



EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION

It has been recognised at both global and European level that there is a clear link between poor or disadvantaged backgrounds and low educational achievement. Furthermore, families from such backgrounds have been shown to most benefit from access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services. The European Council's targets in 2010 included increasing the provision of childcare to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and to at least 33% of children under 3 years of age (European Parliament, 2011).

In 2005, the Agency's project analysis highlighted a model of ECI focused on child development and the impact of social interaction upon human development in general and on children in particular. This model constitutes a shift from the traditional form of intervention that principally focuses on the child, to an extended approach involving the child, their family and the environment. This shift corresponds to the evolution of a broader range of concepts in the disability field, namely a move from a medical to a social model.

Five elements were identified in the analysis as relevant to this model and requiring effective implementation; they are all interconnected and cannot be considered in isolation from each other:

Availability: A shared aim of ECI and a general priority in all countries is to reach all children and families in need of support as early as possible.

Proximity: Support services should reach all members of the target population and be made available as close as possible to families, both at local and community levels.

Affordability: Services should be offered free of charge or at minimal cost to families by means of public funds from health, social or education authorities, or through non-government organisations including non-profit associations.

Interdisciplinary working: Professionals in charge of direct support to young children and their families belong to different disciplines (professions) and consequently have diverse backgrounds according to the service they are connected with. Interdisciplinary work facilitates the exchange of information among team members.

Diversity of services: This element is closely connected to the diversity of disciplines involved in ECI. The involvement of three services – health, social services and education – is a common characteristic in various countries, but also constitutes one of the main differences.

The results of the 2005 Agency analysis highlighted that 'ECI relates to the right of every young child and their family to receive the support they might need. ECI aims to support and empower the child, the family and the services involved. It helps to build an inclusive and cohesive society that is aware of the rights of children and their families' (EA, p. 3).

The main findings of the updated 2010 analysis clearly support the three priorities highlighted previously:

The need to reach all populations in need of ECI: This priority relates to the common aim and priority across all participating countries of reaching all children and families in need of support as early as possible.

The need to ensure equal and quality standards of provision: This priority relates to the need to have clearly defined quality standards for ECI services and provision. Furthermore, the development of mechanisms to evaluate and ensure adherence to



quality standards would improve the effectiveness of ECI services and ensure the same quality of service provision nationwide, despite geographical differences.

The need to respect the rights and needs of children and their families: This priority relates to the need to create family focused and responsive services. These services will work for children and families and involve parents at every level of planning and developing ECI services for their children.

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Introduction: Why is ECI a crucial area and what are its benefits?

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Feedbacks:

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Floor open to questions