SOCIAL INCLUSION, EDUCATION AND URBAN POLICY FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Inclusion is a Journey, not a Destination

Bee different

CONTENTS

WHAT COMPETENCES ARE NEEDED IN ECEC FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION?

Output #02: cases and competence profile - introduction

After reviewing different policies and practices on social inclusion in the various partner countries (output #01) and after collecting relevant case material, we tackle the question of what competences are needed to develop and maintain real inclusive ECEC settings. Even though the search for the ultimate definition of 'social inclusion' continues, and different approaches still exist, it is clear that the competence debate cannot wait. As we agree, in this project, that inclusiveness is part of ECEC quality and as we know that quality highly depends on the workforce, this debate is indeed vital.

Based on the discussions on inclusion and illustrated by real life cases, we elaborate the competence debate with inspiration from both the CoRe research and the European Quality Framework for ECEC (2014), which state that the need is not only for competent practitioners, but for a comprehensive competent system.

This text is a final version, after discussion among project members. However, this doesn't mean that the debate is now closed. The text can continue to serve as discussion material.

The quality of ECEC depends on the competences of people working with children, families and communities. Don't say 'This is how WE work' but rather 'How do YOU think WE can help you?'

"Working with families with a migration or low-income background requires additional competencies and attitudes: welcoming diversity, respecting different family backgrounds, values and beliefs, outreach work, reflectiveness, commitment, responsiveness, ability to build relations of trust and mutual respect, teamwork, and cooperating with other organizations and structures. Getting the structures right is essential, but so too is working on ethos and practice".(Bennett and Moss, 2011)

A. The need for a competent system

When we agree that accessibility and inclusion are elements of ECEC quality and when we know from research that educated and competent staff are salient factors in getting such quality, a closer look into competences in the context of inclusion seems quite logical.

Added to this we see how our societies become more and more diverse and how ECEC has been gaining more recognition as a sector in which quite some work can be done for children and families in the cause against exclusion. In a way, the childcare centre or the preschool is the very first place where all children meet each other when they leave the home environment. It is their first practice with society and democracy.

It is then not so surprising that e.g. on EU level ECEC has moved up the political agenda[1]. More specifically on the topic of the CIC project, the Commission recommends all member states to 'revise and strengthen the professional profile of all teaching professions and prepare teachers for social diversity'[2]

"As research on accessibility shows , ECEC services that invest in outreaching to marginalized groups and that are committed to take into account their needs in the organization of the centre, are found to be the most successful in fostering the participation of children from low-income and migrant backgrounds. In this sense, the staff needs to develop a pedagogical approach that welcomes diverse family cultures and facilitates a reciprocal dialogue with parents by building a relationship of trust. Such reciprocal and respectful exchange benefits both parties involved. It allows families to benefit from the support provided by the service. It also provides the staff with the parents' expert knowledge of their children and can support a deeper understanding of each child's development (Bennett & Moss, 2011). The pedagogical practices developed within the ECEC centre should reflect different understandings about care, education and upbringing of young children that are negotiated in contexts where contrasting values and beliefs emerge. When serving children and families living in difficult conditions, cooperation with local agencies responsible for education, health and social services becomes crucial. Early childhood practitioners should therefore work in close collaboration with other professionals (schools teachers, social workers,...)." (Vandenbroeck, Lazarri and Peeters, 2013).

> In Copenhagen, interesting practices can be seen in the interdisciplinary collaboration in so-called Child Forums, where professionals and parents work together. The interdisciplinary meetings and Børneforums (Child Forums) require an initiative characterised by close collaboration between the professionals in a child's life and the child's parents. This encompasses the child's primary pedagogues, the management in the child's early years education institution, various other professionals and the involvement of the child's parents. The interdisciplinary collaboration meetings facilitate interdisciplinary discussion in early years education institutions about those children whose wellbeing and development is a cause for concern. The meetings are held in the given institution every four, six or eight weeks. The frequency depends on the number of children and the socio-economic conditions, with the most challenged institutions having an increased frequency of meetings.

Past the individual child, 21st century ECEC professionals also need to perform in a context of increased diversity on all possible levels. The cities in Europe are being characterised more and

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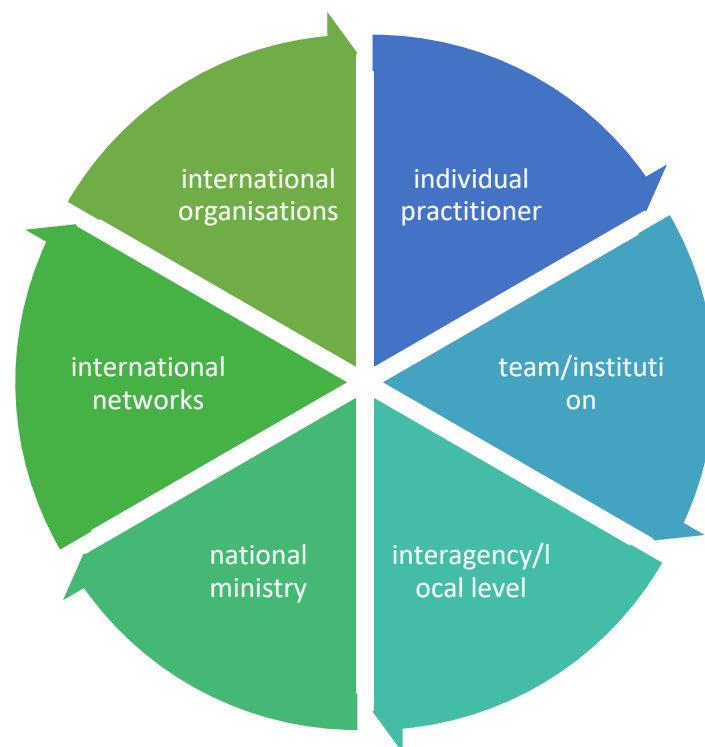[1]See several documents and the EQF (see below). E.g.:
COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow
[2]COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION of 20 February 2013 "Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage" (2013/112/EU)http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013H0112&from=EN

more by so-called 'Superdiversity '[3]. It is no longer one majority groups and a couple of minority groups but rather a vivid and complex mix of several 'minority' groups, living together (or not?) in one city, each with their own backgrounds, cultural habits, language or slang, home and street culture. Recognising this and being committed to offer equal opportunities to all children, requires a lot of the professional today, a lot for which most of them have not really been prepared in the 'traditional' training and education. A culture of change, an openness towards diversity is needed in order to fill the gaps and facilitate the sense of belonging for all children.

In searching for the competent child practitioner/educator/teacher – in general or aimed at working with children in vulnerable situations and towards social inclusion – it seems necessary to go beyond the individual level and to understand that to be fully competent, every individual practitioner needs to be part of a broader competent system (see CoRe research[4]). This is a schematic view on such a competent system on different levels, which can support the CIC project work. The following reflection of the cases will also illustrate the importance of going beyond the individual competences towards certain levels in this system. At this point, most the cases contain illustrations on the individual and team level of competence; this means that there is still quite some work to be done.

One of the main conclusions of the CoRe study is that a sole focus on individual practitioners gives a too narrow approach[5]. Of course, competences need to be present on the individual level (see

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[3] E.g. Maurice Crul, http://www.europe-kbf.eu/~/media/Europe/TFIEY/TFIEY-6_PP/Maurice-Crul.pdf
[4] https://vbjk.be/files/attachments/.885/European_Journal_of_Education_2012_Towards_competent_systems_in_Early_Childhood_Education_and_Care_Implications_for_Poli.pdf
The research Group has agreed upon the relevance and usefulness of this CoRe system and decided to use this for the CIC project.
https://vbjk.be/files/attachments/.94/report_Competence_Requirements_in_Early_Childhood_Education_and_Care_CoRe_Final_Report.pdf
[5]"...That a focus on individual practitioners alone will not increase the overall quality of provision". Urban et al (2012),).

below) but ECEC quality requires more and affects different levels: appropriate staffing, contact-free hours, shared reflection, pedagogical support, strong leadership, professional networks, supportive policies etc. Or as it is stated in the CoRe report: "A key finding of CoRe is that 'competence' in the early childhood education and care context has to be understood as a characteristic of the entire early childhood system. The competent system develops in reciprocal relationships between individuals, teams, institutions and the wider socio-political context. A key feature of a 'competent system' is its support for individuals to realise their capability to develop responsible and responsive practices that respond to the needs of children and families in ever-changing societal contexts." While CoRe did not specifically focus on certain groups of children and families (e.g. context of poverty, migration or children with specific needs) this quote does show how a competent system can deliver the required quality in changing contexts, in contexts of diversity. Competent systems are expected to be able to go beyond the 'mainstream' service delivery. The question would then no longer be 'who can fit in our ECEC service'; it would be 'How would you like us to answer to your need?', which may well be the essence of inclusion. This way, a real competent system would be able to deal with relevant issues in ECEC, such as diversity and inclusion, in a professional, inquiring, searching and solution-oriented way.

In this sense, the search is not for competences that are specifically required to work with specific groups (families in poverty, children with special needs and so forth) but for overall competent systems, benefitting all children and families, included those that may require some specific attention.

Other resources on competences in a context of diversity can be found in e.g. Decet[6], Issa[7], EQF[8] (see below)…but we agreed to use the CoRe study as a starting point, as it gives us the most comprehensive and systematic input in this CIC project.

1. Competences on the individual level

Child practitioners, the people who work and interact with children and their families on a daily basis, need to have a variety of competences, both on a knowledge and attitudinal level. But what is meant by the word 'competence'? Is it a combination of knowledge and skills or does it entail more?

The CoRe research points out that "At the level of the individual practitioner, being and becoming 'competent' is a continuous process that comprises the capability and ability to build on a body of professional knowledge, practice and develop and show professional values. Although it is important to have a 'body of knowledge' and 'practice', practitioners and teams also need reflective competences as they work in highly complex, unpredictable and diverse contexts. A 'competent system' requires possibilities for all staff to engage in joint learning and critical reflection. This includes sufficient paid time for these activities. A competent system includes collaborations between individuals and teams, institutions (pre-schools, schools, support services for children and families…) as well as 'competent' governance at policy level." Or in more easy terms "Knowing, doing and being", all come together in professional ECEC practice. The CoRe research offers an overview of individual competences on the level of knowledge, practice and values. In the context of this document it would lead us too far to look into all the details but it mentions e.g. the holistic perspective of children's development, strategies of learning, communication and participation, children's rights, working with parents, team work, diversity and networking..

[6]http://www.issa.nl/sites/default/files/Diversity-and-Social-Inclusion_0.pdf
[7]http://issa.nl/sites/default/files/Quality-Principles-final-WEB_1.pdf and http://issa.nl/content/quality-framework-birth-three-services
[8]http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf

In the context of diversity and inclusion, such fundamental competences have been researched on several cases and translated for practical use, e.g. by DECET and ISSA (2011)[9]. In this DECET-ISSA project, knowledge, expertise and views were collected among practitioners in order to get some answers to the question whether specific knowledge or competences are needed to work in the context of diversity and inclusion. Or: "When practitioners start working with children and parents of diverse cultures, backgrounds and abilities they can experience uncertainty, culture shock, fear and discomfort. They might think they are not adequately prepared, that they lack specific knowledge, skills and competences to address the situation. Or they might think that they don't need new skills or competences at all. They treat 'all people the same' and people just need to get on with it. Both types of situations arise in everyday practice."

> This is shown in the Slovenian case of Lev. It is stated that 'teachers often feel fear and lack of knowledge'. This is where a competent system could offer the support that is needed.

The truth may well lie somewhere in the middle. Individual practitioners need all basic skills and competences to work in ECEC as it is, and very often this will enable them to work with more vulnerable groups as well. But this may not be enough when the involved families they work with, and the greater societies they live in, become more and more diverse, on so many levels. In those settings, having additional competences (and additional support) will be very helpful.

In the DECET-ISSA research, all interviewed practitioners in all 10 countries in the project pointed out certain competences as being essential, such as:

- Willing to accept diversity in society and respecting other ways of being;
- Being non-judgmental;
- Having an open mind;
- Having empathy and understanding;
- Showing flexibility and adaptability;
- Being sensitive (aware of children's and parents ' needs) and responsive (act on awareness);
- Supporting a sense of belonging;
- Having enthusiasm: being engaged and motivated;
- Being creative in order to find alternative solutions and approaches;
- Showing warmth and being loving.

These, in turn, could be summarised in 5 generic, broad competences:

- Working towards social change (this is, in fact, politics)
- Open communication
- Critical reflection: exploring complex issues from different angles
- Learning from disagreement
- Co-constructing new practice and knowledge with children, parents and colleagues.

Another example is the profile of the PACT 'professional of the future'[10], the T-shaped professional:

- Is well-trained in his/her own discipline (teaching, pedagogy, youth care)
- Is capable of explicit and visualize it's expertise and skills
- Recognises and acknowledges the added value of other professional expertise
- Can make a connection between the disciplines (one's own discipline and those of others)
- Can to contribute to a shared vision

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[9] https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/7277711/file/7277712.pdf
[10] For more info, in Dutch: https://www.pedagogischpact.nl/rijke-speelleeromgeving-voor-jonge-kinderen/blogs/63-pedagogisch-professional-van-de-toekomst/toolkit/218-samen-aan-de-slag

- Has a learning attitude
- Is able and willing to think out of the box
- Is flexible
- Can work effectively and systematically
- Can monitor children together with colleagues
- Can cooperate with other professionals, parents and children
- Can deal with diversity
- Has communication skills
- Has knowledge of modern technology for communication/ social media and applies it

In all of these examples, there is an open mind, a willingness to make (even minor) adjustments to the setting and materials to accommodate children with special needs. Being open for such changes to make more children feel welcome and at ease, could maybe lead to considerations on more fundamental adjustments (e.g. in curricula, approach of 'special needs'): to no longer have the child to adjust to the school system, but the school to adjust to children? Inspiring practices are mentioned in the cases on e.g. allowing children to use their mother tongue, link to the home environment. (cultural inclusion).

The Slovenian case of Lev shows how valuable it is to have a policy on 'getting acquainted' in the first period of childcare or kindergarten. This is important for all children and families but maybe even more so for children with some kind of vulnerability, in this case a muscular disease. Really getting to know a child, listening to the parent's expectations and fears, refers to relational competence and can help families to feel welcome and appreciated. The same goes for keeping the dialogue open with parents. Again, this is crucial for all families, not only for families with children with special needs.

The case further states: "First step in relation towards parents is to know your own borders, lines, how far can I go and be self-confident at. Important step to understand parents is to listen them - be (active) listener and try to understand what they feel – maybe denial, grief, loss, guilt, confusion, powerlessness, disappointment, rejection etc. Second is to discuss about expectations - what are our expectations and what can we do – always in the best interests of the child – in kindergarten and parents at home? In this phase it is important to cooperate and discuss with kindergarten´s consultant, even principal about our possibilities, expectations, responsibilities."

Peeters and Sharmahd (2014) present the notion of the 'agentic' practitioner, a practitioner who is engaged in reflective processes, searching for better ways to address the needs of vulnerable groups. These are also called the 'actors of change' among the many ECEC practitioners. In their article, Peeters and Sharmahd refer to 3 different studies, making the point that the traditional, technical 'body of knowledge' is no longer sufficient for an ECEC reality that is more diverse than ever before.

One of the research results ('the construction of a new professional) draws some conclusions on reflective practice. "Working with vulnerable groups requires four categories of basic and generic competences:

- The ability to look for solutions in contexts of disagreement. ECEC practitioners who work with families from vulnerable groups need to have the ability to discuss intensively in teams and confront different opinions on which concrete decisions can be taken and put into practice.
- To focus on meeting with the Other, the one we do not know. ECEC practitioners should try to understand the child and parent who is 'different'. This is a basic competence, especially when working in ECEC services with poor parents and children at risk (Dahlberg and Moss 2005).
- The ability to co-construct knowledge with others (colleagues, parents,

children). The ECEC practitioners who work with children at risk must have the competence to construct new practical knowledge, as well as new ways of working with children, parents and colleagues in collaboration with the pedagogical counsellor.

- Acting with a focus on social change. 'Actors of change' should develop competences that help them discover what is possible in working with children and parents at risk, and to change the pedagogical practice aimed at providing children with more opportunities for development and learning."

As stated at the TFIEY (Vandenbroeck, Lazarri and Peeters, 2013) "Early childhood practitioners working in contexts of diversity have demanding and complex tasks that require them to constantly reflect on their educational practices, to revise their pedagogical approaches and to co-construct professional knowledge together with children and parents. The individual professional cannot meet these demands alone. Systemic approaches to ECEC quality and workforce professionalization are needed (Bennett, 2012; Urban et al. 2012)." Which brings us to the other levels in the competent system.

> As experienced by a support educator in the Danish Child Forum practice, "what works at the interdisciplinary collaboration meetings is that everybody speaks from within his/her own field and professional position. The meetings create a space where the quality is reflected in the meeting's systematic approach and reflection, which comes close to the practice itself."

2. Competences on team/institutional level

Beyond the individual level, it is clear that practitioners work within a certain team setting, where conditions can be supportive or not. Several strategies to enhance competences overall are available and have proven to be successful.

Urban et al[11] don't use the more technical-instrumental approach of competence, but consider "the transformational potential of professional practices which are constantly co-constructed, de-constructed and reconstructed in the relationships with children, families and communities". This also includes that initial training and education (leading to formally required qualifications) is as important as continued professional development (such as in-service training, supervision, pedagogical coaching, team reflection...The CoRe research further states that coherent support and CPD policies can effectively increase competence and the level of professionalism, even among low-qualified practitioners. It also refers to substantial evidence that shows that investment in initial training is cost-effective when combined d with CPD. This combination is also advocated in the EQF (see below).

Different methods of increasing competences have been developed throughout the year. We just give some examples here, of which some are reflected in the cases.

> The Danish case of the Stenurten centre shows how teams build their own knowledge and expertise to develop an certain working method. 'The institution has pieced together their own educational pedagogy based on theoretical considerations and practical experiments. This is a pedagogical

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[11]Urban, M. et al, Towards competent systems in ECEC, implications for policy and practice, *European Journal of Education*, vol. 47, nr. 4, 2012, p. 508-526. (competence being understood as a characteristic of the entire ECEC system)

principle showing a direction in the educational work and organization of work. This is called "relations learning".'

While some cases show how staff members learn from each other and support each other in their professional growth, other practices are also being described, such as bringing in an expert.

The PACT pilots have led to the development of the I-Prof profile. 'The inclusion professional is a behavioural expert of a Youth Care Organisation who is commissioned by a school, after school organization or child care centre. The I-Prof is part of the team and therefore always available. He/she is a colleague of teachers, educational professionals and other professionals of the team. On team level interdisciplinary cooperation is key: In the interdisciplinary team, professionals from different disciplines and background (schools, childcare, care) collaborate and bring in various expertise. Their knowledge, skills and expertise are complementary. They are willing to get to know each other's discipline, language and culture. Together they design a learning and development community for the children they feel responsible for.

This approach raises an essential issue on adding certain professionals to a system. Do we talk about an inclusion 'expert' to support the ECEC teams or to take over? In the context of what we learned from the CoRe research, it is highly relevant to be aware of how this expert will support the teams and how the roles and responsibility is being divided. Is it about investing in 'specialist' professionals to 'step in' whenever necessary and thus take over in a way? Or is it about supporting every team member towards working in a more inclusive way? Is it about coaching or about an expert 'magician' to solve all problems? It should be clear what the exact role is here. In PACT it is very clearly not the idea of an expert 'taking over' from the team, but being an essential and supportive part of it. When the 'specialist' has a clear role to support the whole staff, it can add to the overall continuous professional development. In PACT, it is in fact an addition, while all professionals keep their role. The I-prof will e.g. coach and give advice, think together with the other team members, facilitates the group dynamics, offers support in the contacts with parents and so forth.

Also, the CoRe research (2011) suggests that "the content of ECEC is deepened when professionals are generic, rather than specialised in one field of work or one specific age group."
Another risk of using experts, is the risk of so-called net-widening, problematising individual children rather than looking to the whole ECEC context.

Team meetings – time for reflection

It is important for ECEC staff not to feel alone vis-à-vis the daily challenges in their work. Regular team meetings, in which they can openly discuss certain issues, questions, uncertainties…can be very helpful.

In the case of Lev (SL) some relevant questions are noted on how a teacher and an assistant can work together and define each other's roles. It is the teacher and the assistant who will care for and educate Lev, not an extra specialist.

In the case of Mark (SL) it is remarkable to read how honest Mark's teacher could be about her frustration, even 'antipathy towards him'. Talking about emotions and doubts can be very helpful and this is what seems to be happening in that centre: 'But we are aware that we aren´t perfect and we try, through discussion and reflexion, overcome different barriers that we have.'

It is also worthwhile to have teams in which not everyone has the same professional background or training, but to have a mix of competences, as was shown in the PACT projects. This lead to seeing the added value of a mix of perspectives and the idea if the T-shaped team, besides the T-shaped individual professional. One of the results of the PACT pilots was that inter professional cooperation on the work floor is one of the success factors. Conclusions on results and professional's wellbeing were:

- Inter professional cooperation gets people enthusiastic, they learn from each other, they feel supported and better equipped to work with diversity among children
- There is a shift of focus from attention for vulnerable children to strengthening the pedagogical climate for all children
- The first results show less referrals of children to specialist provisions .

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

A frequently used strategy to strengthen professionals' competences is the concept of the professional learning community. Recently, a NESET analytical report on this subject was published (Sharmahd et al, NESET II, 2017)[12].

> "We learn constantly from each other and to each other, from the parents, our colleagues and from the children". Elmer childcare centre practitioner in the NESETII report.

Given the multi-diverse nature of our current societies and the challenges that it brings along, ECEC staff can no longer rely on mainstream, traditional knowledge and practices or standardized solutions that would fit the needs of all families and children. "Negotiation and reflection are then essential competences to be achieved by practitioners/teachers in ECEC services and schools in order to contextualize pedagogical practice and adapt it to the diversity of children and families." (NESET II, p. 5) These competences however are not easily developed in traditional initial training or CPD. New notions of competence need new approaches in how to develop them. In a PLC professionals learn from an with each other in an active, democratic and participative way.

A PLC can be described as 'a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an on-going, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way' (NESET II, p. 5 and references there).

As mentioned in some of the cases, being able to discuss practice with colleagues, to have a (reflective) dialogue about what happens in the floor, can be very supportive and can bring new insights.

Based on literature and case studies in the NESET II report, 5 major criteria are mentioned in defining a PLC:

- Frequently engage in reflective and in-depth dialogue among colleagues on educational matters
- Move from classroom doors into 'deprivatisation of practice' : this concept refers to 'open up' towards each other's practice, give feedback, plan together and also to build relationships with the neighbourhood and with the parents
- Invest in collective responsibility (see competent system: no sole professional is responsible for improving ECEC)
- Focus on a shared vision and values (children's rights, diversity,…)
- Presence of leadership.

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[12] https://issa.nl/sites/default/files/pdf/Publications/by%20members/NESET-II_AR2_2017_PLC.pdf

Other authors also comment on the value of such PLC: "…that in order to enhance practitioners' competence to work with disadvantaged families at individual and team level, a learning community (Wenger, 1998) should be created within ECEC institutions. Such a learning community should be sustained by:

- a common culture inside the ECEC services that is underpinned
    - by a common vision (an inspiring pedagogical framework),
    - by a system of ethical values in work with parents, children and neighbourhoods,
    - by a strong commitment towards each child and parent,
    - an openness to dialogue with parents, children and colleagues.
- a vision of learning starting from practice that creates opportunities for peer coaching (learning from other practitioners) and takes into account intergenerational exchange of knowledge and competences (experienced and less experienced learn from each other) and is focused on team learning. "

Pedagogical guidance and coaching

The case of Ghent has been described in the CoRe study and by Peeters and Sharmahd (2014). Looking into structural and long term pedagogical coaching, it became clear that low qualified practitioners reached high levels of competence, due to this continued investing in pedagogical coaching. Some success were made explicit such as: guidance by specialised staff, involving team members as owners of change, long term investment and view on professional development, supporting learning communities, a common vision, commitment and so forth.

In the Ghent case, the overall information contains fundamental choices in perspective. Such as: 'The out-of-school care does not aim to replace education or care at home, but rather support and expand on it. Children, parents, community and care team are engaged as valuable partners.' Or 'To ensure a continuum of care and connection with the broad network around the child, the out-of-school care collaborates actively with families, childcare centres, schools and neighbourhood. Parents are always welcome and stimulated to participate in decision-making. Children explore the neighbourhood, shop locally and use public spaces. The childcare is part of the local community and tries to mirror its values in its daily practice. Or 'The child's free choice is essential.'

Reflective methods

The concept of 'the reflective practitioner' has been described quite regularly in recent (see also Peeters and Sharmahd 2014)To feed into a more come reflective attitude, observation and documentation are important instruments for the ECEC practitioner.[13]

The Danish case 1 (Stenurten centre) shows how practice can evolve, benefiting the child, in different steps: observation, background knowledge, plan of action, continued observation, action and reflection.

The other Danish case (Solund centre) clarifies this as well: 'When you have evaluated you start again with no. 1 new goals etc., new actions and new evaluations. All the time you adjust practice and actions. The process continues. A circular process. If this is going to be a success it is important that the individual teacher reflects on his own practice, and also reflects with his colleagues. That he is able to adjust his methods in relation to the child, to encourage and motivate the child and adjust in terms of time. That he is a participant in a culture where openness and feedback among parents

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[13] One of the methods that has been disseminated and used within European countries is Wanda. See https://vbjk.be/en/publication/wanda-manual

and colleagues come natural and is professionally based and always with the child as a starting point. Challenges and dilemmas may occur. Parents who will not co-operate, or disagreement among colleagues etc. These challenges should not stop us from inclusion all 24 hours.

Job shadowing

Another exciting way to learn from and with each other is Jobshadowing. Colleagues go visit each other in the work place – either in the same country or in another country - and spend a couple of days observing how others work, joining in the work and reflect on that. Why do others do things differently? Can we try that as well? How can we 'import' new ways of working, new ways of engaging with children and their parents? How come that some things work in other ECEC centres and not in ours? This exchange doesn't only bring in new knowledge and experiences but it also invites participants to stop and think about their own work. It also confronts people with 'cultural shocks', surprising practices to think and reflect about in a mixed group of jobshadowers and their hosts.

In the Erasmus+ project on parent participation, EQUAP, child practitioners and ECEC centre coordinators engaged in such an exchange (see all info on www.equap.eu) and were very enthusiastic about it. All of them said that it was an eye-opener, a professional 'boost': witnessing other practices, discussing vision, reconsidering their own work and learning from others. In this project, the focus was on how to involve parents in ECEC, but this jobshadowing method can be used on other issues as well, e.g. dealing with diversity and working on inclusion.

Diversity of the staff

The workforce, engaging with diverse groups of populations, should reflect the diversity of the public addressed. (TFIEY, 2013). This is still quite a challenge, but in several countries we see a shift happening. The added value of diversifying teams can be seen in practices such as bridging persons, bilingual practitioners/teaching assistants or staff members with a background of migration or poverty or staff members from minority groups. More diversity in a team can not only lower the threshold for families to attend ECEC services; it can also add to team reflection on stereotypes and prejudices. In the TAM childcare centre in Berlin e.g. the staff have different backgrounds and there is also gender diversity. However, this kind of diversity within the team does not mean that a Moroccan child practitioner should join a team to work with Moroccan families. 'Ethnic (or other) matching' should be avoided and all staff members should be able to work with all families. Otherwise, the existing inequalities would be repeated in the team (a typical example would be the cleaning lady, from an ethnic minority, in an 'all white' team). Reality however still shows that team members from minority or vulnerable groups are still often employed on an assistant level, while teachers and directors are predominantly white and middleclass.

In the German case of Jelani, we read that e.g. 'Mutual respect and tolerance of different cultures is important to this Kita. It has colleagues with Turkish, Polish, English and French language skills who help with language difficulties.'

Diversity can also be understood as having a mix of different professions and professional levels, like the above mentioned inter professional cooperation or having professionals work with students.

In the Netherlands, integrated children's centres are being developed, in which inter professional cooperation is a valued work method. In this context pilots are being set up with training institutions where students of different disciplines shape some kind of shadow team. Teachers in training work

with pedagogues and social workers in their internship, and in doing so they learn and train their profession. This exchange between training institutes and practice gives a win-win: not only the students learn but also the training institutes develop a close link with practice, learn from the student's experiences and develop and improve the content of their training program.

Cooperation with other services – integrated approach

Competences can also be enriched by cooperation with other (ECEC)services. The idea of a more integrated approach is now on many policy and research agenda's. The underlying concept is that 1 plus 1 equals more than 2. As we cannot expect ECEC professionals to be able to deal with every possible problem, getting engaged in a cooperative kind of network can be very supportive. Ideally, it can focus on the problem at hand more effectively and it can give the ECEC professional the required support. In Berlin e.g. policies and practices have been developed to make childcare more accessible to refugee children, by means of so-called Willkommenskita or the Sprungbrettangebote ('diving board'), in which bridges are built between pedagogical work within asylum reception centres and mainstream childcare centres[14].

In the Ghent case of M. we saw a detailed illustration of the links between out of school care, school and the CLB (pupil support system, both on preventive health and psychosocial support, linked to every school in Flanders). There was frequent communication about the child's problematic behaviour between the school and the STIBO throughout the year. Both school and STIBO also had the parents involved as much as they could.

Another example of integrated work is being developed in the Netherlands with the 'Integrated Child Centres', with intensive inter professional cooperation on the work floor among staff from e.g. childcare and education. Alongside the work, some training institutes are connecting students from different disciplines as well, to share learning experiences, link with practice while studying their own discipline.

3. Local policy level

In the CIC project, the focus is on local, urban policy. In reference to competent ECEC systems, the local level can indeed play an important supportive role: in financing, in providing professional support, in developing a vision on high quality ECEC.

On inclusion of children with special needs, the Ljubljana case explains the local policy of a double take: children with disabilities can either attend mainstream preschool with additional personal assistance of they are referred to more specialised preschools with tailored programs. Children can also move from a mainstream to a more targeted ECEC provision, as described in the case of the girl with autism. This case pointed at several issues: the efforts made by the preschool, the involvement of parents, the consideration of the best interest of the child.

In the conclusion of this case, we can read some arguments that would support this policy: 'While inclusion of a child with special needs can have a positive impact on other children within the group, in cases of severe deficits the negative aspects prevail. And while moderate disorders are something regular kindergartens (and schools) wish to deal with because it teaches all involved empathy, patience and acceptance, they do not wish and cannot deal with severe cases. Not only are the teachers not sufficiently trained, the environment itself is not supportive enough for the child who will evolve much more in specially and specifically adapted environment, backed up by trained

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[14] See NESET II, AR1/2018, Role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefitting vulnerable groups, such as Roma (forthcoming)

> professionals. If children with special needs receive enough suitable professional assistance, they will often learn to control their disorder, even to such an extent it becomes unnoticeable. In such cases, even a normal inclusion to society in adulthood is possible.'

Another example of the impact of local policy can be found in the city of Ghent. The city has a long history of investing in professional support in the ECEC sector (Peeters, De Kimpe and Brandt, 2016). Over 35 years of pedagogical coaching has supported the design of innovative practices and to improve the work with different vulnerable groups, such as children living in poverty, children with special needs or children from ethnic minorities.

The city's department, involving all levels of staff in a democratic process, has been developing a clear vision on ECEC, of which 'being inclusive' is one of the key elements. Others are e.g.: being accessible and affordable, respect and value diversity. All teams and practitioners can count on pedagogical coaching and have ample CPD opportunities. Also, the DECET principles are used in training and implemented on the work floor. The ECEC department of the city of Ghent continuously works on systemic quality and on developing innovative practice, for which partnerships are developed with e.g. the Ghent University.

On the team level the department facilitates several strategies for team support and professional development: conferences, intervision groups, team and individual coaching, team days, 'debutants' course and international networking. Also within the teams, diversity is important in terms of age, gender, ethnic origin etc.

The Ghent ECEC system served as a case study in the CoRe research and 4 competences were fundamental:

- Openness to parents: appreciating the dialogue with parents as a source of professionalization
- Engagement towards social change: developing a culture of openness, based on the conviction that every professional can make the difference
- The ability to reflect critically
- The ability to create new practices and knowledge

Peeters, De Kimpe and Brandt (2016) conclude that: 'The competent system of the city of Ghent is characterised by a common culture on different levels of the system. This culture is underpinned by a common vision, by ethical values towards children, parents, colleagues and the neighbourhood. It strives for social change on all levels of the competent system.'

Yet another example is the German policy on ECEC for refugee children. Given the amount of refugees coming into Germany since 2015, a specific kind of ECEC was developed, the 'Willkommens' classes and childcare centres. But the context of slow bureaucracy, funding issues and part of public opinion tending to xenophobia and exclusion does not make this a simple endeavour.

> The case of the Berlin Municipality mentions e.g.:
> 'Younger children should enter a regular day nursery as soon as possible. However, they encountered a very tense situation, since the need for nursery places had been extremely high for years and the planning did not count on a significantly higher demand. Missing places and missing staff could not be made available in short- or even medium-term.'
> 'On the one hand, there was a great willingness for inclusion of refugees by volunteers and people in charge in the administration. On the other hand, inflexible structures, inadequate control, long decision-making processes, shortage of specialized staff and so on led to a seemingly uncontrolled situation that caused anxieties in parts of the population who then favoured exclusion rather than inclusion.'

4. Regional/national policy level

Policies on a regional or national level highly influence the possibilities of ECEC services to move forward to more inclusion and support the ECEC workforce on this journey. This is usually the policy level where regulations, and (appropriate) funding, are designed and monitored. Think about issues like: qualification levels, adult/child ratio, wages, CPD, access to ECEC, opportunities for team dialogue (the so-called 'child free' hours) and so forth.

Again the CoRe research has some enlightening results on this level. Just to mention a few:

- a plea to consider ECEC as a public good[15], as literature review showed that high levels of systemic professionalism are more difficult to achieve and keep up in private and marketised systems.
- The negative effects of precarious working conditions. Low wages and little to no opportunity for team learning will not contribute to higher levels of professionalism
- Reference to OECD and UNESCO reports making the case for integrated ECEC systems (instead of the split systems with child care on the one hand and preschool on the other) which tend to result in more coherent, stronger policies and increased professionalism
- Invest in pedagogical support on a structural level

An example here could be the Flemish investment in 'inclusive' childcare centres. Kind en Gezin. Inclusion in this project refers to facilitating the access of young children with special needs to mainstream childcare centres. Some of these centres have been working on this for quite some time, within an approach of progressive universalism and 16 of those centres have been involved in a trajectory to improve their 'inclusion' policy and practice. They gather regularly in a professional learning network and get pedagogical guidance from both Kind en Gezin and VBJK. Besides improving their own practice, they are also some kind of 'reference centre' for other childcare initiatives within their region. The idea is that they can inspire other centres and support them in developing or improving their own inclusive practice.

The national or regional level is also relevant on the issue of professional qualification. It is usually on this policy level that the standards are set for initial training requirements and that CPD systems are being suggested and/or funded. Research has established that theory and practice need to keep inspiring one another and that initial training needs to be updated and strengthened by on the job training (Peeters & Sharmahd, 2014). Fukkink and Lont (2007) even concluded that a lack of initial training can be partly compensated by in-service training, on the condition that it is of sufficient intensity and length

Another issue on the level of national/regional policy is the choice between the so-called split (childcare and preschool separated and most often under different ministries) and integrated ECEC. Overall, the qualification requirements are higher in the integrated systems, where care and education are linked for children up to mandatory school age, than in the split systems, where childcare often still sets lower qualification criteria than for preschool. *Urban et al (*2012) state that "the integration of services for all young children either in the education or welfare system in a unitary system tends to lead to more coherent policies, great professionalism, higher qualification requirement and better wages".

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[15]See also EQF, statement 10 on Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC

5. International level - networks and organisations

The European Union

It has been mentioned before but ECEC is an important topic on the EU agenda. On the one hand, quite a lot is being expected (e.g. better school outcomes, employment opportunities for parents…) which tends to limit the benefits of high quality ECEC to a somewhat instrumental, future-oriented level. On the other hand, there is an increased attention for the here and now of young children and their families and the role of ECEC as such.

The EU issued some highly relevant recommendations and increased the focus on professional development in the field of education in several programmes and funding schemes. Some elements are worth mentioning here:

- the development of the EQF and recommendation of May 2018)[16]
- the focus on the importance of initial training, combined with Continuous Professional Development (CPD), the on-the-job training
- the recognition of the complexity of the job and the plea to invest in support for professionals
- the plea for a systemic approach to professionalization

'The range of issues tackled by ECEC staff and the diversity of the children in their charge requires continuous reflection on pedagogical practice as well as a systemic approach to professionalisation. In many countries, training for working with children at risk is an integral part of initial training, but many other aspects of diversity are not sufficiently covered. In addition, ECEC staff rarely have the same possibilities for induction, in-service training and continuous professional development as are available to school teachers.' (EC communication on ECEC, 2011)

Reference to this policy level is made in the NESET II report where it mentions e.g. "Co-reflection is so critical in ECEC services and schools because it empowers educational staff in dealing with the growing diversity of children and families, and it increases accessibility."

The European Quality Framework for ECEC - EQF

Another helpful and relevant framework is the EQF. This policy document was drafted by experts from all over the EU and its 10 statements on ECEC Quality are endorsed with research evidence as well as illustrated by inspiring practices. This document has no legally binding status but aims at inspiring ECEC policies throughout the EU. The EQF has now been the basis of a list of indicators and it has lead the way for the most recent EU recommendation proposal on ECEC[17].

The EQF consists of 5 major themes, each with 2 statements. While the EQF does not have a specific statement on inclusion, the inclusive approach can be found throughout the text. Also important is that the EQF makes a clear statement on the fact that accessibility is an integral part of quality.

A short overview:

1. Accessibility	- Available and affordable ECEC for everyone - Participation, social cohesion, and diversity
2. Workforce	- Training and permanent learning - Supporting working conditions
3. Curriculum	- Holistic development of the child - Collaboration and reflection

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[16] https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/ecec_en_act_part1_v8.pdf
[17] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1530527826400&uri=CELEX:52018DC0271

| 4. Monitoring and evaluation | - Information to support the improvement of quality
- In the child's best interest |
| 5. Governance | - Responsibility and collaboration
- Legal entitlement to access to ECEC |

The EQF: statements 3 and 4 on workforce and supportive working conditions[18]. It often refers to the importance of both initial training and CPD, on learning and reflecting in teams, on the importance of pedagogical support etc.

Such as: "Research shows that professionalisation initiatives that actively involve practitioners in designing the content of the training – by addressing issues that arise out of their everyday practices – and activities that support them throughout the process of reflecting and collectively re-devising practices might be the most successful." Or "Effective initiatives also help practitioners to develop and use transformative practices that respond to the needs of children and families in local communities. ECEC staff professionalisation could take different forms, encompassing: the exchange of good practices among centres (documenting, networking and disseminating); participatory action-research and peer learning opportunities (communities of practices); pedagogic guidance provided by specialised staff (pedagogical coordinators, advisors, etc.); training provision for ECEC centre coordinators/managers/directors."

Overall, the EQF also considers accessibility/inclusion as part of the quality system, not a separate issue. This is quite an important shift.

International professional networks
International networks of professionals also play an important role in competence development. Issa, the International Step by Step Association, is just one example here. It is a fast growing network of professionals working with young children and it provides many different supporting instruments such as publications[19], conferences, training packs. (all info on www.issa.nl). OMEP (http://old.worldomep.org/) is another example, being a worldwide network for professionals in Early Childhood Education.

Another type of support can be found in unions (e.g. BUPL in Denmark, www.bupl.dk) and professional organisations (e.g. DECET, www.decet.org) that advocate for quality conducive work conditions, working in contexts of diversity and so forth.

B. Supportive working conditions for competences for inclusive working: inspirational materials

With the CoRe study in mind, it is clear that ECEC professionals require supportive working conditions to maintain and increase their competence to respond to the changing societal needs in the context of diversity. Above we discussed the different levels in the competent systems; the working conditions are usually not limited to one level only, but can be shaped on e.g. the level of national policy as well as within the ECEC services on the work floor. This is all about three interconnected parts: staff initial preparation, continuing professional development and working conditions.

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[18]http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf
[19]https://www.issa.nl/quality_principleshttps://www.issa.nl/node/388https://www.issa.nl/node/389https://www.issa.nl/quality_framework_birth_to_three

On this issue, we can refer to the conclusions of the TFIEY meeting on workforce (New York, 2013): "Investing in children means investing in the professionalization of workforce. There is a proven link between quality of the workforce and outcomes for children BUT this link is strongly influenced by the level of actual working conditions, the presence (or lack) of systemic support of all staff. Quality of ECEC staff is not only a question of qualifications and pre-service preparation but also of different types of sustained training on the job, favourable working conditions, and pedagogical mentoring and support. Transformative education and workforce preparation is needed to get the reflective practitioners that we need in a context of hyperdiversity and multilinguism. ECEC practitioners are to be 'actors of change'. Therefore investments in leadership are also crucial. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and support must be provided to all staff, with sufficient length and intensity to be effective and leading to change. Both pre-service and in-service training are necessary. For instance, a minimum of 50% of the staff should have a bachelor degree. Staff from different backgrounds can increase the awareness of stereotypes and prejudices within the team and move forward in learning to deal with these. In diversifying the workforce, ethnic matching should be avoided: all staff members should work with all children and families. Diversifying the workforce is not only an issue of ethnic background but also an issue of gender."

> The Slovenian case of Mark is a nice illustration of how to embrace diversity: 'One of the general principles is the principle of equal opportunities, respect for diversity of children (respect for the specifics of children's culture of origin) and the development of multiculturalism. In our kindergarten we give children opportunity to express in their mother tongue(bring books, read stories, sing songs, listen their music), to show their native language and culture in various activities. We also encourage parents to engage in work life in kindergarten, present their culture, language and habits, but we also respect their privacy, worldview and values. We have some good practice of inclusion in our kindergarten, for example: teacher learned some Albanian words, so she could communicate with a child, we arrange play spaces and activities so that everyone is included, use different non-verbal and visual material, signs, we encourage families to present their culture and language at different events, show us how they celebrate their holidays etc.'

> The same idea of embracing diversity can be seen in the Berlin case of Jelani, where it states: Jelani's Kita takes integration serious and interprets it as the involvement of children from all nationalities without prejudice in group activities. For the children, it is an enrichment to get to know and understand the differences and similarities of different cultures at an early stage. They should not live side by side, but live together. The largest group of children in this Kita are children from Arabic and Turkish speaking backgrounds. They also have children from Russia, Poland, Thailand, Vietnam, Pakistan, Spain, several African countries and Serbia.

- Berlin PPT[20] and brochure (illustrations of a competent system):
- Cooperation networks (paediatricians, therapists, poverty experts, parent groups....)
- Support for practitioners in team, workable adult/child ratio, addition of staff with specific competences (either temporarily or standard)
- Secure financing
- CPD on inclusion, anti-bias
- Political will (inclusion in legislation, see also EQF)

- 5 steps to Quality: a training pack on the EQF[21]

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[20] See surf drive (not accessible to the general public)
[21] http://files.eun.org/SEG/5%20Steps%20to%20Quality%20-%20Training%20Package_ECEC_%20final%20version.pdf

- DECET competence brochure, focusing on e.g. attitudes towards diversity, team support, reflective practice, qualification and CPD...

- DECET principles for ECEC[22]: ECEC is a place where
  Everyone feels that he/she belongs.
  Everyone is empowered to develop the diverse aspects of his/her identity.
  Everyone can learn from each other across cultural and other boundaries.
  Everyone can participate as active citizen.
  Everyone can actively address bias through open communication and willingness to grow.
  Everyone works together to challenge institutional forms of prejudice and discrimination.

- Be willing to cooperate with parents as equal partners, co-education. Parents have their own competences and the professional's knowledge is not 'the best' per se. Both parents and professionals should engage in a co-educating relationship. ECEC should add to the home environment and not compensate that.

- Added value of a diversified staff: lowering thresholds, building links between staff and families (sharing e.g. a language, religion, experiences of exclusion)

- Reflection methods for teams (e.g. Wanda[23])

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[22]VBJK has also translated and adapted these principles in terms of an inclusive approach for children with special needs (2007, only available in Dutch)
[23]https://vbjk.be/nl/projecten/wanda-internationaal and https://vbjk.be/en/publication/wanda-manual

C. Some reflections after reading the case material

In general, it is very interesting to read through the cases and to get a feeling on how practitioners look on their own practice and way of working. While it is helpful to read this with the wider ECEC context of the given country in mind, the view on the work floor is also very interesting. One can also feel how the practice is different and how perspectives are different. Some cases e.g. start from the children in the centre, from their agency. They really report, document on what children are doing and how they, as professional, respond to it in an inclusive way (Solund case). Other cases rather start from the organisation's perspective and explain how and why their way of working can or cannot receive children with certain specific background (Amsterdam case).

With case studies from the work floor, most input is situated on the level of individual and team competences. This should be no surprise: it is a recount of the daily work, situations and incidents.

What does 'inclusion' mean?
Several cases are about children with special needs, not about other forms of (social) exclusion. In former meetings of the CIC project, it has become clear that the partners do not all have the same definition on what (social) inclusion is. This is, in fact, a complex concept and finding a shared definition may be impossible or even unwanted. But while we do not have to fully agree on a definition of 'inclusion', we should be clear on the fact that 'social inclusion' deals with more than special needs. It also refers to other more vulnerable groups, such as children from families living in poverty, or children in a context of asylum or migration.

In addition, we feel that inclusion is an issue on the system level. ECEC provision needs to be inclusive, towards many different groups of families and children. It is not e.g. the child that needs to adapt to the childcare centre or preschool, but the other way around.

> Slovenia, Lev case: Because of the child with special needs in her group she had to plan more, think about activities, adjust programme, sometimes daily routine. She had to be flexible, open, creative, reflective, empathetic and patient.

Inclusion also has to do with a comprehensive approach, a way of being.

> As the Danish teacher writes: 'Inclusion is not something which takes place on Tuesday between 10 and 12. Inclusion must take place all the time in all areas of the institution. It is the grown-ups who make the inclusion while being aware of the fact that the children are the most important actors in the inclusion.'

Inclusion refers to a willingness to be open towards the other, "To focus on meeting with the Other, the one we do not know". This is a fundamental openness, not one that is limited by the question of 'to what point inclusion can be stretched'.

> In the Amsterdam cases, the use of a certain language can reflect a rather deficit approach: e.g. 'too far behind' - 'Y doesn't seem to benefit enough from the involvement of Okido' – 'Parents are not supportive of the idea of research'. 'Unfortunately the parents did not consent...'

In inclusion the main question should be 'how do we make our service accessible for all' and not 'at what point a child is better off elsewhere?'. The main focus can sometimes be on 'changing the child to fit in' instead of on 'changing the school'. This of course requires changes on the systemic level. Practitioners who need to work here and now, will not always have the resources (both material and immaterial) to respond to every single child's need in a way that would best serve their interest and needs at the moment.

One of the Pact cases, about Senna, is also very illustrative.' Senna is a six year old boy who at random can become very physical. Apparently out of nowhere he can become very angry, confrontational and aggressive. Senna is in Laterna Magica, an integrated childcare/ school centre, and one of the PACT pilots. Lieke, the professional from Laterna Magica decided to become 'Senna for a day'. In a way she creeps in his skin and experiences a day in the way Senna does. Senna is also filmed during his daily routines.

The result? The many sensations of the group space create unrest with Senna. He is not happy with himself. "Miss, it is so very busy and I don't like that" Senna confides with Lieke. We developed a plan in which Senna could stay in the group and could participate, like the other children. When he needed to have some extra protection he doesn't have to be part of the circle call and if the group is reading out loud, he can put on his headset, so that he can stay concentrated on his work. In this way he still participates.

The plan was developed by the complete team. Together they review the films and Lieke can enter her observations. Also the parents are being involved: does Senna experience the same unrest at home, and how do they deal with that? Experiences are shared, adjustments made and also at home the changes are being implemented. Headsets have been made available for all children in the group.And the results pay off. Senna is less influential to the group and his parents also observed that he has more peace at home. A beautiful ongoing line has been created from home to the child centre, with the result of a child that gets support in the way that is most needed.'

This is also an example of how changes that are initially being made for one child, can also benefit all the other children.

This leads us to the core of the discussion: the differences between the 'deficit' model and the 'inclusion' model. Here are just some starters for this fundamental discussion:

	Deficit model	Inclusion model
Perspective	Use all means to deal with the 'disorder' to get the differences out of the way as much as possible. Needs approach	Diversity is part of society. Every child is different. Rights approach (see DECET)
View on the child	The child as a problem. Needs to 'normalise'. How does the child need to adapt to the group Big focus on the disability. Labelling the child	Child is an agent, with all its strengths and weaknesses. How does the group work for every single child?
View on the parents	Parents don't always know best. Under pressure by professionalist knowledge	Parents as first educators, they know their child. Co-educators with the team and possibly supporting specialists. Choice for mainstream or targeted provision
View on the professional	Practitioner needs to be a specialist as well, a technician	Empathic professional for every child in the group each with their specifics. A pedagogue not a therapist.

Parent involvement

Another point is the cooperation with parents and the way the parent/staff relations develop.

A general principle that is being upheld is that the parents are the first educator. This is also the main principle in the CRC. Caring for children and educating them is ideally a question of cooperation, of mutual trust, of shared responsibility between parents and professionals. While this is easy enough to understand and agree with, it is not all that simple when put into reality.

> The Danish case of Solund centre describes this very nicely: 'In order to understand this principle it is important that you as an educationalist/human being are aware of the view of human nature you possess. Furthermore, you are very much conscious of your actions in the meeting with the child and the parents.
> We meet on an equal footing. We do not meet on the same status, because we do not have the same status. I come with a pedagogical knowledge, experience, etc. For the child and his parents this may be the first time they meet an institution. In this meeting our actions as human beings should show that our worth and merits are of the same nature.
> We meet in the complementary relation where both parties contribute, are heard, are seen, are acknowledged, are appreciated thereby achieving a feeling of solidarity with each other. We create a fellow-feeling.'
> 'We as an institution act. You as parents act. We interact.
> It is through dialogue with the parents that we, with our pedagogical background, plan, act, communicate and evaluate. While the parents possess great knowledge of their child, we must therefore link together the two factors so we can act accordingly for the benefit of the child.'

In other cases there seems to be a certain attitude towards parents 'who don't listen, who don't follow up on what the teacher says or suggests'.

> In the case of Mark (SL) it is mentioned how the teacher does want to engage with the parents. She advised them and even while they seemed to agree, they didn't follow up on that advice.

The case report doesn't add much more but the interesting question would be here why Mark's parents did not go with the teacher's advice. As they are Macedonian, could it be that they didn't really understand what the teacher said and then say they agree because that seems easier ? Or is it an issue of trust?

As top-down attitude of 'teacher knows best' is not very conducive to create a relation of openness and trust. A competent ECEC system recognises parents as the first educators and engage in a process of co-constructing education, sharing the responsibility and looking for ways to support the child and respond to his/her needs.

> In the case of the municipality of Ljubljana, the position of parents is described in a somewhat ambiguous way. They are involved and the preschool did go along with their choice for a given time, even while not agreeing. When the child finally moved to a preschool for children with special needs the parents 'are still not happy about it but had at some time agreed with the placement.' The 'problem' here, being the parents, is described as a dilemma (which it often can be indeed): One of the problems considering this case is the parents' rights which overrule the rights of the child. Professional pedagogues' opinion was that the girl belongs to a development department instead of a regular one. That would have been the right way to go and the best path for her to follow. But her parents disagreed and until they relented there was nothing that could be done, except maintaining status quo.' The question of what is in the child's best interest (CRC, art 3) is a very difficult one: who defines this best interest? What is the best interest? Differences of opinion between parents and professionals are quite common in such cases.

Discussing the child's development with the parents can be very tricky. It is important not to antagonise the parents, to try to follow their pace in accepting that there may be some issues with their child.

In the Berlin case of Jenali, we see how the childcare centre also points to positive sides of the child and also manages to have the mother agree to certain testing, which lead to additional support for Jelani. While this case shows how highly committed the childcare centre has been throughout several years, and how much they have tried to find the best solution for Jelani, while at the same time showing consideration for the parent's point of view, it didn't end well. 'A joint support conference of all involved stakeholders came together to discuss the further course of action. The mother showed understanding for the raised concerns, but the father scolded at all participants and denounced the failure of the "German system". Without parental consent and cooperation, this conference ended. The father refused to bring his child back to the Kita, although Jelani had there a reserved place. Jelani's place wasn't revoked by the Kita, as no other conceivable solution was found so far, and both parents were fully employed.' Jelani, however, did not return to the day-care center.

The 'introduction' period with and for parents and children is quite a positive practice (very often applied in childcare, not as often in pre-school), for all families but certainly for families in vulnerable living situations. Parents and children get to know the centre and vice versa. The first period, the basis for mutual trust is built. The same goes for involving the parents in discussing the child's strengths and weaknesses and how to work with the child.

Output #02: cases and competence profile - conclusion

As said at the start, this document serves as inspiration for discussion, or for training purposes, on the question what competences are needed for (socially) inclusive ECEC practice. It does not, in this limited context, define what inclusive ECEC is, as this depends a lot on the national context. What we did see from the case material, is that inclusion is a broad concept and it is about dealing with a diversity of families and children, attending ECEC services: children living in poverty, children with a background of migration and asylum, children with special needs, children living in a-typical families…This 'superdiversity' of service users, can be quite demanding for professionals and it should be clear that they cannot deal with this on their own. Not only competent professionals are needed (combining both knowledge and certain attitudes) but also comprehensive competent systems in which professionals can find the support and coaching that they need. These systems include individuals, teams as well as the broader pedagogical and political context around the work in ECEC. Key words in this area are: initial training and CPD, a positive view on diversity, reflective practice, pedagogical support and coaching, supportive working conditions, learning with and from each other, and overall inclusive policies.

SELECTION OF RELEVANT RESOURCES

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

CoRE
https://vbjk.be/files/attachments/.94/report_Competence_Requirements_in_Early_Childhood_Education_and_Care_CoRe_Final_Report.pdf

DECET – ISSA, Diversity and Social Inclusion Exploring Competences for Professional Practice in ECEC

Early Childhood Workforce Initiative documents, http://www.earlychildhoodworkforce.org/

EU Commission (2011), *Communication on ECEC : Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow*, COM(2011) 66 final
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0066&from=EN

ISSA Publications on www.issa.nl

NESET II, *Transforming European ECEC services and primary schools into Professional Learning Communities: drivers, barriers and ways forward* (2017)
https://issa.nl/sites/default/files/pdf/Publications/by%20members/NESET-II_AR2_2017_PLC.pdf

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