

DRAFT THEMATIC GUIDANCE FICHE FOR DESK OFFICERS

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

VERSION 2 – 27/01/2014

RELEVANT PROVISIONS IN THE LEGISLATION

Regulation	Article
CPR (1303/2013)	Article 9 (9) - Thematic objective: promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination Article 9 (10) - Thematic objective: investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning Annex I CPR: section 5.5 Annex XI Thematic ex-ante conditionalities: section 9.1
ESF Regulation (1304/2013)	Article 3: Scope of support <u>(b)</u> Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty through: (iv) Enhancing access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality services, including health care and social services of general interest <u>(c)</u> Investing in education, skills and life-long learning through: (i) Preventing and reducing early-school leaving; promoting equal access to good-quality early-childhood, primary and secondary education
ERDF Regulation (1301/2013)	Article 3: Scope of support (d) Investment in, social, health, research, innovation, business and educational infrastructure (e) Investment in the development of endogenous potential through fixed investment in equipment and small-scale infrastructure; including small-scale cultural and sustainable tourism infrastructure, services to enterprises, support to research and innovation bodies and investment in technology and applied research in enterprises Article 5: Investment priorities (9) promoting social inclusion and combating poverty through: (a) investing in health and social infrastructure which contribute to national, regional and local development, reducing inequalities in terms of health status, promoting social inclusion through improved access to social, cultural and recreational services and the transition from institutional to community-based services (10) Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning by developing education and training infrastructure

	<p>Recitals:</p> <p>(15) In order to promote social inclusion and combat poverty, particularly among marginalised communities, it is necessary to improve access to social, cultural and recreational services, through the provision of small-scale infrastructure, taking account of the specific needs of the disabled and the elderly</p>
<p>EAFRD Regulation (1305/2013)</p>	<p>Article 5: Union priorities for rural development</p> <p>(1) (c) fostering lifelong learning and vocational training in the agricultural and forestry sectors</p> <p>(6) promoting social inclusion poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas</p>

This is a draft document based on the new ESIF Regulations published in OJ 347 of 20 December 2013 and on the most recent version of the relevant Commission's draft implementing and delegated acts. It may still require review to reflect the content of these draft legal acts once they are adopted.

1. Rationale for the policy and main objectives

Education and training policy is an area where, as a result of the subsidiarity principle, the EU has supporting competence as defined by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Lisbon Treaty). The Treaty (Article 165) provides that "the Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action". In addition Article 9 requires EU to "take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health."

ECEC can make a significant contribution to achievement of these goals. There are strong economic, social, educational benefits of promoting ECEC, ranging from contributing to the creation of a skilled workforce, through supporting a better work-life balance, up to its crucial role in breaking the cycle of disadvantage. ECEC provides an essential foundation for successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and later employability. Complementing the central role of the family, ECEC has profound and long-lasting impact which measures taken at later stage cannot achieve. Children's earliest experiences form the basis for all subsequent learning. If solid foundations are laid (cognitive, social, emotional and physical) in the early years, later learning is more effective and is more likely to continue lifelong, lessening the risk of early school leaving, increasing equity of educational outcomes and the reducing the costs for society in terms of lost talent and of public spending on social, health and even justice system. These arguments are particularly relevant for the disadvantaged.

Key policy challenges

- *In terms of access*

The Barcelona targets and the European benchmark on ECEC participation have been only partially achieved:

Barcelona target

At the 2002 Barcelona European Council, set the targets of providing childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age¹.

- Regarding the lower age-group between 0 and 3 years and examining the total coverage irrespective of the number of hours spent in formal childcare arrangements, ten Member States plus Iceland and Norway have met or surpassed the Barcelona objective of a 33% coverage rate (Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, (Norway), France, (Iceland), Spain, Portugal, Slovenia, Belgium, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom). Two other Member States (Ireland, Finland) have reached an intermediate level of coverage of over 25%. This means that 15 Member States still need to make considerable progress in order to

¹ Provision is measured as children cared for (by formal arrangements other than by the family) as a proportion of all children in the same age group (children under three or between three years and the mandatory school age). This indicator is broken down by the number of hours per week during which the children are cared for (up to 30 hours a week /30 hours or more a week). Data are collected through an EU harmonised survey, the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). Formal arrangements are defined as: organised structure with qualified staff, at a day care centre or at organised family daycare.

meet the established targets. Availability was particularly poor in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia where the rate of childcare was less than 5%. In most countries there was a clear difference between regions (e.g. in Germany and in Italy)

- Regarding participation in education by children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and examining the total coverage irrespective of the number of hours spent in formal childcare arrangements, eleven Member States (Belgium, Spain, France, Sweden, Germany, Estonia, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Ireland, Denmark and UK) plus Iceland have met or surpassed the Barcelona objective of a 90% coverage rate. 2011 Italy also achieved the objective, but the childcare rate in Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain declined noticeably, sinking below the objective of 90%. 13 Member States still need to make progress in order to meet the established targets. This is particularly the case in some of the Eastern European countries, including acceding country Croatia, but also Lithuania, Romania, Latvia, Greece, Bulgaria and Poland. Notably, there is large variation between countries in the number of hours spent in formal childcare arrangements.

The **European benchmark** in the ET2020 strategy (not considered to be a target to be reached by individual countries by 2020) suggests that at least 95% of children between years of 4 year old and the age of starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education across the EU by 2020.

- In 2010 the early childhood education participation rate was 92.3%. Although there is a general increase of the EU average in participation, a number of countries are far below the benchmark. In other countries rates are already above 95%. The availability of alternative types of provision such as family day care could be an underlying reason for lower level of participation in some countries (e.g. FI).

Participation in ECEC, child/staff ratio and total expenditure per pupil²

	Age range ³	Participation in ECEC (%)		Child/staff ratio ⁴		Expenditure per pupil ⁵	
		2006	2011	2006	2010	2006	2009
EU 27 countries	-	89.3	93.2	14.1	13.4	-	-
Belgium	4-5	99.9	98.1	16.0	15.9	15.5	16.0
Bulgaria	4-6	80.5	86.6	11.5	12.0	30.1	34.7
Czech Republic	4-5	92.6	87.8	12.5	13.9	16.1	18.4
Denmark	4-6	92.0	97.9	:	:	17.6	24.4
Germany	4-5	93.0	96.4	14.3	12.6	17.5	21.8
Estonia	4-6	94.9	89.1	8.3	6.0	10.5	13.2
Ireland	4-5	:	99.7	14.1	19.8	:	:
Greece	4-5	70.9	74.6	12.4	:	:	:
Spain	4-5	98.5	100.0	14.0	13.0	18.5	24.0
France	4-5	100.0	100.0	19.3	21.5	16.4	18.6
Italy	4-5	100.0	96.0	11.6	11.8	19.4	19.4
Cyprus	4-5	84.7	85.0	18.1	17.0	17.2	20.4
Latvia	4-6	87.2	92.7	13.5	12.1	25.7	42.3
Lithuania	4-6	75.8	84.2	8.9	7.8	22.9	31.4
Luxembourg	4-5	95.0	95.6	:	12.0	:	19.9
Hungary	4-5	94.5	94.5	10.7	11.0	:	:
Malta	4	95.5	100.0	12.7	15.2	22.6	24.5
Netherlands	4	74.2	99.6	:	:	16.6	18.0
Austria	4-5	88.1	94.3	16.8	14.7	22.6	26.2
Poland	4-6	64.0	78.4	18.0	18.7	28.0	26.8
Portugal	4-5	86.8	95.4	15.0	15.7	15.1	15.3
Romania	4-5	81.2	82.0	18.2	17.5	12.9	13.5
Slovenia	4-6	88.6	89.8	9.4	9.4	30.7	30.6
Slovak Republic	4-5	79.4	76.9	13.5	12.5	18.3	20.1
Finland	4-6	68.1	74.0	12.0	11.0	14.0	15.6
Sweden	4-6	91.3	95.3	11.4	6.3	15.6	17.6
United Kingdom	4	91.1	97.0	19.8	15.9	25.5	22.8
Croatia	4-5	61.9	70.6	12.8	12.1	27.7	30.3

- **In terms of quality:**

- Many countries lack a coherent vision across the sectors of education and care during the early years and thus lack coherent governance mechanisms.

² Commission Staff Working Document on the Education and Training Monitor 2012, accompanying the "Communication from the Commission on rethinking education: investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes, SWD 2012 (373) final

³ Used age range to calculate the participation rate in early childhood education and care.

⁴ Pre-primary education only, enrolment and personnel in full-time units (FTU).

⁵ Total private and public expenditure as a percentage of purchasing power standards (PPS) per pupil compared to GDP in PPS per capita.

- The training and competences of pre-school staff requires more attention: training varies, and many unqualified people are still working in the area.
 - A curriculum is often lacking or is not age-appropriate taking into consideration all the needs of children (physical, emotional, social and cognitive), and thus integrating care and education care.
 - Parental involvement remains a problem, particularly in the case of the disadvantaged;
 - Many countries lack an over-arching framework to ensure quality.
 - Comparable data are lacking, especially concerning provision for the youngest children under 3-years old.
- *In terms of public investment:*
 - Although there is substantial evidence that throughout the lifecycle investing into the early years brings the greatest returns, countries tend to invest more into education in middle and later childhood. One Euro invested brings several times more in the early years than in the later stages of life. So there is no trade-off between equity and efficiency of the education system at this stage. Later, particularly remedial action might be much more expensive and less successful.

EU policy on ECEC

As a response to the call for European policy cooperation in in early childhood education and care, the Commission adopted in **February 2011 the Communication "Early childhood education and care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow"**, which sets out key issues for future co-operation with the aim to improve access and quality of services **from birth to the start of compulsory schooling**⁶.

The **Communication** focuses on **two main topics**: to provide **access** to child care and education for all and to raise the **quality** of the provision. It proposes to do this through **well-integrated services** of care and education that build on a joint vision of the role of ECEC, of the most effective **curricular frameworks**, and of **staff competences** and **governance arrangements** necessary to deliver it.

- Only high quality ECEC **can reduce educational disadvantage**, improve children's average attainment, foster the emergence of skills and establish positive attitudes to learning, and more broadly, counterbalance socio-economic differences.
- Therefore, there is a strong **need to integrate care and education in a holistic way from birth to compulsory school age**. The aim should be to support cognitive, social, physical and emotional development and well-being of children, rather than early "scholarisation".
- The promotion of quality needs a coordinated policy development with other sectors, appropriately trained able and well-paid staff with good working conditions, efficient funding of the service, the involvement of parents and wider social services into the work of ECEC, an overarching pedagogical framework and above all political – and financial - commitment.

⁶ **Important policy documents** leading up to the issuing of the Communication on ECEC COM (2011) 66 final:

- Council Conclusions on efficiency and equity in education and training (2006)
- Council Conclusions on preparing young people for the 21st century: and agenda for European cooperation on schools (2008);
- Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (2009)

In May 2011 EU Education Ministers adopted **Council Conclusions** which endorsed these plans and launched a process of policy co-operation at European level on early childhood education and care. These Conclusions invite Member States to analyse their current situation as regards ECEC provision with particular attention to their accessibility and quality and to reinforce measures to ensure equitable and generalised access to high-quality ECEC services, as well as to invest in ECEC as a growth enhancing measure. The Council also invited the Commission to support the exchange of good practice, to broaden the evidence-base on ECEC and to monitor and report on progress towards the EU benchmark within the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) .

2. How to operationalize the policy theory with regard to ESIF?

a) Ensure affordable access for all children from 0 to compulsory school age:

As a result of lack of available places, public funding as well as of awareness of the services, access is a problem particularly for the disadvantaged, i.e. socioeconomically disadvantaged, with migrant or Roma background, or with special educational needs, including disabilities. In order to break the poverty cycle, ECEC services should be reinforced. Affordable access to high quality ECEC **for all children**, especially by disadvantaged groups in the deprived micro-regions, neighbourhoods is essential. To that end targeted measures might need to accompany policies for universal access.

Many countries are in the process of widening access by introducing one or more years of compulsory kindergarten, before the compulsory school. But often there is no financially thought through strategy behind this legislation, thus widening access is on the detriment of quality of the services (EL, PL, etc).

b) Ensure high-quality of all services for children (from birth to compulsory school age) and their families:

Quality has very heterogeneous definitions and interpretations, therefore the criteria, according to which quality is monitored and evaluated, needs to be clear. It is key to **all measures that widening access should go together with accompanying quality standards**. These should be based on the country's specific socio-economic situation, well-targeted and supported by relevant data. The Commission is currently working on a proposal for a European Quality Framework on ECEC, the broader areas of which have already been identified in the Commission's Communication in 2011 which are in line with the rationale and findings of the OECD's recently published Starting Strong III (2012) publication.

The following type of actions should be supported from the ESIF:

ESF

- Measures that **widen access** in an inclusive way to high-quality ECEC services, by giving access to disadvantaged groups to mainstream facilities. Special attention should be paid to affordable access in deprived areas and to the equal participation of marginalised groups, including Roma. To this end targeted measures to support the enrolment of disadvantaged children in ECEC, complementing universal access, which may include removing financial barriers, providing free meals, as well as support by mediators and pedagogical assistants might be necessary. Further support for segregated educational facilities should be avoided.

- Measures that enable the establishment of **comprehensive integrated services** (including measures targeting child protection, health, housing, integration), which are particularly beneficial for the disadvantaged. (See also point above)
- Measures to facilitate **transition from early childhood education and care to primary school**, particularly for disadvantaged children to prevent unjustified enrolment into special needs education. Joint pedagogical programmes for pre-schools and primary schools should be encouraged.
- Measures towards the **professionalization of staff** (including widening and raising the levels of education through improving the avenues of initial education as well as induction, in-service training and continuous professional development as well as specific programmes for up-skilling those who are already in the services); training of staff on how to address diversity and enhance inclusion; improving the working conditions of staff
- Measures to develop an **overarching age-appropriate curriculum or pedagogical framework** that promotes a holistic approach to the children (addressing their diverse needs, incl. cognitive, social, emotional and physical). It is key that there should be emphasis not only on the cognitive but also on the non-cognitive and meta-cognitive skills and on free-play from birth to compulsory school age.
- Measures that promote a **systemic and coherent vision** on the early years (from birth to compulsory school age) that enable **dialogue between actors** of a wide range of sectors involved in early years policies, such as education, social affairs, family affairs, health, employment, integration and children's rights from governmental and non-governmental organisations and the parents. There should be horizontal coordination between the different actors at local, regional and national level and vertical coordination between the different levels of government.
- Measures to establish **quality assurance mechanisms** that include competence requirements of staff (or of teams of staff), pedagogical orientations and standards, a regulatory framework for early childhood services, child outcomes for monitoring child development in order to identify problems early and intervene in time.

ERDF

Investments in education are one of the categories of public expenditure highlighted in the 2013 Annual Growth Survey which should be prioritised and strengthened, while ensuring the efficiency of such expenditure. Furthermore, all Member States have received a CSR with regard to education and training in 2013. In a number of Member States, particularly in the less developed regions, such reforms of education and training systems may also need to be supported by investment in education infrastructure, triggering ERDF expenditure.

In contrast to the 2007-2013 period, where infrastructure investments were eligible only in convergence regions, for 2014-2020 they are now eligible in all regions. The principle of thematic concentration allowing for a genuine focus of resources nevertheless needs to be respected. Another important change concerns that the purchase of equipment has become an eligible expenditure from the European Social Fund. This widens the range of possibilities for the ESF to undertake education-related investments. In any case, the purchase of infrastructure, land and buildings remain non-eligible for the ESF. Infrastructure investments can be financed by the ERDF, if covered by the operational Programmes and if the budget foreseen is realistic.

Infrastructure investment for early childhood education (i.e. from birth to compulsory to school age) can be supported under thematic objective 10 on education or 9 on social inclusion and poverty reduction, which includes social infrastructure. The choice made by the Managing Authority should be based on the objectives of the relevant operational programme and the intervention logic set out therein, in particular the specific objective in question. For example, creches (0 to 3 years) can also be supported under thematic objective 9 on social inclusion, in the context of measures to enhance the inclusion of women on the labour market after maternity leave.

The following points should be taken into account:

- Investments proposed under a programme should be based on a mapping exercise (carried out as part of ex-ante conditionality), taking into account demographic trends. Additionally, the selection of specific investments by the managing authority should take account of a “demographic proofing” criterion.
- Isolated renovation of buildings with limited impact on quality or participation should be avoided (for example, renovation/refreshing of existing and functional creches, which should be maintained through mainstream maintenance budgets). Investments should be individually justified as being cost-effective and sustainable.
- An integrated approach with ESF investment is highly desirable in order to maximise effectiveness. Investment in ECEC infrastructure should always be accompanied by the necessary measures to ensure appropriate quality.
- Identified weaknesses in current spending, such as isolated piecemeal investments, should be addressed notably through a strategic approach. The possibilities presented by investments in the current programming period should be fully exploited and be taken into account in the programming for the new period.
- Funding is unlikely to be sufficient to implement wide reforms or investment programmes. It should therefore be concentrated on areas within the overall strategy allowing for a measurable impact and added value (e.g. with a demonstration or seed effect).
- Infrastructure investment should preferably go beyond the refurbishment of buildings. They can also encompass investments necessary for modernising teaching and learning methods, including teaching material, which could also be supported by ESF.
- Educational infrastructures can also play an important role in integrated urban development and could be part of strategies developed to meet social challenges in urban areas.
- Where appropriate, investments should contribute to equal access to quality ECEC and in any case should not support special schools systems, but contribute to breaking down segregation.

3. Example for good practice

Sure Start Program in Hungary

Hungary joined the to the *Sure Start Program* in 2003 (the programme was launched originally in the UK in 1999)

The aims and principles of the Hungarian programme

The specific mission of Sure Start children's centres is to provide assistance in developing the skills and capacities of young children (0-6) living in extreme poverty and often unacceptable social and housing conditions; they are most often of Roma ancestry and with serious obstacles to socialization. Such assistance to children at an age crucial to their later development is essential for their future success in school, and also of enormous benefit to their families. At present, there are forty-eight Sure Start children's centres in Hungary, and in the near future another fifty-six will open with EU funding.

The programme aims to eliminate child poverty and exclusion by facilitating the local, already existing services connected to the target group. On the other hand, building a local community can provide a supporting environment to enhance the parent's child-rearing competence. This programme does not create a new parallel supplier system, but it increases the chances to achieve the objectives of the already existing system by linking the local services to the target groups based on local needs. The services of Sure Start are delivered through integrated packages, community initiatives moulded to local needs with the cooperation of child health organisations and early day care institutions (nurseries, kindergartens, and family and welfare support services).

Some important investment areas: Combining the care and support to parents and children; Encouraging working together methods for all relevant professionals, service providers, local authorities, family members; Training provided to helpers in Children's Houses provided in modules and e-learning format.

Success factors: the willingness and ability of the different sectors and departments to collaborate, because this influences the spending as well. Education and welfare services define rigid professional boundaries between sectors which are difficult to cross.

5. Further reading

- ECEC on Europa:
http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/childhood_en.htm
- Communication on ECEC
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0066:FIN:EN:PDF>
- Council Conclusions on ECEC
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:301:0005:0008:EN:PDF>
- Tackling social and cultural inequalities in ECEC; Eurydice (2009)
<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about/eurydice/documents/098EN.pdf>
- National ET 2020 reports from 2012
http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

- Starting Strong III, OECD ((2012)
<http://www.oecd.org/edu/preschoolandschool/startingstrongiii-aqualitytoolboxforearlychildhoodeducationandcare.htm>
- Rethinking Education – Education Monitor
http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking/sw373_en.pdf (chapter 5, pp. 27-29)
- Eurydice – country reports
https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Ongoing_Reforms_and_Policy_Developments
- Report from the Commission on the Barcelona objectives
http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/documents/130531_barcelona_en.pdf
- Recommendation on investing into children
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1060&langId=en>
- Mapping of country practices in collecting data on ECEC through the thematic working group on ECEC (nora.milotay@ec.europa.eu)
- Forthcoming Statistical report on the Barcelona target (DG JUST, contact muriel.bissieres@ec.europa.eu)
- Key data on ECEC, Eurydice, forthcoming in 2014