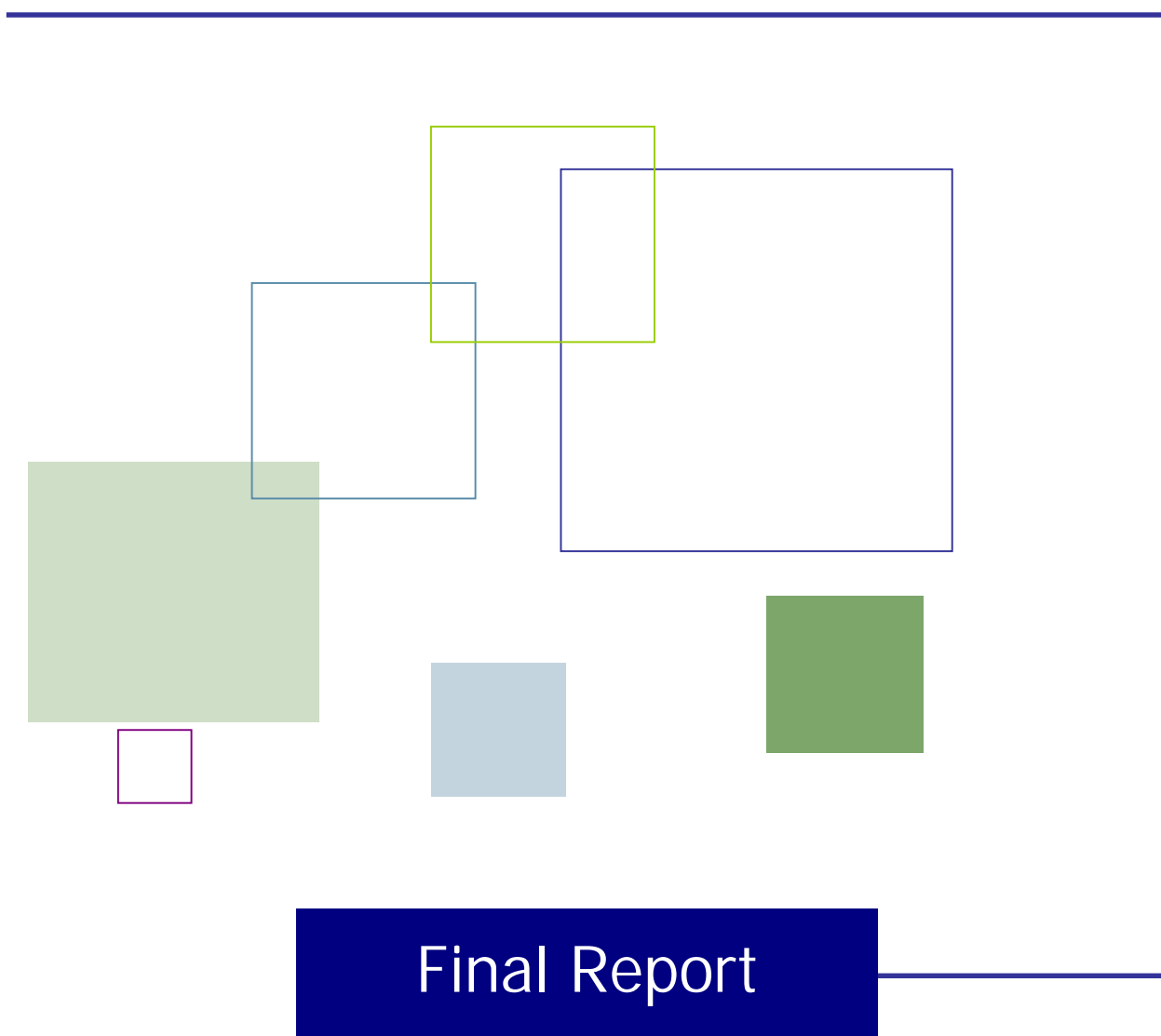




ECEC for children from disadvantaged backgrounds: findings from a European literature review and two case studies.



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Early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children from disadvantaged backgrounds: Findings from a European literature review and two case studies

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Literature review:

Literature Review of the Participation of Disadvantaged Children and families in ECEC Services in Europe, written by Dr Arianna Lazzari, Department of Education Science, Bologna University and Professor Michel Vandebroek, Department of Social Welfare Studies, Ghent University.

Case Studies:

A review of government initiatives for young children in England, 1997-2010, written by Professor Peter Moss, Thomas Coram Research Unit, University of London; and

OSF/ISSA approaches to teacher training and pedagogy, written by Dawn Tankersley (International Step by Step Association Program Expert) and Sarah Klaus (Director, Early Childhood Program, Open Society Foundations)

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This study has been carried out for the Directorate General Education and Culture in response to a request for services under the Framework Service Contract No EAC/02/2010 with the overall objective of supporting the work of the Commission and Member States, within the Education and Training work programme, in the field of ECEC and social inclusion. For the purposes of the study it was decided to focus on the following groups of vulnerable and disadvantaged children: children living in poverty or at risk of poverty; children of migrant or refugee families; Roma children and children at risk of educational failure.

The study is informed by two literature reviews based on existing studies from EU Member States. These reviews address barriers to, and best practice in engaging disadvantaged children and families in ECEC services and on children's acquisition of cognitive and non-cognitive (including social skills) through participation in ECEC services and their importance to social development, successful transition to school and social inclusion. In addition, two case studies were commissioned: the first on the government initiatives for young children in the UK (1998 - 2010), and the second from the International Step by Step Associations and Open Society Foundations focusing on teacher education and pedagogy.

The study first sets the scene by providing current data on child poverty in Europe and on the access rates of disadvantaged children to high quality early childhood services. According to the Eurostat Newsrelease (<http://ec.europa.eu/Eurostat>) of 8 February 2012, 23.4% (115 million people) of the population of EU-27 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. For the moment in Europe, the overall poverty trend is negative: the numbers of unemployed and poor have increased significantly since 2008. Children particularly exposed to the risk of poverty include those from large, low-income families; households with a migrant background; Roma children; street children and those who are exposed to a series of social risks such as homelessness, violence and trafficking. In all countries except Denmark, Finland, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden, children are at greater risk of poverty or social exclusion than adult populations (<http://ec.europa.eu/Eurostat>).

Children born into severe poverty are disproportionately exposed to factors that impede their psycho-motor development, socio-emotional growth and cognitive processes. When linked with deprived or neglectful family backgrounds and poorly educated parents, poverty becomes the single greatest barrier to educational achievement (Coleman, 1996; Duncan et al. 1998; Heckman, 2008; Ladd, 2011).

Access to ECEC

Compared to other regions in the world, European enrolment figures in publicly supported child care and early education are relatively high. Over the last decade, the percentage of children enrolled in the final year of early education has risen steadily from 85.2% in 2000 to 92.4% in 2010 (Eurostat, 2013). EU countries are now encouraged by ET 2020 to reach the target of 95% enrolments in early education by that year.

Comparable data on the access of children from disadvantaged backgrounds across the European countries are not available. Member States define disadvantage in different ways or else, as in several countries, do not collect disaggregated data on these children but are content to designate certain neighbourhoods as priority education areas. In general, the counting of children from disadvantaged backgrounds takes place within the context of child poverty analyses and is based primarily on income-based measures to the neglect of social, family and spatial indicators.

The two largest groups of low-income and potentially marginalised children in Europe are children from immigrant and Roma backgrounds. Although weakly enrolled in childcare services (0-3 years), children from migrant backgrounds are strongly enrolled in public early education, but figures from OECD (2012) for 15 year olds suggest that proportionally more of these children may be placed in disadvantaged ECEC centres or schools. The participation of Roma children is much weaker, being almost non-existent in childcare (unless children have been taken in charge by statutory order) and reaching on average less than 50% in early education. In addition, compared to the access of majority populations, access to infant health and social services by Roma families is comparatively low.

What measures are European Member States taking to provide ECEC for children at-risk?

The major government policy is to provide free, universal early childhood education for all children from 3 or 4 years to compulsory school age. In addition, the EU Member States underwrite, to a greater or lesser extent, specific measures to make early education more effective for children at-risk of education failure. Where the financing of services for these children is concerned, three main strategies are apparent: additional financial assistance and/or additional staffing (the most widespread); financial incentives for staff working with children at risk or in settings where the majority of children are from groups at risk; and additional financial support from central level to local authorities, taking into account regional demographic and socio-economic factors. Other measures include changes in legislation to ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and especially Roma children, do not suffer either exclusion or discrimination when they enter compulsory schooling. Several countries have made the final year of kindergarten compulsory or have created compulsory 'preparatory classes' for vulnerable children before they begin the primary school curriculum. The Nordic countries distinguish themselves by adopting also an early prevention approach, that is, by making equity, employment and income distribution a central tenet of their social welfare systems, thereby reducing radically the number of children and families in poverty.

Issues and concerns

Several independent agencies consider that current efforts in Europe to combat child poverty and to improve access for at-risk children to early childhood services remain very inadequate and that the issue of child poverty and child well-being is not sufficiently addressed in the Europe 2020 process. In particular, more attention needs to be given to the pre- and post-natal health of mothers in marginalised groups and to the development of young children from infancy onwards. In this matter, the negative effect of poverty on child development is not sufficiently appreciated. Investment in early education and care services remains far behind investment in other education cycles, even though health and well-being in early childhood lay the foundation for later development, as shown in the following literature reviews from European sources.

The literature reviews and case studies

In the literature reviews, preference was given to studies, which provided a "thick" description of outstanding programmes, had received research validation, were informed by a relevant theoretical background and included a careful reflection on the wider social, cultural and political context in which successful educational practices were generated. However, the authors underline that the findings from the reviews can be generalised beyond national boundaries only with precaution, as the history, traditions, organization and practices of early childhood differ greatly from one European country to another.

Review of barriers and best practices in engaging disadvantaged children

There is a consensus across the literature review that the main barriers to participation in ECEC services are:

- Low socio-economic status including a low level of parental education, low family income or parental unemployment;
- Living in poor neighbourhoods/rural areas/marginalised settlements;
- Ethnic minority background, influenced by the length of time parents have been residing in the host country and their ability to master the host country language;
- On the supply side, other factors hinder participation in ECEC services, in particular: desirability by excluded groups, based on whether they understand these services and their evaluation of the usefulness of these services for their children.

Concerning good practices for engaging disadvantaged children and families in ECEC services, the authors conclude that structural conditions and inclusive practices need to be put into place to increase the access of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, for example:

- A universal entitlement to publicly funded, affordable ECEC provision from the end of parental leave or at least by the age of three or four years;
- The integration of ECEC systems (regulation, administration and funding) that promote more equitable access and a more unitary approach to 0-6 provision;
- A combination of high quality ECEC centre-based provision and parent support programmes (family health, parent education, counselling, adult education...);
- A valued, well qualified and adequately supported workforce;
- Inter-agency cooperation between ECEC centres, health and social services, local authorities;
- A political commitment toward democracy, equality and civil rights.

Few European countries manage to implement all the above policies in their early childhood systems and some countries are weak in all domains. Where effective entitlements to early childhood services are concerned, good practice can be seen in the Nordic countries and Slovenia, where young children receive a place in an early childhood service from the end of parental leave. In these countries, the local municipality has the statutory obligation to provide such a place in a local early childhood service.¹

Although, both practice and theory support a more integrated approach to young children's development and learning, most European countries are far from having a unitary concept of education and care. Research suggests that countries that have integrated services gained certain advantages: a rethinking of the purpose, provision and practice of ECCE across all age groups; changed perceptions of ECCE among the workforce, parents and the wider public, including a greater recognition of the pedagogical value of early childhood services; greater coherence in early childhood policy; the reduction or elimination of inequalities between services for children under and over 3 years; and more efficient resourcing for ECCE through the merging of administrations. An important advantage of integrating the sector within education is that parents from immigrant and traditional backgrounds are more likely to enrol their children in an education service than in a day-care system.

Review of cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes from ECEC

Most longitudinal studies conclude that high quality ECEC programmes have long-lasting effects on children's cognitive development. These services enhance holistic development and cognitive abilities that facilitate further acquisition of domain-specific skills related to language, general knowledge and mathematics. In this regard, the authors of the literature review suggest that "quality is less the result of a specific programme oriented towards cognitive development than a more generic aspect of ECEC".

Few European studies exist in Europe on the effect of ECEC on children's social skills and socio-emotional development during the early years, but those reviewed confirm that early

1. In Finland and Norway, this obligation is sometimes side-stepped by municipalities, which offer a substantial home care subsidy to encourage parents to rear their child at home.

experiences of socialisation with peers in formal settings promote pro-social behaviour, self-regulation and learning dispositions. The largest and most reliable European study, the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project from the United Kingdom, suggests that socio-emotional skills acquired in the preschool years tend to fade out rapidly in primary school. However, if early socialisation experiences are carried out in settings providing high quality care and education, the beneficial effects on children's social and emotional development can persist considerably longer, although other factors – such as the quality of the home learning environment and further school experiences, also play important roles. In sum, it is the combination of different environments and different experiences over time that matters.

All studies focusing on sub-samples of vulnerable children report that high quality ECEC benefits especially children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, whose gains in cognitive and socio-emotional development are higher than for middle-class children. The research further suggest that a universal service providing good quality programmes for all, in which special attention is given to disadvantaged children, is be preferred over separate provision focussed exclusively on targeted populations. In addition, children from disadvantaged backgrounds gain most when ECEC services are closely linked to employment, health and social policies that promote a more equal redistribution of resources across a population.

Where programmes are concerned, the study indicates three impediments to children's learning and development: insufficient duration and/or intensity of the preschool experience, 'poor quality' in the early childhood programmes available; and lack of appropriate follow-up and support given to at-risk young children in the early years of primary schooling. Characteristics of poor quality at both system and programme levels include: lack of leadership and managerial quality at central and/or local government level; weakness in structural and programme quality at centre level; inadequate teacher education, both at pre- and in-service levels, particularly in regard to effective outreach to disadvantaged populations; and insufficient attention to transition into primary school.

The case studies

The first case study is an analysis of the vast ECEC reform, undertaken by the Labour government in England from 1987-2010, which includes many insights into governance, financing and efforts to reduce child poverty. The case study reveals that:

- During the period of ECEC reform, child poverty was greatly reduced, but this was due to income support to vulnerable households rather than to early childhood services, although the latter have an influence through allowing parents (in particular, lone parents) to work.
- Work status, income and parental education levels were more strongly correlated with the take-up of childcare than other variables such as ethnicity.

The case study underlines the need:

- *To have in place a professional administration that actively manages and finances the national ECEC system and proposed reforms.* This suggests that quality concerns should include attention to the quality of system governance and are wider than just a focus on the performance of educators and teachers.
- *To accompany efforts to engage disadvantaged families and their children in ECEC services with strong social policies.* Engagement with families was a central feature of the English reform, not only in centres (especially efforts to improve the home-learning environment of children) but also at the wider community level and in official policy.
- *To consult widely with local stakeholders and public opinion.* The effort to engage in widespread consultations contributed greatly to the success and irreversibility of the reform.

- *To accompany ECEC reform with research at every stage.* A focus on evidence-based research, data collection, ex-ante research and post-ante evaluations was a strong and successful feature of the transformation of ECEC in England.

The second case study focussed on teacher education implemented by the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), which is currently active in more than 30 countries. As with the English case study, the OSF/ISSA report reinforces several of the conclusions advanced by the authors of the literature review, in particular:

- *That the workforce is central to the quality of early childhood services at centre-based level.* Early childhood educators have the chief responsibility for creating child-centred, interactive, and inclusive environments for the children in their care, and for engaging parents in their children's learning.
- *That teachers and educators need support to carry out this responsibility well.* OSF and ISSA have created a strong framework of support for teachers through regular in-training and through establishing communities of learning with supportive on-line resources. It has also formulated an outstanding set of guidelines for early childhood and primary school teachers working with disadvantaged children, families and communities.
- That work for young children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds needs to be accompanied by social justice information and action against discrimination and prejudice. These values figure strongly in ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy and in its teacher education courses.

Key messages

The key messages from the literature reviews and case studies are brought together in the final chapter of the study. In addition to the findings outlined above, they underline that quality ECEC provision for children from disadvantaged backgrounds will include attention to

Governance responsibilities: Administrative responsibility includes effective governance and adequate resourcing of the early childhood system; the formulation and strict observance - not least in poor neighbourhoods and rural areas - of minimum standards for young children, both in the physical environment (buildings, space per child, outdoors, pedagogical materials...), and in programme quality (see below). ECEC administrations should seek to remove all barriers to early enrolment and to broaden the understanding of ECEC services for disadvantaged communities to include: comprehensive services; outreach to parents and the local community; community-based strategies to protect maternal and infant health...

Pedagogical quality: Pedagogical quality at centre level depends both on structural features, (e.g. staff qualifications; adequate pre-service and in-service education; smaller teacher-child ratios that allow attention to individual children; an enriched learning environment; a professionally developed play-based curriculum²...) and on staff knowledge and practice. In particular, staff need to have a deep understanding of how young children learn and a thorough mastery of the curriculum. They should be aware of the importance of relational and rich verbal interactions with young children and provide ongoing support to socio-emotional well-being and development.³ Attention to diversity, with an emphasis on creating a positive emotional climate that welcomes the diverse needs of children and families, is also

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2. The curriculum should be open enough to allow the teaching staff to respond pertinently to the particular strengths, needs and contexts of the children in their care
 3. Unlike most other European studies, EPPE (2004) gave much attention to socio-emotional development and identified the closeness and quality of relationships between teachers and children as being of core importance. Staff showing respect to children, listening to what they say, responding sympathetically and using language and reasoning were associated with better social-emotional outcomes. Staff were encouraged to give particular attention to the development of autonomy, self-regulation and positive social behaviour (cooperation, sharing, and empathy) in young children.

a feature of quality, especially when children from disadvantaged backgrounds are present. EPPE (2004) showed that cognitive achievement was more likely to occur when adults worked one-to-one with children and in focused small group work. Likewise attention to parents, in particular, to helping parents to support children's learning at home, was found to be a critical indicator of quality.

The social environment. Where disadvantaged children and families are concerned, early childhood systems need to be supported by a broader welfare system that links policies across many sectors – employment, education, health and social services. This presupposes a cultural and political commitment to democratic rights, equality and solidarity. In such a framework and as part of a network of co-ordinated services at national and local levels, early childhood centres have the potential not only to provide care and education to young children and their families, but also to catalyse cultural and political change by linking their initiatives to those of other public agencies and NGOs. The authors of the literature review remark, however, that only within a shared vision of ECEC as a public good can this goal be concretely achieved.

Chapter 1: Introduction

An overview of the joint agreement and its objectives

This study has been carried out for the Directorate General Education and Culture in response to a request for services under the Framework Service Contract No EAC/02/2010 for the provision of expertise and support for European Cooperation in Education and Training - Studies / External Part (Lot 4). The overall objective of the study is to support the work of the Commission and Member States, within the Education and Training work programme, in the field of ECEC and social inclusion.

The EU dialogue with Australia in education and training is underpinned by the EU-Australian Partnership Framework adopted on 29th October 2008. This framework makes provision for the exchange of information between the partners with the aim of promoting knowledge building and sharing on mutual issues of interest. Among the follow-up actions agreed upon, was to jointly produce a policy study on Early Childhood Education and Care, with special attention to disadvantaged and culturally diverse groups of children.

In both regions, reaching the groups most in need of ECEC services is a major challenge that needs orchestrated efforts cutting across traditional sectoral boundaries. This joint study with Australia was designed with the aim of developing a framework for comparing the two regions and, within this framework, identifying the main success criteria concerning accessibility and quality of ECEC in order to promote the integration of disadvantaged children into society and to give them an equal chance with their more advantaged peers. For the purposes of the study, it was decided to focus the European literature review, case studies and analysis on the following groups of vulnerable and disadvantaged children:

- Children living in poverty or at risk of poverty
- Children of migrant or refugee families
- Children at risk; and
- Roma children

Among the requirements set for the joint study in the Terms of Reference were:

- a) A literature review of existing studies from Australia and EU Member States on barriers to, and best practice in engaging disadvantaged children and families in ECEC services to enhance their social inclusion.
- b) A literature review of existing studies from Australia and EU Member States on children's acquisition of cognitive and non-cognitive (including social skills) through participation in ECEC services and their importance to social development, successful transition to school and social inclusion.
- c) Two case studies each from Australia and the EU where ECEC services engage successfully with specific disadvantaged groups.

The main requirement, to undertake a joint study with Australia was modified during the study owing to unforeseen delays on the part of the Australian team, who were unexpectedly taken up with priority policy work during the period scheduled for the study. A new agreed schedule accepted the preliminary findings from the European literature reviews and confirmed that the European case studies proposed by SOFRECO should go ahead. Furthermore, as it became clear that the Australian data could not be provided within a suitable timescale for the final report, it was agreed with DG EAC to finalise the draft report

using the European data only. It is to be hoped that this delay will be overcome in time and that Australian data will be supplied to allow a comparative analysis of the two contexts.

Given the diverse contexts in the 27 EU Member States and the wide range of organisations and agencies engaged in international work in the early childhood field, the next section of the Introduction will define the key terms used in the study. After these definitions, there follows a brief presentation of the methodology and structure of the report.

Key terms

Early childhood education and care services

The term 'early childhood education and care' is used in a broad sense in this study. It covers all publicly funded services aiming to ensure the well-being, health and education of young children from pre-natal to primary school entry. These services can be provided by a variety of formal, non-formal and informal settings, including peri-natal and mother-child services, home-based and community-based childcare programmes, crèches, play groups, kindergartens and preschools. For children from disadvantaged backgrounds, issues of infant and child health, parent education, language stimulation and early socialisation are particularly critical. At the other end of the age range, transitions into compulsory education also need attention, where primary school classes need also to take into account the well-being and natural learning strategies of young children. As underlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art.3.1) 1. "In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration."

Children at-risk of educational failure due to a disadvantaged background

In this report, we follow the OECD distinction between 'children with special educational needs' and 'children at-risk of educational failure due to a disadvantaged background'. It focuses predominantly on the latter and interchanges the terms 'children from a disadvantaged background' and 'children at-risk' (of education difficulties). Depending on the country in question, this group of children, which includes children from immigrant and migrant populations, is large in all school populations, ranging across Europe from 14% in Finland to 49% in Romania. In some neighbourhoods and in isolated regions, the entire child population may be at-risk. The educational needs of these children are defined by the OECD as:

'the educational needs of students that are considered to arise primarily from socio-economic, cultural and/or linguistic factors. There is present some form of background, generally considered to be a disadvantage, for which education seeks to compensate. The definition encompasses children living in poverty; children living in areas where services are less accessible (e.g. rural areas); children from low-income families; children with a migrant and/or second language background; and children belonging to very disadvantaged groups, such as Roma (OECD, 2006).

"Children with special needs", that is, children whose educational needs derive from sensory impairments or from organic disabilities, including communication and processing disorders, are less numerous.⁴ Except to briefly summarise the main findings of studies undertaken by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE), *Early Childhood Intervention – Progress and developments, 2005–2010*, this paper does not provide advice concerning early childhood intervention (ECI), as the educational needs of children with special needs is a specialised policy area and central to the work carried out by EADSNE. Neither does this report address specifically the particular needs of children at-risk of violence, sexual exploitation or other severe at-risk situations. These are areas of special expertise that cannot be adequately addressed within the limits of one paper.

4. In parallel with improved screening of dyslexia, attention-deficit disorder and other learning disabilities, the number of children diagnosed with learning disabilities due to organic or processing disorders has grown significantly in recent years,

Yet, certain principles of inclusion are common to all groups of children, for instance, the principle that the social and education rights of *all* children, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, should be fully recognised and implemented by education and other ministries responsible for young children.⁵ A second principle is that by addressing child and family poverty issues, countries could reduce significantly the number of children born with or contracting special needs.⁶ In addition, by reducing child poverty, countries could greatly increase equality of opportunity, as national data show that in most countries the poorest families with little formal education are least likely to use early intervention services.

Toward a definition of 'disadvantaged background'

Because low income is a situation shared by most at-risk families, our concept of disadvantaged background is closely – but not exclusively – related to being born into or belonging to a household 'at risk of poverty', as defined by Eurostat (2012) (<http://ec.europa.eu/Eurostat>):

Persons at-risk-of-poverty are those living in a household with an equivalised disposable income below the risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set in the EU at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income (after social transfers). The equivalised income is calculated by dividing the total household income by its size determined after applying the following weights: 1.0 to the first adult, 0.5 to each other household members aged 14 or over and 0.3 to each household member aged less than 14 years old.

Where inequality of education outcomes is concerned, it is important to broaden the understanding of 'at-risk' beyond the notion of low income. According to Bourdieu (1993), differences in social and cultural capital (non-material resources) constitute a major difference between the classes and determine substantially the educational opportunities available to children. In addition therefore to low income and jobless households, at-risk indicators include social and family situations that prevent or reduce participation in mainstream society, such as, minority ethnic or migrant status; place of residence, or lack of access to essential services, such as health and education. Personal and family factors, for example, having a disability; family dysfunction, homelessness, weak social networks and low parental education - also influence risk of education failure.

Roma children⁷

The Roma population (along with those assimilated to the group) is recognised as the biggest ethnic minority in the European Union, with between 10 and 15 million people (12 million is the most cited figure). They are, for the great majority, EU citizens and live in all 27 member states. It is estimated that as many as 50 per cent of their population is composed of children below the age of 15 years. If this is the case, there are approximately 6 million Roma children under the age of 15 years, giving an estimated child population of over 2 million children under 6 years, that is, greater than the combined under-6 population of the five Nordic countries.

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5. An authoritative interpretation of what the Convention means vis-a-vis young children is provided by General Comment No. 7 (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006).
 6. In situations of severe poverty, it can be difficult to separate primary and secondary causes of developmental delay, as both genetic and environmental factors contribute.
 7. In the present text, the term "Roma" is used in the loose sense adopted in official policy documents from the European Parliament and the European Council, that is, as an umbrella term which includes groups of people who self-identify as Roma or who have similar cultural characteristics, such as Sinti, Travellers, Kalé, gens du voyage, etc. whether sedentary or not. Around 80% of Roma are estimated to be sedentary (SEC, 2010,400). We are aware that in referring to children from Roma backgrounds in blanket terms, we run the risk of adding to the current discrimination and imposed homogenisation of these children. Like other children from excluded backgrounds, each Roma child should be seen first of all as a child, as a subject of rights (including the right to care and education) and deserving of respect equal to other children. Inclusion and belonging should be strongly promoted in every community and early childhood centre in which these children are present.

In Europe, Roma children are an extreme example of child poverty. The recent survey by UNDP and the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2012): *The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States*, provides striking figures on Roma poverty. On average, about 90% of the Roma surveyed live in households with an equivalised income below national poverty lines. Severe deprivation is also widespread: on average, around 40% of Roma live in households where somebody had to go to bed hungry at least once in the last month because they could not afford to buy food. Roma children have also higher rates of asphyxia at birth, complications from premature birth, respiratory illness, and diarrheal diseases than majority children. These conditions are the four principal causes of child mortality up to five years of age in developing countries. The situation is a matter of serious concern not only for Europe's economic future but also for its present reputation for human rights, including its implementation of treaties and legally binding instruments, such as, the EU Directive 2000/43 on *Equal treatment on grounds of racial and ethnic origin* (the Racial Equality Directive) and the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*.

Children from immigrant backgrounds

Immigrant children are defined in the present study as children from another country, within or outside Europe, whose parents or grandparents have settled in the host country, or who may be seeking asylum, have refugee status, or be simply irregular immigrants. Although some few countries require proof of residence prior to admitting children into the school system, most EU countries extend the right to education to all children of compulsory school age irrespective of their immigrant status. Children from families who have been settled in the host country for more than two generations are not considered immigrant.

Social inclusion

Another key concept employed in the Commission's *Request for Services* is the notion of social inclusion, defined within the Lisbon process as follows:⁸

Social inclusion is a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It ensures that they have a greater participation in decision making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights.

In contrast, social exclusion is a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. Exclusion distances people from jobs, education and training opportunities, as well as from social and community networks and activities. Excluded families have little access to power and decision-making bodies and thus often feel powerless and unable to take control over the decisions that affect their day to day lives. In terms of early childhood services, this may mean that children from socially excluded families have less access to services or receive services of poor quality. Parents too may be ignored and lack representation on decision-making bodies.

Cognitive and non-cognitive skills (including social skills)

The *Request for Services* draws attention to the acquisition of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills (including social skills) as a goal for early childhood services. Definitions of these skills can vary significantly according to the socio-economic situation and cultural preferences of different communities and countries, and are further influenced by particular schools of developmental psychology.⁹ In addition, there is considerable disagreement

8. Definition from the EC's 2004 Joint Report on Social Inclusion.

9. For example, behaviourists tend to privilege cognitive skills and social behaviours from an adult perspective and see the development of children as accumulating pre-defined skills, through large group instruction. In contrast, constructivist and socio-cultural schools of thought describe knowledge and behaviour as being co-

among experts about what constitutes intelligence and the extent to which its development is influenced by the environment.

In education circles, cognitive skills are often equated to 'academic' knowledge and skills, which are then measured through standardised tests or teacher assessments. The indicators of cognitive development most frequently measured in the early years are: general knowledge appropriate for the age; receptive and expressive communication skills; early literacy and numeracy skills, such as pre-reading abilities and number concepts; school readiness; grade retention; and need for special education placement.

Non-cognitive skills are likewise often equated to the social skills that contribute to the smooth running of classrooms, for example, to the growing ability of the young child to self-regulate (to be autonomous, tolerate frustration, take turns, wait, stand in line...); to show positive social behaviour (sharing, co-operation, empathy, learning to live and work with other children) and acquire learning dispositions (motivation to learn, showing persistence and perseverance in carrying out learning tasks...). The lack of antisocial/worried behaviour at school entry can also be taken into account, as worry and stress undermine the ability of young children to focus and learn. For this reason, the socio-emotional climate of classrooms and centres is a critical process indicator.

Methodology

The study follows the methodology outlined in the tender with the exception of the integration of the EU and Australian data, given the absence of the latter. The time-line included the preparation of guidelines, contracting and reception of two literature reviews and two case studies.

Literature Review A – A literature review of barriers to, and good practices in fostering the social inclusion of disadvantaged children and families through ECEC. This review took into account sources from countries with different social regimes, different languages and different ECEC traditions. Findings from the large array of literature reviewed were then collated and summarised into themes relevant to the research design.

Literature Review B – A literature review of existing European studies on children's acquisition of cognitive and non-cognitive skills (including social skills) through participation in ECEC services and their importance to social development, successful transition to school and social inclusion.

Based on the findings from the literature review, two case-study themes were proposed to the Commission, viz.: governance and teacher education. These themes were selected as there is broad consensus in European research circles that in addition to poverty reduction and respect for children's rights, governance and teacher education are critical elements in developing high quality in early childhood services. After authorisation from the Commission, recognised specialists in each field were contracted to carry out the case studies:

A case study of government initiatives for young children in England, 1997-2010, written by Professor Peter Moss, University of London;

A case study of Open Society Foundations (OSF) and International Step by Step Association (ISSA) approaches to teacher training and pedagogy, written by Dawn Tankersley (ISSA Program Expert, Step by Step, Budapest) and Sarah Klaus (Director, Early Childhood Program, OSF)

A summary of the literature reviews and case studies is provided in Chapter 3, with an analysis of lessons to be learned relevant to our overall theme: *The contribution of ECEC to promoting educational attainment and social development of children from disadvantaged*

constructed by young children through interactions with their environment. The approach is more sensitive to the subjective world of the child and requires a more child-centred pedagogy and lower child:staff ratios.

backgrounds. Data from the literature review and the cases studies are pulled together in order to identify key criteria for early childhood systems in their effort to provide high quality services to children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Structure of the report

The report is organised into four chapters: an introduction; an overview of the European early childhood context; a summary of the literature review and case studies; and conclusions.

Chapter 1: Introduction, provides a brief overview of the *Request for Services* and its objectives, defines the key terms used in the report and describes the methodology.

Chapter 2: The European Context, provides data on the extent of child poverty in Europe and describes the negative impact of poverty, especially in infancy and early childhood. It then provides a brief overview of the access of children to early childhood services across European countries, in particular, the access rates of children most severely at-risk, such as, migrant and Roma children.

Chapter 3: The literature review and case studies, provides brief summaries of the main findings from the literature reviews and the two external case studies (the full text of each can be found in Appendix I and II).

The report concludes with *Chapter 4*, which summarises the key messages from the literature reviews and case studies.

Chapter 2: Child poverty and disadvantage in the European policy context

The following chapter provides current data on child poverty in Europe and on the access rates of disadvantaged children to high quality early childhood services. Much of this data and information has been collated from the qualitative studies published by the Commission and other authoritative sources.

2.1 Child poverty in Europe

Data on poverty in Europe

According to the Eurostat *Newsrelease* (<http://ec.europa.eu/Eurostat>) of 8 February 2012, 23.4% (115 million people) of the population of EU-27 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The highest shares of persons being at risk of poverty or social exclusion were recorded in Bulgaria (42%), Romania (41%), Latvia (38%), Lithuania (33%) and Hungary (30%), and the lowest in the Czech Republic (14%), Sweden and the Netherlands (both 15%), Austria, Finland and Luxembourg (all 17%). For the moment in Europe, the overall poverty trend is negative: the numbers of unemployed and poor has increased significantly since 2008.

Children are at greater risk of poverty

During the past twenty years, child poverty has increased significantly in most European countries, with younger children facing a higher risk of relative poverty than any other group. Children particularly exposed to the risk of poverty include those from large, low-income families; households with a migrant background; Roma children; street children and those who are exposed to a series of social risks such as homelessness, violence and trafficking. As can be seen from the following Table I, children are at greater risk of poverty or social exclusion than adult populations, except in Denmark, Finland, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden. (<http://ec.europa.eu/Eurostat>).

Table 1. Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age group, 2010 %

	Children (0-17 years)	Working age population	Elderly (65 years and over)
EU27*	26.9	23.3	19.8
Belgium	23.2	20.0	21.0
Bulgaria	44.6	36.9	55.9
Czech Republic	18.9	14.1	10.1
Denmark	15.1	19.5	18.4
Germany	21.7	20.8	14.8
Estonia	24.0	21.8	19.0
Ireland	:	:	:
Greece	28.7	27.7	26.7
Spain	29.8	25.1	22.6
France	23.0	20.0	12.0
Italy	28.9	24.7	20.3

Cyprus	:	:	:
Latvia	42.0	37.0	37.7
Lithuania	34.3	34.0	30.0
Luxembourg	22.3	17.5	6.1
Hungary	38.7	30.5	16.8
Malta	24.4	19.1	21.9
Netherlands	16.9	16.5	6.2
Austria	18.8	16.1	15.8
Poland	30.8	27.6	24.4
Portugal	28.7	24.1	26.1
Romania	48.7	39.7	39.9
Slovenia	15.2	18.1	22.8
Slovakia	25.3	20.2	16.7
Finland	14.2	17.1	19.5
Sweden	14.5	15.0	15.9
United Kingdom	29.7	21.2	22.3
Iceland	17.6	14.7	5.3
Norway	14.6	15.7	12.3
Switzerland	19.9	13.7	27.7

Source: Eurostat (2012)

The impact of poverty on early development and education can be severe

Children born into severe poverty are disproportionately exposed to factors that impede their psycho-motor development, socio-emotional growth and cognitive processes (Shore, 1997, Fraser Mustard, 2002, McCain et al. 2011). Their socio-emotional development can be undermined when in the first years of life they experience high stress on a daily basis: (Greenspan & Shanker, 2004, Shanker 2011). A recent longitudinal study from Sweden on the 1950 birth cohort (Bäckmann & Nillson, 2010) identifies long-lasting periods of poverty in childhood as being most detrimental for future educational and social achievement. When linked with deprived or neglectful family backgrounds and poorly educated parents, poverty becomes the single greatest barrier to educational achievement (Coleman, 1996; Duncan et al. 1998; Heckman, 2008; Melhuish et al. 2008; EACEA, 2009; Del Boca, 2010; Ladd, 2011).¹⁰ Likewise, the PISA study (OECD, 2004) confirms the strong influence of socio-economic background on the educational achievement of 15-year olds.

Too often, the link between poverty and low school performance is not sufficiently addressed. Attention to quality and pedagogical is necessary, of course, but education policy-makers should not ignore the handicap to educational achievement that child poverty imposes. When asked to comment on the success of the Finnish education system, the director general of the Centre for International Mobility and Cooperation at the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, Pasi Sahlberg, replied:

High-equity education in Finland is not a result of educational factors alone. Basic structures of the Finnish welfare state play a crucial role in providing children and their families with equitable opportunities for starting a successful educational path at age of 7. Early childhood care, voluntary free preschool (attended by 98%), comprehensive health services, and preventive measures to identify possible learning and development difficulties before children start schooling are accessible to all.

The education system performance has to be seen in the context of other systems in society, for example, health, environment, rule of law, governance, economy, and technology. It is not only that the

10. A very recent American study shows once again that student achievement is highly influenced by the family income and school quality. Where the interaction of these two influences is concerned, the crucial variable is not the average neighborhood income, but the average income of the school's students. If the latter does not change, student achievement will not change.

- The richer western European countries have generally higher access rates to pre-primary/kindergarten education than the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, where only Hungary, Estonia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic are above the OECD average of 82%. Finland is an exception, but this is partially explained by the availability of alternative types of provision, such as the family day care.
- The gap in access between East and West is far wider where childcare is concerned: With the exception of Slovenia, which achieves well above average EU participation rates, the CEE countries have far lower access rates to childcare, which has become almost non-existent in some countries.
- Underlying reasons for low access can be: low employment opportunities for women, cultural norms, funding decisions at local or national levels, operational constraints in increasing the supply of early childhood education in specific areas of the country, or for specific groups of children; poor quality and weak pedagogical approaches (EURYDICE, 2009).

Access rates of children from disadvantaged backgrounds

Comparable data on the access of children from disadvantaged backgrounds across the European countries are not available. Member States define disadvantage in different ways or else, as in several countries, do not collect disaggregated data on these children but are content to designate certain neighbourhoods as priority education areas. In general, the counting of children from disadvantaged backgrounds takes place within the context of child poverty analyses and is based primarily on income-based measures, sometimes to the neglect of social, family and geographical indicators.

However, several countries identify groups of children most at risk of education failure, for instance, Belgium, France, the Nordic countries, and the UK. The two largest groups of low-income and potentially marginalised children in Europe are children from immigrant and Roma backgrounds. Strong overall enrolment is recorded for immigrant children in early education,

The participation of Roma children is much weaker, reaching on average considerably less than 50%. Where childcare is concerned, the enrolment of both groups is extremely weak. For example, in Belgium Flanders, *Kind en Gezin*, (2010) reports:

Use of child care by ethnic minority children and children from underprivileged families is much lower (in Flanders) than in the population of children as a whole. Only 32.6% of ethnic minority children and 21.0% of children in underprivileged families use child care on a regular basis (compared to a 70.8% use by Flemish children). Compared with Spring 2004, regular use by ethnic minority children has increased considerably, but use by underprivileged children has stayed the same:

Table 2. Use of child care by disadvantaged groups in Flanders (2009)

	Regular use	Limited use	No use
Flemish children	70.8	5.5	23.7
Ethnic minority children	32.6	6.1	61.3
Children born into underprivileged families	21.0	8.7	70.4
Children born into families that are not underprivileged	65.7	5.6	28.7
Children in one-parent families	54.6	9.5	36.0
Children being brought up by a married or cohabiting couple	63.8	5.6	30.6
All children	63.2	5.8	31.0

Source: Kind en Gezin (2010), *The Child in Flanders*, 2009¹¹

11. Kind en Gezin (Child and Family) is the national agency for children pre-natal to three years in Flanders, Belgium. It has developed an exceptionally wide range of peri-natal services and parent support programs,

Migrant populations in European countries

In 2009, non-nationals of the country where they reside in the European Union totalled approximately 31 million, i.e. 6.4% of the total EU population, a rise from 5.7% only three years previously. Among this group, almost 2 out of 3 are non-EU citizens (4% of total population) with a large share of Turks, Moroccans and Albanians (Eurostat. 2009). The country with the highest share of foreigners is Luxembourg, where more than 43% of inhabitants are non-natives, but only 14% of whom are citizens of countries outside the EU. In the rest of the EU, non-nationals constitute a large share of the total population in Cyprus, Spain, Ireland and Austria (more than 10%).¹² In five countries, the percentage of non-national young children exceeds 10%, namely Luxembourg (where more than 50% of children are non-nationals), Austria, Ireland, Spain and Italy.

Access and achievement rates of migrant children

Migrant children include children born in another country (within or outside Europe) and children whose parents or grandparents were born in another country. They are an important and growing group in European education. Of the EU's 27 member states, 15 now have school populations in which at least 10 per cent of 15-year-old students are migrants. Many schools in large EU cities may have half or more students of foreign origin.

Early enrolment in early childhood services is generally seen as a major prevention strategy for these children, especially for migrant children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may also confront differences of language and culture between school and home. However, although enrolments continue to improve,

"migrant children in some countries, for example in Germany, still enrol at a later age and overall at a lower ratio compared to their native peers (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales 2007a, 43 (EACES-Nesse, 2008).

In most countries for which there is available data, native and migrant children enrol equally in early education systems where participation is nearly universal, such as in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. A second pattern is that children with parents born abroad appear to participate slightly more than native children in Estonia and the Czech Republic, while in Portugal, the gap in enrolment – according to the available figures - is about 10 percentage points in favour of migrant-background children, 100% of whom are registered as participating in ISCED 0. Finally, according to the European Commission (3013) report, there is a third group of countries where the participation of children with migrant parents in formal ECEC is lower. This is the case in Austria, Cyprus, Iceland and Italy. The largest discrepancies appear in Iceland and Cyprus in which there is a difference of over 20 and 10 percentage points, respectively. Italy also falls into this category as the proportion of children with native parents in ECEC reaches 96%, compared to 88% for migrant background children.

Education achievement: In general, migrant children fare less well in schools in comparison to their peers from the host countries. According to the EACEA (2009) analysis , "Migrant students are disadvantaged in terms of enrolment in type of school, duration of attending school, indicators of achievement, drop-out rates and types of school diploma reached." Though globally true, taking first- and second-generation migrants separately, the gap is evident only for the first generation, while those classified as second-generation migrants are

reaching almost the entire Flemish population. The programs include home visits, consultations schemes for infants and toddlers, vaccination programs, early detection, as well as educational advice. Special services for families in poverty and ethnic minority families are incorporated within mainstream provision, including the recruitment of staff from ethnic and excluded groups.

12. In two Baltic countries, Latvia and Estonia, 16-18% of the population is considered non-national, consisting primarily of citizens of the former Soviet Union who have the status of "recognized non-citizens" (Eurostat. 2009).

on average more educated than natives.¹³ However, figures from OECD (2012) for 15 year-old PISA children across OECD countries suggest that more than one-third of first generation immigrant children attend schools with the highest concentrations of students with low-educated mothers.¹⁴ As the quality of schools in disadvantaged areas is generally inferior to mainstream schools, this, no doubt, has an impact on early school leaving. In this regard, *Education at a Glance* (2012) comments:

...education policy alone is unlikely to address these challenges fully. For example, immigrant children's performance on PISA is more strongly (and negatively) associated with the concentration of educational disadvantage in schools than with the concentration of immigrants per se, or the concentration of students who speak a different language at home than at school. Reducing the concentration of educational disadvantage in schools may imply changes in other areas of social policy – for example, housing policies that promote a more balanced social mix in schools at an early age. Page 89.

Early school leaving: Across Europe, the percentage of early school leavers is almost double for young people with a migrant background (26.3% vs. 13.1). The countries in which the overall rate for migrants is far above the EU average are Greece (44.4%), Spain (45%) and Italy (42.4%). The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is also in this category, with 43.8% of migrants and 15.9% native early leavers. The contrast between early school leaving among migrant children and majority children is most marked in Southern Europe (Greece, Spain, Italy and Cyprus) and France, but is also marked in Austria (22.1% vs. 6.0%) and Germany (22.7% vs. to 8.8%), where migrants are between 3 and 4 times more likely to leave the educational system without completing upper secondary education or continuing their education with alternative learning activities. There are a few countries where the situation is reversed, namely Portugal, the United Kingdom and Norway, countries in which immigrant children stay longer in education than their majority counterparts (European Commission, 2013).

Contributors to the consultation organised by the European Commission in the framework of the July 2008 Green Paper entitled *Migration and mobility: Challenges and opportunities for EU education systems* identify the following as the most frequently cited challenges for migrant children in education:

- The strong link between socio-economic and educational disadvantage;
- The lack of co-ordination between the different policies addressed to migrant children and their families;
- The trend towards school segregation;
- The absence of comprehensive equal opportunities policies;
- The fact that schools have often still not adapted to the needs of migrant pupils or cannot reach out to their families;
- The lack of necessary intercultural skills by teachers; and
- The lack of financial resources for addressing these problems.

The EACEA-NESSE analysis cited above shows also that differences in student outcomes vary considerably between countries. Analysis of the 2003 PISA data for instance showed that in Sweden, the percentage of 15 year old migrant students reaching only the lowest

13 Second generation is defined as natives whose parents were born abroad. In countries receiving highly educated migrants, second generation children sometimes have lower education achievement than their parents, as, for example, in Finland and Ireland.

14. Figures from OECD (2012) for 15 year-old PISA children, based on the children's self-report show:

- Migrant pupils with a low-educated mother (upper-secondary not attained) are enrolled 55.1% in disadvantaged schools, compared to 50.1% among majority pupils;
- Migrant pupils with a highly-educated mothers (tertiary attained) are enrolled 26.1% in disadvantaged schools, compared to 14.5% among majority pupils;
- Migrant pupils with a highly-educated mothers (tertiary attained) but living in families with a low occupational status (with a HISEI lower than 40) are enrolled 43.9% in disadvantaged schools, compared to 22.4% among majority pupils;

reading competence level was 16%, whereas in Germany the figure was 44% (Stanat & Christensen 2006).

Access rates of Roma children to early childhood services

Compared to the access of majority populations, access to health and social services by young Roma children is comparatively very low compared to majority populations. The RECI Overview (2012) and other reports record:

- Low or irregular access of Roma mothers to pre-natal and infant health services;
- Low birth-weight and other prenatal and birth disorders;
- Poor nutrition and food insecurity, including during pregnancy and infancy;
- Inadequate infant health, dental, and vision care, often the result of passive medical services that are reluctant to reach out actively to the poorest families, or are so under-financed that emergency rather than preventive care becomes the norm;
- Family stress (often due to lack of employment and income) and lack of verbal interaction;
- Negative neighbourhood characteristics, both social and environmental, including marginalisation, substandard housing and community infra-structure.

Even if access to high quality early education services were available, such factors affect significantly the health and learning capacities of children and limit what early education or schools can accomplish.

Access rates of all children to childcare services are relatively very low in the countries where Roma constitute a significant minority. Among the small percentage of children accessing these services, Roma children are almost entirely absent, both for reasons of access and desirability. The majority of Roma families live in rural areas where childcare structures may be entirely absent. In addition, very few Roma mothers have access to work outside the home and child-rearing at home is considered as a precious part of Roma tradition. Because of their late entry into kindergartens, many Roma children have the supplementary difficulty of entering school without the rudiments of the national language of instruction.

Data on the access of young Roma children to pre-school (kindergarten) services is difficult to uncover. Shortly after their transition to market economies, some Central and Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, the former Yugoslav states, Romania...) ceased – in the name of non-discrimination - to collect disaggregated data on Roma and other minority children. In the national census surveys, minorities were identified only through self-report – an unreliable means of assessing minority populations as many prefer to declare themselves as belonging to the majority. Today, several countries have no precise idea of the percentage of highly disadvantaged Roma children in the child population. Lack of this basic data makes it very difficult to develop effective policy for these children or to monitor and evaluate programmes. Knowledge of Roma child numbers, enrolments, and completion rates is derived basically from external studies, carried out by international organisations, such as OSF, UNDP, UNICEF, and the World Bank, often sponsored by the European Commission.

The present report draws data on Roma from the UNICEF MICS surveys (2006, 2010), the RECI Overview Report (2012), the European Commission reports (2009, 2013) on *Progress towards the common European objectives in education and training* and, in particular, on data from the recent publication by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and UNDP, entitled *The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States* (UNDP/FRA, 2012). The latter analysis is based on two surveys sponsored by the Commission and organised by UNDP and the World Bank. The surveys covered Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. In all, 22,203 Roma and non-Roma were interviewed and information on 84,287 household members was gathered. Interviews were carried out face-to-face in the homes of both Roma and non-Roma

respondents. With regard to the access of Roma children to early childhood services, the survey analysis paints a bleak picture:

- On average, only one out of two Roma children surveyed attend pre-school or kindergarten. Only two countries – Hungary and Spain – succeed in providing access to early education to more than 70% of Roma children before compulsory education begins. In other countries, with significant Roma minorities, participation rates can be extremely low, sometimes less than one Roma child in four.
- During compulsory school age, at least 10 % of Roma children aged 7 to 15 in Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, France and Italy are identified as not attending school, meaning that they are still in preschool, or not yet in education, or have skipped the year, or have stopped school completely or are already working. This proportion is highest in Greece with more than 35 % of Roma children not attending school. Participation in education drops considerably after compulsory school: only 15% of young Roma adults surveyed complete upper-secondary general or vocational education.
- Only 15 % of young Roma adults surveyed have completed upper-secondary general or vocational education, compared with more than 70 % of the majority population living nearby.

The Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI) project, sponsored by UNICEF, Open Society Foundations and the Roma Education Fund, reports rather lower attendance figures for pre-school and kindergarten. This disparity is possibly due to the difference between the *formal enrolment* of children in early childhood services (which Roma parents surveyed in the FRA/UNDP survey are likely to have reported) and the *actual attendance rates* which, in the case of the RECI project, were provided by teachers and school administrators. RECI also reports a serious neglect of Roma children 0-3 years old.

EU support for the education of migrant and Roma children

Over the last decade, the EU has promoted general education policies and reforms that are specifically targeted on migrant children and youth. The green paper *Migration and Mobility*, which draws on extensive research on the education of migrant pupils, is an example. When published in 2008, it opened a broad debate on how education policies can better address the challenges posed by migration flows into and within the EU. It makes relevant policy recommendations in areas such as language acquisition and multilingualism, school segregation problems, teacher training and education. Current EC policies on early childhood education and care, early school leaving, and newly arrived migrants are also most relevant to the education of migrant children. Education aspirations for migrants are also helped by programmes in the field of fundamental rights, equality, and antidiscrimination; integration, social inclusion and cohesion (OSF, 2010).

EU initiatives to promote the education of Roma children are strongly in evidence. Not only has the Commission published a raft of research and directives but also, with its co-operating partners - The World Bank, the Open Society Foundations, and UNICEF – it created the Roma Education Fund in 2005, within the framework of the Decade for Roma Inclusion. The fund promotes and carries out research on Roma education and takes part in various educational projects for Roma children. Its most recent major project is called *A Good Start*, which ran in 16 of the most deprived rural and urban settlements in Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, and Slovakia.

What measures are European Member States taking to provide ECEC for children at-risk?

The major government policy for these children is to provide free, universal early childhood education for all children from 3 or 4 years to compulsory school age. Thus, in principle, in Belgium, Spain, France, Italy and the Netherlands, all children are enrolled at the age of 4 until the start of primary education while Germany, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden have also seen significant

increases in participation since the Barcelona targets were announced in 2002. In addition, the EU Member States underwrite, to a greater or lesser extent, specific measures to make early education more effective for children at-risk of education failure. These are summarised in EACEA (2009) as follows:

All countries implement measures intended to prevent educational difficulties for children at risk. In the majority of countries, intervention is targeted at groups on the basis of defined social, economic or cultural criteria. In a few countries, support is based on the individual needs of children identified during the course of their education/instruction... This may include special language training programmes mostly for enhancement of the second language, but sometimes also for the mother tongue. The most common (programmes) are compensatory programmes or the provision of specialist support for older children (3-6 year-olds) at pre-primary level.

Where the financing of services for these children is concerned, three main strategies are apparent: additional financial assistance and/or additional staffing (the most widespread); financial incentives for staff working with children at risk or in settings where the majority of children are from groups at risk; and additional financial support from central level to local authorities, taking into account regional demographic and socio-economic factors. The Nordic countries distinguish themselves by adopting also an early prevention approach, that is, by making equity, employment and income distribution a central tenet of their social welfare systems, thereby reducing radically the number of children and families in poverty.

Other initiatives can also be cited, such as:

- Changes in legislation to ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and especially Roma children, do not suffer either exclusion or discrimination when they enter compulsory schooling. An outstanding example is the Serbian *Law on the Fundamentals of Education* (2009) which recognizes that children with disabilities and/or learning challenges should have opportunities for education equal to those of other children. Inclusion is viewed as intrinsic to the mission, values, and practices of public education. A new *Law on Pre-school Education* goes in the same direction and innovates in the matter of assessing children with disabilities and learning difficulties. No longer will these children be placed in categories or assessed in terms of special placements, but solely in terms of the supports they will need in mainstream schools.
- The creation of a compulsory 'preparatory class' or making the final year of kindergarten compulsory, before young children enter compulsory education. Several CEE countries have introduced this 'zero year' and Hungary intends to lower the compulsory age for kindergarten from 5 years to 3 in the present year (2013).

Overall, therefore, many initiatives for children at risk are taking place all over Europe. The Eurochild analysis of the NSRs and NRPs mentions that

The area in which positive measures are identified most frequently is the development of pre-school/early education especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. AT, BE, BG, CY, DE, EE, FR, HU, IT, LT, NL, PL, PT, SI, UKE).

But there also are many concerns:

A first concern is that several independent agencies consider that current efforts in Europe to combat child poverty and to improve access for at-risk children to early childhood services remain very inadequate. For instance, from May to September 2011, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) carried out a survey of its members across Europe requesting their evaluation of the first NRPs (National Reform Programmes). The following citation summarises the overall judgment of the survey on the commitment of European countries to reduce child poverty:

The findings from this analysis of the 2012 NRPs and NSRs... show, for the second year in succession, that the issue of child poverty and child well-being remains a relatively minor and unaddressed issue in the Europe 2020 process. Most Member States' NRPs do not prioritise the issue of child poverty and social exclusion. Very few set targets for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion. Even when these issues are a priority, the approach is often far too narrow, focussing just on labour market access and educational disadvantage but largely ignoring issues of income support and access to services.

Similar Eurochild (2012a) analyses also identify weaknesses in country commitment to reducing child poverty and provide many country examples of disregard for social issues and children's well-being. Overall Eurochild considers that national plans lack a rights-based approach to children in poverty and that, in general, these plans do not commit themselves to quantifiable goals. The conceptualisation of early childhood services also remains weak: countries privilege kindergarten attendance "with a lack of focus on services for 0-3s including pre- and post-natal care". Young children are still not given sufficient attention in most countries and the negative effect of poverty on their development is not sufficiently understood. Investment in early education service is still far behind investment in other education cycles, even though early childhood health and well-being are the foundations of later development, as shown in the following literature reviews from European sources.

A further concern is that despite the many initiatives in Europe on behalf of young children from disadvantaged backgrounds, sufficient information on the large-scale government programmes for these children is lacking. We shall refer again to this gap in information in the section on research in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3: The literature reviews and case studies

This chapter provides brief summaries of the main findings from the literature reviews and the two external case studies (the full text of each can be found in Appendix I and II). Each summary is followed by a short discussion summarising the main lessons to be learned, relevant to early childhood policy for disadvantaged children.

3.1 The literature reviews – an introduction

In its *Request for Services*, the European Commission asked for two literature reviews, one of existing studies from the EU Member States on “barriers to, and best practices in, engaging disadvantaged children and families in ECEC services (in order) to enhance their social inclusion” and a second on “children’s acquisition of cognitive and non-cognitive (including social skills) through participation in ECEC services and their importance to social development, successful transitions to school and social inclusion”. The full text of the literature reviews can be consulted in Appendix I.

The literature reviews were carried out by Dr Arianna Lazzari, Department of Education Science, Bologna University and Professor Michel Vandebroek, Department of Social Welfare Studies, Ghent University. The relevant studies were identified through sifting through research databases, research portals and books, and then selected according to the eligibility criteria agreed. For the purpose of the analysis, both primary studies and literature reviews were taken into account, provided that they were carried out in EU Member States and published since 2000. A special effort was directed toward the maximum representation of EU countries in the studies selected, with particular reference to different social welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 2002) and to the different situations from which disadvantage might stem (e.g. living in poor neighbourhoods, coming from a migrant background, living in contexts of ethnic division, belonging to segregated groups such as Roma). Only peer-reviewed articles, books and authoritative statements from the European Commission, national governments, universities/research centres and NGOs were taken into account in the analysis. Preference was given to studies, which provided a “thick” description of outstanding programmes, had received research validation, were informed by a relevant theoretical background and included a careful reflection on the wider social, cultural and political context in which successful educational practices were generated. According to the authors, the findings from the review should be generalised beyond national boundaries *only with precaution* as the history, traditions, organization and practices of early childhood differ greatly from country to country.

Part A – Review of barriers and best practices in engaging disadvantaged children

Main barriers to participation

There is a consensus across the literature review that the main barriers to participation in ECEC services are the following (all references are provided in the literature review):

- Low socio-economic status including a low level of parental education, low family income or parental unemployment (Ghysels & Van Lanker, 2011; Felfe & Lalive, 2011; Del Boca, 2010; OSCE, 2010; Boisson, 2008; Vandebroek et al., 2008; Driessen, 2004; Sylva et al., 2004; Wall & Josè, 2004; Leseman, 2002);

- Living in poor neighbourhoods/rural areas/marginalised settlements (OSCE, 2010; Vandebroek et al., 2008; Noally et al. 2007);
- Ethnic minority background (Boisson, 2008; Vandebroek et al., 2008; Wall & Josè, 2004), influenced by the length of time parents have been residing in the host country (Driessen, 2004; Leseman, 2002) and their ability to master the host country language (Driessen, 2004).
- On the supply side, other factors hinder participation in ECEC services, in particular: desirability by excluded groups, based on whether they understand these services and their evaluation of the usefulness of these services for their children (Vandebroek, 2007, Vandebroek et al. 2008).

Good¹⁵ practices for engaging disadvantaged children and families in ECEC services

The authors identified in the literature a number of good practices to engage disadvantaged families and their children and improve their social inclusion. Among these practices were:

1. Inclusive practices across early childhood services that incorporate a commitment to social justice and the creation of a positive affective climate toward families and children from disadvantaged backgrounds
2. Responsiveness to children, parents and communities through co-constructing new educational practices with children and their families.
3. Parent involvement within which reciprocal dialogue and responsive practices are fostered. The studies analysed highlight that such co-constructive processes are better fostered in the context of informal meetings, practitioner-parent workshops, and participatory research projects rather than in the context of formal report meetings.
4. Outreach to families who are not attending ECEC services through collaborating with locally established voluntary organisations, which have already developed trusting relationships with marginalised groups, such as, immigrant and Roma communities.
5. Renewed staff training that redefines traditional practice and encompasses more broadly work with parents and local communities (Urban, Vandebroek et al., 2011). In turn, educators need to be supported in fulfilling increasingly demanding tasks through professional development that encourages them to reflect critically on their attitudes and beliefs and provides them with new insights into educational practice.
6. *Participatory, practice-based research*: Inclusive ECEC programming is grounded in practice-based research that explores the needs and potentialities of local contexts, within an ecological framework. Ethnographic research methodologies – that allow a culturally-situated investigation of children and parents’ perspectives – have made a substantial contribution to this field (Tobin, Mantovani & Bove, 2010). According to Whalley et al., (2007), collective participatory research projects encourage educational experimentation and sustain innovation within ECEC settings.
7. ECEC providers actively involved in community consultation processes and engaged with civic issues that improve the lives of the families they serve.

The authors of the literature review conclude that structural conditions and inclusive practices need to be put into place to increase the access of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and propose the following policies:

- A universal entitlement to publicly funded, affordable ECEC provision from the end of parental leave or at least by the age of three or four years;

15. The authors of the literature review preferred to use the term ‘good practices’, to underline the need for careful reflection on the wider social, cultural and political contexts in which successful educational practices are generated and to emphasise the aspect of re-invention over that of replication (Moss & Urban, 2010).

- The integration of ECEC systems (regulation, administration and funding) that promote more equitable access and a more unitary approach to 0-6 provision;
- A flexible organisation of ECEC services in terms of enrolment, attendance requirements and opening hours arrangements...
- A combination of high quality ECEC centre-based provision and parent support programmes (family health, parent education, counselling, adult education...);
- A valued, well qualified and adequately supported workforce;
- Inter-agency cooperation between ECEC centres, health and social services, local authorities;
- A strong and equal partnership between ECEC and compulsory school education;
- A political commitment toward democracy, equality and civil rights.

Discussion

Many academics in the ECEC field would agree with the conclusions put forward by the authors of the literature review but, in some areas, implementation may be difficult. Few European countries manage to implement all the above policies in their early childhood systems and some countries are weak in all domains. For example:

Implementing a universal entitlement to ECEC services.

In most European countries, *a universal entitlement to ECEC services* is generally funded from the age of three years, but then for varying periods. Entitlements to a service may range from two hours daily for eight months of the year to a full-day service for eleven months (the practice in the Nordic countries). In some countries, despite an entitlement to a public service from three years, sufficient support for severely disadvantaged children can be lacking. Awareness does not always exist that unemployed parents may not be able to afford the supplementary expenses (transport, winter clothing, shoes, materials...) of sending a child to kindergarten. In addition, attendance may not be sufficiently encouraged or supervised, prompting some countries to legislate compulsory attendance from 5, 4 or 3 years of age. In contrast, other countries introduce home care subsidies, which encourage parents to keep their children out of services. In yet other countries, a full-day service may be available in the capital and other cities, but even a half-day service is not available to children in poorer rural areas.¹⁶

Where effective entitlements to early childhood services are concerned, good practice can be seen in the Nordic countries and Slovenia, where young children can receive a place in an early childhood service from the end of parental leave. In these countries, the local municipality has the statutory obligation to provide such a place or, as is the case in Finland and Norway, to provide a substantial home-care subsidy.

Integrating childcare and early education systems

The integration of childcare and early education systems (regulation, administration and funding) to promote more equitable access and a more unitary approach to 0-6 provision. Although, both practice and theory support a more integrated approach to young children's development and learning, most European countries are far from having a unitary concept of

16. According to analyses conducted by Van Raven (2010, 2011) for the RECI project, the present long-day kindergarten in several CEE countries favours better-off families as it provides not only early education but also highly subsidised afternoon care for dual working parents - a relatively affluent group in these countries. At the same time, for lack of funding, sufficient kindergarten places do not exist for children from low-income backgrounds – including Roma children in rural settlements - precisely the children who benefit most from early childhood services. A fairer and more effective organisation of services would aim to provide a morning early education service for every child, with afternoon child care being available to parents who wish to pay the full or partial costs. The funding saved on long-day services might allow local governments to improve infrastructure and staffing requirements for children attending the morning period and support simple community services in remote settlements.

education and care, not to mention an organisation of services that reflects such thinking. To change the situation will be challenging.

According to one of the few sustained studies on the question (Kaga et al., UNESCO 2011) a move toward integration can bring the following benefits: a rethinking of the purpose, provision and practice of ECCE across all age groups; changed perceptions of ECCE among the workforce, parents and the wider public, including a greater recognition of the pedagogical value of early childhood services; greater coherence in early childhood policy; the reduction or elimination of inequalities between services for children under and over 3 years; more efficient resourcing for ECCE through the merging of administrations; and the creation of a stronger ECCE system that can influence compulsory education. Although integration within any sector that is strongly committed to young children is possible, an important advantage of integrating the sector within education is that parents from immigrant and traditional backgrounds are more likely to enrol their children in an education service than in a daycare system.

Good practice is again provided by the Nordic countries and Slovenia, which have brought together childcare and early education into one service type for children 1-5 years, with unified access criteria; funding and regulation, workforce, curriculum and pedagogical work;— all under one ministry or policy direction. Theoretically, the move makes good sense as the cognitive learning and socio-emotional development of young children takes place in a progressive but unified fashion across the early childhood period. In addition, the structuring of the service under education generally leads to better salaries, career structures and training of staff – all markers of improved quality in services.¹⁷ A unitary system also allows - particularly in small countries - the development of research in the early childhood field, as when given the responsibility for training an entire ECEC workforce, a university department has the critical mass to engage in early childhood research. In this regard, the relatively small (in population) Nordic countries are again an example and continue to provide each year first-class research on early childhood practice (see Moser, 2011).

Part B - Review of cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes from ECEC

The review covered European research on children's acquisition of cognitive and non-cognitive skills (including social skills) through participation in ECEC services and their importance to social development, successful transition to school and social inclusion.

Main findings

1. High quality ECEC programmes have positive long-lasting effects on cognitive development

As a reminder, the indicators of cognitive development most frequently measured in the early years are: general knowledge appropriate for the age; receptive and expressive communication skills; early literacy and numeracy skills, such as pre-reading abilities and number concepts; school readiness; grade retention; and need for special education placement.

Most longitudinal studies conclude that high quality ECEC programmes have long-lasting effects on children's cognitive development. By promoting children's holistic development, ECEC services enhance fundamental cognitive abilities that facilitate further acquisition of domain-specific skills related to language, general knowledge and mathematics. Some few studies - referring particularly to targeted programmes for disadvantaged children (Veen et al. 2000-2002; Goede & Reezigt, 2001) – concluded that ECEC attendance did not have the

17. England has also unified early childhood services under the Ministry for Education, but because of the presence of a large for-profit sector in childcare, the upgrading of the workforce in terms of qualifications and pay levels has proven particularly difficult.

expected positive impact on children's cognitive development. In this regard, the authors of the literature review suggest that "quality is less the result of a specific programme oriented towards cognitive development than a more generic aspect of ECEC."

2. ECEC programmes have positive effects on children's social skills and socio-emotional development during the early years, but they may not last through primary school.

Non-cognitive skills are often equated to the social skills that contribute to the smooth running of classrooms, for example, to the growing ability of the young child to self-regulate (to be autonomous, tolerate frustration, take turns, wait, stand in line...); to show positive social behaviour (sharing, co-operation, empathy, learning to live and work with other children) and acquire learning dispositions (motivation to learn, showing persistence and perseverance in carrying out learning tasks...).

Few European studies exist in this field but those reviewed confirm that early experiences of socialisation with peers in formal settings promote pro-social behaviour, self-regulation and learning dispositions. However, given the considerable differences that characterised the research framework, design and content of the studies reviewed, drawing out evidence on the basis of comparison of research findings becomes quite problematic as studies may belong to different disciplinary fields and imply considerable differences in framing the research questions and in designing methodological tools for answering such questions.

The largest and most reliable European study, the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) research project from the United Kingdom finds that children with preschool experience were at an advantage on measures of independence and concentration, co-operation and conformity, positive learning dispositions, and peer sociability compared with those with none. However, the findings further indicate that the socio-emotional skills acquired in the preschool years fade out by the second year of schooling.

3. The positive effects of ECEC are greatest for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. A high quality early education experience facilitates greatly their transition into primary school.

All studies focusing on sub-samples of vulnerable children report that high quality ECEC benefits especially children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, whose gains in cognitive and socio-emotional development are higher than for middle-class children. The results suggest a universal service providing good quality programmes for all, in which special attention is given to disadvantaged children, is preferred over separate provision focussed exclusively on targeted populations. This is confirmed by several of the qualitative studies and is also to be found among the recommendations of the policy documents reviewed.

In addition, studies report that children who attended ECEC programmes adjust better to formal learning within school settings, provided that ECEC was of high quality. A pre-school experience of good quality has a significantly positive impact on language acquisition and pre-numeracy knowledge. Only one study (Caille, 2001) found that pre-school attendance did not substantially reduce inequalities in school careers, which still remain strongly affected by family and neighbourhood backgrounds. This French study did not provide answers as to why this was the case, but qualitative studies of the French "école maternelle" suggest that the lack of effect may be related to elements of the curriculum, e.g. the lack of play-based learning and a child-centred curriculum (Brougère, Guénif-Souilamas & Rayna, 2008).

4. Acceptable quality in ECEC programming is critical to ensuring children's cognitive and social development.

The studies analyzed generally agree that quality of ECEC provision is crucial for promoting children's cognitive and social development which, in turn, contributes to enhancing educational opportunity and social integration. As these aspects are particularly salient for children who live in conditions of socio-economic disadvantage, deepening the discussion on

the characteristics of ECEC provision that are associated with good quality becomes important. The literature review identifies multiple factors associated with ECEC quality for disadvantaged children including: early attendance, high staff qualifications; staff:child ratios that allow attention to individual children; a positive emotional climate that welcomes the diverse needs of children and families (for a full list, see page 76 of the literature review).

5. Parental involvement in their children's education is important.

The quality of the child's home learning environment plays an important role in shaping children's cognitive and social development (EPPE, 2004). ECEC programmes that foster the participation of parents and involve them in pedagogical decision-making and involve them in their children's learning make a real difference to educational achievement. Parental participation is closely linked to less anxious behaviour among young children; higher academic achievement, enhanced social skills, and improved personal hygiene and eating habits in childhood (EPPE, 2004). In addition, as the 2010 *Sure Start* evaluation in the UK shows, mothers engaged in *Sure Start* activities report greater life satisfaction, less chaotic homes, better home learning environments, less unemployment, their children in better health and less likely to be overweight (Eisenstadt, 2011). In addition, as in Germany and the United Kingdom, the mandate of early childhood centres can be enlarged to provide parenting education, counselling, and adult education leading to cultural enrichment and employment. Recent Dutch research (Bernard van Leer Foundation, November 2012) notes, however, that many barriers can stand in the way of a genuine partnership between parents and practitioners, including:

- Lack of confidence among both parents and practitioners;
- Different expectations of each other's role and contribution;
- In training programmes for practitioners, lack of attention to the skills needed for working with parents;
- Insufficient recognition by staff of the diversity of family contexts.

According to the authors of the literature review, several practices help to establish mutual relationships between parents and professionals, for example: daily, informal but intentional contacts between educators and parents; the creation of democratic decision-making structures (e.g. parent committees) for the management of ECEC services; and an open-minded disposition of staff toward diversity, including the challenging of unfair practices. It also helps relationships if staff takes an active interest in community affairs and in the living concerns of disadvantaged families. The authors also highlight the importance of a mixed workforce that reflects the social and cultural diversity present in local communities. In many instances, the recruitment of ethnic minority teachers and assistants has inspired not only wider access of children from marginalised groups but also action on cultural issues and social inclusion.

6. Children living in countries where ECEC includes comprehensive health and social services gain most from participating in ECEC programmes.

Disadvantaged children gain most from ECEC in countries where programmes are embedded in strong welfare policies co-ordinated across the sectors and accompanied by a wider cultural and political commitment to democracy, children's rights, solidarity and equality. ECEC services are more effective when closely linked to employment, health and social policies that promote a more equal redistribution of resources across a population. It is no coincidence that the impact of family background on children's educational achievement has less influence in Nordic countries where universally accessible ECEC is provided and socio-economic differences are less marked than elsewhere. Without a supportive welfare system, ECEC services, even of high quality, are not sufficient to eradicate child poverty or achieve social inclusion.

7. Bringing together the different factors

Similarly to cognitive development, none of these factors taken in isolation can account for long lasting positive effects on children's social and emotional development: it is rather the combination of experiences over time that matters. Research outcomes probably tell us more about the conditions to support non cognitive development than the elements composing those developments. Hence the study by Melhuish et al (2006) in the UK emphasises that high quality pre-school is "associated with staff qualification and professional development; strong leadership and strong philosophy for the setting shared by all staff; ethos and emotional climate of the setting (warm and responsive interaction with the children); parental partnership; and a pedagogy that provides opportunities to extend children learning through play and self-directed activities".

Discussion

ECEC and children's cognitive development

The findings on children's acquisition of cognitive skills through participation in ECEC services echo the conclusions from several large-scale American studies, most of which show that publicly funded early childhood programmes have positive effects on children's cognitive development – especially on the development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds - and that these effects can continue well into elementary schooling and, in some instances, into later life (Barnett, 1995 and 2006).¹⁸

The EPPE and other European studies cited by the authors also find that participation in high quality ECEC is positively associated with gains in mathematics and literacy, and other measures of cognitive performance such as intelligence tests, school readiness, grade retention, and special education placement, after controlling for socio-economic status and other background variables. These effects are most noticeable among children from low-income families, but are reinforced or reduced by background variables, such as the quality of the ECEC setting, the home learning environment, the duration and intensity of the ECEC experience, and the socioeconomic mix of the ECEC centre (EPPE, 2004).

The latter point needs perhaps some comment. Education research shows that the socialization and language development of children from families with little formal education improves far more rapidly when they are mixed with middle-class children. (Harlen & Malcolm, 1999). Again, bringing minority and majority children together in the same classroom provides them with an opportunity to learn to live together. Streaming children at an early age into different classrooms according to origin and ability goes against basic equity principles and, according to *PISA 2009 Results* brings little educational advantage to 'brighter' children (OECD 2010). The best performing education systems do not segregate young children according to ability but "embrace the diversity in students' capacities, interests and social backgrounds with individualised approaches to learning."

...the most impressive outcome of world-class education systems is perhaps that they deliver high quality learning consistently across the entire education system, such that every student benefits from excellent learning opportunities. To achieve this, they invest education resources where they can make the greatest difference, they attract the most talented teachers into the most challenging classrooms, and they establish effective spending choices that prioritise the quality of teachers. (OECD, 2010)

18. A less positive outcome emerges from the most recent evaluation of Head Start (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, December 2012), which shows that the positive impacts on literacy and language development demonstrated by children who entered Head Start at age 4 had dissipated by the end of 3rd grade, and that on average, Head Start children were academically indistinguishable from their peers who had not participated in the programme.

Children's socio-emotional development and social outcomes

In contrast, socio-emotional gains made from participation in early childhood tend to fade out far more quickly - by the second year of schooling according to the British EPPE study.¹⁹ The authors (Sylva et al.) explain this result in different ways:

- The combination of different environments and different experiences over time influences strongly the maintenance of non-cognitive skills: When early socialisation experiences are carried out in high quality care and education settings, the beneficial effects on children's social and emotional development can persist considerably longer (see also EPPESE, 2012);
- The influence of the primary school on young children is very powerful and the learning dispositions and social competences acquired in early childhood settings may be more influenced than cognitive outcomes by the peer group during schooling. In addition, by the end of Year 2 of primary school in Britain, most children had been in their primary school for three years longer than the majority of children had been in pre-school;
- Another explanation for the finding that pre-school effects were stronger at age 6 than at age 7, is the use of national assessments as the main academic outcome at the end of Key Stage 1. These assessments vary from year to year and may not have the psychometric strength of the standardised reading and maths assessments that EPPE used at age 6;
- The authors underline also that despite the finding that socio-emotional skills tend to fade out rapidly, "the longitudinal follow up of EPPE children confirms that pre-school continues to show a generally positive impact on developmental outcomes. It supports earlier conclusions that preschool can play an important part in combating social exclusion and promoting inclusion by offering disadvantaged children, in particular, a better start to primary school." (EPPE, 2004).

Other European studies modify somewhat the rapidity of fade-out. Andersson's (1992) Swedish longitudinal study (on a much smaller sample) found that "early entry into day care (pre-school) tends to predict a creative, socially confident, popular, open and independent adolescent" (p. 33). Later studies by the EPPE team (2006, 2007) suggest that high pre-school quality, supported by a good primary school and home-learning environment, can maintain children's social / behavioural outcomes until the age of 10 years. The studies by Del Boca and Pasqua (2011) on Italian children and by Felfe, C. and Lalive, R. (2011) on German children confirm the continuing influence of early socialising in preschool on children in primary school. In general, Dutch studies, for example, Driessen (2004), are much less optimistic and confirm the fade-out effect.

Moreover, research findings emphasise that the quality of the home learning environment is more important for children's social/behavioural development than parental occupation, education and income, suggesting that fostering active parental engagement through pre-school is likely to benefit children attainment on the long term.

A possible explanation for this difference in findings is that in different countries, there may be less consistency (as in the UK) between ECEC and school settings and thus more likelihood of rapid fade out during the primary school years. If such is the case, more attention needs to be given in the early primary years to maintaining and strengthening the social skills and positive identities acquired during the preschool years. These skills and, in particular, identity issues, are far more complex than simple behaviours that facilitate class management and learning processes, e.g. the Heckman trio of "motivation, perseverance, and tenacity" (p. 45 of the literature review). In a world where pressures on adolescents can be relentless, parents and teachers need to pay greater attention to the development of self-concept, self-regulation and empathy in young children and their ability to make meaningful,

19. More recent research from the same source suggests that if high quality ECEC is provided, both cognitive and non cognitive effects can last across the primary school years (EPPESE, 2012).

long-term relationships.²⁰ Laevers (2011), the founder-researcher of Experiential Education, often refers to the etymology of the word 'delinquent', the roots of which imply the loosening of links and relationships with significant others and one's community.

The issue of socio-emotional development is particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, as they are likely to experience greater challenges to self-concept during the early years. Public health data from the United States suggests that more than 10% of young children between birth and five years old have experienced social-emotional stresses that negatively impact their functioning, development and school-readiness (Brauner & Stephens, B. C. 2006). Among the most common early childhood mental health disorders are: anxiety disorders, phobias, oppositional defiant disorders, difficulties with regulating emotions, relationship problems, developmental delays and increasingly, processing disorders such as ADHD (attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder).

Where these children are concerned, the research agrees that high quality early childhood services contribute to their socio-emotional development and later social outcomes, for example, reduction in negative social behaviour (Leseman, 2002, 2009; Eurydice, 2009). However, this finding needs to be tempered by the fact that children from excluded, low income, dysfunctional households and neighbourhoods have often less access to appropriate services and are at greater risk of hunger, violence, and socio-emotional stress. In some countries, many of these children come from excluded groups that suffer from prejudice and a denial of their culture and language. From this perspective, the socio-emotional development of young children should not be conceptualised as simply an issue of acquiring compliant social skills or as the socialisation of minority children into majority practices and values, but as a sensitive and ongoing issue for each child that touches not only on learning dispositions but also on personal identity, self-concept, inclusion and the feeling of belonging. As noted by Vandebroek (2012) vis-à-vis migrant children:

For many children, their introduction to ECEC represents their first step into society. It presents them with a mirror on how society looks at them and thus how they may look at themselves, since it is only in a context of sameness and difference that identity can be constructed. It is in this public mirror that they are confronted with these essential and existential questions: Who am I? And is it OK to be who I am?

The Rand Corporation research team, (Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005) have identified three features that lead to larger or longer-lasting positive outcomes for children, namely, better trained staff; smaller staff/child ratios; and more interactive pedagogies vis-à-vis both children and parents, greater intensity, but they warn that while early childhood programmes generally improve outcomes for participants, "they typically do not fully close the gap between the disadvantaged children they serve and their more advantaged peers" (p. xix). Negative family and neighbourhood characteristics continue to weigh on children's development and learning, despite the security and improved parenting behaviour that involvement in ECEC can bring. In sum, early childhood centres and school wishing to provide well-being and belonging to excluded children need to go beyond seeking only compliance and respond more adequately to the deeper socio-emotional needs of children through attention to individual children, school climate and policies to ensure that every child and group belongs.

Challenges to development and learning at family level

Among the family features identified as putting development and learning at risk are: low birth weight, low levels of maternal education, a poor home-learning environment and low socio-economic status (Melhuish, 2011). This suggests that more attention needs to be given to the well-being of low-income families with young children who, in certain situations,

20. The basic foundations of socio-emotional development are laid during the period 0-3 years, mainly through the quality of care provided to the child. During this period, the infant-toddler's sense of security and attachment to significant others develops. The child learns gradually to control aggressive feelings and compulsive behaviours and, around the age of 15 to 18 months, to develop feelings of unconditional empathy toward others (Zero to Three, 2008).

need income support, assistance with employment, and improved access to pre- and post-natal health, social welfare and educational support. For this reason, the authors of the literature review suggest that “*children living in countries where ECEC includes comprehensive health and social services gain most from participating in ECEC programmes*”. An implication for early childhood policy is that countries need to invest in comprehensive services at least in certain neighbourhoods, that is, in early childhood services that provide, in addition to education and care, basic nutrition and health screening to young children at-risk and that facilitate the access of mothers to health, social services and other forms of support.

Challenges to development and learning at programme level

Where programmes are concerned, the literature review indicates three impediments to children’s learning and development: insufficient duration and/or intensity of the preschool experience, ‘poor quality’ in the early childhood programmes available; and lack of appropriate follow-up and support given to at-risk young children in the early years of primary schooling.

Insufficient duration and/or intensity: European early childhood programmes differ widely from country to country and the time that children spend in programmes varies considerably. Other things being equal, children who begin early - for example, from the age of three years - have a decided advantage over children who enjoy only one year of preschool before entry into primary education. Likewise, intensity (daily and annual duration) matters: children who have access to a full day, eleven-months experience in a good setting will have a learning – and in many instances - a socio-emotional advantage over children who experience only twelve hours a week, interspersed by absences or by long breaks.²¹ There is some evidence, in fact, to suggest that children from disadvantaged or unstable homes may benefit from full-day services (Andersson, 1992) although other research suggests that the deprivation of maternal care can have negative effects on the socio-emotional development of young children under 18 months (Belsky, 2001; EPPE, 2004; NICHD, 2006, Datta Gupta & Simonsen, 2007).²² The general conclusion is that the quality of the ECEC setting plays an influential role, with negative short-term outcomes associated with long hours in poor quality care and with less stable care – features that may also affect maternal care.

*Poor quality at both system and programme levels: Where ‘poor quality’ is concerned, one can surmise that commentators are referring to one or all of the following.*²³

- *Lack of leadership and managerial quality at central or local government level* leading, for example, to neglect of the sector: inadequate financing, an organization of services that does not suit either parents or children; inequalities of access, insufficient system research, inadequate data collection and monitoring...;
- *Weakness in structural and programme quality at centre level*, for example: buildings not fit for purpose, insufficient pedagogical materials, an inappropriate curriculum, excessive

21. The EPPE research in England suggests that regularity is more important than intensity, but most American research identifies intensity (number of hours per day) is an important variable.

22. Counter evidence to this claim exists, from Andersson, 1992 and, in particular, from Early Head Start in the USA which provides good quality centre-based infant-toddler care for children from low-income families. Evaluations of the project found that more time in child care was not associated with anxious or aggressive behaviour (Love et al.,2003). This led the authors to conclude “that quality of child care is an important factor influencing children’s development and that quality may be an important moderator of the amount of time in care” (p. 1031). A new American Norwegian study (Dearing, 2012), looking at more than 75,000 children in day care in Norway, has found little evidence that the amount of time a child spends in child care leads to an increase in behavioral problems.

23. References to ‘poor quality’ are often unhelpful as it may not be evident what feature of quality is in question or missing. ‘Quality’ in early childhood is a complex construct, much influenced by socio-cultural contexts, and its presence in services catering for disadvantaged children presupposes that many different elements combine to provide support and education for the children and their families.

- child:staff ratios,²⁴ teachers not certified in early childhood pedagogy or insufficiently qualified in some other way;
- *Lack of pedagogical quality among teachers*, for example, lack of empathy for diversity or disadvantage; lack of training in the skills necessary to practice effective outreach to marginalized communities and children; lack of knowledge and understanding of the early childhood curriculum and how young children learn; inadequate teacher-child verbal interactions; lack of skills in engaging parents in children's learning; lack of attention to ongoing quality improvement through, for example, team documentation, research, professional development... Many of these issues can be resolved by better initial training and ongoing professional development, but pay, working conditions, and the motivation of staff may also need consideration.
 - *Insufficient attention to transition and to the early years in primary school*: Another important obstacle to the effectiveness of early childhood services is inadequate support to at-risk children as they enter primary school. The years from 6 to 9 years are crucial for the acquisition of reading and writing skills - a moment when young children in difficulty should be strongly supported to master these basic skills. PISA (2004) indicates that countries performing well in literacy, such as Finland, invest heavily in this stage of education, providing extra teachers and specialised staff to give individualised support to children during these critical years. As noted above, this is one of the aims of Step by Step Program training: "to promote child-centred, individualised teaching and learning, combining high-level instruction with support for the needs of each child".

3.2 The case studies – an introduction

In its Request for Services, the European Commission requested the submission of two case studies "where ECEC services are engaging successfully with specific disadvantaged groups". As the SOFRECO team considered that two examples of good practice could be repetitive (many examples of small-scale good practice already exist), narrow in focus (issues of governance and financing are rarely treated) and of little probative value (see remarks on research in our conclusions, Chapter 4), it proposed to the Commission two more substantive case studies:

- An original analysis of the vast ECEC reform, undertaken by the Labour government in England from 1987-2010, which includes many insights into governance, financing and efforts to reduce child poverty.
- A summary of independent evaluations of the large-scale teacher education programme and pedagogical approach piloted by the Open Society Foundations and the International Step-by-Step Association across the Central and South-Eastern Europe (CEE) countries.

(For the full text of the case studies see Appendix II: *A review of government initiatives for young children in England, 1997-2010*, written by Professor Peter Moss, Thomas Coram Research Unit, University of London; and *OSF/ISSA approaches to teacher training and pedagogy*, written by Dawn Tankersley (International Step by Step Association Program Expert) and Sarah Klaus (Director, Early Childhood Program, Open Society Foundations).

24. Child:staff ratios in public pre-school in the USA are generally held at 10 or fewer children per trained adult (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2012). This ratio compares very favourably with average ratios in European kindergarten services.

Case Study 1 - Peter Moss, "A review of government initiatives for young children in England, 1997-2010"

This case study, written by Professor Peter Moss, Thomas Coram Research Unit, University of London, focuses on England and the period of the Labour government from 1997 to 2010²⁵. It examines developments in early childhood education and care (ECEC) during this period – the first time that an English government had treated ECEC as a policy priority. The particular interest of this case study is twofold. First, it explores a large national ECEC reform programme in its essential details – among others: governance and financing; organisation of services, supply of services and enrolments, the ECEC workforce, and engagement with families. Second, it provides a nuanced evaluation of the link between early childhood policy and child poverty reduction. After a brief introduction, the paper falls into three main sections:

- An examination of the ECEC legacy that the Labour government inherited from long-serving, preceding Conservative governments;
- An overview of the main Labour government initiatives, 1997-2010, in particular in the field of early childhood policy. Detailed information is provided on:
 - Governance and finance
 - The organisation and management of services;
 - The supply of services and participation levels;
 - The ECEC workforce;
 - Engagement with families;
 - An evaluation of what the Labour government achieved in the area of child poverty and in ECEC, and assesses the impact of the latter on the former.
- A concluding section reviewing the Labour administration's record: what it achieved and what it failed to do.

Main findings

a. A negative legacy

The Labour government inherited in 1997 a high level of child poverty and an early childhood system that had received little previous policy attention and was little changed in its basics since 1945, including:

- A split between 'early or nursery education' (the responsibility of the education department) and 'childcare' (the responsibility of health);
- A diverse and fragmented array of services;
- Low public investment and provision inadequate to meet need or demand;
- A workforce that predominantly consisted of low paid and low qualified childminders and nursery and playgroup workers;
- An early compulsory school age (5 years), with many children entering the first year of primary school (reception class) on a voluntary basis at an even earlier age.

b. During the period of ECEC reform, child poverty was greatly reduced, due rather to more equitable income redistribution than to early childhood services

The author provides evidence that the improved provision of early childhood services greatly assisted the move of lone parents into work, but that the substantial reduction in child poverty achieved depended essentially on income redistribution and wage levels. "In 1977,

25 During this period, although much policy related to child poverty (e.g. taxation and benefits) remained with the UK government, responsibility for ECEC resided with the four countries that constitute the United Kingdom: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. For this reason, the case study focuses on the largest of these countries, England.

of every £100 of value generated by the UK economy, £16 went to the bottom half of workers in wages; by 2010 that figure had fallen to £12, a 26 per cent decline. Indeed, the trend may be even starker: the inclusion of bonus payments at the top reduced the bottom half's share to just £10 in 2010 (Whitaker and Savage, 2011, p.2)." A more equitable income redistribution was achieved through the tax and benefit system and to greatly improved employment rates for lone parents, although the latter was greatly helped by childcare provision.

c. The reform effort was accompanied throughout by 'evidence-based' research and evaluation.

Although no overall assessment of the system was made, different parts were evaluated, notably by the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project, which, from 2002 onwards, researched different types of provision and their effects on children. The highest quality (based on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), and best cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, was found in public sector providers and in school-based and integrated services. Local authority day nurseries and private sector full-day or sessional childcare had significantly lower scores.

The value of *Sure Start* (and the subsequent *Children's Centres*) was demonstrated through a series of national evaluations of *Sure Start* (NESS). For example, the 2010 evaluation report (NESS, 2010), published after the Labour government had left office, showed many positive results, although predominantly for parents and families rather than for children. One important point made by NESS (and others) was that *Sure Start* as an area-based programme, targeting areas with high levels of disadvantage, missed many disadvantaged children who did not live in these areas. This was one reason for the extension of later *Children's Centres* to every community. Another problem highlighted by the researchers was the way *Sure Start Local Programmes* had been implemented.

d. Research on participation revealed that work status, income and parental education levels were closely associated with the take-up of childcare.

All the evidence pointed in the same direction: the more disadvantaged the child, the less likely s/he was to participate in ECEC, with the exception of children from lone-parent families.²⁶ A factor that may account for this relationship is the lower employment rates amongst families in disadvantaged areas; 63 per cent of families in the most deprived areas were in work compared with 94 per cent of those in the least deprived areas. Children with mothers with a degree-level qualification were three times as likely to attend services as children with mothers with a qualification below level 2 (39% vs. 13%) (Bennett and Moss, 2010, Table 5.5).

e. Engagement with families was a central feature of the reform.

Parent engagement was a feature of the reform and has become a statutory obligation for both *Sure Start Local Programmes* (SSLPs) and *Children's Centres*. However, comprehensive information is lacking on how parents engage with ECEC services, whether as consumers working the market; citizens seeking democratic participation; or needy clients requiring support. It is also worth noting that a criticism of the initial SSLPs, raised in the first report of the NESS, was their apparent failure to reach the most disadvantaged parents.

[P]arents/families with greater human capital were better able to take advantage of SSLP services and resources than those with less human capital (i.e. teen parents, lone parents, workless households). The finding that an intervention has produced greater benefits for the moderately disadvantaged than for the more severely disadvantaged has occurred in other evaluations of interventions (National Evaluation of Sure Start, 2005, p.8).

26 A special effort was made during the period in question to provide affordable childcare to lone parents and to bring them back into the workforce.

f. Improved – but could do better

The reform responded well to some of the negative features that the Labour government had inherited in 1997 (see a. above), for example, it helped to improve access and developed *Children's Centres* as an integrated, multi-purpose form of provision. Yet, several of the inherited features still persist, suggesting that the government failed to look critically enough at the system it inherited and continued to build in large part on what already existed. In particular, having integrated responsibility for policy-making and regulation of all early years services, the integration of the split system then stalled, leaving untouched the 'wicked issues' of funding and workforce, and retaining in practice two separate sectors – 'early education' and 'childcare' – with major differences in conceptualisation, access, funding, workforce and type of provision. Although government strongly emphasised universal coverage, full-time access and the quality of services remain limited particularly in the childcare sector due to an equally strong insistence on marketisation, privatised provision, parental fees and low-waged labour. In sum, despite setting itself ambitious goals, not least the government's vision of 'childcare services in this country becoming among the best in the world', some major drawbacks ensured that ECEC in England failed to match that vision.

Discussion

The case study places the British early childhood reform in its historical, social and political context. It calls attention, in particular, to governance aspects of quality – professional administration, public consultation and communication, planning based on rigorous research, adequate investment - aspects of quality that are often overlooked in the present focus on instructional strategies.

When the reform was initiated in 1998, England was experiencing high levels of child poverty and a low early years service base, with provision grossly inadequate to meet either need or demand. Some twelve years later, the following are among the achievements that have improved the lives of young children and families (Eisenstadt, 2011):

- Maternity leave extended to 12 months, paid leave for 9 months;
- Parents with children up to age 6 years have been granted the right to request flexible working hours – a right that is largely respected by employers;
- Tax credits have been granted to working parents, up to a maximum of 80% (now reduced to 70%) of childcare costs;
- A *Sure Start* Children's Centre has been established in every disadvantaged community;
- Large gains in access for all children were made with significant improvements in programme quality, especially in the government sector;
- All children in early years provision now access a single play-based curriculum, the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS), recently revised through the Tickell review;
- Based on the Early Years Foundation Stage profile, the gap in school readiness between poor children and the rest has narrowed;
- Legislation has been passed, making the provision of *Children's Centres* a statutory duty for local authorities
- Legislation has also been passed requiring every local area to have a strategy for reducing child poverty. Child poverty rates were greatly reduced during the period in question.

Lessons from the case study

Given the economic and research advantage of the UK, the question arises: How relevant are these advances to other countries? The SOFRECO team suggests that the following themes identified by the author are relevant to other ECEC systems in Europe:

The case study underlines the importance of active professional management in undertaking a national reform aiming to achieve greater access for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

From 1998 onwards, more than two hundred administrators were employed at central level²⁷ to organise the reform and implement the *Sure Start* experiment. The results show that investment in an active professional administration pays off: by 2010, nearly all children in England were taking advantage of the free early education entitlement (15 hours per week) for 3 and 4 year olds: 92 per cent of 3 year olds and 98 per cent of 4 year olds (Department for Education, 2011).²⁸ This allocation of skilled personnel to manage the system stands out against the paucity of professional ECEC administrators in some other countries. The European Commission has noted in several accession reports that insufficient staff are available at national level to take on complex negotiations and reforms or even to spend the funds that are flowing in from European and international projects to improve ECEC systems. The early childhood field is a more complex field than education as it comprises both childcare and early education and shares important responsibilities with other departments, such as, infant and maternal health, family policy, social welfare, and in the case of Roma children, with home affairs, justice and non-discrimination. In sum, administrative teams in charge of ensuring appropriate access for children from disadvantaged backgrounds need to have critical mass and wide range of expertise.

A focus on evidence-based research, data collection, research and post-ante evaluations was a strong and successful feature of the reform.

Every step of the English reform was accompanied by documentary and quantitative research, scoping studies, evaluations and consultations with leading stakeholders and university researchers. There was a concern from the beginning to analyse the successes and failures of similar reforms in other countries, to gather submissions from all stakeholders, to collect data, and – unusual in the European context – to fund random control trials and other rigorous social science research. In addition, a strong evaluation team emerged – the National Evaluation of *Sure Start* (NESS) - to provide ex ante and post ante evaluations of *Sure Start* planning and results. Although the author of the case study and the then director of the *Sure Start* initiative (Eisenstadt, 2011) point to certain weaknesses in the feed-back mechanisms - due to the frantic pace of reform and the difficulties of cross-ministry co-ordination – the principle of independent evaluation was established, with the recognition that government action and policy could and should itself be scrutinised and corrected.

Among the *acquis* of this impressive research effort were:

- A confirmation of the better quality of public sector services (both integrated services and nursery schools) compared, for example, to playgroups, family daycare, private and local government day nurseries. In general, the public integrated centres and nursery schools had a higher proportion of trained teachers than other services;
- The finding that good quality *integrated* education and care, such as that offered in Early Excellence Centres, was most effective for the development of young children;
- The conclusion that positive impacts from high quality ECEC are still evident on the cognitive development of disadvantaged children, up to at least the age of 11 years - a more encouraging conclusion than findings from the most recent (December, 2012) Head Start evaluation. EPPE also confirms the very positive effects on parents and

27. A more decentralised administration of early childhood services can be envisaged as, for example, in the Nordic countries, leading to greater public discussion and local stakeholder inputs into the organisation of services. However, the point at issue here is the need to employ a critical mass of professional administrators to take in charge the complexities of a universal early childhood system.

28. A large increase in the enrolment of 2-year olds (at present, 40%) is also expected from September 2013 when children from eligible (disadvantaged) families are provided with free places.

parenting that engagement with an ECEC centre can bring, an effect also found in the Head Start evaluation

- A clarification of what constitutes pedagogical quality at centre level (staff qualifications and the quality of adult:child verbal interaction; smaller teacher-child ratios; a professionally developed but appropriate curriculum). For staff, it was important that they should have a good understanding of how young children learn and a deep knowledge of the curriculum. It was important also that they should provide ongoing support to the socio-emotional well-being and development of young children. Attention to diversity, with an emphasis on individualised teaching and support, was also found to be, in certain circumstances, a critical indicator of quality. Likewise attention to parents was identified as contributing significantly to quality, in particular, helping parents to support children's learning at home.
- The identification of pedagogical aspects that are particularly important for cognitive outcomes:
 - The quality of staff-child interaction: EPPE showed that cognitive achievement was more likely to occur when adults worked one-to-one with children and during focused small group work;
 - The availability of rich learning resources;
 - Programmes that are attractive to and engage children; and
 - A supportive environment for children to work together
- Attention to socio-emotional development: Unlike other studies, EPPE gave much attention to socio-emotional development and identified the closeness and quality of relationships between teachers and children as being of core importance. Staff showing respect to children, listening to what they say, responding sympathetically and using language and reasoning were associated with better social-emotional outcomes. Staff were encouraged to give particular attention to the development of autonomy, self-regulation and positive social behaviour (cooperation, sharing, and empathy) in young children. The study also found that adequate space and a better physical environment were associated with decreased antisocial and worried behaviours.

The need to be cautious about the notion that access to early childhood services can significantly reduce child poverty.

The finding that during the period of ECEC reform, "child poverty was greatly reduced, due rather to more equitable income redistribution than to early childhood services" invites caution concerning the European Commission (2013) conclusion concerning the effect of early childhood services on poverty reduction. The EC study states:

When available, ECEC seems to pose one solution to social exclusion and reduce educational disadvantages. Several countries have implemented specific early childhood educational programs as part of their anti-poverty policies. An example is the Sure Start program in the United Kingdom.

Much depends on how these early childhood educational programmes are conceived and implemented, for example, whether they include health and social welfare outreach to families and parents in difficulty and whether they manage to integrate in early childhood centres and schools children at risk with more fortunate children from other backgrounds.

The effort to consult stakeholders and public opinion at local level contributed significantly to the success of the reform and has guaranteed its irreversibility.

At this stage, fifteen years later, it is difficult to recapture the enthusiasm of the nation-wide consultation effort that took place at local level through the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships. These Partnerships, put into place and supported by government, consisted of representatives from the maintained, private, and voluntary sectors; local education, health, and social services; universities, employers, trainers, parent bodies (including lone parents), NGOs and advisors. Members of the partnership served on a voluntary basis. Their role was to assess the current provision of care and education at local

level, to develop plans for future expansion, and to raise quality. Although by 2001, a greater centralisation of policy, regulation, management, training and curriculum had already begun,²⁹ the initial partnerships gave a powerful impetus to public interest in services for young children and built up a strong constituency in favour of government responsibility for their maintenance.

Case Study 2 - Open Society Foundations/International Step by Step Association approaches to teacher training and pedagogy

The early childhood education reform project, 'Step by Step', (SbS) was launched by the Open Society Foundations³⁰ (OSF) in 15 countries in Central Europe and Eurasia in 1994. Consolidated today into a growing regional association and known as ISSA³¹ (the International Step by Step Association), it is currently active in more than 30 countries. The programme has introduced social inclusion, child-centred practices, community and family-based approaches into existing systems in the region through a series of pilots in government kindergartens (Klaus, 2004). Prior to the Step by Step Programme, emphasis had been placed in the region on teacher centred learning, academic achievement and conformity. The Step by Step Program supports professional learning communities and develop a strong civil society that influences and assists decision makers to:

- Provide high quality care and educational services for all children from birth through primary school with a focus on the most disadvantaged.
- Promote child-centred, individualised teaching and learning, combining high-level instruction with support for the needs of each child;
- Respect diversity, inclusive practices, and culturally appropriate learning environments.
- Recognise educators' many roles as facilitators, guides, and role models in the learning process and their need for self-improvement and on-going professional development;
- Ensure greater inclusion of family and community participation in children's development.
- Family and community involvement in children's development and education;
- Promote social education and community engagement in public education;
- Respect for diversity, inclusive practices, and culturally appropriate learning environments.

This case study, written by Dawn Tankersley (ISSA Program Expert) and Sarah Klaus (Director, Early Childhood Program OSF) comprises four chapters:

Chapter 1 - An introduction to the Open Society Foundation's Step by Step Program and the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), its vision, and goals;

Chapter 2 - An outline of the purposes of the study;

29. In 2001, all childcare services were brought under a new central regulatory authority – OFSTED (also responsible for schools) – replacing previous regulation by local authorities. With the shift from Sure Start local programmes (SSPS) local to Children's Centres (CCs) in 2003-4, local authorities regained their central role at local level, assuming responsibility for the CCs that replaced SSLPs and for the management of the 'childcare market' in their area. By then, however, policy had shifted from a focus on support for children and parents to an emphasis on children's cognitive development, parental employment and increased marketisation of childcare services.

30 The Open Society Foundations (OSF) is a network of international, regional, and national foundations active in more than 100 countries around the world. OSF works to build vibrant and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable and open to the participation of all people. In 2010, the OSF programmes disbursed nearly \$147 million on education and development programmes supporting children, youth, and young scholars globally.

31 ISSA is a membership association that connects organizations working in the field of early childhood development and education. Established in the Netherlands in 1999, building on the investment and the success of the Step by Step Programme, ISSA grew into a vibrant network promoting principles of quality, equity and diversity in ECD

Chapter 3 – An overview of Step by Step Program, the ISSA Principles and practices and their evaluation;

Chapter 4 – Conclusions from the evaluations.

The particular interest of the case study is threefold. First, it emphasises that the workforce is central to the quality of early childhood services. Practitioners are responsible for creating child-centered, interactive, and inclusive environments for the children in their care, and for promoting parent empowerment and involvement in learning. Second, the study provides an insight into how to organise professional development for working teachers and even to influence pre-service education colleges with a well-defined set of pedagogical principles. Third, OSF and ISSA have called on extensive consultation and external evaluation to measure the effectiveness of its pedagogical approach and teacher training. These evaluations have generally favoured experimental methodologies; that is, the evaluation methodology employed is clearly explained, can be replicated by others, may include a control group, and employs adequate statistical treatment of the results.

Main findings

a. The Step by Step Program and ISSA promote a democratic interactive approach to training teachers

Features of the new training approach include:

- Decentralised, school-based professional development (carried out at model sites) versus strictly centralised, university-based development;
- On-going training instead of training which took place every five years;
- An approach that translates theory into practice by focusing on practice;
- Training delivered by practicing master educators, instead of faculty who taught only theory;
- Training that employs an interactive, constructivist approach instead of faculty-centred lecturing (Tankersley, Mikailova and Sula, 2012, pg. 130-131);
- Specific trainings tailored to specific needs.

b. ISSA has developed a set of guidelines for early childhood and primary school teachers working with disadvantaged children, families and communities.

Drawing on its wide experience and the inputs of hundreds of teachers and ECEC experts, ISSA developed an outstanding set of guidelines for early childhood and primary school teachers working with disadvantaged children, families and communities: *Competent Educators for the 21st Century: ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* (ISSA, 2010 - http://www.issa.nl/docs_pdfs/Quality-Principles-final-WEB.pdf).

The *ISSA Principles* proposed in *Competent Educators* were formulated to guide teachers in their work with children and families. They are not imposed as quality standards, which may undermine rather than support professional autonomy and responsibility, but are intended rather for discussion by pedagogical teams.. Regular discussion of the *Principles*, conducted by master educator and/or local and on-line professional development communities, aims to develop understanding of seven themes: 1. Interactions; 2. Family and Community; 3. Inclusion, Diversity, and Values of Democracy; 4. Assessment and Planning; 5. Teaching Strategies; 6. Learning Environment; 7. Professional Development.

c. OSF and ISSA have created a strong framework of support for teachers.

The OSF Step by Step Program provided educators with child-centred educator training, teacher manuals and professional development modules. After the publication of the *Principles of Quality Pedagogy*, ISSA developed additional resources to assist educators in understanding what the specific indicators under each of the Principles imply. These supports include:

- Creating a voluntary teacher certification system that includes mentoring support and allows teachers to receive an ISSA certificate of teaching excellence;
- Putting in place a mentoring system. Trained mentors were required to visit each pilot site at least one time each month to work with teachers. Mentoring has been replaced in recent years, by *local and on-line professional development communities*. This move was inspired by the concept of using democratic participatory approaches in professional development work that would also nurture critical thinking, dialogue, and reflection on what is quality practice. It moves mentoring from being a hierarchical practice whereby the expert tells the educator what they are doing wrong and how they can improve; to a more horizontal dialogue in which educators reflect on and share what is working well for them and how to build on their strengths;
- Providing on-line professional development and support: ISSA is concerned that all educators stay current on research developments and engage in dialogue about culturally responsive quality pedagogy. To this end, ISSA has supported the following functions:
 - Intranet – an internal communication tool for the network which includes news from members, network news, info on trends/resources, etc.
 - Library of Resources – Library of video clips supporting the *ISSA Principles*, library of resources produced by ISSA, and library of other relevant resources linked to the *ISSA Principles*.
 - Online Education – support online courses offered by ISSA or its members. The first course is the result of a project funded by IBM – a Course for Kindergarten Teachers (under development).

d. ISSA promotes the crucial role of the local educator.

ISSA proceeds from the position that although sound research findings exist about the conduct of early education and care, quality is still a concept that needs to be explored and implemented by the practitioners according to the cultural background and needs of the learning community, rather than presented as a universal solution for all situations and centres. It believes that democracy forms the foundation of the preschool and for this reason, early years' activities should be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic processes and values, including respect for the rights of young children and families, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).³²

e. Step by Step trains its educators to work closely with parents.

The Step by Step Program trains its educators to work closely with parents and has developed specific programmes for parents, for example, *Getting Ready for School* and *Parenting with Confidence*. These texts, again meant for discussion, aim to build up better skills and knowledge to support children's development and learning. These resources have been especially useful for work in Roma and other communities that do not have easy access to pre-schools or health services.

Discussion

As with the English case study, the OSF/ISSA report reinforces several of the conclusions advanced by the authors of the literature review, in particular:

32. Four basic principles summarize the approach of the UNCRC to children: the right to life, survival, and development; the right to non-discrimination; the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children; and respect for the views and voice of the child. There are also more specific articles addressing the rights and responsibilities of parents and the duties of governments to provide appropriate assistance for families and services for young children. According to ISSA, these principles should guide early childhood policy at all levels. Professionals working in the field need guidance concerning what democratic values and principles mean for their everyday practice.

Lessons from the case study

a. The adoption of more democratic approaches and processes in early childhood education

According to the OSF/ISSA text, “competent educational systems have to create life spaces where educators, teachers, and communities, can work together to promote well-being, development, and learning for each child, based on principles of democratic participation.” For this reason, the Association has developed, in consultation with international experts, administrators, teachers and local stakeholders a series of guidelines to support teachers in their work.³³ These guidelines touch not only on the basics of teaching practice (planning, assessment, teaching strategies, managing the classroom and the learning environment) but also emphasise democratic processes and values, including a fundamental respect for the rights of young children and their families in the conduct of early education.

This approach to early education, which seeks to define *collegially* with parents and communities what constitutes quality in their particular context is not without its challenges. It obliges stakeholders – parents, teachers and administrators – to re-examine the meaning of ECEC not only for their country (the national curriculum) but also in terms of the outcomes that parents and the local community expect. In this discussion, community expectations are not untouchable but are modified by the requirements of the curriculum and by the goals and practices that research indicates are appropriate for young children. Yet, the exchange can be a learning experience for all concerned and helps to inform parents about the importance of early education and care. The discussion is also critical for teachers as it widens their knowledge of family and community life, thereby allowing them to enrich the official curriculum and make it more relevant and attractive to the children and their parents.

b. Creating a professional approach to teacher training

This concern emerges strongly from the literature review. The professional development model promoted by Step by Step and by the ISSA principles is a good example of large-scale praxeological research, that is, research on practice carried out by practitioner teams who know a context well and have an immediate use for the results of their reflection. The training of volunteer teachers is decentralised to small model schools or sites, and is delivered by practising master educators. The approach is democratic and based on interactive, co-constructed learning.³⁴ It is also principled, based on democratic values. Early childhood education is given a useful focus by what Fortunati (2009) calls ‘transformative principles’: “a belief in the protagonism of the child; in the open and collegial nature of educational work; and in the centrality of family participation in the educational project.” These concepts can transform early childhood pedagogy and generate a fundamentally democratic vision of education.

Positive attitudes toward children are central to Step by Step’s training work and to the ISSA principles, likewise a strong theme to emerge from the literature review. Although based on experience rather than on experimental research, the Italian school of early childhood pedagogy makes here again an important contribution. According to Malaguzzi (1993), the founder of the Reggio Emilia schools, young children are ‘rich’ - rich in their humanity and rich in potential. Before having an ethnic, social or national marker, or an organic special need, a child is, first of all, a subject of rights, a unique human being with multiple possibilities and gifts which a good educator can help to identify and develop. Every child coming into a public education system has a right to respect for her person, to a response to

33. (See ISSA, 2010, *Competent Educators for the 21st Century: ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy*, which foregrounds interaction with children, families and communities: http://www.issa.nl/docs_pdfs/Quality-Principles-final-WEB.pdf).

34. It is well known that teachers tend to reproduce in their teaching practice the instructional and learning processes used in their initial formation. Hence the need to break with transmissive models of pedagogy and to introduce ECEC students and teachers to more participatory, interactive and experiential modes of learning that resemble the natural learning strategies of young children.

her individual needs and to the recognition of her individual strengths, regardless of her socio-economic, ethnic, migrant or other background.

At the same time, the child's family and cultural background are important both for the child and her educator. Children's identities are nurtured by feelings of belonging that are developed through meaningful relationships with adults and peers, and through interaction with a welcoming environment that values their language and cultural background (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008). ISSA assists teachers to create in their centres a positive environment for disadvantaged children and their families through providing meeting places where educators can pool their experiences about the attitudes, words and practical actions that comprise skilful outreach work.

c. The promotion of social justice and inclusion in education.

The third ISSA principle for competent educators is a commitment to promote social justice and equality in education:

Inclusion, Diversity and Values of Democracy: *The teacher provides equal opportunities for every child and family to learn and participate regardless of gender, race, ethnic origin, culture, native language, religion, family structure, social status, economic status, age, or special need*

From the beginning of the decade, OSF and ISSA have developed a number of resources (publications, training...) for *Education for Social Justice* to support work in Roma communities. However, efforts to change traditional attitudes to diversity and special needs continued to remain a challenge because of the lack of societal and structural support for social justice issues. "Even for those who are committed to the process, it is a long journey requiring both mentoring support and networking to sustain personal energy and enhance professional capacity" (ISSA, 2012, citing Lee and Vranjesevic, 2009, pg.37).

In 2006, therefore, ISSA found it necessary to give greater visibility to the issue, as many children of traditionally excluded groups in the region, including Roma and children with special needs, were either placed in segregated settings or enrolled in mainstream centres with teachers untrained to support diverse classrooms or to address the specific needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In order to address the challenge, ISSA developed an additional standard to promote quality in the area of social inclusion. This standard was retained in the revised version of the *ISSA Principles for Quality Pedagogy as Inclusion, Diversity, and the Values of Democracy (2010)* and has become an important goal for teachers trained in Step-by-Step methods. The importance of this principle is also underlined by the authors of the literature review, who remark that inclusive practices in early childhood centres need to be grounded on an ethical commitment to social justice and respect for diversity.

Chapter 4: Key messages

Although we are aware that the richness and nuances of the texts reviewed cannot be captured adequately in a series of statements, we list below some key messages that the literature review and case studies identify as being relevant for early childhood practice and policy for disadvantaged children and their families.

A. Research in Europe

A first message from the review is that given the diversity of European contexts, it is risky to generalise research and policy findings across the Union. The authors of the literature review write, for example: “the findings of the country studies can be generalised beyond national boundaries *only with precaution* as the history, traditions, organization and practices of early childhood services (in Europe) differ widely from one country to another.”

They also critique the limitations of the current ‘human capital’ research paradigm in Europe,³⁵ which is favoured particularly in the English-speaking liberal economies. In this regard, they note that, in contrast, “much of the educational research generated within European countries, where ECEC has been conceived as a public good within a right-based framework, focuses on pedagogical approaches and participatory processes, rather than on the evaluation of children’s outcomes”. We would add that there is also a strong current of policy-focussed research in Europe that strives to take into account the linkage between early childhood policy with, not just the labour market needs, but also the functioning of democracies function, distributive justice and the basic rights of children and their parents.

Some weaknesses also exist in early childhood research in Europe:

Within the rich diversity of the European countries, there exist early childhood traditions and systems that have still not found a voice. Journals such as the *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* and *Children in Europe*, and the international organisations and NGOs working in the field contribute much toward stimulating country-specific research, but governments can lack the motivation, financing and expertise to promote research on young children at national level.

Again, as the literature review shows, gaps exist also in the range of research. Some central issues and topics, such as the socio-emotional development of children in our centres and schools, are too rarely discussed and examined. The rapid fade-out of socio-emotional development during the transition year into primary school needs further elucidation.

Administrations too may lack the research necessary to make appropriate policy decisions, most frequently in relation to policies for disadvantaged, migrant or ethnic minority children. Oftentimes, these gaps occur in quantitative research, where some countries too rarely

35. The authors mean by this a conceptualisation of early childhood programming that gives priority to the interests of the competitive economy over children’s interests, and decides what is good for children on their behalf. In this manner, curricula and standards are formulated without any real consultation, aiming primarily to form children to be efficient workers in the future. The ‘human capital’ paradigm looks at ECEC in an instrumental way, from the perspective of enabling parents to work or as a means of inculcating ‘core’ knowledge that will be useful in later schooling. While these aims are also necessary, the mindset tends to neglect important aspects of citizenship and democracy and ignore the well-being and wider needs of children, which include – particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds - health and social inclusion goals. In sum, children are constructed in instrumentalist terms rather than being considered as citizens, subjects of rights. Further, the paradigm tends, in many European countries, to overlook younger children (1-3 years) and to impose on pre-school children (3 years and upwards) narrow instructional goals with inappropriate staff:child ratios and pedagogies. It is therefore not surprising, as the literature review reveals, to find in ECEC literature far more studies on cognitive outcomes than on equally important health and non-cognitive issues.

collect large data sets or use experimental methodologies³⁶. Although too much attention can be given to quantitative methods and ‘evidence-based’ approaches (see Vandenbroeck et al., 2012), they are still needed. Governments are increasingly reluctant to invest in early childhood services (in particular, in preventive peri-natal services and early ‘childcare’ for the under-3s) without some proof of return on investment. The benefits of such research could be great, leading to better knowledge of the numbers of children from disadvantaged, migrant and ethnic backgrounds and of the structural and process quality needed in the centres catering for them.

The conclusion may be drawn that European countries should embed more research into their policy making for young children. Base-line data on children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their access to early childhood services is currently lacking in many countries. Qualitative research on inclusion issues is also needed to investigate further the links between early childhood services and the various mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion. If the aim is to encourage countries to learn from each other, cross-national research examining national policies for disadvantaged young children across European countries should be encouraged. Many excellent policies are already in place, for example, in Belgium where the national agencies for young children currently implement innovative strategies for disadvantaged young children and families. It would be most useful if comprehensive comparative research on such large-scale ECEC approaches could be undertaken and the appropriate policy lessons drawn.

B. Child poverty and disadvantage

1. Child poverty has increased significantly in Europe in recent years with younger children facing a higher risk of poverty than any other group. Children particularly exposed to the risk of poverty include those from Eastern Europe (over 40% of children in Bulgaria and Romania live in poverty); Roma children;³⁷ children in large, low-income families; children in migrant families; street children and children who are exposed to a series of social risks such as homelessness, violence and trafficking. Taken together, these children comprise almost a quarter of the EU child population.

2. Poverty during early childhood is particularly destructive. Children born into severe poverty are likely to be exposed to factors that impede their psycho-motor development, socio-emotional growth and cognitive processes. A recent longitudinal study from Sweden on the 1950 birth cohort (Bäckmann & Nillson, 2010) identifies long-lasting periods of poverty in childhood as being most detrimental for educational achievement and social mobility. When linked with deprived or neglectful family backgrounds and poorly educated parents, poverty becomes the single greatest barrier to educational achievement.

3. A definition of disadvantage is provided in the Introduction to this study, but it is important to underline that a wide diversity of disadvantaged families and groups exists. The needs and strengths of minority, second language families may differ greatly from those of low-income mainstream groups. In addition to fiscal and employment policies to alleviate family disadvantage, face-to-face outreach work to families and children from public and community services remains necessary.

4. In disadvantaged neighbourhoods, early childhood services have an important role to play in facilitating parental employment, in making available parenting and community education, in supporting the nutrition, health and social needs of young children... but they cannot alone resolve poverty issues. A growing body of research suggests that poverty, ill-health and

36. An outstanding exception to these weaknesses has been the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) research project from the United Kingdom. EPPE uses a large randomised sample and provides both quantitative and qualitative research on the value of high quality ECEC for both educational attainment and the socio-emotional development of young children.

37. Roma children 0-5 years are numerous – according to some estimates numbering more than the combined under-6 population of the five Nordic countries.

social exclusion are strongly correlated with prevailing approaches to social welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009, the Marmot Review, 2010). The national social welfare regime influences also the organisation of the early childhood system and generally dictates whether universal services or selective targeting are on offer.

C. The access of children at-risk to appropriate early childhood services

1. The access rate of 5-year old children to part-time or full-time early education averaged 92.3% in 2008 across the EU (European Commission, 2013), but significant gaps in access exist across Europe. Among the Central and Eastern European countries, only Hungary, Estonia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic reach the average enrolment. Where childcare is concerned, gaps in access are far wider: With the exception of Slovenia, which achieves well above average participation rates, children in the CEE countries have far lower access rates to childcare.³⁸

2. Comparable data on the access of children from disadvantaged backgrounds across the European countries are not available. The two largest groups of potentially marginalised children are children from migrant and Roma backgrounds. Strong overall enrolment is recorded for immigrant children in early education, but the participation of Roma children is much weaker, reaching on average less than 50% in the final year before compulsory schooling. Where childcare is concerned, enrolment is extremely weak for migrant children and almost non-existent for Roma children.³⁹ The access rates of Roma mothers and infants to pre- and post-natal services is also relatively low in most countries.

3. As the literature review shows, the low enrolment rate of marginalised groups in early childhood services is not simply a matter of culture or tradition. The English research on participation, cited in Case Study 1, reveals that work status, income and parental education levels are far more closely associated with the take-up of childcare than ethnicity.⁴⁰ This corroborated by research from different countries in Europe (RECI, 2012 in the CEE countries, Vandebroek et al., 2008 in Belgium), namely, that identifiable barriers exist that restrict the choices of low-income, marginalised families, such as, lack of services; distance from services; poor quality of services including negative attitudes toward the group, even toward the children themselves; poverty and stress so severe that parents may not be able to afford the supplementary expenses of placing their child in a service (transport, winter clothing, shoes, materials...); illiteracy and other enrolment difficulties; lack of help and exclusionary attitudes toward the group by local administrations...

D. Findings from the review of barriers and best practices in engaging disadvantaged children

1. The main barriers to participation in ECEC services are the following:

- Low socio-economic status including a low level of parental education, low family income or parental unemployment;

38. It should be noted that access figures do not take into account the quality of services. In addition, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia are leaders among EU countries where upper secondary attainment and prevention of early school leaving are concerned.

39. In the national census surveys of several Central and East European countries, minorities are identified only through self-report – an unreliable means of counting minority populations as many prefer to declare themselves as belonging to the majority. Likewise, school systems may not disaggregate enrolment rates along ethnic or socio-economic lines. For this reason, accurate figures on minority enrolments rarely exist. Knowledge of Roma child numbers, enrolments, and completion rates is derived basically from external studies, carried out by international organisations, such as OSF, REF, UNDP, UNICEF, and the World Bank, often sponsored by the European Commission. Lack of basic data makes it difficult to develop effective policy for these children or to monitor and evaluate their progress.

40. Deprivation can induce a neighbourhood or even regional 'ethnic effect' which, in turn, can lead to fewer or lower quality services, fewer well-educated parents, lower levels of expectation for children... and intensified segregation of and prejudice against the group involved.

- Living in poor neighbourhoods/rural areas/marginalised settlements;
- Ethnic minority background influenced by the length of time parents have been residing in the host country and their ability to master the host country language;
- Factors on the demand side include the desirability of services by excluded groups, based on whether they understand these services and their evaluation of the usefulness of the services for their children.

2. The literature review identified several good practices⁴¹ used in Europe to overcome barriers and engage more children in ECEC services, including:

- Inclusive practices across early childhood services that incorporate a commitment to social justice and the creation of a positive climate toward families and children from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- Responsiveness to children, parents and communities through co-constructing new educational practices in dialogue with them
- Outreach to families who are not attending ECEC services through collaborating with locally established voluntary organisations that have already developed trusting relationships with marginalised groups, such as, immigrant and Roma communities;
- Renewed staff training that redefines traditional practice and encompasses more broadly work with parents and local communities. In turn, educators need to be supported through professional development that encourages them to reflect critically on their attitudes and beliefs;
- Inclusive ECEC programming is grounded in participatory practice-based research that explores the needs and potentialities of local contexts, within an ecological framework. Ethnographic research methodologies – that allow a culturally-situated investigation of children and parents’ perspectives – have made a substantial contribution to this field;
- The active involvement of ECEC centres and staff in community consultation processes and engaged with civic issues that improve the lives of the families they serve.

3. The authors of the literature review conclude that structural conditions and inclusive practices need to be put into place to increase the access of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and propose among others the following policies:

- A universal entitlement to publicly funded, affordable ECEC provision from the end of parental leave or at least by the age of three or four years. All studies focusing on sub-samples of vulnerable children report that high quality ECEC benefits especially children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, whose gains in cognitive and socio-emotional development are higher than for middle-class children. The research further suggest that a universal service providing good quality programmes for all, in which special attention is given to disadvantaged children, is to be preferred over separate provision focussed exclusively on targeted populations. In addition, children from disadvantaged backgrounds gain most when ECEC services are closely linked to employment, health and social policies that promote a more equal redistribution of resources across a population.
- The integration of ECEC systems (regulation, administration and funding) that promote more equitable access and a more unitary approach to 0-6 provision;
- A flexible organisation of ECEC services in terms of enrolment, attendance requirements and opening hours arrangements...
- A political commitment toward democracy, equality and civil rights. Low-income families with young children often need income support, assistance with employment, and improved access to pre- and post-natal health, social welfare and educational support. For this reason, the authors of the literature review suggest that “children living in

41. The authors of the literature review preferred to use the term ‘good practices’, to underline the need for careful reflection on the wider social, cultural and political contexts in which successful educational practices are generated and to emphasise the aspect of re-invention over that of replication (Moss & Urban, 2010).

countries where ECEC includes comprehensive health and social services gain most from participating in ECEC programmes”.

4. Some EU countries are well advanced on these policies, but many are not. Even agreed policies, such as providing universal early childhood education to all 3-5 children, are carried out in very different ways, depending on the country. Entitlements to a service may range from two hours daily for eight months of the year to a full-day service for eleven months (the practice in the Nordic countries). In addition, quality may differ greatly in terms of teacher skills, child:staff ratios, care given to children and learning environments.

5. The integration of care and education services is far from being achieved in Europe, although the research shows obvious advantages for children, staff and parents when these services are conceptualised as one and placed under the responsibility of one ministry or agency. Integration results in greater coherence in early childhood policy; the reduction or elimination of inequalities between services for children under and over 3 years; a rethinking of the purpose, provision and practice of ECCE across all age groups; a greater appreciation of the pedagogical value of early childhood services; and more efficient resourcing of ECCE through the merging of administrations.

E. Findings from the review of cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes from ECEC

1. The main findings are as follows:

- High quality ECEC programmes have positive long-lasting effects on cognitive development;
- ECEC programmes have positive effects on children’s social skills and socio-emotional development during the early years, but effects may not last through primary schooling;
- The positive effects of ECEC are greatest for children from disadvantaged backgrounds; a high quality early education experience facilitates transition into primary school;
- Acceptable quality in ECEC programming is critical to ensuring positive effects;
- It is critical also to involve parents in their children’s development and learning.

2. EPPE and other European studies cited by the authors find that participation in high quality ECEC is positively associated with gains in mathematics and literacy, and other measures of cognitive performance such as intelligence tests, school readiness, grade retention, and special education placement, after controlling for socio-economic status and other background variables. These effects can remain at least until the age of eleven years.

3. Socio-emotional gains tend to fade out far more quickly. This finding is confirmed by the most recent (December, 2012) Head Start evaluation, where fade-out of socio-emotional progress occurred in first grade. In contrast, Andersson’s 1992 study in Sweden showed that although some fading occurred during the primary school years, socio-emotional skills gained during the preschool years can emerge again during adolescence. A possible explanation is that across countries, very different quality levels operate. In addition, depending on the country, less consistency may exist between ECE and school settings, leading to a greater likelihood of rapid fade out.

4. Another explanation is that socio-emotional skills may be defined too superficially as simple behaviours that facilitate class management and learning processes. The socio-emotional development of young children is considerably more complex. In a world where pressures on adolescents can be relentless, parents and teachers need to pay greater attention to the development of self-concept, self-regulation and empathy in young children and to their ability to make meaningful, long-term relationships.

5. Children from dysfunctional households and/or low-income, urban neighbourhoods may be at greater risk from socio-emotional stress and learning difficulties and, at the same time, have less access to appropriate services. The socio-emotional development of these children should not be conceptualised as simply an issue of acquiring compliant social skills or as the socialisation of minority children into majority practices and values, but as an

ongoing developmental task for each individual child that touches on issues of personal identity, self-concept, inclusion and attitudes to society. As noted by Vandebroek (2012) vis-à-vis migrant children:

For many children, their introduction to ECEC represents their first step into society. It presents them with a mirror on how society looks at them and thus how they may look at themselves, since it is only in a context of sameness and difference that identity can be constructed. It is in this public mirror that they are confronted with these essential and existential questions: Who am I? And is it OK to be who I am?

6. Where programmes are concerned, the literature review indicates three impediments to children's learning and development: insufficient duration and/or intensity of the preschool experience, 'poor quality' in the early childhood programmes available; and lack of appropriate follow-up and support given to at-risk young children in the early years of primary schooling.

F. Findings from Case Study 1

Moss, P. *A review of government initiatives for young children in England, 1997-2010*

1. A major feature of the reform of the English early childhood system was the intensity and rigour with which it was managed at both central and local levels. The case study calls attention in particular to governance aspects of quality – public consultation and communication, planning based on rigorous research, improved investment, and adequate professional administration - aspects of quality that are often overlooked in the present focus on teacher evaluation and instructional strategies.

2. During the period of ECEC reform, child poverty was greatly reduced, due rather to more equitable income redistribution than to early childhood services, although these greatly assisted the move of lone parents into work. Research on participation in ECEC services revealed that work status, income and parental education levels were closely associated with the take-up of childcare.

3. Every step of the English reform was accompanied by exemplary documentary and quantitative research, ex ante scoping studies, evaluations (especially, the National Evaluation of *Sure Start* (NESS) studies) and consultations with leading stakeholders and university researchers. There was a concern from the beginning to analyse the successes and failures of similar reforms in other countries, to gather submissions from all stakeholders, to collect data, and – unusual in the European context – to fund RCTs and other rigorous social science research.

4. The EPPE research clarified what constitutes pedagogical quality at centre level, viz. a qualified and motivated staff; smaller teacher-child ratios; a professionally developed but appropriate curriculum. Among staff the following were identified by the research as important– the quality of adult:child verbal interaction, an understanding of how young children learn, a deep knowledge and understanding of the curriculum; and support to the socio-emotional well-being and development of young children. In certain neighbourhoods, attention to diversity, an emphasis on positive emotional climate and individualised teaching and support were also found to be critical indicators of quality.⁴²

5. The reform of the English ECEC system likewise drew attention to parents and the importance of the home learning environment. Parent engagement was a feature of the reform and has become a statutory obligation of both *Sure Start Local Programmes* and *Children's Centres*. However, *Sure Start* evaluations show an apparent failure to reach the most disadvantaged families.

[P]arents/families with greater human capital were better able to take advantage of SSLP services and resources than those with less human capital (i.e. teen parents, lone parents, workless households). The finding that an intervention has produced greater benefits for the moderately disadvantaged than for the

42. The authors of the literature review also underline on several occasions the importance of creating a positive emotional climate that welcomes the diverse needs of children and families.

more severely disadvantaged has occurred in other evaluations of interventions (National Evaluation of Sure Start, 2005, p.8).

6. The effort to inform public opinion contributed greatly to the success of the reform and has guaranteed its irreversibility. The varied and intensive consultations and the initial Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships are an example of leadership from government, supporting bottom-up initiatives at local level

7. The reform of the early childhood system responded well to some of the challenges that the Labour government had inherited in 1997, for example, it helped to improve access and developed *Children's Centres* as an integrated, multi-purpose form of provision. Yet, having unified responsibility for policy-making and the regulation of all early years services, the integration of the split system then stalled, leaving untouched the issues of funding and workforce, and retaining in practice two separate sectors – 'early education' and 'childcare' – with major differences in conceptualisation, access, funding, workforce and type of provision.

G. Findings from Case Study 2

Tankersley D. & Klaus, S. OSF/ISSA approaches to teacher training and pedagogy

The main findings are:

1. *A more interactive and co-constructive approach to teacher education brings positive results:* Over the two decades, OSF and ISSA have introduced a new manner of training teachers to the CEE region. The Step by Step Program has decentralised the training of volunteer teachers to small model schools or sites, where in-service teacher education is delivered by practising master educators. The approach is based on interactive, co-constructed learning.⁴³ It is also principled, based on democratic values. In the ISSA vision, early education is based on what Fortunati (2009) calls 'transformative principles': "a belief in the protagonism of the child; in the open and collegial nature of educational work; and in the centrality of family participation in the educational project."

2. *The importance of teacher support.* The strong framework of support for teachers created by Step by Step and ISSA includes:

- Providing educators with child-centred educator training, teacher manuals and professional development modules;
- Creating a voluntary teacher certification system that includes mentoring support and allows teachers to receive an ISSA certificate of teaching excellence;
- Developing *local and on-line professional development communities*. This move was inspired by the concept of using democratic participatory approaches in professional development work that would also nurture critical thinking, dialogue, and reflection on what is quality practice;
- Providing on-line professional development and support, including an internal intranet site, a library of resources and online education.

3. *Practical guidelines for practising teachers.* Drawing on its wide experience and the inputs of hundreds of teachers and ECEC experts, ISSA has developed an outstanding set of guidelines for early childhood and primary school teachers working with disadvantaged children, families and communities.⁴⁴ The principles, developed through praxiological research,⁴⁵ are intended to guide teachers in their work with children and families. They go

43. It is well known that teachers tend to reproduce in their teaching practice the instructional and learning processes used in their initial formation. Hence the need to break with transmissive models of pedagogy and to introduce ECEC students and teachers to more participatory, interactive and experiential modes of learning that resemble the natural learning strategies of young children.

44. See *Competent Educators for the 21st Century: ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* (ISSA, 2010 - http://www.issa.nl/docs_pdfs/Quality-Principles-final-WEB.pdf)

45. Praxiological research is research on practice carried out by practitioner teams who know a context well and have an immediate use for the results of their reflection.

beyond the announcement of quality standards, which tend to undermine rather than support professional autonomy and responsibility. The Principles aim to open quality to discussion in every centre and to develop understanding of seven themes: 1. Interactions; 2. Family and Community; 3. Inclusion, Diversity, and Values of Democracy; 4. Assessment and Planning; 5. Teaching Strategies; 6. Learning Environment; 7. Professional Development.

4. *The critical role of the local teacher in defining quality.* ISSA emphasises the critical role of the local educator who seeks to define collegially with parents and communities what constitutes quality in their particular context. The process is not without its challenges as it obliges stakeholders – parents, teachers and administrators – to re-examine the meaning of ECEC not only for the country as a whole (expressed in the national curriculum) but also in terms of the outcomes that parents and the local community expect. The exchange is a learning experience for all concerned and helps to inform parents about the importance of early education and care. The discussion is useful for teachers as it widens their knowledge of family and community life, allowing them to enrich the official curriculum and make it more attractive to the children and their parents.

5. *The promotion of inclusion, diversity and democratic values in teacher training.* Step by Step and ISSA give strong visibility to the issue, as many children of traditionally excluded groups in the region, including Roma and children with special needs, continue to be placed in segregated settings or enrolled in mainstream settings with teachers untrained in supporting diverse classrooms or in addressing the supplementary needs of disadvantaged children. ISSA networks also invest in national policy-making consultation processes and their centres are encouraged to engage in issues that concern the civic life of their communities.

Concluding remarks

The literature reviews and case studies have examined many central aspects of ECEC policy and practice in favour of children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds. Among the subjects investigated were:

- *The extent of child poverty in Europe* and the very negative impact of severe poverty on the early development of infants and young children;
- *The access of children at-risk to early childhood services* and the supplementary difficulties that the more marginalised children experience;
- *The barriers against and good practices for engaging children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds in ECEC services*, for example: inclusive practices across early childhood services that incorporate a commitment to social justice and the creation of a positive affective climate toward families and children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- *The challenge of initiating necessary reforms*, such as, providing a comprehensive universal entitlement to services or attempting to integrate care and education systems, both policies that have the potential to bring disadvantaged children into early childhood services, earlier and in greater numbers.
- *A review of how early childhood services contribute to the cognitive and non-cognitive development of young children.* The analysis covered also research on what constitutes quality in services – a necessary condition for child development to take place. It also called attention to socio-emotional development, which is often defined superficially as acquiring social skills or learning dispositions, or even as the socialisation of minority children into majority practices and values.
- *The need to combine equity and quality.* It is clear that system quality cannot be achieved without equity, as without equality of opportunity during early childhood and primary schooling, a significant proportion of children from low-income backgrounds will leave education early. It is critical that early childhood services in disadvantaged areas should provide pedagogical excellence: the best possible teachers who, trained in diversity, can support the home learning environment and provide pedagogical

interaction with children that stimulates language, socio-emotional and cognitive development..

- *An account of national early childhood service reform in England* and of the central contribution that active governance and strong research made to its success. The effort to win over public opinion in favour of the reform also contributed greatly to its realisation and has guaranteed its irreversibility even during a recessionary period.
- *An overview of an interactive teacher training and professional development model* that promotes professional teaching skills, co-constructed child-centred practice, and the ongoing involvement of families and communities.

The findings of the literature reviews and case studies indicate that a supportive early childhood system has an important role to play in reducing the effects of child poverty, if it provides comprehensive services to young children to meet their holistic needs, namely, health, nutrition, socio-emotional and cognitive development. Such a system is greatly strengthened if it also reaches out to parents in order to involve them in their children's upbringing and education and, if necessary, to facilitate their access to essential health, social welfare and other services.

In parallel, the ECEC system can contribute greatly to fostering social inclusion, especially when it is embedded in a system of public governance that seeks to address, with due urgency, issues of inequality and exclusion. Because disadvantage has multiple causes, it must be tackled on multiple fronts, a fact emphasised also in the Council of Europe conclusions:

'... child poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that can be faced only through a comprehensive approach that combines employment for parents, income support and access to social services, including early childhood education and care, as well as health care services and education: as such it involves adequate human and financial resources (Council of the European Union, 2011b).

In sum, where disadvantaged children and families are concerned, early childhood systems need to be supported by a broader welfare system that links policies across many sectors – employment, education, health and social services – and which presupposes a cultural and political commitment to democratic rights, equality and solidarity. In such a framework and as part of a network of co-ordinated services at national and local levels, early childhood centres have the potential not only to provide care and education to young children and their families, but also to catalyse cultural and political change by linking their initiatives to those of other public agencies or NGOs. The authors of the literature review remark, however, that only within a shared vision of ECEC as a public good can this goal be concretely achieved.

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