Speech/TFIEY\\_ChristaPreissing.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures,_documents_and_external_sites/13_Speech/TFIEY_ChristaPreissing.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, J. and Moss, P. (2011), *Working for inclusion: how Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens. Final report of the cross-European program Working for Inclusion: the role of early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion.* ([www.childrenscotland.org.uk/wfi](http://www.childrenscotland.org.uk/wfi)), p.62.





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study<sup>6</sup> for example, showed that continued professional development and diverse methods of on the job training also contribute to quality improvement. With the group of children with a migrant and low-income background in mind, training is needed on issues like anti-bias education, social justice, inclusion, multilingualism and superdiversity. Continued pedagogical support, sufficient enough in length and intensity, is also vital, as are supportive mechanisms working on competences of reflective practice, dialogue with parents or pedagogical support.

- ***Where the required competences need to be acquired by the individual practitioner, this is also true for the whole professional system, including the necessary coherent policies.***

Developing more competent practices for vulnerable groups implies a joint effort of the individual practitioner, the team and the management, but certainly needs to imply training centres, local administration and regional/national governance as well. The CoRe study reported on the importance of coherent policy and practice on all those levels, combining among others measures like: training in and among ECEC centres on all staff levels, creating learning communities, investing in pedagogical mentoring and other supportive measures, increasing the number of bachelors, increase opportunities for job mobility, deploy a variety of on the job training, allow for 'non-contact' time and connect and cooperate with other sectors (health, social services, schools...).

- ***The workforce, engaging with diverse groups of populations, should reflect the diversity of the public addressed.***

The added value of diversifying the workforce is becoming clearer and there is an increase in ECEC services of bridging persons, bilingual practitioners/teaching assistants or staff members with a background of migration or poverty. Staff from ethnic minorities can challenge stereotypes and prejudice within the team and may lower the barrier for some families. However, experts have also formulated some reminders on this issue. 'Ethnic matching' should be avoided: all staff members should be able to work with all families. Avoid repeating society's inequalities within the team (a typical example would be the cleaning lady, from an ethnic minority, in an 'all white' team). Include lower qualified staff in job mobility programs in order to lead them to similar qualifications and job conditions as average staff. Include the whole team in staff development or team meetings.

- ***The competence debate: the need for a competent system for all children.***

In Europe, as in the US, there is clearly more work to be done in both workforce preparation and continued professional development.

Opposed to the sector of mandatory education, there is no coherent regulation on qualification of the workforce in ECEC. [Prof. Whitebrook](#)<sup>7</sup> explained how these qualifications are different, depending on the location, state, type of program, funding and most of all, family resources. Translated to the vulnerable

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.vbjk.be/files/CoRe%20Final%20Report%202011.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS->

FRB/05)\_Pictures,\_documents\_and\_external\_sites/13)\_Speech/TFIEY\_MarcyWhitebook.pdf





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group of children and families with a background of migration and/or poverty, this leads to the problematic conclusion that those children most in need of high quality services are least likely to receive them (this is quite similar in many European countries).

Moreover, in working with children from diverse backgrounds, a similar diversity is still hardly reflected among the staff in ECEC services. Workers from minority groups will most often be employed on an assistant level, while teachers and directors are predominantly white and middleclass.

The fact that many children of immigrants are being taken care of by informal, non-licensed providers, of which all data are lacking, adds to the insecurity on the level of quality.

Not only the (lack of) qualification requirements raises questions. There is also a lack of attention for professional development, once on the job. Measures such as teaching support, learning communities, adult well-being, job crafting and program leadership should be put in place.

On European side, [Dr. J. Peeters](#)<sup>8</sup>, presented some findings of the CoRe study<sup>9</sup> on competence requirements in ECEC throughout Europe, which are also very diverse. The qualification requirements are higher in the integrated systems (where care and education are linked for children up to mandatory school age) than in the split systems. In some countries up to half of the ECEC workforce consists of formally unqualified auxiliary staff, working with the higher qualified practitioners, even though they take up a lot of very important care work with the young children and they play an crucial role in the interaction with the parents, especially those of disadvantaged groups. There is hardly any in-service training for them or opportunities for upward job mobility. The division of tasks, with the auxiliary staff performing the more practical caring tasks, brings with it the risk of jeopardizing a holistic pedagogical approach. In Europe too, rethinking professional development is highly recommended, e.g. to provide these assistants with qualifying training trajectories and investing in continued professional development that is based on reflecting on practice. In a rapidly changing society and to work with diverse groups, it is now clear that, while qualifications are certainly a factor for high quality ECEC for all, initial qualification alone will no longer suffice.

The CoRe study also marks the importance, not only of competent individual ECEC workers, but also of a competent system, referring to the team and the organization, but also to interagency cooperation and supportive governance of ECEC workforce. Policies on working conditions that provide supportive measures like reflecting on one's practice, learning communities or pedagogical coaching are still lacking in several countries. Other problematic areas in many countries are a.o.: high staff turnover, unbalance child/staff ratio, lack of child free hours (for training, meetings, reflection...), poor working conditions.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\\_Pictures,\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/13\\_Speech/TFIEY\\_JanPeeters.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures,_documents_and_external_sites/13_Speech/TFIEY_JanPeeters.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Urban, M., Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A. and Van Laere, K. (2011), *CoRe, Competence requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Final report doe the European Commission, DG Education and Culture. Research documents.

<http://www.vbjk.be/en/node/3818>





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- ***Inspiring practices to support and prepare practitioners.***

[T. Mussati](#)<sup>10</sup> (Italy) makes a case for continuous professional development (CPD) and strong pedagogical coordination, showing how this improved staff quality, even in the complicated Italian split system of ECEC, being a patchwork of regulations, levels of governance, qualifications and funding.

In Italy CPD is systemic, systematic and situated. ECEC workers have both the right and the obligation to take 'child-free' hours, making time for team meetings, planning, documenting, contacts with parents, or training. CPD aims at improving reflecting attitude and collective competence building.

*Pedagogistas* coach the teams and link them with parents. Peer interaction and parental involvement are seen as major sources of support.

Since this is all still happening on team level, future networking among ECEC services with exchange visits, regional documentation centres, more support for the pedagogistas themselves and interagency cooperation on children's rights and inclusion is recommended.

[Prof. J. De Maeseneer](#)<sup>11</sup> wants to see healthcare workers as agents of change and introduce transformative learning and a more direct link to real practice during university studies. He talked about an initiative at the Ghent University where students at the Faculty of Medicine were merged with students of the Master in Social Work in day-to-day practice to become more aware of and responsive to the needs of disadvantaged groups. This way, they learn about family-systems and parenthood, they actually see the consequences of socio-economic differences and they get to understand how health care is related to environmental constraints. The technical medical education is broadened with innovative educational modules with a strong focus on community-based health care, communication skills and awareness of social accountability.

Both from England (UK) and New York City (USA) new developments in the ECEC profession were illustrated aimed at improving both knowledge and skills and dispositions.

[Prof. C. Cameron](#)<sup>12</sup> explained the development of the Early Years Professional in England. This bachelor level function is aimed at bridging the care and education divide, to work with 0-5 year old children, to lead change on practice and implement new curricula. Although shortcomings persist in working conditions, the benefits are becoming clear: a better understanding of theory and how to apply in practice, a feel of being better equipped with pedagogical language, more enjoyment of work and lower staff turnover, more confidence

In New York City, with all its diversity, quality of ECEC provision is still very different depending on the socio-economic status of the parents. There are huge disparities in quality and effectiveness between professionals working with children from low-income families and those working with middle and upper

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\\_Pictures,\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/13\\_Speech/TFIEY\\_TulliaMusatti.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures,_documents_and_external_sites/13_Speech/TFIEY_TulliaMusatti.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.calameo.com/read/0017742959ed4557dcaa4?authid=zBiROjWUikOr>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\\_Pictures,\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/13\\_Speech/TFIEY\\_ClaireCameron.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures,_documents_and_external_sites/13_Speech/TFIEY_ClaireCameron.pdf)





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class children. Guaranteeing quality and excellence to all is a major challenge. [J. Howe](#)<sup>13</sup> talked about several system reform related initiatives that are being developed such as a workforce registry, early learning guidelines, a higher education inventory, quality rating and improvement systems and a core body of knowledge.

The importance of bringing in the context in workforce preparation became clear in the specific setting of Northern Ireland, where peace-building initiatives on different levels and targeted at different groups are being developed and implemented. Several examples were presented by [S. Fitzpatrick](#)<sup>14</sup>, such as: media campaigns, opening conversation among young children on conflict symbols, in-service training for teachers and management teams (reflecting on prejudice, meaningful dialogue on culture and religion, sensitive communication with parents...), parent education and support and community engagement and empowerment.

## RAISING THE STAKES: BOTH ON THE FIELD AND IN POLICY AND ACCORDING BUDGETS

- Where working in the early years sectors (care, education, health...) requires several specific competencies, knowledge and attitudes, **additional competencies and attitudes are needed when working with families with a migration or low-income background**. The level of quality and preparation of staff in ECEC contributes to a large extent to the overall quality level of the services offered. To make ECEC and health provisions more inclusive, more accessible and more valuable for these vulnerable groups diversity must be welcomed. Throughout the presentations, recurring issues were: respecting different family backgrounds, values and beliefs, outreach work, reflecting on practice, commitment, responsiveness, ability to build relations of trust and mutual respect, teamwork, and cooperating with other organizations and structures.
- **To offer quality services, not only individual professionals, but also the system as a whole needs to be highly competent**. Developing competent practices should be a joint effort between individuals, teams, training centres, pedagogical coaches, actors at the governance level, and (international) exchange fora. These practices lead to higher levels of professionalism and more democratic ways to deal with conflict or misunderstandings. Such exchange should not only be enabled within the ECEC sector but should also cross over to other sectors like health, social work and education. Alongside, the low status of ECEC workers could be improved by better working conditions as well.
- As children learn in many different ways, we need **'open' curricula, where children's life experiences and their own learning strategies are valued**. Separate or specific curricula for vulnerable children do not seem to have additional value; any core curriculum should meet the

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\\_Pictures\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/13\\_Speech/TFIEY\\_JessicaHowe.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures_documents_and_external_sites/13_Speech/TFIEY_JessicaHowe.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05\\_Pictures\\_documents\\_and\\_external\\_sites/13\\_Speech/TFIEY\\_SiobhanFitzpatrick.pdf](http://www.kbs-frb.be/uploadedFiles/2012-KBS-FRB/05_Pictures_documents_and_external_sites/13_Speech/TFIEY_SiobhanFitzpatrick.pdf)







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strengths and needs of diverse groups of children and ensure equitable educational outcomes and well-being in all areas.

- **A holistic view of education, including not only cognitive and academic development but also healthy, socio-emotional development is necessary in approaching** both the issues of curricula and workforce development. In many countries, both curricula and teacher preparation still keep a strong focus on academic success, on outcome and performance of children. From this session we learned that if this focus is too strong or dominant, it minimizes the chances for a safe setting to negotiate what and how young children from disadvantaged background could or should learn.
- Working in early years doesn't only imply working with children. **Engaging in respectful dialogue with parents, especially those of minority and vulnerable groups, is equally important:** to strengthen mutual understanding of norms, values and backgrounds and to recognize the expertise of parents.

How could and should these messages be translated into policies and according budget lines? Where can and should changes be made? How can investing in (young) children be connected with investing in ECEC workforce?

While both the EU and the US understand the necessity of raising the level of professionalism in ECEC, the policy approach is somewhat different. The EU 2020 targets<sup>15</sup> are clear on a.o. education and the fight against poverty, both in which ECEC has a major role to play, but the search for the required budget remains highly problematic. Choices will have to be made and there is no clear overall agreement on what level of ECEC education is required exactly. On US side, there seems to be a growing acceptance on the importance for quality ECEC for all children. Political attention and budgets are increasing. The major concern is that, when more ECEC workers are needed, and when they have to be highly educated and competent (bachelors/masters), not enough financial resources will be available. Some voices say that, instead of focussing on degrees, we should develop systems of validating certain qualifications and capacities, which meet the need of young children. Others then, point out the paradox of having higher teacher requirements as children grow older, when we know for a fact how important those early years are in a child's development.

To attract more people to ECEC, the work in ECEC services will need an upgrade as well. The difference in status, salary and working conditions between ECEC workforce and school teachers is no longer acceptable.

Early intervention (e.g. home visits) for children at risk, is considered to be one of the keys to get children to those services that will help them prepare to get to school. But shouldn't ECEC be more than just that?

Policies should be aimed at valuing early years provisions as such, as a basic provision that children – and their parents – are entitled to. There is enough evidence of the value of high quality ECEC, but this not

<sup>15</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/targets/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/targets/index_en.htm)





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always used as a basis for policies. In developing such policies, the families at stake should also get a stronger voice; their needs and opinions rarely get a place in the discussions

## FINAL TAKEAWAYS AND REMAINING CHALLENGES

- **ECEC Curricula** should serve all different categories of children. Specific curricula for children with a migrant or low-income background have not led to better outcomes. The focus needs to be on the holistic development of children, including learning and academic outcomes, but also well-being, positive identity formation, inclusion. Curricula need to be defined in dialogue with parents (what do they need, what do they think is important) in a reciprocal relationship of respect and mutual trust. And finally, they have to be implemented by committed, competent and qualified staff.
- Investing in children means investing in the professionalization of **workforce**. There is a proven link between quality of the workforce and outcomes for children BUT this link is strongly influenced by the level of actual working conditions, the presence (or lack) of systemic support of all staff. Quality of ECEC staff is not only a question of qualifications and pre-service preparation but also of different types of sustained training on the job, favorable working conditions, and pedagogical mentoring and support. Transformative education and workforce preparation is needed to get the reflective practitioners that we need in a context of hyperdiversity and multilingualism. ECEC practitioners are to be 'actors of change'. Therefore investments in leadership are also crucial. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and support must be provided to all staff, with sufficient length and intensity to be effective and leading to change. Both pre-service and in-service training are necessary. For instance, a minimum of 50% of the staff should have a bachelor degree. Staff from different backgrounds can increase the awareness of stereotypes and prejudices within the team and move forward in learning to deal with these. In diversifying the workforce, ethnic matching should be avoided: all staff members should work with all children and families. Diversifying the workforce is not only an issue of ethnic background but also an issue of gender.

*Future planned themes of TFIEY Meetings, all of which will focus on low-income and migrant families in particular, will include: Successful Parent and Family Engagement in the Early Years: Reaching out to Immigrant and Low-income Families (Lisbon, PT, Jan. 2014); Multilingualism and Multiple Identities (Rotterdam, NL, summer 2014); the Role of National Governments, Policy Levers, and Effective Decentralization; Integrated Systems; and Evaluation.*

