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ANNEX

ANNEX

to the

Proposal for a Council Recommendation

on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems

{SWD(2018) 173 final}

ANNEX
QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality¹.

The European Pillar of Social Rights

Learning and education start from birth and early years are the most formative in children's lives as they set the foundations for their lifelong development. This quality framework provides key principles and a European approach to high quality early childhood education and care systems based on good practices in the EU Member States and state of the art research. It comprises ten quality statements which are structured along five broader areas of quality: access, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, and governance and funding. The ten quality statements describe the main features of high quality services as identified in practice. The quality framework is a governance tool aimed at providing orientation for the development and upholding of early child and education systems. To enable self-assessment and further reflection, it also provides a list of indicators that can be used at national, regional or local level.

The framework's main objective is to provide good quality early childhood education and care for all children and its development is guided by the following principles:

- high quality services are crucial in promoting children's development and learning and, in the long term, enhancing their educational chances;
- parents' participation as partners of such services is essential - the family is the most important place for children to grow and develop, and parents (and guardians) are responsible for each child's well-being, health and development;
- early childhood education and care services need to be child-centred, actively involve children and acknowledge children's views.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

THE EU QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

ACCESS to quality early childhood education and care services **for all children** contributes to their healthy development and educational success, helps reducing social inequalities and narrows the competence gap between children with different socio-economic backgrounds. Equitable access is also essential to ensure that parents, especially women, have flexibility to (re)integrate in the labour market.

Quality Statements:

1. Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children.

Universal legal entitlement to early childhood education and care services provides a solid basis for reaching out to all children. Population data and parents surveys on the demand for early childhood education and care places can serve as a basis for estimating further needs and adjusting capacity.

Provision can address barriers that may prevent families and children from participating. This may include an adaptation of the requested fees for early childhood education and care to allow also low-income households' access. There is also evidence that flexibility in opening hours and other arrangements can enable participation especially for children of working mothers and from minority or disadvantaged groups.

Provision that is equally distributed across urban and rural areas, affluent and poor neighbourhoods, and regions can widen access for disadvantaged groups in society. Availability and affordability of high quality services in neighbourhoods where poor families, ethnic minorities or migrant families reside is reported to have the biggest impact on supporting equity and social inclusion.

2. Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity.

Early childhood education and care settings can actively encourage participation by involving parents, families and carers in decision-making processes (e.g. in parental committees). Reaching out to families - especially to women and disadvantaged or minority or migrant families - with targeted initiatives allows them to express their needs and enables services to take these into account when tailoring provision to the demands of local communities.

Recruitment of staff from marginalised, migrant or minority groups can be encouraged as it has proven to be of advantage if the composition of staff in early childhood education and care settings reflects diversity in the community.

Creating a welcoming environment for children that values their languages and home backgrounds contributes to the development of their sense of belonging. Appropriate continuous professional development also prepares staff to welcome and support bilingual children.

Early childhood education and care settings can develop good practices in families for a smooth transition from the home environment to the setting, as well as foster high levels of parental participation by organising specific initiatives.

STAFF is the most significant factor for children's well-being, learning and developmental outcomes. Therefore staff working conditions and professional development are seen as essential components of quality.

Quality statements:

3. Well-qualified staff with initial and continuing training that enable them to fulfil their professional role.

Effective early childhood education and care systems consider raising the professional status of staff, which is widely acknowledged as a key factor of quality, by raising qualification levels, offering flexible career prospects and alternative pathways for assistants. This can be supported by aiming for a pedagogical workforce that is composed of professionals holding a full professional qualification specialised in early childhood education at ISCED 6 level, in addition to assistant staff.

State-of-the-art initial education programs are designed together with practitioners and provide a good balance between theory and practice. It is also an asset if education programmes better prepare staff for working collectively and for enhancing reflective competences. Such programmes can benefit from training staff to work with linguistically and culturally diverse groups, from minority, migrant and low-income families.

Staff that are equipped to follow the developmental needs of young children and able to detect potential development problems can more actively support child development. Regular, tailor-made and continued professional development opportunities benefit all staff members, including assistants and auxiliary staff.

Regarding the necessary elements of child development and psychology, competences for staff should include an applied child protection module, and more generally the rights of the child.

4. Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

Early childhood education and care systems that aim at improved working conditions, including more adequate wage levels, can make employment in early childhood education a more attractive option for better-qualified staff, looking for proper careers.

Adult-child ratios and group sizes are most adequate if designed in an appropriate manner for the age and composition of the group of children, as younger children require more attention.

Professional learning communities, where they exist within and across settings, have shown a positive impact through assigning time and space for staff collegial practices and joint work.

Offering mentoring and supervision to newly recruited staff during their induction can help them to quickly fulfil their professional roles.

CURRICULUM is a powerful tool to improve well-being, development and educational experience of children. A broad pedagogical framework sets out the principles for sustaining children's development through educational and care practices that meet children's interests, needs and potentialities.

Quality statements:

5. A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential addressing their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development and their well-being.

Child-centred pedagogical approaches can better sustain children's overall development, provide support for their learning strategies and promote their cognitive and non-cognitive

development by building more systematically on experiential learning, play and social interactions.

There is strong evidence that an explicit curriculum is an asset as it can provide a coherent framework for care, education and socialisation as integral parts of early childhood education and care provision. Ideally, such a framework defines age-specific learning goals while enabling educators to personalise their approach to the individual needs of children and can provide guidelines for a high quality learning environment. It gives due consideration to including availability of books and other print material to help literacy development of children.

By promoting diversity, equality, and linguistic awareness an effective curriculum framework fosters integration of migrants. It can nurture the development of both their mother tongue and language of education.

6. A curriculum that requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice.

A curriculum can help to better involve parents, stakeholders and staff and to ensure that it responds more adequately to the needs, interests and potentialities of the children.

A curriculum can define roles and processes for staff to collaborate regularly with parents as well as with colleagues in other children's services (including health, social care and education sectors).

Whenever possible, the curriculum can provide guidelines for early childhood education and care staff to liaise with school staff on children's transition to the primary and/or pre-primary schools.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION are enablers for sustained quality. By pointing to strengths and weaknesses, its processes can be important components of enhancing quality in early childhood education systems. They can provide support to stakeholders and policy makers in undertaking initiatives that respond to the needs of children, parents and local communities.

Quality statements:

7. Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice.

Transparent information on service and staff or on curriculum implementation at the appropriate – national, regional and local – level can help to improve quality.

Regular information feedback can make the process of policy evaluation easier, also by allowing to analyse the use of public funds and of what is effective and in which context.

To identify staff learning needs and to make the right decisions on how best to improve service quality, it is beneficial that early childhood education leaders collect relevant data in a timely manner.

8. Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child.

In order to protect the rights of children, robust child protection/child safeguarding policies should be embedded within the ECEC system to help protect children from all forms of violence. Child protection policies should cover four broad areas: (1) policy, (2) people, (3)

procedures, and (4) accountability. More information on these areas can be found in "Child safeguarding standards and how to implement them" issued by Keeping Children Safe.²

Monitoring and evaluation processes can foster active engagement and cooperation among all stakeholders. Everyone concerned with the development of quality can contribute to – and benefit from – monitoring and evaluation practices.

Available evidence indicates that a mix of monitoring methods (e.g. observation, documentation, narrative assessment of children competences) can provide useful information and give account of children's experiences and development, including helping a smooth transition to primary school.

Monitoring tools and participatory evaluation procedures can be created to allow children to be heard and be explicit about their learning and socialising experiences within settings.

GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING are crucial to enable early childhood education and care provision to play its role in the personal development of children and in reducing the attainment gap and fostering social cohesion. Governance needs to be part of a comprehensive system of coherent public policies that link early childhood education and care to other services concerned with the welfare of young children and their families.

Quality statements:

9. Stakeholders have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.

Early childhood education and care provision should ideally closely collaborate with all services working for children, including social and health services, schools and local stakeholders. Such inter-agency alliances have shown to be more effective if governed by a coherent policy framework that can proactively foster collaboration and long-term investment in local communities.

Stakeholders' involvement has been shown as crucial to design and implement early childhood education and care provision.

Responsibility for all regulations on early childhood education and care and for funding can ideally rest with the same department.

10. Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded early childhood education and care, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders.

Improvement of quality in service provision for all children might be better achieved by progressively building up universal legal entitlement. It can be useful to evaluate whether market based early childhood education and care services create unequal access or lower quality for disadvantaged children and, if necessary, make plans for remedy actions.

A close link to labour, health and social policies would clearly be an asset as it can promote a more efficient redistribution of resources by targeting extra funding towards disadvantaged groups and neighbourhoods.

² http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/rights_child/standards_child_protection_kcsc_en.pdf

